



Plate 11 - View of a Drain (Site 41)



Plate 12 - View of a Drain (Site 41)

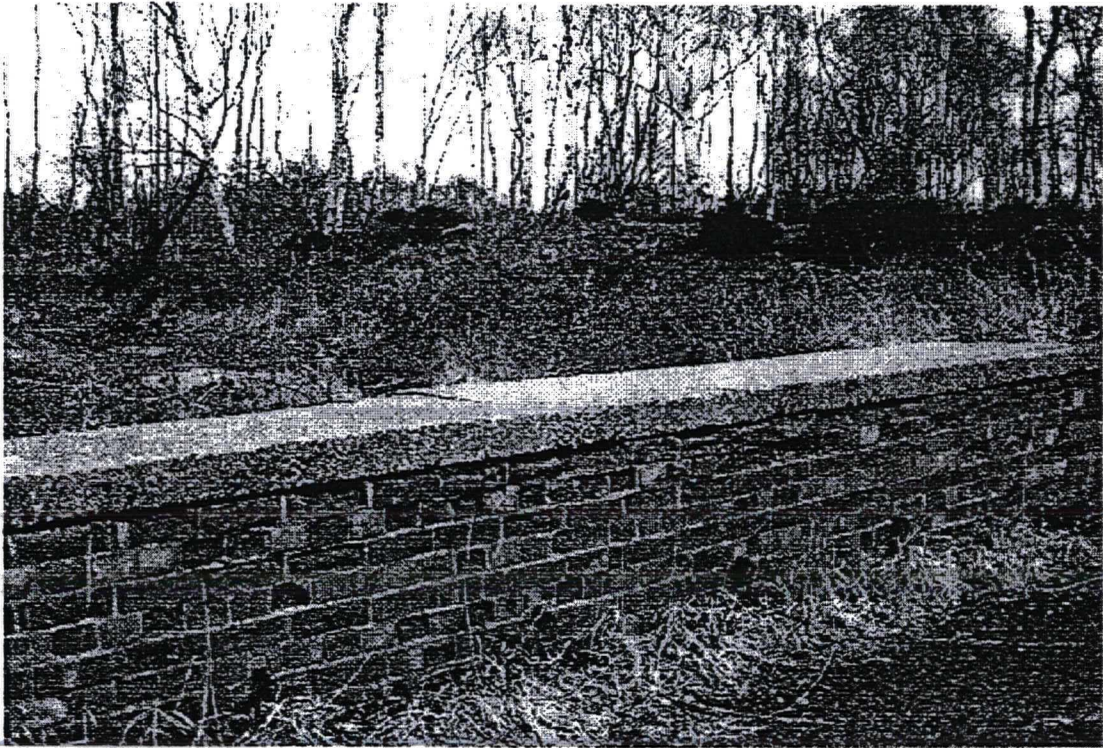


Plate 13 - View of a RAF Riccall Bomb Bays (Site 45)

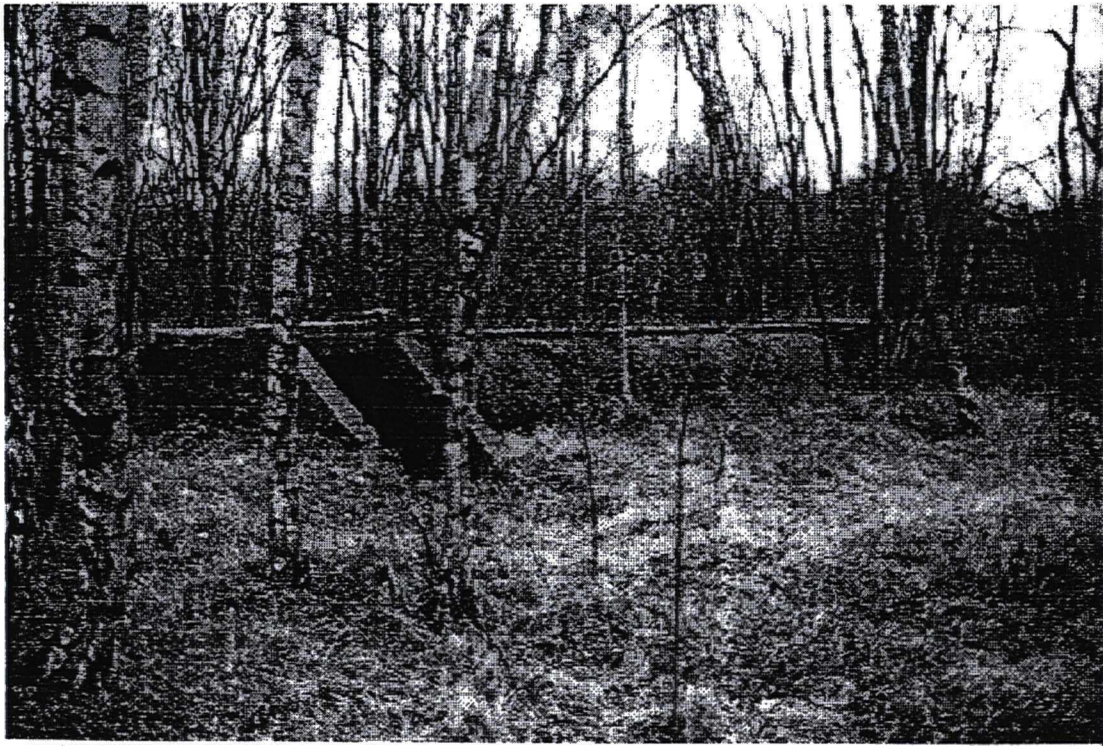


Plate 14 - View of a RAF Riccall Air Raid Shelter (Site 57)



Plate 15 - View of a RAF Riccall Fusing Point (Site 46)



Plate 16 - View of a RAF Riccall Fusing Point (Site 46)



Plate 17 - View of a RAF Riccall Main Runway (Site 58)



Plate 18 - View of a RAF Riccall Anchor Point (Site 61)

A ditch was dug by the Air Ministry to drain the area of the bomb and explosives dump (Site 41; Pls. 11-12). This drain runs anti-clockwise from a point along the northern margin of the dump (SE 65433710) to a point midway along the northern perimeter (SE 65483737); thereafter the ditch runs north-west in a straight line, exiting the Common at SE 65053764.

Site 46 lies immediately east of the north-west tip of the bomb and explosives dump, and is bisected by King Rudding Lane (Pls. 15-16). The site consists of two elements. On the northern side of the lane exists a west-east aligned earth bank, 32m long, 4m wide and 1.5m high. On the south side of the lane a C-shaped bank of similar dimensions encloses a concrete floor; this represents the remains of a temporary building, enclosed by earthen blast shields, which was used to store fused bombs. Unfused bombs were relatively inert; the addition of the fuse made them more hazardous, and safe storage would be required at that stage. The banks are in fair condition, with no established trees. However, there are a number of burrows, at least some of which have been caused by metal-detectorists (observed 26.1.94); this damage needs to be prevented.

Site 47 A-C was the explosives laboratory (47A), with two associated stores (47 B and C). The sites of these buildings lie adjacent to King Rudding Lane, between the eastern perimeter track (site 59) and the fused bomb store (site 46). Site 47A lies north of the road and was served by two tarmac tracks leading from the road to both ends of the building. The site now exists as a rectangular concrete base for a Nissen hut, 16m x 8m in size. Site 47B lies 170m east of 47A, and follows the same pattern. 47C lay on the south side of the road, and was again served by two tracks. Site 47C was of different dimensions to the two other buildings, being 20m east-west and 5m north-south. Sites 47A-C are partly overgrown with brambles and birch saplings; this process is particularly advanced at site 47A.

Historical Summary

The economic and social development of the village is intrinsic to understanding the development of the Common.

Manorial History

The village of Skipwith is mentioned in the Domesday Book under the name of *Schiperwic*; which is an old (Anglo-Saxon) form modified by Scandinavian influence. The first element of the name means sheep, and the second element has various meanings including a camp or station, village, castle, bay or bend of a river (Smith 1937). The most likely translation of the village name is 'sheep farm' (*ibid.*).

