

MESOLITHIC RESEARCH IN SURREY

WITH A TRIBUTE TO
WILFRID HOOPER, LL.D., F.S.A.

BY

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INTRODUCTORY

THE object of this contribution is to present an abridged synthesis of the mesolithic researches carried out in Surrey during the last two decades by integrating the results of field observations completed in West Surrey with those in the rest of the county. This has been made possible by the ready co-operation of Mrs. Wilfrid Hooper, who has placed the material collected by the late Dr. Hooper at the writer's disposal for study and record. Thus, in some part, this synthesis becomes a tribute to one who was a pioneer in mesolithic research. In this summary, it should be stated, other researches are included, so that it may be regarded as a comprehensive, up-to-date survey of the mesolithic age in this county.

The terms West Surrey and East Surrey are used without relation, except vaguely, to the statutory divisions of the county; they refer to a conventional bi-section of the county, for convenience of discussion, by a line of longitude through Dorking. Territory immediately adjacent to the county boundary is included in the review where sites have some obvious relation to the Surrey prehistoric region.

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The first important contribution to mesolithic literature, so far as Surrey is concerned, was made by Dr. Hooper in 1933, and was published in *Sy.A.C.*, Vol. XLI, under the title "The Pigmy Flint Industries of Surrey." At that time very little research had been done anywhere in respect of the mesolithic period which had captured Dr. Hooper's interest and imagination. Very few microliths—the fascinating, tiny flint points characteristic of the mesolithic industry—had been discovered in England and, in 1933, they were generally described as "pigmy" on account of their diminutive proportions. That term, however, gradually gave place to "microliths." Dr. Hooper's article was a comprehensive survey of the sites he had located in the eastern and central districts of the county.

He also included references to sites in West Surrey where research was being carried out.

Dr. Hooper's zeal in tracing fresh sites and gathering material was unbounded, as was his enthusiasm for prehistoric archaeology generally. He became an ardent member of the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia, now the Prehistoric Society, and, in 1927, a contribution of his appeared in the Proceedings of the Society. Its title was "On Pigmy Burins in Surrey and Sussex." Here again the wording of the title conformed with the terminology current twenty years ago. "Pigmy burin" was the term used for what we still call the micro-burin, which is not a burin, or graver, but a waste product from the making of microliths.

Dr. Hooper did not confine his field work to Surrey; he was interested in the excavations and the meetings of the Prehistoric Society, and in his collection are finds from Kelling Heath, Windmill Hill and Peacehaven. The fateful war period of 1939-45 halted his activities in the field and ill-health, aggravated by continuous overworking, brought them to an end, but, although the field was no longer accessible, Dr. Hooper maintained to the end an interest in the study of a subject to which he had made no small contribution.

MESOLITHIC SITES IN SURREY

Details of the extensive distribution of mesolithic sites in West Surrey appeared in Research Paper No. 2¹ of our Society, and the distribution of similar sites in East Surrey may be found in Dr. Hooper's article² referred to above. Further details of the Farnham sites were published in the Prehistoric Survey³ of that region. These sites, together with recently discovered sites, are mapped on Fig. 1.

The wide extent of the distribution of mesolithic occupations in the region is striking, and it is interesting to note how the pattern of distribution was influenced by both geological and topographical factors. A broad analysis of the pattern reveals definite coherent groupings. There is a chain of sites, east and west, clinging to the North Downs, the chalk outcrop which held unlimited flint supplies; there is a loose cluster of sites over the greensand which provided hunting lands, and a thin line of occupations on the hills from Blackdown, actually in Sussex, by Pitch Hill and Holbury to Leith Hill. There is a sporadic sprinkling of sites north of the chalk outcrop—Heath Brow, Cæsar's Camp and Horsell—and a group containing Ewell, Carshalton and Addiscombe. These latter sites indicate that profitable research might be made in their vicinity. An important but restricted number of sites lie close to the Thames

¹ Rankine, W. F., *A Mesolithic Survey of the West Surrey Greensand*, 1949.

² Hooper, W., "The Pigmy Flint Industries of Surrey," *Sy.A.C.*, Vol. XLI, 1933.

