

Drayton
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JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

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AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION
ON LAND EAST OF STONEHILL LANE,
NORTH AND SOUTH OF BASSETT LANE,
SUTTON WICK, OXFORDSHIRE

On behalf of

J. Curtis & Sons Ltd.

July 2000

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REPORT FOR J. Curtis & Sons Ltd.
Radley
Abingdon
Oxfordshire
OX14 3NQ

PREPARED BY John Moore

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ENQUIRES TO John Moore Heritage Services
48 Cornwallis Road
Oxford OX4 3NW

Telephone/Fax 01865 775473

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Summary

Due to a high water table the evaluation of this proposed mineral extraction site was only partially carried out. However archaeological remains were located. Prior to the evaluation by machine cut trenches, the presence of archaeology was suspected from cropmarks seen on aerial photographs. The site covers the west edge of an 'island' of first terrace gravel surrounded by alluvium marking the courses of former river channels. A channel is present along the western and southern parts of the site.

A suspected trackway was dated to the later Roman period and appears similar to one excavated further east. These trackways appear to be associated with a change in landuse from arable to pasture when there was a raise in water table leading to alluviation in the area. An undated ditch found on the south edge of the 'island' may belong to the Roman arable phase of landuse.

A small pit containing burnt bone is most probably a human cremation and may indicate the presence of a funerary monument not located by trenching. Undated pits and a post-hole along with burnt-out tree throw pits on the south edge of the island indicate activity probably of the prehistoric period. The presence of an apparent copse providing a ready supply of firewood may have been the reason for activity in this place. The clearance of trees may well belong to the earlier Roman period when arable agriculture was taking place.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Fig. 1)

The site of proposed extraction is situated approximately 1km northeast of Drayton. The area is to either side of Bassett Lane just to the east of Stonehill Lane (NGR SU 4875 9482). The area is approximately 8.3 hectares (excluding the lake) and it lies at c. 50m OD. The field is farmland with the south field containing a fishing lake. The solid geology is Kimmeridge Clay overlain by first terrace gravels. The western edge of an 'island' of first terrace gravel is found within the extreme south-eastern corner of the field to the north of Bassett Lane and in the north-east and central east parts of the southern field. To the west and south are alluvial deposits marking the position of a former channel of the river Thames.

1.2 Planning Background

Planning permission has been sought from Oxfordshire County Council to extract minerals from an area north and south of Bassett Lane, east of Stonehill Lane at Sutton Wick. Due to the presence of known remains of archaeological interest in the vicinity of the development, the County Archaeological Services (CAS) advised that an archaeological evaluation of the site be undertaken prior to the determination of the planning application. Accordingly the CAS produced a *Brief* for such an evaluation. John Moore Heritage Services in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the ~~CAS~~^C CAS partially carried out the evaluation.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area in which the site of proposed extraction is located is one of considerable archaeological potential for it lies less than 200m to the west of the western ditch of Neolithic Drayton North cursus, and the prehistoric complex of a possible long enclosure of earlier Neolithic date a Bronze Age ring ditch and other suspected ring ditches. An ovoid enclosure is known from aerial photographs to lie to the south of the possible long enclosure (Barclay *et al.* forthcoming). A cropmark of a long barrow (PRN 5254) is known 350m to the west with a cropmark ring ditch (PRN 15302) to the east of it. Fieldwalking has established that activity in the later Neolithic period and a possible occupation site of the earlier Bronze Age were centred just to the east, north and northeast of the long barrow (Holgate, 1986). To the north and northeast of the long barrow is a relatively tight group of features, known from aerial photographs, (PRN 8460) if coeval, which includes a large circular feature with two smaller ones in close proximity. There is also a cropmark rectangular enclosure, linear features and possible pits. These are possibly in close association with the 58 flint flakes of late Neolithic date mentioned above. Immediately west of Stonehill Lane near its junction with Bassett Lane is a possible rectangular enclosure (PRN 8458), again known from aerial photographs.

Some 800m to the west, excavation in 1996 investigated two undated rectangular enclosures. Fieldwalking of the same field during overburden stripping resulted in the recovery of a substantial quantity of flint working debris of probable later Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. In addition sherds of a mostly plain tripartite vessel of the collared Urn tradition of the early Bronze Age were found (Bruce & Moore, forthcoming).

