Investigation No	Intervention No	Quarry Phase	Activity	Contractor	Date
10	Intervention 3	2b, 5a	Walkover and contour survey	FAS	Summer 1999
11	Intervention 4	2b, 5a	Watching brief	FAS	September 1999
12	Intervention 6	2b	Walkover survey	FAS	December 1999
13	Intervention 5NE	2b	Watching brief	FAS	January - February 2000, May 2000
14	Intervention 5NW	3	Watching brief	FAS	October - November 2001
15	Intervention 5SW	3	Watching brief	FAS	April and June 2002, September 2002
16	Intervention 5SE	4	Watching brief and test pits	FAS	November - December 2003, June 2004
17	Intervention 9	0.2083	Topographic survey (Flasks)	FAS	August 2003
18	Intervention 7	0.2083	Augur survey (Flasks)	FAS	August 2003
19	Intervention 8	0.2083	Evaluation (Flasks)	FAS	September 2003

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

There is now a considerable corpus of information available for the development of the Thornborough landscape, and a strong interest from both academic and public quarters. However, very little in the way of modern archaeological information was available for the area at the outset of this project in 1995. The principal prehistoric features - the henges, cursus and round barrows - had long been recognised, and had formed the focus of antiquarian attention since the 1860s. Continued interest in the 1950s added to the knowledge of these monuments, but again this activity focussed on small-scale investigations of specific monuments. Until recent work by the Vale of Mowbray Neolithic Landscape Project (Harding 1994-1997; Harding and Johnson 2003; 2004a-d), and the work at Nosterfield Quarry, little research had been undertaken to understand the wider context of these monuments. The current state of knowledge has been summarised in recent reports and large-scale assessments (Harding and Johnson 2003; FAS 2003a). Fieldwalking programmes (Harding and Johnson 1994; 2004b), environmental investigations (Howard *et al* 2000; Long and Tipping 1998; Tipping 2000), survey and excavation (Harding and Johnson 2004a-d) allow the landscape of the Thornborough monument complex to be explored further. Even so, fieldwork in the area is still seen to lag behind the more intensively studied prehistoric landscapes of southern England, and calls have been made for more comprehensive, detailed investigations of upstanding and below-ground archaeology (Harding and Johnson 2003, 9). In this context, the current work at Nosterfield quarry will provide a valuable and significant contribution to this area of research.

2.1 HISTORY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS IN THE NOSTERFIELD AREA

The relative lack of knowledge at the outset of this project in 1995 can be emphasised by considering the history of investigation to that date, through antiquarian activity, early archaeological excavations and modern research. These results contrast dramatically with information that has been acquired since that date. The main focus was naturally on the prehistory of the area, but until the work of the 1990s, very little work was undertaken on a

broader, landscape-wide scale.

2.1.1 Antiquarian studies

Prehistoric monuments

Antiquarians and commentators of the 18th and 19th century had long been aware of the major monuments of the Nosterfield/Thornborough area, and particularly the three Thornborough henges that lie to the south of Nosterfield Quarry (Pennant 1773, in Thomas 1955, 443). The Ordnance Survey edition of 1852 labels them as 'camps' (OS 1852), and it appears that the nature and date of these monuments was little understood. Some contemporary scholars did, however, question this identification, instead suggesting their use for cattle pens or religious assembly (Lukis 1870a, 118-9). Antiquarian activity did not, however, focus on the henges, but on the more familiar barrows that cluster around them. These were recognised as prehistoric burial sites, and as such, were expected to yield interesting finds. Excavation of these monuments, many of which had already been substantially diminished by ploughing, formed part of the pastimes of notable individuals, and most particularly for this region, of the Reverend W. Lukis (Lukis 1870a, 119). Lukis' accounts record the enthusiasm of his contemporaries for the excavation of ancient remains:

> '...in the following week the Rev. W. Greenwell, of Durham, paid me a visit, and as I knew that no manual employment would afford him greater pleasure than grave-digging, I proposed that we should make a further examination of Howe Hill....' (Lukis 1870b, 176)

Numerous barrows are known to have existed in the wider area of the vale occupied by the Rivers Swale and Ure, and a considerable number have been recognised in the immediate vicinity. Lukis describes the remains of 'Centre Hill' barrow, between the southern and central henges, and records the finds of a body, thought to have been in a log coffin, '5 feet below the apex' (Lukis 1870a, 119). To the south of the Nosterfield Quarry, a series of barrows gave 'Three Hills Field' its name, and several more barrows are known from cropmarks and upstanding remains in the area around the Thornborough henges. Lukis is known to have investigated all three of these monuments, and records, albeit briefly, finds of ceramic vessels, flint and cremated bone (Lukis 1870a, 120).

