

## NOTES

# Two Early Bronze Age flat axes from Woldingham and South Nutfield

The two Early Bronze Age copper alloy flat axes published here, both metal detector finds, were reported independently within a few months of each other. The Woldingham axe was submitted for identification to Jonathan Cotton at the Museum of London in May 1994, while that from South Nutfield came to Guildford Museum and then to David Williams as part of an ongoing programme of liaison with east Surrey detectorists in the spring of the same year. Both axes remain in private possession at the time of writing (June 1995).

### The finds (fig 1)

A The first axe was found by Guy Creasy, a member of the West Kent Detector Club, on the summit of the North Downs east of Woldingham in April 1994. The findspot is situated in a field known as Long Downs, on land belonging to Warren Barn Farm. Long Downs lies west of the modern B269 road, which runs along a spur of the Downs as far as Nore Hill, 1.5km to the north-west. The locality is an elevated one (+250m OD), with panoramic views in all directions; surface geology is Clay-with-flints over Upper and Middle Chalk. The soils comprise palaeo-argillic brown earths of Batcombe Association on the valley slopes.

The axe itself is diminutive, measures only 49mm in length and 21mm in width at the blade, and weighs 17.81g. It is flat in cross-section, with a narrow blade and an asymmetric lozenge-shaped long profile, with the hint of a low stop bevel cast high on the blade towards the butt. The cutting edge is slightly expanded, although the worn condition of the piece makes it difficult to gauge its original form. It seems unlikely, however, that it would have been as crescentic as the second axe published here. The axe is in poor, if stable, condition. None of the original surfaces survives and the present pitted surface has a mainly dark green patina, although there are areas of reed-green patina along the cutting edge. Localized patches of sandy red-brown soil adhere to both faces.

Early Bronze Age material recorded from the locality includes a bronze flat axe from just over the county boundary at Petts Wood, Orpington, Kent (Bowen 1967; Needham 1983), and Beaker pottery from Titsey, Limpsfield and Chaldon within the county, and from Bromley and Hayes beyond (Clarke 1970, 485, 499; Philp 1973, 12; Needham 1987, 101). Diagnostic flintwork comprises a number of barbed-and-tanged arrowheads from the Limpsfield area and elsewhere (Field &

Cotton 1987, figs 4.3, 4.15), together with a knife or possible miniature dagger from Botley Hill, south-east of the present findspot (Cotton 1993–4).

B The second axe was found by Mr J Wright of Crawley in a field belonging to Paddock Farm, South Nutfield. It lay 75mm below the surface in ploughsoil. The findspot is situated south of the Redhill–Tonbridge railway line, and close to the Redhill Brook, a tributary of the Salfords Stream, itself part of the Mole drainage system. The site lies on Weald Clay just below the south-facing slope of the Lower Greensand ridge. The soils hereabouts comprise seasonally waterlogged stagnogleys of Wickham 1 Association.

This small axe measures 73mm in length and 43mm in width at the blade and weighs just under 65g. It has low flanges with rounded sides, a narrow arched butt, lozenge-shaped long profile and low stop bevel, and an expanded crescentic cutting edge. Though much corroded, enough of the original surfaces survive on both faces for a panel of decoration to be made out between the stop bevel and the base of the blade. This comprises an angled rain-pattern motif bordered top and bottom by double rows of punched dots. Little of specifically Early Bronze Age material has been recorded from the South Nutfield locality hitherto. However, the findspot lies roughly midway between two groups of barrows on the Lower Greensand, at Reigate Heath to the west and Godstone to the east (Grinsell 1987, 30, 34), while the same geological stratum has yielded flintwork including barbed-and-tanged arrowheads (Field & Cotton 1987, fig 4.15). Needham has also drawn attention to a group of five flat axes of copper and early bronze types from Wealden localities in Sussex (1987, 126 and footnote 33), which may be linked with palynological evidence for human exploitation of the area dating from the late Neolithic.