In the Domesday Book *Schiperwic* consisted of 3 carucates belonging to Hugh son of Baldric, which before the Norman Conquest had been held by Gam (VCH). Subsequently the Bishop of Durham acquired 2 carucates and in 1200 enfeoffed Richard d'Avranches. The d'Avranches family held the Estate until c.1353. After this date it is known that this manor passed to the Skipwith family by marriage between Catherine d'Avranches and William Skipwith. The Skipwith family were first mentioned in the early 14th century. In 1086, the other carucate had passed to Robert Stutville. Overlordship of this carucate passed by marriage to the Wake family, and by a further marriage to the Earls of Kent. However, by the time of Sir Thomas Skipwith's death in 1418, when he was "seised of the whole manor of Skipwith", the Skipwiths were the sole owners of the entire village.

In 1709, Mary, widow of Willoughby Skipwith, sold the Estate to Francis Annesley. In 1801 Arthur Annesley sold the Estate to Thomas Bradford, who in 1802 sold it on to J.P. Toulson.

After the death of J.A.P. Toulson in 1889 his trustees sold the manor to Lord Wenlock and the manor of Skipwith became part of the Escrick Estate. Escrick Estate was inherited by Irene Forbes-Adam, niece of Lord Wenlock, in the early part of the 20th century.

Economic History

The Archaeological Evidence

The consideration of the aerial photographic evidence (section 3: p. 20), previous excavations (section 3: p. 15) and the standing earthworks on the Common (section 3: p. 28) have all indicated the wealth and extensive nature of land use on and around the Common from the Prehistoric period through to modern day.

Neolithic/Bronze Age

Known Bronze Age activity on the Common is confined to the four surviving Round barrows which indicate preferred burial practise of Bronze Age man in this area of the Vale of York. Unfortunately, no settlement has been conclusively attributed to this period, but there is the possibility that the concentration of crop marks directly to the north of these barrows may relate to the same period.

Iron Age

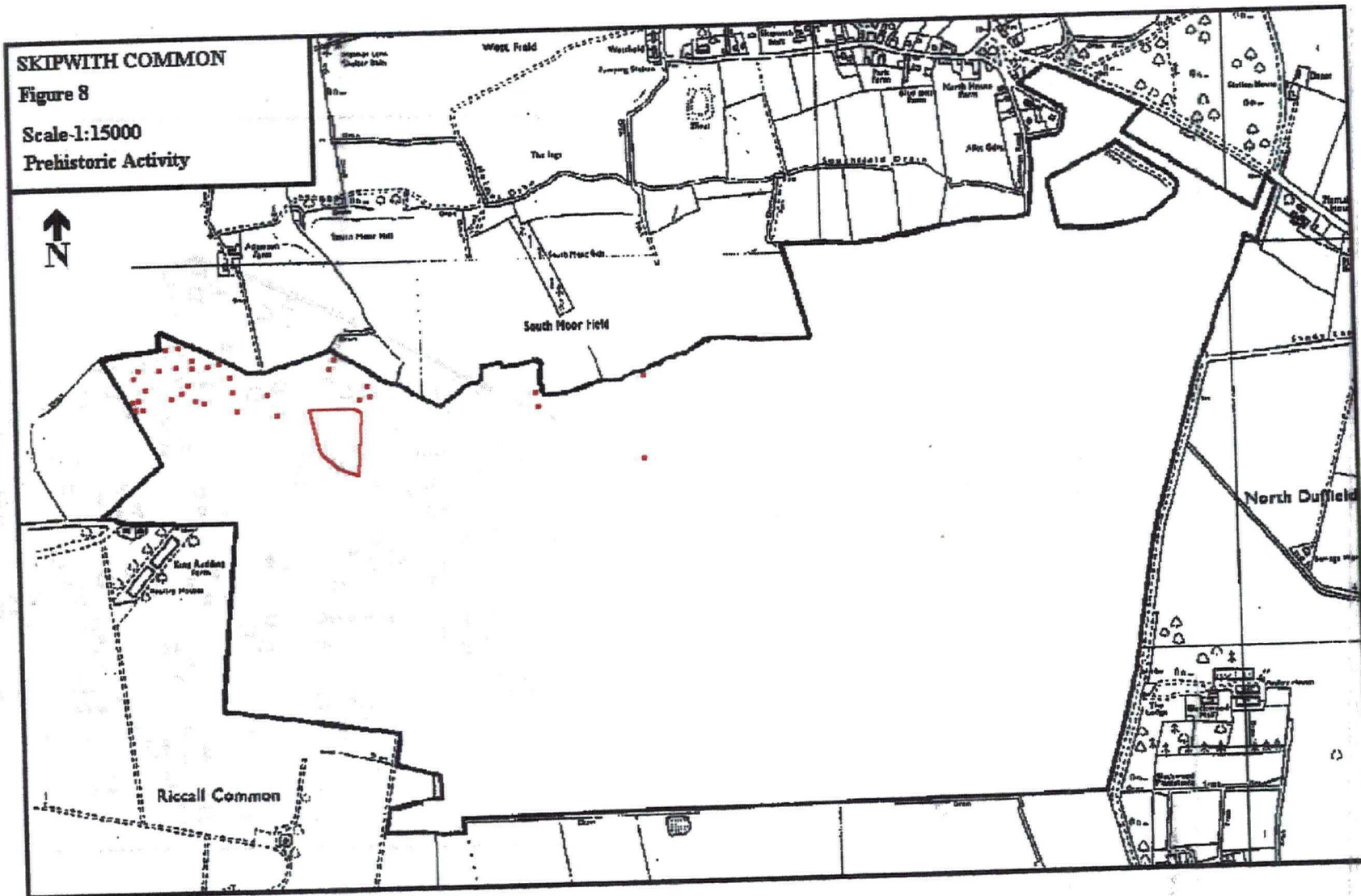
In the Iron Age, the north-western part of the Common sees an intense focus of funerary activity, with the raising of at least 25 Square barrows. Not only does this type of site exist within the Common but it is also seen to extend beyond the present day limits of the Common into the adjoining agricultural land to the north (Pl. 3). Aerial photographic evidence has indicated the presence of 4 more square barrows in the latter area, two of which are situated to the west of a large linear cropmark which may represent a boundary feature. The inter-relationship of boundary ditches and square barrows has been examined elsewhere, primarily by Dent at the sites of Garton and Wetwang Slacks on the Yorkshire Wolds (Dent 1982). He concluded that "the practise of building isolated burial mounds may reflect open settlement ... the growth of a nucleated cemetery ... suggests that settlement was stabilising around a central point" (Dent 1982, 450). The presence of the boundary cropmark to the north of the Common may have restricted further funerary use of land which was required for the settlement of a population that is assumed to have been expanding.

