

NORTH DEVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY
EXCAVATIONS AT LITTLE POTHRIDGE, MERTON, DEVON, DURING 2013, 2014, 2015
(Site code: LPM13/LPM14/LPM15)

LITHIC COLLECTION

Location

Grid ref: SS522141

Located in a small sheltered valley on a South East facing slope approx. 130m above sea level. Sited below a spur above the river Torridge, approx 0.75km to the East. Several natural springs on site. From the top of the spur, far reaching views can be had of the surrounding countryside and Dartmoor to the South West.

Project

During 2013-2015 a collection of 24 pieces of flint (including two chert) were found in disturbed soil during excavations carried out by NDAS on the site of a possibly 18th century clay pipe factory at Little Potheridge, Merton. The site has seen use as a medieval field system, an orchard, and is currently ploughed land, close to farm buildings which may have been the site of a small industry of clay pipe making in the 18th century.

Lithic Finds

Some Mesolithic pieces; a bladelet with use wear, and a small bladelet core (chert). Several primary flakes (pebble origin), covered with cortex, one example (no. 15) appears to have fine serrations to one edge and a polished area on the dorsal face, showing possible use wear. A red chert flake, possibly knife/cutting tool, with milky white patination. See photos in this report. A honey coloured bifacially worked knife/cutting tool. A number of small flakes (some points), showing retouch. A pebble end scraper with abrupt retouch (23).

Colours vary from good quality honey coloured flint, through pale grey/white, grey/brown, dark grey, red and black.

Where cortex is visible, the collection includes both pebble and nodular flints. Evidence of hard hammer striking on some pieces (eg no.11; small flake), with wide conchoidal rings on dorsal face.

It was noted that the majority of pieces showed retouch mostly on the dorsal face; ventral faces remained mostly smooth, with little or no retouch. This is a similar characteristic to the Mesolithic lithic collection found at West Yeo Farm, Witheridge by NDAS between 2009 and 2012.

Burned Pieces: There were 4 burned pieces; (2) a thick hollow flake, (21) a core fragment, (22) small flakes, (24) bladelet piece (possible microburin).

Evidence of re-use: There was 1 thick core rejuvenation flake (no. 12), hard-hammer struck, with evidence of platform retouch at distal edge of dorsal face, probably re-used as a scraper. The core chert (no. 19) may have been re-used as a chopper/crusher (evidence of use wear).

Tool Classification:

Bladelets : – 3 (2 notched)
Scrapers: - 1 bifacially worked scraper
Knife/cutting tool: - 2
Bladelet Core (chert): - 1 (possibly re-used as chopper)
Chip: - 1
Flakes, some with use wear

Colours:

Honey: 6
Dark grey with white spot inclusions: 4
White/grey: 2
Light brown: 2
Black: 1
White: 1
Light grey/Mid grey/Grey brown 6
Pink/red chert 1
Yellow chert 1

Source of raw material/Geology

Little Potheridge lies just to the North East of the Petrockstowe Basin, in an area of sandstone. It is assumed that the raw material for flint tools may have come from river or beach pebbles; the site is close to, and just above, the river Torridge. Alternatively these flints may be the remains of residual and fluvial flint after chalk has been washed away (see paragraph below on Petrockstowe Basin). Further investigation and research is ongoing.

Petrockstowe Basin:

Flint deposits are reported in parts of the Petrockstowe Basin (Edmonds et al (1969, 78) and Edwards and Freshney (1982, 222-31). Also, DAS Proceedings No. 60 2002 Inland Flint in Prehistoric Devon; Sources, Tool-making Quality and Use”, John Newberry.

It has been noted by members of NDAS (Phil Collins and Dave Locke) that a field at Bury Moor Bridge contains a massive amount of worked flint pieces, a sample of pieces have been collected but are yet to be analysed. The collection includes some obvious Mesolithic bladelets and bladelet cores. Also some Neolithic – early Bronze Age pieces (Henrietta Quinnell, pers. comm.) The field is located at the Eastern edge of a shallow valley at the foot of a South Western slope, beside the Little Mere river. A round barrow (Scheduled Monument No. 016210), SS5172 1055, lies 1km to the West, in the same valley. It is not yet known if the flints are associated with activities related to the barrow.

Orleigh Court near Bideford is a known site of residual flint (DAS Proceedings No. 60 2002 Inland Flint in Prehistoric Devon; Sources, Tool-making Quality and Use”, John Newberry).

