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A MESOLITHIC SITE AT GREAT MELTON

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SUMMARY

The near total excavation of a concentration of flintwork on arable land at Great Melton has produced the first unselected collection of a Mesolithic industry in East Anglia, dug and recorded under controlled conditions. The setting of the site is unusual, being high above and a kilometre distant from the nearest river valleys of the Tiffey and the Yare. It is interpreted as a short-lived hunter's camp. The discarded artefacts below the ploughsoil were, for the most part, disturbed by rabbit burrows, but the distribution may still reflect something of the original shape of an assumed shelter. Typology indicates parallels with the prolific scatter of Mesolithic artefacts on Kelling Heath, but dating can only be judged by the similarity of the Great Melton industry to known Early Mesolithic industries elsewhere in southern Britain dated between 7000 and 8000 BC. A thermoluminiscence date on a burnt flint suggests it may be more recent.

The Site

The discovery of a prolific concentration of Mesolithic flintwork on the surface of an arable field just south of Hall Farm at Pockthorpe, Great Melton, Norfolk, was made early in 1984 by Mr. D.G. Woollestone. This was during the course of his extensive field walking and metal detecting in this area. It was noted by him as his site 210A and duly reported to the Norfolk Archaeological Unit. A trial excavation of four separate metre squares was made in March of that year and showed that the concentration of Mesolithic flintwork extended through the ploughsoil and into the subsoil beneath. It also showed that it was restricted to a small area of about 10 x10 m. This suggested that the flintwork represented one episode as opposed to the more usual spread of such material over a much wider area, probably resulting from a palimpsest of individual scatters from intermittent visits over unknown periods of time. There were no indications of any flint artefacts of later periods and it was thus considered that, as such, this concentration could give a true example of a Mesolithic flint industry in Norfolk appertaining to one period and purpose. In the absence of any site of this nature in the county ever having been dug in an unselected and controlled manner, and with the possibility of it being destroyed by deeper ploughing, it was decided that an area excavation should be conducted to retrieve it. This was done in 1986-87 by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit when time was available, directed by J.J. Wymer with the assistance of an M.S.C. team of diggers. Some of the work was supervised by N. Guy and P. Millington-Wallace.

The location of the site (Fig. 1), some ten kilometres to the west of Norwich, is somewhat unusual for Mesolithic sites in this part of Norfolk, where scattered flint artefacts of the period tend to be found along river valleys. The Great Melton site is just over a kilometre from the nearest streams and on relatively high ground, 35 m above their floodplains. It is also on the relatively poorly-drained Till Plain of central Norfolk, although in this area it is considerably dissected and at Great Melton itself the till is mainly of a sandy or silty nature. It is mapped as Boulder Clay on the 1975 edition of the B.G.S. 1:50,000 sheet 161 (Norwich). The lighter nature of the soil in the vicinity of the excavation site may have some relevance to its chosen position. At present the nearest source of water is a minor brook that rises about 300 m to the

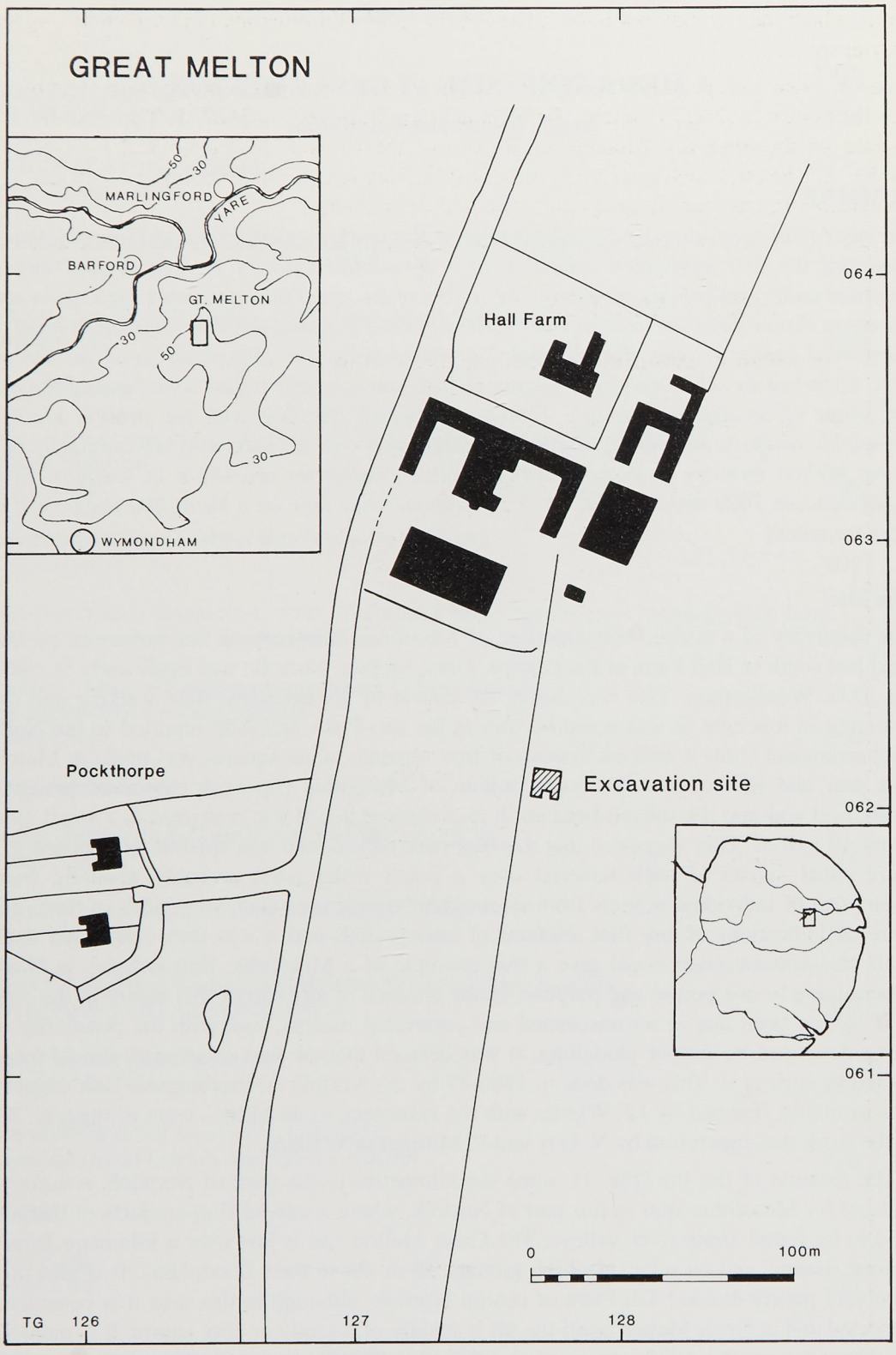

Fig. 1
Location plan of the Mesolithic site at Great Melton, Norfolk.

south, which may or may not have existed at the time. Old brickpits in that vicinity suggest a heavier soil.

Faden's late 18th-century map of the area shows that the site was on the very edge of what was then Great Melton Common. The National Grid Reference is TG 12780521 and the site is entered on the Sites and Monuments Record of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit as MLG 16753. All the excavated material is preserved in Norwich Castle Museum, with details of the excavated positions per metre square for individual artefacts.

