

**SUTTON POYNTZ WATER TREATMENT WORKS,  
SUTTON POYNTZ, NR. WEYMOUTH, DORSET  
Archaeological Evaluation**

**Report No. W616**

36638

**Prepared for:**

Wessex Water PLC

Quay House

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## **Summary**

An archaeological evaluation was carried out on the 19th and 20th July of an area just north of the existing Water Treatment Works at Sutton Poyntz (NGR SY 70550/83985) on behalf of Wessex Water plc.

Trenches representing approximately a 3% sample exposed a series of gullies, ditches and postholes. It is suggested this is evidence of a potentially well preserved mid to late Iron Age settlement with some evidence of occupation during the Neolithic, Late Bronze Age and early Roman periods.

It is considered that the site therefore contains areas of high archaeological sensitivity.

## **Acknowledgements**

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# ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT SUTTON POYNTZ WATER TREATMENT WORKS, SUTTON POYNTZ, NR. WEYMOUTH, DORSET

## 1. Introduction

In line with best practice and Planning Policy Guidance note 16, Wessex Water plc commissioned an archaeological evaluation of the proposed site of a water treatment works. The site lies in the field to the north and west of the existing waterworks at the north end of the village of Sutton Poyntz. It is bounded on the east and north east by the eroded valley of the River Jordan, and is on ground that slopes down from the north to the south. The area for evaluation was roughly rectangular, *c.* 70m by 60m, with the south-west corner at SY 70550/83985 (fig. 1).

The evaluation took the form of a 3% trial trench sample using a mechanical excavator to remove topsoil. Because of existing service trenches across the eastern part of the site, the original proposal of eight trenches, ten metres long, had to be modified. Five such trenches were dug in the western part of the site, but in the eastern part two longer trenches were excavated along the eastern edge of the area. The total length of trenching was 88m; all trenches were 1.5m wide, excavated using a JCB fitted with a toothless bucket. The work was carried out on the 19th and 20th July 1993.

## 2. Archaeological Background

Sites of prehistoric date are well represented in the area (fig. 1), with numerous Bronze Age round barrows present on the South Dorset Ridgeway, to the north of the pipeline (RCHM 1970, 456-7), and the Iron Age hillfort at Chalbury to the west. During construction of the now disused reservoir, nearly 100 cremations and several inhumations of Bronze Age date were recorded and excavated (SMR Weymouth 435, centred on SY 69958336, RCHM 1970, 457). A human inhumation (SMR Weymouth 470, SY 69758345), of unknown date, was uncovered during the construction of the present reservoir.

Archaeological evidence dating to the Roman period is recorded to the south of Preston, where both a Romano-British villa (RCHM 1970, 616) and temple (RCHM 1970, 618) have been excavated. Further evidence of Romano-British occupation was found to the north-west of Sutton Poyntz, in Plaisters Lane (SY 70198424, RCHM 1970, 618-9), where building debris and pottery were uncovered, and two nearby inhumation burials were excavated. Late Iron Age and Romano-British occupation (SMR Weymouth 448, centred on SY 70678393) and burials were also located immediately to the east of Sutton Poyntz waterworks

construction of a house, 'Watermeadow'. Additional material was recovered from the site of the waterworks.

A watching brief on the Empool to Chalbury water main noted archaeological features in the area of the assessment (Lancley 1993, Wessex Archaeology 1991) which were attributed to Roman and medieval activity.