Examination of the small-scale figures in Holgate (*ibid.*) suggests that the north field subject to this evaluation was fieldwalked and no lithics were recovered. Within the proposal area are a series of linear features that have been identified through aerial photography. They consist of two converging lines orientated northeast southwest with an apparent squared northern end (part is in the field to the east, north of Bassett Lane, where landuse has prevented the formation of cropmarks). To the south of Bassett Lane the two features continue in a more southerly direction. Two other linear features are present. One on a northwest southeast orientation crosses the two previously mentioned features, and another one to the north in a northeast southwest direction.

2 AIMS OF ASSESSMENT

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the *Written Scheme of Investigation* were as follows:

- To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.
- To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.

- To assess the ecofactual and environmental potential of the archaeological features and deposits.
- In particular to establish the presence/absence of Neolithic and later prehistoric activity between the Drayton North cursus and the long barrow.
- To establish the date and nature of the cropmark features within the proposal area.
- The final aim was make available to interested parties the results of the investigation subject to any confidentiality restrictions.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

The CAS issued a Brief for a field evaluation. John Moore Heritage Services in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with the CAS carried out the work. The evaluation was to involve the excavation of forty-three trenches. Due to a high water table it was only possible to excavate fourteen complete and two partial trenches. Two of the complete trenches were additional to the originally designed trenches in order to further define the extent and character of archaeology located. Excavation was carried out using a 360⁰ mechanical excavator fitted with a 4.5 foot wide toothless bucket. Alluvial deposits were excavated in spits. Archaeological features were investigated by hand to determine their date, character and extent.

The two partial trenches (Trenches 27 and 34) were abandoned due to flooding of the former and sudden collapse of the sides due to water pressure in the latter. Trenches 1 and 20 in the northern field suffered from inflowing water during excavation but it was possible to establish the presence/absence of archaeology. The whole of Trench 44 and the southern parts of Trenches 41 and 45 again suffered from inflowing water. In the first case a ditch was recognised and pottery was retrieved from it while features in the other two trenches were excavated partially under water.

Site procedures for the investigation and recording of potential archaeological deposits and features were defined in the *Written Scheme of Investigation*. The work was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994), and was monitored by Mr. Hugh Coddington of the CAS.

3.2 Methodology

Fourteen complete trenches and two partial trenches were excavated within the proposed development area (Fig. 1). Trenches 1, 20, 25, 28, 29, 33, 35, 37 and 41 measured 30m x 1.5m in area. Trench 32 was only 25m long due to the presence of an overhead cable at the west end while Trench 43 was split in two, either side of the track leading into the field but totalled 32m in length. The additional Trenches 44 and 45 were 21m and 42.5m long respectively. The western 5m of Trench 34 was

