

ELI 560

SLI 5085 1439

94/6

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

60539 - Prehist
60564 - E Med
64184 b Med

29 STATION ROAD, RUSKINGTON
LINCOLNSHIRE



PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY

Site Code: SRR94
CCM Accession Number 128.94

CONTENTS

29 STATION ROAD, RUSKINGTON

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF REPORT

FOR

TERRY SYKES DESIGN & BUILD.

(ON BEHALF OF THE CHESTNUTS RESIDENTIAL HOME
PARTNERSHIP)

BY

COLIN PALMER-BROWN

PRE-CONSTRUCT ARCHAEOLOGY
66 SCHOOL LANE
SILK WILLOUGHBY
SLEAFORD
LINCOLNSHIRE
NG32 8PH

PHONE & FAX 0529 302874

© Pre-Construct Archaeology
September, 1994

CONTENTS

1.0	Non-Technical Summary	1
2.0	Introduction	1
3.0	Planning Background	3
4.0	Geology and Topography	3
5.0	Archaeological and Historical Background	3
6.0	Aims	4
7.0	Methodology	4
8.0	Results	4
	8.1 Early Bronze Age features	7
	8.2 Saxon/medieval features	8
9.0	Conclusions and recommendations	8
10.0	Acknowledgements	10
11.0	Appendices	11
	11.1 List of Contexts	
	11.2 Colour Photographs	
	11.3 Site Archive	
	11.4 References	

1.0 Non-Technical Summary

A planning application was submitted to North Kesteven District Council to construct a four-bedroom extension on the south side of The Chestnuts Retirement Home. Permission was granted, subject to a condition requiring archaeological observation and recording during earth-removal.

A three-day recording brief has demonstrated that the development site lies in the heart of an early Bronze Age inhumation cemetery of regional (and possibly national) significance. It has also shown that important Anglo-Saxon and medieval deposits are well-preserved in this part of Ruskington.

