Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age flint artefacts from Little Woodcote

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based on fieldwork by David Stanbridge and Robert Stanbridge

A surface collection of flints, gathered over 20 years, has shown prehistoric activity in an area previously considered devoid of finds.

Introduction

A collection of over 500 pieces of flint has been amassed over the last 20 years by David Stanbridge and Robert Stanbridge. Numerous unworked struck flakes were discarded by them in the field. The collection is a result of intensive fieldwork on open agricultural land consisting of smallholdings and nurseries at nos 7, 8, 25, 38, 39, 40, 41 and 53 Little Woodcote Estate from TQ 282 621 to TQ 288 620 (fig 1). The land is gently sloping at a height of approximately 100m OD, and is situated on chalk with overlying Frilsham soil (a well-drained mainly fine loam soil). To the north-west the land rises gently to the Late Bronze Age site at Queen Mary's Hospital, an area capped by Thanet Sand, and to the south-east the land rises more steeply to the North Downs. As far as is known, no soil which could have contained flint artefacts has been imported to the site.

The flint in this collection is a medium to dark grey, or brown in colour. Much of it is heavily patinated, the colours on the patinated pieces being light to dark grey. There are no indications of the source of the flint. The collection is composed solely of surface finds, and out of a total of 547 flints, only five flints were free from any sign of damage. Many of the artefacts are badly damaged, often making it difficult to distinguish between this and intentional working. This should be borne in mind with regard to figs 2–5, where only obvious damage has been distinguished, and in the following discussion it may be assumed that all artefacts are damaged unless described otherwise. It is most likely that this damage has resulted from the continuous cultivation of the land from which the flints were collected; it is a common feature of surface collections from ploughed fields. The situation is further complicated by the fact that several artefacts show unmistakable evidence of being re-worked into a different artefact type at a later date, often after a patina had formed over the original working.

The recognisable artefact types range in date from the Mesolithic to the Bronze Age, and it seems likely that flints such as blades, flakes, scrapers and cores also vary as broadly in date, but it is not possible to assign specific dates to these categories solely on their morphology.

Each piece has been photographed, identified and measured, and a detailed catalogue and the photographs have been placed in the archive collections of the Society's library. Only axes and arrowheads are catalogued here, and a small selection of the most diagnostic artefacts is illustrated; all other details are in the archive. Wherever possible measurements were taken parallel to, or perpendicular to, the striking platform of flakes or flake artefacts (after Saville 1980), but where this was not possible, the overall maximum dimensions were used. Because of the mixed nature of the assemblage, statistical analysis of types was deemed invalid. The total weight of the collection is 12,235g, and percentage of total weight has been used to quantify the various flint types. The flints are retained by the finders.

List of types

FLAKES AND BLADES (fig 2 no 2; fig 5 no 4)

There were 241 unretouched flakes and blades (fig 2 no 2), which comprised 35.6% of the assemblage. Of these, only three flakes and one blade were undamaged. There were 95

