Cheviot Quarry Coarse Stone Assessment

By: Clive Waddington

Background

The excavations at Cheviot Quarry produced an assemblage of non-flint coarse stone artefacts that included amongst other things a 'carved stone ball' roughout, a possible 'macehead' roughout, whetstones, quernstones, and a hammerstone for knapping. Some of these artefacts came from demonstrable Neolithic contexts, on the basis of their pottery associations, and so they can be confidently considered to belong to this period. The finding of carved stone balls outside Scotland is unusual, although previous finds of such balls in North-East England are known from Hetton North Farm (Northumberland) and Houghton-le-Side (County Durham) (see Speak and Aylett 1996; Waddington 2004) and examples from Stanwix, Cumbria and Bridlington, Yorkshire (Marshall 1977). The only other quernstone known from a secure Neolithic context in Northumberland is the saddle quern found in a Neolithic pit on the nearby site at Thirlings (Miket 1987, 59), although so far no illustration of this piece has yet been published.

Quantification

A total of 10 coarse stone objects have been recovered from excavations at Cheviot Quarry. The table below summarises these artefacts.

Find No.	Context	Feature	Type	Material	Provisional Date	Description
23	051	Pit F9	Whetstone	Sandstone	Early Neolithic	An oval disc-shaped sharpening stone with abraded edges and plano-convex profile
24	051	Pit F9	Hammerstone	Quartz	Early Neolithic	Hammerstone used for chipping with evidence of crushing visible at the two opposed ends
71	051	Pit F9	Possible Macehead Roughout	Sandstone	Early Neolithic	Elongated, macehead-shaped stone with a smooth and almost symmetrical profile, a flattened top/bottom and being of typical size for a stone macehead
92	009	Pit F9	Stone Ball Roughout	Quartz	Early Neolithic	An attempt at a six-sided stone ball (Marshall's Type 4a, 1977) which has two surviving facets, two failed facets and two left unmodified, though the ball was smoothed prior to the attempts at the facets
105	009	Pit F9	Nodule	Quartz	Early Neolithic	Egg-shaped white quartzite nodule alien to the immediate surrounding geology and included in the pit fill
221	262	Pit	Pestle ?	Sandstone	Poss Neolithic	An elongated egg-shaped stone, smoothed and with some indication of wear at each end
266	340	Pit inside Building 4	Quernstone	Andesite/Granite	Neolithic	Broken saddle quern with one smoothed rubbing face
461	340	Pit inside	Quernstone	Andesite/Granite	Neolithic	Bulbous rock with two

		Building 4				smoothed rubbing faces and a broken corner.
283	342	Hearth inside Building 4	Rubber?	Andesite/Granite	Neolithic	A small triangular-shaped piece of rock with a single smoothed and flat surface
462	133	Post Hole of Building 3	Whetstone	?	Late Neolithic	Small, elongated and symmetrical sharpening stone

Dating

A total of five of the coarse stone artefacts (23, 24, 71, 92, 105) came from Pit F9 which was an artefact-rich pit that contained distinct upper and lower fills, both of which included large quantities of Early Neolithic carinated bowl sherds, together with some flint tools and debitage. All these coarse stone items can be associated with an Early Neolithic date based on this association. Three of the artefacts (266, 283, 461) were found in pits inside Building 4 in contexts that contained Neolithic plain ware pottery sherds, which although Neolithic, have not yet been dated to any part of the Neolithic period in North-East England. One artefact (462) came from a posthole that formed part of Building 3 which was one of the Late Neolithic (based on the associated pottery evidence at this stage) rectangular buildings. The final artefact (221) came from an undated pit close to others that contained Early Neolithic pottery, and so it is most likely that this pit also dates to this period as the Late Neolithic material was clustered in a different part of the site to this area.

Significance

The evidence for the production of a stone ball in Northumberland is so far unique and implies that it was intended perhaps as a copy of the better-made examples from further north. The knowledge of such exotic items implies communication links with areas considerably further north as most stone balls are found in Aberdeenshire (Marshall 1977). The saddle querns and possible rubber within a house are indicative of domestic activity associated with the processing of cereals while the hammerstone indicates the working of flint on the site. Other artefacts such as the whetstones and possible pestle are similarly indicative of everyday tasks associated with residence on a farming settlement. The presence of so many coarse stone objects in pit F9, together with struck flints and a large amount of pottery, suggest at the least that deliberate disposal of artefactual debris in large deeply cut pits was an important routine in Early Neolithic life.

Further Work

Each artefact requires a fuller description and its relationship with other finds, contexts and structures on the site exploring. The finds also need to be related to the local and regional archaeological record and what is known of these types of objects more widely. A full archive report should be produced that can be included as part of the publication report. This will take Clive Waddington 1 day. Each of the 7 artefacts should be drawn for publication.

References

Marshall, D. 1977. Carved stone balls. *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 108: 40-72.

Miket, R. 1987. *The Milfield Basin, Northumberland 4000 BC - AD 800*, MLitt Thesis (unpub.) University of Newcastle Upon Tyne.

Speak, S. and M. Aylett 1996. The Carved Stone Ball from Hetton, Northumberland. *Northern Archaeology* 13/14 (Neolithic Studies in No-Man's Land. Papers on the Neolithic of Northern England from the Trent to the Tweed.): 179-181.

Waddington, C. 2004. *The Joy of Flint. An Introduction to Stone Tools and Guide to the Museum of Antiquities Collection*. Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Museum of Antiquities.