

# MESOLITHIC ARTIFACTS FROM LEY HILL

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THE artifacts described below were found by Dr. K. P. Oakley in 1929. They were briefly mentioned in J. F. Head's *Early Man in South Buckinghamshire* (1955).<sup>1</sup> The present writer is much indebted to Dr. Oakley for permission to publish these finds, for making them available for study and drawing, and for helpful comment on the artifacts themselves.<sup>2</sup>

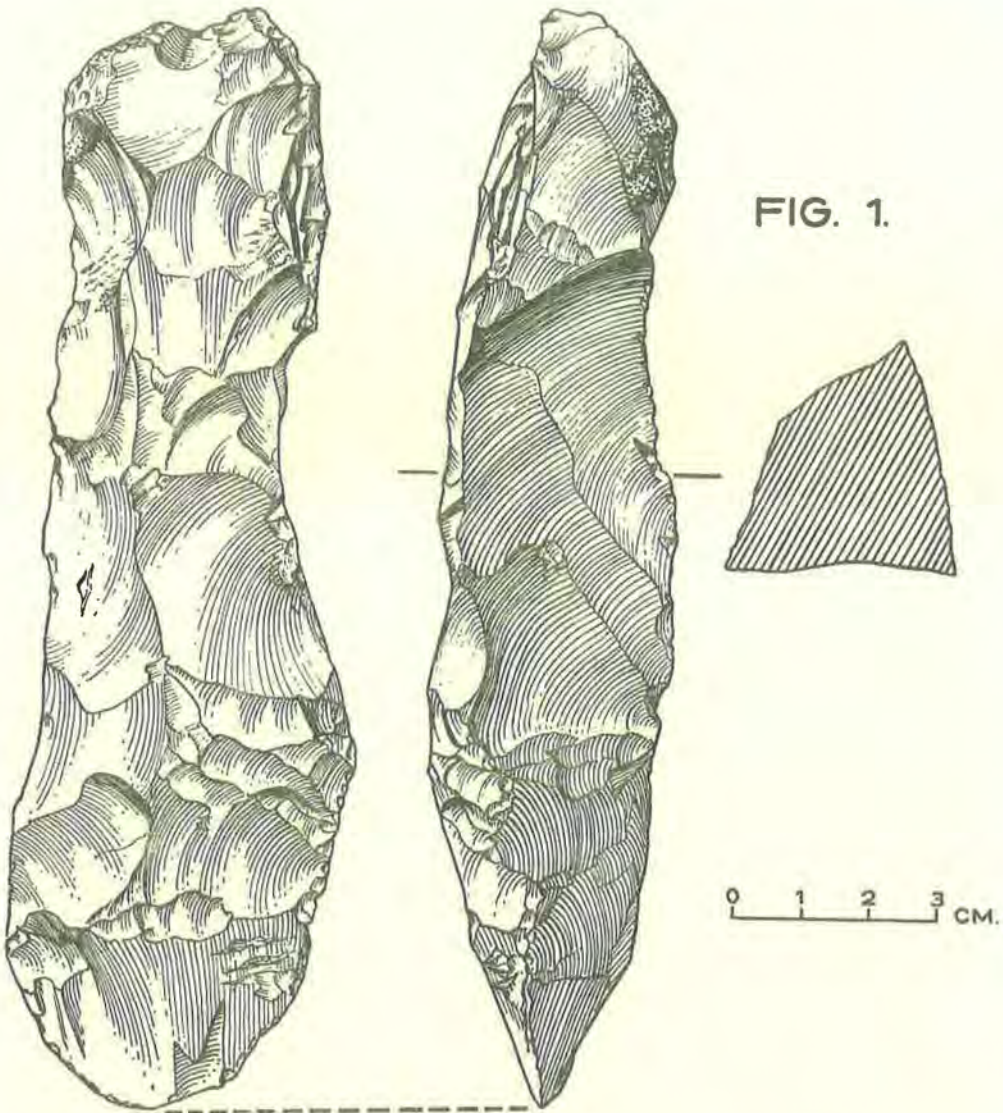
The artifacts, all of local flint, were found in a field on the edge of Cowcroft Wood, Tyler's Hill, near Ley Hill (N.G.R. Sheet SP.90. 983018). They were only a handful in number, there being one tranchet axe, one core, and four waste flakes. The axe was found on 2nd November, 1929, lying on the surface in the bottom of a sand-pit in the field. On 26th December, 1929, the conical core and three small flakes were found on the edge of the same sand-pit. On the same occasion a fourth flake was found in the next field, "about one hundred yards from the sand pits".<sup>3</sup> A few *Cardium edule* shells were also picked up in these fields by Dr. Oakley.<sup>4</sup>

The axe and the core were deposited in the collection of the sub-department of Anthropology at the British Museum (Natural History), whilst the remaining flakes cannot at present be traced. The objects described here are the axe and the core, which have been examined, and the flakes which are described from Dr. Oakley's diary entry.

