

# An Upper Palaeolithic assemblage from Howburn Farm, South Lanarkshire

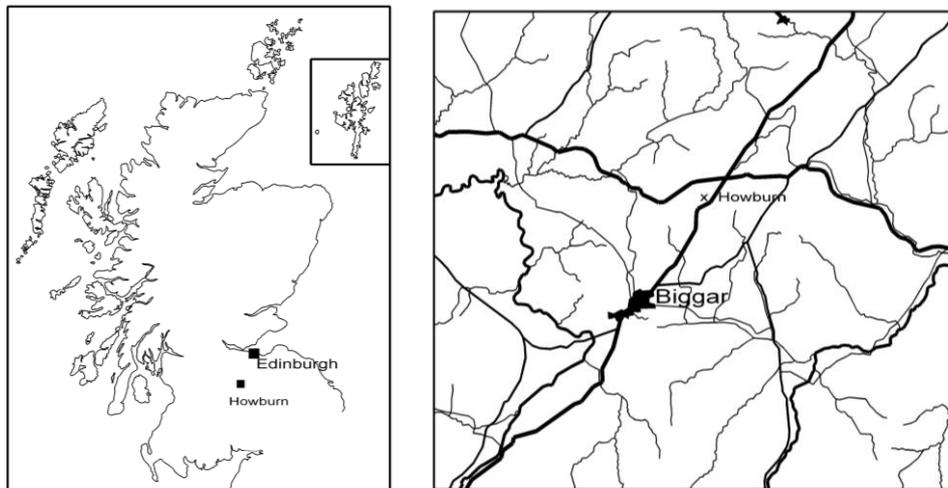
*Torben Bjarke Ballin*

*LITHIC RESEARCH, Stirlingshire*

Funding from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and other sources, enabled detailed analysis of the 2009 assemblage from Howburn and the completion of a comprehensive database catalogue.

In 2006, Biggar Archaeology Group (BAG), directed by Tam Ward, carried out an excavation at Howburn Farm, near Biggar, South Lanarkshire, and the voluntary group recovered an unusual lithic assemblage. Due to the inclusion of much so-called Yorkshire flint, the *c.* 1,100 lithics were initially thought to be of a Late Neolithic date, but cursory examination of the finds by the present author and Alan Saville, Senior Curator at National Museums Scotland, revealed the presence of much earlier diagnostic pieces, and they suggested an Early Mesolithic, or even Upper Palaeolithic date.

*Fig. 1a-b. The location of the site, north-east of Biggar.*



To increase the number of diagnostic elements, and to clarify site chronology in general, it was proposed to carry out supplementary excavations in the area. Another season's hard work (2009) by the BAG resulted in the excavation of two new trenches (Trench I 2009 and Trench II), one of which represents an extension of the initial trench (Trench I 2006), whereas the other trench represents exploration of other parts of the terrace. Trench I 2009 yielded *c.* 1,300 additional lithics, and Trench II *c.* 2,600. In total, the early prehistoric finds from the terrace at Howburn Farm now numbered *c.* 5,000 pieces.

Close scrutiny of the collection by Torben Ballin and Alan Saville revealed a fairly homogeneous assemblage, in terms of raw material preferences and typo-technological ele-

ments, and although the finds undoubtedly include artefacts from the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods, the bulk of the assemblage is certainly Upper Palaeolithic. In typological terms, the Upper Palaeolithic material is composed largely of 1) tanged points, supplemented by backed points and fragments; 2) scrapers, many of which are based on regular blades; and 3) burins. In addition there are some truncated pieces and various forms of piercers.

In the Upper Palaeolithic of NW Europe, tanged points are known from several contexts, but the 30 pieces from Howburn clearly belong to the Hamburgian Havelte phase. Havelte points are characterized by having an asymmetrical tang, which was formed mostly by ‘pro-pellar’ retouch (ie, one lateral side retouched from the dorsal face, and the other from the ventral face), and many tangs are associated with a ‘notch-and-spur’ feature to facilitate hafting. The collection includes 70 blade-scrapers, some of which are equipped with a working-edge at either end. The frequently acute scraper-edge of these implements sets the pieces apart from blade-scrapers from later periods. A total of 34 burins define this assemblage as unique in a Scottish context, as for example Scottish Mesolithic sites rarely yield more than a few burins, and the tool type is generally absent from post-Mesolithic locations. Thirty-six truncated pieces probably include various forms of knives as well as fragments of points. A small group of piercing implements include a handful of so-called *Zinken* (asymmetrical piercers only found in Hamburgian contexts), and equal numbers of traditional piercers and so-called *becs* (robust Palaeolithic piercers).

