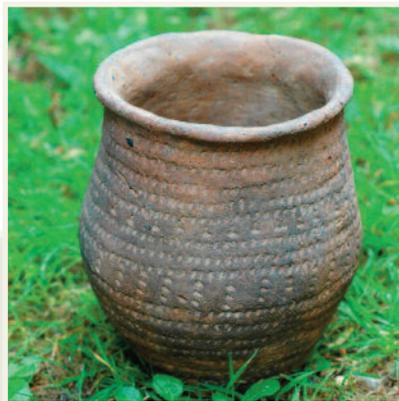
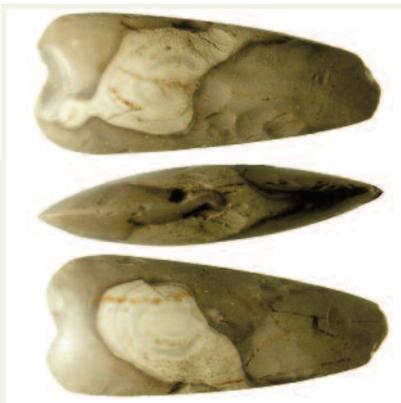


The Stour Valley Heritage Compendia

Prehistoric Landscape Compendium

Written by Daniel King



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Contents

Introduction	4
Stone Age	7
Palaeolithic 'Old Stone Age'	7
Mesolithic 'Middle Stone Age'	10
Neolithic 'New Stone Age'	11
Bronze Age	15
Iron Age	18
Further Reading	21
Prehistory Glossary	22

Introduction

It is difficult not to be impressed by much of the evidence of human activity left behind in the landscape. There are a vast number of archaeological sites above ground all across Britain. We have huge collections in museums all over the country which detail everything from the mundane day to day lives of past peoples, to objects of social and ritual importance. There are monumental sites which even today seem to defy our understanding of what these peoples were capable of and why. Strange outlines appear around us in the landscape, which in many cases we see as mundane and ordinary. Yet, when we consider what these outlines mean and why they are there, we are left with a whole series of questions. When we walk in the landscape today we are literally surrounded wherever we go by the detritus of past human lives. Little pieces of evidence are everywhere, in the countryside, in our gardens, in our homes and all connecting us to the past and the peoples before us.

The Stour Valley is no exception to this density of archaeology and monuments in the landscape when compared to the rest of the British countryside. There are over 200 sites and artefacts recorded in the county Historic Environment Records for the project area of the Managing a Masterpiece programme which are attributed to the prehistoric period and there are over 500 others which are likely to be from this period. This evidence of human activity covers the whole of prehistory right from the earliest Stone Age right up to the Iron Age. There is of course more after this period as well, but prehistory ends with the invasion of the Romans in AD43 when we begin to see a written history in Britain.

What all this archaeological evidence tells us immediately is that there is clear evidence of human activity over much of the prehistoric period in the Stour Valley. That in itself is not so unusual, but it is awe inspiring when we start to consider just how long the prehistoric period is.

People first appeared in previously uninhabited north-west Europe around 800,000 years ago. This gives us well over half a million years of human habitation in the British Isles. This a time span that is difficult to

Date AD/BC	Archaeological Periods and Sub-divisions	
AD43	Roman invasion	
AD1 / 1BC	Iron Age	Late
		Middle
		Early
1000BC	Bronze Age	Late
		Middle
2000BC		Early
3000BC	Neolithic	Late / Chalcolithic
		Middle
4000BC		Early
5000BC	Mesolithic	Late
6000BC		
7000BC		Early
8000BC		
9000BC	Stone Age	Final Upper
11,000BC		
15,000BC		Later Upper
30,000BC	Palaeolithic	Earlier Upper
50,000BC		
100,000BC		Middle
250,000BC		
500,000BC		Lower
800,000BC		

Fig 1, Table of prehistoric Periods

comprehend in terms of normal human experience, but that is the period we are looking at for 'prehistory' – a time from the invasion of the Roman Empire in AD43 and all the way back in time to the first humans or hominids (people) to live or visit what we now call the Britain.

A matter we should keep in mind when looking back in time in any landscape, is how much that landscape will have changed. A changing landscape is something we often gloss over in our mind as something to do with the industrial revolution and mechanization of farming practices. There is no question that the rise of modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*) is intrinsically linked with huge changes in landscapes across the world since at least the Neolithic period. However, over the passage of time the climate, nature and the very mechanics of the solar system itself has changed the landscapes we now live in by orders of magnitude beyond what mere humans have ever done.

Analysis carried out on deep sea cores and ice cores has been used to derive oxygen isotope stages (fig 2) giving us evidence of global temperature changes over a vast period of time. The proportions of oxygen isotopes in parts the cores which represent a point in history will indicate various climatic conditions. This isotope evidence can be used to help us understand when parts of the world were covered in glacial ice. This is important for a number of reasons, not least because we can discern when parts of the world would have been suitable for exploitation by people and more importantly when people would have been able to access places by simply walking there (and crossing the odd river or two).

When the climate was cold during a glacial expansion, the lands between Britain and the continent would dry out and make access far easier than today. However much of the country was then covered by snow and ice during the glacial maximum, so it is unclear just how much land would have been exploitable given the likely environmental conditions.

The idea of glaciations is particularly important when looking at the evidence for the activity of people during the Palaeolithic period. We know for example that people arrived in Britain before the Anglian cold stage 480,000 BC. We also know from many sites in the south of England that there were people present during the interglacial periods. There is every likelihood that the Stour Valley, or the area in which it now sits, was every bit as fertile as the rest of the country. It would have been full of wildlife and more than able to support groups of hunter gatherers. What then happens is the evidence of people in the area is buried or washed away by glacial outwash a number of times over hundreds of thousands of

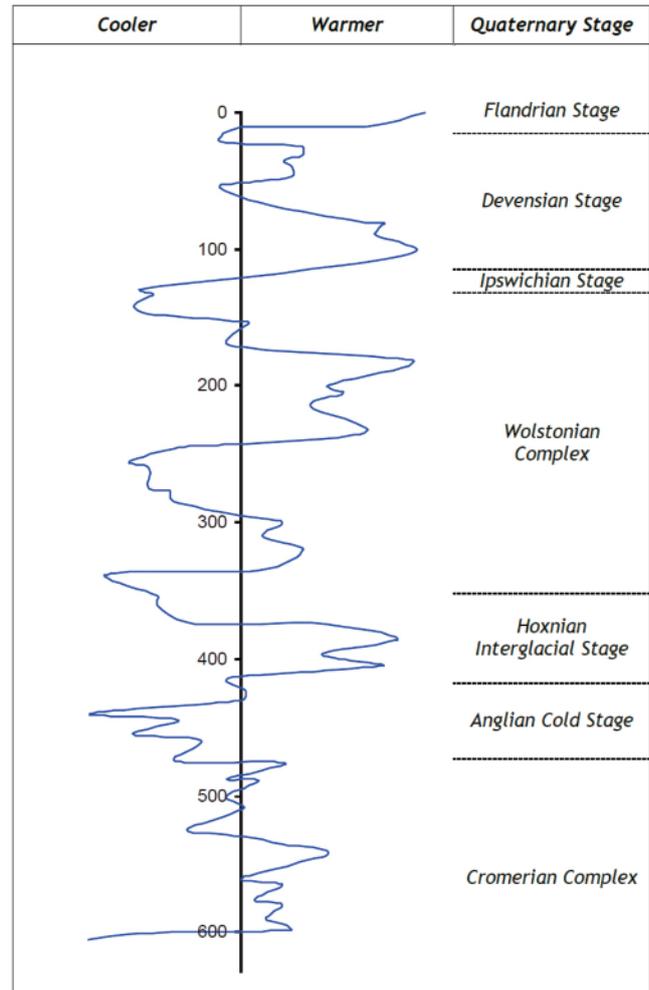


Fig 2, Oxygen Isotope Stages and British Quaternary Stages (isotope stages, blue line left, in thousands of years – BC)

years. If we look at the map below, we can see the underlying geology or bedrock of the Stour Valley. We know that the Stour Valley, like most of the drainage pattern of East Anglia, was formed in the aftermath of the retreating Anglian ice sheet.

What we see in the next map, is that same geology of the valley overlaid with all of the superficial deposits laid down by erosion elsewhere and glacial deposition. What becomes clear is how the Stour Valley, much of East Anglia and indeed much of the south is covered by glacial outwash. Most of this material would have been deposited by the Anglian glaciation.

What this means is that much of the activity of people in the landscape during the Lower Palaeolithic period is either buried very deep or has been washed away or moved out of its original context.

The Stour Valley cuts down through the glacial till deposits on the Suffolk/Essex border exposing various sand and gravel deposits. It is a relatively narrow flood plain surrounded by gently rising slopes out to about 500 metres from the river

where the angle becomes steeper up to the top of the plateau surrounding the valley. This floodplain has traditionally been used for grazing; likely right back into prehistory, but much of the valley is now subject to intensive arable farming. The news isn't all bad, significant areas of permanent pasture have survived in the Dedham Vale AONB (Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) where considerable efforts are made to protect the current landscape and its natural heritage.

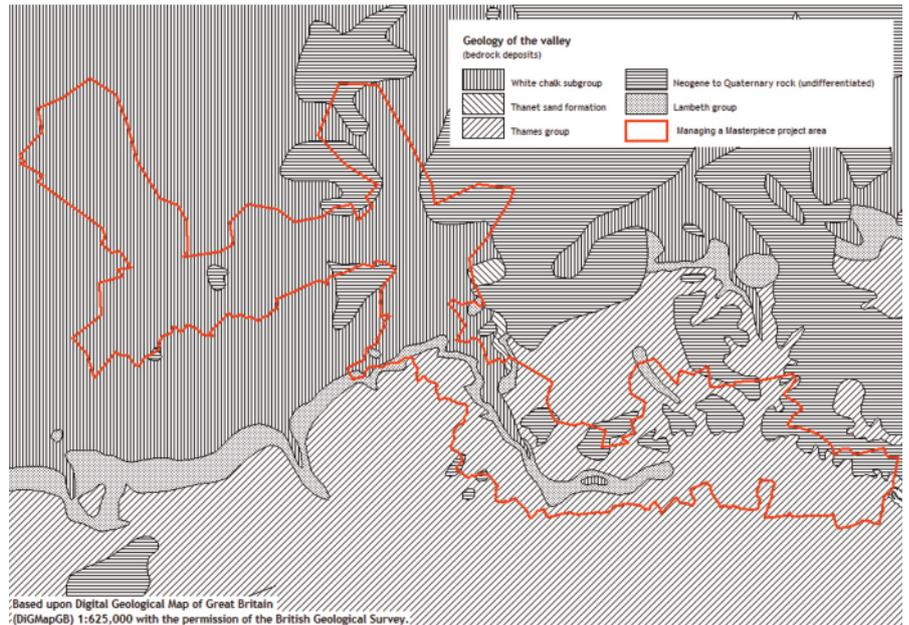


Fig 3, Geology of the Valley (Bedrock Deposits)

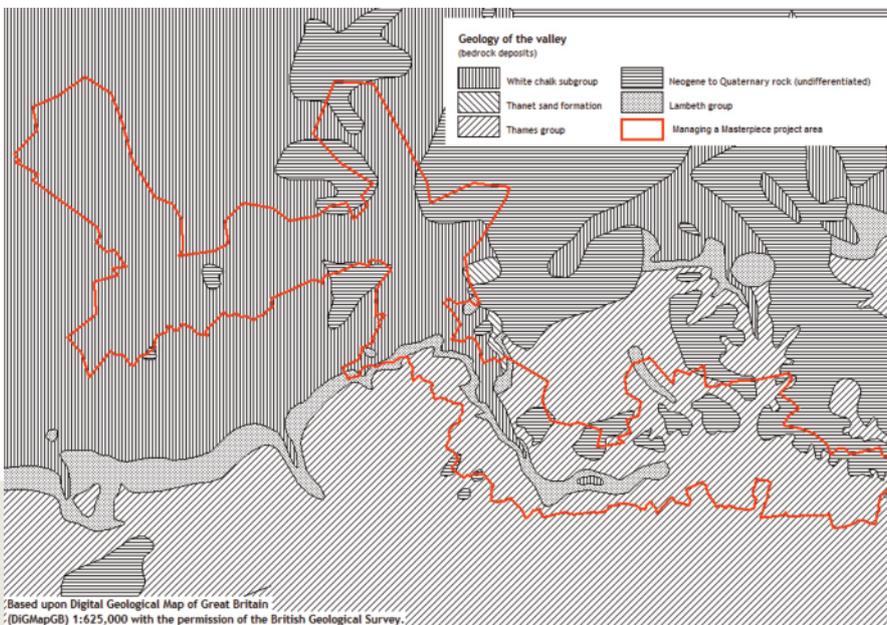


Fig 4, Geology of the Valley (Superficial Deposits)

The Stone Age

As already discussed, the Stone Age covers a huge period of time (subdivided into three main stages as set out below). During this period the Stour Valley fluctuated from barren and inhospitable arctic tundra to a lush forested landscape full of wild animals. There would have been herds of herbivores like the aurochs (wild cattle), deer, horses, bison and even mammoths. There would also have been the attendant predators such as wolves, bears and lions. The valley has gone back and forth through these climatic changes for far longer than people have been around. In fact, we know that there have been at least four such major glacial maximums in the last 500,000 years and four corresponding warmer periods.

Palaeolithic ('Old Stone Age')

During the Palaeolithic period people would have lived as hunter gatherers and most likely in small family groups. These groups would have been very mobile and most likely there would have been annual movements following game or food resources and shorter movements of a particular herd of animals. We know from evidence elsewhere that Palaeolithic people would use natural sites such as caves for shelter, although no such sites have been discovered in the Stour Valley. But what other types of shelter, would they have built? The tool set and objects carried by these people were probably quite limited.

