

A MESOLITHIC ASSEMBLAGE FROM MOOR FARM, HOLYPORT, NEAR MAIDENHEAD

R E AMES

SUMMARY

An in-situ flint assemblage from Moor Farm, Holyport, shows similarities with assemblages from a number of sites, including the west Berkshire sites of Thatcham, Greenham Dairy Farm, and Wawcott. The assemblage is in the Maglemosian tradition and a date in the latter part of the seventh millennium BC is probable.

INTRODUCTION

The site at Moor Farm is approximately 2km (one and a quarter miles) to the south of Maidenhead and is adjacent to the M4 access road from the A308 Maidenhead to Windsor road (Fig 1). The site (at SU 892 790) lies on the edge of the Taplow terrace where the ground slopes down towards a stream known as the Cut. This stream, previously known as the Shaffelmoor stream, is a tributary of the Thames joining that river near Dorney Reach. The main deposits of the area, which is at an average height OD of 25m (82ft), are pleistocene flood loams.

The existence of the site, by way of a scatter of surface material, was discovered by members of the Maidenhead and District Archaeological Society during the winter of 1970/71 when the Cut was diverted to make way for the building of the M4 access road. Such surface material as was found over a large area of the disturbed ground was almost certainly derived from the cutting of the new stream bed.

EXCAVATION

With the kind permission of the Summerleaze Gravel Company, excavations were carried out by Reading Museum during Easter of 1971 (Rutland 1972) and, on a larger scale, by the Society during 1971/72. It has to be said at the outset that, whilst a large quantity of flint material was recovered during the two excavations, no actual working floor was positively identified nor the true extent of the site.

A number of sections were excavated over an area of some 100m by 20m. These sections consisted of four 5ft x 5ft sections, dug in 3in spits to a depth of 5ft by Reading Museum and located on the north side of the diverted cut, and, mainly to the south of the diverted cut, eight sections of various sizes dug in 3in spits to a depth of 5ft by the Society. Three of these were 2m-square and the others were 1m-wide strips (Fig 2).

Stratigraphy

Three distinct layers below the topsoil were recorded by Reading Museum and these were described as follows.

Topsoil: greatly disturbed ploughsoil, containing worn and polished flint material, medieval tile, and pottery fragments.

Layer I: blue clay with some flints.

Layer II: 'peaty' layer; peat with wood, bone, and nut shells; Mesolithic flint; Neolithic and Romano-British debris at the top.

Layer III: fine grey sand; Mesolithic flint; some of the flint burnt.