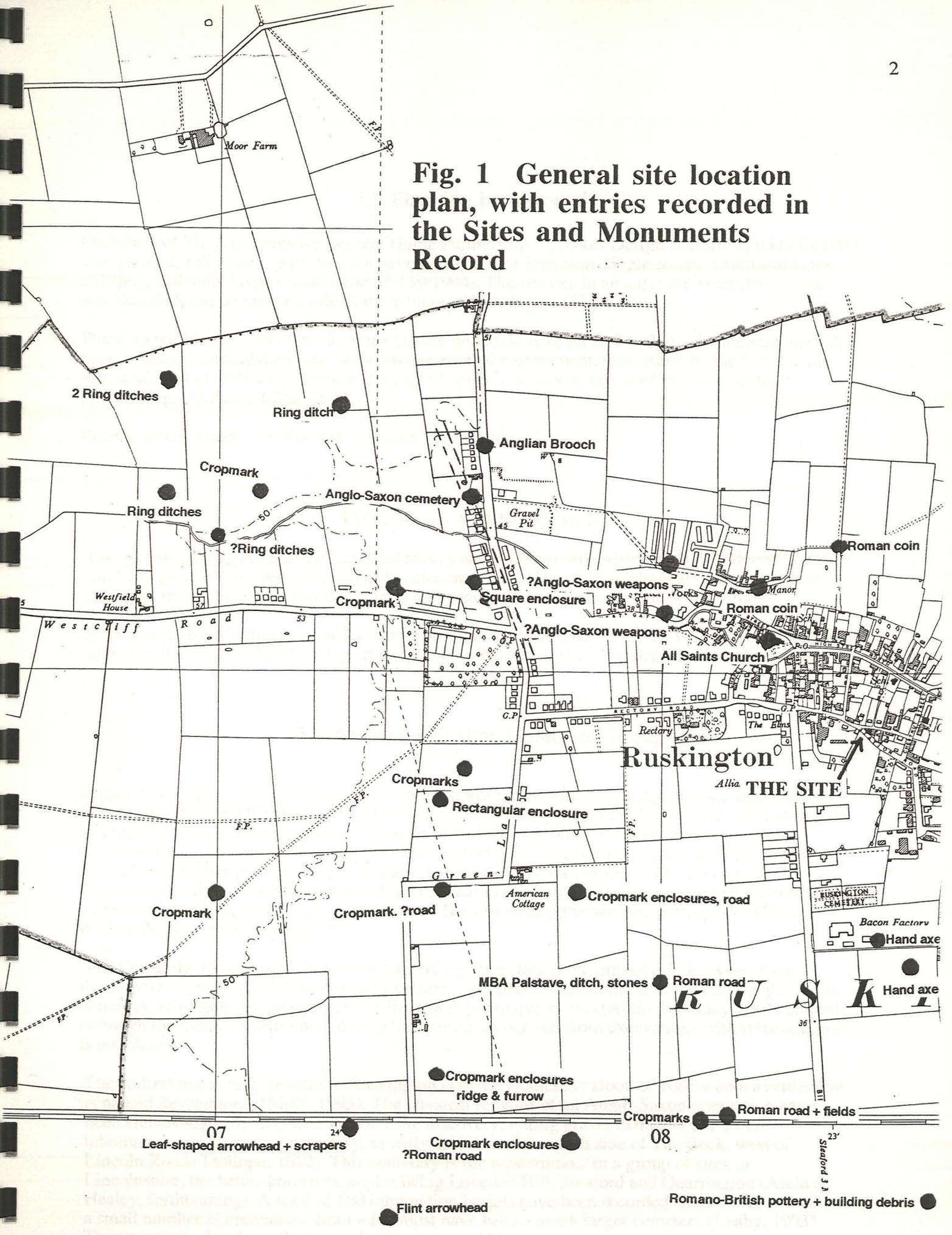
2.0 Introduction

An archaeological watching brief took place between August 23rd and August 25th on the site of an extension to 29 Station Road, Ruskington (Fig.'s 1 and 2). These works were commissioned by T. Sykes Design & Build (on behalf of the Chestnuts Partnership) and were centred on a project specification submitted to the Client and the Community Archaeologist for North Kesteven.

Based on data extracted from the Sites and Monuments Record, the archaeological potential of the site was not considered to be high. Although there are important prehistoric, Romano-British, Anglo-Saxon and medieval remains in Ruskington, the majority of known sites lie west and south-west of the present development, and whilst there was always a very real possibility that archaeological remains would be disturbed during development, it was considered likely that such remains could be adequately investigated within the parameters of a recording brief only. The remains discovered during the present development will enhance the Sites and Monuments Record and will raise the level of archaeological emphasis to be placed on future developments in this area of Ruskington.

The central national grid reference is TF 508490 350870

Fig. 1 General site location plan, with entries recorded in the Sites and Monuments Record



3.0 Planning background

On behalf of The Chestnuts Retirement Home Partnership, T. Sykes Design & Build applied for (and was granted) full planning permission to construct a four-bedroom, single-storey, extension to an existing residential home (application 52/139/1994). The site lies in an angle between Holme Lane and Station Road on the east side of the village of Ruskington (Fig. 2).

Planning permission was granted, subject to the undertaking of an archaeological watching brief. A project brief, outlining the scope of the archaeological requirement, was issued by the Community Archaeologist on 14th July, 1994, and a project specification was prepared by Pre-Construct Archaeology on August 2nd, 1994.

Prior to development, the site was a grassed garden area.

4.0 Geology and topography

The British Geological Survey 1: 50,000 survey sheet 127 records widespread drift deposits of Fen sand and gravel, these being largely of Pleistocene origin. The older geological formation which underlies these deposits is Jurassic clay, which outcrops on the eastern side of the village.

Soils around Ruskington are usually light, comprising coarse sandy topsoils which overlie sand and gravel containing cornbrash and quartzite pebbles; these being the drift deposits described above.

5.0 Archaeological and historical background

A potentially dense pattern of settlement evidence associated with the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods is implied by the number of cropmarks which cluster on the west side of Ruskington: a complex of ring ditches, probably remnants of Bronze Age burial mounds, and 'native-style' enclosures suggest that significant levels of settlement may have been sustained at almost any time throughout the later prehistoric and Romano-British periods. Earlier this year, an evaluation excavation sited in the angle of Westcliffe Road and Lincoln Road, located sections of an Iron Age enclosure, as well as a small pit containing late Neolithic/early Bronze Age pottery (Pre-Construct Archaeology, unpublished report).

The line of the Roman road, Mareham Lane/King Street lies approximately 700m west of the development site. It may have attracted roadside settlement (excavations at the nearby Anglo-Saxon cemetery demonstrated the existence of Romano-British quarry pits (Atkin & Healey, forthcoming), although the nature of settlement during this period, as derived from excavations within Ruskington, is not clear).

The earliest historical reference to Ruskington is in the Domesday Book of 1086 where a settlement is named *Reschintone* (Mills, 1993). The physical remains of an Anglo-Saxon population have been archaeologically documented since the discovery, during gravel extraction, of a rich inhumation and cremation cemetery, as early as 1871 on the north side of The Beck, west of Lincoln Road (Trollope, 1872). This cemetery is the westernmost in a group of sites in Lincolnshire, the better-known examples being Loveden Hill, Sleaford and Quarrington (Atkin & Healey, forthcoming). A total of 180 inhumation burials have been recorded since 1872, as well as a small number of cremations from what must have been a much larger cemetery (Leahy, 1993). They appear to date from the later 5th/6th century AD.

Although the Saxon cemetery has been extensively sampled by excavation, settlement remains (house plans, roads, rubbish pits etc) have not been found in Ruskington and the location of the main focus of occupation during this period has not been established.

6.0 Aims

The principal aims of the watching brief at 29 Station Road were to ensure that any archaeological features or artefactual remains exposed or retrieved during groundworks were recorded and interpreted to standards accepted by the Community Archaeologist for North Kesteven. A project Specification, based around these objectives, was jointly agreed between Pre-Construct Archaeology, the Community Archaeologist and the Client.

