

# SOME PALÆOLITHS FROM THE BLETCHLEY DISTRICT

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THE Buckinghamshire County Museum possesses a group of fourteen hand axes from various sites in Bletchley and Fenny Stratford. They were acquired by the Museum in the 1920s and, though of considerable interest, have never yet been published. The *Records of Buckinghamshire* for 1922<sup>1</sup> mentions the gift of flint implements from Bletchley or the Brickhills by three schoolboys, J. Robinson, W. Souster and F. Claridge, and also lists as being “found by them but not given—an Eolithic hand axe (at Brooklands Gravel Pit, Fenny Stratford); various ovate axes of the Chellian type (at Yard’s End Gravel Pit, Fenny Stratford and Canal Dredging Bank); various axes of the Mousterian type (from the Ouzel Bed, Saffron Gardens)”. The *Records of Bucks* for 1924 mentions that eight palæoliths found by schoolboys near Bletchley (presumably some of those listed above) were purchased by subscription.<sup>1</sup>

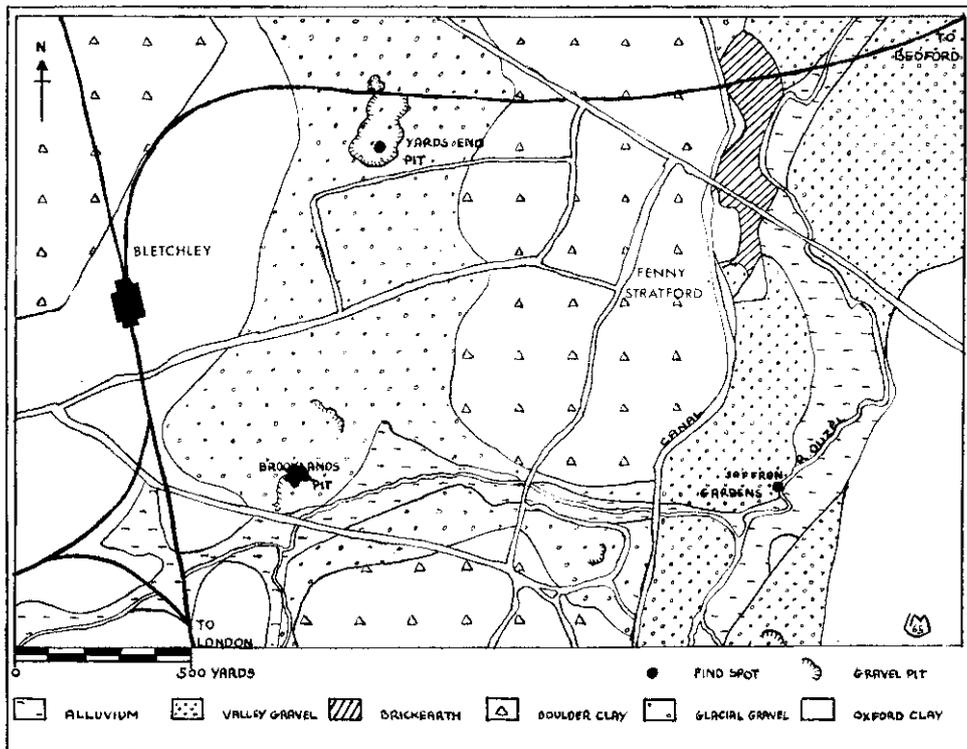


FIG. 1. Map of the Bletchley area showing geology and find spots of palæoliths.

Bletchley stands on the Oxford Clay and Kellaway Beds that in this part of the county are overlain to the south by Lower Greensand and to the north are weathered to expose Cornbrash and Great Oolite beds. The solid geology is overlain by drift deposits.<sup>2</sup> These consist of glacial gravels which are sandy in places, and overlying this, an extensive area of Boulder Clay, which is mainly very chalky in appearance, but in the Fenny Stratford area contains a high proportion of flints. Between the canal and the river there is a small area of brickearth.

