

AN INTERVENTION EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE COASTAL SITE AT REDCLIFF, SANDOWN, ISLE OF WIGHT

By KEVIN TROTT

ABSTRACT

During the spring of 1994 a series of cliff falls at Redcliff, Sandown, exposed a small area of stratified deposits and features of Iron Age date. The late Prehistoric activity found supports the continuity of this area as a small scale seasonal settlement or industrial site (Tomalin 1990). A small assemblage of pottery, briquetage and struck flint was recovered, this was excavated from layers and features situated between the modern cliff edge and internal erosion interface.

LOCATION

The site at Redcliff is situated 18 metres north of a 1978 investigation where a early 1st–2nd century AD Roman salt-working flue gully and occupation floor were examined in detail underlying the parade ground within a Victorian Artillery Fort (Tomalin 1990). The present excavation (Fig. 1) is located on a sheer east facing cliff some 45 metres high. This cliff situated within Sandown Bay, is composed of ferruginous sandstone of the Lower Greensand series and can be susceptible to frequent coastal erosion processes.

THE EXCAVATION

A preliminary site visit to Redcliff following a series of cliff falls identified a new area of archaeological activity situated to the north of the 1861 Victorian artillery battery. The archaeology consisted of a series of layers and features exposed within the cliff face and internal erosion interface, situated one metre back from the edge of the present cliff line (Fig. 2).

Phase 1

The earliest level on the site was represented by a thick deposit of light brown sand with mottled red patches of ferruginous staining (context 2012), this layer was resting on the yellow natural sands (context 2013) of the ferruginous lower Greensand beds. The modest assemblage of worked lithics in Context 2012 suggest a Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date.

Phase 2

A thin deposit of medium brown loamy sand (context 2011) containing Middle Iron Age pottery, briquetage and Prehistoric worked lithics represents Phase 2 settlement activity.

Phase 3

The third period of settlement or industrial activity was found within Context 2004. This undulating dark brown sand layer contained a modest assemblage of artefacts in association with three features. A single large post hole (context 2005) some 0.40 metres in diameter and 0.30 metres in depth was excavated within the erosion platform. The fill (2006) contained chalk rubble that can be interpreted as packing stones. Nearby two smaller stake holes were investigated (contexts 2007 and 2009), both were similar in diameter (0.12 m) and depth (0.20 m). All three features penetrated both contexts 2011 and 2012.

Phase 4

A medium brown aeolian sand (context 2003) containing chalk marl sealed phase 1 to 3 layers.

