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Pits and Place-making: Neolithic Habitation and Deposition Practices in East Yorkshire *c.* 4000–2500 BC

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This article presents the findings of a study which sought to explore the nature of Neolithic habitation practices in east Yorkshire, primarily using evidence from pits. The morphology of pits and material deposited into them were examined in order to discern the kinds of activities taking place close by, and the possible motivation behind pits being dug. The temporality, spatial organisation, and landscape distribution of pits was considered in conjunction with information from domestic features, artefact spreads, and monumental and funerary features in order to create a coherent image of the ways in which people lived in and exploited the landscape.

It is argued that, given the scarcity of direct evidence for residential contexts, the information from pits can tell us about occupation practices. Viewed in conjunction with evidence for changing subsistence practices and an increasingly monumentalised landscape from the Early Neolithic onwards, the deposition of domestic material in pits is interpreted as part of cycles of renewal that created more permanent connections between people and their homes.

As with much of Britain, the meaning and nature of the 'Neolithic' in east Yorkshire is far from clear. From around 4000 BC, substantial time, effort, and collaboration was being invested in the construction of earthworks and funerary monuments, and people had begun to practice cereal cultivation, pastoralism, and woodland management (Manby *et al.* 2003). However, relatively few examples of domestic structures have been found, and it is unclear how far a model of sedentary village life is applicable, or whether people led more mobile existences.

Shallow, bowl-shaped pits, often filled with substantial quantities of cultural material, are ubiquitous across the British Isles, and can be useful in creating a picture of occupation practices that does not rely on domestic structures (for example Garrow 2006; 2007). The broken pottery, flint debitage, and plant and animal remains within pits can be interpreted as the debris of domestic activities and, therefore, help to answer questions about subsistence strategies, landscape use, craft production, and attitudes to place. Neolithic ground surfaces are rare and morphology studies of buried soils in some pits have found that they could have been almost a metre deeper than they appear (Hummler 2007, 397–406). For this reason pits can be seen as 'windows' onto a variety of activities taking place above ground, including possible houses that no longer survive.

The motivation behind pit digging and deposition has been the focus of much debate. Some have advocated primary uses before being infilled, such as grain storage (Field *et al.* 1964) or the quarrying of building materials (Parker Pearson 2007,140). Others see the deposition of material as the motivation for digging; either to dispose of rubbish or in more spiritually meaningful acts of 'structured deposition' (Thomas & Richards 1984). Rubbish and ritual need not be mutually exclusive, and as one study of pits in east Yorkshire concluded, domestic waste was probably imbued with spiritual meanings and memories through the purposeful act of deposition (Harding 2006; see also Hill 1995). Some of these issues will be returned to in the discussion section of this paper.

Pit digging and filling can be seen as part of a series of habitual social actions that led to increased connectivity between people and places during the Neolithic (Pollard 1999; Harris 2009). Some studies

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have explored how pits may have related to temporal movements and periods of occupation (for example Garrow *et al.* 2005; 2010). The occasions on which pits were dug and filled have often been interpreted as the end of occupations, perhaps to mark the departure of the group onto another seasonal location, as a promise of their return the following year (Edmonds 1999, 29; Chaffey & Brook 2012; Garrow 2006).

THE DATA SET

A total of 536 features from 29 sites were considered (Tables 1 & 2; Fig. 1). Distinctions were made between pits, post-holes, and hollows in order to distinguish purpose-dug depositional pits from accumulations of material or secondary deposits, although these categories probably had overlapping roles in prehistory. Other features pertaining to settlement activity were also considered, including seven domestic structures and several 'occupation spreads'.

Pits varied in shape, size, association, and context, and reflect a range of practices rather than a single feature type with a single purpose. However, certain trends did emerge. Most were under a metre in diameter and under 0.50 m deep (albeit these are measurements to truncation horizons). They were usually circular or oval, and bowl-shaped, supporting Thomas's theory that they were not used for food storage (Thomas 1999, 64–74).

Of the 250 pits in which the stratigraphy was recorded, 197 contained a single fill, and only 20 more than two fills. This suggests that they were backfilled in a single action, fairly soon after having being opened, and it is likely that most were dug solely for the purpose of deposition. This is also true of pits elsewhere (Garrow 2006).

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF FEATURES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

Feature	*No. of features*
Pit	343
Post-hole	133
Hollow	23
Spread	16
Ditch	14
Structure	7
Total	536

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF SITES INCLUDED IN THE STUDY

Site Name	*No. pits, post-holes/hollows*
Beacon Hill	6
Bessingby Hill	2
Burton Agnes	1
Carnaby Top	20
Caythorpe gas pipeline	53
Cottam Warren	3
Craike Hill	1
The Crayke, Bridlington	2
Creyke Beck	3
Easington Warren	21
Fimber Church	1
Flamborough, Hartendale	24
Ganstead to Asselby pipeline	6
Garton Slack	24
Hayton	4
Heslerton	58
High Green	6–8
Kilham	16
Langton Wold	1
Leven	3
Low Caythorpe	3
Melton Quarry	37
Mill Street	0
North Carnaby Temple	17
Pocklington waste water treatment works	3
Rudston Pits Plantation	5
Rudston Wold	16
Sewerby Cottage Farm	166
St. John's Road	0

THE STUDY AREA AND LANDSCAPE DISTRIBUTION

East Yorkshire is rich in the remains of Neolithic activity. A wealth of monumental evidence is concentrated on the chalk uplands of the Yorkshire Wolds, in particular the landscape around Rudston, which comprises an extensive Neolithic monumental complex, including long and round barrows, the 'Maiden's Graves' henge, five cursuses, and the Rudston monolith, the largest standing stone in Britain (Fig. 2).

The location and landscape character of east Yorkshire is key to the special role it may have played in the Neolithic. It forms the culminating point of a chalk seam that extends north-east from Wessex, providing high-quality, easily accessible flint and good agricultural land (Fig. 3).

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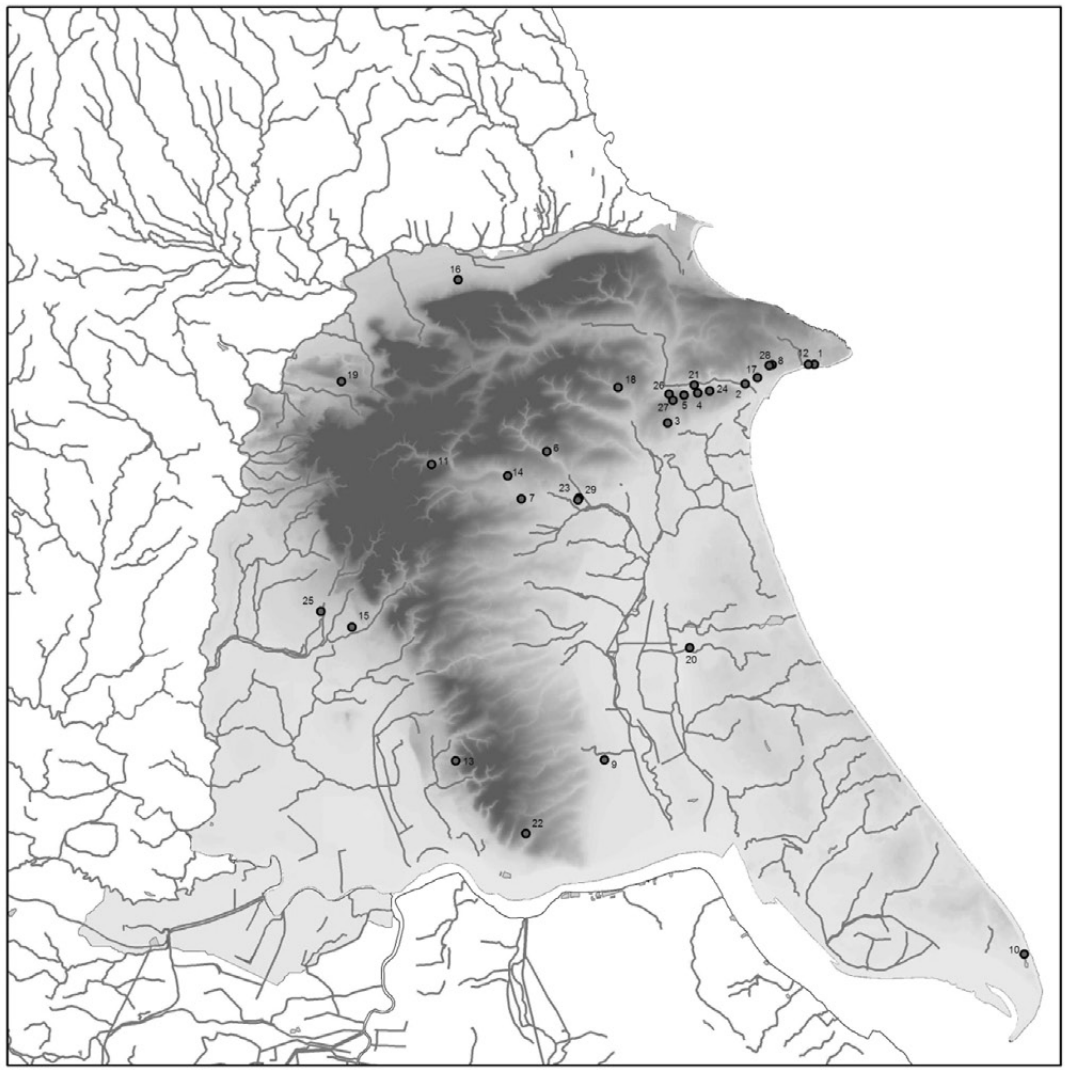

