

## Palaeolithic handaxes in Scotland

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### ABSTRACT

*The occurrence and typology of artefacts of handaxe type in Scotland are reviewed and it is concluded that, though some are genuine Lower Palaeolithic implements, none of these finds provides convincing evidence for early Palaeolithic human presence in Scotland.*

### INTRODUCTION

While debate continues about when Western Europe was first colonized (Dennell & Roebroeks 1996; Roebroeks 1996; Roebroeks & van Kolfschoten 1995) and by exactly which hominid type (Stringer 1996), there is general agreement that colonization certainly had happened by c 500,000 BP, by which time archaic variants of *homo* were widely dispersed. Other than from infrequent skeletal remains, these hominids are identifiable in the archaeological record primarily by their lithic artefacts, especially by the most distinctive artefact type — the biface or handaxe — made predominantly from flint but also from a wide variety of other rocks. Handaxes continued to be manufactured over a very long period of time, throughout most of the Lower Palaeolithic and into the Middle Palaeolithic, but the classic European bifacial handaxe, often described as Acheulian after the type-site of St Acheul in northern France, is the diagnostic indicator *sans pareil* of the Lower Palaeolithic (Wymer 1982, 102–8; Wynn 1995).

In Britain, on current knowledge, the Lower Palaeolithic starts with the evidence from Middle Pleistocene sites, such as Boxgrove, West Sussex, and High Lodge, Suffolk, for the presence of handaxe manufacture from pre-Anglian deposits which appear to date to around 500,000 BP (Roberts *et al* 1995; Roe 1995). Spectacular sites such as Boxgrove (Roberts 1986), where handaxes are found in direct association with knapping debris (Bergman & Roberts 1988), with bones of butchered animals, with human remains, and in datable contexts, are of course the very rare exception. Normally handaxes are uncontexted surface finds or from secondary contexts such as gravels (Wymer 1995). Nevertheless, handaxes are so distinctive and specific that the detailed study of their occurrence in Britain has been very revealing (Roe 1964) and is still a focus of current research (Wymer 1996).

The painstaking record by Roe (1968) of almost 39,000 handaxes found in Britain showed the overwhelming majority occurred south of a line from the Wash to the Severn Estuary. In reviewing this distribution, Roe (1981, 135; 1988, 4–5; 1996, 4) has continued to regard it as a realistic indicator of the main areas of human settlement during the Lower Palaeolithic, rather

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than as a product of the subsequent processes of geological erosion, which have obviously affected the north of Britain far more markedly than the south. This view has been disputed by Wymer (1988; cf Wymer & Straw 1977), who has considered the finds from northern England as a shadowy reflection of a significant Lower Palaeolithic presence there, most of the evidence for which has been lost or obscured as a result of erosion.

In fact, the debate about the extent of early Palaeolithic occupation in Britain has a lengthy pedigree, with many of the problems relevant to the interpretation of the evidence already considered in the last century by Evans (1897, 580). There is no doubt that environmental conditions and habitats, perfectly conducive to human settlement, would have applied at various phases within the Middle and early Late Pleistocene in northern England and Scotland when handaxe users were probably present further south. There is thus no *prima facie* reason why there could not have been a Lower Palaeolithic human presence in Scotland, but several possible explanations for why any settlement should have left no tangible trace.

In Scotland and northern England the geological factors are paramount. Episodes of extreme glacial and periglacial conditions during the last 500,000 years, especially in mainland Scotland, mean that deposits dating before the Late Devensian (ie before c 26,000 BP) are extremely rare (Sutherland & Gordon 1993). Terrestrial sediments which could conceivably have contained relics of human activity have been entirely removed, extensively reworked, or otherwise obscured, so that the chances of finding Lower Palaeolithic archaeology, if it ever existed, in contemporary contexts in Scotland are virtually nil. Hope need not be ruled out absolutely, as shown by the fortuitous preservation of both Lower Palaeolithic artefacts and hominid remains in secondary contexts in debris flows within the cave system at Pontnewydd in north Wales, an area also subject to extreme glacial conditions (Green 1984). However, no such potentially promising location, even including the once-championed caves at Creag nan Uamh, Assynt, has yet been identified in Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

The other main factor to be considered is that of the raw materials available for the manufacture of artefacts liable to survive in redeposited or exposed situations. Most of the handaxes known from southern England are of flint, which was readily available there in appropriate nodular form. In Scotland flint was readily available only as pebbles, normally far too small for the production of handaxes. The only Scottish location which does in certain circumstances produce flint of sufficient size and quality is in Buchan (Bridgland *et al* 1997, fig 7), but there is no reason to suppose that this particular material, mostly buried deep within undisturbed Tertiary deposits of marine origin, would have been available at the surface during the Quaternary.<sup>2</sup> It is difficult, therefore, to imagine any flint handaxes being manufactured locally in Scotland, but not impossible, however far-fetched, to contemplate handaxes of flint being brought to Scotland during Lower Palaeolithic times from other areas.

Flint is by no means a *sine qua non* for handaxes, however, as is abundantly clear from those parts of the Lower Palaeolithic world where flint is absent. Many other suitable lithic materials could be exploited, as was the case with quartzites, cherts, and other rocks in parts of England and Wales (MacRae & Moloney 1988). The earliest handaxes yet known from central England are extremely refined examples made from andesite (Roberts *et al* 1995; Wise 1993), and there is no doubt that comparable rocks suitable for handaxe manufacture would have been easily available in scree material or as erratics or waterworn cobbles in Scotland. Handaxes made of materials other than flint, because of their lesser hardness, are more readily abraded into unrecognizable forms once out of a protected context. This could provide a significant bias given the hostile erosional regimes which Scotland has experienced, but it is a circular argument which does not indicate that handaxes were there in the first place.

