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archaeology & built heritage



## Archaeological Observation

For

**Amey plc**

On behalf of

**Severn Trent Water**

Concerning

**Water Main Renewal  
Frodesley to Acton Burnell  
Shropshire**

February 2018



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*Cover: View southwest of trenching.*

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## 1 Non-Technical Summary

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*Border Archaeology Ltd (BA) was instructed by Amey plc on behalf of Severn Trent Water plc to carry out Archaeological Observation ('watching brief') of approximately 1.6km of trenching in connection with the renewal of mains pipework between Frodesley and Acton Burnell Shropshire.*

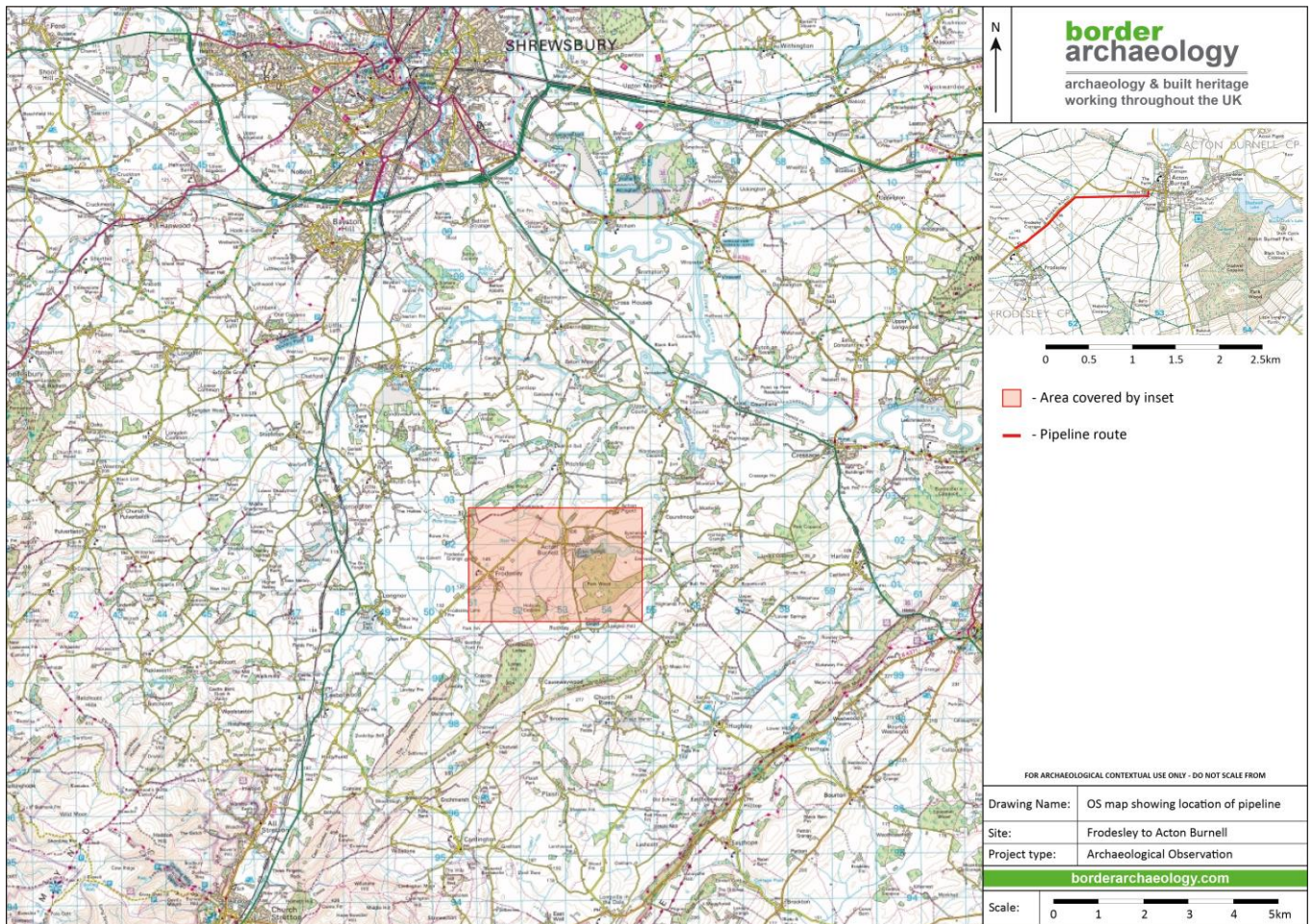
*Trenching was excavated across farmland, adjacent to and crossing, Frodesley Lane/Watling Street. Trenching was approximately 0.3–1m wide with an average depth of 1.1m.*

