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# Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume XCIII  
for 2004



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THE CONDUIT: *local history and archaeology organisations and events*

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**Volume XCIII  
for 2004**

Editor Alison Taylor

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## Contents

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The Structure and Formation of the Wandlebury area Steve Boreham	5
Prehistoric Lithics from Station Road, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire Jon Murray	9
Evaluation survey and excavation at Wandlebury Ringwork, Cambridgeshire, 1994–7 Charles French	15
A Roman Cemetery in Jesus Lane, Cambridge Mary Alexander, Natasha Dodwell and Christopher Evans	67
Anglo-Saxons on the Cambridge Backs: the Criminology site settlement and King's Garden Hostel cemetery Natasha Dodwell, Sam Lucy and Jess Tipper	95
The Origins and Early Development of Chesterton, Cambridge Craig Cessford with Alison Dickens	125
A late seventeenth-century garden at Babraham, Cambridgeshire Christopher Taylor	143
The Hearth Tax and the Country House in 'Old' Cambridgeshire Tony Baggs	151
The Cambridgeshire Local History Society Photographic Project 1992–2000 Gill Rushworth and John Pickles	159
Surface scatters, rates of destruction and problems of ploughing and weathering in Cambridgeshire Stephen Upex	161
Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2003	179
Book Reviews Alison Taylor	189
<i>Index</i>	195
Abbreviations	201
Recent Accessions to the Cambridgeshire Collection Chris Jakes	203
Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference 13 March 2004, Law Faculty, Cambridge: <i>Recovering Cambridgeshire's Past</i>	215
THE CONDUIT: local history and archaeology organisations, societies and events	221

## Editorial

The first thing you will notice about these Proceedings is our leap (as a belated welcome to the 21st century) into colour, for our cover and a number of plates. This is not really an innovation: CAS had beautiful colour plates in 1883 and a few other 19th century volumes. At last this is affordable again, and the water colour drawings and photographs we wanted to show seemed to fully merit some extra expense. In future, we will look carefully at illustrations that would benefit from such reproduction and would be particularly keen to include fine examples of artefacts.

This volume contains some very substantial reports on archaeological work, for we are one of the few outlets available for full publication of excavations. It is refreshing to see that these all relate to recent work, not the backlogs that once were a feature of British archaeology. A quick look at the 'Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2003' section however reminds us what a small proportion of current work can be made available in this way. Of course, reports on all sites are produced and can be purchased from the relevant units or consulted in the county archaeological office. In future, these will also be added to a national data base known as OASIS, run by the Archaeology Data Service, so accessing this huge amount of data will eventually be much simpler. We aim to keep you abreast with such advances through our own website, [www.camantsoc.org](http://www.camantsoc.org).

It was a great pleasure to be asked by the Cambridgeshire Local History Society to publish a short note on their superb photographic project, a worthy successor to CAS' similar project in the early part of the 20th century, now a much valued part of the Cambridgeshire Collection. This voluntary effort will likewise be used by those involved with the historic environment in years to come. The same Society asked us to include the list of recent additions to the Cambridgeshire Collection, compiled by Chris Jakes. This list used to be included in *Conduit* and has been much missed. It reminds us that our local historians are not far behind local archaeologists in their labours, a tribute to the floods of new data from an ever-active antiquarian community.

'Fieldwork', 'Reviews', 'Spring Conference report' and 'Conduit' are regular items we have managed to maintain – and which add to another substantial volume. This year, 'Conduit' was compiled at short notice by our redoubtable President, Tony Kirby, to whom we owe many thanks. In the nature of things this has to be done at the last moment, and even so many societies do not have a complete programme for the following year at the time we need it. We would therefore like to have a Supplement later in the year, as with original *Conduit*, but currently this is beyond our means. Perhaps we will have better news next year.

