ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

NORTH HOUSE FARM, SKIPWITH

NORTH YORKSHIRE

REPORT

February 2000

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

An archaeological watching brief was carried out by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd in association with Mike Griffiths and Associates on behalf of RJB Mining (UK) Ltd. The aim of the investigation was to identify archaeological remains cut by the new drainage channels and to assess whether the remains would be affected by the drainage works. This report presents the results of the investigation (Intervention 19) carried out in January 2000.

1.1 LOCATION AND LAND USE

The work was carried out in one field belonging to North House Farm. The field at NGR SE 669 382 is situated on the south side of the village (Fig.1), between two areas of Common and adjacent to the main Skipwith to North Duffield road. The area is locally drained by a series of drainage channels and ponds which border the field. At the time of investigation the field was under set-aside condition, although it is usually arable. In total the field covered 2.97ha.

1.2 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Archaeological discoveries made around the village of Skipwith as a result of earlier surveys, extensive aerial reconnaissance and limited ground investigation have revealed a widespread pattern of land-use and settlement from the Iron Age onwards (Fig.2).

Previous investigations during similar drainage works nearby at Redmoor Farm, Skipwith, located archaeological features, some of which were beneath deposits of wind blown sand and had been buried from detection by aerial reconnaissance. Fewer archaeological features were discovered during similar investigations at Park Farm and on other fields belonging to North House Farm, toward the centre of the village, despite the close proximity to known cropmark sites (FAS_stm04, Intervention 18).

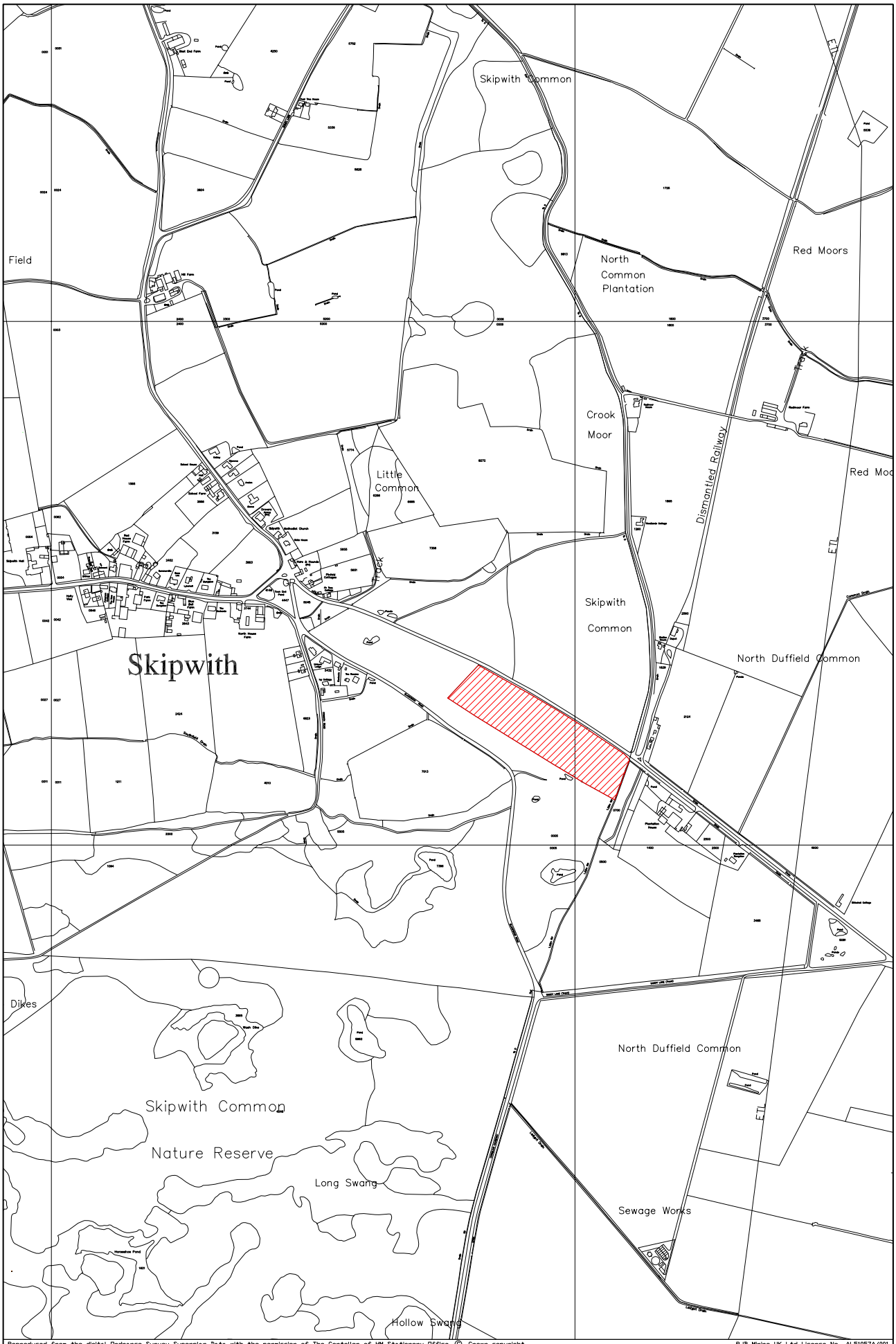
In the field monitored by this watching brief, no cropmarks or visible earthworks indicating archaeological occupation were identified in the field before it was drained.

