

Prehistoric Artefacts from North Northumberland Forests: The Berthele Collection

Ian Hewitt

Introduction

A large collection of artefacts was assembled by F.M. Berthele BEM, from the mid 1960s to the early 1990s, whilst working as a ganger for the Forestry Commission. His collection was amassed principally from forest plantations. Plantation ploughing disturbed areas of land which had been previously used for light agricultural purposes and stock grazing. Inevitably, a number of archaeological sites became exposed, and buried artefact scatters were revealed. The scope of the collection ranges from Mesolithic to Anglo-Saxon, and includes objects of horn, glass, pottery, jet, shale, flint and other worked stones. There is also an array of geological specimens which require a separate review.

A selection of archaeological items from the Berthele Collection was published by Jobey and Weyman (1981, 39-42) as a component of the Millstone Hill cairnfield survey. In their report the authors assert that 'it has not been possible to assign more than a general provenance to most of the finds', and this remains true today.

Objectives

Since Jobey's paper there has been no attempt to publish all or part of the collection. Limitations of time and resources have been the principal deterrents, and these problems are yet to be resolved. The purpose of this paper is to examine the history of Mr Berthele's work and, in particular, to:

- i) outline factors which affected the development of the collection,
- ii) assess and redraft the documentary archive (maps),
- iii) outline proposals for future work on the collection, both for archive and for publication purposes.

Collection strategy and recording

Mr Berthele did keep records of his finds on maps (reproduced below), which show the specific find spots of some objects. Amongst these are a cupped stone, a shale disc and a bugle bead. For the most part though, the maps

give generalised information. In particular, flints are divided into just two sub-groups:

- i) arrowheads (leaf-shaped or barbed and tanged).
- ii) unclassified flints (scrapers, fabricators, waste flakes, etc).

Apart from finds lettered *a* to *h*, the number of artefacts retrieved from each marked spot is not given. Consequently, the maps cannot be used as indicators of finds density. Arrowheads probably represent the exception to this rule. Their special status within the collection indicates that they were individually recorded. In recent months a number of additional arrowheads has been identified from amongst the mass of unclassified flints. Some of these might have come from the plantation areas, but they will not have been identified on the maps.

An unquantifiable minority of the collection was derived from ploughed farmland. However, the major source of the assemblage was situated within six forest plantation groups (Maps 2-7). Most of the artefacts were gathered after ploughing and prior to tree planting. Mr Berthele worked alone, searching for artefacts among the newly-formed furrows. This imposed a linear gathering system with a consistent individual bias towards flint, the largest category in the collection.

The context for most of the finds is unknown. This is a result of the awesome size of the Berthele Collection as compared with the general nature of the accompanying records. In addition, 'pre-plantation archaeological assessment was limited and much important information has been lost.

The Documentary Archive (Maps)

The collection's paper archive (Maps 2-7) demonstrates that the recovery of artefacts was affected by certain physical variables.

i) Small unplanted forest areas, which were not ploughed, produced few finds. Examples include rock outcrops and quarries. These are especially evident on Maps 2, 5 and 7.

ii) The map of the western plantation at Wooler Common (Map 4) suggests that finds recovery was low in zones with high concentrations of fire breaks and trackways. Similarly, artefact retrieval was thin near to the forest path at Quarryhouse (Map 6). In these places

