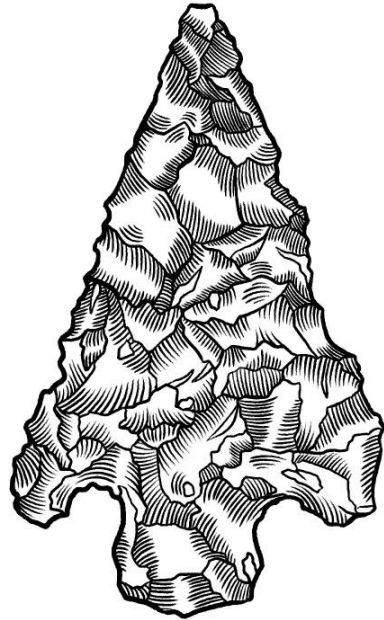


¹Lithics: an overview of a specialism



Tabitha Lawrence 2214078

¹ Left to right: an Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead I found at an excavation in 2022, an archaeological illustration of the arrowhead by E. Strange and a subsequent tattoo of the arrowhead on my right arm.

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Appendix

A copy of the Excel spreadsheet current employed at CAT for lithics analysis.

Identify the key reference and data resources that you use in your specialism to ensure that your work is properly informed, and critically evaluate their accessibility, currency, reliability and relevance. (40%, 3,000 words or equivalent)

Introduction

“stone tools...reflect the fossilised acts and goals of the hominins that created them”

(F.W.F Foulds, 2010)

The quote above summarizes my approach towards lithics. As an early career individual, there have been hindrances and positives using key reference and data resources which either make or break a specialism. In the following evaluation, I hope to explore these and give a true reflection of the impact. I have selected the more standard references for this reflection.

Overview of my current specialism and working practises

My interest in lithics started during university for their aestheticism and uniqueness. During field schools, research digs and my first commercial unit in 2020 I then started finding lithics myself, furthering developing my interest in them (figure one). A key moment was finding two barbed and tanged arrowheads in 2022. In February 2023 I arranged with my then field archaeology manager Adam Wightman to start training in lithics specifically. This started with analysing lithics and creating the reports together. Since then, I have become the primary contact for all lithics within CAT, with me conducting the initial analysis and report to then be proofread by Adam for medium to large assemblages. My practises are informed by my combined experience of lithics and field archaeology, my volunteer roles, my educational pathway and my network within heritage.

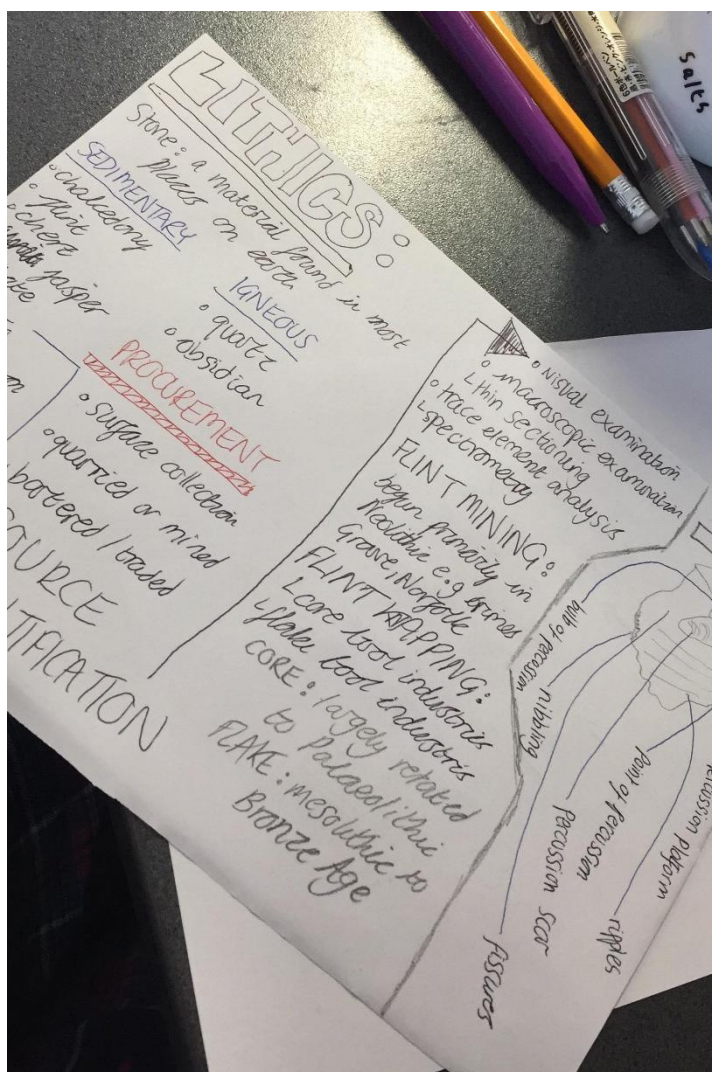


Figure one: a photograph of notes I made in 2018 in university, using random resources from Google. My first key reference resource within my specialism.

