

FIELD WALKING PREHISTORIC SITES IN GOSPORT

(Reports I and II)

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ABSTRACT

The first two of a series of reports on prehistoric sites under investigation by the staff of Gosport Museum, prior to gravel extraction, are presented. Evidence for a long period of activity from the middle Mesolithic to the Early Bronze Age was found at Shoot Lane south east. Important groups of artefacts of Paleolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age date were recovered from Sandhills Lane west. The reports include microfiche sections.

REPORT I: SHOOT LANE SOUTHEAST

Early in 1981 new excavations for plateau gravel were started by Hall Aggregates (South Coast) Limited, at their Lee-on-the-Solent site. The excavation was in the rectangular strip form, and followed the removal by scraper of the top-soil overburden. The area covered by the excavation was SU 5720 0155 to SU 5751 0152; SU 5722 0144 to SU 5755 0145 (Fig 1).

The geology of the area is a loamy, clay soil with many derived flint nodules overlying plateau gravel. Local plateau gravels contain upper Cretaceous flint from the chalk, chert from the green sands and reworked pebbles from the lower Tertiary pebble beds (Fig 2).

The area had previously been a field worked by Cherque Farm and has been under continuous cultivation since the seventeenth century. The only documentary evidence of occupation is for a small smithy (Fig 1) which stood on the bend in Shoot Lane adjacent to Shoot Farm.

Due partly to the site's proximity to a recorded though apparently unexcavated shell-midden (White 1967) and also to the fact that stone tools had previously been collected in the area (Capt G Civil pers comm), the Museum felt that it would be advisable to monitor and where possible collect material as the soil overburden was removed.

The rapid method of extraction and the

length of time involved in obtaining permission to monitor the site, meant that only a salvage operation could be undertaken. The field was levelled in preparation for stripping the remaining soil; the removed soil having been deposited in spoil heaps around the edge of the site, it will presumably be replaced on the conclusion of the excavation.

A preliminary inspection of the freshly levelled area was undertaken. No immediate evidence for settlement was found. Safety considerations required all field walking to be undertaken when working had ceased for the day. Daily inspection took two forms: (i) field walking the surfaces scraped down to the top of the plateau gravel; (ii) field walking fresh spoil heaps.

For reasons outlined above it was not possible to record the stratigraphical position and map reference of each item though the impression gained was that of an even distribution of artefacts over the whole area.

THE FLINT INDUSTRY

Below are listed items collected from the soil overburden at the site. It was impossible to speciate the shells due to their fragmentary nature. Because of the need for speed and the presence of large number of waste flakes, cores and burnt flints, it was impossible to keep an accurate count.

1. Shell remains \times 12
2. Burnt flints, abundant
3. Waste flakes, abundant
4. Cores, abundant
5. Microliths \times 3
6. Hammer stone \times 2
7. Thumb scraper \times 3
8. Hollow scraper \times 3

