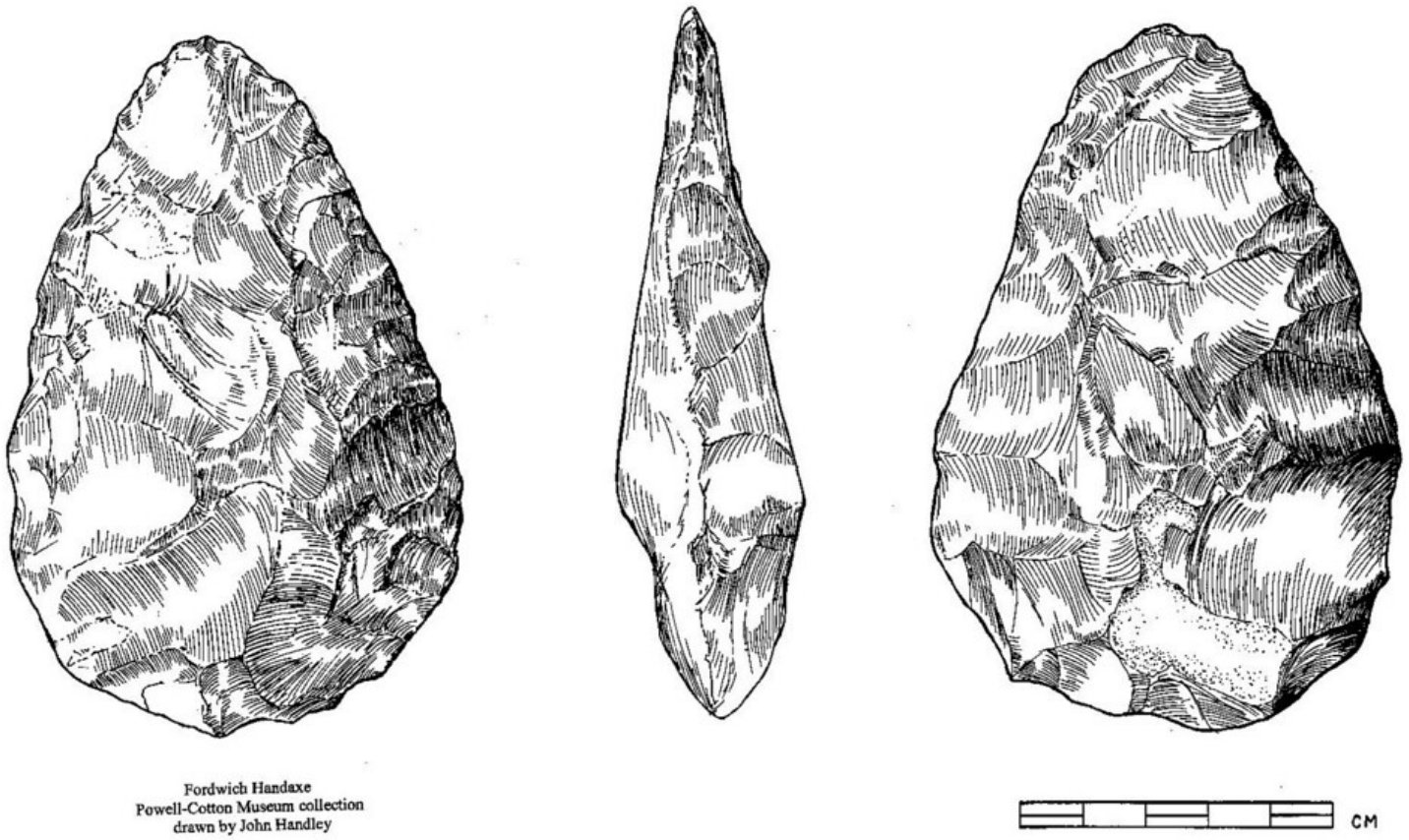
ARCHAEOLOGY

FTC TOPIC PAPER NO. 4



Fordwich Handaxe
Powell-Cotton Museum collection
drawn by John Handley

ARCHAEOLOGY TOPIC PAPER

FTC TOPIC PAPER No.4

Introduction

1. The Eastern Bypass (now referred to in the Draft Local Plan as an "Eastern Movement Corridor") was proposed by Canterbury City Council ("CCC") to alleviate traffic congestion within the City of Canterbury. CCC commissioned Stantec to undertake a feasibility study of the suggested routes.

