Excavations at Buttsbury Estate, Ilford.
London Borough of Redbridge.

IG - LH 92.
LDPEM/ACIG/206.

Level III Draft Report.

M. Beasley.
21.06.93.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

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Introduction

An assessment and rescue excavations were conducted on an area chosen for development by the London and Quadrant Housing Association. The development consisted of the existing Buttsbury Road housing estate, and an area of land to the east, previously used as allotments and now as a grassed playing area. It is bounded to the north by Loxford Lane, to the west by Buttsbury Road, and to the south by Loxford Water (Fig 1).

The site is known to have been the property of the Abbess of Barking, the Abbess being licensed in 1319 to fell trees in Hainault Forest to rebuild the house at Loxford after a fire. The estate reverted to a Thomas Powle in 1557, and was owned by a succession of farmers until the end of the 19th. century, when much of the land was sold for house building. The current Loxford Hall dates to the 19th. century.

The site is also in close proximity to the Iron age settlement at Uphall Camp, within half a mile of the Barking Archaeological Priority Zone. Before the 20th. century canalisation of Loxford Water it was on the high tide mark of the river. There is also evidence of possible ridge and furrow (the remains of Medieval ploughing resulting in the formation of a series of linear banks and depressions) visible on the allotments area to the east.

The evaluation was intended to assess the need for further archaeological investigation. The rescue excavations were intended to mitigate negative impact of development on the archaeological resource.

The work was conducted in two phases; the first an assessment on the whole area affected by development, starting on the 21st. of November 1992 and lasting for four weeks. The second phase, of rescue excavations on the playing fields to the east of the estate, started on the 4th. of January 1993, and lasted for six weeks. A total of ten trenches were excavated in both phases, varying in size from 3m. x 5m. to 65m. x 12m. The excavations were conducted by field staff from the Passmore Edwards Museum.

The excavations were funded by London and Quadrant Housing Association, negotiated for and directed by Dr. F. M. Meddens for the Passmore Edwards Museum, and supervised by the author.

Abstract

The excavations revealed extensive evidence of settlement on the site from the Bronze Age to the Roman periods, with some Mesolithic and Neolithic flint work, limited evidence of activity during the post-Medieval period, and Nineteenth and Twentieth century activity, including evidence of land management during these later periods.

Resistivity Survey.

At the start of the project it was decided to run a limited geophysical survey to target areas of potential archaeological remains. Due to the nature of the site, this was limited to a resistivity survey over the playing field area, and on the larger grassed areas within the estate itself (Fig.2).

Twenty-one 20m. x 20m. resistivity squares were surveyed in advance of the phase 1 assessment. The survey was conducted using a Geoscan RM15 Basic resistivity meter, with 0.5m. twin array. Readings were taken at 1m. sample intervals on a 1m. zig-zag traverse, with a 1mA current, and the resulting data processed through Geosoft software.

The plot for the playing field showed three large linear ditches, two running north-south, and one running east-west. These were located on the east side of the survey area, with the west of the area showing considerable over-burden. Three trenches were sited to investigate these features.

The plots (grids 16 - 21) surveyed in the estate itself revealed modern service runs over most of the areas surveyed, with the exception of plots 16 and 17. These showed badly defined high and low resistance anomalies.

An additional four grids were surveyed to the north-east of the field at the commencement of Phase 2 excavations to cover the area of the development not surveyed in Phase 1. The results from these grids were inconclusive showing no recognisable archaeological features.

Excavation Summary.

Phase 1: Assessment.

Phase 1 was designed as an assessment to evaluate the archaeology of the estate, in order to determine a strategy for preservation in-situ or rescue excavations if deemed necessary.

Trench 1.

Trench 1 was positioned in the playing field area (Fig. 1). It measured 10m. x 5m., aligned north-south, and was sited over the east-west resistivity anomaly. The trench was excavated by machine to a depth of c. 1.20m. below current ground surface, at which point the natural gravel was reached. This removed c. 0.30m. of modern topsoil and two layers of Post-Medieval plough-soils. Cut into the natural gravel was a linear ditch running east-west, and several smaller features. The ditch fill yielded fragments of an almost complete Romano-British storage jar. These features were fully excavated.

Trench 2.