These deposits are dissected to the north by the Bedfordshire Ouse and immediately to the east of the town by the River Ouzel that joins the Ouse at Newport Pagnell, seven miles upstream. Both rivers are associated with considerable deposits of gravel and alluvium (Fig. 1). The Grand Union Canal runs roughly parallel to the present River Ouzel, built on an embankment across the flood plain. Apart from the group of implements under consideration, no palæoliths from the Ouzel gravels are known. There have been, however, various gravel pits in the neighbourhood, utilising both the glacial and the river gravels, though none of them is now open and no sections have been recorded. The pit at Yard's End, in the glacial gravel, is marked on the 1953 edition of the 6 in. O.S. map (Bucks sheet XV SW), and another smaller pit immediately to the north of the Bletchley-Bedford railway line is marked on the 1898 edition (Bucks sheet XV SW). Brooklands Pit was between Bletchley and Water Eaton, also in the glacial gravel and which, in addition to the "eolithic hand axe" mentioned above, which was not acquired by the Museum, is supposed to have produced some palæoliths. There was also a pit described as being near Bletchley Station, though this may have been one of the three described above. Various other smaller pits in both the river and the glacial gravels were noted by the 1895-6 geological survey.

#### CIRCUMSTANCES OF FINDS

The following details have been taken from the Accession Book of the Buckinghamshire County Museum.

No. 5: Brickhill Road is the road to Bow Brickhill on the east side of the Ouzel and to the north of the A.1. It is now known as Bow Brickhill Road and is on the Oxford Clay.

Nos. 4, 8-11, 14: These were all found lying on the surface in the Yard's End Gravel Pit, Fenny Stratford. This pit produced sand as well as gravel.<sup>3</sup>

No. 13: Possibly came from the same place.

#### AFFINITIES OF THE PALÆOLITHS

Extensive collections of palæoliths have come from the Bedford Ouse valley. In the neighbourhood of Bedford, the 40 foot Biddenham terrace gravels, correlated by Arkell with the late Boyn Hill and Middle Barnfield stages of the Thames,<sup>4</sup> have produced abundant palæoliths of typical Middle Acheulian pyriform type. Ovates are rarely found.<sup>5</sup> In the St. Neots area, terrace gravels correlated by Marr<sup>6</sup> and Patterson<sup>7</sup> with the lowest or middle terrace of the Cam and the buried channel stage of the Thames, has produced a group

of cordate/ovate hand axes associated with flakes that show some evidence of Levalloisian technique.

None of the Bletchley hand axes can be directly associated with terrace gravel, and the only ones that can be regarded as a group are those from the Yard's End Gravel Pit (Nos. 4, 8-11, 14). The evidence for their true association is not good, but their similarity to each other is such that they were almost certainly originally associated. Individually, any of these hand axes could be paralleled from a Middle Acheulian assemblage (e.g. from Biddenham or one of the collections from the Boyn Hill gravels). However, it is suggestive that, of fourteen hand axes, only one (No. 1) is a typical Middle Acheulian type. The other ovate/cordate types, including such late-looking examples as Nos. 4, 8 and 10, suggest affinities and a date more closely linked with the St. Neots than the Biddenham examples.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to Mr. C. N. Gowing, Curator, Buckinghamshire County Museum, for very kindly tracing details of the history of the palæoliths and to Mr. W. Souster for information about the circumstances in which they were found. Fig. 1 is based on Crown Copyright Geological Survey map by permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office.

