

# Surface collection of worked flints from the Thursley Common area

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## Introduction

In 1995, volunteers from the Society cut a trial trench into one of the two mounds on Thursley Common that overlook the bog (Graham 1996; Graham & Dyer, in prep). During the course of this work, the site was visited by several English Nature voluntary wardens, who mentioned finding worked flint on the commons. As a result, a number of private collections have been examined and recorded and this paper summarizes the results and also includes references to the few previously known finds from the locality.

## Location, geology and topography (fig 1)

The area (c 875ha) covered in this paper has been chosen purely on the basis that it includes all the newly reported find sites and is otherwise entirely arbitrary. It covers parts of Elstead, Ockley, Thursley and Witley Commons and basically comprises the land lying between Elstead to the north and Thursley village to the south. The ground, which largely consists of heathland and raised bog, forms part of the west Surrey Lower Greensand heathlands, which stretch northwards from Haslemere. The Lower Greensand, in the area under consideration, in the main consists of Sandgate Beds to the north and east and Folkestone Beds to the south and west.

The land around Pudmore Pond, on Elstead Common, is low-lying and waterlogged and forms the largest raised bog in south-east England. To the north-east and west, the ground rises gently and is cut by a number of streams, several of which were dammed to form hammer ponds for iron working in the post-medieval period. To the south, the land rises more steeply to form a range of low hills, which overlook the bog itself.

The commons, which are open to the public, are crossed by a number of footpaths and firebreaks, which, understandably, form the source of most of the finds of worked flint. This must undoubtedly be taken into account when considering the distribution map, which may well reflect the effects of modern ground disturbance rather than prehistoric land use.

## Previously recorded finds

A small number of flints have previously been recorded from within and immediately around the area, though in the main, these lack a precise provenance, usually being described as 'from Thursley'. Haslemere Museum contains a number of such small collections and individual finds, which have been studied by Field and Woolley (1984) and Wymer (1977).

A group of four Bronze Age barrows lie between the 70m and 80m contours on Witley Common and a further two mounds are sited on the southern edge of the area of raised bog on Thursley Common. These latter mounds were formerly listed as tumuli, then de-listed as a result of an excavation in 1959 (Corcoran 1961) and now once again appear, as a result of the 1995 excavation, to be of Bronze Age date (Graham 1996).

A number of Mesolithic sites lie c 1km to the west, on Hankley Common, and form part of the series excavated and reported on by Rankine in his study of the Mesolithic of the West Surrey greensand (1949).