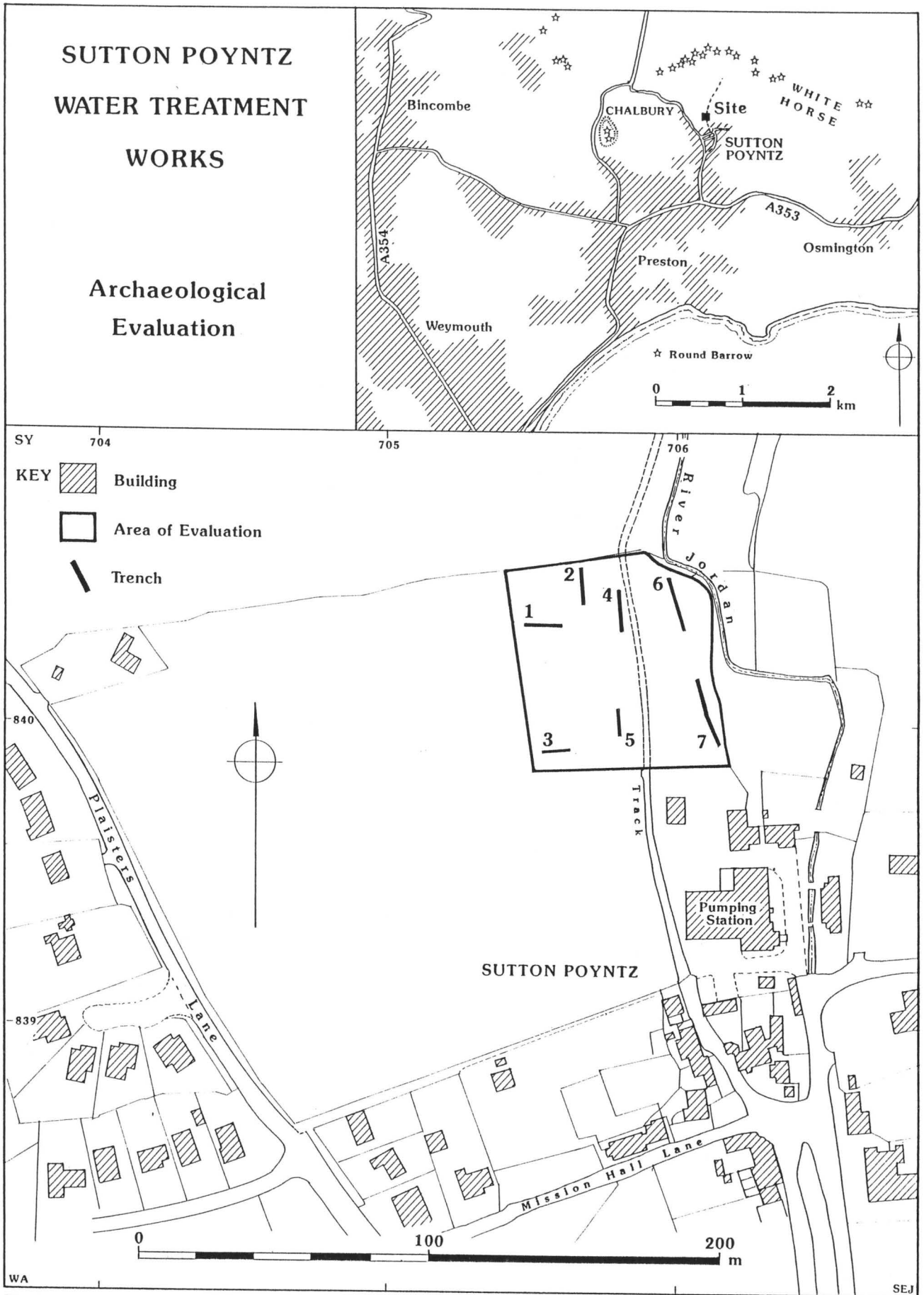


Fig. 1: Site location

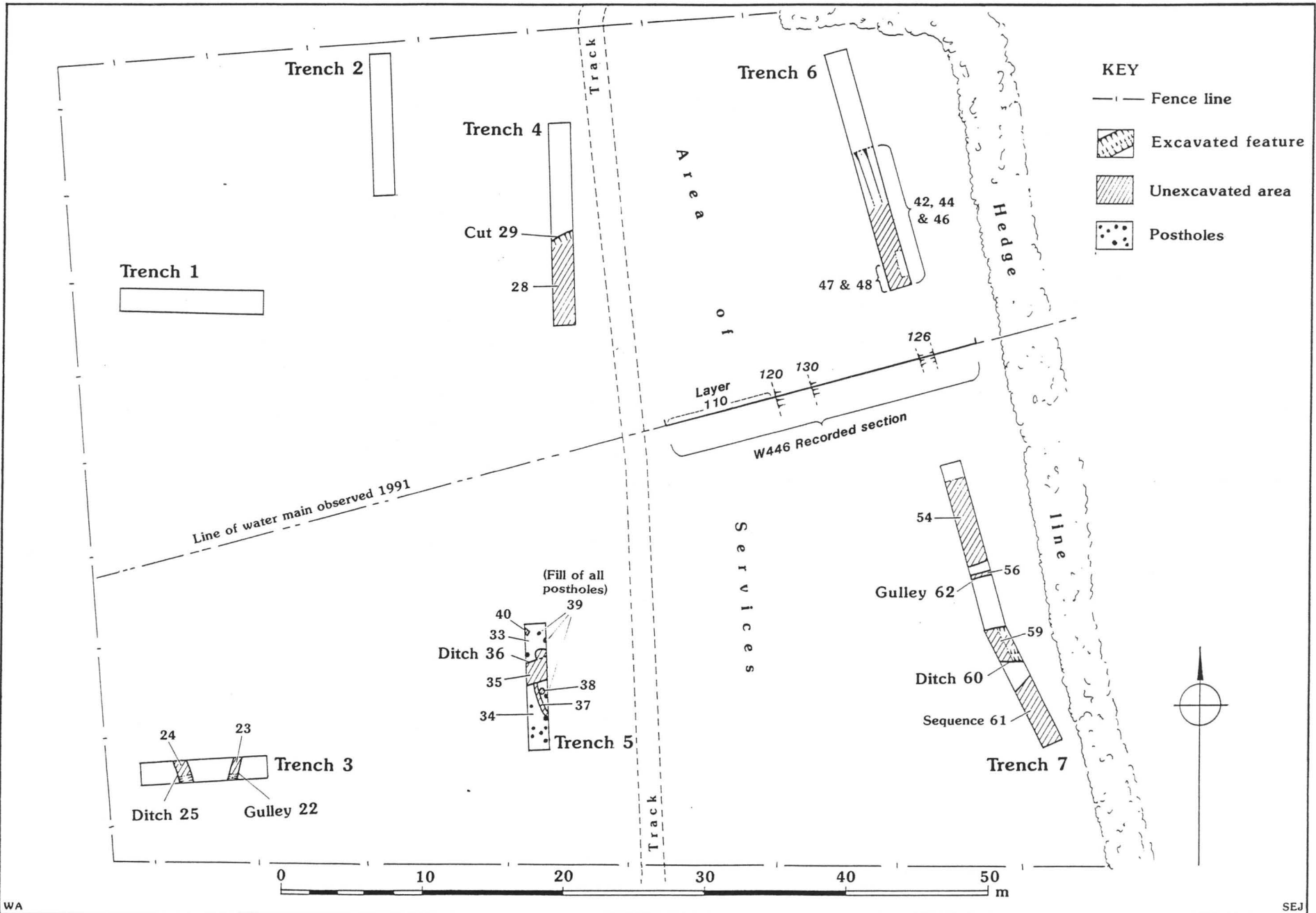


Fig. 2: Trench plan showing archaeological features



### **3. The Results**

#### **3.1 Geology**

With the exception of Trench 7, in the south-eastern corner of the site, the surface of the Kimmeridge Clay was revealed at the base of all the trenches. This varied considerably in depth below the modern ground surface, due to the relatively recent levelling up that has taken place along the southern part of the area.

In Trenches 1, 2, 4 and the northern part of Trench 6 the surface of the Kimmeridge clay was encountered immediately beneath the top soil, at depths of between 0.15 m and 0.30 m below the present ground surface. In Trench 1 a thickness of *c.* 0.65 m of this brown clay (Layer 12) was exposed, merging downwards into a greyer clay (Layer 13). In the North end of Trench 2, a deeper machine cut exposed a thickness of 1.40 m of uniform brown clay (Layer 16). In the other trenches, only the surface of the layer was exposed.

In the southern part of the site, the surface of the clay was deeper, in Trenches 3 and 5 being at *c.* 0.85 m below the present ground surface.

In Trench 7 the surface of a soft, very decayed chalk was exposed at a depth of *c.* 0.50 m. The relationship of this deposit with the Kimmeridge clay encountered in Trenches 1-6 is unknown.

