AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

AT

ALDBOROUGH GATE

BOROUGHBRIDGE, NORTH YORKSHIRE

AOC Archaeology

on behalf of:

George Wimpey PLC

April 1998

AOC
ARCHAEOLOGY

On Behalf of:

George Wimpey PLC
Strategic Land Management
28 Barnton Grove
Edinburgh
EH4 6BT

National Grid Reference (NGR): SE 3980 6570

Prepared By: Catherine Cavanagh

Excavation by:

Catherine Cavanagh
Karl Hulka

Illustration by: Damien Carr

Timing:

Excavation
14th - 15th April 1998

Post-excavation and report preparation
16th - 17th April 1998

Enquiries to:

AOC Archaeology
40 Langham Street
London W1N 5RG

Tel. (0171) 436 1988
Fax. (0171) 436 1989

Non-Technical Summary

In the course of an archaeological evaluation exercise, undertaken during the 14th and 15th April 1998, three trenches were opened by AOC Archaeology in fields to the north of Aldborough Gate road. A full report has been prepared. The trench positions are shown on Figure 1.

The County Archaeologist, Neil Campling, visited the investigations on the second day of fieldwork and was able to inspect Trenches 1 and 3. Trench 2 had already been backfilled.

No archaeological remains of any significance were encountered during the evaluation. Trench 3 intercepted two roughly circular crop-marked features seen on aerial photographs. No archaeological feature or sediment or artefactual inclusion was detected that would indicate a human origin for the observed crop-marked features. Instead, a probable peri-glacial gully-like feature within the sub-soil was detected and this could conceivably have contributed to part of the easternmost crop-mark feature. The locations of both crop-marked features towards the centre of a poorly drained natural hollow, militate further against any human origin.

CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF PLATES

1 SUMMARY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken by AOC Archaeology to assist a planning enquiry into a development proposal on land north of Aldborough Gate road, to the south of Boroughbridge. Three trenches were excavated to the surface of the natural sand. Despite the proximity of the site to the Roman Town of Isurium on which the present town of Aldborough now stands, no archaeological features or deposits apart from Medieval ridge and furrow were observed during the work. Two large circular features seen on aerial photographs were evaluated and interpreted as geological rather than manmade.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Site Location

The site considered by this report lies to the south of Boroughbridge and to the west of Aldborough, on the western side of the vale of York.(Fig. 1). It is centred on National Grid Reference (NGR) SE 3980 6570. The southern end of the site is bounded by Aldborough Gate road which runs along the brow of a hill. The north and west edges of the site are defined by housing estates, a leisure centre and Boroughbridge High School. The land slopes steeply down from the south and more gradually from the north to form a hollow in Field 7286 and where the pond is located (Fig. 2).

The site is currently occupied by Greystones House, garden and paddock (8959), agricultural fields, pasture and a modern pond. At the time of the evaluation, Field 8772 was under pasture, Field 7286 contained a crop and Field 7466 had been ploughed. Although the soil is well-drained and easily worked, it is not very fertile and requires frequent manuring. Access is from Aldborough Gate.

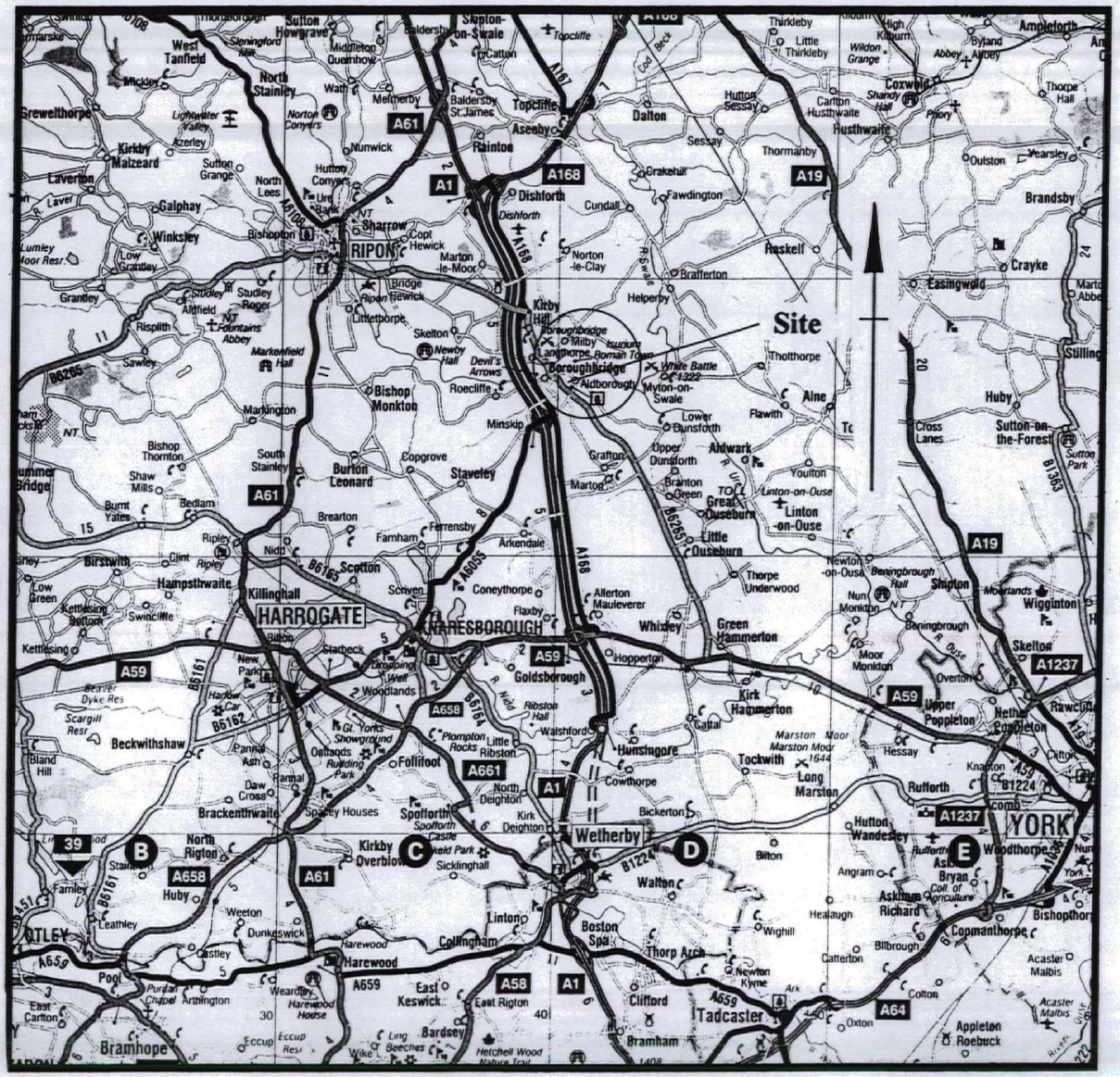
The underlying geology of the site is Bunter Sandstone (Geological Survey of Great Britain (England and Wales) Sheet 62, 1967). This is overlain by the drift geology which comprises glacial beds of boulder clay mixed with pockets of sand and gravel. Deposits of natural sand were predominant on the site.

2.2 Archaeological and Historical Background

The following information has been compiled from York Archaeological Trust's Desk Top Study of 1998 in conjunction with consultation of aerial photographs held at the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in the Heritage Unit based at North Yorkshire County Council's offices at Northallerton.

Prehistoric

Although there is evidence for human activity in the Vale of York from the Mesolithic period onwards, field walking by the Aldborough Research Committee has not revealed any concentrations of prehistoric artefacts on the site under consideration. A bronze leaf-shaped spear head of possible Bronze Age date, recovered from OS land parcel 0001, seems to have been an isolated find.



Scale: 1:250,000

Figure 1 Site Location

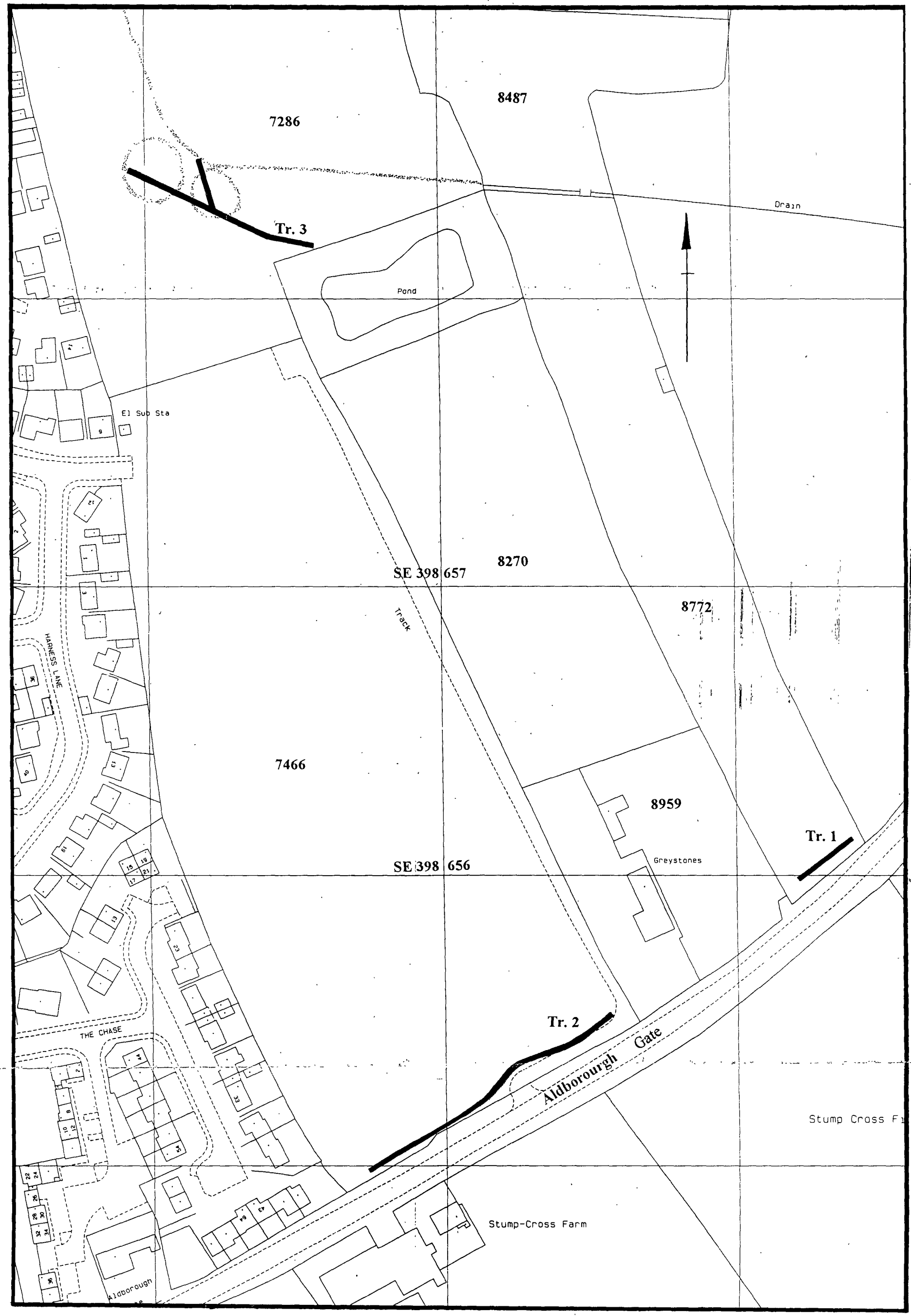


Figure 2 Trench Locations Related to Features on Aerial Photographs

Aerial photographs (Plate 1) show two circular features in Field 7286 which have been interpreted as either the remains of a ditch associated with a Bronze Age barrow, Iron Age farmsteads or simply variations in the underlying geology.

Roman

The site lies about 0.07 km west of the wall around the Roman Town of *Isurium Brigantum*, beside what is believed to be the line of a former Roman road preserved as Aldborough Gate. Other Roman sites are thought to exist close to the site due to discoveries made during field walking and also excavation in advance of the A1 Road improvement schemes.

However, field walking by the Aldborough Research Committee in Fields 0001 and 3000 produced no concentrations of Roman material. In Field 0001 virtually no Roman pottery was recovered apart from in a narrow area beside Aldborough Gate, supporting the theory that this was a Roman road, and a similar strip along the west edge of the field possibly indicating a trackway. A slightly larger quantity of finds were recovered from Field 3000 including a penannular brooch fragment found near the boundary of Fields 0001 and 3000. Possible Roman kilns were identified just outside the north-east edge of the site.

The relatively low quantity of finds dating to the Roman period may mean that manuring did not take place, perhaps because the fields were not used for agricultural purposes, albeit hey may have been used as pasture.

Medieval

A useful source for this period is the *Domesday Book* written in the 11th century, which is organised by landholders within Counties. During the Medieval period, the site was part of the lands belonging to Lords of the Manor at Aldborough and therefore likely to have been farmland.

This theory is supported by evidence from aerial photographs of extensive Medieval farming in the area between Aldborough and Boroughbridge. Differential moisture retention, due to parallel lines of 'ridge and furrow' formed by medieval ploughing techniques, causes linear marks in the soil or crops which can be seen from the air, even if they are not visible on the ground.

Post-Medieval

The majority of the fields on the site have been enlarged since the Medieval period, which involved the removal of hedge lines. Where the fields have been used for agricultural purposes, the ridge and furrow has either been deliberately levelled or ploughed out. Within the last ten years, a modern pond has been created in the south-eastern corner of Field 7286. An east/west orientated linear feature seen on aerial photographs in Field 7286 was likely to have been a continuation of the drain seen at the edge of Field 8487.

2.3 Planning Background

This report on the archaeological evaluation has been produced as part of the background information for the Harrogate District Local Plan Inquiry.

Due to the presence of features of potential archaeological interest within the vicinity of the application site, and in line with PPG 16, the Archaeology Section of North Yorkshire County Council commented that an archaeological evaluation would be necessary in advance of any development on the site.

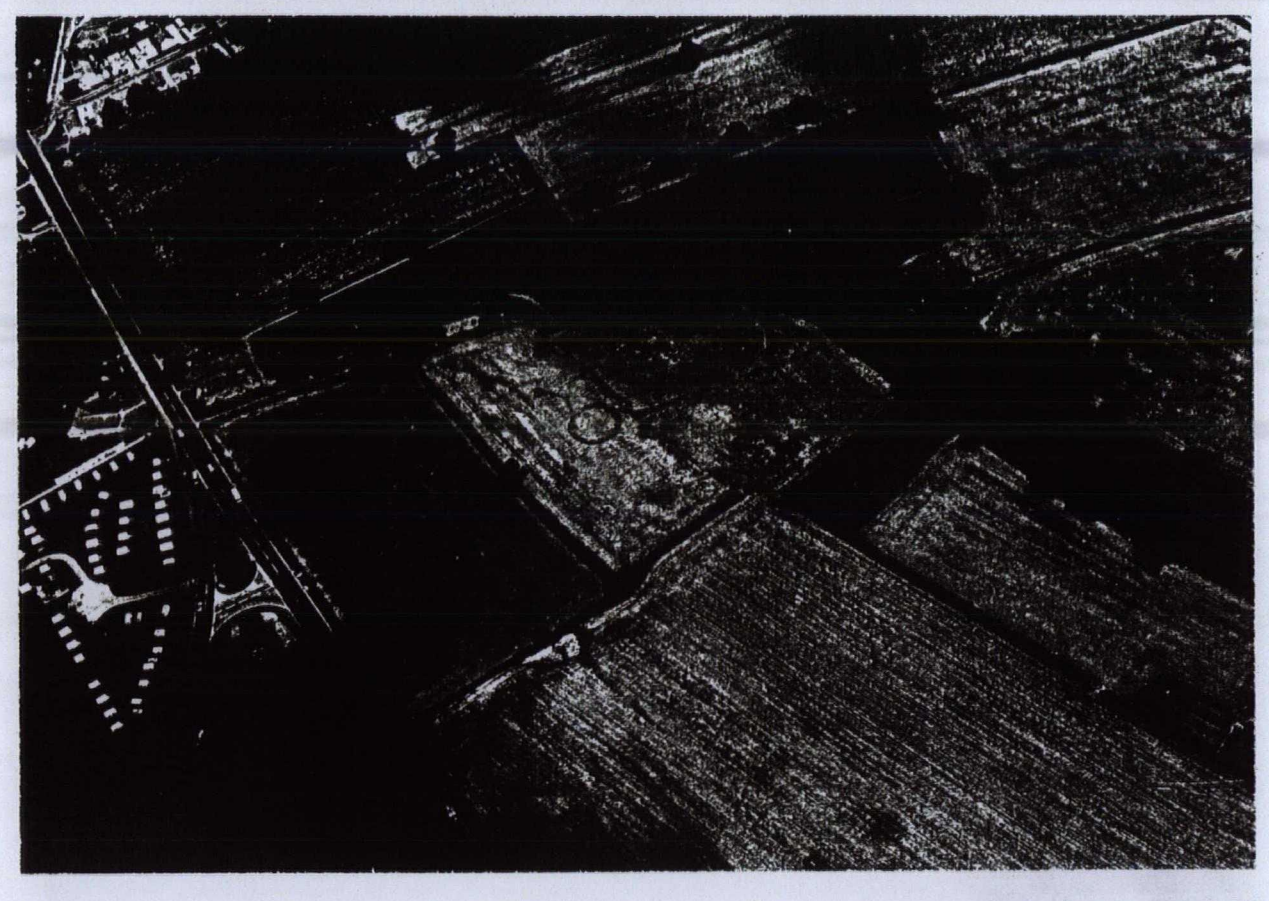


Plate 1 Aerial Photograph with Field 7286 in the Centre

Plate 2 Ttrench 3, Facing East

3 STRATEGY

3.1 Research Design

A scheme of investigation for the site was designed by AOC Archaeology and submitted the County Archaeological Officer, with the agreement of the client. This provided for limited field evaluation of the site at Aldborough Gate.

The field evaluation was to comprise the mechanical excavation of two trenches using a JCB equipped with a 5' toothless ditching bucket supplemented by limited hand investigation of suspected archaeological deposits. The integrity of any archaeological features or deposits which might better be excavated in conditions pertaining to full excavation, or might warrant preservation *in situ*, would not be compromised.

One trench was to be positioned along Aldborough Gate to see if Roman burials were present, while another would intercept the circular features seen on aerial photographs in OS Land Parcel 7286.

3.2 Aims of the Investigation

To establish the presence/absence of archaeological remains within the site.

To determine the extent, condition, nature, character, quality and date of any archaeological remains encountered.

To discover whether Roman burials exist along the line of the Roman road.

To identify whether the crop mark features are man-made or of natural origin.

3.3 Methodology

Trenches 1 and 2 were located where Roman burials might be expected beside the Roman road, which Aldborough Gate is thought to follow. As no significant archaeological deposits were encountered in either trench, it was considered unnecessary to extend Trench 1 into Paddock 8959 which was in use. Trench 3 targeted cropmarks in Field 7286 and was initially dug as a single north-west/south-east stretch. In order to be certain that the crop marks had been intercepted, and on the advice of the County Archaeologist, Trench 3 was subsequently extended northwards.

Excavation of the trenches was carried out using a JCB 3CX mechanical excavator equipped with a 1.55m wide toothless ditching bucket. This proceeded to the surface of the natural sand at a depth of between 0.30m and 0.65m, at which level anomalies requiring investigation were also visible. Sondages were dug through the sand in each trench to ensure that it was natural in origin. All further excavation was conducted by hand. Individual trench dimensions are given in Appendix A.

The work was carried out in accordance with the standard specified by the Institute of Field Archaeologists (1994). Standard AOC Archaeology techniques were used throughout, involving the completion of written trench sheets for each deposit encountered

with scale plans and/or section drawings where appropriate. Levels were calculated by surveying from an Ordnance Survey benchmark on the large shed to the north of 'The Bungalow' on Stump Cross road. A full photographic record was made, using black and white print and colour slide film. The trenches was backfilled following completion of the appropriate records. The County Archaeologist for North Yorkshire, Neil Campling visited the site and inspected Trenches 1 and 3.

Aerial photographs held at the Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) in the Heritage Unit based at North Yorkshire County Council's offices at Northallerton were consulted in light of the results of field work.

This report has been prepared in accordance with the minimum requirements of Appendix 7.1 of *MAP 2* (English Heritage 1991)). A copy of the report will be supplied to the County SMR on the understanding that it will become a public document after an appropriate period of time. A summary of the findings of the evaluation will be submitted to the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* for publication.

The archive is currently being prepared in accordance with the guidelines published in *Guidelines for the Preparation of Excavation Archives for Long-term Storage* (United Kingdom Institute for Conservation, 1990) and *Standards in the Museum Care of Archaeological Collections* (Museums and Galleries Commission, 1994). The site archive will be deposited with the appropriate museum when complete and does not include any finds. If further works are to be undertaken on the site in the foreseeable future, the evaluation archive will be deposited with that of the further works.

4 CONDITIONS

Weather conditions during field work varied from dry and sunny to overcast with snow, but had no adverse effect on the recording of trenches. Upon exposure the deposits were slightly damp providing good conditions for definition. However, the wet weather caused soft edges to collapse where excavation was deepest and water accumulated in the bases of trenches.

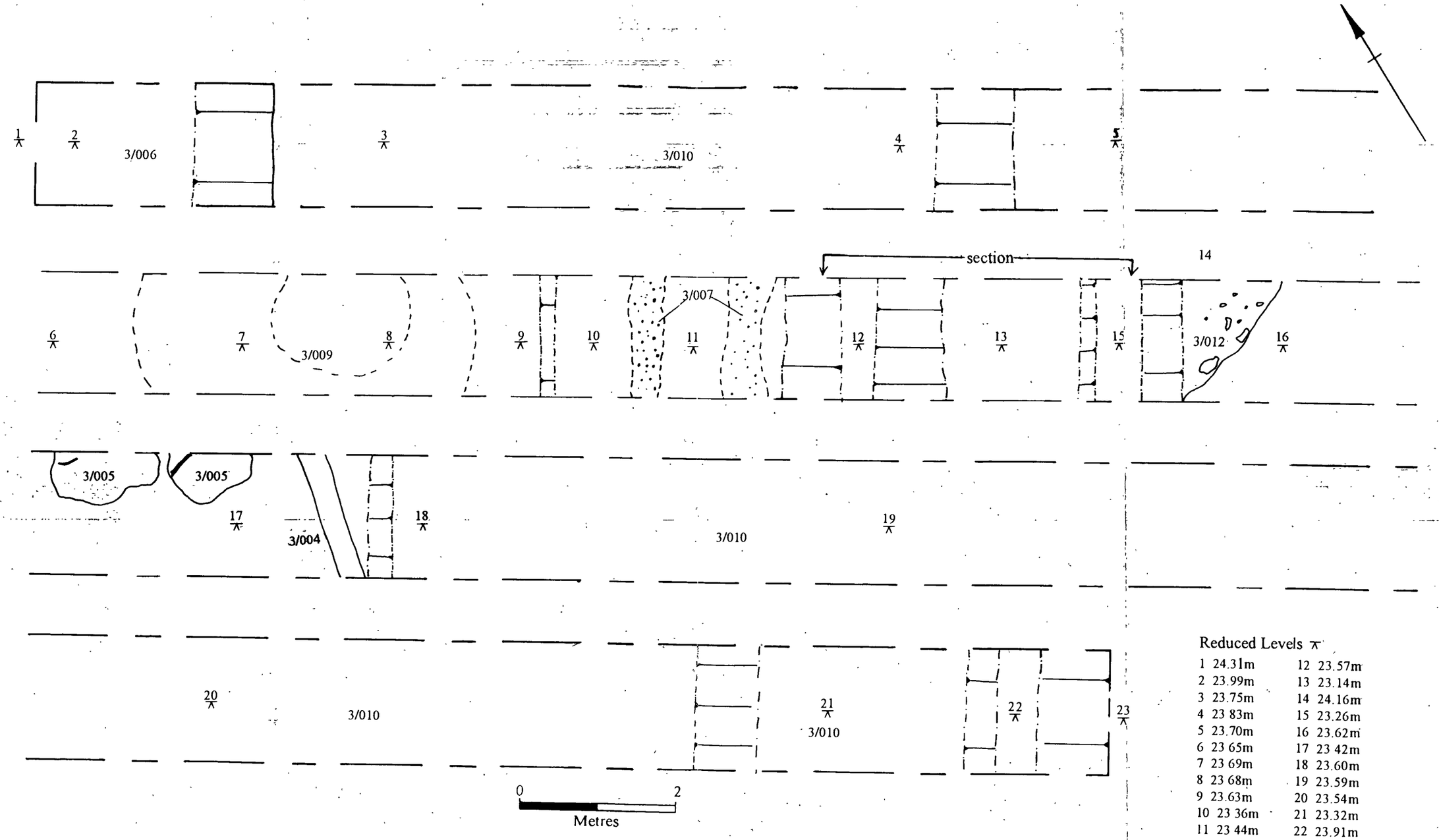
5 RESULTS OF FIELDWORK

Details of individual contexts are listed in Appendix B. Trench 3 is illustrated by a plan (Fig. 3), which does not include the subsequent northward extension, and a section drawing (Fig. 4).

Geology

The earliest deposit revealed during excavation was the natural sand which contained a small amount of silt and clay. This varied considerably in colour across the site from mid yellowish brown or orange to a pale grey dependent on local geotechnical conditions. These colour changes were most notable in Trench 3 and may be a clue to the formation of the crop/soil marks visible on aerial photographs.

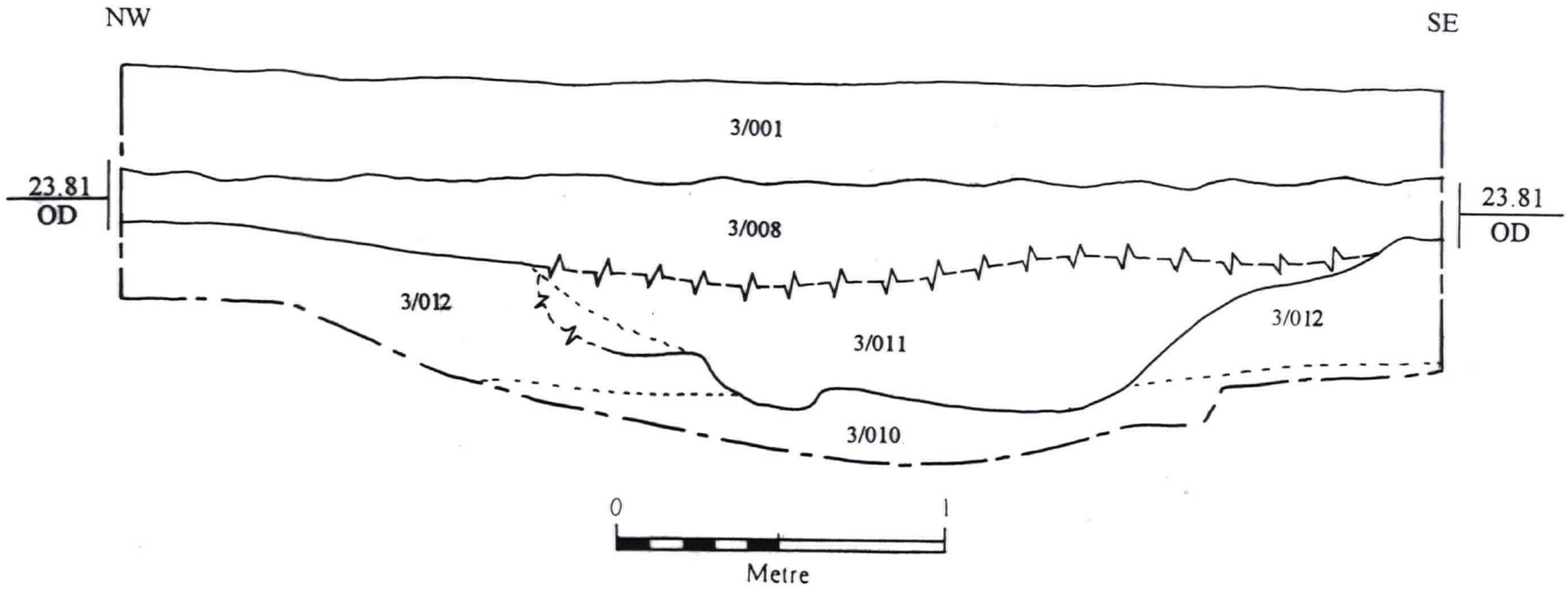
These soil/crop marks were in the form of two roughly circular features, the eastern one of which is very clear while the other is less so (Plate 1). These features were located close to the centre of a slight topographical depression which was damper than the rest of Field 7286.



Reduced Levels

1	24.31m	12	23.57m
2	23.99m	13	23.14m
3	23.75m	14	24.16m
4	23 83m	15	23.26m
5	23.70m	16	23.62m
6	23 65m	17	23 42m
7	23 69m	18	23.60m
8	23 68m	19	23.59m
9	23.63m	20	23.54m
10	23 36m	21	23.32m
11	23 44m	22	23.91m
		23	24 02m

Figure 3 Plan of Trench 3 Scale 1:50



Scale 1:20

Figure 4 South-West Facing Section through Geological Feature in Trench 3

Apart from the impeded drainage, no other variations were noted on the surface, such as differential vegetation growth or artefact concentration, that could have corresponded to the aerial photographs.

A 0.40 m deep depression in the natural sand was situated where Trench 3 diverges, possibly corresponding to the southern part of the smaller of the two circular soil/crop marks. The depression had an irregular shape in profile (Fig. 4). Although it was roughly linear in plan, resembling a ditch prior to excavation, the feature contained no evidence of human activity. The fills within it were a yellow sand with frequent waterworn sandstones [3/012] overlain by a grey leached sand [3/011]. Fill 3/011 was sealed by a 0.12-0.34 m deep pale greyish brown silty sand subsoil [3/008], which was present over most of the western end of Trench 3. The linear feature was presumed to have a geological origin due to the barren nature of Fills 3/011 and 3/012 and the fact that B-horizon 3/008 formed over Deposit 3/011, incorporating parts of its surface. The depth of this geological feature may have influenced soil colour due to water retention within it, which may provide an explanation for the circular features seen on aerial photographs. No similar depression was found which corresponded to the opposite side of the soil/crop mark circle

Trench 3 contained other geological anomalies which were basically variations in the nature of the natural sand due to stone content, iron panning and leaching of minerals. To the west of Deposits 3/011 and 3/012 were two roughly linear bands of dark grey sandy gravel [3/007]. At first these were thought to be ditches but proved to be less regular on inspection with no clearly defined cut edges. Gravel 3/007 was probably the top of an earlier deposit beneath Natural Sand 3/010. Area 3/009 (Plate 2) comprised a patch of pale yellow sand surrounded by mottled dark orange and light brown sand which, upon excavation, proved to be natural.

Prehistoric and Roman

No deposits or artefacts belonging to these periods were encountered during the evaluation, either within trenches or on the surface of the ploughsoil.

Medieval

Currently used as pasture, Field 8772 retained the undulating surface characteristic of Medieval ridge and furrow. The ridge and furrow was orientated north/south and the narrow shape of the field appeared to be a survival from the original field system, especially as it was bounded by well-developed hedges containing several species of plant.

The furrows were also visible cut into the surface of Natural Sand 1/002 in Trench 1. With the exception of the ridge and furrow, no archaeological sediments or features were observed in Trench 1 either within the topsoil or in the exposed surface of the natural sand.

Although most of the ridge and furrow in Field 7286 had been ploughed out, the bases of furrows parallel to those in Field 8270 survived beneath the ploughsoil in Trench 2. The distance between the centres of furrows was approximately 17 m. Deposits of mid brownish grey sandy silt between 0.05 m and 0.15 m deep had accumulated in the furrows of Trench 2, but contained no dating evidence.

Post-Medieval

Ceramic land drains were encountered in both Trench 2 and Trench 3. These were only 0.60-0.70 m below the present land surface, and seemed to have been laid within the furrows of Trench 2. Another type of drain encountered in Trench 3 was 'Mole Drain' 3/004 (Fig. 3) which was over 1.00 m deep and contained fragments of modern brick and iron.

Trench 2 exposed a ditch filled with rotten wood which was interpreted as a possible former hedge line. Roots 3/005 were detected near the centre of Trench 3 where they had disturbed the natural sand as well as the topsoil. Root Disturbance 3/005 may derive from recent removal of a hedge, as Field 7286 was formerly divided by a boundary on the same alignment as that between Fields 7466 and 8270.

A 0.30 m thick deposit extending for 12 m in the east end of Trench 3 comprised redeposited sand mixed with ploughsoil [3/002]. deposit 3/002 was thought to have originated from the recent creation of the pond to the south-east of the trench.

The latest deposit on site was a mid greyish brown sandy loam Topsoil [1/001, 2/001 and 3/001]. This deposit varied very little across the fields investigated and was between 0.25 m and 0.35 m deep. All the finds from the ploughsoil were post-medieval in date and included fragments of transfer-printed pottery and clay pipe stems. No finds were collected from the site.

6 CONCLUSION

The completed field work effectively met the original aims of the investigation. During the evaluation, no significant archaeological features were identified apart from the remains of ridge and furrow. It is likely that the trenches were located in open areas that had always been paddocks or fields. There was no evidence for Roman activity in any of the trenches.

Although Trench 3 intercepted the circular features seen on aerial photographs, they did not appear to be man-made. No feature, sediment trait or inclusion was detected that would indicate an anthropic origin for the observed soil/crop marked features. The natural gully in Trench 3 was deep enough to cause differential drying of the ploughsoil and, along with ferrous variations in the topsoil due to mixing with the natural sand by ploughing, natural sand may have been seen from the air. It should also be stressed that the location of the putative soil/crop mark features was almost at the centre of a poorly drained natural hollow and differential drainage due to variations in the soil textures may have contributed to the formation of the soil/crop marks.

The aerial photographs were taken in Autumn 1977 and perhaps the circular features were visible because the plough was cutting through them, in which case they may have been completely destroyed during the intervening 21 years.

7 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Yorkshire Archaeological Trust (January 1998) *Aldborough Gate, Boroughbridge, North Yorkshire: Report on an Archaeological Desk Top Study*

APPENDIX A

Trench Dimensions

TRENCH	LENGTH *(x 1.55m)m*	DEPTH *m*	MAX HEIGHT *mAOD*	MIN HEIGHT *mAOD*
1	22.50	0.50	28.71	27.03
2	100	0.60	31.17	29.72
3	67.50 & 15.40	0.45 0.45	24.31	23.91

APPENDIX B

Context List

Context	Description	Length	Width	Thickness
1/001	Topsoil	Trench	Trench	o.30 m
1/002	Natural Clay Sand	Trench	Trench	N/A
2/001	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	0.25-0.35 m
2/002	Sandy Silt in Base of Furrows	Trench	Furrows	0.05-0.15 m
2/003	Natural Clay Sand	Trench	Trench	N/A
3/001	Ploughsoil	Trench	Trench	0.30 m
3/002	Mixed Material Dug to form Pond	12.00 m	Trench	o.32 m
3/003	Fill of 3/004	2.00 m	Trench	0.35 m
3/004	Cut for Mole Drain	2.00 m	Trench	0.35 m
3/005	Root Disturbance	0.60 m	2.50 m	N/A
3/006	Ceramic Land Drains	N/A	Trench	N/A
3/007	Geological Feature	0.40 m	Trench	N/A
3/008	Subsoil	40.00 m	Trench	N/A
3/009	Variation in Colour of Natural Sand	4.25 m	Trench	0.12-0.34 m
3/010	Natural Sand	Trench	Trench	N/A
3/011	Grey Sand above 3/012	2.40 m	Trench	0.45 m
3/012	Natural Sand and Pebbles	2 m & 1 m	Trench	0.35 m

Context numbers are preceded by the number of the trench in which they were recorded.