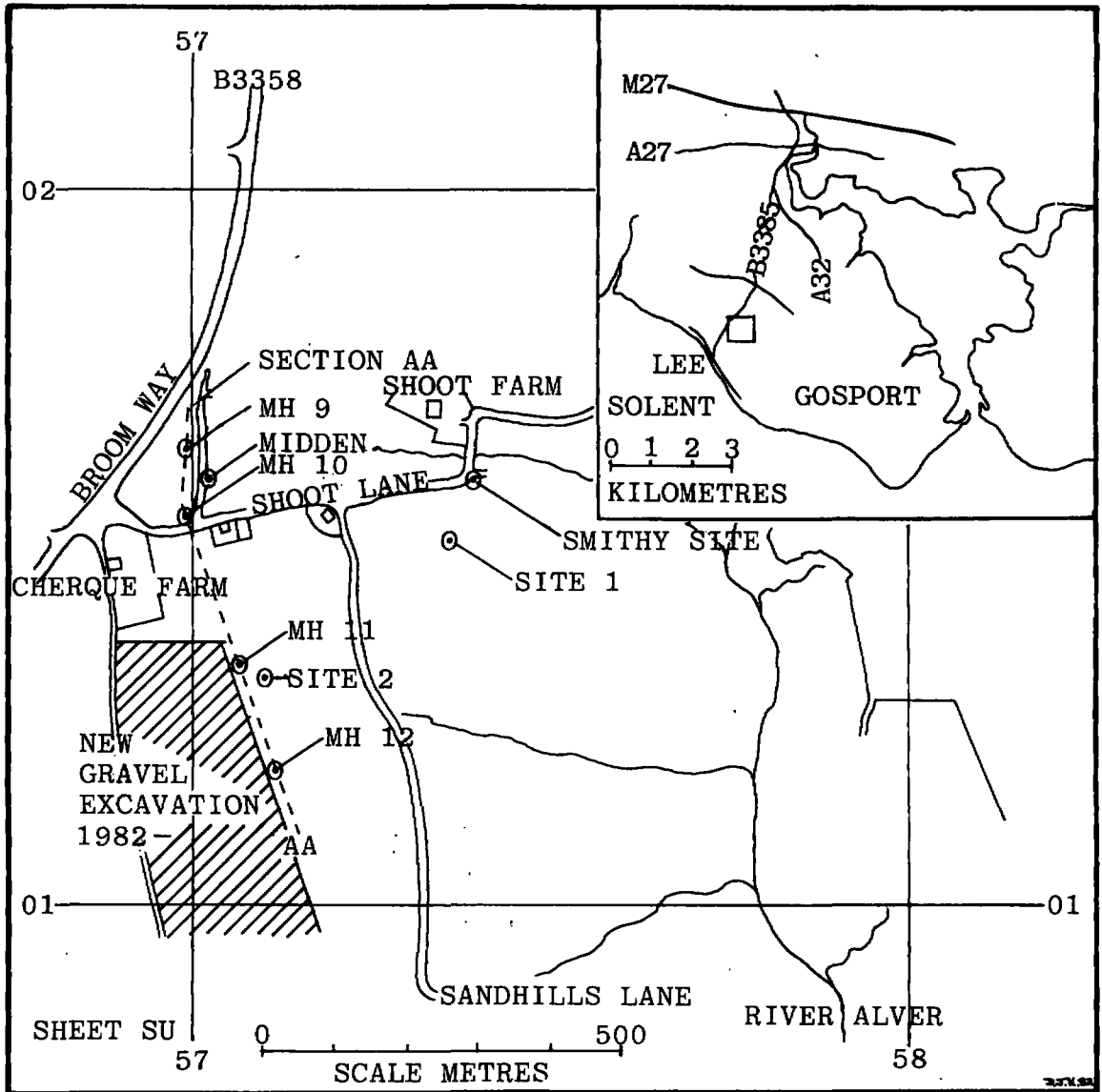


Fig 1. Location of the Shoot Lane and Sandhills Lane sites. The location of Fig 4 is shown as Section AA.

- | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 9. Awl/borer | 16. Pick |
| 10. Knife | 17. 'Fabricator' |
| 11. Blades × 6 | 18. Push plane/nosed scraper |
| 12. Side scraper × 7 | 19. Kidney shaped scraper |
| 13. End scraper × 3 | 20. Waisted flake/tool |
| 14. Horse-shoe scraper × 3 | 21. Projectile point |
| 15. Heavy scraper × 4 | 22. Barbed and tanged arrowhead |

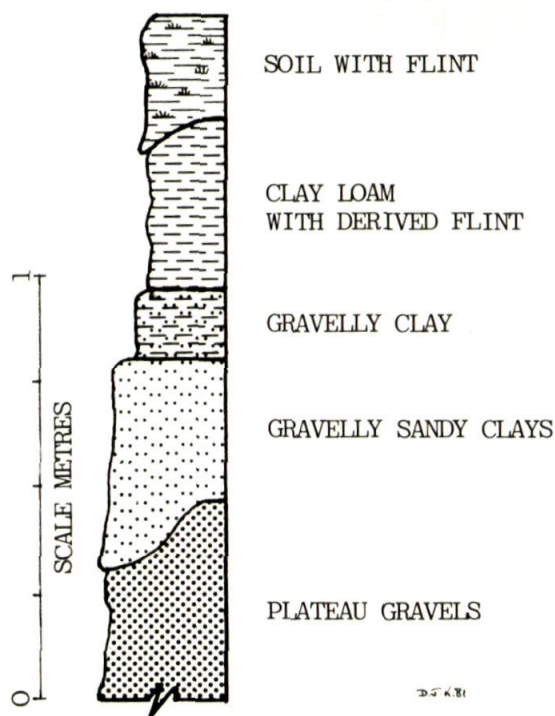


Fig 2. Geology of the Shoot Lane area.

Most of the flints have a fresh, unabraded appearance. The colour range is from dark brown to blue/grey. Some of the tools have white cherty inclusions. Cortex, where present, is blue/white to brown in colour.

