MESOLITHIC TO BRONZE AGE ACTIVITY AT PARCHEY SAND BATCH, CHEDZOY

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INTRODUCTION

Between 1976 and 1984, a substantial quantity of Mesolithic to Bronze Age lithic artefacts was obtained from the ploughed surface of the Parchey sand batch at Chedzoy, near Bridgwater, Somerset (ST 350375). The primary aim of this report is to record the fieldwork which was carried out at that time and to provide a provisional assessment of the evidence which was obtained. By considering the site in both its geographical and archaeological contexts, it is hoped to provide a stimulus to further research in this potentially rich corner of the Somerset Levels.

The Mesolithic element in this collection contains a wide range of retouched tool forms, including one of the largest recorded groups of microliths from any single site in the south-west peninsula. Although probably a mixture representing more than one occupation phase, it is unusual in containing hollow-based points and other microlith shapes more readily paralleled in assemblages from Surrey and Sussex than in the south-western counties.

The Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts from Parchey represent some of the most substantial lithic and ceramic evidence for fen-edge activity in the Somerset Levels. Of particular interest is the close proximity of the site to both known and suspected prehistoric timber structures preserved within the surrounding peat moors. This juxtaposition may significantly increase the potential value of the site for future research.

To a large extent, the Mesolithic and post-Mesolithic elements within the collection will be considered separately. Although the evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age activity is outlined in some detail, more emphasis has been placed on the typology and possible affinities of the larger Mesolithic component, which has been briefly discussed on two previous occasions (Jacobi 1979, 73; Norman 1982, 18–19). The collection has been deposited in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton (Accession No. 26/1997).

LOCATION AND PHYSICAL BACKGROUND

The hamlet of Parchey lies within the parish of Chedzoy, some 5km to the east of Bridgwater. Here, a low sandy hillock known as the Parchey sand batch forms the eastern extremity of the Chedzoy 'island', which is composed largely of marine Burtle Bed deposits of probable

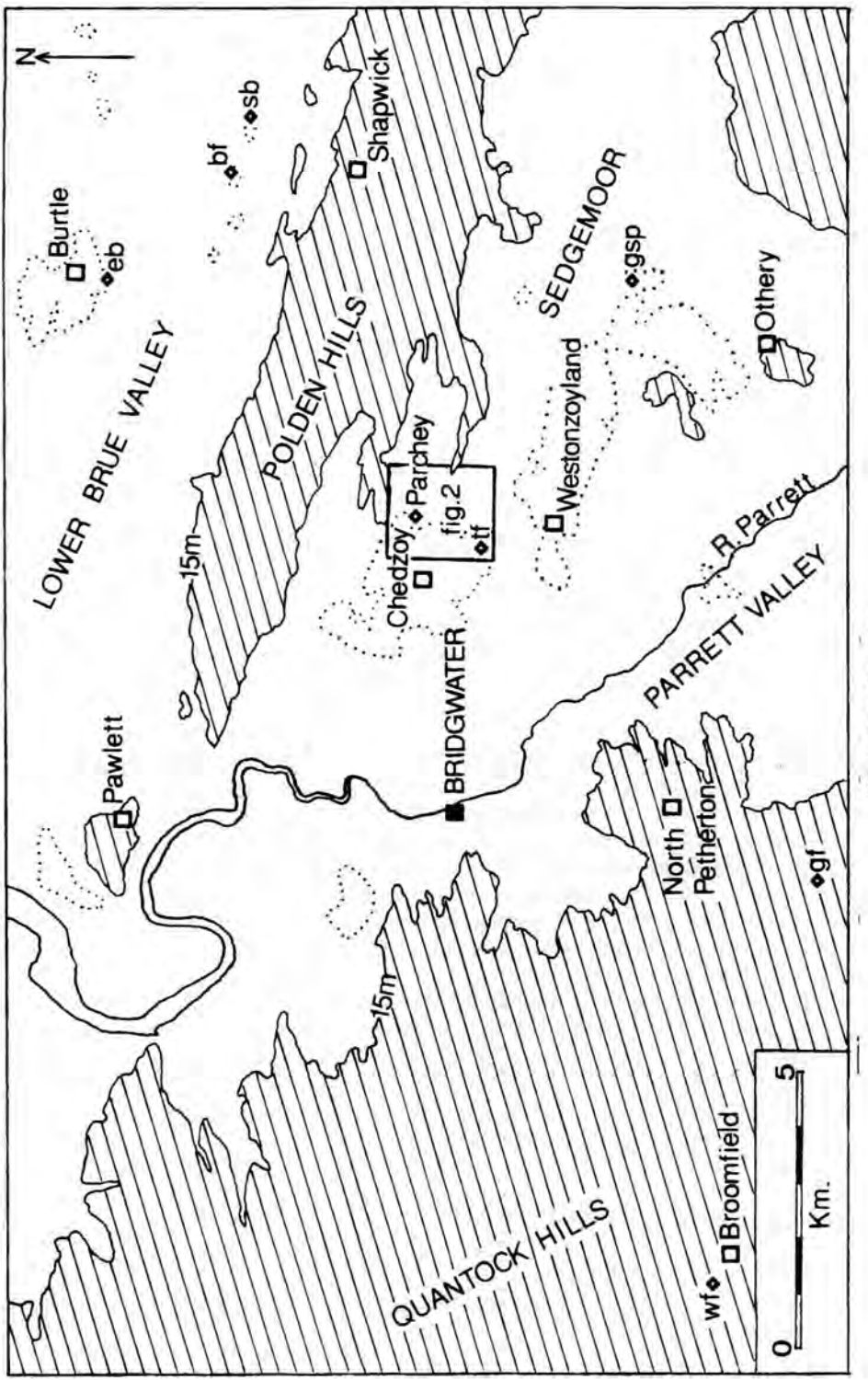

Fig. 1 Location map

Ipswichian age (Fig. 2; Edmunds and Williams 1985, 50). These reach a maximum elevation of about 9m OD, which is some 4 to 5m above the surface level of the recent (Holocene) clays and peats which surround the island. In places, such as at Greylake near Middlezoy (Kidson and Heyworth 1977, 52–3), Burtle Bed sands, silts and gravels exceeding 8m in thickness were deposited on a land surface of red Mercia mudstone, a fragment of which is exposed as a small inlier immediately south of the Parchey sand batch. This rock type also underlies most of the buried valley system beneath the Holocene sediments and forms the adjacent higher ground of Sutton Hams and the lower slopes of Pendon Hill, some 500m to the south-east and north-east of Parchey respectively. These latter areas of higher ground extend eastwards to join the Polden Hills, a prominent ridge of Jurassic clay and limestone which divides the south Somerset Levels (Sedgemoor) from the Brue valley to the north.

To the east and north of the Chedzoy island, the modern surface of the Levels is blanketed by estuarine clays which are believed to have been deposited during the late Iron Age and Roman periods. These form part of the coastal clay belt, which covers most of the seaward end of the Somerset Levels between Weston-super-Mare and Bridgwater. To the south-east of the island, Lang Moor and King's Sedgemoor are composed mainly of fen peat up to 3.5m in thickness which, in a few places, is overlain by a thin veneer of riverine clay.

The Levels immediately adjacent to the Parchey sand batch lie close to the boundary between the clay and the inland peat moors. This was clearly seen in section along the back ditch of the King's Sedgemoor Drain, following a recutting of the banks in 1979. Between the western tip of Sutton Hams and Parchey Bridge, a superficial layer of clay with occasional channels cut into the underlying peat thickened northwards to form a deposit of grey estuarine or riverine clay at least 2.5m in depth.

Along its southern and south-western margins, Parchey sand batch is bordered by peat at the surface. However, along its eastern and south-eastern edges, the presence of surface clay suggests that erosion of the peat by brackish estuarine waters may have taken place. If this has occurred, it could have implications for the survival of archaeological remains contained within the peat.

Much evidence relating to the prehistoric environment of the Parchey sand batch prior to the 4th millennium BC now lies permanently concealed beneath the Holocene deposits of the adjacent moor. However, it does appear likely that a low ridge of Mercia mudstone extended north-westwards from Sutton Hams towards the Chedzoy island prior to the onset of peat formation in this area. The contours of the pre-Holocene buried valley system beneath the Levels, as published by Kidson and Heyworth in 1976, suggest that a dry land crossing might have persisted here throughout the Mesolithic and into the early Neolithic period. Similarly, it seems probable that a supply of fresh water would have existed in the immediate vicinity of Parchey. One possible source could have been the inlet on the western side of the sand batch, which may have been formed, at least in part, by the action of water rising along a spring line at the junction between the sand and the underlying mudstone. However, the likelihood of other archaeologically significant features, such as streams or freshwater pools, having been present on the buried land surface must remain the subject of conjecture.

The western side of the Parchey sand batch is occupied by an L-shaped field, which will be referred to as field P.1. The south-eastern part of this field consists of a gently domed area of Burtle sand with a maximum elevation of about 6m OD. To the south-west of this, the sand dips

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Key to Fig. 1

Land over 15m OD hatched; Burtle beds (sand) shown with dotted outline

◆	Mesolithic sites mentioned in the text	tf	Triggol's field, Chedzoy
wf	Westleigh Farm, Broomfield	sb	Shapwick Burtle 'island'
gf	Greenway Farm, North Petherton	bf	Brickyard Farm, Shapwick
gsp	Greylake No 1 sandpit, Middlezoy	eb	Edington Burtle

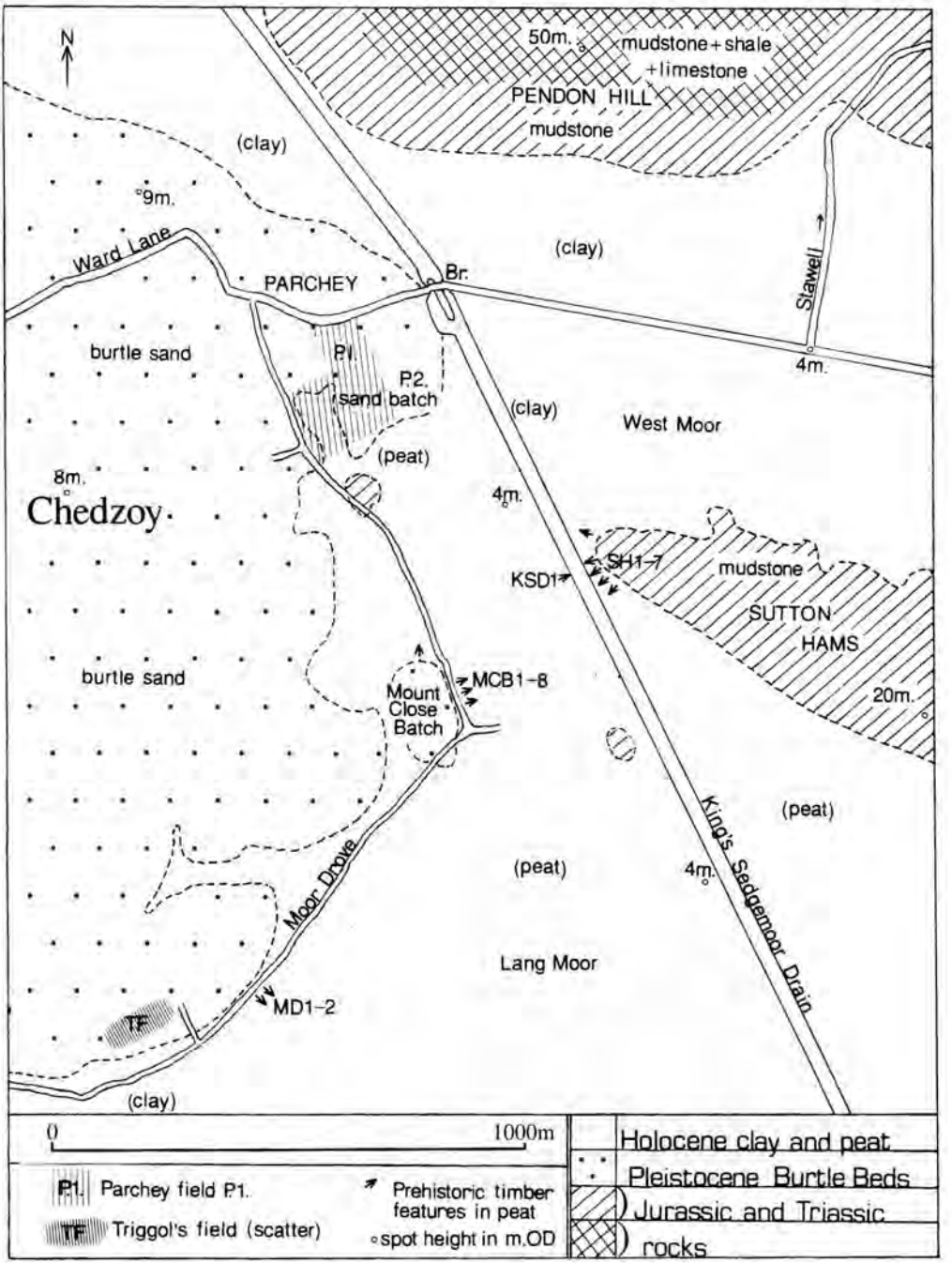

Fig. 2 The area around Parchey

beneath the inlet of peat which lies between the sand batch and the main Chedzoy island to the west. The southern edge of the field is bordered by a water-filled ditch, beyond which the gently sloping sand forms an indistinct surface boundary with the peat.