2. Regarding Archaeology & Heritage, Stantec's report 6.1.18 states:

> "There are no statutory heritage sites affected by either alignment. At this stage, data from the Historic Environment Record has not been accessed. Both options pass over the historic Roman road and it is likely that archaeological remains will be present. A desktop archaeological report should be considered to determine if there are further archaeological features which may affect the alignment of the bypass routes. Further surveys such as geophysics and trial trenching are likely to further inform route alignment during outline and detailed design." [Underlining added]

3. As part of its sustainability appraisal and environmental assessment, CCC should have, but has not, carried out an assessment of the impact in terms of the archaeology of the currently proposed route of the Eastern Bypass and of all reasonable alternatives. It has done neither.

4. This paper summarises the impact of the Eastern Bypass on the Palaeolithic archaeology existing in the fluvial gravel terraces that lay underneath Fordwich, part of the Stour Valley, Canterbury. This paper concentrates solely on Palaeolithic archaeology although there are other archaeological time periods and heritage sites in Fordwich that should be, but have not been, assessed or taken into account but which are also likely to exist.

5. This Topic Paper is not a substitute for the work CCC should have done but has not. However, it does demonstrate that the currently preferred route is expected to have a devastating impact on an internationally important archaeological site that will likely require *in situ* preservation.

Background

6. During the 1920s and 1930s, some 330 British Acheulean (Lower Palaeolithic era) handaxes were discovered in Fordwich (these are now at the British Museum and Herne Bay Museum). These significant finds were discovered during industrial quarrying on the west side of Fordwich which lies alongside the Fordwich Conservation Area. Recording the exact Geophysical sites and date of each handaxe was impossible at that time due to the limitation of technology (Appendix 1. *Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Fordwich Plateau.* 2.3.2)

7. In order to achieve exact dating, samples of soil surrounding each find must be examined by infra-red radioflurouescence and subjected to laboratory testing. Naturally, during a quarrying operation in the 1920s this wasn't possible. Sadly, an unknown number of bifaced handaxes and associated flakes entered private collections or were lost as part of the aggregate output (Appendix 2, 2i).

8. Fordwich is one of the earliest Palaeolithic sites in north-western Europe and the only site in northern Europe where handaxe assemblage numbering into the hundreds has been discovered. (Key, A. 2022, *Abstract*).

Archaeological work at Fordwich during 2022

9. Although there have been scarce handaxe discoveries in Fordwich over the past 90 years that are comparable to the huge amount of finds in the 1920s-1930s (Ashmore, A. (1980). *The typology and age of the Fordwich Handaxes*), it has very recently been discovered that the artefact-bearing gravel terraces which run directly underneath Fordwich are much more widespread than previously

thought (Appendix 1. 2023, *Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Fordwich Plateau* 2.3.2). Along with that new evidence, it is theorised that these wider terraces will hold a similarly high load of Palaeolithic artefacts.

10. Fordwich was pleased to accept Alastair Key (Assistant Professor in Palaeolithic Archaeology at Cambridge University) to excavate trenches on the west side of Fordwich in 2022. His paper, *On The Earliest Acheulean in Britain, first dates and in-situ artefacts from the MIS 15 site of Fordwich, Kent, UK,* published afterwards in the *Royal Society Open Science*, 2022, openly urges more exploration of Fordwich and says that after decades of only being mentioned in passing, Fordwich can now be considered a crucial piece of the Palaeolithic puzzle in Europe. (Key, A. 2022). He goes on to state, "Technologically, Fordwich [archaeology] is revealed to be more diverse than previously known, with handaxes, cores, flakes, scrapers and other retouched tools now evidenced" (ibid).

