

Lanton Lithic Assessment

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The section headings in the following assessment report refer to those in the 'Management of Archaeological Projects' (HBMC 1991), Appendix 4.

1. FACTUAL DATA

Quantity

A total of 51 chipped lithics were recovered from the Lanton excavations and were identified as being of prehistoric date.

Provenance

Table 1 below lists the feature numbers/contexts from which the material was recovered. Most of the Neolithic pieces came from pit fills in and around the Neolithic structures with a few more from posthole fills. Most of the Mesolithic material came from within the sand and gravel substratum.

Context No	Context Type	No Lithics	Lithic Types Present	Period
245		1	Flake	
015		1	Flake	
019		2	Flake, Core	
783		2	Blades	Neo
637		1	Flake	
181		10	Flakes, Point, Knife, Scraper	Neo
281		1	Flake	
1076		1	Flake	
083		2	Flake, Core	Mes
255		1	Bladelet	Mes
267		1	Retouched Blade	Mes-Neo
1066		1	Blade	Neo
011		1	Flake	
311		1	Blade	Neo?
535		2	Blades	
319		1	Flake (tuff)	Neo
595		1	Flake	
799		1	Flake	
103		1	Flake	
907		1	Flake	
1009		1	Flake	
533		2	Flake, Blade	
1215		1	Core	Mes

467		1	Flake	
431		1	Blade	Mes
055		1	Flake	
597		1	Flake	
593		1	Flake	
921		1	Flake	
595		1	Flake	
779		1	Core	
587		1	Flake	
017		1	Core	
Unstrat		4	Blades, Flake	Neo
Total		51		

Table 1. Lithic counts by context.

Dating

The Lanton assemblage of lithics contains diagnostic material of Mesolithic and Neolithic date. The diagnostic Mesolithic material is all made on non-flint locally occurring material such as agate, while the Neolithic material is made exclusively of flint – much of it of good quality. There is also one piece of chipped tuff, probably from Langdale in the Lake District, and this is likely to have been chipped from a stone axe head.

Contamination

Most of the Neolithic material came from discrete pit features that had not been disturbed by later activity. The Mesolithic pieces were retrieved from within the sand and gravel substratum and so are likely to have been chipped and discarded in another location before the being flushed downstream by the glacial meltwaters that deposited these gravel spreads.

Residuality

The range of periods represented on the Lanton Quarry site indicate that this area of landscape has been favoured for settlement from Mesolithic through Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age and Early Medieval times, and therefore the potential for earlier material to become incorporated in the fills of features cut into the ground at a later date will always remain. However, the location of the various features across the site indicates that activity in succeeding periods took place at different foci across the terrace surface.

Range and Variety

The assemblage contains a mixture of waste flakes and blades, broken blade tools, and other blade-based tools including knives, scraper, point and retouched blades. These pieces are Neolithic in date and are made from good quality flint, including some nodular flint clearly imported to the North East region. A good example of the latter is the long

unmodified blade from context 783. The Mesolithic material includes flakes and some micro-cores for microlith production made predominantly on agates and chert. The quantities of lithics made from the different raw materials is shown in Table 2 below.

Raw Material	Quantity
Flint	29
Agate	12
Chert	8
Other	2
Total	51

Table 2. Breakdown of lithics by raw material.

Condition

None of the pieces show fresh breaks and therefore the broken pieces have been broken in antiquity prior to discard. The flint pieces from the Neolithic pits are in mint condition and none show any signs of patina development. Conversely the agate and chert Mesolithic pieces from the gravel substratum sometimes show evidence of rolling and abrasion and many have developed patinas on them indicating their greater antiquity and the taphonomic processes that have brought them to their resting place.

Primary Sources and Documentation

There are no primary sources or documentation that might enhance the study of this collection.

Means of Collecting the Data

The lithics were excavated from the ground using hand tools (trowels and small tools) and from sieves with a 1cm² mesh. Each lithic was washed in tap water and gently cleaned with a toothbrush before being left to air dry. Each lithic was placed in an individual plastic bag that was labelled with a unique small find number and the context number.

For the assessment, the lithics were un-bagged and laid out on tables and grouped by context. lithic counts and weights were recorded and a preliminary examination made of all pieces. The sherds were then re-bagged and packed, by context, into a sturdy plastic storage box.

2. STATEMENT OF POTENTIAL

Value of the Data

The Lanton lithic assemblage adds some useful data to that collected at Cheviot Quarry and Thirlings. In particular, the finds of Neolithic material from features associated with Neolithic activity and buildings provides a rare glimpse of definite Neolithic material. In

North East England very little is known about Neolithic flint assemblages and there is very little in the way of dating control for such Neolithic artefacts. This collection, though small, provides the potential for some associated dating of the various forms. The observation that the Neolithic material is all flint, and much of this good quality imported material, supports similar observations made on the surface fieldwalking collection from Lanton, but also for the Neolithic material recovered from Cheviot Quarry and Bolam Lake.

Aims of Research

Given the low quantity of Neolithic material known from northern England generally the lithics should be documented thoroughly by production of an illustrated catalogue. The following aspects would be worthy of further study.

Dating and Cultural Associations

The dating of the lithics can be partly determined on the basis of typology, however, more secure direct dating of the Neolithic material from discrete pit features is possible. AMS dating of surviving organic residues in the pit fills from short-lived species, single entity samples would be the ideal.

Characterisation

Full assessment of the material types and comparison with other assemblages will allow the full research potential of this small, but useful assemblage, to be realised.

Function

Insights into the function of the various pieces can be suggested on the basis of typological form. The other way of assessing lithic function is to examine the organic residues and/or wear patterns surviving on the lithic surface. These techniques, though potentially informative, may be better focussed on larger assemblages or as part of a project that looks at other Neolithic lithics from a larger group of sites.

Integration of Study with Other Research

The study of this assemblage could be enhanced through comparison with the dates, styles and circumstances of discard with Neolithic assemblages from the nearby sites of Cheviot Quarry (Waddington 2000; Johnson and Waddington in press), Thirlings (Miket 1987), Bolam Lake (Waddington and Davies 2002) and elsewhere (e.g. Harding 1981; Miket 1976; 1981; 1985; Waddington 1996).

3. ARCHIVE REQUIREMENTS

Storage and Curation

The lithics are currently contained in a sealed and labelled plastic bags. Each lithic is individually bagged and those lithics from the same context all bagged again in a context specific larger bag. These bags are stored in a sturdy plastic storage box.

Retention and Discard Policy

It is recommended that all of this collection is kept for future study.

4. REFERENCES

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