

NORFOLK ARCHAEOLOGICAL UNIT

Report No. 910

**An Archaeological Watching Brief at
Cells 4, 5 and 6, Leech Pit Wood, Lyng Quarry,
Sparham**

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Location: Cells 4, 5 and 6, Leech Pit Wood, Lyng Quarry, Sparham
Grid Ref: TG 0785 1790
SMR No: 3018 SPA
Date of fieldwork: January 7th to 10th 2002, July 1st to 3rd 2002 and 1st to 7th April 2003

Summary

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by Norfolk Archaeological Unit at Leech Pit Wood, Sparham in January and July 2002 and April 2003 ahead of extensions to Lyng Quarry.

Although relatively little archaeological evidence was discovered, two flint artefacts were found which suggest prehistoric activity on the site. Also recorded were three ditched field boundaries that divided broadly rectangular fields. It was established that they were in use by the mid 19th century (possibly earlier) and fell out of use by the late 19th century. They were succeeded by a series of modern drains containing ceramic drain pipes. Undated pits and post-holes were also encountered.

1.0 Introduction

(Figs 1 and 2)

An archaeological watching brief was undertaken by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (NAU) at Leech Pit Wood, Sparham in central Norfolk. The work was carried out ahead of extensions to Lyng Quarry in to areas of land referred to as Cells 4, 5 and 6. It followed on from previous work by the NAU consisting of an archaeological evaluation of Cells 1 to 6 in 1999 (Brennand 1999) and an excavation within Cell 3 and a watching brief of Cells 1 to 3 in 2000 (Bates 2001).

Work was undertaken in accordance with a Brief issued by Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (letter from David Gurney, Norfolk Landscape Archaeology (NLA) to Dr Christopher Howlett, Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd, 13.01.00) and a Method Statement for watching briefs prepared by the NAU. The work also followed a specification prepared by Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd (Howlett 2000). The watching brief was funded by Redland Lafarge Aggregates.

The work was designed to assist in defining the character and extent of any archaeological remains within the proposed redevelopment area, following the guidelines set out in *Planning and Policy Guidance 16 — Archaeology and Planning* (Department of the Environment 1990).

The site archive is currently held by the Norfolk Museums Service, following the relevant policy on archiving standards.

2.0 Geology and Topography

(Fig. 1)

Although within the parish of Sparham, Cells 4, 5 and 6 are located within 1km of the village of Lyng, which lies a short distance to the west. The cells are situated on the northern side of the valley of the River Wensum, with the most southern cell (Cell 4) only c.200m from the present river channel.

The area around Cells 4, 5 and 6 has been extensively quarried for sands and gravels. The areas to the immediate east and west are restored or are undergoing restoration after extraction. At the time of this archaeological work Cells 1 to 3 were being actively quarried.

The site lies at approximately 15.50m OD, the land rising slightly from the north to the south. It overlies glacial sands and gravels, above a solid geology of chalk. The site was cleared of woodland in the winter of 1999/2000 and at the time of the watching brief work was covered with short grass and nettles, small shrubs and saplings and occasional heaps of soil and tree stumps.

3.0 Archaeological and Historical Background

The area surrounding the site has been extensively quarried providing a number of opportunities to examine its archaeological potential. The Norfolk Historic Environment Record (HER) has been consulted and the most relevant sites discussed in broad chronological order below.

The area is of particular interest as the location for flint finds of Palaeolithic (500,000 BC to 10,000 BC) and Mesolithic (10000 BC to 4000 BC) date. A sandpit, within the vicinity of the site, produced an assemblage of Mesolithic material including an axehead, a burin and flint flakes (HER 3018). The same site also produced a range of Neolithic (4000 BC to 2500 BC) material including pottery, a polished stone axe, a leaf-shaped arrowhead and flint flakes. A find of early Neolithic pottery and flint flakes, associated with a hearth or hearths, occurred within the quarry immediately to the west (HER 3023).

Bronze Age (2500 to 700 BC) activity is represented by numerous round barrows and ring-ditches within the environs of the site. This is not unusual as Bronze Age barrows in Norfolk are often concentrated along the major river valleys. A bowl barrow (HER 3021) immediately to the west of the site (Lawson 1986, 3) was removed during quarrying operations before 1976. A tumulus (HER 3022) to the south-west of the bowl barrow, which may have been a natural mound, was also removed prior to 1976. An isolated find of a perforated stone battleaxe of 'Beaker type' approximately 300m to the west (HER 3020) may also have been associated with a grave. Bronze Age pottery was also recovered from the same sandpit that produced a large assemblage of flint (HER 3018). There are further barrows and ring-ditches to the south of the river (Wymer 1996, 55). The siting of these monuments may also suggest the area was at least partially cleared of woodland by the Bronze Age.

