

Introduction

Excavations were undertaken by the Sussex Archaeological Society (directed by John Manley and David Rudkin) at Fishbourne Roman Palace (just to the west of Chichester, Sussex) for periods of six weeks during 1995, 96, 97, 98 and 99 (Figs 1, 2, 3, 4 & 5). The location of the excavations was just to the east of the main Palace at NGR SU 8407 0475 (Figs 6, 7, 8, 9 & 10), within Fishbourne parish. The area of Fishbourne witnessed considerable archaeological activity in the second half of the 20th century, with, in 1960, the discovery of masonry foundations that prompted the excavation of the Roman Palace itself (Cunliffe 1971) over the ensuing decade. Subsequently Alec Down led exploratory excavations immediately to the east of the Palace in 1983, followed by rescue excavations in 1985–6 in advance of the construction of the A27 a little further to the east (Cunliffe *et al.* 1996). East of the A27 a series of rescue excavations were undertaken by the Chichester District Archaeological Unit and its subsequent reincarnation, the now sadly defunct Southern Archaeology (Fig. 8). Our excavations, in the last five years of the century, followed on the trial work of Alec Down in 1983 and were research excavations as opposed to rescue investigations. The aims of our excavations were to reveal more about the pre-

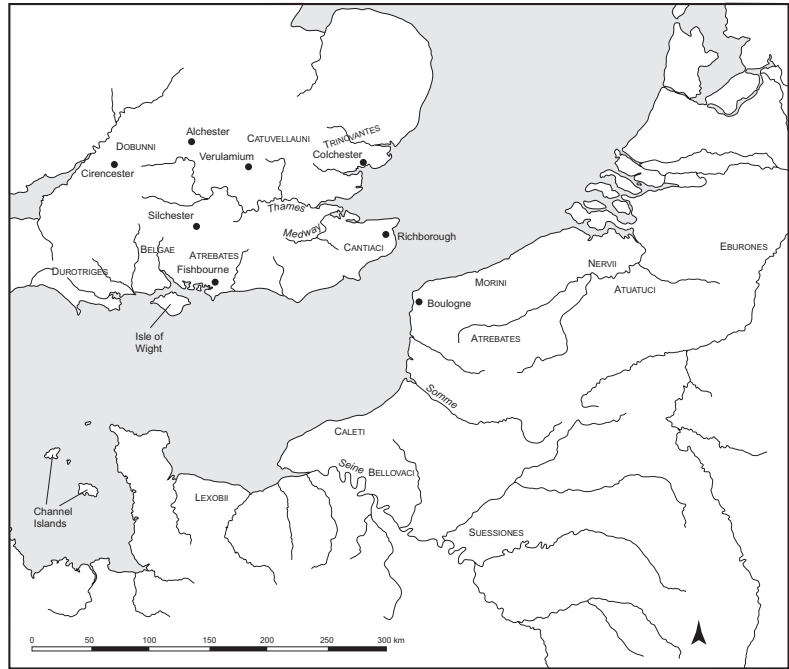


Fig. 1. Map of southern Britain and north Gaul, showing some key sites, and tribal names at the time of the Roman invasion of AD 43, and the location of Fishbourne.

