

A GAZETTEER OF MESOLITHIC FINDS ON THE WEST SUSSEX COASTAL PLAIN

by M. W. Pitts

This article aims to be a comprehensive gazetteer of all known Mesolithic sites on the Coastal Plain of Sussex west of the Arun (up to February 1977). The area covered extends north to the E-W grid line 070 and west to the N-S line 800, extending beyond this to cover the whole of the Selsey peninsula. This area (c. 220 square km) is the same as that covered by the writer's gazetteer of Roman material¹ (Fig. 1).

ABBREVIATIONS

- C.D.M. Chichester District Museum.
 Palmer S. Palmer, *The Mesolithic Industries of the Southern Littoral Areas of England*, (unpub. M.Phil. thesis, Univ. of Southampton, 1973).
 P.P.S. *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*.
 S.A.C. *Sussex Archaeological Collections*.
 S.N.Q. *Sussex Notes and Queries*.

GAZETTEER

1. *Arundel*. TQ 010060.
 Palmer (p. 73) writes of a tranchet celt² from this grid reference.
2. *Marsh Farm, Binsted*. SU 994048.
 Between about 1940 and 1960, Mr. E. E. Wishart of Marsh Farm, Binsted, assembled a collection of flint artifacts from an area mainly confined to a single field. Apart from the Mesolithic celts, the flints are typical of the many flint-producing sites on the Plain. I am grateful to the finder for showing the find-area to me, for allowing me to examine the collection and to borrow some of the pieces for drawing. Outline drawings by the writer of the core tools not illustrated here have been placed with the C.D.M. Apart from the artifacts here described, the collection includes two flaked Neolithic celts found by Mr. Wishart in one of his fields at Gumber Farm, at SU 954115; their lengths are 202 mm and 125 mm respectively. All the objects are in Mr. Wishart's possession.
 The soil at the site is a variant of the Lyminster series. Hodgson's specimen profile No. SuW 17 lies within the area of the finds: he describes the C horizon as a 'pale brown . . . very friable, structureless loamy sand'.³

Table 1. Contents of the collection

Flakes	303	
Small blades or blade fragments ⁴	30	(Fig. 2.4-8)
Spherical flint hammerstone, c. 80 mm in diameter	1	
Cores	5	(Fig. 2.9-13)
Tranchet celts (cf Table 2)	8	(Fig. 2.1-3)
Pick (cf Table 2)	1	(Fig. 3.1)
Other core tools (cf Table 2)	2	
Scraper	1	(Fig. 3.4)
Bifacially worked oval disc	1	(Fig. 3.2)
Tanged point	1	(Fig. 3.3)

Table 2. Details of core tools (measurements in mm)

No.	Description	Fig.	Length	Width ⁱ	Thickness ⁱⁱ
1	Tranchet celt	2.1	136	48	43
2	Tranchet celt		123	42	31
3	Tranchet celt	2.2	122	49	32