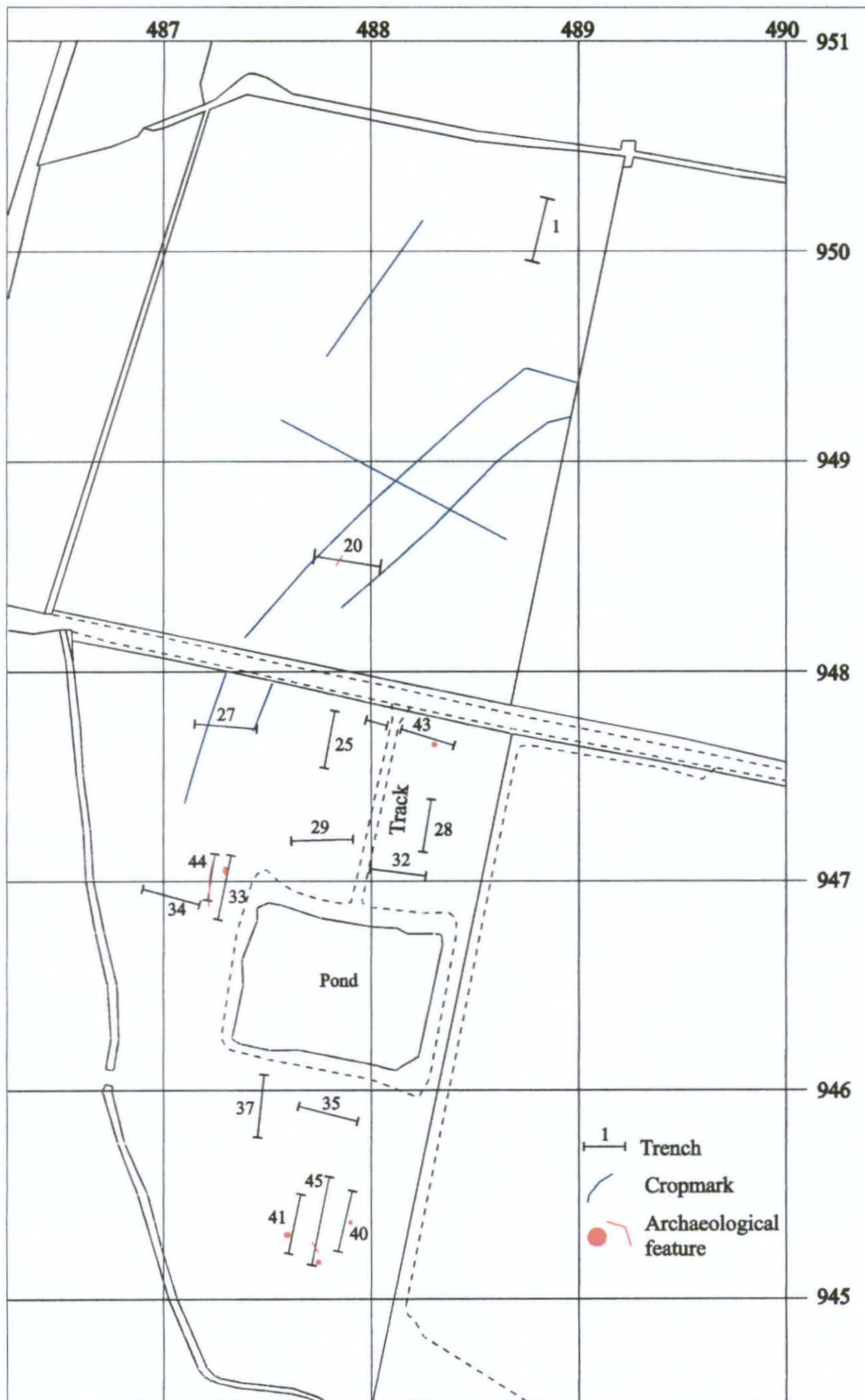


Fig. 1. Trench location

excavated before abandonment while only the western 12m of Trench 27 was dug. The excavator removed material in spits to the surface of gravel deposits.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate. A photographic record was produced. Trenches were backfilled after recording and inspection by the CAS.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Site Investigations

Site investigations had been carried out on the site prior to the archaeological evaluation being undertaken. Sixteen continuous flight auger boreholes had been drilled on the site. Sand and gravel was found to be overlain by a thin topsoil of 0.2m and a varying thickness of alluvium between 0 and 1.7m. The alluvium thickens from east to west where the sand and gravel of the first terrace is overlain and in part replaced by alluvium (ECC Quarries)

4.2 Archaeological Investigations

Natural deposits of sand and gravel were found in all trenches excavated.

North Field

Two trenches (1 and 20) were opened up in this field. The latter completely filled with water during the excavation while the former had water lying in the base. Modern ploughsoil of 250-300mm thickness overlaid alluvium of 250-300mm thickness (Trench 1) and 320mm (Trench 20), which in turn overlaid gravel deposits. A linear feature filled with clay was observed 12.5m from the west end of Trench 20. It was c. 800mm wide and probably represents one of the two cropmark features forming the trackway. A further trench in the middle of the field was started but immediately abandoned when the high water table was confirmed.

South Field

Five trenches (25, 28, 29, 32 & 43) were excavated in the northeast corner of the south field on the gravel 'island'. The ploughsoil was 200-300mm thick and overlaid a buried ploughsoil, 100-150mm thick, in Trenches 25, 28, 32 and 43 (absent in Trench 29) which in turn overlaid the gravel. A probable post-hole or small pit 43/4 was found in Trench 43. This circular feature had a diameter of 150mm and a similar depth. The clay loam fill contained fragments of charcoal.

