

ARCHAEOLOGICAL NOTES.

ST. URIAN'S COPSE

Yaverland, near Brading, I.O.W.

By D. R. A. WATSON, M.P.S.

THE Roman archaeology of the Isle of Wight is sketchy and it is badly recorded. Possibly the most important of recent discoveries of this period is of the late-4th-century foundations of part of Carisbrooke Castle, suggesting that a hitherto unrecorded "Saxon shore" fort existed there. This discovery, together with the opulent "Brading Villa" only a mile from the copse site under review, strengthens the observations which follow.

At this date one has to assume that the finds of Roman tiles and pottery about a century ago in the north half of the copse (*vide* O.S. 6-inch map) are correct. The presence of tiles indicates a building or settlement of some sort. By far the most fascinating aspect, however, lies in the topographical analogy between this site and that of Richboro' (RVTVP1Æ), near Sandwich, Kent. These I tabulate below for comparison :

Richboro'.

1. Situated at N. end of a tidal strait (Wautsume) formerly separating Thanet Isle from Kent.
2. Adjoining rise of land "Richboro' Hill," beyond which :
3. (*Ref. "Archaeologia Cantiana," Vol. viii*) "A remarkable excavation into the W. side of Richborough Hill, 3 acres of which are cut back, . . . to form a harbour or anchorage."

St. Urian's.

1. Situated at N. end of a tidal strait which in Roman times made an island of Bembridge and Yaverland, finally "reclaimed" about 80 years ago.
2. Adjoining rise of land, "Centurion's Hill," beyond which :
3. A remarkable inlet with an unnaturally precipitous side cut back into the S. side of "Centurion's Hill."

[Note that in each case the excavated anchorage has been made on the sheltered inner position beyond rising ground relatively hidden from view, and in each case well out of the tidal scour which exists in these narrow straits.]

In the case of the St. Urian's "harbour" there are one or two further very significant factors which fit into the strategical picture of 4th century defence.

1. This is the nearest point of high water to the highest point of the land—Bembridge Down (Palmerston redoubt), 343 feet.



2. Throughout historic time this down has been valued as a look-out position. The Oglander memoirs are full of references to its use for this purpose. To-day the whole ridge is W.D. property and annually acquires some new unsightly defence erection. The end-points of vision in very clear weather are Chanctonbury Ring (which appears as an "island" above horizon) and Inkpen Beacon. One cannot conceive the Romans ignoring so fine a look-out position.
3. If one stands by the watergate in the Roman wall of Portchester fort, the redoubt on Bembridge Down exactly fills the entrance of Portsmouth Harbour. Ergo, signals of approaching danger in the open Channel could speedily warn Portchester and also any fleet anchored below in the suggested harbour.

I offer these analogies and topographical details as existing facts without pressing any *a priori* case; I feel that they are of sufficient interest to warrant further research—links in the chain of evidence applicable to the "Saxon Shore" defence system. I am not suggesting another Richboro' beneath the oaks of St. Urian's.

[As a footnote to those not knowing the conditions at this site I would stress two major technical difficulties:

1. The copse is badly waterlogged for much of the year, an artificially-induced condition consequent upon the reclamation of the Haven with alteration of levels and drainage.
2. There is a stratification-complex caused by the presence of a later, mediaeval, settlement (Wolverton, or Wulfhere's-run), the footings and debris of which can easily be traced along the hazel runs.]

WAVE ACTION AT HURST CASTLE SPIT.

By L. E. TAVENER, M.A.

CHANGES in the form of Hurst Castle Spit are of increasing interest not only to the geomorphologist but also on account of the large area of land that would be seriously flooded should the spit be breached.

In 1931 Lewis made a survey of the spit and drew a number of deductions as to the movement of the shingle and the forces that were at work.¹

The spit is composed, for the most part, of gravels transported to their present position by the action of storm waves. Most of the shingle is derived from Plateau Gravel and has been brought to the shore by soil creep, landslips and falls of cliff.

From Hurst Castle westwards the shingle covers the almost horizontally bedded Barton Clays, until the clay beds gradually outcrop to form a small cliff. (Plate IIA). This cliff, which at first rises only a few inches above the shingle bank, increases in height westwards, until at Highcliffe the beds are 50 feet or more above the shingle. These soft clays yield rapidly to seepage, especially after a continuous wet period, and also to marine erosion, and would be eroded even more quickly but for the protection afforded by the shingle. In several places the coast is being eroded at the rate on the seaward side of the shingle of 10 to 15 feet per annum. (Plate IIB). (At one point along the spit there are traces of a bridge which, not many years ago, crossed a small stream on the landward side of the spit. (Plate IIIA)).