### Discussion

With their low stop bevels and lack of cast flanges, both pieces conform to axes of Needham's class 4, and can be placed within the latest phase of pre-Arretton Early Bronze Age metalwork,

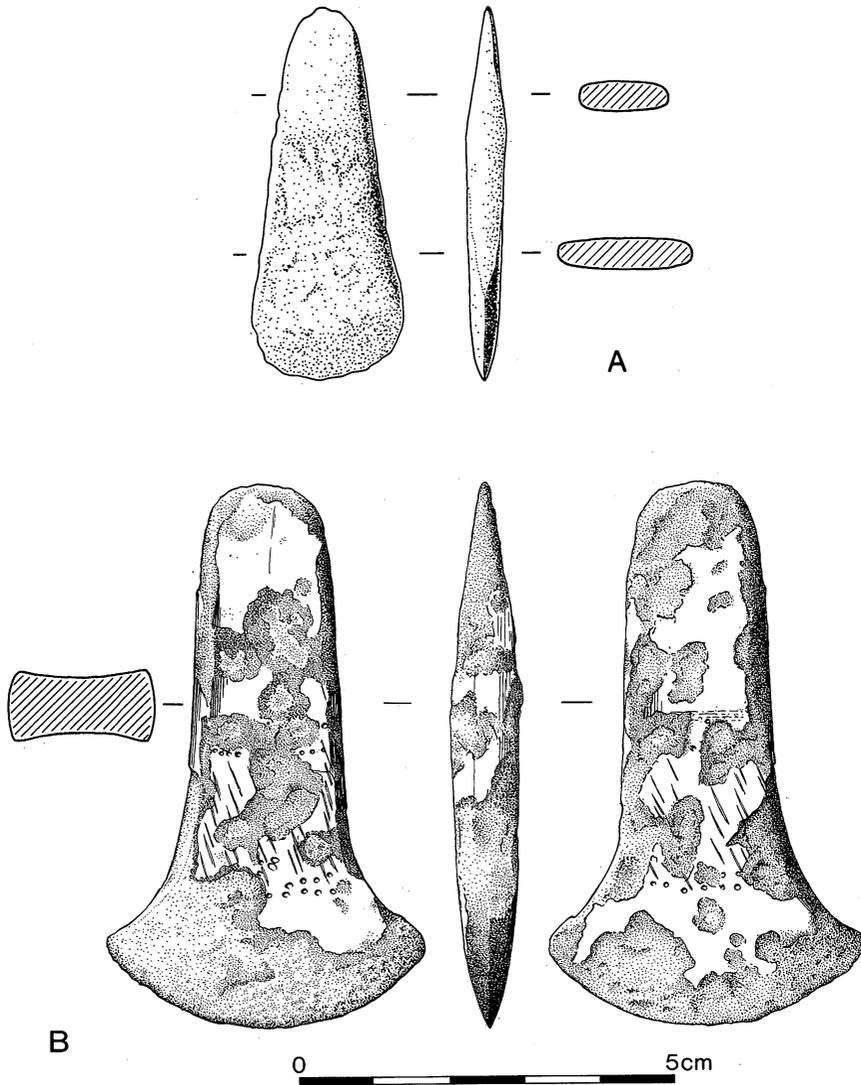


Fig 1 Early Bronze Age flat axes from Woldingham (A) and South Nutfield (B). (1:1)

currently dated *c*1800–1600 BC (Needham 1983; Needham *et al* 1985, Metalwork Assemblage V).

