JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

FOR

BABLOCK HYTHE RISING MAIN, STANTON HARCOURT PARISH, OXFORDSHIRE

SP 4220 0600 to SP 4342 0445

On behalf of

Thames Water Utilities Ltd

APRIL 2008

REPORT FOR	Thames Water Utilities Ltd Engineering Division (PU002) Gainsborough House Manor Farm Road Reading Berkshire RG2 0JN
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John Moore Heritage Services carried out a watching brief during the excavation for a new Thames Water pipeline. An undated ditch and ploughed out bank was found containing a primary deposit of burnt material. Two undated pits were also recorded.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

Thames Water Utilities carried out the replacement of a rising main along a route close to Bablock Hythe, Oxfordshire. The work was from the Bablock Hythe SPS (SP 4342 0445) and running north for approximately 600m (SP 4356 0522) before turning west following the field boundaries for about 1km when it turns north (SP 4243 0552) towards Stanton Harcourt STW (SP 4220 0600). The geology was Alluvium over 1st Terrace Gravels. The area was relatively flat and lies at approximately 65m OD.

1.2 Planning Background

As part of the consideration for the rising main, Thames Water Utilities Ltd (TWUL) consulted Oxfordshire County Archaeological Services (OCAS). Due to the number cropmarks representing archaeological remains in the area TWUL agreed that an archaeological watching brief should be maintained during relevant groundworks. 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

The development site is located in an area of archaeological potential. A Mesolithic Thames Pick (SMR 13927, SP 4287 0604) has been recovered from the field to the east of Stanton Harcourt STW. Bronze Age artefacts (SMR 5047, SP 4210 0582) have been recovered close to the northern end of the area, to the south west of Stanton Harcourt STW. These are now in the Ashmolean Museum.

Several scatters (SMR 3920, SP 4289 0603; SMR 3934, SP 4260 0598; SMR 3943, SP 4226 0520) of Romano-British pottery have been recorded within 200m of the route of the pipeline. These high concentrations would suggest possible occupation activity in the area. An un-inscribed Roman marble altar (SMR 1662, SP 4350 0420) was dredged up from the Thames a few hundred metres to the south of the Bablock Hythe SPS. Though obviously not *in situ* it indicates the likely presence of a Roman Temple in the area.

Two scatters of medieval pottery (SMR 3923, SP 4234 0522; SMR 3922, SP 4327 0526) dating between the 12th and 14th centuries have also been recovered with 150m to the south of the pipeline. Not far to the west of the pipeline lies the Manor of Stanton Harcourt and a complex arrangement of medieval fish ponds and a possibly moat for an earlier building (SMR 13742, SP 4150 0595).

