JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

GATEHAMPTON FARM, GORING, OXFORDSHIRE.

NGR SP 6029 7973

On behalf of

Thames Water Utilities Ltd.

OCTOBER 2007

REPORT FOR	Thames Water Utilities Ltd. Clearwater Court (RBH2) Vastern Road Reading RG1 8DB
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the excavation for a new pipeline as phase one of improvement works to existing operations for Thames Water supplies at Gatehampton, Goring. The two known palaeochannels were found along with a possible posthole. Artefacts recovered from the excavated material included a Palaeolithic flint long blade, sherds of late Iron Age and Roman pottery. The long blade within a ploughsoil suggests that further knapping deposits are present west of those previously found. The Iron Age pottery indicates that more activity of this date occurred on the site than previously believed.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The site is located to the west of the Reading to Didcot railway line south of Goring (NGR SP 6029 7973). From the railway bridge the area slopes down, across a marked ridge to the River Thames. The area lies at c. 45m OD. The site lies on the north bank of the Thames on the inside of a bend, and in the narrowest part of the Goring Gap where the river passes through the Berkshire Downs. Between the chalk escarpment and the river at this point is a flint gravel terrace some 1200m wide, which slopes gently down to the edge of the flood plain. The acidity of the soils has dissolved all the calcareous constituent of the gravel, leaving only flint pebbles between which postglacial clays have percolated. Overlying the gravel alongside the river is a sandbank 200-250m wide. There is a sharp drop from the edge of the terrace onto the floodplain; this was formerly the edge of the river channel, which has subsequently migrated southwards (Allen 1995).

1.2 Planning Background

Thames Water is to undertake various improvement works to the existing water operations site at Gatehampton. Phase 1 was to consist of a new pipeline approximately 320m in length within a 10m easement strip that ran from the railway bridge in a south-westerly direction towards the river to join an existing pipe. The easement stripping was to be to a depth of c. 0.4m below the current ground surface. The pipe is to be partially buried and the pipe trench was to be approximately 1m wide and 0.7m in depth. The exposed part of the pipe will be covered with topsoil. Due to the potential of the work to impact on archaeological remains, (see below) Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) suggested a watching brief be carried out during the groundworks.

1.3 Archaeological Background

The area where the pipeline is to be laid contains a number of very important archaeological features. These include approximately seven Bronze Age barrows that make up part of a larger barrow cemetery, a Neolithic enclosure ditch that may be part of a causewayed enclosure, a Roman corn drier, a Grubenhaus and spreads of Mesolithic and Neolithic artefacts. The site was crossed by a late Pleistocene channel, and in the resulting hollows successive prehistoric occupation horizons accumulated.