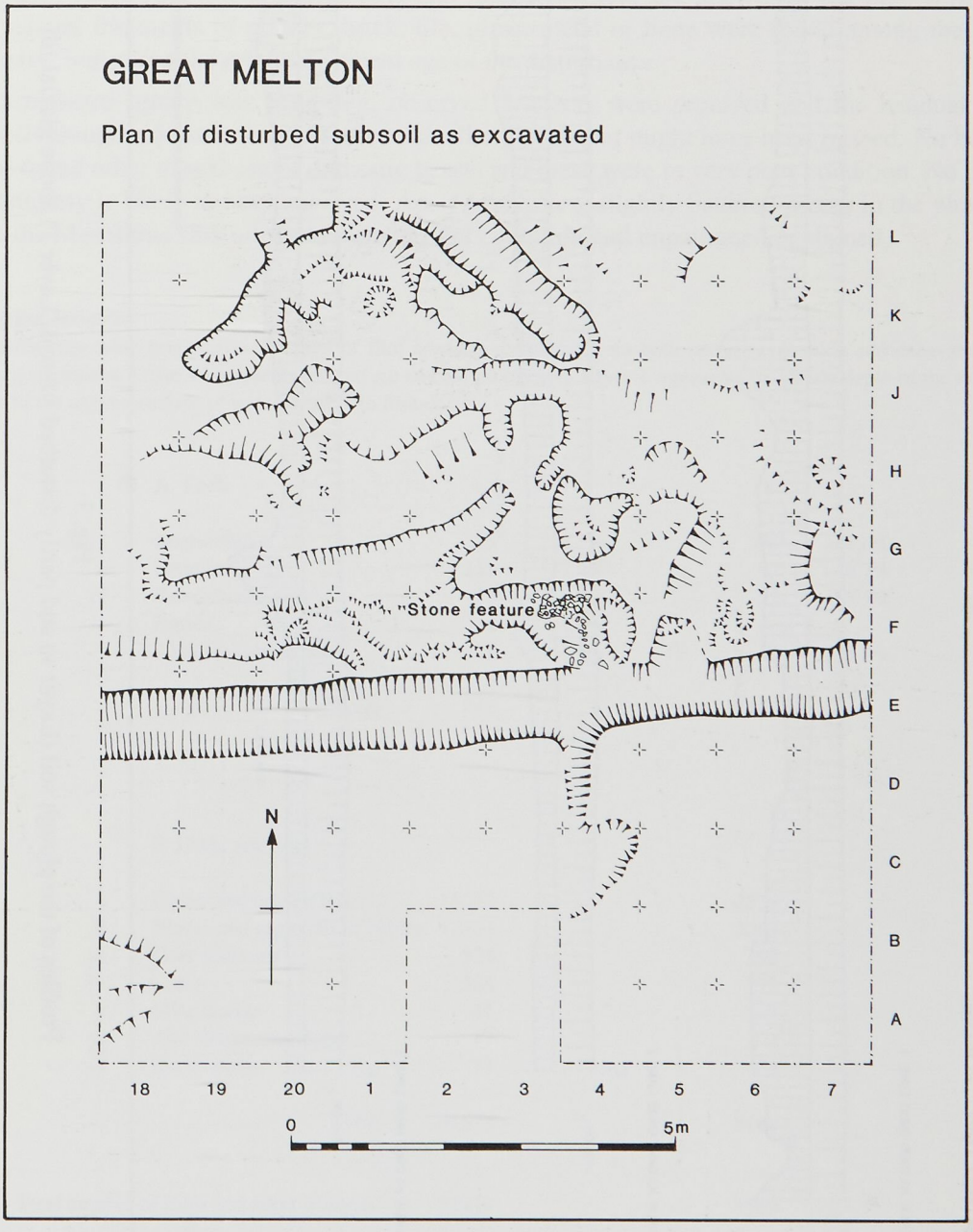

Fig. 2 Grid numbering of metre squares as excavated and plan of excavated area. A recent back-filled ditch crosses the site from E7 to E18. The other disturbances are considered to be a complex of rabbit burrows.

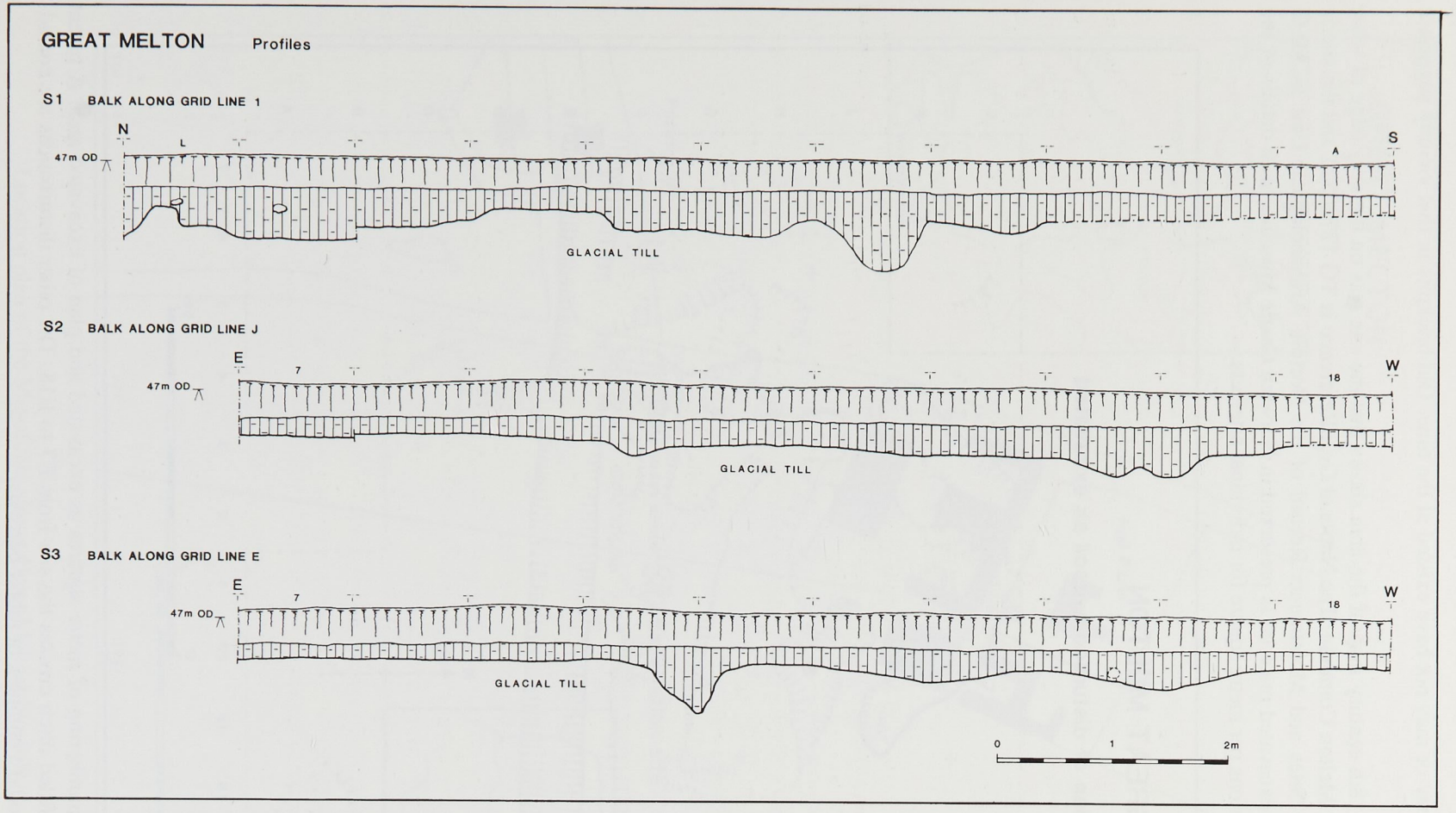

Fig. 3
Profiles of the plough soil (Layer +) and partly disturbed subsoil (Layer 1) above glacial till.

The Excavation

On the basis of the flints exposed on the surface and the result of the trial excavation a grid of metre squares was superimposed on the area. Material from each metre square was excavated separately, with a distinction being made in recording material from the ploughsoil and the subsoil (Fig. 3). From its vertical distribution through 40 cm or more it was clear that any previous primary context was destroyed, so more precise three-dimensional recording was not warranted. As work progressed it was seen that the base of the subsoil was found to be very irregular, occupying linear depressions and hollows. These are shown on the plan (Fig. 2). Occasional fragments of pottery, brick, tile, glass, metal or bone were found among the flint industry, indicating the relatively recent age of the disturbance.

Each metre square was hand-dug, observed artefacts were removed and the residual soil sieved through a 5 mm mesh to retrieve smaller pieces that might have been missed. No bones were found other than those of domestic beasts and these were in very poor condition. No bone of antiquity is likely to have survived. Apart from a few slightly battered pieces in the ploughsoil, the Mesolithic flint artefacts were in mint condition and unpatinated or stained.

The Flint Industry

The following table summarises the total of flint artefacts recovered from both surface collection and excavation of 107 square metres. Layer + represents the surface and the ploughsoil. Layer 1 represents the whole depth of the subsoil down to the uneven surface of a sterile till with flints.

	A. Tools	1		+	
i	Microliths	286	38.5%	34	18.0%
ii	Scrapers	241	32.4%	92	48.7%
iii	Retouched pieces	171	23.0%	52	27.5%
iv	Burins	34	4.6%	–	–
v	Axes/picks/punches	11	1.5%	11	5.8%
	Total	743		189	

	B. Other artefacts		
i	Flakes and broken flakes	18007	2819
ii	Blades and segments of blades	12684	2083
iii	Core trimmings	524	98
iv	Cores	388	172
v	Microburins	41	3
vi	Axe sharpening flakes	17	2
vi	Burin spalls	13	3
	Total	31674	5180
	Total number of tools and other artefacts	32417	5369

In addition, a large number of shatter-pieces and spalls (<20 mm maximum dimension) were recovered in the soil excavated from Layer 1. The former (c.1180) were noted and discarded as were the latter, apart from the retention of a representative sample.

