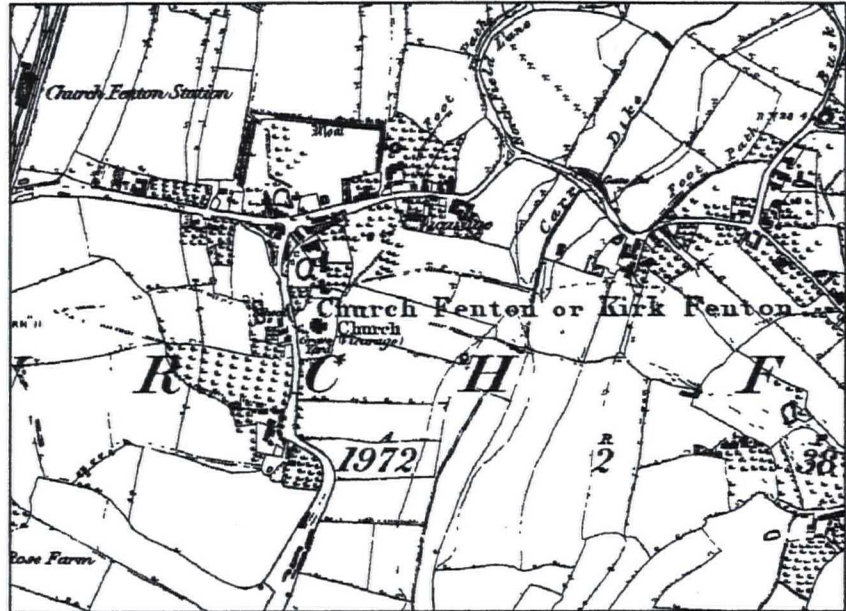




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KIRK FENTON PRIMARY SCHOOL CHURCH FENTON NORTH YORKSHIRE

A Report on an Archaeological Watching Brief

by Isabel Mason

re 10/5/05

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PRIMARY SCHOOL

CHURCH FENTON,

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**A REPORT ON AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL
WATCHING BRIEF**

by

Isabel Mason

April 2005

Cover Illustration:

