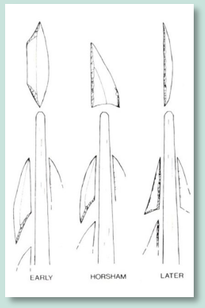
Mesolithic Surrey

9300-4300 BC

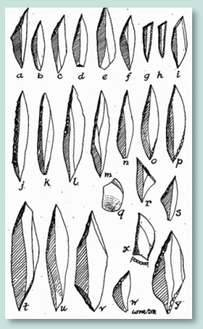
HERITAGE FUND

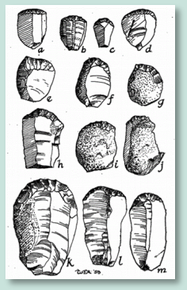
Lithic scatters

As the small groups of hunters and gatherers in the Mesolithic were largely nomadic, their flint tools and waste flakes – knapped from local stone – are usually the main indications of their movement and temporary occupation of sites. This evidence was often in the form of flint scatters, including the larger cores from which the flakes were knapped (see core and flake blades from modern-day knapping, *centre left*). Smaller, more developed tools were required for hunting, including small blades known as microliths (*centre right*), scrapers (*bottom left*), tranchet axes and core adzes (such as the one from Leatherhead, *right,* as well as range of flints from the Farnham terraces, *bottom right*). By the Later Mesolithic, around 6700 BC, new styles of tools appeared which may have been brought over from the continent. The asymmetric 'Horsham point' – dating to around 7000 BC – was replaced by straight-backed bladelets or rods in the later period (see the reconstruction of hunting projectile heads and later microlith from Orchard Hill, Carshalton, *right*).



(Photos: Surrey Archaeological Society, Chris Taylor, Ancient-Craft/James Dilley, David Graham; Drawings: Roger Ellaby, W F Rankine)