The Revd Frederick Smith, the most ardent champion of very early prehistoric presence in Scotland, was well aware of the raw material question (eg Smith 1899) and sought to convince sceptics that his collection of very rolled specimens of non-flint rock from many parts of Scotland comprised genuine palaeoliths (Smith 1909). Smith's claims (see below) were readily dismissed (Lacaille 1946; 1954), but with hindsight, given the 'eolith-mania' of his times, it is only surprising that so few such claims were made in Scotland. Nevertheless, rather similar suggestions do continue to arise from time to time (Urquhart 1994) and will no doubt always do so sporadically. It was the recent publication of a handaxe ostensibly from Islay (Mithen *et al* 1992) which stimulated the author's interest in a reconsideration of this particular topic (Saville 1993).

The primary purpose of the present article is to review all the evidence available to the author for finds of handaxe type in Scotland, most of which have come to light since Lacaille's assessment (1954). The map (illus 1) shows the location of the main findspots considered in the text.

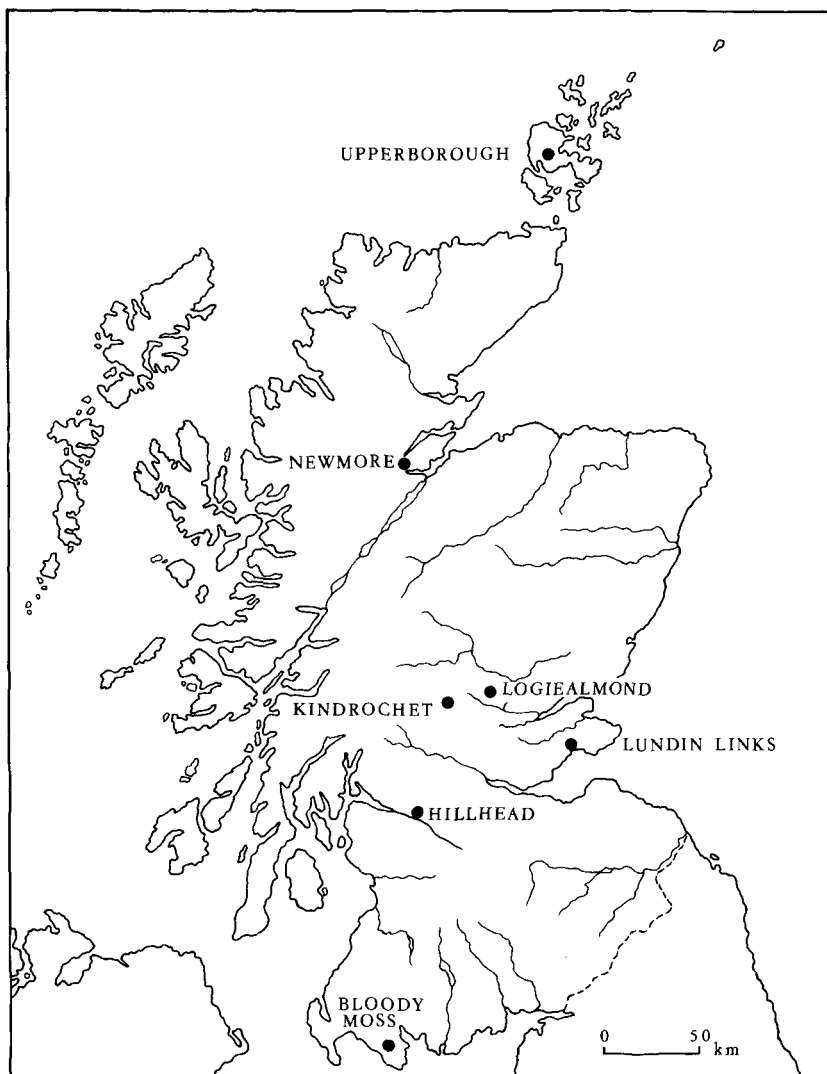
## THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE FROM SCOTLAND

The objects to be discussed can be subdivided into two categories: those artefacts which are indisputably handaxes of diagnostic early Palaeolithic type; and those which resemble Palaeolithic forms but which are less distinctive in their typology, raising doubt about their typological attribution and thus their age.

Before considering these handaxes and handaxe-like artefacts, it is necessary to consider briefly any other objects which have been claimed as early Palaeolithic.<sup>3</sup> The material from Scotland which the Revd Frederick Smith (1909) published as Palaeolithic has not been given any professional credence (Lacaille 1946, 65) and it is perfectly clear from Smith's own illustrations that these finds were all naturally formed stones, misunderstood in an excess of 'eolith-mania'. Smith's substantial book (1909) was the culmination of many years of dogged determination to prove the existence of Palaeolithic occupation, as recorded in several other articles (Smith 1894; 1895; 1899). In pursuing this goal, Smith was very much part of a Europe-wide trend to demonstrate the extremes of human antiquity by reference to finds of the pseudo-artefacts of stone now known variously as eoliths, geofacts, naturefacts, or tephrofacts (Raynal *et al* 1995; Roebroeks & van Kolfschoten 1995; Schnurrenburger & Bryan 1985). Beginning in the 19th century, the eolith controversy (Roe 1981, 27–8) raged most famously in Britain at the beginning of the present century in East Anglia, where Reid Moir was the chief protagonist in favour of eoliths as artefacts and, despite convincing denials from Hazzledine Warren and others, the debate was still alive in the 1930s (Kendrick & Hawkes 1932, 1–12 and references therein).

Thus, it is not too surprising that in 1936, Ludovic Mann could report in a note in the journal *Nature* the discovery of 'rolled stone implements of types similar to those of the palaeolithic cultures of England and France' from glacial clays and derived gravels in Shetland (Mann 1936). This initial announcement was never followed by any further publication or other substantiation, and the claim was dismissed by all other authorities (McCallien 1937, 175; Lacaille 1946, 65). The whereabouts of these 'implements' are unknown.

