

98/16

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT OATSHEAF HOUSE
DEEPING ST NICHOLAS
DOS98**



A P S
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
PROJECT
SERVICES

Event 43620
SOURCES 48336418337
23798 483448 ? B Age

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING
BRIEF AT OATSHEAF HOUSE
DEEPING ST NICHOLAS
DOS98**

Work undertaken for
Mr G. Watkins

June 1998

Report Compiled by
Dale Trimble

TFE 17688 12979

National Grid Reference: ~~TF174213TI~~
City and County Museum Accession No: 139.98

A.P.S. Report No 49\98

Lincolnshire County Council
Archaeology Section

25. JUN 98

acceptance 23/09/98

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1. SUMMARY

A watching brief undertaken during development of land at Oat Sheaf House, Deeping St. Nicholas monitored the excavation of foundation trenches for a new garage and extension.

The site lies within an Early Bronze Age barrow cemetery first identified during the Fenland Survey. Aerial photography and a geophysical survey have identified a large ring ditch and very low mound in the garden to the east of the recently constructed house. A watching brief in 1992 identified a second possible barrow mound at the south end of the property, adjacent to the A16 Spalding to Market deeping road..

The watching described in this report has identified features and deposits which support the suggestion that the mound recorded in 1992 may be a barrow mound.

2. INTRODUCTION

2.1 Background

Archaeological Project Services was commissioned by Mr G. Watkins of Oat Sheaf House, Deeping St. Nicholas to undertake an archaeological watching brief during the excavation of foundation trenches on land at Oat Sheaf House, Deeping St. Nicholas, South Holland District. The archaeological watching brief was requested by South Holland District Council and undertaken in accordance with the Lincolnshire County Council Manual of Archaeological Practice (LCC 1997).

During the watching brief, observations and records were made of deposits revealed during the excavation of foundation trenches for a new garage at the south end of the property and an extension to the existing

garage, (Fig. 2) which is to be converted to domestic use.

2.2 Topography and Geology

Oat Sheaf House is located adjacent to the A16 Market Deeping to Spalding Road in the parish of Deeping St. Nicholas, 1.2km northeast of Market Deeping and 1.5km southwest of Spalding at NGR TF17421311.

Locally the site occupies the crest of a low ridge on the gravel terrace of the River Welland. Later peats and clays, accumulated in the fen basin and formed during episodes of freshwater flooding, have encroached upon this area in the post glacial period.

2.3 Archaeological Setting

The site lies within an Early Bronze Age barrow cemetery first identified by the Fenland Survey in 1986 when two mounds were recorded. The larger and better preserved of the two mounds is located in a field of pasture c. 150m east of Little Duke Farm (Fig. 3). The second is located in the back garden of Oat Sheaf House and survives as a very low mound and ring ditch. In 1989 a lake was constructed immediately to the north of the first mound and two ring ditches were recorded which are also likely to have surrounded barrow mounds.

In 1991 the owner of Oat Sheaf House sought planning permission to demolish the current house and erect a new dwelling and garage. A watching brief was undertaken during the construction of the new house and a possible burial mound was identified in a service trench near the southeast corner of the property. When mapped these mounds and ring ditches extend south to north in a more or less linear fashion over of distance of c 300m, an arrangement not uncommon in barrow cemeteries of this date. This barrow cemetery is one of several recorded in the

vicinity during the Fenland Project. Figure 3 shows these and others which have been recorded by aerial photography. Most of the mounds on the immediate fen edge have only recently become visible due to the dessication and subsequent shrinkage of overlying peat layers.

The construction of the lake adjacent to the upstanding barrow on Little Duke Farm posed an immediate threat to the continuing survival of preserved organic remains in the monument. In response to this a full excavation of the mound was undertaken in 1991 (French 1994). The excavations recorded a complex multi-phase monument which was used for burial over a period of *c.* 500 years. The earliest burial dated to around the beginning of the 3rd millennium BC and was an inhumation of a young child placed within a hollowed out log coffin and buried in a 0.8m deep oval pit. This burial was eventually surrounded by a ring ditch and buried beneath a mound constructed of turves and material quarried from the ring ditch. At a later date the mound was extended and surrounded by a 45m diameter ring ditch. It was probably during this phase that two adult crouched inhumations were inserted into the mound.

Sometime during the middle of the second millennium BC, the burial tradition at the site changed from inhumation burial to cremation. The cremated bone was placed in small pits inside leather bags or ceramic urns.

Over the past decade increasing evidence of Bronze Age settlement in the area has also come to light. During the Fenland Survey several sites of this period were identified from pottery and other artefacts found in the topsoil (Fig. 3). Excavations at one of these sites *c.* 1.5km southeast of Oat Sheaf House in 1992 identified evidence of a settlement dating from the Early Bronze Age to the Iron Age. More recently, an area excavation

at Welland Bank Quarry in Deeping St. James parish, has recorded a complete Late Bronze Age village and an associated field system.

