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Middlewich Gas Main, Cheshire

Archaeological Watching Brief

Report No. Y086/13

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**Middlewich Gas Main,
Cheshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

Report No. Y086/13

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of a new gas main running through Middlewich town centre, a part of which ran adjacent to St Michael and All Angels Church. Five deposits of human burials were encountered in this area, four of them heavily disturbed. The human remains have been assessed by an osteologist and arrangements for their reburial under the terms of a Ministry of Justice licence have been made.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) between August 2012 and February 2013 on the insertion of a gas main through Middlewich town centre. The work was commissioned by Balfour Beatty Utility Services for the 'North West Gas Alliance'. The CFA code and number for the project is MIDW/2075.

All work was undertaken in accordance with a written scheme of investigation (WSI) agreed with the Cheshire development control archaeologist. The work was intended to mitigate the destruction of buried archaeological remains should they be encountered, through 'preservation by record'.

1.1 Site Location and Description

The pipeline ran east to west along St Michaels Way (A54), from the Bull Ring across the Town Bridge, then north-south along Leadsmithy Street to Lewin Street (Figure 1).

The geology of the area is fairly complex with the superficial geology comprising 'Devensian - Diamicton Till' with bands of 'clay, silt, sand and gravel alluvium' over Triassic Sedimentary 'Halite Stone and Mudstone' (BGS 2013).

1.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

A concise summary of archaeological investigations in the town is given in the Cheshire Historic Towns Survey of Middlewich (Shaw and Clark 2003).

The pipeline is within Zone 2 (former salt working) and Zone 4 (planned medieval settlement) of the Cheshire Historic Towns Survey Strategy (Shaw and Clark 2003). The Trent-Mersey canal and Middlewich town centre form part of the Cheshire Council Conservation area.

The church of St Michael and All Angels is a Grade II* listed building. The church contains 12th-century fabric, and was renovated during the 19th century (Shaw and Clark 2003, 4).

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1.3 Objectives

In general the project objectives were to:

- determine the form and function of any archaeological features encountered;
- determine the spatial arrangement of any archaeological features encountered;
- as far as practicable, recover dating evidence from the archaeological features, and;
- establish the sequence of any archaeological remains present on the site

2. WORKING METHODS

The development consisted of the excavation of a utility trench to allow the insertion of a new gas main.

2.1 Watching Brief

The pipe trench was excavated by a mini-digger under close archaeological supervision along the length of the pipeline route. The trench was typically 0.5m wide and 1m deep. Archaeological remains were recorded by means of standard forms, drawings and representative photographs in accordance with the WSI and CFA's standard procedures.

2.2 Standards and Guidance

CFA Archaeology is a registered organisation (RO) with the Institute for Archaeologists (IfA). All work was conducted in accordance with relevant IfA Standards and Guidance documents (IfA 1994), the WSI and CFA's standard methodology.

The appropriate licences for the removal of human remains were granted on 21st August 2012 and 6th December 2013. (Licence Number: 12-0149/12-0234). All human remains were handled with due care and attention by qualified and experienced field staff as set out in CFA's policy for the handling of human remains. Bone fragments that were visible in section, but not otherwise disturbed by the excavations were left in-situ.

2.3 Monitoring

The Cheshire Development Control Archaeologist was informed in advance of the work commencing and updated during the course of excavation.

2.4 Archiving

The project archive, comprising all CFA record sheets, plans and reports, will be ordered according to current guidelines and to nationally recognised standards (Brown

2011) in order to be deposited at the relevant museum within an agreed timescale. The Oasis reference for the project is cfaarchal_147645.

3. RESULTS

The majority of the pipe trench revealed made-ground deposits of compacted building rubble. The modern road surface and its foundation (001) extended 0.6m below the current ground surface where it overlay a hardcore deposit of compacted building rubble (002). The only significant remains recovered during the watching brief were human remains relating to the former burial ground of St Michael and All Angels Church, these remains had been disturbed in the past by post medieval activity and the construction of the road. Below is a description of the context the human remains were identified followed a specialist osteology report and a catalogue of unstratified finds.