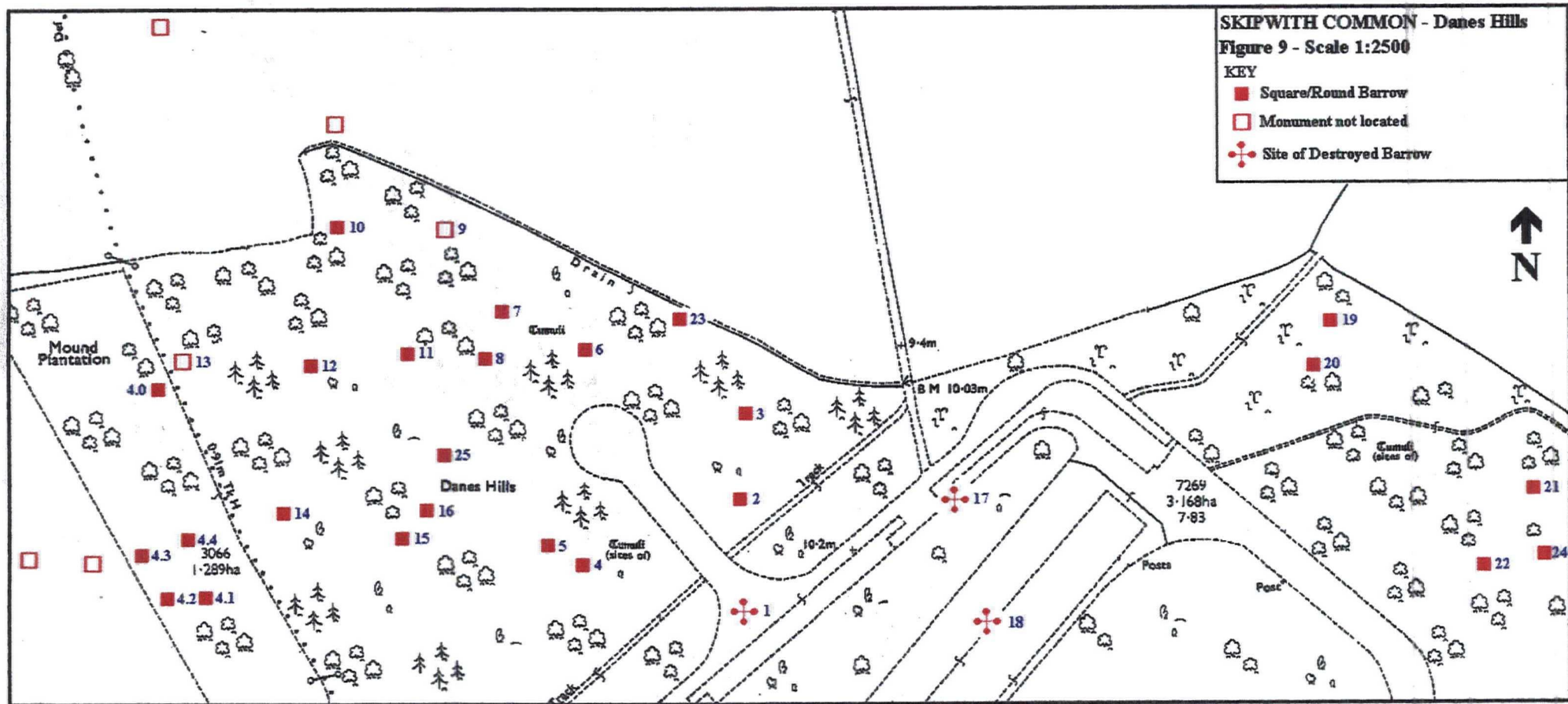
SKIPWITH COMMON

Figure 8

Scale 1:15000

Prehistoric Activity





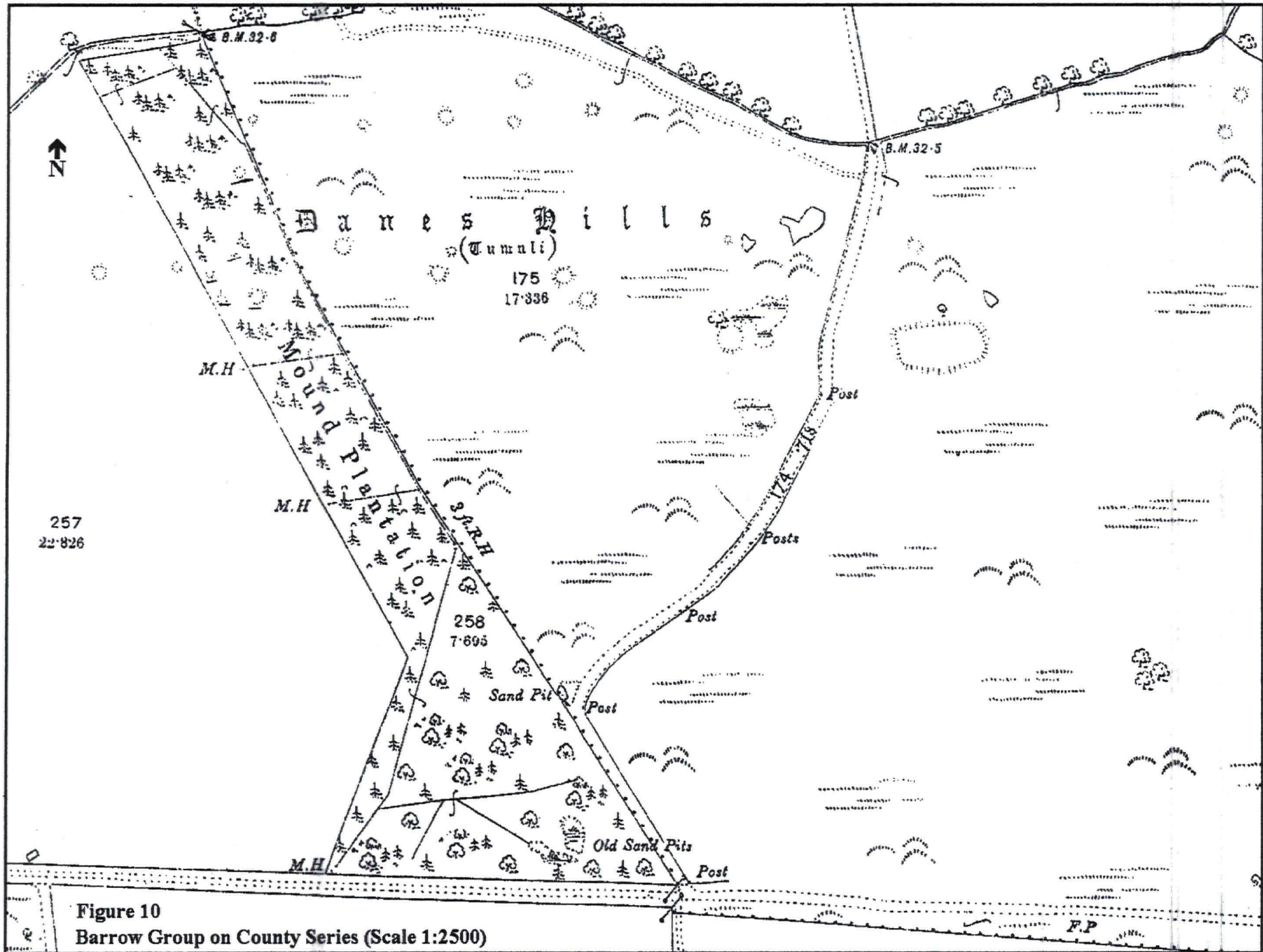


Figure 10
Barrow Group on County Series (Scale 1:2500)

Further examples of the relationship between settlement and linear boundaries were recorded by the excavations at Maiden's Grave Farm and Bell Slack (Stead 1977).

Unfortunately it is not possible to date the Square barrows on the Common. The early antiquarians which excavated the sites were primarily concerned with locating burials and impressive finds, rather than dating evidence from primary contexts. The finds from the barrows appear to have been confined to flint artefacts sometimes of the "crudest form" and "pieces of decayed iron of various shapes" (Proctor 1855). If one considers the typology of the barrow form (ie. square), the presence of cremations within a number of the barrows (ibid.) is peculiar in an Iron Age context and may indicate a late date for the site as shown by comparison to sites on the Continent (Decker & Scollar 1962).

It is apparent that the northern edge of the Common was being used for funerary purposes during the Bronze and Iron Ages; only a small proportion of these features appear to occur outside the Common. Comparison of the soil map (Fig. 3) and the earthwork plan (Fig. 7.1) shows that the distribution of funerary monuments corresponds with the poorer soils. The poorer soils of the Holme Moor/Sandburn Association (Appendix 1) would most probably have been marginal, if not totally unsuitable for cultivation in the Bronze and Iron Ages.

The occurrence of possible enclosures on the Common, as reported by Proctor (p. 00) and the 'encampment' mentioned by Burton (p. 00), are more difficult to explain. The fact that he was able to locate additional square barrows to those recorded by the Ordnance Survey surveyors indicates his ability to recognise earthworks. The problems arise in interpreting this data. Proctor (Proctor 1854) saw an enclosure with "single, double and even treble banks and ditches" which passed away from an area of elevated ground (ie. ground on the 10m contour). On the eastern side was an irregular enclosure (Figs. 5 and 8) "like a small field" which was also trenched and banked, and which enclosed 2 oval ring ditches in the north-east corner. He believed that this collection of features represented "an early British settlement", "the elevated area was the stronghold, the enclosure the cattle pen, the oval rings in the corner the herdsmen's huts and the square barrows with associated skeletal material to be the "peaceful repositories of the peasants". The excavated Square barrows produced no associated finds and so were interpreted as the bases of dwellings.

