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Parish	8011
Rec'd	? 1994

Presentation Survey

SKIPWITH COMMON

**This survey was produced by
MAP Archaeological Consultancy Limited
on behalf of the
Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.
(MARCH 1994)**

SKIPWITH COMMON PRESENTATION SURVEY

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Glossary

Aerial Photograph – a photograph taken from an aircraft to show cropmarks or soil marks in the fields below.

Anomaly – an irregularity.

Antiquarian – student or collector of antiquities.

Arras Culture – Iron Age culture distinguishable by their funerary arrangements – interring their dead in square barrows.

Barrow – A mound of earth raised over a burial. Can be either a square or round mound.

Bronze Age – 2000BC – 750BC. A period in prehistory when copper and its alloys was smelted to produce artefacts for the first time.

Coup – wheelbarrow for transporting peat.

Cropmark – Differential growth in cereal crops caused by underground anomalies, ie ditches causing greater growth and walls restricting the growth of the crop.

Enclosure – A walled, fenced or bank and ditched area of land, defensive or for controlling stock.

Fieldwalking – A non-intrusive method of fieldwork. Archaeologists systematically record the artefacts on the surface of a ploughed field, noting their type and location. Can locate buried features and assess their date.

Fossa/Fossae – a ditch or moat, the excavation of which has contributed to the bank or mound of a barrow/enclosure.

Furze – gorse.

Garth – an enclosure, yard or garden

Geophysical Survey – either resistivity or magnetic susceptibility can be used to detect changes in the subsoil, which may indicate archaeological activity.

Iron Age – 700BC – 43AD. A period in prehistory when iron ore was smelted and forged into iron artefacts for the first time.

La Tene – An iron Age culture with links with the continent, named from the decoration on artefacts associated with the people.

Ladder Settlement – An iron age and Romano-British linear, agricultural settlement, using ditches to separate different plots of land. Normally following a specific contour.

Line Pond – A retting pit filled with water used specifically in flax production. The water rots the useless part of the plant away. A line being a thread of linen or flax.

Ling – heather

Medieval – 1066AD – 1540AD. An historical period, from the Norman Conquest to the Reformation.

Modern – 1800AD – present day. An historical period noting the industrialisation of manufacturing and agriculture.

Peat pot – an alternative name for an area of peat working.

Post mill – a specific type windmill.

Post-medieval – 1540AD – 1800AD. An historic period from the Reformation to the industrialisation.

Prehistoric – The time before written records, prior to 43AD in Britain.

RAF – Royal Air Force.

Retting – The rotting of flax in water to separate the useful part from the useless.

Romano-British – 43AD-410AD. The Roman Conquest and Government of Britain.

Soilmark – Differences in soil colour caused by underground anomalies, for example soil will be darker over ditches or pits, lighter over stone/brick walls.

Tumulus/Tumuli – A mound of earth over a grave – a barrow.

Acknowledgements

The presentation survey was undertaken by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. Aerial photographs (Pl. 5) was taken by P. Eastwood, and reproduced by kind permission of G. Eastwood; Plates 6-9, 11-18 by A.E.Finney, M.R. Stephens and P.A. Ware (MAP copyright), Plates 1, 2, and 10 by the kind permission of Cambridge University, Plates 3 and 4 by permission of P.V. Addyman and information derived from work by A. Crawshaw (Fig. 6). Figures and plans were computer generated using Deskscan II and Photofinish software.

Particular thanks are extended to the staff of the Brymor Jones Library (University of Hull - references prefixed with DDFA in text) and the Humberside County Records Office (Beverley). Thanks are also due to the staff of Selby Library, the Borthwick Institute, the National Archaeological Register, T. G. Manby, T. Dixon of English Nature, C. Fitzgerald of Yorkshire Wildlife; and C. Forbes Adam for access to the Estate maps and other documentation in possession of the Escrick Park Estate.

MAP also wish to thank the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for all their help and encouragement throughout the survey.

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Plate 1.
Aerial View of Skipwith village and the Common.

SKIPWITH COMMON PRESENTATION SURVEY

Introduction

Skipwith Common is situated to the south of the village of Skipwith, near Selby, in the Vale of York, North Yorkshire (SE 6550 3745: Fig. 1) and comprises the Front, Back and Little Commons, giving a total area of 800 acres. The subject of the present study is Front Common which, although part of the Escrick Park Estate, has been leased to the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust for management and presentation purposes since 1968.

The Front Common was designated a SSSI in 1954 and is 664 acres in area (Fig. 2) which forms a wetland environment, with scrub, birch and recently thinned conifer plantation. The land forms a sub rectangular unit and is bordered by arable farm land to the north, west and south, and the Skipwith to South Duffield road to the east.

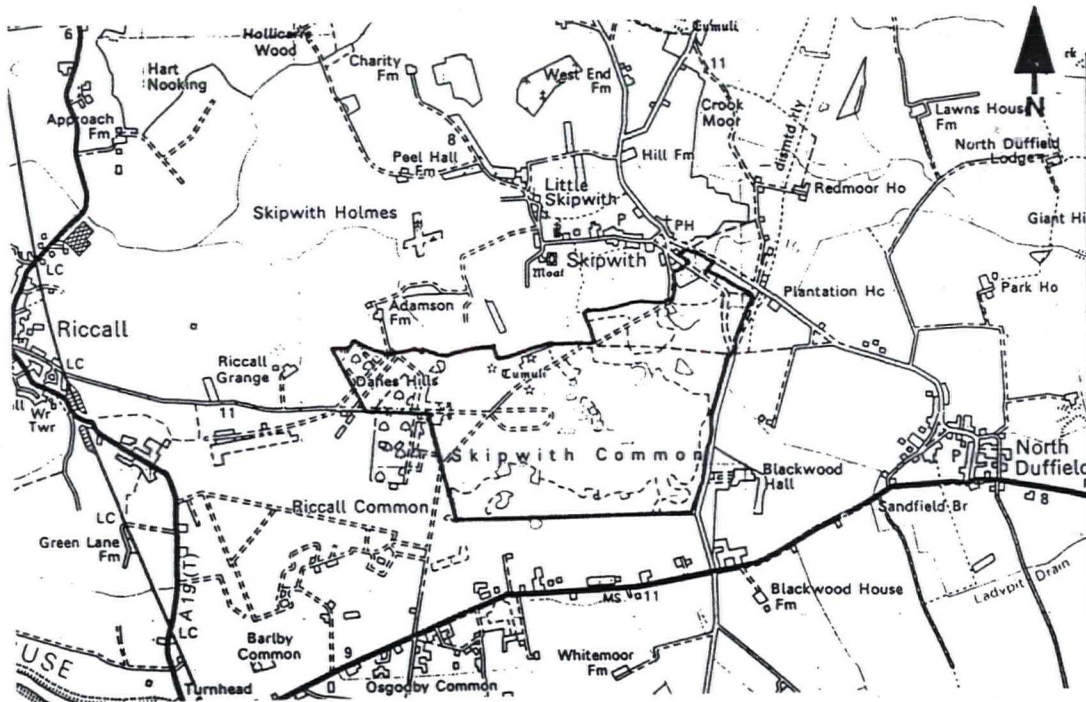


Fig. 1. Scale 1:5000

The Vale of York was produced over many millennia by the wearing away of the soft Triassic or New Red sandstone series of strata. The convergence of a number of rivers into the Humber formed a great inland basin. The Humber estuary was formed when water from this inland basin cut into the oolitic limestone and chalk deposits of the Wolds. During the last Ice Age the area was a vast inland lake, which became partially filled by material from the surrounding hills.



The Common is flat, lying between 9-10m A.O.D. The surface geology of the area around Skipwith Common is characterised by soil type 821 (Everingham Series). This is an Aeolian Sand, which forms a deep stoneless permeable sandy soil. The ground water in the locality is controlled by drainage ditches. This type of soil is at risk from wind erosion; the results of which are clearly visible today on land to the north of the village (around Church Farm). The Common itself stands on

