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Archaeological Observation

Bristol Water

New Water Main Pylle Hill

Pylle Hill

Shepton Mallet

Somerset

BA4 6TD

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Cover: View northwest of Field 4 under excavation; Pylle Church is visible to the north (centre right)

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Contents:

1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology Ltd (BAL) carried out a programme of archaeological observation during the engineering groundworks required to install a new water main at Pylle Hill Shepton Mallet Somerset (NGR: ST 61765 38398– NGR: ST 60752 38063).

The pipeline extended westwards for a distance of approximately 1.2km from a connection point on the A37 Fosse Way and through fields to the S and SW of Pylle Lane to its termination at Pylle Hill (fig. 1). The work was carried out in two phases. Phase 1 comprised a pit excavation extending across the modern carriageway and associated verge from an existing connection on the A37 to a new connection point located within the field immediately adjoining to the west. Phase 2 comprised trenching excavations extending west through a series of field enclosures to the termination of the pipeline adjacent to Pylle Hill.

The Phase 1 engineering methodology comprised conventional open-cut trenching whilst Phase 2 was carried out using a trenching machine. An initial topsoil strip was not required for either phase of works and observation was thus limited to the pipe trench itself.

The modern A37 follows the course of the Fosse Way, an important Roman highway, and evidence of Roman occupation had been identified to the east of the A37. The western end of the route runs close to Pylle Manor and Manor Farm, which represent a settlement of medieval origin. Previous works in the area revealed a large ditch interpreted as a moat, potentially of 13th -14th century date.

However, the present groundworks revealed no evidence of archaeological features or deposits of any period: the pit extending across the carriageway of the A37 and into the verge revealed only a sequence of modern road construction and resurfacing deposits and it is possible that any surviving evidence of the original Roman road construction or associated features and deposits may have been removed during the course of these later engineering works.

2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Limited (BAL) was instructed by Bristol Water to carry out a programme of archaeological observation during installation of a new water main at Pylle Hill Pylle Shepton Mallet (*fig. 1*). The route extended W for a distance of approximately 1.2km from a connection point on the A37 Fosse Way (NGR: ST 61765 38398) (*figs. 2 & 3*) to its termination adjacent to Pylle Lane (NGR: ST 60752 38063) (*fig. 3*).

The engineering works were carried out in two phases, neither of which required an initial topsoil strip, and observation was thus limited in scope to the pipe trench itself.

Copies of this report will be supplied to Bristol Water and to Tanya James Historic Environment Officer South West Heritage Trust.

3 Site Description

The site lies principally within fields to the S and SW of Pylle Lane with a short section at the eastern extent of the scheme crossing the present A37 Fosse Way, which generally follows the course of the Roman road.

3.1 Soils and Geology

The study area comprises pelo-stagnogley soils of the DENCHWORTH series (712b), comprising slowly permeable seasonally waterlogged clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils. Some fine loamy soils over clayey soils are present with only slight seasonal waterlogging and there are some slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils. The geology is Jurassic and Cretaceous clay.

4 Historical and Archaeological Background

The pipeline route crosses a section of the A37, which follows the line of the important Roman highway known as the 'Fosse Way' (PRN 55101). Evidence of a Roman settlement was identified during a field-walking survey undertaken in 1995 within fields lying to the E of the A37 and extending towards Lower Easton Farm (PRN 15052), which identified a large amount of ceramic building material (CBM) of Roman date, including combed box-flue tile, brick, stone slate, mosaic *tesserae* and one piece of worked tufa, as well as large pieces of Ham and Doulting stone (PRN 12222). Surprisingly, only a small quantity of Roman Pottery was recovered from these fields. These building materials were interpreted as relating to a Roman structure of high status, possibly a villa (PRN 15053), located somewhere to the E of the A37 and S of Lower Easton Farm.

No archaeological fieldwork has been recorded within the fields W of the A37 in this area; consequently, it was considered possible that evidence of the Roman road, its *agger* (embankment) or associated settlement activity might be encountered in the vicinity of the eastern section of the pipeline route.

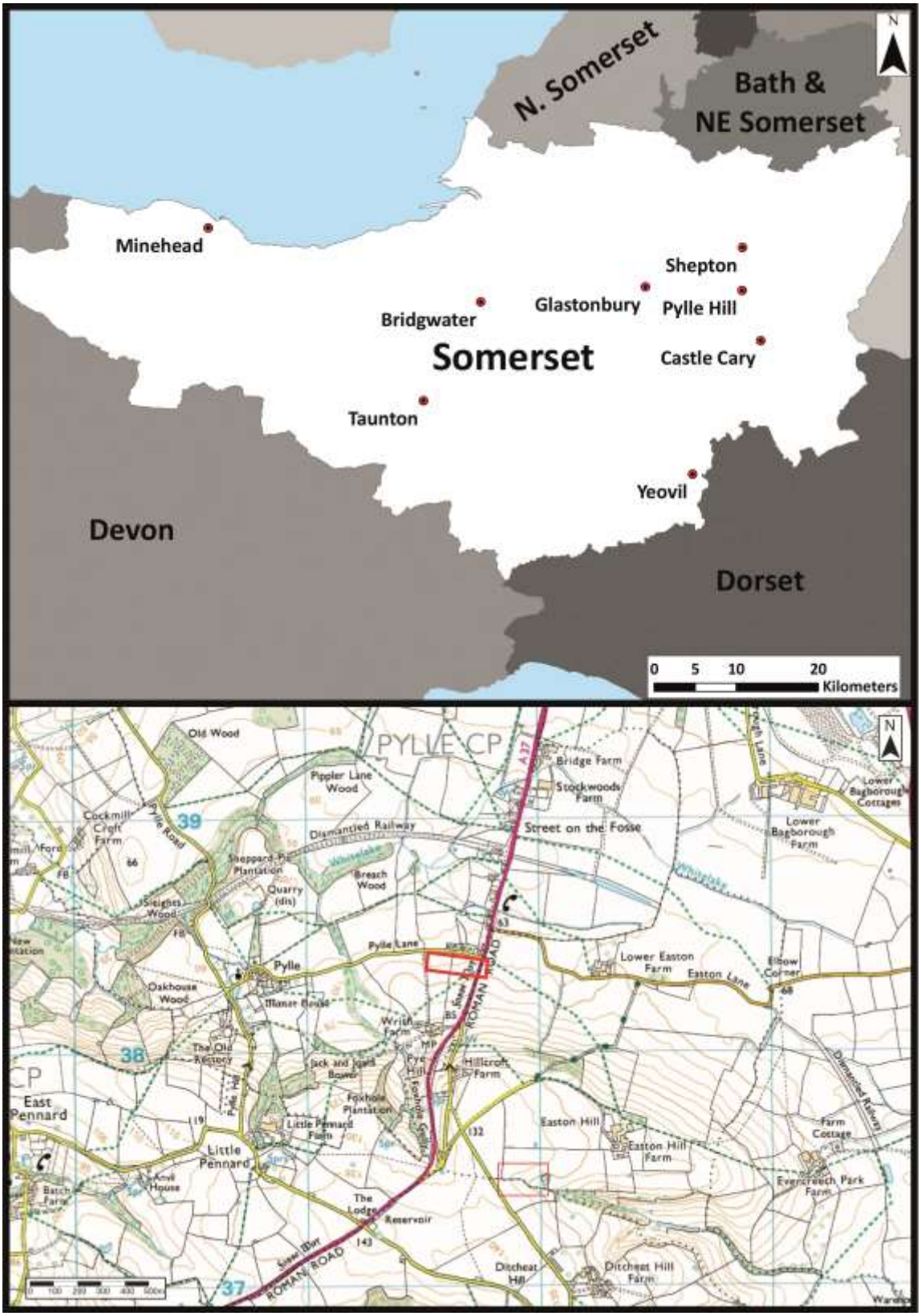

Fig. 1: Plan showing location of the engineering groundworks

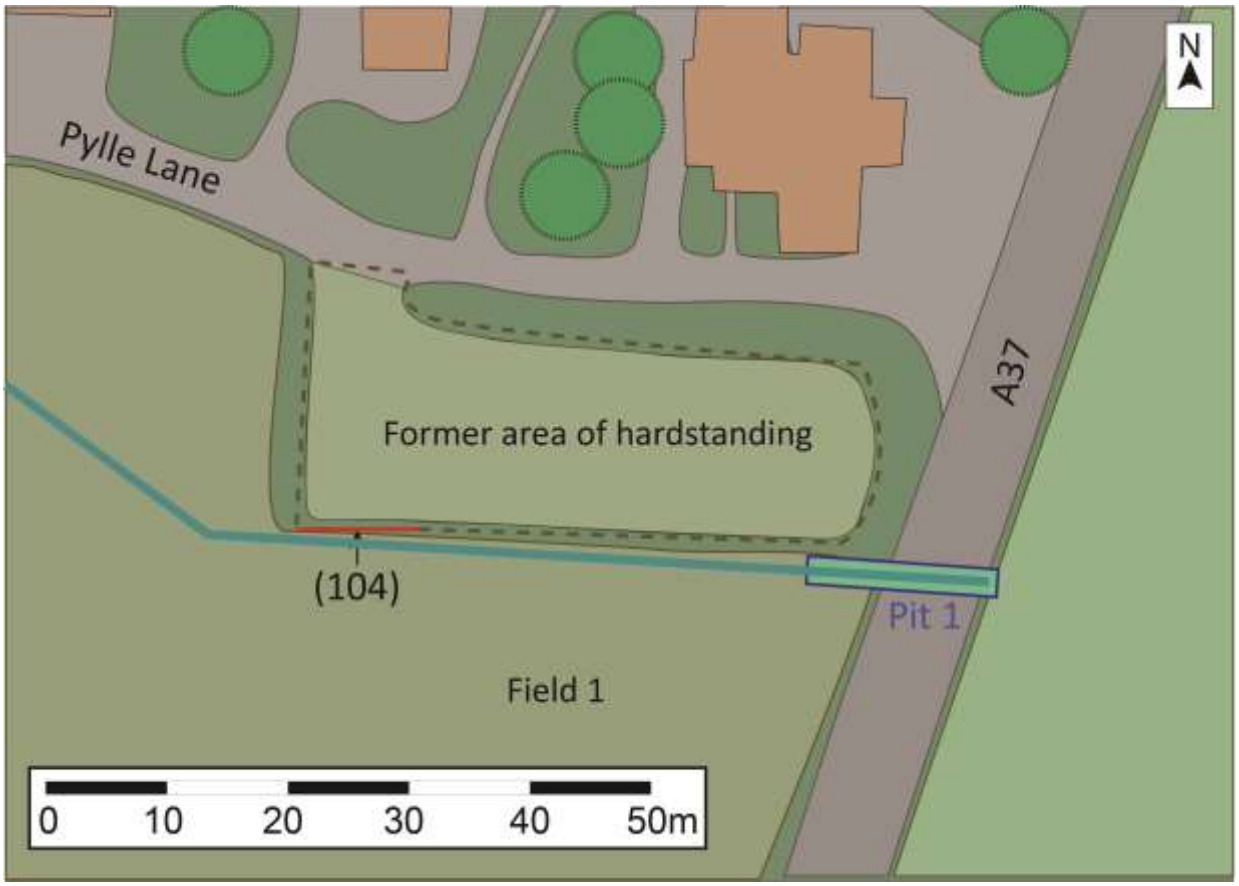

Fig. 2: Plan showing pipeline route extending W from a connection point on the A37 Fosse Way

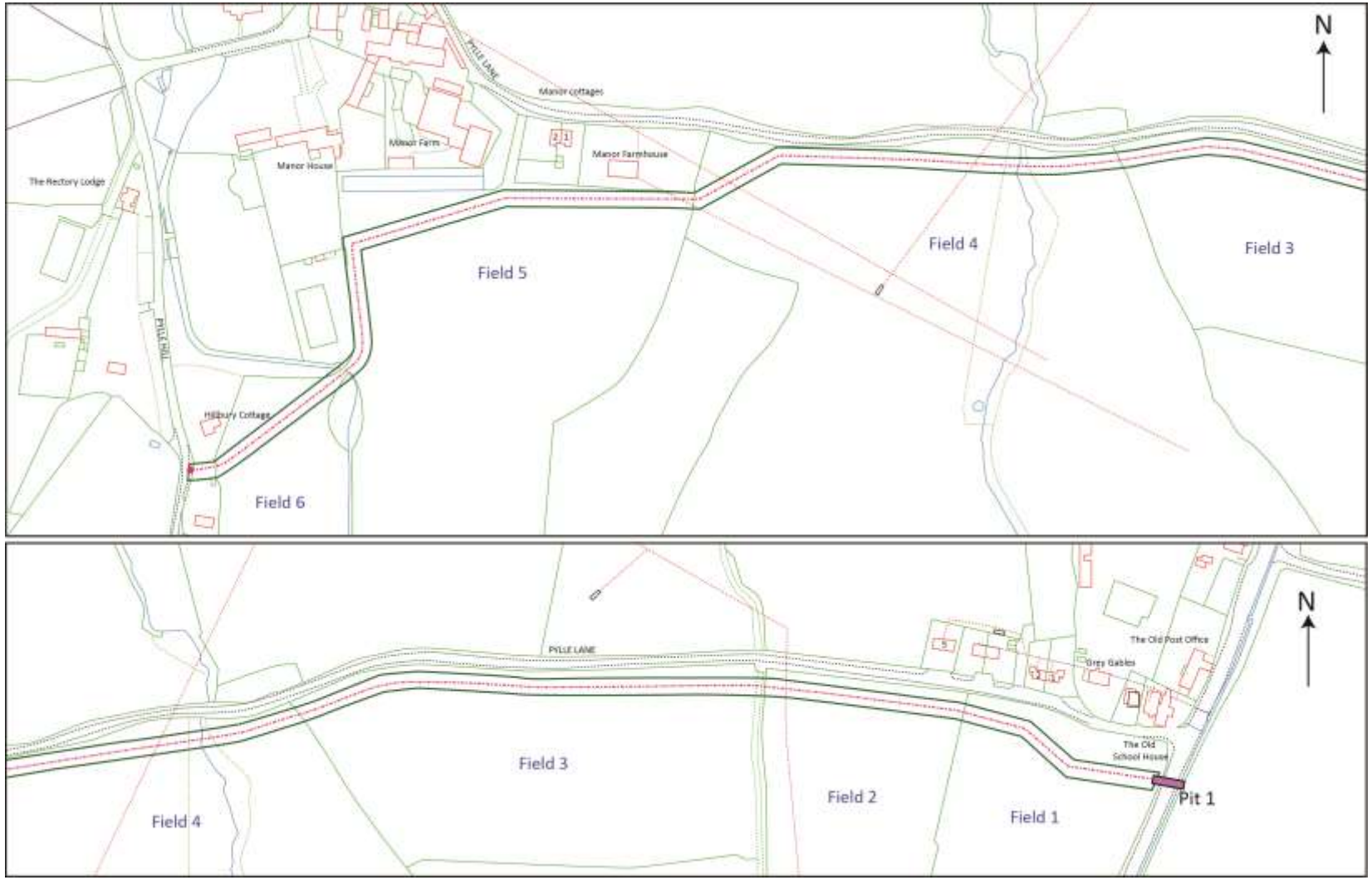

Fig. 3: Plan showing the course of the pipeline route (based on the engineering plan supplied to BAL by Bristol Water for information

Although no previous fieldwork has been carried out within the fields immediately S of Pylle Lane and to the W of the A37, there was considered to be some potential to encounter remains of a medieval date at the western end of the route, where it runs close to Pylle Manor and Manor Farm, a settlement site of medieval origin.

The manor of Pylle is documented in the Domesday survey of 1086 forming part of the lands held by Glastonbury Abbey. It is believed that an original medieval/Tudor manor house (PRN 25315) lay to the N of the present Manor House, which is of 17th -century and later date. Manor Farm lies to the E with a long pond known as 'the canal', which it is thought, may be a millpond.

A watching brief in 1997 during the construction of a swimming pool to the SW of the Manor House (PRN 25560) revealed the section of a large ditch, which was interpreted as a moat. There was no evidence for the date of construction but it appeared to have been filled in around the time of the construction of the present house. Samples recovered from the lower silts appeared to be rich in organic material including wood. A study of the historical background suggests that the moat may date to the 13th or 14th century.

5 Methodology

The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with practices set out in *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (CIfA 2014), *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (CIfA 2014) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015, 25-5). Border Archaeology adheres to the CIfA *Code of conduct* (2014) and to Somerset County Council's Heritage Service *Archaeological Handbook* (Membery 2011).

5.1 Archaeological Observation

The engineering ground works undertaken within the specified study area were carried out in two phases. Phase 1 comprised a machine excavated pit measuring 12m in length, 0.3m wide and 1.2m deep whilst Phase 2 was undertaken using a mechanical trencher to open a 0.2m-wide trench crossing through Fields 1-6.

An archaeologist was present during both phases work and the presence/absence of archaeological features was noted and recorded to a satisfactory and proper standard, consistent with CIfA guidance (2014).

5.2 Recording

Full written, graphic and photographic records were made in accordance with Border Archaeology's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (2014). Records include:

- A completed *pro-forma* context record sheet for each stratigraphic unit

- Plans of excavated areas showing the extent of the area (tied into the Ordnance Survey National Grid and located on a 1:2500 plan), the extent of any stratigraphic units and appropriate detail within stratigraphic units
- A photographic record of all stratigraphic units - including a representative photographic record of the progress of the archaeological work. The record was made using a high-resolution digital camera and an appropriate scale was included in each photograph; all photographic records were indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. Details concerning subject and direction of view were maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

6 Results

6.1 Phase 1

6.1.1 Pit 1

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(001)		Deposit	Topsoil	Moderately compacted dark brown clayey silt, frequent small sub-angular stones; measured >2m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.2m. Same as (101) in Field 1. Overlying (002)	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(002)		Deposit	Subsoil	Firm mid yellowish-brown silty clay, frequent small sub-angular stones; measured >3.5m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.25. Same as (102) in Field 1. Underlying (001), overlying (009)	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(003)		Deposit	Fill of former ditch feature [004]	Loose, dark brown and black mottled clayey silt, frequent large to small stones & occasional brick fragments, extensive rooting and disturbance; measured 1m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.9m. Fill of [004]	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
4	[004]		Cut	Infilled section of former ditch feature	Linear; aligned N-S; break of slope top gradual, sides moderately sloping, break of slope base gradual, base concave; measured 1m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.9m. Filled by (003)	-	-	-	-	-	Post-Medieval/ Modern
5	(005)		Deposit	Existing tarmac road surface	Compact black tarmac; measured 9m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.1. Overlying (006)	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
6	(006)		Deposit	Bedding layer for (005)	Firm light orange sterile deposit of small stones; measured 9m × >0.3m × 0.3. Underlying (005)	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
7	(007)		Deposit	Former tarmac	Compact black tarmac; measured 9m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) ×	-	-	-	-	-	Modern

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
				road surface	0.1m.						
8	(008)		Deposit	Concrete bedding layer for (007)	Indurated grey concrete; measured 9m (E-W) × >0.3m (N-S) × 0.6. Underlying (007), overlying (009)	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
9	(009)		Layer	Natural substrate	Firm mottled mid greyish-yellow & mid greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E	-	-	-	-	-	N/A

Pit 1 measured 12.5m × 0.3m × 1.2m. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

Plate 1: View W of Pit 1 showing hedgerow boundary between the A37 and Field 1

The stratigraphic profile at the W end of the pit comprised topsoil (001) overlying subsoil (002), which itself overlay natural (009). Excavation continued beneath an extant hedgerow boundary at the eastern edge of the field, which also formed part of Pit 1 and which thus remained undisturbed (*Plates 1 & 2*). The associated ditch [004] contained a backfill material (003) and truncated the subsoil (002). This western part of the pit fell within Field 1 and (001), (002) and (009) were the same as (101), (102) and (103), respectively.

The majority of the pit crossed the A37 on the course of the Fosse Way Roman road and the stratigraphic profile comprised an existing road surface (005) overlying an associated hard-core bedding layer (006), which, in turn, sealed a former tarmac road surface (007) and associated concrete bedding layer (008), which overlay the natural substrate (009) (*Plate 1*).

No evidence of an original Roman Road surface was encountered and it is possible that any such surface had been removed during road re-surfacing works.

Plate 2: View W of Pit 1 showing excavation beneath hedgerow

6.2 Phase 2

6.2.1 Field 1

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(101)		Deposit	Topsoil	Moderately compacted dark brown clayey silt, frequent small sub-angular stone; measured 0.27m thick, trench wide. Same as (001) in Trench 1	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(102)		Deposit	Subsoil	Firm sterile yellowish-grey silty clay; measured 0.40m thick, trench wide. Same as (002) in Trench 1	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(103)		Layer	Natural	Firm mottled mid greyish-yellow & mid greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions & organic patches; extended trench wide at L.O.E. Same as (009) in Trench 1	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
4	(104)		Deposit	Area of modern building debris	Mixed CBM stone/tarmac rubble; measured 5.0m × >0.3m × 0.10-0.50.	-	-	-	-	-	Modern

The trench extended over a total distance of 114m and measured 0.3m wide and 0.9m deep. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

The stratigraphic profile comprised topsoil (101) overlying modern building rubble (104) within the eastern extent of the trench. Rubble stone surface (104) appears to represent the southernmost extent of a rectangular area of modern hardstanding occupying the NE corner of Field 1 and abutting the S side of Pylle Lane, which is first visible on an aerial photograph of the site dated 2009.

Underlying (101) over the majority of the trenching and underlying (104), where present, was a subsoil deposit (102) sealing the natural substrate (103) (*Plate 3*).

Contexts (101), (102) and (103) were the same as Pit 1 contexts (001), (002) and (009), respectively.

Plate 3: View NW of trench in Field 1

6.2.2 Field 2

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(201)		Deposit	Topsoil	Moderately compacted mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench-wide tot a thickness of 0.15m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(202)		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately compacted mid greyish-brown silty clay, occasional small sub-angular stones, rare CBM fleck; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.12m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(203)		Layer	Colluvium	Firm light yellowish-brown sterile silty clay; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.73m	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
4	(204)		Layer	Natural	Firm mottled mid greyish-yellow & mid greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E.	-	-	-	-	-	Modern

The trench ran for a distance of 110m and measured 0.3m wide and 0.9m deep. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

The stratigraphic profile comprised topsoil (201) overlying subsoil (202), which, in turn, sealed a colluvial hillwash deposit (203) overlying the natural substrate (204) (*Plate 4*).

Plate 4: S-facing section of trenching in Field 2

6.2.3 Field 3

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(301)		Deposit	Topsoil	Loose mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.14m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(302)		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately compacted light-mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.1m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(303)		Layer	Colluvium	Firm light yellowish-brown sterile silty clay; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.8m	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
4	(304)		Layer	Natural	Firm light greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E.	-	-	-	-	-	Modern

The trench ran for a distance of 326m and was 0.2m wide and 1.2m deep. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

Topsoil (301) overlay subsoil (302) which sealed a colluvial hill-wash deposit (303); (303) overlay the natural substrate (304) (*Plate 5*).

Plate 5: View N of S-facing section of trench in Field 3

6.2.4 Field 4

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(401)		Deposit	Topsoil	Loose mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.1m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(402)		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately compacted light-mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.16m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(403)		Layer	Colluvium	Firm light yellowish-brown sterile silty clay; measured 0.1m thick, trench	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
4	(404)		Layer	Alluvium	Firm light brown sterile clay; measured 15m × 0.3m × 0.65-0.15m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
5	(405)		Layer	Natural substrate	Firm light greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E.	-	-	-	-	-	N/A

The trenching extended over a distance of 243m and measured 0.2m wide with a depth of 1.2m. Observation in this area was carried out in two sections due to the presence of a stream flowing N across the central part of the field and flanked by protected hedgerows. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

The excavations revealed topsoil (401) overlying subsoil (402). On the W side of the stream crossing, the subsoil sealed a colluvial hill-wash deposit (403) directly overlying the natural substrate (405) (*Plate 6*), whilst on the E side, the subsoil overlay an alluvial layer associated with the stream, which, in turn, sealed (405) (*Plate 7*).

Plate 6: View E towards stream crossing showing trench in Field 4

Plate 7: S-facing section of trench in eastern half of Field 4

6.3 Field 5

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(501)		Deposit	Topsoil	Loose mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.2m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(502)		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately compacted light yellowish-brown silty clay, occasional small sub-angular stone; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.33m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(503)		Layer	Natural substrate	Firm light greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E.	-	-	-	-	-	N/A
4	(505)		Deposit	Rubble hard-core surface at field access point	Moderately compacted rubble, brick, stone &tile fragments; measured 20m × >0.2m × 0.15m thick.	-	-	-	-	-	Modern

The trench extended over a distance of 320m and measured 0.2m wide with a depth of 1.2m. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

The stratigraphic profile comprised topsoil (501) overlying subsoil (502) which sealed the natural substrate (503). The rubble hard-core surface (504) was located towards the centre of the field and was laid directly into the topsoil (501) at a field access off Pylle Lane (*Plate 8*).

Plate 8: View NW of trench in Field 5 showing rubble surface (504)

6.3.1 Field 6

Item	Context No.	Matrix Phase	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Dating
						Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(601)		Deposit	Topsoil	Loose mid brown clayey silt, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.2m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
2	(602)		Deposit	Subsoil	Moderately compacted light yellowish-brown silty clay, occasional small sub-angular stones; extended trench wide to a thickness of 0.41m	-	-	-	-	-	Modern
3	(603)		Layer	Natural substrate	Firm light greyish-blue sterile clay, limestone inclusions; extended trench wide at L.O.E.	-	-	-	-	-	N/A

The trench measured 78m × 0.2m with a depth of 1.2m. No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.

The stratigraphic profile comprised topsoil (601) overlying subsoil (602), which, in turn, sealed the natural substrate (603) (*Plate 9*).

Plate 9: NW-facing section of trench in Field 6

7 Results

Although the eastern end of the route impacted directly upon the present course of the A367 Fosse Way, no evidence of features or deposits of archaeological significance was revealed. However, the ground works were of limited extent in terms of trench width and it remains a possibility that archaeological deposits or finds survive outside the area of engineering impact.

Phase 1 (crossing the A37) was carried out by means of conventional open-cut trenching whilst the majority of the trenching was cut using a mechanical trencher. In both cases, the resulting trench was narrow, ranging from 0.3m wide in the carriageway to only 0.2m where the pipeline crossed through fields, the maximum depth in each case being 1.2m.

The profile of Pit 1, which affected the carriageway and verge, revealed a sequence of modern road construction deposits and it is possible that previous road construction and resurfacing activity had entirely removed any evidence for original features associated with the Roman road.

The trenching opened in Field 1, extending immediately to the W of the existing carriageway and verge, was also devoid of any such evidence, in contrast to the results of previous archaeological work carried out in fields to the E of the A37, extending towards Lower Easton farm (PRN 15052), which identified evidence potentially representing the presence of a high-status building of Roman date within the vicinity.

No evidence encountered of medieval settlement activity at the western end of the route, close to Pylle Manor and Manor Farm, a settlement site of medieval origin.

The groundworks in Fields 2, 3 and 4 revealed extensive layers of colluvium with alluvial deposits encountered adjacent to the watercourse in Field 4; these deposits are represented by contexts (203), (303), (403) and (404), respectively. It remains a possibility that the absence of any artefactual material within the topsoil may in part be attributable to this material potentially overlying any archaeological remains that might otherwise have been brought to the surface as a result of later cultivation activity.

Overall, the results of the observation reveal an agricultural landscape that has remained unchanged, with no evidence for any previous settlement activity outside of those areas identified by the course of earlier works.

8 Copyright

9 Bibliography

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