The interpretation of the Square barrows relies upon the work of previous excavators and their own interpretations, although it is hoped that future sample excavation and survey would be productive once the area is cleared of trees and undergrowth. The form of the Square barrows on the Common is consistent with other Iron Age sites in Eastern Yorkshire. However, they are oddities both in their position, in the Vale of York, where they are isolated from other La Tene finds, and because cremations were found there (Stead 1961). The peripheral position of the Skipwith Square barrows may be explained by the fact that Skipwith is on the south-western margin of the territory of the Parisi, the tribe with whom Square barrows were almost exclusively associated. The nearest known Square barrows to the Skipwith examples occur as crop marks in Bubwith and Skirpenbeck, 15 miles to the north-east (Loughlin and Miller 1979). The fact that Hodgeson found Roman pottery in the fill of some of the barrow ditches (Hodgeson 1959), suggests that the ditches were filling up during the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D., but not necessarily that the barrows were of Roman origin.

The only evidence for an enclosure is Proctor's plan and notes, and construction of the airbase would have seriously affected the area in which the enclosure reputedly lay. Without further evidence it is impossible to date this feature or carry the discussion any further.

Roman

Apart from the information on Roman activity outlined above, the only other information to date comes from the fieldwalking of a portion of South Moor Field in 1993 (MAP 1993). Romano-British sherds were recovered during the fieldwalking of an area immediately north of northern boundary of the Common. The corresponding cropmarks in this area (Pl. 5) are of rectangular enclosures which may represent field-systems, and the pottery may have been deposited during manuring.

During the excavation of a pond at Hill Farm (Oak Mere Fishery: SE 6622 3907) for N. Patrick Romano-British finds were recovered (Wagner 1980).

Anglo-Scandinavian

Archaeological evidence for this period in Skipwith is at present almost non-existent. It is possible that some of the cropmarks around the Common may relate to activity of this date, but without further assessment (i.e. fieldwalking and sample excavation) the evidence is lacking.

There is evidence for this period in the architecture of the tower of St Helens church, which was founded in 960 A.D. Within the tower of the Church is a piece of carved stone depicting a dragon swallowing its tail, an Anglo-Scandinavian representation of the end of the world (Ragnarok).

Medieval and post medieval periods

As mentioned above, there were 3 carucates (ie as much arable land as could be ploughed annually by 3 plough teams) in Skipwith at the time of the Domesday Book (1086). In addition there was woodland two leagues long and one broad.

Medieval clearance of the woodland produced large tracts of enclosed farm land. The evidence of the early assarting (clearance) is to be seen in the names of fields, i.e. those field names containing "hurst" (DDFA 14/21, 1657) and "ridding/rudding", eg. "Redness Rudding" and "South Ruddings" (DDFA 14/19, 1657). The latter document also refers to a close called "the sarte"; sarte is a shortened form of Assart meaning "a clearing in the woodland". DDFA 14/19 also refers to "a parcel of free moor called Forty Foot", apparently a reference to the Common. "Close" is also a term used to describe areas of enclosure, eg. Mill Close, situated within the north-east part of the Common (SE 6670 3855) is obviously an area enclosed directly from the Common.

By the mid 17th century there were 4 Open Fields in the village known as West, South, North and South Moor Fields (Escrick Park Estate map of 1769). This map shows South Ridding as a close between South Field and the Common (Escrick Park Estate map).

Open fields and the additional enclosed areas were one element in the economic life of the village. Enclosed meadows, pastures, woodland and large common wastes were also of great importance. Generous common rights on the waste areas were essential to pastoral economies, who would exploit them for turf digging as well as rough pasture (Hey 1986).

In the 13th and 14th centuries the Skipwith and d'Avranches families had shares in the woodland and Common (YAS xlv). In 1310 the parson of Skipwith surrendered his rights to have wood, pasture and turf in Skipwith wood and in return was granted 5 acres of wood for his own use, common pasture wherever Richard d'Avranches' free tenants had it and 15 loads of turves a year (Cal. Pat 1307-130). Further evidence for the cutting of peat on the Common comes from a document dated 1333 which records "Redditum octo carectarum turbarum que dicuntur petes cum pert in Skypwyth" (ibid. 1333).

In 1636 Willoughby Skipwith gave to Robert Pinkney under a 21 year lease "free common on Skipwith Moore with liberty of digging turves and cutting whins (as the other inhabitants have)" (DDFA 14/15).

In 1642 Willoughby Skipwith granted Robert Pinckney for 21 years "pasture for 6 beasts, 1 horse, 80 sheep, 2 swine", and "likewise for geese and ducks" in Skipwith Moore (800 ac), also "3 wain loads of turves and 1 man's load of whins from same moore" (14.6.1642: DDFA 14/270).

In 1766 John Raper received from Banastre Walton the right to "common of turbary and free fishing" (DDFA 14/354).

In June of 1800 Henry Pierson was granted the right of "common pasture and turbary in Skipwith" (DDFA 14/361). In 1821, William Harper, as part of the sale of various parcels of land and buildings received "common of pasture and turbary in Barby, Osgodby and Skipwith" (DDFA 14/417(B)).

The above extracts from the Calendar of documents of the Escrick Park Estate illustrate that rights of turbary existed on the Common for a period exceeding 500 years. The visible traces of peat extraction exist in the form of a series of ponds (Fig 11: Pl. 1).

Turf or peat was for centuries, especially after the forests were cleared, the chief fuel available for domestic use. The right of turbary gave the right to cut peat in a certain area, in this case Skipwith Common. Peat was extracted using customary procedures and correct methods of working with special tools.

The tools in peat extraction were a cutter or flaying spade, a peat spade or slicer, and a pricker (Fig. 12). The cutter resembles a hay spade with a bent handle. The flaying spade was a large tool used to remove turfs when clearing the land. Both were used by pushing horizontally. The slicer had a small flange or wing, which enabled two sides of peat, one broad, and one narrow, to be cut at a stroke. It was used with a downward action by the workman standing at the top of the face of the peat pot, or sometimes with a horizontal action from the bottom. This tool was made by local blacksmiths to a pattern which varied from area to area. The oricker pricked and nicked the third side along the bottom of each spit (Hartley and Ingleby 1985).

Generally speaking, some peat pots were deep, others shallow, depending on the depth of the peat, so that the face or bench where the cutting proceeded varied in height from two or three spits to six or more. First, the old peat, which had been exposed to frost was cleared away, and the top layer of turf pared off. By customary usage these were placed at the base of the face, then the worker began with the slicer. About six peats might be supported at a time on the spade and cast into the low peat barrow.

Barrowed at once to firm dry ground the peats were spread in close rows. Then in about 3-7 days, depending on the weather, they hardened and were set into piles. This involved two, three, or four peats being propped up against each other to allow the wind to blow through them. More peats could be heaped up and around the central core. The peat shrunk considerably whilst drying.

