

# Irthingborough Rising Main, Ditchford Road, Northamptonshire



## Archaeological Watching Brief Report



March 2014

**Client: Anglian Water**

OA East Report No: 1588

OASIS No: oxfordar-171658

NGR: SP 2837 7355

**Irthingborough Rising Main, Ditchford Road, Northamptonshire.**

**Archaeological Watching Brief**

*Site Code: XNN IRM 13*

*CHER No.*

*Date of Works: 9th December 2013 to 13th January 2014.*

*Report No: 1588*

*Excavator: Michael Webster*

*Client: Anglian Water.*

*Report Date: March 2014*

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## **Summary**

*Between the 9th December 2013 to the 13th January 2014, OA East carried out an archaeological watching brief on land off Ditchford Road, Irthingborough, Northamptonshire (SP 2837 7355).*

*The monitoring was carried out during the excavation of three trenches, dug to locate an existing water main, the stripping of a 15m wide easement and the excavation of a new service trench. No archaeological remains were observed during the watching brief.*



## 1 GEOLOGY AND TOPOGRAPHY

- 1.1.1 The site is located 400m south-west of the River Nene, (centered on SP 492837 267355, Fig. 1). The area slopes upwards from 43m AOD in the south corner of the field to a level plateau at 46m AOD. The north-west boundary of the field is formed by a trackway which occupies the route of a former railway (Nene Valley Line), further to the north the field drops down to the level of the existing river.
- 1.1.2 The underlying geology comprises Northamptonshire Sand Formation-Ironstone; Ooidal sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 172-176 million years ago in the Jurassic period. Along the lower western side of the field the geology comprises Whitby Mudstone Formation-Mudstone; sedimentary bedrock formed approximately 176-183 million years ago in the Jurassic Period (BGS).

## 2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

- 2.1.1 The Nene valley is rich with archaeological remains. The construction of new houses, roads and railways, along with quarrying for both ironstone and sand and gravels, has resulted in many archaeological sites being recorded within a two mile radius of the site. A summary of these finds is presented below by period.

### ***Prehistoric and Roman***

- 2.1.2 Iron Age remains in the locality include a pre-Roman settlement beneath the Roman Town of Irchester and Iron Age enclosures and field systems recorded locally (Monument No SP 96 NW 2). A series of aerial photographs show enclosures and ditches covering 25ha (Monument No 347091). A prehistoric or Roman ring ditch (Monument No 968108) is located south of the A45. At Irthingborough, Crow Hill the site of an Iron Age Hill Fort was later settled by the Romans (Thatcher 2012).
- 2.1.3 To the south of the site, the line of the Wellingborough Road may have originated in the Roman period running south-west towards the Roman small walled town/fort of Irchester, situated south of the River Nene (NHER 1760/1). A hoard of Roman coins (42000) were found in 1963 to the east of the town. Work in the town and its environs has been carried out as far back as the 19th century, including recent work during the construction and widening of the A45. A possible road (Monument no. 345469) linked Irchester to the settlement /town at Duston, near Northampton, to the west.
- 2.1.4 Further archaeological evidence relating to the Roman period has also been recorded east of Poplar Barn (NHER 1906). The character of the finds recovered during field artefact collection suggests the location of a settlement typical of hillside locations during the Roman period which occupy the River Nene Valley.

### ***Saxon and early medieval***

- 2.1.5 Irthingborough is first recorded in the Saxon period as *Yrtlingaburg* in AD 780, as *Edinburne* in the Domesday survey of 1086, and as *Hyrtlingberi* in 1137. The name, a combination of the old English *yrblinga* ploughmen and *burg* meaning fort, suggests a fortified location for protecting cattle during the Early Saxon period. This may have been located on Crow Hill to the east, where a 13th century furlong name *aldeborough* refers to a promontory fortified in the Iron Age and Roman period. Saxon remains are also recorded at Higham Ferrers along with a settlement which pre-dated the establishment of Chicheley College in the 15th century.



### **Medieval**

- 2.1.6 When the Domesday Survey was written, the proposed development site probably lay to the south-west of the village core of Irthlingborough. During the medieval period Irthlingborough may have comprised of two settlements focused on parish churches at All Saints in the east and St Peters. The villages lay in the Huxloe Hundred and were surrounded by six open fields.
- 2.1.7 Medieval earthworks of a village or farmstead, with associated field systems, are recorded immediately to the east of Irchester as does part of the former Hamlet of Chester on the Water (Monument No SP 96 NW 7). Ridge and furrow agriculture has been recorded to the north-east (NHER 1754/0/4 & NHER1754/0/3).

