

Introduction

The case study for this essay comprises the open-area excavation of a tile production site at Finchingfield, Essex, undertaken by Cotswold Archaeology (CA) in Spring 2022. This fieldwork and immediate assessment of this project were the focus of a previous essay (Gifford 2023), which considered how they related to aims and objectives outlined in the project's initial WSI (Mortimer 2022). At the completion of the project's Post-Excavation Assessment (PXA), an Updated Project Design (UPD) was developed and integrated with the overall report (Antrobus 2023). Since that time, the project has reached a closing point, with reporting and submission for publication complete; the final archive preparations for the ADS and Braintree Museum are currently underway, and data has been submitted to OASIS for inclusion in the local HER.

The present essay's scope is limited to specific products of work undertaken since the issuance of the UPD: primarily the publication report, and secondarily the online publications. The objective of this paper is to assess how these products realise the objectives and plans expressed in the project design – specifically, for our purposes, the UPD (Antrobus 2023). In particular, discussion will centre on:

- Clarity and thoroughness of reporting
- How reporting addresses project objectives
- How report/product content compares with UPD outline

Products for dissemination

As a minimum level of reporting, the initial WSI (Mortimer 2022, 9-12) committed to a post-excavation assessment report (published online and disseminated to the client and local planning authority (LPA), a short note in a local journal (*Essex Archaeology and History*), and physical and digital archive deposition with Braintree Museum and the Archaeology Data Service (ADS). However, following the discovery of a medieval tile production site potentially with rare associated structures, further reporting was considered necessary. The original WSI lacked specificity to realise the potential of the site (Mortimer 2022, p.4), so a UPD was produced (Antrobus 2023, p.84) specifying three final products for publication (beyond the archives):

- A further, full report produced for publication in *Essex Archaeology and History*
- The PXA report itself to be considered a final archive report, augmented by additional specialist reports and draft publication texts archived alongside

- The illustration and publication of a palaeolithic handaxe found, via Twitter (now X) and CA's website.

Publication report

Product

The UPD includes an overview of the planned report for publication, "A medieval tile kiln at Bardfield Road, Finchingfield", comprising c.9400 words plus tables/illustrations (Antrobus 2023, p.85). This report (Antrobus, forthcoming) is now completed and approved for imminent publication in *Essex Archaeology and History*.

The report actually produced amounts to 13,013 words (excluding tables and illustrations), roughly 40% longer than planned in the project design. In large part, this growth was due to expansion of the phased site descriptions, finds sections, and overall discussion: some sections doubled the provisional wordcount (c.f. Antrobus 2023, p.85). Unsurprisingly, in this final phase of work, the post-excavation project did go over-budget, which the project's manager attributes in large part to 'perfectionism' in the production of this report (Mortimer 2024, pers. comm.)

The result, however, is that descriptions and illustrations of significant site features are sufficiently detailed (e.g. including feature dimensions, specific scientific and artefactual dating evidence, and specific palaeoenvironmental species identifications) to both characterize the archaeology and allow for meaningful comparison with other sites for parallels. Indeed, interpretation throughout the report is also meaningfully contextualized through the use of both historical evidence and archaeological comparanda. Though only selected artefactual assemblages were discussed in the report, the most significant (ceramics and metalwork) are explicitly detailed, and where appropriate, illustrated to provide ample material for comparison and characterization. The level of illustration also expanded dramatically, from three figures planned in the UPD (Antrobus 2023, p.85) to sixteen figures submitted for inclusion: these include photographs and plan of site and feature details, as well as artefact illustrations, and go a long way to improving the clarity of the report. This level of detail is heavily selective, however: by contrast, the 400 words provisioned for *Plant macrofossil and charcoal* (Antrobus 2024, p.85) were omitted altogether, with environmental remains instead discussed *ad hoc* in other sections.

