Quaternary Newsletter
Book Review
QRA Quaternary Research Association

50 STONE AGE FINDS BY KEVIN LEAHY

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With such a wealth of artefacts to choose from, it's a wonder that Kevin Leahy could narrow it down to just fifty for this book, which is a part of the "50 finds" series from the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS). Leahy worked at the North Lincolnshire Museum for close to three decades so readers can expect to be delighted by artefacts and sites from the area, especially in the latter half of the book. The book itself is a slim reference volume that promises an overview of a broad 'Stone Age', from the Lower Palaeolithic to Early Bronze Age, during which stone tools were routinely used in Britain.

The book is split into ten numbered sections: (1) The Raw Materials: Flint and Stone/Rock, (2) The Discovery of the Stone Ages, (3) The Lower Palaeolithic, 850,000 BP (and earlier), (4) Changing Climates: The Ice Ages, (5) The Mesolithic Period, 10,000-4000 BC, (6) The Range of Lithic Implements That You are Likely to Find, (7) The Neolithic Period, c.4000-2500 BC, (8) The Late Neolithic Period, c. 3300-2500 BC, (9) The Early Bronze Age, 2450-1300 BC, and (10) Recognising Worked Flints – with accompanying Introduction, Chronology, and Further Reading chapters

Throughout the book are the promised '50 finds' accompanied by an additional ninety high resolution illustrations and photographs of artefacts and sites alike (selected examples below). I was expecting this book to be exclusively stone tools, so it was intriguing to see pottery and stone jewellery included in the '50 finds'. Alongside the artefacts presented was discussion of how changing climate led to changes in Britain's palaeogeography over the last c.850,000 years, humans' responses to both palaeogeography and climate, and the impacts of Neolithic (and later) settlement on the wider landscape – all of which will no doubt be of interest to readers of the QN. Also helpful for those interested in archaeology within Quaternary research is discussion of what happens when artefacts appear outside of their usual context, e.g. the eolith debate, Lower Palaeolithic handaxes in Roman temples, and seventeenth century CE gunflints – all referenced and beautifully illustrated. The final chapter being dedicated to recognising intentional worked stone versus natural breaks capped this off well, and I suspect will be a helpful resource for those new to this type of 'treasure hunting'.

The outline set out in 'Chronology' is followed in the numbered chapters, with brief interludes in chapters 4 and 6. These interludes, whilst not unwelcome, are sometimes at odds with the rest of the text and lead to information feeling as though it's somewhat out of sequence. For example, chapter 4 deals with the chronology and climate fluctuations of the Middle and Late Pleistocene. Whilst this is helpful information, it would have been more helpful as part of the Introduction to put the book's first three numbered chapters in chronological and climatic context. This chapter also includes the Middle and Upper Palaeolithic which would have benefitted from expansion into separate chapters of their own, with additional illustrated artefacts to demonstrate more of the range of artefacts from both periods. Similarly, chapter 6 ('The Range of Lithic Implements That You are Likely to Find') would have been better placed at the end of the book after or as a part of chapter 10 ('Recognising Worked Flints'). Having it in the

middle felt like an interruption to the chronological flow of the rest of the book, which is a shame as it includes several beautiful examples.

Notable when reading the book is the limited finds, space, and detail given to the Palaeolithic compared to later periods. The Lower Palaeolithic (as the longest individual time period in the book) was given just nine pages and three of the '50 finds', the Middle Palaeolithic five pages and one of the '50 finds', and the Upper Palaeolithic six pages and three of the '50 finds'. This is compared to 28 pages and 19 finds given to the Neolithic, and chapter 6 having nine of the '50 finds'. The scope of handaxe variation within the Palaeolithic wasn't discussed or particularly illustrated, outside of bout-coupés being present exclusively in the Middle Palaeolithic. This seemed an oversight given recent work to correlate morphotypology with Marine Isotope Stages (MIS; Bridgland and White, 2014, 2015), the interesting dynamics of periods like MIS 11 with apparently distinct material culture groups (García-Medrano et al., 2022; White et al., 2026), giant handaxes (Dale et al., 2024), and drivers of differences in handaxe form (Shipton and Clarkson, 2015; White et al., 2019; Muller et al. 2025). Similarly, it would have been good to see more mention of the evolving arguments around the timing of and mechanisms behind Levallois (core preparation) emergence (White et al., 2024), and more of the range of Upper Palaeolithic tool types. However, the sites you'd expect are there, with good descriptions of Happisburgh, Boxgrove, and Creswell Crags, which were integrated well into discussions about the wider field. The Clacton spearhead also made an appearance, although wasn't discussed in as much detail as the later Neolithic pottery; bone tools were omitted.

Overall, this book is a well-presented reference guide to an array of tool types and uses of stone covering c.850,000 years. In the context of Quaternary studies, with the level of attention given to later periods, this is a potentially useful companion guide for colleagues whose Holocene sites coincide with archaeological interest, or those who are just looking for an introduction to the field. There are some interesting sites to consider and, in the case of later examples, are accessible and free to visit. The detail on the first c.840,000 years that the book covers is a little sparse, but there's no denying that it is beautifully illustrated (see examples here) and was enjoyable to read through for this review.

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The Portable Antiquities Scheme, Paperback, February 2026, 96 pages, 140 photographs/illustrations, £15.99.



Figure 1: Selected illustrations from the text, reproduced with permission: **(1)** Flint handaxe, c. 650,000B P, Happisburgh, Norfolk, length: 128 mm; **(2)** Late Middle Palaeolithic 'Bout Coupé' handaxe, c. 60,000–40,000 BP, Harting, Sussex, length: 87 mm; **(3)** Flint scraper, c. 2500–800 BC, Ashill, Norfolk, length: 78 mm; **(4)** Polished edge flint knife, 3300–2500 BC, Banham, Norfolk, width: 92 mm ; **(5)** Polished flint axe from Greenstead Green, Essex ; **(6)** Leaf-shaped flint arrowhead, 4000–2200 BC, Cocking, West Sussex, length: 38 mm; **(7)** Early Bronze Age 'barb and tang' arrowhead, 2500–1500 BC, Thames at Wandsworth, London, length: 31 mm; **(8)** Spacer-plate from a jet necklace, 2050–1800 BC, Boughton Monchelsea, Kent, length: 45 mm; **(9)** Late seventeenth century gunflint, Whitwick Leicestershire, length: 31 mm.