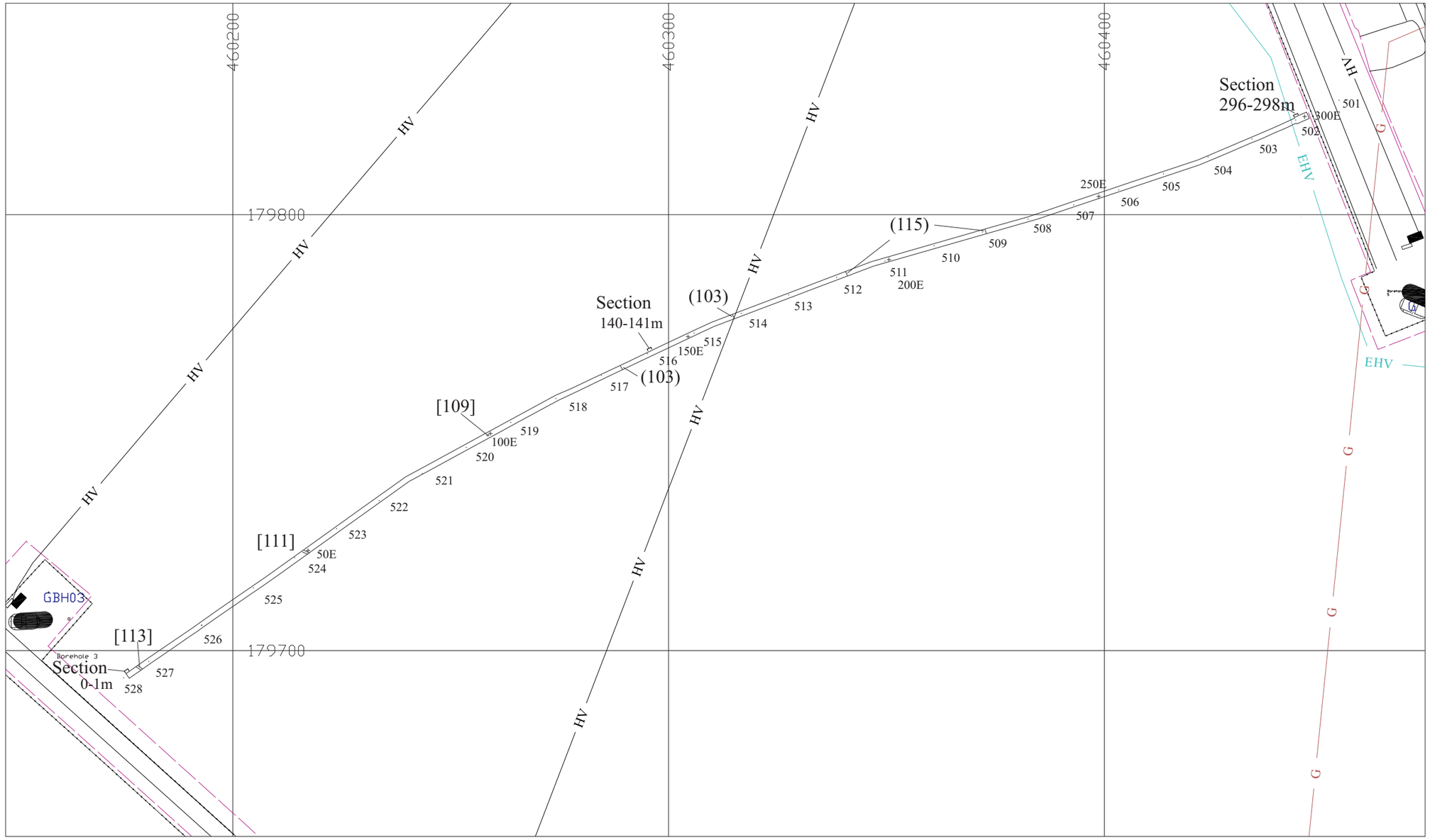


Figure 1. Site and trench location plan

A long blade industry indicates a probable butchery site of the early postglacial period (Allen 1995). In the wider context there are further barrows and a villa east of the railway line. Excavations were undertaken prior to water pipe laying between 1985 and 1988 (*ibid*).

From the results of the 1985-1992 work (Allen 1995,) the top of the archaeology over most of the route was expected at a depth of *c*. 400mm. Topsoil of 250mm overlies a ploughsoil of *c*. 150mm. East of the railway the archaeology is lower at *c*. 800mm with a much thicker old ploughsoil.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To identify and record any archaeological features and artefacts exposed during the groundworks.

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

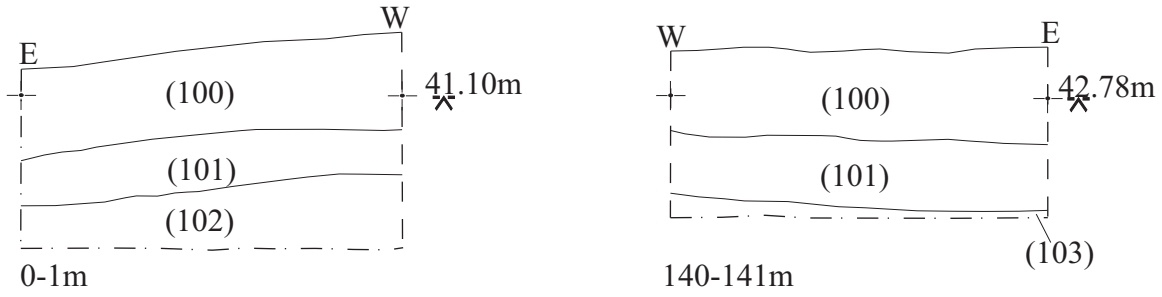
OCAS issued a Brief for the work, which John Moore Heritage Services carried out to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS and Thames Water. The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994).

