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ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION ON LAND AT WYGATE PARK, SPALDING, LINCOLNSHIRE (SWP03)

INTERIM REPORT

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ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES

Event LI5828
Source LI9918
Mon LI87269 23943
LI87270 23944

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INTERIM REPORT

Work undertaken for
Broadgate Homes Ltd.

May 2003

Report Compiled by
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National Grid Reference: TF 2370 2375
Accession Number: LCNCC: 2001.456

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROJECT SERVICES
Institute of Field Archaeologists'
Registered Organisation No. 21

CONTENTS

1. SUMMARY

A scheme of archaeological trial trenching was undertaken on land at Wygate Park, Spalding, because the site lay within an area of known archaeological activity dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods.

Previous investigations, including desk based survey, geophysics and field walking had identified a low level of archaeological activity on the site dating to between the Iron Age and modern periods.

The natural deposits revealed are predominantly associated with saltmarsh formation, although two significant landscape features were identified. In the northeast the edge of a substantial clay filled feature, possibly an ancient mere. On the west side of the site was a north-south oriented Roddon (Silt Levee) which formed the highest ground on the site.

Revealed on a slight terrace on the north end of the Roddon was a discrete group of curvilinear ditches of probable medieval date and uncertain function. Similar features have been investigated on other sites in the fens, but they are not well understood and they are in need of further study.

A series of east-west boundary ditches had formerly divided the site into smaller strip fields, a system of land use that may have its origins in the medieval use of dylings to secure areas of grazing.

Artefacts, including pottery, brick and bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods have been recovered from the site. A number of environmental samples have been taken from selected features, although these await processing.

2. INTRODUCTION

Starting on the 29th of April a scheme of works for archaeological evaluation (trial trenching) has been undertaken, prior to residential development on land at Wygate Park, Spalding, Lincolnshire. National Grid Reference TF 2370 2375 (centre).

Spalding is situated 23km southwest of Boston and 30km southeast of Sleaford in the administrative district of South Holland. The site is located to the northwest of the town between existing residential areas, to the south and east, and Vernatt's Drain to the north.

The area is the site of a proposed residential development and has been subject to a desk-based assessment (Albone 2000) and a geophysical and fieldwalking survey (Rayner 2002). The Senior Built Environment Officer, Lincolnshire County Council recommended that a further stage of archaeological evaluation, comprising trial trenching, be carried out to provide information to assist the determination of any planning application.

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL OVERVIEW

No evidence of prehistoric (pre 50 AD) archaeology has been recorded within the proposed development site. From the Neolithic through to the mid- to late Iron Age, the area was subject to periods of marine incursions and consequently there was little human use of the landscape during that time. By the Romano-British period (50 - 410 AD) a drop in sea level resulted in extensive settlement on the marine silts, with evidence of contemporary deposits further to the south and west being exposed. Furthermore, extensive cropmarks of Romano-British field systems and droveways have been recorded to the west. In addition, recent investigations in the centre of Spalding have also exposed Romano-British deposits sealed by later silts (Cope-Faulkner forthcoming). Subsequent marine incursions late in the period, probably during the 4th century, resulted in the abandonment of these sites and the masking of Romano-British ground levels and deposits by alluvial silts.

Historically the proposed development site lay within Pinchbeck parish. Pinchbeck is first referred to as *Pincebec* in the Domesday Survey of 1086. The place-name refers to the stream associated with either the minnow or the linnet (Cameron 1998, 97).

At the time of the Domesday Survey, land at Pinchbeck was held by Ivo Tallboys and Guy of Craon. Included among Ivo Tallboy's holdings were 4 fisheries producing 1500 eels.

Although historical sources provide information about the development of Pinchbeck village during the medieval period, the outlying rural parts of the parish are less well documented. As the proposed development site is located in such an area its history is difficult to ascertain.

A sparse scatter of pottery of medieval date (1066 - 1500 AD) has been identified during a walkover survey of a site 500m to the south of the proposed development area. It is likely that this represented an agricultural manuring scatter (Albone 2000, 8).

The 17th century was the great period of fen drainage. Vernatt's Drain, which forms the northwest boundary of the site, was constructed in the 1630s as part of the drainage of Deeping Fen (Wheeler 1896, 318). However, the post-medieval period (1500 - 1900 AD) is represented only by a manuring scatter of pottery (Albone 2000, 8) recorded to the south of the proposed development area.