3.1 Human Remains

The disturbed, but more intact burials were located on a 10m-long stretch of the pipe trench running east to west along St. Michael's Way, adjacent to the current graveyard (Figure 2). One fairly intact skeleton was disturbed by the excavation (Skeleton 001) along more three disarticulated remains (002,004,005) and an isolated bone (003).

Generally the human remains were located at a depth of 0.9m below the current ground surface in a friable brownish-grey clayey-silt (003) which underlay the compacted hardcore deposit (002) forming the base of the road. The constraints of the narrow trench during excavation meant that a full profile of the burial contexts was not easily identifiable, although bone preservation was generally very good.

The most intact human burial was Skeleton 001. The remaining bone assemblages had been previously disturbed and intermingled; Disarticulated Remains 002 were identified in and around the backfilled cut of a salt-glazed ceramic drainage duct (Figure 3).

A single human bone fragment (Disarticulated Remains 003) was identified within a deposit of demolition rubble underlying the current road surface (002) on Leadsmithy Street.

3.2 Specialist Report on the Human remains

by Sue Anderson

A partial articulated skeleton (001) and four groups of disarticulated bone (002, 003, 004, 005) were recovered during a watching brief on a pipe trench close to a known burial ground. All identified bones are catalogued by context in Appendix 3.

Method

Measurements were taken using the methods described by Brothwell (1981). Sexing and ageing techniques follow Brothwell (1981) and the Workshop of European Anthropologists (WEA 1980). Stature was estimated according to the regression formulae of Trotter and Gleser (Trotter 1970). All non-metric traits are listed in Brothwell (1981).

Skeleton 001

The human remains recorded as Sk. 001 comprise a complete right humerus, the proximal three-quarters of the right radius and ulna, one rib, and the shaft of the right femur. The bones were in good condition but were stained dark brown.

The size of the bones suggest that the individual was probably female (humerus head diameter 42mm). Age was more difficult to determine as the only evidence was the complete fusion of the epiphyses and a lack of any signs of degeneration. The individual may have been young or middle-aged when she died. The length of the humerus (304mm) provided an estimated living stature of 1.601m (5' 3").

In addition a second right femur shaft was recovered, along with a small piece of animal bone. It was also in good condition but was lighter in colour. The disarticulated femur was from a larger individual than the articulated bone and may be male. A slight indentation at the midshaft (c.23 x 9mm) on the lateral side contained a patch of rough but rounded new bone growth which may represent an inflammatory response to a wound. However, the changes were barely noticeable and it is likely that any related injury had occurred several years before death.

Disarticulated remains 002

This group of bone totalled 108 fragments which included pieces of skull, long bones and torso (although very little of the latter was present). The bone was generally in fair to good condition, although several skulls and some of the long bones showed signs of surface erosion. Several bones, in common with Sk 001 were stained very dark brown. One radius had a cut mark and some scratches on the shaft which may have been the result of post-mortem disturbance.

Based on the number of frontal bones of the skull, this group represents an absolute minimum of six individuals. However, the fragments of rear portions of the skull which were clearly from different individuals to those of the frontal bones increased this minimum to thirteen, and other fragments of cranium almost certainly did not belong to any of these skulls. Some of the long bones and fragments of torso may be from the individuals represented by the skulls, but none of the long bones formed pairs or appeared to belong to adjoining bones and it is likely that these remains represent charnel. If, as it appears, the torso fragments and long bones represent different individuals, there may be as many as 30 individuals in this group.

Most bones were from adult individuals, although one small humerus may have been from a sub-adult or small adult female. In most cases the long bones were represented by shafts only and the state of epiphyseal fusion could not therefore be judged. Where it was possible to sex bones (particularly the skulls, fragments of pelvis and those long bones for which measurements were possible, it was clear that both men and

women were present. Age was more difficult to determine as very few diagnostic pieces were present. The cranial sutures of some skulls were fully fused whilst others remained open indicating the presence of both young and older adults, and one mandibular fragment containing two teeth was probably from a man in middle-age.