7.0 Methodology

As the Client expressed a willingness to undertake all soil stripping and excavation in one operation, a continuous watching brief was maintained over a period of three full days, though machining was restricted to a duration of two days, leaving a further day for limited excavation and recording.

Mechanical excavation was undertaken using a JCB with back actor, fitted with a 0.5m wide bucket.

The building plot was marked-out with wooden pegs and clean sand lines. The whole of the topsoil, [1], was then stripped in level spits to depths varying between 25cm and 30cm. Trenching commenced on the west side of the plot and progressed eastwards.

The depths of construction trenches below the modern ground surface varied between 80 - 90cm, though two soakaways at either end of the plot were slightly deeper.

Machining usually ceased just beneath the top of a natural gravel surface, [4], which was common to the whole development, except where disturbed by archaeological features.

Archaeological features were not generally apparent at levels above the clean natural sandy gravel surface, and investigations were largely undertaken after the completion of mechanical stripping. Pottery sherds were, however, retrieved during trenching and were roughly provenanced.

The bases of all trenches were cleaned and inspected for intrusive archaeological features. Concentrations were observed within the north foundation cutting, with lesser scatters elsewhere. It is acknowledged, however, that some shallow features which were seen in section were not recorded, simply for lack of time (the trenches were filled with concrete after the three day watching brief).

Each feature seen in plan was hand-excavated (to varying degrees) and artefacts and ecofacts (where present) were collected and subsequently submitted for specialist appraisal. Colour photographs were taken (prints and slides) and features were planned at 1:20. Some features were drawn in section, though the drawn record was limited by the short period of time available.

Recording and excavation was undertaken by C. Palmer-Brown, assisted on two occasions by various members of the residential home Partnership, to whom thanks are expressed.

8.0 Results

Following mechanical stripping, the north and westernmost construction trenches were cleaned and examined. As noted, a concentration of features lay on the north side of the development area, which was investigated as a matter of priority.

Fig. 2 Site Location (based on plans by T. Sykes)

