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**Knutsford, Cheshire
Gas Main Works**

Archaeological Watching Brief

Report No. Y078/13

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Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken during the excavation of pits for the renewal of a gas main running through the 'Area of Archaeological Potential' through Knutsford town centre. No archaeological remains were recorded and no finds were recovered.

1. INTRODUCTION

This report presents the results of an archaeological watching brief undertaken by CFA Archaeology Ltd (CFA) between July and October 2012 on the renewal of a gas main through Knutsford 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 KNUT/2068.

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 through 'preservation by record' should they be encountered.

1.1 Site Location and Description

The pipeline ran south-east along Manchester Road (A50) from Albert Street (Fig. 1 SJ 74920 78840), then enters the 'Area of Archaeological Potential' through Canute Place, before turning south along the length of Princess Street, then turning north-east down Church Hill. It runs from 64m above the Ordnance Datum to 62m AOD along Princess Street and terminates at 54m AOD at the bottom of Church Hill and the junction with Kings Street (SJ 75295 78590).

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). Soils of the area are predominantly 'sand to sandy loam' with some 'clay to clayey loam' (NERC 2011).

1.2 Historical and Archaeological Background

There are sites and findspots from the prehistoric to the Roman period in the area and the town is recorded as a settlement in the Domesday Book. Through the medieval period, rather than develop into a commercial or industrial centre, the town became known as a residential area for wealthy county families (Shaw and Clark 2003). It remained a prosperous town throughout the post-medieval period and into the present day, where it has developed into a tourist centre with the nearby Tatton Park.

Research potential is mainly focused on the development of the town from the medieval period onwards. Archaeological work at the Angel Public House recorded well-preserved leather goods and wood along with a pottery assemblage dating from the 15th to 18th centuries (Shaw and Clark 2003, 10).

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 re-lining of existing pipework, with access pits being excavated and the new pipes inserted along the existing pipe route.

2.1 Watching Brief

Pits were excavated by a mini-digger at intervals along the existing pipeline route (Plate 1); these were left open during the removal of the old pipe and the insertion of the new replacement pipe. The pits were monitored either during their excavation or inspected shortly afterwards. The pits were inspected for evidence of archaeological features and the resulting spoil was visually inspected for finds. Appropriate recording forms were completed and photographs were taken of each inspected pit.

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.

2.3 Monitoring

The project was monitored by Mark Leah, the Cheshire Development Control Archaeologist, who was informed in advance of the works taking place.

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.

3. RESULTS

The locations of the pits monitored are shown on Figure 1; photographs of pits form Plates 1-4. Excavation of the pits was almost entirely through the material redeposited during the construction of the original gas main (Plate 3); only rarely was natural soil encountered. No archaeological features were recorded and no pre-modern finds were recovered.

The depths of the pits varied from 0.75 - 0.80m along Princess Street to 0.20m at the junction of Church Hill and Kings Street. The pits were cut through tarmac and then builders stone / gravel stone and disturbed mixed redeposited clay or sand. Along part of Princess Street cobbles were recorded, probably dating to the late 19th or early 20th century. Most of the pits were fairly small measuring from 1m² to 2-3m in length by 1-1.5m wide, apart from Pit 03 on the corner of Canute Place and Princess Street (Plate 2).

As most of the pits were small and within the area disturbed by the cut for the original pipeline, there was little opportunity for the recording of the natural stratigraphy. The exception was in Pit 03. Stone setts (c. 0.15m x 0.14m) were recorded below the tarmac road surface, then a bedding layer of dark reddish-grey sand with some gravel over further bands of sand with lenses of grey gravel, then made ground of mixed dark grey sandy gravel, and cinders over cleaner though still redeposited orange-brown sand. Compact yellow to light orange natural sand was encountered at 0.70m below the ground level (Plate 2).

As the pipeline route continued down Church Hill the depth of the pipeline became much shallower and the pits did not penetrate beyond the cobbles, tarmac or underlying builders sand (Plate 4).

4. CONCLUSIONS

Although the watching brief was maintained along the length of the new pipeline within the 'area of archaeological potential', excavation was rarely beyond made ground or outwith the original pipeline cut. Consequently the opportunity to encounter pre-modern archaeological remains was slight. However, the watching brief has contributed to the understanding of the stratigraphy along some of the main thoroughfares within the historic core of the town, and has ensured that the development did not disturb important archaeological remains.

