

LOW BIRKER  
WESTON  
NORTH YORKSHIRE  
SE 17250 46500

| NYCC HER |       |
|----------|-------|
| SNY      | 19169 |
| ENY      | 6400  |
| CNY      |       |
| Parish   | 6139  |
| Rec'd    |       |

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF

for

AMEY CONSTRUCTION LTD.

FEBRUARY - MAY 1994

Kevin John Cale

June 1994

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**SUMMARY**

An archaeological watching brief was maintained during the removal of topsoil and subsoil deposits within two fields which are situated on the northern flood plane of the River Wharfe near the hamlet of Weston. These works were undertaken in advance of the extraction of gravel deposits.

The desk top study indicated that the two fields known as Low Birker had a potential to contain archaeological remains associated with the medieval settlement of Weston and earlier prehistoric activity.

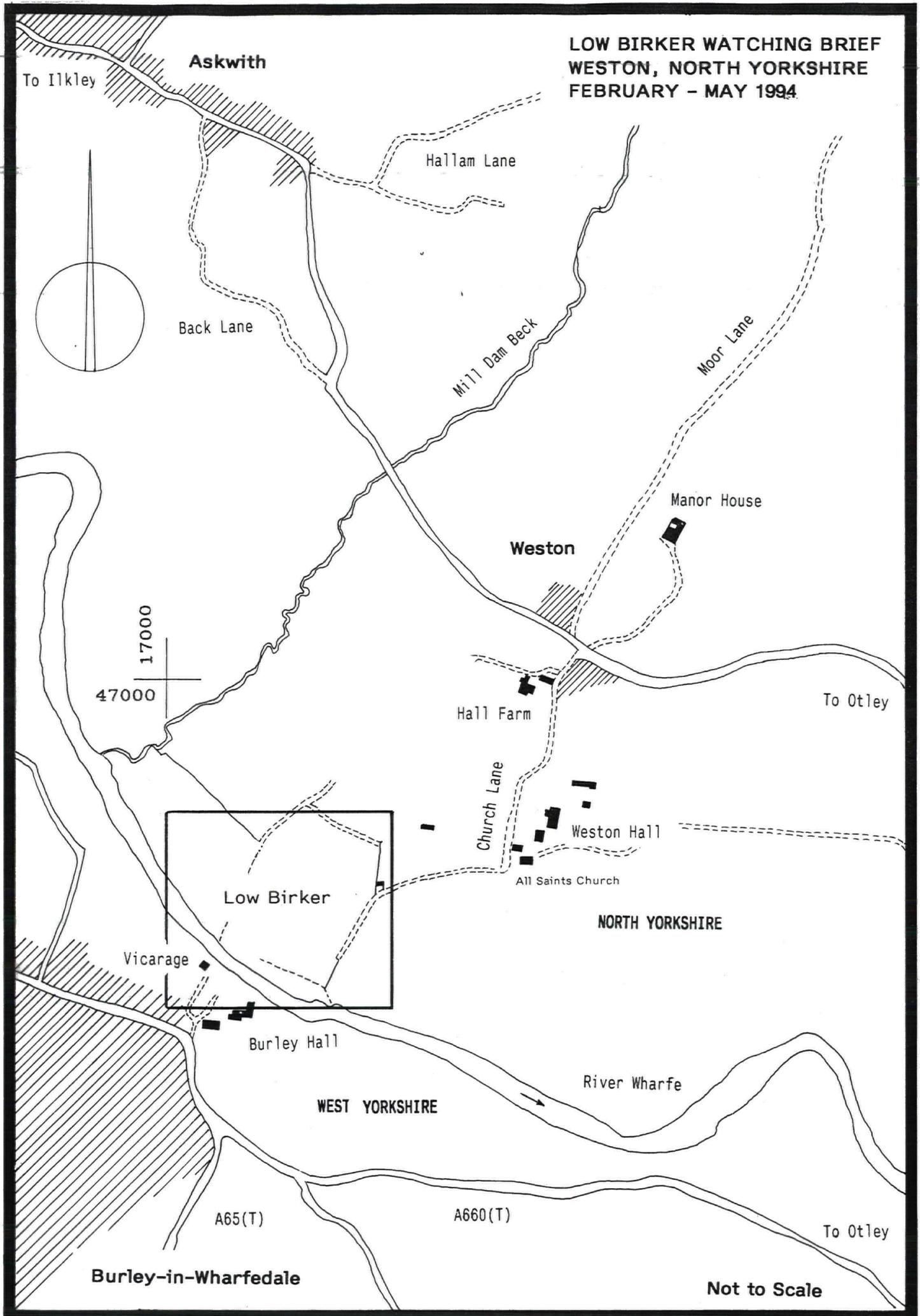
A site inspection prior to the commencement of works indicated that both of the fields had been agriculturally improved and there was an indication that the eastern field had been subject to land drainage. It was noted that the western field contained a number of shallow earthworks that had not been described or identified in previous studies. The two fields were separated by a north south aligned ditch and bank feature.