Iron Age (700BC to AD 43) and Roman period (AD 43 to 410) remains and artefacts are surprisingly rare in the area around the site, although it may be presumed that the wider area was settled and occupied by farmsteads and hamlets. There is a Romano-British settlement and pottery production site within the parish of Weston Longville to the south-east (Gurney 1994, 35) and Roman pottery sherds have been recovered from an area to the south of the present site (HER 3048).

No Anglo-Saxon or medieval remains or artefacts have been recorded within the immediate environs of the site, although Anglo-Saxon objects have been recovered during field survey approximately 500m to the south (HER 3048). The name 'Lyng' may imply that much of the area was rough heath or poor quality land during the Anglo-Saxon period.

The site of a chapel and a Benedictine nunnery in priory form lie to the south (HER 3048). The foundation date of the priory is unknown (Knowles and Hadcock 1953, 213); allegedly it was transferred to Thetford c.1160-76, although the nuns were still present on the site in 1250 and probably retained ownership of the chapel. The chapel was in private hands shortly after the dissolution (Blomefield 1808, 250-251).

A series of well preserved earthworks within the village of Lyng to the west may well be tofts, or even a defended manorial site dating from the medieval period (HER 12303).

Recent archaeological investigations undertaken by the NAU involved the excavation of nineteen trenches during the evaluation of Cells 1 to 6 (Brennand 1999). Nine of these were located within the area covered by the watching brief and excavation conducted within Cells 1 to 3 (Bates 2000), whilst ten were located within the area of the watching brief of Cells 4, 5 and 6. Archaeological features were found in two of the trenches, both of which were located within Cell 3 (Brennand 1999, 7-9). In Trench 12 two probable north to south linear features were excavated. They were identified again during the watching brief. Neither contained artefacts, although they may have been of prehistoric date. In Trench 18 a possible curvilinear feature, two possible pits and a probable modern drain were recorded. During the excavation the curvilinear feature was found to be of probable natural origin and a possible was discovered close by. Two clusters of post-holes were identified during the watching brief, one close to the southern end of Trench 10 and one between Trench 9 and 11. Drains of recent date were also recorded (Brennand 1999, 3-9; Bates 2001, 4-5).

4.0 Methodology

(Fig. 2)

The objective of the watching brief was to record any archaeological evidence revealed during the topsoil stripping of Cells 4, 5 and 6. It was hoped that this would enable an assessment to be made of the nature, extent, date, quality, condition and significance of any archaeology found.

Cell 4, which constitutes the south-western part of the site, was stripped of topsoil during January 2002. A haul road was established through the centre of the watching brief area at this time; this was not stripped at any point during the archaeological work. Cell 6, which constitutes the eastern part of the site and the south-eastern part of Cell 5, which constitutes the central part of the site, was stripped in July 2002. The stripping of the north and western parts of Cell 5 took place in April 2003. All topsoil

stripping was carried out using a hydraulic 360° excavator fitted with a toothless ditching bucket and was monitored by an archaeologist.

Spoil, exposed surfaces and features were scanned with a metal detector. All metal-detected and hand-collected finds were retained for inspection, other than those which were obviously modern.

All archaeological features and deposits were recorded using NAU *pro forma* sheets. Trench locations, plans and sections were recorded at appropriate scales and colour and monochrome photographs were taken of all relevant features and deposits.

5.0 Results (Appendix 1)

(Figs 2, 3 and 4)

The orange and yellow sand and gravel natural subsoil [101] was found all over the survey area. There was large scale disturbance to this deposit by numerous tree-boles, many of which contained roots and stumps ([107]). Nonetheless it was possible to machine the surface of the natural subsoil to a relatively flat and clean surface. Where present archaeological features were clearly visible, easily identifiable and relatively well preserved.