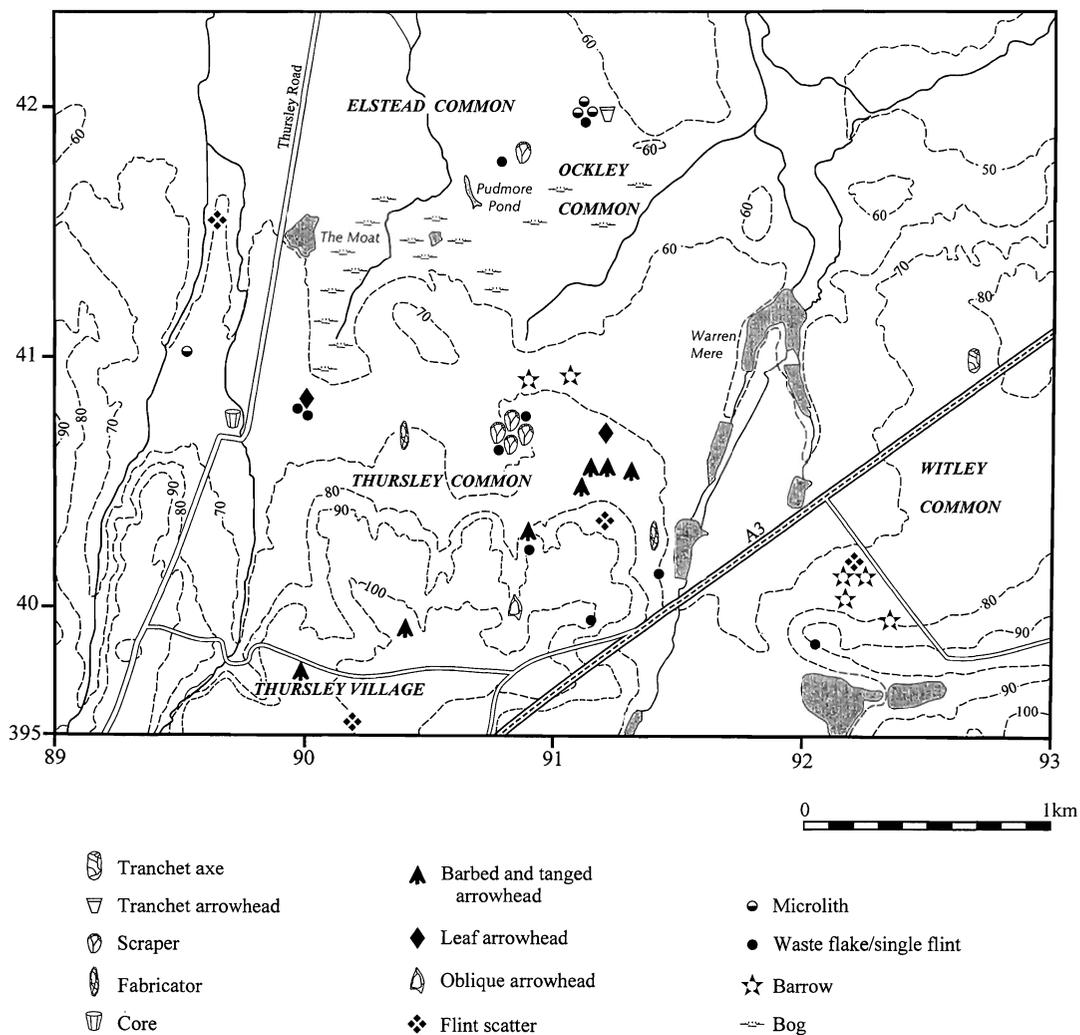
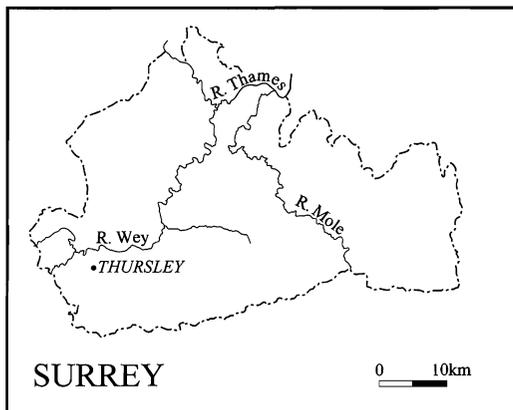


Fig1 Location map of Thursley Common showing distribution of worked flints within the area SU 890 395-930 425 for which find sites have been recorded. (Reproduced from the 1994 Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 scale map with the permission of The Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office, © Crown Copyright MC87175M).

## The flintwork

The finds of flintwork are listed in NGR order. Initials in brackets refer to the finder who retains the item: BB — Mr B Boyd, Westridge, 56 Croft Road, Godalming; DB — Mr D Boyd, 14 Busdens Lane, Milford; RF — Mr and Mrs R Fry, 8 Homefield Cottages, Highfield Lane, Thursley; PH — Mr and Mrs P Huish, Pax Cottage, The Lane, Thursley; MP — Mr M Pankhurst, Home Croft, Truxford, Elstead.