*The Axe* (Fig. 1). Length: 16.3 cm. Max. width: 3.6 cm. Max. depth: 5.1 cm.

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The axe is an elongated core-axe of tranchet type. Its cutting-edge is flaked so as to make the axe a pick rather than an adze (which is the more common form). The technique employed and the shape produced would therefore seem fully to justify the description of the piece as a "Thames Pick". But strictly speaking, the term should not perhaps be applied to this axe, for it has one feature which is not found on the typical "Thames Pick". This is the concave section which was removed from the under-side of the axe by taking three large flakes, all struck from the same side. Together with a slight concavity in the top of the axe, this feature produces a very clear waisted profile. Indeed, from the side the axe looks more like a chopper, although this is a false impression, there being no cutting-edge on the under-side. The deliberate production of a waist can only be interpreted as an attempt to produce an axe which could be held more firmly. The axe would thus seem to be a variant, or an elaboration of the common Maglemosian "Thames Pick" core-axe. The patina varies from bluish white to pale cream.



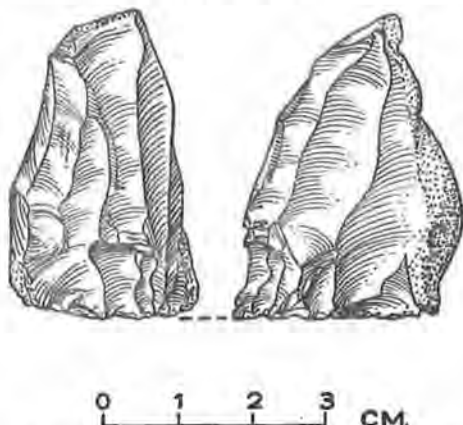
*The Core* (Fig. 2). Height: 4.0 cm. Diameter of base: 2.5 cm. B.M. (N.H.)  
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Originally a weathered pebble, a series of blades have been struck, leaving us with a very fine conical core with a bluish-white patina. Although it was found on a different occasion and in a slightly different find-spot to the axe described above, its original association with the axe seems assured.

*The Flakes.* No measurements are available. Whereabouts unknown. All four flakes are reported to have had well-marked bulbs of percussion and to have shown traces of the original cortex. The patina on all four flakes was bluish

white. The flakes seem to have been waste core flakes, and the association of three of them with the conical core just described might suggest that the core had had its striking platform renewed.

FIG. 2.



*Discussion.* There can be little doubt that the axe, the core, and three of the flakes were originally in association. The fourth flake, according to Dr. Oakley's notes, was in every way similar to the other three and the probability is that it too is contemporary with the axe and core. This group of finds would seem to be only the sixth discovery of Mesolithic artifacts within the Chiltern Hills of Buckinghamshire. The others were at Kimble Farm (just inside Oxon),<sup>5</sup> High Wycombe,<sup>6</sup> Desborough Castle (West Wycombe),<sup>7</sup> and Amersham,<sup>8</sup> where two find-spots are known. These discoveries all point to a Mesolithic penetration of the Chilterns following the line of the river valleys, although none of the discoveries were made actually in the valley bottoms. The group discussed here provides us with a useful addition to our scanty knowledge of the Mesolithic occupation of the Chilterns, and in particular provides us with the earliest traces yet recorded of human occupation of the Chess Valley.

Since this article was written two finds of Palaeolithic implements in the Chess Valley have invalidated the claim of the Ley Hill artifacts described above as the earliest known traces of human habitation in the valley. An Acheulian hand-axe has been found at Cholesbury-cum-St. Leonards, NGR SP.950064 (Records XVII, p. 411) and an ovate hand-axe, unrolled and with a creamy-white patina, has recently been discovered in the grounds of Cestreham School, Chesham, NGR SP.969034.

<sup>1</sup> J. F. Head, *Early Man in South Buckinghamshire* (1955), p. 149.

<sup>2</sup> I am also indebted to Miss M. O. Miller for her excellent drawings.

<sup>3</sup> These facts are all taken from Dr. Oakley's diary for that year.

<sup>4</sup> Dr. Oakley emphasises that there is no need for the shells to be in any way connected with the artifacts.

<sup>5</sup> Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society of East Anglia, II, p. 437. This is an occupation site.

<sup>6</sup> J. F. Head, *op. cit.*, p. 155 and Fig. 6c.

<sup>7</sup> J. F. Head, *op. cit.*, p. 169 and Fig. 6b.

<sup>8</sup> Unpublished. Found by Dr. Oakley who informs me that he has discovered "a handful of flakes and one or two cores" in the gardens of each of the houses he has occupied at Amersham. These are at 4 Grimsdell's Lane and 2 Chestnut Close. These items are still in the private collection of Dr. Oakley.