

A Report on the excavations carried out at Rocky Clump, Stanmer, by the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society during 1997

Introduction

The excavations at Rocky Clump, Stanmer began in April 1997 and finished in late November. The summer was mainly dry and sunny. There was no digging on the site during August and September as the BHAS Field Unit accepted an invitation from Mr Chris Grestorex of Archaeology South East to assist in the rescue excavations of fields, designated for housing, at Eastbourne College of Art & Technology. Our members gained considerable experience from working on the site which revealed over 150 Anglo-Saxon graves and between 50/60 Iron Age pits.

The excavations at Rocky Clump included, as in past years, training of new personnel many of whom were involved with archaeological courses run by Sussex University. For students to complete their modules for the Certificate in Practical Archaeology they need to accrue fifteen days field experience, much of which they spent with us. The BHAS Field Unit now has 26 active members and most days saw between 10 and 15 personnel on site. Geophysical surveys were undertaken once again in the south field on the flat area running down the hill to the south east. A possible line of low readings may indicate some form of activity in this area or may prove to be further solution hollows. In 1998 there will be a greater emphasis on geophysical surveys for the Society has now purchased an RM15 resistivity meter. It may also be beneficial to conduct a magnetometer scan to seek out hearths as none of these have come to light as yet, with the exception of the burning in pit 57/70.

The site was scanned on several occasions with a metal detector by either Mr Michael Fairbrother or Mr Laurie Gaston. Mr Fairbrother also examined the surrounding north field in a random manner producing one very abraded and unreadable Roman coin. The site was examined and flags indicated locations of possible artefacts. No bronze items were noted, but subsequent excavation produced 2 Roman coins of Claudius II. The site was also visited by unofficial metal detectorists but there was no site disturbance, so no finds are suspected. These detectorists made known their presence by the removal of all the site flags.

The excavations

The excavation continued to use the 2 metre by 2 metre trench context numbers to allow an investigation into the spatial disposition of artefacts found in the top soil, these were logged and recorded. It became very evident that a lack of artefacts occurred in squares outside the enclosure area, proving that at this particular site the archaeology has not drifted away or down the hill. The excavation opened up a new area of 128 square metres, both to the east and to the north of the 1996 excavations. The object of the new trenches was to locate the eastern and northern boundaries of the enclosure, and confirm the features found in the 1996 assessment trenches.

The initial movement was to the east where trench contexts 2 13-223, (40 square metres) produced post hole features. Contexts 221,222 and 223 showed a reduction in finds found in the top soil, this being an area outside the enclosure. The features located included post hole context 208, originally found in assessment trench 205. New post holes found included contexts 248,249,250, and 208. These post holes ran in a north south alignment parallel to those on the west side of the enclosure. (Ref context numbers

84,58,74,71,160,175 and 188.) Other features included two large pit/postholes contexts 244 and 247. Post hole 247 produced a clear definition of a post pipe. These post holes, together with post hole context 90, provide some form of partition for the enclosure.

The excavation then moved northwards to include 2 metre by metre contexts 224,225,226,227,228,229,230,231,260,261 and 262. A further assessment trench was cut into land north of context 260, numbered context 269, this assessment trench showed that the line of post holes terminated at post 259. From this section of trench J (44 square metres) it was possible to determine the north east boundary of the enclosure. Further post holes were found including context 252 and 259. A large pit feature was also located in the north east area, context 274, and an area of badly disturbed chalk, context 270/271. The new area also provided an intensity of flint nodules and compressed flint indicating the presence of the flint cobbling known from 1995 and 1996. A large number of artefacts were found among the cobbling, including bone, pottery, and a rubbing stone.

The final section of the 1997 excavation involved a movement to the west where contexts 232,233,234,235,236,237,238,239,263,264,265 and 266 were investigated. This new section (48 square metres) produced an inverted 'L' shaped site. The final movement also included a small section extending north from contexts 263 and 264. This section (16 square metres) was to 'chase' a linear feature running north under the baulk. This feature still continues going northwards into the land. Assessment cuts show the feature continues for some distance. During top soil removal an area of solution material was noted in contexts 239 and 266, this area was identified in the 1996 assessment trench as being the location of possible post holes contexts 197 and 200. A possible post hole may be context 295 in this same area; another post hole 285 lies in area context 239. This last area has only been trowelled down to feature depth and planned. The area contains many flint nodules and it was considered necessary to plan the flint disposition prior to its removal. The excavation has now reached this point and work in 1998 will reveal the nature and depth of features, including post holes in this area. Coming to light is a second linear feature running west to east through contexts 239,237,264 and 263. This linear feature cuts through a solution pipe and joins the south/north linear feature in context 263. Mr David Rudling on one of his visits suggested that these features are probably ditches into which the flint floor has sunk.

