FIRCROFT, HEADWELL LANE, SAXTON.

REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION.
OSA REPORT No: OSA08EV14.

JULY 2008.

OSA

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Report Summary.

REPORT NO:	OSA08EV14
SITE NAME:	Headwell Lane, Saxton
NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE:	SE 477 367
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TIMING:	Fieldwork: June 2008 – July 2008 Report: July 2008
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1.0 Abstract.

An archaeological evaluation was carried out by On Site Archaeology at the proposed development site of Fircroft, on Headwell Lane, Saxton between 30th June 2008 and 1st July 2008. The purpose of the evaluation was to view the nature and character of below ground archaeology ahead of proposed development in the garden belonging to the property. The evaluation comprises two trenches, each 5m x 2m in size.

Trench 1 was found to contain two postholes and two linear features. One linear feature was cut into the limestone bedrock, the other features were cut into the deep B-horizon of the soil profile. The postholes possibly belong to a small scale structure such as a fence or animal pen. The uppermost linear feature could be evidence of a robbed out structure, or an old hedgerow. The linear feature cutting through bedrock was a north-south aligned ditch, also seen in trench 2. No dating evidence was found in this trench.

Trench 2 was found to contain an L-shaped feature cutting the deep B-horizon and a linear feature cutting limestone bedrock. The L-shaped feature may be the remains of a small scale structure such as an animal pen. The linear feature was a continuation of the ditch found in trench 1. No dating evidence was found in this trench.