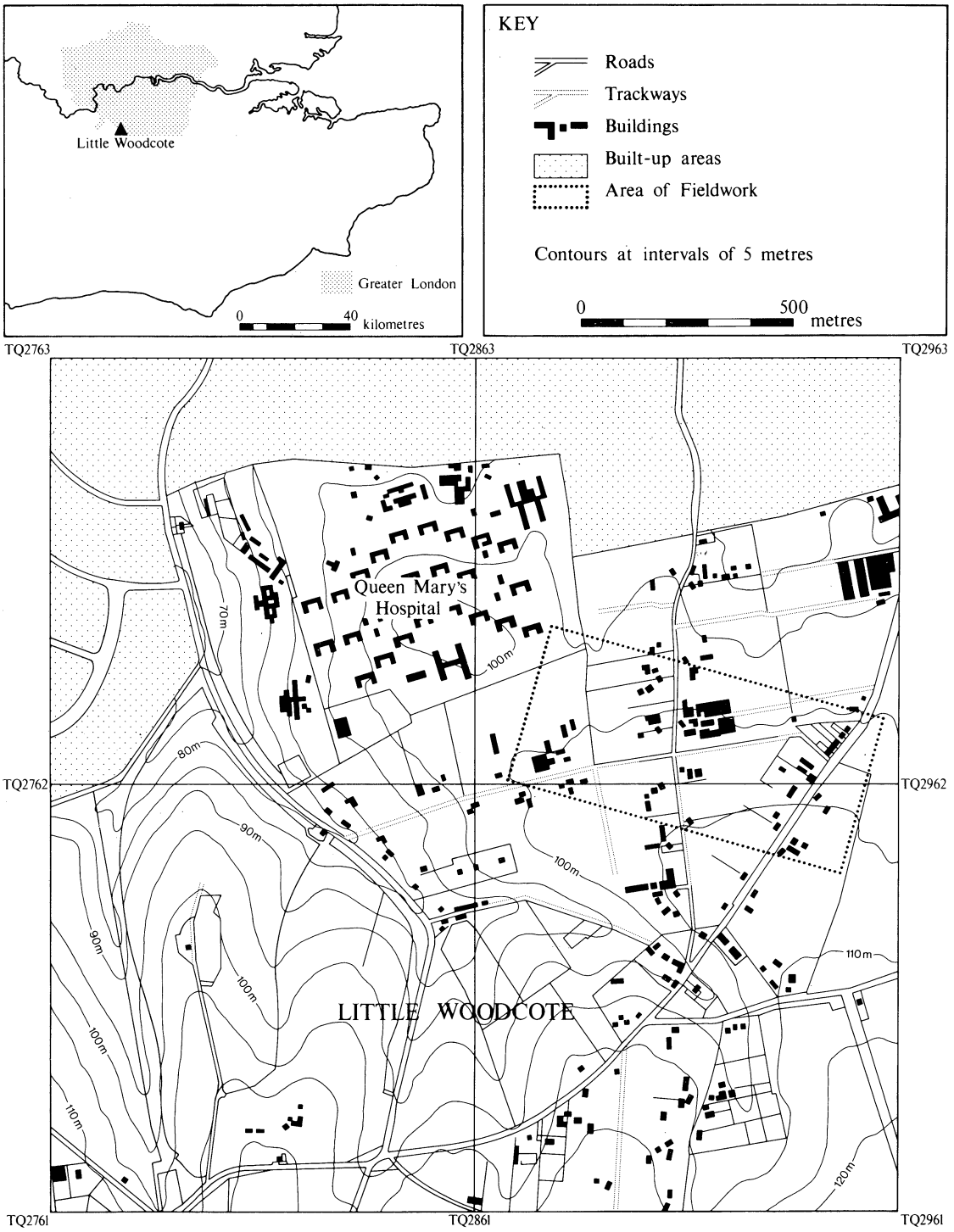

Fig 1. Little Woodcote: site location (based on the Ordnance Survey)

