

Colchester Archaeological Trust,
Watching brief,
Water-mains renewal at Boxted, Essex
(NGR: TM 003329)

In July 1992, the Anglian Water Authority sponsored a watching brief on mains renewal works along a 900 m route crossing the valley between Boxted village and Boxted Cross. Although no observations had previously been made in that part of the valley, aerial surveys have produced cropmark evidence of field boundaries, trackways and enclosures extending over a large area to the east.

The new main was laid in fields immediately to the west of the lanes known as Carters Hill and Parsonage Hill. Groundworks involved the removal of 250-300 mm ploughsoil to form a 6 m wide track for the passage of heavy machinery, which then cut a 300 mm wide pipe trench to a minimum overall depth of 1.1 m. The initial phase of soil stripping yielded medieval and prehistoric finds, the distribution of which are shown in figure 1. Ground conditions varied along the course of the stripped track; they were at their most favourable for finds recovery on Parsonage Hill and this factor may account for the apparent focus produced by the relatively high flint retrieval rate in that area.

The soil stripping and subsequent trench cutting revealed a general stratigraphy of stoney sand subsoils on the higher ground, merging into a clay loam at the bottom of the valley. Of the few discernible features only one, at a bend near the southern end of the route, appeared to be early (fig 1). At that point the natural stratigraphy within the narrow confines of the cutting was interrupted for a length of 34 m by a darker sandy loam which extended to the bottom of

the trench. The significance of this feature remains uncertain since practical considerations prevented further examination within or beyond the trench. Its profile suggested two possible interpretations: either a straight north-south ditch intersected tangentially by the curving course of the cutting; or alternatively, deposition of earlier topsoil into a natural fold in the side of the valley.

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