On the west edge of the 'island' near the north-west corner of the agricultural lake two trenches located archaeological features. Trench 33 orientated north south contained a circular feature 400mm in diameter with a depth of 150mm. The steep sided feature had a rounded base. It was filled with a loose clay loam with 10% pebbles. It also contained fragments of burnt bone, which are probably human. A further trench was excavated parallel and to the west of Trench 33. This Trench 44 contained a ditch orientated north south, which run the whole length of the trench. This trench was situated just off the top of the 'island' edge. It was not possible to

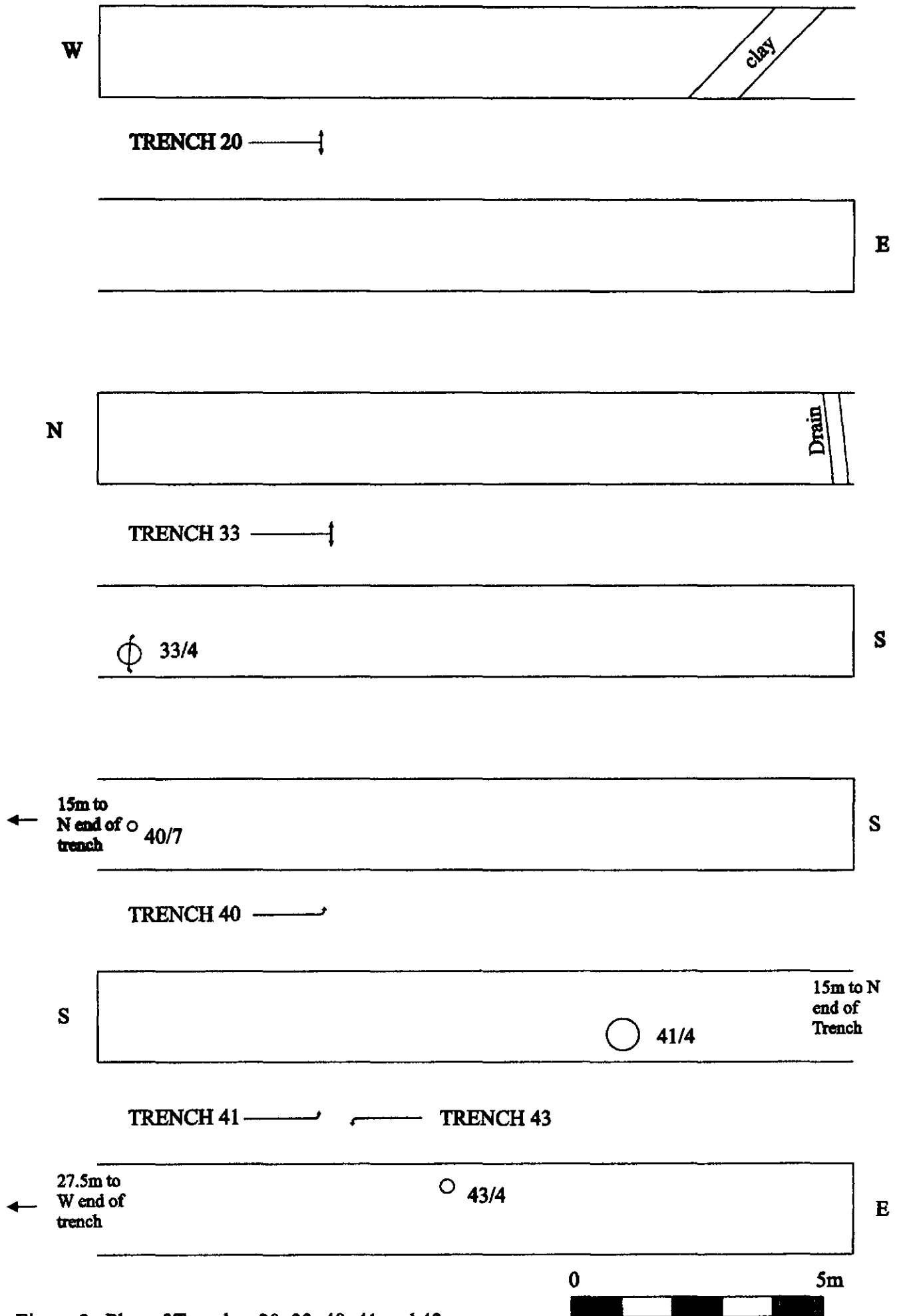


Figure 2. Plan of Trenches 20, 33, 40, 41 and 43.

