Condover new rising main Archaeological Evaluation at land north of Condover, Shropshire







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Condover new rising main – Archaeological evaluation at land north of Condover, Shropshire

Peter Lovett

With contributions by Derek Hurst; illustrations by Carolyn Hunt

Summary

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land north of Condover, Shropshire (NGR SJ 48941 05955) on behalf of Mott MacDonald working with Mott MacDonald Bentley for Severn Trent Water, who intends to construct a new rising main, which is being undertaken using permitted development rights. The evaluation confirmed the presence of a pit alignment as observed on an aerial photograph, and this is presumed to be of prehistoric date,. The only other archaeological evidence recovered was 18th/19th century pottery from the ploughsoil.

Report

1 Background

1.1 Reasons for the project

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken at land north of Condover, Shropshire (NGR SJ 48941 05955; Fig 1). It was commissioned by Mott MacDonald, working with Mott MacDonald Bentley, as part of a new rising main to be constructed for Severn Trent Water, and this scheme is being undertaken using permitted development rights.

The proposed development site is considered to include heritage assets and potential heritage assets, including a potential pit alignment shown in aerial photographs (PRN04919), and a projected Roman road (PRN08494-MSA18781).

The project conforms to the generality of briefs, and with a written scheme of investigation (MM 2016; WSI). The project also conforms to the *Standard and guidance: Archaeological field evaluation* (CIfA 2014a).

The event reference for this project will be provided on submission of the report to the HER.

2 Aims

The aims of this evaluation are:

- to identify whether the suspected pit alignment shown on aerial photographs was present, even though it was not detected on the geophysical survey;
- to identify any Roman activity associated with a possible Roman road, in particular the possible linear features seen on the geophysical survey close to this location;
- to identify any previously unknown archaeological remains and attempt to define their location, extent, date, function and form;
- to provide sufficient information to inform further archaeological investigation, if necessary.

3 Methods

3.1 Personnel

The project was led by Peter Lovett (BSc (hons.)), who joined Worcestershire Archaeology in 2012 and has been practicing archaeology since 2004, assisted by James Spry (BA (hons.); MA).The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Derek Hurst (BA (hons.), Post-exc PG Dip) who also contributed the finds report. Illustrations were prepared by Carolyn Hunt (BSc (hons.); PG Cert; MCIfA).

3.2 Documentary research

An archaeological desk-based assessment (DBA) had been undertaken by Mott MacDonald Bentley (MMB 2015). The DBA identified various archaeological features along the full route of the development. In respect of this evaluation at Condover, a Roman road has been projected to run to the south of the development. Aerial photography had also been used to identify a probable (?Iron Age) pit alignment running across the route of the works, as well as possible rectilinear enclosures to the north and west.

3.3 Fieldwork strategy

The fieldwork was undertaken between 3 and 4 October 2016 on the basis of the WSI (MM 2016), though with trench 1 repositioned to avoid a modern boundary, and trench 2 repositioned on further study of the aerial photograph. Six trenches in all, amounting to just over 200m² in area, were excavated over the site area of 3.3ha (Fig 2). Trenches 3 and 4 were located to test the

results of geophysical survey (Stratascan 2015), whilst Trench 2 (Fig 3; Plates 2-4) was carefully focussed on the pit alignment visible in aerial photographs.

Deposits considered not to be significant were removed using a 360° tracked excavator, employing a toothless bucket and under archaeological supervision. Subsequent excavation was undertaken by hand. Clean surfaces were inspected and selected deposits were excavated to retrieve artefactual material and environmental samples, as well as to determine their nature. Deposits were recorded according to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012). On completion of excavation, trenches were reinstated by replacing the excavated material.

3.4 Structural analysis

All fieldwork records were checked and cross-referenced. Analysis was effected through a combination of structural, artefactual and ecofactual evidence, allied to the information derived from other sources.

3.5 Artefact methodology, by Derek Hurst

The finds work reported here conforms with the following guidance: for findswork by CIfA (2014b), for archive creation by AAF (2011) and for museum deposition by SMA (1993).

3.5.1 Artefact recovery policy

The artefact recovery policy conformed to standard Worcestershire Archaeology practice (WA 2012; appendix 2).

