

## NOTES

### Results of fieldwalking at Barnfield East, Abinger

#### Introduction

Barnfield East (also known as Leaser's Barn Field, TQ 111 480) is situated in the National Trust-owned area of Abinger Roughts, Abinger (fig 1); it has been under cultivation for many years, being recorded as arable in the Abinger Tithe Apportionment of 1840. The field lies on the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand just below the chalk escarpment of the North Downs, from which it is separated by the Gault Clay. It is thus well situated for both agriculture and artefact manufacture, being located in a series of geological and environmental habitats that provide light sandy soils and water-holding clay, while flint is available from the chalk downland.

In early 2012 the Lithics sub-group of the Prehistoric Group of Surrey Archaeological Society began to reassess the large assemblage of worked flint collected by Keith Winsor, who had been allowed access to a number of fields in the Abinger area. Among the finds from Barnfield East was a significant number of apparently Bronze Age pottery sherds recovered from two concentrations during fieldwalking in the 1980s and 90s. In May 2012 and following ploughing, these areas were the subject of a further fieldwalking exercise, with each find location recorded using a handheld global positioning system (GPSMAP 62st). The field was walked in a north–south direction at 2m intervals starting at the eastern end and extending 150m westwards. The resulting material, together with the earlier collection of flintwork, was assessed, identified and recorded.

#### The lithics

A total of 1075 flints was recovered: 114 waste flakes; 640 flakes; 211 blades including butts, segments, tips and bladelets; three utilised flakes; 22 tools including scrapers, side scrapers and core rejuvenating flakes; eleven notched flakes; one bashed lump; 26 blade cores; one borer; two microburins; and two microliths.

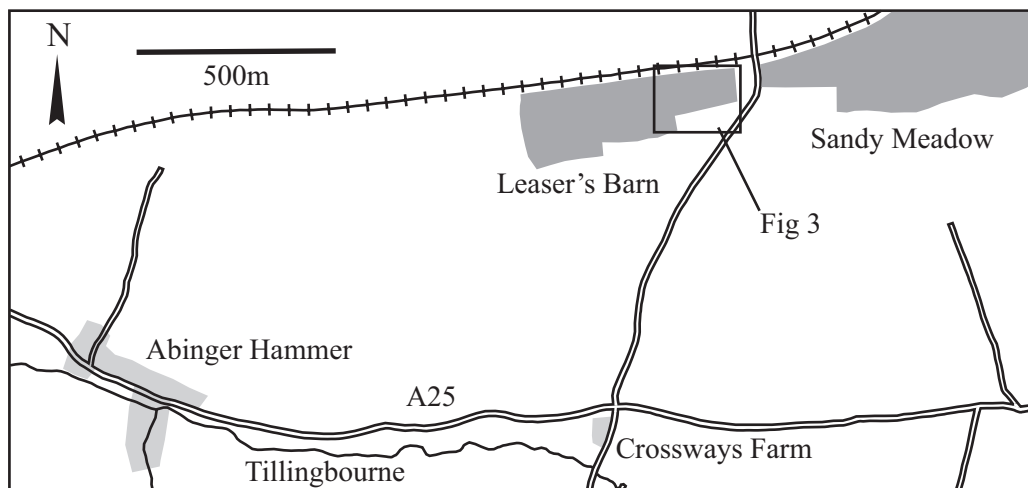


Fig 1 Barnfield East, Abinger. Location map.

