1EW02 Enabling Works – Area South. Pipeline Diversion (007) Fulmer to Haste Hill (1S17CPSTT): Lithic assessment

Introduction

A total of 208 pieces of struck flint from 22 separate contexts was available for assessment. Of these, 72 were recovered by hand in the field and the remaining 136 were retrieved from a rapid scan of wet sieved samples off-site. The large quantity of unworked burnt flint present in the latter samples was not quantified for the purposes of this initial assessment.

The lithics are set out by context and type in the Table below. As this shows, a majority of the material was recovered from the fills of cut features and supervening horizontal layers located in Trenches 7 and 8, with other individual flints from contexts within Trenches 6, 12 and 14, and Test Pits 1 and 16.

Individual contexts within Trench 7 include colluvium [18], shallow tree-throw [19], burnt flint layers [21] (upper; sample <2>) and [22] (lower; sample <3>), the latter sealing a series of stake holes [23]-[28] (samples <6>-<11>). Further contexts comprise pits [8] and [14] (samples <1> and <12>, respectively) and ditches [10] and [12] (samples <5> and <4>, respectively).

Associated dateable evidence was sparse but included a single sherd of Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery (in two pieces) and three scraps of possibly Medieval pottery from context [8], sample <1> in Trench 14, together with a worn scrap of possibly Roman/Medieval pottery from context [10], sample <5> in Trench 8.

The lithic assemblage

Raw material and condition

The raw material comprised often thermally fractured river cobbles with smooth cortex, principally of mottled grey-brown flint, although there were a handful of attractive orange-brown flake blanks. A majority of the assemblage was in reasonably fresh condition, although one or two pieces had milky surface re-cortication, while others were iron-stained on the high points.

Several pieces had been burnt, while quantities of burnt unworked flint were recovered from the various wet-sieved contexts.

Technology, dating and affinities

Virtually all the lithic material comprised debitage in the form of flakes, parallel-sided blades and bladelets, spalls and irregular nodular shatter. A single pebble-worked-as-core apart, there were no formal cores present in the assemblage, although four crested pieces and four rejuvenating/trimming flakes point to the preparation and maintenance of cores. Formally retouched tools were totally absent, but there was a single notched piece on a plunging blade, a blade fragment with marginal retouch and an irregular secondary flake with abrupt scraper-like retouch at its distal end.

Several contexts produced reasonable quantities of lithics. These included those from Trench 7, shallow tree-throw context [19] which incorporated crested pieces and blades/bladelets of likely Mesolithic/early Neolithic type, and the surface of the natural in Trench 8, context [29] which also contained several parallel-sided blades c 60mm in length. (A plunging notched blade c 80mm in length was amongst material recovered from Trench 8, colluvium context [18].) Moreover, further lithic material, principally spalls and irregular nodular shatter was retrieved from the 'burnt flint layer' in Trench 7, contexts [21] sample <2> and [22] sample <3>. Technologically these latter pieces are more likely to be of later prehistoric type.

Table: All lithics from all contexts

Cxt	Cxt type	Flake (frag)	Blade (frag)	Fl/Bl (frag)	Spall	Shatter	Core (frag)	Rejuv/ Trim	Other	Total
TP1	-						1 PWC			1
TP16	-	1							1 misc ret on irreg flake frag	2
Tr 6 [37]	Subsoil	1	1							2
T7 [18]	Colluvium	1		(1)					1 notched piece on plunging flake	3
T7 [19]	Tree throw	2 (4)	3 (7)		1	2			3 crested pieces	22
T7	Upper		1 (1)		1	1				4

[21]	burnt flint									
T7 [21] <2>	Upper burnt flint	(3)			13	11		1		28
T7 [22] <3>	Lower burnt flint	(9)	(2)		13	30				54
T7 [23] <6>	F10 Stakehole				5	3				8
T7 [24] <7>	F10 Stakehole				1	1				2
T7 [25] <8>	F10 Stakehole	1			2					3
T7 [26] <9>	F10 Stakehole				5	6				11
T7 [27] <10>	F10 Stakehole				3					3
T7 [28] <11>	F10 Stakehole	(1)			2					3
T8 [18]	Colluvium	2	1	(1)		2				6
T8 [29]	Top of natural	7 (7)	2 (1)	(1)		2			1 blade frag with marg ret	21
T8 [10]	Ditch	1 (1)			1			1		4
T8 [10] <5>	Ditch	1			5	5				11
T8 [12] <4>	Ditch				3	1				4
T8 [14] <12>	F10 Pit	2			3				1 crested piece	6
Tr 12		(1)				2				3
T14 [1]	Subsoil							1	1 irreg scraper on sec flake	2
T14 [8]	Pit					1				1
T14 [8] <1>	Pit				2					2

T16 [30]	Colluvium							1		1
Totals		**19 (26)**	**8 (11)**	**(3)**	**60**	**68**	**1 PWC**	**4**	**8**	**208**

The significance of the assemblage

The lithic assemblage is a mixed one and appears to incorporate elements of possible Mesolithic/early Neolithic material from tree-throw context [19] in Trench 7 and the top of the natural, context [29], in Trench 8. Material of likely later prehistoric date was recovered from the burnt flint layer(s) contexts [21] and [22] in Trench 7. For what it is worth, the lithic evidence points to episodic activity within this area of the Colne valley.

It is difficult to be precise about the nature of this activity, however, although the possible tree-throw and spread of burnt flint would not be out of place amongst the depositional signatures recorded elsewhere, as for example at Terminal 5, Heathrow (Framework Archaeology 2010). It is possible that the spread of burnt flint represents part of a later prehistoric burnt mound or cooking place, though further field work will be required to confirm this.

Comparable lithic assemblages have been noted previously from the area of Harefield Moor south of Harefield, including Dewe's Pit and Dewe's Farm (Lacaille 1961, 117-123 and 114, fig 3).

Potential for further work

The small size and mixed nature of the lithic assemblage, together with the absence of diagnostic tool types makes the dating and significance of the material difficult to assess, though elements characteristic of Mesolithic/early Neolithic and later prehistoric technology appear to be present.

No more work on the existing material is justified or proposed at present, although a group shot of the 22 pieces of struck material recovered from tree-throw context [19] could be incorporated in the assessment report.

Future field work, particularly in the areas around Trenches 7 and 8, might enable the recovery of significantly larger, diagnostic groups of lithic material worthy of more detailed analysis and discussion.

References

Framework Archaeology, 2010 *Landscape Evolution in the Middle Thames Valley. Heathrow Terminal 5 Excavations Volume 2*, Framework Archaeology Monograph No 3

Lacaille, A D, 1961 Mesolithic facies in Middlesex and London, *Trans London Middx Archaeol Soc* 20 (3), 101-50

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