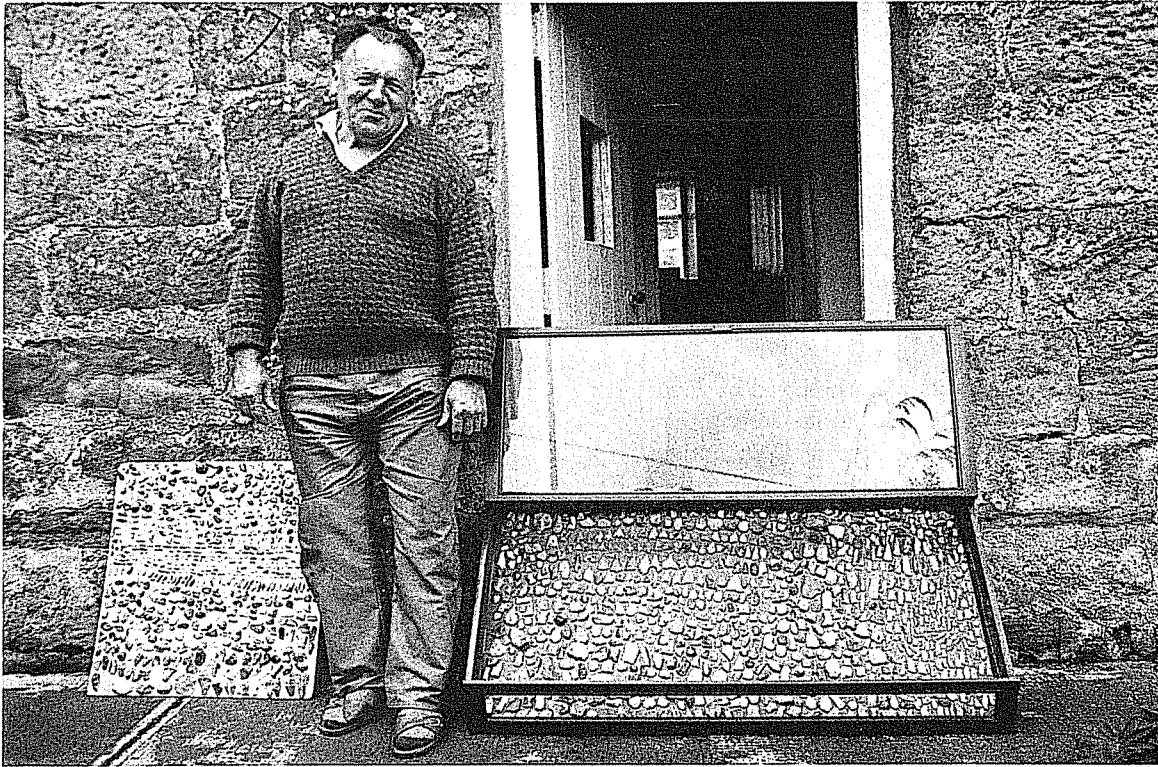
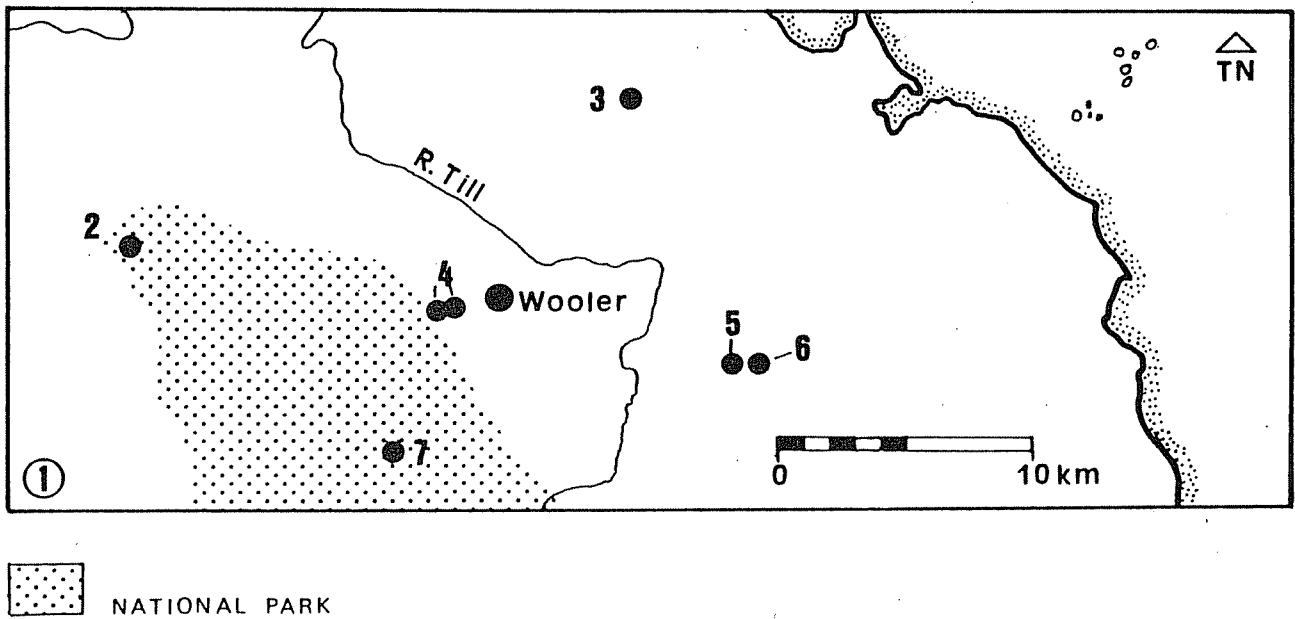