It is likely that in addition to the element of suggested 'perfectionism', the disparity between the length the report/production time and the plan as outlined in the UPD (and overall project budget)

was partially due to initial underestimation of the required time/space to do the report justice. The task list detailed in the UPD (Antrobus 2023, p.87) makes specific provisions for most elements of the work undertaken, but in specific areas likely underestimated: at assessment, extremely limited analysis had been undertaken on the vital CBM assemblage; however, only one day was allocated for “Work on distribution, kiln structure and comparable assemblages” (Antrobus 2023, p.85). It is also surprising that the likely need to include some level of artefact illustration for publication was not anticipated in the planned report outline (Antrobus 2023, p.85), though artefact illustration was included in the task list (Antrobus 2023, p.87). It seems that the reasonable scope and resource commitment for producing this report had not been entirely thoroughly considered in the project design.

Content vs. specific objectives

The publication report fairly comprehensively addresses the objectives laid out in the UPD:

Objective 1: establish the historical context for the site

(...) Objective 2: Further research the kiln structure and establish the contribution that it makes to the body of knowledge from known kilns sites in Essex and nationally

(...) Objective 3: assess consumption and status at the site

(...) Objective 4: compare the site to other ‘tile factories’.

(Antrobus 2023, p.80-83)

Due to the tone and intended audience of the medium, the publication report does not explicitly reference the objectives themselves, but the content adheres closely to these objectives, which are in themselves centred on topics from the regional Research Framework (RF 2022). *Objective 2* and *4* (Antrobus 2023, p.81-83), being closely related, are both explored in detail in the site feature descriptions of *The kiln* and *Structures*, as well as throughout the entire *Tile-production site* discussion (Antrobus, forthcoming). *Objective 1*, concerning the historical context of the site (Antrobus 2023, p.80-81), is clearly addressed in both the *Archaeological and historical background* and *Landscape* sections of the publication report (Antrobus, forthcoming); *Objective 3*, concerning consumption and status at the site, is discussed in the *Subsistence and consumption* section (Antrobus, forthcoming).

That is not to say that all specific objectives were neatly achieved without obstacle: in several cases, suggested approaches outlined in the UPD (Antrobus 2023, p.80-83) failed to produce desired

results. One of the main approaches suggested for achieving *Objective 1* was documentary research to establish kiln ownership/patronage, and the likely market for its products (Antrobus 2023, p.80); the UPD task list allocated 1.5 days for such research (Antrobus 2023, p.87). However, as the report states, “it has not been possible to trace the ownership of the development site prior to 1633”; nonetheless, the report addresses the question, and outlines available evidence regarding links to contemporary, local individuals and estates (Antrobus, forthcoming, *Archaeological and historical background*). Similarly, where *Objective 2* sought to identify products of the kiln through closer spatial analysis of the CBM distribution (Antrobus 2023, p.81), results were not forthcoming (Anderson forthcoming, *Forms and fabrics*). This absence of evidence is nevertheless discussed in the *Date, form and function* section of the report, and through comparison with other sites (Smallwood 1978; Eames 1961; Riall 2003) established as not out of the ordinary.

One significant deviation from the UPD plan is the non-inclusion of an “interpretation drawing” specified for inclusion in the publication report (Antrobus 2023, p.83, 85), conceived as a reconstruction of the kiln site, to include significant features likely associated with tile production at the site, such as clay puddling pits, a possible workshed represented by *Structure 2*, etc. in addition to a reconstruction of the kiln itself (Antrobus 2024, pers. comm.) This was suggested as part of *Objective 4* of the UPD, to facilitate comparison of the kiln-complex’s spatial organisation and provisioning to other sites, or reconstructions/contemporary depictions of such sites (Antrobus 2023, p.83). However, given resource constraints, the plan could not be fulfilled. Though such an illustration is arguably of limited academic use, since it would involve some careful speculation, it could have contributed significantly to the legibility and accessibility not only of this report, but also potentially to the wider discourse around such sites.