Section of 1852 Ordnance Survey showing Church Fenton

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Abbreviations

NGR	National Grid Reference
YAT	York Archaeological Trust

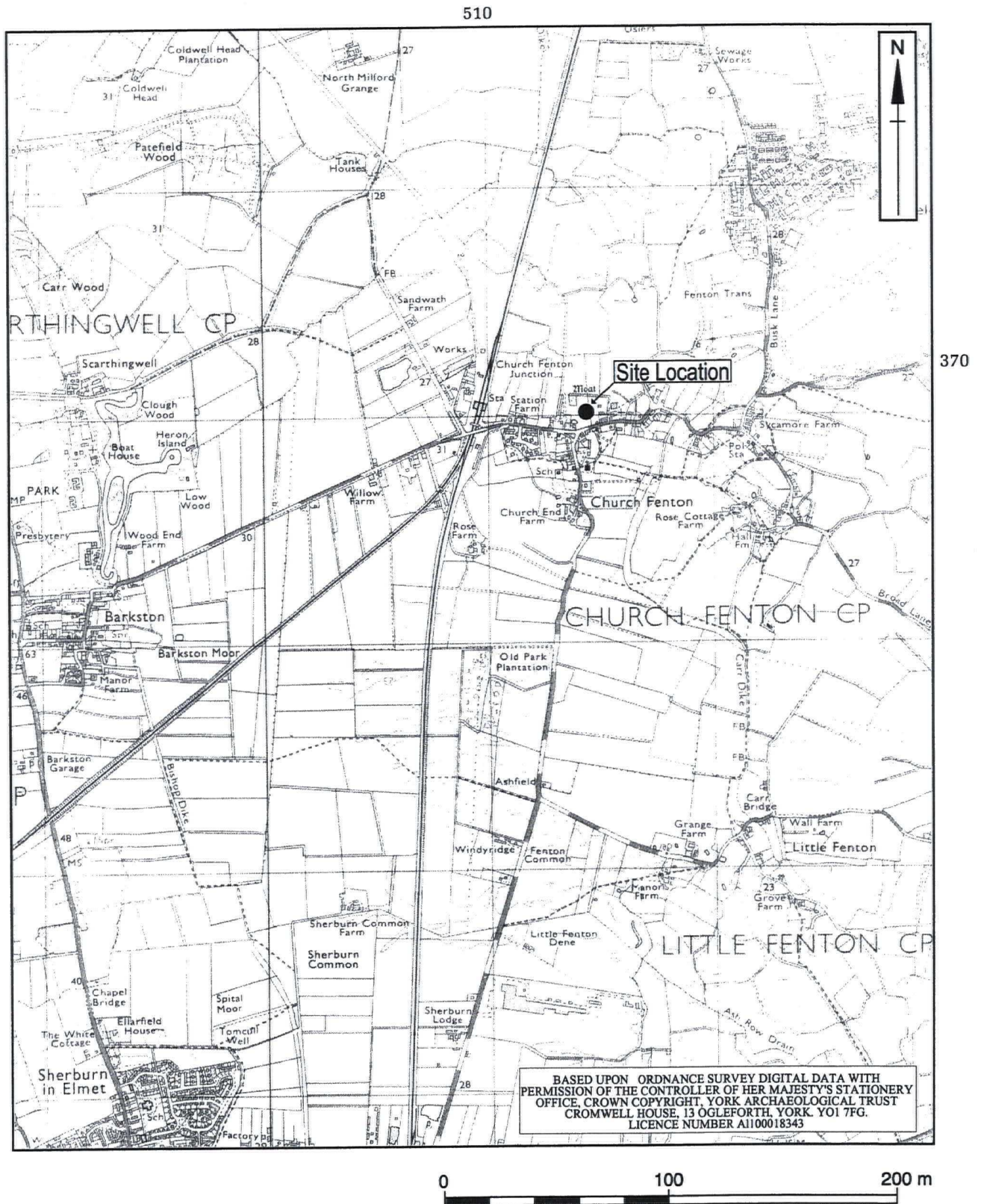


Fig. 1 Site location

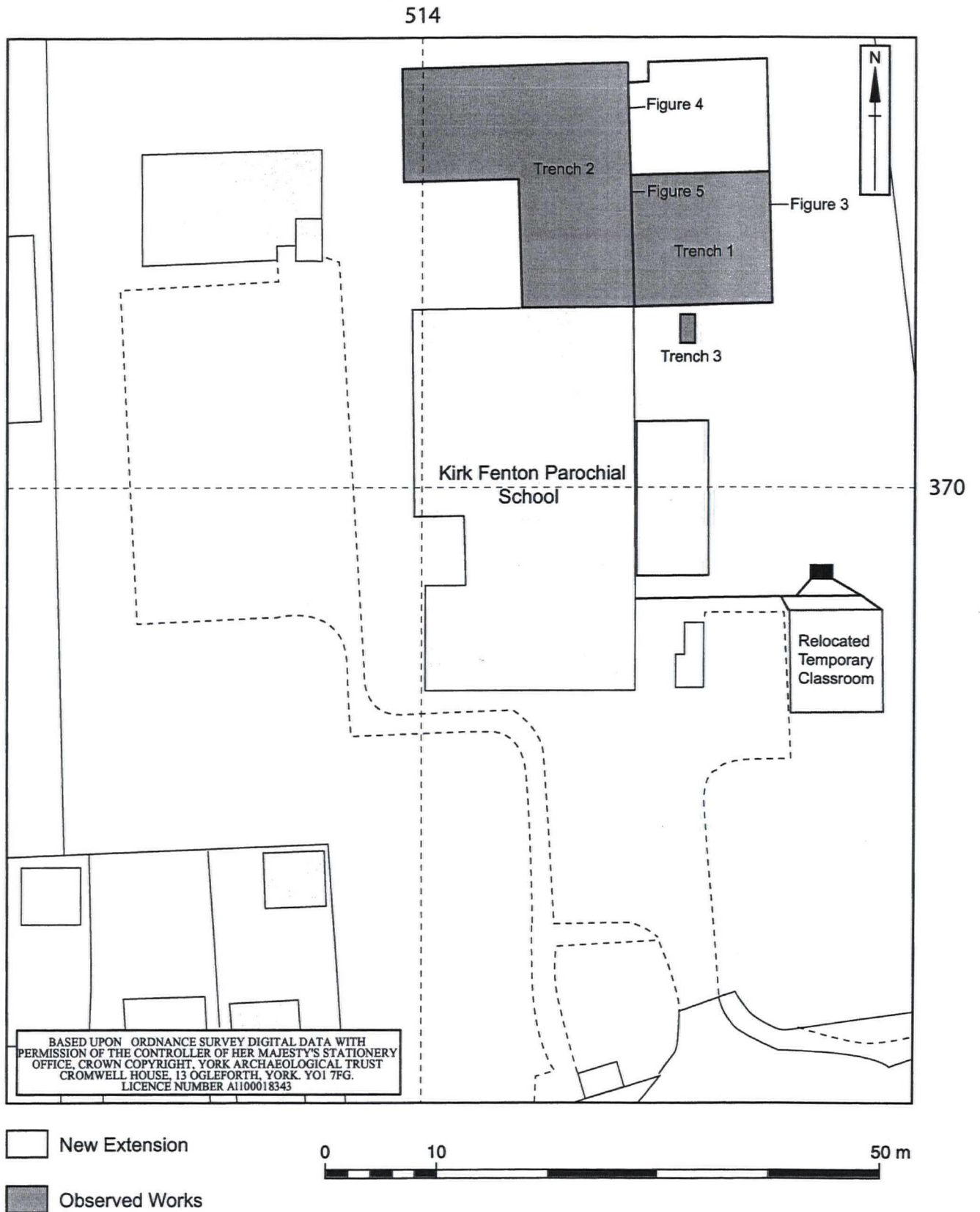


Fig. 2 Location of works

SUMMARY

The York Archaeological Trust (YAT) undertook an archaeological watching brief at Kirk Fenton Primary School to monitor excavation prior to the construction of extensions to the school. This watching brief revealed little in the way of significant archaeological features with ridge and furrow and a possible earlier boundary ditch being the only archaeology of any antiquity. This material was not unexpected as the site is known to be within medieval moated manor.

1. INTRODUCTION

Intermittently between 22 March 2004 and 25 August 2004 YAT conducted an archaeological watching brief at Kirk Fenton Primary School, Church Fenton, York (NGR SE 514370; Fig. 1). The work was carried out on behalf of WM Saunders Partnership, to the specification supplied by North Yorkshire County Council. The aim of the watching brief was to assess the depth and character of the surviving archaeological remains in the area and record any such remains encountered during the works.

2. METHOD STATEMENT

The watching brief at Kirk Fenton Primary School, Church Fenton was undertaken in several phases. This work was a continuation of previous watching brief undertaken by YAT on the 17 February 2004 which involved the observation of a drainage trench located to the east of the original school (Dean 2004; Fig. 2).

The first phase of the current project was undertaken on 22-24 March 2004. This involved the observation of the removal of a mound and the topsoil stripping of an area to the north-east of the school using a small 360° mechanical excavator (Fig. 2). The area stripped measured c. 11m x 12.5m and was excavated to a depth of up to c. 0.74m.

The second phase of the project, undertaken 26-31 March 2004, observed the excavation of a foundation trench located to the north of the school (Fig. 2). This trench was roughly 'L' shaped being 11m x 21m and was excavated to a maximum depth of c. 0.25m.

The final phase of the project was undertaken on the 25 August 2004 and observed the excavation of a 5m x 2m trench to the east of the school, dug to a maximum depth of 0.73m.

