Basingstoke Underground Electricity Cable, Hampshire

An Archaeological Watching Brief
for Scottish and Southern Energy plc

by Helen Moore
Thames Valley Archaeological Services
Ltd

Site Code CBR01/91

March 2002
Summary

Site name: Underground Electricity Cable Pipeline, Basingstoke

Grid reference: SU6620 5330 to SU6640 5460

Site activity: Watching Brief

Date and duration of project: 24th September- 23rd November 2001

Project manager: Helen Moore

Site supervisor: Helen Moore

Site code: CBR01/91

Length of Pipeline: 4.24km

Summary of results: A wide bank of gravel with two probable ditches lying on either side was observed in the cable trench in a field adjacent to the A33 at Chineham. This is likely to be a section of the Roman road running between Silchester and Chichester, as it lies exactly on the alignment of the Roman road according to the OS map.

Monuments identified: Roman Road

Location and reference of archive: The archive is presently held by Thames Valley Archaeological Services, 47-49 De Beauvoir Road, Reading, Berkshire, RG1 5NR and will be deposited with Hampshire Museum Service in due course.

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                          Steve Preston 25.03.02
Introduction

This report documents the results of an archaeological watching brief carried out to the north east of Basingstoke near Chineham and Little Basing, (SU6640 5460) (Fig. 1). The work was commissioned by Ms Jenny Emmett of Wardell Armstrong Consulting Group, 22 Windsor Place, Cardiff, CF10 3BY on behalf of Scottish and Southern Energy plc.

Wardell Armstrong Consulting Group were instructed by Mr John Bennett, Major Projects Group, Scottish and Southern Energy plc to arrange for an archaeological watching brief to be carried out on the excavation of an underground electricity cable pipeline near Basingstoke. In advance of this work, Wardell Armstrong had undertaken a baseline environmental study of the proposed route to identify potential ecological and archaeological constraints, and also consulted Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record for evidence of sites of all periods along and up to approximately 1km either side of the pipeline. Two areas were identified as archaeologically sensitive, requiring archaeological monitoring. The projected line of a Roman road was located in an area of grassland close to the A33, and the proposed route of the cable would cross it (Fig. 2). A large field near Little Basing adjacent to Barton’s Lane was also to be monitored for archaeological features (Fig. 3). An earlier watching brief carried out in 1997 in this field had highlighted no features of archaeological significance.

The excavation trench for a 11kV cable was required to run for approximately 4.24km from Basingstoke sub-station to the sewage works at Whitmarsh Lane run by Hampshire Waste Services Ltd. The cable was to be laid in a narrow trench and the route would largely run under roads, grass verges, and along the railway and embankment.

Given the potential for archaeological finds, particularly in the area of the projected Roman road, a watching brief was proposed. The field investigation was carried out to a specification approved by Jenny Emmett, Assistant Archaeologist for Wardell Armstrong Consulting Group. The fieldwork was undertaken by Helen Moore and Erlend Hindmarch, on the 24th September, the 3rd, 16th, 25th and 26th of October and the 23rd November, 2001, and the site code is CBR01/91. The archive is presently held at Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Reading and will be deposited at Winchester Museum Service in due course.
**Location, topography and geology**

The areas to be archaeologically monitored were two fields of grassland on the north-eastern edge of Basingstoke. The field containing the projected line of the Roman road lies to the south of Chineham village adjacent to the A33. The other, larger field, lies near Little Basing, adjacent to Bartons Lane. The River Loddon flows to the south of both of these areas and Old Basing village lies to the south-east (Fig. 1).

The underlying geology comprises a series of coloured clays, loams and sands with pebbles that are part of the Reading Beds tertiary deposits in the northerly section of the route, and these overlie upper Chalk strata dating to the Cretaceous period. Flints occur throughout this deposit which is described as a hard greyish-yellow white chalk (BGS 1981).

The geology actually observed in the field adjacent to the A33 was a mottled mid brown sandy clay with gravel patches and off-white chalk with ironstone inclusions. Roots and animal activity disturbed the natural subsoil. The field adjacent to Bartons Lane had more defined chalk deposits with a shallow depth of topsoil lying immediately above the chalk. The chalk was white below the surface and contained flint nodules. Patches of orange sandy gravel were also observed. The surface of the chalk was permeated with solution holes and disturbed by animal burrows. The field with the projected Roman road lies at 75m above Ordnance Datum, and the field adjacent to Bartons Lane at 78m AOD. Both fields were fairly flat and low lying.