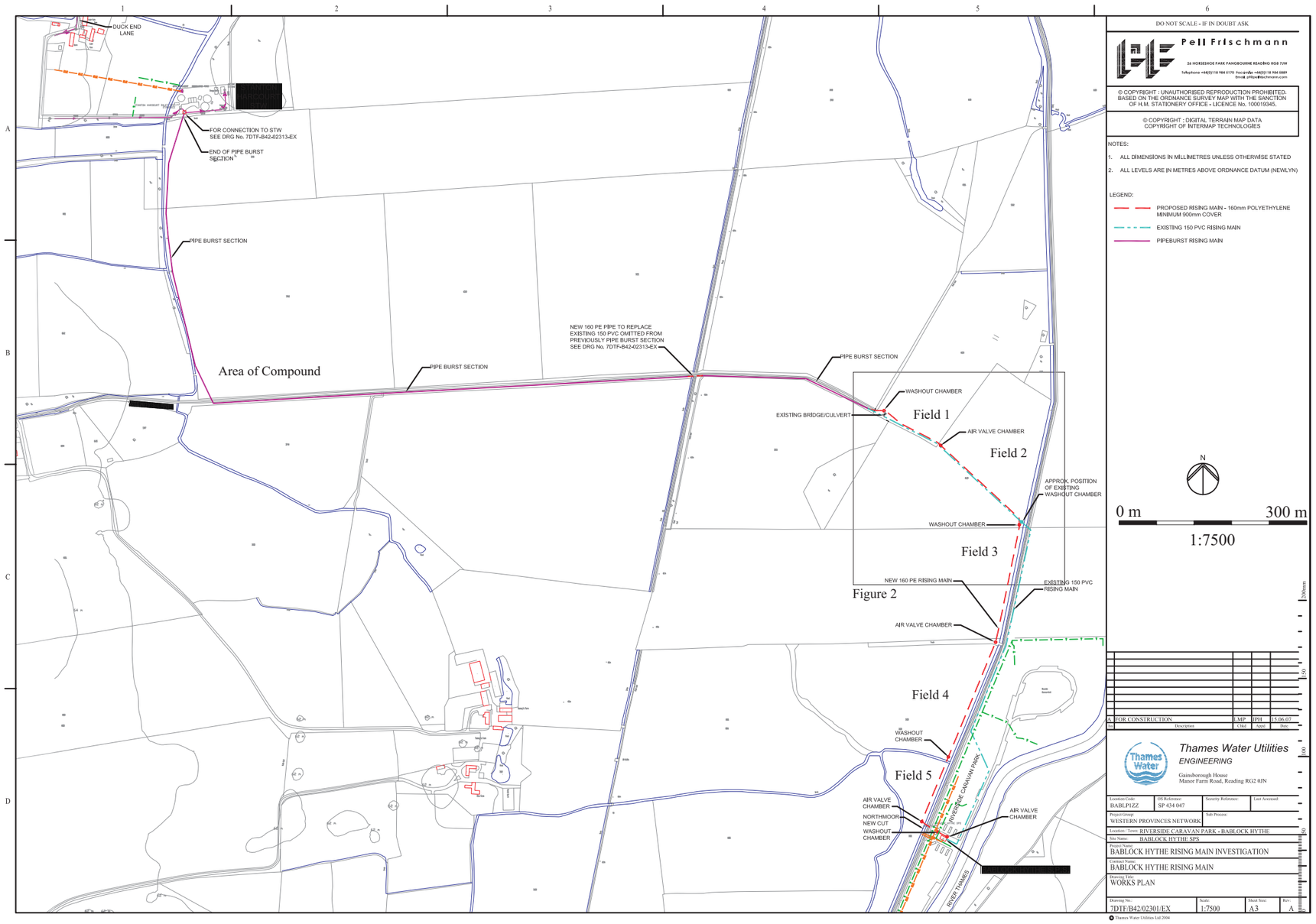

Figure 1. Site location

A few hundred metres to the south of the Bablock Hythe SPS lies the old ferry crossing across the Thames (SMR 1235, SP 4150 0420). In 1279 it was held by John Locus and referred to as the ferry of Babbelak. In 1774 it was called Langley Weir and in 1791 the Biblick Ferry.

Aerial photographs (FAS Oxford 1961 Run 12 4177-4168, 1981 Series 1337, 1338 and the Geonex 1991 Line 15 133-135 and Line 16 077-078) show multiple linear crop-marks as well as what appear to be pits, rectangular and circular enclosures. Fourteen examples have been recorded very close to the pipeline. Four sets of parallel linear features have been considered to be trackways (SMR 8329, SP 4220 0515; SMR 8330, SP 4270 0580; SMR 8333, SP 4320 0580 and SMR 12194, SP 4240 0560) and three are possibly field boundaries (SMR 15041, SP 4320 0550; SMR 15042, SP 4380 0520 and SMR 15062, SP 4280 0480). Seven are distinctly enclosures (SMR 8328, SP 4240 0490; SMR 8332, SP 4306 0505; SMR 12195, SP 4280 0520; SMR 15039, SP 4300 0510; SMR 15040, SP 4290 0550; SMR 15063, SP 4260 0470; SMR 15064, SP 4280 0440). Many of these linear features cross the line of the pipe and many appear longer on the photographs than they are recorded by the SMR. Some of these crop-marks may be associated with the pottery scatters previously noted.

