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SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

STONE TOOLS FROM RAINBOW BAR, HILLHEAD

By BRIAN HACK

Abstract

Stone tools of possible palaeolithic type have been found at Rainbow Bar, Hillhead. Their date is problematic and the subject of debate, to which the new material presented here forms a significant contribution.

Introduction

The occurrence of stone tools at a low-tide site centred on NGR SU 530 022 was first recorded by J C Draper (1951). He illustrated and described a collection of artefacts, which he believed was of lower palaeolithic, 'Clactonian', provenance. It was possible to compare the material with tools from the type-site at Clacton-on-Sea, Essex (Warren 1951).

The Material from the Site

The proposal for a 'Clactonian' period for some of the material from Rainbow Bar was, and still is, based on typological factors, together with a consideration of the very worn and archaic physical appearance of the artefacts. It is acknowledged that chopping tools, roughly formed bifacially to give a sinuous cutting edge to part of the circumference of a pebble or suitable piece of stone, are known to occur as an occasional element in any stone industry (Lacaille 1951; Hack & Cornish 1991; Hack 1992). However, the tool as such is generally considered to be a major element in early palaeolithic industries, being found on many early palaeolithic sites world-wide (Leakey 1971).

Many of the struck flakes at Rainbow Bar have also been formed in typical 'Clactonian' fashion, having high-angle striking platforms and pronounced bulbs of percussion. These flakes are generally thick in section, and their edges show little or no evidence of secondary working or re-sharpening, or shaping of their primary edges. Many of the flakes are cortical, with some showing evidence of previous flake removal before they themselves were struck from the core.

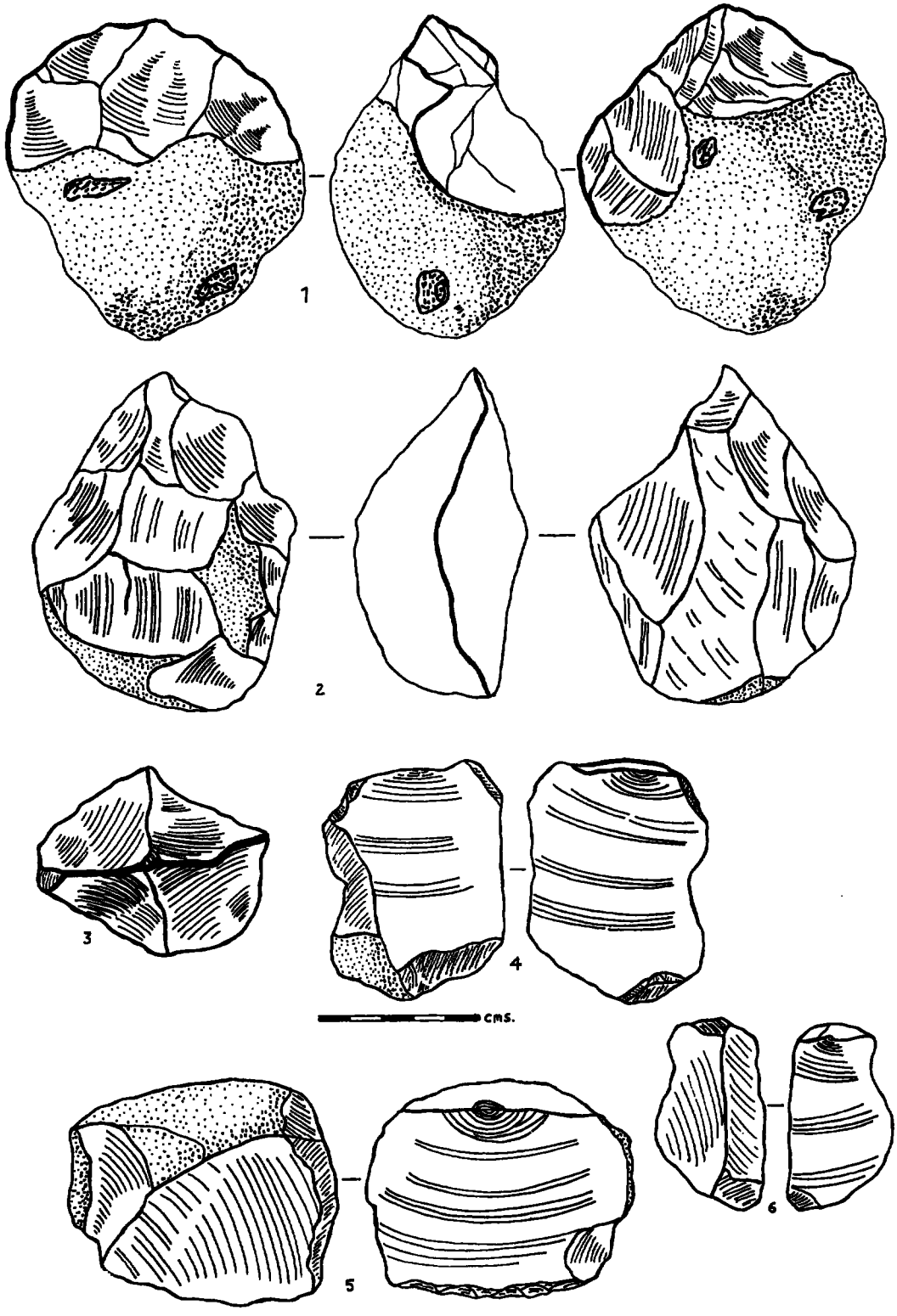
The 'Clactonian' type chopping tools and flakes from the site have a distinctive white to ochreous patination. The chopping tools have generally received more wear and abrasion to the ridges between the struck facets and to their edges, than the flakes. This is perhaps to be expected, as they would be subject to more rounding and pounding by tidal action following their exposure on the surface.