### **Post medieval**

- 2.1.8 Post-medieval quarrying for iron stone, sand and gravels along the valley bottom, by the South Durham Iron Company, is recorded to the south of the A45, now in the Irchester Country Park (Monument No SP 96 NW 65). During the 19th century a railway was cut across part of the Roman town to link the quarries. The now disused Nene Valley line, which closed in the 1960s, ran immediately north of the site and linked Northampton to Peterborough.

### **Modern**

- 2.1.9 By the mid 19th century the landscape and the region in general was beginning to accrue the characteristics of early industrialisation. The Midland Railway had been built between London and Leicester serving St Pancras by 1867. The first edition OS 1:10,000 40 NW shows the proposed development site still largely farmland with fields which reflect the Inclosure of 1806. However, industrial development based on limestone quarrying and brick and tile manufacturing began in the late 19th century.
- 2.1.10 The brick works of Dunn and Pendered began quarrying for the extraction of materials from a quarry to the north (NHER 6389/1) during this time. Slightly later, in 1898, the plant added the production of cement, based on outcropping limestone (NSMR 6389), to its existing repertoire of brick and tile and in 1907 the site was rebuilt its name changed to the Premier Portland Cement Co. Meanwhile in the period from 1909 to 1915 land was assembled by Ebb Vale Steel Iron and Coal Co Ltd and in 1915 quarrying and mining began in the area around White Lodge. To serve the mines, a tunnel was driven beneath Wellingborough Road carrying a tramway and allowing access between the mines and the London and North Western Railway, which carried the sintered ore to Ebb Vale.
- 2.1.11 The site remained in operation during the middle part of the 20th century. However, reduced demand led to its closure on 30th September 1965. The mine galleries were emptied of equipment and the tunnels filled in between 1965 and spring 1966, although many of the buildings associated with the sintering plant to the south of Wellingborough Road remained derelict.

## **3 METHODOLOGY**

- 3.1.1 The objective of this watching brief was to determine as far as reasonably possible the presence/absence, location, nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any surviving archaeological deposits within the development area.

- 3.1.2 The Brief required that a suitably qualified archaeologist be present during the stripping of soils and excavation associated with the new service trench to replace an existing water main.
- 3.1.3 The area of investigation was located on land to the south-west of Ditchford Road, north of the A45, near Irchester.
- 3.1.4 All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using OA East's *pro-forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales digital photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.
- 3.1.5 Site conditions were dry and mild. The field had been cultivated earlier in the year and during the works the farmer was feeding the plough soil with effluent from a near by septic tank/reservoir.

## 4 RESULTS

### 4.1 Introduction

- 4.1.1 Trench 1 was positioned to confirm the presence of a gas main, which ran parallel with the north-west edge of the field. Trenches 2 and 3 were situated towards the south corner of the field in order to locate the trench cut for the existing water main.
- 4.1.2 The excavation of a 15m wide easement exposed the alignment of the existing water main across the field.
- 4.1.3 A new trench was excavated for the laying of a new water pipe along the whole length of the easement, on an alignment parallel with the existing water main.

### 4.2 Trench 1

- 4.2.1 The trench was located towards the north-west edge of field (fig 2). It was 2.5m x 1.2m in dimensions and cut through a topsoil 0.30m thick and a subsoil 0.25m thick. The natural deposits, which comprised mixed clay with outcrops of ironstone were excavated to a depth of 1.1m, whereupon the gas main was exposed.

### 4.3 Trench 2

- 4.3.1 The trench was located towards the south corner of the field (fig 2). It measured 6.5x1.2m and was cut through a 0.28-0.36m thick topsoil, a 0.18-0.20m thick subsoil. In the south-western half of the trench a 0.15m thick alluvial deposit was recorded. The mixed natural ironstone and clay was excavated to a depth 1.2m. No evidence of either the water main or archaeological features or deposits were observed in the trench.

### 4.4 Trench 3

- 4.4.1 The trench was located parallel with Trench 2 (fig 2, plate 1) and measured 26x1.2m wide. It cut through a topsoil 0.25-0.30m thick, a subsoil 0.20-0.54m thick and down through the natural deposits to a depth of 0.70-0.95m. No evidence of either the water main or archaeological features or deposits were observed in the trench.

