

Humber Field Archaeology

Archaeological Consultants and Contractors



Archaeological Observation
Investigation and Recording

On land at
Willerby Brow
Staxton Hill
Staxton
North Yorkshire

Planning Reference: 08/00144/MREM
National Grid Reference: TA 0077 7800
Site Code: WB2008.031

for

Mr. R. Bradley

Watching Brief Report Number: 1019

May 2008

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D. Jobling (BA Hons.), May 2008

Summary

A programme of archaeological recording was undertaken by Humber Field Archaeology during groundwork associated with the erection of a free-range poultry house at Willerby Brow, Staxton Hill, Staxton, North Yorkshire.

Monitoring of the topsoil stripping followed by targeted excavation where necessary revealed a small amount of archaeological material overlying a succession of natural chalks gravels and silt sands. The base of a southwest-northeast orientated undated linear slot was recorded cutting into chalks. An undulating shallow valley in the northeastern and central areas of the site had been filled by a hill wash deposit. The foundation remains of a 20th century structure were noted also. No artefacts were encountered during the programme of work.

1. Introduction

This report presents the results of a programme of archaeological observation, investigation and recording undertaken by Humber Field Archaeology, on behalf of Mr. R. Bradley, during groundwork associated with the erection of a free-range poultry house at Willerby Brow, Staxton Hill, Staxton, North Yorkshire (*Figure 1, Plate 1*).

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The proposed site of the poultry house occupies an area at the north-east corner of an agricultural field adjacent to Willerby Brow Plantation, west of the B1249 Staxton Hill Road at *c* NGR TA 0077 7800.

2. Archaeological Background

Natural topography and geology

The site lies above the northern escarpment of the Yorkshire Wolds at *c* 135m OD, overlooking the alluvial Carrs. The Wolds consist of Upper Cretaceous Chalk (British Geological Survey, Sheet 54 Drift Edition 1950), overlain by a variety of mainly shallow chalky soils, which locally are categorised as Soil Association 343h, Andover 1 (Soil Survey of England and Wales 1983).

Archaeological and historical features

The Yorkshire Wolds were exploited throughout the prehistoric period, and there are still traces of a complex archaeological landscape, including traces of agriculture (field boundaries, plough marks, driveways), land division (embankments and ditches) and funerary monuments (burial mounds or *tumuli*). Some of these have been investigated in the Staxton Wold area, including a long barrow to the south on Willerby Wold. This and other features were also recorded as part of an aerial photographic survey of the Wolds (Stoertz 1997).

There are a number of archaeological features and sites recorded on the North Yorkshire Historic Environment Record across Willerby and Staxton Brows. These comprise remains known from both surviving earthworks and crop mark evidence, and include linear boundaries, dykes, round barrows and enclosures and field systems, as well as recorded find spots of prehistoric material, such as a polished flint axe.

The majority of these features are of prehistoric date, but Romano-British settlement was also extensive on the Wolds as a whole. Traces of later occupation are less likely, as the locations of most medieval and early post-medieval settlements are either known or still in use, although isolated features associated with agricultural practices may be present.

A geophysical survey undertaken in 2007 by Archaeological Services WYAS recorded two converging linear anomalies, indicative of in-filled ditches. A geological origin was not ruled out however.

3. Methodology

The work associated with this project was carried out by staff from Humber Field Archaeology (HFA), in accordance with a site-specific project design produced on 24th March 2008 (Atkinson 2008).

The scheme of works comprised a continuously monitored topsoil strip followed by targeted excavated where necessary. A series of three visits were made to the site between the 28th April and 1st May 2008.

Any exposed areas of subsoil and lower stratigraphic units were examined for archaeological deposits. The excavated dimensions of the foundation trenches were recorded, as were the depth sequences of any exposed stratigraphy. Where archaeological deposits/features were identified, context numbers were assigned and detailed descriptions were made, plans and sections were drawn and a photographic record was maintained.

It is the intention of HFA to deposit the archive with Scarborough Museum.