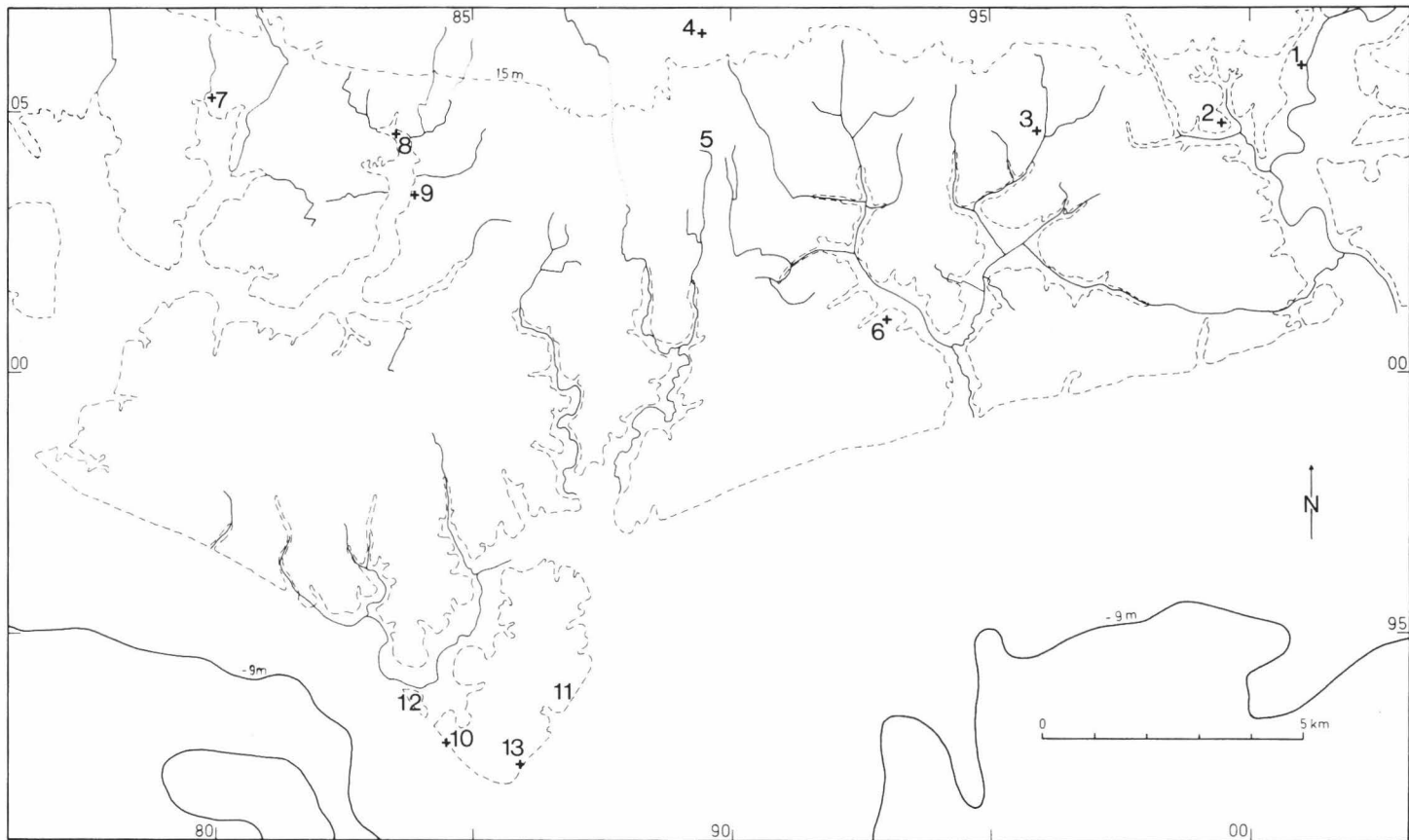


Fig. 1. Mesolithic sites on the West Sussex Coastal Plain. Submarine contour taken from O.S. 1:63,360 map, 1968-69 revision. Dashed line marks modern coast, except where carried inland along edge of estuarine alluvium (at Pagham, Bognor Regis and Arundel)

4	Tranchet celt		110	42	31
5	Tranchet celt		105	42	30
6	Tranchet celt		96	40	25
7	Tranchet celt		91	42	28
8	Tranchet celt	2.3	85	35	24
9	Unfinished tranchet celt?		113	60	44
10	Pointed core tool		85	35	26
11	Pick	3.1	133	38	35

- (i) Maximum width parallel to axis of cutting edge).
(ii) Maximum thickness perpendicular to axis of cutting edge).

As with most surface collections, artifacts of more than one period are present. The two largest blades, distinguished also by their colour, one (Fig. 2.7) patinated dark grey-blue, and the other (Fig. 2.8) of creamy red-brown flint, would not be out of place in a late Glacial context, although large blades are found in apparently Mesolithic assemblages.⁵ The tanged point (Fig. 3.3), probably the oval disc (Fig. 3.2) and possibly the scraper (Fig. 3.4) would seem to be of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date. The pick (Fig. 3.1) is probably also Late Neolithic.

The Mesolithic material comprises eight tranchet celts, at least some of the blades (e.g. Fig. 2.4 and 6) and cores (e.g. Fig. 2.9, 10 and 11) and one microburin (Fig. 2.5). The absence of microliths (apart from the indirect evidence of the single microburin) in a collection containing well over 300 unretouched flakes or blades, many of small size, is probably significant.

Seven of the Marsh Farm celts have patches of cortex remaining, generally in a way that suggests that long nodules of circular section were selected as raw material. This feature is clearly demonstrated at Farnham, where such a nodule, which appears to have broken in half while being flaked into a celt, was found in Pit I.⁶ The most regularly flaked, as well as the least damaged celt (Fig. 2.2), has small, steep scarring on part of one face of the cutting edge, as would be consistent with it having been hafted as an adze—rather than an axe-blade. Unlike the other celts, Fig. 2.1 has for most of its length its thickness greater than its width. Since the nature of the flake scars indicates that this feature was deliberately produced, it is possible that it represents a different hafting position (i.e. as an axe) from the others, which on analogy with No. 1, could all be adzes.

3. Barnham Nurseries, Eastergate. c. SU 959046.

The writer noted seeing a relatively large tranchet celt from Barnham handed in to the C.D.M. for examination in 1974-75. No record of this could be found in the museum.

There are two iron-stained tranchet celts on view in Littlehampton Museum marked 'Barnham'. Together with a similar celt in the same case, these are probably the three referred to by Hearne⁷ as a 'Thames pick (5½ in. long)' and two 'roughly shaped picks or chisels, brownish-yellow', from Barnham Nurseries, found with a number of apparently later flints. The writer was unable to examine these celts as no key could be found to the cabinet.

