



Land to the south of Watling Street, Manor Fields, Bletchley, Buckinghamshire

Archaeological Watching Brief Report

December 2017


Client: Anglian Water

Issue No: Final
OA Report No: 2166
NGR: SP 88659 33781



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Archaeological Watching Brief Report

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Summary

Over three days between October and December 2017 (30th October – 1st November, 5th December 2017) OA East carried out an archaeological watching brief on land to the south of Watling Street, at Manor Fields Pumping Station, Bletchley (SP 88659 33781). The monitoring was carried out ahead of excavations for drill pits for inserting sewage pipes. The trenching was located close to the Roman fort and town of *Magiovinium*, east of Fenny Stratford. The trenches were located on either side of the River Ouzel.

No archaeological finds or remains were observed.

Acknowledgements

Oxford Archaeology would like to thank Anglian Water for commissioning this project.

The project was managed for Oxford Archaeology by Richard Mortimer. The fieldwork was directed by James Fairbairn and Robin Webb. Thanks are also extended to the OA staff who prepared the archive under the management of Kat Hamilton.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of work

1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology (OA) was commissioned by Anglian Water to undertake an archaeological watching brief at Manor Field Pumping Station, Bletchley.

1.1.2 The work was undertaken ahead of the laying of additional pipes between the pumping station and existing pipes to the south of Watling Street.

1.2 Location, topography and geology

1.2.1 The site lies on the eastern outskirts of Fenny Stratford, centered on SP 88659 33781 (Figure 1), within the parish of Bletchley and Fenny Stratford. The northern edge was defined by Watling Street and the western edge by the road into Bletchley Rugby Club. The River Ouzel lay across the middle of the route. The proposed works consisted of four test pits to be dug in drill and access locations for the pipework.

1.2.2 The test pit area lay in the valley for the River Ouzel, with a maximum height of 68m aOD towards the south-east. The natural geology of the area consists of Oxford Clay, overlain in places by terrace gravels and alluvium (BGS 2017).

1.3 Archaeological and historical background

1.3.1 The archaeological and historical background of the site has been discussed in depth for works on the opposite side of Watling Street (Zeepvat 2004), and will only be summarized here with additional mention of works in the immediate vicinity.

Earlier Prehistoric (before 600BC)

1.3.2 Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic activity in the region has been strongest in the section of the Ouzel Valley in Milton Keynes, and has been mostly represented by chance finds of flint hand-axes recovered during drainage works (SMR 1166, 1167, 1187, 1927), with no earlier prehistoric sites identified.

Later Prehistoric (600BC-AD43)

1.3.3 Occupation sites have been identified in the region (Fenny Lock) dating from the late Bronze Age to early Iron Age in the form of post-built structures, gullies and pit alignments (Ford and Taylor 1996). Iron Age activity has also been seen on a larger scale during excavations in the Ouzel valley at Hartigans Gravel Pit and Pennylands (Williams 1993), Wavendon Gate (Williams *et al* 1996), Caldecote (Zeepvat *et al* 1994) and Saffron Gardens (SMR 1270).

Roman (AD43-450)

1.3.4 The Milton Keynes area fell within the *civitas* of the Catuvellauni – an area covering much of the south-east Midlands – with its capital at *Verulamium* (St Albans). About 1km east of Fenny Stratford a fort was constructed following the Conquest, and although it was short-lived, its site was incorporated into the small enclosed town of *Magiovinium*, centered on Dropshot Farm.