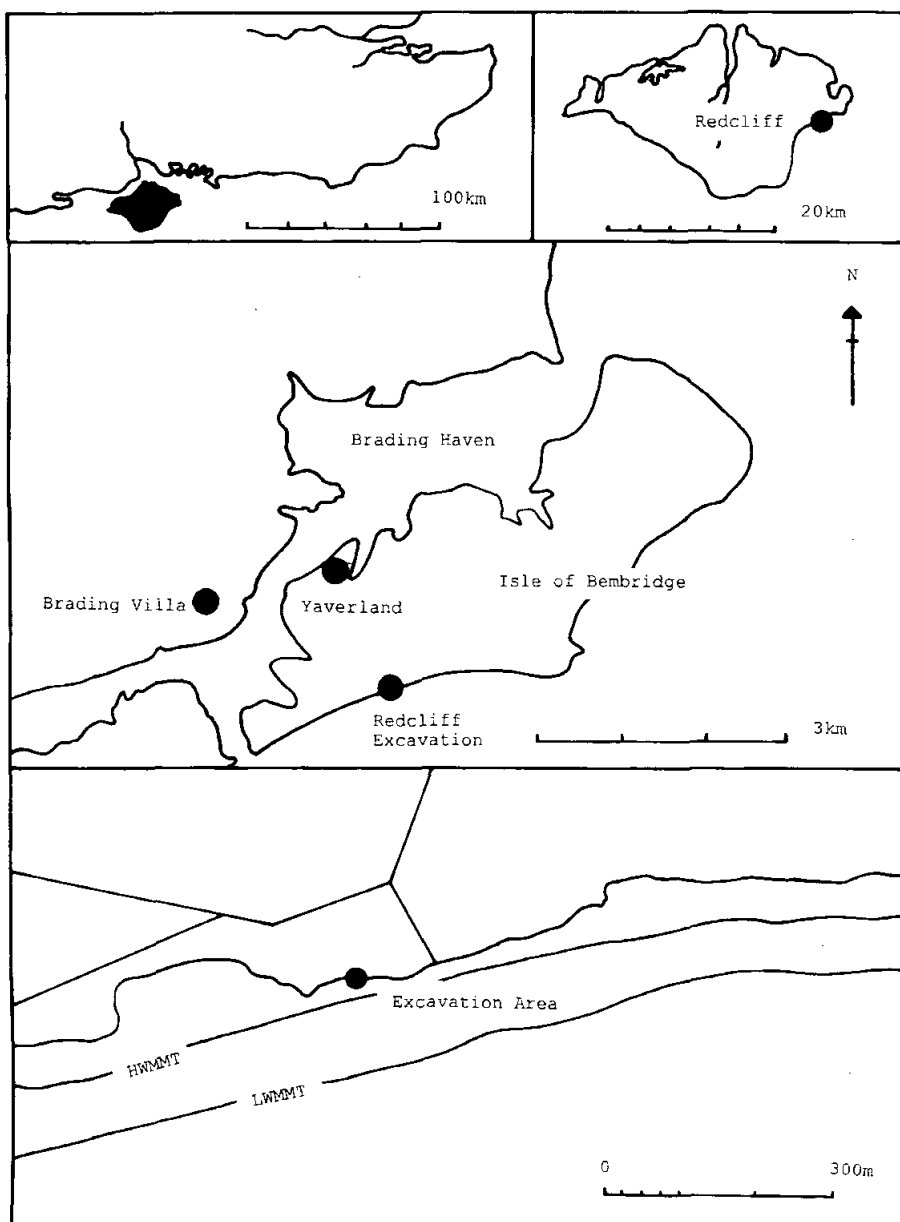


Fig: 1 Site Location

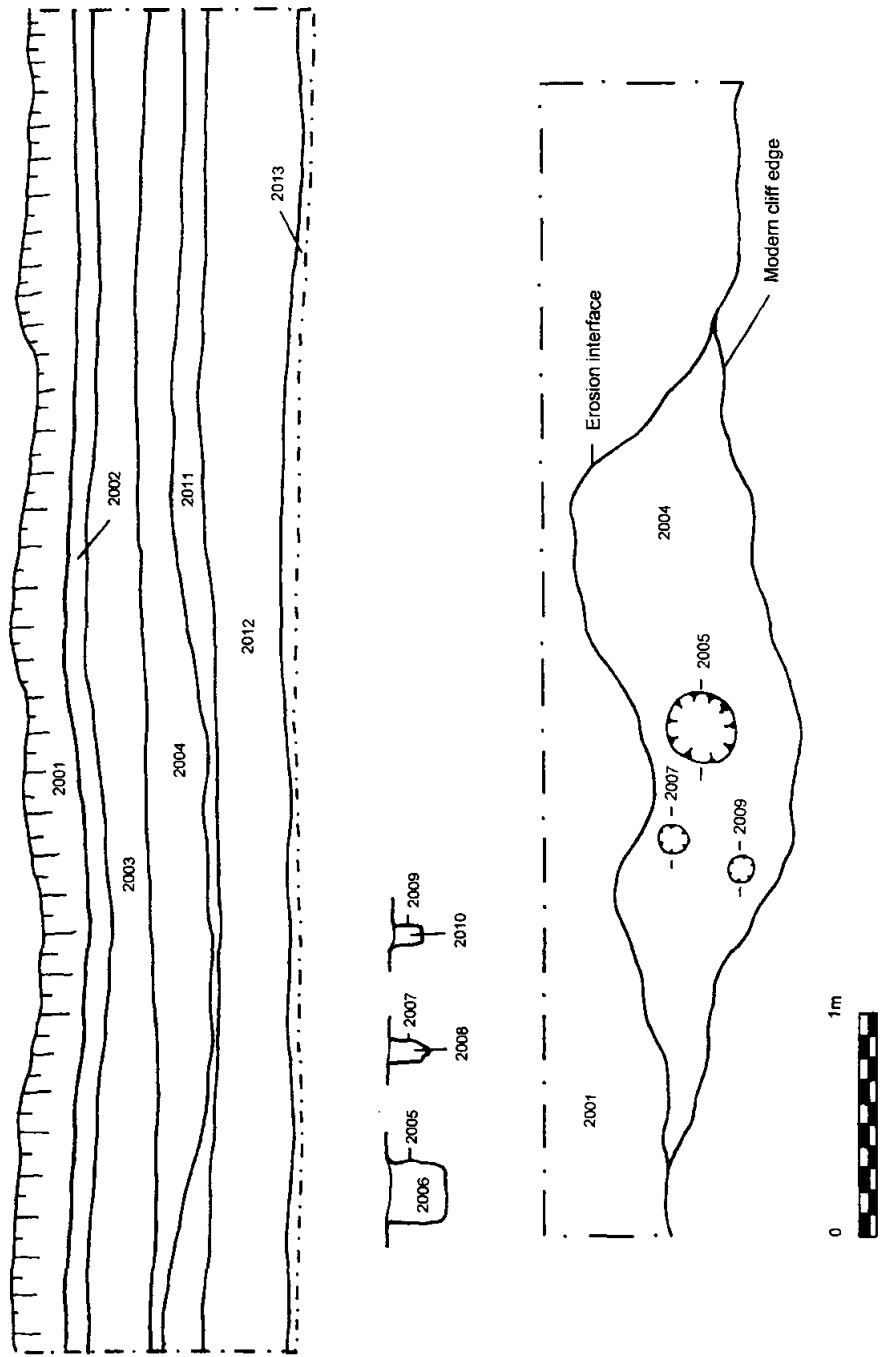


Fig. 2 Archaeological sections and plan of features within the east facing cliff edge

This deposit suggests later agricultural activity on the site and may be contemporary to Context 26 recorded in the 1978 excavation (Tomalin 1990, 93).

Phase 5

A thin layer of light brown aeolian sand (context 2002) accumulated above (2003) this was later sealed by a modern dark brown sandy topsoil (context 2001). Both 2001 and 2002 are undated, but both could be related to Context 2 and 3 that were identified in the 1978 excavation (Tomalin 1990, 94).

THE ARTEFACTS

The Iron Age pottery

Introduction

The excavation produced a total of 48 sherds (725 gm.) of pottery. This material ranged in date between the Middle Bronze Age and the Late Iron Age period.

Methodology

This assemblage from the excavation was not large enough for quantification by Estimated Vessel Equivalents based on rim fragments. Fabrics and inclusions were identified alongside the mean weight per fabric.

Table 1

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Date Range</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>	<i>Weight</i>
2011	BA.1	Closed Form	MBA-LBA	1	5g
2011	MIA.1	Closed Form	MIA	2	10g
