

SUMMARY OF TOPSOIL EXCAVATIONS

The topsoil, a dark grey brown (Munsell 10YR4/3) clayey sandy loam was found over the entire site varying only in the depth of the deposit, other likely variables such as colour, and the quantity of inclusions were not observed.

The layer was relatively friable and contained a low quantity of inclusions of root with the occasional water worn pebble and charcoal fleck.

The depth of the deposit would appear to be directly reflective of the surface of the naturally deposited subsoils and gravels across the site which were noted to undulate, consequently the depth of the topsoil deposits varied, this ranged from a minimum of 12 cm within the south western corner to a maximum of 48 cm towards the northern extent of the site.

No archaeological features or anomalies were noted within the topsoil deposits.

The layer contained a small assemblage of worked and unworked flint fragments, these were recovered over a wide area at SE 17140 46560, SE 17200 46520, SE 17290 46540, and SE 17300 46550 with no specific concentrations noted. A total of four flints were recovered from the topsoil these included a broken blade, two retouched flakes and a natural unworked fragment.

Two sherds of pottery were recovered from the topsoil, at SE 17130 46570 and SE 17160 46510 the coarse make up of the fabric together with the high quantity of inclusions and the high level of abrasion indicates that the pottery may well be early medieval in origin.

The layer also contained a low quantity of modern finds, this small assemblage was dominated by fragments of plastic and metalwork which was all of an agricultural origin. The occasional sherd of modern and nineteenth century pottery and porcelain were identified together with a small number of clay tobacco pipe stems, glass fragments and a small quantity of broken animal bone. It can be concluded that these finds have arrived within the topsoil as a result of the recent manuring and cultivation of these fields.

SUMMARY OF SUBSOIL EXCAVATIONS

The subsoil a dark orange brown (Munsell 10YR4/4) loamy sandy clay was found over the entire site, the layer did however vary in both colour and in the quantity of inclusions found within it, it was concluded that these variables were due to the leaching of the natural sand and gravel deposits beneath.

The layer was relatively well compacted and contained a moderate to high quantity of inclusions of water worn pebble and cobble with the occasional fleck of charcoal, the intensity of the inclusions varied across the site.

The depth of the deposit would appear to be directly reflect the contours of the naturally deposited sands and gravels across the site which were noted to undulate, this uneven terrain became more pronounced towards the east. The peaks and troughs within the sands and gravels resulted in the depth of the subsoil varying considerably within a short distance, ranging from a minimum of 40 cm to a maximum of 180 cm.

Within the south western corner of the site the loamy sandy clay gave way to a substantial layer of alluvial sands, which exceeded 220 cm in depth, this change in soil types would appear to directly correlate with the angle of declination of the sands and gravels. It was from this deposit which was found to continue south towards the River Wharfe that two fragments of antler bone were recovered. These fragments were recovered from works outside the area under investigation and were found adjacent to the River Wharfe at SE 17110 46460.

Two elliptical shaped concentrations of water worn cobbles were identified within the subsoil, at SE 17270 46570 and SE 17370 46550 these two features measured 3 metres by 6 metres and were made up of water worn cobbles which were less than 20 cm in size. Although of a similar size and planform the two anomalies were not found to be physically related, no finds were identified with these features. It has been suggested that these features may form part of land drain structure, there was, however, no indication to suggest that these features were part of a drainage network.

No finds were recovered from this layer.

PLATE 10



Detail of the former meander of the River Wharfe cutting into the gravels, as noted within the east facing section of the borrow pit, facing west.

PLATE 11



Detail shot depicting the western extent of the trench excavated in advance of the diversion of the River Wharfe, it was from these deposits of fluvial sands that the antler fragments were retrieved, facing east.