2.0 PROCEDURE

2.1 DRAINAGE PROCEDURE

A sequence of previous drainage schemes was observed in the field. These included both ceramic and plastic pipes running in an approximately east-west direction.

The current drainage scheme was installed in order to replace failing drains affected by mining subsidence. The one short main drain was installed in an east-west alignment, with longer laterals



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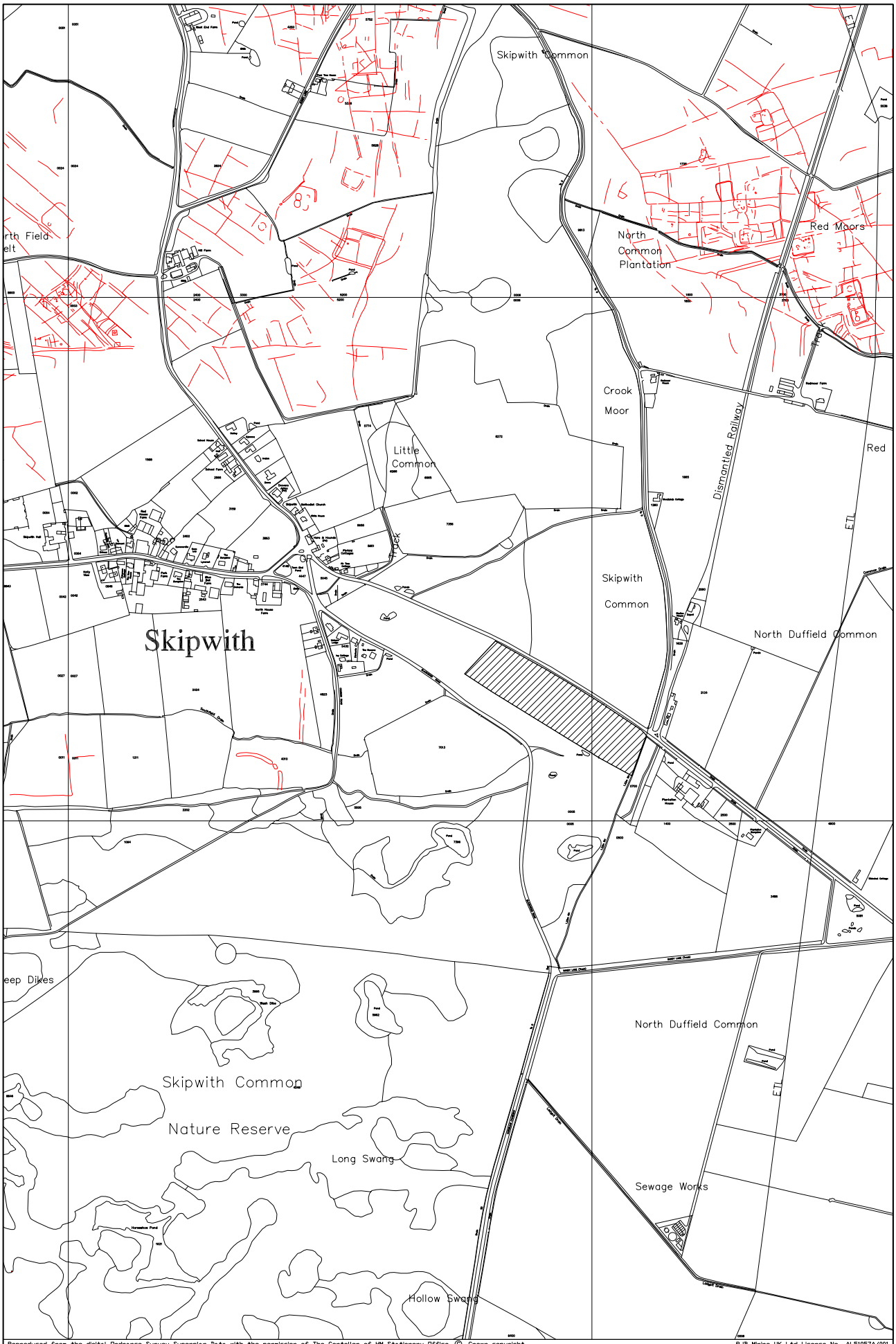
North House Farm Skipwith location of the watching brief