Although used for arable purposes at the time that fieldwork was carried out, field P.1 has now returned to grassland. To the east of field P.1, field P.2 has not been ploughed in recent times and appears to have been extensively quarried for sand or marl along its eastern edge.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

The peat deposits to the south and south-east of Parchey have produced a number of significant archaeological finds. In 1976, the late Mr Bernard Stone of Chedzoy informed the writer that substantial quantities of timber and red deer antlers had been exposed near the tip of Sutton Hams when the King's Sedgemoor Drain was widened during the Second World War. He vividly recalled the discovery of a possible log boat, several metres in length, which was smashed to pieces by a tractor on the following day. Apart from antlers donated to the Somerset County Museum by Mr Stone, none of this material appears to have survived and no record is known to have been made at the time.

Between 1979 and 1983, fieldwork by the writer and others located a number of brushwood and timber structures of probable Neolithic to Bronze Age date within a few hundred metres of the Parchey sand batch (Fig. 2). Sections through these features were recorded in the peat adjacent to higher ground at Sutton Hams (SH 1–7), Mount Close Batch (MCB 1–8) and further south along the Moor Drove (MD 1–2). The Sutton Hams and Moor Drove structures have been published (Norman and Clements 1979; Norman 1980) and the field notes from Mount Close Batch and the King's Sedgemoor Drain (KSD1) will be added to the Somerset Levels archive held in the County Record Office in Taunton. Two of the Chedzoy structures were subsequently radiocarbon dated to between 3532–3363 cal BC (HAR-4375) and 3345–3098 cal BC (HAR-4374) (Coles 1989, 67). Fragments of roundwood and timber found in the spoil from rhyne cleaning operations elsewhere in this area suggest that much more archaeological material remains to be located here.

Due to an absence of deep, regularly cleaned rhynes adjacent to the Parchey sand batch, no evidence has been obtained for similar structures in the peat of this area, although it seems very probable that these are present. No attempt to locate concealed timbers or to delineate the sand/peat interface by auguring was made during this fieldwork.

With the exception of field P.1 and Triggol's field on the southern edge of the Chedzoy island, no arable land was present along the edge of the Burtle Beds in the Parchey area at the time that fieldwork was being carried out. Although isolated flints were found in molehills along this margin, no sustained fieldwork was carried out here. Similarly, although some artefacts were found in chance disturbances in field P.2, fieldwork was limited to confirming that the artefact scatters encountered in P.1 continued eastwards into this field. On the main Chedzoy island, a grid survey carried out in 1982 at the southern end of Triggol's field (ST 34503620) revealed a diffuse scatter of Mesolithic to Bronze Age lithics, including a small concentration of Mesolithic debitage near the sand/peat interface.

FIELDWORK

Distribution of Artefacts

The presence of lithic artefacts in field P.1 was first noted in October 1975 during a preliminary visit to the area. In 1976, systematic walking on the ploughed part of the field was undertaken in order to determine the extent of the artefact scatter. This revealed three areas where finds

were more prolific (Fig. 3: Areas A, B, and C) and these were later mapped by using markers to indicate the approximate extent of each concentration.

Over the ploughed field as a whole, marked differences were observed between the distribution of Mesolithic and post-Mesolithic artefacts. Material diagnostic of a Mesolithic industry was, to a very large extent, restricted to the three areas indicated on Figure 3. Areas B and C consisted of fairly diffuse scatters of patinated cores and debitage, with only a few microliths and other retouched forms. However, Area A produced over 85% of the total Mesolithic collection from the field. This material showed a wide range of patination and included all the hollow-based points and later Mesolithic type microliths which were recovered from the site.

Lithic material suggestive of a Neolithic or Bronze Age industry was widely distributed across the field, as shown on Figure 4. No obvious concentrations were apparent, although a substantial proportion (>60%) of finds were made within 50m of the southern edge of the field, including Area A on Figure 3. These later artefacts also occurred in areas where Mesolithic material was apparently absent, including the northern part of the field and to the west of Area A. Although small, pressure-flaked scrapers and other typical late Neolithic or Bronze Age artefacts were widely scattered across the field, material more suggestive of an earlier Neolithic industry was largely confined to the south-eastern corner around Area A.

Air photographs taken in 1989 and retained in the Somerset Sites and Monuments Record appear to show a linear group of small irregular rectilinear enclosures along the southern edge of field P.1. To the north of these, faint marks suggesting small irregular plots are visible in the vicinity of areas B and C (Fig. 3). Although these features correspond with areas which have produced significant quantities of post-Mesolithic artefacts, it is not possible to relate them directly to the results of the earlier fieldwork.

Grid Survey

In 1980, a grid survey was carried out in the south-eastern corner of the field, where the densest concentration of artefacts (Area A) had been located. An area covering 675m^2 of weathered plough soil was gridded with string into 2.5m squares (Fig. 5). Each square was thoroughly searched and all pieces of flint and chert greater than 5mm in length were recorded. In the section of the grid marked by a heavy line on Figure 5, each individual find was recorded and plotted on a plan, as shown on Figure 6. Over the remainder of the gridded area, the artefacts recovered were aggregated to provide totals for each 2.5m square. These are shown on Figure 5, along with aggregated totals for each square in the individually plotted section of the grid.

The distribution pattern of finds from within the gridded area shows a marked degree of clustering of artefacts. It does not have the appearance of an entirely random scatter of material which has been widely distributed by recent agricultural processes. This can be clearly seen in Figure 6 where, for example, a group of five microliths accompanied by much debitage is clustered within a 5m square. It is also possible to detect a difference in the distribution of patinated and unpatinated artefacts. This may reflect the probability that a large proportion of the latter are of post-Mesolithic date and are thus unrelated to the patinated Mesolithic material. The possibility that the results of this survey may indicate the positions of *in situ* concentrations of artefacts is supported by the condition of the finds themselves. A large majority of these are in sharp, undamaged condition and do not appear to have been circulating within the plough zone for any length of time.

THE LITHIC ARTEFACT COLLECTION

An approximate total of 21kg of flint and chert artefacts has been obtained from field P1. Of this, about 16% shows evidence of retouch or heavy wear; the remainder being unretouched

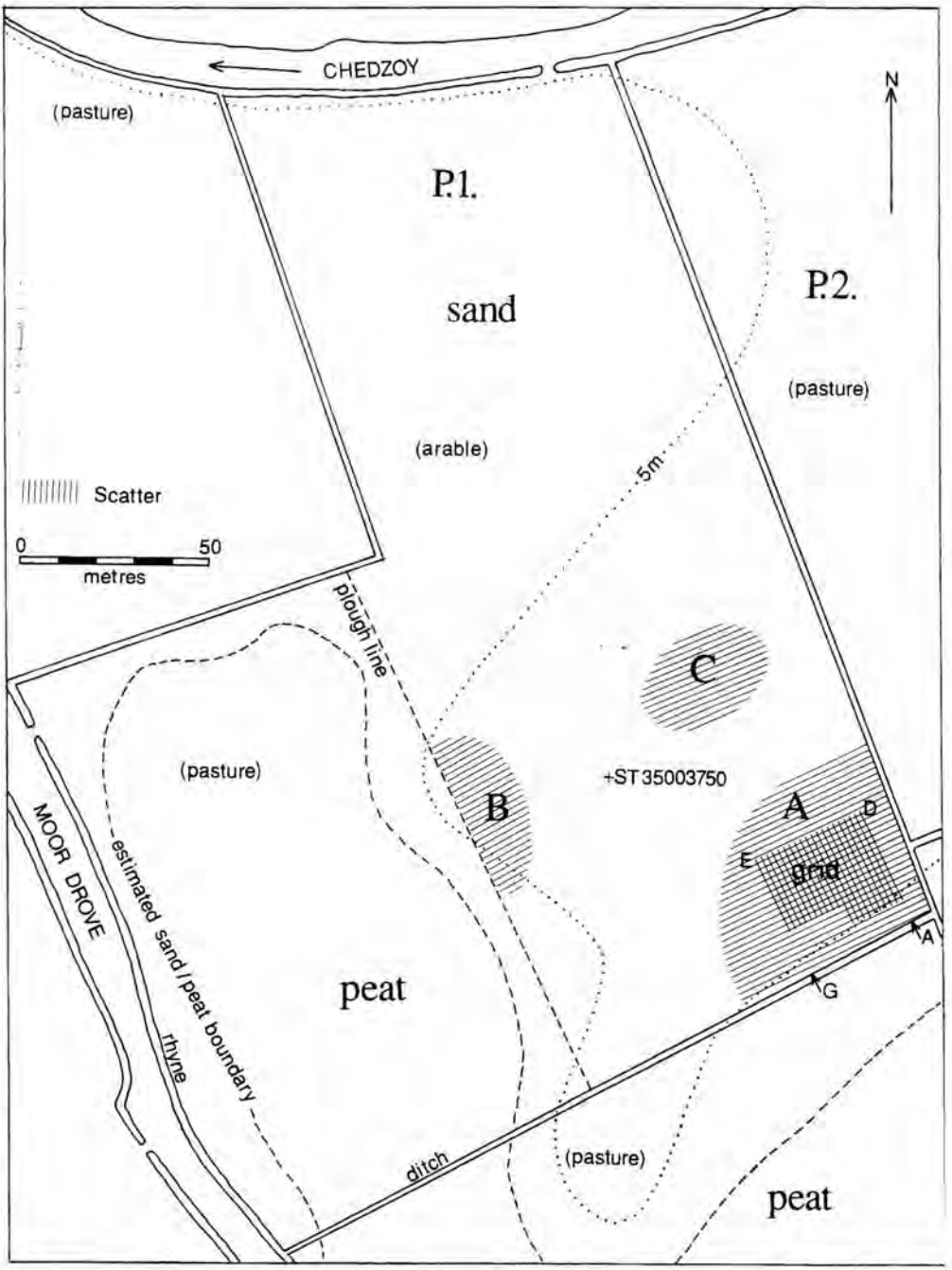

Fig. 3 Parchey P.1: distribution of Mesolithic artefact scatters

flakes, cores and other debitage. By using a combination of artefact typology, raw material type and degree of patination, it has been possible to place over 80% of the collection into Mesolithic and post-Mesolithic groups with a reasonable degree of confidence. However, some 10% of

retouched pieces are more problematic and, when included in the following analysis, are noted as being of uncertain age.

THE MESOLITHIC GROUP

Approximately 75% of the total weight of artefacts collected is thought to belong within a Mesolithic context. It seems possible that this material represents a series of occupation episodes which could have occurred over a substantial period of time. This is most apparent in the variations in raw materials, patination and typology between the artefacts from the main concentration (Area A) and those from the smaller scatters in Areas B and C. When appropriate, attention will be drawn to such potentially significant differences in the following account.

Raw materials

About 55% of the diagnostic Mesolithic artefacts are made of Upper Greensand chert. The majority of the cores and outer flakes in this material bear traces of cortex which is either fresh or only lightly abraded. This seems to indicate a source either on or adjacent to an outcrop of Cretaceous Upper Greensand. Much of this relatively fresh material is even grained and predominantly grey-brown to dark-grey in colour. However, a smaller proportion of pale yellow to amber coloured chert with unabraded cortex is also present.