4. Results

Site Description

The site of the development covered an area measuring 102.00m southwest-northeast along its southern edge, 100.90m along its northern edge and 33.70m southeast-northwest along both eastern and western boundaries (3416.20m² within a 270m perimeter). The site decreases in height from the southwest to northeast, with a high, nearly flat, plateau in the southwestern third lowering into a shallow southeast-northwest orientated valley which constitutes the remaining two-thirds of the site and rises slightly to the northeast. Following the initial topsoil strip (*Figure 2, Plates 2, 3*), the site was then artificially levelled with material/spoil generated from excavating into the western side of the rise being used to raise the level in the eastern half of the site.

Recorded Data

Phase 1 – Natural deposits

The basal layer observed at the development was (104) mid brown white chalk. This layer was seen only on the western side of valley (103 – see below) as a thin band viewed up to 1.20m wide southwest-northeast and 19.10m northwest-southeast in plan (22.92m²) which continued outside the area of excavation. The entire thickness of this layer was not established; however the deposit is greater than 0.50m deep based on observed data.

Overlying (104) is substantial white chalk layer (103). This deposit was recorded on either side of the shallow valley with the following recorded measurements.

Western Area:

Deposit (103) covers an area measuring 33.70m at the western boundary, 60.50m along the northern edge and 46.60m along the southern edge; these are all artificial boundaries cut by the mechanical excavator. The eastern edge of the deposit formed a natural and gentle 'S' curve with an observed length of 28.10m and continued outside the area of excavation. This was a total of 1744.10m²

Eastern Area:

(103) in this area was confined to the northern half of the eastern part of the site. The machine cut edge measurements were: 31.80m along the northern boundary and 30.50m along the eastern boundary. The western (20.70m) and southern (28.80m) edges of the deposit were overlain by (102) (see below) and formed a gentle 90° corner at the southwest. The total observed area was 708.10m².

Valley:

There was an in-filled depression, or valley, in the eastern area of the stripped zone. The western edge of the depression met the natural gentle 'S' curve of chalk (103) at 28.10m, with the eastern edge following the western and southern edges of (103) on the eastern side of the site (20.70m and 28.80m respectively). The southern and northern extents were the edges of the development, 57.20m at the south and 12.60m at the north (940.40m²). This natural feature was filled by (102) hill wash, consisting of well sorted small to medium gravels and mid to light brown sands and silts. Later cutting by mechanical excavators at the site demonstrated that (102) was 0.30m thick at the west and increasing to the east, continuing below the level of excavation. (102) continued outside the area of excavation to the south and north also (*Figure 2, Plate 4*).

Phase 2 – Archaeological deposits (undated)

A single southwest-northeast orientated linear slot [106], 16.32m long and 0.30m wide, was recorded in the central and western area of the stripped zone. The linear had a slight curve to the north at its western extent. Rapid excavation of the feature demonstrated a uniform concave 'C' shaped profile 0.15m deep which was filled by a mid to light sand silt containing a moderate amount of small gravel and chalk inclusions (105) (*Figures 2, 3, Plates 4, 5*).

Phase 3 – Modern surface and associated material

The uppermost layer at the development site was the current topsoil (101); dark grey brown soft loam viewed up to 0.30m thick, but generally 0.20m thick. In the northeastern area of the site there appeared to be the remains of a former structure (107), however the demolition debris from this had been removed prior to the instigation of the current programme of archaeological monitoring, therefore accurate plotting of the area for (107) was not possible. It was observed that (107) consisted of broken, greater than 1.00m long concrete slabs, brick and mortar rubble and occasional rebar-type material (*Figure 2*).

Access Road

The access road to the development site runs along the eastern side of the current field southwards towards the entrance. The current excavations at the site utilised large farm machinery (tractors) to remove spoil generated by the excavations. Precipitation prior and during the site work meant that the topsoil (101) was fairly waterlogged and as a result, the area where the access road is to be placed was heavily 'churned' by the large wheels on the tractors, sometimes up to a depth greater than 0.40m mixing both the topsoil and the upper levels of chalk in this area. In view of this, it was determined that monitoring of any access road excavations would not prove beneficial to the archaeological record.