The three items of 'Palaeolithic type' published by the Abbé Breuil (1937), found by him in the area of Kindrochet (NGR: NN 723 233) to the west of Comrie, Perthshire, survive in the Perth Museum & Art Gallery collection (reg no PERGM: 16/1937).<sup>4</sup> Breuil's publication of these objects as Palaeolithic was somewhat half-hearted, though he did claim the opinions of several leading scholars of the day in support of the most convincing being 'a humanly-made implement of fairly old palaeolithic date' (1937, 464). Although the finds were accepted initially, sight unseen, by Movius (1942, 48), no subsequent authority has regarded them as palaeoliths<sup>5</sup>



ILLUS 1 Outline map of Scotland, showing the find-locations mentioned in the text

(Movius 1953, 81; Lacaille 1946, 76; 1954, 25–6). Now of some antiquarian interest, Breuil's finds are curios without direct relevance to Scottish prehistory.

Finally in this preamble, mention should be made of the handaxe in the Museum of Islay Life at Port Charlotte, Isle of Islay. This is a genuine flint handaxe, originally published as having been found on the western side of the Gruinart estuary near Ardnave (Mithen *et al* 1992). However, subsequent information revealed this handaxe to have been part of a collection established at Bowmore School, and not a local find (Harding 1993). The Islay handaxe, therefore, is simply another instance of the many Palaeolithic handaxes in Scottish museum collections which are definitely or probably from southern England or northern France, or which have no information whatsoever about their provenances.

## PALAEOLITHIC HANDAXES

There are currently four examples known from Scotland which have, or reputedly have, Scottish provenances.

*Bloody Moss, Sorbie, Wigtownshire (NGR: NX 415 442) (illus 2)*

This handaxe is without doubt the finest specimen reported from Scotland, as well as apparently being the first authentic handaxe to enter the archaeological record in Scotland.

**Description** Complete handaxe in good condition with no modern damage. Some rolling of the flake-scar ridges and local dulling of the edges, though these are still sharp in parts. Variegated coloration, mainly olive green-grey, with patches of ochreous brown. There are small patches of cortex surviving on both faces, but very worn and of vestigial thickness. Length 181 mm; breadth 100 mm; thickness 50 mm; weight 785 g.

The first notice of this handaxe seems to have been when it was purchased for the collection of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland (NMAS). It created both interest and suspicion at the time, as the anonymous author (probably Dr Joseph Anderson) records:

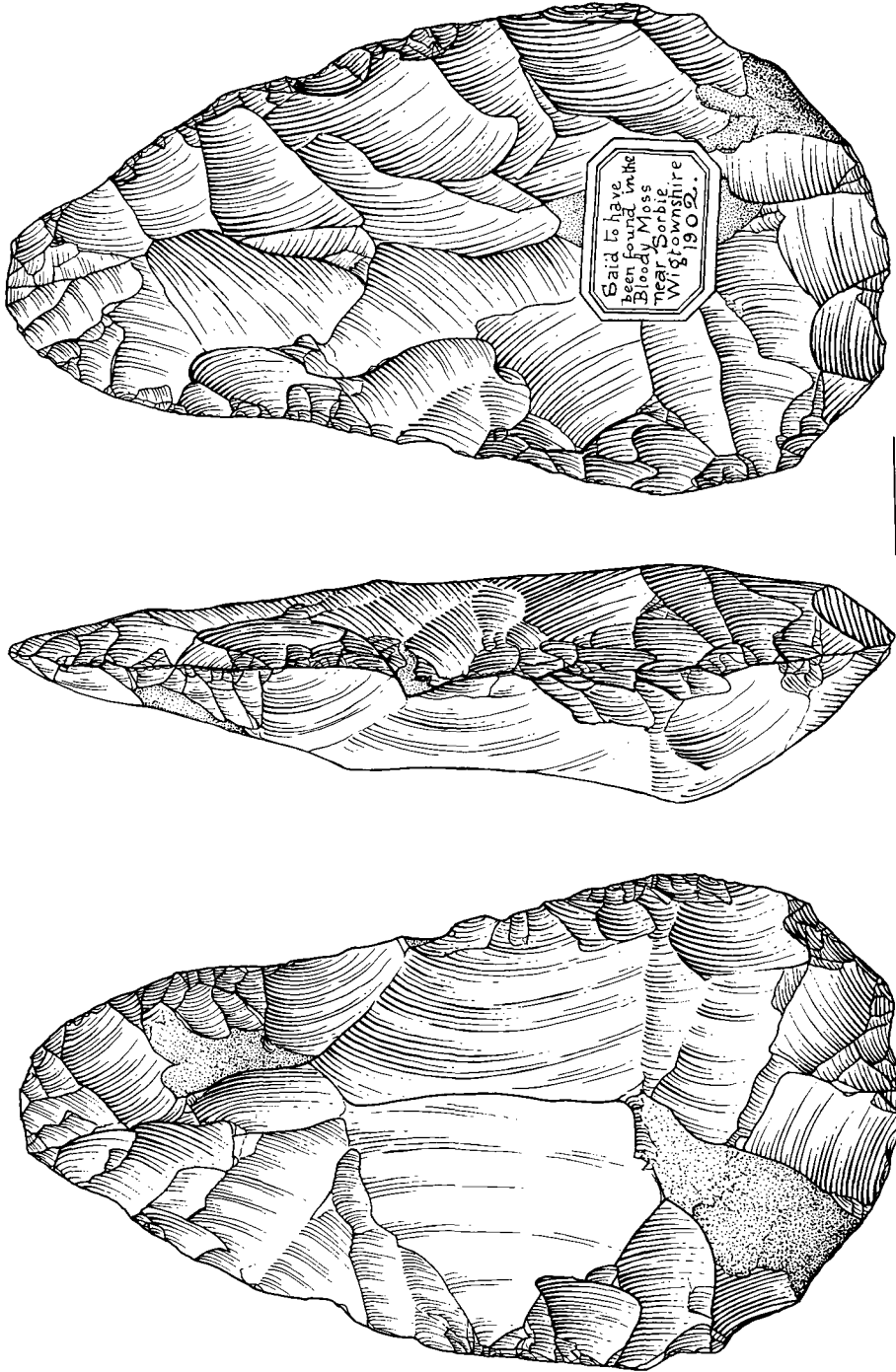
This being the first instance of an alleged discovery of a palaeolithic implement of flint in Scotland, the Purchase Committee requested Dr Anderson to obtain all the evidence from the parties on the spot, and to submit the implement itself, along with the evidence, to Sir John Evans and Sir Hubert Maxwell (Anon 1902, 632).

