

Neolithic Axes in Bedford Museum: Some Recent Acquisitions

DAVID KENNETT

SUMMARY

A summary of the recent acquisitions by Bedford Museum of local neolithic finds. These are stone axes from Biggleswade, Putnoe and Elstow Moors, and a flint axe from Biggleswade.

The neolithic collections of Bedford Museum have long been recognised as important, as is shown by publication a long time ago of the pottery and stone collections¹ then existing. Recently, however, a number of new acquisitions of chance finds have been made and this short note seeks with drawings to bring these finds to some greater prominence. In the last few years only one new ceramic acquisition has been made by the museum, that is a beaker from Sussex, but several finds of stone implements have been brought in.

Since 1966 Bedford Museum have acquired three stone axes all from Bedfordshire, a flint axe from Biggleswade and an axe-hammer from Rollesby, Norfolk. The local finds are illustrated on figure 2.

1 Axe of Great Langdale stone found at Furzefield, Putnoe, Bedford in 1970. Length 252mm, maximum width to the crescentic blade 91mm (70/B/17).

2 Axe of Great Langdale stone found at Biggleswade, exact location not known, in 1966. Length 131mm, maximum width 58mm (66/B/17).

3 Greenstone axe, damaged at the blade and with a fault on one face, found on Elstow Moors and given to the museum in 1971. Polished with a trapezoid blade, length 101mm, maximum width 52mm (71/B/112).

4 Polished flint axe, little damaged, found at Biggleswade in 1970. Length 137mm, maximum width 54mm (70/B/50).

This group of diverse finds provide a fair cross-section of the larger stone implements of neolithic England. All ascriptions of stone have been made visually as thin slicing has yet to be done.² The publication of a range of stones in the local axes illustrates the wide connections of neolithic Bedfordshire in the areas from which axes originated. Great Langdale axes, from Westmorland, have also been found in some quantity in the Nene valley. Northampton Museum have seven examples in all:

from Burton Latimer, Bugbrook, Duston, Gretton, between Gretton and Kirby, near Irchester and from Northampton itself. There is another example from Elstow Road, Bedford, in Bedford Museum³ as well as the two here published. There is a greenstone axe from Miller's Bog, Pavenham in Bedford Museum⁴ and Northampton Museum have examples from Stimson's Avenue, Northampton, and near Helpstone. Apart from the Biggleswade axe there is a polished flint axe from Cauldwell Priory, Bedford.⁵ Cornish stone, found at a number of localities was often used for axes and Bedford Museum have examples of Cornish stone axes from Kempston⁶ and Wyboston.⁷ There are chert axes from Cauldwell Priory⁸ and Jackman's Farm, Kimbolton Road, Bedford,⁹ and one of white chert from Blunham.¹⁰ Slightly more unusual in the stone is an axe of Ophitic Dolerite found at Amphill.¹¹

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author is grateful to Mr F.W. Kuhlicke for access to the collections of Bedford Museum and for encouragement and permission to publish these chance finds.

NOTES

- 1 S Piggott 'Neolithic Pottery from the British Isles' *Arch J* 88 (1929) 110-112; G C Dunning 'Bronze Age Beakers found in Bedfordshire' *Ant J* 18 (1938) 284-286; A Evans *Ancient Stone Implements* (1872) *passim*; and P G Langdon *Bedford Modern School Museum Guide* (1926) 25-29 and pl 3. The two other finds mentioned in this note will be published in appropriate periodicals.
- 2 For work on petrology of stone implements see E D Evens *et al* 'Fourth Report on the Petrological Identification of Stone Axes' *P P S* 28 (1962) 209-266 and references there cited.
- 3 Bedford Museum, 2625
- 4 Bedford Museum, 2619; Evans, 1872, 101.
- 5 Bedford Museum, 2626.
- 6 Bedford Museum, 2623.
- 7 Bedford Museum, 2668.
- 8 Bedford Museum, not accessioned
- 9 Bedford Museum, not accessioned but has contemporary label.
- 10 Bedford Museum, not accessioned
- 11 Bedford Museum, 2637.

The Bedfordshire Archaeological Council is indebted to Bedford Corporation for a grant towards the cost of this paper.