

1992

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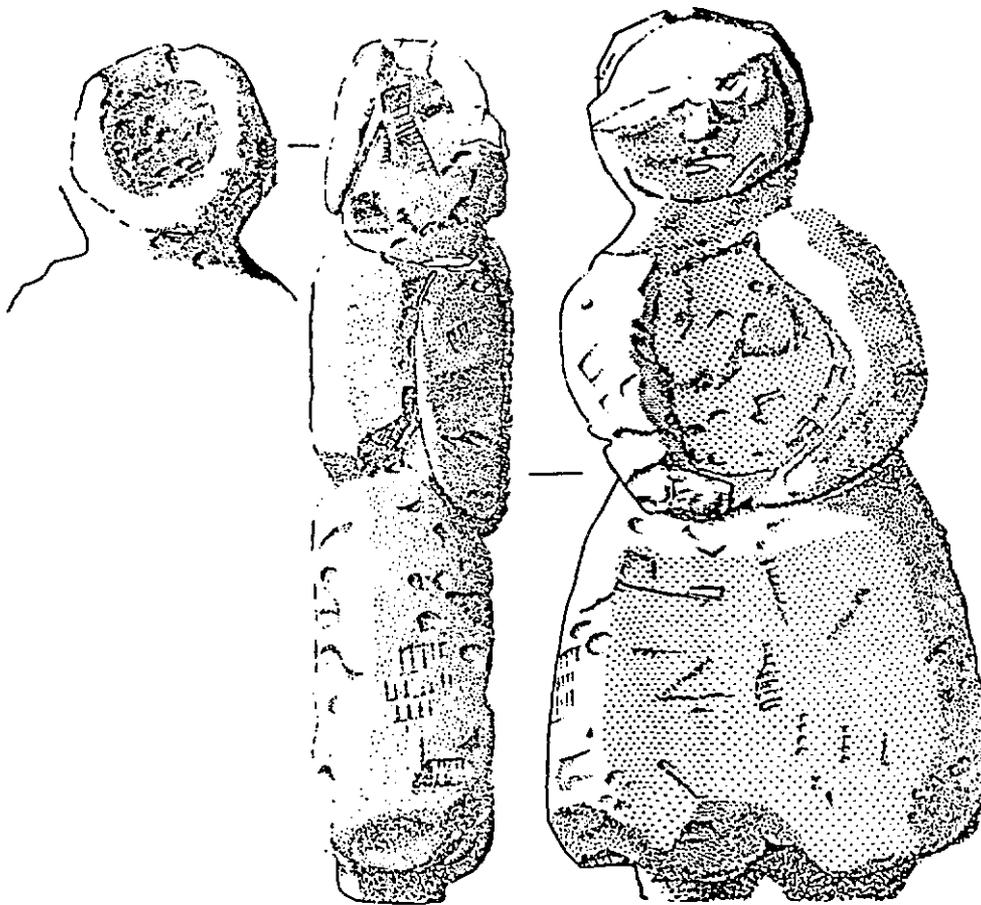
An Archaeological Evaluation of

Tesco's Fishbourne Site

*Fishbourne rd,
(Chichester)*

1992

C.D.A.U.



John Wildman BA

Archaeological Evaluation, Tesco site, Fishbourne 1992

Introduction

At a meeting of Chichester District Council's Archaeological Advisory Committee on February 25th 1992 concern was expressed by a member that there were no plans to carry out an evaluation at the site of the proposed Tesco store at Fishbourne. The District Archaeologist explained that at the time the application was submitted there were no grounds for believing that the proposed development had any significant archaeological implications, and that, since outline planning permission had been granted, the developers could not be required to fund any such evaluation.

The Committee instructed the District Archaeologist to approach Tesco's with a view to obtaining access to the site for an archaeological assessment, and to see if they would be prepared to fund the work. Agreement was reached on both issues, and an evaluation, begun on April 27th, was completed on May 14th, with the aid of a donation of £3,500 from the developers.

The account below is an interim statement. A more detailed report will appear in a forthcoming volume in the Chichester Excavations series.

The archaeological background

The site (SU 846 046) lies 600m east of Fishbourne Roman Palace, excavated in 1961-69 (Cunliffe, 1971). One of the features located by trial trenching in 1969, and not described in detail in the 1971 account, was a deep-water channel marking the southern limit of the south garden where it abutted the head of Fishbourne Creek (Cunliffe, 1971, 133; Cunliffe, forthcoming). This was traced eastwards for about 400m, towards the Tesco site. An attempt to locate it during a watching brief when the new line of the A27 was built in 1986 was unsuccessful, as was limited trial trenching in the vicinity in the same year.

