

East London Gravels: The Prehistoric Worked Flint from Whitehall Wood, Upminster

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Introduction

The assemblage comprised 207 pieces of worked flint, weighing a total of 2.963kg. The vast majority of flint consisted of flint-knapping waste – mainly large rough chunks and flake cores characteristic of Late Bronze Age technology, and often of poor quality. The largely undatable and often unstratified nature of the assemblage, which mainly occurred singly or in small groups, precluded the need for further analysis of the assemblage as a whole, with the exception of two refitted cores from F77 (Figure *:1-2).

Raw Material

Flint colours ranged from light to medium and dark brown and grey, often tinged with yellow. The unpredictable quality and, where present, thin remnant cortex, indicated that most, if not all, of the flint originated from a secondary source, probably from river gravels. Traces of possible utilisation were noted on some of the material, although many of the unretouched flakes and much of the other debitage appears to have sustained edge damage which is easily confused with utilisation.

Discussion

No formal tools and few retouched items were noted, which is also suggestive of a Late Bronze Age date (Herne 1991), or possibly even an Early Iron Age date (Humphrey and Young 2003). The assemblage was comparable to similar material from the much larger assemblage recovered from the Late Bronze Age riverside zone at Runnymede Bridge, Egham, Surrey (Bevan Forthcoming A).

The only evidence for re-fitting in the collection came from F77 – a large flake core of a distinctive speckled brown flint and three conjoining flakes (Cat. No 1, Figure *:1). The core was of probable Late Bronze Age date and the flint was of a superior quality to the rest of the collection, although it had a rough, patchy, corticated exterior. Three small joining fragments from a pebble core of dark grey translucent flint were recovered from the same context (Cat. No. 2, Figure *:2).

While the worked flint is of local significance only, as it indicates some activity at the site occurring in the Late Bronze Age and possibly Early Iron Age, some insight into the core reduction process was provided by the partially-refitted flake cores from F77 (Cat. Nos. 1-2, Figure *:1-2). The larger core had been reduced in a simple but systematic manner from one roughly-formed platform and the smaller core was made from a small, poor quality, split pebble. The exploitation of the small pebble core may indicate resource stress - that good quality flint was at a premium – during later prehistory.

Catalogue

1. Large flake core and three conjoining flakes. Speckled brown flint. Probable Late Bronze Age date. Total length: 70mm, width: 68mm, thickness: 55mm, total weight: 166 grams. F77. Figure *:1.
2. Three small joining fragments from a pebble core. Dark grey translucent flint. Probable Late Bronze Age date. Total length: 40mm, width: 36mm, thickness: 27mm, total weight: 25 grams. F77. Figure *:2.

3.

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