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**Mesolithic finds in west Gloucestershire**

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agreeing to its publication. Ian Standing and Bryan Walters drew the implement to my attention and facilitated its study, while the helpful comments of Dr Stuart Needham of the British Museum have considerably improved this note. The palstave remains in the private collection of Dr Hart.

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## MESOLITHIC FINDS FROM WEST GLOUCESTERSHIRE

When compiling the data for the chapter on 'palaeolithic and mesolithic evidence. . .' in the *Archaeology in Gloucestershire* volume, it proved impossible to cite any definite mesolithic finds from Gloucestershire west of the River Severn (Saville 1984, 74). Since that chapter was written new fieldwork by Bryan Walters has led to the discovery of a surface flint scatter which includes mesolithic material at a field named Nedge Cop (SO 567058), south of Orles wood, in the parish of St Briavels (Walters 1985, 21). The scatter, spread across the south-easterly sloping field, has been sampled by random surface recovery during several visits by Mr Walters over the last two years, resulting in a collection of 542 flints to date. These can be classified as follows:

unretouched flakes, spalls, etc.	388
unclassified burnt fragments	59
cores	14
core fragments	4
flaked lumps	4
bifacial arrowhead fragments	3
microliths	13
scrapers	10
piercers	4
spall from a polished axehead	1
miscellaneous retouched pieces	42
Total	542

The collection is a mixed one, containing neolithic/bronze age implement types as well as mesolithic ones, but the mesolithic element is significant, being represented by distinctive cores, scrapers, and miscellaneous retouched pieces in addition to microliths. These St Briavels finds can be seen, therefore, as representing the location of the first unequivocal mesolithic site to be documented in west Gloucestershire. The thirteen microliths (ten of which are illustrated in FIG. 7) are mostly fragmentary and can be given only a crude classification:

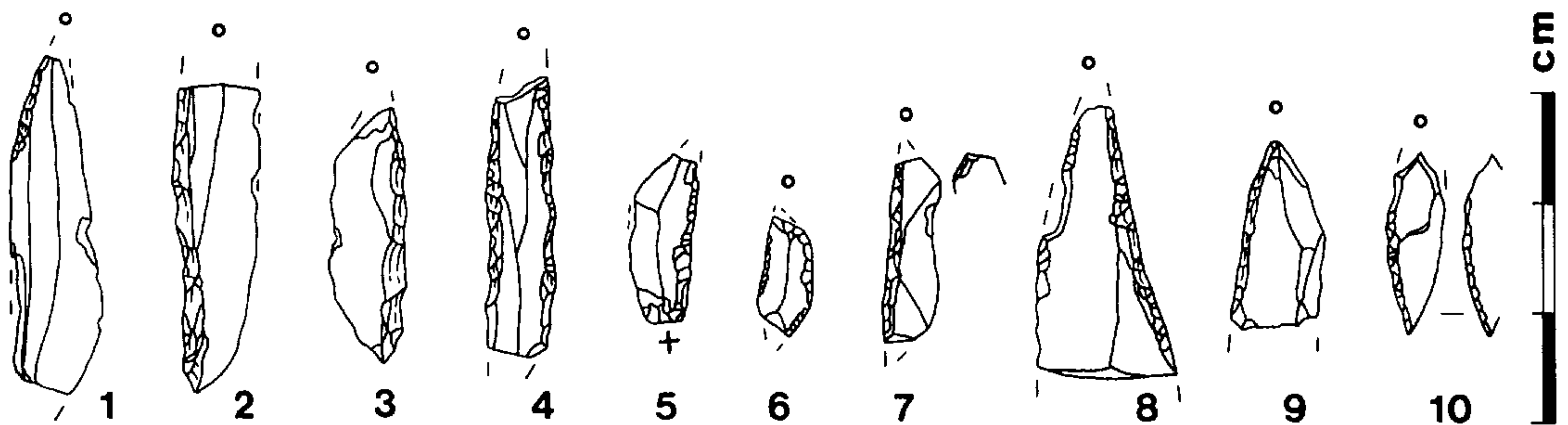


FIG. 7 Microliths from St Briavels. Scale 1:1. Drawn by A. Saville.

obliquely blunted, LHS	1	(FIG. 7, 1)
edge blunted, LHS	1	(FIG. 7, 2)
edge blunted, RHS	1	(FIG. 7, 3)
bilateral edge-blunted	1	(FIG. 7, 4)
atypical	1	(FIG. 7, 5)
geometric triangular	1	(FIG. 7, 6)
unclassifiable	7	(FIG. 7, 7 - 10)
Total	13	

Although this classification is necessarily imprecise, the typology of these 'narrow blade' microliths indicates a later rather than earlier mesolithic attribution for this material.

A further mesolithic findspot, so far identified from a single microlith, has been recorded at a field named Perch Holly (SO 617172) in Ruardean parish (Walters 1985, 24). It is notable that both this findspot and the St Briavels scatter are on high ground, at 600 ft (183 m) above OD in the case of Nedge Cop field, and at 800 ft (245 m) above OD at Perch Holly field, the latter spot commanding extensive views to the north and west. Both sites are on well-drained soil on Carboniferous limestone or sandstone. Dry soils and elevated positions are locational attributes shared with most of the known mesolithic sites elsewhere in Gloucestershire (Saville 1984, fig. 4).