Shown on distribution map (fig 1) and illustrated (figs 2–3, nos 1–35)

- |    |   |       |   |
|----|---|-------|---|
| 1  | SU 8973 4072. Blade and flake core, grey multipolar. Rear surface smooth where large flake has been removed. (BB)   | 14    | <i>c</i> SU 9085 4075. A flake with a broken distal tip. The proximal end has been retouched to form two shallow points. This is not a typical awl or piercer, neither is it a saw. Probably Neolithic. The colour of this flake, so different from all the others in this assemblage, suggests that it may have come originally from river gravels; there are several patches of Blackwater and Godalming Wey Gravels on Thursley Common. The other possibility is that it might be Bullhead Bed flint, but the geology of the Commons consists mainly of the Folkestone Beds series of the Lower Greensand, with no Reading or Thanet Sands being present. (DB) |
| 2  | SU 9000 4085. Awl/borer, light greyish-brown. (BB)  | 15    | SU 909 403. Barbed and tanged arrowhead of greyish-brown flint, slightly patinated, with shallow pressure-flaking on both surfaces: the tip broken, probably in antiquity: outer sides slightly convex: squared tang and barbs, with one barb longer than the other. Later Neolithic–Early Bronze Age. (RF)   |
| 3  | SU 9000 4085. Leaf-shaped arrowhead, grey, some pressure flaking on dorsal surface and edge retouch on both surfaces. Early Neolithic. (BB)   | 16    | SU 909 403. Secondary flake (not arrowhead) of light brown flint: on ventral surface, proximal end has bulb and scar of percussion present, and distal end has an area of shallow edge retouch to form a sharp point: there is no retouch or surface flaking on the dorsal surface. This piece may possibly be an awl. Uncertain, but probably Neolithic. (RF)  |
| 4  | SU 9000 4085. Serrated piece, greyish-brown, on secondary flake. Serrations occur on part of one edge. (BB)   | 17    | SU 9105 4050. Barbed and tanged arrowhead of light brown flint, patinated, with shallow pressure-flaking on both surfaces: outer sides straight: barbs pointed and of equal length: the tang is squared and longer than the barbs. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. (RF)  |
| 5  | SU 904 399. Barbed and tanged arrowhead, pressure flaked. Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age. (DB)   | 18    | SU 9115 4055. Arrowhead, dark grey, pressure flaking on both surfaces. Broken at tip and across ?midline. (BB)  |
| 6  | SU 904 407. Fabricator, greyish-yellow with one end (top of illustration) dark brown. Retouch on both ends. Unusual coloration suggests that this piece may have come from a deposit of Blackwater Terrace 3 river gravels on Thursley Common. (BB)   | 19    | SU 9115 4055. Arrowhead, light brown, pressure-flakes, barbed and tanged. Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. (BB)   |
| 7  | SU 908 418. Small projectile point made on a dark brown mottled flint flake, with a rounded stub left on one outer edge at the proximal end of the flake; there is shallow retouch round most of the edge, including the stub. There is a sharp distal point. The proximal edge is squared, with some thinning of the dorsal surface at this point. It is possible that the stub was intended as a hafting aid. This piece cannot be assigned to a definite period, but it is more likely to be Neolithic than Mesolithic or Bronze Age. (RF) | 20    | SU 9115 4200. Transverse arrowhead with tranchet blow struck across the damaged, broader, edge. Later Mesolithic or Neolithic. (DB)   |
| 8  | SU 9080 4190. Scraper, grey, probably thumbnail type (Bronze Age), but broken at midline in antiquity. Blade butt, grey retouched round most of edge, but horizontally broken. ?Scraper. (BB)   | 21–22 | SU 9125 4035. Two blunted points. ?Horsham industry. (BB)   |
| 9  | SU 9084 4000. Oblique hollow-based arrowhead in light grey flint. Late Neolithic–Early Bronze Age. (PH)   | 23–27 | SU 9125 4035. Five obliquely blunted points. (BB)   |
| 10 | <i>c</i> SU 9085 4075. Scraper, made on a flake. This is a side scraper but with some end retouch. Probably Neolithic rather than Mesolithic. (DB)  | 28    | SU 9125 4035. Horsham point. (BB)   |
| 11 | <i>c</i> SU 9085 4075. A long flake, possibly from trimming a core, because of the 'step' on the flaked (dorsal) surface. On the proximal (bulb) end there seems to be some retouch; this could have been used as a scraper but it is not a good one. Mesolithic or Neolithic. (DB)   | 29–31 | SU 9125 4035. Three snapped blade fragments: 1 butt and 2 segments. (BB)  |
| 12 | <i>c</i> SU 9085 4075. End scraper, made on a flake; this piece could be pulled (towards) or pushed (away) as it has a concave lower surface. Probably Neolithic. (DB)  | 32    | SU 912 407. Leaf arrowhead of dark grey flint, made on a very slightly curved flake, with shallow pressure-flaking on both surfaces: one end is blunter — possibly hafting end. This tool form is common throughout the Neolithic. (RF)   |
| 13 | <i>c</i> SU 9085 4075. A scraper, made on a thick, chunky flake. Neolithic. (DB)  |       |   |

