

NOTES

TWO NEOLITHIC POLISHED FLINT AXES FROM THE VALE OF AYLESBURY

During a programme of systematic fieldwalking by Aylesbury Past Project between 1986 and 1988 Roman, Saxon and medieval artefact scatters were recovered (Dalwood and Platell 1988). Prehistoric pottery and lithics were only recovered in small quantities, but two items deserve publication in this note. Archive documentation and the objects themselves are retained at Buckinghamshire County Museum.

1. Axe, broken, from Hartwell (SP 80901190). The middle portion of a neolithic ground and polished flint axe, with slightly flattened sides. It is broken at both ends: at the blade end, the flake scars are unpatinated; at the butt-end, they have a white patina. The whole is battered and worn, but the butt-end flake scars suggest flakes struck to rework the piece. The polished surfaces carry a milky white patina over orange flint. (AFS 16, S.F. 1041; BCM CAS 5619, Acc. No. 301.1987).

2. Axe, broken, from Stone (SP 78971118). The butt-end of a neolithic ground and polished flint axe, with a rounded section. It has a clean regular break, and is slightly chipped at the butt-end. The sides are faceted towards the break. The polished surfaces are patinated a pale milky grey, over an opaque grey-brown flint. (AFS 24, S.F. 1042; BCM CAS 5627, Acc. No. 308.1987)

The two axes are similar in size and type, both being ground and polished flint axes with faceted sides, well-known throughout southern England, and the commonest type of flint axe (Class 6) in the East Midlands (Moore 1979, 86). Their resemblance to Group VI (Langdale) stone axes has been noted (*ibid*; Whittle 1977, 65), although it is uncertain how this similarity should be interpreted.

The source of these flint axes might be

expected to be the flint mines of East Anglia or Sussex, but flint mines have been found in the Chilterns at Peppard Common (Peake 1913) so a local source may be possible. Reworked axes, such as No. 2, are common finds: the reworking of the butt-end, perhaps to facilitate the re-shafting of a broken axe, is found amongst Cotswold flint axes, and it may reflect the distance from flint sources (Tyler 1976, 13).

Both axes were recovered from localities which have not produced any other lithic material. The neolithic occupation in the Vale of Aylesbury has been inferred from the recovery of artefactual material at Walton Vicarage (Farley 1976, 160-1, fig. 2), in Aylesbury (Dalwood forthcoming) and at Scotsgrove House, Haddenham (CAS 4194). In addition, a total of five stone axes and three flint axes have previously been found: two stone axe fragments from Walton Vicarage (Farley 1976, fig. 2: 17-18), a stone axe from Aylesbury (CAS 4450), another probably from Aylesbury (CAS 1807), and two flaked flint axe fragments also from Aylesbury (CAS 1807). In addition, a single stone axe has been found in Bierton (CAS 2386), and a polished flint axe in Dinton (CAS 4982). The material from Walton Vicarage comprised stone axe fragments, ceramics (Peterborough Ware) and other lithics, all as residual material; otherwise axes and datable neolithic scatters are not associated.

It is generally supposed that neolithic flint axes were broken and discarded or lost in use, and that their distribution is a function of the process of neolithic clearance (Tyler 1976, 3). Although some stone axes could not have functioned as tools at all, and others are too small to have been heavy felling tools (Bradley 1978, 12-13), the majority may be interpreted as timber-working tools, used for clearance together with fire-setting and ring-barking