*A series of earlier road surfaces and associated post-medieval artefacts were encountered.*

*Towards the northeastern extent of the scheme, evidence for a palaeochannel, or buried wetland deposit, was encountered. This possibly predates the existing watercourse, which has been redirected and channeled.*

## 2 Introduction

Border Archaeology Ltd (BA) was instructed by Amey plc on behalf of Severn Trent Water to carry out Archaeological Observation ('watching brief') of groundworks associated with the renewal of approximately 1.6km of 250mm diameter rising main between Frodesley and Acton Burnell Shropshire (*fig. 1*).



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*Fig. 1: Site location*

The engineering groundworks combined direct drilling and open-cut trenching over agricultural land adjacent to Frodesley Lane/Watling Street with a road-crossing at NGR: SJ 51467 01460. The trenching was approximately 0.3-1m wide and was excavated to an average depth of 1.1m. The pipeline route comprised four sections, as follows: (*fig. 2*);

- Section 1 - NGR: SJ 51343 01402 to NGR: SJ 51462 01464 (approximately 138m).
- Section 2 - NGR: SJ 51470 301458 to NGR: SJ 51723 01661 (approximately 330m).
- Section 3 - NGR: SJ 51819 01769 to NGR: SJ 52041 01973 (approximately 302m).
- Section 4 - NGR: SJ 52041 01973 to NGR: SJ 52805 01992 (approximately 765m).

### 3 Site Description & Geology

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The pipeline route runs over farmland parallel to Frodesley Lane/Watling Street. The topography over the course of the route falls from approximately 142m AOD, adjacent to its starting point immediately N of Frodesley at NGR: SJ 51343 01402, to roughly 114m AOD at its termination on the edge of Acton Burnell at NGR: SJ 52805 01992.

The soils are typical stagnogleys of the CLIFTON series (711n) consisting of slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged reddish fine and coarse loamy soils, with similar soils with slight seasonal waterlogging and some deep coarse loamy soils seasonally affected by groundwater. The underlying geology consists of reddish till (SSEW 1983).

### 4 Brief Historical & Archaeological Background

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#### 4.1 Prehistoric

Evidence of prehistoric activity within the vicinity of the pipeline is fairly limited. Finds within the vicinity include a perforated stone axe (HER No. 03630) recovered from the garden of The Rectory Frodesley (NGR: SJ 5154 0100) in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

A possible hybrid double-ditched enclosure survives as a cropmark (HER No. 00443) in the field immediately NW of the pipeline (NGR: SJ 5219 0230). Measuring roughly 100m (N/S) × 90m (E/W), the enclosure is considered to be of probable Iron Age to Roman date. An entrance has been noted to the S, together with an inner ditch with in-turns. The field was walked in 1977 but no finds were recorded.

A possible prehistoric enclosure at Hall Meadow Acton Burnell (HER No. 31966) (NGR: SJ 53172 02158) was recorded as a series of ditch-like magnetically enhanced anomalies during geophysical survey in 2015. However, subsequent field evaluation in 2016 failed to identify any features. A section of N/S ditch of probable medieval date was located immediately to the E, in evaluation Trench 9.

#### 4.2 Romano-British

The groundworks run alongside a Scheduled section of the Roman road from Wroxeter to Leintwardine (Watling Street W of Wroxeter) (HER No 00108; Scheduled Monument 1006252) (Margary 6b). The cropmark of the road was photographed at Acton Burnell (centred on NGR: SJ 5270 0207) as part of an aerial photographic survey carried out in 2010.

Associated with the road is a Roman Bridge Abutment at Radnals Bridge (HER No. 00290; Scheduled Monument 1006280) to the NE of the pipeline route (NGR: SJ 5250 0255) comprising remains of embanked approaches to a bridge carrying Watling Street across a stream. The site has revealed evidence of Roman road surfaces, although the bridge abutment itself is considered likely to be a medieval rebuild.

