

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

PRIORS GREEN, TAKELEY,

ESSEX

TL 5830 2135

On behalf of

Thames Water Utilities Ltd

SEPTEMBER 2007

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Engineering Division (PU002)
Gainsborough House
Manor Farm Road
Reading
Berkshire
RG2 0JN

PREPARED BY Eoin Fitzsimons & John Moore

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ENQUIRES TO *John Moore Heritage Services
Hill View
Woodperry Road
Beckley
Oxfordshire OX3 9UZ
Tel/Fax 01865 358300
Email: info@jmheritageservices.co.uk*

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CONTENTS

	Page	
<i>SUMMARY</i>	1	
1 INTRODUCTION	1	
1.1 Site Location	1	
1.2 Planning Background	1	
1.3 Archaeological Background	1	
2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION	3	
3 STRATEGY	3	
3.1 Research Design	3	
3.2 Methodology	3	
4 RESULTS	4	
4.1 Adjacent to Dunmow Road	4	
4.2 Adjacent to East Cottage	6	
4.2.1 Prehistoric features	6	
4.2.2 Medieval features	6	
5 FINDS	7	
5.1 The Iron Age Pottery	7	
5.2 The Medieval Pottery	7	
5.3 Cremated human bone	8	
5.4 Flint	9	
5.5 Iron nails	10	
6 DISCUSSION	10	
6.1 Earlier prehistoric	10	
6.2 The Iron Age	11	
6.3 The Romano British	11	
6.4 The Medieval	11	
6.5 The Post-Medieval	12	
7 BIBLIOGRAPHY	12	
 FIGURES		
Figure 1	Site location	2
Figure 2	Sections	5

Summary

John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief during the excavation for a new Thames Water pipeline. Several phase of former activity on the site were identified.

Earlier prehistoric activity in the form of discarded flints was present in sufficient quantity to suggest occupation or a settled activity in the near vicinity of East and West cottages. Some of the flints appear to be of the late Neolithic or early Bronze Age. Later prehistoric activity was represented by two Iron Age cremations.

Pottery suggests that this land was used for agriculture in the Romano British period. Ditches suggest either agricultural land divisions or the edge of a small settlement in the 12th and 13th centuries. Intermittent small-scale quarrying for sand has been carried out on the site during the post-medieval period.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The development comprised a linear pipeline crossing the old A120 road from the pumping station east of Crumps Farm, then running westwards along the north side of Dunmow Road and then north and west of East and West Cottage to Jacks Lane. The length was c. 300m centred on NGR TL 5830 2135.

1.2 Planning Background

As part of the consideration for the construction of a new sewage pipeline for the Priors Green development at Takeley Thames Water Utilities Ltd consulted the Historic Environment Management Team of Essex County Council (HEM). As part of the pipeline was to cut across the Roman Road of the A120, which is known to be archaeologically significant, it was recommended that archaeological monitoring work needed to be undertaken during the initial stripping process. HEM produced a Brief for the work. A Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by John Moore Heritage Services on behalf of Thames Water and approved by HEM outlined the method by which the archaeological work would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The pipeline cut across the old A120 which runs along the Roman Road of Stane Street (HER 4698). The Roman road runs from Colchester through to Braughing in Hertfordshire. A number of Roman settlements have been identified set back from the road edge and medieval settlements both on the roadside and set back.

Recent work by Essex County Council Field Archaeology Unit on the Priors Green development has revealed Bronze Age (probably late rather than middle Bronze Age) settlement. Within these features have been residual flintwork from the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods indicating activity of these periods in the area. In addition late