Limitations

The clear limitation of the publication report is its selective scope: the report is designed to exclusively focus on the most significant features and assemblages at the site, which effectively means the exclusion of all Prehistoric and Roman evidence found. Generally, these amounted to small quantities of mostly residual worked flint, Bronze Age and Roman pottery, and a few prehistoric pits, which were understandably considered to have been adequately reported with the completion of the PXA (Antrobus 2023); however, the exception is a palaeolithic handaxe, which though residual, warranted enhanced prominence enough to justify illustration and online publication (Antrobus 2023, p.87). Despite not being thematically relevant to the kiln site report, given the resource

commitment to the publication report, a short note and illustration of the handaxe could have been included, to enhance its discoverability as a contribution to the corpus of examples from Essex.

Online publications

Archive report

Indeed, while the publication report in *Essex Archaeology and History* is deliberately selective, a more comprehensive account of the evidence is constituted in the final Archive Report (Antrobus 2024). It was suggested in the UPD that the PXA report itself could serve as the archive report, once accompanied by additional specialist reports produced in the final stages of work (Antrobus 2023, p.84): indeed, the PXA report did include an enhanced level of research, stratigraphic analysis and contextualisation compared with many assessment reports.

However, in reality, the final Archive Report produced (Antrobus 2024) is much changed from the PXA; though it has been developed from that report, rather than simply appending additional specialist reports, the findings from the final stages of analysis have been integrated to produce an updated, complete and cohesive report of the project's findings. Indeed, taking account of the specific areas where the PXA required additions - for instance, the inclusion of a detailed assessment of the vital CBM assemblage, X-radiography of the metal artefacts, further scientific dating and analysis of environmental evidence – it seems inevitable that interpretation evolved sufficiently over the course of the post-assessment work to necessitate reapproaching the report. Simply appending documentary research and artefactual analysis would have produced a report of severely limited clarity and coherency. Given the limited, selective approach of the publication report, it is appropriate that the authoritative, overall report for archive should properly integrate the full findings of further environmental analysis, artefactual reporting and prehistoric archaeology omitted in the publication report. The Archive report is to be included in all archive depositions, therefore made publically available via ADS, in line with the original provision of the UPD (Antrobus 2023, p.84). The original WSI stipulates that a PDF of the final report will also be published on CA's website (CA 2024); though not yet uploaded, this is likely scheduled for the same time as the ADS deposition.

Handaxe

The final publication product specified in the UPD (Antrobus 2023, p.84) is the site's illustrated/photographed palaeolithic handaxe, to be published on Twitter (*sic* – now X) and CA's website.

The artefact was published on X in February (Fig.1; CA 2024b), and is live on CA's virtual museum (Fig. 2; CA 2024c). Again, however, the execution of this task has deviated from the UPD: while the project provisioned 0.5days for Ryan Wilson to illustrate/photograph the object (Antrobus 2024, p.87) , in reality, the illustration was passed to CA's 3D modelling specialist, Li Sou, to create a fully rendered, interactive model for public access on CA's virtual museum. This outcome enormously enhances the intelligibility and accessibility of the artefact beyond the simple photography provisioned in the project design. Such modelling is funded from a separate CA Virtual Museum budget (Collier-Jones, pers. comm.), so incurred no extra cost to the project.

Conclusions

The publication and archive reports both constitute well-contextualised, detailed, and clear reports, issued on schedule (Antrobus 2023, p.88). From the LPA's perspective, the outcome is excellent - clearly addressing the agreed objectives of the project and in doing so, contribute valuably to regional research frameworks.

Though different, the reports are complementary. While the publication report provides a focused, clear and cohesive report of the tile production site specifically, isolating the most significant evidence for discussion, it is not complete: a reader seeking palaeoenvironmental or animal bone reports, for instance, would need to look elsewhere. The archive report, meanwhile, does offer this completeness, albeit in a less focused and digestible format: since the archive report will be freely available on the CA website and ADS, this adequately compensates.