Another mesolithic item of rather different character which has come to light as a result of Bryan Walters' researches is shown in FIG. 8. This is a mesolithic core-tool discovered as an isolated find some 40 years ago by Mr R.C. Jones when terracing the garden of Model Cottage (SO 67901384), Elton Road, near Littledean but in Newnham parish (Walters 1985, 28). This implement cannot be fully classified, since partial refolding in antiquity has obscured any working edge, but it can be regarded as a generalized axe/pick type of heavy woodworking tool, probably used hafted in a sleeve of bone, antler, or wood. The surface of this tool is discoloured to a light grey, with iron staining on the flake ridges. Its dimensions are: length 80 mm, width 41 mm, thickness 21 mm; the weight is 76.5 g. The only other mesolithic core-tool known from Gloucestershire is the similarly proportioned tranchet axe thought to derive from the Barnwood gravels (Saville 1984, 72 and fig. 6).

The above finds now allow the quite categorical assertion that mesolithic settlement activity did take place, at least in the later mesolithic, in the Forest of Dean region, and thus to a certain extent they counterbalance the prevailing Cotswold distribution of known mesolithic sites in the county.

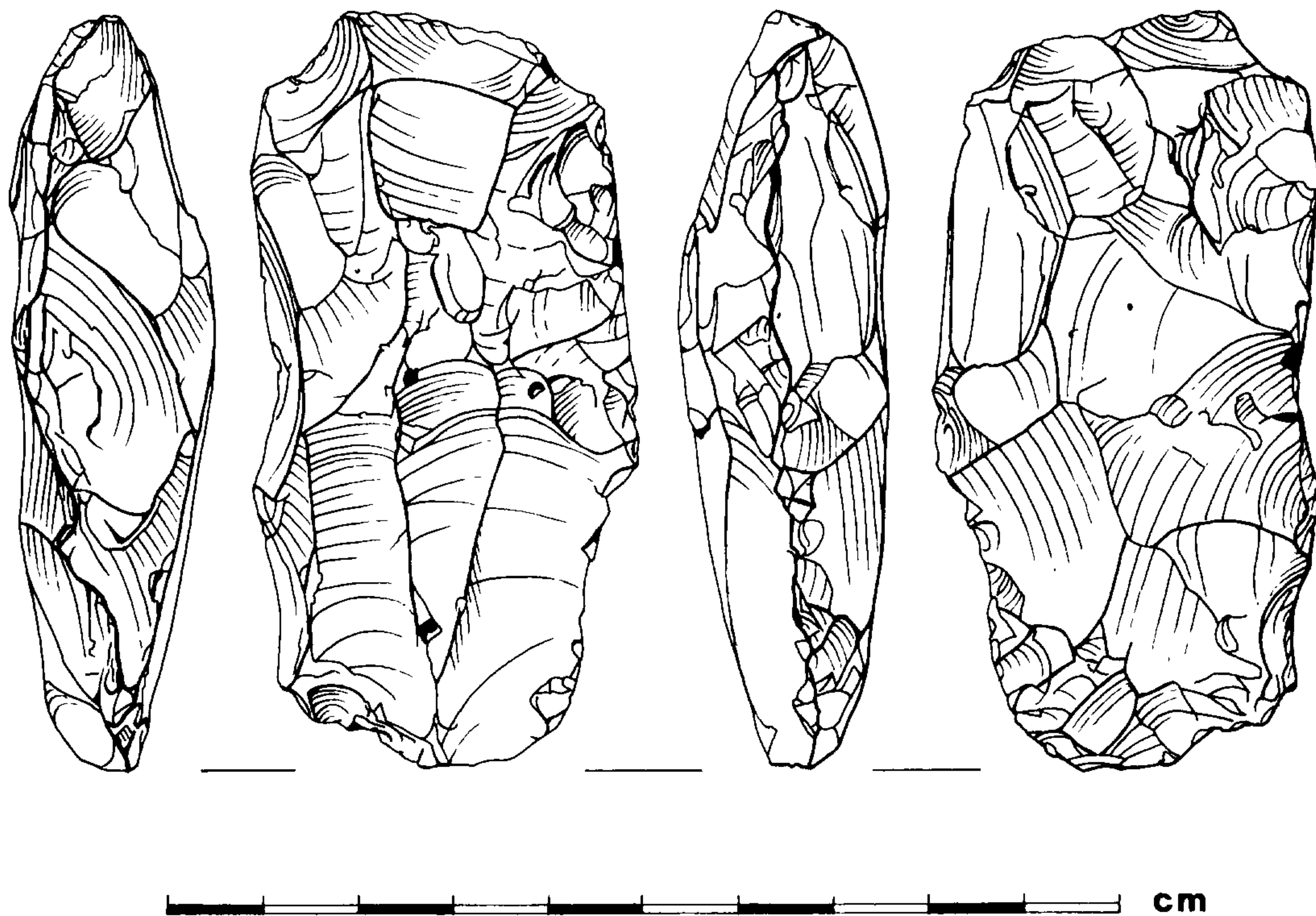


FIG. 8 Mesolithic core-tool from near Littledean. Scale 1:1. Drawn by Susan Banks.

#### *Acknowledgements*

I am indebted to Bryan Walters for allowing me to examine his flint collection and to publish the mesolithic finds, as well as for much general help and advice. The core-tool is published here by permission of its present owner, Mr D. Macer-Wright, and my thanks are due to Susan Banks for her drawing of this implement.

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