

A Mesolithic Site in West Ewell

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Among the prehistoric and Romano-British material recovered from a small garden in Ewell between 1963 and 1967 were 73 worked flints. In this paper I suggest a Mesolithic date for most or all of them.

THE SITE

No. 34, Station Avenue (N.G.R. TQ 214626) is built on the London Clay, at the very edge of the Thanet Sand. In fact, the subsoil of the last few feet of the garden shows the dividing line. The site is about a quarter of a mile from the springs of Ewell, and a few hundred yards from the Hogsmill river. The nearest water is the small tributary stream that passes along Green Lanes to feed the Hogsmill. The part of the garden searched is comparatively small—some 500 sq. ft—and the subsoil has been so disturbed that there is little chance of any structural remains surviving. In 1964 a short length of a small V-shaped channel cut into the Thanet Sand was observed and excavated at the easternmost limit of the garden. But it is only a couple of feet from the boundary with the railway and parallel to it. I regard it therefore as recent.

The finds are analysed and discussed below. The percentage of waste material (67.1%) is well below what one would expect, and requires explanation. On a proper excavation, every piece of flint is recovered and studied. This collection is simply the more obvious pieces recovered incidentally during cultivation; my own experience has shown me that some waste is always produced which one would only accept as artificial in association with recognisable flakes and artifacts. I must therefore have missed material of this kind. Even so, it would have required a great many more pieces over the five years to have brought the total to the 96% for instance, recorded at Farnham (Clark, 1939, 72).

THE INDUSTRY

The material

Nearly all the flint used was obtained from the chalk downs, some two or three miles to the south. It is of a translucent blue-grey colour, shading to grey and grey-brown, often attractively mottled with opaque cherty inclusions. It is found in usefully large nodules, with a thick white cortex. Worked into portable pieces at the source (Rankine, 1949, 11), it was further worked on the occupied site. 47% of our material is cortex flakes or cores.

Pebbles of the Pleistocene gravels were sometimes used, and a few of our smaller pieces are probably from this source. One core, in particular, (No. 1) shows the distinctive battered dark cortex, and orange grey staining on an ancient break. Three adjacent flake surfaces show light superficial staining, and the remaining surfaces are fresh and unpatinated. It has thus the appearance of re-used core. Two waste flakes of a distinctive honey-coloured mottled flint may be of the material said by Rankine to come from the Hogsmill valley and used as evidence of a westward movement (Rankine, 1956, 55).

Two further pieces call for special comment. One is a tiny flake of a dense, almost black flint that I have not seen commented on elsewhere. It seems to be a good material, free from imperfections. The second is a cortex flake. It is of good texture, and bright reddish amber; it is, I think, a specimen of Rankine's shade A (Rankine, 1952, 148-9). Carpenter traced this (and other colours) to 'the few shallow beds of gravel found between Ewell and Kingston' (Carpenter, 1958, 155).

The artifacts

The collection includes no outstanding specimens, and many whose identification must remain tentative. I have had the benefit of some valuable suggestions from Mr J. C. Draper, who read this paper in draft; responsibility for the conclusions, however, is entirely mine. I have leaned heavily on Rankine's excellent introductory study (Rankine, 1956b) and other works quoted in the bibliography to this paper—especially the Surrey Archaeological Society's three Research Papers. On the whole, I follow the classification used by Clark (*passim*).

First, the general composition of the collection:

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>By-Products:</i>		
Cores	9	
Waste flakes	36	
Core rejuvenators	2	
Microolithic rejects (micro-burins)	2	
<i>Total</i>	48	67.1
<i>Finished implements:</i>		
Scrapers	11	
Gravers	1	
Blade segment	1	
Fabricator	1	
Unfinished implements	2	
<i>Total</i>	16	22.0

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
<i>Utilised flakes:</i>		
Scraping	3	
Fabricating	4	
<i>Unclassified artifact</i>	1	
	—	
<i>Total</i>	8	10.9
	—	
<i>Total pieces</i>	72	
	—	

I would repeat here my reservations about the statistical value of this analysis. The identifications are very tentative, and are discussed in detail below.