Key references`

C. Butler *Prehistoric Flintwork* (2005)

accessibility: I have a paperback copy bought by myself with my own funds. There is a second copy in our office owned by Adam. As far as I am aware there is no digital copy available. This prohibits quick digital searches throughout the book. The glossary is fairly extensive, and the accessibility of text is written in a semi-formal manner with good introductory chapters. The CAT paper copies are well-worn and damaged, but still accessible.

currency: this publication was printed in 2005 and had had no revisions since publication. The currency for the time was moderately comprehensive, as shown in the references

spanning at least six decades of different resources across the UK. A revision of the book would be worthwhile due to newer research. The chapter on Iron Age flintwork is short in evidence and explanation. Since the book's publication there has been several works on Iron Age knapping including Humphrey (2004) and McLaren (2009) (2010) (2011). It is also minimal on British-made gunflint technology and analysis, and once again more recent research has been conducted (Ballin, 2012, Whittaker, 2015).

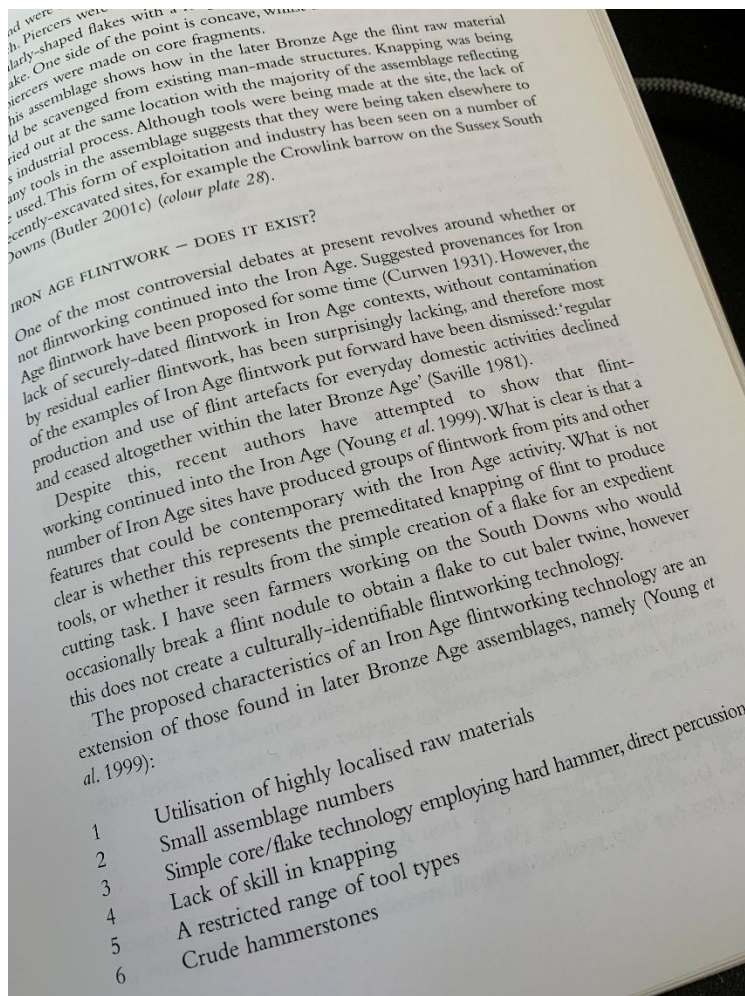


Figure two: a page from Butler's book describing Iron Age knapping and evidence for it.

reliability: it was strongly recommended to me in my early training that this book was the first publication to buy and use, and how it was the principal book used by British lithicists. I have found it to be a reliable resource with defined period chapters which have aided my classification of lithics in my reporting. It does falter in reliability for more specific details, with an example being the size of Neolithic polished axes and their variability. Since my

training and understanding have progressed, I have understood there are other texts which either surpass or are aligned with this publication.