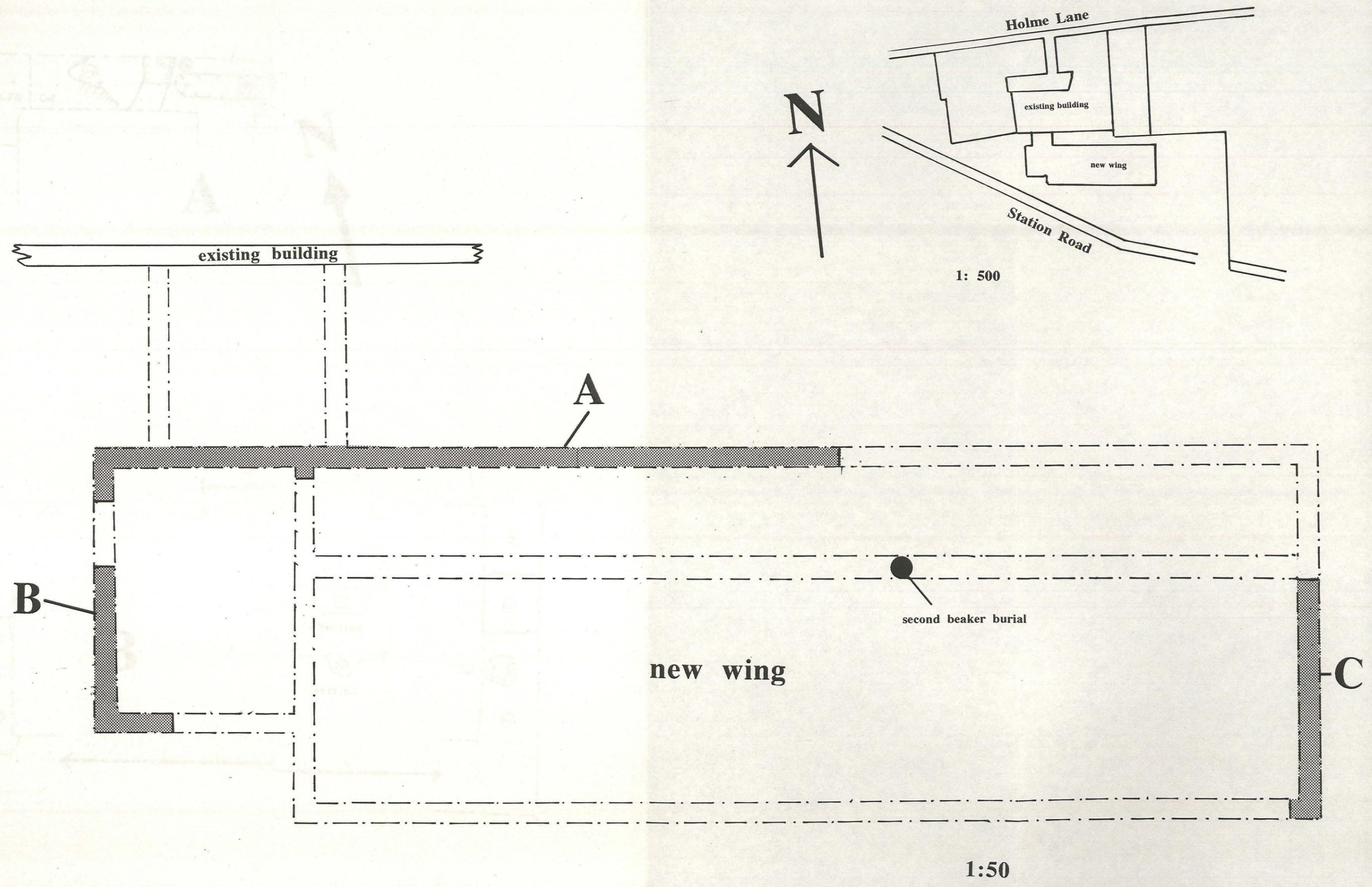
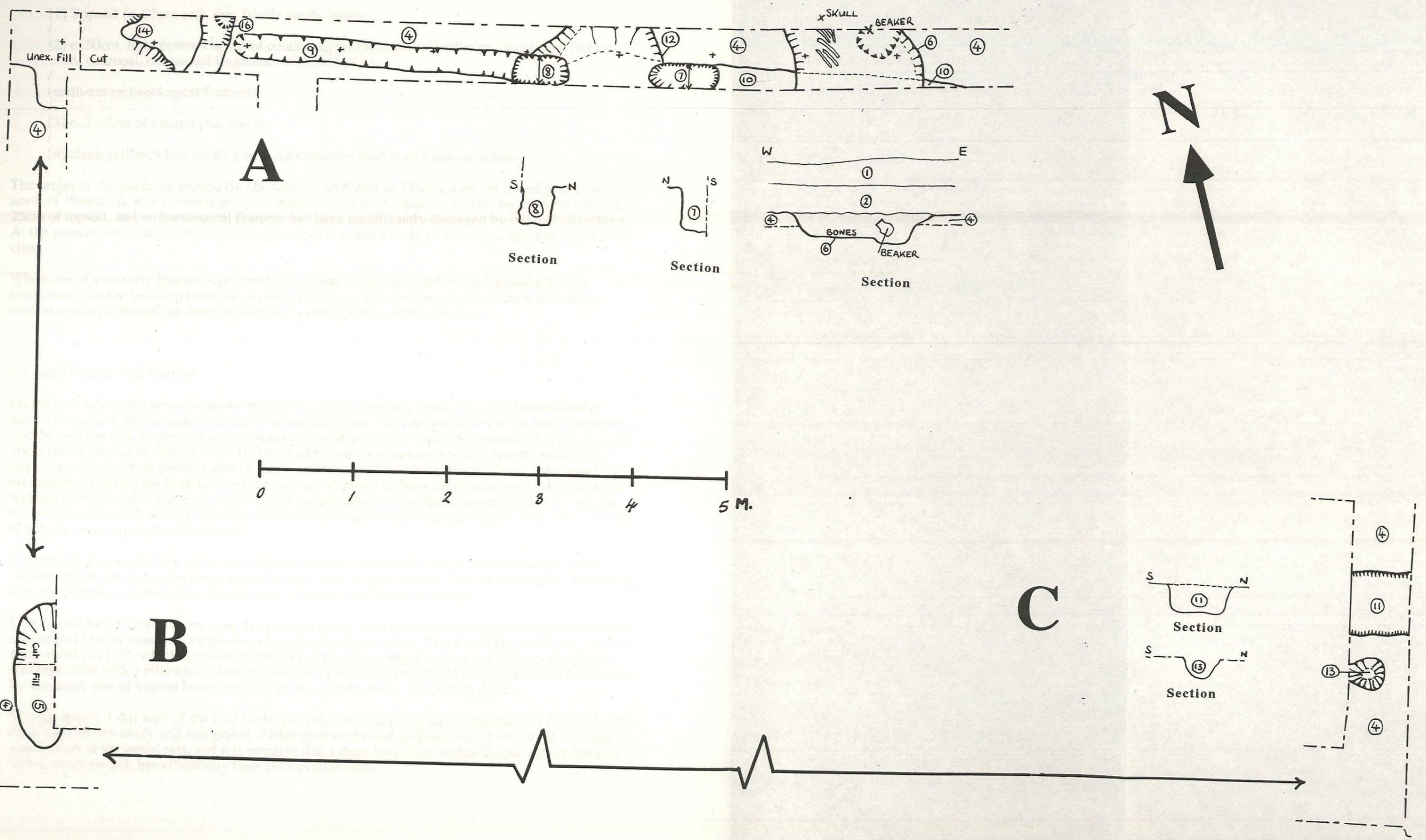