Anderson recruited the local assistance of Sergeant John Pirie of the Constabulary at Whithorn, but it proved impossible to obtain exact information about the pedigree of the handaxe. The confused tale which emerged led to the conclusion that there had probably been conflation of the finding of a later prehistoric flint axehead while drain-cutting in Bloody Moss c 1870 by James Sletch, and apparently subsequently lost, with the handaxe which the vendor, Joseph Young of Whithorn, said he obtained from John Webster, a crofter at Bloody Moss and a close friend of James Sletch. Where Joseph Young may have obtained the actual handaxe itself was unclear, though Maxwell suggested it might have gone astray from his collection of specimens taken to Whithorn to illustrate a lecture he gave some years previously. As Maxwell commented, 'the whole thing is a puzzle and conveys a lesson of caution in regard to locality of origin and juxtaposition' (Anon 1902, 633).

The handaxe was recorded in the NMAS's log as a purchase of 1902 but, unusually and perhaps because of the doubts about its provenance, appears not to have been given a registration number. It could not be traced at the time of publishing a previous note which mentioned this handaxe (Saville 1993), but searches of the National Museums of Scotland (NMS) Archaeology Department reserve collections during their current rehousing have located it, and it has now been registered (NMS: AB 3076).

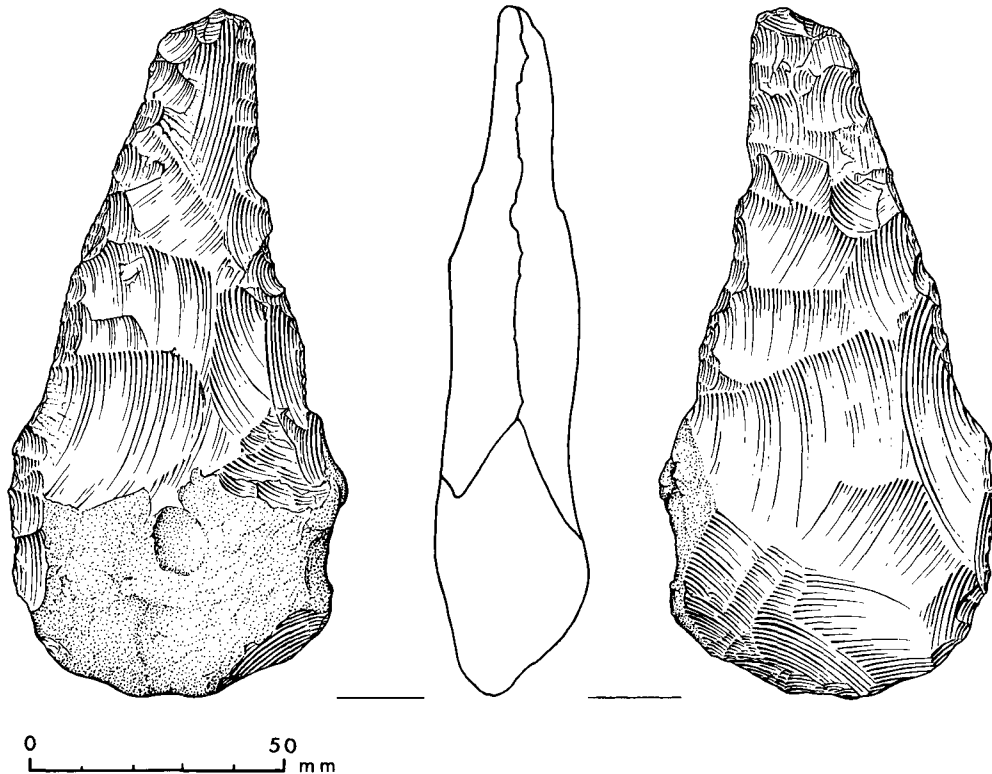
*Logiealmond, Perthshire (NGR: NN 990 305) (illus 3)*

Breuil (1937, 464) drew attention to this handaxe, which is in the collection of Perth Museum & Art Gallery (reg no PERGM: 5/1935).



0 50 mm

ILLUS 2 Palaeolithic flint handaxe: 'Bloody Moss, Sorbie, Wigtownshire'. Scale 2:3



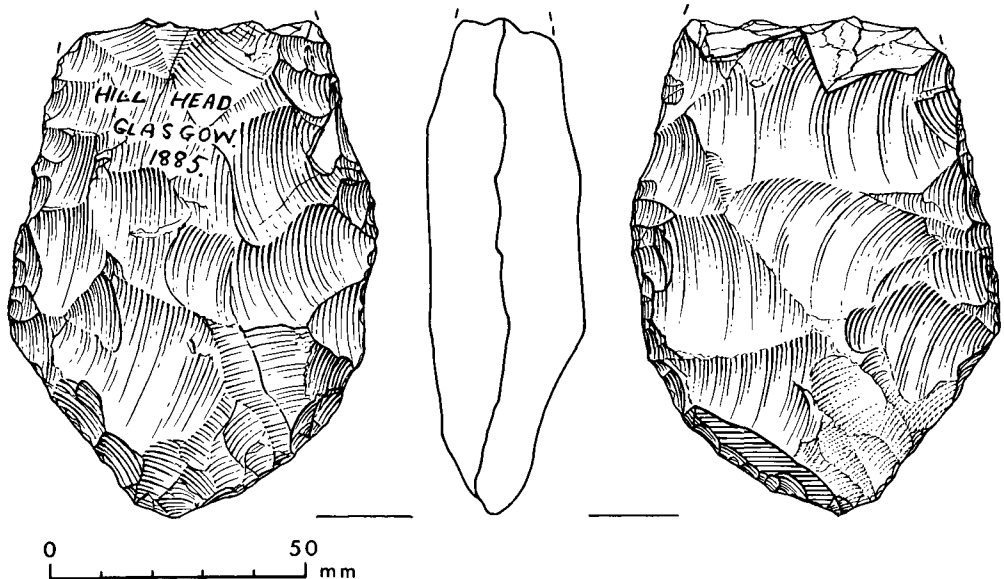
ILLUS 3 Palaeolithic flint handaxe: 'Logiealmond, Perthshire'. Scale 2:3

**Description** Flint handaxe of markedly pointed, ficron-like form. The butt is cortical on the dorsal surface. The surface is densely stained to a variegated ochreous colour: pale yellow-brown through to dark red-brown. The flake-scar ridges are very rolled and sometimes abraded and the edges are very battered. There is a slight, ancient, break at the tip, which is completely rolled, with the break-surface the same colour as the rest. The registration number occurs twice on the ventral butt surface, once in black ink on an applied paper label, and again in black ink directly on the flint. Length 136 mm; breadth 66 mm; thickness 31 mm; weight 248 g.

