

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL WATCHING BRIEF AT WHEATEAR FIELD, ATTENBOROUGH, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, 2010.

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Summary

- Trent & Peak Archaeology was contracted by Black & Veatch Ltd on behalf of the Environment Agency to conduct a watching brief during the creation of a wet meadow habitat at Wheatear Field, Attenborough, Nottinghamshire.
- The groundworks were carried out between 26th of October to the 28th of November 2010 by Jackson Civil Engineering with archaeological monitoring by Trent & Peak Archaeology.
- Wheatear Field is centred on SK 51870 3373 and lies within the Attenborough Nature Reserve.
- Evidence of human activity within the vicinity of Attenborough ranges from the Mesolithic through to the present, with finds including Neolithic stone axes and pottery, Bronze Age metalwork and pottery and pottery from the Iron Age, Roman and Medieval periods.
- Topsoil stripping and substantial landscaping created an undulating surface, comprising ridges and furrows which run approximately north-east/south-west along the entire length of the site.
- Machine excavation of subsoils revealed successive deposits of alluvial clays and demonstrated a consistent sedimentary sequence across the site. No organic rich sediments consistent with the presence of palaeochannels or buried soil horizons were identified. Directly beneath the topsoil a series of parallel horse-shoe field drains was revealed possibly dating to the early 19th century.
- The watching brief determined that no archaeological features or deposits were disturbed by the groundworks carried out to create the wet meadow habitat.

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1. INTRODUCTION.

Trent & Peak Archaeology was contracted by Black & Veatch on behalf of the Environment Agency to carry out a watching brief during ground works to create a wet meadow habitat at Wheatear Field, Attenborough, Nottinghamshire centred on SK 51870 33712 (Figure 1). The groundworks were carried out by Jackson Civil engineering between 26th of October to the 28th of November 2010 and the archaeological monitoring was conducted by members of staff of Trent & Peak Archaeology.

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Wheatear Field lies between two gravel pits that since the end of extraction have been turned into lakes that form part of the Attenborough Nature Reserve. The field itself had not been disturbed during the earlier phase of mineral extraction and therefore held the potential of having preserved archaeological features and possible palaeo-environmental deposits.

A number of archaeological discoveries from the wider area were made during phases of quarrying. These included a Mesolithic harpoon head (Bishop 2006) which provides the earliest evidence of human activity in the locality. Quarrying and chance finds indicate activity extended throughout later prehistory. Discoveries include Neolithic stone axes, leaf-shaped arrowheads, Bronze Age metalwork (1966 EMAB no 9,35) and pottery (1974 EMAB no10,40). Iron Age and Romano British pottery has been recovered from previous quarrying activity (1974 EMAB no 10, 40 – 43). The Roman period is also represented by pottery. Activity in the Medieval period is demonstrated by both pottery and a silver coin hoard (1974 EMAB no 10, 44).

Attenborough is not recorded in the Domesday Book but the church is listed as belonging jointly to Toton and Chilwell. The church of St Mary is less than a mile to the east of Wheatear Field and abuts a Scheduled Monument, comprising a group of medieval fish ponds (SAM no.29922/HER M655). More recently excavations in Church Field, located immediately to the east of the scheduled area, have revealed further evidence of medieval activity within the general vicinity of Wheatear Field (T&PA *infra.*).

3. SITE TOPOGRAPHY AND GEOLOGY

Attenborough Nature Reserve is approximately 9km south-west of Nottingham, on the left bank of the river Trent within the river's alluvial flood plain. It lies immediately to the south of the modern village of Attenborough and covers some 365 acres.

Wheatear Field itself is located centrally within the reserve on the southern bank of Tween Pond and the northern bank of Clifton Pond. The field is flat and low lying but with localised surface irregularities.

Wheatear appears to be a reference to a type of migratory bird which presumably was a common visitor to the area. The wheatear is a passerine bird, genus *Oenanthe* of the *Muscicapidae* (flycatcher) family.

4. METHODOLOGY

Top soil was removed by a tracked 360° excavator using a bladed ditching bucket operating under archaeological supervision. Excavation proceeded in the form of strips running north-west/south-east. The top soil was then taken by dumper and stored on site for later use in the creation of new reed beds in Tween Pond, north-east of the site. No plant was permitted to run on the stripped surface until it had been inspected by the attending archaeologist.