**Archaeological background**

Consulting the Hampshire Sites and Monuments record for known archaeological sites along the length of the pipeline and up to 1km either side of it, produced evidence for extensive prehistoric activity in the area. Lithic scatters dating to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods have been recorded and burials dating to the Bronze Age and Iron Age have been found. A Bronze Age Bell barrow was excavated prior to the construction of the Buckskin housing estate, and Bronze Age burials have been found at Daneshill and Popham. Several Iron Age settlement sites were also noted at Rucstalls, Oakridge and Viables.

Four Roman settlement sites have been excavated at Old Basing and Cowdery’s Down, and Roman pottery scatters were also noted from the area.

The major archaeological feature likely to be encountered during excavation of the pipeline is the Roman road that runs between the Roman town of Silchester (*Calleva Atrebatum*) and Chichester (*Noviomagus Regnensium*). Margary’s standard work (1955) on this subject, numbered this road 155, using his system of road numbering where single figures were for important roads, double figures for secondary roads and three figures
for minor roads. On publication of his first volume of *Roman Roads in Britain* in 1955, which covered south of the Foss Way to the Bristol Channel, this road had only recently been discovered. Air photographs by the Archaeological Division of the Ordnance Survey showed a rectangular posting-station next to a road at Iping Marsh near Milland in Sussex. Only roads of some importance were provided with posting stations, and subsequently substantial remains of the road southwards towards Chichester were discovered. The route northwards from Milland towards Silchester has since been pieced together. This road was of great strategic importance and may have been constructed within a decade of the Roman conquest in AD 43 (Millett 1990). The posting station at Iping has not been excavated but surface Roman pottery has been found within its confines. It is a rectangular earthwork with rounded corners approximately 110m by 100m in size, lying adjacent to the Roman road. The earthwork has turf banks and is comparable in size to Alfoldean and Hardham posting-stations on Stane Street, the Roman road from London to Chichester. Both of these sites have been excavated and dated to the first century AD, although the dating may need to be reassessed. These sites may suggest a comparably early date for the construction of the Chichester to Silchester road.

Another site that indicates the importance of this roadway is that of Neatham, a Roman small town partly excavated from 1969 to 1979 in advance of the construction of the A31 Alton Bypass (Millett and Graham 1986). This site is situated at a crossroads of the Chichester to Silchester road and the road from Winchester (*Venta Belgarum*) towards London. It is likely to be the settlement known as *Vindomi* in the Antonine Itinerary, a book of Roman roads attributed to Caracalla (M. Aurelius Antoninus) dated to around AD 210. This book contained lists of towns and the distance between them in Roman miles. *Vindomi* has not been definitely identified but the co-ordinates seem to indicate that Neatham may well be it. The settlement may have been situated here because of its proximity to the four major centres of Winchester, Silchester, Chichester and London, where there would have been a demand for goods and services and with much passing trade. This crossroads formed a focal point for the area and a settlement developed from approximately AD70/90, suggested by the pottery and coins, to the end of the Roman occupation and probably beyond. The Silchester to Chichester road was excavated as part of the excavation of the town, and evidence for the road consisted of a causeway of natural gravel with some larger flints rammed into the surface with a ditch to one side of it. The fill suggested deliberate backfilling probably completed by the beginning of the second century. It was V-shaped in profile and about 1.00m deep. The road had been resurfaced in various areas with the natural gravel.

The route of the road (Fig. 6) leaves the south gate of Silchester and continues on a dead straight course in a south-easterly direction until it reaches Greatham. It then turns further to the east, heading over Chapel Common.
and goes through the village of Milland, where it follows a minor road. To the south of Milland the road appears as an *agger* (bank or causeway) at Waldergrove farm and then heads roughly southwards until it enters Chichester at the north gate of the Roman town.

Saxon sites from the area of the pipeline include Basingstoke itself, and two other Saxon settlements.

A Norman ringwork and bailey exists at Old Basing, and constructed inside the ringwork is a later fortified Tudor House, known as Basing House. This was besieged during the civil war. Royalist civil war earthworks are also found at Old Basing. There is a Medieval Tithe Barn in Old Basing, and a post-Medieval watermill. Oliver’s Battery, a Norman motte and bailey castle lies to the east of the proposed route.

**Objectives and methodology**

The purpose of the evaluation was to determine the presence/absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological deposits within the area of the pipeline, in particular the section of Roman road in a field adjacent to the A33. The cable trench was excavated using a JCB-type machine with a toothless bucket approximately 0.60m wide to a depth of 0.80m, and this remained consistent along the entire route of the pipeline which was 4.24km in length.

The areas to be archaeologically monitored were a field to the east of the A33 at Chineham, and a larger field near Little Basing adjacent to Bartons Lane. Both of these areas were excavated in the presence of an archaeologist. Other areas of the pipeline were also checked for the presence/absence of archaeological features. Spoil heaps were monitored for finds. Archaeological deposits were hand-cleaned, and sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10, and plans at 1:20.

