

STAINES (SR)

PENTON HOOK ISLAND

LALEHAM, near STAINES, SURREY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

NGR TQ 0430 6915

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

FEBRUARY 1998

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Date: *10/2/98*

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Summary.

In September 1997 the Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) undertook a watching brief on Penton Hook Island, Surrey (NGR TQ 0430 6915), during the excavation of six test pits by the Environment Agency (EA). The natural gravel core of the island was seen in all of the test pits, and their sections displayed overlying silts and clays, masked by a considerable dump of material derived from dredging operations over the years. None of the deposits seen produced any finds.

1. Introduction (Fig. 1)

The watching brief was commissioned by Rofe, Kennard and Lapworth Consulting Engineers on behalf of the EA, and was necessitated by PPG 16 on the advice of the County Archaeological Officer as the site is thought possibly to be of archaeological interest, and also because of the presence of many other sites of archaeological interest in the immediate vicinity. It is further to a previous watching brief undertaken by the Unit in the wetland area of the island in April 1997.

2. Background

The Thames Valley is a region rich in archaeological landscapes. This is demonstrated graphically through aerial photography on the gravels of the upper and middle Thames; results from field work and excavation show that these patterns have been repeated along lower stretches of the river. The distribution patterns of archaeological material tends to confirm the view that both the banks of the Thames and its tributaries were heavily settled during the prehistoric period. This is unsurprising as the soils are both light and easily worked, the underlying gravels ensure excellent drainage and the river itself is a major means of communication, enabling trade. The same factors that encouraged the initial settlement of these areas, ensured their continued exploitation through time.

The largest known concentration of middle and later Saxon settlements in this area of the Thames valley has been excavated in advance of gravel extraction and housing development at Yeoveney (Robertson-Mackay et al. 1981), Thorpe, Croydon (Drewett, 1974), Stanwell (Poulton 1978) and Staines (Drewett, Rudling and Gardiner 1988, 294). The Middle Thames valley is especially rich in identified archaeological remains, particularly from the Neolithic period and the Bronze Age. However, much of this evidence is in the form of cropmarks, stray finds of Bronze or Iron Age metalwork, stone axes or scatters of lithics and has been subject neither to detailed investigation nor to excavation, particularly in comparison with the Upper Thames region.

To the west, the OAU is excavating sites along the Maidenhead, Windsor and Eton Flood Alleviation Scheme; these sites have produced a wide range of archaeological evidence ranging from Neolithic pits and burials, flint scatters, a Bronze Age ring ditch, settlements and land boundaries, Saxon pits and mediæval settlement.

Large assemblages of pottery, animal bone and small finds have been recovered and some of the sites have also been rich in waterlogged and environmental remains. In addition, the OAU is currently excavating at Eton, on the Eton Rowing Lake Project, which is providing extensive information on the Bronze Age landscape, with particular emphasis on the Thames. Seen in this context, there is a great deal of interest in test pitting activity anywhere in this area, which possibly could supplement the information already retrieved, with particular reference to riparian sites.

3. Aims

To record any archaeological remains exposed on site during the course of the proposed works to established standards (Wilkinson, 1992), to secure the preservation by record of any archaeology, the presence and nature of which could not be established in advance.

4. Methodology

All six test pits were machined under close archaeological supervision to a depth between 1.50m and 2.50m. Natural deposits were exposed in all the test pits. Within the constraints imposed by Health and Safety considerations the deposits exposed in plan and section were cleaned, inspected and recorded in plan, section and by colour slide and black and white print photography. Written records were also made on proforma sheets.

5. Results (Figs 2 & 3)

All the test pits measured 0.60m by 1.45m on the surface.

Test Pit 1.

Test pit 1 was machined to a depth of 1.50m. The earliest deposit seen here was (1004), natural gravel containing a small percentage of alluvial clay. This was sealed by (1003) a friable mid brown stony clay loam with 2% silt, 0.50m thick. This was sealed by (1002), a mid brown clay loam with 2% silt, 0.43m thick. This was sealed by (1001), a friable light brown sandy clay with 30% silt, 0.22m thick. This was sealed by (1000), a friable mid gray loam 0.14m thick, the topsoil.

Test Pit 2.

Test pit 2 was machined to a depth of 2.50m. The earliest deposit exposed here was (2005), a mottled orange/brown/gray clay, with a very slight silt content; at the base of the test pit it could be seen that this deposit became a very dark gray. This was sealed by (2004), a thin band of loam, 0.10m thick. This was sealed by (2003), a thin band of chalk, 0.20m thick. This was sealed by (2002), a very loose yellow stony sand 0.50m thick. This was sealed by (2001) a mid brown stony clay loam with 2% silt, 0.16m thick, which was overlain by (2000), the topsoil as before, 0.15m thick.

Test Pit 3.

Test pit 3 was machined to a depth of 2.50m. The earliest deposit exposed here was (3005), a mottled orange/brown/gray clay, shading to dark gray at the very base of the test pit, 1.50m thick. This was sealed by (3004), a thin band of loam 0.10m thick. This was sealed by (3003), a band of chalk 0.40m thick. This underlay (3002), a loose yellow sand 0.50m thick. This was sealed by (3001), a mid brown slightly silty clay loam, 0.16m thick. This was sealed by (3000), the topsoil as before.

