

Fig. 1: Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age sites in eastern London and western Essex:
 1. Whitehall Wood (Passmore Edwards Museum excavations 1982-83),
 2. Moor Hall Farm, Aveley (K. Barton, 1959),
 3. Moor Hall Farm, Rainham (PEM excavations 1979-81),
 4. Great Sunnings Farm and 5. Manor Farm, Upminster (PEM excavations 1983-84).

A Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age field system and settlement at Whitehall Wood, Upminster

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EXCAVATIONS IN 1982 and 1983 by the Passmore Edwards Museum¹ in the open field between Whitehall Wood and Little Brick Kiln Wood uncovered traces of a prehistoric field system and

settlement. The site was then threatened by gravel quarrying; it has now become a pleasure lake. Whitehall Wood, part of a group of woods called Belhus Woods, owned and administered by Essex

1. The excavations were funded through the Governors of the Passmore Edwards Museum and the GLC. The Curator of the Passmore Edwards Museum kindly gave permission for the

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Fig. 2: The Whitehall Wood sites and cropmarks (A. 1982-83 excavations, B. 1983 and C. 1984 watching briefs) and the cropmarks at Huntshill Farm (D.).

County Council, lies partially in the parish of Upminster, now in the London Borough of Havering (Fig. 1). It is approximately 14 miles (23km) east of the City.

This area has been heavily quarried for sand and gravel and very little of the original land now remains. The few unextracted fields in the vicinity are likely to be quarried within the next decade. Many sites have been found on the gravel terraces between Rainham and Thurrock and recently there has been much excavation as a result of both the construction of the M25 and other roads and of increased quarrying. The Whitehall Wood site was discovered from cropmark photographs², but by no means produced the densest or most interesting set in the immediate area, most probably because of the shallowness and relatively small size of most of the features. The field itself had been cultivated until recently, but the shallow soils were only suitable for cereal crops or grass.

Previously, little was known about the site. It is recorded as having produced Roman tile³, but no

2. National Monuments Record Air Photographs Unit.
3. Passmore Edwards Museum Sites and Monuments Record.

certain Roman material was found during the excavations. The area was, however, littered with debris from the post-medieval tile kilns in the adjacent Brick Kiln Wood⁴. Shown as farmland on Chapman and André's map of 1777, the site was still open in 1982. Judging by traces of Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age settlement found in gravel workings in late 1983 on the north side of Whitehall Wood, the present day 'historic' woodland⁴ covers the main part of the prehistoric settlement (Fig. 2). Further ditches traced in quarrying in 1984 produced no finds and may not belong to the system.

The settlement and field system

The settlement and its fields can be separated into different areas of activity (Fig. 3). Furthest from the apparent living area, close to Little Brick Kiln Wood, were a number of pits full of burnt flint and charcoal. The flint may have been used as filler for pottery, such as that found on the site, but there were no signs of pottery-making in the area investigated. Clays suitable for brick-making lie a few tens of metres to the south of the site.

4. Information from Essex County Council Country Parks Section.



Fig. 3: Part of the Late Bronze Age – Early Iron Age field system at Whitehall Wood:
A. Major ditch, B. small ditches and gullies and C. post holes and post pits forming a possible structure. Other alignments of post holes are also visible.

Closer to the settlement, but still within the prehistoric fields, there was evidence of flint-knapping. Several flakes, which fitted back together, were found in a field ditch, and a large shallow pit contained much flint debris and pebbles. The pit, which had post holes delimiting its edges, seems to have been some sort of sheltered working hollow. Of the many fragments of flints, the most interesting were a crudely made scraper and the core from which it was struck. This flint is not of high quality and is probably derived from local pebbles rather than the finer flint in the chalk deposits at Thurrock, some 3 miles (5km) to the south-east. A number of flint flakes and tools were found scattered over most parts of the site, many of which were made of better quality flint. In the absence of any other dating evidence, it seems likely that the flint working belongs to the same period as the rest of the site. No metal objects were found.

Most of the site was divided up by a system of large ditches, probably main boundary ditches, and small, narrow, shallow ditches or gullies, probably for marking out individual plots or small fields (Fig. 3). The larger ditches were on average 1.0 - 1.5m (3ft 3in - 5ft) wide and 0.40 - 0.60m (1ft 3in - 2ft) deep (Fig. 3, A). The smaller ditches, often only 0.40-0.60m (1ft 3in - 2ft) wide and a few centimetres deep, sometimes ran for short lengths and were probably recut frequently (Fig. 3, B). Their final appearance was of a long narrow ditch made up of sections on the same alignment, looking rather like a string of sausages with occasional breaks. The distance between each alignment of ditches on the western part of the site was about 20m (65ft 6in). It is clear that, although the small ditches could not have been used to contain flowing water, they could still have been effective for drainage. Or, if the soil in the past was as shallow as the modern topsoil, they may also have served as bedding trenches. This

