

UNCORRECTED ARCHIVE REPORT**APPENDIX 10 – BONE IMPLEMENTS****by Joy Browning****General Trends**

Early to later Neolithic objects include pins, points and unworked antler objects; the Beaker objects comprise perforated boar's tusks, pins and sheep limb bone fragments. Objects from the middle to late Bronze Age period (possibly redeposited) are an antler beam and another pin. Uses may have been for punching holes in leather and for decorating it. The larger tips (early Neolithic No 9 L160/A/2, and mid to late Bronze Age No 4, F162) were probably too big to penetrate leather and could have been used for basketry as manipulators to insert and twine together basket material (Campana 1980). The groove-and-splinter technique to make blanks from which finished objects could be made, is evident among some of the earlier prehistoric objects.

The greater intensity of occupation from the Iron Age onwards is reflected in a wider range of types of bone implement and manufacturing techniques. The groove-and-splinter technique, continued to be used, and in addition, bones were often split longitudinally and then ground down to create the shapes and surfaces required. From this period onwards bones were also worked with saws and drills to cut pieces to the desired shape (the first perforated metatarsi occur in the Iron Age). The introduction of metal meant that more effective saws and knives were available for working bone.

Some bones were used 'as found' but are distinctive for the patterns of wear and polish resulting from their use. Some objects have been burnt and polished, apparently to produce an aesthetically pleasing shiny black surface.

Most of the bone artefacts at Mount Farm are from Middle Iron Age contexts. There are various forms including metatarsi points and blades, gouges and scoops and antler combs. The objects from the Late Iron Age and Roman contexts are less varied and do not present any significant new types or techniques. With more metal tools and objects widely available there was probably less reliance on bone implements for many everyday tasks.

Earlier Prehistoric***Tusk Pendants (Beaker)***

A number of functions have been suggested for these items, all of them involving presagious or prophetic powers. They were generally worn as amulets to ward off evil spirits. Similar examples have been found at Wilsford, Wiltshire which are also perforated and are from the Beaker period (Clarke 1970, vol 2 297, 138 W/MR 1157)

Pins, Pegs and Points

The Neolithic and beaker pins were either small and cylindrical, or longer with the natural surface preserved including some made from sheep limb bones that retain the natural facetting of the bone. They were trimmed to very narrow points. The point from the Later Bronze Age period was made from a sheep limb bone fragment; probably using the Groove-and-splinter technique. It departs little from earlier ones, and might be redeposited.

Utilised Antlers

Two antlers were found in early Neolithic Pit F160. One, comprising forked tines that have been polished and striated by wear, may be a rake or a small (or broken) pick. The other is a section of shaft with the tines removed that might have been used as a hammer.

The Later Bronze Age antler object (Fig 25 no. 9, 162/A/22) is made from a forked tine and beam. The other tines and the burr have been sawn off. A similar object has been excavated at South Cadbury (Britnell 1977, object no 300). Both examples have been worn smooth. This part of the antler usually formed part of the waste assemblage. However, the wear need not result from subsequent use as an implement: the antler may have been shed long before it was found and worked, and the freshness of the cuts suggest that they may post date the wear or weathering. Forked antlers were sometimes made into implement handles, but this is not obviously the case here.

Iron Age and Roman

Pins, Pegs and Points

There is a high correlation between the types of artefacts and the material used to make the implement. In most cases the tool departs little from its original form. It is the inherent properties of the bone matter which decides what the object will be and its ultimate function. Some of the pins and points, however, may be by-products using the off-cuts from making other implements, as with the groove-and-splinter technique used for examples from an earlier prehistoric pit, 343/A/1 and the pit or grave (F618/2) cut by the Beaker burial F618.

In the Early Iron Age, horse metapodials and a dog ulna were used, with the result that the points were larger with the anterior end of the bone kept intact to grip with. In the Middle Iron Age, horse and deer metapodials were employed and appear to be roughly cut.

