

**GREATER THAMES ESTUARY  
ESSEX ZONE  
MONITORING SURVEY  
INTERIM REPORT No 2**



Essex County Council



ENGLISH HERITAGE

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**Report prepared by**

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**2003**

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***Front cover shows sunrise over the Blackwater Estuary in December 2002***

# **GREATER THAMES ESTUARY; ESSEX ZONE MONITORING SURVEY**

## **INTERIM REPORT No 2 2003**

### **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

- 1.1 This interim report describes the ongoing work, which has been carried out on the Greater Thames Monitoring Survey from January 2002 to March 2003. The first interim which was issued in January 2002 (Heppell and Brown 2002), which details the reasons for the project and its aims and objectives.
- 1.2 The initial phases of the project comprised revisits to eight coastal sites, which had first been examined during the Hullbridge survey in the 1980s (Wilkinson and Murphy 1995). The data collected at these sites provided valuable information as to their current condition, the threats that they are facing and provided suggestions as to further work, which could usefully be carried out in these areas.
- 1.3 In addition to the brief revisits one site, Rolls Farm, was selected for regular monitoring over a two-year period. The results of the continuing visits to Rolls Farm are summarised in this interim report.

### **2.0 ROLLS FARM**

#### **2.1 Background**

- 2.1.1 Rolls Farm is a multi-period complex, located on the north shore of the Blackwater estuary, and contains a range of site types which are located within the intertidal zone, such as buried land surfaces, prehistoric wooden structures, a red hill and relict sea wall.

#### **2.2 The Neolithic Site**

- 2.2.1 The Hullbridge survey had identified a dense artefact scatter eroding out from a lower peat deposit, at approximately -1.5m OD. Initial revisits to Rolls Farm failed to locate any significant scatter in the area, although the occasional flint and abraded pottery was located.
- 2.2.2 The subsequent visits to the site have located a more dense finds scatter, located to the west of those identified during the Hullbridge survey. This scatter comprised a number of struck flints, which were in very good condition. The scatter was, like that of the initial

Hullbridge survey, located close to low water and eroding out from the lower peat shelf. 2.2.3

Given the density of this scatter, and its differing location in comparison to that of the initial survey work, it would seem reasonable to suggest that this scatter may represent a previously unrecorded area of Neolithic activity, which is now being actively eroded.

## **2.3 Wooden Structures**

2.3.1 A number of wooden structures are present at Rolls Farm, largely concentrated in a single area, close to the current edge of the salt marsh. These comprise wattle trackways and brushwood bundles. One of these structures, 204, is being re-planned at each site visit. This wattle panel was some 5m long and c1m wide.

2.3.2 The monitoring has shown that some of the larger and more exposed elements of the structure have now been washed away. This is particularly the case at the west end, and along the northern edge. At the eastern end of the structure further parts of the wattle panelling are now exposed. Since the start of the monitoring work it appears that at least 0.08m has been lost from the vertical height of the sediment around the structure.

2.3.3 Immediately to the north of 204 a further wattle panel, 203, was located. This panel, which is higher up on a shelf of the salt marsh cliff has now all but disappeared, with only the upright posts still visible. Brushwood bundle 210 has also gone.

2.3.4 The wooden structures located to the west of the main concentration, closer to the red hill, have also been monitored. These were in poor condition at the start of the monitoring process and have again all but disappeared.

## **2.5 The Red Hill**

2.5.1 There are a series of red hills along the north of the shoreline, one of these BL11, lies on the edge of the current salt marsh edge. This feature barely rises above the salt marsh but is clearly visible from the seaward side, elements of the structure, including clay lined tanks, were visible.

2.5.2 Initial visits, which took place in the latter half of 2001, showed clear evidence of erosion, particularly on the exposed south west facing section of the feature. The subsequent visits, after the more stormy winter months, showed that a great deal of material has been lost in the area. It was also noted that a great deal more briquetage was present compared to the previous visits.

## **2.6 Other**

- 2.6.1 The Rolls Farm site lies to the north of Thirslet Creek, to the south of this on the mud flats close to the low water mark, lies the Collins Creek fish trap complex (Hall and Clarke 2000). This complex is visible from Rolls Farm. Initial field visits to Rolls Farm had noted a number of isolated pieces of timber loose on the shore, at the time these were too fragmentary to identify. However, during the revisits that took place after the winter months, a large number of wooden posts were seen on site. These clearly originated from the Collins Creek complex, and were, in general in. good condition. Indeed on some cases the round peg holes still had their pegs intact.
- 2.6.2 In many cases these timbers have been reused, and set upright around the pools of the relict creek system, presumably to mark out areas where oysters can be found.

## **3.0 THE STUMBLE**

- 3.1 The Stumble is also a multi-period complex, which after initially being identified during the Hullbridge survey, was subject to extensive sampling and selective open-area excavation. At the Stumble a large area of submerged land surface contained extensive remains of early Neolithic settlement with particular foci located some 800m to the east of the causeway to Osea Island. Later Neolithic settlement evidence was also located at various locations. The revisit identified a dense finds scatter in the same area as that excavated but also noted further material to the west, closer to the causeway.
- 3.2 In early 2003 a report was received from a Mr Larner, a retired fisherman who visits the Stumble regularly, that he had recovered both pottery and flintwork from the site in recent months. As such it was decided that a repeat visit should be carried out to locate this material. The site was visited by R. Clarke and A. Gascoyne of ECC. The location of the finds scatter was much closer to the causeway than any noted previously. In addition to the finds, wooden structures and what may be part of a red hill were located.
- 3.3 Mr Larner also brought along a small selection of the finds he has recovered from the site, these included a remarkable number of flint axes, polished stone axes, flint scrapers, arrowheads. In addition substantial pieces of pottery, probably Peterborough ware, have been recovered. Whilst the investigations during the 1980s recovered large assemblages of high quality flintwork and early Neolithic pottery together with Peterborough ware and some Grooved Ware, the axes represent a significant new addition to material from the site). An initial meeting has been arranged between Mr Larner and Hazel Martingell to assess the flintwork in the collection and consider what further work may be necessary.

(N.B. The work outlined in 3.2-3 although relevant to the English Heritage funded monitoring project and therefore included here, was separately funded by ECC

#### **4.0 SUGGESTED FURTHER WORK**

4.1 The work of the Greater Thames monitoring survey, begun in 2001, is successfully collecting and collating data on the effect of coastal erosion which is both destroying existing sites and exposing new ones. A full assessment report on the project will be prepared in autumn 2003. In the meantime it may be worth noting two points:

**Collins Creek Complex;** This is a major monument which is clearly actively eroding and is representative of a series of Saxon fishtraps in the Blackwater estuary. These extensive wooden structures, a number of which are Scheduled Ancient Monuments, are not included in the current monitoring programme. Given the rather different tidal conditions which affect these structures it may be appropriate to consider further work on the fishtraps to consider their current condition/ rate of destruction. Previous survey has provided an accurate baseline data (Hall and Clarke 2000). Although the complex lies close to low tide work is feasible, particularly as there are a number of very low spring tides this year which would provide a longer window in which to work.

**The Stumble:** The work this year has clearly illustrated that the archaeological material at the Stumble covers an extensive area, and that there is a wide range of finds present. However these areas are also actively eroding. Further monitoring at the Stumble would be appropriate, possibly including excavation/systematic regular finds collection. Good condition finds therefore flint and pottery study. Dating for emerging wooden structures

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