

**Pastures Road**  
**Mexborough**  
**South Yorkshire**

*Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment*

**Contents**

1. Introduction
2. Methodology
3. Archaeological and historical background
4. Catalogue of sites
5. Conclusions

Bibliography

Acknowledgements

Figures

Appendix

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## **List of Figures**

- Figure 1.* Site location.
- Figure 2.* The study area with catalogue numbers and development area.
- Figure 3.* Extract from the First Edition Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1854 (sheet 284), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 4.* Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1893 (sheet 284 NW), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 5.* Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1903 (sheet 284 NW), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 6.* Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1932 (sheet 284 NW), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 7.* Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1938 (sheet 284 NW), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 8.* Extract from the Ordnance Survey 6 inch scale map of 1948 (sheet 284 NW), with study area highlighted.
- Figure 9.* Extract from an auction catalogue map of 1847, with the study area highlighted (The John Goodchild Collection).

## **List of Plates**

- Plate 1.* The view over the study area looking south-west towards Mexborough, with the pond in the foreground, and the proposed development area in the centre.
- Plate 2.* Part of the proposed development area looking west, showing the height difference between the cultivated ground and the terraced area to the left.
- Plate 3.* View over the proposed development area looking north-westward, with the section of road constructed as part of an earlier development.
- Plate 4.* ‘The Ings’ looking east. An area of former low lying ground, used as a tip for Denaby Main Colliery, and now landscaped as pasture and woodland.

## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 Archaeological Services WYAS was commissioned by Ben Bailey Homes Ltd to undertake an archaeological desk-based assessment of an area of land to the north-west of Pastures Road, Mexborough, prior to the proposed construction of an industrial development.
- 1.2 The purpose of the study is to identify and assess the significance of sites and finds of archaeological interest within the area of the proposed development. The study also extends to all land within a 500m radius of the development area itself, centred at SE 4930 0050 encompassing an area of approximately 78.5 hectares. This will allow any archaeological remains to be seen in the context of the surrounding historic landscape.
- 1.3 The study area encompasses land to the north-east of Mexborough, lying between the River Dearne to the north, and the River Don to the south. Pastures Road runs south-west to north-east across the area, and the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Canal runs through its southern edge. To the western side of Pastures Road the land is under arable cultivation, and to the east land use consists of areas of pasture, new tree plantations and scrubby grassland. A hotel, 'Pastures Lodge' has recently been built on the southern side of Pastures Road, and a sewage works is located at its south-western end. On the northern side of the study area, the course of the River Dearne has been altered in recent years, and large earth embankments have been constructed as flood defences along its line. The 'Trans-Pennine Way', a network of public footpaths, also runs through the northern edge of the study area, following the river.
- 1.4 The area of the proposed development itself can be divided into two distinct blocks. On its north-western side it takes in an area of land currently being used for arable cultivation; on its south-eastern side the ground is around 2 – 3m higher than the surrounding fields, and consists of an area of rough grassland (*see* Plates 1 and 2). This south-eastern area has previously been landscaped into two terraces, formed by dumped earth, as part of a development begun in the early 1990s. However, apart from a short section of road, and accompanying street lighting, this earlier development was not completed (Plate 3).
- 1.5 The soil is largely river alluvium on the north and eastern sides of the study area, with stoneless clay and loamy soils to the west, and well-drained coarse loamy soil towards the centre. The study area is located within the area of the Yorkshire and East Midlands Coal Field, the underlying geology of which comprises Upper Carboniferous Coal Measures (Edwards and Trotter 1954, 42).
- 1.6 A geotechnical survey of the proposed development area was undertaken in 2001 by JPA consultants. This survey included the sinking of a number of trial pits and boreholes to establish the nature of the geology and soils across the site. The records of this work are found in Appendix 2.
- 1.7 No Listed Buildings, Scheduled Monuments, designated Parks and Gardens or Battlefields are found within the study area.

## **2. Methodology**

- 2.1 The study has collated available documentary, photographic and cartographic material directly relevant to the study area. These sources are held in the South Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), The John Goodchild Collection at the Local History Study Centre, Wakefield, and the National Monuments Record (NMR). A range of other publications and websites have also been referred to and these are listed in the bibliography.
- 2.2 Archaeological features and artefacts discovered within, and immediately adjacent to, the study area have been given a numerical identifier and listed in Section 4 together with an eight-digit National Grid Reference number. The location of these features has been recorded on a map of the area (*see* Fig. 2).
- 2.3 A site visit was carried out on 20th October 2005, where accessible, to assess the survival of previously documented features and to identify any previously unknown sites of archaeological interest that may survive on the ground.

