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An Archaeological Excavation
at
Double Dykes, South Holme, North Yorkshire.

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10.4.91

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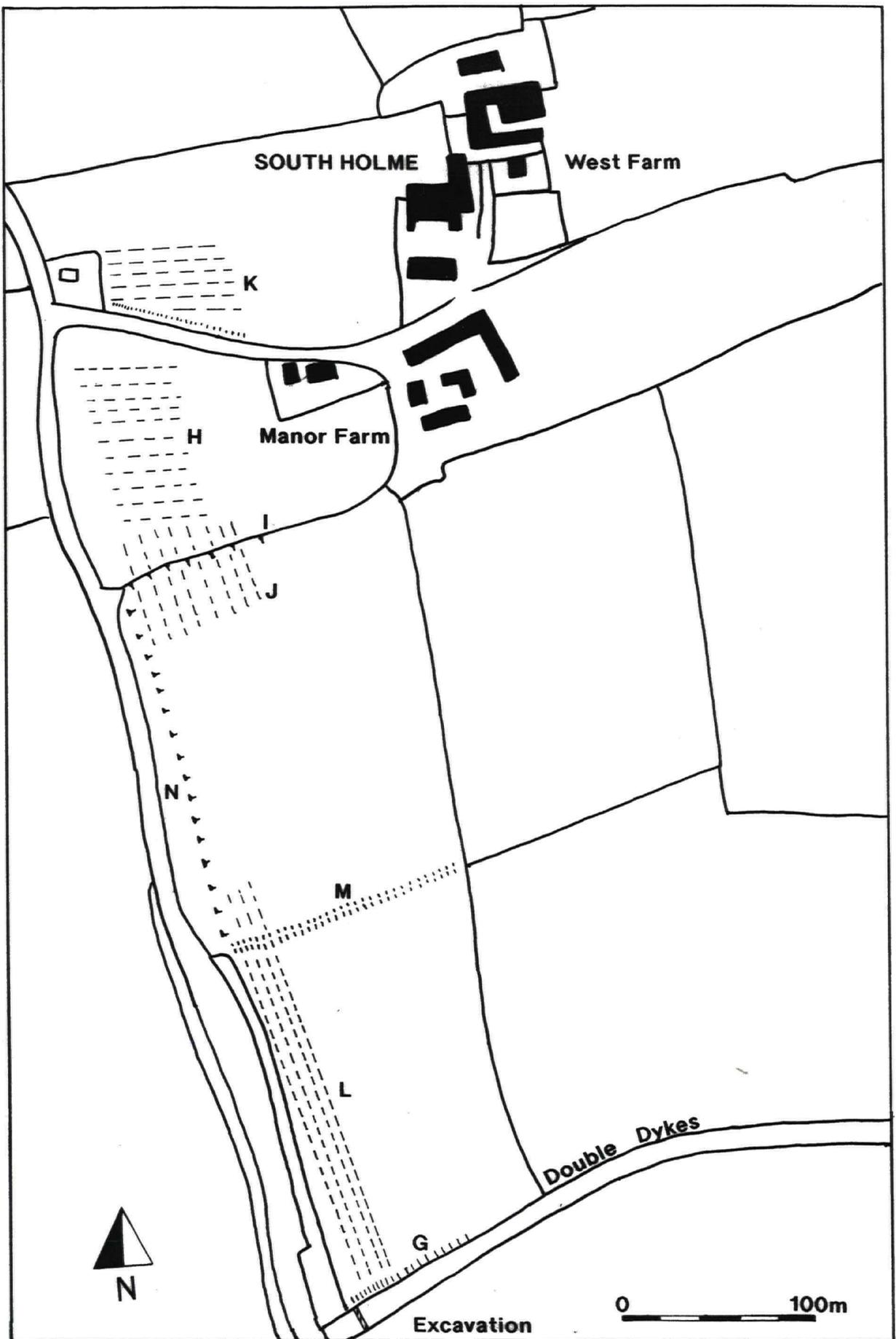


Fig. 1 Site Location and Earthworks

Introduction

The course of the new water-main from East Ness to Coneysthorpe cut through the earthworks of a low bank with ditches at either side, known as Double Dykes. The site was situated c.400m south of South Holme, North Yorkshire, SE: 7008 7678. The earthworks were believed to represent a prehistoric (Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age) Land Boundary, and accordingly MAP were approached by Yorkshire Water to excavate the area in advance of destruction.