FIGURE 6

THE LOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION OF FINDS

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

key

medieval pottery sherd



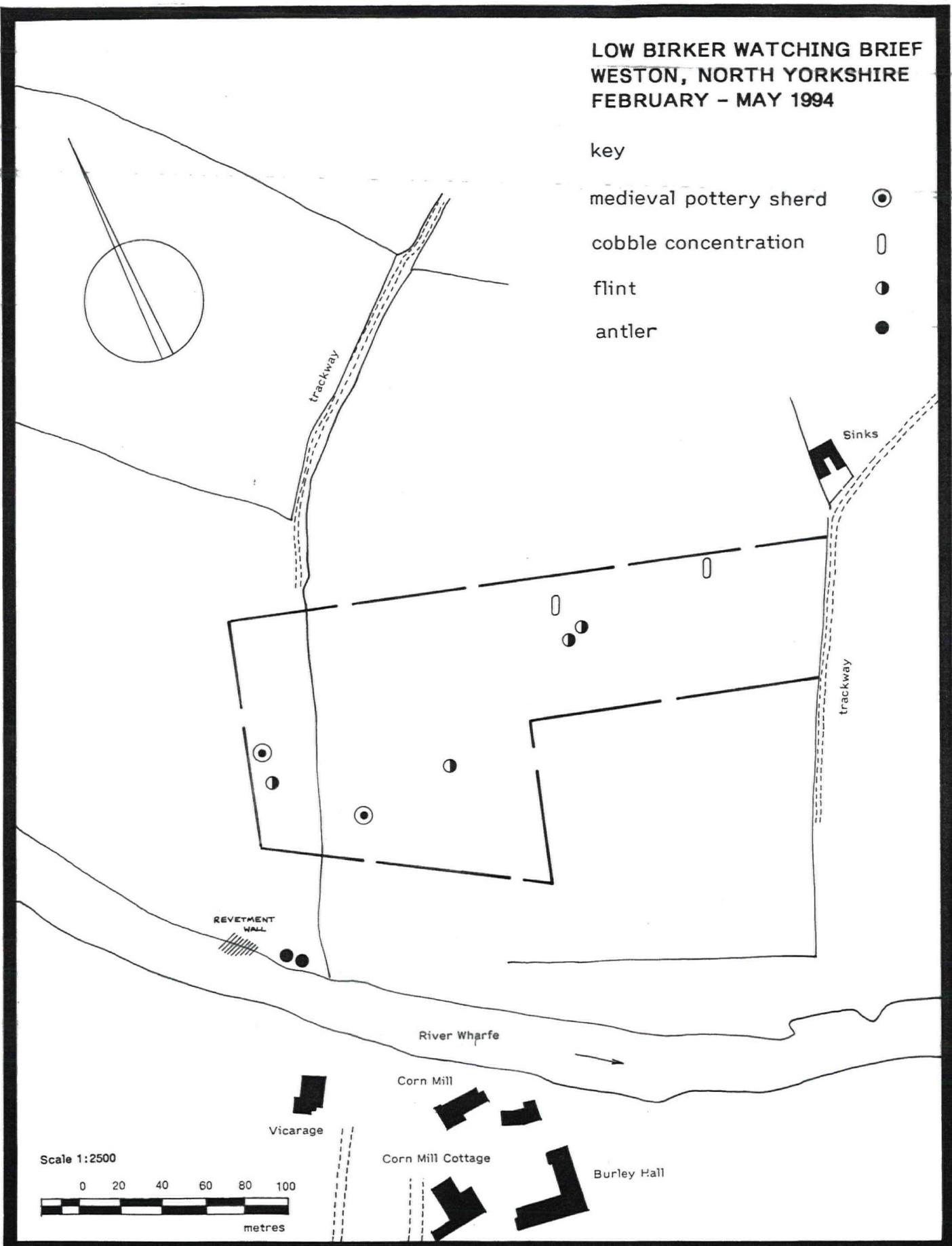
cobble concentration



flint



antler



SUMMARY OF GRAVEL EXTRACTION

The alluvial sand and gravel deposits were found over the entire site, the layer was found to vary considerably in both colour and in the quantity of inclusions found within it.

The discolouration within these deposits was largely due to iron staining and ranged from yellow greys to dark orange browns. The size and grade of the gravels varied from 2 - 60 cm in size, and the sands within which they were suspended ranged from coarse to finely grained deposits. These variations all occurred within horizontal beds that were clearly the result of sedimentary deposition.