A record of all deposits encountered in the watching brief was made in a watching brief note book. Deposits and location of observed works were recorded on sketch sections and plans or annotations on copies of developer's plans. All records of the watching brief are stored under the Yorkshire Museum accession code YORYM 2004.17

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Church Fenton is a village located 12 miles south-west York and 7 miles north-west Selby within a flat open landscape. The watching brief was carried out because the school is located within the area of the moated medieval manor and within the historic core of the village.

The following account is based on the information on the website www.church-fenton.net researched for the initial report on the site during February 2004. Church Fenton is a small village located within the wapentake of Barkston Ash. The first documentary evidence of Fenton is in 963AD when King Edgar made a grant of twenty Hides to Aeslac of Sherburn-in-Elmet. The land was low lying, often below sea level. Tracks that existed were limited to ridges of high ground. We can perhaps assume that the village main street reflects one such ancient path. The name Church Fenton has evolved over the years, starting as Fentune in 963 to Fentun in the Domesday book of 1086. Kirk Fenton is first mentioned 1338 signifying the establishment of a church in the village. 'Ton' or 'tun' suggests a community within an enclosure, reclaimed from the 'fen' which is an old English word for a marsh. It is likely that the origins of the village were agricultural, although in 1400 records show that many villagers were employed at the Huddleston stone quarry at a time when the stone was being used to build York Minster.

Major drainage works opened up the majority of the land for agriculture between 1600 and 1800 and the moated house of the Lord of the Manor used to stand on the site of Manor Farm. Railways first appeared in the area with the introduction of the Leeds & Selby line which opened in 1834. The York & North Midland was formed in York in 1835 and began planning a link to London. The first plan showed the railway passing through Kirkby Wharfe and North Milford. However, objections from the Grimston Estate led to a revised plan on the current route through Ulleskelf to Altofts near Normanton to connect with the Leeds to Derby railway. Originally the railway crossed Common Road on a level crossing, with a station on the site now occupied by the present railway bridge. In 1847 a new line was built to Harrogate for which a new station was built with workshops and an engine shed. In 1854 the York and North Midland was bought by the NER. The line from Leeds arrived in 1869 and in 1904 additional tracks were built to York which required the building of a new (third) station. On the northern side of the village is the RAF station established in 1937 as a fighter base to protect the northern industrial towns. In the later twentieth century the base developed its present role of a training station.

4. THE EXCAVATIONS

Phase 1 (22-24 March 2004)

The first phase of this project entailed the observation of an artificial mound located to the north-east of the school. It consisted of a mixed, friable dark brown clay silt with moderate inclusions of orange clay and occasional inclusions of modern CBM. The mound was found to be modern disturbed topsoil from previous works on the site that had been left to grass over.

Following the removal of the mound an area of 11m x 12.5m was stripped to a maximum depth of 0.74m (Fig. 2). The west-facing section (Fig. 3) revealed natural (1007) at 0.74m BGL which was firm/plastic light brown yellow slightly silty clay, beneath a layer of formed subsoil (1006), also believed to be natural, which was a firm/friable light brown silty clay and 0.20m in depth. This subsoil appears to have been disturbed by ridge and furrow ploughing activity (1005), as a depression was encountered within this section. These in turn were overlain by a buried topsoil (1004), between 0.10-0.20m in depth and consisting of firm, dark grey brown clayey silt containing several sherds of pottery ranging in date from the late medieval through to the post-medieval period. Several post-medieval clay pipe stems were also found as well

