

JOHN MOORE HERITAGE SERVICES

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

AT

TOWN MOOR, MAIDENHEAD,

BERKSHIRE

SU 8956 8148 – SU 8909 8160

*On behalf of
The Clancy Group*

AUGUST 2010

REPORT FOR The Clancy Group
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Summary

A watching brief was conducted by John Moore Heritage Services during the laying of a new high-pressure water pipeline at Town Moor, Maidenhead, Berkshire. There is evidence for land management of the area with the clearing out of ponds. Later there is an attempt to drain the area with ditches being excavated. This would appear to have some limited success, but later rubble is dumped in order to firm up the ground.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Site Location (Figure 1)

The Town Moor is an open area of public parkland west of the Thames River, bordered by Ray Street (NGR SU 8956 8148) to the east, Blackmoor Lane (NGR SU 8926 8164) to the north and Holmanleaze (NGR SU 8909 8160) on the west. The underlying geology is Taplow Gravel to the west of the area, alluvial deposits towards the centre and Shepperton Gravels to the west (BGS Sheet 255).

1.2 Planning Background

Berkshire Archaeology had advised that due to the potential of the site to contain buried archaeological remains, a condition be attached requiring that an archaeological watching brief be carried out during the period of ground works. This is in line with PPG 16 and Local Plan policies. Berkshire Archaeology prepared the *Brief* for the archaeological work. The *Written Scheme of Investigation* outlined the method by which the watching brief would be carried out in order to preserve by record any archaeological remains of significance.

