

NOTES

LOWER-PALAEOLITHIC ARTEFACTS FROM FOURTH TERRACE, HANBOROUGH, GRAVEL DEPOSITS NEAR CULHAM, OXFORDSHIRE

Two Lower-Palaeolithic artefacts (Fig. 1) were discovered in August 1996 in gravel deposits at Culham Hill (AOD 80 m., NGR SU50859640) overlooking Abingdon to the N. and Culham to the S. The gravel survey of the area describes these gravels as being part of the fourth terrace, Hanborough, sequence that is poorly represented in the area.¹ They are patchily distributed and are confined to higher ground. The site at Culham Hill comprises a ridge composed of Kimmeridge clay at the base with lower greensand and Gault clay higher up with the whole capped by gravel. The limestone component of the fourth terrace gravels on Culham Hill is largely decomposed, a characteristic of ancient gravel deposits, and has not been seen to be deeper than 2 m. They were exploited on a small scale in the recent past although not commercially.

Both artefacts were found after disturbance during construction of a farm trackway, and as a result of their location in an exposed gravel section, together with their colour and condition, are considered to have been present within the gravels themselves and not intrusive. Fourth terrace gravels were deposited in cold or cool conditions and are believed to post-date the Anglian glaciation. They are thought to have been deposited at least 350,000 years ago² during Oxygen Isotope Stage 10 thus providing a minimum age for these objects. Artefacts from this period are uncommon in the county with some of the only known examples being found at Long Hanborough³ and Finstock.⁴ The authors have seen other unpublished handaxes from Hanborough terrace gravels discovered near Radley College, Oxfordshire and nearby at Bagley Wood. Surface finds found by J.P. Wallis at Lodge Hill, Abingdon and Lower Farm, Radley may be of similar age. The reader is referred to D.A. Roe⁵ for a discussion of flint implements from this period and could not do better than to read J. Wymer's recent publication providing records of artefacts of similar age from Oxfordshire.⁶

¹ C.E. Corser, 'The Sand and Gravel Resources of the Country around Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Description of parts of 1:25,000 sheets SU 49, 59 and SP 40, 50' (Mineral Assessment Report 38, HMSO, 1978).

² D.J. Briggs, 'The Environmental Background to Human Occupation in the Upper-Thames Valley during the Quaternary Period', in R.J. Macrae and N. Moloney, *Non-flint Stone Tools and the Palaeolithic Occupation of Britain* (BAR Brit. Ser. 189, 1988), 173.

³ W.J. Arkell, 'A Palaeolith from the Hanborough Terrace', *Oxoniensia*, xi-xii (1946-7), 1-4.

⁴ J. Tyldesley, 'A Palaeolithic Biface from Finstock, Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, xlviii (1983), 143-4.

⁵ D.A. Roe, 'The Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, lix (1994), 1-15.

⁶ J. Wymer, *The Lower Palaeolithic Occupation of Britain*, vols. 1 and 2 (Wessex Archaeology and English Heritage, 1999).