- 1.3.5 Watling Street, originally Roman in origin, joins London, the Midlands and Wales, with the original course of the road to the north of its current route. The town of *Magiovinium* grew with improvements in communications and farming practices, with agricultural settlements nearby at Caldecot and Wavendon Gate.
- 1.3.6 The excavation of a trench for a sewer pipe in 1971 revealed 2nd-4th century AD pottery, building debris, the base of a pseudo-Venus pipe-clay figurine and an inhumation (EMK16; Elvey and Viney 1971,219). This sewer pipe ran along the south-eastern edge of Trench 2.
- 1.3.7 Excavations between 1955 and 1961 to the east of the trench locations revealed 26 Roman burials, three phases of a Roman metalled surface and building debris (EMK1036), in the vicinity of Trench 4. An extra-mural Roman settlement cemetery was revealed to the north of the site at a shallow depth that had been damaged by ploughing (EMK112), with a Roman field system slightly further to the north-west (EMK458, EMK906). Further excavations to the east in 1962 revealed a large amount of building debris, graves and a hoard of 600 4th century coins (EMK32).
- 1.3.8 Dredging from the River Ouzel to the south-east revealed Roman, medieval and post-medieval pottery and building debris (EMK1038).
- Saxon (AD450-1066)*
- 1.3.9 Limited Saxon remains have been found in the area, with the Saffron Gardens site (SMR 2140) showing late Saxon occupation, and Fenny Lock revealing two early Saxon sunken-feature buildings. However, 38 inhumations excavated (between 1954 and 1956) to the east of the Roman cemetery (EMK1036), to the north of the current area, are believed to have been Saxon (EMK527).
- Medieval (1066-1500)*
- 1.3.10 The medieval settlement at Fenny Stratford developed as a market place serving Bletchley, Water Eaton and Simpson, and was located at the top of the hill overlooking the Watling Street crossing of the River Ouzel. The first reference to the market was when Roger de Cauz was granted the right to hold the market by the king (VCH 1927, 276).
- Post-medieval (1500-1900)*
- 1.3.11 Fenny Stratford suffered during the 17th century with the civil war and plague decimating the population, and meant that the route of Watling Street left much to be desired until the late 18th century-early 19th century when Parliament intervened to establish a trust to manage the section of the road near the town. The arrival of the canal in 1797 prompted the expansion of local industries – such as brickmaking – although many of these were short-lived with the arrival of the London Brick Company at nearby Newton Longville.
- 1.3.12 Up until the late 19th century, the area to the north of Watling Street, to the north-east of the current site has been recorded as farmland, with lime kilns and a brickworks established adjacent to the canal.

2 EVALUATION AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The objective of this watching brief was to to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 The area of investigation was located (Figure 1) in the corner between the current route of Watling Street (the northern boundary) and the drive for Bletchley Rugby Club (the western boundary). The River Ouzel runs between the areas for Trench 1 (by the pumping house) and Trenches 2-4.

2.2.2 Machine excavation was carried out by a 360 degree tracked excavator using a 1.8m wide ditching bucket under constant supervision of a qualified and experienced archaeologist. Machine excavation was carried out to the depth of geological horizons as no archaeological deposits were encountered.

2.2.3 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales, and digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

2.2.4 Site conditions during the works were dry with only a slight breeze.

3 RESULTS

3.1 Introduction and presentation of results

3.1.1 The results of the evaluation are presented below, and include a stratigraphic description of the trenches. The full details of all trenches with dimensions and depths of all deposits can be found in Appendix A. The only artefacts identified on site were obviously modern machine cut bricks, concrete, scraps of wood, iron bars and a hub cap.

3.2 General soils and ground conditions

3.2.1 The soil sequence between all trenches was uniform to the north of the River Ouzel (Trenches 2-4), with only modern deposits visible in Trench 1 to the south of the river. The underlying natural geology consisted of alluvial orange-brown silt clay with patches of blue-grey clay. This was overlain by two modern disturbance layers – a dark brown grey clay silt overlain by a dark brown silt – and a dark grey brown silt topsoil.

3.2.2 Ground conditions throughout the watching brief were dry until the water table was reached. This did not affect Trench 1, but from a depth of about 1m in Trenches 2-4 resulted in a creep of water into the base of the trenches. Trench 2 also suffered from water run-off from the road were a drain fed into the side of the trench.

3.3 General distribution of deposits

3.3.1 No archaeological features were visible within the trenches, with modern disturbance making up the excavated areas. The south-western edge of Trench 2 saw a slight rise in the level at which natural geology was encountered.

