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Gascoigne Wood Spoil Disposal

Preliminary Archaeological Assessment

October 1992



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

GASCOIGNE WOOD SPOIL DISPOSAL

Preliminary Archaeological Assessment

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1. Summary

Clients:

Arup Environmental
Ove Arup and Partners
13 Fitzroy Street
London W1P 6BQ

Site location

The archaeological assessment covers an area of 9km² between SE 5231 and SE 5534, centred on a core area of approximately 1km² in the parishes of Sherburn-in-Elmet and South Milford, North Yorkshire.

Dates

The assessment was conducted between 6.10.92 and 16.10.92. The rapid field survey was carried out by two officers of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service on 8.10.92.

Project Director

Ian Roberts, Senior Field Archaeologist

Summary of results

Archaeological evidence is sparse for the core area of the assessment, although this does not preclude the presence of sites of archaeological significance. In the surrounding area there are several sites of medieval date, and there is evidence of ancient field boundaries and enclosures of unknown date. In addition, material of prehistoric and Romano-British date has been found in the area.

2. Introduction

2.1 Assessment briefing

West Yorkshire Archaeology Service was commissioned by Ove Arup and Partners, on behalf of British Coal, to carry out a preliminary archaeological assessment of the site of a proposed spoil disposal site near Sherburn-in-Elmet, North Yorkshire.

This report contains the results of a desktop study of the archaeological potential of the site and its environs. Results of the rapid field survey carried out in accordance with section 2.7 of the specification have been integrated with other sources (see section 2.3). The assessment will form the basis of recommendations pertinent to a planning application for the proposed disposal site.

Preliminary consultation of the North Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) failed to reveal the presence of sites of archaeological significance in the core area. However, it is clear that the surrounding area is one of some archaeological importance, characterised by enclosed settlements raised above the low, flat expanse of the Vale of York.

2.2 The geographical setting

The village of Sherburn-in-Elmet lies between Pontefract and York, towards the western side of the Vale of York. The area of the study is centred at the eastern edge of the parish, some 5 miles west of Selby.

The underlying geology of this part of the Vale is sandstone, with a drift of lacustrine clays, silts and sands. These have developed Stagnogley soils, subject to long periods of fluctuating water tables. The archaeological implication is of poor agricultural soils, but paradoxically good preservation of deposits.

Figure 1 shows the area of the assessment, with drainage and current land use highlighted. Relief is minimal: the average gradient is around 1:1000, with a range of heights between 5m and 10m OD. Where natural prominences have occurred in the levels, these have often been utilised for human settlement, and in places ditched enclosures have been constructed in the past to protect against flooding.

2.3 Sources used in the assessment

Documentary sources for this area are generally poor. The North Yorkshire SMR has relied primarily on substantial aerial photograph coverage, which benefits from the proximity of the Sherburn Aero Club whose airfield lies within the assessment area.

A copy of an enclosure map of 1770 exists, but is of such poor quality that it is virtually useless for reconstructing field boundaries. The original has been sealed and is unavailable for research. It is presently in the keeping of the Sherburn Parish Council. The earliest boundaries which can be reconstructed are those recorded on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey of 1851. These have been traced onto Figure 2.

Other sources, including the results of archaeological excavations at Manor Garth (SE



