KAS / LEES COURT ESTATE – STRINGMANS FIELD EXCAVATION INTERIM REPORT

PROJECT CODE: SF18

SITE: Stringmans Field, near Stringmans Farm, Faversham ME13 0LA

NGR: TR 0248 5435

PLANNING REFS: n/a

DATE: 12th – 24th September 2018

PREPARED FOR: Kent Archaeological Society, University of Kent and Lees Court Estate

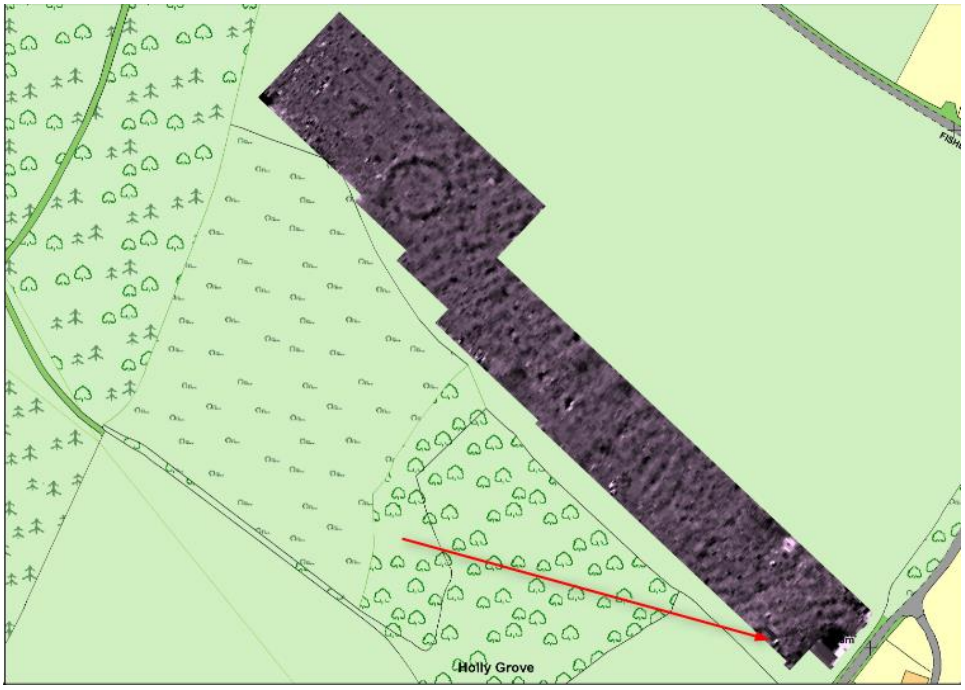
Interim Excavation Report

Contents

		Page
1.	Introduction	3-4
2.	Summary of Results	5-10
	• Area 1	5-8
	• Area 2	8-9
	• Area 3	10
3.	Conclusion	11
4.	Recommendations	11
5.	Appendix A – Context Register	12
6.	Appendix B – Section Map	13

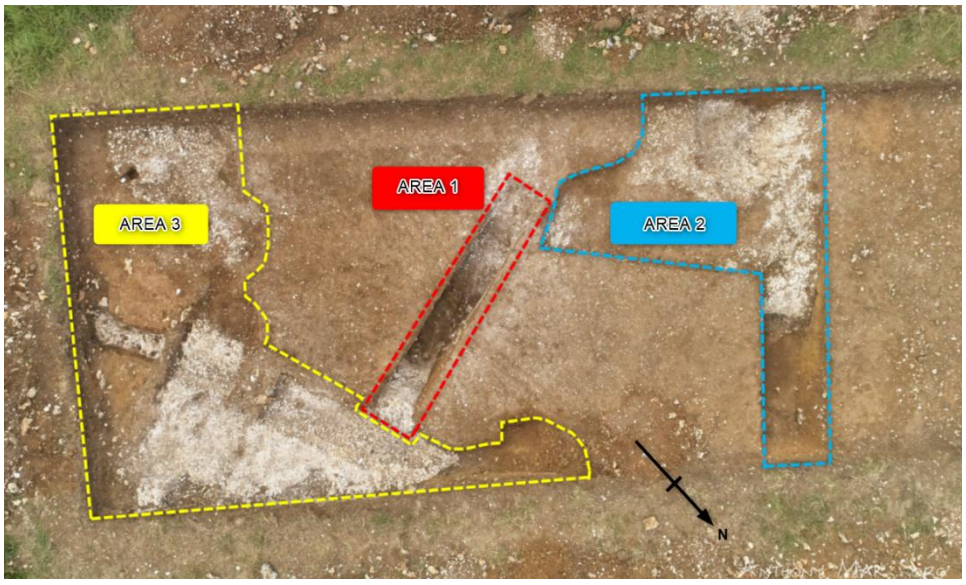
1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. The excavation at Stringmans Field (TR 0248 5435) was carried out from 12th – 24th September 2018 as part of the KAS Lees Court Estate Archaeological Project. A 25m x 5m trench was de-turfed and topsoil removed by machine over a strong magnetic response (see fig 1), the result of a KAS geophysical survey carried out in April 2018.