1. Hand axe of ficon type. Suggestion of twisted profile. Thin cross-section at tip, rather thicker at butt, which is well worked. Well finished with shallow flanking. Ochreous patina. Unrolled.
2. Small pointed biface of rather irregular shape. Made on flake with bulb and part of platform still showing. Quite well worked on both sides. Secondary working on original flake surface. Differential patination, brown on original flake surface, grey/cream on other surface. Unrolled.
3. Small ovate hand axe made on flake. Some work on bulbar surface, including removal of bulb and striking platform. Rather irregular profile, but quite well finished. Thin cross-section. Mottled grey patina. Unrolled.
4. Small regular ovate hand axe. Well made, fine shallow flaking, and well finished with thin cross-section. Worked butt, though some cortex remaining on both sides. Made on dark grey flint, with thin patchy grey patina on one side only. Lightly rolled.
5. Cordiform hand axe. Well finished with fine shallow flaking and regular profile. Thin cross-section. Made on dark grey flint, one side unpatinated, the other with mottled grey patina. Lightly rolled.
6. Hand axe of rather irregular ovoid-almond shape. Well made and finished, with quite thin but irregular cross-section. Possibly made on flake. Mottled grey patina. Unrolled.
7. Almond-shaped hand axe. Quite well made and finished. Straight and even profile, thin cross-section at tip, thicker towards butt. Some deepish scars remaining. Worked butt with small patch of cortex. Made on grey flint. Patchy white patina. Unrolled.
8. Smallish ovate hand axe. Quite well made and finished. Even profile, thin cross-section, butt slightly thicker than tip. Some steep flaking round edges. Unrolled or very slightly rolled. Differential patination, ochreous on one side, cream on the other.
9. Cordiform hand axe, quite well made and finished mainly with shallow flaking, though some steep flaking still remaining and some cortex at butt. Regular pro-