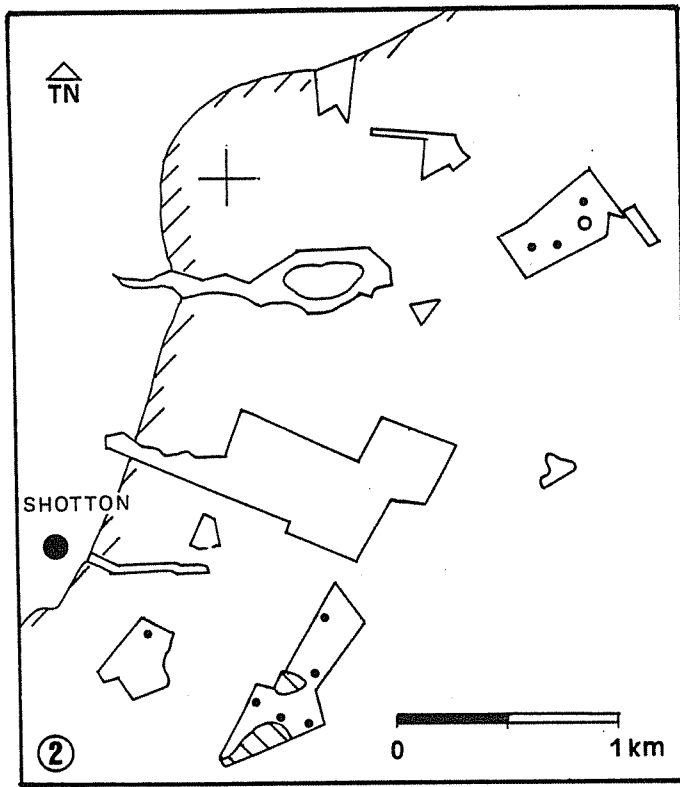