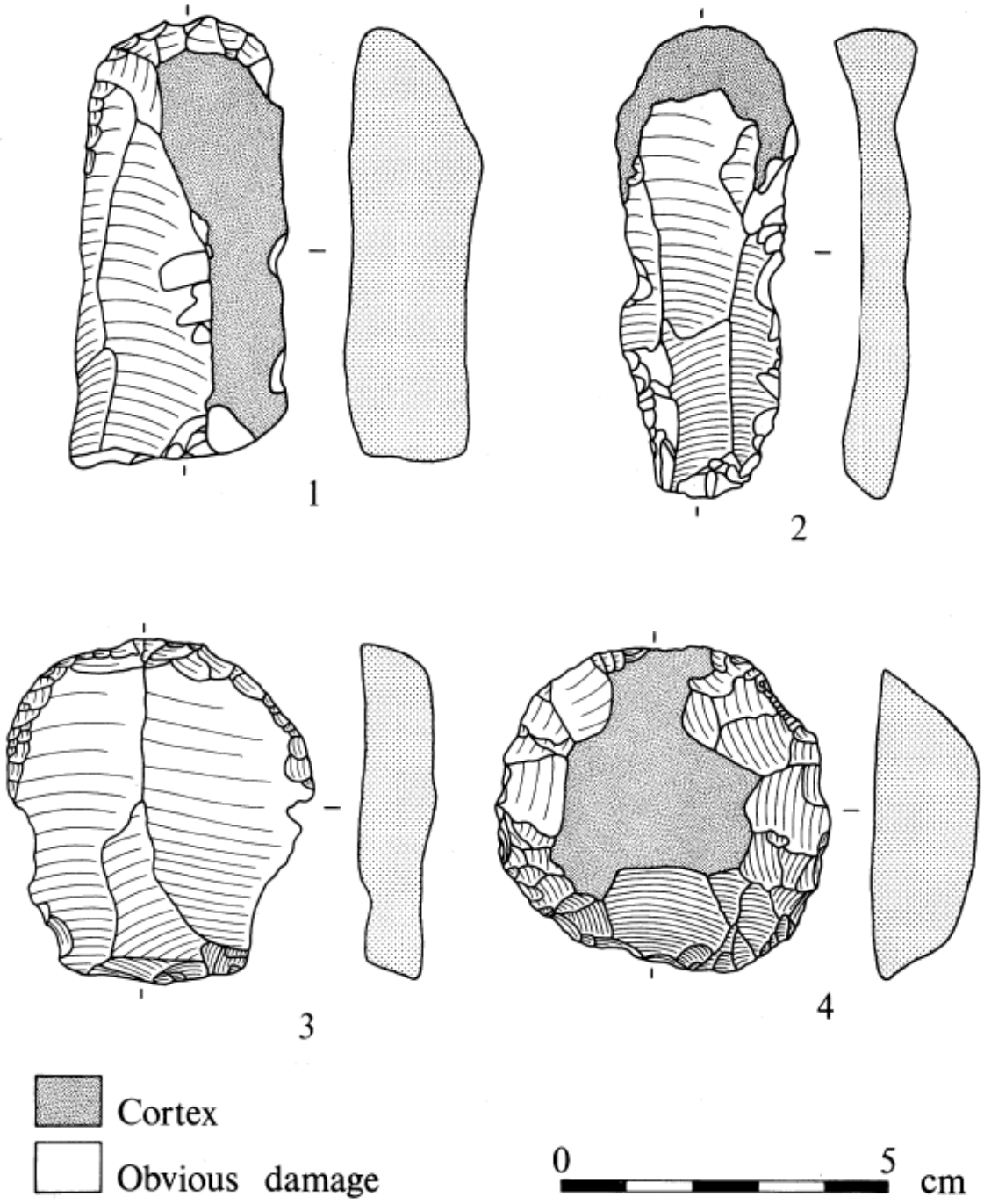

Fig 2. Flints from Little Woodcote: 1, long end scraper; 2, unretouched blade; 3, short end scraper; 4, disc scraper. 1:1

retouched blades and flakes comprising 6% of the total weight of the assemblage (only one flake was undamaged). There were also three obliquely truncated examples (fig 5 no 4). Blades are elongated flakes and they have been placed in this category if their length is at least twice their width (Tixier 1974, 5). Blades can be termed bladelets if under 5cm in length (Tixier 1974, 7), but this distinction has not been used here.

SCRAPERS (fig 2 nos 1, 3, 4)

Scrapers comprised 10.3% of the collection. The system of classification used is based on that of Hurst Fen (Clark 1960, 217). The majority of scrapers from Little Woodcote were made on the ends of short flakes, usually with a convex scraping end. There were 46 of these short end scrapers (fig 2 no 3), with nine long end scrapers (fig 2 no 1), 12 side scrapers, four hollow scrapers, four disc scrapers (fig 2 no 4), and three 'thumb-nail' scrapers.

CORES

Twenty-eight cores were found (16.1% of the collection). Three had been reused as hammerstones. No attempt to classify the cores has been undertaken in view of their uncertain date-range. Fragments of two ground axes had also been reused as cores.

POINTS

Points comprised 3.5% of the total weight of the collection. The word 'point' is used as being less specific in terms of function, following the terminology of Saville (1981, 9). Twenty-five points were identified, and there were also three elongated points. The latter are known from Late Neolithic, Beaker and Bronze Age contexts (Saville 1981, 61). They are large heavy flakes with elongated points at the distal end. Their function is not known.

AWLS (fig 5 no 3)

Six awls were identified (0.4% of the collection). These are points which usually have alternating retouch and could therefore have been used as awls.

RODS

Nine rods were identified (1.8% of the collection). Apart from one example, they may all have been used as fabricators. The term rod covers all prismatic tools; the term fabricator is only used where there is definite evidence of use as a strike-a-light, and the Little Woodcote ones were not conclusive. The rods are likely to be of Bronze Age date (Saville 1981, 63).