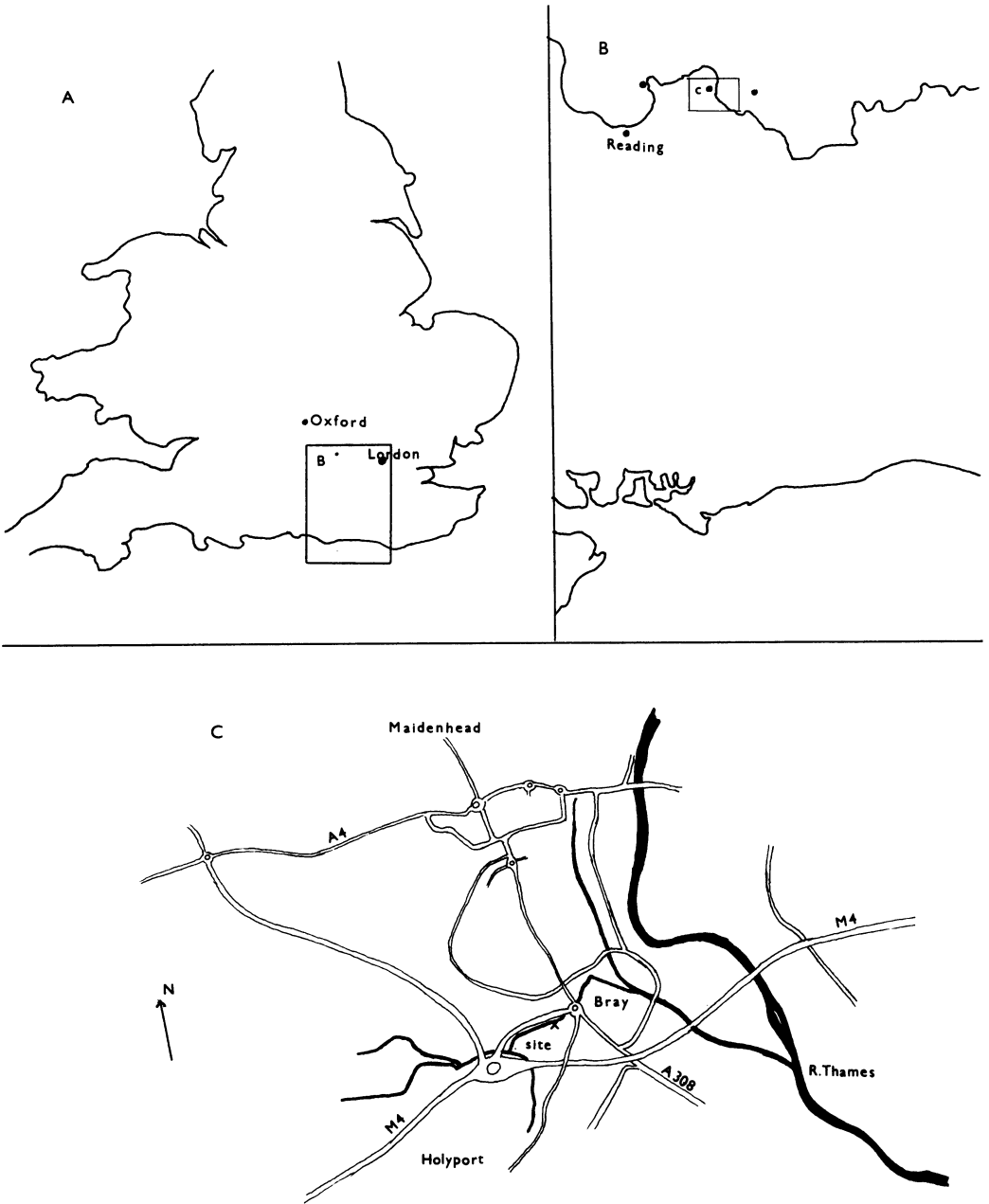


Figure 1 Moor Farm, Holyport: site location

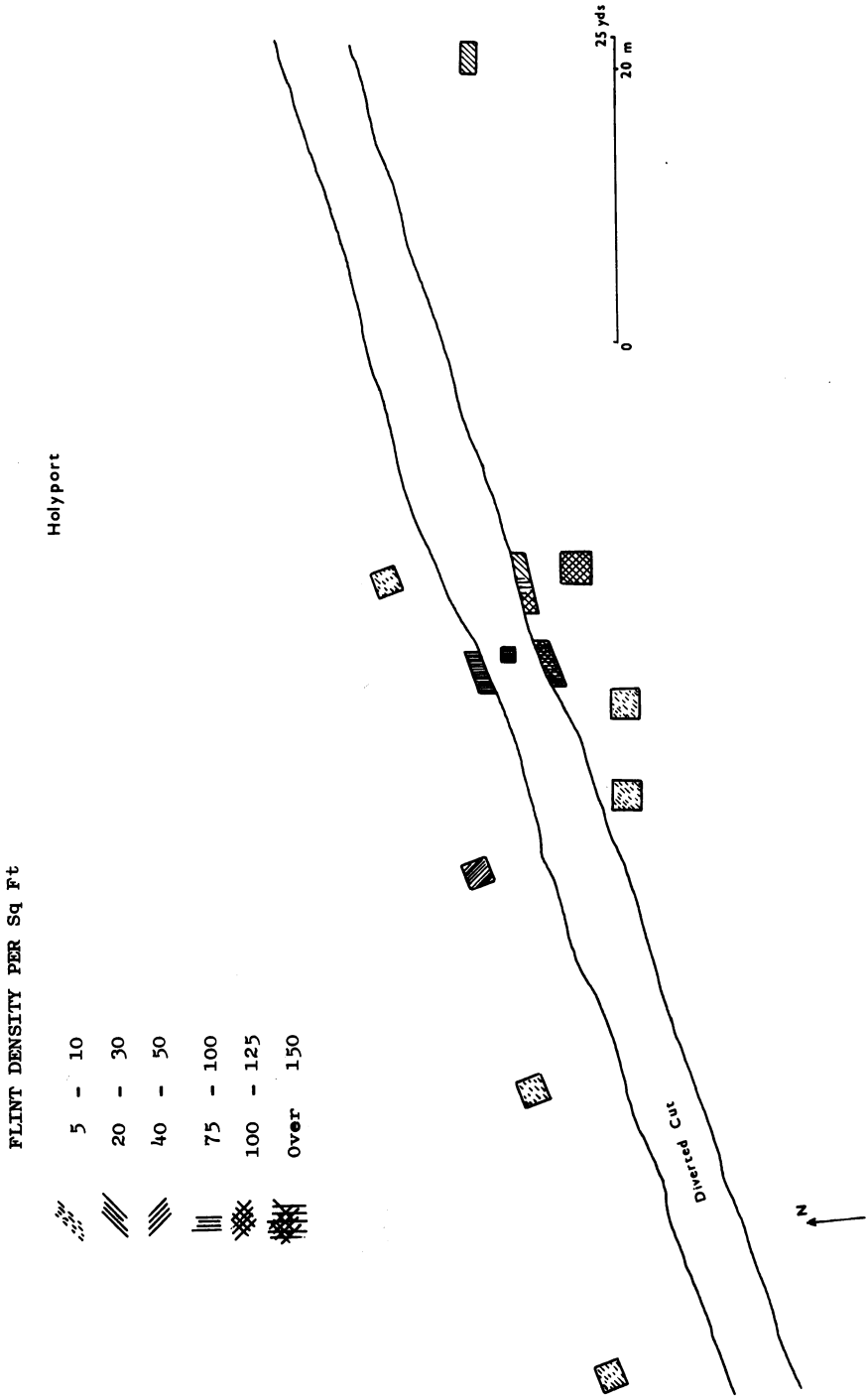


Figure 2 Moor Farm, Holyport: excavations

The Maidenhead Archaeological Society also records three principal layers of alluvial sandy loams or clays below the ploughsoil, although in one part of their excavations there appeared to be a possible fourth layer. However, the flint material from this 'layer IV' does not differ from that in layer III and the texture and appearance of the 'layer' did not differ appreciably from III. It is likely, therefore, that the layer is more apparent than real and the finds are treated accordingly.

Flints from the ploughsoil and layer I were not numerous. They were generally polished and/or abraded and by no means necessarily Mesolithic. The material from layers II and III, on the other hand, was quite fresh, much of it still with chalk adhering to its cortex. It is the material from layers II and III that has, therefore, been considered in this report. There is no stratigraphic break in the distribution of flints in the two layers and no apparent typological difference between top and bottom of the distribution. Pottery fragments were present in all excavated layers, albeit in very small numbers and very fragmentary, especially in layers II and III.

THE FLINT MATERIAL