### 4.5 Easement Strip

- 4.5.1 With the course of the water main pegged out in the field, a 15m wide easement was excavated from the north-west edge of the field to the southern corner (Fig. 2 plate 2). The topsoil was removed along the full 250m length of the easement to a depth of 0.3-

0.5m, exposing the cut for the existing water pipe trench. No archaeological features or deposits were observed during the stripping.

#### **4.6 Pipe Trench**

4.6.1 Excavation of the new pipe trench was by a mechanical excavator fitted with a V shaped ditching bucket. The sloping sides of the cut exposed a subsoil up to 0.3m thick, a 0.5m thick mixed ironstone and clay layer, which sealed a possible glacial feature that in turn cut the natural clays. The glacial anomaly (plate 3), was aligned south-west to north-east and was 2.3m wide x 1.8m deep with regularly sloped sides. No archaeological features were observed in the trench.

### **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

During the watching brief no archaeological features were observed, the glacial feature recorded during the excavation of the pipe trench for the new water pipe could possibly be the origin of the crop marks observed in the field.

### **6 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

- 6.1.1 The author would like to thank Anglian Water who commissioned and funded the archaeological work. The project was managed by Richard Mortimer
- 6.1.2 There was no written brief for the archaeological works but a verbal agreement was given by Lesley Anne Mather to undertake the work.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

BGS British Geological Survey. [www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/](http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/)

PastScape, The National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE)  
<http://www.heritagegateway.org.uk>

Thatcher C, 2012 Prehistoric and Roman Remains at land west of Irthlingborough, Northamptonshire. Archaeological Evaluation.

## APPENDIX A. OASIS REPORT FORM

All fields are required unless they are not applicable.

### Project Details

OASIS Number	oxfordar-171658		
Project Name	Archaeological Watching Brief on land off Ditchford Road Irthingborough, Northants.		
Project Dates (fieldwork) Start	09-12-2013	Finish	13-01-2014
Previous Work (by OA East)	No	Future Work	No

### Project Reference Codes

Site Code	XNNIRM13	Planning App. No.	
HER No.		Related HER/OASIS No.	

### Type of Project/Techniques Used

Prompt

### Please select all techniques used:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Field Observation (periodic visits)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Record
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Excavation (100%)	<input type="checkbox"/> Part Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Field Walking
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Recorded Observation	<input type="checkbox"/> Systematic Metal Detector Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysical Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Remote Operated Vehicle Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Test Pit Survey
<input type="checkbox"/> Open-Area Excavation	<input type="checkbox"/> Salvage Excavation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Watching Brief

### Monument Types/Significant Finds & Their Periods

List feature types using the [NMR Monument Type Thesaurus](#) and significant finds using the [MDA Object type Thesaurus](#) together with their respective periods. If no features/finds were found, please state "none".

Monument	Period	Object	Period
<input type="text"/>	Select period...	<input type="text"/>	Select period...
<input type="text"/>	Select period...	<input type="text"/>	Select period...
<input type="text"/>	Select period...	<input type="text"/>	Select period...

### Project Location

County	Northamptonshire	Site Address (including postcode if possible)
District	Wellingborough	Ditchford Road, Irthingborough, Northants.
Parish	<input type="text"/>	
HER	<input type="text"/>	
Study Area	0.375h	National Grid Reference <input type="text" value="SP 9287 6739"/>

## Project Originators

Organisation	OA EAST
Project Brief Originator	
Project Design Originator	
Project Manager	Richard Mortimer
Supervisor	Tam Webster