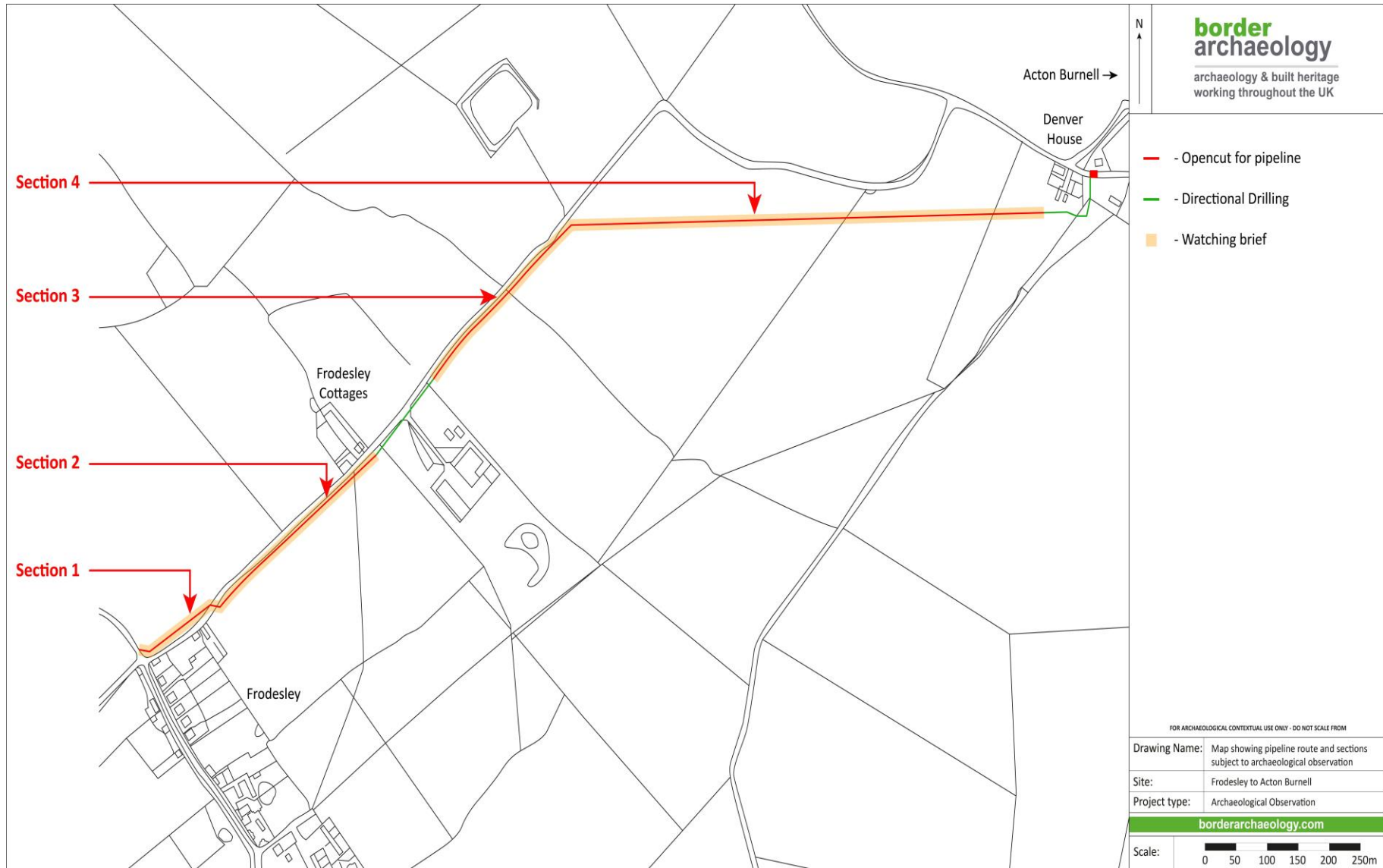


Fig. 2: Plan showing location of groundworks observations



### 4.3 Medieval

The manor of Acton is mentioned in the Domesday Survey of 1086, when the Lord of the Manor was Robert son of Corbet.

The medieval town of Acton Burnell (HER No. 05056; Scheduled Monument 1015812) was founded by Robert Burnell, Bishop of Bath & Wells and Chancellor of England. Burnell was granted a weekly market and two annual fairs in 1269-70.