A list of the trenches giving lengths, breadths, depths and a description of sections and geology is given in Appendix 1.

**Results**

During archaeological monitoring of the cable trench excavated across the field adjacent to the A33, a bank of orange gravel (51) was observed in the area that according to the OS map was the projected position of the Roman road. The gravel viewed in section was 0.16m deep and about 6m wide. It was banked up higher at the south-western side and gradually sloped towards the north-east (Fig. 5). The gravel was very compacted with larger flints at the surface and smaller flints banked up underneath. The surface of the gravel was 74.29m AOD at its highest point, and 74.16m AOD at its lowest point. The rest of the cable trench also had gravel patches, but
none were as high or as wide. This, in all likelihood was the causeway or *agger* of the Roman road, constructed using the natural gravels as a compact surface. No finds were recovered from the gravel. On either side of the *agger* were probable ditch cuts (01) and (02) with mid brown silty clay fills with frequent gravel inclusions (Fig. 4). No finds were observed from these ditches. Both ditches were judged to be approximately 1.20m wide but were unexcavated because of the narrow width of the trench. Lying immediately above the *agger* and the ditches was approximately 0.15m of mid brown silty clay subsoil and then 0.20m depth of dark brown clayey silt topsoil. No finds were recovered from the spoil heaps.

No other archaeological features were observed along the length of the trench through this field.

The field adjacent to Bartons Lane in Little Basing was monitored during machining, but no archaeological features were observed. The chalk subsoil contained a great many solution hollows and animal burrows, but on investigation any archaeological possibility was ruled out.

**Finds**

No finds were observed or retained from either of the two archaeologically monitored areas.

**Conclusion**

The large bank of gravel observed in the cable trench in the field adjacent to the A33 lies in almost the exact location of the projected Roman road running from Silchester to Chichester. No other gravelly areas in the rest of the trench were large or well defined enough to be the road. Roman roads as a rule are generally constructed using local materials, with the *agger* usually in the form of a bank of earth, and the surface constructed of finer materials such as gravels. The gravel surface in the trench was compacted and ditches was observed on either side of it. Widths of Roman roads vary but are usually around 7.5m, and the gravel in this trench was 6–7m wide. All these points are fairly conclusive evidence for its being the Roman road. No obvious linear raised areas in the field were seen, but it was fairly rough marshy ground.

The line of the road has been projected on to the OS map from aerial photographs, but this watching brief has produced conclusive evidence for the Roman road to pass through this field, and added to our knowledge of its form and state of preservation. This road was of great strategic importance from a communication and supply point of view. The existence of roadside stations (*mutationes*) and inns (*mansiones*) along its length indicate its importance for the imperial post (*cursus publicus*), which would have required services at regular intervals along principal roads. Settlements would have then developed in these areas due to the passing trade (Millett, 1990).
References
Bagshaw, R.W, 1990, Roman Roads, Shire Publications Ltd
Wardell Armstrong Consulting Group, 2001, Specification for an Archaeological Watching Brief on the Underground Electricity Cable Between Basingstoke Sub-station and Hampshire Waste Services Ltd. Sewage Works
APPENDIX 1: Trench details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Trench No.</th>
<th>Length (m)</th>
<th>Breadth (m)</th>
<th>Depth (m)</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.24km</td>
<td>0.60m</td>
<td>0.80m</td>
<td></td>
<td>A stretch of probable Roman road was observed in the cable trench excavated in the field adjacent to the A33 at Chineham. It consisted of a bank of orange gravel approximately 6m wide and 0.16m deep with ditches on either side of it which were unexcavated. No finds were observed and no other archaeological features were seen along the length of the pipeline.</td>
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Underground electricity cable, Basingstoke Road, Chineham, Basingstoke, Hampshire, 2002

Figure 1. Location of site within Chineham and Hampshire.

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Figure 2. Map showing location of the Silchester to Chichester Roman Road and electricity cable pipeline CBR01/91
Figure 3. Map showing the electricity cable pipeline and the area archaeologically monitored
Basingstoke Underground Electricity Cable Pipeline Watching Brief, 2001

Figure 4. Plan showing the Roman Road within the cable trench
Figure 3. West heading trench section showing the Stilbester to Chichester Roman Road
Basingstoke Underground Electricity Cable Pipeline
Watching Brief, 2001

Key
- Roman Road from Silchester to Chichester
- Roman Roads of Certain Course
- Roman Roads of Uncertain Course

Figure 6. Map showing the Roman Roads of Hampshire (not to scale). Taken from www.romanroads-in-britain.org.uk  CBR01/91