

## AN EARLY MESOLITHIC SITE AND PREHISTORIC FLINTWORK FROM GRAFFHAM COMMON AND NEIGHBOURING AREAS ON THE LOWER GREENSAND, WEST SUSSEX

by R. D. C. Holgate, E. W. Holden and H. G. Holden

*Surface flint collection in the Graffham Common area on the Lower Greensand since 1978 has produced a substantial early Mesolithic flint assemblage and a range of smaller assemblages dating from the early Mesolithic period to the Bronze Age.*

### INTRODUCTION

Flints were collected from the surface of sandy rides within a large conifer plantation on Graffham Common (Fig. 1) during visits by E. W. and H. G. Holden between 1978 and 1985. Three dense scatters (Fig. 2: A, B and C) were found in the vicinity of SU 933189. Flints seemed only to come to the surface after the sand had been disturbed by horse-riding and they were found more readily after rain. No digging of any kind took place, only the gradual accumulation of worked flints, rarely more than a few at any one time. When the rides were formed, possibly some 25 years ago, the surface vegetation (mainly heather and bracken) was removed for a width of 4–5 metres and the topsoil, to a depth of *c.* 0.15 metre, was formed into low banks each side of the rides.

Graffham Common lies 2–3 km. north of the South Downs on undulating ground which rises to some 40–50 metres O.D. near the site. A small stream flows northwards *c.* 300 metres south-east of the flint scatter (Fig. 2). The whole of the common lies on the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand; on, or very close to, the surface are patches of hill gravel and flint rubble.

### THE GRAFFHAM COMMON FLINT ASSEMBLAGE

The three discrete areas which produced humanly-struck flint (A, B and C) occur within

100 metres of one another, and as they date to the same period they will be discussed as a single assemblage. A total of 1,967 flints were recovered and these are summarized in Table 1.

The flint is olive green, orange, grey or dark grey-brown in colour, and cortex, where present on artefacts, is usually thick and unabraded. Flint of this nature can be found locally on the Lower Greensand as nodules, though much of the natural flint to be found in the immediate vicinity of the site today consists of angular lumps of flint gravel, much of which is badly frost-cracked. It is clear that only the best flint available was selected for flaking; this flint proved to contain relatively few flaws, thus making it eminently suitable for controlled flaking.

The majority of pieces in the total assemblage (*c.* 95 per cent) consist of debitage, i.e. debris resulting from flint flaking. Most blades and flakes come from carefully worked cores, but seven flakes resulted from axe manufacture. The core reduction strategy followed is typical of that used in the Mesolithic period. Good quality flint nodules were selected and flaked into cylindrical cores with two opposing platforms (e.g. Fig. 3, No. 2) using both hard and soft hammers. Then blades and bladelets were struck off using a soft hammer (or possibly a punch), with the edge of the platform being abraded between each blade/bladelet removal to trim off any overhangs. In some instances, a blade removal plunged, taking

