

PLATE 1



General shot of Low Birker prior to the excavation of the borrow pit, facing west.

PLATE 2



General shot of Low Birker prior to the excavation of the borrow pit, facing east.

SITE LOCATION AND DESCRIPTION

The hamlet of Weston is located on the lower slopes of the north facing aspect of the lower Wharfedale valley. The settlement is situated upon the 100 metre contour, within the rural parish of Weston.

The landscape is typified by fields of improved pasture that are enclosed by dry stone walls and fences, intermixed with copses and plantations of mixed woodland that occur intermittently across the hill side, the landscape is generally well managed and is typical of estate type management. The farms are large, nucleated and isolated, and serviced by a network of un-metalled trackways and lanes.

The site, known locally as Low Birker consists of two relatively large, sub-rectangular shaped fields of improved pasture which occupy the lower gravel terraces and floodplain leading down to the northern bank of the River Wharfe.

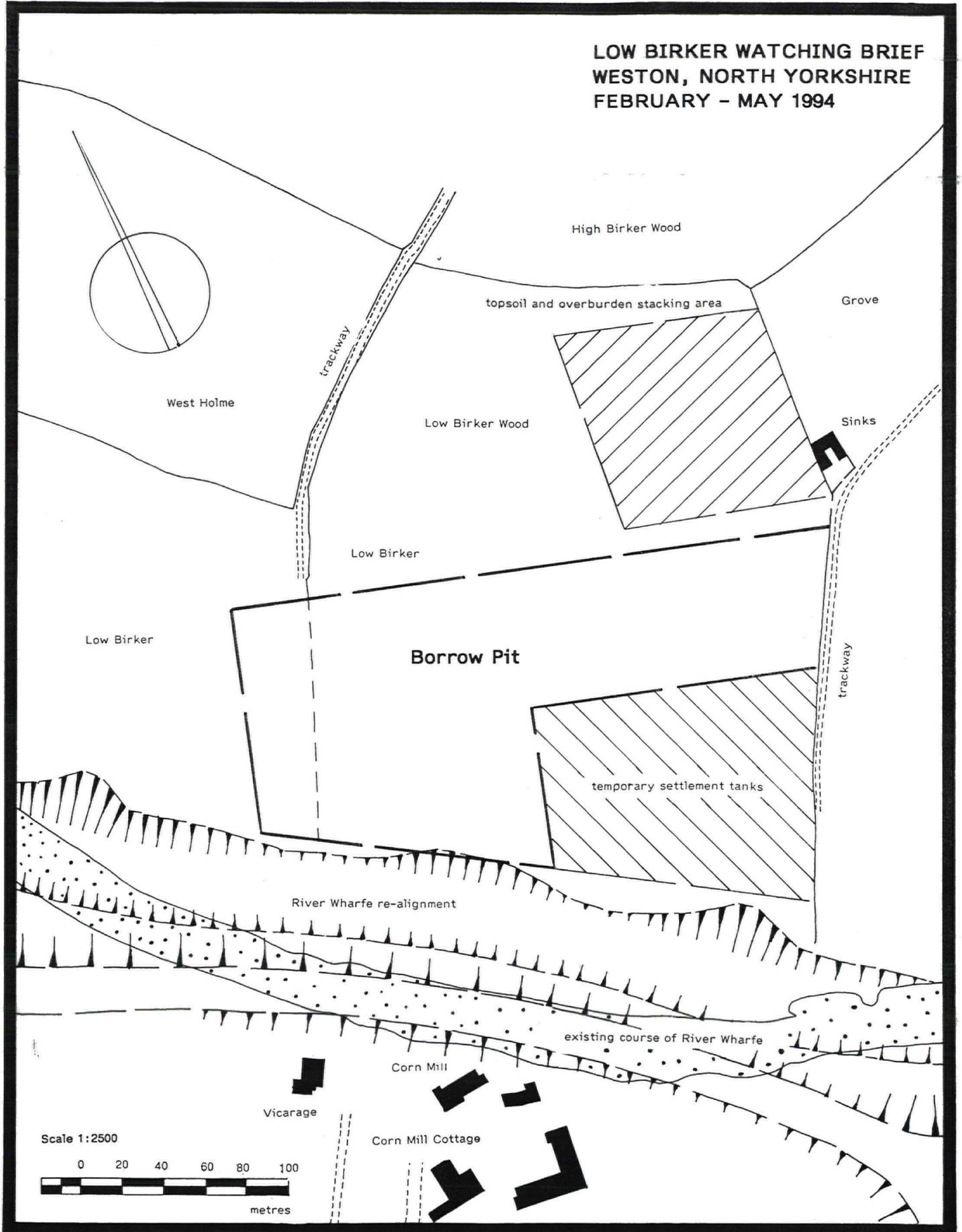
The two fields are situated to the south west of the hamlet of Weston and directly opposite the northern fringe of Burley-in-Wharfedale which is located on the southern banks of the Wharfe within the county of West Yorkshire. The fields are physically very similar and are separated by a medial fenceline which runs along the remains of what is now a shallow banked ditchline. To the south the fields are contained by the River Wharfe, here the fragmentary remains of a dismantled dry stone wall formed the northern boundary, to the east a dry stone wall runs parallel to a narrow service lane. To the north the fields are contained by a natural south facing escarpment, this natural gravel terrace running along the 63 metre contour has been utilised as a landscape feature within the park and supports a series of equally spaced mature Sycamore trees. The western boundary of the field is a modern fenceline.

