

RECTORY FARM, WEST DEEPING
ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF
INTERIM STATEMENT

PHASE 1

Site code RFWD 02/03
NGR: 51139 31056

Statement prepared for
Lincolnshire County Council

by

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May 2004



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ELI 9043

SU 12322, 12333

PRN 37127, 37128, 35803, 35804, 38885, 38886, 37129

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Summary

- *A watching brief was undertaken during soil stripping associated with the ongoing extraction of sand and gravel at Rectory Farm, West Deeping in Lincolnshire by Redlands Aggregates Limited. Lincolnshire County Council, who had entered into a Section 106 agreement with Redlands Aggregates Ltd., commissioned these works that comprise the 1st part of a multi-phase investigation.*
- *The site lies within a landscape rich in prehistoric and Romano-British remains. Previous investigations of the site, including a desktop assessment, fieldwalking, geophysical survey (magnetic susceptibility and detailed gradiometry) and excavation, revealed archaeological remains dating from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age to the late Roman period.*
- *The beginning of human activity in Phase 1 can be traced as far back as the Neolithic, when a rectangular structure and timber circle may have been erected. At this time a small ritual pit was dug and an auroch skull placed within, with a large piece of Grooved Ware pottery placed on top of the skull. The timber circle was probably replaced by a class I henge which is depicted on the aerial photographic plot.*
- *A potential beaker period settlement that had been preserved under a medieval headland was found immediately outside the entrance to the henge. The full extent of the settlement remains unknown, as it had not survived beyond the headland area. In the Early Bronze Age a cremation was buried adjacent to the henge, within a Collared Urn. The positioning of the cremation in relation to the henge shows the monument was still revered by this time.*
- *In the Late Bronze Age the landscape was transformed, with a coaxial system of ditches dug across the site. These are likely to represent droveways for herding livestock down to the valley pasture in the dry months and back up to the higher dryer ground in winter. Associated farms have not as yet been found.*
- *In the Iron Age the previous field system was abandoned and replaced, perhaps indicating climatic change had reduced the usefulness of the valley pasture for livestock, culminating in a change from pastoralism to a bias towards crop production. A single enclosure of probable Iron Age date was exposed within the Phase 1b area.*
- *Several burials were also recorded. One is certainly of Roman date, although the other, a crouched burial, may be earlier.*
- *A group of undated pits were found to each contain a single bovine horn core, suggesting potential ritual deposition. However on current evidence it is not possible to assign the pits to any particular Period (although they are likely to be prehistoric).*