The top soil, 0001 (maximum thickness 300mm) was removed to reveal the underlying alluvial subsoil, 0002. Further layers of alluvial clay (0003 and 0004, see below) were then excavated by the tracked machine to leave an undulating surface, comprising ridges and furrows which run approximately north-east/south-west along the entire length of the site.

These undulations form the new wet meadow habitat, providing standing water in the base of the furrows during the winter and spring, an ideal breeding habitat for a range of water fowl.

5. RESULTS

All the intrusive ground works were monitored for the presence of archaeological remains. The average depth of top soil, a mid brown clay loam, was 300mm. Immediately below the top soil a series of horse-shoe field drains of later 19th – early 20th century date were revealed. These were visible directly below the base of the topsoil at the south-west of the field then sloped down gradually to the north-east ceasing to become visible at approximately the mid point of the excavation. They were evidently intended to drain Wheatear Field to the north-east. Figure 2.

In order to excavate the ridges a further 700mm of alluvial clay was removed, comprising layers 0002, 0003 and 250mm of deposit 0004. This level corresponded to the top of the ridge. The bases of the furrows were a further 500mm deep giving a maximum depth of 1.250m below the stripped surface. The base of the furrows did not extent below the base of layer 0004.

The landscaping revealed an underlying sedimentary sequence of alluvial clays but no organic rich sediments consistent with palaeochannels or buried soil horizons. However, the base of alluvial deposits was not reached by the current excavations which penetrated to a depth of c.26.514mOD, and such deposits may have been present at greater depths.

The following stratigraphic sequence was recorded. This was consistent throughout the excavated area. Figure 3.

<i>Context</i>	<i>Thickness</i>	<i>Description</i>
0001 (topsoil)	250/300mm	Brown silty clay loam
0002	235mm	Yellow silty clay
0003	220mm	Brown silty clay
0004	342mm, observed*	Yellow silty clay

* to the level of the top of the ridges; a further 500mm of 0004 was partially observed as the base of the furrows were excavated.

With the exception of the ceramic field drains mentioned above, no buried features or deposits of archaeological significance were observed, and no artefacts were recovered in the course of the ground-works.

6. CONCLUSIONS

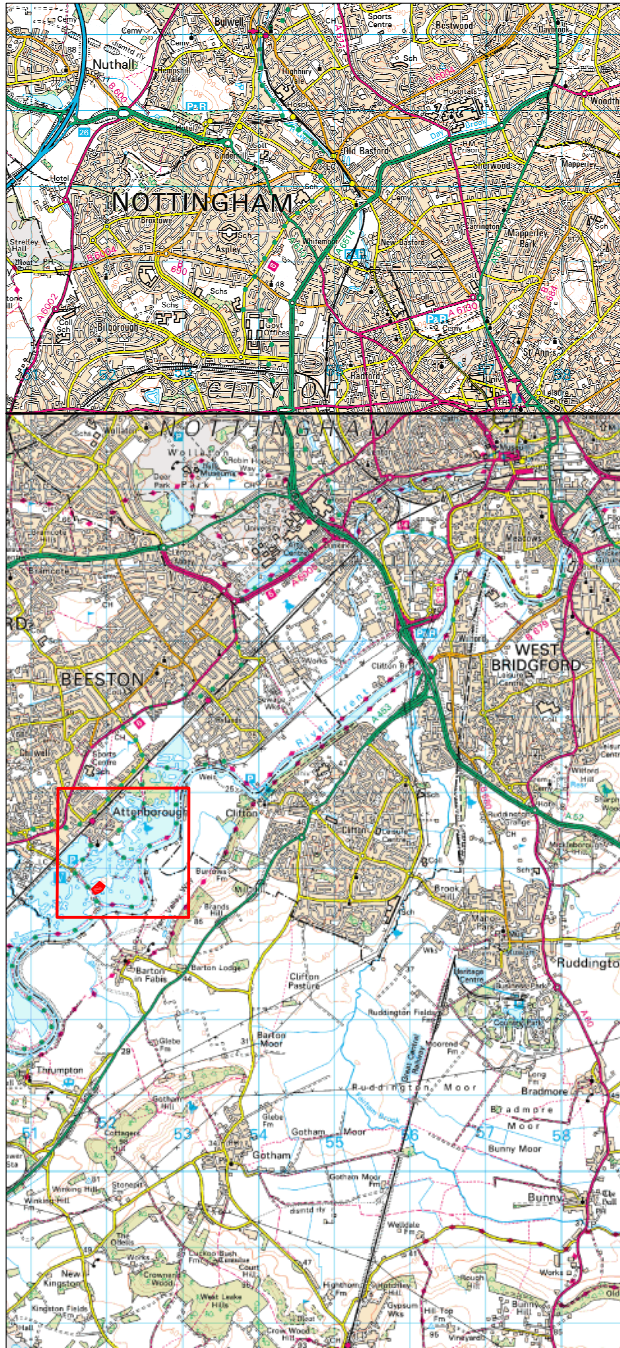
The only remains of any archaeological significance revealed during the course of the ground works were ceramic field drains. These were horse-shoe type drains and are likely to date to the later 19th or early 20th centuries. Consistent with the floodplain location, the frequency of the drains suggests that the ground has historically been wet and that a substantive investment in drainage infrastructure had been necessary to improve the ground for agricultural purposes.


