

Brislington Community Museum News

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News & events

As this is our first issue, and the group has been working behind the scenes to set up the basic structures of the museum, we don't have a great deal of actual news to report. But we didn't want that to stand in the way of getting the ball rolling and showcasing this, our new platform for sharing our interests in all aspects not only of local history but community art and science.

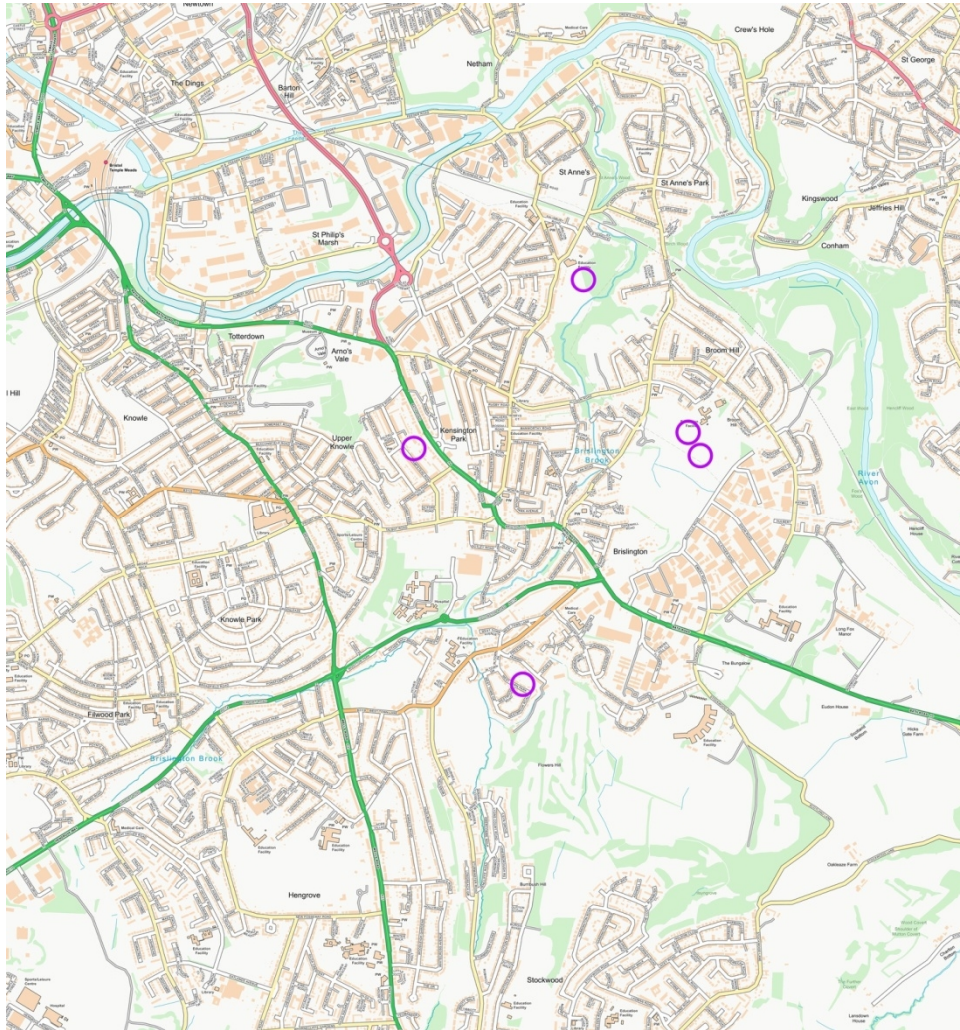
The launch of this publication itself is the biggest news we've had for a while. For one thing, every issue will be deposited with the British Library, and we'll be including updates on as many of our museum exhibits as possible. That means all the care and attention we put into producing them will be available for researchers of the future, no matter what happens to our website or organisation.