## **3. Archaeological and historical background**

### **3.1 Prehistoric and Roman period**

- 3.1.1 The earliest evidence for prehistoric occupation in the area comes from an array of flint artefacts that have been found through field walking during the late 1970s. These largely appear to date to the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods, and consist of flint scrapers (**5**, **6**, **9**), retouched flakes (**7**, **12**, **13**) and retouched blades (**8**, **11**). These were all found within a relatively small area of ploughed fields to the west of Pastures Road.
- 3.1.2 There is evidence that there may have been extensive late prehistoric and possibly Romano-British occupation within the study area. The remains of a rectilinear enclosure have been identified through aerial photographic analysis carried out as part of *The Magnesian Limestone in South and West Yorkshire Project*. This was recorded in a field to the west of the sewage works, surviving as a crop mark, together with an associated field system and track (**1**).
- 3.1.3 A section of a probable drove road or trackway cuts across the north-western quarter of the study area, in an approximately south-east to north-west alignment (**4**). It continues westward for almost 1km, and may be of an Iron Age or Roman date. This feature may also be contemporary with a further possible field system, lying at the centre of the study area (**10**).

### **3.2 Medieval and Post-Medieval period**

- 3.2.1 There has been a settlement at Mexborough since at least the late 11th century when it is named in the Domesday Book as *Mechesburg* (Williams and Martin 1992, 865). However, it is probable that the town originated during the Saxon period, and the name may derive from the Old English for 'Mēoc's fortification' (Smith 1961, 77).

- 3.2.2 There is extensive evidence that much of the study area was cultivated during the medieval period. Areas of probable medieval ridge and furrow ploughing has been identified surviving as earthworks from aerial photographic analysis, across the fields on the western side of Pastures Road (14), although these now appear to have been ploughed out.
- 3.2.3 It seems that medieval landholding and agricultural patterns continued to survive into the mid-19th century. A map of 1847, which accompanied an auction catalogue for lots of land around Mexborough, shows that strips of land continued to be held by individuals (Fig. 9; John Goodchild Collection 1847). The Ordnance Survey maps for this area also show that the alignment of later boundaries continued to be influenced by the line of the medieval furrows. These furrows generally form an elongated reverse-S shape, due to the plough team pulling to the left to allow themselves greater space to make a turn at the end (Taylor 1975, 82). This shape was therefore preserved in the enclosed tracts of the former furlongs. (Ordnance Survey 1854; 1903; 1932; 1938; 1948; Figs 3-8).
- 3.2.4 There appears to be no evidence surviving on the ground of either the blocks of medieval ploughing, or the lines of the later boundaries that enclosed them. Modern intensive farming across the site has seen the removal of many of the boundaries to create larger fields, and any surviving earthworks appear to have been destroyed by plough action.

### **3.3 18th, 19th and 20th century developments**

#### *Landholding and field organisation*

- 3.3.1 There were major changes to landholding and the organisation of the landscape around Mexborough during the 19th century. Many of the areas of open fields were enclosed during this time, whether due to the continued process of piecemeal enclosure and reduction of common rights held over the land (Goodchild 1997, 201), or through Parliamentary enclosure after 1861. Some of the new boundaries followed the lines of former blocks of medieval ploughing, preserving their former alignments in the later field pattern (Ordnance Survey 1854; see above). Other areas of land appear to have escaped enclosure, such as Mexborough Low Pasture, on the eastern edge of the study area. However, this was rough pasture, and constantly waterlogged and under threat from flooding, and was therefore must have been marginal land at best (Ordnance Survey 1854; 1948).
- 3.3.2 ‘The Ings’ is an area bounded approximately by the River Don to the south, the River Dearne to the north and Pastures Road to the west. This was originally low-lying ground, which would probably have been rough, permanent pasture. The place name element *Ings* derives from Old Norse, and in Yorkshire is often found in names of meadows and low-lying pasture close to rivers. The area is marked on the First Edition Ordnance Survey map of 1854 as ‘Liable to Floods’ (Fig. 3; Ordnance Survey 1854). During the early part of the 20th century the southern part of this area had become submerged by water and by the late 1920s most of the land in the triangle of land between the Rivers Don and Dearne appears to have been submerged (Ordnance Survey 1903; 1932). In the 1950s, the area began to be used as the site for a tip

from the Denaby Main Colliery to the south of the River Don, with an aerial ropeway being used to transport material away from the pit head to the tips (Ordnance Survey 1956). This area has now been re-landscaped as open pasture and mixed woodland (Plate 4).

