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**Coventry Pipeline Phase 2 (North-east) :
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

by

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Summary

In September 1993 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (B.U.F.A.U.) was commissioned by Severn Trent Water Ltd to undertake an archaeological watching brief along the route of a new water main, laid by the contractors Murphy Group for Severn Trent, to the north-east of Coventry, West Midlands. The watching brief was carried out between late October 1993 and early January 1994.

Introduction

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by B.U.F.A.U. during the stripping of top-soil ahead of the laying of a new water main between Bedworth Road, Hawkesbury and the A46 Rugby Road, Binley Woods.

An earlier watching brief, to the north of Coventry was carried out, by B.U.F.A.U. during Phase 1, involving the laying of a water main between Eaves Green (south of the A45) and Hawkesbury, in June and July 1992. The results of archaeological monitoring here were largely negative. While features such as old stream courses and field boundaries were located, and could often be related to map sources, no features or deposits of archaeological interest were observed.

Aims and Methodology

A tracked bulldozer was used by the contractors to remove top-soil, approximately 0.50m deep, from a 20-25m wide strip of land along the route of the pipeline (Figure 1, Areas A-H).

The aim of the watching brief was to provide a record of any archaeological features and deposits affected by top-soil stripping and pipe-laying. The site was visited regularly throughout the top-soil stripping stage and was carefully and repeatedly walked. The exposed sections of the sides of the stripped areas and the spoil heaps were examined thoroughly. Any areas of potential archaeological interest were cleaned manually by shovel and trowel. Relevant information including sub-soil type, presence of ridge and furrow, old field boundaries and other landscape features was noted, allocated field numbers and plotted on O.S 1:2,500 maps.

It should be noted that the method of top-soil stripping: using bulldozers, combined with the movement of vehicles and plant along the stripped area, often in very poor weather conditions, provided less than ideal conditions for the monitoring of top-soil stripping from an archaeological perspective.

Results

Area A

Between Bedworth Road and Aldermans Green Road the route of the water main ran under the M6 and crossed the Coventry Canal, following it for a short stretch across grassland, a disused railway embankment and a land-fill site before crossing the Oxford Canal. No features of any archaeological significance were encountered.

Area B

The route between Aldermans Green Road and Shilton Lane ran across slightly undulating fields under plough and pasture. A slight bank, aligned north-south, was noted between No.40 Lentons Lane and the Oxford Canal. The bank may be a former field boundary or may possibly be associated with disused mineshafts in this area. The sub-soil to the west of the bank was a red clay forming wide irregular bands across the stripped area. To the east of the bank, modern rubble material was observed in small spreads, in plan, sporadically for 40m. This material was almost certainly associated with a disused mineshaft and associated modern buildings in adjacent fields. South of the corner of Lentons Lane and Shilton Lane a heavy clay sub-soil was exposed. A small Post-Medieval glazed pottery base was recovered from the top-soil, immediately to the east of Shilton Lane.

Area C

From Shilton Lane to the M6/M69 junction, the route ran across fields under plough and pasture and crossed the Oxford Canal. East of the Oxford Canal the top-soil stripping along the route of the pipeline cut through a field (Field 2400) under pasture containing ridge and furrow (evidence of Medieval strip farming), aligned northwest-southeast. No further archaeological features were observed in this section.

Area D

This section of the route ran between the M6/M69 junction and a small coppice south of the M6 across pasture and arable fields. It was monitored in very wet weather conditions and the sub-soil was badly rutted by contractor's vehicles. No archaeological features could be observed.

Area E

The route of the pipeline ran southwards from the M6, running parallel with the east side of the A46 bypass, across pasture and arable fields to Faber Road. The sub-soil horizon here showed some evidence of modern disturbance, probably associated with the construction of the A46 eastern bypass. The course of the pipeline cut well defined ridge and furrow in a field (Field 1507), under pasture, to the south of a stream north-west of Walsgrave Hill Farm. This ridge and furrow, orientated northwest-south-east terminated at a bank aligned northeast-southwest. A later field boundary bank, aligned northwest-southeast incorporated a mature tree and cut across the ridge and furrow. Traces of similarly aligned ridge and furrow were also noted in adjacent fields to the east and south (Fields 1507a, 2680 and 1648).

Area F

The route crossed the A46 bypass and ran southwards across pasture and ploughed fields close to the River Sowe, to the A4082 Link Road. In a field (Field 0778), under pasture, immediately to the south of Field 1507, north of Faber Road the route cut ridge and furrow orientated north-west, south-east. Traces of similarly aligned ridge and furrow were also noted in a field to the south of Faber Road (Field 1648).

West of the A46 bypass, in a field (Field 9181) under pasture, the pipeline cut ridge and furrow aligned east-west. A later ditch and bank, orientated north-south, cut across the ridge and furrow. In an adjacent field (Field 9181a), to the west, similarly aligned ridge and furrow was observed and on the western side of the River Sowe (Field 9181b) north-south aligned ridge and furrow was noted.

South of Faber Road the pipeline cut ridge and furrow, orientated east-west, in the central part of a field under pasture (Field 6851). Further east-west aligned ridge and furrow was observed to the east in Field 8652.

Area G

This section of the route followed the River Sowe under the A4082 Link Road and continued south along the western edge of the A46 bypass across a former land-fill site, to the A427 Brinklow Road. West of the A46 bypass some deposits of modern material were observed, associated with the former land-fill site. No archaeological features were observed.

Area H

From the A427 Brinklow Road along the eastern side of the A46 bypass to the A428/A46 Rugby Road Island occasional modern disturbance of the sub-soil was observed. The foundations of a modern-brick built structure were revealed, approximately 400m north of the A428 in Field 8700. To the south of this structure, also in Field 8700, a large deposit of charcoal, approximately 10m long and 5m wide, overlying natural gravels, was exposed by the top-soil stripping approximately 520m south of the A428. No dating evidence was recovered from this deposit. Just to the south of the deposit of charcoal waterlogged natural gravels were seen to slope upwards towards the A428. Near the A428 these gravels thinned out and were replaced by a silty clay sub-soil. Top-soil stripping ceased here and the route of the pipeline followed the A428 Rugby Road eastwards to Binely Woods.

Conclusions

A high concentration of Medieval ridge and furrow was observed during monitoring of top-soil stripping near the A46 eastern bypass near the Faber Road crossing. This may reflect the proximity of Medieval settlement or Medieval cultivation associated with Coombe Abbey, though no dating evidence for these features was recovered. Although some landscape features such as ridge and furrow and possible former field boundaries were observed during top-soil stripping no archaeological features or deposits meriting further investigation or more detailed recording were revealed. However, it should be borne in mind that the method of top-soil stripping, while necessary to carry out the work, limited the effectiveness of the watching brief.

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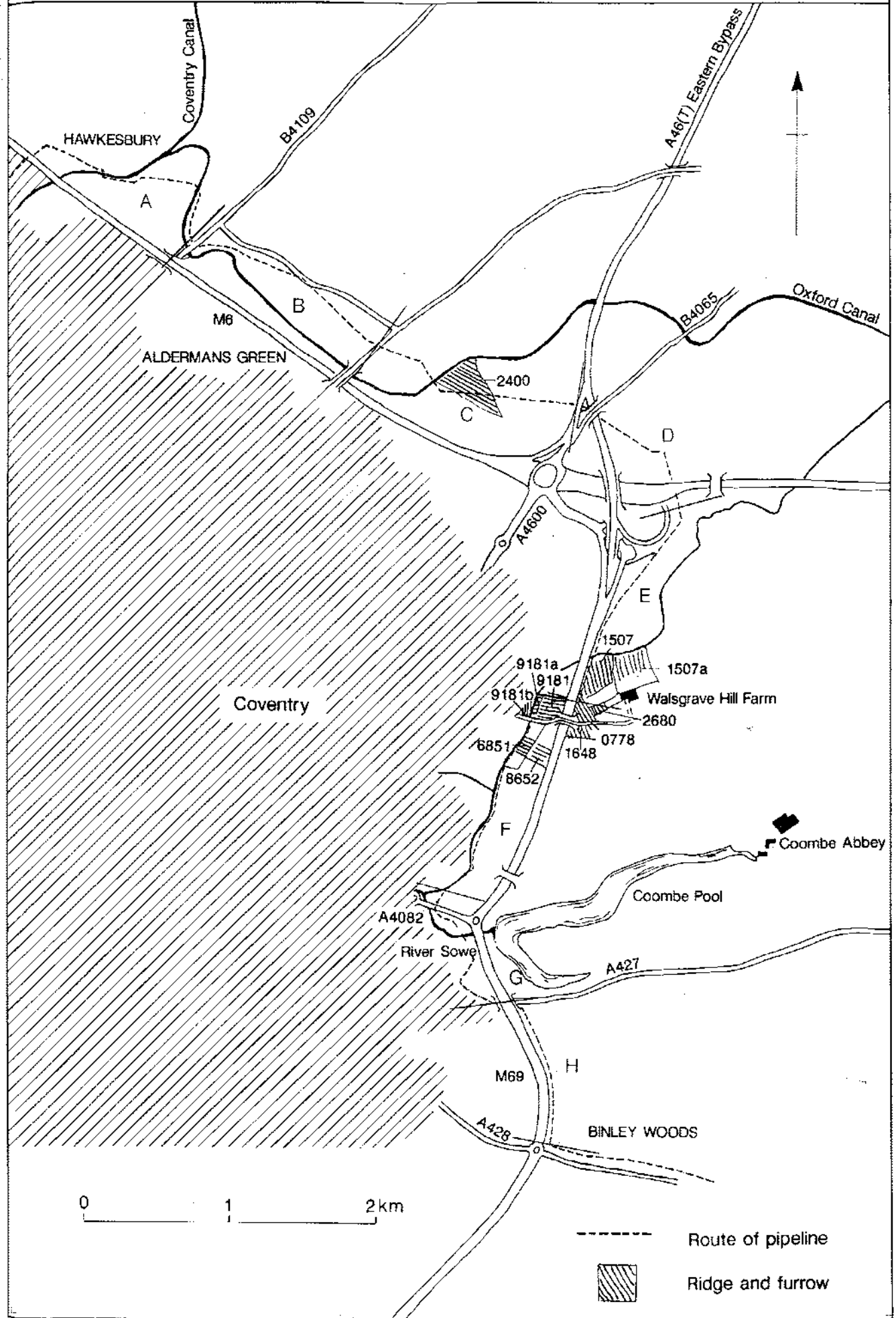


Figure 1