

# A NEOLITHIC SITE AT ASTONHILL, NEAR MINNINGLOW, DERBYSHIRE

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## SUMMARY

*A small collection of surface finds from a new site near Minninglow at SK 203586, includes single sherds of Grimston ware, "Windmill Hill ware with Ebbsfleet traits" (the first of its kind from the midlands), Mortlake and Fengate ware. Stone artifacts include a variety of Neolithic types, and a Mesolithic microlith. The finds suggest a long period of occupation, perhaps from before 3,000 B.C. to after 2,000 B.C.*

**S**EVEN sherds of pottery, forty-nine flint and chert artifacts and three chips from polished stone axeheads were found at SK 203586 in 1969 by Mr. L. Cliffe, who kindly made the material available for study through the good offices of Miss B. Tuttle, Secretary of the Archaeology Section of the Old Mansfield Society. In view of the scarcity of Neolithic pottery from Derbyshire, it may be useful to record the sherds, pending a more complete account of the fieldwork. The finds are at present in Mr. Cliffe's possession, at 46 Base Green Road, Sheffield.

## THE SITE

The finds were made on the surface of a ploughed field bordering the north side of the unmetalled road, Hedge Lane, near the farm of Astonhill. Hedge Lane lies along the 1,050 ft. contour line, on the north slope of the ridge carrying the Roman road south east from Buxton towards Little Chester, Derby. The Neolithic chambered tomb of Minninglow lies one mile to the south east, and that of Green Low two miles to the east. The Arbor Low henge monument is four miles to the north west.

In the vicinity of the site, the gentle northward slope of the land is broken by a shallow valley looking eastwards, which becomes the larger valley separating the Minninglow ridge from Elton Common, the next area of higher ground about a mile to the north east (fig. 1). Considerable quantities of Neolithic artifacts have been collected from fields on Elton Common, and described by Radley and Cooper (1968). The bedrock of the area is carboniferous limestone.

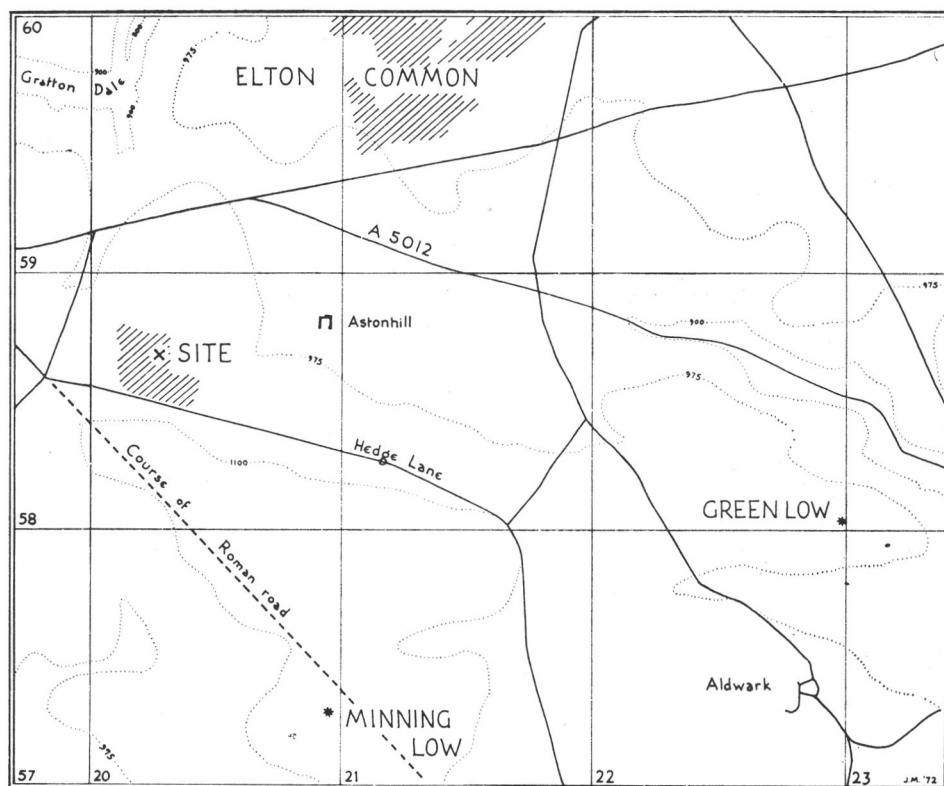


FIG. 1. Astonhill Neolithic Site location map; national grid in kilometres. Shaded areas show occurrence of surface flint; the pottery was found at X.

