

Brize Norton Sewage Treatment Works Transfer Pipeline,  
Oxfordshire  
1996

An archaeological watching brief  
on behalf of Thames Water Utilities

Brize Norton Sewage Treatment Works Transfer Pipeline, 1996  
Archaeological Watching Brief

Report 96/17

by Jo Pine

## INTRODUCTION

This report details the results of an archaeological watching brief on the easement of a transfer pipeline that runs for 5.5 km, from Brize Norton treatment works to Witney sewage treatment works, west Oxfordshire (centred SP 325 073)(Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Juliet Roper, senior Conservation and Heritage scientist on behalf of Thames Water Utilities, after consultation with Oxfordshire County Council Archaeology Services who prepared an archaeological brief for the scheme. Work was undertaken under statutory powers and the terms of the 1989 Water Act Code of Practice on Conservation, Access and Recreation. The fieldwork was conducted during May 1996. The find and site archive will be deposited with Oxfordshire County Museum Service.

The routes of pipelines are a major source of ground disturbance in the landscape and can lead to archaeological deposits been damaged and/or destroyed by machine activity along the easement as well as in the actual pipe trench itself.

The purpose of this watching brief, therefore, was primarily to examine the easement in advance of pipe laying so that any archaeological deposits identified could be excavated and recorded before their damage or destruction.

### Geology and Topography

The pipeline runs north east from Brize Norton sewage treatment works for approximately 5.5 km, turning south east close to the Witney treatment works. The brief stated that the majority of this route was located on the course of a dismantled railway line but in fact it ran alongside the route on the north side over green field areas. It

only followed the old railway for 0.5 km. at the north eastern end. The pipeline follows an undulating topography rising gently from Brize Norton at approximately 75 m. AOD, dipping slightly before rising to 87 m. AOD at Witney sewage works. The solid geology along the route is Oxford Clay.

### **Archaeological Background**

The pipeline route is in an area where little is known of the archaeological landscape. Sites in close proximity are a round barrow, probably of Bronze Age date 0.5 km. south of the route (SP 3190 0645) and 'The Black Moat' (SP 3200 0800), a Medieval moated site, possibly a manor or hunting lodge.

The pipeline easement itself does not dissect any known archaeological features although, in addition to the above, it is close to the Windrush valley, which appears to have been extensively utilised in both the Iron age and Roman periods. Further documentary evidence indicates there was activity in the Brize Norton area in Saxon and Early Medieval periods. The lack of known archaeological sites along the route may be the product of a lack of field survey and the restrictions on development in rural settings.

### **METHOD**

The field work comprised of two components:

- a) monitoring of topsoil stripping along the easement.
- b) excavation of the subsequent features identified.

The machine stripping commenced from the Brize Norton treatment works in a north eastern direction towards Witney, turning south east close to the Witney sewage works. The easement was stripped of top- and sub- soil in a wide corridor of between 8-10 m. The easement was broken only by road crossings and when the route followed the old railway line.

This process was carried out under archaeological supervision on a continuous basis,

the easement and spoilheaps being systematically searched directly following stripping. Due to weather conditions and its effect on the local geology parts of the easement became heavily churned up and in some small areas the topsoil was not completely stripped.

## RESULTS

The easement has been broken up in to field numbers in order to make discussion of observations a simpler task. (Fig. 2).

**FIELDS 1-3** Modern land drains were identified and in field 2 Post-Medieval disturbance was indicated by the presence of concrete and glass.

**FIELD 4** Three linear features running north west -south east were observed. Excavation showed them possibly to be the badly truncated remains of Medieval furrows. The fills of these only contained a small quantity of undiagnostic tile fragments.

**FIELDS 5-8** The only features identified here were ploughmarks and a couple of Post-Medieval spreads of brick and tile.

**FIELDS 9-15** Within fields 9,11,13,14 Post-Medieval spreads (brick, tile, pottery, etc. and ditches were observed in addition to ploughmarks.

**FIELDS 16-18** The south west half of the easement in field 16 contained Post-Medieval dumps of brick, tile and concrete and the topsoil was not completely removed. For the remaining parts of fields 16, 17 and 18, the easement ran along part of the disused railway line, and construction of the latter will have destroyed any archaeological features if they had once existed.

**FIELD 19** A series of linear features running approximately north east-south west were identified, spaced at intervals of 8-10 m., for over 400 m. along the easement. Subsequent excavation revealed these as possible truncated remains of plough furrows. No dating evidence was recovered as the only find was a fragment of daub. However, their form and spacing suggest that they are likely to be of Medieval date.

**FIELDS 20-22** Many thin ploughmarks were observed in these fields. Further, field 21 contained a series of shallow gullies of Post-Medieval origin which were possibly for drainage.

