

PREHISTORIC AND ROMANO-BRITISH FINDS BETWEEN BARLBOROUGH AND HODTHORPE, DERBYSHIRE

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Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust (T&PAT) was commissioned by Severn Trent Engineering in 1992 to evaluate the route of a pipeline constructed between a reservoir near Barlborough (SK 48287751) and the junction of Broad Lane and the A60 (Mansfield Road) near Hodthorpe (SK 55297656), mainly within the parishes of Barlborough and Whitwell. The pipeline ran approximately west–east across the gently undulating dip slope of the Lower Magnesian Limestone escarpment (Eden *et al.* 1957, 141–46) for *c.* 7.5km. It intersected several flint scatters which the County Archaeologist, Dr D. Barrett, recommended should be evaluated prior to construction of the pipeline. The work described in this report followed a watching brief by Ian Wall of Creswell Heritage Trust, conducted during geological explorations along the proposed pipeline route (Wall 1992), and comprised a programme of test-pitting, geomagnetic survey and evaluation excavations. The fieldwork was carried out from July to September 1992, and was followed by a watching brief during construction, focused on an area where test-pitting had revealed two Romano-British pottery concentrations (Fig. 1: Trenches 117 & 123). The project was managed for the Trust by DK and supervised in the field by VP. The geophysical survey was conducted by Geoquest Associates, under the direction of Dr M. Noel, and the watching brief was carried out by S. Malone of T&PAT. A detailed report on this work, together with the archive and finds, has been deposited in the Sheffield City Museum (Knight and Priest 1997). The archive includes specialist reports on the lithic artefacts (D. Garton), Romano-British pottery (R. S. Leary) and geophysical survey (Dr M. Noel).

103 test-pits, each 1m square, were excavated along a 3.1km length of the pipeline where it traversed several Neolithic/Bronze Age flint scatters recorded in the Derbyshire Sites and Monuments Record (Fig. 1). These were dug with the aim of establishing whether the sites represented activity foci, warranting further evaluation, or were merely the components of a background scatter. It was hoped also to obtain additional artefacts which would assist the dating of these scatters. The pits were spaced 20m apart within the flint scatters and at intervals of 40m between the scatters. The pit fills were removed by trowel in a series of 50mm spits, generally down to solid or weathered limestone bedrock or to a limestone breccia, interpreted as a scree deposit formed by frost weathering in periglacial conditions. A number of test-pits yielded a mainly brown or reddish brown basal clay deposit, up to *c.* 0.3m deep, commonly contained within hollows in the underlying limestone. The clay incorporated a variety of non-local lithologies, including granitoid rock and chert pebbles, and was interpreted as probably an intermittent glacial drift deposit. The soil was sieved for finds through a 7mm mesh, and all Medieval and earlier finds were recorded individually.