Plate 1. Fritz Berthele with part of his collection at Hepburn Cottage





Map 1. Location map of the plantation areas detailed in maps 2-7 (Wooler centre = NT 992 282).

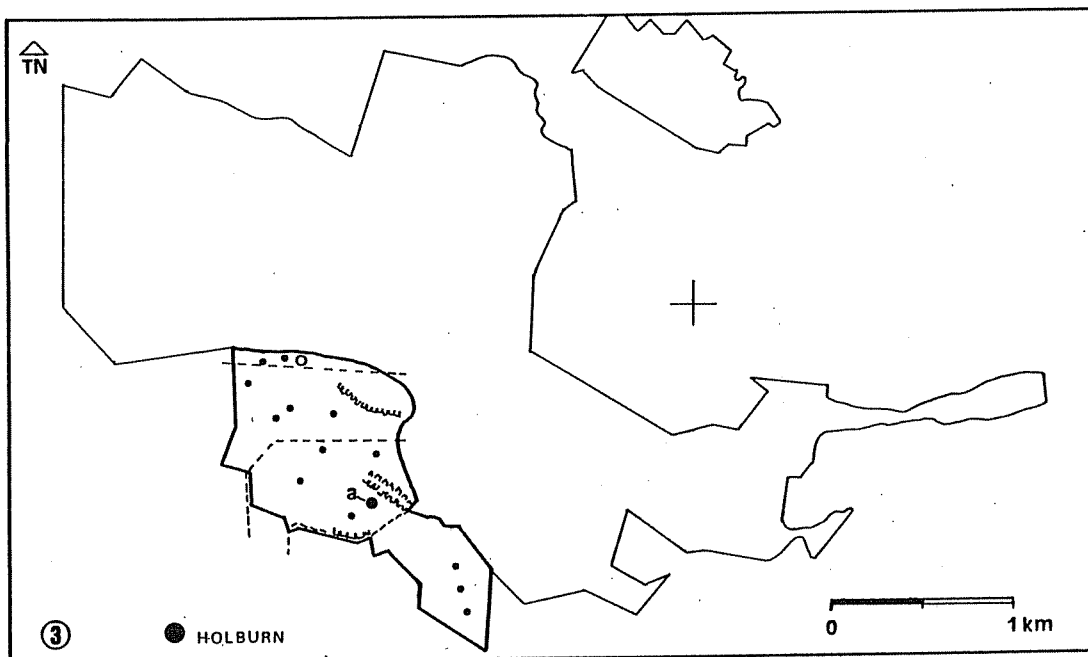


Key to maps 2-7.

- *Unclassified flint*
- *Unclassified arrowhead*
- ⊙ *Special find*