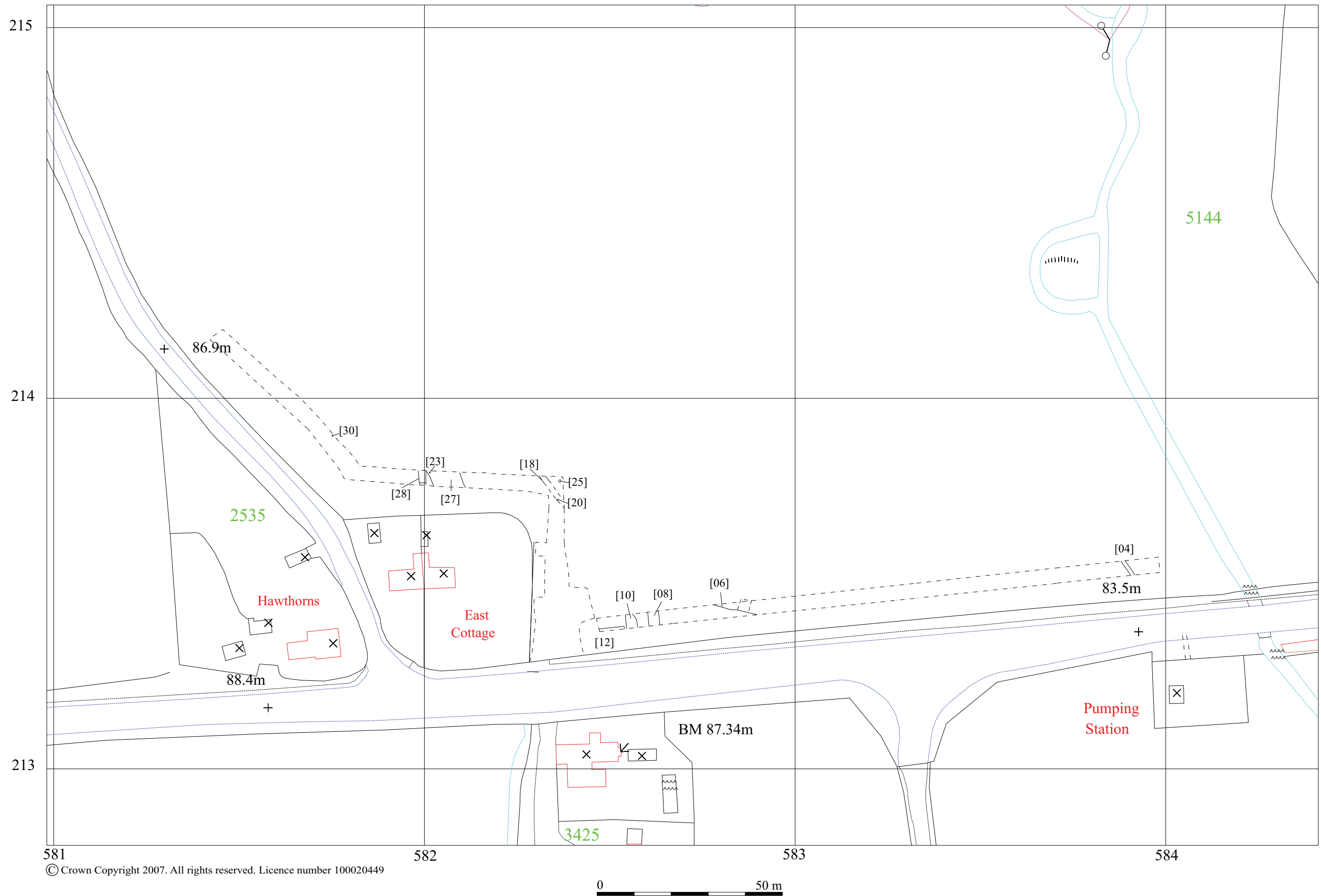


Figure 1. Site Location

Iron Age and Roman field systems have been found along with some medieval settlement adjacent to Jacks Lane (pers. com. Adrian Screwby).

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

The aims of the investigation as laid out in the Written Scheme of Investigation were as follows:

- To identify, investigate and record any archaeological remains exposed during the ground works
- To make public the results of the work.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

HEM issued a Brief for the work, which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with HEM.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994 & 1995) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The pipeline was constructed in open trench excavation. The topsoil strip for the easement was 4m wide.

An archaeologist was present on site during the course of the stripping for the pipeline easement along with the topsoil strip for the compound. A 360° excavator equipped with a toothless ditching bucket carried out the topsoil strip. The 800mm wide trench across the northern half of the road was monitored. The connection from the north side of the road to the east-west length and the trench across southern side of the road was not monitored as the contractor did not inform the archaeologist of when this was occurring. The excavation within the pumping station compound was also monitored.

The length of easement from north and west of the compound was cleaned after the topsoil strip and features were investigated and recorded by a team of four archaeologists.

