

NOTES

EARLY BRONZE AGE HOARD FROM MILVERTON, SOMERSET

INTRODUCTION

A hoard of three Early Bronze Age flanged axes (Fig. 1) was found in September 1974 during the construction of the Milverton bypass on behalf of the Department of the Environment. It was discovered by three members of the work force of the contractors Dick Hampton Ltd., Mr. Cyril Bray, Mr. Dick Arthurs and Mr. John Pavey. They were spotted by Mr. Arthurs from the driving seat of an earth moving vehicle. Mr. Bray took one of the axes to the Somerset County Museum and the importance of the find was recognised.

The Ordnance Survey grid reference for the find spot is ST 11942673, above 250 feet above sea level. It lies on the south-west facing slope above Hillfarrance Brook and the course of the old G.W.R. Barnstaple line. The solid geology of the area consists of Triassic and Permian pebble beds and conglomerate, and lower marl.

DESCRIPTION

The axes, which are all made of bronze, were found approximately 4 feet below the ground surface in a deposit of red marl. Mr. Arthurs described them as being placed directly one on top of another. They follow the normal design of Early Bronze Age flanged axes having a narrow rounded butt, a broad crescentic blade and flanges along almost the whole length of the sides. All have a slight transverse ridge or bevel at about the centre, which is nowhere near as well defined as the stop ridge of the later palstaves. The two undecorated axes appear to be unused. Both have lost the corners of the blade but this may have occurred during sharpening. Any casting flashes have been removed and the surfaces well polished. The decorated axe has suffered more from corrosion but the indications are that it was not in mint condition when buried.

Axe 1	Length	13.1 cm
	Thickness (flange)	2.1 cm
	Thickness (bevel)	1.3 cm
	Width (blade)	7.3 cm

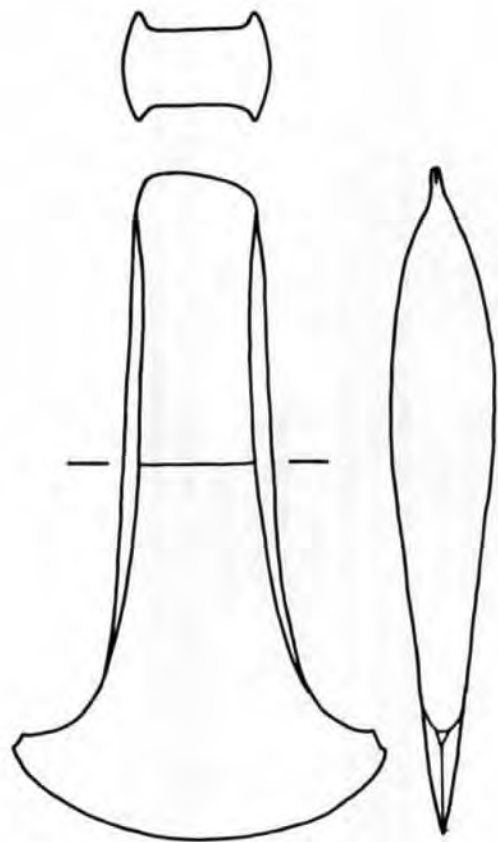
The axe is undecorated. The flanges are slightly curved in section. Running along the edge of the butt and for a short distance down each edge is a slight groove. Such a feature is fairly common and was mentioned by Evans (Evans, 1881, 50) when discussing the hoard from Plymstock, Devon.

Axe 2	Length	13.0 cm
	Thickness (flange)	1.8 cm
	Thickness (bevel)	1.3 cm
	Width (blade)	7.3 cm

