

A FLINT FACTORY AT THATCHAM, BERKS.

I. REPORT OF SITE AND EXCAVATIONS.

BY HAROLD PEAKE, F.S.A., F.R.A.I.

In the autumn of 1920 some of the workmen on the Sewage Farm of the Newbury Corporation were engaged in levelling a low mound and depositing the soil in a hollow close by. During these operations they came upon a few small pointed-butted celts and a number of flakes, most of which they threw away; one celt and a few flakes were taken the following April to the Newbury Museum. The site was inspected without delay, and resulted in the discovery of similar flakes in a thick deposit of black soil immediately underlying the surface soil; the problem was, however, further complicated by the discovery of Romano-British potsherds in the same deposit.

Mr. Crawford and I resolved, therefore, to undertake a systematic exploration of the site, as soon as the crops were off the ground. In the meantime, while cultivating the land during the summer, the workmen recovered most if not all of the implements which they had discarded the previous autumn.

THE SITE.

The Sewage Outfall Works of the Borough of Newbury are situated two miles from the centre of the town, in the parish of Thatcham, on the south side of the Lower Way Lane, which here runs parallel to and south of the London and Bath road. The greater part of the farm lies on a level bench, 6 feet above the alluvium of the River Kennet, and 28 feet below the top of the valley gravel, which is here about 260 feet above O.D., and over which runs the neighbouring section of the Bath Road. Across this bench run two old channels, nearly silted up, one of which still contains some water; this was the low place which it was intended to fill up. The surface slopes towards the south-west, where it ran down in a gentle grade to the edge of the alluvium before the levels were altered by the erection of tanks. South of the water is a small bank, about 450 by 210 feet, raised two feet above the level of the bench, and falling suddenly on the other side to the level of the alluvium. It was while removing a portion of this bank that the flint implements and flakes were discovered. This bank, at the point where the excavations were made, lies as nearly as possible at Lat. 51° 23' 53", and Long. 1° 16' 45" W.; the altitude of its summit is 234 feet above O.D.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

The operations, which were carried out by the workmen on the sewage farm, under the able direction of the Manager, Mr. Boseley, consisted of removing the surface soil and the black soil down to the

clean gravel, along part of the north side of the bank, nearest to where the implements had been found the previous year. Every particle of soil removed was passed through a sieve, and all worked flints, bones, and potsherds removed by the workmen, who soon became expert in distinguishing worked from natural flints.

The chief difficulty in interpreting the evidence was the lack of stratification; flint implements and Romano-British potsherds occurred apparently at the same level. So it was decided to cut a fresh section at some little distance. Acting on the advice of Mr. Boseley, who informed us that he had observed some red earth, which appeared to have been burnt, while cultivating a patch near by as a garden, we dug a trench about 50 feet to the south, 30 feet long and two feet wide, and continued this until we reached the clean gravel. This trench we dug ourselves, with the aid of Mr. G. S. Ghurye, who assisted us throughout, and with occasional help from various visitors to the site, who were pressed into our service as payment for watching the operations. The section which we found was instructive, and cleared up all difficulties.

Dr. Arthur R. Dwerryhouse, of University College, Reading, who visited the site later and examined the side of the trench, thus describes the section:—

“The surface is formed of Peaty Soil, which at the western end of the section rests upon a white Shell Marl. The Shell Marl thins out towards the east, and the surface soil then rests on a layer of peat which extends beneath the Shell Marl, but is only about one inch thick at the western end of the section. Beneath the peat is a red gravel, the upper four or six inches of which are stained by the admixture of peat from the layer above. The boundaries of the Shell Marl are somewhat indefinite, as it is mixed to some extent with the peat below and with the soil above.”

In the Peaty Soil, which formed the top layer, we found the remains of three hearths about six inches above the top of the peat. At the same level, and not far from the hearths, were bones of oxen and Romano-British potsherds. At the base of the peat and above the gravel were found a few flint implements and a large number of flakes.

II. THE FLINT IMPLEMENTS AND FLAKES.

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The flints from the Thatcham site must be divided for purposes of description into two large classes—(1) those which were found under the compact layer of peaty soil or under the shell-malm, (2) those which were found elsewhere on the site. Strictly speaking, only those belonging to class (1) can be proved to belong to a single period, since they alone were sealed up under an undisturbed,