Fig. 1 Drainage and land use

Key

Boundary of core area

Sown with winter wheat

Potatoes

Sugar Beet

Pasture

Harvested crop

Direction of drainage



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0 1km



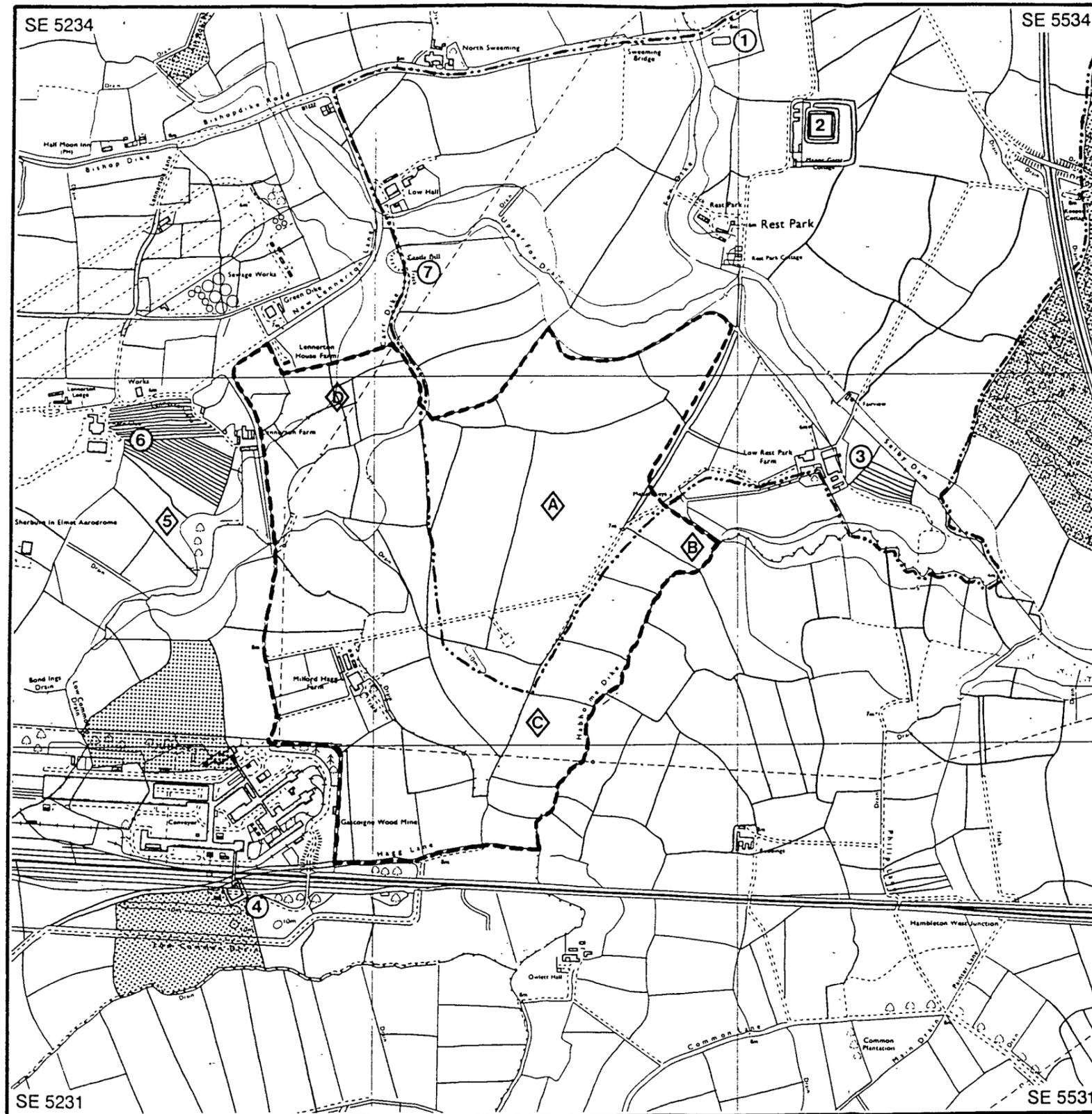


Fig. 2 The archaeological resource

Key

- Boundary of core area 
- Sites known from aerial photography 
- Sites known from documentary sources 
- Sites known from fieldwork 
- Woods in c. 1851 
- Field boundaries, roads, c. 1851 
- Medieval park boundary 

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0 1km



543336), are listed in the bibliography, together with sources which have been identified, but not examined.

Figures 1 and 2 are based on the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 series (1986), reduced to approximately 75%.

3. Archaeological resources of the study area

References in this section refer to numbered points on Figure 2. These identify either individual sites, or areas where some archaeological activity may be inferred to have occurred. Each reference on the figure is keyed to indicate the major source of the information.

3.1 Sites identified outside of the site boundary

1. **Cropmark settlement SE 539339 SMR# 9448**
Probable site of a building which has been identified as the Parker's House belonging to Rest Park (Le Patourel 1973, 42). The site is known only from aerial photographs. It is of rectangular form, and lies just to the south of the road from Sherburn to Cawood, known as Bishopdike Road. It is thought that the house may have continued in use after the abandonment of Manor Garth (see below, section 3.1.2) in the mid-16th century, but the site has never been excavated.

