

Test pitting at Whirlow Hall Farm, Sheffield, 2011



ARS Ltd Report 2011/ 98
October 2011

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Whirlow Hall Farm Trust received funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to undertake a programme of heritage research and archaeological investigations into the history of Whirlow Hall Farm. The project comprised a professionally-led programme by Archaeological Research Services Ltd of training, participation, learning activities and public engagement. Part of the project involved carrying out the excavation of a number of test pits with school children from the local area. The test pits were excavated in Barley Field (Field 2 of the fieldwalking exercise) under the supervision of a professional archaeologist from Archaeological Research Services Ltd as this field had yielded an assemblage of flint tools and chipping waste as a result of previous fieldwalking over the field.

The results of the test pitting were consistent with the fieldwalking, which was undertaken in the same field. The finds collected by the pupils were related to intensive post-medieval farming practices where items such as broken clay pipe and pottery were added to the manure prior to it being spread on the fields. The finds collected, therefore, may not be indicative of any surviving sub-surface archaeology of the evaluated field, as a large majority of them were probably brought in from another location. A single flint tool was discovered in Test Pit 7.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope of Work

1.1.1 The test pitting element of the project involved carrying out the excavation of 12 test pits with school children from the local area. The test pits were excavated in Barley Field (Field 2 of the fieldwalking exercise) under the supervision of a professional archaeologist from Archaeological Research Services Ltd according to the written scheme of investigation agreed with SYAS (See Appendix 1).



Figure 1 Test pits under excavation by pupils from Ecclesall Junior School.

1.2 Location and Geology

1.2.1 Whirlow Hall farm is situated on the edge of the city of Sheffield, South Yorkshire, approximately 8km to the south-west of the city centre (NGR SK 31233 83177 (centre)) (Figure 1). The farm extends to some 55ha (138 acres) and occupies a site which generally slopes from north to south and west to east.

1.2.2 The underlying geology consists of Rough Rock Sandstone, which is a coarse-grained feldspathic sandstone. There are no recorded superficial deposits (bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience). The soils are classified as freely draining slightly acid loamy soils (landis.org.uk/soilscapes).

