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**A63 MELTON GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTION
ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATIONS**

INTERPRETATIVE REPORT

December 1994

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A63 MELTON GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTION

ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATIONS: INTERPRETATIVE REPORT

1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The trial excavations on South Lawn, Melton were commissioned by Anthony Walker and Partners¹ (AWP) in July 1994 and Northern Archaeological Associates (NAA) were appointed by competitive tender. This interpretative summary is based on a geophysical survey carried out by Geo-Services International (UK) Ltd in 1993² and the final report on the trial excavations³. The work was carried out as part of DMRB Stage 3 archaeological investigations in advance of the proposed construction of a new grade separated junction on the A63 at Melton.
- 1.2 The geophysical survey identified five groups of ditched enclosures ('a' to 'e' on figure 1) associated with two complexes of linear ditches ('f' to 'g' and 'h' to 'i' on figure 1). The complex was interpreted as forming an Iron Age (700 BC - AD 71) and/or Romano-British (AD 71 - AD 450) rural settlement, with at least two phases of occupation. In order to provide more information on the sub-surface archaeological features, a trial excavation strategy was prepared for those parts of the site likely to be affected by the preferred route alignment.
- 1.3 In detail, the objectives of the trial excavations were:
 - i) to confirm the results of the geophysical survey and the interpretation of the complex as an Iron Age/Romano-British settlement;
 - ii) to test for the presence of archaeological features and deposits associated with the anomalies identified by the geophysical survey, and any archaeological remains not identified by previous stages of work;
 - iii) to determine the depth and stratigraphic complexity of any archaeological features and deposits within the site, but not to investigate stratigraphic relationships in detail;
 - iv) to determine the date and relative significance of any archaeological deposits within the site;
 - v) to provide further information contributing to an assessment of the likely scope, cost and duration of further evaluation and/or excavation works.
- 1.4 The evaluation strategy employed a total of 10 trenches (A to J on figure 1), whose combined area was 1065m². This comprised a sample of approximately 1.97% of the area of archaeological interest in South Lawn. The excavations took place in July 1994. Subsequent modifications to the construction and landscaping proposals meant that Trenches F, G and H lay wholly or partially outside the affected area.

2 SUMMARY OF THE EXCAVATION RESULTS

2.1 Enclosure 'a'

- 2.1.1 This enclosure lies in the south-west corner of the site, at an acute angle to and apparently intersecting an east - west linear complex ('f' to 'g'). A boundary ditch on the north and east sides and an internal dividing ditch were visible on the geophysical survey, but the extent of the enclosure to the west and south were unknown. Trenches A and B were positioned to determine whether the boundary ditch survived and continued to the west and south in areas where it was not visible as a geophysical anomaly. Trench C examined the apparent intersection of the boundary ditch and an adjacent area inside the enclosure. Results in Trenches B and C necessitated the extension of both these trenches by 50m² each.
- 2.1.2 The boundary ditch was identified in all three trenches. It was shallow, U-shaped and about 0.8m wide, and at least two phases of excavation were identified. In Trenches A and B it continued on the alignment shown by the geophysical survey. An adjacent feature immediately to the south, on a parallel alignment, could have been the foundation for a fence or palisade.
- 2.1.3 The internal dividing ditch terminated before it reached the boundary, so the chronological relationship of these features could not be clarified. A total of seven other ditches on various alignments were identified in the interior of the enclosure, but their stratigraphic relationships with it could not be determined in such a limited excavation area; they are probably not all contemporary.
- 2.1.4 Two groups of structural features were recognised in the interior of enclosure 'a'. In Trench B, construction slots representing parts of a rectilinear building at least 12m long and 6.1m wide were recognised. Associated features around the east end of the building indicated that it probably had a complex plan. Further to the north, in the extension to Trench C, a group of post-holes probably represented part of a circular building. The post-holes lay either side of one of the internal ditches, which cannot therefore be contemporary with the circular building.
- 2.1.5 The stratigraphic evidence indicates that at least two phases of construction or occupation were present both in the ditch defining the enclosure boundary and in the internal structures and ditches. However, not enough features intersected each other within the excavated areas to determine either the full number of phases or which features were contemporary with each other. Artefactual evidence demonstrated that the complex rectilinear building in Trench B dated to the medieval period (13th or 14th century), while the circular building is probably pre-Roman in date (1st century BC-1st century AD). The dating evidence for the enclosure ditch and the internal ditches was ambiguous; some features produced late Iron Age