2. **Manor Garth SE 543336 SMR# 9447**
The site, now destroyed, of a substantial moated manor house, excavated in 1963 (Le Patourel 1973). Manor Garth was the Archbishop of York's manor house of Rest Park. Founded some time in the middle of the 14th century, the house had stone foundations and was unenclosed. After a licence to crenellate dating to 1383 (Cal. Pat. Rolls, 1381-5, 333) obtained by Alexander Neville, the original house was destroyed. It was replaced by a main 'fortlet' or residential block, backed by an enclosed courtyard of half-timbered buildings, including a chapel. The main block measured some 45m by 11m, with walls nearly 2m thick, and a tower at the south end. The buildings were set within an impressive double moat fed by streams from the north-east.

The latest pottery found at the site belongs to the late 15th or early 16th century, and documentary sources are equivocal about the latest date at which the house can be shown to have been occupied. Nevertheless, it is clear that the archbishops retained the park until 1647 when it was confiscated by Parliament (Wheater 1882, 139). It was sold to John Blakestone and Edward Cludd for £3903 9s (a low price, by all accounts).

Figure 2 shows the outline of the park, based on a plan of the township of Sherburn-in-Elmet, drawn in 1824 by John Paver.

3. **Medieval agriculture SE 544327 SMR# 5335**
An area of ridge and furrow (the result of medieval cultivation using the mould

board plough). Detected from aerial photography, it occupies a low promontory to the south-east of Low Rest Park Farm, close to the confluence of Habholme Dike and Selby Dam. It is possible that it is associated with earlier phases of the farm. According to Paver's plan of 1824, the farm lies near the south-east corner of the medieval park of Rest, and it is, therefore, possible that in the medieval period the farm was a gatehouse to the park.

4. **Ragged Shaw medieval moated site SE 525315 SMR# 9469**
Noted by Le Patourel (1973, 125), this moated site, now destroyed, lay in the parish of South Milford. Air photographs show that it must have been part of a much larger complex. An enclosure award map names it as Reygate Shaw; it appears to have been a capital messuage belonging to the important Reygate family who held the land in the 14th century. No excavation has been conducted on the site.
5. **Location of archaeological find SE 525326 SMR# 9475**
This is listed in the SMR as an axe-hammer, found near Milford Hagg Farm in 1971, but no further information was located. It is said to be in the Yorkshire Museum. It is probably Neolithic or Early Bronze Age in origin (Neil Campling, pers. comm.), but it is not possible to determine whether it was associated with a settlement, or represents a chance find. However, it does indicate prehistoric activity in the vicinity (see section 3.2). In the past there have been suggestions that axe-hammers may, in fact, have been used as tines for an ard, the earliest form of plough (Leahy 1986, 148).
6. **Medieval agriculture SE 524328 SMR# 532101**
Area of ridge and furrow, now ploughed out, immediately to the east of the Sherburn Aero Club buildings. Two fields are clearly visible from the air. It probably represents medieval ploughing associated with Lennerton Farm. The place-name Lennerton itself derives from the Old English, and refers to Leofnoth's farmstead. It is first recorded in the early part of the 13th century (Smith 1963 IV, 61).
7. **Castle Hill SE 531333 SMR# 944705**
This low, ill-defined earthwork has been associated with the moated site at Manor Garth, and is referred to as a 'ploughed-out motte' (Le Patourel 1973, 39). The term 'motte' is usually ascribed to defensive mounds within fortified sites, often of the period after the Norman Conquest. However, whilst it is plausible that this site has some association with the manor of Rest Park, and lies upon its supposed western boundary, there is no evidence to suggest that it represents the remains of a defensive mound.

Rapid field inspection suggests that the present earthworks may, in part, result from the upcast of material from the adjacent Carr Dike during drain cleaning operations (see below, section 3.2:D).

Field survey area

Location and topography

The survey area, of about 1 km², falls across the south-eastern boundary between the parishes of Sherburn-in-Elmet and South Milford. The area now is bounded by Lennerton Farm and Gascoigne Wood Mine to the west; Hagg Lane to the south and Habholme Dike and Melton Leys Cottage to the east. The irregular northern boundary to the site is partly formed by Lennerton House Farm, Carr Dike and the terraces approaching Upper Fox Dike.

In general the land is flat, with occasional gentle undulations that rarely rise above 10m OD. However, the north-western part of the site does fall rapidly to below 5m OD in the vicinity of the Carr Dike watercourse.