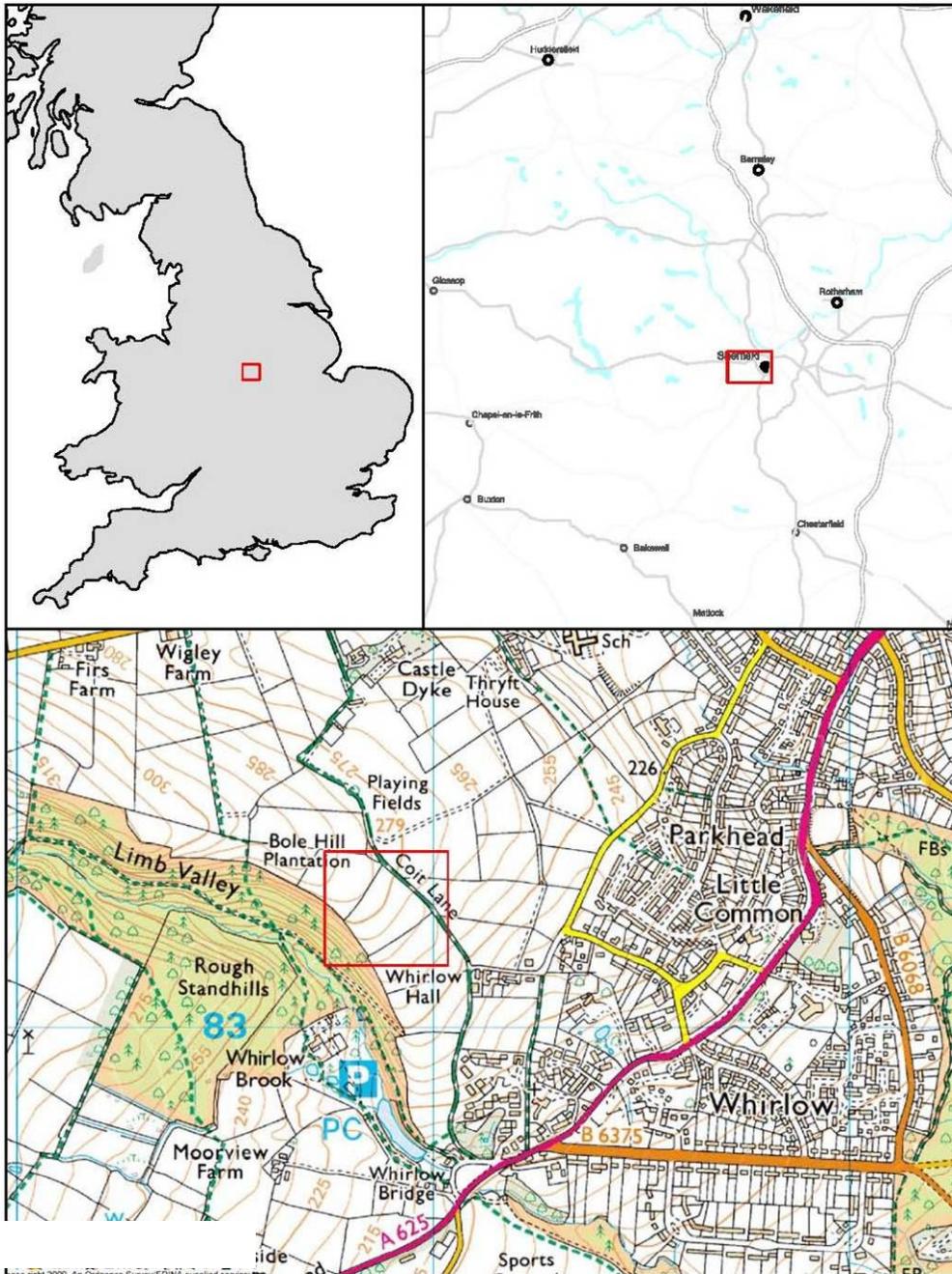
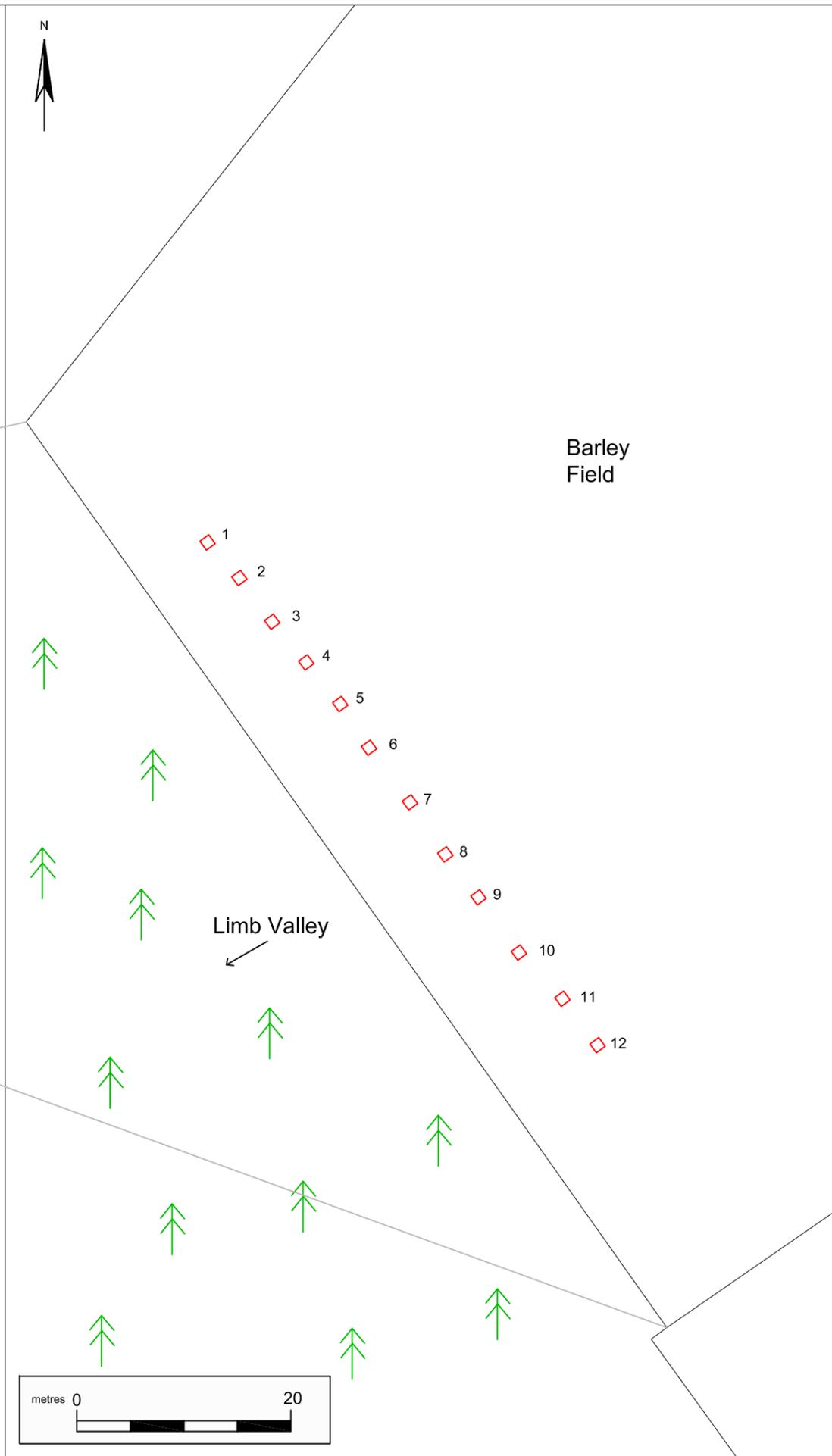
