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Archaeological Report



Project Name: West Heslerton Primary School Site 13BA

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Summary

A watching brief was carried out on behalf of Ruston & Hotham over an extension to the car park at West Heslerton primary school. West Heslerton, North Yorkshire. Only two plough truncated archaeological features were encountered.

The area concerned is situated to the north of the current school and to the south of the track leading to Rectory Farm, and is centered on NGS grid reference SE 91457/75873.



Figure 1 Aerial photograph taken in 2005 with location of site superimposed (scale bar 100m)

Known archaeology in the area

The excavation of the early Anglo-Saxon settlement in the fields to the east and north of the site also found widespread evidence of Roman and Iron Age activity, as well as more dispersed earlier prehistoric features, and thus the potential for finding archaeological features in this area is always present. That being said, the geophysical surveys carried out around the school indicate that the main foci of activity are located to the north and east (Roman and Anglo-Saxon), and the west (the medieval village of West Heslerton). From the geophysical data, it was anticipated that the remains of the furrows of ridge and furrow ploughing would be encountered (see Figure 2).

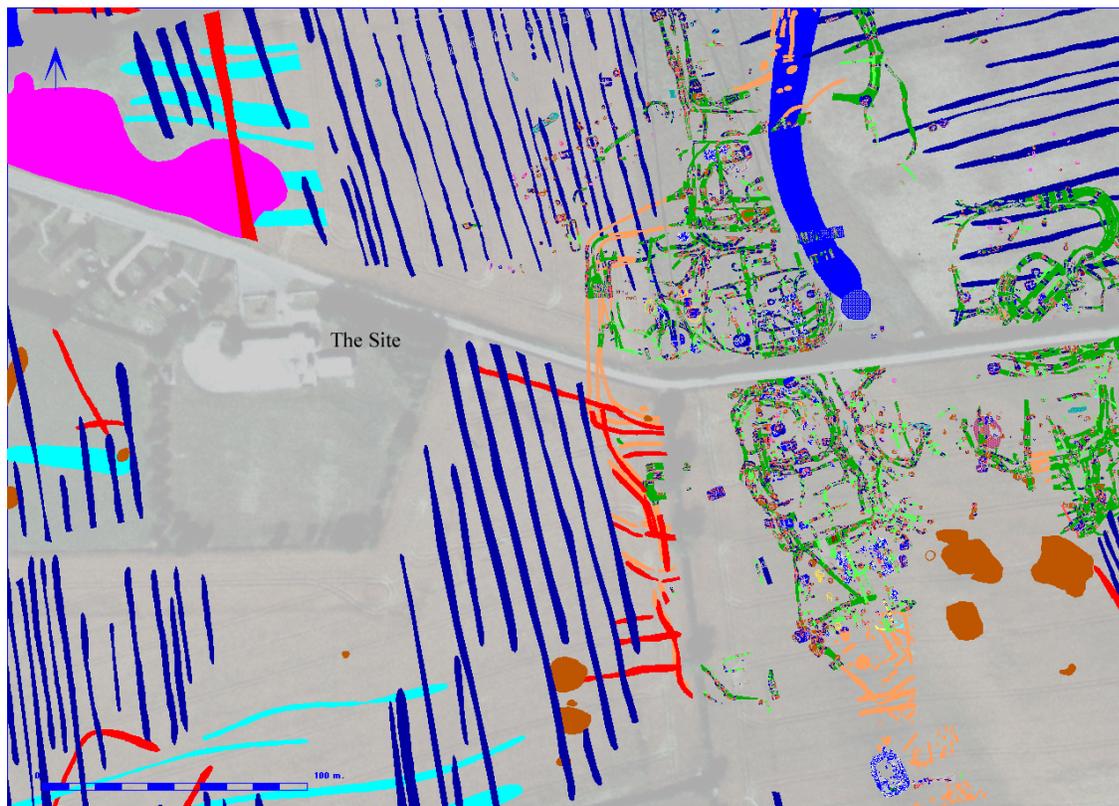


Figure 2 Excavated and geophysical survey plans on an aerial photographic background.

Discussion

The initial phase of the watching brief was carried out on the morning of the 28th and the afternoon of the 29th of November, 2006, and comprised archaeological supervision of the removal of the topsoil, down to the chalk bedrock. The depth of soil removed varied from 30cm in the north-west corner to 25cm in the south. The soil removed was a loamy sand, with up to 15% chalk inclusions. Modern disturbance was evident down the western edge, caused by the construction of the current car parking facilities. Two services trenches (for electric cables) were located in the central and western parts of the area. Apart from a single green-glazed potsherd, the only finds encountered during the stripping were of modern origin.

Two archaeological features were encountered in the northern part of the area, where the depth of overburden removed was greatest. Both of these features had been plough truncated, so that only the bottom 5-10cm remained. The first feature noted was a small posthole, with only the bottom 5cm of the feature remaining. There were no finds, and the fill was a mixed loamy sand with 50% chalk gravel inclusions. No other post holes were encountered within the stripped area, so interpretation of the possible function is not possible at this stage.



Figure 3 Excavated remains of the truncated ditch and post hole.

