

Three stone axes from Newmarket, Isle of Lewis

Joanna Close-Brooks*

In May 1976 Mr and Mrs A Morrison of 100 Newmarket, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis found three stone axes and a flint scraper when cutting peat near Newmarket at c NGR NB 426367 (Ponting 1977). Mrs Morrison reports that the axes were found at the base of the peat and close together as shown in the diagram (fig 1, 5) with the flint below the axes. The position suggests they were buried in a container, perhaps a bag. The find was drawn to my attention by Mr and Mrs G Ponting of Callanish, and through their initiative Mrs Morrison has kindly made the find available for recording. The illustrations are by Miss Helen Jackson.

Dr H Macpherson of the Royal Scottish Museum has kindly identified the axes. They are made from foliated quartzitic gneisses, psammitic rocks which are found widely in Northern Scotland and occur on Lewis. The feldspar minerals in the axes have weathered during their long sojourn in the peat to give white chalky coatings. One axe (fig 1, 2) still retains a slight vestige of polish near the cutting edge. It has a square butt and is 110 mm long. The second axe (fig 1, 3) is more oval in shape, slightly concave in section, and also 110 mm long. The third implement (fig 1, 1) is adze shaped, with an asymmetrical bevel on one side, and a pointed butt. It is concave in section, and 116 mm long. The flint scraper is by contrast quite unpatinated. It is made on a

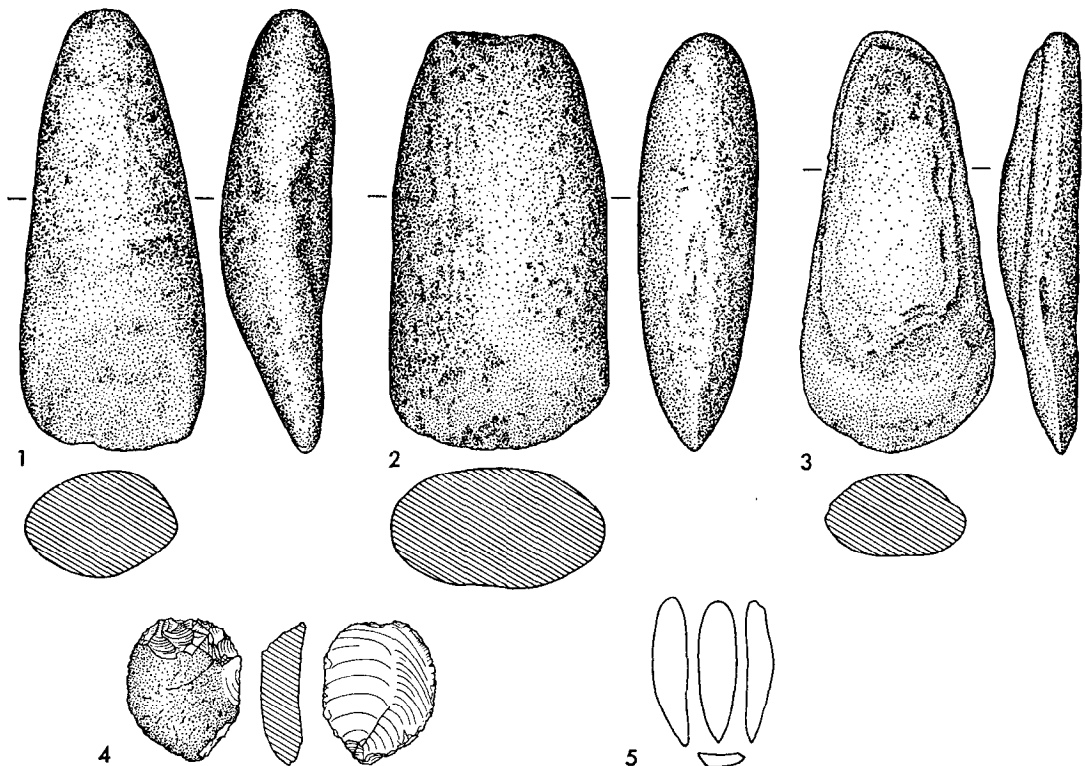


FIG 1 Stone axes and flint scraper from Newmarket, Lewis (Scale 1 : 2 except no 5)

* National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, Queen Street, Edinburgh

primary flake of yellow-brown flint, 36 mm long, with cortex over most of the dorsal surface, and trimmed at one end with rather coarse retouch (fig 1, 4).

Because the surface of the axes is so weathered it is not possible to determine if they are in mint condition or have been used. A few other instances of hoards of axes are known. These include a pair from Glenshee, Angus, apparently in mint condition (Donations 1872, 154; Neish 1872, 174–5), and a group of three from Bogueknowe, Colvend, Stewartry of Kirkcudbright, of which one at least has been used (Donations 1902, 243). Both these hoards may be of Lake District, Group VI stone. There are also at least two hoards from Shetland, both of axes made of local stone, a pair of axes from near Lerwick, 'found together in a moss' (Purchases 1904, 12), and three from Tingwall Glebe (Purchases 1883, 20). Four small axes found together at Fairslacks near Carlops, Peeblesshire have heavily weathered surfaces like the Lewis examples (Purchases 1902, 67). The unused axes may have been in the possession of traders, the used ones must have been personal belongings. Rare groups of jadeite or polished flint axes are also known.

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