Fig. 3 Archaeological features in north, east and west foundation trenches
 (to be used in conjunction with Fig. 2)



The stratigraphic sequence exposed above the natural sub-stratum appeared, superficially, to be broadly similar over the whole site, though this is clearly not the full story. The basic order of deposition may be summarised thus:

- [1] Topsoil (c. 25cm soft, dry, friable sandy loam)
- /
- [2] c. 50cm, light brown clay-sand containing frequent gravel inclusion, occasional flecks of charcoal, occasional fragments of flint/chert
- /
- (earth-cut archaeological features)
- /
- [3] c. 3 - 7cm of natural pea-gravel
- /
- [4] clean yellow/white sandy gravel, interspersed with corn brash inclusion.

The origin of the made-up ground (ie [2]) was not understood. During a recent investigation on a site north of Westcliffe Road, Ruskington, (c. 900m further west), natural gravels lay directly beneath c. 25cm of topsoil, and archaeological features had been significantly damaged by modern ploughing. At the present site, features were better- preserved beneath a body of soil, the origin for which is not clear.

When one of two early Bronze Age burials were first discovered (below), the possibility was considered that the build-up could be explained as the levelled remnants of a barrow mound (or several mounds), though no direct evidence for this could be demonstrated.

8.1 Early Bronze Age features

On the east side of the northernmost construction trench, an early Bronze Age decorated beaker narrowly escaped destruction when the JCB bucket clipped and damaged part of its rim. The beaker, and the remains of a single inhumation burial, lay within a shallow pit, [6], excavated approximately 30cm below the top of natural (Fig. 3). The beaker, which measures 14cm in length, rested in a sloping position a short distance east of a series of disarticulated long bones. These constituted an incomplete skeleton, the flesh from which had decomposed or been removed elsewhere, before the remains were placed in the grave. After receiving permission from the Coroner's Office to exhume the remains, the north section face was cut-back and fragments of a human skull, believed to be that of a male, were exposed and removed.

A second beaker burial was discovered approximately 2.5m south-east of the first during a last-minute dash at the end of the field project to check that all plan features had been sampled. Recording was, by necessity, restricted to photography, plotting and sketch drawing.

This second burial narrowly-escaped destruction, as the JCB bucket had scraped the upper surface of a decorated beaker which accompanied a few disarticulated bones. The vessel lay on its side, set in a steep-sided pit, [15], which was dug at least 35cm into the natural surface and, like its neighbour, was backfilled with a mixture of clean brown soil mixed with gravel. On the north side of the beaker lay the small pile of human bones, as well as two, rather crude, struck flint flakes.

Approximately 1.4m west of the first burial pit, [6], was a large pit-like disturbance, [12], filled with clean light brown sandy soil and gravel. Although it contained no finds, its fill was similar to that seen in both of the burial pits, and it is possible that a third burial lies within the pit a short distance further south (which has effectively been preserved *in situ*).

8.2 Saxon/medieval features

A number of earth-cut features, usually containing distinctive dark soil fills, were briefly investigated which contained pottery, ranging in date from the mid-Saxon to early medieval periods. Although interpretation is inevitably limited by the small sample area and the conditions in which the finds were made, enough evidence was gathered to justify careful monitoring of future earth-moving in this area of the village.

In the south-west corner of the site, a small pit-like feature, [5], was defined, where its dark backfill contrasted against the surrounding white/yellow sandy gravel. A section of fill was removed, exposing the shallow profile of a pit which did not exceed c. 20cm in depth (below natural). It contained one sherd of late Saxon/early medieval pottery, as well as a fragment of slag. The latter was examined by J. Cowgill (City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit), who has suggested it had been generated in the process of iron smithing.

The pit containing the first beaker burial, [6], was truncated on its south side by a shallow east-west trench, filled with dark humic soil, [10]. This was traced for a distance of c. 2.5m, where its west end joined a substantial post hole, [7], the fill of which was identical. The post hole measured at least 45cm in depth.

A gap of approximately 85cm separated the above from a second, similar, post hole, [8], which also adjoined a contemporary shallow trench, [9], traced for a distance c. 3.0m. The west end of the trench terminated at its junction with a perpendicular (north-south), though less regular, shallow trench, [16]. A small section of fill from the latter was removed, exposing a circular depression in the north-east corner; possibly a post hole. The maximum depth of the trench was 25cm.

On stratigraphic and spatial grounds, it is likely that the two large post holes, the trenches which they joined, and the shallow north-south trench described above were contemporary. A small number of pottery sherds were recovered from [7] and [8], which were examined by Dr A. Vince (City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit) and have now been entered on the Lincoln database. Of four sherds, two are late Saxon, two early medieval. Naturally, it is the later of the two ranges which must be considered as a basis for dating these features, though even residual pottery may be taken as evidence that settlement was taking place in this part of Ruskington during the Saxon period.