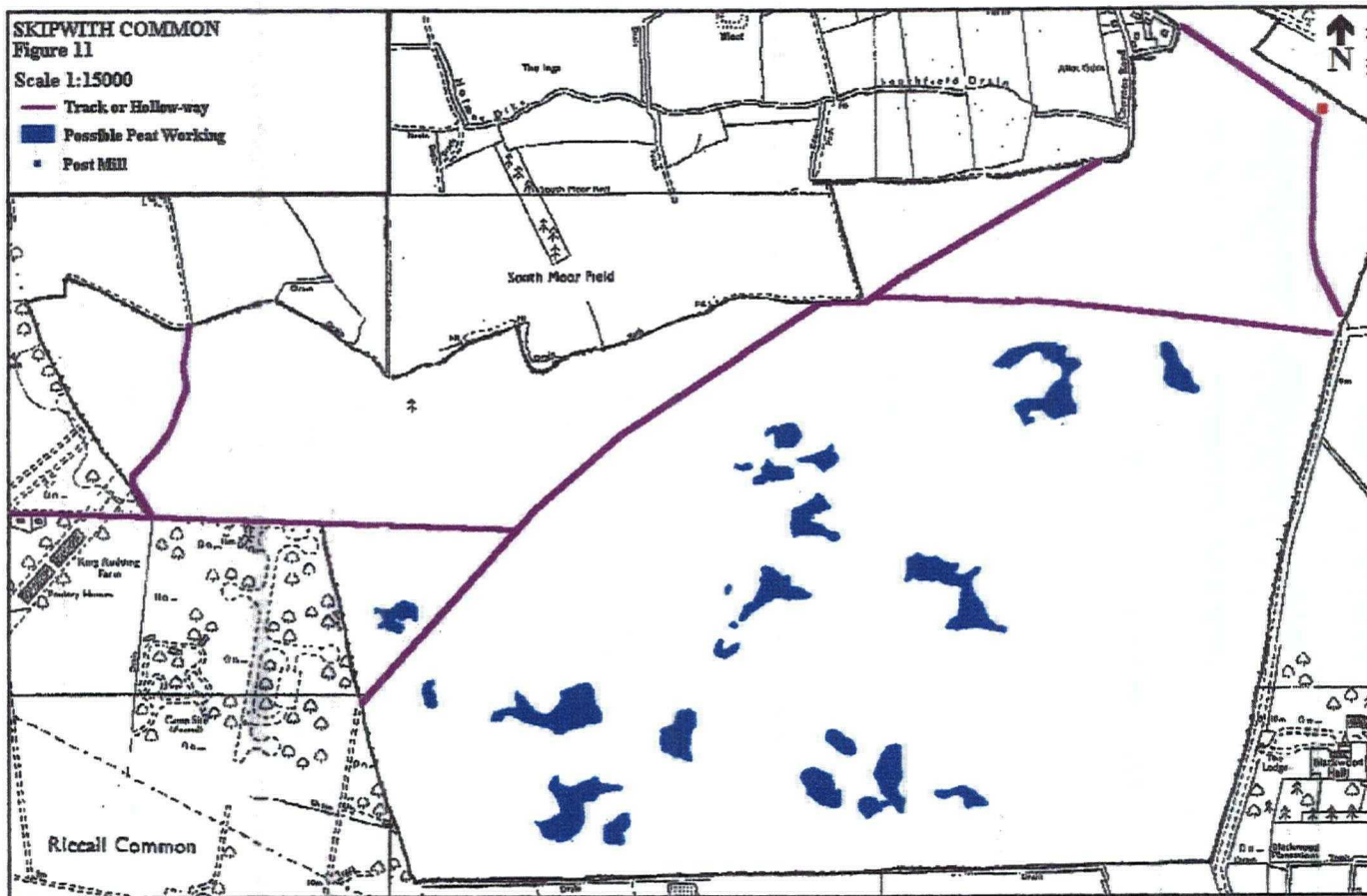
Finally the peats were stacked in a pike or rick. These stacks were carefully made. A circle was marked out, and peats stood on end from the base to form a pyramid. Small broken pieces were sometimes thrown inside. Once stacked it would appear that the peat did not spoil and could be removed from the site when required. One stack generally equated to a cart load.

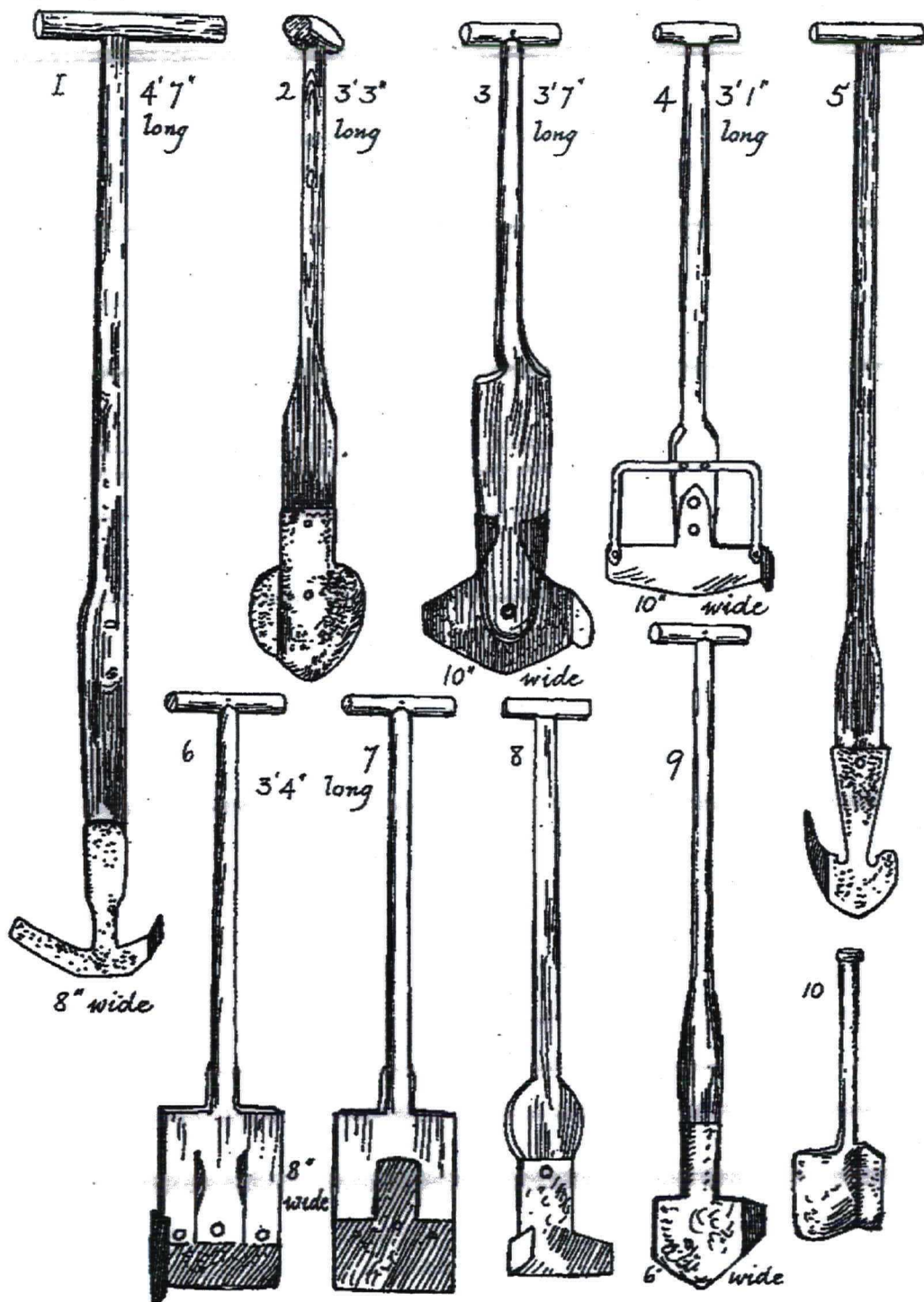
Peat carts were of light construction and of varied types. Some were constructed with wooden wheels, others were coups (wheel-barrows) fitted with peat shelvings, or coups specially made for the job with high latted sides.

The peats from the bottom of the peat pot tended to dry black and very hard and therefore compared very favourably with coal.

It is clear from the documentary sources that the Common was used for grazing in the medieval and post medieval periods. The poor quality of the soils, along with the value of activities protected by Rights of Common, dictated that it was impractical to consider enclosing the whole of the Common. Generally speaking, only the sectors that possessed better quality soils eg. South Moor Field, partly under Kexby Association soils (Figs. 2 and 3), were removed from the Common for cultivation.

