

Central Area Pumping Stations: Maidenhead to Bray Rising Main

NGR SU 901 789

Archaeological Watching Brief Report



Oxford Archaeological Unit

October 1996

CENTRAL AREA PUMPING STATIONS : MAIDENHEAD TO BRAY RISING MAIN
BRAY, BERKSHIRE.
NGR SU 901789

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF.
(BRWIPS'96)

OXFORD ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

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Summary.

The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out a watching brief in August 1996 on the southernmost section of the new rising water main under construction between Maidenhead Sewage works and Bray pumping station. No archaeological features were noted, but a concentration of struck flint of late Mesolithic/Neolithic date was recorded emanating from both the present and a buried ploughsoil, some 340-360m from Bray pumping station.

Introduction.

This watching brief was commissioned by Thames Water Utilities, who have initiated a programme of archaeological monitoring, under the terms of the 1989 Water Act Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation.

The new rising water main runs between Maidenhead Sewage Works at SU 892805, and Bray pumping station beside the B3028 at SU 901789 (Fig. 1). The landuse is a combination of playing fields, a rubbish tip, a golf driving range and arable cultivation. It is low-lying and essentially flat. The underlying geology is alluvium and Taplow river terrace gravel. The main consists of three sections: Maidenhead Sewage Works to Braywick Park, Braywick Park to The Bingham's, and The Bingham's to Bray pumping station. The section from Maidenhead Sewage Works to Braywick Park will be laid using pipe bursting, and the central section by using directional drilling. These methods will have no archaeological impact. However, the southern section between The Bingham's and Bray pumping station (Fig. 2) was laid using cut and cover methods and a full archaeological watching brief was undertaken in accordance with standard OAU procedures. This area is used for arable cultivation and has been regularly ploughed. The main objective of this project was to locate, excavate and record any archaeological remains that would be affected by the pipe laying.

Archaeological Background.

The alluvium and gravel of the Thames south of Maidenhead are of high archaeological potential. An area of Mesolithic and Neolithic occupations has been excavated at the Canon Hill Estate at Braywick, which is just to the west of the southernmost section of the pipeline. Another Mesolithic occupation site lies beside the A308 (M) immediately to the west of Braywick. Excavations at Weir Bank Stud Farm have revealed Mesolithic/Neolithic features, a Middle Bronze Age settlement and field system, and Iron Age/Romano-British features (Barnes and Cleal, 1995). A Bronze Age metalwork hoard and stray Mesolithic artefacts have also been recorded in the Braywick and Bray area.

Archaeological Methodology.

Excavations for the southern section of the pipeline were observed and inspected by the OAU on a daily basis.

From 7-13th August a strip trench 712m long, 7m wide and 0.25-0.40 deep was opened, from Bray pumping station, northwest to The Cut.

This was accomplished using a 360 degree excavator with a toothless bucket to minimise damage to, and increase the visibility of, any archaeological features. The trench was examined for archaeological features and artefacts, as was the spoil, which was deposited at the side of the trench. After some heavy rain the trench and spoil were rechecked for any features or artefacts which may have become visible. Measurements were taken along the trench from Bray pumping station for recording purposes, and the depth of the trench was noted at periodic intervals.

Between 19-24th August the pipe trench, measuring approximately 0.75m wide and excavated to a maximum depth of 2.3m below the ground surface, was dug along the length of the strip trench. The sections of this trench were inspected and the spoil was searched for archaeological material.

A daily diary of work in progress and archaeological observations was kept, and supplemented by a photographic record. Small finds such as flint and pottery were recorded individually by context and their location in respect of the pipeline noted. Descriptions of relevant contexts were recorded using the standard OAU format.

Description of Results (Fig.2).

The completed length of trench under inspection was 712m long. No archaeological features were observed during the topsoil stripping to the excavation of the pipe trench. It is possible that no archaeological features exist in this area, but it should be noted, from Bray pumping station for a distance of 600m along the strip trench, the depth excavated did not penetrate below the level of the modern ploughsoil, the trench being mostly between 0.25-0.30m below the ground surface. This was confirmed by the presence of modern material such as brick, metalwork and plastic bottles on the base of the trench. From the 600m mark to the end, the trench was up to 0.40m deep and modern plough marks were clearly visible on the base of the trench indicating that all the modern ploughsoil had been removed, though this section was also devoid of archaeological features.

Although not of archaeological significance a number of areas of modern disturbance were noted, characterised by sand or gravel fills and containing modern material including brick. These relate mainly to previous pipe laying work from the Bray pumping station along the same route; this disturbance combined with drains from adjacent houses, may have removed any archaeological remains.

The sections of the pipe trench also failed to reveal any archaeological features although various areas of modern disturbance, mostly relating to pipe laying activity or field drains, were observed.

One piece of medieval pottery was recovered from the modern plough soil spoil, 423m from Bray pumping station.

A total of 30 pieces of struck flint were also collected from two ploughsoil contexts. A concentration was clearly evident between 349m and 378m along the trench from the pumping station. Some pieces were recovered from a buried ploughsoil up to 0.70m below the present ground surface. A number of pieces of burnt flint were also noted in this area. The flint is mostly dark brown in colour with lighter mottled patches, and uncorticated apart from one flake. The cortex is thin and greyish, and was probably obtained from local gravel deposits.

