

PRELIMINARY REPORT ON A RECENT COLLECTION OF STONE ARTEFACTS FROM THE '100 FOOT TERRACE' AT ABBOTS LEIGH, AVON

by

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ABSTRACT

Fieldwalking has yielded a considerable collection of stone artefacts from Chapel Pill Farm, Abbots Leigh, a site previously described by Lacaille (1954). The collection appears to be derived wholly from locally available material (predominantly chert), and despite differential preservation (some pieces are abraded while others are fresh) appears not to be transported other than by solifluction. Unlike other collections containing Lower Palaeolithic artefacts, a very wide range of tools is present including burins, awls, scrapers, choppers, handaxes and hammerstones.

INTRODUCTION

The occurrence of Lower Palaeolithic artefacts in the periglacially disturbed gravels of the lower reaches of the Bristol Avon has been recorded in three published papers, Davies and Fry (1929), Lacaille (1954) and Roe (1974). In a more widely ranging study (Roe, 1981) recorded prolific finds of Lower Palaeolithic artefacts from the lower reaches of the Bristol Avon, notably at Abbots Leigh. Attention was drawn to the quality of the raw material which was used, mainly poor quality chert, flint and a little quartzite and indurated sandstone, which affected the industry, giving it a rough appearance and a bias towards small implements. Roe (1981) suggested that given better stone to work, the industry at Abbots Leigh might well resemble that occurring in the middle gravels at Barnfield Pit, Swanscombe, Kent (Wymer, 1964).

In this paper we describe finds obtained in 1991 after some 120 man-hours of fieldwork from a 15.4 hectare arable field at Chapel Pill Farm, Abbots Leigh, Avon (centred on NGR ST 543758).

FIELD SITE

The Chapel Pill Farm field from which this collection was obtained lies at an elevation of about 30 m AOD. The field slopes gently north-northeast towards the tidal estuary of the Avon. To the east there is an incised dry valley with a spring in the lower section. The site is underlain by the Triassic Keuper Marl, but above this gravels allocated by the Geological Survey to the Second Terrace of the River Avon are found (BGS Sheet 264). The main lithic material exposed by cultivation is chert, but rounded quartzite pebbles up to 8 cm in diameter are fairly common. There is a small amount of flint, but very little limestone. The

chert nodules are typically 5 to 10 cm in diameter, with some up to 15 cm and a lesser number of somewhat larger pieces. Further details of the site may be obtained from Lacaille (1954), including maps, site photographs and drawings of artefacts which have previously been reported from the area.