The watching brief was undertaken on Monday 7th March 1994 and concluded on 16th May 1994, during which time approximately 2.74 hectares were machine excavated.

FIGURE 1

SITE LOCATION PLAN

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## INTRODUCTION

In February 1994 Amey Construction Ltd instructed Kevin John Cale, Archaeological Consultant, to maintain an archaeological Watching Brief during the mechanical excavation of a borrow pit for the extraction of sands and gravel for use in the construction of the A65 Burley-in-Wharfedale bypass.

Mr.N.Campling, Archaeological Officer, North Yorkshire County Council had informed Amey Construction in 1993 that the proposed works were situated within an area of nationally important prehistoric archaeological potential.

It would therefore be necessary to place an archaeological condition on the proposed ground disturbance and as such it was recommended that a watching brief provision should be maintained throughout the excavation of topsoil, subsoil and gravel excavation.

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

### Historical:

The hamlet of Weston was in existence by the 11th Century, the settlement was first recorded in the Domesday Survey of 1086, It is believed that the present extent of the settlement had been largely achieved by the late eighteenth century.

The first reference to Weston Hall appears in a Poll Tax Return of 1378, [Upper Wharfedale - H.S Speight 1900] although the existing hall dates to the 17th Century. However records indicate that the medieval hall may have succeeded a earlier structure known as Merhall Castle, this fortification is suspected to correspond with the earthwork classification type E (Victoria County History), and is thought to have been demolished by King John during the 12th Century. Unfortunately the exact location of the castle is not know, but it has been suggested that it occupied the site of the existing Hall.

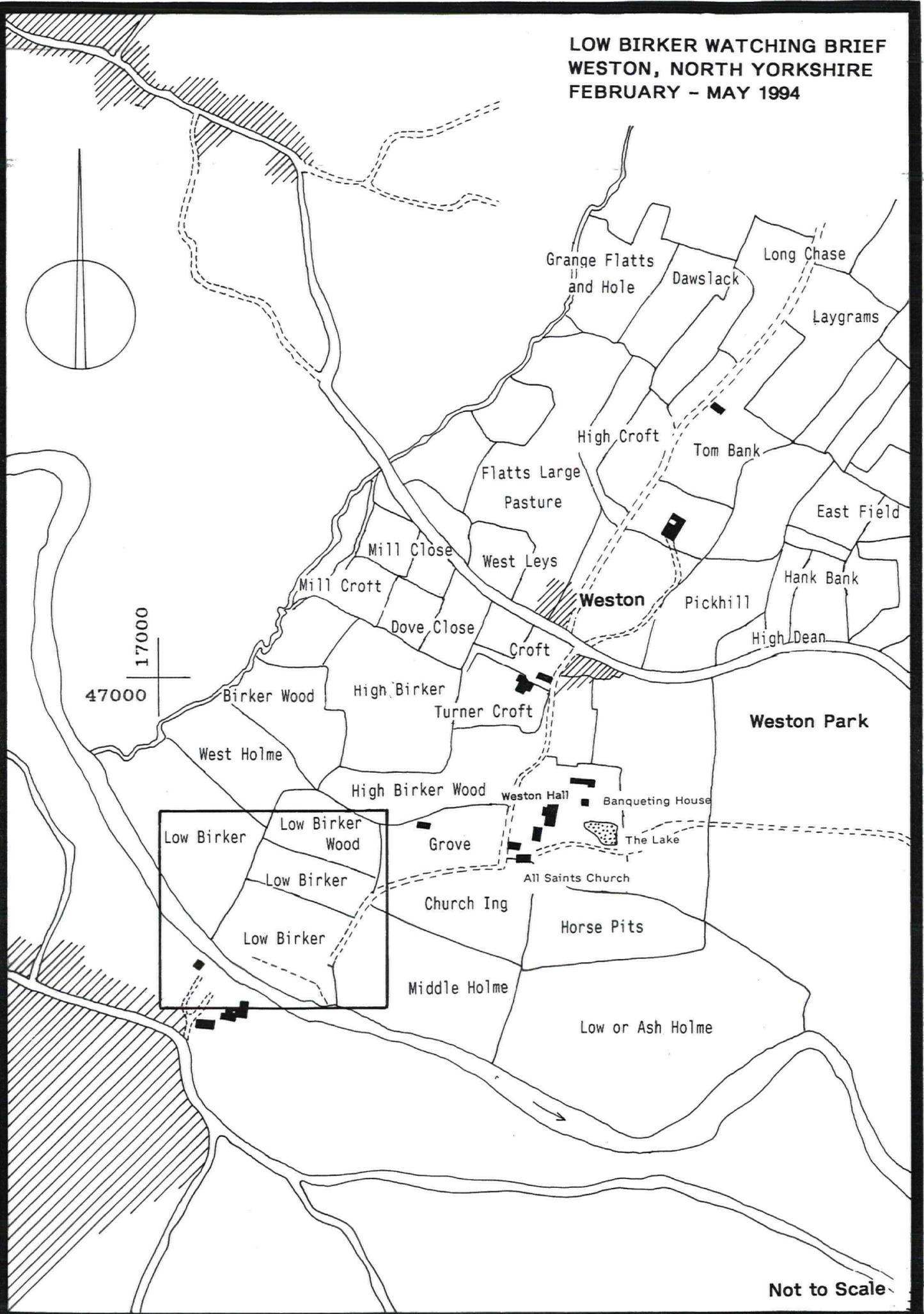
[Archaeological Journal Vol.38, 1881]

The church at Weston is dedicated to All Saints, and has recently been the subject of a detailed fabric analysis by Johnathon Clarke, it is known that it contains fabric dating back to the 11th / 12th century, with a turret instead of a tower and a porch of late 16th Century origin. The location of the church is unusual in being situated on the 68 metre contour, upon the upper gravel terraces, overlooking the flood plains to the south and at the foot of a relatively steep hill, some quarter of a mile distant from the crossroads that mark the centre of the present settlement. The church shares this situation with the 17th Century Hall and it's ancillary buildings which include a large, medieval tithe barn.

FIGURE 2

PLACE AND FIELD NAMES

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Not to Scale

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL:

There has been no archaeology previously identified on the Low Birker site but there is known prehistoric archaeology on the adjacent gravel terrace. The gravel terracing has been proven to have been utilised by the Mesolithic and Neolithic peoples, who are known to have camped and settled along the banks of the River Wharfe. There is uncorroborated evidence from the amateur archaeologist and geologist Mr. B. Matthews that organic deposits containing neolithic remains survive at some depth 4/5 metres below the surface alluvium deposits.

A site inspection of Friday 21st January 1994, revealed that the site supports only a small number of upstanding archaeological remains, these include:

- a. the slight traces of ridge and furrow that were aligned east north east but these features had been largely destroyed by more recent and successive cross ploughing of the fields.
- b. two sections of a banked ditchline, [please see Appendix A for further details] this feature with a shallow profile and a rectilinear planform survives relatively well intact within the eastern most field. A detailed inspection of the bank revealed that it supported more than the occasional water worn cobble and unworked sandstone fragment, indicating that the bank may have originally supported a dry stone wall.

The proposed works would only have a limited impact on the bank and ditch feature, with the greater part of the east west alignment lying outside the site boundary, the north south aligned section would, however, be destroyed during the topsoil and sub-soiling works.

- c. a sinuous bank with a very shallow south facing aspect identified within the western field and aligned east west, it is possible that the structure maybe a previously unidentified field boundary, it's form however would suggest a natural, possibly alluvial feature.