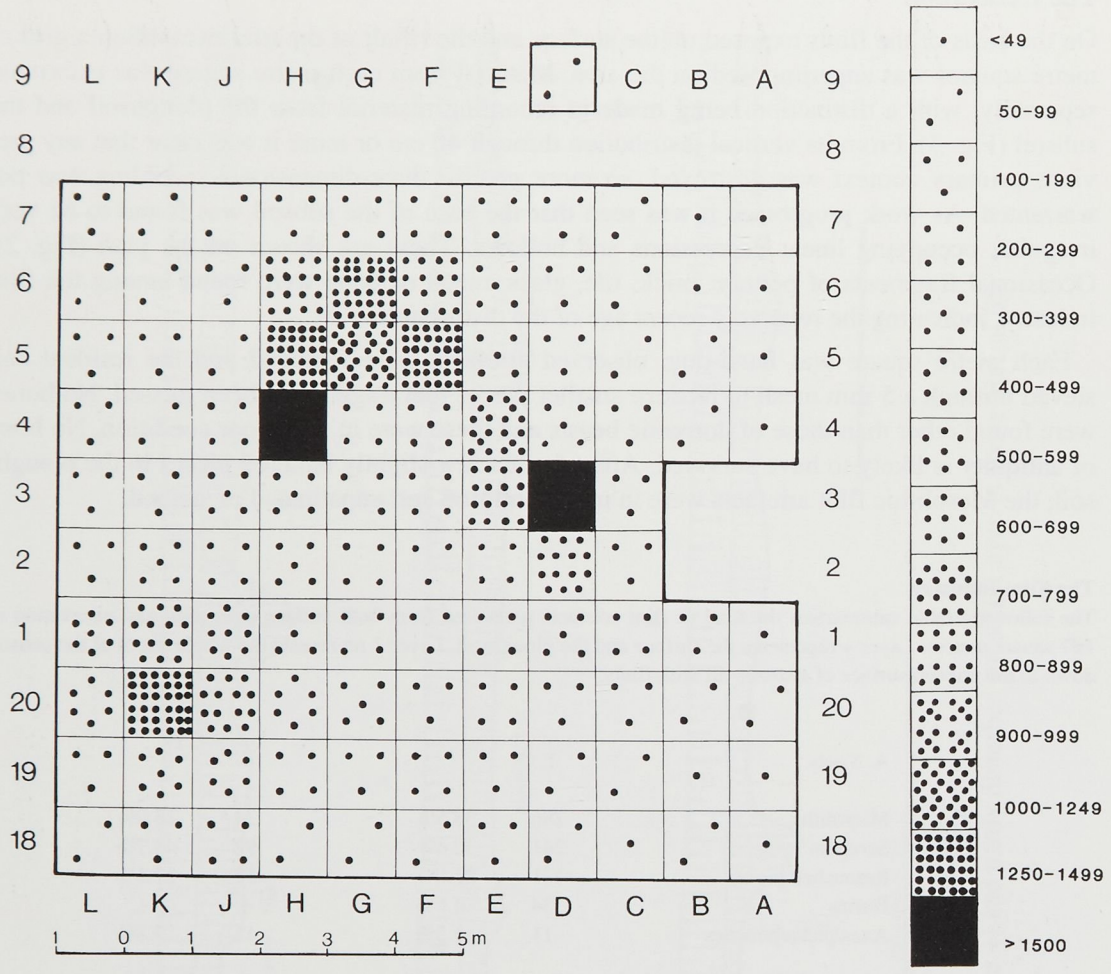

Fig. 4
Distribution plan of all artefacts as excavated by metre squares.

Other lithic components comprised five probable hammerstones and two rubbers.

The distribution of all artefacts per metre square is shown on Fig.4.

Microliths (Fig. 5, nos. 1-43)
A total of 320 microliths were recovered, including broken fragments. Only one conjoining pair of fragments was recognised: a snapped point from F3 and a segment from C7.

Of the 286 examples from layer 1,136 can be described as substantially complete, but the majority of these have broken bases or tips, only 13 being apparently undamaged, but good estimates of their original lengths can be made for all of this category. The remaining fragments are listed in the table below. The majority can be classified by the type and position of retouch (as shown) but no estimate of length is possible.

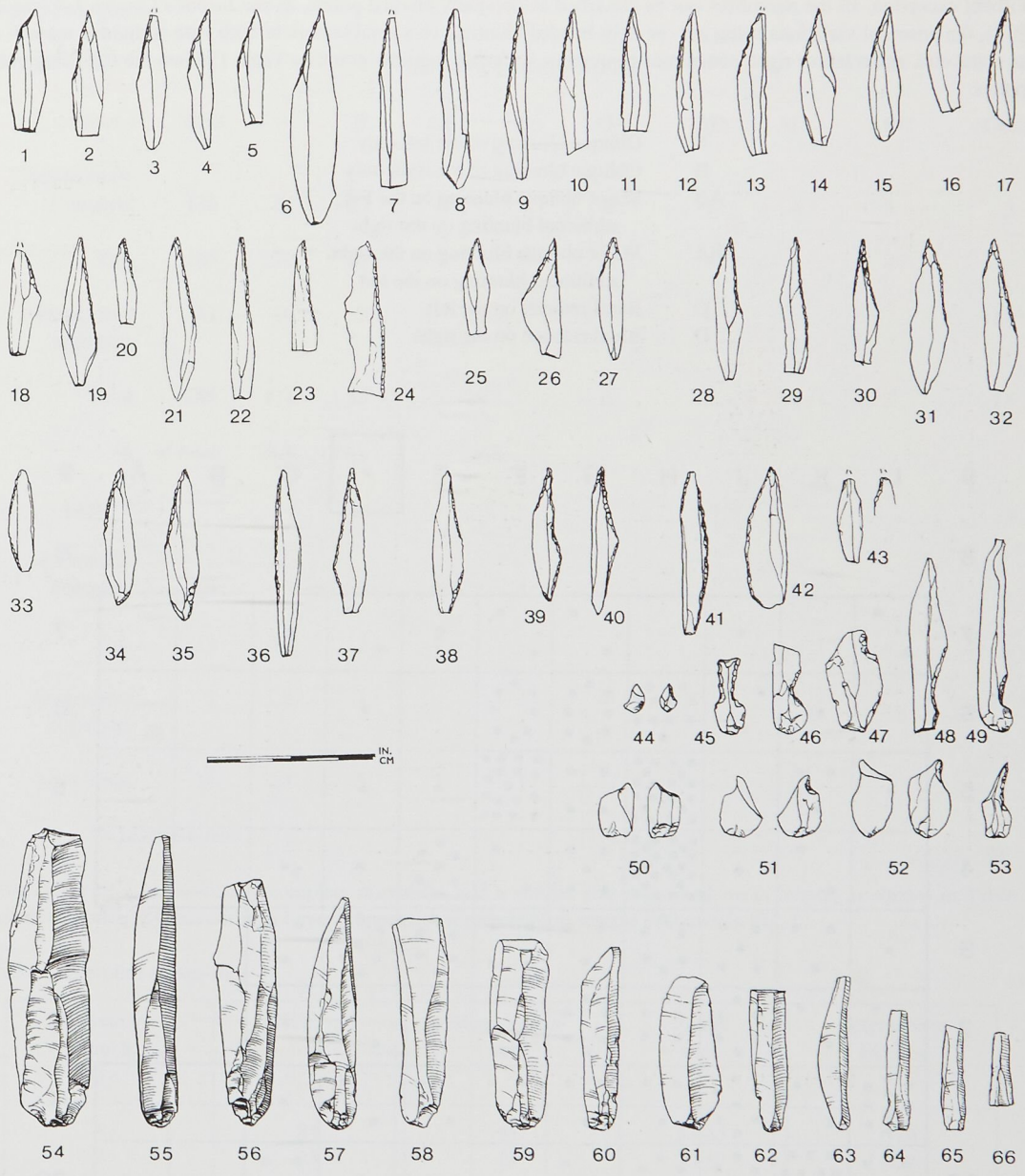

Fig. 5 1-43 Microliths
44-53 Microlith manufacturing debitage:

44, 47, 50-52 successful snapped micro-burins
45 reject piece possibly from rod-like microlith
48-49 unsnapped micro-burins
46, 53 unsuccessfully snapped micro-burins (mis-hits)

54-66 Blades

Without exception, all the microliths can be classified as obliquely blunted points, as per Jacobi's Classes 1-4 (Jacobi 1978), the principal variations being left- or right-handed blunting, or a combination of both with additional retouch at the distal end, again left or right, sometimes continuous with that from the point. In Table 1 below the following code applies:

A	Oblique blunting of the left only
B	Oblique blunting of the right only
AB	Major oblique blunting on the left, addtional blunting on the right
BA	Major oblique blunting on the right, additional blunting on the left
C	Basal retouch on the left
D	Basal retouch on the right

