

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF**  
**AT**  
**CENTURIES, SONNING SEWAGE PUMPING STATION**  
**REPLACEMENT RISING MAIN (4N3G),**  
**OXFORDSHIRE**  
**SU 74163 76136 - SU 74828 76222**

*On behalf of*  
*Thames Water Utilities Ltd*

**DECEMBER 2007**

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## **Summary**

*John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief during the excavation for launch/receptor pits for a new Thames Water pipeline.*

*Several undated ditches were encountered, two of them indicating a further area of human activity not found in the previous evaluation. Part of an Anglo Saxon wooden structure in the form of three upright timbers was also found along with a further upright timber 40m away. Two flints dating to the Mesolithic and the late Neolithic/Bronze Age were recovered.*

## **1 INTRODUCTION**

### **1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)**

The route ran westwards from the Sewage Pumping Station (NGR SU 74828 76222) along the southern edge of the field immediately north of the B478 Playhatch Road before crossing the A4155 Henley Road to end at SU 74163 76136. The geology is mostly terrace gravel overlain by alluvium, with deposits of Langley Silt at the extreme ends of the route.

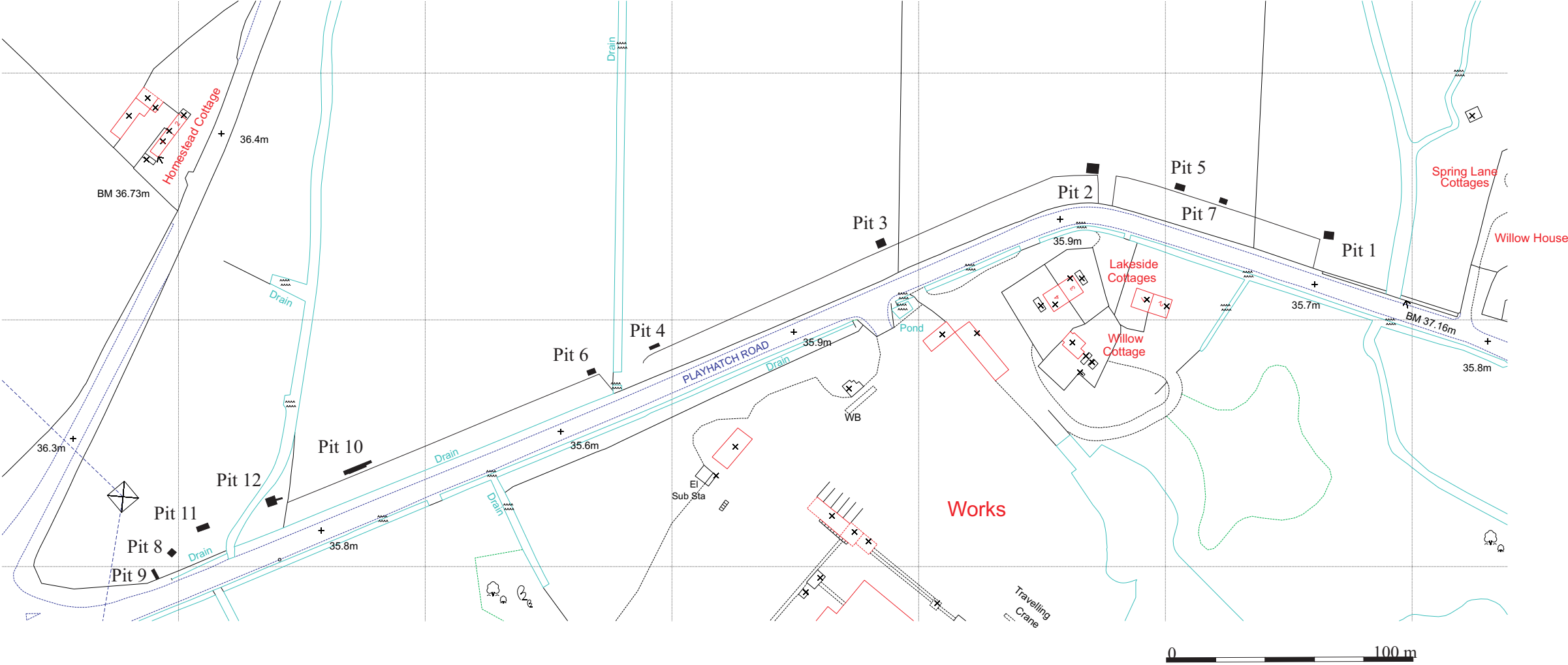
### **1.2 Planning Background**

As part of the consideration for the construction of the replacement rising main at Sonning Thames Water Utilities Ltd consulted the Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS) who advised that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during the period of the groundworks. The reason for this was that significant archaeological remains had been found previously in the field through which the majority of the pipeline was to pass. A Written Scheme of Investigation prepared by John Moore Heritage Services on behalf of Thames Water and approved by OCAS 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**

An archaeological evaluation of the fields to the north of Playhatch Road found a preserved sequence of alluvial and peat deposits on the site, which overlay an ancient palaeochannel. Evidence for prehistoric activity was recovered, including a flint assemblage, which suggested a low intensity usage of the site from the Mesolithic through to the Bronze Age. In addition, a number of features were identified near the boundary between an apparent island of free-draining sands and surrounding wet land. The features were excavated into surviving ancient ground surfaces and included a pre-Christian grave of Iron Age or later date, ditches and post holes. On the margins of the peat to the west of the site, evidence for timbers and possible stabilisation of the wet ground was recorded (Oxford Archaeology 2004). The potential area for archaeological remains for the pipeline were considered to be centred on the area of the angle in Playhatch Road.

The earliest evidence for human presence in the area are three Acheulian ovate hand axes PRN 13151, SU 74577616; PRN 13150, SU 74277604; PRN 2184;



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Figure 1. Site and Pit Locations