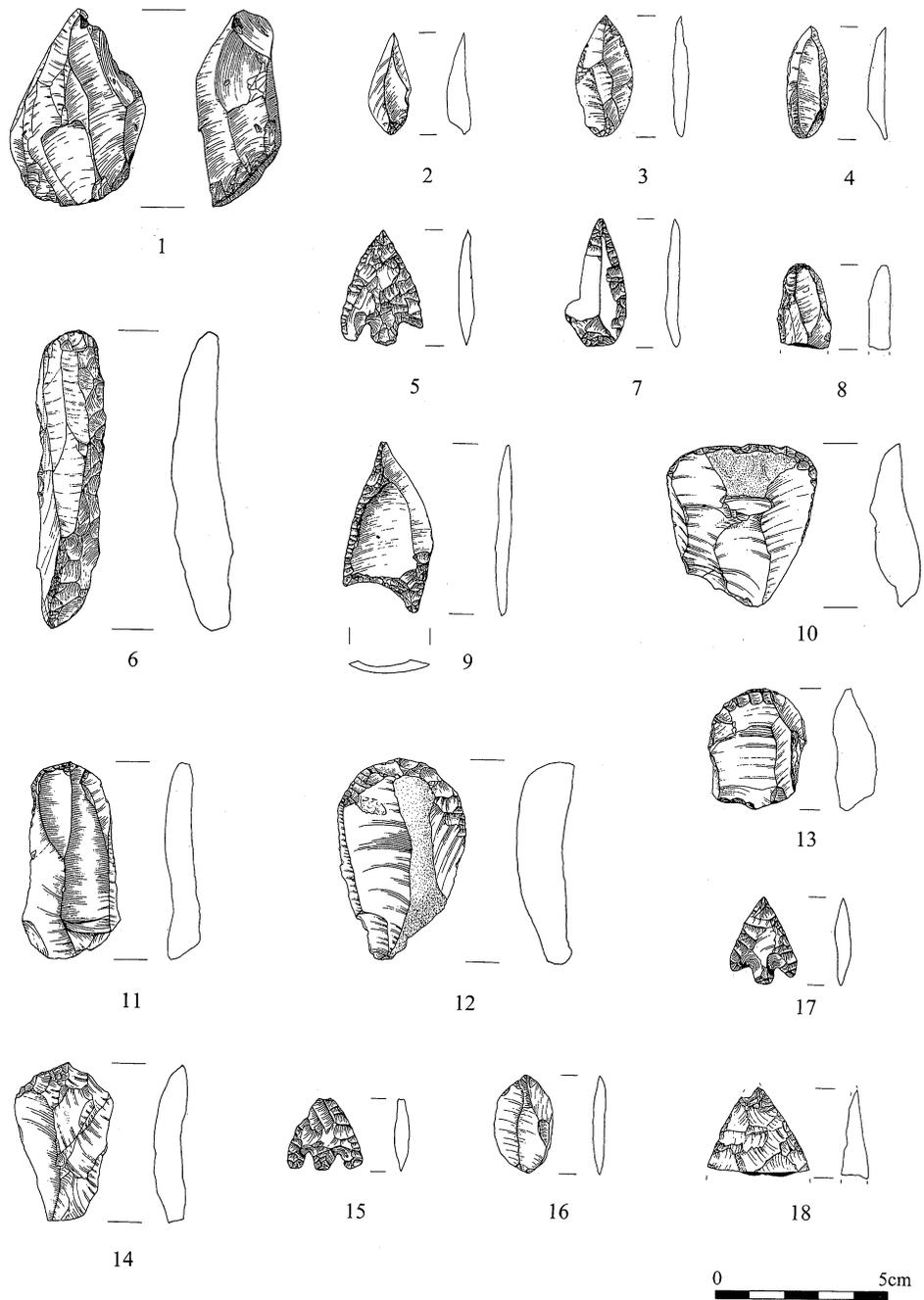


Fig 2 Worked flints from the Thursley Common area: nos 1-18.

- 33 SU 9135 4055. Barbed and tanged arrowhead, pressure-flaked. Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age. (DB)
- 34 SU 914 403. Fabricator made on thick chunky flint flake. The piece is D-shaped, with soft-hammer flaking on the convex or dorsal side,

which is dark grey with a patch of cortex remaining along the top: the flat ventral surface is light grey and unworked. There is intermittent edge retouch on the dorsal, particularly at the blunter end where the tip has been broken, probably in antiquity. (RF)