The flint cobbling or floor is concentrated in contexts 210, 217, 228, 230, 232, 234, 235, 233, 231, 229, and 262. The cobbling has a well defined east boundary running north south through features 216,217,228,231,262,202 and 283. There are possible intrusive features of contexts 245,288,286 and 287 which may prove to be post holes or solution material. Only further excavation in 1998 will confirm this.

The Features

Context 244

This was a large pit or post hole. The fill was chalky loam with some small flint pieces. No definition of a post was observed. The pit was oval to a maximum size of 89cm and the depth was 28cm. The only find in the fill was some burnt bone. Though in the bottom of the pit were two well defined rectangular 'beam slots cut into the sides. This type of 'beam slot feature was noted in 1996 in context 193. Both slots are in a south to north alignment, but it is not possible to make any other connection at present. This pit is one of three contexts, 90, 244 and 247, that may indicate a cross partition of the enclosure.

Context 247

A post hole with a well defined post pipe in its north west segment. The fill of this post hole was similar to 244, a chalky loam with only a small quantity (about 1%) of flint nodules. The dimension of the larger cut were oval 1 .2m by 85cm. the depth was 40cm. The dimensions of the post context 255 were 25cm diameter and 33cm deep. Post hole 90 had a similar chalky loam fill.

Contexts 208, 248,249,252 and 259

This set of post holes defines the eastern boundary of the enclosure with post hole context 259 being the most northerly. The alignment of these post holes is well defined with the exception of post holes 248/249; these two post holes are the most southerly with 249 being only a shallow feature. Post hole 248 is a much deeper but it is slightly out of line with the others. All these post holes, with the exception of 249, were flint packed and of substantial size.

Post Hole	Diameter	Depth
context 208	60cm	50cm
context 248	40cm	17cm
context 249	30cm	10cm
context 250	90cm	43cm
context 252	65cm	47cm
context 259	82cm	37cm

Context 270/271

These features proved to be an area of badly disturbed chalk. Excavation showed irregular incursions into the natural chalk. These features resembles a tree hollow, similar to those revealed inside the clump when trees were blown over in the 1987 gales. There were no archaeological finds.

Context 274

This proved to be a very enigmatic feature. It was observed after heavy rain. The feature has a considerable girth, oval in shape it measured 1 .6m by 1 .25m, but only had a depth of 17cms. The feature lies immediately north of the most northerly post hole context 259. The feature contained a fill of chalk nodules both small and large. The sides were ill-defined and irregular. The base of this feature was mainly very flat, down to bedrock chalk, with irregularity on the south west side. This feature provided no archaeology and must be

considered yet another tree hollow.

Context 245

This is the linear feature running south to north into the field; a possible ditch. It is too early to give width dimensions without further investigation. The ditch, if it is indeed one, is packed with flint and covered with numerous artefacts including pottery and bone. The feature appears to be widening at its northern end. No sections have been cut, this will begin in 1998.

Context 292,293 and 294

This feature is the linear 'ditch' running west to east that meets with linear feature context 245. This ditch is less well defined and broken into three sections because of the variety of fill observed. Context 292 appears to contain many chalk nodules, whilst context 293 is very flinty in substance and 294 is at present ephemeral, complicated by cutting through a solution area.

Contexts 285 and 295

These features are just emerging from under the top soil and may be post holes at the west end of the enclosure. Further work in 1998 will confirm the nature of these features.

The Small finds

- 1) Coin of Claudius II A.D. 268-270 Ae Antoninianus. Rome mint. Context 234
- 2) Coin of Claudius II A.D. 268-270 Large fragment of an Ae Antoninianus barbarous 17mm dia. Context 236
- 3) Coin of Constantine I Circa A.D.330 Context 229. Some traces of silvering.
- 4) Small clay bead. context 229.