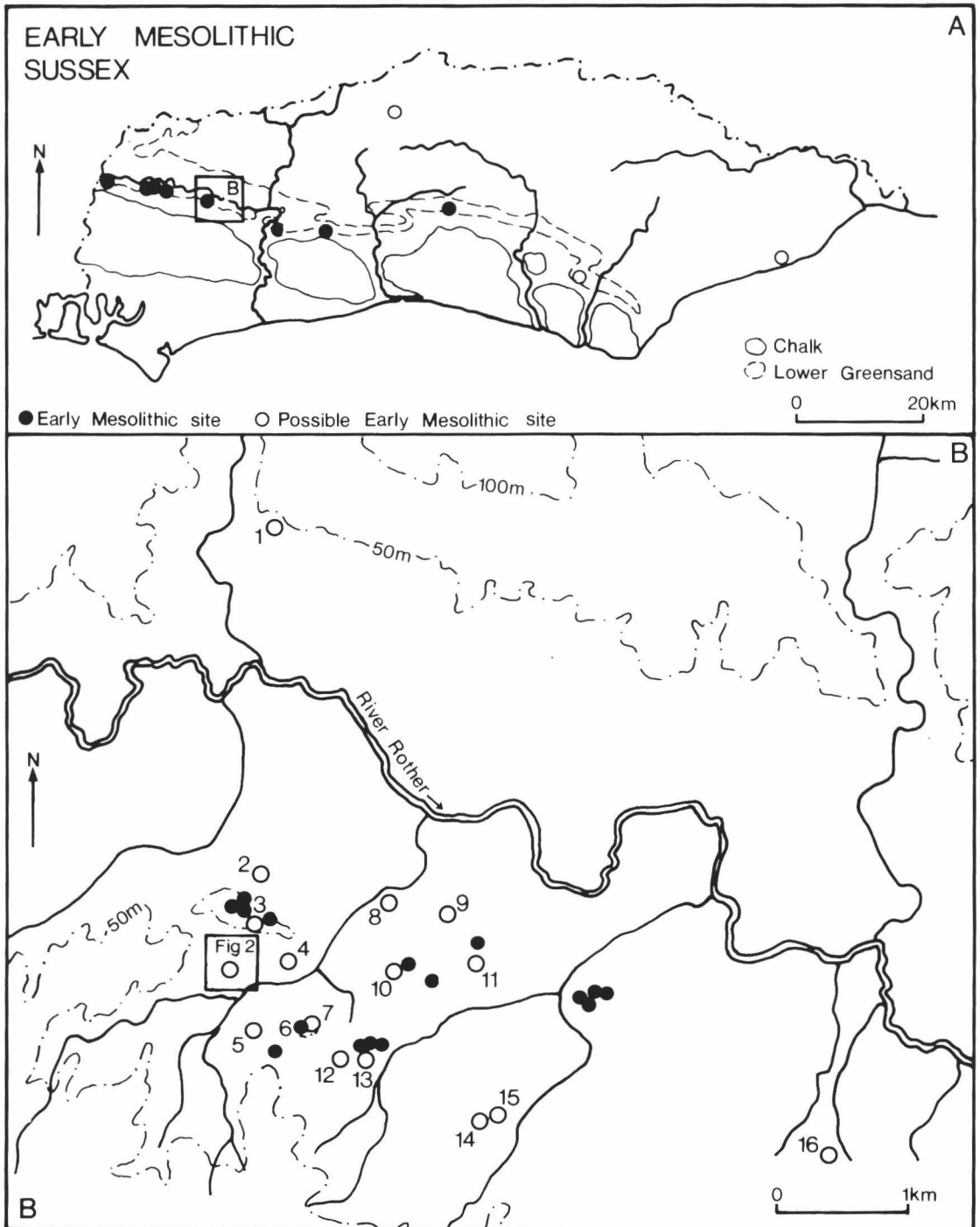


Fig. 1. A, location map of Graffham Common and early Mesolithic sites in Sussex (after Jacobi 1978, with additions); B, localities where humanly-struck flint has been recovered in the vicinity of Graffham Common (open circles) and round barrows (filled circles) on the Lower Greensand.