During the early 20th century, the boundary of Spalding Urban District was extended. Previously it had lain 500m south of the site, but was moved north to the course of Vernatt's Drain moving the site from Pinchbeck parish into Spalding.

Cartographic evidence from the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1815 shows the proposed development segmented into three fields, however, by 1906 this was reduced to two and finally by at least 1973 the site had been consolidated to form a single larger unit.

The geophysical survey recorded two zones of enhanced susceptibility, one of which may reflect a former field boundary. Detailed Gradiometer survey revealed a plethora

of probable natural responses although a short ditch-type anomaly was detected and several other linear ferrous and magnetic signals were recorded that may represent damaged pipes, service or field drains or former drainage ditches (Rayner 2002).

A total of 115 artefacts was recovered during fieldwalking of which pottery was by far the most abundant ranging in date from the prehistoric to early modern periods. The finds probably indicate that the proposed development site lies on the fringe of probable Iron Age to Romano-British settlement. However, there is no evidence of any Saxon activity and it is not until the medieval period that the land was re-utilised. The artefactual remains probably derived from manuring and suggests that the area was agricultural land on the edge of any settlement. A slight concentration of 12th - 14th century pottery was recorded in the southeast and may suggest the occupation lay to the south of this area. Furthermore, this situation appears to have been maintained until the early modern period (Rayner 2002).

4. RESULTS

The earliest deposits revealed were alluvial silts and clays indicative of an ancient wetland environment, probably saltmarsh with fine clayey silts occurring in discrete patches in the centre and south east portions of the site indicating the presence of palaeochannels. Two significant landscape features were identified, in the northeast area of the site the edge of a substantial clay filled feature, possibly an ancient mere, and on the west side of the site was a north-south oriented Roddon (Silt Levee) which formed the highest ground on the site.

On a low terrace on the north end of the Roddon, Trenches 3, 22 and 23 revealed a number of curved ditches, one of which formed a ring, with three others forming a possible second outer ring. It is possible that other ditches form rings, although the full extent of these features is beyond the limits of the trial trenches. One of these ditches produced pottery dating to the medieval period. Ring ditch features similar to these have been excavated in a number of places in the fens and have been variously dated to between the Romano-British and early medieval periods. It is likely that the form and function of these features is determined either the unique environmental setting of the fens, or the equally unique socio-economic organisation of the fen inhabitants.

Traversing the entire site is a series of parallel east-west oriented ditches, the majority of which have been dated to the post-medieval period. These are probably field boundaries, and are recorded on maps dated to the 19th century (Albone 2000), although investigations to the south of the site suggested that such field systems have their origins in the medieval period (Snee 2003).

Covering the entire site was a layer of topsoil, of varying depth, consistent with many years of agricultural activity, which continue even as the trial trenching progressed.

5. CONCLUSIONS

A scheme of archaeological trial trenching was undertaken on land at Wygate Park, Spalding, because the site lay within an area of known archaeological activity dating from the prehistoric to the post-medieval periods.

Previous investigations, including desk based survey, geophysics and field walking had identified a low level of archaeological activity on the site dating to between the Iron Age and modern periods.

The trial trenching revealed a sequence of saltmarsh deposits truncated by an ancient mere and a Roddon. A discrete group of curvilinear ditch features were recorded on the north end of the Roddon, the highest ground within the site. These features were probably of medieval date although the function of the features could not be clearly identified.

The presence of ring ditches is well known in the Fens from aerial photography (eg. Riley 1946; Wilson 1978) though their date and function is a matter of debate. Silvester recorded ring ditches as part of the Roman period earthworks at Hilgay, Norfolk (1988). Nearer to Spalding one such circle cut deposits in the Roman Bourne-Morton canal (Lane 2000, fig. 43) and at Gosberton part of four curving gullies were located, one post dating a Middle Saxon structure (Trimble 2000, fig. 37).

As at Spalding, the Gosberton part circles were situated on the highest land. This would be in keeping with the Wygate Park example and also with such circles being interpreted as having an agricultural functions, such as stack stands.

Riley (1946) estimated the size of the circle to between 9 and 17m diameter. Again this is in keeping with the examples from Wygate Park.