Trench 2 was positioned on the playing field area (Fig. 1). It was located to the north of Trench 1, and also measured 10m. x 5m. It was aligned east-west across a second resistivity anomaly. It was machine-excavated down to natural gravel, removing a similar sequence of topsoil and plough-soils to that found in Trench 1. The plough-soil was cut by a linear trench cut with a ceramic land drain, running north-south. As in Trench 1, the natural gravel was cut by silt filled features. These were excavated by hand, and have been interpreted as a post-holes, stake-holes, and pits of probable Middle Bronze Age date. The fills of these features yielded pottery of about this date and some worked flint implements.

Trench 3.

Trench 3 was positioned in the playing field area (Fig. 1). It was another 10m. x 5m. machine excavated trench over the third linear resistivity anomaly. It is thought that this corresponds to a field boundary shown on 19th. century maps of the area. Similar topsoil and plough-soils to those in Trenches 1 and 2 were removed to the natural gravel. This was cut by a linear ceramic land drain, running north-south, and two natural features. No indication was discovered of the linear feature identified on the resistivity plot: no sign of its presence existed either in section, or cut into the natural. This is peculiar, in that the plot shows the feature strongly, and the two similar features were identified in both Trenches 1 and 2. Enough residual pottery of probable Middle Bronze Age and Romano-British date was recovered from the plough-soils in all three of these trenches to postulate the presence of a fairly sizeable settlement in the vicinity.

Trench 4.

Trench 4 was located to the far west of the site, on a grassed area between Buttsbury Road and the backs of the properties to the west (Fig. 1). It measured 5m. x 3m., and was aligned east-west. 20th. century topsoil was removed to reveal 19th. century deposits, and these removed to the natural gravel. Cutting the gravel were two linear ditches of Post-medieval date, and two undated post-holes.

Trench 5.

Trench 5 was located on the corner of Loxford Lane and Medway Close (Fig. 1). It was a machine-dug 3m. x 5m. trench to a depth of c. 1m. This revealed deep 20th. century dump layers overlying a brick and cobble surface, cut by two 20th. century service trenches for iron pipes. These were in turn cut by a trench for a concrete encased pipe of 20th. century date. The brick surface consisted of stock bricks laid on edge to form a solid surface, with parallel lines of cobbles laid into the top to either in-fill wheel ruts, or to create a harder surface for wheels. The surface lay over dump deposits of 18th. or 19th. century date, which lay over natural gravel. It is thought likely that the brick and cobble surface relates to a predecessor of the

present Loxford Hall, c. 15m. away.

Trench 6.

Trench 6 was located in the centre of the middle block of buildings on the estate (Fig. 1). It measured 5m. x 3m., and was aligned north-south. After removing the paving slabs a layer sand, a layer of crushed tarmac and a layer of compacted earth c. 0.10m. deep were revealed. These overlay natural gravel at a depth of c. 0.10m. The trench was abandoned at this point, with no further recording. It is likely that the area was graded down when the 1960's estate was built.

Trench 7.

Trench 7 was located on the southern boundary of the estate (Fig. 1), and comprised a machine excavated 5m. x 3m. trench running east-west. A depth of c. 0.60m of concrete and screed were broken out, revealing a grey-blue silty clay. It is thought this may be either a pond, or a previously silted-up course of the River Loxford. 19th. century pottery was recovered from these clays. At c. 1.4m below ground surface, the top of a brick wall was revealed. This was cleaned and recorded, but not further excavated due to Health and Safety considerations.

The clays continued to a depth of c. 2.3m. below current ground surface, at which point they were found to overlie natural gravel.

Phase 1 of the excavations finished at this point.

Phase 2: Rescue Excavations.

Based on the results of the archaeological evaluation, and in consultation with the developers, it was decided that rescue excavation of the surviving archaeological remains was the most acceptable option.

Trench 8.

Trench 8 was located in the area of the playing field (Fig. 1) where construction was likely to destroy large areas of the archaeological resource. It measured 65m. x 12m., and aligned north-south. The area covered the footprints of the main block of buildings in Phase 2B of construction. Included in this area was the previously excavated Trench 3. This was not re-excavated, but a baulk left to the north and south of the back-fill. The area to the south was designated Trench 8A. Machine stripping of the areas removed an identical sequence of topsoil and plough-soils as that recorded in Trenches 1 - 3. These again overlay natural gravel.