4. Strettington Farm, Boxgrove. SU 993067 area.

A quantity of struck flint was picked up during the Oving Field Survey in 1974-75⁸ east of Maudlin. Amongst about 90 pieces, the majority of which are probably Neolithic or later in date, are a few of Mesolithic character. These include a very regular prismatic blade core with two opposed platforms (47 mm long) and a conical blade core with one platform (40 mm long). The latter is patinated a mottled grey-blue. Of the whole collection, only eight other pieces (none of which is retouched) are patinated. Of these, five could have come from such a blade core: indeed it is possible that one small blade came from this very core, the colouring of the flint and cortex of the two pieces being identical. Of some interest is the finding on this site of a flat, red pebble (? quartzite)⁹ used as a hammerstone (Fig. 6.1); such pebbles are a characteristic feature of several of the wealden Mesolithic sites.¹⁰

5. Oving. c. SU 8904. J. Evans, *The Ancient Stone Implements, Weapons and Ornaments, of Great Britain*, 2nd ed. (1897), Fig. 15.

Evans illustrates a fairly large tranchet celt, from 'Oving, near Chichester'. This object is now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford (Ac. no. 1927. 3793). L 167 mm. W 53 mm. T 40 mm.

6. North Bersted, Bersted. SU 930010.

(a) *Introduction.* Excavations north of Hazel Road directed by the writer in 1975 revealed a small hollow containing seven pieces of struck flint of Mesolithic character. Fourteen other pieces in later contexts complete the collection from this site. Although slim, this evidence is important in demonstrating the presence of Mesolithic settlement (as opposed to the dropping of celts during hunting forays, as would probably have been argued in the not too distant past) on the Plain. The seven pieces referred to also constitute the sole stratified group from the area. In view of its significance in the present context, it has been decided to publish the material in detail here, rather than with the main excavation report.¹¹

An important point concerns the reasons for separating these few pieces from a collection of more than 400 flints, ascribed by the writer to a latest Neolithic/Early Bronze Age context. These are three: stratigraphy, typology/technology and patina. The association of seven pieces in a small hollow (Fig. 4.1-7 and Fig. 5) at the south end of the excavated area contrasts with the area of Beaker settlement about 45 m (50 yards) further north, from which slightly less than a third of all the flints from the site derive. Taken together, the pieces in this hollow are undoubtedly Mesolithic. The small blade technology contrasts strongly with the generally unprepared core technique represented by the later material. Two pieces