5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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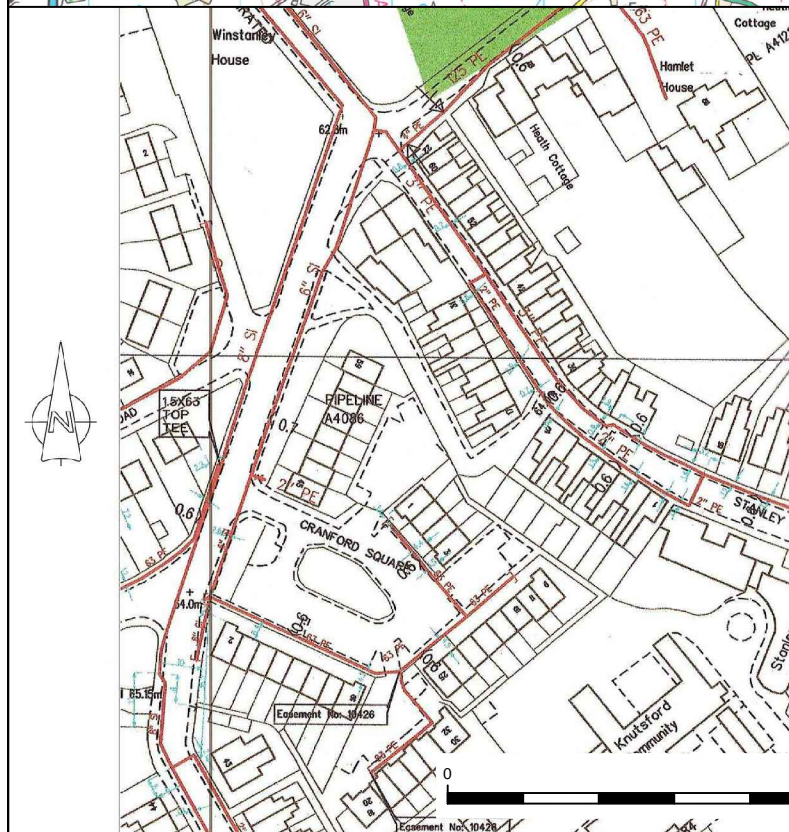
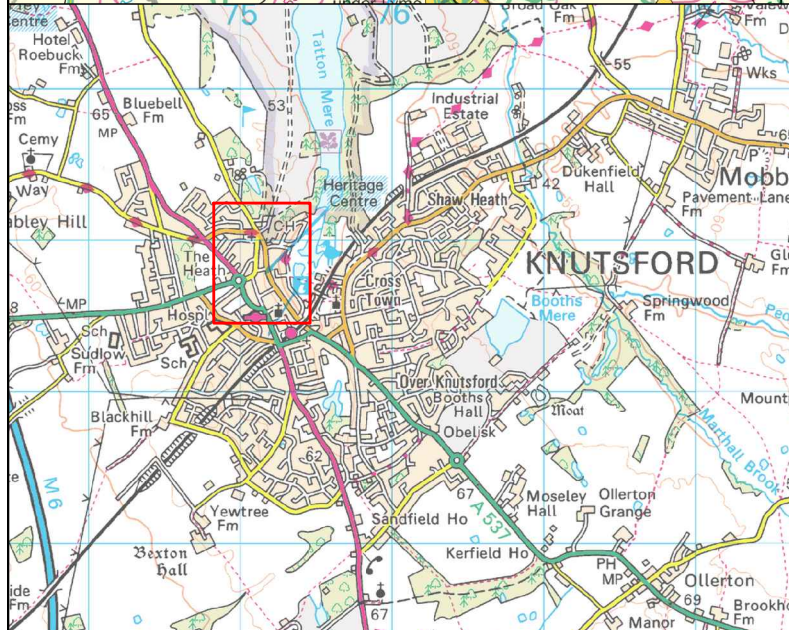
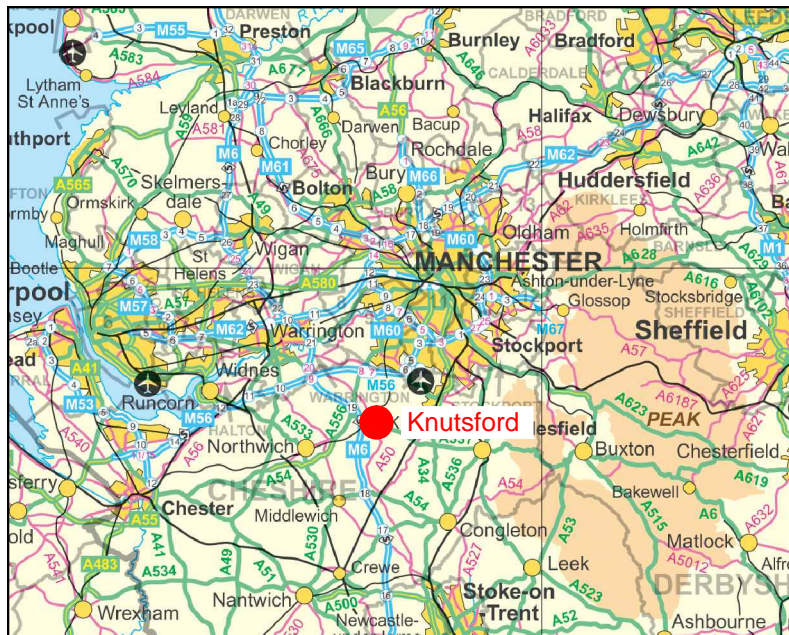
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Figure 1



Key:

- Pits
- Pipeline Route

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Fig. No: 1 Revision: A

Title: Site and Pit locations

Project: Knutsford Gas Main Works

Client: North West Gas Alliance

Scale at A3: 1:2000

Plates 1-4



Plate 1: Working shot during the excavation of Pit 07, looking north along Princess Street



Plate 2: Pit 03 at the junction of Canute Place and Princess Street, looking north-west



Plate 3: Pit 08 looking north



Plate 4: Pit 17 looking south-west