³ Lowther, A. W. G., Oakley, K. P., Rankine, W. F., "A Survey of the Prehistory of the Farnham District," *Sy.A.C.*, 1939.

—Ham Common, Esher, Barnes Common and Wimbledon Common —which appear to have had some close connection with the mesolithic infiltration into the Thames basin.

The map shows clearly that the Surrey mesolithic system is not an isolated entity, as is evidenced, for instance, by the Hampshire continuation, by way of Oakhanger, the most prolific site yet discovered, to the Sussex greensand. Sites also run eastward into Kent.

The following brief notes refer to sites supplementary to those already published in the three references mentioned above.

Abinger Common. Excavated by Dr. Leakey¹ in 1949 and published in Research Paper No. 3 of this Society.

Buckland Corner. A rich chipping floor in the top-soil of a sand-pit, now obliterated, was investigated by Mr. T. H. O. Phillips of Reigate in 1937.

Barnes Common. A collection of flint implements which belonged to the late Mr. J. Pierce of Wandsworth came into the writer's possession a few years ago; it contained a quantity of mesolithic material from this site. There are several pieces of translucent brown flint. I have been informed by Mr. Antony Marshall, who has worked this site over many years, that it is well known for its coloured flint.

Charlwood. This site was located by Mrs. Frith of Charlwood; it is important in that it is off the greensand.

Eel Pie Island.² G. F. Lawrence records one microlith from this site.

Esher. Excavated by Major J. P. T. Burchell³ and published in *Ant. Journ.*, Vol. XXVII, 1947.

Ewell. Mr. Tom Walls of Ewell has collected a considerable quantity of material from sites in this district.

Hillbury. When the heathland around Hillbury Camp, near Cutt Mill, Seale, was ploughed during the war two large mesolithic occupations were located by Mr. Fred Clark of Worplesdon, who collected a typical implement assemblage, among which scrapers dominated.

Ham Common. This site was located by the late Mr. J. G. Marsden and published in *Proc. P.S.E.A.*⁴ in 1934. It would seem to be related to Barnes Common and Wimbledon Common.

Wimbledon Common. This site was brought to the writer's notice in the same way as Barnes Common. The exact position of the site, which was known to the late Mr. J. Pierce, cannot be ascertained, but some of the flints from it are labelled "near the Windmill."

THE MESOLITHIC FLINT INDUSTRY

The excavations of the Farnham pit-dwellings in 1937-8 brought to light a complete flint industry which contributed much knowledge to what was already known about mesolithic occupational activities. Also it threw much light on mesolithic knapping technique. Further, the Farnham excavated material became a standard by which the East Surrey implements from surface sites could be compared and assessed. The range of tools from the pits included axes, gravers, scrapers, saws, borers and microliths, the distinctive implement type of the period. Microliths were numeri-

¹ Leakey, L. S. B., *A Mesolithic Site at Abinger Common, Surrey, 1951.*

² "Antiquities from the Middle Thames," *Arch. Journ.*, Vol. LXXXVI 2nd S., Vol. XXXVI, pp. 64-98, 1929.

³ Burchell, J. P. T., and Frere, S., *The Occupation of Sandown Park, 1947.*

⁴ *Proc. P.S.E.A.*, 1934, Vol. VII, Pt. III, p. 429

cally dominant. There was no vestige of wood or bone; the imperishable flint alone had survived.

Here some industrial interpretation of certain characteristic implements may be attempted. The transversely sharpened axe, both adze and pick, was the implement of the forest people and thus implies a wood industry. In the light of the recent important discoveries at Star Carr¹ the gravers, or chisels, can scarcely be dissociated from a bone industry and, probably, were also used for slotting wood. The saws, always small and finely serrated, could only have been used on bone. The functions of the various microlith types cannot be dealt with so confidently. The commonest type is the blunted point, Fig. 2, Nos. 8, 9, 10, of which there are variants, but all seem to have functioned as arrow-tips. A shorter and broader type, Fig. 2, No. 7, is very suggestive of a barbed point and may have been used in series. Most interesting of all are the so-called geometric forms, triangles and crescents and the rare trapeze. Their functions remain a mystery, but they are regarded as indications of a late phase of the mesolithic.