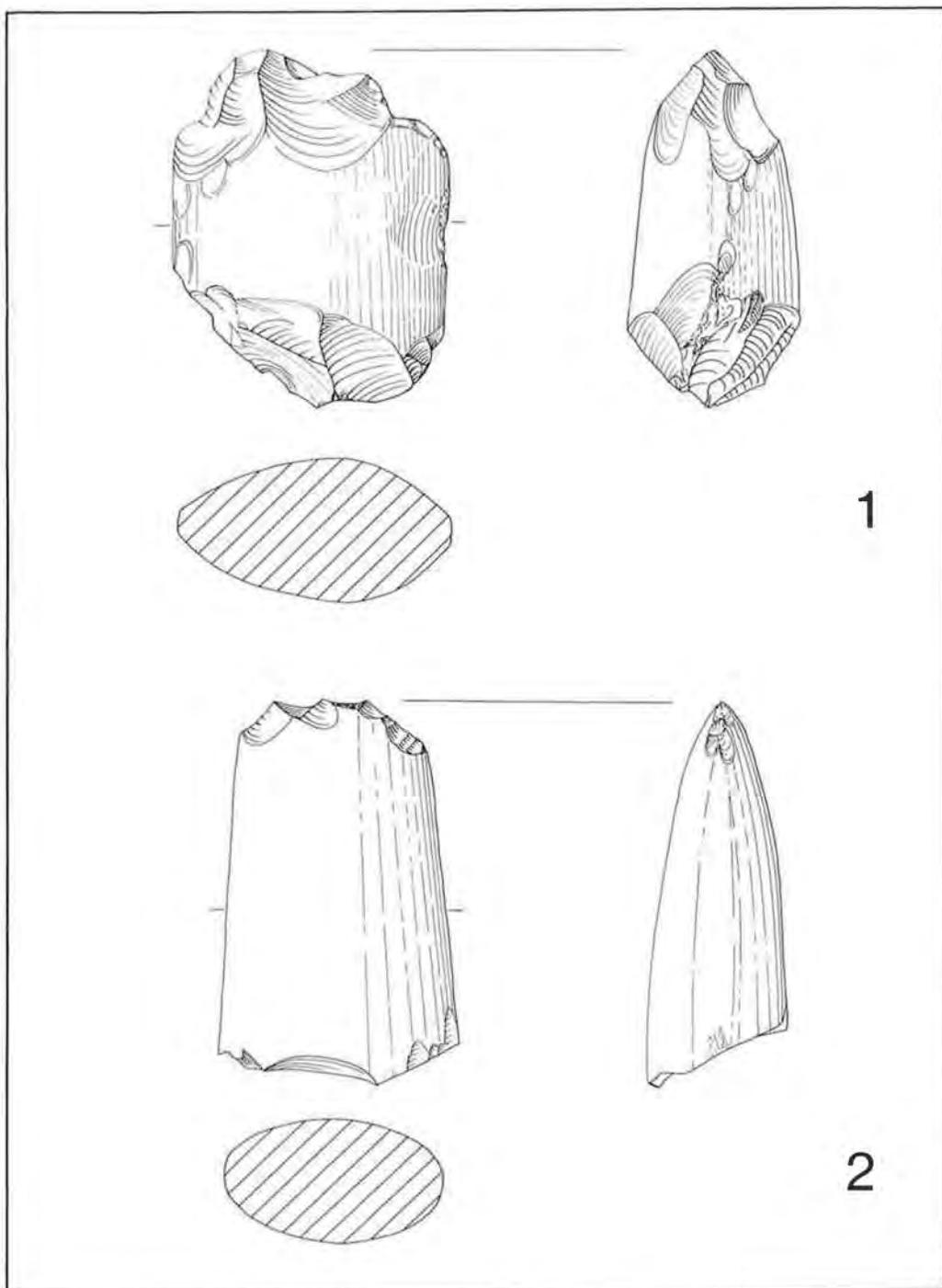


Fig. 1. Neolithic polished flint axes from (1) Hartwell and (2) Stone. (Scale 2:3)

(Fowler 1983, 165). Another possibility is that these objects were 'ritual' deposits as has been suggested in the Cotswolds and Berkshire (Holgate pers. comm.) Neolithic activity in the Vale of Aylesbury is certainly indicated by this material, but the present distribution is largely the product of chance discovery during archaeological fieldwork and more prosaic activities which probably account for the concentration in Aylesbury's urban and suburban area.

Acknowledgements

The Aylesbury Field Survey was part of a programme of fieldwork carried out by Aylesbury Past Project, a Community Programme scheme funded by the Manpower Services Commission, to whom thanks are due for enabling publication to be completed. The two axes were drawn by Alison Hawkins. Thanks are also due to Mike Farley and Robin Holgate.

Hal Dalwood

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EXCAVATIONS AT MOAT FARM, HEDGERLEY

Introduction

Moat Farm, Hedgerley (SU 97738830 and Fig. 1) is thought to be the site of the original Bulstrode Manor which was associated with the Knights Templars since before 1200. The order was dissolved in 1308. An account of the history of the site is given by A. Baker (1980).

Only a part of the moat now survives (Fig. 1), the course of its southern and western perimeters are not known. The whole site is generally considered to be medieval in date, though the Ordnance Survey have suggested that it may have utilized the remains of the ditch of an Iron Age plateau fort. This hypothesis can not now be easily checked as most of it has been destroyed by gravel working on the west and by construction of the nearby M40 motorway.