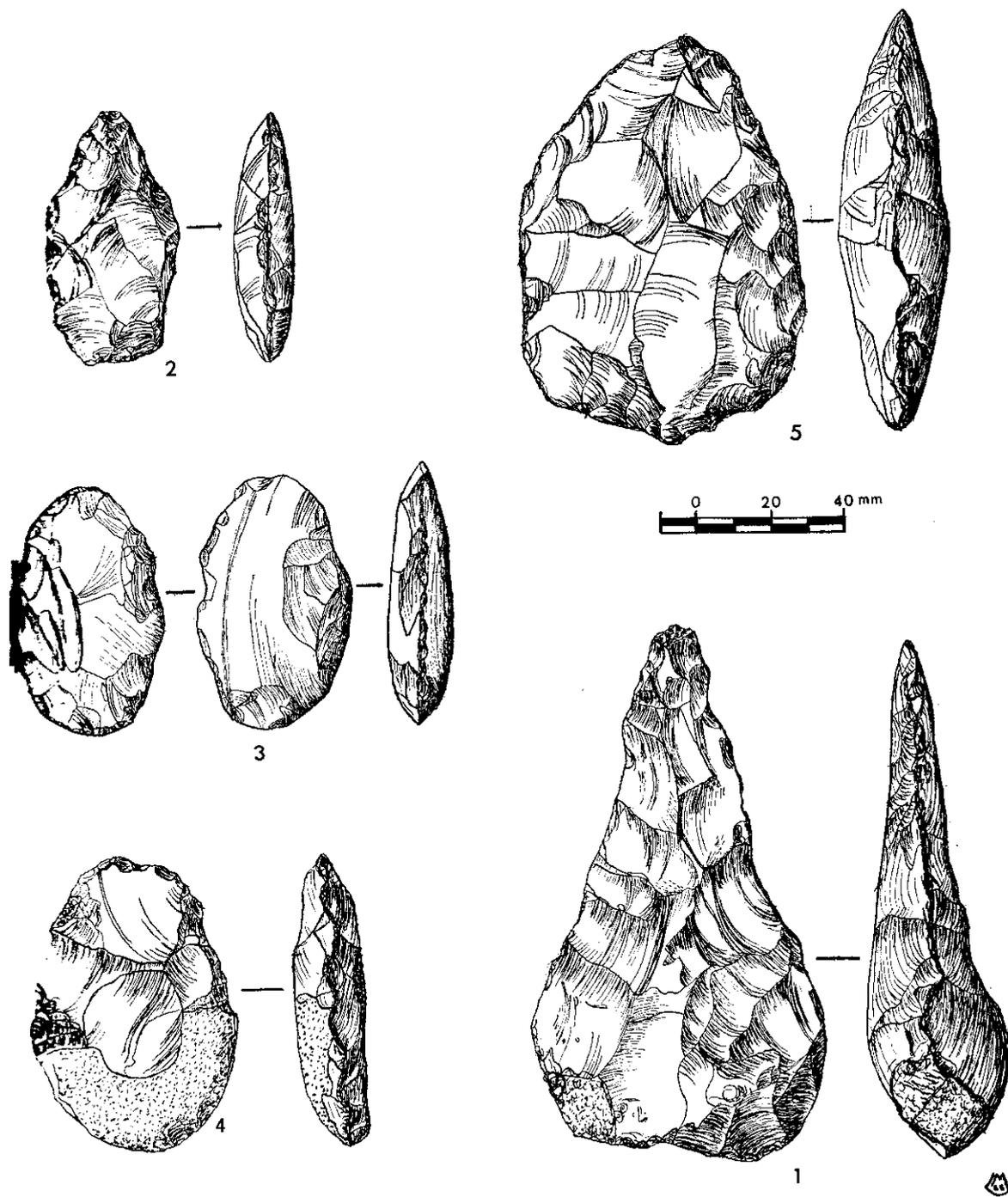


FIG. 2. Palaeoliths from the Bletchley area, nos. 1-5.