Land use

At the time of survey the southern half of the area had been recently sown. The north-eastern part of the site (about 30% of the area) was given over to beet and potato crops and the remaining land, to the west and north of Milford Hagg Farm, and to the north-west of Carr Dike, provided paddocks and rough pasture for livestock. See Figure 1.

Survey strategy

Beyond the requirement of carrying out a general survey of the whole area, potential archaeological sites within the core area, identified by the desktop study, were targeted for particular investigation.

Results (Figure 2)

- A. **Enclosure/Field System SE 53553261**
Although situated in the beet field, inspection of this area was facilitated by a harvested strip some 800m long and 20m wide and orientated WNW-ESE. Systematic fieldwalking between Melton Leys and Carr Dike yielded 11 fragments of fire-cracked stones, predominantly from one place (c. SE 53393270); one body sherd of a medieval vessel and one rim sherd of Romano-British pottery (c. SE 53223278 and SE 53113283 respectively). Fire-cracked stones are inferred to reflect prehistoric activity in the area: these stones are known to have been used to boil water for cooking prior to the introduction of metal vessels, and are therefore likely to belong to the Neolithic and earlier periods.
- B. **Enclosure/Field System SE 53943254**
Situated on the recently sown arable land at the extreme eastern edge of the survey area. A triangle of land between Melton Leys and Habholme Dike was systematically walked (see Figure 1). This yielded one large sherd of medieval pottery and 7 fragments of fire-cracked stones. A number of butchered animal bones were also noted, though not kept.

- C. **Lennerton Parish Boundary SE 53413211**
The parish boundary to the east of Milford Hagg Farm is referred to as 'Keeper's Walk' on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map (1851), and was investigated on the basis that the name might reflect one of the early boundaries of Rest Park in the form of an earthwork for a park pale. No extant earthworks were in evidence here and the parish boundary was only apparent as a nominal line between different crop regimes.
- D. **Pasture to the north-west of Carr Dike c. SE 52833289**
A low-lying area seemingly containing extensive 'earthworks' (see section 3.2). The land descends gradually south-eastwards in terraces towards Carr Dike. The western bank of Carr Dike has been significantly enhanced by the upcast spoil of successive re-cuts of the watercourse. It seems very likely that many of the apparent 'earthworks' in this area could be due to the wider distribution of such spoil, from both Carr Dike and numerous other land drains traversing the area, superimposed upon the natural landscape features. Nevertheless, some of the 'earthworks' could be legitimate remnants of some of the earlier field boundaries portrayed on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map in this area (see Figure 2). Moreover, the presence of ridge and furrow agriculture just 300m to the west, and the putative site of a low-lying (and now rather unconvincing) medieval motte at Castle Hill about 250m to the north, might warrant further clarification of the nature of these earthwork anomalies.

4. Discussion

Within the core area of the assessment no archaeological sites of major significance were located. Material from the prehistoric, Romano-British and medieval periods was, however, found during the rapid field survey. None of them provide clear evidence of ancient settlement, and yet, in conjunction with the axe-hammer found just to the west of the site, they suggest settlement-related activity from the prehistoric to medieval periods. Since no archaeological sites have been located by aerial or field survey, an appropriate fieldwalking strategy seems the most likely method to locate any settlement. Dense concentrations of artefacts found on the surface of ploughsoil would indicate the probable presence of archaeological activity.

It is quite clear that this area has been settled, intermittently at least, for several thousand years, despite apparent disadvantages of frequent flooding in the past. In the prehistoric period activity may have been sporadic, involving seasonal, non-sedentary activities. Permanent agriculture of some sort is likely to have occurred from the Romano-British period onwards, as pressure for food production outweighed the disadvantages associated with marginal land.

The parish of Sherburn-in-Elmet is thought to have formed the eastern boundary of the kingdom of Elmet, which flourished in the period after the fall of Rome some time in the 5th century AD. However, British place-names do not survive in the immediate area, and the earliest documentary reference comes as late as 937 AD, when Athelstan gave the royal manor of Sherburn to the See of York (Anon, *YAJ* 21 1911-12, 195-201). At the time of the Conquest the manor of Sherburn was held by the Archbishop of York. Domesday records two

churches, each with a priest, 350 acres of meadow, woodland pasture 8 leagues by 3 leagues, underwood amounting to 4 leagues by 1 league, and open land amounting to 5 leagues by 2 leagues. The population comprised more than 60 villagers and other smallholders (Morris 1986, 2B1; SW.BA1). By the early 14th century the manor had fallen into decay (Clay 1932, 206), and for the next 200 years it was the manor of Rest Park which became dominant.

