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LAND SOUTH OF A64, SPITAL CORNER, STAXTON.
PROPOSED MOTEL DEVELOPMENT.

INTERIM
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION.
OSA REPORT No. 98EV12

National Grid Reference: TA 023 793

January 1999



Brooch from Spital Corner, Staxton

OSA

ON SITE ARCHÆOLOGY

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Report Summary

ON BEHALF OF: East Yorkshire Builders Ltd
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PLANNING APPLICATION No: 97/01018/OUT

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TIMING: Excavation
18th – 25th January 1999

Post excavation & report preparation
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PERIODS REPRESENTED: Anglian, Prehistoric/Romano-British.

1.0 Summary

An archaeological evaluation on land south of the A64 at Spital Corner, near Staxton in North Yorkshire, was undertaken by On-Site Archaeology between the 18th and 25th January 1999 on behalf of East Yorkshire Builders. The evaluation was undertaken to fulfil a condition attached to the planning application for the construction of a proposed motel on the site. The site is located within a former sand quarry and covered an area of c.265m². Extensive areas of the site had been quarried leaving only a plinth of material between quarry pits standing to the original ground level

Three parallel ditches, the largest of which measured 4.90m wide and 1.70m deep, ran east-west across the site, but were truncated by the quarry pits. An Anglian grave containing a flexed inhumation was cut into the fill of the southernmost ditch. A small iron knife blade, and also a brooch with fabric impressions, were associated with this inhumation. A sherd of 2nd century AD Roman pottery was recovered from a fill of the northernmost ditch.

The text and illustrations for this report, unless indicated otherwise, were prepared by Guy Hopkinson and David Tyler of On-Site Archaeology, with contributions by Dr Alan Vince, Barbara Precious, and Sandra Garside-Neville. Excavation was undertaken by Tim Charlson, Guy Hopkinson and David Tyler.