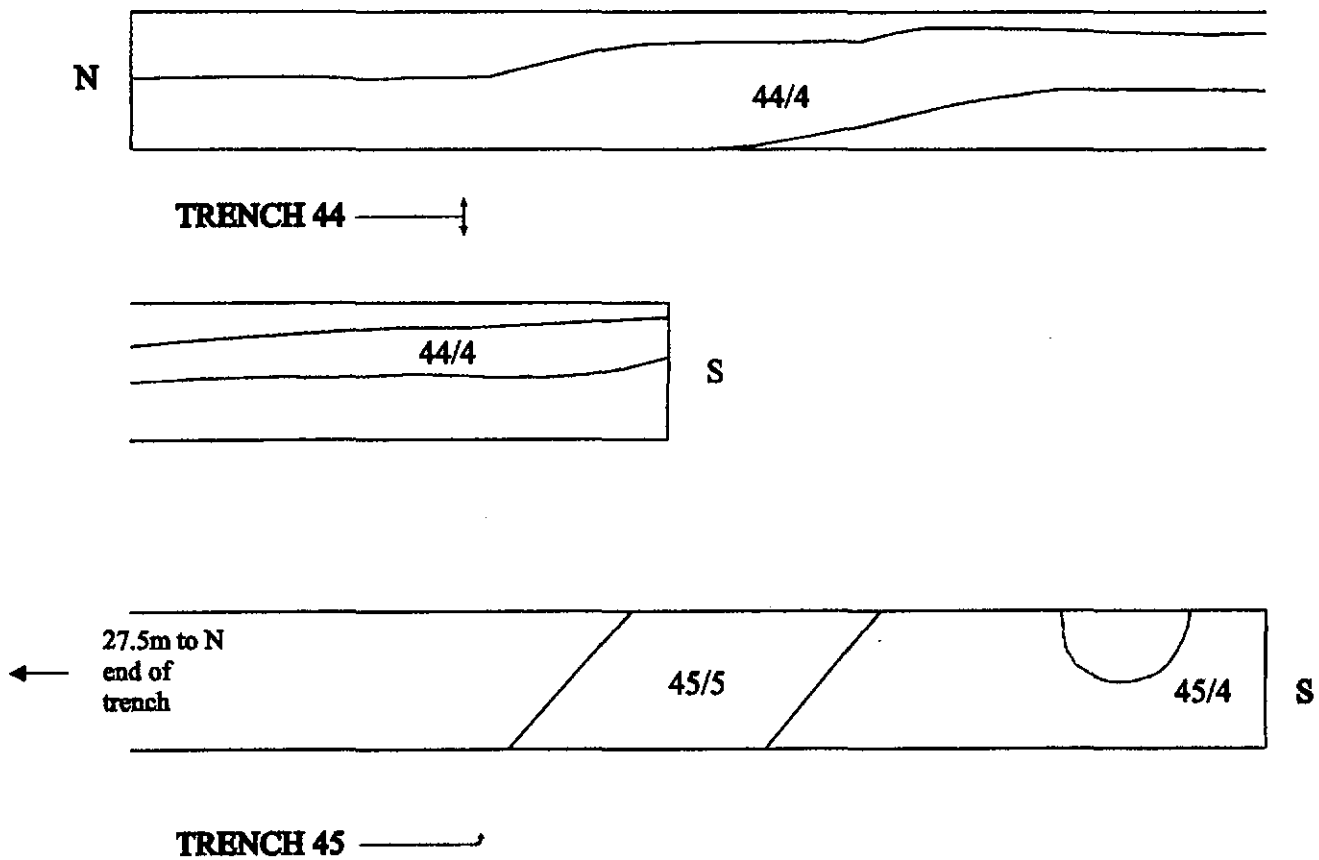


Figure 3. Plan of Trenches 44 and 45.

determine the relationship of the ditch to the alluvial deposits due to the rapid inflow of groundwater. For similar reasons it was not possible to excavate a section through the ditch. However sherds from one vessel were retrieved from the top fill of the ditch (44/4). This ditch is considered to be the east cropmark feature seen on aerial photographs to run into this field from the northern field.

