

Finds on your Doorstep –12,000 years of life in Haxey - finds recorded on the Portable Antiquities Scheme Database (search for finds.org.uk) – by Martin Foreman, Finds Liaison Officer for North Lincolnshire

The Mesolithic (10,00-4000 BC) 42 records including 74 objects

The ice has gone, but so has Doggerland: the happy hunting ground between England and the Low Countries is now under water. Great-grandad said you could once walk right across, but you know how they go on about the good old days...

Mesolithic people were hunter-gatherers, and probably followed migrating herds. The low swampy land where Lake Humber had been was good for catching fish and wildfowl, though summer might bring fever, and winter flood. Like American Indians, Mesolithic people probably also learned the uses of plants – in America, up to a fifth of all species were good for something.

Mesolithic finds found here are flints, and show the process by which tools were made. Flint cores were left after striking off smaller thin flakes. Often roughly pyramid-shaped, they might themselves be used as tools.



Flint cores, from Low Burnham

NLM-D6941F

NLM-12BE95

NLM-128D46

One-piece flint tools included small blades or saws used to dismantle game animals, scrapers to clean hides, and borers to make holes in them so they could be sewn together. This tool kit would remain essential.



Blade, two saws, scraper and a borer, from Haxey and Low Burnham

NLM-494C79

NLM-F6BE6A

NLM-455134

NLM-4956E8

NLM-BDF205

Debitage includes tiny flakes which were mounted to make composite weapon tips. A tranchet axehead was for woodworking. It was hafted, and sharpened by an angled blow to one end.



Little and large:debitage and a tranchet axehead from Low Burnham

NLM-F02CF5

NLM-57F0CD

NLM-EA4667 NLM-E75E77

NLM-9BF99F

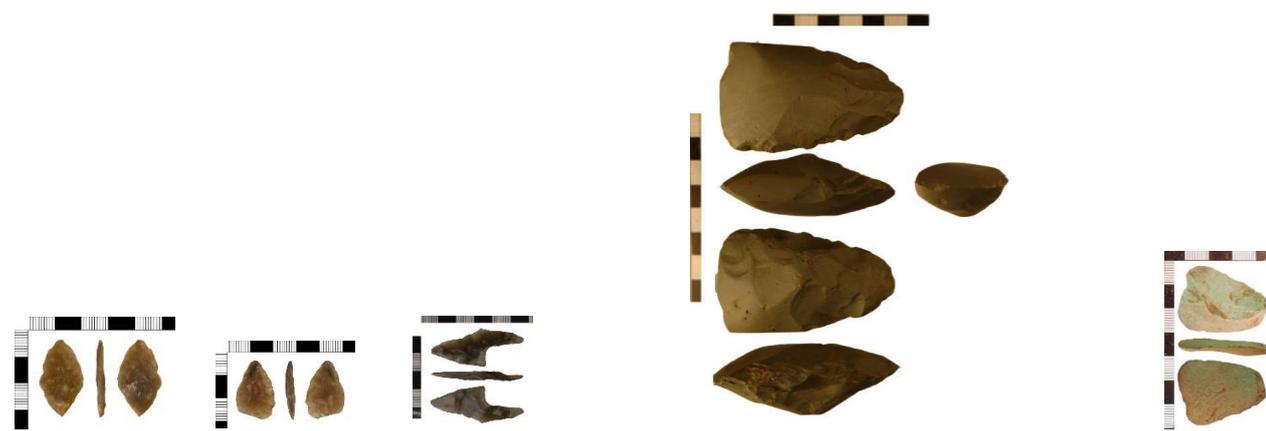
YES, BUT...

Many of these flints have a white patina from exposure to a chalky environment, or orange stains from being rolled in gravel. But Haxey isn't on chalk or gravel. Most flint from Low Burnham is like this. Might objects have come in much later by cart or lorry with chalk used to marl the fields? Or road metal? Perhaps Haxey was quieter in the Mesolithic than it seems at first sight.

The Neolithic (4000-2350 BC) 49 records including 64 objects

The Neolithic is when man invented home. And property. As crops began to be planted, people had to stay in one place long enough to tend, protect, harvest and store their food. As communities put down roots, the dead – or some of them - might be buried in collective graves overlooking the old neighbourhood and their descendants. Domesticated animals could be kept in one place, rather than having to follow migrating beasts. There could be tension between old-style hunter-gathers, herdsmen and farmers – remembered in the Biblical tale of Cain and Abel - and arrowheads and finely polished stone axeheads appear alongside tools.

