



**Archaeological Watching Brief for New IDB  
Drain**

**at Potter Heigham, Norfolk**

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HW Report No. 110**



<b>Project name</b>	<b>Potter Heigham, IDB Drain</b>
<b>Client</b>	<b>Broads Internal Drainage Board</b>
<b>NHER Event No</b>	<b>ENF 126446</b>
<b>Grid reference</b>	<b>TG 4229 2056 to TG 4337 1955</b>
<b>Date of fieldwork</b>	<b>4th May to 3rd June 2011</b>

## **Introduction**

Broads Internal Drainage Board undertook works to divert the main IDB drain located to the east of Potter Heigham village (Fig. 1). They were able to carry out the works under their permissive powers.

The new drain followed the line of existing dykes, widening and deepening these. The new dyke runs along the landscape boundary between marshland to the north and east and 'high' ground to the south and west. This area was therefore identified as one of possible archaeological potential. An archaeological watching brief was therefore requested by Norfolk Historic Environment Services.

The works were undertaken by the Broads Internal Drainage Board who commissioned the archaeological works.

## **Historical Background**

The earliest known evidence of settlement in the area dates to the Romano-British period. Field boundaries, probably of this date have been identified from aerial photographs (NHER 43718) (see Fig .2). Potter Heigham is mentioned in the Domesday Book although at this time it appears to be a relatively modest settlement. The church of St Nicholas in Potter Heigham is of a 12th-century foundation suggesting an early medieval date for the growth of the village. The rise of the settlement is likely to be in response to the development of the peat cutting industry which was extensive in this area forming the nearby Hickling Broad and Heigham Sound. The village has had continuous occupation from this time through to the present day.

Other sites close to the line of new dyke include post-medieval drains and dykes (NHER 43716, NHER 43720) a possible but undated ring ditch (45085), an undated curvilinear feature (43717), post-medieval agricultural earthworks (30630) and World War II bomb craters (43715) (Fig. 2).

## **The New Drain**

The majority of the new drain was created by deepening and widening existing dykes on their eastern side. The spoil from this was spread on the east bank to form a low wide rise. Topsoil was stripped by bulldozer from the

area of the low bank and re-spread across the area once the low rise had been created. Along the line of new dyke, topsoil was not removed separately from the main dig.

Construction work progressed quickly with c.50m of dyke being excavated each day.

## **Archaeological Methods**

Monitoring visits were made to the site on a regular basis. Nine visits were made during the 5 week development period. On these visits the areas of topsoil strip were searched for any obvious archaeological features or finds. Metal detecting was carried out where conditions were suitable. The sides and base of the newly cut dyke were observed and any possible features or significant changes in the soils noted. Access into the dyke was not possible as water was present in the new dyke at all times. Particular attention was paid to areas where the new dyke ran close to known archaeological sites.

## **Results**

During the topsoil strip no archaeological features were seen and only one small sherd of Roman-British grey-ware was retrieved from the spoil heap. Some cut features were observed in the newly cut dyke sides and are described below in locational order from north-west to south-east (Fig. 2). The natural subsoil in the northern part of the site was a yellow/grey, very sandy silt/clay, while to the south the dyke cut through grey clayey silts with no sand content.

### **Observation 1**

A change in the revealed deposits was noted between the south and north parts of this section of dyke. At the south end the natural deposits were made up of largely of yellow/grey very sandy silt/clay. At a point close to the south end of this area the sand was observed to drop away becoming visible only in the base of the new dyke. Over the sand sat a deposit of silty peat, above which was an orange/grey silty clay (Plate 1). The top of this deposit was very churned, probably as this area had once been woodland.

It is thought that the sandy silt/clay represented at the south end of the trench represents the start of the 'high' ground upon which the village of Potter Heigham was established while the peats are the start of the low-lying marshes. Such peaty deposits are known just 150m further north where they have been dug out and now form Heigham Sound and Hickling Broad.

