Peterborough to Whittlesey Reinforcement Main: An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment

Scott Kenney
March 2005

Cambridgeshire County Council
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Peterborough to Whittlesey Reinforcement Main:
An Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment
TL 1913/9588 to TL 2351/9585

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March 2005

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SUMMARY

This study attempts to define the archaeological potential of land along the route of the proposed Peterborough to Whittlesey Reinforcement Main, running approximately from TL 1913/9588 to TL 2351/9585. It also attempts to determine the potential impact of the development proposals upon the archaeological resource and suggests possible mitigation strategies. The study was commissioned by Anglian Water. It is largely based upon existing sources, and the results of recent excavations adjacent to the proposed route.

The proposed route begins just south of the point at which Fletton Parkway crosses the old railway and then passes to the south of Stanground and north of Farcet heading eastwards. It then passes to the south of Horsey Toll and joins the existing main at Narrow Drove, south of King’s Delph reservoir.

The study area lies within a zone of high archaeological potential crossing the Fen Edge, and areas that have been islands within the Fen at various times. The entire Stanground to Whittlesey area is rich in archaeological sites from the prehistoric period onwards.

Prehistoric finds have also been discovered close to the route, and further abroad in the Fen, while the internationally important Bronze Age site of Flag Fen is only 2.5km to the north, and the potential exists to find similar sites. A possible Bronze Age barrow has been identified at the eastern end of the route.

Probably the greatest potential of the development corridor is for the discovery of further Roman remains, of which numerous examples have already been recovered, both as stray finds and during excavations. The pipeline route converges with that of the proposed road associated with the potential future southward expansion of Stanground. The area of these proposals has been subject to archaeological investigations that have revealed Roman enclosures and other features.

In the area around the Scheduled Ancient Monument of Horsey Hill Civil War Fort, any development may reveal 17th century artefacts, both military and civilian, and could potentially reveal the location of earthworks that have been subsequently ploughed out.

Previous aerial photographic and geophysical surveys have been useful in establishing the location of archaeological remains within the study area. Further geophysical work along the route may be helpful in refining the characterisation of these remains.


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## Drawing Conventions

### Sections
- Limit of Excavation
- Cut
- Cut - Conjectured
- Soil Horizon
- Soil Horizon - Conjectured
- Intrusion/Truncation
- Top of Natural
- Top Surface
- Break in Section

### Plans
- Limit of Excavation
- Deposit - Conjectured
- Natural Features
- Intrusion/Truncation
- Sondages/Machine Strip
- Illustrated Section

### Numeric Information
- Cut Number: 118
- Deposit Number: 117
- Ordnance Datum: 18.45m ODN
Peterborough to Whittlesey Reinforcement Main:
An Archaeological Desktop Study
TL 1913/9588 to TL 2351/9585

1 INTRODUCTION

This desktop study was commissioned by Anglian Water in order to define the archaeological potential of land in a corridor 500m either side of the proposed route of the Peterborough to Whittlesey Reinforcement Main. The relevance of other known sites outside this subject area is also considered. Additionally, this study is intended to assess the potential impact of the development.

The proposed route skirts the southern edge of the development proposals for the southward expansion of Stanground and straddles two local authorities, Peterborough City Council and Cambridgeshire County Council. While this report has been compiled in response to briefs from both authorities, the majority of the proposed route lies within Peterborough City Council’s remit.

The proposed route begins at TL 1913/9588, just south of the point at which Fletton Parkway crosses the old railway and then passes to the south of Stanground and north of Farcet heading eastwards. It then passes to the south of Horsey Toll and joins the existing main at Narrow Drove, south of King’s Delph reservoir, finishing at TL 2351/9585 after a total distance of 4.84km.

2 GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

According to the British Geological Survey, at the western end of the proposed scheme, the route is underlain by made ground where Oxford Clay was removed for Fletton brickyards. The route then crosses areas of Alluvium, Glaciolacustrine Deposits and Boulder Clay. Towards the eastern end the route crosses Nordelph Peat, which overlies First Terrace Gravels (BGS 1995, 2004).

The corridor of the proposed route skirts the higher ground of Peterborough to the north and Farcet and Yaxley to the south, continuing through almost flat Fenland. Most of the route is below 3m OD.

At the western end of the route the land has been disturbed by mineral extraction, largely removing Oxford Clay for brickmaking, which occurred on-site. Between Farcet and King’s Delph, the land is almost wholly agricultural, classified by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) as Grade 3. Grades 2 and 3 are considered to be the best agricultural lands.
Figure 1 Location of the study area, with the proposed route shown in red
3 METHODOLOGY

The aim of this desk-based assessment is to provide information concerning the location, extent, survival and significance of the known archaeological remains in the vicinity and along the proposed route, as well as assessing the potential for further archaeological remains to survive. The conclusions of this document will be a prediction at best.

