

SWARKESTONE LOWES, DERBYSHIRE

Excavation in Advance of British Gas Pipeline Construction

March - May 1994

SUMMARY REPORT

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1 INTRODUCTION

**Archaeological Background**

The site lies to the south of Derby on a hog-backed gravel ridge, part of the Hilton terrace of the River Trent, and overlooks the Trent Valley to the south and Sinfin Moor to the north. The archaeological remains of which the site consists lie to the east and west of Lowes Lane, a north-south lane which divides the site approximately in two (Figure 1).

To the east of Lowes Lane, centred on SK368295, lies a Bronze Age barrow cemetery, (Derbyshire SAM 41), composed of six round barrows, five of which survive as upstanding earthworks with a varying degree of preservation. Limited excavation in the 1950s showed that, in addition to Bronze Age inhumation and cremation, the remains of Beaker-period settlement survived sealed beneath Barrow IV, while barrow II contained secondary Anglo-Saxon inhumations. The barrows lie within the angle of an L-shaped cropmark ditch, probably part of a larger enclosure, shown by excavation to be Iron Age in date; a triple pit-alignment, also apparent as a cropmark, runs west to east just to the north of this enclosure. Within the enclosure there are cropmark traces of a number of linear ditches in a rectilinear pattern.

To the west of Lowes Lane, centred on SK362294, lies a further group of cropmarks. These include a number of linear ditches indicating a system of rectilinear land-division, a double-ditched driveway, a number of superimposed quadrilateral enclosures and a large double-ditched irregular polygonal enclosure. In the 1960's limited excavation of one enclosure produced a quantity of pottery of late Iron Age and Romano-British date, suggesting that the cropmark features are probably of that date. Previous excavation indicates that many more archaeological features exist than those revealed by cropmarks.

**Reasons for the Excavation**

In the summer of 1994, British Gas planned to construct a new 18" gas pipeline, and divert part of an existing 12" pipeline, across the archaeological site. Pipeline construction involves the stripping of topsoil from an approximately 14m wide working easement, prior to the excavation of a deep narrow trench within which the new pipe is laid. Where possible, the new pipe was to be laid close to the existing 12" pipe to reduce disturbance to archaeological deposits. However, prior trial excavation by Trent & Peak Archaeological Trust in December 1993 showed that archaeological remains survived even within the easement of the existing pipeline and thus would be affected by construction of the new pipe.

Therefore, a programme of excavation was devised to record archaeological remains prior to pipe construction. The programme comprised three stages of

archaeological investigation and recording together with general measures to limit the impact of pipe construction on archaeological remains by restricting the extent of topsoil stripped within the working easement.

#### **Excavation Strategy**

In recognition of the extensive area requiring excavation and the likelihood that archaeological remains of varying degrees of preservation, complexity and significance would be encountered, a flexible excavation strategy was devised, comprising three stages.

##### *Stage 1*

In two areas of particular archaeological importance the extent of topsoil stripping was restricted to an approximately 4m wide swathe; within this area archaeological deposits were fully excavated in advance of the British Gas construction programme. These areas were where the pipe was to be laid on a new line across field 0036, an area of proven Iron Age and Romano-British occupation, and within field 8070, for the 100m stretch between barrows III and IV, where it was felt possible that traces of late Neolithic/early Bronze Age settlement might survive beneath the plough-spread material of the barrow mounds.

##### *Stage 2*

In areas considered to be of secondary archaeological importance where archaeological remains were anticipated, but were not thought likely to be as numerous or important as those considered in stage 1, archaeological investigation was planned to follow stripping of the topsoil (here as before limited to a 4m wide swathe) from the pipe easement by British Gas contractors. In the event sufficient time was available for topsoil to be stripped by archaeologists and excavation to proceed in advance of pipe construction.

##### *Stage 3*

In other areas a watching-brief was maintained during normal British Gas pipe construction procedure. The watching-brief was carried out within fields 1061, 4058 (where archaeological remains appeared less likely to survive because of extensive past disturbance) and on the eastern side of field 8070, where it was felt that archaeological remains might extend beyond known cropmark features.

#### **Recording Strategy**

The excavated areas were assigned numbers (starting with 10 and continuing to 17) in order of excavation. In all areas topsoil was stripped by machine and archaeological features excavated by hand.

In the areas excavated as part of stage 1 it proved possible to spend time cleaning and recleaning by trowel the natural sand and gravel exposed by the machine stripping of topsoil. In this way some insubstantial archaeological features, which were not immediately apparent, were revealed, excavated and recorded.

In the areas excavated during stage 2 shortage of time necessitated a more robust excavation strategy; features apparent when topsoil was machine stripped were marked and the areas around these features cleaned by trowel prior to their excavation. The adoption of this excavation strategy makes it possible that some less obvious features may have escaped detection during this stage of the excavation.

In both areas it proved possible to fully excavate and record all observed archaeological features revealed within the stripped areas.