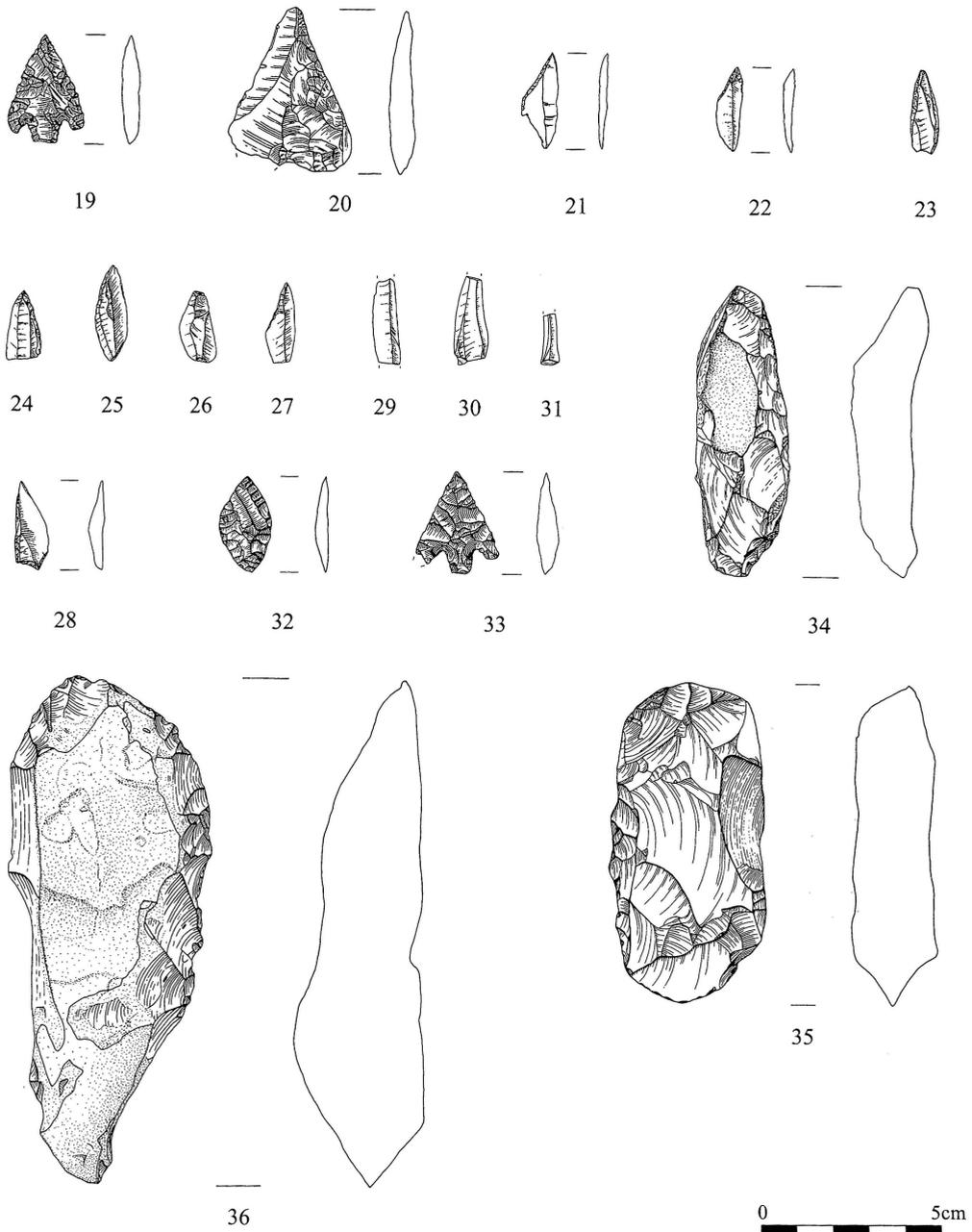


Fig 3 Worked flints from the Thursley Common area: nos 19–36.

35 SU 927 410. Small tranchet axe of patinated light brownish-grey flint, with soft-hammer flaking on both surfaces. Tranchet flake removed from one surface of one end; slight edge damage (with iron staining) at one side of this flake. There is some steep edge retouch, which looks

fresher and greyer, at the other end of the axe. Has this axe been partly buried, so that only half (the tranchet end) was exposed above ground, or was this end re-used as a scraper? Mesolithic. The find of this axe was noted in *SyAC* 76, 126. (RF)

Shown on distribution map (fig 1), but not illustrated:

- SU 895 410. Microlith, Kingston Museum.  
 SU 8967 4155. Small-medium scatter of waste flakes, found on the edge of a trackway that crosses the side of a small hillock, rising above boggy ground. The finder mentioned giving away two arrowheads, but retains all other material. Site of a Mesolithic flaking floor. (MP)  
 SU 900 397. Barbed and tanged arrowhead from the garden of Old Hall, Thursley (SCC SMR antiquity no 2148)  
 SU 9022 3953. Flint scatter, material lost. (SCC SMR antiquity no 2060)  
 c SU 9085 4075. A blade segment. The proximal and distal ends of the flake having been snapped off, this segment could have been retouched to form a tool, but no further work has been done on this piece. (DB)  