The Woldingham piece belongs to a group of diminutive axes sometimes, though not exclusively, associated with burials (eg as at Wilsford G.64 (Annable & Simpson 1964, 52, 107)), which can as easily be identified as fine carpentry tools as the non-functional votive pieces they are often assumed to be. Larger axes of this type from local Thames-side districts have been listed by Needham (1987, 99 and footnote 5), to which can be added the recently published example from the western end of the county at Green Lane Farm, Farnham (Graham 1989). At 76mm in length this latter piece is on the small side and comparable to one of the Thames pieces from Sunbury Weir (Cotton 1981), which is only 70mm in length. (The South Nutfield axe is scarcely larger at 73mm.) The expanded blade tips of the South Nutfield piece presage those of the ensuing cast-flanged Arreton types (Needham 1983, class 5), which represent the final phase

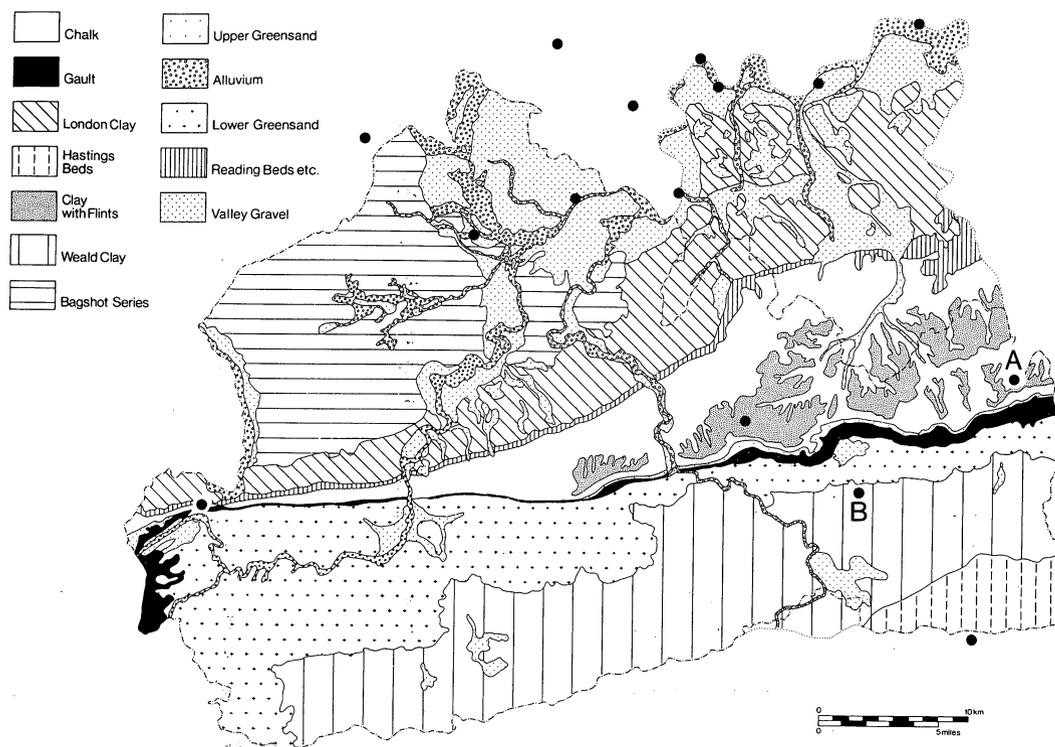


Fig 2 Distribution of pre-Arreton bronze axes in Surrey, after Needham 1987, fig 5.2, with additions

of Early Bronze Age metalworking. Equally notable here are the panels of decoration on its blade, for which no exact parallels exist (eg Megaw & Hardy 1938; Needham 1983), though axes using varying combinations of decorative motifs in panels on the faces of their blades are known from Surrey reaches of the Thames, as for example at Kingston (Needham 1987, fig 5.1 no 5), Mortlake (MoL O.1167) and Kew Bridge (MoL O.1169).

The two axes published here are therefore significant additions to the county record for, Thames finds apart, Surrey is virtually bereft of pre-Arreton bronzes (fig 2; Needham 1987). The only other such axes recorded from the Surrey hinterland hitherto comprise those from Green Lane, Farnham, mentioned above, and the large, early stop bevel example from Walton Heath (Carpenter 1961) — the latter, like that from Woldingham, recovered from the Clay-with-flints deposit high up on the North Downs.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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