

XIII

MUSEUM NOTES, 1999

1. RECENT LITHIC FINDS FROM BOWDEN DOORS

A small assemblage of lithics from the sandstone outcrop of Bowden Doors (NU 070326) was passed to the Museum of Antiquities by Derek Cutts after their discovery by climbers at this popular crag. Previous excavations by Burgess, 300 yards from the south-east end of the crag, located a "considerable number of small pieces and chips of flint" (1972,

49). The only diagnostic pieces from the excavations were of Mesolithic type and all were found in the thin sandy soil overlying the bedrock. No associated structural features were found in the small trench.

In this new collection of finds there are two groups: the first an assemblage of 16 from beneath an overhang towards the north end of the main crag, where the ground had been eroded by climbers (Acc. No. 1998.5); the second group being a small group of three lithics

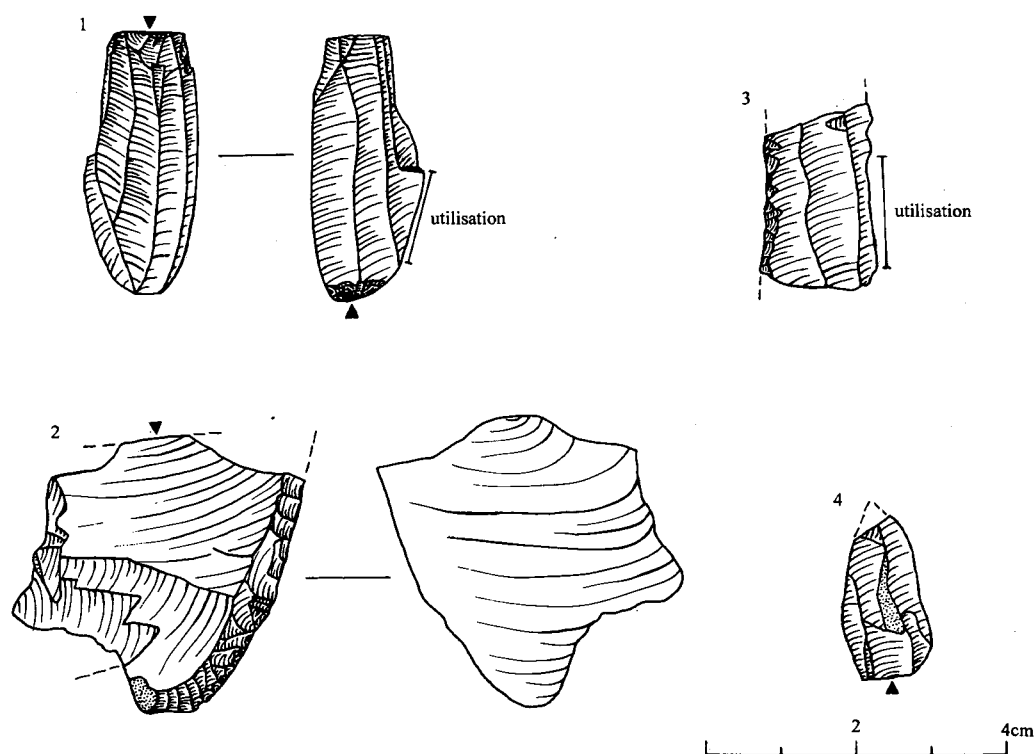


Fig. 1 Recent lithic finds from Bowden Doors (drawn by C. Waddington).

from the adjacent Colourheugh Crag, sometimes known as Back Bowden Doors (Acc. No. 1998.4).

Group I includes a classic example of an opposed-platform core with narrow, parallel-sided blade scars, typical of late Mesolithic and early Neolithic assemblages (Fig. 1.1). A broken scraper made on a large flake with steep retouch also fits into a Late Mesolithic tradition (Fig. 1.2), while a pointed blade with a burin removal or snapped end may be a blank for a microlith which was abandoned due to an impurity at its tip (distal end). The only other retouched piece in this group is a broken flake with a hinge fracture and tiny blade removal scar on its dorsal surface; edge damage along one side indicates its use probably as some kind of scraper. The other twelve pieces include five small broken blade segments, four small broken flakes, two small flakes and a broken pointed flake which might be a microlith tip.