The collection comprised 20 flakes, 4 blade-like cores, 5 cores and 1 edge retouched flake. Three of the cores were blade cores and the fourth possessed blade-like removals. Both cortical and inner flakes were collected; these ranged in proportions from narrow and blade-like to broad and squat pieces. Both hard and soft hammers appear to have been used, but soft hammer flaking was the most common. No blades were recovered but some of the flakes have blade scars on their dorsal surfaces. Flake platforms were generally plain.

As the material is from unstratified contexts it is quite possible it is of mixed date. The presence of blade cores, soft hammer flaking and flakes with dorsal blade scars would, however, suggest a date in the late Mesolithic or early Neolithic for the bulk of the collection. Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork have previously been found at Bray (Barnes and Cleal, 1995, 21) and Wymer has also noted that Mesolithic finds are common in the vicinity (1977, 4-5, 9). Material of this date has also been recovered during the ongoing excavations by the OAU at the Eton Rowing Lake, Dorney.

Conclusion.

No archaeological features were observed in the course of the watching brief, although as noted above, the area examined was very restricted both in depth and width. Apart from 1 sherd of medieval pottery, which cannot be closely dated, the remaining finds were all struck flints. These came from either modern or old ploughsoils but seem to form a low density concentration. The assemblage appears to date mostly from the late Mesolithic/early Neolithic period and may indicate the presence of activity close in the vicinity. However, the limited extent of the trench excavation, and the previous disturbance could suggest that the apparent concentration is a result of post-depositional processes. This said, the finds do add to the evidence for significant activity in the local area during the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic as shown by other investigations in the region.

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Flint Assessment by Tess Durden.
3/10/96.

References

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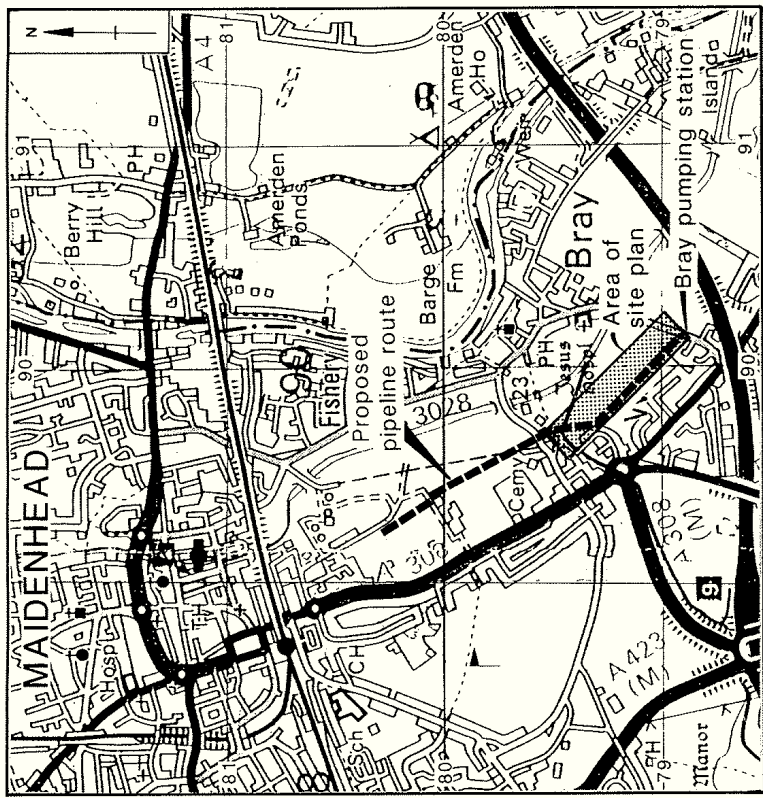


figure 1

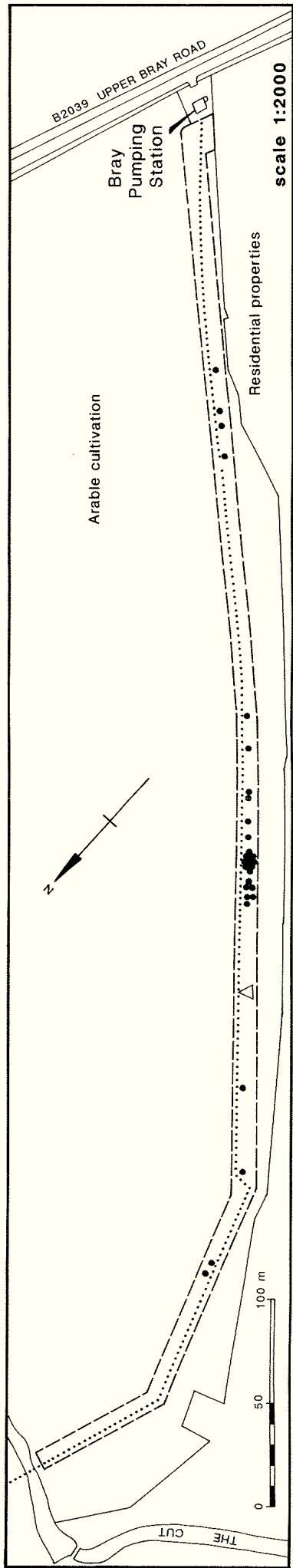
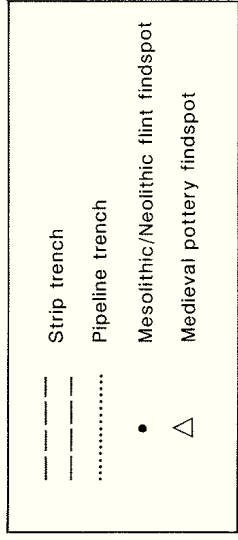


figure 2

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