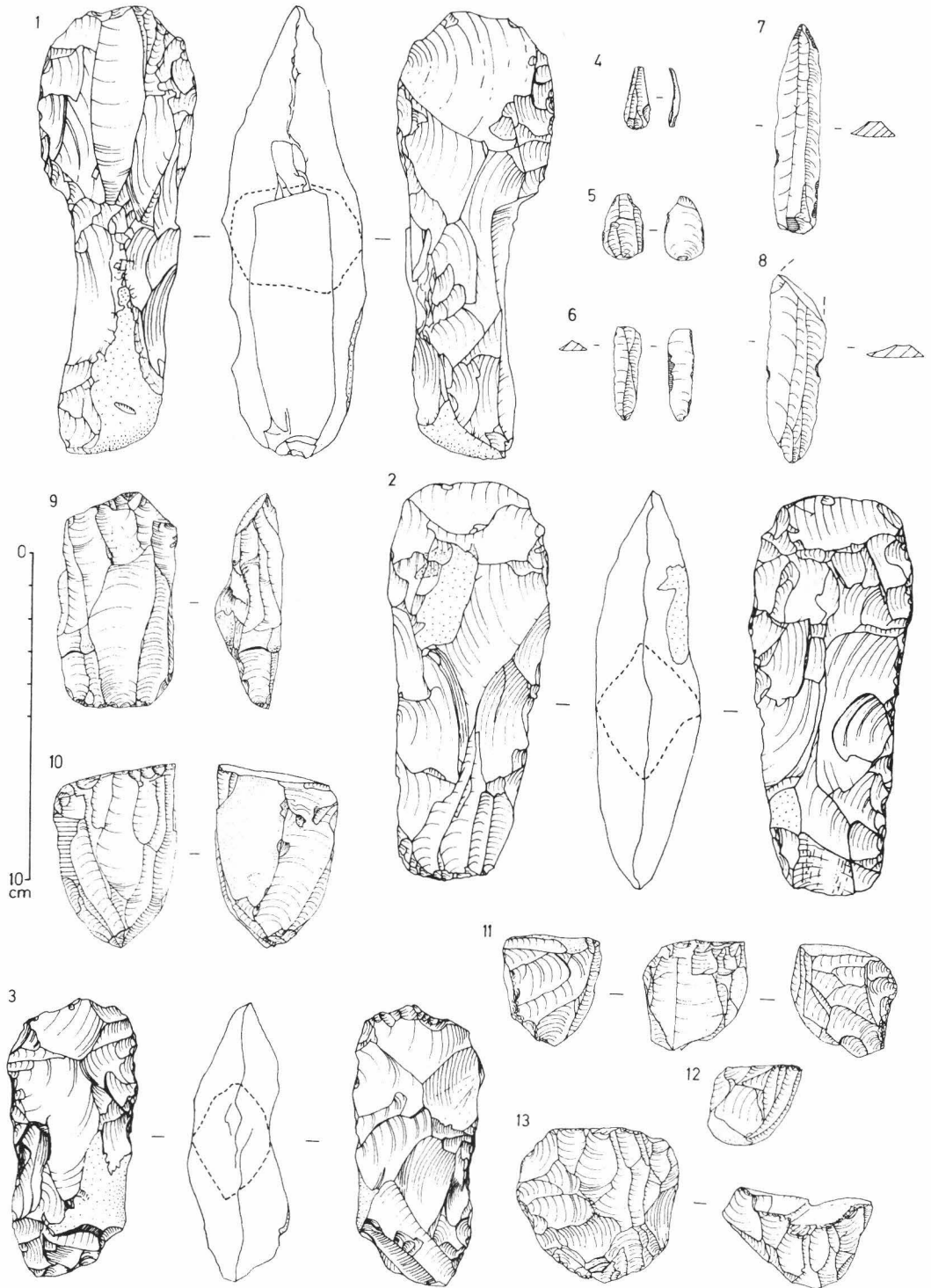


Fig. 2. Finds from Marsh Farm, Binsted (Gazetteer No. 2)

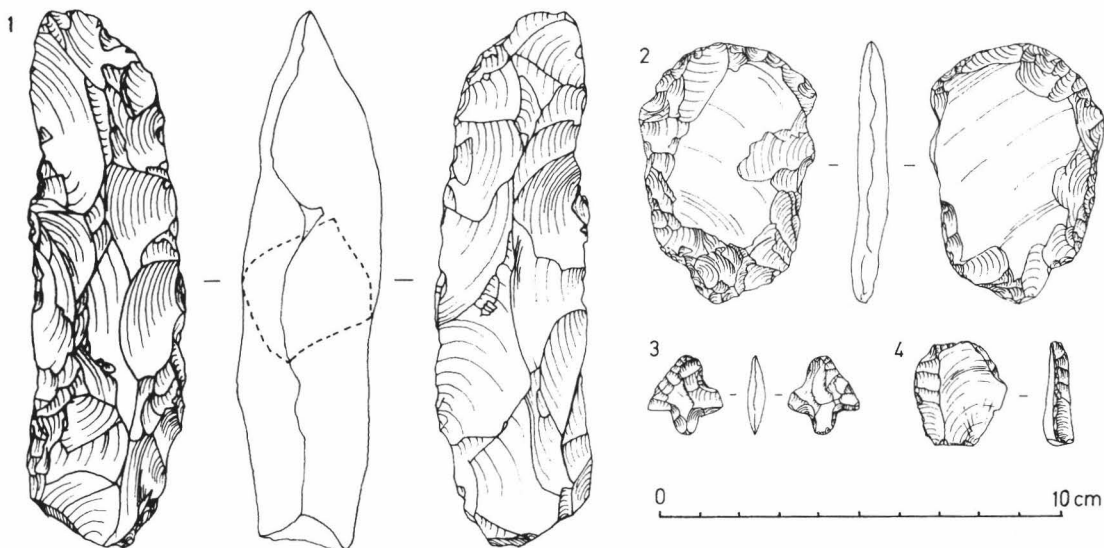


Fig. 3. Neolithic flints from Marsh Farm, Binsted (Gazetteer No. 2)

in the pit are patinated. There are only about a dozen patinated pieces in the whole collection, of which two (Fig. 4.9 and 4.14) are again clearly Mesolithic; conversely, there are no Neolithic types which are patinated. The significance of patination has also been noticed at Strettington Farm (Gazetteer No. 4).

(b) *Pit* (Fig. 5). The pit was dug into orange-brown brickearth, in places quite sandy. There were a number of broken flint nodules in layer 3 of the type that occur in diffuse layers in the brickearth on the site, apparently sorted by periglacial action. None had any humanly produced flake scars.

Layer 1 Hard, structureless, dark grey plough-soil.

Layer 2 Orange-brown brickearth.

Layer 3 Orange-brown slightly sandy brickearth.

After wetting and scraping off the surface of the profile, layer 2 was distinguished from 3 by the former absorbing more water. This process also revealed the presence of vertical earthworm channels in layer 3, but not in 2. All the flint artefacts were found in layer 3.