Fig. 1.
Neolithic pit sites in east Yorkshire

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Fig. 2.
The Rudston monolith

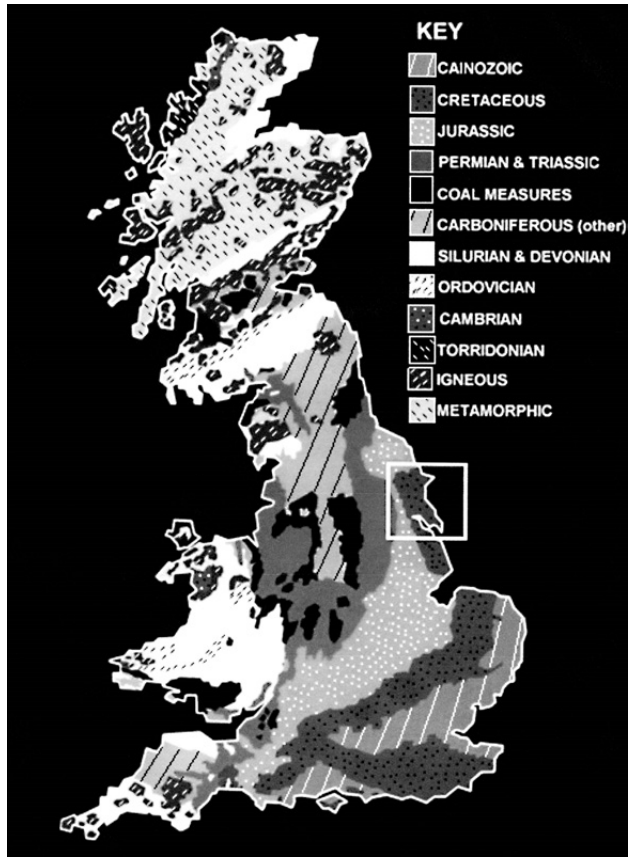

Fig. 3.
The geology of Britain (modified after www.coalpro.co.uk). The cretaceous band (black-dotted) is the chalk seam, and the boxed area is east Yorkshire

Extensive riverine and overland routes allowed for trade and communication. Greenstone axes from Langdale in Cumbria have been found in greater quantities in east Yorkshire than anywhere else (Edmonds 1995, 52–3), while flint artefacts or raw material may have been exported to Cumbria and Wessex (Durden 1996; Bradley & Edmonds 1993, 163). Axes from Cornwall, north Wales, and Northern Ireland are also present (Manby *et al.* 2003, 49). East Yorkshire is also one of the major findspots for Grooved Ware pottery outside Wessex and Orkney.

Neolithic pits in east Yorkshire were largely concentrated on the lower slopes of the Yorkshire Wolds (Figs 1 & 4). These gentle hills would have provided dry but well irrigated landscapes, and palaeosol from underneath Neolithic barrows shows the soil to have been fertile and easily workable (Manby *et al.* 2003, 70). Valleys such as the Great Wold Valley would have provided shelter and access to water.

In contrast, few pits have been found in Holderness, the lowland plains to the east of the Wolds (Fig. 4). Here the geology is dominated by alluvium, silt, and boulder clay, and it is likely that much of Holderness was developing into wetlands and saltmarshes from before 4000 BC (Van de Noort & Ellis 1995, 119). The few sites that have been uncovered, such as the barrows, pits, rectangular structure, and hengiform monument at Easington Warren, and the pair of Grooved Ware pits at Leven, may have been situated on dryer 'islands' of better-draining gravel (Evans & Steedman 2001; 1997; Steedman 1993).

The western and southern zones, comprising the

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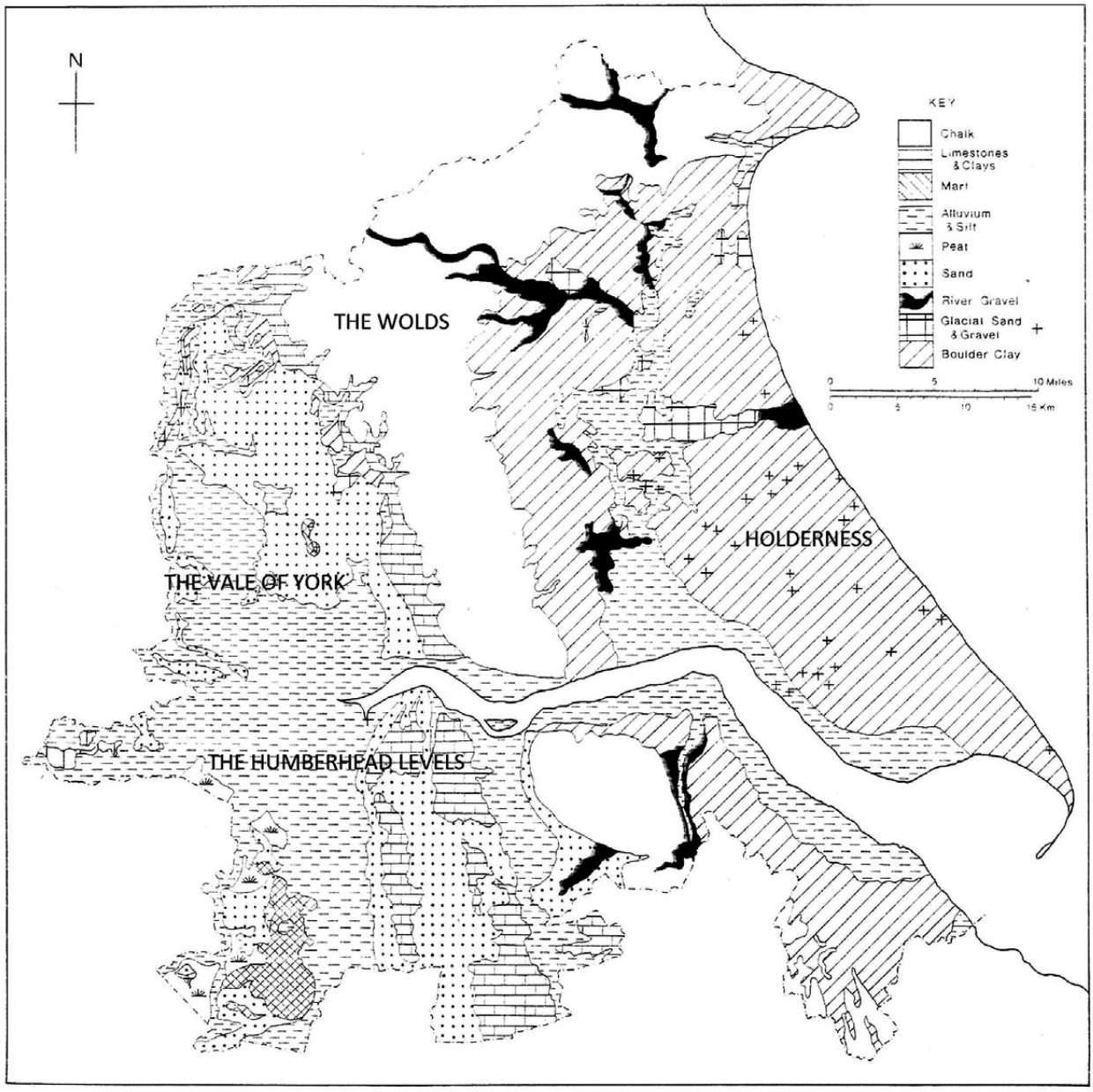

Fig. 4.
The geology and landscape zones of east Yorkshire (modified after Loughlin & Miller 1979)

Vale of York and the Humberhead levels respectively, also consist of lowland alluvium and silt, and some poor-quality sandy soils. Environmental sequences for the Neolithic suggest fen-carr landscapes in the Vale of York (Van de Noort & Ellis 1999, 107), and peat bogs and wetlands in the Humberhead levels (Van de Noort & Ellis 1997, 32). These areas were largely devoid of Neolithic pits.

It appears, therefore, that the locations of pits correspond to areas well suited to settlement. Of the