Test Pit 4.

Test pit 4 was machined to a depth of 2.50m. The earliest deposit exposed here was (4006), a light blue/gray clay. This was sealed by (4005), 0.30m of dark brown/orange clay. This underlay (4004), 0.40m of dark brown clay. This was sealed by (4003), 0.40m of buff/olive clay. This underlay (4002), 0.30m of stony mid olive silty clay loam, 5% medium gravel. This was sealed by (4001), 0.15m of olive silty clay loam. This was sealed by the topsoil (4000), here measuring 0.20m.

Test Pit 5.

Test pit 5 was machined to a depth of 2.50m. The earliest deposit exposed here was (5004), 0.20m of mid blue clay. This was sealed by (5003), 0.70m of mid gray clay. This was sealed by (5002), 0.70m of mottled buff/light gray silty clay. This underlay caps (5001), 0.60m of buff clay loam, 1% silt. This was sealed by the topsoil (5000), 0.30m thick.

Test Pit 6.

Test pit 6 was machined to a depth of 2.50m. The earliest deposit exposed here was (6005), a mid gray gravel exposed in the base of the test pit. This was sealed by (6004), a thin, loose clay, 0.50m thick. This was sealed by (6003), a red/orange gravel. This underlay (6002), 0.50m of clean sand. This was sealed by (6001), 0.33m of a buff clay loam with 1% silt. This was sealed by a thin skim of topsoil (6000), 0.10m thick.

6. Discussion

Natural deposits were exposed in all the test pits, appearing immediately below dumped dredged material (numbered as (1001)-(6001)), a sequence previously identified during test-pitting in the wetland. No cut features were seen and no finds were retrieved. Certain of the deposits seen can be traced across some of the test pits dug, e.g. the band of chalk numbered separately as (2003) and (3003). It is thought possible that this deposit represents the deposition of a working platform on the island, possibly when work was undertaken on the creation of a cut under the weir at the northern end of the island. It is thought likely that this work, combined with dredging and dumping operations over the years have combined to remove any

archaeological traces which may have been present in those areas of the island so far examined.

John Dalton
OAU
February 1998

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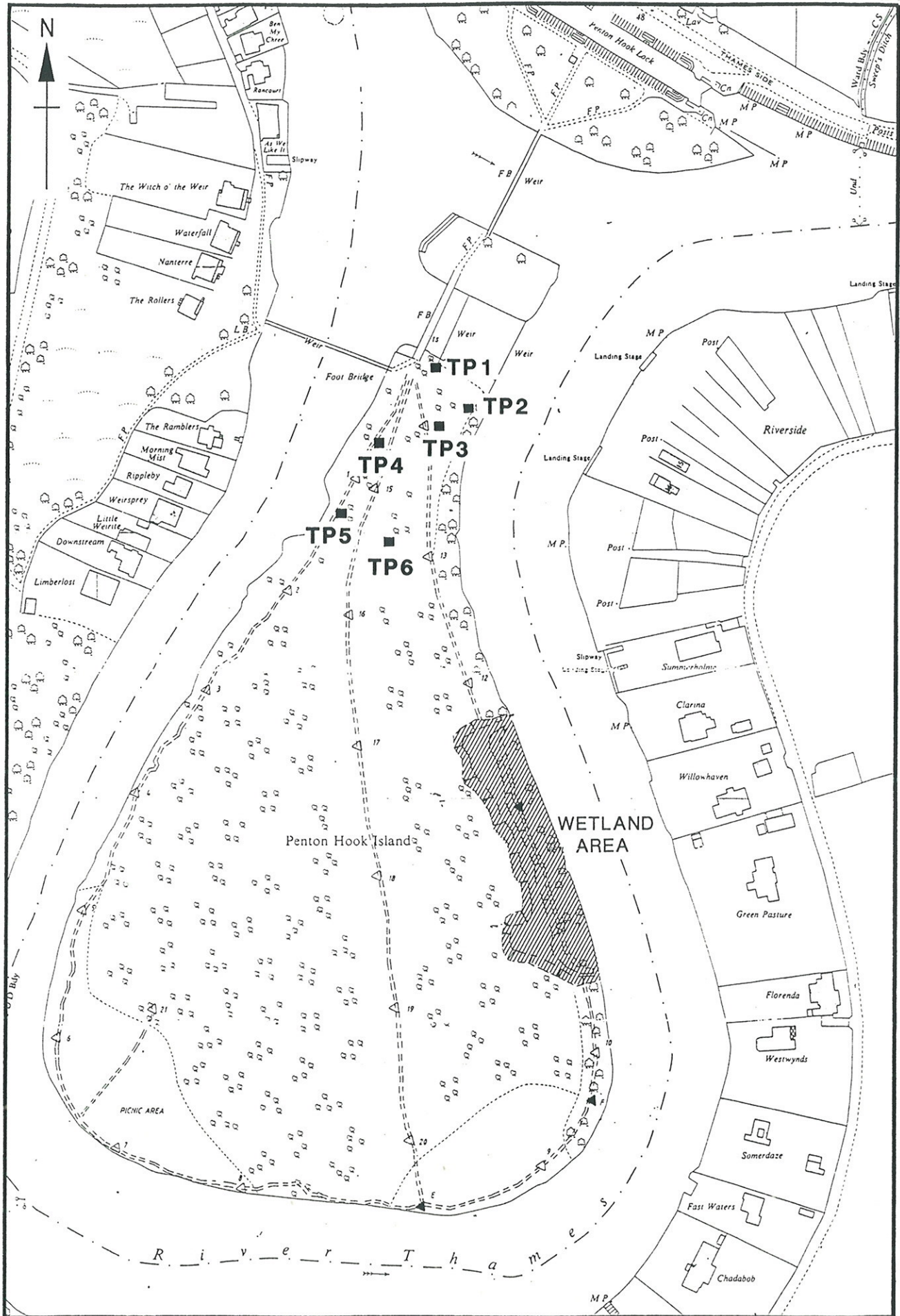