A few tools of apparently later type, possibly of the mesolithic period, are also found on Rainbow Bar. These are generally lighter, and consist of a few picks and flakes, having a more sophisticated and better formed appearance. The difference in their degree of wear and patina is distinctive when compared with the previously described material.

The raw material for the manufacture of these artefacts exists in abundance on Rainbow Bar, and consists of pebbles and pieces of flint. This flint has cherty inclusions and would be rather intractable in the knapping and shaping process.

The Debate about the Dating of the Material

The doyen of British lower palaeolithic archaeology, Dr J J Wymer, is of the opinion (pers. comm.; cf also 1974) that, as there is at present no dating evidence to support a 'Clactonian' claim for material from Rainbow Bar, and as the typology of similar material occurring at other littoral sites can be more positively dated to the mesolithic or later periods, the case for the site must remain un-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proven. Dr Wymer visited Rainbow Bar with the late Mr Draper, and also examined his collection.

Dr D A Roe (1981, 149–50), however, is inclined to favour the possibility of a 'Clactonian' claim for Rainbow Bar, and has referred to the similarities with the littoral site at Clacton itself (Warren 1951).

New Finds from the Site

The present writer recently found a damaged but well-formed handaxe on the site. Dr Wymer kindly examined it, and gave the opinion that it was derived from the gravel cliffs which occur in the immediate area. Therefore, it does not support a lower palaeolithic claim for the material as a whole.

The items illustrated in Fig. 1 have all been recently found by the writer on Rainbow Bar. They display a strong lower palaeolithic typology, as do other new finds from the site, not illustrated here.

Conclusion

The problem of the date of this site is still not resolved, despite the new material. This report is offered in the hope that it may stimulate a re-examination of the currently enigmatic clues that are offered at each low tide by the Rainbow Bar.

Acknowledgements

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Author: Brian Hack, 94 Stubbington Lane, Stubbington, nr Fareham, Hants PO14 2 PE

Fig. 1.1 (opposite) A large chopping tool made on an irregularly shaped, locally obtained, flint pebble. The pebble shows evidence of some fossil inclusions.

Fig. 1.2 A roughly formed handaxe made from the same material as 1.1. The maker has obtained a cutting edge on almost all of the circumference of the artefact.

Fig. 1.3 A bi-conical core of 'Clactonian' type. Four flakes were detached from one side prior to it being turned over and having three further flakes removed.

Fig. 1.4 A flake, 19 mm thick, having a high-angle striking platform and pronounced bulb of percussion. The outer face shows a pornounced negative bulb of percussion due to a previous flake removal.

Fig. 1.5 A flake, 37 mm thick, having a high-angle striking platform and bulb of percussion. Inverse secondary working has been applied to maintain the cutting/scraping edge.

Fig. 1.6 A flake, 14 mm thick, with bulb of percussion and high-angled platform.