pottery, while others produced single sherds of 12th century pottery. The alignment of the enclosure suggested that it was not contemporary with the east-west linear complex ('f' to 'g'). This conclusion was supported by the identification in Trench A of a slot probably forming part of the east-west linear complex, which was cut by the north boundary ditch of the enclosure.

2.2 Enclosure group 'b'

- 2.2.1 The geophysical survey shows three large rectilinear enclosures in the north-west part of the site, all appended to the north side of the east-west linear complex ('f' to 'g'). The curved corner and multiple ditches at the south-west corner of this group suggest the possibility that some of the component ditches of the linear complex turn to the north, but the geophysical survey is not sufficiently clear or extensive in this area to make a positive interpretation.
- 2.2.2 No trial excavation was undertaken in this complex, as it lies outside the area which would be affected by the proposed construction and landscaping proposals.

2.3 Enclosure 'c'

- 2.3.1 Enclosure 'c' lies in the angle formed by the south side of the east-west linear complex ('f' to 'g') and the east side of the north-south linear complex ('h' to 'i'). One internal subdividing ditch and several smaller possible internal features are visible on the geophysical survey. The east and south sides of the enclosure are formed by a single large ditch. A smaller ditch runs parallel to and 6m to the south of the south side, with a northern return at its east end. This northern return intersects the main enclosure ditch, and the two ditches are therefore unlikely to be contemporary.
- 2.3.2 Trench E was positioned to examine the intersection of the south side of enclosure 'c' with the north-south linear complex ('h' to 'i'). Trench F investigated the interior of the enclosure, while Trench G examined its intersection with part of another enclosure complex to the east (enclosure group 'd').
- 2.3.3 The boundary of the enclosure proved to be a large V-shaped ditch, 2.8m wide and 1.8m deep. It cut the fills of two of the ditches forming the north-south linear complex, and terminated at the third, which was 3.7m wide and 1.9m deep and which effectively formed the west side of the enclosure. Finds from the enclosure boundary ditch and the contemporary linear ditch included large quantities of animal bone and pottery, mostly of the late Iron Age to early Roman period. A human jawbone, probably from a disturbed burial, was also found in the enclosure ditch.
- 2.3.4 A much smaller ditch (0.30m wide by 0.26m deep) running parallel to the south side of the enclosure terminated at one of the north-south

linear ditches cut by the south boundary ditch of enclosure 'c'. While its relationship with the north-south ditch could not be proved, it is likely to have been contemporary. This ditch could, therefore, represent part of a predecessor to enclosure 'c'.

2.3.5 In Trench F, parts of at least two circular and one rectilinear buildings with post-hole foundations were identified in the interior of the enclosure. None were contemporary with each other, and all were earlier than a shallow ditch which divided the central part of the enclosure. Part of a foundation slot for another rectilinear structure was recognised at the north end of the trench. There were a large number of other structural features (post-holes and foundation slots), but it was not possible to identify the structures of which they formed parts. Non-structural features included a number of pits, widely varying in size, shape and fill. Two of these pits were cut by the central ditch, which was in turn cut by another pit.