Fig 3:

1. Heavy scraper; light brown flint with cherty inclusions, a large area of blue/white cortex is present on the dorsal surface.
2. Horse-shoe scraper; white/grey flint containing several white cherty inclusions.
3. Horse-shoe scraper; dark brown flint with several large white cherty inclusions.
4. Horse-shoe scraper; dark yellow/brown flint.
5. Push plane/nosed scraper; blue/grey flint with a small area of white cortex on the dorsal side.
6. Barbed and tanged arrowhead; brown flint.
7. Projectile point; brown flint.
8. Knife, white/grey chert-like flint.
9. Kidney shaped scraper; brown flint with a single large cherty inclusion.
10. Pick; white chert-like flint.

DISCUSSION OF THE FLINT INDUSTRY

The site is situated within a mile of the coast and sits between two partially silted tributaries of the River Alver. The types of tools found at this site suggest a long period of prehistoric presence, probably covering a time span from middle Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age. Large numbers of burnt flints were also found which further suggests an extensive period of occupation.

Though the period was extensive it is felt that the size of the settlement groups was small, the high numbers of tools found being a reflection of the abundance of flint and chert derived from the underlying plateau gravel. This abundant source of raw material possibly meant that tools could be fashioned at the site and then discarded after use.

REPORT II: SANDHILLS LANE WEST (SU 5707 0132)

Following the successful completion of the excavations of Shoot Lane south east (SU 5745 0155) by Hall Aggregates (South Coast) Limited, permission was sought to extract the remaining gravel underlying the rest of Cherque Farm area. Permission was granted to the company to begin new excavations in the Spring of 1982. The excavations were to cover the area SU 5689 0138 to SU 5701 0140; SU 5701 0045 to SU 5746 0049 (Fig 1).

The method to be used to extract the gravel was similar to that described above, the only variation being that the extraction would be staggered in five phases. The first phase beginning at the north end of the field (see Fig 1, hatched area).

GEOLOGY

The underlying geology is described above. Fig 4, Section AA, displays similar lithology to that recorded in Fig 2, with the addition of the interface between the plateau gravel and underlying sandy clay of the Bracklesham Group. Manholes 9 to 12 on the southerly run of the Peel Common to Browndown trunk sewer also provided useful triangulation points when field walking.

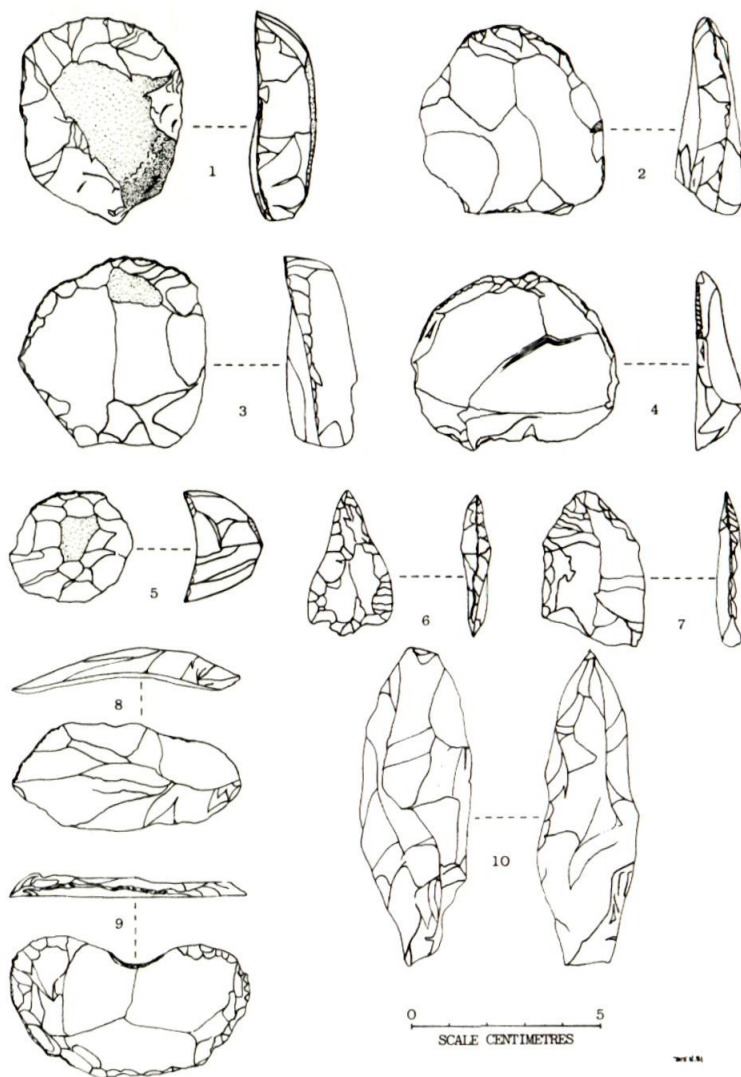


Fig 3. Shoot Lane, Gosport. Flint implements.