## 2 RESULTS

A brief summary of each area of excavation is presented below. These comments are based on a preliminary analysis of the results of excavation; a full report will be produced after detailed study of the excavated material.

### Area 10, Field 0036

An area approximately 120 x 3m, crossing field 0036, was excavated as part of stage 1 of the archaeological programme. The majority of archaeological features were encountered at the eastern end of the trench, close to the boundary with field 4058. In this area the excavation was extended to encompass an area approximately 20m east-west by 5m north-south. Here excavation revealed a number of intercutting ditches and gulleys; pits and post-holes. These features produced a substantial quantity of Iron Age and Romano-British pottery, animal bone, flint and part of a bronze Romano-British brooch; undoubtedly the remains of a settlement site. Slag fragments found within the fill of one pit may indicate Romano-British industrial activity.

### Area 11, Field 8070

An area approximately 100 x 3m, extending west beyond the plough-spread mounds of barrows III and IV and east beyond the cropmark of the Iron Age enclosure ditch, was excavated as part of stage 1 of the archaeological programme. Excavation revealed a number of small pits and post-holes, some containing fragments of handmade prehistoric pottery. A substantial quantity of struck flint was also recovered, including a number of pieces which may be of mesolithic date from the fill of a single shallow feature. A cutting was excavated through the Iron Age enclosure ditch and a single fragment of handmade prehistoric pottery and a large quantity of struck flint were recovered from its fill.

### Area 12, Field 4058

A small trench 10 x 5m, situated against the western boundary of field 4058, was excavated as part of stage 1 of the archaeological programme. This trench aimed to investigate the possible eastward continuation of Iron Age and Romano-British settlement noted in field 0036. Excavation revealed a number of substantial pits, the fills of which contained sherds of Iron age pottery; a further large clay lined pit contained a substantial quantity of Roman-British pottery.

**Area 13, Field 8070**

An area approximately 150 x 3m, extending from the western boundary of field 8070 east to barrow V, was excavated as part of stage 2 of the excavation programme. Excavation revealed a large number of postholes and pits many of which contained Iron age pottery in their fill. Several of the north-south linear cropmarks, known from aerial photographs, were crossed by this trench. Excavation showed one to be a substantial v-profile ditch, the fill of which produced a substantial quantity of Iron Age pottery.

**Area 14, Field 8070**

An area approximately 150 x 3m, extending from the eastern edge of area 13 to the western edge of area 11, was excavated as part of stage 2 of the archaeological programme. Further evidence for Iron Age activity was uncovered in the form of a number of postholes and pits containing Iron age pottery in their fill.

**Area 15, Field 9923**

As part of stage 3 of the archaeological programme a watching-brief adjacent to the Derby Canal recorded a shallow gully of Post Medieval date.

**Area 16, Field 5153**

An area approximately 50 x 3m, crossing field 5153 immediately north of barrow I, was excavated as part of stage 2 of the archaeological programme. This area proved to be especially productive. A long curving gully, containing substantial quantities of Iron Age pottery, a number of pits and the butt end of a substantial ditch were excavated. Together these features may indicate a further focus of Iron Age settlement

**Area 17, Field 4058**

Much of the northern part of field 4058 was thought to have been heavily disturbed by past quarrying. As part of stage 3 of the archaeological programme, a watching-brief was maintained and, in spite of less than ideal conditions, recorded a number of archaeological features including several substantial ditches, pits and gullies which due to their character and nearby surface finds are presumed to be Iron age or Romano-British in date.

**Additional Watching-brief**

In addition to the work described above a watching-brief was maintained across fields 1061 and 0062 as far west as Moor Lane, and across field 8070 and 9923 east to the Derby Canal. No further archaeological features were noted in these areas, though conditions were far from ideal: such features may have existed, but escaped notice.

### 3 CONCLUSIONS

The programme of excavation in advance of British Gas pipe construction across Swarkestone Lowes has proved most worthwhile and has recovered significant new evidence for past activity at the site, in particular in confirming that remains are more dense than cropmarks would suggest.

No substantial evidence of activity prior to the Iron Age was recovered. The possible mesolithic struck flint from area 11 is interesting and will warrant further examination. A few pits and post holes within area 11 produced handmade pottery which may prove to be earlier than Iron Age in date, but no remains comparable to the well-preserved Beaker period settlement beneath barrow IV survive. It seems likely that here, and across most of the site, insubstantial archaeological features, such as those associated with earlier prehistoric settlement, have been destroyed by ploughing where not protected by the overlying barrows.

Evidence for Iron Age occupation is more widespread than was formerly thought. In addition to the centre of Iron Age activity excavated in areas 10 and 12, pits, post-holes, ditches and gulleys containing Iron Age pottery spread across much of the western part of field 8070 and all of field 5153, perhaps indicating a further focus of Iron Age settlement. The recovery of a substantial quantity of Iron Age pottery from all of these areas may, with further analysis, make it possible to identify datable zones of Iron Age activity across the hilltop.