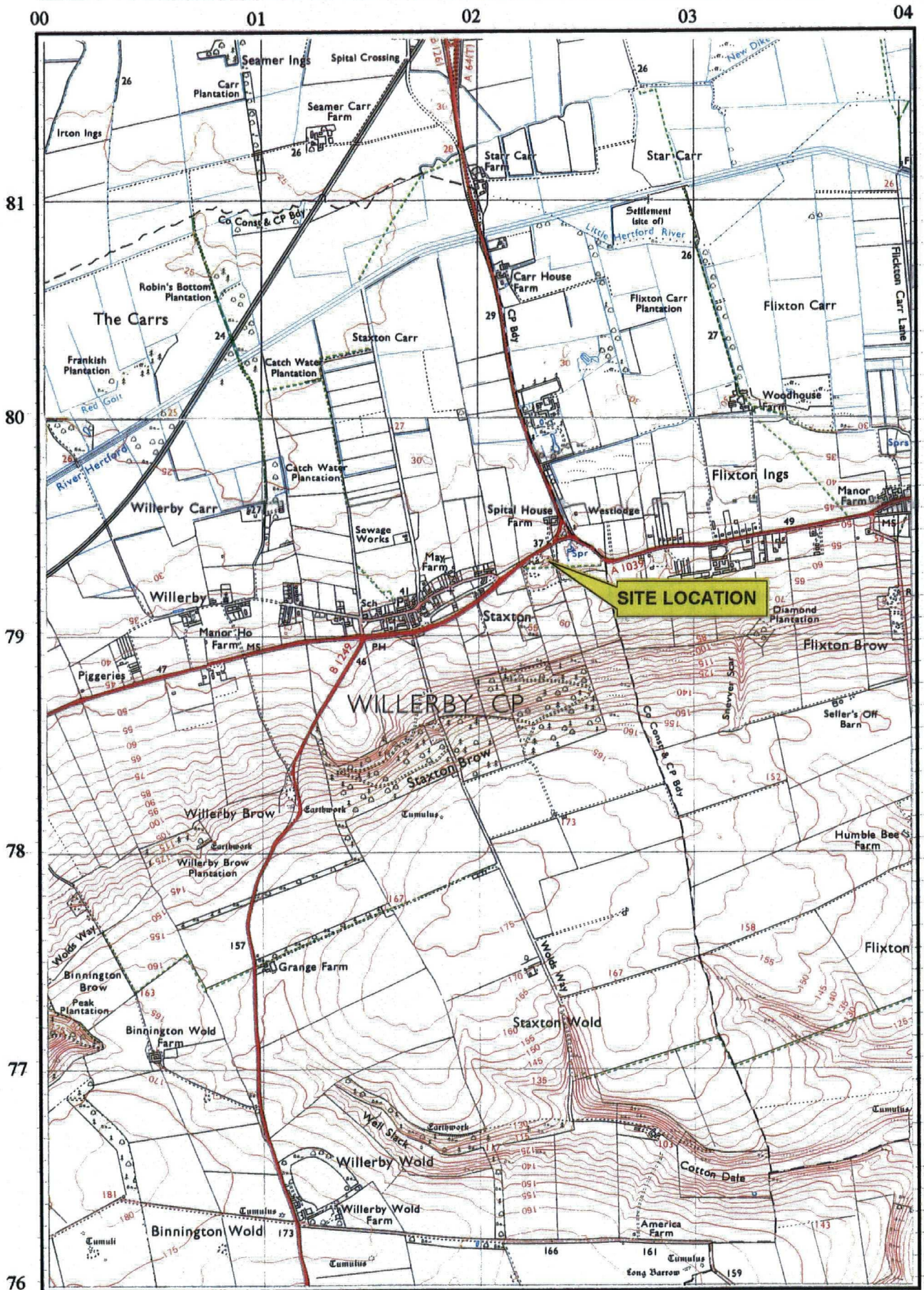


Figure 1. Site Location (NGR TA 023 793)

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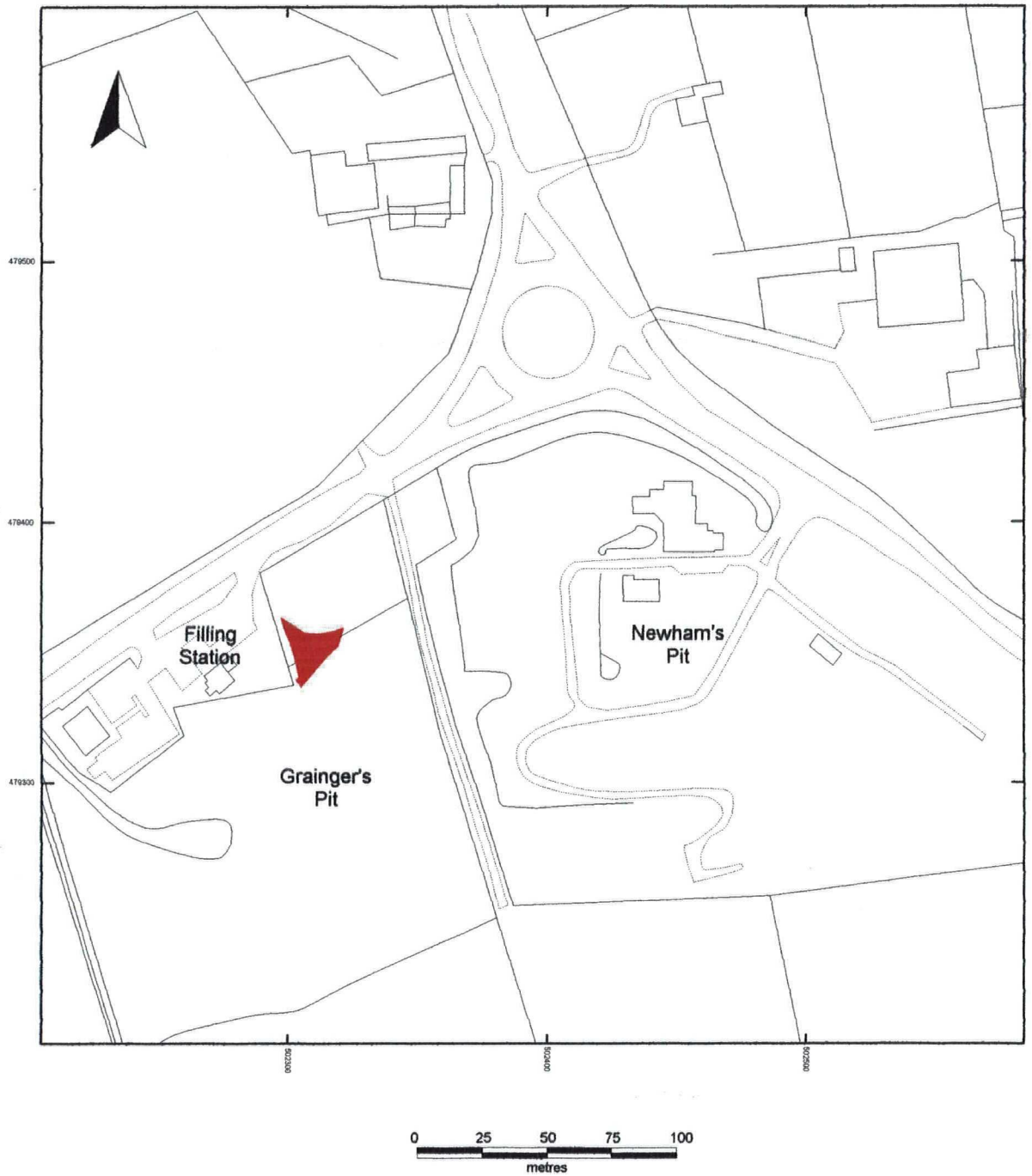