A series of east-west boundary ditches had formerly divided the site into smaller strip fields, a system of land use that may have its origins in the medieval use of dylings to great secure areas of grazing.

Artefacts, including pottery, brick and bone dating from the medieval to post-medieval periods have been recovered from the site. A number of environmental samples have been taken from selected features, although these await processing.

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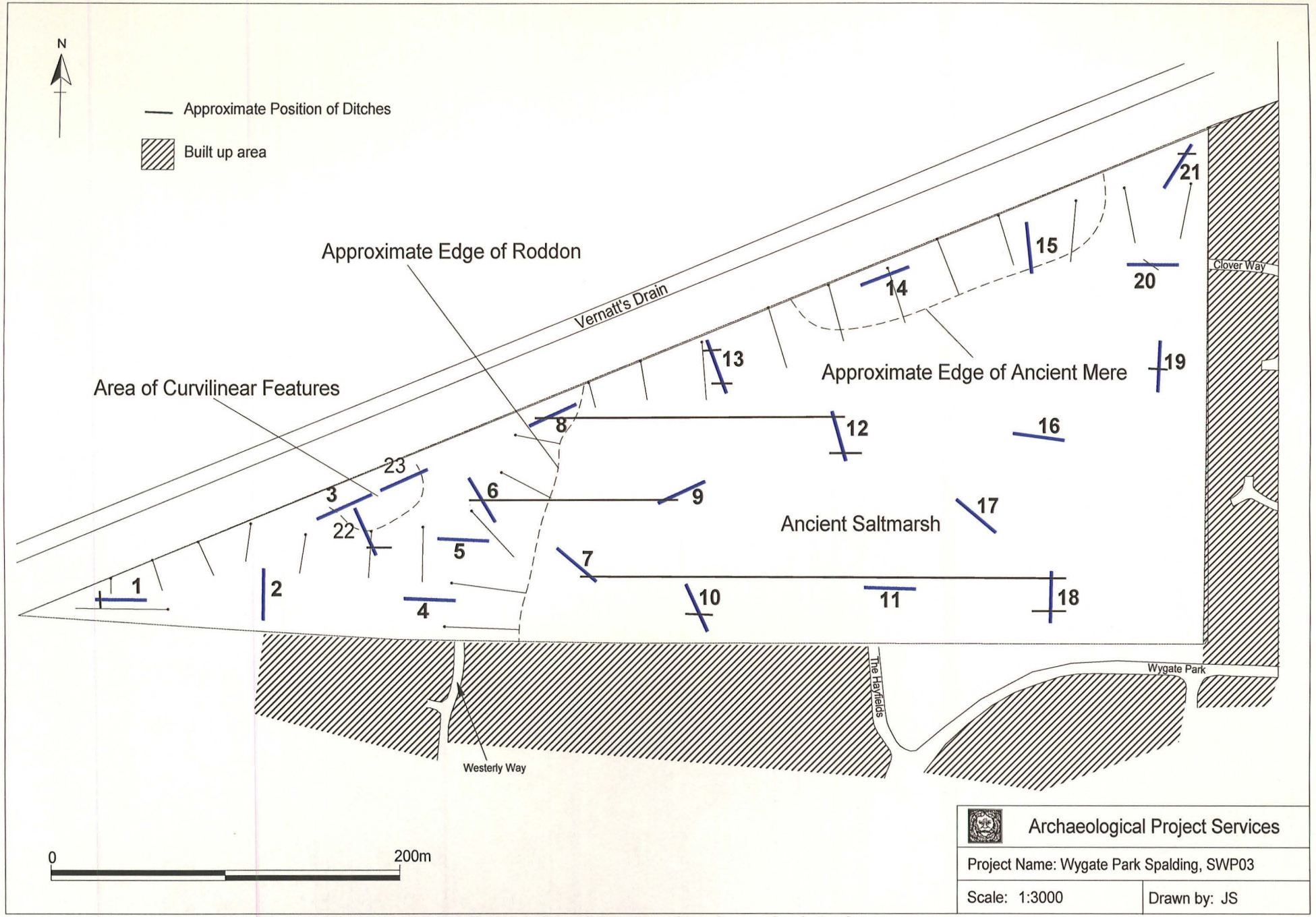

Figure 1 - Trench location plan showing principle features