(a) *Cores*

The mesolithic flint-worker aimed to produce long thin blades and broad flakes, with the minimum wastage. The core was discarded only when no more flakes could be detached from it. No. 3 is part of a blade core; the underside has been re-worked. No. 2 likewise is part of a core that has been worked in two directions. It was detached subsequently with a sideways blow, perhaps to rejuvenate the parent core, and finally used as a scraper. The other rejuvenating flake is not a good one; it, too, was worked in two directions, and after a couple of mis-hits that produced unworkably small flakes, was struck off sideways. The cores show the use of stone-on-stone percussion, and also the shallower flaking with a bone or wooden striker. Two cores have evidently been used as hammer-stones. The smallest core is only $\frac{2}{5}$ inch long, but has had five tiny flakes struck from it. The striking platform is lightly patinated.

(b) *Waste flakes*

Two only are illustrated, Nos. 4 and 5. Both have a resemblance, probably misleading, to axe-sharpening flakes. Sharpening flakes are known from Ewell, and No. 5 is strongly reminiscent of Carpenter's No. 4, from Ewell Court. These do not, however, show clearly the facet which would be part of the original cutting edge of the axe.

(c) *Microlithic manufacture*

The older term 'micro-burin' includes both bulbar and tip rejects. They are not, as far as we can tell, tools. Nos. 6 and 7 are possible micro-burins, both from the bulbar end of the flake. Both show the use of the notch technique; the break is clean on No. 6 but has been neatly worked away on No. 7 to obtain a tiny chisel-like edge: the asymmetrical notch is encouraging. The notched blade, No. 8, is best regarded as an unfinished implement. It is