To the south of the agricultural lake a further five trenches were excavated. Trenches 35, 37, 40 and 45 had modern ploughsoil of 200-300mm while Trench 41 lying on the southwest edge of the 'island' had a slightly deeper ploughsoil at 350mm. A buried ploughsoil, 100-500mm thick, was found in Trenches 35, 37 and 40, the last consisting of ploughed alluvium. Seen in the top of the gravel deposits within all trenches were several tree throw pits, some of which exhibited evidence for burning. The trees were densest in Trench 40. Trenches 41 and 45 contained deposits of alluvium overlying the gravel within the whole of Trench 41 and in the southern part of Trench 45.

A probable post-hole was located in Trench 40. This circular feature had a diameter of 80mm and a depth of 60mm and was filled with light brown very clayey loam. Towards the south ends of Trenches 41 and 45 was a pit within each trench. These lay on the slope of the 'island'. 41/4 was ovoid, 650mm x 500mm and 100mm deep. It had 45° slopes and a flat base and was filled with a loose deposit of black burnt clay loam with 20% pebbles (some scorched). Pit 45/4 was excavated under water and eastern half lay under the baulk. The pit had a diameter of at c. 1.6m and a depth of c. 150mm. The fill was a sandy clay.

To the north of pit 45/4 was an apparent linear feature. Some of it was excavated under water in an attempt to recover dateable artefacts. The feature was c. 2.5m wide, although it may have been recut. The depth was c. 450mm in the centre and to the south while the northern part was only c. 100mm deep. The feature, which is considered to be a ditch, was orientated northwest southeast and is probably parallel to the edge of the 'island'. No artefacts were retrieved from the two pits or the ditch.

Attempts were made to excavate two trenches within the former river channel to the west of the 'island'. The western 10m of Trench 27 were excavated before a french drain was cut through and the trench flooded. The gravel deposits were c. 500-600mm below ground level beneath alluvial deposits and the modern ploughsoil. The western 5m of Trench 34 was excavated before the water pressure caused the sudden collapse of the trench sides. Alluvial deposits extended to c. 1.5-2m below ground level.

5 FINDS

Cremated bone - T Jackman

Pit 33/4 contained 26g of well-burnt bone consisting of parts of rib, cranium and long bone. All the bone is white in colour and calcined except for the fragment of long bone that is blue-grey in colour and not so well burnt. The remains are most likely human and adult. In addition it is unusual for animal bone to be subject to such high temperatures (author's comment).

Pottery – P Booth

Three sherds of Roman pottery were recovered, in quite poor condition, from context 44/4. The sherds (weighing 30 g) were in a fairly fine sandy oxidised coarse ware fabric (in fabric group O10 of the OAU Roman pottery recording system) and were all from the rim of a single vessel, probably a narrow-mouthed jar of Young (1977) type O6. This type is dated AD 240-400 by Young (1977,

6 DISCUSSION

While the evaluation was only partially completed with c. 30% undertaken archaeological features were located. These seem to be confined to the edge of an island of first terrace gravel.

The ditch within Trench 44 is dated to the later Roman period. The ditch is known from aerial photographs to be one of a pair extending in a gentle curve to the east edge of the northern field where it apparently turns eastwards. It is probable that these ditches define a trackway originating from the northern one of two Roman enclosures known from an aerial photograph (Cambridge University Collections of Aerial Photographs. BTT 057). The trackway appears similar to one excavated 350m to the east. The Roman field system in the area appears from ceramic evidence to have developed in the early Roman period, with abandonment or a change in landuse caused perhaps by the increased rate of alluviation by around the late 3rd century AD. The increase in overbank alluviation lead to the probable abandonment of arable fields and a switch to pasture (Barclay *et al*). The trackway may have been for herding animals down to grazing on the lower lying land. It is interesting to note that a post-medieval field boundary appears to follow a similar line to the west cropmark of this trackway (*cf.* Benson & Miles, Map 33)

The ditch seen in Trench 45 may be of Roman date and belong to the arable field system. A similar ditch on the south edge of the 'island' was excavated some 220m to the southwest (*ibid.*).