It remains to offer further thanks to our retiring President. Tony has taken the Society safely through two quite difficult years, and this October hands over to Nicholas James. Our Secretaries carry an even larger burden of work for the Society, of which organising nine lectures, often by speakers of national repute, is only one part. We are therefore extremely grateful to our retiring Secretary, Liz Allan, and to Janet Morris, who has now taken on the challenge. We must say a sorry farewell too to Don Fage, who has had the tough job of Registrar. It may also be noticed that we still have vacancies for Excursions Officer and for Editor of *Conduit*, so do contact us if you are interested in volunteering.

Alison Taylor  
Editor

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# Prehistoric Lithics from Station Road, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire

Jon Murray

with contributions by Nina Crummy and Tom McDonald

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*Archaeological investigations in 1997 revealed a significant assemblage of Mesolithic to Bronze Age struck flint on the Greensand ridge east of the Millbridge Brook at Gamlingay, including six tranchet axes. No traces of prehistoric buildings were located, but pits and tree hollows containing prehistoric pottery were found. A possibly Neolithic pebble-hammer was recovered from the fill of an Anglo-Saxon sunken featured building.*

## Introduction

A significant assemblage of Mesolithic material was recovered during archaeological investigations by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (now Archaeological Solutions Ltd) in 1997. The site comprised c. 3.92ha of arable land immediately south of Station Road, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire (TL 2430 5190), located on a partially alluviated Cretaceous Lower Greensand terrace above the floodplain of the Millbridge Brook to the southeast of the village at 46–48m OD.

The principal archaeological evidence at this site concerned an Anglo-Saxon farmstead and cemetery which is detailed elsewhere (Murray 2004). The present article summarises the results of fieldwork and analysis of prehistoric material. Full details can be found in the archive fieldwork and publication reports held at the Archaeological SMR for Cambridgeshire and the Cambridgeshire Collection, Cambridge Central Library, and in the full publication report mainly regarding the Anglo-Saxon site (Murray 2004).

## Fieldwork and excavation

A significant scatter of Mesolithic material was discovered during rapid fieldwalking, gridded test pitting and evaluation (Murray 1996; Murray 1999). The Mesolithic component of the rich flint scatter found in the topsoil, on the crest of the Greensand 'dome' overlooking the Millbridge Brook c. 120m to the west, suggests occupation of this part of the river terrace. Blade cores, blades, microliths and five transversely flaked tranchet axes (Fig. 1; see McDonald below)

were present. One further tranchet axe was found on the surface of a natural, sand-filled hollow during the excavation. Struck flint was occasionally recovered from tree hollows features and dips across the site, although there was no recognisable pattern to deposition. Such features probably acquired intrusive flint through downward 'drift' of artefacts.

The surface flint scatter contained material predominantly dated to the Neolithic and Bronze Age. Three Neolithic or prehistoric pits, four tree hollows and a ditch revealed by excavation suggested occasional use and perhaps small-scale occupation or the site. A pebble-hammer (Fig 2; see Crummy below) was recovered from the fill of an early Anglo-Saxon sunken-featured building (Grubenhaus) constructed close to two Neolithic pits. Tree hollows, suggesting the presence of woodland on parts of the site during this period, may have been used as temporary shelters. The features and the flint scatter suggest the manufacture of flint tools for hunting while based at a temporary camp on the river terrace.

## Struck flint

Tom McDonald

A large quantity of struck flint representing two or more industries was recovered from the subsoil and from the fills of tree hollows, pits and later archaeological features. 2598 pieces of struck flint weighing almost 20kg, and 31 lumps of fire-cracked flint were collected from the site.

The raw material varies from light grey to dark grey brown and is frequently grey or dark grey and some pieces are mottled. The flint is characterised by a thin and generally battered cortex typical of gravel flint collected from the surface. Flaws such as frost fractures and pitting are present on a small number of pieces. Yellow and reddish chert occurs in small quantities. The condition of the flint falls between not sharp and fairly sharp, with the sharper pieces coming from the fills of later features. Varying degrees of patination occurs throughout the collection, ranging from light to heavy. Reuse of patinated flint is evident on a small number of flints. Post-depositional edge damage and breakage is infrequent, as much of the flint was processed in the field. Few pieces display battered or

heavily rolled edges.

