

Devon County Council Historic Environment Record

Civil Parish & District: Crediton,	National Grid Reference 284410.99732	Number:
Subject: archaeological watching brief of the installation of a gas main at Downes Farm, Exeter Road, Crediton.		Photo attached? YES
Planning Application no:	Recipient museum: Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter	
OASIS ID: southwes1-76236	Museum Accession no: 97/2010	
Contractor's reference number/code: CER10	Dates fieldwork undertaken: 29.03.10 to 12.04.10	
<p>Description of works.</p> <p>A programme of archaeological monitoring was undertaken by South West Archaeology (SWARCH), at the request of Steve Miller of Morrison Utilities (the Client), during the installation of a gas main at Downes Farm, Exeter Road, Crediton. The work was carried out in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation approved by DCHES and was directed by L. Bray.</p> <p>The course of the gas main ran for c. 510m on an east-west alignment from a point c.100m to the north-west of Downes Farm before turning south towards the A377 for a further 200m, where it cut through the hedgebank bordering the road (see plan Fig. 1). The topsoil was stripped along a 6m wide easement zone along the line of the gas main by a tracked, mechanical excavator using a 1.2m wide toothless grading bucket under strict archaeological supervision. Following stripping, the trench for the gas main was cut along the centre of the easement zone by another tracked excavator using a 0.5m wide, toothed bucket. This trench was cut to a depth of c. 1.7m from the surface of the subsoil. This work was not continuously monitored, but the section revealed in the trench was checked regularly for the presence of archaeological features or deposits.</p> <p>The site had been ploughed recently and was under a young cereal crop. The topsoil reached a maximum of 0.4m in depth, although on average was c. 0.3m thick. It consisted of a single layer of red-brown, sandy clay containing occasional poorly-sorted, sub-rounded stone inclusions up to 30mm in size. The surface of the subsoil was fairly hard and had been extensively marked by ploughing in a roughly east to west direction. It was pinkish-brown in colour and consisted predominantly of a friable clay-silt containing abundant, poorly-sorted, small stone inclusions of 10mm to 100mm in size giving the deposit a coarse, gravelly texture. Occasionally the character of this material varied, becoming more gravelly in places. Examination of the section of the pipe trench suggested this layer of the subsoil was on average c. 0.5m thick, although this varied significantly in places. It overlay an unknown thickness of coarser material which contained occasional larger stone inclusions up to 150mm in size and although firm was relatively friable. This material is likely the result of the weathering of the Permian breccia which forms the bedrock in the area. A clear boundary between the lower subsoil horizon and the bedrock was not observed, probably due to its gradational nature.</p> <p>No archaeological features or deposits were identified during the stripping of the easement zone. This was unexpected as, according to the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map, the line of the stripped area crossed three relict field boundaries which were likely to be associated with ditches. One possible explanation for the absence of these ditches may lie in the potential difficulty of digging into the hard subsoil by hand. Examination of the surface of the field revealed the presence of broad linear depressions along the approximate lines of the relict field boundaries suggesting that the former hedgebanks had been constructed by scooping topsoil from a wide zone rather than using the spoil from a narrower ditch excavated into the subsoil. The western boundary of the field supports this theory as the hedgebank here is constructed along the eastern edge of a linear depression (Plate 1). However, an alternative explanation for the apparent absence of field boundary ditches may be that they were not detected due to the nature of the subsoil. In support of this, the pipeline trench cut through several field drains, of ceramic pipe and stone-filled types, a plastic pipeline of unknown function and revealed the gas main at its eastern end. All of these features were of relatively recent date, especially the plastic pipeline and the gas main, yet the cuts in which they were placed were invisible both in plan and in section (Plate 2).</p> <p>At its western end the pipeline cut through the hedgebank running along the northern side of the A377 which defines the southern boundary of the field. This was a relatively slight feature (Fig. 2), reaching a maximum height of c. 0.5m, despite a change in ground level of c. 1m between the field and the road surface. It was constructed of an undifferentiated mass of topsoil (108); a dark brown clay-silt containing occasional sub-rounded stone inclusions of up to 40mm size and abundant roots, a form of construction which lends support to the hypothesis proposed above. This material had been piled on the subsoil which was consisted of two separate layers (109) and</p>		

(110). The former was a firm, orange-brown silty sand with a gritty texture derived from the numerous small stone inclusions it contained, while the latter, deeper horizon consisted of a silt-clay matrix containing frequent sub-angular stone inclusions up to 50mm in size giving it a coarse texture. The A377 ran east-west to the south of the hedgebank at a level c. 1m lower than that of the field containing the pipeline necessitating the construction of a revetting wall. Due to the instability and depth of the trench through the hedgebank, the construction of this feature could not be closely inspected with safety, but appeared to have been achieved by cutting into its steep southern face [107] and packing the resulting space with rubble containing stone blocks up to c. 250mm in size before constructing the wall {112}. Stratigraphically, it appeared that the construction of the revetting wall pre-dated that of the hedgebank (108) but, given the composition of the latter of loose piled topsoil, and the cutting of the revetment into the face of the hedgebank, it is possible that (108) pre-dates the revetment.