Despite hosting an early Parliament of England called by Edward I in 1283, Acton Burnell failed to thrive and the last documented evidence for a market is in 1364 and in 1379; by the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Acton Burnell was no longer functioning as a town.

Acton Burnell Moated Site (HER No. 00288), a square moated structure, is located adjacent to the NW extent of the pipeline route (NGR: SJ 5287 0213). The site was levelled in 1963 under the supervision of the Ministry of Works and only a shallow depression now indicates the site of the moat. The work revealed a covered stone drain leading from the centre of the enclosure to discharge into the moat, together with the foundations of a drystone wall on the E side. The foundations of a timber bridge spanning the moat consisted of four substantial beams forming a rectangular foundation with uprights and braces to a height of 18 inches. The only dateable finds recovered were a several glazed roof tiles and pottery of 12<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> century date.

A mill of probable medieval to post-medieval date is located immediately NW of the pipeline (HER No. 05045) (NGR: SJ 5282 0200). The mill site, which is shown on the 1845 tithe map, appears to have gone out of use soon after 1856 and had been demolished prior to publication of the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1<sup>st</sup> edition map of 1882. Its location on the edge of the medieval town, adjacent to a medieval manor house, suggests a probable medieval origin. The Old Mills site (HER No. 03617) further to the NW of the pipeline (NGR: SJ 5210 0270) represents a watermill, again of medieval to post-medieval date.

A hollow way of probable medieval to post-medieval date has been recorded to the W Acton Burnell (HER No. 06212) (NGR: SJ 5297 0203) adjacent to the NE extent of the pipeline route.

### 4.4 Post-medieval

A small number of post-medieval features are recorded in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline. These include the site of a 19<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> century brickworks (HER 06854) (NGR: SJ 5108 0163) shown on the OS 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6-inch map of 1888 and the site of post-medieval coal-workings to the NW Frodesley (HER No. 06855) (NGR: SJ 5067 0196) marked as "Old Shafts (Coal)" on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition OS. The map does not, however, show any post-medieval features directly on the pipeline route.

A possible post-medieval quarry and a mound of unknown date, possibly representing a house platform (HER No. 05048) (NGR. SJ 5311 0192).

The site of a former post-medieval watermill (HER No. 15668) is located S of the NE extent of the pipeline route (NGR: SJ 5291 0201). The mill was evidently closed by 1856 and subsequently demolished.

## 5 Methodology

The programme of archaeological work was carried out in accordance with a *Written Scheme of Investigation* (Amey 2016) and with *Standard and Guidance for an archaeological watching brief* (ClfA 2014), *Standard and Guidance for the collection, documentation, conservation and research of archaeological materials* (ClfA 2014) and *Management of Research Projects in the Historic Environment: The MoRPHE Project Managers' Guide* (Lee 2015). BA adheres to the requirements of the *ClfA Code of conduct* (2014).

### 5.1 Trenching

Where necessary, namely, at the road-crossing, tarmac surfacing was removed by machine and hydraulic breaker operating under archaeological supervision. Elsewhere, the ground was removed under archaeological supervision using a back-acting toothless bucket down to engineering depth. Potentially significant deposits were not removed by machine before their character was reasonably understood.

### 5.2 Recording

A full written, graphic and photographic record was made in accordance with BA's *Archaeological Field Recording Manual* (2017) and included:

- A standard numbered context record for each stratigraphic unit encountered.
- A location plan tied to OS National Grid data. Sections were produced on gridded, archive-stable polyester film at a scale of 1:10. However, it should be noted that contractor Health and Safety constraints precluded entry to trenching in order to undertake detailed recording. All drawings were numbered and listed in a drawing register, these drawing numbers being cross-referenced to written site records.
- A high-resolution digital photographic record was made. Photographs contained appropriate scales and were indexed and cross-referenced to written site records. Subject and direction of view were maintained in a photographic register, indexed by frame number.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Section 1