THE METHOD

The Museum was informed that Hall Aggregates had applied for permission to exploit gravel from the remaining farm land adjacent to Cherque Farm. In early 1981 it was known that the site would be to the west of Sandhills Lane and the northern part of the field.

Permission was granted for an area which is close to the shell midden, mentioned above. On

further research into the archives at Gosport Museum, it was found to have been investigated (Cooke 1923). An extract of the investigation report is given below.

'A Kitchen Midden found in a gravel pit at the SW corner of Chark Common (SU 5701 0161) 2ft 6ins below the present surface. The Midden layer consisted of a mass of oyster, whelk, mussel and winkle shells. In the same

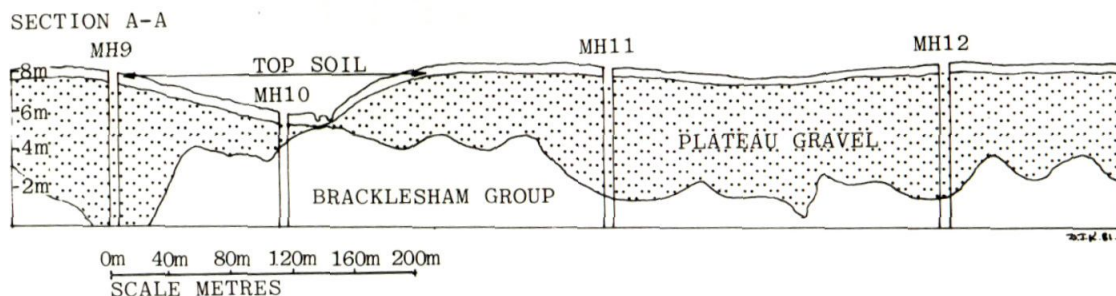


Fig 4. Sandhills Lane, Gosport, Section AA. For location see Fig 1.

level were found hearths, around which was a layer of charcoal intermixed with a large number of potboilers.

Flint implements found consist of: one fluted scraper, three flat scrapers, many potboilers from the hearths, ten cores, nine scrapers, one borer, one fabricator, one wedge and many spalls from the overlying loam. These implements were identified by Miles Burkitt as probable Neolithic or Bronze Age types. No pottery was found.

The area also contained a site recorded 1935–38 by the late Captain G Civil (SU 5717 0138) at which he noted finding: '(i) 11 Round Scrapers; (ii) 6 Fine Scrapers; (iii) 2 Borers; (iv) 1 Flake Knife; (v) 1 Chisel Headed Arrowhead. Some to the west of and south of the midden.' He ascribes the periods Neolithic to Bronze Age to the finds.

It was therefore decided to concentrate on the area bounded by the co-ordinates: SU 5689 0155 to SU 5730 0155; SU 5690 0110 to SU 5730 0110. As already described the area for which permission had been granted was in fact west of the line of the Peel Common to Browdown trunk sewer and east of Common Barn Lane. The first two phases of the excavation fell within the co-ordinates field walked. An application has been submitted to exploit the remaining area east of the pipeline and west of Sandhills Lane, again partly falling within the section field walked.

The first time the area was field walked was in the early summer of 1981 and was somewhat limited by the fact that the field contained a crop of potatoes. Investigation was not impossible,

however, as foliage cover in the area was very patchy because of infestation of the crop by Eel worms, thus stunting the growth of the plants.

The furrows ran in an east/west direction across the width of the section. It was decided to walk every second furrow across the section. The overburden along the line of the trunk sewer was not cultivated and therefore produced a gap of twenty feet in width down the length of the area walked. The strip was inspected for artefacts but was found to consist mainly of a mixture of the underlying layers dominated by plateau gravel. It was noted that on the cultivated sections of the field the more gravelly areas seemed to reflect the nearness of the plateau gravel to the surface of the field.

The second time the field was inspected was after the plant foliage had been cropped to facilitate harvesting, again every second furrow was walked. The lifting of the potato crop began in mid-summer 1981 and was complete by early winter 1981. The field then lay fallow.

The final inspection was undertaken in December 1981 and continued into January 1982. During this period the whole area of the field, with the exception of Phase 1 (Fig 1) was ploughed. This exposed a fresh surface containing new material. The furrows on this occasion ran from north to south, dictating the direction to be field walked. The area which was left fallow, Phase 1, will be investigated as the excavation progresses and will form the basis of a third paper.

THE FLINT INDUSTRY

Below is a list of the items collected from the

plough soil, though the list is not a complete one. Some of the material collected showed obvious signs of secondary work, but could not be easily placed into a recognised category.

