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**The Strensham to Mythe Pipeline, 1991: Observations in
Gloucestershire**

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range of the type (Green 1980). The final use of the arrowhead may have been as a ritual or votive object, in view of the lack now of all projecting parts.

The Flandrian sediments are being eroded today along much of the Severn Estuary coast; evidence of Neolithic to earlier Bronze-Age activity may consequently be found at other sites.

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THE STRENSHAM TO MYTHE PIPELINE, 1991: OBSERVATIONS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Introduction

In 1991 the Archaeology Service of Gloucestershire County Council undertook observation and recording during the construction of a c. 7-km long water pipeline running from Strensham Water Works (O.S. Nat. Grid SO 91603970) in south Worcestershire to Mythe Water Works (SO 89003335) just north of Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire. The construction of the pipeline was undertaken by Severn Trent Water Ltd., which commissioned the programme of archaeological work.

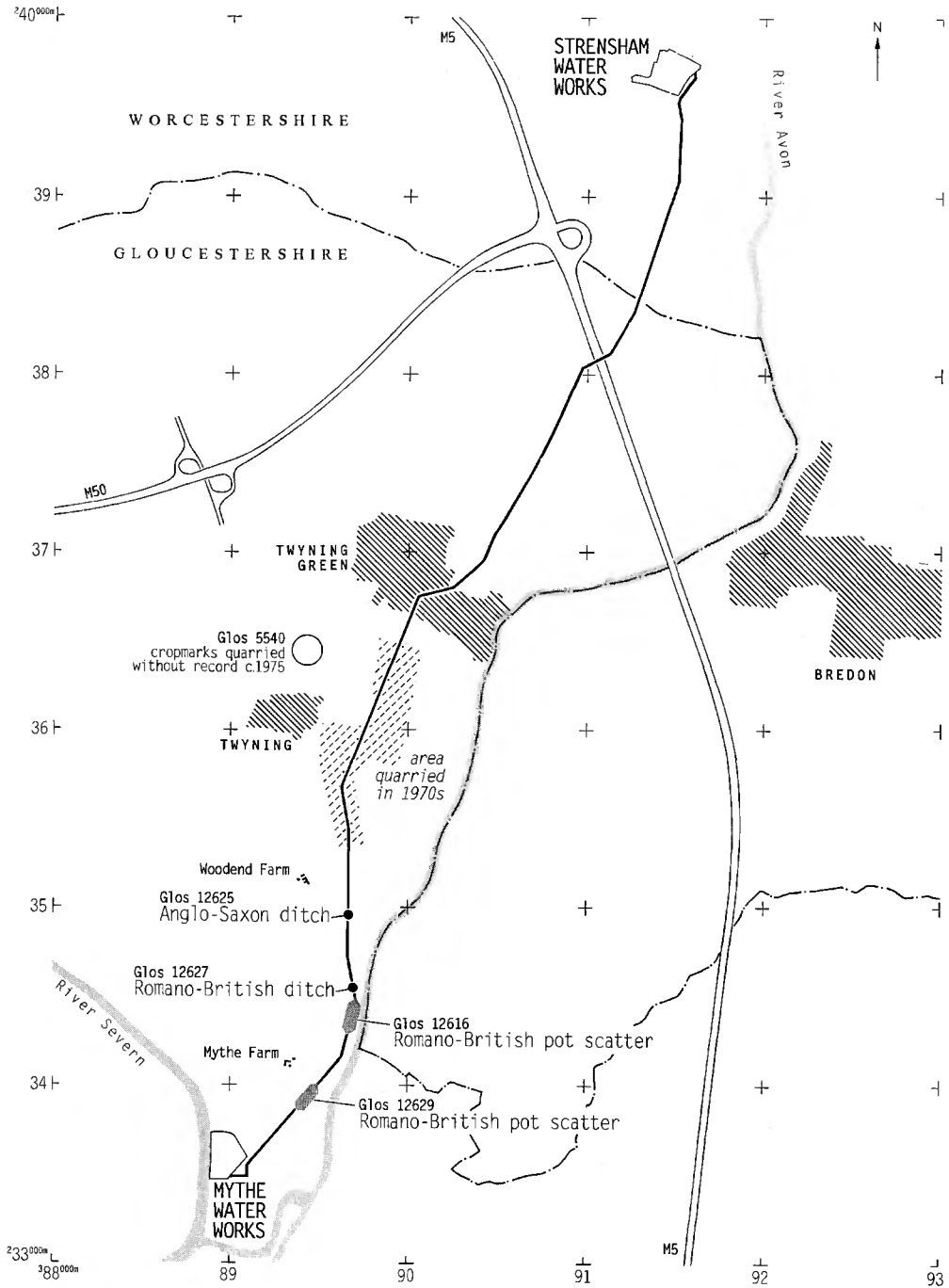


Fig. 1 Map showing the route of the Strensham to Mythe pipeline and sites and areas of archaeological interest along its Gloucestershire section.