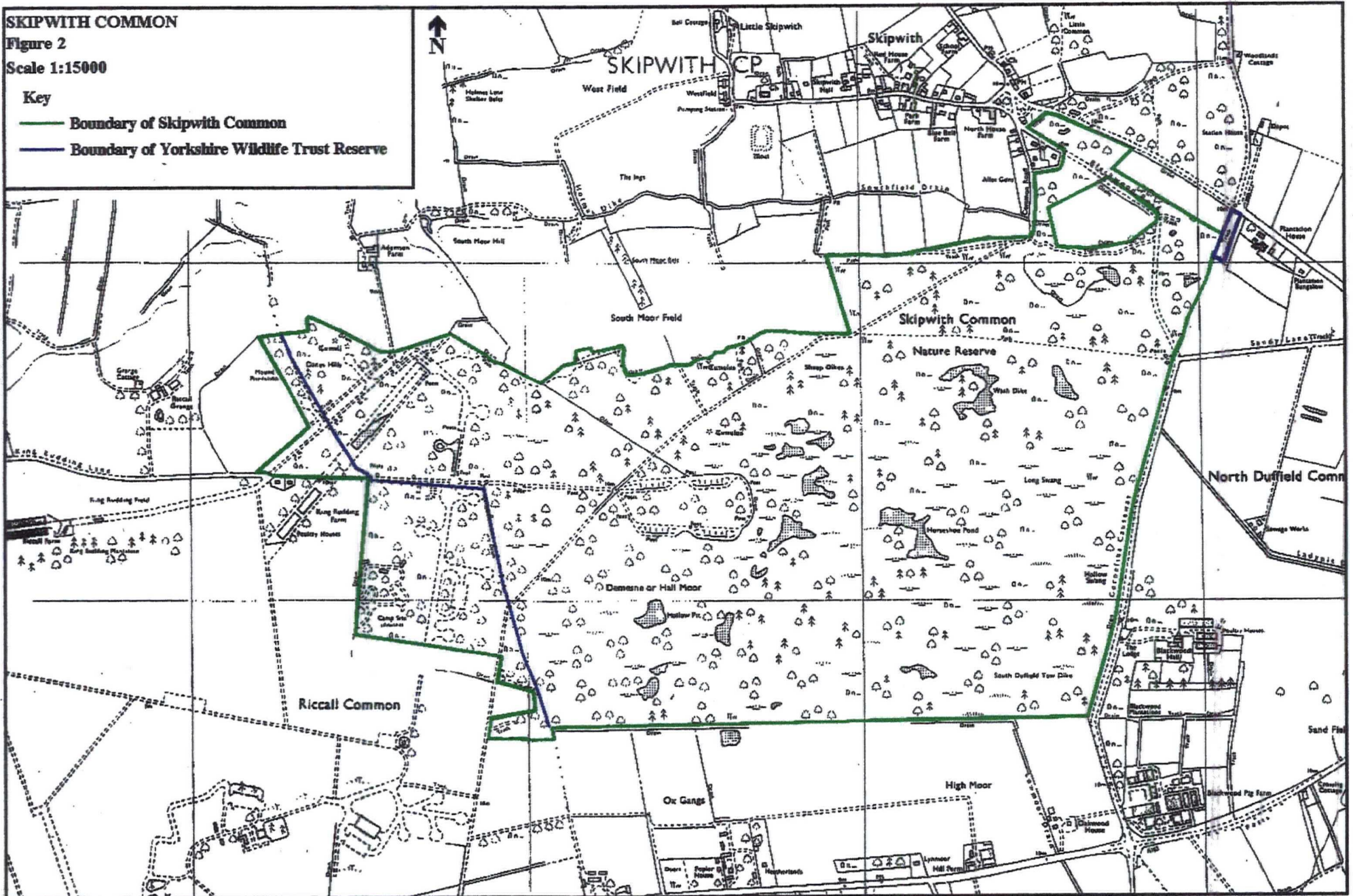
SKIPWITH COMMON

Figure 2

Scale 1:15000

Key

-  Boundary of Skipwith Common
-  Boundary of Yorkshire Wildlife Trust Reserve

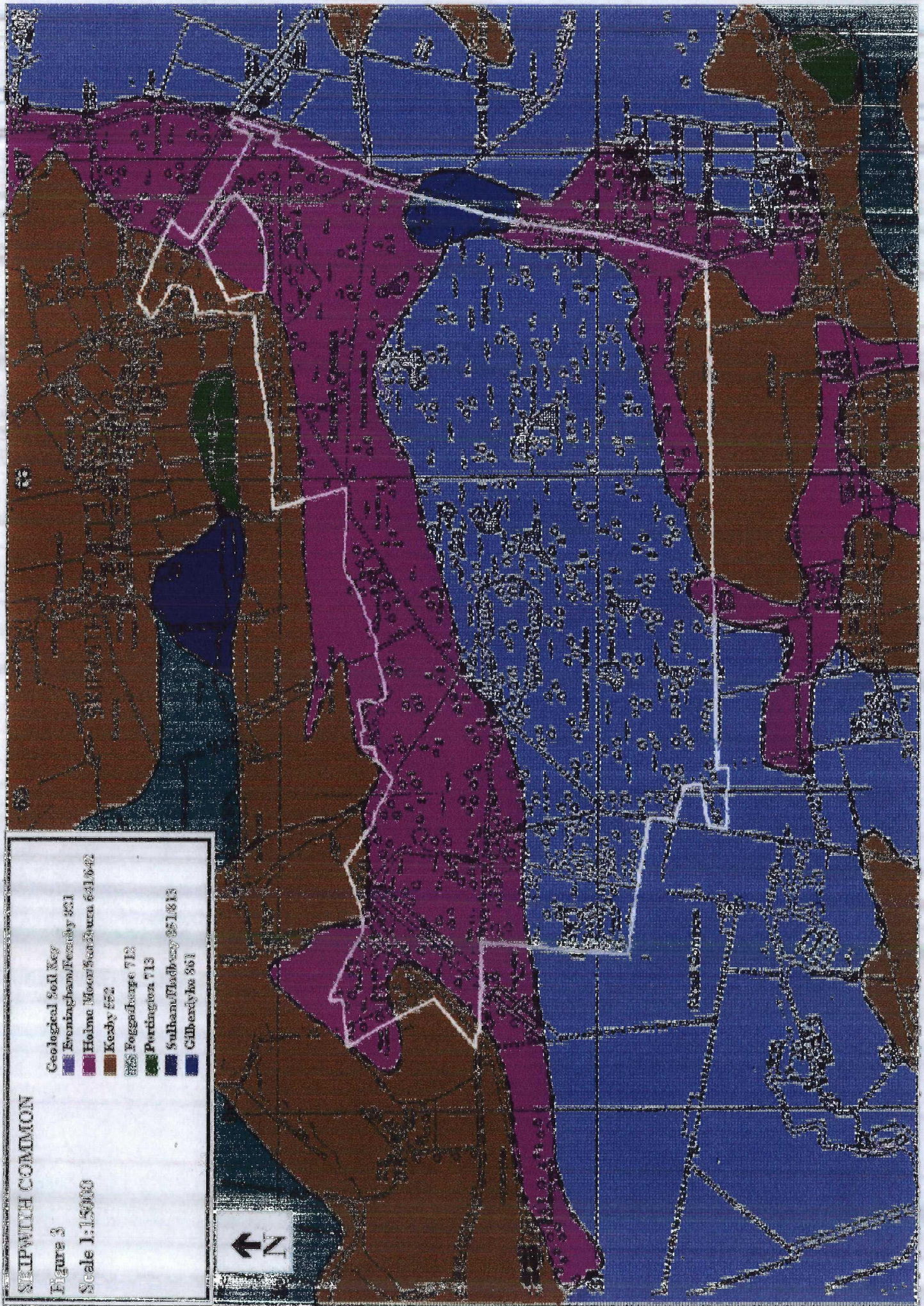


STIPWICH COMMON

Figure 3

Scale 1:15000

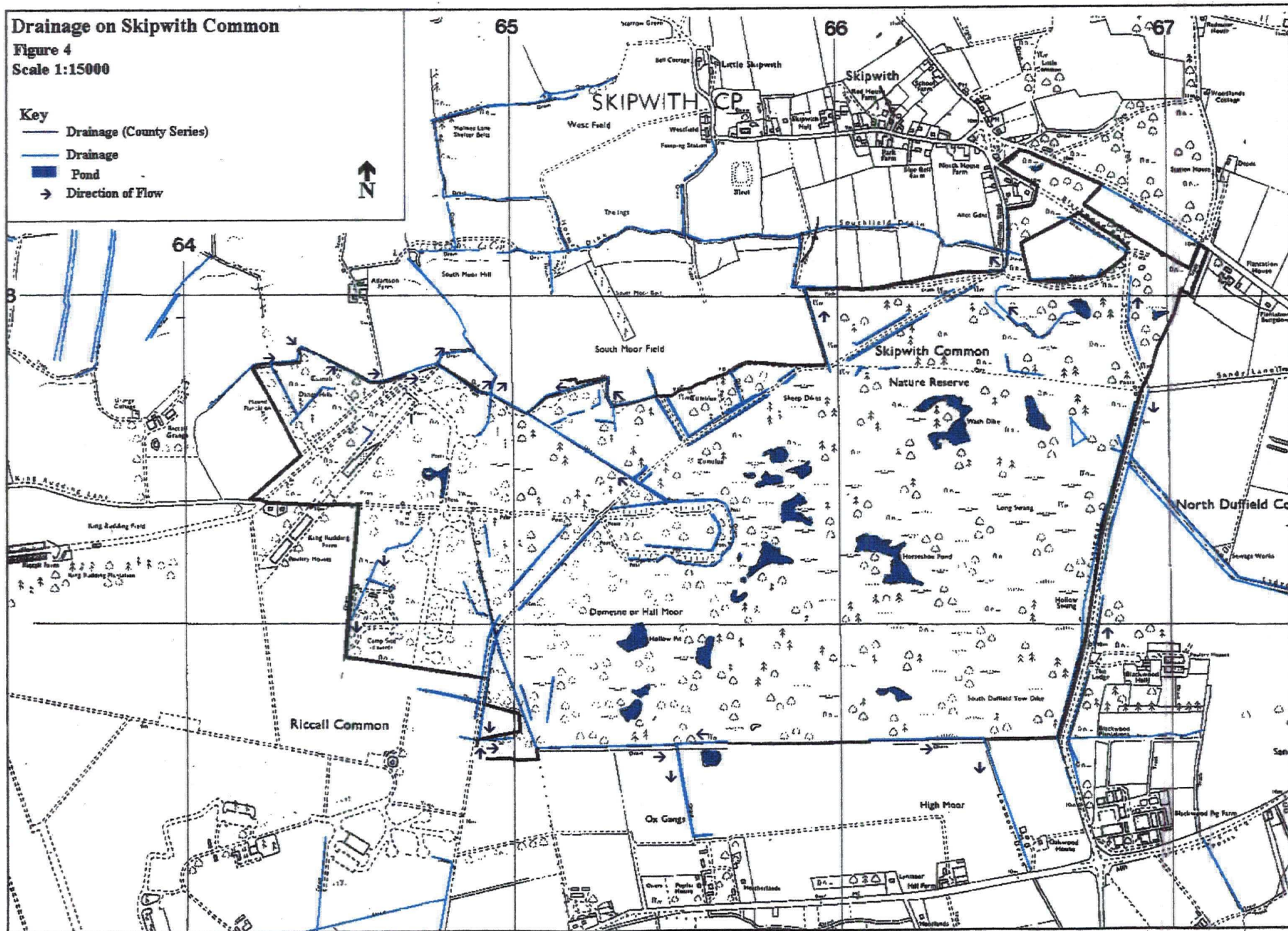
- Geological Soil Key
- Eveningham/Kesby 621
 - Holme Moor/Sandburn 641/642
 - Kesby 552
 - Foggsdorp 712
 - Perrington 713
 - Sulham/Fladbury 651/613
 - Cilberdyke 661



Drainage on Skipwith Common

Figure 4
Scale 1:15000

- Key**
- Drainage (County Series)
 - Drainage
 - Pond
 - Direction of Flow



soils of the Everingham, Home Moor/Sandburn and Gilberdyke (Fig. 3), which is in marked contrast to the surrounding soils of the Kexby series. The marked difference in soil types is central to the development of land use in Skipwith parish from the earliest times to the present day.

On Skipwith Common the level of the water table fluctuates around 9m O.D. therefore there is a considerable amount of standing water. Drainage of the site is by way of a number of drains and ditches (Fig. 4).

The majority of the drainage ditches are peripheral to the reserve and are associated with improving the drainage of the adjacent arable land. A number of the drains within the Common were constructed to drain the surface of King Rudding Lane. The only apparent attempt to drain the interior of the Common was made by the RAF in the 1940's when a drain was excavated around the area to be used for bomb storage (Figs 4 & 18: pp. 36 - 44 and 60 - 62). The drain runs in a semicircle around the bays before draining away to the north to a drain on the northern edge of the Common. This drain was blocked by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust in late 1993.

The Yorkshire Wildlife Trust applied for a presentation survey to be undertaken under the provisions outlined by English Heritage for Farm Presentation Survey Grants. The resulting survey was completed by the staff of MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd in early 1994.

The report consists of a number of sections which discuss the environmental, archaeological and historical background for the land unit which forms Skipwith Front Common.

Environmental Survey

Introduction

In order to place the extensive utilisation of the land from the Neolithic period through to modern times in its correct context, it is essential to consider the environmental history of the area. This section of the report considers the evidence from the earliest periods through to a consideration of the present flora on the Common.

Environmental Background

At a number of times during the past two million years, arctic and alpine ice-caps have grown and swept over much of the Northern Hemisphere including most of the British Isles. Between the periods of glacial advance, fossil and sub fossil remains of plants and animals, particularly pollen, show that the climate ameliorated for long interglacial periods to conditions as good as, if not warmer than, those of today.

Pollen bearing peat deposits, thought to be contemporary with the Hoxnian interglacial (comparable to the Lower Palaeolithic), show a sequence of vegetation changes with birch and pine colonising the open tundras as the ice retreated. Mixed deciduous woodland followed with oak, elm, ash, alder, hazel and other trees of today's woodland. There was finally revertence to fir, pine and birch forest as the climate once more deteriorated with the re-advance of the ice sheets. In the middle of this woodland phase there is a fall in the tree pollen and an increase of grasses suggesting an opening up of the forest environment. It has even been suggested that this phase represents man's deliberate attempt at clearance through the use of fire to facilitate easier hunting conditions (Evans 1975). Even so, it is clear from the available archaeological evidence for this area of the country that the climate in the Hoxnian and Devensian periods was not suitable to sustain human life.

Deposits from the Late-glacial period (12,000 - 8,000 BC) show that trees did not immediately recolonise the land. Extensive erosion and solifluxion caused by proximity of the ice-cap resulted in the establishment of tundra species i.e. dwarf birch (*Betula nana*), arctic willow (*Salix herbacea*) and mountain avens (*Dryas octapetala*). Other species included thrift (*Armeria maritima*) and opportunist weeds i.e. knot grasses (*Polygonaceae*) and goosefoots (*Chenopiaceae*). These plants represent a plant succession on warmer and more fertile soils. Subsequent organic sediments contain birches (*Betula pubescens* and *Betula pendula*) and aspen (*Populus tremula*), all representing a move towards forest cover of the land. Archaeological remains of this period - the Palaeolithic - is totally absent from this area of Yorkshire.

Tree pollen preserved in peat deposits show an increase throughout the Palaeolithic period. Climatic conditions appear to have facilitated the development of forest cover following a pattern broadly similar to the development in previous interglacials (Godwin, 1975; Pennington, 1969). By 7500 BC pollen of pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), hazel (*Corylus avellana*), oaks (*Quercus* spp.) and elms (*Ulmus* spp.) superseded that of birch as mixed deciduous woodland grew. Peat formed during this period is indicative of a warm and dry environment. The period from c. 8000 BC to the coming of Rome in 43 AD sees the establishment of Prehistoric occupation and the gradual exploitation of the landscape.

The Mesolithic period (8000 - 3500 BC) saw man occupying the coastal fringes or river valleys in the autumn and winter and moving to higher ground during the more favourable summer months. These people were hunter-gathers and operated from small camps which are difficult to locate in the archaeological record due to their transitory nature; the only tangible signs of such sites are collections of food debris or collections of fine flint tools known as microliths.

During the Neolithic period (3500 - 2000 BC) the climate appears to have been more continental than today. The pollen counts indicate a fall in elm pollen. The cooler winters and warmer summers are unlikely to have caused this fall. However, it is now suggested that an outbreak of a disease similar if not akin to Dutch Elm Disease may have been responsible (Green, 1981). Detailed pollen analysis of these horizons also reveals the advent of weeds such as ribwort plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*) and nettle (*Urtica dioica*), agents of human settlement, suggesting that prehistoric man was beginning to have an effect on the environment. Subsequent forest clearance is apparent in the pollen record; tree pollen is replaced by grass and cereal pollen; pollen of weeds and the presence of charcoal all point to clearance techniques. This is further confirmed by the appearance in the pollen spectrum of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) and birches suggesting the use of the slash and burn technique of shifting agriculture. The policy of forest clearance eventually leads to greatly increased runoff, erosion and losses of nutrients from the ecosystems (Borman et al, 1968). The presence of high nutrient levels and mineral particles in peat formed at this time also suggests that forest clearance and nutrient runoff into drainage basins was taking place (Green Pearson, 1977).

During the Bronze Age (2000 - 750 BC) the archaeological record shows how settlements and farmsteads were concentrated on the better well-drained soils of the morainic deposits. Once areas were cleared, continuous burning or grazing was needed to preserve the status quo. The quality of the land and soils is central in this period. The occurrence of Neolithic and later funerary sites within, to the north and north-east of Skipwith Common indicate that there was probably settlement and utilisation in the immediate vicinity during this period. The work involved in raising the burial mounds, clearing and cultivating the land suggests that there was a social and political structure to society.

Clearance, pastoral husbandry and conversion to arable land continued throughout the Bronze and Iron Ages, although climatic deterioration from about 1000 BC did lead to large areas of previously cleared farm land being abandoned. The development of society in the Iron Age (700 BC - AD 43) had reached a point whereby the need had arisen to protect the land to sustain the growing population and as a result a warrior society known as the Parisi evolved. A cultural characteristic of this tribe was the tradition of burying their dead in square barrows - many of which still survive on the Common.

The increased scale of Romano-British agriculture and the expansion of settlement and industry continued man's impact on the environment, attested by archaeological evidence. Aerial photography of the Vale of York has produced evidence for crop mark sites which represent farmsteads and associated rectilinear enclosures and trackways (p. 20). Many of these sites are dated to the Iron Age/Romano-British periods, although recent work has shown that this interpretation is not necessarily correct (Finney 1989). Rectilinear enclosures associated with trackways can also be assigned to the Bronze Age period.

The Anglo-Saxon period of history (450 - 1066) witnessed a sharp increase in the clearance of woodland, and the wooded areas, but even so it is only in the later medieval period (1066 - 1540) that further mass clearance was instigated through the process of assarting.

The woodland clearance of the dark ages did much to mould the present face of the British countryside. Clearance radiated out from the villages and other settlements so that in many areas the original forests were cleared until only isolated woods and copses remained along the parish boundaries where clearance from adjoining villages met. Some of the woods and parish hedges still survive and represent relicts of primeval forest cover, rich in species. Enclosures and clearance continued throughout the medieval period. Even so, there was widespread use of woodland as game reserves and as sources of timber for building. Woodlands became managed as coppice or pollard to supply small timber on a regular basis. However, the depredations caused by the iron industry, and especially the charcoal burners, resulted in edicts during the Elizabethan period restricting felling.

The enclosure acts of the late 19th and early 20th century resulted in the chequered pattern of hedged fields which are so common in the British countryside today. The hedges were used as dividers, being cheaper than constructing walls and more popular because they were self-renewing. Where cattle or sheep were to be enclosed hawthorn was most widely planted, because of its dense

growth. Whatever species are planted in time the hedge becomes of mixed species due to bird-carried seeds.

