

A Leicestershire Source for Group XX

by *Philippa J. Bradley*

Group XX was first defined by F.W. Shotton (1959, 141) and at present accounts for 2.7% of all sectioned implements from this country (Clough 1988, 5); therefore the group is of some importance. Axes predominate in Group XX, although a variety of perforated forms, some adzes and one wedge are known (see Table 1). Axes vary from being well formed and finished to cruder examples. However, Clough and Green (1972, 123) noted that Group XX axes appeared to have been produced in a distinct form, the 'Type A', which may perhaps be seen as a characteristic product of the Group. The Type A was produced in two sizes, 19-23cm and 11-13cm long; implying that there was some degree of organisation in the production of Group XX.

Various perforated forms are also known, for example, CAM44, a Thames pestle and DB53, an ovoid mace; the relatively small numbers of these implements would suggest an emphasis on the production of axes. The intractable nature of the Charnian material may have dissuaded further production of perforated implements. Additionally, two Midlands groups, XII and XIV, seem to have produced only perforated implements. The distribution of the products from these two groups overlap, to some extent, with that of Group XX (see Maps 11, 13 and 17 in Clough and Cummins 1988). It is likely therefore that local demand for axes and perforated implements was met from production within the region; Group XX producing the axes and Groups XII and XIV the perforated forms. However, there was still a demand for other groups as can be noted from the distribution maps.

Group XX implements are distributed widely over the country with noticeable concentrations in Derbyshire, East Anglia and the Fen Edge (see Table 2). This distribution supports the theory of a Charnian source for Group XX, although some biases are noticeable. The Derbyshire concentration, for example, may be largely attributable to the collector Thomas Bateman (Moore & Cummins 1974, 6). The majority of implements have come from surface collection, usually informal rather than organised with archaeological considerations in mind, and often from the nineteenth century. However, gradually examples are coming to light through controlled fieldwalking and excavation, for example, fragments of a Group XX axe from excavations at Wigber Low (Cummins 1983, 61). The distribution of Group XX would be consistent with unrestricted hand to hand exchange; a clustering of implements reasonably close to the presumed source in Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire and a gradual falling off in density with distance from this source.

Several Group XX have come from archaeological contexts (see Table 3), some of which are not well dated and some are merely associations with other axes. Again a major problem with all axe studies is the lack of proper provenance information, however, this situation is changing. Perhaps the most interesting context is that of Rams Hill (BER70) where a Group XX axe was recovered from within the sarsen tip in the east terminal of the southern entrance (episode 11) (Bradley & Ellison 1975, 86). The axe had subsequently been used as a hammerstone. Two carbon 14 dates were produced from the layer in which the Group XX was found, 1050±90 bc (Har 231) and 740±70 bc (Har 230); the earlier date was

Table 1
Type of Implements in Group XX

	Axe	Adze	Wedge	Perforated Forms
N81	Square cross-sections	SY69	HAMP76	N138 P-h
L179				N101 A-h
L1265	Butt portion pecked			CAM44 Thames pestle CAM168 Mace?
NOT50	Elliptical cross section. Blade end blunted by use as a pestle (Moore & Cummins 1973, 238)			SX1 Pestle N172 Mace SU134 Mace part perforated NP86 Mace fr. NP103 P-h fr. possibly reworked from an axe (Bamford 1985,92)
SH45/ah	Reused as a hammer, drilled with conical finger holds (half preserved)			DB53 Mace ovoid DB192 Pebble mace fr. Almost certainly reworked from a butt fragment of an axe (Moore & Cummins 1974, 74)
BER70	Reused as a hammerstone			Y901 Mace
Y450	Reworked axe			
N152	Large Type A (Clough & Green 1972, 150)			
S101	Small Type A (Clough & Green 1972, 152)			

(Only unusual or reused axes included)

KEY

P-h Pebble-hammer
A-h Axe-hammer
fr. Fragment less than half

Table 2
Distribution of Group XX Implements

South Western England	5
South Eastern England	5
London and Middlesex	1
East Anglia	28
South East England	11
West Midlands	7
East Midlands	41
Yorkshire	10
Cumbria	1
North Eastern England	1
Isle of Man	1
(Evens, E., Smith, I.F. Wallis, F. S 1972, 242)	
Total	111

(Table 2 based on Table 2 in Clough 1988, 5).

thought to be more consistent with the site (Bradley & Ellison 1975, 87). Tool marks from an axe of this type were discovered on part of the palisade fronting the timber rampart, a phase contemporary with the layer in which the axe was found (Bradley & Ellison 1975, 87). The interpretation of this find is problematic and still open to question. The axe from the Neolithic house at Ronaldsway, Isle of Man (MANX4) was published in 1972 as a Group XX (Evens, Smith and Wallis 1972, 242). In Clough and Cummins (1988 222) the axe is described as a tuff. Group XX axes have been recovered from causewayed enclosures, for example, Windmill Hill and Briar Hill; two barrows, Wigber Low and Cross Platts Plantation; a cairn over a cist, Bicton Circle, Clun and from near the henge of Arbor Low at SK 160636. Axes from these contexts warrant further investigation.