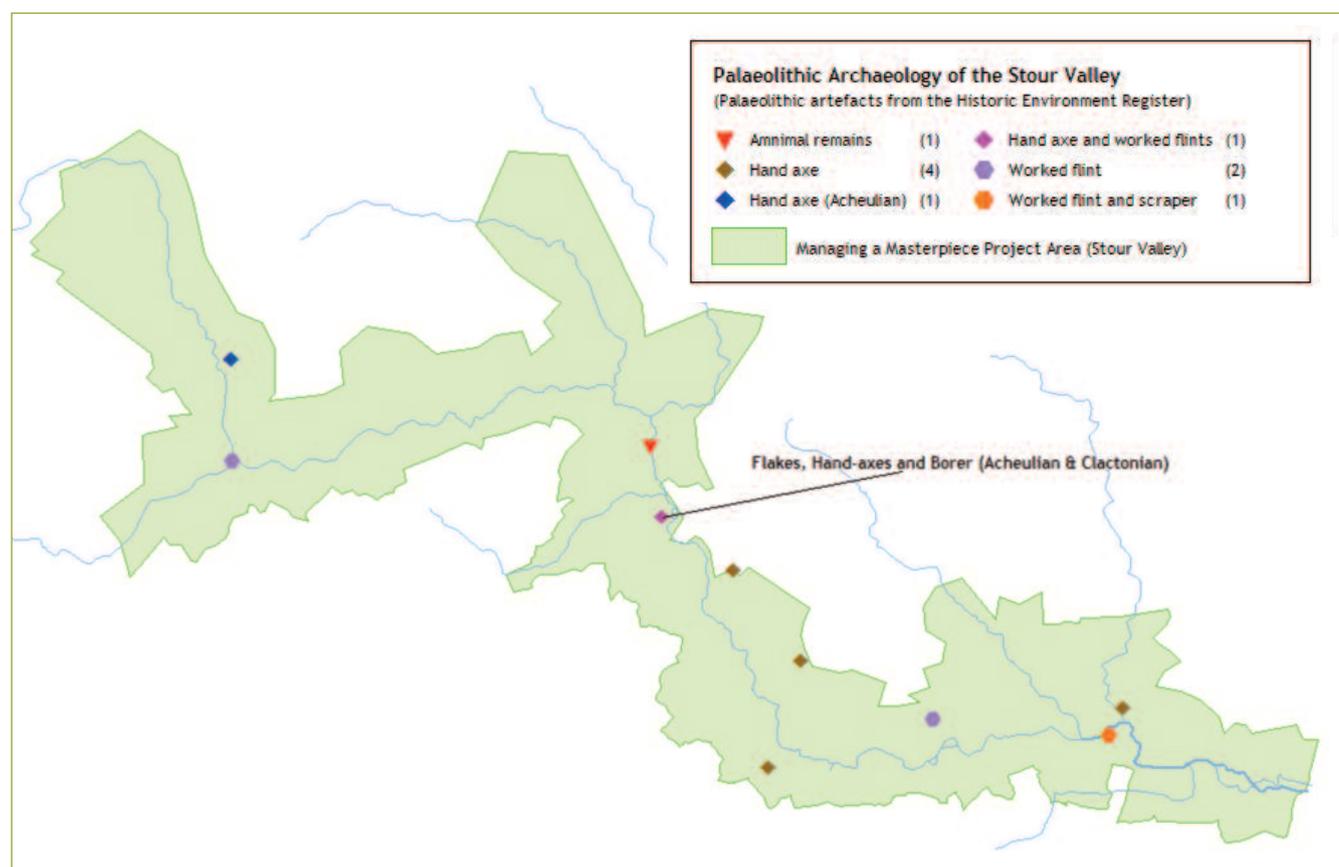


Fig 5, Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Valley

Their interaction with the environment around them in terms of building anything was also likely to have been limited and would have disintegrated over a relatively short period.

What this means in terms of the archaeology left behind is that there is often very little evidence indeed. This is one of the reasons that people living by hunting and gathering are often seen by archaeologists as 'ghosts in the landscape'. Their very nature is so transitory that we often only find evidence of their passing at kill sites, where animals have been butchered, such as the Lynford mammoth site in the Little Ouse valley in Norfolk, or where certain resources such as shell fish have been consumed.

What we do find however is the stone they worked. Often this material is out of context (having been moved from where it was deposited) but it does tell us that people were around during the Palaeolithic period. The Historic Environment Records (HER) for the Stour Valley have eight Palaeolithic finds or groups of finds and there may be more that have not been identified yet. The map below shows the distribution of these finds across the valley and it appears that the whole area which now forms the valley was utilised in some manner during this extended period. The best finds come from a former gravel pit at Brundon where various flint tools were discovered during gravel extraction. There are two major recognized types of Palaeolithic stone tool and both of these are present within artefacts found in the Stour Valley. More importantly both these types of artefact were found at Brundon.

The set or style of stone tools known as Clactonian was first discovered at an archaeological site in Clacton on Sea and hence the name. The site appeared to be a relict river bank from the Hoxnian period (424,000 to 374,000 BC) which had evidence of animals being processed such as horse, bison and deer among others. Analysis of the stone tools suggested they had been used in woodworking, hide scraping and butchery of animals. The surrounding area was made up of open forest and grassland according to the analysis of pollen particles from archaeological deposits. This and other sites have led to the general theory that the Clactonian tool users preferred riverside locations and these have only to date been found in the east of the country.

This is perhaps an unsurprising location for a group of hunter gatherers given the ecotone nature of such a location. That is the way in which you have two or more environments close together giving a diverse range of resources. The river would have fish and molluscs etc. The woodland would provide wood, plants, fungi and birds. The open grassland would offer different opportunities such as bigger game. When you consider the whole together it forms a very desirable location for hunters and gatherers alike.

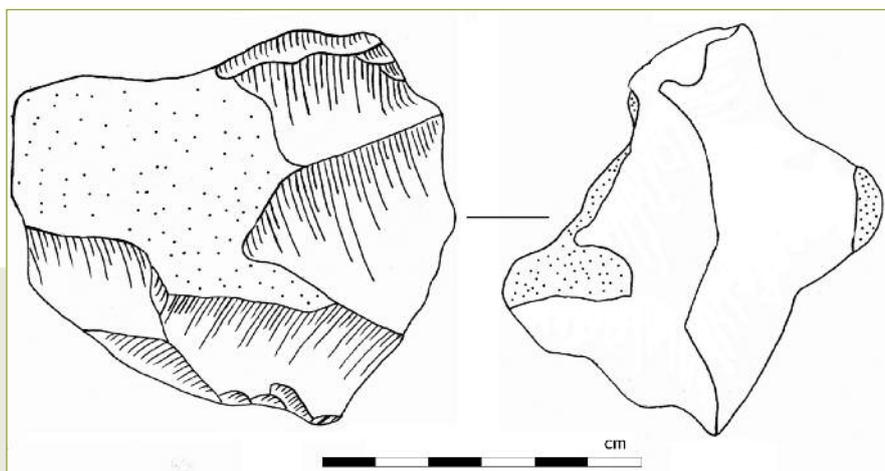


Fig 6, Clactonian tool.

This idea of people being bonded to the river valleys is something we see elsewhere in East Anglia's past and it's something we will see again and again.

The stone tools themselves often feel more basic than their competing technology, known as the Acheulian. They are often made with less flaking; seem coarser and less skilled in manufacture.

The major differences between the Acheulian and Clactonian technologies are that the Acheulian artefacts are found in a much wider set of sites and not confined to the east of the country. There are some sites where the two technologies have been found together although not side by side, but from different occupation layers. Acheulian tools users too prefer waterside locations (beside rivers and beside lakes) but are also known to have made use of cave sites (outside the Stour Valley).

The stone tools themselves are often more technically proficient in their manufacture. It is apparent that a soft hammer was used when finishing the hand axes for example, leading to a cleaner and more regular finish. We do find some surprisingly brilliant examples of Acheulian hand axes which took real skill to manufacture and yet they seem to have been a throwaway item. Made, used and left behind.

It is difficult to say much about the Stour Valley on the basis of such small numbers of the Palaeolithic finds. However we do know that people were here. We know they hunted and exploited animals in the valley. We can see that there are both of the key types or technologies are at work within the valley, particularly with the most interesting finds at Brandon pit, where a number of both Clactonian and Acheulian objects were found.

Given that many of the artefacts have not been recorded as being from one or other type it is difficult to discuss any relationship between the two groups use of the Stour Valley. However we can say with confidence, that during the Palaeolithic period the valley was used by people in much the way we would expect with a distinct spread of artefacts along the river valley. This leaves the lasting impression that despite huge changes in climate and geography, the river has been an important resource and travel route for 'people' right back into our very early prehistory.

Toward the end of the Palaeolithic we start to see the emergence elsewhere in Britain of more complex tools and worked flints. The number of flints in toolkits increased and we see the hand axe phased out in favour of tools for specific purposes. This has been linked to the arrival in Britain of modern humans (*Homo sapiens sapiens*). Unfortunately where these worked flints have been found there have not been any contemporary human remains present. It appears from the evidence available in the Stour Valley that there is less activity during this period. Is it entirely possible that the evidence just hasn't been found in the valley so far or possibly recorded evidence is incomplete.