There was little evidence of pathological conditions in this assemblage. Two fragments of ?male ischia, a left and a right, did not appear to be a pair, but both were stained dark brown and both had evidence for enthesophyte formation at the edges of the ischial bursae. This is likely to be an age-related degenerative change, but could also be due to repetitive movement. A condition known as ‘Weaver’s bottom’, or ischial bursitis, can be caused by continued movement whilst sitting on a hard seat and these lesions could have been due to similar habitual motion, perhaps in a work-related activity. A relatively rare anatomical variant, an occipital bun, was noted in one of the ?female skulls.

Disarticulated remains 003

A single fragment of an adult left humerus shaft was recovered. It was stained dark brown.

Disarticulated remains 004

Incomplete lower limb bones of four individuals (left tibia and fibula, left tibia, right tibia, proximal right femur), a fragment of humerus and two pieces of skull made up this group.

Disarticulated remains 005

This collection appears to represent a minimum of four individuals. An adult ?male was represented by most of the right leg, an unsexed adult by the left femur shaft and possibly the first and second metacarpals, an adult female by a large part of the torso, and an adult male by the left clavicle and scapula.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This small group of bones represents the remains of at least six individuals, based on the minimum number of duplicated skull parts, but probably considerably more. Assuming that most of the bones represented separate individuals, which is possible given the lack of pairings or obvious matching of limb bones from the same side, the assemblage could represent more than 40 burials. Contexts 002, 004 and 005 in particular are likely to be charnel deposits, and this is reflected in the erosion and breakage of most of the bones. All individuals were adults, with the possible exception of one humerus which may be from a sub-adult (teenager?), and both men and women appear to be present in roughly equal numbers. Very little pathology was observed due to the fragmentary nature of the remains.

No further work is recommended and the remains may be reinterred.

3.3 St. Michael and All Angels Church Alterations

The church of St. Michael has formed the centre of the town from about the 12th century onwards (Shaw and Clark 2003). Road improvements in the 1920s and 1930s led to the demolition of many buildings surrounding the church. The graveyard was truncated during road-widening schemes and the construction of a dual carriageway (the current A54).

Documentary evidence confirms that a number of ‘vaults’ on Lower Street were entered into to remove human remains for reburial ‘elsewhere in the graveyard’ (Earl 1994):

Forty-two graves had to be disturbed and the relatives of the deceased raising no objections, the remains were re-interred in a new portion of the churchyard which was an amount of surplus land acquired for the scheme. The ground was consecrated by the Bishop (Earl 1994, 135).

It is possible that the human remains retrieved from the utility trench were burials that underlay the ‘vaults’ and graves in the portion of the graveyard that was altered during the road expansion. The disarticulated remains attest to the disturbance and reposition of the graves; a ceramic land drain (004) visibly truncates Disarticulated Remains 002 in section, and pottery sherds and animal bone fragments were retrieved from around Disarticulated Remains 004.

Miscellaneous Finds

A fragment of bone, most likely part of a cutlery handle, was found within a mixed deposit of masonry rubble (002) on Leadsmithy Street. It is most likely nineteenth century or later in date.

Four sherds of post-medieval pottery and two fragments of animal bone were identified with Disarticulated Remains 004. The bone fragments are most likely cow.

On a stretch of Leadsmithy Street, a former asphalt road surface was identified 0.5m below the current road surface (Figure 4), indicating the extent to which the modern road surface has been raised.

4. CONCLUSION

The only significant remains encountered during the watching brief were the human remains from the former graveyard of St. Michaels and All Angels Church, These remains were all highly disturbed by 19th century and more recent activity. A minimum of six individuals (although possibly as many as thirty or more) were identified and excavated. These remains will be reinterred in a suitable burial site in accordance with the terms of the Ministry of Justice licence.

