

RAPID APPRAISAL OF ENGINEERING IMPACT

(for Bristol Water)

Mark Yeo River Crossing

Rooksbridge

Somerset

NGR: ST 37311 50292 – ST 37504 50330

JOB N^o: BA1302BWMYRC



Head Office: Chapel Walk Burgess Street Leominster Herefordshire HR6 8DE Tel: 01568 610101

Winchester Office: Unit 25 Basepoint Business Centre Winnall Valley Road Winchester Hampshire SO23 0LD Tel: 01962 832720

Email: neil@borderarchaeology.com Web: www.borderarchaeology.com

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Report specification

Report compilation: Catherine Hollinghurst MA

Editing: Stephen Priestley MA

Approved: Neil Shurety Dip. MG. M.Inst.M

Executive Summary

This Rapid Appraisal of available archaeological and historical sources concerning the route of a proposed mains renewal scheme by Bristol Water, stretching for approximately 200m adjacent to Pill Road, Rooksbridge, Somerset, has reached the following conclusions regarding the extent and significance of the archaeological resource within the area in question.

- There is a lack of recorded evidence for any archaeological sites of prehistoric date in the immediate vicinity of the route.
- Evidence for late Roman or early medieval activity in the vicinity of the site is represented by a series of relict river or salt marsh channels lying immediately N of the pipeline route, the largest of which is referred to in early Saxon charters as the River Siger. There is potential for evidence of these relict channels, or of occupation or industrial activity such as salt panning adjacent to them, being encountered.
- The major feature dating to the medieval period is the waterway known as the Pilrow (or Pillrow) cut, which connected the Axe and Brue rivers and provided a link between Glastonbury Abbey and several of the coastal manors under its ownership, thus enabling the transport of goods via barge across the Somerset Levels. It appears to have been constructed in the late 12th-early 13th century, and remained in use throughout the medieval period. There is potential for evidence relating to the construction or maintenance of Pilrow Cut to be revealed by the pipeline work, in addition to the possibility that evidence of vessels using the canal or structures once standing adjacent to the waterway could be revealed.
- Just outside the 100m radius around the pipeline route used for the purposes of this study is further evidence for medieval activity in the area. This is in the form of a pottery scatter, and the remains of an earthwork enclosure predating Pilrow Cut (the waterway runs through it), identified from aerial photographs of the site.
- Post-medieval activity is limited, but includes 'anciently' (between the 17th - 19th centuries) and 'recently' (18th - 20th) enclosed land which was formerly wetland, and Pillrow Farm, which is depicted on maps of 1886 but only visible as a ruin on the RAF vertical aerial photographs of 1947.
- There is also a high degree of potential, owing to the nature of this landscape, for evidence of deeply stratified alluvial peat deposits to be encountered during the work, in addition to preserved palaeoenvironmental materials (such as pollen) and waterlogged wood.

Conclusion and Recommendations:

Based on the results of this Rapid Appraisal, it would appear that the potential for encountering features or deposits of prehistoric origin is **Low**, however there would appear to be **Moderate** potential for Roman or early medieval activity to be encountered, associated with the relict river/salt marsh channels identified immediately to the N of the route. It appears that there is **Moderate to High** potential for encountering evidence of medieval activity in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline route, specifically in the central section where the route traverses the Pilrow Cut.



1. Introduction

The proposed water mains scheme is located on Pill Road, approximately 2km S of the village of Rooksbridge (Somerset). The route (approximate length 200m) extends E along the S boundary of a field immediately N of and parallel to Pill Road for 100m and then crosses the Pilrow Cut and continues eastwards adjacent to an E-W aligned boundary/drainage ditch dividing the neighbouring fields to the E of Pill Road (**Figs.1 & 2**). The proposed engineering methodology includes directional drilling at least 3m below the existing ground level.

This Rapid Appraisal constitutes a rapid trawl of archaeological databases and other readily available sources of historical and archaeological information (where deemed appropriate) to identify whether the proposal has a potential archaeological dimension requiring further clarification.

The following sources were consulted in the preparation of this Rapid Appraisal.

Evaluation and study of archaeological databases

A search was made of the Somerset Historic Environment Record for any sites of archaeological or historic interest within a 100m radius of the pipeline route.

Evaluation and study of secondary sources

Secondary sources relating to the study area were also used, including articles from *Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society*, *Medieval Archaeology* and other relevant publications on the archaeology of the Somerset Levels, in particular the historic water management of the area.

Evaluation and study of cartographic and other pictorial evidence

A limited number of historic map sources were consulted, including historic and modern OS maps of Somerset (such as the OS 1st edition and 2nd edition maps (1886 and 1903 respectively) and later OS mapping dated 1974 and 2013).

Soils and Geology

The soil type within the vicinity of the study area is classified as the NEWCHURCH 2 series (814c), comprising deep stoneless (mainly calcerous) clayey soils, with groundwater controlled by ditches and pumps. The land is flat with some places at risk of flooding, with underlying geology of marine alluvium (SSEW, 1983).

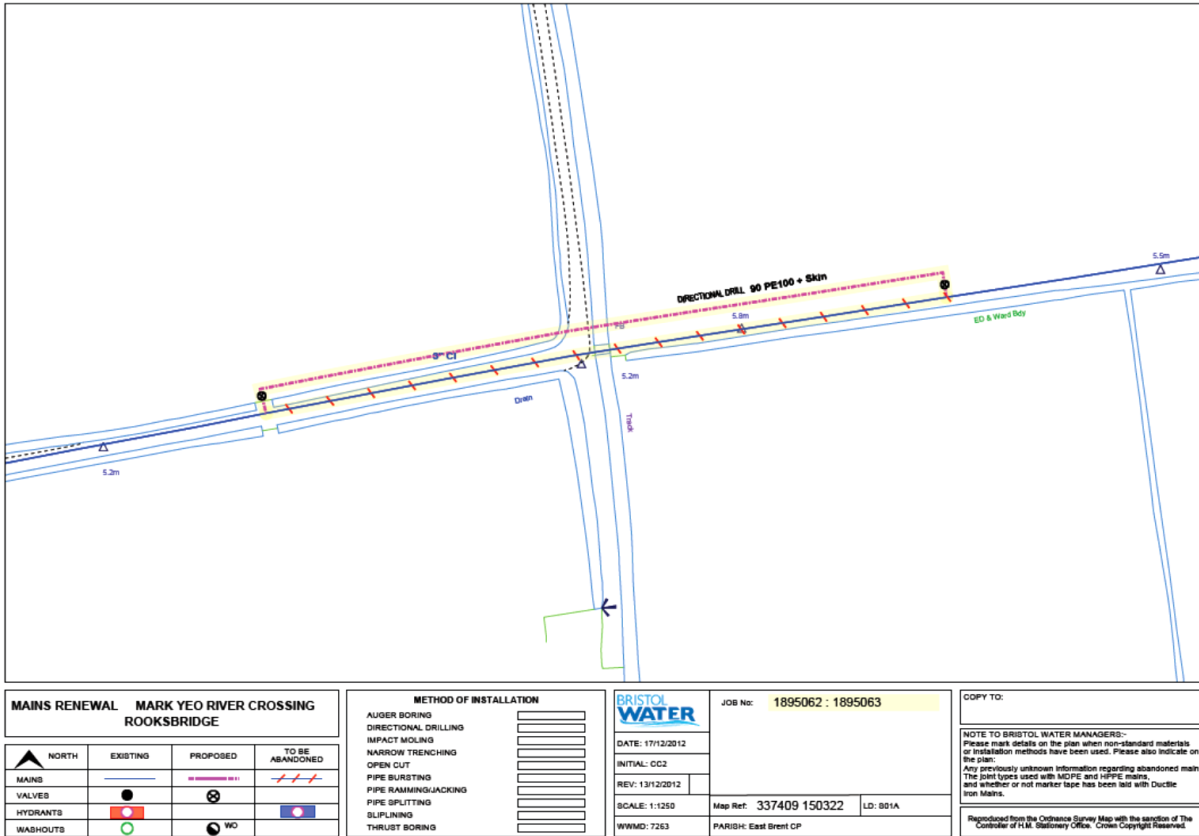


Fig.1: Detailed plan (scale 1:1250) showing the route of the proposed water mains scheme at Mark Yeo River Crossing, Rooksbridge, Somerset. (Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol Water).

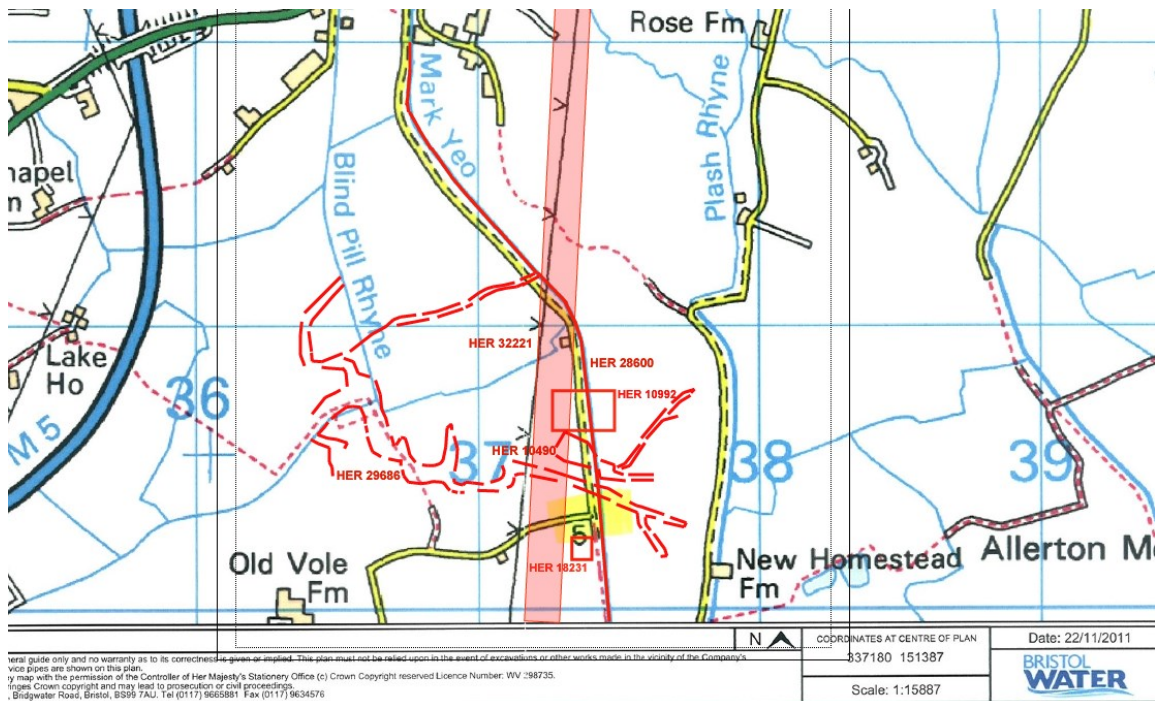


Fig.2: Map showing the locations of the sites (in red) listed by the Somerset HER within the vicinity of the pipeline route (study area marked in yellow). (Reproduced by courtesy of Bristol Water).

2. Summary Assessment

The route of the proposed water mains scheme (NGR: ST 37311 50292 – ST 37504 50330) extends for approximately 200m along the N side of Pill Road, crossing Pilrow Cut and then continuing eastwards through fields to the E of Pill Road.

Prehistoric

Although the Somerset Levels is known to have been extensively exploited during the prehistoric periods, no recorded evidence for archaeological remains of prehistoric date has been identified in the vicinity of the pipeline route.

Roman

Although evidence for Roman settlement has been identified in the wider locality of the pipeline route, most notably the foundations of substantial masonry buildings of late Roman date identified during drainage operations at Blind Pill Rhyne, about 1km NW of the study area (HER 11118; ST 366 512) there is only limited evidence relating to the Roman period in the immediate vicinity of the site.

A series of relict river or salt marsh channels lying immediately N and NE of the route (HER 29686) appear to date from either the late Roman or early medieval period. The largest example of these, which drained the area between Brent Knoll and the Polden Bridge, is referred to in early Saxon charters as the River Siger. Most of these channels were, at least in part, previously identified by aerial photography, but recent LIDAR data has revealed the system of waterways to a greater extent (Brunner & Farr-Cox, 2006). It is possible that the work on the pipeline may uncover further evidence relating to these channels or perhaps evidence for human activity in the form of occupational or industrial activity such as salt panning.

Medieval

Although there are few instances of recorded evidence relating to medieval activity in the vicinity of the pipeline route, there are sites of high importance in the area. The middle section of the pipeline route crosses the course of the Pilrow Cut, also known as the Mark Yeo (HER 28600), a medieval canalised waterway which ran through Mark, and merged with the River Axe at Glastonbury's port at Rooksbridge. Glastonbury Abbey, as the major landowner in the area, was responsible for the construction of the Pilrow Cut and for substantial alterations to the course of several other rivers in the Somerset Levels during the medieval period, which were designed principally to improve communications. Due to their position and appearance (the level of the water within the channels was often higher than the surrounding ground), it seems unlikely that they played any great role in the drainage of the wetlands, although they will have assisted the prevention of flooding from upstream by channelling water across the low-lying moors (Rippon, 2004, 118).

Although the exact construction date is unknown, it appears that the Pilrow Cut definitely existed by 1235, when Robert Malerbe was recorded as being responsible for the upkeep of Glastonbury Abbey's waterways as far as Mark Bridge (Rippon, 2004, 117). The cut enhanced the flow of the river Brue to the W of Wedmore Island, but seems to have given the abbey a means of connecting Glastonbury with the coastal manors under its ownership, enabling the transportation of produce and materials between the two (Silvester, 1999, 134). Williams (1982, 105) refers to the Pilrow Cut as a barge canal linking the outlying estates of Brent with the abbey, highlighting this usage as a means of transporting goods.

By 1316 the construction of the Pilrow Cut must have been completed, as written sources from this time mention that it reached the sea (HER 28600), and in c.1400 a sea-going vessel is known to have foundered at some point along its route. In approximately 1500, there is once again evidence of the waterway's use connecting Glastonbury with the sea as two boats were used to ship seats from Bristol to the abbey's small port at Rooksbridge, before smaller vessels continued the journey to St John's church in Glastonbury (Rippon, 2003, 105).

In addition to its value to the abbey in terms of a means of communication across the Somerset Levels, the Pilrow Cut also supported a watermill, a highly valued resource frequently owned by religious orders in medieval England, at Rooksbridge. 'Rooksmulle' is recorded in 1189 as having a value of 40 shillings, meaning that it was the most valuable of Glastonbury Abbey's mills (Rippon, 2003, 105). Today the former waterway no longer has any connection with the river Brue, and is instead used for drainage purposes.

Evidence of medieval activity in the area is also visible just beyond the 100m radius of this study: two sites are listed by Somerset HER to the N of the pipeline route. Pilrow Cut appears to have been constructed through the site of an earlier rectangular enclosure, which, owing to visual evidence of apparent internal features, is suggested to be the remains of a building (HER 10490). This, and what appears to be part of an approach track on the SE side, was identified in 1985 as a result of the Somerset County Council claylands aerial photo survey. To the N of this is also a pottery scatter (HER 10992) comprising occasional medieval sherds to the W of the Pilrow Cut (area of ST 373 507), with sherds dated to the 14th-15th centuries to the E of the waterway (area of ST 374 507).

Post-Medieval

Only one site of post-medieval date is recorded in the Somerset HER in the vicinity of the pipeline route. To the S of the middle section of the route (immediately to the W of Pilrow Cut, at ST 3740 5021) is the former site of Pillrow Farm. The farm is marked on the OS 1st edition 25 inch map (1886) and the OS 2nd edition map (1903), but had fallen into disuse by the Second World War as it is visible only as a ruin on the RAF vertical aerial photos taken in 1947 (HER 18231) and is not marked on later OS mapping of the area.

The area to the S of the pipeline route (on the E side) as far as the Pilrow Cut is, according to the Somerset HER, 'recently enclosed' land (ie. enclosed during the 18th – 20th centuries) which was formerly wetland. The area to the N of this section, and covering both the N and S of the remainder of the route on the E of the Pilrow Cut, was again formerly wetland, but this was enclosed earlier ('anciently enclosed'), at some point between the 17th and 19th centuries.

With regard to the landscape surrounding the pipeline route, historic maps show little in the way of change in the immediate area. There was a former field boundary within approximately 30m to the N of the route shown on the OS 1st edition 25 inch map of the area (1886), but, as this still appears on an OS 1:10000 map of the area dated 1974, the removal of this boundary must have occurred relatively recently. This, and the disappearance of the aforementioned Pillrow Farm, appears to be the only difference to the immediate surrounding landscape visible from historic map sources.

Recent fieldwork in the vicinity of the study area has produced somewhat negative results. An programme of trial trenching undertaken to the N and NW of the study area as part of the proposed Pillrow Wind Farm Development in March 2012 (subsequent to an extensive geophysical survey) identified no significant archaeological deposits or features, with natural alluvial clays being

identified at a depth of 0.5m below ground level (HER 31602; Chaffey, 2012). An area to the W of Pilrow Cut (close to the W end of the pipeline route) was the subject of a recent earthwork survey between Bridgewater and Compton Bishop by Oxford Archaeology in 2013 (HER 32221) however no information on the results of this survey is yet available.

3. References

Somerset Historic Environment Record

Amec, 2012, *Broadview Energy Ltd, Pilrow Wind Farm, Environmental Statement, Vol. 1 (Main Text)*

Brunning, R. & Farr-Cox, F. 2006, 'The River Siger rediscovered: LIDAR survey and relict landscape on the Somerset claylands', in *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary: Annual Report of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee*, 7-15.

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Rippon, S., 2003, 'Water and wetlands in medieval estate management: Glastonbury Abbey, Meare and the Somerset Levels in South West England', *Ruralia*, Vol. 5, 93-112

Rippon, S., 2004, 'Making the most of a bad situation? Glastonbury Abbey, Meare, and the Medieval Exploitation of Wetland Resources in the Somerset Levels' in *Medieval Archaeology*, Vol. 48, 91-130

Silvester, R., 1999, 'Medieval Reclamation of Marsh and Fen', In Cook, H. and Williamson, T. (eds.): *Water Management in the English Landscape: Field, Marsh and Fen*. Edinburgh, 122-140.

SSEW, 1983, *Soil Survey of England and Wales*. Silsoe

Williams, M. 1982, 'Marshland and Waste' in Cantor, L. M. (ed.) *The English Medieval Landscape*. London, 86-125

Cartography

(Maps were obtained from Somerset Heritage Centre unless otherwise stated)

1886 – OS 1st edition 25 inch map

1903 – OS 2nd edition 25 inch map

1960 – OS provisional edition 6 inch map

1974 - OS 1:10,000 map

2013 - OS 1:2500 map

Aerial Photography

Vertical aerial photographs from 1947, 1999 and 2006 were consulted.