Scale 1:10000

Figure 1



Cropmarks around Skipwith village | Scale 1:10000 | Figure 2

feeding it at right angles. The main took the water into a small dyke on the west side of the field. The drainage work was carried out by contractors (Sweeting Brothers Ltd) working for RJB Mining. The drainage channels were mechanically excavated using a tracked trenching machine which cut a narrow channel 0.15-0.40m wide and spread the upcast either side of the cut. The drain, which comprised conjoining lengths of plastic pipe, was fed directly into the trench by a mechanism mounted on the rear of the machine. The main drainage channel was backfilled first with gravel ballast and then with the upcast. Imported gravel (40mm stone) was used as ballast in the main drain and was fed into the trench from a conveyer belt mounted on the side of a trailer. The lateral drains were backfilled immediately with soil, pushed into the trenches by a blade mounted onto the front of a tractor. The maximum depth of the new drainage channels was 1.50m below ground surface.

At the junction of each lateral drain, trenches were dug with the back-acting arm of a JCB in order to connect the lateral and arterial channels. On average these trenches measured 1.00 x 3.00m and were cut to a depth of up to 1.50m.

2.2 WATCHING BRIEF PROCEDURE

During the watching brief, contact with archaeological remains was sought both in section, on either side of the drainage channel, and in plan from the upcast. However, observation of the sections was often limited since the trenches were so narrow and the contractors' routine was to backfill them immediately. Without the ballast, the pipes laid in wet areas were likely to float and therefore lead to an uneven drainage flow.

Where access to standing sections was restricted, the principle method of feature identification was from the upcast. On the lighter sandier subsoil changes in colour, which marked the location of buried archaeological remains, were pronounced.

In addition to the watching brief, a series of exploratory test pits were hand dug at intervals across the field in order to investigate and measure the depth of buried strata. Each test pit consisted of a small hole, approximately 0.50 x 0.50m, dug to the subsoil interface, (schematically represented on the plans below).

3.0 WATCHING BRIEF RESULTS

The field was generally level with a slightly raised terrace toward the south-eastern end (Fig3), it lay between the 10.40m and 9.20m contour.

The installed drains covered a total length of 2.26km.

Sixteen test pits (TP1-16) were dug at intervals of approximately 50m across the field (Fig.4). From these it was possible to map the character of the subsoil, which consisted mainly of sand. Two test