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Appendices 1 – 4

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context no.	Trench/Area	Type	Description
000	Site	Deposit	Natural substrate
001	Site	Deposit	Made ground; modern road surface
002	Site	Deposit	Made ground; compacted demolition rubble
003	St Michaels Way	Deposit	Brownish-grey friable clayey-silt
004	St Michaels Way	Cut	Cut for ceramic land drain
005	St Michaels Way	Deposit	Backfill of ceramic land drain

Appendix 2: Photographic Register

1	South facing section of Utility Trench showing Skeleton 001 in section.	North	Bright
2	South facing section of Utility Trench showing the area around Skeleton 001.	North	Bright
3	Overhead shot of Utility Trench showing Skeleton 001 in South facing section.	North	Bright
4	South facing section of Utility trench showing Disarticulated Remains 002 in section.	North	Bright
5	Overhead shot of Utility Trench showing Disarticulated Remains 002 in South facing section.	North	Bright
6	North facing section of utility trench showing Disarticulated Remains 004	South	Bright
7	General shot of utility trench from Town Bridge Junction to Bull Ring	West	Bright
8	General shot of made ground profile at Town Bridge Junction	South	Bright
9	General shot of made ground profile at Town Bridge Junction	West	Bright
10	Oblique shot of utility trench section on west pavement of Leadsmithy Street	North-east	Overcast
11	General shot of groundworks at Town Bridge showing made ground profile	South-west	Overcast
12	General shot of groundworks at Town Bridge showing made ground profile	North-east	Overcast
13	East facing section of utility trench on east pavement of Leadsmithy Street	West	Overcast
14	North facing section of utility trench orientated east/west across Leadsmithy Street	South	Overcast
15	General shot of utility trench facing north up Leadsmithy Street	North	Overcast
16	Oblique shot of east facing section of utility trench in Leadsmithy Street showing previous road surface	South	Overcast
17	General shot of utility trench facing south down Leadsmithy street	South	Overcast

Appendix: Human Remains Catalogue

Methods of age and sex determination are generalised to give an idea of the bones used. Sexing based on the pelvis used more traits than entries might suggest. 'DF' stands for discriminant function, a statistical method of determining sex, where +2.0 is very male, -2.0 very female (WEA 1980).

Teeth are recorded in the form illustrated below:

Maxilla	R.	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	1	2	3	4	5	X	7	U	L.
Mandible		O	7	6	5	4	-	-	-	/	/	3	4	5	6	7	C	
			A												C			

Code	Meaning
1 2 3 etc.	Tooth present in jaw.
X	Tooth lost ante-mortem.
/	Tooth lost post-mortem.
U, u	Tooth unerupted.
O, o	Tooth in process of erupting.
C	Tooth congenitally absent.
- - -	Jaw missing.
A	Abscess present (above/below tooth number).
C	Caries present (above/below tooth number).

Lower case letters a-e and u/o are used for deciduous teeth. Attrition patterns are coded according to the scores suggested by Bouts and Pot (1989, modified version of Brothwell's original tooth wear chart).

A few abbreviations have been used in the catalogue for commonly occurring pathological conditions and anatomical regions. These are as follows:

OA	osteoarthritis	MT	metatarsal
OP	osteophytosis, osteophytes	MC	metacarpal
C	cervical)	L.	left
T	thoracic) vertebrae	R.	right
L	lumbar)		

Any other abbreviations should be self-explanatory, since they are simply shortened forms of bone names or anatomical areas (prox = proximal, lat = lateral etc.).

Tables of measurements for the major long bones are included after the catalogue of disarticulated remains.

