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**Aldro Earthworks
SAM 20463
Birdstall Wold
North Yorkshire**

Archaeological Watching Brief

**January 2000
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Contents	Page
Figure List	2
Plate List	2
1. Introduction	3
2. Geology	3
3. Archaeological and Historical Background	3
4. Methodology	4
5. Results	4
6. Conclusion	6
7. Bibliography	6

Figure List

	Page
1. Location Map. Scale 1: 25000.	7
2. Map of Aldro Scheduled Monument. Scale 1: 10000	8
3. Location of Trench. Scale 1:12500.	9

Plate List

1. View Showing Southern End of Linear Earthwork and Road Embankment. Facing South.	10
2. Aldro Rath Barrow, Showing Truncation by Road. Facing North-East.	10
3. Aldro Rath: Northern Arm of Barrow Bank. Facing East.	11
4. Aldro Rath: Southern Arm of Barrow Bank. Facing East.	11
5. View of Infilled Earthwork Ditch. Facing North-West.	12
6. Section Through Northern Earthwork Bank. Facing East.	12

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1. Introduction

An Archaeological Watching Brief was conducted by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. at Aldro Earthworks Scheduled Monument, Birdstall Wold, North Yorkshire, on January 24th 2000. The site lies to the north of Aldro Farm (SE 8080 6320 : Fig. 1) at a mean height of 230m AOD. The work was undertaken on behalf of North Yorkshire County Council and involved the monitoring of groundworks associated with the widening of the minor road from Thixendale to Leavening.

All work has been funded by North Yorkshire County Council.

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2. Geology

The site lies on Andover 1 Association soils. Soils of this type consist of thin loamy topsoils occurring over chalky fine rendzina subsoils, above a solid geology of chalk (Mackney 1983, 91).

3. Archaeological and Historical Background

In the vicinity of Aldro Farm there are a number of linear earthworks and barrows which were systematically recorded by J.R. Mortimer (Mortimer 1905, 55-82). The

linear earthworks are thought to date to the Middle Bronze Age and in many cases are directly associated with bowl barrow funerary monuments of Late Neolithic to Early Bronze Age date. The archaeological significance of this Prehistoric landscape is reflected in the fact that nine barrows, a linear boundary earthwork and two cross-dykes have together been listed as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Aldro Earthworks, SAM No. 20463 : Fig. 2).

The current road-widening scheme posed a threat to two elements of these Monuments (Fig. 3). These were the bowl barrow known as Aldro Rath and the associated linear boundary earthwork. The existing road already cuts the linear earthwork and whilst the central barrow mound survives intact, the encircling ditch and bank have been partially destroyed where they pass under the line of the road.

4. Methodology

The monitored groundworks consisted of a single trench running along the eastern edge of the existing road surface. All excavations were carried out using a back-acting mechanical digger with a toothless bucket, the work being undertaken with full archaeological supervision.

5. Results

The monitored trench was 1m in width and was excavated to a mean depth of 0.1m from surface level. A total length of approximately 120m of trench was monitored, from the junction with Vessey Pasture Lane opposite Aldro Farm, to a point north of the east-west earthwork cut by the road (Fig. 3).

The section of trench cut from Aldro Farm to Aldro Rath barrow exposed a brown silty subsoil deposit with 60% inclusions of broken chalk nodules and fractured natural flint. No finds were recovered and the deposit was interpreted as natural. Overlying this deposit was 0.1m of modern tarmac road surfacing.

From a point approximately 10m north of Aldro Farm the road surface rose above the height of the surrounding ground with a well-defined bank along its eastern edge. No soil changes were noted in the base of the trench, indicating that the bank was formed of upcast natural material. This section of road follows the supposed north-south line of the linear earthwork south of Aldro Rath. However, no dating evidence was recovered from this section of the trench and the possibility exists that the bank is a modern construction, rather than the remnants of the Prehistoric earthwork. In support of this theory, it was observed that the southernmost tip of the visible earthworks south of Aldro Rath were discontinuous with the line of the roadside bank (Pl. 1).

Whilst the central mound of Aldro Rath survives intact, the surrounding ring-ditch and earth bank have been truncated on the western side by the creation of the modern road (Pl. 2). At both points where the barrow bank is cut by the road the bank was found to have been eroded or deliberately cut back at a point 1.2m east of the road so that no evidence of the earthworks could be seen in the eastern trench section (Pls. 3 & 4). No evidence of the line of the bank was seen in the base of the trench and it must therefore be assumed that the earthwork has been completely destroyed where it passed beneath the road.

A deposit of modern hardcore and tarmac was seen in the base of the trench at a point directly opposite the barrow mound. This deposit was approximately 18m in length and roughly corresponds to the line of the barrow ring-ditch where it passes beneath the road. This deposit represents in-filling of the barrow ditch in order to create a level road surface and it may be assumed that the ditch survives, albeit in a truncated form, beneath this deposit.

The road cuts the linear earthwork at a point north of Aldro Rath. To the east of the road, the earthwork consists of two earth banks separated by a well-defined ditch. A second deposit of modern tarmac and hardcore, 5.80m in length, was seen in the base of the trench at the point where the road crosses the line of the ditch (Pl. 5). At this point the road is raised above the level of the ditch and this deposit represents

in-filling of the ditch during construction of the modern road. It may be assumed that the ditch survives in a truncated form beneath the road.

No evidence of the line of the linear banks was seen in plan, but an oblique section was obtained at the point where the northern bank was cut by the present excavation (Pl. 6). The exposed section of the bank was 0.25m in height, 6.50m in length and consisted of a brown silty deposit with a high percentage of chalk and flint inclusions, which was interpreted as upcast natural subsoil. This was sealed by a humic topsoil deposit varying from 0.1m - 0.35m in depth. The limited height of the bank as recorded in section is explained by the fact that, as with the barrow bank, the earthwork bank was noticeably eroded at the point where it was cut by the road.

6. Conclusion

The present road-widening scheme afforded a useful opportunity to assess the survival of the Scheduled Monuments beneath the modern road surface. Whilst no evidence of upstanding earthwork features were seen beneath the road, the survival of the barrow ditch and linear ditch were confirmed. However, the limited depth of the excavations meant that it was impossible to accurately assess the degree of preservation.

The limited extent of the groundworks meant that, on this occasion, no significant damage occurred to the earthworks.

7. Bibliography

Mackney, D. 1984 Soils and Their Use in Northern England. Harpenden.

Mortimer, J.R. 1905 Forty Years' Researches in British and Saxon Burial Mounds
of East Yorkshire. London.