Ditch [142] was traced from eastern edge of Cell 4, aligned east-to-west, for 83m. After this distance it turned northwards to become orientated north-to-south and was traced to the northern edge of the watching brief area. It was 'U'-shaped in profile, ranged between 1.3m and 1.75m wide and was up to 0.65m deep. The four sections excavated along its length ([117], [127], [131] and [138]) revealed a patchy primary fill of pale brown sand ([132]) but was mostly filled with dark brown and black sandy silts ([118], [128], [133] and [139]). These probably accumulated overtime and indicate slumping into the ditch from its sides. Two of the sections ([131] and [138]) had evidence that the ditch had been recut on one occasion ([158] and [140] respectively), while one ditch slot ([117]) suggested it had been recut on three occasions ([119], [121] and [123]). The recuts were filled with grey and brown silty sands ([120], [122], [124], [134], [135] and [141]). A modern ceramic field drain pipe had been placed within the two of them ([123] and [140] unfigured) and a flint artefact and piece of ceramic building material was collected from another ([135] unfigured).

Two ditches were identified that were aligned similarly to ditch [142] and which, as a result, were probably associated with it. Ditch [144] was located about 88m to the east of the northern section of ditch [142] and was roughly on the same north to south alignment as it. It had a 'V'-shaped profile, was up to 0.9m wide and had a maximum depth of 0.62m. This ditch ([144]) contained a mid brown grey silty sand, the result of natural slumping and collapse from the side of the ditch.

In the northern part of Cell 5 was ditch [146], which was on the same east to west orientation as the east to west part of ditch [142]. Four sections were excavated through it ([160], [162], [164], and [166]) which demonstrated that it had a varying profile, with a maximum width of 1.05m and a maximum depth 0.35m. It contained a light brown grey silty sand [145].

The recutting of ditch [142] and the placing of a ceramic drain within it was probably part of a specific drainage programme. It is more than likely that this programme included the establishment of three drains found in Cell 4 ([111], [116], and [125]), one of which contained a similar modern ceramic drain pipe. Drain [116] was located

to the south of the turn in ditch [142] and was orientated on the same north to south alignment as the north to south part of that ditch. It was traced to the southern edge of Cell 4. It had a broad 'U'-shaped profile, was up to 0.45m wide and had a maximum depth of 0.15m. To the east of the turn in ditch [142], and on roughly the same east to west alignment as the ditches east to west part, was drain [125]. This drain had a broad 'U'-shaped profile with a flat base, it measured 0.32m wide by 0.23m deep and was traced to the southern edge of Cell 4. Located to the south of the eastern section of ditch [142] and aligned roughly north-west to south-east was drain [111] (fill [112]). This ditch disappeared beyond the eastern edge of site. It had a broad 'U'-shaped profile with a concave base, was up to 0.48m wide and 0.23m deep and contained a modern ceramic drainage pipe.

In addition to these drainage ditches two modern features were found in the southern part of Cell 4. Rectangular pit [113] appeared to cut the fill of drain [116], it measured 1.5m by 1.1m, was up to 0.15m deep. It contained a dark grey brown silty sand [114]. Another modern feature [109] that was sub-rectangular in shape, measured 5.5m long by 1.8 m wide, with an irregular profile was identified. It was filled with a brown sandy silt and large flint pebbles [110] and was probably a geological test-pit or a feature associated with quarrying.

Three groups of undated features were identified, one in the southern part of Cell 4 and two in the central area of Cell 5. Post-hole [104] was located close to the southern edge of Cell 4. Oval in plan, it was 0.36m wide, 0.1m deep and contained a mid brown sand [105]. It may have been associated with a post-hole or slot [102] that was located about 1.1m to the north-east. This feature ([102]) measured almost 1m long, 0.32m wide and 0.18m deep, had a 'U'-shaped profile and was filled with a mid brown sand ([103]). Approximately 35m to the north-east of these two features was an isolated post-hole [136]. This had a broadly 'U'-shaped profile, it was 0.65m long, 0.3m wide and 0.11m deep and was filled with a grey brown silty sand ([137]).

In Cell 5 two oval shaped post-holes were found close to the northern edge of site. Post-hole [152] measured 0.2m by 0.14m by 0.11m deep and was filled with a brown silty sand ([153]). Located c.7.2m to the east of this feature was post-hole [150] which contained a brown orange silty sand mixed with clay ([151]) and measured 0.36m by 0.34m by 0.21m. A short distance to the south-west (28.5m) of these features two roughly circular shaped pits were found ([154] and [156]). The easternmost pit ([154]) had diameter of 0.8m, was 0.28m deep and was had a brown orange silty sand fill ([155]). The westernmost [156] contained a mixed orange and black silty sand fill [157], had a diameter of 0.34m and was 0.22m deep.

