

I. INTRODUCTORY

IN the western area of West Surrey, where the sinuous county boundary interlocks with that of Hampshire, there is to be found a very remarkable prehistoric region. It centres round Farnham where, along the Wey Valley, gravel terraces have yielded abundant flint implements of the Pleistocene Age and remains of animals which were contemporary with the interglacial periods. There also, based on a spring, a short length from the Wey river, was, in mesolithic times, an important settlement where nomads sought shelter in pit-dwellings, water from the spring, flint from the nearby chalk outcrop, and food from the heathlands to the south. At Badshot, near Farnham, there was a neolithic long barrow, where pottery of the earliest type was discovered during an excavation in 1936. Many neolithic flint tools, such as leaf-shaped arrow heads and polished axes, have been found in the district around. Along the ridge, south of the Wey and overlooking the town of Farnham, were the burial grounds, the urn-fields, of the Bronze Age folk who cultivated the soil and grew corn in the valley. On the hill-tops, as at Crooksbury and Caesar's Camp, are the ditched strongholds of the Iron Age people, who persisted in their pastoral occupations in the district until after the arrival of the Roman army.

Thus this Farnham region preserves evidence of the complete sequence of British prehistory, and it is this sequence, rather than the wealth of any particular period association, that makes the district so remarkable. And, with the exception of the palaeolithic association which Farnham retains in its undisturbed gravel terraces, West Surrey also boasts a similar complete cross-section of the prehistoric successions, and here we find the mesolithic association dominating. This association persists throughout Surrey, and also throughout the Weald, and so a mesolithic survey of the West Surrey greensand becomes, in effect, a type study of the whole Wealden province.

In preparing this fairly comprehensive mesolithic survey of West Surrey, the writer has been influenced by two motives. The first is to record the results of observations, made during many years of field work in the region under discussion, in the hope that they may be of some use in guiding future research. There are still many gaps in our knowledge of the mesolithic occupation. The second motive is to attract the interest of the casual reader of prehistoric literature, and so, maybe, inveigle him into a serious study of an interesting subject—the most fascinating phase of Surrey's varied prehistory.

It should be stressed that all the descriptions and conclusions in this discussion are based directly on the writer's actual field experience, and this is particularly true of the account of the mesolithic flint industry in Part III.

EXPLANATION OF REFERENCES

For the purpose of this survey the geographical reference "West Surrey" includes, from west to east, the Hampshire border overlap to that part of the county demarcated, approximately by the longitude of Betchworth. From north to south it takes in the country lying between the latitudes of Horsell and Blackdown, thus including the Sussex border overlap. This area, which covers some one hundred square miles, contains some of the most delightful corners of our English countryside, and typifies that pleasing variety of heathland, downs, and woodland, which makes Surrey so attractive. And behind all this scenic beauty is a fascinating prehistoric background.

An extensive network of over eighty mesolithic sites spread over this area, makes West Surrey an important region, and it is obvious that this unique mesolithic association is due to the fact that the district, by virtue of its varied geology and topography, offered the nomads important advantages in their strenuous struggle for existence. On the other hand it must be kept in mind that

intensive investigations have been carried out in this region, and the results of these have stressed the importance of its mesolithic association. Possibly, as research spreads to neighbouring areas, it will be found that West Surrey's outstanding mesolithic connection is paralleled, if not surpassed, in the eastern part of the county, or in other districts of the Weald. Throughout the ensuing pages the writer discusses the mesolithic question in terms of his West Surrey experience.

The term "greensand" is used to indicate the sandy tract of the outcrop of the Folkestone Beds of the Lower Greensand; in the main this outcrop coincides with the heathlands of West Surrey, but it must be remembered that much of this area was broken for agricultural uses about a century ago.

THE MESOLITHIC PERIOD IN TIME

The mesolithic occupation of West Surrey can only be dated approximately between vague limits. Broadly, it came between the close of the palaeolithic period, of remote antiquity and glacial association, and the neolithic period which probably opened up in West Surrey half-way through the third millenium B.C. It began after the rigorous climatic conditions of the final glaciation had become sufficiently ameliorated to render human occupation endurable. Also, it seems very probable that it began before the inflow of the North Sea resulted in the separation from the Continent of what is now Britain, and that is generally accepted by climatologists as having been effected c.5000 B.C. Probably the mesolithic people became active in the Weald about 6000 B.C.