A cross section of the shingle embankment at Milford-on-Sea shows a ridge, normally about 12 feet above H.W.M.; on the seaward side there is a succession of storm beaches; and then a steep slope which flattens out as the coast comes under the influence of normal tide and current action.

The currents, wind directions, and wave motions vary slightly from season to season, and from year to year; and accordingly, the embankment is subjected to considerable changes of erosional activity. In some years the bank is built up by accretion of shingle; in other years shingle is removed and the bank is lowered. Occasionally the spit is breached, and a most serious situation arises.

These changes may take place with alarming speed and usually occur when extreme conditions obtain, such as storms and very high tides. In some years material is removed until the spit is

1. W. V. Lewis, "The Effect of Wave Incidence on Configuration of a Shingle Beach," *Geog. Jour.*, Vol. LXXVIII (1931), 129-148.

PLATE II.

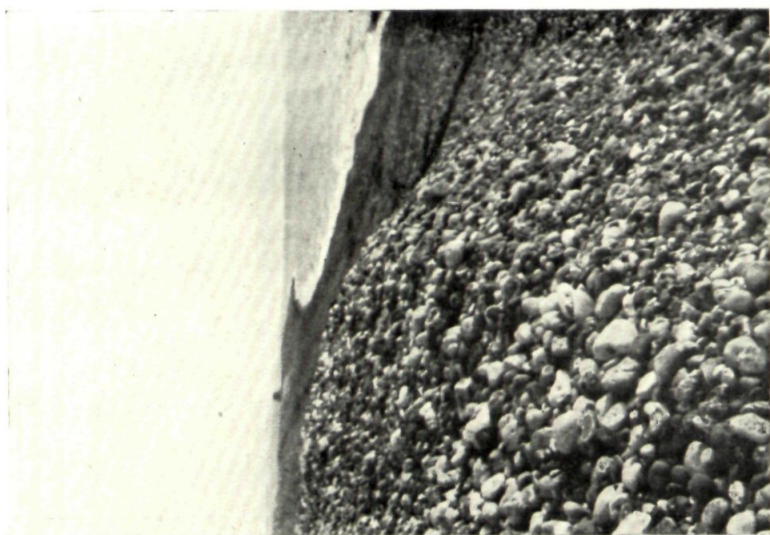


A.

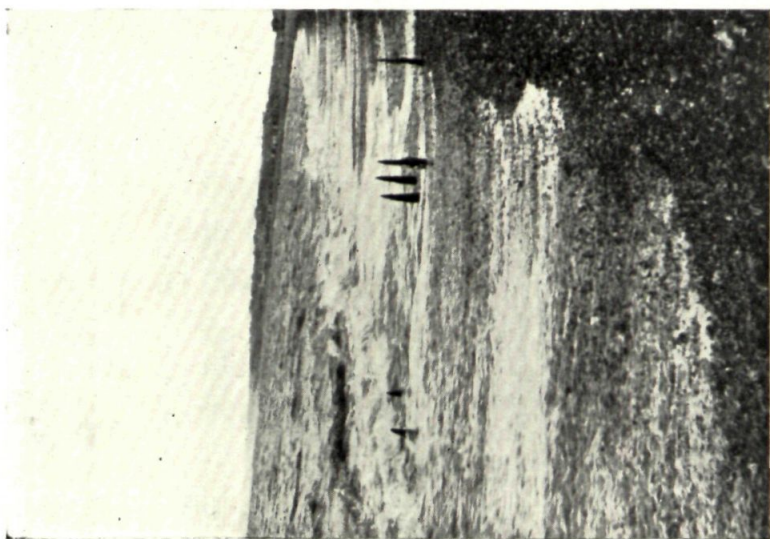


B.

PLATE III.



B.