An east-west, steep-sided, trench which was examined in the easternmost foundation cutting, [11], contained a large sherd of hand-made pottery, probably of middle Saxon date. The trench could not be directly associated with any other features, though it is possible that a sub-circular post hole, a short distance to the south, [13], was related.

Other earth-cut archaeological features were briefly examined during the watching brief, though they were not always understood or dated. In the west corner of the north construction trench, a dark, seemingly amorphous area of disturbance, [14], was quickly sectioned on one side, revealing a shallow cut, the fill of which contained fragments of tile and one sherd of late Saxon/early medieval pottery.

9.0 Conclusions and recommendations

The potential of Ruskington and its surrounding area for furthering our understanding of regional Bronze Age settlement is high. Sites dating to within this long cultural period are recorded in the Sites and Monuments record, but distribution maps are more a reflection of circumstantial techniques used by archaeologists than real density (which, of course will never be fully known). In built-up areas, the watching brief may be the only viable tool available for identifying archaeological remains in hitherto blank areas.

As the majority of the known later prehistoric sites are documented only from cropmarks, mostly on the west side of the village, there has not been the perceived need to investigate them (even though most of these sites are at the perpetual mercy of the plough).

Why exactly Ruskington was important during the Beaker period (c. 2700 -1700 BC) and the subsequent middle and later Bronze Age is not known. It may be that the light soils which overlie free-draining gravels were a major attraction, though other reasons are possible. It has been suggested, for example, that the major north-south Roman road, Mareham Lane/King Street, was in fact a formalisation of a more ancient prehistoric trackway (Whitwell, 1982).

The Beaker period is characterised by the appearance of a new ceramic tradition (ie beakers), as well as the introduction of a new range of artefacts, up-graded agricultural techniques and new methods of burial in single flat graves or round barrows: in the preceding Neolithic period, communal burial took place beneath earthen long barrows.

The most common beaker vessels were often made in fine, thin-walled, reddish fabric and had flat bases (May, 1976). They were usually decorated over the whole of their exterior surfaces with horizontal linear or panelled ornament, using comb or string impressions. Their small form, and the appearance of handles on some vessels has been taken as evidence that they were drinking vessels, the common beverage possibly being beer (Childe, 1947). Although this supposition is difficult to demonstrate archaeologically, evidence from a Beaker grave at Ashcroft, near Fife in Scotland, suggested that a beaker grave offering may have contained an alcoholic beverage such as mead (Parker Pearson, 1993).

The introduction of Beaker 'culture' to the British Isles has been traditionally associated with the notion of a continental invasion. The evidence for this has been sought partly from the fact that, very often, Beaker burials contain the bones of round-headed (*brachycephalic*) individuals, whereas those from graves of the earlier period were long-headed (*dolichosephalic*). However, the trend is not universal and it is possible the change was simply the result of genetic modification (*ibid.*).

There is no doubt that cross-continental links were intensified during this and subsequent periods, though these changes are perhaps best viewed as the inevitable consequences of wider exchanges of ideas and culture; not necessarily forced-adoption under oppressive rule.

In common with much of England, Beaker pottery is widespread throughout Lincolnshire (though relatively few complete vessels have been found). To give a glimpse at the distribution, the following is a conservative list of sites where positive identifications (to varying degrees) have been made (based largely on an archive prepared by C. Allen, housed at the City and County Museum, Lincoln):

Ancaster	Barrowby	Beacon Hill	Billingham
Caistor	Caythorpe	Cherry Willingham	Claxby
Denton	Fiskerton	Grantham	West Keal
Helpringham	Kirkby on Bain	Osgodby	Gt Ponton
Revesby Abbey	Risby Warren	Ruskington	Salmonby
South Kelsey	South Willingham	Stainsby	West Ashby

Although Beaker funerary sites are relatively common, settlement, or occupation, sites are few in number, nation-wide. At Risby Warren, near Scunthorpe, excavations in 1933 revealed a cluster of pits close to an area of blackened sand, in the centre of which were the fragile remains of a hearth (May, 1976). It was thought possible that some of the small pit-like features were, in fact, post holes associated with a structure.

It is hoped that the beakers recovered from the Ruskington site will form the basis for a detailed (published) account, and that human bone samples may be submitted for radiocarbon dating.

The recovery of Saxon and early medieval remains at the Station Road site will also enhance the Sites and Monuments record, even though the smallness of the sample area precludes a more definitive statement on the status of features exposed. Excavations on the west side of Ruskington have failed to locate structural evidence that would complement the large cemetery which has been recorded over more than a hundred years. However, the recovery of mid-late Saxon pottery in stratified contexts may raise the potential of south-east Ruskington where future planning applications necessitating ground disturbance are concerned.

11.0 Appendices

10.0 Acknowledgements

On behalf of Pre-Construct Archaeology, sincere thanks are expressed to Terry Sykes, the Commissioning Client, and to all members of the Chestnuts Residential Home Partnership who assisted with the watching brief and provided countless refreshments during the course of the work. Thanks go also to Nicola Nuttall, the Community Archaeologist for North Kesteven, and to David Start (Heritage Lincolnshire) for providing informative support. Thanks are due to Alan Vince and Jane Cowgill (City of Lincoln Archaeology Unit) for finds assessment. Finally, thank you to all of the residents at the Chestnuts Home for making this watching brief a memorable one.