Inevitably we'll be showcasing some old and familiar exhibits, but our understanding of them develops over time, so this is an opportunity to present the latest ideas and insights. We've also begun a program of adding more links between our online exhibits, providing context and suggesting avenues for further research (for example there's now a bibliography in our library wing).

We hope you'll feel comfortable contributing to this periodical - all styles of input are welcome, and all proficiencies too. We all start somewhere and it's the journey that's important - we're all on a learning curve of some sort, so rest assured there'll be people to assist every step of the way.

Ken Taylor, chair

Our Neolithic exhibits



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This map shows the distribution of the Neolithic finds so far contributed to our museum (as usual, we don't have the finds, only permission to exhibit photographs etc). All are flint and found in Brislington, Bristol.

The most northerly is the small blade described elsewhere in this volume (100729a1).

The Kensington Park find site has a half-moon

scraper (100808a1) and a scatter of waste flakes (110521a2).

The most northerly of the Broomhill sites is a leaf-shaped arrowhead (220207a1) and to its south is a tool that had been reused several times for different purposes (220212a1).

The most southerly, West Town, find is a flint blade (110730a1).

Multi-purpose flint

A prehistoric flint tool found in December 2021 in a field at the proposed housing development at Brislington Meadows shows that once it was no longer fit for its primary purpose, it was changed into an entirely different type of tool - not once, but twice. The Stone Age was not a throw-away culture.

Around 5,000 years ago, a local resident struck a precise blow on a large chunk of flint, and a sliver of black stone split away from the core. Around 10cm in length, 2 wide, and just 0.5 thick, this was a double-edged knife blade as sharp as a modern razor.

Flint doesn't occur naturally in this area - and this quality comes from a chalk geology (probably Salisbury Plain), so they'd had to barter something valuable to get hold of the nodule of rock.

Kurt Adams, Finds Liaison Officer (Portable Antiquities Scheme, Bristol Museum & Art Gallery), estimated its age to around



3,500 BCE to 2,500 - the later part of the New Stone Age (Neolithic).

It takes concentration to knap flint successfully, so while they were in the mood, they'd probably have struck several more at least, putting the blades carefully aside for later use. These were everyday items, but black flint like this is high quality and wasn't cheap, so when eventually this one broke, it wasn't thrown away but examined to see how it could best be re-used (lower grade grey flint was often so riddled with flaws that options for re-use were severely limited).

The back of the blade is smooth and gently curved, while the front has a distinctive central ridge that runs the full length down to the pointed tip - this ridge gives the stone some much needed strength, as thin flint is brittle as glass. The shape is useful in another important way - when the blade happens to break diagonally across the width, as this one did (about 3cms from the base), each of the sharp edges ends in a point - one on each part of the broken tool.

From one tool, two more emerge - not cutting edges, but sharp points that can pierce animal skins for sewing clothes, like an awl. When held, the thumb firmly presses into the smooth back while the fore- and middle-fingers rest either side of the central ridge - it's the familiar grip we use when we hold a pen.

The identification of this awl as part of a sewing kit is bolstered by another feature that's characteristic of this sort of tool. Just up from its point, the sharp edge is flaked with tiny notches that nibble into the stone forming a concave crescent of serrations. Sewing thread or even sinew rasped sharply against this miniature saw-toothed sickle could be severed as readily as cutting it with a pair of scissors.

Eventually the tip of the awl broke, but even then this veteran tool saw further use. The original break across the blade was sharp enough to use as a flat-edged scraper and it has tell-tale signs of wear. To grip it tightly the middle finger curls against the back, the thumb rests against the ridge, and the forefinger needs to press down right on the original edge of the blade (the section

just above the crescent cutter was carefully blunted for comfort).

Every last part of this little stone was used intensively - whatever they'd paid the merchant who'd brought the original nodule, they clearly got their money's worth. Even after three uses, it's likely the remnant was put aside in case hard times one day brought it back into play (happily for our farming family, it appears that day never came).