Standard John Moore Heritage Services techniques were employed throughout, involving the completion of a written record for each deposit encountered, with scale plans and sections drawings compiled where appropriate.

4 RESULTS (Figures 1-2)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [] indicate features i.e. cuts, although is also used for the grouping of modern cuts and fills; while numbers in () show historic feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Adjacent to the Dunmow Road

The lowest deposit encountered was the natural geological deposit (02), which was pale orange-brown clay with 10% gravel and flint, sandy in places where there were pockets of denser gravel up to 35% by volume. This was on the lower slope adjacent to Dunmow Road. On the crest of the slope, approximately from feature [08] westwards and northwards the natural deposits comprised orange flinty gravel in an orange sandy clay matrix with pockets of orange clay (03). The overlying 250mm thick ploughsoil (01) was a mid grey-brown slightly clayey silt with varying concentrations of gravel. The interface between the two geologies is close to feature [06] (Fig. 1).

Cut into the natural deposit (02) were features [04] and [06]. [04] was a linear ditch which was orientated NNW-SSE and was 1m wide. It was filled with (05) which was dark grey-brown clayey silt with occasional gravel and chalk pieces. The upper fill contained a piece of animal bone and fragments of brick or tile.

Feature [06] was linear and orientated WNW-SSE. Only a west side that was at an angle of 10-20° could be identified. The base of the feature was flat and at least 3.40m wide. This feature was filled with pale-mid grey-brown sandy clay containing 5-10% gravel (07). The colour of the fill gradually changed colour to pale brown-yellow at the base of the feature. The fill was approximately 3.40m wide. No distinct east side was identifiable and the impression gained was that this feature was a lynchet formed by ploughing parallel to the slope (Fig. 2). Contained within the fill was a relatively large amount of Brown Sandy and Orange Sandy wares with some animal bone (since misplaced) and fragments of tile and brick.

Cut into the natural deposit on the crest of the slope (03) were three features. A 3m wide linear feature [08] was orientated N-S. Its upper fill was a dark grey-brown silty sand with fibrous material and 10% small gravel (09). The feature was either a ditch or more likely connected with gravel extraction as the fill appeared to have been imported onto the site.

Feature [10] was an irregular cut with the southern part linear (again N-S) but with the northern part of the east side curving towards the west side. The fill of this feature consisted of a sandy loam (11) similar to (09). A piece of late post-medieval roof tile was found in the upper fill of this feature. Feature [12] was linear and parallel to the road. It was 1.2m at its widest where seen, extending beyond the south side of the easement. It was filled with (13), which again was similar to (09). A piece of hand made brick was recovered from this fill.