2.3.6 Finds from the enclosure included large quantities of pottery of early Romano-British type as well as earlier pottery imported from the south of Britain or the continent in the half-century preceding the Roman advance north of the Humber. There were also large quantities of animal bone, almost all from cattle, sheep/goat and pig, apparently representing domestic refuse. Other evidence for domestic activity included fragments of three quern stones (hand-mills for grinding grain) and very ashy fills in at least one pit, with large quantities of charcoal and bone; these could derive from cooking.

2.3.7 The stratigraphic and artefactual evidence indicates that there were two possible phases of enclosure, with four or five phases of domestic occupation in the interior, running from the late pre-Roman Iron Age up to the 2nd century AD (the early Roman period).

2.4 Enclosure group 'd'

2.4.1 The geophysical survey shows a group of small ditches lying immediately to the east of enclosure 'c', forming either a complex of sub-divided enclosures or a series of superimposed individual enclosures of various dates.

2.4.2 Trench G examined the intersection of one of the ditches associated with this group of enclosures with enclosure 'c', and an adjacent area in the interior of the enclosure group. This area had been particularly badly affected by medieval and more recent ploughing.

2.4.3 An east-west ditch (1.8m wide by 0.7m deep) forming part of complex 'd' ran towards the eastern edge of the much larger eastern boundary ditch of enclosure 'c', but was connected to it only by a shallow slot which broadened and deepened to the east. It was not possible to establish a clear relationship between the two features, but it is likely that they were contemporary. A small, possibly

structural, slot with a right-angle bend lay to the north of the east-west ditch, and a small pit cut the north side of the ditch.

- 2.4.4 Two distinct phases of activity were recognised in Trench G. The small ditch forming part of enclosure group 'd' was probably contemporary with the main ditch of enclosure 'c', which was dated to the late Iron Age and early Roman periods. Little evidence was found to indicate its possible function.

2.5 Enclosure 'e'

- 2.5.1 The geophysical survey shows a large rectilinear enclosure appended to the north side of the east-west linear complex ('f' to 'g'). Although an apparent break in the east side may be an entrance, it is more likely to have been caused by the magnetic signature of a ferrous object in the ploughsoil.
- 2.5.2 Trench H examined the south-east corner of this enclosure. The east and south sides of the enclosure were formed by a roughly V-shaped ditch 1.9-2.3m wide by 1m deep, with a series of very dark fills. These contrasted sharply with the brown, gravelly fills seen in most of the other features on the site. The south side also formed part of the northern component of the east-west linear ditch complex ('f' to 'g'). Its continuation to the east was a much shallower gully, also with a dark fill, which widened and deepened to become a shallow U-shaped ditch (0.8m wide by 0.65m deep) further to the east.
- 2.5.3 The area north of the east-west ditch, both inside and outside the enclosure, was covered by a midden deposit which did not extend south of the enclosure ditch or its continuation to the east. Only two features were recognised in the very small internal area which was examined, a shallow pit and a posthole. The former was overlain by the midden layer. A sub-rectangular pit (1.2m long, 0.25m wide and 0.45m deep) lying outside the enclosure to the east contained a crouched inhumation burial. This was recorded and left *in-situ*, as required by the specification. The burial pit cut the dark soil horizon.
- 2.5.4 At least two and possibly three phases of activity were represented by the features and deposits in enclosure 'e' and the area to its east. Finds from these areas included animal bone and pottery, mainly of late Iron Age hand-made types.

2.6 The linear ditch complexes ('f' to 'g' and 'h' to 'i')

- 2.6.1 The geophysical survey shows a complex of linear features ('f' to 'g') running from east to west through almost the full length of the site, a distance of roughly 420m. These features are likely to extend further to the east and west, beyond the boundaries of South Lawn and the area of geophysical survey. Approximately in the centre of the site, it is crossed by a similar complex ('h' to 'i') running roughly

from north to south across the survey area. Again, it is likely to extend beyond the survey area in both directions.