Discussion

The excavations at Rocky Clump in 1997 have emphasised the complexity of the site and the square shape of an enclosure or building is now beginning to take form. However, several phases to this building can already be determined by the existing evidence. The new building is immediately to the north of the 'shrine' feature excavated in the 1950's. An area between the two buildings is going to be cleared of old fallen trees and form part of the excavation site for 1998. The new building consists of a line of post holes to the west, context numbers 84, 58, 74, 71, 160, 175, 188 and possibly the most northerly in this line 285. Another possible post hole in this sequence is 295, but this post hole would have no counterpart on the east side. The east side of the building consists of post holes 248/249, 250, 208, 252 with 259 being the most northerly post hole. A line of posts joining these two, west to east, should emerge in 1998. A possible post hole context 287 in line with 259 would confirm this configuration. On the east side of the enclosure further examination will need to take place as other post holes should be located under the spoil heap. The south end of the east line of post holes is markedly higher in northern orientation than the west side, so this conclusion can be drawn. Excavation should confirm this hypothesis.

Three post holes contexts 90, 244 and 247 mark a possible partition of the new building. These post holes only had chalky loam for fill, unlike the substantial flint packed post holes of the sides, but the post context 247 had a well defined post in its section context 255.

A chronology is beginning to come to light for the building. The east side of the enclosure is probably of original dating. On the west side, however, there are two distinct phases. There are in fact two lines of post holes running northwards, the inner line consisting of context numbers 59, iii, 176 and 164. The outer line, or later phase, is further to the west and consists of contexts 84, 58, 74, 71, 160, 175, 188 and 285. The cobbling or flint floor does not extend past this line of post holes and must be assumed to be contained within the enclosure. The most important evidence for phasing comes from post hole context 111 that was found 'beneath' the flint flooring cut into a solution pit. This post hole was well defined by chalk blocks. The flint cobbling does not continue all the way to the east side but stops short by 1-2 metres.

It is in this area, on the east side, that further complexity arises. There is a general deposition of flint nodules, much of it disturbed by the plough, but sufficient to emphasise the floor layer. It is also on the east side that the linear feature appears that may prove to be a ditch. This ditch context 245 is cut by another running east west context 292, 293, 294. Both of these ditches are flint packed, probably from the flooring. The alignment of these ditches to each other is 90 degrees. The alignment to the post holes of the enclosure is 5 degrees further to the west. The ditch running south to north also continues out past the north boundary of the enclosure, but is further complicated by the fact that even outside the enclosure perimeter it is still flint packed and covered with pottery? Small trenches cut to the north of the baulk show that the feature continues to some extent. A number of features can already be discerned among the flint cobbling, but only further excavation will identify their nature and relationships.

The results of the excavations at Rocky Clump have provided evidence for a building or enclosure with coin and pottery dating to the late third century and possibly early fourth century. The building probably connected to the 'shrine' has several phases. A small enclosure was constructed over an existing ditch system and further dating evidence from the ditch fills will be needed to confirm this hypothesis. This enclosure was then extended to the west and a cobbled floor laid. Rubbish pits, contexts 167/i 85, and domestic utilisation of a pit for constructing a corn dryer, context 57/70, lay on the outside of the enclosure to the west. A series of pits or post holes, flint packed but probably also part of the cobbled floor lay to the south contexts 54, 82 and 83. These features also lying under the floor would form part of the first phase of building. The new building/enclosure is of considerable size and square in shape measuring 11m north to south and also 11m east to west.

Post excavation work is already being undertaken with all of the material washed, 90% marked and the same quantity sorted into categories. Among the bone material has been noted quantities of antler. The dog head from the pit context 14 has been confirmed by Dr Jeremy Adams at the Booth Museum and also by Dr Elizabeth Somerville at Sussex University. There were no metal finds in 1997 other than the coins already mentioned. The pottery is becoming very interesting in that prehistoric flint calcined sherds are now being found in the recently opened sections in contexts 233 and 234. This new find of pottery may suggest a pit in this area as the new section has also produced a rubbing stone.

