

A Polished Flint Axe from a probable Bronze Age Living Site

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National Grid Reference : ST47025858.

O.S. Map 6 in. to 1 mile, Somerset XVIII N.W.

In a field to the east of Hill Cottage in the parish of Churchill rather more than half of a polished flint axe was found in 1953. The butt end of the axe is missing but the fracture has the same degree of weathering as the rest of the specimen (*Fig. 5*). It is clear that the butt end fracture, like the others on this axe, is ancient.

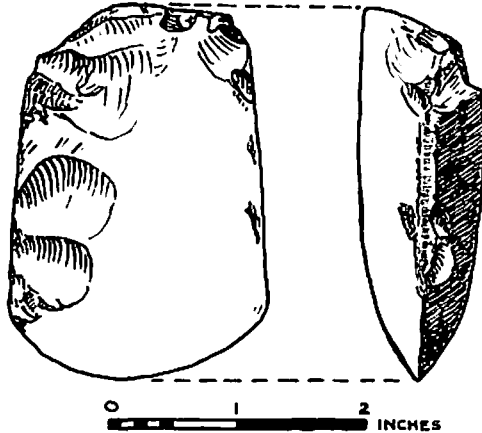


Fig. 5.—Incomplete polished flint axe from Hill Cottage, Churchill. Two-thirds natural size.

The cutting edge of the axe shows an asymmetrical curve of a type with a continuously changing radius such as is seen in any modern woodman's axe. A study of the cutting edges of polished stone axes suggests that the asymmetry of the cutting edge may not always have been accidental but deliberate, and hence it may be possible, from the form of the edge to determine whether the implement was really meant to be an axe, or a hoe/adze type of implement.

A few yards away from where the axe was found there was a small and much weathered barbed and tanged arrow-head. There is a scatter of flints over the immediate area, but none to speak of in adjacent areas. An

appreciable number of flint chips and quite a number of actual implements have been found at each season's ploughing over the past few years. The implements are mainly knives and scrapers, and there is a marked absence of Early Bronze and Neolithic types. The collection appears to be Late Bronze Age. It is very likely that the area was a living site, probably of the Late Bronze Age, and that the axe was being used as a source of raw material in an otherwise flintless area (*see also* Grinsell, p. 42 of this issue).

To the south is Bos Swallet (N.G.R. ST46475837), in which the Sidcot School Caving Society established a Bronze Age hearth level (Stanton, 1950). The evidence on which the dating was based was not very sound, and the few sherds of pottery that this level yielded cannot now (1954) be found. There is more than one hearth level exposed in the section and further excavations are now in progress.*

To the south-east lie a group of barrows, not yet completely excavated (Read, 1923, 1924). One of them, N.G.R. ST47445844, numbered T.5 (Tratman, 1927), yielded a disturbed primary beaker burial in a well-made cyst (Read, 1923, p. 67, and 1924, p. 132), and excavations now in progress have revealed a Late Bronze Age cremation cemetery in and beyond the south zone of the barrow. To the south-west of the living site are other Bronze Age barrows (Read, 1923, p. 70). These obvious signs of the presence of Late Bronze Age folk in the area lend colour to the suggestion that the place where the flint axe and other implements were found is a living site of the Late Bronze Age.

I am indebted to Mr. L. V. Grinsell for the drawing from which *Fig. 5* is made and also to Professor E. K. Tratman for his help in the construction of this report.

REFERENCES

- READ, R. F., 1923, "Report on the Excavations of the Mendip Barrows during 1923", *Proc. U.B.S.S.*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 65-73.
 READ, R. F., 1924, "Second Report on the Excavation of Mendip Barrows", *Ibid.*, No. 2, 132-146.
 STANTON, W. I., 1950, "Bos Swallet," *Burrington*, Mendip Nature Research Comm. of Wells Nat. Hist. and Arch. Soc., 42nd Report, p. 11.
 TRATMAN, E. K., 1927, "Field Work", *Proc. U.B.S.S.*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 25-39. List of barrows, p. 31.

* *Editors' Footnote:* Sidcot School have resumed their dig at Bos Swallet. There are three hearth levels there, though the middle one is very faint. Nothing has been found to enable a date to be given to the upper two hearths, but from their position in relation to the surface and the lowest hearth it seems likely that the top will prove to be Early Iron Age and the second Middle Bronze Age.

The lowest hearth is yielding "B" Beaker pottery in some quantity, and flint implements.