*Figs 2-4. Typical Hamburgian tanged points (2-3 with ‘notch-and-spur’).*



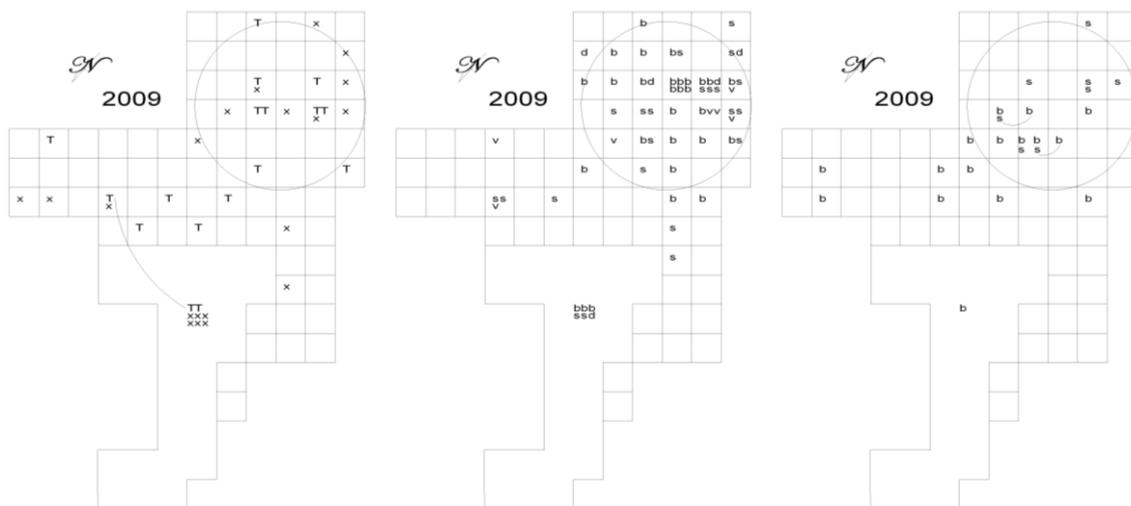
*Figs 5-7. A double blade-scraper, a multiple burin, and a cylindrical blade-core.*



The technological approach followed by the Howburn settlers is distinct, and although single-platform cores are present at the site, opposed-platform technique seems to have been the preferred approach. Most cores are rather squat cylindrical specimens, but there are also several slender cylindrical cores, similar to those found in Hamburgian contexts on the Continent. However, the most diagnostic technological element is the site's so-called *en eperon* blades. The *en eperon* technique provides cores with fine platform faceting, and blades struck off these cores have a notable spur at the proximal end. Although this approach has been noted in connection with Continental Hamburgian sites, it is mainly associated with sites from contemporary Magdalenian and Creswellian industries.

The site includes a number of lithic concentrations, but one is particularly interesting, as it appears to be almost devoid of later intrusive elements. Where most other concentrations include finds in different raw materials, as well as Mesolithic and Neolithic stray finds, the concentration in the southern part of Trench I 2009 almost exclusively consists of flint artefacts, and the diagnostic implements form an oval cluster. It is thought that this concentration may have been formed within a late Hamburgian tent, and there are spatial similarities between this concentration and assumed Hamburgian tent concentrations in southern Denmark.

Fig. 8. Possible Late Hamburgian tent structure in the corner of Trench I 2009: a) points; b) scrapers, and c) burins. The distribution of burins and burin spalls indicates that burins may have been produced inside the tent but used outside.



The presence of Havelte points, and the application of the *en eperon* technique, both indicate a date at the end of the Hamburgian period, between c. 12,300-11,900 BP. Usually, this period is associated with Late Glacial nomadic reindeer-hunters, which would explain the raw material composition of the assemblage. Most probably, these people followed reindeer herds on their yearly cycle, from Scotland, through north-east England, and possibly onto the then dry parts of the North Sea, the 'Doggerland', and back, and flint, as well as various forms of chert may have been picked up along the way. However, a deeper understanding of these groups, their material culture, technology, economy and ideology relies on the discovery of further Upper Palaeolithic sites in northern Britain. For now, the settlers from Howburn Farm

should first and foremost be celebrated as some of the earliest pioneer settlers in recently deglaciated northern Britain.

The Howburn post-excavation project was sponsored by the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Historic Scotland, National Museums Scotland, and the Robert Kiln Trust. Interim reports have appeared in *Lithics*, *British Archaeology*, *Current Archaeology*, and the *Oxford Archaeological Journal*. The analyses funded by the Society's grant will form part of the final publication of the 2006-2009 work at Howburn, which is currently in active preparation. The artefact photos in this summary are courtesy of Tam Ward, BAG.