

ARCHIVE REPORT ON FOX HILL, AN IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT IN
BADSEY, HEREFORD AND WORCESTER.

By Bruce Watson, with a contribution by John D Shepherd.

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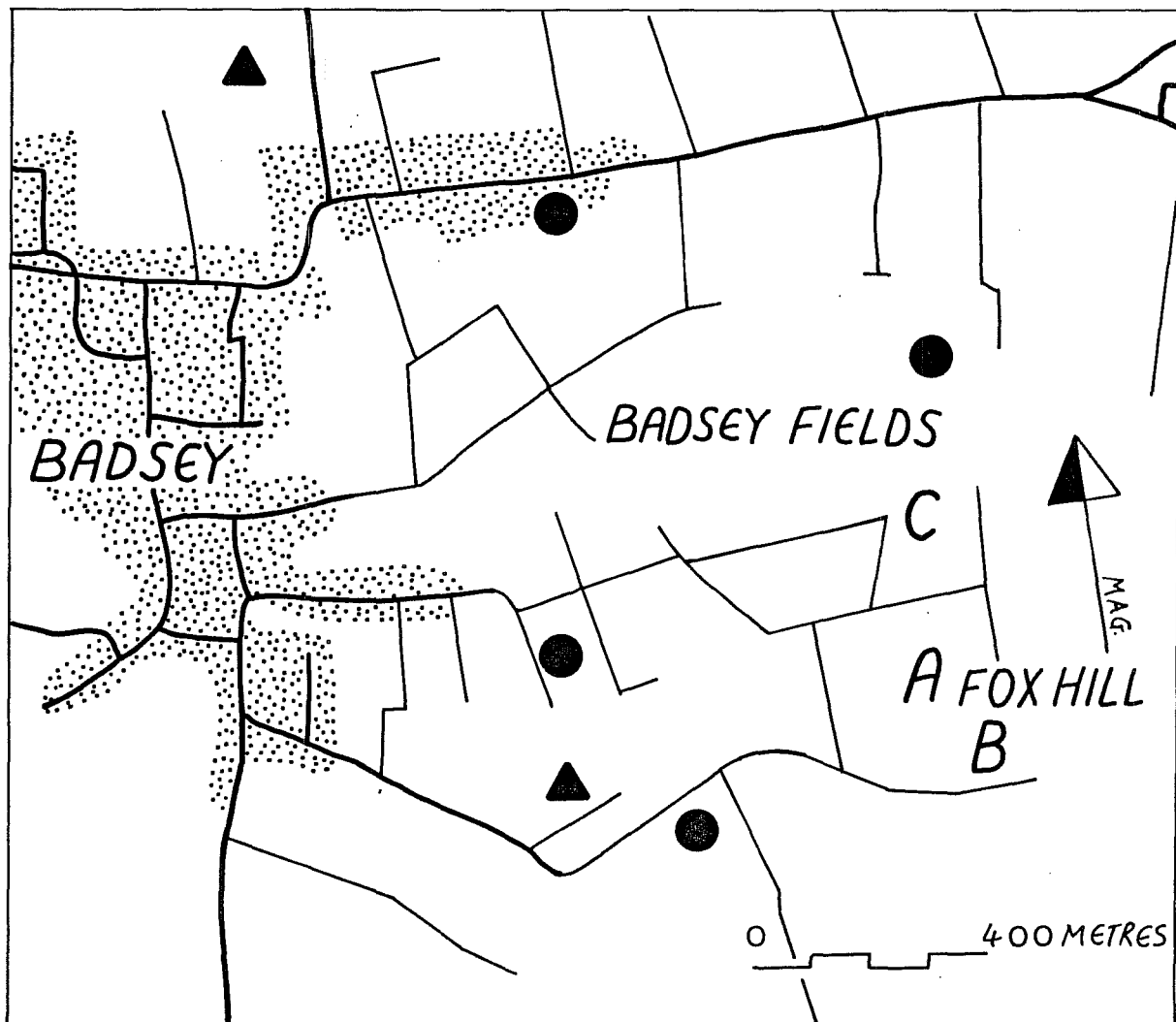
SUMMARY

Iron Age and Romano-British finds have been discovered in the Fox Hill area
of Badsey fields (SP 0838 4298) since the 19th century. This report describes
past and present finds from the site.