3. AIMS

A brief containing specific aims was not produced by the curator but the work was undertaken in accordance with the Lincolnshire County Council Manual of Archaeological Practice (LCC 1997). An archaeological watching brief is defined as '*a formal programme of observation and investigation conducted during any operation carried out for non-archaeological purposes within a specified area, where there is a possibility that archaeological deposits may be disturbed or destroyed.*' (IFA 1994, 1).

4. METHODS

The proposed development required the excavation of foundation trenches for a new garage and an extension to the existing garage, which is to be converted to domestic use (Fig 2). Following excavation by machine, the trench sides were observed and, where safe, the sides cleaned and rendered vertical. The depth and thickness of each deposit was measured from the contemporary ground surface. Each deposit or feature revealed within an opened area was allocated a unique reference number (context number) with an individual written description. Sections were drawn at a scale of 1:10. A photographic record was also compiled.

Records of the deposits and features identified during the watching brief were examined. Phasing was assigned based on the nature of the deposits and recognisable relationships between them. A list of all contexts with interpretations appears as

5. RESULTS

5.1 Description of the excavation

The deposits and features identified during the watching brief can be divided into four groups. Group 1 deposits were natural gravels and buried soils recorded in both the new garage plot and the extension plot. In the foundation trenches for the new garage, deposits forming part of a possible Bronze Age mound were recorded and form the contexts within Group 2. The barrow deposits were overlain by peat and a layer of clay alluvium which together form all of the deposits within Group 3. The fourth group of contexts comprises modern features and deposits and subsoils and topsoils.

5.2 Group 1 Natural Deposits

A layer of loose reddish brown sandy gravel (027) (Fig 5 Section 4) recorded in the extension plot represents the underlying drift geology in the area. These gravels fringe the fen basin and form a broad fan in the Lower Welland Valley. Mostly these deposits relate to large scale water movement at the close of the last ice age some 10 000 years ago. In the garage plot, gravels were not revealed within the depth of the trenches and natural deposits are represented by a mottled dark greyish brown clayey sand (014) (Fig 5, Section 2) and (024), (Fig 5 Section 3) a mid greyish brown fine to medium sand containing burnt patches and occasional charcoal flecks. These were the lowest and earliest deposits recorded in the garage plot and are likely to represent ancient palaeosols or buried soils. A roughly worked piece of flint recovered from (024) represents the only artefacts recovered from these buried soils. A friable mid brown sandy clay overlying the gravel (026) (Fig 5 Section 4) in the extension plot may also be a fragment

of an ancient soil horizon. This interpretation is supported by the deposits in the garage plot being overlain by a possible Bronze Age mound, in turn sealed by layers of apparently undisturbed peat.

5.3 Group 2 Barrow Deposits

This group of contexts comprises a deposit forming a possible barrow mound and a single overlying layer which might represent the remains of a soil formed over the top of the monument. A homogenous, 0.80m thick, reddish brown clayey fine sand (018) (Fig 5 Sections 2 and 3) forms the deposit from which the mound in the garage plot was constructed. The upper surface of (018) slopes gently from west to east, very much in the manner expected of a low mound. The mound is overlain by (017) a 0.10m thick, firm mid-greyish brown clayey fine to medium sand containing moderate to frequent charcoal flecks and occasional flecks of fired clay. This layer is likely to represent the formation of a soil on the surface of the mound. The inclusion in the layer of charcoal and fired clay suggests the presence of contemporary settlement in the area. Again, an early date for this layer is suggested by the presence of an overlying layer of undisturbed peat. Although accurate dates for peat formation are not available for this area, the upper peaty fills of the ditches surrounding the Little Duke Farm barrow have been dated to the late 2nd millennium BC (French, 1994). These may be the same deposits which seal the mound recorded on this watching brief.

5.4 Group 3 Peat and Alluvium

Peat deposits and a layer of clay alluvium form the deposits within this group. These were all recorded within the western and northern sections of the garage plot. However, truncation and disturbance by later modern features has resulted in

discontinuous deposits, making correlation between the layers difficult. In Section 1 (Fig. 5) at the south end of the western trench of the garage plot the buried soil (006, Group 1) underlies (005) a stiff dark brown peaty clay, in turn sealed beneath (004) a black friable sandy peat. This peat was overlain by a sequence of deposits dating to the modern period. In Section 2, in the northern foundation trench, the possible buried soil (014) is underneath (013) a friable, black sandy peat. In turn, (013) is overlain by (012) a stiff, mottled mid greyish brown peaty clay with patches of dark brown peat sealed by a second layer of friable dark brown/black sandy peat (011) (Fig 5 Section 2). This apparent absence of the second layer of peat in the western section of the trench is best explained by localised mixing and intercalation of deposits during deposition. In general however, these deposits represent rising water tables and flooding, generally accepted to have commenced in the middle of the second millenium BC (Hayes and Lane 1992). At the eastern end of the trench the mound and (017) are beneath (016) a dark brown sandy peat, probably the same deposit as (011). The sealing of the mound by (016) means that the mound must have been constructed at an early date and cannot relate to modern activity.

