

Site investigations at Beddington Lane, Sutton, Surrey

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Introduction and methodology

Beddington Sewage Farm (TQ 290 660) occupies about 100ha (250 acres) of former pasture land, between Beddington Park and Mitcham Common in the London Borough of Sutton (Fig. 1). The site is within an area of proven archaeological potential, being adjacent to the site of the Beddington Roman Villa Scheduled Ancient Monument¹. Pre-historic activity has been recorded within the sewage farm complex itself (interim storage lake on Fig. 1²), and nearby at the 'Philips Site'³.

Conditional planning permission for mineral extraction necessitated a programme of archaeological works, comprising in the first instance a detailed desk-top assessment and field evaluation of the proposed development area. RPS Clouston Environmental Consultants were appointed to manage the work, and Thames Water subsequently commissioned Wessex Archaeology to undertake the field evaluation in two stages. The following report is a summary of the Stage 1 field evaluation results only⁴.

The aims and methodology of the field evaluation were set out in detail in a Brief prepared by RPS Clouston for the London Borough of Sutton. The Brief specified that the area be evaluated by means of machine-cut trenches, each 5m (16ft) wide and between 10m and 25m (33ft and 80ft) long. The location of the trenches was pre-set, distributed across the evaluation area to achieve a 2% sample. A total of 2196m (7200ft) of 5m (16ft) wide trench (10980m²), representing 77 individual trenches, was specified. During the Stage 1 evaluation forty-one trenches were excavated, representing 4801m² (as shown on Fig. 1).

The two major aims of the field evaluation defined in the Brief, may be summarised as follows:-

(i) to determine the location, extent, date, charac-

ter, condition, significance and quality of any surviving deposits likely to be threatened by the redevelopment.

(ii) to clarify and/or ascertain the nature and extent of existing disturbance across the site and so allow comments to be made on the likely survival of archaeological deposits.

All trenches were opened using a 360 tracked excavator equipped with a 1.75m wide toothless ditching bucket, under constant archaeological supervision. Machining was halted at the top of natural geological deposits or at the upper boundaries of archaeological deposits. All trenches were recorded using the standard Wessex Archaeology recording system and in accordance with the Brief. All finds were retained, and a single soil sample was taken at the request of the Museum of London Environmental Department. A system of weekly monitoring by English Heritage (London Division) and the London Borough of Sutton Environmental Services Dept. was implemented. The monitoring included the inspection of each trench before giving approval for backfilling.

Results

Natural deposits and soil profiles

The natural base in all trenches was mixed flint-gravel and brickearth with occasional amorphous natural hollows, lenses of decalcified tufa and pockets of grey clay. The absolute level of the natural base varied between 25.39m OD in Trench 602 and 30.14m OD in Trench 501.

A natural, *in situ*, soil profile only survived intact beyond the extent of the lagoons and beneath the lagoon embankments. In some cases, a truncated soil profile was evident beneath the sludge deposits within some of the lagoons. However, even outside the lagoons, slurry injection had affected the topsoil both in texture and colour.

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1. L. Adkins and R. Adkins 'Excavations at Beddington, 1982' *London Archaeol* 4, no. 12 (1983) 326-9; L. Adkins, R. Adkins and J. G. Perry 'Excavations at Prehistoric and Roman

Beddington, 1984-85' *London Archaeol* 5, no. 6 (1986) 152-7.