Taken as a whole Group I indicates Late Mesolithic rather than Early Neolithic activity around this crag line even though the core and the broken blade segments would be at home in either a Late Mesolithic or early Neolithic assemblage. A wide range of flint types are evidenced in this small assemblage including seven pieces of light grey flint of various shades which may come from north-east Yorkshire, three pieces of more translucent types of flint, two pieces of orange flint, one white piece, one khaki piece and two burnt pieces of unknown original colour. The presence of these different flint types may be indicative of several different visits to this particular spot or, alternatively, could simply indicate the collection of flint from a diverse range of sources. It is interesting to note, however, that there is no indication of any of the north-east coastal flint which can be found in the boulder clays of the coastal strip or as pebbles on the beach, particularly as this type of flint dominates the assemblages from the coast only 8-25km away.

The second group of flints includes a small agate blade with a broken tip which may have been utilised as a microlith (Fig. 1.4). The likely source for this raw material is the raised

fluvio-glacial gravel terraces which are concentrated in the Milfield plain, and to a lesser extent strung along the upper reaches of the River Till towards Bewick and Powburn. A broken blade tool with retouch along one long edge and utilisation along the other has been burnt black and subsequently both its ends have broken off (Fig. 1.3). This piece has three parallel-sided blade scars on its dorsal side, again indicating a Late Mesolithic-Early Neolithic flintworking tradition. The last piece is a small flake with a hinge fracture that has utilisation on the dorsal edge of its proximal end, indicating its use as a tool at some point. This piece is made from very high quality nodular flint.

Overall, the assemblage displays a wide range of raw materials, but a consistent flaking technology and range of types that would fit most comfortably in a late Mesolithic or possibly early Neolithic tradition. However, the scraper from Group I is almost certainly Mesolithic and the possible microlith, microlith point and blank in Group II also hint at Mesolithic rather than early Neolithic activity at the foot of these crags. The position of the Group I assemblage from below an overhang is consistent with the use of these outcrops as rock shelters echoing the sites known as Goatscrag (Burgess 1972) and Corby's Crag (Beckensall 1976). The sandstone craglines of north Northumberland appear to have been popular upland locales during the Mesolithic, and the occurrence of microliths and microlith-associated pieces at these crag sites indicate their association with transitory upland hunting activities, such as the repair and maintenance of projectile points.

Clive Waddington

REFERENCES

- BECKENSALL, S., The excavation of a rock shelter at Corby's Crag, Edlingham, *AA*³, 4, (1976), 11-16.
BURGESS, C., Goatscrag: A Bronze Age rock shelter cemetery in north Northumberland. With notes on other rock shelters and crag lines in the region, *AA*⁴, 50 (1972), 15-69.

2. A NEW STONE AXE SOURCE IN THE NORTHUMBERLAND CHEVIOTS

A plough-damaged ground and polished stone axe was found by Colin Richards of the Department of Archaeology, University of Glasgow, in 1996 near Ewart, Northumberland (Acc. No. 1998.7; Fig. 2). The axe was recovered from a ploughed field known as "The Wilderness" (NT955318), which aerial photographs have shown to contain the Ewart Henge (Harding 1981), a possible mortuary enclosure (Miket 1976), pit alignment 2 and part of pit alignment 1 (Miket 1981). It is of interest that the axe appears to have been found within the ovoid enclosure that has been suggested as being a Neolithic mortuary monument (Miket 1976, 128).

The axe was passed to CW who was under-

taking a fieldwalking project in the area, and thence to the Museum of Antiquities. The axe was then passed to DS in the Department of Geological Sciences, University of Durham, for the identification and provenancing of the stone. The rock type from which the axe is made proved to be andesite which matches specimens of the andesitic lava of Devonian age in the Cheviot area. Precise details of the rock specimen are obscured by a weathered exterior but some obvious characteristic features are nevertheless apparent. In particular, there are irregularly shaped, more or less uniformly coloured grey particles, which are very smooth to the touch and obviously more resistant to weathering than the rest of the specimen. There are infillings of cavities within this lava in which the filling consists probably of chalcedony or some other variety of silica.