5.5 Group 4 Modern deposits and Topsoil

All recent and modern disturbance as well as subsoils and topsoils have been placed within group 4. In the garage plot these include (003) (Fig. 5 Section 1) a loose to moderately compacted mid yellowish brown fine to medium sand. This deposit contained numerous brick fragments and may represent made up ground. A similar interpretation may be applied to (002), a moderately compacted dark greyish brown fine sand. This context also contained frequent modern bricks and mortar. The modern topsoil is

represented by (001) a friable dark greyish brown fine sand.

Two cut features [021] and [009] recorded in Section 2 represent recently dug pits containing abundant modern bricks and other building materials. The only archaeological significance of these features is that they have truncated the possible Bronze Age barrow mound. In the eastern foundation trench the mound has been completely removed by [021] a steep sided trench cut through the modern topsoil.

In the extension plot the only context in Group 4 is (025) (Fig 5 Section 4), a loose and friable dark brown sandy peat which forms the modern topsoil.

6. DISCUSSION

No deposits thought to be archaeological in origin were recorded in the extension plot. In the garage plot however, the western edge of a possible Bronze Age barrow mound was recorded. Although no direct evidence in the form of burials was recovered, there are several reasons for interpreting this feature as a burial mound. The material from which the mound was constructed is very similar to that recorded during a watching brief in 1992 when a full north south profile of the mound was recorded (Fig 6) (French 1994). In this case, the typical domed shape of a burial mound was drawn. A single struck flint recovered from the mound during the 1992 watching brief suggests that the material is not a natural deposit. Also, a roughly worked flint recovered from beneath the mound material during the 1998 watching brief demonstrates that the mound is no earlier than late prehistoric in date, and could not have formed as part of the gravel terrace at the close of the last glaciation.

The west to east slope of the mound recorded in the 1998 watching brief is

spatially consistent with the mound recorded in 1992 (Fig 2). The lack of layering in (018) causes some problems of interpretation. In the 1991 excavations of the nearby barrow at Little Duke Farm, numerous tip lines of the different deposits used to construct the mound were recorded. This mound however, was surrounded by a deep quarry ditch from which gravel was extracted. The mound at Oat Sheaf House has no ditch and it is possible that the clay layers which usually overly natural gravels in the area were used to construct the mound. This might account for the lack of layering in the mound as there would be no loose gravel to form tip lines. Other ditchless mounds are known from the fens including one recorded only 400m north of Oat Sheaf House (T. Lane *pers comm*)

To obtain conclusive proof that the mound is circular, a west east aligned section on the projected east side of the barrow would be required. At present, interpretation of the mound as natural formed seems unlikely. Natural features rarely display such sudden variations in height and it is difficult to explain the form and shape of the mound in terms of any known natural process in this area.

7 CONCLUSIONS

The watching brief recorded additional evidence for a low, ditchless mound at the southern end of the property at Oat Sheaf House, although some doubts over the interpretation remain. Barrows without ditches are known from the Fens, where they have been recorded in a barrow group at Baston (*ibid*) and near to Oat Sheaf House itself. If the mound at Oat Sheaf House can be identified as a barrow, it provides additional information for the organisation and character of barrow cemeteries in this region during the Bronze Age.

8. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeological Project Services would like to acknowledge the assistance of Mr. G. Watkins, the resident of Oat Sheaf House Ltd for commissioning the fieldwork and post-excavation analysis and allowing access to the site. The work was coordinated by Tom Lane and this report was edited by Tom Lane.