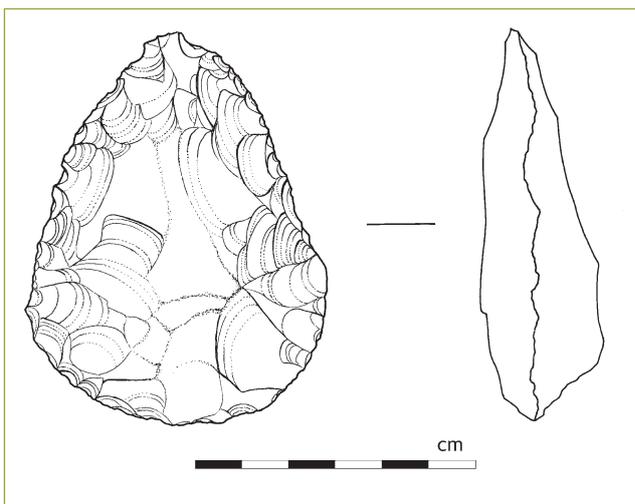


Fig 7, Acheulian hand axe. (SF-41E663, drawing courtesy of Donna Wreathall at Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

Mesolithic ('Middle Stone Age')

At the end of the last ice age people returned to Britain, probably in small numbers at first, following the wild prey animals they were dependant on. Over time this became a continuous period of occupation and social development which continues to this day. The dominant tool culture of bladed flints which became popular during the Upper Palaeolithic is replaced by more sophisticated backed blades where one side of the flint is extensively reworked and other additions such as steeply retouched tools like burins and awls.

Looking at the spread of archaeological evidence in the Historic Environment Record for the valley during the Mesolithic, we can see from the map below that there is a good spread of such finds up and down the valley. Given that these artefacts are dated well after the end of the last glacial maximum in the Devensian period, there is a better chance of these finds being in undisturbed deposits. However most of these finds have been opportunistic rather than by design. One such example is an assemblage of flints and a flaked-axe found at Hall Farm, Clare while field walking a complex of crop marks.

An interesting thing to note is that the numerous finds of flint axe-heads with chisel-like blades that are called tranchet axes (cutting tools). Unlike the earlier Palaeolithic hand axes, these were designed to be hafted and could be used to fell trees. These highly developed tools gave the Mesolithic peoples the ability to change the environment around them significantly.

We know that riverside and lakeside locations seem to have been the main areas for occupation during this period and these settlements were generally open camps. There are hints from other places from finds such as wooden paddles that water craft were important, although we don't have any finds of boats or canoes in Britain which date from this period. The idea that water craft were important fits with the spread of Mesolithic finds along the river course of the Stour Valley.

There were a few cave sites used elsewhere in Britain during this period as well but these represent a very small percentage of Mesolithic sites.

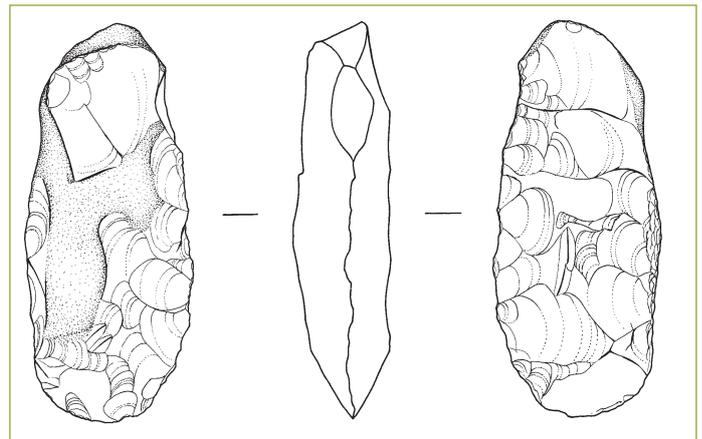


Fig 8, Tranchet axe head discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-E69180, drawing courtesy of Donna Wreathall at Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

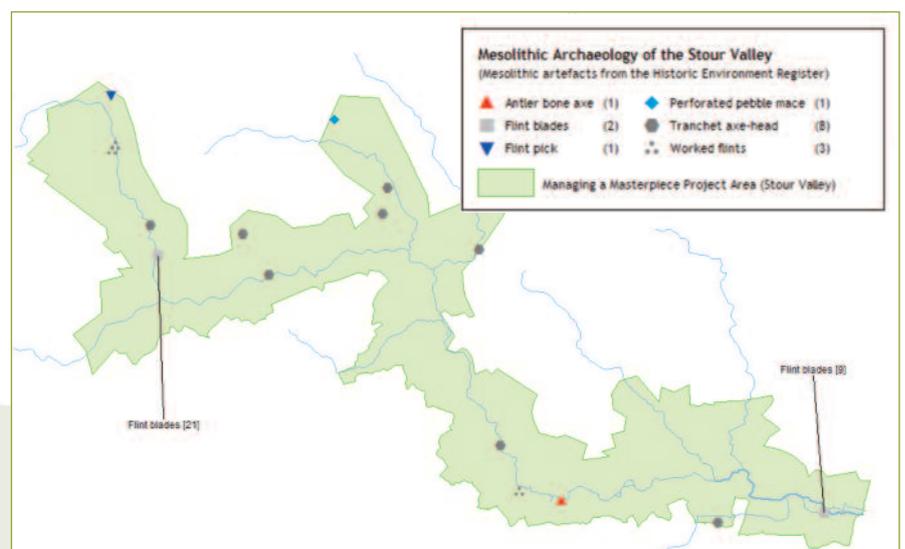


Fig 9, Mesolithic Archaeology of the Valley



Fig 11, Mesolithic flints discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-2F4361, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)



Fig 10, Tranchet axe head discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-537113, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

Unfortunately we don't have any sites in the Historic Environment Records for the Stour Valley which are exclusively Mesolithic, and what is found tends to represent a small proportion of the finds.

Effectively we have just a glimpse of these hunter gatherers in the valley, telling us they were definitely here, but not a great deal more. We can infer that they were expanding their domination of the landscape due to the increased number of sites in the valley where finds have been made. Weight is added to this argument by the amount of time that this period represents when compared to the vast span of time covered by the Palaeolithic. We have more sites or finds in a shorter period of time.

The Mesolithic represents the period right before the explosion of people across the whole of Britain as they begin to exploit the world around them more intensively. We should not forget that estimates vary of just how many people were living in Britain by this period; these generally fall between five and twenty thousand people. This population estimate, plus the higher number of finds in the Stour Valley suggest that the valley is an important resource for the Mesolithic hunter gatherers.

By the end of the Mesolithic period the hunter-gatherer groups were very adept at making and using tools. Tools such as bone needles were used to manufacture clothing from skins and increased flexibility of these groups enabling them to adapt better to their environment. The flints they produced were often tiny, known as microliths, they formed part of composite tools, usually wood or bone with hard flint edges. These tools were technically brilliant and made much better use of what was a precious resource.

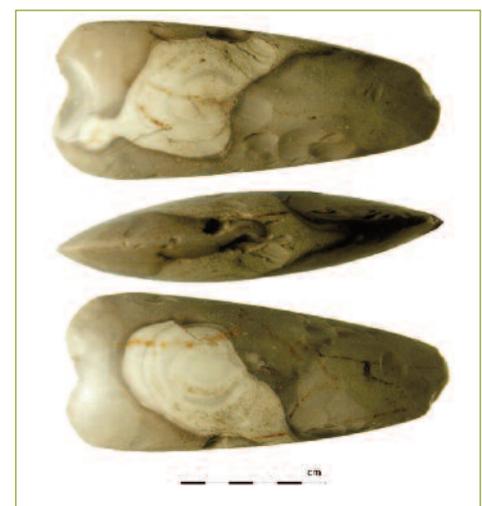


Fig 12, Polished stone axe discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-83CF57, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

Neolithic ('New Stone Age')

Entering the Neolithic period in the Stour Valley we find the emergence of new methods of using existing technologies as well as the apparent development of new techniques. We start to see the emergence of new technologies such as polished stone axes,



Fig 13, Leaf shaped arrowhead discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-4DA341, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

quern stones, leafshaped arrowheads, sickles and pottery. These types of artefacts are often referred to as the ‘farming package’ which as it suggests, are as a result of the hunter gatherers beginning to settle in more permanent locations. However we should think of these first so called farmers as more likely gardeners and hunters rather than full blown farming peoples.

