

**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF ON THE POTTER HILL
TO GALLOWS NOOKING COMMON PIPELINE,
NOTTINGHAMSHIRE/LINCOLNSHIRE
NGR SK 485853 360778 - 485870 360573**

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Prepared on behalf of J. Murphy & Sons Ltd.



(Area 4 pipe cutting, photograph by R.Holt)

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Areas and ref 485890 360611

by Howard Jones and Ray Holt

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1 NON TECHNICAL SUMMARY

- The pipeline corridor falls within a landscape containing significant archaeological remains. These include a cropmark complex likely to form the remains of a settlement and associated field system of possible Iron Age or Romano-British date.
- The modern A46 has long been known (with significant deviations) to follow the line of the Fosse Way, an important Roman road.
- At Gallows Nooking Common on the south-east side of the A46 an undated low earthen bank marks the county boundary between Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire. Recent excavations on the south-east side of the earthwork have identified a ditch containing Iron Age pottery.
- At its south-east end the pipe easement lies within 300m of the site of the Norton Disney Roman villa.
- In the Anglo-Saxon period Potter Hill may have formed a convenient prominence for the construction of a burial mound, whilst in the medieval period the locality may have also been used as a place of execution.
- The archaeological impact of the pipeline was reduced by the use of a directional boring technique. This ensured that the pipeline passed beneath the A46 and the county boundary earthwork and any adjacent ditches.
- Monitoring of the topsoil stripping of the two easements either side of the road carriageway revealed no significant archaeological features. Extensive portions of the two easements showed signs of earlier disturbance relating to the original pipe trench.
- A ditch was identified in the section of the Area 5 pipe trench, although undated the dark coloured humic fill and suspected north-west/south-east orientation (later re-used by a field drain) suggest that it formed part of the post-medieval landscape.
- The absence of any archaeological evidence consistent with the Fosse Way Roman road within Area 4 may be significant. Together with a similar lack of evidence from recent excavations nearby on the south side of the A46 at Gallows Nooking Common (Kinsley 1993; Holt, Jones and Knight 2001) it may favour the location of the Roman road beneath the modern carriageway.

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1. PROJECT/PLANNING BACKGROUND

T&PAU was commissioned by Murphy Pipelines to provide a watching brief on a proposed gas main diversion either side of the Fosse Way. Following discussions with the respective County Archaeological Officers for Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire a scheme was agreed limiting disturbance to two main areas (Fig.1). Evaluation excavations conducted by T&PAU in 1991 (Kinsley 1993) and May/June 2001 (Holt, Jones and Knight 2001) highlighted the possibility of an Iron Age ditch running approximately parallel to the eastern side of a low earthen bank that marks the Nottinghamshire - Lincolnshire county boundary at this point (Fig.2). To avoid any potential damage to this archaeologically sensitive boundary a directional boring technique was employed to pass beneath the carriageway of the A46 and to emerge on the Lincolnshire side of the earthwork. Protective surfacing was used to limit any damage by machine trafficking to the earthen bank. The numbering of the monitored areas, 4 and 5, follows the sequence established for fieldwork at Gallows Nooking Common by T&PAU in 1991 (Kinsley 1993) and continued in 2001 (Holt, Jones and Knight 2001).

2. SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Potter Hill (NGR SK 48587 36067) is a pronounced hill of Lower Lias shale, clay and rare limestone capped with glacial sands and gravels. Surrounding this prominence are flat low-lying areas of older river gravels. Within the excavated area the natural consisted of very variable mixed sands and gravels with occasional lenses of silty clay and distinct areas of hard iron-panning.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The pipeline crosses a landscape of considerable archaeological significance. Key elements in the general vicinity include a cropmark complex, a Roman villa and the Fosse Way Roman road. Less than ½ km to the south-west, recent evaluation excavations at Gallows Nooking Common have identified a possible Late Iron Age territorial boundary whose line appears to be followed by the earthen bank that marks the Nottinghamshire - Lincolnshire county boundary at this point.

