# 9. The Worked Stone

by Fiona Roe

## 9.1 Introduction

The small collection of stone objects amounts to three pieces of quern, three unworked fragments of quern material and two spindlewhorls, nearly all of which came from Iron Age contexts (Table 9.1). The quern materials are imported from outside the immediate area. In addition to these eight finds, 643 stone slingstones were recorded (Table 9.2), while burnt stone came from sixteen contexts (Table 9.3).

## 9.2 Querns

One small, burnt fragment of quernstone, which has long lost any working traces, is Upper Old Red Sandstone, with a source area some 88.5km (55 miles) west of Segsbury in the Forest of Dean or south Wales. This was retrieved from context (1685) (the lowest fill of pit [1312]), associated with residual early Iron Age pottery, though the upper pit layers contained middle Iron Age pottery. There is some evidence that Old Red Sandstone was already coming into the area by the late Bronze Age, since another burnt quern fragment was found at Tower Hill (Roe 2003b). Old Red Sandstone saddle querns were also found in early to middle Iron Age contexts at Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt (Bradley, Roe and Wait 2005). Evidence to date suggests that this later prehistoric use of Old Red Sandstone was taking place mainly on sites either near or to the south of the Thames.

Three worked fragments of quernstone, together with one unworked piece of quern material, are all Lower Greensand from around Culham, a source area by the Thames some 18km north east from Segsbury. This particular greensand is distinguished by the presence of highly polished quartz pebbles in a calcareous matrix. Two of the worked fragments (SF's 17 and 18, not illustrated) came from fill (1595) of early Iron Age pit [1345], and probably belong to the same piece, either the upper or lower stone of a saddle quern. The third worked fragment came from an upper fill (1709) of a probable early Iron Age pit [1337] with some late Bronze Age residual pottery. An unworked fragment of this distinctive quern material came from fill (4020) of Iron Age posthole [4019].

Saddle querns made from Culham greensand were widely used in Oxfordshire, particularly on sites on the Thames gravels (Roe forthcoming). The use of this quernstone was not an Iron Age innovation, since fragments have been found in both Neolithic and middle Bronze Age contexts at Corporation Farm, Abingdon (unpublished), and from a Bronze Age context at Yarnton (Roe in preparation). The distribution of most of these querns gives the impression that river transport was being used to deliver them to sites along the Thames and its tributaries (Roe 2000, 189), and some of these querns were already reaching Reading by the late Bronze Age (Roe forthcoming). Segsbury is one of only two sites not situated close to rivers that are now known to have received these querns. The other site, Blewburton Hill, is also an Iron Age hillfort on the chalk downs (Collins 1947, 21 & 1953, 49; Reading Museum). However, these sites are only six and eleven miles from Culham, so there would have been no great difficulty in procuring this variety of quernstone. Nevertheless, the local sarsen would have been a more obvious choice of corn grinding material at both these sites. There may have been an ulterior motive behind the acquisition of greensand from Culham, very possibly linked to the exchange of other commodities.

The non-discovery of sarsen querns at Segsbury must be fortuitous, since it is very probable that they were being used here. Sarsen was freely available in the area (Osborne White 1907, 120), and was used in some quantity in the rampart construction. The apparent absence of these querns could partly be explained by the fact that sarsen does not always survive very well, particularly when broken into small pieces and burnt. However sarsen querns are known from various other sites on the Ridgeway, including a large collection of fragments preserved in two late Bronze Age pits on Tower Hill (Roe 2003b). Only one sarsen quern fragment was found at White Horse Hill, Uffington (Roe 2003a), perhaps because of the limited nature of the excavations. The twenty one fragments of "slightly dished mealing stones" found during the 1896 excavations at Liddington Castle (Passmore 1914, 579) do not appear to have been kept, but a single sarsen saddle quern has survived in the collections of the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

### 9.3 Spindlewhorls

Both of the spindlewhorls are made from chalk, and each came from an Iron Age pit, one (SF 5) from lower fill (1412) of pit [1009], the other (SF 59) from lower fill (1728) of pit [1019]. Both are crudely made (Figures 9.1.1 and 9.1.2), as was a chalk spindlewhorl from White Horse Hill, Uffington (Roe**,** 2003a - 184 & fig. 9.10.2). Similar spindlewhorls are common on chalkland sites, including Liddington Castle (Passmore 1914, 584 & Plate IV, 2), and must often have been made quite casually, whenever the need arose.