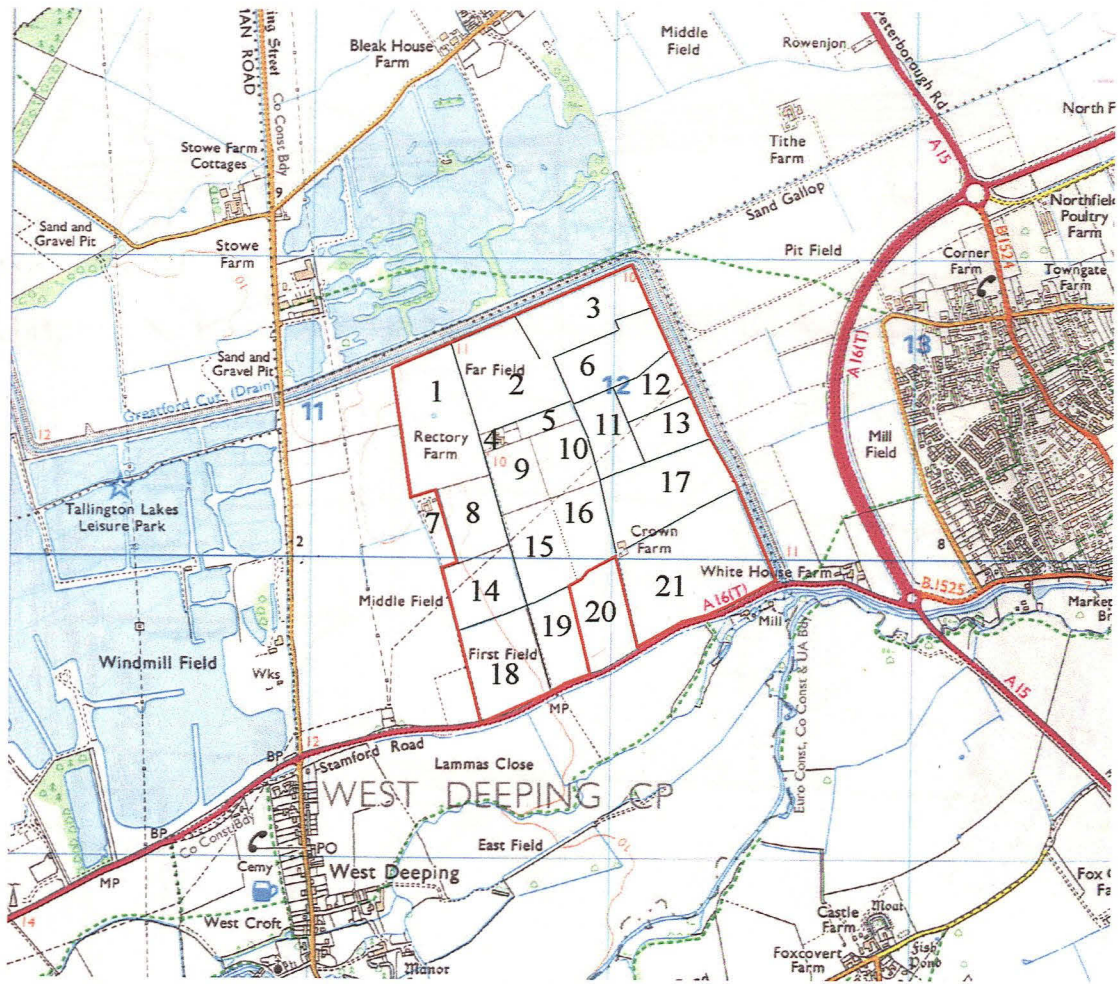


Figure 1: Site location at scale 1:25,000, showing site outlined in red, with field numbers shown