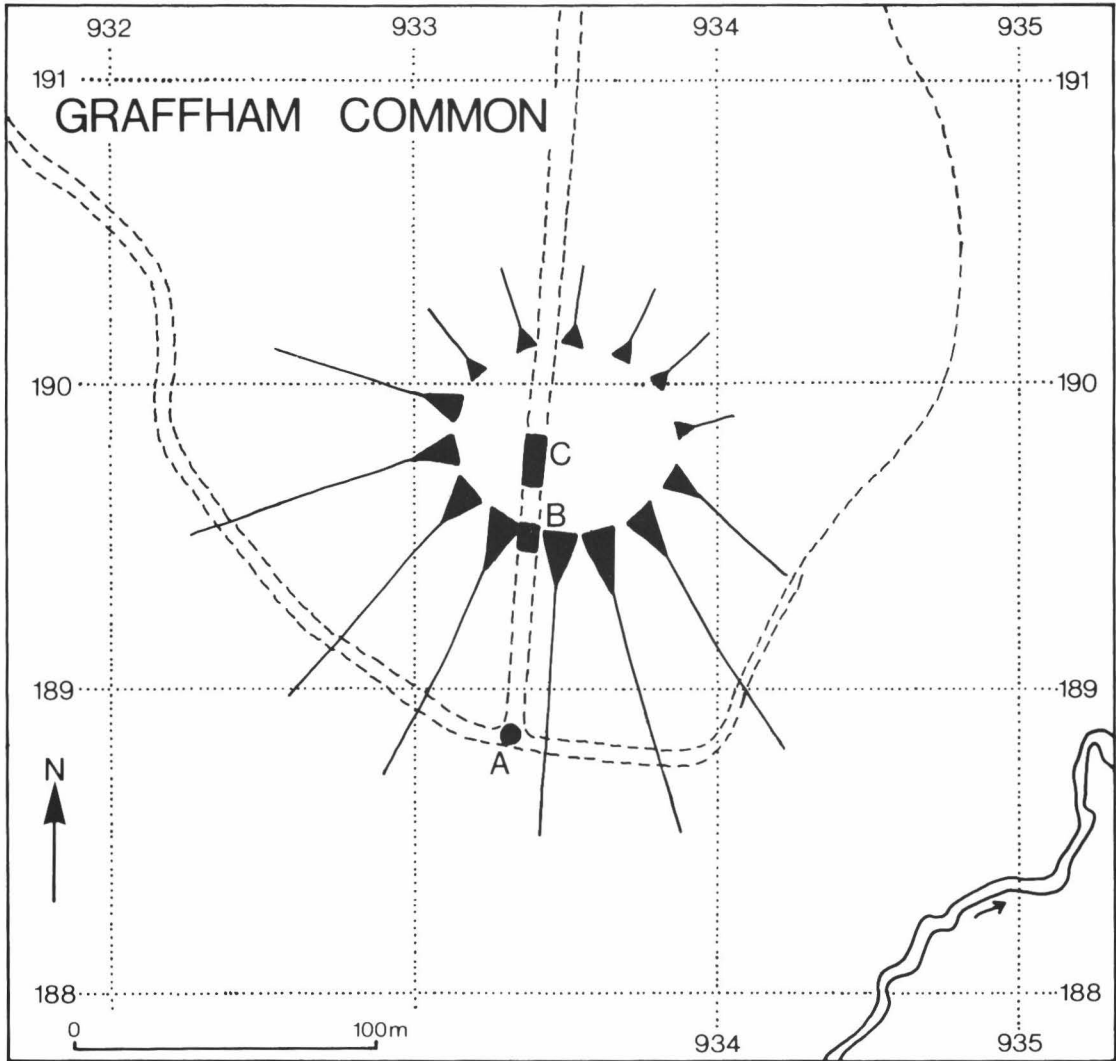


Fig. 2. Sketch plan of the early Mesolithic site at Graffham Common.

the opposing platform away with it and leaving a tetrahedrally-shaped core with only one platform (e.g. Fig. 3, No. 1). This, in turn, was used as a single platform core to produce bladelets. When the angle between the striking platform and the flaked surface approached a right angle, the platform was frequently 'rejuvenated' by removing the whole platform in the form of a core tablet (e.g. Fig. 3, No. 3). 'Cresting' was also used to prepare the flaked surface prior to

blade/bladelet removal. A more comprehensive description of this particular sequence of core reduction can be found in Barton (1981).

Few implements (*c.* 0.9 per cent) are present in the assemblage. Of these, fragments of microliths predominate with a total of 11 (e.g. Fig. 4, Nos. 1-9). Microliths have been classified according to their shape and extent of retouch (Clark 1933) and those present in the assemblage belong to the obliquely blunted or blunted-

TABLE 1  
The Graffham Common Flint Assemblage

	<i>A</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>C</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Debitage</i>				
Flakes	200	46	208	454
Blades	91	2	52	145
Bladelets	3	11	11	25
Blade/bladelet fragments	168	112	583	863
Axe-thinning flakes		3	4	7
Chips	26	12	242	280
Single platform, flake cores	2			2
Single platform, bladelets cores	9		2	11
Two opposing platforms, bladelet cores		1	4	5
Shattered pieces	40	10	19	69
Crested blades	3		3	6
Core tablets		2	7	9
Tranchet axe-sharpening flake			1	1
<i>Implement</i>				
Scrapers	2		1	3
Fabricator			1	1
Microlith fragments	2	1	8	11
Horsham point			1	1
<i>By-products</i>				
Microburins			5	5
Miss-hit microliths	1		1	2
Fire-fractured flint	26	5	36	67
Total	573	205	1,189	1,967

