SECTION ONE

Introduction

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The Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project

The main excavations reported here were carried out between 1989 and 1990 in advance of the construction of the A27 Brighton Bypass. This new road, which destroyed a 15km stretch of chalk downland along the northern borders of Brighton and Hove, begins at Southwick in West Sussex and ends at Falmer in East Sussex. The excavations, which involved six sites (Mile Oak, Benfield, Hangleton, Redhill, Eastwick Barn and Downsview/land adjacent to Coldean Lane) and six dry valley bottom sections (Cockroost, Benfield, Hangleton, Toadeshole West, Toadeshole East and Eastwick Barn) (Fig. 1.1C), and subsequent post-excavation analysis/report writing, were funded by English Heritage. Since this programme of archaeological works was agreed only shortly before the commencement of the construction of the new road, it was not possible to include a stage of pre-construction survey as recommended eight years earlier by Dr Andrew Woodcock, the County Archaeologist for East Sussex, at the Brighton Bypass Public Inquiry (Woodcock 1981). (Note survey and assessment investigations are now routinely carried out at the planning stages of most road schemes.) The shortcomings of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project were due to the lack of time for a detailed archaeological assessment of the whole route. This problem was partly offset by the valuable efforts of various local organisations – for example, the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society – which undertook a programme of fieldwalking along the route of the Bypass (Hartridge et al. 1989). Dr Woodcock’s submission to the Public Inquiry in 1981 had also included a review of the known sites and findspots along the proposed route of the Bypass, and the selection of the sites which were excavated was partly determined by the results and recommendations of the East Sussex County Council survey.

In addition to the English Heritage-funded programme of archaeological works for the Bypass, there were also assessment excavations and watching briefs along the route of the new road for other clients, including West Sussex County Council and various construction firms. In East Sussex the additional works, which were all undertaken by the University College London Field Archaeology Unit, were associated with planning applications for the use of sites at Benfield and Eastwick Barn for the dumping of excess chalk, and for temporary site offices (Fig. 1.1C). A report on an assessment by Guy Beresford at Southwick Hill, in West Sussex, forms part of this volume (see Section 10). At Sweetpatch Valley Bottom, which is located just to the north of the Bypass, a dry valley section was excavated in 1990 by Keith Wilkinson as part of his doctoral research. While the Sweetpatch site lies off the route of the Bypass, it was chosen to fill a geographical gap of 4km between two of the valley bottom sections investigated by Wilkinson as part of the Bypass Project. A report on Wilkinson’s research excavation is therefore also included in this volume (see Section 13).

Archaeological background

There has been a long tradition of archaeological fieldwork in the Brighton area (and indeed in Sussex generally) – mainly small-scale excavations focused on settlement sites – and the Bypass Project was thus able to build upon a substantial amount of knowledge, to investigate further some of the known sites, and to include some of the previously unpublished discoveries (e.g. flintwork from Redhill) in this report. The history of archaeology in Brighton, as this volume’s bibliography (see Section 16) demonstrates, includes an impressive number of amateur fieldworkers, including G. Burstow, E. and E. C. Curwen, W. Gorton, L. Grinsell, R. Gurd, R. Hartridge, E. Holden, G. Holleyman, J. Holmes, W. Jacobs, R. Kenward, I. Margary, N. Norris, H. Toms, R. Williamson, A. Wilson, S. Winbolt, C. Yeates and, currently, J. Funnell. Of these, the works of Toms and Hartridge require particular mention.

Herbert Toms, one of the great pioneers of chalkland archaeology, is the subject of a biographical article by Professor Richard Bradley (1989). Although trained by the famous General Pitt-Rivers, Toms was not, however, ‘an excavator in the Pitt-Rivers tradition’. Instead he developed the methods of analytical field survey, working in Sussex and Dorset, and passed on such methods to other archaeologists, including the Curwens. In 1896, after three years working as Pitt-Rivers’ assistant, Toms left for a position at Brighton Museum, where he worked until his retirement in 1939. He was a founder member of the Brighton and Hove Archaeology Club and in 1912 formed its ‘Local Earthworks Survey’. Between 1907 and 1927 he published detailed studies of a large number of sites in Sussex, including field systems, enclosures and hillforts, and according to Professor Bradley, Toms was the first person to publish an adequate survey of a ‘Celtic’ field system. In addition, Toms was among the first archaeologists ‘to consider the formation and dating of lynchets on the basis of direct field observation’ (Bradley 1989: 38). Much of his fieldwork was undertaken in the vicinity of the Brighton Bypass (Toms 1907, 1910, 1914, 1924, 1926, 1934, 1936; Gurd et al. 1924), and in the cases of Redhill and Eastwick Barn
involved sites which were subsequently to be further investigated during the Bypass Archaeology Project. In addition, at Eastwick Barn, it was possible to undertake research into one of Toms’ particular interests: methods of field clearance on the chalk and associated flint cairns and banks. Another of Toms’ interests, water supply, especially ponds, remains an important research issue for the future, but was partially addressed at both Mile Oak and Downsview by the discovery of features interpreted as ‘ponds’. Toms’ fieldwork in the Brighton area is still of considerable importance for new research, especially landscape archaeology.

The work of Ray Hartridge is also of considerable importance with regard to the archaeology of the Brighton Bypass. In addition to his involvement towards the end of his life with fieldwalking along the proposed route of the Bypass (Hartridge et al. 1989), the excavations that he directed between 1968 and 1974 at Slonk Hill, Shoreham, investigated part of the A27 immediately to the west of the area affected by the Brighton Bypass (Hartridge 1978: 69–141; see Fig 1.1C). The excavations at Slonk Hill revealed the remains of two Bronze Age barrows, a small unenclosed Iron Age settlement (sixth to first century BC), and a Romano-British settlement (late first/early second to late fourth century AD). The settlement evidence is of particular interest here since no domestic sites of the Iron Age or Roman periods were investigated as part of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project.