Five methods of collection were used. These comprised rapid field walking, sieved shovel test pitting set out on a staggered 20m grid, controlled fieldwalking of 10m\_ collection points, material sieved from the fills of tree hollows, material sieved from features containing prehistoric pottery and material hand collected from later archaeological contexts.

The Mesolithic material comprises elements of the mixed flint scatter within the plough soil and much of the residual material found in later archaeological features. The derivation of the flint is uncertain, as it was recovered by surface collection and occurred in residual contexts, although the scatter generally fol-

lows the crest north-east of the Millbridge Brook.

The diversity of the debitage, the mode of knapping and variations in patination, suggest that both blade and flake industries are present. The small fine blade production found with flint tranchet axes is characteristic of the early Mesolithic period (Clark 1934). Many of the cores are small and heavily used, and are comparable to those at Peacocks Farm (Clark & Higgs 1960; Smith *et al.*1989) and contain a high proportion of single platform (pyramid) type A1-2 cores and opposed platform types B1 (Clark & Higgs 1960).

The presence of a fragment of polished stone axe, soft and hard hammer struck flakes, small numbers

Table 1. Flint summary.

	Fieldwalking Evaluation	Fieldwalking in quadrants Excavation	Fieldwalking in 10m units	Test pitting at 20m intervals	Flint from features	Total
Flakes	54	128	163	187	726	1258
Blades	29	55	54	91	344	573
Chips	-	19	60	86	393	558
Flake cores	-	1	3	-	4	8
Blade cores	3	14	9	7	18	51
Pyramid cores	6	7	4	-	-	17
Core fragments	4	6	11	4	16	41
Core rejuvenated flake	-	-	-	-	4	4
Core tools	-	5	-	-	1	6
Lumps	-	11	26	10	28	75
Microliths	-	1	-	-	6	7
Burnt	5	4	6	-	16	31
Total	101	251	336	385	1556	2629

Table 2. Retouched pieces.

	Fieldwalking Evaluation	Fieldwalking in quadrants Excavation	Fieldwalking in 10m units	Test pitting at 20m intervals	Flint from features	Total
Point on a blade	-	1	-	-	-	1
Point	-	1	-	-	-	1
End scraper/Point	-	-	-	2	-	2
Oblique point	-	-	-	-	1	1
Sickle	-	-	-	-	1	1
Awl	-	-	-	-	1	1
Misc/retouched flakes	-	-	7	5	16	28
Misc/retouched blades	2	4	1	3	-	10
Microliths	-	1	-	-	6	7
Notched blades	2	-	-	2	-	4
Notched flakes	1	1	2	4	-	8
Notched/scrapper	-	-	-	1	-	1
Serrated blade	-	-	-	1	-	1
Side scraper	-	-	-	2	-	2
End scraper	-	1	-	2	1	4
Button scraper	-	-	-	-	1	1
Fabricator	-	-	2	-	-	2
Core fragment	-	-	1	-	-	1
Flaked axes	-	4	-	-	1	5
Axe fragments	-	1	-	-	-	1
Total	5	14	13	22	28	82



