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SNY	774
ENY	483
CNY	1896
Parish	6003
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**Masham Quarry,
North Yorkshire**
Watching Brief, September 1988
Area B.



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

Watching Brief, Redland Aggregates Quarry, Masham, N. Yorks.

19-21 September 1988

H. Weldrake, R. Turner, B. Lowe

Summary

The field to the north of the processing plant at the Masham Quarry (O.S. grid ref. SE 21468290) ^{Area B.} was inspected by West Yorkshire Archaeology Service. In the absence of any apparent or previously known archaeological features, only a sample of the area was stripped of ploughsoil. This stripping, carried out under close supervision, revealed four small pits at the western edge of the field. These pits contained ash, charcoal and traces of burning: they were probably used for processing crops, but yielded no datable finds. An additional area was stripped adjacent to the pits in the hope of revealing related features, but none were discovered. It was decided that further topsoil-stripping was unnecessary, and that normal subsoil-stripping procedures could be resumed.

Report of Watching Brief

The 6.135 hectare field (O.S. field no. 4700) immediately to the north of the processing plant and stripping operations at the Masham Quarry was visited by R. Turner and H. Weldrake on 14 September 1988. Approximately 50% of the field had already been removed by Redland Aggregates, but a surface inspection of the remainder revealed no indication of archaeological features on the site. Similarly, an examination of the North Yorkshire County Council Sites and Monuments Record revealed no documented cropmarks or archaeological finds in the immediate area. In the

absence of archaeological indicators, it was decided that it would be appropriate to strip a sample area of the field under close supervision before committing to full topsoil stripping.

Two strips were taken (see plan), running the length of the field (less the width of the soil band to the north) and each c. 5m in width. The exposed subsoil varied from compact red-brown sand to yellow-brown sandy clay to grey-brown clay, all containing frequent fragments of sandstone measuring from 50-500mm in diameter.

In Strip I, this initial topsoil clearance exposed four archaeological features (see plan): three pits spaced at 1.75m intervals along a straight line, and a fourth pit immediately adjacent to these and slightly to the south-west. The first three pits were virtually identical, each consisting of a circular cut c. 0.55m wide and 0.25-0.35m deep. The sides and base of each cut had been burnt, the marks of scorching being more severe at the top of the cut than at the base. Lining each cut was a patchy layer of ash and fragments of charcoal, 20-70mm deep; above this ash, and filling each cut to the top, was a layer of unburnt clayey silt, which contained a high proportion of sandstone fragments 50-200mm in diameter. At least one of these cuts was sealed by the topsoil.

The fourth pit was similar in character but was 1m in diameter and c. 0.50m deep. The sides and base of this cut had also been burnt but in this instance the marks of scorching were even throughout. Above this burning was a layer of ash and charcoal up to 100mm deep and extending approximately halfway up the sides of

the cut. This ash was sealed by two layers of backfill: the lowest c. 250mm thick and consisting of a large quantity of sandstone fragments, up to 300mm in diameter, within a matrix of yellow-brown silty sand; the uppermost c. 200mm thick and consisting of clean yellow-brown silty sand. Burning had obviously occurred within all four cuts, and a 50% sample of each ash layer was taken for analysis. Apart from one seed, the analysis did not recover any carbonised plant, animal or industrial remains, and gave no clues about the function of the pits. No finds were discovered within any of the pits, but such features are usually associated with crop processing. An additional c. 30m² area was stripped adjacent to these features in a search for related archaeology, but nothing further was discovered. Strip II proved completely barren.

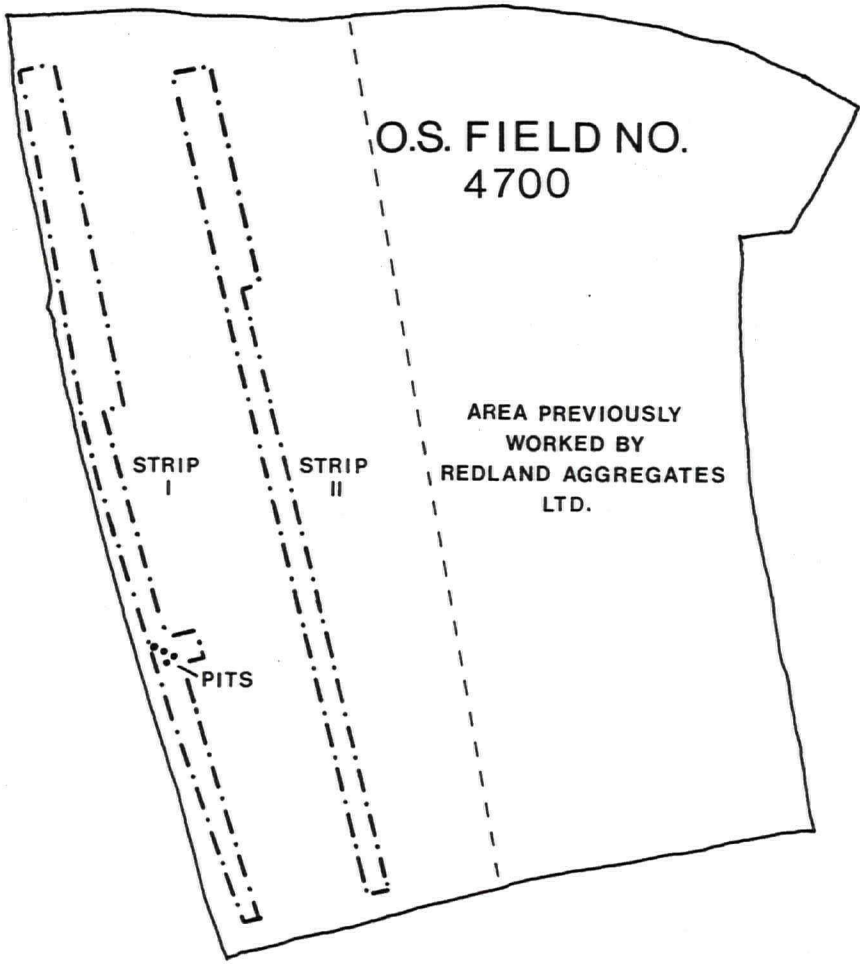
The Primary Archive of the watching brief, including field notes and sketches, has been lodged with the North Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record.

In the absence of any substantial archaeological remains within the sample area stripped, Peter Nicholas, Site Manager for Redland Aggregates, was informed by the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service on 21 September 1988 that normal subsoil stripping procedures could be resumed in this field.

Helen Weldrake
September 1988

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