5. M. U. Jones and D. Bond 'Later Bronze Age Settlement at Mucking, Essex' in *Brit Archaeol Repts* 83 (1980) 471-82.
6. C. Couchman 'The Bronze Age in Essex' in *Archaeology in Essex to 1500* (ed. D. G. Buckley) CBA Research Report No 34 (1980) 40-46.
K. J. Barton 'Report of an Excavation at Aveley, Essex' *Thurrock Historical Society* Publication (1959).
S. Needham and C. Burgess 'The Later Bronze Age in the Lower Thames Valley' in *Brit Archaeol Repts* 83 (1980) 437-69.
7. P. Greenwood 'The cropmark Site at Moor Hall Farm, Rainham, Essex' *London Archaeol* 4 No 7 (1982) 185-93. Passmore Edwards Museum excavations, 1979-1981.
8. Passmore Edwards Museum excavations 1983-1984, and 1983.
9. Passmore Edwards Museum Collections, and material collected by the late Andrew Caldwell.
10. Drawings and information from Margaret Jones, Mucking Post-excavation.
11. Photographs by the National Monuments Record Air Photographs Unit.

field system, dated by finds of Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age pottery, is the only example of this period in eastern London or western Essex.

Fringing the edge of Whitehall Wood, on the northern side of the site, were some larger, deeper pits, which had finally been used for rubbish. Some may have been dug originally for storage or rubbish or as quarry pits for sand and gravel. Close to these (Fig. 3, Area C) were some small and relatively deep, circular pits, probably post pits from a rectangular building. There were also traces of other structures and apparent alignments of post holes/pits on the edge of the main settlement area, now covered by woodland.

Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age settlement on the Rainham-Thurrock Gravels

Whitehall Wood is one of several Late Bronze Age - Early Iron Age sites known in the Rainham-Upminster-Tilbury area (Fig. 1). These include two defended sites at Mucking⁵, domestic debris and a hoard from a gravel pits by Moor Hall Farmhouse, Aveley⁶, and a probable cremation cemetery at Moor Hall Farm (Launders Lane), Rainham⁷. Some cremation burials from Great Sunnings Farm and the remains of a round house from Manor Farm, both east of Upminster⁸, appear to date to the Early Iron Age. All these excavations were carried out in advance of gravel quarrying. Earlier Iron Age material was also retrieved from a quarry on the site of Hornchurch Aerodrome⁹.

A comb-decorated sherd from a post hole at Whitehall Wood (Fig. 4a) is similar in shape and decoration to a vessel from Mucking¹⁰, and a flint-tempered sherd with finger-impressed decoration from one of the small ditches (Fig. 4b) can be paralleled with sherds from the Moor Hall Farm cremation cemetery. The pottery assemblage as a whole bears a general resemblance to other Late

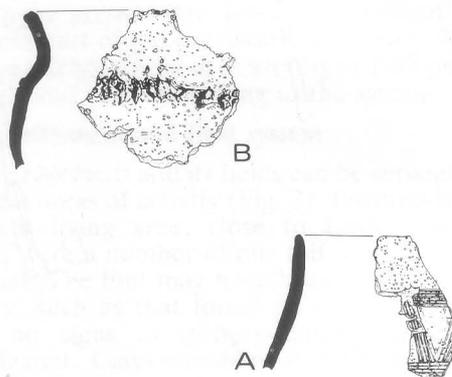


Fig. 4: a. Comb-decorated sherd.
b. Sherd with finger-impressed decoration.
Scale ¼.

Bronze Age – Early Iron Age pottery in eastern London and western Essex.

Whitehall Wood may have been related to or had connections with two nearby sites: Moor Hall Farmhouse (Aveley), 1.5km (1 mile) away, and Moor Hall Farm (Rainham), 2km (1¼ miles) away. Unfortunately, as much of this area was quarried before there was any regular archaeological coverage, it is likely that many other sites were lost. There is no accompanying settlement for the Rainham cremation cemetery, unless it was linked to the settlement at Moor Hall Farmhouse, about 1.25km (¾ mile) further east.

Future work is envisaged on a complex cropmark site to the north of Whitehall Wood when gravel

extraction begins. Enclosures and circular features are visible¹¹ (Fig. 1, D).

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Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2Y 5HN (01-600 3699).

Croydon & District. Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collection every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Mrs Muriel Shaw, 28 Lismore Road, South Croydon, CR2 7QA, tel. (01) 688 2720.

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Sandford Manor and Fulham High Street. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

Inner and North London Boroughs, by the Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (North London). Several rescue sites in various areas. (01-837 8363).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Shipley, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston. (01-546 5386).

North-East London Boroughs, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

South-West London Boroughs, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (South-West London). Excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew. (01-940 5989).

Southwark and Lambeth, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology, Southwark and Lambeth. Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Derek Seeley, Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-541 8911).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17 (01-703 3324).

West London Boroughs, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Enquiries to 273A Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of field work. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £5.50 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, SE11 6RE. (01-582 0494).