AXES (fig 3)

The 18 axes and axe fragments formed 10.3% of the collection. The five flaked axes and fragments range in date from the Mesolithic to the Neolithic, while the 13 ground axe fragments date from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age. Two ground axe fragments have been later reworked into points (fig 3 no 2), and two others have been reused as cores.

Flaked axes (fig 3 nos 1, 3)

There were four complete flaked axes and one butt end.

1 103mm long, 44mm wide, 30mm thick. Some cortex.
2 Complete but probably unfinished axe. 123mm long, 55mm wide, 29mm thick. Patinated. Fig 3 no 1.

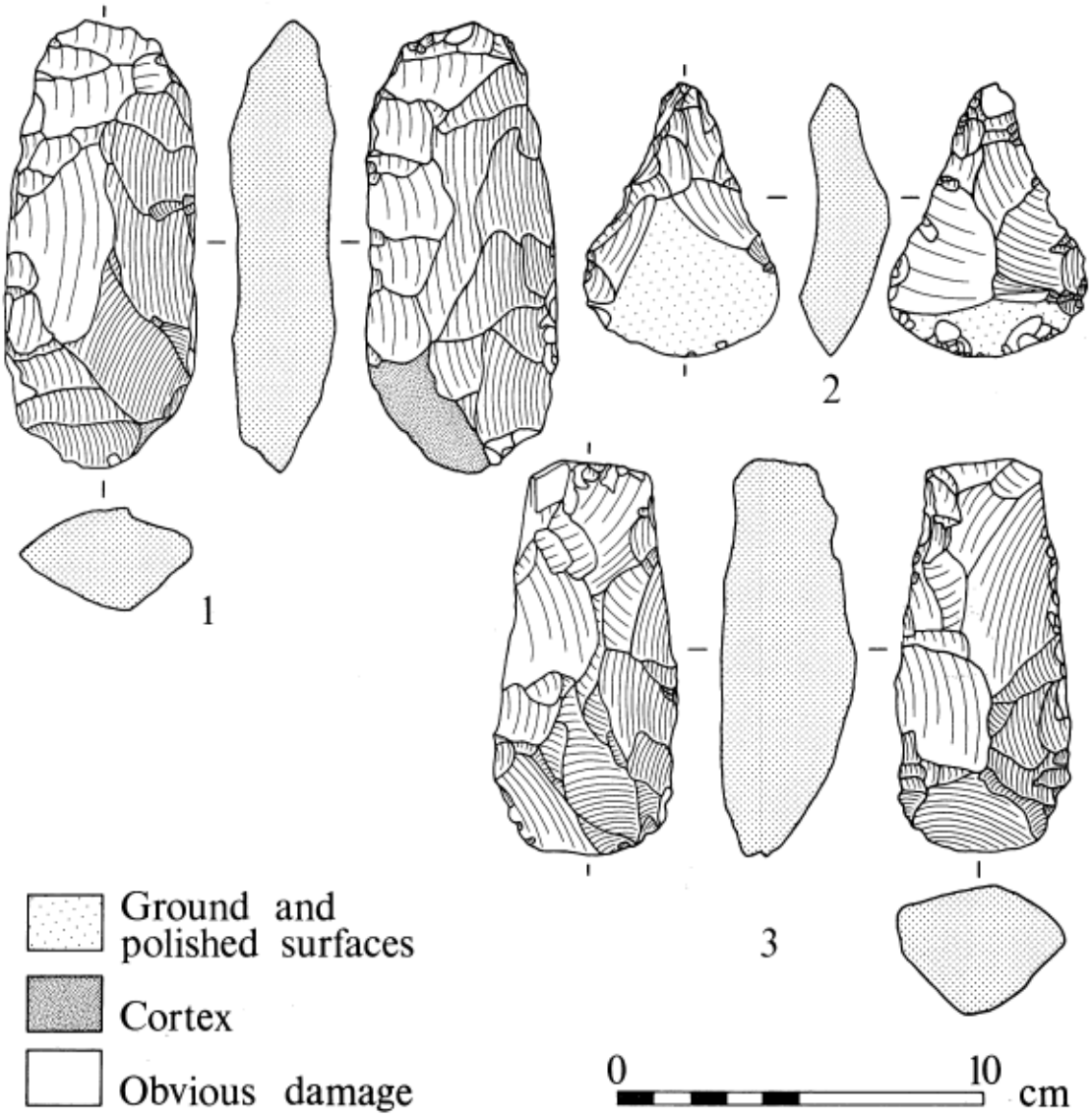

Fig 3. Flints from Little Woodcote: 1, flaked axe; 2, point made on a ground axe fragment; 3, flaked axe. 1:1