- 2.6.2 East of the intersection, the east-west complex appears to consist of four ditches, although there are numerous apparent interruptions in the central pair. West of the intersection, the central pair of ditches are very indistinct where they are visible at all. At the west end of the site, all the features become very unclear in an area which is less responsive to geophysical survey. The north-south linear complex changes at the intersection in a similar way. Four ditches are visible in the southern section, all but the westernmost being strong continuous anomalies, while only two ditches are visible north of the intersection. Both complexes were initially interpreted as possible trackways and/or major boundary features.
- 2.6.3 Trenches A and H were positioned across the line of the east-west complex ('f' to 'g'), Trench A to the west of the point where it ceases to be visible on the geophysical survey, and Trench H immediately south of enclosure 'e', to determine its relationship with that enclosure. The north-south complex was investigated in Trench E.
- 2.6.4 Two small U-shaped slots (approximately 0.5m wide and 0.3m deep) crossed Trench A on the correct alignment and spacing (11m) to represent a continuation of the northern and southern ditches of the east-west complex ('f' to 'g'). Unfortunately, the space between them could not be investigated because of a live sewer pipe. The southern slot was cut by a ditch probably forming part of the northern boundary of enclosure 'a'.
- 2.6.5 Two V-shaped ditches approximately 1.8m wide by 0.8m deep, with almost identical profiles but contrasting fills, crossed the southern end of Trench H. These clearly correspond with the southern pair of ditches seen in the eastern half of the east-west system ('f' to 'g'). The next ditch to the north is not visible at this point on the geophysical survey, and it was not recognised in the trench. The northernmost "ditch" was much more complex, and actually consisted of four separate features. The largest was the boundary ditch of enclosure 'e' which was continued to the east by a shallow gully which broadened to become a small ditch (see above); both of these features had distinctive dark fills. A similar shallow ditch ran parallel to and just intersected the south edge of these two features, with yet another similar feature along its south edge. Although these ditches are unlikely to have been contemporary, it was not possible to determine their order of excavation.
- 2.6.6 The stratigraphic evidence established that enclosure 'e' was probably contemporary with one of three shallow ditches forming the north side of the east-west complex ('f' to 'g'). These probably represent successive replacements for each other. It is not possible at this stage to say whether the two large ditches at the south end of Trench

H were contemporary, but at least one of them is likely to be contemporary with enclosure 'c'.

2.6.7 Four north-south ditches were recognised in Trench E, all forming part of linear complex 'h' to 'i'. The westernmost of these was a shallow U-shaped ditch and, as it did not intersect any other feature in the trench, its place in the sequence could not be determined.

2.6.8 The other features in Trench E clearly represented at least three distinct phases. The two easternmost ditches of the north-south complex were both cut by, and therefore earlier than, the southern boundary of enclosure 'c'. This boundary terminated at, and was contemporary with, the next ditch to the west. The final phase was a much smaller ditch running along the line of the second ditch from the east, cutting the boundary of enclosure 'c'. The pottery recovered from the ditches suggests that the first phase was entirely late Iron Age, while the second phase may have spanned the Iron Age/Romano-British transition. A human skull fragment in the upper fill of the easternmost ditch could be from a disturbed burial, possibly the same one as the jawbone found in the ditch of enclosure 'c'.

2.7 Other features and areas

2.7.1 There are a number of other features visible on the geophysical survey, which are either of unclear significance or are of low archaeological potential. The bulk of these represent ridge and furrow features produced by medieval/post-medieval cultivation, and have been omitted from figure x for the sake of clarity. Some ridge and furrow features were recognised in excavation as broad, shallow linear depressions.

2.7.2 Large curvilinear features to the east and west of enclosure 'e' could be natural, or could represent parts of enclosures; if so, they are likely to be pre-Roman in date. Two faint north-south linear features were examined in Trench I, and proved to be very shallow irregular gullies, possibly relating to medieval/post-medieval cultivation. A small ditch and a posthole of unclear significance were recognised in Trench J. No features were recognised in Trench D, which was placed to test the archaeological potential of a large area containing no geophysical anomalies other than ridge and furrow. One of the strong isolated non-linear anomalies lay within the area of Trench G, but no feature was recognised which could account for it. It was therefore probably caused by a ferrous object in the ploughsoil.