The Flora

The Common is a large tract of heathland situated on a spur of glacial sands which form the watershed between the lower Derwent and Ouse valleys in the Vale of York. Due to the mixture of dry and wet heath, poor fen, reed (*Phragmites australis*), swamp, bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*), open water and birch woodland (*Betula pendula* and *Betula pubescens*) the vegetation is extremely varied. In many places birch and Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) have colonised the open heath.

The wet heath is the largest single tract of its type in the north of England and the cross-leaved heath (*Erica tetralix*) is the dominant species on the Common, with abundant purple moor-grass (*Molinia caerulea*). There is also a small population of marsh gentian (*Gentiana pneumonanthe*). The dry heath is dominated by heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) together with purple-moor grass, the latter occurring particularly where dry heath grades into wet heath.

Poor fen communities have developed in areas which probably originated as peat cuttings in a former valley mire. These consist of soft rush (*Juncus effusus*), jointed rush (*J. articulatus*), bog mosses (*Shagnum palustre*, *S. squarrosum* and *S. recurvum*), with marsh cinquefoil (*Potentilla palustris*), bog pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), marsh pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), common marsh bedstraw (*Gallium palustre*) and narrow buckler-fern (*Dryopteris carthusiana*). Locally, there are areas of base enrichment where large bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus uliginosus*), yellow looserife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*), lesser skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), marsh arrowgrass (*Triglochin palustris*) and marsh stitchwort (*Stellaria palustris*) occur.

Archaeological Background

Skipwith Common is part of a rich archaeological and historical landscape. This is illustrated by, not only the surviving architectural elements within the body of the parish church of St Helen's, Skipwith Hall and a number of 18th century houses, but also by a well preserved earthwork of a moated site and associated features. In addition to these features, the aerial photographic record for the parish of Skipwith is extensive. In recent years it has been greatly enriched by the extensive flying of Mr Eastwood and the aerial photographic records which he and his son have collected. Recent work by A Crawshaw is also incorporated within this report.

Previous Archaeological Work

The majority of previous work has concentrated on upstanding monuments on the Common.

Along the northern boundary of the Common is a scatter of prehistoric barrows (SE 6550 3760), with a more dense grouping further to the east (SE 6450 3775).

The first of these two complexes would appear to represent a small, widely spaced grouping of possible round barrows consisting of four tumuli (sites 26, 27, 28 and 29). Two of the barrows, sites 26 and 27, are shown as 'sites of' on the 1:2500 O.S. maps (at SE 6527 3767 and 6529 3763 respectively), however, both tumuli still exist (Figs. 7.1 & 21: p. 30 and 84), albeit much reduced in size by natural erosion and previous unrecorded excavation. To the east of these is a single barrow, site 28, (SE 65544 3771), again this site has been greatly affected by erosion and excavation of the central portion (Figs. 7.1 & 21: p. 30 and 84). Immediately to the south of this small barrow is a much larger barrow, site 29, (SE 6554 3750: Figs 7.1, 7.4 and 21: p.30, 37 and 84). All four barrows are classified as Scheduled Ancient Monuments (County No. 289).

There are references to the recovery of Middle Bronze Age Urns on Skipwith Common (Elgee 1933, 85); unfortunately it has not been possible to trace the details of any such excavations, if indeed any took place. Examination of the barrows (sites 26-28) shows that they have been disturbed by previous excavation, and it is known that at least two excavations were undertaken on the Common Proctor's activities in 1849 (discussed below); perhaps the round barrows were investigated during this period.

To the west of this concentration lies a complex of Iron Age square barrows. This group of tumuli and outliers is known as 'Danes Hills' (Scheduled Ancient Monument County Number 289). At least 35 barrows appear to have formed the cemetery (Fig. 9), traces of which remain visible on careful examination of the Common (p.28) and from aerial photographic evidence (p. 20: Pls. 2-4: Figs. 6, 7.2 & 9).

The earliest recorded excavations of Danes Hills were carried out in 1754 by Dr. John Burton when he opened a number of 'barrows' on the Common:

"Upon Skipwith Common; between Riccall and Skipwith, fouth of laft place; are the vestiges of an encampment, near to which are several Tumuli; call'd to this day, the Danes-Hills. Having obtained leave of the Lord of the manor, the Revd. Mr. Potter, Vicar of Hemingbrough, a perfon well verfed in antiquities, and I had several of thefe open'd in AD 1754, and in the centre of one of the largeft of them to the fouth-eaft, we found almoft one perfect Skeleton of a young man, as appeared by his teeth; and part of another; they were laid with their faces towards the eaft upon the ground, covered with a bed of fine dry fand, of a reddifh colour, grown over with fhort ling or heather. I took up the bones, as they lay in due order; the head of the younger perfon was laid betwixt his kees, having I perfume, had his head cut off in battle; the teeth were all therein, and very firm and fresh; the jaws of this, with a piece of courfe facking cloth, that adhered to the thigh bone, I have now by me. After examining this Tumulus, I had several others opened, the reft being all of a leffer fize; but found only

calcined human bones, ashes, and pieces of decayed iron of various shapes; ever since the aforefaid battle, it is by tradition to this day, said, that the Danes were permitted to encamp here, 'till they had buried their dead, and their ships at Riccall could be ready for their re-embarking for Norway. All of which agrees so well with the history of that engagement and what followed it, that I make no doubt of the truth of the fact; moreover there is a piece of ground about half a mile south of these Tumuli call'd the King Ridding, and there is a way near to it call'd Olaves-Road or Lane, from Olave the son of Harfager, who returning into his native country, is supposed to have made this road to his ships in the river Oufe, lying very near their camp (Burton 1758).

In 1849, the Yorkshire Antiquaries Club opened at least 10 of the barrows:

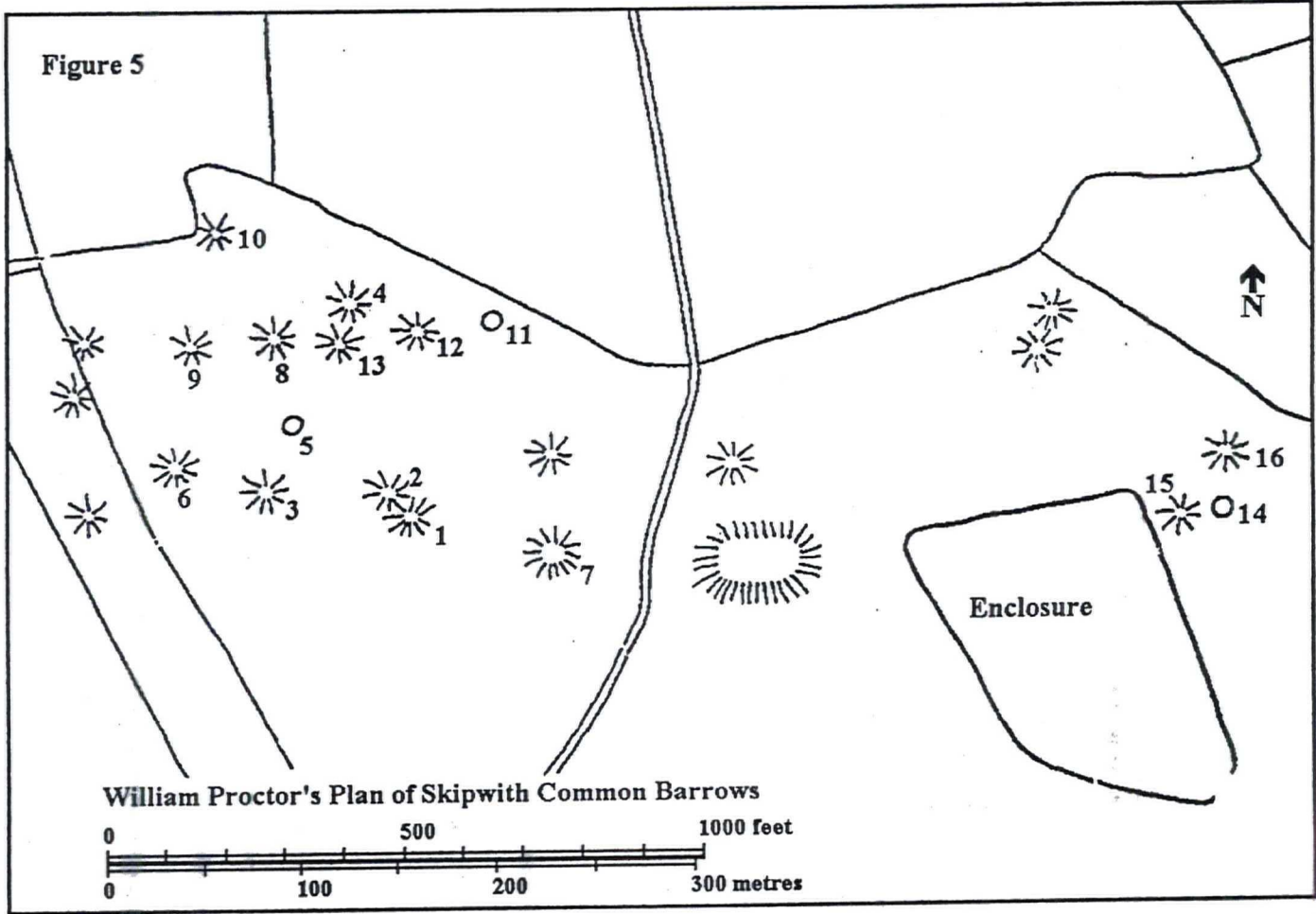
"On Skipwith Common, ten miles south-east of York, are many conspicuous tumuli, which are, by popular tradition, connected with the defeat of the Norwegian army which landed at Riccall, and after defeating the Northumberians at Fulford, was overwhelmed by the English at Stamford Bridge. Here the tumuli are called Danes' Hills. These tumuli are situated about three quarters of a mile south-west of Skipwith church; other tumuli much resembling these, are found on another portion of the common land about the same distance north-east of Skipwith church. The road from Skipwith to Riccall passes by the former, that from Skipwith to Wheldrake and Stamford Bridge by the latter. If the tradition were correct, that these mounds are the graves of the Norwegians slain in the retreat from Stamford Bridge, we should find in them abundant proof of the hasty burial of a large number of men, probably without fire.

The tumuli at Skipwith Common are of medium and not very unequal size, except that one which stands apart is much greater in diameter and somewhat superior in height to all the others. There are two groups of tumuli; on the west twelve of these mounds are conspicuous, the great tumulus, already mentioned, being on the south-east extremity. Besides these are nine small mounds, with oval or circular trenches. The greatest distance between any two adjoining is rather less than 700 feet. East of the great mound is a small group of three tumuli and several heaps, besides two oval or nearly oval tumuli. In the first series the appearance of the fosse, in which the tumuli are set, is very distinct, and the even sharp aspect of the little oval round trenches remains. It was ascertained, by measure, that most of the tumuli are set in a square fossae, as if the angles were more depressed than the other parts; by the compass it was clear that they had been set out by the cardinal points, north and south, east and west. This was not the case with the oval tumuli. The same facts were observed in the eastern group. Between the two sets of tumuli is an elevated portion of dry, sandy ground, now covered with furze, across which an old trackway, to some depth, is traceable, passing down to the south side of the fossa of the great tumulus, and joins the road to Riccall. In the other direction it is marked by old tracks on the north of the smaller group of tumuli. Small single, double and even treble banks and ditches pass away from the elevated ground; on the east of it is an irregular inclosure like a small field, but trenched and banked after an antique fashion, and enclosing at the north-east corner two oval ring ditches.

The tumuli on being opened shewed neither urn nor skeleton, nor arms of any kind; nothing, in fact, but the heaped up and discoloured sand, oak, charcoal, and some few calcined bones and a few chips of flint, such as in other cases have been regarded as arrowheads of the rudest kind. The oval or circular rings were slight trenches, the materials from which had slightly raised the interior; the central spaces were examined with little success. Merely shewing traces of fire towards the end, rather than in the middle, they suggest the notion of their being the basis of rude huts.

The observations made on Thorganby, near Skipwith lead to the exact same results. Similar tumuli, set in similar square fossa, similar earth rings, oval and rectangular, but mostly square, occur on that Common. The tumuli, when opened, yielded carbonaceous matter, but no skeleton. On other parts of the Common, other earth rings appear far away from the tumuli.

On the evidence obtained from these tumuli and earth rings, there is no difficulty in deciding that the hills were not raised over the bodies of Northumbrians, and are no part of the result of the fight at Stamford Bridge. The despair of the Northmen and haste of the Englishmen would not allow them to wait to set out, by the cardinal points, square fossae, within which to raise sepulchral mounds; and again, had such a host been buried in this manner far more distinct of internment than those found would have appeared. But on the assumption, that here was located an early British settlement on the outskirts of the forest of Galtres, all is clear. The sandy hill is the stronghold - the dykes are lines of defence - the enclosure, with openings on its sides, becomes an ancient cattle enclosure; the oval rings on its margin are herdsman huts; the other rings are bases of dwellings; and the tumuli are



the peaceful repositories of the peasants, among whose few bones neither weapons of war nor instruments of chase were wasted. That it was a British rather than Anglo-Saxon settlement may be decided from the fact that the latter people interred in large heaps rather than separate tumuli; and at Arras, amid the numerous British tumuli which exist at that place, it one with a similar square fossa, 45 feet by the side, and set nearly by the cardinal points (Proctor 1855).

A further report on Proctor's excavations is quoted:

"With one exception these tumuli vary from 2' to 4' in height and 20 to 40' in diameter, they are circular, but each is surrounded by a square fossa about 1' deep and 3' wide on each side, which point due north, south, east, and west. Five of the tumuli are placed in a line from east to west, and at equal distances from each other; between them are scattered several small round heaps too small to attract attention in any other situation. One of them is curiously placed at the north-east angle of the trench of the tumulus no. 3; this in common with several others was excavated and found to contain a decayed substance like peat.