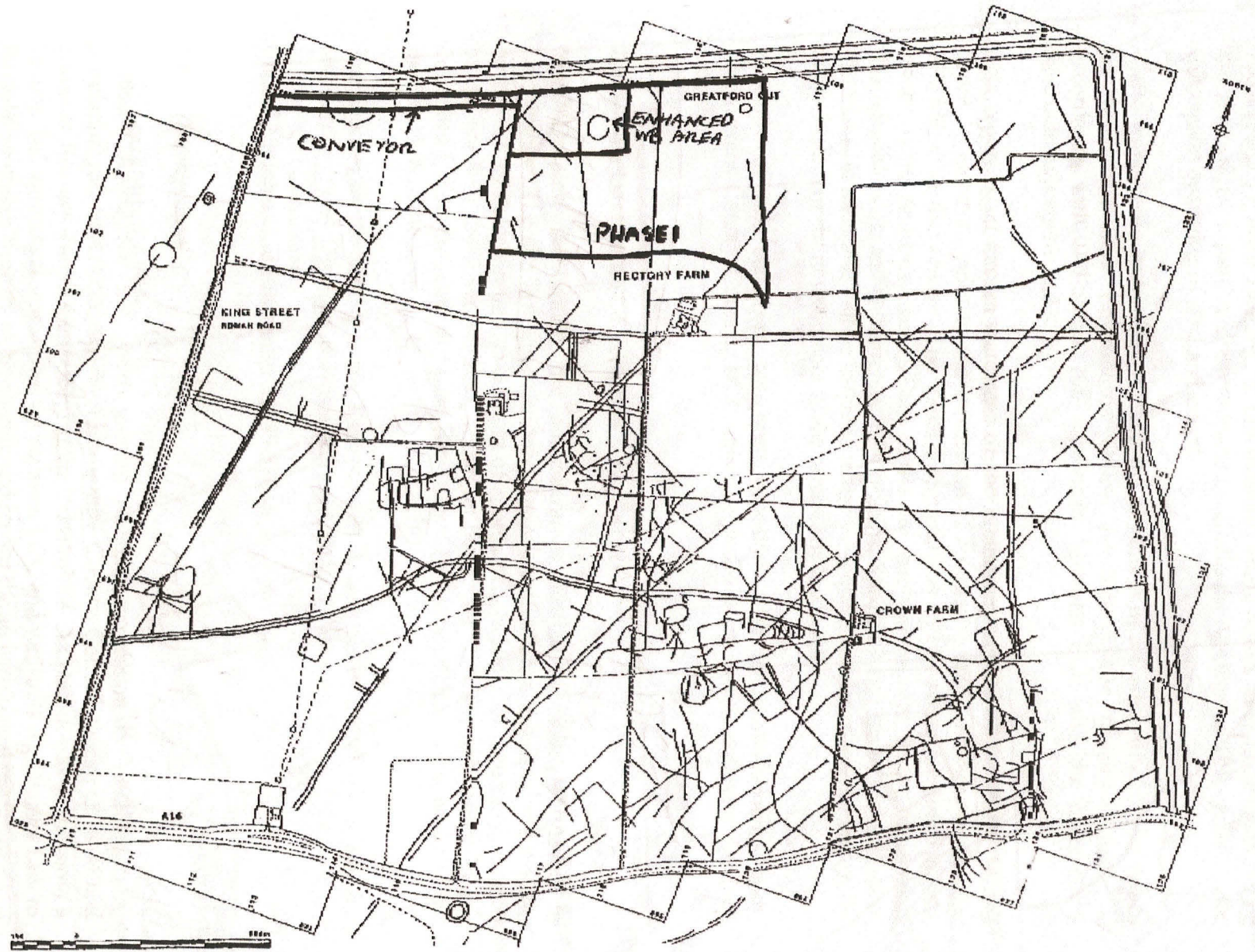


Figure 2: Aerial photographic plot of West Deeping site (taken from specification provided by LCC)

1.0 Introduction

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) was commissioned by Lincolnshire County Council to carry out an archaeological watching brief on agricultural land at Rectory Farm (Field 1), West Deeping, in Lincolnshire. These works were undertaken during the removal of topsoil and overburden by Redlands Aggregates Ltd, prior to the subsequent quarrying of sand and gravel.

These works were undertaken to fulfil the objectives of a formal project brief issued by the Senior Built Environment Officer for Lincolnshire County Council, in accordance with a Section 106 agreement between LCC and the landowners, Redlands Aggregates Ltd.

This report is an interim statement of the preliminary results of the Phase 1a and Phase 1b elements, prior to the submission of an interim report of these works that will follow in due course. The initial interpretations of this phase are based on the results of the previous investigations at the site, coupled with the results of an aerial photographic plot, and stratigraphic relationships. Specialist analysis of the artefactual material is in hand and will be included in the subsequent interim report, to inform the interpretation of the development of the prehistoric landscape

A Copy of this statement has been deposited with the commissioning body, Lincolnshire County Council. PCA have retained a copy of the statement for their records.

2.0 Site location and description

West Deeping lies within the administrative district of South Kesteven in Lincolnshire. The site lies approximately 2km west of Market Deeping, and c.11km north-west of Peterborough, at a height of approximately 10m OD. The site is located to the north of the River Welland, within its floodplain. The site is bounded by the Greatford Cut to the north and east, King Street (a Roman Road) to the west and the modern A16 to the south.

The site lies on the solid geology Kellaways sand, overlain by a drift geology of fen and terrace gravel (British Geological Survey, 1978).

Central National Grid Reference: 51139 31056

3.0 Background

Redlands Aggregates Ltd. were granted planning permission in 1992 (planning permission ref. SK81/0552/90) by Lincolnshire County Council to extract sand and gravel at Rectory Farm, West Deeping, in Lincolnshire. As part of this permission, a Section 106 agreement was drawn up between LCC and Redlands Aggregates Ltd. to formulate a design strategy to investigate and record the archaeological resource.

