

## RECENT ARCHAEOLOGY

## MINIATURE AXES IN NORFOLK

*by Peter Robins*

A miniature flaked axe (Fig. 1a), probably of Neolithic date, was found in the parish of Stanfield in late 1994 by a metal detectorist, Mr T. Gascoyne and brought to the Department of Archaeology at the Norwich Castle Museum for identification.



Fig. 1

Miniature axes – a) from Stanfield, b) and c) from Weasenham Heath, d) from Feltwell



The axe, which measures 63 x 29 x 12mm, is made from brown mottled flint and is flaked over both faces: it shows signs of minor edge damage and wear at the blade end, indicating clearly that this was the working edge. The butt end terminates in a small facet which does not seem to be a broken point and which may represent the residue of a striking platform of a flake from which the tool had been prepared.

Although a similar miniature axe was recorded by Field (1982) as an unusual find from the vicinity of the Cissbury flint mines in Sussex, the recognition of miniature axes as a sub-class of the group of core tools that comprises axes, adzes and picks is largely due to Gardiner (1987, 1988). Gardiner encountered significant numbers of miniature axes in her survey of the Neolithic flint work of Southern England and noted that while the more common 'heavy' axes were normally of a length in excess of 110mm, the miniatures were usually less than 85mm in length with a clear gap between the two and not a continuous gradation. Gardiner's examples were recognised among excavated material from Cissbury (more than 50 specimens) and were also found to be "very common in surface scatters all across the South Downs".

Coincidentally, during the cataloguing of the Albert Hooks Collection of flint artefacts in the Norwich Castle Museum, two further examples of miniature flaked axes were encountered. Both are recorded as being found on Weasenham Heath and are illustrated in Figure 1b and c. Example 1b is 79mm long, made from pale grey flint and flaked over both faces with the exception of a small area of smooth thin cortex on one face; the central area of each face is composed of a single flake scar which may represent the surfaces of the original flake from which the implement was prepared. A transept sharpening flake scar is evident on one face and the blade edge is chipped and worn. The profile is such that the implement could be considered as nearer an adze than an axe.

Example 1c is 95mm long, prepared from mottled grey flint, and has a rather pear-shaped outline and a thicker profile than 1b. It is flaked over the whole of one face and what remains of the other: this latter has been badly damaged by fire, crumbling part of the surface and affecting the outline at one edge,

Miniature polished flint axes are also reported from Southern England by Gardiner (1987) and are now recorded from Norfolk. An example from Eaton (Norwich) was exhibited at a meeting of the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia by Mr E Adcock and is illustrated in the Proceedings (Adcock 1914). The Eaton axe (which is on exhibition in the Norwich Castle Museum) clearly consists of the cutting edge of a larger polished axe which has been reduced by flaking, perhaps after accidental fracture, and terminates in a short, obtuse, pointed butt. Its length of 65mm places it within the category of miniature axes under Gardiner's criteria but the width and thickness (52 and 24mm respectively) are disproportionately large in comparison with the flaked example above.

A recent addition to the Secker Collection (No 438) falls more comfortably into the miniature polished flint axe category. Found at Feltwell (and illustrated in Figure 1d), this example is in a pale grey, slightly granular flint: it measures 69 x 37 x 18mm and is polished at the cutting edge only, more extensively on one face than the other. The slightly asymmetrical shape of the cutting edge suggests that it also may have been cut down from a larger polished axe, followed by some repolishing.

All these miniature axes/adzes are surface finds but most probably can be ascribed to the Neolithic. They seem to be the first to be identified in Norfolk and outside Southern England, though other examples may remain unrecognised in existing collections.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## A COUNTERMARKED AS OF CLAUDIUS I FROM CAISTOR ST EDMUND

by Robert Kenyon

A recent coin-find by a metal detector user at Caistor St Edmund is worthy of a brief note here, not for its intrinsic value – for this is a common Roman coin in poor condition – but for questions it raises about the behaviour of coins in circulation in 1st-century Roman Britain.

The coin is an imitative *as* of Claudius I (AD 42-54) (*cf.* Sutherland, 1935), with a mostly illegible legend, which bears the Roman countermark *BON* incuse across the neck of the obverse 'portrait' bust. The reverse-type is that of Minerva holding a shield advancing right with raised arm holding a spear (*cf.* RIC 100). It may be recognised as a contemporary imitation not only by its very indifferent die engraving but also by its reduced module and eccentric die-axis (24mm, die-axis 240°, 4.93g) which can be seen to be grossly undersize and underweight when compared with the module of an orthodox Claudian *as* (30mm, die-axis 180°, 10-11.5g). This particular worn copper coin is slightly corroded from deposition in the earth, but now is stabilised by conservation.

The relative frequency of finds of imitative Claudian *asses* of this type may be contrasted by the rarity of this particular countermark in Britain: to be more specific it may be useful to put figures to those observations. In a recent study of bronze coins of Claudius I found in Britain (Kenyon 1992), the author records c. 3,500 Claudian *asses* as having certain or likely British provenances. Of those, two-thirds have the Minerva reverse-type and almost all are imitative specie. Inspection of published coin-lists from major Claudio-Neronian sites such as Richborough, Kent (Reece, 1981, 57) and Colchester, Essex (Crummy, 1987, 84-92) will show



Obverse



Reverse

Plate 1

Countermarked Claudian *as*. Scale 1:1