#### **3.2 Archaeological Features**

The archaeological evidence revealed by the evaluation trenches can be divided into three types:

- occupation evidence consisting of ditches, gullies and postholes with a date range potentially spanning the first millennium BC and the first years of the first century AD. This occupation appears to be confined to the southern part of the site.
- a large area of infilling in the eastern part of the site; potentially the filled-in bed of an early meander of the River Jordan, and containing Iron Age and Roman pottery sherds.
- a layer of limestone rubble with slate fragments that forms a spread of debris sealing the southern part of the site. This may be derived from the construction of the waterworks.

##### **3.2.1 Occupation evidence of the 1st Millennium BC**

Subsoil features were revealed in Trenches 3, 5 and 7, in each case sealed by a layer of dark clayey loam (Trench 3, 19; Trench 5, 32; Trench 7, 53) which represents the surface of the field prior to the deposition of the stone rubble mentioned above.

###### *Trench 3*

**Ditch 25;** a steep-sided feature with a 'V' shaped profile. It had been cut into the clay to a depth of *c.* 0.60 m and was *c.* 1 m wide at the top. Its infilling was a dark grey clay, containing

much redeposited natural clay, as well as pottery predominantly of the first half of the 1st millennium BC (Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age), although one sherd of Roman date was also present. The feature was aligned approximately N-S.

**Feature 22;** this was an irregular linear feature cut into the surface of the clay to a depth of *c* 0.15 m. It had shallow, but steep edges, and within the narrow section that was excavated there was evidence of a shallow posthole. Its fill, Layer 23, was identical to the overlying loam, Layer 19 and also contained pottery of 1st millennium BC date.

Both these features were apparently sealed by a dark, loamy clay, Layer 19, *c* 0.20 m thick, being the topsoil/ploughsoil in the field prior to the period of dumping described below. Similar pottery was recovered from this layer.

#### *Trench 5*

A concentration of features was revealed cutting the surface of the natural clay (33) in the northern part of the trench, and in the southern part of the trench cutting into Layer 34, a greenish yellow clay. Layer 34 may be the weathered surface of the natural sequence of clay, but pottery recovered from it is likely to be of earlier Neolithic date.

**Postholes** - A total of 13 postholes was revealed. Of these, eleven were consistent in size and infilling, being *c.* 0.20 m in diameter with an infill of dark grey, clayey, loam containing charcoal flecks (Layer 39). Many of these also contained fragments of limestone, suggestive of disturbed packing stones. A larger posthole with a diameter of *c.* 0.35 m was also revealed, the fill of which (Layer 38) contained large limestone rubble. The last posthole lay beneath the north-west edge of the trench. Its fill (Layer 40) contained a large quantity of limestone rubble, but it may be stratigraphically later than the features described above, and was not clearly sealed by Layer 32. Due to the presence of post-packing requiring more detailed recording none of the postholes were excavated neither was there any stratigraphical relationship to the two linear features that were also revealed in the trench.

**Gully 37** - this was visible as a band of material *c.* 0.35 m wide, aligned approximately N-S. It was a grey-brown loam (Layer 37) containing may flecks of brown clay. It was not excavated but pottery recovered from its surface is probably of Later Bronze Age (*c.* 1000 - 800 BC) date. It was cut by Ditch 36 and did not appear to the north of it. In plan, the feature was apparently curving.

**Ditch 36** - aligned approximately E-W, this feature was *c.* 1.60 m wide at the top with fairly steep sides. Only the top of it was excavated and its full depth and profile is unknown. The fill was a very dark grey, clayey loam with scattered fragments of limestone, Layer 35. Pottery from this layer can be dated to the Early Iron Age (*c.* 800 - 600 BC). The significance of an irregularity on its northern side is unknown.

A projection of this feature to the east could join up with a broadly comparable feature excavated in Trench 7, Ditch **60**.

With the apparent exception of Layer 40, the fills of all these features were sealed by Layer 32, a dark, clayey loam, up to 0.20 m thick.

#### *Trench 7*

Two subsoil features were revealed, cutting into the decayed chalk bedrock Layer 55, that was revealed in the central part of the trench.

**Gully 62** - this was aligned approximately E-W and was a gully or small ditch *c* 0.65 m wide and 0.35 m deep. It had steep sides and a rounded base, and a dark, clayey loam infill, Layer 56. Pottery from its fill is of early Roman date.