This note summarizes the results of the archaeological work carried out in Gloucestershire. The results of the observations along the *c.* 1.3 km of the pipeline in Worcestershire, which revealed two areas of Romano-British occupation, will be described elsewhere (Parry forthcoming). The pipeline formed part of a larger scheme linking Mythe with Trimpley in north Worcestershire: the results of archaeological observations in various stages of the scheme in Worcestershire have been published already (Dinn and Hemingway 1992; Jackson *et al.* 1996).

The route of the pipeline in Gloucestershire (Fig. 1)

From Mythe Water Works the pipeline ran north-eastwards for *c.* 1 km across the flood plain on the western bank of the river Avon before it turned northwards onto rising ground. There it skirted Woodend Farm and Twyning and ran through the centre of Twyning Green, from where the pipeline ran north-eastwards on an alignment parallel with, and a few metres east of, Downfield Lane. It continued on the same alignment *c.* 400 m beyond the Bristol-Birmingham motorway (M5) to the county boundary.

For most of its length in Gloucestershire the pipeline ran across drift geological deposits of sand and gravel forming the 2nd terrace of the River Avon, the terrace being situated at heights of between 15–20 m above O.D. At the southern end *c.* 1 km of the pipeline was constructed on lower ground formed by the alluvial silts of the flood plain beside the river Avon. North-east of the motorway the underlying subsoil was Lower Lias Clay. Excluding the built-up area of Twyning Green, all of the land transected by the pipeline was under pasture in 1991.

Method

At an early design stage Severn Trent Water Ltd. consulted Gloucestershire County Council regarding the impact of the proposed pipeline upon archaeology and it was found that the proposed route ran across no known areas of archaeological significance. However, since almost all of the land parcels in question were under pasture, and many contained evidence for ridge and furrow cultivation, it was surmized that earlier deposits might lie undetected below medieval ploughsoil and modern ground level. A programme of observation was therefore undertaken to record chance finds of archaeological deposits.

Construction of the pipeline was observed by two archaeologists during the months June–September 1991. Sites and areas of archaeological interest discovered during the observations were assigned numbers within the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record (abbreviated *Glos.*): numbers were also assigned to individual land parcels transected by the pipeline and all unstratified finds from each parcel were retained. A detailed report on the results of the observations (Parry 1996) has been deposited with the Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record.

Initially, an area *c.* 20 m wide was fenced and the topsoil was removed by machine and stockpiled to one side to form a working easement 12–15 m broad. Secondly, two pipe trenches were excavated parallel to one another and *c.* 5 m apart. One was for a 700-mm diameter pipe; this trench was usually excavated first and then backfilled before the second trench, for a pipe measuring 250 mm in diameter, was dug. Following backfilling of the trenches the former ground level of the construction easement was restored.

The topsoil stripping led to the reduction of ground level by *c.* 0.2–0.3 m. In many places it revealed an underlying soil derived from medieval ploughing. Thus, the view of the natural subsoil below the medieval ploughsoil (i.e. the level at which any earlier archaeological deposits would be observed) was often restricted. Excavation of the pipe trenches offered a second opportunity to view below the medieval ploughsoil. However, in practice it was difficult to observe

significant deposits at this stage of construction since the trenches were rapidly excavated below subsoil level by machines equipped with toothed buckets and the upper edges of the trenches were immediately given a rough batter to avoid falls of loose material. These two factors—the depths of medieval ploughsoil over the natural subsoil and the method of trench construction—militated strongly against the recovery of archaeological information. Nevertheless, four areas of interest were revealed and these are located on Fig. 1.