3 87mm long, 43mm wide, 28mm thick. Some cortex. Patinated.
4 109mm long, 50mm wide, 37mm thick. Slight patination and cortex. Fig 3 no 3.
5 Butt end. 82mm long, 48mm wide, 31mm thick. Patinated.

Ground axe fragments (fig 3 no 2)

A total of 13 ground axe fragments was found.

6 Flaked and partly ground axe. Broken. Patinated. 60mm long, 45mm wide, 24mm thick.
7 Butt end of a ground axe. Patinated. 78mm long, 48mm wide, 36mm thick.
8 Butt of flaked and partly ground axe. Slightly flattened sides. Broken with hinge fracture. Patinated. 50mm long, 47mm wide, 25mm thick.

9 Fragment of a ground axe. Patinated. 57mm long, 34mm wide, 25mm thick.
10 Butt end of flaked and partly ground axe. Slight patination. Slightly flattened sides. Similar to Adkins & Jackson type B (1978, see especially no 30). 67mm long, 38mm wide, 19mm thick.
11 Butt end of ground axe. Some cortex (ground smooth). Patinated. 43mm long, 47mm wide, 20mm thick.
12 Cutting edge of ground axe. Reused as a point. Patinated. 73mm long, 53mm wide, 19mm thick. Fig 3 no 2.
13 Flake of ground axe reused as a point. 42mm long, 35mm wide, 10mm thick.
14 Ground axe fragment reused as a core. Patinated. 32mm long, 64mm wide, 30mm thick.
15 Ground axe fragment reused as a core. Patinated. 34mm long, 33mm wide, 20mm thick.
16 Ground axe fragment. Patinated. 22mm long, 26mm wide, 10mm thick.
17 Flake with hinge fracture from a ground axe. Patinated. 32mm long, 34mm wide, 7mm thick.
18 Flake from a ground axe. Patinated. 39mm long, 32mm wide, 8mm thick.

ARROWHEADS (fig 4, fig 5 no 1)

Eighteen arrowheads were found, comprising 0.9% of the collection. Leaf arrowheads date from the Neolithic into the Beaker period, and possibly later (Green 1980, 93–4). Green divides leaf arrowheads into three shape groups (A–C) and four sizes (1–4). Two type 2A arrowheads were found at Little Woodcote; these are most commonly found in East Anglia, and are not well represented in south-east England (Green 1980, 215). There are two type 3A arrowheads; this is a very common type, particularly in south-east England, as are the type 3B arrowheads (Green 1980, 215). One type 4B arrowhead is present; this is most common in the West Country, but is found in south-east England as well (Green 1980, 215). There are also two type 4C arrowheads; type 4C arrowheads are found in the Lower Thames area, but are not very common.

Oblique forms of transverse arrowheads have Late Neolithic and Beaker associations, dating from *c* 2000 bc to 1500 bc (Green 1980, 114–15). They are found mostly in East Anglia and the Yorkshire Wolds, and are not very common in south-east England (Green 1980, 103).

Sutton type a barbed and tanged arrowheads are characterised by their vestigial barbs. The form is predominant in the Cotswolds and Midlands, although it does occur in the Lower Thames area (Green 1980, 119, 240). Sutton type b arrowheads incorporate a miscellaneous range of tanged only and of barbed and tanged arrowheads. They are the most common type of barbed and tanged arrowhead, and although they are found in south-east England, they occur most commonly elsewhere (Green 1980, 118, 122). All Sutton types of arrowhead have Beaker associations.

Ballyclare type b barbed and tanged arrowheads are found mostly in Ireland. They are extremely rare in south-east England. This type of arrowhead was possibly used for prestige or as a specialised missile point, possibly for hunting game. Very few associations are known, the earliest being Beaker, *c* 1900 bc (Green 1980, 117, 118).