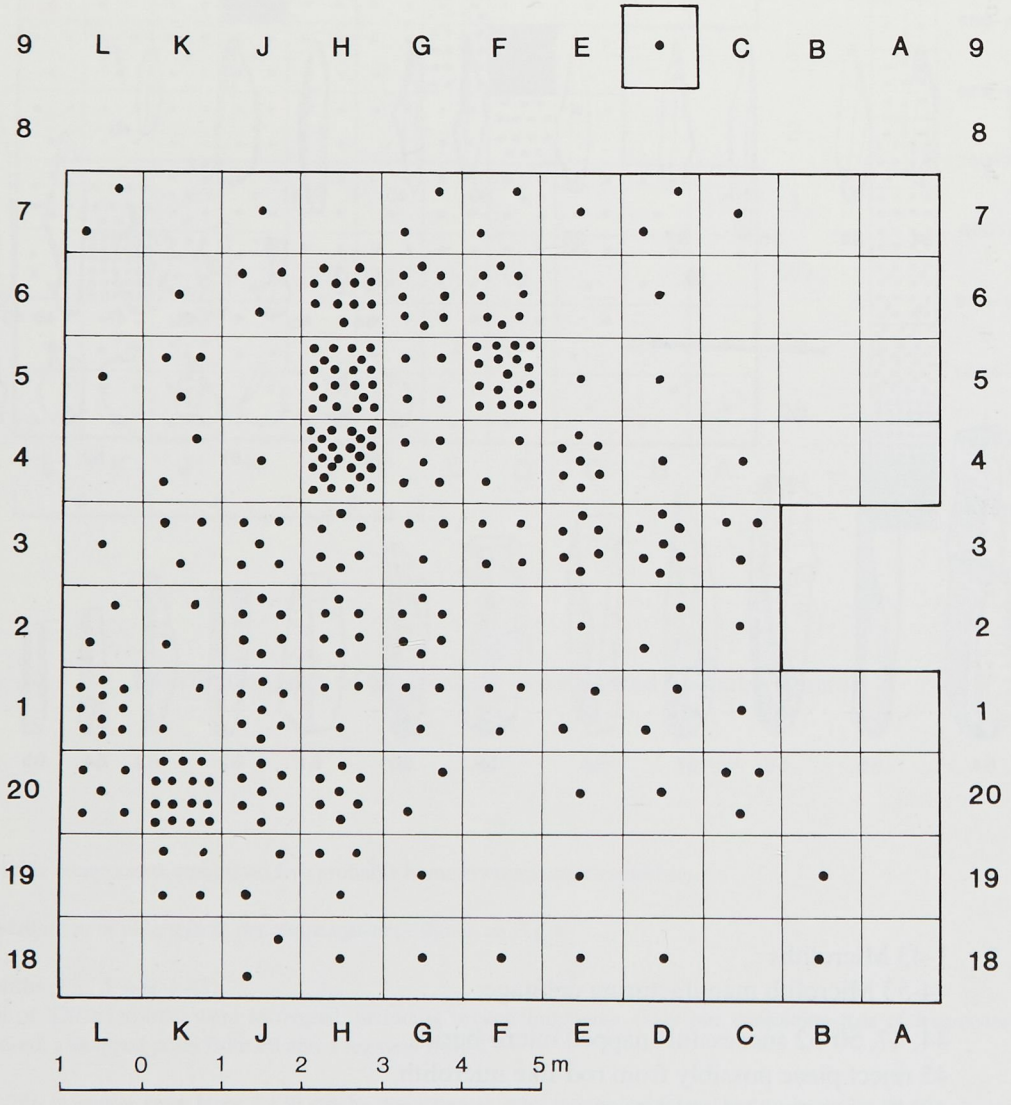

Fig. 6
Disbribution of microliths per metre square.

Table 1 Microliths

		Position of blunting/retouch								
Layer 1	Total	A	B	AB	BA	AD	BD	AC	ABD	Other
Substantially Complete	136	81	23	6	8	6	2	4	3	3
Tips	109	70	29	7	3	–	–	–	–	–
Fragments/ segments	41	20	3	...4...		–	–	–		14*
Total	286	171	55	28		6	2	4	3	17
%	of total	59.8	19.2	9.8						
Layer +										
Substantially complete	16	11	2	1	1	–	–	1	–	–
Tips	13	10	2	1	–	–	–	–	–	–
Fragments/ segments	5	2	1	–	–	–	–	–	–	1*
Total	34	23	5	2	1	–	–	1	–	1

* = indeterminate

All categories of substantially complete microliths had a similar size range and mean length, as shown in Table 2, where data from all microliths in Layer 1 appear. A representation sample is shown in Fig. 5.

Table 2 Microlith dimensions

Blunting/ retouch Type	Number	Mean length mm	Range mm	Reference to Figures
A	81	46	33-65	1-16
B	23	43	30-57	17-23
AB and BA	14	40	28-51	24-32
Other	18	44	29-67	33-43
Overall	136	45	28-67	

As well as fully formed microliths, a few apparently incomplete examples can be recognised. One is a bladelet snapped by microburin technique but otherwise unworked. Two other microblades (included in Table 1) show typical microlithic retouch and may represent unfinished examples of microlith preparation by retouch alone, without prior removal of the bulbar end by microburin technique.

Microburins (Fig. 5 Nos. 44-53)

The presence of microburins in the industry shows that the technique was used for microlith production, but the number of microliths recovered (319) is far in excess of the number of successful microburins (19). The presence of two microblades with microlithic retouch but no evidence of microburin technique may indicate that some microliths were prepared directly from microblades by retouch alone.

Mis-hits and failures form a substantial portion of the microburins recovered. Numbers are shown in Table 3, which also shows that approximately 10% of microburin notches were on the left hand side, the majority being right handed. One mis-hit had been notched on both sides of the blade, the notches being exactly opposed, resulting in a straight snap across the narrow neck that remained. All microburins, including three from the ploughsoil are listed in the table.

Table 3 All Microburins

	Right hand notch	Left hand notch	Total
Successful	18	1	19
Mis-hits	12	–	13*
Failures/not completed	9	3	12
Totals	39	4	44*

* includes one with both right and left notches. Examples of each category are illustrated in Fig. 5, 44-53

Scrapers (Fig. 7, Nos. 67-84)

Scrapers represent the second most frequent finished implement of the industry, 241 being recovered from below the ploughsoil (Layer 1) and a further 92 from the ploughsoil (Layer +). The two collections appear to be identical in general character but are listed separately in Table 4.

The overwhelming majority (94%) of scrapers present in the industry are rounded end or end and side scrapers on thick flakes. There is a considerable range of size and thickness. Those from layer 1 have a maximum dimension ranging from 20 to 80 mm and a maximum thickness from 5 to 31 mm. A representative group is shown in Fig. 7. The next most frequent category of scraper is the "end-on-blade", of which 18 (5.4%) are present, of which only two are double ended. Both of the latter and five of the single-ended group have cortex on part of their dorsal faces (Nos. 67-71). The remaining two scrapers (0.6%) are hollow scrapers. One is broken, the other is on an elongated flake, which is also retouched along its sides and has cortex on the dorsal side (No. 75).

Table 4 Scrapers

	Layer 1	Layer +	Total	%	Ref to Figs
Rounded scrapers on flakes					
With > 50% cortex on dorsal face	39	19	58	18.5	72-74
< 50% - 10% on dorsal face	91	28	119	38	
> 10% on dorsal face	52	26	78	25	79-81
Without dorsal face	45	13	58	18.5	
	227	86	313	100	
Other scrapers					
End scrapers on blades – single					68-71
Without cortex on dorsal face	7	4	11		76
With cortex (>20%) on dorsal face	4	1	5		
End scraper on elongated flake – double	2	–	2		67
Hollow scraper on elongated flake	1	1	2		75
	14	6	20		

The appended histogram (Fig. 10) shows the size distribution of the rounded scrapers within each category of the classification by extent of cortex on the dorsal surface. Measurements are from the striking platform of the flake to the most distant point of the scraper edge. Broken scrapers have been excluded from the sample, leaving 171 complete examples.

Fig. 7 67-84 Scrapers:

67 Double ended
68-71 Blade end scrapers with no cortex
72-74 Blade end scrapers with >50% cortex
75 Hollow scraper
76-78 Rounded scrapers with no cortex
79-81 Rounded scrapers with <10% cortex
82-84 Rounded scrapers with 10-50% cortex

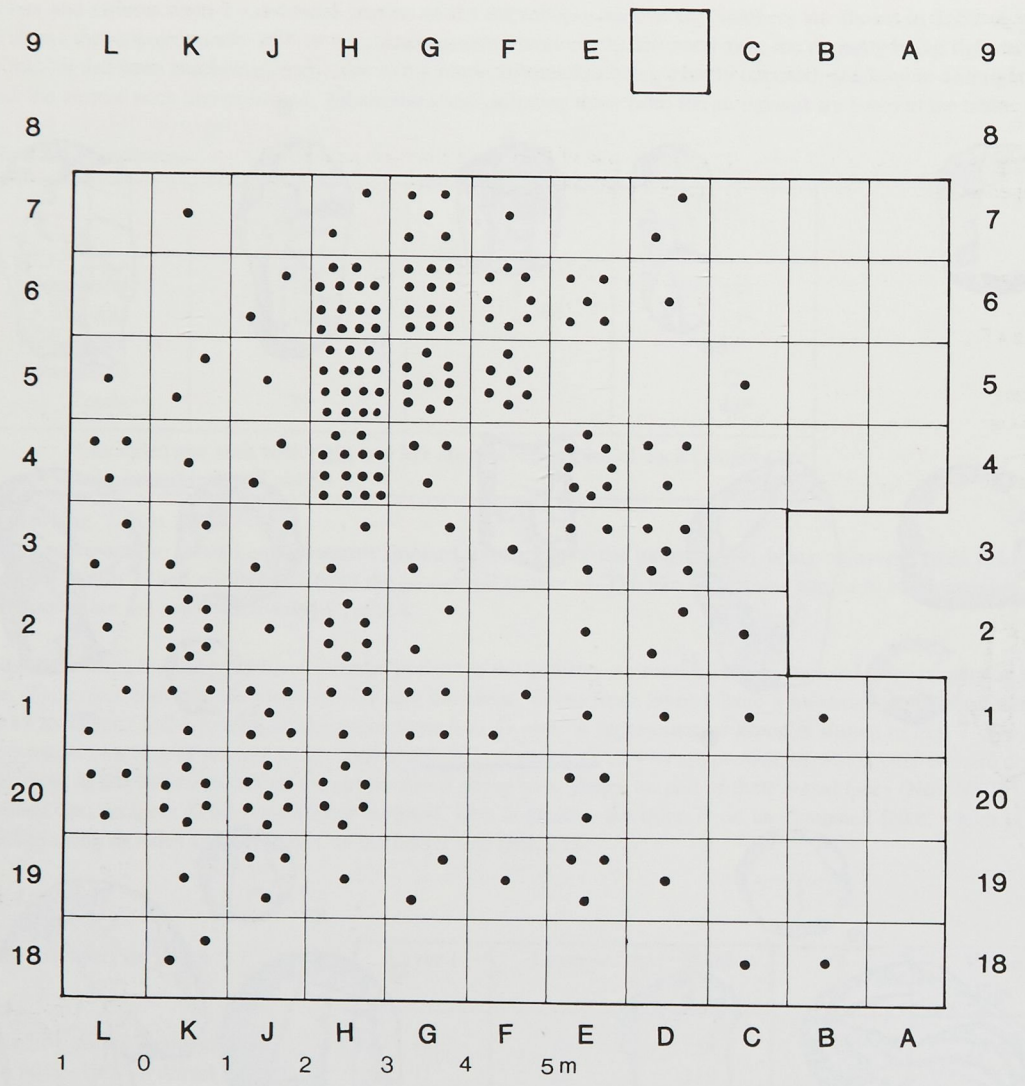

Fig. 8
Distribution of scrapers per metre square.