2. J. Heathcote 'Excavation Round-up 1989: part 2, London Boroughs' *London Archaeol* 6, no. 7 (1990) 194.

3. DGLA excavations 1990.

4. Full evaluation report - WA 1992: Report No. W501A

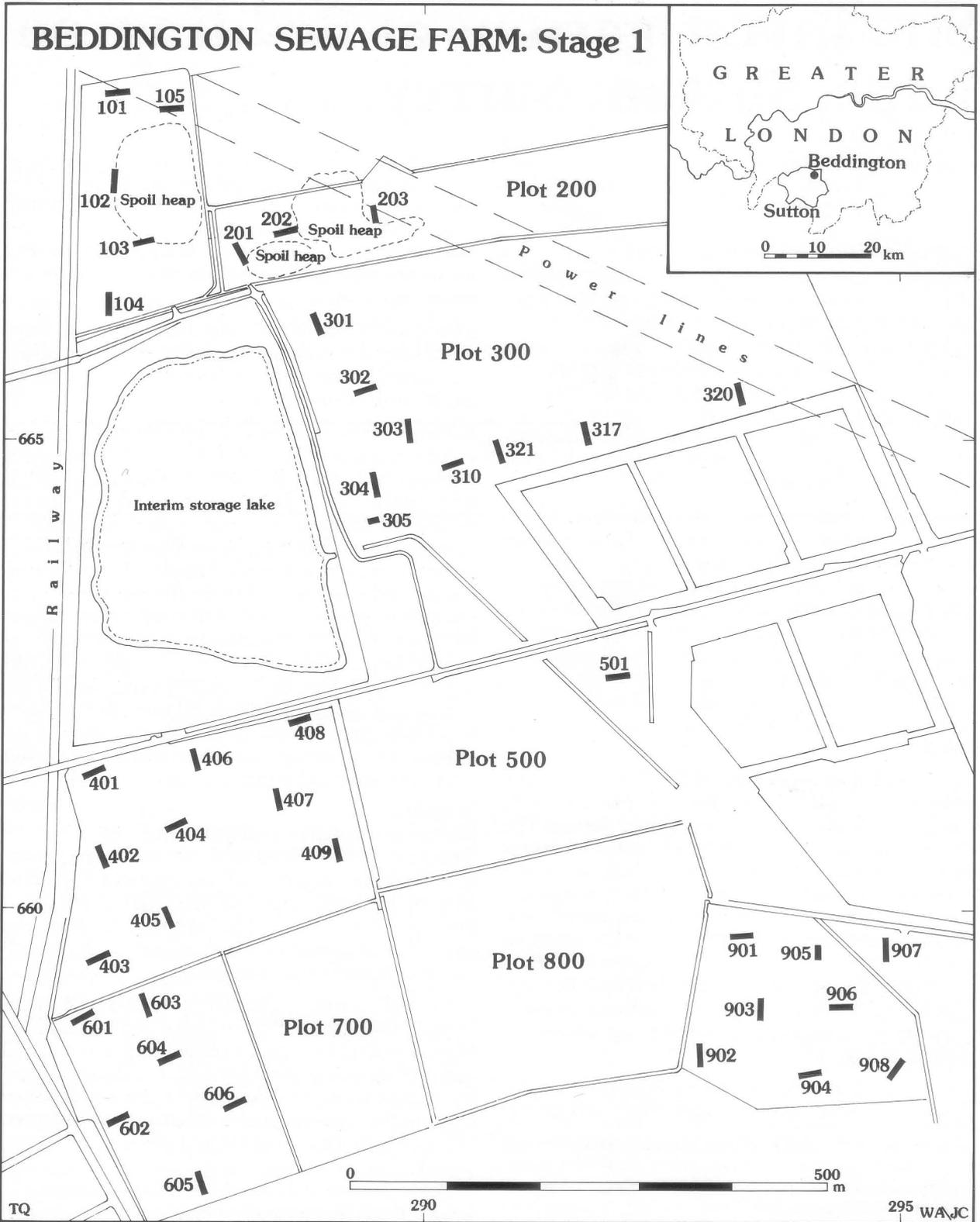


Fig. 1: the site, and trench locations

Archaeological deposits

Archaeological observations consisted entirely of subsoil features cut into the natural base. They were relatively small in number and distributed across most parts of the evaluation area. Overall, subsoil features were revealed in Trenches 101, 104, 303, 310, 320, 402, 406, 407, 408, 501, 605, 905, 907 and 908. The most common type of feature encountered was shallow linear gullies such as those recorded in Trench 905 (Fig. 2a). Similar features were revealed in Trenches 101, 310, 320, 406, 407, 408, 605 and 908; all characterised by shallow rounded profiles. Most survived only in discontinuous lengths and no finds other than small quantities of burnt flint were recovered from any of the excavated segments.

Deeper ditches were less common, only occurring in Trenches 104, 303 and 501. The most clearly defined was Ditch 1242 in Trench 104 (Fig. 2b) which appeared to cut through a similar feature (1247), aligned N-S. No dating evidence was recovered from these two features. A limited amount of dating evidence was recovered from two ditches (1403 and 1409) in Trench 501 (Fig. 3a). Both contained small quantities

of coarse, flint tempered pottery, burnt flint and worked flint (see below).

Postholes and stakeholes were only revealed in Trenches 905 and 501. In Trench 905 (Fig. 2a) two shallow sub-circular features were recorded (1034 and 1036), one of which cut gully 1038. Neither feature produced dating evidence. A single example of a pit, or possibly a large posthole occurred in Trench 907 (Fig. 3b, feature 1198). This feature was 1.5m long, 0.75m wide and 0.45m deep (5ft by 2.5ft by 1.5ft) and contained moderate quantities of burnt flint (see below).