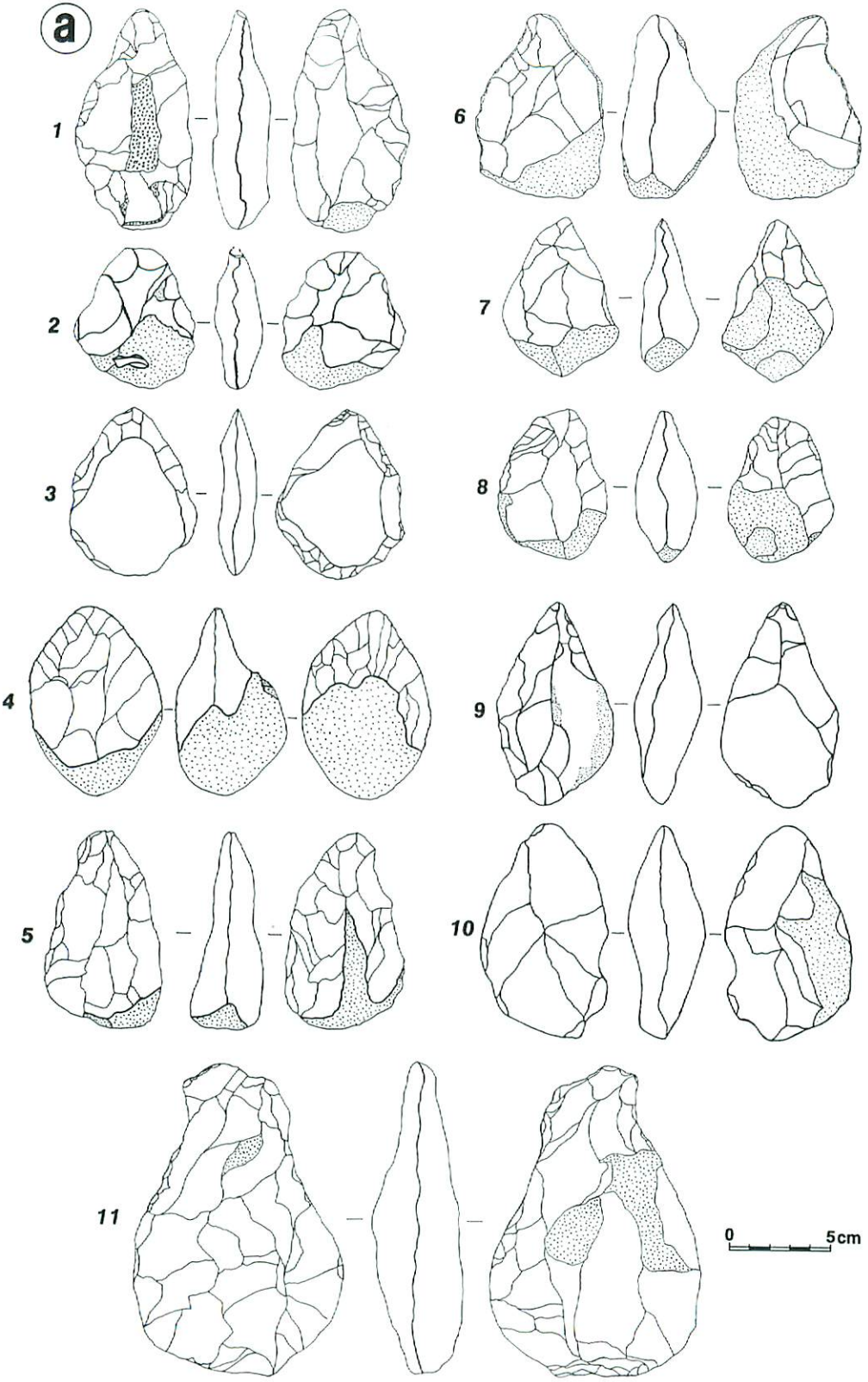
NATURE OF ARTEFACTS

In all a total of several hundred artefacts have been recovered, which will be lodged with the City Museum, Bristol. A representative selection from this collection is described and figured below (Figure 1). The principle raw material used in the manufacture of the artifacts was cobbles of a rather poor quality honey-coloured chert. In some of the tools this chert displays a waxy quality, which has also been noted by Lacaille (1954). Many of the artefacts might strictly be described as being made of thick flakes, but have apparently been formed from split or broken chert cobbles. Some fine flaking does occur, as can be seen from the figured examples (Figure 1 number 4 and 5 for example). Conchoidal rippling is only rarely apparent due to the poor quality of the chert, and to patina and