We have no data on which an absolute time measurement may be based. There is, however, the significant evidence of the wind-blown sand deposits, which are extensively developed in West Surrey. These deposits are associated with carstone pebbles polished by wind action, to which they were subjected when dry cold conditions prevailed, and a strong wind was blowing in one direction. Mesolithic chipping floors are found in these deposits, and often deep down in them. Thus the deposits appear to have been contemporary with mesolithic activity in the Weald. Further research by geologists and prehistorians may result in the narrowing of the vague limits we now have to accept in placing the mesolithic period in the time sequence. It is certain that association with these deposits must attach some considerable antiquity to it. See Part V, page 31. Then there is the limited evidence of the patination changes of mesolithic flints which have been long exposed; even on sandy soils such flints acquire a greyish-white colour which indicates a lengthy exposure to patinating agents. Finally, the amount of erosion effected by the spring, which is the focus of the Farnham Pit-Dwelling Settlement, indicates that a very long time has elapsed since the pits were first established. This conclusion is supported by the amount of debris, flints and burnt flint in the bed of the stream emerging from the spring. (1)

THE MESOLITHIC PEOPLE

The mesolithic folk were food gatherers, and therefore essentially nomads. They were hunters who relied solely upon the resources of their living space—their hunting grounds. In addition they were ingenious flint workers who had developed a high standard of technique in the fabrication of the implements upon which they relied for their sustenance. Flint was essential to their daily life, and they were very discriminating in the quality of the flint they used. Their implements are distributed over the West Surrey greensand. These tools are the only evidence of the people themselves, and, in fact, practically all we know about their activities is based on the interpretation of these implements of imperishable flint.

(1) Rankine, *A Mesolithic Site at Farnham, S.A.C.*, vol. XLIV (1936).

We know that they dug pits for shelters and that they could produce fire. Every chipping floor shows evidence of hearths, and so, presumably, they were acquainted with cooked food. No pottery has been identified among the relics and no skeletal remains have been preserved.

THE MESOLITHIC INFILTRATION INTO WEST SURREY

We know still less about the circumstances of the mesolithic infiltration than we do about the folk engaged in it, but it would seem that these primitive people drifted, directly or indirectly, into the Weald from the east (2) some time before the insulation of Britain had been effected. Doubtless they were attracted and held by the prolific flint-bearing chalk outcrops they found along the North and South Downs. They roamed the Weald in search of hunting grounds, camping here and there on the greensand tracts, where, today, we find ample evidence of their foragings. Exactly where these people came from we do not know, but obviously, they must have emerged from a flint-bearing countryside. Eventually they left the Weald and their destination is another mystery. (3)

One interesting fact is known in connection with their racial history. When they were on exodus from their homeland another folk movement was afoot. The Maglemosian folk were emerging from the Baltic regions and these people were equipped with the tranchet axe, an implement now well known in West Surrey where over 130 specimens have been recorded from mesolithic sites. The presence of this axe among mesolithic implements is evidence of Maglemosian influence on mesolithic culture and indicates some fusion between the two peoples.

HISTORICAL NOTE

Some brief historical note on mesolithic field work in West Surrey should be recorded. Long before the appearance of Dr. Grahame Clark's *Mesolithic Age in Britain* (1932) which, incidentally, integrated several widespread discoveries of sites in Britain into a coherent narrative, and also established the importance of the mesolithic culture, the pioneer field-workers of West Surrey—Mang'es, Kerry, Alden and Lasham—had already found microliths, and they were puzzled by them. Some of their finds are in the Museum at Guildford.

Before 1880 Blackheath, which eventually proved to be a mesolithic site of great importance, attracted the attention of collectors. Implements found there by General Pitt-Rivers are in the museum named after him in Oxford. In 1884 an (4) account of the site was published by Colonel H. H. Godwin-Austen. Since then much mesolithic material has been collected on Blackheath, but, unfortunately, little has been recorded.