 SU 9086 4077. A blade segment (burnt). (PH)  
 SU 9115 3990. A utilized piece. Neolithic/Bronze Age. (PH)  
 SU 9115 4200. A microlith, triangular in form, with retouch down one side and longitudinal flakes removed down the second side. Later Mesolithic. (DB)  
 SU 9115 4200. A flake, retouched down one side, which finishes at one end in a chisel-like edge. (DB)  
 SU 9115 4200. A small flake, possibly a microlith; the bulb of percussion is absent from the proximal end, but there is some retouch on one side near this end. (DB)  
 SU 9115 4200. A microlith, with shouldered point, retouched along one side. Later Mesolithic. (DB)  
 SU 9115 4200. Transverse arrowhead, with possible tranchet flake removed from the sharp end (the broader end) to make it sharper still. Late Mesolithic-Early Neolithic. (DB)  
 SU 9125 4035. Five geometric (narrow-blade) types (1 with cortex on tip and 2 broken). (BB)

#### Note

Definition of fabricator from draft glossary of typological terms (Lithic Studies Society):

These are rod-like tools, characterized by abrasion on one or both ends; the abrasion may also extend down the sides. The abrasion is very distinctive in that the most heavily abraded areas are worn smooth. Two types have been distinguished:

- a) those with a thick lozenge-shaped section and retouched from all directions
- b) those with a triangular or flattish D-shaped cross-section and unretouched bulbar face.