3.4 Trenches

Trench 1

3.4.1 Trench 1 (Figure 1) was located on the northern edge of the pumping house at Manor Fields. The main area was a 7x7m square, with a 3m wide strip stretching back to the platform at the front of the building. This trench was excavated to a depth of 1.2m and encountered only modern build-up layers.

3.4.2 The layers within this trench consisted of a plastic dark yellow brown silt clay overlain by a friable mid yellow brown clay silt build-up layer that contained frequent machine-cut bricks, and a compact mid grey silt layer with asphalt and frequent stones that was probably part of a former parking area. An area of plastic blue-grey clay was also visible abutting the footings of the pumping house building.

Trenches 2-4

3.4.3 Trenches 2-4 (Figure 1) were located in a line parallel to the line of Watling Street.

3.4.4 Trench 2 was located on the northern side of the River Ouzel, 8.4m to the south of Watling Street. This was excavated as a 9.5x5.2m area, with the location of a sewer pipe inserted in 1971 on its south-eastern side. Where the sewer pipe was not located, the trench was excavated to a depth of 1.6m before natural geology was encountered.

- 3.4.5 Trench 3 was located 18.5m to the south-east of Trench 2, and was excavated as a 3.5x1.8m area. This trench was excavated to a depth of 1.62m before the natural geology was encountered. The deposit immediately above the natural geology contained concrete blocks.
- 3.4.6 Trench 4 was located a further 18m to the south-east of Trench 3 and was opened as a 5.6x1.8m area. The south-eastern edge of this trench was located on the side a manhole, with the sewer pipe revealed at a depth of 1.25m. The trench was stepped beyond the edge of the sewer pipe trench cut to a depth of 1.6m.
- 3.4.7 The layers within these trenches consisted of a friable dark brown grey clay silt that was overlain by a friable dark brown silt and a friable dark grey brown silt modern topsoil.

3.5 Finds summary

- 3.5.1 Only modern artefacts were visible and these were not retained.

4 DISCUSSION

4.1 Evaluation objectives and results

4.1.1 No archaeological finds or features were uncovered during the excavation of the trenches. The soil sequence was disturbed in both areas that were examined. In Trench 1 this was from the construction of the pumping house for which excavations would have been deep due to the nature of its use. For Trenches 2-4 the disturbance consisted of a series of deposits (described above) that are likely to have been the result of works for the construction of the current line of Watling Street, the insertion of drainage for the road and the insertion of sewers.

4.2 Interpretation

4.2.1 The absence of archaeological finds and features from these trenches suggests that the limit of the Roman town of *Magiovinium* was to the south-east, towards the edge of the area for which there has been a geophysical survey (Walford 2014). Other works to the west of the town (east and north of the current site) have revealed cemeteries and finds of Roman and later date. However, the majority of these were on higher ground. The work for the sewer pipe by Trench 2 revealed finds that may have arrived through post-depositional processes, whilst the investigations that occurred near Trench 4 in 1955 may have extended into the area of the trench.

4.2.2 The proximity of the trenches to the current course of the River Ouzel, and the presence on the south-western edge of Trench 2 of slightly higher natural geology suggest that the area lies within the floodplain of the river, with modern disturbance having gone below the level of any archaeology. Instead, the favoured ground for the building of the fort, and then town, overlooking the crossing of the river was on the higher ground to provide the vantage point and avoid flooding. The previous investigations show the location of the current site as outside the town.

4.2.3 To the north of the current area, to the opposite side of Watling Street, field systems existed, suggesting that Watling Street may have formed the boundary as there was only a 30m wide strip before the river was reached. By the time the settlement area is reached to the south-east of the current area this has expanded to 69m, and then expands rapidly as the area of the *Magiovinium* is reached.

