

## Lithic artefacts from test pits in East Oxford

Prepared for the East Oxford Archaeology and History Project



Olaf Bayer December 2014

## Introduction

This report summarises the results of an analysis of lithic artefacts recovered during a programme of test pit excavation carried out between 2010 and 2014 by the East Oxford Archaeology and History Project, or ARCHEOX. ARCHEOX is a community archaeology project hosted by Oxford University's Department for Continuing Education, and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Oxford University's John Fell Fund.

## Methodology

A total of 71 pieces of flint with a combined weight of 411g were recovered from 31 of the 73 test pits excavated by the ARCHEOX project. A further 17 pieces of unworked flint from test pits were excluded from analysis. For ease of analysis and synthesis these finds are grouped into a series of 10 loosely defined test pit clusters (see table 1 and figure 1).

A full analysis was conducted of this assemblage (see associated .xlsx spread sheet). However, the small and spatially dispersed nature of the component assemblages, combined with their potentially wide chronological span makes the results of this analysis difficult to summarise. As a result this report comprises a simple summary of artefact chronology and raw material type for each test pit cluster.

Area	Test pit numbers	Total lithic artefacts
1. Iffley/Rose Hill	10, 14, 15, 12, 21, 34	15
2. Littlemore	60, 62, 64	7
3. Ark T Centre/Cowley	5, 6, 8, 65	9
4. Iffley Fields	1, 3, 48, 51, 54	8
5. Bartlemas	4, 17	4
6. Cowley Marsh	22	1
7. Temple Cowley	66, 69, 70	13
8. Greater Leys	36, 38, 39, 40, 50	5
9. Marston	46	1
10. Headington Quarry	42	8
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>71</b>

Table 1. Test pit clusters

## 1. Iffley village/Rose Hill

	Test pit 10	Test pit 14	Test pit 15	Test pit 12	Test pit 21	Test pit 34	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>							
Blade (unmodified)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
Flake (unmodified)	2	1	1	3	0	2	9
Chip	1	0	0	1	0	0	2
<b>Retouched tools</b>							
Flake (retouched)	1	1	0	0	0	0	2
Flake (notched)	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>15</b>

Table 2. Lithic artefacts from Iffley

15 pieces of worked flint were recovered from 6 test pits in the area of Iffley village and Rose Hill. Test pits 10 and 15 are on lower lying ground close to the historic core of Iffley village, whilst test pits 12, 14, 21 and 34 are on higher ground on the north-western flank of Rose Hill. The assemblage contains no individually chronologically diagnostic pieces, although in general terms it is considered likely to be of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. A single unmodified blade from test pit 21 hints at a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic presence in this area. The majority of the assemblages is struck from flint ranging from dark to light grey in colour. Single pieces of mid-pink and orange-brown flint are also present. Where they survive, cortical surfaces suggest a nodular flint source for this material.

## 2. Littlemore

	Test pit 60	Test pit 62	Test pit 64	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>				
Blade (unmodified)	0	0	1	1
Flake (unmodified)	1	1	2	4
Flake core (fragment)	0	0	1	1
<b>Retouched tools</b>				
Scraper (fragment)	0	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>

Table 3. Lithic artefacts from Littlemore

A total of 7 lithic artefacts were recovered from a series of test pits excavated across the Greater Leys area in late spring 2013. None of the lithic artefacts is individually diagnostic, however, the presence of a single unmodified blade hints at a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic presence in this area. The majority of the assemblage is likely to be Neolithic or Bronze Age in date. Raw materials range in colour from mid to dark grey, and where present cortical surfaces suggest a nodular flint source.

### 3. Ark T Centre

	Test pit 5	Test pit 6	Test pit 65	Test pit 8	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>					
Blade (unmodified)	1	0	0	0	1
Flake (unmodified)	3	1	0	1	5
Chip	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Retouched tools</b>					
Flake (retouched)	1	0	0	0	1
Scraper (fragments)	0	0	1	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>9</b>

Table 4. Lithic artefacts from the ArkT area.

A small assemblage of lithic artefacts (see table 2) was recovered from the area of the ArkT centre (test pits 5, 6 and 65), close to the historic core of Church Cowley on the northern flank of Rose Hill, overlooking the valley of the Boundary Brook. A further single lithic artefact was recovered from Kelburne Road (test pit 8) approximately 400m upslope to the southeast. This assemblage contains no individually chronologically diagnostic pieces. The majority of the assemblage is likely to represent Neolithic or Bronze Age activity, although two pieces display traces of a blade-based technology hinting at a potentially Mesolithic or Early Neolithic presence in this area. The raw material ranges in colour from dark to light grey, and where present cortical surfaces indicate a nodular flint source.