At the distance of about a furlong to the east of the principle tumuli and separated from them by some curious earthworks are several more of these small heaps. Of the larger tumuli 7 were examined by digging trenches from north to south, averaging 4' in depth by 10' in length through their centres; they are all formed of fine sand. In all of them at a depth of 2' to 3' traces of fire were observed in the form of black sand with combustion of peat. These strata were from 6" to 1' depth and in every instance appeared to have been previously disturbed. In only 3, i.e. nos 1, 2, and 4 were traces of burnt bones found and these but in scattered and minute fragments. In no 4 a portion of human skull was recognised. The largest tumulus of the group lies to the south-east and is doubtless that in which Dr Burton found a human skeleton. This mound is 50' diameter and 4' to 5' high, grown over by trees and shrubs and much degraded with fossa - the trench is wider and deeper than the others. We discovered at a depth of 3' traces of black discoloured sand and the following bones - portion of a skull, two thigh bones each 18" long, a tibia and some other bones; they were so soft that they could be cut with a knife from the top of earth matter (sic) and were probably parts of the skeleton discovered by Dr Burton in 1754. The three tumuli 8, 9, and 10 preserved the same general indications as the others; the other three 11, 12 and 13 were not examined. In some of the tumuli were traces of iron or other objects met with. Attention was now directed to the groups of small mounds to the east. In some of them nothing was discovered but a mass of brown earth and decayed peat. In others were marks of fire but not traces of human remains. In three however, nos 14, 15, and 16, at a depth of 9" wood charcoal and burnt bones were found, in one case accompanied by an arrowhead of flint not ill - formed".

In 1941, in advance of construction of the airfield, four mounds which were to be destroyed, were excavated by Miss K Hodgeson. The following is the unpublished report of these excavations:

"In 1941 I was asked by Dr. John Charlton, FSA, to supervise the excavation of a site near Riccall in the East Riding of Yorkshire which was about to be destroyed by the construction of an airfield. This site, locally known as The Dane Hills, consisted of seven flat topped sandy mounds rising from the marshes near the mouth of the river.

They were conspicuous among the reeds and bracken owing to the fine short grass with which they were covered, the largest measured 34 ft x 38ft and the smallest 17ft x 14ft.

Four of these mounds were excavated and showed similar features. The ditch which surrounded each proved to be of typically Roman character with rounded corners and V section; in deed Mr F G Simpson, CBE, FSA Scot. who visited the excavation several times, exclaimed "that ditch has been cut by men with Roman military training".

The sections cut through these ditches were striking and instructive. They showed alternating of clean yellow sand and dark mud, the dark layers were much thicker, and were due to the heavy growth of weeds in summer while the thinner layers of clean sand represent the wash down, from the mounds in winter.

The only feature of the mounds was a slight trace there of a wall or breast work of laid turf surrounding the flat top. There were no postholes, showing that these mounds cannot have been look-out towers or signal stations which was the first suggestion that came to mind.

There was a certain amount of ash, charcoal and bones, attesting occupation, but except one sherd, all the pottery, which was entirely Roman of the 3rd-4th century came from the ditches and most

have been? Fishing or wild-fowling are two possibilities but the most interesting and very probable suggestion is that the mounds were shaped and used by detachments from the garrison at York, sent to obtain reeds for thatch and wattling.

A few flint blades, typical Yorkshire microliths were found in the soil".

This report is unfortunately incomplete. There is no site plan to determine which barrows were excavated (the original site plan was returned to the Air Ministry and has since been lost), and the excavation data only indicates the excavation of two barrows, not four. The sites of three barrows (sites 1, 17 and 18) would have been destroyed by the construction of the airfield. Excavation data record the remains of an inhumation burial from one of the barrows, but it is not mentioned in Hodgeson's summary. A letter between Stead and Hodgeson states that she saw no signs of disturbance to the sites from previous excavations, although from information recounted above it is clear that Proctor and most probably Burton had also excavated the large mound (site 18) believed to have been targeted by Hodgeson. It is interesting to note that the barrow, site 18, would appear to have consisted of a large oval mound measuring 44m by 25m as depicted on the 1st edition 6" OS map (Fig. 10, p. 48) and also on the 1:10560 OS map dated to the 1930's; unfortunately this feature is not conclusively referred to in the existing Hodgeson archive.

In addition to this there is a reference to the excavations of the Reverend E.W. Stillingfleet, who in 1817 excavated on Skipwith Common and later in 1865 gave to the Yorkshire Museum a piece of coarse woollen garment reportedly from Skipwith Common. The following is a brief report on the textile fragment:

"There is a piece of cloth in plain twill which was discovered in a barrow on Skipwith Common, Yorkshire, in 1817 by the Rev. E W Stillingfleet, but nothing more is known of the association of this find; a portion of this cloth is preserved in the Yorkshire Museum. The count is 18 ends by 12 picks. Z - spun. It is a very coarse and heavy cloth and caked with mud. There is a border of eight threads which seem to be woven much the same way as Army selvedge, or possibly the longitudinal threads are twisted together in pairs. Outside the edge is a short fringe of groups of threads noted together. This means the edge is either the top or the bottom of the cloth, probably the latter." (Hensall 1950).

In the 19th century, W. Proctor's plan of the area of the Iron Age cemetery (Proctor 1864: Fig. 5) indicated the presence of a large enclosure, which appears to have been formed by single, double and even treble banks and ditches (SE 64800 37584 centre). This feature was never recorded on any Ordnance Survey maps and it is clear that the construction of the main runway would have seriously effected the interior of the enclosure and also disturbed portions of the northern and southern enclosure banks.

From documentary sources there would appear to be approximately 35 barrows forming the Danes Hill cemetery. The majority are situated within an area of approximately 300m by 200m; with 7 barrows as outliers to the east. The mounds appear to have varied in size from 4-16m. The majority were enclosed by a square ditch, the corners of which were orientated to the cardinal points of the compass; these are two of the characteristics which define Iron Age Square Barrows.

The Iron Age barrow cemetery appears to be associated with the complex cropmarks south of Adamson Farm; the second barrow complex to the south of South Moor Field may also be associated to a dense concentration of cropmarks to the north (p. 22 - 23).

That this area of the Vale of York attracted prehistoric settlement is also illustrated by the high density of cropmarks around Skipwith Common (Fig. 6) and Little Common where a second barrow cemetery also known as 'Danes Hills' is situated (SE 6664 3994; Scheduled Ancient Monument County Number 293).

The presence of Roman activity in the vicinity is presently only illustrated by limited excavations at SE 6637 3870, where traces of Roman settlement were located during the excavation of a pond (Wagner 1980), and also from the field walking of South Moor Field (MAP 1993).

Aerial Reconnaissance

Aerial photographs provide valuable information on archaeological features which, due to agricultural destruction, are no longer visible above ground. The aerial photograph is capable under favourable conditions, i.e. low angled sunlight, to show up earthworks, and perhaps of more importance, features which now only exist as soil or crop marks.

The parish of Skipwith has acted as a magnet for a number of years to the aerial photographer. The collection of prints stored at the Archaeology Section of North Yorkshire County Council is extensive and apparently the largest collection for a single parish in North Yorkshire. This collection has recently been augmented by the reconnaissance undertaken by Mr Eastwood in recent years, A Crawshaw and British Coal as part of a management agreement with the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust.

An integral part of the presentation survey is to consider the aerial photographic cover for the relevant area. This has proved difficult in regard to the Common as the present vegetation is not really conducive for the production of crop marks. Even so a consideration of the aerial photographic evidence around the Common has proved worthwhile. All grid references are centred.

Aerial reconnaissance of land to the north of the Common is dominated by two very complex groups of crop marks at SE 6445 3891 (Fig. 6: Site 1) and 6530 3780 (Fig. 6: Site 16).

Site 1: SE 6445 3891. In the area to the south of Adamson Farm (SE 6455 3800) a complicated series of crop marks have been identified by aerial photographs (Pls. 3-4). The latest feature would appear to be linear aligned north-west to south-east (Fig. 6 - A) which appears to be on the line of a tributary of Holmes Dike and which continues into the Common, where it joins a drainage ditch which follows the northern boundary of the Common. It is possible that this drainage trench was excavated during the 1940's when drainage projects were undertaken on the Common by the military. A number of the more acutely orientated linears of north-north-west to south-south-east alignment may represent field drains or be traces of ridge and furrow. Within the remaining elements are a series of square (B) and rectilinear enclosures (C), a number of ring ditches (D) and linear ditches (E).

On the extreme west of the concentration (Fig. 6 - F) are two ditches aligned north-south and which appear to define the limit of the intense utilisation of the land; to the east are numerous enclosures, but to the west there is only a limited degree of activity (G). This activity is represented by randomly orientated linear features of uncertain date and, more importantly, three square enclosures (H). These features measure approximately 10m square but perhaps of more importance is their orientation. The corners of the enclosure ditches are aligned to the cardinal points of the compass. Considering their close proximity to the group of square barrows immediately to the south, it seems likely that these three square enclosures represent the northern limit of the barrow cemetery. If this is so then the two ditches to the east may have acted as the boundary dividing domestic and agrarian activity from an area set aside for funerary use.

Just to the south of the boundary ditches (I) SE 6435 3885) is the crop mark of a fourth square enclosure (J) measuring approximately 16m in width, situated to the north of Barrow 10 (Figs. 6 and 9).

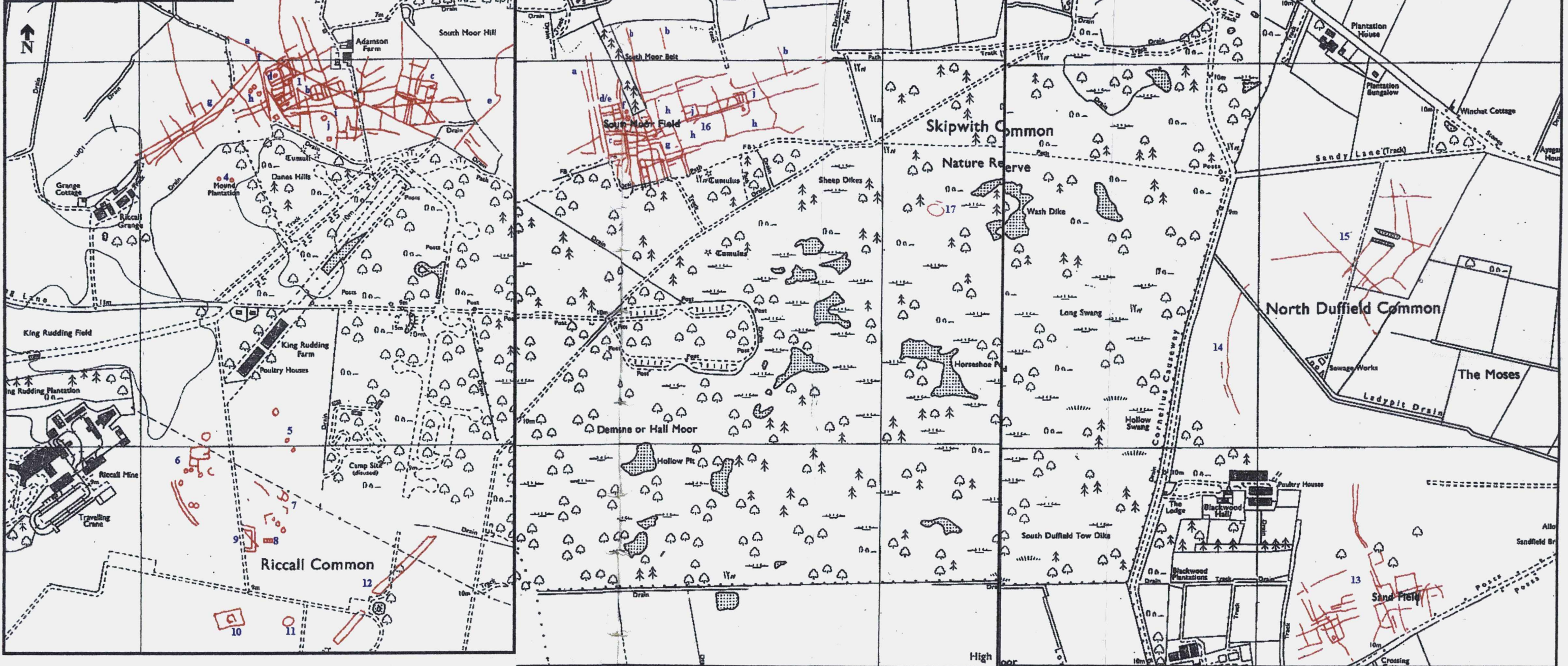
The enclosures (C) as mentioned above vary greatly in shape and size but a constant is the realignment of the features suggesting longevity of use. The geology of this area is susceptible to wind erosion and rapid silting up of the ditches may have necessitated their recutting.

Although all the crop marks run towards the Common there is no direct evidence from the aerial photographic data to suggest that these or features similar to them continue into the Common, except for feature A (Fig. 6), dated by association to 1941. What is also unclear is the relationship of the enclosures and field systems to the barrow cemetery, a problem which may only be resolved through other research such as geophysical survey and sample excavation.

Site 2: SE 6430 3928. Crop mark of a ring ditch of c. 35m in diameter. Site type and date unknown.

Site 3: SE 6456 3930. One linear cropmark aligned south-south-east/north-north-west with three perpendicular linear features on east-north-east/west-south-west with a single feature aligned

SKIPWITH COMMON
Figure 6
Aerial Photographic Data
Scale 1:10000



north-east/south-west. To the west of this arrangement is a two linear features converging on a single point to form a V-shape. The features may represent ditches associated with the complex of crop marks to the south of Adamson Farm (site 1). Equally it is possible that they represent geological anomalies or field drains.

Site 4: SE 6422 3877 and 6425 3767. To the west of the north-western boundary of the Common (Figs. 6 and 9) aerial photographic data shows the presence of two sub-circular crop mark features represented by a single enclosure ditch. These features are also shown on the 1st edition OS map as tumuli (Fig. 10) and would appear to be the western limit of the barrow cemetery. Further confirmation of site type was provided in the mid 1980's when ploughing turned up human bone in the vicinity of these crop marks (Eastwood pers com.).