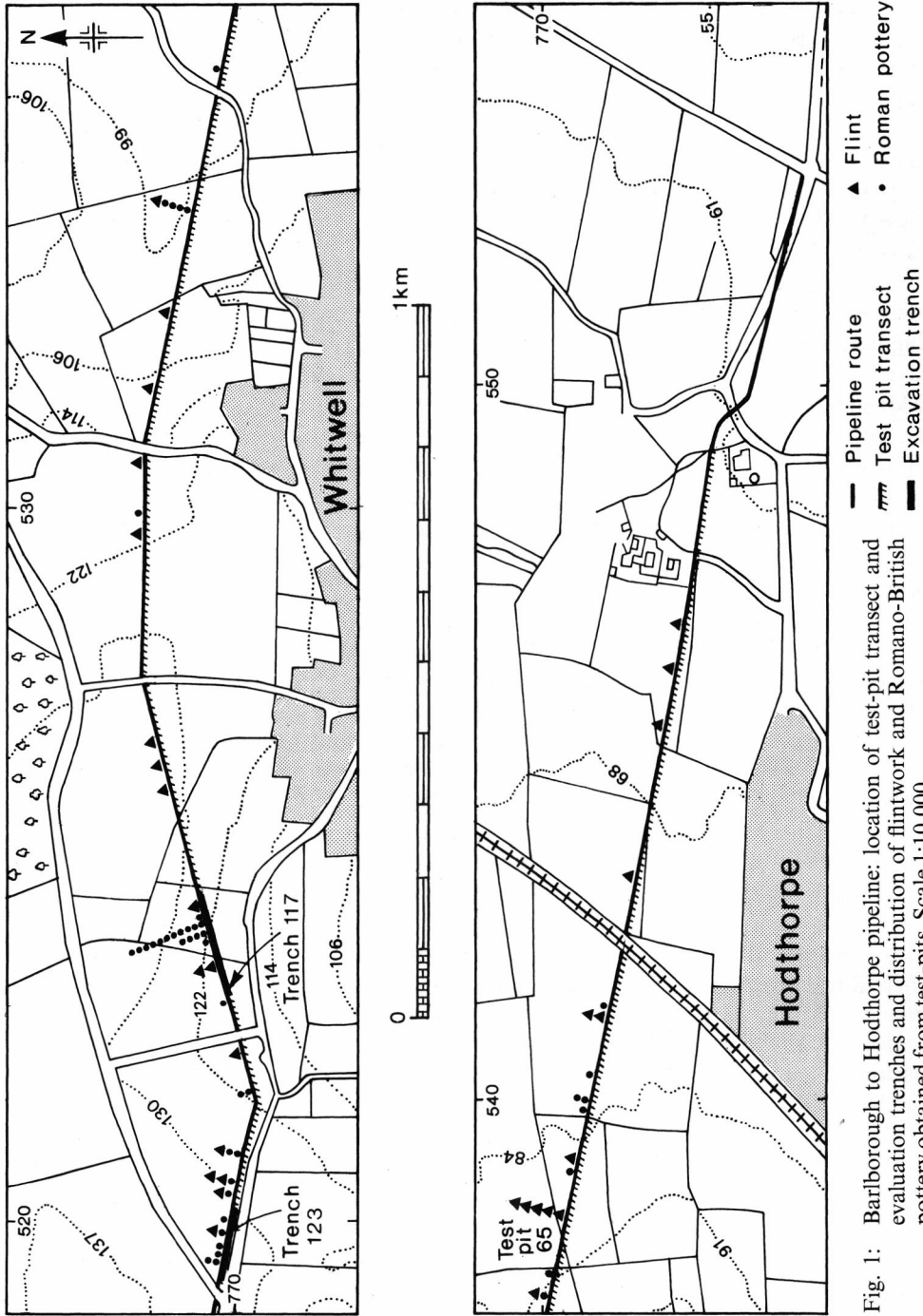


Fig. 1: Barbborough to Hodthorpe pipeline: location of test-pit transect and evaluation trenches and distribution of flintwork and Romano-British pottery obtained from test-pits. Scale 1:10,000.

A thin background scatter of Mesolithic to Bronze Age flintwork was recorded in the topsoil within all arable and pasture fields which were sampled by test-pitting, but the only possible concentration was recorded in Pit 65, to the north-east of Whitwell village (Fig. 1). Topsoil in this pit incorporated two fragments of struck flint, a flint spall, a calcined flint chip and a burnt chert chip which could derive from a later prehistoric activity focus, but unfortunately none of these finds was closely datable. An additional four test-pits were dug, 2m to the north, south, west and east of Pit 65, with the aims of establishing the spatial extent of the artefact spread and of obtaining additional dating evidence. These yielded no additional material, indicating perhaps a cluster of very restricted size.