### 4. Iffley Fields

	Test pit 1	Test pit 3	Test pit 48	Test pit 51	Test pit 54	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>						
Flake (unmodified)	0	0	1	2	0	3
Blade core (rejuvenation flake)	0	0	1	0	0	1
Flake core (fragment)	0	1	0	0	0	1
<b>Retouched tools</b>						
Flake (retouched)	0	0	1	0	0	1
Scraper (side and end)	0	0	0	0	1	1
Scraper (fragment)	1	0	0	0	0	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>8</b>

Table 5. Lithic artefacts from the Iffley Fields area

The Iffley Fields group of test pits (test pits 48, 51, 54 and 57) centres on the Bedford Street/Fairacres Road area, close to the presumed find spot for the Holocene portion of the Bell Collection (see Bayer 2014). Test pits 1 and 3 to the east of Iffley Road and overlooking the northern edge of Cowley Marsh have been appended to this group. As with many of the other test pit groups, there is little in this assemblage of 8 artefacts that is individually chronologically diagnostic. A probable blade core rejuvenation flake from

test pit 48 is potentially of late Mesolithic or Early Neolithic date. Artefacts displaying traces of blade-based reduction sequences from test pits 48 and 51 indicate further activity of this date. The remainder of the material is considered to be broadly Neolithic or Bronze Age in date. In terms of raw material most of this assemblage is struck from mid to dark grey flint. The blade-core rejuvenation flake is heavily patinated and has a mid-orange-pink colour. Where present cortical surfaces indicate a nodular flint source for all of raw material in this area.

Test pits 48, 51, 54 and 57 belong to a group of test pits deliberately located in the presumed area of the Bell collection (Bayer 2014, Nicholas and Hicks 2013). Whilst it was possible to show that prehistoric activity of broadly the same date and using of similar raw materials exists in roughly this area, it was not possible to further refine the location of the Bell Collection.

## 5. Bartlemas

	Test pit 4	Test pit 17	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>			
Flake (unmodified)	2	0	2
<b>Chronologically distinctive pieces</b>			
Gunflint	0	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>

Table 6. Lithic artefacts from Bartlemas

Three lithic artefacts were recovered from test pits in the area of Bartlemas Chapel at the north-eastern edge of Cowley Marsh (test pits 4 and 17). This assemblage contains a single individually chronologically diagnostic piece, a small gunflint, struck from a near black, dark grey flint, and measuring 16x16mm by 5mm thick from test pit 17 (see figure 2). An 18<sup>th</sup> or 19<sup>th</sup> century date is suggested for this artefact (Alison Roberts and Anni Byard pers comm.), post dating any Civil War activity on the site. Neither of the other two artefacts are individually diagnostic, however, they are likely to belong to the same general spread of Neolithic and Bronze Age activity evidenced by lithic finds from Archeox excavations at Bartlemas Chapel (Bayer 2012). Areas of cortex on one of the artefacts indicate a nodular flint source for this raw material.

## 6. Cowley Marsh

	Test pit 22	Total
<b>Chronologically distinctive pieces</b>		
Microlith	1	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 7. Lithic artefacts from Cowley Marsh.

A single straight-backed microlith (see figure 3) of late Mesolithic date was recovered

from test pit 22 on Cricket Road in the area of Cowley Marsh. It is heavily patinated and appears to have been struck from an orange brown flint.

## 7. Temple Cowley

	Test pit 66	Test pit 69	Test pit 70	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>				
Blade (unmodified)	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
Flake (unmodified)	1	3	6	<b>10</b>
<b>Retouched tools</b>				
Flake (retouched)	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>13</b>

Table 8: Lithic artefacts from the Temple Cowley Area.

A total of 13 lithic artefacts were recovered from a series of test pits excavated in the Temple Cowley area in summer 2013. Although none of the artefacts are individually diagnostic, the presence of two unmodified blades suggests a potential Mesolithic or Early Neolithic presence in this area, whilst the majority of the assemblage is broadly of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. All artefacts are struck from a light to dark grey flint. Cortical surfaces indicate a nodular source for this material.

## 8. Marston

	Test pit 46	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>		
Flake (unmodified)	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>

Table 9. Lithic artefacts from Marston

A single unmodified flint flake struck from mid grey nodular flint was recovered from test pit 46 in the grounds of St Michael's School off Marston Road. No date is suggested for this artefact.

## 9. Headington Quarry

	Test pit 42	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>		
Flake (unmodified)	8	<b>8</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>

Table 10. Lithic artefacts from Headington Quarry

Eight unmodified flint flakes were recovered from test pit 42 in Headington Quarry. None of these artefacts is individually diagnostic, however, none would be out of place in an assemblage of Neolithic or Bronze Age date. All are struck from a mid to dark grey flint. Where present cortical surfaces indicate a nodular flint source for this material.