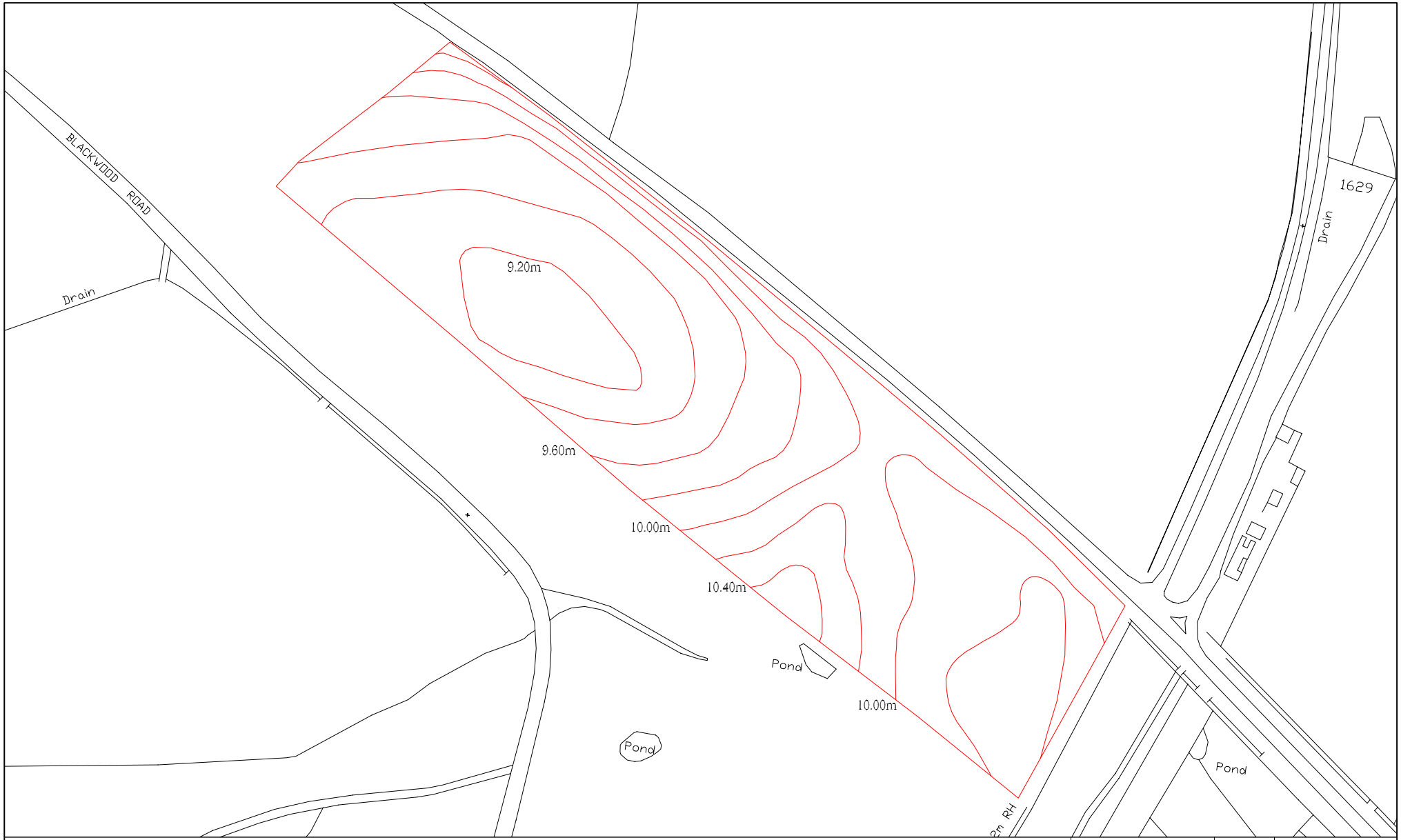
pits located in the centre of the field produced a clay subsoil (TP7 and 8), but no peat or organic clay deposits were identified. Wind blown sand was seen in two other test pits situated in the central part of the field (TP5 and 6).

Three archaeological features were tentatively identified. F1 and F2 are probably linear gullies or small ditches and appear to cross the field. F3 is an isolated contact, perhaps the end of a similar gully or a small discrete pit. No finds were recovered from the upcast of the feature fills to indicate a possible date, nor were any finds recovered from elsewhere in the field.

4.0 ASSESSMENT

The results of this investigation show a different picture compared to that from previous archaeological work carried out in the area. Although similar work undertaken in other areas around Skipwith (Interventions 17 and 18) has identified extensive deposits of wind blown sand over widespread areas, only one small localised aeolian deposit was recognised in this field. This may be due partially to local conditions, for example the Common land may have been less intensively farmed in antiquity and less exposed than fields on the periphery.