The excavations closest to the Tesco site both lay to the north-west, on the north side of the former A27 (now Fishbourne Road East). In 1987 limited trial trenching was carried out in the rear garden of 34 Fishbourne Road in advance of a proposed development, but no archaeological features were seen. In February 1992, however, the adjacent site to the west was investigated for Chichester District Council and a number of ditches and other Roman features were located. These were initially interpreted as part of a semi-formal garden fronting the Palace on the basis of the excavator's interpretation of similar features located in 1985-6 beneath the present course of the A27 (Down, forthcoming). From a site north-east of Tesco's, close to the railway crossing on Fishbourne Rd East, a small statue of a Romano-Celtic Mother Goddess, presumably from a shrine, was recovered by building workers in 1991 and ultimately presented to Fishbourne Palace museum (see cover for illustration).

References

- Cunliffe, B. W. (1971) Excavations at Fishbourne Society of Antiquaries Research Report XXVI.
- Cunliffe, B. W., Down, A and Rudkin, J (forthcoming) Chichester Excavations 9 Chichester District Council.

The Evaluation

1. Method

A series of trenches 8 to 10 metres apart, running north-south, were taken out by machine on the proposed site of the main building, their combined length being roughly 550 metres. A metal detector was used to recover artefacts from the spoil. After cleaning up the base of the trenches, a number of archaeological features were noted and fully excavated. The finds from these features showed that the site had had some limited use over a long period of time from the prehistoric to the post-medieval period.

2. Description

Prehistoric

A small shallow pit 0.5m in diameter found at the southern end of trench D (context 60) was filled with fire-cracked flint. Similar features on other sites have been attributed on the basis of associated finds to a broad period from the mesolithic to the Iron Age. At Fishbourne the earliest artefacts recovered, although not directly associated with this feature, were of Bronze Age date.

Romano-British

Two small areas were clearly associated with Roman occupation. At the northern end of trench F a small group of flat-bottomed post holes (nos 11, 13, 15, and 16) and associated pits produced a quantity of Roman tile fragments and pot sherds. The two large pits in this group (23 and 25) were clearly Roman, producing a quantity of tile including one fragment of combed flue tile. Many pot sherds including two Samian fragments, bone and oysters were also present. To the south of this area in trench E a further group of Roman features was encountered. A small feature (1) 0.75m wide running east-west could be seen cutting patches of yellow clay and flints but could not be traced to the west in the brickearth of trenches F and G. It may have been a pit or possibly part of a ring ditch; time did not allow for its excavation. A large quantity of Roman pot sherds, including 1 sherd of Samian and 3 sherds of Gallo-Belgic wares of the late 1st century AD were found in this feature. Associated with the ? ditch were two post holes (5 and 29) and a number of shallow depressions which produced Roman material. A large pit in trench D to the east (58) yielded a larger quantity of material including oyster shells, tile, pot sherds and two fragments of slag.

Medieval and Modern

A number of features produced occasional medieval pot sherds, but from the distribution of unstratified small-finds found by metal detecting, ie, copper alloy, buttons, buckles, studs, a thimble and four lead cloth seals, the final phase of use appears to have been post-medieval. There did however appear to be a buried medieval topsoil, and many of the shallow features could have been merely variations in its surface, especially pits 54 and 56. Where this layer was completely removed it was found to seal two medieval pits 45 and 47. These produced only Medieval material, floor tile and pot sherds. A number of small-finds were recovered from this buried topsoil by metal detecting: 2 copper alloy objects, 3 copper alloy pin heads and seven lead objects.

A further evaluation was carried out 150m to the south-east of the main building under the proposed site of the petrol filling station. This proved to be barren of any archaeological material.

Discussion

The evaluation has demonstrated sporadic use of the area from the Bronze Age onwards. However, the archaeological features revealed are perhaps no more numerous than would be expected from an assessment of a site of similar size anywhere along the Coastal Plain, and nothing has been found which would justify more extensive excavations in advance of redevelopment.

The Roman use of the site differs considerably from that of the two sites to the north-west (the 1985-6 excavation beneath the A27, and the 1992 District Council site east of it). At both of these there was evidence for intensive use of at least parts of the sites in the earlier Roman period, and both were characterised by large quantities of artefacts of high quality, presumably material collected on the Palace middens and subsequently spread on the fields. The Tesco site yielded a comparatively small quantity of pottery and, in relative terms, little tile.

For the post-Roman period the finds are again compatible with the use of the field for agriculture. with material again finding its way to the site as 'night soil'.