3.5.2 Method of artefact analysis

All hand-retrieved finds were examined. They were identified, quantified and dated to period. A *terminus post quem date* was produced for each stratified context. The date was used for determining the broad date of phases defined for the site. Ceramics were examined under x20 magnification and referenced as appropriate by fabric type.

There was no environmental sampling as this was not appropriate and so no more artefactual material was to be added from this direction.

3.5.3 Discard policy

The following categories/types of material will be discarded after a period of 6 months following the submission of this report, unless there is a specific request to retain them (and subject to the collection policy of the relevant depository): You will need to specify below according to the WA standard practice (though this has not been fully formulated but for the moment will probably consist of the following

- where unstratified
- post-medieval material in general, and;
- generally where material has been specifically assessed as having no obvious grounds for retention.

4 The application site

4.1 Topography, geology and archaeological context

The geology of the development area consists of superficial deposits of glaciofluvial sheet deposits, Devensian sand and gravel overlying Salop Formation Mudstone, Sandstone and Conglomerate (BGS 2016). The land lies on a gently undulating field that lies at *c* 86m AOD. The pipeline route cuts across the field from the north-east to the south-west, with roads to the south and east.

For the archaeological context, please refer to the DBA (MMB 2015) which makes reference to the main features: a pit alignment (PRN04919), a possible Roman road (PRN08494), and cropmarks (PRN02412).

4.2 Current land-use

The site is today an arable field, which had been recently ploughed but was not under crop.

5 Results

5.1 Structural analysis

The trenches and features recorded are shown in Figures 2–3. The results of the structural analysis are presented in Appendix 1.

5.1.1 Phase 1: Natural deposits

The natural consisted of a glaciofluvial till, comprising loose sands and gravels in places with frequent pebbles and cobbles, and elsewhere of firm yellow silty sand. It was between 0.5m and 0.76m below the current ground surface.

5.1.2 Phase 2: Prehistoric deposits

Two shallow pits were identified and excavated in Trench 2 (Figs 2-3; Plates 2-4). These were part of the pit alignment identified from aerial photography. Pit 204 was 1.1m wide and 0.14m deep, whilst pit 206 was 1.37m wide and 0.16m deep. Both were filled with a firm mid orangey grey silty sand with frequent pebbles and gravels.

5.1.3 Phase 3: Modern deposits

A thin subsoil was present in places. This was a loose yellow brown silty sand and derived from the glaciofluvial material beneath, the interface with which was rarely clear. The topsoil (0.5m–0.6m thick) had been heavily ploughed.

5.2 Artefact analysis, by Derek Hurst

The very small artefact assemblage was all unstratified (100; from ploughsoil) and of 18th/19th century date (see Table 1).

period	material class	material class sub-type	object specific type	count	weight (g)
post-med	ceramic	earthenware	domestic pot	1	4
post-med/modern	ceramic	porcelain	domestic pot	1	4
Totals				2	8

Table 1: Quantification of the assemblage

6 Synthesis

The two pits excavated in Trench 2 are part of the presumed Iron Age pit alignment that runs northwest to south-east across the development area. No artefacts were recovered.

Pit alignments are a poorly understood prehistoric feature type. Their purpose is open to debate, with the earlier Bronze Age examples considered to serve a possible ritual function, whilst Iron Age iterations are thought to be of a more prosaic nature, possibly as a consequence of small quarrying activity in order to quickly form a bank (EH 2011).

Such a linear earthwork adds to the data that relates to the expansion of agricultural land-use from the Bronze Age into the Iron Age in the region, as identified in the regional research framework for the west Midlands (Watt 2011).

7 Significance

7.1 Nature of the archaeological interest in the site

The archaeological features consisted of two shallow pits, tentatively dated to the Iron Age but potentially earlier. They were filled with similar material, a sterile sand and pebble deposit and formed part of a pit alignment first identified through aerial photography.

7.2 Relative importance of the archaeological interest in the site

The function of pit alignments is poorly understood, and so the recording of more examples is a valuable addition to the relatively sparse data on this type of prehistoric feature in the region.

7.3 Physical extent of the archaeological interest in the site

The topsoil provides a cover of at least 0.5m, though only a thin subsoil separates the natural and the ploughsoil. The untruncated parts of the pits are shallow, at between 0.14m–0.16m deep, and these form part of a pit alignment running for at least 100m on either side of the projected route of the pipeline.