Two concentrations of Romano-British pottery were recorded during test-pitting to the south-west of Whitwell Wood, the westernmost of which correlated with a pottery scatter recorded during earlier fieldwalking of the pipeline route by Creswell Heritage Trust. Additional test-pits were dug in these areas, reducing the interval between pits to only 10m, in order to obtain more information on the density and character of the pottery and to establish more precisely the spatial extent of the scatters. Sieving yielded significant additional material, including as many as eleven sherds from one pit in the easternmost of the two scatters (Pit 115). It was decided, therefore, to excavate a trench across each of the concentrations to establish whether the finds derived from associated structural remains (Fig. 1). Trench 117 extended downslope for 143m, while Trench 123 extended across an elevated area of limestone plateau for 100m; both were dug to a width of 3m.

Topsoil was removed mechanically from trench 117 and the exposed surface was cleaned by hand. This revealed patches of solid or weathered limestone bedrock mainly towards the eastern end of the trench, where it cut across the higher and more exposed plateau surface. Elsewhere, the topsoil was generally stratified above a brown or reddish brown silty clay loam or silty clay, interpreted as probably an *in situ* subsoil augmented on the valley slope by colluvial accumulations. The most significant discovery was a c. 12m-wide band of dark yellowish-brown silty clay loam, crossing the trench near its eastern end (Layer 05). This layer incorporated occasional rounded pebbles and limestone fragments and a significantly higher density of Romano-British sherds than was recorded elsewhere within the pipeline corridor. Manual excavation of Layer 05 showed it to occupy the upper 0.15m of an irregular karstic depression, filled towards its base with angular limestone rubble above solid bedrock. The rubble appears to represent a scree, formed by frost weathering in periglacial conditions, while the upper silty clay loam may represent a colluvial deposit formed by the accumulation of soil and other material transported downslope by gravity. The colluvial interpretation is strengthened by the location of Layer 05 within a hollow immediately downslope of a pronounced break of slope: an ideal location for the accumulation of material drifting downslope. The collection of Romano-British pottery from Layer 05 and from the overlying topsoil is very mixed, comprising a total of 36 mainly small and abraded sherds ranging in date from the 1st to 4th centuries, as might be expected if the collection had accumulated over a long time period as a result of the downslope movement of artefacts. The origin of the pottery remains unclear, but the sherds could possibly have derived from a hitherto undetected Romano-British occupation focus immediately upslope of the pipeline route.

Topsoil was also removed mechanically from Trench 123, revealing solid or weathered limestone bedrock for much of the westernmost portion of the trench, where it cut across

the higher and more exposed plateau surface. Excavations elsewhere revealed a sub-ploughsoil layer of brown silty clay loam or silty clay interpreted, in view of the topographic location of the trench, as probably an *in situ* subsoil. The exposed surface was cleaned by hand, revealing immediately beneath the topsoil a minimum of fourteen closely spaced and roughly parallel intercutting gullies, aligned obliquely to the axis of the trench. These varied from 0.15m to 0.6m wide by between 0.08m and 0.36m deep, were irregular or roughly U-shaped in profile, and yielded no finds. Interpretation is problematic, but a recent agricultural origin, associated possibly with field drainage or subsoiling, seems most likely. One small gully (16), cut into bedrock to a depth of only 0.1m and up to 0.5m wide, was aligned roughly at right angles to these features, and yielded two Romano-British greyware body sherds and two heat-affected stones. The feature could conceivably relate to Romano-British activity, but its origin remains obscure.

The Magnesian Limestone escarpment of north-east Derbyshire may have been fairly extensively settled in the Romano-British period, to judge by the discovery nearby of settlements at Scratta Wood (Challis and Harding 1975i, 94, 136–37) and possibly within Whitwell Wood (Knight 1986) and near Barlborough (Hart 1984, 96, Plate 3); further afield, Romano-British settlements have been recorded on the limestone escarpment at sites such as Shirebrook (Kay 1951) and Scarcliffe Park (Lane 1973). The present evaluations suggest agricultural exploitation of the area immediately south of Whitwell Wood in this period, together possibly with a settlement focus, and in this respect have provided a valuable addition to our knowledge of the distribution of Romano-British activity in this region.

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