down-one-edge classes (Clark's Types A and B). These two types consistently recur in early Mesolithic (8th and 7th millennia b.c.) assemblages (Jacobi 1973). One Horsham point (Fig. 4, No. 10) was also recovered; these are considered to date to the 7th and early 6th millennia b.c. (Jacobi & Tebbutt 1981). The only other implements consist of a fabricator (Fig. 3, No. 6) and three scrapers (e.g. Fig. 3, No. 5). Five microburins (e.g. Fig. 4, Nos. 12, 13 and 14), two miss-hit microlith fragments (e.g. Fig. 4, No. 11), seven axe-thinning flakes and a tranchet axe-sharpening flake (Fig. 3, No. 4) testify to the manufacture of microliths and the preparation

of tranchet axes ready for use on or in the vicinity of the site. The fire-fractured flint, to which ten of the blade fragments and two of the microlith fragments should be added, is likely to have come from hearths.

Clearly, only a sample of the flint assemblage has been collected from the site, but the consistent adoption of a blade technology to flake good quality, locally available nodular flint suggests that the assemblage is contemporary and Mesolithic in date. The absence of geometric microliths and the presence of obliquely blunted and single-edge-blunted microliths, along with a Horsham point, narrow this down to the early

Mesolithic period. However, the number of implements present in the assemblage is low (0.9 per cent). The microburins and miss-hit microliths show that hunting equipment was manufactured on the site and the axe-thinning flakes and tranchet axe-sharpening flake suggest that axes were also flaked; both of these items, though, were probably used and, in some cases, eventually disposed of elsewhere. The variety of implements in the assemblage indicates that the site is more than a mere hunting stand, but whether or not it was a short-stay camp occupied at one particular time of the year or a site visited on more than one occasion to perform one or more special activities (a 'task-specific' site) must still remain an open question.

The Lower Greensand in Sussex supported a number of early Mesolithic sites (Fig. 1A). The first discoveries were made while observing sand quarrying activities and subsequent excavations have yielded large flint assemblages, the remains of hearths and, in the case of Hassocks (Toms 1907) and Selmeston (Clark 1934), so-called 'pit-dwellings'. The flint assemblages are characterized by large quantities of microliths and microburins, and smaller numbers of scrapers, burins, microdentulates, notched flakes and axe-sharpening flakes, and the occasional tranchet axe or fabricator (e.g. West Heath: Clark 1932; Brailsford 1937; Iping Common: Keef & *al.* 1965; Hassocks: Toms 1907; Selmeston: Clark 1934; and Rackham: Garton 1980). The assemblage from Graffham Common would therefore appear to be a typical example of those recovered from early Mesolithic sites on the Sussex Lower Greensand.

Off the Lower Greensand in Sussex, there are two possible early Mesolithic sites in the Weald: Hastings and St Leonard's Forest (Fig. 1A; Jacobi 1978, 19). Others may exist on the South Downs and West Sussex coastal plain, but none have been discovered to date. The present picture would suggest that the Weald, especially the Lower Greensand close to rivers and streams, was exploited by itinerant bands of hunter-gatherers, but whether this region was exploited

all the year round is unclear. As Britain was still joined to the European continent at this time (Jacobi 1973, 245-6), it is possible that these Wealden sites represent summer camps occupied by hunting bands originating from the area south of the downs. Until an early Mesolithic site with associated faunal and botanical information has been investigated, it is unwise to speculate further.

#### FLINTWORK FROM THE VICINITY OF GRAFFHAM COMMON

In addition to the Graffham Common site, E. W. and H. G. Holden have found flints at other localities on the Lower Greensand within 5 km. of the common. These are listed below.