Types of arrowhead are described according to Green (1980).

Leaf-shaped arrowheads (fig 4 nos 1, 2, 6–8)

1 Type 2A. Patinated. 43mm long, 31mm wide, 8mm thick. Fig 4 no 1.
2 Type 2A. Patinated. 48mm long, 28mm wide, 9mm thick.
3 Type 3A. Patinated. 39mm long, 22mm wide, 6mm thick.
4 Type 3A. Slight patination. 26mm long, 14mm wide, 3mm thick. Fig 4 no 7.
5 Type 3B. Tip broken. Some cortex. Patinated. 35mm long, 19mm wide, 6mm thick. Fig 4 no 2.
6 Type 4B. Patinated. 23mm long, 15mm wide, 3mm thick. Fig 4 no 6.
7 Type 4C. 35mm long, 13mm wide, 5mm thick. Fig 4 no 8.
8 Type 4C. Slight patination. 32mm long, 16mm wide, 5mm thick.

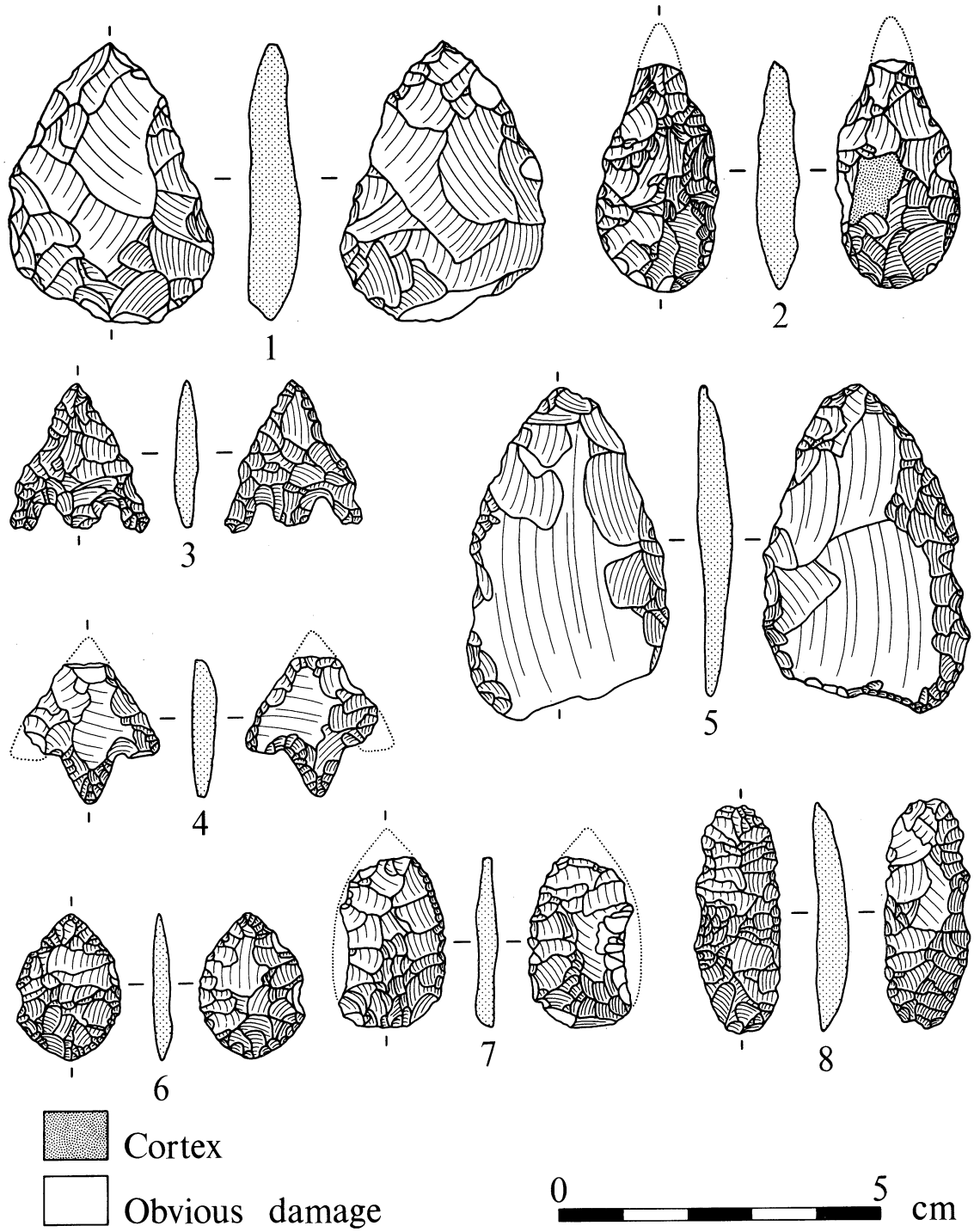

Fig 4. Flints from Little Woodcote: 1, type 2A leaf arrowhead; 2, type 3B leaf arrowhead; 3, Sutton type b barbed and tanged arrowhead; 4, Sutton type a barbed and tanged arrowhead; 5, British oblique type e transverse arrowhead; 6, type 4B leaf arrowhead; 7, type 3A leaf arrowhead; 8, type 4C leaf arrowhead. 1:1