The 1st edition 1:2500 OS map (1876) of the area shows the majority of the fields having the same layout as at present.

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To make a record of any significant remains revealed during the course of any operations that may disturb archaeological remains.

In particular:

- to determine the nature of any crop-marks that cross the line of the rising main
- to record any evidence of Romano-British or medieval activity associated with the crop-marks

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work 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) and the principles of MAP2 (English Heritage 1991).

3.2 Methodology

The pipeline was constructed from the Stanton Harcourt STW to Field 1 (Fig. 1) by pipe bursting. The launch/receptor pits were examined either after excavation or were monitored during excavation. The topsoil strip for the compound was monitored.

Through the fields east of the end of Steady's Lane the pipe was constructed in open cut trench set in a 6m wide easement. The easement was examined after topsoil stripping. The pipe trench was monitored on an *ad hoc* basis to determine the presence absence of archaeological features. The topsoil strip in Field 1 was deep enough to establish that there was no archaeology present. Evidence of a feature was seen after topsoil stripping in Field 2 and the majority of the pipe trench in this field was monitored. Parts of the pipe trench in Fields 3 and 4 were monitored. The pipe was laid by directional drilling in Field 5. The launch/receptor pit at the south end was examined after excavation.

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 2 & 3)

All deposits and features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in [ ] indicate features i.e. cuts, while numbers in ( ) show historic feature fills or deposits of material.

4.1 Steady's Lane

Within the compound at SP 4247 0559 250mm of topsoil (1) overlay pale yellow-brown sandy silt with gravel (2). Steady's Lane was tarmacadam overlying 200mm gravel and shingle make-up (3) over an old subsoil of mid brown silty clay with a large quantity of small gravel (4). This was generally *c.* 150mm thick although it increased to 400mm thick in places. In places this did not remain under (3) and was generally seen in the verge. The subsoil overlay the natural geology that was composed of pale yellow-brown sandy clay with 60% gravel content (7). Contexts [5] and (6) were the cut and fill respectively of the original pipe trench.

4.2 Fields 1 -5

In Field 1 the pasture was supported by a topsoil of friable mid grey-brown clayey silt with 1% fine and medium sized gravel 170mm thick (8). This overlay an old ploughsoil of sticky pale-mid grey-brown very slightly silty clay with 0-10% small and medium gravel content (9). Generally the gravel content was 1-2%. Up-cast from a pond in the south-east corner of the field overlay this last deposit.

Within Fields 2 and 3 the natural 1st Gravel Terrace deposits (12) comprised pale yellow and white sub-rounded and sub-angular gravel with the occasional pocket of the overlying deposit in the top. The overlying deposit was an old ground surface composed of very friable silty clay with 1-2% very fine snail shell fragments and the

