

# Northamptonshire Archaeology

An archaeological watching brief  
at Main Street and The Green

Allexton

Leicestershire

October 2006



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**OASIS REPORT FORM**

<b>PROJECT DETAILS</b>		
Project title	An archaeological watching brief at Main Street and The Green, Allexton, Leicestershire	
Short description (250 words maximum)	Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the excavation of a cable trenches and boring for underground electric cabling on land along Main Street and The Green, Allexton. One trench 135m long, 0.3m wide and 0.7m deep was located in a field edge and the grass verge along the north edge of Main Street. Evidence of an earlier cobblestone road surface was exposed along the western end of the trench. Further east the cobble surface had been largely destroyed by the cutting of other modern service trenches. No other archaeological remains were present.	
Project type	Archaeological Watching Brief	
Previous work	None	
Future work	No	
Monument type and period	Cobbled road surface	
Significant finds	None	
<b>PROJECT LOCATION</b>		
County	Leicestershire	
Site address	Main Street, Allexton	
Easting	481700	
Northing	300400	
Height OD	99.4m AOD	
<b>PROJECT CREATORS</b>		
Organisation	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Project brief originator	Richard Clark, SPA Leicestershire County Council	
Project Design originator	Northamptonshire Archaeology	
Director/Supervisor	Danny McAree MA MBA PG Dip PIFA	
Project Manager	Iain Soden BA MIFA	
Sponsor or funding body	Central Networks	
<b>PROJECT DATE</b>		
Start date	October 2006	
End date	October 2006	
<b>ARCHIVES</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Content (eg pottery, animal bone etc)</b>
Physical		
Paper		1 Plans and 10 sections, 10 each of Colour Slide and B/W photographs, 1 Contact Print.
Digital		Digital copy of report and Figures



**AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF  
AT MAIN STREET AND THE GREEN, ALLEXTON**

**LEICESTERSHIRE**

**OCTOBER 2006**

*Abstract*

*Northamptonshire Archaeology carried out a watching brief during the installation of underground electric cables on land beside Main Street and The Green, Allexton. One trench, measuring 135m long, 0.3m wide and 0.7m deep was located in a field edge and the grass verge along the north edge of Main Street. Evidence of an earlier cobblestone road surface was exposed along the western end of the trench. Further east the cobble surface had been largely destroyed by the cutting of other modern service trenches. No other archaeological remains were present.*

**1 INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Background**

Archaeological investigation comprising a watching brief during the installation of underground electricity cables was carried out by Northamptonshire Archaeology on behalf of Central Networks (formally East Midlands Electricity), on land alongside The Green and Main Street, Allexton (NGR: SK 817 004).

The work was undertaken in response to an application by Central Networks and approved by Harborough District Council to replace existing overground cable and poles with low voltage underground cable. The works complied with a condition for archaeological attendance and investigation as required by the Senior Planning Archaeologist, Leicestershire County Council in a brief issued on the 13th January 2006 (Clark 2006) and the specification prepared by Northamptonshire Archaeology (McAree 2006).

The purpose of the watching brief was to identify and record archaeological deposits exposed during the works.

## 1.2 Location and Topography

The works are located within the village of Allexton and extend some 135m along The Green and Main Street and include the provision of four low voltage underground services to the houses to the east of The Green, a new service to the site of a proposed new house at the west end of the garden of the White House on Main Street and a new service to the Old Rectory to the east of Main Street and immediately north of St Peter's Church (Fig 2).

The underlying geology has been mapped by the British Geological Survey of Great Britain as comprising Chalky Till.

The junction of The Green and Main Street is located at 99.4m AOD sloping down towards the line of the brook to the north of the village at 91.1m AOD.

## 1.3 Historical and Archaeological Background

The name Allexton is derived from Old English and is composed of two elements, a personal name, *Aethellac* and *tun* meaning, farmstead, place or settlement. It was recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086 as *Adelacheston* in the Gartree 'Wapentake', the Danelaw equivalent of the Saxon 'Hundred'. The Allexton estates extended across three of the wapentakes, one now in the adjoining county of Rutland.

In Framland Wapentake, the King held 6 bovates of land that were recorded as being 'waste' with no taxable value.

In Gartree Wapentake, the King's sister, Countess Judith held land at Allexton., her tenant, Grimbald, is recorded as having 5 caracutes of land. Prior to the conquest, there had been 5 ploughs. At the time of recording there was one plough held in demesne. 4 villans and 4 bordars also had a plough. There was a mill rendering 2 shillings. It had been worth 10 shillings in the reign of King Edward the Confessor, it was judged to be worth 20 shillings at the time of the Domesday Survey.