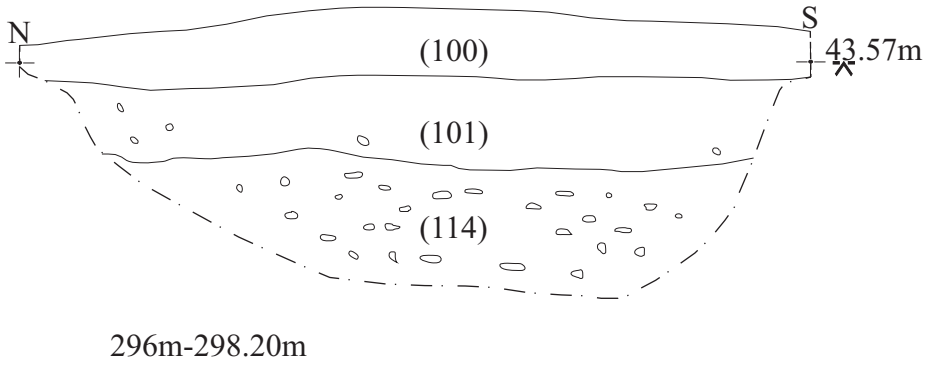
3.2 Methodology

Immediately prior to site works commencing it was decided that easement stripping would not be carried out due to the potential damage to archaeological remains, and instead that a non-ground penetrating method of terram matted hardcore being placed on the top of the ground, be employed. An archaeologist continuously monitored the excavation of the pipe trench, which was 305m long, 1.6m wide, and *c*. 500mm deep.

Within the trench, several context changes occurred, and as such, it was decided that representational sections of the trench should be recorded, with this occurring at every 35m. Ten sections in total were recorded of which, three are included within this report (Fig. 2) and the remainder are within the archive. A plan was made that includes the points at which certain contexts receded and others were more visible in the base of the trench (also within the archive).

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





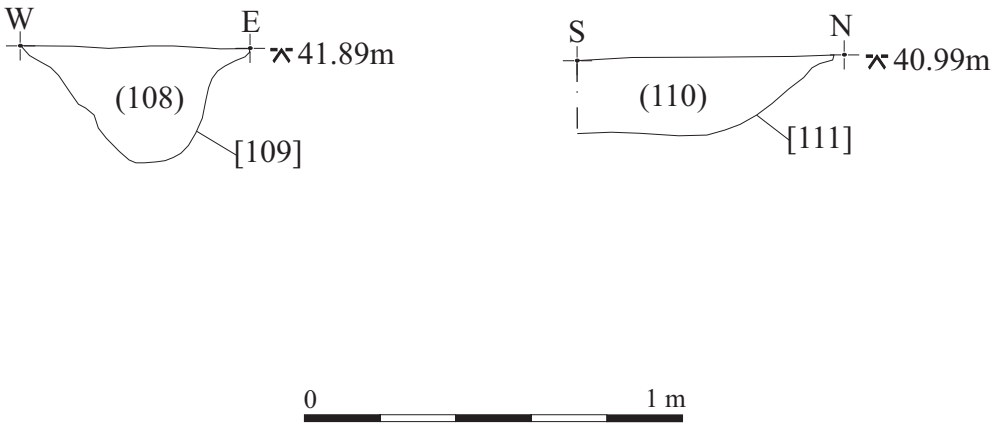


Figure 2. Representative sections of trench and possible features [109] and [111]

4 RESULTS (Figs. 1 and 2)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. cuts; while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. All measurements given along the trench are from the west end, i.e. 100E is a point 100m along the trench from the west end. Points 501 – 528 on Figure 1 are construction survey points and Ordnance Survey co-ordinates of each are contained within the archive.

Natural deposits of yellow-orange silty sand and flint gravel (102) were present at the west end of the trench at a depth of 0.36m. These were seen from 0 to 49E and again from 71E to 134E where the top of it was up to 0.46m below ground level. Within the surface of (102) were natural pockets of loose, dark brown, sandy-loam (105), which were less than 0.5m deep in places, and as shallow as 0.01m.

Overlying the natural deposits was a brown-grey, sandy loam of c 0.4m depth (101). A rise in the ground level of the site between 49E and 71E resulted in the lower part of (101) remaining in the base of the excavated trench still covering the top of natural (102). Whether this material is an old ploughsoil or colluvial deposits is unknown. This also partly overlaid the western side of palaeochannel deposit (103).

Stratigraphically above and cut into natural deposit (102) were two deposits of yellow-orange, sandy loam, which had a high sand content (103 and 115). (103) occurred between 134E and 165E while (115) lay between 194E and 226E (as seen but extending further to the east at a lower level than excavated). These deposits are the latest fills of the two palaeochannels discovered by Allen (1995). The eastern one occurred on a slightly higher plateau than the topography further west.

Overlying the eastern part of palaeochannel deposit (103) and the eastern palaeochannel (115) was a ploughsoil of red-brown, friable sandy loam (104). This had a higher concentration of flint nodules and stones from 253E to the west end of the trench (114). This ploughsoil was at least 0.40m deep with the base of it not being seen.

At the eastern end of the trench from *c.* 260E was a further ploughsoil of friable brown-grey, sandy loam (again numbered 101) that overlay ploughsoil (114). This was 0.18-0.22m thick. The uppermost deposit across the field was the modern ploughsoil of dark brown, sandy loam (100), around 0.02m deep.