Early prehistoric (Palaeolithic -Bronze Age)

No evidence for early prehistoric activity is recorded from the site itself. Several stray finds are recorded from the vicinity of the site; including a pebble mace head of suggested Mesolithic date (Lincs. SMR/4330), a Neolithic polished stone axe (Lincs. SMR/4331a), an Early Bronze Age barbed and tanged flint arrowhead (Lincs. SMR/'E'), a flint awl reputedly of Bronze Age date (Notts. SMR/04037) and a Late Bronze Age socketed bronze axe (Lincs. SMR/'H') (Knight 1991, 22). A programme of systematic fieldwalking conducted as part of the original archaeological assessment of the road corridor yielded no prehistoric finds from the area of Gallows Nooking Common (Knight 1991, Fig 31).

Later prehistoric (Iron Age)

No diagnostic Iron Age stray finds are recorded from the site or its vicinity. However, the north-western easement (Area 4) lies on the edge of an extensive multi-phase cropmark complex of trackways, linear boundaries and enclosures, its morphology suggesting a probable Iron Age or Romano-British date.

Roman

Approximately 0.3km to the south-east of the Area 5 easement lies the important site of the Roman villa of Norton Disney, revealed by ploughing in 1933 and excavated by Adrian Oswald from 1934 to 1937 (Oswald 1937). Finds included skeletons, coins, pottery, glass, bronze and pewter. The date range for

the coins agrees broadly with the excavation results, implying an occupation period of *c.* AD 70 to 360 (Lincs SMR/Ei; S.A.M. 7).

The Fosse Way was a major strategic road constructed by the Roman army in the latter half of the first century AD (Knight 1991, 6; Salway 1981, 95-97), Potter Hill marks a distinct shift in the alignment of the Fosse Way. From Newark the road approaches the Common aligned approximately north-east and continues toward Lincoln markedly further to the east. The precise position of the Roman road relative to the modern A46 remains uncertain. Evaluation excavations on the south-east side of the A46 at Gallows Nooking Common found no trace of the Roman road and perhaps favour a location beneath the modern carriageway (Kinsley 1993; Holt, Jones and Knight 2001).

Anglo-Saxon

There are two potential indications of early medieval funerary remains from the vicinity. William Stukeley's 1776 edition of the *Itinerarium Curiosum* depicts a tumulus, known as Potter Hill, positioned within the centre of the Fosse Way. The precise location of this possible burial mound is now unknown.

The poorly recorded discovery of a group of as many as 60-70 inhumations between Collingham and Potter Hill raises the possibility of further burials of this date along the Fosse Way. However, accounts of the discovery are sparse and the suggested finds included Roman, prehistoric and possible Anglo-Saxon objects (Curtis 1843-4; Wake 1862, 42; Kelly 1881, 36).

Medieval – Post Medieval

The history of the area during the medieval period is poorly documented. Place name evidence (Gallows Nooking Common, Scaffold Lane) may imply an execution site in the locality, possibly involving the re-use of the Potter Hill burial mound.

Evidence for the post-Roman history of the Fosse Way is similarly lacking. Stukeley shows a broad scrub/tree-lined route-way but also indicated that at nearby Brough, to the south-west, the road had been ploughed over (Stukeley 1776). The current arrangement of road and county boundary has been regarded as indicating a post-Roman shift in the course of the Fosse Way, although recent excavations adjacent to the modern A46 have produced no evidence of the Roman road (Kinsley 1993; Holt and Jones 2001).

4 METHODOLOGY

The topsoil stripping within the two easements (Area 4, 5) was carried out by a 360° excavator with flat-bladed bucket. The entire stripped surface and edges of the excavated area were inspected. The spoil was searched for finds of archaeological significance, none were found.

Within the respective easements, pipe trenches varying between 3 - 7.5m in width were cut with sloping sides using a 360° excavator with flat-bladed bucket. The depths of the pipe cuts varied considerably ranging between 1.6m - 2m within Area 4 and between 0.9m - 3m within Area 5.

Where safety considerations permitted, the sloping sides of the respective trenches were inspected and hand-cleaned. A photographic, drawn and documentary record was produced of all features of potential archaeological significance. These were located by EDM survey.