Life seems to have revolved around small single farmsteads at the beginning of the Neolithic period. Excavations of the few Neolithic settlements within the region have found limited evidence in the form of pits, post holes and the odd gully or ditch. However contemporary excavations elsewhere in Britain have found a few larger rectangular houses which are somewhat similar in style to those found in Lower Saxony, Germany and elsewhere in mainland Europe. This may be an indication of the transfer of ideas, knowledge or people across Europe during this period. It is likely such houses would have been built of wood,

although stone has been used in contemporary structures, in places where it was fairly easily available. They would also have been surrounded by garden plots, grazing and woodland which would provide both food and raw materials.

It appears the Neolithic peoples of Britain began to see the world differently and realised how they could manipulate the environment, plants and animals around them in order to reduce life’s uncertainties. These were ideas which spread across Europe as ideas transferred through human contact or with people as they migrated. They show up in the archaeological record as new types of pottery or artefacts, non-native domesticated livestock and new crops such as non-native cereals. For the first time we start to see evidence in the Stour Valley of peoples activity beyond simple artefacts.

There is an extensive spread of artefacts along the valley which are attributed to this period, when the world appeared to be a dramatically changing place. Flint remains the main material for making anything with a working edge. Axes, awls, adzes, arrow heads (leaf shaped), knives, scrapers and sickles are the main tools. Living as a hunter gatherer would be extensively reliant on the skills of the individual, the uses of agricultural techniques and animal husbandry would require a wider communal effort. It is perhaps unsurprising that we begin to see evidence of this in the archaeological record in the form of timber and earthwork monuments, and burial mounds called barrows by archaeologists.

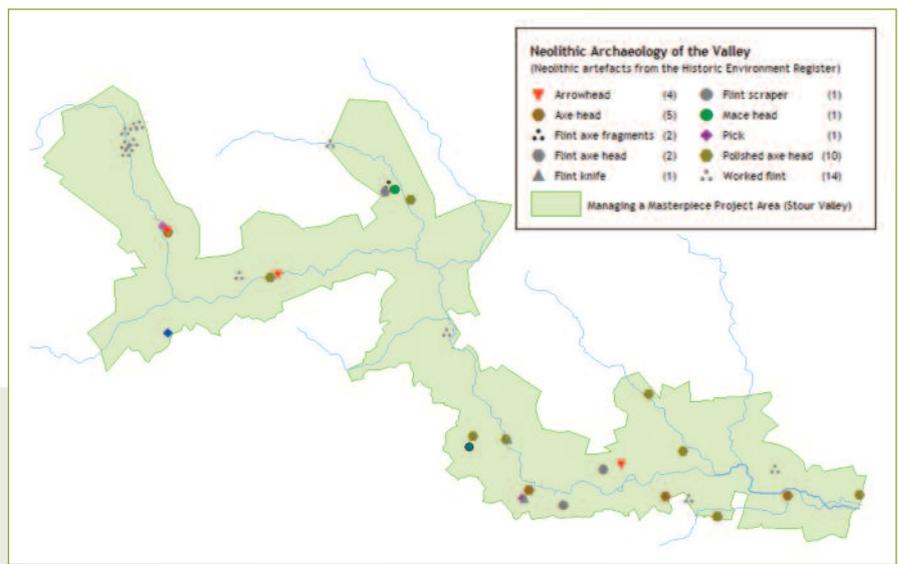


Fig 14, Neolithic Archaeology of the Valley.

We see evidence of a more complex culture shaping the landscape, a culture where it is likely that some forms of skill separation have started to take place. A new type of axe-head appears which has been ground down and polished. This seems something excessive for a tool that, although it will work as an axe, carries a high chance of breaking and therefore invalidating all the effort put into the fine finish. These objects therefore take on some form of social or ritual significance beyond being just an axe. We know from excavations at Grimes Graves in Norfolk that flint was mined in a highly organised manner demonstrating its importance. We also know stone axes were being manufactured and transported great distances across the country. There are believed to be two major trading routes into Suffolk from the south west and north west of England. These routes were identified when it was found that axes made of Cornish stone are more common in the south east of Suffolk toward the Stour Valley and those made of stones from the Lake District are more common in the north west of the county.

The people of the early mid fourth millennium became so well established that they were able to start building large earthworks. Why this construction began and to what purpose is unclear, however these sites are usually linked to ritual practices by archaeologists. The standing stones such as those from Alphasstone Churchyard which might be genuine prehistoric settings or just a later collection of erratics, and Barrows like those at Birdbrook Hall, Nayland add to this idea of ritual within the landscape. Although a Neolithic date for both these sites has been called into question, the fact remains that monuments begin to appear during this period. This suggests that as people were able to stay in the same place for longer, they took to more permanent displays of their spirituality or ritual behaviour.

It is possible that there is further evidence of ritual from this period in the form of undated long barrows which exist near Hall Farm, Stoke By Nayland and north of Cockey Hatch, Nayland. In fact, a number of the sites which survive as earthworks or cropmarks are currently undated but recorded as barrows, mounds, tumuli or long barrows which are largely terms for the same thing and may well turn out to tie in with the early Neolithic period. Long barrows became popular in the early Neolithic and remained so for several hundred years. Often all that is left is an ovate cropmark

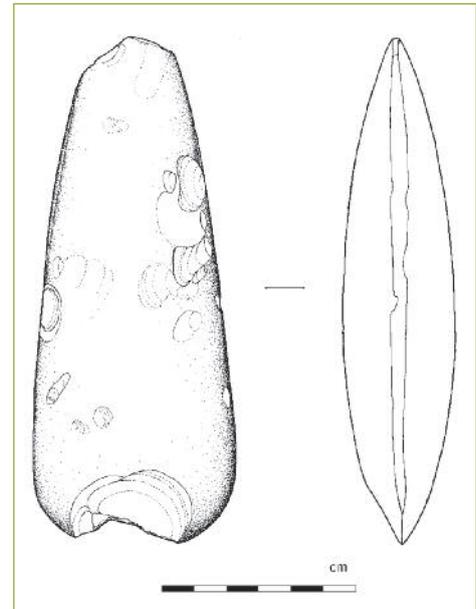


Fig 15, Polished Stone Axe discovered in the Stour valley. (SF-83CF57, drawing courtesy of Donna Wreathall at Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

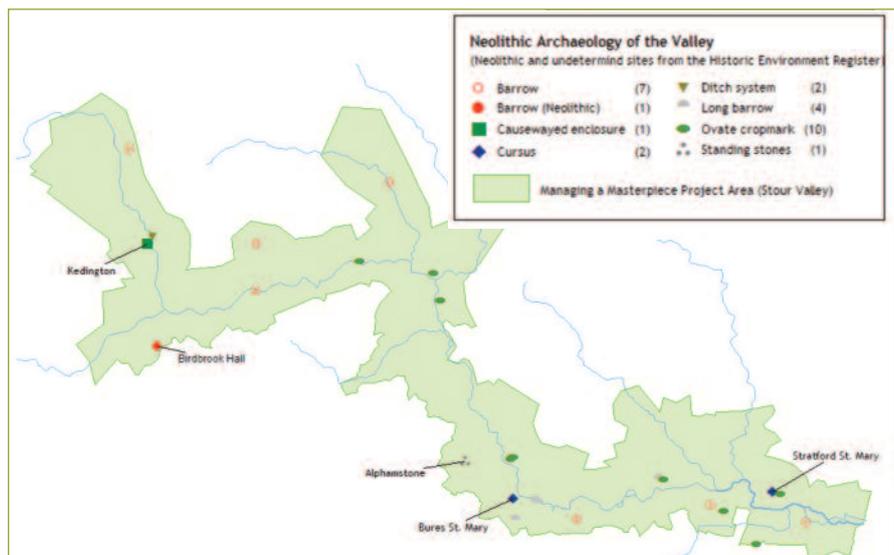


Fig 16, Neolithic Archaeology of the Valley

when a long barrow is ploughed away, although such marks are also interpreted as mortuary enclosures where the dead were taken and laid in state or prepared before burial.

