

THE MAKERS OF THE HEATH - BRONZE AGE & IRON AGE WOKING

Iain Wakeford © 2014

In the last couple of weeks I have got through two calendars – the first my ‘geological calendar’ where we discovered how relatively recent the soils of the Woking area are, and then my ‘human calendar’ where again we discovered that it was not until a couple of days before the end of our imaginary year that man first left his mark on Woking in the shape of over a thousand flint tools at the Upper Palaeolithic site of Goldsworth Park.

With the coming of the Bronze Age, roughly 2,500 BC, I hope we have reached a timescale that is not so vast that it cannot be easily imagined, so that after two weeks my metaphorical diaries can be put away!

There can be no doubt that Bronze Age man once lived in this area, but exactly where he lived is harder to establish. We know that he lived here because there is ample evidence that he died here, in the shape of numerous Bronze-Age burial mounds (or tumuli) that can be found marked on the old Ordnance Survey maps all over North-West Surrey. They can still be found at places such as at West End, Wisley, Whitmoor and Horsell Common, but many more (at one time there were up to two hundred throughout the whole of Surrey) have been lost.

Here at Horsell Common there are two ‘bell barrows’ and a ‘disc barrow’, although the latter is slightly harder to find unless you really know what you are looking for.

There was also once a bell barrow in the grounds of a house in Woodham Lane called Lynwood, but that was evidently destroyed when Lynwood Close was built on the site.

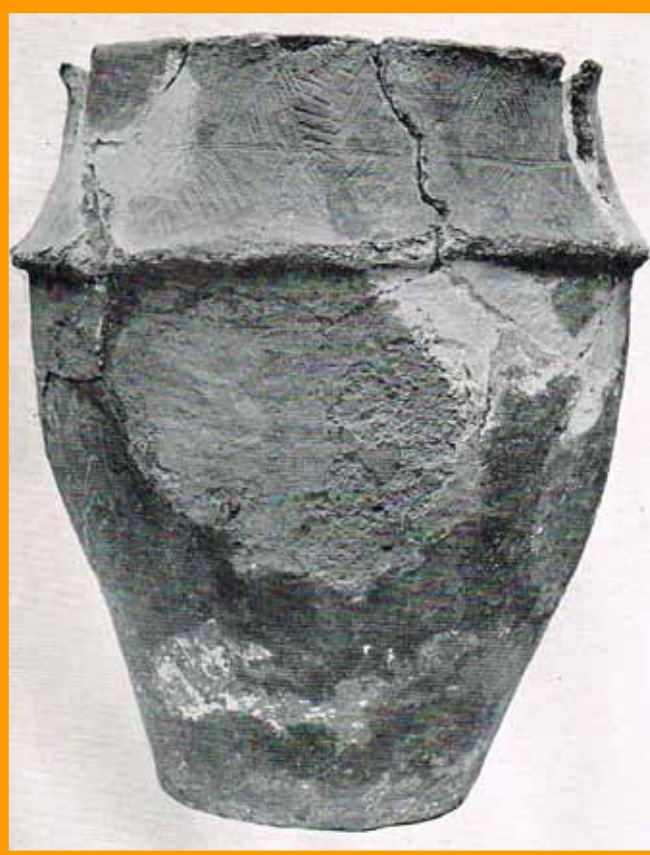
Just because we are now looking at the Bronze Age, however, doesn’t mean that man didn’t continue to make tools out of stone (just as we continue to use pen and paper in an age of electronic devices). Finds from the Bronze Age include a fine flint axe found at Maybury, with fragments of pottery found in the Chobham area as well as at Byfleet, Mayford and Westfield. A Bronze Age palstave (a type of axe) may also have been found at Goldsworth, although the label on the item found by Dr W



The Bell-Barrows at West End were photographed from the air in the 1920's.



Although the Disc Barrow on Horsell Common is not easy to see, the ditch of the nearby Bell-Barrow is much clearer, with the light-coloured grass growing in the damp soil bounded by the heather on the dryer ‘berm’.



Urn found in excavation of a Bronze Age Barrow at Silvermere, just across the borough boundary from Byfleet. The urn was discovered in about 1830 when the foundations of a house (called Silvermere) were being dug. Apparently there were originally three urns found, all filled with fragments of bone and charcoal, although only the one illustrated above survived.

Hall in the 1920's rather misleadingly states that it was found 'in a ditch 800 yards west of the old Basingstoke Canal bridge at Merrow'. As many of Dr Hall's other finds were from Merrow,

it may just be a slip of the pen, with the real find-spot being near Langman's Bridge not far from his home at Goldsworth Lodge.

Another Bronze Palstave was found when they

Woking's First Necropolis?



In the 1850's the London Necropolis Company bought Woking Common to lay out their vast cemetery, but the idea of burying the dead on the heathlands of the Woking area could go back thousands of years as the two bell barrows and one disc barrow on Horsell Common show. The question is where did these Bronze Age people live? Was it on the nearby ridge of Maybury Hill or down by the fertile waters of the Rive Ditch and the valley of the Sheerwater Lake? Or should we be looking further north, to the site of Maclaren's factory beside the River Bourne?

