

East Beach Pond, Selsey, West Sussex

An Archaeological Watching Brief

for J.A. Pye Ltd

by Helen Moore

Thames Valley Archaeological Services Ltd

Site Code EBS02/91

December 2002

Summary

Site name: East Beach Pond, Selsey, West Sussex

Grid reference: SZ 865 934

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 14th October, 27–29th November 2002

Project manager: Helen Moore

Site supervisor: Pamela Jenkins

Site code: EBS02/91

Area of site: 2770sq m

Summary of results: No archaeological features were observed during the works to enlarge the existing East Beach pond. Four pieces of unstratified struck flint, and one piece of abraded medieval pottery were retrieved from the eastern edge of the pond along the edge of stripped topsoil, but no other archaeological finds or features were observed.

Monuments identified: None

Location and reference of archive: The archive is currently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, RG1 5NR. It is intended that it will be deposited with Chichester Museum in due course.

This report may be copied for bona fide research or planning purposes without the explicit permission of the copyright holder

Report edited/checked by:	Steve Ford✓ 20.12.02
	Steve Preston✓ 19.12.02

East Beach Pond, Selsey, West Sussex An Archaeological Watching Brief

by Helen Moore

Report 02/91

Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out at East Beach Pond, East Beach Road, Selsey, West Sussex (SZ 865 934) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Mr Jon Chamberlain, of J.A. Pye Oxford Ltd, Langford Locks, Kidlington, Oxon, OX5 1HZ.

Planning permission has been granted (SY/01/00786/FUL) to enlarge the existing East Beach pond, in order to collect the waste water from the new housing estate currently being constructed by Pye Homes in Chichester Road, Selsey. A condition (7) applied to the permission required a watching brief to be undertaken during the groundworks. This is in accordance with the Department of the Environment's Planning Policy Guidance, *Archaeology and Planning* (PPG16 1990), and the District's policies on archaeology. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Mr James Kenny, Archaeological Officer for Chichester District Council.

The fieldwork was undertaken by Helen Moore and Pamela Jenkins, on 14th October, and the 27th, 28th, and 29th of November 2002.

The site code is EBS02/91. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Chichester Museum in due course.

Location, topography and geology

The site is located on the eastern side of Selsey, adjacent to a car park and on a flat parcel of land in front of the sea wall. The pond lies near areas of housing, and the land around the pond, prior to being enlarged, was laid out to grass and shrubs. Pagham village lies to the north-east, and the Witterings lie along the coast to the west (Fig. 1). The land surrounding the pond lies at approximately 2m above sea level. The natural water level in the pond is at 0.98m above Ordnance Datum, and at high tide it rises to 1.11m AOD. The underlying geology is Bracklesham Beds (sand, silt and clay) and aeolian deposits ('brickearth') (BGS 1979). The geology actually observed during the groundworks was a pale to mid orange silty clay with pale grey patches. The sediments were fine and clean and were banded, as organic layers were sandwiched between the silty clay layers. These sediments may have formed during successive periods of flooding. Below the silty clay lay a dark orange gravel.

Archaeological background

Selsey has been occupied since prehistoric times, and finds from all periods have been recorded from various locations around Selsey. A Palaeolithic hand axe is the earliest artefact recorded on the Sites and Monuments record. Finds from the gravel ridge running north- south through the peninsula, included Neolithic Peterborough and Windmill Hill pottery, and polished stone implements possibly indicating an occupation site (White, 1934).

Evaluation and excavation on a site just off Chichester Road in Selsey produced Bronze Age and Iron Age settlement evidence and landscape features (Preston, 2002). Secondary cremations dating to the middle Bronze Age were recorded in a Bronze Age penannular ring ditch located to the east of the site, excavated in 1989 (CBA, 1989). Two sites with Late Bronze Age pits and postholes to the west of East beach pond were excavated in 1998 (Seager Thomas 1998). Isolated Bronze Age finds include an early Bronze Age beaker (possibly from a burial), middle to late Bronze Age pottery, an early Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead and a stone axe of probable late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date (Ford, 2000). A gold bracelet described in the *Antiquaries Journal* (1926) and possibly two bucket-urn burials dating to the Late Bronze Age have been found in Selsey (White, 1934).

Evidence for substantial Iron Age defensive ditches supposedly part of a postulated Iron Age *oppidum* (or fortified town), have been excavated in Broadreeds Holiday camp, the majority of which has been destroyed by marine erosion (Kenny, 1989). A large number of gold coins of *Commius*, *Tincommius*, *Verica*, *Epillus*, and *Cunobelin* dating to the Iron Age were found on the beach in 1877 along with a collection of scrap gold (White 1934). These finds may indicate an Iron Age site of some importance in the area, hence the postulated *oppidum*.