Figure 2. Detailed site location. Scale 1:2500. Excavation Area shaded red.

2.0 Site Location, Geology, Topography and Land Use

The site is situated to the south of the A64 Malton to Scarborough road, some 250m to the northeast of Staxton and 100m southwest of Spital Corner. The site is located at National Grid Reference (NGR) TA 023 793 in the county of North Yorkshire and the parish of Willerby (see Figure 1 for location).

The site is at an elevation of approximately 38m AOD, situated at the northern foot of the Yorkshire Wolds and the southern edge of the Vale of Pickering, on the slight incline of an undulating sand hill. The sand formations, deposited by glacial melt waters, vary in thickness and are underlain by *in situ* chalk or boulder clay. This geological sequence produces numerous springs which flow northwards into the carrlands, which are now drained by the Derwent and Hertford rivers but would in prehistory have been meres and lakes.

Extensive areas of the site have previously been quarried for sand extraction, with only a few baulks between quarry pits standing to the original ground level. At present the land is unused and partially overgrown with shrubs and small trees. The area of the site immediately adjacent to the A64 has at some stage been used as a car park or storage area, and currently has a rudimentary tarmac surface.

3.0 Archaeological Background

The site of the proposed development is situated in an area of exceptionally high archaeological potential, with documented archaeological remains from the early Bronze Age through to the Medieval period located in the immediate vicinity. If one looks slightly further afield, to Flixton and Seamer Carrs, then the period of exploitation or occupation extends back as far as the Upper Palaeolithic.

3.1 *Late Upper Palaeolithic (c. 10 000 - 7600 BC)*

The sites of Flixton Carr and Seamer Carr in the Vale of Pickering have produced Creswellian flint artefacts and Spratt (1993) suggests that this area might have been part of the 'exploration zone' for Upper Palaeolithic hunter-gatherers.

3.2 *Mesolithic (c. 7600 - 3500 BC)*

The Vale of Pickering appears to have been widely exploited during the Mesolithic, (for example the landscapes around Seamer Carr (NGR TA 040 830), Flixton (NGR TA 040 813 and TA 034 810) and Star Carr (NGR TA 027 810) are renowned for discoveries of this period), however there is no recorded evidence for occupation or use of the site or its environs during this period. Indeed, it would appear that Mesolithic sites in the Vale of Pickering tend to focus on the 24m above Ordnance Datum (AOD) sub-surface contour (P. Lane, *pers. comm.*), which lies to the north. A few minor surface sites have been discovered on or near the Tabular Hills, but the majority of sites in East Yorkshire are focused on the sandstone moorlands (Spratt, 1993). Whether this apparent distribution of sites is due to factors of field work bias or later deposition is unclear.