Overall, this chert appears somewhat less varied in colour and texture than a typical selection from the Greensand Beds of the Blackdown Hills, some 25km to the south of Parchey. Notably rare are the strongly coloured amber to chocolate-brown varieties which occur in both early and later Mesolithic type collections from West Somerset and East Devon. One possible alternative source for this unabraded chert from Parchey is the Upper Greensand scarp which skirts the western edge of Salisbury Plain between Westbury and Wincanton. Reference samples obtained from this scarp near the source of the River Brue, some 40km east of Parchey, provide a close visual match for most of the Parchey material, as well as for the chert component of the early Mesolithic collection from Greylake No. 1 sand pit near Middlezoy (Wainwright 1960).

A relatively small proportion of the chert from Parchey bears heavily abraded and stained cortex and appears to have come from a river gravel. Most of this is yellowish to amber in colour and may originate from the Blackdown Hills. As similar material has been found within the basal Burtle Beds in the Middlezoy area, this supply of chert could have been obtained from within a short distance of the site.

The remaining 45% of diagnostic Mesolithic artefacts are made of flint, which occurs in a range of colours and textures. Much of the more elegant blade-like material is made of high quality olive-grey to black flint. Being mainly heavily patinated, this flint bears traces of fresh cortex, indicating sources on or very near a chalk outcrop. Visually, it is indistinguishable from much of the flint in the Mesolithic collections from Greylake No.1 sand pit and the Shapwick Burtle 'island' (Fig. 1). Although uncommon within Area A at Parchey, it is the dominant flint type in the scatters from Areas B and C.

The main concentration of artefacts in Area A has produced flint of variable quality and colouration; dark grey, yellowish grey and pale brownish grey, often with distinctive beige grey inclusions, being the most common. This material has been brought to the site both as small unabraded nodules and as more worn pieces probably derived from solifluxion or river gravel deposits. Although the precise origin of this flint is unknown, the relatively fresh cortex on most pieces suggests sources within the chalklands of Wessex, possibly in Wiltshire or North Dorset. A small amount of poor quality, light grey gravel flint, similar to material which occurs in the River Parrett gravels around Langport and in the Burtle Beds at Greylake, is also present.

Although a few Mesolithic pieces from Parchey are made of flint resembling samples obtained from Beer Head in Devon, the characteristically speckled 'Beer' flint is notably absent. Also

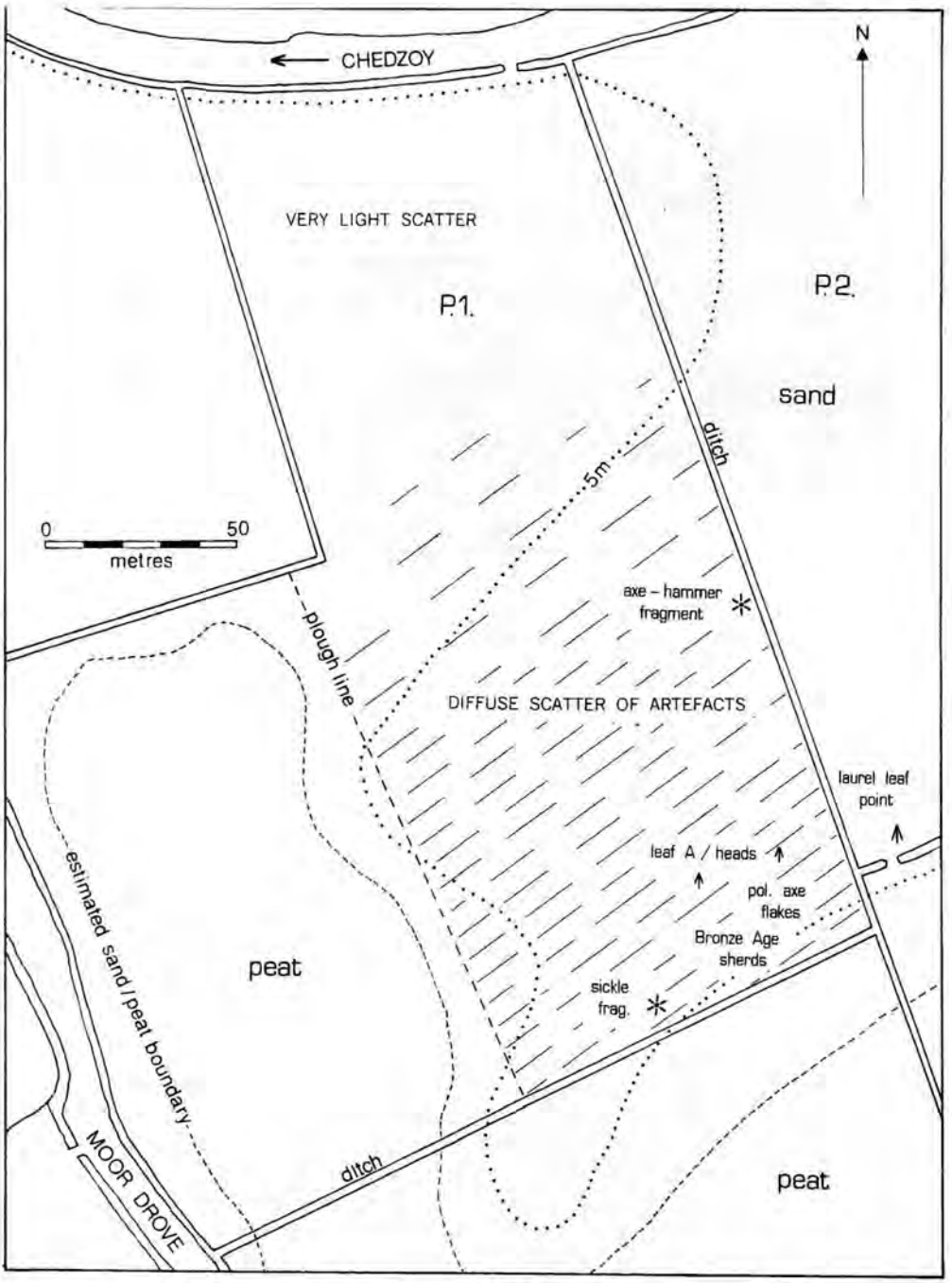

Fig. 4 Parchey P.1: distribution of Neolithic/Bronze Age artefacts

apparently absent is flint in the form of chatter-marked beach pebbles. This may be significant as beach-derived pebble flint, believed to have come mainly from Pleistocene deposits along

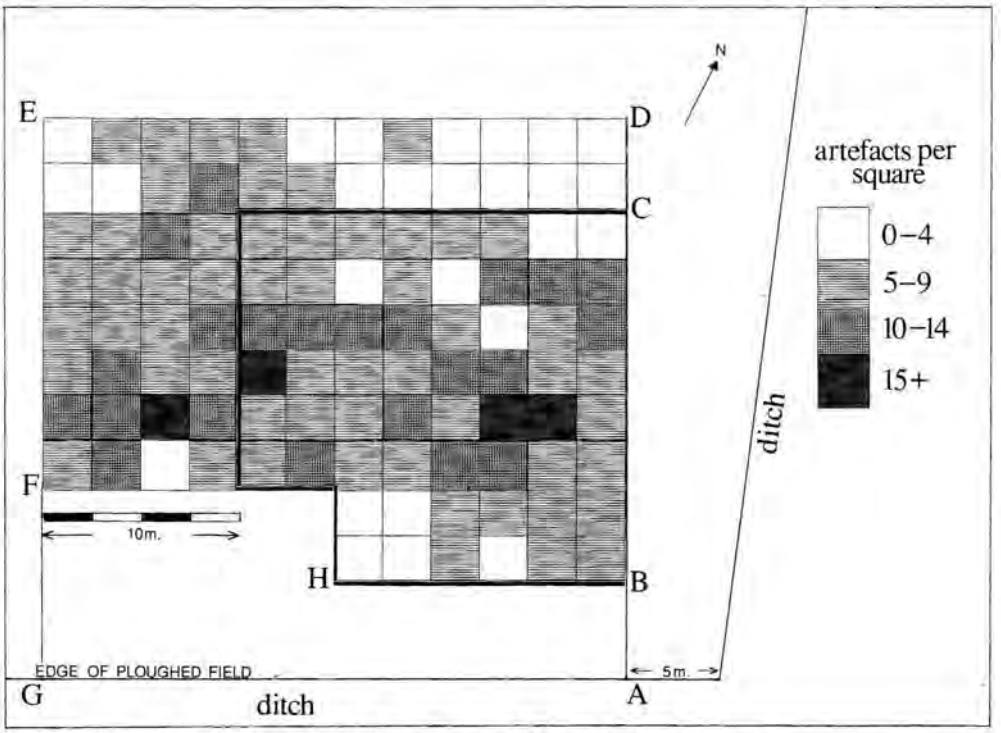

Fig. 5 Parchey P.1: grid-survey of part of artefact scatter A

the coasts of North Devon and Cornwall, occurs in all known later Mesolithic collections from the Quantock/Exmoor region to the west of the Parrett.

In terms of raw material types used, no substantial evidence has been found for a link between Parchey and known assemblages from the Mendip area to the north. The range of colours and textures of flint and chert used at Birdcombe Court, Wraxall (Somerset County Museum, Gardiner Collection) and Totty Pot, Cheddar (Hawkes Collection) differs markedly from that present at Parchey. Similarly, no obvious similarities in raw material types have been noted between Parchey and those Mesolithic collections from Mendip currently housed in the Axbridge and Wells museums (pers. comm. C.J. Bond).

Patination

Approximately 90% of diagnostic Mesolithic artefacts show some degree of patination. It seems probable that variations in soil chemistry across the site, in combination with differing degrees of resistance to surface alteration between the various raw materials present, have been major factors in determining the amount of patination undergone by individual pieces. However, the possibility that time-related factors have also been involved is indicated by an almost total lack of patina amongst the post-Mesolithic artefacts from across the entire field. A further hint that this may be the case occurs in Areas B and C, where the large majority of Mesolithic artefacts in both flint and chert are heavily patinated; in marked contrast to Area A, where most pieces show only light to intermediate degrees of patina.

An attempt has been made to sort retouched pieces into meaningful groups on the basis of patination. However, with the possible exception of material from Areas B and C, this has failed to produce any significant typological patterning which can be related to distinct phases of Mesolithic activity on the site.