This handaxe, of classic Acheulian character, was donated by Mr John McGregor of Bridgend, Perth. Breuil records that it was reportedly found 'in a cavity' at Logiealmond, which is a parish on the north side of the River Almond to the west of Perth, though he himself obviously doubted this provenance (Breuil 1937, 464).<sup>6</sup> While one cannot agree with Breuil that the handaxe is necessarily made of flint from south-east England, it is hard to dispute his suspicion that it could have been a recent import to Scotland. Hard evidence is absent, but the similarities between the condition and appearance of this handaxe and examples from southern England, and the absence of authenticated examples from Scotland, make Logiealmond an unlikely provenance.

*Hillhead, Glasgow — or Hill Head, Hampshire? (illus 4)*

This fragmentary handaxe is in the collection of Inverness Museum & Art Gallery (reg no INVMG: 00/67).



ILLUS 4 Palaeolithic flint handaxe: 'Hill Head, Glasgow'. Scale 2:3

**Description** The lower portion of a handaxe, butt end complete, broken off at the distal tip, where perhaps a third or quarter of the total length of the tool is lost. The break is ancient, since, although it post-dates the heavily discoloured surface of the handaxe, it is itself quite discoloured. The condition of the handaxe is rolled, with some recent abrasion on the edges. No proper cortex remains, though an area at the butt has what appear to be traces of the inner limit of cortical cover. The discoloured surface is a variegated ochreous brown/grey, while the break is a light yellow/buff colour. The original colour of the flint is nowhere fully apparent. Length 99 mm; maximum breadth 71 mm; thickness 32 mm; weight 258 g.

Written on the handaxe in black ink, as shown on the drawing, is HILL HEAD GLASGOW 1885, while on the opposite face are the vestigial traces of a former white paper label. There is no information on record at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery as to when or how the handaxe was acquired, before its registration in 1967, and although the lettering of the provenance is different from and presumably precedes that of the registration number, it does not appear to have the character of lettering from 1885. Possibly the whole or part of this was copied from the former paper label.

Apart from the writing on the handaxe, there is no independent evidence to substantiate its provenance or former ownership. It is inherently improbable, however, that a find of this type at this date in Glasgow would have received no publicity and recording at the time. If one accepts that a Glasgow attribution is unlikely, but that the location Hillhead is correct, then there would obviously be many possibilities for the assumption that Hillhead was Scotland's best known Hillhead, the one in Glasgow (*c* NS 570 670), in the absence of any other data. Hillhead is, in fact, a very common placename at local farm or hamlet level, and there are many occurrences in Scotland as elsewhere in Britain. However, it is interesting that the writing on the handaxe appears to render Hill Head as two separate words, which brings to mind the locality of Hill Head in Hampshire (NGR: SU 540 023), well known as the findspot of hundreds of Lower Palaeolithic handaxes (Roe 1968, 99), now widely dispersed in museum collections, including three examples in the NMS, derived from the former Royal Scottish Museum collection. Finds of palaeoliths



from Hill Head, Hampshire, were certainly well known by 1885 (see discussion in Evans 1872, 546) and many entered the Sturge Collection, including examples in a rolled condition with deeply ochreous coloration similar to the Inverness Museum specimen (Smith 1931, 75–8).

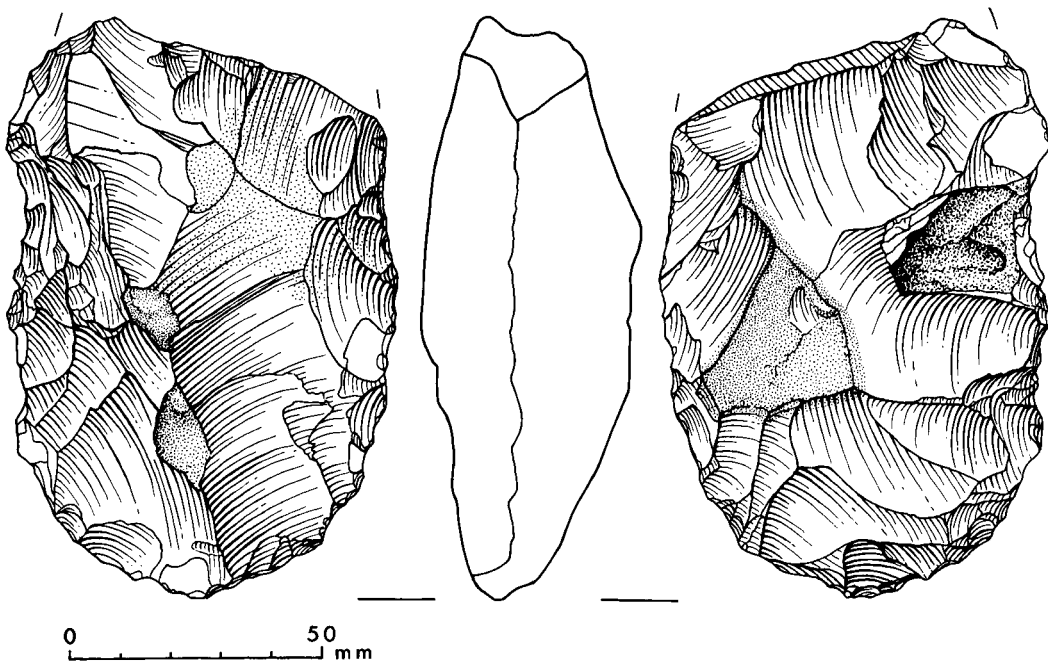
Although proof is lacking, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that this handaxe is most likely to have been found originally at Hill Head in Hampshire, subsequently acquiring its link with Glasgow after arriving in Scotland, by default of any associated documentation other than the incorrectly understood placename.