A total of some 15 310 pieces were examined from layers II and III of both excavations. Material from the Reading Museum excavation has been previously described by the writer in Rutland 1972. The type of flint varied from black or grey, grey with cherty inclusions, to what can best be described as marmalade-coloured. Some of the grey flint is stained a pale ochreous colour to a depth of up to half a millimetre. Very little of the flint shows any patination: where it does occur, it varies from a feint milky white or blue to various dentritic patinas. Whereas most of the flint used had a fresh appearance, some use had been made of river pebbles or cobbles. Much of this material was full of

frost fractures and incipient cones of percussion. This is reflected in the way some of the cores of this material have 'worked' badly.

The flint material can be categorised as tools, by-products, or waste. Of the whole assemblage, fabricated tools or utilised pieces accounted for 2.78% (425 pieces). By-products account for 0.3% (47) and waste 96.91% (14 838). The numbers of types within each category are as follows.

<i>Tools</i>	
Microliths	117
Scrapers	85
Burins (or pseudo-burins)	12
Adzes (2 + 2 fragments)	4
Saws	5
Fabricators	1
Utilised or retouched pieces	201
<i>By-products</i>	
Microburins	25
Burin spalls	c 14
Adze 'sharpening' flakes	8
<i>Waste</i>	
Flakes and fragments	c 13 839
Blades and blade-like flakes	484
Cores	235
Crested pieces	53
Core tablets or rejuvenators	54
Other core trimmings	27
Blade segments	101

Tools

Microliths Using Clark's classification (Clark 1934), the microliths, mostly obliquely blunted points, can be classified as follows.

