SNY	9455
ENY	2798, 2799 2800
CNY	–
Parish	3060
Rec'd	–

The Landscape Research Centre

The Old Bridge Barn ~ Yedingham ~ Malton ~North Yorkshire ~YO17 8SL

Interim Report

Dog burial inserted into prehistoric grave Area 10AD, 2004

Excavations undertaken ahead of aggregates extraction at Cook's Quarry, West Heslerton

Interim Report

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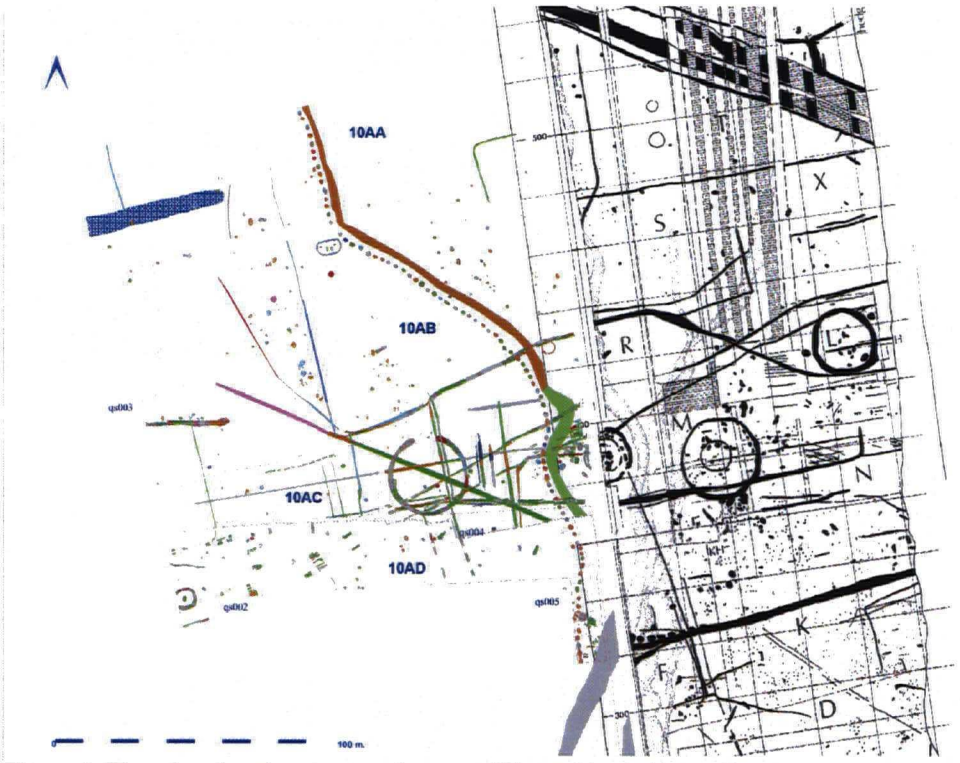

Figure 1: Plan showing the excavated areas of Site10 in relation to Site1

The Site (OS Grid Reference SE 916 / 768)

Cook's Quarry, West Heslerton is situated on the southern side of the Vale of Pickering between the villages of East and West Heslerton. The site has been the subject of archaeological investigation since the late 1970s when rescue excavations were undertaken covering nearly 5Ha between 1977 and 1984 on Heslerton Parish Project Site 001. The excavations programme was instigated following the discovery of Early Anglo-Saxon burials during sand extraction, and revealed a site with well preserved evidence relating to settlement and ritual spanning the period from c.5000BC to AD700, after which time the land was used for agriculture. The well drained but poor quality sandy soils had provided an ideal location for prehistoric settlement and, whilst easy to till, must have produced relatively low returns. It has been argued that this may have been a contributing factor towards the siting of a number of Late Neolithic and Bronze Age barrows, which may have been deliberately placed in areas where the soils had been depleted by primitive agriculture.