The gravel was cut by numerous silt filled features of various sizes. These were hand excavated. The majority of them have been interpreted as apparently unconnected post-holes or storage pits. Structural elements were limited to a probable

fence or palisade line and a row of post holes. The palisade line is worthy of note as it appears to have been constructed of vertically driven planks, rather than the more usual pattern of posts. Natural features, including two large tree holes were also recorded.

Two linear land drains were found running north-south in trench 8. The first of these aligns with to that in Trench 3. This continued in Trench 8A. The second ran parallel to this to the west of the trench. Both the trenches for them were cut through plough-soil.

The majority of the man-made features were concentrated to the north of the trench, reinforcing the impression of the settlement pattern, observed in Trenches 1 and 2, is concentrated to the north and east. The finds from this trench are of similar date to those recovered from Phase 1.

Trench 8A revealed only natural features, other than the linear land drain recorded in Trenches 3 and 8.

Trench 9.

Trench 9 was a 22m. x 10m. machine-dug trench to the south of Trench 8 (Fig. 1), in Phase 2B of house construction . The machining removed plough-soil and topsoil. These deposits overlay a deposit, c. 0.30m. deep, of sandy silt. This is thought to be a possible previous course of the Loxford. From within the silts a number of flint tools, waste flakes, and cores were recovered. These flints included a well-made microlith (small find 1). The silt also contained patches of decayed charcoal, probably the residue of fires.

Cutting the silt were three linear ditches for land drains, two probable post-holes to the south-west, and a large tree hole. One of the linear drains also appears in Trenches 3, 8, and 8A. The second ran parallel to the first, to the east, and both were fed into a third, running east-west.

A sondage was machine dug in the south-east corner of the trench to determine the depth of the silt deposits. These were found to be 0.25m. deep and overlay natural sand and clay.

Trench 10.

Trench 10 was a machine-dug 20m. x 10m. trench to the north-east of Trench 8 (Fig. 1). It was aligned north-west to south-east on the footprints of the northernmost block of Phase 2B of house construction. Stripping revealed topsoil and plough-soils, overlying natural gravel. This was again cut by silt-filled features. The trench revealed more structural evidence for the settlement in the form of a linear gully, and a curved butt-ended ditch. A collection of large, regular, intercutting pits to the north of the site have not been interpreted as yet. These features were associated with a number of post holes of various sizes. Very few finds were recovered from the trench, with the exception of sizeable fragments of pottery recovered from the butt-ended ditch.

Two more linear field drains were recorded, running north-

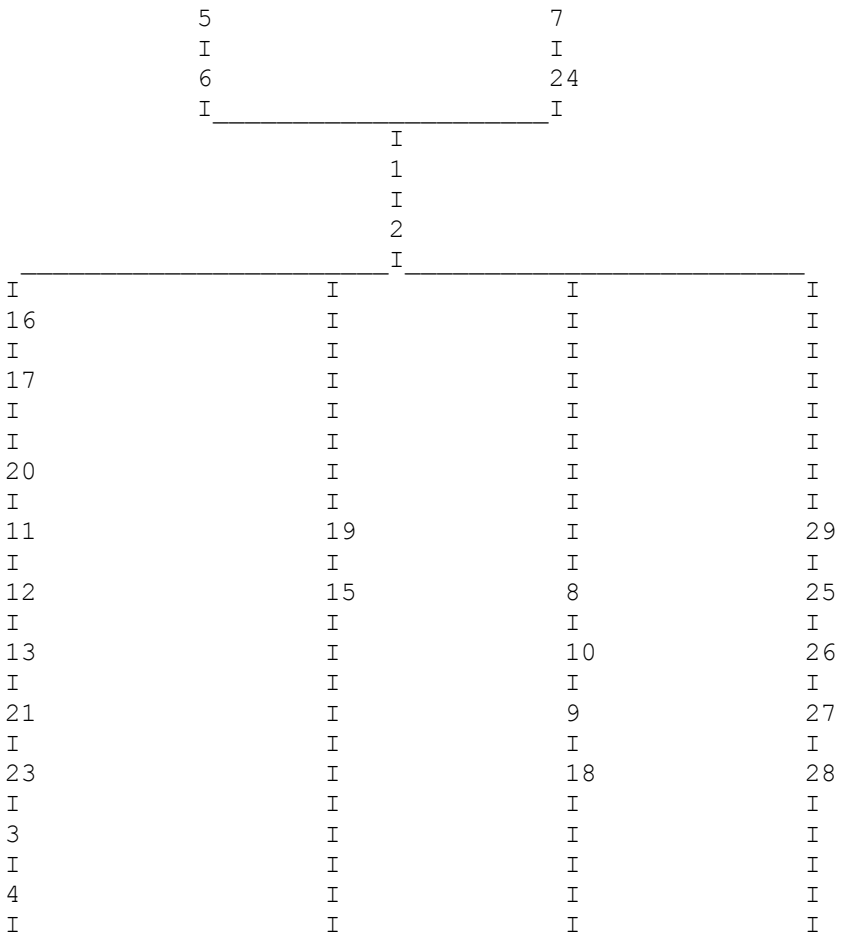
south. One of these aligns to that found in Trenches 3, 8, 8A, and 9, and the other to the parallel drain in Trench 9.

