

A PRELIMINARY NOTE ON THE PALAEOLITHIC SITES IN THE UPPER RAVENSBOURNE AREA, BROMLEY, KENT

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ABSTRACT

Many Palaeolithic sites, first discovered in the late 19th century or early 20th century, lacked adequate publication and coherent curation of the finds which were frequently exchanged or sold and dispersed. This study focuses on a number of minor sites that have suffered in this way. The study area is in the parish of West Wickham, Kent, now part of the London Borough of Bromley. Three men discovered most of the lithic material found in the study area in the years from 1878 to 1898. All three gave partial accounts of their finds in various contexts during the period 1882 to 1908 and many of these accounts have been located for this study. Parts of their collections have been identified in the collections of two museums. The aim of this study is to investigate to what extent it is now possible to construct a useful account of the Palaeolithic of the Upper Ravensbourne Valley.

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INTRODUCTION

Many sites discovered in the late 19th century or early 20th century were not adequately reported or not published at all. The finds were frequently exchanged with examples from the collections of other collectors or sold and dispersed, particularly on the death of the original collector. However some of these finds were eventually placed in museum collections. This note relates to some minor sites of this sort.

THE STUDY AREA

The study area is in the southern end of the parish of West Wickham, Kent, now part of the London Borough of Bromley where it adjoins the parishes of Hayes and Keston on the east and the former Kent/Surrey border on the west (Fig. 1).

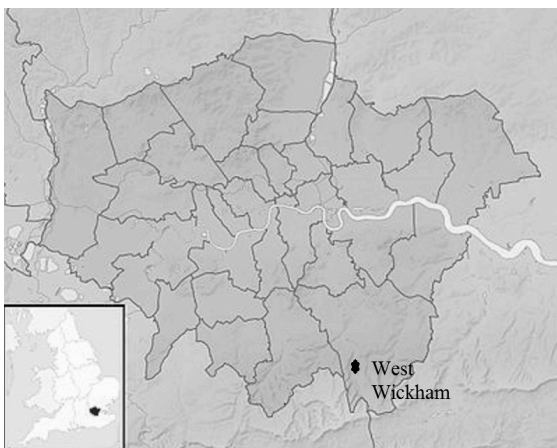


Figure 1. West Wickham location map

It is located where the Weald Anticline in the south meets the edge of the London Basin in the north. In the south, there is an outcrop of the Upper Chalk of undifferentiated Lewes Nodular Chalk formation and Seaford formation representing a portion of the lower dip slope of the North Downs. The interfluves are capped by clay with flints and towards the edge of the chalk there are patches of the Thanet Sand Formation. Two main arms of the Ravensbourne Valley, now dry, with some smaller subsidiary valleys dissect the chalk with patches of higher-level gravels along its course. Dewey noted that the chalk forms a re-entrant angle into the Tertiary outcrop in the north of the area on account of the erosion of the overlying beds by the River Ravensbourne. The Harwich Formation occupies much of the northern part of the area. It forms a plateau with marked escarpments down to the valley and its two arms. On the fringes of the plateau are narrow outcrops of the Woolwich Formation of the Lambeth Group and the Thanet Sand Formation, but both are usually obscured by downwash from the Harwich Formation (Dewey *et al.* 1924: 74; Burnham & McRae 1974: 84; Ellison *et al.* 2004).

THE LOCATION OF KNOWN COLLECTIONS AND ARCHIVES

Palaeolithic flint material was located in this area in the period 1878 to 1905. Parts of the original collections are now curated at the British Museum and Bromley Museum – all

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Table 1. Palaeolithic artefacts found in the Upper Ravensbourne area between 1878 and 1905 that are now in the British Museum or Bromley Museum collections or that were described in contemporary accounts

<i>Museum</i>	<i>Hand axes</i>	<i>Cores</i>	<i>Scrapers</i>	<i>Points</i>	<i>Flakes</i>	<i>Total</i>
British Museum	31	1	61	6	11	110
Bromley Museum	5	1	2	0	0	8
Described	9	0	4	0	3	16
Total	45	2	67	6	14	134

having passed through the collections of at least one other person or museum. One hundred and eighteen artefacts have been located. An analysis of this is in progress to which will be added published information about 16 other artefacts that can no longer be traced (see Table 1) The original collectors wrote about their finds in academic journals, popular journals, personal notebooks and maps, personal scrapbooks, privately published papers and local newspapers during the period 1882 to 1908. Many of these accounts have been located for this study in the academic journals and at Bromley Local Studies Library, the British Library, Bexley Reference Library and the Library of the Society of Antiquaries, Burlington House.

THE COLLECTORS

Three men can be linked to the discovery of lithic material in the study area in the years from 1878 to 1898.

George Clinch (1860–1921) grew up on Rows (or Rouse) Farm in Church Field Valley. He collected Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic material from the surface of fields on the farm from 1878 to 1888, when he married and moved away (Knowlden 2010). He found Palaeolithic material in six fields all of which are located in Church Field Valley (Clinch 1889: 184). These fields are listed in Table 3 and shown in Figure 2. He published a table of his finds in Church Field in 1893 (see Table 2) Clinch wrote about these finds many times (Clinch 1881, 1882, 1884, 1886, 1889a, b, 1893, 1900 & 1908). Flaxman Spurrell included Clinch's initial finds in his survey of Palaeolithic implements found in west Kent (Spurrell 1883).

Table 2. Table of finds in Church Field as published in Science Gossip (Clinch 1893: 136)

<i>Description or class</i>	<i>Number</i>
Hatchets and almond-shaped weapons	20
Scrapers and trimmed flakes	34
Flakes	50
Miscellaneous	20
Total	124

Arthur Santer Kennard (1870–1948) grew up about five miles away from Beckenham. His first discovery of lithic material in the area was made in 1887. He carried out a wider survey of the fields in the area in 1894–5 and subsequently paid the farmworkers to supply him with anything they found (Griffin 1906: 57.) During the period from 1888 until 1909 he belonged to the Bromley Naturalist Society. He frequently talked at their meetings on a range of topics including his Palaeolithic finds in the study area. These meetings were fully reported in the *Bromley District Times* by Kennard and he kept copies of the reports in a scrapbook (Kennard 1900, 1904 & 1909).

Alfred Edward Salter (1863–1926) visited the area with Kennard as part of his research into the superficial deposits of central and parts of southern England. (Salter 1899 & 1904) In 1904, he noted, “[a]t West Wickham, 261 ft. O.D., Mr G. Clinch, Mr A.S. Kennard, and myself have obtained Palaeolithic implements from the fields” (Salter 1904: 9).

Material now in the British Museum can be clearly linked to Clinch and Kennard. There is