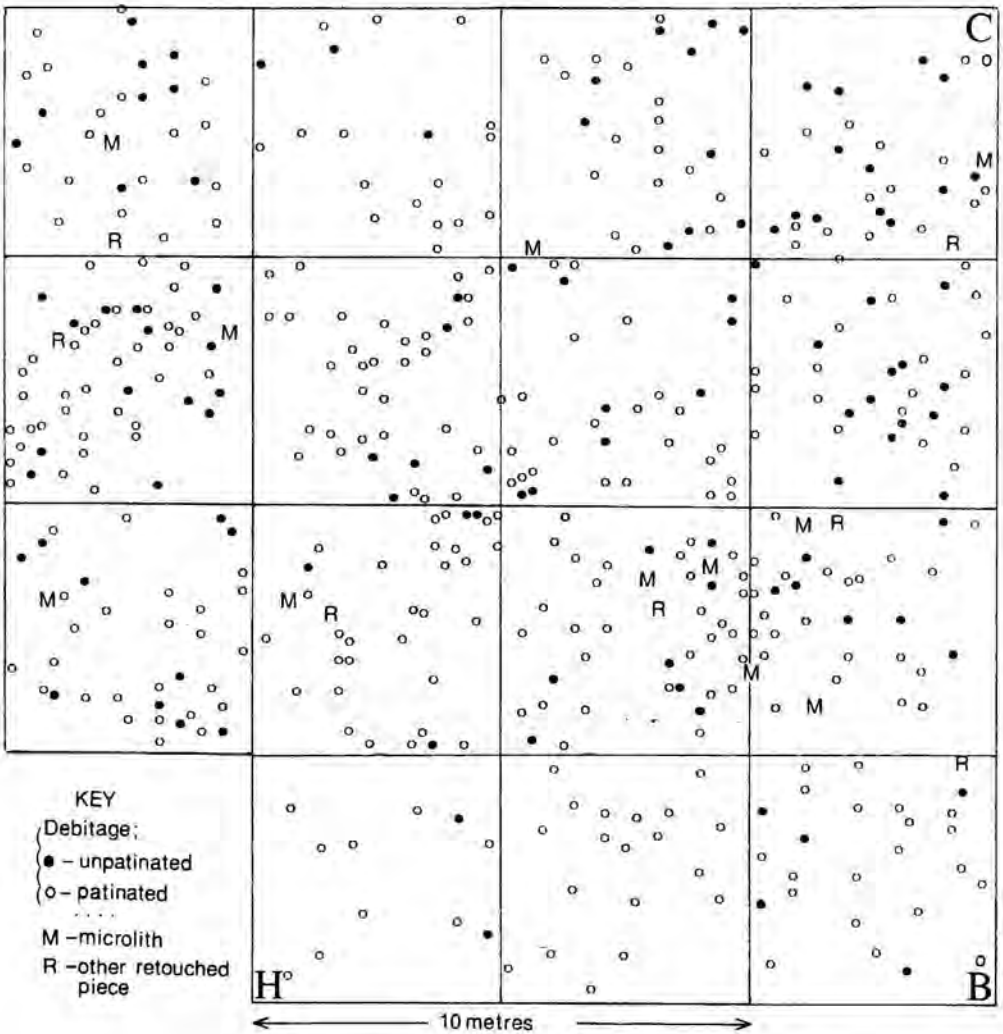

Fig. 6 Detail of individually plotted finds

Debitage

Of the 85 cores thought to belong in a Mesolithic context, some 60% are made of flint. The majority are of single platform type, although pieces with two or more platforms, either parallel or at right angles to each other, are also present. A few cores show no sign of ever having produced elongated flakes or bladelets and are only distinguishable from post-Mesolithic forms by virtue of their raw material type and patination. Many of the flint cores are small and heavily worked, whereas a greater proportion of chert cores appear to have been discarded whilst still capable of producing useful flakes. The more intensive reduction of flint cores is also indicated by a relatively higher proportion of platform rejuvenation flakes in this material.

Overall, the Mesolithic debitage from Parchey is characterised by a rather high proportion of irregularly shaped material. Within Area A in particular, indications from both cores and other debitage suggest that a relatively high ratio of flakes to parallel-sided bladelets may be a consistent technological feature of the industry or industries represented by the collection. However, Areas

B and C have produced a somewhat higher proportion of bladelets to flakes as well as a few larger blade-like pieces in high grade flint and chert.

Retouched and utilised pieces

A total of 420 Mesolithic type artefacts show evidence of retouch or heavy wear. Of these, the microliths are of special interest and are discussed in some detail. Amongst the other forms present there is a substantial number of small retouched pieces, many of which have the appearance of being multi-functional and are difficult to classify with any precision. As these are clearly an important element and merit some description, they have been grouped on the basis of the type and position of their main retouched edges. However, as some could have been placed in more than one group, this system should be seen as a convenience rather than as a formal typology.

Of the retouched pieces (Table 1), the large majority were found within the limits of Area A. Although included in these totals, significant artefacts from Areas B and C are noted separately in the text.

Table 1 Occurrence of Mesolithic artefacts

Category		*Total*
1	Microliths, microlith fragments and related pieces	146
2	Convex scrapers	58
3	Burins	2
4	Denticulated pieces	24
5	Pieces with steep retouch along one edge	14
6	Pieces with steep retouch along two parallel edges	3
7	Pieces with multiple steeply retouched edges	26
8	Pieces with retouch converging to a point	32
9	Nosed pieces	2
10	Truncated pieces	8
11	Notched pieces	6
12	Edge-trimmed pieces	3
13	Retouched pieces with abraded ends	2
14	Indeterminate retouched pieces	37
15	Unclassified broken retouched pieces	40
16	Pieces with worn edges/ends	12
17	Other utilised pieces	4
18	Tranchet adze sharpening flake	1
Total		420

1 Microliths (including fragments and related pieces)

These have been classified as in Table 2. Unless otherwise stated, both complete and broken examples from all parts of the site are included in each category.

Microliths from Area A

All the classifiable microliths from Area A are shown on Figure 7 (nos 1–83). For the purpose of discussion, these have been sorted into two sets on the basis of shape alone; the analysis of raw material types used and degree of patination having failed to produce any groupings capable of meaningful interpretation. Although not intended to represent clearly defined assemblages, these sets appear to suggest that elements belonging to two distinct microlith technologies could be present within the collection from this part of the field.

The first set of microliths (Fig. 7.1–36) consists largely of obliquely backed pieces (Fig. 7.1–13), triangles of isosceles or near isosceles shape (Fig. 7.18–23) and basally modified pieces of

Table 2 Microliths and related forms

Type		*Total*	*Figure 7 number*
1	Obliquely-backed pieces	16	1–13, 84–5, 88
2	Obliquely-backed with retouch along lower part of opposite edge (rhomboidal pieces)	2	14, 15
3	Obliquely-backed with retouch along lower part of same edge	2	16, 17
4	Triangles of isosceles or near isosceles form	6	18–23
5	Hollow-based points	9	24–32
6	Backed piece with inverse basal retouch	1	33
7	Straight-backed asymmetrical pieces with retouch along opposite edge	3	34–6
8	Broken straight-backed pieces	4	37–40
9	Convex-backed pieces	1	41
10	Convex-backed pieces with retouch on opposite edge (lanceolate pieces)	14	42–55
11	Broken convex-backed or lanceolate pieces 3	56–8	
12	Scalene pieces	24	59–82
13	Lunate	1	83
sub-total		86	
14	Unclassified fragments	42	86–7, 89–95
15	?Unfinished microliths	3	96
16	Micro-intermediates	2	
17	Microburins	8	
18	Microburin mis-hits	5	

hollow-based form (Fig. 7.24–32). The obliquely-backed pieces are mainly small and there is a notable absence of larger, more elongated forms typical of local early Mesolithic type assemblages, such as Greylake No.1 sand pit, Middlezoy (Wainwright 1960) or Greenway Farm, North Petherton (Norman 1975). However, the rhomboidal pieces (Fig. 7.14, 15) and the largest triangle (Fig. 7.20) would not look out of place in either of these latter collections.

Representing nearly half of the verifiable total from Somerset and Devon, the hollow-based points (Fig. 7.24–32) are mainly short, asymmetrical pieces, although one (Fig. 7.24) is of symmetrical form. Although Fig. 7.32 has been included in this category, it could perhaps be as easily regarded as having a pointed base formed by inverse retouch. There is also a single atypical example of an inversely retouched microlith with a rounded base (Fig. 7.33), although this is of rather crude workmanship and may be unfinished. Also included in this set are three straight-backed asymmetrical pieces with light retouch along the right hand edge (Fig. 7.34–6).

Taken as a whole, this first set of microliths is currently without known parallels in the south-west, where both early Mesolithic and later 'southern English' type assemblages have been identified (Jacobi 1979; Jacobi and Tebbutt 1981). Whilst small obliquely backed pieces occur sporadically across the region, small isosceles and hollow-based forms are uncommon and the inversely retouched and straight-backed asymmetrical pieces appear to be without local parallels.

Although a few microliths from this set could potentially derive from an early type assemblage resembling Greylake, these represent, at most, a very minor element and their omission would not significantly alter its overall appearance. However, when viewed in a wider context, the set as a whole appears to share certain features with a number of excavated assemblages from the western end of the Weald. Occurring mainly in West Surrey, these Horsham-type assemblages are characterised by a limited range of microlith shapes and contain varying proportions of small obliquely backed pieces, hollow-based points, isosceles triangles and rhomboidal pieces.

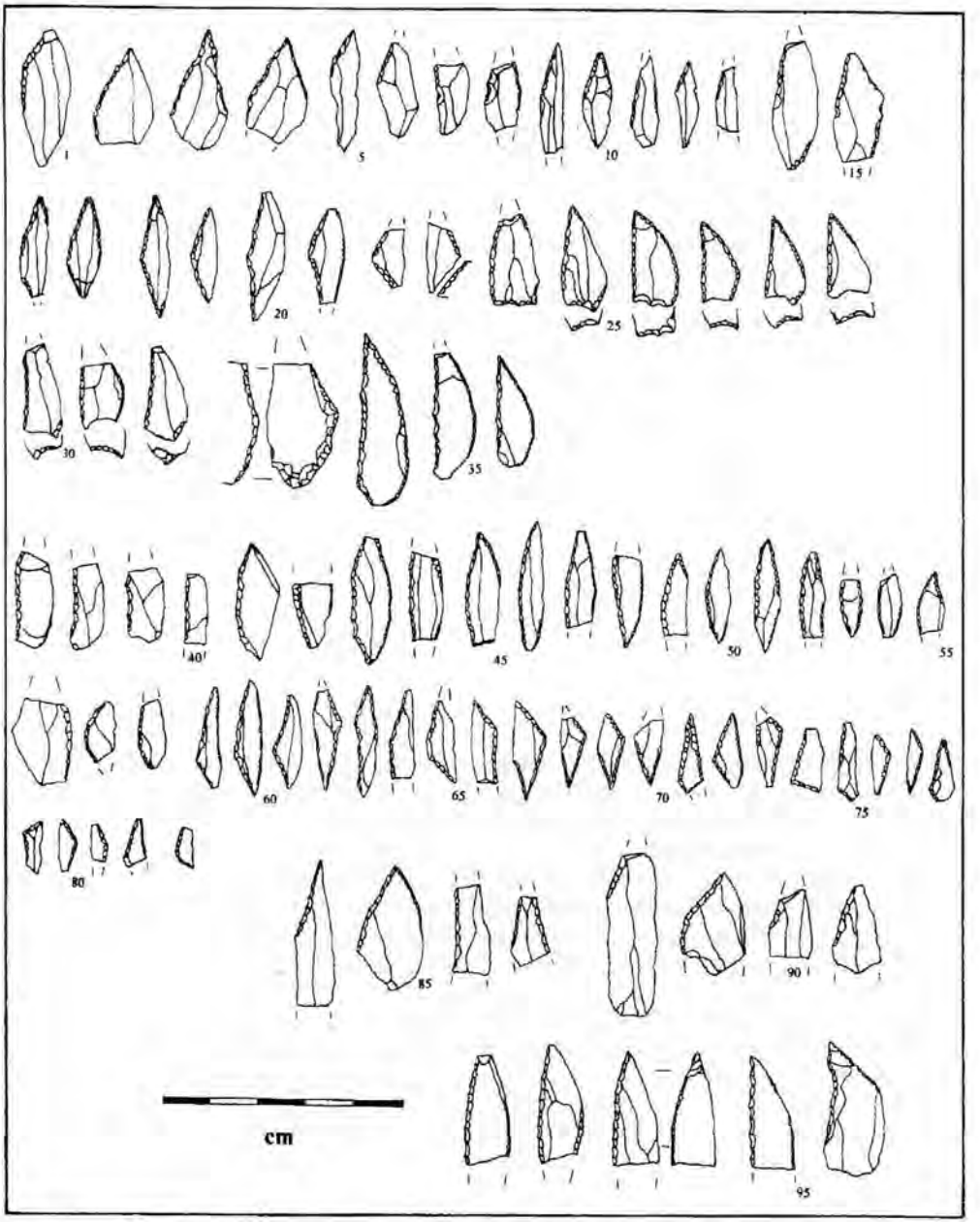

Fig. 7 Microliths from field P.1. 1–83, 92–6: Area A; 84–7: Area B; 88–91: Area C

Current radiocarbon evidence suggests that they span the 7th millennium BC, with uncalibrated determinations ranging from 6980 bc ± 100 (OxA 0376) for Longmoor Inclosure Site 1 in East Hampshire to 5990 bc ± 120 (OxA 0379) for Kettlebury Site 103 in West Surrey (Smith 1992, 186–7). However, doubts have been expressed regarding the reliability of the latter date and it has been suggested that it may be too recent (pers. comm. R. Jacobi).