Of particular interest is the north-south cropmark ditch excavated in field 8070 and shown to be Iron Age in date. This strongly suggests that the pattern of linear cropmarks crossing field 8070 represents a series of subdivisions of the large Iron Age enclosure, perhaps marking out a rectilinear field system. Evidence for similar rectilinear field systems, perhaps of Iron Age date, is known from elsewhere in the Trent Valley, for example at Gamston, Nottinghamshire and on the Sherwood Sandstone of north Nottinghamshire (the brickwork plan field system).

Further evidence for Romano-British activity was uncovered within areas 10 and 12. The watching-brief within area 17 suggests that more extensive and better preserved remain of Romano-British activity may survive than hitherto though. Evidence appears to indicate a small Roman settlement, probably a farm, but perhaps with some additional industrial activity.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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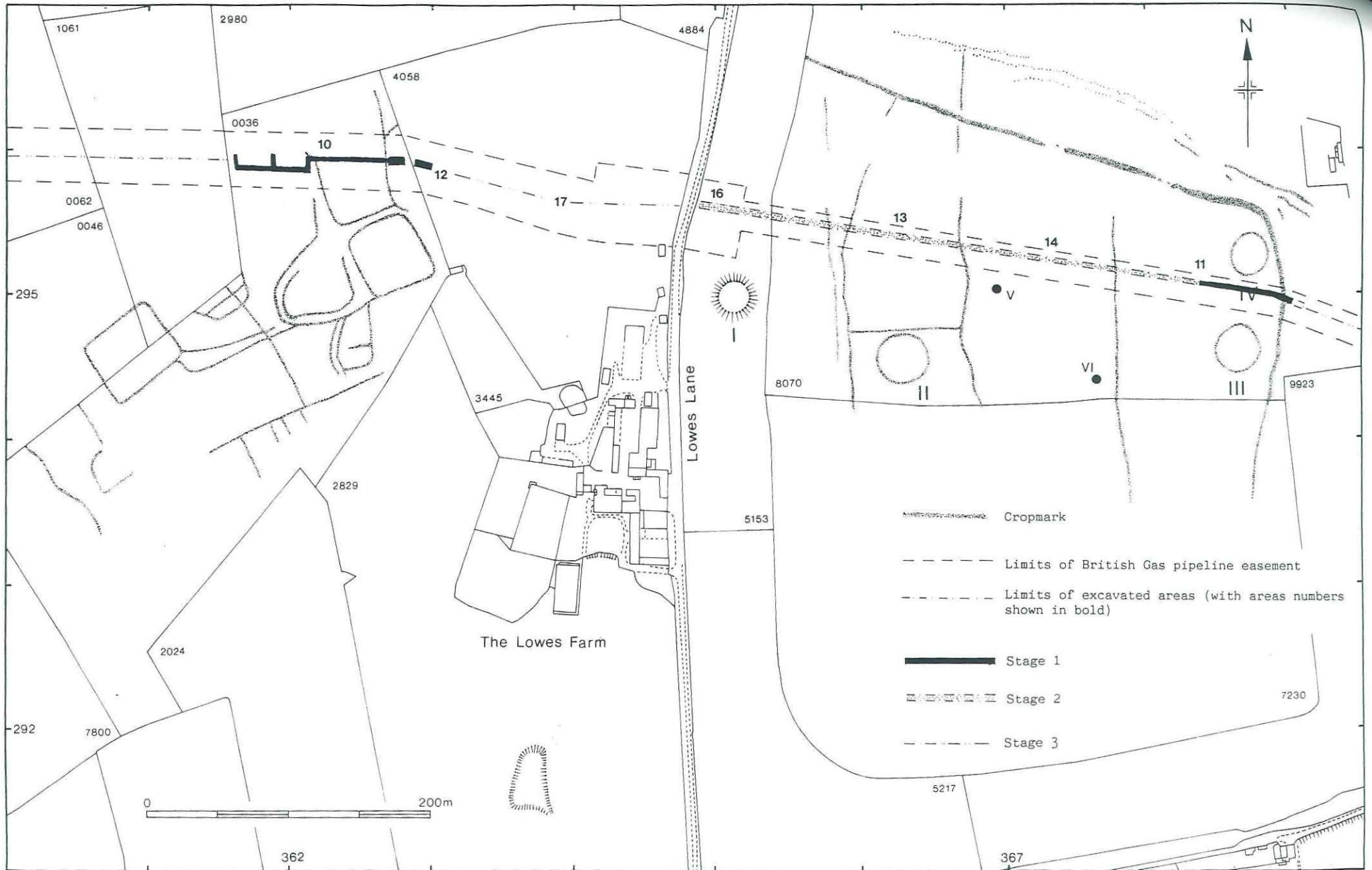


Figure 1: Swarkestone Lowes, Derbyshire, showing the cropmarks to the east and west of Lowes Lane, the limits of the British Gas pipe easement and the limits of the excavated areas with area numbers shown in bold (nb area 15 is beyond the limit of the drawing)