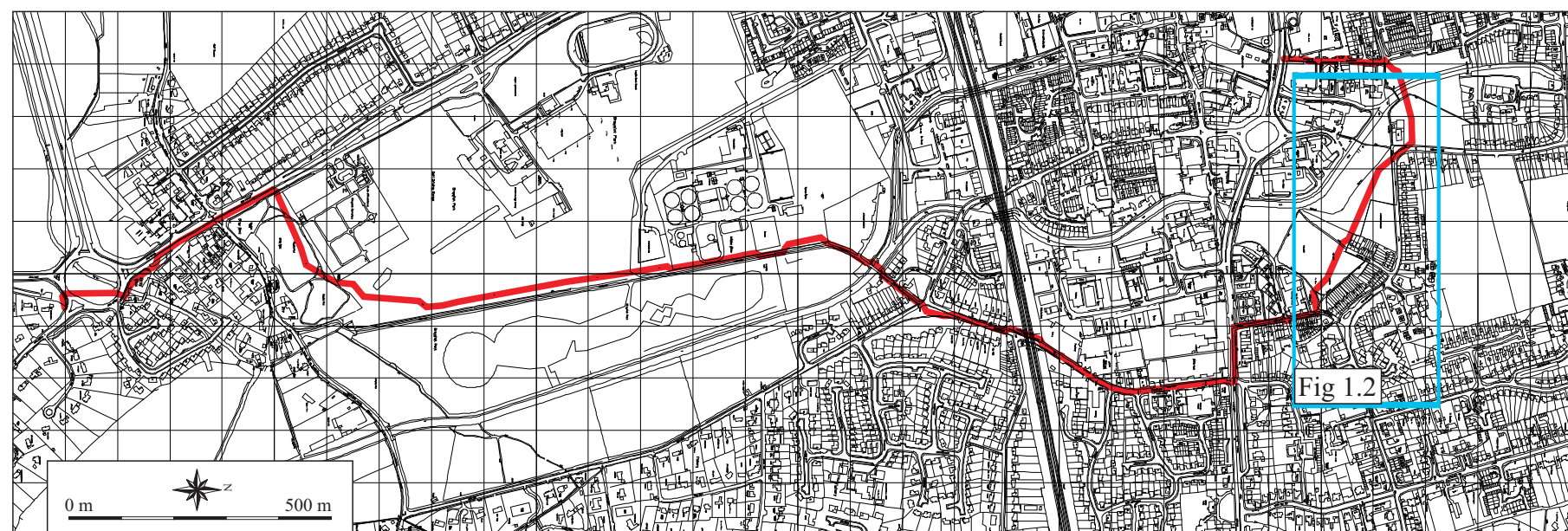
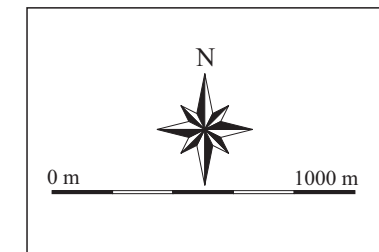
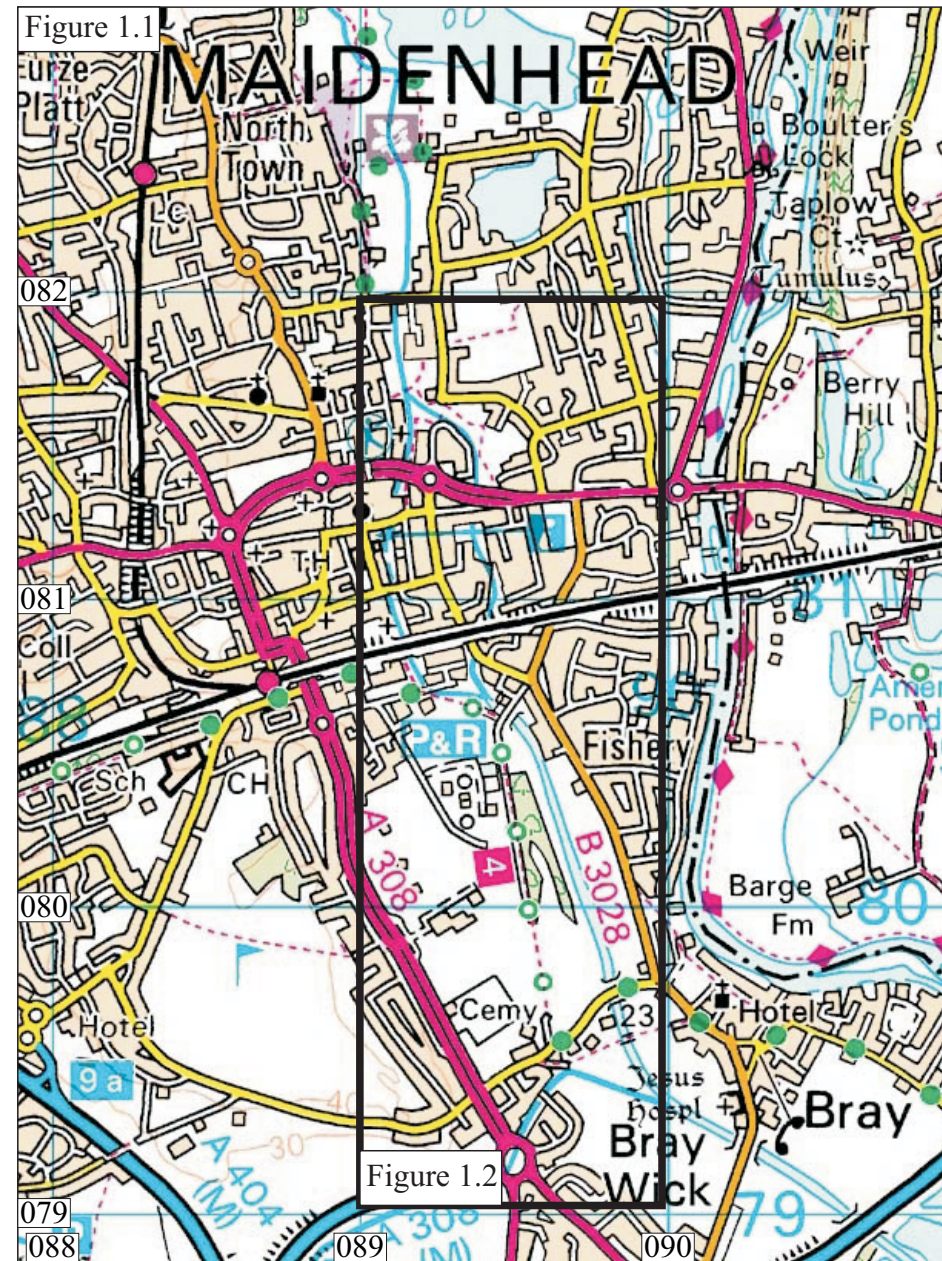
1.3 Archaeological Background

Although there were no known archaeological sites logged in the Berkshire Sites & Monuments Record within 250 m of the proposed development site, it was agreed that a Watching Brief would be useful, both to enhance our understanding of the Moor and to provide an evaluation of the future archaeological potential of this little known area of the town.