Site 5: SE 6431 3809, 6440 3801 and 6441 3798. Three circular ring ditch cropmarks which may represent ploughed out barrows with only the ditch now visible.

Site 6: SE 6415 3786. A crop mark complex consisting of seven ring ditches, rectangular enclosures and two linear ditches. The latter may form a trackway aligned north-north-west to south-south-east. The form of these crop marks suggest that they may represent a settlement of the Romano-British period.

Site 7: SE 6435 3784. A arrangement of 3 ring ditches, and a group of curvi-linear features. To the south of this group is site 8 which may be related to site 7.

Site 8: SE 6437 3769. A single ditched rectangular enclosure with an internal circular feature which may represent a barrow or a dwelling.

Site 9: SE 6429 3768. A double-ditched rectangular enclosure.

Site 10: SE 6423 3757. A large rectangular ditched enclosure with a smaller internal square enclosure with possible entrance.

Site 11: SE 6437 3755. A large circular ring ditch crop mark measuring approximately 30m in diameter.

Site 12: SE 6450 3747 to 6476 3774. A straight linear cropmark measuring 20m in width, visible in two sections over a length of 400m. The form appears to be indicative of part of a runway, but its alignment does not correlate with known features associated with RAF Riccall; this would tend to suggest that the feature predates the construction of the RAF base.

Site 13: SE 6726 3655. A complicated grouping of linear and rectilinear cropmarks covering an area of approximately 1600 m²; the central area of which was removed by the construction of the railway in the 19th century. The arrangement is not dissimilar to Sites 1 and 16 and thus suggests that this area was also heavily settled in the pre-medieval period.

Site 14: SE 6694 3706 to 6695 3739. A double ditched curvi-linear cropmark, possibly representing a trackway.

Site 15: SE 6733 3752. A series of linears and one possible rectangular enclosure. Alignment of features suggests activity of different periods.

Site 16: SE 6538 3784. In the area of land known as South Moor Field, a complicated grouping of crop marks exists. On a 1:10000 map base the complexity of the information is masked by the scale (Fig. 6), but on consideration of the aerial photograph (Pl. 5) the picture of land usage becomes much clearer.

A proportion of the linear features on the site represent land drains (A). Other linears on a north-south alignment appear to represent ridge and furrow of pre-enclosure date (B); this area was part of one of the Open Fields (South Field) and therefore their presence is to be expected. In the centre of

the area where modern ploughing is possibly to a greater depth, the medieval plough lines have been removed, providing a much clearer picture of any earlier features.

It is possible that from the subtle realignments of a proportion of the linear features, remodelling of the complexes was being undertaken, potentially over a long period of time. The crop marks suggest the presence of a trackway (C) which has an east-west alignment before changing course and heading towards the Common. Rectangular (D) and square enclosures (E) can be seen as well as a ring ditch feature (F) which may represent a ploughed out barrow (others are known in the area of the Common to the south). There are also small dark circular features which may be interpreted as pits and within the enclosures these circular features may represent huts/single dwellings (G). Of course without controlled excavation much of the interpretation is hypothetical.

To the east of South Moor Belt is a continuation of the crop mark complex; although in this area the features are less dense and are composed of a number of large rectangular enclosures (H) and a series of five smaller, almost square enclosures (I) adjacent to a trackway aligned east to west (J). This may represent a ladder settlement; sites of this type are associated with the Iron Age/Romano-British periods.

Dating of the features is problematic. No excavation has occurred in this area. Past excavations concentrated on the funerary elements of prehistoric society, i.e. the barrows on the Common.

Field walking was carried on the area covered by the crop marks to the west of South Moor Belt (Fig. 6) in South Moor Field. The level of the data recovered was restricted. The collection of medieval pottery retrieved suggested that this area of land was in cultivation from the 12th century onwards. The density of Roman pottery sherds increased in the area directly adjacent to the Common, suggesting that the crop mark features in this area of the site may date to the Romano-British period. Unfortunately no conclusive dating evidence was found for the north and central sectors.

17. A sub circular feature with possible entrance to the north-east with a linear bank/ditch directly in front. Felling took place on this area of the Common in 1992. This feature is not shown on the 1st edition OS maps. It is approximately 50m from Wash Dyke and therefore may have been used as a sheep enclosure. It is situated in an area which is slightly higher than the surrounding ground and consequently drier during winter.

Conclusions

It is clear from the available evidence that there are specific areas of ancient intensive land use around the edges of the Common (AP sites 1, 13 and 16).

The density of the cropmarks falls to the south away and this may be explained by the known limits of the Common. Up until the 19th century Skipwith Common formed a single unit with Riccall, Osgodby and Barby Commons. If one accepts that this unit is of great antiquity, the scarcity of cropmark sites to the south, west and east of the Common is readily explained, for the Common may have only been used for pastoral and funerary activity, excluding cultivation and settlement. The fact that the settlement is peripheral to the Common may be explained by the geology; the settlements tend to occur on the good crop-producing soils which are relatively easy to cultivate, whereas the poorer, more marginal land is being used for rough pasture and burial.

Although outside the remit of this survey, an examination of the data for tracts of land around surviving commons eg. Back Common and Strensall Common, along with areas where Commons once existed, eg. at North Duffield, Barby and Selby, might produce some interesting information and land use comparison.

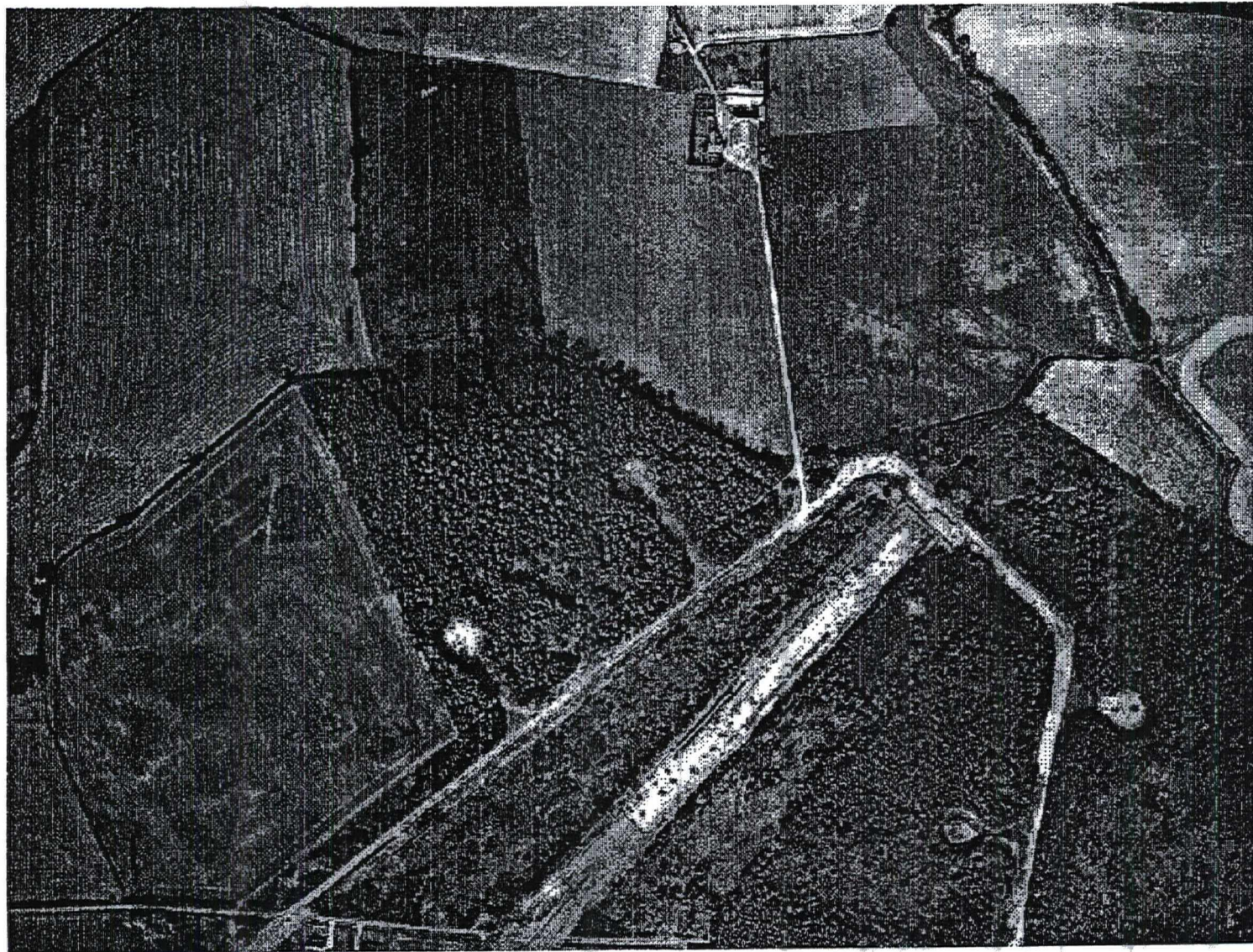


Plate 2.
Aerial View of Danes Hills.

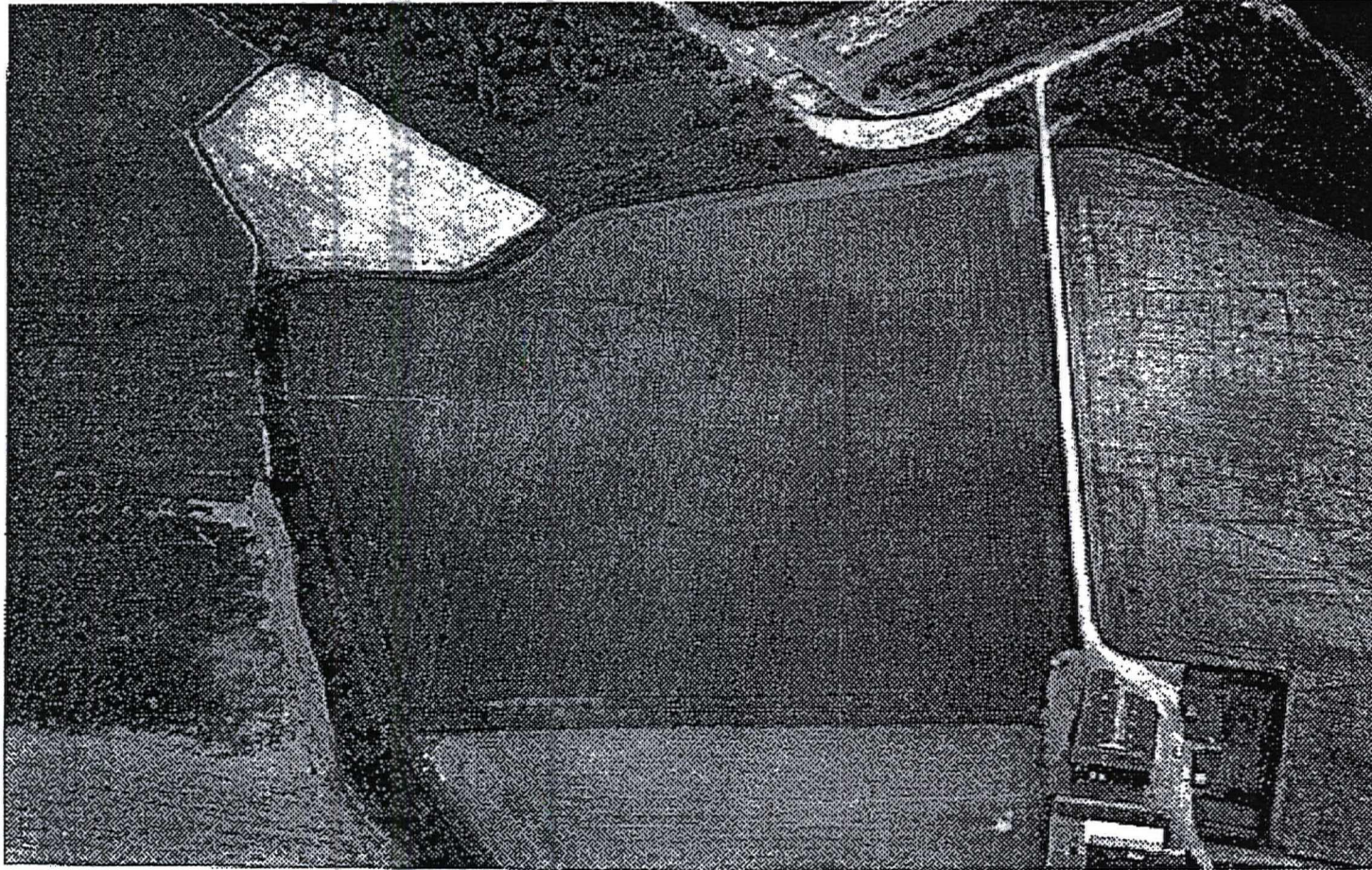


Plate 3.
Aerial View of Land to the west of Adamson's Farm.