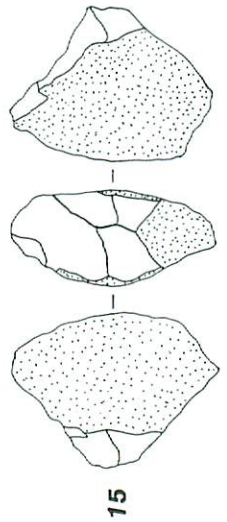
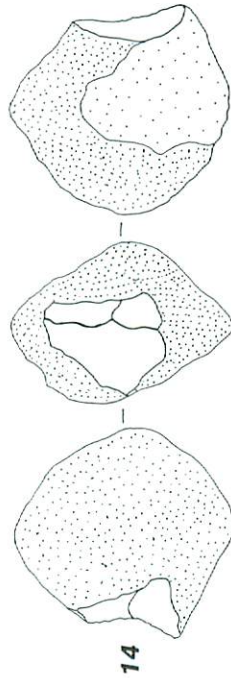
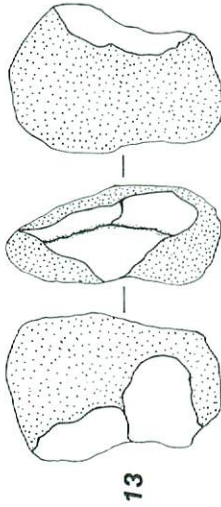
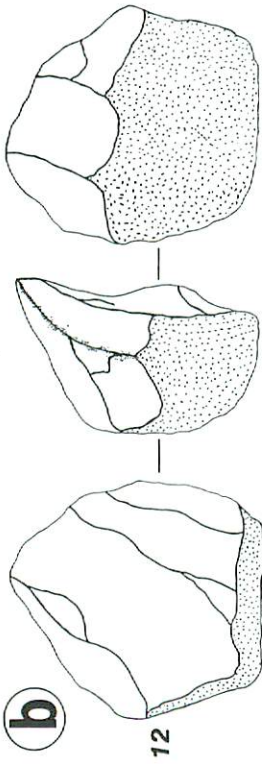
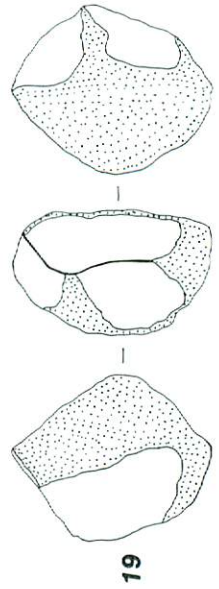
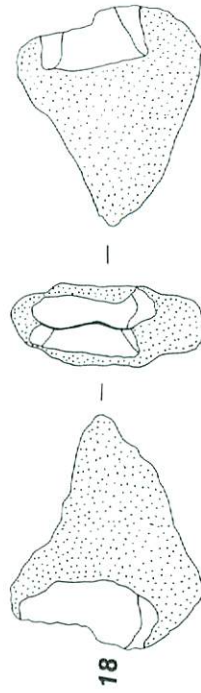
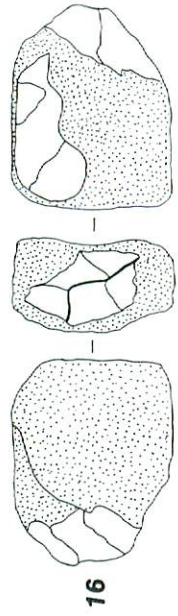
Figure 1. (following pages) *Selected artefacts from the recent Chapel Pill collection:*

- a) 1, handaxe of flint with ochreous colour and sparkling crystalline inclusions; 2, handaxe of chert with waxy texture; 3, handaxe of flint with large area of thermal damage on each face; 4-10, handaxes, 10 of flint; 11, handaxe of flint with uniform ochreous colour.
- b) 12-19, chopper tools.
- c) 20-25, chopper tools, 21, 22 and 25 of flint; 26-28, thick flakes (25, 15 and 20 mm respectively); 29, unstruck Levalloisian type core? The other face is flat and completely cortical (see also Lacaille 1954); 30, frost damaged bifacially worked artefact; 31, large side-scraper; 32, chopper tool or unfinished handaxe?; 33-34, burins/gravers; 35, large scraper on triangular sectioned non-cortical core; 36, handaxe?
- d) 37-38, large pick-like implements; 39, well-made awl; 40, large incurved scraper 45 mm thick; 41, multiple incurved scraper 25 mm thick; 42, double incurved scraper 19 mm thick; 43, combined awl and incurved scraper 22 mm thick; 44, double incurved scraper 12 mm thick; 45, multiple incurved scraper 10 mm thick of flint; 46, large combined side and incurved scraper 36 mm thick; 47, flake side-scraper with inverse retouch; 48, awl 26 mm thick of flint; 49-51, struck flakes showing bulbous faces; 52, anvil or hammerstone quartzite pebble having a battered face; 53, possible fabricator? 22 mm thick with well rounded ridges, ends and edges; 54, core roughly triangular in section and 50 mm thick; 55, core of flint, roughly triangular in section and 46 mm thick; 56, double side-scraper 35 mm thick of flint.