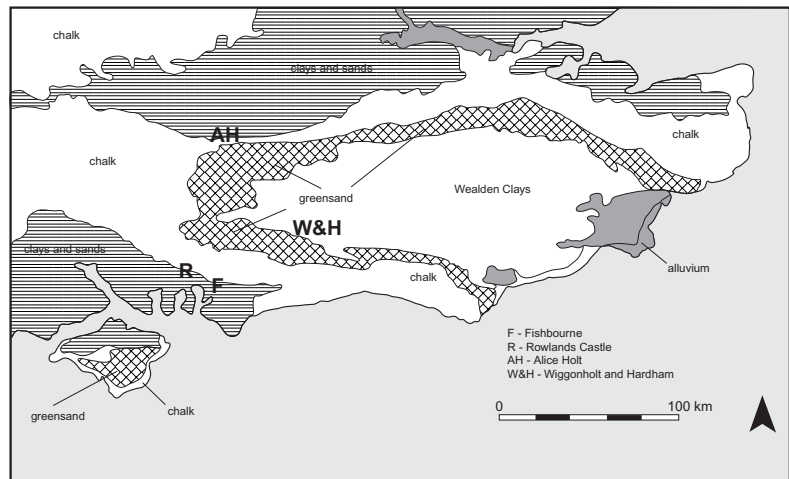


Fig. 2. Map of southern Britain showing the location of Fishbourne, the location of key pottery industries, and stone resources such as flint (from the chalk) and greensand.

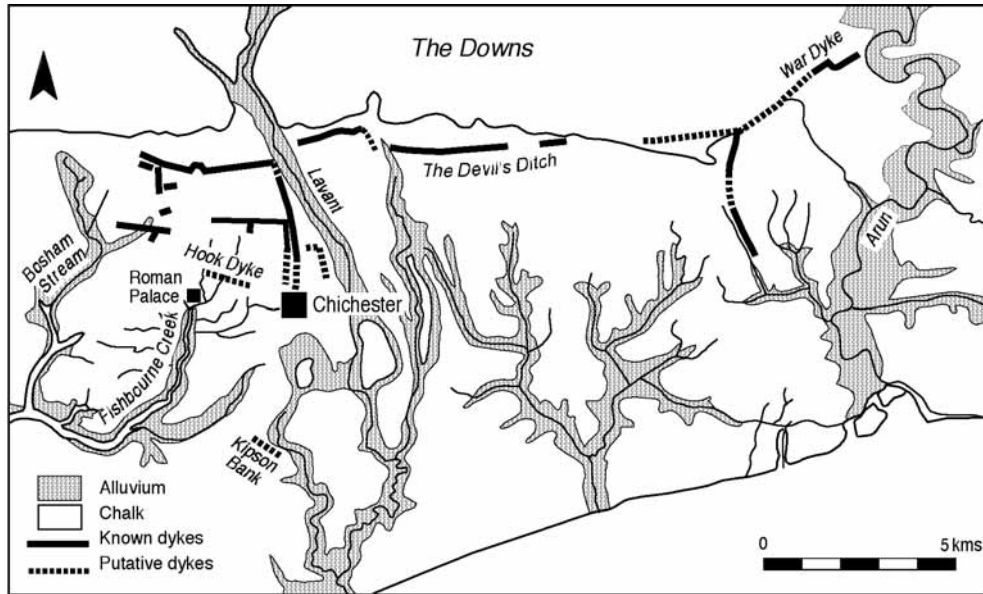


Fig. 3. Plan of Chichester harbour showing the location of the Palace and Roman Chichester, and the Chichester Dykes.