Redlands Aggregates Ltd. notified the Council that stripping of topsoil and overburden at Phase 1a was to commence in September 2002. At this time LCC commissioned PCA to undertake the Phase 1 works.

4.0 Archaeological and historical background

An archaeological assessment of the site has been undertaken, comprising a desktop study, fieldwalking, geophysical survey, and excavation of a total of four hectares (Hunn and Rackham in preparation).

The excavations were concentrated to the south-west of Rectory Farm, and in the south-east corner of the site (Field 21). Following completion of the fieldwork the chronology of the site was divided into nine main periods, dating from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age through to the Late Roman period. Below is a short summary of each Period.

The earliest evidence for activity (Period 1: Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age) was limited to 17 sherds of pottery from a secondary context within a ring ditch in Field 1, and over one hundred sherds from two contexts in Field 21. A number of flints were recovered during fieldwalking that also appear to belong to this period of activity.

By the Early Bronze Age a number of funerary monuments began to appear. Two of these were investigated in 1994. The Later Bronze Age (Period 3) is represented mainly by a distinctive coaxial system of ditches that are depicted on the aerial photographic plot for the site.

Period 4, the Early to Middle Iron Age, is represented mainly by pottery from Field 21 that came from secondary contexts. Also at this time a multiple ditch system seems to have been introduced which cut across the earlier coaxial field system that seems to have gone out of use by this time.

The first evidence for settlement appears in the Middle Iron Age (Period 5), where a possible roundhouse and a pit were excavated near to Rectory Farm. A radiocarbon date from the pit was calibrated to 400 – 150 BC. By the Late Iron Age (Period 6) there is more extensive evidence for settlement, especially in Field 21, where the remains of a possible village were discovered. The Rectory Farm site contained more limited settlement evidence, possibly a single-family unit.

The transition to Period 7 (Early Roman period) is unclear as the tradition of continuity of Late Iron Age pottery forms makes it difficult to define the changes. There is a clear change in activity at this time however, with an enclosure with a palisade built at the Rectory Farm site, and a sub-rectangular structure appearing in Field 21. By the 2nd to early 3rd centuries AD (Period 8) ditched enclosures appeared at Rectory Farm that were subdivided and associated with substantial post-built structures. In Field 21 more structures appeared and the boundaries were re-defined. The 3rd and 4th centuries saw a marked change at both sites. At Rectory Farm the previous post structures were replaced by a stone building with associated post-built structures, including a possible aisled building. A rectangular bathhouse also appeared indicating the presence of a villa complex. In Field 21 the various structures seem to

have gone out of use, although a number of burials occurred. In the Late Roman period (Period 9) the landscape is one of a planned, fairly regular rectangular field pattern that was orientated north-north-west – south-south-east, possibly associated with the villa complex. In Field 21 there is evidence for settlement and burials at this time.

So far there has been little or no evidence beyond the Roman period to ascertain whether the local settlements collapsed or continued.

5.0 Methodology

The site was stripped of topsoil and subsoil using a 360⁰ excavator with a smooth ditching bucket. The removal of these deposits was monitored intermittently to identify any archaeological features exposed by this process.

The archaeological fieldwork entailed a thorough inspection of the machine-excavated area, and the production of a plan of the remains using an Electronic Distance Measurer (EDM). Archaeological deposits identified by this process were subjected to limited excavation, in order to assess their nature, dimensions, and to attempt to recover datable materials. These investigations resulted in the production of written descriptions of each layer upon standard watching brief context recording sheets. Colour photographs and scale drawings, in both plan and section, compliment these accounts.

The fieldwork for Phase 1 was carried out in two stages: Phases 1a and 1b. The phase 1a works were initially undertaken by Simon Bray between the 9th September and 20th December, 2002. As the works progressed, a team of four experienced archaeologists were also added to provide an adequate record of the archaeological resource within the available timescale. The following year Phase 1b was monitored, by Alex Brett, and ably assisted by one experienced archaeologist. This stage of works began on the 9th October 2003, and was completed on 19th December of the same year.