In 1978 the impending sale and possible use of the site of Moat Farm for gravel extraction prompted the Hedgerley Historical society to apply for permission from the Department of Transport for a preliminary field study at Moat Farm, including trial excavations in selected areas. Following receipt of permission excavations took place in 1979 and an interim account was published by B. Stainton (1980) and see photograph in Rice (1980, 60).

The Excavation

A survey of the site was carried out on the ground with a proton-magnetometer and from the air with an infra-red pyrometer. Both of these surveys indicated large areas of anomalies within the moat.

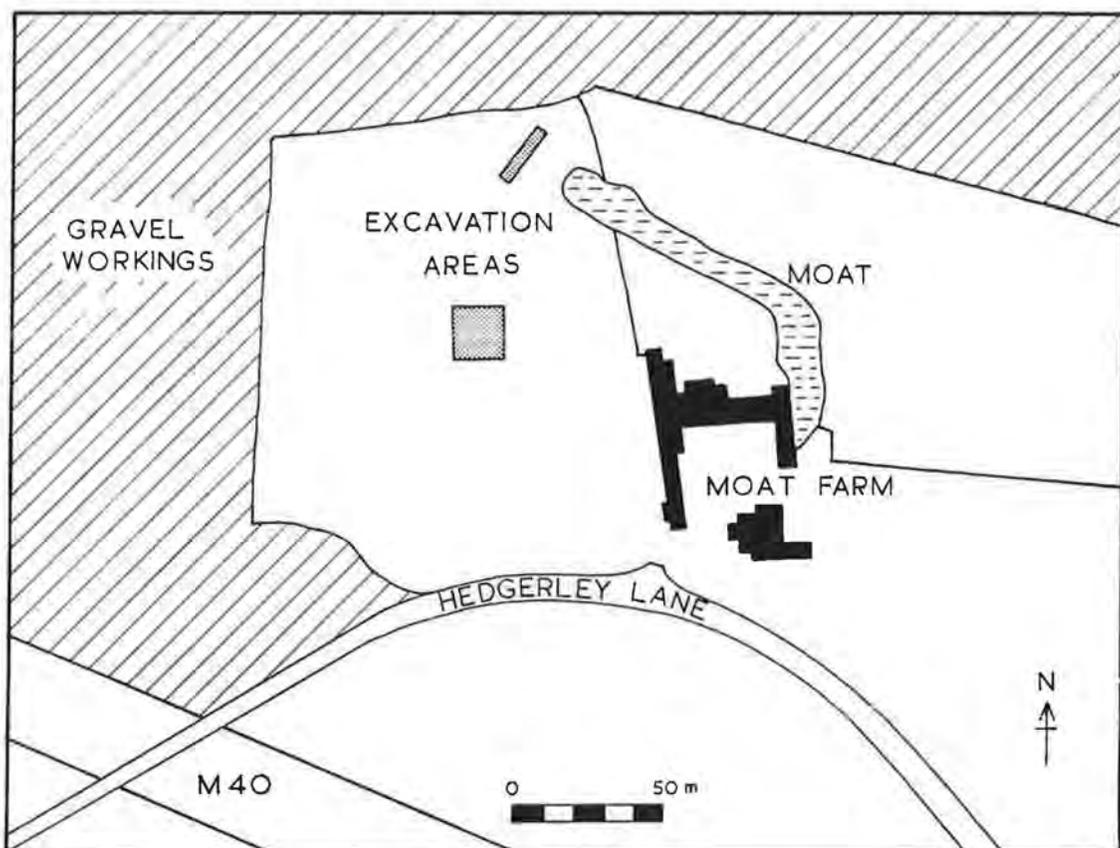


Fig. 1. Moat Farm, Hedgerley, showing the excavated area and moat section.

A section was cut through a dry portion of the moat (Fig. 1). The line of the moat and its subsequent infilling was revealed, though a detailed profile could not be ascertained as the bottom lay beneath the water table. It is probable that the moat ditch had a generally wide, flat bottom. The only dating evidence from this trench was a sixteenth-century lead-glazed sherd found in one of the lower layers of fill.

A grid was laid down within the moat and a series of nine trenches were opened up. In all of the trenches a dense layer of building debris was found only 200 mm beneath the present ground level. Fragments of walls were present in four trenches and there was evidence of robbed foundations in a further two (Fig. 2). Based mainly on differences in construction it was

considered that at least three building periods were represented.