## 10. Greater Leys

	Test pit 36	Test pit 38	Test pit 39	Test pit 40	Test pit 50	Total
<b>Unmodified debitage</b>						
Flake (unmodified)	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Flake core (fragment)	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
<b>Retouched tools</b>						
Flake (notched)	0	0	0	1	0	<b>1</b>
Piercer	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>

Table 11. Lithic artefacts from Greater Leys

A total of 5 lithic artefacts were recovered from a series of test pits excavated across the Greater Leys area in the summer of 2012. None of these pieces is individually diagnostic, however, taken as a group all are indicative of Neolithic or Bronze Age activity. Only one of the five pieces retains any cortical surfaces. This piece has water-worn cortex suggesting a gravel source for at least some of this material. Four of the pieces (including the piece with water-worn cortex) range in colour from mid to dark grey. The remaining piece is struck from a mid orange brown flint.

## Conclusion

The excavation of test pits by the Archeox project was not a systematic attempt to understand the distribution of prehistoric sites in East Oxford. Test pit location was largely determined by factors such as access to land, opportunities for community outreach in particular areas, or by research questions relating to later periods in the historic landscape. The only exception to this being the excavation of a group of 6 test pits in the Iffley Fields area which sought to define the original location of the Holocene portion of the Bell Collection.

In terms of understanding the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Early Bronze Age archaeology of East Oxford, the value of the Archeox test pit excavations has been to offer a series of randomly distributed tiny windows into the area's former plough soils. The small number of lithic artefacts recovered from the test pits adds useful information to the fairly sparse existing distribution maps of Mesolithic (Oxford City Council 2011a, figure 2), Neolithic (Oxford City Council 2011b, figure 2), and Bronze Age (Oxford City Council 2011b, figure 3) activity in the East Oxford area. In general terms test pit lithic finds suggest quite widely distributed Neolithic and Early Bronze Age activity punctuated by occasional hints of earlier activity from the Mesolithic and/or the Early Neolithic. It is interesting to note the tendency for many of the project's test pit lithic finds to be found on slopes overlooking lower ground (see figure 1). In terms of individual artefacts the test pit lithics

include both the oldest and youngest stone tools discovered by the project; a Late Mesolithic microlith and a Post-Medieval gunflint.

Where present, areas of cortex on all but one of the artefacts are relatively unabraded. This suggests that the majority of this material is derived from a nodular flint source, either from within *in-situ* chalk deposits or from clay-with-flints deposits. The closest sources of such raw materials are on, or close to, the Chilterns and the Berkshire Downs at least 15km to the east, south and south-west of Oxford. Only a single piece has areas of water-worn cortex and is derived from a wider range of possible riverine or gravel sources, potentially much closer to Oxford. The assemblage is likely to have been created by millennia of multiple episodes of inhabitation by at least partially mobile communities. Certainly the evidence of the assemblage's raw materials indicates that the communities that created it were keyed into patterns of movement, contact and exchange that reached beyond the immediate Oxford area.

## **Bibliography**

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- Test pit lithic finds
- Test pit no lithic finds

Height m OD (derived from OS Panorama DTM)  
 High : 171  
 Low : 52

Height m OD (derived from 1m LiDAR DTM @ Environment Agency/Geomatics Group data)