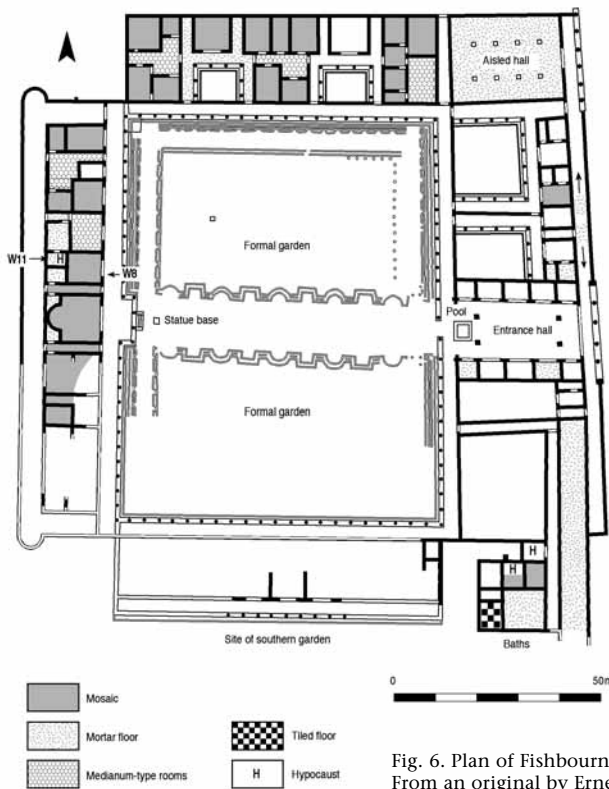


Fig. 6. Plan of Fishbourne Roman Palace, indicating some of the floor coverings. From an original by Ernest Black and finished artwork by Sue Rowland.

Palace phases of activity in the area, and particularly to shed more light on the Roman military occupation.

METHODOLOGY

As a preamble to the excavation report it may be useful to comment on how we conducted our excavations. Some use of geophysics was made prior to the excavations. The late David Combes kindly undertook a resistivity survey in advance of the 1996 dig, and that allowed us to position accurately the trench over the remains of the eastern range of Building 3. English Heritage also conducted a magnetometer survey over the entire pasture field in which we excavated. These surveys are filed in the paper archive at Fishbourne Roman Palace.

The excavations took place each summer and the labour force on the site, apart from the two directors, comprised three paid supervisors and a team of about 20 to 30 volunteers drawn from the Sussex Archaeological Society and paying trainees (Figs 11, 12, 13, 14 & 15). Clearly the latter had had

very little archaeological experience prior to arriving on-site. Essentially, in 90s Britain where most archaeological work was carried out by professional contracting units ahead of development works on an all-year-round basis, our summer research excavations were something of a throwback to the way a lot of archaeology was carried out in the 50s and 60s. Inevitably, with a team of mixed abilities mistakes were made. We were using a total station to record the individual find spots of a number of categories of small finds. This proved invaluable to our understanding of the site, but the recording of hundreds of small finds each day, especially in the 1998 season, when we unexpectedly encountered a finds-rich midden, did cause administrative problems and led to a higher rate of errors in the finds recording than in previous seasons. The use of a Single Context Planning (SCP) system was also new to some of our supervisors and modifications will be made, if we excavate again at Fishbourne, on how we use SCP on the site. In particular, section recording, not one of the obvious strengths of the SCP system as published by the Museum of London Archaeology Service, occasionally suffered as some supervisors drew what they could see, and failed to reconcile the on-site section drawings with the context numbers as excavated.

In terms of finds recovery, and the appreciation of the various distribution maps of finds in this report, it is important to point out that prior to hand excavation on average some 400 mm of topsoil was stripped from the site by machine. The only areas where we excavated by hand from the turf downwards were in Area B and in the central north-east corner of Area A, when we extended the trench. An area which was not excavated was the north-west corner of Area A (Fig. 9), to the west of the flanking or boundary wall, since excavation of this area