#### *Industrial and urban features*

- 3.3.3 The town of Mexborough itself went through dramatic changes during the 19th century, as the effects of rapid industrialisation transformed it from a village with a population of just 417 in 1801, to a town of 10,430 people by 1901 (John Goodchild 1997, 200). Mexborough was well placed to take advantage of the new industrial developments, being situated close to the River Don. This had been made navigable during the mid-18th century by the construction of a series of canal cuts along its length, such as Mexborough New Cut (part of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation), which lies at the southern edge of the study area (15).
- 3.3.4 The growth of the town saw the encroachment of new housing onto former agricultural land, and the construction of new infrastructure that served the new industries and the growing population. By the 1890s a terrace of houses had been constructed at the south-western edge of the study area, and a sewage works was constructed to the north-east of these at a similar time (2, 3; Ordnance Survey 1893). This sewage works was established to process the waste from Mexborough itself, which had seen rapid growth in industry and population. Initially it was a small works, consisting of a number of sewage beds, with a pumping station supplying water from the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation to its south. By the late 1920s the works had expanded, with a number of new structures across the site (Ordnance Survey 1932). Further expansion took place during the 1970s, which saw the works expand eastwards (Ordnance Survey 1976-81). During the late 20th century a housing estate was constructed over former agricultural land at the western edge of the study area.

## **4. Catalogue of sites**

- 4.1 These sites have been catalogued from west to east, and their locations marked on Fig. 2. Each catalogue entry includes a National Grid Reference (NGR) together with a South Yorkshire Sites and Monuments Record number (SMR) and a National Monuments Record number (NMR) where relevant.

1. **Enclosure** **NMR: SE40 SE28 SMR 2001 SE 488 004**  
A rectilinear enclosure, together with associated field system and trackways, has been identified surviving as cropmarks through aerial photographic analysis (*The Magnesian Limestone in South and West Yorkshire Project*). The form of these features indicates a probable Iron Age or Romano-British date.
2. **Don View Row** **SE 4894 0017**  
A terrace of late-Victorian houses on the south-western edge of the study area. These had been constructed by 1890, and are depicted on the Ordnance Survey map of 1893. They continue to be occupied today.

- 3. Sewage Works** **SE 4909 0036**  
A sewage works is located on the northern side of Pastures Road, to the immediate north of Don View Row. There has been a sewage works on the site since at least the 1890s, and it is first marked on the Ordnance Survey map of 1893.
- 4. Drove road** **NMR: SE40 SE23 SMR 2988 SE 491 006**  
A section of a drove road or ditched lane which runs for almost 1km in an approximate south-east to north-west orientation, following the natural contours of the hills. The eastern most length, within the study area, shows as a very strong crop mark with possible deepening, or rutting. It is probably of prehistoric or Romano-British date.
- 5. Flint scraper** **SMR 1962 SE 492 004**  
A flint scraper, probably Mesolithic or Neolithic in date, was discovered on the surface of a ploughed field to the north-east of the sewage works around 1977/8. These are currently held in Doncaster Museum.
- 6. Flint scraper** **SMR 1963 SE 493 006**  
A flint scraper, of probable Mesolithic date, was discovered on the surface of a ploughed field in 1977/78.
- 7. Mesolithic and Neolithic flints** **SMR 1965 SE 493 005**  
Flints probably dating to the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods, discovered on the surface of a ploughed field in 1977/78. These comprised of two retouched flakes, and one notched flake. One of the retouched flakes and the notched flake is held in Doncaster Museum, and the other in the reference collection of Mr A. Reace, Mexborough.
- 8. Flint assemblage** **NMR: SE40 SE21 SMR 3755 SE 493 005**  
An assemblage of flints of unknown period, discovered in 1976. This comprises of 3 flint scrapers and 6 retouched blades. These are now held in Doncaster Museum.
- 9. Flint scraper** **SMR 1959 SE 493 007**  
A single flint scraper was discovered on a ploughed field surface in 1977/78. It appears to date to the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods.
- 10. Possible field system** **SMR 0094 SE 493 005**  
A possible field system including a rectangular enclosure, perhaps associated with other probable Iron Age or Romano-British features (1, 4).
- 11. Retouched flint blades** **SMR 1960 SE 494 006**  
Two retouched flint blades were discovered on a ploughed field surface in 1977/78. These are probably Mesolithic or Neolithic in date.
- 12. Retouched flake** **SMR 1961 SE 494 007**  
A retouched flake was discovered on the surface of a ploughed field in 1977/78. It appears to date to the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods. It is now held in the reference collection of Mr A. Reace, Mexborough.