They also built causewayed enclosures such as the one at Kedington, which have been variously interpreted as tribal centres or markets, perhaps utilised in the trade of axe heads, or even ritual centres where the dead are exposed or cremated. There are also two known cursus monuments at Bures St. Mary and Stratford St. Mary. It is possible that there are more and the Historic Environment Records are full of linear features followed by a question mark. Examples exist where cursus monuments overlay a causewayed enclosure, so it is possible these are slightly younger than the monument at Kedington. Similarly little is known about why these linear sites were built and it has been suggested they are some form of ceremonial procession way. The site at Stratford St. Mary is made more interesting by the existence of a hengiform circle at one end. This wooden or earthwork equivalent of a stone circle is as close as we often get in terms of understanding how important wood working was within the ritualistic behaviour of the Neolithic people.

We also see further evidence of ritual in the form of the two ring ditches identified as being round barrows of Neolithic origin. One near Dedham also gives us some of the first evidence of pottery in the valley in the form of a Beaker, although this does actually suggest a slightly later date. However the majority of the ring ditches in the valley will be Bronze Age in origin.



Fig 17, Neolithic pottery. (SF-026FC0, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)



Fig 18, Bronze Age flints. (SF-565677, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

Bronze Age

We know that the first metal tools began to arrive in Britain in the mid to late third millennium BC, first copper then bronze. Yet we also know that flint tools were still commonly used, though it appears from finds made in the Stour Valley that the level of technical quality in manufacture starts to decline. The arrival of metal has also been linked to the arrival of Beaker pottery in the country, a distinctive decorated group of pottery vessels which often utilise geometric designs scored into the surface. These vessels were found across Europe at this time which is more evidence that people, or more likely ideas were travelling across the channel, probably in some form of trading activity.

The number of metal artefacts steadily increases during the Bronze Age, and we can see from the map that there are a significant number of finds in the valley. The number of metal weapons such as spear heads and swords that have been found suggests a secular and possibly tribal system where weapons and status were important. In one hoard alone found in the valley there were 4 swords and 8 socketed axes. Terret rings which are used to guide reins and sometimes form attachments on horse

harness have also been found in the valley, both on their own and in a hoard.

There have also been a large number of finds (18) of tools that are linked to wood working, which demonstrates how important it was within the Bronze Age life. Tools made out of bronze are far more durable than flint, can be repaired when broken or sharpened when they are blunt. We see from the finds we have in the Valley just how important tools made of bronze were.

There are in fact two further hoards not on the map which are just outside the project area in the northern part of the valley, but all the hoards are fairly equidistant and there is no suggestion of metal working centre within the valley. We do see quite a gap in metal finds between the northern and southern halves of the valley. Apart from this gap, we can see what has become the classic



Fig 19, Bronze spearheads. (SF-54C472, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)



Fig 20, Bronze palstaves. (SF-9398D2, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

pattern of evidence within the valley, remaining relatively tightly to the river and typical riverine activity as we see in the archaeology in surrounding river valleys.

It is likely that life still centred on smaller farmsteads, which still continued to be built mainly out of wood and were lived in by extended family groups. These have been found elsewhere to take the form of small roundhouses, as little as 5 metres across with a small porch at the entrance. As farmers they would have grown barley, flax and wheat. They would also have kept cattle, goats, horses, pigs and sheep.

We might infer from the lack of bronze farming tools within the archaeological record that it was not seen as a priority to have such implements and that carving or working with wood was seen as more important. We know from elsewhere in the UK that such implements did exist, but none have been found in the Stour Valley. However, we know that many farming tools such as ploughs would have been made from wood and of course we

could suggest that a bronze axe is a farming tool. But bronze was expensive and it is possible Neolithic technology of flint bladed sickles etc. continued because of the cost of the metal. The ring ditches of the Stour Valley are numerous and there are over 200 covering the valley floor. The majority of the ring ditches are on the northern side of the river and these tend to be concentrated in to relatively dense groups near Stoke by Clare, either side of Cavendish and around Long Melford. There is also a series of groups in the southern part of the valley from Nayland down to Stratford St Mary. Although it is possible some of the smaller ring ditches may represent a round house, the vast majority of large features will be ritual monuments linked to burial or cremation. We can see from the map that there are a number of cremations, the majority being found on the southern side of the river. Interestingly, only cremations have been found in the Stour Valley and no contemporary inhumation burials. Also the method of building monuments such as ring ditches in this

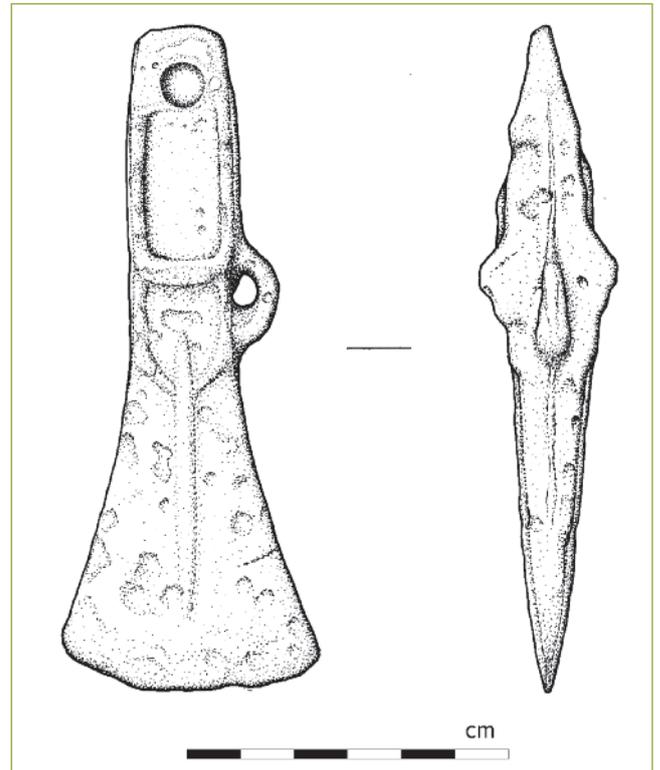


Fig 21, Bronze palstave. (SF-F16375, drawing courtesy of Donna Wreathall at Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

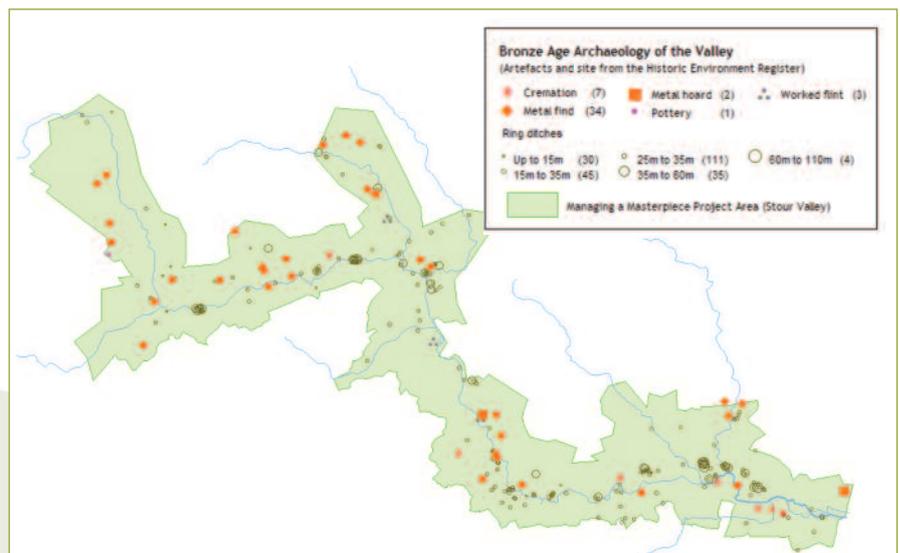


Fig 22, Bronze Age Archaeology of the Valley



Fig 23, Bronze gouge. (SF-10DB52, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

manner would not interfere with pastoral behaviour; their livestock would be able to move about freely. It is likely that marking the landscape in this way was also linked to the idea of ownership.