A summary of this report was published in West Midlands Archaeology 32, 1991,
page 32.

POSTSCRIPT

In 1993 Mr Stewart's finds were given to HWCM.



KEY

- Romano-British finds.
- ▲ Iron Age and Romano-British finds.
- ⋯ Badsey village.
- Road.
- - - Trackway.

A to C See text.

Figure one, site location plan.

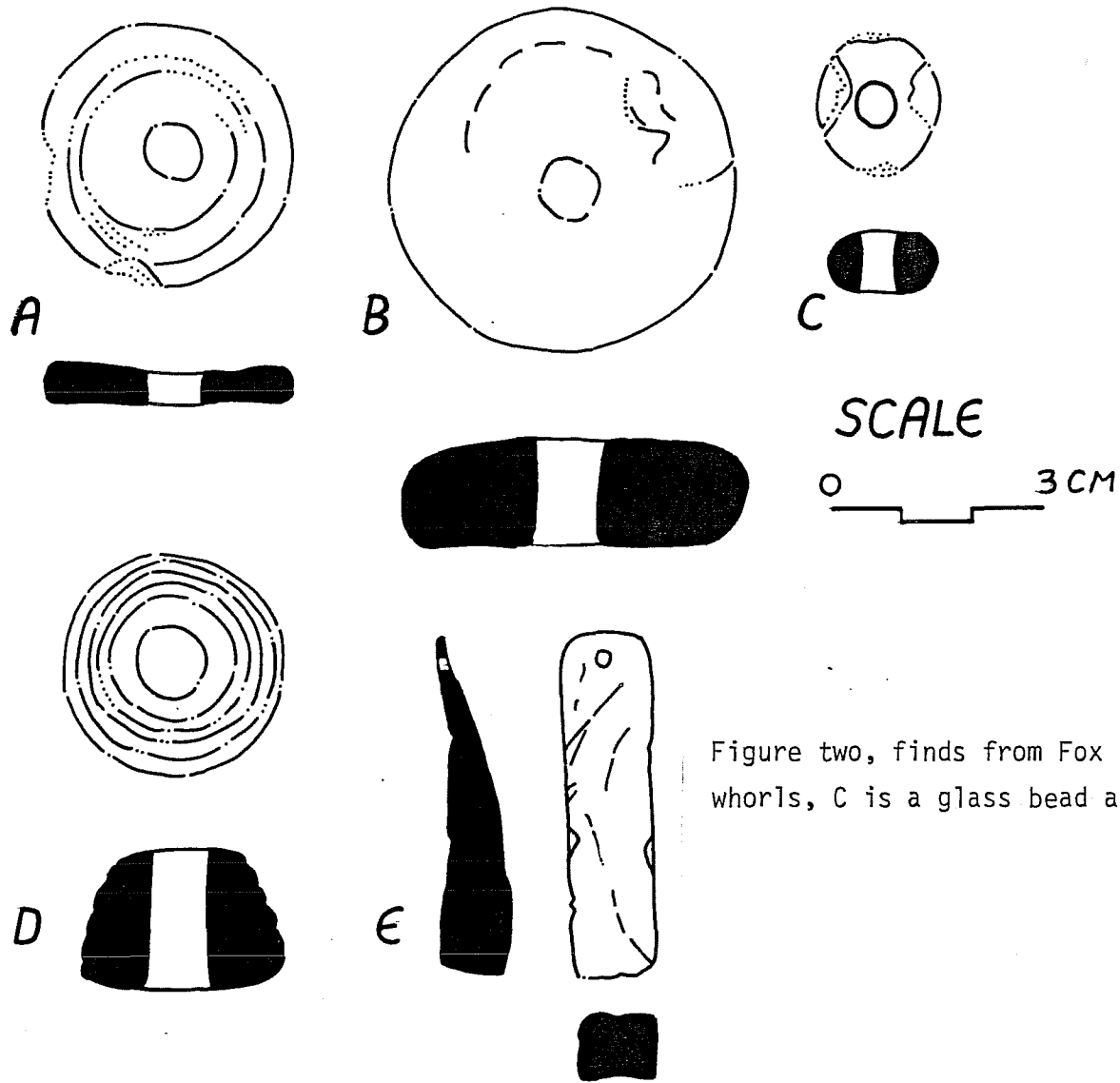


Figure two, finds from Fox Hill. A, B and D are stone spindle whorls, C is a glass bead and E a lead fishing weight.

FOX HILL - AN IRON AGE AND ROMANO-BRITISH SETTLEMENT IN BADSEY, HEREFORD AND WORCESTER.

Introduction

The aim of this article is to describe the various archaeological finds from one area of the arable land to the south-east of Badsey village in South Worcestershire, known locally as Fox Hill (SP 0838 4298), (see figure one, site A).

Early discoveries 1840's to 1900

As this area has been arable land since the Medieval period, cultivation has brought to the surface many objects. This material was first recorded by May, who noted finds of coarse pottery, samian ?, one copper coin of Constantine (AD 306-337), stone slabs - discoloured by fire, animal and human bones. There was also " a rude bead or annulet of pared bone, one inch in diameter and a fourth of an inch thick " (May, 1845 : 244). This information was repeated by Allies (1852 : 87-88) and Haverfield (1901 : 218. A woman's skeleton is believed to have been found on the site in 1880.¹

Discoveries 1901-1969

Earlier this century a number of human skeletons (about 11 in total), including several crouch burials, were found within the vicinity of the site.² The posture of the crouch burials suggests that they may have been of Iron Age date as similar burials have been found locally at Beckford (Britnell, 1975 : 9).