11.2 Colour photographs

11.3 Site plan

11.4 Summary

11.0 Appendices

11.1 List of contexts (classification)

Context	Classification
---------	----------------

Context	Classification
---------	----------------

11.1 List of contexts

11.2 Colour photographs

11.3 Site Archive

11.4 References

11.1 List of contexts (classification only)

Context	Classification
[1]	Topsoil
[2]	Thick mixed extensive layer: ?made-up ground
[3]	Intermittent horizon of pea-gravel (natural)
[4]	Clean yellow/orange sandy gravel, interspersed with corn brash inclusion
[5]	Pit-like feature containing E. med pottery + slag
[6]	EBA burial pit containing human remains + decorated (incised) long-necked beaker
[7]	Deep post hole associated with E. medieval palisade structure
[8]	Deep post hole associated with E. medieval palisade structure
[9]	Shallow E-W palisade trench/beam slot, extending westwards of post hole, [8]
[10]	Shallow E-W palisade trench/beam slot, extending eastwards of post hole, [7]
[11]	East-west ?palisade trench seen in E. end of plot. Contained 1 sherd ?middle Saxon pottery
[12]	Irregular pit-like feature, west of burial pit [6], truncated by post holes [7] and [8]. Suspected burial pit but no finds in cutting
[13]	Post hole on south side of ?palisade trench [11]. Possibly related.
[14]	Irregular feature(s), extreme west end of north foundation trench. Function uncertain; roof tile + E. med pottery
[15]	Second beaker burial pit. Contained decorated beaker, disarticulated human bones + 2 crude flint flakes
[16]	Shallow north-south gully at west end of east-west palisade trench [9]. Where sectioned, contained possible post hole void