5 RESULTS

5.1 Topsoil strip of Areas 4 and 5

Inspection of the surface of Areas 4 and 5 after removal of topsoil and prior to any machine trafficking revealed no definite archaeological features. However, the dry and dusty conditions were not ideal for the identification of archaeological features and substantial portions of each of these areas appeared to have been previously disturbed by the original easement for the gas pipeline. Sub-circular or irregular discolourations *c.* 1 - 2m in diameter were observed within the natural gravel surface of Area 4. Examination of these irregularities in plan and within the section of the pipe trench (see below) has indicated a probable origin in periglacial conditions.

5.2 Area 4 Pipe Trench

The pipe cutting within Area 4 provided sections through two features of possible periglacial origin (Pl.1, Pl.2). However, these were overlain by a thick layer of redeposited material originating from the earlier pipe easement and therefore could not be observed in plan. Examination of the two sections revealed characteristics favouring an origin in periglacial processes. These features, termed *involutions*, are generally regarded as either the by-product of variations in pressure (*cryoturbation*) "induced by freezing within the active layer above the permafrost table" (Lowe and Walker 1997, 104), or variations in sediment sizes whilst saturated. The features can be distinguished as natural rather than archaeological on the basis that the underlying strata are buckled by pressures resulting from saturation or the freeze thaw process, rather than being cut into, as would be expected in a man-made feature. Similarly within the features the pattern of layering is inconsistent with the infill of an open pit or ditch, but is indicative of the deformation of natural strata under freeze-thaw action (cf. Boardman 1985, 206-209; Foster Flint 1957, 200-201).

5.3 Area 5 Pipe Trench

Examination of the pipe cutting within Area 5 revealed two archaeological features. A possible shallow ditch base yielding no evidence of date (0200) and a post-medieval land drain (0204) cutting into this feature.

0200 and 0204(Pl.3)

Feature 0200 comprised a shallow flat-bottomed depression *c.* 0.2m deep and *c.* 2.2m wide, with a distinctive lower fill of black loamy sand. This could not be securely identified in plan but seems likely to have been the remains of a linear ditch. No dating evidence was recovered, although the ditch line appears to have been followed by the later cut for a ceramic field drain of 19th/20th century date. The field drain cutting was aligned at 90° to the low bank marking the Nottinghamshire - Lincolnshire county boundary at this point.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The Potter Hill to Gallows Nooking Common gas main diversion lies within a sensitive archaeological landscape. To the north-west of the A46 the pipeline lies on the fringe of a major cropmark complex consistent with settlement of Iron Age/Romano-British date. With occasional deviations, the modern A46 has long been accepted as continuing the line of the Fosse Way Roman road. To the east of the road the pipeline crosses the undated earthwork marking the Nottinghamshire - Lincolnshire county boundary. Evaluation excavations only 158m to the south-west of this point of intersection revealed evidence of an Iron Age boundary ditch appearing to follow the course of the earthwork on its south-east side.

Despite the wealth of archaeological remains in this area the archaeological impact of the gas main diversion appears to have been low. Given the proximity of a substantial cropmark complex, this is perhaps surprising and the widespread disturbance resulting from the earlier pipeline should be taken into account. The contractors use of a directional boring technique passing below the A46 (and presumably any surviving Roman road deposits), the county boundary earthwork and any associated ditches greatly limited the threat to known archaeological deposits.

Topsoil stripping within Area 4 revealed no trace of the Roman road. Together with the results of recent excavations to the south-west at Gallows Nooking Common, this may favour the superimposition of the modern A46 over the Fosse Way at Potter Hill.

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Fig.1 Location map showing the position of the two easements (Areas 4 and 5) relative to the county boundary and Fosse Way. Scale 1:7500.

