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Two prehistoric implements found near Tytherington, Avon

by F. E. S. Roe
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Stone object (FIG. 7, 16)

Quadrant cut from a laminated Lias limestone fragment. Only the curved side has had to be shaped. Fill of feature 10.

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E.G. and A.J. PRICE

TWO PREHISTORIC IMPLEMENTS FOUND NEAR TYTHERINGTON, AVON

The area round Tytherington, eleven or so miles north-east of Bristol, is a prolific one for sites and finds both of pre- and post-Roman date, and two noteworthy implements, a macehead and a flint axe or chisel have recently been recorded from this vicinity. The writer is indebted to Mr Roger Howell for drawing her attention to these finds.

The macehead, of which only half now survives, was found at Stidcote Farm (ST 6835 8863).

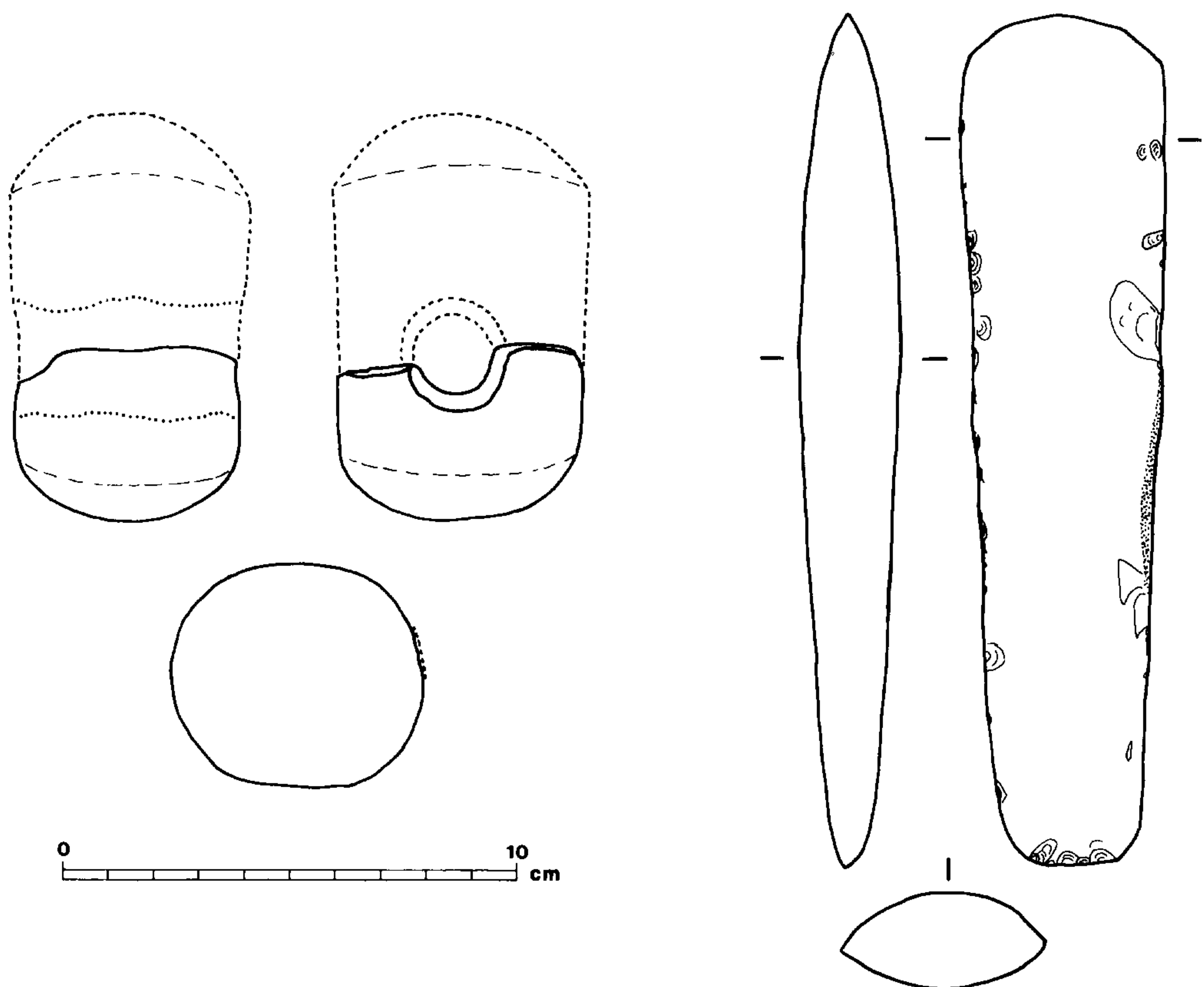


FIG. 8 Implements from Tytherington, Avon. Left: macehead; right: axe/chisel. Scale 1:2.