In some areas, such as the interpretive kiln-site illustration and *Plant macrofossil and charcoal* report section, the publication report omits elements specified in the UPD. However, overall, the report over-delivered relative to the design, being better illustrated, more detailed (and significantly longer) than provisioned. The archive report, too, over-delivered, by fully integrating all analysis into a cohesive revised report for clarity, rather than simply appending additional specialist data to the existing PXA, as suggested in the UPD. Similarly, the online publication of the handaxe was delivered to a significantly higher standard than provisioned.

Unplanned expenditure on the longer publication report and revised archive report did, however, eventually send the project over-budget. Nonetheless, these over-steps appear mostly justified by the utility and quality of the products. As such, it is perhaps better to see the discrepancies between the UPD and the eventual output as a factor of underplanning/provisioning at the UPD stage, rather than over-delivery in execution. Given many analysis and research tasks were initiated at PXA, before

the UPD's development, and how post-UPD work deviated from the plan, it seems this project team worked somewhat organically, rather than strictly in response to a formal project design. This approach, and the bleed between project stages, likely exacerbated budget-planning difficulties; challenges; however, in this case, they helped produce a high quality project outcomes.

Figures



Figure 1 Social media post of palaeolithic handaxe (CA 2024b)

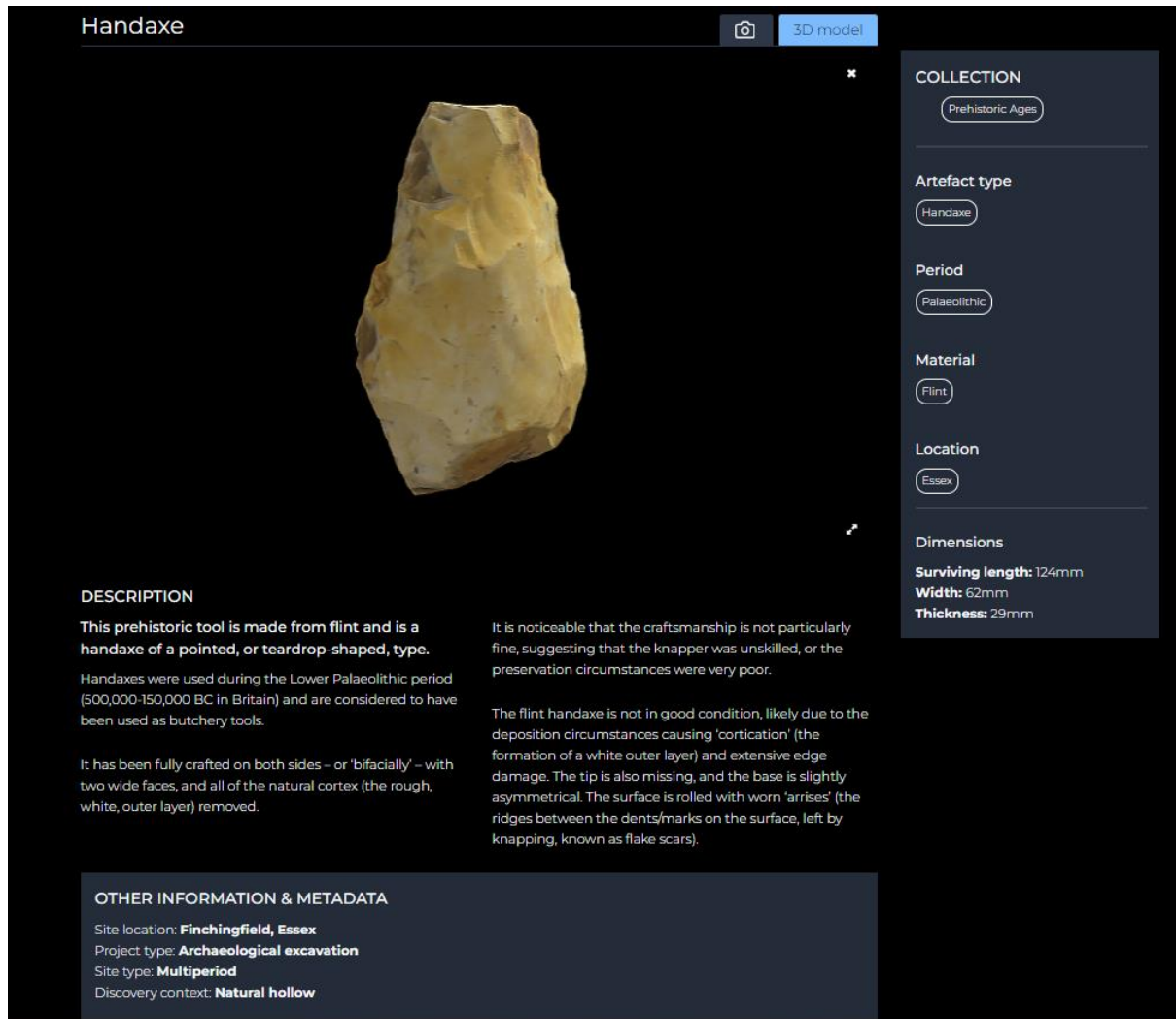


Figure 2 The palaeolithic handaxe on Cotswold Archaeology's Virtual Museum (CA 2024c)

Bibliography

Anderson, S. (2024) "Ceramic Building Material" in Antrobus, A., *A medieval kiln and enclosures at Bardfield Road, Finchingfield, Essex Excavation Archive Report*

Anderson, S. (forthcoming) "Ceramic Building Material" in Antrobus, A. "Medieval Enclosures and a Tile Kiln at Bardfield Road, Finchingfield" *Essex Archaeology and History*. Draft version available at: Supporting Documents.