Localised patches of a thin mid grey brown silty sand subsoil ([106], [129], [130] and [149]) were seen throughout the watching brief area. These were sealed by a dark brown grey sandy loam topsoil ([100] and [148]). Finds from many periods were retrieved from this topsoil and include an iron coach bolt (Cell 4 [100]), a struck flint, a piece of pottery, fragments of ceramic building material, a piece of quern stone, a limestone mullion, five copper alloy objects and a piece of white metal (all from Cell 5 [148]).

6.0 The Finds (Appendix 2)

Flint

Two flint flakes were recovered from the site (ditch fill [135] and topsoil [148]), they are probably of prehistoric date.

Post-Roman pottery

A single body sherd of Thetford-type ware was retrieved from the topsoil ([148]). It weighs 0.009kg and dates to between the 10th and 11th centuries.

Ceramic Building Material

Nine fragments of ceramic building material, weighing 2.526kg, were recovered from four contexts ([112], [135], [148] and unstratified). They consist of a post-medieval pan tile, post-medieval brick and a piece from a modern land drain.

Small Finds (Appendix 3)

Two small find numbers were allocated to artefacts recovered from topsoil [148]. One was a small piece of grey vesicular lava quern stone (SF1). The other was a fragment of medieval chamfered mullion made from limestone (SF2).

Metal Objects (Appendix 4)

Seven post-medieval metal artefacts were found in the topsoil ([100] and [148]). These objects were recorded but not allocated small find numbers as they hold no archaeological significance.

7.0 Conclusions

Relatively few archaeological features were exposed during the watching brief, although the natural subsoil was disturbed by numerous tree-boles. As what archaeological features present were relatively easy to identify and were generally well preserved, it seems likely that the evidence for tree coverage is probably a true representation of the land-use history of the site.

The two worked flints discovered during the project – one as a residual find in ditch [142] and one in the topsoil [148] – are suggestive of prehistoric activity on the site. They are an addition to the Mesolithic or Early Neolithic flints previously recorded (Brennand 1999; Bates 2001) and support the suggestion of focused prehistoric activity close to the Wensum (Brennand 1999, 11). There is also the possibility, however, that the undated post-holes and pits may be prehistoric in date. If so, this would suggest that prehistoric activity was more spread out than previously thought.

It seems probable that ditches [142], [144] and [146] were field boundaries and divided broadly rectangular fields. They are not shown on the first (1884) and second (1906) edition Ordnance Survey maps; where Cells 4, 5 and 6 are shown located within a single large field. It is likely, therefore, that the ditches were established by the mid 19th century at the latest and that they had fallen out of use by the late 19th century. It is probable that the insertion of a ceramic drain pipe into the upper fills of the ditch [142], along with the establishment of other drains in Cells 3 (Bates 2001, 5) and 4 at the same time, took away the drainage use of the ditches and allowed the creation of larger fields.

It is worthy of note, however, that the present southern edge of Cell 6 is marked by an east-to-west aligned ditch. The alignment of this feature suggests that it was originally part of the east-to-west ditch [142]. This means that although the part of ditch [142] located within Cells 4 and 5 was disused by the late 19th century, the line of the ditch has survived as a field boundary.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Redland Lafarge Aggregates Ltd for their co-operation on site and for funding the watching brief. Phoenix Consulting Archaeology Ltd offered help and advice in their role as archaeological consultants.

The fieldwork was carried out by John Ames, Francesca Boghi, David Robertson and Sandrine Whitmore. The site drawings were digitised by John Ames, Francesca Boghi and David Robertson. Lucy Talbot processed and reported on the finds, the flints were examined by Sarah Bates and Richenda Goffin studied the pottery. The report was edited by Alice Lyons, illustrated by Sandrine Whitmore and produced by David Dobson.