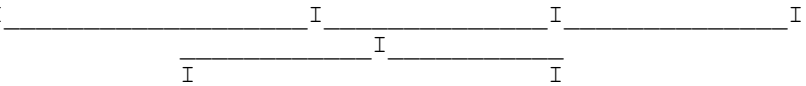
Methodology.

The findings of this report are structured using the Harris matrix system as a model. The Harris matrix is a representation of the chronology of the site in the form of a flow diagram, showing the earliest events at the bottom working to the later events at the top. The numbers in the text represent archaeological contexts, or single archaeological events. The groups establish sequences of chronology of related events. Phases constitute distinct periods of activity on the site to which groups can be related.

Group Discussion.

Trench 1.

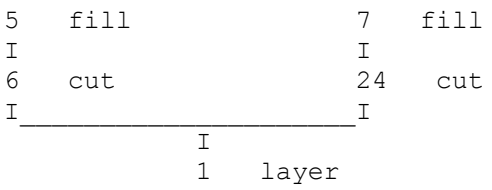




14 22Group 1a.

levels m. A.O.D.
highest lowest

1	layer;dark grey sandy silty clay	5.670m.-5.390m.
5	fill;dark grey sandy silty clay	5.600m.-5.060m.
6	cut;linear, straight sides abrupt slope to flat bottom	5.600m.-5.060m.
7	fill;dark grey black silty clay with sand	5.670m.-5.270m.
24	cut;shape uncertain, concave sides moderate slope to concave base	5.670m.-5.270m.



Two cuts with associated fills cutting topsoil. 20th. century.

Plan: -- Section: 1

C/S: --
B/W: --
Phase: 7

Group 1b.

2	layer;brown orange clay silt	5.390m.-4.480m.

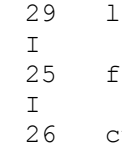
Probable plough-soil layer. Post-Medieval.

Plan: -- Section: 1

C/S: --
B/W: --
Phase: 5

Group 1c.

25	fill;mid grey sandy silt with gravel	4.890m.-4.790m.
26	cut;linear, irregular sides gradual slope to irregular bottom	4.890m.-4.790m.
29	layer;orange brown sandy silt	5.220m.-5.050m.



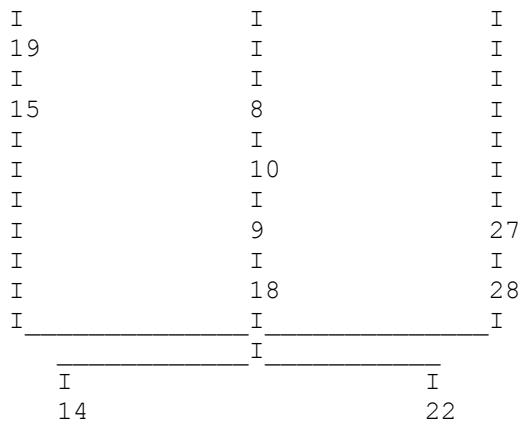
Possible plough soil overlying probable natural rain-water gully and associated fill. Undated.

Plan: 26 Section: --

C/S: --
B/W: 5.6-9
Phase: 3

Group 1d.