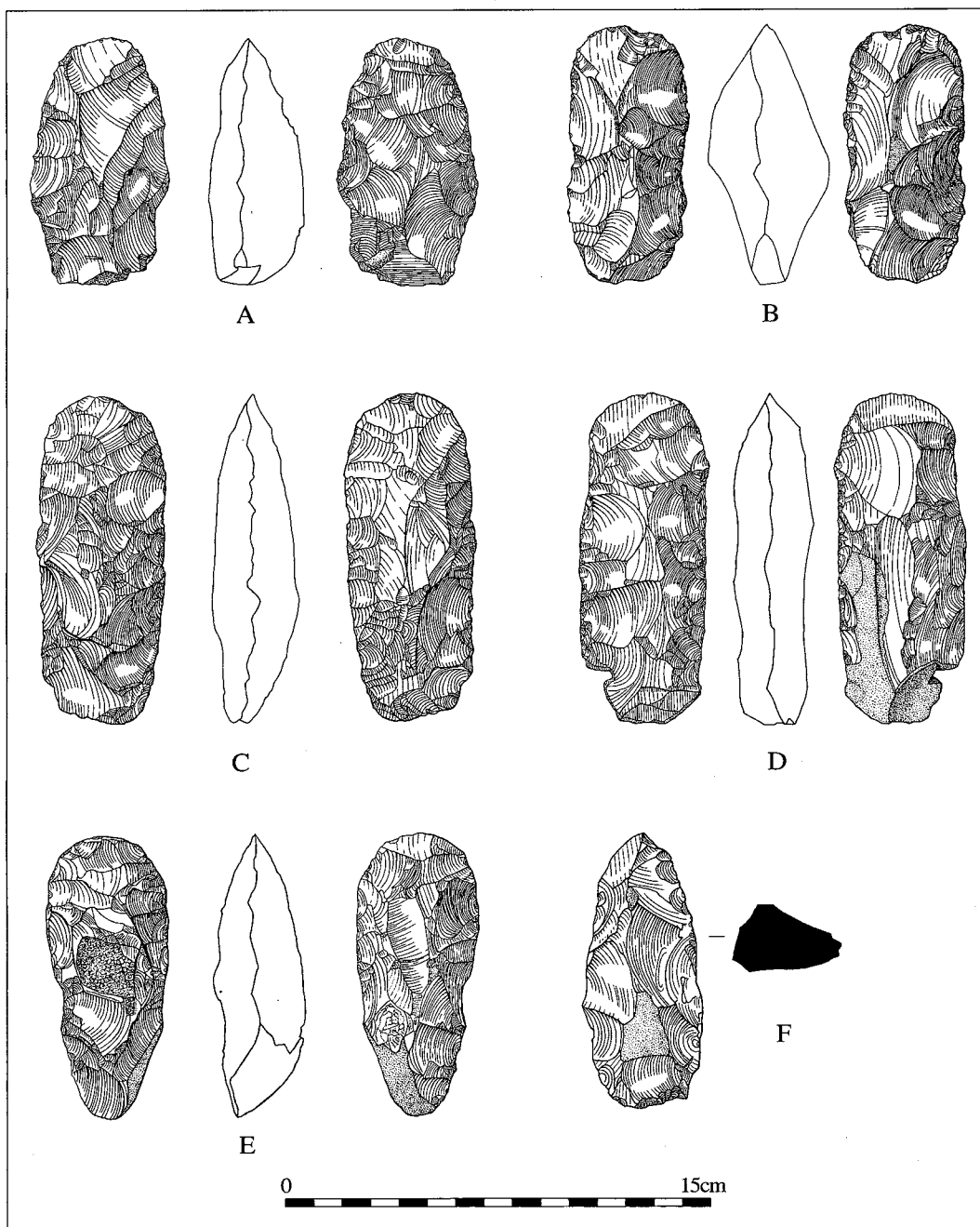


Figure 1. Mesolithic flint transept axes.

of flake cores, core fragments and core rejuvenation flakes is characteristic of later flake-dominated industries (Holgate 1985). Retouched flakes include a small number of distinct pieces, comprising two fabricators or strike-a-lights, a glossed single piece sickle and a fragment from a shallow scale-flaked round or button-shaped scraper. Sickle pieces were used up to 2000 BC (Pierpoint 1981). The button scraper is common to the early Bronze Age and fabricators are known from Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age periods. The presence of hard hammer-struck flakes is characteristic of the metal age industries (Ford *et al.* 1984).

#### Flint transept axes (Fig. 1)

Fig. 1A SW Quadrant Seg C (Fieldwalking)

Not sharp; light grey; cortical; tapered thick butt end; rounded cutting edge with minimal shallow retouch; pointed oval in cross section; striations and remnant blade scars are apparent on both faces. Length 91mm. butt: height 31mm, width 23mm; mid point: height 47mm, width 31mm; cutting edge: height 30mm, width > 13mm (146g).