The two pits and probable post-hole on the edge of the island south of the lake indicate that some form of activity was being undertaken. The burning in the some of the tree throw pits shows that woodland here was being exploited as indicated by the burnt nature of the fill of pit 41/4. Unfortunately no dating evidence was forthcoming from the features but the activity must belong to the Roman or prehistoric period. The tree clearance is most likely to belong to the earlier Roman period when the landuse was arable.

The two other features could possibly be discrete features each representing an isolated act. The post-hole/pit in Trench 43 was not associated with any other features or artefacts in the vicinity. The small pit (probable cremation) in Trench 33 while lying only 8.5m from the Roman ditch 44/4 is unlikely to be associated with it. However if it is a cremation then while it may not be a discrete isolated feature and could be associated with a ploughed out barrow set on the edge of the 'gravel island'. While only one ring ditch (ploughed out barrow) is definitely known to be associated with the Drayton North cursus, aerial photographs hint at two other similar features, one at the north end and a further one to the east near the long enclosure. The Drayton

South cursus has several, with examples up to 225m from it. A ring ditch in this location would be c. 270m west of the Drayton North cursus.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The partial evaluation did reveal archaeological features of local significance. Further evidence of the use of the landscape in the Roman period was obtained in the form of a trackway and a probable ditch relating to the arable field system. Exploitation of woodland on the southwest edge of an island of first terrace gravel for specific activities was being undertaken during an unknown period but no later than the Roman period. Other more discrete activities were being carried out across the site. The presence of a further prehistoric funerary monument in the area is indicated by the probable cremation.

The cropmark of the paired features has been dated to the later Roman period but the date and character of the other cropmark features have not been established.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Institute of Field Archaeologists 1994 Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Field Evaluations

APPENDIX 1

Trench 1

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
1/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	250mm	Modern
1/2	Alluvium	Trench	Trench	250-300mm	
1/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 20

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
20/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	300mm	Modern
20/2	Alluvium	Trench	Trench	320mm	
20/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 25

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
25/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	300mm	Modern
25/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	150mm	
25/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 28

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
28/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	250mm	Modern
28/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	150mm	
28/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 29

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
29/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	300mm	Modern
29/2	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 32

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
32/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	200mm	Modern
32/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	100mm	
32/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 33

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
33/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	250mm	Modern
33/2	Alluvium	Trench	Trench	150mm	
33/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
33/4	Pit	400mm	400mm	100mm	?cremation
33/5	Drain	1.5m	250mm	250mm	Modern

Trench 35

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
35/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	200mm	Modern
35/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	400-500mm	
35/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 37

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
37/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	300mm	Modern
37/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	350mm	
37/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		

Trench 40

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
40/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	200mm	Modern
40/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	100mm	
40/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
40/4	Post-hole	80mm	80mm	60mm	

Trench 41

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
41/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	350mm	Modern
41/2	Alluvium	Trench	Trench	650mm	
41/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
41/4	Pit	600mm	500mm	100mm	

Trench 43

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
43/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	300mm	Modern
43/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	100mm	
43/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
43/4	Post-hole	150mm	150mm	100mm	

Trench 44

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
44/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	390mm	Modern
44/2	Alluvium	Trench	Trench	285mm	
44/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
44/4	Ditch	21m	1.1m	?	Roman

Trench 45

<i>Context</i>	<i>Type</i>	<i>Length</i>	<i>Width</i>	<i>Depth</i>	<i>Date/comments</i>
45/1	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	230mm	Modern
45/2	Buried ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	220mm	
45/3	Natural	Trench	Trench		
45/4	Pit	1.6m	800mm+	150mm	
45/5	Ditch	2m+	2.5m	450mm	