6.0 Results (fig. 3)

Previous investigations at the site had identified a landscape rich in prehistoric and Romano-British remains. These investigations resulted in the formulation of a phased chronology for the site dating from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age through to the late Roman period. This initial assessment will attempt to place the results of the Phase 1 enhanced watching brief into this site chronology. Caution must be applied however, as crucial dating evidence from pottery analysis and information from other specialists remains outstanding at present.

6.1 Pre-Period 1 (Neolithic)

A group of five sub-circular pits arranged in a circle were located towards the north-western side of Phase 1a. It has been suggested the pit group could represent the settings for large timber posts forming a wooden hengiform monument (Pryor *pers. comm.*). Such monuments began to be erected at the time the major forest clearances

occurred, and may have represented prominent landscape markers (territorial) or perhaps small, 'family' shrines (Pryor 1999).

A large circular enclosure-like cropmark was apparent within Phase 1a on the aerial photographic plot of the site. This was revealed during the topsoil stripping and a baulk was left across the feature to allow the Environmental Archaeologist (James Rackham) to assess whether there was an associated bank in evidence. Subsequent analysis showed this not to be the case (J Rackham *pers. comm.*) and so the baulk was removed. The penannular enclosure had a single entrance facing the east, and pottery was recovered from the ditch that appeared to be of Bronze Age date. The form of the monument is very like a class I henge, a monument that is associated with ritual activity such as feasting. It is possible the enclosure was constructed to replace an earlier (and smaller) wooden timber circle (see above).

A further pit, isolated from those mentioned above, lay towards the north corner of Phase 1a. This circular pit was most unusual as it contained a large piece of Mid – Late Neolithic grooved ware pottery placed upon the skull of an auroch. Grooved Ware pottery is often found in communal ritual contexts, such as at henge monuments, and within special pit deposits with the deliberate selection of animal, human bone, and exotic stone artefacts (Pollard 1997). It is without doubt that this pit is a further example of such practice. The location of the pit perhaps indicates it is more likely associated with the penannular ditch rather than the suggested circle of posts.

Further to the south, a series of postholes may represent the remains of a wooden rectangular structure orientated broadly east – west. Within the structure there appeared to have been a central partition, evidenced by a linear slot. Although undated, the form of the structure and size (c.10m long) is similar to known examples of earlier Neolithic date, such as at Buxton (Pollard 1997). Incidentally, the Buxton example also contained partitions within the structure (*ibid.*).

6.2 Period 1 (Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age)

Removal of a medieval headland towards the north end of Phase 1a revealed a palimpsest of archaeological cut features. This group of postholes, pits and shallow gullies, seems, on pottery evidence to represent the remains of a settlement that dates to the 'beaker period', approximately 2700 – 1700 BC. The extent of the settlement remains unknown, as modern ploughing appears to have destroyed any remains that were not protected by the medieval headland.

6.3 Period 2 (ritual Bronze Age landscape)

A small pit investigated to the west of the pre-Period 1 potential henge contained a human cremation within an Early Bronze Age collared urn (c.1500 – 1000 BC). It is likely the henge was in use at the time the cremation was interned; there are many parallels across the country where cremations, or even inhumations, were placed adjacent to henges (Whittle 1999)

6.4 Period 3 (Later Bronze Age)

The third period dates to the Later Bronze Age, and is characterised by a series of coaxial parallel ditches that extend across the whole quarry site. This field system was exposed within Phase 1 as a number of ephemeral ditches running north-north-east –

south-south-west, similar in orientation to the Bronze Age field systems at Fengate, near Peterborough. At Fengate, Pryor has argued that these ditches resembled specialised droveways for livestock; a system built around 1800 BC and continued in use until approximately 900 BC (1999).

A series of large pits that were excavated across the site resemble well pits; examples of which have been dated to the Later Bronze Age at Fengate (Pryor 2003). Whilst wells are likely to have been dug throughout the prehistoric (and later) occupation of the site, the high number of livestock that the landscape may have supported would have required a water source during the winter months when they were not out on the fens. On this basis the pits, some of which contained preserved waterlogged wood, are on balance more liable to be associated with the Later Bronze Age than any other period.