## THE POTTERY

The sherds are small, and all are to some extent abraded. Some of the fabrics are soft, and it is surprising that the pottery has survived ploughing and exposure. Five of the sherds are illustrated in fig. 2.

1. Rim sherd in relatively hard, thick, fine ware, with smooth brown-black surfaces. Some surface pitting has occurred where a finely-crushed filler has partly disintegrated. The piece is too small for the rim diameter to be measured accurately, but the curve indicates that it was from a bowl with a wide mouth. There is a slight lipping of the rim.

The sherd is fairly certainly from a bowl of Grimston type. It may be closely compared locally with the sherds from the forecourt area of Green Low (Manby 1965, 12, fig. 6 no. 1), and from the occupation site within the cursus at Aston upon Trent, 22½ miles to the south east (Reaney 1968, 80, fig. 6).

A radiocarbon date of  $2,750 \pm 150$  B.C. (BM-271) for the Aston site has recently been obtained, bringing this ware in Derbyshire into approximately the same chronological position early in the Neolithic period as the Grimston ware of Yorkshire, where radiocarbon dates from barrows range from  $3,080 \pm 90$  (Seamer

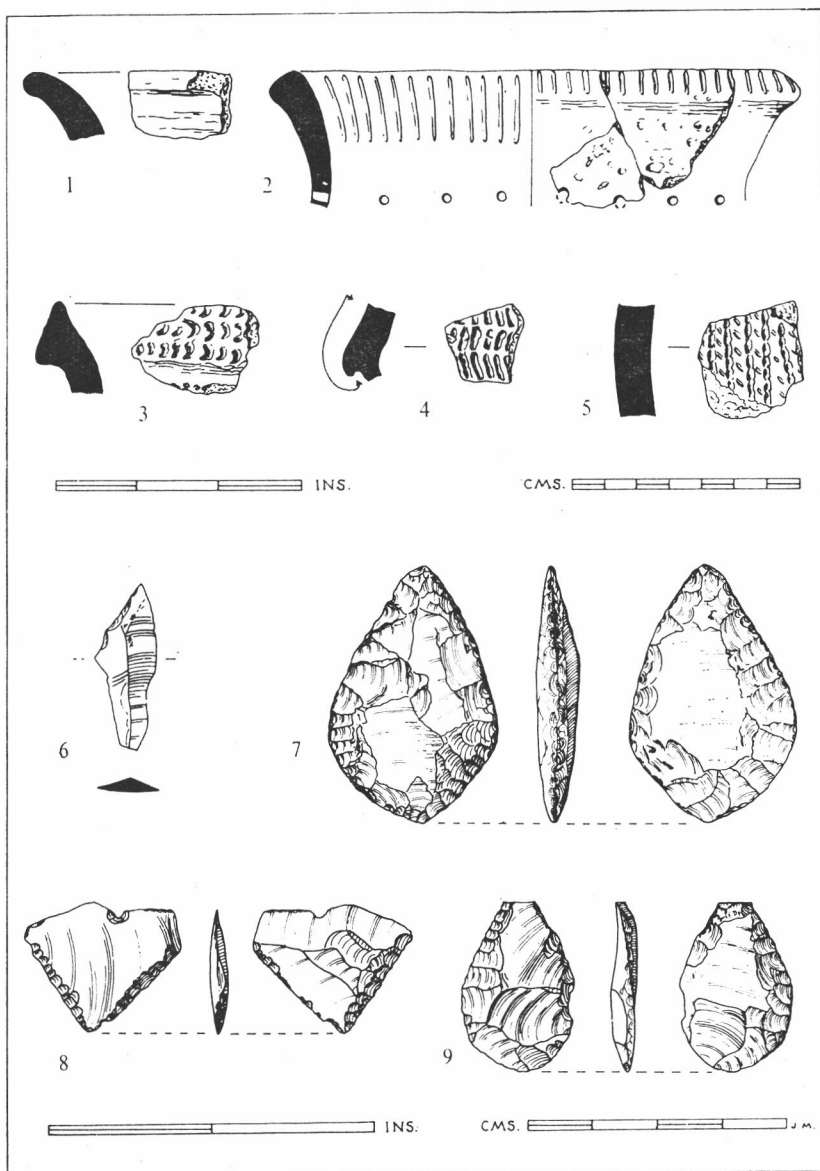


FIG. 2. Astonhill, pottery and flint.