The area is known as the 'Town Moor,' the latter part of the name suggesting it may have once been marshland (Smith 1987). This being the case, its high water content may have precluded it from both cultivation and development leaving it as the open public space that is seen today.

The site now occupied by the town of Maidenhead was known up to the latter part of the 13th century as South Elington or Aylington. This name, which appears in the Bray Court Rolls for the last time in 1296 is supposed to have been gradually superseded by the later one after the construction of a new hythe or wharf on the river, which brought an increase of prosperity and population.

A section of the Cookham, Maidenhead and Bray canal passes along the west side of the Town Moor (MMR 16132). Today this can be observed as a dry ditch. The Ordnance Survey 1: 10500 map of 1900 shows the area to be undeveloped.



— Pipeline extent

Figure 1. Site location

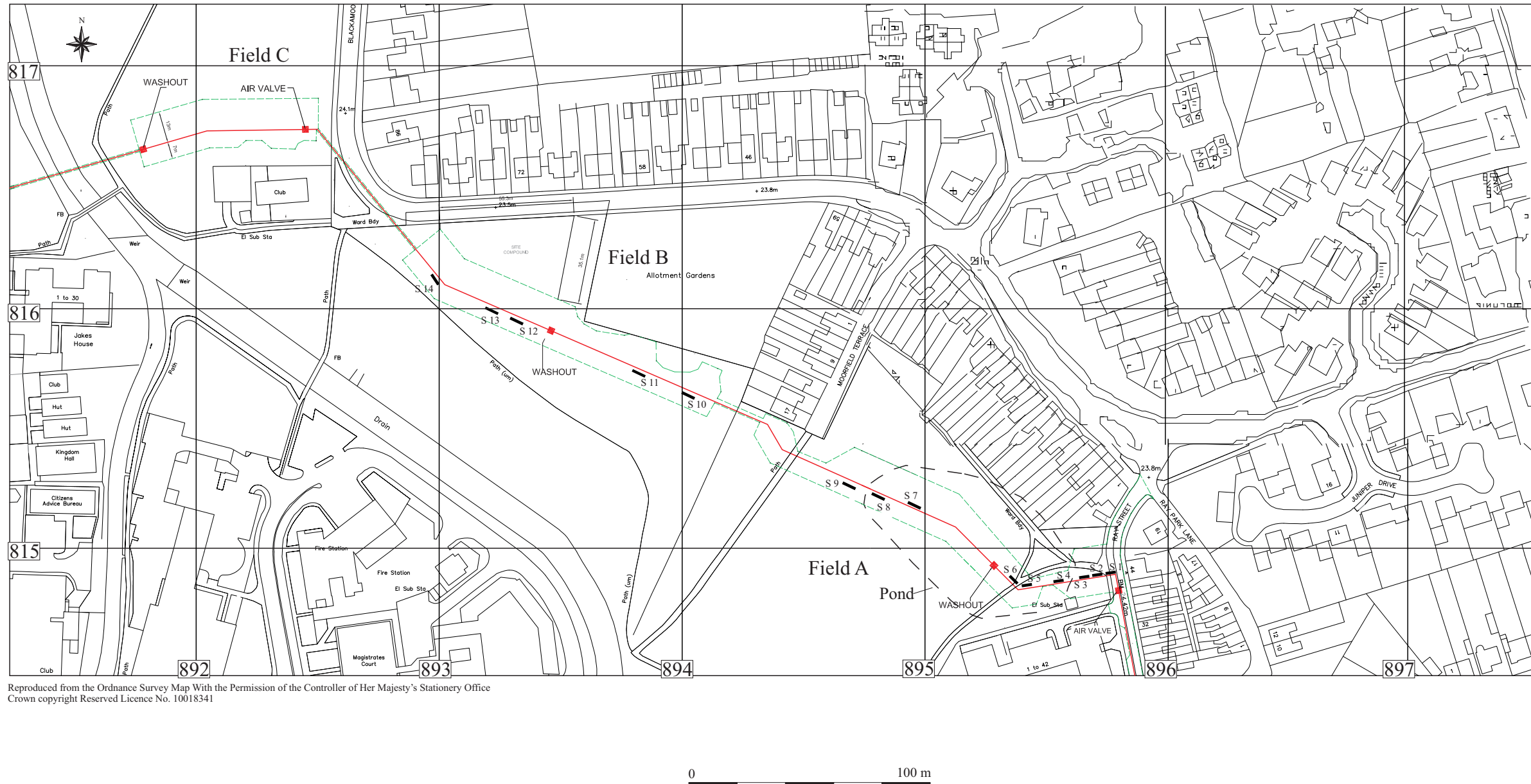


Figure 2. Plan of area watched and location of sections

2 AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION

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

- To record any archaeological remains that will be impacted upon by the pipeline trench
- In particular to record the potential for post medieval features relating to the canal.