Articulated remains

Sk. 001 Female, young or middle-aged adult

<i>Description:</i>	Part of the right side of the skeleton only, comprising humerus, incomplete radius and ulna, one rib, femur shaft..
<i>Condition:</i>	Good. Dark brown staining.
<i>Determination of age:</i>	Epiphyses fused. No degenerative changes.
<i>Determination of sex:</i>	Bones gracile, humerus head diameter 42mm.
<i>Stature:</i>	1.601m (5' 3") from humerus.
<i>Non-metric traits:</i>	No septal aperture, epicondylar process or third trochanter.
<i>Pathology:</i>	Nothing observed.
<i>Extra bone:</i>	See below, 'Disarticulated remains'. Also 1 frag of animal bone.

Disarticulated remains

Context	Description	MNI*
001b	R femur shaft. Slight indentation at lateral midshaft with rough patch of rounded new bone growth, c.23 x 9mm.	1
002	<i>Skull</i>	
	Frontal and fragment of R parietal, adult ?male. Ext surface erosion.	1
	Frontal with attached fragment both parietals, thick, large brow ridges, male. Ext surface erosion.	1
	Frontal (2 frags), very thin, ?female.	1
	Frontal (5 frags, 2 joining), male?	2
	Frontal frag (central) with coronal suture.	1
	Parietals and occipital (2 frags), with R parietal foramen. Lambdoid fused, sagittal partly fused.	1
	Posterior parts R & L parietals. Lambdoid wormian bone. Sagittal suture fused. Eroded ext surface.	1
	L parietal (2 frags), L parietal foramen. Lambdoid and sagittal unfused.	1
	L parietal, part R parietal, occipital (2 frags), female? Sutures fused.	1
	Posterior L parietal with small part of R, and R parietal foramen.	1
	Anterior L parietal (2 frags, joining)	1
	?Parietal/frontal (4 frags). Eroded.	1
	22 fragments of cranial vault, some possibly same as above, some probably not.	
	Occipital, thin, with large occipital bun, female?	
	R temporal, adult female.	
	L temporal frag, male? Eroded ext surface.	
	Petrous temporal frag.	
	R malar, female?	
	L malar, male?	
	Lateral fragment frontal, male.	
	Lateral fragment frontal, female.	
	L mandible frag, small teeth but chin robust, prob male. L PM2 and M1 present, wear on molar (4+) suggests middle-aged. Teeth: - - - - - / / / / / 5 6 / -	
	R maxillary molar (M3?), small, poss carious lesion.	
	<i>Torso</i>	
	R scapula frag.	
	4 ribs frags.	
	Lumbar vertebra with slight osteophytes superior body.	
	R innominate, sciatic notch narrow, male.	
	L innominate (2 frags), sciatic notch wide?, female?	
	R ischium, male, enthesophytes anterior bursa. Dark brown.	
	L ischium, unsexed, enthesophytes anterior bursa. Dark brown. Not a pair with R?	
	<i>Arms</i>	
a	R humerus (2 frags), male?, near-complete, head lost, eroded surfaces.	

Context	Description	MNI*
	R humerus shaft.	
	L humerus (2 frags) shaft, sub-adult or small female?	
	L humerus shaft, female.	
	L humerus distal half of shaft.	
	R humerus, distal fragment.	
b	L radius (2 frags, complete), fairly robust, male? Stature estimate 1.69m (5' 6½").	
	L radius shaft, female? Cutmarks (probably post-mortem) and erosion.	
	R ulna shaft.	
	R ulna distal shaft frag.	
	R hand (MC1, MC2, MC4, one phalanx)	
	<i>Legs</i>	
c	R femur shaft and distal end (3 frags), female.	
d	?L femur (3 shaft frags), female – may be a pair with c?	
e	L femur proximal half shaft.	
f	R femur (3 frags proximal end), male. Possibly same as dark brown stained ischium.	
g	L tibia (2 frags shaft), female?	
h	R tibia shaft, male? eroded.	
	Fibula shaft frag.	
	5 small, thin shaft frags femur.	
	4 frags unidentified, including 1 animal.	
003	L humerus distal shaft fragment, male? Stained dark brown.	
004	2 frags adult skull (parietal/frontal)	
a	L tibia (2 frags, near complete, prox end lost) and distal third L fibula, adult.	
b	L tibia shaft, adult ?female.	
c	R tibia midshaft (3 frags), adult ?male.	
d	R femur proximal frag, large, adult male.	
	R humerus distal half of shaft, adult.	
	2 unident long bone frags, poss same as the other bones above.	
005	R femur distal half, most of tibia and distal half of fibula, adult ?male. New bone formation on linea aspera of femur.	
a	L femur shaft, long but fairly gracile, adult.	
b	L 1st-2nd metacarpals.	
	Torso of young/middle-aged adult ?female: C4-T9 and L1-2 vertebrae, several rib fragments, R clavicle (medial end fused), part of sternum.	
	L clavicle lateral half and two frags of scapula, adult male	

