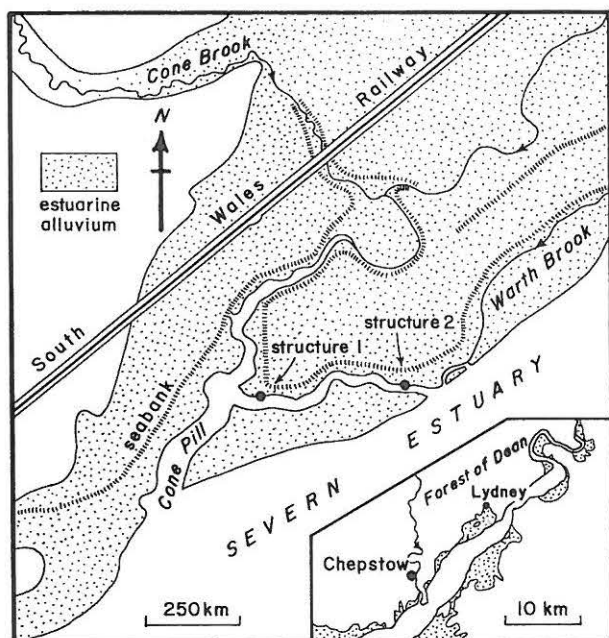


TWO PROBABLE WOODEN JETTIES AT CONE PILL, LYDNEY LEVEL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE

by J.R.L. Allen

Cone Pill in the parishes of Woolaston, Alvington and Lydney (with Aylburton) is the tidal lower reach of the Cone Brook, entering the middle Severn Estuary at the southwestern end of the Lydney Level on the flanks of the Forest of Dean (Figure 1). Over the last five to ten years, the expansion of lozenge-shaped shoals and channels along the northwestern margin of Lydney Sands has caused the marsh-edge in the general vicinity of Cone Pill to retreat inland along two great arc-shaped cliffs at a rate measuring as much as one metre per month. By 1999 the erosion had pushed the coast back roughly to the position of a former, nineteenth-century tributary of Cone Pill, known at the time as Warth Brook (Figure 1). This tributary is recognisable as an expanding, open channel in all nineteenth-century maps of the area, although contemporaneous coastal erosion, a harbinger of present events, had breached a short portion. Stratigraphic sections at the confluence with

Figure 1: The Cone Pill area as it existed in 1879-80, showing the location of the two wooden jetties on the lower reach of Warth Brook.



Cone Pill show Warth Brook to have been comparable in width and depth with Cone Pill itself. By around the end of the century, however, the local sedimentary regime in the estuary had changed. The lower reaches of Warth Brook were silting up rapidly and new marsh was quickly spreading southeastward away from the former shoreline.

The present erosion has exhumed and exposed on the coastal cliffs two contrasting wooden structures that formerly stood on the right bank of the lower reaches of Warth Brook (Figure 1). More of the structures remain concealed beneath the marsh surface but already there have been possibly substantial losses to the river.

Structure 1 (Figure 2A), lying near the confluence of Warth Brook with Cone Pill (NGR *c.* ST 6080 9922), consists of four parallel rows of closely spaced, upright sawn planks (0.08x0.23 m section) and poles (0.07-0.13 m diameter) to which a few stout horizontal timbers had been secured with iron fixings, now badly corroded. Except where they had been exposed for some time, these deal timbers were fresh-looking and showed no signs of decay. Against one row of timbers sheets of corrugated iron had been placed. The rows, jutting out southwestward into the former Warth Brook, are spaced at 1.75 m, 2.5 m and 1 m apart, counting from the southeast. Their tops lie at about 2 m below the present surface of the adjoining marsh. No evidence remained of any decking that might have been placed across the uprights, but the design suggests that boats could have been berthed between the two more widely spaced, inner rows. Stacked bundles of coppiced hazel rods and furze, together with pieces of sacking, had been put on the surface of the mud that lay between the rows, possibly to give the builders a firm footing. No artefacts were found in association with the structure, but the silt around the wooden rows yielded numerous sheep and cattle rib and long bones and also vertebrae.

