The flint

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Introduction (table 1)

Excavations at Chalgrove, Oxfordshire yielded a very small assemblage of 10 struck flints and 16o mostly tiny fragments of burnt unworked flint weighing just 132g. The assemblage lacked any cores or tools but did include several blade forms and had one possible microburin indicating a likely Mesolithic presence.

Methodology

The artefacts were catalogued according to OA South's standard system of broad artefact/debitage type (Anderson-Whymark 2013; Bradley 1999), general condition noted and dating was attempted where possible. The assemblage was catalogued directly onto an Open Office spreadsheet. During the assessment additional information on condition (rolled, abraded, fresh and degree of cortication), and state of the artefact (burnt, broken, or visibly utilised) was also recorded. Retouched pieces were classified according to standard morphological descriptions (e.g. Bamford 1985, 72-77; Healy 1988, 48-9; Bradley 1999). Technological attribute analysis was initially undertaken and included the recording of butt and termination type (Inizan *et al.* 1999), flake type (Harding 1990), hammer mode (Onhuma and Bergman 1982), and the presence of platform edge abrasion.

Table 1: assemblage from Chalgrove, Oxfordshire

CATEGORY TYPE	Number
Flake	5
Blade	2
Bladelet	1
Blade index	37.5% (3/8)
Irregular waste	1
Microburin	1
Total	10

Burnt unworked	160/132g
No. burnt (%)	0/10 (0%)
No. broken (%)	6/10 (60.0%)
No. retouched (%)	1/10 (10.0%)

Provenance and condition

The assemblage was dispersed around numerous contexts with just one fill containing more than one struck flint. Two pieces were recovered from ditch 1100, fill 1101 but neither was diagnostic. Almost all of the flintwork originated in features of Iron Age or Roman date, but some were found in undated features. Burnt unworked material was concentrated in areas A and C whereas the largest component of the struck assemblage came from area B. However, there was no concentration in the dispersal of the flintwork that might have indicated a prehistoric focus to the excavation area

The flints were in quite poor condition with just 20% fresh pieces and 30% lightly damaged flints. Moderately damaged pieces accounted for 30% and there were 20% in worse condition. Levels of cortication were also quite varied ranging from uncorticated to heavy. All these factors support the idea that the assemblage is entirely residual.

Discussion

This very small assemblage was largely uninformative, it lacked tools and cores and contained one probable diagnostic element, a microburin found in mid Iron Age ditch 1088,

fill 1089. As a distal example with a slightly miss-hit notch its identification is not confirmed. However, distal microburins are very often less obvious that their proximal counterparts and miss-hits can be quite common. The presence of numerous blade forms also supports the possibility that at least some of the assemblage is Mesolithic but these blades could also date to the Neolithic None of the flintwork recovered typified later prehistoric assemblages that can include material of Iron Age date (McLaren 2008).

The bulk of the burnt unworked flint was very small and suggests accidental burning of flint cobbles. Although this material was concentrated in areas A and C, there was never more than one group of burnt pieces from any given group, however, all were recovered from environmental samples and it is very probable that this material was not actively collected on site.

Overall, the assemblage is of very limited importance but does indicate a probable presence here during the Mesolithic period. Mesolithic sites and stray finds are becoming increasingly common in the Oxfordshire region largely due to an increase in large open area developer funded excavations of later date producing limited amounts of Mesolithic flintwork and it is likely that a significant part of the Oxfordshire region was frequented by these groups on at least an occasional basis.

Additional work
Illustration of possible microburin? (1/4 day)

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