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A Neolithic Stone Axe from Andoversford

by B. Rawes
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Notes

A NEOLITHIC STONE AXE FOUND AT ANDOVERSFORD

During the 1970 excavations at Andoversford in advance of the construction of the new bypass, a large ditch was investigated, just north of the old railway embankment, opposite the turning to Stow (SP 02501970). A neolithic stone axe was found on the flat bottom of the ditch among a layer of stones of about the same size. The ditch was filled with a dark silty deposit containing Roman building material, coins and pottery. The majority of the dateable objects belong to the fourth century A.D.; and it is thought that the ditch remained open until at least the end of that century. The axe is an attractive artifact and it is possible that it was kept as an object for display or prized for religious or other reasons. It could have been picked up and brought to Andoversford at any time during the two and a half thousand years before the fourth century A.D. Indeed its travels could have been distant and intermittent, so that although it was found in a stratified level, it less certainly belongs to Andoversford than if it had been found in a ploughed field away from a Roman context.

The axe is a greenstone. Its colour is greenish-grey and it is mottled with a dark mineral. The polish is especially fine on one of its narrow sides where it has been smoothed flat; enabling it to stand upright on a level surface. It is possible that this flattening was done at a date much later than that of its manufacture. The axe fits perfectly into the grasp of an average-sized hand, not thereby suggesting that it was necessarily used as a hand-axe. A 20 mm chip has been broken off a corner of the butt end, and there is a slight irregularity at one point in the line of the cutting edge. Otherwise it is in perfect condition.

The axe is now in Cheltenham Museum. It joins four other polished axes from Andoversford from the collection of Mr G. B. Witts (accession number 1912:126). These were described in Volume x (1892) of the *Proceedings* of the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club, by W. C. Lucy, F.G.S. They have been examined by the Sub-Committee of the South-West Group of Museums and Art



PLATE I Stone Axe, Andoversford.

Galleries on the Petrological Identification of Stone Axes and are as follows:—

Sub-Committee No. 84;	Glos No. 3;	Axe Factory Group IX.	} Fourth ¹ Report Fifth ² Report
„ „ „ 85;	„ „ 4;	Slate.	
„ „ „ 1460;	„ „ 75;	Axe Factory Group IX.	
„ „ „ 1461;	„ „ 76;	Axe Factory Group IX.	

In Volume XVII (1951) of the *Proceedings* of the Prehistoric Society, the Third Report of the above Sub-Committee describes Group IX, which comes from Tievebulliagh Hill, County Antrim: 'The rock is a distinctive porcellanite composed of dark spinel and a light fine-grained aggregate of sillimenite and mullite'.

The report on the thin-sectioning of the new find (Sub-Committee number 1455, Glos. number 74) follows.

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Report on Stone Axe Glos 74/1455 Fifth Report
by the Implement Petrology Committee of the Implement Petrology Survey of the South-West.

- a) *Macroscopic*. An attractive rather curious rock of a general greenish-grey colour with abundant dark grains and larger pieces of a blackish mineral.
- b) *Microscopic*. Very decomposed feldspar forms the basis of this rock, but there are also fresh prisms of plagioclase present. Much tourmaline occurs in irregular grains and prisms, green to pale brown in tint, sometimes with blue cores. Pleochroism is feeble. It sometimes shows a fibrous cleavage parallel to the length and fracture. There is also some green fibrous hornblende and a number of very irregular, often skeletonised grains of black iron ore. The green hornblende is sometimes recrystallised and sometimes partially or wholly converted to green or blue tourmaline.

The rock is a tourmalised greenstone and probably of Cornish origin.

Examined by E. D. Evens and F. S. Wallis.

¹ *Proceedings* of the Prehistoric Society, xxviii (1962), 209-266.

² *Proceedings* of the Prehistoric Society, xxxviii (1972), 235-275.