2011	MIA.2	Open Form	MIA	1	20g
2011	MIA.2	Jar	MIA	1	35g
2011	MIA.2	Open Form	MIA	2	10g
2011	MIA.2	Handle	MIA	2	110g
2011	MIA.2	Closed Form	MIA	7	115g
2011	MIA.3	Open Form	MIA	1	15g

Fabrics

BA.1. Handmade soapy fabric with profuse up-to 3.00 mm. crushed grog. and up-to 0.50 mm. black and red ironstone filler.

MIA.1. Handmade fabric with profuse up-to 2.00 mm. crushed calcined flint and some up-to 0.50 mm. quartz.

MIA.2. Handmade fabric with profuse up-to 0.20 mm. quartz and moderate up-to 1.00 mm. calcined flint filler.

MIA.3. Soapy handmade fabric with profuse up-to 2.00 mm. crushed grog.

LIA.1. Brown-black Vectis ware variant with profuse up-to 0.50 mm. quartz filler.

LIA.2. Brown-black Vectis ware variant with profuse up-to 0.20 mm. quartz filler.

LIA.3. Durotrigian Black-Burnished ware.

The assemblages

Assemblage 1. From a thin occupation layer (context 2011).

This layer produced 17 sherds (320 gm.) of pottery. The assemblage was too small for quantification by EVEs based on the rim sherds, but a quantified by number and weight of sherds per fabric.

The Middle to Late Bronze Age sherd can probably be regarded as residual in this context. The overwhelming bulk of the sherds are from Fabric MIA.2. with vessels in MIA.1 and MIA.3 being represented in only a few sherds.