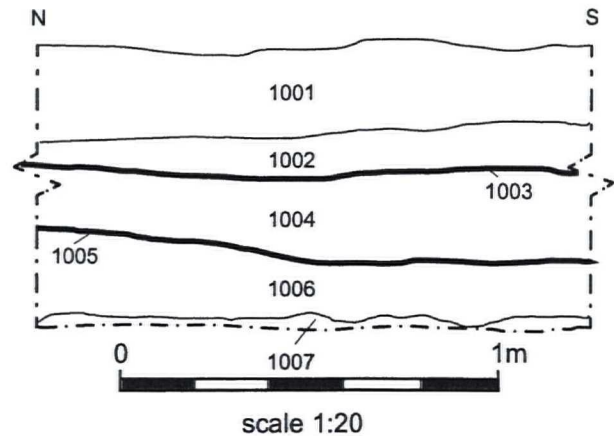


Fig. 3 Trench 1, west facing section, representative section

as a possible fragment of Roman pottery. The earliest pottery fragments recovered from this context were found at the base of the deposit, within the furrow. This would suggest the ridge and furrow recorded as Context 1005 dates from c. 13th century. The buried topsoil was later cut by a clearance cut (1003) thought to have been contemporary with the construction of the school as it was overlain by a levelling deposit containing construction debris (1002) 0.14m in depth. Context (1002) was a firm yellow, light brown slightly silty clay containing frequent inclusions of limestone fragments. Finally this was overlain by modern topsoil (1001), 0.20m in depth, which was a friable, soft dark grey brown clayey silt with occasional inclusions of modern debris such as modern brick and tile.

The observation of this trench revealed that the earliest activity in this area was agricultural due to the presence of furrows aligned east-west. The pottery encountered from above this feature suggests that the agricultural activity on the site relates to its later medieval usage which would be an appropriate date for ridge and furrow. Any later activity on the site has been removed by the clearance cut and the next phase relates to construction of the school.

Phase 2 (26-31 March 2004)

During the second phase of the project observations were made of an 'L' shaped trench which measured 9m x 21m (Fig. 2). Natural in this area was discovered to be mixed deposit with the uppermost soil consisting of a firm/plastic light brown yellow slightly silty clay (2010) similar to that encountered in the previous trench. This was found at depth of 0.70m. Towards the northern end of the trench (Fig. 4) natural was cut by shallow ditch (2009), aligned east-west

and c.1.40m deep. The basal deposit of this ditch (2007) had a maximum depth of 0.18m and was a purplish brown loose clay silt sand overlain by a plastic yellowish grey silt clay with occasional yellow clay streaks and very occasional charcoal flecks 0.78m in depth (2005). The upper deposit of the ditch was 2003, a friable pale brown clay with moderate streaks of yellow clay,

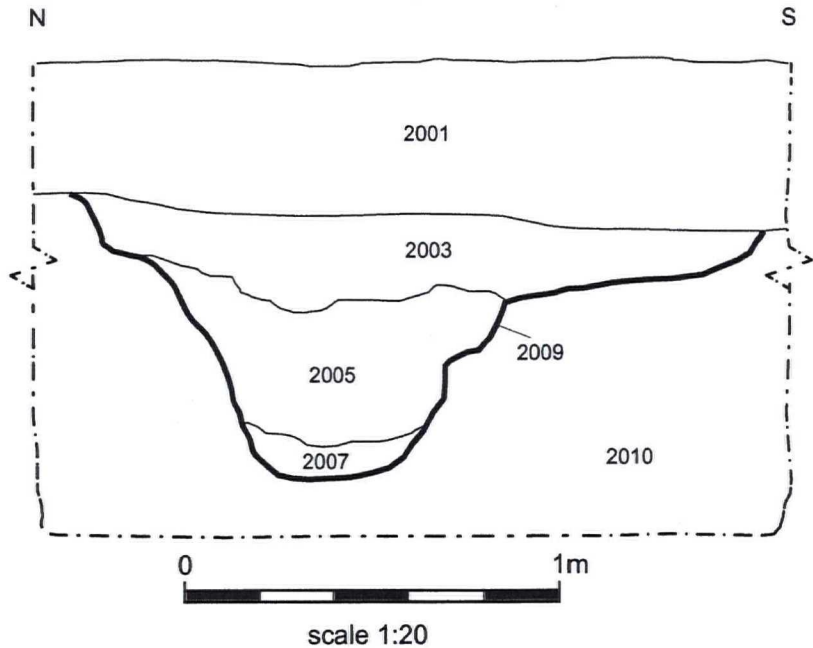


Fig. 4 Trench 2, west facing section, northernmost furrow

occasional inclusions of charcoal flecks and occasional inclusions of burnt clay flecks, 0.46m in depth. The upper fill of the ditch was overlain by a deposit of topsoil (2001) 0.70m in depth and consisting of a friable, loose dark grey brown clayey silt, similar to that discovered in the previous trench.