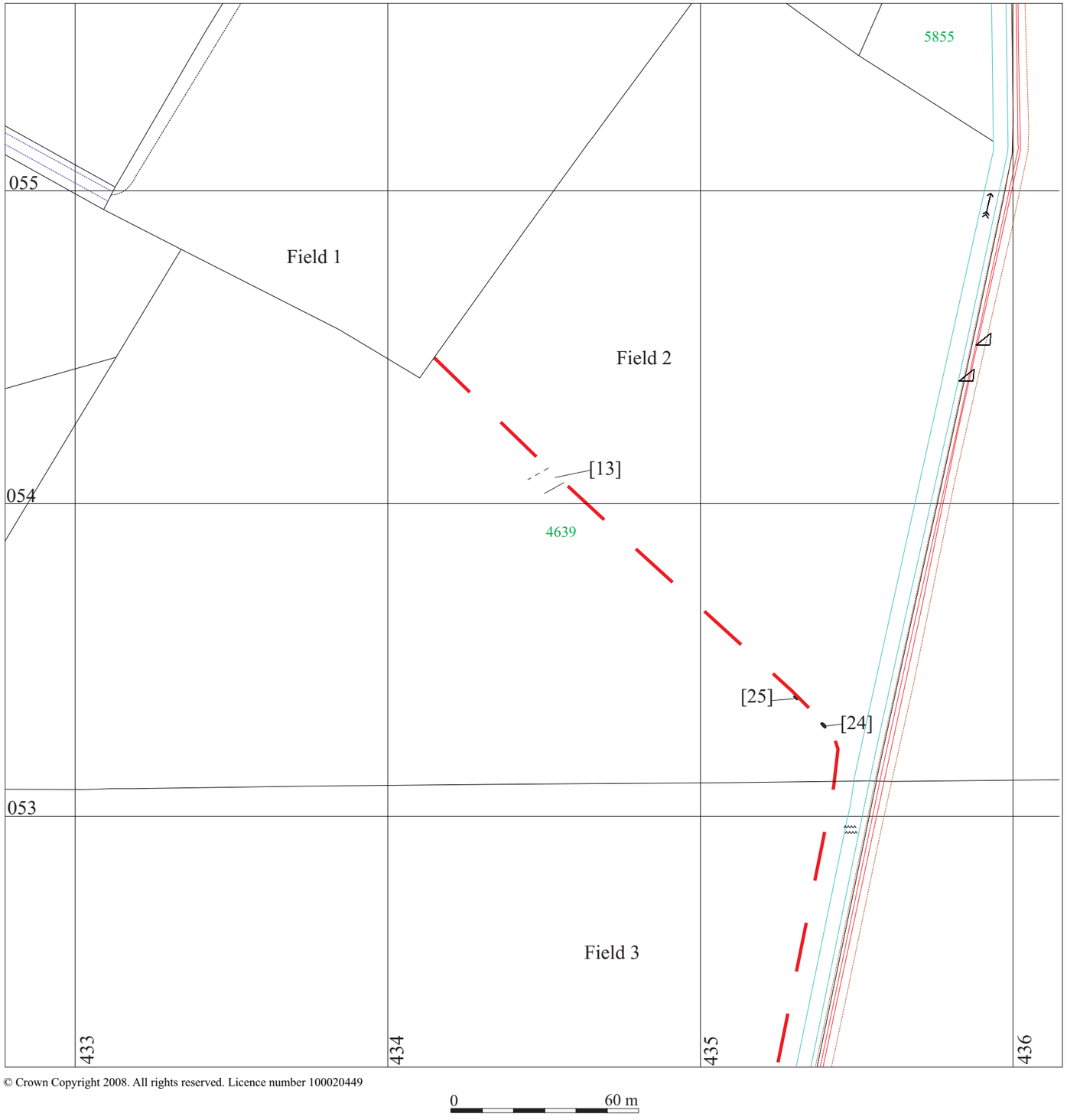

Figure 2. Location of features

occasional complete small snail shell (11). This had an alluvial origin. In places within Field 2 this deposit did not exist having been incorporated into the overlying topsoil through ploughing. Elsewhere this deposit was up to 90mm thick increasing to 200mm thick in the extreme southeast corner of Field 2 and up to 250mm at the south end of Field 3. Within Field 3 was a gravel island with the top lying between 69m and 81m from the south end of the field. On the south and west sides of the island was a deposit of grey silty clay alluvium (23) 270mm thick at the south end of the field thinning to 100mm at 60m into the field from the south end and to nothing at 65m. On the other side of the island the same deposit was 450mm thick at 86m into the field and 600mm thick at 92m. The deposit lost its silty nature at *c*. 100mm depth. This underlay deposit (11).