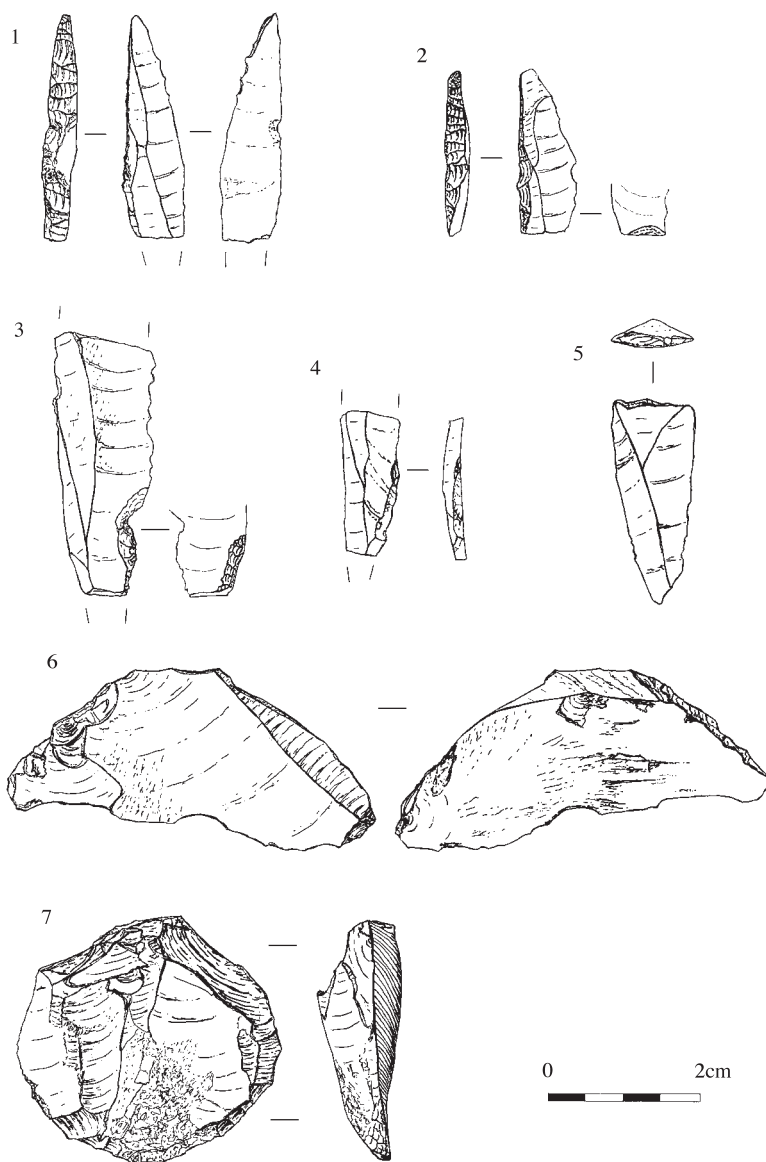


Fig 2 Barnfield East, Abinger. Flints: 1) obliquely backed point, 2) Horsham point, 3), 4) and 5) retouched blade fragments, 6) axe-sharpening flake, 7) scraper (drawing Chris Taylor).

Also among the material is an obliquely-backed point (fig 3.1), a Horsham point (fig 3.2), blade fragments with retouched edges (figs 3.3, 3.4 and 3.5), and an axe-sharpening flake manufactured from an orange-coloured flint not common on this site (fig 3.6). One of the few potentially Bronze Age pieces is a scraper (fig 3.7) that contrasts in knapping style with the rest of the assemblage.

Patination and staining are varied throughout with many pieces showing little or no change from the original material. This ranges in colour from dark to light grey and fawn to cream, with some showing portions of each, while others are coated with a milky staining. Three or four flakes are possibly Palaeolithic and have a cream/white thick patina. The probable source of the flint is the adjacent North Downs.

In addition, 173 burnt flints were recorded, although no concentrations were apparent. Whether these derived from prehistoric settlement or are the residue from much later lime production to the north and east of the site is unclear, but in view of the chalk scatter also observed, liming of the acid sand seems the probable explanation.

Despite the considerable amount of mostly Late Bronze Age pottery sherds from this site, the flint material is not contemporary but appears to be mostly Mesolithic in character, similar to that found during previous fieldwork. This included one scalene triangle, two obliquely-backed points, two straight-backed blades or rods, and one Horsham point from earlier finds, suggesting a date in the first half of the late Mesolithic period (8000–6000 BC). This material is similar to that from other local sites – Sandy Meadow (TQ 115 483) some 300–400m to the east, and Paddington Farm (TQ 102 472) (Winser 1987).