Fig. 1B Area 25 (Fieldwalking)

Not sharp; grey/dark grey; cortical; tapered butt end; rounded cutting edge with irregular retouch, one face heavily chipped (through use); pointed oval in section; remnant

flake; blade scars. Length 94mm. butt: height 23mm, width 9mm; mid point: height 39mm, width 38mm; cutting edge: height 38mm, width >19mm (141g)

Fig. 1C L2000 (Topsoil)

Not sharp; light grey/grey; tapered butt end; rounded cutting edge; rounded oval in section; remnant flake scars. Length 120mm. butt: height 29mm, width 7mm; mid point: height 44mm, width 28mm; cutting edge: height 40mm, width >16mm (176g)

Fig. 1D L2000 (Topsoil)

Fairly sharp; light grey/dark grey; tapered butt end, cortical; rounded cutting edge; pointed oval in section; remnant flake scars, with irregular retouch. Length 120mm. butt: height 30mm, width 18mm; mid point: height 44mm, width 27mm; cutting edge: height 37mm, width 16>mm (176g)

Fig. 1E Grubenhause F2466 Upper fill L2594

Not sharp; fire cracked; grey/dark brown; tapered rounded butt end (cortical); rounded cutting edge; pointed oval in section; remnant flake scars, with irregular retouch. Length 109mm. butt: height 14mm, width 12mm; mid point: height 41mm, width 26mm; cutting edge: height 38mm, width 10>mm (142g)

Fig. 1F NGR TL 2449 5251 (Recovered by Jim Brown during fieldwalking)

Not sharp; grey opaque, rounded butt end cortical; post-depositional damage around cutting edge; pointed oval in section; remnant flake scars, with irregular retouch. Length 100mm. butt: height 7mm, width 18mm; mid point: height 39mm, width 24mm; cutting edge: height 29mm, width 19>mm (137g)

### Pebble-hammer

Nina Crummy

The basal fill of Grubenhause (F2430 L2432) contained half a pebble-hammer (SF72; Fig. 2), a prehistoric shafthole implement sometimes formerly referred to as a pebble mace (Cummins & Moore 1973, *passim*). However, unlike mace heads, pebble-hammers are made by setting a shaft into the centre of a naturally discoidal pebble, which is otherwise unadapted, and the shaftholes of these are always hour-glass shaped, whereas those of maces have straight or gently curving sides. Pebble-hammers first appear in the Mesolithic period, but may have continued into the Neolithic. They also occur on even later Bronze Age, Iron Age and Roman sites, but the extent to which they were multi-period tools is uncertain (Roe 1979, 36). This example is made from a large natural sandstone pebble (diameter 102.5mm, height 53.5mm) and the shafthole has a marked ridge at its mid-point (max/min diameter 37/21mm).

This example cannot closely be dated, but may originally have been associated with any one of three periods represented by the worked flint from the site. It is possible that the pebble-hammer derived from a Neolithic feature truncated during the construction of the Grubenhause. It was then probably collected and curated as an intriguing and valued object. At Mucking, the deliberate collection and curation of Roman finds was noted from at least one sunken-

featured building on the site (*ibid*, 71), and a number of objects deposited in graves in the Buckland Anglo-Saxon cemetery near Dover, Kent, had been collected and treasured. These included holed fossils and pebbles with an 'obvious visual attraction', which were probably credited with amuletic power (Evison 1987, 121–2). A direct parallel to the collection of the Gamlingay pebble-hammer fragment is a complete quartzite mace head from the fill of a sunken-featured building at West Stow (Pieksma & Gardiner 1989, 47, fig. 36).