The 1998 excavations need to answer a number of important questions. How do the two

buildings link up? New work will need to be undertaken within the precincts of Rocky Clump itself. This will include further investigations into the ditch surrounding Rocky Clump, probably dating to the 18th century; it would prove useful to find this ditch cutting earlier features. There is a large section within the trees between the two excavations that warrants investigation; this will be subject to the successful removal to other areas of the clump of rotting tree debris. Other investigations need to be undertaken to the west of the existing section to pick up the 'medieval' ditch. It is possible that the ditch system found within the existing excavations may link up and prove to be part of a temenos? Other projects include a 'chasing' of the ditch running northwards to determine its dimensions and a geophysical survey in this same area to examine findings from a 'diviner' of an even larger feature? An examination of the cemetery area within the trees where a possible grave location, unexcavated underlying an old tree, may provide more positive artefact or radio carbon dating for the cemetery site. Further work on the existing features will provide greater artefactual dating evidence. Personal communications from members of the previous excavations indicate that the site certainly continues in the south field; the fieldwalking in 1993 provided pottery concentrations in this area. Part of the 1998 programme will include geophysics with the new RMI5 resistivity meter recently purchased by the Brighton and Hove Archaeological Society, with assistance from grants from both Brighton and Hove Council and the Sussex Archaeological Society. Attempts will also be made to conduct a magnetometry survey of the same area. All projects will be training for new members and enhancement of knowledge for the existing BHAS Field Unit. The data will provide further knowledge and assist in ultimately determining the nature of this Romano-British site, whether it is a temple or shrine, or as considered in a recent publication (Gilkes 1997), a Romano-British farmstead. It is important not to undermine the importance of a site for being a farmstead, as so very few of these have been excavated, many excavations concentrating on villas only. Rocky Clump is a very complex site and there are still many more questions to answer.

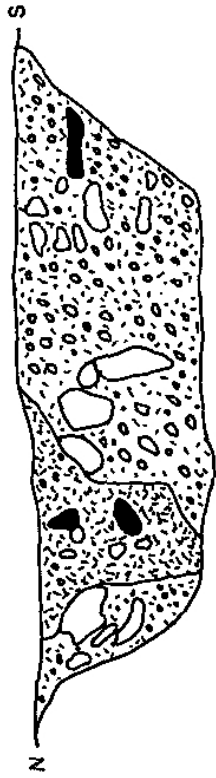
Acknowledgements

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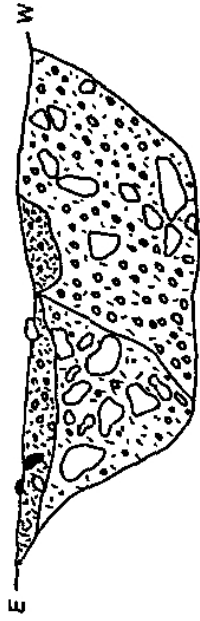
John Funnell (6th March 1998)

Reference:-

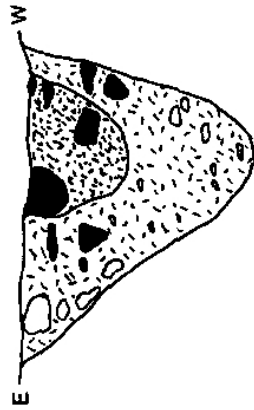
Gilkes ,O. 1997. Excavations at Rocky Clump, Brighton, Sussex Archaeol, Collect. 135, 113-125.



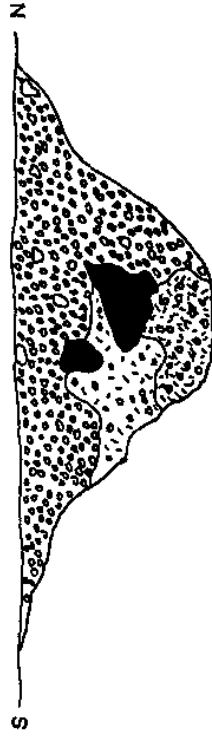
CONTEXT 247



CONTEXT 247



CONTEXT 208



CONTEXT 250





CONTEXT 274

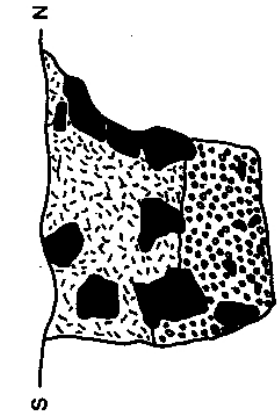


CONTEXT 274



CONTEXT 273





CONTEXT 252



CONTEXT 259



CONTEXT 272

CONTEXT 259



CONTEXT 244



PROFILE OF CONTEXT 271
ROCKY CLUMP SECTIONS 1997