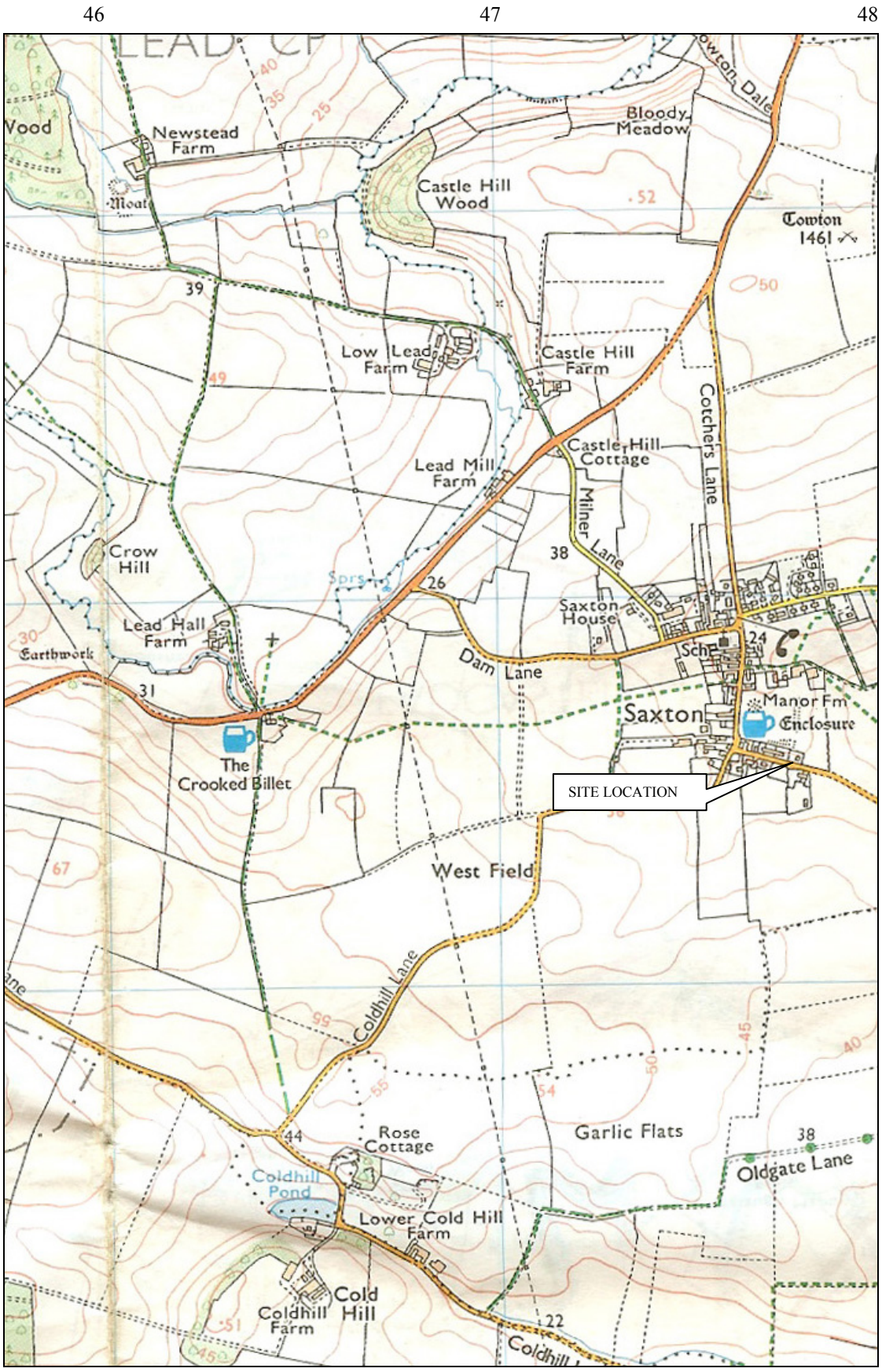

Figure 1. Site Location (NGR SE 477 367).

2.0 Background.

2.1 Site Description

The village of Saxton lies to the immediate south of the village of Towton, and to the immediate west of the village of Barkston Ash. The proposed development site lies on the eastern edge of Saxton. It is bounded to the south by Headwell Lane, to the east by agricultural land, to the north by grazing land, and to the west by a residential property (figure 1).

The current land use of the site is residential. The area comprises a detached, single storey dwelling and garden with various out buildings. The garden itself is turfed, with several fruit trees and a vegetable patch. The application site currently comprises a garden/orchard of approximately 0.25ha. adjacent to the existing dwelling (Fircroft). The study area forms a low planted mound.

The underlying geology of the site is Magnesian Limestone of the Permian period (British Geological Survey, 2001).

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

The proposed development site lies within an area of archaeological interest, with the potential for the survival of remains of the prehistoric and later periods.

The site is adjacent to a scheduled ancient monument comprising a medieval Motte and Bailey castle (scheduled Monument No 20518). The motte is forty metres in diameter at the base and about two metres high. A slight eight metre wide ditch surrounds the mound and there is a hollow area at the top which marks the site of the tower which was originally located here. The Manor House, formerly the residence of the Hungate family, was demolished in the early nineteenth century but its foundations survive immediately to the south of Manor Farm. The monument was altered by the building of a later medieval manor house in the north east corner of the bailey and also by the creation of small enclosures, a hollow way and a pond beside the motte.

In addition the Ordnance Survey map of 1849 shows earthworks aligned northwest to southeast to the south of the motte which may form the outer bailey ditch. This feature may extend into the application area

2.3 Methodology

In all trenches the topsoil was removed by a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket down to the level of the first visible archaeological horizon or to the level of the natural geological horizon, whichever came first. A total of two trenches were excavated, each measuring 5m by 2m (figure 2).

The exposed surfaces were then cleaned by hand in order to detect any archaeological features revealed through textural or colour changes in the deposits. Once this had been completed, sections were hand excavated through the archaeological features that had been identified. Standard *On-Site Archaeology* techniques were followed throughout the excavation. This involved the completion of a context sheet for each deposit or cut encountered, along with plans and/or sections drawn to scale. In trenches containing archaeological features, 1:50 scale plans and, where necessary, 1:20 detail plans were drawn. Sections were drawn at 1:10 scale, although long sections were drawn at 1:20 scale when appropriate. Heights above Ordnance Datum (AOD) were calculated by taking levels from a temporary benchmark (TBM). Plans were tied in to the National Grid using a total station. A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained. This comprised digital colour photographs, colour slides and black and white negatives.

All archaeological works were carried out in accordance with the methodologies set out in the *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavation,* and *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Watching Brief* prepared by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (IFA), the IFA *Code of Conduct,* as well as with additional methodologies agreed with the county archaeologist.