When the second feature was first seen, the excavator initially believed that this was probably the remnants of a Medieval plough furrow, but the orientation of this feature did not match with the known alignment of the ridge and furrow field system. It was thus interpreted as the shallow remains of a ploughed-out ditch. The fill (remaining depth varying from 5-10cm) was a loamy sand with 50-60% chalk gravel inclusions. The only find was a river-worn pebble. The ditch continued to the north under the topsoil, but as it was to be preserved under a membrane and stone capping, no further excavation of the feature was conducted.

As the western half of the site was stripped, it became evident that the topsoil was deeper towards the north, and no further archaeological features were noted. The only feature was a line of chalk, indicating the presence of the electricity services trench (confirmed by using a Digicat power line detector).

When the north-western area was stripped, the topsoil (only 15cm deep at this point) was immediately above a layer of hillwash. A further 15cm of this colluvial layer was removed. The hillwash had been disturbed by a number of services (water, electricity and telephone service trenches were all present).



Figure 4 Telecom services pipe cut through the hillwash deposit.

The only find recovered from the hillwash was a small, abraded fragment of Medieval green-glazed pottery.

The second phase of the watching brief was carried out on the afternoon of the 30th November and the morning of the 4th of December, 2006, and comprised the examination of the wall footings, which were excavated to a depth of approximately 60 cm below the current ground surface. These were excavated by machine through a 50cm thick layer of made up ground consisting of chalk rubble, bricks and other building detritus, and 10cm of the underlying chalk geology. No archaeological features were encountered during the construction of these footings. A single solution hole was noted during this phase of the excavation.



Figure 5 Footing 2 showing the solution hole



Figure 6 First footing after excavation (looking west)



Figure 7 Second footing after excavation (looking west)

Conclusion

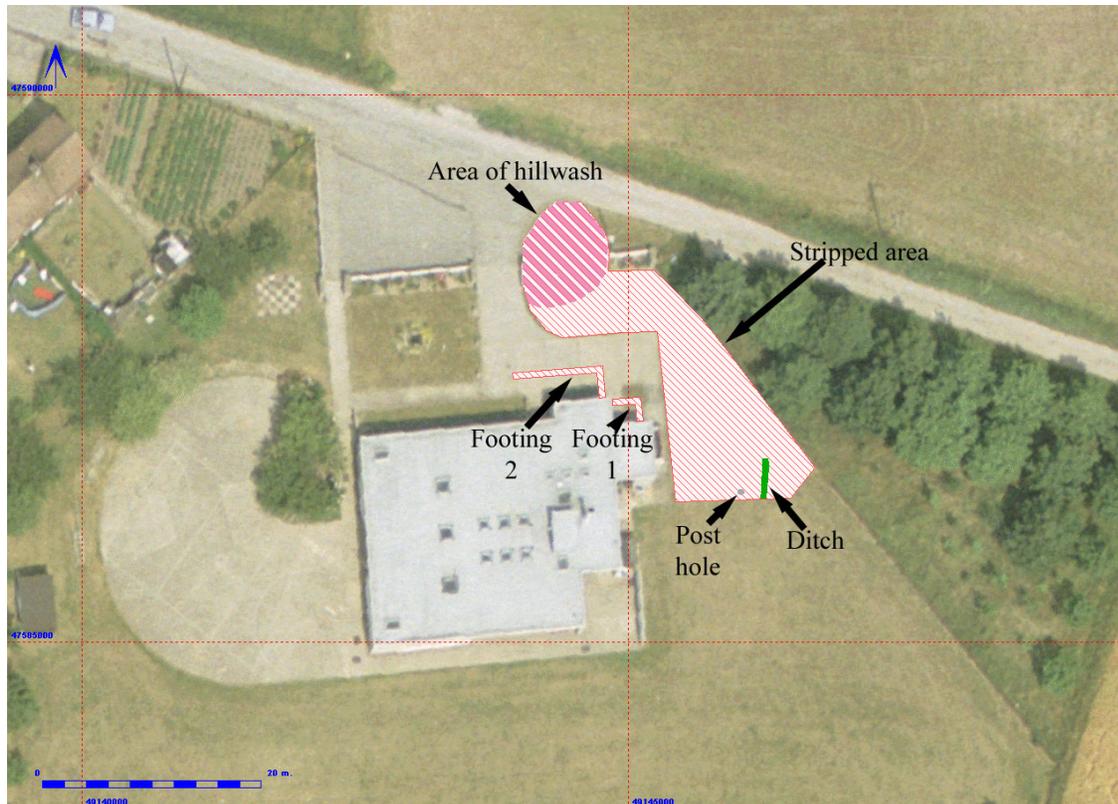


Figure 8 Location of areas observed and archaeological features encountered (scale bar 20m).

In conclusion, it can be stated that only in the southern part of the stripped area was enough topsoil removed to disturb the underlying archaeological features, both of which were severely plough truncated. The rest of the area had been previously disturbed in the 1960's by the construction of the school (on a raft) and the concrete parking area. It is possible that archaeological features remained preserved under the area of hillwash in the northern part of the stripped area.