11. A recent handaxe discovery (GRTR 15 NE 1931) by Archaeologist Peter Knowles from Durham University at Moat Rough (which the Eastern Bypass is proposed to traverse) indicates that the artefact-laden gravel terraces are abundant *right across* the whole Fordwich plateau. Moat Rough itself is an untouched, large open glade surrounded by trees and a completely separate location from where the original handaxes were found, being approximately 1km south of Fordwich town hall and 100m from Stodmarsh Road (Appendix 1, *Geoarchaeological Interpretation*, 8.1) (Knowles, P. Green, R. Lewis, P, 2022, *A New Palaeolithic Handaxe Discovery from the Fordwich Plateau.*

12. It is hard to over-emphasise the significance of this recent find (which is catalogued and visible on the *Kent Historic Environment Record*) and the fact that the discovery was made in ground that has been left fallow for decades. This gives the enormous potential for finding *in situ* artefacts in Moat Rough, all of which may answer questions on the age of the Fordwich handaxes and

represent a crucial piece of Palaeolithic history (Key, A. *Abstract*, 2022).

Impact of the Eastern Bypass Route

13. An independent *Desk Based Assessment* (DBA) by *Swat Archaeology* for a proposed housing development at *The Old Woodyard* on Moat Lane, Fordwich (next to *Sandpit Wood* over which the Eastern Bypass is proposed to run), states that the potential for finding Prehistoric artefacts in that area is high, Iron Age artefacts as moderate and Roman as low/moderate *(Swat Archaeology, 2020)*. Rating the potential for finding Prehistoric artefacts as 'high' indicates that artefacts are extremely likely to be found in that area (Appendix 2, 1).

14. The Eastern Bypass Route runs right through Sandpit Wood (which has two areas with tree preservation orders) and will inevitably and significantly harm the archaeology contained therein. The DBA (commissioned by Fordwich Town Council) from independent Archaeologist Consultant Peter Knowles (Durham University) also concludes, "The Palaeolithic potential along the route of the Fordwich Bypass has been assessed as having the highest level of potential – high" (Appendix 2, 1). It is possible that these artefacts would require in situ preservation entirely incompatible with road construction (Appendix 1, Discussion 3.1.3).

15. It should be emphasised that Knowles states that it is highly likely that archaeological mitigation will be required along the ENTIRE Easter Bypass route through Fordwich (Appendix 1, *Discussion*, 3.1.1 & 3.1.4)

16. Due to the evidence of these two independent DBAs, it is quite plain that the proposed route of the Eastern Bypass is the worst possible choice out of the three routes that Stantec considered. The Eastern Bypass would inflict significant, irreparable harm to archaeology all along the route through Fordwich.

17. The original proposed Bypass route that went through the SSSI of Chequers Park Wood presents significantly less harm to archaeology (Appendix 1. *Conclusion*, 3.2.1). This is because the industrial gravel quarrying close to the SSSI in the 1920s/1930s most likely denuded that area of Palaeolithic artefacts. It should also be noted that no significant Palaeolithic finds have been reported from the Chequers Park Wood SSSI area (Appendix 1. *Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Fordwich Plateau*. 2.3.2.)

Cost of Mitigation

18. It is possible that finds would need to be preserved in situ. However, even if the road was constructed through these sites, absolutely no account has been taken of the significant additional delay and increase to capital works cost caused by such extensive mitigation works that would have to be carried out.

19. During road building, according to KCC's own standard terms for a DBA (which they must produce before deciding the course of the Bypass), developers must check 500m on each side of a proposed route for archaeology (Appendix 1, *Discussion*, 3.1.4). If archaeology is present, then there are significant delays whilst trenches are dug to slowly excavate around artefacts and record findings.

20. Considering that the fluvial gravel terraces run throughout Fordwich, the 500m checking either side of the length of the Eastern Bypass route (ibid) will ensure the route suffers from expensive delays and costly work using companies who specialise in archaeology.