The flints found at Little Potheridge will form part of the archive of the Little Potheridge kiln site and will be deposited with the archive at the museum of North Devon and Barnstaple.

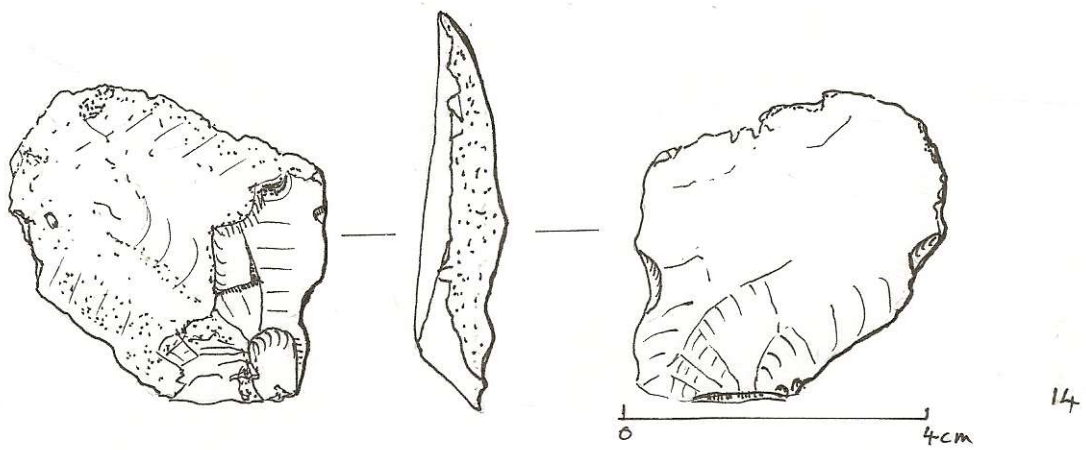
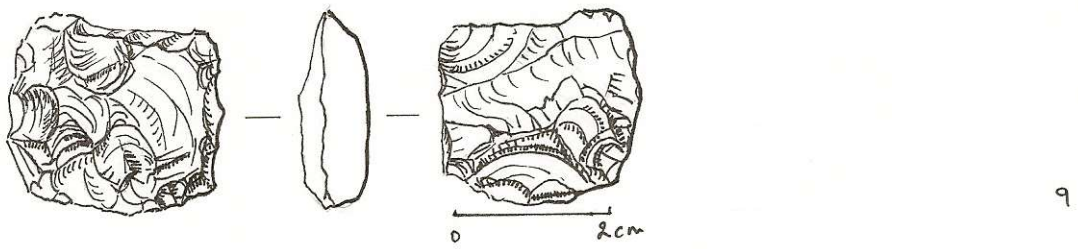
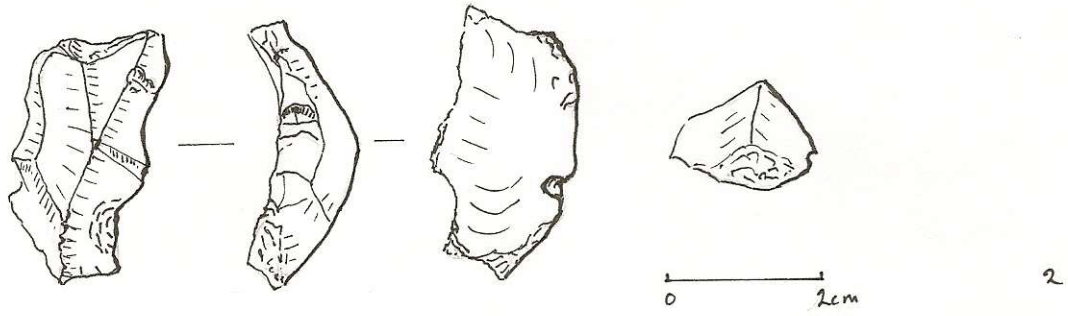
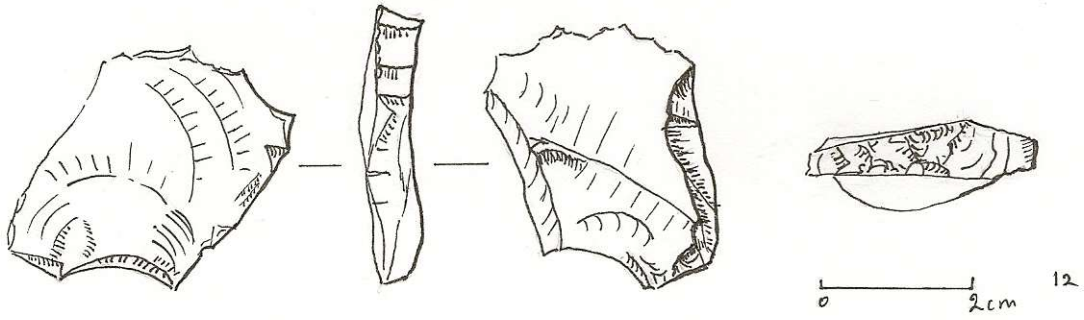
Guide to Illustrations