Retouched pieces (Fig. 12, Nos. 112-119)

Table 5 Retouched Pieces
Artefacts classified under this heading are of miscellaneous character, but can be further described as follows:

		Layer 1	Layer +	Ref. to Figs
a	Flakes and fragments of flakes with retouch or use marks	81	18	117-118
b	Blades and segments with backing, retouch or use marks	58	23	112-115
c	Flakes, blades and fragments with notches	21	11	119
d	Saws	11	0	116
	Totals	171	52	

In categories a) and b) many of the artefacts are rather irregular in form and the extent of retouch was very variable: some inverse retouch was present. A number of the artefacts resemble scrapers but with retouch on the edges or of very limited extent and are therefore excluded from that classification. Of the few relatively regular pieces one truncated blade and four fully-backed blades can be recognised.

In category c) the amount of retouch and the depth of notching is again variable. A few pieces are notched near their bulbar ends as though for the microburin technique but otherwise seem quite unsuitable in form for microlith production.

In category d), saws, most are on regular, parallel-sided blades or segments of blades. Five carry denticulations on the right, three on the left and three on both sides: the gauge is consistent on each implement but varied from a coarse 3 mm to a fine approximately 1 mm spacing.

Burins (Fig. 9, Nos. 85-91)
Burins are rare within the Great Melton assemblage, totalling 34 in all from Layer 1, of which only four can be classed as simple, single blow burins (Nos. 85,89), and a further four as dihedral burins (No. 88). Thirteen probable burin spalls (Nos. 86,87) were also recovered from Layer 1 and a further three from the ploughsoil.

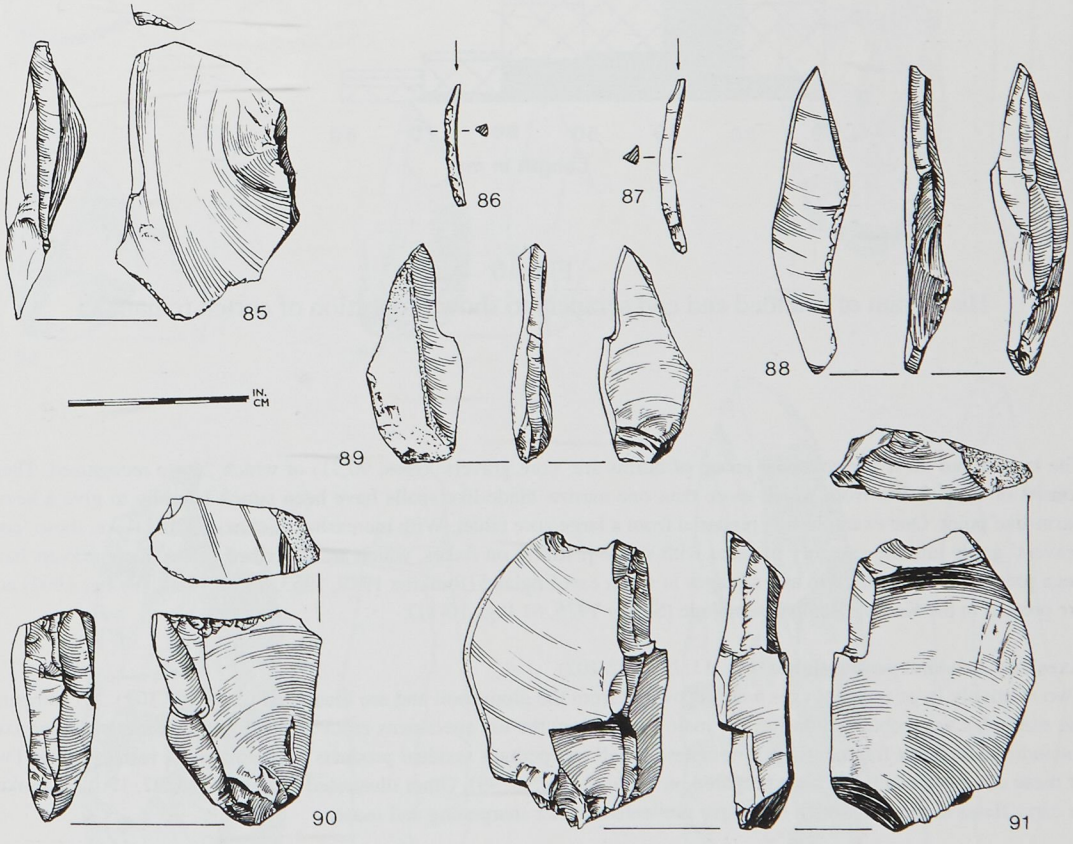

Fig. 9 85-91 Burins:

85 Truncation burin on flake
86-87 Burin spalls
88 Dihedral burin
89 Burin on oblique truncation
90-91 Core burins (= core gravers)

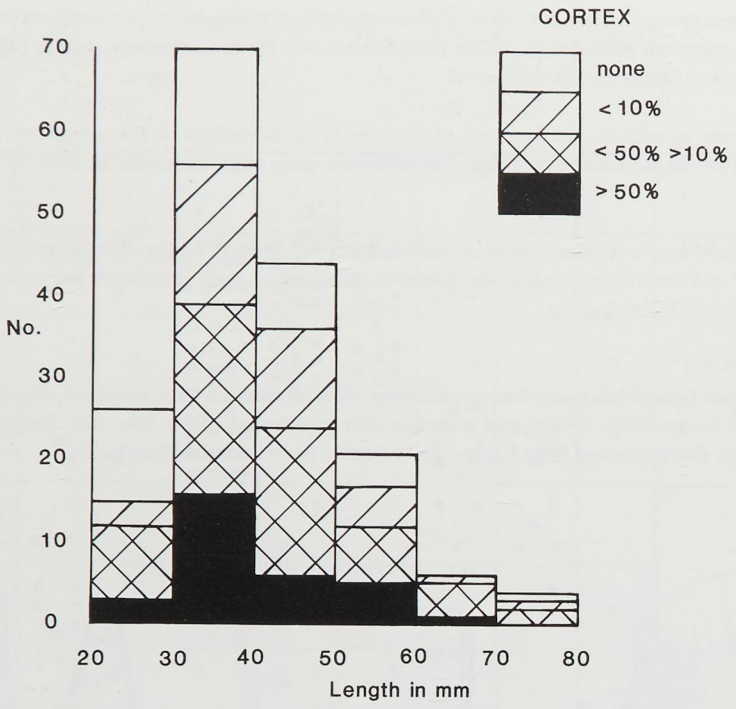

Fig. 10
Histogram of rounded and end scrapers to show proportion of cortex remaining

The largest and most controversial group of burins are 'core gravers' (Nos. 90,91) of which 26 are recognised. These consist of thick flakes from which more than one narrow blade-like spalls have been struck laterally to give a heavy burin-like point. One example was prepared from a large core tablet. With increasing thickness of the flake, these 'core gravers' grade into the category of cores with single platform on flakes, which are described below. Core gravers have been previously indentified in assemblages in south east England (Rankine 1949, 1953, 1956. 1960; Wymer 1962) and are present in the Kelling Heath assemblage (Sainty 1925, 61 Figs 10-11).

Axes and Axe-sharpening flakes (Fig. 11, Nos. 92-102)
Two relatively large tranchet axes were recovered from the ploughsoil and are illustrated (Nos. 101,102). No comparable examples were obtained during the main excavation, the ten specimens recovered being fragments of larger axes (including one burnt fragment) or, if complete, small and perhaps residual products of reworking or resharpening. Two of these complete examples were prepared on blade cores (No. 99). Other illustrated examples (96, 97, 100) are broken or carry flaws in the flint which may have prevented further sharpening and reuse.

Resharpening of axes by the tranchet blow technique is attested by the recovery of a total of 19 axe-sharpening flakes carrying the characteristic battered edge and preparation scars of the axe face. Four typical examples are illustrated (Nos. 92-95)

Cores and Core Trimming Flakes (Fig. 12, Nos. 103-111)
A total of 560 cores were recovered from the excavation, 388 being from below the ploughsoil, and a further 172 from the surface and ploughsoil. The classification that follows is an adaptation of the nomenclature of Barton (1992, 100-108 Figs) developed for Upper Palaeolithic typology. In addition to the cores, large numbers of core trimming flakes, both tablets and crested flakes, were present in the assemblage.