APPENDIX A TRENCH DESCRIPTIONS AND CONTEXT INVENTORY

Context	Trench	Type	Depth (m)	Description	Finds	Date
1	1	layer	-	Natural geology	-	-
2	1	Layer	0.5	Build-up	-	Modern
3	1	Layer	0.4	Build-up	-	Modern
4	1	Layer	0.3	External surface	-	Modern
5	2-4	Layer	-	Natural geology	-	-
6	2-4	Layer	0.76	Build-up	Concrete, brick	Modern
7	2-4	Layer	0.52	Build-up	Iron	Modern
8	2-4	layer	0.3	Topsoil	Hub cap, iron	Modern

APPENDIX B BIBLIOGRAPHY

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APPENDIX C OASIS REPORT FORM

Project Details

OASIS Number	Oxfordar3-303092		
Project Name	Bletchley, Newton Leys Manor Fields Pumping Station		
Start of Fieldwork	30-10-2017	End of Fieldwork	05-12-2017
Previous Work	No	Future Work	Unknown

Project Reference Codes

Site Code	XBUBNL16	Planning App. No.	-
HER Number		Related Numbers	-

Prompt	Water Act 1989 and subsequent code of practice
Development Type	Infrastructure
Place in Planning Process	Not known/Not recorded

Techniques used (tick all that apply)

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography – interpretation | <input type="checkbox"/> Grab-sampling | <input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Aerial Photography - new | <input type="checkbox"/> Gravity-core | <input type="checkbox"/> Sample Trenches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Annotated Sketch | <input type="checkbox"/> Laser Scanning | <input type="checkbox"/> Survey/Recording of Fabric/Structure |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Augering | <input type="checkbox"/> Measured Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Targeted Trenches |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dendrochronological Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Metal Detectors | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Test Pits |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Documentary Search | <input type="checkbox"/> Phosphate Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Topographic Survey |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Sampling | <input type="checkbox"/> Photogrammetric Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Vibro-core |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Fieldwalking | <input type="checkbox"/> Photographic Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Visual Inspection (Initial Site Visit) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey | <input type="checkbox"/> Rectified Photography | |

Monument	Period
None	None
-	Choose an item.
-	Choose an item.

Object	Period
None	None
-	Choose an item.
-	Choose an item.

Insert more lines as appropriate.

Project Location

County	Buckinghamshire	Address (including Postcode) Manor Fields, Bletchley, Milton Keynes, MK2 2HX
District	Milton Keynes	
Parish	Bletchley and Fenny Stratford	
HER office	Milton Keynes SMR	
Size of Study Area	65.8 sq m	
National Grid Ref	SP 88659 33781	

Project Originators

Organisation	OA East
Project Brief Originator	Anglian Water
Project Design Originator	Anglian Water
Project Manager	Richard Mortimer

Project Supervisor Robin Webb

Project Archives

	Location	ID
Physical Archive (Finds)	N/A	N/A
Digital Archive	OA East	XBUBNL16
Paper Archive	Milton Keynes Museum	XBUBNL16