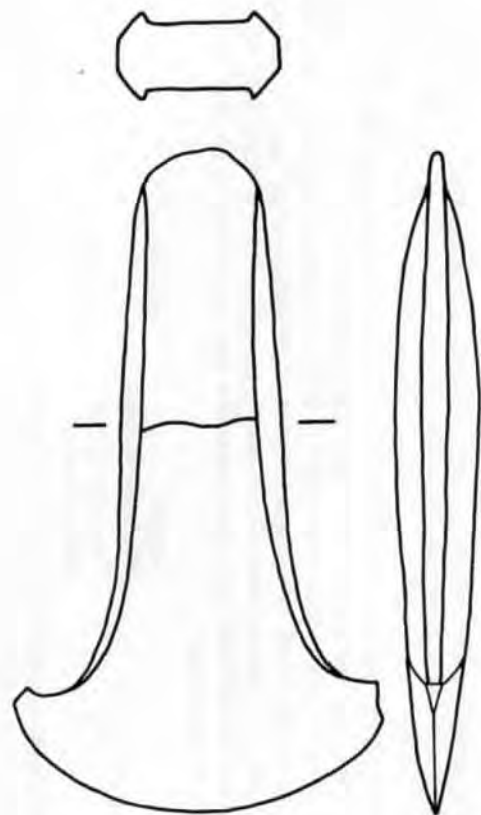
This axe is also plain but differs from the above in that the flanges are chamfered on both edges producing three facets on each. A similar technique was employed on an axe from a hoard at Westbury-on-Trym, Gloucestershire (Megaw and Hardy 1938, Fig. 11).

Axe 3	Length	12.0 cm
	Thickness (flange)	1.7 cm
	Thickness (bevel)	1.1 cm
	Width (blade)	6.7 cm

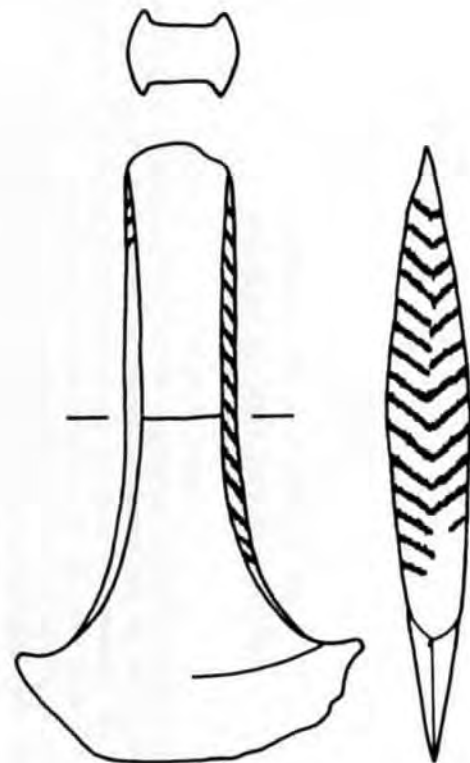
Axe 3 is smaller than 1 and 2. It has decoration along the face of the flanges, though on one side only a few traces survive. The pattern is hammered and takes the form of a single line of chevrons.



1



2



3

Fig. 1 Milverton Hoard



Plate I Milvorton Hoard

DISCUSSION

The hoard belongs to what has become known as the Arretton Down tradition of metalworking of the Early Bronze Age. They are dated to this period through being found in association with objects such as daggers with three rivets and tanged and socketed spearheads. In more absolute terms they belong to the latter half of the Early Bronze Age, about 1850–1700 B.C. on the revised chronology, or 1500–1400 B.C. on the old.

Individual finds of flanged axes, including decorated types, occur throughout the British Isles, but in hoards they are restricted almost entirely to south of a line from the Severn to the Wash. The nearest hoards to Milverton are from Plymstock in Devon with 16 flanged axes and Westbury-on-Trym, Avon, with 3 axes.

This hoard is of particular interest because it is the earliest yet found in Somerset. The county has produced a large number (Smith, 1959) but they all date to the Middle and Late Bronze Age.

The axes are now in the Somerset County Museum.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are particularly due to Mr. Mick Aston, Somerset County Archaeologist, for his help throughout, to Mr. Mark Davis, of the Somerset County Museum, for photography and advice, to Mr. J. Moat, Mr. D. Amor and Mr. B. Wyatt of the Water Board, Taunton, for helping us to make a careful examination of the vicinity of the find spot, and to all of the bodies connected with the Milverton bypass for their co-operation.

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- Britton, D., 'Traditions of Metalworking in the Later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age of Britain', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* xxix (1963), 285 - 325.
Evans, Sir John, *Ancient Bronze Implements of Great Britain and Ireland* (1881).
Megaw, B. R. S. and Hardy, E. M., 'British decorated Axes and their diffusion during the earlier part of the Bronze Age', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* iv (1938), 272 - 307.
Smith, M. A., 'Some Somerset Hoards and their place in the Bronze Age of Southern Britain', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society* xxv (1959), 144 - 187.