3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

John Moore Heritage Services carried out the work to a prepared Written Scheme of Investigations (WSI) agreed with Berkshire Archaeology.

The recording was carried out in accordance with the standards specified by the Institute for Archaeologists (1994).

3.2 Methodology

An archaeologist maintained on site during the course of all excavations which had a potential to disturb or destroy archaeological remains. The groundwork was carried out down to the natural geological horizons with a 360° type tracked excavator.

Originally, the WSI had been based upon the course of the pipeline being demarcated by an 'easement trench' prior to the excavation of the pipeline trench itself; this was not the case, however, in practice. Therefore, all observations were made within the narrow confines of the pipeline trench itself with none of the features being observed in plan. Both the pace of the works and the depth of the trench precluded detailed or prolonged analysis of the archaeological features

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. A photographic record was also produced.

4 RESULTS

4.1 Results (Figures 2-3)

All features were assigned individual context numbers. Context numbers in () show feature fills or deposits of material.

The areas were divided up into Field 'A' immediately west of Ray Street, Field 'B' being taken from the line of the poplar trees which divide the site (and which

demarcate a change in the ground levels also) and, finally, Field 'C' for the small area on the other side of Holmanleaze.

The natural geological deposit (4) in this area consisted of Taplow Gravels, alluvial deposits and Shepperton Gravels spread across an area of roughly 0.5 km. Banding was seen within the natural deposits. The lowest band observed consisted of a layer of flint and pebbles (4D), above this was a 0.3m-0.6m thick band of soft mid yellow sand (4C). A 0.4m – 0.5m thick band of light yellow clay-sand overlay this. The uppermost band was up to 0.6m thick of mid brown-yellow sandy clay (Fig. 3, section 1).

Field A

Cut into the natural (4A) was a large ditch 9. This was located less than 10m west of Ray Street. This ditch 9 was aligned roughly NNW-SSE, measured 1.95m wide, 0.34m deep and was filled with a dark grey silty clay (8). Judging by the slope of the sides the base may have been relatively flat ((Fig. 3, section 2).

A later ditch 7 cut ditch 9. This may be a later re-cutting of the original ditch or one on a different alignment. Unfortunately due to the narrow width of the excavation this could not be determined. The fill was a mid grey silt-clay (6) that contained the rare piece of burnt flint and heavily abraded medieval pottery.

Both ditches were sealed by a 0.17m thick layer of mid brown-orange silt-clay (5). Overlying this was a 0.13m thick layer of dark brown-grey clay-silt (3).

To the west of the ditch 7 was a shallow pit 11 (Fig. 3, section 3) that was 1.1m wide, 0.23m deep with a flattened U-shaped profile. It was filled with a mid grey silt-clay (10). This pit was cut into the natural (4A). Deposits (3) and (5) were not present in this area.

At around 18.90 m west of Ray Street was the edge of a shallow depression approximately 90m by 50m in plan (Fig. 2). This may have originally represented a pond and it appears to be man-made having been cut 19 into the natural (4C) with the upper natural bands removed.

The lowest deposit in this area was a blue-grey alluvial clay (20) the full extent of which was not seen, overlying this was a 0.18m thick layer of peat (18). Above this was a layer of mid brown silty clay (17) that was up to 0.8m thick (Fig. 3 sections 4, 5 and 6).

This pond appears to have been re-excavated possibly to clean it out. The cut 16 for this excavation is ill-defined. It was filled with a light grey loamy silt (15) up to 0.75m thick. This re-excavation may have increased the area of the pond extending it to the west but far more shallow than to the east (Fig 3. section 8).

At a later date the pond was obviously silting up and no longer required. In an attempt to drain it ditch 14 was excavated. This was cut into the surface of deposit 15 and measured 1.32m wide, 0.68m deep with a U-shaped profile that had a relatively flat base. This was filled with a mid grey-brown silt-clay (13) flecked with charcoal and containing brick fragments (Fig. 3, section 4).

