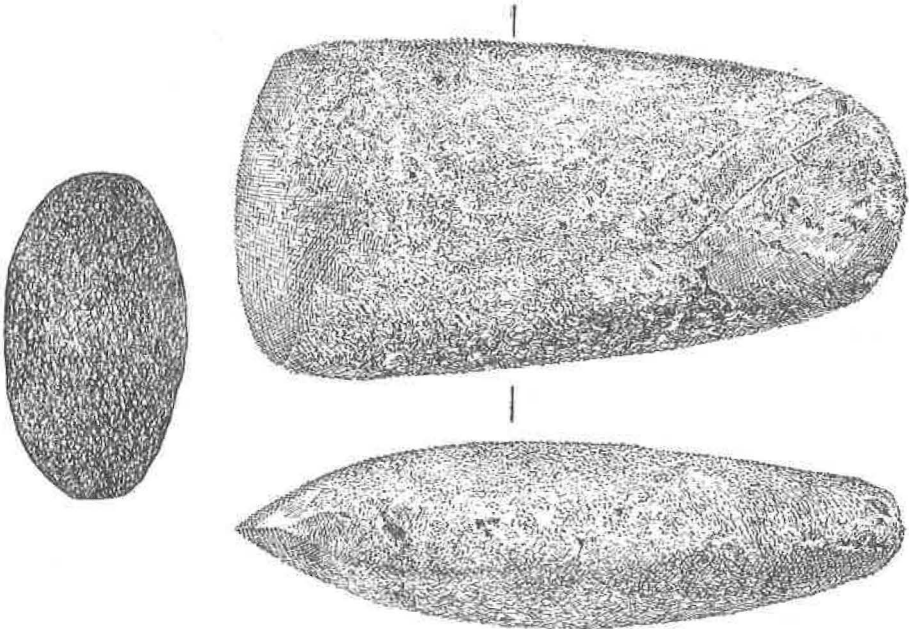


A STONE AXE FROM IVER,  
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

The stone axe here illustrated was found in the bed of the Colne Brook, a tributary of the River Colne, near the eastern boundary of the parish of Iver, by Mr. W. S. M. Whitehead, of Slough. The exact spot cannot now be determined, but a position on the stream about 150 yards south of the Grand Junction Canal and near the footbridge marked on the 1932 edition of the Six-inch map (Buckinghamshire LVII N.W.) is sufficiently accurate for most purposes.



Axe of greenstone from Iver, Bucks  $\frac{2}{3}$ .

The axe is a well-made, shapely specimen with thickened rounded butt and a somewhat irregularly flattened oval section, its length being 132, its width (at the edge) 62, and its thickness 37 mm. The

dark green surface has several large and irregular pits in it and is roughened on both faces; but the edge, parts of the butt, and parts also of the sides retain a high polish and from the traces of this polishing which remain elsewhere it is probable that the whole implement was once so treated, its present condition being due to weathering.

Mr. Whitehead has kindly allowed the axe to go to Dr. F. S. Wallis of Bristol for sectioning and recording in the index of stone axes now being compiled for the whole country in an attempt to obtain more exact information as to the rocks used in the making of these and similar implements. Dr. Wallis reports as follows:—

The rock is nearly wholly composed of large very irregular patches of rather decomposed felspar and similar areas of green hornblende with the same parallel arrangement. The felspar is ragged and shows no crystal boundaries; plagioclase twinning is visible. It is full of small needles and plates of green or colourless hornblende. The ref. index of the felspar is distinctly above that of balsam.

The hornblende is green or bluish-green and is composed of small interlocking plates and needles, often arranged in fan-shaped sheaves giving high polarisation colours.

Patches of brown mica, often in optical continuity with the hornblende, occur. Some patches of unaltered hornblende occur in the mica, which is fresh and gives high polarisation colours. The mica is usually of a very irregular shape, but sometimes shows straight boundaries. A considerable amount of iron ore is present.

The rock is a greenstone, allied to, but not identical with, Group III.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See "First Report of the Sub-Committee of the South-West Group of Museums . . . . on the Petrological Identification of Stone Axes," *Proc. Prehistoric Society*, 1941, pp. 55-6.

Group III of Dr. Wallis's provisional classification comprises a small series of implements made from a greenstone the probable source of which is thought to have been the coast of Cornwall to the south-east of Marazion. Four axes of this material are known from Wessex, the nearest to the present find being a fragment from Beckhampton, Wiltshire, now in Mr. Keiller's Museum at Avebury. Others will no doubt be identified when the work of the Central Committee on axe-petrology is more advanced. At the same time it must be noted that Dr. Wallis does not regard the Iver axe as identical in its rock with this Cornish greenstone, so that its exact place of origin cannot be regarded as finally established: here too greater precision will probably be possible in due course.

Should the axe ultimately prove to be of Cornish origin it will not be difficult to account in a general way for its discovery at Iver. Bearing in mind the Beckhampton axe already mentioned, the present find might well be due to traffic along the north Wiltshire and Berkshire Downs by way of the Ridgeway, which could have been diverted down the Thames Valley, also one of the great highways of southern Britain in early times, as so many distribution maps show. The presence of the axe in the stream may be due simply to its having been accidentally dropped into it, or it may have been derived from the surface of the flood-plain gravel in the neighbourhood. There is plenty of evidence that these low-lying gravels were lived on in Neolithic times, as they also were much later. It is now a generally accepted fact that the gravels of the Thames and other rivers played an important part in the early colonisation of the country by reason both of their accessibility and of their general suitability for primary settlement; and an increasing number of finds of Neolithic pottery from the flood-plain gravels testifies to this.

The axe remains in the possession of Mr. Whitehead, to whom thanks are due for permission to examine and publish it and to obtain the necessary section for petrological purposes. I have also to thank Dr. K. P. Oakley for bringing it to my notice and Dr. F. S. Wallis for the report quoted above.

W. F. GRIMES.

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