

INTER TRENCH PHASING

Phase I

Consists of Groups 1.7, 2.7, 3.4, 4.4, 5.7, 6.4, 7.6, 8.4, 9.4, 10.5, 11.6

This Phase contains the earliest event seen on site and probably dates back to the Wolstonian ice age (367,000 BP to 128,000 BP) (Wymer, 1985). The Phase is made up of several layers of fluvial river gravel forming the Taplow terrace.

Phase II

Consists of Groups 2.5, 5.6

This Phase comprises two ice wedges, naturally formed geological features dating from the Wolstonian or Devensian Ice Ages (367,000 BP to 10,000 BP) (Wymer, 1985). Ice wedges are formed when, in conditions of extreme cold, the frozen ground contracts and then cracks. During the spring thaw the cracks become filled with water which subsequently freezes and expands forcing a wider gap in the ground. Continuation of this process over several years may lead to the accumulation of a substantial wedge of ice. After the ice age, when weather conditions became more mild, the wedges melted and the cracks were filled with fine sediments to create features with a distinctly v-shaped profile.

PHASE III

Consists of Groups 4.1, 5.5, 7.5, 9.3, 11.5.

This Phase was composed of various brickearth and redeposited brickearth layers evident in most trenches on site that were dug deep enough to expose it. Their deposition has resulted from fluvial or aeolian action in either the last ice age, the Devensian (70,000 - 10,000 BP) (Evans, 1975), or the previous Wolstonian Ice Age (no evidence to enable the use of archaeological or geo-scientific dating techniques). The brickearth on site did not appear to be one homogeneous layer, but as layers of different consistencies of sand silt and clay indicating different processes of wind or water deposition. Also included in this Phase is sandy gravel deposit (13) from Trench 2 which is a possible fluvial deposit derived from the gravel of Phase I.

PHASE IV

Consists of Group 7.4.

This Phase consists of a single ice wedge later in date than the one recorded in Phase II (probably associated with the Devensian ice age 70,000 to 10,000 BP) (Evans, 1975) but formed in the, same way. See explanation in PHASE II.

PHASE V

Consists of Groups 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 5.3, 6.2, 7.3, 8.2, 10.3, 11.4.

This phase consists of various cuts, mainly of uncertain purpose and date, distributed throughout the trenches. In Trench 1 there were two probable field boundary ditches, one running N-S and one running E-W, the N-S one being later in date because it cuts the other. Other features in this trench include five possible post holes, six possible pits or cuts of sub-rectangular shape and one probable animal burrow containing one small fragment of tile which was undateable but probably fell to the depth at which it was found as a result of the animals disturbance. The features were quite densely packed and, although its possible that the post holes might provide archaeological evidence, it was impossible to locate structural patterns due to the limited boundaries of the excavation. The section in Trench 5 showed a large cut of uncertain purpose which is also connected to this phase. In Trench 6 there were three features, all of which were truncated which makes it difficult to ascertain their shape and function though they may be archaeological. Trench 7 contained three features, one possible post hole, one cut of uncertain purpose, and in the section another possible post hole. In Trench 8 there were two large cuts which could be pits but irregularity of shape and edges suggest a natural silting process. However, Trench 8 also contained a linear ditch, truncated on the northern edge, which was probably a field boundary. In Trench 10 the shape of three features suggest a possible post hole and two possible pits, while the one cut in Trench 11 could have been a pit but with no finds its function remains uncertain.

This phase consists then of three definite ditches whose function was almost certainly as field boundary demarcation, as well as possible archaeological evidence of a number of post holes and pits. The number of post holes may suggest human activity in the form of structural settlement but because of the limits of the excavation we cannot locate structural patterns.

Also the lack of finds makes specific function and dating impossible. In comparison to Iron Age sites like Uphall Camp where finds were sparse but with ample evidence for wooden built structures, in the form of post holes, it could be suggested that these features at Butterkist have a prehistoric date. Alternatively, the absence of finds in relation to features may indicate a non-domestic function where material culture may not be expected to be present. Without absolute proof of archaeological significance though it is possible that, with the exception of the ditched settlement/field boundaries, all these features have occurred as a result of natural silting.

PHASE VI

Consists of Groups 4.2, 9.2, 11.2.

This phase consisted of a layer of agricultural soil and a ditch running N-S across Trench 4 which was probably a field boundary associated with nineteenth or twentieth century landscape use prior to Butterkist.

PHASE VII

Consists of Groups 1.1, 2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 3.1, 3.2, 4.1, 5.1, 5.2, 6.1, 7.2, 8.1, 10.1, 10.2, 11.1.

This phase consisted of various hard-core, asphalt and concrete make-up layers, an external grass layer and a recurrent tarmac layer. Visible in the section was also the remains of a foundation wall and drain which are associated with the Butterkist build and can be dated pre 1939.

PHASE VIII

Consists of Groups 7.1, 9.1.

This, most recent phase, consisted of several layers of demolition material spread across the site and two piers trenches, one in Trench 4 and one in Trench 7. This activity took place in 1993 with the demolition of the Butterkist factory in preparation of the area for a new housing complex.

SUMMARY

The archaeological evaluation at the site of the Butterkist factory, Blackbourne Road, Dagenham was undertaken because it lies within a 300m archaeological priority zone surrounding St Peters and St Pauls Church, Dagenham. The first reference to Dagenham is in a charter of the 7th Century. The zone has been put in place in an attempt to discover this settlement. No obvious evidence of Saxon settlement was recovered but the excavation of the site did reveal eight phases of both natural events and human activity. The earliest phase, the gravel deposited by the Thames forming the Taplow terrace, suggests that at this stage the site was completely submerged under water. The next phase showed a change in environmental conditions where an arctic environment resulted in the formation of ice cracks and wedges, which were later filled with fluviially sorted sediments. Sealing this was the fluvial or aeolian deposited brickearth phase with evidence of a much later ice wedge marking the next phase. Although the next phase shows evidence of the possibility of substantial human activity the only features we can be definite about are the boundary ditches. It is possible that the site shows evidence of habitation at an uncertain date between 10,000 BP and 20th Century but these features may also have occurred as a result of natural silting. The next phase shows a limited amount of evidence of market garden activity while the Butterkist phase shows more recent construction activity. Lastly, 1993 demolition material comprises the final phase. Although no Saxon archaeology was found, the Pleistocene history of the site was revealed and also that possible archaeological activity of an unknown date was present on the site.

THE FINDS

Trench 1

Unstratified

1 sherd of Late Medieval Fine Ware externally reduced (LMFE)	Undated
1 sherd of Cream ware with blue decoration (CREAB)	1760 - 1900?
1 sherd of unidentified redware	Undated
1 clay pipe stem	Undated
2 fragments of tile	Undated

BIBLIOGRAPHY

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WYMER, John 1985. Palaeolithic Sites of East Anglia. Geo Books, Norwich.

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