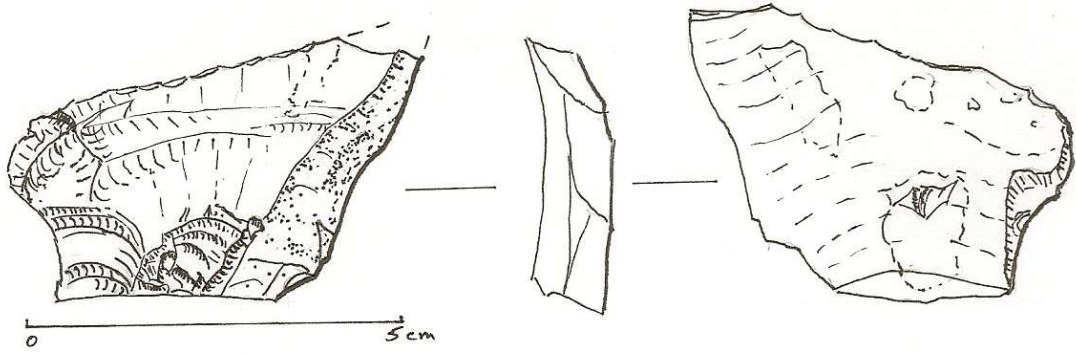
Some of the lithics collected during excavations have been illustrated at a scale of 1:1.

- 12: Dark grey flint flake with white inclusions. Core tablet, utilised piece (scraper)
- 2: White (burned) hollow flint flake
- 9: Honey colour flint flake; bifacially worked tool
- 14: Light grey/white flint plus cortex, primary flake
- 18: Honey coloured flint plus cortex. Nodular. Knife/cutting tool, broken
- 19: Orange/honey coloured chert with dark brown cortex. Bladelet core. Mesolithic. Possible use wear at apex (for crushing/chopping purposes)
- 1: Light brown flint, notched bladelet – damaged
- 13: Mid-grey flint with white spot inclusions. Wide flake with possible knife-like trimming
- 10: Light grey/white flint flake, broken, with use wear
- 17: Honey coloured/patinated flint. Notched bladelet, broken, with use wear
- 8: Dark brown flint flake, leaf shaped, with heavy use wear
- 15: Not illustrated but photographed: primary flint flake with tiny serrations at one edge and a polished area on dorsal face – possible use wear
- 20: Pink flint flake side scraper with red stained cortex

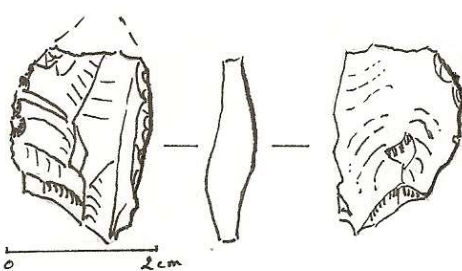
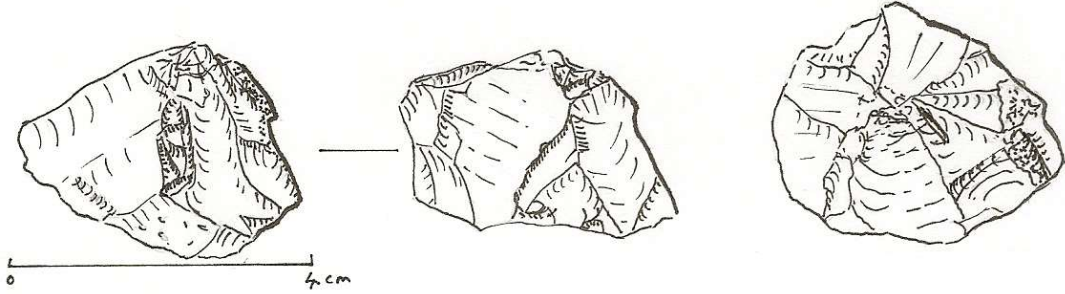
Plates: Photograph by microscope of (15) showing tiny retouch along broken edge across width of flake; ventral face