11.2 Colour Photographs

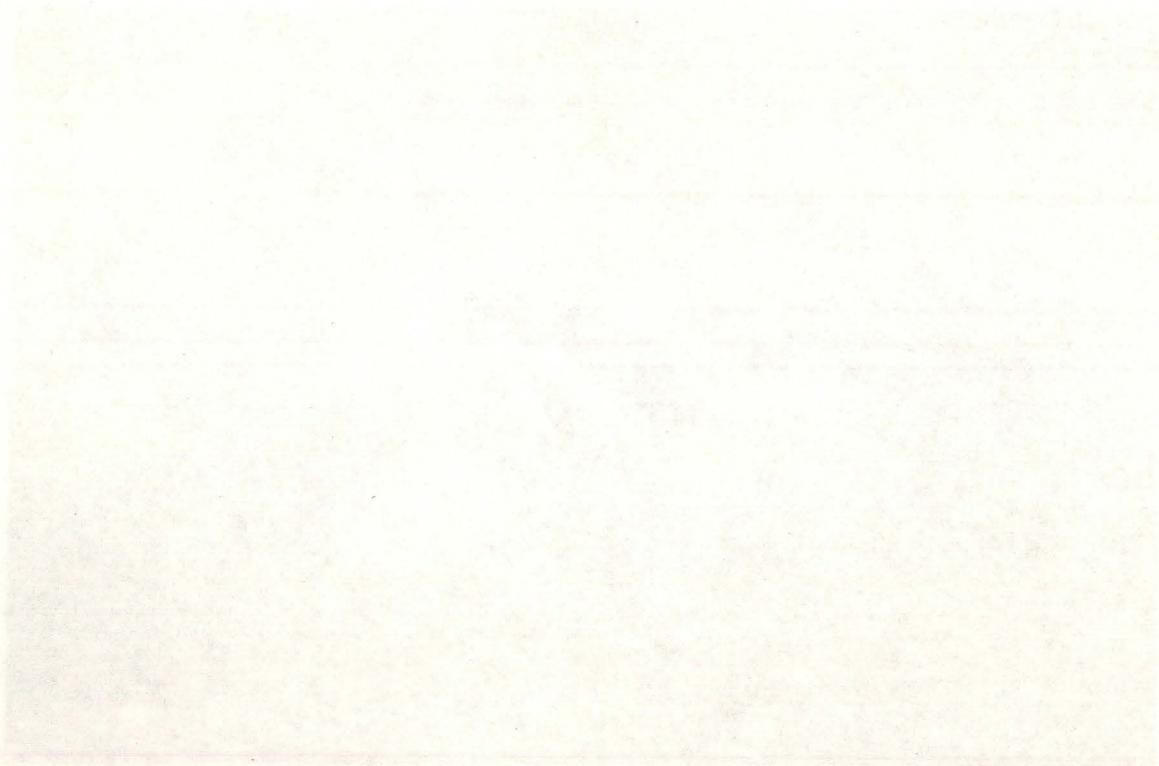
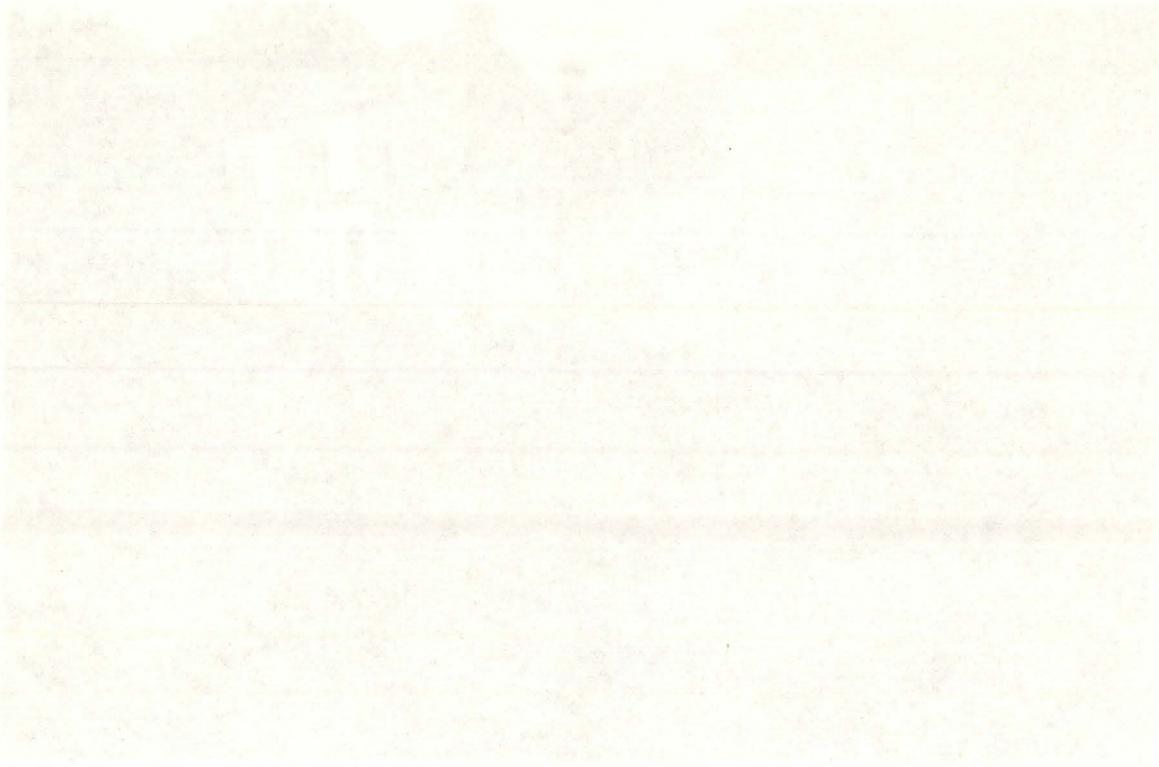


Figure 11.2.1: Faded and washed-out images from board 11.2



Photo. 1 General view of foundation trenches, looking west



Photo. 2 Beaker and human remains from burial pit [6]



Photo. 3 Burial pit [6], part-excavated, showing beaker (*in situ*) in section + human remains, looking west



Photo. 4 Burial pit [15], with beaker *in-situ*, looking north-east



Photo. 5 Early medieval palisade trenches at junctions with large post holes/entrance, looking south-east



Photo. 6 Trench [11] and post hole [13] in east foundation trench, looking west

11.3 Site Archives

The basic site archive comprises the following:

Two pages (four sides) of context record notes

x2 colour print films, x1 colour slide film

X1 composite 1:20 scale drawing (plans and sections)

x2 boxes of finds

Misc. notes

Primary records are currently with Pre-Construct Archaeology, though the paper and physical archive will be deposited with the City and County Museum within 1 year of completion of this report, together with a more detailed archive list.

The site owners wish to retain ownership of the two early Bronze Age beakers from contexts [6] and [15], though are keen that they should remain in the guardianship of the City & County Museum, Lincoln, provided they are placed on public display.

11.4 References

British Geological Survey; 1:50,000 survey sheet 127

Childe, VG 1947 *Prehistoric Communities of the British Isles* (London)

Leahy, K 1993 in Vince, A (Ed.) *Pre-Viking Lindsey*

May, J 1976 *Prehistoric Lincolnshire*

Mills, A D 1993, *English Place-Names*

Palmer-Brown, C 1994 Land off Westcliffe Road and Lincoln Road, Ruskington, Lincolnshire: An Archaeological Desk Top Study by Pre-Construct Archaeology (unpublished)

Parker-Pearson, M 1993 *Bronze Age Britain* (English Heritage)

Trollope, E A 1872 *Sleaford and the Wapentake of Flaxwell and Aswardhurn* (Sleaford)

Whitwell, JB 1982 *The Coritani* (Oxford)