In 1846, in the more easterly area surrounding the henge at Hutton Moor, antiquarians opened a barrow. Accounts record traces of charcoal, and evidence for burning beneath a small cairn, though no burial was identified (Manby 1971, 178). Lukis also excavated three barrows on Melmerby Common in 1864, and all were found to contain cremated bone, one with an urn and one with a pygmy cup (Lukis 1870a, 120; Manby 1971, 177). Their precise locations are unknown, although one is presumed to have been the 'Burtree Barrow', as flint implements from the investigations are recorded to have come from 'a barrow west of Sixpenny Hill, Parish of Sharow'. These activities seem to have been popular for some time, and the barrow at Stapley Hill, near Kirklington, is known to have been excavated in 1903 (Manby 1971, 175).

Fortunately, Lukis and his contemporaries left some account of their activities, though the records are notably cursory (Lukis 1870; Harding and Johnson 2004a, 5). Prior to recent excavations at Nosterfield Quarry, and in the Thornborough monument complex (Harding and Johnson 2004a; 2004d), these were the only 'archaeological' records pertaining to Bronze Age monuments in the immediate vicinity, and over the centuries, the barrows have been increasingly damaged by cultivation (Harding and Johnson 2004a, 16).

Early medieval sites

Lukis also encountered burials which seem likely to date to the early medieval period. At Howe Hill, near Carthorpe, four inhumations were identified and excavated. One was found to have been buried with at least four glass beads, and other grave goods included knives, buckles and strap ends. From Lukis' descriptions, it appears that these might represent crouched burials (Lukis 1870b). Another inhumation close to Camp Hill, again with grave goods, was deemed by Lukis to be 'evidently of the Danish period' (Lukis 1870b, 180). Lukis notes the propensity for burial on the top of gravel ridges (Lukis 1870b).

Of subsequent early medieval activity little appears to have been known, and the enthusiasm for exploring any possible sites of this date is not so evident. Collingwood (1907; 1909-11) records the presence of Anglian sculpture from Magdalen Field, and from the garden of Tanfield Lodge, while Whellan (1859) records the presence of a chapel near Hall Garth. Little further attention was given to remains of this date, and the nature of activity during this period remains largely uncertain today.

Even less attention appears to have focussed on remains of later periods. Few upstanding monuments of medieval and later date are known from the vicinity; the area is considered to have been primarily common land or agricultural through to the modern period. Antiquarian activity remained directed primarily towards the prehistoric monuments.

2.1.2 Archaeological investigations of the 20th century

Prehistory

The focus on major monuments continued into the 20th century, when more detailed archaeological investigations were carried out at the Thornborough monument complex (Thomas 1955; Vatcher 1960), and in the wider area. In addition to the three monuments of the Thornborough alignment, the henges further south, at Hutton Moor, Nunwick and Cana Barn, were studied. Of these six, four were subject to some form of archaeological investigation during the early to mid-20th century. The Hutton Moor henge was investigated 'some years' before 1929 (Raistrick 1929, 364) and Nunwick was explored in 1961(Dymond 1964). During 1952, Nicholas Thomas investigated the central of the Thornborough henges (Thomas 1955). At the central henge, two small sections were cut across the inner ditch, one of which was extended to investigate the outer bank, two were cut across the known line of the cursus and a small trench was dug close to the centre of the henge (Thomas 1955, 428). A profile across the northern henge was also undertaken, with two test pits dug into the bottom of the inner ditch (Thomas 1955, 434).

During investigations of the central Thornborough henge, Thomas identified a significant quantity of gypsum, which was used to suggest that the monument banks may have been coated with white gypsum (Thomas 1955, 433). Conclusions concerning date and chronology were, however, rare, as few diagnostic finds were produced. On the basis of simplicity, the Nunwick henge was considered to be the earliest of the six (Dymond 1964, 101). Thomas (1955, 429) used climatic evidence from soil samples to suggest a date in the early Bronze Age for the construction of the henges. Only during much more recent excavations of the Thornborough complex were more secure, scientific dates produced, and various phases of construction identified (Harding 1998; Harding 2003).

Burl's classification of the henges, building on work by Atkinson and Piggott, highlighted the links between these monuments as a distinct group. Five of the six known henges in the region belong to Burl's Class IIA, of which the 'Big Rings' of Dorchester-on-Thames is the only example outside this area of North Yorkshire (Burl 1969). The recognition of these monuments as a regional group was an important move away from the concentration on monuments in southern England.

A cursus, running across the central Thornborough henge, was initially identified between 1945 and 1958 by J.K. St Joseph, whose aerial photographs revealed a linear feature at least 2.3km in length and between 44 and 58 km wide, aligned NE-SW. Thomas (1955) carried out excavations of the cursus ditch in 1952, also recording the sections of the cursus as they were removed during gravel quarrying at their western end (Thomas 1955, 429-432). Thomas showed that the cursus ditch underlies the southern bank of the central henge, and a high humus content in the lower backfill of the cursus ditch was seen to reflect the location of the monument in 'relatively close woodland under an oceanic climate with plentiful rainfall'. It was therefore concluded that 'the Thornborough cursus was constructed in the Atlantic or pre-Bronze Age climatic phase (Thomas 1955, 432).