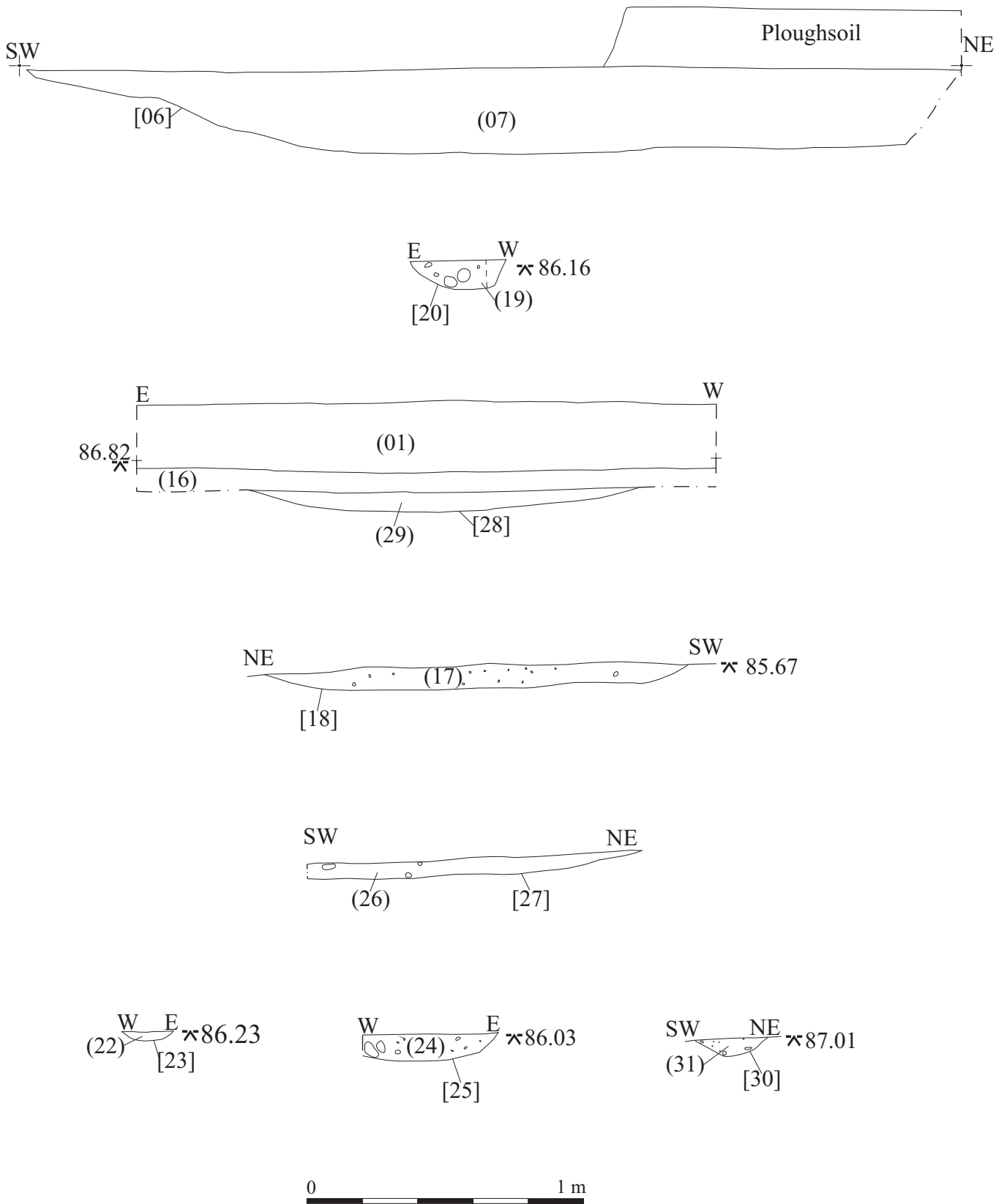


Figure 2. Sections

4.2 Adjacent to East Cottage

All of the features on the part adjacent to East Cottage were cut into natural deposits (03).

4.2.1 Prehistoric features

Cremation pit [20] was circular in shape, and survived 0.10m deep and 0.35m in diameter. The break of slope at the top was *c.* 80°, while the break of slope with the base was only 30°. The base was sloping gently (Fig.2). The fill of the feature was medium grey-brown with black staining sandy silt with 40% charcoal flecking, 10% small gravel, and 10% small angular stone with the largest fragment being 0.04m in diameter (19). The fill contained burnt human bone, two sherds of Iron Age pottery and some iron nails (see 'Finds' below). The pit had been truncated by the later ditch [18].

Cremation pit [25] was roughly circular with a 0.45m diameter and survived 0.11m deep. The pit had been heavily affected by ploughing and was cut by a land drain. The top of sides was at 30° while the bottom of slope was 15-20°. The pit had a flat base. The fill was moderately compacted mid to dark grey-brown silty clay with 50% small stone inclusions (24). Again the fill contained burnt human bone.

4.2.2 Medieval features

Deposit (16) was a lower ploughsoil which was only visible in the area surrounding East Cottage and further westwards. It was a pale grey-yellow silty sand and sandy clay, which reflected the natural (03). It was 0.09m thick. It contained an assemblage of abraded pottery with five small fragments of brick and tile.

Below deposit (16) was a linear ditch [18] that survived 1.50m wide and only 0.07m deep. It was orientated NW-SE and was heavily disturbed by ploughing. The fill of this feature was mid brown with dark yellow mix sandy silty clay (17 & 21) that contained a small fragment of tile.

A small posthole [23], which was 0.19m in diameter and 0.03m deep was cut into the fill of ditch [27]. The posthole was heavily truncated by modern ploughing. It was filled with moderately compacted dark brown silty clay with small stone inclusions (22). The linear ditch-like feature [27] only survived 0.11m deep but was 6.20m wide (part illustrated Fig. 2). The sides sloped at *c.* 10°, while the base was flat. It was orientated NW-SE and was filled with (26), a hard medium greyish brown silty sand that contained 10% small gravel, 10-15% charcoal flecking and 5% small stone.

