



Fig. 1. West Heath dig, looking south-east.

(Photo: P. R. Clinch)

A Mesolithic Site on West Heath, Hampstead — a Preliminary Report

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APART from three flakes reported from West Heath by the Thames Basin Archaeological Observer's Group¹, few worked flints had been seen on Hampstead Heath until six artefacts were found near the Leg of Mutton Pond in 1973 by Mr. Alec Jeakins of the Hendon and District Archaeological Society. A total of 150 surface finds were made between 1973 and 1976 along the footpath and the edge of a steep eroding bank. In view of the degree of erosion, the GLC kindly gave permission for HADAS to undertake an excavation in May 1976 under the direction of Mr. Desmond Collins, M.A.

The site (TQ2566 8676) is on high ground (96m. above sea level) which falls away to the west into the

Brent valley; adjacent and to the south, lies the Leg of Mutton Pond, an artificial lake made about 1820, by damming the western end of a small, spring-fed stream where it passes through a steep miniature gorge. The site lies on a natural platform of Bagshot Sand (which is covered by 25 cms. of a fine sand or silt) near its junction with an outcropping of Claygate Beds.

The site was laid out in a grid of 2m. squares orientated along a north-south (magnetic) axis. Excavations commenced in alternate trenches and, with the later excavation of the intervening areas,

1. Thames Basin Archaeological Observer's Group Report New Series 15, (1963) 8.

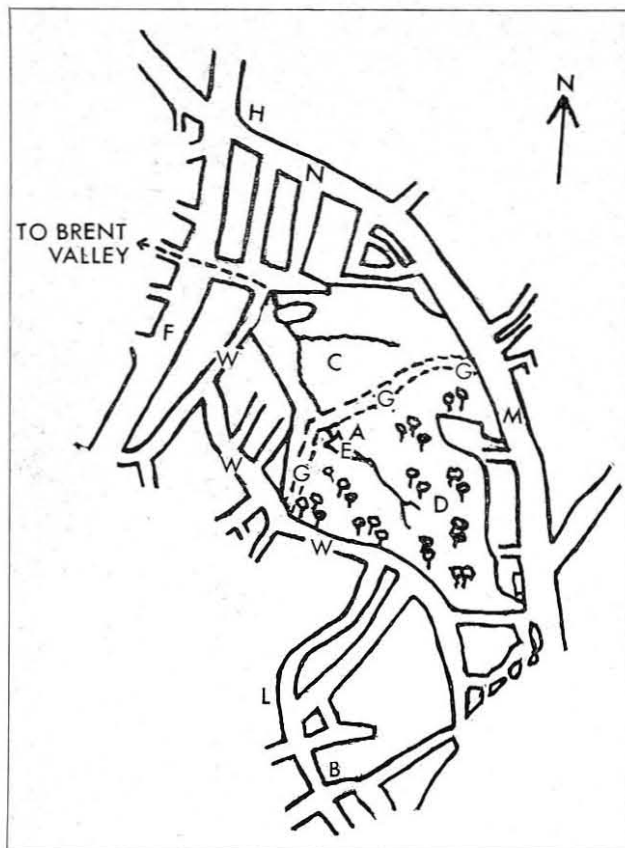


Fig. 2. LOCATION OF SITE: (scale $2\frac{1}{2}''=1$ mile)

- A The Site
- B The find spot of Thames pick
- C Golders Hill Park
- D West Heath
- E Leg of Mutton Pond
- F Finchley Road
- G Sandy Road
- H Golders Green Station
- N North End Road
- M North End Way
- L Reddington Road
- W West Heath Road

ultimately produced a total exposure of the old land surface.

Flints were found throughout the top 20 to 30 cms. of the soil; and it is too early to be sure where density was greatest. This "top soil" consisted of grey sand or silt, more or less heavily leached into a "podzol," and occasionally, at its base, a clear "hard pan" or solid iron concretion at a depth of 20 to 30 cms. In the underlying orange sandy clay, believed to be the base of the Bagshot Sands, flint tools were not found, but some of the best tools found to date were just above the orange sand.

We have found some patches of burnt flint, porcelain-crazed pebbles and a little charcoal scatter.

Leaching of the soil was too great to permit reddening or large deposits of charcoal but it is hoped that Thermo-luminescence Dating may be possible. Possible post and stake holes, some possible pebble alignments and several manuports were also found.

Between 1st May and mid-June some 2462 flint artefacts were excavated. The flint is of fine quality, pale grey to fawn in colour with very little remaining cortex. It does not appear native to the site and its origin is, as yet, unknown. In this, the assemblage appears analogous to that found on the sandy site at Perry Woods, Kent². Of the flint artefacts found, 58 were possible tools or retouched pieces and included the following more obvious examples:—

Microburins	8	Obl. truncated	
Obl. blunted points	6	blade	1
Other microliths	9	"Rod" atypical	1
Cores	12	Saw-edged blade	1
Core Scrapers	1	Scalene triangle	1
Backed point	1		

No tranchet axes have been found on the site but a heavily iron-stained Thames pick of a type usually associated with these assemblages was reported by Mr. Holmes from a near-by garden (TQ 268 858).