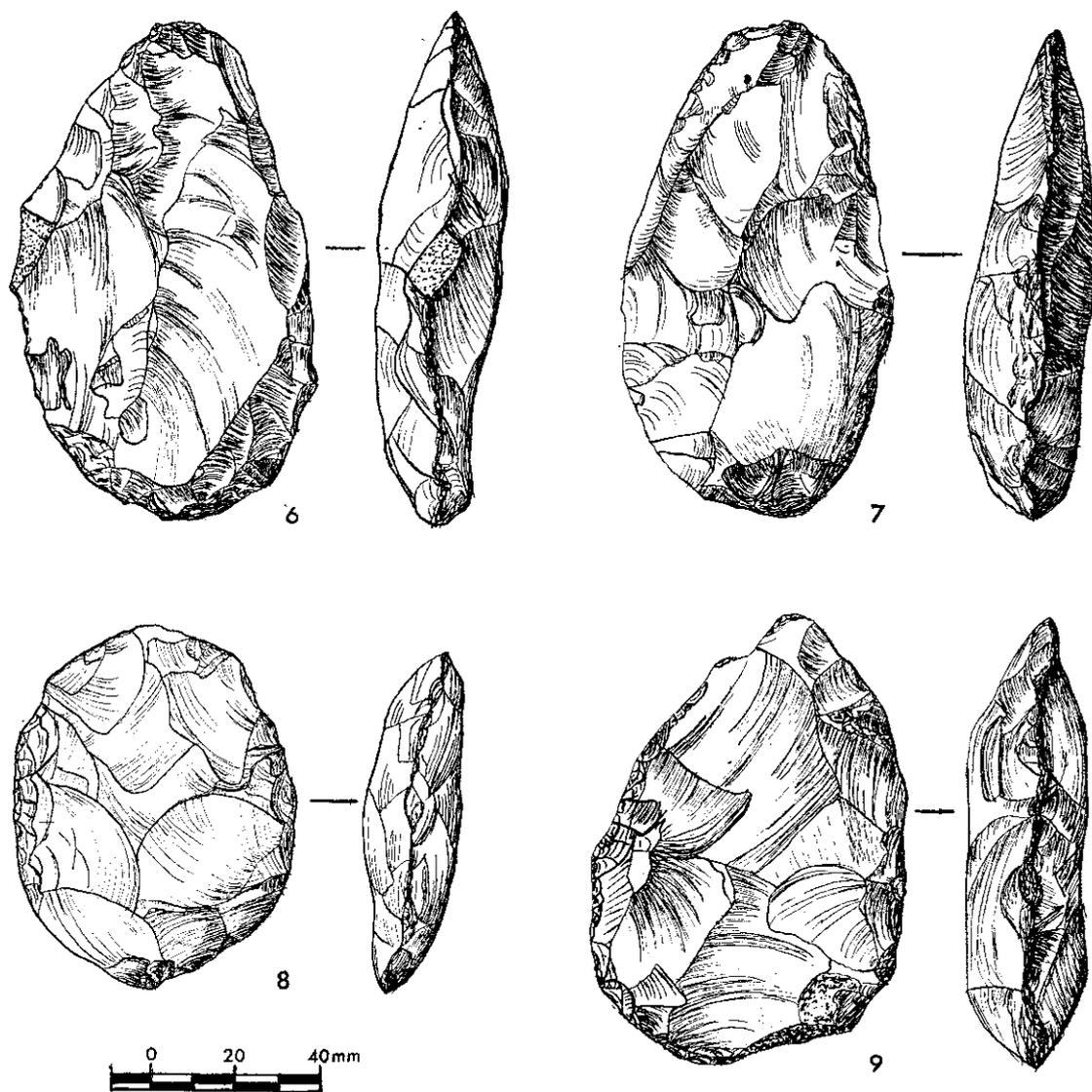


FIG. 3. Palaeoliths from the Bletchley area, nos. 6-9.