Following a salvage excavation undertaken in 1999, in area 10AA, formal arrangements for excavation ahead of extraction were agreed with the quarry owner Mrs A Jones, and work continued in 2001 (10AB excavated July-October, 2001), 2002 (10AC excavated May-August, 2002) and 2004 (10AD excavated April-November, 2004). Excavation in any one season was not continuous, for example in 2004, when the area was stripped and rapidly planned in April, with excavation proper taking place from August to November. No excavation was undertaken during 2003 as a large buffer between the excavated area and the quarry face had been established during 2002, and the exceptionally dry conditions would have made most aspects of excavation exceptionally difficult. The combined area covered in these four sessions of fieldwork amounts to some 2.8Ha, maintaining an extraction buffer of nearly 1Ha between the active quarry face and the limits of the investigated area at any one time. The evidence from Site 1 indicated that the quantity and complexity of the archaeological resource

increases from north to south, a pattern that has been confirmed on Site 10. Much of the importance of the work done to date relates to Late Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age activity on the site.

Geophysical Survey

A geomagnetic survey was undertaken during 2001 as part of a broader survey project investigating the archaeology of the Vale and undertaken on behalf of English Heritage. The results from Site 10 are interesting on account of the failure to reveal most of the important archaeological features; this confirmed a suspicion that this method would not provide sufficient evidence to evaluate the site. Very large or modern linear features show reasonably well, but little of the complexity that lies beneath the field can be seen; even after the knowledge gained from previous excavation, major trackways, ditches barrows and a hengiform enclosure remained undetected.

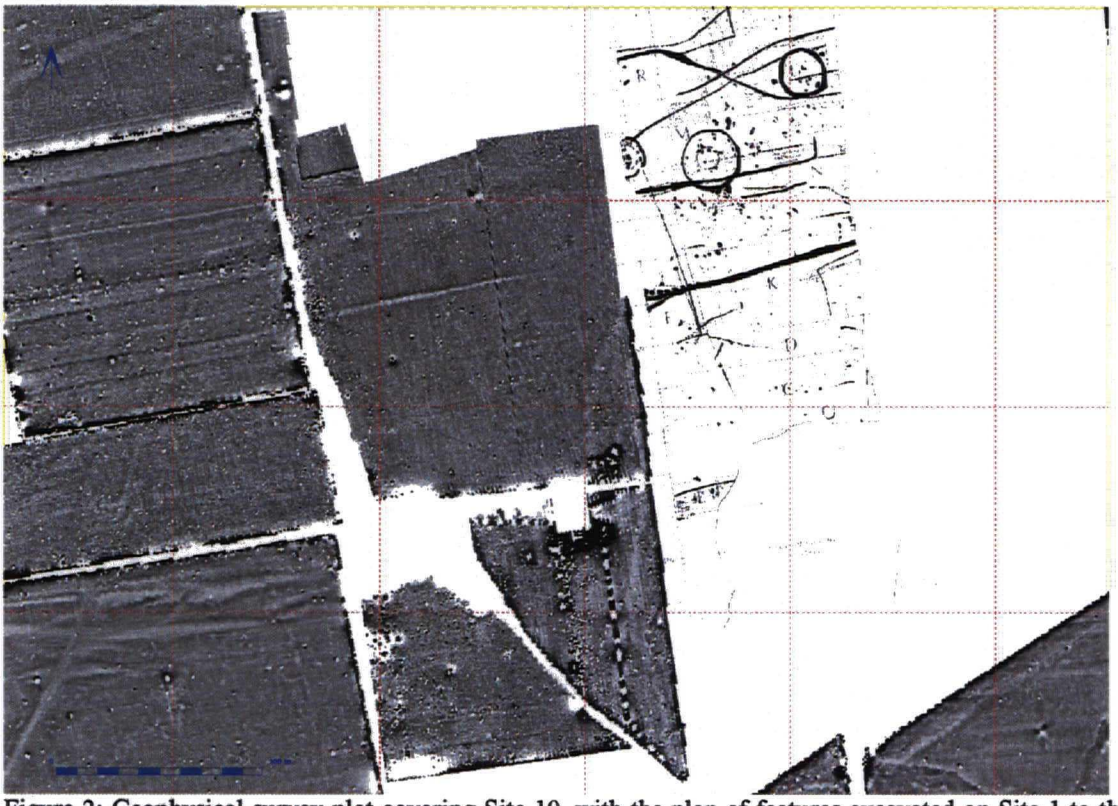

Figure 2: Geophysical survey plot covering Site 10, with the plan of features excavated on Site 1 to the east.