One of the redundant peat workings, Wash Dyke, may take its name from pastoral use of the Common, referring to the washing of sheep. This process generally took place in June. At one time a better price was paid for washed wool. Washing encouraged the growth of the rise, the new wool which lifts the fleece from the skin of the sheep and the state of which largely determines the right time for clipping, which usually took place about ten days after washing. Recent aerial photography of the Common (Fig. 6) has located a sub circular feature which due to its location, 50m to the west of Wash Dyke, may have acted as a holding pen for the sheep during washing.





Peat Cutting Tools

Figure 12

In addition to the peat working, the northern part of the Common was the focus for the preparation of flax for the linen industry (see above). A date for the construction of the line ponds is difficult. The fact that processing flax formed an important cottage industry in the post medieval period might suggest an origin in the medieval period. The complex nature of the eastern group of line ponds could also be explained by longevity of use, the complex arrangement coming about through periodic remodelling of the ponds.

Documentary evidence really only exists within the Estate records from c. 1616, even so in the 17th century it would appear that flax was an important part of the economic life of the people of Skipwith. In a will of 1618, Isabell Buttrie left a parcel of land called 'Lyncroft' to her daughters (DDFA 14/8). A Revocation of Uses of 1657 mentions 'Lincrofts' (DDFA 14/19). There are later references to 'Lynelands' (1713, DDFA 14/68) and 'Line Lands' (1732, DDFA 14/101). The various forms 'lyn', 'lin', 'lyne' and 'line' would appear to derive from the Old English 'line', which means flax. References quoted would therefore appear to record land where flax was grown.

Perhaps the most interesting reference to this period and the cultivation of flax comes in 1768 when Thomas Proctor of Selby, a flax dresser, and William Chapman of Whitby, a sailmaker, purchased land including Lingcroft and Mill Hill Close (DDFA 14/105 & 166).

Flax was chiefly cultivated for the seeds of its blue flowers which were taken to the Selby mills and crushed to produce linseed oil. The stems were also dressed locally and often stored in the old Abbeys barn before being shipped to textile factories in the West Riding and made into linen. Before the advent of this more structured industry, these processes were carried out within the village.

In the late 18th and 19th centuries the flax industry became important for the economy of Selby. Flax was grown extensively in the area. The importance of this crop is seen in the fact that three markets a year were held in Selby solely for flax, on the Tuesday before Candlemas (2nd of February), Thursday before Old Martinmas (11th of November) and the Thursday before Christmas.

Other small scale industries on the Common included sand extraction (discussed above).

As mentioned above a windmill stood on the Common. In 1616 a windmill formed part of the sale of land and buildings to Richard Bowes and Ralph Lodge from William and Anne Skipwith (DDFA 14/276). In the same year documents mention "Miller lands" (DDFA 14/4) and "Milne Close" (DDFA 14/5). In 1661 there is a reference to "Milnes Hill Close" (DDFA 14/32). In 1708 a mortgage document (DDFA 14/62) mentions "Milne Roods in South Field"; 'rood' can mean clearing. Milne Rood appears in an assignment of 1734 (DDA 14/105) and a lease of 1741 (DDA 14/109). In 1772 refers to "Milner lands" (DDA 14/173).

In 1709 2 windmills are mentioned (DDA 14/250) and again in 1828 (DDA 14/201).

In an assignment of 1801 a "windmill" is mentioned (DDA 14/181). In 1818 a tenancy agreement states "messuage with post mill and 2 parcels of land enclosed from the moor" (DDA 14/192); this tenancy agreement is renewed in 1834 (DDA 14/210) when J.A.P. Toulson and Samuel Arrand, miller, agreed on an increase in rent from £26 5s in 1818 to £34 in 1834.

The right to grind corn was generally held the lord of the manor. In practice, milling was farmed out to the miller for a cash rent payable to the Lord of the manor, as can be seen by the transaction between Toulson, lord of the manor, and Arrand, miller.

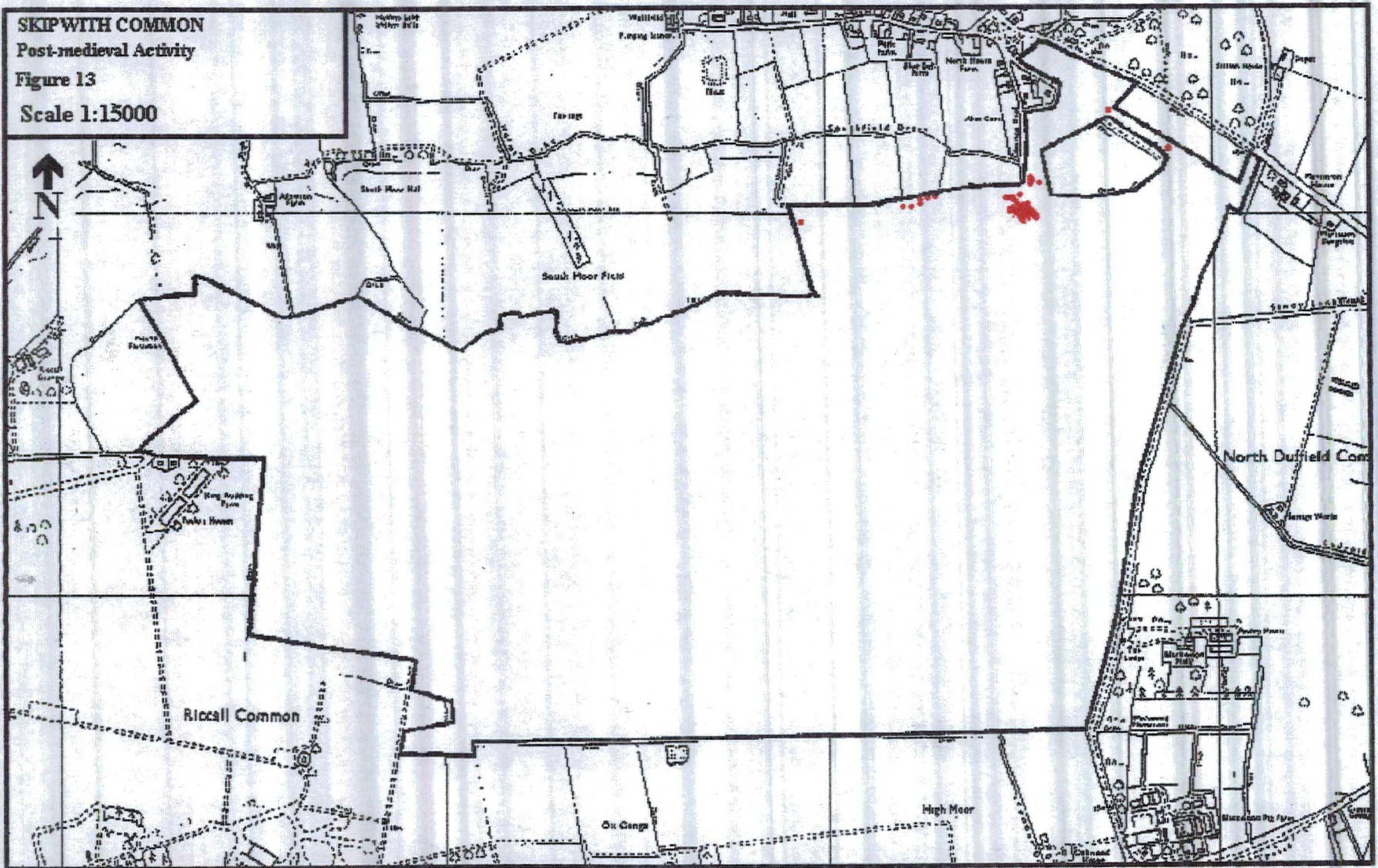
The location of the windmills can be ascertained from cartographic study. The mill situated in the area known as Old Mill Hill is to be found on the area of Common known as Back Common (SE 6682 3849, Fig 00) which is just to the north of present study area. The second mill (Site No. 32) was situated within Front Common at SE 6688 3816 (Fig. 15). It is this mill which is probably one referred to in 1818, along with a messuage and land. The messuage was probably Mill Farm which is shown on the First Edition OS maps of the Common (SE 6700 3811) but by the early 20th century it had been demolished (there is no reference to this building on the 10:560 map of c. 1932). The

SKIPWITH COMMON

Post-medieval Activity

Figure 13

Scale 1:15000



land referred to as being "enclosed from the moor" is presumably the area known as Mill Closes (SE 6670 3815) and depicted on the Estate map of 1768-9.