Table 2

<i>Context</i>	<i>Fabric</i>	<i>Form</i>	<i>Date Range</i>	<i>No. of Sherds</i>	<i>Weight</i>
2004	MIA.1.	Closed form	MIA	1	5g
2004	MIA.2.	Open form	MIA	2	25g
2004	LIA.1.	Jar	LIA	1	10g
2004	LIA.1.	Closed form	LIA	1	10g
2004	LIA.2.	Jar	LIA	1	20g
2004	LIA.2.	Cooking pot	LIA	5	165g
2004	LIA.2.	Closed form	LIA	13	130g
2004	LIA.3.	Closed form	LIA	8	125g

Fig. 3.1. Saucepan pot rim in a light brown Fabric MIA.3. Ext. rim diameter 170 mm. PRN: 1126. 2011.

Fig. 3.2. Saucepan pot rim in a black Fabric MIA.2. PRN: 1126. 2011.

Fig. 3.3. Bead-rim jar in black Fabric MIA.2. Ext. rim diameter 110 mm. PRN: 1126. 2011.

Fig. 3.4. Handle from a closed vessel in black Fabric MIA.2. PRN: 1126. 2011.

Assemblage. 2. From an occupation layer (2004).

This occupation layer produced 32 sherds (490 gm.) of fresh broken sherds, this suggests that this material is representing an 'in-situ' assemblage that is later in date than Assemblage 1. The dating of this ceramic collection is remarkably similar to a recently excavated coastal midden deposit at Ventnor, situated on the south coast of the Isle of Wight (Trott 2002).

This pottery includes the following pieces:

Fig. 3.6. Bead-rim bowl of Form 8 (Tomalin 1987) with carinated shoulder, in handmade fabric LIA.1. Ext. rim diameter 140 mm. PRN: 1126. 2004.

Fig. 3.7. Everted-rim jar variant of Tomalin Form 10/14 (1987) in handmade Fabric LIA.1. Ext. rim diameter 140 mm. PRN: 1126. 2004.

Fig. 3.8. Everted-rim cooking pot of Tomalin Form 10 (1987) in brown Fabric LIA.2. Ext. rim diameter 230 mm. PRN: 1126.2004.

Assemblage 3. From Post hole 2005.

This feature produced two joining sherds (50 gm.) from a Bead-rim bowl of Tomalin Form 8 (1987) in handmade Fabric LIA.2. (Fig. 3.5). Ext. rim diameter 160 mm. PRN: 1126. 2004.

Assemblage 4. From post hole 2007.

Two sherds of Fabric LIA.2. (5 gm.) were recovered from this feature. These consisted of a body and base sherd from a closed vessel.

Assemblage 5. From Post hole 2009.

Two joining base and body sherds in Fabric LIA.2. (5 gm.) were excavated from this feature.

The Briquetage

The recent intervention excavation at Redcliff produced 513 gm. of briquetage collected from three contexts. The assemblage was in an extremely fragile condition and mainly composed of organic tempered sherds. Analysis of this collection indicated that four fabric types were present.

The Briquetage supports

Eight undiagnostic fragments (fabrics B-D) and two square-profile bar supports in Fabric B. were located in Contexts 2004, 2006 and 2011. The fragments and diagnostic ceramic bars are usually associated with a kiln or oven construction (Poole 1987, 178). The two bars may have once supported evaporating

