

# A Mesolithic Site at Wonham

by R. L. ELLABY

During the winter of 1970/1 the writer observed a scatter of flints in a field immediately to the south of Wonham mill. Subsequent fieldwork revealed a dense concentration over about 500 sq m on the highest point of the field close to the edge of the river bluff. To date over 4000 pieces of flint have been collected, the bulk of which comprises a typical Mesolithic assemblage. Three flint arrowheads and a plano-convex knife from elsewhere in the field could suggest, however, that some of the material is of a later period.

## THE SETTLEMENT (TQ 2235 4945)

The settlement is situated in a commanding position about 50 m above OD on a promontory bluff of Low Terrace gravels formed by the confluence of Shagbrook and the River Mole. The gravels rest on the junction of the Weald and Atherfield clays. The site is therefore just off the Greensand which outcrops a few hundred yards to the north and east.

Good views are obtained to the north along Shagbrook which cuts through the Lower Greensand ridge on which several mesolithic sites have been observed in the neighbourhood. Views are obtained along the Mole to the west, and to the south as it crosses the Weald clay tract, where also further sites have been discovered on the terrace bluffs (see p. 9).

The site would thus appear to command a possible east-west route along the Greensand ridge and a possible north-south route by way of the river into the central Weald (Fig. 1). The variety of geological features in the immediate vicinity must have provided a hunter-gatherer community with good supplies of raw materials in the form of various forms of plantlife suited to sand, silt or clay, while gravel from the terrace was immediately to hand for flintworking. The proximity of the river and stream, which flow about 50 m from the site, assured supplies of fish, waterfowl and game.

## THE FLINTS

The bulk of the raw material for flint knapping was almost certainly taken from the gravel terrace as indicated by the weathered and stained cortex, old thermal fractures and the great variety of colours and textures of the struck pieces. Patination varies from complete absence to opaque white but the majority of flakes are only incipiently affected. This differential

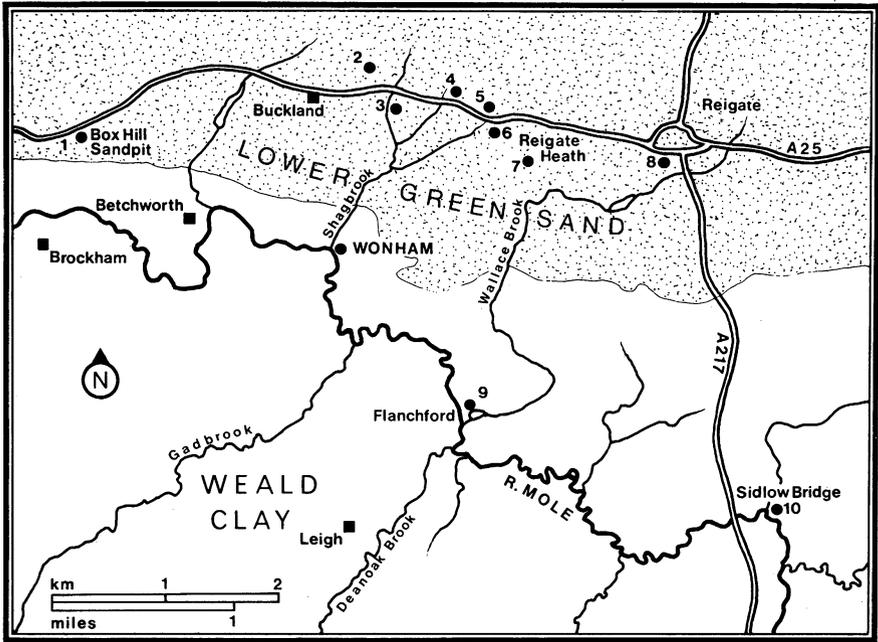


Fig. 1 Mesolithic sites in the neighbourhood of Wonham

patination cannot be used as a guide to difference in age as it is clear that different forms of flint patinate at varying rates. This can be demonstrated on several pieces of variegated flint where patination is only exhibited on distinct zones, the boundaries of which denote a change in physical or chemical composition.