Wheater (1882, 19) notes that the enclosure of the park pre-dates the earliest phase of the buildings at Manor Garth, confirmed by a series of inquisitions dating to 1262-3. Confirmation that the northern boundary of the park lay along Bishopdike Road comes from John Leland, King's Antiquary to Henry VIII, who noted during his *Itinerary* that:

From thence to Sherburn, a market town, wherein be many pinneres, about five miles [from Cawood]. The way between well wooded, and almost still riding by a river called Bishop's Water, that riseth a little on this side of Sherburn, and goeth into Ouse. In the way betwixt I rode hard by a Park, as I think of the bishop of York. (Quoted by Wheeler 1882, 18)

Sherburn-in-Elmet was subject to Parliamentary Enclosure as late as 1770 under a private act (Act 10 Geo III C.39). Since then there have been three major influences on the landscape. Gradual further enclosure of fields has taken place, as is evident from Figure 2, creating larger fields with more organised drainage. Secondly, the area was utilised during the Second World War as an aerodrome. This is now disused, but there is a small aero club with a grass runway. Thirdly, the sinking of Gasgoigne Wood Mine since the war, covering more than 0.3km², constitutes a major impact on the archaeological resource, of which the only known casualty is the moated manorial site at Ragged Shaw.

5. The archaeological response

5.1 Significance criteria

For the purposes of this assessment, the criteria used to assign significance factors to the archaeological resources already noted were based on the information potential of the resource. In short, this means that the most valuable resource would be regarded as that which offered the greatest potential for inferring past events and activities, regardless of period or historical associations. This is by no means the only valid means, but it ensures that sites are assessed with recourse to value judgements.

The most significant factor affecting information for this assessment is the preservation, or otherwise, of sub-surface archaeological deposits by waterlogging. Where anaerobic conditions are likely to exist in conjunction with a known presence of archaeological activity, then it is likely that high levels of inference may be generated under suitable recovery methods. Such conditions, however, appear to occur rarely at ground level in the assessment area. This is because varying levels of groundwater, associated with gleyed soils, alter the stability of organic materials, and tend to destabilise them. Le Patourel, in her descriptions of Manor Garth, makes no mention of either waterlogged levels in the moat, or the survival of organic deposits. More organised and effective methods of drainage during the last 200 years are likely to have further diminished archaeological potential in this respect. This would also apply to the moated site at Ragged Shaw, and to the Parker's House north of Manor Garth.

Elsewhere, the ability to reconstruct elements of the medieval and earlier landscapes would be of significance, but the lack of good documentary information renders this approach unlikely. It would be difficult, therefore, to generate useful further information about earthworks at Low Park Farm, Lennerton Farm, and Castle Hill.

Finds located in or near the core area indicate that archaeological activities have left a residue in this area. However, even open area excavation would be unlikely to yield information of a sufficiently high quality to justify such an intensive operation. Nevertheless, there may be suitable methods for assessing the range and intensity of activity in the core area by non-intrusive techniques.

5.2 Recommendations

It is important to note that the apparent absence of substantial archaeological sites, such as settlements and enclosures, does not indicate that no such sites existed. On the contrary, while scatters of pottery may have found their way into fields through well-understood discard processes, fire-cracked stones are unlikely to have moved very far from their place of use, and may therefore indicate settlement in the close vicinity.

It is recommended that, prior to spoil disposal, a programme of fieldwalking be undertaken covering the whole of the core area. This would need to be arranged to coincide with harvesting and ploughing, to maximise results. If any areas were located which reflected more than a sporadic level of activity in the past, these might benefit from a limited programme of geophysical survey. Such areas might include dense scatters of pottery or flint. Any further response would depend on the results of this programme.

Any planning constraint would be likely to conform to the following model (PPG 16, 30):

No development shall take place within the area indicated (this would be the area of archaeological interest) until the applicant has secured the implementation of a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation which has been submitted by the applicant and approved by the Planning Authority.

Acknowledgements

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Max Adams, Field Archaeologist
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Additional fieldwork conducted by:
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Maps prepared by:
Andy Swann, Senior Illustrator

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DB/M/252 Plan of Milford Lodge Estate, 1834

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South Milford: award WRRD B11 p346; no plan

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