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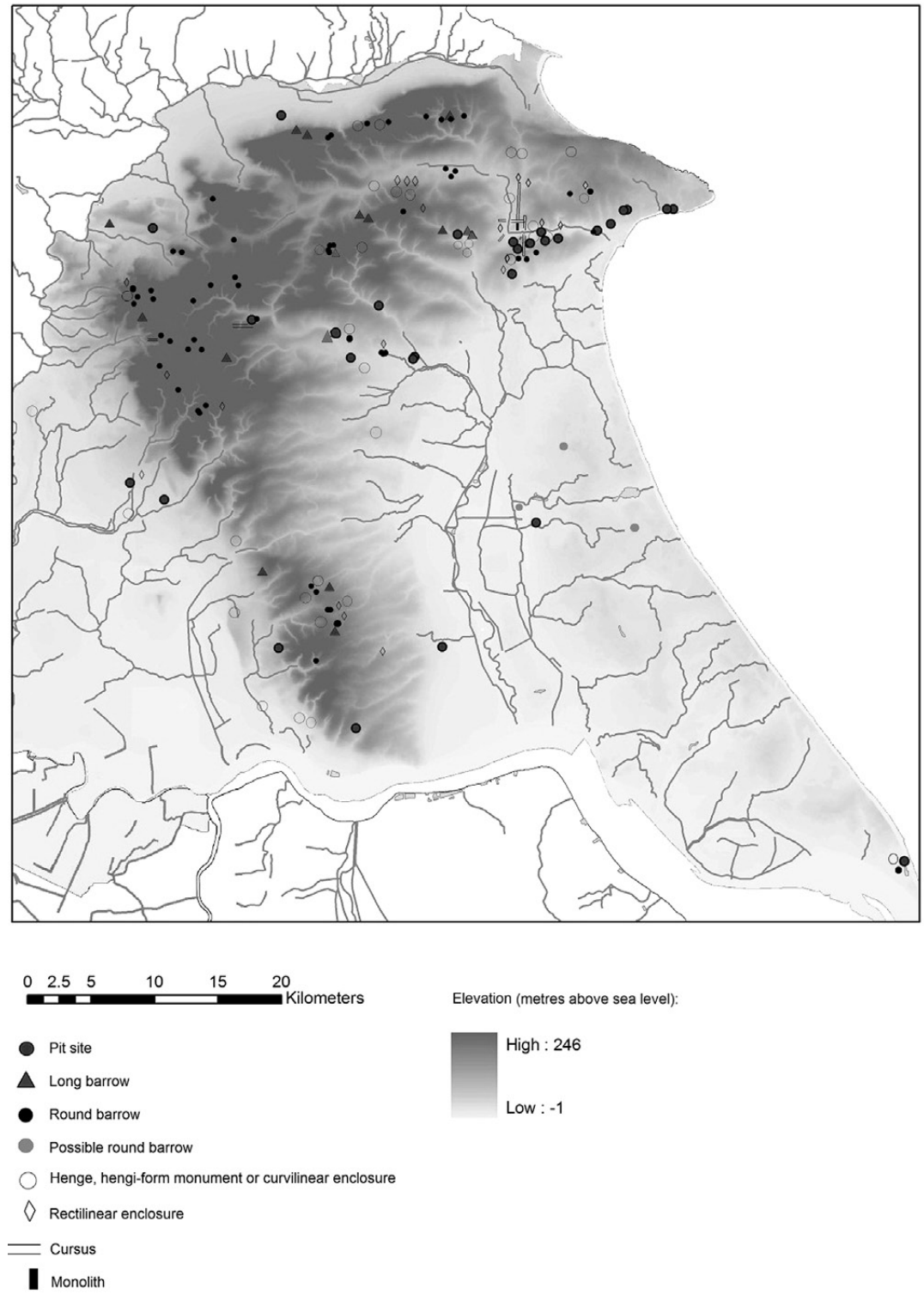

Fig. 5.
Neolithic pits, monuments, and funerary features in east Yorkshire

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29 sites, 14 were within 1 km of modern rivers (most of which can reasonably be used as a guide to the location of Neolithic water courses), 24 within 3 km and 28 within 5 km. Sites were rarely located on the highest slopes but positioned in sheltered locations.

The second distributional trend showed that Neolithic pits were often situated close to Neolithic monumental and funerary features (Fig. 5). Of the 29 sites, 13 were within 1 km of funerary and ceremonial monuments, and a further 12 within 5 km. The most elaborated monumental areas were also those with the most pits. The few pit sites that were located in areas devoid of monumental features, for example Creyke Beck and Leven in Holderness, had few pits probably belonging to a single phase (Northern Archaeological Associates 1998; Evans & Steedman 1997; Steedman 1993). This suggests that monumentalised locations on the Wolds, such as Rudston and Garton Slack, were used repeatedly or continuously for settlement, while the Holderness settlements devoid of monuments may have been small-scale or temporary.

Limited space here does not allow for finer chronological resolution, and so it must be accepted that in some cases, substantial lengths of time may have passed between the establishment of the features shown in Figure 5. For example, round barrows have been included due to their unique position in east Yorkshire as a feature of the Middle Neolithic onwards (Manby *et al.* 2003, 49). However, many round barrows, particularly those in the highest uplands of the Wolds, are probably of Bronze Age date. It is nonetheless the author's opinion that the overall distribution trend suggests that the same landscapes were being repeatedly exploited for both pits and monuments throughout (and beyond) the Neolithic. Where finer chronological sequences were examined, such as the Rudston locale, pits were the earliest features in the landscape, and were subsequently dug in increasing numbers alongside increasing monumental elaborations.

Although surface finds followed the same general pattern, being most frequent on the Wolds, the distribution was much more widespread and indiscriminate than that of pits and monuments (Manby *et al.* 2003, 71). This pattern also occurs in East Anglia (Garrow 2006). It is likely that pits, like monuments, represent a more permanent type of investment in place, while surface finds and scatters indicate more transient occupations.

HISTORICAL CHANGE AND TEMPORALITY

Many sites remained foci for human activity over considerable periods of time. Sites such as Bessingby Hill, Heslerton, and Kilham showed continued deposition in pits from the Mesolithic into the Early Neolithic (Earnshaw 1973; Powlesland 1986; Manby 1976). The material and manner of deposition was similar in Mesolithic and Neolithic pits: usually flint wastage, burnt material, and animal bone fragments. At Kilham, Mesolithic pits containing human bone lay directly within the area that was to become a Neolithic mortuary enclosure. Some authors have suggested a fundamental difference between the mindsets of hunter-gatherers and farmers (Hodder 1990), but the continuation of this meaningful practice may provide a culturally comprehensible link across the transition.

Other sites were occupied from the earliest to latest Neolithic, and even into later prehistory. At Garton Slack, Neolithic pits, a long barrow, and mortuary enclosure were succeeded by Bronze Age round barrows and Iron Age square barrows and settlements (Brewster 1980). At Easington Warren, an Early Neolithic occupation represented by pits, post-holes, and a possible house was succeeded by a later sequence of monumental building, including a Late Neolithic hengiform monument and Bronze Age round barrows (Evans & Steedman 2001).

Perhaps the most continually exploited area was the Rudston locale, where pit digging continued against extensive monumental development from the Early Neolithic onwards. The increasing investment in place reflected in the continual elaboration of landscapes like this may have led people to see fixed locations as their permanent 'home'. Pit digging may have played an important role in this process, as will be discussed below.

Pits were dated to six period groups defined as *Mesolithic* (9500–4000 BC), *Grimston Ware* (4400–3300 BC), *Towthorpe Ware (*3500–3000 BC), *Peterborough Ware* (3400–2600 BC), *Grooved Ware* (3000–2400 BC) *and Bronze Age (Beaker, Food Vessels, and Corded Ware,* 2500–1500 BC) (Fig. 6). *Mesolithic* and *Bronze Age* pits were only included when present alongside Neolithic pits, to reflect continuity in settlement and deposition across these imposed definitions. The period groups were devised following ceramic and flint typologies categorised and contextualised by Terry Manby (Manby 1974; 1975;

Manby *et al.* 2003). Pits were dated primarily by matching flint and pottery found within them to these material typologies, though any available radiocarbon dates were measured against Manby's absolute date ranges. These period groups are broad and at times overlapping (see Fig. 6), and in many cases the lack or inaccuracy of absolute dating meant that more detailed chronological sequences could not be refined. However, as long as these shortcomings are remembered, the ceramic groupings can be used as a guideline for viewing chronological progression.

In addition to these broad period divisions, at some sites it was possible to group pits into clusters interpreted as singular digging and/or depositional episodes. Pits were interpreted as belonging to the same cluster based on a number of factors. In some cases, refitting material from different pits suggested the pits were filled contemporaneously, for example at Caythorpe, North Carnaby Temple, Hayton, Sewerby, and Leven (Abramson 1996, 8; Manby 1975, 45; Halkon *et al.* 2010; Fenton-Thomas 2009, 152; Steedman 1993, 7). In other cases, the spatial organisation of pits implied they belonged to a cohesive feature group, such as a linear alignment of 18 pits at Caythorpe (Abramson 1996, 6), or the pits dug in regular formations in relation to monumental features at Kilham and Garton Slack (Manby 1976, 123–5, Brewster 1980, 88–90). In other cases pits were grouped based on spatial proximity, morphological and material similarities.

Throughout most periods, pits most commonly occurred singularly or in clusters of fewer than ten. The digging and filling of pits may therefore have been a small-scale but frequent activity carried out by small groups such as families. Despite close proximity at many sites, the inter-cutting of pits is remarkably rare, occurring within only five clusters at only three sites. This suggests pits must either have been dug at a similar time, or have been marked in some way after being filled. It is unlikely that they were left open as single and homogeneous fills suggest quick backfilling.

Whilst the temporality of pit clusters was difficult to determine, it is possible that they represent times in occupation cycles, such as moments of abandonment, arrival, return, or renewal. At the very least, chronologically separable clusters show that many sites were used continuously or repeatedly over longer time-spans. Table 3 shows that at some sites, up to 23 distinct pit clusters were dug, spanning a time-frame from the earliest to the latest Neolithic. In the Rudston locale, pit groups from several 'sites' belonged to a continuous landscape that was inhabited throughout the Neolithic (Fig. 7).

It is impossible to tell exactly how long people remained in one place. People almost certainly continued to move about the landscape, herding animals, importing and exporting trade goods, and hunting. However, what these repeated pit digging episodes can tell us is that from the Mesolithic onwards, but increasingly from the Early Neolithic, people were beginning to repeatedly make physical marks on particular spots, and that they were taking the trouble to clear them of their own rubbish. Rather than move to new occupation areas, people may have 'renewed' old ones by clearing up and burying debris from domestic activities. The lack of inter-cutting suggests that too long cannot have passed between digging episodes, and the sheer quantities of material at some sites, particularly in the later Neolithic, suggests that occupations may have been either long-lived, heavily populated, or a combination of both. A sort of 'settling down' appears to have been taking place, not necessarily by way of all members of the community remaining physically static year-round, but perhaps through changing attitudes to places and new concepts such as 'home'.