The extent of the deposits described above is slightly distorted in that the trench was excavated to a set depth cutting across the 'grain' of the stratigraphy that is dictated by the topography.

Within the trench a few possible features were encountered. A possible posthole [109] was located at *c*. 95E along the trench line. This was 0.4m in diameter, and 0.3m deep (Fig. 2). It was filled with a loose, dark brown, sandy loam (108). A possible gully [111] was found at *c*. 49E that was roughly 1m wide, 0.2m deep, and was running into the side of the trench. Another possible gully [113] occurred at 2.8E along the trench and was 0.5m wide. This was 1.60m long within the trench extending beyond the sides of the trench. Both were filled with a loose, dark brown, sandy loam. Although [113] was quite regular in plan, it was very irregular when sectioned.

Likewise [111] was very irregular when sectioned. These features occurred within an area which had pockets of sandy-loam deposits (105), and all produced sterile fills similar to (105). While feature [109] may possibly be a posthole, features [111] and [113] are more likely to be natural features.

Finds of pottery and tile were recovered from contexts (100), (103) and (104).

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery and Tile Fragments (by Francis Raymond)

Twenty-two pieces of pottery (weighing 261 grams) and two tile fragments (weighing 22 grams) were recovered during the watching brief (Table 1). The largest groups date to the post-medieval (13 sherds, weighing 201 grams) and Roman periods (seven fragments, weighing 63 grams) with only one sherd of medieval date being represented (weighing five grams).

As with most of the pottery, the remaining three sherds are wall fragments providing no evidence for vessel form. One is in a grog tempered ware of likely first century AD date, of a type that emerged during the late Iron Age and continued in production after the Roman Conquest (Table 1, 100, 155.0 m.). The second sherd is potentially

Context	Distance	No.	Wt. (gms.)	Spot Date/Comments
U/S	-	1	12	Post-medieval
100	-	1	10	?Roman – tile fragment
100	-	1	4	?Roman
100	-	4	39	Post-medieval
100	102.0 m.	1	19	Post-medieval
100	116.0 m.	1	19	Post-medieval
100	151.0 m.	1	4	Post-medieval
100	155.0 m.	1	4	Late Iron Age to early Roman
100	155.0 m.	1	18	Roman
100	155.0 m.	1	12	Roman – tile fragment
100	155.0 m.	1	35	Post-medieval
100	165.0 m.	1	5	Roman
100	166.0 m.	1	31	Post-medieval
100	214.0 m.	1	15	Post-medieval
103	151.0 m.	1	8	Late Iron Age
103	153.0 m.	1	3	Roman
104	-	1	11	Early Roman
104	-	1	14	Post-medieval
104	166.0 m.	1	2	Late prehistoric
104	166.0 m.	1	5	Medieval
104	185.0 m.	1	13	Post-medieval
	TOTALS	**24**	**283**	

Table 1: Catalogue of pottery and tile fragments

of overlapping date, being made from a fabric tempered with a mixture of crushed burnt flint and grog that is likely to be of late Iron Age origin (Table 1, 103, 151.0 m.). The third, which is made from a coarse sandy ware with sparse quantities of burnt flint, cannot be phased closely since it could have been produced at any time between the late Bronze Age and late Iron Age (Table 1, 104, 166.0 m.).

5.2 Other finds

At roughly 253E, a late Palaeolithic flint long-blade was found within ploughsoil (104), similar to others found in the area during the 1985-1992 excavations (Allen, 1995).

6 PALAEOENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS

No palaeoenvironmetal samples were taken during the process of this watching brief.

7 DISCUSSION

The possible features recorded during this watching brief had the same fill, which was decided was actually (105) i.e. a natural deposit probably filling solution holes. In the absence of any other evidence for structures it is also worth considering feature [109], a possible posthole, as a similar non-archaeological feature.

The undulations observed within the sections of the trench are natural and to be expected in a floodplain area. The presence of (114) towards the eastern end of the trench suggests that the depth of the archaeology is actually lower than 800mm, as recorded by the 1988 excavations. The two palaeochannels found earlier (Allen 1995) were again encountered.

A further find of a flint long blade of latest Palaeolithic date was found in a ploughsoil. This suggests other flint knapping deposits may be present further west than those previously found (*ibid*).

Finds of late Ion Age pottery suggests that probably there was more activity of this date than previously thought (*ibid*, 124). The Roman finds indicate that the area was under the plough. The single find of medieval pottery reinforces the view of Allen (1995) that this area was meadowland during this period and that ploughing and associated manuring was not occurring.

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