11. PERSONNEL

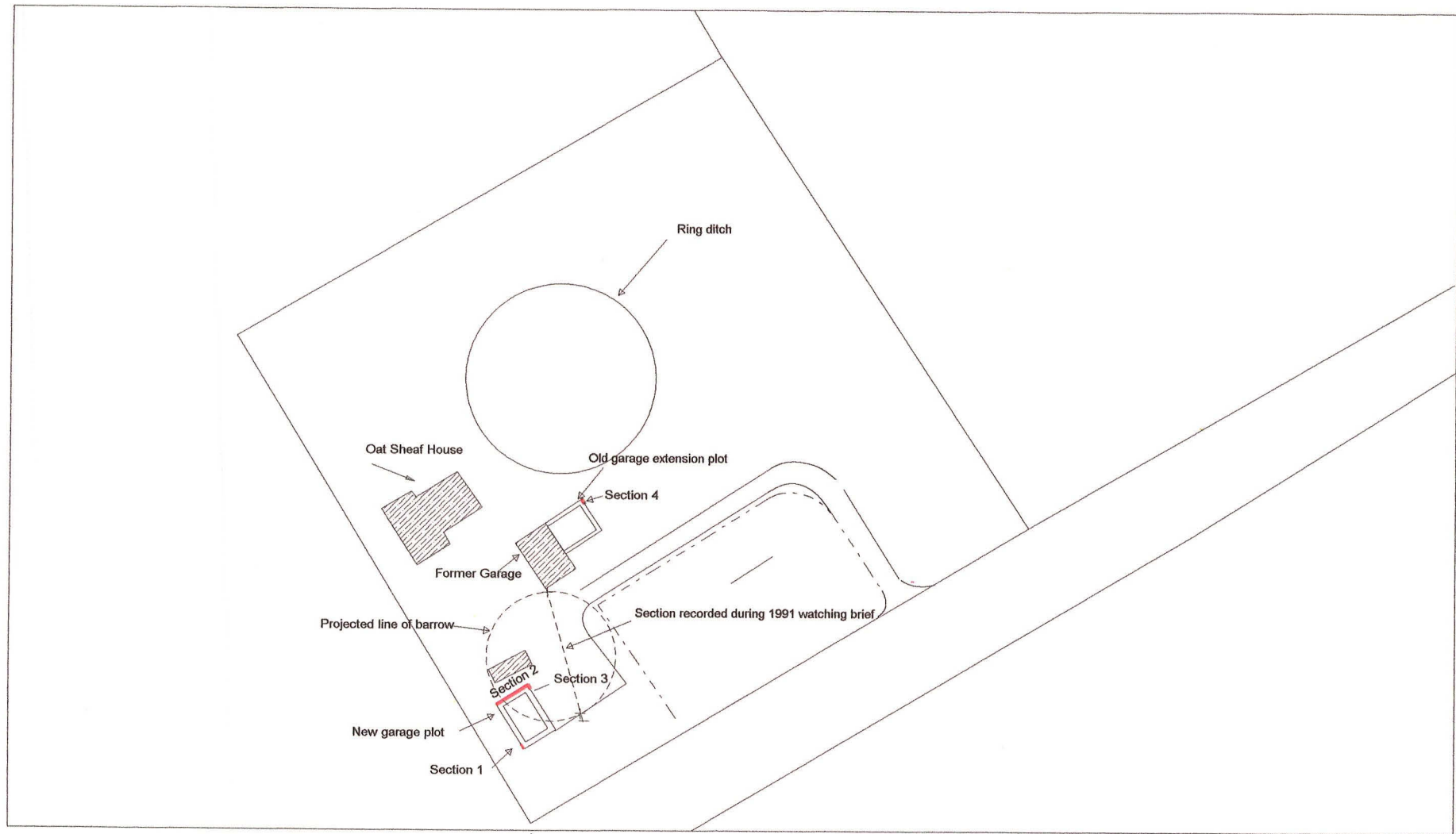
Project Coordinator: Tom Lane
Research: Dale Trimble
Supervisor: Dale Trimble
Finds Processing: Denise Buckley
Illustration: Dale Trimble and Neil herbert
Post-excavation Analyst: Dale Trimble

12. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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- Lincolnshire County Council, 1998, *Lincolnshire Archaeological Handbook, A Manual of Archaeological Practice*



