

501



DEFENCE ESTATES
Delivering Estate Solutions to Defence Needs

STRENSALL TRAINING AREA (STA)
ARCHAEOLOGICAL BASELINE ASSESSMENT

May 2003

Version 1.0 (Draft for Comment)

P. Abramson

Summary

Introduction

2.0 Site History and Heritage Value

3.0 Methodology and Information Sources

4.0 Landscape History

5.0 Archaeological Sites within the Study Area

6.0 Relevant Statutory Items and Planning Policy

7.0 Conclusions

Bibliography

STRENSALL TRAINING AREA

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BASELINE ASSESSMENT

Summary

The baseline assessment of the Strensall Training Area (STA) has identified several sites of archaeological significance and historical landscape value. Although not designated as Scheduled Monuments or Listed Buildings the sites retain a local significance and are important in that they contribute to the development of the historic landscape.

1.0 Introduction

This report describes the archaeology and landscape history of the Strensall Training Area (STA) by reference to both known and previously unrecorded archaeological sites, including scheduled monuments, listed buildings and monuments not protected by cultural heritage legislation.

An Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) for the STA has not yet been compiled and sites of archaeological significance and historic landscape value have not been formally assessed. This report initiates the identification of such features. It is considered that this is an ongoing process and that further work on the estate (coupled with changing perceptions of sites of archaeological and historic significance) will no doubt increase the baseline level of understanding presented in this assessment.

With respect to the remit of the assessment and the terminology used in the report, archaeology and the historic environment is a broad description which is synonymous and inclusive of such terms as the historic built environment and most aspects of cultural heritage. It has also much to contribute to understanding the character of the landscape and the traditional forms of land management which, over time, have shaped and created it.

The MOD are grateful for the support and assistance afforded by John Oxley, the City of York Archaeologist who provided information which has been incorporated into this report.

2.0 Aims and objectives

The principal aims of this report are as follows:

- to present a baseline assessment which describes the sites of cultural heritage and historic landscape value on the STA and provides background information to place them in their landscape and cultural context
- to describe the current land-use practices which have an impact on the resource
- to presents an Action Plan which identifies a number of issues for the future ongoing management of the sites of cultural heritage on the estate.

As a baseline assessment the report is **not** intended to provide detailed information on the condition of the sites nor does it present specific recommendations for their conservation and management.

3.0 Location and topography

Strensall Training Area (STA) occupies 770 hectares (1900 acres) of land situated to the south-east of the village of Strensall and to the north-east of the Towthorpe, some 6 miles north-east of York.

The training area is situated on flat land bounded to the east by the York moraine and to the west by the flood Plain of the River Foss. The surface deposits are aeolian sands of post-glacial age overlying a succession of sands and clays of lacustrine origin. At the base of the succession is a bed of boulder clay. The thick glacial deposits overlie Bunter and Keuper sandstones of Triassic age. Soils vary from pale yellow sand with little humus to well developed podsols.

Strensall Common is an area of considerable landscape importance. It is exceptional within its context of an acid heathland in a lowland part of the north of England with wide expansive views and a lack of enclosure. There are extensive views across the common over vegetation types including heather, grassland, wetlands and scrub woodland towards the screen of trees and woodlands that border the site. It is an historic landscape that has largely avoided the impact of agricultural intensification that has occurred in the surrounding areas.

Approximately 579 hectares of the training area is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) for its lowland heathland and the site is also of considerable entomological importance.

4.0 Landscape history and archaeological background

4.1 Prehistoric period

Few prehistoric sites are recorded for this area although a number of stone axes recovered from around Strensall may indicate activity in the Neolithic period (circa 4000-2500 BC). Further north, at Dunscombe (centred on SE 638622), the division of the landscape into large fields is recorded as linear and curvilinear cropmarks on oblique aerial photographs. Such activity is likely to be of Iron Age or Romano-British date.

4.2 Romano-British period

A fieldwalking survey undertaken by John Bateman in the mid-1980s recovered evidence for a Romano-British site (SMR 4283) on the west bank of the River Foss at Strensall New Bridge (SE 625606). Over 700 fragments of Romano-British pottery were recovered from a field together with medieval sherds and nine worked flints of prehistoric date. The precise nature of the site remains uncertain, but it strongly suggests settlement activity in the area during the Romano-British period. The presence of this site relatively close to the training area demonstrates the potential for other sites to be present in the training area.