relevance: overall, the book has proved to be relevant to my specialism. It has been used and referenced in every report I have created since 2023. I have benefited from the introductory chapters, explaining in simple terms what flint is and its use in the past. As a novice in geology and geoarchaeology, this sped up my understanding. Chapter ten of 'analysing prehistoric flintwork' is the most relevant chapter to my employment. It presents an overall analytical view across both research and commercial archaeology. Points made about dimensions, weight and further study (such as refitting) are stated within this chapter as well. However, due to probably the book's age, references to other organisations which would be relevant (like ClfA) are not present.

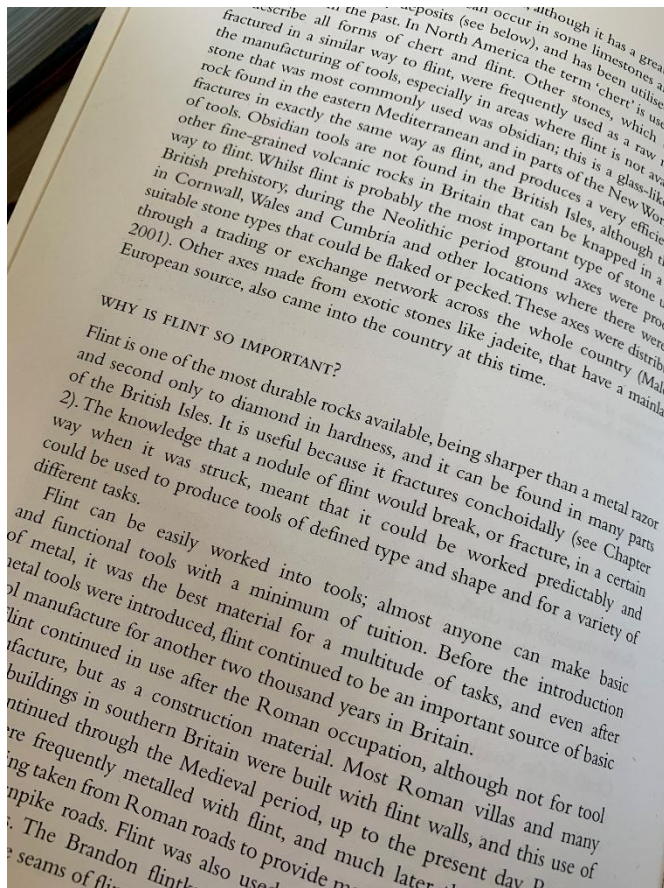


Figure three: introductory chapters in Butler's book about the formation of flint, and its presence in prehistory aided my understanding of knapping and stone tools.

T B Ballin Classification of Lithic Artefacts from the British Late Glacial and Holocene Periods (2021)

accessibility: a paper copy of the publication was bought by Adam when it was released. He has since lent it to me for my own use. Between Adam and I we managed to find a digital version of the publication as a PDF. Overall, the publication is significantly shorter than the Butler 2005 publication and includes more colour images alongside ink illustrations. However, the printed version is notably poorer printing quality and blurry, therefore it is often easier to use the digital version of the publication.

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Figure four: a photograph of the contents of Ballin's publication (2021).

currency: the currency of the publication is worth highlighting. It was printed in 2021 so is a relatively new addition to lithic studies. The publication makes frequent references to recent and older publications across journals, monographs and grey literature reports.

reliability: the publication's reliability is of a high standard as the author T B Ballin is a well-known lithicist with a strong standing in the academic community. His work is current and regularly published within journals and guides (Ballin, 2017). With this academic background, the publication has heightened my own analysis. However, the publication's terminology and in-depth detail is usually not necessary for the day-to-day assemblages I encounter. As I am still in training under my workplace mentor Adam, he would likely oppose the implementation of new phrases such as *propeller* or *stepped* retouch. His argument would be the use of such terms are either too specific or not standardised for commercial purposes.

relevance: the structure of the publication differs to other publications. The publication states it will not go into further detail about raw material, analytical approaches, and reduction techniques. Furthermore, it only examines material from Late Upper Palaeolithic to the Early Iron Age, although the examination of Iron Age knapping is fairly minimal. Unlike Butler's publication (2005) the chapters of this publication are split by terminology and typologies and not by time periods. There is considerably more detail and terminology within this publication, an example being that retouch is three pages long and includes morphology, angle, delineation. The publication is very relevant for further detail and explanation of formal tools. The relevance of dating evidence is present but explained in a more detailed, academic way in comparison to Butler's publication.