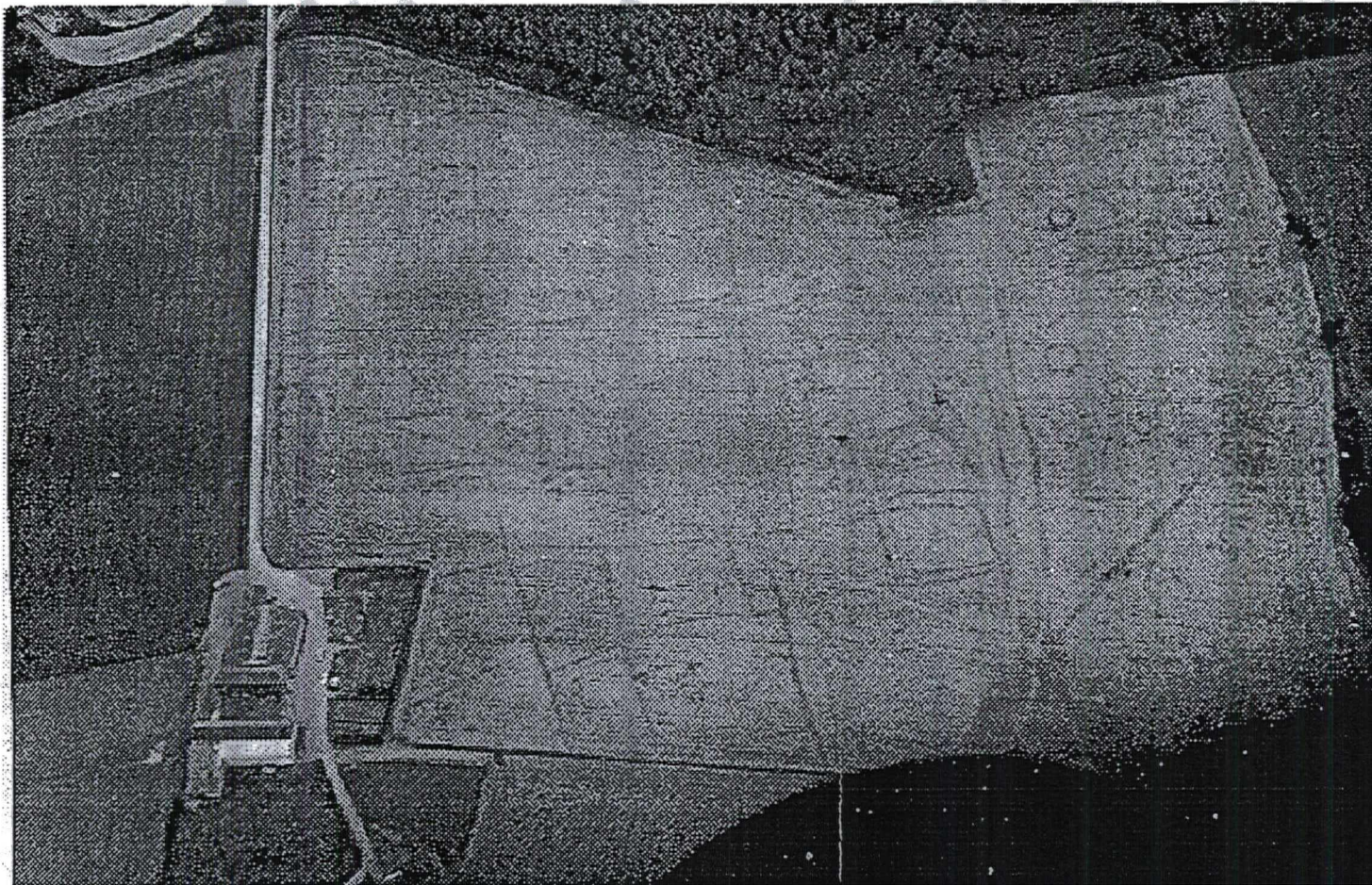


Plate 4.
Aerial view of Land to the East of Adamson's Farm.



Plate 5.
Aerial View of South Moor Field.

The Earthwork Survey

Introduction

The earthwork survey was undertaken in January and February 1994. Winter months, especially January and February, are an ideal time to visit many of the surviving earthworks on the Common, for the undergrowth is sufficiently low as not to create too many problems of access and visibility, although dense low bracken cover was a problem as were small clusters of dense brambles. Although the sparse vegetation is conducive to fieldwork, the amount of water on the Common at this time of year is not. However, it must be stressed that the winter of 1994 was much wetter than that of preceding years. The much larger areas of waterlogging made accessibility to some of the peat workings impossible. Alternatively, when some of the sites were reached there was so much water as to prevent assessment of the workings themselves (although the pots themselves are generally under water, it is possible to see their when water levels are low). By the same token, although traces of drainage and possible causeways were also partially visible it was impossible to survey them with any certainty; it is for this reason that the data on the peat working is limited in this report. Further work will be recommended (p. 66).

In addition to the descriptions contained in this section of the report, there is also a catalogue of the features to be found in Appendices 3 and 4 (p. 77 and p. 85).

The earthworks present on the Common fall into 6 distinct groups – the barrows, peat and sand workings, line ponds/retting pits, boundary banks and associated ditches, a post-mill and features associated with RAF Riccall (Fig 7, 7.1 – 7.4).

The Barrows

This group falls into 2 categories – the Round Tumuli and the Square Tumuli.

The Round Barrows: Four round barrows were located sites 26, 27, 28 and 29. The sizes varied from 5m in diameter to 20m; height also varied from 0.7m to 1.2m. All had suffered from natural erosion. In addition, there was evidence of previous excavation in the form of central hollows or trenches. There is no known documentation narrating the finds from these barrows, although it seems safe to say that the excavation were probably undertaken some time in the 19th century. There is a single reference (Elgee 1933) stating that a Middle Bronze Age Urn was found on Skipwith Common; considering that the other barrows on the Common are square, it is that the vessel was found during the excavation of one the round barrows.

The Square Barrows: Of the 25 barrows known from First edition OS maps and previous excavations (Proctor 1854) within the survey area, only 20 were definitely located (see Appendix 4 for barrows outside the survey area in Mound Plantation; Fig. 7.2). At present, the barrows are masked by a variety of vegetation; some are covered with brambles, gorse and grass, plus some with naturally regenerated silver birch, and the occasional oak and conifer. Bracken is the main ground cover for Sites Nos. 10, 19, and 20; dense bracken may have obscured sites Nos. 9 and 13 (not found).

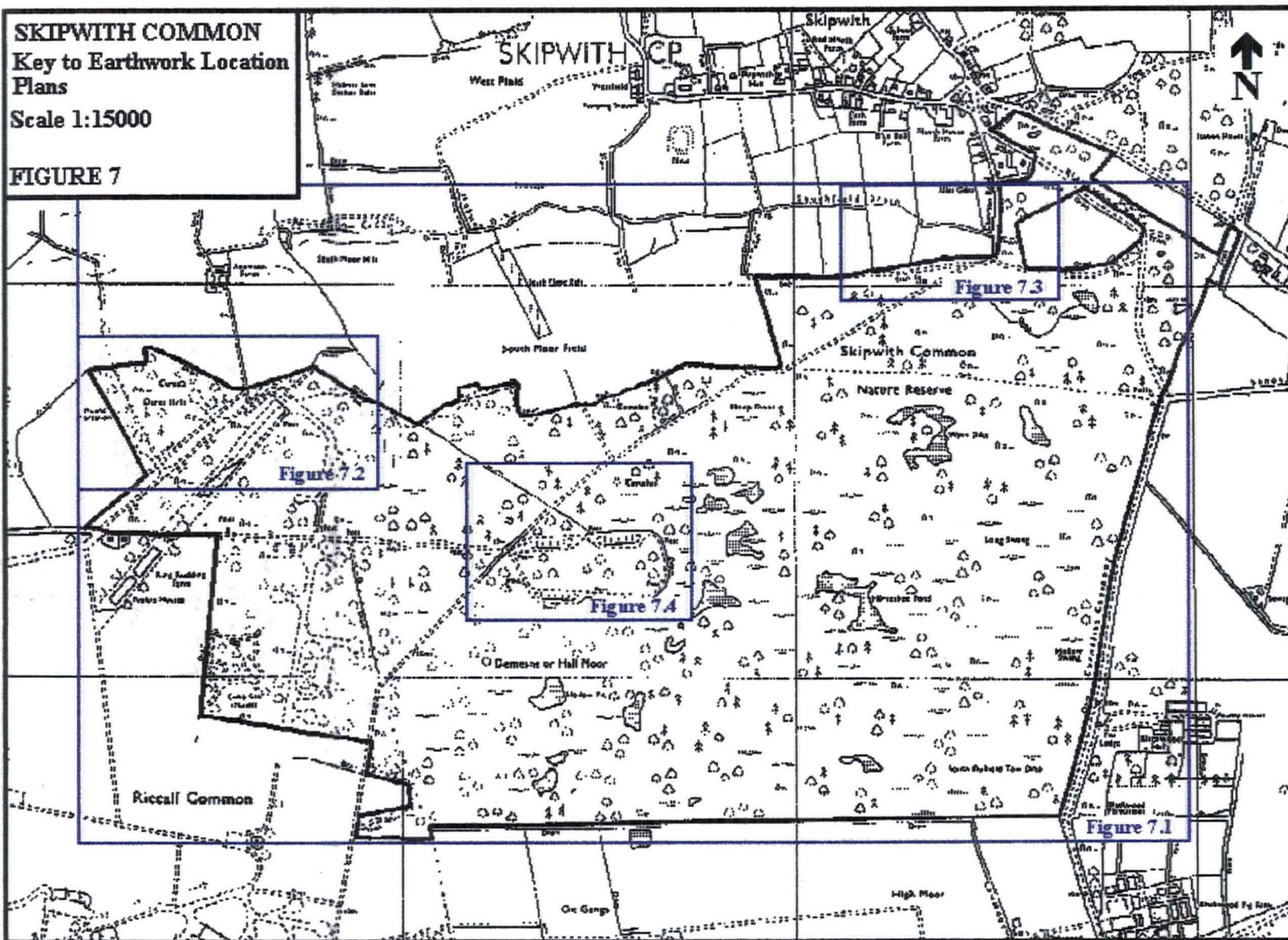
Where the sites were clearly visible, the characteristic straight-sided mound was recognised, and the accompanying ditch could also be traced at site Nos. 6, 7, 14, and 15). A number of the sites also exhibited the flat topped mound also characteristic of the square barrow (Nos. 23, and 24).

Damage to the sites consisted of previous excavations (Nos. 3, 5, 6, and 8) and more modern activity in the form of recent felling and burrowing by rabbits (Nos. 5, 10, 14, 16 and 19). Site No. 23 is currently being used as a base for a water tank and Site Nos. 1, 17 and 18 were destroyed by the construction of the perimeter track for RAF Riccall.

The square barrows are confined to the northern limit of the Common, being situated on marginal land with poor soils. The square barrows could relate to the series of settlement cropmarks to the north.

SKIPWITH COMMON
Key to Earthwork Location
Plans
Scale 1:15000

FIGURE 7



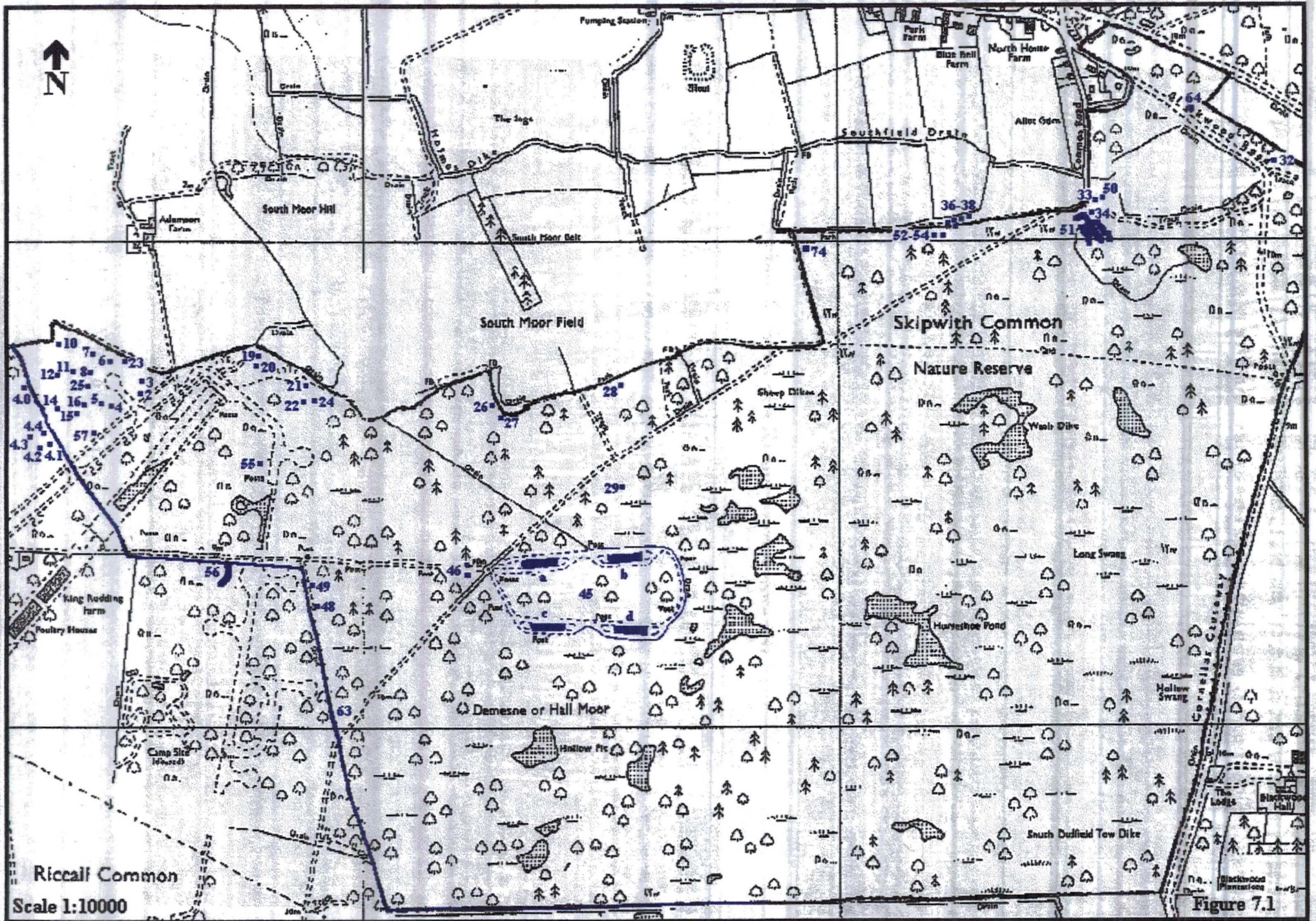


Figure 7.1



Plate 6 - View of a Round Barrow (Site 28)



Plate 7 - View of a Round Barrow (Site 28)