(c) *Flint artefacts* 1-7, from the pit:

1. Plunging flake off a blade core, which has removed the edge of the striking platform opposite that from which the flake was struck. Patinated pale bluish-white.
 2. Hinging blade, patinated pale milky blue.
 3. Small flake with tip broken off.
 4. Small flake with fine abrupt retouch on centre of right dorsal edge.
 5. Small flake with tip broken off.
 6. Small flake with fine parallel retouch on right ventral edge.
 7. Truncated blade.
- 8-21, from Neolithic and later contexts:
8. Blade with abrupt microlithic retouch along the whole of the left dorsal edge, with a small area of fine scarring on the opposite edge, which also has a notch on the ventral face, produced by the removal of a single flake.
 9. Thinly patinated blade with small 'burin de Siret' (flaking accident) on the butt.
 10. Blade with serrations on right dorsal edge and a retouched notch (possibly damage) on left ventral edge.
 11. Flake patinated pale bluish-white with abrupt retouch at tip. Fine direct scarring on the proximal end (the butt is removed) suggests this to have been the working edge of the implement (this scarring is not visible in the drawing).
 12. Small flake with abrupt retouch on its distal end. Both ventral edges have fine discontinuous scarring.
 13. Fine blade in mint condition.
 14. Hinging blade patinated bluish white.
 15. Small core with two surviving platforms.
- (16-21 are not illustrated).

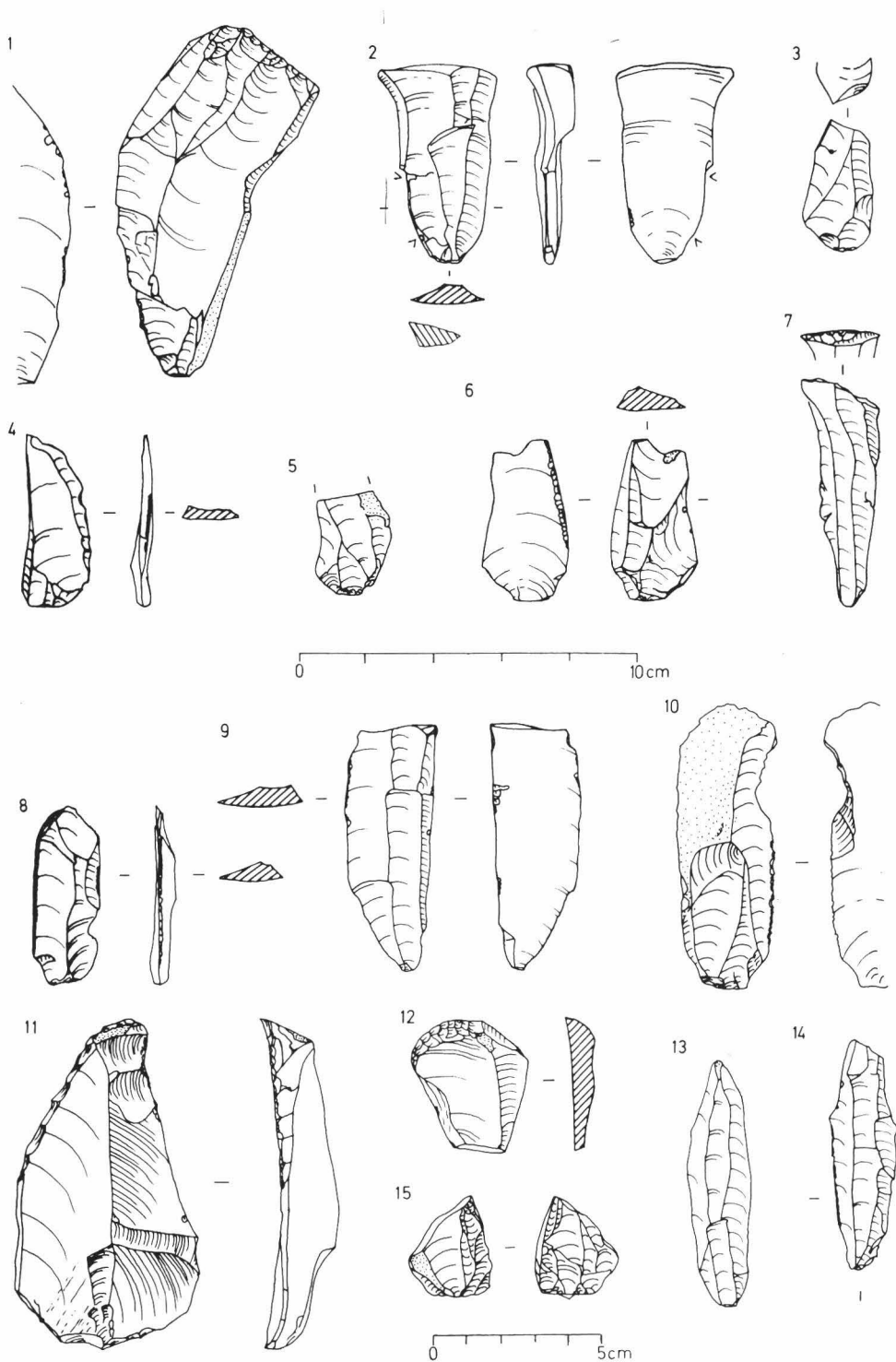


Fig. 4. Finds from North Bersted (Gazetteer No. 6). All at natural size, except for No. 15 ($\times \frac{1}{2}$). Nos. 1-7 are all the artifacts from the pit (Fig. 5)

16. Small blade-flake with abrupt retouch across tip. The retouch, however, may be a product of post-depositional damage.
17. Small blade fragment.
18. Flake from a prepared core with at least two platforms, patinated creamy blue.
19. Lightly patinated blade, 35 mm long. Unretouched, but scarring suggests use of distal end, which is shaped like the tip of a truncated blade.
20. Truncated blade, 40 mm long, patinated greyish-white.
21. Heavily damaged blade, 25 mm long.