Vatcher recorded the nature of the cursus ditch some six years later, when 'owing to extensive gravel quarrying, part of the northwest side of the cursus ditch had been exposed and part quarried away' (Vatcher 1960, 425). Although no artefacts were recovered from this fieldwork, study of the soil samples led Vatcher to support the conclusion that the monuments would have been constructed in the late Neolithic-early Bronze Age, again on the grounds of evidence for climate change (Vatcher 1960, 179). This date has since been parallelled by finds at other cursus sites in Yorkshire (Topping 1982).

During quarrying in 1958 a stone cist was uncovered, containing a crouched inhumation, on the central line of the cursus (Vatcher 1960, 181-2). This may represent continued use of the monument complex into the Bronze Age. During the 20th century, more work was also undertaken on the barrow burials. The Quernhow barrow was investigation in 1949 (Waterman 1951), revealing two phases of burial, which included cremations accompanied by food vessels.

Roman

Investigations during the 1930s to 1960s also revealed more about Roman use of the Nosterfield landscape, though the lack of major settlements in the area means that known remains are dispersed and often fragmentary. The main landscape feature that has been recognised for some time is the route of Dere Street, which formed a predecessor to the modern A1. Sections of road surface were identified at Healam Bridge in 1949 (*YAJ* 1951, 522-3) and at the Baldersby Gate cross roads in 1939 (*YAJ* 1943, 97-9). This was the only Roman route known in the area.

Major forts were known to have existed at Aldborough and Catterick, but the much closer settlement at Healam Bridge was not securely identified until the 1990s, just prior to the onset of the current investigation (Jones 1994). This fort was dated by ceramic evidence to the Hadrianic/Antonine period, though some evidence for 3rd and 4th century activity has been revealed. The settlement comprised a fort and associated *vicus*; the latter had come to dominate the site by the 4th century (Jones 1994). Additionally, a single inhumation was known from investigations (Jones 1994).

Within the more rural landscape surrounding the area of investigation, a number of smaller sites were known, including at least two villa complexes. Investigations at Well, less than 1km northwest of Nosterfield, produced evidence for a bathhouse, and tessellated pavement (Gilyard-Beer 1951), ascribed a date in the late 2nd century (Smith 1969, 78). A second villa has been recognised to the south, at Castle Dikes, where a bipartite complex was identified within a subrectangular earthwork (Berry 1953), producing evidence for mosaic floors of 2nd-century date, and fragments of painted plaster (Liversidge 1969, 141, 148). At Yamagarth, near Kirklington, a burial was found, associated with finds of 'white ware', though the only Roman evidence in the immediate vicinity comprised a bronze brooch, found in 1951 (*YAJ* 1951, 523).

Throughout the 20th century, interest in archaeological evidence of later periods increased, and the deserted medieval villages of Britain were given more attention (Beresford and Hurst 1971). The sites of East Tanfield, Yarnwick Garth, Nunwick, Howgrave and Sleningford are among the deserted settlements in the area surrounding Nosterfield; the village of East Tanfield was considered by Beresford and Hurst to be of medium quality, worthy of preservation (Beresford and Hurst 1971).

2.1.3 Modern investigations in the Nosterfield Quarry area

During fieldwork of the early 1990s, prehistorians such as Harding expressed the need to appreciate regional variation in monumentality, and to move away from using the southern complexes of Wessex as comparanda (Harding 1991). In recognising the lack of modern archaeological research directed towards the monuments of this area, and the need to explore their landscape context, the Vale of Mowbray Neolithic Landscape Project was established in 1994, and conducted a series of investigations which ran until 1999.

2.2 THE STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN 1995

At the outset of the current investigation, the significance of the prehistory of the Nosterfield area was beginning to be recognised, tying in with a move towards wider landscape approaches to prehistory. The work by Harding was revealing the complex organisation of the landscape, as a programme of reconnaissance fieldwalking demonstrated variations in the distribution of artefacts from different periods. During the Mesolithic and early Neolithic, the area appears to have been widely used, and no discrete patterns were identified. However, during the later Neolithic and early Bronze Age, contemporary with the construction of the major monuments of the area, there appears to have been a marked change in the occupation of the landscape, and evidence for domestic occupation was found to occur at locations distant from the henge monuments. This has been interpreted as a conscious separation of sacred and profane, corresponding with major changes within the organisation of society (Harding 1994, 1995).

The watching brief that had started within Nosterfield Quarry was providing a rare opportunity to investigate large open areas within the landscape and was beginning to reveal the nature of the surviving archaeology within this area. Although much damaged, and often destroyed, by medieval, post-medieval and modern agriculture, the archaeology within the wider area was beginning to be recognised by the academic community as one of significance for the study of prehistory and landscape use in northern England.