FIELD ARCHAEOLOGY SPECIALISTS LTD

University of York
King's Manor
York YO1 7EP

TELEPHONE (01904) 433952
FACSIMILE (01904) 433935
E-MAIL arch18@york.ac.uk

Neil Campling
NORTH YORKSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
Heritage Unit
County Hall
Northallerton
North Yorkshire
DL7 8AH

6 November 2002

Your ref:
Our ref:

NYCC HER	
SNY	7630
ENY	1235
CNY	
Parish	2170
Rec'd	7/11/02

Dear Neil

PRELIMINARY STATEMENT - NOSTERFIELD QUARRY

Further to our recent telephone conversation, please find enclosed a copy of a preliminary statement prepared after the last watching brief at Nosterfield quarry. I am afraid the plans are rather general since we have not yet been instructed to undertake the post-excavation, however, the alignments are correct.

I hope this will be of some use to you pending the preparation of a formal report. Mike Griffiths has informed me that the client is due to hold a public day on the 18th November, after which we will be able to discuss formally the next stage of the project.

Yours sincerely
For and on behalf of Field Archaeology Specialists

Annette Roe
Senior Project Manager

N.Y.C.C.
ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES
Recd. - 7 NOV 2002
Pass to NC
Ackd.
Ansd.

Preliminary statement of results from Nosterfield Quarry (SE 7661 0886)

Since 1995, mineral extraction at the Nosterfield quarry has provided the opportunity to investigate an area of *c*.53.1ha. on a site immediately to the northeast of the Thornborough henge complex. An area of 4 x 3km centred on these henges has been the subject of a long-term research project by Jan Harding of Newcastle University (Fig 1). The henges are sited on a gravel platform flanking the River Ure and are equally spaced *c*.550m apart on a NW-SE alignment, the central one overlying part of an earlier cursus . Each is *c*.240m in diameter and is defined by a double entrance through a pair of ditches and a massive intervening bank. These are the largest such sites outside the Wessex chalklands and the complexity of their layout is matched only by three similar monuments a few kilometres downstream, Nunwick, Hutton Moor and Cana Barn and by the site of Big Rings at Dorchester on Thames in Oxfordshire (Harding 1998,27). Harding's recent survey and excavation programme has tentatively identified zones of activity in the vicinity of the henges, such as the complete lack of material from the area in the immediate vicinity of the henges from the middle Neolithic onwards, and suggests that activity in this landscape was a structured over a long period of time (Harding 1998,37). The results of the watching brief at the Nosterfield Quarry site will help significantly in the interpretation and understanding of this landscape.

RESULTS 1995-2002 (Fig. 2)

The excavations have produced evidence for a sequence of activity from the early Neolithic to the early Roman period. The results can be expressed in terms of the principal feature types:

Linear features included large ditches up to 4m in width and 1.50m deep which cross large sections of the landscape and suggest a grid of boundaries orientated NE-SW. One of these cut a ring ditch and they seem to have been respected by two of the pit alignments.

The pit alignments fell into four different types: One alignment comprised sub-circular pits up to 0.80m in diameter and *c*.0.30m deep spaced *c*.1m apart and aligned NNE-SSW, turning to the NNW at the northern end; another comprised a ditch *c*.2m wide and 1.20m deep running SSE-NWW and turning into a pit alignment as it turned towards the north, with sub-rectangular pits, *c*.2.60m x 1.30m x 0.50m deep, spaced *c*.0.50m apart; the third type was seen in two almost parallel alignments orientated NW-SE, comprising elongated sub-rectangular pits *c*.1.8m x 1.20m x 1.0m deep, spaced *c*.0.80m apart; and the fourth type was seen in two parallel alignments running almost N-S, each comprising at least nine large circular pits, eroded to 1.80m in diameter at the top, and up to 1.80m deep, spaced *c*.10m apart. None of the pits showed evidence for posts.

Miscellaneous scattered pit groups were excavated, predominantly across the eastern half of the site in areas overlooking low-lying ground, and produced occasional concentrations of lithic material, pottery, two stone hand-axes and part of a conical jet bead.

