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Research Project

BRADFORD KAIMS ARCHAEOLOGY PROJECT

FLINT IN PREHISTORIC BRITAIN



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Flint is a type of stone that was used to make tools during the prehistoric period. It was a popular material to use as when struck it fractures in a fairly predictable manner and produces flakes with very sharp edges. Sharper even than modern surgical steel in fact.

The process of working flint nodules to make tools is called knapping. It was done by striking a large piece (core) of flint with another hard object, called a hammerstone, which splits the flint into thin, sharp splinters called flakes. To the left you can see two, small, flint cores found at Bradford Kaims in 2014.

Flint flakes are the most commonly used tool by prehistoric people as they could be easily made and are extremely sharp. Flakes can be further worked by additional flaking, by direct striking or by pressure flaking. At the Bradford Kaims, many flakes have been found (such as those on the right), which suggests that prehistoric people were actively making stone tools in the area.



Blades are the most common flint tool used by prehistoric people, either as an individual tool or as a series of cutting edges mounted to a wooden artefact. A blade is a flake with parallel sides that is usually twice as long as it is wide.

Three different examples of blades can be seen to the left. Their shape and method of production can be used by experts to date them.

Scrapers are modified flakes that have been retouched along at least one side to produce a wedge-like scraping edge. They are mainly used to remove hair and fat from animal hides. One of the stages in preparing them to be used for clothing and shelters. Scrapers were used all through prehistory, with the most well-known type, the thumbnail scraper, appearing in the early Bronze Age.



One of the most common flint tools used from man's early origins and well into the later prehistory, when metal tools began to be used, was the stone axe. An example, mounted to a wooden handle, is shown below.



The working of flint by a skilled knapper can produce sophisticated shaped tools. Flint arrowheads are one of the most recognisable and beautiful of such artefacts. They vary from the simple and functional triangular ones (left and right, opposite) to more elaborate types with a tang to attach the point to a shaft (centre, opposite).