NORTH-WEST OXFORDSHIRE
SUPPLY IMPROVEMENTS

PROGRAMME OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL RECORDING

C.A.T JOB: 1053
C.A.T REPORT: 01060

MAY 2001

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CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS ........................................................................................................... 2

SUMMARY .................................................................................................................................. 3

1. INTRODUCTION ................................................................................................................... 4

   1.1 Introduction ..................................................................................................................... 4
   1.2 The study area ................................................................................................................ 4
   1.3 Archaeological Specification and Methods
       Contractors Working Methods ..................................................................................... 5
       Archaeological Methodologies ..................................................................................... 5

2. RESULTS ............................................................................................................................. 7

   2.1 Advanced excavations .................................................................................................. 7
   2.2 The watching brief ....................................................................................................... 8

3. ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS .............................................................................................. 9

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY ................................................................................................................ 9

APPENDIX 1 ............................................................................................................................. 14

   Concordance of finds ......................................................................................................... 14
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure 1 Location plan showing northern extent of pipeline route ........................................ 11
Figure 2 Location plan showing southern extent of pipeline route ........................................ 12
Figure 3 Plan of site 8 showing archaeological features ......................................................... 13
SUMMARY

Between July and October 2000 Cotswold Archaeological Trust undertook a programme of archaeological recording in connection with the laying of potable water main in north-west Oxfordshire. The pipeline route ran for approximately 17km in length between Charlbury (NGR SP 8335 7950) and Swinford (NGR SP 9100 7655).

Advanced stripping adjacent to the upstanding earthwork of Grim’s Ditch confirmed the earthwork did not extend across the pipe route, rather it terminates in the field immediately to the west of the site. To the south-east of Eynsham, a small number of undated postholes were identified.

Throughout the remainder of the pipe route a small number of worked flint, including a barbed and tanged arrowhead, were recovered from the topsoil.
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological recording undertaken between July and October 2000 in connection with the laying of potable water main in north-west Oxfordshire. The findings of the associated archaeological excavation undertaken near Wilcote, Oxfordshire (centred on NGR SP 3650 1550) have been reported upon separately (CAT 2001).

1.1.2 The work was commissioned by Lang Hall Archaeology on behalf of Thames Water Utilities Ltd

1.2 The study area

1.2.1 The pipeline route runs for approximately 17km in length between Charlbury (NGR SP 8335 7950) and Swinford (NGR SP 9100 7655), traversing a landscape dominated by arable farmland (Fig. 1).

1.2.2 At Swinford the underlying geology is dominated by alluvium and terrace gravels, rising onto the Oolite and Forest Marble, before dropping again to the Lias Clays of the Evenlode Valley at Charlbury.

1.3 Archaeological Specification and Methods

1.3.1 An archaeological brief issued by Lang Hall Archaeology proposed the investigation of three previously identified archaeological areas in advance of the main phase of construction (LHA 2000). Secondly, a watching brief was to be maintained during all intrusive groundwork along the pipeline corridor, with further contingency for excavation in the event that significant archaeological deposits were encountered.
1.3.2 The objectives of the archaeological recording were:

(i) to observe any operations that may disturb or destroy archaeological deposits.
(ii) to investigate the presence/absence, nature, extent, character, date, and preservation of any buried archaeological remains.

Contractors Working Methods

1.3.3 A fenced wayleave, approximately 15m in width, was established throughout the pipeline route. Within this wayleave all topsoil was mechanically stripped prior to the excavation of the trench for the water pipe.

Archaeological Methodologies

1.3.4 The field methodologies employed during the programme of archaeological recording were:

Advance Excavations

1.3.5 The three identified archaeological areas (Areas 4, 8 and 14) were machines stripped by mechanical excavator equipped with a toothless grading bucket. All machining was carried out under archaeological supervision to the top of the first significant archaeological horizon or the top of the natural substrate, which ever was encountered first. The locations of the excavation areas are illustrated on Fig. 1.

Area 4: 30m either side of postulated alignment of Grim’s Ditch
Area 8: 315m, centred on (SP 4220 0910)
Area 14: Wilcote

1.3.6 Sufficient hand cleaning was undertaken to define the presence and extent of archaeological deposits, and to allow the compilation of a site plan. All
fieldwork was undertaken in accordance with the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* issued by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA). All archaeological deposits were recorded in accordance with CAT Technical Manual 1 *Field Recording Manual* (1996). All artefacts recovered were catalogued and analysed in accordance with CAT Technical Manual 3 *Treatment of Finds Immediately after Excavation* (1995). Particular emphasis was given to potentially datable artefacts such as pottery. A full written, drawn and photographic record was kept during the programme of works.

The Watching Brief

1.3.7 All intrusive groundworks along the pipeline route were monitored for the presence of archaeological deposits. If archaeological features were revealed during topsoil stripping they were hand excavated and recorded in plan. Features identified during the machine excavation of the pipe trench were recorded in section only. All work was undertaken in accordance with the IFA *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Briefs* (1994) and CAT Technical Manual 1 *Field Recording Manual* (1996). A full written, drawn and photographic record was kept during the programme of works.