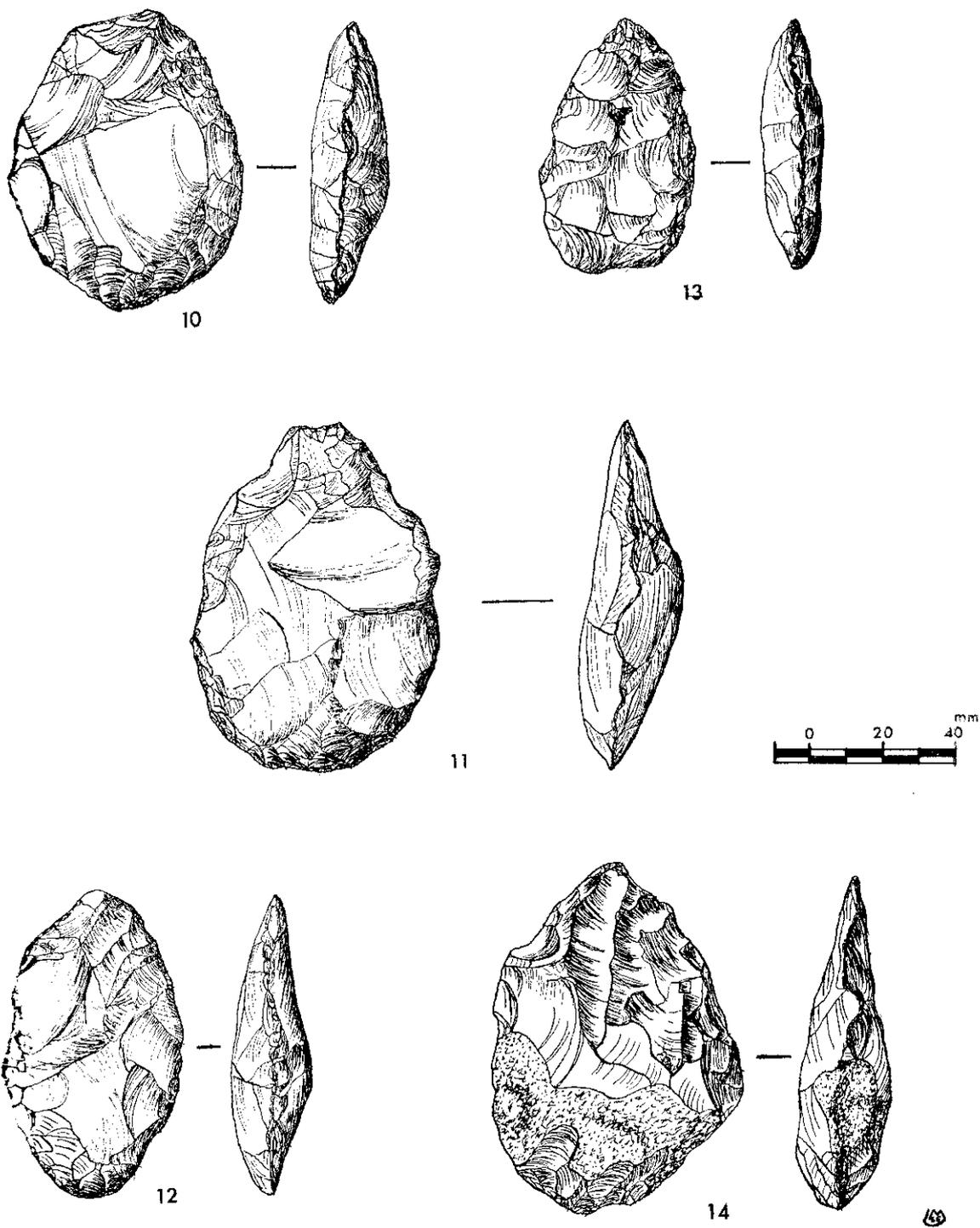


FIG. 4. Palaeoliths from the Bletchley area, nos. 10-14.

- file, fairly thin cross-section. Mottled grey patina. Unrolled.
10. Smallish disc-like ovate hand axe. Well made and finished with shallow flaking. Profile slightly irregular. Thin plano-convex section. Made on dark grey flint. Flat surface unpatinated, mottled white patina on curved surface. Unrolled.
  11. Ovate hand axe. Quite well made and finished. Thin cross-section and even profile, except for one place where maker has been unable to remove lump. Unrolled. Ochreous patina.
  12. Small ovate hand axe. Well made and finished with shallow flaking. Thin cross-section. Mottled ochreous and cream patina. Lightly rolled.
  13. Small triangular biface. Well finished with shallow flaking. Rather irregular profile. Thin cross-section. Made on dark grey flint. Probably made on flake but both sides completely worked. Patchy white patina. Unrolled.
  14. Ovoid or sub-triangular hand axe. Quite well finished with shallow flaking. Worked butt, though some cortex remaining on sides. Probably made on whole nodule. Fairly thin cross-section. Mottled cream patina. Unrolled.

The British Museum possesses an "eolith" from "a pit near the station at Bletchley", found and given by the Revd. A. G. O. Kindall. It is a rather battered natural pebble, resembling a rough ovate and stained a deep ochreous colour.

<sup>1</sup> *Rec. Bucks.*, Vol. XI, pp. 221, 223, 360.

<sup>2</sup> 6 in. O.S. map, Bucks sheet XV, 1885 ed., geologically surveyed by A. V. Cameron, 1895-6.

Manuscript copy.

<sup>3</sup> Information from Mr. W. Souster.

<sup>4</sup> W. J. Arkell, *P.P.S. New Series*, Vol. XI, 1945, pp. 25-27.

<sup>5</sup> J. Evans, *Ancient Stone Implements*, 1872, pp. 479-484, Figs. 414-418. Collections at Bedford Museum, the British Museum, Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, Cambridge.

<sup>6</sup> C. P. Tebbutt, J. E. Marr and M. C. Burkitt, *P.P.S.E.A.*, Vol. V, 1922-27, p. 166.

<sup>7</sup> T. T. Paterson and C. F. Tebbutt, *P.P.S. New Series*, Vol. XIII, 1947, p. 37.

No.	Accession No.	Details of Finds
1.	114.22	From dredged mud at the canal side, Fenny Stratford. (N.B. Neolithic flints were also found in this mud.)
2.	114.22	
3.	123.22	
4.	45.24	Yard's End Gravel Pit, Fenny Stratford.
5.	120.22	Drainage works, Brickhill Road, Fenny Stratford.
6.	46.24	Bed of River Ouzel, Saffron Gardens, Bletchley.
7.	47.24	
8.	48.24	Near Bletchley.
9.	49.24	
10.	50.24	
11.	51.24	
12.	122.22	From clay by allotments, Denbigh Road, Fenny Stratford.
13.	116.22	Heap of stones from roadside, Bletchley.
14.	52.24	Sandpit near Bletchley.