At this point the current programme of archaeological monitoring at the development site was concluded.

5. Discussion

The following is solely the opinion of Humber Field Archaeology.

The current programme of archaeological monitoring at the development site has demonstrated the presence of a single undated southwest-northeast linear slot [105]. The slot appears to represent the basal remains of a truncated, larger feature and could be related to features recorded previously to the north, such as the linear earthwork dyke which crosses Willerby Brow. Alternatively, the feature could be the remains of a pre-Enclosure field boundary, perhaps the base of a former hedgerow. This feature appears to have been identified during the survey undertaken by ASWYAS (Harrison and Gidman 2007, *Fig. 3*).

The large linear anomaly revealed during the geophysical survey on the eastern side of the site was encountered during the current programme of work and constitutes the southeast-northwest valley with hill wash in-fill (102). There was no observed evidence during the strip of the remaining potential features from the geophysical survey.

There was no evidence to suggest that the remains of the previously demolished structure (107) at the site had any negative impact upon the below ground deposits.

6. Acknowledgements

Thanks are accorded to Mr. R. Bradley and the site excavation contractors for help and co-operation during the course of this project.

The work was carried out in accordance with a site-specific project design prepared by HFA (Atkinson 2008). The onsite monitoring and recording was undertaken by D. Jobling and D. Rawson. The report text and illustrations are the work of the author, with editing by D. Atkinson.

7. References

Atkinson, D., 2008, Willerby Brow, Staxton Hill, Staxton, North Yorkshire. Project design for a programme of archaeological recording.

Harrison, S. and Gidman, J., 2007, Land at Willerby Brow, Staxton, North Yorkshire. Geophysical Survey. Archaeological Services WYAS. Report No. 1734.

Management of Archaeological Projects (MAP2), English Heritage, 1991.

Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983.

Stoertz, C., 1997, Ancient Landscapes of the Yorkshire Wolds, RCHM.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 Context list

- (100)-Unstratified.
- (101)-Topsoil.
- (102)-Hill wash/Valley infill (natural).
- (103)-Chalk/chalk brash (natural).
- (104)-Chalky sand and gravels (natural).
- (105)-Fill of linear slot [106].
- [106]-Linear slot cut.
- (107)-20th century demolition debris.

Appendix 2

Archive

Project Details:

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Museum Reference or Accession Number: pending from Scarborough Museum

Author D. Jobling **Date of fieldwork** 28th April - 1st May 2008.

Report Number. Humber Field Archaeology Watching Brief Report Number 1019
May 2008

Quantity

5x A4 plastic sleeves contain the paper archive

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Index to Archive

1 Background:

1.1 Project Design

1.2 Correspondence

1.3 Related publication: Harrison, S. and Gidman, J., 2007, Land at Willerby Brow, Staxton, North Yorkshire. Geophysical Survey. Archaeological Services WYAS. Report No. 1734.

2 Site Data:

2.1 Site plans

2.2 Site staff visit log

3 The Photographic Record:

3.1 Photographic Catalogue

3.2 Contact Sheets

3.3 Reference Prints

4. Final Report:

Archaeological Observation, Investigation and Recording on land at Willerby Brow, Staxton Hill, Staxton, North Yorkshire. Humber Field Archaeology Watching Brief Report Number 1019, May 2008.