**Ditch 60** - similarly aligned approximately E-W, this was a steep-sided feature *c* 2.20 m wide, with a shallower shelf along its southerly side. Only the top of the feature was excavated, this largely unexcavated lower fill being a dark, silty loam, Layer 59 which contained pottery of 1st millennium BC and Roman date. This was sealed by a band of loam and rubble, Layer 58, with a dished profile, above which lay a dark loam layer, Layer 57, probably comparable to Layer 53, a dark loam up to 0.20 m thick which sealed the whole base of the trench. (cf. Layer 32 in Trench 5).

### **3.2.2 Infilling in the eastern part of the site**

In the southern end of Trench 6 and the northern end of Trench 7 a sequence of layers was observed and recorded which appeared to lie within a broad hollow or hollows. This sequence went down to a depth *c* 1.50 m below the present field surface in the north end of Trench 7, where it comprised very dark, silty clay/loams (Layer 54) above the truncated surface of decayed chalk. The sequence was more complex in Trench 6, suggesting an earlier hollow, Layer **50**, filled with dark silty clays, Layers 47 and 48, beneath and to the south of a later hollow, Layer **45**. Feature 45 was at least 11 m wide, but with a depth of only *c* 0.70 m; it was filled with a silty clay (Layer 46) overlain by a band of rubble and clayey loam (Layer 44). The broad hollow in the top of the feature was filled with a pale brown, loamy clay, Layer 42, which may be a colluvial deposit.

Within this sequence, only layers 47 and 48 produced pottery. The sherd from layer 47 is of Iron Age date while those from layer 48 are Romano-British. No recent material was recovered. If these features/hollows represent a meander in the former course of the River Jordan or a coombe in the side of its valley, much of this infilling may have been eroded from

the sides. The material in the layers does not necessarily, therefore, reflect the date of deposition.

These features and the type of infilling deposit are comparable with the complex layers recorded in the section of a pipeline which crossed the site in 1991 (Lancely 1993, fig. 3). What have been termed Ditches **120** and **130** (and indeed Layer 110 to the west of the Ditches) may all derive from the meanderings of the river which now lies to the east of the site (cf. the very tight meander that defines the north-east limit of the site).

### **3.2.3 Limestone rubble over the southern side of the site**

This was revealed over the whole length of Trenches 3, 5 and 7, and in the southern ends of Trenches 4 and 6. It was a fairly consistent deposit of limestone rubble in fairly friable, dark, clayey loam. It included many fragments of roofing slate and its maximum recorded thickness was c 0.50 m. Up slope to the north it was thinner, eventually fading out. Stratigraphically it lay beneath the present clay topsoil and turf and above an earlier topsoil/turf.

It is suspected that it is derived from the construction of the waterworks to the SE of the site being debris used to level up the field.

## **3.3. *Archaeological Finds***

All artefacts recovered have been quantified by number and weight for each context. A summary of this information is presented in Table 1 and full details can be found in the archive. A brief scan of the whole collection was undertaken to establish the nature and, where possible, the date range of the artefacts recovered. The results of this scan are presented by material type below.

### **3.3.1 The Metalwork**

Only one metal object was recovered, a complete, hand-made iron nail from the infilling deposits (61) in the southern end of Trench 7. Nails of this type can date from the Roman period onwards and its occurrence in association with pottery of prehistoric, medieval and post-medieval date is of little help in establishing a more precise date range for this item.

### **3.3.2 The Pottery**

A total of 74 sherds, 540g, of pottery was recovered. The majority of these are of 1st millennium BC date although two sherds, probably of earlier Neolithic date, 22 Romano-British, three medieval and one post-medieval sherd were also recognised. Although the condition of the sherds is generally good, they tend to be small (mean weight 7.3g) and comparatively few featured sherds were found. The assemblage is described by chronological period below.

### *Earlier Neolithic*

The earliest activity identified during the evaluation is represented by two sherds from the layer of weathered natural clay (34) in Trench 4. Both are plain body sherds from vessels of unknown type, but based on general appearance and fabric type have been assigned to the earlier Neolithic period. One occurs in a coarse, dark grey beef-type calcite tempered fabric, which is broadly similar to fabrics of earlier Neolithic date from Maiden Castle (Cleal 1991, 171-183) and is of local origin. The other sherd is clearly a south-western product and has been tentatively identified as gabbroic ware (Cleal pers. comm.). The fabric of this sherd is, however, considerably coarser than that of gabbroic wares from other sites in the south Dorset region (Cleal 1991, fabric Ga:1 for example) although a range of fabrics, varying in terms of the density and size of inclusions, are known from Caen Brea (Smith 1981). Gabbroic wares are derived from the Lizard in Cornwall (Peacock 1969).