*Newmore, Ross & Cromarty (NGR: NH 544 523) (illus 5)*

In 1991, the National Museums of Scotland acquired by donation a find from Newmore, near Muir of Ord, at the western end of the Black Isle.

**Description** This implement (reg no NMS: AB 3035) is the major part of a flint handaxe which has lost its tip in antiquity. One face is stained a fairly uniform ochreous brown; the other, cortical, face is less evenly discoloured, with some flake surfaces a darkish grey colour. Some more recent edge chips (left open in the drawing) reveal a medium grey-coloured interior. There is some rolling of the flake-scar ridges. Present length 110 mm; breadth 79 mm; thickness 42 mm; weight 370 g.

The handaxe was found in 1990 at the door of a derelict croft house. The finder was of the opinion that the object must have been collected from a local field by the late crofter, but had no positive evidence to support this assertion. All things being equal, the general character of the handaxe would suggest southern Britain or northern France, and although there is again no hard evidence one way or the other, an original provenance from the Black Isle seems improbable.



ILLUS 5 Palaeolithic flint handaxe: 'Newmore, Ross & Cromarty'. Scale 2:3

## IMPLEMENTS WITH HANDAXE AFFINITIES

Two of these are currently known to the author and warrant further description.

### *Upperborough, Harray, mainland Orkney (NGR: NY 310 180) (illus 6A)*

This implement was presented to the NMAS (reg no NMS: AA 133) in 1913 and was briefly mentioned together with photographic illustrations by Callander (1931). The only information on the provenance is that it was 'picked up . . . on the surface of the ground, in gravel, on the Common to the west of the township of Upperborough, Harray, at about half a mile distant from the Loch of Harray, and some 5 miles inland from the sea' (Anon 1914).

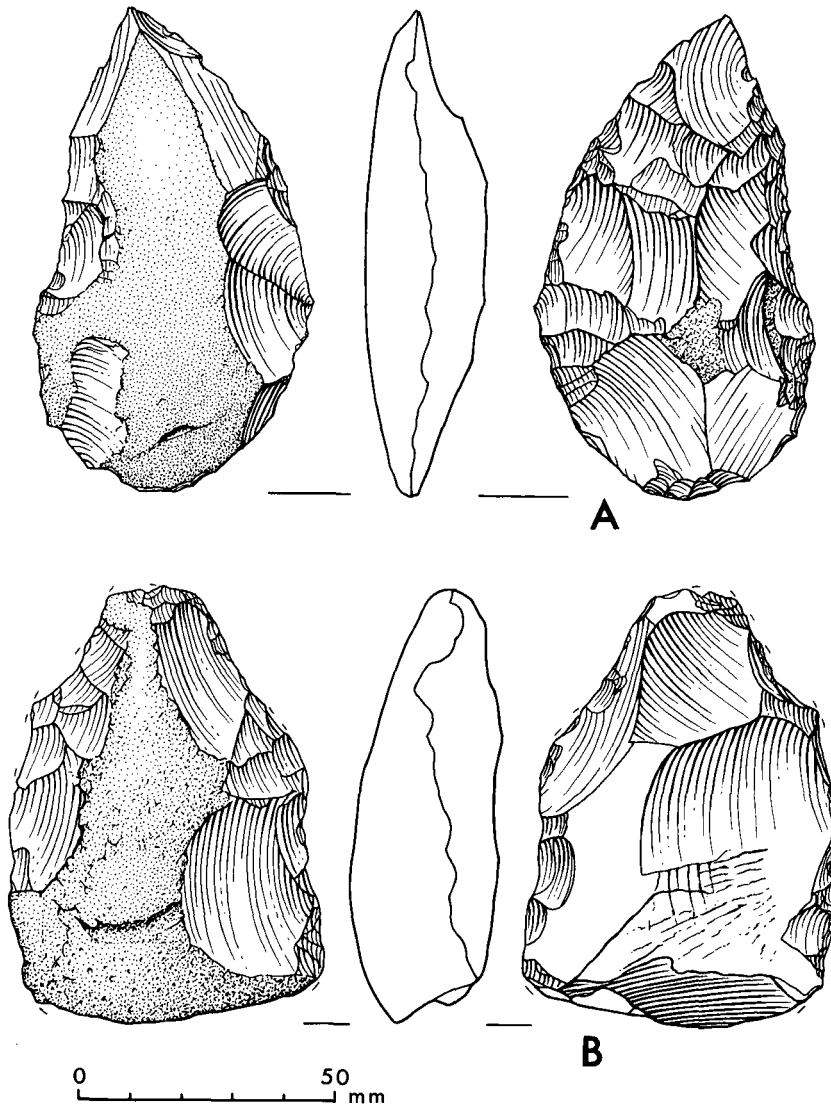
**Description** Small flint biface, partially flaked on the cortical dorsal surface, fully flaked on the ventral face. Complete, except that the tip has probably been unintentionally modified by a blow just below the tip, which has created a deep flake scar which considerably reduces the thickness. This blow may be a knapping error or use-damage; it does not obviously post-date the other retouch. The condition of the whole implement is sharp, and it has a variegated coloration of olive-green and slightly ochreous brown. Length 95 mm; maximum width 54 mm; thickness 24 mm; weight: 111 g.

This biface, in extremely good condition, is not sufficiently diagnostic typologically to be described without equivocation as a handaxe of Lower Palaeolithic type. As a single find, this judgement would apply irrespective of wherever it was found out of context. Nothing else quite like it has ever been recorded from Orkney, though relatively large-sized later prehistoric bifacial arrowheads and knives of flint do occur, as occasionally do other flint artefacts of quite large size (Callander 1931, fig 10).