The STA is located 6km to the north of York, the capital of northern Britain in the Roman period. As such there is a potential for further archaeological deposits associated with this period to be present within the landscape. For example at Naburn, 5km south of the city, aerial photographs recorded field enclosures and settlement evidence which, upon excavation, showed continuity from the Iron Age into the Roman invasion period. The position of this site, on the banks of the River Ouse, is comparable to Strensall, where the River Foss runs close to the training area.

4.3 Medieval period

The area of Strensall and Towthorpe Common was, for many centuries, part of the Forest of Galtres, which covered up to 7,500 acres. It ranged from Crayke in the north to the walls of the city of York in the south and from Tollerton in the west to Bulmer in the east. After the Norman Conquest it became a royal forest and remained a rich source of timber and wild game.

Ridge and furrow in the south-west of the STA is recorded on aerial photographs suggesting that medieval ploughing was carried out on the margin of the common land.

4.4 Post-medieval period

During the reign of Charles I land was allotted to various parishes, including Strensall, and by the 18th century it is thought that the common looked much as it does today.

As a result of the Crimean war (1854-1856) the government decided to establish a training base in the north of England. Between 1876 and 1884 the War Office bought land on Strensall and Towthorpe Commons from the then Lord of the Manor, Leonard Thompson and various other landowners. In 1884 this arrangement was enshrined in the Strensall Common Act.

Reference to OS 1st edition map of 1853 (Yorkshire, Sheet 157) shows an area of enclosed fields on Towthorpe Common in what is now the south-west corner of the STA. This field system has been all but removed by the buildings of the training area although several field boundaries are visible on aerial photographs. Enclosed fields in the north-western area of the site once existed in the area that is currently taken by Strensall Golf Course. Elsewhere on the STA the open, carr landscape recorded on the 1st edition OS map is similar to that of the present day.

5.0 Methodology and information sources

The principal sources of information consulted as part of the assessment were:

5.1 City of York Archaeology Section

- Sites and monuments Records
- Files of published and unpublished archaeological and historical information
- Vertical and oblique aerial photographs
- Schedule of ancient monuments
- Listed buildings
- Register of Parks and Gardens
- Battlefields register

5.2 English Heritage, National Monuments Record, Swindon

- MONARCH printouts
- Vertical aerial photographs database
- Oblique aerial photographs database

5.3 Field inspection

A site inspection of the training area and several of the recorded sites was undertaken in February 2003.

6.0 Archaeological sites within the study area

The sites identified are summarised in Table 1. Each site has been identified by a Sites and Monuments Record number (SMR) and/or a National Monument Record reference (NMR) or a letter code for sites not previously recorded. Sites are located by a national grid reference (NGR), a central grid reference being provided for extensive sites.

Table 1: Archaeological sites within the STA

Site	NMR/SMR	NGR	Classification	Period
1	SE65NW5	SE 635 586	Ordnance depot	20th century
2	SE65NW10	SE 639 598	Enclosure	Medieval/post-Medieval
3	SE65NW11	SE 6446 5955	Circular peat stands	Post-medieval
4	SE66SE36	SE 6546 6046	Stack stands	Post-Medieval
5	N/A	SE 6462 5911	Bunkers	Post-medieval
6	N/A		Ridge and furrow	Medieval
7	N/A		Parish boundary	Medieval/post-medieval

6.1 Scheduled Monuments

There are no scheduled monuments within the STA

6.2 Listed Buildings

There are no listed buildings within the STA

6.3 Non-designated sites

Several non-designated sites of archaeological significance have been identified as a result of the assessment. All of the sites are considered to be of local significance and are related to relatively recent agricultural practices (e.g peat and stack stands) or military activity (e.g. ordnance depot and slit trenches).

1	SE65NW5	SE 635 586	Ordnance depot	20th century
---	---------	------------	----------------	--------------

Site 1 is a former anti-aircraft ordnance depot dating to the 1930s situated in the south-east corner of the study area. The building is currently used as a Royal Engineers and Mechanical Engineers repair depot.

2	SE65NW10	SE 639 598	Enclosure	Medieval/post-Medieval
---	----------	------------	-----------	------------------------

Site 2 is an earthwork enclosure of probable medieval or post-medieval date located immediately adjacent to a footpath at SE 639 598 and shown on the 1st edition OS map of 1853 as Stot Fold. The enclosure measures approximately 50m by 30m and is visible on vertical aerial photographs of the STA. The feature was largely obscured by a dense covering of grass and gorse at the time of the site inspection.