## Project Archives

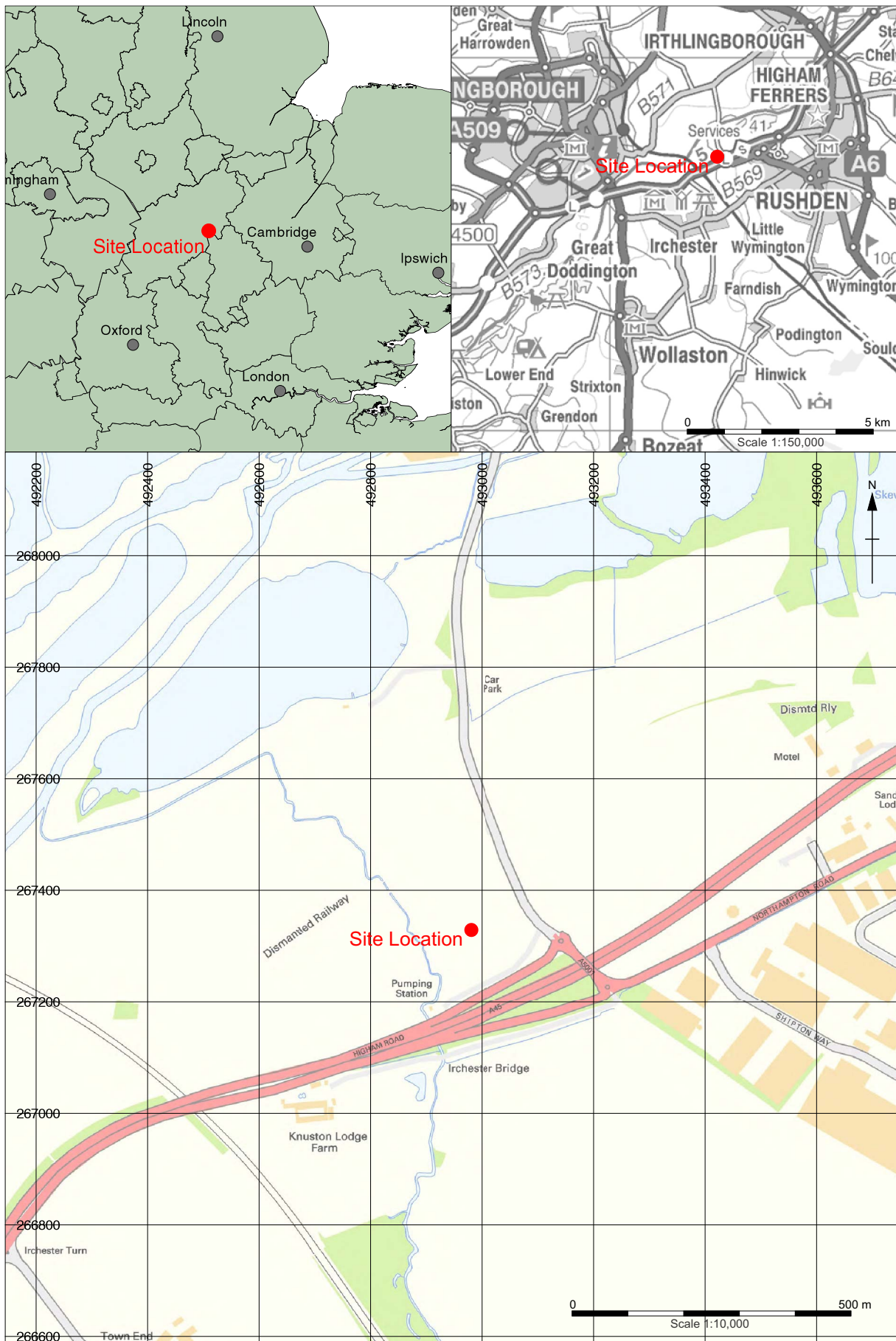
Physical Archive	Digital Archive	Paper Archive
Northamptonshire county store	OA East office Bar Hill	Northamptonshire county store
XNNIRM13	XNNIRM13	XNNIRM13...

## Archive Contents/Media

	Physical Contents	Digital Contents	Paper Contents
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Ceramics	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Environmental	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Glass	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Digital Media	Paper Media
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<input type="checkbox"/> Geophysics	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Correspondence
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<input type="checkbox"/> Survey	<input type="checkbox"/> Matrices
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Text	<input type="checkbox"/> Microfilm
<input type="checkbox"/> Virtual Reality	<input type="checkbox"/> Misc.
	<input type="checkbox"/> Research/Notes
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Photos
	<input type="checkbox"/> Plans
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Report
	<input type="checkbox"/> Sections
	<input type="checkbox"/> Survey

### Notes:



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Figure 1: Site location





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Figure 2: Position of Easement showing trenches and glacial anomaly





Plate 1: Trench 3



Plate 2: Easement top soil strip, north end of site, showing existing pipe trench





Plate 3: Glacial anomaly in side of new pipe trench



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