Rotherwas Futures, Hereford

One of the most exciting archaeological discoveries within Herefordshire in 2007 was the Rotherwas Ribbon. Uncovered in 2007 along the route of the new Rotherwas Access Road it was a linear feature provisionally dated to the Neolithic or early Bronze Age c2000 BC. The Ribbon was made of deliberately fire-cracked stones and quartz which formed a linear undulating ridge at least 60m in length. The linear surface, which was possibly re-laid on several occasions, contained small flint artefacts, a large proportion of which showed signs of burning and breakage. Animal bones from cattle, pig and sheep were also found within the stones and showed evidence of being burnt at temperatures in excess of 800oC – far beyond the normal temperature required for cooking. The Ribbon is at the southern end of a small range of hills bordering the floodplain of the River Wye and its confluence with the River Lugg. It descends the lower slopes of the ridge-end that supports Dinedor camp, an Iron Age hill fort that overlooks the river. It was within a stone’s throw of the Rotherwas Ribbon and at the junction between the lower slopes of the ridge and the floodplain of the Wye that Archaeological Investigations Ltd uncovered another area of burnt stones. (C) Derek FoxtonAn aerial photograph of phase 2 of the Rotherwas Futures Project. A frosty morning at the start of the job One possible explanation for the burnt material is that it is part of a burnt mound. A number of these features have been found in various parts of the country, including Birmingham and Shropshire, though most have been found in the uplands of Britain and in Ireland. It is possible that this perceived bias is a result of the greater likelihood of their survival in upland areas, being more likely to be ploughed out or otherwise damaged at lower levels. The mound was cut by a number of later features including numerous drains. These would have been laid to drain the fields, possibly when the area was part of the Rotherwas Estate. These features are invariably associated with a source of water. They have been interpreted as cooking sites, though the lack of animal bone is thought to argue against this, industrial sites, or saunas. This ancient water channel probably originated from a sping on the slopes of Dindor. Its calcium rich fill suggests that the water was very clean. One of the prehistoric pottery sherds from the burnt mound. The fabric was hard and well fired and had quartz and possible mudstone inclusions which broke through the surface of the pottery. The rim is rounded, everted and has three light fingertip dimples on the top of the rim.The small assemblage from the site was largely undiagnostic material dating from teh early Bronze Age to the Iron Age. This artifact was the April 2008 find of the month.This type of blade was most probably used to assist in the skining of animals, perhaps to saw through tendons etc. It was most likely used unhalfted between finger and thumb and clearly fits a right handed person rather than a left handed one.