Three ring ditches were excavated on the western part of the site, which appear to be non-domestic in character. One, 4.9m in diameter, was badly truncated and another, 7.5m in diameter, was cut by one of the large ditches making it unclear whether either of them had any interruptions or internal features; the third, 17m in diameter, has been interpreted as the quarry ditch for a barrow, since it was clearly uninterrupted and had an unurned

cremation within its circle. This last was cut by one of the pit alignments.

Burials, other than the cremation within the ring-ditch, fell into two categories: A group of 10 *cremations*, four of which were in inverted urns preliminarily dated to the Middle Bronze Age (Vyner, *pers. comm.*), seemed to be positioned along the line of a ditch orientated NW-SE; and two *inhumations* were discovered, one of them placed in a partially silted up pit belonging to one of the alignments. Each inhumation comprised disarticulated bone belonging to one individual apparently carefully placed in the ground after defleshing (Holst, *pers. comm.*). C_{14} dating may be possible on one of these.

A well-preserved Roman oven/kiln, dated by archaeomagnetic analysis to 100-170AD, was excavated and although it was the only securely Roman feature, there was evidence for a *Roman ploughsoil* which survived in patches and dished into the top of earlier features.

Natural features included a series of deep solution holes and areas of marl and peat which allowed a build-up of organic material which is of great value to the study of environmental changes.

Finds

The majority of the finds come from the scattered pit groups and the pit alignments in the eastern half of the site, although lithic and some ceramic material was recovered from surviving ploughsoils and from the subsoil surface after topsoil stripping. In some areas reconnaissance survey was undertaken both before and after stripping. The treatment of finds from the excavation follows procedures agreed with Vyner. Not all the finds have so far been analysed.

The pottery from the pit assemblages seems to span the Neolithic period, comprising Grimston, Peterborough and Grooved wares, and some Beaker sherds have also been discovered (Vyner 1998). The cremation urns belong to the Middle Bronze Age.

Lithic assemblages include a high percentage of scraping tools suggesting that domestic processing was carried out at the site. The majority of the lithics are flakes and chippings characteristic of secondary knapping and trimming, and very few cores have been found. Some arrowheads have been found in pits but appear to be unused, which may indicate a ritual deposition. Most of the lithics are flint although there is some knapped chert, and they date to the early and late Neolithic period (Rowe 1998). Two polished stone hand-axes were recovered from pits (one of them fragmented), and one scraper had clearly been knapped from a polished flint axe.

Animal bone did not survive well except for the occasional mandible or tooth and some calcined bone was recovered from scattered pits but it was so fragmented that it was impossible to say whether it was animal or human.

Half a jet bead, conical in shape (20mm diam. x 6mm high), was recovered from a large shallow pit near the centre of the excavated area.

Environmental sampling and C_{14} dating

A strategy for paleoenvironmeental sampling has been designed in association with Dr. S. Carter (Headland Archaeology). To date samples have been taken for C_{14} dating from selected deposits; Kubiena box samples

in order to understand and characterise infill sequences; bulk samples to assess the potential for preservation of macroscopic plant and insect remains; and auger samples in order to recover column samples from peaty or waterlogged deposits.

Assessment of a group of column samples taken from a series of deep solution holes near the margins of a former lake has produced an exceptional sediment record for the post-glacial period (Tipping 2000).

A preliminary C_{14} assay from one of the holes, F45, indicates a sequence dating from the early Holocene through to the late Iron Age, a time which covers the periods of archaeological activity defined at the site and which includes the construction of the major monuments associated with the Thornborough henge complex.

The scale of detail and control available from the study of this sequence is rarely available on gravel quarry sites, and together with the results of the watching brief work and recent discoveries, it should provide an exceptional record of human interaction and landscape change over a long period.