### The pottery

The prehistoric pottery assemblage (fig 3) comprises 257 small, mostly abraded sherds. Up to four prehistoric pottery traditions may be represented, but the greater part (more than 95%) can be attributed with reasonable certainty to a single tradition and period – post-Deverel-Rimbury, in this case datable to the Late Bronze Age, somewhere between the end of the 2nd millennium BC and *c* 800 BC. Its diagnostic characteristics here are a range of mostly fine to medium and medium to coarse flint-tempered fabrics, thin, sometimes heavily-fingered vessel walls, and a handful of feature sherds displaying typical (although not in all cases exclusively) post-Deverel-Rimbury forms, such as the carinated shoulder, the heavily gritted base, and the expanded hammer-head and the internally bevelled rim. A significant fraction of the assemblage shows evidence of burning in the form of reddened interior and exterior surfaces and breaks.

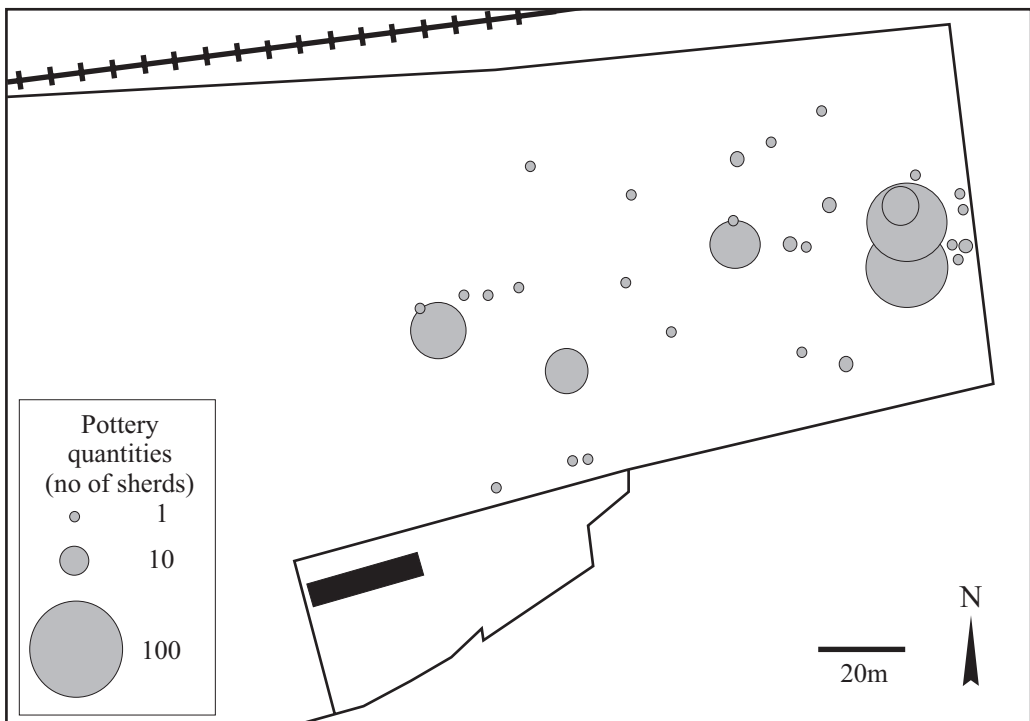


Fig 3 Barnfield East, Abinger. Plan showing distribution of Bronze Age pottery.

Possible earlier pottery is represented by two very coarsely but patchily flint-tempered sherds that have a laminated structure often associated with local Neolithic pottery traditions; a sherd in a coarsely grog-tempered fabric of a type widely associated with Biconical and Collared Urns, which date to the beginning of the Bronze Age, and two or three thick, very coarsely flint-tempered sherds that could belong to the Middle Bronze Age Deverel-Rimbury tradition. Possible later prehistoric sherds among the assemblage – once again just a handful – are flint tempered with natural glauconite or shelly inclusions. These could extend the period covered into the Iron Age. However, it should be emphasised that in the proportions represented, all of these – both the possibly earlier and possibly later sherds – could be accommodated within the post-Deverel-Rimbury tradition. Also, many of the post-Deverel-Rimbury types, albeit in smaller proportions, could likewise be included within these earlier and later traditions. In an unstratified assemblage, neither possibility can be ruled out.