Several fragments of loom weights (including one complete example) were recovered from the Phase 1b excavations. These appear to resemble typical Middle Bronze Age bun-shaped or cylindrical loom weights, examples of which have been found in at Rengate, Billingborough, Swallow (Lincolnshire), Knight's Farm in Burghfield (Buckinghamshire) (Bacon 1984). This shape of loom weight was replaced by a pyramidal version, which in turn pre-dates the triangular loom weights of the Iron Age. The presence of loom weights indicates that weaving was taking place on the site in the Mid – Late Bronze Age. No spindle whorls, which are also associated with this industry, were recovered however.

6.5 Period 4 (Early – Middle Iron Age)

A series of broadly east – west orientated linears were identified within the southern half of Phase 1b. These do not conform to the Period 3 coaxial ditch system and are therefore likely to post-date them. They are more likely associated with later re-organisation of the landscape, at a time when the fens were becoming progressively wetter, and perhaps unsuitable for summer grazing.

6.6 Period 5 (Middle Iron Age)

A broadly square enclosure appears to have replaced the earlier Iron Age field system by the Middle Iron Age. The western boundary of the enclosure respects a glacial feature that forms a linear feature in the landscape running roughly north-north-west – south-south-east. It is unclear as to the function of the enclosure; it may have served as a stock enclosure or contained a dwelling or farmstead.

6.7 Period 6 (Late Iron Age)

The enclosure of Period 5 seems to have been abandoned by the Late Iron Age. Evidence for this can be seen in the digging of two pits within the ditch butt-ends that form the entrance to the enclosure. The excavation of these pits is unusual, and may signify the 'closing' of the enclosure; a physical act to formalise its abandonment.

6.8 Periods 7 - 10 (Late Iron Age to the end of the Roman period)

The only remains from Phase 1 of the quarry site that can be firmly attributed to between the end of the Iron Age and the end of the Roman period were two burials and a series of quarry pits. The quarry pits were all at the western end of the Phase 1 conveyor belt strip, and are almost certainly associated with the quarrying of gravel for the construction of the Roman Road, King Street, immediately to the west.

Of the burials, one, a crouch^{ed} burial, was very poorly preserved, and potentially may be earlier in date. No dateable material was recovered with the human bone however, and it seems that only radiocarbon dating would prove when the individual lived during the site's history.

The second burial was discovered at the south-western corner of Phase 1a. The body, which was extended on an east – west alignment, had been buried with a small knife.

6.9 Undated

A group of pits were excavated in Phase 1a (and one in Phase 1b) that each contained a single bovine horn core within their backfill. The inclusion of a horn core within the pits provides strong evidence for a ritual nature to the pits, and although they remain undated, they are almost certainly of prehistoric date. Based on the results of the watching brief across the Phase 1 area it seems likely they are related to either the Neolithic or Bronze Age ritual landscape.

7.0 Preliminary discussion and conclusions

The watching brief has revealed that the first known activity at the site began at some point in the Neolithic, perhaps with the construction of an isolated rectangular structure at the west edge of the Phase 1 works. Such buildings usually leave no or insubstantial evidence of their existence, as the communities led mobile lifestyles through a rapid cycle of clearance, cultivation and abandonment of plots, along with the necessity to herd livestock between grazing areas. Generally rectangular (and square) structures are associated with the earlier Neolithic, with round or oval more typical of the later Neolithic (Pollard 1997). Especially during the Early Neolithic it is usual for structures to be in isolation, representing short-lived single households.

At some stage in the Neolithic it appears a timber circle was built, perhaps as a family shrine or territorial marker. This may have been replaced by a larger, more permanent monument, a class I henge. The form of these monuments, a penannular ditch with one or several entrances, and usually an external bank are suggestive of a ritual function, perhaps for the staging of ceremonies or group feasts. It has been suggested that the presence of the bank outside the ditch meant the henge acted as an early form of amphitheatre, with the people standing on the bank to view the ceremonies within (Pryor 2003). The construction of this monument is perhaps an indication that the area was becoming more populated and/or more settled and less nomadic. As part of the ritual development of the landscape a pit was dug and the skull of an auroch placed carefully within. A large piece of Neolithic Grooved Ware pottery was also laid on top of the skull before the pit was carefully backfilled. This is a classic example of the internment of Grooved Ware pottery in a ritual context. The association of the pottery with henge monuments is also a well-known phenomenon.