As previously noted the surface of the gravels undulated, the shallow troughs between these raised areas of gravel were filled with subsoils. Inspection of the physical relief of this deposit indicates that surface water had been responsible for creating this landscape. Further evidence of these ancient watercourses were noted within the east facing section, in the south west corner of the site, here the backfilled channel of a former meander of the River Wharfe was identified. The substantial quantities of yellow-orange brown sand that had been identified within this area of the site were the sediments that had accumulated within this former watercourse. The location of this backfilled meander correlates exactly with the alignment and location of the shallow, sinuous earthwork feature that was initially identified within the western field.

The gravels were excavated down to approximately 3 metres in depth, at which point a layer of blue grey coloured shaley sand was encountered.

No finds were recovered from this layer.

PLATE 8



General shot depicting the excavation of subsoil from the central area of the borrow pit, the undulating surface of the gravel deposits can also be noted, facing west.

PLATE 9



General shot depicting the initial stages of gravel extraction at the western extent of the borrow pit, facing east.

CONCLUSION

The recent archaeological watching brief at Low Birker, Weston, has provided a useful overall view of the buried soil horizons within the area of the borrow pit. It is interesting to note how slight the changes in the soils are over what is an extensive area.

The watching brief has shown that the potential for the survival of archaeological deposits on this site was low. The minimal amount of archaeological material identified also suggests that human activity, certainly Roman or later, was probably limited if not entirely absent from the site. Perhaps one of the most remarkable results of the watching brief was the lack of surface finds of Medieval material and evidence of Medieval cultivation. The scarcity of medieval pottery from the site would suggest that the Low Birker fields were beyond the effects of Medieval manuring, it is possible that this area of the flood plain was only brought into cultivation during the Post Medieval period.

The desk top study had indicated that a medieval / post medieval thoroughfare may have crossed the Low Birker fields, however the watching brief provided no physical evidence within the buried soil horizons to substantiate this claim. However, prior to and during pile driving works on the northern bank of the River Wharfe a number of large sandstone fragments and water worn cobbles were noted on the surface and buried within the river bank. It would appear to this structure may well have been part of a revetment wall protecting the Low Birker fields from flooding. Whilst the location of this structure (SE 17110 46460) correlates with a likely medieval crossing point of the River Wharfe there was no evidence to suggest that it had in anyway been a component of a bridge or ford.

The archaeology of the site is dominated by evidence of prehistoric activity. This takes the form of a small scattering of flint which is nevertheless significant since flint is alien to the area and the occurrences must equate with some form of prehistoric activity.

In all four flint artifacts were recovered from these works, consisting of a broken blade, two retouched flakes and a natural unworked fragment. This small assemblage was recovered from relatively shallow levels within the topsoil, a deposit that was also found to contain 20th Century material and had subjected to a high level of cultivation.

This distribution is undoubtedly real and must reflect the particular significance of this area in the late Mesolithic and early Neolithic period.

It is impossible to say without further detailed investigation what is represented by these flint scatters. By their nature, predominantly natural fragments, flakes and broken or unfinished tools, they would suggest areas of flint processing. A complete lack of complementary material such as pottery or evidence of burning might suggest they relate to temporary activities or are removed some distance from areas of permanent occupation.

It is recommended that the small finds assemblage recovered from the watching brief receive further consideration from specialists should they deem the sample worthy for detailed examination. The finds should eventually be submitted to Harrogate Museums Service for proper storage.

Kevin John Cale
June 1994

APPENDIX A

LOW BIRKER EARTHWORK RECORD:

FEATURE A

Type:	agricultural: structure
Class:	earthwork: ditch: banked
NGR:	SE 17300 46580
Planform:	linear
Aligned:	east / west
Material:	earth, sandstone fragments, cobble
Condition:	moderate
Length:	260 metres
Width:	7 metres
Depth:	54 cm
Fig Nos:	5
Plate No:	6, 7
Film/Frame No:	1/ 5-7, 9, 16, 18, 22-23, 26
Previous Data:	none

Description:

a linear ditch and bank feature, situated on the lower slopes of the natural gravel scarp, the feature falls on a shallow gradient from the disused barn and courtyard complex known as the Sinks to the dry stone boundary wall at the western extent of the field. The dry stone wall and the construction of a gateway has destroyed the physical relationship between this structure and what would have been it's continuation towards the River Wharfe (Feature B).