Leaf-shaped arrowheads were used with a long bow for hunting, and perhaps also warfare. Fine polished Greenstone axes came from Langdale, Cumbria - these look better suited to clubbing than to woodwork.



Arrowheads from Haxey, polished axehead from Low Burnham, and a chip from another axehead

NLM-9E0CA4

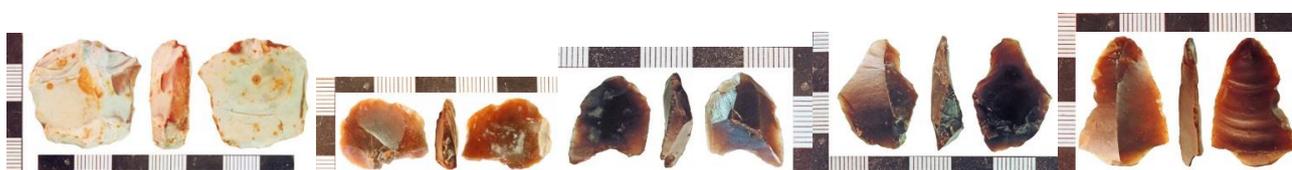
NLM-9DFFC8

NLM-ED6F12

NLM-76FD15

NLM-450DED

Tools – knives and scrapers - were made from pale grey flint brought from the Wolds, or of better glassy flint imported from further afield. The best early Neolithic flint is the dark brown colour of plain chocolate.



Scrapers and knives from Low Burnham, including a set of top quality blades of dark brown flint

NLM-6015E3

NLM-60093A

NLM-8914C1

NLM-EFFAB8

NLM-FCD019

Other established types of tools continued to be used, though the quality of flint-working seems to decline over time. Perhaps people now had more to do with their time, and developed economical ways of working.



Two Scrapers from Haxey; backed blade, piercer and scraper with battered edge from Low Burnham

NLM-57FB1B

NLM-455C38

NLM-F77F4B

NLM-DFDCD2

NLM-12D4B5

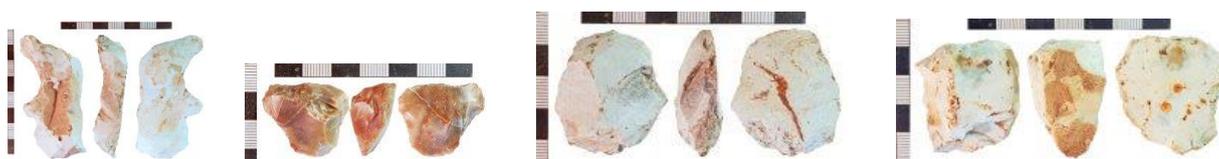
YES, BUT...

Stone axes could be used to cut down trees to clear woodland, which did happen in the Neolithic. But there are easier ways to clear trees – like fire, ring-barking, or grazing. Weapons have a special status from what they do and who does it. Maybe the distant origin of Cumbrian axes also made them special. Was this a peaceful time in Haxey, or a boggy version of the Wild West?

The Bronze Age and the Iron Age (2350BC-AD43) 14 records including 14 objects

Climate change. They were all talking about it... in the Bronze Age. Sea-level rise saw rivers back up and marginal land become brackish marsh. Wet summers set back planting. Low-lying parts might become uninhabitable, and force retreat to higher ground. They still provided summer grazing – meat comes ready-salted if livestock graze on salt marsh. More people and less space would mean competition for resources. In uncertain times, those with vital know-how could get a ready audience. New leaders now began to covet the bright new metal bronze, drawn from stone by what seemed like magic worked by the first smiths.

Bronze Age flint tools are more casually worked than before, though serving similar purposes. Notched scrapers were used to trim wooden arrow-shafts. But less effort and prestige was invested in flint-working.



Notched scraper and three other swiftly-made scrapers, all from Low Burnham

NLM-50FE31

NLM-12DE47

NLM-1299C9

NLM-6021CB

Fire-cracked pebbles were burnt in a fire and then dropped into troughs or pots of water to heat it. Perhaps for cooking, or for a lordly hot-tub. A fragment of sword blade shows a Bronze Age warrior passed this way.



Pot boiler stone and carp's tongue rapier blade fragment, both from High Burnham

FAKL-19038D

NLM-9DE2F3

The Iron Age saw clans merge to form tribes. Haxey was in the Corieltauvi heartland – possibly (from the old Welsh) meaning *army of the broad land*. Unimpressive potsherds point to a settled community nearby.