### *1st Millennium BC*

A total of 46 sherds were recognised as belonging to the 1st millennium BC although the majority could not be more precisely dated. Fabrics are dominated by those tempered with beef-type calcite although coarse and fine quartz sand tempered fabrics, oolitic limestone, non-beef calcite and flint gritted wares were also present. The range of fabrics can be paralleled at a variety of sites in the area including Hengistbury Head (Brown 1987, 213), Maiden Castle (Brown 1991, 185-186), Rope Lake Hole (Davies 1987, 151), Eldon's Seat (Cunliffe and Phillipson 1969, 206) and Coburg Road, Dorchester (Cleal 1993, 36) as well as amongst the pottery recovered from sites B and D along the route of the Chalbury to Osmington water main, located just to the north of the present site (Lancley 1993). All the fabrics are likely to be of local manufacture.

Recognisable vessel forms are rare among the material recovered, the majority being plain body sherds from coarseware forms. One sherd, in a fine quartz tempered fabric, probably from a shouldered jar, has finger tipping decoration on the angle of the shoulder and is probably of Later Bronze Age date. It was recovered from the surface of gully 37 in Trench 4. A rim sherd from a tripartite jar, paralleled by Early Iron Age JB2 types at Maiden Castle (Brown 1991, fig.154, 2, 4 and 7, fig.155, 12 and 16) and Hengistbury Head (Brown 1987, ill.134), was found, together with body sherds of oolitic limestone and beef-type calcite tempered fabrics, in the filling of Ditch 35. Fragments from hematite-coated bowls were noted in groups of coarseware body sherds of mixed 1st millennium BC/Roman date, from the filling of Ditch 25 and from Ditch 60. These vessels are also of Early Iron Age (c. 800 - 600 BC) date and the occurrence of these sherds in a fine sand and rare-sparse beef-type calcite tempered fabric indicates local manufacture.

### *Romano-British Pottery*

With the exception of one tiny fragment of samian, from a Central Gaulish source, all the Romano-British pottery recovered is Black Burnished ware from the Wareham/Poole Harbour region of Dorset. Only two vessel forms could be recognised, all the sherds from the filling of Gully 62 joining to form part of the rim from a jar with an upright, slightly beaded rim (Seager Smith and Davies 1993, 231, fig. 122, type 1) while a sherd from a small bead rim beaker or jar (Seager Smith and Davies 1993, 231, fig. 122, type 7 or fig. 132, type 10) was found, together with the samian sherd, in Ditch 60. Both these forms are dated from the mid/late 1st - early 2nd century AD.

### *Medieval*

Three medieval sherds were recovered, one from the infilling (61) at the southern end of Trench 7 and two joining sherds from the subsoil (15) in Trench 2. All the sherds are of the same quartz-gritted fabric, are probably derived from cooking-pot forms and can be dated from the late 12th - 13/14th century AD.

### *Post-medieval*

One sherd of 18th - 19th century South Western sgraffito ware was found the infilling (61) at the southern end of Trench 7.

### **3.3.3 The Fired Clay**

In total, 14 fragments, 26g, of fired clay were recognised. All the pieces are small and featureless so it is not possible to determine the type of object/structure from which they were derived. The pieces are all associated with pottery dating to the 1st millennium BC, and are probably of a similar date range.

### **3.3.4 The Worked Flint**

Two flakes, 14g, were found in the filling of ditch 36 in Trench 4. One of these is a waste flake of Portland chert, the other, of amber-coloured flint, has edge retouch along the distal and one lateral edge of the flake. Both are of prehistoric date and occur with three sherds of prehistoric pottery, at least one of which can be dated to the early Iron Age.

### **3.3.5 The Stone**

In addition to fragments of slate noted during the evaluation, five fragments, 220g, of other stone were found. These consist of four pieces of reddish-brown fossiliferous limestone, most probably from the Ham Hill quarries (Somerset), and a single piece of fine-grained limestone probably from the Portland or Purbeck Beds. None of the pieces show signs of deliberate working although the fine-grained limestone fragment is of suitable thickness to be derived from a Roman roofing tile. The Ham Hill Stone was probably brought to the area as building stone.