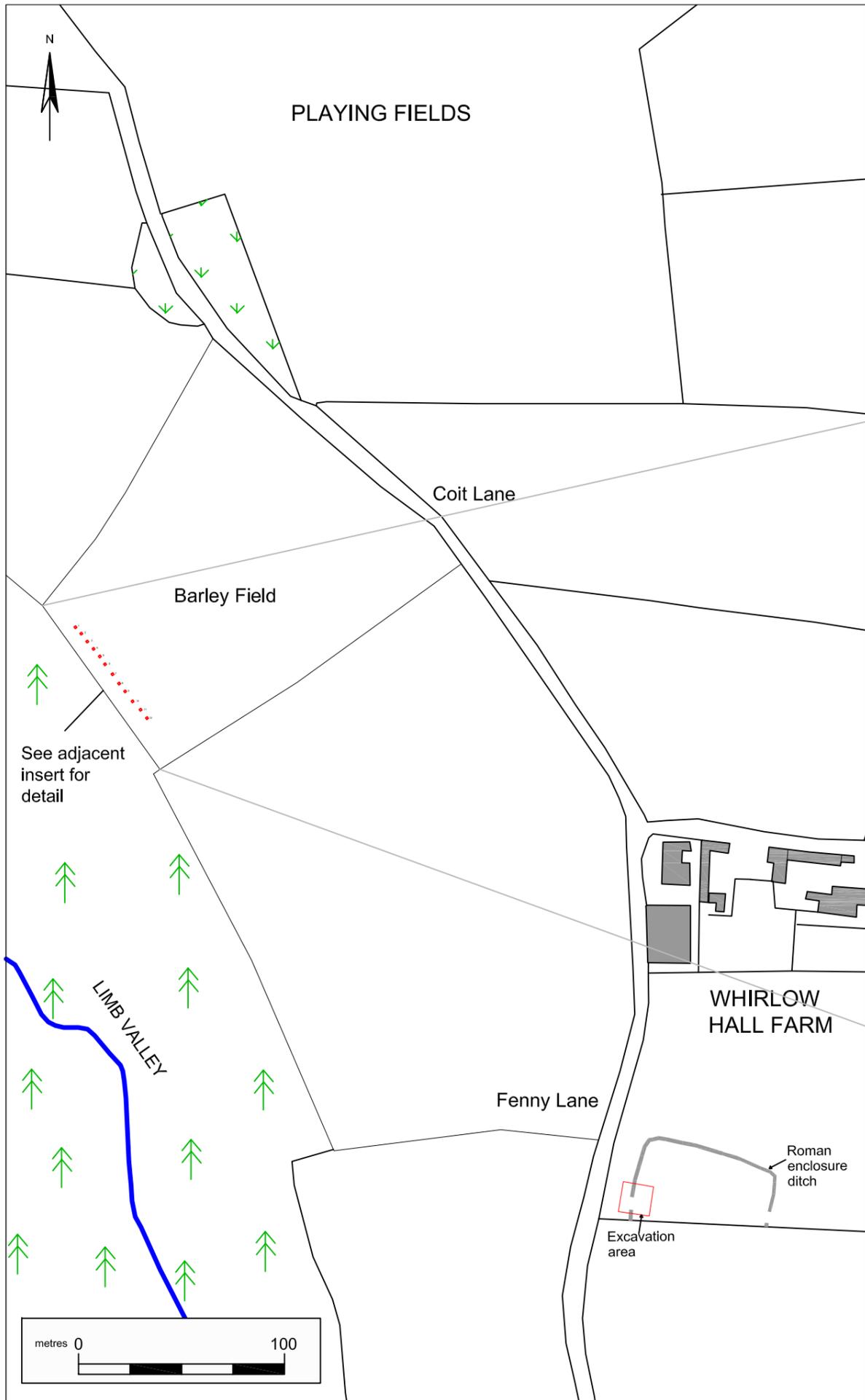