### **Observation 2**

The natural subsoil through which the dyke was excavated in this area was a yellow/grey very sandy silt/clay. In places this was only c.0.4m below the present ground surface. At the north-west end of the new dyke a deposit of peaty material was visible (Plate 2). This possibly sat within a 'cut' which was c.50m wide and c.0.7m deep. Small fragments of twigs and brushwood were visible within the peat. Overlying this was a dark organic silty clay sealed by a

grey sandy silt/clay. It is thought likely that this material may have accumulated within a shallow pond or hollow.

### **Observations 3, 4 and 5**

Further east two much deeper features were noted (Observations 3 and 4) (Plate 3). These were straight-sided c.4m wide over 1.5m deep. Their base was not reached in the excavation of the new dyke. The function of these features is not known, but their fill was very similar to the topsoil in the area indicating that they are probably post-medieval in date. To the east of these one ditch (Observation 5) was noted in the section of the dyke. This was aligned north-east to south-west, c.0.5m deep, and was cut at an angle by the new dyke. Its fill was a mid orange brown clayey silt.

### **Observation 6**

A broad ditch was identified crossing the new dyke at a very acute angle (Plate 4). It ran on a north-west to south-east alignment, was c.1.2m deep and had a single fill of mid grey brown sandy silt. It is possible that this is part of the nearby field system identified through aerial photography (NHER 43718).

### **Observations 7 and 9**

At two points the yellow/grey sandy silt/clay was seen to dip and be overlain by later silty deposits (Plate 5). The lowest of these was a pale grey soft silt, overlain by a dark grey highly organic silt, above which was an orange grey silty clay. The dark organic silts were seen throughout the section of dyke excavated between these two points. It is suggested that this change in deposits represents the edge of 'high' ground on which later settlement developed and the start of the peat formation in the low marsh also seen at the northern end of the new dyke (Observation 1).

The plot of aerial photographs indicates that a part of the sinuous post-medieval ditch should have been apparent in the section of the new dyke (Fig. 2, Site 4370) however, nothing which could equate to this was observed.

### **Observation 8**

The dark organic silts (Observations 7 and 9) were cut by a single large feature (Plate 6). This ran on a north-west to south-east alignment and was cut at an angle by the new dyke. The angled section of this feature measured c.40m. Its base was not observed as it was deeper than the new dyke indicating a depth of over 2m. This feature was filled with an orange/grey silty clay. On the evidence seen interpretation of this feature is difficult; but it is suggested that this may be part of a natural channel cutting the organic marsh deposits. Alternatively this could be a deliberately cut feature.

### **South-east part of dyke**

The natural deposits through out this area were orange/gray clayey silts.

At the south-east end of the works the newly widened dyke passed close to site NHER45085. This site, a possible ring ditch, was seen as an earthwork on photos dating from 1972 and 1995. Aerial photograph interpretation has

suggested that this may have been post-medieval in date. Neither the topsoil strip nor the excavation of the new dyke adjacent to this site revealed any archaeological features, and no finds were retrieved from any of the disturbed soils, which may elucidate the date or function of this site.

## **Conclusions**

As has been noted above the line of the new dyke lay on edge of the high ground upon which the village of Potter Heigham was established; the land to the north and east being low lying marshes extending to the edge of Hickling Broad. The interface between these two landscapes was observed in the sides of the new dyke. In addition one possible palaeochannel was noted. Of the archaeological features observed, one ditch can be associated with undated cropmark evidence. Unfortunately artefacts which have indicated the date of any of these features were not retrieved.

## **Acknowledgements**

Thanks are expressed to the Broads Internal Drainage Board for sponsoring these works, and particularly to Adam Holmes and his team for their help and co-operation while carrying out the groundworks.



Figure 1. Site location map. Scale 1: 25000 .