Late Mesolithic 7500BC ~ 4000BC

Worked flints dating to the Late Mesolithic period were found alongside the relict stream channel, which follows the western boundary of Site 1, but have not been a feature of the areas so far examined on Site 10. The stream channel probably provided a routeway through a wooded landscape and may have provided a suitable location for hunting animals drinking at the stream. Recent work re-dating large post-pits found at Stonehenge has shown that these pits, which contained posts up to a metre in diameter and conventionally dated to the Neolithic, were sometimes set up in the Late Mesolithic, and we will have to await radio-carbon dates to determine the date of a series of massive post pits excavated on both Sites 1 and 10 and discussed below.

Neolithic and Early Bronze Age 4000BC ~ 1500BC

A number of large post-pits, which contained posts probably like totem poles, were interpreted on Site 1 as parts of an Avenue, running to the north towards the wetlands dominating the centre of the Vale of Pickering at this time. The discovery of a number of these pits on Site 10 demands a re-interpretation of the evidence, with the largest pits from both sites forming what appears to be a large flattened oval some 90-100 metres across. Other smaller pits, containing posts with a diameter of about 50cm, have been found extensively over the areas examined, forming one confirmed avenue running north, with others requiring further analysis before their precise arrangements can be identified and interpreted.

During 2002 much attention was devoted to the examination of a Hengiform (figs. 3 and 4) enclosure measuring c28 metres in diameter with a single entrance to the north. This contains a pair of large post pits which appear to be positioned with respect to the entrance; they were associated with large amounts of cremated bone which had trickled into the postholes as the posts had rotted away. It is possible that the posts had held platforms, or even been inverted tree-trunks, the root network itself forming a platform upon which cremated remains had been placed. An *in situ* cremation had been placed in a small pit against one of the posts. Dating material for the hengiform enclosure and the post-pits was frustratingly absent; it is possible that radio-carbon dates may be secured from the cremated bone.

Figure 3: Composite photograph showing the hengiform enclosure and later features during excavation in 2002.