ClfA The Toolkit for Specialist Reporting

accessibility: the toolkit is accessible via its own webpage embedded within the ClfA website. The toolkit's chapter are clear and easy to access as seen in figure five. Each chapter contains hyperlinks to further resources, ranging from the PAS to the 2011 Historic England guidance *Archaeological Evidence for Glassworking*. Searching for additional information or keywords is quick given the toolkit is digital. It appears the toolkit is not downloadable as an entire document, but only as specific resources including the advisory checklist as a PDF and recording checklist as a Word document. The entire toolkit is free to access via ClfA which is positive for all students and early careers professionals.

Toolkit for Specialist Reporting

Version 1.1 (February 2021)

Toolkit menu

- Introduction
- Background
- Who is the Toolkit for?
- What is in the Toolkit?
- Current standards and guidance**
- Checklist structure
- Using the advisory checklist
- Advisory checklist
- Downloads
- Useful contacts and resources

Advisory checklist

The advisory checklist specifies the criteria against the three types of specialist report:

- **Type 1:** Description - for relatively insignificant assemblages
- **Type 2:** Appraisal - where there is the potential for further work
- **Type 3:** Full analysis - following detailed analysis of significant assemblages

Table definitions:

- **X** - include this
- **O** - include this if possible or appropriate

	1	2	3
Overall Project Report			
Quantification of overall site assemblage by category, eg coins, pottery, iron, animal bone, charcoal (as minimum tabulated by weight for bulk finds/enviro, item count for registered finds)	X	X	X
Description of recovery strategy, eg hand collection, bulk sample derived, metal detector	X	X	X
Description of excavation sampling strategy	X	X	X
Description of selection strategy	X	X	X
Location of final archive (digital and physical) including repository accession number	X	X	X
Interpretation of the overall material assemblage, incorporating discussion of the local and wider context and the evidence from the site as a whole	X	X	X
Specialist Report (material or object categories, eg animal bone; coins)			
Document information	1	2	3
Title of report incorporating subject and project name	X	X	X
Name of author (including qualifications)	X	X	X
Date of data collection/recording	X	X	X
Date of analysis/report completion	X	X	X
Introduction	1	2	3
Summary of the nature of the assemblage and its significance	X	X	X
Overall size of assemblage (eg total count and weight)	X	X	X
Aims of the report	X	X	X
Description of recovery strategy, eg hand collection, bulk samples derived, metal detector	X	X	X

Figure five: screenshots of the ClfA toolkit chapters and the advisory checklist. The checklist is a methodology towards report creation which proposes three types of reports (one to three) for grey literature reporting within commercial archaeology.

currency: the toolkit was released in February 2021 and therefore only has reference material up until that date. The references listed within the toolkit's standards and guidance are split into four areas (*general standards and guidance, Historic England guidelines, other specialist standards and archives*). However, notably within these lists there are no specific lithics guidance. The LSS is referenced in the useful contacts chapter, and lithics are covered within other organisations such as the PAS and ClfA Finds Group. All archaeological finds are covered within the ClfA *Standard and guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (2020b). If updated, the toolkit would presumably include the most recent lithics guidance from Historic England published in 2023, 2024, 2025.

reliability: the reliability of the toolkit is subjective, as it is presented as a base document for advice aimed at finds specialists. It was designed to be used in conjunction with ClfA standards (2020a and 2020b). It notably states that it is “designed to be applicable to the full range of archaeological materials (artefacts, ecofacts, human remains, environmental remains, industrial waste)” (2021) so its reliability for the identification of lithics is not applicable. However, its reliability for lithics analysis within a grey literature report is important and creates a standard of writing across a varied and diverse sector (Hewerdine, 2019).

relevance: the toolkit is extremely relevant as it was designed for the use within commercial practises, although it is not a standard neither does it cover all specialisms (such as earth works). It is stated that it can apply to a wide range of archaeological investigations to full-scale excavations. I have found so far this to be relevant, as it is a standard document amongst many units and reporting practises (Tierney, 2025). Within my own company it is not used with the efficiency it could be, and official ClfA standards relating to archaeological archives and material are more referenced and utilised (2020a and 2020b).