There is evidence from Belchamp St. Paul which indicates there was a woodland environment at the bottom of the valley with patches of grassland toward the end of the Neolithic period. The ring ditches then constructed show up in the archaeological record as a period of increased mineral alluviation containing charcoal and it has been suggested that they were built before enclosures. There is some evidence that this is true from the way in which some linear enclosures clearly use already existing ring ditches to complete the enclosure. There is also a second period of mineral alluviation at Belchamp St. Paul which seems to support this hypothesis of the ring ditches being used as an existing focus in the landscape which was later used in the division of the landscape into enclosed field systems.

What we see by the end of the Bronze Age is a well developed culture within the Stour Valley which keeps its dead close at hand, and identifies itself with and within the landscape in a typical pattern of riverine activity. We also know they had a well developed trading network and that they appear somewhat distinct from the areas around them.



Fig 24, Bronze Age Beaker. (27 G rey1, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

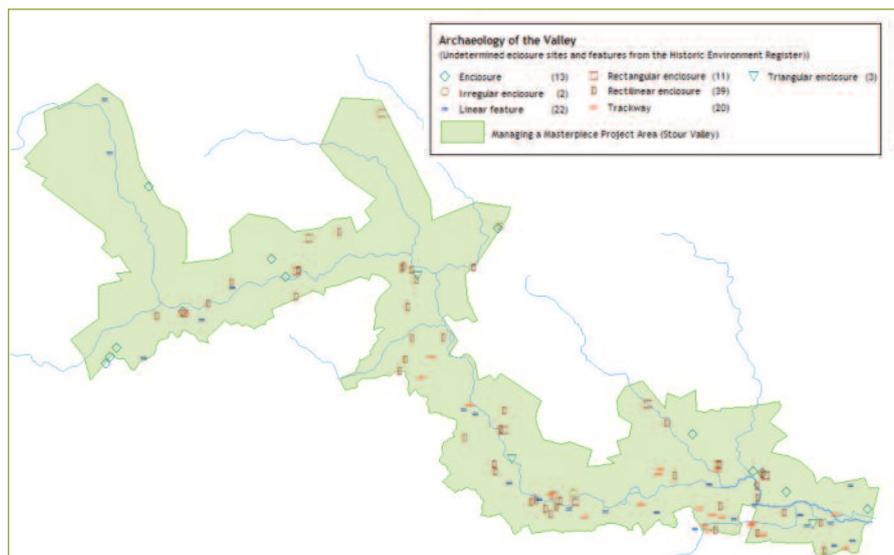


Fig 25, Archaeology of the Valley

Iron Age

During the first millennium BC, probably around 800 BC to 700 BC, the use of iron was introduced to Britain. This of course had huge repercussions for the Bronze Age culture that had evolved to exploit bronze, trade with it and linked it to the status of an individual or tribe. We know that by the end of the Bronze Age that bronze was the primary material used for weapons and tools of all descriptions yet the arrival of iron led to its virtual abandonment for such purposes. This was likely due to its durability and relative abundance compared to bronze.

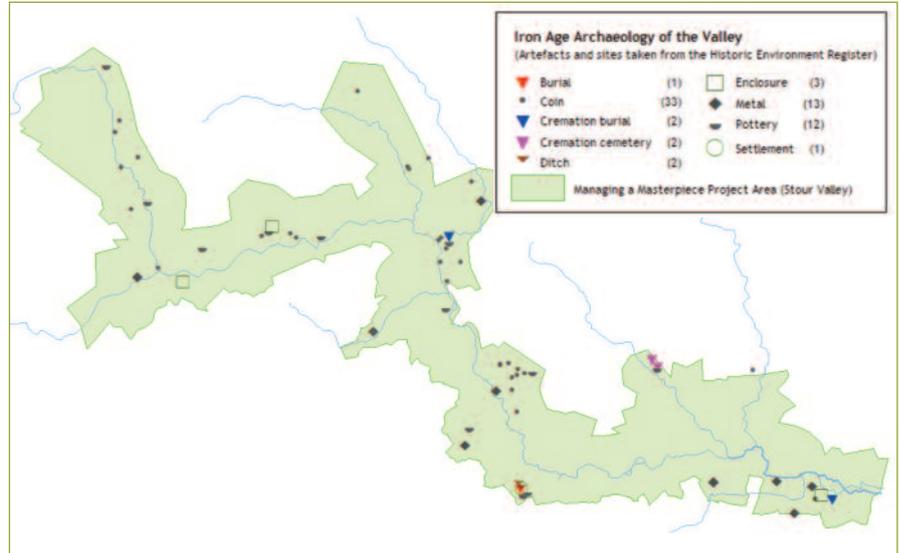


Fig 26, Iron Age Archaeology of the Valley

Apart from the change in technology to the use of iron, there are very few other changes that can be identified in the archaeology of the period. The pottery we see in the Iron Age for example follows a continuous sequence from that which was being made before. It suggests that not only were these the same people, but there was no major change in the population and that the rise of iron was brought on by the transfer of ideas rather than by the wholesale movement of people.

As we have seen from the maps there are many enclosures within the valley which are undetermined in origin. But there are a few which have been dated to the Iron Age and perhaps the most interesting is



Fig 27, Iron Age gold stater of Addedomaros found in the Stour Valley. (SF-AD4148, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

the least certain. The double ditched three hectare enclosure at Clare known as Clare Camp is thought to be Iron Age, but this has not been confirmed as such by excavation. The local area has turned up artefacts such as Iron Age pottery and prehistoric flints and recent excavations at the primary school in Clare found late Bronze/early Iron Age post holes. Considering this latest evidence, it seems probable that the site may well have a prehistoric date.

Fortified sites are rare in Suffolk during this period and only two others are known. This is perhaps an indication of less land space or resource pressure during this time in the Stour Valley and wider Suffolk. We do know the Stour Valley is right in the

middle of the region controlled by the Trinovantes, the Celtic tribe which occupied the area from central Suffolk right down to the Thames estuary. Many such Iron Age enclosures would have been rally points rather than fortresses expected to weather an all out assault and would have been used as storage for harvested crops as well as protected enclosures for livestock. They may equally have had some ritual use. Further afield down in Essex there are a larger number of Iron Age or potential Iron Age sites which exhibit such defensive perimeters. However it is quite possible that many fortified sites would have been a statement of secular power or a demonstration of an areas support for such leadership.

Despite the presence of a possible Iron Age fort in the valley we know that most settlements of the period seem to have been undefended, as is the case throughout most of East Anglia. Some of them were defined by ditches and banks which may have been the case with the settlement discovered near Mount Bures, where a number of Iron Age ditch features have been found in close proximity to the settlement.

We know there were a number of settlements within the area of the Stour Valley, unfortunately most of these fall outside the project area and are not on the map. But there were settlements west of Clare and some in the southern part of Sudbury. It is possible that there were further settlements near Long Melford north of Sudbury, near Little Cornard at Mumford's Wood and further east near Polstead at Bushy Park Wood. Scatters of small finds such as coins and pottery in these areas indicate a fair amount of activity during this period. The strongest evidence comes from the cremation burials at Long Melford and the cremation cemeteries near Polstead. However none of the locations have been confirmed as settlements by excavation.

People during this period continued to live mainly in wooden houses, which were round and generally between 10 and 12 metres in diameter.



Fig 28, Iron Age mini terret ring. (SF1093, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)



Fig 29, Iron Age brooch made from copper alloy in a La Tene style. (SF-3CFB81, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

They continued to remain mainly farmers growing wheat and barley and continued to practice animal husbandry keeping cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and horses. They would have been tied to the river by their need for water for much the same reasons as during the Bronze Age and most Iron Age settlements found in the region have been within a mile of a watercourse. We know from the evidence of horse harness in the form of terret rings and bronze toggles, that people were riding horses. Some finds which display a high level of artistic embellishment, such as those found near Long Melford which exhibit La Tene features, might indicate high status individuals were riding around the valley.