All work was funded by Yorkshire Water, with the cooperation of the contractors, M.P. Burke Ltd.

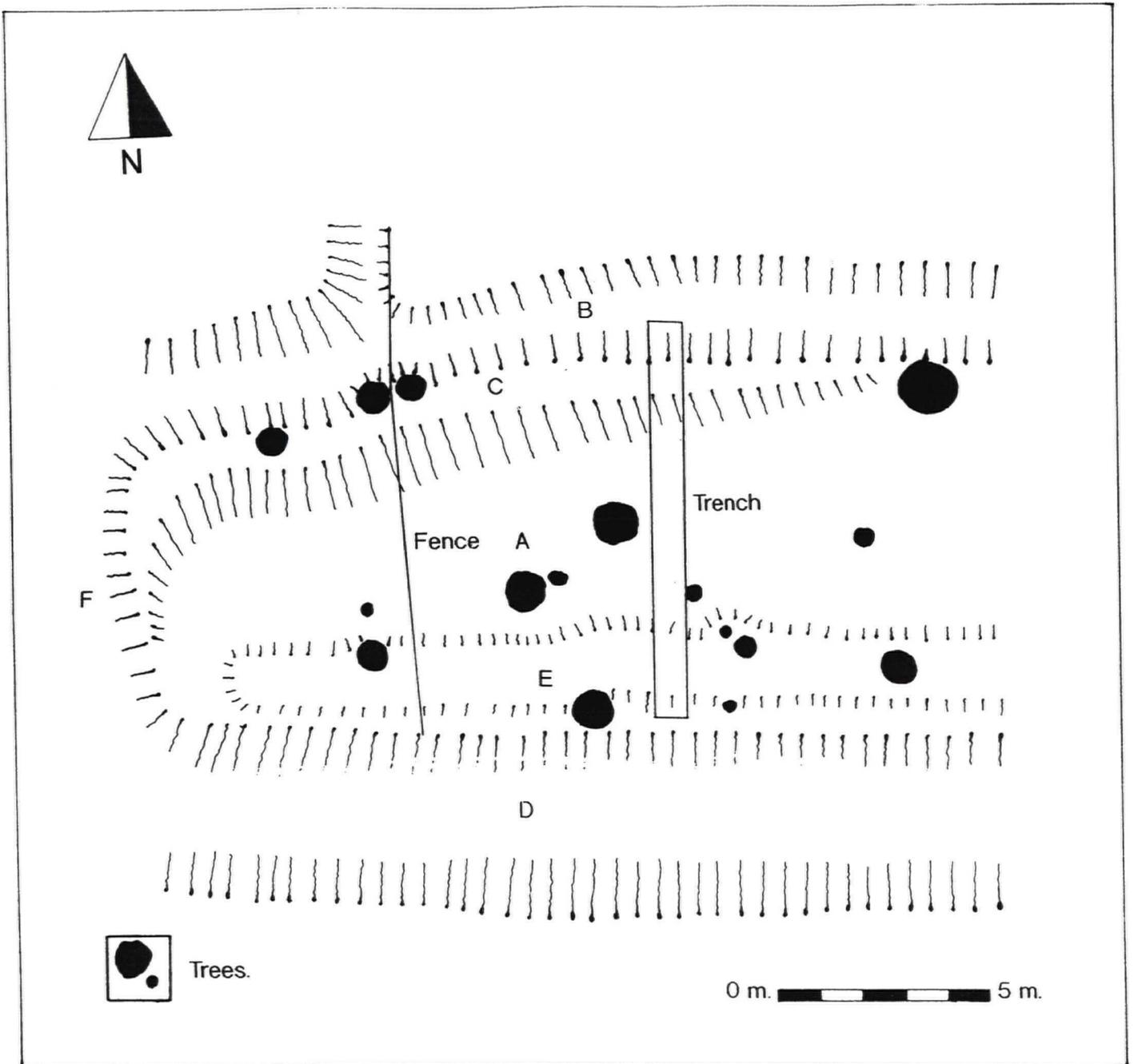


Fig. 2 Earthwork Plan

The Earthworks (Fig. 2)

The earthworks formed a low platform (A), c.9m wide, flanked by two ditches, all of which were on a WNW-ENE alignment.

The northern ditch (B) had a rounded-V profile and a depth of 0.9m. A low bank (C), c.0.3m higher than the centre of the platform, and 2.0m wide, occurred along the southern edge of the ditch. To the north, an amorphous, low bank (G) ran parallel to the ditch (Fig. 3). Bank G was c.8m wide and 0.15m high.

The southern ditch (D) consisted of a functioning drainage channel, to all intents and purposes a stream, the base being filled by running water to a depth of 0.70m. Ditch D had a total depth of 2.0m and a width of 4.5m at the top. The profile was a rounded-V. A low, broad bank (E), c.0.10m high and 2.0m broad, occurred along the northern edge of the southern ditch.

A further ditch (F) linked ditches B and D at a point c.12m west of the excavated section. Ditch F had been dug in recent times to improve surface drainage (pers. comm. Mr. Tate, land-owner).