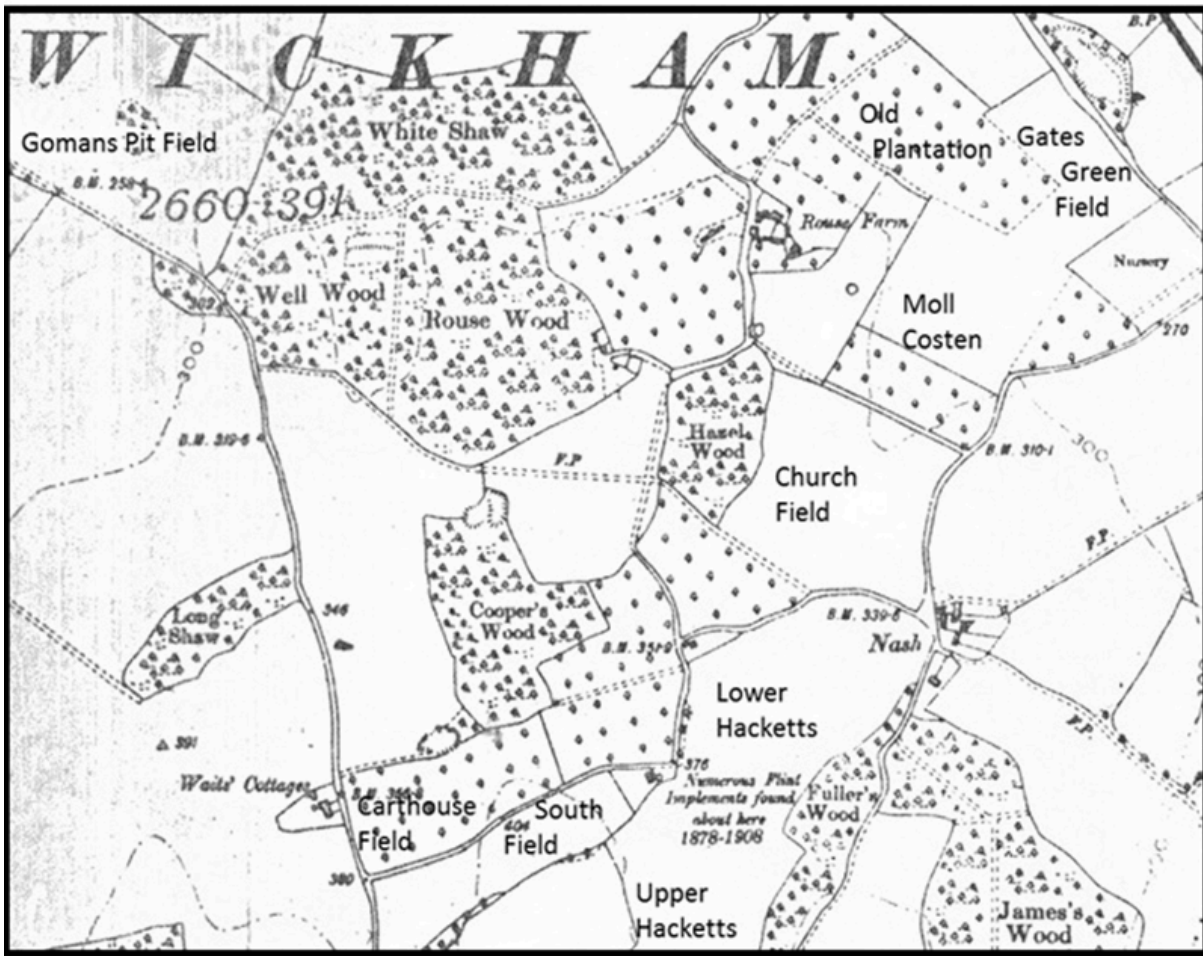


Figure 2. Fields in Church Field Valley and Chestnut Avenue Valley (top left) in which Palaeolithic material was found (based on the Ordnance Survey six-inch sheet 1910)

more of Clinch's collection in Bromley Museum. A third collection in the British Museum could have been Salter's collection or part of Clinch's collection. It was bought by the Wellcome Collection at the sale of the de Barri Crawshay collection at Stevens Auction House in 1929. The sale catalogue included material from Clinch's collection although the lots that included this third collection did not mention Clinch's name.

As members of the Geologists' Association and Fellows of the Geological Society, all three wrote about and discussed the geological context of their finds. Even though the finds were mainly surface finds after ploughing, they all linked them with river terraces. The finds in Church Field Valley were considered to be of sufficient significance to be mapped on the

1910 six-inch Ordnance Survey sheet (see Fig. 2).

THE IDENTIFICATION OF FIELDS/FIND LOCATIONS

Three find areas have been identified using the contemporary accounts, writing on the artefacts, the field names and find sites from an 1882 sketch map drawn by Clinch (Clinch 1889b) and field names on the 1838 tithe map.

These are:

1. Church Field Valley
2. Chestnut Avenue Valley
3. Tiepigs Lane Gravel Pits

Outline details of each site are given in Table 3.

Table 3. Details of the three identified find areas

Find Locations	Geology	Fields/Pits in which artefacts were found.	Notes
Church Field Valley (TQ 463640; 82–105 m OD) This meets the main Ravensbourne Valley eastern arm about a mile south of its confluence with the western arm.	Colluvial sequence with palaeo-argillic brown earth soil on Clay-with-Flints at the top, and shallow soils directly on the chalk on the downslope. The dry valley bottoms have Pleistocene head (Coombe deposits) and Holocene hillwash (Burnham & McRae 1974: 86). Dewy <i>et al.</i> (1924: 101) noted “Traces of a higher terrace” at the end of Church Field Valley and this terrace at 90 m OD was clearly mapped on the contemporary BGS geological map.	Church Field, Moll Costen, Gates Green Field, Carthouse Field, Old Plantation, South Field, Lower Hackett’s Orchard and Upper Hackett’s Orchard (all shown in Fig. 2).	Most of these fields are now used for grazing and have not been ploughed for many years.
Chestnut Avenue Valley (TQ 394644; 78–96 m OD) This meets the main Ravensbourne Valley eastern arm about half a mile south of its confluence with the western arm.	As above.	Goman’s Pit Field. (located in Fig. 2)	This valley, including Goman’s Pit Field, is now partially built over along a road called Chestnut Avenue.
Tiepigs Lane Gravel Pits (TQ 395659; 61 m OD) These pits were at the confluence of the two, now dry, arms of the Ravensbourne.	“A good section in the alluvial flat was seen. Unrounded flints rested sharply on Thanet Sand, and the President (Mr A.S. Kennard) suggested that these deposits were caused by Solifluction, during the later stages of the Glacial Period” (Wood 1945).	Two Palaeolithic artefacts were reported as being found in association with a range of late Pleistocene mammals (mammoth, rhinoceros, horse and reindeer) at the base of the gravel on the Thanet Sand (Griffin 1906: 55.)	One pit is now covered with housing; the other is a playing field.

DISCUSSION

The Palaeolithic flint material found in the Upper Ravensbourne area can be broadly assigned to three discrete areas, the most important of which is Church Field Valley. Most of the flint material would appear to be from the fields on either side of Church Field Valley. That part of the material that is still

available for research in museum collections may represent less than 40% of what was originally found. Some original finds are now allocated to the Mesolithic period and are still in the collections of the museums. The aim now is to combine the evidence from the surviving lithics with that available from the documentary evidence to construct an account

of Palaeolithic activity in this area that is as complete as is now possible.

FURTHER WORK

A final report is being prepared. This will include an analysis of the lithics and further consideration of the context and age of the finds.

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