The outer edges of the phase 1 wall (trenches C4 and B4) were defined by lines of flints which had not been dressed, and which were sitting in a foundation trench. Irregular-shaped flints were also present in the core of the wall, along with some mortar and pieces of chalk. The phase 1 wall was traced for about 6 m running westward, and it probably continued on the same alignment underneath the later phase 2 wall. A mortar floor was associated with the phase 1 wall and overlay an earlier chalk floor. The limited excavation did not determine whether the chalk floor was associated with the phase 1 wall, or some earlier activity. Robbed wall foundations a short distance to the north

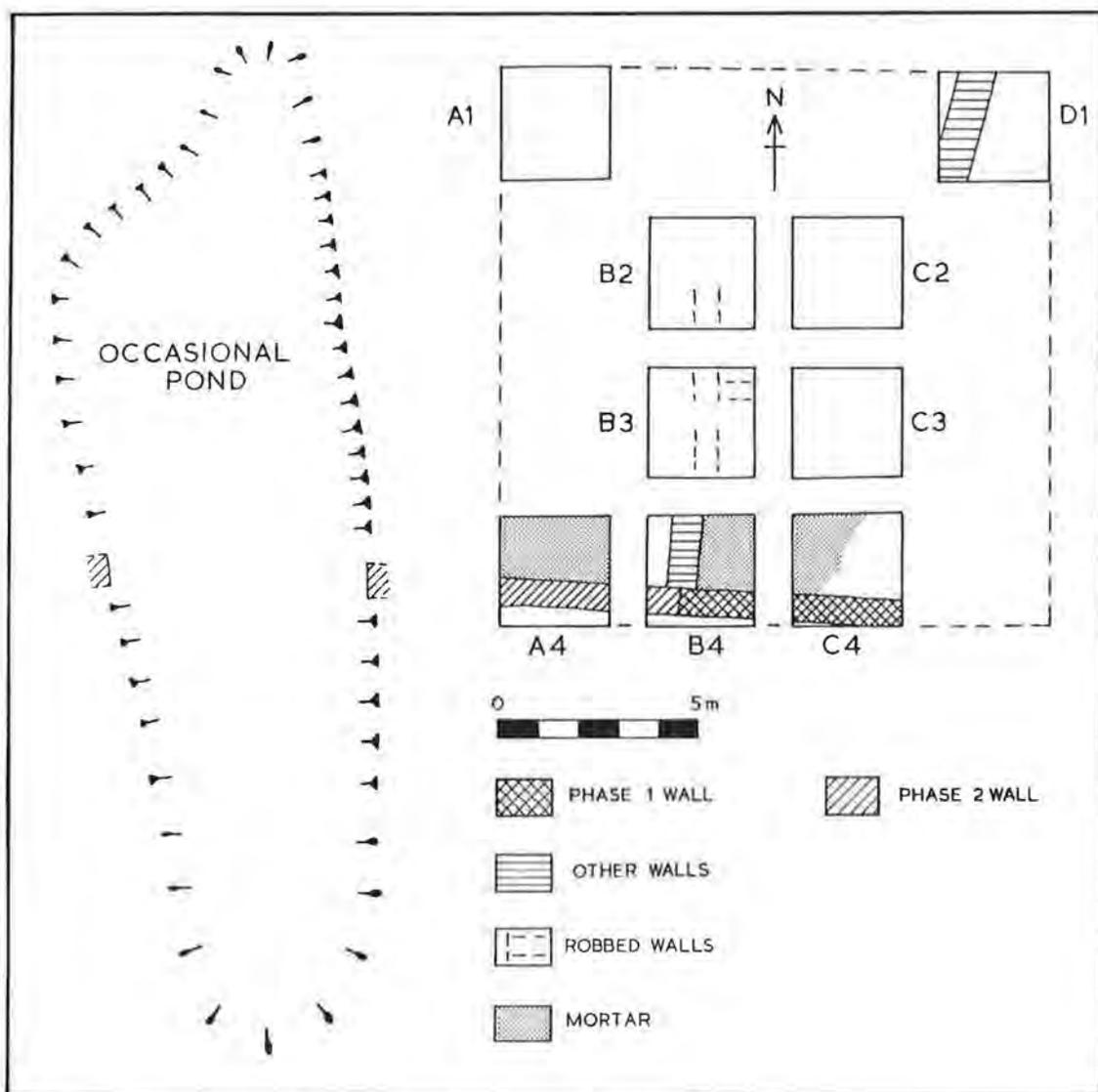


Fig. 2. Plan of excavations within the moat.

