

A palaeolith and a palstave from the Wey valley near Ripley

The two items which form the subject of this note were passed to David Williams following a chance encounter at the Bushy Hill School summer fair in Merrow in June 1998, at which a Middle Bronze Age palstave was brought to the display stand of the Newlanders Club by Mr Paul Richens. Subsequent contact with Mr Richens through the good offices of members of the Newlanders Club, a new metal detecting and social club based in the Guildford area, resulted in the production of the palstave and also of the flint biface for full recording. An interim note on the two pieces appeared in *Bulletin* 325.

The palaeolith (fig 1)

The first piece comprises a flint biface of distinctive flat-butted cordate or bout coupé form, length 112mm, width 80mm, thickness 24mm and weight 258.5g. Slim and radially-flaked with one flatter face (on the right in the illustration), the high points and edges of this example are unrolled and in a fresh, though not mint, condition. The parent flint is a lustrous mottled grey-brown with cherty inclusions. The piece is unpatinated although the domed face has light ochreous staining. Two small patches of smooth cortex survive on one edge and on the flatter face, together with an expanse of thermally-fractured surface at the butt. Small patches of sandy soil adhere to various crevices, particularly on the domed face.

Although the piece has only recently come to light, it was originally found around 1967 by Mr Richens, then a schoolboy, who was skimming stones in an active gravel quarry situated east of Papercourt Farm, which lies between Ripley and Send. Several other artefacts, including a perforated stone axe-hammer and an iron spearhead, have been recorded during earlier gravel extraction in the same locality (eg Clark 1952). As it was recovered from a quarry spoilheap beneath a conveyor belt the biface must be considered strictly as an unstratified stray, but the gravel being worked was situated in the area roughly centred TQ 038 565, which suggests that the findspot was likely to have lain on the lowest Wey terrace gravels a few hundred metres distant from the modern course of the river Wey and just below the 25m contour. These Wey

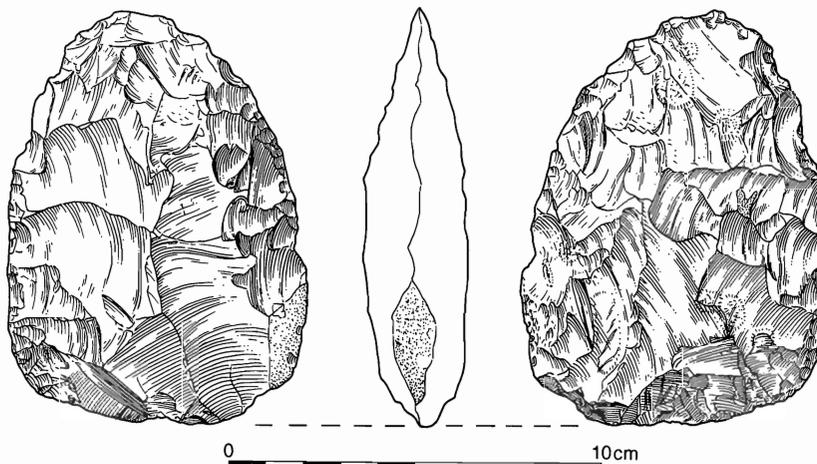


Fig 1 The palaeolith

gravels are presumably of Devensian age, and the unrolled condition of the piece indicates that it is probably contemporary with their deposition (John Wymer, pers comm).

Ripley is not a locality which has produced Palaeolithic material hitherto, as the recent Southern Rivers Survey Project makes clear (Wessex Archaeology 1992–3, 70); indeed there is nothing else of this date known from the entire course of the Wey between Guildford and Weybridge (John Wymer, pers comm). Nevertheless, bifaces approximating to *bout coupé* form have been recovered from Terrace D at Farnham further up the valley (Bury 1916; Oakley 1939, 49–50; Roe 1981, 265–6), along with a handful of flakes of Levalloisian type. However, Farnham Terrace D represents the last course of the ancient Wey/Blackwater before its capture and re-routing by the Tilford/Godalming river (Wymer 1987, 21), though the date at which this occurred remains unclear. Oakley suggested that Terrace D corresponded with ‘the glacial phase with which the Upper Mousterian of the classic cave stations is generally associated’; more recently Wymer (Wessex Archaeology 1992–3, 70 table 4) has proposed a tentative correlation between Farnham Terrace D and the Upper Floodplain terrace of the Thames. From its provenance, the new Ripley piece is clearly associated with an early course of the present Wey, and though an isolated find can reasonably be ascribed to the insular Mousterian of Acheulian tradition; Roe (1981, 265–6) provides a convenient if short list of the other such bifaces from the county.

The palstave (fig 2)

The second piece is a fine example of a Middle Bronze Age copper-alloy looped palstave of broad-bladed type, which measures 156mm in overall length, 65mm in width at the blade, 25mm in width at the stop ridge and 426.74g in weight. The flanges, which are virtually triangular in profile, extend a little below the stop to merge with a plastic shield design on either

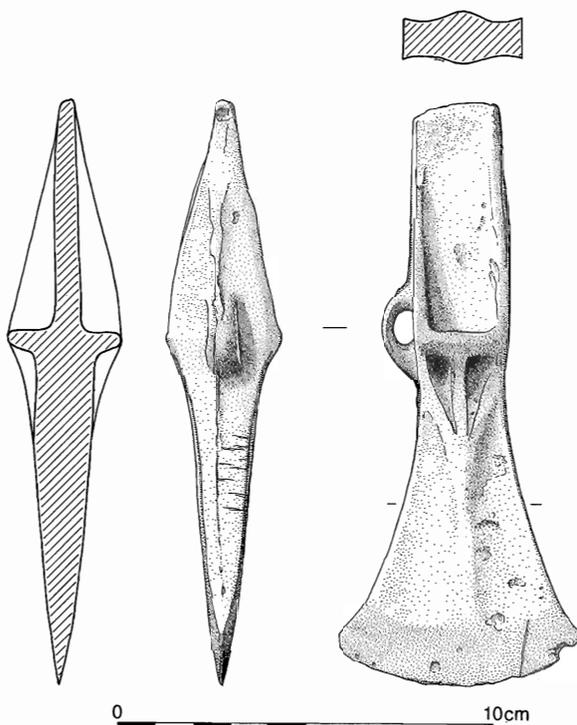


Fig 2 The palstave

face. The shield itself expands into a central rib which runs from the stop all the way down both faces of the blade to meet the chamfer of the cutting edge. The casting flashes on both sides have been hammered down and the piece now has an attractive even dark green surface patination.

The piece can be placed within Rowlands' developed shield-pattern or Class 1 palstaves (1976, 28–30) and at 156mm in length conforms to his Group 3, those of medium size. The width at stop/length proportion of 0.16 falls at the top end of the range for classic shield-pattern palstaves (defined as 0.12–0.16 by Field & Needham 1985, 116), which comprise one of the staple products of the Acton Park 2 industries according to Burgess (1976, 74). On current evidence, the Acton industries might start as early as 1500 BC, though few independent dates are yet available (eg Needham *et al* 1997, 84–6), but the present piece is probably attributable to a slightly later 14th century BC date.

The axe was found by Mr Richens' father in about 1959 or 1960 in the garden of a house called Falconwood in Brook Lane, Send, just after the house was built and while he was clearing rubbish from what is believed to have been a bomb crater. As such the reported findspot lies within the Wey valley and in an area which, the axe-hammer from Papercourt Farm apart (Clark 1952), has revealed little relevant material hitherto (eg Needham 1987, fig 5.9), although recent opportunities for fieldwork on any scale hereabouts have been limited (Rob Poulton, pers comm).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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