Further east, on the edge of the High Weald near Horsham, a group of undated surface collections appears to be dominated by a similar combination of microlith shapes, although some later Mesolithic types, including scalene pieces, also occur (Clark 1934). Probably the most useful example is the collection from Beeding Wood, where relatively little obviously later material appears to be present. In addition to hollow-based points, this latter collection also contains inversely retouched pieces with rounded or pointed bases; types which do not occur in the excavated assemblages further west in Surrey. However, the chronological relationship between the hollow-based points and the inversely retouched pieces, which are also present in undated collections in central England (Saville 1981) is currently uncertain (pers. comm. R. Jacobi).

In terms of its overall composition, this first set of Area A microliths appears to share more common features with these Horsham-type assemblages than with any other defined assemblage type in England. This is most apparent in the relatively high proportion of hollow-based points and the presence of small obliquely-backed pieces, rhomboidal pieces and triangles of more or less isosceles shape. Although not present on dated Horsham-type sites, the inversely retouched and straight-backed asymmetrical microliths find their closest parallels within related collections from the Weald; the latter pieces closely resembling in outline a few of the inversely retouched microliths from Beeding Wood (Clark 1934, fig. 10.177, 185) and Colgate (British Museum Attree Collection)

The second set of microliths from Area A (Fig. 7.37–83) is composed largely of shapes associated in England with Mesolithic assemblages postdating the mid 7th millennium BC. It is dominated by scalene pieces (Fig. 7.59–82), which occur in a variety of shapes and sizes including neat triangular forms (Fig. 7.67–9) and sub-triangular pieces (Fig. 7.66, 79). Also well represented are convex-backed microliths with retouch along part or whole of the opposite edge (Fig. 7.42–55). These lanceolate pieces are mainly of narrow, elongated form and there are relatively few of the short, broad pieces (Fig. 7.55, 57), which are common in many later type collections from the south-west, such as Totty Pot, Cheddar (Hawkes Collection) and Cleeve Hill, Watchet (A.L. Wedlake Collection).

Of the straight-backed microliths, three (Fig. 7.37–9) are relatively broad and no narrow forms under 4mm in width or retouched along both edges are present. This may be significant as such pieces are widespread in later Mesolithic contexts elsewhere in Somerset and are well represented in the collections from Hawkcombe Head, Porlock (Norman 1982) and Hay Wood Cave, Hutton (Everton and Everton 1972). With the exception of a single lunate piece (Fig. 7.83), no other small narrow-blade microlith shapes have been found at Parchey.

In typological terms, this second microlith set is of relatively simple composition and bears an overall resemblance to later Mesolithic assemblages belonging to Jacobi's southern English grouping (Jacobi and Tebbutt 1981). These are characterised by the dominance of convex-backed and/or lanceolate microliths over obliquely backed and straight-backed pieces; these latter forms, if present, usually occurring in relatively small numbers. Scalene pieces are normally represented and variations in the relative proportions of these may, at least in part, be time-related. Other small narrow-blade shapes such as four-sided pieces and narrow micro-tranchets are normally either absent or present as minor elements. Currently, the earliest dated example of an excavated assemblage belonging to this grouping is Culverwell on the Isle of Portland in Dorset (Palmer 1976). This assemblage, which contains a high proportion of scalene pieces, has uncalibrated radiocarbon dates of 5151bc ± 97 (BM 960) and 5200bc ± 135 (BM 473).

The sorting of the Area A microliths into the sets described above was based on a suspicion that they could derive from separate assemblages rather than form part of the same industry. However, the possibility that the collection might represent a single typologically diverse assemblage must now be addressed.

Across the south-east of England, many surface sites have produced collections containing hollow-based points in addition to a wide range of other microlith shapes. Of these, the collection

from Warnham Lodge near Horsham appears to provide a good overall parallel for the Parchey material (Clark 1934; Jacobi 1979). A few published excavations, including Farnham in Surrey, have also yielded typologically 'mixed' groups of microliths (Clark and Rankine 1939). In his report on the latter site, Clark proposed that a distinct Horsham Culture, geographically confined to the Weald, could be identified by a combination of core axes with a diverse array of microlith shapes, including hollow-based points and small later type pieces such as scalene triangles. For many years, this interpretation was widely accepted although, by the 1970s, doubts were emerging regarding the true status of this 'culture' (Mellars 1974, 90). In 1987, Ellaby tentatively speculated that such complex microlith groups might, in reality, be mixtures or 'palimpsests' containing artefacts from separate episodes of occupation (Ellaby 1987). Most recently, an examination by Roger Jacobi of the microliths from Farnham housed in the British Museum has confirmed that the collection includes shapes which occur elsewhere in dated assemblages that are widely separated in time (pers. comm. R. Jacobi). As far as the present writer is aware, no modern excavation has produced an uncontaminated assemblage which confirms the continued use of hollow-based points beyond the 7th millennium BC, or demonstrates an association between these pieces and scalene or other later microlith shapes.

On the limited evidence currently available, it is clearly not possible to make a definitive assessment of the microlith collection from Area A. Although a single period 'mixed' industry of a type envisaged by Clark may be present, it seems at least as likely that two chronologically distinct assemblage types could be contained within the collection. Of these, one might be considered to resemble a Horsham-type assemblage and the other a later Mesolithic assemblage of a type known to exist by the last quarter of the 6th millennium BC. Whilst on current dating evidence one might expect a Horsham-type component to precede the later material, the actual time span involved need not necessarily be great and it would seem quite feasible that the entire collection could belong within a late 7th to early 5th millennium BC time frame.

It may also be significant that both sets of microliths are composed of similar types and relative proportions of flint and chert, most of which has probably been imported from sources located some distance from Parchey. Although this might be seen as suggesting that both could form part of the same assemblage, it could equally well support a hypothesis that the Horsham-type and the later type components were made at different times by groups possessing similar raw material procurement strategies. Thus such groups could have exploited geographically similar annual territories or maintained comparable systems of inter-group contact and exchange. Furthermore, if the potentially limited time frame is taken into account, it might seem reasonable to suggest that these groups could represent different generations of the same family unit. In such a hypothesis, one might be tempted to envisage a series of occupation episodes spread over a period of time; during which an assemblage of essentially Horsham type microliths was replaced, either abruptly or more gradually, by one dominated by later Mesolithic shapes. This latter scenario might well present problems for the interpretation of material obtained in the future through excavation. Indeed, unless discrete clusters of microliths could be identified, it might prove difficult to distinguish a chronologically mixed group from a single period 'mixed' assemblage.

Microliths from Areas B and C

Two obliquely-backed microliths (Fig. 7.84–5) and two unclassified fragments (Fig. 7.86–7) have been found within Area B. Area C has produced a further obliquely backed piece (Fig. 7.88) and three broad obliquely retouched fragments (Fig. 7.89–91). Absent from both these areas is any sign of the hollow-based or later type microliths which dominate the collection from Area A. As so few microliths were found in these artefact scatters, little can usefully be said regarding typology, except to note that all eight either are, or could be, of obliquely backed type. However, as a group, they appear markedly larger than the obliquely backed

pieces from Area A, suggesting that they might represent different, possibly earlier, episodes of occupation.

2 Convex scrapers

Of the 58 examples believed to be of Mesolithic date, some 30% are very small with a retouched edge of 15mm or less in length. The main forms present are shown in Table 3 and illustrated on Figure 8 (1–15).

Table 3 Occurrence of convex scrapers

Position of retouched edge	*Total*	*Figure 8 number*
End of flake/blade	32	1–5
Side of flake	4	6
End and one side of flake/blade	8	7–9
End and both sides of flake/blade	4	10–12
Both ends of flake	2	13
Round (retouch on 80% of periphery)	4	14, 15
Broken	4	

Simple end scrapers on flakes rather than blades are the dominant type present and these often bear a minimal amount of retouch. Although most have convex working edges, a few pieces are square-ended with a more or less straight, steeply retouched edge. Of the combined end and side scrapers, several have both concave and convex retouched edges and were probably multi-functional.

The small group of retouched pieces from Area B comprises three end and two end and side scrapers (Fig. 8.2, 4, 8), all of which can be closely matched with pieces in the early Mesolithic type collection from Greylake. There is also a single end scraper from Area C.

3 Burins

These appear to be rare and the only convincing examples are two small angle burins, one of which is double-ended (Fig. 8.16)

4 Denticulated pieces

These are characterised by coarse retouch producing an irregular toothed working edge (Fig. 8.17–20). They range in form from flakes with three or more notches along part of one edge to pieces resembling poorly made scrapers. In three cases, a denticulated edge is combined with a steeply retouched scraper-like edge (Fig. 8.17).

5 Pieces with steep retouch along one edge

Included in this category (Fig. 8. 21–5) are five flakes with concave retouched edges (Fig. 8.21), four with more or less straight edges and two with angled edges (Fig. 8.22, 23). Also present are two small backed blades (Fig. 8.24) and a large, partially backed blade with evidence of heavy wear along its unretouched edge (Fig. 8.25). This latter piece came from Area C.

6 Pieces with steep retouch along two parallel edges

Three broken blades have been placed in this category (Fig. 8.26)

7 Pieces with multiple, steeply retouched edges

Most of these are small, neatly made and possess three or more distinct edges formed by steep retouch (Fig. 8.27–39). Of the 26 pieces included here, 17 have varying lengths of steep retouch producing several possible working edges. There is normally a well defined angle where these

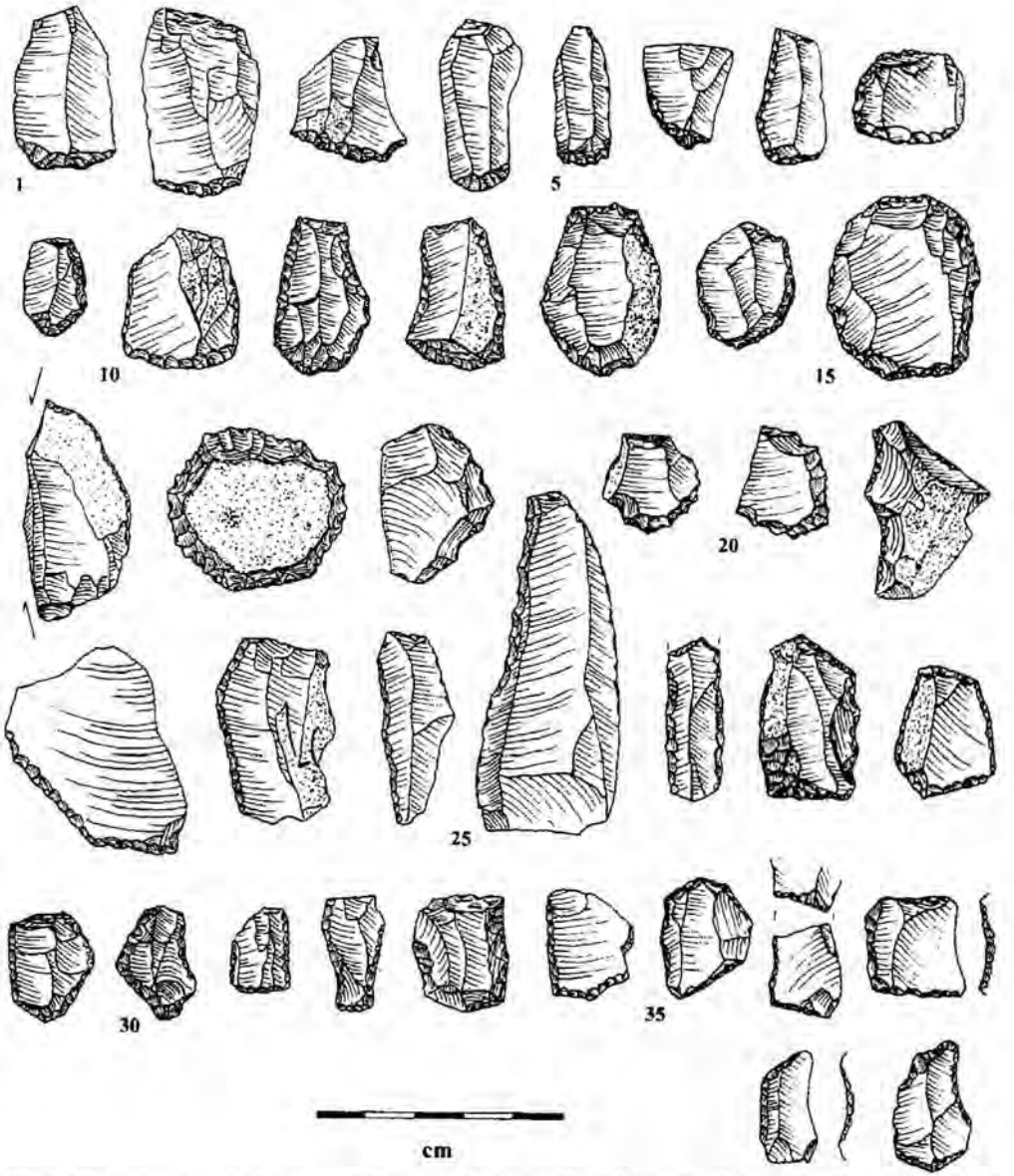

Fig. 8 Mesolithic retouched pieces. 1–15 scrapers; 16 burin; 17–20 denticulated pieces; 21–5 pieces retouched along one edge; 26 piece retouched along both edges; 27–39 pieces with multiple retouched edges

edges converge and, in some cases, sharp points which may have been of functional significance are present. A further nine pieces have steep retouch which could be interpreted as backing for a straight or concave working edge. Of these, four are small, obliquely truncated flakes with concave retouch along one edge (Fig. 8.38, 39)