The distribution of pebble-hammers within Cambridgeshire shows a cluster in the area of Cambridge, to which the Gamlingay example may be added (Roe 1979, fig. 15). The Fen Ditton pebble-hammer from this cluster is the only one from the county to have been assigned to a specific petrological group. It is made from a rare greywacke probably sourced from Cornwall, the only other examples of which come from Zennor (Clough & Green 1972, 145, CAM 81; Clough & Cummins 1979, 127, Group XIX; Roe 1979, 47). Most pebble-hammers from the eastern counties are quartzite, though sandstone examples are known from Stalham, Norfolk and Great Bealings, Suffolk (*ibid*, 36; Clough & Green 1972, 146–51).

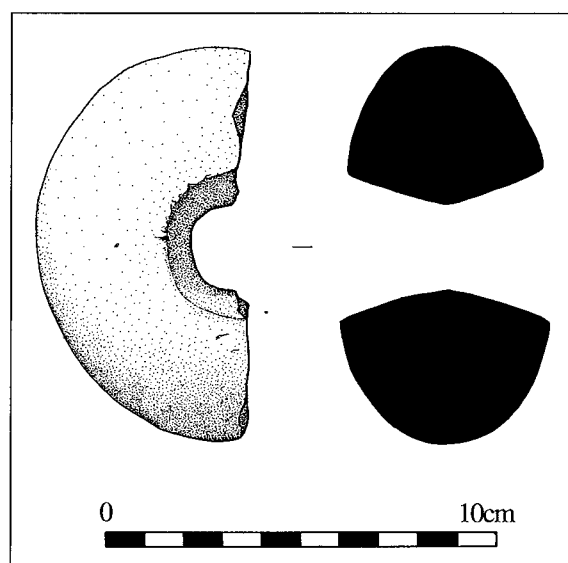


Figure 2. Sandstone pebble-hammer.

### Discussion

#### Previous lithic finds in the vicinity of Gamlingay

Quantities of prehistoric finds have long been noted in the region (Fox 1923) and the Victoria County History recorded the discovery of early prehistoric microliths and later flints 'found on the surface at Gamlingay'. Gamlingay's sandy heaths and acidic bogs were unfavourable to medieval agriculture, thus preserving the prehistoric flint work until ploughed up by later agriculture (Taylor 1997).

Numerous findspots of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age flints are recorded along the valley of the

Millbridge Brook at Dutter End to the east and on the Heath to the southwest of Gamlingay (SMR 2393a, 2395, 00105 and 00060; Brown 1989; Stubbert 1993; Taylor 1997, 51–2). Neolithic/Bronze Age flints have been discovered west of the village and river valley, suggesting a settlement in the vicinity (SMR 2395 and 2396). Jim Brown provided further information on findspots of Mesolithic to Bronze Age flint work in the vicinity of the village, mentioning a barbed arrowhead and flint tranchet axe. This was found at the medieval moated site of Dutter End to the north (Brown 1989), and is described in this report (McDonald above; Fig. 1F). Jim Brown also noted material from the northern terrace of the Millbridge Brook, including a leaf-shaped arrowhead, discoidal knife and microlith point, as well as a general scatter of flakes and cores.

#### *The Mesolithic flint assemblage*

The Mesolithic flint assemblage, though not in situ, adds to the known distribution of sites in the region (Austin 1997) and further confirms activity along the main river tributaries at this time. The presence of earlier Mesolithic sites along the Lea and Colne valleys has been noted (Holgate 1995), but none are recorded along the Ivel valley to the west until the later Mesolithic period. The presence of Mesolithic core tools in tandem with retouched pieces and cores is characteristic of a base camp (Mellars 1976; Pierpoint 1981), although this scatter probably represents a seasonal or low-density camp (Kvamme & Jochim 1989) that took advantage of the river margins along the wider and wooded stream which would have provided abundant fish, wild fowl and game.

During the Holocene era, much of lowland Britain was forested, with breaks around lakes and rivers, opening up the hunting and fishing potential of these areas (Jacobi 1996). The presence of Mesolithic axes, including a fragment from a broken axe, may suggest that tree clearance was occurring in the dense virgin forest of this valley. Jacobi (citing Cane 1986) suggests that there was a definite change in social and economic organisation between the Early and Late Mesolithic periods, with early specialised subsistence economies organised solely from base-camps, developing into generalised subsistence economies with task-sites satellite to base camps. However, supporting evidence comes from Central Pennine sites rather than East Anglia.