3.3 *Neolithic (c. 3500 - 1700 BC)*

A number of Neolithic sites are present in the vicinity, but the majority seem to be located to the south, on the Yorkshire Wolds. Whether this distribution is due to a bias in archaeological field work rather than a true pattern of site distribution is questionable, but it is clear that the depth of recent deposition (alluvial, colluvial, and aeolian) in the Vale of Pickering may have obscured many potential sites of this period. One of the nearest Neolithic sites is Sammy Rider's Pit, at Flixton, where a row of pits or post holes were discovered with Grimston and Grooved ware pottery sherds in the fills (Brewster, unpublished)

3.4 *Bronze Age (c. 1700 - 600 BC)*

During the Bronze Age both the general area and the immediate vicinity of the site were extensively used. The transitional zone between the Yorkshire Wolds to the south and the low lying Carrlands to the north would have provided a suitable base from which to exploit the resources of the two areas.

Excavations carried out in 1957 on land adjoining a filling station immediately west of the site revealed a Beaker funerary complex comprising eleven crouched, contracted or flexed

inhumations, two of which were associated with Beakers. Some of the inhumations had been placed within well-defined grave cuts whilst others had been placed directly on top of the subsoil with stones packed on top of the body. The majority of the burials were orientated east-west, however one was found to be orientated north-south and another northeast-southwest. All the burials have been dated as prehistoric, and given the lack of evidence for a barrow have been interpreted as being part of an Early Bronze Age flat cemetery (Stead, 1960). The nearest example of a similar flat cemetery is thought to be at Middleton-on-the-Wolds, to the south of Driffield, which also contained a number of beaker burials.

An archaeological watching brief undertaken in 1993 during the renovation of the filling station at Staxton (MAP, 1994) revealed a crouched inhumation within a sub-oval grave cut, the upper fill of which contained large flint boulders.

Stead's excavation also revealed three parallel ditches immediately to the south of the funerary complex. These contained no dating evidence, but the confinement of medieval pottery sherds to the topsoil above the ditches suggests they are pre-medieval, and they have been interpreted by Stead (1960) as possible field boundaries associated with a nearby Romano-British settlement at Newham's Pit to the east (Brewster, 1957).

An adult female inhumation associated with a Beaker, dated to the Early Bronze Age, was found from a sand and gravel pit to the northeast of the site.

3.5 *Iron Age & Romano-British (c. 600 BC - AD 410)*

Evidence of Iron Age and Romano-British activity has been recovered from the immediate vicinity of the site. The remains of an Iron Age settlement comprising a palisade trench and a series of pits containing pottery, bones, bone needles and saddle querns and rubbers were found during sand extraction at Grainger's Pit to the southwest of the site.

Slightly further afield, a recent excavation at Potter Brompton, to the west of Staxton, revealed an Iron Age square barrow cemetery (M. Johnson, *pers. comm.*).

Excavations carried out at Newham's Pit revealed a double-ditched Romano-British enclosure. Although the majority of the area enclosed by the middle ditch had been destroyed through sand removal, three hut stances and two rubbish disposal pits were found in the remaining area. Two separate phases of occupation have been proposed dating AD 80-90 and AD 100-120 and the site has been interpreted as a probable camp or fortlet under military control (Brewster 1957). Iron Age and Romano-British pottery was also found during the excavation of the Beaker funerary complex (see section 3.4 above).

3.6 *Anglo-Saxon to Medieval (AD 410 – AD 1540)*

The village of Staxton has a pre-Conquest foundation date, the name being first recorded in the Domesday Book of 1086. The name means 'Stakk's farmstead', and demonstrates an Anglo-Scandinavian influence (Smith, 1937).

An Anglian cemetery was discovered at Grainger's pit, immediately to the south of the filling station, during sand-quarrying operations. Thirty-eight burials were excavated by Brewster between 1936 and 1937, of which twenty-one had associated grave goods. The records and many of the finds from this excavation, however, were lost during World War II. Subsequent excavations revealed a further eighteen burials, but little material has been published. Artefacts recovered include iron spear heads, a key, chatelaines, fibulae and a small bucket made of yew (Sheppard, 1938).

Anglo-Saxon pottery sherds were found associated with two chalk floors located within the outer enclosure ditch of the Romano-British enclosure (section 3.5). The floors probably represent the remains of a 6th century settlement, perhaps contemporary with the nearby Anglian cemetery.