A large annular jar was found close to the site in 1929 (see figure one, site B). The jar was 46 cm high, with a band of finger-impressed raised cordons around the base of the neck (Smith, 1957 : fig 8, 1). A very similar Iron Age vessel is known from Ireley Farm, Stanway, Gloucestershire (Saville, 1984 : fig 3, 33). Parallels with material from Allen's Pit, Dorchester, (Harding, 1972 : plate 52-B), suggest that the Fox Hill jar is of early Iron Age date (circa 8th to 5th century BC).

Agricultural work (probably drainage) during the 1920's, revealed a number of " flat stones place in a line on edge, face to face " at a depth of about 60 cm below the surface.³ This feature was probably a stone-lined field drain of pre 19th century date. To the north of the site (see figure one, site C),

a cist-like structure was discovered by Arthur Jones a local archaeologist. " It consisted of a large stone, lying flat, surrounded by other stones on edge ". There was no topstone but the interior contained burnt pebbles and ashes.⁴ This enigmatic structure may have been a Romano-British corn drying oven, as it seems very similar to the rubble-built oven found locally at Wickhamford in 1967 (Reynold, 1971 : 12).

Arthur Jones was of the opinion that the site was surrounded by a vallum or rampart, which could be seen in the south-east corner of the site during the 1920's but was being flattened by cultivation.⁵ Today there is no sign of this feature. It seems more likely that this feature was part of the local ridge and furrow or a field boundary bank, than a rampart.

In 1934 an uninscribed silver Dobunnic coin of early 1st century date was found on the site (Allen, 1961 : 130).

Fieldwalking by Dr G R Malkin during the 1930's produced the following finds, now in Evesham Almonry Museum (site No 9).

Iron Age

One local shell tempered ware jar rim (Price and Watson, 1981 : 92). There were also three sherds of either late Iron Age or Romano-British date, two local shell tempered ware and one sherd of Malvern ware, Peacock's (1968 : 415) fabric A.