Drawn Illustrations and photos: Derry Bryant

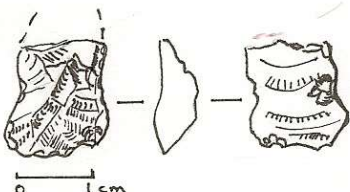




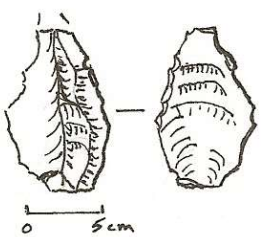
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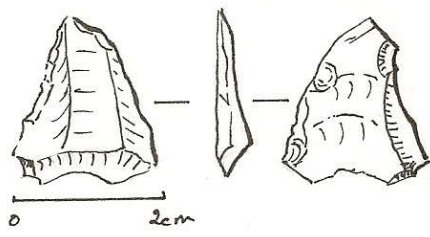
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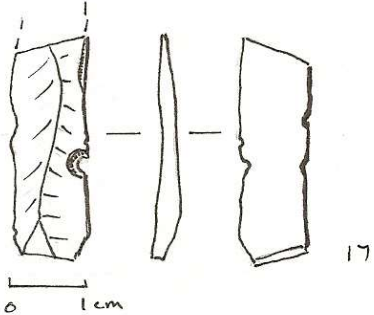
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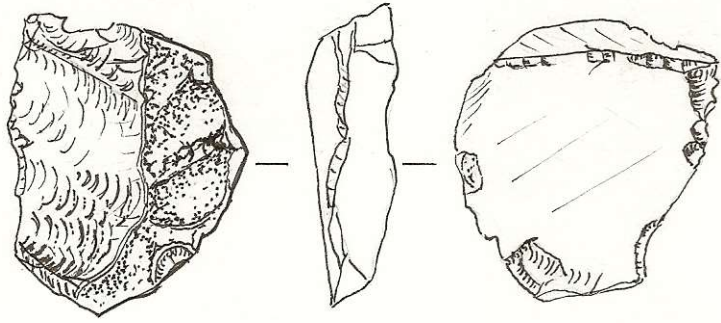
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10



17



0 3cm

20

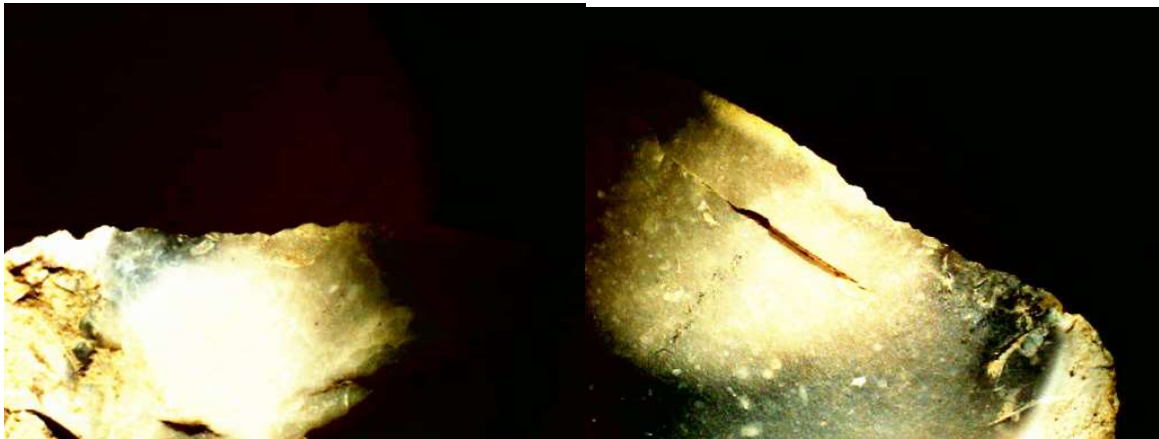
Close up photographs of serrated edge on primary flake no. 15



Area polished area by use wear

Tiny serrations

Size of flake: 3.5cm x 3cm. Photos not to scale.