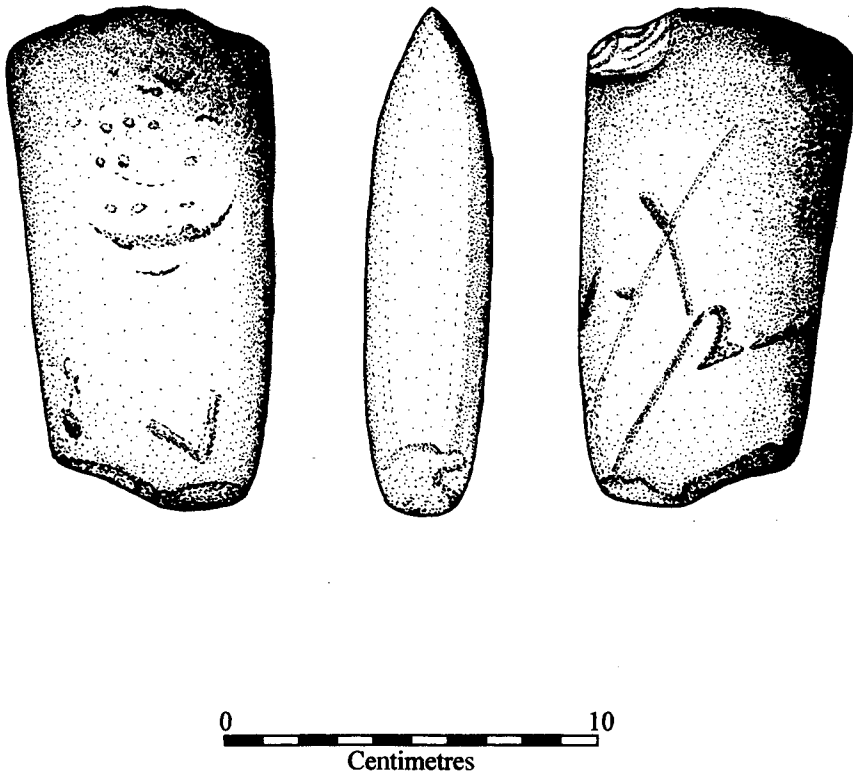


Fig. 2 Stone axe from Ewart, Northumberland (drawn by John Davis).

Much less obvious, but still apparent, are very small white or pink crystals of feldspar minerals. The closest match to a specimen of Cheviot andesite in the Department of Geological Science's collection is specimen number 23668: a sample of lava from near Ingram in the Breamish Valley, Northumberland. The confidence with which this stone type was able to be identified meant that thin-sectioning of the axe was considered unnecessary. It would seem that an as yet unrecognised Cheviot axe source may exist. Given earlier references to "porphyry" (ie lava) axes from the Milfield basin (eg Miket 1987, 68), it would appear that this most recent find is not unique.

The nearest andesite rock outcrops to this source area which could have formed possible quarry sites are Cunyan Craggs and the prominent exposures on the south side of the Harthope Burn, which include Langlee Craggs, Long Craggs, Housey Craggs, Middleton Craggs and Tathy Craggs. It may be no coincidence that the Threestoneburn stone circle is situated within view of all these outcrops (although the modern plantation around part of the circle obscures some of these crags from view). Therefore, recalling the situation in Cumbria where open stone circles have been suggested as being intimately associated with the Group VI axe trade (Bradley and Edmunds 1993), it is possible that an analogous situation may

have obtained for the north-east Cheviots (see also discussion in Waddington 1998).