<i>Class</i>	<i>No.</i>
A1a	35
A1b	2
A1c	3
A1d	1
A1	4
A2a	26
A2b	2

<i>Class</i>	<i>No.</i>
A2c	1
A2d	1
A2	2
A	11
B1	2
B2	2
B4	1
B	3
C1a	4
C	1
D1b	2
D5	1
D8	1
D	2
F1bii	1
F2 (possible)	1
G2a	1
G2c	1
Unclassifiable	6

Scrapers The 85 scrapers can be simply described as follows.

'End' scrapers	22
'Side' scrapers	14
Denticulate tools	13
Hollow scrapers	3
'Horseshoe' scrapers	33

Burins Twelve possible burins were identified, although it has to be said that implements in this category are not always readily recognisable. Many pieces of waste with two surfaces meeting at a suitable angle may have been used as burins without having been fabricated as such. Equally, many apparent gravers may well have been bladelet cores.

Adzes Adzes or axes, normally to be associated with industries having Maglemosian affinities, are represented by two complete examples, two fragments, and eight sharpening flakes. The two complete examples have both been finished off with a tranchet blow to form the cutting edge. One is of the Thames Pick type. Of the sharpening flakes, only two show signs of wear.

Saws and fabricator The five recognisable 'saws' and the 'fabricator' are typical of those

to be seen in the assemblages from Oakhanger V and VII, Thatcham, Wawcott III, Downton, and Farnham Pits (for references to these and other sites/assemblages, see Appendix: comparative assemblages).

Retouched Some 200 pieces can be considered as retouched or utilised. In the majority of cases, one is clearly dealing with a definite retouch rather than wear or abrasion from use. Some of the small notched pieces may be discarded stages of microlith production.

By-products

Microburins The low ratio of microburins to finished microliths (25 : 117) is echoed at most other Mesolithic sites. Assuming that recovery during excavation and recognition during examination of material have been satisfactorily carried out, one is led to surmise that either microliths were not always produced using the microburin technique or that they were often produced away from the 'occupation' site or 'hunting camp'. Other sites with a similar low ratio are Thatcham, Farnham, Downton, and Oakhanger. The assemblage from Liss Forest, Hampshire, had, in contrast, a microburin count exceeding that of the microliths.

Burin spalls As with burins, the burin spall is not always easy to recognise with certainty. However, a probable 14 were recovered from Holyport.

Waste

Of the almost 15 000 pieces classed as waste, just over 2500 have been damaged to a greater or lesser extent by fire. The sizes of the waste pieces vary from minute chippings to as large as 90mm across. About 13% of the waste (1530 pieces) has cortex on more than a quarter of the dorsal surface. Some 484 pieces are blade-like, that is roughly parallel-sided and approximately three times longer than wide. These blade-like flakes account for 3.24% of all waste and vary in length from 19mm to 85mm.

Blade segments Counted separately from waste are the blade segments of which there

are 101. At least seven of these have traces of wear on one edge. Whilst many of these segments may well have been waste, the fact that some at least have traces of wear may suggest that they should be seen as an assemblage type rather than waste. Segments could have been hafted in wood or bone to form a composite tool. As a by-product of the segments, some 71 'blade' tips and 169 bulbar ends are included in the waste.

Cores The 235 cores vary in size, type, and quality of flint, and as to whether they were used for flake or blade production. The smallest is no more than 25mm long. Both fresh flint and river pebbles or cobbles had been used. The latter, with their incipient cracks and cones of percussion, would have made knapping somewhat unpredictable. A simple breakdown of core types is as follows.

Single platform	137
Single platform, conical	8
Double platform, conical	1
Platform at each end, flaked one side	24
Platform at each end, flaked both sides	12
Two platforms at right angles	20
Others	33

Core rejuvenators There are 54 pieces which fall into this category. These are the complete, or almost complete, striking platforms which have been removed from cores to facilitate further flake or blade removal.

Another type of core rejuvenator or trimmer is the long 'blade' struck from either the core platform and curving under the core removing the 'apex' or struck from the 'apex' and curving slightly to remove part of the striking platform. Twenty-seven of these are identified and this type has been commented on from elsewhere, for example, Downton and Farnham.

Often confused with core rejuvenators are the crested pieces; 53 of these have been identified and are more probably the result of core preparation. Some of the very small examples could equally have been burin spalls. One example from Holyport has a retouch on the ventral side.