Perhaps the most valuable results of the evaluation are not from what was found, but from what was absent. The deep-water channel identified by Cunliffe, interpreted by some as a possible canal linking the city of Chichester to the sea, does not appear to extend as far east as the Tesco site, and its function must remain questionable.

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FBT.92 SMALLFINDS SUMMARY

Context (Feature)

U/S CuA objects: 28
 Pb objects: 35
 Pb cloth seals 4
 Other Pb: Pb disc
 Other CuA: 1 CuA button, 4 CuA buckles, 1 Coin, 1 Key?,
 1 spoon, 3 studs, 1 washer, 1 thimble, 3 buttons
 1 Flint scraper
 1 metal object
10 (9) CuA object
24 (23) CuA ligula
64 CuA objects: 3 + 1 pinhead + 1 wire
 Pb objects 7
 Worked flint

101 in total

Some of these items will undergo further cleaning and conservation, following which closer identification may be possible.

FBT.92 OTHER FINDS

Context (Feature)

- 2 (1) 1 frag. Roman tile
3 flint waste flakes
1 animal tooth
83 sherds (700g) Roman pot
- 4 (3) 1 sherd ? Roman pot
- 8 (7) 1 medium fragment Roman tile
- 10 (9) 1 small oyster shell
1 frag. fire cracked flint
1 frag. Roman tile
2 sherds medieval pot
7 sherds Roman or Medieval pot
- 12 (11) 1 sherd ? Roman pot
- 14 (13) 3 medium fragments Roman tile (0.2kg)
- 17 (16) 1 fragment Roman tile
1 sherd ? Roman pot
- 19 (18) 1 small fragment slate
- 21 (1) 2 frags. Roman tile
4 frags. animal tooth
28 sherds Roman pot (200g)
- 22 (1) 5 frags. Roman tile (400g)
30 sherds Roman pot (300g)
10 frags. (700g) Roman tile
71 sherds Roman tile (500g) including 1 sherd of samian
3 sherds ? Gallo Belgic late 1st century AD
- 24 (23) 6 frags. Roman tile (1,100g)
11 frags. bone (including one sheep mandible)
13 sherds (100g) Roman pot
11 oyster shells
3 frags. Roman tile
21 sherds Roman pot (400g) including 2 of samian
- 26 (25) 1 frag. Roman brick
1 frag. Roman flue-tile (combed)
6 oyster shells
12 sherds (500g) Roman pot
2 oyster shells
4 frags. bone
2 frags. Roman tile
13 sherds Roman pot (150g)

- 28 (27) 4 fragments Roman tile (450g)
- 34 (33) 1 sherd medieval or post-medieval pottery, 1 fragment ?
Roman tile
- 36 (35) 4 sherds ? Roman pottery, 1 sherd medieval
- 38 (37) 2 sherds Roman
1 frag. oyster shell
- 40 (39) 3 sherds post-medieval pot
9 sherds Roman & ? Roman
- 44 2 sherds Roman pot
2 frgs. Roman tile (1 brick, 1 combed flue tile)
- 46 (45) 1 sherd medieval pottery
- 48 (47) 1 frag. medieval floor tile
5 sherds medieval pot
- 53 (52) 4 flint waste flakes
2 small fragments bone
4 oyster shells
4 sherds post-medieval pot
12 sherds Roman or medieval pot
1 piece Roman tile
- 55 (54) 1 fragment Roman tile
- 57 (56) 5 oyster shells
1 frag. fire-cracked flint
2 frags. slate
4 small sherds ? Roman
1 frag. Roman tile
1 frag. ? medieval or post-medieval ? tile
- 59 (58) 2 flint waste flakes
13 oyster shells
7 frags. (200g) fire-cracked flint
1 animal incisor (pig ?)
2 frags. slag/vitrified material
2 frags. Roman tile
12 sherds Roman pot (100g)
- 61 (60) Many small-medium fragments fire-cracked flint (1kg)
1 small sherd Roman pottery
- 63 (62) 4 medium - large fragments Roman tile (1.2kg)



