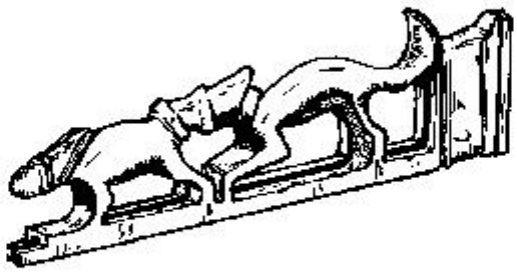
Ampthill & District Archaeological



& Local History Society

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Published in Bedfordshire Archaeology
Volume 19 1991.
www.adalhs.uk

Mesolithic Finds from Priestley Farm, Flitwick

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SUMMARY

The opportunity, presented when the Southern Gas feeder pipe was installed across Bedfordshire in 1977, was taken to walk the fields in advance of excavation to look for archaeological features on the ground and to watch the work as it progressed. Special attention was given to the sections cut by the digger. Experience in the area suggested that Mesolithic material could be expected and a concentration of flints was found in the soil disturbed by the workings and the plough soil of

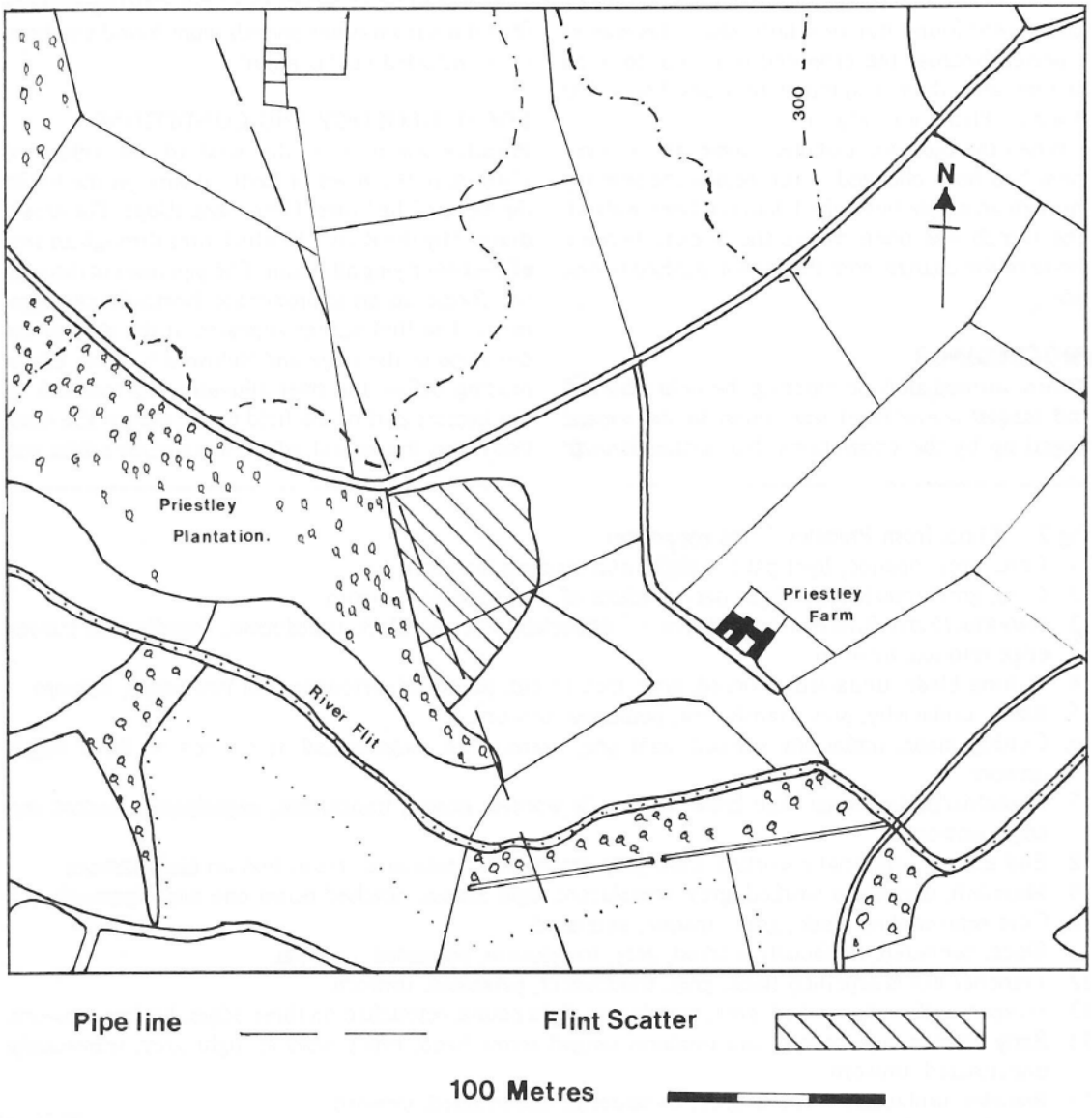


Fig 1 Map of Priestley Farm, Flitwick TL 0154 3325

the surrounding field. No features were found, probably due to the initial clearance of topsoil in advance of the trench, but the flints collected from the disturbed soil serve to increase our knowledge of prehistoric Bedfordshire. The location of the scatter relative to the geological features continues a pattern previously recorded in the area.