Figure 1 - General Location Plan



0m 50m

Figure 2 Site Location Map

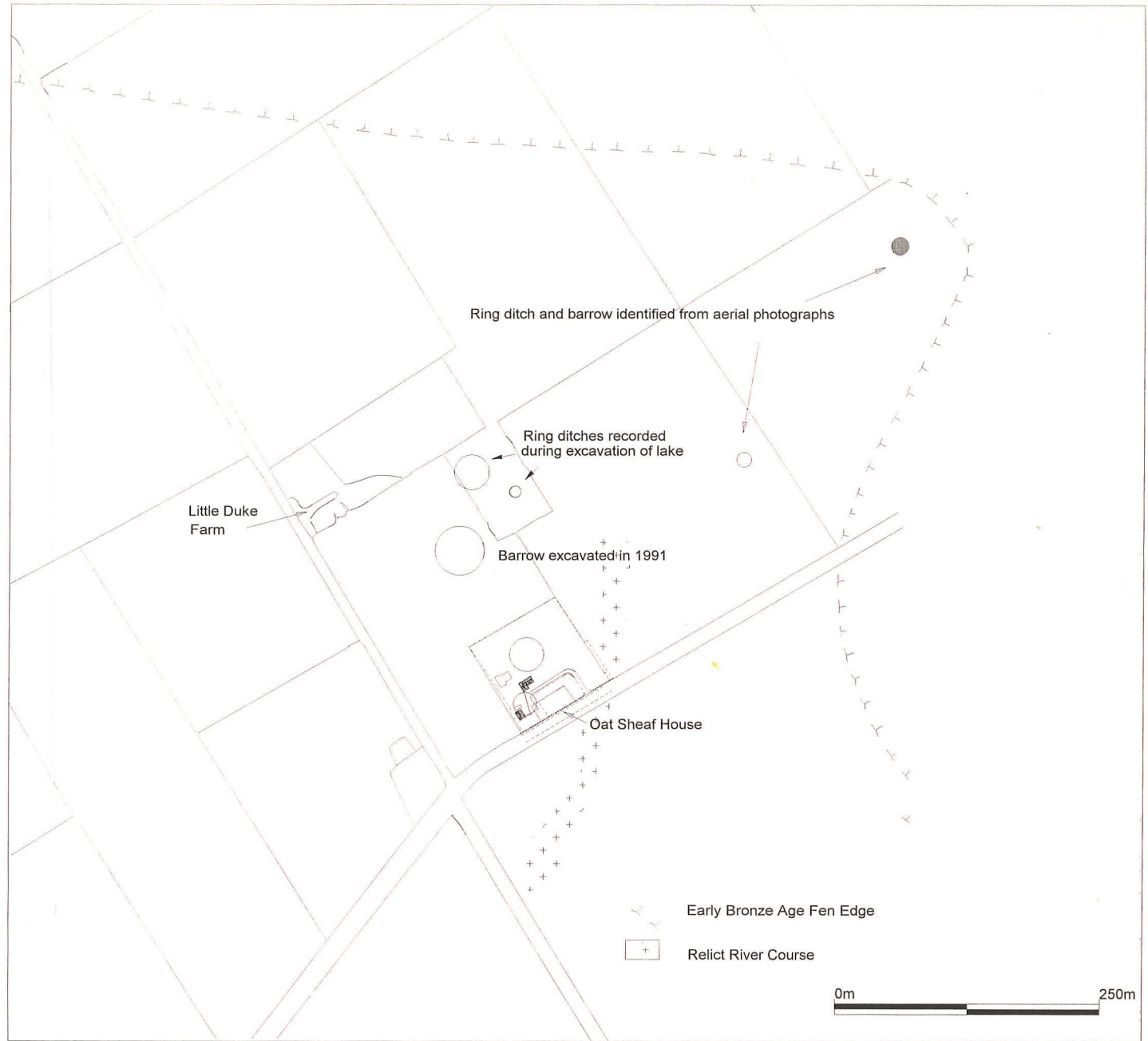


Figure 3 The Barrow Cemetery at Oat Sheaf House

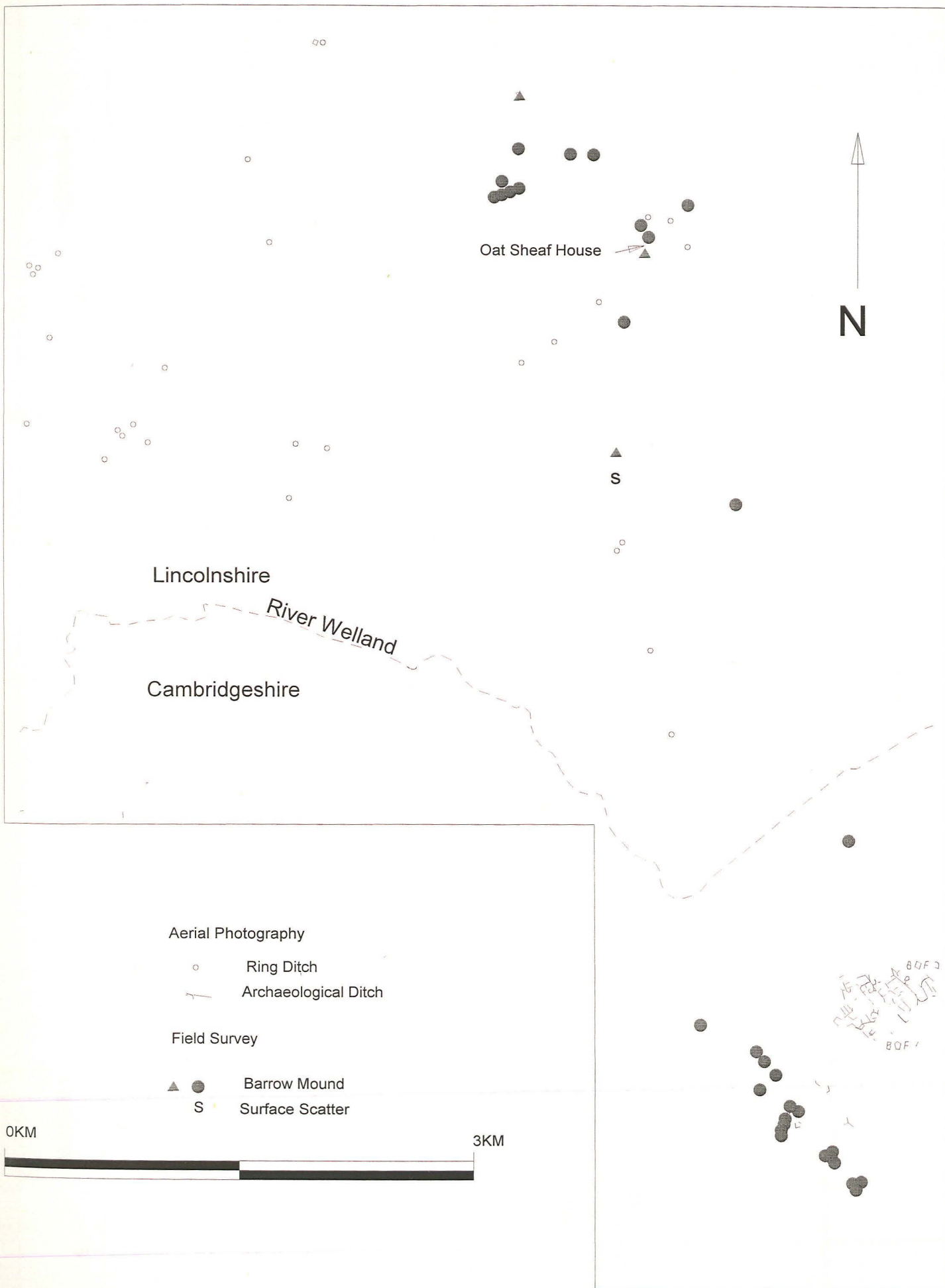


Figure 4 Barrows, Ring Ditches and Surface Scatters in the Lower Welland Valley

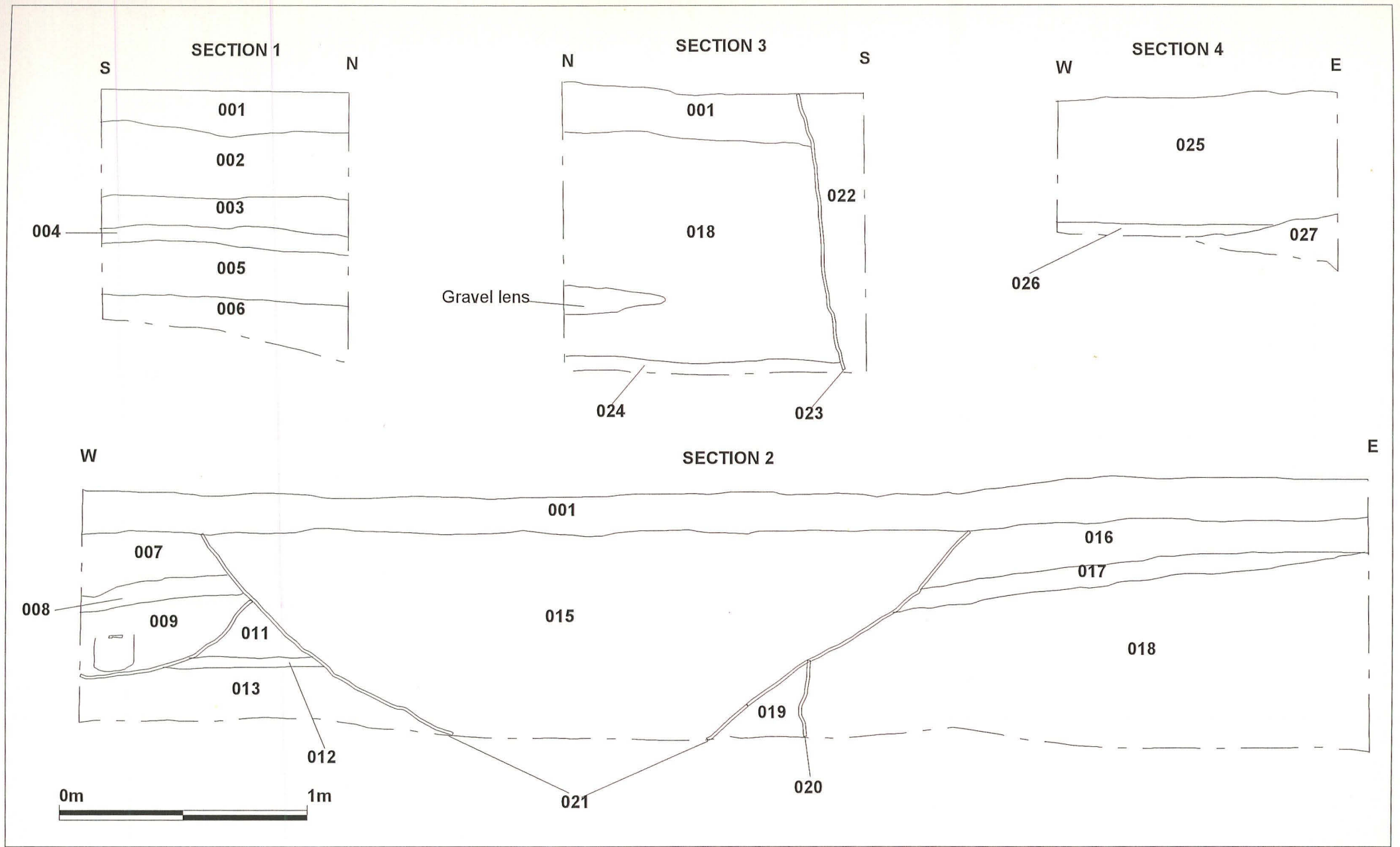


Figure 5 Sections 1,2,3 and 4

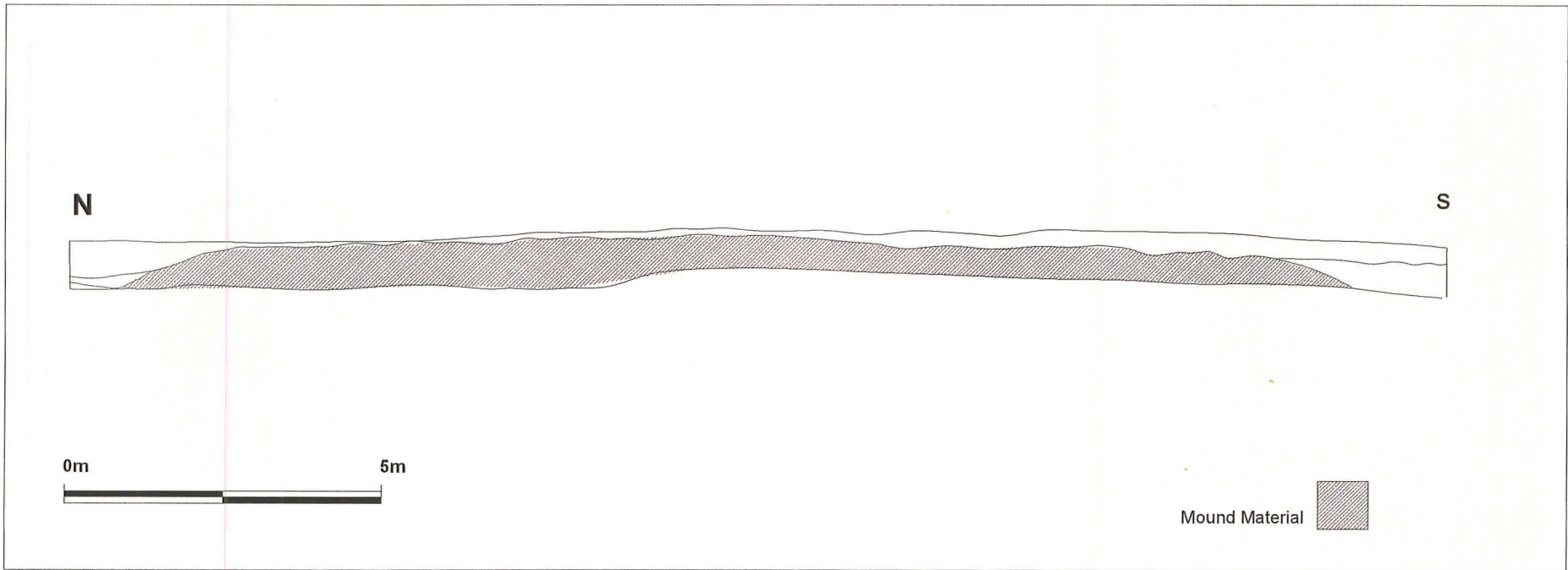


Figure 6 Section From 1991 Watching Brief showing section of possible barrow



Plate 1: Section 2 - New garage plot from southwest, showing possible mound sloping down from east to west.



Plate 2: Section 3 - Garage plot from west. Mound material sealing buried soil at base of Trench.

Appendix 1: Context Description Summary

Context	1 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Topsoil	Topsoil		
Soil:	Friable/Loose Clayey Fine Sand		Colour	Dark Greyish Brown		Thk:	0.2 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Context	2 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Spread	Make up		
Soil:	Loose		Colour	Dark Greyish Brown		Thk:	0.35 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Made up Ground? Very top soily but contains frequent inclusions of modern building materials