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Appendix 1: Context Summary

Context	Category	Description	Period
100	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
101	Deposit	Natural	Natural
102	Cut	Post-hole or slot	Uncertain
103	Deposit	Fill of post-hole [102]	Uncertain
104	Cut	Post-hole	Uncertain
105	Deposit	Fill of post-hole/slot [104]	Uncertain
106	Deposit	Subsoil, to east of main haul road	Uncertain
107	Cut	Tree-hole	Modern
108	Deposit	Fill of tree-hole [107]	Modern
109	Cut	Pit	Modern
110	Deposit	Fill of pit [109]	Modern
111	Cut	Drain	Modern
112	Deposit	Fill of drain [111]	Modern
113	Cut	Possible pit	Modern
114	Deposit	Cut of possible pit [113]	Modern
115	Cut	Drain	Modern
116	Deposit	Fill of drain [115]	Modern
117	Cut	Ditch segment	Post-medieval
118	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [117]	Post-medieval
119	Cut	Ditch segment recut (of [117])	Post-medieval
120	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [119]	Post-medieval
121	Cut	Ditch segment recut (of [117])	Post-medieval
122	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [121]	Modern
123	Cut	Drain/ditch segment recut (of [117])	Modern
124	Deposit	Fill of drain/ditch segment [123]	Modern
125	Cut	Drain	Modern
126	Deposit	Fill of drain [125]	Modern
127	Cut	Ditch segment	Post-medieval
128	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [127]	Post-medieval
129	Deposit	Subsoil, to west of main haul road	Uncertain
130	Deposit	Subsoil, large spread to west of main haul road	Uncertain
131	Cut	Ditch segment	Post-medieval
132	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [131]	Post-medieval
133	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [131]	Post-medieval

Context	Category	Description	Period
134	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment recut [158]	Post-medieval
135	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment recut [158]	Post-medieval
136	Cut	Cut of post-hole	Uncertain
137	Deposit	Fill of post-hole [136]	Uncertain
138	Cut	Ditch segment	Post-medieval
139	Deposit	Fill of ditch segment [138]	Post-medieval
140	Cut	Drain/ditch segment recut (of [138])	Modern
141	Deposit	Fill of drain/ditch segment [140]	Modern
142	Master	Ditch	Post-medieval
143	Deposit	Fill of drain [144]	Post-medieval
144	Cut	Drain	Post-medieval
145	Deposit	Fill of ditch [146]	Post-medieval
146	Master	Ditch	Post-medieval
147	Deposit	Organic fill of natural depression	Uncertain
148	Deposit	Topsoil	Modern
149	Deposit	Subsoil	Uncertain
150	Cut	Post-hole	Uncertain
151	Deposit	Fill of post-hole [145]	Uncertain
152	Cut	Pit	Uncertain
153	Deposit	Fill of pit [152]	Uncertain
154	Cut	Pit	Uncertain
155	Deposit	Fill of pit [154]	Uncertain
156	Cut	Pit	Uncertain
157	Deposit	Fill of pit [156]	Uncertain
158	Cut	Ditch segment recut (of [131])	Post-medieval
159	Deposit	Fill of segment [160] of ditch M146	Post-medieval
160	Cut	Segment of ditch M146	Post-medieval
161	Deposit	Fill of segment [162] of ditch M146	Post-medieval
162	Cut	Segment of ditch M146	Post-medieval
163	Deposit	Fill of segment [164] of ditch M146	Post-medieval
164	Cut	Segment of ditch M146	Post-medieval
165	Deposit	Fill of segment [166] of ditch M146	Post-medieval
166	Cut	Segment of ditch m146	Post-medieval

Appendix 2: Finds by Context

Context	Material	Quantity	Weight (kg)	Period
Unstratified	Ceramic building material	3	0.997	Post-medieval
100	Iron	1	-	
112	Ceramic building material	4	1.008	Post-medieval
135	Ceramic building material	1	0.500	Post-medieval
135	Flint	1	-	
148	Pottery	1	0.008	Late Saxon to medieval
148	Ceramic building material	1	0.021	Post-medieval
148	Copper alloy	5	-	
148	White metal	1	-	
148	Lava (SF1)	1	-	
148	Stone (SF2)	1	-	
148	Flint	1	-	

Appendix 3: Small Finds

Small Find	Context	Quantity	Material	Description	Period/date
1	148	1	Lava	Quern	
2	148	1	Limestone	Chamfered mullion	Medieval

Appendix 4: Catalogue of Other Metal Objects (not small found as they have no archaeological significance)

Context	Quantity	Material	Object Name	Description	Date
100	1	Iron	Coach bolt	-	Post-medieval
148	2	Copper alloy	Buckles	Harness	Post-medieval
148	1	Copper alloy	Bell	Fragment	Post-medieval
148	1	Copper alloy	Teaspoon	Handle	Post-medieval
148	1	Copper alloy	Collar	With suspension loop	Post-medieval
148	1	White metal	?Vessel	Fragment	Post-medieval