High : 111.224  
 Low : 43.841



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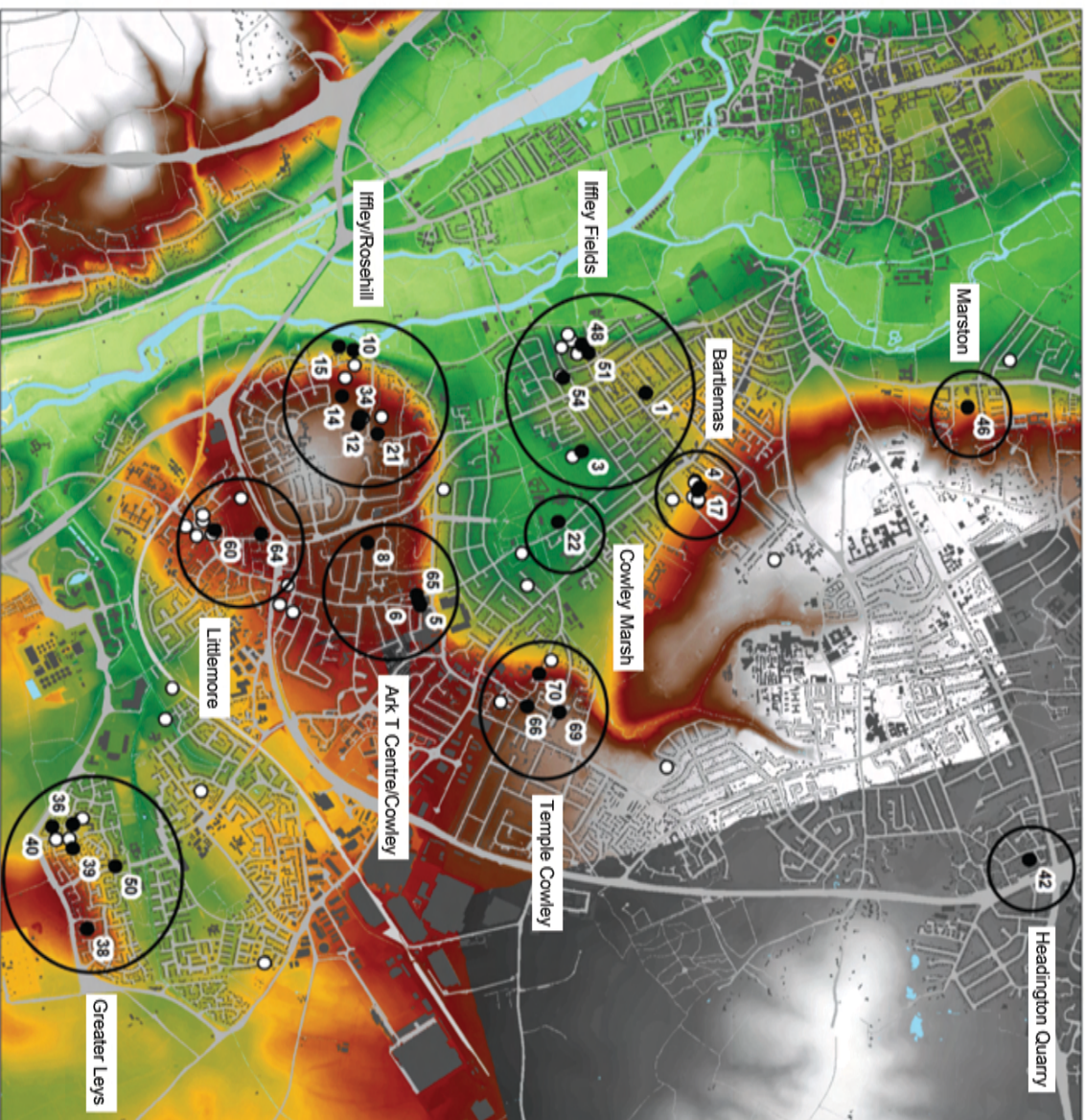


Figure 1. Archeox test pit lithic finds

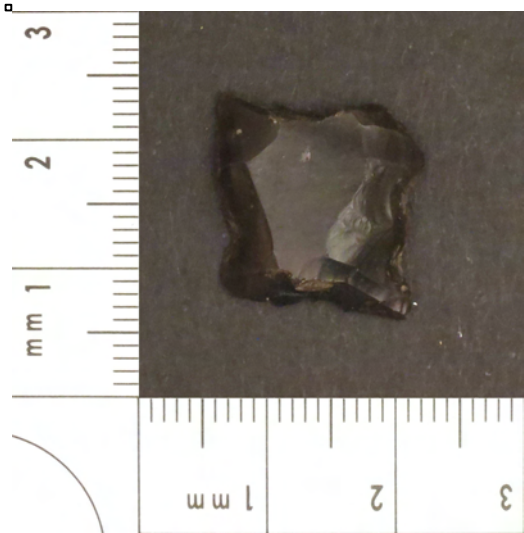


Figure 2. Post-medieval gunflint from test pit from test pit 17

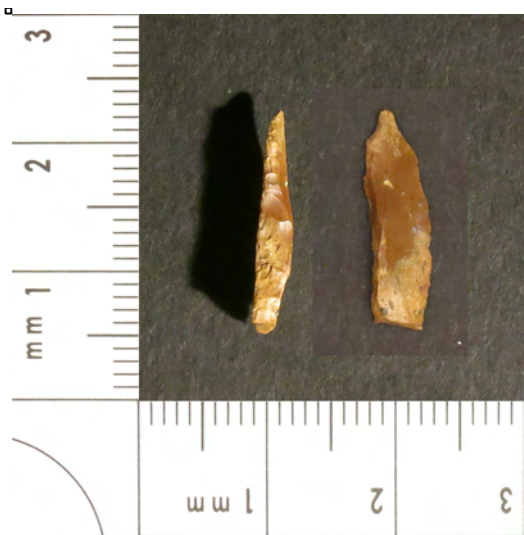


Figure 3. Late Mesolithic microlith from test pit 22