Context	3 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Spread	Make up		
Soil:	Loose Fine to Med Sand		Colour	Mid Yellowish Brown		Thk:	0.13 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Made up ground/demolition layer. Probably extends to west end of plot but later truncations prevent joining of deposits.

Context	4 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Natural	Peat		
Soil:	Friable Sandy Peat		Colour	Black		Thk:	0.1 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Humified peat. Extends northwards until truncated by modern activity. Observed throughout southern foundation trench

Context	5 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Natural	Peat Alluviu		
Soil:	Stiff		Colour	Dark Brown		Thk:	0.25 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Clay deposit. Interesting that it underlies peat. Probably represents phase of freshwater alluviation

Context	6 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Buried Soil	Void	Layer	
Soil:	Indurated Medium Sand		Colour	Mid Brownish Grey		Thk:	0.23 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Possible Buried Soil

Context	7 Area	garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Pit	Tertiary	Unknown	
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Upper fill of late pit or ditch

Context	8 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Pit	Secondary		
Soil:	Loose/Friable Mortary Sand		Colour	Light Brown Dark Brown		Thk:	0.18 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Fill of Ditch or pit

Context	9 Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Pit	Primary		
Soil:	Loose Sandy Peat		Colour	Dark Brown		Thk:	0.3 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method: Machine

Primary Fill of modern pit or ditch. Contains rusty iron vessel

Context 10 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Cut **Interpretation** External Pit Rubbish Unknown
Shape **Cnrs:** **L:** 0.8 m **W:** 0 m **D:** 0.6 m **BOS Tp** **Sides** Concave **BOS Bse** Not Perceptible **Bse** Concave **NK** **Tr'd**

Modern pit or end of ditch

Context 11 **Area** garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Natural Void Layer
Soil: Friable Sandy Peat **Colour** Dark Brown **Thk:** 0.23 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m **Method:** Machine

Appears to represent a humified peat. Probably undisturbed and of prehistoric origin.