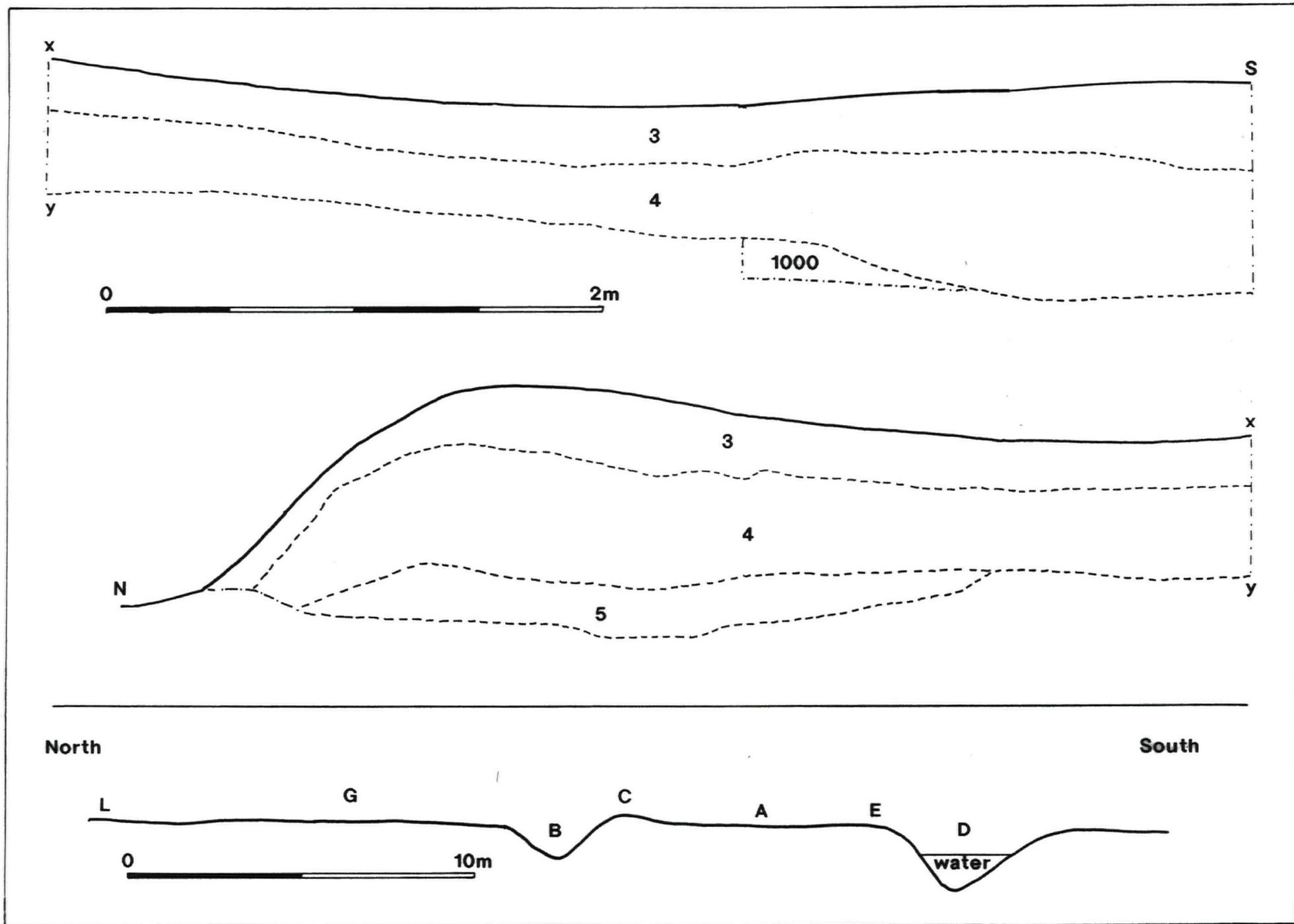


Fig. 3 Sections and Profile

Excavation Results (Figs. 2 and 3)

The hand-excavated trench contained three general layers. A dark yellowish-brown, silty, loamy clay (3), with a depth of between 0.18 and 0.30m, formed the upper layer. This context overlay 4, a layer of brownish-yellow crumbly, plastic clay, which was between 0.25 and 0.5m deep. 4 contained an Fe object and a clay tobacco pipe bowl. Both of these contexts were at their deepest at the banks C and E.

At the northern end of the trench, a reddish-yellow clay, 5, overlay the natural, which consisted of light brownish-yellow to yellowish-grey clay with occasional small pebble inclusions. The surface of the natural sloped gently to both the north and the south of the central platform.

No trace of any buried soil representing an old ground surface was observed over the natural surface. No ditch fills were identified by the excavation, and nor were such observed during the machine-cutting of the pipe trench.

Discussion and Conclusions

The excavation revealed a relatively simple stratigraphy, contexts 3, 4 and 5. The make-up of the banks, C and E, was shown to be identical to the material comprising the platform. Indeed, the banks have the appearance of having been created by the cleaning out of the ditches. Context 4 probably represented material dumped by the cutting of the ditches, with context 3 representing successive ditch cleanings. Context 5 was similar to 4, but redder in hue, perhaps due to percolation from running water in the ditch.

As stated above, the natural surface dipped gently to the north and the south, but not sufficiently to suggest the presence of any ancient cuts preceding the formation of the functioning drainage ditches.

The dating of Double Dykes relies on two factors: the finds, and the situation of the ridge and furrow relative to the ditches and banks.

The Fe object from context 4 obviously assigns the layer to the Iron Age or later. The clay pipe bowl and stem from the same context indicates a post-Medieval date; the bulbous shape and flat spur suggest a date in the second half of the 17th century.

The earthwork ridge and furrow referred to above, occurs at roughly 90 degrees to the Dyke earthworks, but becomes obscured along a line c.8m north of ditch B, where it is replaced by the low bank G on the same alignment as B. Bank G could represent a headland at the southern edge of a pre-enclosure field, thus suggesting that Double Dykes pre-dates that field. It may be significant that Double Dykes forms the Parish Boundary between South Holme and Slingsby, indicating some antiquity for a boundary along the line of Double Dykes.