The bulk of the flints consists of the usual waste flakes and cores and the remainder includes scrapers, awls and many pieces exhibiting retouch, either random or to form points, spurs and edges for grasping or scraping. It is not safe to say that all these pieces belong to the Mesolithic because of possible later admixture but the following artefacts of definite Mesolithic association can however be noted:

|                      |    |                      |
|----------------------|----|----------------------|
| Microliths           | 31 | (Fig. 2, nos. 1-31)  |
| Microburins          | 26 | (Fig. 2, nos. 32-34) |
| Gravers              | 11 | (Fig. 2, nos. 35-36) |
| Tranchet axe         | 1  | (Fig. 3, no. 37)     |
| Axe sharpening flake | 1  | (Fig. 3, no. 38)     |

## DISCUSSION

As in the rest of Britain, the later stages of the Mesolithic period in the Weald are probably marked by a general increase in the production of small geometric, rod and needle shaped microliths. In the 4th millennium bc the rod form constitutes a very strong element in the microlithic inventories, especially in the Pennines (Switsur and Jacobi 1975). Similar forces appeared to be at work at High Rocks (Money 1968) in the Weald where nearly 25 per cent of the microliths were of this form and radiocarbon dates of  $3780 \pm 150$  bc and  $3710 \pm 150$  bc were obtained.

At Abinger Common (Leakey 1951) the microliths were almost exclusively of rod and needle shaped form and must fall very late in the period, a fact which has not gone unnoticed by others (e.g. Bradley 1972, 14).

The outstanding features of the Wonham industry are the lack of microliths with hollowed or inversely retouched bases, the low number of obliquely blunted points, and the high count of tiny geometric, rod and needle shaped microliths.

The site may therefore fall very late in the sequence, possibly as late as the 4th millennium bc

## MESOLITHIC SITES IN THE NEIGHBOURHOOD OF WONHAM

### Greensand sites

- 1 Box Hill sandpit TQ 202 504. Site destroyed
- 2 Buckland Corner TQ 236 506. Site destroyed
- 3 Reigate Heath TQ 237 504

The above sites have been mentioned by Hooper (1933), but the whereabouts of the collections are unknown.

4 Reigate Heath TQ 238 502. A concentration of flakes from a small area of disturbed ground was found here by Mr D. R. Hamilton. The collection, with other sporadic finds from the Heath, is now in the Reigate Priory School museum.

5 Buckland Corner sandpit TQ 234 507. Site destroyed. Whereabouts of collection unknown. This site has been mentioned by Hooper (1945, 15) and Rankine (1952, 3).

6 Lawrence Lane TQ 227 510. Several flakes in the face of a small disused sandpit have been observed by the writer.

7 Buckland TQ 228 507. A scatter of flints in a field overlooking Shagbrook has been shown to the writer by Mr D. Williams. Apparently, at the turn of the century the fields around Buckland were a rich source for flint collectors (Johnson and Wright 1903, 133).