7. *Bosham*. SU 799053. *S.N.Q.* 17 (1969), pp. 125-6.

B. Hooper has described a 'mesolithic core' of 'the saddle-shaped variety with two opposing platforms' found with other lithic material which he considered to be later in date, the collection made during roadworks on the A27. Dr. Jacobi notes that Newbury Museum has a tranchet celt, apparently from Bosham.

8. *New Fishbourne, Chichester*. SU 835045 area.

Cunliffe (*Excavations at Fishbourne 1961-1969 I* (1971), p. 6) refers to an unabraded tranchet celt which was found in estuarine silt at c. 2.75 m OD, during excavations at the Roman palace. Palmer (her Fig. 3) illustrates what appears to be a second tranchet celt from the same area (L 15 cm. W 5 cm. T 5 cm). There are a few flint flakes on display in the museum at Fishbourne, described as indicating the activity of 'hunters' on the site: however, there seems no reason to regard these as Mesolithic.

9. *Apuldram, Appledram*. c. SU 840030.

One of a group of boxes in the C.D.M. labelled 'Mesolithic Apuldram' with the above grid reference contains as well as 94 flint flakes, 65 small blades (less than 70 mm long, several less than 40) and seven plunging blades off blade cores. Many of the blades are very fine, and would seem to be most probably Mesolithic. Mr. A. G. Woodcock, the museum curator, informed the writer that two microliths had been found at Apuldram. Although one of the afore-mentioned boxes contained a small label reading 'microlith, obliquely blunted, Form A 1', these could not be found in Chichester. However, the Barbican House museum, Lewes, has two flints from Apuldram, presented by a Mr. H. Morris and marked 'CH.H.'. One of these is a small broken flake, but the second is a true microlith, the only such to have been seen by the writer from the area of this Gazetteer (Fig. 6.2). Palmer illustrates a microlith from 'Appledram' (her Fig. 7.5), which is apparently different from that figured here; however, she only refers to a single microlith, and the difference may be illusory.

10. *The Looe, Selsey*. SZ 845929. E. Heron-Allen, *Selsey Bill, Historic and Prehistoric*, Duckworth (1911), Pl. XII.

This plate illustrates four views of a tranchet celt, apparently at a reduction of $\times \frac{1}{2}$. The unadjusted measurements from the photograph (length 115 mm, width 32 mm, thickness 29 mm) perhaps suggest that in fact it is printed at or near actual size.

11. *East Beach, Selsey*. c. SZ 8794.

There are three Mesolithic tranchet celts in the C.D.M. (acquisition nos. 121-3) from Mr. E. L. White's collection. 121-2 are marked 'East Beach'. Their measurements are: 121, L 136 mm, W 48 mm, T 36 mm; 122, L 132 mm, W 47 mm, T 40 mm. There is also a box of flints in the museum labelled 'Selsey East'. It contains 25 flakes, 28 end-scrapers on flakes, 13 blade or blade fragments (one of which is from a polished flint celt) and nine flake cores. Besides these are three blade cores (one with one platform, the others with two opposed platforms; all three have blades struck from about three-quarters of the platform circumference) and a plunging flake from a blade core; and a noticeably irregular tranchet celt (L 95 mm, W 48 mm, T 33 mm). These five Mesolithic pieces are possibly to be associated with the two 'East Beach' celts.

12. *West Beach, Selsey*. c. SZ 8393 (?).

Tranchet celt: L 124 mm, W 52 mm, T 50 mm (from Mr. White's collection, C.D.M. acquisition no. 123).

13. *West Street, Selsey*. SZ 845930.

Tranchet celt in British Museum found in Mr. S. H. Day's garden at the shore end of West St. in 1906, 'under the Coombe Rock on surface of Raised Beach' (BM 1934 10.13 10). L 225 mm, W 63 mm, T 56 mm.