The post mill would have been constructed on four large timber beams with a central post. The cross beams would have been set at right angles and laid into a shallow trench which would have also been packed and most probably weighted. The central post was generally a tree trunk set into a large posthole set into the mound. The sails were attached to the shafting and gear wheels, and ultimately to the grindstones within the mill. The whole structure would bear on the central post so that the sails faced directly into the wind. The purpose of the mound was to raise the mill above the surrounding land and therefore to fully exploit any breeze (Fig. 15).

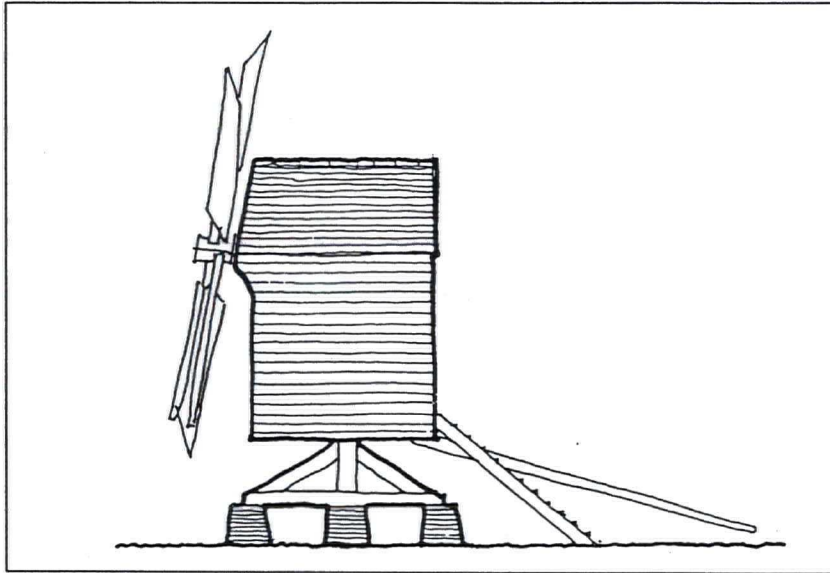


Figure 15.

A final piece of information on post medieval events on the Common is that it was the rallying point for an assembly of the rebels during the Pilgrimage of Grace in 1536 (L & P Hen VIII). There is no further mention of any specific events taking place on the Common at the time, other than the rallying of the rebels under the leadership of Sir Robert Aske, who was executed in York in 1537.

Modern period.

A hand-drawn map of the Common, ?1860s, shows a number of elements relating to its use (DDFA 14/256; Fig. 17). The Selby road bisected Lord's or Hall Moor on a south-west to north-east alignment, with a road to Riccall leading off it in a north-westerly direction. Three plantations of trees ("planted by Mr. Toulson") were depicted. 'Dane Hills' are roughly sketched at the north-east of the Common, adjacent to an area where 'J.G.T.' (Toulson) "took down the wood". In addition, the southern and western boundaries of the Common were marked by boundary posts encribed 'S' (for Skipwith).

Throughout the 19th century the open fields remained and the Common rights were still exercised, although payments were exacted by the lord of the manor for those who held the rights. In 1807 14 people paid for 14 'stints' (rights) on the Common. From 1807-19 payments were made for the extraction of turf (peat), whins, ling and sand, and for grazing (DDFA 14/265). In 1822 30 common right holders were listed. By 1869 this number had decreased to 22 and in 1904 there were 34 stints, of which the lord of the manor held 26, 6 being held by villagers. This number remains the same at the time of writing.

The Common rights are enshrined in the *Regulation and Inclosure (Skipwith) Provisional Orders Act (1901)*, which provided for the appointment of five conservators to oversee use of the common,

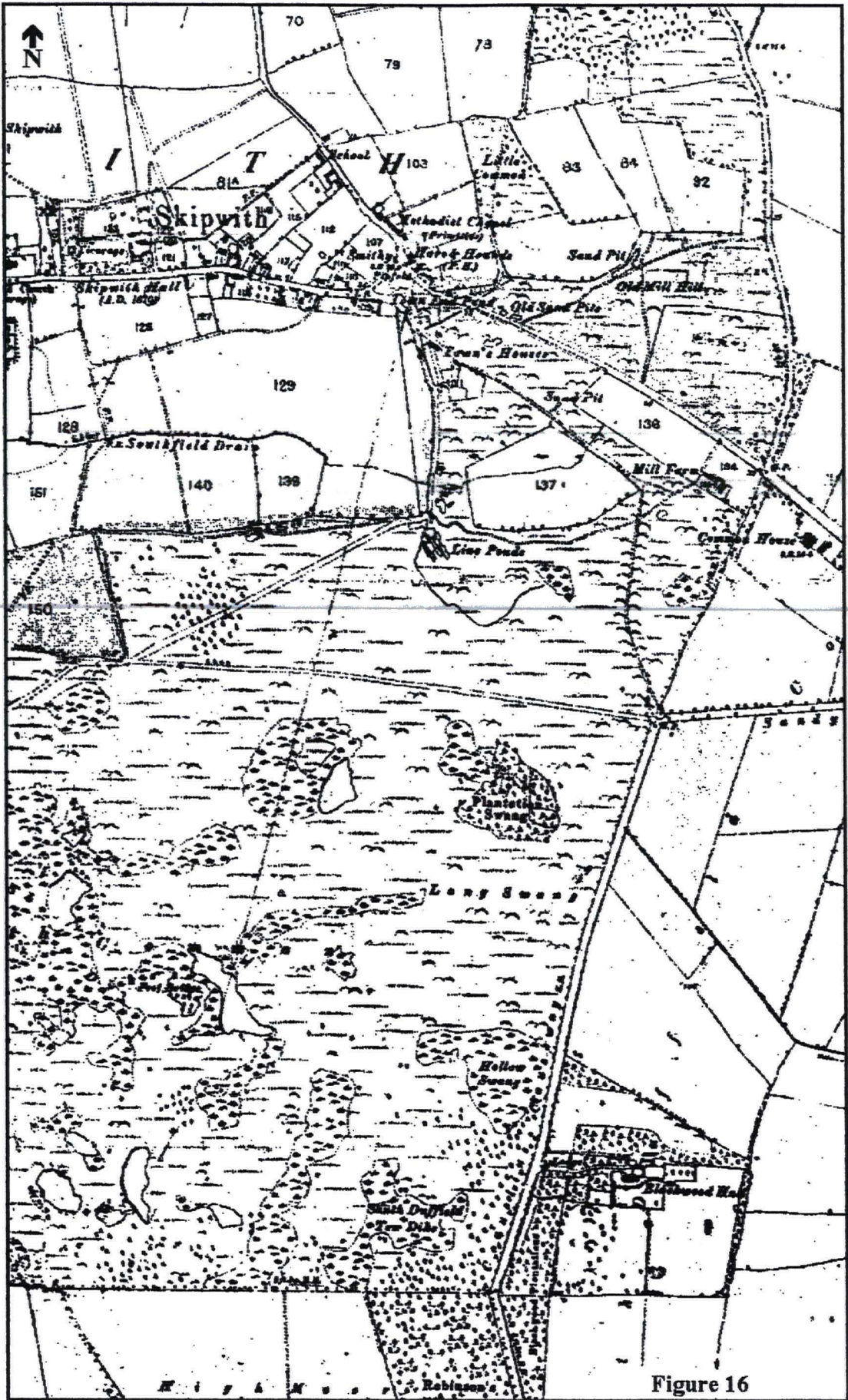
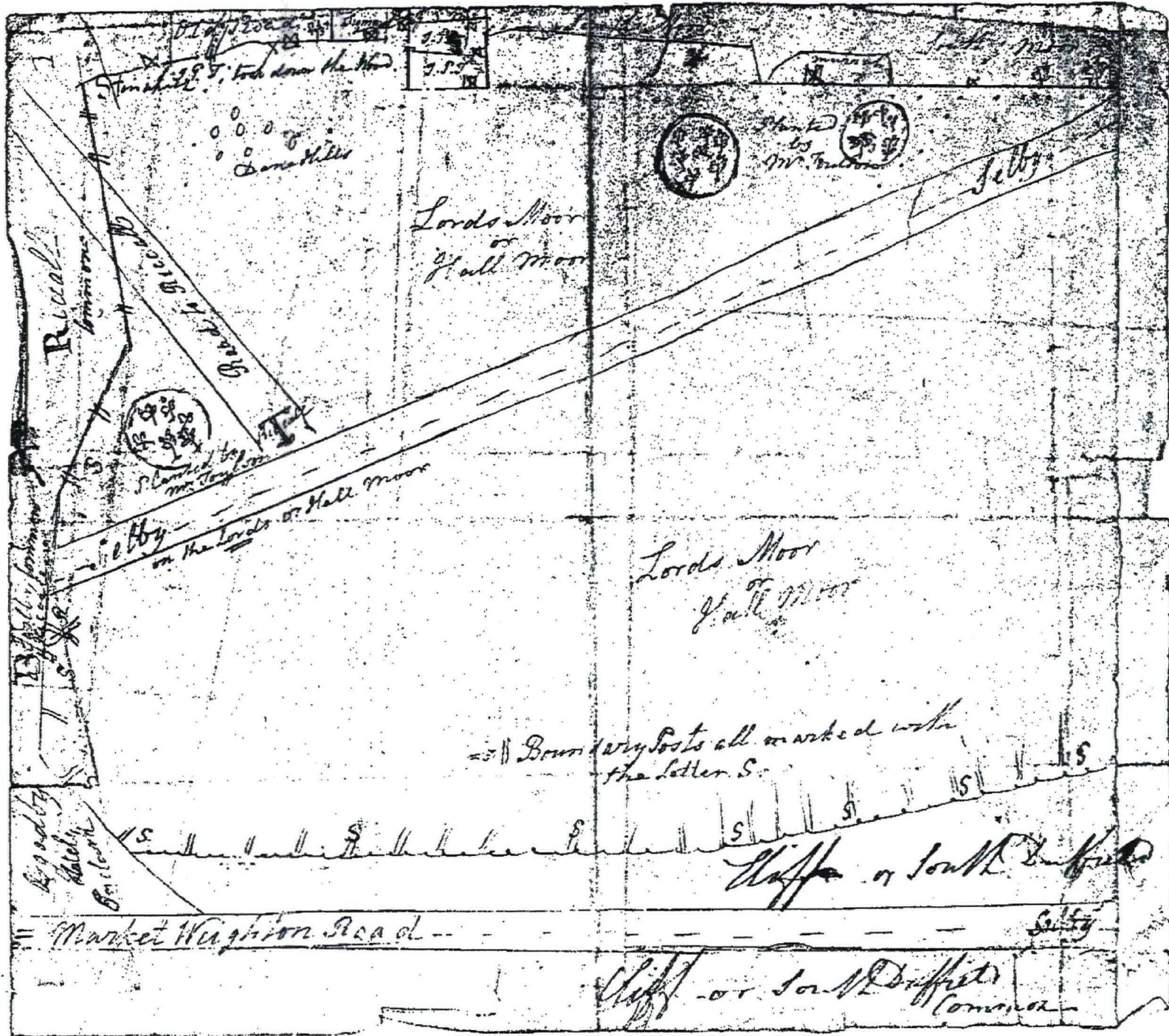