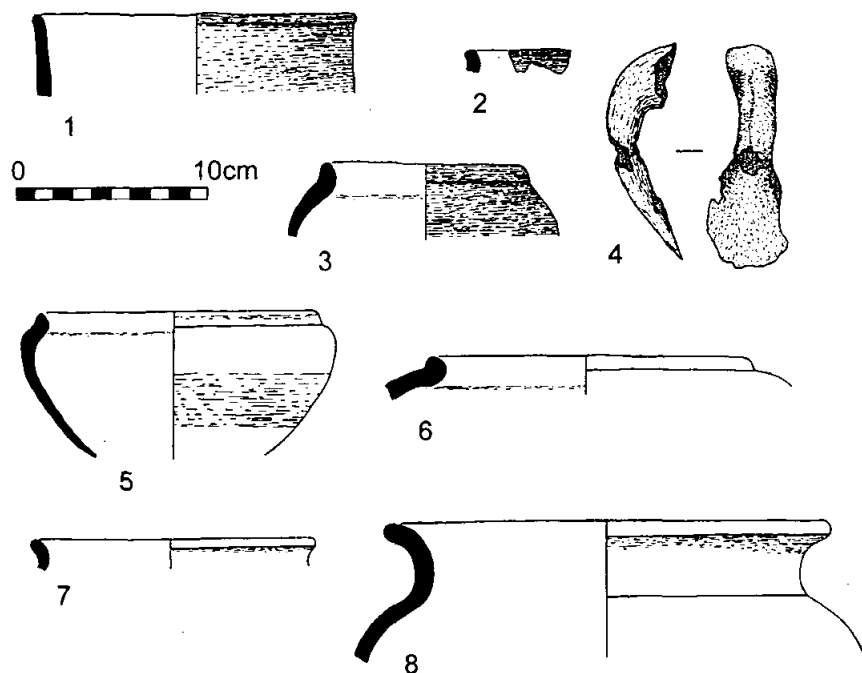


Fig. 3 The Iron Age Pottery

troughs that contained brine.

Fig. 4.1. Briquetage kiln support. PRN: 1126. 2004.

Fig. 4.2. Briquetage Kiln support. PRN: 1126. 2006.

The Briquetage vessels

The large majority of the organic tempered sherds (fabric A) recovered probably represent fragmented ceramic containers in which brine was evaporated or the resulting salt was packed. These vessels are commonly found on salt evaporation sites and would imply that, with the kiln supports, salt was produced at Redcliff in the Iron Age period.

Fig. 4.3. Briquetage vessel in an oxidised dark red Fabric A. PRN: 1126. 2011.

The fabrics

Type A. A coarse, sandy-silty clay with large quantities of chaff impressions up-to 0.4 mm. in size. Chaff seams to be the main temper in this fabric along side fragmented fossil gastropod shells (genus *Tarebia*), both chaff and crushed shell would have made up to 25–50% of the tem-

per. The vast majority of the sherds excavated show signs of contact with high temperatures resulting in a dusky red colour (3/2 2.5YR).

Type B. This fabric is made of clay or coarse, sandy-silty clay with no chaff inclusions present. The colour is an oxidised red (5/6 2.5YR) with creamy streaks of clay. This fabric contains a small amount of well rolled red quartz grains around 2–2.5 mm.

Type C. This fabric is a coarse, sandy-silty clay with no chaff impressions. The surface is oxidised light red (6/8 2.5YR) with a reduced dusky core (3/2 2.5YR).

Type D. This fabric is made of clay or coarse, sandy-silty clay with no chaff impressions. The colour is an oxidised red (5/6 2.5YR) with creamy, streaks of clay. The core is reduced to a dark grey (N3/ 2.5YR).

The animal bone

The survival of bone at Redcliff was poor, due to the high acidity of the soil. Scarcely any quantities

Table 3

<i>Contexts</i>	<i>Fabric A</i>	<i>Fabric B</i>	<i>Fabric C</i>	<i>Fabric D</i>
2004	3 (40 gm.)	6 (178 gm.)	2 (30 gm.)	1 (5 gm.)
2006		2 (160 gm.)		
2011	9 (75 gm.)	4 (25 gm.)		
Total	12 (115 gm.)	12 (363 gm.)	2 (30 gm.)	1 (5 gm.)