SU 74027632) dated from 500,000BC – 40,000BC. Two of these came from immediately south of Playhatch Road. Cropmarks of ?Bronze Age linear features and ?ring ditches are known 400m SW of the W end of the pipeline (PRN 15337; SU74007580). A further cropmark of a circular enclosure is known 500m to the west (PRN 10914, SU 73807597) while a linear cropmark is at SU 74007660 (PRN 15336) and cropmarks of a circular enclosure, a pit and linear features lie 500m NNE of the site (PRN 10915, SU 74876670).

An archaeological evaluation and watching brief 300m SW of the W end of the pipeline recorded features dating from the Neolithic to Roman periods (PRN 15892, SU 739756).

## **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
- The particular aims were to record any remains relating to the activity found during the evaluation north of Playhatch Road.

## **3 STRATEGY**

### **3.1 Research Design**

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the archaeological watching brief to a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed with OCAS.

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**

Directional drilling was used for laying the new pipe. This involved the excavation of launch/receptor pits. In addition pits were excavated for washout chambers. An archaeologist was present on site during the excavation of these pits. The width of the pits were between 1.1m and 2m with the narrower ones being stepped out along their long axis with the removal of the ploughsoil (i.e. Fig 2, Pit 6).

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. ditch cuts, while numbers in ( ) show feature fills or deposits of material. The context number is preceded by the pit number so that [1/03] is a cut 03 within pit 1.

### 4.1 The 'island' and deposits to the east

The apparent island of free-draining sand located in the evaluation (Oxford Archaeology 2004) was encountered in Pits 2, 5 and 7. The highest point was in Pit 2 where the top of the pale-mid yellow sand (2/02) was 270mm below existing ground level. At a depth of 1070mm the sand became interleaved with clay lenses (2/03). To the east, the top of the island in Pit 5 was at a depth of 1300mm where it comprised flinty gravel and pockets of sand (5/06) and in Pit 7 at a depth of 1200mm as pale yellow brown, mottled white, sand with 10% clay content (7/10).

Overlying the island material in Pit 5 was 250mm thickness of pale-mid yellow alluvial clay with some sand and gravel towards the base of the deposit (5/05). This in sequence was overlaid by soft 350mm of pale-mid grey-yellow clay (5/04), followed by 300mm of dark grey-brown slightly clayey and slightly peaty silt (5/03) and then 100mm thick pale brown-yellow mottled orange slightly friable clay (5/02). Within Pit 7 the alluvial sequence above the island deposit, from the base upwards was: soft pale blue-grey and orange-brown clay with occasional sand, 500mm thick (7/04); 400mm of pale blue-grey and orange-brown clay (7/03); and 50mm of mid orange-brown, mottled grey, clay (7/02). Deposits (5/02) and (7/02) can be equated but there appeared to be no similarity between the other deposits in these two pits.