The remains of a settlement to the north-east of the pre-Period 1 henge seem, on pottery evidence, to date to the beaker period; that is the transition between the Neolithic and Early Bronze Age (c.2700 – 1700 BC). To date, only one beaker settlement has been identified in England, at Belle Tout on the south coast (Bewley 2003). The excavator, Richard Bradley, suggested the site was permanently occupied,

and that cattle herding was likely to be important. The interpretation that beaker dwellings existed at this site is a contentious issue however, and has been discounted elsewhere (Parker Pearson 1999). The full extent of the West Deeping settlement complex will never be known, as the strip survived solely due to its protection under a headland of medieval date. The density of the remains is perhaps suggestive this site was continuously occupied. Unusually, the settlement was located immediately in front of the entrance to the earlier henge monument. The henge would have been visible, and it is probable that at least some knowledge of its function was also retained at this time as the discovery of a later cremation suggests an association with the penannular ditched enclosure following the beaker period.

At some stage during the Early Bronze Age (post-dating the beaker settlement remains) a collared urn containing the remains of a cremated individual were placed in a pit that was dug to the west of the henge. This burial was not random and suggests the continuing of tradition and ritual within this part of the site. This tradition dated back to the Neolithic and may have spanned a considerable period of time. The burial of the dead at this location perhaps indicates the beaker settlement had been abandoned at this time; as such burials were not likely to be so close to existing settlements.

Aerial photographic evidence and further archaeological investigations have identified the site lies within a larger landscape (c.250 hectares) of Bronze Age coaxial boundaries, associated enclosures and fields. This, and evidence from other sites such as Fengate and Maxey, indicates a major organisation of the local population to construct these boundaries for their individual needs. The droveways at Fengate were shown to have been constructed to move livestock to and from the rich Fen pasture, and the principal is very likely the same for West Deeping; moving the livestock to the fens to the south during the 'dry season' and returning them perhaps in October or November when the water levels began to rise again and the fens became marginal. It has been estimated that between 3,000 and 6,000 sheep may have been managed within this landscape (Coles and Hall 1998). The picture of West Deeping and other sites in the Welland valley in the Bronze Age is one of an economy heavily based on pastoralism, with little evidence for crop production. There is some evidence for weaving taking place at this time from the recovery of loom weights.

The Bronze Age co-axial structured landscape of droveways and associated fields appears to have been abandoned by the Iron Age, when the system was replaced by a much less organised system that continued from the Iron Age and possibly throughout the Roman period. This appears to be an identical picture to that at Fengate, suggesting perhaps a period of change throughout the fenland around 900 BC, possibly as the fens were becoming too wet to allow grazing of the livestock. This realignment of boundaries and perhaps changing of land use, whilst being widespread, is less structured. The lack of cohesion may be evidence of a lack of community by the Iron Age, with no organisation of people to construct these major landscape boundaries. Instead, the picture is one of an ad-hoc series of farmsteads, each with their own interests and needs.

The Iron Age system of boundaries appears to complement a trackway to the south, beyond the excavations, that joins with King Street to the west. The trackway seems on cropmark evidence, to be of similar date to King Street. It is possible therefore that

King Street has an earlier, Iron Age origin, with the system of tracks and roads forming the basis for the associated field systems. This can only be proved/disproved by excavation of the track that runs through fields 4, 5, 11 and 12 however. Quarrying adjacent to King Street (Phase 1 conveyor belt strip) does indicate the road was built, or at least repaired, during the Roman period.

Further evidence of Roman activity in the form of an inhumation burial with a small knife was discovered at the south-west corner of the site. Such burials are often associated with others and it is possible that a cemetery exists to the south-west of Phase 1.

One poorly preserved burial that was discovered during the Phase 1b works appears to be crouched, perhaps indicating an earlier phase of burial to the extended Roman burial above. It is possible the remains are of Iron Age date, and if so, would be relatively rare. Unfortunately there was no associated dating evidence, so the only recourse for dating the remains is probably using a scientific dating method, such as radiocarbon dating.