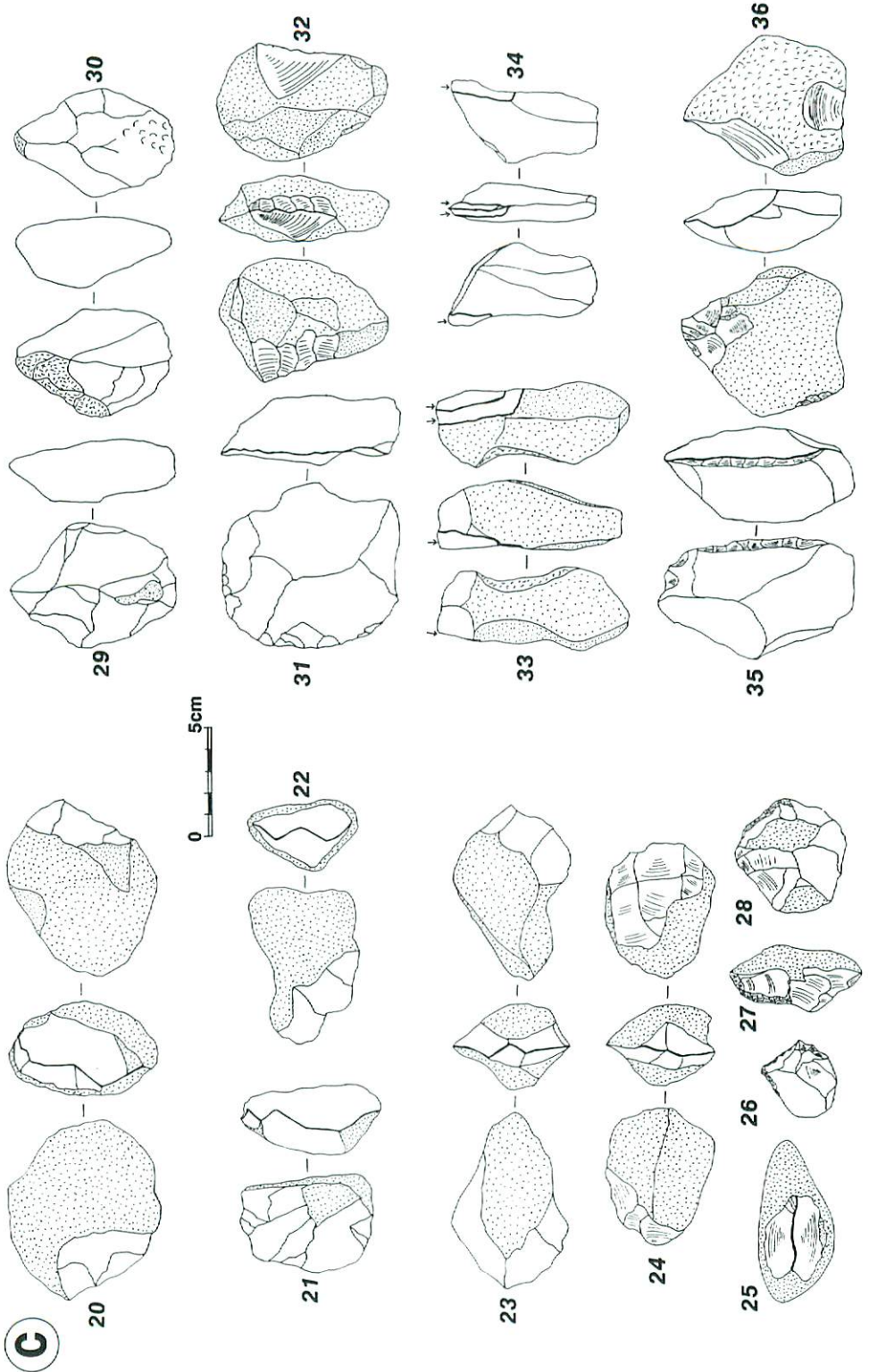
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