

PRELIMINARY NOTE ON HANDAXES FOUND IN GRAVEL DEPOSITS AT WARSASH, HAMPSHIRE

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IN THE summer of 1969 two handaxes were found in the gravel underlying the gardens of nos. 90 and 88 Osborne Road, Warsash, by the householders concerned. The implements were stratified at the same depth, and horizontally within 20 feet of each other, near where the 50 foot terrace of the area has been cut through by a small river valley (fig. 1).

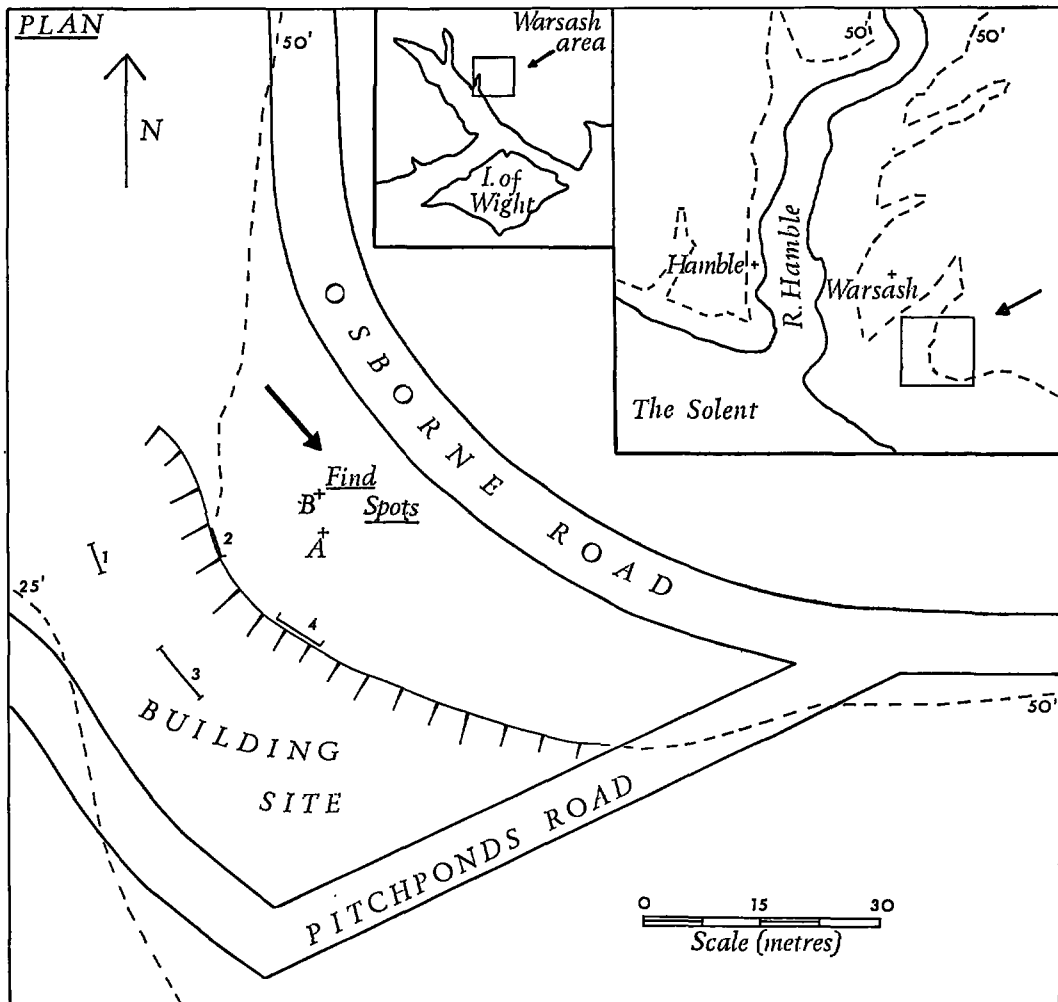


Fig. 1

As can be seen from the photograph (plate I) the first handaxe is a splendid pointed specimen (length 21.3 cm., breadth 10.6 cm., thickness 6.25 cm.), made from greyish-yellow flint, with a small amount of white patination but only a trace of ferruginous staining. It is a core tool trimmed carefully on both faces, the flakes removed varying in size up to 5 cm. long. The standard of flaking is high, as is illustrated by the delicate point, which is still reasonably sharp. The edge of the implement is straight and regular, showing evidence of much secondary working. The tool appears originally to have been trimmed all the way round the butt, but a frost crack has caused the removal of a large piece. There is further evidence of the action of frost in the several other large cracks apparent on the surface of the tool, and on one surface which shows slight frost pitting. The remarkable freshness of the other face shows that the implement cannot have travelled far since its manufacture, and it is thus presumably nearly contemporary with the gravels in which it was found.

The second handaxe is smaller in size (length 16.8 cm., breadth 8.6 cm., thickness 4.6 cm.), although made of much the same kind of flint as the first one. Here the tip has been broken but the tool still only shows a small degree of rolling. It is less finely worked than the first specimen, with a more twisted edge and a lesser degree of secondary retouch, but it seems possible that this might be connected with a large flaw in the flint on one side, which caused the maker of the tool to leave it unfinished. There are marked similarities in the method of flaking, and in the shape and mode of manufacture, between the two tools.