Figure 2 Site location.



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Site Code: WHIR 11
 Drawing Ref: Report_Fig3
 Date: OCT 2011
 Drawn: JS
 Scale: -

Figure 3
 Maps showing the location
 of the test pits in Barley
 Field

Key:
 Test pit

Notes:

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2. TEST PITS

2.1 Background

2.1.1 A programme of test pitting was carried out in Field 2, or 'Barley Field', located north-east of the farm buildings, which covered an area of 2.2 hectares. The field was accessed from Coit Lane and will be used for growing turnips. The elevation of the field was approximately 275m OD. The field sloped north-west to south-east, with the south-western part being slightly lower. The field had been deep-ploughed and weeds had been allowed to grow to about a metre high in parts. The weeds were lowest along the western edge of the field next to the Limb Valley. Grass had been growing in this part of the field during the fieldwalking, so it was decided that the test pits should be targeted to investigate this area. This part of the field was also the closest to the Limb Valley, which has been established as a probable focus for Prehistoric activity given the amount of lithics discovered in this area during the fieldwalking.



Figure 4 Pupils from Ecclesall Juniors being instructed on how to sieve the soil from their test pits.

2.1.2 The field had previously been fieldwalked by volunteers in June 2011 and finds produced from this field totalled 224. They were found to have been spread across the field with a concentration towards the south-western area. A single sherd of medieval pottery was found (find no.1163), a 17th century clay pipe bowl (find no.1293) and a 19th century decorated clay pipe bowl that had been imported from France (find no.1325). Also during the fieldwalking a total of 60 lithic artefacts were discovered in this field being made from flint and chert (see Fieldwalking report). They were mostly recovered in the western half of the field which is the side closest to the edge of the Limb Valley where the test pits were located.