### *Lundin Links, Lower Largo, Fife (NGR: NO 404 027) (illus 6B)*

A second enigmatic biface is the one donated to Kirkcaldy Museum & Art Gallery (reg no KIRMG: 1960: 7) in 1960 by Sir John Gilmour (ex Montrave Hall collection). There is no information about the circumstances of finding or provenance, other than that it was found at Lundin Links, near the standing stones. This provenance is written on the ventral surface of the biface, apparently at the same time as the museum registration number, and thus after it arrived at Kirkcaldy Museum. The same surface has the remains of a large paper label; possibly this had the same provenance information and was removed in 1960. Lundin Links is on the south Fife coast, just west of Lower Largo; the well-known standing stones (Walker & Ritchie 1987, 176), now on a golf course, are about 500 m inland.

**Description** Small biface of lightish grey flint, partially retouched on the cortical dorsal surface, wholly retouched on the ventral surface except for a probably thermal scar area (left open on the illustration) and the fact that the distal tip appears to be a partially unmodified hinge fracture. The cortex is chatter-marked and waterworn. The condition is slightly rolled on some of the ventral flake-scar ridges, and at various points around the edge, where some instances of more recent damage truncate the rolled areas. The tip has some damage and abrasion, but can never have been symmetrically sharp. There is an old break at the base, but this could possibly have been incorporated in the original form of the implement. Length: 86 mm; maximum breadth: 62 mm; maximum thickness 28 mm; weight 158 g.



ILLUS 6A Flint biface: Upperborough, Harray, Orkney.

ILLUS 6B Flint biface: Lundin Links, Lower Largo, Fife. Scale 2:3

The Lundin Links implement, chunkier than that from Orkney, is closer in some respects to being a handaxe, and yet, admittedly with a fair degree of intuition, it fails to convince as a conventional Lower Palaeolithic type.

Both the Orkney and Fife bifaces are therefore rejected as acceptable handaxes of Lower Palaeolithic character. This assessment is inevitably subjective, and sufficient doubt remains to make the publication of these pieces appropriate here.

## DISCUSSION

Of the finds reviewed here, none of those which is typologically of definite Lower Palaeolithic character can be shown to have a convincing local provenance in origin. Their attribution to Scotland rests on mistaken placenames, confusion with other implements, and loss or ignorance of acquisition history. The most likely explanation in each case is that the handaxes have 'escaped' from antiquarian or curio collections, lost such provenances as they ever had, and acquired Scottish provenances by default. Perhaps the most damning criterion, given the lithic resource base in Scotland, is that all of the known examples of handaxes are of exotic flint, rather than local stone.

If and when further instances of handaxe finds come to light in Scotland,<sup>7</sup> it will be important that all the circumstances pertaining should be subject to rigorous source criticism. The possibility of Lower Palaeolithic human presence in Scotland cannot be ruled out, but on present evidence the archaeological record provides no justification for any such claim.

Precisely similar circumstances apply elsewhere in north-west Europe. In Ireland, where erosional factors during the Quaternary were only somewhat less severe than in Scotland, there is still no positive evidence for pre-Mesolithic presence, despite early attempts to claim the existence of Lower Palaeolithic sites and finds (see review by Movius 1942, 105–17; cf Woodman 1996).

In Denmark the earliest accredited settlement is in the Lateglacial phase, though several claims for much earlier Palaeolithic finds have been made. Some of these claims involve the same problem described above in the case of the Orkney and Lundin Links finds, of how to classify implements which bear some resemblances to handaxes. In a recent review of the Danish situation, Holm & Larsson (1995) cannot substantiate any well-provenanced finds of convincing palaeoliths, but they are prepared to keep an open mind about the possibility of eventually finding Lower Palaeolithic material, feeling that the view that geological factors will inevitably have obliterated the evidence is too pessimistic. They are encouraged in their opinion by the relative proximity of some Palaeolithic finds from Germany, but this is little different to the case of English handaxe finds *vis-à-vis* Scotland.

The reality may well be that in Scotland, Ireland and Denmark the search for locally produced Lower Palaeolithic handaxes is indeed a search for phantoms (Holm & Larsson 1995, 201). Some consolation may be sought in the Welsh situation, where, were it not for the Pontnewydd Cave finds, the Lower Palaeolithic, even after considerable research input, would be represented by only six or so stray finds of handaxes (Green & Walker 1991, 30). However, all of these are from the far south of Wales, at or beyond the limits of recent glaciation. Since Scotland has yet to produce a single, reliably local, Lower Palaeolithic find, the prognosis for extending Scottish prehistory to this period cannot be optimistic.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am particularly grateful to Gavin Grant at Kirkcaldy Museum & Art Gallery, Mark Hall at Perth Museum & Art Gallery, and Robin Hanley at Inverness Museum & Art Gallery, for access to objects in their care, for help with information, and for arranging permission to publish objects from their respective institutions. I am especially indebted to Mark Hall for researching aspects of the material in Perth and for supplying copies of letters in the Perth Museum archive. Derek Roe and John Wymer kindly read an earlier draft of this paper and I am most grateful for their interest and helpful comments. The paper has also benefited from the comments of Clive Bonsall as referee. Any errors of fact or judgement remain the sole responsibility of the author. Finally I

must thank my colleague Tam Ward for his assistance in rediscovering the Bloody Moss handaxe and the NMS Library staff, particularly Emma Robinson, for help with references.