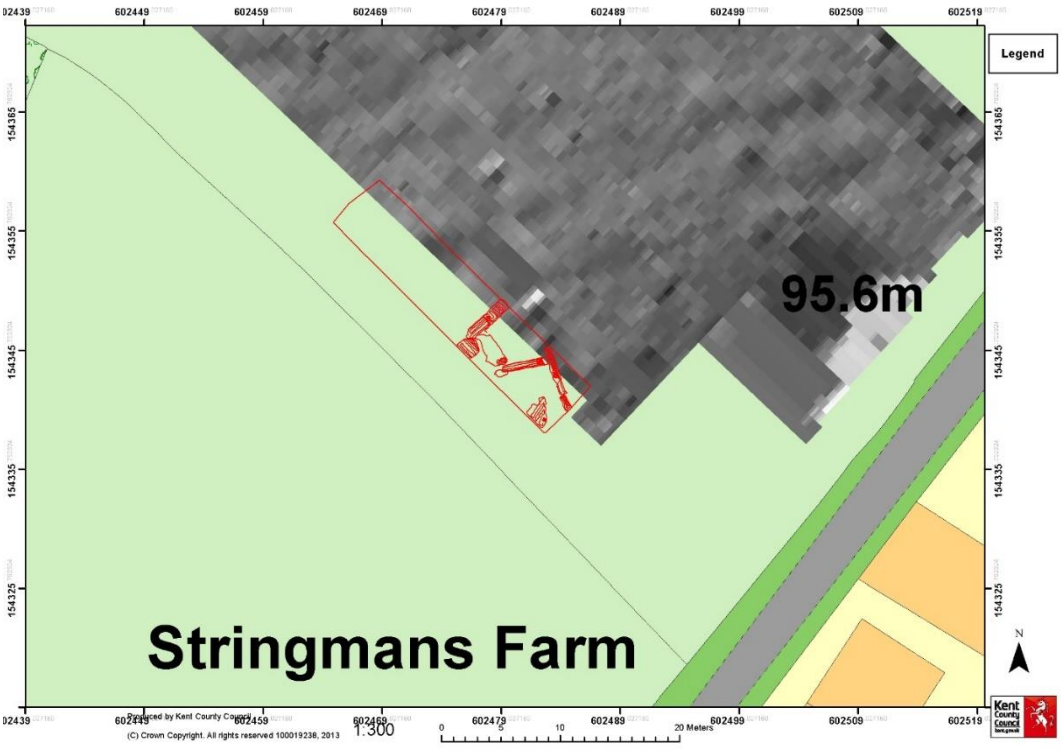


(Fig 1 – geophysics results of Stringmans Field – April 2018, courtesy of KCC)

1.2. The excavation results have been divided into three trench areas as labelled below:



(Fig 2: trench/area map of 2018 excavations)



(Fig 3: rectified trench features overlain on geophysics results, courtesy of KCC)