Flint blades like this were literally cutting-edge technology in the Neolithic, and the people that used them were among the first to live in one place and farm the land (their predecessors had favoured a more nomadic lifestyle). Such relics of these earliest settled inhabitants of Brislington are not uncommon, which suggests the community here was thriving and it's likely that Brislington has been populated continuously ever since.

It's poetically apt that this tool made by a farmer was found in a spot that's still an open field. It's extremely unlikely that its sibling, the other piece of the broken blade, will ever be found, but such things can happen - it would be fascinating to know just how it too was refashioned into an item that also was probably useful more than once.

Our Stone Age flint knapper knew that each of the blades - chips off the old block - would go through its own sequence of changes before being laid to rest. As day follows night, it's part of the natural cycle to find and creatively resurrect the value in something broken. It took our craftsperson a good deal of time and practise to master each of the techniques required to produce an array of different tools, and this single relic is a powerful testament to this unknown Brisling's imagination, ingenuity and skill.

Before meeting with Kurt Adams, this flint featured on page 6 of the Bristol Times insert in the Bristol Post on 04-01-2022.

Find spot: Brislington Meadows. ST 62607102
Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor
Text written by Ken Taylor in 2022
Photographer: Ken Taylor
Acquisition number: 220212a1

Half moon scraper



This Neolithic flint tool was unearthed in a back garden during the 2003 Time Team Big Dig, and was mentioned on one of the weekend's shows. Both sides of the sharp edge bear the scars where many shallow flakes have been detached by wear during use. The curved edge is up to 9mm in thickness, and was carefully knapped to provide an even surface.

The small patch of brown and white is all that was left, when the tool was made, of the original

surface or cortex of the flint nodule. Depending on its size and quality, a nodule could provide material for dozens of tools.

Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington. ST 612710

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Text written by Ken Taylor, in 2010

Photographer: Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 100808a1

Waste flakes



These tiny pieces of flint are the waste products of tool production. As a flint nodule is struck repeatedly, many fragments are broken off, some large enough to form into small tools, some much too small to be of any practical use. Gradually, by removing the unwanted flint, the tool is sculpted into its desired shape.

Such tiny pieces of stone are easily overlooked, but a scatter of these would always be left behind at the site where a flint tool was made. Sometimes they can be pieced back together like a 3D jigsaw.

A scatter like this, which contains flakes from many different flint nodules (characteristically having different colours, textures, etc), may indicate a settlement site, where many tools were fashioned over many years. These are likely to date to the Neolithic period of the Stone Age.