At the time of inspection the field was found to have been heavily grazed and the southern extent of the field had already been temporarily fenced off and the tree cover and vegetation from this area removed, the area had also been subjected to a high level of ground disturbance cleared and top-soiled in advance of the diversion of the River Wharfe and the construction of the bypass road. Within the south eastern corner of the field a series of temporary settlement tanks had been excavated. All these works at the southern extent of the field were exempt from the archaeological condition that has been placed on the borrow pit excavations.

FIGURE 4

SITE PLAN

LOW BIRKER WATCHING BRIEF
WESTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE
FEBRUARY - MAY 1994



Scale 1:2500



METHODOLOGY

The preliminary investigation into the site conducted by Mr.N.Campling, Archaeological Officer, North Yorkshire County Council indicated that the site had a high potential for the survival of archaeological remains. There was a very real possibility that the borrow pit excavations would disturb archaeology associated with the medieval field systems associated with the settlement of Weston and the earlier prehistoric activity on the gravel terraces.

The archaeological condition

It was felt that there was a need to maintain a watching brief during all ground disturbance within Low Birker. The watching brief condition makes provision for an archaeologist to be present on site, to witness the excavation process, whilst also allowing the archaeologist a reasonable length of time to satisfactorily record any archaeology encountered. By following this procedure it is hoped that information can be compiled relating to the presence, absence, extent, condition, character, quality and date of any archaeological features or deposits that may have survived within this field.

The desk top study

Prior to the commencement of site works a desk top study was undertaken as the initial phase of the commission with the object of establishing the range of archaeological data previously recorded and thereby establish the terms of reference for the fieldwork. This involved an examination of the North Yorkshire County Sites and Monuments Record, in particular its map based data, and the sources for those records. In terms of the corridor and its immediate environs this proved to be dominated by information obtained from aerial photographs.

The scheme of works

The proposed works were to be undertaken in three separate phases:-

- i. the initial process of removing the turf and topsoil from the site would be undertaken by a Caterpillar DH6 Bulldozer, this would scrape the overburden from the site in a series of parallel, four metre wide linear tracts, depositing the accumulated material in spoil tips at the edges of the site.
- ii. following the completion of the above, a similar method would be adopted for the removal of subsoil deposits from the borrow pit.
- iii. the extraction of the gravel deposits can only commence following the completion of the above, initially it had been intended to employ a dragnet for this purpose, however, as it turned out a team of tracked excavators would be responsible for the excavation of the gravel.

PLATE 3



General shot depicting the technique employed in the stripping of turf and topsoil depicting Feature C, facing south.

PLATE 4



General shot depicting the north eastern extent of the borrow pit following the removal of turf and topsoil, facing south west.

In order to satisfy the archaeological condition placed on this proposed extraction process, it was agreed that the archaeologist should be present, on site, during the removal of turf, topsoil and subsoil deposits, the extent of observations will be determined by the nature of the buried soil horizons and the archaeology exposed.

It was decided that in order to maximise the return of archaeological information from this site the fieldworker would follow the Bulldozer, on foot and at a safe working distance, noting artefact scatters and any anomalies visible on the surface of the recently disturbed ground.

Site Variables

Every effort was made to prevent any biases in artefact identification from influencing the record. There were, however, a number of variables that have to be taken into consideration. As might be expected during this period between March and April the weather conditions were unsettled and variable and as a consequence so were the prevailing light conditions. Combined with the state of the top/subsoils and the overall ground visibility this undoubtedly produced a great variability in the conditions which were experienced.

It had been initially anticipated that the observation of the gravel extraction would be restricted due to the expected high level of the water table, which it was expected would submerge the greater part of all gravel deposits. However, due to the changes that have been made in the technique of gravel extraction which has resulted in the artificial lowering of the water table, it became possible to occasionally inspect these deposits that would have otherwise been submerged.

FIGURE 5

EARTHWORKS ON AND ADJACENT TO THE SITE

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