Tarmac offices

study area (JH), (approx)

previous extraction

Watching Brief (MGA)

AP cropmarks (approx)

excavation (20thC)

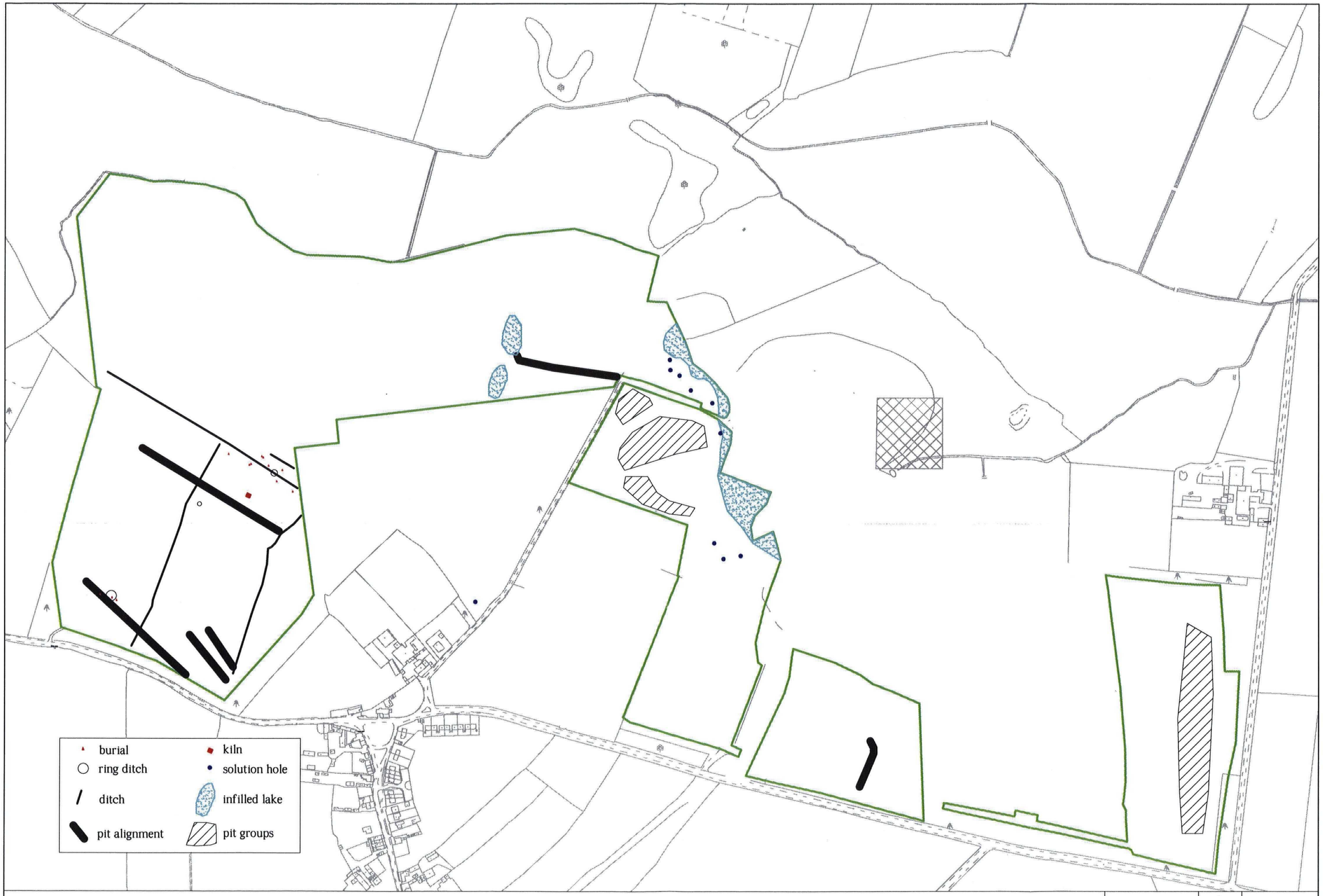
Fieldwalking areas

FAS

Nosterfield, summary of archaeological investigations (August 2002)

Scale 1:10,000

Figure 1



Nosterfield quarry watching brief, principle feature groups | Scale 1:5000 | Figure 2