The flint

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Introduction (table 1)

This excavation yielded a small assemblage of 34 struck flints and just four quite large pieces of burnt unworked flint weighing 90g. The flints were largely recovered as residual finds in later features particularly Iron Age pit fills and post-medieval ditches. Some originated in treethrows or from Bronze Age to early Iron Age features and these were potentially contemporary with them. However, even if some material was contemporary, it only amounted to three pieces, a very low-level degree of flint utilisation. Some of the pieces were also clearly much earlier in date than this Bronze Age phase and included blade forms as well as core tablets and crested blades from Neolithic or earlier assemblages. Overall, the assemblage was very sparse in its nature, and probably represent material recovered from several flint-using episodes spanning at least two thousand years.

Table 1: The flint assemblage from Little Martins Field, Oxfordshire

CATEGORY TYPE	
Flake	20
Blade	2
Bladelet	2
Blade index	16.67% (4/24)
Irregular waste	3
Core tablet	1
Crested piece	2
Core multiplatform flakes	1
Core fragment	1
Retouched blade	1
Retouched flake	1
Total	34

Burnt unworked flint	4/90g
No. burnt (%)	6/34 (17.65%)
No. broken (%)	15/34 (44.12%)
No. retouched (%)	2/34 (5.88%)

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.

The assemblage (table 2a & b)

The assemblage was quite dispersed across site in a range of features, largely ditches and pits (table 2a). These dated from the underlying natural through to the post-medieval period (table 2b). The largest single collection being represented by five flints from middle Iron Age ditch 2157 (2158, 2159 and three flints from 2182). This small assemblage included two blades, one of which was soft-hammer struck with platform edge abrasion and was clearly Mesolithic

or Neolithic in date, and it is very likely that this assemblage is entirely residual. There were three other cuts or layers that yielded at least three flints, two of these (layer 29 and ditch 63) were post medieval in date and contained flints from a range of probable periods but the third example, ditch 128, was our sole potentially contemporary assemblage. These three pieces comprised multiplatform flake core, a flake and a piece of indeterminate waste. Of these, the core more typified Neolithic industries but could conceivably be Bronze Age in date, while the other two pieces where wholly undiagnostic

Overall, the flints were in good condition, 53.57% were fresh, 28.57 displayed light edge damage and only 17.86% were moderately damaged with no heavily damaged or rolled pieces. The flint either displayed light or no cortication and a limited range of cortex types including chalk, thermal and weathered surfaces. All of this suggest largely locally gathered flint that had suffered little from post-depositional agencies.

Table 2a & b: The flint assemblage by context type and phase

CATEGORY TYPE	Total	Percentage	Phase	Total	Percentage
Ditches	19	55.89	Natural	1	2.94
Pits	7	20.59	BA-EIA	3	8.82
Postholes	3	8.82	MIA	15	44.12
Layers	3	8.82	RB-EAS	1	2.94
Treethrows	1	2.94	P-Med	13	38.24
Natural	1	2.94	X	1	2.94
Total	34	[100]		34	[100]

Discussion

The flint assemblage from Little Martins Field, Brightwell-cum Sotwell is of little note. There are no significant concentrations that could suggest that we are dealing with contemporary flintwork and what few pieces there are from prehistoric contexts generally indicate a multi-period assemblage. Formal tools are absent and the solitary core recovered was largely undiagnostic. Several core dressing pieces as well as a retouched blade and other blade forms indicate an early prehistoric component and some of the flakes from the assemblage are typically later prehistoric in character and could date from the Bronze Age or even Iron Age phases of activity. However, most were recovered as residual finds in post-Medieval contexts and in any case, we are dealing with very small quantities of flint indicating that any flint use here was actually quite peripheral to the main focus of activity on site.

There is the potential that some of the flintwork could belong to the Iron Age phase of activity on site. However, there are some key problems with this including the fact that Iron Age flintwork is viewed with some suspicion by the lithics specialist community in Britain (McLaren 2008; Saville 1981). Such assemblages are often very hard to identify since they are believed to most likely mirror mid-late Bronze Age flintwork and thus are typically seen as being residual (Humphries & Young 1999). Here, however, while this is the most likely possibility, the potential remains that some of the flintwork could be viewed off as being Iron Age in date.

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