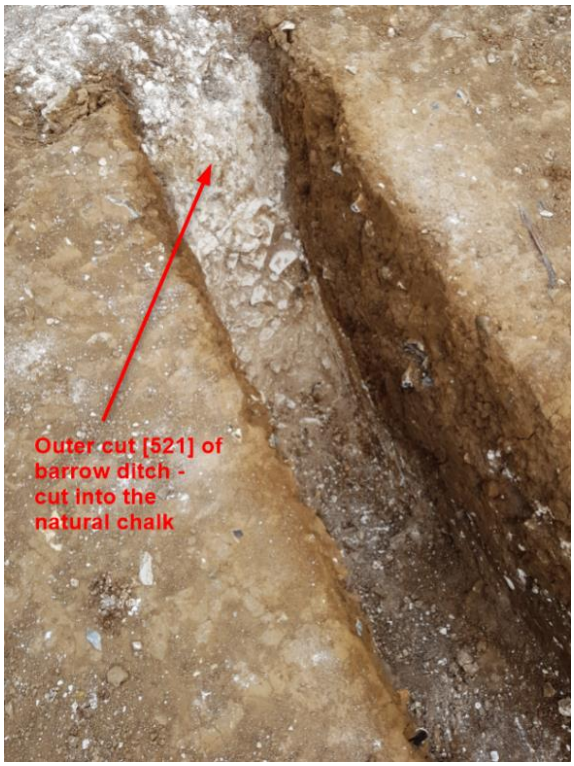
1.3. The trenches and their internal features were plotted using a Leica GNSS, the results of which are overlaid on the geophysics (magnetometry) results. It should be noted that the first rectification of the geophysics results may not be as accurate as the current GNSS plan. However, what is clear is the excavation did investigate the general area of the strong magnetic response exhibited by the ring ditch.

2. SUMMARY OF RESULTS

- **Area 1**

2.1. Following this summer's excavation, the evidence that emerged from the excavation in Stringmans Field suggests the most likely explanation for the anomaly shown in the geophysics (Fig 1) is a Bronze Age barrow. A combination of geophysical and excavation evidence suggests the barrow has a ring ditch c.15-20m in diameter, approximately 1.0 to 1.5m wide and c.1.0m in depth.

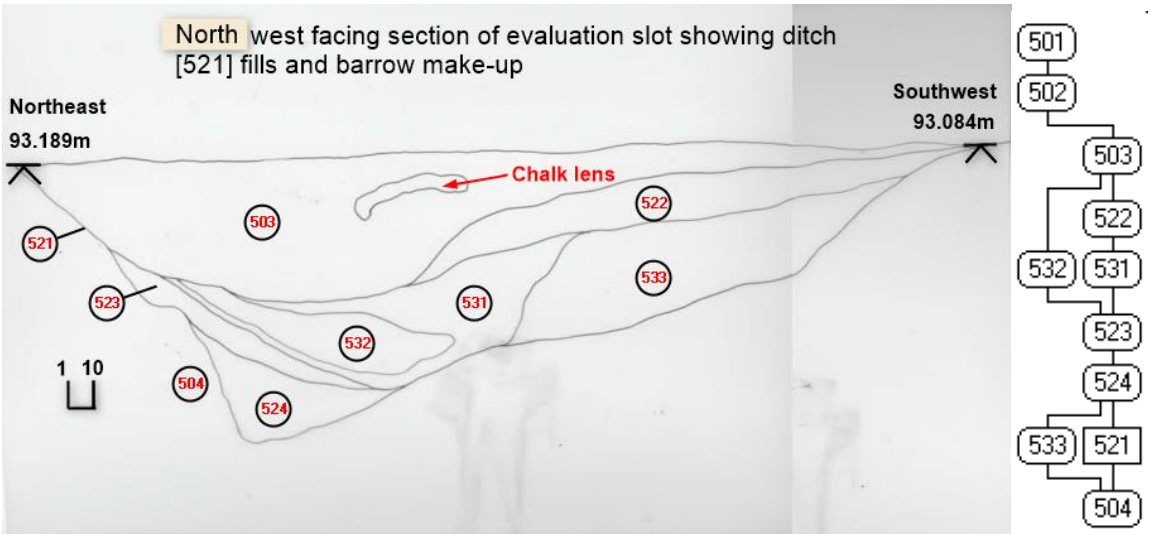
2.2. The outer cut for the ring ditch [521] is clear (see Figs 2 & 3) in slot trench:



(Figs 2 & 3 showing outer ditch cut [521] into natural chalk bedrock)