Physical Contents	Present?	Digital files associated with Finds	Paperwork associated with Finds
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Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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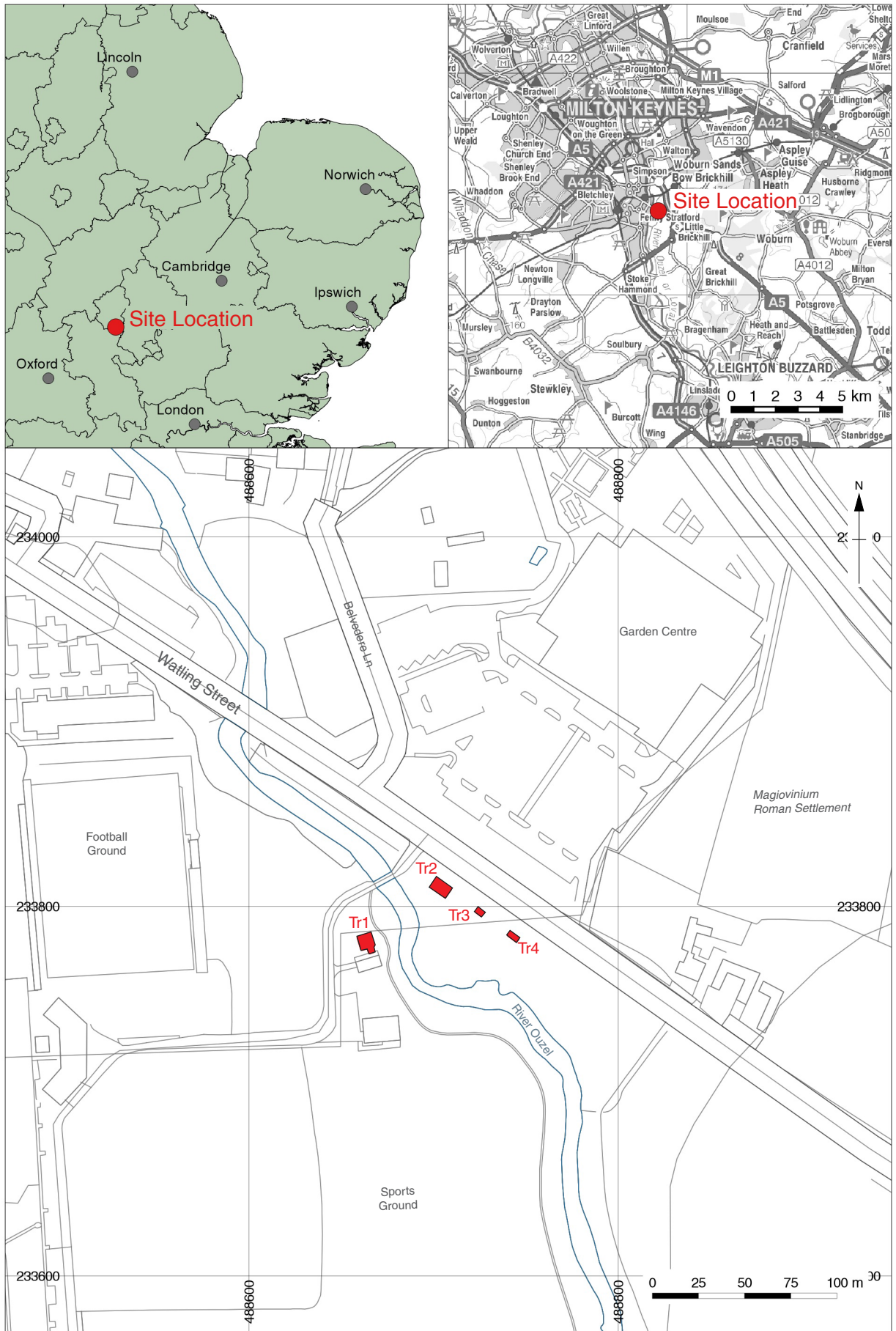
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GIS	<input type="checkbox"/>
Geophysics	<input type="checkbox"/>
Images (Digital photos)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Illustrations (Figures/Plates)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Moving Image	<input type="checkbox"/>
Spreadsheets	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>
Text	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/>

Paper Media

Aerial Photos	<input type="checkbox"/>
Context Sheets	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Correspondence	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Diary	<input type="checkbox"/>
Drawing	<input type="checkbox"/>
Manuscript	<input type="checkbox"/>
Map	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Matrices	<input type="checkbox"/>
Microfiche	<input type="checkbox"/>
Miscellaneous	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research/Notes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Photos (negatives/prints/slides)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Plans	<input type="checkbox"/>
Report	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sections	<input type="checkbox"/>
Survey	<input type="checkbox"/>

Further Comments



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Figure 1: Site location showing archaeological monitoring (red)



↑ Plate 1: Trench 1, from the north



← Plate 2: Trench 1, from the north



←
Plate 3: Trench 2, from the south-east



←
Plate 4: Trench 3, from the south-west



←
Plate 5: Trench 4, from the south-west



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