SPATIAL ORGANISATION

Although many pits were recorded in isolation or in small, amorphous scatters, in other cases patterns could be discerned using the spatially and materially associated clusters described above and the relationship of pits to other features. Sewerby Cottage Farm provides the best example of an extensive and multi-phased occupation complex, incorporating pits, post-holes, structures, and occupation spreads. There is a clear spatial distinction between the occupation areas, comprised of dump-layers, small-scale structures, and numerous post-holes, concentrated to the south of the site, and the clusters of artefact-rich depositional pits located to the north (Fenton-Thomas 2009). At Heslerton, the depositional pits were also spatially distinct from the post-holes and possible ovate structure (Powlesland 1986).

A single pit at Sewerby had been dug into the central post-hole of a house structure in the southern occupation area and contained Grooved Ware. It has been interpreted as a 'closing deposit' to mark the

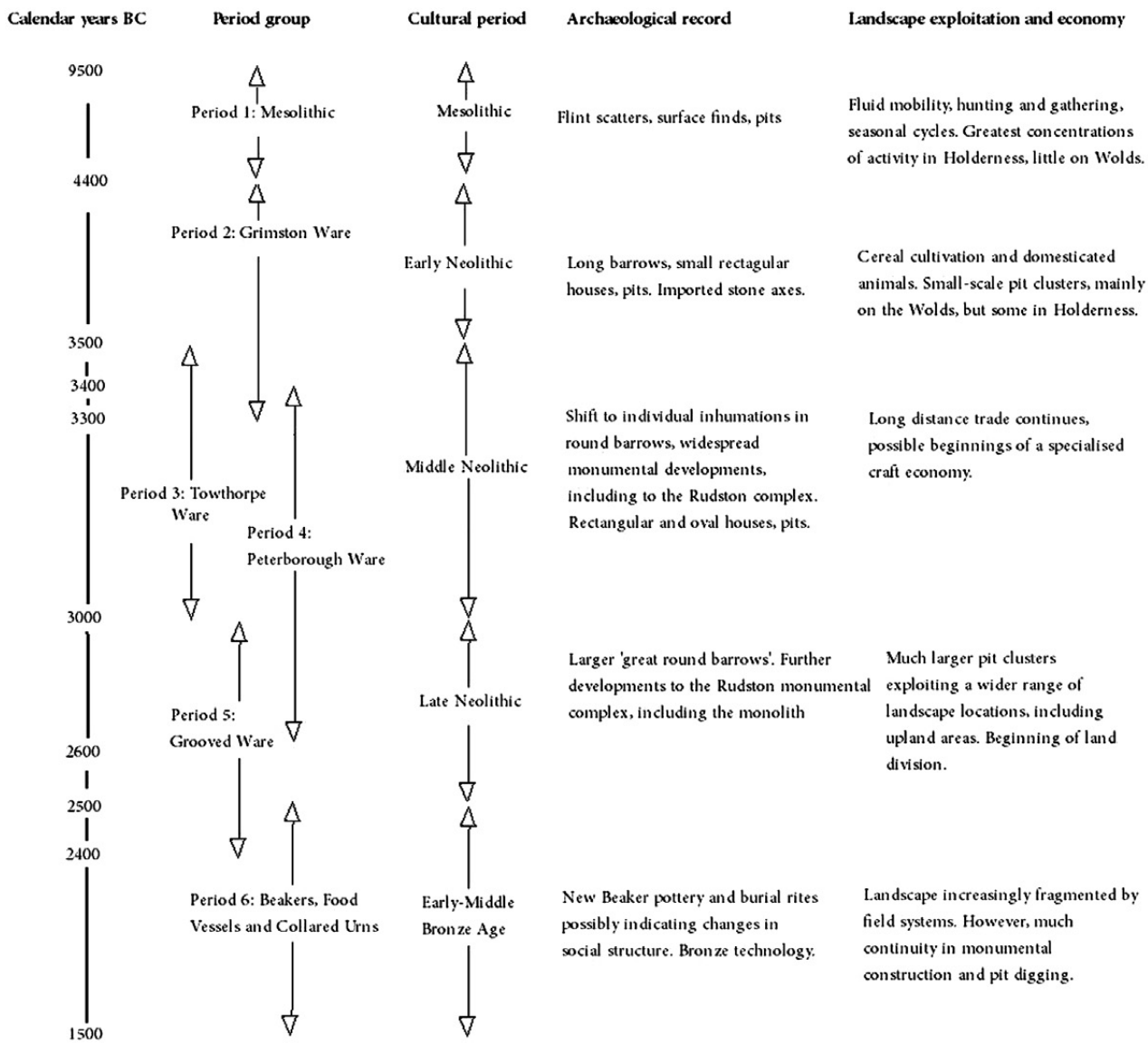

Fig. 6.
Summary of chronological sequences

abandonment of the house (Fenton-Thomas 2009, 59). At Garton Slack, three pits containing Late Neolithic flint and pottery were aligned directly in front of the entrance to the circular domestic structure, which would have impeded entrance to the house and may therefore relate to its decommissioning. This practice is known elsewhere, for example at Durrington Walls in Wessex, where pits filled with Grooved Ware were dug into layers of midden dumped onto abandoned houses (Parker Pearson 2007).

This pattern of pits being dug *into* or *apart from* but not *close to* domestic structures is also observed at Kingsmead Quarry in the Thames Valley (Chaffey & Brook 2012). At other sites, these spatial distinctions

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TABLE 3. SUMMARY OF THE SIZE & NUMBER OF CLUSTERS OF CONTEMPORARY PITS AT SELECTED SITES, VIEWED AGAINST THE OVERALL PERIODS COVERED BY OCCUPATION

Site	*No. pit clusters*	*No. pits in each cluster*	*Total no. pits*	*Ceramic periods covered (Fig. 6)*	*Cultural periods covered (Fig. 6)*
Bessingby Hill	2	1	2	1– 2	Mesolithic–Early Neolithic
Carnaby Top	12	1–3	19	3–6	Middle Neolithic–Early Bronze Age
Caythorpe gas pipeline	10	1–18	70	2–6	Early Neolithic–Late Bronze Age
Craike Hill	1	1	1	2, 4–6	Early Neolithic–Early Bronze Age
Easington Warren		1–4	21	2, 5– 6	Early Neolithic–Early Bronze Age
Flamborough	4	1–19	24	5	Late Neolithic
Garton Slack	3	2–14	23	2-4?,5–6	Early Neolithic–Late Bronze Age
Heslerton	5	1–8	58	1–4, 6	Mesolithic–Late Bronze Age
Kilham	3	2–6	17	1, 2, 4, 6	Mesolithic–Middle Bronze Age
Melton Quarry	8	2–13	37	2?, 4–6	Early Neolithic–Late Bronze Age
North Carnaby Temple	4	1–13	17	2, 4–5	Early Neolithic–Late Neolithic
Rudston Pits Plantation	At least 3	1–3	5	2, 5–6	Early Neolithic–Early Bronze Age
Rudston Wold	10	1–3	14	2, 4–6	Early Neolithic–Early Bronze Age
Sewerby Cottage Farm	23	1–22	165	3–5	Middle Neolithic–Late Neolithic

did not apply and pits were scattered over the same area as structures, post-holes, hearths, and spreads. It appears that rules about where pits could be dug were not universal but did exist at certain sites.

At some sites, pits were spatially related to monumental and funerary features. At Kilham, all seven Neolithic pits were positioned in significant locations within the mortuary enclosure. At Garton Slack, where larger areas were excavated, two distinct areas of Neolithic activity could be distinguished, with different kinds of pit. The first was the long barrow enclosure, where two pits contained cremated human bone and a food or drink offering respectively (Brewster 1980, 88–90). In a separate area set apart from the enclosure, 12 pits containing flint chips and pottery sherds were located amongst several post-holes and a possible domestic structure (*ibid*, 124–31).

The relationship between pits and other Neolithic features in the Rudston area can be seen in Figure 7. The pits date from the Early to Late Neolithic, while the cursuses, henge, and monolith are of Middle–Late Neolithic date. It is likely that the area began as a simple occupation and was elaborated over time. The pit sites are concentrated to the south of the Gypsey Race, on either side of cursus A. One pit at the Rudston Pits Plantation makes direct spatial reference to the cursus, being cut into the fill of its eastern ditch (Abramson 2001, 3–4). However the landscape 'division' created by cursus A did not prevent pits, enclosures, and barrows being located on either side of it. The main factor limiting the distribution of the pits was the Gypsey Race, which may have carried some spiritual meaning that prevented occupation to the north, or it may be that the southern slopes were better sheltered. The 'ritual' landscape of Rudston is best thought of as a lived-in one; the sheltered location, good soils, rolling hills, and useful water source being simultaneously the impetus for settlement and veneration.

MATERIAL CULTURE

While some pits were relatively 'empty', many contained high concentrations of cultural material. Flint and pottery were the most common materials, and were usually deposited as a single fill, mixed together with animal bone, plant remains, and burnt stones. Occasionally human remains, worked stone, and worked bone were also present. As well as providing information about the kinds of activities taking place close to pits, the composition and

Fig. 7.
Pits in the Rudston locale (from the sites of Rudston Wold, Rudston Pits Plantation, Caythorpe, Low Caythorpe, Carnaby Top, North Carnaby Temple, and Burton Agnes), represented by period group, and other Neolithic features in the landscape

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condition of assemblages can provide an understanding of the treatment of material prior to and during deposition.