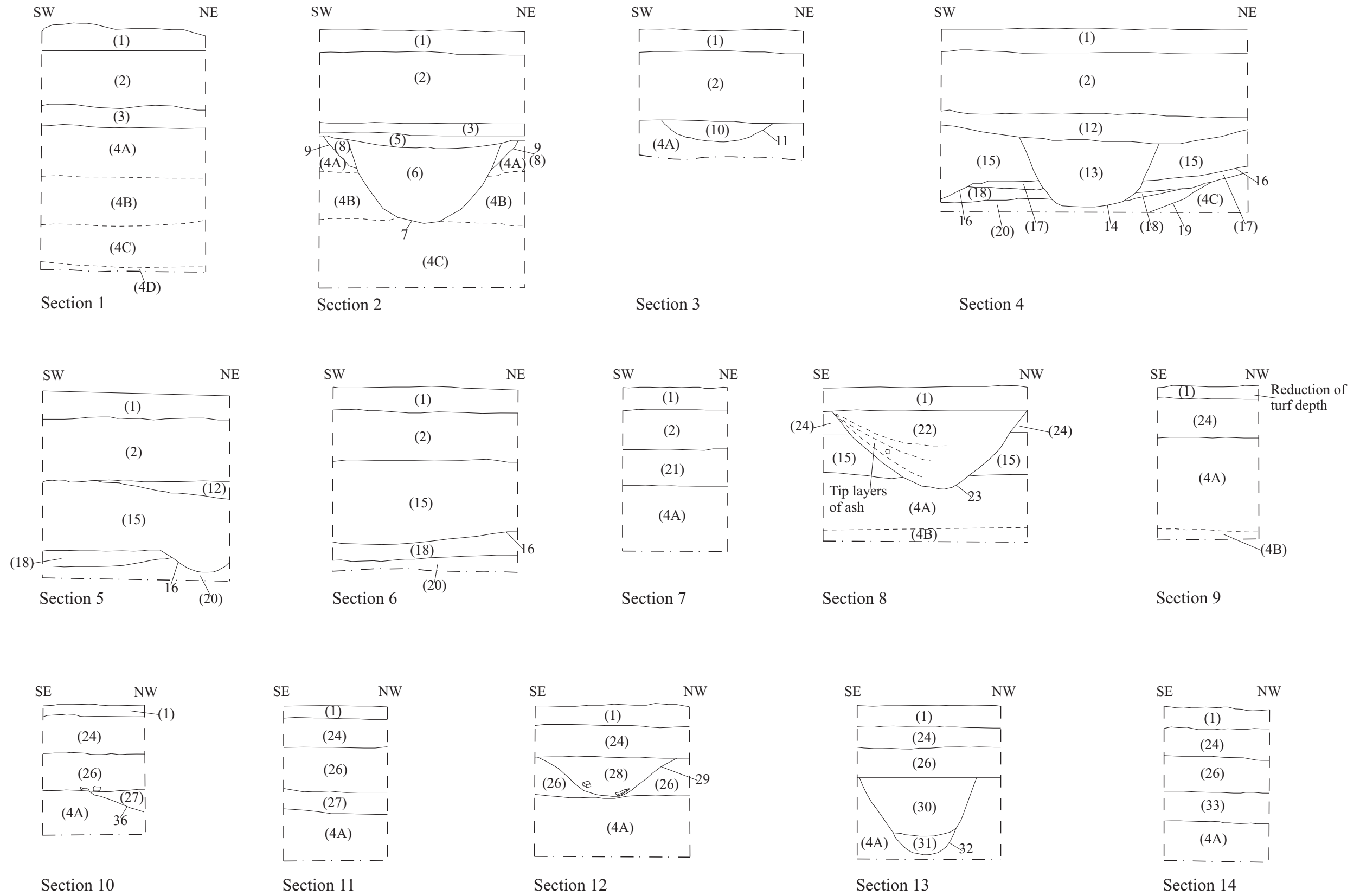


Figure 3. Sections

This ditch 14 was probably cut into the lowest point or depression of the old pond, that itself finally silted up with a dark-brown silty clay (12) deposit (Fig. 3 sections 4 and 5). Deposit (12) may be the same as or related to deposit (3)

In places 19th-20th century brick rubble (21) had been dumped into “soft-spots” within layer 15 (Fig.3 section 7).

All of these features and deposits were sealed by a layer of crushed brick, rock and cinder fragments in a brown-grey clay matrix (2) that was up to 0.66m thick. It contained 19th-20th century metal and glass. Towards the west of the field the layer was only 0.4m thick and contained significantly less amounts of brick and stone (24).