2.8 The excavated materials

2.8.1 The earliest pottery from the site included significant quantities of late Iron Age hand-made material, as well as high-status Gallo-Belgic pottery of similar date imported from the continent or the south-east of England, probably through the possible pre-Roman trading port identified at Redcliff, North Ferriby, some 2km to the south-east of

Melton, where similar material has been found. Later pottery was mainly Flavian/Antonine material (late 1st to 2nd century AD), dating to the period of Roman expansion into the north of Britain. Until these excavations, this early imported material has never been found in the rural hinterland of Redcliff and the destination of the imports found there has been a mystery. The distribution of various pottery types within the site in this early period has revealed important differences between parts of the site.

- 2.8.2 Significant quantities of snail shells, carbonised seeds, other carbonised plant material and charcoal were found in various parts of the site. Preservation and taphonomy were highly variable, which limits the potential contribution of samples from some contexts or types of context, but the potential value of the ecofactual data from the site was considerable.
- 2.8.3 Large quantities of animal bones were recovered from the trial excavations, mainly consisting of large domesticated animals (horse, sheep, cattle and some pig). There were also bones from small mammals, birds and amphibians, but there was no clear evidence to suggest that they were economically exploited. Overall, the bone assemblage is unusually well-preserved and has a particularly interesting age structure.

2.9 Deposits

- 2.9.1 Over most of the site, the topsoil overlay a sandy B-horizon, which lay directly over the sand and gravel subsoil; in these areas, archaeological features only survived where they cut the gravel subsoil. In the central area the B-horizon was thinner than elsewhere, and in Trench G it was absent; some features in this area had consequently been damaged by modern ploughing.
- 2.9.2 The northern part of Trench H coincides with a prominent terrace, which runs across the whole field from north-west to south-east. In this area, the modern B-horizon overlies an earlier buried B-horizon. Below this layer, an Iron Age midden deposit and features cutting it were recognised, all above the level of the subsoil.

3 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

- 3.1 The trial excavations have confirmed the presence of an important Iron Age/Romano-British settlement, or rather a group of separate settlement enclosures linked by linear ditch systems; this arrangement is termed a "ladder" or "clothes-line" settlement. While there was stratigraphic evidence for alterations in the layout of each enclosure or ditch complex and the character of the occupation of two of the enclosures, it was not possible in such a limited investigation to determine which, if any, of the separate enclosures or enclosure groups were contemporary. The artefactual evidence suggested that the occupation of most parts of the site was largely confined to a period of about one century, starting in the half century before the Roman occupation of the region in AD 71 and ending in the mid-late 2nd century AD.
- 3.2 A medieval (13th-14th century) building was found in Enclosure 'a'. Other features associated with that enclosure contained 12th century pottery, and given the placing and alignment of the building within the enclosure, it is possible that enclosure 'a' itself was also medieval. However, some features in the enclosure contained Iron Age pottery and there was at least one circular Iron Age building. The dating evidence for the enclosure is therefore inconclusive.
- 3.3 The nature, phasing and function of the two linear ditch systems appears more complex than originally anticipated, and their interpretation as trackways requires some revision. It was shown that not all elements of each complex were contemporary. During the later phase of enclosure 'c', for instance, there was probably only one linear ditch running from 'h' to 'g', turning at 90° to form two sides of enclosure 'c'. Two other ditches in the north-south complex were already completely filled, and there was no evidence to indicate whether the fourth was open at this time. In addition, the dimensions of some of the ditches were inappropriate for features flanking tracks, particularly given the narrow spaces between the ditches. However, the two slots seen in Trench A at the western end of the east-west complex are both appropriately spaced (11m apart) and appropriately sized to form the edges of a trackway. It is likely, therefore, that there was an east-west trackway in one phase, superseded at least in part by a multi-phased sequence of north-south and east-west boundary ditches. It remains unclear whether there was ever a north-south trackway.
- 3.4 There is little evidence to suggest that significant archaeological deposits are present in the large areas containing no major geophysical anomalies, ie. between enclosure 'a' and the north-south linear complex ('h' to 'i'), and to the east of enclosure group 'd'. However, the possibility that some remains are present in these areas cannot be altogether dismissed; some highly significant types of archaeological feature, such as graves, are unlikely to be revealed by geophysical survey. A single grave was found in Trench H, just outside enclosure 'e', and this could indicate the presence of an Iron Age and/or Romano-British cemetery in this area, outside any of the known enclosures. This grave was not detected by the geophysical survey.