A major component of the Bypass Project, the study of dry valley bottoms and colluvial processes, also builds upon the very important work of Sussex pioneers in this field. We are referring here to the works of Martin Bell in particular, but also of Michael Allen (Bell 1981a,b, 1982, 1983; Allen...
1984b, 1987). The Bypass provided the opportunity for a particularly intensive application of methods previously used at widely dispersed locations in East Sussex.

**Project aims and methodology**

The principal aim of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project was the study of a chalk downland landscape rather than individual archaeological sites. The Field Archaeology Unit had previously helped to develop the study of plough-damaged chalkland landscapes by its multi-period investigation of Bullock Down Farm and its environs, near Eastbourne, East Sussex (Drewett 1982a) (see Fig. 1.1B). While the Bullock Down project had involved the intensive study of a fairly compact block of downland, the route of the Bypass provided the opportunity to sample, by a random transect (i.e. the route of the road), a much larger tract of chalk downland. The South Downs are essentially made up of a series of chalk ridges, valley slopes and dry valley bottoms, and the range of activities which took place on the Downs in the past relates directly to these three zones. All three zones (i.e. nine ridges, 18 valley slopes and seven dry valleys) were affected by the construction of the Bypass, and a multi-period project based upon the route of this road therefore provided a valid random sample of the archaeological landscape of the South Downs. The potential importance of this particular ‘transect’ was increased on account of the fact that approximately two-thirds of its route was under pasture, with half of that amount being permanent pasture. Thus in contrast to the Bullock Down project, which had concentrated upon plough-damaged downland, the Brighton Bypass provided the rare opportunity to investigate large areas of downland pasture, some of which may not have been ploughed since Roman times. The general richness and variety of the known archaeology in the vicinity of the proposed Bypass, which includes both settlement sites and field systems, also provided an excellent opportunity for a project to integrate settlement archaeology with a major palaeoenvironmental study, and to examine the evolution of downland settlement and land-use over time from the Mesolithic to the twentieth century.

In order to achieve the main aims of the project, the original fieldwork programme concentrated upon the evolution of land-use by sampling dry valley deposits and field lynchets, with only limited sample excavations of settlement sites. The choice of the settlement excavations was made partly in order to try to answer specific period-based problems. Therefore at Redhill it was hoped that the known Mesolithic site would be able to help elucidate the nature of downland Mesolithic settlement. The selection of a settlement for excavation was also made with regard to that site’s proximity to a dry valley section in an adjacent valley, thereby allowing the possibility of establishing the settlement’s palaeoenvironmental context.

During the course of the fieldwork the settlement excavation programme was modified to include more extensive excavations at Mile Oak and Downsview, where the initial sample excavations had revealed previously unknown prehistoric sites of great importance in their own right. Additional fieldwork was also unexpectedly required during the post-exca vation stage of the project, when following an arson attack, it became necessary to ‘excavate’ carefully a garage used by Sue Hamilton to store finds, including pottery discovered on the Brighton Bypass!

Lack of resources and time meant that unfortunately it was not possible for the Field Archaeology Unit to maintain a watching brief during all Bypass construction groundworks, and to carry out salvage excavations where appropriate. Such actions, which were commendably recommended by Dr Woodcock at the Brighton Bypass Public Inquiry in 1981, would probably have increased considerably the number of known archaeological sites and findspots for the route of the Bypass. The much more targeted use of available resources to try to answer specific research problems was, however, considered by the then Director of the Field Archaeology Unit, Dr Peter Drewett, to be a higher priority.

**The Project Archive**

The fieldwork documentation, drawings and photographs, the retained finds and the specialist reports have been deposited at Brighton Museum.

**This volume**

This volume has been designed to provide reports on all of the main fieldwork undertaken as part of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project. It begins with the various site excavations funded by English Heritage, starting at Mile Oak at the western end of the Bypass and ending with the excavations adjacent to Coldean Lane (which included the Downsview site) at the eastern end of the new road. The next section reports on the excavation of the six dry valleys (which are again arranged from west to east along the Bypass route). This is followed by a specialist section on the radiocarbon determinations. Other sections include the reports on the excavations at Southwick Hill and Sweet-patch Valley Bottom referred to above, and summaries of Field Archaeology Unit excavations at two sites: Varley Halls and Patcham Fawcett, which are located very close to the route of the Bypass and provide important settlement evidence for comparison with the contemporary settlements at Mile Oak and Downsview. Some of the main discoveries and conclusions of the Brighton Bypass Archaeology Project are summarised and discussed in Section 11.

All radiocarbon measurements in this volume have been calibrated using the datasets of Stuiver and Pearson (1986), Pearson and Stuiver (1986), and Pearson et al. (1986) and the computer program OxCal v2.18 (Bronk Ramsey 1994, 1995). Results before c. 7000 BP have not been calibrated. The calibrated date ranges cited in the text are those for 95% confidence. They are quoted in the form recommended by Mook (1986), and with end points rounded outwards to 10 years if the error term is greater than or equal to 25 radiocarbon years, or to 5 years if less than this. Ranges in normal type have been calculated using the maximum intercept method (Stuiver and Reimer 1986), those quoted in *italics* derive from the mathematical modelling method described in Section 9.