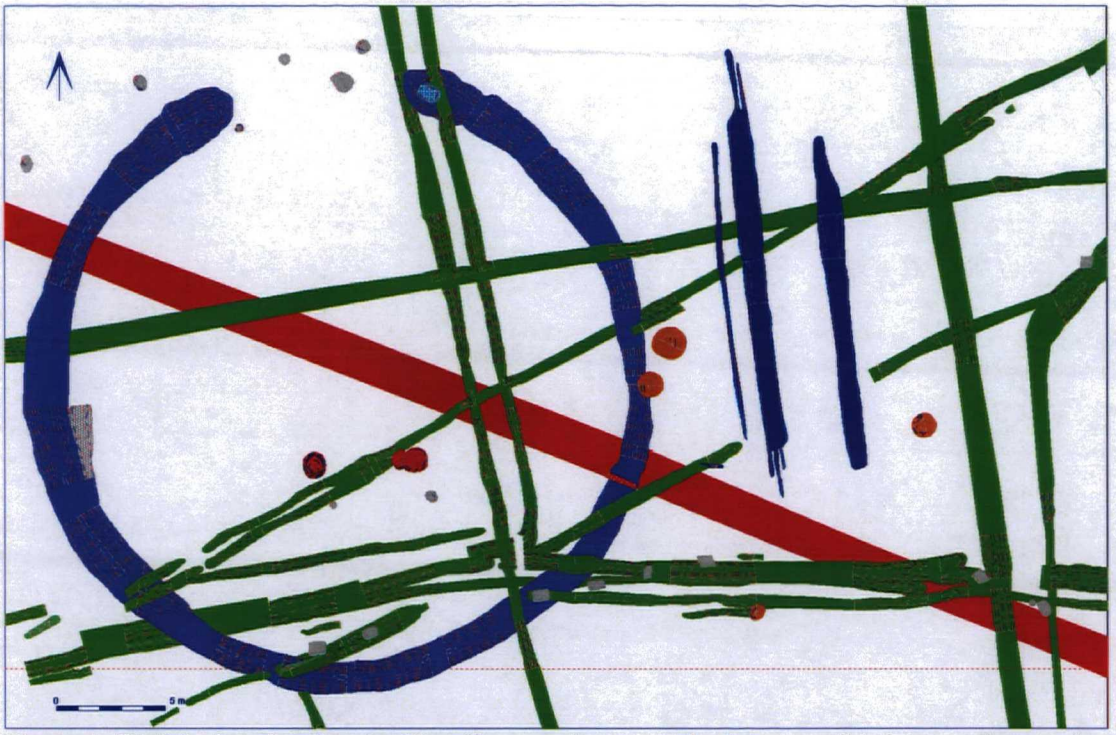

Figure 4: Digital plan showing the Hengiform enclosure cut by later, possibly Bronze Age trackway ditches, and then by Iron Age field ditches.

Excavation during 2002 also included the area immediately to the west of the half excavated Barrow 1R examined on Site 1, and it was anticipated that this would include the excavation of further burials accompanied by Food Vessels and Beakers.

In the intervening years between the excavation of 1R and that of 10AC it is estimated that up to 5 metres of ground had been lost through erosion of the quarry face prior to 1999. The lost section included the central part of what was originally interpreted as a mortuary house; a slightly curved post trench against the eastern edge of the area seemed to form the western wall line of this structure. This was cut in places by the inner ditch of the monument that had been interrupted on the eastern side. There was no outer ditch on the western side of the monument; a relict steam channel had apparently defined the western side, and the presence of this stream channel may explain the lack of survival of any skeletal material in the dozen possible graves that lay between it and the inner ditch (Figure5). Poor bone survival is to be anticipated in an area subject to frequent flooding where the graves were cut into well drained sands. Even on Site 1, bone survival was very poor when graves were cut into sand as opposed to the gravelly sand, which would have provided a much more alkaline environment.