A further linear ditch [28] orientated N-S, was 1.50m wide and survived 0.09m deep. The slightly irregular sides sloped at between 20-30 degrees and it had a flat base. The ditch was filled with moderately compacted pale yellow-grey silty clay with 2% small gravel (29). The west side of the ditch had a concentration of large flint nodules and other stone lying on the base. The relationship between this feature and ditch [27] was not discernible but the pottery indicates that ditch [28] was the earlier.

Feature [30] was a small posthole, which was circular in plan, 0.26m in diameter and 0.06m deep. This feature was heavily affected by modern ploughing. The feature was

filled with moderately compacted mid grey-brown sandy clay with small flint nodules no larger than 0.02m and small stones no larger than 0.03m (31).

5 FINDS

5.1 The Iron Age Pottery by Frances Raymond

The two small Iron Age sherds (weighing five grams) from the cremation (19) are made from a soft coarse sandy ware with an oxidised exterior. Both are wall fragments and are almost certainly derived from a single vessel. Such wares had a long history of use throughout the Iron Age and cannot be phased without evidence for vessel style.

5.2 The Medieval Pottery by Paul Blinkhorn

The pottery assemblage comprised 187 sherds with a total weight of 1,042g. It consisted of a range of medieval wares, with the fabrics present suggesting that there was activity at the site during the 12th - 13th centuries. The following types were noted:

Brown Sandy ware: 12 – 13th century? Rough, sand-tempered coarseware with moderate to dense sand temper. 79 sherds, 492g.

Orange Sandy ware: 12th – 13th century? Hard orange sandy coarseware, often with a grey core. 43 sherds, 228g.

Hertfordshire Grey ware: 12th – 14th century. Reduced sandy wares, probably from a number of sources, some of which are as-yet unknown (Turner-Rugg 1993). 45 sherds, 212g.

Heddingham Ware: Late 12th – 14th century. Fine orange micaceous glazed ware (McCarthy and Brooks 1988, 300-2). 12 sherds, 62g

Mill Green ware: Late 13th – 14th century. Sandy glazed ware, main product glazed and slip-decorated jugs (Pearce et al. 1982). 3 sherds, 6g.

GRE: Red Earthenware, 16th – 19th century. Fine sandy earthenware, usually with a brown or green glaze, occurring in a range of utilitarian forms. Such 'country pottery' was first made in the 16th century, and in some areas continued in use until the 19th century. 1 sherd, 3g,

In addition, four sherds (39g) of residual Romano-British material were also present.

The pottery occurrence by number and weight of sherds per context by fabric type is shown in Table 1. Each date should be regarded as a *terminus post quem*. The range of fabric types is perhaps as would be expected in western Essex, comprising sandy coarsewares typical of numerous sites in the county, along with Greywares of probable Hertfordshire type, and small quantities of glazed pottery.

The assemblage was generally very fragmented, with the mean sherd weight of 5.5g being very low for a medieval site. Much of the material was also somewhat abraded, with the surfaces very worn in most cases. The pottery appears to have undergone

considerable attrition before final deposition, and has a generally secondary depositional character. The rimsherds present comprise entirely jugs and jars, and it appears to be entirely of a domestic nature.

Table 1: Pottery occurrence by number and weight (in g) of sherds per context by fabric type

Context	RB		Herts Grey		Brown		Orange		Hedingham		Mill Green		GRE		Date
	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	No	Wt	
16	4	39	24	158	43	269	28	120	9	50	2	2	1	3	U/S
17			11	17	1	1	3	16							12thC
21					2	19	1	14	1	6					L12thC
22							1	3							12thC?
26			1	10	7	30			2	6	1	4			L13thC
29			8	21	26	173	9	74							13thC
31			1	6			1	1							12thC
Total	4	39	45	212	79	492	43	228	12	62	3	6	1	3	

5.3 Cremated human bone by Linzi Harvey

Nature of the sample

A small quantity of cremated human bone was recovered from the fill (19) of a shallow sub-circular pit [20] during archaeological investigations at Prior's Green in Essex in July 2007. The fill of this feature contained about 40% charcoal flecking, and is thus unlikely to represent an *in situ* cremation, but may represent a cremation burial or cremation related deposit. The feature contained two sherds of Iron Age pottery. A number of iron nails were also found within this fill, which may originate from cremation debris or may even suggest the presence of a container. The remains examined here were found in close proximity to a second, probable cremation burial [25], a feature which contained three miniscule fragments of burnt bone (not examined).