- 13. Retouched flake** **SMR 1964** **SE 495 009**  
A retouched flake was discovered on the surface of a ploughed field in 1977/78. It appears to date to the Mesolithic or Neolithic periods.
- 14. Ridge and furrow** **SE 4954 0066**  
Extensive blocks of ridge and furrow ploughing have been identified across the study area through aerial photographic analysis (*The Magnesian Limestone in South and West Yorkshire Project*). There appears to be no earthwork remains of this ploughing surviving on the ground, and the area has been heavily ploughed in recent years. A number of field boundaries depicted on Ordnance Survey maps from 1854 onwards, run on the same alignment as the ridge and furrow, and appear to represent the enclosure of the furlongs in the area. These boundaries have a distinctive reverse-S curve, as they follow the line of the earlier furlongs. None of these boundaries now survive within the study area.
- 15. Mexborough New Cut (canal)** **SE 4964 0022**  
The Mexborough New Cut is a section of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation that lies to the north of the River Don, and runs through the southern edge of the study area. This is made up of stretches of canal that make the River Don navigable from Goole, on the River Ouse, to Tinsley near Sheffield. This was begun in 1722 and completed in 1751 (Pennine Waterways website).



## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The dumps of earth that form the two terraces over the south-eastern part of the site will have obscured any surviving archaeological features that were previously extant in this area. However, due to the depth of the dumped material that forms the terraces, it is unlikely that any sub-surface features that survive below them will be impacted upon by future development work.
- 5.2 The north-western part of the proposed development area encompasses land that is currently used for arable cultivation. Although no earthwork remains have survived the modern intensive ploughing here, it is possible that sub-surface archaeological features may exist. Without the increased depth of soil from the dumping that occurs in the south-western part of the site, such features may well be disturbed by future construction work.
- 5.3 There has been a concentration of finds discovered in the plough soil in fields within the study area, dating to the Mesolithic and Neolithic periods. It is possible that further artefactual remains of such date may be uncovered in the section of the field that is incorporated into the north-western part of the proposed development area.
- 5.4 Aerial photographic analysis has identified a range of probable late prehistoric or Romano-British features across the study area. These survive as sub-surface features, appearing as crop or soil marks on the ground; there is no evidence of earthworks surviving from this period.
- 5.5 The area has remained largely agricultural land since at least the medieval period, with the slightly higher ground on the valley sides being used for arable cultivation, and the lower land close to the rivers (which was prone to flooding), probably being kept as permanent pasture. These areas obviously gave their name to Pastures Road.
- 5.6 It is clear that the remains of medieval field patterns and ridge and furrow ploughing survived across the study area into the second half of the 20th century. These features have been extensively mapped and recorded through aerial photographic and cartographic analysis (mainly through the work carried out for *The Magnesian Limestone in South and West Yorkshire Project*), and on historic Ordnance Survey mapping. However, little of this earlier landscape pattern survives on the ground today, and the area to the west of Pastures Road has been intensively ploughed, with the large majority of the earlier field boundaries removed. No further evidence of medieval structures, surviving as surface or sub-surface features has been identified in the area.
- 5.7 The impact of industrialization, such as the construction of the Sheffield and South Yorkshire Navigation on the southern side of the study area, appears to have had little impact on the land to its north. However, the use of land close to the River Dearne as tips for material from Denaby Main Colliery from the 1950s caused the transformation of the landscape in the north-eastern part of the study area, known as *The Ings*, which went from being low-lying waterlogged ground to the present landscaped hill. Further landscape

alterations were undertaken in the late 20th century when a new channel for the River Dearne was constructed, and large earthwork flood banks built along its bank. These alterations have therefore drastically changed the topography of the land in this area over the last fifty years, and may have obscured or destroyed further archaeological evidence of the historic landscape.

- 5.8 Therefore, there is little threat to the historic character of the landscape, as much of the earlier features of this have now been destroyed, or drastically altered. However, the existence of the previously constructed terraces of dumped earth in the south-eastern part of the proposed development may protect any sub-surface features which these overly.

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## **Appendix 1**

*South Yorkshire Archaeological Service, 'Brief for Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment, Pastures Road, Mexborough'*

## **Appendix 2**

*JPA Civil, Structural, Geotechnical & Environmental Engineering Consultants,  
2001, 'Land at Pastures Road, Mexborough, South Yorkshire', Borehole Logs*