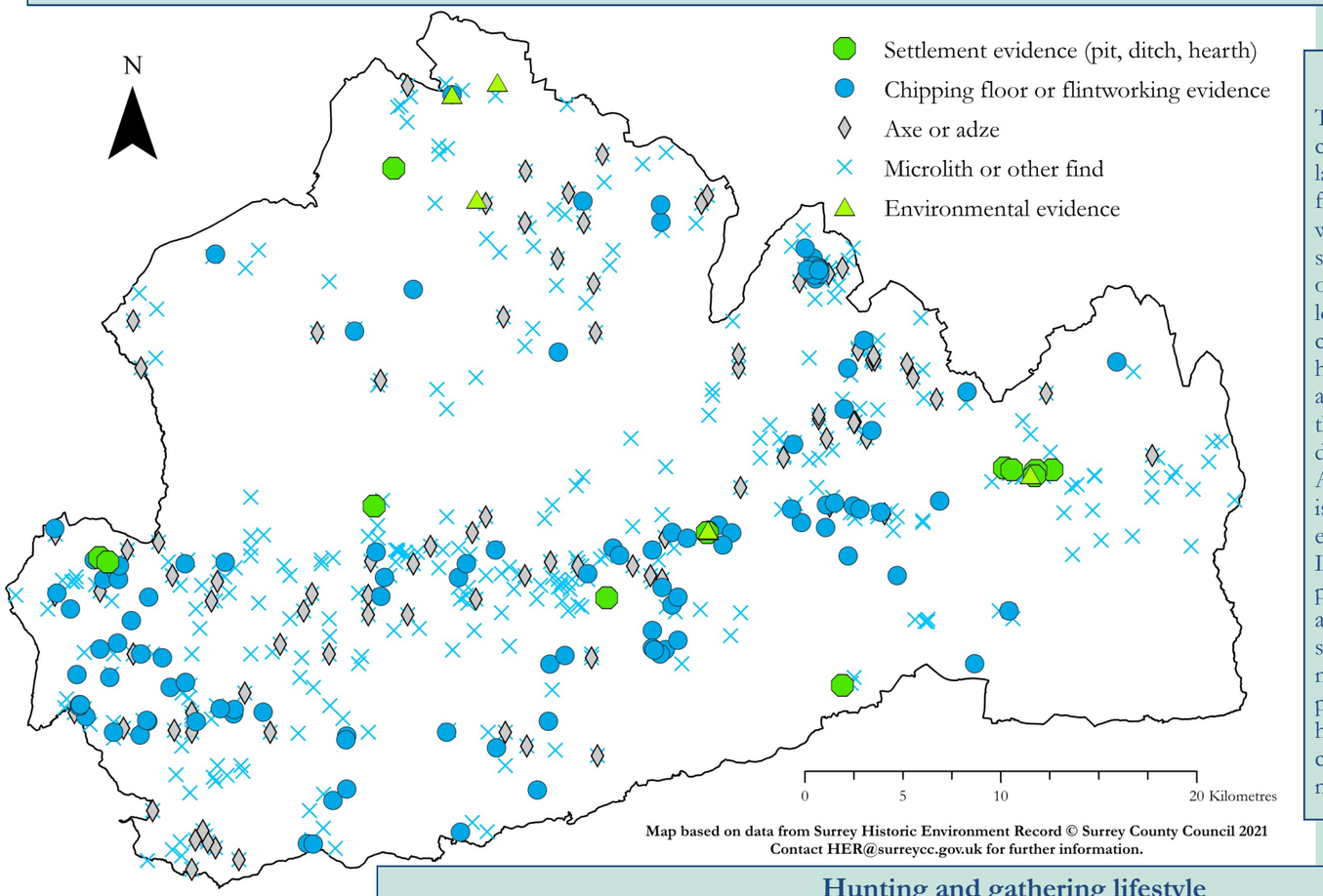
Metal Detecting

If undertaken responsibly, detecting can make important contributions to archaeological knowledge. Detectorists are reminded that it is illegal to trespass – remember all land has an owner! – and to record finds with their local Finds Liaison Officer and the Portable Antiquities Scheme. For more on the Code of Practice, please see www.finds.org.uk.

Portable Antiquities Scheme
www.finds.org.uk

Mesolithic dwellings

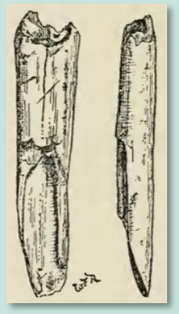
Flint scatters, indicating flint-working, are the most common indication for the temporary occupation sites of the period. Occasionally though, pits and hearths are also excavated which contain valuable environmental information. At North Park Farm, Bletchingley (*right* and *cover*), evidence of fire and cooking activities demonstrated that the hollow was repeatedly used over a long period, with the number of struck flints totalling over 75,000. The material recovered from the hearths at Bermondsey (*far right*) – combined with use-wear analysis on the flint tools – also provided insight into the site activities, and an early excavation at Bourne Mill, Farnham (*left*) uncovered at least 18 pits, though they may have been for quarrying, rather than dwellings. (Images: C E Borelli, Surrey County Archaeological Unit, London Archaeological Archive & Research Centre)



Map based on data from Surrey Historic Environment Record © Surrey County Council 2021
Contact HER@surreycc.gov.uk for further information.

Transition to the Neolithic

The Mesolithic period is regularly defined by characteristics of a migrating society, including lack of any monumental architecture and changes from a microlithic technology. The overall lifestyle was clearly variable however, with sites ranging from small bases for overnight occupation to favoured locations used repeatedly as camps over the years. This hunting and gathering lifestyle almost certainly continued into the Neolithic, even after the development of farming. Although the evidence in Surrey is limited, it is possible that the early domestication of animals took place in the Late Mesolithic, though examples such as the possible sheep metacarpal from Farnham (*above*) are only speculative. Whether or not this shift in subsistence was the direct result of continental newcomers, or was taken up by the indigenous population through trade and contact, it impacted heavily on the archaeological record, including the changing flint technology and disappearance of microliths. (Image: W F Rankine)



Hunting and gathering lifestyle

By the Mesolithic, the landscape had shifted from open tundra vegetation to covered woodland – a mixture of oak, lime, hazel and elm – as a result of climatic warming. With the warmer environment came new sources of food – wild birds, boar, deer and fish – which resulted in the change to a migrating hunting and gathering lifestyle. The small groups of hunter-gatherers lived off what they could find or hunt from season to season, whether nuts, berries, fruit, wild cattle, deer, pig, fish and fowl. Charred plant remains such as hazelnuts (as in the example from West Kent, *left*) are often the most common evidence of this subsistence economy – even being able to date associated flints, as at Kettlebury – and roe deer bones have been recovered both from hearths at Bermondsey and pits at Charlwood. Although flint tools are by far the main evidence of hunting equipment, occasional implements fashioned from bone and antler have been found, such as the antler spearheads from Wandsworth and Battersea (*right*). (Images: © Historic England, ELWJphotography; Drawing: David Williams)