8	fill;light reddish brown clay silt	4.810m.-4.540m.
9	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	4.720m.-4.540m.
10	cut;sub-circular, straight sides abrupt slope to stepped bottom	4.810m.-4.540m.
14	layer;mottled brown\green sandy silt clay	4.700m.--------
15	cut;circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	4.860m.-4.690m.
18	cut;vertical sides abrupt slope to sloping bottom	4.720m.-4.540m.
19	fill;light grey brown sandy clay silt	4.860m.-4.690m.
22	layer;orange brown sandy gravel	5.040m.--------
27	fill;mid grey brown silty sand	4.860m.-4.720m.
28	cut;circular, straight sides gradual slope to pointed base	4.860m.-4.720m.



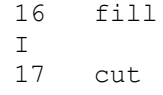
Three post holes and one stake hole with associated fills, cutting two layers of natural gravel. Possible Middle Bronze Age date.

Plan: 10,15,18,25 Section: --

C/S: 1.28,29 2.2-5 4.20-22
B/W: 2.2-5 4.11-14 5.2-5
Phase: 3

Group 1e.

16	fill;grey brown clay silt	4.980m.-4.600m.
17	cut;linear, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	4.520m.-4.420m.



Possible re-cut of earlier ditch and subsequent silting. Romano-

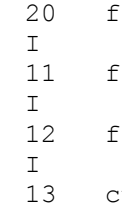
British date.

Plan: 17 Section: 1

C/S: --
B/W: --
Phase: 4

Group 1f.

11	fill;light grey sandy silt	4.680m.-4.520m.
12	fill;light grey sandy clay with silt	4.510m.-4.420m.
13	cut;square, concave sides abrupt slope to flat bottom	4.680m.-4.370m.
20	fill;light grey sandy clay silt	4.980m.-4.560m.



Possible re-cut of earlier ditch, with associated fills. Romano-British date.

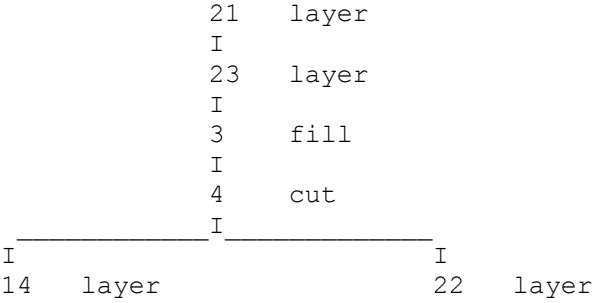
Plan: 13 Section: 1

C/S: 1.30,31 2.6-9
B/W: 2.6-9
Phase: 4

Group 1g.

3	fill;grey brown sandy clay silt	4.740m.-4.490m.
4	cut;linear, straight sides, gradual slope to concave bottom	4.740m.-4.490m.
14	layer;mottled brown\green sandy silt clay	4.700m.--------
21	layer;mid brown sand silt and gravel with sand	5.240m.-4.720m.
22	layer;orange brown sandy gravel	5.040m.--------

23 layer;light brown clay sand 5.200m.-5.040m.



Linear ditch cut with fill and spoil from original ditch excavation, cutting natural gravel. Romano-British date.

Plan: 3, 4 Section: 1

C/S: 4.16-19
B/W: 4.15-18
Phase: 4

Trench 2.

Group 2a.

51	layer;dark brown sandy clay silt	6.240m.-6.080m.
30	layer;dark brown sandy silty clay	6.080m.-5.810m.

51 layer
I
30 layer

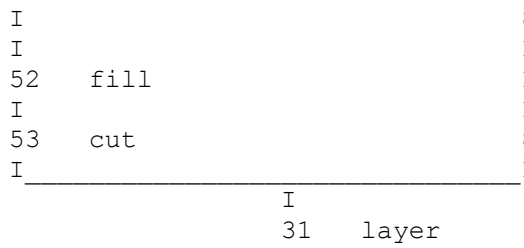
Two topsoil layers. 20th. century.

Plan: -- Section: 3

C/S: --
B/W: --
Phase: 7

Group 2b.