Antrobus, A (2023) *Land at Bardfield Road Finchingfield Essex Post-Excavation Assessment and Updated Project Design* Unpublished CA report SU0410_01. Available at: Supporting Documents.

Antrobus, A. (2024) *A medieval kiln and enclosures at Bardfield Road, Finchingfield, Essex Excavation Archive Report* Unpublished CA report SU0410_2. Available at: Supporting Documents.

Antrobus, A. (forthcoming.) "Medieval Enclosures and a Tile Kiln at Bardfield Road, Finchingfield" *Essex Archaeology and History*. Draft version available at: Supporting Documents.

Antrobus, S. (2024) In-person conversation with author, April 22.

Cotswold Archaeology (2024a), *Archaeological Reports Online* Available at: <http://reports.cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/> (accessed 12 May 2024)

Cotswold Archaeology (2024b) [X] Available at: <https://twitter.com/CotswoldArch/status/1755867786172149810> (Accessed 12 May 2024)

Cotswold Archaeology (2024c) *Handaxe* Available at: <https://cotswoldarchaeology.co.uk/museum/handaxe/> (Accessed 12 May 2024)

Collier-Jones, C. (2024) Email to author, 10 May.

Jones, F. (2019) WhatsApp message to David Evans, 10 January.

Eames, E.S. (1961) "A Thirteenth Century Tile Kiln Site at North Grange, Meaux, Beverley, Yorkshire" *Medieval Archaeology* 5, p.137–168

Gifford, C. (2023) *HPAR7004 Assignment 1* Unpublished document. Available at: (Previous submission)

Mortimer, R. (2022) *Bardfield Road, Finchingfield, Essex Written Scheme of Investigation for an Archaeological Excavation* Unpublished document.

Mortimer, R. (2024) Telephone call to author, 10 May.

Research Frameworks (2022) *East of England Regional Research Framework* Available at: <https://researchframeworks.org/eoe/> (Accessed 13 May 2024)

Riall, N. (2003) "Excavations at Borelli Yard, Farnham: the tile kiln", *Surrey Archaeology Collection* 90, p.295–336

Smallwood, J. (1978) "A Medieval Tile Kiln at Abbey Farm, Shouldham" *East Anglian Archaeology* 8, p.45–54