

# Warnham Historical Society

## MESOLITHIC FINDSPOTS NEAR HORSHAM

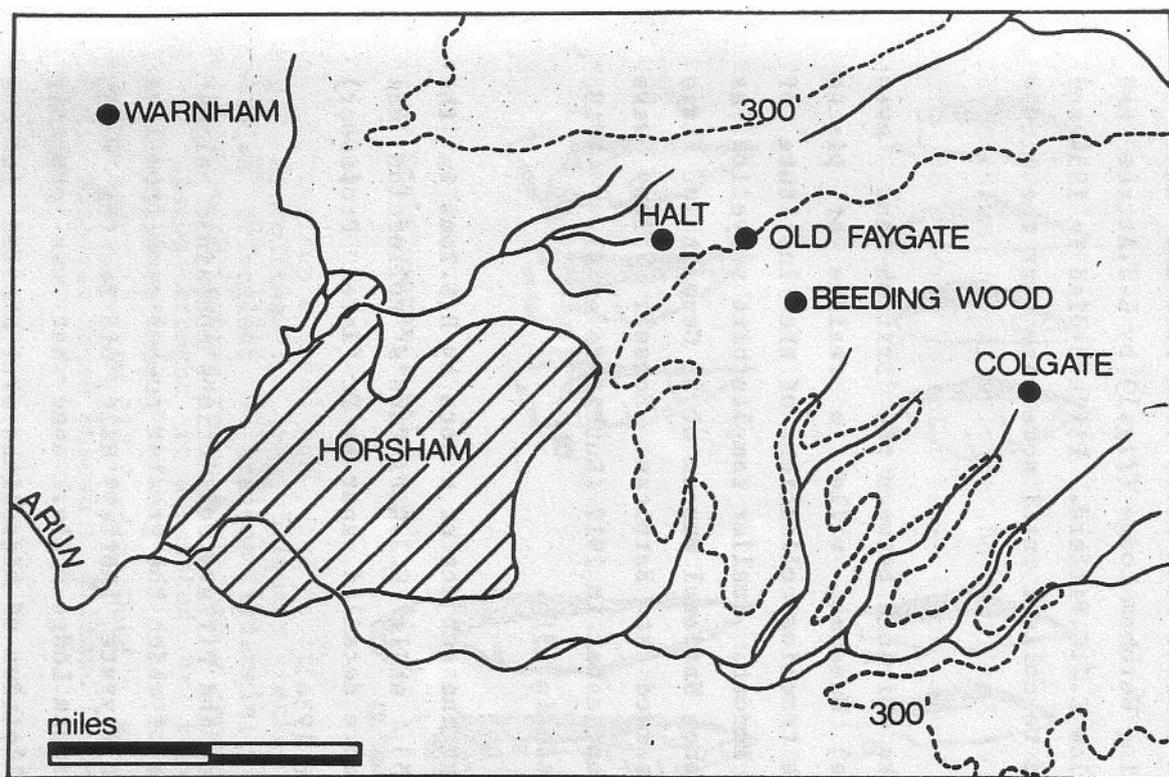
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Mesolithic remains have at various times been found in the vicinity of Warnham, notably at Bailing Hill Farm, Denne Farm, Long Pond Field, Sands Farm, The Sands, Warnham Lodge and most recently on Cider Mill Farm. Many of the mesoliths found are in the British Museum. Others are in the museums in Horsham and Worthing. These show that pre-historic man inhabited these parts between 10 and 12 thousand years ago. Through the good offices of Professor E. Boyland the following article has been produced by Dr. R.M. Jacobi of the Department of Classics and Archaeology at the University of Lancaster to whom we are most grateful.