The first attempt at digging a flint site, which eventually proved to be a mesolithic station of importance, was made in 1903 by Mr. Allen Chandler, of Haslemere, on Blackdown, and the finds are now in Haslemere Museum. In 1920 Canon O'Farrell systematically explored, with the spade, a site at Heath Brow, north of Farnham. There the flints were prolific. Unfortunately, neither excavation became the subject of a report, but some finds from the Heath Brow site were described in the *Prehistory of Farnham*.

In 1925 (5) a site which yielded mesolithic material was investigated by Mr. J. Langden-Davies at Cockshott Hollow, Leith Hill. The micro-burin, or basal reject, was recorded here apparently for the first time in the county. About 1926 an investigation of the Snailsynch site (6) at Farnham by Major Wade revealed mesolithic material in a blown-sand deposit, and here the graver was recorded for the first time in Surrey.

(2) See Appendix X.

(3) A mesolithic - neolithic continuity has been suggested by some authorities.

(4) *Journ. Anthr. Inst.*, vol. XIII, 1884, 137-143

(5) *Ant. Journ.*, 1926, 82-3. *S.A.C.*, vol. XXXVII, 1926, 89.

(6) *S.A.G.*, 1926, 78.

The first serious contribution to Surrey mesolithic literature was made by Dr. Wilfrid Hooper, of Redhill, in 1933 (7). He followed up a line of occupation sites across the country from west to east and over the border into Kent.

Then came the discovery of the important Pit-Dwelling Village at Farnham and the two excavations of 1937 and 1938, under the direction of Dr. Grahame Clark, brought to light a complete assembly of mesolithic flint work for the first time in this country. Thus the unique importance of West Surrey as a mesolithic region was established.

II. THE MESOLITHIC OCCUPATION OF THE GREENSAND

“Life in prehistoric Britain was moulded more by the exigencies of the food quest than by any other factor.”—GRAHAME CLARK.

The mesolithic occupation of West Surrey, as of the Weald generally, was in no way a haphazard or fortuitous happening. It was the outcome of natural causation, influenced and decided by a fortunate mingling of favourable geological and topographical factors. These factors combined to provide comparatively comfortable, if not genial, living conditions for a food-gathering people—conditions which, at any rate, made existence at least possible for them. Briefly, the geological factor provided unlimited stores of flint and well drained soils which favourably influenced ecological conditions. Topographical variety provided hills, streams, and an easy terrain. Each factor in itself contributed in some measure to ensure an optimum economic background both for animal life and for the nomads who pursued it, and, over and above all, the geological factor provided flint in profusion to be fashioned into the implements which made that pursuit profitable.

(1) THE GEOLOGY OF WEST SURREY AND ITS INFLUENCE ON SETTLEMENT

Before the main features of the mesolithic settlement in West Surrey can be adequately appreciated, some acquaintance with the geology of the region is essential.

The main feature of the geology of West Surrey is a continuous outcrop of chalk running east and west, measuring about one hundred yards in width at Farnham and widening to three miles near Horsley. Inconspicuous in the Farnham region, this chalk ridge gradually swells into fairly high downland towards the east where its scarp dominates the scenery. Between Farnham and Guildford the highest point reached by the outcrop is 505ft.; near Dorking, and to the west of it, Hackhurst Downs stand 733ft. above sea level.

The upper beds of this chalk ridge contain layers of flint either in nodular or tabular form, and, the beds being well inclined to the north, these flint layers are much exposed on the surface. This outcrop, with its maximum exposure of flint, was the main reason for the mesolithic settlement just as it attracted the flint-using people in palaeolithic, neolithic, and to a lesser degree in Bronze Age times. On this chalk outcrop the mesolithic folk had easy access to unlimited supplies of good raw flint material which provided them with the implements that ensured their existence. How they discovered this belt of flint-bearing outcrop we do not know; they came upon it in their wanderings into the Weald probably before the land bridge collapsed and they maintained contact with it all along the inner margin of the North and South Downs. For them it was a veritable flint craftsman's paradise. Moreover, these rich flint supplies were close to good hunting grounds—the well-drained lands of the greensand proper—and, near at hand, were ample supplies of water which attracted game. Over this outcrop,

(7) Hooper, *The Pigmy Industries of Surrey, S.A.C.*, vol. XLI (1933).