Handmade Iron Age potsherds are perhaps fragments of broken cooking pots, from Low Burnham

NLM-2AF88D

NLM-2AF14A

Bronze was now used for brooches, dress fittings and horsegear. A horse appears on coins of the Corieltauvi, perhaps a tribal totem. Were gold and silver coins made not as a currency, but as offerings to sun and moon?



Brooch and two silver coins from High Burnham; plated 'gold' coin with a copper core from Haxey

NLM-379852

NLM-2C64B6

NLM-BEA607

SWYOR-4BB849

The Roman period (AD 43-410) 160 records including 229 objects

What did the Romans do for us? In Haxey, it was pot, brooches, and coins. Pottery was mass-produced in the Humber region, and concentrations of sherds mark settlements: at Low Burnham with a later holy well; High Burnham, busy since the Bronze Age; and Haxey - perhaps as a manuring scatter from nearby farms. Earlier brooches fastened clothing, but also signalled tribal identity. Some later types were perhaps from military or official uniforms.

Coins *may* suggest a money economy, but were usually of low value. Most are from later Roman times, and these perhaps only got about so taxes could be paid.

Greyware was made throughout the Roman period. Sherds are usually worn by centuries of later farming. Because they are fragile, and useless when broken, bits of pots show where the household rubbish went.



Greyware sherds, dated to AD 100-410, all from Low Burnham

NLM-184D7F

NLM-64C031

NLM-80CC78

NLM-2B1745

Early Roman bow brooches were made by Britons, but in numbers suggesting a market economy. Rear-hook fastening (nos 3 and 4) may mark Iceni types. Trumpet brooches (no. 5) originated in Yorkshire (*Brigantia*).



Bow brooches from near Haxey, Low Burnham, and High Burnham

NLM-2BEC3A

DENO-C4709B

NLM-0E3177

NLM-6A1422

NLM-487CB1

Some types of brooch are associated with the Army. No. 1 resembles types which came to Britain with the invasion of AD43. No. 2 is thought to have Iron Age antecedents in Yorkshire; no. 3, a cockerel, might relate to the cult of Mercury; nos 4 and 5 may be associated with later Roman military or official uniforms.



Brooches, the first from Low Burnham, others from High Burnham and Haxey

NLM-EC9344

NLM-FCC63E

NLM-358BFD

NLM-9DE4E1

YORYM-1CA007

Roman coins arrived in Haxey from about AD 70, and only two (out of 70) are silver. Most are copper alloy 'gros', but they still show activity over 300 years. This spanned a breakaway Britannic empire (AD 283-296), conversion to Christianity under Constantine, and final weakening of imperial control over Britain.



Coins from Low Burnham, Haxey and High Burnham – no. 4 was a Carausian Brexit issue

NLM-DBFC86 NLM-15782A YORYM-E3C0F9 NLM-DD3194 NLM-B12F19 NLM-2B5201 NLM-EC8193 NLM-D716EF

The Early Medieval Period (AD 410-1100) 36 records including 36 objects

The Anglo-Saxons first arrived as mercenaries for late Roman or sub-Roman *tyrants*. We see little of the first generations, so Haxey was perhaps uninviting to them. But, from the 600s, we have evidence of their settlement and status. From 669, Christianity would be promoted by kings over the new local lords.

The Vikings are a lot more visible. Anglo-Saxon wealth was a magnet to the raiders, but they soon came to stay. History tells us whole armies could take refuge in the Isle of Axholme, where access by water suited the shallow draught long-ship, and where they could 'borrow' horses.

A gold pendant probably comes from the burial of a local gentlewoman. Dress accessories, the first silver coin for 400 years, hairpins, tags, and more silver, all show local wealth growing under an English regime.



Rich metalwork from Haxey, Low Burnham & High Burnham; the gold and silver is from Haxey

LVPL-C2D4CE NLM-165C91 NLM-99F413 NLM-7F95AB NLM-BAB903 NLM-E6BF36

Vikings came first for slaves and silver, then to settle with their wives and farm. A bullion economy was developed to use all that loot, so it seems everyone had a set of weights to check sums rendered in silver.



Viking tortoise brooch and strap ends from between Low Burnham and Haxey, along with weights

DENO-941B9F DENO-C4DB3F NLM-B633CE NLM-75EF12 NLM-BB567B NLM-950843 NLM-400659

His sword was the Viking's best friend, and large strap ends came from the broad belt he hung it on. A horse made for a swift raid and swifter getaway - Anglo-Scandinavian stirrup mounts show ongoing use of horses.