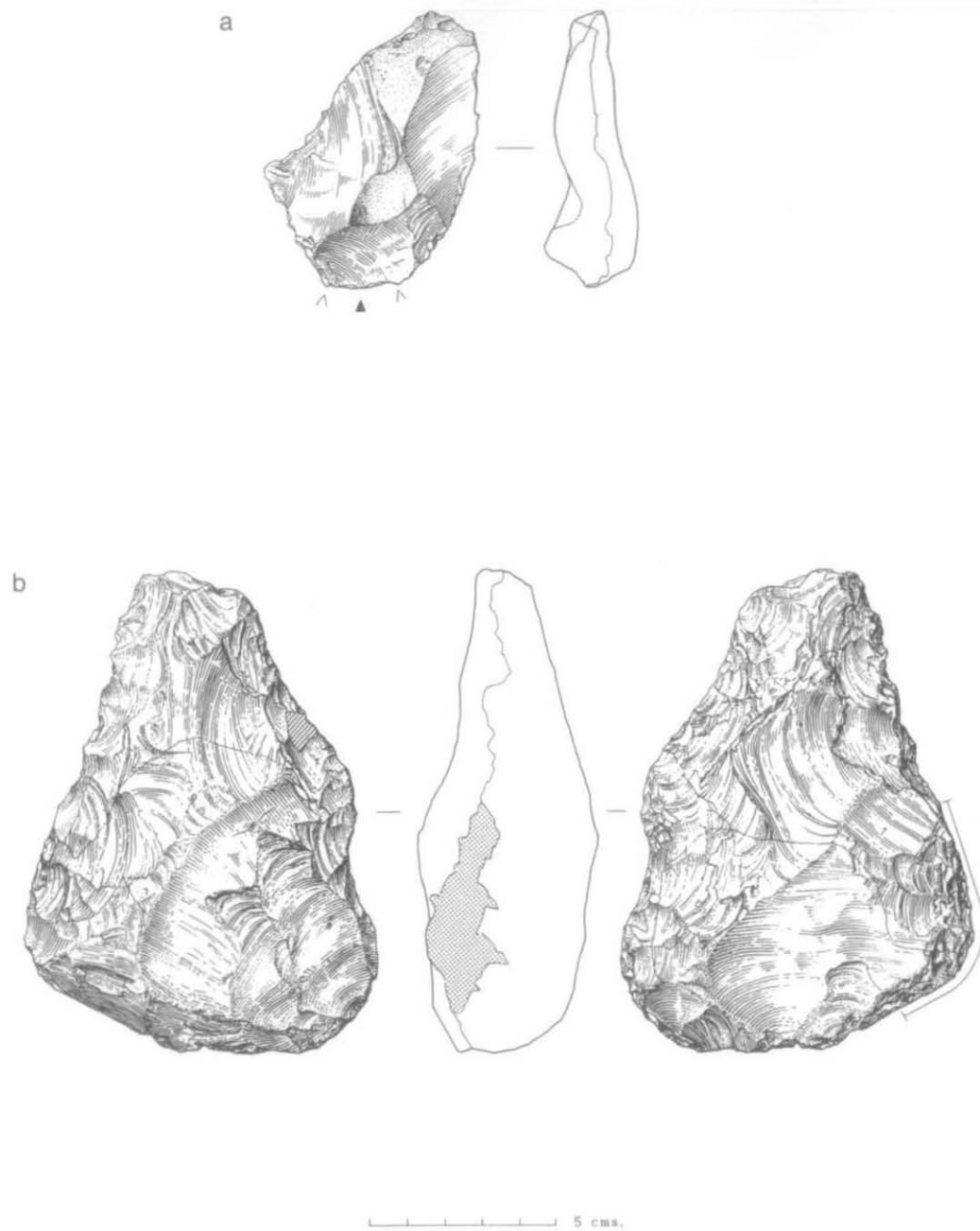


Fig. 1. a. Hard-hammer struck flint flake from Culham Hill, Oxfordshire. b. 'Archaic' hard-hammer knapped flint biface from Culham Hill, Oxfordshire.

The two objects described here add to the limited information available on hominid occupation in the area during this period. The flake is unremarkable, has a wide striking platform, is hard-hammer struck and is deeply patinated and rolled. It has a serviceable edge and may have been utilised, perhaps for cutting. The biface appears 'archaic', was knapped using a hard hammer from poor quality, probably local, flint which has subsequently been frost-cracked and is also deeply patinated and rolled. Of note is the area near the butt which in our opinion represents crushing damage resulting from its use as a hammer. This damage is consistent with its use in this manner as seen on similar more recent artefacts. The fact that crushing is confined to one area argues against it being the result of damage caused during the process of gravel aggradation.

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Both objects will be deposited with the Donald Baden-Powell Quaternary Research Centre, 60 Banbury Road, Oxford OX2 6PN.

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