Find spot: Hampstead Road, Brislington. ST 612710

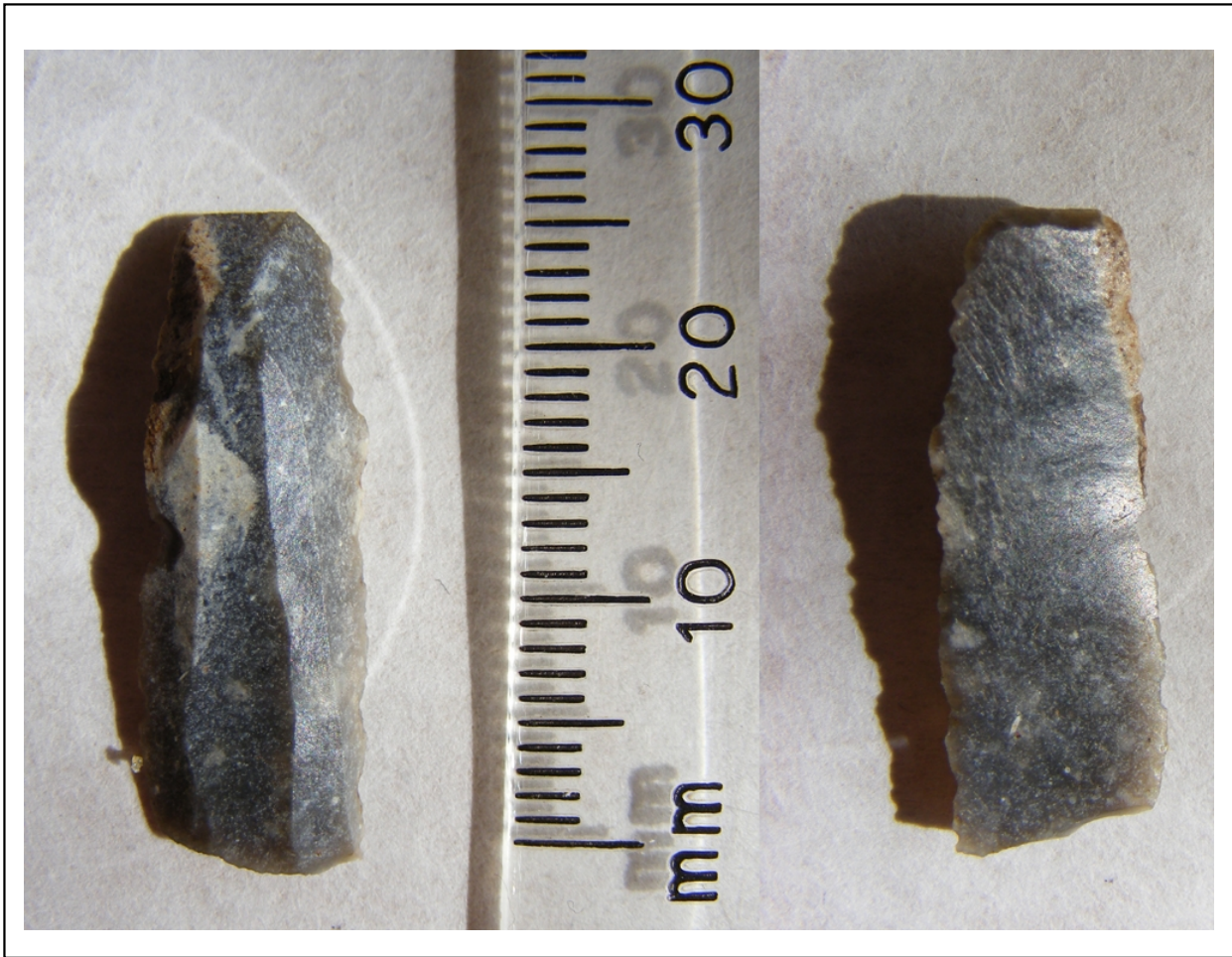
Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Text written by Ken Taylor, in 2011

Photographer: Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 110521a2

Flint blade (narrow)



The long, roughly parallel ridges on one side show that this flint blade was knapped from a prepared flint core. It's small to medium sized, at 25mm in length. It probably dates to the Neolithic period.

Having been found on land owned by Bristol City Council, this was handed in to Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.

This ancient artefact was found on the surface of the ground in Nightingale Valley, Brislington, Bristol, beside the footpath connecting Wick

Road and the Packhorse Bridge.

Such items may be found almost anywhere in Brislington & St Anne's, so they're not exactly rare, but each is unique and tells us something new and important about the people who lived here before us.

Find spot: Nightingale Valley, ST 62087193

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Text written by Ken Taylor, in 2010

Photographer: Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 100729a1.

Flint blade (broad)



This Neolithic flint blade was struck from a carefully prepared nodule that had been shaped to have a roughly flat surface called a striking platform. By hitting the edge of this platform with another stone (or other tough implement such as an antler) at just the right angle, a sliver of flint is detached from the core. With skill and a little luck, this sliver will be a useful blade with two edges.

The parallel lines are scars left by other, smaller blades being struck off. By continually working

around the outside of the core (which becomes somewhat cylindrical in the process), a single nodule of flint can produce dozens of razor-sharp blades (each analogous to a modern penknife).