These artifacts are Middle Acheulean in type, parallels for them being widely distributed, both in the immediate vicinity and in the important Lower Palaeolithic sites of the Thames Valley.

It is only rarely nowadays that such implements are found in a stratified context, and in this case it was decided to take the opportunity offered to section the gravels of the site in four places (fig. 2), to enable a profile to be built up from the top of the terrace to bedrock. Because handaxes of a precisely similar nature are being regularly recovered from a gravel pit nearby, the area around Warsash consisting of a flight of gravel spreads, it was thought that a detailed examination of these deposits in terms of the implements which they contain, would prove profitable. A method for such a study

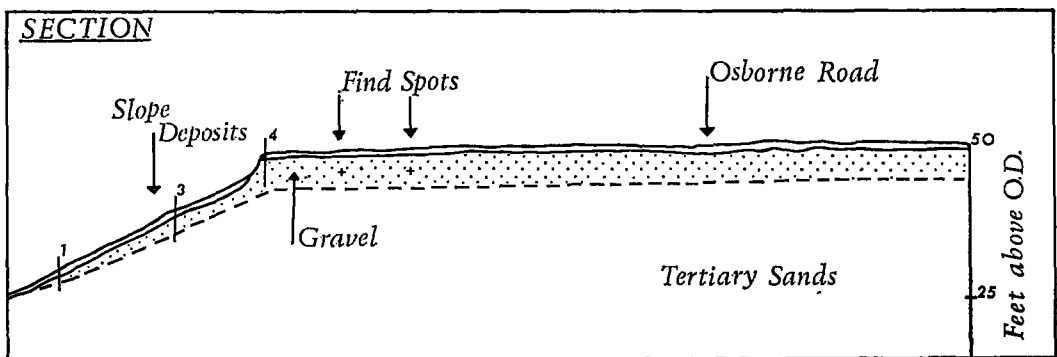


Fig. 2. Osborne Road, Warsash, schematic section showing terrace deposits.

PRELIMINARY NOTE ON HAND AXES

has been established, and interesting results have already been obtained from analysis of samples taken from the above-mentioned sections. Various sedimentological techniques are being employed in order to define accurately the composition and characteristics of the gravel, and to establish the environment of deposition. This is of particular importance in the case of an area such as Warsash, where there was considerable uncertainty as to whether the gravel spreads were of fluvial or marine origin. It is hoped by work now in progress to section these gravels at a number of different points, attempting to show their interrelationships and their connections with the implements which they yield so profusely, and also to comment in greater detail upon these flint industries and their affinities. In the case of this particular site sectioning was facilitated by the presence of building works, and a large number of further sections are exposed in gravel pits.

Any unrecorded information about finds belonging to this period which have been in this neighbourhood, or in any part of southern Hampshire, would be greatly appreciated.