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Site Location

scale 1:25000

Figure 1



Plan of Penton Island

scale 1:2000

Figure 2

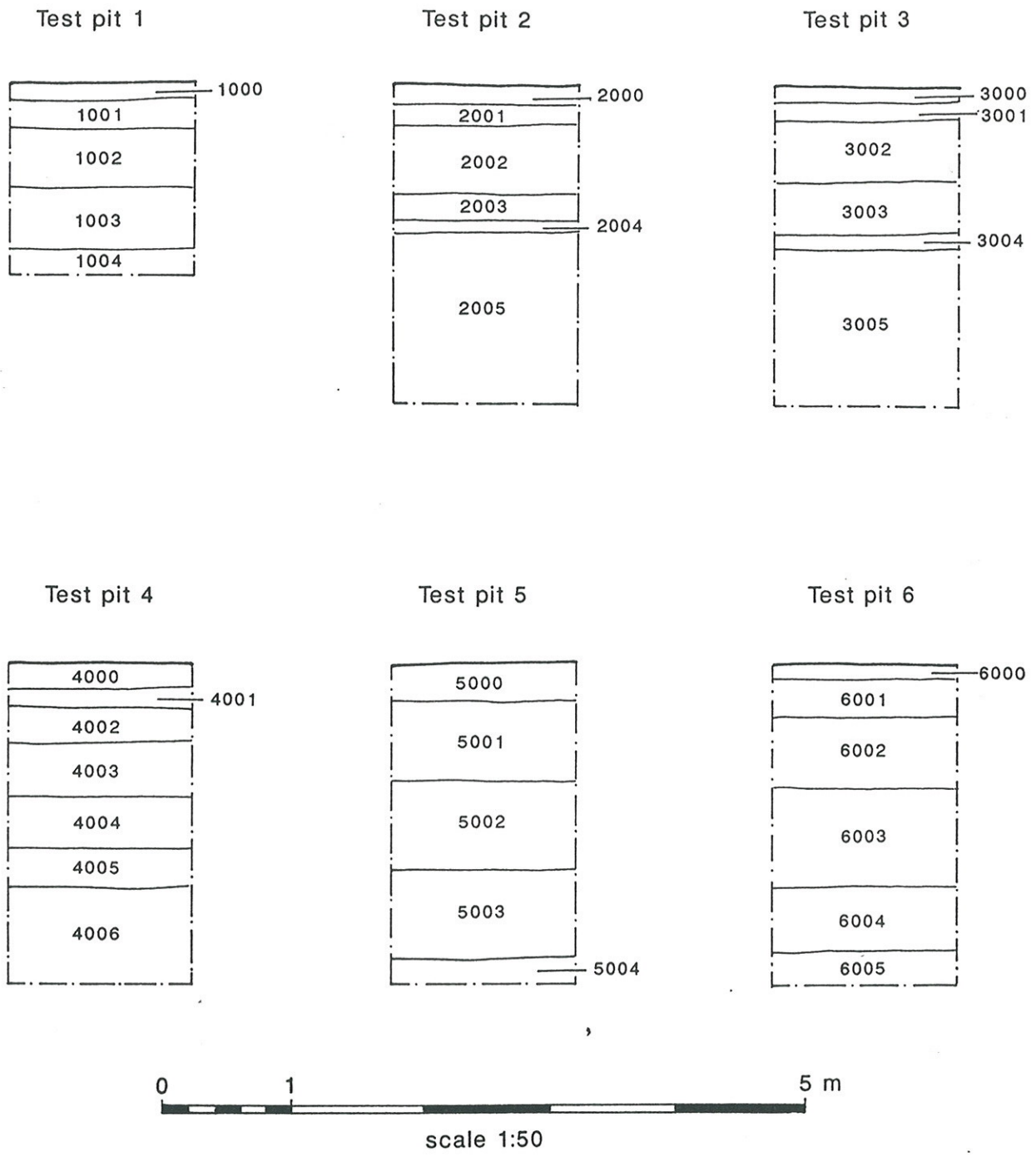


Figure 3

