

NOTES

AN ACCOUNT OF AN EXCAVATION OF A PREHISTORIC FLINT MINE AT MARTINS CLUMP, OVER WALLOP, HAMPSHIRE, 1954-5

Abstract

No excavation report of the prehistoric flint mines at Martins Clump appears to survive, although the available evidence indicated that an excavation had been conducted. One of the excavators has now been identified, and this paper records such details of the excavation as can be determined, based on an interview with her. Further studies are required to relate the mines to neighbouring ones at Easton Down.

Introduction

There are two major groups of prehistoric flint mines on Salisbury Plain on land owned by the Ministry of Defence known as the Porton Ranges. One is the Easton Down group, in the parish of Winterslow, Wiltshire; the other is the Martins Clump group in the parish of Over Wallop, Hampshire. They are 3km apart. Both consist of over a hundred closely spaced shafts, long since filled in.

One of the smaller shafts and a small pit at Easton Down were explored by Dr J F S Stone (1931) who discovered antler picks, ox *scapulae*, flint tools and struck flakes. Antler picks from the excavations have since been subjected to a Carbon 14 analysis which yields a date of 2530 ± 150 bc (BM-190). The mine shaft was 14ft in diameter and about 12ft deep (imperial units will be given where they were quoted originally), bellling out towards the bottom. A cross section and a photograph of the interior of the mine are published in Stone's *Wessex before the Celts* (Stone 1958).

A short note in the *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club and Archaeological Society* (Stone 1933) briefly describes the Martins Clump group and illustrates some flint tool finds in the area. A few more details may be found in Stone's first notebook (Stone 1932). He wrote (1933): 'Since an exhaustive study of this new mine

cluster must await the completion of the Easton Down group, it has been thought advisable to place on record such facts as have been gained from a somewhat cursory examination'. There is no published record that Stone excavated a mine at Martins Clump. The first notebook contains the material for the Hampshire Field Club paper of 1933 and some aerial photographs of the site. The second and final notebook (Stone 1948) is also silent on the matter of an excavation. However, in *Wessex before the Celts* he wrote (p 41) '... the base of the pit was enlarged by undercutting to bell-shaped form at both Easton Down and Martins Clump'. Stone was meticulous in his recording and it has been puzzling that no account of an excavation at Martins Clump was published. Some of those who knew Stone were sure that a dig had been made there.

The Excavation

In 1986, one of us (DJJ) was approached by Mrs Barbara Watson of Salisbury with the information that she and her husband, Colonel James Watson, who commanded a detachment of Royal Artillery at the Government Establishment at Porton Down, had excavated a flint mine at Martins Clump during 1954 and 1955 at the request of Dr Stone. They had prepared a report of the excavations for him which appears to be lost now. At the time, Stone was busy with his manuscript of *Wessex before the Celts* which was not entirely complete before he died suddenly in 1957. This probably accounts for the Watsons' report not being published and the inclusion of a reference to the characteristics of a mine at Martins Clump in his book.

Mrs Watson kindly agreed to be interviewed (16 Dec 1986) and furnished information on the dig from memory and from notes written

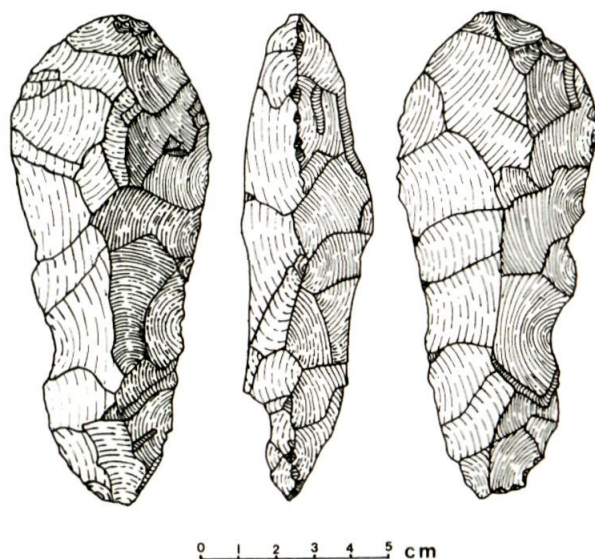


Fig 1. A flint tool found in the excavation.

on the artefacts she had retained. The mine appeared as a small depression before excavation and proved to be 8–10ft deep and 10–12ft in diameter, approximately circular with straight sides. A small ‘gallery’ about 3ft high and stretching for about 3ft was found at the bottom of the shaft. Its construction would appear to be part of the belling out process, which was not as smooth as Stone’s cursory account of 1958 might suggest. An antler pick with a worn brow tine and a snapped off bay tine was discovered at a depth of 2ft 6in to 3ft together with an isolated piece of antler. A discarded axe roughout 120mm by 85mm was found at a depth of 5ft 9in, just above the gallery, with a quantity of charcoal which appeared to be the remains of a small fire. Two small axes were found. One was given to Nicholas Holbrook, who assisted in the dig; the other is in Mrs Watson’s possession and is illustrated in Fig 1. Mrs Watson did not recall the presence of notable quantities of struck flint flakes; she and her husband were familiar with such objects.

Mrs Watson provided us with the negatives of seven black and white photographs of the dig. These enabled us to estimate from the

surrounding landscape features the National Grid coordinates of the shaft as SU 2501 3871. The photograph reproduced here as Fig 2 shows the interior of the shaft with the ‘gallery’, and should be compared with the photograph of the Easton Down mine in *Wessex before the Celts*, when marked similarities will be observed.

Discussion

This new information tends to confirm that there are no significant differences between the two groups of flint mines and their associated industries. They can only be assumed as closely related in time and culture until more detailed excavations and analyses have been conducted to resolve the issue.

Acknowledgements

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Fig 2. A view into the excavated flint mine.

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