### **Finds**

The majority of the finds retrieved from excavated features were undiagnostic fragments of tile and brick. The only find of note was a sherd of Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery from field 4, recovered as a surface find. A number of sherds of pottery were recovered from the spoilheaps and easement surface (not retained) were of Post-Medieval or modern date.

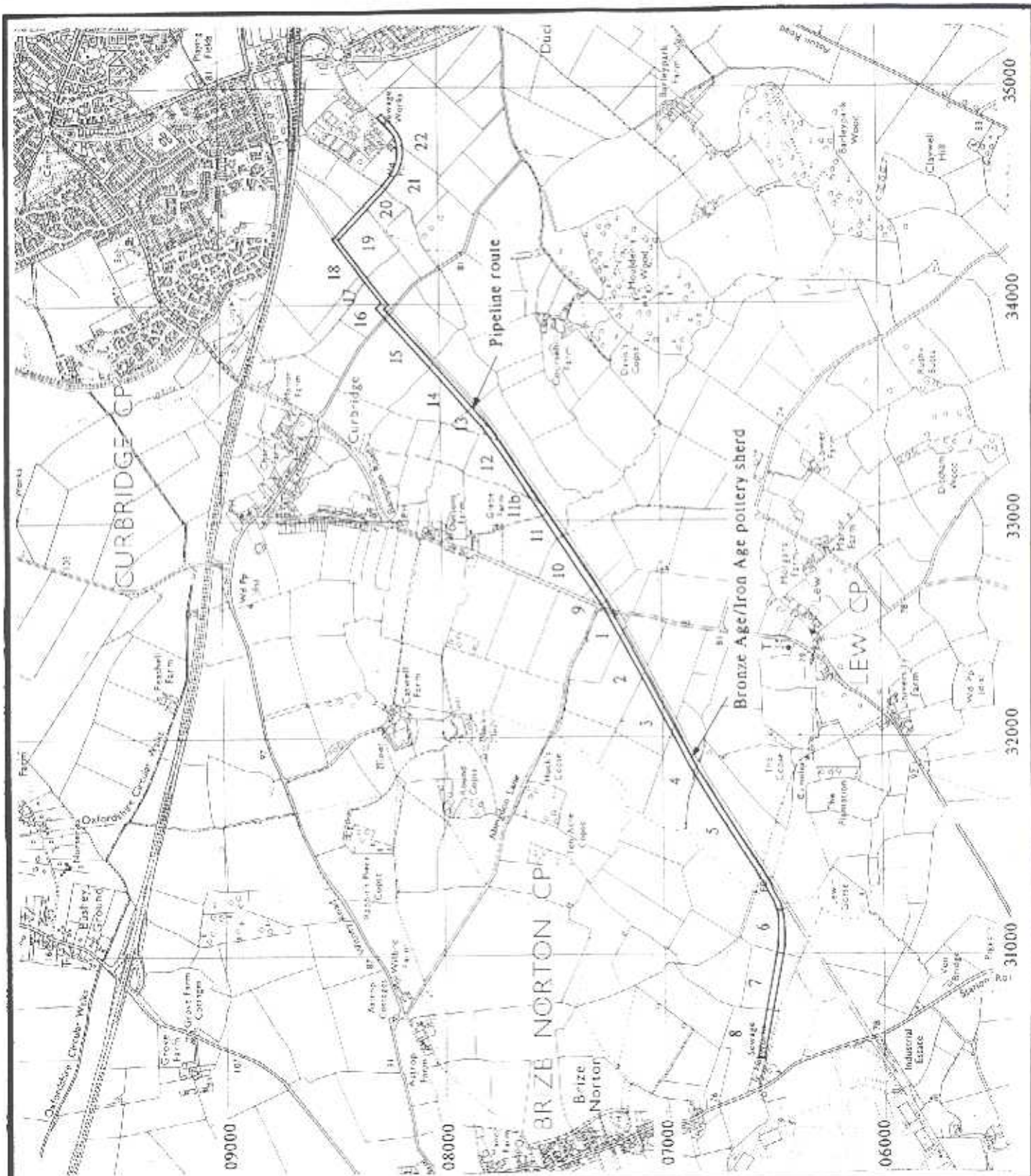
### **CONCLUSION**

No significant archaeological deposits were identified in the easement during the course of the watching brief. A number of features were observed but were all thought to be the result of Medieval/Post Medieval agricultural activity. Examination of the spoilheaps took place but this produced no finds earlier in date than the Post-Medieval period.

# Oxfordshire



Figure 1. Location of site within Oxfordshire.



## Brize Norton to Witney Pipeline, Oxfordshire, 1996

Figure 2. Location of pipeline and field numbers.  
Based on the OS. map SP20/30

Scale 1:25 000

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