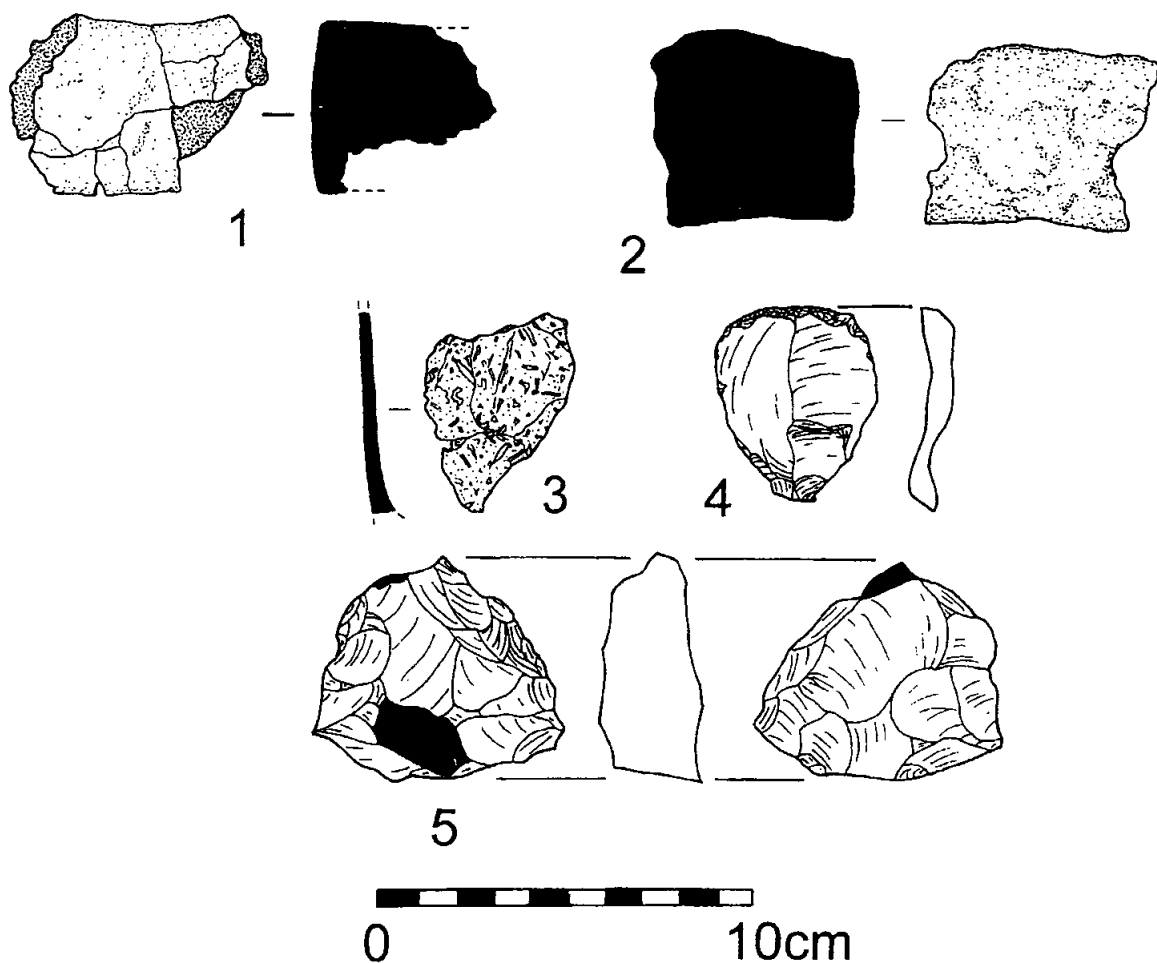


Fig. 4 The Briquetage and worked flint

Table 4

<i>Context</i>	<i>Identification</i>	<i>Comments</i>
2004	Cattle Upper Molar	Three complete examples
2004	Cattle Metatarsal	Proximal end with snapped shaft
2004	Cattle Rib	Gnawed
2004	Sheep Radius	Gnawed
2006	Cattle Upper Molar	Fragment

Table 5

<i>Implements</i>	<i>Context:</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2011</i>	<i>2012</i>
Debitage		1	4	5	19
Unused Flakes		0	3	1	4
Cores		0	0	0	1
Scrapers		0	0	0	1
Total		1	7	6	25

of bone material survived. However a small quantity of bone was collected (110 gm.) from two contexts. The assemblage of bone from Context 2004 and 2006 consisted of the following:

The assemblage from Context 2003

Context 2003: This is a possible Medieval chalk marl deposit. A single small piece ofdebitage was found, it would suggest this artifact is residual.

The marine shells

Four fragmented limpet shells (5 gm.) were recovered from Context 2004. Although the shells were very fragmentary the limpets could be assigned to the *Patella vulgata* species that are commonly found on rocky shores, unlike the sandy beach conditions found at Redcliff today.

The assemblage from Context 2004

Context 2004: This layer is directly under Context 2003 and represents a Late Iron Age occupation area. The worked flint excavated from this layer consists of hard hammer struckdebitage and both soft and hard hammer struck flakes. The broad dimensions of this flint assemblage suggests residual artifacts of Neolithic date.

The worked lithics

A total of 39 worked lithics have been recovered from four separate contexts (Table 5) at Redcliff. Only one context produced more than ten pieces of flint. As these assemblages are small they offer little quantitative data and will be briefly summarised.

The assemblage from Contexts 2011

Context 2011: This Middle Iron Age layer produced a single waste flake and a small assemblage of soft and hard hammer struckdebitage fragments. The small collection of worked lithics is residual and may derive from Context 2012 that is sealed by this layer (2011).

The assemblage from Context 2012

Context 2012: This thick layer was preserved by Context 2011 and produced a total of 25 worked pieces (Table 5).