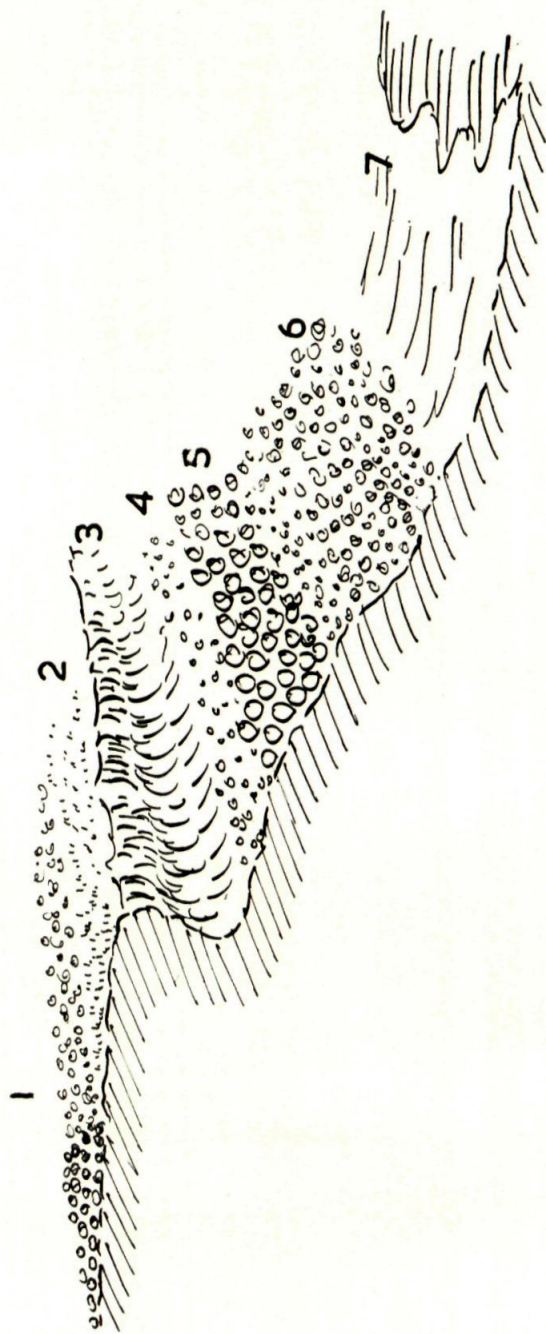


A.

PLATE IV.



PLATE V.



almost breached. Such weakening of the spit is regarded with considerable concern, as extensive flooding and serious damage to many acres of property would result should the spit be completely breached. Protective measures in the form of groynes and sea-walls check the movement of the shingle to some extent.

Observations along one section of the spit indicate that the process of erosion is somewhat as follows. As storm waves break on the shore, the shingle is carried forward until the force of the waves abates. By this process of lifting and pushing, the shingle builds up the embankment on its seaward side. As the waves lose their power the heaviest shingle is deposited first, and a distinct line of large shingle can be seen along the top of the bank. As the waves recede and the water flows back—down and through the shingle—a rough distribution of shingle according to size is spread down the slope; the larger pebbles being deposited first and the size of shingle diminishing down the slope. (Plate IIIB).

The wave action, together with the smaller shingle carried in the waves, acts differently on different parts of the embankment. Part of the wave action undercuts the softer clays which outcrop to form a small scarp along several hundred yards of the spit: and the scouring action of the moving shingle carried in the waves carves out a distinct, overhanging cliff which in some places is as much as three or four feet in height. The small shingle that has undercut the overhanging cliff is deposited at the cliff base. From time to time the overhanging portion of the cliff falls, and so the whole spit is gradually moving landwards. (Plates IIA and B, Plate IV).

On the other hand, many of the larger waves break completely over the embankment and extend their action on to the top of the spit and inland for several yards. This upper part of the wave also contains small shingle which is thrown clear of the overhanging cliff and is deposited a few yards inland. Between the slight mound of deposited shingle and the cliff face is a narrow zone unaffected directly by erosion or deposition. As the waves abate the amount of shingle deposited on the top of the spit decreases, though the undercutting of the cliff continues for a considerable time, as the cliff is nearer the sea and at a lower level. (Plates IIA and B).

Thus, distinct and parallel belts of material extend along the spit and the shingle is roughly sorted according to size. (Plate V).

From inland to sea level these belts appear as follows:

1. Fairly small shingle, remarkably regular in size, forming a small low ridge with a slightly steeper seaward slope, and gradually dying out inland.

2. A belt varying in width, practically unaffected by erosion or deposition, and still grass-covered.
3. The cliff, which has been distinctly undercut ; in several places it has fallen in.
4. A narrow belt of fine shingle which has been dropped at the base of the cliff after pounding the cliff face.
5. A belt of varying width, of large shingle which the waves have been able to push up the slope and deposit.
6. A steep slope, with strongly marked storm beaches, in which the shingle is sorted more or less according to size ; the shingle becoming smaller down the slope.
7. The gradual slope to the sea.

A MESOLITHIC SITE ON OLD WINCHESTER HILL.

By J. C. DRAPER.