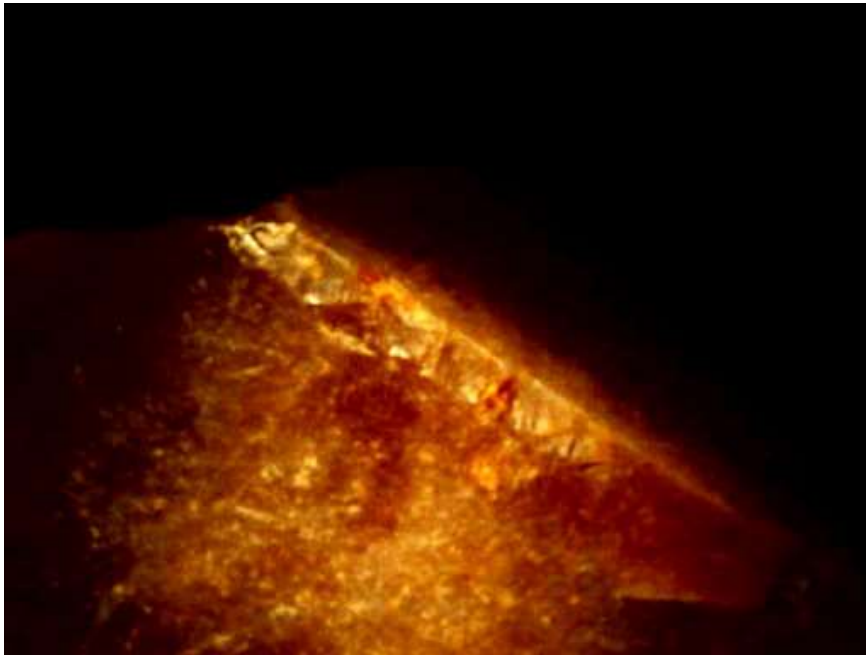


Dorsal face

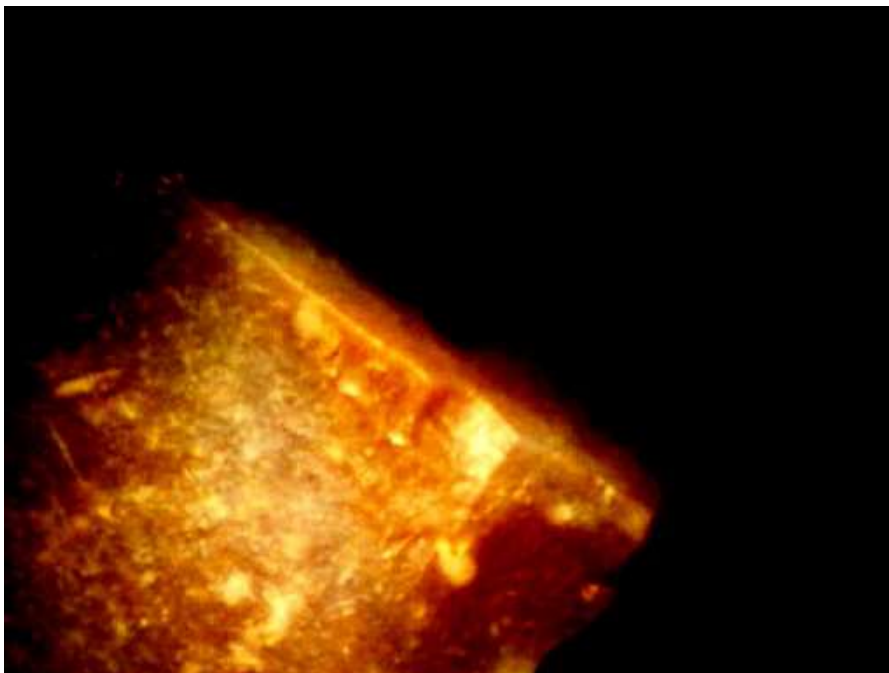
Ventral face

Photos taken by microscope x10

No. 20 Red chert flake: tiny retouch along broken edge of ventral face; left end



No. 20 Red chert flake: tiny retouch along broken edge of ventral face; right end



The author is grateful to Henrietta Quinnell for help with identifying the lithic collection

Derry Bryant 2015

References

1:50,000 Geological Map (Chulmleigh), Sheet 309

"The Geology of Devon" E.M.Durrance, D.J.C. Laming (eds) 1982, Chapter 9; The Tertiary Sedimentary Rocks R.A.Edwards and E.C.Freshney

DAS Proceedings No. 60, 2002 "Inland Flint in Prehistoric Devon; Sources, Tool-making Quality and Use" John Newberry

"Prehistoric Flintwork" 2005, Chris Butler

Acknowledgments

John Bradbeer; geology

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NDAS members

Clinton Estates

The Nancekivell family (farmers)