2.1.3 It was established during the fieldwalking that there was a cluster of finds towards to base of the slope in the south-western corner as that was the lowest point of the field. This is unlikely to reflect a genuine cluster of artefacts but is more likely to be due to the movement of the finds downslope as a result of ploughing and the effects of gravity. However, there is unlikely to have been much lateral movement of the lithics and so their position probably reflects a concentration of activity in the upper north-west area of the field where the ground is more level and from which the lithics further down the slope have probably derived.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A total of 12 test pits were excavated in the first phase and were located along the western edge of the field (Figure 3). The pits were all 1m square in size and evenly spaced 5m apart. Each pit was excavated by hand to the base of the topsoil horizon using spades to carefully remove the top layer of weeds or turf and trowels, hand shovels and buckets in 10cm spits. The soil was broken down sufficiently to allow the recovery of artefacts that could be less than 1cm in diameter and 100% of the soil within each pit was sieved through a 10mm mesh in order to maximise finds recovery (Figures 3 and 5).



Figure 5. Pupils from Dore Primary busy excavating and sieving.

2.2.2 On completion of the excavation of each pit at least one section was recorded by photograph and drawing at a scale of 1:20. A pro-forma record sheet was completed for each test pit, and context record sheets were completed. The test pits were then carefully backfilled, compacted, and the turfs relaid in order to reinstate the ground to its former condition. The location of each test pit was recorded using a total station which was related to the Ordnance Survey grid.

2.3 Results

2.3.1 The test pits were recorded by professional archaeologists. The topsoil was found to exist to a depth of approximately 0.3m in all of the test pits and was a loose, very dark brown (10YR 2/2) sandy silt which contained pieces of coal, slag and occasional sandstone. Below the topsoil was a compacted subsoil (002) which was not excavated as part of this test pitting exercise.

2.3.2 The topsoil was found to contain a small amount of clay pipe stems and broken modern pottery. The pottery was nearly all plain and printed Whiteware and bone china. The sherds were all small in size, no larger than 0.02cm x 0.02cm. A single flint flake was recovered from Test Pit 7.



Figure 6. Test Pit 2, looking North.



Figure 7. Test pit 6, looking East.



Figure 8. Test pit 8, looking South.



Figure 9. Test pit 12, looking South.

3. DISCUSSION (see Fieldwalking Report)

3.1 The results of the test pitting were consistent with the earlier fieldwalking discoveries. It was concluded that the finds are mostly related to intensive farming practices where items such as broken clay pipe and pottery were added to manure prior to it being spread on the field. The finds collected therefore may not be indicative of any buried archaeological features that might survive in the field.

3.2 The flint flake recovered is unlikely to have been part of the manuring deposit and is more likely to represent prehistoric activity in this general at Whirlow Hall Farm. The location of the flint is of interest given its proximity to the edge of the Limb Valley which is an important natural routeway, giving access from the head of the Sheaf valley on to the high moorlands above. As well as being rich in animal and plant life, the ridge would have provided shelter from the prevailing westerly winds and a vantage point to monitor and control access up and down the valley.

4. PUBLICITY, CONFIDENTIALITY AND COPYRIGHT

4.1 Any publicity will be handled by the client.

4.2 Archaeological Research Services Ltd will retain the copyright of all documentary and photographic material under the Copyright, Designs and Patent Act (1988).

5. STATEMENT OF INDEMNITY

5.1 All statements and opinions contained within this report arising from the works undertaken are offered in good faith and compiled according to professional standards. No responsibility can be accepted by the author/s of the report for any errors of fact or opinion resulting from data supplied by any third party, or for loss or other consequence arising from decisions or actions made upon the basis of facts or opinions expressed in any such report(s), howsoever such facts and opinions may have been derived.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

6.1 Archaeological Research Services Ltd would like to thank all staff and volunteers at Whirlow Hall Farm for their help and assistance. Particular thanks are due to the pupils and teachers from Ecclesall Juniors and Dore Primary and Katie Lob and the parent helpers who both assisted and helped to carry out the test pitting survey.