A feature of the Iron Age Stour Valley which is difficult to reconcile is the apparent lack of evidence for people. We do see a number of scatters of pottery throughout the valley but very little has been confirmed in terms of settlement. There have been a number of finds of brooches, horse harness and coins which clearly indicate people of substance were active within the valley. This idea also fits nicely with the potential Iron Age enclosure at Clare, which may be an indication of high status activity. It is also possible that a number of the enclosures and linear features we have already seen on the maps are from this period, but this has not yet been confirmed by excavation.

Oddly the use of iron may actually have led to a situation where artefacts are less likely to be found due to a detection bias and deterioration of the artefacts. The changing funerary practices and a movement away from large monuments also leave less obvious evidence within the valley. There is little doubt that there is more evidence of the activity of people to be found in the Stour Valley during the Iron Age. But in order to find it, it will require investigations which are specifically targeted at features which are likely to be from this period.



Fig 30, Iron Age gold stater of Tasciovanus found in Stour Valley. (SF-4C72C3, picture courtesy of Suffolk County Council Archaeological Service)

Further Reading

If you are interested in finding out more about the prehistory of the Stour Valley or the prehistory of Britain in general a good starting point are some of the books below. Keep in mind some of these will be academic books and quite expensive so please visit your local library, where you will be able to order in most of these books.

Book list

An Historical Atlas of Suffolk - David Dymond, Edward Martin - Suffolk County Council in conjunction with The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History (1989)

Prehistoric and Roman Essex - James Kemble - The History Press (2009)

Prehistoric Britain - Timothy Darvill – Routledge (2010)

Late Quaternary Environmental Change Physical and Human Perspectives - Martin Bell and Michael J C Walker - Longmans Scientific and Technical (2005)

Stone Worlds, Narrative and Reflexivity in Landscape Archaeology - Barbara Bender, Sue Hamilton and Chris Tilley - Left Coast Press (2007)

The Archaeology of Constable Country: the crop-marks of the Stour Valley - Nigel Brown, Debbie Knopp and David Strachan - Essex County Council (2000)

The British Palaeolithic, Human Societies at the Edge of the Pleistocene World - Paul Pettitt and Mark White - Routledge (2012)

The Origins of the British - Stephen Oppenheimer - Robinson (2012)

The Prehistory of Britain and Ireland - Richard Bradley - Cambridge University Press (2007)

Land of the Iceni. the Iron Age in Northern East Anglia - John Davies and Tom Williamson - Centre of East Anglian Studies (1999)

Prehistory Glossary

Acheulian: an archaeological industry of stone tool manufacture associated with early humans during the Lower Palaeolithic era.

Adze: an ancient type of edge tool used for smoothing or carving wood, similar to an axe but with the head mounted perpendicular to the handle.

Alluviation: a process of production of alluvial deposits, which are unconsolidated (not cemented together into a solid rock) soil or sediments, which has been eroded, reshaped by water in some form, and re-deposited in a non-marine setting.

Artefact/s: in archaeology, an artefact is an object recovered by some archaeological endeavour, which may have a cultural interest.

Awl: an awl is a long, pointed spiked tools (in this context in made from stone or bone) which is used to make holes in wood or leather.

Barrow: a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves.

Beaker Pottery: a distinctive style of pottery which appeared in Britain around 2500BC

Bronze Age: a period defined by the use and manufacture locally of bronze. Typical thought of as being from 2100 to 750BC.

Burins: a burin is a special type of lithic flake with a chisel-like edge which prehistoric humans may have used for engraving or for carving wood or bone.

Causewayed: term used to describe an enclosure which has a causeway/s across any enclosure ditch, which permit access to the inside.

Clactonian: an archaeological industry of stone tool manufacture associated with early humans during the Lower Palaeolithic era.

Core/s: a) a core sample is a cylindrical section of (usually) a naturally occurring substance. Most core samples are obtained by drilling with special drills into the substance, for example sediment or rock, with a hollow steel tube called a core drill.

b) a lithic core is a distinctive artefact that results from the practice of lithic reduction or manufacture of flakes.

Cursus: a name given to the large parallel lengths of banks with external ditches which are now understood to be Neolithic.

Devensian: the most recent glacial period or cold stage within the last ice age, occurring during the last years of the Pleistocene, from approximately 110,000 to 10,000 years ago.

Glacial: a glacial period (or alternatively glacial or glaciation) is an interval of time (thousands of years) within an ice age that is marked by colder temperatures and glacier advances. Interglacials, on the other hand, are periods of warmer climate between glacial periods.

Glacial Outwash: is a plain or area of deposits formed of sediments picked up by a glacier and deposited by meltwater or outwash at the terminus of a glacier.

Hafted: hafting is a process by which an artefact, often bone, metal, or stone, is attached to a haft or handle. This makes the artefact more useful by allowing it to be used with more effective leverage.

Hengi-form: the word henge refers to a particular type of earthwork of the Neolithic period, typically consisting of a roughly circular or oval-shaped bank with an internal ditch surrounding a central flat area

of more than 20 m in diameter. A hengi-form monument would be like an ordinary henge except the central flat area is between 5 and 20 m in diameter, they comprise a modest earthwork with a fairly wide outer bank.

Hoard: in archaeology, a hoard, or 'wealth deposit', is a collection of valuable objects or artefacts, sometimes purposely buried in the ground.

Hominid/s: ancient human ancestors.

Ice Sheet: an ice sheet is a mass of glacier ice that covers surrounding terrain and is greater than 50,000 km² (19,000 sq mi), thus also known as continental glacier.

Iron Age: a period defined by the use and manufacture locally of iron, typical thought of as around 750BC to AD43, when the southern half of Britain was invaded by the Romans.

Isotope: isotopes are variants of a particular chemical element, such as carbon-12, carbon-13 and carbon-14, which are three isotopes of the element carbon.

Lithic - is a flake or piece of stone which has been removed from another piece by percussion / striking or by pressure.

Mesolithic: a period known as the middle stone age defined by the end of the last ice age, the Pleistocene, around 9000BC, and continuing through the early part of the Holocene to about 4500 BC.

Neolithic: a period known as the new stone age defined by the coming of farming and lasting from around 4500 to 2100 BC.

Oxygen Isotope Stages: are alternating warm and cool periods in the Earth's paleoclimate, deduced from oxygen isotope data which reflect changes in temperature derived from data from deep sea and ice core samples.

Palaeolithic: a period known as the old stone age defined by the arrival of hominid or ancient people to Britain and lasting from around 1,000,000 to 9000 BC.

Palstave: is a type of early bronze flanged axe-head which is hafted by means of a forked wooden handle kept in place with high, cast flanges and stop bar.

Quern Stones: are stone tools for hand-grinding a wide variety of materials. They were used in pairs. The lower, stationary, stone is called a quern, while the upper mobile stone is called a handstone.

Sickle: is a hand-held agricultural tool with a variously curved blade typically used for harvesting grain crops or cutting succulent forage.

Socketed Axes: bronze axes which have a socket behind the blade which is used to haft the tool and a small loop on the side of most of the socketed axes would have been used to help secure the axe head to the haft more securely.

Stater: was an ancient coin used in various regions of Britain, these are thought to have been modelled after Greek staters, minted elsewhere in ancient Europe.

Terret rings: are small metal loops on horse harness, guiding the reins and preventing them from becoming tangled or snagged.

Tranchet: a term derived from a French word for a chisel-like blade and applied to lithic tools made by removing a flake, known as a tranchet flake, parallel to the final intended cutting edge of the tool which creates a single straight edge as wide as the tool itself.

Tumuli: tumuli is plural, tumulus is singular. Latin term for a mound of earth and stones raised over a grave or graves.

Tundra: is an environment where the tree growth is hindered by low temperatures and short growing seasons.

Vessels: in this context a pottery container, jug, vase or bowl etc.



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The Stour Valley
Landscape Partnership