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A PALSTAVE HOARD FROM SOUTH PETHERTON, SOMERSET

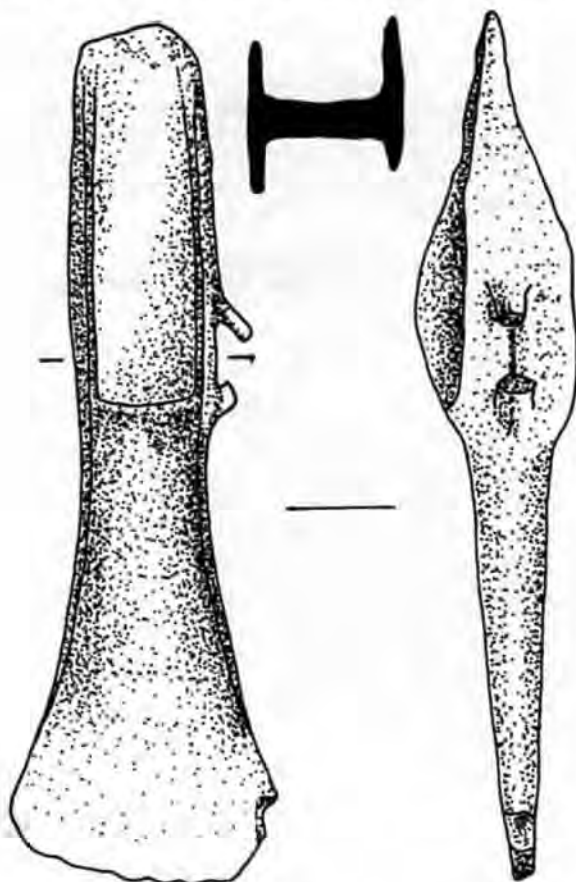
CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE FIND

The palstave hoard from South Petherton has been the subject of some enquiries in the past, and recently what appear to be the surviving specimens from the hoard have come to light.

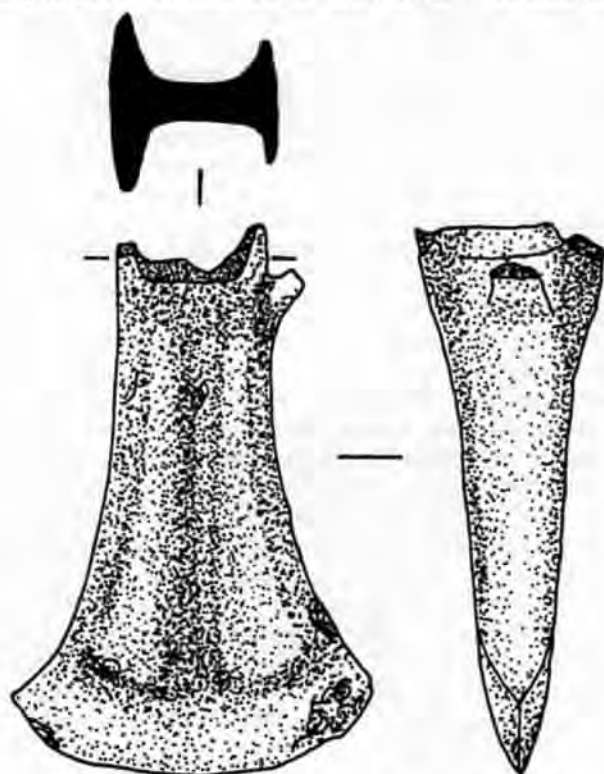
At the meeting of the Archaeological Institute in 1953 (*Arch. J.*, x 1853, 246-7) Mr. Henry Norris of South Petherton exhibited a palstave with a loop on each side which had been found in 1842 in a field near South Petherton. At the same time, he showed what are described as three bronze celts, found in 1830, at Wigborough near the same place. In the collections of the Exeter City Museum are two palstaves said to have been purchased in 1857 at the sale of the late Henry Norris of Taunton, which were found at Wigborough Farm, South Petherton, in 1820. It would seem clear that the Wigborough Farm hoard (approx. nat. grid ref. ST 448152) originally had three palstaves, of which two are now in Exeter, and that, quite separate from these, there was also a double-looped palstave found near the same place.