31	layer;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.880m.-5.460m.
52	fill;orange brown sandy clay	5.810m.-5.400m.
53	cut;linear, abrupt top to concave sides, gradual slope to concave bottom	5.810m.-5.400m.
83	fill;yellow brown clayey sand silt	5.470m.-4.820m.
84	cut;linear, straight sides abrupt slope to concave bottom	5.470m.-4.820m.
100	fill;ceramic pipe	4.940m.--------



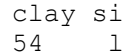
Linear ditch, and mole drain with associated fills, cutting plough-soil. 19th. century.

Plan: 84 Section: 3

C/S: 6.7-10
B/W: 6.6-9
Phase: 6

Group 2c.

54	layer;orange brown sandy clay silt	5.660m.-5.240m.



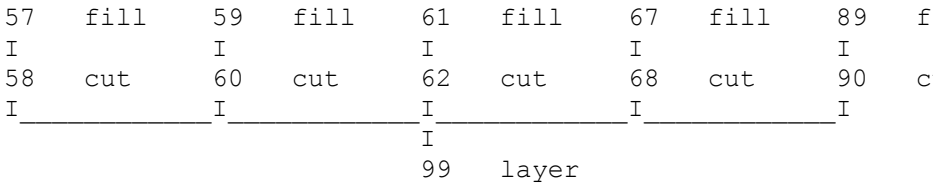
Plough-soil. Post-Medieval.

Plan: -- Section: 3

C/S: --
B/W: --
Phase: 5

Group 2d.

57	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.250m.-5.150m.
58	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.250m.-5.150m.
59	fill;orange brown sandy clay silt	5.260m.-5.060m.
60	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.260m.-5.060m.
61	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.370m.-5.220m.
62	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.370m.-5.220m.
67	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.290m.-5.190m.
68	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.290m.-5.190m.
89	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.370m.-5.300m.
90	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual to concave bottom	5.370m.-5.300m.
99	layer;gravel with silt and clay	5.470m.--------



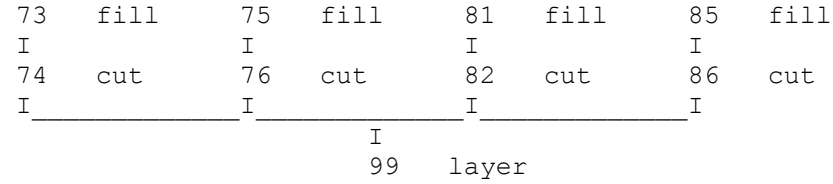
Line of five post holes with associated fills cutting natural gravel. Possible Middle Bronze Age date.

Plan: 99 Section: --

C/S: 4.23-33 5.10-13 6.35-37
B/W: 4.23-33 5.14-21 6.35,36
Phase: 3

Group 2e.

73	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.400m.-5.220m.
74	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to flat bottom	5.400m.-5.220m.
75	fill;mid brown sandy clayey silt	5.470m.-5.340m.
76	cut;ovoid, concave sides, bottom not reached	5.470m.-5.340m.
81	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.450m.-5.250m.
82	cut;ovoid, straight sides gradual to pointed bottom	5.450m.-5.250m.
85	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.460m.-5.330m.
86	cut;ovoid, concave sides moderate to concave bottom	5.460m.-5.330m.
99	layer;gravel with silt and clay	5.470m.--------



Line of four post holes with associated fills cutting natural gravel. Middle Bronze Age date.

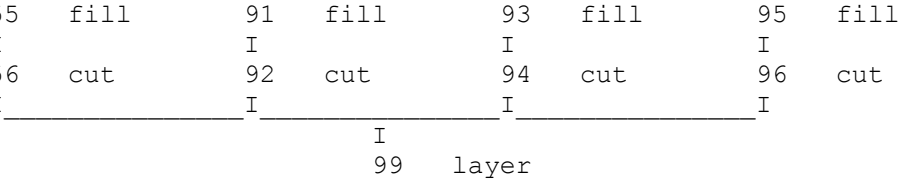
Plan: 99 Section: 3

C/S: 6.11-14,19-26,31-34
B/W: 6.10-13,18-25,31-34
Phase: 3

Group 2f.

55	fill;yellow brown clayey sand silt	5.340m.-5.100m.
56	cut;linear with butt-ends, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.340m.-5.100m.
91	fill;mid brown sandy silty clay	5.280m.-5.170m.
92	cut;ovoid, straight sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.280m.-5.170m.