In Goscote Wapentake, Grimbald again held land from Countess Judith, at this location half a caracute. In demesne was half a plough and a mill that rendered 16*d*. It was valued at 5 shillings.

A caracute (from the Latin *caruca* – plough) was notionally the area that could be ploughed by an eight strong team of oxen. It is variously described as caracute, ox-gang or ploughland and was the equivalent for tax assessment of the *hide* used elsewhere in the Domesday returns. A bovat was a measure of land assessed as 1/8 of a caracute, literally, one oxen

worth of plough land.

A rough rule of thumb is that a caracute (or hide) was the equivalent of 120-150 acres of land, depending on the yield of the soil. The King's holdings would thus equate to about 90-110 acres (36.5-40 ha) and Countess Judith's land to about 675-800 acres (250-330 ha).

This was a substantial holding with at least eight families working the land with two eight-ox plough teams. The presence of a two mills indicates at least another two families and that the estate was located adjacent to flowing water as most mills were still water driven at this time. This would indicate that the estate held at least part of the Eye Brook from early in its history.

As late as 1890, the modern parish of Allexton retained a water mill on the Eye Brook and was assessed as having an area of 1027 acres. If one allows for common, water meadow, waste and scrub around the recorded arable of 1086, the modern parish had changed little in size from the estate recorded by the Domesday Survey.

It is not known when Allexton acquired its own church but the present parish church of St Peter was built around 1160 and retains two fine Norman Romanesque arches in the north arcade of the nave. The population of Allexton is recorded in the census returns of 1888 as 64 with a current population of 58. If the original 10 families comprised man, wife and three or four children (a common estimate to account for childhood deaths and the need for additional hands to work the land), then the Domesday population would be consistent with the modern occupation of the village.

Apart from the church, the remains of earthworks outlining a moated site are located in a field to the south of the village adjacent to the Eye Brook. There are other earthworks in the field indicating a possible causeway approach to the south-west corner of the moated site and a series of low banks (and possibly excavation ditches) outlining a roughly rectangular platform to the south and west of the moated site. It is not known when the site was constructed but these types of moated sites were most commonly constructed between 1250-1350 after which they declined in numbers and popularity.

To the west of the village, Allexton Hall, now a farmhouse, was formerly a seat of Lord Berners. The house had its own independent access and private bridge from the main (A47) road across the Eye Brook to the house. Access to the village was and is to the east of the village centre with a bridge across the Eye Brook from a lane off the main A47 road.

The bridge is flanked to the west by brick-lined revetting for sluices and a mill race no doubt connected with the mill that formerly stood at this location.



The Leicestershire County Historic Environment Records (HER) and Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) holds no information directly related to the areas subject of the watching brief.

Allextton remains an area of archaeological interest as the provenance of the earthworks of the moated site, the location of the early mill and the location of the earliest settlement in the village have not yet been fully established.

No previous archaeological work has been carried out within the area of the proposed cable trenches.

## **2 METHODOLOGY**

A single open trench was required to lay in new underground cable along the length of Main Street from The White House at the east of the village to the entrance to Allextton Hall at the west (Fig 1). All other cables were installed using sub surface boring and were not subject to archaeological supervision.

The trench was excavated using a 1 ton mini excavator equipped with a 300mm toothless excavating bucket. The excavation was supervised by an archaeologist; this included the supervision of topsoil, subsoil and overburden removal until archaeologically sensitive deposits, natural horizons or the required depth for the cable trench was reached. All deposits were examined sufficiently to identify their nature. Context details are included in the trench descriptions and in a context list at Appendix A. Recording was supplemented by a 1:100 plan of the trench locations and section drawings (at 1:20) of 1m sections at 10m intervals along the length of the trench or across discrete features as appropriate. A photographic record in black and white, colour slides and digital images of the trenches was completed.

## **3 RESULTS**

### **3.1 The trench**

The trench was excavated along the southern edge of the field immediately adjacent to the entrance to Allextton Hall at the west of the village and extended 135m along the grass verge on the north side of Main Street to the entrance drive into The White House at the east of the village (Fig 1, Plate 1).

The natural was compact grey/yellow chalky clay (01) containing sub-angular grit and flint

up to 10mm. This blended with a covering of sub soil of very stiff brown/yellow sandy clay (02) containing sub-angular grit and flint gravel up to 10mm. This layer varied between 100mm-200mm along the length of the trench.