## THE MESOLITHIC FINDSPOTS NEAR HORSHAM



*Fig. 1: Map showing relationship of the principal microlith sites of the "Forest Ridge" to present-day Horsham. After Woodcock n.d.*

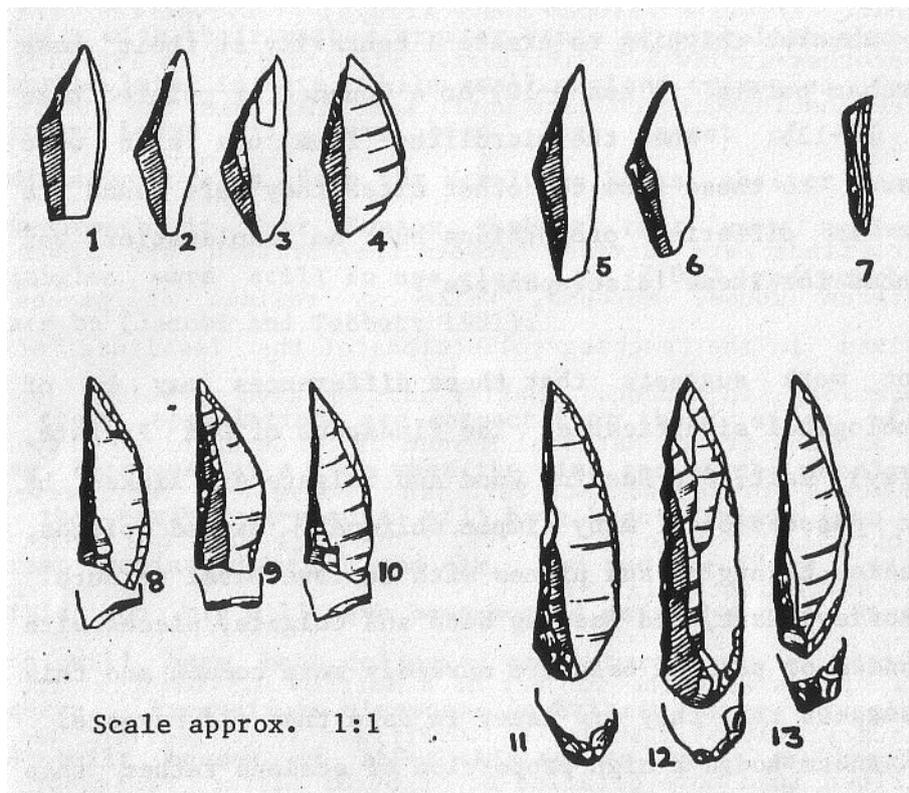
As long ago as 1877 Thomas Honeywood of Horsham reported the discovery of 'thousands' of flint implements in St Leonard's Forest. His finds, sometimes believed to come from the area of Beeding Wood, survive in the museums at Brighton and Lewes and include a large number of tiny elongated splinters of flint converted by steep chipping along a part of the whole of their edges into

what in the nineteenth century was called pigmy (or pygmy) flints, but which we now term microliths. The microliths we believe characterize the Middle Stone Age or Mesolithic Period which appears dated to between about 10 and 5,000 radiocarbon years before present (bp). Their exact use remains uncertain.

Honeywood was perhaps the first person in Britain to figure a microlith (1877, Fig.4). These he described as "...very curious. They are small, generally about one inch in length, some only half an inch, and about a quarter of an inch in width, and appear at first sight to be mere chippings or waste pieces, but on examination, we find evident proof of design in their manufacture. Of this type I have dug up above 100 specimens, and every one alike, having a sharp point at the end, also a sharp cutting edge on the right side; but on the left side they are thick and chipped away...these specimens might have served as arrow points..." (ibid.p.180).

Following this early start, very large collections of microliths were amassed from sites both east and west of Horsham, including Warnham Lodge (fig.1) by C.J. Attree and his brother-in-law E.J.G. Piffard. Piffard died in 1934 and Attree continued to collect until some time near the middle of 1937.

Their finds are divided between the British and Lewes (Barbican House) Museums, while a residue of pieces survives in the teaching collections of the Institute of Archaeology in London. Smaller samples have travelled as far as the French National Museum of St Germain en Laye (documents preserved at Barbican House). They were exhibited at Manchester in 1912 (Sutcliffe et al. 1913, p.15) and Brighton in 1915.



*Fig.2 Microliths : 1-4 obliquely backed pieces; 5-6 isosceles triangles; 7 scalene triangle; 8-10 "Horsham Points" with inverse retouch to form a concavity at base; 11-13 pieces brought to a pointed or rounded tail by inverse basal retouch. Nos 1-6 and 8-13 from Old Beeding Wood : No.7 from Warnham Lodge. Barbican House Museum : Piffard Collection : From Clark 1934.*

Their finds were the subject of a note by H.S. Toms in the *Antiquary* (1915), while E.J.G. Piffard's collection was described in a more detailed paper by Dr (later Professor) Grahame Clark in 1934.

