



Figure 1.1: Location of the excavation area, with the other sites referenced in this report.

# CHAPTER 1: *Introduction*

## Background to the Project

This report presents the results of archaeological investigations carried out at Pode Hole quarry, Peterborough, between 1999 and 2005. The archaeological work was undertaken as pre-quarrying mitigation in order to fulfil a condition of planning consent.

Pode Hole (sand and gravel) quarry lies to the south of the A47, between Eye and Thorney, in the parish of Thorney and is thus situated in the part of the Cambridgeshire Fens known as the 'North Level'. Pode Hole is considered part of the City of Peterborough for administrative purposes, but has historically been part of Cambridgeshire. The investigated area (hereafter referred to as the 'project area') was centred on NGR 526500 303600 and occupied a single block of land covering slightly over 23.5 hectares (c. 58 acres).

The project area was the subject of pre-quarrying watching brief, evaluation and excavation carried out intermittently between 1999 and 2005.

## Project Aims

The quarry expanded intermittently over a number of years, via a number of 'Extraction Areas', with the archaeological investigation of each Extraction Area taking place immediately prior to its quarrying.

The episodic nature of the archaeological intervention at Pode Hole quarry therefore offered the opportunity to refine the research aims and methodologies of the project as it progressed. At the start of the project, the nature and location of potential archaeological remains were uncertain, and an early written scheme of investigation (WSI) noted '*an apparent lack of target features*' (Howlett, 2001, p.10). However, by the time the final Extraction Area was topsoiled, the archaeological deposits and features thereby revealed conformed to an anticipated pattern.

Below is a summary of the recurrent research themes that came to guide the excavation of the project area:

*1. The transition from the monument-dominated landscape of the Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age to the settlement and field landscapes of the later Bronze Age.*

Fieldwork was undertaken not only to record the form and extent of the barrow cemetery and field system, but to explore the role the barrow cemetery played within the field system. To what extent did the builders of the field system take account of the existence of the barrows? Did

they re-use them as depositories of the dead, or did they become mere guide-posts for land survey? To what degree were barrows the focus of later activity?

*2. The character and development of the agricultural landscape of the later Bronze Age.*

Was all of the field system set out and used at the same time, or was it modified during use? What was the land at Pode Hole used for during the Bronze Age? What was the relationship between it and the supposed 'Romano-British' field system preserved in an adjacent Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM No. 20802)? Was there any evidence of structured deposition of artefacts and ecofacts within it? Two characteristics of the field system were that it contained many interruptions, and that some elements were partially double-ditched, and fieldwork was undertaken in awareness of the need to explore and explain these features.

*3. Environmental change in the second millennium BC, and human interaction with, and exploitation of, that changing environment.*

Due to the anaerobic conditions that existed towards the bases of the waterhole pits and ponds, the opportunity was available, via the study of preserved pollen, plant macrofossils, molluscs and wood, to embark upon detailed reconstruction of the past environment at Pode Hole. Was there evidence of gradual or intensive deforestation? How much woodland was present on the site during the main period of its occupation? Was this woodland harvested and managed? Did the site host arable or pastoral agriculture?

*4. The distribution, nature and development of the Bronze Age domestic activity, particularly with regard to flintworking and its ceramic technology.*

Where was settlement focussed in the project area, how was it integrated into the field system, and how did this relate to pre-existing uses of the landscape? Was it possible to identify the extents of landholdings associated with structures? How did the material culture of the area's inhabitants change during the Bronze Age?

Fieldwork was therefore undertaken to best capture and interpret the physical products of the dynamic interrelationships between changing landscape and changing society that the site was found to contain for the second millennium BC.

The archaeological fieldwork was not carried out in isolation from either the aims or results of other research in the locality. The guidance and regional overview provided by Ben Robinson, the City of Peterborough Historic Environment Manager was particularly welcome

in this regard. The initial written scheme of investigation (Howlett, *op. cit.*) was designed with reference to the regional research agenda (Glazebrook, 1997), and during fieldwork at Pode Hole site visits were undertaken by excavation staff to other units active on neighbouring sites.

## Methodology

Work at Pode Hole quarry commenced in 1999, with an evaluation and watching brief prior to the quarrying of Extraction Area 5. In following years, Extraction Areas were not evaluated prior to quarrying. Instead, initial topsoiling was carried out under permanent and direct archaeological supervision. Before subsoiling and quarrying took place, the Extraction Area was located and planned, and then targeted features and deposits were excavated in accordance with the WSI and the project's developing research aims. This pattern repeated itself over several years, with the excavation of Extraction Areas 5 to 8 inclusive.



Plate 1.1: Paul Gelderd excavating Pond Cluster 3.

In practice, this meant that 10% of the total length of ditches were hand excavated, and 10% of isolated features were half sectioned. The intersections between features were targeted in order to construct a stratigraphic sequence for the site. The termini of ditches also formed a focus for investigation, as did apparent interruptions in the ditches forming the field system. This was done in order to ascertain whether the interruptions were deliberate or the result of plough damage to shallow features, and to investigate the existence of possible entrance structures.

All ring-ditches were excavated, with 50% of the circumference being removed by hand. Potential archaeological features within and around each ring-ditch were investigated in order to check for primary, secondary or satellite burials.

A minimum of 50% of each waterhole pit was hand dug; in many cases these were entirely excavated by hand especially where they contained anaerobic lower fills.

Environmental sampling focussed on the fills of these features, as soil conditions were most conducive to organic preservation. Pit fills found to contain pottery and bone were especially targeted. By complementing the samples taken from the stratified sequence of artefact-bearing deposits in pits with radiocarbon samples, it was hoped to create an absolute chronology to better understand the development of the ancient economy of the site.

A full excavation methodology, regarding recording conventions, photographic formats etc, is presented in the interim reports for Extraction Areas 5 to 7 (Phoenix Archaeology Consulting Ltd/Network Archaeology Ltd, 1999-2004 inclusive).

## Report Structure

This report contains six chapters. This chapter has introduced the circumstances of the project, its research aims, and the methodologies chosen to pursue these aims. Chapter 2 presents the project area in the context of its location in time and place, and summarises the results of other archaeological and palaeoenvironmental work in the immediate vicinity. Chapter 3 gives the results of the fieldwork, and presents the evidence of the archaeological features found in the project area. A description and analysis of artefacts and ecofacts recovered from the site follows in Chapter 4 and 5. Chapter 6 draws the evidence together, and discusses the development of the project area through time, as demonstrated by its archaeological features, material culture and the changing environment they existed within. The nature of the archaeology of the project area means that this report emphasises its occupation during the final two millennia BC, a period commonly referred to, with the attendant recognised pitfalls (Parker Pearson, 2005), as the Bronze Age (2000-700 BC).