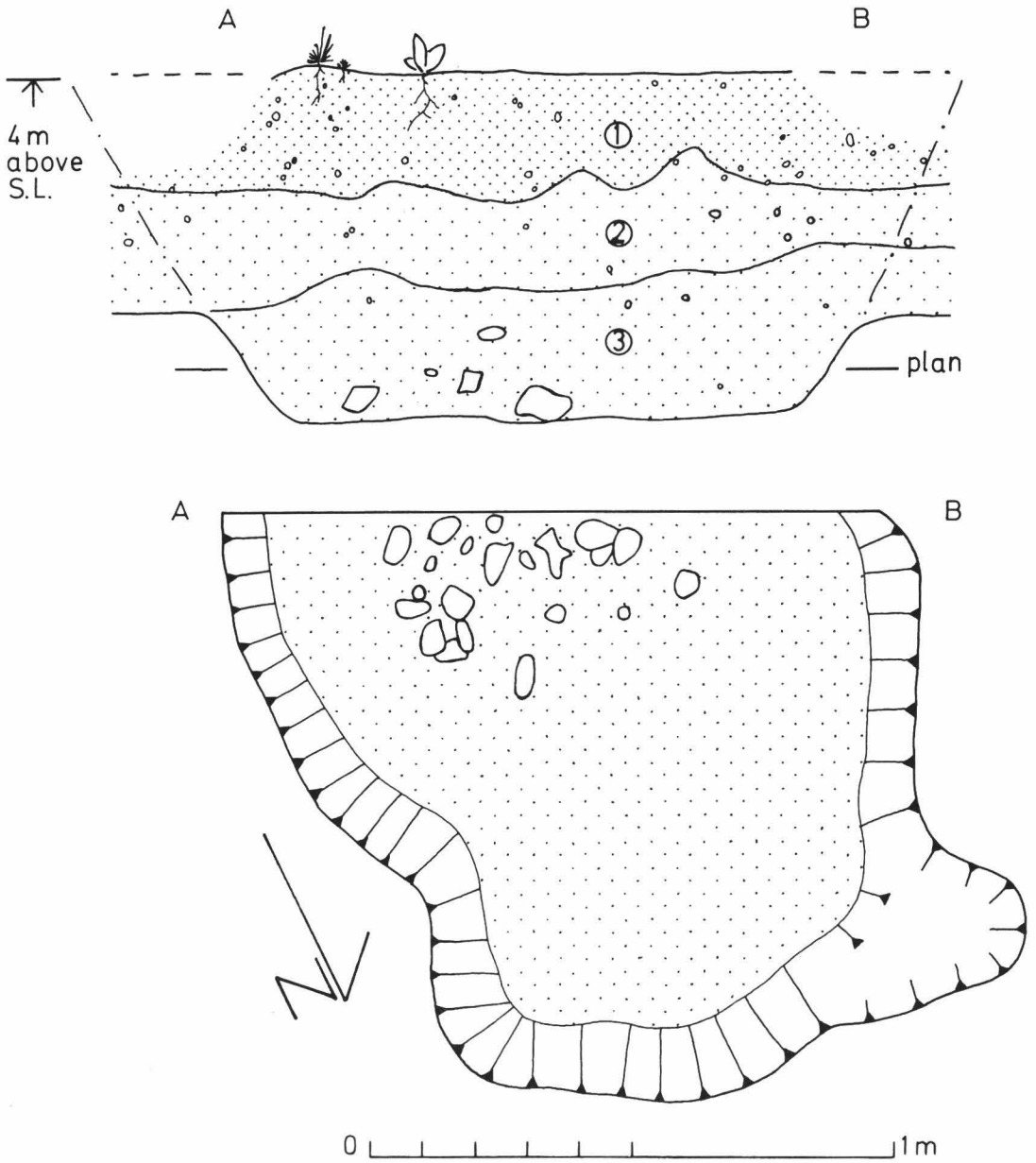


Fig. 5. Section and plan of Mesolithic hollow at North Bersted (Gazetteer No. 6)

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The material is too sparse to warrant any detailed consideration of early post-glacial activity on the Plain. The sites noted would appear to be of a very different nature to the prolific Mesolithic sites in the Weald to the north and east. The absence of quantities of microliths and associated manufacturing debris is noticeable, and although this could be ascribed to the small size of the collections from all of the sites, this point in itself may be significant; several of the sites are represented by a very few Mesolithic pieces present in sizeable collections, apparently mainly of later date (Gazetteer nos. 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 11). The same absence, or small number of microliths apparently occurs in the coastal and inland districts to the west in Hampshire.¹²

This rarity of microliths and the common presence of tranchet celts (a pattern that, as is demonstrated by quantities of material in the C.D.M., continues northwards on to the Downs) may indicate a date relatively late in the Mesolithic (Apuldram, with its quantity of fine blades and obliquely blunted point, may be the one early site). If this were so, the activities represented would have coincided with a fairly dramatic change in the landscape, and as a consequence, in the available resources, associated with the continuing post-glacial rise in sea level. The five fathom contour in Fig. 1 has been drawn as much to symbolise this change as to give an accurate representation of the coast line at any particular date. Though no detailed evidence is available for this area, it seems likely, on analogy with dated deposits elsewhere, that the migration of the coast from the five fathom contour northwards to run into the inlets now represented by estuarine alluvium, took place during the Mesolithic/Neolithic transition. Here, this was a period marked both by the arrival of people from outside the region bringing a new technology and subsistence basis, and by a serious reduction in the area of land available to the native hunter-fishers.

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Author: M. W. Pitts, Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury.