In order to map the potential for archaeology along the proposed route, the investigation concentrated on the accessible archaeological and historical resources held by Peterborough Historic Environment Record (PHER), the Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER) and documentary sources held by the CCC Archaeological Field Unit. Reports on archaeological interventions carried out in and around Stanground were consulted.

Cartographic sources going back to the 18th century were examined, but did not show any significant differences compared to modern maps of the area.

Aerial photographic assessments were previously carried out by Rog Palmer, Air Photo Services, to meet the requirements of earlier design briefs for nearby development proposals (Palmer 1997, 1998). These assessments demonstrated that medieval ridge and furrow cultivation occurred across the western part of the route. Other features identified may be part of an enclosure, possible of Iron Age or Roman date.

Geophysical survey has been undertaken to the north of the proposed route, and this revealed enclosures and other features of possible Iron Age or Roman date (GSB 2002).

The results of previous archaeological interventions have been incorporated into the conclusions below. Fieldwalking and trial trenching were undertaken immediately to the north of the proposed route, revealing Roman finds scatters and ditches probably dating to the same period, or possibly earlier (Taylor & Maull 2003).

4 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORIC BACKGROUND

4.1 Past Landscape and Environmental Change (Hall 1987, Hall & Coles 1994)

The changing nature of the Fen over the past 7000 years has influenced the placement of settlement and restricted the areas available for agriculture. Much of the occupation and activity sites found are around the Fen Edge, and are situated on marginal land, within easy reach of fen resources.
Prior to the Mesolithic, the entire fen basin was dry, but by the early Neolithic, the first peat fen had formed, and the marine deposits of the Barroway Drove Beds encroached upon this peat during the late Neolithic. By the early Bronze Age, this marine flooding had ceased and peat again formed on the surface. This was followed by further marine incursions of the Upper Barroway Drove Beds and yet another peat formation. The probable Neolithic course of the Nene crosses to the northeast of the study area.

During the Iron Age, the Terrington Beds were deposited, but these only occupy the north-eastern part of Cambridgeshire, and most of the fen was under peat. In the Roman period, the water table fell and it can clearly be seen from the distribution of finds that the local inhabitants were using land within the fen itself for industrial and agricultural purposes. The Iron Age peat would have suffered wastage and hence the drainage pattern has disappeared.

In the Saxon period the drainage system seems to have been in chaos and the record is confused, but generally, the water table was rising, and by medieval times, the fen islands had shrunken slightly, and the fen itself would have been much wetter.

The shape of the Fen Edge did not change dramatically in this area until the medieval period, but the course of the Nene has altered quite profoundly, and the presence of its Neolithic palaeochannel to the northeast of the study area may have implications for any programme of archaeological investigations.

4.2 Palaeolithic and Mesolithic (500000-4500 BC)

Little material and few sites have been found in the western Fenland bordering Peterborough that date from the early prehistoric periods. A Palaeolithic handaxe found ‘at Fletton’ is in Peterborough Museum (HER 01632), and animal bone was found in a pit of the same date near the old watercourse in the Fletton Brick Co’s No 1 Yard (HER 01633a).

No definitively Mesolithic finds have been recovered from the study area.

4.3 Neolithic and Bronze Age (4500-800 BC)

Two dugout canoes found in 1828 at Horsey Bridge and possibly left in situ probably date from the Neolithic or Bronze Age (HER 02955). A scatter of flint that dates to the Neolithic and Bronze Age was identified during fieldwalking (HER 51320).
The Bronze Age is well represented in this area. Although not within the pipeline corridor, the Bronze Age site at Flag Fen is one of the most important in the eastern counties, and is of international significance. Locally, within the Fenland, it is without peer, and is extensively discussed elsewhere (see bibliography). The site consists of the waterlogged remains of a Bronze Age village and associated ritual activities. It lies about 2.5km almost due north of Horsey Hill.

Within the corridor, several Bronze Age sites and find spots have been recorded. Ring ditches were found at the junction of Narrow Drove and King's Delph Drove (PHER 08156) and just south of Milby Farm (PHER 06804). Burials were recorded from gravel pits near the present Fletton Lake (PHER 01633). A socketed axe came from south of Farcet (PHER 02936), and a leaf shaped Late Bronze Age sword from just NW of the depot at Horsey Toll Farm (PHER 02937). A Bronze Age palstave axe was found close to Horsey Hill fort (PHER 02950).