Methods

Cremated remains were examined under light magnification (x10) and data recorded onto paper record forms following IFA standards and guidelines (Brickley and McKinley 2004). The aim of this assessment was to characterise the cremated bone as fully as possible, with reference to demography, pathology and the circumstances of the cremation itself. Additional references were used where appropriate.

Discussion

Due to the small size of this sample, very few firm conclusions can be made. The total weight of the bone recovered was 14g, an amount inconsistent with a complete inhumation of any one individual of any age. It is likely therefore, that a great deal of material was lost prior to inhumation or during excavation. The small amount of bone material recovered raises the possibility that this is not a full cremation burial, but a cremation-related deposit or a monumental 'cenotaph' type deposit.

The bone itself was white/light grey and well fired in appearance. This indicates that the individual represented here was cremated at a temperature of more than 600-650°C, for a period of time greater than 2 hours. The firing appears to have been

fairly even. The largest fragments recovered in this sample were around 15mm in length, with the majority of fragments being around 5mm in length.

Despite this, a few skeletal elements were broadly identifiable. At least two fragments of sturdy cortical bone were noted, indicating the presence of a humerus or femur. A number of fragments of spongy ‘trabecular’ bone were identified, which may be from the pelvis area. A few fragments of skull vault were also recognised. The majority of the cremated material was unidentifiable due to the high degree of fragmentation. Since all identifiable elements are consistently small in size and fairly gracile, it seems reasonable to assume this sample represents one individual. It is impossible however to determine the sex, age or pathological condition of the individual.

A possible cremation burial [25] (not assessed here) was observed to the north of this cremation burial [20]. It seems reasonable to assume that this cremation burial is of a similar date, as the form of the burial – a shallow pit without a pottery container for the cremated remains – is typical for a late Bronze Age or early Iron Age inhumation in the south of England. The presence of iron nails in the fill of both pits may suggest a container was used to hold the remains although it may be more likely that the nails are remnants of pyre or coffin construction. Cremated remains at this time are thought more likely to have been wrapped in perishable materials. It is worth noting that the small amount of charcoal recovered in the pit fill (c.40% charcoal flecking) indicates the bones had probably been carefully removed from the remains of the cremation pyre, before being deposited in pit [20].

Table 1: Summary table of cremated remains

<i>Burial no.</i>	<i>Weight</i>	<i>Maximum fragment size</i>	<i>Colour of bone</i>	<i>Identifiable elements / notes</i>
(19)/[20]	14g	15mm x 11mm	White / light grey (Indicates a 600°C+ cremation temperature)	Few skull vault fragments, two probable humerus/femur shaft fragments and several possible pelvis fragments. Rest of sample highly fragmented. Even taking dehydration/shrinkage of the bones during cremation into account, the remains are all small in size and fairly gracile, suggesting one individual present in the sample. Sex, age and pathological condition cannot be determined.

5.4 Flint by Roy Entwistle

Introduction

A small assemblage of struck and worked flint was recovered during the watching brief (Table 2). It consists of ten pieces (weighing 101 grams) from the ploughsoil (context 16) and 2 pieces (weighing 31 grams) from a ditch fill (context 26). Aside from a single burnt fragment from context 16, the remainder of the flint is in fresh condition and is composed of tertiary flakes. The raw material seems likely to have been derived from the chalk, which outcrops some five kilometres to the north-west of Takeley.

<i>Item</i>	Number	Weight	Context
Blade	2	5	16
Tertiary Flake	5	49	16
Scraper	1	13	26
Retouched Flake	2	25	16
Broken blade	1	18	26
Burnt worked flint	1	22	16

Table 2: composition of the flint assemblage

The Assemblage

Aside from the three blades (two from context 16 and one from context 26), the assemblage consists of squat flakes, some of which bear prominent step terminations and percussion ripples. Two of the flakes from context 16 have been worked to form implements. One has been retouched along one edge to form a borer, with the point snapped off; the other carries crude retouch along one side and a retouched notch on the opposing side. The single scraper has retouch along one side which originally may have continued around the distal end, where the flake has been snapped off.