Rapid Response Excavation

1.3.8 In the event that significant archaeological deposits were encountered during the course of the watching brief, contingency was made for the appropriate recording of the deposits.
2. RESULTS

2.1 Advanced excavations

Site 4: Grim's Ditch (SP 3833 1222)

2.1.1 Aerial photographic and geophysical survey of the immediate area was undertaken prior to the commencement of fieldwork. Neither survey identified evidence for the continuation of Grim’s Ditch into the field subsequently crossed by the pipeline. Nonetheless, an area totalling 60m in length by 15m in width was machine stripped to the top of the natural substrate under archaeological direction across the postulated alignment of the earthwork.

2.1.2 No archaeological deposits or features were identified, with natural gravels exposed throughout.

Site 8: Cropmark site near Eynsham (SP 4220 0910)

2.1.3 A geophysical survey identified a multi-period prehistoric settlement and ritual landscape approximately 750m to the south-east of Site 8. An aerial survey of Site 8 itself indicated the presence of possible pits and medieval furrows and therefore the site was targeted for further archaeological investigation.

2.1.4 The site, which measured 315m x 15m, was machine-excavated to the top of the natural substrate under constant archaeological direction and subsequently hand-cleaned.

2.1.5 The natural substrate comprised red-brown to light yellow-brown Forest Marble (804) over the western two thirds of the site, with Second Terrace Calcareous River Gravels (803) throughout the remainder.
2.1.6 Six post-holes were identified: [807], [811], [823], [832], [834] and [836]. All were sub-circular in plan, ranging from 0.15m to 0.38m in diameter, and filled with orange-brown clay silt. No artefactual material, excepting a fragment of animal from posthole [823], was retrieved from these features.

2.1.7 Evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation was restricted to the east of the site and was represented by broad, shallow, linear cuts in the natural gravel. The features were broadly orientated north to south, and contained a yellow-brown silty clay fill that was indistinct in composition from the subsoil. The subsoil itself is interpreted as the ploughed out remnant of the medieval cultivation soils.

2.1.9 All the foregoing features were sealed by grey-brown silty clay topsoil (801), from which 6 struck flints, including an early Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead (SF 802), and a single sherd each of Roman and medieval pottery were recovered.

2.2 *The watching brief*

2.2.1 A number of difficulties were experienced during the watching brief. The natural substrate was frequently not revealed throughout the wayleave due to the shallow nature of the topsoil strip, furthermore the exposed surfaces were often smeared with disturbed soil. Whenever possible, the wayleave was also visited during pipe laying operations, when the excavated pipe trench could also be examined. Over large lengths of the scheme, therefore, a width of only c.1m of natural subsoil was exposed. This inevitably hindered the recognition, and particularly the interpretation, of archaeological features. While it is conceivable that sites with a low density of cut features might have gone unnoticed, it is very unlikely that any major sites were missed.

2.2.2 The natural substrate was typically sealed by a light yellow-brown subsoil up to 0.3m thick. Occasional features were identified cutting this horizon but all were demonstrably modern in date.
2.2.4 Inturn the subsoil was overlain by grey-brown clay silt topsoil from which one piece each of worked chert and worked flint, and three sherds of Roman pottery were retrieved (see Table 1 for description and location).

3. ASSESSMENT OF RESULTS

3.1 As outlined above, few deposits or features of archaeological significance were identified during the programme of archaeological recording.

3.2 The advanced stripping of Area 4, adjacent to the upstanding earthwork of Grim’s Ditch confirmed the findings from previous surveys that the earthwork did not extend across the pipe route, rather it terminates in the field immediately to the west of the site. The incompleteness of the earthwork has previously been commented upon (Crawford 1930; Copeland 1989), with past agricultural regimes, settlement and industry being offered as possible causes for the observed gaps in the earthwork circuit. The current fieldwork provides evidence that the associated ditch at least was not continuous, and adds credence to the hypothesis that Grim’s Ditch was constructed in short stretches separated with gaps possibly for access (Copeland 1989, 283).

3.3 At Site 8, to the south-east of Eynsham, interpretation is by necessity limited due to the paucity of archaeological features, although outlying features associated with the possible Iron Age/Romano-British settlement (identified 250m to the south) and/or the multi period prehistoric settlement at Foxley Field (700m to the south-east) may be offered.

4. BIBLIOGRAPHY


LHA (Lang Hall Archaeology) 2000 *North West Oxfordshire Supply Improvements (Scheme 7VVB)*. *Brief for Archaeological Monitoring*
Figure 1
Figure 3
APPENDIX 1

Concordance of finds

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Context Type</th>
<th>SF Number</th>
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<td>Roman Sandy Greyware pottery</td>
<td>SP 408 101</td>
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<td>303</td>
<td>Roman Sandy Greyware pottery</td>
<td>SP 379 131</td>
</tr>
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<td>Topsoil</td>
<td>307</td>
<td>Flint ?blade core trimming flake</td>
<td>SP 377 132</td>
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<tr>
<td>Subsoil</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>Roman grog-tempered pottery</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>802</td>
<td>Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged arrowhead</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Retouched flint ?scraper</td>
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