In Roman times it is likely that a settlement existed here. Finds including pottery, coins and other metalwork have been recorded at several locations, and reused Roman brick and tile have been incorporated in the construction of the walls of the Rectory (Ford, 2000). A Roman *villa* is recorded three miles to the north of Selsey at Sidlesham, and the Roman road from Chichester (*Noviomagus Regnensium*) probably extended to Selsey Bill.

No Saxon entries are recorded on the Sites and Monuments record, but Selsey is known in Old English as *Seolesiae* c.715 AD, and in Domesday Book (1086) is recorded as *Seleisie* meaning the 'Island of the Seal' (Mills, 1998). Saint Wilfrid established a monastery here in 681, and preached as a missionary for five years. King Ethalwald of the South Saxons granted Wilfrid land to build the monastery. Bede writes

'(the king) gave to the most revered prelate, the land of eighty-seven families to maintain his company which were in banishment, which place is called Selsea, that is the island of the Sea-Calf' (Hunter-Blair, 1997)

The monastery no longer exists and may have disappeared because of coastal erosion.

A Medieval deer park existed in Selsey, but its whereabouts is unknown, it may well have disappeared under the sea, as a large part of the coastline has eroded away since the Domesday survey was undertaken.

The name Selsey Bill is not recorded until the 18th century, however in Old English the term 'bile' meaning a bill or beak is used topographically to describe a promontory.

Objectives and methodology

The purpose of the watching brief was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of development. An archaeologist was on site to watch the machining during the enlargement of the pond. A 360⁰ machine fitted with a toothless ditching bucket was used. The landscaping of the banks of the pond and the island within it were monitored for archaeological features and finds, as was the removal of a causeway to the island (Fig. 2). Spoil heaps were checked for finds.

Results

No archaeological features were observed during the monitoring of the machine excavation of the pond. However, four unstratified pieces of struck flint, and a sherd of pottery possibly medieval in date, were recovered from the eastern edge of the pond, along the edge of stripped topsoil (Fig. 2). The soil removed from the southern edge of the island in the pond was disturbed and contained modern brick and plastic, but elsewhere the soils appeared undisturbed and natural.

Finds

Struck flint by Steve Ford

Four pieces of unstratified struck flint were found. All of the pieces are made from gravel flint. They comprise two flakes, a spall (a flake less than 20 x 20mm) and a bashed lump, that is a small piece of flint with a single flake removal. None of the pieces are chronologically diagnostic and they can only be dated broadly to the Neolithic-Bronze Age period.