Moor, NPL-73) to  $2,880 \pm 125$  (Kilham, BM-293). Apparently later in date, and thought to represent a typological development, is the bowl with a more rounded profile from the Giants' Hills I long barrow at Skendleby, Lincolnshire (Phillips 1936, 78, fig. 20). Antler from the bottom of the barrow's ditch has recently provided two radiocarbon dates, of  $2,460 \pm 150$  (BM-191) and  $2,370 \pm 150$  (BM-

192). If these dates correspond to the building of the barrow and the deposition of the bowl, it would suggest that Grimston ware continued in use in Lincolnshire at least until the middle of the third millennium B.C. The evidence is inadequate for firm conclusions to be drawn, but at present Grimston ware seems to belong mainly to the first half of the third millennium B.C. in radiocarbon years.

2. Rim and joining neck sherds in fairly hard, thick ware, with surfaces, particularly on the outside, pitted by the disintegration of the filler, giving a "corky" appearance to the fabric. Some of the holes are of considerable size, up to 4 mm. across, but no remaining inclusions are visible to indicate their character. The rim is everted, and flattened and thickened at the top, where there is a decoration of incised lines. Similar incised lines are arranged vertically below the rim on the inside of the vessel. The curve of the rim is marked enough to allow the diameter to be judged fairly accurately. The lower edge of the smaller joining sherd shows parts of two holes piercing the wall of the vessel; the edge is badly abraded, but there can be little doubt that the holes were part of a row around the neck.

This is perhaps the most interesting sherd in the collection. The rim-form has no local parallel so far, but resembles rims from the causewayed camp at Windmill Hill, Wiltshire, where the upright or slightly everted form is to be found on necked jars of Dr. Smith's *Windmill Hill ware with Ebbsfleet traits* (Smith 1965, fig. 19, P 79; fig. 29, P 228 and P 229). The incised rim and inner neck also have clear parallels among other decorated Windmill Hill wares (Smith 1965, fig. 26). Most of the Ebbsfleet ware sherds from Windmill Hill, however, bear whipped cord decoration (29 out of 41 examples); but elsewhere, as Piggott has noted (Piggott 1954, 308), incised decoration is more common. Examples can be seen at Ebbsfleet itself (Piggott 1939, 418, fig. 7, 5, etc), and from the Whiteleaf Hill barrow in Buckinghamshire (Childe and Smith 1954, 223, fig. 5, 1).

The distinction between Windmill Hill ware and Ebbsfleet ware does not now carry the profound cultural implications that it did when Peterborough wares, of which Ebbsfleet ware is typologically earliest, were thought to represent a "Secondary" sub-Mesolithic element parallel to a "Primary" intrusive Windmill Hill culture. Dr. Smith has shown that Ebbsfleet ware stems directly from those Windmill Hill wares with limited decoration. Radiocarbon dates from Windmill Hill itself and elsewhere in the south, suggest that this pottery belongs to the middle of the third millennium B.C.

3. Rim sherd in very coarse black ware, which is softer than nos. 1 and 2, and is cracked and worn smooth. The filler is coarsely crushed flint and other stone. The external bevel is decorated with cord impressions, but these are not clearly defined because of wear.

Locally the rim form resembles that from the Mortlake ware derived vessel from the Arbor Low barrow (Fowler 1955, 100, fig. 21 lower), and outside the area again has parallels at Windmill Hill (Smith 1965, fig. 33, P 257-262). A Late Neolithic date, early in the second millennium B.C., is likely for this sherd.

4. Small sherd of hard coarse black ware with large fragments of flint filler up to 6 mm. across. Although damaged, the outer side appears to have part of an overhang, and the inner side curves inwards. The original unbroken surface is indicated by arrows. The decoration consists of herringbone cord impressions. These features suggest that the sherd is from the overhanging rim of a Fengate ware jar, and like no. 3, a Late Neolithic date is likely.
5. Body sherd in very thick coarse ware with some coarse flint and other stone filler.

The ware is black, but has reddish-buff exterior surface; it tends to flake internally, and to crack along the thickness of the wall. Decoration is by linear cord-impression and oblique nail-marks in the intervening zones.

The sherd resembles Fengate ware or collared urn, and could be Late Neolithic or even Bronze Age in date.

Not illustrated are two undecorated body sherds, one from a large, extremely coarse vessel, with coarse flint filler and buff exterior surface. The fabrics compare with the Late Neolithic sherds, nos. 3-5.