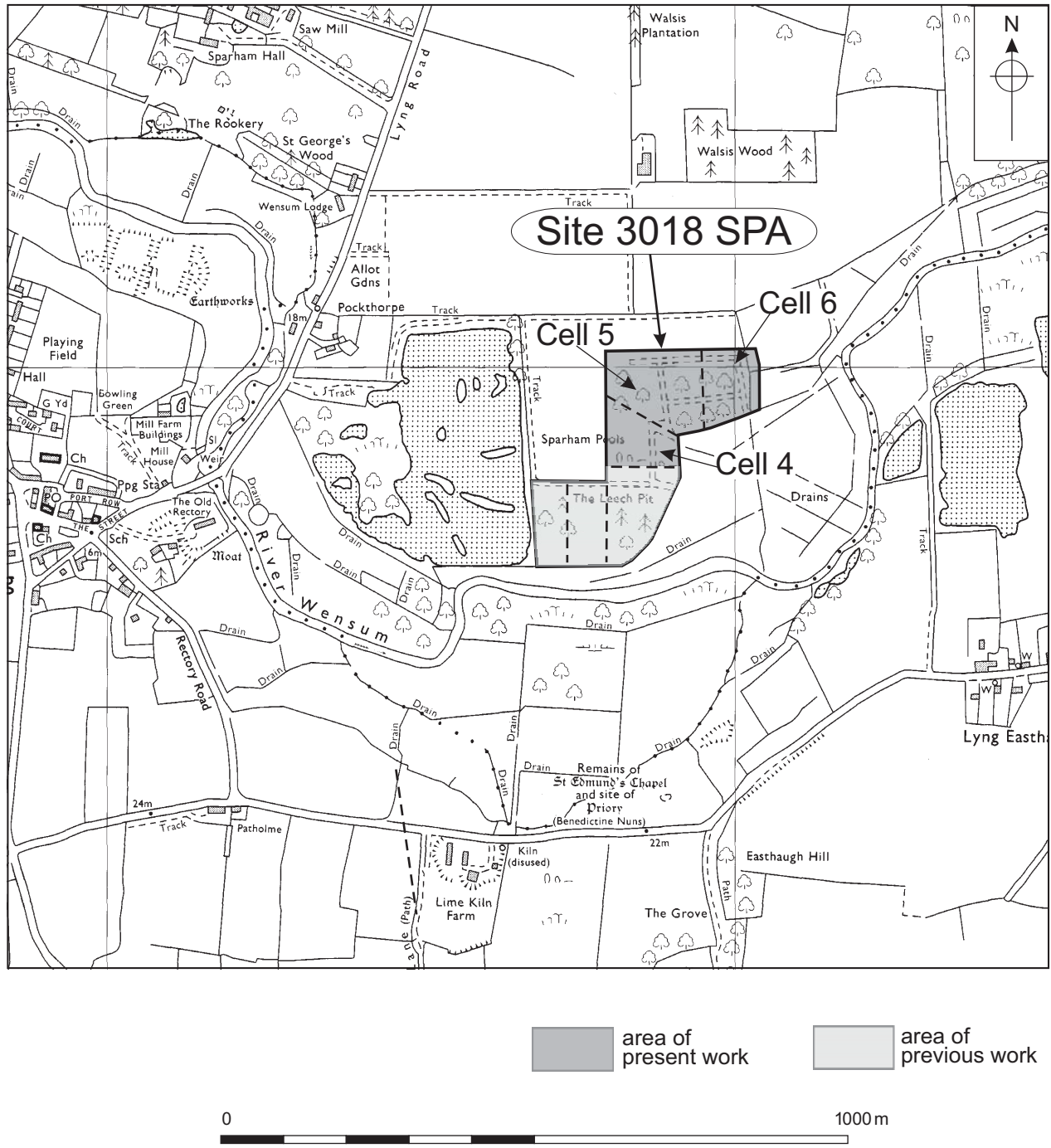


Figure 1. Site location. Scale 1:10,000.