### 9.4 Slingstones

The most prolific stone finds from Segsbury were slingstones, including 544 from Iron Age pit [1009], which was not far from the postulated entrance to the main roundhouse in Trench 1, gully [1003]. Twenty were found in the ditch terminal near the east entrance to the hillfort in Trench 6, fill (6003). Another 13 contexts of varied type, such as pits, ditch fills, rampart fill, an ancient soil horizon and topsoil produced a further 64 slingstones. These are quite varied in size, with an average weight of 47.7g. Nearly all are flint pebbles, with one of quartzite and two of other materials, which would be consistent with a source in the Clay-with-Flints (Osborne White 1907, 81). The flint pebbles all have 'clatter markings', which gives them a distinctive crackled outer surface. Similar pebbles were recorded at White Horse Hill, Uffington (Roe 2003a), and also during the 1976 excavations at Liddington Castle, where most were found behind the rampart (Hirst & Rahtz 1996, 48).

### 9.5 Burnt Stone

The quantity of burnt stone is relatively small, amounting to just over 3kg. It came mainly from occupation areas inside the hillfort, particularly Trench 1. Most of this burnt stone is sarsen, and especially the fine-grained, cherty variety that was unsuitable for grinding purposes.

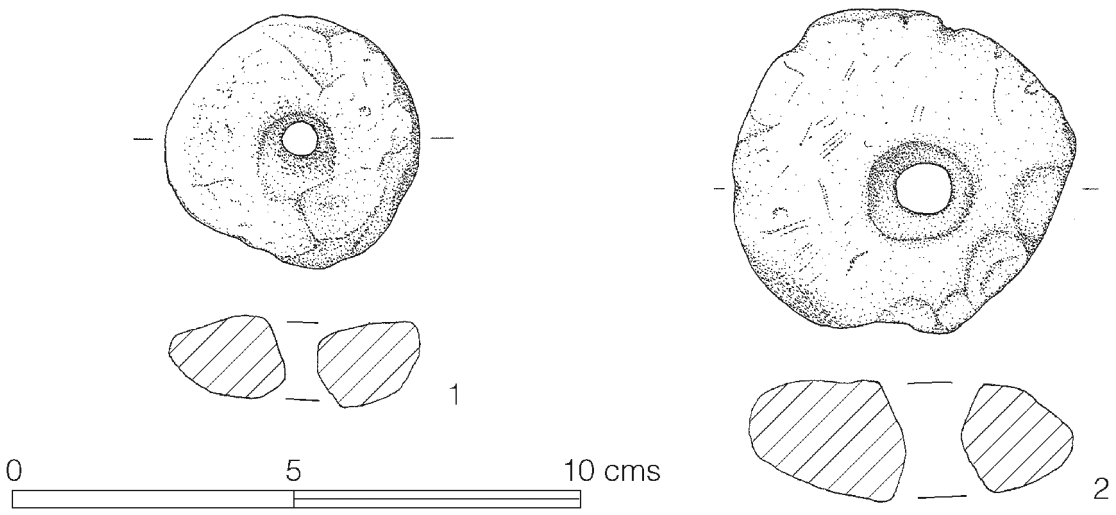


***Fig. 9.1 Two chalk spindlewhorls: (1) SF 5 (context 1412); (2) SF 59 (context 1728) at 3:4 scale (drawn by Alison Wilkins)***