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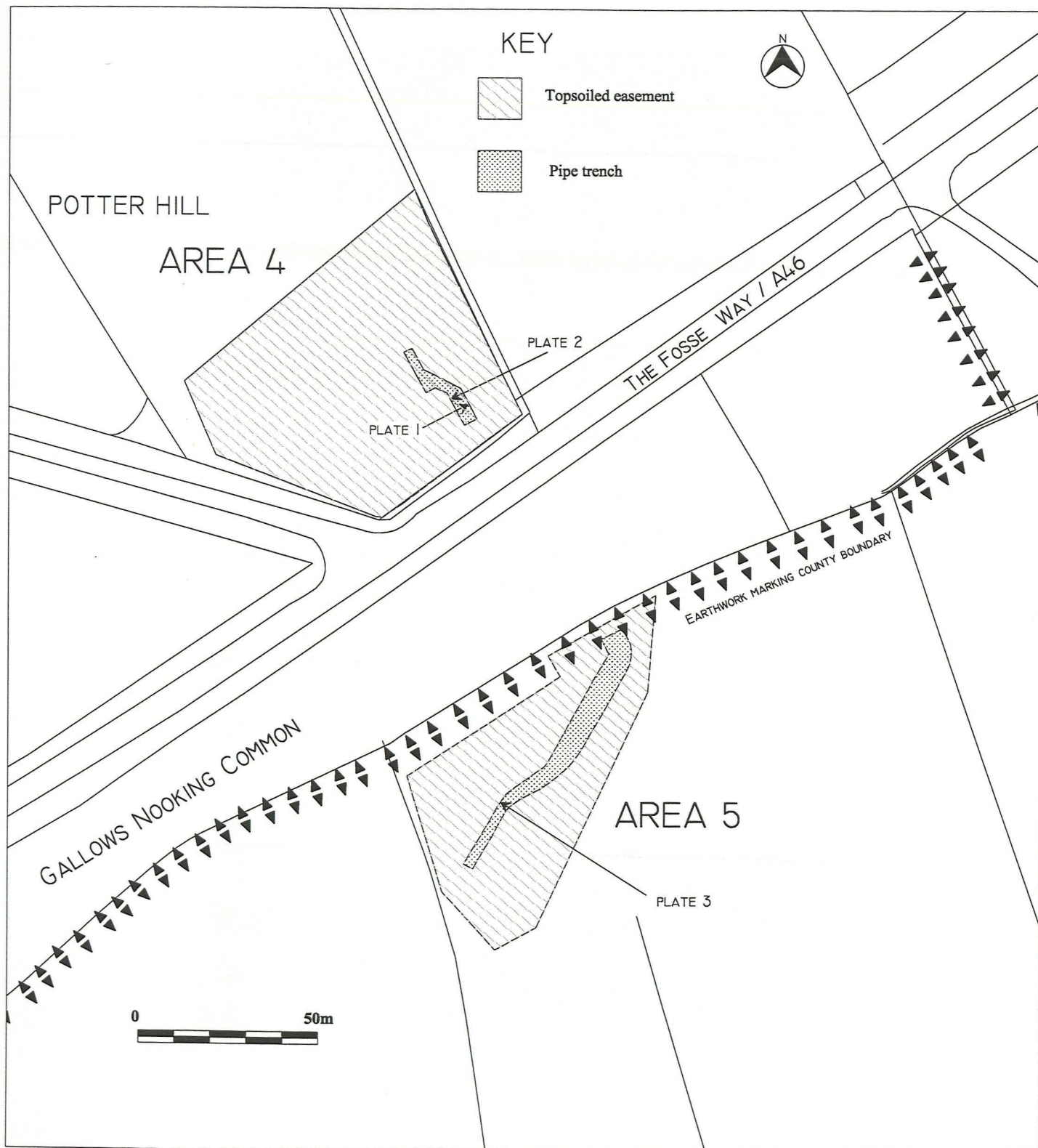


Fig. 2 Plan of easements and pipe cuttings showing location of features recorded within Pl.1 - 3. Scale 1:1500.

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Pl.1 Periglacial involution feature within north section of Area 4 pipe trench. Photo by R. Holt.



Pl.2 Periglacial involution feature within south-west section of Area 4 pipe trench. Photo by R. Holt.



P1.3 Ditch 0200 and land drain 0204 within west section of Area 5 pipe trench. Photo by R. Holt.