There were large numbers of primary, secondary and tertiary waste flakes, which indicates that the tools were both prepared and completed at the site. The fact is enforced by the presence in the list of finds of cores, hammer stones and fabricators.

1. Cores, abundant
2. Waste flakes, abundant
3. Burnt Flints, abundant
4. Shell remains × 30
5. Hammer stones × 8
6. Fabricators × 19
7. Flint Knives × 14
8. Sickle sections × 5
9. Blades × 19
10. Arrowheads/Projectile points × 3
11. Spears point
12. Arrow blanks × 5
13. Saw
14. Thumb scrapers × 17
15. Double ended scraper
16. End scrapers × 88
17. Side scrapers × 64
18. Heavy scrapers × 25
19. Round scrapers × 38
20. Beaked scrapers × 21
21. Horseshoe shaped scrapers × 3
22. Hollow scrapers × 69
23. Awls/borers × 71
24. Microliths × 7
25. Microlith cores × 5
26. Push planes × 2
27. Axes × 2
28. Choppers/Cleavers × 2
29. Anvil stone
30. Multi-purpose tools × 26
31. Gunflints × 13

To try and establish the numbers of burnt flints present on the site, two small surveys were undertaken. Ten metre radius circles were marked out on randomly chosen points on the field. Then all the burnt flint on the surface was collected and weighed. The results are recorded below:

Centre Point of Circle	Numbers of Burnt Flint	Total wt (gms)
SU 5712 0129	91	2005 gms
SU 5719 0122	236	3782 gms

It is felt that the numbers of microliths found are not representative of the true quantities on the field. To establish the true figure a sample from the site would have to be sieved. It is hoped to be able to do this when the site is excavated.

The gunflints listed and others found in Gosport will be illustrated and discussed in a separate article.

Three round scrapers, three double-ended scrapers, three thumb scrapers, two horse-shoe-shaped scrapers, two heavy scrapers, five end scrapers, four beaked scrapers, three side scrapers, seven awls, two multi-purpose tools, five hollow scrapers, the saw, three fabricators, three knives, the spear point, the three arrowhead/projectile points, two microliths, two blades, one sickle section, both the axes, one push plane and one chopper/cleaver are described and illustrated in the microfiche section (Figs 5-10).

DISCUSSION OF THE FLINT INDUSTRY

The Palaeolithic material found at this site has its origins in the plateau gravel and does not represent a local Palaeolithic settlement. The Palaeolithic artefacts were generally found at points of high concentration of flint and are all contemporary with those found at the classic site of collection of the 1860's — Rainbow Bar, Hill Head. The Mesolithic artefacts found are small in numbers; this probably reflects the fact that most of the material from this period is below the plough-soil level and therefore would not be common as surface finds.

The Neolithic material found in such large numbers probably represents a period of settlement that follows on from the Mesolithic occupation of the area. The level of settlement possibly reached its peak around the late Neolithic/early Bronze Age. The quality of implement produced as seen in those tools attributed to the middle to late Neolithic period again seems to show two levels of craftsmanship, one level being quite fine work the other show-

ing a definite crudeness. The roughness of manufacture is not of the same form as that seen in earlier pieces from the same area.

The artefacts are considered crude because of their overall shape which does not fall within any easily recognisable grouping, but their usage is discernible by the areas that show secondary dressing. A possible reason for this roughness in manufacture, seen in the later artefacts, is derived from the fact that the area has an abundant source of raw material.

The Bronze Age artefacts were found in isolation from any other evidence of Bronze Age settlement. It is felt that there is further evidence to be found of an actual site of settlement other than that found at the Midden. The problem is that most of the land which could hold the evidence is difficult to gain access to because it is either private houses or part of the Royal Naval Air Station, or incorporated into the local golf course. Some of the original Cherque Common can still be found and it is hoped that access may be granted to look at it for evidence of occupation.

MICROFICHE

The following illustrations of flint implements from Sandhills Lane West are published, with full descriptions, in microfiche: Fig 5, Neolithic and Bronze Age scrapers (Nos 1-11); Fig 6, Neolithic and Bronze Age scrapers (Nos 12-21); Fig 7, Neolithic awls and multi-purpose tools (Nos 22-30); Fig 8, Neolithic scrapers, saw and fabricators (Nos 31-39); Fig 9, Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age knives, spear point, arrowheads, microliths, blades, sickle section and axe head (Nos 40-53); Fig 10, Palaeolithic hand axe and scraper, Mesolithic push-plane and Neolithic chopper (Nos 54-57).

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