ON the main ridge of the South Downs three miles to the east of Warnford is Old Winchester Hill. Its Iron Age fort and barrows are well known. Before the downland was ploughed in 1948 a rough track led from the road to the fort, which stands at 650 feet O.D., the Grid Reference is 41/643205. Although yew trees have been uprooted and a disc barrow ploughed over, a dewpond survives about 80 yards from the entrance to the fort.

In the spring of 1948 while walking between the dewpond and the edge of the ploughed land the writer picked up a mesolithic blade. A search of the vicinity produced more mesolithic pieces. Further searches proved that the flints occurred over a definite area, roughly a rectangle 30 yards by 10 yards. One longer side runs with the cultivated margin and no doubt the site extends further under the yew trees and undergrowth.

The ploughed land here consists of flints large and small, much broken chalk and very little soil.

Material.

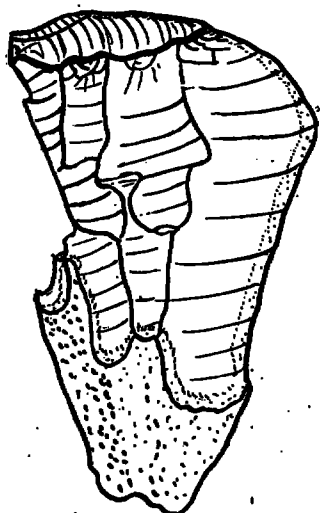
The flint used for knapping has been obtained from the site and is of a greyish non-lustrous variety with thick cortex. Only a few pieces show any signs of patination, which is interesting because from a neolithic site on the downs nearby the writer has obtained a large collection of artifacts all deeply patinated.

Mr. W. F. Rankine, F.S.A. (SCOT.), has examined a typical collection from the site and has stated that the cores are mesolithic in form and rejuvenation, and the flakes are typical, although the workmanship is somewhat inferior. Also Mr. Rankine gave the information that he knew of no further mesolithic sites on the South Downs.

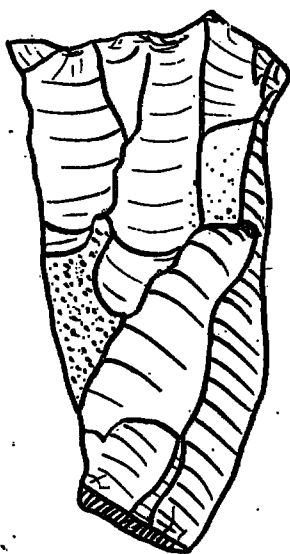
Description of Artifacts. Actual Size.

The collection numbers 350 pieces and consists of cores, blades, flakes and all the wastage usually found on a mesolithic site. So far no microlith or micro-burin has turned up.

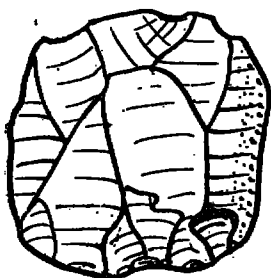
Cores. Of seven cores found to date, three are of the single platform type as Fig. 1, and each retains much cortex. There are two specimens of two parallel platform type cores as Fig. 2. An interesting feature showing on both of these cores is that one end is patinated; this diminishes until at the other end none shows, pointing to long undisturbed exposure on the surface. A small



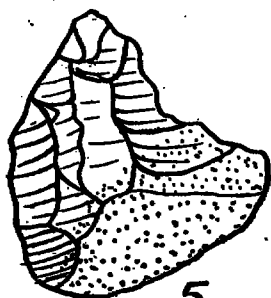
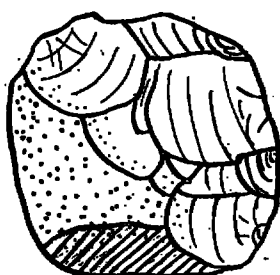
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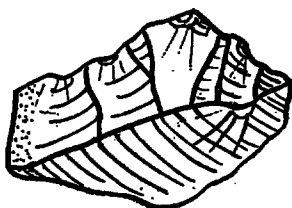
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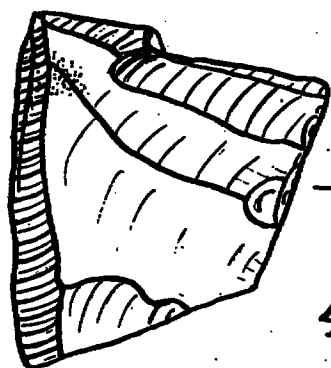