Examining collections of mesolithic material taken from various sites in the county, one is struck by the similarity they bear to the Farnham types; similarly, implements from mesolithic sites all over the Weald display the same conformity; in fact, this resemblance is so constant that it facilitates the ready recognition of mesolithic technique and types. This resemblance, again, tends to support an assumption that the mesolithic of Surrey, and indeed the whole Weald, the Horsham industry, is single phase in character, but, of course, future discoveries may modify this view very considerably.

(a) *The transversely sharpened axe.*

The wide distribution of transversely sharpened axes, or tranchets, throughout those parts of the county known to have been hunted by the mesolithic people is significant. If we are to accept this implement as a type tool of forest folk, then we must also accept that, in mesolithic times, the terrain was well wooded. No less remarkable, on a somewhat lesser scale, is the distribution of the transversely sharpened pick, the Thames pick, of which several specimens were found in the Farnham excavations, and the possible use of these tools in preparing dug-outs cannot be ruled out.

Dr. Hooper, writing in 1932, stated in his report on Surrey mesolithic sites: "Surrey has furnished few examples of the tranchet axe. The authors of neolithic man in North-east Surrey² figure a tranchet found by them at Headley Heath, and four others known to me have been found since at Albury, Blackheath and Farnham." In 1938³ the writer was able to publish a list of 112 tranchet axes

¹ Clark, J. G. D., "Excavations at Star Carr, Yorkshire," *Proc. Prehist. Soc.*, 1949 and 1950.

² Johnson and Wright, *Neolithic Man in North-east Surrey*, 1903.

³ Rankine, W. F., "The Tranchet Axes of South-west Surrey," *Sy.A.C.*, Vol. XLVI, 1938.