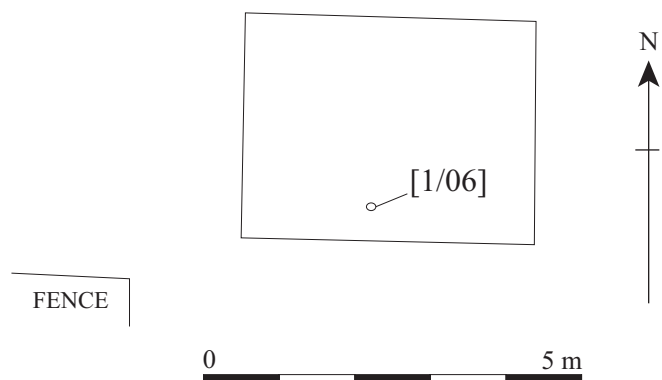
Further east within Pit 1 gravels and green-brown and orange clay (1/05) was seen at a depth of 1350mm. This was overlain by interleaved layers of mid orange-pale brown and grey-blue clay some 100mm thick (1/04) which in turn was covered by 670mm of mid grey clay with occasional charcoal flecks (1/03), in turn covered by 360mm of mid orange-pale brown, mottled grey, clay (1/02). The last is the same as deposit (7/02) but the other deposits cannot be reconciled with those further westwards.

Within Pit 1 and driven into deposit (1/03) was a wooden post [1/06]. This was roughly rectangular with a cross-section measuring 45x100mm. The remaining length was 520mm and the end 160mm had been tapered to a point. The top of the post was sealed by deposit (1/02).

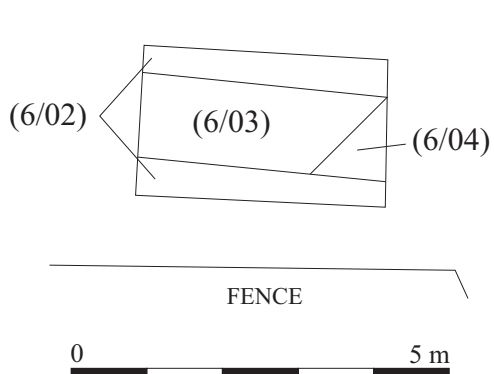
Three posts were found *in situ* in Pit 7 cut into deposit (7/04). They were set in postholes cut into deposit (7/04). All three postholes (7/05, 7/07, 7/14) were circular with a 200mm diameter. The fills of the postholes (7/06, 7/08, 7/09) were pale grey clay. The tops of two of the posts [7/12 & 7/13] survived 100mm above the surface of deposit (7/04); the third was only 50mm high above the surface. Post [7/11] was sunk *c.* 610mm into the ground, while the others were *c.* 700mm [7/12] and 860mm [7/13].

The posts were oak with large heartwood indicating that they were *c.* 20 years old when cut. Post [7/11] from posthole [7/05] had not survived in very good condition. It was 660mm long and had been roughly trimmed to measure 90x65mm at the