Blades and Points Made from Ovicaprid Tibiae

Of this group, two of the implements are from early/middle Iron Age contexts (141/A/1 and 122/A/1) and two are from Roman ones (273/A/1 and 605/A/4). They are all similar, yet include a wide variety of shapes. Some appear to have been broken and

recycled within the prehistoric period (141/A/1 and 273/A/1), as at South Cadbury, (Britnell 1977 68-70, fig 20 p.176). Some are more heavily worn (122/A/1) and others might be in the process of manufacture (605/A/4 – cf Britnell 1977, nos. 87-90, fig.21 p. 177). The differing shapes might result from work that took place in stages.

The manufacturing technique was quite uniform within this group. The proximal end of the bone is cut away to form a sharp edge. Only the tip shows any distinct traces of wear and appears to be the result of light friction. However, 122/A/1 is far more heavily worn, possibly the result of a more compressed application.'

Points Made from Ovicaprid Metapodia

These objects from Mount Farm are of early and middle Iron Age and Roman date, as are examples from other sites such as Gravelly Guy (Lambrick and Allen 2004) and South Cadbury (Britnell 1977). They vary considerably in the degree of wear. Some are trimmed aslant at both ends on opposing sides (524/A/3), others are worn in such a way to suggest animal predation (63/A/1 and 200/F; cf Binford 1981, 54 fig 3.17). The evidence for considerable use of these artefacts in contrast to the wear on ovicaprid tibiae, suggests that this group of points were given a different function. There appear to be far fewer points made from ovicaprid metapodia than of ovicaprid tibiae generally. The ovicaprid metapodia from South Cadbury include some heavily used examples (Britnell, 1977; 179, fig 23, nos 105-115, notably 109-110). Evidence from All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923, 89, p19, nos 1-7) and Maiden Castle (Wheeler, 1943, p1 XXIVA no 11) show less worn examples. This might be the result of different usage of the blades from site to site or even within site.

Metacarpi with Central Perforations

The only object of this type at Mount Farm is undatable and was made from an unfused metacarpal (Fig 50, no. 13). It is incomplete, having been broken at the point of its transverse perforation. At South Cadbury these objects are of Middle and Late Iron Age date.

These implements could have been used as shuttles or for weaving (Henshall 1950, 148; Crowfoot 1945, 157; Wild 1970, 34). The consensus view is that the metacarpi were used to wind twine or as netting needles or bobbins. They were frequent finds at Maiden Castle, Glastonbury and Wookey Hole (Wheeler 1943, 306-7, pl XXVA, 11-13; Bulleid and Gray 1917, 421-3, type A, fig 150, no B365; and pl LXIII no B273; Balch 1914, 114, P1 XXIIIB, no 18).

Grooved and Polished Ovicaprid Metapodia

This group consists of early and middle Iron Age examples of a common type of bone implement found on many Iron Age sites in the region. They are notable because of the similarity of the very distinctive wear pattern that distinguishes them, although their function is still mysterious. Sheep metapodia are usually used, and this applies to three

of the examples from Mount Farm (661/A/8; 505/C/1). A fourth (203/J/1) is made from a sheep's radius, which although fragmentary has sufficient of the key characteristics to be included within the group.

The uniform wear, particularly the spacing of the grooves, suggests that they had a very specific function and, their common occurrence on most Iron Age settlement sites indicates use in a fairly standard process, which could plausibly be a part of textile or leather working. The definite grooving has been attributed to the friction of threads; (Wheeler 1943, 306) and even as "bucket handles" (cf Clay 1924, 481). A more credible interpretation is perhaps that of thong stretchers, (Semenov 1964, 189). Other examples are found at Ashville, Farmoor, Gravelly Guy and Yarnton and are well known from Maiden Castle (Wheeler 1943, 306 p1 XXXVA nos 4-5) and All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923, pl 19, no 18).

Pointed Rib Blades.