## NOTES

- 1 The Creag nan Uamh caves near Inchnadamph, Assynt, Sutherland, were claimed as the haunt of 'Palaeolithic man' (Cree 1927), though admittedly the supposed human occupation was never thought to be Lower, rather than Upper, Palaeolithic. While the caves are of very considerable importance for Quaternary research, in particular because of the Middle/early Late Devensian faunal remains they contain, it is no longer thought they provide evidence of any prehistoric human activity (Murray *et al* 1993; Saville in press). This is not to deny the theoretical Palaeolithic potential of any cave with deposits of Pleistocene age; any new discovery of such in Scotland would merit close archaeological scrutiny (cf Wymer 1995, 49).
- 2 This is a different argument from that advanced by Gemmell & Kesel (1979, 74–5), who, despite the use of the terms 'palaeoliths' and 'Palaeolithic', were essentially speculating on the potential for Upper Palaeolithic or Lateglacial human presence in Buchan. Pebble flint sufficient for the manufacture of some classes of Upper Palaeolithic artefacts would certainly have been easily available in Buchan, as indeed it would have been in many coastal locations throughout Scotland, but no convincing artefact evidence for any pre-Mesolithic human presence in Buchan or elsewhere in Scotland has yet been discovered (Saville in press).
- 3 Roe (1981, 134) mentions, in addition to Smith (1909), Asher (1922) as an author claiming Palaeolithic artefacts in northern Britain. The reference cited, a catalogue of stone implements in Perth Museum (a separately bound offprint of Asher's 1923 article), does not actually include any specific suggested palaeoliths from Scotland, though it does include the Irish eoliths from Holywood, County Down (Asher 1923, 38–9).
- 4 The Breuil items are individually numbered 49 to 51 in the Perth Museum records, and can be described as follows:
 

49 (Breuil 1937, 464 & pl 29, lower) Large stone flake, length 141 mm, breadth 106 mm, thickness 25 mm. Two flakes removed across the dorsal surface from the lower left side and some damage at the distal tip. No 49 could possibly be a humanly struck flake, since it has a reasonably convincing striking platform and appropriate dorsal/ventral surfaces, and the two flake scars on the dorsal surface could be deliberate removals. However, there is no other modification to make this into a tool and there is no obvious working edge. More importantly, there is nothing about this flake which is diagnostic of age.

50 (Breuil 1937, 464 & pl 29, upper) Block of stone with a natural flat surface forming a platform from which six or more flakes have been detached, giving it the character of a simple core. Wear has occurred on part of the platform edge since the removal of the flakes. Length 160 mm, thickness 75 mm. This is a natural block from which several flakes appear to have been removed deliberately. It is not a tool, though it could conceivably be a block of building stone trimmed to shape. Again there is absolutely nothing diagnostic of age, except that the wear indicates it is not fresh. Both items 49 and 50 were collected on separate occasions by Breuil as uncontexted surface finds in an abandoned gravel pit near Kindrochet house.

51 (Breuil 1937, 464, not illus) Large stone slab with triangular cross-section; length 215 mm, breadth 131 mm, thickness 51 mm. Possibly struck (and subsequently partly burnt?), but otherwise unmodified and conceivably produced by a natural blow, with splitting along a fracture plane. There is nothing about this slab of rock which suggests it could have been produced, or functioned, as a hand tool. Found by Breuil near Easter Dundurn house 'amongst the materials used in the construction of an ancient smelting furnace(?)' [*sic*].

A further object in Perth Museum — reg no 50A/1939 (or 50A/1934 or 50A/1937 — there is some uncertainty), which has been stored with the above finds — is a triangular flake of rock. Although just possibly humanly struck, this is not obviously a tool, and had been included with the Palaeolithic material in the store only because of its shape, which superficially resembles that of a handaxe. Nothing further is known about this piece of rock and it cannot be accorded any archaeological significance.

- 5 From the correspondence of 1944–8 surviving in the Perth Museum & Art Gallery archive it is clear that, after much initial confusion over which stones were which, Lacaille did eventually see the Kindrochet artefacts published by Breuil. Two rock specimens from the Perth collections were sent in 1945 to Lacaille, then at the Wellcome Historical Medical Museum in London, in response to his enquiries about Breuil's objects, but Lacaille's letter of 4 May 1945 acknowledging their receipt says 'They do not . . . appear to be those which the Abbé Breuil figured in his disconcerting paper . . .'. The two stones seen by Lacaille he pronounced as naturally fractured and not archaeological, but it is not now possible to identify in the Perth Museum collection which stones these were. Subsequently, in 1948, following reorganization after the wartime packing of the collections, the curator James Wood located the Breuil items and sent them to Lacaille, who concluded in a letter to Wood of 19 November 1948 that 'they show no positive evidence of "humanity"'. Thus Lacaille had not seen Breuil's finds by the time of his dismissal of them in his Geological Association paper (1946, 76), which was read to the Association in 1944, but he had seen them before completing his major work on the Scottish Stone Age, in which they merited only very casual reference as 'not convincing' (1954, 26).
- 6 Perth Museum records throw little further light on the provenance of this object. The Abbé Breuil's secretary, Mary Boyle, wrote in December 1936 to the curator, Mr Ritchie, requesting further information on the Logiealmond handaxe. Ritchie's reply (20 January 1937) states: 'I regret that I can give you no information regarding its finding, except that it was found in a cavity.' Miss Boyle responded (22 January 1937) with a further batch of probing queries: 'You say it was found in a cavity, do you know on what estate? and do you mean between rocks or in a cave? Do you know who picked it up, and if so if the person is alive and could be consulted? or did you arrive at its possession second or third hand?' There is no indication in the Perth Museum archive that Ritchie ever replied to this letter.

A letter dated 4 May 1945 from A D Lacaille to James Wood (see note 5 above), then curator of Perth Museum, contains the following observation: 'From what you say regarding the Logiealmond hand-axe, I need not trouble you to send this on since it is pretty evident from Breuil's and your own indications that no faith can be placed on its alleged provenance.' Unfortunately, it has not yet been possible to trace a copy of the preceding letter from Wood to Lacaille to ascertain what his comments were about the handaxe.

- 7 Addendum May 1998. Information from Mr Neil Curtis has led to the opportunity to record a Palaeolithic flint handaxe found by Dr Andrew Taylor on the beach at Musselburgh, East Lothian. This will be published in a future issue of *Discovery & Excavation in Scotland*. The author would be grateful for information on any other Palaeolithic handaxes or related types with ostensible Scottish findspots in public or private collections.

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