Amorphous scoops and hollows were encountered in a number of trenches. Most displayed asymmetric profiles and undifferentiated sterile fills but a small number had more regular profiles, and two contained quantities of burnt flint. It is difficult to determine whether all or any of the scoops were of anthropogenic origin but, overall, the contrast in definition compared with other subsoil features recorded on the site suggests that few, if any, of the amorphous scoops and hollows are of archaeological origin or interest. Nevertheless, the low levels of finds from the evaluation

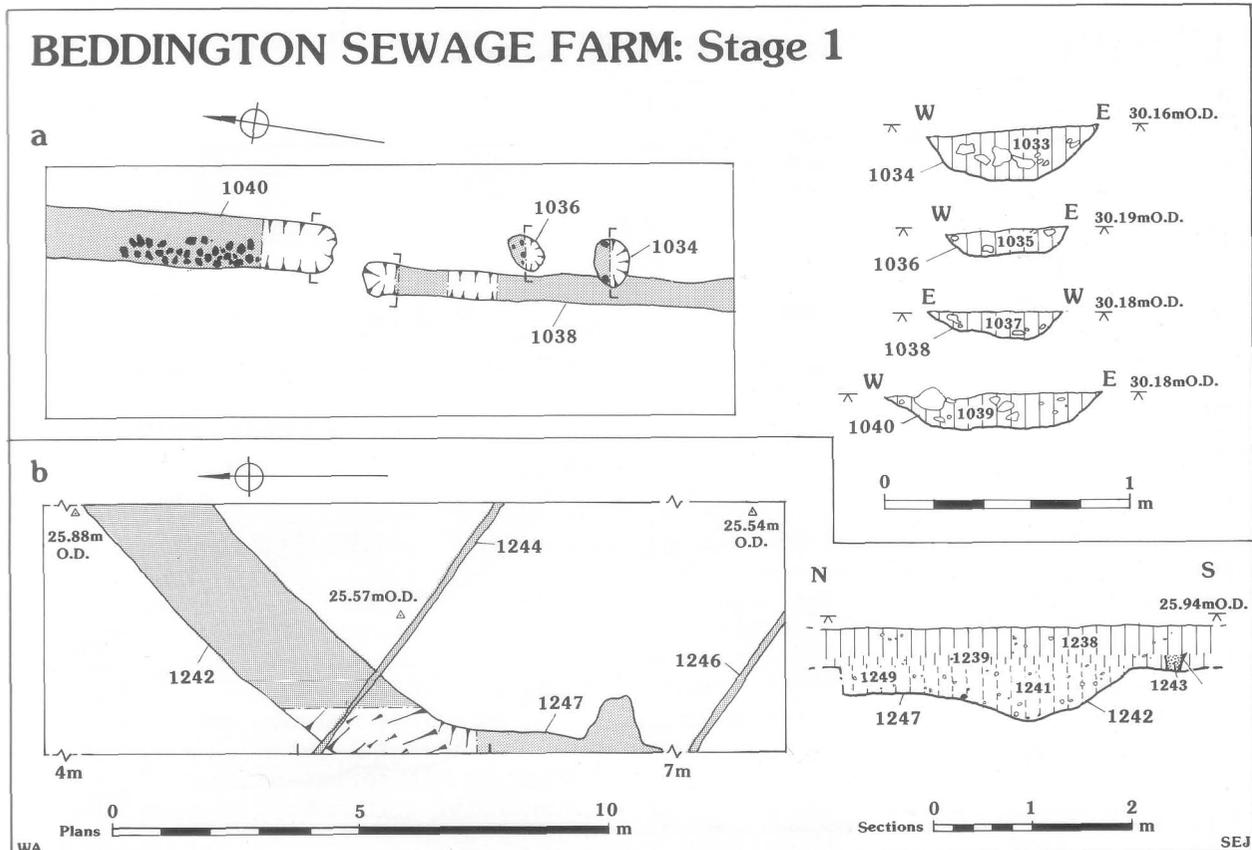


Fig. 2: a, Trench 905 plan and sections; b, Trench 104 plan and sections.

places a rather higher value on the small groups of material from such 'natural' features than would normally be the case.