* MNI = minimum number of individuals

Post-cranial measurements

	Sk.		001	001b	002a	002b	002c	002d	002e	002f
Femur										
Diaphyseal length	FeL1	R								
		L								
Head diameter	FeHd	R								49
		L								
Min subtrochanteric A-P diameter	FeD1	R	27	32					26	
		L								
Max subtrochanteric M-L diameter	FeD2	R	30	35					35	
		L								
Minimum shaft diameter (A-P)	FeD3	R	25	31			28			
		L						28		
Maximum shaft diameter (M-L)	FeD4	R	24	29			25			
		L						26		
Meric Index 100(FeD1/FeD2)		R	90.0	91.4					74.3	
		L								
Tibia										
Diaphyseal Length	TiL1	R								
		L								
A-P diameter at nutrient foramen	TiD1	R								
		L								
M-L diameter at nutrient foramen	TiD2	R								
		L								
Cnemic Index 100(TiD2/TiD1)		R								
		L								
Humerus										
Diaphyseal Length	HuL1	R	304							
		L								
Head diameter	HuHd	R	42							
		L								
Epicondylar breadth	HuE1	R	56		64					
		L								
Radius										
Diaphyseal Length	RaL1	R								
		L				238				
Stature		L	1601			1690				

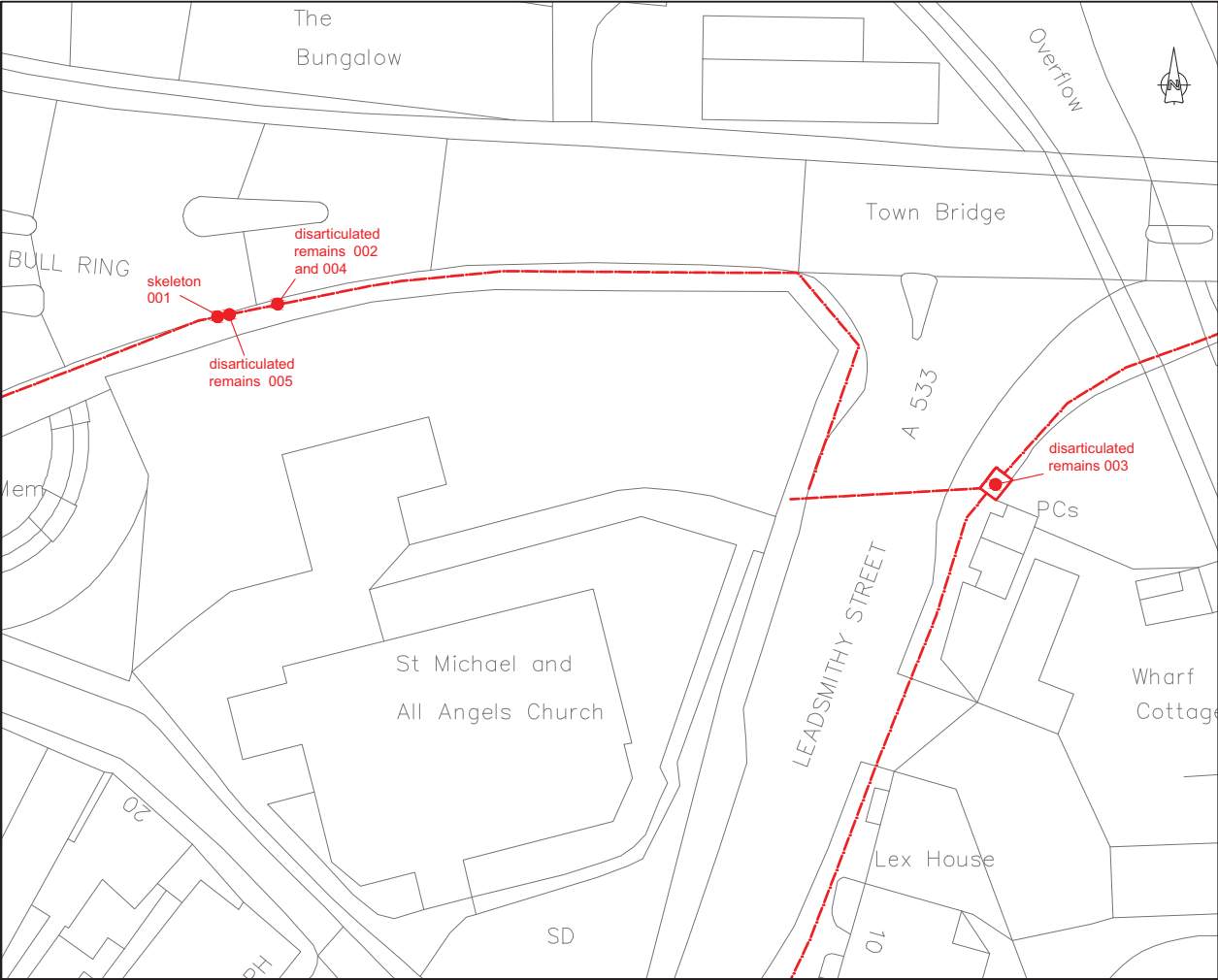
	Sk.		002g	002h	004a	004b	004c	004d	005a	005b
Femur										
Diaphyseal length	FeL1	R								
		L								
Head diameter	FeHd	R						48		
		L								
Min subtrochanteric A-P diameter	FeD1	R								
		L								27
Max subtrochanteric M-L diameter	FeD2	R								
		L								32
Minimum shaft diameter (A-P)	FeD3	R							26	
		L								29
Maximum shaft diameter (M-L)	FeD4	R							31	
		L								26
Meric Index 100(FeD1/FeD2)		R								
		L								84.4
Tibia										
Diaphyseal Length	TiL1	R								
		L								
A-P diameter at nutrient foramen	TiD1	R					36		37	
		L	30		30	28				
M-L diameter at nutrient foramen	TiD2	R		23			27		24	
		L	20		23	21				
Cnemic Index 100(TiD2/TiD1)		R					75.0		64.9	
		L	66.7		76.7	75.0				
Humerus										
Diaphyseal Length	HuL1	R								
		L								
Head diameter	HuHd	R								
		L								
Epicondylar breadth	HuE1	R								
		L								
Radius										
Diaphyseal Length	RaL1	R								
		L								
Stature		L								

Measurements in mm.