Sword pommel & horse fittings from High Burnham; stirrup mounts and ring: Haxey

NLM-C65791 NLM-48A1E4 NLM-5B110D NLM-954ADC NLM-E6F6FD NLM-D4A8C9

So what did his wife do? It looks like she was hand-spinning with a spindle whorl. Lead whorls are often too heavy to make fine thread, but are good to ply twine to make rope... you need lots of rope to rig a long-ship.



Lead spindle whorls from High Burnham, Low Burnham & Haxey, forms early to later

NLM-EA275D

NLM-7C1945

NLM-655962

NLM-0DB189

NLM-137807

NLM-230442

NLM-759F41

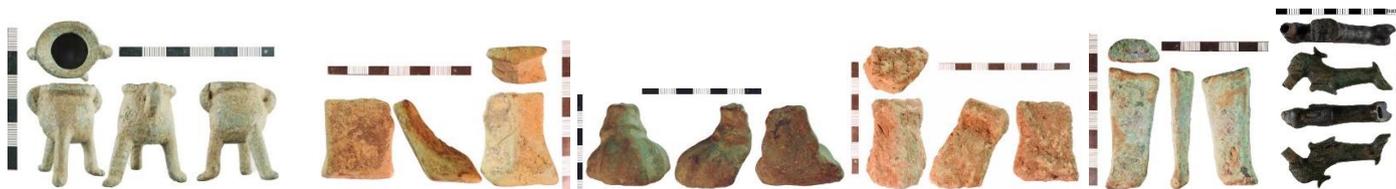
YES, BUT... How do we know all these plain lead objects are old? The weights seem to observe Viking-Age systems of measurement, and have been found on Viking-only sites elsewhere, as at Dublin. For spindle whorls, their shapes mirror those of the much more numerous whorls made of bone, stone and clay found at places like York, which are securely dated to this period.

The Medieval period (1100-1500) 465 records including 539 objects

Finds from Haxey illustrate daily lives of prospering peasants. Bulk goods and pottery came in from the Midlands via the River Trent. Belt fittings and bits of cooking pots are the most common metal finds, with silver coins close behind. The coins suggest economic activity rose through the 1200s, peaked under Edward I, and crashed in the time of Edward III – and the Black Death.

They were pious. Seals used to close property deals bore religious imagery and texts. If crops failed, pilgrim souvenirs were torn open and emptied on the land as a remedy. There was a cross on every coin.

A stew pot sat at the heart of every well-to-do home, and would be used till it wore out, when the metal was probably recycled. Bread and beans were daily staples, though fish was more often available than meat.



Toy cauldron from High Burnham, and metal vessel fragments from around Haxey

NLM-43A40D

NLM-7FA0DC

NLM-13068F

NLM-5AA38E

NLM-E35E51

YORYM-98CFBA

Seals suggest there was an active market in land, and there may have been a degree of functional literacy - using reading or writing, but only for what you need. This is still common in the developing world today.



Seal matrices from East Lound and Haxey with another stamped impression; stylus and lead pencil

SWYOR-39C6D8

NLM-F73E95

NLM-C5D881

NLM-406848

NLM-FBE45A

The coins recorded are all from High and Low Burnham, and may hint at the conversion of feudal day-work to money rents. All were perhaps accidentally swept up and thrown out. Sixpence was a good day's wage.



Small change from King John to Edward II: cut coins were for daily shopping or minor purchases

NLM-1637C9

NLM-94BDAB

NLM-7F39B9

NLM-C052EE

NLM-F75EA7

A belt of leather or fabric was worn as an inheritance from Anglo-Saxon days, when it was part of the dress of a free man. As well as gathering clothing, it carried a meat knife and was fastened with a metal buckle.



Buckles from High and Low Burnham, of common styles from Anglo-Scandinavian to later medieval

NLM-DC37C4

NLM-16EE62

NLM-17360C

NLM-16C9E5

NLM-BE4984

NLM-7989C5

YES, BUT...

Why are there no medieval coins from near Haxey village? It's the biggest place, the centre of the modern parish, and has a medieval church. We know metalwork has been found nearby. Sadly, this might be a gap in our knowledge caused by selective recording – some people may indeed have found coins, but only reported what they didn't want to sell or keep to themselves.