

THE STONE AGE HUNTERS OF GOLDSWORTH PARK

Iain Wakeford © 2014

Last week we took a brief look at the geology of Woking and noted the relatively recent nature of the earth beneath our feet – at least as far as Geologists are concerned. I tried to explain this by imagining that the time from the Big Bang to the present day was condensed into one year and noted that if that were the case then it would not be until the 28th December that this area was finally lifted out of the sea to become land. Of course what I should have pointed out is that there was some land above what is now left that was eroded away over the remaining few days of that year, but I hope the use of the calendar gave you some idea of the vast amount of time involved in the geological history of our area.



In the 1920's Sir Henry Lawson, who lived at a house called Brockhill off Littlewick Road at Horsell Birch, discovered thousands of flint tools dating from the Upper Palaeolithic period. Later excavation was carried out just before the fields were developed as part of Goldsworth Park with the finds now kept at the British Museum.

On that Calendar, man first appeared on the scene in the final hour of New Years Eve, so this week I want to re-set the clock so that this time January 1st marks the time that Anthropologists tell us that the first human-like creatures started using stone tools, roughly 2.5 million years ago in a period that Archaeologists know as the Palaeolithic (or Old Stone Age).

Scientists like to come up with fancy names (if not fancy theories) and the Cave Man that some of us read about as a child is now well and truly out of date.

Although nobody at the time would have recognised the difference, we now have to think of the Stone Age as being divided into at least three periods – the Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and



Paintings on the walls of the Lascaux Caves in southwestern France and the Altamira Cave in Spain were created towards the end of the 29th December on our new calendar.

At the end of the Paleolithic era, there were perhaps just over five million inhabitants of the earth, with just a small group of these visiting our area during one or two summers in that vast period of time



The heath land of places such as Cheapside in Horsell, was probably the result of over farming in the Neolithic and Bronze Age.

Neolithic – with all of these periods often being sub-divided further by Archaeologists to distinguish subtle differences in the tools and technologies used.

The Lower Palaeolithic lasted until about 300,000 years ago (give or take a few tens of thousands of years) or about the middle of November on our new calendar. The Middle Palaeolithic followed until the morning of Boxing Day when Upper Palaeolithic Man first appeared on the scene, succeeded at almost midday on the 30th December by Mesolithic Man (and Neolithic Man early in the morning of New Years Eve).

It was during the later part of the Upper Palaeolithic (between about 2.30am and 6am on December 30th) that man first left his mark on our area in the form of over a thousand flint tools (and possibly charcoal) from a site on the edge of the hockey pitches of Goldsworth Park known as 'Brockhill'.

The tools are of a type known to Archaeologists as 'Creswellian' as they are similar to ones first found in the caves of the Creswell Crags in Derbyshire. And although they were probably only left at Brockhill by one small family group, possibly on one hunting expedition, in one summer, during one of the interglacial periods

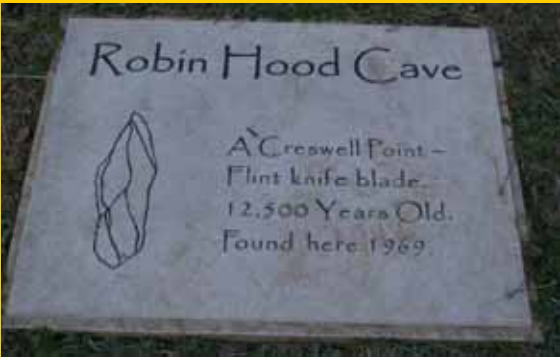
The Stonehenge of Pyrford

Just how old the 'Pyrford Stone' is we do not know. It is said to be an ancient boundary marker, but some think it may also be part of a prehistoric monument - an outlier to a stone circle perhaps (or a sole survivor of one on this site). Indeed some point to St Nicholas' Church just down the hill as being a possible prehistoric ritual site. The churchyard is circular, often the sign that the early Christians to the area took over a previous heathen place of worship, using the ancient stones in the fabric of their new church. What better way of 'converting' people than to completely take over their religion and amalgamate it into your own.