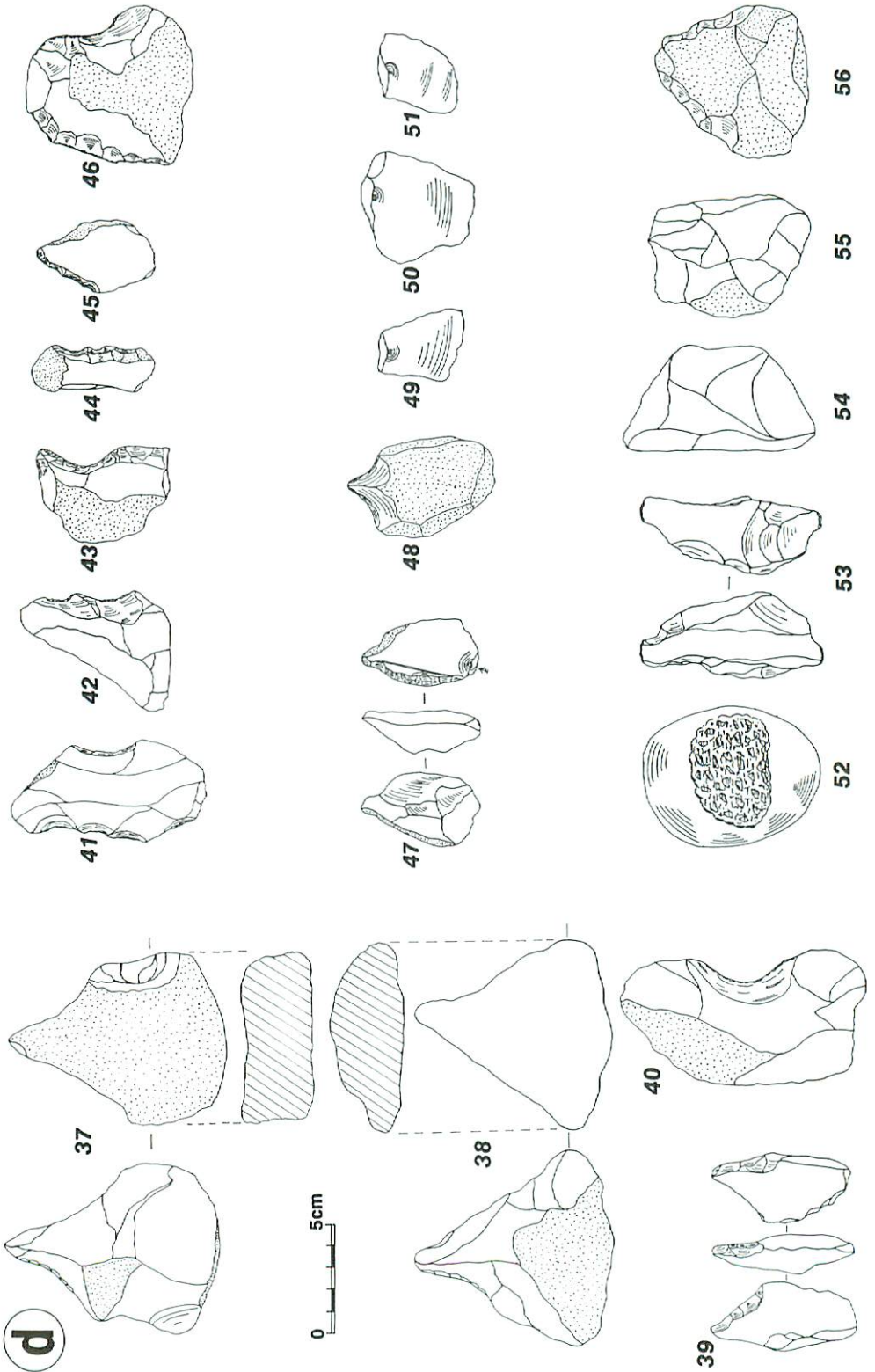