At about 15m to the east of the entrance to Allexton Hall, the sub soil and natural were cut by a modern service trench [10] with vertical sides and flat base, 0.3m wide and 0.6m deep and filled with the re-deposited upcast from the excavation (11). It was aligned roughly east-west and contained a modern electricity cable. Cutting this trench to the north and running parallel to it was another modern service trench with vertical sides and flat base [12] containing a 5" rigid plastic duct containing modern electric cable connecting the overhead power supply outside of Allexton Hall to the underground supply within the grounds of the hall. The trench was filled with the mixed re-deposited upcast from its excavation (13). A wide jointing chamber 3m long and 2m wide was opened up over this cable so that the new underground supply could be joined to the earlier underground cable. Finds from the fills of the two features comprise white tin-glazed and transfer-printed pottery, broken bottle glass and occasional fragments of bone. The finds all date to the 19th to 20th century. The electric cables each carry dating data and were both manufactured in 1991-1992 and would normally be installed with a year of manufacture (pers comm) Jim Walsh, Project Engineer, Alfred McAlpine Contractors.

Cutting the sub soil and natural to the south of the electric cable trenches was another trench with vertical sides and a flat base [08] 0.5m wide and 0.6m deep. This contained a 2" cast iron water pipe and was filled with the re-deposited upcast from its excavation (09). White tin-glazed pottery from the fill was dated to the late 19th and early 20th century.

About 5m to the east, the sub soil and natural were cut by a soakaway [06] 2.5m wide and 0.6-0.7m deep with sloping sides (60°) and an irregular dished base.

It was filled with dark brown sandy clay loam containing abundant lumps of ironstone/limestone up to 300mm, large rounded river pebbles up to 200mm and frequent coarse grit and flint gravel up to 20mm. Finds from this fill included fragments of broken brick and roof tile, white glazed and transfer-printed pottery, broken bottle glass and a modern steel nut and bolt. These all date from the late 19th and 20th century.

At about 10m further east and just to the west of the field entrance opposite the junction of Main Street and The Green, a trench [04] with vertical sides and a flat base 0.3m wide and 0.65m deep contained a 3" diameter earthenware land drain, laid in 12" lengths.

It was filled with the mixed re-deposited upcast from its excavation (05). White glazed

pottery and bottle glass from this fill was dated to late 19th or early 20th century.

At the field entrance itself, the full width of the gate and entrance had had the top soil removed and replaced by a layer of modern re-used bricks and concrete blocks (14) laid onto a 20mm layer of coarse gritty sand and lime mortar forming a hard surface for vehicle access into the field. This extended across the grass verge and butted against the northern edge of the modern carriageway of Main Street at this point.

Immediately to the east of this field entrance, overlaying the sub soil was a layer of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel (16) up to 200mm deep supporting a compact and regular layer of large round river pebbles/cobbles (15) up to 300mm forming a level surface. Larger round cobbles had been laid on edge forming a clearly defined edge to the carriageway. On both sides of this 'edging' the surface was made of smaller rounded pebbles/cobbles forming a nicely coursed and level surface (Fig 1, Plate 2). The cobble surface extended to the hedgerow to the north of the road and extended below the modern tarmac of the modern road surface.

At about 15m to the east, this surface was broken up by the cutting of a modern cable trench [17] with vertical sides and flat base. This trench measured 0.3m wide and 0.6m deep and contained a 35mm rigid plastic duct in 3m sections containing BT telecommunications cable. It was filled with the re-deposited upcast (18) from its excavation. This fill contained numerous rounded river cobbles, grit and sand indicating it had cut through the earlier cobbled surface along its length. This trench extended for 45m along the northern edge of Main Street before passing under the road to an overhead pole on the south side of Main Street. White tin-glazed and transfer-printed pottery from the fill dates from the 19th and 20th century.

At the apex of the corner on Main Street where the road curves to the north around the east side of The White House, a modern soakaway [19] had been dug into the grass verge. There was no evidence of the earlier cobble surface at this location. The soakaway was 1m wide with steep near vertical sides and sloping from the edge of the road surface up to 0.7m deep at the north-east. The soakaway was filled with sandy clay loam (20) containing small grit and gravel. At the north of the cut, a 4" salt glazed water pipe drained storm water from the grounds of The White House into the soakaway. Cutting the north-east of the soakaway was a modern 1m wide 0.6m high red brick wall containing a 4" rigid plastic water pipe. This pipe extended beyond the wall in a trench [21] with vertical sides and flat base 0.5m wide and 0.7m deep and filled with the re-deposited upcast (21) of its excavation.