A detailed inspection was made of an exposed section of this feature following excavations in advance of the construction of a haul road. It was revealed that this structure has been formed by excavating back into the natural fall of the slope, the upcast of which has been utilised to form the shallow bank to it's immediate south. It would appear that from the quantity of unworked sandstone and cobble identified upon and bedded within this bank that the structure may have supported a dry stone wall.

The structure was found to be in a moderate state of preservation, it's profile at the eastern extent had been degraded and partially destroyed by repeated agricultural traffic which have utilised this low point in the natural scarp to gain access into the fields from the north.

PLATE 6



Detail of the banked ditchline at it's eastern extent prior to the excavation of a haul road through this structure, west.

PLATE 7



General shot depicting the removal of turf and topsoil from the area of the banked ditchline prior to the construction of a haul road, facing north.

FEATURE B

Type:	agricultural: structure
Class:	earthwork: ditch: banked
NGR:	SE 17150 46550
Planform:	linear
Aligned:	north / south
Material:	earth, sandstone fragments, cobble
Condition:	poor
Length:	170 metres
Width:	430 cm
Depth:	53 cm
Fig Nos:	5
Plate No:	5
Film/Frame No:	1/ 1, 5, 12-13
Previous Data:	none

Description:

a linear ditch and bank feature, situated on the flood plain and until recently acting as the medial, partition boundary between the two Low Birker fields. The feature falls on a shallow gradient from a modern gateway at it's northern extent to the banks of the River Wharfe to the south. The dry stone wall and the construction of a gateway has destroyed the physical relationship between this structure and what would have been it's continuation in a easterly direction (Feature A).

It would appear that this structure has been formed by excavating the linear trough into the topsoil deposits and the upcast from which has been utilised to form the shallow bank to it's immediate east. It would appear that from the quantity of unworked sandstone and cobble identified upon and bedded within this bank that the structure may have supported a dry stone wall.

The structure was found to be in a poor state of preservation, the profile of the ditch, although relatively overgrown had been maintained and continued to function as drainage structure, however, the bank had been badly damaged and consequently it's profile was extremely shallow. The feature had until very recently supported a wooden rail fence and had therefore continued to act as a boundary structure.

The excavation of the central and northern extent of this structure was observed, unfortunately it's southern extremity had been previously destroyed (being located outside the remit of this archaeological provision). The blade of the Bulldozer cleanly truncated the bank revealing the high quantity of water worn cobbles, no dating evidence was identified or recovered from these excavations.

PLATE 5



**Detail of the banked ditchline following the removal
of the former fenceline, facing south.**

APPENDIX B

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS CONSULTED IN NYCC SMR:

The main source of aerial photographs consulted was the archive held in the North Yorkshire County Sites and Monuments Record which is at County Hall, Northallerton. This collection includes a representative sample of photographs taken from a number of public and private sources. It includes both high level vertical and oblique archaeological photographs. Only those photographs which could be directly consulted have been plotted.

A set of oblique colour photographs held by Amey Construction was also consulted.

Weston SE 182468

<u>COLOUR OBLIQUES</u>	<u>B&W VERTICAL, SCALE 1:10500</u>
AJC 180/23 - 16/2/89	MER. AIRMAPS 25/68/075 - 25/04/68
AJC 180/24 - 16/2/89	MER. AIRMAPS 45/68/178 - 13/06/68
AJC 180/25 - 16/2/89	MER. AIRMAPS 45/68/177 - 13/06/68
AJC 180/26 - 16/2/89	
AJC 180/27 - 16/2/89	
AJC 180/28 - 16/2/89	
AJC 180/29 - 16/2/89	
AJC 180/30 - 16/2/89	

AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHS CONSULTED AT AMEY SITE RECORDS

COLOUR OBLIQUE

PAUL WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY 23/99:11 - 04/12/93

APPENDIX B

CARTOGRAPHIC SOURCES CONSULTED:

A number of maps of varying dates, scales and types were consulted to provide a background to the archaeology of the survey area. These included the first edition of the Ordnance Survey 6" maps made in 1855, and revised in 1896 and 1910, also consulted were the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 sheets of 1909.

Many thanks to Mr.S.Moorhouse who kindly provided me with a composite map, a synthesis of his most recent research on the Lower Wharfedale valley and upon which he had annotated the field and place name evidence of the area. The data for this source has been assimilated from documentary evidence and from 18th Century Tithe maps.