As noted above, over large parts of the evaluation area, modern activities have completely removed or altered the topsoil and subsoil overburden, and, both within and outside these areas modern trenching, ploughing and slurry injection have striated the upper horizons of the natural base. Comparisons between ground levels in some parts of the site and the adjacent track levels indicated that up to 0.5m (20in) of subsoil and gravel have been removed from some parts of the site.

Finds

A full catalogue of all finds recovered is not presented in this report. The notes below merely aim to provide a brief overview of the finds, by category.

Fourteen sherds of pottery weighing a total of 26g (10z) were recovered from two adjacent features 1403 and 1409 in Trench 501. The fragments are small and fragile, though not abraded, and of a laminated fabric with an ill-sorted flint temper.

Thumbnail impressions are clearly visible on two of the fragments, and the part-profile of a flat base displayed by another. A Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age date seems appropriate and the sherds are tentatively identified as Peterborough Ware.

Seven pieces of undiagnostic worked flint were recovered from features in Trenches 501 and 406 and from the topsoil in Trench 401, including a borer and a retouched flake. The latter was recovered from feature 1409 (Trench 501) which also produced six small fragments of fired clay (total only 2g) which may therefore be contemporaneous.

A total of 86 pieces (1076g) of burnt flint were recovered, mostly consisting of small groups from various features, including those in Trench 501. Larger groups were recovered from pit/posthole 1198 (Trench 907) and hollow 1105 (Trench 404).

Twelve fragments of post-medieval and modern building material were recovered from topsoils, gullies in Trenches 406 and 407, and a probable tree hole in Trench 401. One fragment of brick from feature 1155 in Trench 402 is of earlier date, probably medieval.