8 Pieces with retouch converging to a point

a) Thick pointed pieces. Six flakes have thick triangular sectioned tips and could be interpreted as awls or borers (Fig. 9.1–3).

b) Thin pointed pieces. Nine flakes have narrow retouched points and could be interpreted as light awls or piercers (Fig. 9.4–8). Four are very small and one has been formed at the distal end of a retouched bladelet (Fig. 9.7).

c) Broad pointed pieces. Of the 14 pieces included here (Fig. 9.9–12), most are made on thin flakes and the points formed, if intended to be functional, do not appear capable of sustained use on a hard material. Four examples have additional areas of retouch, suggesting that they may have been multi-functional.

Also included under this heading are three narrow pieces which, although broken, have steeply retouched edges which may have converged towards a triangular sectioned point (Fig. 9.13).

9 Nosed pieces

Two thick flakes have steep retouch converging to form a rounded point or 'nose' (Fig. 9.14).

10 Truncated pieces

Eight small bladelets have one end truncated by steep retouch; in six cases obliquely and in the other two transversely (Fig. 9.15, 16).

11 Notched pieces

Three flakes have two adjacent notches and three have single notches (not illustrated). Several pieces included in other categories also possess single notches (eg. Fig. 9.20).

12 Edge-trimmed pieces

Three bladelets have one edge apparently strengthened or resharpened with fine, shallow retouch (Fig. 9.17).

13 Retouched pieces with abraded ends

These pieces could be interpreted as punches or 'fabricators' (Fig. 9.18, 19). Figure 9.18 shows a thick, steeply retouched blade with its bulbar end rounded by heavy wear. This piece was found in Area C. The second example (Fig. 9.19) combines a convex, scraper-like edge with a heavily worn and rounded bulbar end.

14 Indeterminate retouched pieces

Eleven flakes have rather coarse, irregular retouch along one or both edges and a further 26 pieces bear short lengths of secondary working (Fig. 9.20–2).

15 Unclassified broken retouched pieces

These are too fragmentary to allow them to be placed in any of the above categories (not illustrated).

16 Pieces with worn edges/ends

A broken blade (Fig. 9.23) with coarse retouch at its bulbar end has both edges rounded by abrasion to a width of 1.5mm. Three unretouched bladelets (Fig. 9.24, 25) are similarly abraded at one or both ends and a further eight flakes (Fig. 9.26) are heavily worn along one or more edges. In all cases, the wear may be the result of grinding against an abrasive surface such as a piece of sandstone.

17 Other utilised pieces

Two small flakes with shallow, invasive spalling on both dorsal and bulbar surfaces may have been used as wedges for splitting bone (Fig. 9.27). Two small cores have battered surfaces suggesting that they were used as hammerstones.

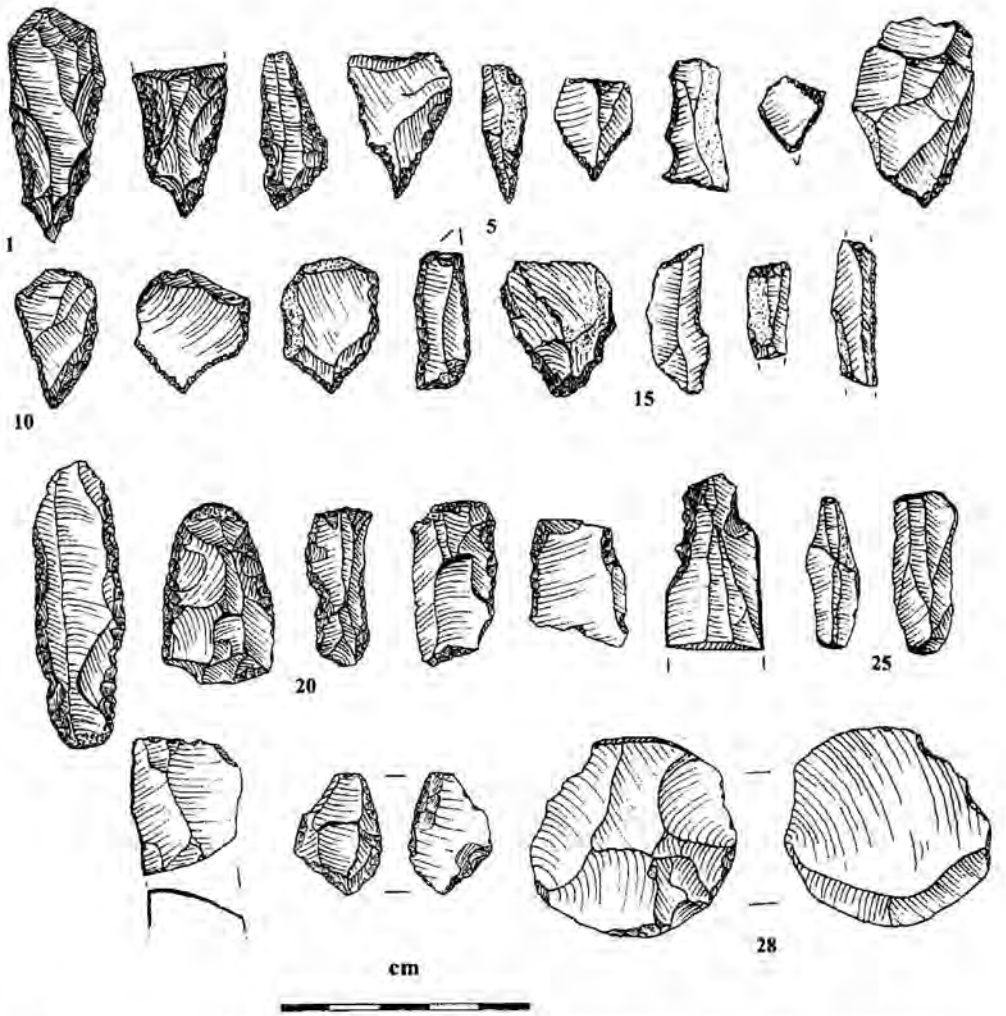

Fig. 9 Mesolithic retouched pieces. 1–13 pieces with retouch converging to a point; 14 nosed piece; 15–16 truncated pieces; 17 edge-trimmed bladelet; 18–19 retouched pieces with abraded ends; 20–2 indeterminate retouched pieces; 23–6 pieces with worn edges/ends; 27 flake with shallow, invasive spalling; 28 tranchet adze-sharpening flake

18 Tranchet adze-sharpening flake

Found to the west of Area A, this piece is made of high quality flint and is heavily patinated (Fig. 9.28). Apart from two flakes from Area B which might derive from the reworking of a broken tranchet adze, there is no other evidence for the use of this tool type at Parchey.

THE POST-MESOLITHIC GROUP

Approximately 25% by weight of the total Parchey collection is thought to be of post-Mesolithic date. On the evidence of the diagnostic pieces present, most of the artefacts appear to belong within a broad time frame spanning the earlier Neolithic to the middle Bronze Age.

Lithic raw materials

Over 80% of these artefacts are in good quality flint, which ranges in colour from black and dark grey to shades of mottled orange and yellowish brown. With few exceptions, the patches of cortex which remain on cores and outer flakes are unabraded, indicating that the flint has been obtained direct from the chalklands of Wessex or beyond rather than from secondary sources such as river gravels. A small amount of dark grey to black mottled flint has been visually matched with reference samples obtained from the Beer Head chalk outcrop in Devon.

Apart from some poorer quality flint, the only other raw materials occurring in a definite post-Mesolithic context are represented by a single pressure-flaked scraper in Greensand chert and a few flakes of Portland type chert, including a blade with coarsely serrated edges (Fig. 10.20).

Patination

In marked contrast to the Mesolithic group, only three diagnostic Neolithic or later retouched pieces show any evidence of patination. As both Mesolithic and post-Mesolithic artefacts made from a wide range of flint types were interspersed within the area of the grid survey (Fig. 6), it seems probable that this difference in condition is largely time-related.

Unretouched flakes and debitage

A range of flake shapes is represented, from elongated pieces which would not be out of place in an earlier Neolithic context to broad, squatter forms suggestive of a later Neolithic or Bronze Age industry.

Approximately 750 unretouched flakes and fragments and 28 cores are believed to be of post-Mesolithic date. Although twelve of the cores are neat, multi-platformed pieces in high grade flint, an equal number are rather crude, amorphous objects in material of indifferent quality. Both the relatively low proportion of debitage present and the small number of cores in good quality flint suggest that some of the retouched and/or utilised pieces may have reached the site as pre-selected flakes or as ready-made implements.

Retouched and utilised pieces

A total of 175 pieces has been classified as shown on Table 4 and Figure 10.

Table 4 Occurrence of post-Mesolithic artefacts

Category		*total*	*Figure 10 numbers*
1	Scrapers	73	1-9
2	Retouched knives	7	13, 16–18
3	Awls/piercers	9	22, 23
4	?sickle blade fragments	2	14, 15
5	Fabricator	1	
6	Leaf arrowheads	2	10, 11
7	Laurel leaf point	1	12
8	Flakes with serrated edges	6	20, 21
9	Flakes with light retouch or heavy wear	26	19
10	Polished flint axe flakes	6	
11	Flakes with battered edges	7	24
12	Unclassified retouched pieces of probable Neolithic or Bronze Age date	20	
13	Unpatinated retouched pieces of uncertain date	15	

The most striking feature of this collection is the large number of scrapers present. Although a few are coarsely retouched, irregular pieces, the majority are well made and clearly defined.

These range in form from thick flakes with steep, carefully executed retouch, of possible earlier Neolithic date, to small, round pressure-flaked pieces of late Neolithic or Bronze Age type. A selection is illustrated (Fig. 10.1–9). Although clearly a mixed group, most are thought more likely to belong in a later Neolithic or Bronze Age than an earlier Neolithic context.

Amongst the artefacts thought likely to be of earlier Neolithic date, the two leaf arrowheads (Fig. 10.10, 11) and the laurel-leaf point from the edge of field P.2 (Fig. 10.12) represent the only evidence for post-Mesolithic hunting activity in the Parchey area. Apparently absent are the transverse and barbed and tanged arrowheads which might be expected in a collection containing much typologically later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age material. Other artefacts which might belong in an earlier Neolithic context include six flakes struck from polished flint axes and, more tentatively, three retouched flake knives (Fig. 10.13), a probable fragment of a bifacial sickle blade (Fig. 10.14), and a bifacially flaked piece with heavy wear along one edge (Fig. 10.16).

In addition to a number of small, pressure-flaked scrapers, retouched pieces indicative of a late Neolithic or early Bronze Age industry include a small plano-convex knife (Fig. 10.17) and three other pressure-flaked pieces which appear to have been intended as knives (Fig. 10.18).