630

620

610

600

590

580

570

560

6550mN
 5500mE

510

520

530

540

550

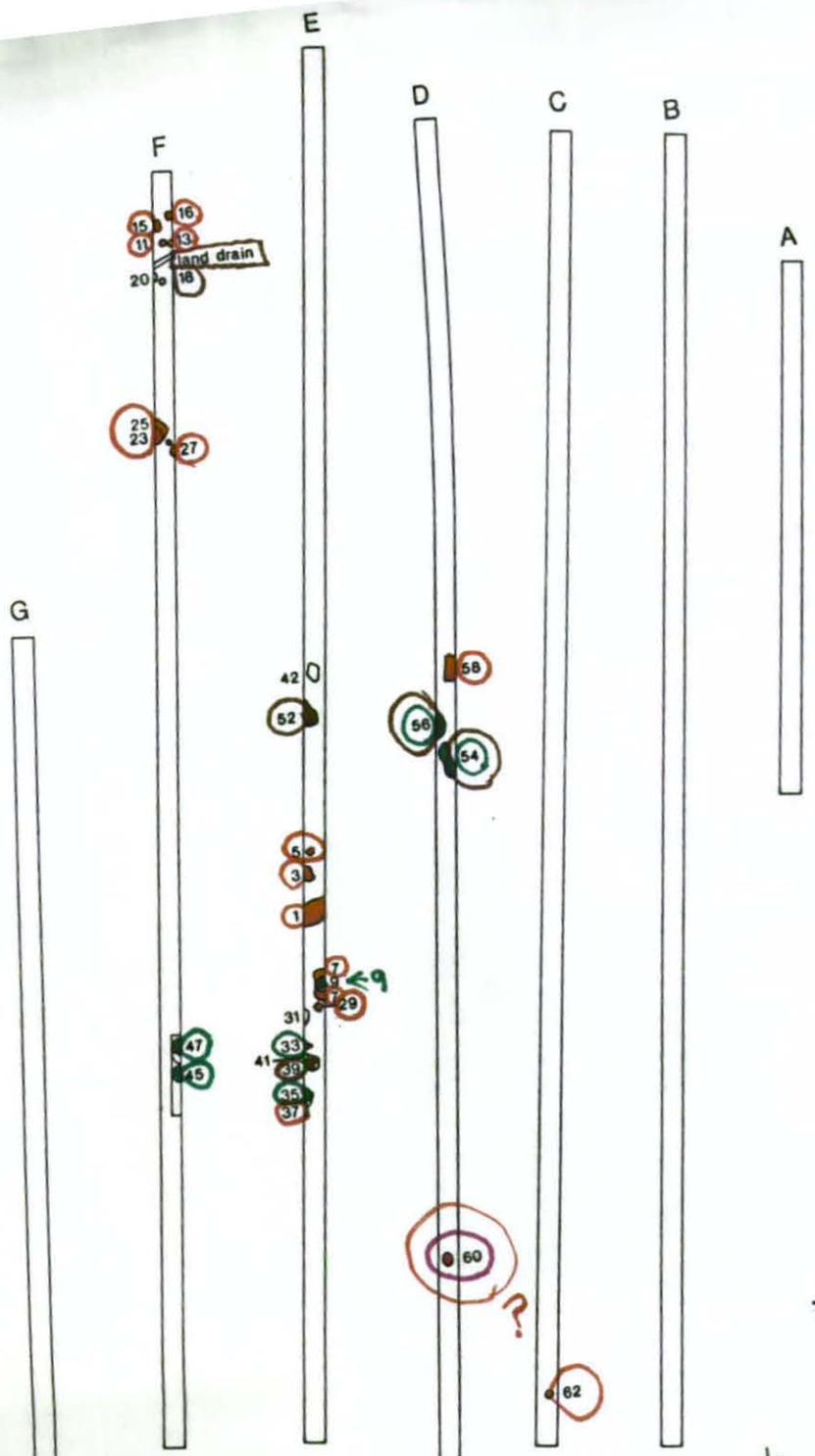
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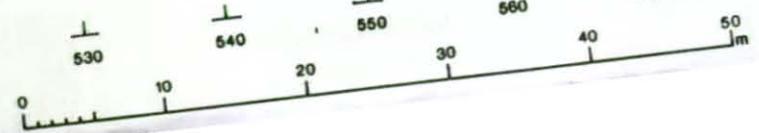
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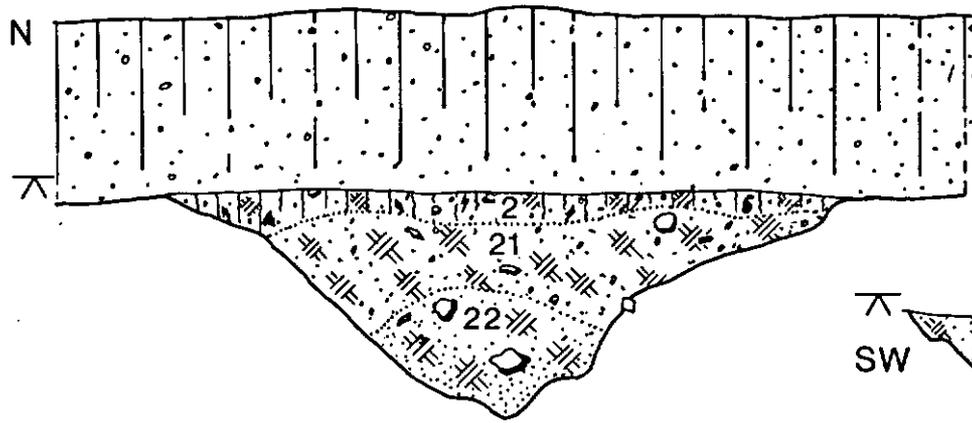