The term 'fabricator' originally thought to have been used as a punch or 'flaker' in knapping is simply a label that now carries no functional implication. Some have been found in association with pyrites or marcasite and it has been suggested that they may have been 'strike-a-lights'.

Others have been found with leather-workers' tool kits, and may be part of that process. They are found in Mesolithic through to Early Bronze Age contexts, and although the form is ubiquitous there is some suggestion that the flattened D-shaped types are distinctive of Late Neolithic Beaker industries.

- SU 9143 4014. A blade segment. (PH)  
 SU 9205 3985. Waste flake recovered from a scrape made by the Herpetological Society near the top of the hill. Mesolithic?  
 SU 922 402. Small-medium scatter of waste flakes collected by Mr Baldock along a Herpetological Society scrape on the north-east side of the barrow group on Witley Common. The material was taken into Guildford Museum for identification. This probably forms part of the same site as that recorded by A W G Lowther and listed as SCC SMR antiquity no 1779 sited at SU 9217 4016. Site of a Mesolithic flaking floor.

Flints collected along two firebreaks/paths between c SU 904 406-914 408 and SU 914 400-915 403 (not shown on the distribution map; one piece illustrated):

A large random surface collection comprising: a fabricator; a side-scraper/pick (Neolithic; fig 3, no 36); a petit-tranchet arrowhead (Late Neolithic); 2 microliths (Jacobi class 3A, Horsham period?); 4 utilized pieces, including 1 retouched flake; 6 blades (Early Mesolithic?); 27 blade fragments; 1 blade core; 2 primary flakes; 112 waste fragments. (PH)

#### Unprovenanced:

- Tranchet axe from Thursley (Wymer 1977, 286)  
 Tranchet axe from Thursley, in Haslemere Museum.  
 Neolithic implements, including an axe head, in the Institute of Geological Sciences.  
 Fragment of axe from Thursley, in Haslemere Museum (Field & Woolley 1984, microfiche 14).  
 Mesolithic site, Witley Common (Wymer 1977, 289).  
 Mesolithic flakes, Thursley Common, Surrey CC SMR antiquity no 1791 (c SU 9000 4000).  
 Miscellaneous flints from the Tucker collection in Haslemere Museum and from the Copley collection in Kingston Museum.

## Conclusions

It is difficult to draw any firm conclusions from the relatively small sample of material under consideration and from the fact that the collections do not represent the results of a comprehensive survey, rather being casual finds made on areas of modern disturbance. However, it is safe to say that Thursley Common, which had previously produced little recorded flintwork, was in fact exploited throughout the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Ages and no doubt continued so to be, up to the present day. Results of pollen analysis from the bog itself have been interpreted as indicating forest clearance in the Neolithic or Bronze Age and as showing that this activity directly resulted in the formation of the peat bog (Moore & Wilmott 1976).

A few tentative thoughts do, however, occur when looking at the distribution map (fig 1). The Mesolithic flaking floors seem to continue the trend, known elsewhere, of being sited on higher land overlooking streams or wet ground and it might well be worth looking at such areas elsewhere on the common in the hope of locating further sites.

The Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Ages seem to be particularly well represented in the collections with a high proportion of tools, such as arrowheads and scrapers, being recorded. Given the apparent concentration of such finds from the ridge to the south of the Thursley Common barrows, it seems at least a possibility that there was an occupation site somewhere in the general area.

Certainly it is interesting to note that the common, which previously had been a 'blank' on the map of prehistoric Surrey, was in fact used throughout the period. Apparent 'blanks' in the record, at least in this part of the county, are more likely to reflect the destruction of the archaeological record by casual collecting over the past 150 years or so than to represent an absence of activity in the prehistoric period. Until very recently, at best, such collections ended up in local museums labelled as 'unprovenanced' or as being from a general area and at worst, were thrown away unrecorded. Given goodwill, and a wider understanding of the issues, as shown at Thursley, perhaps it is still not too late to recover some idea of human exploitation of the Greensands in the prehistoric period.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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