Figures 1 – 4



<p>Key:</p> <p>----- Gas main viewed during watching brief</p> <p>Scale at A4: Main plan, 1:1250</p>	<p>Fig No: 1</p> <p>Title: Site Location Plan</p> <p>Project: Middlewich Gas Main, Cheshire</p>	<p>Revision: A</p>	<p>Client: North West Gas Alliance</p>	<div data-bbox="1173 1971 1348 2128"> </div> <div data-bbox="1356 1971 1532 2128"> <p>CFA ARCHAEOLOGY LTD Unit 22 Moorland's Business Centre Balme Road, Cleckheaton West Yorkshire, BD19 4EZ</p> <p>T: 01274 864245 F: 01274 878494 yorkshire@cfa-archaeology.co.uk</p> </div> <div data-bbox="1173 2139 1532 2184"> <p>Drawn by: TB Checked: KH Report No: Y08613</p> </div>
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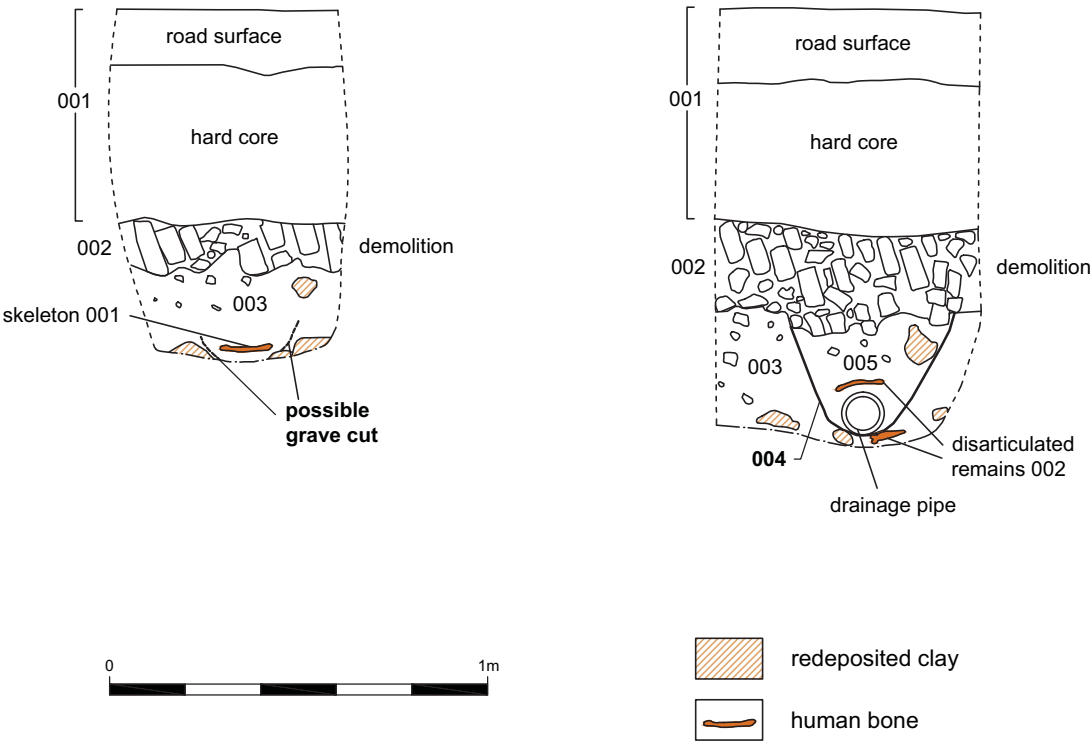
Key:
Gas main viewed during watching brief





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Fig. No:	2	Revision:	A
Title:	Location of Human Remains		
Project:	Middlewich Gas Main, Cheshire		
Client:	North West Gas Alliance		
Scale at A4:	1:500		
Drawn by:	TB	Checked:	KH
Report No:	Y08613		





Key:	Fig No:	3	Revision:	A	Client:	North West Gas Alliance			
	Title:	South facing sections of utility trench showing skeletons 001 and disarticulated remains 002					CFA ARCHAEOLOGY LTD Unit 22 Moorland's Business Centre Balme Road, Cleckheaton West Yorkshire, BD19 4EZ T: 01274 864245 F: 01274 878494 yorkshire@cfa-archaeology.co.uk		
	Project:	Middlewich Gas Main, Cheshire					Drawn by:	Checked:	Report No:
Scale at A4:	1:20					TB	KH	Y08613	



Fig 4. - East facing section of utility trench in Leadsmithy Street showing previous road surface

Fig. No: 4		Revision: A	Project: Middlewich Gas Main, Cheshire
Drawn by: TB	Checked: KH	Report No: Y08613	Client: North West Gas Alliance
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