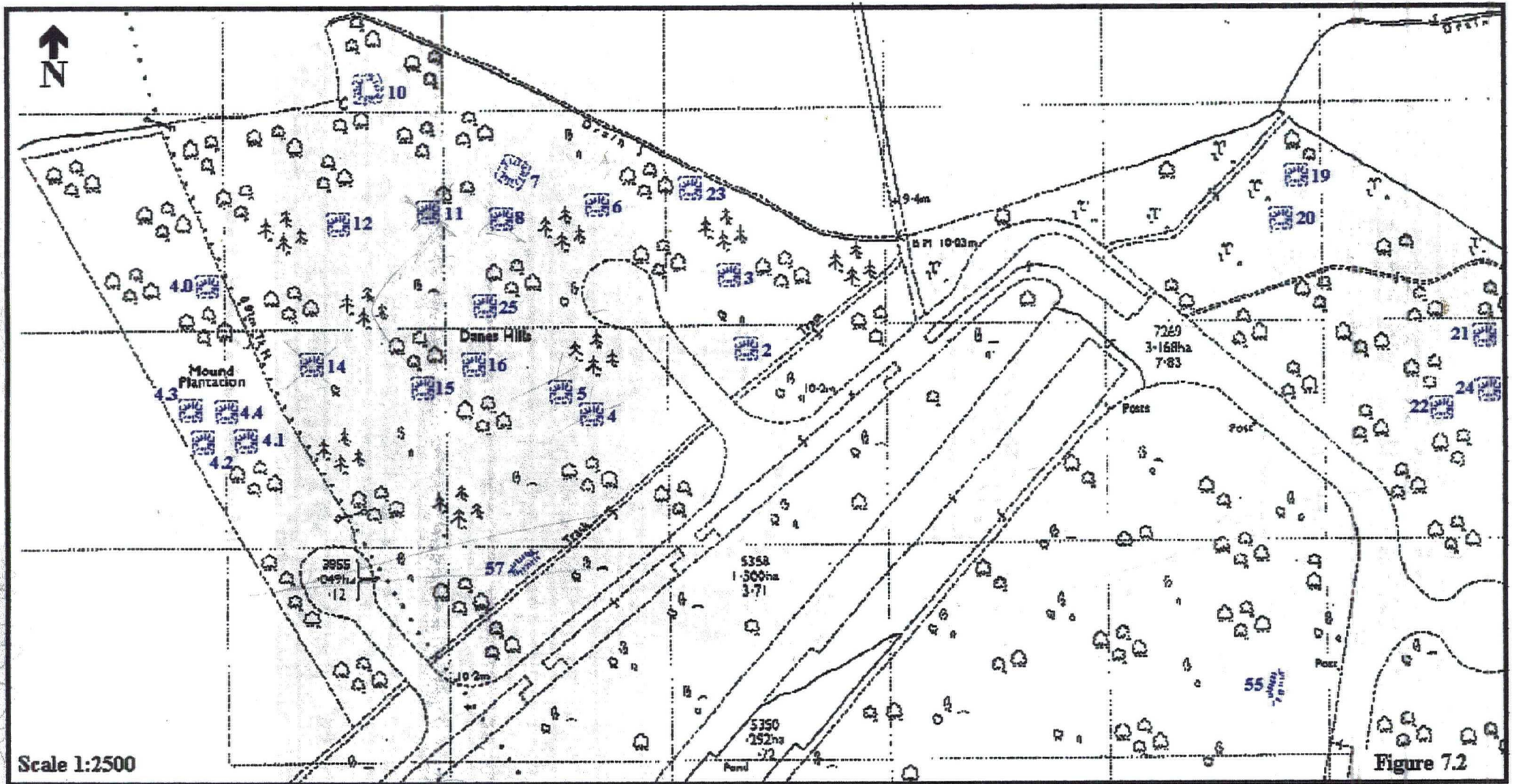


Figure 7.2

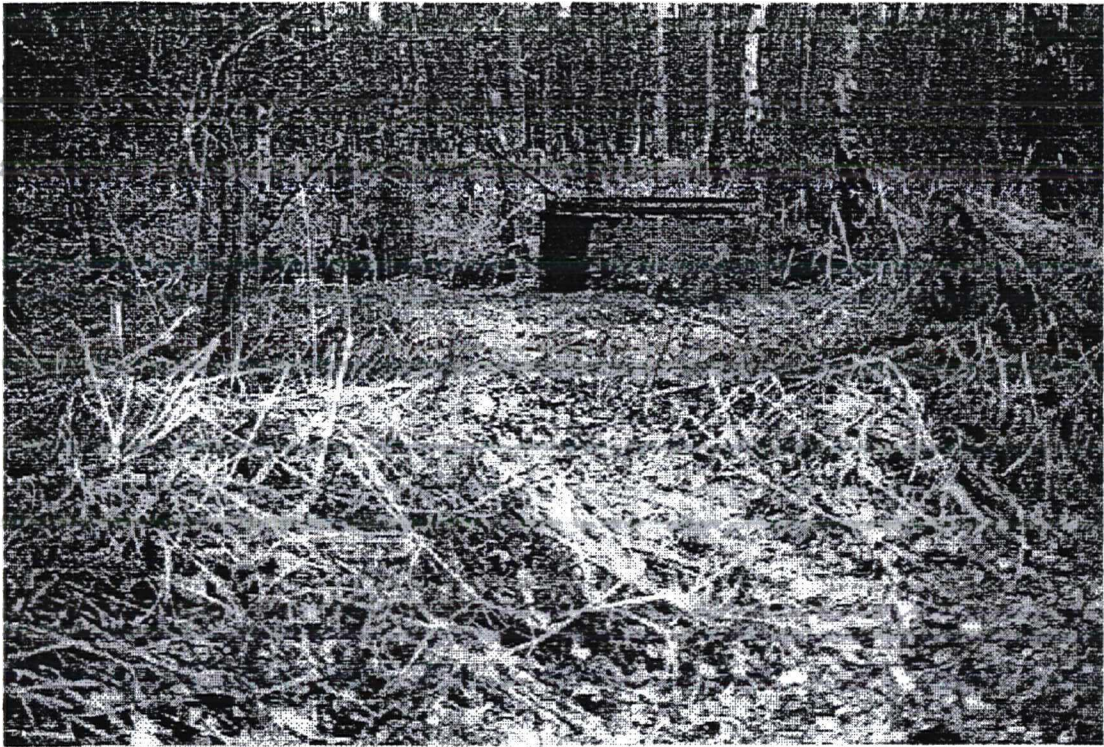


Plate 8 - View of a Square Barrow (Site 23)



Plate 9 - View of a Line Pond (Site 36)

The square barrows were not the easiest of sites to locate due to the heavy growth of natural vegetation and the fact that in many cases they do not exceed 1m in height. Their importance for the study of the Iron Age and their association to the complex cropmarks to the north cannot be overstated. Future research into the square barrows is necessary for the above reasons (see also p. 65).

The peat/sand workings

As mentioned above the majority of this category of earthworks were submerged in water at the time of the survey.

A total of 18 peat workings are located on the Common (Site Nos. 30, 31, 40, 42-44, 66-73) and situated in the central portion of the site. These features vary in length from 150m to 50m and exhibit a variety of shapes from the circular to the horseshoe. Although now described as ponds or dykes on O.S. maps, the fact that these features are situated on known peat deposits, and that there is documentary evidence to support peat extraction on the Common (see p.50), these features probably originated as peat workings. On the First edition O.S. map a particularly large 'pond' was called 'Hollow pit' (Site No. 72), a name more suggestive of an old working than a natural pond.

It is probable that other earthworks are associated with these workings; vestiges of drainage channels were noted during the course of the survey, but an excess of water prevented firm remains from being recorded.

The sand workings consist in the main of a number of roughly circular pits. Site 64, situated to the north of the post mill, is sub circular in plan, 10m in diameter, and is of unknown depth due to the fact that it is presently under water. A further feature which is not apparently a line pond (Site no. 74) is not under water and measures 15m by 10m, with a depth of 1.5m.

The Line Ponds

Like the previous groups of earthworks, the line ponds are confined to specific areas of the Common. In this example the features are concentrated into an area on the north-eastern fringe of the Front Common. They form two distinct groups, Site No. 51 and Site Nos. 36, 37, 38, 39 and 52, based on their size and form. The western group (Site Nos. 36, 37, 38, 39 and 52) is formed by 5 individually excavated rectangular depressions measuring in size from 9m to 20m in length and 5m to 7m in width; the depths are similar at 1.5m. They also vary in orientation, 2 (Site Nos. 38 and 39) are aligned east to west and 3 (Site Nos. 36, 37 and 52) are aligned in the opposite direction, ie. north to south. In addition further to the west are 2 more depressions (Site Nos. 53 and 54) which may also be line ponds, although this interpretation is open to question because of their irregular form.

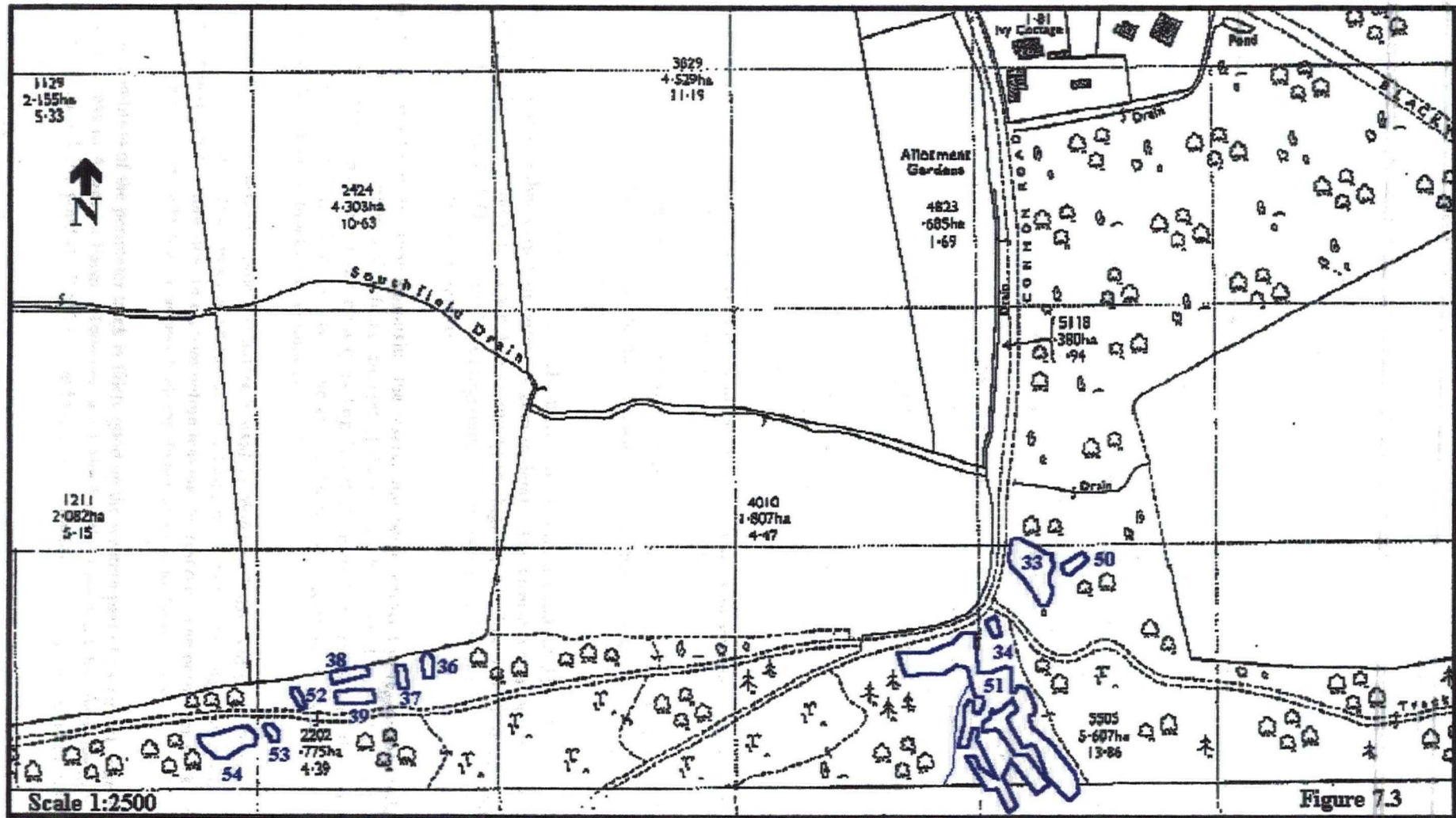
The eastern group is formed by a complicated unit of more than 5 pits. The majority of the pits are aligned on a north-south alignment and their inter-relationships is unclear. Longevity of use and the potential need to clean out these ponds may have resulted in the need to dig more ponds. Equally, if greater quantities of flax were to be processed at any given time, more pits may have been excavated to accommodate the extra flax.

Unfortunately the group was under water at the time of survey but the general layout as shown on earlier maps (Figs. 7.3 & 16) was still visible.

A pond situated to the south drains into the line ponds. It is suggested that this pond was deliberately constructed to provide the ponds with a constant supply of fresh water.

The Post Mill

This feature (Site No. 32) is currently obscured by dense bracken cover. It exists as a slight mound in an otherwise relatively flat area. The site measures approximately 12m in diameter and stands to a height of 0.8m. No sign of a central hollow for a post setting was observed, but this may have been covered by a fallen silver birch.



Boundary Banks

Only one boundary bank, Site No. 63, was located. This feature coincides with the line of the parish boundaries between Skipwith and Riccall Cliffe. Four distinct zones were recognised.