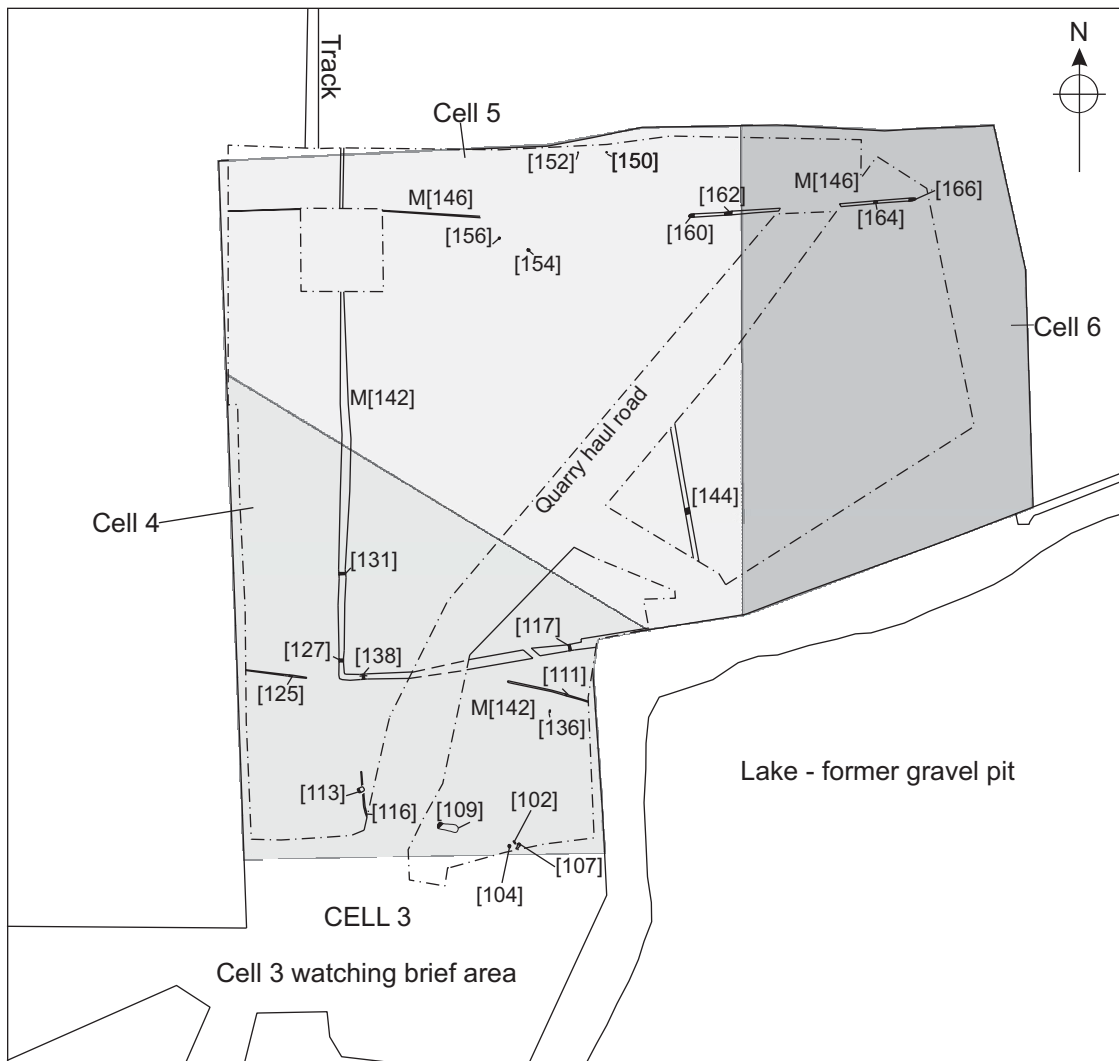
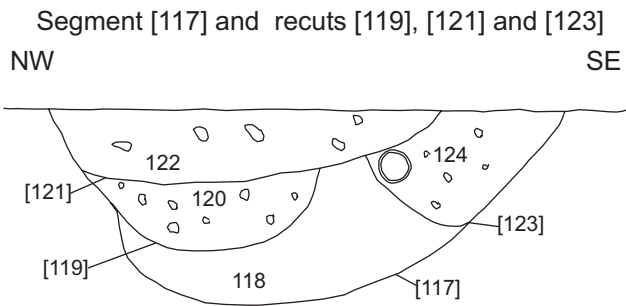
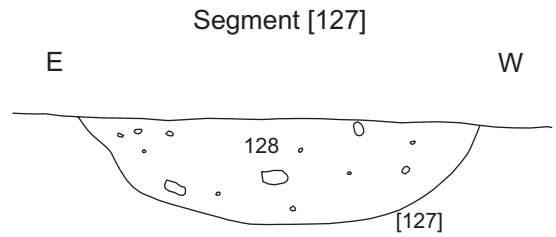


Figure 2. Location of the watching brief area and archaeological features found.
Scale 1:2000

