NOTES

Lithic objects from Plonk’s Hill, Shamley Green

Introduction

Informal fieldwalking has been undertaken by one of the authors (IW) over a number of years on fields at Plonk’s Hill, Shamley Green (centred TQ 033 432) and has resulted in the recovery of a collection of worked flints and other lithics. The bulk of the collection comprises several hundred worked flints, which vary in date from Mesolithic (microliths and microburins), through Neolithic (leaf-shaped and shouldered arrow heads and two further polished axe fragments) to Early Bronze Age (one barbed-and-tanged arrowhead). In addition, a small number of Palaeolithic pieces including a small triangular biface, and four later pieces – a greenstone axe, a sarsen pebble hammer, a polished axe fragment and a fabricator – were found, and it is these latter objects that are the subject of this note.

Location

Plonk’s Hill is a spur at the southern margin of the greensand ridge where it is cut by the Bramley Wey stream (also known locally as the Cranleigh Waters). On the east side of the stream, the top of the spur consists of Lower Greensand overlain by small areas of river gravels and other drift deposits, and below this successive narrow bands of Atherfield and Weald Clays bound alluvial deposits close to the stream. The spur causes a narrowing of the Bramley Wey valley and provides an extensive outlook reaching from the North Downs into the Low Weald.

The lithics

PALAEOLITHS

a) Small triangular biface, findspot TQ 033 4320, Hythe Beds (fig 1a)
A small biface, close to an equilateral triangle in form, 59mm in height with a maximum width of 60mm, with a thumb-sized flake taken transversely from one side close to the base. The artefact has a waxy, creamy-buff surface with some ochreous staining, particularly on the high points and ridges, which are somewhat abraded. Areas of damage are also heavily patinated and no parent flint is visible. There is some frost crazing. The piece is considered to be Mousterian of Acheulian tradition (Peter Harp, pers comm).

b) Axe fragment, findspot TQ 028 4300, Atherfield Clay (not illustrated)
A portion of an axe that might have been split during use and which has been subjected to later retouch. The flint is relatively unpatinated but has very heavy ochreous staining.

c) Levallois flake, findspot TQ 0302 4270, Atherfield Clay (fig 1b)
A flake, 115mm long with a maximum width of 67mm, produced from a ‘tortoise’ core, with a well-prepared striking platform. The artefact is relatively unpatinated and the ridges are unabraded. Recent chips suggest that the parent flint is pale grey in colour and a number of chips around the edges, which reveal an intermediate degree of ochreous staining, suggest that the flake might have undergone some deliberate modification since its original deposition.

d) A large flake, reputed to have been found on Run Common (area TQ 034 419) by a Mr Glover and later given to IW (not illustrated)
A flake, 103mm long with a maximum width of 42mm. The piece has been retouched later and has heavy ochreous staining, but where this has been removed by recent damage the parent flint can be seen to be a pale grey in colour.

e) Seven small flakes of probable Palaeolithic origin, all of which bear signs of later retouch. Of these, two have a waxy cream-buff patination while the remainder have heavy ochreous staining (not illustrated).

LATER ARTEFACTS

a) Greenstone axe (fig 2)
A Class A sub-type ii axe, length 100mm, width 60mm, maximum thickness 23mm, stumpy in shape with ‘more or less straight sides tapering to a wide curved butt’ (Field & Woolley 1984), though this example is notably asymmetric. From visual examination only, it appears to be made of greenstone or epidiorite. The stone cannot be fully identified without petrological analysis but it is notable that a high proportion of those from Surrey which have been studied have been found to comprise epidiorite thought to be from Devon or Cornwall (ibid) possibly from the Mounts Bay area (Stone & Wallis 1951). There is some modern damage to one face.
b) Sarsen pebble hammer (fig 3)
A large, ovoid pebble hammer, length 145mm, width 90mm, maximum thickness 55mm with a central, hour-glass-shaped perforation through a natural, otherwise unshaped piece of sarsen with slight ochreous staining. Both ends of the implement show signs of wear, that on the blunt end being a little off-centre owing to the asymmetrical shape of the pebble.

c) Polished axe fragment, findspot TQ 032 429, river gravel (not illustrated)
A fragment representing part of one end of a polished flint axe, broken in antiquity, and with a waxy, cream-buff surface.

d) Fabricator, findspot TQ 032 432, Hythe Beds (not illustrated)
A fabricator, length 80mm, width 22mm, maximum thickness 12mm, in pale grey flint with a triangular cross-section.

Discussion
Gravel terraces associated with the Bramley Wey have produced other examples of Palaeolithic implements, particularly during gravel extraction in Shalford and Bramley in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. A very similar, though slightly larger, triangular biface was found at Peasmarsh, a large area of formerly marshy ground at the head of the valley (Evans 1897, 595), and finds, apparently now lost, but discovered ‘in gravel near a stream in Wonersh’ (VCH, 1, 254) may relate to this site. There are also local stories of Palaeolithic and Neolithic finds being made by a farm worker from the immediate area but these rumours cannot be substantiated and the finds are not available for study.

The concentration of flint from later periods appears to indicate visits to the site over a long period. Of the pieces reported here, pebble hammers may be of Mesolithic date (Rankine 1949, 70–6) but Neolithic and Bronze Age contexts are also known (Roe & Radley 1968, 173–4). The Neolithic greenstone axe described here has a close parallel from Shoelands, Puttenham (Field & Woolley, 1984, fig 1, no 26) and in Surrey in general, findspots of these Group I axes are concentrated close to the Thames and the Wey and their tributaries. On the greensand there is a concentration in the Peaslake–Holmbury area which, as here, was found in a commanding position (ibid). Neolithic activity is clearly attested by the fragments of polished axe found at Plonk’s Hill and the fabricator may also relate to this period although a Bronze Age date is also possible.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Peter Harp and Jonathan Cotton for their assistance in identifying the pieces and to the latter for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this note.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Fig 3 Plonk’s Hill. Later artefacts: sarsen pebble hammer. (Drawing by Alan Hall)