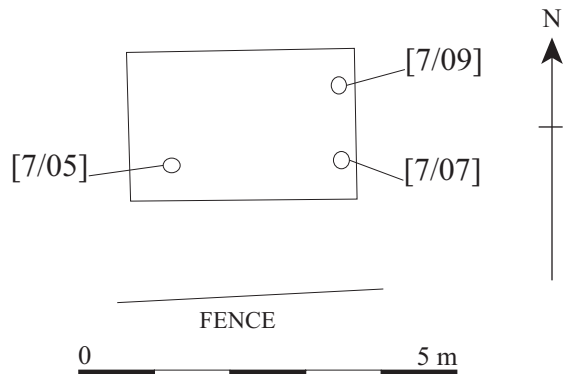
PIT 1



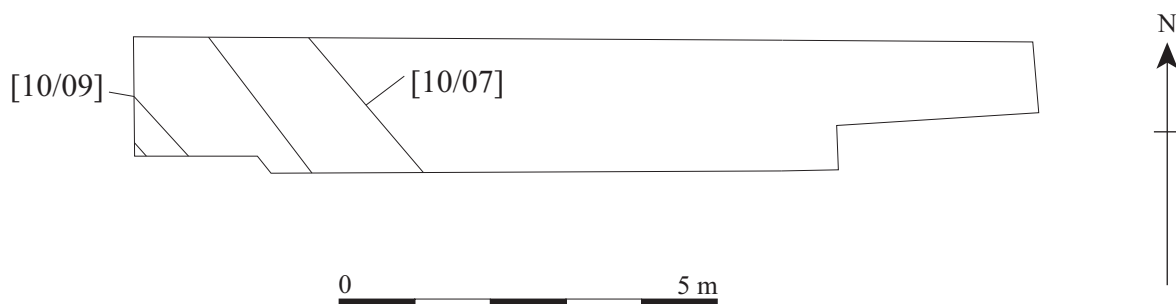
PIT 6



PIT 7



PIT 10





surviving top end, 90x90mm in the middle and 45x80mm at the middle of the taper which narrowed to 25x16mm. The tapered part was trimmed on three sides for a length of 190mm. Post [7/12] from posthole [7/07] was slightly irregular with the bark trimmed off and was 804mm long. The surviving top end measured 88x67mm, the middle 87x65mm and mid taper 54x47 narrowing to the tip 15x10mm. The taper was 340mm long. Post [7/13] from posthole [7/09] survived 960mm long again with the bark trimmed off. The surviving top measured 103x78mm, the middle 95x88, and the mid point of the taper 60x62mm to a tip of 15x15mm. The taper was 370mm long. Post (7/12) was dated to the Saxon period.

The uppermost deposit in all pits was the modern ploughsoil context (01), varying in thickness from 220mm to 300mm.

### **Deposits west of the 'island'**

Again little consistency existed in the alluvial sequence between the pits. Pit 3 was seen to a depth of 1.5m. The lowest deposit seen was pale-mid brown-yellow clay mottled orange (3/06) starting at a depth of 1400mm below ground surface. This was overlain by 330mm of pale yellow-grey slightly friable clay with lenses of pale and mid blue-grey clay with roots (3/05). This was tipping down from west to east. Above the last was 200-350mm of pale yellow-brown clay (3/04) overlaid by 170mm pale-mid grey clay (3/03) under mid orange-brown slightly friable clay with 1% small chalk inclusions (3/02).

Within Pit 4 the lowest deposit was pale yellow clay and sand (4/04) seen at a depth of 1200mm below ground level and continuing for at least 500mm. This was covered in turn by 450mm pale yellow clay (4/03) and pale-mid orange-yellow clay (4/02). 24m to the west Pit 6 had a sequence of pale yellow friable clay with a very slight sand content (4/03). This was at least 1000mm thick commencing at *c.* 500mm below ground level. This was covered by pale orange-grey and pale yellow clay 100-200mm thick.

Deposits (3/02, 4/02, & 6/02) were similar as were deposits (3/03 & 4/03). Deposits (4/04 & 6/04) had a slight similarity although the top levels of these deposits differed by *c.* 500mm.

Cut into the top of deposit (6/03) was the side of a ditch [6/04]. This ditch was at least 1.3m wide and was 650mm deep with the west side at an angle of 60° and a slightly rounded base. It was filled by a primary deposit of pale grey clay under dark grey peaty clay under pale grey clay (6/05).

Pit 10 had a sequence of pale white-orange and pale orange sand (10/06) commencing at 1050mm depth overlain in turn by soft yellow-brown, mottled green clay (10/04), then stiff dark blue-green clay (10/03) and yellow clay (10/02). Pit 11 had a deposit of more than 850mm of pale yellow-brown with grey mottling clay (11/02) under the topsoil.

Cut into the top of the sand (10/06) in Pit 10 were two linear features both aligned northwest/southeast. Ditch [10/07] was just over 1050mm wide and was *c.* 350mm deep with sides at 45°. It was filled by soft dark grey-brown silty clay (10/05) containing a piece of animal bone seen in section but not retrievable. Gully [10/09]

was 400mm wide and c. 150mm deep with sides at 45-60° and a rounded base. The gully was filled by soft dark grey silty clay with 1% gravel content.