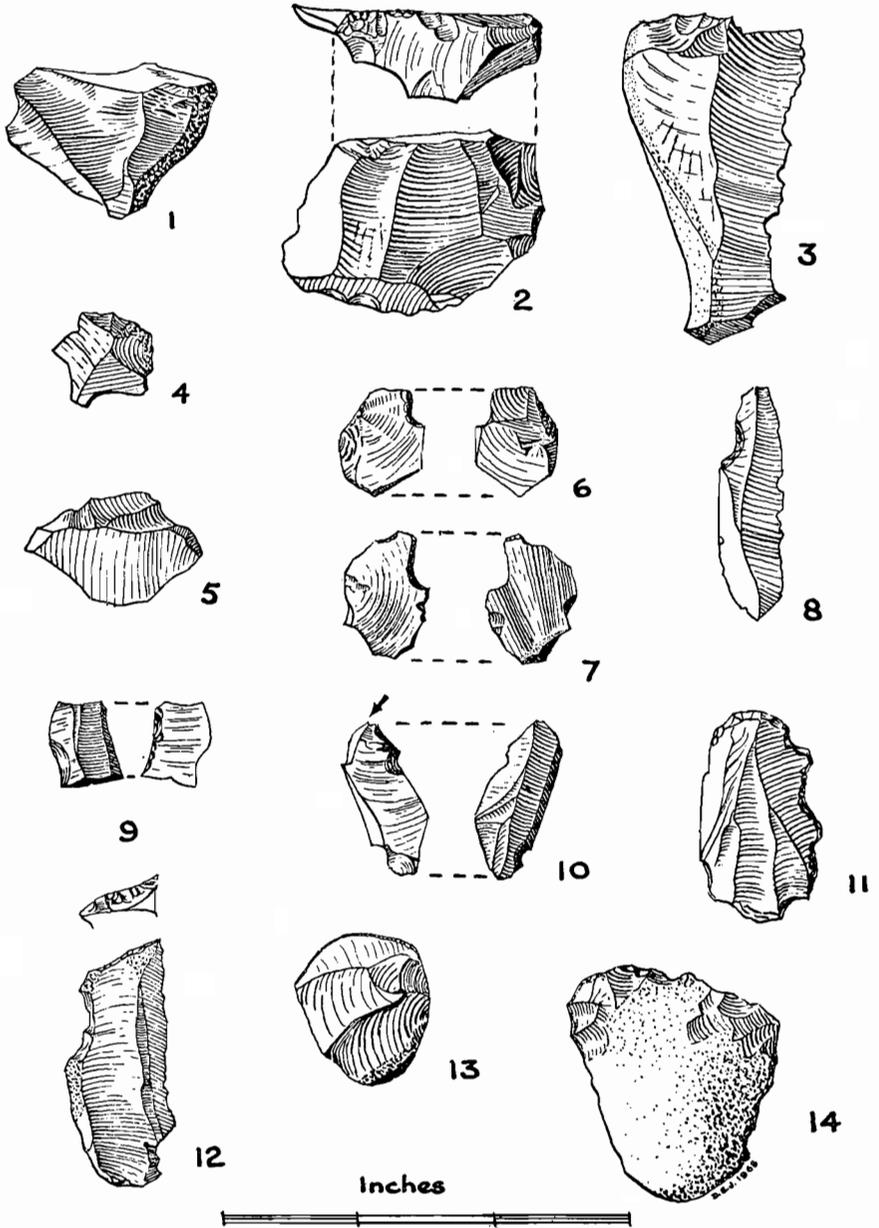


Fig. 1 Flint implements from West Ewell

a fine, translucent micro-blade, with a small diffuse bulb; the notch is rather too angular for a scraper, and is matched by irregular fine retouch at the other side. It appears to be the first stage in the manufacture of a microlith of Clark's type C (Clark, 1934). There need be no surprise at the lack of finished microliths: we are lucky to have the rejected pieces.

The blade segment, No. 9, is part of a utilised blade. Such objects have long been recognised as implements in their own right. Our specimen shows the peculiar 'dent' to which Rankine has called attention (Rankine, 1954).

(d) *Gravers*

Five flakes bore very strong superficial resemblances to gravers. The sharpened facet of a genuine specimen should be channelled and show the negative bulb resulting from the removal of the spall. Four failed this test, and the fifth (No. 10) is damaged at the crucial point. I gave it the benefit of the doubt. It is a blade graver, in the fine translucent grey-brown flint, sharpened with a single oblique blow, which left a small step, or jag. This is often evidence of re-edging (Rankine, 1955, 202). The cutting edge would have been about $\frac{1}{24}$ inch wide. The blade was apparently not 'backed' by secondary working. In the absence of secondary working I have classified the other candidates as waste flakes.

(e) *Scrapers*

All eleven scrapers are on flakes or blades, except for one, which may be the residue of a core. Two are simple round scrapers, one (No. 13) a neatly worked semicircle with very fine retouch, and the rest have straight or gently curved edges. I illustrate two that served a double purpose; No. 11 is an end scraper with a hollow worked on one side, and No. 12 has a rough hollow and an oblique end worked to a vertical edge. One end-scraper is unfinished, but would have been a pretty specimen.

(f) *Fabricator*

No. 14 is a cortex flake that has been roughly worked to a rounded end. The subsequent damage to this is the result of pressure, not percussion. This effect has been shown by Leakey to be the result of pressure-flaking, though the rounded end is unusual (Leakey, 1951, 32).

(g) *Utilised flakes*

It is generally recognised that a great many flakes were used without secondary working—but it is not easy to identify the signs of this use. Three flakes show damage along one edge only, but the spalls are not sufficiently regular to be a deliberate retouch. I conclude therefore that they were used for scraping. The damaged edges of the other four show rough usage, perhaps as fabricators.

(h) *Unclassified*

This category comprises one specimen, a thick flake with a crudely worked edge, not regular enough to be a serrated saw-edge, and too crude to be a scraper, unless unfinished.

DISCUSSION

In the foregoing comments a Mesolithic date has been assumed. It is rare for a collection of surface material to include nothing of later date, and it is perfectly possible to attribute much of this material to the Neolithic or Bronze Age. But there is nothing that certainly belongs to a later period, and the admittedly tenuous evidence for microlith manufacture reinforces the overall impression that part, at least, of the material is indeed Mesolithic.

If that is so, the collection fits easily into what we already know of Mesolithic settlement in Ewell. The background of the local finds—or more important, of the people who may well have settled here for a time—has been summarised by Mrs Dorothy Nail (Nail, 1963). Finds in the Hogsmill, and the Ewell area, were surveyed by Mr L. W. Carpenter over ten years ago (Carpenter, 1958); since then subsequent fieldwork, and in particular the discovery of Mesolithic material at no. 7, High Street, Ewell, have made an up-to-date survey of matter of urgency.

Mesolithic man was a hunter and fisher, and constantly on the move. Any settlement was never more than a temporary or seasonal affair. But axe sharpening flakes from Glyn House and Ewell Court (Carpenter, 1958, 155) suggest forest clearance, and it was good hunting country, to judge from the number of scrapers. Several calcined flints from the present site may also be signs of occupation at this time. However, I have refrained from stretching the evidence of a small and incidental collection further than it will allow; and I hope that it will one day be seen in the context of a good general study of all the finds made locally, many of which are still in private hands, and few of which have been properly published.

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