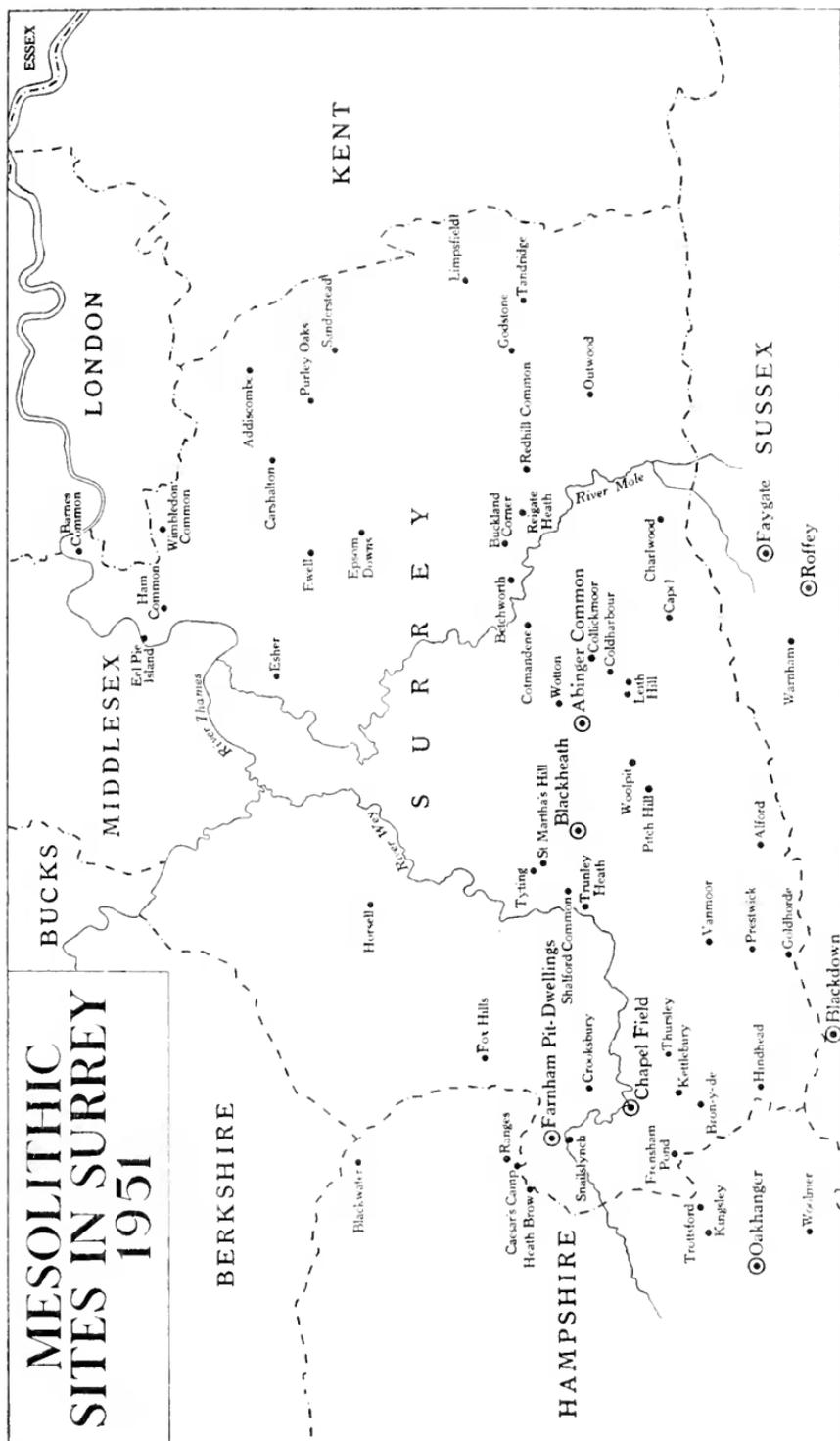


FIG. 1.—MESOLITHIC SITES IN SURREY (1951).

from South-west Surrey which now has grown to include 138 axes. There are a few tranchets in the Hooper collection which are not yet included in the list. In addition to axes numerous sharpening flakes have been found in Surrey: Dr. Hooper found several in the Leith Hill district. Such a remarkable concentration of tranchets is very significant evidence of mesolithic activity in this sector of the Weald, particularly in the west of the county. It is noteworthy in this respect that forty-nine tranchets were found in, and around, the Farnham pit-dwellings.

(b) *Gravers.*

A detailed description of this implement type may be found in Research Paper No. 2, p. 23.

The first record of gravers to be found in the county appears in the 1926 edition of the British Museum *Guide to Antiquities of the Stone Age*, p. 78. Gravers found on Snailslynch Farm, Farnham, are described and figured. This site was about half a mile south-west of the Farnham pit-dwellings and, incidentally, there is now every reason to believe that there was also a system of pit-dwellings at Snailslynch. Following this discovery many other gravers were found on surface sites in Surrey, and the excavations at Farnham in 1937-8 resulted in the discovery of twenty-six specimens. Dr. Hooper collected several gravers from East Surrey and found many in the Leith Hill area. Some of these are illustrated in *Sy.A.C.*, Vol. XLI; Fig. 3, No. 8, p. 60, a double form, is noteworthy.

Two types of graver occur in Surrey—a light graver made on a blade and a heavy kind made on a core or stout flake. The latter type, generally known as a core graver, predominates. Gravers are not found on every mesolithic site; they appear to be associated with large sites of a semi-permanent character. Some heavy gravers were excavated from the Esher site and others were found on the surface at Blackheath, Albury, and, as stated above, on Leith Hill. At Oakhanger, just over the Hampshire boundary, where a major site was transected in 1950, the writer secured 122 specimens, all heavy gravers, including some of Perigordian type. There are gravers of this type in the Hooper Collection and they came from Leith Hill.

There is no doubt that many gravers have been overlooked by collectors; a tranchet axe could never escape notice, but the non-spectacular contour of the ordinary graver often passes unobserved.