93	fill;mid brown sandy silt clay	5.280m.-5.160m.
94	cut;ovoid, straight sides abrupt slope to flat bottom	5.280m.-5.160m.
95	fill;mid brown sandy silt clay	5.280m.-5.130m.
96	cut;ovoid, straight sides gradual slope to pointed bottom, undercut to north	5.280m.-5.130m.
99	layer;gravel with silt and clay	5.470m.--------

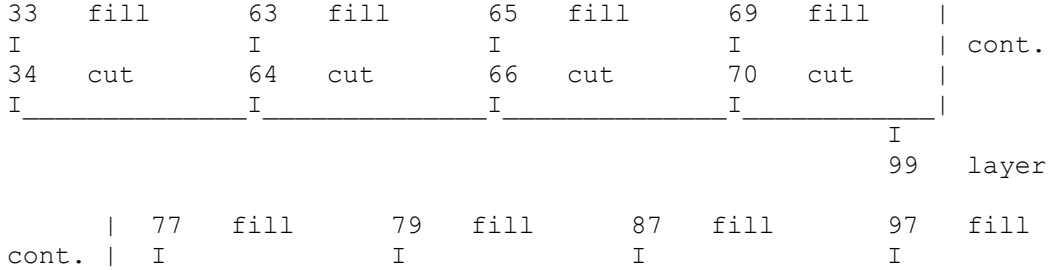


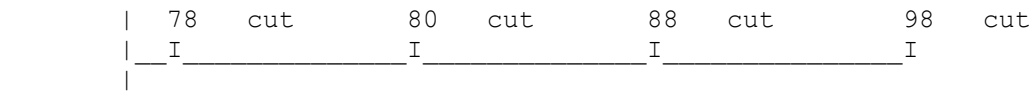
Butt-ended linear pit with three stake holes and associated fills at one butt end, cutting natural gravel. Middle Bronze Age date.

Plan: 99 Section: 3C/S: 3.5-8
B/W: 3.7-10
Phase: 3

Group 2g.

33	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.440m.-5.170m.
34	cut;truncated, concave sides, bottom not reached	5.440m.-5.170m.
63	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.220m.-5.010m.
64	cut;ovoid ?,concave sides, bottom not reached	5.220m.-5.010m.
65	fill;yellow orange sandy clay silt	5.430m.-5.020m.
66	cut;circular,straight sides gradual slope to pointed bottom	5.430m.-5.020m.
69	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.470m.-5.250m.
70	cut;sub-circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.470m.-5.250m.
77	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.480m.-5.350m.
78	cut;ovoid, straight sides moderate slope to concave base	5.480m.-5.350m.
79	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.470m.-5.300m.
80	cut;ovoid, straight sides sharp slope to flat bottom	5.470m.-5.300m.
87	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.370m.-5.280m.
88	cut;circular, concave sides gradual slope to concave bottom	5.370m.-5.280m.
97	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.370m.-5.120m.
98	cut;circular, straight sides gradual slope to pointed bottom, undercut to east	5.370m.-5.120m.
99	layer;gravel with silt and clay	5.470m.--------

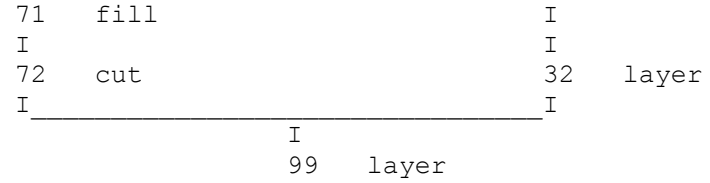




Eight unrelated pits with associated fills cutting natural gravel. Middle Bronze Age date.

Plan: 99 Section: --
C/S: 4.34,35 6.15-18,27-30 7.26-30
B/W: 6.14-17,26-29 7.22-37
Phase: 3
Group 2h.

32	layer;light brown gravel with sandy clay silt	5.500m.-5.240m.
71	fill;mid brown sandy clay silt	5.280m.-5.190m.
72	cut;irregular, irregular sides gradual slope to flat bottom	5.280m.-5.190m.
99	layer;gravel with silt and clay	5.470m.--------



Gravel lens and natural feature with associated fill. Dating uncertain.

Plan: 99 Section: --

C/S: 3.9-12
B/W: 3.11-14
Phase: 3