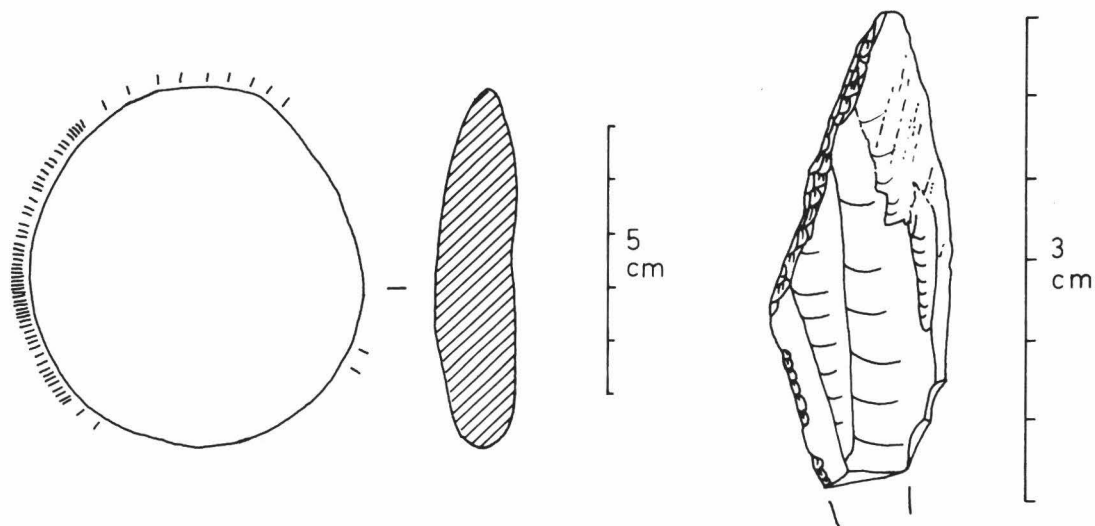


Fig. 6. Pebble hammerstone from Strettington Farm (Gazetteer No. 4) and obliquely blunted point from Apuldram, Appledram (Gazetteer No. 9)

¹ M. W. Pitts, 'A gazetteer of Roman sites and finds on the West Sussex coastal plain', *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, 117 (1979), 63-83.

² 'Celt' is used throughout this article in preference to 'axe' or 'adze', avoiding the doubtful interpretations implied by the latter two terms.

³ J. M. Hodgson, *Soils of the West Sussex Coastal Plain*, Harpenden (1967), pp. 89-90.

⁴ Defining a blade as a removal, with straight parallel edges and one or more ridges, whose length is at least twice its width, and a blade fragment as a piece with more or less parallel ridges, implying fulfilment of the conditions for a blade when complete.

⁵ E.g. Pett (E. Sussex), *S.A.C.* 110 (1972), p. 8; Minsted (W. Sussex), *S.A.C.* 113 (1975), p. 60. In the latter report the relevant blade is again distinguished from its associated material by its colour.

⁶ *P.P.S.* 5 (1939), Fig. 13.1, p. 81.

⁷ *S.N.Q.* 5 (1934), pp. 57-60; in his article, Hearne labelled the celts numbers 3, 8 and 9.

⁸ *Sussex Archaeological Society Newsletter* 15 (1975), p. 68.

⁹ This piece is currently in the hands of the CBA Implement Petrology Group for the SE. Any further information will be published in a subsequent 'Shorter Notices' in the *S.A.C.*

¹⁰ W. F. Rankine, 'Pebbles of non-local rock from Mesolithic chipping floors', *P.P.S.* 15 (1949), pp. 193-4. Rankine (*op. cit.* and in his *The Mesolithic of Southern*

England, Research Paper of the Surrey Archaeological Society No. 4 (1956), pp. 55-8) although suggesting both the Thames gravels and Chesil Bank in Dorset as possible sources of some of these pebbles, preferred the South West of England as the main provider, and used this interpretation to support his own peculiar brand of *Wanderlust*. A further possible source that Rankine did not consider is the area covered by this Gazetteer. Hodgson (*op. cit.* note 3, p. 10) has referred to the presence of erratic stones in the Pleistocene raised beach deposit that underlies the Coastal Plain. In order to test the suggestion that some at least of the foreign pebbles in the Wealden Mesolithic sites could be erratic pebbles from this raised beach, a careful watch was kept during the 1974-75 Field Survey (cf note 8) for any pebbles of this nature, whether or not they showed any sign of use. In the event, all the foreign stone recovered consisted of angular fragments, except for the single pebble illustrated in this article, which is undoubtedly an artifact. Whatever the origin of the Mesolithic pebbles, their movement as objects of exchange is, on present evidence, at least as likely as their association with wandering groups of people.

¹¹ O. Bedwin and M. W. Pitts, 'The Excavation of an Iron Age Settlement at North Bersted, Bognor Regis, West Sussex, 1975-76', *S.A.C.* 116 (1978), 293-346.

¹² J. C. Draper, *Proc. and Papers Hants Field Club* 23, (1968), pp. 110-119; R. Bradley and E. Lewis, *Rescue Archaeology in Hants*, 2 (1974), pp. 5-18.