Pottery

For all ceramic groups, the pottery in pits was highly fragmentary and incomplete. Sherds were not arranged in any particular way. Despite often large numbers of sherds, many derived from different vessels, and there were very few complete vessels. This suggests that the pottery was broken before deposition and only a small proportion of larger quantities of broken pottery was deposited into pits. In some cases, sherds from the same vessel were spread across the fill of more than one pit, indicating that they belonged to the same depositional episode.

Occasionally, more selective practices could be observed. Two pits at Melton and one at Caythorpe each contained the fragmentary remains of one complete vessel *only* (Antoni, pers. comm.; Abramson 1996, 8); The sherds appeared to have entered the pit already broken and had been exposed prior to deposition. They do not, therefore, represent deliberate destruction or unbroken deposits, but show that care and deliberation were involved in the curation and deposition of some 'waste' items.

Some pits at North Carnaby Temple, Rudston Wold, and Flamborough contained the usual broken sherds alongside complete pots that were unbroken when deposited, and may have originally stood upright (Manby 1975, 45, 39–40; 1974, 72) (Fig. 8). If the fragmentary pottery represents accidentally broken pots from domestic activities, and its being placed in the ground constitutes a disposal ceremony, then the complete, upright pots may have contained offerings designed to give special thanks or to wish for good fortune. The condition of sherds varied. A large number were described as 'small' and 'fragmentary'. In just over a third of cases where condition was recorded, sherds were weathered, showing that they had spent some time in a broken state prior to deposition. In two-thirds of cases, sherds were freshly broken. Deliberate breakage for the purpose of votive deposition is possible, but does not explain why in so few cases did whole pots make it into the pit(s). It is more likely that when pots were broken in the course of everyday living, a few sherds were deposited in pits. Other sherds may have been piled up in a pre-pit context, but taken from these piles frequently, not allowing time for them all to become weathered or for substantial middens to build up. In several cases, weathered and unweathered sherds were found within the same pit, indicating that sherds collected from different sources were deposited together.

A large range of vessel forms were present, including fine and coarse wares, large and small, decorated and undecorated vessels. This suggests that the pots derived from multiple spheres of activity, rather than being specially produced or connected to particular ritual or domestic practices.

In some cases, different vessel forms, or different portions of vessels, were selected for different kinds of deposition. At Sewerby Cottage Farm, the pits demonstrated a smaller variety of vessel forms than the occupation areas, and the sherds were larger and less weathered. There was also a scarcity of lower body portions, interpreted as deliberate selection of upper body portions (Fenton-Thomas 2009, 152). The breakage of particular kinds of vessels may have required immediate deposition (of the upper body?) in pits to the north of the occupation area, while other broken vessels were left to weather in dumps within the occupation zone. These customs may not have been universal, but elements are recognisable at other sites. The deposition of broken pottery in pits was probably dependent on localised superstitions and habits.

Flint and worked stone

Worked flint was the most frequent material in pits, though quantities varied considerably. While in some pits flint constituted the only cultural material, there was a broad correspondence between large concentrations of flint and of pottery.

Most pit assemblages contained large amounts of debitage, while tools were relatively rare; of the 157 pits considered, at least 65 (41%) contained no retouched implements. All aspects of the knapping sequence were present, showing that production probably took place in close proximity to the pits, although no complete knapping sequences were recorded. This may indicate that the material in pits was only a small proportion of larger assemblages. The ratio of retouched implements to waste flakes was similar in pits as in occupation hollows and spreads, showing the material in pits to be representative of everyday occupation debris (Tables 4 & 5). This was also true of the types of tools found in pits as compared to hollows and spreads (Table 6).

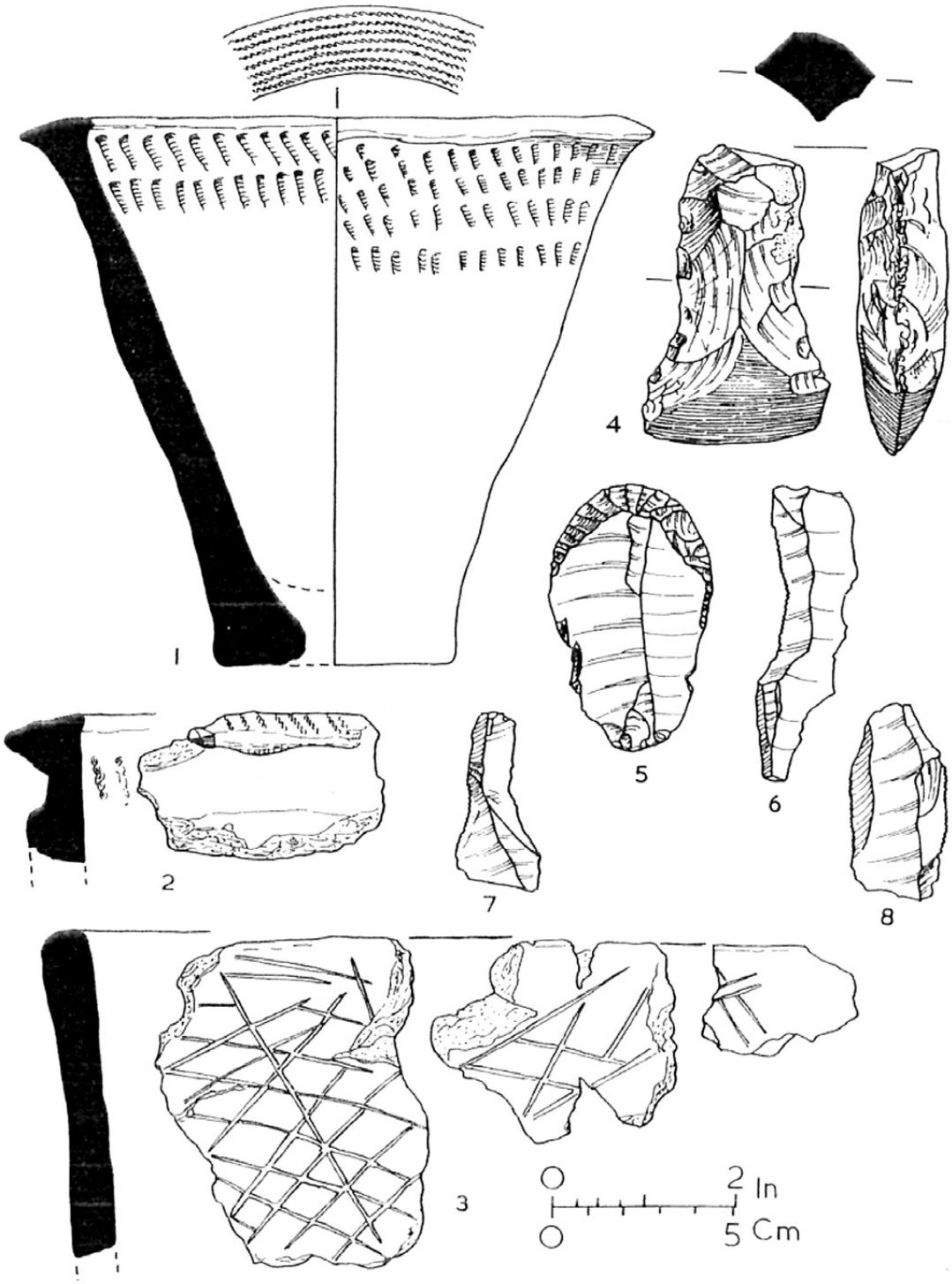

Fig. 8.
Material from a pit at Rudston Wold, including a complete 'bucket-shaped vessel' and partially polished flint axe (after Manby 1975)

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TABLE 4. SUMMARY OF FLINT ASSEMBLAGE COMPOSITION FROM PITS. PERCENTAGES ARE IN ITALIC, ACTUAL NUMERIC VALUES IN BRACKETS

Site	*Cores*	*Flakes, blades, chips, etc.*	*Tools*	*Hammerstones*
Bessingby Hill Neolithic 'burial'	*0* (0)	*0* (0)	*100* (1)	*0* (0)
Carnaby Top	*1* (27)	*93* (1882)	*5.5* (111)	*0.5* (5)
Caythorpe gas storage	*8* (3)	*67* (24)	*25* (9)	*0* (0)
Cottam Warren	*4* (2)	*94* (49)	*2* (1)	*0* (0)
Craike Hill pit	*0* (0)	*100* (4)	*0* (0)	*0* (0)
The Crayke	*0* (0)	*100* (12)	*0* (0)	*0* (0)
Flamborough, Hartendale	*8* (33)	*86.5* (360)	*5* (21)	*0.5* (2)
Ganstead to Asselby	*0* (0)	*95* (142)	*5* (8)	*0* (0)
Hayton		*88* (43)	*12* (6)	*0* (0)
High Green	*6* (1)	*94* (16)	*0* (0)	*0* (0)
Kilham Mesolithic pits	*2.5* (4)	*95* (142)	*2.5* (4)	*0* (0)
Kilham Neolithic pits	*0* (0)	*100* (16)	*0* (0)	*0* (0)
Langton Wold	*3.5* (2)	*89.5* (51)	*7* (4)	*0* (0)
Leven		*100*	*0*	*0* (0)
Low Caythorpe	*3* (4)	*84* (107)	*12* (15)	*1* (1)
Melton Quarry	*6* (57)	*86* (791)	*8* (77)	*0* (0)
North Carnaby Temple	*1.5* (30)	*93* (1736)	*5* (99)	*0.5* (5)
Pocklington Waterwaste	*3* (3)	*84* (91)	*13* (14)	*0* (0)
Rudston Pits Plantation	*4* (2)	*85* (46)	*11* (6)	*0* (0)
Rudston Wold	*2* (26)	*86.5* (955)	*11* (118)	*0.5* (4)
Sewerby depositional pits	*6* (77)	*91* (1198)	*3* (35)	*<1* (1)
Mean	*3* (271)	*90.5* (7665)	*6* (530)	*0.5* (18)