Within Field 4 the natural 1st Terrace Gravel Deposits were pale mid yellow small and medium gravel with 70% sand content with the top lying at 780mm below modern ground level (22). Above this in the south part of the field was a 520mm thick alluvial deposit of pale yellow–brown clay, slightly mottled pale grey, becoming greyer with depth (21). Above this was a 140mm thick alluvial deposit of pale-mid grey clay (20). This last deposit had been ploughed in the past. In the centre and north part of the field was a deposit of pale yellow-brown friable clay with 5% fine snail shell fragments (19). This became pale blue-grey in places at 20-40mm depth. This was higher in the centre of the field sloping down slightly towards the stream and down to the north and south. This deposit was noticeably higher than deposit (11) in Field 3. This would appear to have formed a slight island with deposits (20) and (21) infilling the lower area on the south side of the 'island'.

Overlying both deposits (19) and (20) was a layer of mid brown-grey friable clay with the occasional piece of gravel (18). This was not present in the central part of the field where (19) was higher. It was *c.* 70mm thick in the north part of the field and up to 120mm thick in the south part. This deposit had been ploughed in the past. The 250mm thick topsoil/ploughsoil was composed of grey-brown silty clay with some gravel along the stream side of the easement derived from dredging (17). The topsoil contained the occasional piece of modern and late post-medieval iron object and bottle glass.

4.3 Archaeological features in Field 2

Three features were found within Field 2. The first was a linear feature that is identifiable on aerial photographs orientated northeast-southwest. The feature was partly recognisable after the topsoil strip. A narrow section was cut through it along the southwest side of the easement. It was intended to further record the feature during the excavation of the pipe trench. However heavy rainfall resulted in the easement flooding within this field and subsequent plant movement caused heavy rutting. Therefore the feature was not identifiable during the trench excavation. The feature was first recognised as a deposit of gravelly material lying under the topsoil. It was more easily seen on the southwest side of the easement although definite edges were not apparent.

A cut [13] some 300mm deep was found. The southeast side was at an angle of 20-25^0 and the base was flat. The north-east side of the feature was not found and the width appeared to be in excess of 6.2m (Fig. 3). At this point hand excavation was halted with the intention of establishing the full width during the excavation of the pipe

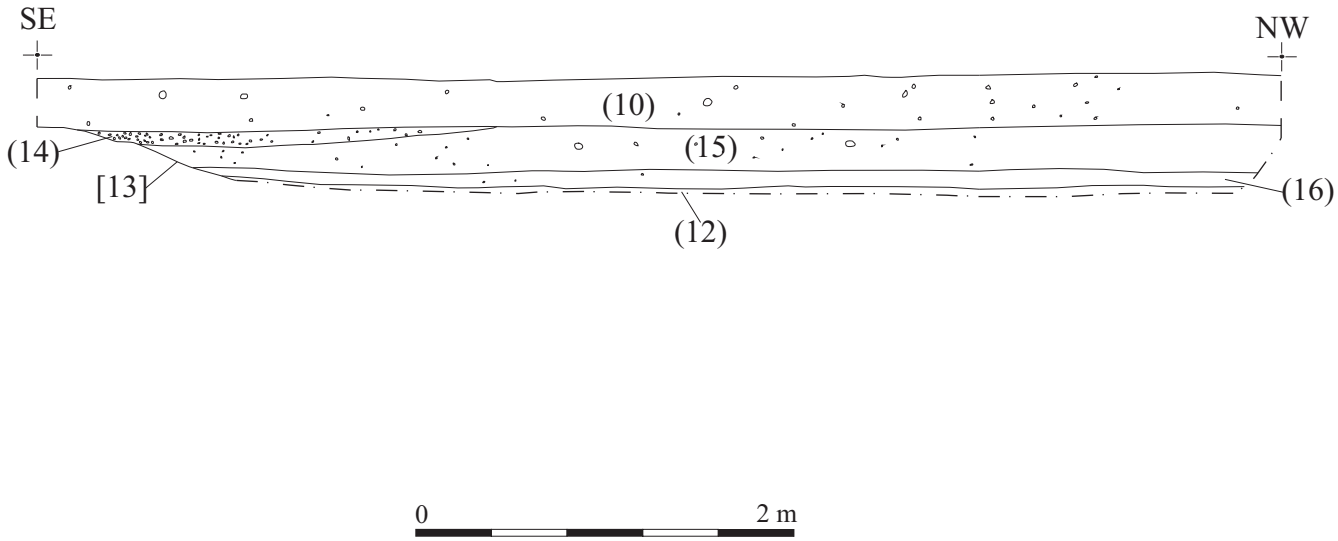

Figure 3. Section of feature [13]

