

A Bone to Pick

An Overview of Recent Research on Flint Picks.

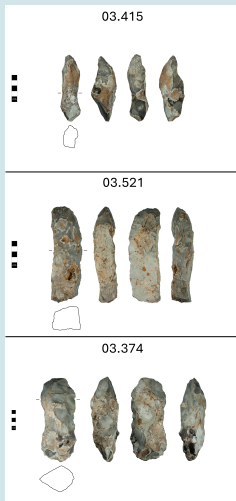
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INTRODUCTION

Neolithic stone core tools are a diverse group which have seen incredibly little research in Britain (excepting axeheads). Of these, picks, have suffered majorly from this disinterest despite being frequent at many Mesolithic & Neolithic sites, especially flint quarries & mines. Defined as elongated core tools, picks are typically no shorter than 70mm & generally minimally modified tools, which retain large amounts of cortex. Recent research analysing 57 picks from a fieldwalked Late Neolithic site in East Hampshire provided many insights into pick manufacture & their larger context. The study centred around a unique criterial analysis, so-far minimally applied in post-glacial lithic research. This allowed the notoriously inconsistent type to be evaluated by creating a set of quantifiable criteria based off of artefact morphology. Results demonstrated that picks were hafted tools, expediently made & used to excavate through clay-rich soil to extract flint. The methodology presented in the research has the potential to reveal much more about other pick assemblages & regional flint procurement.

TYOLOGY



Pointed Pick

This type is defined by a working end which is pointed or tapered. These picks most commonly feature triangular or near-triangular cross-sections, often resulting in a pyramidal shape at the working end. These are generally the most common type.

Narrow Edge Pick

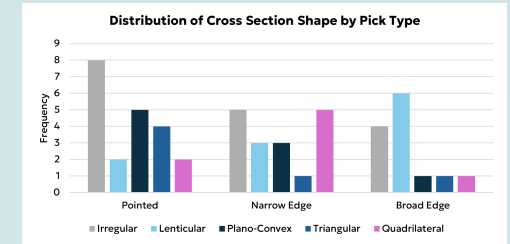
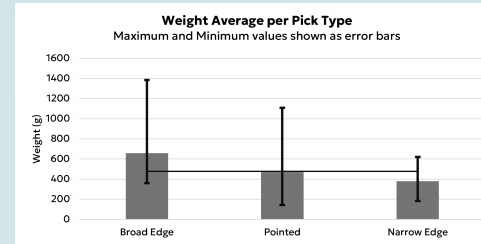
These picks have one flat working edge narrower than the body of the pick oriented at around 90° to the length. The transition from the body to the edge is often trapezoidal in shape. They are frequently made with a quadrilateral cross-section. These are the second most common type

Broad Edge Pick

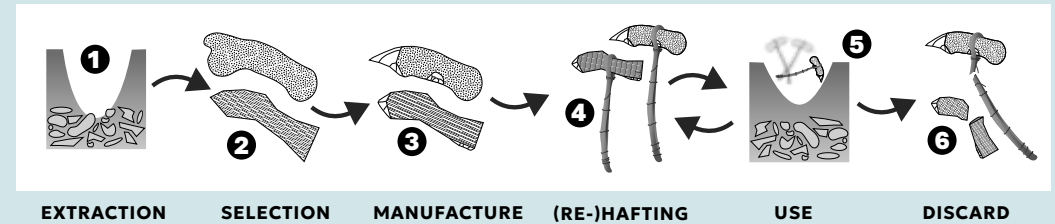
These picks are characterised by a wide or rounded working edge more or less equal in width to that of the tool. On average this group is the heaviest, longest, widest & thickest. Broad edge picks also have a tendency for lenticular cross-sections. They are the rarest type.

METHODOLOGY

To meaningfully analyse the diverse & inconsistent assemblage, a series of criteria based on main morphology & features of the picks was developed. For the East Hampshire assemblage a set of 17 criteria was decided upon. These are: length (mm), width (mm), thickness (mm), end width (mm), weight (g), type, cross-section shape, end position, cortex coverage, horizontal & vertical waisting, horizontal & vertical curvature, lateral abrasion, hafting traces, use wear & preservation.



CHAÎNE OPÉRATOIRE



CONCLUSIONS

Results of analysis showed that most criteria varied notably with each type, especially metrical features & cross-section shape (see above), which supports the developed typology and may also implicate each type as serving differing functions. Other criteria suggested that the picks were hafted (demonstrated by wear & occasional modification in the middle of the picks) & used for brief periods (interpreted through the good preservation & minimal use-wear). Further, the minimal modification of the picks implies that selection of a suitable blank was an incredibly important aspect of the manufacturing process. Criterial analysis also enabled the creation of a chaîne opératoire (see below). Evaluation of the remaining lithic assemblage showed that scrapers, cores & knives prevailed, implying occupation. Conclusions of the research provides a rare glimpse of flint procurement away from flint mines; in this case comprising recurrent seasonal occupation associated with flint procurement and other domestic tasks. The methodology presented in this research has not only resulted in an improved understanding of picks, including convincing evidence that they were primarily extractive tools, but also larger patterns of flint extraction. This illustrates that significant findings can be made from unstratified lithic assemblages, reinforcing the importance on surface lithic scatters. Application of the techniques to similarly overlooked core tools like waisted tools, or other lithic artefacts entirely could provide equally important insights into Neolithic and Mesolithic society.