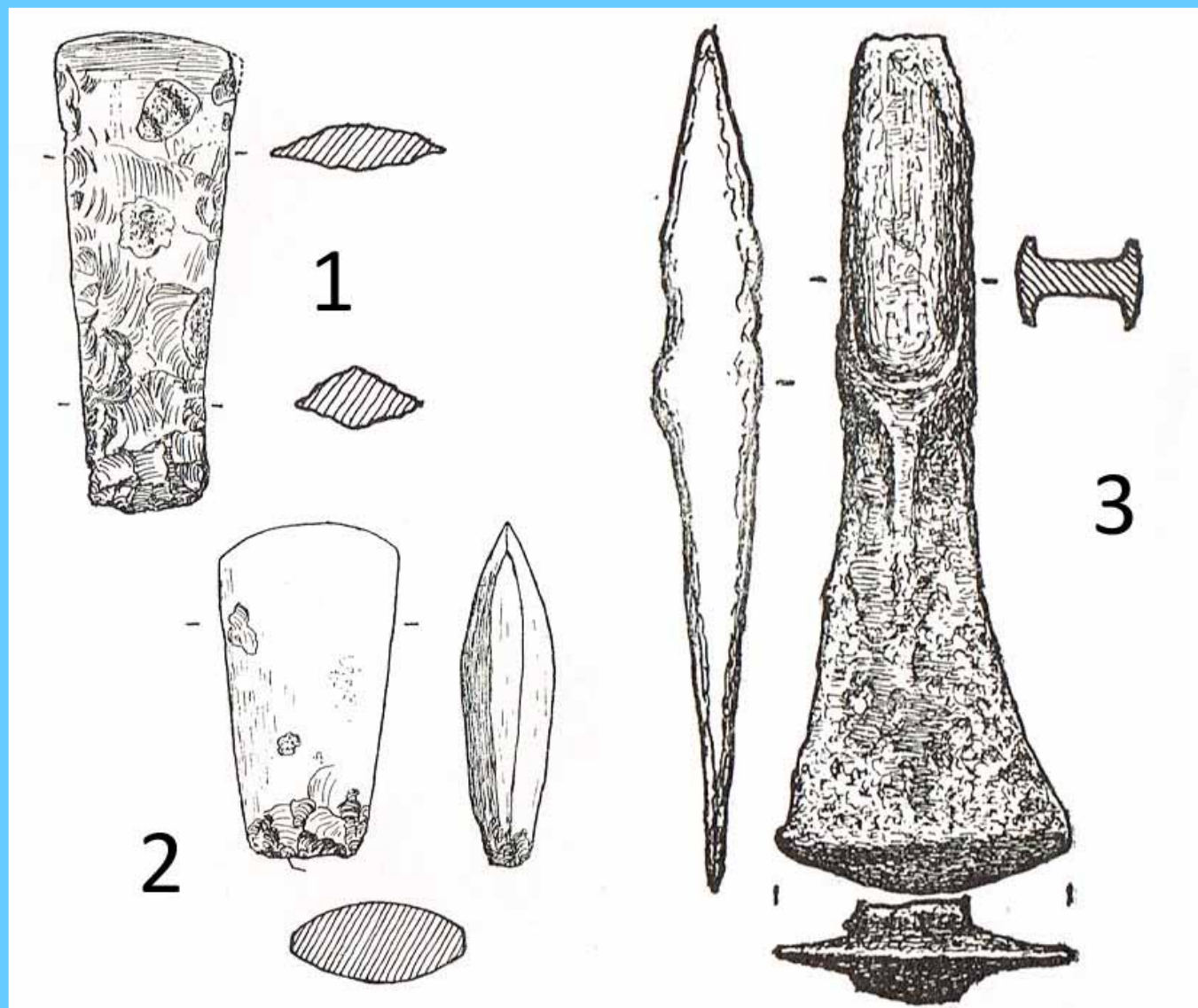
The other question often asked is who is buried here? Is it the burial ground of some long forgotten battle, or the graves of some tribal leaders who died peacefully and were buried with fine grave goods? We will never know. The barrows have unfortunately been dug into in the past with no record of any finds, but judging from other similar sites it appears that there may have been little to find in the first place.

were building the Sheerwater estate in the mid 1950's and according to Eric Gardner, writing about the lower Wey Valley in the Surrey Archaeological Collections in 1910 'it appears that a large number of implements and urns, dating from the Bronze Age, have been discovered in the immediate vicinity' including a bronze bucket from Brooklands; dug-out canoes from Wisley and Weybridge and a 'remarkably fine paddle found in a meadow at Send' The latter was discovered by Mr Tarrant, who would later go on to discover a Romano-British site whilst developing the Hockering Estate in Woking.

Just across the road from The Hockering, on Monument Hill in the 1960's an Iron Age occupation site was discovered. Mr F.A. Hastings explained in the Surrey Archaeological Collections of 1962, 'The site consists of a small pocket of occupation beginning in the Iron Age – dominated by pottery, loom-weights and pot boilers. It then continues into the 1st and 2nd centuries AD and finally there is evidence of 4th century occupation denoted by the green glass bead and pottery.'

Other finds along the Wey Valley from the Iron Age include a 1st century BC vessel from Pyrford, a 1st century BC bronze from West Hall, West Byfleet, and an Iron Age shield discovered near Chertsey.

Lethal Weapons found in Maybury & Sheerwater!



In the 1950's local historian Mr A.R. Bliaux discovered a couple of early Bronze Age axes in Maybury, possibly on the site of the Maybury Estate that was being developed at that time. According to the report in the Surrey Archaeological Collections of 1958 one (1) was 'of ochreous brown flint with some whitish inclusions and cream-brown patina' whilst the other (2) was a 'polished axe with some blue-grey mottling on the surface'.

Just across the railway line on the site of the Sheerwater Estate (about 100 yards from the site of the former Bell Barrow at Lynwood Close) a bronze palstave (3) was discovered in 1956. It weighed 9¼ oz, about 260 grams, and was evidently hafted onto a wooden handle and used perhaps as a sort of chisel or axe to shape or chop down trees.

Was this Bronze Age Palstave found by Dr Hall near his home at Goldsworth, or 'in a ditch 800 yards west of the Basingstoke Canal (sic) at Merrow'?