Two trenches, in particular, showed a heavy concentration of struck flakes with average densities of 73 and 105 per sq.m.

The pH value of the soil is very low (3.5) so no evidence of organic material was to be expected but samples of organic mud were removed from a waterlogged area about 450 yards from the site, to be examined for fossil beetles by Miss Maureen Girling of the Department of the Environment. Pollen and Soil analysis and C14 Dating are to be undertaken from the samples, and wood retrieved from the lowest level (1.30 m.) was retained for identification. It is hoped to learn something of the Prehistoric environment of the Heath. One flint possibly showing evidence of working was found among the samples.

The excavation is to continue during the summer to ensure that all material is removed from the area at risk. Research on the material will continue during the winter and it is hoped to publish a full report and evaluation at a later date, together with the acknowledgements due to the many people whose help to and co-operation with HADAS made the excavation possible—not least of whom is the Director, Mr. Desmond Collins.

2. A. G. Woodcock "Mesolithic Discoveries at Perry Woods, Selling, Near Canterbury, Kent" *Archaeologia Cantiana* 90 (1975) 169-77.

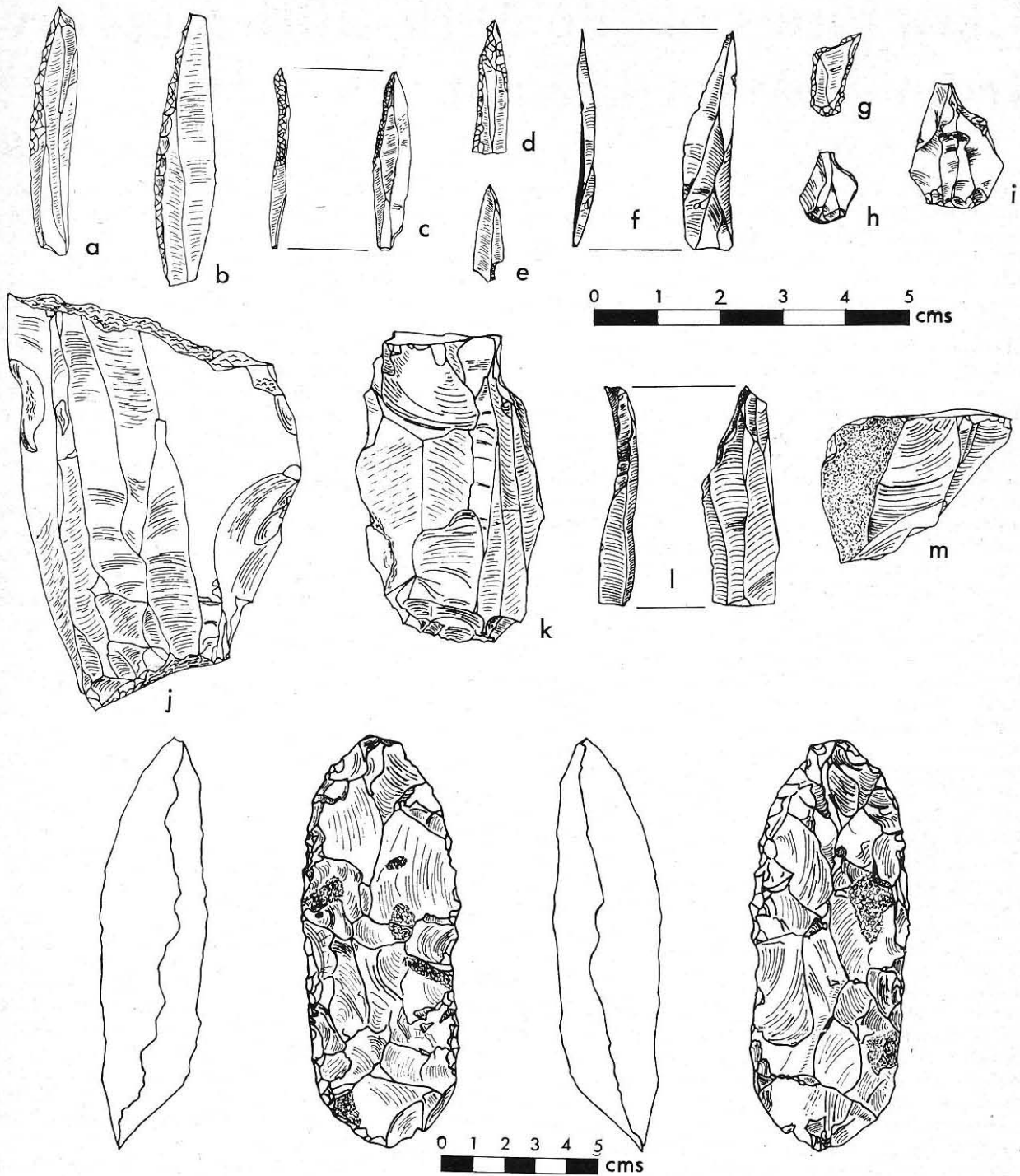


Fig. 3: Flints: a-d microliths, e microburin (distal), h, i microburins, f, l flakes, g scalene microlith, j, k, m cores, bottom: Thames pick from Reddington Road. (Drawing: Colin Evans)