- *Cupped mobiliary stone*
- *Track*
- ⊕ *Map reference point*
- ▲ *Finds from known funerary site*

-  NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY
-  UNPLANTED

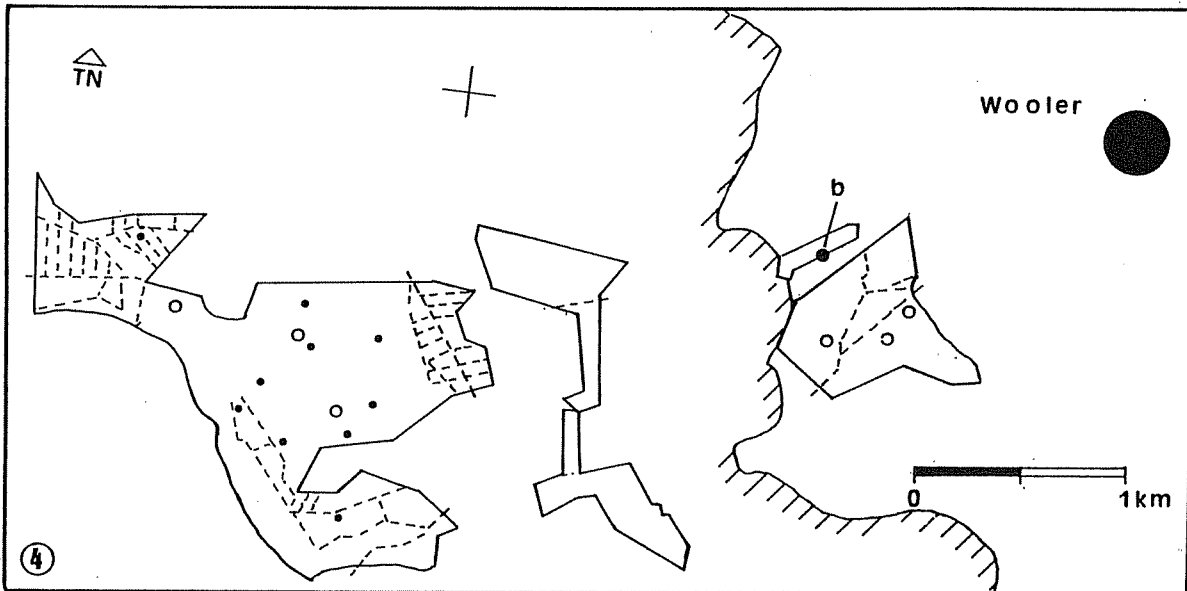
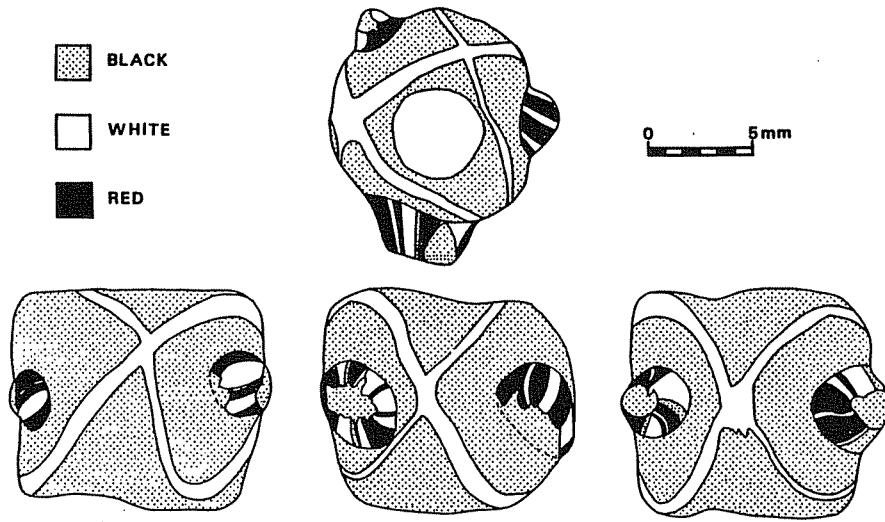
Map 2. Kilham Parish (NT 85 32)