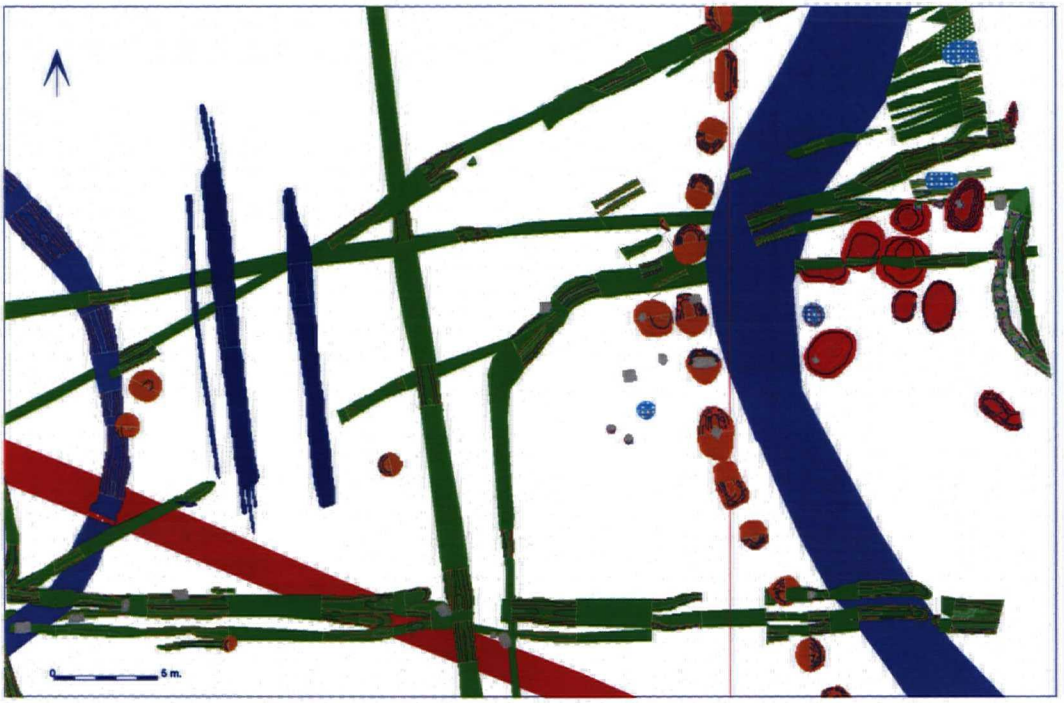

Figure 5: The eastern half of area 10AC showing the stream channel with possible graves and the inner ditch of Barrow 1R to the east; a pit alignment lies to the west.

The distribution and density of the graves on the eastern side of 1R was quite different to that on the west, and it is possible that the monument was already subject to damage from flood activity during its life.

At the western limit of excavation in area 10AD, excavated between April and November 2004, a small barrow measuring just over seven metres in diameter indicates that the monument complex identified as Barrow Cemetery 1 during the excavation of Site 1 extends right across Site 10, incorporating the Hengiform enclosure excavated in area 10AC. It appears that the cemetery succeeds the probably ritual landscape articulated through the large post arrangements discussed above. The small barrow examined during 2004, although not yet dated, is most likely to date to the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age. It shows a sequence of events not paralleled at any other excavated site in Britain; the monument comprised a simple enclosing ditch, a small part of which lay beyond the western limit of excavation, with a single central burial pit in the centre. The ditch filling on the southern side of the monument indicated that the grave might have been disturbed in the past, with chalk gravel derived from the re-opening of the grave left in the upper fill of the ditch. This was in fact the case. We had already seen re-opening of a grave for interment of a second individual in Barrow 1R, 110m to the east, where the bones of an individual had been carefully stacked against the western side of the grave when a later individual accompanied by a Beaker was inserted into the grave. The grave excavated in this new example proved even more interesting; it had been disturbed and the original burial removed, leaving the articulated right foot in a position indicating a crouched burial. This burial had been replaced not by another human, but by the body of a young dog (see photograph on cover) (Fig.6).