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abrasion. Indeed while the average general condition of the collection might be described as somewhat worn and abraded, there are examples of material in fresh condition, together with others which are very heavily worn. A few possible worn sandstone artefacts were found (not figured here), but some of the rounded sandstone pebbles show bruising and may have been used as hammers (Figure 1, number 52). Flint palaeoliths are relatively rare (c. 5%), reflecting the paucity of flint nodules in the gravels exposed, and are generally of small size and of poor quality (Figure 1, numbers 21 and 22). An exception is the largest of the handaxes (Figure 1, number 11) which is of high quality.

Table 1. *Numbers of artefacts of different types represented in recent collection from Chapel Pill. In addition to those included in the table there are several hundred worked but uncategorised pieces.*

Artefact Type	Number
Chopper Tools	137
Scrapers	116
Incurved Scrapers	81
Handaxes ¹	61
Struck flakes ²	45
Cores	35
Picks	25
Points	12
Discoids	11
Hammers	11
Burins	7
Spheroids	6
Knives	5
'Tea-cosy' chopper cores	4
Cleavers	3
Wedges	2
Fabricators	2
Punch	1
Total	<u>564</u>

- Notes**
1. Includes 'rough-cuts' and incompleated axes.
 2. Utilised and/or worked.

A considerable variety of tool types, flakes and cores are recorded from the site (Table 1). These include choppers, incurved and small notched scrapers, handaxes, picks, points and burins. Examples of distinctive 'tea-cosy' type chopper cores are also represented, one of which is formed of light-grey flint, the only example of this material noted from the site. The handaxes are generally small and pointed with a rough rather irregular outline. The majority have rounded ridges

between the flaked facets and their edges are dull (Figure 1, numbers 5, 6, 7 and 8). It would appear that in many cases only one edge was intended for utilisation, the other edge being roughly shaped, presumably from the use of stone hammers. Chopper-tools are well represented, many examples having only three flakes struck to produce a working edge, two from one face and one from the other (Figure 1, numbers 13, 14, 19 and 22). No examples of 'fire-crackled' stones, or any evidence of use of fire have been noted.

Of particular interest is the remarkable similarity between some of the artefacts suggesting that they were possibly made by the same person. Handaxe 4 (Figure 1) has an almost identical twin, while the pick-like implements 37 and 38 are identical in style, although 38 is much more abraded than 37. This together with the presence of cores and flakes struck in manufacture, suggests that despite the different degrees of abrasion, the artefacts may not have been moved far (Treacher et al, 1948). Indeed it is of significance that an adjacent field at the same level which also has an abundant scatter of suitable chert cobbles does not appear to contain any artefacts.

DISCUSSION

It seems clear that the artefacts recorded at Chapel Pill are derived from local material found in the '100 ft terrace' of the River Avon. Furthermore, the fact that artefacts are absent from adjacent fields exposing the same terrace gravels, and that cores and flakes as well as finished tools are found, suggests that Chapel Pill was a site where tools were actively manufactured. This is supported by the occurrence of tools of almost identical morphology, possibly the output of a single individual. It is also of interest that although there is a wide scatter of artefacts throughout the field, the highest concentration is on the gentle slopes adjacent to the spring. This would undoubtedly have been a suitable habitation site, with fresh drinking water and commanding views over the surrounding area and the Avon Valley. This concentration may also however result from geomorphic processes, coarser material being concentrated by solifluction and slope wash on the valley sides. This may also explain the high degree of differential abrasion in what appears to be a single assemblage.

The wealth of artefacts present in this collection is of some interest (Table 1). The examples of burins show a definite and undoubtedly preconceived idea of the functions to which a tool formed in this manner might be applied. Together with the occurrence of numerous small notched, and larger incurved scrapers, and boring type pointed tools, this suggests that their makers had a practical knowledge of and a requirement for a wide range of stone tools. No artefacts have been recovered of a typology suggestive of any period other than the Lower Palaeolithic, the handaxes being particularly characteristic. However, some caution is necessary in ascribing this antiquity to the collection, in that the artefacts may reflect the nature of the available raw materials (see for example the Neolithic tools made from Bunter quartzite pebbles figured in Masson-Phillips (1958)). There is thus a possibility that the collection is either more recent than Lower Palaeolithic, or is a mixed assemblage of Lower Palaeolithic and younger material.

CONCLUSION

In submitting this note we hope to draw attention to the wide range of stone tool types which occur at Abbots Leigh. Much of our present knowledge of Lower Palaeolithic industries is based on earlier collections, which were in many cases selected by labourers working in the gravel-pits of south-eastern Britain. These workers favoured selective collecting, and handaxes being the most attractive and therefore the most readily saleable items, were predominant in their choice of the stone tools deserving retention. It seems probable that many otherwise characteristic and contemporary stone tools were overlooked, or dismissed as of no value. The Lower Palaeolithic sites in the Bristol area may well contain evidence which will help archaeologists to fill in some of the gaps in our present record concerning the range of stone tool types which are applicable to the British Lower Palaeolithic period. There seems little doubt that many more interesting archaeological discoveries will be made here although, it seems unlikely that these will supply anything more than tentative typological clues regarding the chronology of the Chapel Pill site. In this respect we concur with Roe (1974) who drew attention to the need for further research on the chronology of the Lower Avon Terraces.

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