*Map 3. Shiellow Crags/Holburn Moss, near Lowick (NU 07 38).
a = Anglo-Saxon pottery fragments.*

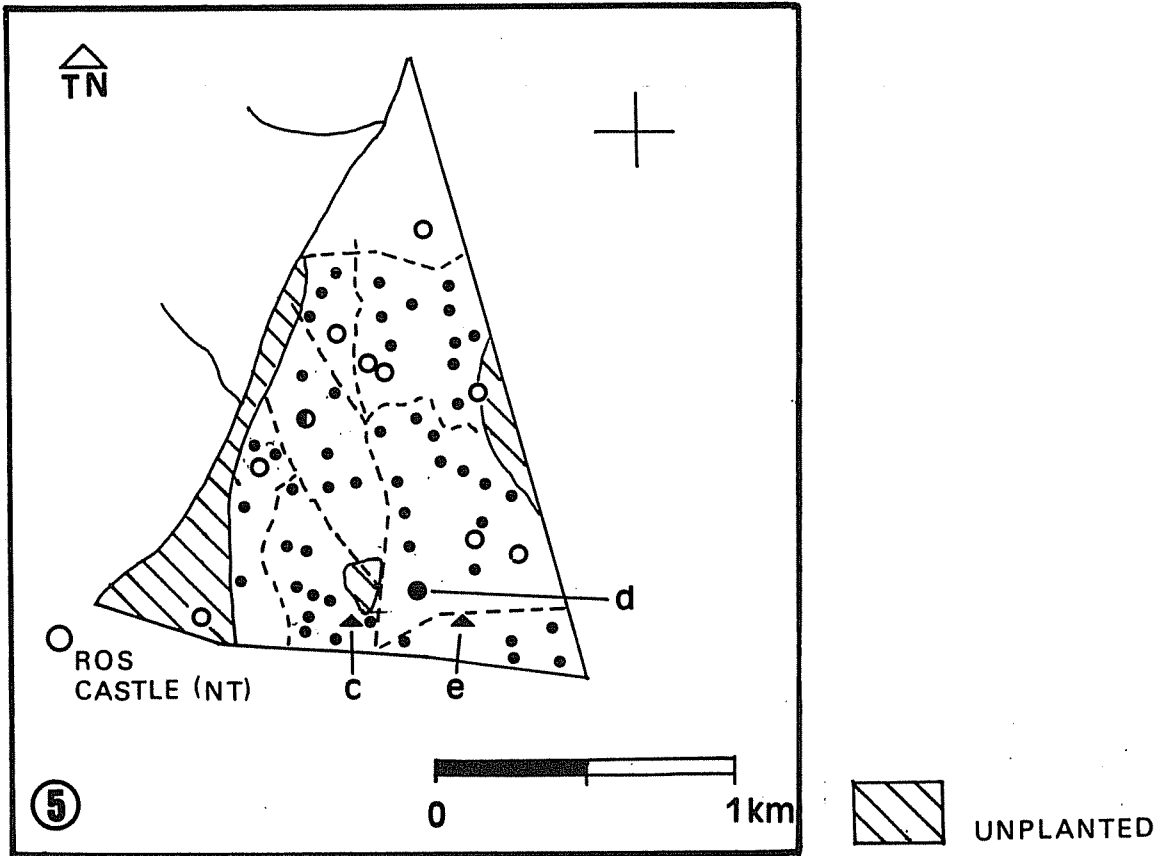
IRON AGE BEAD, WOOLER COMMON

NORTHUMBERLAND

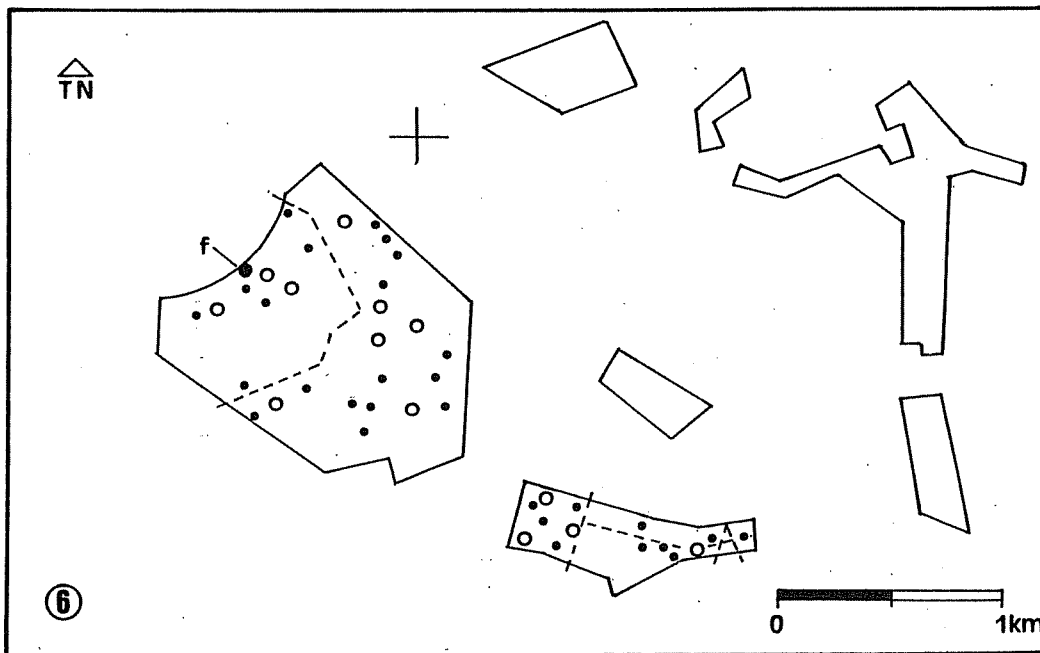


 NATIONAL PARK BOUNDARY

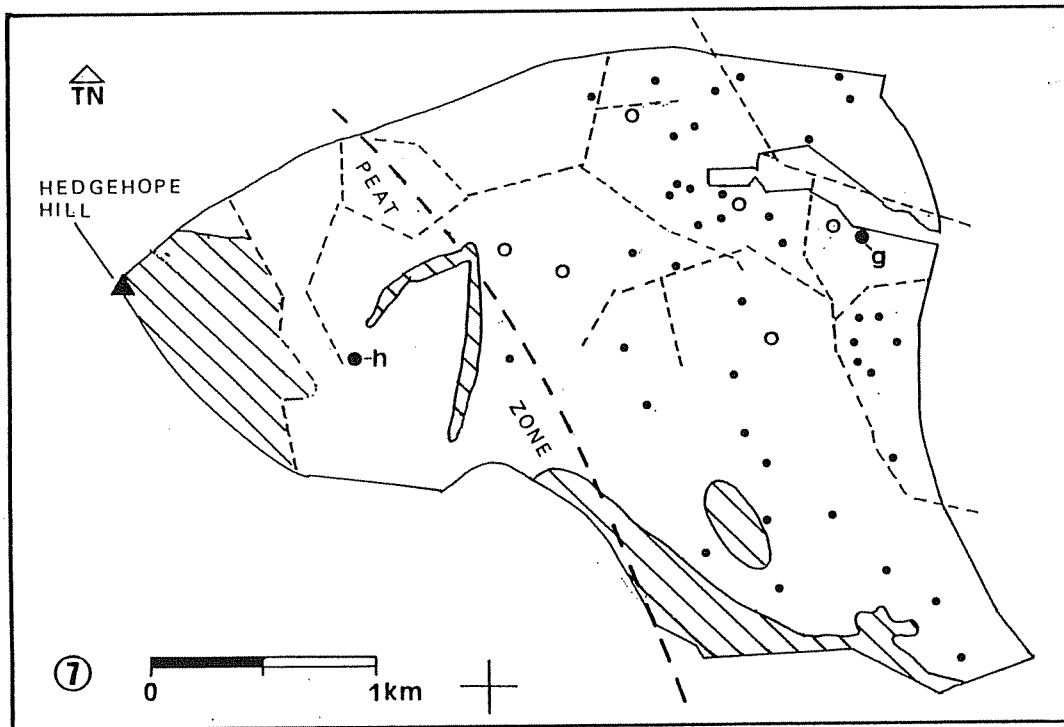
Map 4. Wooler Common (NT 96 28).
b = Iron Age bead, hitherto unpublished.



Map 5. Ros Hill Wood, near Chillingham (NU 10 27).
c = grave artefacts including shale ring (Jobey et al 1981, fig 8/16).
d = polished axe.
e = grave goods, including perforated shale disc (Jobey et al 1981, fig 8/18).
 Cupped stone (not lettered) approx NU 080 260 (Beckensall 1983: 43)



Map 6. Quarryhouse (left) and Haughterslaw, near Chillingham (NU 12 26).
f = jet bugle bead (Jobey et al 1981, fig 8/17).



Map 7. Threestoneburn, near Ingram (NT 96 18).
g = half jet bead.
h = horn object at 1m depth.

preparatory ploughing was less intense than elsewhere.

iii) Although the numerical value of each find spot is not certain, the maps suggest that the density of artefacts from Ros Hill Wood (Map 5) is particularly high. The close proximity of this plantation to Mr Berthele's home at Hepburn might indicate that it was searched more intensively than elsewhere.

iv) Large areas of forest are devoid of finds. In some cases these were planted before collecting began (Maps 2, 4 and 6) or were outside Forestry Commission bounds (Map 3).

v) Peat cover restricted retrieval of artefacts at Threestoneburn (Map 7).

The amalgam of human and physical variables must be considered when attempting to interpret the maps.

A Strategy for the Future

The Berthele Collection has immediate relevance as a type series for north Northumberland prehistory. In the longer term, it is imperative that a number of measures should be planned and implemented.

i) The archaeological component of the collection should be placed in secure display units (short term).

ii) Maps 2-7 do not document the whole of the Berthele Collection. The support of a larger paper archive is required. An illustrated catalogue should be compiled, assigning an accession number to each item. Identification and provenance to be included wherever possible.

iii) Appropriate long term display and storage should be planned, taking into account conservation, consolidation and environmental control where necessary.

The F.M. Berthele Collection is now owned by Sir Humphrey Wakefield, Bart., and is on display to visitors at Chillingham Castle, Northumberland.

Acknowledgements

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