Within Pit 9 the lowest deposit seen was pale-mid orange clay, mottled pale blue-grey, containing a layer of white silty clay (9/05). This deposit was encountered at a depth of 1400mm. It was overlaid by 150mm pale grey clay (9/07) and then 350mm friable mid orange-brown clay (9/06). These deposits were cut by a large ditch [9/04] parallel to the road to the south. The ditch was 1.2m deep with the north side 2.5m north of the fence marking the south field boundary. The lowest fill was 500mm of pale grey clay containing occasional brick (9/03) overlain by 700mm of mid orange-brown friable clay containing at least two fragments of roof tile (9/02).

The lowest deposit within Pit 8, at a depth of c. 880mm was pale yellow-grey sand with 5% gravel content and thin lenses of white silty clay (similar to the lens in deposit (9/05)). This deposit was at least 550mm thick and was covered by brown-yellow sand and 30% gravel (8/05). This in turn was covered by mid orange friable clay with a very slight sand content (8/04) and then pale grey friable clay (8/03) and then pale brown clay (8/02). Deposit (9/06) equates with (8/02) and (9/07) with (8/03).

The uppermost deposit in all pits was a ploughsoil (01) of 160- 300mm thickness.

## **5 FINDS**

### **5.1 Flint** (*By David Gilbert*)

Two pieces of worked flint were recovered.

The first was from (2/2). It is a hard hammer struck rejuvenation flake with c. 5% of cortex. It is 38mm long, 31mm wide and 8mm thick. The dorsal surface shows signs of previous flake detachments. A pale grey mottled patina cover the majority of the surface. It is likely to be of a late Neolithic to Bronze Age date.

The second was from (4/1). A soft hammer struck microburin of Mesolithic date. It is 23mm long, 11mm wide and 1mm thick. The dorsal surface displays c. 10% cortex, it shows no patina and is orange brown in colour. It is notched from the dorsal surface, although the snap for the burin blow is not classic it is present. The proximal end has also been trimmed and thinned.

## **6 DATING**

Oak post (7/12) was radiocarbon dated to 1330± 35 BP, with a 95.4% probability of 640-780AD and 68.2% probability of 650AD (55.2%) 700AD, 740AD (13.0%) 770AD. Reference SUERC-15569 (GU-15739).

## 7 DISCUSSION

The previous evaluation on the site (OA 2004) revealed several phases of activity from the Mesolithic through to the modern period. Although dating evidence for features and deposits was scarce many of these were assigned a general prehistoric date. While this is reasonable, the dating of the timber structure in this watching brief to the Saxon period raises problems with the previous dating. Mid Saxon pottery can be mistaken for prehistoric pottery especially when it is in poor condition as was that from the evaluation (OA, 2004, 9). Both investigations have shown that correlating deposits between trenches is not straight forward and that the low-lying land was crossed by braided watercourses that have silted up at different times.

The proximity of the post in Pit 1 to those in Pit 7 (44m apart) would suggest a similar date. However, that in Pit 1 was sealed by a deposit (1/02) that occurred in Pit 7 (7/02) but above a 400mm thick alluvial deposit (7/03) that sealed the surface that the three posts were set in. It is possible that Pit 7 was within the position of a slight depression at the time that the structure was erected and this later flooded causing the deposition of deposit (7/03). Thus this deposit would not necessarily be present in Pit 1. Alternatively the posts in the two pits could be of different periods.

The posts within Pit 7 are part of a structure with the three posts forming a right angle. Exactly what this structure was is unknown but it may have been domestic situated on the edge of the 'island' perhaps seasonally occupied to exploit marshland resources. The burial discovered in the evaluation was thought to be probably pre-Christian of at least Iron Age or later date (OA 2004). While initial analysis of the brooch fragment suggested it was not of Saxon date (*ibid*, 16) this cannot be ruled out given the dating of the timber structure.

Further ditches and gullies were found during the watching brief. That found in Pit 6 is at right angles to two ditches (of differing dates) to that in evaluation Trench 61 (*ibid*, Figs 2 & 10) and may be stratigraphically associated with evaluation ditch 6107.

The ditch and gully found in Pit 10 indicate a further area of activity not identified in the evaluation. This suggests that further areas of human activity may not have been revealed by the early investigation.

The ditch found in Pit 9 is post-medieval in date, formerly a large drainage ditch along the side of the field.

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