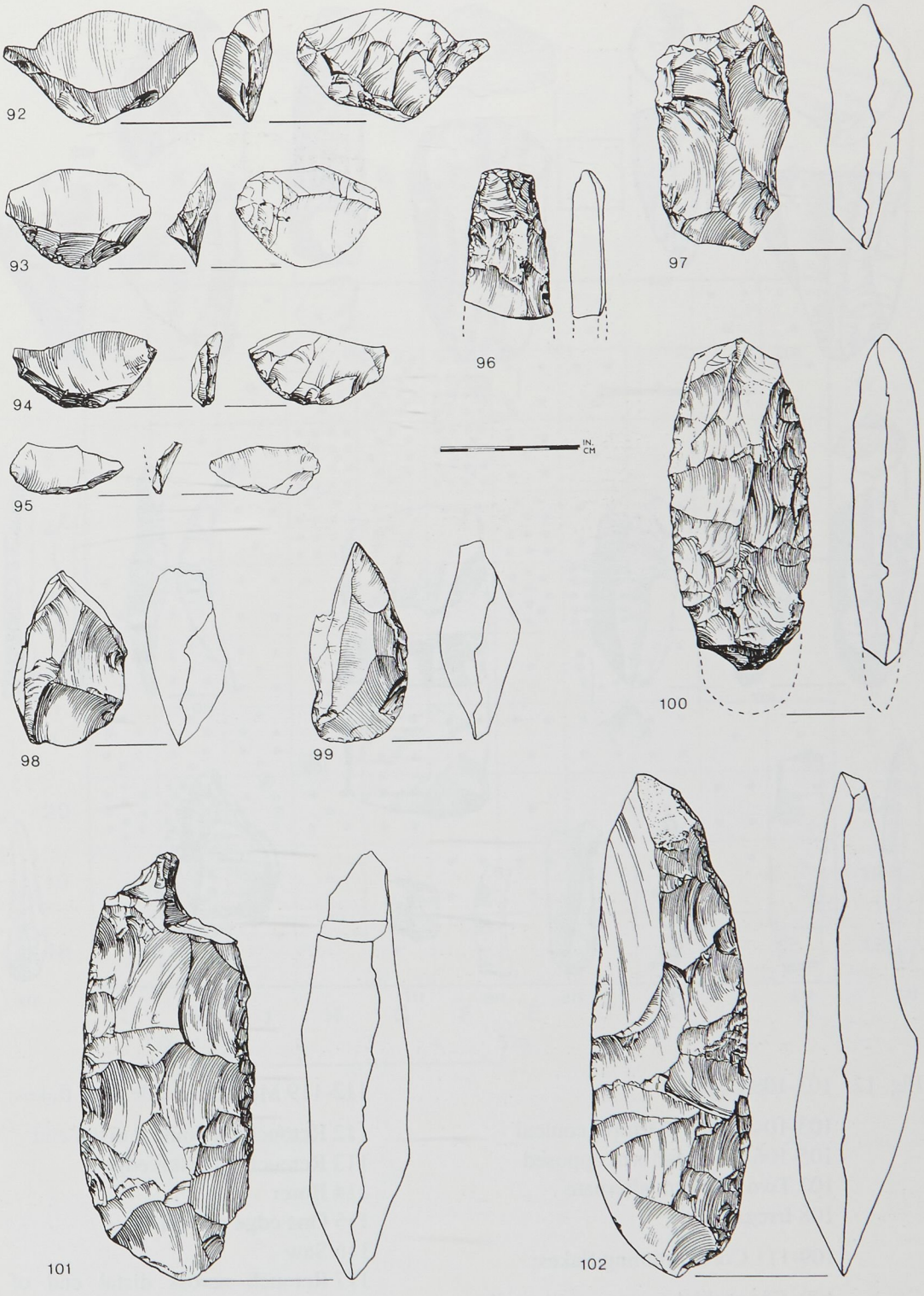

Fig. 11 92-95 Axe/adze sharpening flakes
96-102 Complete or broken axes/adzes

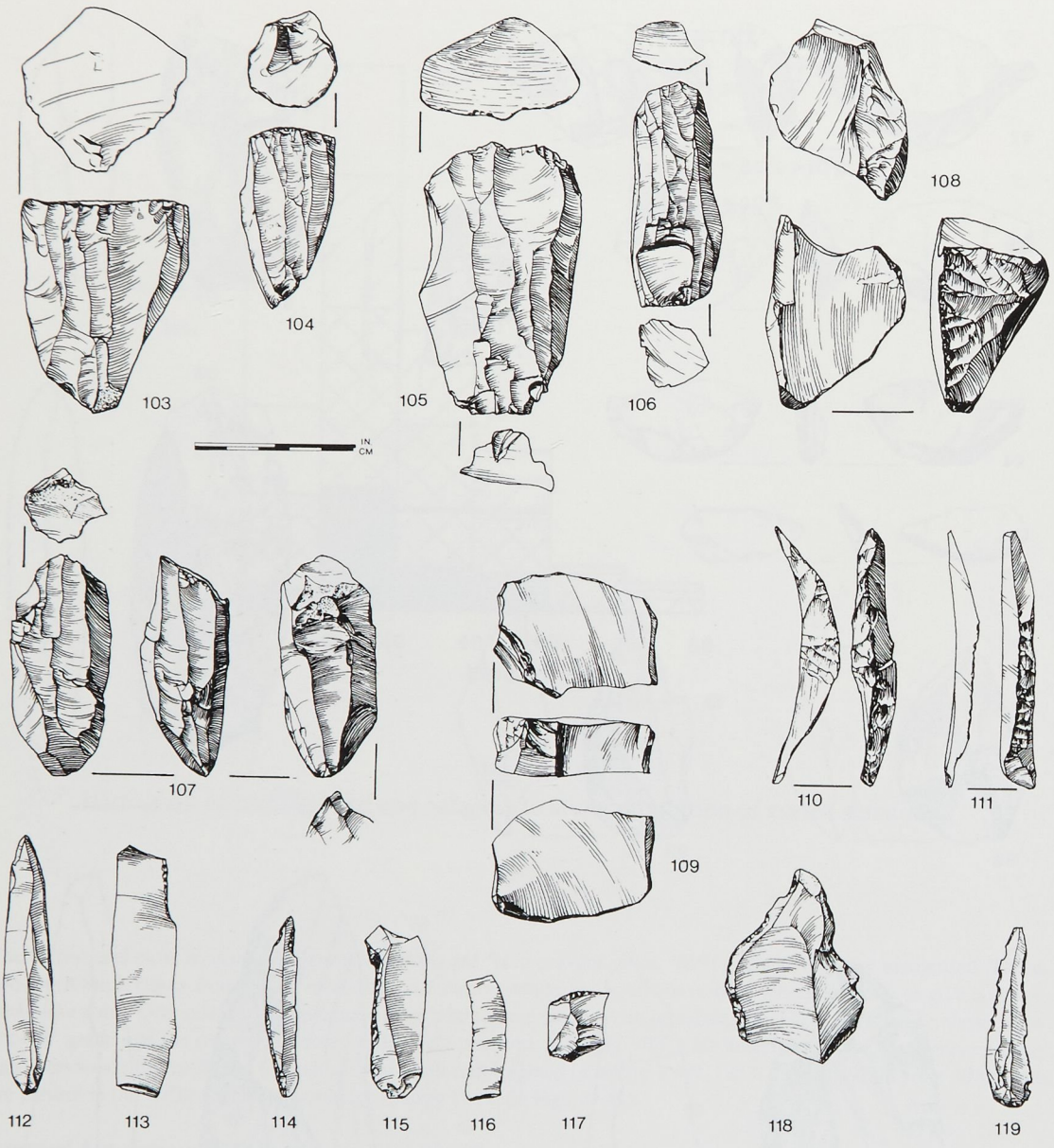

Fig. 12 103-108 Cores:

103-104 Single platform conical
105-106 Two platform opposed
107 Two platform alternate
108 Irregular

109-111 Core trimming flakes:

109 Core tablet rejuvenating spoilt platform
110-111 Crested flakes from initial preparation

112-119 Modified blades and flakes:

112 Retouch on pointed distal end
113 Retouch on distal edge
114 Borer
115 One edge retouched
116 Saw
117 Retouch across distal end of small, square flake
118 Flake with irregular retouch
119 Denticulate