Pottery

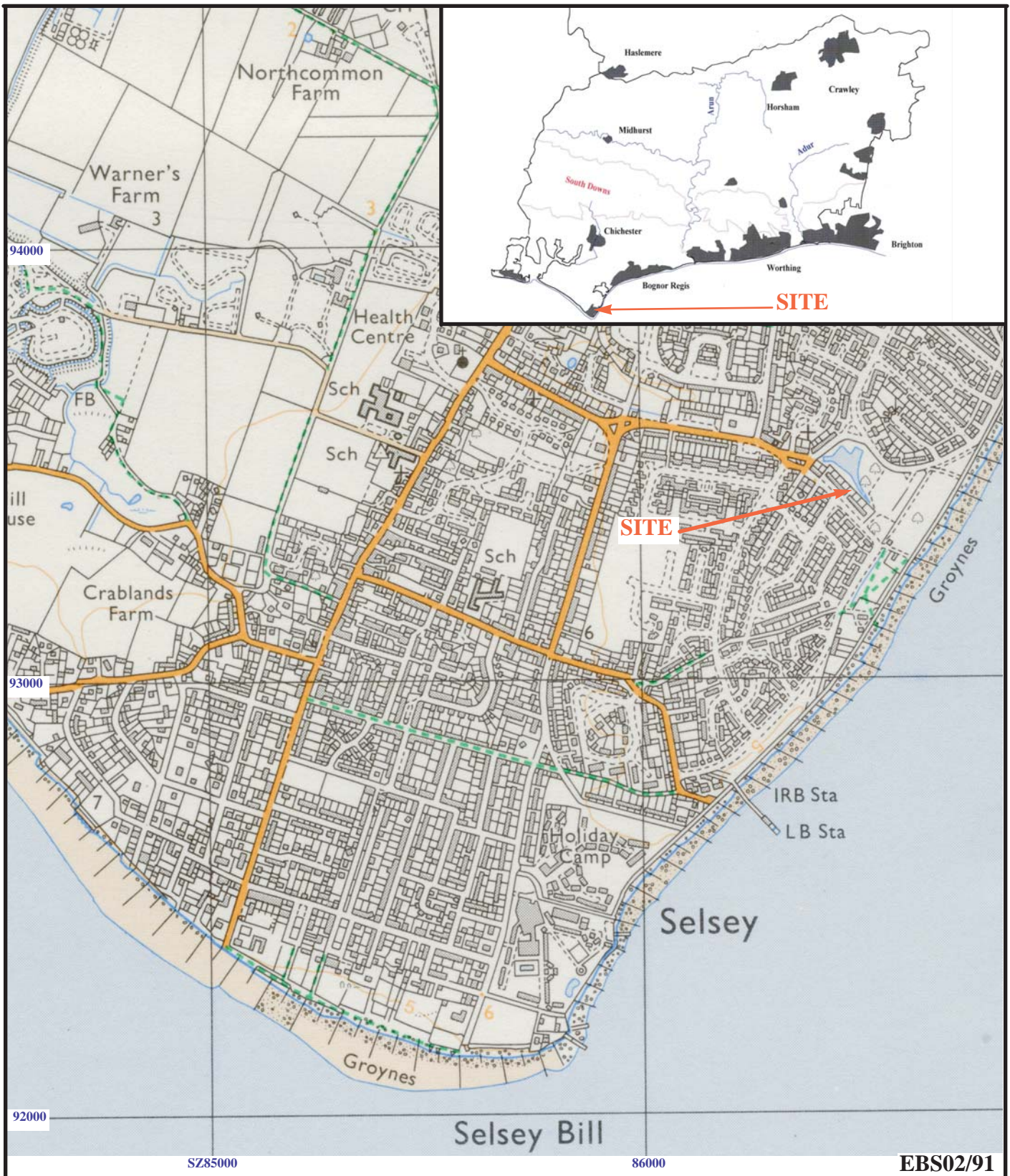
One unstratified abraded sherd of pottery was recovered. It showed traces of a pale green glaze on one side and is of medieval date.

Conclusion

No archaeological features were observed during the monitoring of the groundworks. The few finds of struck flint and the sherd of medieval activity only point to casual use of the area. The sea wall to the south of the pond was constructed in the 1957, and it is possible that the land in this area was landscaped during this process. It is also possible that this area has been marshland for sometime, which may account for the general lack of archaeological material. The presence of alluvial clays and silts may indicate a significant period of flooding and wetness. The land is very low lying at approximately 2m above sea level here, and it is possible that settlement was concentrated in other areas where the land is higher and less prone to flooding.

References

- BGS, 1977, *British Geological Survey*, 1:625,000, South Sheet, 3rd Edition (Solid), Keyworth
- CBA 1989, '*Archaeology in Britain, 1989*', Council for British Archaeology, London
- Ford, S, 2000 'Chichester Road, Selsey, West Sussex, An Archaeological Evaluation' Thames Valley Archaeological Services Report 00/56
- Hunter-Blair, P, 1997, *An Introduction to Anglo-Saxon England*, Cambridge
- Kenny, J, 1989, 'Excavations at Selsey Bill, West Sussex, 1988: An Interim Report' Chichester District Council
- Mills, A D, 1998, *Oxford Dictionary of English Place Names*, Oxford
- PPG16, 1990, *Archaeology and Planning*, Dept of the Environment Planning Policy Guidance 16, HMSO
- Preston, S, 2002 'Chichester Road, Selsey, West Sussex, A Post-Excavation Assessment' Thames Valley Archaeological Services Report 00/56, Reading
- Seager Thomas, M, 1998, 'New Evidence For A Late Bronze Age Occupation of Selsey,' *Sussex Archaeol Collect* **136** 7–22
- White, G, 1934, 'Prehistoric Remains from Selsey Bill' *Antiq J* **14** 40–52



EBS02/91

**East Beach Pond, Selsey, West Sussex, 2002
Archaeological Watching Brief**

Figure 1. Location of site within Selsey and West Sussex.

Reproduced from Ordnance Survey Pathfinder SZ89 1:12500
Ordnance Survey Licence AL52324A0001



East Beach Pond, Selsey, West Sussex, 2002



Fig.2 Map Showing the Groundworks for the Enlargement of East Beach Pond