LANDSCAPE AND PREHISTORY OF THE EAST LONDON WETLANDS

Investigations along the A13 DBFO Roadscheme, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham, 2000-2003

by Elizabeth Stafford
with
Damian Goodburn and Martin Bates

LANDSCAPE AND PREHISTORY OF THE EAST LONDON WETLANDS

by Elizabeth Stafford with
Damian Goodburn and Martin Bates

oxfordarchaeology
southsouthsouth

Landscape and Prehistory of the East London Wetlands

Investigations along the A13 DBFO Roadscheme, Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham, 2000-2003

by Elizabeth Stafford
with Damian Goodburn and Martin Bates

and other contributions by
Alistair Barclay, Catherine Barnett, Edward Biddulph, Barry John Bishop, John Crowther, Denise Druce, Stuart Foreman, Andrew Haggart, Richard Macphail, Jacqueline McKinley, Frank Meddens, Lorraine Mepham, Rebecca Nicholson, Sylvia Peglar, Ruth Pelling, Louise Rayner, Edward Rhodes, Alison Sheridan, David Smith, Lena Strid, Charlotte Thompson, John Whittaker

illustrated by
Elizabeth Stafford, Hannah Kennedy, Mark Gridley and Magdalena Wachnik

Oxford Archaeology Monograph No. 17
2012

The publication of this volume has been generously funded by Transport for London

Published by Oxford Archaeology as part of the Oxford Archaeology Monograph series

Designed by Elizabeth Stafford and the Oxford Archaeology Graphics Office

Edited by Rebecca Nicholson

Front cover: Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) wet woodland, Brownsea Island, Poole Harbour, Dorset (photograph by David J. Glaves, all rights reserved)

Back cover: Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead from Movers Lane, RIR01 1033 (photograph by Magdalena Wachnik)

ISBN 978-0-904220-70-4

This book is part of a series of monographs which can be bought from all good bookshops and internet bookshops

For more information visit www.thehumanjourney.net

Typeset by Production Line, Oxford

Printed in Great Britain

Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

List of Plates

Summary

This report presents the results of archaeological investigations carried out during improvements to five key junctions along a stretch of the A13 trunk road through the East London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham. The A13 at this location runs parallel to the River Thames, traversing the very edge of the Thames gravel terraces and alluvial floodplain. Previous archaeological work has shown the Thames gravel terraces to be one of the most intensively occupied regions of Southern England during the prehistoric period and locations on or adjacent to the terrace edge have high potential for preserving organic remains such as timber structures and palaeoenvironmental evidence in waterlogged conditions.

The archaeology recorded covers a wide chronological range representing intermittent activity spanning the Mesolithic through to the post-Roman period. Regionally important evidence of Neolithic activity included artefact assemblages of pottery and worked flint. A rare cache of charred emmer wheat recovered during evaluation at the Woolwich Manor Way site provides definitive evidence of early Neolithic cereal cultivation in the vicinity, and a fragment of belt slider made from Whitby jet attests to long distance exchange networks. The greatest concentration of activity, however, dates to the 2nd millennium BC and includes several Bronze Age timber stake-built structures and brushwood trackways with associated wetland edge occupation.

The A13 structures add to the corpus of regional evidence for trackway building and marshland exploitation during this period. The broadly north-south orientation would suggest they were built to maintain access to the Thames floodplain during a period of increased wetness. This may have been to exploit a range of natural resources and to herd animals to seasonal pasture. To the west, at Freemasons Road, a double row of large oak piles may represent the remains of a wooden footbridge linking the drier ground of the terrace to an island on the Lea floodplain. The piles are among the most substantial known in the region and are of similar form to those from Runneymede Bridge and Vauxhall. The bridge structure seems to have been associated with a series of gullies and postholes representing some form of enclosure perhaps associated with the corralling of animals. At Movers Lane a burnt mound deposit and associated pits located at the edge of a palaeochannel appear to post-date trackway construction and date to the latter part of the 2nd millennium BC, as does a cremation deposit and series of linear features that may define boundaries or drainage systems.

Evidence during the later periods was sparser and probably relates to a period of marine incursion, with the spread of saltmarsh environments and tidal creeks making the area unsuitable for activity. Extensive geoarchaeological and palaeoenvironmental sampling carried out during the lifetime of the project provides an important record of landscape evolution and periods of major change can be detected, both natural and anthropogenically induced. As well as providing a context for the archaeology along the A13, this raises a number of issues regarding the interaction of local communities with the natural environment, how they responded to change and to a certain extent exploited it. Ultimately this is of relevance not only to understanding the past but also to current concerns regarding environmental management along the Thames estuary.