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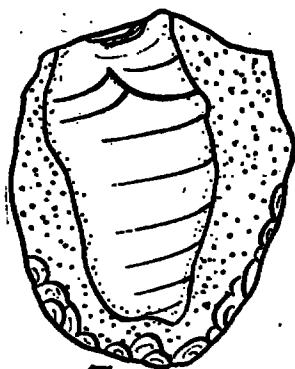
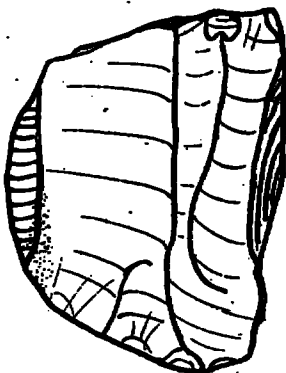


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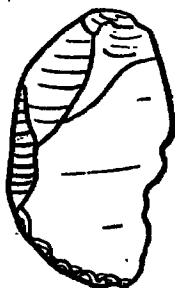
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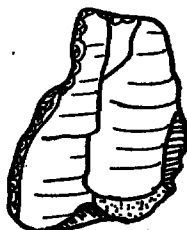
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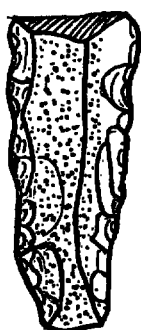
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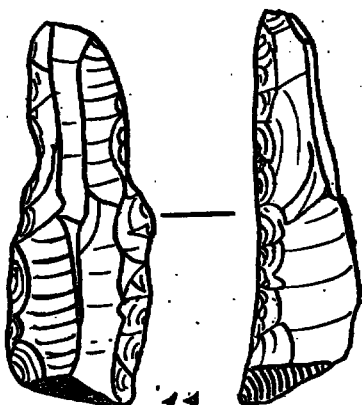
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E



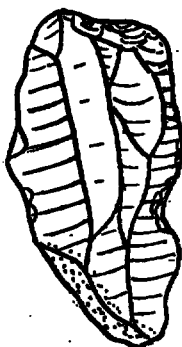
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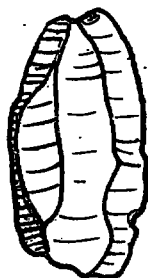
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14



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16



17



18



19



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(SCALE $\frac{1}{2}$)

core having two platforms at right-angles is Fig. 3, and Fig 4 shows a three platform type. Core rejuvenation is evident and Figs. 5 and 6 show two examples of core trimmings.

Scrapers. A large flake struck in the preparation of a core has been made into a scraper (Fig. 7). A broken tip of another scraper is shown (Fig. 8). The occurrence of broken scrapers and tips on mesolithic sites has already been noted.¹ Fig. 9 shows a smaller scraper worked on a blade.

There are two double-edged side scrapers (Figs. 10 and 11); the latter has been made from a large keeled blade, and is of black flint unpatinated, instead of the typical greyish flint used on the site.

Blades. One-third of the 250 flakes found can be classified as blades; these vary from specimens $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches long down to minute forms. Fig. 12 shows a blade tip that has been converted into a hollow scraper; and Fig. 13 has one edge carefully trimmed. A large keeled blade with one edge partly retouched is Fig. 14.

Two large faceted blades are shown (Figs. 15 and 16); the former has a worked notch. Figs. 17 to 20 show typical small blades, and of these Figs. 18 and 19 show partly worked edges.

The site is at present covered with a growth of clover, and it will not be possible to carry out further searches until the land is again ploughed. Since preparing these notes the writer has found a mesolithic site at Southwick which has produced a complete industry, including microliths, micro-burins, and a tranchet-axe. From the shore at Cams, near Fareham, Mr. C. J. Mogridge and the writer have collected a large amount of mesolithic material.

These two sites, with the one already described, form links in a chain of mesolithic sites from the sea coast to the typical Greensand site at West Heath, Petersfield.²

Since preparing this article the land enclosed by the promontory fort at Butser Hill has been cleared and ploughed, and during several visits in the autumn of 1951 I discovered a group of twelve mesolithic sites scattered over the ploughed area of about ten acres.

The most important finds from these sites are four microliths, five microburins, one tranchet-axe and three axe-sharpening flakes; and eight graters.

Another small mesolithic site has been found on Old Winchester Hill. This is about 200 yards N.N.E. of the one already noted.

1. Rankine, *Mesolithic Survey of West Surrey, Greensand*, 1950, p. 16.

2. Clarke, *The Mesolithic Age in Britain*, p. 75, fig. 40.