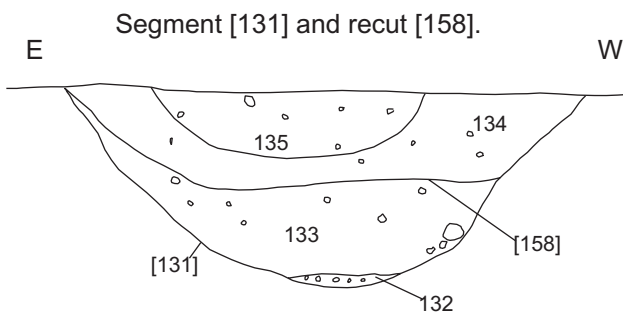
Ditch M[144]



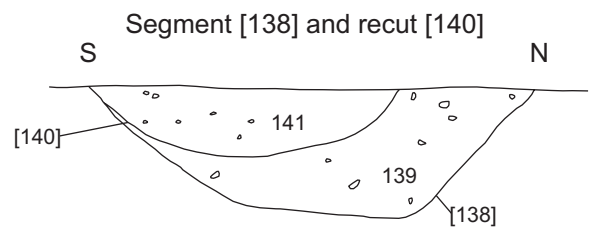
South-west facing section



North facing section

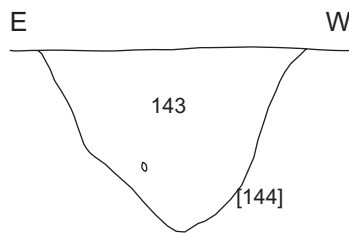


North facing section



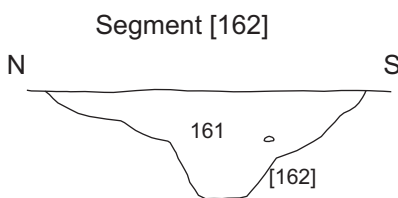
East facing section

Ditch [144]

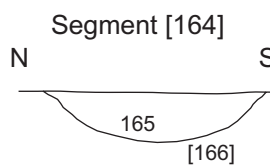


North facing section

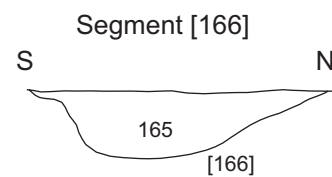
Ditch M[146]



West facing section



West facing section



East facing section



Figure 3. Ditch [42], sections. Scale 1:10

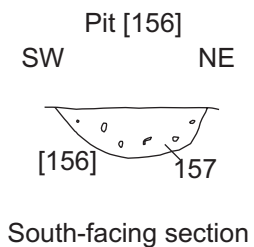
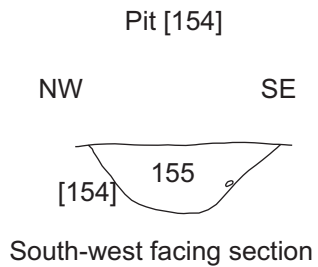
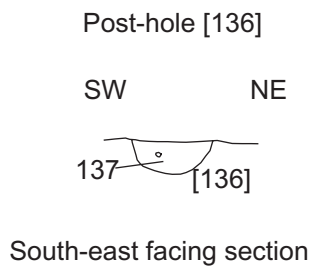
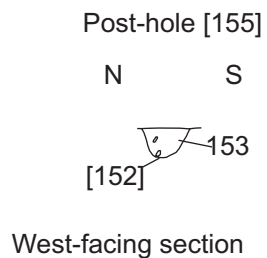
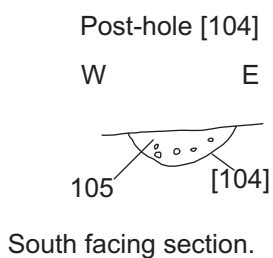
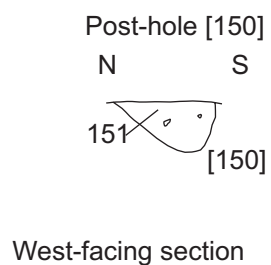
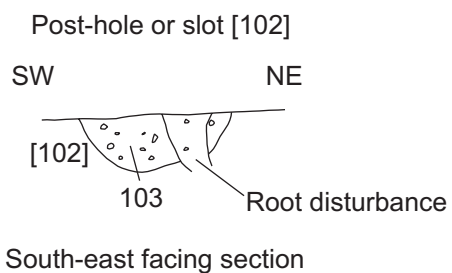


Figure 4. Undated features, sections. Scale 1:10