- 3.5 The significance of a number of geophysical anomalies which could not be tested in the trial excavation remains unclear. This particularly applies to the broad, diffuse curvilinear anomalies to the east and west of enclosure 'e', which could be of natural origin or could imply the presence of earlier enclosures.
- 3.6 The recognition of unusually well-preserved deposits and features in the northern part of Trench H indicates that similar preservation conditions probably exist under the remainder of the prominent terrace which crosses South Lawn from north-west to south-east. While their likely state of preservation enhances the value of any remains under this terrace, they would be particularly vulnerable to damage by compression, as significant components of the remains would be above the level of the gravel subsoil.
- 3.7 There are three main categories of excavated materials from Melton: pottery, animal bone and other ecofacts (carbonised plant remains and snail shells). While these are all examined primarily for the sake of the information they can reveal about the site, they can also have an independent significance of their own. In some cases, the ceramic, faunal or ecofactual assemblage from a site can be as important archaeologically as the site itself.
- 3.8 The trial excavations have shown that the settlement at Melton contains a particularly significant pottery assemblage. The recovery of more pottery would provide a very rare opportunity to address some outstanding questions about the political and trade relations between the local tribe (the Parisi) and the Roman-occupied south prior to the Roman advance north of the Humber in AD71, the nature of Parisian society itself and the changes which occurred after the Roman occupation. The pottery section in the trial excavation report states that "it is vital that proper provision for excavation and recovery of further material is included in the plans for the site."
- 3.9 The faunal and ecofactual data also demonstrate considerable potential, and both could contribute significantly to some of the same questions addressed by the pottery and other data from the site. They are also able to provide valuable data on a variety of economic, environmental and land-use topics. Their significance was therefore such as to enhance the overall importance of the remains.
- 3.10 The site as a whole is unusual in a number of respects. It is rare to find evidence for continuity of occupation through the Iron Age/Romano-British transition on a ladder settlement. English Heritage have identified sites whose occupation spans this transitional period as a national priority for investigation⁴. This is also the first site to provide evidence for the distribution of the Gallo-Belgic pottery imported through Redcliff in the first 70 years of the first century AD. The ceramic, ecofactual and faunal remains from Melton could therefore make an unusually significant contribution to the study of the late Iron Age/Romano-British rural economy.

4 REFERENCES

- 1 Anthony Walker and Partners 1994 *A63 Melton Grade Separated Junction, North Humberside: Contract and Specification for Trial Excavations*
- 2 Geo-Services International (UK) Ltd 1993 *Melton Grade Separated Junction: Geophysical Investigation*
- 3 Northern Archaeological Associates 1994 *An Iron Age and Romano-British 'Ladder Settlement' at Melton, North Humberside*
- 4 English Heritage 1991 *Exploring Our Past: Strategies for the Archaeology of England*



A TRENCH LOCATIONS

ⓐ MAJOR GEOPHYSICAL ANOMALIES



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PROJECT	MELTON GRADE SEPARATED JUNCTION
TITLE	ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRIAL EXCAVATIONS
SCALE	1:2500
	FIGURE 1