It is interesting to note that the medieval headland that had protected the beaker period settlement remains was located adjacent to the henge monument. This practice occurs throughout the Welland valley at places such as Maxey (Pryor et al. 1985, 59), suggesting the henges were visible as prominent mounds and used as field markers in the medieval period. If this is the case at West Deeping, and it is not just pure coincidence, then it indicates the henge did indeed have a bank, which had since been lost through subsequent modern ploughing.

8.0 Effectiveness of methodology

The watching brief methodology employed allowed a rapid record of the archaeological resource prior to its destruction for gravel extraction. The very high watertable did not allow the complete excavation of some features however, although nothing could be done to remedy the situation.

9.0 Acknowledgements

Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) would like to thank Lincolnshire County Council, especially Mr Jim Bonnor and Mr Steve Cattney, for this commission. Thanks are also expressed towards Redlands Aggregates Ltd, specifically Phil Cotterill, for his help throughout the works. The various Project Officers and archaeologists involved are also thanked for all their hard work.

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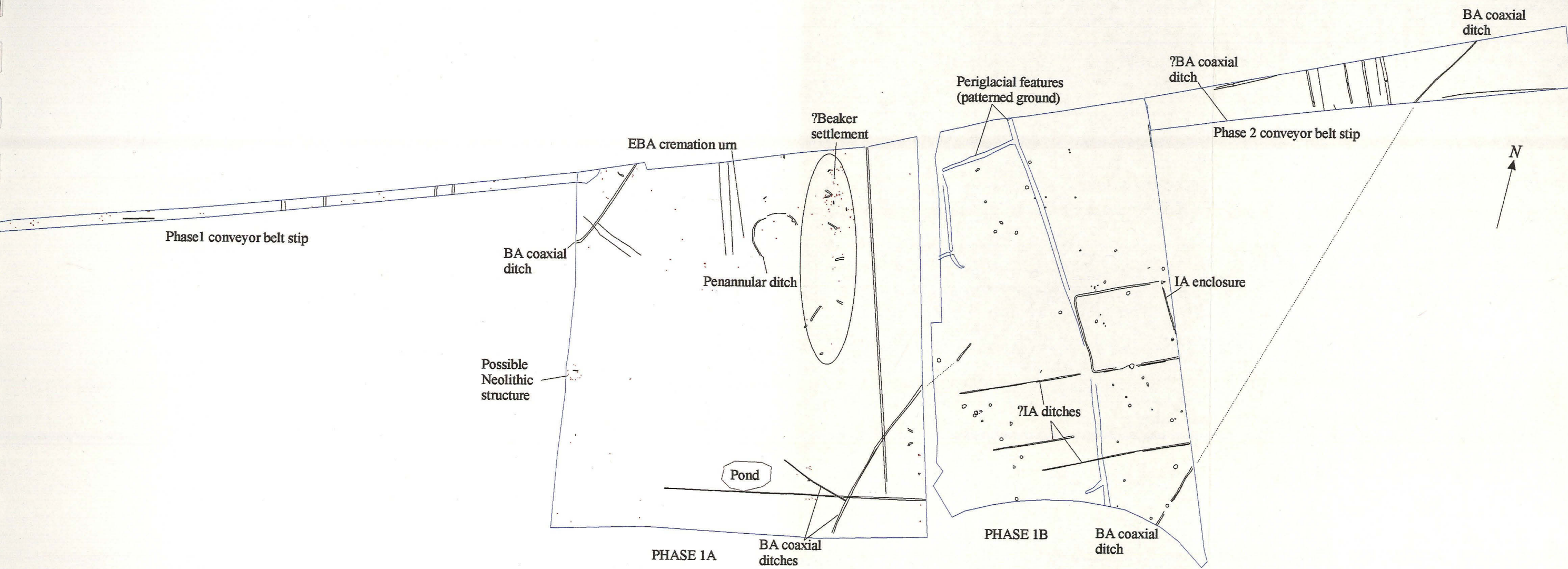


Figure 3: Phase 1a and 1b works at scale 1:2500.