REFERENCES.

Bishop, M. 2006. 'An archaeological resource assessment of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic in Nottinghamshire', in *East Midlands Archaeological Research Framework*

1966, *East Midlands Archaeological Bulletin*, Number 9. May, J. (editor) University of Nottingham, Nottingham

1974, *East Midlands Archaeological Bulletin*, Number 10. Beeby, B.M. (editor) University of Nottingham, Nottingham



 WEF Wheatear Field, Attenborough, Nottinghamshire
Figure 1 Site location plan
Scale at A4 1:100000 / 1:10000

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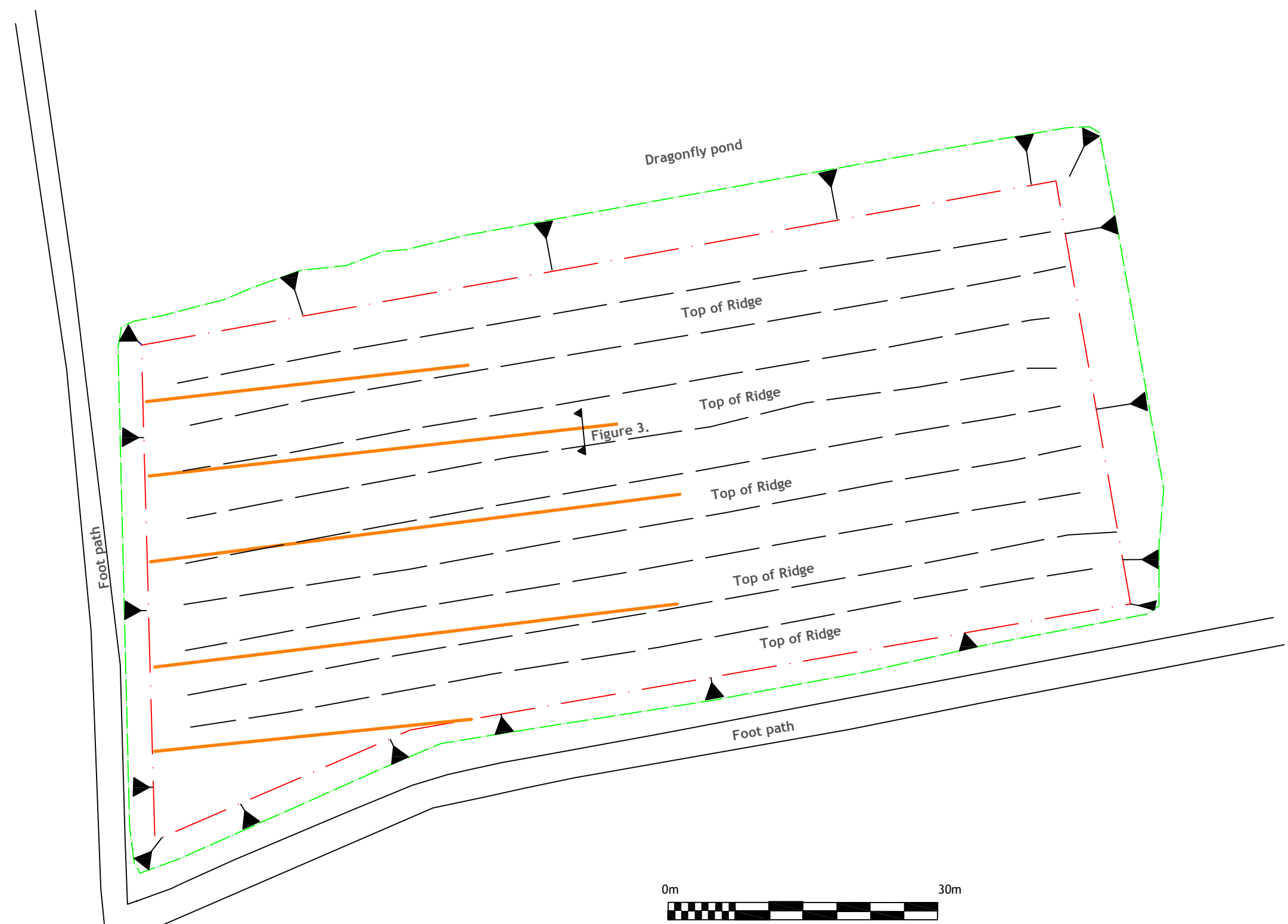
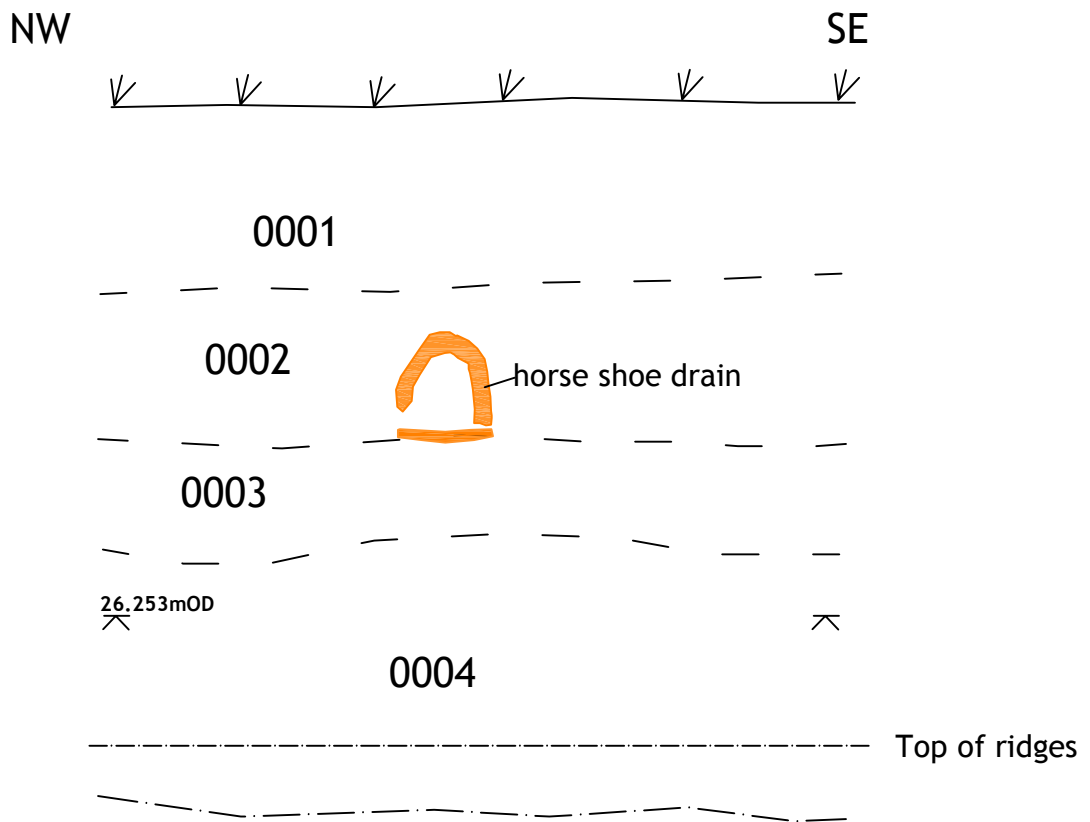


Figure 3.

- Ceramic field drains
- Base of excavated area
- Top of excavated area
- Position of ridges



- | | |
|------|---------------------------------------|
| 0001 | Medium brown silty clay loam, topsoil |
| 0002 | Yellow silty clay, alluvium |
| 0003 | Brown silty clay, alluvium |
| 0004 | Yellow silty clay, alluvium. |



PLATE 1. Topsoil stripping at the south-west end of Wheatear field. Looking north-west.



PLATE 2. Stratigraphy below the topsoil with horseshoe drain. Bands of probable alluvial clays were consistent across the site. The tops of the ridges are at the level of the base deposit in this Photograph. Looking north-east.



PLATE 3. Constructing the ridges. Looking north north-east.



PLATE 4. The completed ridges. Looking southsouth-west.