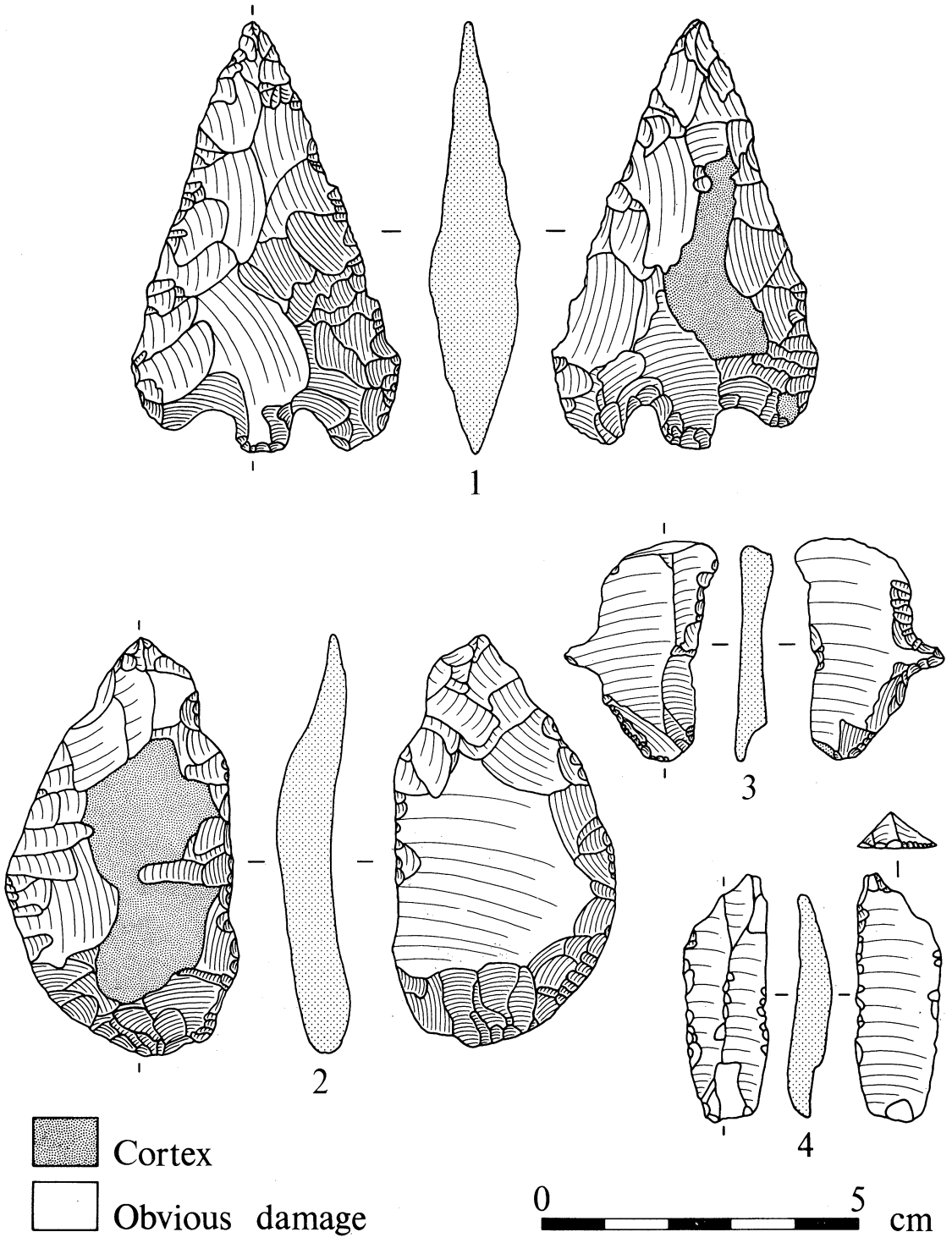

Fig 5. Flints from Little Woodcote: 1, Ballyclare type b barbed and tanged arrowhead; 2, laurel leaf; 3, awl; 4, obliquely truncated blade. 1:1

Transverse arrowheads (fig 4 no 5)

9 British oblique type e. 35mm long, 24mm wide, 5mm thick.
10 British oblique type e. 51mm long, 30mm wide, 6mm thick. Fig 4 no 5.
11 British oblique type e. Slight patination. 32mm long, 28mm wide, 7mm thick.

Barbed and tanged arrowheads (fig 4 nos 3, 4; fig 5 no 1)

12 Sutton type a. Barb, tang and tip broken. 19mm long, 16mm wide, 4mm thick.
13 Sutton type a. Tip missing, one barb slightly broken. 21mm long, 20mm wide, 4mm thick. Fig 4 no 4.
14 Sutton type b. Some cortex. One barb missing. 27mm long, 21mm wide, 4mm thick.
15 Sutton type b. One barb broken. 22m long, 17mm wide, 5mm thick.
16 Sutton type b. Barbs are longer than the tang. 23mm long, 21mm wide, 4mm thick. Fig 4 no 3.
17 Sutton type b. Part of tang missing. Patinated. 22mm long, 22mm wide, 5mm thick.
18 Ballyclare type b. Some cortex. 68mm long, 42mm wide, 14mm thick. Fig 5 no 1.

LAUREL LEAVES (fig 5 no 2)

The two laurel leaves comprised 0.2% of the collection. Laurel leaves are bifacially worked pieces. They have an asymmetrical form, and do not possess the acute point of leaf-shaped arrowheads; for this reason they are thought not to be missile points (Clark 1960, 223). They are largely early to middle Neolithic in date (Saville 1981, 65).

1 Some cortex. 65mm long, 36mm wide, 9mm thick. Fig 5 no 2.
2 Slight cortex. Patinated. 45mm long, 23mm wide, 8mm thick.

The remaining flints (14.9% of the collection) comprised 21 unretouched amorphous chunks of flint and one gun-flint.