DESCRIPTION

1. Palstave, side loop (broken), narrow blade expanding to a narrow cutting edge (much abraded). The blade slightly convex. A U-shaped stop, and narrow flanges. Length — 141 mm, width across blade — 43 mm, width across butt — 18 mm. Exeter Museums no. A331.



2. Palstave, broken off just above the stop and upper portion missing. Loop (broken). Wide blade, expanding to a wide-bevelled cutting edge. On each blade face, two deep indentations creating a strong middle rib. The stop is nearly straight, and the flanges would clearly have been wide. Existing length — 89 mm, width across blade — 58 mm. Exeter Museums no. A 332.



DISCUSSION

The hoard contains an example of Smith's 'high-flanged south-western type', and as such takes its place with the hoards containing bronzes of this type which she has discussed (Smith M., 1959, 144-187). Hoards which are comparable, but much larger, are those from Sherford, Somerset (*Inv. Arch.* GB 45), and Blackrock, Sussex (*Inv. Arch.* GB 47(1), (2)). The 'high-flanged' palstave is one of Butler's 'broadbladed' type (Butler, 1963, 50-57), and compares most closely with his Class IAIf (p. 54), although on the South Petherton example the shield-shaped depression is elongated and dominated by its central rib. The loop on the piece would place it in the later part of the broad-bladed palstave sequence.

The other piece belongs with Butler's narrow-bladed series, and is of Class IIA4 (p. 59). This would place it relatively late in the narrow-bladed sequence.

As Butler has suggested, the broad-bladed palstave type came into manufacture first, and then the two classes of palstave developed in parallel until the final stages of the Middle Bronze Age industries and the early stages of those of the Late Bronze Age, when the broad-blade pieces disappear. The conjunction of these two palstaves would suggest that the South Petherton hoard belongs in the later part of the Taunton — Barton-Bendish sequence of later Bronze Age metalwork.

REFERENCES

- Butler, J. J., 'Bronze Age connections across the North Sea', *Palaeohistoria* ix (1963), 1-286.
 Smith, M., 'Some Somerset hoards and their place on the Bronze Age of Southern Britain', *PPS* xxi (1959), 144-187.

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TRACES OF NEOLITHIC ACTIVITY IN THE HIGHER AREAS OF THE QUANTOCK HILLS