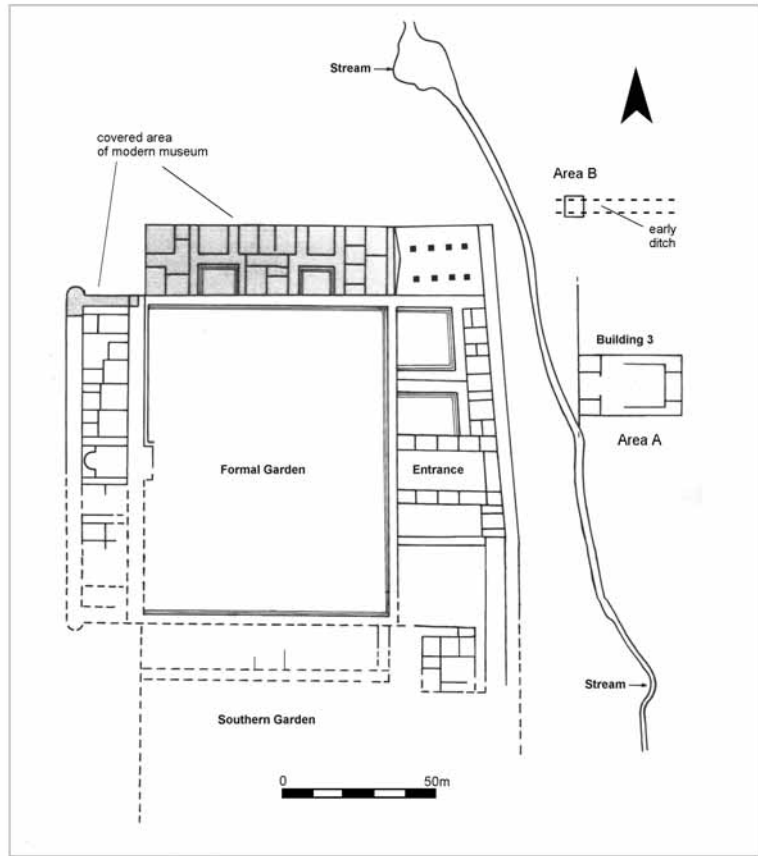


Fig. 7. Outline plan of the Palace and the location of Area A and Area B, indicating the outline of Building 3 and the ditch in Area B.

would have not produced significant additional information pertinent to our reasons for excavation. Sieving on site was carried out on a sample basis, usually using the rule of sieving every third barrow-full of earth. Sieves were usually of 13 mm mesh size. Metal detectorists, from the West Sussex Metal Detecting Club, were present on a daily basis from the 1997 season onwards and greatly increased the percentage recovery of metal finds.

With regard to numbering the contexts on the site, all contexts were given an unique number so no context number was repeated. Individual context numbers were given both to fills of features, to cuts and to more widespread deposits. In certain cases, when excavating homogeneous fills in pits or ditches, a context was arbitrarily divided into subdivisions usually of about 100 millimetre thickness (e.g. 612, 621.2, 621.3 etc. in the sump (Fig.