**Table 9.1 - Catalogue of worked stone**

| Year | Trench | Context | SF | Description | Stone | Context type | Phase by pottery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 96 | 1 | (1412) | 5 | Complete **spindlewhorl**, unevenly shaped, hour-glass hole; diam 45 mm, th 18 mm, 30g | Chalk | Lower fill of pit [1009] | EIA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1595) | 17 | Fragment from **saddle quern or rubber**, possible grinding surface, could be part of SF 18; now 104 x 69 x 63 mm, 640 g | Lower Greensand from Culham area | An upper fill of large pit [1345] | EIA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1595) | 18 | Fragment from **saddle quern or rubber**, flat grinding surface, could be part of SF 17; now 128 x 99 x 84 mm, 1.650 kg | Lower Greensand from Culham area | An upper fill of large pit [1345] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1685) | - | Two burnt fragments, unworked, but a quern material; 37g | Upper Old Red Sandstone, pebbly sandstone | Lowest fill of pit [1312] | EIA/MIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1709) | - | Fragment with worked surface, probably from **quern or rubber**; 51 x 46 x 51 mm, 135 g | Lower Greensand from Culham area | Upper fill of pit [1337] | LBA/EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1728) | 59 | **Spindlewhorl**, nearly complete, unevenly shaped, hour-glass hole; diam 61.5 mm, th 20 mm, 40 g | Chalk | A lower fill of pit [1019] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4020) | - | Small fragment, unworked, but a quern material; 5g | Lower Greensand from Culham area | Fill of posthole [4019] | IA |

**Table 9.2 - Catalogue of slingstones**

| Year | Trench | Context | Description | Stone | Context type | Phase by pottery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 96 | 1 | (1010) | 15 pebbles; 1000g | 15 x flint | Top fill of pit [1009] | EIA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1412) | 544 pebbles; 36,000g<br>(sample of 29x only kept) | 28 x flint (of kept sample)<br>1 x quartzite | Lower fill of pit [1009] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1685) | 3 pebbles; 115g | 3 x flint | Lower fill of large pit [1312] | EIA/MIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1708) | 1 pebble; 25g | 1 x flint | Lower fill of large pit [1343] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1729) | 1 pebble; 20g | 1 x flint | Middle fill of large pit [1336] | EIA |
| SC 96 | 3 | (3006) | 4 pebbles; 340g | 4 x flint | Upper rampart fill | IA |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4000) | 5 pebbles; 210g | 5 x flint | Topsoil | - |
| SC 97 | 5 | (5000) | 19 pebbles; 610g | 19 x flint | Topsoil | - |
| SC 97 | 6 | (6003) | 20 pebbles; 690g | 20 x flint | Upper fill of ditch terminal [6002] | IA/R |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7085) | 10 pebbles; 370g | 8 x flint<br>1 x sandstone<br>1 x uncertain | Middle fill of pit [7007] | IA |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7319) | 2 pebbles; 70g | 2 x flint | Ancient subsoil layer beneath rampart | LBA/EIA |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7610) | 4 pebbles; 200g | 4 x flint | An upper fill of ditch [7607] outside rampart | |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7612) | 5 pebbles; 125 g | 5 x flint | An upper fill of ditch [7607] outside rampart | IA |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7613) | 3 pebbles; 210g | 3 x flint | A middle fill of ditch [7607] | IA |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7614) | 2 pebbles; 90g | 2 x flint | A middle fill of ditch [7607] | |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7619) | 5 pebbles; 115g | 5 x flint | A lower fill of ditch [7607] | IA |