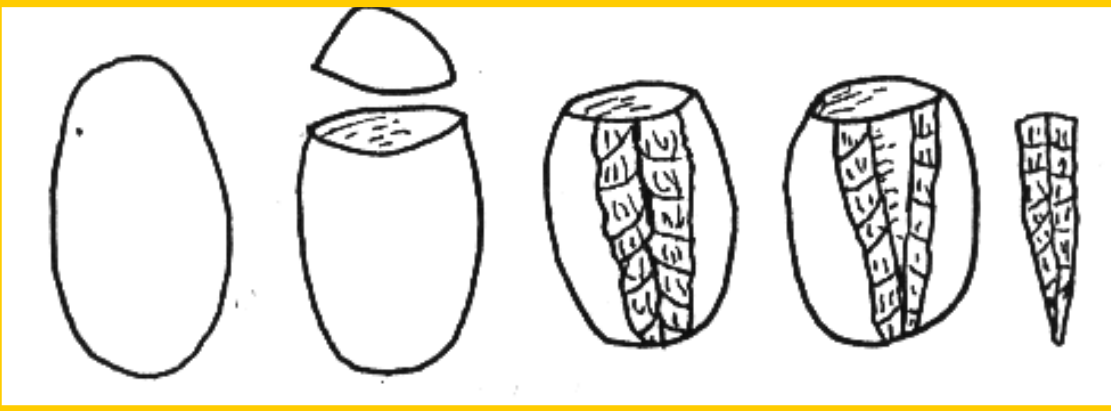
The Pyrford Stone, like much of the fabric of Pyrford Church, is made out of Sarsen Stone – the same rock used in the construction of much of Stonehenge. Granted the Pyrford Stone is perhaps not quite so impressive as that particular monument, but at least here you don't have to pay nearly £20 and have to book in advance in order to walk a few miles to be fenced off from touching it!



The Creswell Crags in Derbyshire is a limestone gorge honeycombed with caves where tools and evidence of life during the last Ice Age (and Britain's only known Ice Age rock art) has been found. Some of the flint tools discovered at Brockhill, are similar to the Creswellian tools.



Producing a blade from a flint pebble (left) to the finished blade (right)



of the last Ice Age, their significance in the prehistory of this country (let alone Woking) is immense.

Until Brockhill was discovered most of the occupation sites found of that period were in caves, and it is still one of only a handful of open-air camps so far discovered (including Wey Manor Farm at Addlestone), making Goldsworth Park one of the oldest inhabited sites in Britain!

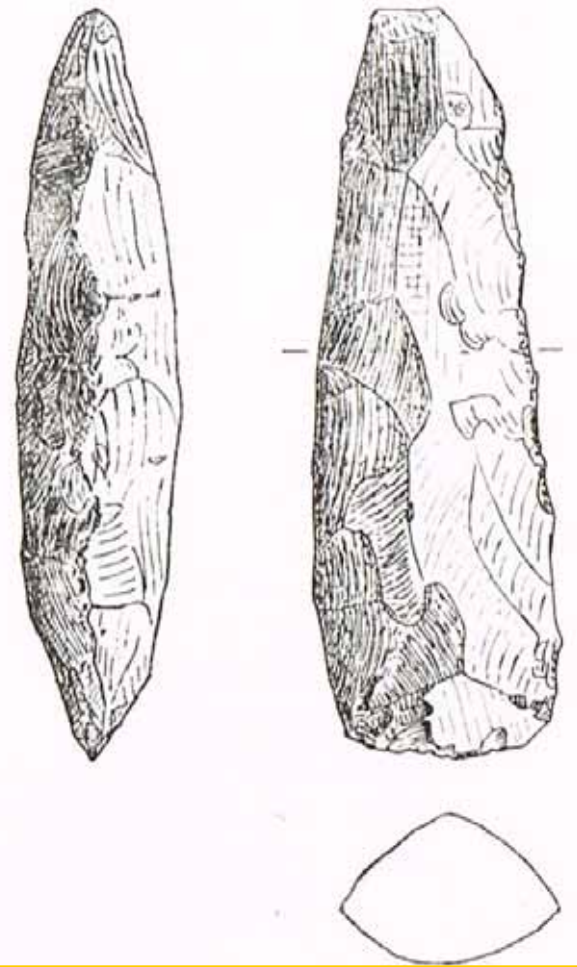
Another lone flint microlith found at Pyrford is all that we have from the entire Palaeolithic period in Woking, but from the Mesolithic there are a few more isolated finds including an adze from a field off Warbury Lane, a stone axe from Knaphill Nursery and another flint axe from Kettlewell Hill, as well as



A rough drawing of the 'pen-knife' point from Pyrford.