(trenches B2 and B3) were considered to be associated with the phase 1 wall.

The construction of the phase 2 wall (trenches B4 and A4) was superior to that of phase 1, though it also was constructed of flints, chalk pieces and tile, the proportion of the latter being greater than in phase 1. In addition, the body of the wall was made harder by a greater proportion of mortar. The phase 2 wall was built

directly on the phase 1 wall and was traced for about 6 m running westward. The traces of wall showing in the sides of the intermittently filled pond to the west (Fig. 2) may be a further continuation of the phase 2 wall.

A short section of wall ran northwards at right angles to the junction of the phase 1 and 2 walls (trench B4). This may be associated with the phase 2 wall, or may represent a separate

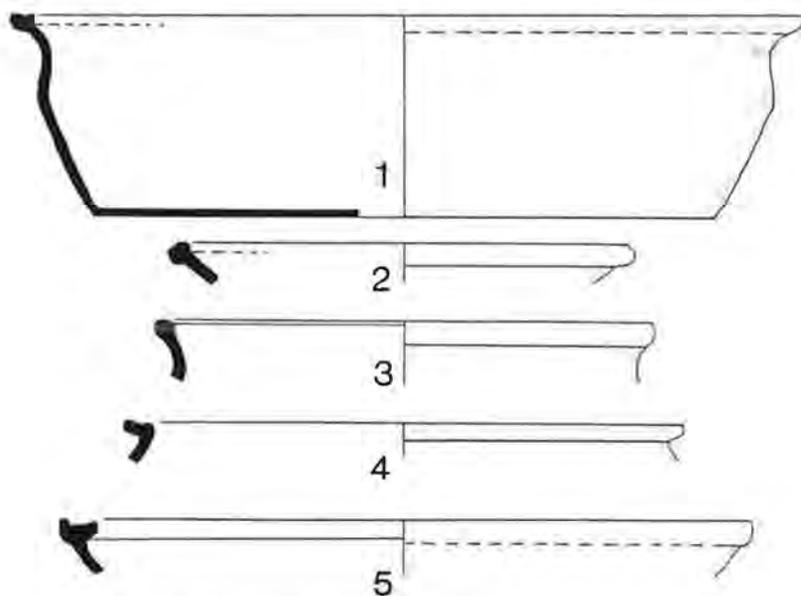


Fig. 3. The medieval pottery. (Scale 1:3).

building phase. The limited excavation did not provide sufficient information on this relationship.

A further section of wall about 10 mm north-east of phases 1 and 2 (trench D1) was uncovered much closer to the surface. It too was constructed with flints, chalk pieces and tiles but the proportion of mortar present was less than with other wall sections.

Features apart from walls were sparse but included a post-hole and a small pit, both located in trench B2.

The Finds

There were no stratified finds from the excavation. None of the trenches produced any firm dating evidence for the construction of the walls. However, a small quantity of medieval pottery was recovered from the general layer of building debris which covered the site, along with some animal bones, oyster shells, a few iron nails and a couple of lead items.

The Medieval Pottery

The medieval pottery, mostly in a hard, sandy fabric, can be dated stylistically to the earlier

years of the fourteenth century. The pottery included a substantial part of a shallow bowl (Fig. 3.1).

1. Bowl in hard fabric with fine quartz. Trench A4.
2. Bowl in hard fabric, olive green glaze on interior. Trench B4.
3. Jar in hard fabric with fine quartz. Trench B4.
4. Bowl in very hard fabric with a high proportion of quartz. Trench B3.
5. Bowl in hard fabric with fine quartz. Trench B3.

Conclusions

The limited excavation at Moat Farm has indicated the presence of a medieval building on the site enclosed by the moat. The meagre finds suggest a date in the early years of the fourteenth century which largely agrees with the date for the occupation of Temple Bulstrode by the Hospitallers. However, the evidence provided by the excavation is insufficient to confirm the site as that referred to in documentary sources.

Since the excavation took place, the sale of the portion of the field in which the site was

located was withdrawn and the site has now been scheduled.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the Department of Transport for permission to excavate and the tenants Major and Mrs A. H. Lascelles, and Mr and Mrs Moodie for their forbearance. The excavations were directed and recorded by Bambi

Stainton and Christopher Stanley. The drawings for publication were executed by Pauline and Stanley Cauvain, who compiled this note on the basis of site records supplied by the excavators. The finds and original documentation have been deposited at the County Museum, Aylesbury.

Hedgerley Historical Society
Chess Valley Archaeological & Historical Society

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