Context 12 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Natural Layer
Soil: Stiff Peat Clay with patches of Dark brown Peat **Colour** Mid Greyish Brown Dark Brown **Thk:** 0.07 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m Not determinable due to late truncation but equivalent to 005 **Method:** Machine

Deposit probably represents phase of freshwater alluviation

Context 13 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Natural Layer
Soil: Friable **Colour** Dark Black **Thk:** 0.22 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m Not determinable due to later truncation but probably equivalent to 004 at south end of plot **Method:** Machine

Humified peat. Appears undisturbed and probably represents prehistoric freshwater fen conditions

Context 14 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Buried Soil Layer
Soil: Friable Clayey Sand **Colour** Dark Greyish Brown **Thk:** 0.05 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m extends w-e from west limit of trench **Method:** Machine

Possible represents prehistoric buried soil

Context 15 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Pit Tertiary
Soil: Loose **Colour** **Thk:** 0 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m **Method:**

Fill of modern pit

Context 16 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Natural Layer
Soil: Friable Sandy Peat **Colour** Dark Brown **Thk:** 0.23 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m **Method:** Machine

Layer of humified, undisturbed peat. Prob. same as 011. Significant difference in height. Also thickening from east to west. May reflect shape of underlying barrow

Context 17 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Natural Layer
Soil: Firm Clayey Sand **Colour** Dark Greyish Brown **Thk:** 0.1 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m **Method:** Machine

Deposit underlies peat layer 017, suggesting an early date. Fired clay & charcoal suggest close proximity of settlement, though no artefacts retrieved. Turf layer on barrow surface?

Context 18 **Area** Garage **Co-ords** 0 / 0 **Context Type** Deposit **Interpretation** External Mound Barrow
Soil: Firm Clayey Fine Sand **Colour** Mid Reddish Brown **Thk:** 0.8 m **Len:** 0 m **Width:** 0 m **Method:** Machine

Possibly make up for barrow mound

Context	19	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Trench	Primary							
<i>Fill of pipe trench</i>																		
Context	20	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Cut	Interpretation	External	Trench	Pipe							
Shape	Linear	Cnrs:	None	L:	0.4 m	W:	0 m	D	0.3 m	BOS Tp	Sharp	Sides	Vertical	BOS Bse		Bse		Tr'd
<i>Cut for modern pipe trench</i>																		
Context	21	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Cut	Interpretation	External	Pit	Rubbish							
Shape		Cnrs:		L:	4.4 m	W:	0 m	D	0.8 m	BOS Tp	Sharp	Sides	Concave	BOS Bse	Not Perceptible	Bse	Concave	Tr'd
<i>Cut for modern pit</i>																		
Context	22	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Trench	Rubbish							
Soil:	Loose Sandy Clay			Colour	Dark Brown		Thk:	1.2 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method:	Machine				
<i>Possibly machine dug trench for demolition rubbish</i>																		
Context	23	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Trench	Rubbish							
Shape		Cnrs:		L:	0 m	W:	0 m	D	1.2 m	BOS Tp	Sharp	Sides	Vertical	BOS Bse		Bse		Tr'd
<i>Very recent cut. Appears to cut topsoil. Contains much rubble. Possibly relates to demolition of house</i>																		
Context	24	Area	Garage	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Buried Soil		Layer						
Soil:	Soft to Friable Fine Sand/Medium Sand			Colour	Mid Greyish Brown		Thk:	0.05 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method:	Machine				
<i>Possible buried soil underlying barrow mound. Poss. waste flint retrieved.</i>																		
Context	25	Area	Extensi	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Natural		Layer						
Soil:	Loose to Friable Sandy Peat			Colour	Dark Brown		Thk:	0.5 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method:	Machine				
<i>Topsoil</i>																		
Context	26	Area	Extensi	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Natural	Subsoil	Layer						
Soil:	Friable Sandy Clay			Colour	Mid Brown		Thk:	0.06 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method:	Machine				
<i>Subsoil</i>																		
Context	27	Area	Extensi	Co-ords	0 / 0	Context Type	Deposit	Interpretation	External	Natural		Layer						
Soil:	Loose			Colour			Thk:	0 m	Len:	0 m	Width:	0 m	Method:	Machine				
<i>Natural Gravel</i>																		

Appendix 2

The Finds

A single piece of roughly worked flint retrieved from context (024) was the only artefact retrieved from the site.

Appendix 3

The Archive

The site archive consists of:

27	Context records
3	Sheets of scale drawings
1	Photographic record sheet
1	Roughly worked flint
4	Sheets of site notes and sketches.
30	Colour photographs

All primary records and finds are currently kept at:

Archaeological Project Services
The Old School
Cameron Street
Heckington
Sleaford
Lincolnshire
NG34 9RW

The ultimate destination of the project archive is:

Lincolnshire City and County Museum
12 Friars Lane
Lincoln
LN2 1HQ

The archive will be deposited in accordance with the document titled *Conditions for the Acceptance of Project Archives*, produced by the Lincolnshire City and County Museum.

Lincolnshire City and County Council Museum Accession Number: 139.98

Archaeological Project Services Site Code: DOS98

The discussion and comments provided in this report are based on the archaeology revealed during the site investigations. Other archaeological finds and features may exist on the development site but away from the areas exposed during the course of this fieldwork. *Archaeological Project Services* cannot confirm that those areas unexposed are free from archaeology nor that any archaeology present there is of a similar character to that revealed during the current investigation.

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