#### *Occupation in the Neolithic/Bronze Age*

Neolithic and Bronze Age occupation of the Gamlingay site was relatively small-scale. Fields about a mile to the south-west of Station Road, along the Millbridge Brook at Littleheath, have produced dense Neolithic flint scatters including barbed arrowheads, spear-tips, scrapers and flint knives, interpreted as a Neolithic settlement (Walker 1911, 64–65).

The cropmark of a ring ditch is present in the field c.150m the southeast of the site (SMR 5372), suggesting funerary use in the Bronze Age. The use of tree hollows as temporary shelters is well-documented at

Hinxton Quarry, Cambridgeshire (Mortimer & Evans 1996) and other sites in the southeast. The use of tree hollows suggests a temporary encampment, perhaps a seasonal hunting camp by the river where tool-making was carried out.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Archaeological work was carried out by Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust (now Archaeological Solutions Ltd) commissioned and funded by Merton College, Oxford. HAT would also like to thank their agents, DH Barford & Co, for their assistance during the execution of the project, in particular Martin Page.

The original desk-based assessment, archaeological evaluation, site stripping and preparatory works were undertaken by the author. The excavation team was supervised by Mike Trevarthen under the Project Management of Tom McDonald, who jointly prepared the Interim Excavation Report. Tom McDonald also prepared the initial phasing of the site. An Assessment and Updated Project Design for this publication was prepared by the Jon Murray. This publication text was edited by Leonora O'Brien.

Site works and the post excavation programme were monitored on behalf of the Local Planning Authority by Cambridgeshire County Council County Archaeology Office. HAT wishes to acknowledge Louise Austin and Simon Kaner of the latter for their input into the project. HAT thanks staff at the Cambridgeshire County Record Office for their assistance in providing historic documentary references.

Air Photo Services Ltd produced an air photographic assessment and replotting as part of the original desk based assessment. Thanks are due to Jim Brown of Art of Aviation Ltd for aerial photographs of the site and for allowing HAT to view flint artefacts collected from the local area, and to Michael Stubbert for providing a copy of his detailed dissertation on the development of Gamlingay.

NB Anglo-Saxon aspects of this site (settlement and burials) are published in *Anglo-Saxon studies in history and archaeology* Vol XIII, 2004.

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### Contents

The Structure and Formation of the Wandlebury area Steve Boreham	5
Prehistoric Lithics from Station Road, Gamlingay, Cambridgeshire Jon Murray	9
Evaluation survey and excavation at Wandlebury ringwork, Cambridgeshire, 1994–7 Charles French	15
A Roman Cemetery in Jesus Lane, Cambridge Mary Alexander, Natasha Dodwell and Christopher Evans	67
Anglo-Saxons on the Cambridge Backs: the Criminology site settlement and King's Garden Hostel cemetery Natasha Dodwell, Sam Lucy and Jess Tipper	95
The Origins and Early Development of Chesterton, Cambridge Craig Cessford with Alison Dickens	125
A late seventeenth-century garden at Babraham, Cambridgeshire Christopher Taylor	143
The Hearth Tax and the Country House in 'Old' Cambridgeshire Tony Baggs	151
The Cambridgeshire Local History Society Photographic Project 1992–2000 Gill Rushworth and John Pickles	159
Surface scatters, rates of destruction and problems of ploughing and weathering in Cambridgeshire Stephen Upex	161
Fieldwork in Cambridgeshire 2003	179
Book Reviews Alison Taylor	189
<i>Index</i>	195
<i>Abbreviations</i>	201
Recent Accessions to the Cambridgeshire Collection Chris Jakes	203
Summaries of papers presented at the Spring Conference 13 March 2004, Law Faculty, Cambridge: <i>Recovering Cambridgeshire's Past</i>	215
THE CONDUIT: local history and archaeology organisations, societies and events	221