Hammer stones

There are four probable hammer stones in the assemblage, one of these is a large river cobble of flint. The others are of sandstone, quartzite, and one of a heavy black material, possibly basalt.

POTTERY

The few pieces of pottery found were extremely fragmentary. They have been examined by the Prehistoric and Roman Department of the British Museum and identified as: grass-tempered ware, probably Saxon; second-century Romano-British; Bronze Age or Early Iron Age.

LATER ACTIVITY

Mention has already been made of pottery fragments identified as Bronze or Early Iron Age, Romano-British, and Saxon. In addition, a fragment of a leaf-shaped arrowhead was also recovered. More specific evidence of later activity, however, are a number of sharpened wooden stakes, set vertically in the ground, which were revealed a short distance from the Mesolithic excavation; these stakes provided a radiocarbon date of 1195 ± 155 BP (560–1160 cal AD, two sigma confidence level: Pearson and Stuiver 1986) (BM-761, unpublished).

DISCUSSION

The most diagnostic element of the flint assemblage can perhaps be said to be the microliths. Of the 117, some 111 can be classified to a greater or lesser extent. Of the 111 classifiable there are 88 obliquely-blunted points (79.27%). This compares closely with the percentages from Iping ii (80.6%), Thatcham II (83%), Frensham Great Pond North (85%), Thatcham IV (85.7%), Thatcham VII (86.9%), Greenham Dairy Farm

(86.27%), and Lackford Heath (89%). All of these sites have been described as Maglemosian and tend to be earlier than those 'geometric' sites having a lower percentage of obliquely-blunted points, for example, Kettlebury 103 (33.9%), Kettlebury L11 (20.27%), and Broomhill (13.16%).

The presence of adzes or axes would also suggest Maglemosian affinities for the Holyport assemblage.

Radiocarbon dates for the Thatcham sites vary from 8415 ± 170 BC uncalibrated (Q659) for site III to 6140 ± 180 BC uncalibrated (BM 65) for site II, although this latter came from a contaminated sample and should perhaps be earlier (Churchill 1962; Jacobi 1976). Greenham Dairy Farm gave a date of 6829 ± 110 BC uncalibrated (Q973; Jacobi 1976). One should perhaps look toward this range of dates for a date for the Holyport assemblage.

The sizes of the complete examples of the Holyport obliquely-blunted points range from as small as 21mm long \times 6mm at its widest to as large as 47mm \times 10mm (although there is an incomplete example measuring 49mm \times 13mm). This size range compares closely with such sites as Heath Common, Sussex (19mm \times 5mm to 48mm \times 8mm), Oakhanger Va (21mm \times 5mm to 45mm \times 10mm), and Oakhanger V (18mm \times 6mm to 51mm \times 10mm).

Jacobi (1979 and pers comm) demonstrates an industrial and probable chronological significance in the mean size of obliquely-blunted points of an industry. Three distinct typological groups of assemblages can be shown based on the length/width measurements of these points: a group of early assemblages in the Maglemosian tradition including those from Thatcham and Greenham Dairy Farm; and a group of later 'Horsham' and geometric assemblages, including those from Sleaford Heath, Farnham Pits 2 and 3, Broomhill, Liss Forest, St Catherines Hill, and Kettlebury. Falling between these two groups is a group which includes Oakhanger V, Va, and VII, Heath

Common, Downton, and Frensham Great Pond North. The Holyport measurements place that assemblage clearly in the middle group, a group of assemblages with distinct Maglemosian affinities.

CONCLUSION

The flint assemblage from Holyport appears fairly well balanced between its microlith and scraper content. The fresh condition of the bulk of the pieces would suggest that it can be seen as an *in situ* assemblage, even though the excavations did not show the full extent of the site or, indeed, give any indication that it was just one site. However, as previously stated, there was no apparent typological difference between the top and bottom of the distribution of flints.

Assuming an homogeneous assemblage, typologically one would place it later than Thatcham, Star Carr, and Greenham Dairy Farm, but earlier than Kettlebury, St Catherines Hill, Farnham, and probably Oakhanger phase III. Typologically Holyport equates with Oakhanger phase II, Downton, Frensham Great Pond North, and Wawcott III horizons I and J. A date in the latter part of the seventh millennium BC is most likely.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to Dr Roger Jacobi for his advice in the preparation of my original dissertation of which this is a summary; to both the Maidenhead and District Archaeological and Historical Society and Reading Museum, for affording me the opportunity to study the material excavated by them; and to Ms Valerie Rigby of the British Museum for identifying the pottery fragments. Excavated material and a copy of the full dissertation, which includes drawings of tools, remain in the care of Reading Museum and the Society respectively.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Clark, J G D, 1934, The classification of a microlithic culture, *Archaeol J*, 90, 52-77.