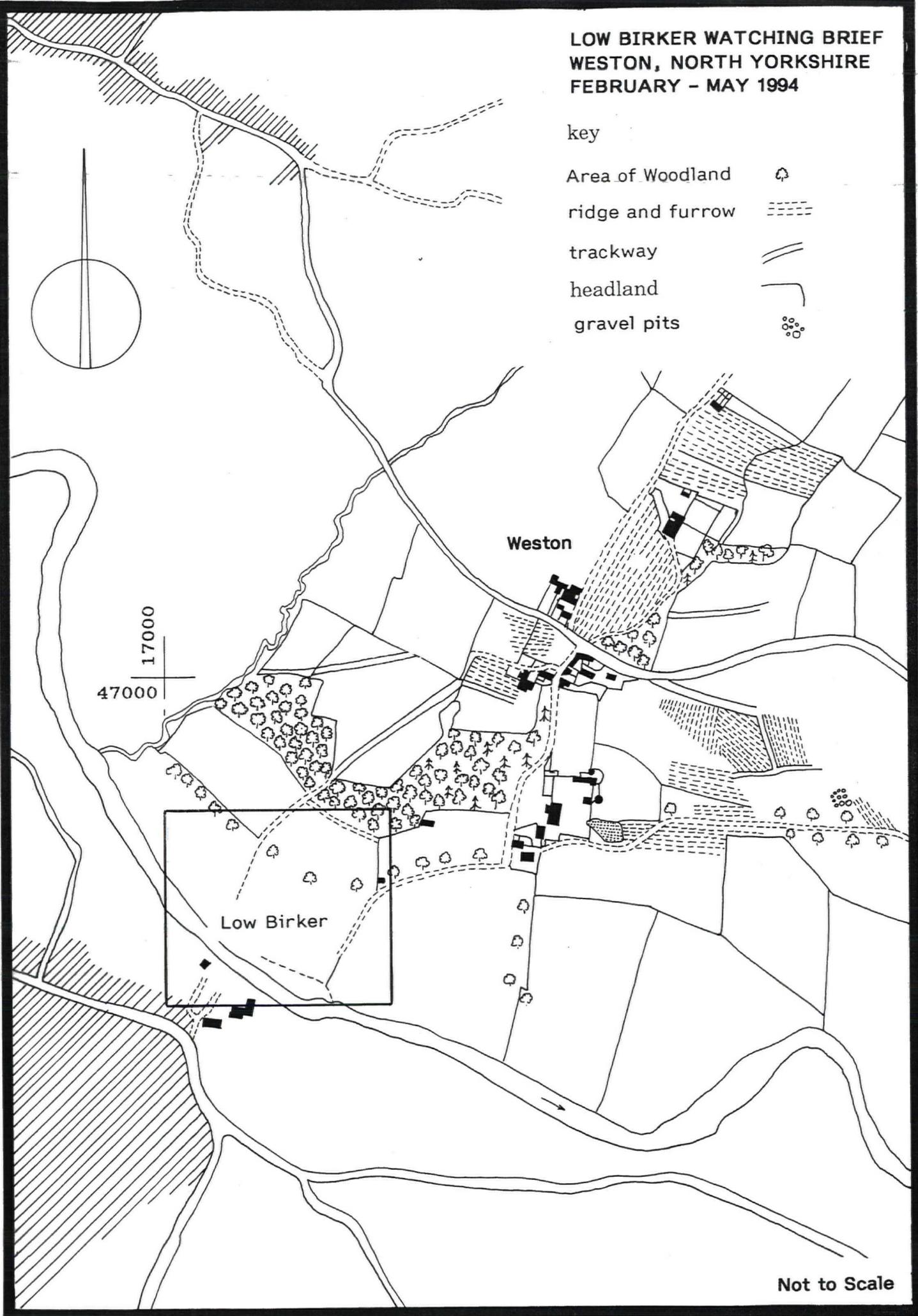
It was noted that the surface water run off within both fields had been recently improved with the insertion of a network of land drains.

There was no evidence from those aerial photographs inspected that the site contained anomalies that may be of an archaeological nature.

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key

- Area of Woodland 
- ridge and furrow 
- trackway 
- headland 
- gravel pits 



Not to Scale

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE SURROUNDING AREA:

The parish and hamlet of Weston has received only a limited level of archaeological research, the focus of previous archaeological attention has been related to Mr. Johnathon Clarke's unpublished thesis and fabric analysis on All Saint's Church. Details concerning those finds of archaeological interest that have been recovered from in and around the hamlet have occasionally appeared in local archaeological journals and periodicals.

The inspection of aerial photographs and the study of place and field name evidence reveals that the settlement of Weston is a shrunken medieval village, and that this settlement was surrounded by a infield field system that was accessed by a network of trackways.

### The settlement

The existing settlement is nucleated around the crossroads on the Otley to Askwith road, the northern and southern quadrants straddling this junction are currently developed and are occupied by buildings dating to the late 18th / early 19th Century, where as those to the east and western quadrants are presently under cultivation.

It is, however, evident that this has not always been the case, as it is clear that the east and western quadrants have been previously developed. Within the small enclosed paddocks located to the immediate north of Hall Farm the intensive and well preserved earthwork remains of medieval building platforms and property parcels can be noted. The western quadrant is presently obscured by mature deciduous woodland, field name evidence would suggest that this was also a site subjected to medieval development.