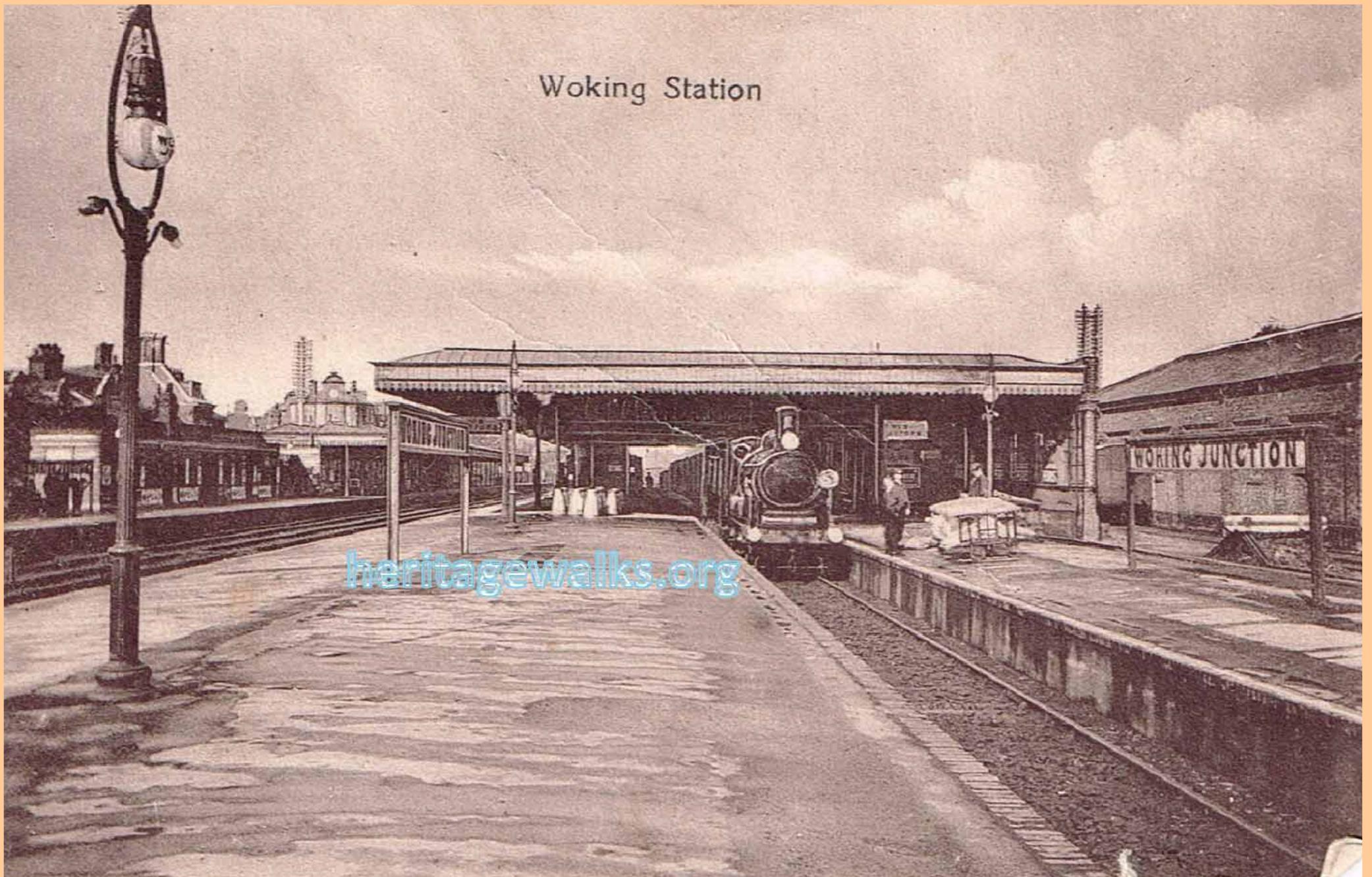
a number of worked flints at Woking Park Farm in Old Woking; a greenstone axe from Walsham in Pyrford; an arrowhead from a flowerbed at Byfleet Church; a 'core' from Westfield; and another axe found at Jackman's Nursery in Egley Road in the 1950's.

From the Neolithic we have a polished flint axe from Dartnell Park in West Byfleet, a double-barbed arrowhead from Fishers Farm in Old Woking and more flint tools including a flake, a pickaxe core, and a thumbnail scraper from Woking Park Farm. The Mesolithic lasted almost fourteen hours, the Neolithic just over five with the Bronze Age (which we shall look at next week) beginning about breakfast-time on the morning of New Years Eve. Man's year on this planet has already gone very quick.



A Mr Lucas of Egley Road found this Mesolithic (or Middle Stone Age) flint axe in May 1957 on what was then part of the old Jackman's Nursery, now the site of Old Hill.

Neolithic Farmers Help Create Modern Woking



It was probably during the late Neolithic period that Stone-Age man first started settling down from the nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle to start farming the thin soils of North-West Surrey. In doing so it is thought he inadvertently created the heath lands that for centuries to come were to play an important part in the history of our area. Without those Neolithic and later Bronze Age farmers over-working the land the cheap common lands of West Surrey and North Hampshire would not have attracted the railway builders of the 1830's and without the station (seen here in the early 1900's) there would be no Necropolis Company and no Victorian town of Woking.