8 The impact of the development

8.1 Impacts during construction

During the construction the cut for the pipeline is expected to be a *c* 1m wide trench at least 1m deep. A 20m wide easement is planned for the length of the pipeline, with a soil strip 10m either side of the new pipe. Though the soil strip would be unlikely to go below the topsoil, considerable disturbance of the top of natural geology is likely given the thinness of the subsoil, and so any remaining pits within the easement area would be subject to disturbance.

8.2 Impacts on sustainability

The NPPF emphasises the importance of sustainability (DCLG 2012, section 131). The historic environment is a non-renewable resource and, therefore, cannot be directly replaced. However mitigation through recording and investigation also produces an important research dividend that can be used for the better understanding of the area's history and contribute to local and regional research agendas (cf NPPF; DCLG 2012, section 141).

9 Publication summary

Worcestershire Archaeology has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, Worcestershire Archaeology intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

An evaluation was undertaken on behalf of Mott MacDonald, working with Mott MacDonald Bentley in advance of the construction of a new rising main for Severn Trent Water just to the north of Condover village, Shropshire (NGR SJ 48941 05955). This confirmed the presence of a northnorth-west to south-south-east pit alignment assigned a prehistoric date based on typological grounds as no associated finds were recovered. The pits survived only in a shallow state due to truncation by agricultural activity.

10 Acknowledgements

Worcestershire Archaeology would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the conclusion of this project: Paul Riccoboni (Mott MacDonald; consultant), Ben King (Mott MacDonald Bentley), and Andy Wigley (Shropshire County Council; archaeological planning).

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Figures



Location of the site

Figure 1





Trench 2: plan and sections of pits 204 and 206

Figure 3

Plates



Plate 1 Trench 6, looking north (1m scales)



Plate 2 Trench 2, looking north-west (1m scales)



Plate 3 Pit 204. looking west (0.5m scale)



Plate 4 Pit 206, looking south-west (0.5m scale)



Plate 5 General view of site

Appendix 1 Trench descriptions

Trench 1

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: North to sou	uth	
Context Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
100	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown loamy sand	0.5	Topsoil
101	Subsoil	Layer	Loose light yellowish brown silty sand	0.07	Subsoil
102	Natural	Layer	Compact mid brownish yellow sand		Natural

Trench 2

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: North-west	to south-e	east
Contex Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
200	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown loamy sand	0.4	Topsoil
201	Subsoil	Layer	Compact mid orangey brown silty sand	0.15	Subsoil
202	Natural	Layer	Soft light yellowish orange sand		Natural
203	Pit	Fill	Firm mid orangey grey silty sand	0.14	Fill of pit
204	Pit	Cut		0.14	Pit cut, part of pit alignment
205	Pit	Fill	Firm mid orangey grey silty sand	0.16	Fill of pit
206	Pit	Cut		0.16	Pit, part of pit alignment

Trench 3

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: East to west	t	
Context Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
300	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown loamy sand	0.6	Topsoil
301	Subsoil	Layer	Compact mid brownish grey clayey sand	0.12	Subsoil
302	Natural	Layer	Firm mid brownish grey silty sand		Natural

Trench 4

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: North-west 1	to south-e	ast
Context Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
400	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown loamy sand	0.43	Topsoil
401	Subsoil	Layer	Loose light brownish grey silty sand	0.32	Subsoil
402	Natural	Layer	Loose light brownish yellow silty sand		Natural

Trench 5

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: East to wes	t	
Context Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
500	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish black loamy sand	0.36	Topsoil
501	Subsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown silty sand	0.28	Subsoil
502	Natural	Layer	Loose mid brownish grey sand		Natural

Trench 6

Length:	23m	Width: 1.5m	Orientation: North-west	to south-e	east
Context Context	t summary: Feature	Context	Description	Height/ depth	Interpretation
600	Topsoil	Layer	Moderately compact mid greyish brown loamy sand	0.45	Topsoil
601	Subsoil	Layer	Soft light yellowish black silty sand	0.15	Subsoil
602	Natural	Layer	Compact mid brownish yellow sand		Natural

Appendix 2 Technical information The archive (site code: not yet assigned)

The archive consists of:

- 1 Photographic records AS3
- 61 Digital photographs
- 1 Drawing number catalogues AS4
- 1 Scale drawings
- 6 Trench record sheets AS41
- 0 Box of finds

The project archive is intended to be placed at: Shropshire Museums Service and ADS as appropriate.