- Churchill, D M, 1962, Stratigraphy of the Mesolithic sites III and V at Thatcham, Berkshire, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **28**, 329–61.
- Jacobi, R M, 1976, Britain inside and outside Mesolithic Europe, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **42**, 67–84.
- Pearson, G W, and Stuiver, M, 1986, High-precision calibration of the radiocarbon time scale, 500–2500 BC, *Radiocarbon*, **28**, 839–62.
- Pitts, M W, and Jacobi, R M, 1979, Some aspects of change in flaked stone industries of the Mesolithic and Neolithic in southern Britain, *J Archaeol Sci*, **6**, 163–77.
- Rutland, R A, 1972, Moor Farm, Holyport, Berkshire, *Counc Brit Archaeol Group 9 Newsletter*, **2**, 3–4.

APPENDIX: COMPARATIVE ASSEMBLAGES

- Broomhill (Hampshire)*
Pitts, M W, and Jacobi, R M, 1979, Some aspects of change in flaked stone industries of the Mesolithic and Neolithic in southern Britain, *J Archaeol Sci*, **6**, 163–77.
- Downton (Wiltshire)*
Higgs, E, 1959, Excavation of a late Mesolithic site at Downton, Wilts, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **25**, 209–32.
- Farnham Pits (Surrey)*
Clark, J G D, and Rankine, W F, 1939, Excavations at Farnham, Surrey, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **5**, 61–118.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979 (as above).
- Flixton (Yorkshire)*
Moore, J W, 1950, Mesolithic sites in the neighbourhood of Flixton, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **16**, 101–8.
- Frensham Great Pond North (Surrey)*
Rankine, W F, 1949, *A Mesolithic survey of the west Surrey greensand*, Surrey Archaeol Soc Res Pap, **2**, Farnham and Haslemere.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Greenham Dairy Farm (Berkshire)*
Sheridan, R, Sheridan, D, and Hassell, P, 1967, Rescue excavation of a Mesolithic site at Greenham Dairy Farm, Newbury, 1963, *Trans Newbury Dist Fld Club*, **11**, 66–73.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Heath Common (Sussex)*
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Iping Common (Sussex)*
Keef, P A M, Wymer, J, and Dimbleby, G, 1965, A Mesolithic site at Iping Common, Sussex, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **31**, 85–92.
- Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Kettlebury (Surrey)*
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Lackford Heath (Norfolk)*
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Liss Forest (Hampshire)*
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Oakhanger (Hampshire)*
Rankine, W F, 1952, A Mesolithic chipping floor at Oakhanger, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **18**, 21–35.
Rankine, W F, and Dimbleby, G, 1960, Further investigations at Oakhanger, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **26**, 246–62.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- St Catherine's Hill (Surrey)*
Gable, G, 1976, *St Catherine's Hill: a Mesolithic site near Guildford*, Surrey Archaeol Soc Res Vol, **3**, Guildford.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Sleaford Heath (Surrey)*
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Star Carr (Yorkshire)*
Clark, J G D, 1949, Preliminary report on excavations at Star Carr, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **15**, 52–69.
Clark, J G D, 1950, Preliminary report on excavations at Star Carr, second season, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **16**, 109–29.
- Thatcham (Berkshire)*
Wymer, J, 1959, Excavations on the Mesolithic site at Thatcham, Berkshire, *BAJ*, **57**, 1–33.
Wymer, J, 1962, Excavations at the Maglemosian sites at Thatcham, Berkshire, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **28**, 329–61.
- Churchill, D M, 1962, Stratigraphy of the Mesolithic sites III and V at Thatcham, Berkshire, *Proc Prehist Soc*, **28**, 362–70.
Pitts and Jacobi 1979.
- Wawcott (Berkshire)*
Froome, F R, 1971–2, A Mesolithic site at Wawcott, Kintbury, *BAJ*, **66**, 23–44.
Froome, F R, *Wawcott III: a stratified Mesolithic succession*, Brit Archaeol Rep, **27**, Oxford.