Table 3
Implements from Archaeological Contexts

Type of Implement	Number	Findspot	Other Details	Reference
Axe	BER70	Rams Hill	Dates of 1050±90 bc and 740±70 bc obtained	Bradley & Ellison 1975, 86-87
Axe, fr.	W125	Windmill Hill	Upper fill of a ditch	Smith 1979, 21
Axe	W1368	Windmill Hill	Surface find	Smith 1979, 21
Axe	MANX4	Ronaldsway	Neolithic House. Two Group XXV and an axe of tuff also came from the site	Evens, Smith, & Wallis 1972, 242
Axe	DB90	Cross Platts Plantation	Found in a barrow in the nineteenth century, no precise context	Bateman 1868, 34-5
Axe, fr.	DB255	Wigber Low, Derbyshire	Associated with Late Neolithic Occupation below a barrow Group XX found fragments with Group VI and acid tuff implements.	Cummins 1983, 61
Axe	DB268	Arbor Low	From the general vicinity of the henge	Clough & Cummins 1988, 192
Axe	SH45/ah	Bicton Circle Clun	Group XX found in a cairn over a burial cist	Shotton 1976, 7
Axe	LOND126	Kew, River Thames	A possible ritual deposit (Bradley 1984, 57)	Stanley 1976, 7
P-h	NP103	Briar Hill, Northants	Final fill of the Inner Ditch Briar Hill	Cummins & Moore 1988, 44
Axe	N160	Feltwell	Feltwell is seen as an area of intensive activity in prehistory	Chappell 1987, 316
Axe, fr.	N120	Feltwell		Clough & Cummins 1988, 178-9
Axe, pt	N171	Feltwell		
Axe	LE21	Spring Barrow Lodge, Leicester	Group XX found associated with LE20 an ungrouped tuff	Moore & Cummins 1974, 73

TABLE 3
Implements from Archaeological Contexts

Type of Implement	Number	Findspot	Other Details	Reference
Axe	L178	Saxby, Lincs	A Group XX associated with L177 a Group VI	Cummins & Moore 1973, 255
Axe	L1328	Lea, Lincs.	A Group XX found thirty yards from L1329 a Group VI (Medium)	

KEY

P-h Pebble-hammer
fr. Fragment less than half
pt Part more than half

Shotton (1959, 141) defined Group XX as:

a tuff with most particles under 1mm but a few up to about 3mm, many obviously broken and angular but others sub-rounded. Chiefly of andesine feldspar, somewhat turbid, much less abundant quartz, often with marked strain polarisation, and many rock fragments which are mainly andesite but which include a few quartz porphyry and fine? rhyolite. Secondary epidote is abundantly developed as granules in the feldspathic material.

Further investigation of the petrology of Group XX was carried out (Bradley forthcoming). It is hoped that this work shows the possible ranges of variation within the Charnian material and Group XX. Although no factory was located, several possible source outcrops were examined. Further archaeological research, in the form of detailed field-walking, may provide more information as to the precise location of outcrops which were exploited in prehistory. Little evidence has to date been recovered in the form of waste from the production of implements. However, a Group XX axe, LE21 from the area of Spring Barrow Lodge (c. SK 449179) appears to be unfinished (I am indebted to Peter Liddle for bringing this to my attention). The findspot is quite close to one of the possible source outcrops at Strawberry Hill Plantation (SK 455171). Another Group XX axe (LE23) was found nearby at Charley, Gracedieu (SK 446175). The amount of waste produced by Group XX may have been quite insignificant. Axes seem to have been flaked initially and then pecked and finally ground. With just over one hundred implements known in the group this waste would probably not amount to very much, at any one outcrop, especially if several exploitation sites are envisaged.

Finds of other prehistoric material in the area, for example, an Early Bronze Age burial, pottery and Neolithic and Early Bronze Age pottery from Rothley Sandpit (SK 565123) and Early Bronze Age occupation material from Blackie Myres (SK 563102) may be associated with the exploitation of rock for the production of axes. Further archaeological work would be necessary to support this idea but a prehistoric presence is attested in the area.

The distribution of Group XX products also supports a Charnian source, mainly across the Midlands with a few outliers to the north and south. The complementary distributions of Groups XIV and XII with Groups XX support this source; these three Groups appear to have the region covered for all types of implements, axes and perforated forms. Apart from Groups XIV and XII, other stone implements were produced in the region. For example, a small number of Markfieldite implements have been found, four axes (CAM66,

LOND33, SO91, and W1303) and a part-perforated battle-axe, LE18. Two hornstone bracers (N148 and N149, a part of the latter only survives) from Hockwold-cum-Wilton are made of material similar to hornstone from around the Beacon Hill area, Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire (Clough and Green, 1972, 138). Indicating that there was a well established tradition of stone working in the area.

From the available evidence it would seem reasonable to see the primary source for Group XX as Charnwood Forest, Leicestershire, where there may have been more than one outcrop being exploited at any one time. However, it is possible that similar rocks were exploited in the Lake District and therefore one could argue for another source somewhere in this region. Glacial erratics may also have been used for the production of some axes, although perhaps not in preference to good sources of outcrop material. DB283 may be a waste flake struck from a glacial erratic during the production of a stone axe, this flake is similar but not identical to DB256, Group XX material which was recovered from excavations at Wigber Low, Derbyshire (Clough and Cummins 1988, 46).

Petrology is useful as far as matching source material with stone implements. However, it is a limited technique which cannot provide solutions to all petrological problems. Archaeological techniques must also be employed if the maximum information is to be recovered. All too frequently the context from which the implement was recovered is ignored or treated very generally. Archaeological survey should follow up petrological work so that any remains of exploitation sites can be studied further. Often only substantial production sites such as Great Langdale which are visually impressive, are studied in any detail. Other problems include the modern quarrying away of prehistoric production sites. Despite all of these problems, in some cases further archaeological work may provide useful results, Group XX is one such example. Fieldwalking in the Charnwood area may provide evidence of prehistoric activity in the vicinity of some of the more likely outcrops. Detailed inspection of these outcrops may also yield evidence of axe production in the form of waste. Such a project may be hampered by the nature of the land, however, work in the available cultivated areas could provide extremely interesting results.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Peter Liddle who indicated that LE21 may have been unfinished. Alistair Barclay read through an earlier draft of the paper and provided useful criticism for which I am grateful.

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