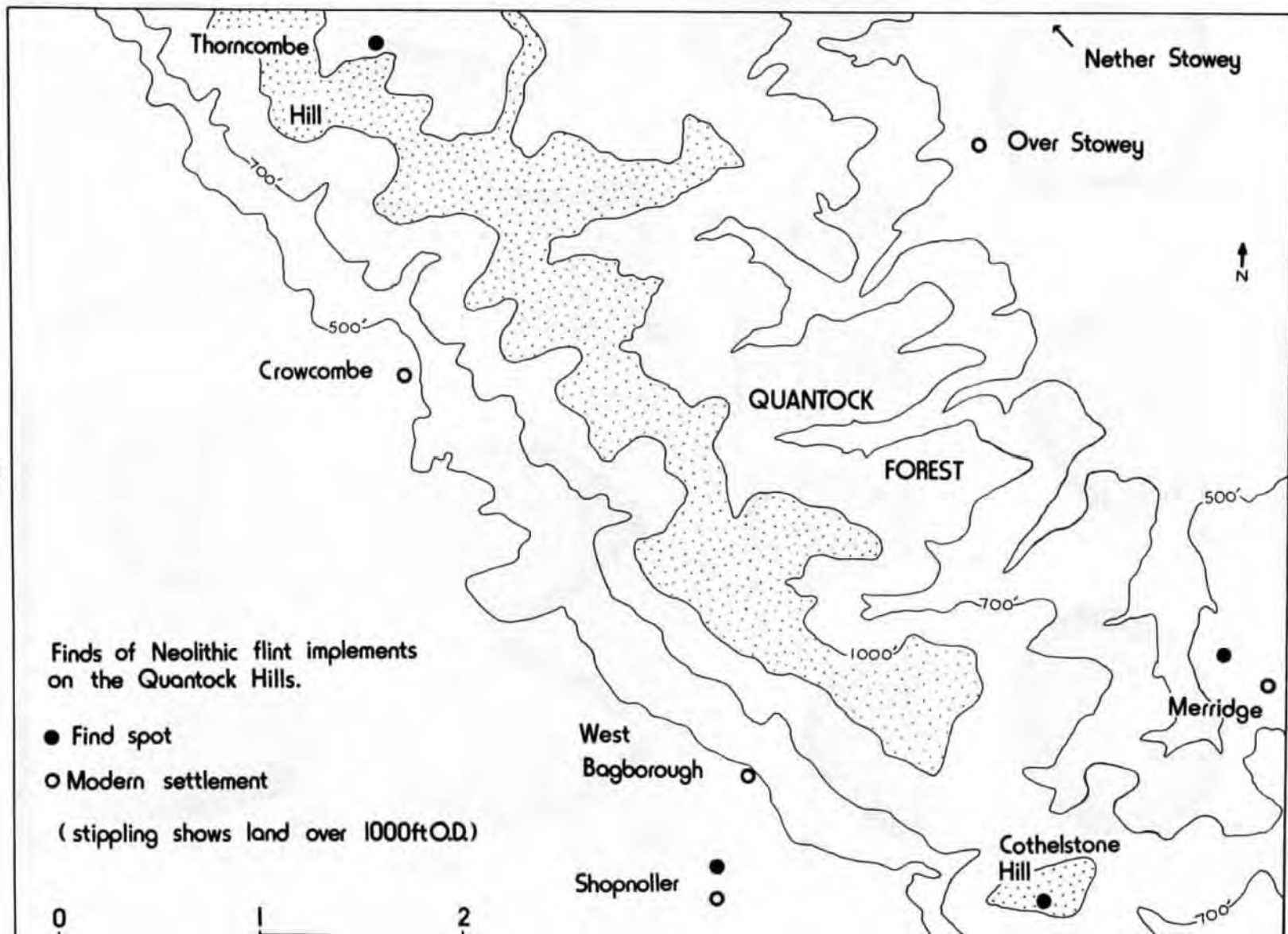
In comparison with many parts of Somerset, the high narrow ridge of the Quantock Hills has so far yielded only a moderate amount of evidence for pre-Iron Age occupation. Very little has been fully published, and the present extent of our knowledge in this area has been excellently summarised in Grinsell 1970. The best represented period appears to be the Early Bronze Age and numerous small cairns, probably of this date, have been recorded. A few barbed and tanged arrowheads and other flints of probable Early Bronze Age date have been found, usually as stray finds along footpaths and bridleways. However, previous writers have been unable to trace any records of Neolithic field monuments or of implements diagnostic of that period from those parts of the Quantock area which lie above the 250 ft. contour line. Indeed, until very recently the recorded evidence indicated that the main Quantock Hills were more or less unfrequented during the Neolithic period.