1. **Within Mound Plantation.** In this area the bank measured approximately 1m at the base decreasing to 0.5m at the top. It was no more than 0.5m in height and where it had been naturally eroded the line could still be discerned by the occurrence of established oaks. In this zone no ditch was apparent and there was no indication that one had ever been associated with the bank.
2. Along the southern boundary of the Common. In this area the bank was well preserved especially at the western end. It measured c.3m in width and stood to a height of c.0.75m. Directly to the south of the bank is a ditch, which has been enlarged and regularly maintained as it forms part of the drainage network around the Common (Fig. 4).
3. The south-western area. Here the bank is visible for a length of 400m, running in a north-western direction from the south-west corner of the Common. The width is c.1m, with a height of 0.3m. Previous plantings, now only visible as stumps, mark the line of the feature and to the east is the line of the ditch, albeit relatively shallow, only c.0.3m in depth and surviving to 0.75m in width.
4. In the area to the east of Site No. 56. Traces of the bank in this area were much more difficult to locate due to dense undergrowth; hence only a length of 30m could be confidently discerned. It was very low only 0.20m in height and very spread. In this area, the large-scale construction activity relating to RAF Riccall may account for the poor preservation.

The Airfield

The airfield, RAF Riccall, had three concrete runways. The main runway, aligned south-west to north-east, had a length of 5940' (c.1827m), with two subsidiaries 4290' (1320m) and 4020' (1420m) in length. A perimeter track or 'taxiway' encircled the runways. The technical, administration and living quarters were in the south-east of the base. The explosives and bomb dump lay away from the airfield to the east (Halpenny 1982). Twelve dispersal areas, some with associated hangars, were situated adjacent to the perimeter track in the east and north-east of the airfield.

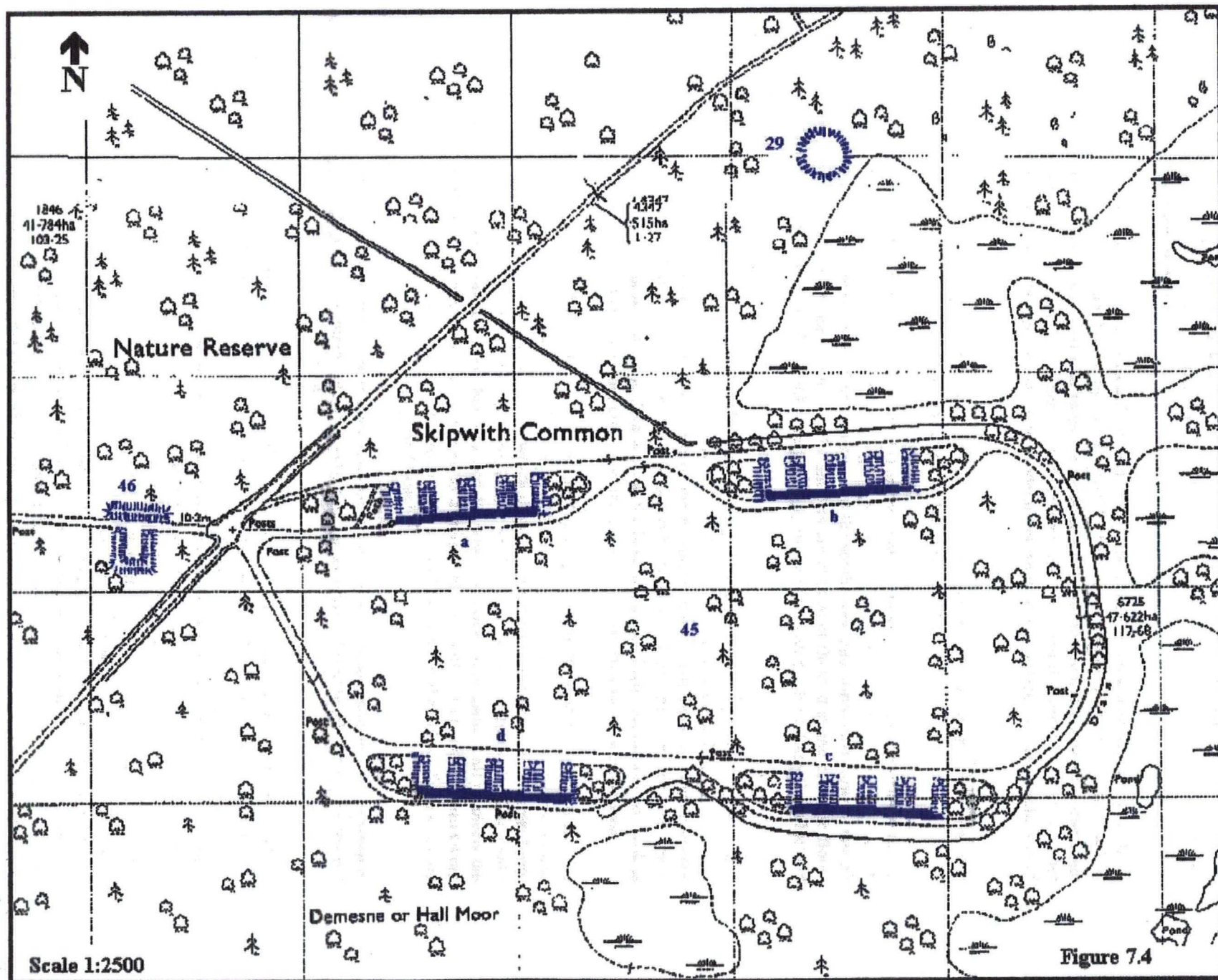
The area administered by the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust encompasses a relatively small part of the airfield, including the northern tip of the main runway and perimeter track, and the bomb and explosives dump (Pl. 10; Figs 7.1 and 7.4).

The main runway (site 58) survives as a level concrete track with a width of 35m (Pl. 17). The concrete is covered by a thin 'carpet' of tarmac, c.2cm in depth. The tarmac was added to even out the concrete surface subsequent to an accident involving the high-speed blow-out of an airplane's tyre during take-off on 18th October 1942. A programme of repairs was carried out to the runway in September 1944, which restricted operations.

Today, a large amount of the runway outside the reserve has been removed to return the land to agriculture. Inside the reserve, a significant amount of the runway has been destroyed to create a wildlife pond. The remainder of the runway is largely intact, apart from erosion of the tarmac surface and some pot-holing. There is also some encroachment of vegetation, especially into the seams between the concrete 'blocks' of the runway.

The perimeter track or 'taxiway' (site 59) enters Yorkshire Wildlife Trust land in the vicinity of Dane's Hills, running for c.350m on a southwest-northeast alignment, before turning southeastwards for c.210m, then running southwards for c.250m before leaving the reserve. The perimeter track was a c.16m wide concrete road which gave access from the dispersal areas to the runways.

The present condition of the perimeter track is fairly good on the western part of its circuit, where it is used as an access to Adamson Farm. However, a c.100m length of the track has been destroyed by the creation of a wildlife pond at SE 647375, and there is encroachment of vegetation north of this point.



The reserve contains the remains of three dispersal bays, sites 60, 61 and 62. The dispersal bays were the points at which the aircraft were kept and maintained, dispersed away from each other to minimise damage in case of attack or accidental explosion.

Dispersal bay, site 60, consists of a 70m long, 14m wide, concrete track leading in a north-west direction from the perimeter track to a circular concrete apron, 30m in diameter. This bay is at present used for the storage (or dumping?) of building rubble, a use that would appear to be preserving the form of the site.

Dispersal point, site 61, survives as a 25m long, 15m wide concrete track leading eastwards from the perimeter track at the north-east tip of the airfield. The circular apron at the end of the track is 40m in diameter. Two large cast iron rings are recessed flush into the concrete surface; these rings are 'picket rings' used to anchor the sheets which secured and protected the aircraft in foul weather (Pl. 18). Site 61, is in fair condition, with moderate erosion of its surface and encroachment of vegetation.

Dispersal bay, site 62, apparently followed a similar pattern to site 61. The site has been removed to create a wildlife pond, which follows the shape of the destroyed bay.

Two air-raid shelters (sites 55 and 57; Pl. 14) are present. Both sites exist as north-south aligned earth banks, c.17m long, 8m wide and 1.5m high. Each shelter has two brick-built entrances which lead into concrete chambers. Site 55 has entrances at the south-west and north-east corners; site 57 at its north-west and south-east corners. The shelters are at present flooded as the concrete floors are c.1m below ground level. The banks are generally overgrown with birch saplings, bramble and furze.

The extreme northern tip of the butts of the machine gun harmonisation range (site 56) lie within the reserve. These butts consist of a massive lunate bank, situated immediately south of King Rudding Lane and west of the eastern circuit of the perimeter track. The bank is aligned north-south, with the 'horns' of the crescent pointing westwards, from which direction the machine-guns would be fired. The bank is 40m long, 20m wide at the base and c.10m high. At present the bank is being used by trail bikes; this is causing erosion to the earthwork, especially to the western base.

The sites of two former Nissen huts (sites 48 and 49) are present on the eastern side of a flooded and overgrown track leading south from King Rudding Lane. Site 48, lies 50m south of site 49 and is the best preserved of the of the two sites, which originally appear to have been of the same form. Site 48 exists as two north-south aligned earth banks, 8m long, 2m wide and 1m high. The banks flank the remains of a concrete floor, 8m long and 4m wide. A brick-built gable wall connects the northern ends of the banks; this wall survives to a height of 2m, with 20 courses of brickwork remaining above ground level. Traces of corrugated iron walls survive at the sides. Both sites are very heavily overgrown with birch saplings and brambles.

The remaining sites to be discussed that are associated with the airfield, and situated on the reserve, are the bomb and explosives dump (site 45 A-D), with the associated fused bomb store (site 46) and laboratory and general stores (site 47 A-C).

The bomb and explosives dump consists of a concrete and tarmac perimeter track of rounded-rectangular plan, 400m in length east-west and 200m north-south. The track served four groups of former buildings (site 45 A-D), the remains of which lie within the encircling track (Pl. 13). Site 45A is the best preserved of these groups of buildings, and is situated at the northwest of the bomb dump. Site 45A consists of five north-south aligned earth mounds, each 16m long, 6m wide and 1.5m high. These mounds formed the blast shields for four former Nissen huts. The traces of corrugated iron walls survive in places alongside the concrete floors. The southern walls of the buildings survive as brick walls, c.1m high, capped by pre-formed concrete blocks which formed a ramp from the interior, so creating a loading bay. The walls have cast iron rings and pins on the outside, presumably to secure weather-proof sheets. There are no traces of walls at the northern ends of the buildings; presumably these consisted of large doors. The banks and floors have been colonised by vegetation; this process is advanced in groups B-D.

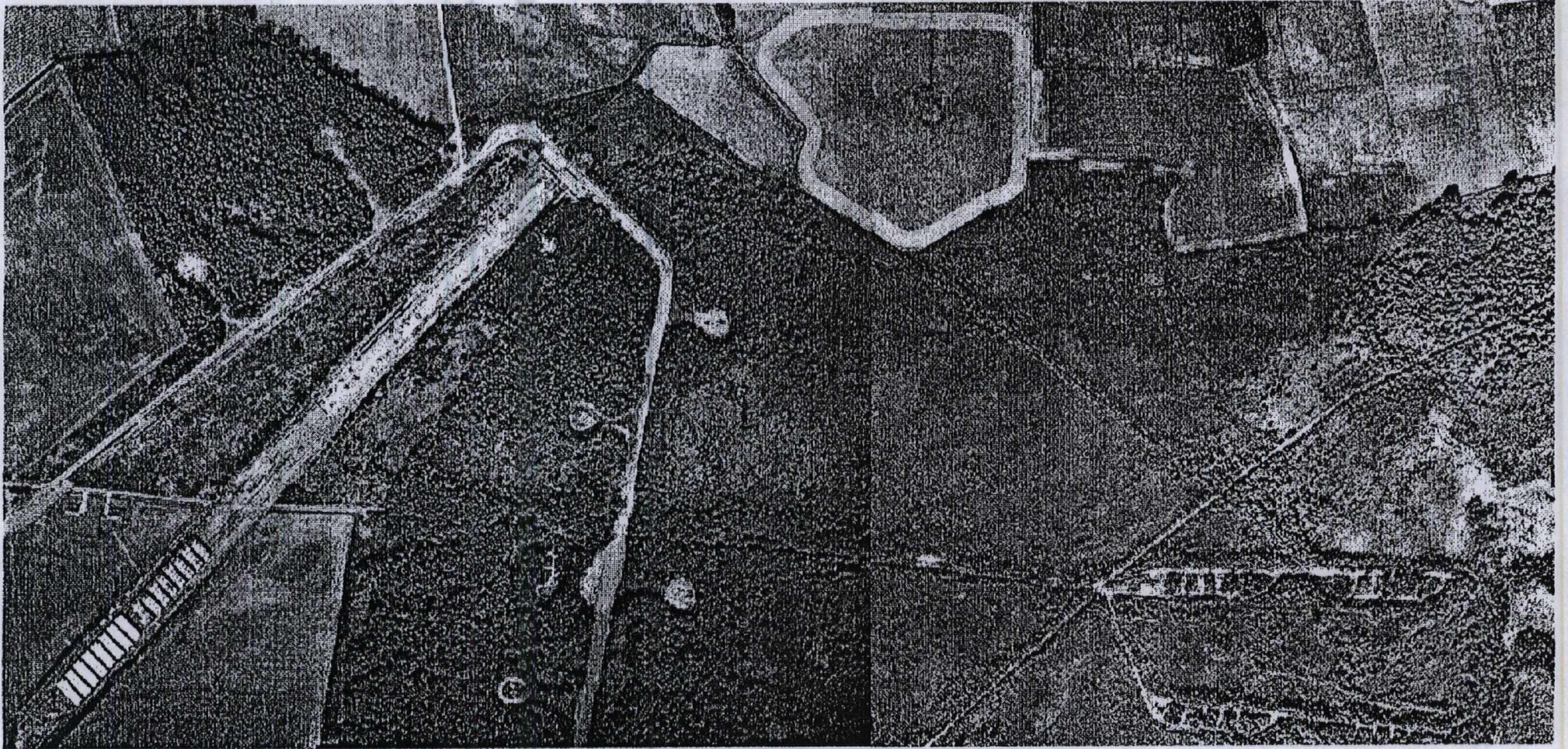


Plate 10.
Aerial View of surviving features of RAF Riccall.