Acknowledgements

The A13 improvements were undertaken under a Design, Build, Finance and Operate (DBFO) contract on behalf of Transport for London (TfL) Street Management, by Road Management Services (A13) plc (RMS). The DBFO contract was awarded in April 2000. Due to the long-running and complex nature of the construction project, the A13 archaeological programme saw an unusually complex interaction between project sponsor, construction contractor and the various archaeological consultants and contractors. The archaeological work was funded by RMS and Transport for London.

Particular thanks are due to Mike Wright and Aidan Murray of the Department's Agent/ Department's Representative (DA/DR) A13 DBFO Site Team for their patience and skill in steering the archaeological project through stormy contractual waters on behalf of Transport for London. The archaeological advisor to the DA/DR team (representing the Project Sponsor, Transport for London) was Oxford Archaeology, who were responsible for supervising the tendering process and monitoring the DBFO construction contractor (RMG) for compliance for the terms of the contract. OA was represented by George Lambrick during the tender evaluation phase, Tim Allen during the preliminary design, Phase I and Phase II evaluation, and Stuart Foreman during the Phase III 'Further Archaeological Works' and post-excavation phases.

External monitoring during the fieldwork, on behalf the local authorities, was undertaken by Nick Truckle of English Heritage (EH) Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS) during the fieldwork, and during the post-excavation by David Divers. Jane Sidell (EH) provided much valuable advice throughout the project.

Chris Place, acting on behalf of Chris Blandford Associates, was appointed Project Archaeologist by RMG in July 2000. He prepared designs for the Phase I and II evaluations and the watching briefs, with detailed input from Ken Whittaker of the main Archaeological Contractor, Gifford and Partners (GP). Martin Bates (University of Wales Trinity Saint David), as sub-consultant to GP, provided key specialist advice in formulating the schemewide research strategy, and subsequently coordinated geoarchaeological activity during the fieldwork and post-excavation assessment phases. Paul Falcini (Wessex Archaeology) took over as Project Archaeologist in June 2001 and produced the Phase III 'Further Archaeological Works Designs'.

All Phase I and Phase II archaeological works (evaluation test pits and trenches) were undertaken by GP, for the most part under the direction of Ken Whittaker (latterly Simon Blatherwick). Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) were employed by GP as fieldwork sub-contractor. Phase III of the investigation, comprising a series of formal excavations (including preparation of assessment reports) was split between GP and Wessex Archaeology (WA) for contractual and financial reasons, the former working on Prince Regent Lane and Woolwich Manor Way, the latter on Movers Lane.

In a project beset by numerous practical challenges, special thanks are due to John Brace of RMG for arranging the plant and temporary works that ensured the field teams were able to operate efficiently in a safe working environment. Other staff of RMG who arranged much logistical assistance for the archaeological teams included Brian Patfield (Prince Regent Lane and Movers Lane) and Doug Pratt (Freemasons Road).

Marion White and Mark Beasley coordinated the fieldwork on behalf of GP, under the direction of Ken Whittaker. The Phase I and II evaluations at all sites, and the Phase III fieldwork at Freemasons Road Underpass, were supervised by Alistair Douglas (PCA) who also wrote the assessment reports. Prince Regent Lane was supervised by Mark Beasley and Gary Evans (PCA) while Tim Carew (PCA) supervised the excavation at Woolwich Manor Way. Alistair, Mark, Gary and Tim prepared the context index, archaeological phase descriptions and matrix diagrams and contributed to the assessment reports for their respective sites. The site plans and sections from the PCA sites were prepared by Josephine Brown, Jo Thomas, Cate Davies, Sally Pickard and Cheryl Blundy (PCA). The surveyor was Giles Hammond and the photographer was Richard Young (PCA). Noreena Shopland (GP) prepared the finds catalogue and coordinated the production of the finds assessment reports. Specialist assessments were completed for GP/PCA by Damian Goodburn (worked wood), Louise Rayner and Charlotte Thompson (pottery), Barry Bishop (worked flint), Jane Liddle (animal bone), John Giorgi (plant remains), John Whittaker (microfossils) and John Crowther (soil chemistry). Staff at Royal Holloway, University of London, completed the pollen and diatom assessments, under the direction of Nick Branch. Martin Bates coordinated the geoarchaeological work.

The Phase III excavation at Movers Lane was supervised by Vaughan Birbeck (WA), who also prepared the assessment report. Mike Allen (WA) coordinated palaeoenvironmental assessments for this site, in discussion with Martin Bates (geoarchaeology); in some cases building on work previously

undertaken by the GP/PCA specialist team for the Phase II evaluation trenching. John Whittaker assessed the microfossils. Mike Allen and Mark Robinson the charred plant remains and Rob Scaife the pollen.