The Lithic Studies Society (LSS) journal *Lithics*

accessibility: the LSS has its society journal *Lithics* available via an open access library. There are 42 journal editions available from 1980 to 2024. All these editions are downloadable as PDFs, ensuring articles and material can be saved and accessed. One of these articles (*'On*

the measurement of Struck Flakes and Flake Tools' by A. Saville 1980) is seen as one of the definitive texts for flake measurements within lithic studies. I have used and observed it as a reference in multiple reports. As a LSS volunteer the committee have an awareness of upcoming articles, which is useful for focusing research aims across different sites. The journal is printed annually and sent as a hard copy for all LSS members. It is worth noting the website requires an urgent update to increase accessibility and usability.

currency: the journal has an open theme and therefore accepts a diversity of topics. Examples include illustration, commercial and research assemblages and experimental archaeology. This variety is also international with academic affiliations. Therefore, the journal is in theory at the cutting-edge of lithic research. The article on flake measurements is not based on a particular assemblage but relies on a methodological approach. Therefore, it can be argued the article on flake measurement is current in its own right.

reliability: the reliability of the journal archives is strong given the peer review process each article undergoes. The articles are peer reviewed by an editorial committee which includes a mix of academics, students and lithicists. They have a formal committee and have ensured there is a variety of feedback and topics for publication. It has been noted lithics are the province of the amateur as much as academics, and often those within lithics received no formal training. It is something the LSS has both profited from and supported in its long history.

relevance: the journal library presents both extremely relevant and irrelevant resources for my specialism. The most relevant articles are those based on UK lithics, and often post-Palaeolithic as in my experience I have dealt with only a small percentage of Palaeolithic material. The journal includes relevant authors from the commercial sector, which provides further opportunity to read the reports of those authors via the Archaeology Data Service. The article by Saville on flake measurements is extremely relevant as many assemblages are composed of flakes. Flakes were also produced across all time periods, so a methodological approach is very relevant to multi-period sites within commercial archaeology.