The example from Mount Farm is from a Roman context (757/A/1) although at South Cadbury they range from the Later Bronze Age to the Late Iron Age. The Mount Farm example has one end trimmed into a blade and resembles one at South Cadbury, (Britnell 1977, fig 27, no 172). Other comparable blades have been found at All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923, pl 7). This type seems to be confined to sites in the South West (Britnell 1977, 92) and particularly early and middle Iron Age sites, so the rib blade from Mount Farm may be redeposited. Its function remains obscure.

Notched Rib Blade

A notched rib blade was found at Mount Farm in a Roman context (757/A/1). These notched blades are found on Later Bronze Age to Middle Iron Age habitations in England. Parallels have been found at South Cadbury (Britnell 1977, fig 27, nos.177-9) and All Cannings Cross (Cunnington 1923), but examples vary in detail from one object to the next. They seem unlikely to have been able to withstand any degree of pressure.

Early and Middle Iron Age Combs

These antler combs are very distinctive though they vary in how far they can be readily identified as belonging to an individual type (Hodder and Hedges 1977). The differences noted concern the shape of the comb and the wear on the teeth, the types of decoration and the distribution of different types. Mount Farm combs have ring and dot decoration and incised and cut lines (41 661 A9 and 29 A 505 C 1 and 46). The same patterns on combs are found at Maiden Castle, (Wheeler 1943, fig 101, no 9, fig 103, no 21 c & d) Hunsbury Hill, Northants, (Fell 1936, Fig 8,1) and Glastonbury (Bulleid and Gray 1917, pl LXVIII, nos 1 & 291).

These combs have had many identifications including amulets worn by druids (Gray and Cotton 1966, fig 10), skin dressing (Stevens 1870, 64-5), plucking wool from sheep (Cunliffe 1974, 264; Challis and Harding 1975, 21), removing hair from skins, or hair

combs (Hodder and Hedges 1977), and weaving combs for beating in the weft on warp weighted looms (Bulleid and Gray 1911, 266-99; Wheeler 1943, 298; Henshall 1950, 146; Crowfoot 1945, 157-8; Wild 1970, 66-7). Their use for preparing skins (for which there are Inuit parallels) is perhaps most likely, but a definitive answer depends on a study of wear patterns which are rather varied possibly as a result of the treatment of the antler and of the subsequent use of the combs.

Polishing and Burnishing Tools

These tools are of early and middle Iron Age derivation. A possible early Iron Age burnisher is made from a horse metatarsal (661/A/3) and a middle Iron Age one is made from a cattle metacarpal (661/C/1). Both have highly polished shafts and are paralleled at Glastonbury, (Bulleid and Gray 1917, ii 414) and Wookey Hole (Balch 1914, P1 XXIII B, figs 11,12) and Meare Lake Village (Gray and Cotton 1966 iii, 321). Definitions of the function of these bones are smoothing web on the loom and burnishing the surface of pottery (Bulleid and Gray 1917, ii, 414). These implements were not especially common in the Iron Age and it seems likely that their use was either non essential or that it could be quite easily fulfilled by an alternative tool.

Possible Antler Strap Union

This unusual object is similar to one from the middle Iron Age enclosed settlement close to the Rollright Stones (Lambrick 1988, 96-7, fig 65 no. 1). Both are a short length of antler hollowed out to make a tube from which a slot like a window was cut transversely across one side. The finished object was polished and decorated and probably further polished in use. The careful carving of these objects suggests that they might have been used as a kind of toggle, possibly to link two straps, one threaded through the tube passing over another placed in the transverse slot to hold it in place. Loosening and tightening the tension would have allowed the position of the link to be adjusted in either direction. Being made of antler it seems likely that these objects were expected to withstand some tension.

Summary

The worked bone assemblage from Mount Farm is not dissimilar to that of other sites covering these periods elsewhere in the region. The evidence from these sites suggests virtually self-sufficient communities: producing textiles, (including leather working), metal tools and pottery. The small agricultural surplus resulting from these activities would have been used to exchange for necessities that the settlements lacked. The range of bone implements found would help to substantiate this conclusion.

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