Waste Material: The vast majority of this assemblage consisted of debitage in association with four hard hammer struck flakes and a single core, all produced on chalk downland flint. A good proportion of the assemblage have cortex present and the size and broad shape of the flakes may suggest a later prehistoric date. Most of the debitage was produced using a hard hammer technique.

Implements

Flake Core: A single large core (weight 52 grams) with broad flake removal scars can be attributed to the Neolithic/Bronze Age period. The core has four platforms suggesting it was worked in a rotational movement. (Fig. 4.5)

End Scraper: A single end scraper (weight 20 grams) was produced on a broad flake of local chalk downland flint. Retouch is abrupt on the distal edge and broad flake removal scars are present on the dorsal surface. This tool fits well typologically with scrapers of the Late Neolithic period. (Fig. 4.4)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The small intervention excavation at Redcliff has added to our knowledge about the continuity of settlement at this location. These new findings are best viewed as a continuation of earlier work (Tomalin 1990) and general on-going site monitoring.

The modest assemblage of flint debitage and worked lithics excavated from layer 2012 can be viewed as an extension of the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age settlement that is situated in this location (Tomalin 1990, 92–93).

During the 1978 excavations at Redcliff a small collection of Middle Iron Age sherds of saucepan pot character were residually found within an Early Roman salt-working flue gully. These particular pottery fragments were recovered from Contexts 28, 50 & 51. The sherds suggested that a possible Iron Age settlement pre dating the early

Roman occupation could be located in the Redcliff environs.

In recent years a small collection of Flint tempered pot sherds, Dressel 1B amphora fragments and glass beads have been collected from a large erosion platform (Context 64) situated to the south of the present site. This material became exposed on the wind-blown surface, as it eroded from its relevant stratified layer or feature within Tomalin's excavation Area B.

The recent exposure of stratified layers at Redcliff indicate the probable location for an Iron Age coastal settlement. The small assemblage of Middle Iron Age ceramics and Briquetage excavated from Context 2011 would suggest some form of settlement or industrial salt producing site is situated in this area.

The Middle Iron Age occupation of this site continued well into the Late Iron Age period, this was proven in the finding of an occupation floor (2004) and subsequent post hole features (2006, 2007 & 2009). These features produced a modest assemblage of local Vectis ware and locally imported Durotrigian ceramics, alongside fragments of briquetage and domestic waste.

The location of the coastal settlement site at Redcliff can be found situated on a high area of unstable land adjacent to Sandown Bay. The Bay would have been the attraction to the Iron Age inhabitants if they were involved with coastal trade and the seasonal production of salt, either for local consumption or for a wider consumer market.

The excavations at this site has shown conclusive evidence for the production of salt at Redcliff during the Middle Iron Age, and continuing well into the Early Romano-British period (Tomalin 1990).

At present the archaeological evidence prevents us suggesting that this was a permanent coastal settlement site as the rate of coastal erosion may have destroyed a much larger proportion of this archaeological site. Another factor to consider is the recent discovery in 2001 of a large Iron Age Promontory Hillfort site at Yaverland (PRN 3353). The new findings at Yaverland are currently being assessed by the author, but this site is situated approximately 2 km to the north-west of the Redcliff site (Trott in preparation).

In view of the current archaeological data at

Yaverland the Redcliff site could be best considered at present, as a peripheral coastal settlement that is situated within a localised territory or estate. The suggestion of a localised territory or estate into which Redcliff can be viewed is answered in its location and proximity on 'the Isle of Bembridge'.

The settlement at Redcliff and the nearby Yaverland Hillfort site are located on the Isle of Bembridge. This small area of land was once separated from the mainland of the Isle of Wight by a tidal inlet. This inlet was later reclaimed in the Medieval period and turned over to pasture and marshland.

The site at Redcliff during the Iron Age period may have had separate territorial land holding unit based on either tribal or locational separation from

the mainland bulk of the Isle of Wight. The Hillfort site at Yaverland would have had a number of peripheral small industrial areas or zones like Redcliff that were best centred for the exploitation of natural resources. These resources could be used to supplement a insular coastal Island community that was a focus for the permanent settlement/trading activities centered around the coastal Promontory Hillfort of Yaverland and the Brading Haven inlet and also the Eastern Yar tributaries.

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Author: Kevin Trott, Graig Ddu, Llanthony, Monmouthshire, NP7 7 NW

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