FIG. 9 Macehead from Tytherington, Avon. Left: end view showing battering; right: side view showing perforation and distinctive banding.

The discovery was made some time in the early 1950s, about 0.3 m below ground surface, while a posthole was being dug near an old pond, the northernmost of three such on the farm. The macehead remains in the possession of the finder, Mr Robert D. Willcox of Garden Cottage, Cowhill, Oldbury-upon-Severn (and formerly of Stidcote). It brings to five the total of maceheads currently recorded from Gloucestershire and Avon (Saville and Roe 1984, 21).

The remaining half of the implement is the narrower end of a pestle macehead. Because the proportions of such maceheads were relatively standardized, it is possible to assess the approximate proportions of this example (Roe 1968, 147). The length would have been about 89 mm, allowing for the centre of the hole to be positioned about 2/5ths of the way along the total length, while the present maximum breadth is 52 mm and the depth 48 mm. The straight sides indicate a pestle macehead of the Thames variety (Roe 1968, 154, fig. 33), and reference to the average measurements for such implements (Roe 1968, 170, appendix II) enables an approximate reconstruction to be drawn (FIG. 8). The shafthole is internally hollowed, a feature quite commonly found on maceheads, and possibly connected with difficulties in drilling. The end shows evidence for battering (FIG. 9) perhaps from use as a hammerstone, while undamaged areas of the surface show minute striae, visible under a hand lens, which are likely to have been created by the polishing process.

This macehead may be compared morphologically with one of grey quartzite from Rockland All Saints, Norfolk (Norwich Castle Museum, accn. no. 813.968; Evans 1897, 223 and fig. 150), and it is also not unlike an unprovenanced example in the Ashmolean Museum (accn. no. N.C. 231) which is made of a similar red-and-white quartzite.

The material used for the Tytherington macehead is possibly of more interest than the shape of the implement. The stone, an iron-stained quartzite, must have been selected for its striking colouring, with dark red ferruginous bands on a lighter background of variable pinkish/yellow/grey appearance (FIG. 9). Materials that were attractive visually were often chosen for maceheads, banded rocks being especially popular, and the likelihood of this coloured quartzite having been selected deliberately is borne out by other examples. A further seventeen or eighteen maceheads made from red-and-white quartzite may be cited, covering all types except cushion maceheads, and from widely distributed findspots in England, Scotland, and Wales. A specific source for this material cannot be suggested, since quartzite pebbles are a widespread phenomenon, and possibilities include Triassic deposits such as the Budleigh Salterton beds, Bunter pebble beds, or even local Rhaetic beds, while they also occur among Pleistocene drift, for instance as plateau pebbles (Cave 1977, 227).

A late neolithic date is likely for this macehead. The only directly comparable implement from an associated context, a fragmentary Thames pestle macehead, was recorded at Skara Brae (Roe 1968, 154 and fig. 33, 6).

The axe or chisel (FIG. 8) was found on Barmer's Lands Farm (ST 6620 8930), and is the property of Messrs Robert and Claud Hetherington, who kindly loaned it temporarily to the writer for recording purposes. It is made of grey, mottled flint with some cortex, and is 187 mm in length, 43 mm maximum breadth, and 21 mm maximum depth. It weighs 210 g and is polished all over, though with traces of flaking remaining along the sides. The implement has a finely striated surface, visible only under magnification, which also shows that the extreme edge of the blade is worn. One surface at the blade end seems to be more polished than the other.

This tool is rather slender compared with other flint axes, and alternative uses suggest themselves. One possibility is that it was used as a kind of auger; it could perhaps also have been utilized as a chisel. This latter type of artefact lacks full definition, often being difficult to distinguish among axes and adzes (Adkins & Jackson 1978, 11), but Manby has identified and described examples from Yorkshire (Manby 1974, 90). These, however, are all smaller than the implement described here, forming a recognizable small class of their own, with some associations with Grooved Ware.

Acknowledgement

The photographs of the macehead were taken by Mr V.P. Narracott of the Pitt Rivers Museum, Oxford.

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FIONA ROE