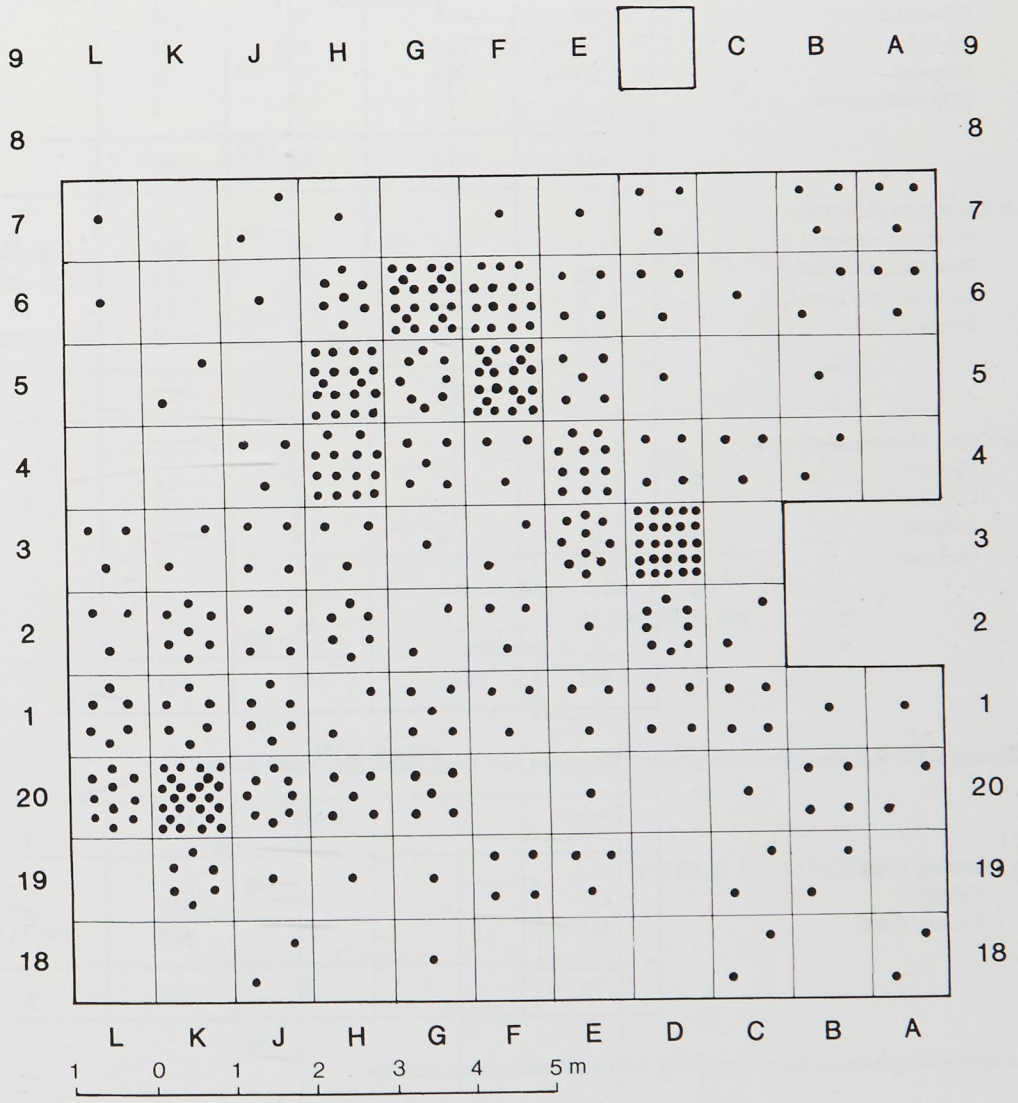

Fig. 13
Distribution of cores per metre square

Table 6 Cores and Core Trimming Flakes

	Layer 1	% of total	Layer +	Total	Ref. to Figs
Blade Cores, one platform					
Prismatic	94	24.2	19	113	103-104
Pyramidal	65	16.8	38	103	
On flake	3*	0.8	15*	18	
Irregular	21	5.4	9	30	
? On broken axes	–		2	2	
	183	47.2	83	266	
Blade Cores, two platforms					
Prismatic, opposed	121	31.2	48	169	105-106
Prismatic, alternate	32	8.2	21	53	107
Crossed (orthogonal)	5	1.3	6	11	
Irregular	6	1.5	1	7	108
	164	42.2	76	240	
Other Cores, Multiple platforms					
Globular	12	3.1	2	14	
Discoidal	5	1.3	1	6	
Irregular	21	5.4	13	34	
On flake	3	0.8	–	3	
	41	10.6	16	57	
	388	100.0	175	563	

* Including some that resemble 'Core gravers' but are on very thick flakes (See under burins)

	Layer 1		Layer +	Total	
Core Trimming Flakes					
Tablets	137		27**	164	109
Crested flakes	387		71	458	110-111
	524		98	622	

** Including one plunging flake comprising both table and crested portions

As a measure of the size of core when initially prepared, ten of the larger core tablets were selected: the maximum dimension across the core platform ranged from 60-85 mm (mean 73 mm). Similar measurements of ten large crested flakes gave a range of 85-136 mm (mean 108 mm). This gives some indication of the initial length of the blade cores.

Blades (Fig. 5, Nos. 54-66)

The production of blades was clearly the primary aim of the industrial techniques employed at the Great Melton site: blade cores formed 91% of all cores found, apparently discarded after the final blade removal. Blades and segments of blades formed 39% of all the artefacts (excluding spalls and shatter pieces). Examination of four arbitrarily selected groups of blades (from squares C1, E6, H2 and K3) showed that about one third were unbroken, the remainder having lost tips or bulbar ends either at the time of or subsequent to preparation. Metrical analysis of the complete blades from this sample (N=136) is summarised on the scatter diagram (Fig. 15).

A representative sample of blades is illustrated: Nos. 54-66.

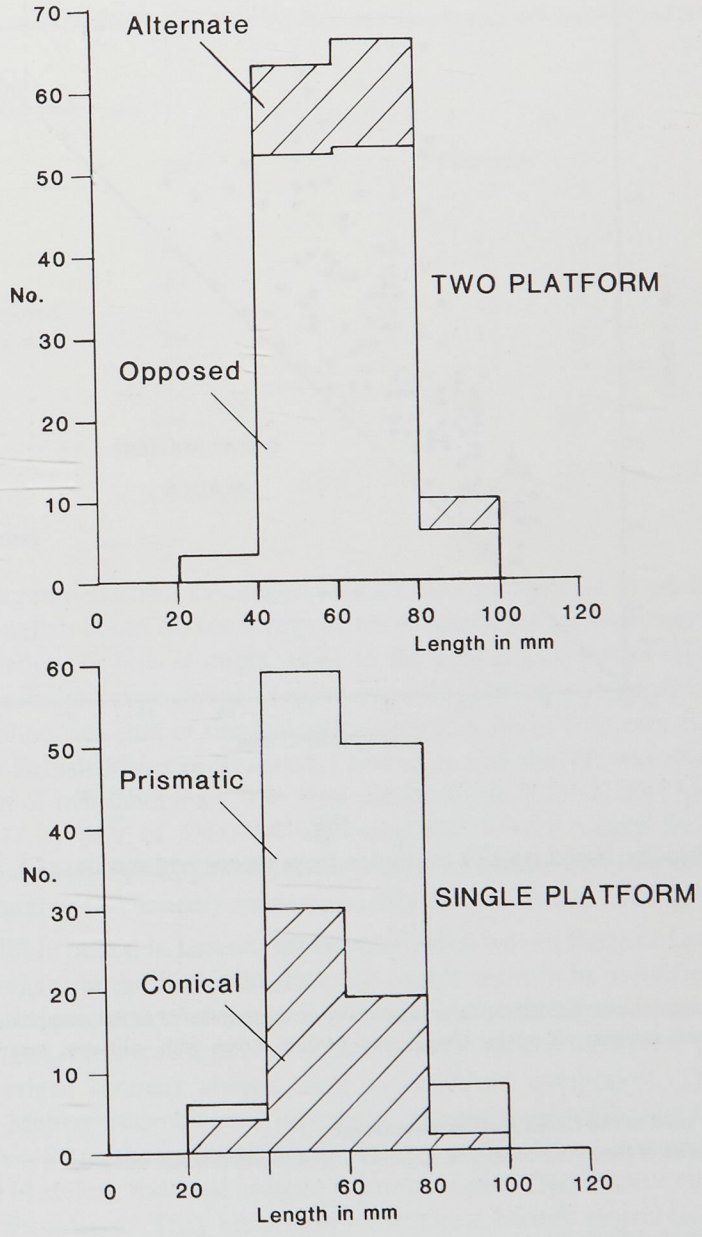

Fig. 14
Proportions of core types

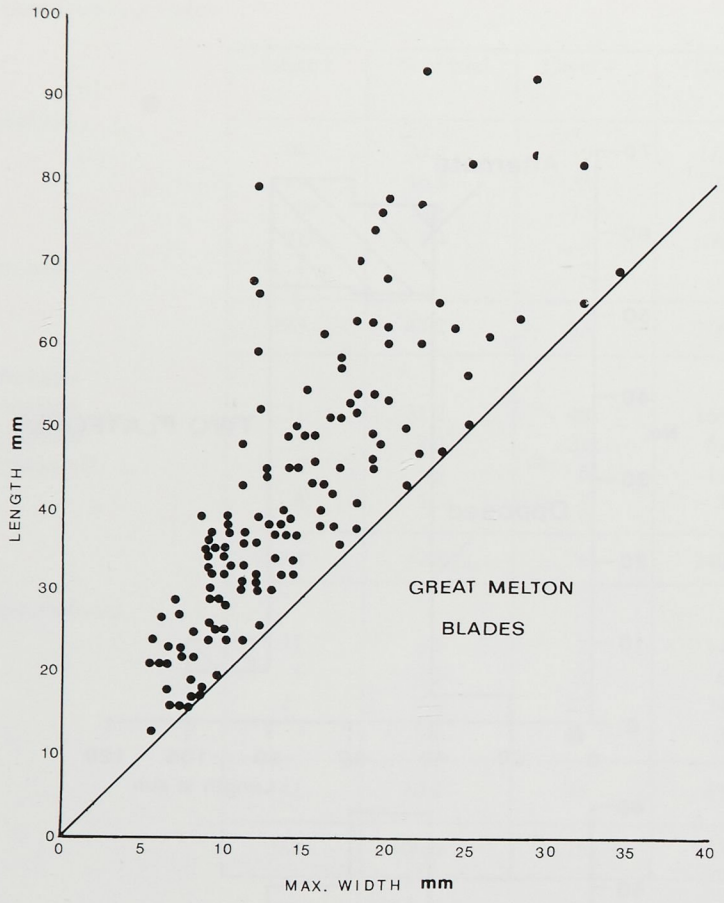

Fig. 15
Size of blades, based on 139 examples from metre grid squares, CI, E6, H2 and K3

Flakes
Flakes, complete and broken, formed the largest category of waste material in the assemblage (N=c.20,000) while the arbitrarily separated category of spalls (flakes and broken flakes with <20 mm maximumum dimension) had N=14,000.