INTRODUCTION

During the winter of 1975-76 the Ampthill and District Archaeological and Local History Society walked the route of the Southern Gas feeder pipe in advance of its installation across Mid Bedfordshire in 1977. In the area of Priestley Farm several struck flakes were found but very little else. This was as expected because the proposed route ran through pasture and then a spinney of trees known as Priestley Plantation (Fig 1).

When the pipe was installed, however, its alignment had been changed to run beside the spinney through an arable field which had not been walked. The trench was open before the Society became aware of the change, with the topsoil pushed to one side.

PROCEEDINGS

Almost immediately on entering the field a barbed and tanged arrow head was found in the topsoil ridged up by the excavations. No further Bronze Age artefacts came to light at that stage but a collection of Mesolithic flints and debris were found in the disturbed soil over approximately 200 m along the route of the pipe-line. Further investigations within the field showed the scatter to cover approximately two hectares of ploughed land to the east of the line. The spinney to the west made it impossible to assess the full area but it is reasonable to assume from the high concentration of flints in the vicinity that the site had been cut in two. Careful scrutiny of the trench revealed no sign of any worked flints or artefacts; removal of the top soil had cleared all possible evidence of occupation.

As would be expected in a field walking exercise four flints from other periods were found and have been included in this report.

LOCAL GEOLOGY AND CONDITIONS

Priestley Farm is to the west of the village of Flitwick in the heart of Bedfordshire on the fertile dip slope of the Lower Greensand Ridge. The area is drained by the River Flit which runs through an area of peat overlying alluvium. The pipeline cut through the Ridge on an approximate North-South alignment. The flint scatter appeared at the start of the dip slope of the ridge and followed it down, disappearing before the river alluvium was reached. In the highest part of the field to the east of the pipeline route, the topsoil, which was slightly acidic, was

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Fig 2 Flints from Priestley Farm (opposite)

1. Core, grey, opaque, light patina, slight iron staining, unworn.
2. Core, grey, translucent, slight patina, traces of iron staining, unworn.
3. Neolithic/Early Bronze Age end scraper, unifacially worked, black, translucent, unpatinated, convex edge retouch, unworn.
4. Cutting blade, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, patinated, retouched on two edges, unworn.
5. Blade, unifacially, grey, translucent, patinated, unworn.
6. Cutting blade, unifacially worked, light grey, translucent, unpatinated, retouched on three edges, unworn.
7. Neolithic/Early Bronze Age knife, unifacially worked, honey, translucent, unpatinated, backed one edge, unworn.
8. End scraper, unifacially worked, dark grey, translucent, patinated, retouched on end, unworn.
9. Microlith, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, light patina, notched down one edge, unworn.
10. Core rejuvenating blade, grey, opaque, patinated.
11. Blade, carinated, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, patinated, unworn.
12. Tranchet axe sharpening flake, grey, translucent, patinated, unworn.
13. Scraper, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, light patina, retouched on three edges, broken, unworn.
14. Early Bronze Age barbed and medium tanged arrow head, finely worked, light grey, translucent, unpatinated, unworn.
15. Bladelet, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, unpatinated, unworn.
16. Bladelet, unifacially worked, light grey, translucent, light patina, unworn.
17. Blade, unifacially worked, grey, translucent, white patina, unworn.