This trench contained a modern brick built inspection chamber providing access and a rodding point to the plastic storm drain. The storm water pipes extended from the soakaway

via the inspection chamber and continued north along the edge of Main Street.

The storm water trench was cut by the continuation of trench [17] containing the BT telecommunications cable that lay mainly within the cut of the earlier water trench at this point. The BT cable terminated in a concrete section jointing chamber 1m long, 0.6m wide and 1m deep. Extending due east from the jointing chamber, another cable trench [23] with vertical sides and flat base cut across water trench [21] and extended across the carriageway of Main Street to an overhead BT telecommunications pole on the south. This contained a 30mm rigid plastic duct containing BT cable and was backfilled with the re-deposited up cast (24) from its excavation.

With the exception of the area where the cobbled surface survived, the sub soil was sealed by a topsoil of firm dark brown sandy clay loam (03) containing sub-angular grit and flint gravel up to 10mm. The depth of topsoil varied between 100mm-300mm along the length of the trench.

### **3.2 Bored cables**

A 75mm pneumatic bore was used to lay 60mm plastic ducting at three locations along Main Street. At the east of the village, a service cable was laid below the modern road surface of Main Street between the terminus of the open trench adjacent to the driveway the White House to the side of the north gable of the garage/outbuilding at the side of the Old Rectory on the east of Main Street (Fig 1).

A bored cable was laid between the existing electricity junction box in the rear garden of The Cottage adjacent to the south boundary of St Peter's Churchyard, north across Main Street to the open trench along the side of the White House (Fig 1).

At the Green, two bored cables were laid either side of The Green from the open trench at the north of Main Street. Small open trenches were cut in the carriageway of The Green on each side of the grassed area to allow service cables to be linked to the adjoining houses (Fig 1).

Only the two bored cables at the east of the village were completed under archaeological supervision, no archaeological features were observed.

## **4 CONCLUSION**

Allextton has a history that must pre-date its inclusion in the Domesday Survey of 1086 and probably has antecedents extending back into the Anglo-Saxon period or earlier. It appears to occupy much the same location as recorded in the Domesday Survey.

The earthworks in the field to the north of the village extend into the garden of The White House and might reasonably be expected to extend south across Main Street and onto The Green in the heart of the village. The excavation across the edge of this field exposed undisturbed subsoil and natural across most of the field with only modern service trenches or field drains cut into the undisturbed natural. The large feature identified as a soakaway is located directly north of the roadway to the west of The Green and seems to have been deliberately located to carry away run off water from the road surface into the adjacent field, particularly as the roadway is immediately adjacent to the east entrance to Allexton Hall.

The cobbled surface exposed along the northern edge of Main Street appears to be an earlier road surface with large rounded river cobbles on edge forming a clear 'edge' to the carriageway with smaller cobbles extending to the hedgerow to the north. Although mainly destroyed by the insertion of modern service trenches along the road verge in recent years, the presence of substantial numbers of rounded river cobbles in the backfill of these trenches indicate the presence of the surface at least as far as the sharp bend in Main Street around the east end of The White House opposite the entrance to St Peter's Church.

Probing along the verge westward to the entrance to Allexton Hall. indicates at least some survival of the cobbled surface to that point. The extension of the cable trench along Main Street to the east, past the corner at The White House revealed no evidence of the cobbled surface. It is possible that the cobbled surface did extend further, but survives only beneath the modern tarmac road surface and did not extend to the hedgerow further east along Main Street.

An alternative interpretation of the evidence is that the cobbled road ran directly from Allexton Hall to St Peter's Church. There is no evidence that it extended onto The Green or extended along Main Street past the church towards the mill crossing at the Eye Brook. As Allexton Hall had its own private lane and bridge over the Eye Brook further to the west, the inference must be that the cobbled road was laid solely to facilitate the journey from Allexton Hall to the church.

The excavations clearly indicate that there has been little activity to disturb the natural subsoils extending into the earthworks in the field to the north of Main Street. All of the modern services are cut into one or other of the verges alongside the existing roads. There is no evidence for disturbed or truncated archaeology and this may indicate good potential for survival of archaeology elsewhere in the village.

As no archaeological features were observed, section drawings have not been included with

this report, but have been retained within the archive.