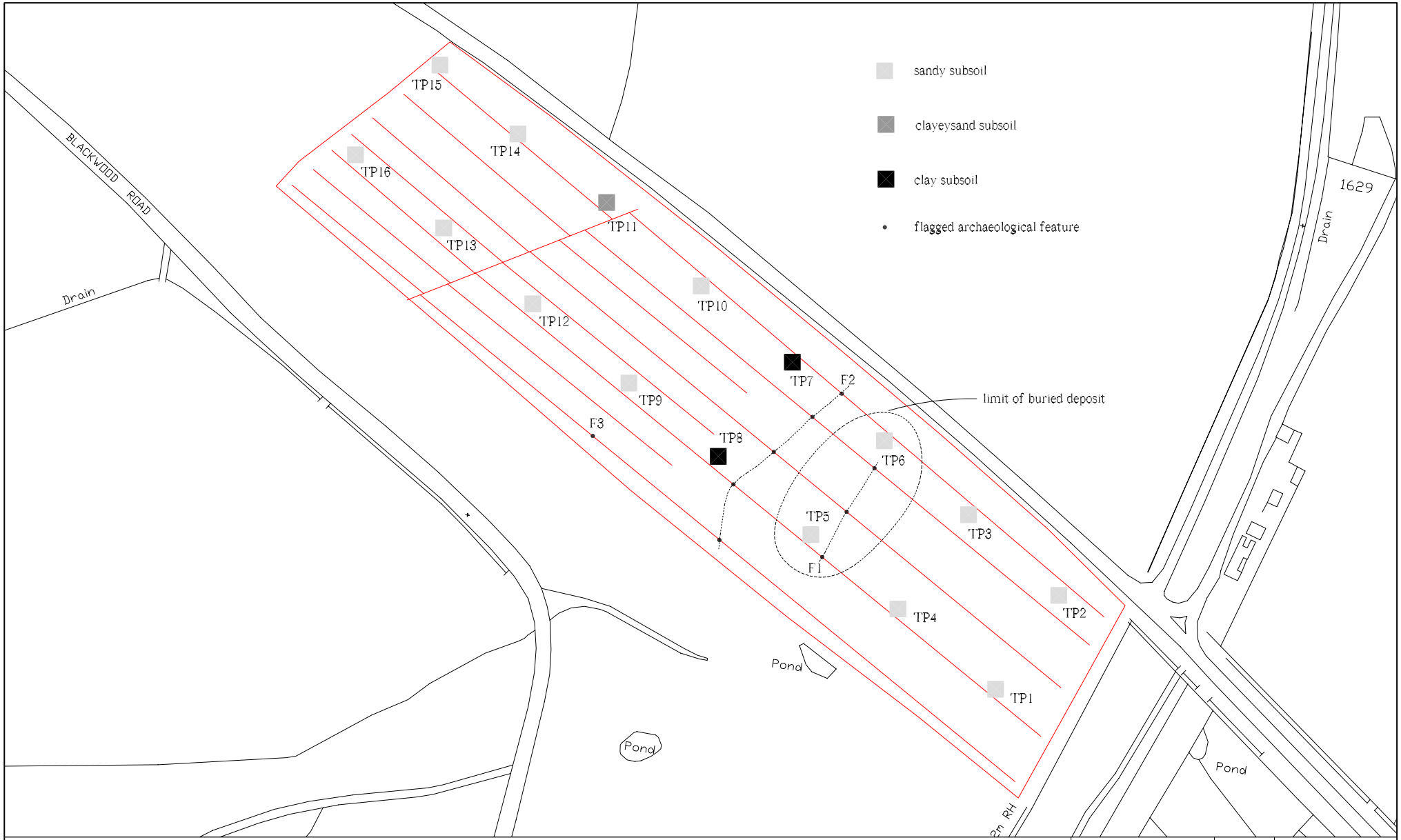
The linear features recognised here may represent earlier field boundaries, some of which may belong to part of the smallholding formerly situated in the south-eastern corner of the field. It is reported locally that the barn was dismantled after a young man, who had been jilted by his lover hanged himself there. It is, however, possible that the features discovered suggest archaeological activity contemporary with earlier patterns of land use and settlement found in the area of Skipwith village. The comparative paucity of features suggest that occupation was not intensive in this part of Skipwith.



North House Farm contour survey (0.20m intervals)

Scale 1:2000

Figure 3



North House Farm land drainage scheme and results of investigations

Scale 1:2000

Figure 4

APPENDIX A: DEPTH AND COMPOSITION OF SOIL STRATA

Field 1 North House Farm

Test Pit No.	Total depth (m)	Thickness of aeolian sand (m)	Subsoil type and Munsell colour	Notes	Additional deposits (m)
1	0.30	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown	-	-
2	0.32	-	sand (10YR 5/ 2) greyish brown	-	-
3	0.31	-	sand (10YR 5/ 2) greyish brown	-	-
4	0.36	-	sand (10YR 5/ 2) greyish brown	-	-
5	0.59	0.25	sand (10YR 5/ 2) greyish brown	-	-
6	0.53	0.21	sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown sand	-	-
7	0.42	-	clay (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-	0.12 sand gravel
8	0.29	-	clay (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-	-
9	0.32	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3 pale) brown	mottled (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-
10	0.30	-	sand (10YR6/ 3) pale brown	mottled (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-
11	0.54	-	clay sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown	mottled (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	0.20 clay sand
12	0.32	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown	mottled (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-
13	0.30	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3 pale brown)	mottled (10YR 5/ 8) yellowish brown	-
14	0.43	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown	-	0.14
15	0.40	-	sand (10YR 6/ 6) brownish yellow	-	-
16	0.50	-	sand (10YR 6/ 3) pale brown	-	0.15 clay sand