3	SE65NW11	SE 6446 5955	Circular peat stands	Post-medieval
---	----------	--------------	----------------------	---------------

Site 3 comprises approximately 50 circular embanked and ditched enclosures 5m-6m in diameter, which are thought to be peat stands of post-medieval date. The features are recorded on aerial photographs in the area of the boundary between Strensall and Towthorpe Commons, centred on SE 6446 5955.

4	SE66SE36	SE 6546 6046	Stack stands	Post-Medieval
---	----------	--------------	--------------	---------------

Site 4 comprises over 40 post-medieval circular stack stands approximately 3m-4m in diameter recorded on aerial photographs of Strensall Common. The features cover an area of about 1km by 0.5 km on the Common centred on SE 6546 6046 in the northern area of the STA.

5	N/A	SE 6462 5911	Bunkers	Post-medieval
---	-----	--------------	---------	---------------

Site 5 consists of three bunkers centred on SE 6462 5911 on Strensall Common recorded on the site inspection. Each bunker is a low circular earthen mound between 3m-4m in diameter with a concrete lined recess on the northern side.

6	N/A	SE	Ridge and furrow	Medieval
---	-----	----	------------------	----------

Site 6 comprises a field system of ridge and furrow situated in the south-west of the STA. Ridge and furrow is indicative of arable farming practices in the medieval period and is characterised by low strips formed by the continuous action of an ox or horse drawn plough over a long period of time. The ridge and furrow at Strensall is recorded on vertical aerial photographs taken in 1962 and shows the strips as overlain, in part, by the firing ranges.

7	N/A	SE	Parish boundary	Medieval/Post-medieval
---	-----	----	-----------------	------------------------

Site 7 comprises the boundary between the parishes of Towthorpe and Strensall. The boundary survives as a ditch running in an east to west direction across the site and is visible at ground level and on aerial photographs.

6.4 Potential for unrecorded sites

The STA lies in an area of archaeological significance, where sites ranging in date from the prehistoric through to the post-medieval periods have been recorded. Whether such sites are present on the STA remains uncertain.

The open nature of the landscape owes much to its use as a military training area, and before that to its status as common land and its previous inclusion within the boundary of a medieval forest. Given this history of 'static-development' it may be expected that any evidence of early activity would survive as visible earthworks.

7.0 Management issues

7.1 Access

Because payment was made to certain Common Rights Holders in Strensall in 1885 all 'Common Rights' were surrendered and the War Office, now the Ministry of Defence, exercises all legal rights over all 1900 acres of the training area. However, it is enshrined in the Act of 1884 that, whilst the common is not being used for military training, civilians have a right to use the common for recreation, subject to certain bye-laws (see Strensall Common byelaws 1972),

The public highway along the northern boundary of the STA is on MOD land. There is open public access to parts of Strensall Common and to all of the Commons when live firing is not taking place. There are no public rights of way but an extensive network of informal paths and tracks across the site are used for walking and horse riding. The training area is occasionally used for orienteering and other outdoor pursuits.

7.2 Military activity

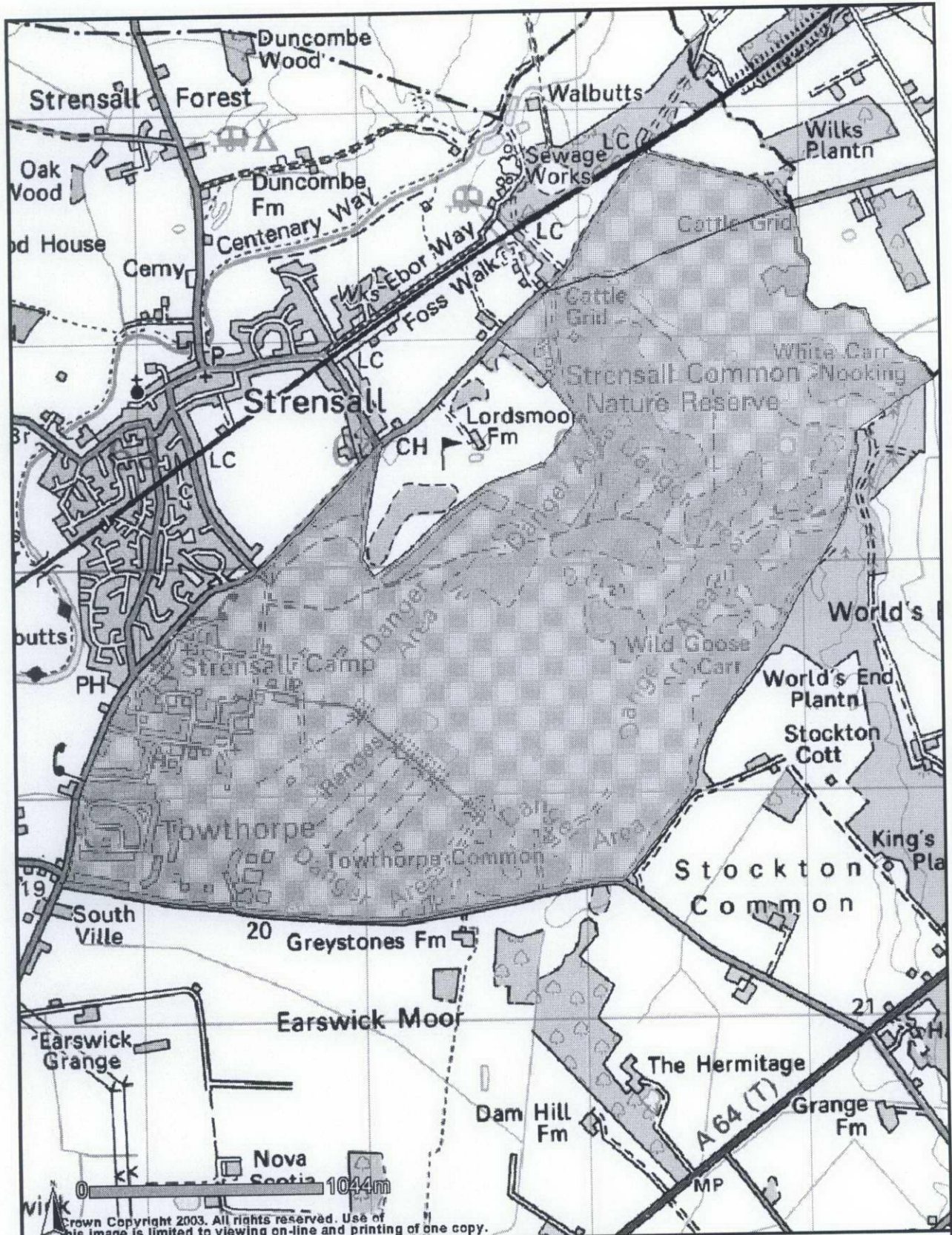
Users of the STA include the Regular Forces, the Territorial Army, cadets and other units. The STA includes six Small Arms Classification Ranges with firing points up to 600m from the targets, together with two No Danger Area (NDA) ranges and a Grenade Range. Firing takes place each day except Wednesday when range maintenance is carried out.

The area is also used for dry training to platoon level. Use of the area for dry training is limited as much of the land lies in the Range Danger Area and cannot be used when firing is in progress, although the Galtres part of the site is always available and is more actively used. Activities included patrolling on foot, use of camouflage and concealment, bivouac areas and include night time use.

8.0 Action Plan

In line with the aims and objectives in Section 2.0 an Action Plan has been compiled which identifies the scope of further work including the identification, conservation and management of the archaeological resource on the training area.

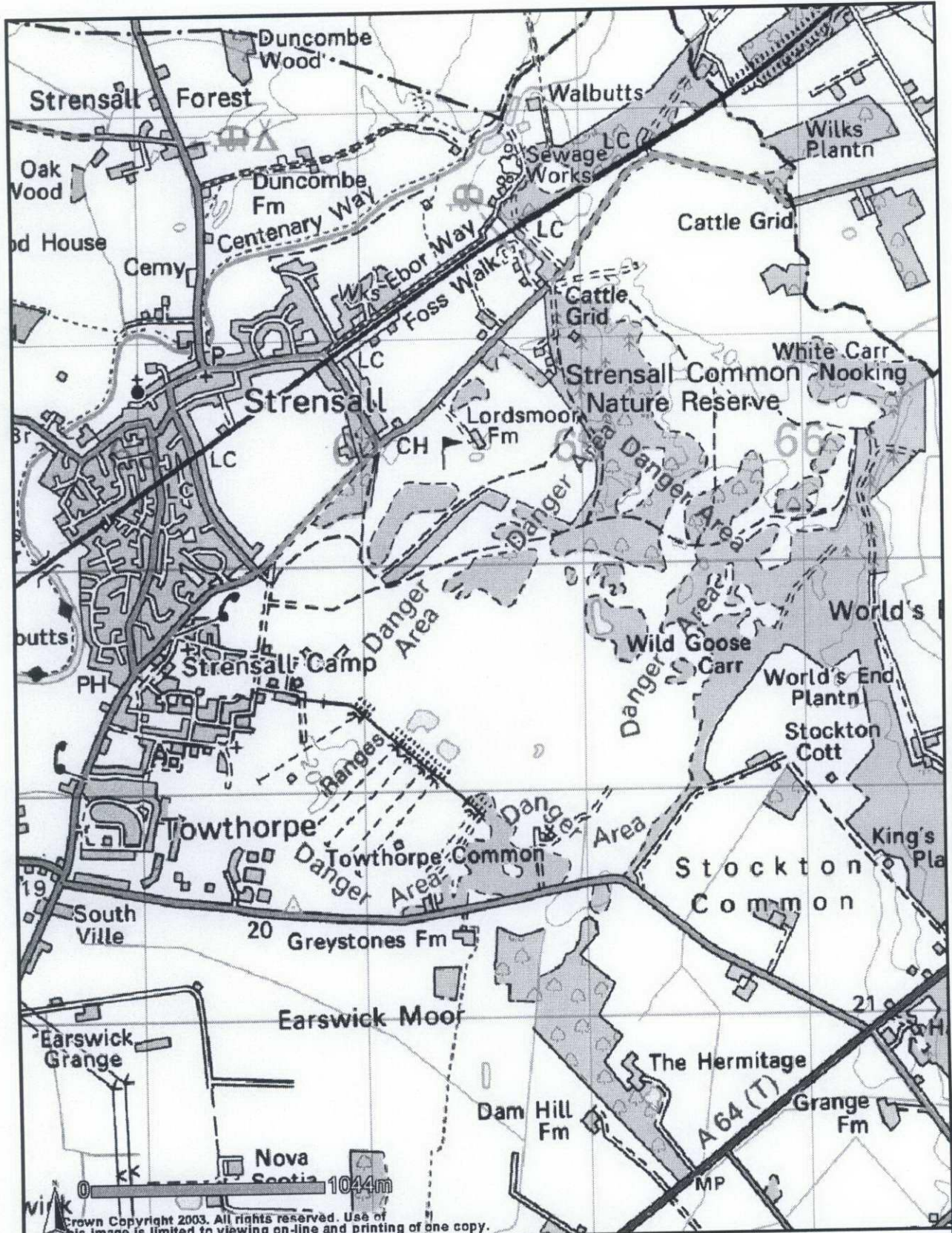
Issue
The full extent of the archaeological and historic landscape resource on the STA is unknown
Objective
Implementation of an ongoing programme of ground and aerial survey to identify further sites and monuments
Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • liaise with Local History Group co-ordinator to organise field survey of selected sample areas of the STA • consult all military and civilian aerial photographic archives for photographs of the STA
Issue
The palaeo-environmental history of the site is unknown
Objective
Prepare a specification for the sampling of land and aquatic peat deposits for evidence of climatic, vegetational and faunal development of the site.
Action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with Wessex Archaeology and the EST ecologist in the drafting of the specification



DE
DEFENCE ESTATES
 Delivering Estate Solutions to Defence Needs

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map by Defence Estates with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
 © Crown Copyright.
 Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Licence No GD 031 89G 001

Title: Strensall Training Area
Bounding Coordinates: SE 62442 57043, SE 66619 62433
Date: 28/8/2003



DE
DEFENCE ESTATES
 Delivering Estate Solutions to Defence Needs

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance Survey map by Defence Estates with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationary Office.
 © Crown Copyright.
 Unauthorised reproduction infringes Crown Copyright and may lead to prosecution or civil proceedings. Licence No GD 001 89G 001

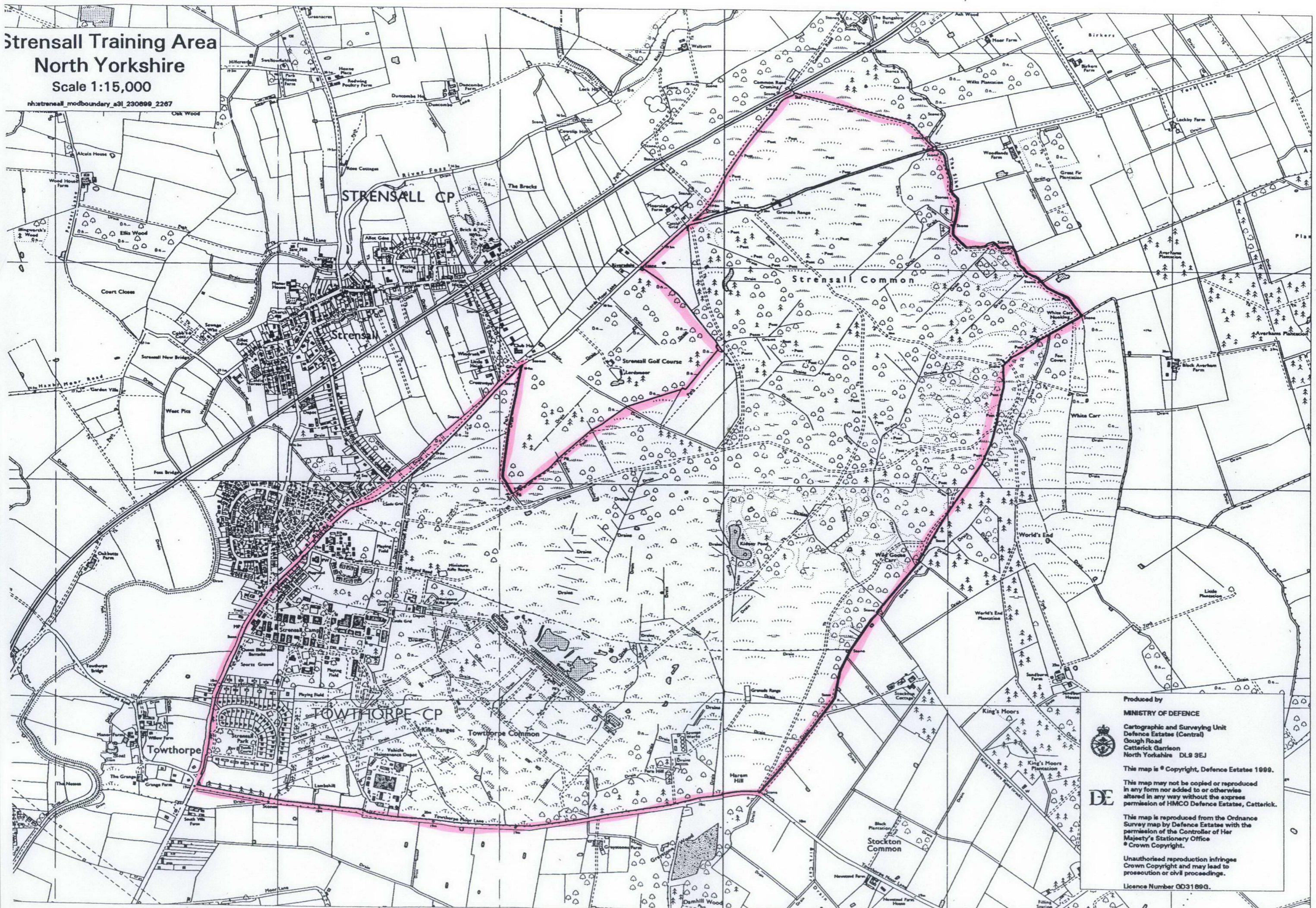
Title: Strensall Training Area
Bounding Coordinates: SE 62442 57043, SE 66619 62433

Date: 28/8/2003

Strensall Training Area North Yorkshire

Scale 1:15,000

nh:strensall_modboundary_a31_230699_2267



Produced by
MINISTRY OF DEFENCE
Cartographic and Surveying Unit
Defence Estates (Central)
Gough Road
Catterick Garrison
North Yorkshire DL9 3EJ

This map is © Copyright, Defence Estates 1999.

This map may not be copied or reproduced
in any form nor added to or otherwise
altered in any way without the express
permission of HMCO Defence Estates, Catterick.

DE

This map is reproduced from the Ordnance
Survey map by Defence Estates with the
permission of the Controller of Her
Majesty's Stationary Office
© Crown Copyright.

Unauthorised reproduction infringes
Crown Copyright and may lead to
prosecution or civil proceedings.

Licence Number OD3189G.