During the medieval period the village of Staxton is thought to have been a centre for the production of Potter Brompton/Staxton ware, a type of coarse heavily-tempered pottery distributed widely throughout East Yorkshire. Excavations carried out by Brewster in the late 1940s unearthed what he interpreted as a number of pottery kilns. This interpretation has been questioned, but recent excavations at the same site produced large quantities of pot sherds and layers of burnt earth and ash (Hopkinson, forthcoming). This recent evidence lends weight to Brewster's earlier findings, and it seems clear that pottery was being produced on a fairly large scale somewhere in the vicinity.

In 1950 part of the grounds of the Hospitium of St Mary, to the north of the A64 at Spital Corner, were excavated. The Hospitium was founded in 1180 and dissolved before 1535. The excavations revealed the main hospice building south of Spital House Farm, a large univallate enclosure to the west, and a graveyard to the east of the hospice (Brewster 1951).

A rectangular medieval building situated within a ditched enclosure was located to the north of the Romano-British enclosure in Newham's Pit (Brewster 1952).

4.0 Methodology.

The overburden was removed by a 360° tracked excavator fitted with a toothless bucket down to the level of the first visible archaeological horizon. 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. Heights above Ordnance Datum (AOD) were calculated by taking levels from a Temporary Benchmark (TBM) which was then tied in with an existing Ordnance Survey benchmark. A photographic record of the deposits and features was also maintained.

5.0 Results

5.1 Introduction

Removal of the topsoil [1019, 1000] and subsoil [1001] revealed a modern land drain trench [1021] and three parallel ditches [1002, 1003 and 1017] orientated northwest-southeast. The ditches were cut into the natural sand and gravel [1018], and had been truncated to the southeast through modern sand and gravel extraction. Ditch [1003] had been further truncated to the north. A modern dog burial [1005] had been cut into the upper fill [1007] of ditch [1003]. A grave [1030] containing a flexed inhumation was cut from the uppermost fill [1022] of ditch [1017].

5.2 Ditch 1003. See Figures 3 and 4, Plate 1.

Context	Description	Interpretation
1003	Cut: Convex-sided, 'V'-shaped cut	Ditch cut
1007	Fill: Friable mid brown sandy silt containing evenly distributed occasional chalk gravel	Fill of cut 1003
1008	Fill: Friable dark brownish grey sandy silt containing evenly distributed rare chalk gravel	Fill of cut 1003
1009	Fill: Friable mid greyish brown sandy silt containing evenly distributed frequent chalk flecks and gravel	Fill of cut 1003
1010	Fill: Compact mid greyish brown silty sand containing rare chalk fragments and gravel	Natural fill of cut 1003
1011	Fill: Firm dark brownish grey sandy silt containing rare chalk fragments	Primary fill of cut 1003 following the disuse of the ditch
1013	Fill: Soft mid yellowish brown sand containing occasional chalk gravel	Redeposited natural material, fill of cut 1014
1014	Cut: Steep sided concave-based cut	Cleaning slot through redeposited natural material 1015 in base of cut 1003
1015	Fill: Compact light yellowish brown sand and chalk gravel	Redeposited natural material in base of cut 1003
1016	Fill: Soft light yellowish brown slightly silty sand containing frequent chalk gravel	Primary natural fill of cut 1003

Ditch [1003] was aligned east-west and cut into the natural sand and gravel [1018]. It had a 'V' shaped profile with irregular, slightly convex sides and measured 21.10m long, 4.90m wide and 1.70m deep. Deposits [1016] and [1015] consist of natural material [1018] redeposited through natural processes. Deposit [1015] was truncated by cut [1014] which is considered to be a cleaning slot or recut. The cut was filled with redeposited natural material [1013] of which the chalk gravel content increased towards the base of the fill. A band of dark brownish grey sandy silt possibly containing an organic fraction [1011] sealed this. The deposit may have accumulated following the disuse/abandonment of the ditch and contained a sherd of Roman pottery. A mid greyish brown silty sand fill [1010] sealed deposit [1011]. The occurrences of frequent thin lenses of light yellowish brown sand towards the base suggest that the layer was naturally deposited. Layer [1009] may represent either natural or intentional backfilling, although the frequency and even distribution of chalk gravel within the deposit suggests intentional backfilling. Layer [1008] sealed [1009], and [1007] overlay [1008].