Find spot: 35 West Town Park, Brislington, Bristol.
ST 61806996

Exhibit contributed by Jonathan Rowe

Text written by Ken Taylor, in 2011

Photographer: Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 110730a1

Arrowhead



When found along a traditional footpath at Brislington Meadows, this flint was assumed to be a waste flake, which is a discarded fragment of stone knapped from the tool being made. Such finds are important archaeologically as they are evidence that Stone Age people were making tools at the site (other waste flakes have been found in these fields). The flake is so thin (no more than 2mm) that the stone is actually translucent.

Its size and shape was immediately reminiscent of a Neolithic arrowhead, but the similarity was disregarded because this flake lacks a pointed tip. Naturally, many arrowheads lose their tips during use, but this flake is so thin toward that place that it could never have had a sharp point.

Closer examination, however, reversed that negative appraisal. An accumulation of details - each insignificant on its own - elevated this flint from the status of waste flake to a leaf-shaped arrowhead (the characteristic form of a Neolithic arrowhead).

It's tempting to try place the various stages in the creation of this iconic tool into chronological sequence - such story-telling isn't great science of course, but it is at least plausible, and offers a way to get into the mind of the person who made it.

Our speculation may begin with somebody purposefully striking a lump of flint with a hammer stone (our tool has a small but characteristic bulb of percussion). This process inevitably generated many waste flakes, some of which could have usefully sharp edges or points. The practiced eye of our flint knapper spotted unusual potential in one of the flakes.

Such a thin flake is easy to snap between finger and thumb. And a clean, straight break near the 'pointed' end was probably made in that way. Although seemingly casual, the break created just the right angle of an arrowhead tip. The same keen eye snapped a second piece away, which brought the body of the arrowhead curving back toward the barb (the part inserted into the wooden shaft of the arrow). The game was on -

the flake could easily have been ruined by internal flaws causing the breaks to go in the wrong direction, but luck or skill was with our knapper - the shape was good.

To perfect the shape, three areas of the perimeter required attention, and tiny flakes have been taken from each of these, rounding the flake to give it a smooth, wafer thin cutting edge. But what of the missing tip? The flake here was naturally razor sharp, and with the weight of the shaft behind it, would have had no difficulty penetrating the feathers of a bird, or the skin of another small animal.

The usual leaf-shaped arrowhead is a faceted work of art, requiring great skill, concentration,

and considerable time to create (so its loss would be a significant event). This lucky piece may have been seen as something of a 'throw away' item, having taken just a few minutes to craft. Perhaps it was given to a child to practise their archery skills. It could even have been made by a child from discarded scraps left by an adult making something else. A small chip in the tip suggests it was once fired at least once from a bow.

Find spot: ST62597119, near the top of the field called Pool Close in the Tithe map.

Exhibit contributed by Ken Taylor

Text written by Ken Taylor

Photographer: Ken Taylor

Acquisition number: 220207a1

Acquisition numbers

Our eight-element references are not merely random digits but contain the date on which the exhibit was catalogued for our museum.

The first two digits are the year in the first century of the third millennium CE (Common Era). Our first ever acquisition has the code 100729a1, so it was catalogued in the year 2010.

The next two digits are the month in that year, and the next two are the date in that month.

Finally we have an alphanumeric code that tells us this exhibit's place among all those catalogued

on that date. The code was designed to be reasonably robust, and to allow visits to view and catalogue people's collections - some of which may have hundreds of items. This code allow for cataloguing 260 exhibits in a day, which is probably plenty.

So, our first acquisition was catalogued on July 29 2010, and naturally it was the very first to be catalogued that day. It was actually the only item to be catalogued that day, but had there been another it would have been acquisition number 100729a2.

Contact us

Contact us - info@brislington.org - to enquire about any of our community museum's exhibits, or to suggest ideas to add to or improve them. Please use the same email address to contribute feedback or items for inclusion in this publication.

We aim to produce this quarterly, but our schedule is flexible so we can react quickly to inform our members of changes or important events. It also means during quiet times we can focus our attention on other matters such as out-reach activities and sourcing and researching new exhibits.