Conclusion

The flint finds forms a small and largely unstratified assemblage, which seems likely to derive from more than one prehistoric period. However, the technological characteristics of the flakes and the form of the single scraper may indicate a late Neolithic or early Bronze Age origin for at least some of the finds.

5.5 Iron nails by John Moore

Cremation pit {25} contained parts of two iron nails (24). One has a sub-rounded head 6.5mm x 5.2mm in plan tapering (5mm deep) to a small shank 2mm in diameter. The other is less well-formed with the head partly broken. The head is irregular with maximum dimensions of 7mm in plan and depth.

Cremation pit [20] contained parts of a minimum of eight nails represented by the shanks (19). There is a variety of nails including two were probably more decorative than functional. These will be described and illustrated in a publication after x-raying.

6 DISCUSSION

6.1 Earlier Prehistoric

The earlier prehistoric is represented by several flints. Some of them are probably of late Neolithic or early Bronze Age date. Given the relatively small area investigated they must be more than casual losses during foraging, hunting or other sporadic activities. The number suggests a more settled activity or even occupation being in the near vicinity.

6.2 The Iron Age

Iron Age activity is represented on this site by two cremations, features [20] and [25]. The pottery that came from [20] was of an unidentifiable form, although was from the same vessel. In cremation [25] no vessel or urn was apparent. Both of the cremations were heavily affected by modern ploughing. Both features had been heavily truncated; [20] by the later ditch and [25] by ploughing. It is possible that the two sherds are part of an urn with the majority being removed by ploughing although urns are a late Bronze Age tradition and one would expect either rim or base sherds to survive rather than the body sherds. Whether the cremations were covered by a small barrow is unknown; later ploughing would have removed evidence for a surrounding shallow quarry ditch.

The presence of nails offers several possibilities: that the burnt remains were placed in wooden containers; the bodies prior to burning were in coffins; some other object was burnt on the pyre or placed in the cremation pit. No evidence for coffins in the Iron Age is known to the authors. The fact that so many nails were present in the cremation pit [20] suggests that an object was placed in the cremation pit as although the bone remains appear to have been carefully retrieved from the pyre would nails have been? The presence of the two larger nails again raises questions. Were they decorative or did they come from a large object that was burnt on the pyre along with the body. The Arras culture burial practice included accompanying inhumations with burial vehicles (Cunliffe 2005). Did something accompany the individual to the afterlife being burnt on the pyre with the nails collected and placed with the burnt human remains?

6.3 The Romano-British

Four residual sherds of Romano-British pottery were found in the lower plough soil (16). They most probably ended up in the land adjacent to East Cottage from manuring practises and represent an extension of the Roman field system known further to the east.

No trace of the Roman road was visible. If it was on the same line of the present road then it would have been destroyed by the deep construction for the road. No roadside ditch was seen. Service connections to the pumping station on the south side of the road had caused deep disturbance. The north part of the road and the connection to the main east-west length was not monitored.

6.4 The Medieval

The medieval activity on this site appears to commence in the 12th century continuing into the late 13th century. It is represented by the remnants of a field system, or the edge of a settlement. The pottery was from a domestic situation; it was very broken and abraded and underwent considerable attrition before its final deposition. This could be an indicator that these features were more to do with agriculture rather than a settlement with the material being spread on the fields during manuring. Feature [06], the lynchet-like feature, must have formed by ploughing perhaps forming the edge to a field or a sub-division with different planting regimes. The lower part of the present field is heavier and at the time of the work the upper part was planted with a cereal crop while the lower part was unplanted.

The two postholes contained pottery dating from the 12th to 13th centuries while the small ditch [18] is dated to the late 12th to 13th centuries. The ditch [28] dates from the 13th century and is replaced by a larger feature [27] that dates from the late 13th century. The last may be a recut ditch or other type of feature as it is too wide for a single episode ditch.

The deposit of large flint nodules and other stones in the fill of ditch [28] probably derives from an episode of field clearance of large stones.

6.5 The Post-Medieval

Features [08], [10] and [12] are likely to be from sand extraction. The material infilling them appeared to have been brought onto the site for that purpose.

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