Romano-British

No of sherds :- 9 Orange Severn Valley ware (1st - 4th century AD)
 2 Samian (1st - 2nd C AD).
 2 Sandy grey ware
 2 Grey ware
 2 Local shell tempered ware - one jar and one dish rim - both
 3rd - 4th C AD.
 2 Dorset Black Burnished ware imitations.
 1 Oxford ware, white fabric mortaria, (2nd - 4th C AD).
 1 Oxford ware, red colour coat, (240 - 400 AD).
 1 Dorset Back Burnished ware flanged dish (2nd - 4th C AD).

Total 22, plus three unidentifiable sherds.

Malkin also recorded from the site a number of coins spanning from the reign of Vitellius (AD 69) to Magnus Maximus (AD 383 - 388).⁶ Other finds from the site include fibulae, a bone pin, pot-boilers, quern fragments, plus ceramic building material (described as roof and flue tiles).⁷

Cox (1967 : 16) listed the site in his catalogue of Vale of Evesham Romano-British settlements, noting that the whereabouts of most of the above finds are unknown.

Recent discoveries

During the 1970's the site was walked by Peter Steward and Edward Price. Finds included a translucent blue glass bead, probably of late Iron Age, Romano-British or early post-Roman date (see figure two : appendix A) plus three stone spindle whorls (see figure two, A, B, and D) and a lead fishing weight of uncertain date (see figure two, E). The spindle whorls are probably of Iron Age date. Very similar examples are known locally from Bredon Hill Iron Age fort (Hencken, 1938 : 84-85). The following Romano-British pottery was also found :-

No of sherds :- 20 Orange Severn Valley ware (1st - 4th C AD).
 5 Grey ware
 4 Samian.
 2 Dorset Black Burnished ware imitations.
 1 Severn Valley ware type, thick walled storage jar.
 1 Local grey ware (sand tempered) of uncertain date.
 1 Nene Valley ware, brown colour coat, post AD 200.

Total 34, plus two unidentifiable sherds. The pottery is in HWC. The other objects are in the possession of Mr Steward.

DISCUSSION

Fox Hill is one of a number of Iron Age and Romano-British sites in South Worcestershire, which are known only from surface finds, therefore the dates assigned to the duration of occupation and the interpretation of the status of the site can only be provisional. However, as the site is located within an area of very high potential for arable farming, it is probable that this was the settlement's primary function. The settlement was probably one of a number of

a number of farmsteads in the area, like Black Banks (see figure one, site D). At both Black Banks (Watson, 1986) and Fox Hill, occupation began during the Iron Age and carried on during the Roman period until the late 4th century. These farmsteads appear to have been fairly prosperous, presumably due to the development of commercial agriculture or the sale of surplus produce, reflected in the volume of coinage from both sites and the purchase of commercially made pottery, including a few fine wares and odd exotic objects, like the glass bead.

Appendix A

The Glass Bead by J D Shepherd.

An annular bead in translucent blue glass, decorated with a broken marvered wave of indeterminate colour, but probably originally white or yellow (Guido, 1978 : 63-4, Group 5a).

Such beads are a long-lived and well-attested type. In the British Isles they are absent from Ireland and extremely rare outside of the Roman occupied lowlands of Scotland and Wales

Without any positive dating evidence from associated material it is difficult to date individual examples of this type of bead. The earliest examples of this type can be found at Arras, Yorkshire, in the 4th or 3rd century BC contexts and they appear according to Guido (1978) until the 6th or 7th centuries AD.

It is, however, probable that this bead should be dated to the late-Roman Iron age through to the early post-Roman period since the broken marvered wave is characteristic of that long era.

FOOTNOTES

1. OS Archaeol Record Card SP 04 SE Antiq No 16.
2. Roman sites at Badsey June 12th 1926, record of site visit in Trans of the Worcs Naturalists Club (1923 - 28), 8 : 197-199. Additional information from OS Archaeol Record Card SP 04 SE Antiq No 16.
3. Trans of the Worcs Naturalists Club (1923 - 28), 8 : 198.
4. OS Archaeol Record Card SP 04 SE 29.
5. Roman sites at Badsey, 1926, see note 2. No earthworks are visible on air photos of the site.
6. Notes by Dr G R Malkin in Evesham Almonry Museum, Badsey file.
7. See note 6.

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