(c) *Microliths.*

Dr. Hooper was the first field worker to recognize the hollow-based point in Surrey; this point later became known as the Horsham point and is regarded as the type microlith of the culture from which it takes its name. This microlith type is evenly distributed throughout the county, although it is inexplicably absent from some sites. In all fifty-five specimens were collected by Dr. Hooper from his

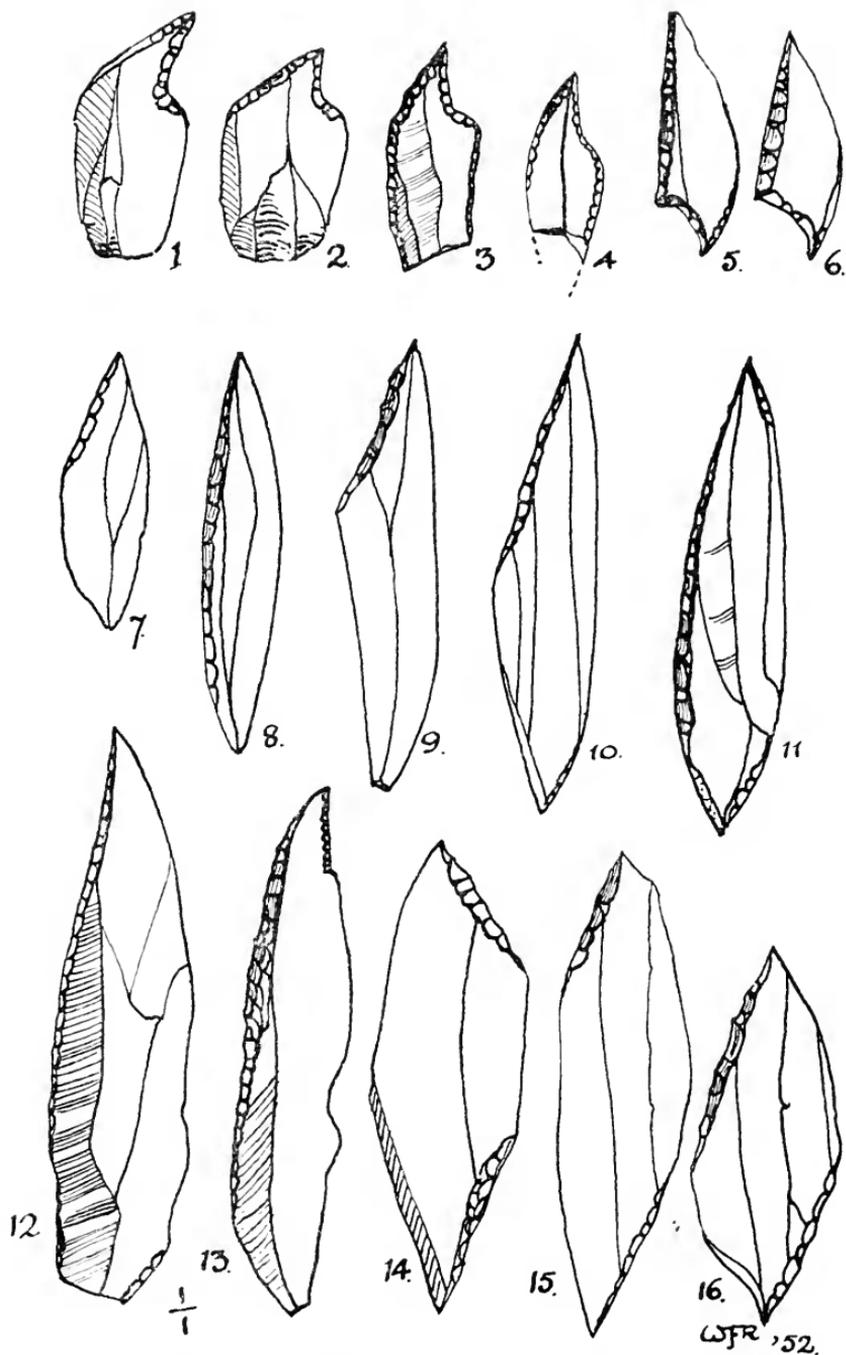


FIG. 2.—REMARKABLE MICROLITHS. FOR EXPLANATION SEE TEXT.