Amongst those artefacts which can only be assigned to a broad Neolithic to Bronze Age time frame, flakes bearing clear signs of wear or, in some cases, light retouch along one or both edges are the most numerous (Fig. 10.19). Also present are several flakes and blades with coarsely serrated edges (Fig. 10.20, 21), pieces with retouched points which could be interpreted as awls or piercers (Fig. 10.22–3), and a few flakes with battered edges, at least three of which may have been produced by the ecaille technique or subjected to sustained use as wedges (Fig. 10.24). Of the 35 retouched pieces in unpatinated flint which have not been classified, at least 20 are likely to be of post-Mesolithic date.

OTHER FINDS

Pottery

Of the 18 sherds in the collection, the majority was found in the south-eastern corner of the field, within an area measuring some 500m^2 (Fig. 4). Most were in a friable condition and could not have been rotated by the plough for any length of time. Twelve sherds are composed of rather soft, grog-tempered fabrics and appear to represent at least two thick-walled vessels. They have been examined by Mrs Henrietta Quinnell, who considered that all were of probable early to middle Bronze Age date and could most readily be compared with material from excavations at Brean Down (Bell 1990) and Norton Fitzwarren hillfort (Woodward 1989).

Of particular interest is a wall sherd of dark grey, grog-tempered fabric which bears irregularly spaced incised lines (Fig. 11). Locally, this style of decoration can be closely paralleled within a middle Bronze Age Trevisker-related assemblage from Norton Fitzwarren (Woodward 1989, fig. 18.20) and a large assemblage of late Trevisker-related pottery from Unit 5b at Brean Down (Bell 1990, fig. 90). At the latter site, this pottery style is associated with a series of uncalibrated radiocarbon dates ranging from 1470 bc ± 100 (HAR-7016) to 980 bc ± 100 (HAR-7017).

In addition to the above, six small, abraded sherds in a variety of finer fabrics cannot be dated, although it is possible that they could all belong in a late prehistoric context (pers. comm. S. Minnitt).

Axe-Hammer Fragment

In 1976, the blade end of a perforated axe-hammer of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age type was found along the edge of field P.1 some 50m north of Area A (Fig. 4). An examination of the

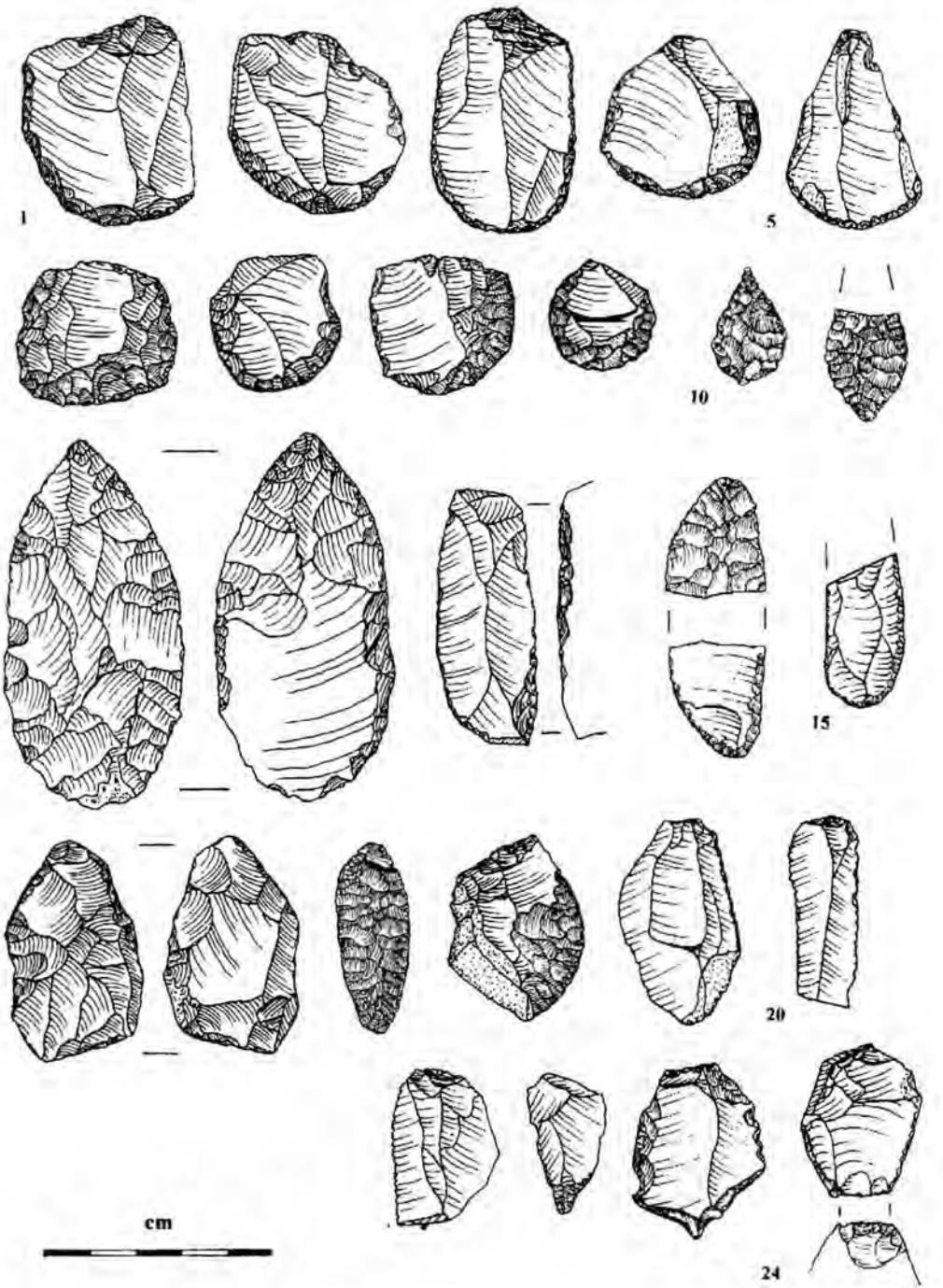

Fig. 10 Post-Mesolithic retouched pieces

artefact by R.V. Davis of the Implement Petrology Survey of the South-West revealed that it had been made of altered amphibolite of probable Cornish origin. Full details and an illustration have already been published (Minnitt 1976).

UNDATABLE ARTEFACTS FROM AREA A

1 A symmetrical oval pebble of a hard, medium-grained Devonian sandstone, 68mm in length, has one end battered and the other abraded, suggesting that it may have served as both a rubber and a hammer stone. It was found within Area A.
2 A small piece of very hard, fine grained sandstone of unknown source (pers. comm. D. Parsons) has been coarsely flaked along its fractured edges. Dark grey in colour, its unflaked surfaces are very smooth and bear numerous fine cut or scratch marks.
3 Of a small number of unidentifiable bone fragments in soft, friable condition, the largest, measuring 16mm in length, appears to have been burnished and bears numerous short, parallel striations on its outer surface.

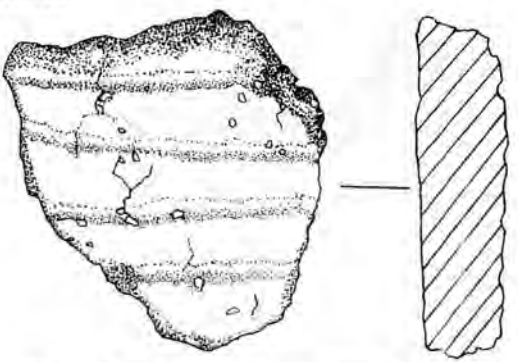

Fig. 11 Decorated sherd from Area A; scale 1:2

DISCUSSION

When considering the archaeological evidence obtained from Parchey, it is important to recognise that there are problems inherent in working with any collection obtained through fieldwalking, no matter how thoroughly this has been carried out. Of these, the ability of both ploughing and soil creep to create misleading artefact scatters can easily be under-estimated. At Parchey, some artefact dispersal has certainly taken place and it is probable that the actual occupation areas are more limited in extent than the scatters recorded on Figures 3 and 4 might imply. However the gentle slope of the land surface, combined with the low incidence of plough damage visible on the artefacts, suggests that the overall distribution pattern is likely to be a reasonable guide to the location of the underlying archaeology.

Although every effort was made to obtain a complete sample, work elsewhere has shown that very small artefacts such as microliths are likely to be missed during surface collection (O'Malley and Jacobi 1978). At Parchey, it is probable that small later-type microliths are under-represented, although the results of the 1980 grid survey suggest that any statistical distortion may not be great.

A further constraint on working with unstratified collections is the lack of any reliable means of gauging the complexity of the site. The use of such parameters as typology, raw material types and spatial distribution can, at best, provide only a vague indication of the possible number of occupation phases. Similarly, any estimate of chronology must rely entirely on artefact typology, which can only provide a broad sequence and may contain many uncertainties. Also

problematic is the use of stone tool types to infer specific economic activities. At Parchey, the wide variety of retouched pieces in the collection can only serve as a guide to the possible range of tasks undertaken on and around the site.

Whilst paying due regard to the limitations outlined above, it remains possible to make some general observations regarding Mesolithic activity at Parchey. As shown on Figure 3, the distribution of artefacts within field P.1 suggests at least three separate areas of occupation. The evidence from the diffuse artefact scatters in Areas B and C is inconclusive, but it is possible that some occupation could have taken place here during the early part of the period, perhaps before 7000 BC. However in the case of Area A, both the extent and density of the artefact scatter indicate a more substantial amount of activity. Whilst the presence of hollow-based points suggests that occupation may have commenced during the 7th millennium BC, most diagnostic pieces are indicative of a somewhat later date. Although it is not possible to assess the overall time scale involved, there are no *typological* reasons why the bulk of the Mesolithic occupation in this area could not date to between about 7000 BC and 5000 BC.

The number of microliths recovered from Parchey clearly indicates that the preparation of hunting equipment was taking place on the site. However, the proportion and variety of other tool types present suggest rather more than an accumulation of artefacts from a number of brief hunting episodes; such assemblages tending to be dominated by microliths with only a limited range of other retouched pieces. Whether the collection could derive from seasonal base camps occupied for periods of several weeks or longer, or more specialised extraction camps, where a range of resource-related tasks was carried out, cannot be assessed on the available evidence. However, the number of scrapers and other small retouched pieces suggests that many of the tasks carried out could have been of an intricate nature; perhaps associated with the preparation and maintenance of equipment or clothing, or the production of small artefacts. Such activities may have been specifically related to resources available within easy reach of the site.

From the point of view of assessing the likely availability of resources, it is unfortunate that so much of the early Holocene landscape is now concealed beneath more recent deposits. However, it is clear that a site catchment with a radius of some 10km would have encompassed a varied topography, ranging in altitude from the floor of the lower Parrett valley (*c.* – 20m OD) to the crest of the Poldens (*c.* + 80m OD). Between these lay a number of small stream valleys, low foothills and the broad interfluves capped with Burtle sand which today form the 'islands' of Chedzoy, Bradney and Sowy (Westonzoyland). Such a landscape is likely to have contained a wide range of both woodland and wetland resources, especially along interfaces between adjacent ecological zones; for example, where marshy valley floors were bordered by forest.

By the first quarter of the 7th millennium BC, the early Holocene rise in world sea level had begun to influence the drainage of the lower Parrett, resulting in the encroachment of freshwater and brackish marsh eastwards along the valley floor (Kidson and Heyworth 1976). Within a few centuries, a fully estuarine regime had developed at the seaward end of the valley and, by about 5500 BC, the accumulation of intertidal silts and clays had given rise to extensive areas of mudflats and salt marsh. Along the valley sides, the forest edge would have slowly retreated upslope in response to the rising water table, forming a major interface where it bordered the newly created wetland areas.

These large scale environmental changes must have had a profound impact on the distribution and variety of resources available to those Mesolithic groups present in the area. At Parchey, the creation of new tracts of forest interface, freshwater wetland and an intertidal zone within the site catchment may have produced an optimum level of those resources sought by the hunter-gatherers. Indeed it may be significant that, on the evidence of microlith typology, most if not all of the Mesolithic activity could have taken place during this period of rapid ecological change.

