

East Horton Farm Fair Oak & Horton Heath, Hampshire

Archaeological Evaluation Report



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Archaeological Evaluation at East Horton Farm, Fair Oak, Hampshire.

Introduction

East Horton Farm (SU 507182) lies in undulating countryside between the 150m and 200m O.D. contours c. 1.5 kilometres east of Fair Oak, Hampshire (Fig.1). The area is currently under mixed arable/pastoral farming with substantial areas of deciduous woodland (Durley Copse and Greenwood c. one kilometre to the south-east). The subsoil is sand. A small tributary of the River Hamble flows north-east to south-west east of East Horton Farm itself, which thus lies in the bottom of a shallow valley.

In 1963 small-scale sand extraction revealed pottery and a ditch of the early Roman period (Collis 1974, 97); trial excavations in 1964 confirmed these findings (*ibid*).

Planning permission for large-scale sand extraction was sought by D.K. Symes Associates on behalf of S.Bastian in January 1987. In the light of the known Roman activity, the County Archaeologist, M.F.Hughes, defined an evaluation brief to be carried out before planning permission could be granted. The brief was to define:-

- 1.) the extent of the Roman site,
- 2.) its date range, and
- 3.) to examine the integrity of the archaeological deposits.

This was to be achieved by fieldwalking and sample excavation. The Trust for Wessex Archaeology was asked to undertake the work, which was funded by the applicants.

The Fieldwork Strategy

The evaluation area covered parts of two fields immediately north-west of East Horton farmhouse, centred on the sand pit at SU 50541835. A

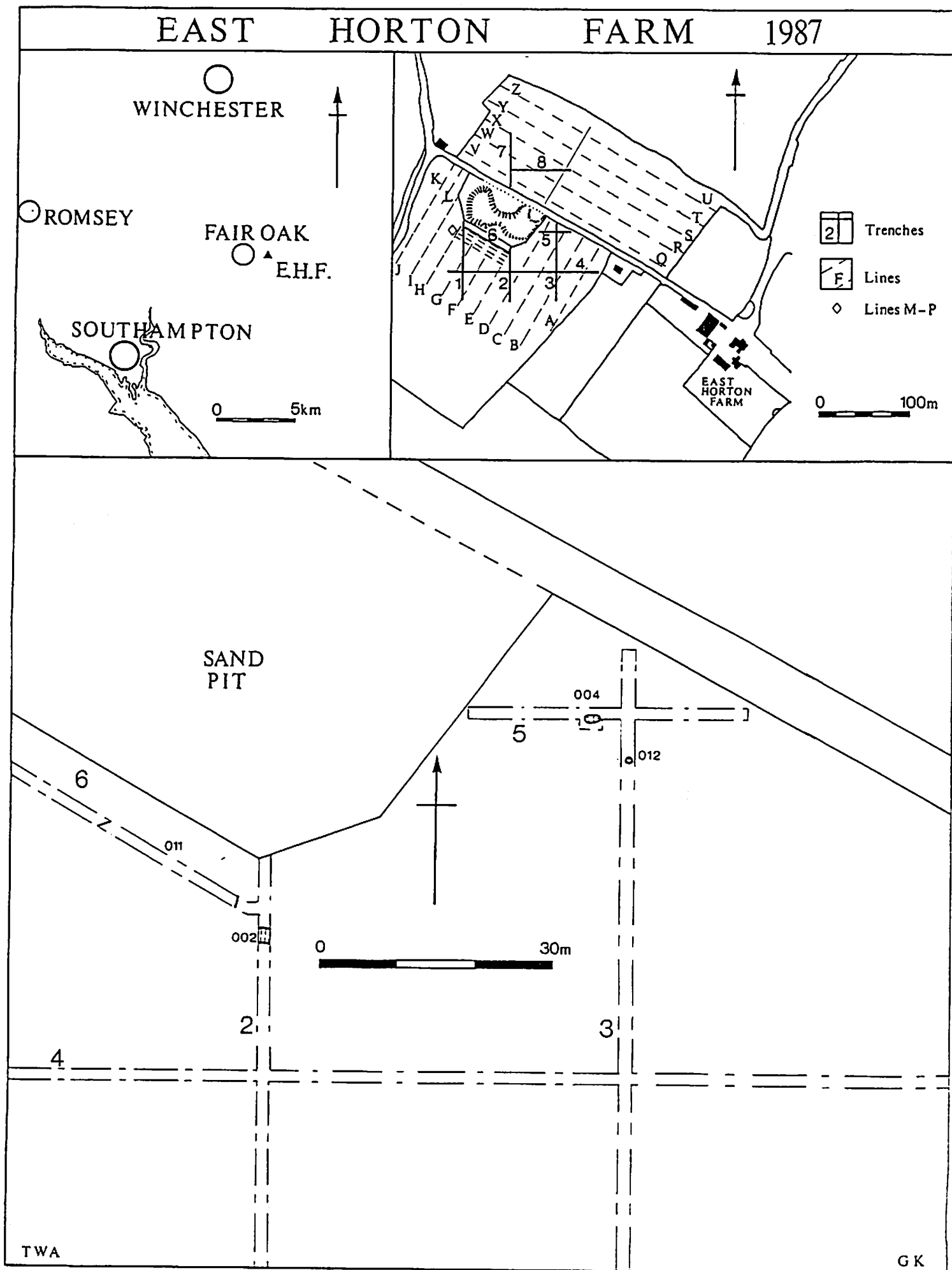


Fig. 1

farm track bisects the area, running through a natural hollow-way between Field 1 to the south, and Field 2 to the north.

a.) Fieldwalking

Fieldwalking was by lines at 20m intervals (A-L running north-west to south-east in Field 1 and Q-Z running north-east to south-west in Field 2), except that lines M-P in Field 1 were at 5m intervals and at right-angles to lines C-I (see Fig.1). This more closely-spaced pattern was adopted in the area expected to contain most evidence of Roman activity immediately to the south of the 1963 sand pit.

b.) Excavation

The excavation programme entailed the machine removal of topsoil in 1.6m-wide trenches on north-south and east-west axes within a 50m grid. Trenches 1-6 were excavated in Field 1 and Trenches 7-8 in Field 2.

Results

a.) Fieldwalking

The fieldwalking was inevitably limited by the area to be covered in the time available and by the extent of crop growth (spring-sown barley). Nevertheless the paucity of finds was notable even in the cross-walked area expected to reveal Roman activity. A total of 72 objects was recorded in Field 1 and 74 in Field 2, of which the majority was post-medieval pottery and tile. However, a small number of prehistoric worked flints was found in each field, as was a single sherd of Roman pottery. The overall character of the finds gave a background of activity but no concentrations were apparent. A detailed record of the finds is available in archive.

b.) Excavation

Three archaeological features were found in Field 1 adjacent to the sand pit which produced the finds of 1963. None were found in Field 2.

Ditch 002 ran east-west across Trench 2. It was 1.69m wide and 0.45m deep with sides sloping at no more than 40° into a rounded base.

It contained three layers. A substantial quantity of burnt flint and pottery was recovered from the 1m-long excavated segment, with about two-thirds of the material occurring in a heavily-burnt middle fill.

Pit 004 in Trench 5 was 2.04m long, 0.8m wide and up to 0.3m deep. It was sub-rectangular in plan with a broad U-shaped profile. There were three fills of which the upper was the most extensive and contained most of the finds.

Circular feature 012 in Trench 3 was 0.76m in diameter and 0.2m deep. It had a single fill, and was probably a post-hole.

Layer 011 in Trench 6 consisted of flint pebbles possibly laid down deliberately as a surface. This could not be tested by excavation due to the limited time available.

The Finds

The Pottery, by H. Riley

A total of 115 sherds were recovered, only one being from fieldwalking (line X). The pottery was initially assigned to broad fabric groups, of which four were distinguished:-

- 1.) Medium sand-tempered ware.
- 2.) Flint-tempered ware.
- 3.) Grog-tempered ware.
- 4.) Fine ware.

The pottery was then examined for form. The sand and flint-tempered rim sherds were all from rounded vessels with high shoulders and beaded rims (Fig. 2:1). Several body sherds of a coarse, heavily flint-tempered fabric, typical of large storage vessels, were recovered from the excavated features and the sherd found in fieldwalking was of this type. A single rim sherd of a grog-tempered fabric was from an everted rimmed jar (Fig. 2:2). The one sherd of fine ware was from a butt beaker (Camulodunum type 113).

Two of the three excavated features (002 and 004) contained pottery. Ditch 002 produced by far the most sherds, containing 90% of the pottery assemblage. There was little difference in the range of fabric and form in the pottery from the two features, although pit 004 produced the butt beaker sherd.

For the whole assemblage, flint-tempered ware was the most common fabric found (73%), with 29% sand-tempered ware and one sherd each of grog-tempered and fine wares.

The pottery assemblage compares closely to that found on the site in 1963-4. These are described as hard, sandy grey wares and black-orange wares with large flint particles, similar to fabric groups 1 and 2 here (Collis 1974, 97). These are dated by Collis to the decades after the Roman conquest and the assemblage described above does not contradict this, a mid 1st-century A.D. date being appropriate for the range of vessel forms.

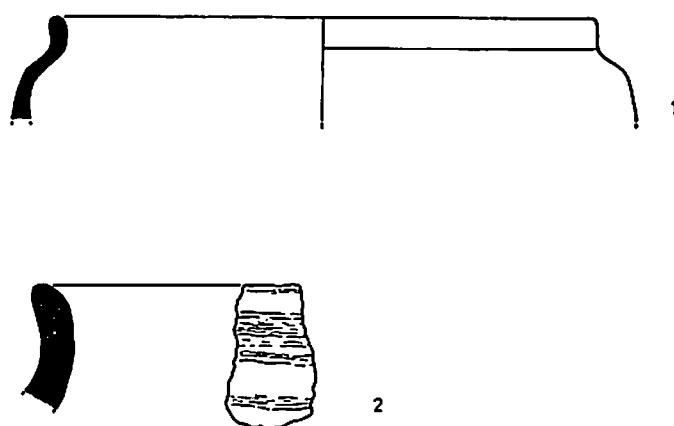


Fig.2

Scale 1:4

The Flint, by H. Riley

During fieldwalking, six pieces of worked flint were recovered and the incidence of burnt flint was noted. Excavation of features produced a large amount of burnt flint, but only three pieces of worked flint. The flints from fieldwalking and excavation are considered as one assemblage here.

All of the flint is of a similar grey/blue colour and is unpatinated with few signs of plough damage. Pebble flint occurs locally, although the core and four large flakes are probably of non-local origin.

The assemblage consists of eight flakes and one core. Four of the flakes were retouched; two were backed and of blade proportions, one being a deliberate blade.

The assemblage is not large enough to make any chronological distinctions on the basis of a metrical analysis, although it is appropriate to note that the two flakes of blade proportions indicate an earlier prehistoric date.

Discussion

Evidence of pre-Roman settlement is restricted to a small number of worked flints recovered during fieldwalking. The finds were isolated and gave no indication of a settlement focus.

The early Roman activity was entirely consistent with the finds of 1963-4. The pottery, including one fragment of butt beaker, was of mid-1st century date, similar to the earlier finds, with jar and bowl forms dominant.

The ditch, pit and post-hole all occurred in a restricted area adjacent to the sand pit, and it is clear that the archaeological activity was concentrated on the higher ground in Field 1. No features were found in Field 2, indicating that Romano-British activity did not extend northwards.

Ditch 002 did not recur in the other trenches, but cobble layer 011 in Trench 6 may have overlain earlier features, thus obscuring its return. Certainly the limited record of the 1964 excavations suggests that ditches were found running south from the sand pit (Collis 1974, 97). The cobbling may also have reduced feature disturbance from ploughing, helping to explain the small number of finds in fieldwalking lines M-P. It is not certain whether ditch 002 was part of an enclosure or a field boundary, though the quantity of finds recovered from a small segment suggests the former rather than the latter. Only further excavation could confirm this.

It was not possible to define whether features 004 and 012 lay within any such enclosure, though this seems likely. The pottery from them was of similar character to the assemblage from ditch 002, which suggests that they were contemporary. The available evidence suggests that the site would probably have been a small farming enclosure typical of the period and area. Examples have been excavated at Brighton Hill South, Basingstoke (Keevill and Fasham 1985), Winnall Down, Winchester (Fasham 1985) and Owslebury, Winchester (Collis 1970).

The site may have been very short-lived, from the homogenous nature of the ceramics, and nothing post-dating the 1st century A.D. has yet been recovered. This suggests that the site was occupied in the decades following the Roman conquest.

Summary

The 1987 evaluation confirmed that an early Roman site of small size and apparently limited lifespan existed at East Horton Farm. It is likely that a large part of the site has already been destroyed by sand extraction.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the landowner, Mr. Bastian, and his family for allowing access to the site and funding the work, and for their interest in the project. The support of M.F.Hughes, Hampshire County Archaeologist, is warmly appreciated. Helen Rees of the Trust for Wessex Archaeology kindly commented on the pottery.

The fieldwork was carried out by Graham Keevill and Hazel Riley, and the project managed by Susan M. Davies, for the Trust for Wessex Archaeology. A fuller description of the evaluation is held in archive. The finds and archive will be deposited with Hampshire County Museum Service.

G.D.KEEVILL and S.M.DAVIES

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