

The accidental transportation of a flint knife from Happisburgh Norfolk to Evesham Worcestershire during 2015

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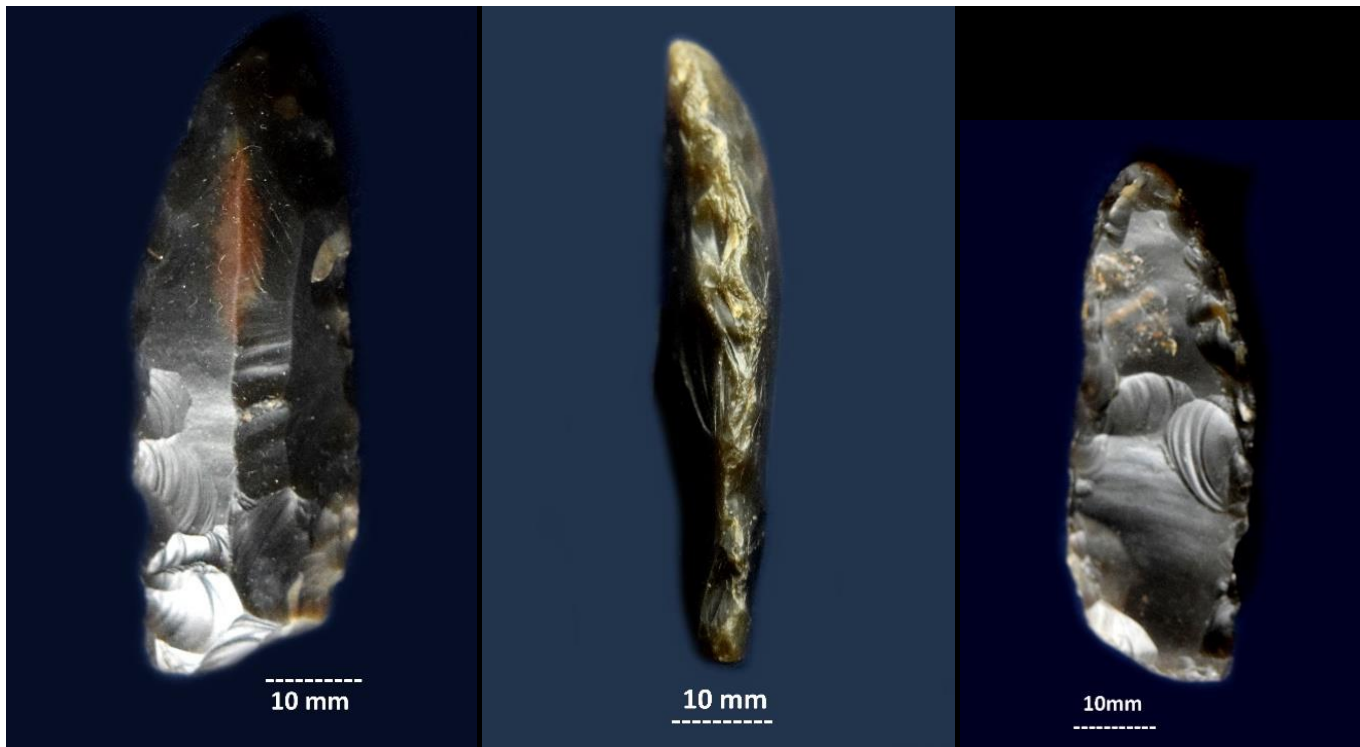
Introduction

During a visit to the Greenhill area of Evesham (SP04) on 4 September 2015 I observed a small neat scatter of flint pebbles on a garden plant bed. Amongst the pebbles was a single flint artefact (01 a-c). Discussion with the owner confirmed that it had been collected in Norfolk by a child but

had not been recognised as a prehistoric artefact. Patination of flint is a useful guide to the relative age of older flint artefacts from some sites but more recent isolated flint artefacts need to be viewed with caution in this regard.

Discussion

The item is a backed knife fashioned in good quality Cretaceous chalk flint with numerous scalariform secondary removals both dorsally (01a) and ventrally (01c). It is a faceted or prismatic blade with the butt removed showing extensive utilisation traces and/or small scale resharpening down the left side (01c). The right side has been effectively battered and the edge blunted in order to render the piece usable when supported by the index finger (01b).



01 a, b, and c Left to right. Backed flint knife from Happisburgh, Norfolk TG33, July 2015, subsequently deposited on a land surface at Evesham, Worcestershire. From left to right: 01a dorsal surface; 01b blunting of side as finger-rest; 01c ventral surface backed on its right edge. © P. F. Whitehead.