4.4 Iron Age and Roman (800BC-410AD)

An Iron Age site was found by Major AN Leeds in 1905 in the London Brick Company's Yard No 1 at Fletton, while further remains were revealed nearby in 1908 (PHER 01348). Apart from this, the only other site of this period is represented by sherds of pottery found west of Bunting's Farm (PHER 01719). The undated cropmarks close to the middle of the route may also date to the iron age or Roman periods (PHER 50653, 51236).

Roman finds are relatively numerous from the study area. Sites and find spots of varying character and quality have been discovered from the entire length of the proposed route, the majority of them in the eastern half. Of particular interest are the kilns, inhumation, pottery, tile and coins found west and northwest of Bunting's farm (CHER 00994, 00995, 00999, 07734, 07735), and building material found just to the north of the proposed route (PHER 51232).

Also apparently found very close to the route was an inhumation (PHER 04018), the location of which may be an isolated burial or might form part of a larger cemetery. The Fen Causeway Roman road/waterway, an extremely important crossing between fen islands, lies to the northeast of the subject area, and approaches to within 700m of the proposed route.

4.4 Saxon and medieval (410-1485AD)

After the Roman finds noted above, there is a dearth of archaeological remains from the later Saxon and medieval periods. A Saxon settlement was uncovered in 1910 (PHER 01381). A medieval ring was found to the north of the route at Field's End Bridge Pit (PHER 3154b).
Figure 3 Archaeological investigations around the study area
The two significant drainage improvement schemes along the route both date from these periods. The King's Dike is a possibly late Saxon canalisation of the ancient course of the Nene, hence its somewhat weaving appearance. In contrast, Morton's Leam, commissioned by Bishop Morton and constructed from 1478-90, is a straight cut, one of the earliest of its type.

The name Stanground is recorded in Domesday as Stangrun (Reaney 1943, after Robertson 1939).

4.5 Post-medieval and Modern (1485-1950)

Aerial photographs analysed for earlier studies and covering the area of the proposed pipeline revealed the presence of ridge and furrow around the built-up area of Stanground, but nowhere else in the study area.

A wind pump is located north of the route (PHER 02908), but the most significant post-medieval site is that of Horsey Hill Civil War Fort (SM 27189). The Fort was constructed to control a bridge across the Nene, and was first referred to in 1644. A contemporary plan exists and is in the British Library. Present day survival of the Fort is good, with only the northwest rampart being slightly truncated by the later road. Within the ramparts, there is also a modern house, the access road to which has cut through two of the banks.

A World War II Airfield was also revealed during the analysis of aerial photographs, located to the north of Horsey Toll (PHER 50570, 50571, 50572, 50573, 50574, 50575).

5 ARCHAEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL

In the areas of clay extraction at the western end of the study corridor, any archaeology will have been completely destroyed, although it may survive in the narrow strips between pits, and between the edges of the pits and field boundaries.

The remainder of the route passes through land that is largely arable, and hence disturbance will have been restricted to the depth of ploughing in most areas. This has obvious ramifications for the survival of sites masked by alluvium and the Nordelph Peat, and as has been demonstrated in the Fengate area, preservation of waterlogged deposits can be excellent.

Finds recovered from the Stanground area include material from all archaeological periods. Recent work in the area has indicated that Roman remains in particular lie very close to the proposed route.
6 IMPACT OF PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

Any intrusion below the level of the ploughsoil has the potential to destroy archaeological deposits in all areas except where quarrying has taken place. This will include the entire pipeline easement.

Although intrusive work just to the north has demonstrated reasonable cover above the archaeology, gravel islands of higher ground where the overburden is thinner cannot be discounted.

Due to the soft nature of the peat and alluvium, heavy plant will have a profound impact upon the underlying archaeology, and this will increase in wet conditions.

7 CONCLUSIONS

Palaeolithic and Mesolithic

Further stray finds from these periods cannot be discounted, although they are unlikely to be found in situ.

Neolithic and Bronze Age

The route will approach the Neolithic palaeochannel of the Nene, and cross elements of the drainage pattern of the period, therefore the potential for finding waterlogged remains (both archaeological and palaeoenvironmental) is great. The opportunity for research into past environmental conditions should not be ignored. Neolithic flint scatters 200m to the north of the route could indicate that occupation sites exist along the nearby Fen Edge.

The local Fen Edge has been demonstrated through numerous investigations to be an area of outstanding importance in the Bronze Age. The sites at Fengeate and Flag Fen in particular have proven the survival of large, complex sites beneath the alluvium and peat cover. Finds made near to the route indicate a strong likelihood of finding further remains of this period.