At present, there is only limited evidence for Mesolithic activity across most of central and eastern Somerset; a situation probably due largely to a lack of amateur flint collecting in these

parts of the county. Excluding Parchey, the only large artefact collections from the Levels come from the Shapwick Burtle 'island' and Greylake No. 1 sand pit, Middlezoy, and are largely the result of fieldwork by H.S.L. Dewar and A. Bulleid (Clark 1933; Wainwright 1960). However, surface collecting by the Somerset Levels Project between 1969 and 1987 has produced small quantities of debitage and occasional microliths from several locations in the Brue valley, notably around Shapwick and Edington Burtle (Coles 1989, 34–61). On the western fringe of the Levels, the only known collection was made in 1973 during the construction of the M5 motorway at Greenway Farm, North Petherton (Norman 1975).

Within the Somerset Levels, Parchey is currently the only site to have produced substantial evidence for later Mesolithic activity, although some artefacts from the Shapwick Burtle 'island', including two lanceolate microliths, could also be of this date. There are, however, more widespread signs of a Horsham influence in single finds of symmetrical hollow-based points from Field B17 at Edington Burtle (Fig. 12.1; Coles 1972, 18; Brown 1986, 20), the Shapwick Burtle 'island' (Fig. 12.2; Jacobi 1979, 73) and a possible narrow example from Brickyard Farm, Shapwick (Fig. 12.3; Coles 1989, 37). Apart from the above, the majority of microliths from the Levels are simple, obliquely backed pieces which could all date to the 8th or 7th millennia BC. Due to this paucity of evidence for later Mesolithic activity, it is not possible to compare the bulk of the Parchey collection to potentially related material from within the Levels. Thus it is difficult to assess whether Parchey could have been one of a number of sites in the area visited by the same Mesolithic groups, or estimate the distances such populations might have travelled during the course of a single year.

Fig. 12 Single finds of hollow-based points from Somerset; scale 1:2

On the evidence provided by the flint and chert types used at Parchey, there is little to indicate contact with contemporary groups in the Exmoor/Quantock region or in the Mendip area to the north. Although much of the Greensand chert could originate from the Blackdown Hills to the south-west, the bulk of the raw material used is more likely to have been brought into the area from the east or south-east. Whilst this may have resulted from inter-group exchange, it could equally well suggest that the annual territories of the groups which visited Parchey included the Greensand scarp and chalklands along the borders of Somerset, Wiltshire and Dorset.

The possibility of a link between Parchey and the western fringes of the Wessex chalk is further supported by the fairly recent discovery of sites producing hollow-based points in south-west Wiltshire and north Dorset. On the chalk uplands of Cranborne Chase, some 65km south-east of Parchey, five separate findspots have produced examples of this microlith type (Arnold *et al.*1988). Of particular interest are collections from Handley Common Site 5 and Stonedown, both of which are located on patches of 'clay with flints' at about 115 and 170m OD respectively. At the former site, a group of 16 microliths contains five hollow-based points in addition to obliquely backed, rhomboidal and scalene pieces. The collection of 18 complete and broken microliths from Stonedown contains at least seven hollow-based points and a bitruncated piece of rhomboidal form. Amongst the fragments are two probable obliquely backed pieces and a second rhomboid (M. Green Collection; Green 2000, fig. 10). Although both collections also contain lanceolate and scalene pieces, they provide a clear indication that a microlith technology with a strong hollow-based component is represented in this area.

Finds of hollow-based points have also been made along the southern edge of the Vale of Wardour at Cann near Shaftesbury and at Rowberry, north west of Berwick St John. At the

latter location, a large artefact scatter has produced nearly 200 classified microliths of various types including ten hollow-based points (Arnold *et al.* 1988; M. Green, unpub. list dated 1995). In the Nadder valley, a single hollow-based point was found at Teffont (Gingell and Harding 1983, fig. 5.13) and on the Somerset/Dorset border south-east of Wincanton, a small mixed collection from Kington Magna (KM1) contains another (Ross 1987, fig. 5.4).

Elsewhere in the south-west, the evidence for the use of Horsham-type microliths is very limited and difficult to interpret. In the north of Somerset, excavations in 1955 and 1997 at Birdcombe Court, Wraxall, some 8km west of Bristol, produced mixed microlith collections totalling about 90 classifiable pieces (Sykes and Whittle 1960; Gardiner 1998). Included amongst these are a few short obliquely backed pieces, broad isosceles triangles, a rhomboid and the lower half of a small hollow-based piece (Fig. 12.4). Further south in the Mendip region, two microliths in the Wells Museum Cooper collection are of some interest. From Kings Down, some 5km east of Cheddar, a piece with an elongated concave base (Fig. 12.5) resembles a hollow-based point belonging to Clark's Type10 (Clark 1932), a shape normally restricted to the Weald of Surrey and Sussex. However, very similar pieces have been classified as tanged points at sites such as St Catherine's Hill, Guildford, where they occur in the same collection as a number of symmetrical hollow-based points (Gabel 1976, figs. 3, 4). Unfortunately, the second piece (Fig. 12.6), which is a well defined hollow-based point, has no precise provenance and is simply labelled as coming from the Mendips.

Of the seven published examples from Devon, all of which are currently housed in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, only a single piece from Aller Farm, Stockland, some 10km north-east of Honiton, is of well defined asymmetric form (Berridge 1985, fig. 4.106). It forms part of a small microlith group which also contains obliquely backed pieces, elongated lanceolate pieces and a broken tanged point. Reynier included this collection in his list of Horsham-type assemblages, but made no further comment on the site (Reynier 1998, 177–8). Also in Stockland parish, a collection of obliquely backed and other early type microliths from Crandon's Cross contains two symmetrical hollow-based pieces (Berridge 1985, fig. 3.74–5), the smaller of which is, in the writer's opinion, a clear example of Clark's Type 3 (Clark 1932, 105). Reynier has suggested that this site might indicate some form of contact between indigenous populations and contemporary groups using a Horsham technology in south eastern England (Reynier 1998, 178). Elsewhere in Devon, the claimed hollow-based points from Yelland (Rogers 1946, fig. 3) and East Week (Greig and Rankine 1953, fig. 1.1) are not, in the writer's opinion, entirely convincing and a piece from Pool Anthony near Tiverton (Berridge 1985, 11) is not a microlith. A further possible example from the Tiverton area, found during unpublished work by a school archaeological society and mentioned by Palmer (1977, 167) cannot be traced and must remain unverified.

Currently, the Wiltshire/Dorset borderlands and the central Somerset Levels appear to be the only areas west of the Hampshire Basin to have yielded more than occasional examples of hollow-based points. Both contain sites which suggest the presence of groups making regular use of Horsham-type microliths and, of these, Parchey is the most westerly location in England to have produced asymmetrical hollow-based points in quantity. This latter site has also produced other microlith shapes which cannot, as a group, be readily assigned to an early Mesolithic assemblage resembling Greylake or to a later assemblage of a type normally encountered in the region.

It has for long been widely thought that the occurrence of hollow-based points outside of the Weald may reflect some form of cultural borrowing or exchange of ideas rather than indicate significant population movement (Reynier 1998, 178). Whilst this might adequately explain the isolated examples in Devon and north Somerset, such a hypothesis becomes more difficult to sustain when applied to the accumulating evidence from Cranborne Chase and the Somerset Levels. In these areas, the presence of collections with a significant percentage of hollow-based and other possible Horsham-type microliths could indicate that groups using some form of Horsham microlith technology penetrated the eastern part of the peninsula; a possibility

noted by Roger Jacobi in 1979. As Cranborne Chase lies mid-way between the Somerset Levels and the western edge of the Weald, it would further seem feasible that such populations could have belonged to a cultural grouping which extended from central southern England at least as far west as central Somerset and east Devon. However, the evidence currently available is very tentative and it is likely that the chronology and cultural affinities of those south-western assemblages which contain hollow-based points will only be resolved by future excavation. In particular, the question of whether the region was exploited during the 7th millennium BC by groups using Horsham-type microlith assemblages *sensu stricto*, or whether the Horsham-type material belongs in different, possibly later contexts, must await further investigation.

In terms of its value to the study of the Mesolithic in the south-west, the greatest contribution of the Parchey collection lies in the issues raised by the number of hollow-based points and other potential Horsham-type microliths which are present. Although it has been possible to discuss these in fairly general terms and to review the evidence from elsewhere in the region, it is clear that surface collections alone can provide few if any answers. Only discrete assemblages and dating evidence obtained through excavation can clarify the situation and allow this Horsham-type material to be seen in its true context. When this has been achieved, it will hopefully be possible to more clearly assess the impact of this essentially south-eastern technology on the development of the later Mesolithic in the south-west peninsula.

The collection of Neolithic and Bronze Age artefacts from Parchey is undoubtedly a mixture and may represent episodes of occupation spread over a long period of time. Although there is some limited evidence for activity during the earlier part of the Neolithic, the bulk of the material appears more likely to belong in a somewhat later context; most of the diagnostic pieces being of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age types. However, some of the more crudely worked artefacts, particularly cores, scrapers and retouched flakes, could belong in a later Bronze Age context and might be contemporary with the sherds of Trevisker-related pottery.

Unlike the earlier Mesolithic material, Neolithic and Bronze Age type artefacts are widely distributed across field P.1 and occur as molehill finds elsewhere in the area. This may indicate a wider use of the sand 'island' than occurred during the Mesolithic and could perhaps be related to the distribution of cultivation plots or pasturing areas on the dry land. Although the variety of retouched tool types indicates that a range of activities was taking place on the site, the number of well made scrapers suggests that some specific process, possibly the preparation of animal skins, may have been important. However, the rarity of arrowheads may imply that hunting did not form a significant part of the economy, except perhaps during the earlier Neolithic. Indications that some of the retouched and utilised pieces may have been brought to the site in a prepared form might suggest that some of the occupation was of a transitory, possibly seasonal nature rather than longer term settlement.

In terms of the potential of the site for future work, the occurrence of a polished bone fragment and Bronze Age potsherds indicates that conditions for the preservation of these materials beneath the plough zone, especially in features such as pits or gullies, is likely to be good. Although, due to the absence of drainage ditches, no archaeological evidence was located in the peat bordering the southern edge of the sand batch, this is regarded as an area of high research potential. The main artefact scatter in field P.1 lies within 30m of the point where the sand dips gently beneath the peat and it is possible that extensive features could exist along this interface. The likelihood that archaeological material is present here is enhanced by the earlier discovery of over a dozen prehistoric wooden structures within about 600m of the site. At least two of those located at Sutton Hams (Norman and Clements 1979) and at Mount Close Batch (unpublished archive) appear to be orientated in the direction of Parchey.

In the Brue valley, artefacts obtained through fieldwork around the edges of the dry land 'islands' suggest that much archaeological evidence is likely to exist adjacent to known or suspected trackway terminal areas (Coles 1972, 18; 1989, 34–61). Due to an absence of ploughed ground, the majority of these are thinly distributed finds from molehills and other chance

disturbances of pasture land. As can be demonstrated at Parchey, where the pasture areas in fields P.1 and P.2 have produced only a few artefacts, such evidence should not be taken as indicating a low density of archaeological material in the plough soil. Indeed, fieldwork along the western edge of P.2, which adjoins the dense scatter (Area A) in P.1, suggests that such isolated finds could indicate areas which contain a considerable quantity of occupation debris. Because of this, it seems probable that Parchey is only one of many fen-edge locations in the Somerset Levels which contain substantial evidence for Neolithic and Bronze Age activity. It certainly provides a good example of how, in a predominantly pastoral region, the recorded distribution of artefacts can be affected by the presence of small areas of arable land.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has presented a detailed assessment of a large, chronologically mixed artefact collection from the Somerset Levels. Although unstratified and thus datable only in general terms, it is hoped that this material has raised issues which can be more thoroughly investigated in the future. It is also hoped to have highlighted the archaeological potential of other sites located along the margins of the Burtle Beds and other dry land 'islands' in the Levels. At Parchey, it is clear that episodes of human activity spread over a long period of time took place on the same small area of the sand batch. This seems to suggest that the site may have had some specific attraction, either in terms of its location or resources, or perhaps for less tangible reasons. Indeed, it might seem reasonable to interpret such persistence of interest as evidence for a preferred location, although there is currently nothing to suggest that this situation continued beyond the middle to late Bronze Age. However, there seems every reason to suspect that Parchey may be typical of 'island' settlement elsewhere in the Levels, and the writer is confident that many comparable sites await identification in the future.

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