1. SU 937223: 2 flakes; 1 scraper (Fig. 3, No. 7).
2. SU 936197: 2 flakes; 2 blades.
3. SU 935193: 3 flakes; 1 blade; 1 microlith (Fig. 4, No. 15).
4. SU 937190: 2 flakes.
5. SU 935185: 5 flakes; 1 blade; 1 single platform, bladelet core.
6. SU 938185: 1 two opposing platforms, bladelet core.
7. SU 939185: 49 flakes; 4 blades; 2 bladelet fragments; 24 chips; 2 fire-fractured flints.
8. SU 945195: 1 ?scraper.
9. SU 950194: 1 leaf-shaped arrowhead (Fig. 3, No. 9; in the possession of H. G. Holden).
10. SU 946190: 1 flake.
11. SU 952190: 3 blades; 1 single edge retouched flake (Fig. 3, No. 8).
12. SU 942183: 1 flake; 1 bladelet.
13. SU 944183: 1 flake; 2 blades.
14. SU 953178: 1 blade.
15. SU 954178: 1 ?scraper.
16. SU 978176: (these flints, found by E. W. and H. G. Holden with C. F. Tebbutt, are now in Worthing Museum and the list below was compiled from notes made by E. W. Holden and R. Jacobi; the microliths are early Mesolithic forms) 48 flakes; 34 blades; 76 blade/bladelet fragments; 13 cores; 1 ?fabricator; 9 microliths; 1 barbed and tanged arrowhead fragment.

The flints from the following localities are probably Mesolithic: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14 and 16. Site 16 could be similar in nature and proportions to the Graffham Common site discussed above. Of the remaining flints, 9 is early

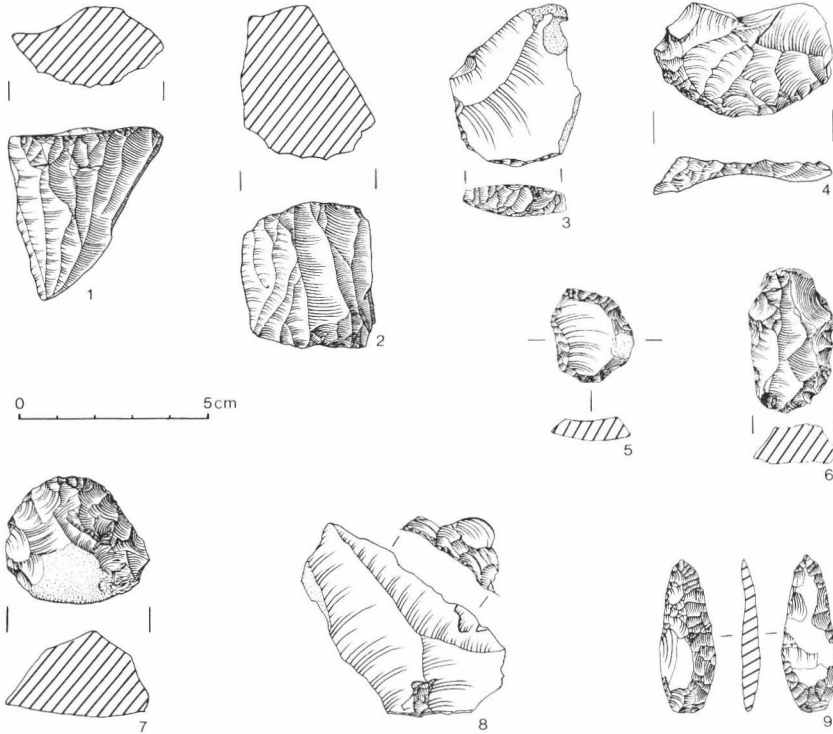


Fig. 3. Flints from the Lower Greensand around Graffham Common. 1 and 5 from Area A; 2 from Area B; 3, 4 and 6 from Area C; 7 from Site 1; 8 from Site 11; 9 from Site 9. 1, single platform, bladelet core; 2, two opposing platforms, bladelet core; 3, core tablet; 4, tranchet axe-sharpening flake; 5, scraper; 6, fabricator; 7, scraper; 8, one edge retouched flake; 9, leaf-shaped arrowhead. (Drawn by Ruth Parkin)

Neolithic, and 1 and at least the arrowhead in 16 could be late Neolithic or early Bronze Age in date.