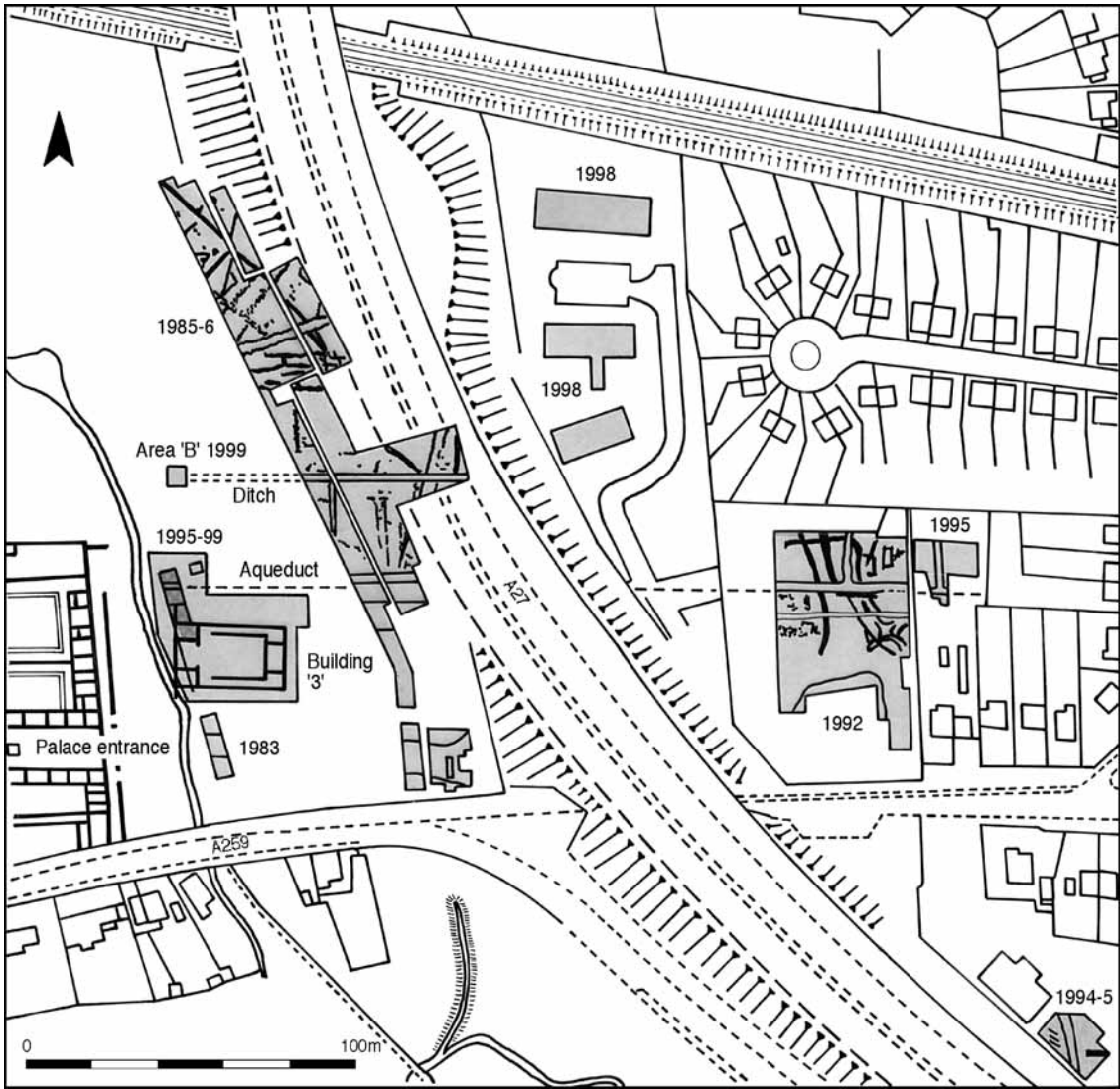


Fig. 8. Plan of all excavations east of the Palace carried out in the 1980s and 1990s; finished artwork by Sue Rowland.

76). This was done so that an evaluation could be made as to whether the pottery in seemingly homogeneous fills had accumulated over a short or longer period of time. Likewise, all small finds were given a unique number so that no number was repeated. Small finds' categories comprised coins, nails, samian sherds, glass sherds, tesserae, flint, keyed tile, copper-alloy objects, clay pipe-stems, lead

and worked bone and any other object deemed 'special'. Bulk finds comprised ceramic building material, coarse and fine pottery, bones and shells.

It is worth remembering also that part of Area A was excavated by Alec Down in 1983 in two trenches, C and D. The location of Alec's trenches (Fig. 117) clearly impact on the distribution plots of categories of finds recovered during the excavation.

LOCATION OF THE PALACE

The setting of Fishbourne Roman Palace and our site has been described extensively in print before (e.g. Cunliffe 1971, 5–9; 1998, 25) and the details need not detain us here. Suffice to say that the Palace lies at the head of a wide and navigable inlet on the southern coast of Britain about five or so metres above sea level. Clay-rich subsoils gently slope down to a southward-flowing stream some three metres in width. The bed of this stream was moved a little to the east in Roman period (between AD 65 and AD 70) to allow for the construction of the proto-palace. Our excavation site lies just to the east of the stream, in a field of rough pasture, that slopes very gradually from north-east to south-west. A particularly extensive archaeological feature of the immediate area are the so-called Chichester Entrenchments or Dykes (Fig. 3), thought to represent some sort of very late Iron Age boundary system (Bradley 1971). And, of course, the Palace lay some two kilometres to the west of Roman Chichester.