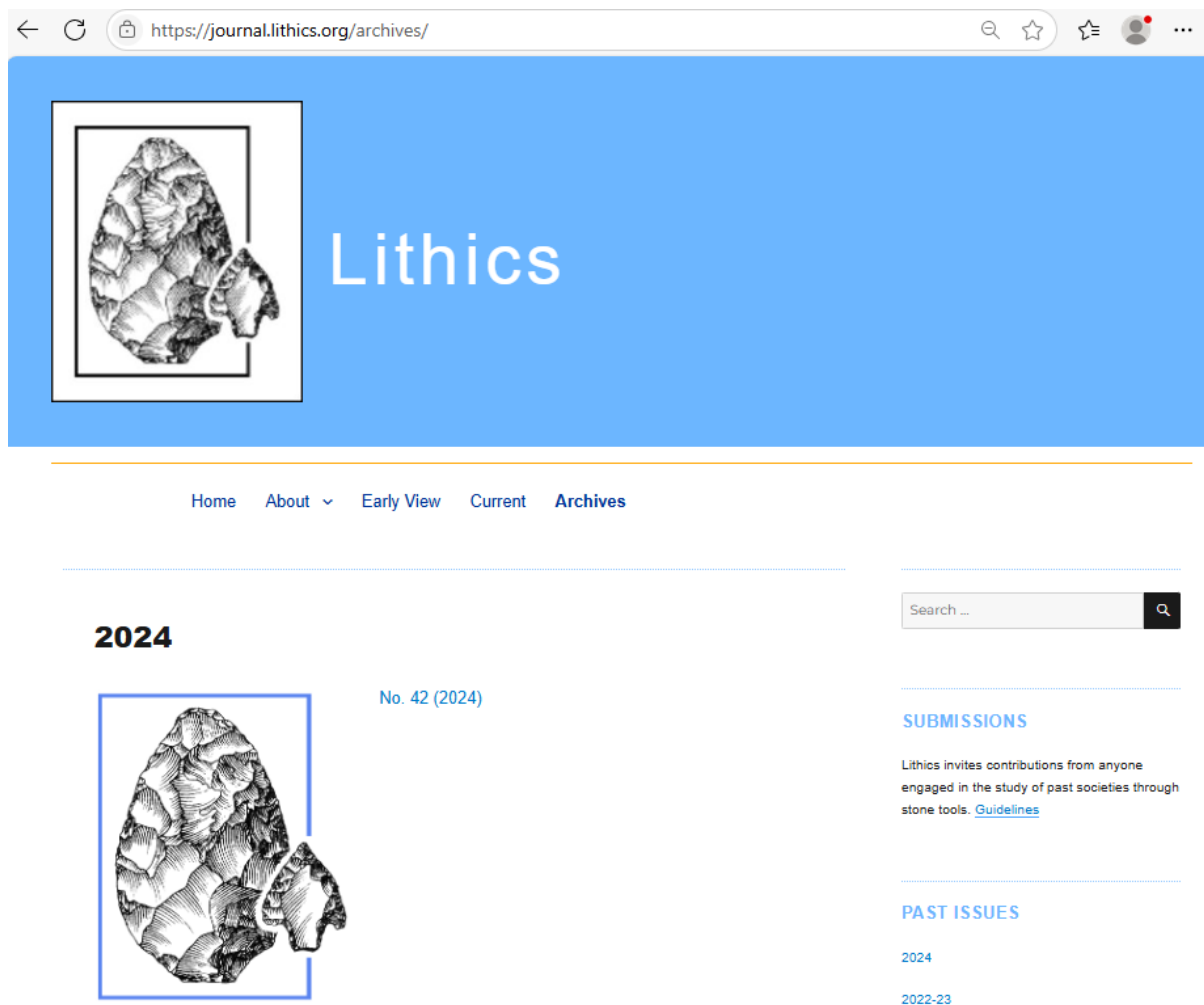


Figure six: a screenshot of the journal website for the LSS. It is outdated in terms of website aesthetics and usability however it remains accessible and free for those wishing to use it.

Key data resources

Excel spreadsheet from Adam Wightman

accessibility: the key data resource I began my specialism with was a spreadsheet for lithics analysis developed by the current specialist Adam. The spreadsheet was provided to me in 2023 when my training started with joint analysis and report creation between us. The report is fairly accessible in terms of subject headings and layout (see appendix). I have made few adaptations to the spreadsheet myself as I have grown more established and independent. These adaptations include:

- Use of highlighting or colour for easy recognition of discarded natural material,
- Use of < > instead of [] to identify environmental samples immediately,

- Increased use of additional comments for analysis,
- Use of new spreadsheets divided by area of pottery dating evidence,
- Systematic use for spreadsheets across all reporting.

currency: the spreadsheet was first developed by Adam during his MA in Palaeolithic Archaeology at Southampton. He adapted the spreadsheet for commercial practises under the mentorship of Hazel Martingell, who was the CAT external lithicist during the early 2000s. Hazel mentored Adam on a regular basis, and the spreadsheet was an evolution from the hand-written recording practises Hazel conducted at the time mostly based on typologies without the use of digital resources. Therefore, it is credible to state the spreadsheet is not the most current data resource. It is an extensive spreadsheet and too voluminous for smaller assemblages or sites.

reliability: the reliability of the spreadsheet is once again subjective. Without the existence of universal lithics standards, the spreadsheet cannot be adequately compared. When the ClfA standards (2020a, 2020b, 2022) are compared with the spreadsheet, the spreadsheet does fulfil the needs of quantification and characterisation. The contextualisation of material is simple and listed as a time period and feature (like a Medieval pit).

relevance: the spreadsheet in its current form is a crucial aspect to my specialism. It provides a clear basis for further interpretation, and information which may not be appropriate for the size of assemblage. The current methodology at CAT includes the measurement of every piece (no weighing is conducted), a full analysis akin to a type two or three report and subsequent interpretation. The final report contains a reduced version of the spreadsheet in table form. During my own research, I have found this methodology may be too extravagant. If the recommended ClfA toolkit report types were implemented, the time and budget for lithics analysis would dramatically change. However, the detail of the assemblage may be reduced significantly due to this.

Other commercial specialist spreadsheets

accessibility: external spreadsheet styles are accessible via digital sources, including the Archaeology Data Service and company specific resources (like Oxford Archaeology Knowledge Hub). These resources are free to use and digital therefore searching for specifics is achievable quickly. However, it does take a significant amount of time to download specific spreadsheets from within grey literature reports. These reports are normally PDFs therefore harder to divide into individual documents. Lithics are sometimes analysed by general finds specialists, therefore the spreadsheets/reporting vary significantly in size and breadth. Furthermore, lithics are often not a searchable term with preference given to time periods and geographic location instead of finds. Therefore, it can be time consuming to search through reports in order to find the lithics analysis.