Provenances: 1, Farnham; 2, Merriden Farm, Leith Hill; 3, Farnham; 4, Pitch Hill; 5, Shackleford; 6, Wolvens, Wotton; 7, 8 and 9, Oakhanger; 10 and 11, Blackdown; 12, Blackheath; 13, Frensham; 14, Oakhanger; 15, Trottsford; 16, Oakhanger. Hooper Coll: Nos. 2, 4, 5 and 6. Marsh Coll: No. 12. Rankine Coll: Nos. 1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16. Nos. 10 and 11 after Clark.

hunting grounds. Goldhorde, at Chiddingfold, was particularly rich in these microliths and yielded twenty-four points. Leith Hill yielded thirteen Horsham points and all were taken from the surface. It is noteworthy that of the twenty-four Horsham points from Goldhorde two have well-developed tangs (see Fig. 2, Nos. 5 and 6), and out of the thirteen from Leith Hill six have similar tangs.

Dr. Hooper made a special reference in his description of Goldhorde that it was rich in micro-burins. The seventy-six specimens he collected there are testimony to an active microlithic industry. Among them are micro-burins of unusual size—three are $\frac{3}{4}$ inch wide, five are $\frac{5}{8}$ inch wide, and some others $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide. These show that large microliths were being produced, although none was found. But large microliths have been found very occasionally in the county and they would appear to have some special functional significance.

Geometrics are represented by scalene triangles on most of the Surrey sites, but since they were mainly taken from surface sites their proportionate incidence is indeterminate. Like Horsham points they appear to be variable, reflecting, most probably, occupational needs.

Explanation of Fig. 2.

Nos. 1 to 4 are shouldered points. Nos. 1 and 2 have bulbs. Nos. 5 and 6 are Horsham points with well-developed tangs. No. 7 is a microlith of the barb type and No. 8 is of the arrow-tip, or missile, type. Nos. 9 and 10 are typical obliquely blunted points, Clark's A type, and No. 11 is a variant of that type. No. 12 is a superb example of Clark's A; it is in grey porous flint. No. 13 is a specialized microlith form with a developed point. No. 14 is a rare trapeze form. Nos. 15 and 16 are Clark's type C. Nos. 10 to 16 are examples of unusually large microliths.

NON-LOCAL MATERIAL AND FOLK-MOVEMENT

Artifacts of Portland chert, pebble rubbers of non-local rock and implements of translucent coloured flint which cannot be related to any outcrop in the county or in Britain and which, also, differs from superficially stained flint, are implications of folk-movement. All these have been recognized in the county.

(a) Portland chert.

A few artifacts of this material have been found in the extreme west of the county. A graver and microliths were found in the Farnham pit-dwellings. Sporadic finds have been traced into the south-western counties to Land's End, but, to date, no such finds have been recorded east of Farnham. This material implies a folk-movement from the westward.

(b) Pebble rubbers.

Pebble rubbers of rock of south-western origin have been found in the Farnham pits and recently on the Oakhanger site. All have been petrologically examined. Again, no similar finds have been made east of Farnham, and, again, the implied folk-movement is from the west.

(c) Translucent coloured flint.

Implements of translucent, uniformly coloured flint have been recorded in many parts of Surrey; this flint exactly matches the translucent coloured implements found in East Anglia. Apparently this material derives from coastal glacial deposits. Such implements have been found at Barnes Common, Reigate, Leith Hill, Godalming, Cutt Mill, West Horsley, Farnham district, and Blackdown. An important series of mesolithic material in brown flint was collected by Dr. Hooper from Leith Hill sites. In every instance inspected by the writer, the coloured flint implement was of mesolithic type. This material implies a folk-movement from the north-east.

CONCLUSION

In concluding this epitomised summary of researches as they are known in early 1952 some reference must be made to the existing scope for further enquiries into the extent and nature of mesolithic occupation in the county. There must still be numerous chipping floors in the extensive blown sand deposits which overlay the greensand, and the systematic transecting¹ of these will increase our knowledge of settlements and the occupational activities of the settlers.

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