In all the Attree and Piffard collections contained almost 4,000 microliths of which the greater number came from five findspots - Old Faygate, (Roffey) Halt, Old Beeding Wood, Colgate and Warnham Lodge. Clark used what was probably the richest collection of microliths ever amassed in the British Isles to define and describe the different shapes of such artifacts to be expected from sites of Mesolithic date in south-east England. He identified microliths of simple type with oblique chipping across one end (Fig.2, nos 1-4) as well as more elaborate types chipped to an isosceles or scalene outline (Fig.2, nos 5-7), and pieces with inverse chipping to create a concavity at their base ("Horsham points" : nos 8-10) or a rounded or pointed base (nos 11-13). When the microliths from one site were compared to those from the other sites they were found to occur in differing proportions but no explanation was advanced for these 'discrepancies'.

Recent work suggests that these differences may be of chronological significance. The findspots of Old Faygate, (Roffey) Halt, Old Beeding Wood and Colgate are linked by their possession of many simple obliquely backed pieces, isosceles triangles and pieces with concave basal retouch. At (Roffey) Halt, Old Beeding Wood and Colgate, pieces with a rounded or pointed base are markedly more common and this may suggest that they are later in date than old Faygate. At Warnham Lodge a high proportion of scalene rather than isosceles triangles and a rarity of concave-based pieces may suggest this findspot as younger than any of the others.

What age are these stone industries? An answer can only be given by looking for comparable material on the European mainland. Collections of microliths which combine the shapes found at Old Faygate are to be found in Belgium at least as early as 9,000 radiocarbon years bp, and this Sussex site could be that old. At this time the Channel would have been a freshwater stream. The microlith populations from (Roffey) Halt, Old Beeding Wood and Colgate with their rather greater range of microlith shapes might be later in date, while small scalene triangles from Warnham Lodge will have been lost latest of all. Radiocarbon dates from the Hermitage Rocks shelter near Crowborough in East Sussex suggest that such scalene triangles were still in use close to 7,000 radiocarbon years bp (Jacobi and Tebbutt 1981).

If these speculations are correct then these sites will have been used at a time when the pine and birch woodland of the nearly Post-glacial will have been turning into a forest dominated by oak and elm. Red and roe deer, wild cattle and pig will have been hunted using bows. Hazel nuts will have been collected and stored as a winter reserve. Excavations elsewhere in Britain have revealed post-built houses of about this age as well as simple windbreaks, the latter most probably during the summer months.

Early commentators on these assemblages from the "Forest Ridge" noted that the flint used had come from either or both the North or South Downs. Finds of typologically similar microliths from sites around the perimeter of the Weald on the Lower Greensand that runs parallel to the chalk 'Downs' hint at exploitation either by the same or by culturally related groups. Flint could thus have been collected or quarried direct or passed by exchange between exploiting groups towards the centre of the Weald.

Each of these sites except Old Beeding Wood has yielded chipped flint arrowheads of types discarded by Neolithic and Bronze Age groups who farmed as well as hunted (and fought). These discoveries make the point that a good settlement location, and these sites are usually close to springs and upon warm well drained ground, will be used many times and by different cultural groups. Re-analysis of the collections stored in Barbican House and the British Museum revealed the presence on a number of sites, particularly (Roffey) Halt, of simple microliths that were longer than the average run of pieces. These

elongated microliths are more typical of the period 10 to 9,000 radiocarbon years bp than they are of any later date. So there had been earlier as well as later hunters using these sites. Many of Honeywood's microliths fall into this category.

Still more surprising was the discovery on going through Piffard's finds from Old Faygate of a shouldered flint blade of a type used in Britain by late Ice Age hunters. This by definition must be older than 10,000 radiocarbon years ago and was perhaps lost as long ago as 13,000 bp. We can only guess!

However, what the flint evidence tells us is that from back within the Ice Age right up until the disappearance of flint-tipped archery equipment in the Bronze Age these sites around Horsham had been used by Prehistoric man – a total period of between 10 and 12,000 years.

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