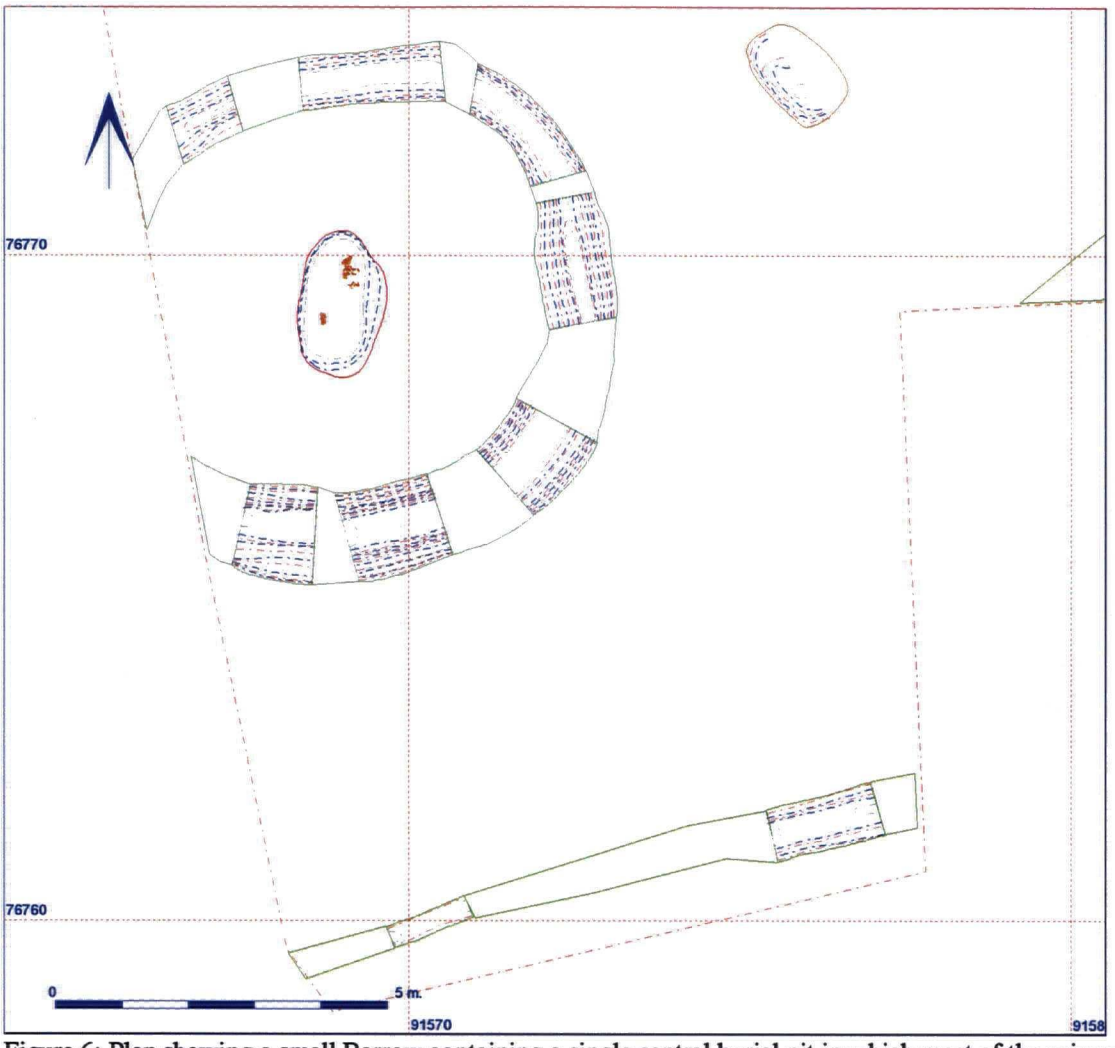

Figure 6: Plan showing a small Barrow containing a single central burial pit in which most of the primary burial had been removed, to be replaced by that of a young dog.

Later Bronze Age and Iron Age 1500BC ~ 54BC

Whilst the paucity of clear evidence relating to Barrow 1R was somewhat dispiriting, the excavations on Site 10 have revealed a stratigraphic sequence that elucidates much of the evidence identified on Site 1 to the east. Field systems and landscape boundaries are notorious for the lack of secure dating information recovered from them; all too often they have to be interpreted within very broad dating strategies, as was the case on Site 1. The frequent intersection of trackway and enclosure ditches and the pit alignments identified on Site 10 have provided secure evidence allowing the sequence of landscape development to be more precisely identified than was possible on Site 1. This evidence not only requires a re-articulation of the chronological sequence of Site 1, but also allows a more considered interpretation of the wider landscape within which the Cook's Quarry site is located.

A trackway (identified in the Site 1 excavation report as Trackway 2) defined by shallow ditches to the north and south, ran along the northern side of Barrow Cemetery 1. The southern trackway ditch cut across the filled ditch of Barrow 1L, and was interrupted to respect the position of Barrow 1R. At the time it was considered to be of probable Roman date, largely as a result of the recovery of Roman pottery from the top

of the filled-in hollow way that had formed between the ditches in some areas. It is now clear that this attribution was wildly incorrect, and that this feature is more likely to be of Bronze Age date. It enters Site 10 from the east and, following broadly the same line, cuts through the monument complex, passing just to the north of Barrow 1R, then cutting across the southern half of the Hengiform Monument with the northern trackway ditch interrupted to respect the small Barrow in 10AD. The precise date of this feature remains unknown; however, on stratigraphic grounds it predates a number of known Iron Age features. The western bank of the stream channel that ran through Sites 1 and 10 towards the north was followed by a sinuous pit-alignment of small 1-2m circular and oblong pits. This same feature was identified in the Anglian Cemetery and on Site 2, and an associated example on the opposite eastern stream bank in the cemetery was identified a further 500m south in the Anglian settlement. The pits of this feature, which are interpreted as planting pits for a hedge in the absence of alternative evidence, cut through the trackway ditches and must therefore be later; but are in turn cut away by field ditches that are clearly Iron Age in date. Once analysis of the small ceramics assemblage recovered from the ditches is complete we may be able to give a more precise date. The stream-edge pit alignment respects an earlier massive pit alignment, which probably pre-dated it, and was interpreted on Site 1 as Late Bronze Age, associated with occupation contemporary with Staple Howe. Further areas of relatively well preserved occupation deposits of this date are anticipated in the area that remains to be examined further south, and it is likely that the pit-alignment will be securely dated at last when its stratigraphic relationship with that settlement evidence is identified.