Distal end retouch defines a nosed scraper indicating that this tool was somewhat composite in nature although its prime function was as a knife. It is probably of Neolithic age in the order of 5000 years old, but its fresh unweathered condition poses a problem. My initial reaction was that it could not have lain on an exposed land surface for that length of time, however occasional very fresh flint tools are found on modern land surfaces. An example of such a tool is shown

in Figs 2a and b. This piece from Welford-on-Avon, Warwickshire, is of interest because its form, function and age invite some comparison with the Happisburgh knife. In this case the artefact was from floodplain sediments which may have contributed to its good preservation and it may also have been unearthed relatively recently. The chance of it originating in Norfolk is, hopefully, zero!

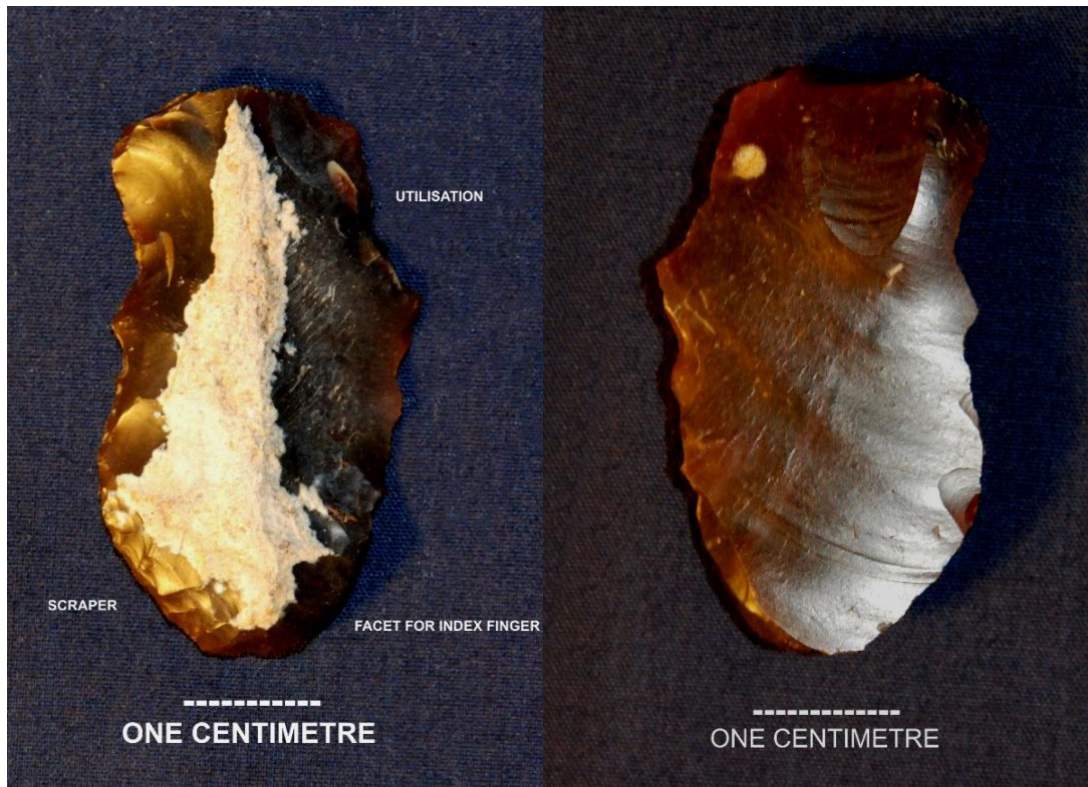


Fig 2. Oblique end scraper on good quality honey-coloured flint flake, modern land surface, Welford-on-Avon, Warwickshire (SP15), 1990, probably Neolithic. Fig. 2a (left): dorsal surface cortex remaining; fig. 2b (right): ventral surface essentially unretouched lightly utilised proximal left. © P. F. Whitehead.

Subsequent enquiry revealed that the Evesham knife had been collected with flint pebbles on the upper beach at Happisburgh, Norfolk (TG33) by a 10 year old girl during July 2015 and later placed by her, unrecognised, in the Evesham garden some 256 kms to the west-south-west. Although flint tools may be transported by natural processes their unwitting distribution by people years or even millennia after manufacture, although probably rare, evidently needs

to be accounted for on occasion. The opportunity to determine a true provenance in this instance has avoided possible future misinterpretation. The archaeology of Happisburgh is of international importance due to the extended timespan of human occupation there covering the larger part of 900,000 years. This artefact was probably a product of relatively recent erosion from the upper cliff sediments.

Images

- 01a. Backed flint knife from Happisburgh, Norfolk TG33. Paul Whitehead
- 01b. Backed flint knife from Happisburgh, Norfolk TG33. Paul Whitehead
- 01c. Backed flint knife from Happisburgh, Norfolk TG33. Paul Whitehead
- 02a. Oblique end scraper on good quality flint flake Welford-on-Avon. Paul Whitehead
- 02b. Oblique end scraper on good quality flint flake Welford-on-Avon. Paul Whitehead