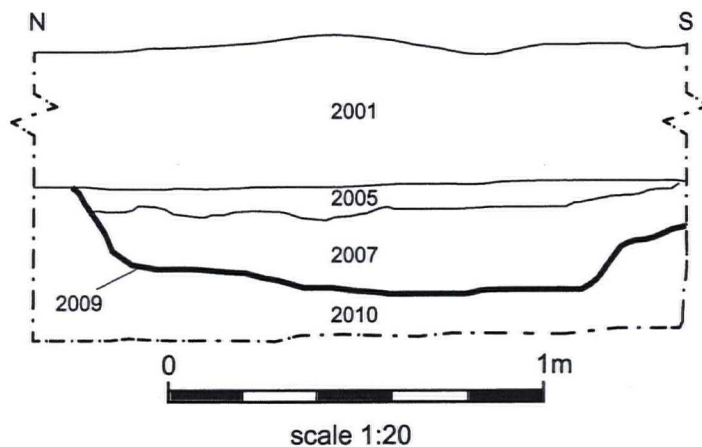


Fig. 5 Trench 2, west facing section southernmost furrow

Further to the south another shallower ditch or furrow (2006), also aligned east-west, was discovered after the removal of the topsoil. The sequence as illustrated in the west facing section (Fig. 5) reveals that natural (2008) was encountered at a depth of 0.70m BGL. This had been cut into by a shallow ditch (2006), similar in plan and section, and on the same alignment as the furrows encountered during the

previous phase of work. The basal fill of this feature (2004) was 0.46m in depth consisted of a mixed clay with occasional inclusions of charcoal flecks, brick and tile flecks and silt patches. Context 2004 also contained frequent inclusions of manganese flecks and moderate limestone fragments. This was overlain by the upper deposit of the feature (2002), 0.18m in depth, which was a crumbly to stiff mixed pale/mid grey brown silt clay with occasional inclusions of charcoal

flecks and fragments, burnt clay flecks, small limestone fragments and small pebbles. This was overlain by 0.70m of topsoil (2001).

The archaeology encountered in this area was similar to that observed during Phase 1. Although the fills of the southernmost feature (2006) appeared to be slightly different it is probable that features 2006 and 1005 are part of the same furrow. Feature 2009 could also have been another furrow, as it was at a distance of 8m, from centre to centre, from 2006. However, 2009 was considerable deeper and may have been a ditch contemporary with the late medieval agricultural activity.

Phase 3 (25 August 2004)

During Phase 3 of this project the excavation of a 5m x 2m trench was observed to the east of the school building (Fig. 2) Natural was encountered in this trench at 0.58m BGL and was described as a light yellow/brown slightly sandy clay (3002). This overlain by topsoil (3001) 0.15m of deep mid to firm dark brown layer of clayey silt, similar to that found in the other two trenches.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This watching brief revealed evidence of medieval agricultural activity, in the form of ridge and furrow ploughing. It is known that the site is located within the boundary of a medieval moated manor and the presence of ridge and furrow, contemporary with the manor, further increases our knowledge about land use within the site and activities of its inhabitants.

Beneath the ridge and furrow there were ephemeral traces of what may be an earlier boundary ditch (2009). However, the lack of dateable material, in fact any finds at all, allows little in the way of interpretation. Further work in this locality should be conducted taking this into account, and perhaps investigate the possibility of features obscured by the ridge and furrow.

The disturbance of the medieval ridge and furrow by later agricultural activity, possible cross ploughing and 'subsoiling', has reduced the visibility of what should be an easily identifiable archaeological earthwork. In addition the clearance cut, identified in Trench 1, which appears to be contemporary with the construction of school, suggests that any further evidence of medieval or later activity on the site will have undergone substantial disturbance.

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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7. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Watching Brief

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