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Archaeology along the Cambourn Gas Main Pipeline

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by

Stephen Kemp. 24th June 1998.

Introduction

Archaeological investigations along the course of the Cambourn Gas Main were undertaken by the Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council between the 1st and 10th June 1998. The work was undertaken for Gas Technology Limited and involved three site visits.

The gas pipeline is 7km long and runs through the parishes of Connington, Elsworth and Knapwell from Friesland Farm on the A14 to the A428 (Figure 1). An easement of 3-4m wide was prepared along the full length of the pipeline in advance of pipelaying which was to be undertaken with a ditch and dig machine. A 0.30m wide pipe trench was excavated during pipelaying, but due to the proposed pipelaying methodology, this was not monitored.

Background

The pipeline route crossed rolling countryside composed of Ampthill and Boulder Clays which is dissected by a number of brooks draining away from springs which dot the high lands. Gravels and alluvium were identified adjacent to the Brooks crossed by the pipeline. Apart from where the pipeline intersected with roads the entirety of the route was through arable lands.

The only archaeology known along the pipeline prior to this work was a single finds spot indicating Bronze working (SMR 11744) and some aerial photographs evidence for medieval cultivation remains. Although large amounts of archaeology were not indicated by the SMR along the route there was potential for remains to exist adjacent to the course of the former Roman Road, the present A14 and in the vicinity of the Bronze working. Significant quantities of Roman material have also been found within Caldecote Parish which lies immediately to the south of the A428.

Methodology

Due to the narrow gauge of the pipe and the trenching methodology the emphasis of the archaeological investigations was placed on monitoring the easement excavations. Both the easement and adjacent spoil were walked, finds collected and further investigations were undertaken where finds or archaeological features were identified.

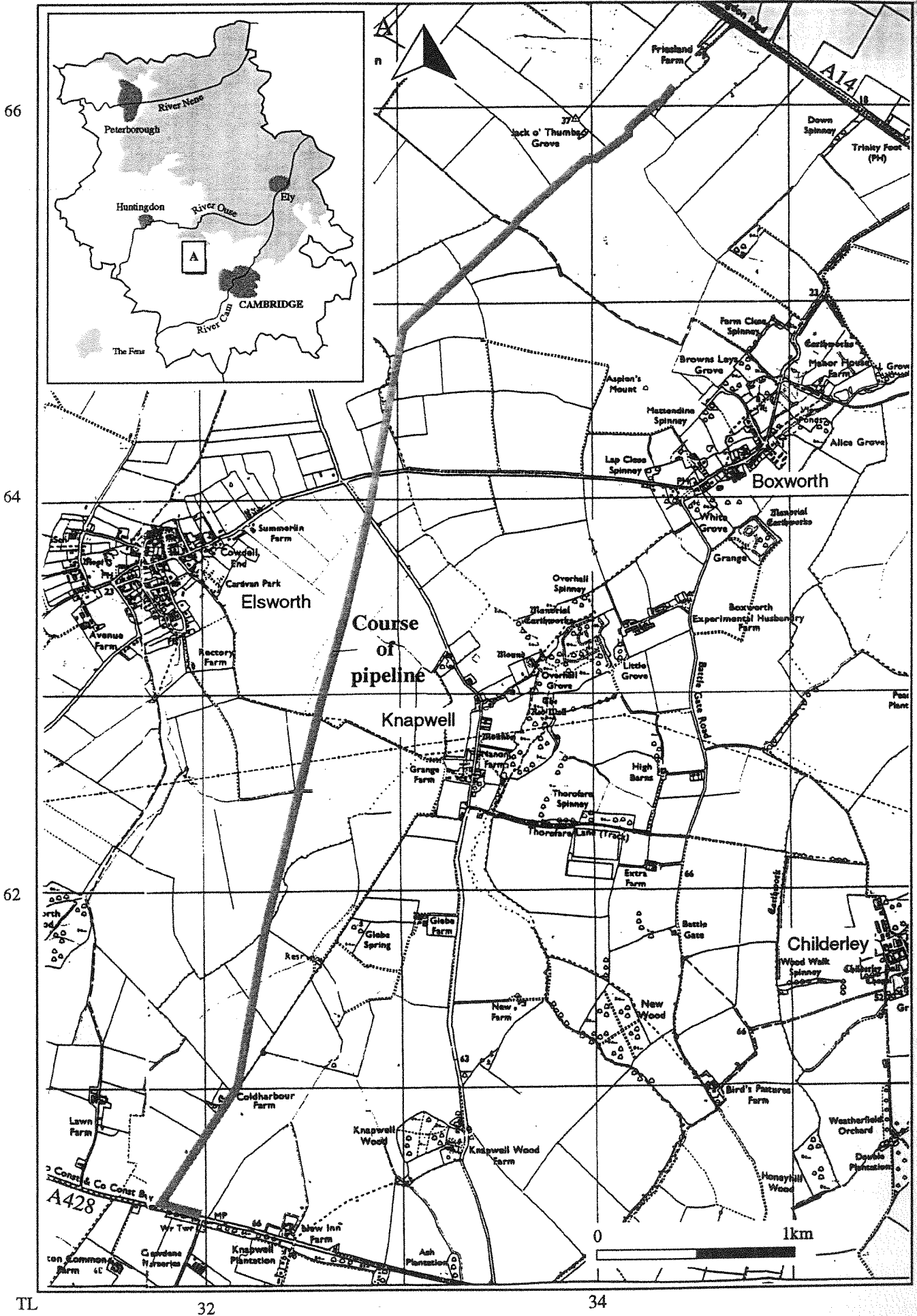


Figure 1 Course of Cambourn gas main

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Results

Approximately 0.20m of topsoil were removed along the course of the easement. This did not expose all the natural clays along the whole routeway and in the main the subsoil was left in place.. The methodology therefore resembled a fieldwalking project and had similar methodological constraints.

Along the whole of the routeway only two sherds of post medieval pottery were recovered even a thorough examination of both the easement and spoil heaps was undertaken. Intensive investigations were undertaken around known or newly discovered finds, areas around the water courses and where the natural was exposed.

Conclusions

Only two sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered along the 7km long pipeline. The scarcity of finds meant that no further investigation was appropriate.

The absence of archaeological features and early finds is not surprising given the few remains known along the routeway. In addition the routeway runs at some distance from the Saxon and medieval settlements known in the area, whilst the majority of prehistoric settlement sites in this area can be found along the river gravels. It is therefore probable that these fields when used during prehistoric times, were utilised for activities which leave few archaeological traces, whilst the cropmarks indicate that during the medieval period they formed part of extensive field systems.