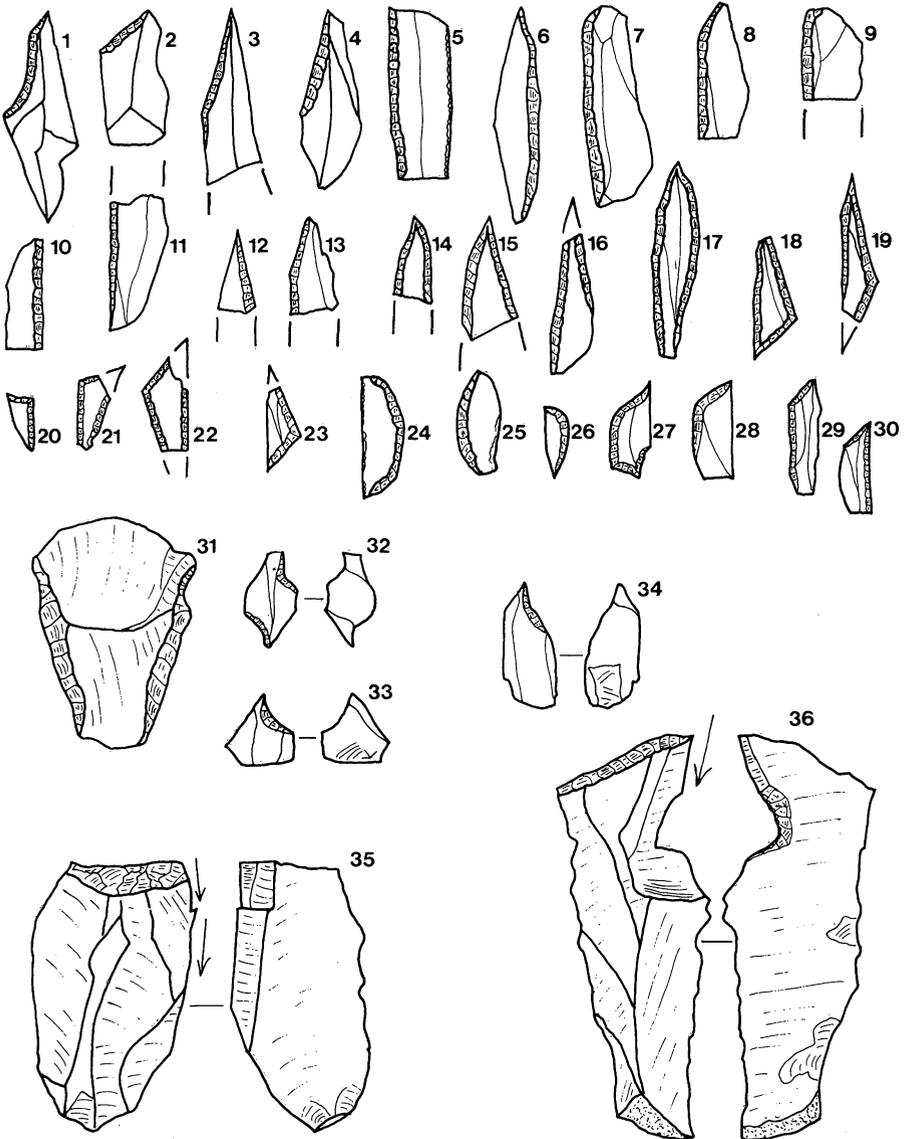


Fig. 2 Flint artifacts from Wonham. (Scale 1/1)  
 Microlith types: 1-4 obliquely blunted points; 5-13 rods; 14-17  
 needle shaped; 18-23 scalene triangles; 24-26 crescents; 27 trapezoid;  
 28-30 sub triangles; 31 petit tranchet.

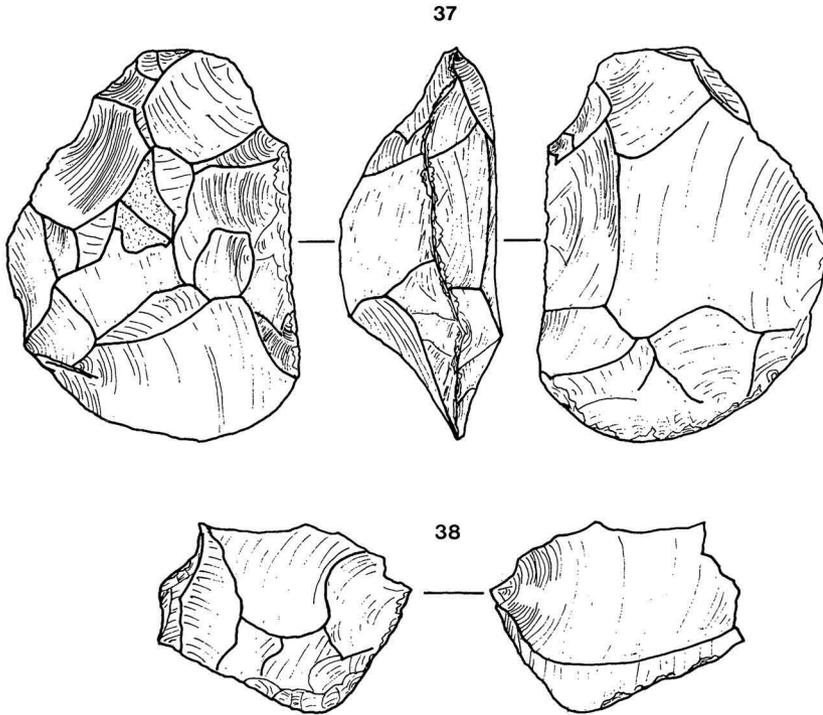


Fig. 3 Flint artifacts from Wonham. (Scale 1/1)

8 Reigate town centre TQ 252 502. The majority of archaeological excavations in the town have produced a few flints but that to the rear of the late Congregational Church (Slade 1974) yielded material in sufficient quantity to suggest the presence of a site in the immediate vicinity.

#### Wealden sites

9 Flanchford TQ 235 480. This site has yielded several microliths of similar types to those at Wonham (Ellaby 1976)

10 Sidlow bridge TQ 262 472. This site, at present being investigated by the writer, is probably that found by Hooper (1933, 68).

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