Romano-British pottery scatters

Two scatters of Romano-British pottery were found during construction on the flood plain adjacent to the river Avon. One (Glos. 12629) was along a *c.* 130-m length of the construction easement centred on O.S. Nat. Grid SO 89423392. Some 400 m to the north was a similar scatter (Glos. 12616) along a *c.* 150-m length of the easement centred on SO 89703440. At both sites the pottery was observed incorporated within alluvial silts at a depth of 1.5 m or more below ground level. From Glos. 12629, 293 sherds weighing 4958 gm were collected. Severn Valley ware accounted for over 70% of the assemblage by weight and small quantities of Samian ware, Black Burnished ware, Grey ware, a coarse Malvernian ware and Oxfordshire ware were present. From Glos. 12616 a similar assemblage comprising 171 sherds weighing 2255 gm was collected, and Severn Valley ware accounted for over 80% of the total by weight. The pottery from both scatters was heavily weathered and abraded. Few diagnostic sherds could be identified but the range of pottery fabrics suggests that both assemblages dated between the 2nd and 4th centuries A.D.

No evidence for contemporary structures was found within the alluvium. The separate locations of the scatters indicate that only discrete areas of the flood plain incorporated the pottery concentrations. An explanation for the distribution is that the pottery was eroded from elsewhere by river action and then deposited within a palaeochannel of the river Avon which the pipeline cut across in two places. The date of deposition of the silts containing the pottery was not established. One possible source for the pottery is an area of Romano-British activity described next.

Romano-British ditch

A ditch (Glos. 12627) centred on O.S. Nat. Grid SO 8969534564 was discovered during construction of the pipe trenches. The ditch was aligned NE–SW and measured a maximum of 0.9 m wide by 0.22 m deep. Excavation of the fill led to the recovery of 47 sherds of Romano-British pottery weighing 895 gm. Severn Valley ware, Samian ware, a coarse Malvernian ware and Black Burnished ware were present. The fill was sealed by a 0.45-m thick deposit of medieval ploughsoil: to either side of the construction easement ridge and furrow earthworks were well preserved. The ditch can be interpreted as an agricultural boundary and the quantity of pottery from its fill may suggest that a Romano-British settlement lay close by. However, no other features were observed in the vicinity.

The ditch lay on the edge of the 2nd gravel terrace of the river Avon, within 30 m of the flood plain next to the river. The pottery from its fill was similar in character and date to the pottery collected at Glos. 12616 and 12629 to the south. River erosion of artefacts from this site may, therefore, explain the origin of the pottery scatters on the flood plain.

Anglo-Saxon ditch

A ditch (Glos. 12625) centred on O.S. Nat. Grid SO 8965434960 was also discovered during the construction of the pipe trenches. The ditch was aligned WSW–ENE and measured *c.* 1.1 m wide by 0.56 m deep. The fill incorporated animal bones and a single sherd of pottery initially thought to date to the Iron Age (Parry 1992). The sherd has been re-assessed (by A. Hancocks) as an example of grass-tempered pottery characteristic of the 5th–8th centuries A.D. (Vince 1984a; Vince 1984b, 251–2). The ditch, therefore, would appear to date to the Anglo-Saxon period but its significance was not established.

Discussion

From the evidence of crop marks revealed on aerial photographs it has long been recognized that the sand and gravel terraces adjoining the river Avon in Warwickshire and Worcestershire were densely occupied during the prehistoric and Romano-British periods (Webster and Hobley 1964). Along the Gloucestershire banks of the Avon, however, relatively few sites of these periods have been identified since for much of the 20th century the land has been principally utilized for pasture in which crop marks are not easily visible. Before 1991 only a single crop-mark site in the locality of the pipeline was known (Fig. 1, Glos. 5540 at O.S. Nat. Grid SO 89393651; Webster and Hobley 1964, 12: site 1). This site was quarried without record during the mid 1970s (information from Gloucestershire Sites and Monuments Record) and its date and significance are uncertain.

The construction of the Strensham to Mythe pipeline offered, therefore, an opportunity to examine a transect across a landscape where early occupation was suspected. The observations led to the discovery of two potential areas of occupation, one Romano-British, the other Anglo-Saxon. Because the working easement offered only a limited view the significance of neither site is fully understood. The find of grass-tempered pottery at the latter site is, however, of some interest since no pottery of this type had been found previously in the locality.

Some 5.7 km of the pipeline lay within Gloucestershire; the 1991 observations revealed, therefore, only one site of potential occupation for every 2.85 km of ground transected. The figure may be misleading since *c.* 1.3 km of the pipeline's route had been previously destroyed by quarrying during the 1970s (Fig. 1). Nevertheless, however viewed, the number of sites identified in Gloucestershire during construction of the pipeline appears low, especially since two Romano-British sites were discovered along the *c.* 1.3-km long section of the pipeline in Worcestershire (Parry forthcoming). The difficulties experienced in detecting archaeology during the pipeline construction have been noted above and it is possible that the observations failed to detect other areas of archaeological significance.

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