Roman and Post-Roman 54BC-AD2000

Despite the presence of a major focus of Late Iron Age and Roman activity only 500 metres to the north, the excavated areas have yielded little evidence of activity during this period in this area. The evidence from Site 1 indicated that that the trackway to the north of the excavated area, lost to quarrying during the early 1990's, was being actively used during the Roman period. The absence of domestic activity need not be surprising; the field systems established during the Iron Age probably continued to be active until the Post-Roman period. New ploughing technologies introduced during the Roman period led to an expansion of arable farming onto the heavier and more productive soils at the foot of the Wolds and it is possible that during this period the infertile sandy lands were left as poor pasture; this might explain a build up of blown sands during the period; as windborne sands became trapped in the grasses the ground surface gradually rose. The major pit-alignment excavated on Site 1 appears to have formed a boundary that was maintained until the Early Anglo-Saxon period. This feature, which diverts slightly to the North where it crosses the relict stream channel on the eastern side of Site 10, emerges on the western bank with the later phases identified as relatively minor boundaries, the most southerly of which is probably fifth or sixth century AD in date. Excavations in 2004 were designed to cover the area where these features crossed the stream, leaving the remainder intact so that they could be examined in a single season. An insecurely dated Mediaeval or Post Mediaeval field boundary, visible as a considerable bank in 1977 and running north-south through Site 10, was indicated by a north-south ditch. Other late features included a Post-Mediaeval fence, with individual fence post-holes cut into a post trench running from east to west across area 10AC. The latest archaeological activity on the site appears to relate to three 19th or even early 20th century quarry pits identified in areas 10AC and 10AD; these had been filled with domestic rubbish. The pits, which were roughly 10 metres in diameter, were approached on a narrow trackway comprising hard packed sand and running from

north-east to south-east; this was also observed and recorded although not fully understood on Site 1. The most recent activity relates to recent (within the last 25 years) plough damage which had cut through the protective layer of blown sand and truncated some of the features, particularly in the centre of the site; this may have been associated with the levelling of the north-south field bank.

Material Culture and Environmental Evidence

The quantity of artefacts and ecofacts recovered so far from Site 10 remains limited, although we expect this to change as we move from an area which we might interpret as the outfield towards the infield areas associated with the settlement evidence identified on Site 1. In the areas examined so far the density of worked flints has been very low, as has the quantity of ceramics recovered from extensive examination of the various boundary features. The post-pits have produced nothing in the way of diagnostic material, and it remains to be seen whether the small amounts of charcoal recovered are sufficient for carbon dating. The environmental potential of this aggressive sandy environment that has oscillated between acidic and alkaline precludes the survival of pollen; even bone survival is very rare, and no deposits with any potential for the recovery of carbonised remains have so far been identified.

Figure 7: The excavation area after stripping in July 2004, (some parts excavated in 2002 in process of quarrying)

Other Evidence

In addition to the various monumental and boundary features identified, there were several isolated features such as tree holes and a number of pits. One shallow pit, which had been partially ploughed away, contained parts of an AOC Beaker; a single domestic pit contained Staple Howe Ware.

Another feature, with no certain dating evidence at this time, comprised a shallow, uninterrupted enclosure ditch, enclosing an area c.9x5m, with three shallow areas of buried soil and a single small shallow pit within the interior. Neither the enclosure ditch

nor the contained features produced any diagnostic finds. This feature may, however, belong to a class of feature termed 'barrowlets' which have been discovered in large numbers through geophysical survey in the area. Excavation elsewhere in the Vale indicates that they may be of late Iron Age or Roman date and that they are associated with cremation burial; most are round but a significant percentage are ovate or sub-rectangular.