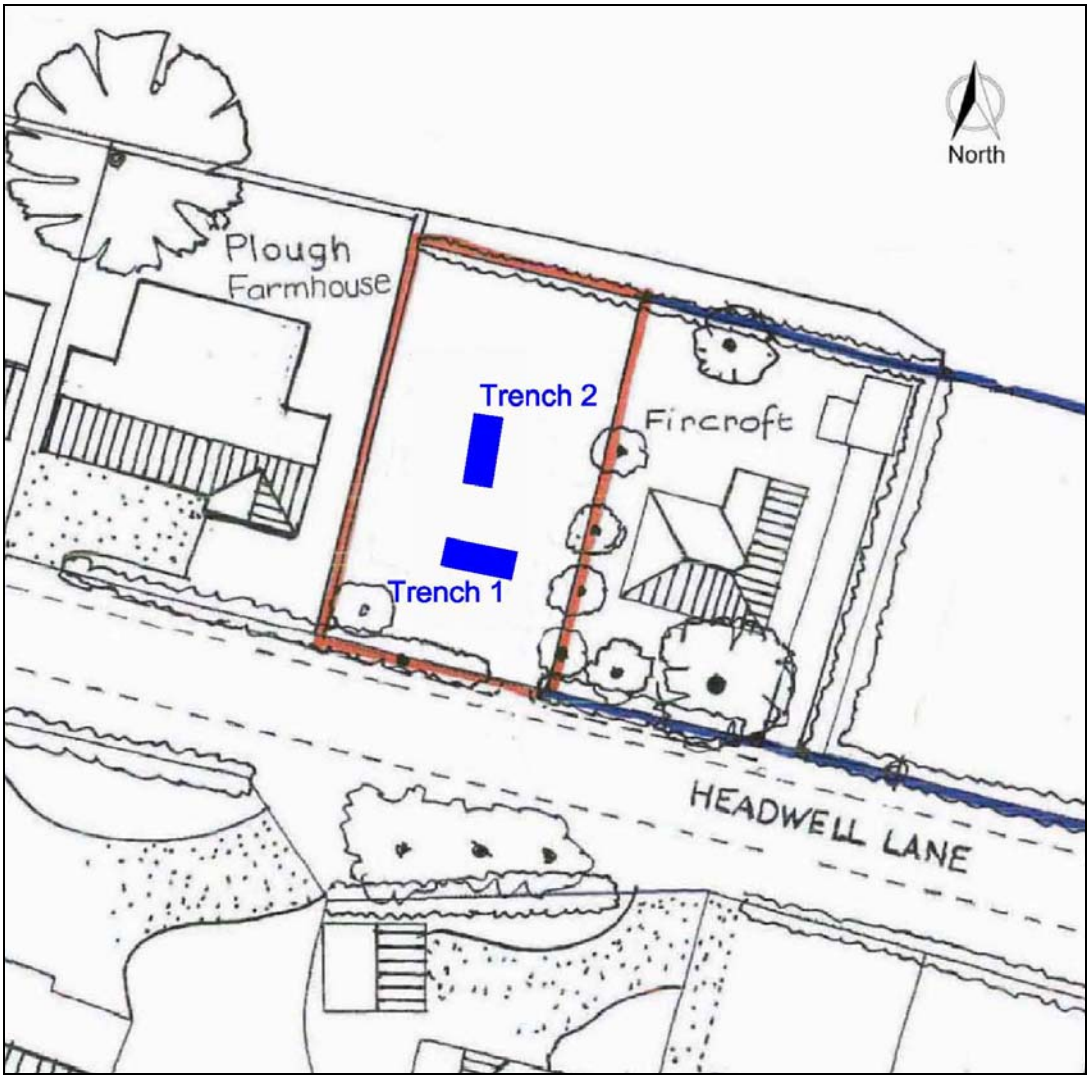

Figure 2. Plan showing position of excavated trenches.

3.0 Results: Stratigraphic Description.

3.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 measured 5m x 2m and was located to the south of the garden (plate 1). The trench contained two postholes and two linear features (figure 3). These features contained no dating material apart from a few tiny flecks of ceramic building material (CBM), so samples were taken in order to ascertain this. It is possible that these features are related to earlier structures that occupied the site.