## 5 ARCHIVE

*Table 1: Summary of site records*

	<b>Contexts</b>	<b>Plans</b>	<b>Sections</b>	<b>Photos</b>	<b>Slides</b>
<b>Trenches</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>

A single plan marks the location of the trenches (Fig 1). All finds were retained from the excavations.

All records and materials will be compiled in a structured archive in accordance with the guidelines of Appendix 3 in the English Heritage procedural document, Management of Archaeological Projects (1991).

An Activity and Source Submission Form will be sent to the Leicestershire SMR.

The archive together with a copy of the monitoring report will be deposited at the Leicestershire County Museum Service, Leicester. Deposition of the archive will conform to the guidelines of the receiving museum.

**6 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

**7 BIBLIOGRAPHY**

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Northamptonshire Archaeology

A service of Northamptonshire County Council

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APPENDIX A

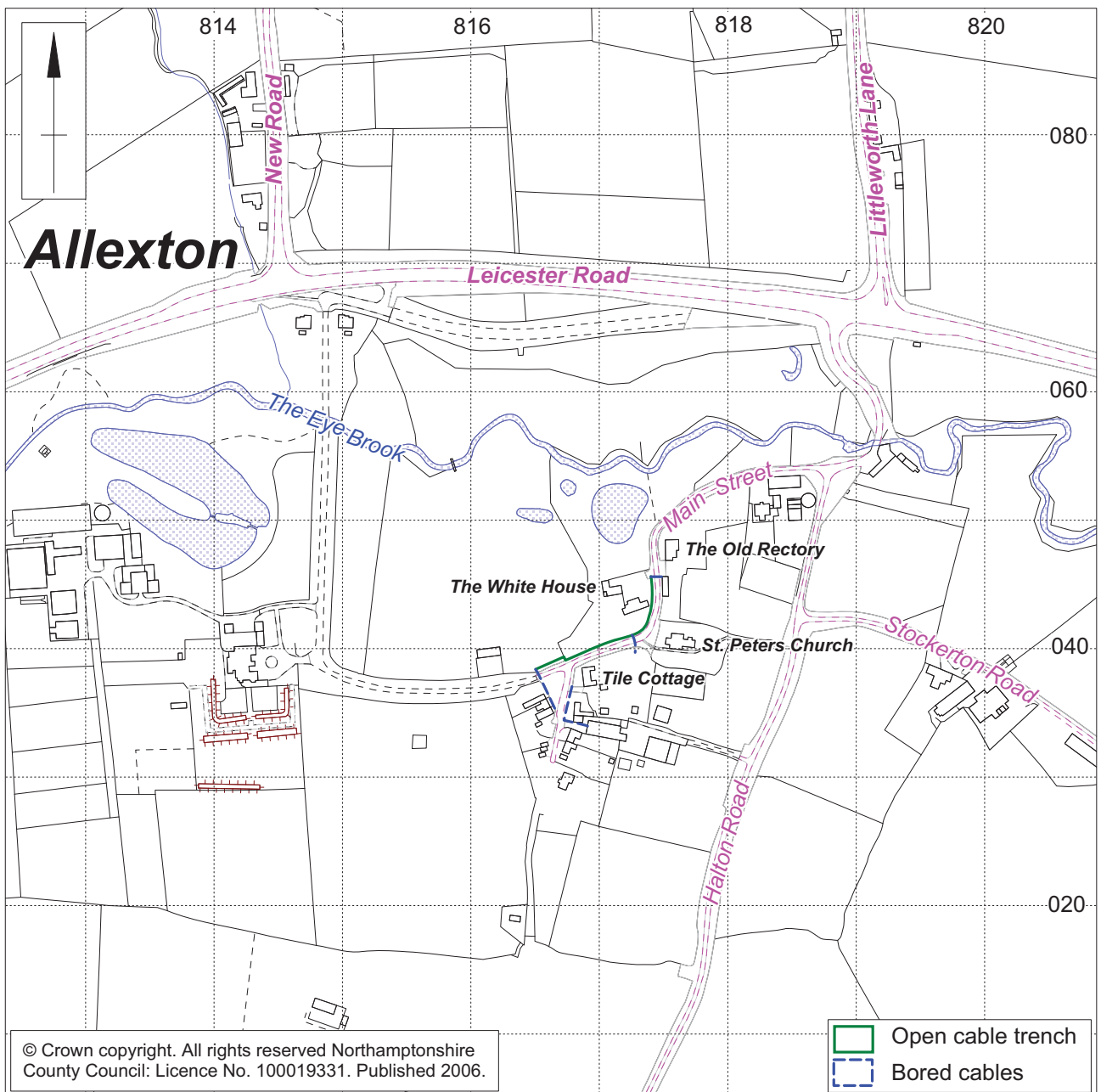
CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS

CONTEXT	DESCRIPTION	INTERPRETATION
<b>Trench 1</b>	(146m long, 0.3m wide, 0.6m deep)	
01	Compact grey/yellow chalky clay containing sub-angular grit and flint up to 10mm.	Natural
02	Very stiff brown/yellow sandy clay containing sub-angular grit and flint gravel up to 10mm. Depth varied between 100mm-200mm along the length of the trench.	Natural sub soil
03	Firm dark brown sandy clay loam containing sub-angular grit and flint up to 10mm. Depth of layer varied between 100mm-300mm along length of trench	Top soil
04	Cut for field drain. 0.3m wide, 0.6m deep. Vertical sides, flat base.	
05	Fill of [04]. Re-deposited mixed upcast from excavation. Contains 4" earthenware field drain in 12" lengths.	Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century
06	Cut of 'soakaway'. 2.5m long, 0.6-0.7m deep. Sloping sides (60°) to irregular dished base.	
07	Fill of [06]. Firm dark brown sandy clay loam containing abundant sub-angular grit and flint up to 15mm. Frequent lumps of ironstone/limestone up to 300mm. Frequent round river pebbles up to 200mm. Occasional modern brick and roof tile.	Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century
08	Cut of service trench, 0.5m wide, 0.6m deep. Vertical sides and flat base.	
09	Fill of [07]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains 2" cast iron water pipe.	Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century
10	Cut of cable trench, 0.3m wide and 0.6m deep. Vertical sides and flat base	
11	Fill of [10]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains low voltage plastic insulated electricity cable.	Occasional brick and blue slate in Fill. Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century. Cable dated to 1991-1992.
12	Cut of cable trench, 0.4m wide, 0.65m deep. Cuts trench [10]. Vertical sides. Flat base.	
13	Fill of [12]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains 105mm rigid plastic duct containing PC 95 CNE low voltage plastic insulated electricity cable.	Occasional brick and blue slate in Fill. Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century. Cable dated to 1991-1992.



**MAIN STREET, ALLEXTON**

<b>CONTEXT</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>	<b>INTERPRETATION</b>
14	Layer of re-used brick, concrete blocks and occasional lumps of ironstone bedded on coarse gritty sand and lime mortar. Laid directly onto sub soil (02).	Hard surface for access into field to north of Main Street.
15	Cobble surface. Round river pebbles up to 300mm laid to form level surface. Linear alignment of large pebbles laid on edge to form distinct division between road carriageway and cobbles extending north to hedgerow.	Early cobbled road surface. Extends from Allexton Hall gateway at west to curve in Main Street opposite St Peter Church in east. Mainly destroyed by modern service trenches.
16	Bedding layer for cobble surface (15). Layer of yellow/brown coarse gritty sand and gravel up to 20mm. Bedding layer up to 100mm deep laid directly onto sub soil (02).	
17	Cut of cable trench, 0.4m wide, 0.65m deep. Cuts surface (15) (16), soakaway [19] and trench [21]. Vertical sides. Flat base.	
18	Fill of [17]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains 35mm rigid plastic duct containing BT telecommunications cable.	Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century.
19	Cut of 'soakaway'. 1m long, 0.6-0.7m deep. Sloping sides (70°) to flat base.	
20	Fill of [19]. Dark brown sandy clay loam with abundant small coarse gritty sand and fine gravel.	
21	Cut of pipe trench, 0.5m wide, 0.7m deep. Vertical sides. Flat base. Cut by [17] and [23]	
22	Fill of [21]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains 4" salt glaze storm water drain with brick built (1m long, 0.65m wide and 0.75m deep) inspection chamber.	Pottery and glass in fill dates to 19 <sup>th</sup> -20 <sup>th</sup> century.
23	Cut of cable trench, 0.4m wide, 0.65m deep. Cuts trench [21]. Vertical sides. Flat base.	Aligned east-west across Main Street and connects to overground pole to east of roadway.
24	Fill of [21]. Mixed re-deposited upcast from excavation. Contains BT telecommunications cable.	



Scale 1: 5000

Pipeline corridor location Fig 1



Plate 1  
Main Street looking west



Plate 2  
Cobbled surface, looking east