Before describing the individual phases of activity on the site, it may be worth rehearsing the chronological phases established by Barry Cunliffe in his excavations on the site of the Palace. These are as follows:

- Period 1a: military store base (AD 43+)
- Period 1b: workshop and timber-framed residence (AD 50–60)
- Period 1c: proto-palace (AD 65–75/80)
- Period 2a: Palace (AD 75/80)
- Period 2b: Palace (AD 100)
- Period 3: Palace (AD 100–200)
- Period 4: Palace and Post-Palace (AD 200+)

Once built, the Palace was probably the residence of a loyal client king known as Togidubnus, until, on his death, the area was absorbed officially into the Roman province of Britannia. The conventional

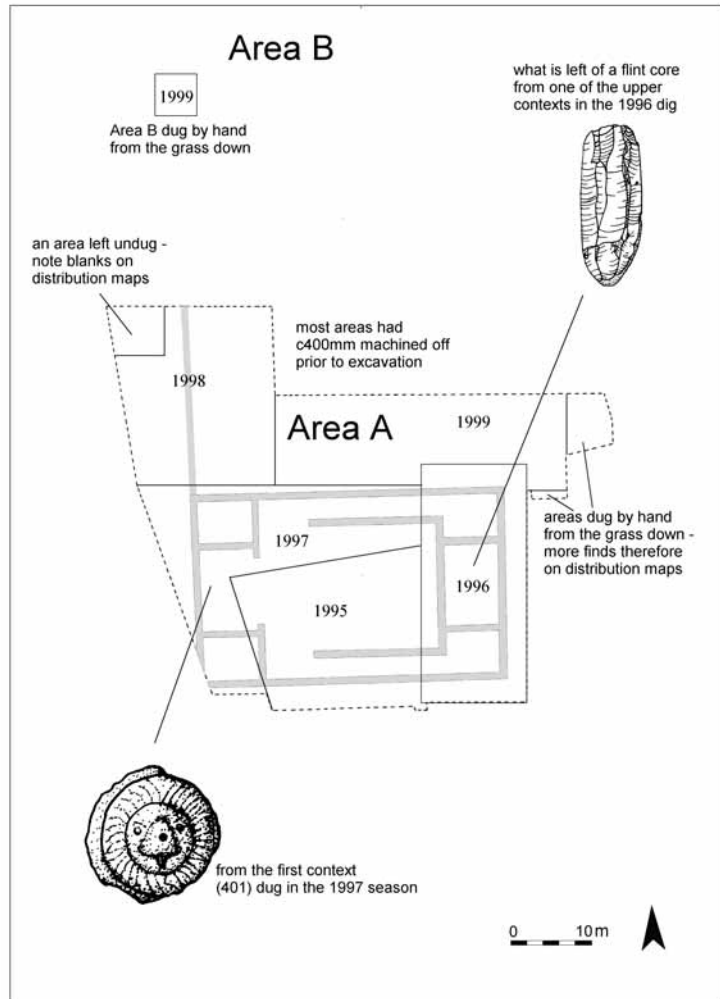


Fig. 9. Plan of the areas excavated in each of the five seasons, superimposed on an outline plan of Building 3.

date for the abandonment of the Palace is c. AD 275.

The text that follows describes, in chronological order, the various phases of human activity on the site from the prehistoric until the modern era. Area A is described first, followed by Area B. The reader may like to familiarize himself or herself with the Phase Tables 30, 31 and 32 at the end of this report which summarize the main events of each phase. Each phase is described according to a uniform sequence: summary; description; finds; how the features or deposits were formed; overall date; interpretation and comment. By way of preface it is worth pointing out that the number of deposits, and



Fig. 15. Training tomorrow's archaeologists was a central component of the dig.

the number of finds, in and on top of Building 3 were relatively few. By contrast, to the north of Building 3, a considerable sequence of deposits developed over time, and it is clear also that most small finds were also recovered from this area. Area B contained similar deposits to the north of Building 3.