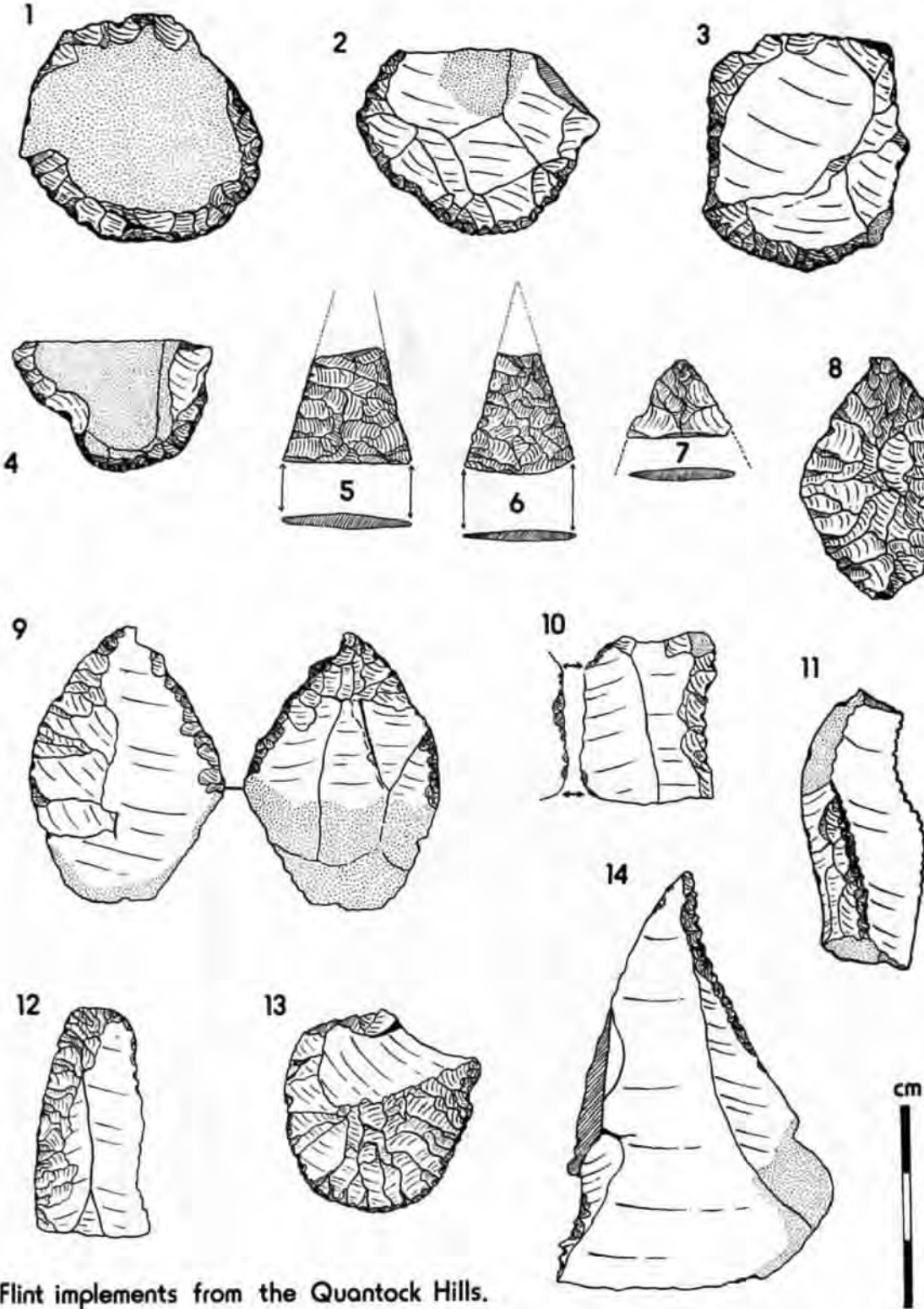
However, during the latter part of 1972 a roughly circular bridleway was cut around the summit of Cothelstone Hill (ST 190327) at a height of a little over 1000 ft. OD. The removal of the turf exposed a sporadic scatter of flints around much of this track and, at one point (ST 19203250) a marked increase in the density of this scatter was noted. Over 200 pieces of flint and chert were collected, of which twenty five had been retouched into implements. The residue consisted of small cores, spalls and waste flakes, some of the latter showing marked signs of utilization. The implements present consisted of convex scrapers, piercers, complete and fragmentary arrowheads, and a few rather shapeless retouched flakes which probably served as knives. The predominant raw materials were grey and black varieties of flint, accompanied by a little Upper Greensand and Portland Chert.

The interesting feature of this small assemblage is the apparent absence of the more characteristic Early Bronze Age implement forms. Although some of the finished pieces could belong to this period, many show features more usually associated with Neolithic industries (Piggott 1954). Of particular interest is a small bifacial leaf arrowhead (Fig. 3, no. 15), which is unusual in that it is made from a flake of Portland Chert. This material has a blackish, slate-like appearance and it occurs on the Isle of Portland in Dorset. Finished implements made of this chert appear to be rather uncommon in South Western England. Also of importance are the fragments from pressure flaked flint arrowheads (Fig. 2, nos. 5-7). Both in outline and cross-section nos. 5 and 6 are clearly from Neolithic leaf forms, and no. 6 in particular shows a very high level of workmanship. The convex scrapers (Fig. 2, nos. 1-4) all show a steeply worked scraping edge formed by ordinary percussion retouch. Although rather on the small side for Neolithic scrapers, they contrast markedly with forms more typical of the Early Bronze Age such as no. 13 which was found on Thorncombe Hill, Bicknoller (ST 132396). Similarly, the small flake knife with a steeply blunted back (Fig. 2, no. 10) can be compared with the small scale flaked knife of probable E.B.A. form (Fig. 2, no. 12) from nearby Broomfield Hill (ST 212328). Other implements from Cothelstone (Fig. 2, nos. 9, 11 and 14) which have been illustrated and described below also may belong to a Neolithic industry.