David Schofield and Clive Waddington

REFERENCES

- BRADLEY, R., AND EDMONDS, M., *Interpreting the axe trade* (Cambridge, 1993).
 HARDING, A., Excavations in the prehistoric ritual complex near Milfield, Northumberland, *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 46 (1981), 87-135.
 MIKET, R., The evidence for Neolithic activity in the Milfield Basin, Northumberland, in C.B. Burgess and R. Miket (ed.), *Settlement and Economy in the Third and Second Millennia BC* (BAR 33, Oxford 1976), 113-42 (1976).
 MIKET, R., Pit alignments in the Milfield basin, and the excavation of Ewart I, *Proc. Prehist. Soc.* 47, 137-146 (1981).
 MIKET, R., *The Milfield Basin, Northumberland 4000BC - AD800*. Unpubl. M.Litt. thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 1987.
 WADDINGTON, C., *A landscape archaeological study of the Mesolithic-Neolithic in the Milfield Basin, Northumberland*. Unpubl. PhD thesis, University of Durham (1998).

3. SILVER SPOON FROM BENWELL ROMAN FORT

This Roman spoon (Acc. No. 1926.23.1) is unusual because of its large size, its use of

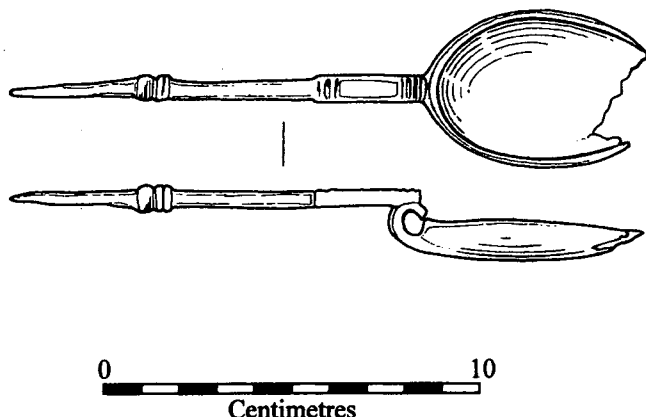


Fig. 3 Silver spoon from Benwell Roman fort (drawn by Sandra Rowntree).

silver, and its early form. It is also unusual to find Roman spoons within forts. The Benwell spoon has not been adequately published since it was first discovered in 1926 during excavations within the fort conducted by James Petch (1927, 147, pl. xxxix).

It is a carefully designed spoon (Fig. 3). Its oval bowl with inside rim (the end of which is unfortunately broken and missing) is joined to the handle by means of a curved piece in the form of an open scroll so that the handle is at a higher level than the bowl, as is normal with Roman spoons. The handle is in three roughly equal lengths, the first with a flat panel of rectangular section with mouldings either end; the second, which is of square section, also ending in a moulding; and the third tapering to a point. The spoon's surviving length is 170mm, its handle is 110mm long, and its bowl is 41mm wide. Recent results of EDX analysis by the University of Newcastle upon Tyne show that the spoon is made of over 99% silver with only minute traces of copper and iron.

Roman spoons first became common in the 1st century AD and those that survive are of two types: the more common having small circular bowls and plain spiked handles; the others being larger with oval bowls and a drop between the handle and the bowl. Examples of the second type are also plain except for the handles, which often have a moulded end sometimes in the form of a knob or a horse's hoof. The Benwell spoon is one of about ten examples known to the present author which derive from the second type and date to the 1st or 2nd century AD. As these Benwell-type spoons have not hitherto been brought together in a publication they are listed here for general comparison. Their oval bowls, often with a flat rim, are generally wider at the handle end – in contrast with a spoon in the 2nd century Backworth (Northumberland) treasure, for example, where the bowl is the other way round (Walters 1921, 48, no. 186). Their handles are made up in sections of two or three lengths divided by mouldings, the first length having a flat upper face. The handles of Nos. 4 and 8 are missing but enough survives to suggest that they belong to the group. All

are of silver unless otherwise stated. Nos. 9 and 10 have highly decorated bowls:

1. Benwell Fort, Hadrian's Wall discussed above.
2. Newcastle upon Tyne, "found in one of the piers of the old bridge" *ante* 1787 (Anon 1806, 402, pl. xxxvii, 2). Now lost. The handle lacks the flat section seen on the rest of the group but the spoon is listed here because of its findspot's proximity to Benwell.
3. Canterbury, "in Watling Street, near Rose Lane" (Jackson 1893, 157, fig. 23). Now lost.
4. Kenchester. Hereford City Museum 7622. Unpublished. Tinned bronze.
5. Boscoreale, near Pompeii. Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. Unpublished.
6. Fayoum, Egypt (Hayes 1984, no. 8).
7. Unknown provenance. British Museum 99.22-18.17 (Walters 1921, no. 97).
8. Unknown provenance. British Museum 1931.4-6.2. unpublished. Bronze.
9. Xanten Roman colonia, Germany. Bowl decorated with double-headed axe, etc. (Gelsdorf 1984, 17-20).
10. Autun, France, found probably in 1614, now lost. Bowl decorated in relief with figure of Mercury, etc. (Montfaucon 1722, I, pl. 72).

Spoons are rarely found on Roman military sites. There are thirty-one of various materials referred to in the Society's *Catalogue of Small Finds from South Shields Roman Fort* (Allason-Jones and Miket 1984), but very few from any of the forts on the Wall itself. South Shields, like Corbridge, however, is an exception in the north of England being a garrison town with a civilian population as well as a military population. Wallsend has yielded a folding spoon but there is no suggestion that this type was "military issue", like the modern Swiss army knife (Sherlock forthcoming). The Benwell spoon was reported as being found beneath a building inside the fort, which, from Simpson and Richmond's later analysis of the fort (1941, plan opposite page 43), was clearly

the *praetorium* or commanding officer's house, a "large and comfortable" house of courtyard type dating apparently from a rebuild after the Hadrianic foundation of which "the aristocrat Tineius Longus, who became quaestor-designate while resident commander will not have been ashamed", (ibid. 17; *RIB*1329, c. AD177-180). No other spoons survive from Benwell or indeed any fort westwards until Chesters, but Housesteads has two, both from the *praetorium* and both of bronze (Charlesworth 1975, 37, and fig. 6). A silver spoon of Backworth type, its bowl decorated with a shell design, was found in the courtyard of the *praetorium* at Ambleside (Collingwood 1915, 58, fig. 29). The Commanding Officer's courtyard house, often with its own heating, baths, etc., and little different from larger Roman town houses, was the principal residence within a fort and one which the Commanding Officer was permitted to share with his family and servants. It is, therefore, not surprising to find civilian objects such as spoons in just such a building within a fort. The high-quality Benwell spoon could easily have belonged to Tineius Longus's household.

David Sherlock

REFERENCES

- ALLASON-JONES, L., AND MIKET, R.F., *Catalogue of Small Finds from South Shields Roman Fort* (1984). Newcastle upon Tyne.
- ANON 1806, Appendix, *Archaeologia* 15, (1806) 402.
- CHARLESWORTH, D., 1975, The Commandant's House, Housesteads, *AA*⁵, 3 (1975) 17-42.
- COLLINGWOOD, R.G., The exploration of the Roman fort at Ambleside, *CW*², 15 (1915) 3-62.
- GELSDORF, F., Ein käufliche Schatz, *Rheinische Landesmuseum Bonn, Berichte* 2/84 (1984) 17-62.
- HAYES, J.W., *Greek, Roman and related metalware in the Royal Ontario Museum* (1984). Toronto.
- JACKSON, C.J., The spoon and its history, *Archaeologia*, 53 (1893), 107-146.
- MONTFAUCON, B. DE, *L'Antiquité expliquée et représentée en figures* I (1722). Paris.
- PETCH, J.A., Excavations at Benwell (*Condercum*), *AA*⁴, 4 (1927) 135-192.
- SHERLOCK, D., A Roman folding spoon from Wallsend, in Griffiths, W., and Hodgson, N., *Excavations at Wallsend* (forthcoming).
- WALTERS, H.B., *Catalogue of Silver Plate (Greek, Etruscan and Roman) in the British Museum* (1921) London.