The majority of known prehistoric sites on the Lower Greensand date to the early Mesolithic period (Fig. 1A). The only other prehistoric settlements where excavations have taken place are the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age site at Rackham (Holden & Bradley 1975) and the late Neolithic and late Bronze Age sites at Selmeston (Clark 1934). At present archaeological evidence would suggest that the Lower Greensand was exploited in the early Mesolithic, then only visited sporadically until the late Neolithic, when certain areas were settled, perhaps intermittently, until the end of the Bronze Age. During this phase of settlement, round barrow cem-

eteries proliferated, as exemplified by West Heath with radiocarbon dates between *c.* 1700 and *c.* 1200 b.c. (Drewett 1976, 150). The area around Graffham Common appears to follow this pattern, but whether this is merely an illusion created by the limited amount of fieldwork undertaken on the Sussex Lower Greensand is still an open question. One way to resolve this problem is to carry out a systematic surface artefact collection survey of land under cultivation, extending the work of Holloway (1979) and Garwood (1985). In the river valleys, flood-plain deposits overlie the Lower Greensand in places. Here, a number of small Mesolithic and Neolithic sites, for example Henfield and Isfield (Wymer 1977, 305–6, 309) and Litlington (Holloway 1979; Garwood 1985), are already known

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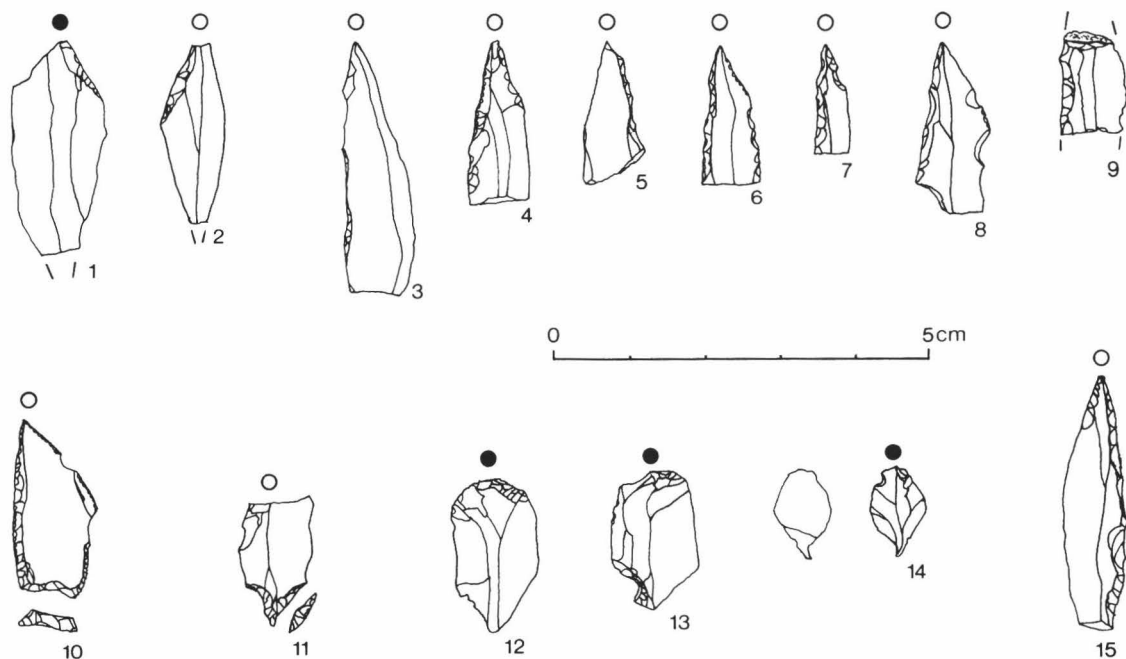


Fig. 4. Microliths and microburins from Graffham Common. 1-7 and 10-14 from Area C; 8 from Area A; 9 from Area B; 15 from Site 3. 1-2, obliquely blunted microliths; 3-9 and 15, microliths blunted down one edge; 10, Horsham point; 11, miss-hit microlith; 12-14, microburins. Filled circle: bulb present. Open circle: bulb absent. (Drawn by Ruth Parkin)

but have yet to be excavated. These are areas where fieldwork should perhaps be concentrated, not only to discover more sites, but also to locate sites with sealed deposits where archaeological, faunal and environmental information is well preserved.

#### Acknowledgements

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