Because the route crosses a large swathe of Fen Edge, which has been an important area for settlement from Neolithic and Bronze Age times onwards, as well as potentially identifying further discrete sites in addition to those already known, any groundworks are likely to reveal evidence of field systems between sites. Evidence may be preserved that contains important information about environmental and landscape change, and landuse from these periods. Also of particular interest is the probable barrow located 50m south of the proposed route (PHER 08156).
Iron Age and Roman

Although extensive Iron Age remains have not previously been found close to the proposed route, there are undated cropmark sites that may extend into the subject area.

The quantity and variety of Roman remains from the study area make it highly likely that further finds from the period will be located during groundworks. The location of several kilns and much other cultural material close to Bunting’s Farm is of particular interest.

Saxon and medieval

The Saxon and medieval periods are not well-represented in the record for this area, but stray finds have been found and further examples and/or the originating deposits, might be expected to be uncovered near previous findspots.

Post-medieval and modern

Stray finds of these periods may be encountered at any point along the proposed route. Elements of relict field systems might be expected in many parts of the subject area.

Summary

The archaeological potential of the development area can be summarised thus:

- Palaeolithic/Mesolithic: low/unknown
- Neolithic/Bronze Age: moderate/known
- Iron Age/Romano-British: high/known
- Anglo-Saxon: low/known
- medieval: high/known
- post-medieval/modern: moderate/known

This is based upon the likelihood versus the available data about the known archaeological resource. In this area, the available data gives a good idea of what may be found in proximity to the proposed route.

The study has demonstrated that the subject site lies within a rich archaeological landscape, surrounded by sites of all periods. Whilst largely Roman and medieval remains or finds are known from the vicinity of the proposed route itself, its overall archaeological potential may be considered moderate, with particular emphasis placed upon the prehistoric periods.
If archaeology is encountered along the route, conditions for preservation are likely to range from good to very good, particularly at depth. The relative proximity of the site to the river may mean that deposits encountered at depth may be waterlogged. These conditions are ideal for the preservation of organic remains such as wood and leather, as well as foodstuffs and pollen, both of which can give an idea of the local environment and economy.

**Suggestions for further work**

The areas of clay and gravel extraction around the brickworks would probably not benefit from further archaeological work, due to the almost total removal of any deposits that might potentially have contained archaeology.

Geophysical survey has demonstrated that it can be helpful in locating areas of archaeology as shown by the evaluation just to the north of the proposed route. Further detailed survey along the proposed route may aid in clarifying the nature and extent of these remains.

Aerial photographic assessment of the area has already been undertaken, and has shown little other than medieval ridge and furrow around Stanground. Further work is not warranted.

Fieldwalking may reveal the location of buried sites if ploughing has begun to truncate them, incorporating finds into the topsoil. This technique would be most appropriate for areas under arable cultivation, but its effectiveness will be reduced in areas where there has been alluviation. Additionally, negative results from fieldwalking cannot be taken as indicative of archaeologically blank areas. One of the major drawbacks of such a program is that all areas of the proposed route are unlikely to be available at the same time and under identical conditions, which can lead to biases in collection. Fieldwalking is often most useful when an area can be assessed over several years.

A programme of linear trenching would be helpful to focus on areas that have demonstrated archaeological potential. Within these defined areas, a 5% sample is considered normal to form a reasonable hypothesis as to the nature of the site.

There is the likelihood of encountering additional Roman kiln sites and their associated features, which would require sample excavation.

The route may cross ancient watercourses, where there may be an opportunity to examine any waterlogged deposits that survive and recover evidence of environmental change, as well as any preserved artefactual material, including wooden vessels and tools.

In any surviving narrow strips, there could be material related to previous findspots close to the route, and trial trenches would help to clarify the extent of these sites.
Ultimately, the relevant local authority advising on planning conditions, eg Peterborough City Council Archaeology Section and Cambridgeshire Archaeology Planning and Countryside Advice, will determine all recommendations for further work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author would like to thank Anglian Water for commissioning this study, in particular Jon Holt. Thanks are also due to Carlos Silva for the illustrations, and to Stephen Macaulay for managing the project and editing the report. Ben Robinson, Senior Archaeologist at PCCAS provided guidance and helpful suggestions. Northamptonshire Archaeology kindly consented to the use of graphics taken from their evaluation report.

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Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record (CHER)

Peterborough Historic Environment Record (PHER)


Reaney, PH , 1943. The Place-Names of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, English Place-Name Society No 19, Cambridge

Cartographic Sources

Stanground and Farcet Inclosure award map, 1805

Ordnance Survey digital maps, 2005


British Geological Survey digital data, 2004
### Appendix 1 HER entries

**Peterborough City Council Historic Environment Record entries**

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**Cambridgeshire Historic Environment Record entries**

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