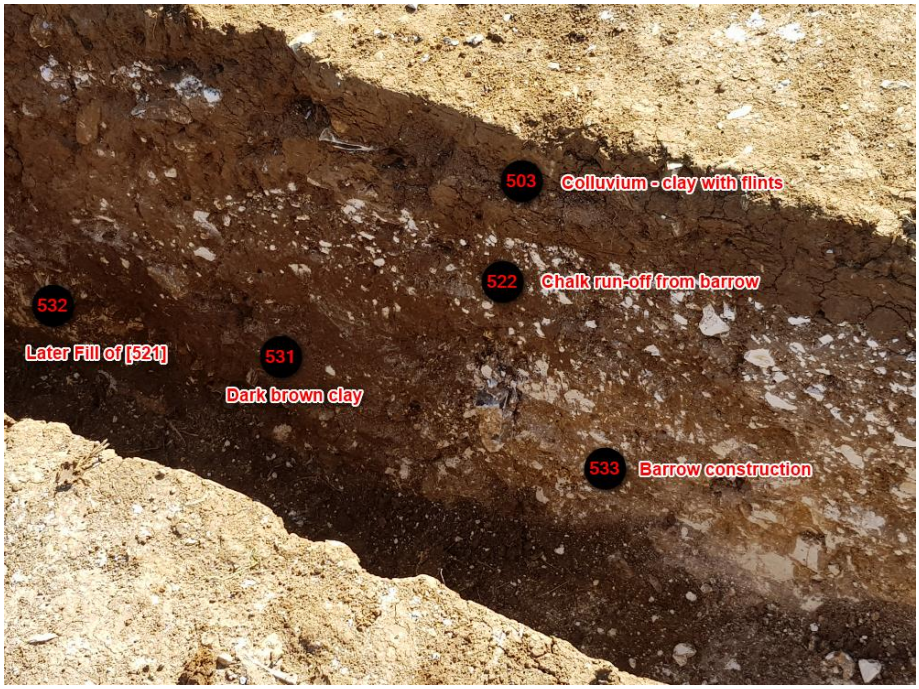
2.3. The barrow structure appears curvilinear and composed mostly of up-cast chalk from the excavated ring ditch, though the final height of the barrow (and its total composition) may have been hindered during the construction phase by the discovery that the natural chalk bed appears to dive off to sandy clay (solution hollow?) to the northwest quadrant of the ring ditch.

2.4. Slot trench in Area 1 provides the clearest indication of the ditch and barrow structure as shown in Section 4 (see Figs 4 &5). Note (501) and (502) are topsoil and subsoil respectively.



(Figs 4 & 5 showing southwest facing section (4) showing ditch fills, barrow construction and stratigraphic matrix)

2.5. South of [521] is the first indications of the barrow structure (533), which appears to be composed of large chalk pieces in a thin brown silty clay matrix. (522) exhibits a pronounced curvilinear profile, but its matrix is too fine and silty to be a permanent structure. Therefore, (522) is believed to be a chalk/soil run-off from barrow surface.

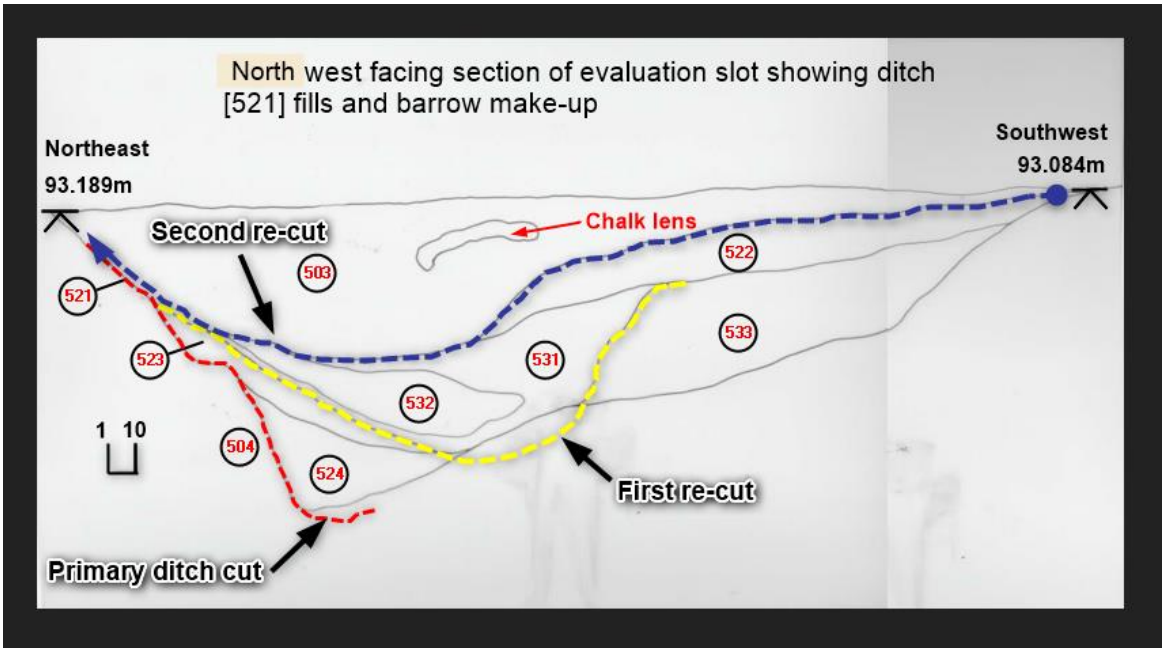


(Fig 6 – northwest facing section of slot trench in Area 1)

2.6. There appears to be a primary fill (524) of [521]; (523) is likely to be a later episode of (524) as its chalk composition is less pulverised.

(Fig 7 - northwest facing section of slot trench in Area 1 showing fills of [521])

2.7. (532) is a later fill of [521] that also suggests [521] has undergone a series of re-cuts over time, though no context numbers have been attributed to any re-cuts until further excavation reveals conclusive evidence for these potential events. Nevertheless, these re-cuts are hypothesised as follows:



(Fig 8 - showing southwest facing section (4) of slot trench in Area 1 detailing possible re-cuts)

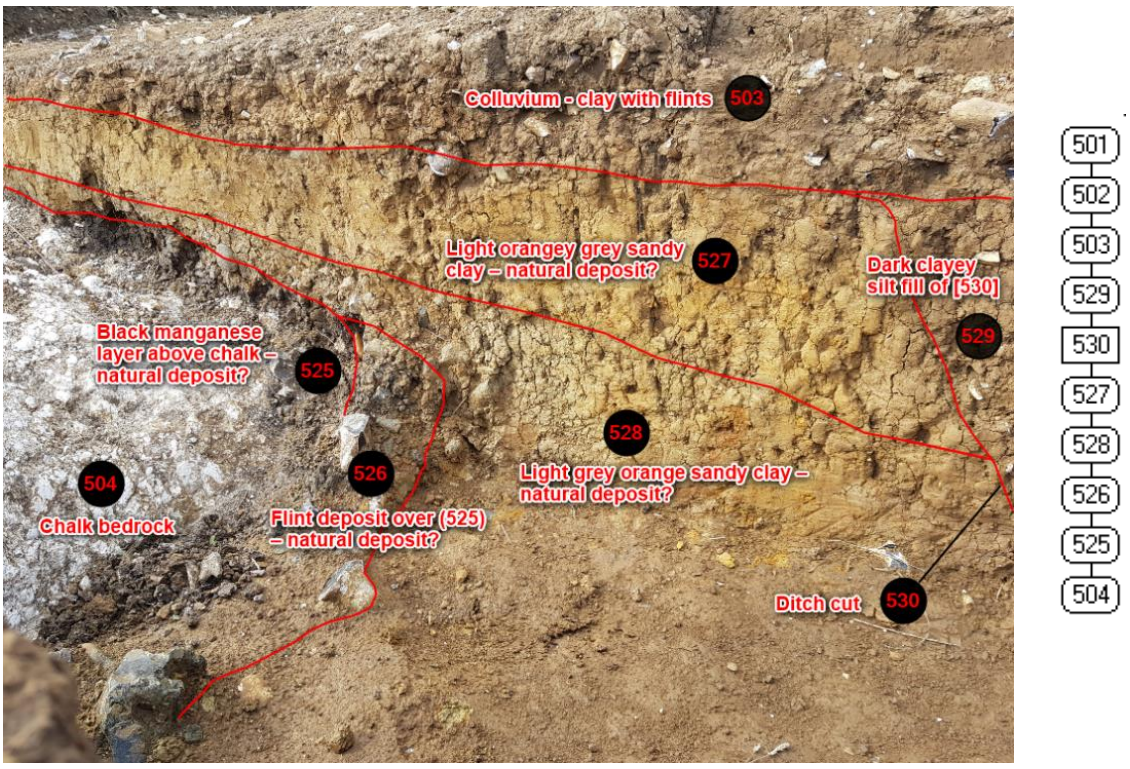
2.8. The primary ditch cut is in red, a first re-cut in yellow is filled by (531) and (532) as run-off from the outer ditch face of [521]; (532) is run-off from the chalk ditch face that appears to have 'crept' into (531) The second re-cut (blue) cuts into the run-off (522), (531) and (532).

By this time, the accumulation of run-off (522), combined with the filling of the ring ditch, would likely have lessened the visible profile of the barrow.

2.9. A small quantity of lithic material was retrieved from (503), (531) and (524). The material consisted of flakes and pieces of waste flint arising from the knapping process. No cores were found. The patination was uniformly white. All the flakes were small and thin, with one or two possible primary flakes.

- **Area 2**

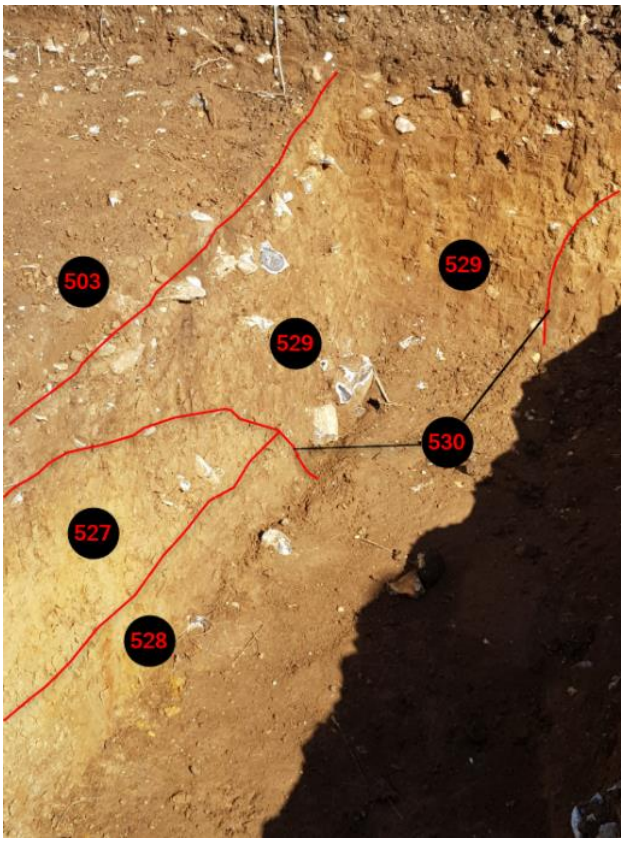
2.10. An excavation in Area 2 to the northwest reveals a probable continuation of the ring ditch cut through this sandy clay (527) and (528). This discovery came as something of a surprise, given the ring ditch in Area 1 is cut into the chalk bedrock. It appears that the construction method used the natural sandy clay as part of the barrow make-up, though much of the curvature has been lost to ploughing.



(Fig 9 – southeast facing section of trench in Area 2 & stratigraphic matrix)

2.11. The chalk bedrock (504) dives off to the northwest, which may have presented an issue for those constructing the barrow. Trench in Area 2 shows a stratigraphic pattern that occurs across the site: orange/grey sandy clay leeching manganese-based minerals to form a black clayey layer between natural(?) flint nodules and the chalk bedrock, suggesting the chalk acts as a boundary that enables manganese to leech out and remain in-situ. Initially, the dark layer was mistaken for possible burning/occupation evidence. However, on a re-

examination of the stratigraphic sequencing, it is clear that this context sits between two natural deposits, and must, therefore, be itself natural.



(Fig 8 – southeast facing section showing ditch [530] with fill (529) sitting on natural sandy clay (527) & (528) in Area 2)

2.12. Given the relatively shallow depth of the trench in Area 2, it is likely that (529) represents a late fill, and in all probability, there are additional fills of [530] below the current limit of excavation, as per slot trench in Area 1.

2.13. Three ceramic sherds (totalling four gms) were found in (529):

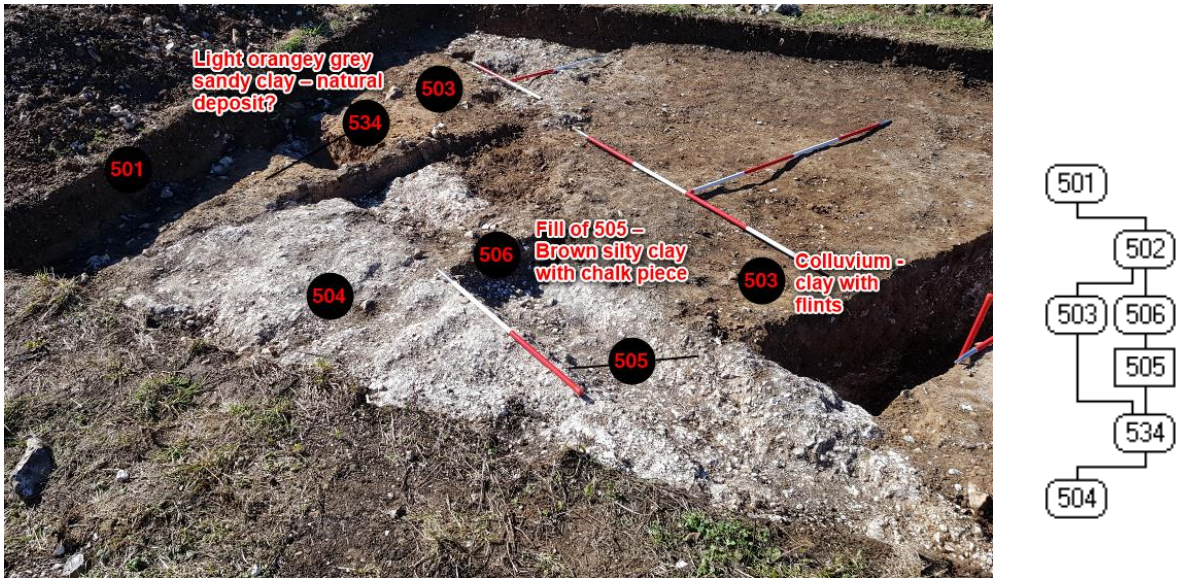
- 2 EP? Beaker flint-tempered ware (slight EBA preference, c.2000-1700 BC range; same vessel);
- 1 LP flint-tempered ware (slight MBA>MBA/LBA preference, c.1550-1350/1150 BC emphasis).
- Same-vessel elements are small but only slightly worn; the thin body wall and dual-tone firing suggests the possible Beaker period date. Their condition compared with the second entry suggests they may be residual in context. The second entry is fairly small, coarse-gritted and near-fresh.
- Likely commencement date - nothing obviously earlier than, possibly, c.2000 BC.
- Likely end-date: If not residual – between c.1550-1150 BC.[1]

[1] Initial Ceramic Report by M. Macpherson-Grant (Dec 2018)

- **Area 3**

2.14. Area 3 presented some issues, not least because a shallow linear ditch some became apparent which, at the time, was thought to be responsible for the magnetic anomaly in the geophysics results. Indeed, it was not until the slot trench in Area 1 was excavated to a depth that indicated the presence of a much broader and deeper ring ditch, that this notion was dismissed.

2.15. The relationship between ditch [505] and [521] remains unclear. [505] is partly cut into the natural chalk (504) but its fill was visible once the top and plough soils were machined off. As (504) runs off towards the southeast, [505] continues as a linear and cuts through (534) – which sits atop (504) and extends into the section wall. Unfortunately, this part of [505] has been overcut onto the natural chalk towards the section wall, so the profile cut into (534) has been lost, though it remains visible in the section wall.



(Fig 9 – Trench in Area 3 showing ditch [505] & stratigraphic matrix)

2.16. Any relationship in plan between (506) and (503) has been machined off during preparation. It is assumed that (534) and (527 – Area 2) are contemporary, and probably the same context. (503) appears in the east section wall to gently sit above (534), and we know (503) sits atop (527) in Area 2. However, (502) does sit above (506) in the same section, suggesting a later date for [505], though further excavation of a nearby portion of [521] is required to establish any direct link to the barrow construction.

2.17. One ceramic sherd (totalling >1gm) was found in (506):

- 1 LP flint-tempered ware (MBA>EIA preference, c.1550-600/50 BC emphasis);
- small, split scrap, one face remnant, otherwise near-fresh;
- likely commencement date – nothing obviously earlier that c.1500BClikely end-date – uncertain but if residual – between c.1550-600BC[2]

[2] Initial Ceramic Report by M. Macpherson-Grant (Dec 2018)

3. CONCLUSIONS

3.1. A combination of geophysical and excavation evidence suggests the presence of a Prehistoric monument with a ring ditch c.15-20m in diameter, most likely a barrow structure.

3.2. Ceramic analysis from secure contexts indicates the barrow structure likely commenced use/function c.2000BC and continued until c.1000BC.

3.3. During this time the barrow ring ditch appears to have been re-cut at least twice, suggesting a period of maintenance spanning c.1000 years.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. The barrow site at Stringmans Field is complex, both archaeologically and stratigraphically. The fact that the barrow was built partly into chalk and partially into clay makes the excavation problematic to track, while a scarcity of finds to date makes analysis difficult. However, the site presents an exciting opportunity and one which holds many months (if not years) of excavation with ample learning potential for students and volunteers. Given these points, it is recommended that continuity of student and excavation supervision remains in place for as much as possible to maintain a consistent understanding of the various complexities associated with the site.

4.2. The following bullet points are areas for consideration for taking the excavation forward:

- Excavate additional slot trenches through [521] towards the centre of the barrow to gain further insight into re-cuts of ring ditch and increase the potential for locating stratified finds;
- Deepen Area 2 to bottom out [530] and gain a better understanding of ring ditch cut into natural clays (527) and (528);
- Discuss with LCE the possibility of cutting an evaluation trench on the south side of the fence to establish the diameter of the ring ditch;
- Take as much of Area 3 area down to any redeposited chalk or natural sandy clay (534) associated with the barrow construction/make-up, where possible, to gain a better appreciation of how the barrow may have looked to contemporaries.

5. **Appendix A – Context register**

Context No	Context Type	Area No	Plan No	Section No	Description	Initials	Date
501	TS	1,2,3			Top Soil	DW	12/9
502	Sub Soil	1,2,3			Sub Soil	DW	12/9
503	Natural	1,2,3			Colluvium/hillwash – Orangey clay with flints	DW	12/9
504	Natural	1,2,3			Seaford Chalk	DW	12/9
505	Cut	3		1	Gully cut (NW-SE)	DW	12/9
506	Fill	3		1	Fill of 505 – Brown silty clay with chalk pieces	DW	12/9
507	VOID						
508	VOID						
509	Cut	3		3	Post-hole cut	DW	17/9
510	Fill	3		3	Post-hole [509] packing	DW	17/9
511	Fill	3		3	Post-void	DW	17/9
512	Cut				Natural deposit?	DW	17/9
513	Fill				Natural deposit?	DW	17/9
514	Cut			4	Natural deposit?	DW	18/9
515	Fill			4	Natural deposit?	DW	18/9
516	Cut				Natural deposit?	DW	20/9
517	Fill				Natural deposit?	DW	20/9
518	Cut				Natural deposit?	DW	20/9
519	Fill				Natural deposit?	DW	20/9
520	Deposit				Re-dep chalk	DW	20/9
521	Cut	1		5	Ditch cut	RT	21/9
522	Deposit	1		5	Chalk run-off from the barrow	RT	21/9
523	Fill	1		5	Fill of [521] chalk pieces in brown silty clay	RT	21/9
524	Fill	1		5	Primary fill of [521] pulverised chalk and clay homogenous mix	RT	21/9
525	Natural	2,3			Black manganese layer above chalk – natural deposit?	DW	21/9
526	Natural	2,3			Flint deposit over 525 – natural deposit?	DW	21/9
527	Natural	2			Light orangey grey sandy clay – natural deposit?	DW	21/9
528	Natural	2			Light grey orange sandy clay – natural deposit?	DW	21/9
529	Fill	2			Ditch fill [521]? – dark clayey silt	DW	21/9
530	Cut	2			Ditch cut [continuation of 521]?	DW	21/9
531	Deposit	1		5	Dark brown clay	RT	21/9
532	Fill	1		5	Later Fill of [521] chalk pieces in brown silty clay	RT	24/9
533	Deposit	1		5	Larger chalk pieces in thin brown silty clay matrix – barrow construction?	RT	24/9
534	Natural	2			Light orangey grey sandy clay – natural deposit?	RT	24/9

6. Appendix B – Section map