trench. The feature was cut into deposit (11). The primary fill was dark grey tenacious clay and soft black peaty clay (16). The latter appeared to have been scorched black with occasional red parts and occasional charcoal fragments. This was 50-80mm thick. Overlying this material was a fill of pale brown-grey mottled orange clay (15) up to 200mm thick. Overlying the southeast side of the feature was a deposit of fine and small gravel in a pale grey-brown silty clay (14). This was 20-60mm thick petering out after 2.3m to only the occasional piece of gravel. This gravel is interpreted as deriving from the original up-cast from creating the feature, being ploughed back into the top of the feature. This was sealed by the topsoil (10).

The feature is interpreted as a wide, shallow ditch. Its width is unusual and it may be that it has cut through an earlier feature, or vice versa, although no such cut was identifiable. The gravel material may be what is recognisable as the cropmark or more likely grassmark. No finds were found within the section excavated.

The other features were 102m to 114m to the southeast seen during the excavation of the pipe trench. The first was an area of burning seen in the west section of the pipe trench. It was *c.* 900mm wide northwest-southeast and *c.* 120mm deep within a shallow cut with a slightly rounded base [24]. The burning was represented by dark brown and black scorched clay. The pit was cut into the natural (12) and was sealed by deposit (11). The feature could only be examined from the top of the pipe trench.

The second pit (25) had a rounded base with a north side at $15\text{-}20^0$ and a south side at 30^0. Again it was only visible in the west side of the 800mm wide pipe trench. The pit was *c*. 1.6m wide and 420mm deep. The primary fill was a mid-dark grey clay 160mm thick. The secondary fill was black and dull red clay with 2% small gravel some 150mm thick. The tertiary fill was pale yellow clay 70mm thick with an uppermost fill of pale grey clay with 10% gravel content 90mm thick. The pit was cut into the natural gravels and sealed by deposit (11). Again no finds were seen.

5 FINDS

No finds other than late post-medieval or modern date within the topsoil were seen during the watching brief. These were not retained.

6 DISCUSSION

The ditch in Field 2 is recognisable on aerial photographs and is at least 300m long orientated ENE-WSW. To the west and south are further linear cropmarks along with a small sub-circular mark (Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record RN 15041). The function of this ditch is unknown but it may be a land division boundary. It would appear to be too shallow for drainage. Its width, at the point investigated, is unusually wide. Again the apparent burning in the primary fill deposit is unusual. One possibility could be associated with land clearance with burning of vegetation to create pasture. A wide feature such as this could have acted as a fire-break; subsequently burnt material being blown, washed or eroded into the bottom of the feature. This would suggest that the area to the north-east was burnt to improve grazing land while that to the south-east was left in its natural form or was being

managed in a different regime. Work in the area has established that grazing would be needed for cattle, sheep, horses and pigs (cf. Lambrick & Allen 2004, 486).

The feature is on the wrong orientation for a medieval or later hedge being removed, similarly for a flood bank. The bottom of the feature was too level for it to have functioned as a holloway/trackway and burnt material would not be expected to fill the base of such a feature.

The two pits south east of the linear feature indicate activity associated with burning. It was felt that the features were man-made and not of natural origin. While the occasional tree throw pit was noticed during the work these did not have a similar appearance. The four stages of filling of pit (25) show that this was not a natural feature. Whether the linear feature and these two pits are contemporary is unknown. Again how extensive, what the purpose and date of this activity was is unknown. However a prehistoric or Roman date is more likely.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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