Owing to its poor condition and lack of stratification, the assemblage can add little to our understanding of local prehistoric pottery traditions. One of the diagnostic characteristics of post-Deverel-Rimbury pottery traditions is the large sizes of assemblages (no other British prehistoric pottery tradition is so abundantly represented). Nonetheless, it is unusual for it to be recovered in such quantities from the surface and it is likely to indicate the presence of a considerable surface or near-surface deposit of Bronze Age material – perhaps a midden, or a destroyed rather than abandoned building – both possibilities that are supported by the evidence of burning on the surfaces.

## Discussion

Fieldwalking at Barnfield East has identified a scatter of Mesolithic flints. To the east, Sandy Meadow, separated from Barnfield East only by White Down Lane, has been well known to lithics collectors for many years, with two discrete concentrations of Mesolithic activity being identified. It is possible that the watershed between the Pipp Brook and the Tillingbourne spanned the varied geologies from the North Downs to the Greensand, allowing easy exploitation of the differing ecologies, as suggested for a similar site at North Park Farm, Bletchingley (Jones 2013).

The large quantity of Late Bronze Age pottery found on the surface at Barnfield East is unusual and there is a lack of similar surface sites for comparison. Material from excavated sites is more readily available, the closest and the largest of which comes from Weston Wood, Albury (Russell 1989), further to the west along the Tillingbourne valley and comparable in landscape position to the site discussed here. At Weston Wood there is a variety of forms and styles, both plain and decorated wares, and the excavation evidence appears to suggest a timeline for both its manufacture and the people who utilised it. In contrast, the surface collection from Barnfield East consists largely of a limited variety of plainware forms that were probably made and used within a single settlement period. It has been suggested by Needham (1987) that plainware assemblages were present in Surrey by 900 BC but not much earlier; nevertheless the evidence does imply repeated if intermittent Bronze Age activity in the area.

A Roman cremation cemetery was excavated in Sandy Meadow in 1929 (Hooper 1927). One sherd of pottery found at that time was later identified as Saxon (Lowther 1939). It would therefore seem that this location has been favoured over millennia, which may be due to its varied geology, allowing tool and pottery manufacture as well as being a relatively level area near water for settlement and agriculture.

In an area known for an abundance of flintwork but very little else, this evidence for permanent or at the least recurring settlement during a single period, and the form this took, is clearly significant to our understanding of prehistoric activity in this locality. The evidence from both Barnfield East and nearby Sandy Meadow suggests that this area would benefit from further investigation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The authors are grateful to Mr R Hewer (National Trust), Mr L Matthews (Manor Farm, Wotton) and Mr P Trower (Wotton Estate) for permission to fieldwalk and survey this area. Thanks are also due to Roger Ellaby, Judie English, David Lea, Jenny Newell, Robin Tanner, Chris Taylor and Ken Waters for their contributions to this project. Finally, thanks are due to SyAS for funding the expert pottery report by Mike Seager Thomas.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Hooper, W, 1927 A Romano-British burial ground at Wotton, *SyAC*, **37**, 220–3  
 Jones, P, 2013 *A Mesolithic 'persistent place' at North Park Farm, Bletchingley, Surrey*, SpoilHeap Monogr, **8**  
 Lowther, 1939 Saxon pottery from Walton-on-Thames, Wotton, and Farnham, Surrey, *Antiq J*, **19**, 325  
 Needham, S, 1987 The Bronze Age, in D Bird & J Bird (eds), *The archaeology of Surrey to 1540*, Guildford: SyAS, 97–137  
 Russell, M, 1989 Excavation of a multi-period site in Weston Wood, Albury: the pottery, *SyAC*, **79**, 3–52  
 Winsor, K, 1987 Prehistoric flint sites at Sandy Meadow, Wotton, *SyAC*, **78**, 184–7

ROSE HOOKER, MIKE SEAGER THOMAS and KEITH WINSER