### The field system

The settlement is surrounded by a intensive and extensive complex of earthworks that are associated with the medieval cultivation processes, the earthworks being largely comprised of ridge and furrow and headlands. To the north and west of the hamlet the alignment of the ridge and furrow correlates with existing field system, indicating that at least within this area the trends of the medieval field system survive, this contrasts with those to the west of the hamlet, here the medieval fields have been largely destroyed during the 17th and 18th Century programme of landscaping associated with Weston Hall.

It was during the 17th and 18th Century's when those fields to the east of the settlement and south of the Otley road were incorporated into the open grounds that straddle the carriageway leading from the eastern gatehouse to Weston Hall.

It would appear that with the exception of that field known as the Grove which is situated to the immediate west of the hall, the topography to the west was less intensively landscaped, with emphasis being placed on the screening of the hall with the deciduous plantations known as the Birker Woods.

The Grove is a relatively level field that supports a complex assemblage of shallow earthworks that would appear to be systematically arranged, however, a detailed inspection would be necessary in order to confirm their form and function, but it would appear that at some time, most probably during the 17th and 18th Century's, the field had been landscaped and cultivated as an ornamental garden adjacent to the hall

#### The transport network

The lanes and trackways that are to be found crossing the landscape surrounding Weston are both the surviving remnants of a medieval transport network and a series of carriageways and ornamental driveways associated with the later hall. A number of these structures are now disused and their location can only be determined from the examination of the old maps and the aerial photographs of the area.

The medieval transport network would have linked Weston with the surrounding settlements of Askwith, Clifton and Denton as well accessing the infield system around the village and the high pasture and open moorland to the north.

It is clear that the alignment of the main Weston to Otley road has been altered to accommodate the intake of land during the laying out of the parklands during the 17th Century, on exiting the village the road would have maintained a direct south easterly route towards Otley, on an alignment this is today marked as a footpath. The present road follows the rectilinear lay out of the north eastern park boundary.

A detailed inspection and comparison of aerial photographs with the available early cartographic sources indicate that during the medieval or post medieval period there may well have been a crossing point of the River Wharfe from the Low Birker fields on the northern bank to the area of the present Vicarage on the southern bank. No evidence of a bridge or crossing point has been confirmed from the documentary sources, however, a field inspection would indicate that a trackway had at some time led from the village down onto the flood plane and to the riverbank, and whilst the present river level would not be suitable for fording purposes a bridging point can not be discounted, especially since on the opposing bank at this point a cutting with a steep V shaped profile can be identified.

### A gazetteer of archaeological finds

A small assemblage of archaeological finds that have been reported within the immediate area of the site are listed below:-

A Mesolithic polished stone axe, Carib type, was recovered from the banks of the River Wharfe near Burley-in-Wharfedale, unfortunately the exact find spot is not known. The artefact was recovered in 1897.

[P.P.S.E.A. Vol.2, 1915 - A.Leslie Armstrong]

A stone Celt axe was found near Burley-in-Wharfedale, apparently on a short cut from the River Wharfe to the Cemetery.

[J.R Foster 20th March 1964]

A chipped flint axe, tranchet, was recovered from pebbles, below the normal river level at Burley-in-Wharfedale. The exact finds spot is not known but is known to have been to the north west of the site. The artefact was recovered in 1959.

[Bradford Archaeological Group Bulletin, Vol.5, No.4, 1960]

A number of Cup and Ring marked rocks have been identified along the upper hill side of the south facing aspect of lower Wharfedale, these stones are to the immediate north of Weston village and within Greystone Plantation.

[Yorkshire Archaeological Journal, Vol.33, 1937]

Buried human skeletal remains were disturbed east of Weston Park between 1968 - 1975 during the extraction of gravels, by quarrymen. Significant buried deposits of peat were also noted, and measured up to 4 metres in depth.

[Correspondence between Mr. B. Matthews and NYCC Archaeological Officer, 1986]

A Roman Coin (date not known) and a associated horseshoe was found at Burley-in-Wharfedale in 1916, during trenching work by A.Kirkbright.

[Dalesman Magazine, Vol.8, 1946]

An Anglo - Danish Cross is currently in the possession of Captain Dawson, Weston Hall.

[Medieval Archaeology, Vol.xiii, 1969]

A set of late medieval stocks were noted in 1941, these were located on the small triangular shaped green at the cross roads within the hamlet, the exact form and date of which are unknown.

[A.Mee, The Kings England, Yorkshire West Riding, 1941, p.414]

It can be concluded from this data that it would appear that there has been a relatively intense period of prehistoric activity within the immediate environs, with no significant, recognisable activity during the Roman period. The immobility of decorative stonework may point to a 8th / 9th Century settlement within the parish, since which time it possible that the settlement has been occupied.