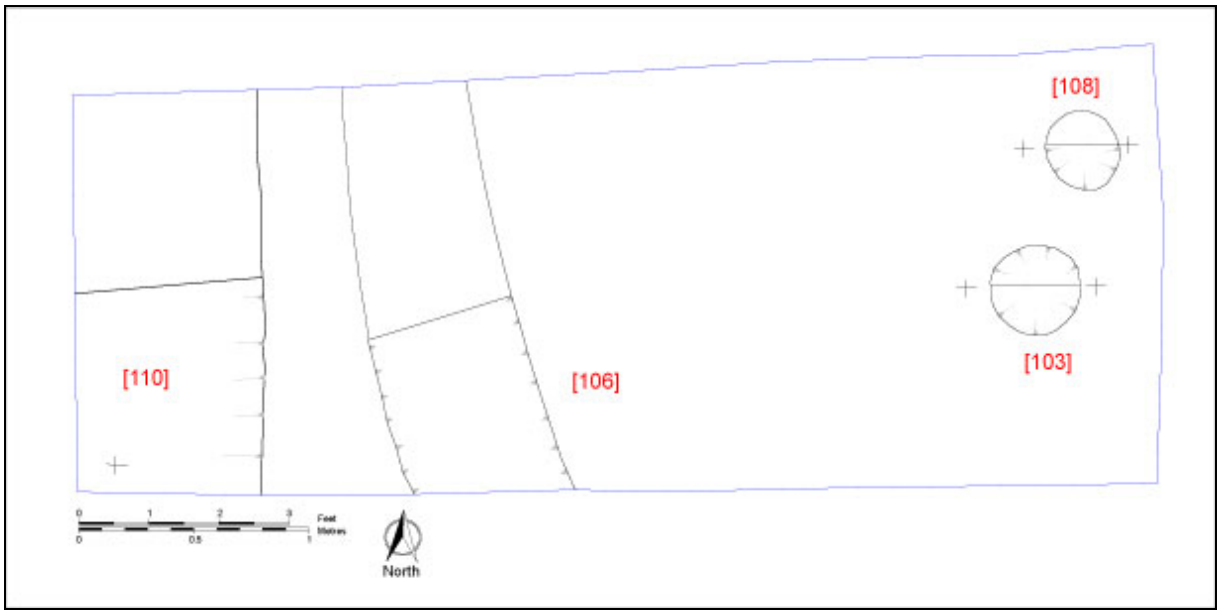

Figure 3. Plan of trench 1.

The earliest deposit in trench 1 was natural geology. Cut into this was north – south running linear feature [110] (plate 2). The linear extended beyond the trench and was over 1.2m wide. Its full width was impossible to ascertain because only one edge was within the trench. It had shallow irregular sides with a concave base and gradual breaks of slope. [110] was filled with light orange brown sandy silt with occasional small stone fragments (109). This feature was a continuation of [206].

Sealing the above contexts was subsoil or B-horizon layer (104) composed of mid yellowish brown soft silty sand with very occasional limestone fragments. The layer measured 0.1-0.2m in depth and was present at 0.54m below ground level below ground level (BGL). This layer was cut by a two post holes [103] and [108], located in the eastern half of the trench and a linear feature [106] in the west half of the trench.

Posthole [103] measured 0.37m x 0.36m in plan and comprised moderate concave sides with a concave base and sharp to gradual breaks of slope (plate 3). The posthole was filled with mid grey brown clayey silt featuring frequent charcoal inclusions and frequent angular limestones (102) and measured 0.13m in depth. Posthole [108] measured 0.33m x 0.3m in plan and comprised steep concave sides with a concave base and sharp to gradual breaks of slope (plate 4). The posthole was filled with mid grey brown silty sand (107) featuring

frequent charcoal inclusions and occasional angular limestones, as well as two very small flecks of ceramic building material (CBM). The posthole measured 0.14m in depth. Both postholes cut through the full depth of (104) and into the underlying natural geology.

Layer (104) was also cut by shallow ditch [106], located in the west half of the trench (plate 5). [106] measured more than 2m (running beyond the limit of excavation to the north and south) in length. It was 0.68m wide and comprised moderate concave sides with a flat base and sharp to gradual breaks of slope. The linear was filled with light pink brown silty sand featuring occasional angular and sub angular limestones, and occasional charcoal flecks (105). The feature measured 0.09m in depth. This feature did not cut through the full depth of (104). All three features cut into (104) were unrelated stratigraphically.

Above layer (104) and features [103], [106] and [108] was a further subsoil layer (101) that measured 0.3-0.4m in depth and comprised mid yellow brown silty sand. Layer (101) sealed all contexts below. This was overlain by topsoil (100) measuring 0.2-0.3m in depth and comprising dark grey brown clayey silt.

3.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 measured 5m x 2m and was located to the north of the garden, 12.3m north of the southern hedge boundary. The trench contained the possible remains of an ephemeral structure, and a linear feature (plate 6 and figure 4).

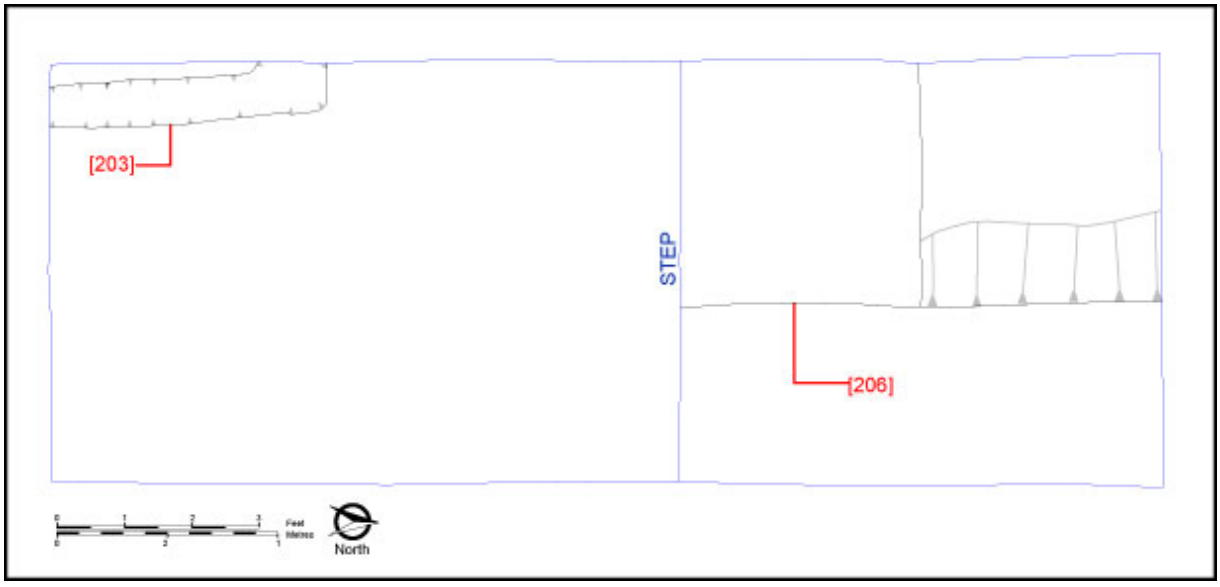

Figure 4. Plan of trench 2.

The earliest deposit in trench 2 was undisturbed natural geology; this material was present at 0.75m BGL. Cut into the natural geology was a north – south running linear feature [206]. The linear feature was located in the northwest corner of the trench and ran beyond the limit of excavation to the north, south and west (plate 7). The linear extended beyond the trench to the north and south and was more than 1.2m wide, only one side being present within the trench. It had shallow irregular sides with a concave base and gradual breaks of slope. [206] was filled with light orange brown sandy silt with occasional small stone fragments (205) and measured 0.3m in depth.

Sealing the above contexts was subsoil (204). This measured 0.3m in depth and comprised mid yellow brown silty sand. This layer was cut by L-shaped possible construction cut [203] (plates 8 & 9). [203] was located in the south west corner of the trench, and ran beyond the limit of excavation to the south and west. The feature measured more than 1.35m long and 0.2m wide comprising shallow concave sides with a concave base and gradual breaks of slope (figure 5). [203] was filled with mid yellow brown sand and gravel with occasional angular limestones 5-250mm (202) and measured up to 0.08m in depth. This feature contained one fragment of animal pelvis (possibly pig) and three fragments of iron slag.

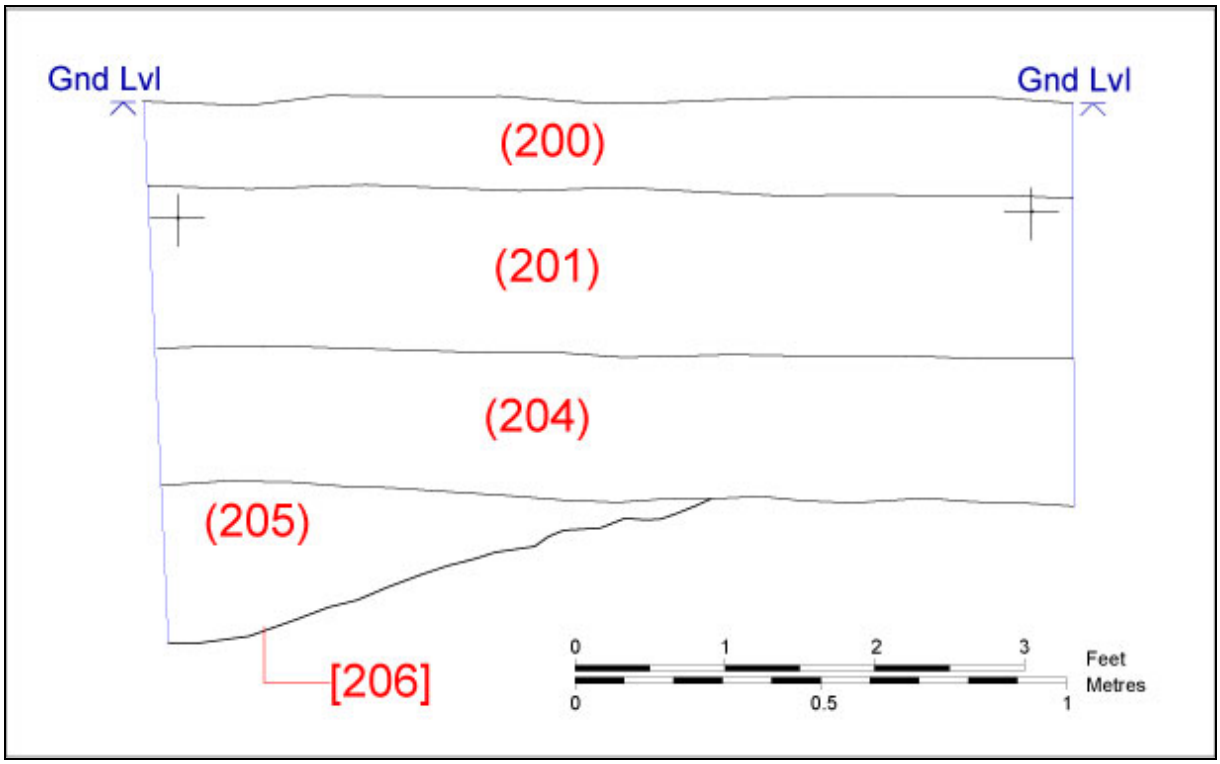

Figure 5. South facing section of ditch [206].

Sealing the above contexts was subsoil (201). This measured 0.34m in depth and comprised mid yellow brown silty sand. This was overlain by topsoil (200) measuring 0.3m in depth and comprising dark grey brown clayey silt.

4.0 Discussion and conclusion.

4.1 Character of the archaeology: linear features

Both trenches 1 and 2 contained linear features. Both features were shallow, ditch like features. However, both features were fairly minor in stature, and this, in addition to a lack of archaeological finds means that it is difficult to ascertain their date and purpose. Three possible explanations for these features are as follows.

Both linear features [106] and [110]/[205] could be the remains of construction cuts for buildings that once stood on this site. The fact that no evidence of structure remains suggests that if these were the remnants of construction cuts, they were robbed out after the structures had gone out of use. Both features [106] and [110]/[205] could be explained in this manner. [106] is very shallow for a construction cut, but this could be due to destruction of the cut whilst it was being robbed out, or other heavy horizontal truncation over time.

An alternative explanation for these cuts is that they are the remnants of old hedgerows, used as field or land boundaries. Archaeologically, hedgerows leave behind signatures that are characterised by being linear, wide and shallow, with somewhat irregular bases caused by root action. Both features [106] and [110]/[205] could be explained in this manner. [106] has a base that is a little too flat for a hedgerow, but this could be due to slight overcutting by the excavator, as fill (105) and layer (204) may have had a somewhat diffuse horizon due to leaching of water. [205] is perhaps a little deep to be the remains of a hedgerow. However, some hedgerows are constructed with larger trees in the centre, and the actual hedge lining the trees either side. This would explain why [205] is much deeper in the centre, with shallow steps on the edge of the cut.

However, by far the most likely explanation of both features is that they are the remains of ditched boundaries of unknown date. Linear [106] is of different character from linear [110]/[205], being far shallower and cut only into the B-horizon of the soil profile, which indicates that it was never very deep. By contrast, [110]/[205] cut into the natural bedrock meaning that - assuming ground surface to be the same as the present day – it was just over a metre in depth. It is possible that [110]/[205] is the remains of the earthworks apparently shown on the 1849 Ordnance Survey first edition map (see section 2.2 above). The lack of dating evidence makes it impossible to be certain of either this identification or the ditches' age.

4.2 Character of the archaeology: other structural features

Trench 1 contained two postholes, [103] and [108]. While not related stratigraphically, the similarities between these postholes in size and shape suggest that they are related in some way, possibly being part of the same structure. As no other postholes were found in this trench, and because of their alignment, we can only assume that any other surviving archaeological features relating to these postholes must exist to either the north or east, beyond the current limit of excavation. As there are only two post holes, it is difficult to

ascertain what form of structure they once belonged to. However, their small diameter suggests that the posts (or stakes) they once held were also small in diameter. Larger posts would require significantly more in the way of post packing in order for them to be fully supported. Thus, it is likely that these postholes derive from a smaller structure, such as a fence or animal pen.

Lack of finds from these postholes means that it is also difficult to determine their date. Two small fragments of CBM from [108] are too small to date accurately, but their appearance suggests that they date to no earlier than the late Medieval period. However, given the relative shallowness of the feature these fragments may be intrusive, perhaps the result of bioturbation.

Trench 2 contained a very ephemeral L-shaped feature, [203]. This feature contained a few angular limestones, situated in a sand and gravel fill (202). Initially, this was thought to be the remains of a land drain. However, further investigation showed that the feature turns approximately 90° to the west at its northern end. This would suggest that the feature represents structural remains. The shallow, ephemeral nature of the features could be due to robbing and subsequent truncation. The dimensions of the feature suggest that the structure would have been small and quite insubstantial. Therefore, it is possible that feature [203] represents the remains of a lightweight structure such as an animal pen. No dating evidence was found in relation to this feature. The iron slag and animal bone present in relation to this feature is likely to be residual.

5.0 Bibliography.

British Geological Survey. 2001. *Solid Geology Map*. 1: 625,000 scale, Fourth Edition.

6.0 Appendix 1 ~ List of Contexts.

Context	Description	Interpretation	Extent	Depth (m)
100	Dark greyish brown clayey silt	Topsoil	Trench (T)	0.2-0.3
101	Mid yellowish brown silty sand	Subsoil sealing cut features	T	0.3-0.4
102	Mid greyish brown clayey silt with frequent charcoal inclusions and frequent angular limestones	Fill of small posthole/stake hole 103	0.37x0.36	0.13
103	Circular cut with moderate, concave sides, gradual breaks of slope and irregular base	Cut of a posthole/stake hole	0.37x0.36	0.13
104	Mid yellowish brown silty sand	Second layer of subsoil cut by features, sealed by 101	T	0.1-0.2
105	Light pinkish brown silty sand with occasional sub-angular/angular limestone fragments and occasional charcoal flecks	Fill of linear 106	more than 2x0.68	0.09
106	Cut of N-S linear with moderate, concave sides, sharp to gradual breaks of slops and flat base	Shallow ditch? Robbed foundation cut?	more than 2x0.68	0.09
107	Mid greyish brown silty sand with frequent charcoal inclusions and occasional angular limestones. Very occasional CBM	Fill of posthole/stake hole 108	0.33x0.3	0.14
108	Circular cut, steep, concave sides, sharp to gradual breaks of slope and a concave base	Cut of a posthole/stake hole	0.33x0.3	0.14
109	Light orangish brown sandy silt with occasional limestones	Same as 205	more than 1.5xmore than 1.2	
110	N-S cut of linear, on same alignment as 206	Same as 206	more than 1.5xmore than 1.2	
200	Dark greyish brown clayey silt	Topsoil	T	0.3
201	Mid yellowish brown silty sand	Subsoil sealing cut features	T	0.34
202	Mid yellowish brown sand/gravel with occasional angular and sub angular limestones, very occasional animal bone and occasional fragments of iron slag	Fill of 203	more than 1.35x0.2	0.08
203	N-S cut which turns 90° to west at northern end. Shallow, concave sides, gradual breaks of slop and concave base.	Construction cut for animal pen?	more than 1.35x0.2	0.08
204	Mid yellowish brown silty sand	Second layer of subsoil cut by features, sealed by 201	T	0.3
205	Light orangish brown sandy silt with occasional limestones	Fill of linear 206	more than 1.5xmore than 1.2	0.3
206	N-S cut of linear, shallow, irregular sides, gradual breaks of slope and concave base. On same alignment as 110	Possible boundary feature, ditch or hedgeline	more than 1.5xmore than 1.2	0.3

7.0 Appendix 2 ~ Archive Index.

7.1 Drawing Register.

Drawing number	Plan, section, elevation	Description	Scale	Date	Initials
1	S	Trench 1, south facing section through 106	1: 10	30.06.08	DP
2	S	Trench 1, south facing section through 103	1: 10	30.06.08	LM
3	S	Trench 1, south facing section through 108	1: 10	30.06.08	LM
4	P	Trench 1, post excavation plan	1: 20	30.06.08	LM
5	P	Trench 2, pre-excavation plan	1: 20	01.07.08	LM
6	P	Trench 2, post excavation plan	1: 20	01.07.08	LM
7	S	Trench 2, east facing section	1: 20	01.07.08	LM
8	S	Trench 2, south facing section	1: 20	01.07.08	LM

7.2 Photographic Register.

Frame	Description	Direction looking	Scale	Date
Digital downloaded 30.06.08				
1-2	Trench 1, pre excavation	west	1x1m 1x0.5m	30.06.08
3-4	Trench 1, pre excavation	east	1x1m 1x0.5	30.06.08
5	Working shot	north		30.06.08
6-7	Pre excavation 103 and 108	north	1x1m	30.06.08
8-9	Pre excavation 103 and 108	south	1x1m	30.06.08
10	Trench 2 pre excavation	south	1x1m 1x0.5m	30.06.08
11	Trench 2 pre excavation	north	1x1m 1x0.5m	30.06.08
12-14	Post excavation 103	north	1x0.5m	30.06.08
15-16	Post excavation 106	south	1x1m	02.10.07
17-18	Post excavation 106	north	1x1m	30.06.08
19-21	Post excavation 108	north	1x0.5m	30.06.08
22	Trench 1 post excavation	west	1x1m	30.06.08
23	Trench 1 post excavation	east	1x1m	30.06.08
Digital downloaded 01.07.08				
1-2	Pre excavation 203	north	1x1m	01.07.08
3-4	Pre excavation 203	south	1x1m	01.07.08
5-6	Post excavation 203	south	1x1m	01.07.08
7-8	Post excavation 203	north	1x1m	01.07.08
9-10	Trench 2, east facing section	west	1x1m	01.07.08
11-12	Post excavation 206	north	1x1m	01.07.08
13-14	Post excavation 206	north west	1x1m	01.07.08
15-16	Trench 2 post excavation	north	1x1m	01.07.08
17-18	Trench 2 post excavation	south	1x1m	01.07.08

7.3 List of Environmental Samples.

Sample number	Context number	Sample Type	Comments	Volume	Type
1	105	Bulk	Fill of linear	10	Silty sand
2	103	Bulk	Fill of posthole	more than 10	Clayey silt

8.0 Appendix 3 ~ Finds Assessment Report.

Report not yet available. However, a comprehensive list of bulk finds can be seen below.

Context	Find	Quantity
105	Cu fragment (tiny fragment)	1
105	Fe object	1
107	CBM fleck	2
202	Fe object	3
202	Animal bone	1

9.0 Appendix 5 ~ The Plates.

Plate 1. Trench 1 post excavation, looking west.

Plate 2. Ditch [110], looking south.

Plate 3. Post hole [103].

Plate 4. Post hole [108].

Plate 5. Ditch [106], looking north.

Plate 6. Trench 2 pre-excavation, looking south.

Plate 7. Ditch [206], looking northwest.

Plate 8. Feature [203] pre-excavation, looking south.

Plate 9. Feature [203] post excavation, looking south.