Conclusion

No Mesolithic finds are known in the area apart from cores, blades, flakes and scrapers recorded from Queen Mary's Hospital, Carshalton (Lowther 1944–5, 71). The only other known Mesolithic finds anywhere near the site are concentrated along the spring line 2km to the north of Little Woodcote (Adkins 1982, 59).

In the Neolithic period there is one find of a stone axe and a few flint artefacts, probably dating to the Neolithic or Early Bronze Age, from Queen Mary's Hospital (Adkins & Needham 1985). Just over 1km to the east, part of a polished flint axe was recorded from Hillcrest Road, Purley (Adkins 1982, 76–7). Numerous Neolithic flint implements were recorded from the Downs at Woodcote 2km to the south-east (Johnson & Wright 1903, 144–7).

In the Bronze Age there is only one known nearby site, and that is the Late Bronze Age site of Queen Mary's Hospital, only 160m to the north-west. However, its date is too late to be related to many of the Little Woodcote finds. No Early Bronze Age sites or finds are known in the vicinity (Adkins 1982).

Apart from these few scattered finds, there are no other known sites or finds in the vicinity of Little Woodcote, and this area, because of the lack of evidence, has been generally assumed to have been avoided for settlement. Intensive fieldwork has dramatically altered the record of past activity in this locality. It is therefore most important that no areas (especially areas likely to be developed in the near future) are classified as being devoid of prehistoric or other settlement and activity until intensive fieldwork has taken place.

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