Cut 23 into this layer (24) was a large pit. It was 1.88m wide, 0.77m deep with a slightly flattened U-shaped profile (Fig.3 section 8). It was filled with dark red-black loam containing a large quantity of ash and cinders as well as late 19th century metal work and glass. There were also notable tip lines of ash present.

Field B

Variations in the natural occurred with sandier deposits (33) becoming heavier with clays towards the west (Fig. 3 section 14).

To the east of the field a large shallow cut 36 was observed into the surface of the natural (4A). It was up to 0.44m deep and over 30m long in plan. The fill of the feature was a mid grey-blue silt-clay (27). This may represent another pond or wet area (Fig. 3 sections 10 and 11).

Further west a ditch 32 was also cut in the surface of the natural (4A). It was aligned NE-SW, up to 0.76m deep and 1.4m wide. The lower fill of the feature was a dark grey silt-clay (31) 0.21m thick. Above this was a dark yellow-brown sandy clay (30) 0.57m thick (Fig.3 section 13).

Both features were sealed by a 0.37m thick layer of mid grey-brown silt-clay (26). This was flecked with charcoal and contained brick fragments.

Cut in to the surface of this layer (26) was a pit 29. It was 1.4m wide, 0.36m deep with a flattened U-shaped profile. It was filled with a mottled brown-grey silt-clay (28) that contained late 19th century glass and metal objects.

Sealing this pit was a brown-grey clay layer up to 0.22m thick and identical to deposit (24) in Field A.

The uppermost layer in both Fields A and B was a dark brown loam topsoil (1) that was on average 0.2m thick.

Field C

John Moore Heritage Services was not informed that the ground works in this area had taken place and Field C was dug without the presence of an archaeologist.

4.2 Reliability of Results and Techniques

Both the pace of the works and the depth of the trench precluded detailed or prolonged analysis of the archaeological features. Field C was dug without the presence of an archaeologist.

5 FINDS

5.1 Pottery (*by Paul Blinkhorn*)

The pottery assemblage comprised two sherds weighing 5g, both from context (6). The two fragments were of a thin-walled pinkish ware, but in a very poor condition. Both are Surrey Whiteware, probably Kingston Ware, Milton Keynes type-series fabric MS15 (Mynard and Zeepvat 1992), and dateable to the late 13th- 15th century. Both sherds are somewhat abraded, and are entirely likely to be residual.

5.2 Lithics (*by David Gilbert*)

A damaged secondary flake (measuring 46mm x 25mm x 5mm) was recovered from context (13). A broken section of a secondary blade (measuring 20mm x 9mm x 1mm) was recovered from context (31). The raw material of both pieces was a honey-brown colour flint. The flint is likely to be residual in these contexts.

Small quantities of thermally fractured flint were recovered from contexts (6), (13) and (31).

5.3 Environmental Remains

Due to the confines of the narrow trenches it was not possible due to Health and Safety concerns to take samples of the deposits recorded.

6 DISCUSSION

The name Town Moor suggests that in antiquity it was either marshland or at least too wet to develop. Its past environmental state was evidenced by the discovery of several alluvial layers in Field 'A' less than 20 m west of Ray Street which contained a band of peat (18). This layer contained vegetation (and substantial timber) in various states of decomposition. The whole seemed to be contained within a shallow depression.

There is evidence for limited prehistoric and medieval activity in the area. Although all artefacts recovered were residual.

Although considered a moor it would appear that at least part of it was managed the re-excavation of the "pond" evidenced by cut 16 would point to this. Although not securely dated this activity took place prior to attempt to drain the area.

It is speculated that the areas status as moorland was possibly brought to a close by the building of the CMB canal. Although it is more likely that there could have been a

prior programme of land-drainage to reclaim the land prior to the canal's construction as witnessed by ditches 6 and 14.

The layer of rubble (2) may relate to the building of the canal either as hard-standing or building debris, however it is more likely deliberately placed at a later date in an attempt to make the ground more solid and less wet. The late 19th century material from context (26) would seem to support this.

7 ARCHIVE

Archive Contents

The archive consists of the following:

Paper record

The project brief

Written scheme of investigation

The project report

The primary site record

Physical record

The finds

The archive currently is maintained by John Moore Heritage Services and will be transferred to the County Museums' Store.

8 BIBLIOGRAPHY

English Heritage 1991 Management of Archaeological Projects

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