In addition to these artifacts from Cothelstone, one of the writers recently found a good leaf arrowhead (Fig. 2, no. 8) on the main Quantock ridge above Holford at ST 138393. This spot is at 975 ft. O.D. Further confirmation of Neolithic activity in the Quantock area is coming from the field researches of Mr. S. H. Price of Courtway, Spaxton. His finds of fragmentary leaf arrowheads and other possibly Neolithic flintwork have been made in arable fields on the lower Quantock hill slopes. Worthy of special note are flint scatters with broken leaf arrowheads at Shopnoller Farm, West Bagborough (ST 165328) and at Merridge (ST 204345). These sites lie at 350 ft. and 650 ft. O.D. respectively.

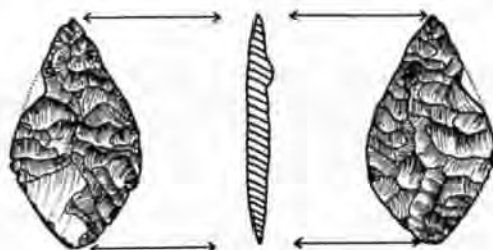
Although the evidence is at present scanty, it now appears that the high areas of the Quantocks were at least occasionally used by Neolithic peoples, if only for hunting purposes. Future fieldwork will doubtless reveal a fuller picture of their activities on these hills.





Flint implements from the Quantock Hills.

Fig. 2



Leaf arrowhead (No. 15)

Fig. 3

NOTES ON THE IMPLEMENTS FIGURED

All except Nos. 8, 12 and 13 are from Cothelstone Hill.

1. Convex scraper on thick flake of black flint. Much cortex over upper surface. Retouched edge at an angle of 75° to main flake surface.
2. Convex scraper on broken flake. Calcined, but little damaged.
3. Convex end scraper in black flint. Roughly trimmed around much of periphery.
4. Rough scraper on broken end of flake. Scraping edge undercut through rechipping.
5. Section of bifacial leaf arrowhead in dark grey flint. Max. thickness at lower break = 1.85mm.
6. Section of bifacial leaf arrowhead in light grey translucent flint. Max. thickness at lower break = 1.45mm.
7. Tip of bifacial arrowhead. ? leaf. Max. thickness at break = 1.90mm.
8. Unifacial leaf arrowhead with flaking at tip on underside. Black flint. Found above Holford at ST 138393.
9. Crude bifacially flaked point in the leaf tradition. Could be roughout, but more likely a poorly finished leaf point. Light grey flint with much cortex.
10. Small flake with blunted back and utilized edge. Black flint.
11. Small core trimming with serrated edge. Pale grey flint.
12. Small scale — flaked knife probably of E.B.A. date. Broomfield Hill (ST 212328).
13. Pressure — flaked convex scraper of E.B.A. type. Thorncombe Hill (ST 132396).
14. Roughly worked tool on thick flake of pale Greensand chert. ?awl or borer.
15. Small bifacial leaf arrowhead in Portland chert. Length = 29mm. Thickness at centre = 2.70mm.

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Grinsell L.V. *Archaeology of Exmoor* (David & Charles, 1970). In particular, pp. 22-27, and distribution maps of leaf and barbed and tanged arrowheads. These maps were based upon detailed inventories recently compiled by H. Stephen Green of Bristol.

Piggott S. *The Neolithic Cultures of the British Isles* (Cambridge U.P., 1954).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to express our gratitude to Messrs. A. L. Wedlake of Watchet, C. F. Clements of Taunton, and S. H. Price of Courtway, Spaxton for reading the script and offering valuable comments. We also wish to thank Messrs. Wedlake and Price for access to their collections of flints from the Quantock Hills and for permission to quote from Mr. Price's unpublished notes.

NOTE All Cothelstone material and other Quantock flints in our possession are shortly to be deposited in the County Museum at Taunton.

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