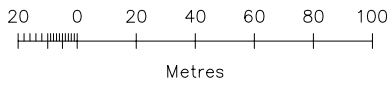
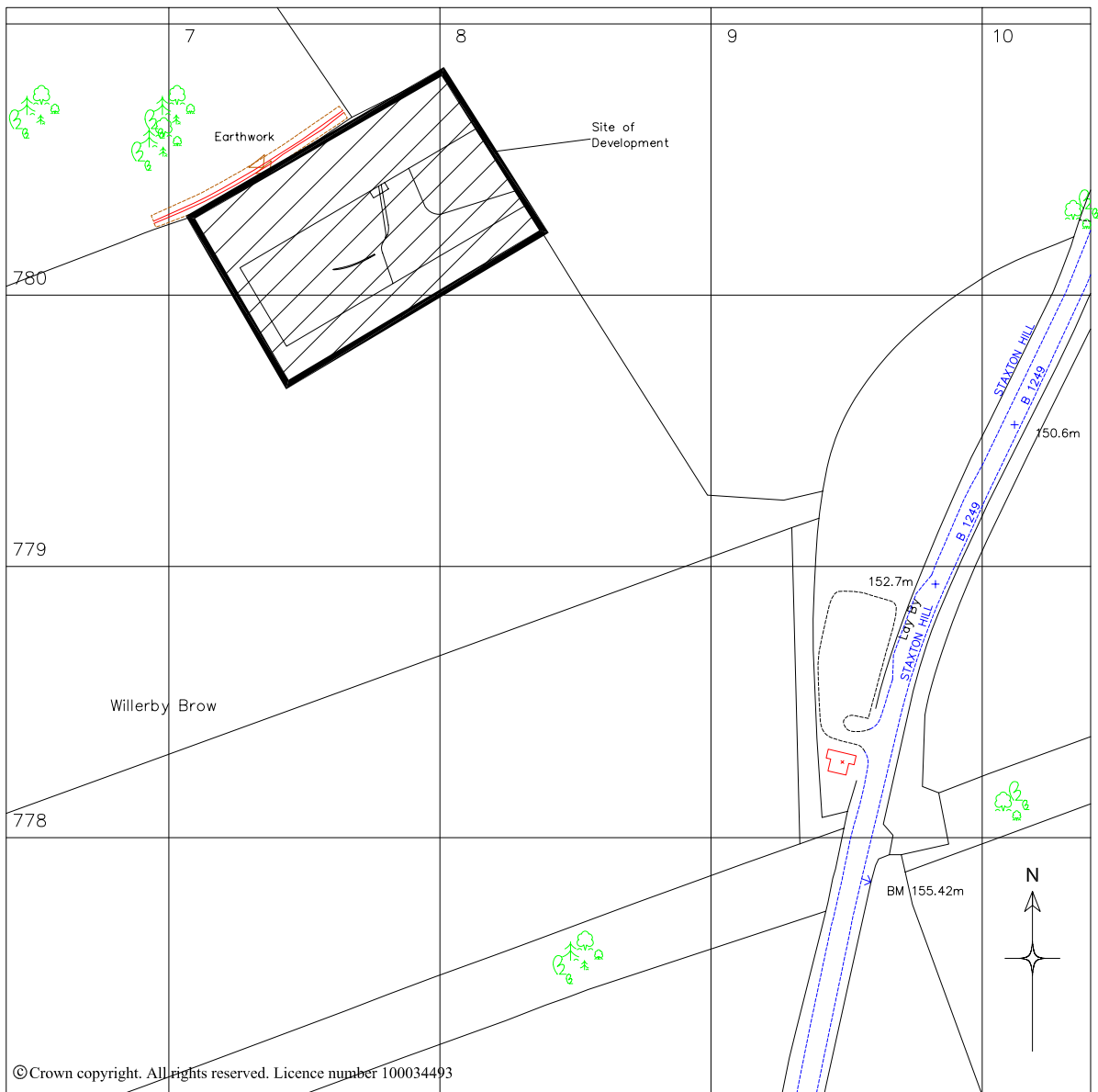
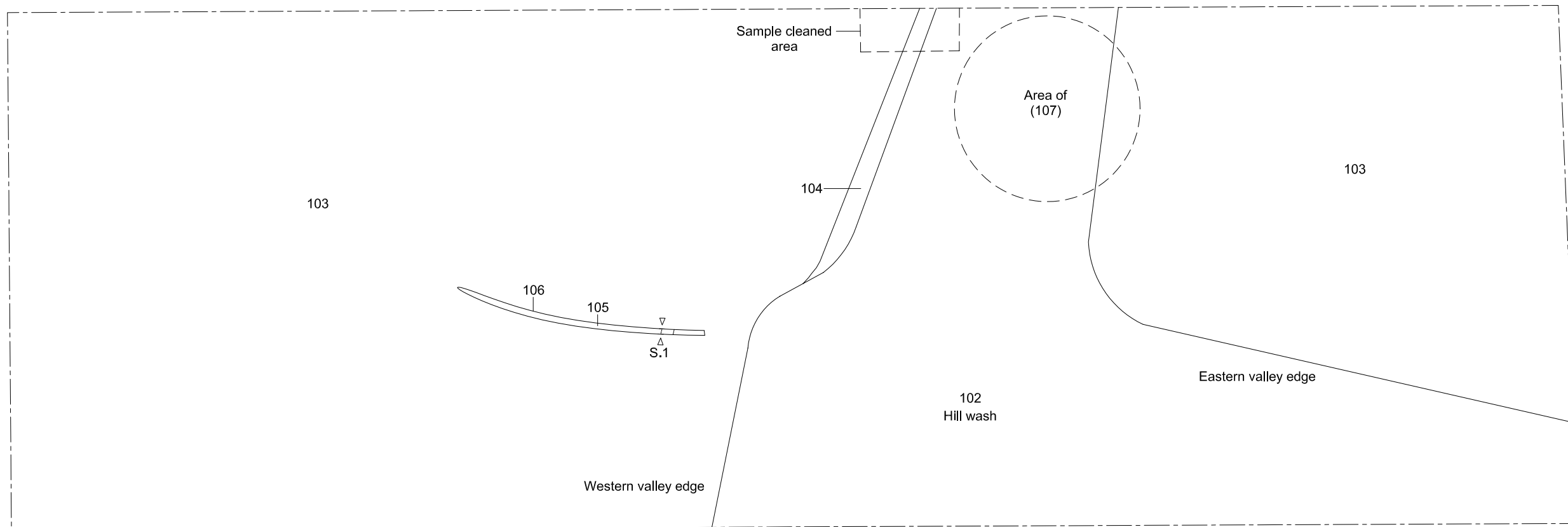