- ◆ Prehist.
- ◆ Roman
- ◆ Med.
- ◆ PMed. +

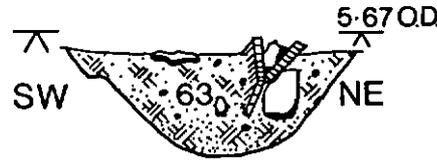


TESCO SITE PLAN
 FB T 92

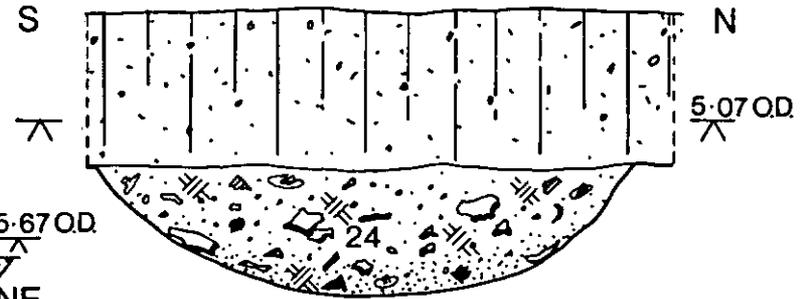




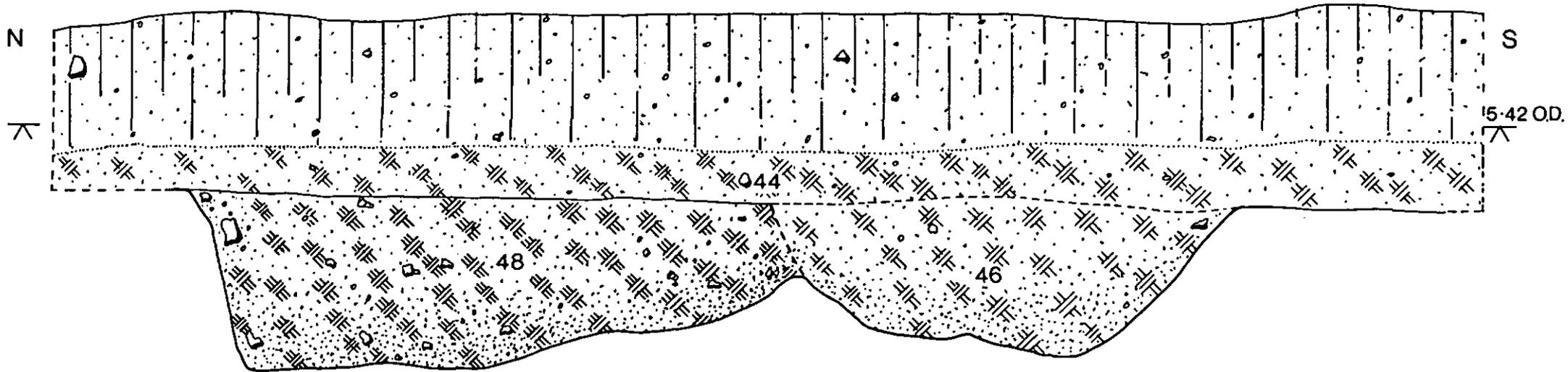
Context 1 Roman ditch
trench E



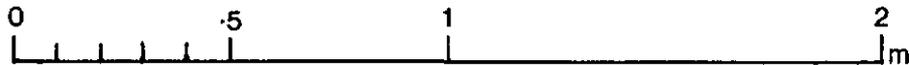
Context 62 trench C
Roman posthole



Context 23 Roman pit
trench F



Context 45 & 47 Medieval pits
trench F



SECTIONS
TESCO Ltd SITE
FB T 92

FISHBOURNE ROAD

Surgery

FB T 1992

FB T 1992

Pond

Drain

Drain

GP

7

5

5