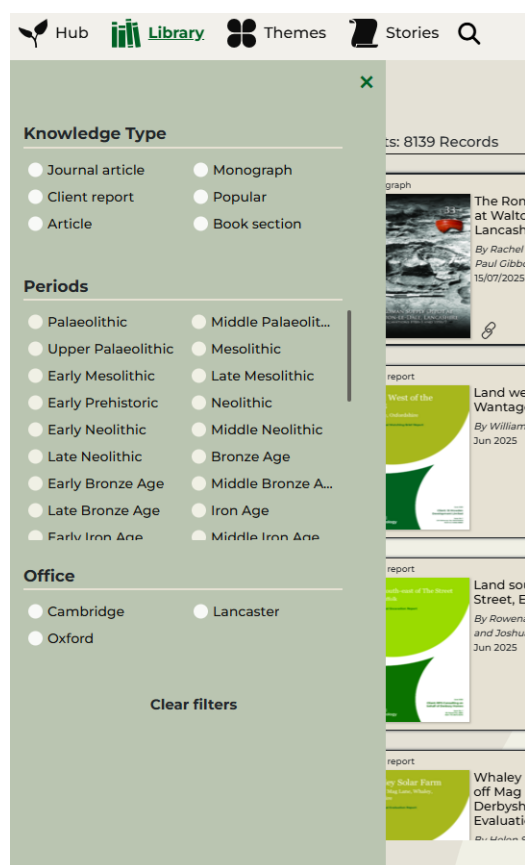


Figure seven: the Knowledge Hub of Oxford Archaeology which includes filters for the searching for publications.

currency: the currency of the data resources, like external spreadsheet, is governed by the digital archiving of the projects for each unit. Some units will upload relatively quickly to

either ADS or their own resources. These uploads normally take the form of a full grey literature report aimed at clients and historic environment advisors within the planning process. The presence of spreadsheets within printed publications such as monographs can be overlooked due to the challenges printed resources bring (Beck et.al, 2021)

reliability: other specialist spreadsheets present a variety of techniques, formatting and options. This variety is due to an unstandardised methodology towards lithics analysis, as unlike pottery studies (*A Standard for Pottery Studies in Archaeology* by Barclay et. al, 2016) or human bone (*Updated guidelines to the standards for recording human remains* by Mitchell, P D and Brickley, M, 2017) there are no specific standards. Therefore, the reliability of external spreadsheets differs greatly.

relevance: the relevance of external spreadsheets to my specialism is extremely high. It allows me to observe different formatting and new categories for analysis. Focusing on resources from commercial archaeology allows me a realistic comparison for my work. Therefore, my own work has developed and not become insular within my specialism which I believe is a common occurrence for specialists.

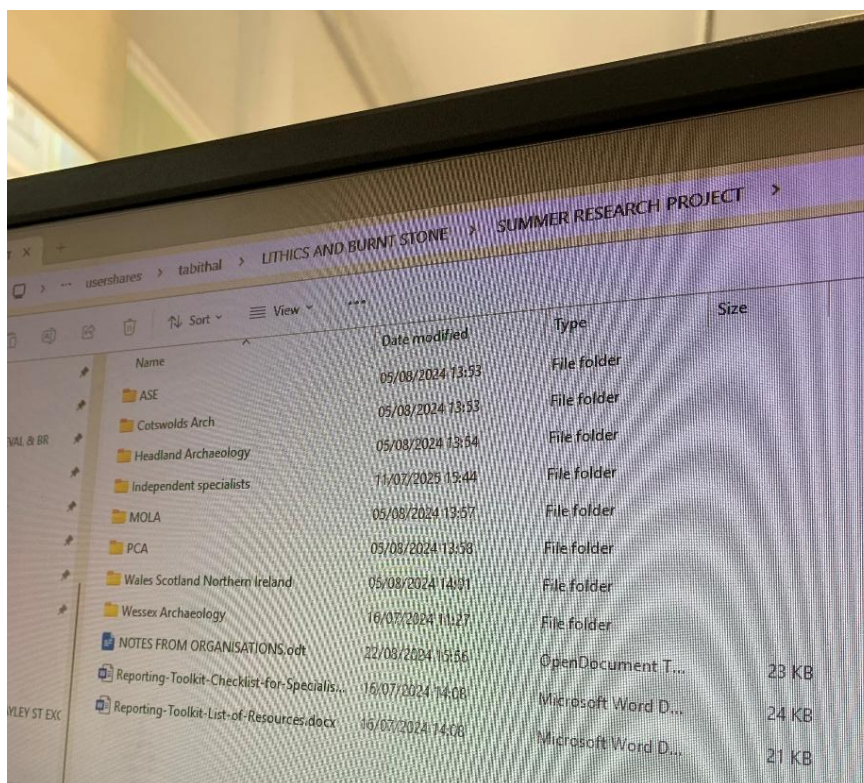


Figure eight: a photograph of my user share at work where I collate spreadsheets and report styles from different commercial units and independent specialists.