### THE STONE ARTIFACTS. A selection is illustrated in figs. 2-3

The three fragments from polished axeheads are of a fine-grained, pale green stone, perhaps of Group VI (Great Langdales). The other artifacts are of mainly unpatinated flint or chert. They consist of a triangular microlith (fig. 2, 6; the only undoubtedly Mesolithic item in the collection), 3 whole or fragmentary leaf-shaped arrowheads (fig. 2, 7 and 9), 1 transverse arrowhead (fig. 2, 8), 5 scrapers (fig. 3, 3-5), 2 awls (fig. 3, 1-2), 2 knives (fig. 3, 6-7), 7 other pieces of flint with secondary working, and 28 other worked flints, including several blades.

### DISCUSSION

The main interest in the collection, beyond adding usefully to the small amount of Neolithic pottery so far known from Derbyshire, lies in the suggestion of a long occupation for the site. The microlith indicates possibly some activity in the later Mesolithic period. The radiocarbon dates associated with comparable pottery elsewhere, imply a Neolithic range from perhaps as early as c. 3,000 B.C. until after c. 2,000 B.C. The early radiocarbon dates for Grimston ware in the midlands and in Yorkshire call into question the assumption which has sometimes been made, that this pottery represents the spread of Windmill Hill elements from the south in the form of a primary Neolithic colonization in the later third millennium B.C. The problem of the origin of Grimston ware remains to be solved. However, the presence at Astonhill of a sherd comparable with *Windmill Hill ware with Ebbsfleet traits* suggests a development at this point in the midland pottery sequence similar to that in the south.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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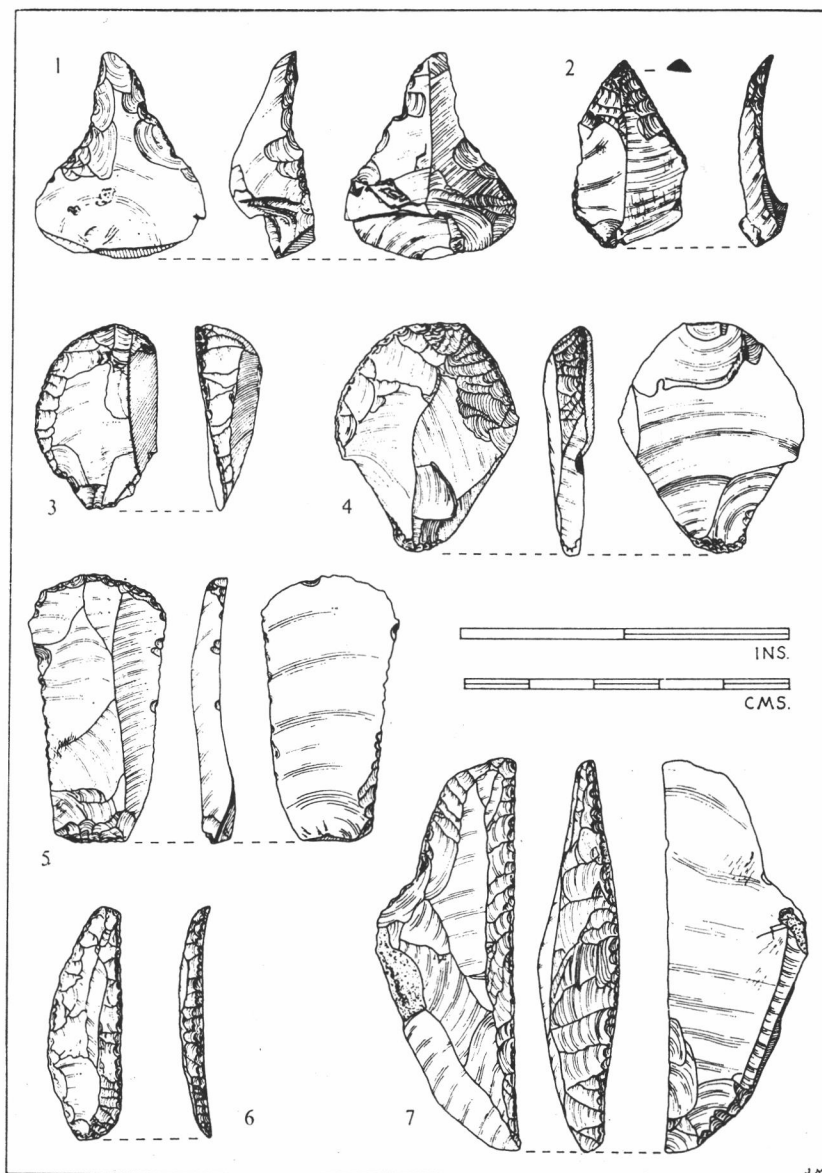


FIG. 3. Astonhill, flint.