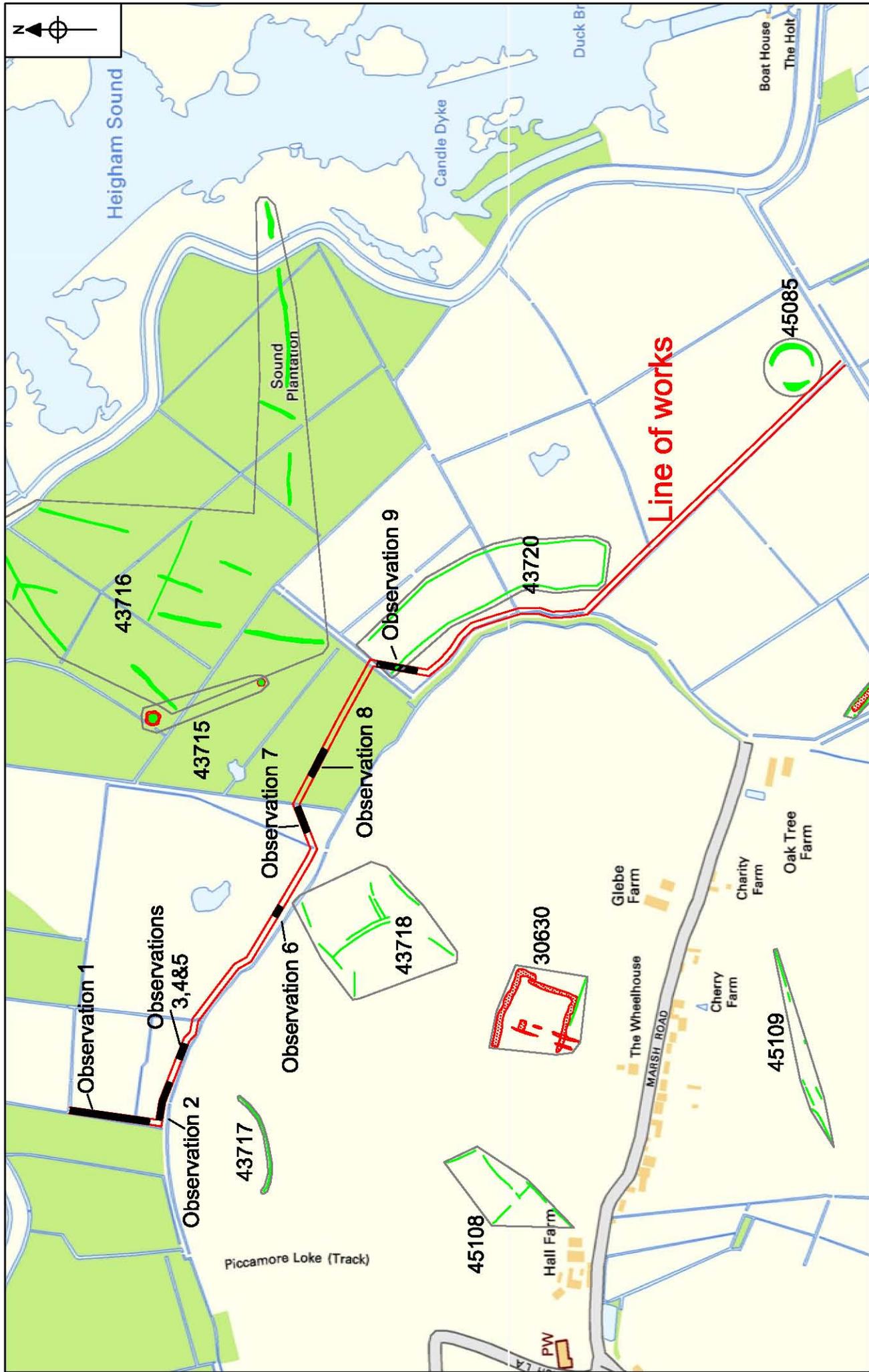


Figure 2. Map showing line of works and sites identified by aerial photographs. Scale 1:75000.



Plate 1. Looking south, showing Observation 1, with dark peaty material



Plate 2. Looking south-east, showing Observation 2 (highlighted), dark peaty material within a broad shallow cut.



Plate 3. Looking south-west, showing from right to left, Observations 3, 4 & 5 (highlighted).



Plate 4. Looking west, showing Observation 6 (highlighted).



Plate 5. Looking south, showing Observation 7 (highlighted), dark organic material overlying yellow grey silty sands.



Plate 6. Looking north-west, showing Observation 9 (highlighted), feature cut through dark organic material.