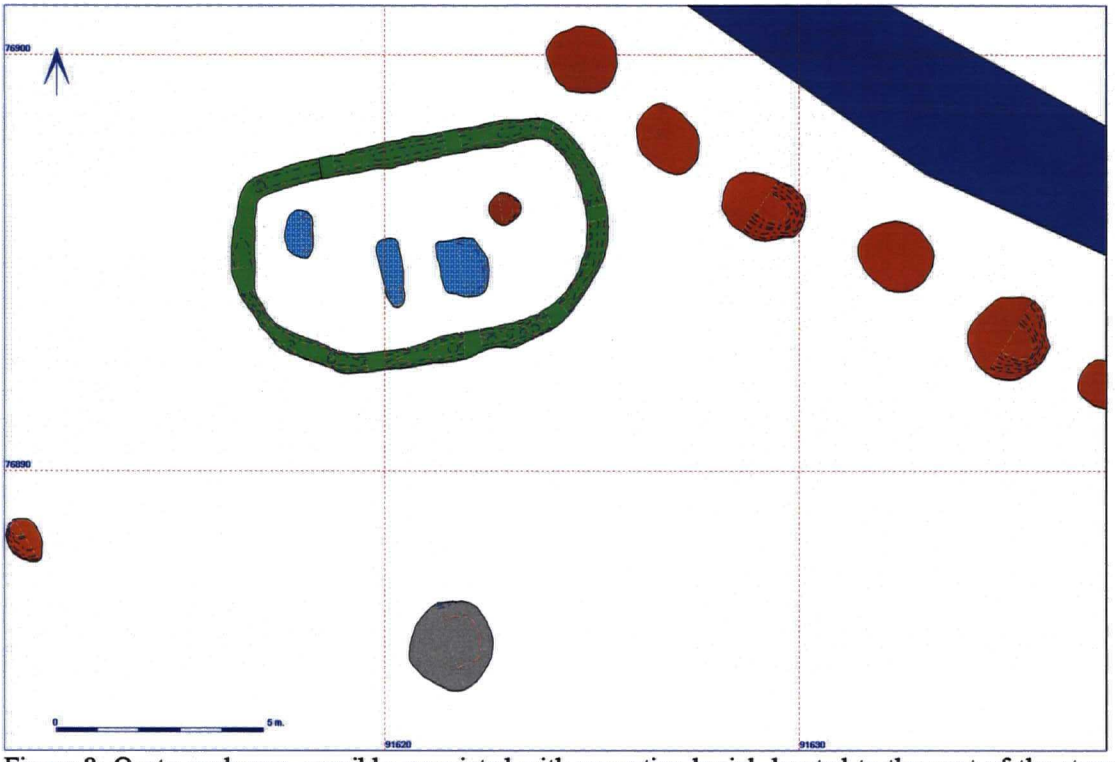

Figure 8: Ovate enclosure, possibly associated with cremation burial, located to the west of the stream channel and pit alignment.

The Archive and Post Excavation

The digital archive covering the three seasons of excavation is largely complete, with context and object databases and survey data checked and verified and the plans all digitised. The section drawings from the recently completed season remain to be scanned. Now that sufficient area has been examined to intelligently target some features where carbon or bone survive for radio-carbon dating, samples can now be selected and submitted to Oxford. The finds assemblage remains small and there has as yet been no need to undertake external specialist analysis, a situation that is likely to change once excavation proceeds further south. Final analysis and full report production will follow the completion of excavation on Site 10, in 2006-7.

Future work

Excavation of the remaining area of Site 10, an area of approximately 1.6Ha, will be undertaken over two seasons in 2005 and 2006, maintaining a buffer between the active quarry face and the limits of excavation. The precise limits of the area covered in each year will to some extent be determined by the rate of extraction and the complexity and distribution of the archaeology exposed during stripping of the overburden.