Perspective as an early career researcher

Role as a volunteer member of LSS

I have benefitted enormously from being a volunteer with the LSS. Since I joined as a member, then subsequently as the Publicity Officer, I have found myself amongst a range of both academics and commercial lithicists. These include experts within the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and later prehistory, across at least five different nationalities and at least eight smaller niches or specialisms (such as geochemical analysis or Neanderthal raw material strategies). Having this experience has been both daunting but also extremely progressive. The sharing of resources, collective attendance at events and my own social media work have propelled my career forward to be aware of the most cutting-edge resource or contacts within lithics, even without having the most technical understanding of lithics (Richardson, 2019).

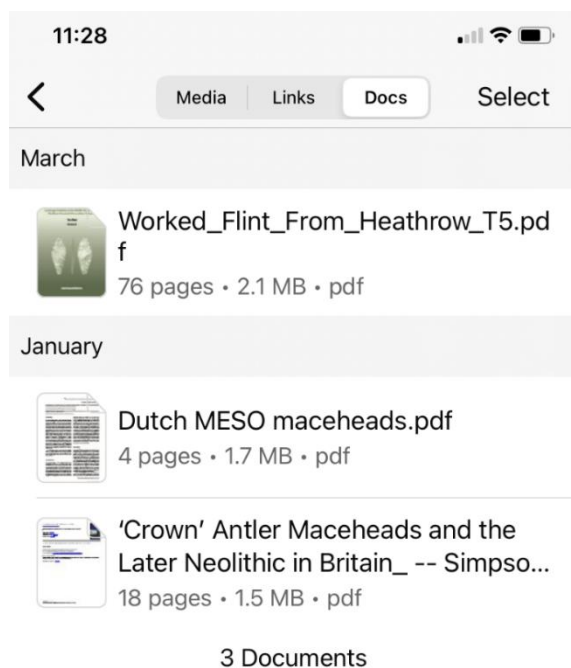


Figure nine: a screenshot from the LSS Committee WhatsApp chat, highlighting publications shared amongst the group for free. These publications have been a useful addition to my training.

Benefits of student and access to UWTSD library

As an early career researcher, the use of the UWTSD library through my current MA has been important to expand my resources. Within my own company, we have a substantial printed reference collection and a digital collection. However, these printed resources can be out of date, and inaccessible due to either physical placement or length of publication. With the UWTSD library, I have accessed multiple resources relevant to my own lithics work and on the occasion my fieldwork. Having a student status has increased my opportunity for discounts at conferences or academic events, and support via the wellbeing teams or digital skills team. However, I want to highlight completing a part time MA whilst in full time employment has its difficulties which have only increased as my own position has become more senior.

Benefit of having a workplace mentor

Verbal communication has proved a vital asset for my specialism. Through my MA I have two workplace mentors of Laura and Adam. These two individuals have bolstered me with their knowledge, expertise and ideas. I understand it is a mutual relationship due to the benefits of my growing specialism and educational pathway. But due to their approach and my company being a smaller, tight-knit unit it has allowed me to speak openly with them and at times question standardised commercial practises, my frustrations and my specialism in a wider picture (such as the residuality of lithics) (Orange and Perring, 2017, Darvill et.al, 2019). This relationship has also progressed my understanding of East Anglian archaeology, aided by resources such as the regional frameworks (Medlycott, 2011). Overall, I have learnt more from these discussions than any of the formal self-study I have completed.

Conclusion

Overall, I feel my specialism is properly informed through avenues outside of my employment alongside avenues within my employment. My volunteer role in the LSS, my student status and my company's unique reputation and personality have fostered my specialism. The accessibility, currency, reliability and relevance have all been affected by my dual role as a lithicist and a field archaeologist, both roles that I hold in equal measure.

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