Context	Slot	Type	F/B	F/O	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Sample No	Provisional Date
1001	-	Deposit	-	-	Very firm dark reddish-brown (rapidly oxidising to greyish-brown) sandy clayey silt; rare sub-rounded stones; 0.38m thick. Overlying (1002).	Topsoil.	-	-	Modern
1002	-	Deposit	-	-	Very firm dark reddish-brown (rapidly oxidising to dark grey) silty clayey sand; frequent sub-rounded stones & regular manganese flecking; 0.22-0.49m thick. Underlying (1001), (1006). Overlying (1003).	Subsoil.	-	-	Modern.
1003	-	Deposit	-	-	Clayey sand; degraded siltstone/sandstone concentrations. Underlying (1002).	Natural.	-	-	-
1004	-	Surface	-	-	Tarmac & aggregate; up to 0.1m thick. Overlying (1005).	Road surface.	-	-	Modern.
1005	-	Surface	-	-	Very firm light greyish-brown mixed rubble in clayey silty sand matrix (stones up to 0.22m in size); up to 0.26m thick. Underlying (1004). Overlying (1006).	Road surface.	-	-	Unknown.
1006	-	Surface	-	-	Firm dark brownish-red sandy clay silt; frequent mixed stones; 0.13m thick. Underlying (1005). Overlying (1002).	Earthen road surface.	CBM, horseshoe.	-	Unknown.

## 6.2 Section 2

Context	Slot	Type	F/B	F/O	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Sample No	Provisional Date
2001	-	Deposit.	-	-	Firm (more friable at NE extent of trench) light reddish-brown silty (rapidly oxidising to greyish-brown) clayey sand; occasional rounded stones; up to 0.39m thick. Overlying (2002).	Topsoil.	-	-	Modern.
2002	-	Deposit.	-	-	Very firm light reddish-brown silty sandy clay; frequent rounded stones; 0.16-0.45m thick. Underlying (2001). Overlying (2003).	Subsoil.	-	-	Modern.
2003	-	Deposit.	-	-	Firm dark greyish-blue clays & sandy gravels lenses; frequent mudstone/sandstone. Underlying (2002).	Natural.	-	-	-

## 6.3 Section 3

Context	Slot	Type	F/B	F/O	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Sample No	Provisional Date
3001	-	Deposit.	-	-	Friable dark brownish-grey silty clayey sand (more clay-rich towards NE extent of trench); occasional mixed stones (stonier towards SW extent of trench); up to 0.38m thick. Overlying (3002).	Topsoil.	C19/C20 pottery, not retained.	-	Modern.

3002	-	Deposit.	-	-	Very firm greyish-brown sandy clay; occasional mixed stones; 0.15-0.33m thick. Underlying (3001). Overlying (3003).	Subsoil.	-	-	Modern.
3003	-	Deposit.	-	-	Predominantly dark greyish-blue clays & sandy gravels lenses; frequent mudstone/sandstone. Underlying (3003).	Natural.	-	-	-

#### 6.4 Section 4

Context	Slot	Type	F/B	F/O	Description	Interpretation	Finds	Sample No	Provisional Date
4001	-	Deposit.	-	-	Firm dark brownish-grey silty sandy clay; rare mixed stone; up to 0.51m thick. Overlying (4001).	Topsoil.	-	-	Modern
4002	-	Deposit.	-	-	Firm mid-greyish-brown sandy clay; occasional mixed stones; 0.12-0.34m thick. Underlying (4001). Overlying (4003), (4004), (4005).	Subsoil.	-	-	Modern
4003	-	Deposit.	-	-	Light greyish-blue clays with mudstone/sandstone concentrations, under light greyish-brown sands. Underlying (4002), (4004). Cut by [4006].	Natural.	-	-	-
4004	-	Deposit.	-	-	Very firm light greyish-blue sandy clay, dark peaty lenses; occasional rooting & amorphous organic remains; up to 0.39m thick. Underlying (4002). Overlying (4003).	Wetland deposit.	-	-	Unknown - seen to extend 172m along trench length.

4005	-	Deposit.	-	4006	Firm dark greyish-blue, sandy clay; frequent gravel & dark organic lenses; extending c. 14m, up to 0.31m thick. Underlying (4002). Fill of [4006].	Water-lain fill of palaeochannel [4006].	Post-medieval pottery, not retained.	-	Post-medieval
4006	-	Cut.	4005	-	Not seen in plan. Seen to extend 14m in the trenching. Migratory cut of a water course. Filled by (4006). Cuts (4003).	Cut of palaeochannel.	-	-	Unknown

## 7 Discussion

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Where potentially older deposits were encountered, the limited extent of investigative work reflects access constraints due to deep and unstable trenching.