### **3.3.6 The Animal Bone**

A total of 47 pieces, 302g, of animal bone was recovered, including two burnt fragments. The condition of the bone is good and although no analysis has been undertaken, the potential for species identification, at least, is apparent from this material.

## **4. Conclusions**

The evaluation recovered structural evidence for a potentially well-preserved mid-late Iron Age settlement with enclosures and structures. The archaeological material recovered in this limited excavation also suggests occupation in the area in other periods both before and after the Iron Age but its nature is uncertain.

The interpretation of the infill in the eastern part of the site is more problematical. Its proximity to the River Jordan may suggest an old stream course. Although it is difficult to date reliably, since the Roman/Iron Age material may be redeposited from elsewhere, it does not seem to be modern, since it is sealed by the old land surface that predates the deposition of rubble connected with the waterworks' construction. If the depression, whatever its origin, was infilled during the Roman or Medieval periods, its proximity to the settlement evidence suggests the potential for archaeological features associated with exploitation of the river or river bank.

The settlement evidence recorded by the evaluation is apparently limited to roughly the area of the site south of the 500 diameter main laid in June/August 1991; if the area of the infill is included, the area of archaeological sensitivity can be extended north of the line of the 1991 main in the part of the site east of the track.

The evaluation has, therefore, demonstrated that approximately 50% of the area of the Sutton Poyntz site has the potential for a well preserved archaeological sequence.

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## 6. TABLE 1 Summary of finds by context

(Totals exclude discarded items; weight in grammes)

Context	Feature	Animal bone	Fired clay	Worked flint	Stone	Iron	Pottery - totals	Pottery - no. of sherds by period					
								Early Neo.	1st mill.	R-B	Med.	Post- med.	
15		23/208g					3/12g			1	2		
19		1/2g	1/10g				3/35g		3				
23	22	1/2g	2/1g				6/34g		6				
24	25	4/18g					19/86g		18	1			
28	29	1/3g					7/27g		7				
34							2/20g	2					
35	36			2/7g			3/41g		3				
37							1/7g		1				
47	50	10/26g	10/14g		1/40g		1/1g		1				
48	50				2/94g		7/29g			7			
56	62						9/156g			9			
59	60	6/42g	1/1g		2/86g		10/66g		6	4			
61		1/1g				1/7g	3/28g		1		1	1	
<b>Totals</b>		47/302g	14/26g	2/7g	5/220g	1/7g	74/540g	2	46	22	3	1	

## 7. TABLE 2: Contexts by trench

	length, width, max depth	contexts
Trench 1	10 x 1.5 x 0.9	11, 12, 13
Trench 2	10 x 1.5 x 1.5	14, 15 16
Trench 3	10 x 1.5 x 0.95	17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25
Trench 4	15 x 1.5 x 0.35	26, 27, 28, 29
Trench 5	9 x 1.5 x 1.1	30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40
Trench 6	17.5 x 1.5 x 1.35	41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50
Trench 7	17 x 1.5 x 1.5	51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62

## **8. Interim note on watching brief at Sutton Poyntz (2/8/93 - 6/8/93)**

An archaeologist from Wessex Archaeology inspected testpits dug on the site to locate the lines of existing services. Deposits as described by the evaluation were noted. The testpits did not appear to disturb any of the archaeological features noted in the evaluation other than the large infilled depression on the eastern edge of the site.

However during the excavation of a testpit on the north edge of the line of the water main on the eastern edge of the site the contractors collected some large freshly broken fragments of human bone. Parts of skull, jaw, rib and long bones were recovered in sufficient amounts to suggest the presence on a inhumation rather than redeposited material. The bones were recorded as coming from the bottom of testpit well within the features noted both during the laying of the water main (Wessex Archaeology 1990) and by the current evaluation. Although no firm date can be assigned to the bones they are associated with deposits with Iron Age and Roman pottery. Despite the problems of using this material for dating noted in the evaluation report it can be suggested that the burial is of some antiquity. The Home Office has been informed and a licence for exhumation of human remains applied for in case it is decided further work is required.