The types of flint used in the Great Melton assemblage
Three main categories of flint were employed, together with a fourth residual category.

Type 1
Greyish buff flint with definite granular appearance on fractured suface. Near cortex (present) the colour darkened to grey or even black. No pebble cortex encountered. Nodule cortex from thin to 2 mm thick.

Type 2
A darker or browner buff flint but with more or less extensive grey mottling. Dark grey to black adjacent to cortex when present. Nodule cortex from thin to 3 mm thick.

Type 3
Dark grey to black flint, with some bluish-white patina. Nodule cortex from thin to 4 mm. Two probable pebble cortexes.

Other
a) Some with relatively heavy patination, bluish-white to white, obscuring colour of main body of flint.
b) Burnt cores, original colouring in doubt
c) Two only: blackish flint with dull red mottling

Flint types 2 and 3 were favoured, as can be seen from the flint used for a sample which comprised only complete and unbroken cores.

Table 7 Types of flint used for blade cores

Blade Core type	No.	Flint types			
		1	2	3	Other
One platform pyramidal	59	13	21	15	10
One platform prismatic	86	16	25	26	19
Two platform, prismatic opposed	116	13	42	47	14
Two platform, prismatic alternate	29	5	11	11	2
Two platform, crossed	27	8	12	4	3
Totals	317	55	111	103	48

Dating and conclusions

The absence of any organic material associated with the flint assemblage in the form of shells, fossil pollen or mammalian bones makes it impossible to assess the environment at the time of the Mesolithic occupation, or how it might relate to the post-glacial pollen chronozones. No charcoal was found so radiocarbon dating was not possible. The only physical method of dating that could be applied was that of thermoluminescence. A burnt flint core from Square J1 was submitted to the British Museum Research Laboratory and the TL was measured by Dr. N.C. Debenham, then of that laboratory. The date obtained was 7.23 +/- 0.97 ka B.P. (British Museum ref. GMM1). A date of 5300 +/- 970 years BC is well within the range of the Mesolithic period in southern Britain, but the known dates of similar flint assemblages to Great Melton (eg. at Thatcham or Oakhanger) are considerably earlier, around 7000-8000 BC.

Broadly, the Mesolithic period in Britain can be subdivided into an Early or Later period, and there are some differences in the flint industries that enable them to be identified. The former has an emphasis on the production of large numbers of obliquely blunted pointed microliths with 'only rarer triangles, bitruncated microliths and convex-backed lanceolate points' (Jacobi 1981, 10). Convex edged scrapers always form a significant component. This adequately describes the Great Melton assemblage. Conversely, although obliquely blunted points still occur in the Later Mesolithic, the microlithic assemblages of this period contain numerous narrow, straight-backed bladelets, rods and scalene micro-triangles. These tend to be much smaller, sometimes quite absurdly so. They are absent in the Great Melton assemblage. The earliest dates for these later very microlithic industries is around 6700 BC on radiocarbon dating evidence (Jacobi, 1976). This is around the time when the post-glacial sea rise had totally inundated any land connection between Britain and the continent across the North Sea. For several centuries before this, movement from the Low Countries to East Anglia must have been hazardous, if not impossible, even with some primitive craft.

Norfolk is rich in Mesolithic flintwork, but has not yet produced a single site with material in undisturbed primary contexts in direct association with faunal remains and environmental evidence, let alone any structures. The county has a scatter of surface discoveries, concentrated

along river valleys, in Breckland and along the Fen Edge, but also occurring sporadically in almost every other type of habitat, even on the Central Till Plain as at Great Melton (Wymer 1977, 204-215). The only prolific site in Norfolk with a flint industry that would seem identical to Great Melton is that on Kelling Heath (Sainty, 1924, 1925, 1928). Mesolithic flintwork is spread over a very large area, nowadays obscured by bracken and heather, on the northern edge of the top of the Cromer Ridge, about 70 m O.D.. At present there is a magnificent view across to the village of Weybourne and out across the North Sea. Until about 7000 BC no North Sea would have been visible, for the coastline would have been nearer to what is termed the Dogger Bank. Instead, there must have been a relatively flat plain stretching to the horizon and beyond. So, although there are no means of obtaining direct dating by physical methods for this Mesolithic occupation on Kelling Heath, it would seem reasonable to conclude that the only reason the place was so favoured was because of the superb viewpoint from which could be observed, at a great distance, passing herds of deer or other animals, and fellow groups of Mesolithic people. With the encroachment of the sea from about 7000 BC there would seemingly be no purpose served in being there, so an Early Mesolithic date can be postulated. The date of the Great Melton assemblage would thus seem most likely to be the same; i.e. somewhere in the time span of 8000 to 7000 BC.

As has been mentioned, there has been disturbance of the archaeological evidence at Great Melton, vertically through the soil below the ploughsoil, as can be seen in the bumps and hollows shown on the plan and sections (Figs 2 and 3), apart from the obvious modern ditches. It seems very unlikely that any of this disturbance is the result of Mesolithic activity. If the plan (Fig. 2) is compared to the plan of rabbit burrows and nesting chambers (Fig. 16) revealed by archaeological-style excavation in Butterdean Wood near Edinburgh (Kolb 1985) a similarity can be discerned. Rabbits are therefore thought to have been responsible for the disturbance of this somewhat lighter and sandier part of the glacial till. However, in spite of this disturbance, the general distribution of the flintwork has probably not been very much affected. A very distinct pattern remains with two adjacent prolific concentrations with a marked decrease all around them. The sudden difference between metre squares containing 1000 or more artefacts, beside some with less than 200, could have been caused by the presence of some intervening barrier. It may not be too fanciful to consider that this could have been the sides of some erected windbreak or dwelling. The less numerous and slightly more dispersed concentration around square K20 may have been a knapping spot. An extensive refitting exercise, though a daunting task given the quantity of material involved, might well be rewarding in defining working areas and giving an insight into camp and domestic activities.

If the interpretation of the site as the temporary camp of itinerant hunters is correct, occupied perhaps only once for days rather than weeks, it is still difficult to know why such a site should be chosen. Unfortunately, it is not known whether they were within a wooded area or in an open landscape. Much of the Early Mesolithic comes within the Boreal period of southern Britain's vegetational history, so coniferous woodland seems most likely. Perhaps seclusion was desirable for some reason, but with so many unknowns there could be a multitude of explanations, not always influenced by design but by human caprice or chance. Perhaps a group on the move found a couple of dead red deer in a reasonably fresh state, thought 'why go any further?' made camp and subsequently decided to stay there for a few weeks or so. Whatever motives inspired them to camp in that spot, it has at least enabled an archaeological excavation to record an episode that remained undisturbed except by rabbits since the site was abandoned.

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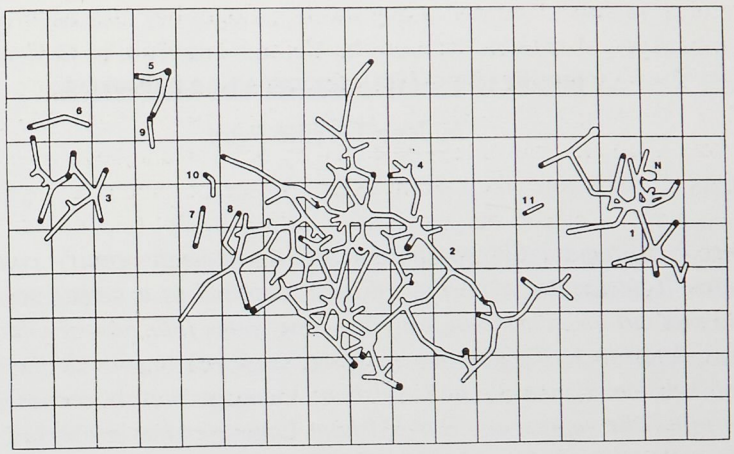

Fig. 16 Rabbit burrow plan as excavated at Butterdean Wood, Macmerry, near Edinburgh, Scotland. N = Nesting chamber containing dried grass and fur (Reproduced from Kolb, 1985).

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