TABLE 5. SUMMARY OF FLINT ASSEMBLAGE COMPOSITION FROM OCCUPATION SPREADS. PERCENTAGES ARE IN ITALIC, ACTUAL NUMERIC VALUES IN BRACKETS

Site	*Cores*	*Flakes, blades, chips etc.*	*Tools*	*Hammerstones*
Beacon Hill	*37* (97)	*37.5* (98)	*25.5* (67)	*0* (0)
Bessingby Hill Mesolithic and Neolithic occupation	*2* (57)	*93* (2157)	*5* (106)	*0* (0)
Craike Hill occupation	*2* (1)	*49* (21)	*49* (21)	*0* (0)
Sewerby occupation areas	*6* (191)	*91* (2910)	*2.5* (84)	*0.5* (8)
Mean	*4* (346)	*91* (5186)	*5* (278)	*0* (8)

TABLE 6. SUMMARY OF FLINT IMPLEMENTS FROM PITS AND OCCUPATION SPREADS. PERCENTAGES ARE IN ITALIC, AND ACTUAL NUMERIC VALUES IN BRACKETS

Artefact	*Scrapers*	*Arrowheads*	*Knives*	*Axes/frags*	*Piercers/ awls*	*Microliths*	*Other retouched implements*
Pits	*53.5* (292)	*7* (38)	*2* (12)	*0.5* (2)	*2* (10)	*2* (10)	*33* (181)
Occupation spreads	*62* (172)	*10* (27)	*2* (6)	*0.5* (1)	*1* (4)	*12.5* (35)	*12* (34)

The condition of flint varied considerably. Some pieces were fresh, and appear to have been deposited relatively quickly. Others showed signs of abrasion, burning, and damage consistent with having spent time in a pre-pit context. Many pits contained both damaged/burnt and fresh pieces, indicating that material was collected from a variety of sources. Retouched implements were the most commonly broken and damaged pieces, and usually showed signs of wear, while flakes and blades were more frequently sharp and complete. It appears that the flint items deposited in pits were either functional items that had reached the end of their use-life, or debitage that was not intended for utilisation or retouch. Occasionally

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there were exceptions in the form of complete, undamaged implements, perhaps included as offerings to sanctify the deposit (Fig. 9).

Worked stone was far less common, but also comprised domestic waste items. Objects such as quern stones, rubbers, burnishers, anvil stones, and hammerstones were usually fragmentary, worn, and broken. However a complete, unbroken saddle quern deposited in a pit at Carnaby Top may have held special significance (Manby 1974). Complete and apparently unused Neolithic querns were deposited at Flag Fen in Cambridgeshire, and the presence of querns and quern fragments in Neolithic pits, long mounds, and causewayed enclosure ditches is well attested (Pryor 2001, 326–7).

Other stone items can tell us about trade and exchange. Fragments of unworked jet and broken jet items testify to imports from the North Yorkshire coast. Several pits also contained fragments of Group VI greenstone, imported from the Langdale region of the Lake District. This material was used primarily for the production of polished axes, an artefact particularly well represented in east Yorkshire that may have been exchanged for raw materials such as flint. The presence of only fragments in pits suggests that these were not usually considered as contexts for the deposition of such sanctified items; only waste from them. Of the eight pits containing greenstone fragments, five contained flakes from working, suggesting that axes were manufactured, reworked or finished in east Yorkshire.

Almost all examples of imported materials in pits were concentrated in the Rudston locale and were restricted to ceramic periods 4 and 5, from around 3400 BC onwards (Fig. 6). Although such materials have been found earlier and elsewhere in non-pit contexts, this distribution echoes the particularly rich material culture of the Rudston area, which was probably one of the most heavily populated and beginning to see increasing social stratification during the second half of the 4th millennium. Exchange with distant communities may have played an important role in the growth of this area.

There is a clear preference at many sites, particularly on the Wolds, for high quality, coastal flint. This suggests that local resources were managed as part of a wider exchange economy. Tess Durden (1996) has argued that flintworking sites on the Wolds were part of a two-stage process whereby flint was extracted from glacial deposits on the coast and transported up into the Wolds to be worked by specialists.

FOOD PROCUREMENT, COOKING, AND HEATING

Faunal assemblages in pits were usually fragmentary, unarticulated and poorly preserved. Some bones showed signs of weathering, and many of burning. Bones and shells were usually mixed up with pottery sherds, flint, charcoal and burnt stones. It is likely that the bones and shells represent the remains of cooked food, some of which had spent time in a pre-pit context such as a midden. Other food remains may have been deposited directly into the pits after meals, alongside sweepings from hearths. Evidence for burning was recorded in association with 129 pits and hollows. In most cases fires were not created in the pits but burnt material dumped into them. Burnt stones, interpreted as 'pot boilers', and sometimes large quantities of charcoal, were often present. This suggests that cooking and heating activities took place close to the pits, supported by the close proximity of hearths at sites such as Beacon Hill, Craike Hill, Rudston Wold, North Carnaby Temple, and Flamborough (Moore 1964; Manby 1958; 1975; 1974). Burnt material was usually mixed with unburnt, and charcoal was usually in the form of inclusions within unburnt soil and material. It seems that sweepings from hearths and cooking areas were dumped into pits alongside unburnt occupation debris.

Some pits at Sewerby are interpreted as 'cooking pits'. They were 'deliberately and carefully filled' with burnt stones, suggesting that they were placed there when still hot and food placed onto them before being covered with another layer of hot stones (Fenton-Thomas 2009, 38). Bronze Age pits at Caythorpe also contained large amounts of burnt stone and have been interpreted as 'fire pits' (Abramson 1996, 12). Whilst it cannot be ruled out that the stones were placed into the pits after use, the lack of other material makes these interpretations plausible.

Faunal remains

Of the 38 animal bone-producing pits, 23 produced only unidentified animal bone. The remaining 15 contained a mixture of domestic and wild assemblages, of which only one contained *only* wild animal bone, and only two *only* domestic (Table 7).

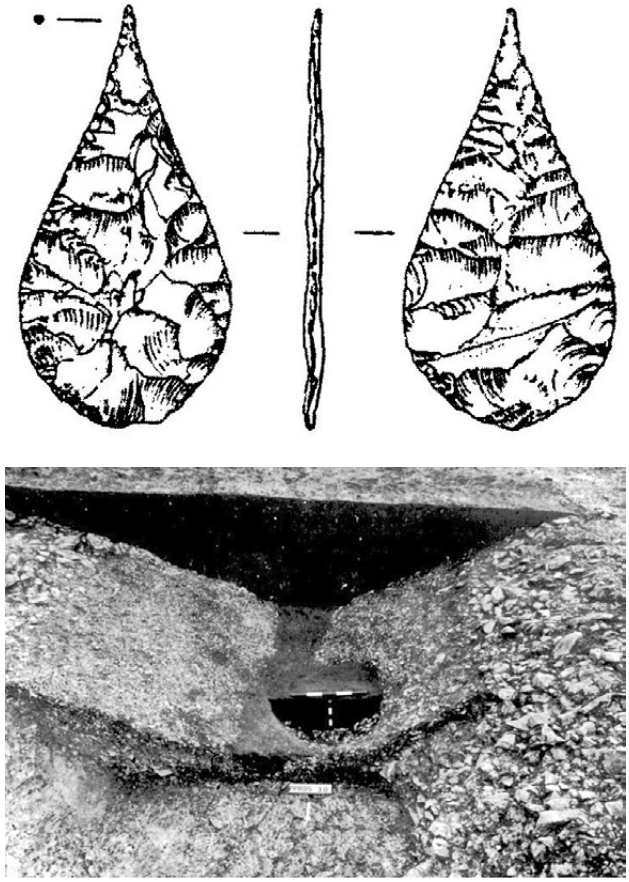

Fig. 9.
A pit dug into the ditch of cursus A at Rudston Pits Plantation, and the leaf-shaped arrowhead found in it (after Abramson 2001)

The earliest identifiable domesticated animals in pits were associated with Grooved Ware and dated to the beginning of the 3rd millennium.

Table 8 shows the number of instances in which animal remains were present against the number of individuals represented. Although many animals were frequently represented in pits, certain animals were present in much larger numbers, in particular domestic cattle, pig, and marine molluscs. The latter's frequency is easily explained by its size, but in the case of pig and cow, it may be a true representation of preference. Some pits contained unusually large faunal assemblages, and may represent single feasting episodes, a short-term occupation by a large group, or a long-term occupation by a small group. The comparative ubiquity of pig remains may imply that special meaning was attached to their deposition. This might be supported by the deposition of an intact piglet skeleton at Caythorpe (Abramson 1996, 10), although the bones were mixed amongst many other faunal remains and probably constitute food remains rather than a 'burial'. Thomas and Richards (1984) argue that the ubiquity and distribution of pig remains at the large henges of Wessex reflect their role as a feasting animal. Perhaps the deposition of food remains in pits was something undertaken after a feast, and so pigs are over-represented. However the majority of pits contained only small amounts of food refuse and so it seems that deposition occurred in a variety of circumstances. It may be that the important role pigs played in the economy was echoed in the social and spiritual meanings they took on.

The first organic residue analysis for prehistoric pottery in east Yorkshire was undertaken at Sewerby Cottage Farm, which concluded that a large number of the pots were used to store animal fats and dairy products from around 3500 to 2500 BC (Fenton-Thomas 2009, 186–96).

Plant remains

Environmental evidence shows that both domestic and wild plant resources were used from the Early Neolithic onwards (Table 9). The earliest associated radiocarbon dates for domesticated cereals came from a pit at Melton dating to 3650–3390 cal BC. Cereal grains at Caythorpe were associated with Early Neolithic pottery (Abramson 1996, 10). Pits containing grain at High Green and Ganstead-Asselby contained 'transitional' Mesolithic–Neolithic flint assemblages (Pre-Construct Archaeology 2003; Network Archaeology in prep.) and may point to the beginnings of agriculture in the earliest Neolithic, although the dating of these pits is problematic. Certain pits at Melton contained exceptional quantities of plant remains. It is unlikely that the pits were used for storage as this does not explain how the remains became carbonised (burning was not *in situ*), or the presence of pottery and flint mixed up with the food remains. The oxidised and weathered state of the pot sherds in these pits suggests that the waste material may have accumulated over some time, and so the grains and shells may represent the burnt and discarded waste of food processing over some time.

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TABLE 7. SUMMARY OF FAUNAL REMAINS FROM PITS AND ASSOCIATED RADIOCARBON DATES

Ceramic period (Fig. 6)	*Site/pit group*	*No. pits*	*Unident. animal bone*	*Domestic animal bone*	*Wild animal bone/ shellfish*	*Conventional radiocarbon age (BP) associated features*	*Calibrated dates BC (to 2 sigma, 95% probability)*	*Lab. Ref.*
1	Kilham Mesolithic pits	2	X					
2	Rudston Wold (Corner Field 11)	1	X					
2	Caythorpe (solitary pit)	1	X					
2?	Ganstead-Asselby	6	X					
3,4	Heslerton	2	X					
4	Melton Quarry (group 1)	1	X			4120±40 (from another pit in same group)	2870–2570	Unavailable
4	Kilham Neolithic pits	3	X			before 4830±125 (date of mortuary enclosure)	3010–2750	Unavailable
4	Rudston Wold (2nd Field West of Reservoir)	1	X					
4/5	Garton Slack (group 3a)	1	X					
5	Hayton pit 1	1		X		4250±50 (from same pit)	2920–2860/ 2810–2690	Beta-223633
5	Hayton pit 4	1	X		X	4110±50 (from same pit)	2880–2550/ 2540–2490	Beta-223632
5	Carnaby Top (site 13)	1	X					
5	Carnaby Top (site 20)	1		X	X			
5	Fimber Church	1		X	X			
5	Rudston Wold (East Reservoir 5)	1		X	X			
5	North Carnaby Temple	5		X	X			
5	Low Caythorpe	2		X	X			
5	Caythorpe (solitary pit)	1		X				
5	Caythorpe (group 1020)	1	X			4160±80/ 3950±70 (from same pit)	2920–2570/ 2630–2270	RCD-2100
5	Pocklington	1	X					
6	Caythorpe (gas storage)	1		X	X			
6	Melton Quarry (group 3)	3	X					

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TABLE 8. SUMMARY OF FAUNAL TAXA FROM PITS

Taxa	*No. features in which represented*	*Minimum number of individuals*	*Ceramic period (Fig. 6)*
Red deer	4	4	5
Dog	2	2	5
Wild cattle	5	5	5
Ox	6	6	1, 2, 5
Marine molluscs	5	26	4–6
Horse	1	1	4
Boar	2	2	5
Domestic cattle	8	17	4–6
Pig	9	35	4–5
Sheep/goat	5	7	5

The proportion of cereals in the diet and intensity of cultivation being practiced cannot be quantified from these results alone. However, the relative ubiquity of cereal grains in east Yorkshire supports cases made for cereal cultivation being a staple subsistence activity in the British Isles (Bogaard & Jones 2007). Coupled with the evidence for repeated occupation in the same locations, this may suggest that farming communities were beginning to lead more permanent lifestyles, perhaps tending crops year-round.

HUMAN REMAINS

Just eight out of the 536 features considered contained human remains. The remains were always highly fragmentary and incomplete, and were sometimes cremated.

At Bessingby Hill, a stone-lined pit dated to the Early Neolithic contained partially cremated bone fragments and a flint axe (Earnshaw 1973). The lack of any other 'debris' and the significance of axes in the Neolithic may suggest that this was primarily a 'burial'. This may also be true for three pits at Garton Slack, which contained cremated human bone only. Two of these lay directly within the long barrow mortuary enclosure and were contemporary with the cremation furnace also found on site (Brewster 1980).

Other pits contained the usual fragmentary flint, pottery, and food remains alongside human bone. In these cases there was nothing besides the human bone to suggest any difference from the majority of 'ceremonial rubbish disposal' pits, excepting an engraved pig humerus from North Carnaby Temple that could be seen as a 'grave good' (Manby 1974). In several cases, human bones were part of homogeneous fills that had accumulated in hollows rather than been deliberately deposited into pits, and so the labels of 'burial' and 'grave good' may be inappropriate.

The human remains interred in pits were no doubt imbued with special meanings, but these were probably different to the meanings attached to those entombed within barrows and chambered cairns. The human remains in pits may have had much more in common with other 'ritual deposits' such as the food offerings buried in the mortuary enclosure at Garton Slack. Cremation and ritual pits on the periphery of larger funerary monuments may have had a role similar to the offerings often found in the ditches of monumental structures (Lamdin-Whymark 2008, 139–72; Thomas 1999, 74–85).

The huge investment put into funerary monuments suggests that Neolithic society placed great importance on the treatment of the dead. During the Early Neolithic, this treatment can broadly be described as communal and symbolic. Individual bodies did not represent the lives of individual people. Excarnation was practiced, remains broken up and involved in a variety of ritual practices (Mercer 1980; Shanks & Tilley 1982). Perhaps the fragments of human bone found in pits and hollows represent just one part of such rituals, as the communal bones of the ancestors found their way into all aspects of economic, social, and domestic life (Edmonds 1999, 42). Beliefs about the lifecycles of houses, settlements, and resources may have been enmeshed with beliefs about the dead.

DISCUSSION: STRUCTURED DEPOSITION AND SOCIETY

The material assemblages, spatial patterns, morphology, and temporal sequences of pits have shown that the practice of depositing cultural 'waste' was at once a recognisable tradition and yet extremely variable. The material deposited was almost always broken, used, or a by-product of procedures such as craft production or food preparation and consumption. However, different levels of care had been taken in the curation of material before deposition, even debris in the same pit often coming from a variety of sources. Certain items were selected or deliberately *not* selected

TABLE 9 SUMMARY OF ENVIRONMENTAL REMAINS FROM PITS AND ASSOCIATED RADIOCARBON DATES

Ceramic Period (Fig. 6)	*Site/pit group*	*No. pits*	*Cereal grains*	*Wild Plant foods*	*Conventional radiocarbon age (BP) associated features*	*Calibrated dates BC (to 2 sigma, 95% probability)*	*Lab. Ref.*
1/2	High Green	1	X				
2	Caythorpe (solitary pit)	1	X	X			
2	Leven	2		X	4855±70 5000±70 (from both pits)	3990–3640 4940–4540	OxA-4413 OxA-4411
2	Melton (group 2)	2		X	4730±40 (from one of the pits)	3640–3490 3460–3370	Unavailable
2?	Ganstead to Asseslby	6	X	X			
2?	Melton Quarry (group 4c)	1		X	4820±40 (from pit in same group)	3660–3620/ 3600–3520	Unavailable
2?	Melton Quarry (group 4e)	1	X	X	4780±40 (from same pit)	3650–3510/ 3420–3390	Unavailable
2/3	Sewerby (group 6)	1		X	4711±33 and 4791±36 BP (from same pit)	3640–3370 & 3650–3510	OxA-13971
3, 4	Heslerton	2		X			
4	Sewerby (group 7)	2		X	4734±35 (from same pit)	3640–3370	OxA-13850
4	Sewerby (trench 17)	Unspecified	X	X			
4	Caythorpe (group 1230)	1		X?	4320±80 (from same pit)	3320–2690	RCD-2101
4/5	Garton Slack (group 1/2)	1		X	5050±150 (from prob. contemp. cremation)	3250–2950	NPL-195
5	Hayton	2	X	X	4250±50 & 4110±50 (from both pits)	2920–2860/ 2810–2690 & 2880–2550 2540–2490	Beta-223633 Beta-223632
5	Caythorpe (group 1020)	1		X	4160±80 & 3950±70 (from same pit)	2920–2500 & 2860–2200	RCD-2100
6	Melton Quarry (group 3)	1	X		2900±40 (from same pit)	1210–970	Unavailable

as suitable for this kind of treatment, and certain locations were sometimes seen as preferable.

In order to elucidate the socio-cultural mechanisms behind such customs, some authors have examined the patterns produced by depositional practices. Julian Thomas and Colin Richards (1984) have described 'structured deposition' as a way in which ritual is evident in the material record, order being produced by the fact that 'specific sequences and rules applied to the contexts and associations of different objects' (Thomas & Richards 1984, 192). They make a valid case for deposition being an act that symbolically reinforced social relations and, through exclusion and revelation, allowed certain members of

the community to maintain power over others.

However, the highly structuralist system envisaged need not have existed, particularly in the case of pit deposition. Each material, artefact, context or decoration need not have had a *specific* message. To own a Ferrari in today's society is to symbolically express one's economic success, but it does not convey a particular profession or salary, and the same message can be expressed by owning a Lamborghini. Pit deposition in east Yorkshire shows little evidence for standardisation, rather the wide range of material composition and arrangement suggest a practice that was communally recognisable, but far from prescriptive.

Religious belief was no doubt present in everyday activities, underpinning the structure of society, and the distinction between 'utilitarian' and 'ritual' activities is better viewed as a gradient than a dichotomy. At domestic sites, the deposition of material in pits was probably a partially 'practical' measure in order to clear space, and the majority of material was 'rubbish' in the sense that it had come to the end of its functional use-life. However, the act of its deposition may have related to moments of spiritual importance. At monumental sites, deposition may have been a more formalised religious act. The difference can be likened to the difference between going to church to hear Mass, and saying Grace before a meal at home. Both serve to maintain power relations, the former through awe-inspiring impressive display and the latter through the quotidian reliving of the social order. The following paragraphs will attempt to explain how different kinds of pits fit into a scale that ranges from the relatively mundane to the highly formalised.

1. The majority of pits contained material that can be described as domestic debris. The pits were not arranged in any spatial pattern, and the material was not selected individually but gathered up *en masse*. The digging and filling of these pits was probably a frequent activity undertaken by small groups such as families. Knapping waste was cleared from flintworking areas, broken pot sherds taken from kitchen floors, and food waste swept up from butchery, food preparation, and eating areas. Hearths were cleaned out and pot boilers taken from where they had been used to heat water or cook food. Additional material was taken from middens.

There appear to have been no social rules regarding the materials associated in the same context. Although some deposits showed limited ordering and selectivity, this probably reflects basic aesthetic preferences or ease of access and transportation.

2. Not infrequently, non-waste items were included in pit deposits, such as complete upright pots (containing offerings?), and unbroken flint axes. Unlike most other items, these were individually chosen, and still *valuable*. They were sacrificed, perhaps to induce better weather or better crops, or in thanks for good health, fat animals or a good harvest.

3. Sometimes pits may have been dug on special occasions. Pits containing unusually large amounts of faunal and plant remains at Caythorpe, Low Caythorpe, Melton Quarry, and North Carnaby Temple could suggest the remains of feasts. At Sewerby Cottage Farm and Garton Slack pits were dug into or in front of houses that must have gone out of use, and may have related to their decommissioning.

4. On occasion, human remains were included in debris deposits. Human remains were treated in a variety of ways in the Neolithic and undoubtedly carried special meanings. Their inclusion in pit fills may have given 'ancestral presence' to everyday activities and even served to commemorate deaths.

5. Sometimes pits with typical fills were dug in special locations, for example within the long barrow enclosure at Kilham. The significance of the 'domestic debris' in these pits may have had a different meaning within this context, just as a bunch of flowers can have a different meaning depending if it is placed on a grave or a kitchen table. These pits may have been dug as part of formal funerals or other ceremonies.

6. Some pits contained no domestic debris, only highly selective deposits, and were usually located in monumental contexts. Examples include the pit dug into the fill of the cursus A ditch at Rudston, containing only a single arrowhead (Fig. 9); two pits dug into the mortuary enclosure at Garton Slack, containing cremated human bones and a food 'offering' respectively; and the two adjoining pits in the centre of the Kilham ring-ditch, each containing an upright ceramic vessel that may have contained a food or drink offering. These pits probably pertained to formal events such as funerals.

The material we see today is only a small part of depositional ceremonies that may have included singing, dancing, eating, and drinking. Therefore, some pits in the lower categories may have been more formalised than some in the higher categories, but the

sequence described here can at least provide a basic guideline to different kinds of deposition.

Certain acts may have been undertaken by particular individuals, for example the group leader after a feast, or head of the family on abandonment of a house. More ritualised deposition in monumental contexts was perhaps only conducted by those with a stronger religious role. In the Early Neolithic, communal burial rites and extensive gathering sites suggest that even the more ritualised depositional ceremonies may have served to maintain communal belief systems and community spirit. In contrast, substantial monumental expansion and individualistic funerary rites point to increasing social stratification in the Late Neolithic, and some of the more formalised deposits may have been involved in elaborate ceremonies that served to advance the power held by certain individuals over the majority. Depositional practices may have contributed to the (re-)negotiation of social relations. However, for the most part pits appear to represent a common practice that took place in the everyday living sphere, available to and comprehended by all members of the community.

CONCLUSIONS AND FURTHER POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

It is clear from the material in pits and their landscape location (and, occasionally, their spatial relationship to structural remains) that they relate to domestic contexts. That pits were repeatedly dug in similar locations over considerable lengths of time, that older deposits were rarely disturbed, that the material residues of daily life were themselves becoming more substantial, that pits were dug into the floors of decommissioned houses and, in one instance, new houses were superimposed onto old, all suggest that particular places were gaining a developed sense of permanence, perhaps comparable to the modern-day concept of 'home'. Of course, permanence of place does not necessarily equal sedentariness of people, and the occasions on which pits were dug and filled have often been interpreted as the end of occupations, perhaps to mark the departure of the group onto another seasonal location, as a promise of their return the following year (Edmonds 1999:29; Chaffey & Brook 2012; Garrow 2006). However, this thesis tentatively offers a different interpretation, whereby at least some people were not making offerings as they left, but tidying up precisely because they were staying. Whole communities need not have been totally 'sedentary' in the most rigid sense of the word, but to some extent the increased investment in place implied by these practices must be equated not only to changed ideology but increased physical presence; for one cannot occur without the other.

The amount of time consumed by agricultural activities in Neolithic Britain is unclear, and debates about the level of immigration and influence from continental Europe during the Mesolithic–Neolithic transition remain polarised (for example Thomas 2007; Rowley-Conwy 2004). However, what is clear is that from the Early Neolithic onwards, a range of new technologies and ideas were being exchanged between Britain and the continent. The establishment of new routines of monumental construction and food production would have required a steep learning curve and it may have been through repetitive physical actions that these new ways of life became sedimented and knowledge imparted. It is easy to imagine deposition in pits as part of ceremonies that 'renewed' practices surrounding contexts such as settlements, cultivation plots, and monuments.

The way that settlements were inhabited was probably changing significantly before the period of technological and ideological exchange that became 'the Neolithic'. The beginning of pit digging and filling in the Mesolithic may have played an integral role in the shift to a lifestyle and identity that was imbued with a sense of 'home'. Within pit deposition, new traditions such as settlement renewal may have been combined with old ones, such as the commemoration of the dead. Technological innovations such as farming and pottery developed symbiotically *alongside* changing attitudes to place; all these aspects causally impacted on one another as part of the daily physical and mental practices that eventually constituted a changed state of affairs.

Pit deposition in east Yorkshire has many similarities with other areas such as East Anglia (Garrow 2006) and the Thames Valley (Chaffey & Brook 2012). It is also worth mentioning that the deposition of domestic debris in pits is well attested across Neolithic Europe, including notably central Europe and the Balkans (Van de Velde 2007; Chapman 2000). The scope of this study does not allow for conclusions to be drawn about the diverse meanings of pit digging for these communities; however it is useful to put the Yorkshire situation into a wider context. Deposition may not

have been defined by pan-European rules of association or structuration, but this recognisable family activity may have been formed a building block towards common identities and affiliations, and even been one of the foundational practices that allowed for cultural comprehensibility across the British Isles and the near continent during the cross-channel communication evident from the first generations of the British Neolithic onwards. Future comparative research may disprove or support these hypotheses.

That said, it is hoped that this study has brought attention to the special character of east Yorkshire that is sometimes ignored in wider overviews. There is much pre-existing evidence to suggest that certain areas were key centres for trade and communication across the British Isles, as well as being the sites of some of the most impressive and anomalous monumental and funerary features in the country (Durden 1996; Manby *et al.* 2003).

The evidence from pits confirms certain trends within the east Yorkshire landscape. Particular types of location were chosen for pit digging and monumental elaboration, whose geographic characteristics were well-suited to settlement, pastoral, and agricultural activities and communication networks. The most prominent centre appears to have been around Rudston, which is interpreted as a heavily populated core area, rather than an occasional gathering point. This area had the largest number of pits, as well as the widest variety of artefacts, including the largest proportion of imported and 'prestige' items.

Over time, the distribution of pits in the landscape became more widespread and prolific, but many locations were consistently occupied and elaborated. The most elaborate monumental developments took place in the Late Neolithic, which is also when the greatest number of pits and greatest proportion of imported and 'prestige' items were recorded. The evidence supports increasingly complex exchange networks and internal social relations during the Late Neolithic.

Like all interpretations, these conclusions are merely intelligent inferences based on the tiny clues left behind by a wealth of past activities. It is hoped that, whether the reader chooses to agree or disagree with these inferences, this study has succeeded in its main objectives: to bring to light the evidence from east Yorkshire in a coherent synthesis, and to provide an informative background to the kinds of issues that are pertinent to future investigations of Neolithic pits.

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