Structure 2 is quite different in character (Figure 2B), lying roughly 325 m to the west and near the short breach on Warth Brook (*c.* ST 6113 9925), by means of which it could have been accessed. Jutting out southward away from the bank of Warth Brook, the exposed part consists of an elaborate, three-dimensional, bolted framework 2.75 m wide of cross-braced, slightly squared poles 0.20-0.25 m in diameter. Only the wood that lay closest to the marsh surface showed signs of decay. The tops of the exposed uprights lie at about 0.95 m below the present marsh surface. Several centimetres



Figure 2: Views of the wooden jetties (spade for scale 0.94 m tall).

A - Structure 1 seen from the east (the far row of timbers is concealed from view).

B - Structure 2 seen from the west, with the revetment of upright poles on the far side.

below the top of each upright a shallow slot had been cut on the inner surface, possibly to receive a light hand-rail. About 1.75 m below the tops a deck had been built by laying 0.30-0.35 m wide planks transversely across four longitudinally arranged, roughly squared tree trunks (0.25x0.35 m). A long revetment of upright poles (0.14 m diameter),

probably intended to protect a steep silt bank, extended southeastward from the end of the framework. All that the associated silts yielded was a few lumps of stone and fragments of brick.

No documentary or cartographic evidence directly relating to the age of the structures has so far come to light, but their context, the construction materials and methods, and the freshness of the timbers all point to dates in the late nineteenth or earliest twentieth century as most likely. The location and architecture of the structures suggest that what is exposed on the eroding cliff are parts of jetties at which small boats could berth. As there is no evidence of roads or tracks linking them across the Lydney Level with the hinterland, it must be supposed that whatever cargoes were either landed or shipped at the jetties pertained to the level alone. It seems likely that these cargoes were chiefly of sheep and cattle intended for fattening or for market. Warth Brook, with its jetties as described above, cannot be regarded as other than a very minor haven, but it lies in a long tradition of trading by water at ports along the estuarine shores of the Forest of Dean (Herbert 1979; Fulford *et al.* 1992; Green 1997, 1999), including landing places at other sites on the Lydney Level (Smith 1976; Herbert 1996a, b; Green 1997).

The probable jetties at Warth Brook seem to be an example of landing places built for the convenience of one or two local landowners, but otherwise considered too unimportant to be placed on documentary record or acknowledged officially. Structures of a similar character and status may be expected to have a wide occurrence elsewhere on the coastline of the Severn Estuary Levels. Given the changeable character of the estuary, some of these structures may have already been lost to erosion, whereas others may lie buried in silt, awaiting exhumation. For example, at Horse Pill, 4 km downstream from Cone Pill, the alluvium preserves a variety of early modern pottery and clay tobacco pipes, and a vessel, the *Francis*, is known to have traded on at least one occasion from there in the late sixteenth century (Waters 1977). There is, however, neither an archaeological record of wharfage at the site, nor any known official recognition of Horse Pill as a port.

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SOMERSET WETLAND ARCHAEOLOGY 1999

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Baltmoor Wall, Athelney

Work by Exeter Archaeology, funded by the Environment Agency, produced evidence for a Dark Age clay bank at the foot of the western end of Athelney Hill overlying an organic layer (445-663 cal AD) which was resting on a buried soil. This bank was subsequently cut by a ditch with a fill containing burnt grain dated to 604-774 cal AD. A section through Baltmoor Wall revealed material suggestive of iron working activity. A peat layer above this context produced a date of 445-663 cal BC. On the south side of the hill a peat layer was encountered in a borehole. The top of this peat was still being formed at a very late date (1201-1257 cal AD). A full report is not yet available.

Roman salterns, Huntspill River

Four circular settling tanks were identified from a Roman saltern in the south bank of the Huntspill River (Site 121 in Grove and Brunning 1998, fig.1). Pottery from the Roman sites on the Huntspill is