### 7.1 Section 1

Section 1 (NGR: SJ 51343 01402 to NGR: SJ 51462 01464) extended NE for approximately 138m over farmland N of and adjacent to Frodesley Lane/Watling Street before crossing to the S side of the road (*fig. 1*).

The groundworks N of the road revealed a very firm dark reddish-brown (rapidly oxidising to greyish-brown) sandy clayey silt topsoil (1001) of 0.38m thickness overlying very firm dark reddish-brown (rapidly oxidising to dark grey) silty clayey sand subsoil (1002). The natural substratum (1003) was encountered at a depth between 0.54m and 0.59m (*Plate 1*). No features or deposits of archaeological significance were encountered.

The road crossing revealed two earlier surfaces beneath modern tarmac (1004), the earliest (1006) consisting of stony sandy clayey silt from which was recovered a single horseshoe and post-medieval brick (*Appendix 1*). This deposit was sealed by road surface (1005), which was of a more consolidated limestone rubble construction within a clayey silty sand matrix.

It is, however, possible that, whilst the artefactual evidence provides an 18<sup>th</sup> -19<sup>th</sup> century date, these road surfaces may relate to the extant Roman road surface through Frodesley and Longnor Green identified by Margary (1973) as being narrow but exhibiting a well-preserved alignment and surface. It is thus possible that the CBM and horseshoe are associated with later road-maintenance.

The 'subsoil' (1002) was seen to continue beneath the earliest road surface (1006) at a depth of 0.49m, with the natural substratum encountered at a depth of 0.98m (*Plate 2*). This increase in depth of approximately 0.25-0.5m to which the subsoil is encountered suggests the road may have originally have been sunken or formed a hollow way in the landscape. The present road surface is up to 1m below the level of the fields to the N and S (*Plate 3*).

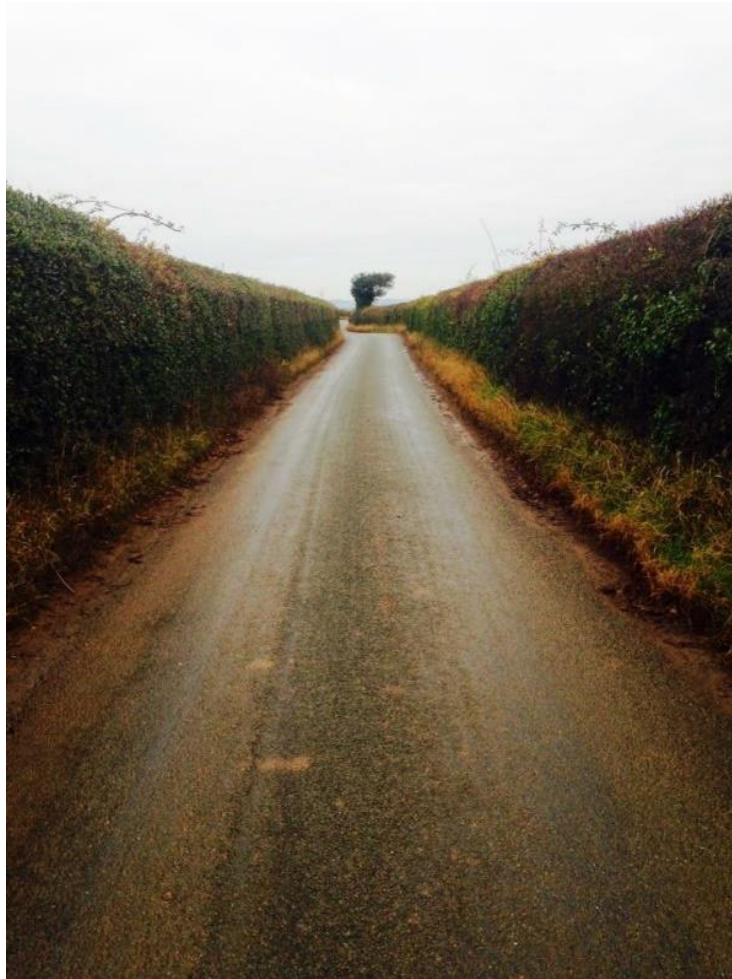


*Plate 1: NW-facing trench profile (Section 1)*



*Plate 2: SW-facing profile of road-crossing (Section 1)*





*Plate 3: View NE along Frodesley Lane showing depth of road relative to fields on either side*

## 7.2 Section 2

Section 2 (NGR: SJ 51470 01458 to NGR: 51723 01661) ran approximately 330m over farmland S of and adjacent to Frodesley Lane/Watling Street.