Figure 1 Site location plan.



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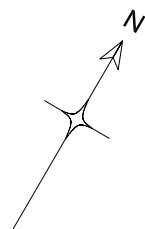
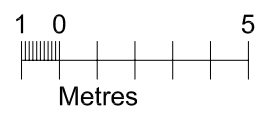


Figure 3 Plan showing the stripped area and the deposits exposed.

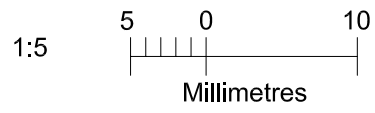
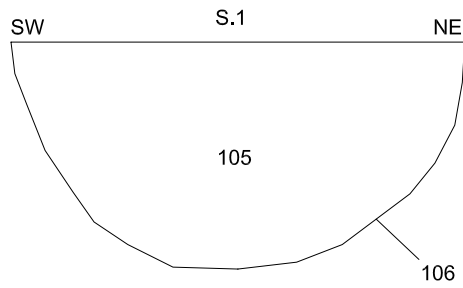




Plate 1 The site of development, looking northwest.



Plate 2 Initial topsoil stripping at the site showing underlying natural deposits (in order from foreground) (102), (104) and (103). Note the varied topography, looking southwest. 1m scale.



Plate 3 Detail of sample cleaned area along the northwestern site boundary, looking northeast, showing deposits (102), (103) and (104). 1m scale.



Plate 4 Working shot showing the shallow valley running southeast-northwest filled by darker hill wash (102) contrasting against chalks (103) and (104). Note the base of shallow linear [106] along the centre line, looking northeast.



Plate 5 Rapid sample excavation of linear slot [106]. 0.30m scale.

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Humber Field Archaeology is an independently-funded part of the Humber Archaeology Partnership, a partnership serving The East Riding of Yorkshire Council and Kingston upon Hull City Council