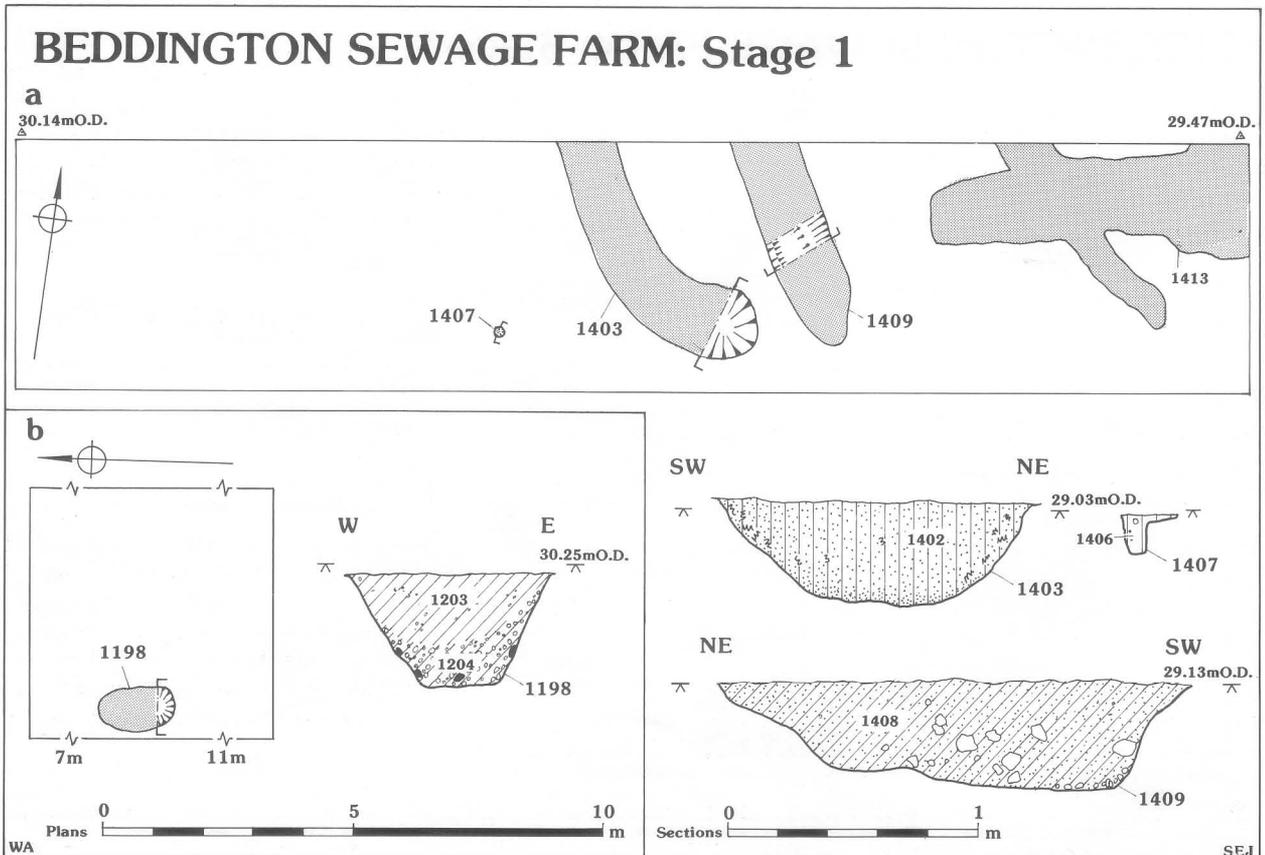


Fig. 3: a, Trench 501, plan and sections; b, Trench 907, plan and section.

Palaeoenvironmental

A single spot sample was taken from an undated, humic deposit (context 1305) within the gravels in Trench 602. It underwent molluscan analysis by M. J. Allen in order to provide some indication of the early post-gravel deposition environment. A small sub-sample was also prepared for pollen and a rapid comment on pollen preservation and floral composition made. The species identification and count of mollusca are included in the full evaluation report but are not reproduced in this summary.

Two environments are probably indicated by the assemblage: an aquatic environment, probably a relatively large body of open water and a terrestrial environment consisting of primary, moist woodland and including evidence for marshland habitats. The humic deposit sampled may represent a severely truncated waterside deposit into which the terrestrial shells had fallen or a damp terrestrial woodland with localised flood deposits. The feature, is however reminiscent of a tree hollow⁶ and the former is most probable. The deposit is a relict of the former land surface, preserved within a hollow in the gravels.

Pollen grains were relatively sparse and poorly preserved. Most were arboreal and consisted primarily of *Pinus*, *Quercus* and *Corylus* with some *Alnus*.

Conclusion

Archaeological deposits survive, for the most part, as isolated gravel-cut features across most parts of the evaluation area. However, with a single exception, the only finds to aid dating such features

comprised small quantities of burnt flint or modern building materials. In Trench 501, the association of Late Neolithic-Early Bronze Age pottery with burnt flint, fired clay and worked flint in two ditch terminals, appears to indicate the survival of archaeological deposits, probably related to domestic/settlement activity. The single large posthole or pit revealed in Trench 907 is comparable in size to those recorded during excavations on the adjacent Romano-British villa site⁷. The feature recorded in the evaluation is shallower by some 0.50m (1ft 8in), but this discrepancy could be accounted for by the postulated 0.30m (1ft) reduction in level of the surrounding natural gravel base.

Widespread and deep disturbance to the natural soil horizons and gravel base is evident across the site. Although it is conceivable that archaeological features/deposits have been completely removed in some parts of the site, the survival of groups of features in some of the most heavily truncated parts of the site, may indicate that the present distribution of archaeological features has not been substantially affected by modern disturbance.

The project archive

The archive⁸ will eventually contain the records, finds and palaeoenvironmental materials from both stages (1 and 2) of the field evaluation. The archive generated from Stage 1 is currently held at the offices of Wessex Archaeology in Salisbury. In due course the whole archive will be deposited with the Museum of London.

6. Cf. R. I. Macphail 'The soil micromorphology of tree subsoil hollows' *CIRCAEA* 5, no. 1 (1987) 14-17.

7. K. Whittaker, *pers. comm.*

8. WA Site Ref. W501 / Museum of London Accession No BDN92.

Addendum

ENGLISH Heritage has confirmed that the circular area scheduled for 'The Globe Theatre' is 4.7m (15.4ft) in diameter and conforms to circle 3¹. This area was centred on the Museum of London's initial projection of the remains (19th October 1989); a circle 3.7m (12.0ft) in diameter, to which an extra 5m (16ft) was added all round. Although the map (23rd October 1989) appended to the entry in Schedule of Monuments depicts the scheduled area drawn to scale, neither the map, nor the written description by H. Knottley (13th December 1989) state the overall dimensions of the scheduled area, nor do they state or show the size of the

projection on which the scheduling was based. By the time the Museum of London published its evaluation report (10th December 1989) its projection had been revised to 19.25m (64.80ft); the report illustrates a projection of 25m². The projection on which the scheduling is based has not been acknowledged in either document. English Heritage's clarification of this matter is, therefore, most welcome.

Martin Clout

1. See Fig. 1 of M. Clout 'The evaluation and scheduling of the Globe Theatre Estate' *London Archaeol* 6, no. 15 (1992) 407-14.

2. *Ibid.*, Fig. 1, circle 1.