## Table 9.3 – catalogue of burnt stone

| Year | Trench | Context | Description | Stone | Context type | Phase by pottery |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| SC 97 | 1 | (1002) | 2 fragments pebble; 50g | Flint | Top fill of pit [1001] | EIA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1170) | 1 fragment pebble; 140g | Sarsen, fine-grained | Top fill of pit [1169] | MIA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1446) | 1 small fragment; 20g | Sarsen, medium-grained | Fill of linear feature [1238] which cuts main roundhouse ditch | IA |
| SC 96 | 1 | (1590) | 1 fragment; 330g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Second down fill of pit [1294] | IA |
| SC 97 | 1 | ( 1684) | 1 fragment pebble; 70g | Sarsen, fine-grained, slightly cherty | Third down fill of pit [1312] | MIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1703) | 1 fragment; 120g | Sarsen, medium-grained | Top fill of pit [1341] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1708) | 1 fragment; 60g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Lower fill of pit [1343] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1712) | 1 fragment; 170g | Flint | Second down fill of pit [1341] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1719) | 2 fragments; 5g & 3g | 1 x flint<br>1 x sarsen, fine-grained | Third down fill of pit [1337] | LBA/EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1720) | 1 fragment; 25g | Sarsen, medium-grained | Lowest fill of pit [1337] | LBA/EIA |
| SC 97 | 1 | (1728) | 1 fragment; 140g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Lower fill of pit [1019] | EIA |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4000) | 1 fragment; 135g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Topsoil layer | |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4000) | 2 small fragments; 5g & 2 g | 1 x sarsen, fine-grained, cherty<br>1 x cherty stone, perhaps from Greensand | Topsoil layer | |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4006) | 1 fragment; 1385g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Top fill of posthole [4005] | IA |
| SC 97 | 4 | (4060) | 1 fragment; 7g | Flint | Top fill of posthole [4059] | IA |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7003) | 1 fragment; 100g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Layer close to rampart | IA/R |
| SC 97 | 7 | (7366) | 1 fragment; 340g | Sarsen, fine-grained, cherty | Soil fill of rear sarsen revetment of rampart | IA |

## Bibliography

BRADLEY, P., ROE, F. and WAIT, G. 2005: 'Stone' in Lambrick G. and Allen T. G. *Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt: the development of a prehistoric and Romano-British community* (Oxford, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph 21)

COLLINS, A.E.P. 1947: Excavations on Blewburton Hill, 1947 *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* 50, 4-29

COLLINS, A.E.P. 1953: Excavations on Blewburton Hill, 1948–1949 *Berkshire Archaeological Journal* 53, 21-64

HIRST, S. and RAHTZ, P. 1996: Liddington Castle and the Battle of Badon: Excavations and Research 1976 *Archaeological Journal* 153, 1-59

OSBORNE WHITE, H.J. 1907: *The Geology of the Country around Hungerford and Newbury, Explanation of Sheet 267* Memoir of the Geological Survey of England and Wales (London, H.M.S.O.)

PASSMORE, A. D. 1914: Liddington Castle (Camp) *Wiltshire Archaeological Magazine* 13, 576-584

ROE, F. 2000: 'The Worked Stone' in Cook, S. and Hayden, C., Prehistoric and Roman Settlement near Heyford Road, Steeple Aston, Oxfordshire *Oxoniensia* 65, 189-190

ROE, F. 2003a: 'Worked Stone' in Miles, D., Palmer, S., Lock, G., Gosden, C. and Cromarty, A.M., *Uffington White Horse Hill and its Landscape: Investigations at White Horse Hill, Uffington, 1989–95, and Tower Hill, Ashbury, 1993–4* (Oxford, Oxford Archaeology and Oxford University School of Archaeology, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No.18) 183-186

ROE, F. 2003b: 'Stone Artefacts' in Miles, D., Palmer, S., Lock, G., Gosden, C. and Cromarty, A.M., *Uffington White Horse Hill and its Landscape: Investigations at White Horse Hill, Uffington, 1989–95, and Tower Hill, Ashbury, 1993–4* (Oxford, Oxford Archaeology and Oxford University School of Archaeology, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No.18) 233-235

ROE, F. forthcoming: 'Worked Stone' in Hey, G. and Timby, J., *Yarnton: Iron Age and Roman settlement and landscape* (Oxford, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph)

ROE, F. in preparation: 'Worked Stone' in Hey, G, Bell, C. and Dennis, C., *Yarnton: Neolithic and Bronze Age settlement and landscape* (Oxford, Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph)