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Commercial Archaeology

Working throughout England and Wales

Archaeological Observation

Bristol Water

Bath Spa University Augmentation Scheme

Wells Road (A39)

Corston

Somerset

August 2015

BRISTOL WATER

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unearth the past....resolve the future

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Report Ref:
BA1428BWBSUC

Grid Reference:
NGR: ST 69438 65326 to NGR: ST 70025 65322

Date:
August 2015

Cover: View southwest of Trench 1

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Contents:

1 Executive Summary

Border Archaeology Ltd carried out a programme of archaeological observation of ground works on behalf of Bristol Water relating to Phases 1 & 2 of the Bristol Water Bath Spa University Augmentation Scheme Wells Road (A39) Corston Somerset. The phasing of ground works was dictated by the need to implement a programme of road closure in Corston village. The first phase of works was carried out in August 2014 and the second phase in July 2015.

The aim of the engineering works was to augment the water supply serving new university accommodation and an open-cut trench was thus excavated along the carriageway (A39) from the entrance to Bath Spa University Newton Park (NGR: ST 70025 65322) to a connection point to the west of All Saint's Church Corston (NGR: ST 69438 65326). Each phase of work extended over a distance of approximately 300m.

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered during the groundworks.

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2 Introduction

Border Archaeology was instructed by Bristol Water to carry out a programme of archaeological observation throughout the ground works phase of the Bath Spa University Augmentation Scheme Wells Road (A39) Corston Somerset serving new university accommodation (*fig. 1*). The route of the scheme extended along Wells Road between NGR: ST 69438 65326 and NGR: ST 70025 65322, with a small chamber located in Ashton Hill.

Observation was carried out in two phases with a lengthy break between the two awaiting implementation of road closures. Phase 1 extended from the Corston Drive entrance to the Bath Spa University Newton Park (NGR: ST 70025 65322) to a point immediately SE of where the Wells Road (A39) crosses Corston Brook on the eastern side of Corston village (NGR: ST 69688 65259). Phase 2 continued from Corston Brook to the centre of Corston village, immediately W of All Saint's Church at the junction of Wells Road and Corston Lane (NGR: ST 69438 65326).

3 Site Description

A single, continuous trench was excavated in two phases along the carriageway (A39), extending for a distance of approximately 600m (*figs. 1-3*) from the entrance to Bath Spa University Newton Park (NGR: ST 700525 65322), along the A39 to the centre of Corston village (NGR: ST 69723 65258). The route of the pipeline rises from approximately 29m AOD at its eastern end to approximately 42m AOD at the western extent, in the village of Corston.

The A39 marks the northern boundary of the Newton Park Estate, comprising a Grade II* Registered Park. The park extends over an area of some 120ha approximately 5km W of the centre of Bath. The ground works area occupies rising ground S of the A4 Bath to Bristol road and the Avon Valley and is situated between the villages of Corston and Newton St Loe.

3.1 Soils & geology

The soils of the area consist largely of typical calcareous pelosols of the Evesham 1 series (411a), composed of slowly permeable calcareous clayey soils associated with shallow well-drained brashy calcareous soils over limestone, the underlying geology being Jurassic clay and limestone (SSEW 1983).

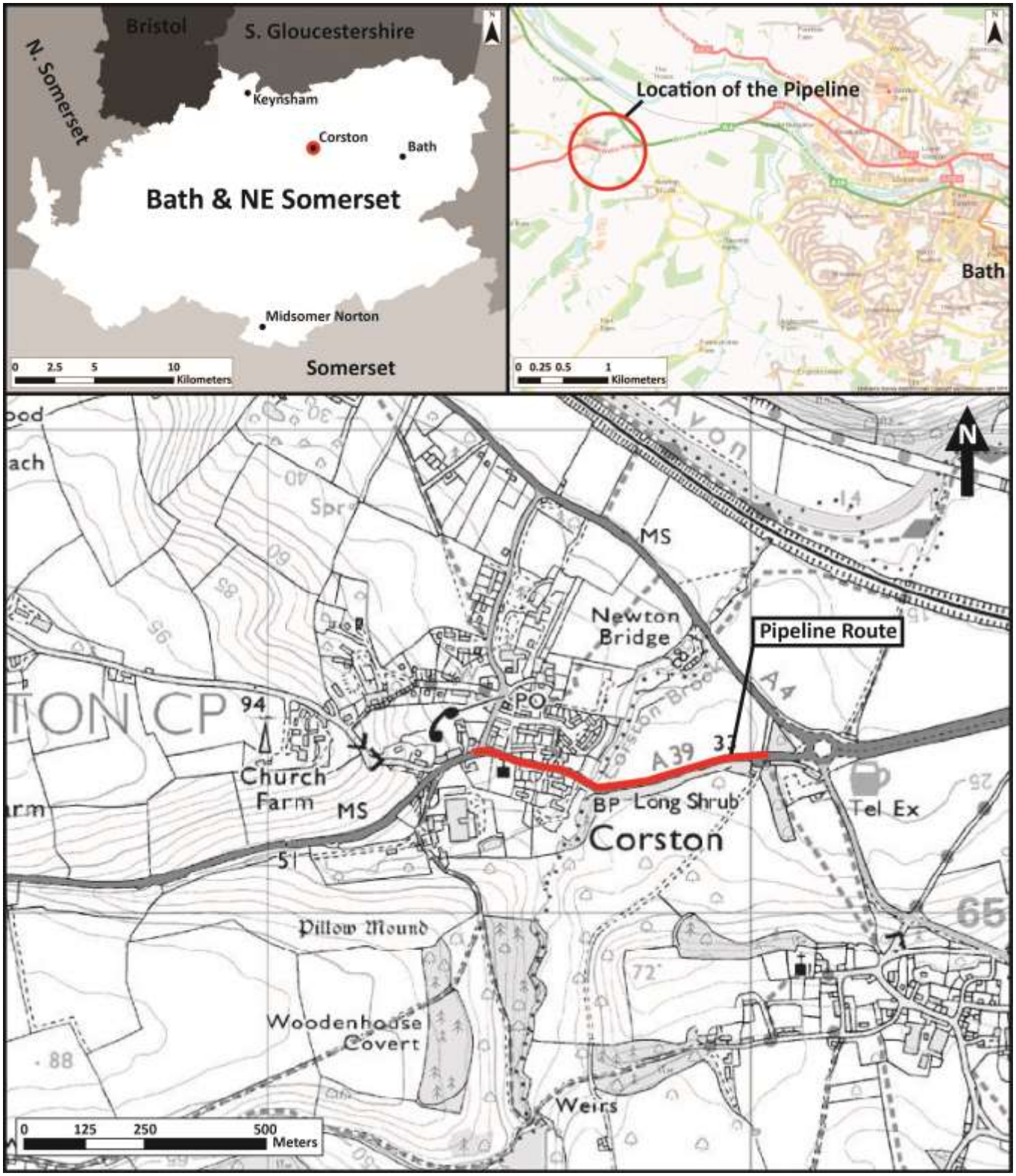

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Fig. 1: Location of pipeline route

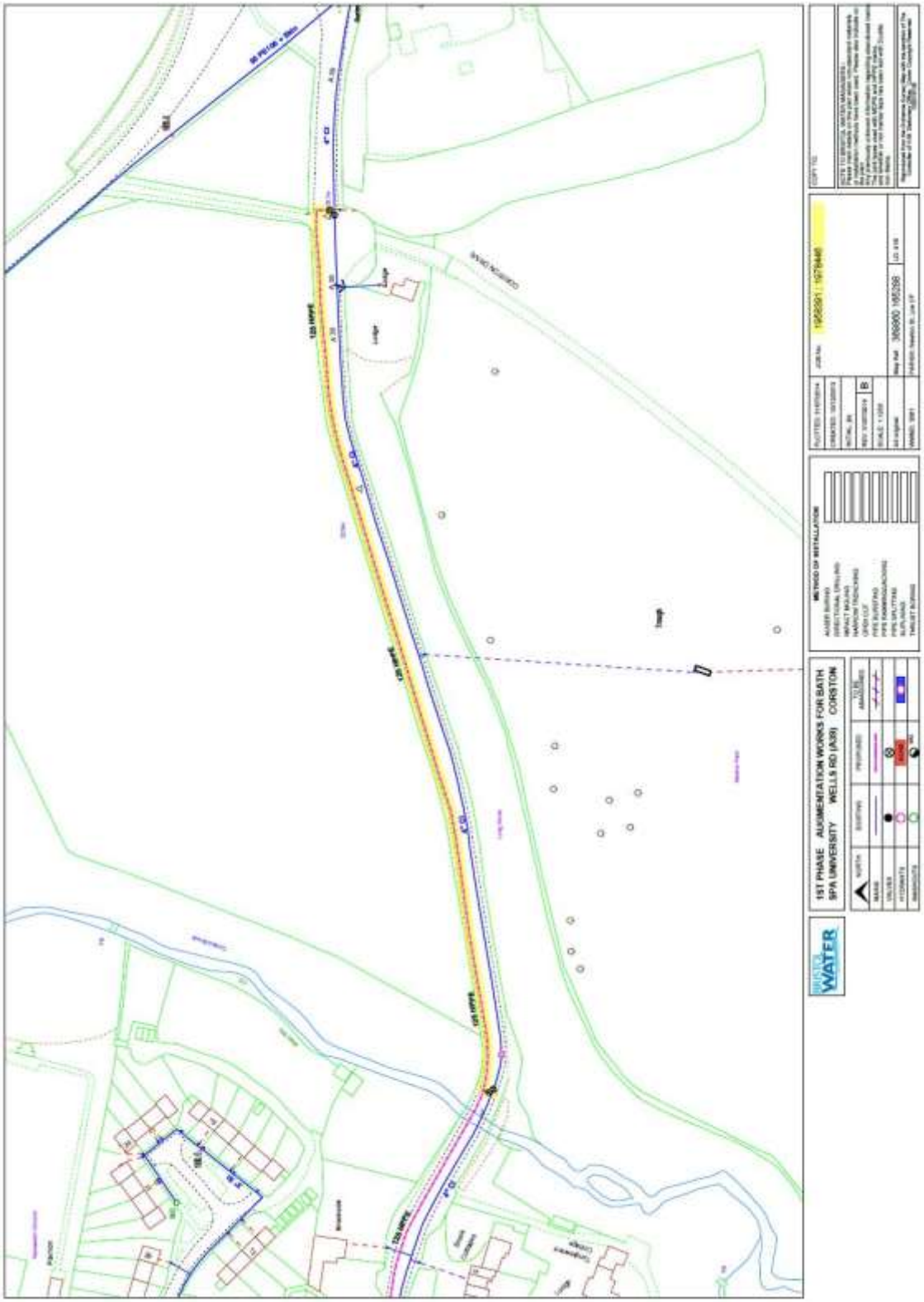

Fig. 2: Scheme map showing Phase 1 (Supplied to Border Archaeology Ltd by Bristol Water for information)

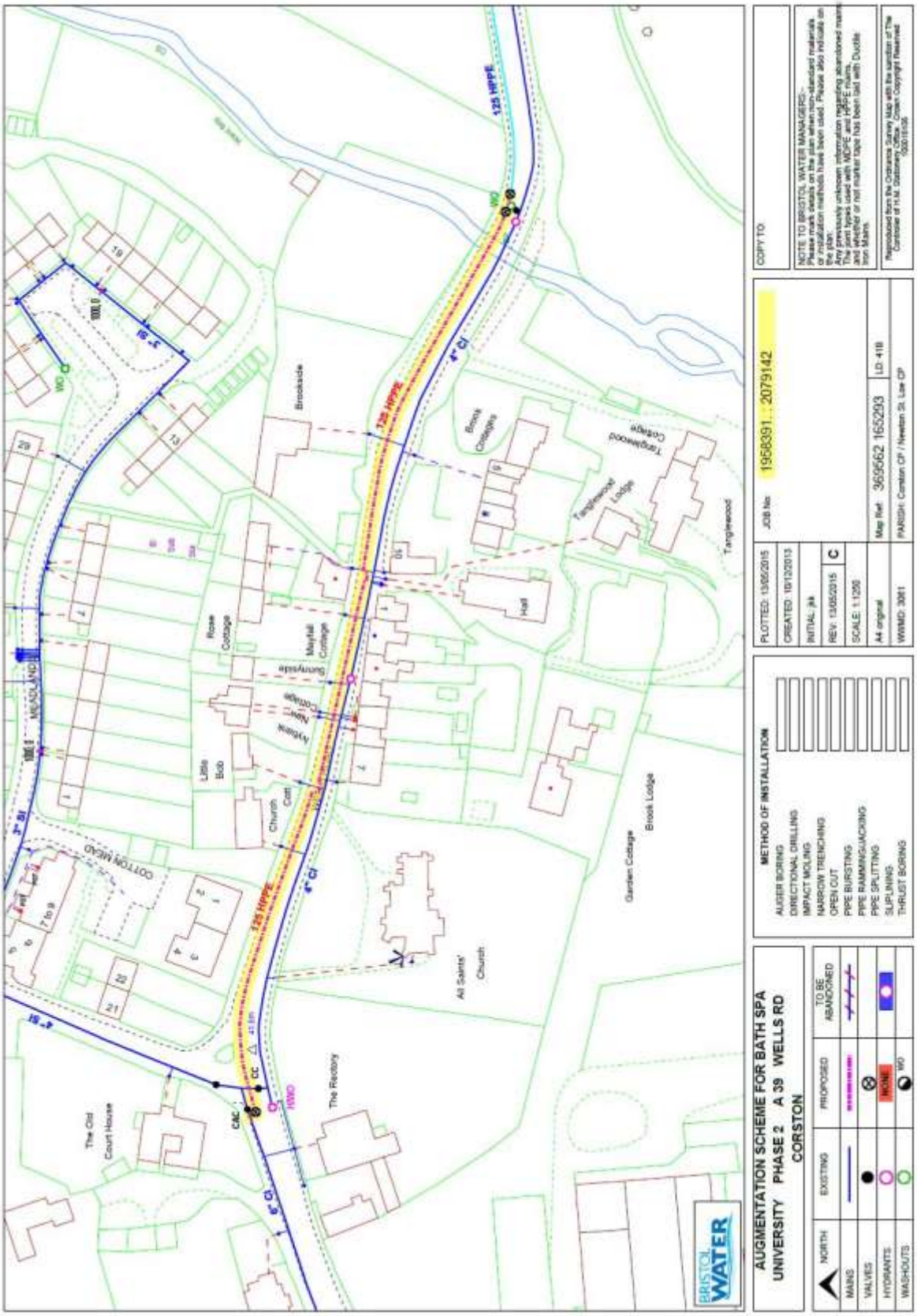

Fig. 3: Scheme map showing Phase 2 (Supplied to Border Archaeology Ltd by Bristol Water for information)

4 Brief Historical & Archaeological Background

Fields to the E and SE of the Globe Roundabout contain significant evidence of Roman activity comprising a villa site (HER Ref MBN1661) near Newton St Loe (NGR: ST 712 655) and associated burial ground (HER Ref MBN1761) (NGR: ST 707 648).

The villa was partially revealed during construction of the Great Western Railway around 1837 and comprised two distinct structures, one of which was investigated in some detail and found to cover an area measuring 55ft × 102ft. Finds included mosaics, hypocaust elements and evidence of painted wall plaster, associated with coins of Macrinus, Constans, Valentinian and Honorius. One of the mosaics, known as the 'Orpheus Mosaic', is now in the Bristol Museum and Art Gallery. Archaeological monitoring of road-widening in 1968 confirmed the location and plan of the buildings whilst an extensive scatter of oyster shell revealed during ploughing to the W of the site (NGR: ST708 656) suggests the complex may have been more extensive than previously thought.

Human remains were noted from 1869 onwards in a field known as 'Quarry Field' to the E of Newton St Loe, a site possibly linked to mining activity in the 19th century exploiting the Lower and Middle Coal Measures of the Pensford Syncline. These remains were discovered in association with Roman coins, pottery and bronze artefacts. With the cessation of extractive activity, no further finds are recorded in this area. However, an archaeological evaluation carried out in 2010 identified further evidence of burial activity to the S of the main cemetery, comprising infant remains and a cremation burial.

Earthwork remains of a possible Roman road measuring 5-6m wide and 0.7m deep (HER Ref: 203809), with a ditch either side, are recorded approximately 300m SE of the Glebe Roundabout (NGR: ST 7050 6520), near the dark earth deposit representing the midden site. The earthworks may comprise a section of a postulated Roman route-way along the left bank of the Avon towards Bristol. It is thus considered possible that the modern A39 follows the course of a much older route.

Archaeologically, the medieval period is represented by a series of slight earthwork features and a small number of 12th -13th -century pottery sherds within an area located roughly SE of the pipeline route in Newton Park, between Newton St Loe and the Corston Brook (HER Ref: MBN1316) (NGR: ST 696 647). These features would appear to be the remains of building platforms possibly representing a settlement that was removed from the park when the village of Newton St Loe was established.

The medieval village of Corston (HER Ref: MBN9743) (NGR: ST 695 653) located at the western extent of the pipeline route contains abundant evidence of medieval settlement activity and constitutes a designated Conservation Area (Area HA), extending eastwards as far as the Corston Brook.

The post-medieval period witnessed an expansion of coalmining activity (HER Ref. MBN9836) (NGR: ST 703 654) within the vicinity of the pipeline route, alluded to above. Around five pits appear to have been operational from the 1730s to1840s supplying the increasing level of demand both from the city of Bath and from the local cloth industry. Coal was also probably used in brewing at the nearby Globe Inn, a late 17th -century public house (HER Ref. MBN9861) (NGR: ST7013265279) located close to the pipeline route on the NW side of Pennyquick.

The Newton Park Estate has been in the ownership of the Duchy of Cornwall since the death of the 5th Earl Temple in 1941. The Estate comprises a Grade II* Registered Park (List Entry Number: 1000567) (HER Ref: MBN4217) (NGR: ST 696 642), of which the A39 marks the northern boundary. The park was laid out in the 1760s on land containing the much remodelled 13th -14th -century Keep of St Loes Castle (HER Ref: MBN1318) (NGR: ST 69 64) (Scheduled Monument 122; Listed Building Ref. 1129476), a fortified medieval manor house, Elizabethan farm buildings and various enclosed gardens. Designed by Lancelot 'Capability' Brown, the park was attached to Newton House, built by Stiff Leadbetter for Joseph Langton in 1762-5 (HER Ref. MBN6567) (NGR: ST 696 643), and was subsequently altered in the 1790s by Humphry Repton. Among the features surviving from Repton's later phase of work is a pair of late 18th -century stone panelled ashlar gate-piers situated adjacent to the pipeline route close to the A39 (NGR: ST 70018 65298). The feature comprises gate-piers with moulded caps, railings, outer piers and rubble quadrant flanking walls swept up towards the piers.

The park consists of 10 principal sections, Brook Park and Lodge Hill Park comprising the northern area lying close to the pipeline. This area largely consists of pasture but since the late 20th century has been given over to arable cultivation and only a few scattered trees remain, although the southern end of Lodge Hill Park retains permanent pasture on the slopes and a number of mature trees dating from the 18th century, including examples of beech, lime, oak, sweet and horse chestnut.

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 Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015). Border Archaeology adheres to the CIfA *Code of conduct* (2014).

Two phases of open-cut trenching were carried out, the majority using a machine fitted with a 0.5m-wide toothless ditching bucket; however, sections of Phase 2 in the vicinity of Corston were excavated using a trencher, which resulted in a narrower trench of only 0.3m wide. The two phases combined constituted 600m of continuous trenching along the carriageway of varying width.

All works potentially affecting archaeological remains were carried out under archaeological supervision and the presence/absence of archaeological features was noted and recorded in a manner consistent with the CIfA *Standard and guidance* (2014).

Phase 1 excavations were carried out in August 2014 and Phase 2 followed in July 2015.

5.1 Recording

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

- A *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 all 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 Trench 1

Item	Context No.	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Provisional Dating
					Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(100)	Layer	Modern tarmac surface	Indurated black tarmac; extended trench wide, maximum thickness 0.11m. Overlying (101)						Modern
2	(101)	Layer	Bedding layer	Compact mid grey concrete aggregate, frequent large gravel; extended trench wide, maximum depth 0.23m Underlying (100), overlying (102)						Modern
3	(102)	Layer	Bedding layer	Friable light yellowish-brown sand, frequent small gravels; extended trench wide, maximum thickness 0.5m. Underlying (101), overlying (103)						Modern
4	(103)	Layer	Natural geology	Compact light reddish-brown clayey sand over limestone bedrock; extended trench wide, maximum thickness 0.75m (to limit of excavation). Underlying (102)						N/A

Plate 1: Trench 1, view to the SW

Trench 1 extended from the entrance of Bath Spa University on the A39 Wells Road (NGR: ST 70025 65322) to a point SE of Corston Brook (NGR: ST 69688 65259).

No archaeology was present within the trench. The stratigraphic profile comprised a modern tarmac surface over a bedding layer which overlay modern levelling material. The natural geology was encountered along the entire length of the trench at a depth of 0.35–0.40m below existing ground level.

6.2 Trench 2

Item	Context No.	Type	Interpretation	Discussion	Finds					Provisional Dating
					Small Find	Pot	Bone	Misc.	Sample No.	
1	(200)	Layer	Modern tarmac surface	Indurated black tarmac; extended trench wide, maximum thickness 0.2m. Overlying (201)						Modern
2	(201)	Layer	Bedding layer	Compacted concrete aggregate; extended trench wide, maximum depth 0.15m Underlying (200), overlying (202)						Modern
3	(202)	Layer	Natural geology	Compact, mid reddish-brown clayey sand over limestone bedrock; extended trench wide, maximum thickness 0.6m to limit of excavation. Underlying (201)						N/A

Plate 2: View NW of Trench 2

Trench 2 extended from SE of Corston Brook (NGR: ST 69688 65259) to a point located to the W of All Saint's Church (NGR: ST 69438 65326).

No archaeology was present in the trench. The modern tarmac surface and associated concrete bedding layer overlay natural geology, which was encountered along the entirety of the trench at a depth of 0.30–0.40m below existing ground level.

7 Discussion

The groundworks extended between Wells Road (NGR: ST 7003 6531) and (NGR: ST 69438 65326), with a small chamber excavated in Ashton Hill. A single continuous trench was opened along the carriageway (A39) in two phases over a distance of some 600m (*figs. 1-3*); trenching was excavated to a maximum depth of 1.10m and width of 0.50m, although a somewhat narrower trench of 0.30m width was used for sections of the route in Phase 2.

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered at any point along the length of the trench. The archaeological sequence revealed consisted of the modern tarmac road surface and associated bedding layer. The bedding material revealed in the eastern part of the trench overlay a modern levelling deposit whilst in the western section this material was laid directly above the natural geology, which was encountered at depths of 0.35–0.40m below existing ground level and consisted of fragmented limestone in a clayey sand matrix above limestone bedrock.

Trench 1 extended from the outskirts SE of Corston village to the entrance to Bath Spa University Newton Park and confirmed that the present road level lay some 1.5-2.5m below that of the surrounding landscape. It would appear likely that ground reduction works were undertaken prior to construction of a road serving Corston village (*Plate 3*) and this may have truncated archaeological features or deposits.

Plate 3: View SW showing the level of the road in comparison to the surrounding landscape

Plate 4: View SW showing the road level in Corston village

However, as it passed over the Corston Brook and into the village, the road levelled out to merge with the surrounding landscape. As this area lies slightly upslope from the brook and the eastern limit of the village it seems likely that it represents the original ground level. It is possible that previous resurfacing work may have disturbed any potential underlying archaeological deposits and as the trench was only 0.3m wide in this area It remains possible that archaeological features and deposits may be present outside the confines of this observation.

8 Copyright

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Report title:	**Report Ref:**
Bath Spa University Augmentation Scheme Wells Road (A39) Corston Somerset : Archaeological Observation	BA1428BWBSUC

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Issue No.	**Status**	**Date**	**Approved for issue**
1	Final	August 2015	Neil Shurety Dip. M G M Inst. M