Figure 16



Reproduced with kind permission of Brymor Jones Library, the University of Hull. Reference DDFA 14256.

Figure 17

whether for grazing, turbarry or recreation. It was also stressed that the tumuli on the Common "shall so far as possible be preserved by the said conservators".

Up to the First World War grazing rights appear to have been exercised on the Common. After the War and the economic depression of the 1920's it would appear that the use of common rights waned. It is also known that in the parish of Skipwith that the number of working farms also declined.

In 1918, a plan to reclaim and enclose the Common was put forward by the east Riding of Yorkshire Agricultural Executive Committee (DDFA 13/324). The estimated cost was £53000, which could have been reduced by the use of demobilised soldiers for labour. The scheme was dropped as it was contrary to the 1901 Enclosure Award.

Between the two wars it would appear that the Common was left to return to nature. However, the Bird Preservation Society recorded a drop in the number of duck visiting the Common (DDFA 13/944). The advent of the Second World War, and the need to take part of the Common for a new airforce base (RAF Riccall), reversed the Common's fortunes.

RAF Riccall opened for operations in September 1942 (Halpenny 1982), one of 389 military airfields constructed in Britain between 1939 and 1943 (Terraine 1985; Fig. 18).

Construction work had begun in 1941, with the requisition of 88.596 ac of Skipwith Common by the Air Ministry (DDRA 13/1052), plus further land from Barlby and Riccall Commons. In terms of the immediate affect upon Skipwith Common, the creation of the airfield involved the cessation of grazing rights, the destruction of a public highway which gave access to Leapers (now Adamsons) Farm from the Common, the opening up of a drain by the Air Ministry, and the felling of a number of trees (ibid.).

The airfield was the base for 1658 HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit), one of the main training units for No. 4 Bomber Group which was embarking on the bombing campaign against Germany and occupied Europe. 1658 HCU was formed to ensure the rapid training of air crew who were stepping up from twin-engined bombers, such as the Handley Page Hampden and Vickers Armstrong Wellington, to the more complicated four-engined Handley Page Halifax. Rapid and efficient aircrew training was essential due to both the expansion of the bombardment of Europe and the heavy losses involved.

The nominal flight strength of the unit was 32 aircraft, and the total compliment of officers and other ranks was around 1200 men and women.

During the period from October 1942 to April 1945 at least 768 crews were trained at RAF Riccall (Lunn and Arbon 1989), which at seven men per crew gives a figure 5378. Crews were British, Canadian, Australian and New Zealander, plus a single Norwegian. Besides training, other duties included air-sea searches for crashed aircrew in the North Sea. In addition, pilots were temporarily drafted to combat units, both for combat experience, and to make up numbers in large raids. In June 1943, four pilots from Riccall took part in a raid on Dusseldorf; only two returned.

Other fatalities occurred during training, sometimes due to the parlous state of the aircraft. Many of the aircraft had seen long service with combat units and hence were liable to mechanical failure. A total of 88 aircrew were killed during training, and another twenty-one were posted 'failed to return', ie. their bodies were not found. None of the aircrew fatalities occurred in the immediate vicinity of the airfield, though many lesser accidents took place during landing and take-off. However, five fatalities occurred among the ground crew in May 1943, when there was an explosion in a Nissen Hut at 'D' flight dispersal.

With the end of the war in Europe in April 1945, Bomber Command was rapidly scaled down. 1658 HCU was disbanded in the same month, and the base was transferred to No. 44 Group Transport Command, flying Liberators and Yorks. In December 1945, the base was transferred to Maintenance Command, and the status of the airfield was reduced to 'care and maintenance'. Flying

operations ceased. No. 91 Motor Unit used the base for storage purposes until the early 1950s, after which the station was closed. The Air Ministry finally disposed of the site on 1st February 1960.

After the war the Common was neglected, the World War II features were left to fall into ruin and nature began to recolonise the Common. Silver birch turned large open areas into thick woodland cover and in the more open areas bracken and brambles prevented easy access.

The Forbes Adam family acquired the Common and Estate in 1954. The main use of the Common at this time was to create habitat for game shooting, particularly of duck, partridge and pheasant. A game keeper operated on the Common at the time.

Recognition of the special qualities of the Common, in terms of its wildlife, intensified after the war, culminating in 1968 when the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust acquired the lease of the reserve. It is only with the impetus of the Yorkshire Wildlife Trust, helped and financed by English Nature, that the Common is returning to the type of landscape which was an accepted and intrinsic part of Prehistoric and medieval man's way of life.