21. Development through an area which is highlighted with a high Palaeolithic archaeological potential (see paragraphs 14 and 15, above) will need significant mitigation for the entire length and width of said development (Appendix 1, *Conclusion*. 3.2.1). If *in situ* Paleolithic archaeology was found during the build of the Eastern Bypass, this would be of *international* significance as it would

help answer long-standing questions about the Fordwich handaxes and their place in the history of early man (Appendix 1. *Palaeolithic Archaeology of the Fordwich Plateau*, 2.3.1). It would make the Fordwich plateau one of the rarest Palaeolithic sites in Northern Europe. A likely outcome would be to have the artefacts preserved *in situ* and have the site **scheduled as a monument** (Appendix 1, *Discussion*, 3.1.3).

22. Although the Stantec Report says at 1.1), "There are no statutory heritage sites affected by either alignment", this statement could not be wider of the mark. A cursory look at the *Kent Historic Environment Record* would have revealed a plethora of listings in and around Fordwich. In addition, the proposed route runs right across the Fordwich Conservation Area and ancient woodland (see further FTC Heritage Topic Paper) and through Sandpit Wood which has tree preservation orders.

23. The Eastern Bypass cuts through Moat Rough, potentially an internationally important site of Palaeolithic archaeology, as accredited in the Specialist Palaeolithic DBA by Knowles, White & Bridgland commissioned by Fordwich Town Council 2022 (Appendix 1. *The Stour Terraces: Geology, Geomorphology and Associated Palaeolithic Archaeology*. 2.2.5).

24. If, contrary to expert advice, the Eastern Bypass were to run through the currently proposed route, it would require archaeological mitigation (however unsatisfactory) throughout its whole length in Fordwich due to the fluvial gravel terraces running underneath the entire route which will likely hold artefacts. CCC has neither considered this nor the associated delay nor its impact on the transport strategy (Appendix 1, *Discussion*, 3.1.4).

25. The cost of the Eastern Bypass (the longest option selected) will likely be far higher than any estimation so far offered by CCC. This is due primarily to the 500 metres that must be carefully searched for archaeology on either side of

the proposed bypass route, plus the expense of specialist archaeological consultants and commensurate time delays (Appendix 1, *Discussion*. 3.1.4).

26. Internationally important Palaeolithic archaeology would be significantly harmed and possibly lost during the building of the Eastern Bypass on the proposed route.

27. Further, it is entirely possible that the area of Moat Rough could receive Scheduling as a Monument, bringing all roadwork to a halt. (Appendix 1, *Conclusion*. 3.2.1)

Appendix

1) Knowles, P. M.J. White, D.R. Bridgland, (2023). *Report on the Impact to the Pleistocene & Palaeolithic and Geoarchaeological Heritage from the Proposed Canterbury Eastern Movement Corridor, Kent (NGR TQ 179 595),*

2) Allen, T. (2023). *Assessment of the Potential Impact on the archaeological and Historic Heritage of Fordwich Posed by the Proposed Canterbury Eastern Movement corridor, Kent.*

References

1) Key, A. (2022). *On the earliest Acheulean in Britain: first dates and in-situ artefacts from the MIS 15 site of Fordwich (Kent, UK)* https://royalsocietypublishing.org/doi/full/10.1098/rsos.211904#d1e2644

2) Ashmore, A. (1980). The typology and age of the Fordwich handaxes. *Archaeologia Cantiana*, *96*, 83- 117.

3) Knowles, P. Green, R. Lewis, P. (2022). *A New Palaeolithic Handaxe Discovery from the Fordwich Plateau.*

4) Kent County Council, *Kent Historic Environmental Records*, Heritage

Maps/Fordwich.

5) Swat Archaeology (2020), *Desk Based Assessment in Advance for the Proposed Development at the Old Woodyard, Moat Lane, Fordwich.*

6) http://www.swatarchaeology.co.uk/pdf/2020/406%20200312%20Old%20Woodyard%20Fordwich%20DBA%20v2.pdf