It is equally possible that the ridge and furrow is overlain by the deposition of material created by successive cleanings of the ditch. The lowness of the bank is more suggestive of that process than the presence of a clearly defined headland. Unfortunately, the field to the south of Double Dykes has been under arable cultivation for many years so that it is not possible to ascertain whether the ridge and furrow continued through into that field.

Linear earthworks on upland areas such as the Wolds and North York Moors have been described in some detail, eg. J.R. Mortimer for the Wolds (Mortimer, 1905) and D.Spratt for the Tabular Hills of the North York Moors (Spratt, 1989). It is apparent that the form of the earthworks at Double Dykes does not conform to any of the recorded examples. A section excavated through a double-dyke at Huggate by W.J.Varley showed a bank 1m high and 6m wide, with a ditch of similar breadth and depth (section in Challis and Harding, 1975, fig. 65). The double-dykes shown schematically in Mortimer (Mortimer, 1905; plate B: T, U, V and W) have a central bank 10m wide and c.2m high, flanked by two ditches from 3 to 8m wide.

The conclusion to be drawn from the excavation is that Double Dykes does not resemble known examples of prehistoric land boundary. Whereas finds from the excavation hint at a post-Medieval date for the construction for Double Dykes, their function as a parish boundary might suggest an earlier date. It is possible that further fieldwork, excavation and analysis of aerial photographs could assign Double Dykes to the correct place in the network of linear earthworks of all periods that cover this area of Yorkshire, further speculation is outside the scope of this report.

Bibliography

Challis, A.J. and Harding, D.W., (1975); 'Later Prehistory from the Trent to the Tyne'.

Mortimer, J.R., (1905): 'Forty Years Researches in the Prehistoric and Saxon Burial Mounds of East Yorkshire'.

Spratt, D.A., (1989): 'Linear Earthworks of the Tabular Hills, north-east Yorkshire'.

Appendix 2 – Earthworks at Manor Farm, South Holme (Fig. 1)

The line of the water main cut through two fields to the west of Manor Farm, South Holme (SE: 769 774, centre), both of which contained extant earthworks. The ridge and furrow remains were recorded in the area of the pipeline corridor, and additional earthworks noted (Fig. 4) ← *not included*.

An area of ridge and furrow (H) is situated in a former orchard, and forms part of the same field system present to the north of Double Dykes. The orientation of the ridge and furrow (K) changes from north-south to east-west c.12m north of an enclosure field boundary (I), which is clearly later than the ridges. The ridges are c.0.25m high and 9m broad at this point, and continue to the south.

To the north of the lane to West Farm, the ridge and furrow (D) continued on the same orientation as K. The remains were 10m broad and 0.40m high.

North of Double Dykes the ridge and furrow ended, or was obscured by a low bank (G). A former field boundary (M) cut across E on an ENE-WNW alignment. M is presumably of enclosure date. To the NE of M, a bank 0.5m high and c.20m wide (N) formed the western boundary of the ridge and furrow.

The ridge and furrow would appear to be the remains of the pre-enclosure fields of the shrunken Medieval village of South Holme, which had 33 tax-payers in the 1377 Poll Tax.

Excavation Methods

An earthwork survey was carried out prior to the commencement of the excavation, the results of which are shown in Figure 2.

A 0.75m wide trench was hand-excavated to the level of the undisturbed natural deposits along the exact line of the area to be destroyed by the pipe trench.

Full plans and sections were drawn and a photographic record taken in colour transparency and monochrome. Recording was by the continuous context system.

Appendix 1 – Finds List

Context 3 – 1 clay tobacco pipe bowl and stem; bulbous bowl, flat spur; 17th century.

Fe object.

Animal bone fragments.

Context 4 – 1 adult cow femur (almost complete).

1 adult cow femur fragment.

Animal bone fragments.

See file for location
map.