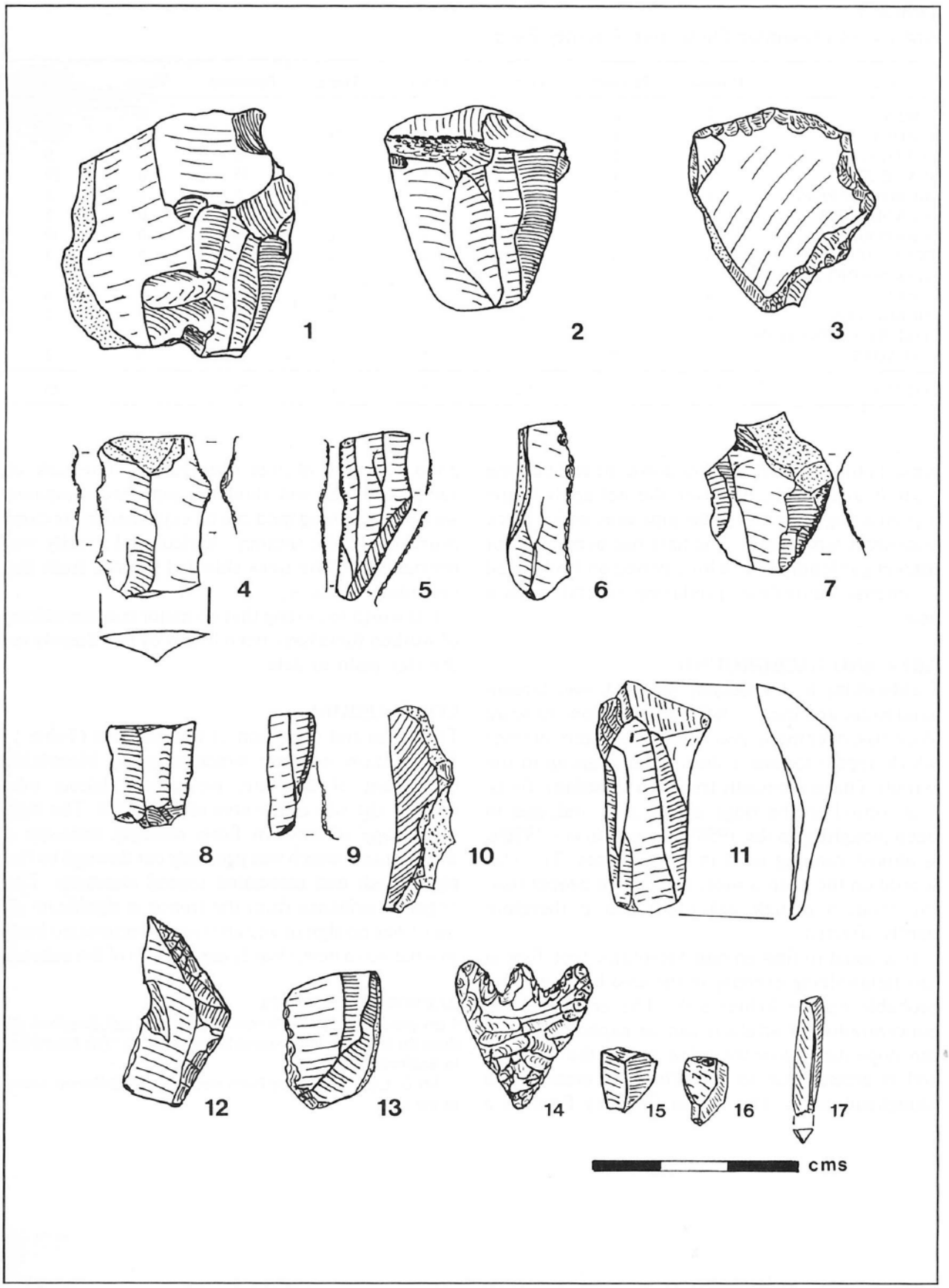

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TABLE 1
Analysis of Mesolithic Flints from Priestley Farm

Type	Uniface	Retouch	Grey	Honey	Transl	Patinated	Worn	Total
CORES	0	0	6	0	2	6	0	6
BLADES	29	4	28	1	23	28	0	29
CUTTING BLADES	5	2	5	0	5	3	1	5
BLADELETS	19	1	18	1	18	17	0	19
MICROSCRAPERS	2	2	2	0	2	2	1	2
MICROBURINS	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
SCRAPERS	10	7	10	0	10	9	0	10
TRANCHET AXE	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1
SHARPENING FLAKE FLAKES	0	0	6	0	6	6	0	6
MICROLITHS	2	0	2	0	2	2	0	2
CORE REJUVENATION BLADES	1	0	2	1	3	3	0	3
TOTALS	69	16	82	3	74	79	2	85

almost pure sand while lower down the soil became a sandy loam. This, however, did not apply to the topsoil along the route of the pipe-line, which was a consistent sandy loam. The field had been used for market gardening over a long period and subjected to intense cultivation, producing several crops a year.

AREA AND BACKGROUND

Fieldwalking by the Society on the Lower Greensand Ridge and the Gault Clay plain below the scarp slope has, over many years, shown a pattern of finds which appear to bear a distinct relationship to the terrain. This is especially true with Mesolithic flints. The topsoil on the ridge is very light and, due to deep ploughing in the 1950's through to late 1970's, is almost running sand in many places. The clay topsoil on the plain is more robust and deeper than the modern plough will reach and is therefore hardly affected.

It is usual to find an odd Mesolithic type flint in any fieldwalking exercise in the area but it is more probable on the lighter soils. The areas of large concentration of artefacts can be expected on the dip slope just below the ridge, where the depth of soil is greater due to the effects of erosion and ploughsoil creep. The site at Priestley Farm is a good example of this observation. The lack of variation of the soil along the pipe-line compared with the adjoining field can be explained by its close proximity to the spinney. Agricultural activity was restricted and the trees shielded the soil from the prevailing winds.

It is worth recording that no major concentrations of worked flints have been found by this Society on the clay plain to date.

CONCLUSIONS

The types and condition of the artefacts (Table 1; Fig 2) show a group which suggests Mesolithic settlement of the site, particularly taking into account the size of the area of collection. The high percentage of unworn flints strongly indicates a working area which was probably cut through by the pipe-trench and associated topsoil clearance. The negative evidence from the trench is significant as there was no sign of any artefact or occupation level in what was a new, cleanly cut, section of the subsoil.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am grateful to Mr M. Wildman who drew and described the flints for inclusion in his unpublished paper on "The Mesolithic in Bedfordshire".

Mr G. Little of Priestley Farm who allowed the Society access to the area.