A firm-to-friable light reddish-brown silty (rapidly oxidising to greyish-brown) clayey sand topsoil (2001) of 0.39m depth overlay a very firm light reddish-brown silty sandy clay subsoil (2002). The natural substratum (2003) occurred at a depth of 0.48-0.82m (*Plate 4*).

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.



*Plate 4: SE-facing trench profile (Section 2)*

### 7.3 Section 3

Section 4 (NGR: SJ 52041 01973 to NGR: SJ 52805 01992) extended approximately 302m over farmland S of and adjacent to Frodesley Lane/Watling Street.

The groundworks revealed a dark friable brownish-grey silty clayey sand topsoil (3001), c. 0.38m in depth, overlying a firm greyish-brown sandy clay subsoil (3002). The natural (3003) was encountered at a depth of 0.52-0.71m (*Plate 5*).

No archaeological features or deposits were encountered.



*Plate 5: SE-facing trench profile (Section 3)*

## 7.4 Section 4

From the NE extent of Section 3, the pipeline turned ENE away from the road, crossing farmland for approximately 765m to its termination on the SW outskirts of Acton Burnell, near Denver House (NGR: SJ 52041 01973 to NGR: SJ 52805 01992).

The groundworks revealed a firm dark brownish-grey silty sandy clay topsoil (4001), c. 0.51m in depth, overlying mid-greyish-brown sandy clay subsoil (4002). The natural substratum (4003) was encountered at a depth of 0.47-1.09m (*Plate 6*).

Approximately 500m E from the start of this section of trenching was a potential wetland deposit (4004) sealed by subsoil (4002). This was composed of light greyish-blue fluvial sandy clay with dark peaty lenses, occasional rooting and amorphous organic remains (*Plate 7*). The deposit was seen to extend roughly 172m along the trench, centered upon a natural depression in the field. No associated finds were recovered. Unfortunately, due to trench instability, it was not possible to recover any samples from this, or a similar deposit, (4005), encountered towards the ENE extent of the trench.

Deposit (4005) itself (*Plates 8 & 9*) was possibly associated with an earlier watercourse [4006] running across the field into Acton Burnell.



*Plate 6: S-facing profile (Section 4)*



*Plate 7: N-facing profile (Section 4), showing wetland deposit (4004)*



*Plate 8: S-facing profile showing, in part, palaeochannel [4006] and fill (4005)*



*Plate 9: Eastern extent of Section 4, showing the potential original course of the waterway*

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## 8 Conclusion

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The paucity of significant archaeological features or deposits may be a reflection of continued and intensive agricultural land-use.

No roadside features or deposits associated with the Roman road (Watling Street) were encountered during the course of the groundworks. However, this should not be seen to reflect the archaeological potential of the area, which has revealed evidence for extensive activity from the Iron Age through to Late Medieval period.

The presence of earlier road surfaces, and their tentative association with what is assumed to be the possible remnants of the original Roman road, is brought into doubt with the addition of a c.18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century horseshoe (*Appendix 1*) and CBM.

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## 10.1 Cartography

Ordnance Survey 1<sup>st</sup> Edition 6-inch Map (Shropshire XLIX.NE) – 1888.

## 11 Appendix 1: Finds Assessment

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Border Archaeology*

A single post-medieval horseshoe (*Plate 10*) was recovered from a stony sandy clayey silt (1006), the earliest of two former road surfaces underlying modern tarmac and sub-base material.



*Plate 10: Post-medieval horseshoe from (1006).*

### 11.1 Description

Large wrought iron horseshoe of c. 18<sup>th</sup>/19<sup>th</sup> century date.

Pronounced toe-clip. U-shaped in plan, nail-holes obscured by corrosion.

Slight thinning of section at Caulkin (Heel) due to wear.

Branch width approximately 25mm wide × 7mm thick. Horseshoe misshapen.

Overall width c.130mm × 165mm in length. 610g



## 11.2 Recommendation

No further work is required.

Title		Ref	
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