For the purpose of this project, the DBFO contractors' responsibilities for analysis and reporting were discharged on completion of the post-excavation assessment phase for the individual sites. A scheme-wide Post-Excavation Project Design (PEPD) was prepared by Stuart Foreman and Elizabeth Stafford of Oxford Archaeology (OA), who coordinated the post-excavation specialist analyses and publication, reporting directly, on behalf of the funding body, Transport for London, drawing on the results of the detailed assessment reports produced by GP/PCA and WA. The reasons for this exceptional arrangement were contractual/financial, and provided the only viable means of analysing and reporting on the fieldwork results in an integrated manner, as envisaged in the Project Design.

The main text and associated specialist reports incorporate the work of the following specialists: Radiocarbon dating was undertaken by Beta Analytic Inc. and the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre (SUERC). Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating was undertaken by Edward Rhodes (then at the University of Oxford). Prehistoric pottery reports were by Alistair Barclay (WA) and Louise Rayner (Archaeology South East, formerly at MoLA). Edward Biddulph (OA) wrote the Roman pottery report and Barry John Bishop the worked flint report. Alison Sheridan (National Museums of Scotland) contributed a report on the jet belt slider from Movers Lane and she thanks Terry Manby for providing information on the Boltby Moor and Blubberhouses Moor sliders. Lorraine Mepham (WA) Charlotte Thompson (MoLA) and Louise Rayner contributed reports on the fired and unfired clay. Pollen from Freemasons Road was analysed by Denise Druce (OA), pollen and diatoms from Woolwich Manor Way by Andrew Haggart (University of Greenwich) and the pollen from Movers Lane by Sylvia Peglar. Ostracods and foraminifera were analysed by John Whittaker (Natural History Museum) and insects by David Smith (University of Birmingham). Waterlogged and charred plant remains were analysed by Ruth Pelling (now at English Heritage). Wood charcoal, waterlogged wood species and age analyses were undertaken by Catherine Barnett (WA). Animal bone was analysed by Lena Strid and Rebecca Nicholson (OA). Human bone from Movers Lane was assessed by Jacqueline McKinley (WA). The sediment micromorphology was undertaken by Richard Macphail (University College London) and the soil chemistry by John Crowther (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David).

The monograph was compiled and designed by Elizabeth Stafford (OA); both Damian Goodburn (MoLA) and Martin Bates (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David) are acknowledged as joint authors in recognition of the central importance of the worked wood and sediment interpretations to the site descriptions, and the fact that their specialist work during the fieldwork, assessment and post excavation stages is entirely integrated within the main text of the volume.

Andy Simmonds (OA) assisted with archive collation, stratigraphic analysis and specialist liason during the early stages of the post excavation analysis. This volume is illustrated by Elizabeth Stafford, Hannah Kennedy, Mark Gridley and Magdalena Wachnik (OA). Frank Meddens (PCA), who contributed to the original project design, provided much valuable advice based on his extensive experience of archaeological work in the Thames marshes, and wrote much of the concluding chapter. Elizabeth Huckerby (OA) provided much useful feedback on aspects of the Holocene vegetation, particularly for Chapter 8. Jon Cotton (FSA, former Curator of Prehistory at the Museum of London) kindly commented on the publication text. Rebecca Nicholson (OA) edited the report. Alex Smith (OA) managed the typesetting and printing.

Oxford Archaeology
Monograph No.17

Archaeological investigations carried out during improvements to five key junctions along a stretch of the A13 trunk road through the East London Boroughs of Tower Hamlets, Newham and Barking and Dagenham have revealed evidence for activity spanning the Mesolithic through to the post-Roman period. Regionally important evidence of Neolithic activity included artefact assemblages of pottery and worked flint. A rare cache of charred emmer wheat provides definitive evidence of early Neolithic cereal cultivation in the vicinity and a fragment of belt slider made from Whitby jet attests the long distance exchange networks. The greatest concentration of activity, however, dates to the 2nd millennium BC and includes several waterlogged wooden structures and trackways, burnt mounds and other evidence associated with wetland edge occupation. Extensive geoarchaeological and palaeoenvironmental sampling provides an important record of landscape evolution and periods of major change can be detected, both natural and anthropogenically induced. As well as providing a context for the archaeology along the A13, this raises a number of issues regarding the interaction of local communities with the natural environment, how they responded to change and to a certain extent exploited it. Ultimately this is of relevance not only to understanding the past but also to current concerns regarding environmental management along the Thames estuary.

oxfordarchaeology
southsouthsouth

ROAD MANAGEMENT SERVICES (A13) plc

RMS

Transport for London

Wessex Archaeology

PCA

Gifford

ISBN 978-0-904220-70-4
90000
9 780904 220704

£25.00

Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES