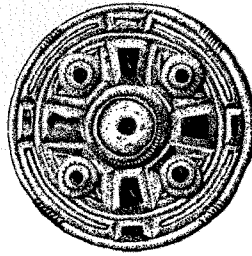


OFFICE COPY

OFFICE COPY.

ARCHAEOLOGY FIELD OFFICE
FULLBOURN COMMUNITY CENTRE
HAGGIS GAP, FULLBOURN
CAMBRIDGE CB1 5HD Tel: 551814
Fax: 551875



Archaeological Field Unit

**Bluntisham Water Tower to Earith Road, Colne -
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

Judith Roberts

1995

Illustrations by Jen May and Tim Reynolds

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A49

Commissioned By Bidwells on behalf of Cambridge Water Company

**Bluntisham Water Tower to Earith Road, Colne
An Archaeological Watching Brief**

Judith Roberts

1995

Illustrators Jen May and Tim Reynolds

With Contributions by Tim Reynolds, PhD.

Report No A49

Archaeological Field Unit
Cambridgeshire County Council
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap, Fulbourn
Cambridgeshire CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946

SUMMARY

In August and September 1994 an archaeological watching brief was carried out by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council, on behalf of Cambridge Water Company, during the laying of a water pipeline between Bluntisham water tower and Earith Road, Colne.

The watching brief revealed very few in situ archaeological remains but two Palaeolithic stone tools were retrieved from gravels removed from the pipe trench to the east of Colne Road, Bluntisham. To the west of the road prehistoric pottery was noted from a possible pit, and Colne-type medieval pottery and post-medieval pottery was found which probably derived from manuring activities.

1 INTRODUCTION

In August and September 1994 periodic visits were made by members of the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council during the excavation of trenches to accommodate a water pipe between the Bluntisham water tower and Earith Road, Colne (see *Figure 1*).

2. GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

The geology of the area consists of 1st/2nd Terrace Ouse gravels overlying boulder clay and Ampthill clay. The depth and degree of sorting of the gravels varied along the length of the pipeline and towards the eastern end (i.e. towards Earith Road) the depth of gravel was minimal and there was a considerable amount of sandy gravel immediately overlying the boulder clay. Westwards the gravels were thicker and better sorted.

The land rises gradually to the north west, from 10m by Earith Road to over 30m by the water tower in Bluntisham.

Land use along the route of the pipeline has varied over the past few years. Maps from the 1970s show many of the fields along the pipeline have been covered by fruit orchards but in more recent years several fields have had trees removed and been brought into arable cultivation. Decaying tree roots were noted in those areas where easements were stripped and in the lengths where trenching without easement took place the top soil and sub-soil appeared considerably disturbed, consistent with the grubbing up of the orchards.

3 BACKGROUND

Palaeolithic remains have been recovered from the gravels to the east of Colne (SMR Nos. 1680, 1681, 1682, 1695, 1786, 2542) and Neolithic/Bronze Age worked flints have also been identified (SMR Nos. 3618 and 3620), suggestive of occupation in the vicinity. Scattered Iron Age and Roman remains have been noted on the SMR (Nos. 946, 1735, 1886, 3572, 3577, 3578, 3721, 8898) and are mentioned in a watching brief along previous phases of the water pipeline (Watson, 1991) but there are no apparent concentrations of remains along the route of the current pipeline.

Medieval pottery kilns have been identified at Colne (Watson, 1991), to the north of the western end of the pipeline (SMR No. 3629) and medieval ridge and furrow towards the eastern part of the route. Ridge and furrow was also marked on the SMR immediately west of Colne Road, Bluntisham but this appears to have been lost under modern housing development and is no longer evident.

4 METHODS

The presence of archaeological remains (indicated on the SMR) in the surrounding area identified this as an area of potential archaeological interest. The narrowness of the pipe trench (rarely more than a metre wide) along much of its length meant that identification

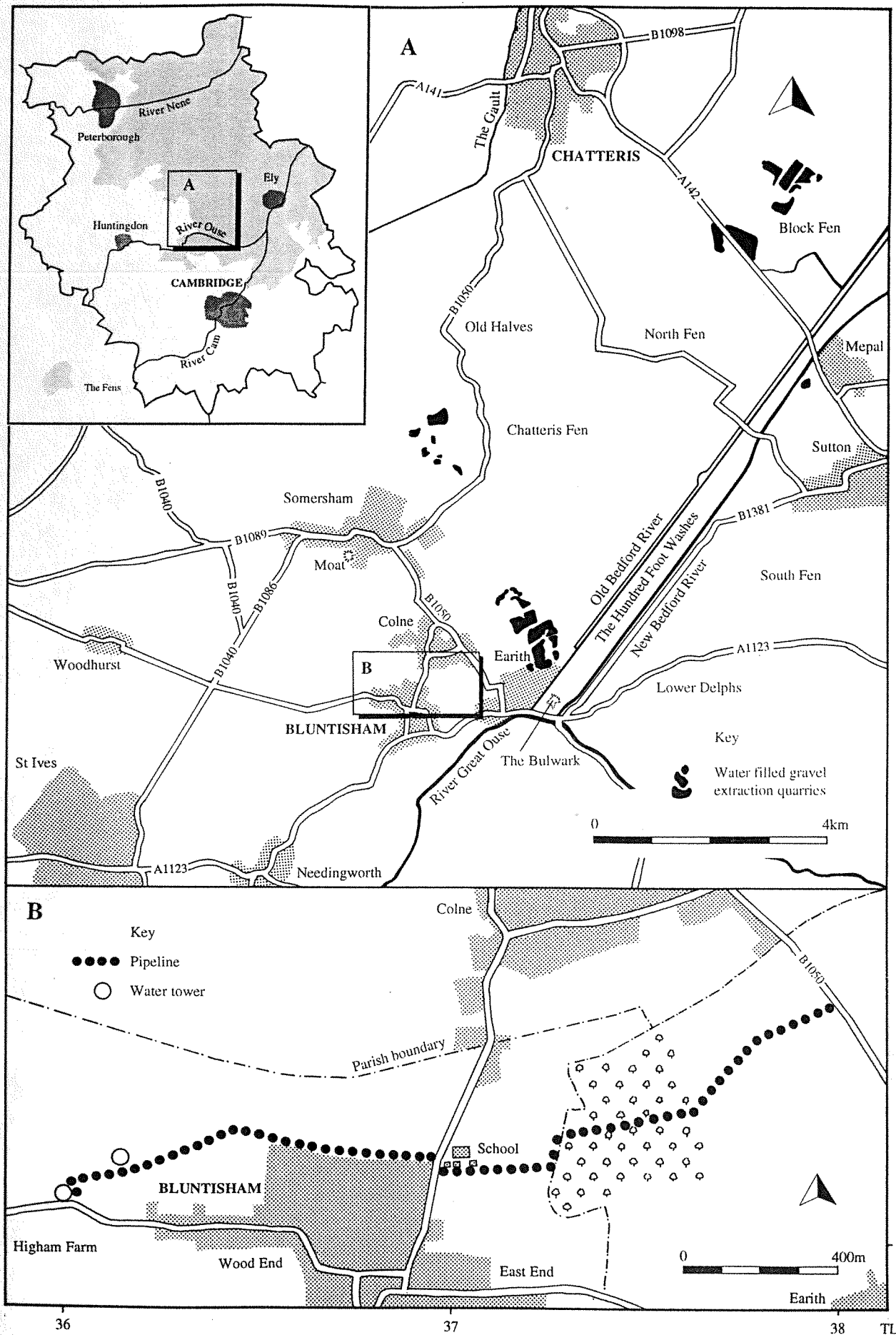


Figure 1 Location map and plan of trenching

of archaeological features was almost impossible but it had been hoped that areas of relict ridge and furrow might be apparent even if the overlying topsoil was heavily disturbed. Along the lengths where trenching without easement took place the archaeological assessment was limited to visual inspection during machine excavation and examination of the upcast spoil.

In three areas (see *Figure 1*) an easement of approximately 5 metres was stripped of topsoil and the underlying subsoil exposed. These areas were examined closely and possible anomalies cleaned, mechanically and by hand, to determine whether they were of archaeological significance. The remaining parts of the trench were excavated with a toothed ditching bucket to a depth of approximately 2.5 metres (well below a level at which Holocene archaeological remains might be expected to be found). It was not possible (because of time and financial constraints) to monitor all phases of work along the pipeline but the trench was visited regularly so that opened trenches, easements and spoil could be examined.

5 RESULTS

An easement was stripped on the rise to the west of Colne Road, Bluntisham towards the water tower and extended along the fence line of a modern housing development. There were no features visible in the easement which could not be attributed to recent tree clearance and building work. Artefacts recovered from the spoil included fragments of Colne-type wares, post-medieval pottery and building materials and other domestic refuse.

To the east an easement, approximately 5 metres wide and 400 metres long, was stripped up the gradually rising slope. This easement was examined soon after it was exposed and patches of burning were noted. Medieval Colne-type pottery was recovered from the easement and spoil but this did not appear to be associated with specific archaeological features. Approximately 80 metres west along the easement a dark area (possibly a pit) containing prehistoric pottery was identified. It was not possible to examine this area in detail as it was subjected to machine damage soon after exposure. The easement runs along an extant hedge line with housing development beyond. The amount of domestic refuse and organic remains revealed in the easement and spoil is consistent with medieval and post-medieval occupation to the south and recent tree cover (presumably orchard) to the north. Patches of burning and some of the possible 'features' appear to be related to the clearance of these trees.

An area immediately to the west of Colne Road, Bluntisham, was stripped of topsoil for the storage of machines and materials. This revealed post-Medieval building materials and domestic refuse consistent with modern development along this side of the road. It is possible that the easement was not stripped to a sufficient depth to encounter archaeological remains but it is likely that building in this area will have caused considerable damage to any underlying archaeology.

The first area exposed was an easement alongside the school, to the east of Colne Road. This area appears to have been orchard in the recent past but is now under grass. The easement and upcast spoil was examined but revealed largely modern disturbance and rubbish. An area of burning was identified, this was associated with modern building material, pottery, glass, coal and undecayed wood. Three struck flints were found scattered along the easement and in the spoil. The abraded nature of the finds and machine damage to the flints indicate modern disturbance which would have truncated any underlying archaeology.

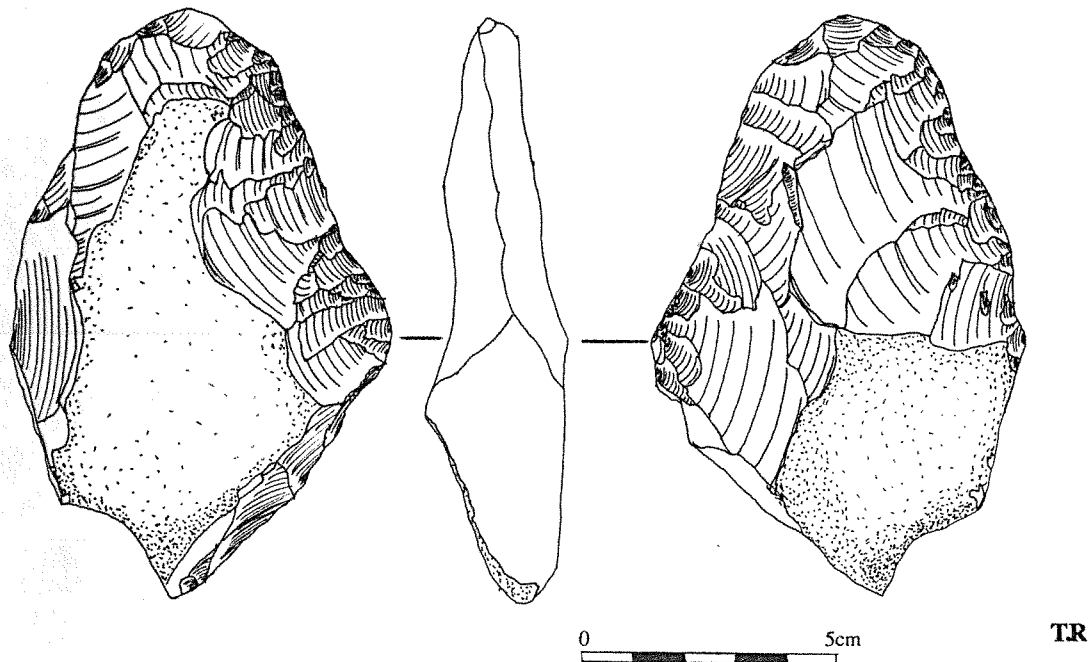


Figure 2 *Palaeolithic hand axe*

Trenching continued beyond the grassland and north along the parish boundary. This area is currently covered in apple trees and there has been considerable root disturbance in the topsoil and subsoil. Gravels were encountered relatively close to the surface (within 30-40 cms) of the ground surface. The well sorted gravels lie immediately over the boulder clay at a depth of approximately 2 - 2.5 metres. A Palaeolithic side scraper was recovered from the upcast spoil (TL3729 7520). Further trenching occurred eastwards through plum and apple orchards. The depth of gravels decreased as did the average stone size and there were increasing amounts of coarse sand overlying the clay.

Topsoil stripping and trenching continued in the area adjacent to Earith Road, Colne (between TL373 753 and TL378 755). The topsoil was incompletely removed but no distinct features were apparent. The line of the previous pipe trench was visible just to the north of the present excavation. Along the eastern extent the gravels overlying the boulder clay were fairly thin (between 0.5-1 metre) and were replaced with coarse sand at the extreme eastern end of the pipe trench. A Palaeolithic hand axe was found lying on the surface of the easement (TL3763 7537). Artefacts from the surface and spoil consisted mainly field drains and post-medieval building material. Linear features (running approximately north-west - south-east) were noticed in the subsoil and were cleaned mechanically and manually. These were irregular, shallow and appear to relate to agricultural activities.

6 DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The method of trenching and nature of recent land use meant it was impossible to identify any archaeological features along the pipeline apart from a possibly prehistoric pit which was damaged by machining before the archaeologists had an opportunity to investigate it. The flake sidescraper recovered (of a transverse type), was damaged post-depositionally but the handaxe had not been affected by recent damage. The latter had, however, developed patina on one surface and was sufficiently worn, although not rolled, to be from a secondary context. The First/Second Terrace gravels from which both derive have been subject to considerable reworking by periglacial activity which has produced ice-cast wedges.

It is likely that both pieces have been subjected to some minor movement but neither shows any signs of periglacial damage. Thus both predate the last glacial maximum at 18,000 BP and were subject to some movement before this time. Typologically, these pieces would be expected to date from between 120-70,000 BP, the terraces themselves are considered to be Devensian (105-10,000 BP). Given the slight movement of the pieces they are likely to be contemporary with the terrace formation and so a date of 105-70,000 BP is most likely. Specific activity sites or occupations would have occurred during this time but have been mildly reworked in the upper terrace gravel deposits. A similar phenomenon would account for the other Palaeolithic entries on the SMR for the area (1680 - a sidescraper plus another flake tool, 1681 - a possible flake sidescraper, 1786 - a handaxe and two cores and 2542 - flake tools). Whether this reflects occupation by Neanderthals or moderns humans remains to be identified. Prehistoric struck flints were identified but their low density does not suggest an area of occupation in the immediate vicinity of the pipeline. There is scattered evidence of medieval occupation to the west of Colne Road and post-medieval building along Earith Road (where there are extant farm buildings). Almost the whole area has been heavily disturbed by the roots of old (and now removed) and current orchards. Evidence of recent machine-made marks (created either during removal of the orchard or in subsequent agricultural activity) suggests that damage to surviving archaeological remains would be severe.

Although liaison with the contractor was good, variable weather and the order in which work was carried out meant unnecessary visits to the site had to be made. The nature of the trenching also meant that it was difficult to see any features in the easement other than immediately after the initial stripping.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Cambridge Water Company (through their Agents Bidwells) for funding this project; the contractor (Roy Chapman of Diss), Tim Malim (Project Manager); Tim Reynolds, Paul Spoerry, Ken Welsh, Spencer Cooper, Sean Damant, Carole Fletcher, Scott Kenney and Steve Membery for visiting the site on various occasions; Jenny May for the illustrations

REFERENCES

SMR Cambridgeshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record

Watson, K., 1991 Longstanton to Bluntisham Pipeline, 1991 - An Archaeological Assessment

Watson, K., 1991 The Medieval kiln site, Old Church Lane, Colne - An Archaeological Assessment



Cambridgeshire
County Council

Archaeology

The Archaeological Field Unit
Fulbourn Community Centre
Haggis Gap
Fulbourn
Cambridge CB1 5HD
Tel (01223) 881614
Fax (01223) 880946