No stratified finds were recovered, but an assemblage of medieval and post-medieval ceramics, glass and clay pipe sherds were recovered. The ceramic assemblage consisted of 168 sherds weighing a total of 961g. It was dominated by 19th and 20th century refined earthenwares (132 sherds, 543g) and significant fractions of North Devon (7sherds, 100g) and South Somerset Earthenwares (8 sherds, 103g). The North Devon material included 3 sherds of sgraffito ware probably dating to the late 17th century. More minor components of the assemblage included Frechen and Westerwald Stonewares (12 sherds, 109g), Jackfield Ware (2 sherds, 8g) and Bristol or Staffordshire Yellow Slip Ware (2 sherds, 7g). Of particular interest were four sherds of probable medieval pottery, 2 with a granitic temper, and a tile fragment also with granitic temper. 14 clay pipe fragments weighing 39g were also recovered, as were 8 sherds of glass, most being derived from late 17th or early 18th century onion bottles, and a copper alloy button with a tinned surface.

A plan as well as any other relevant drawings must be attached showing the location and extent of site, areas investigated and features exposed.

Recorder: L. S. Bray

Date sent to HER: 27.04.2010

Please email completed form to: archaeol@devon.gov.uk or post to County Archaeology Service, Environment Directorate, Matford Lane Offices, County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QW. Information recorded on this form will be added to the Historic Environment Record, and made available to all researchers.

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Figure 1: Site plan for Crediton, Exeter Road
showing the location of the stripped easement zone.



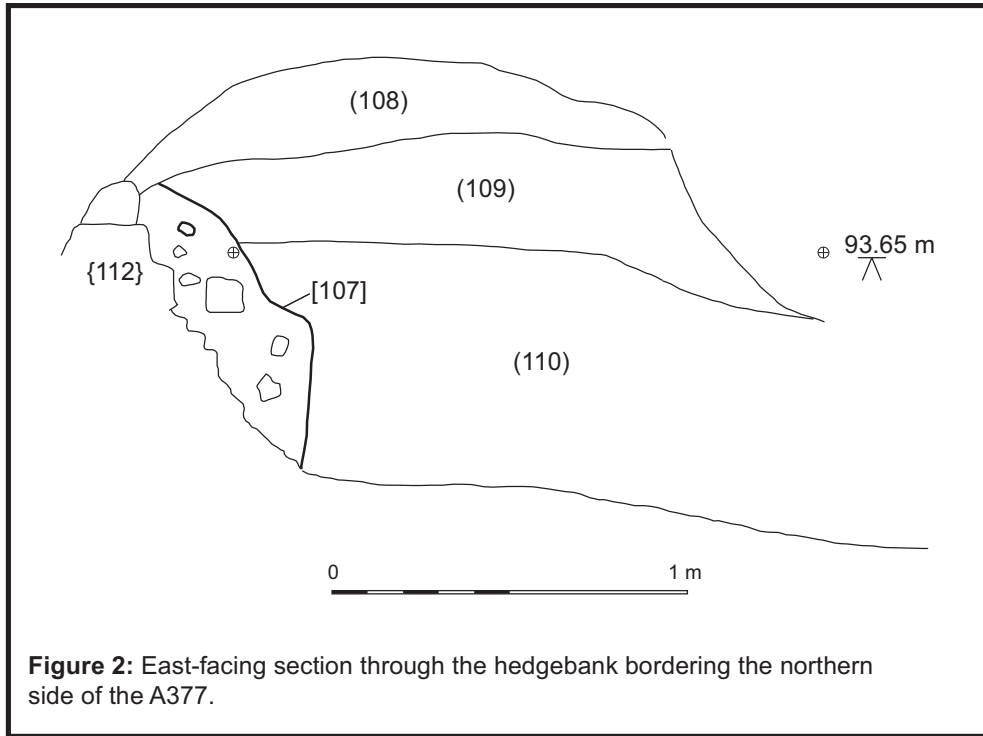




Plate 1: Western boundary of the pipeline field from the south. The depression within which the hedgebank is constructed is clearly visible.



Plate 2: Stone-filled field drain cut by the pipe trench. The cut for the drain is not visible in plan or section.