

A Triple Ring-Ditch at Maxey

by Robert Powell

In conjunction with the Fengate excavation an emergency two-day excavation was carried out at Maxey in 1976. One of the initial aims was to provide comparative material for Fen-Edge settlements such as Fengate. Circumstances finally led to the discovery of a triple ring-ditch.

The feature excavated (fig. 6) was sited on the gravels to the south of the river Welland. Two striking double ring-ditches had been recorded to the north of the marked southern end of the Neolithic cursus at Maxey (RCHM (1960), fig. 6). Of the two we excavated the southern ring-ditch at approximately TL 132075 (RCHM (1960), fig. 6, 100).

The site was unfortunately covered with loose gravel, about 15cm deep, which had to be manually removed. In fig. 6 the dug areas are represented by a solid line and the soil marks by dashes; the dots represent the conjectured outline.

It was thought at first that the feature comprised a small inner ditch (fig. 6, A) and a larger outer one. In fact the outer ditch proved to be double (fig. 6, B and C).

If one takes the ditch features B and C together, it will be seen on the section that the one is apparently cut into the other. Their separation on the plan may be caused by the deep stripping of the topsoil and gravel to reach the quarry level. It is known that up to 25cm of gravel had been stripped away in parts.

Are the ditches contemporary and, if not, which was the first to be constructed? The filling is fairly uniform in section: a dark silty mixture with gravel. No recut line was noticed to indicate any phasing. The inner of the two ditches had an organic lense below the outline of the ditch bottom. That lense would appear to respect ditch C. One may suggest that ditch B was dug and left open briefly for the organic lense to form by leaching; then C was dug, cutting into B. Thereafter both filled up quickly and uniformly.

Ditch A proved to be of the greatest interest: it revealed post-holes set into its filling to form a palisade (fig. 6, feature 20). Most of the post-holes were

of fairly uniform profile, with steep sides and rounded bottoms. They were distinguishable in that their filling was darker than that of the ditch. Nothing was found in the filling of the post-holes excavated (solid lines on the plan), except for a few unidentifiable traces of snails. There were some irregularities in the outline of the ditch and there was a possible entrance at the north of ditch A.

On cleaning away the gravel at the centre of the ring a central pit came to light, measuring c.90cm in diameter. It had steep sides and a flat bottom and averaged 25cm deep. The filling was a very dark sandy silt with a few stones. Here the only finds were made, two waste flint flakes. Both are small, fairly crude and heavily patinated.

In conclusion one must ask whether the ring-ditch is of Neolithic or Bronze-Age date. There are parallels from both periods. For the Neolithic there is Atkinson's site XI at Dorchester, Oxon (Atkinson (1951), 61). This comprised a triple ring-ditch of similar diameter to that at Maxey, a central ring of pits and several definitely Neolithic small finds. The site was also respected by the Neolithic cursus. Of note at Maxey is the relationship of the ring-ditch to the cursus (RCHM (1960), fig. 6). On the other hand from the Bronze Age is an example of a multiple round barrow described by Mr Peter Donaldson in *Durobrivae* 4, 1976, 14f.

Maxey was a dig in an emergency. Perhaps more information could be gained by the digging of the apparent twin ring-ditch (RCHM no. 98) which is scheduled for quarrying in 1977.

Bibliography

- Atkinson (1951) R. J. C. Atkinson, C. M. Piggott, N. K. Sandars, *Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon*, 1951.
- RCHM (1960) Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), *A Matter of Time*, 1960.

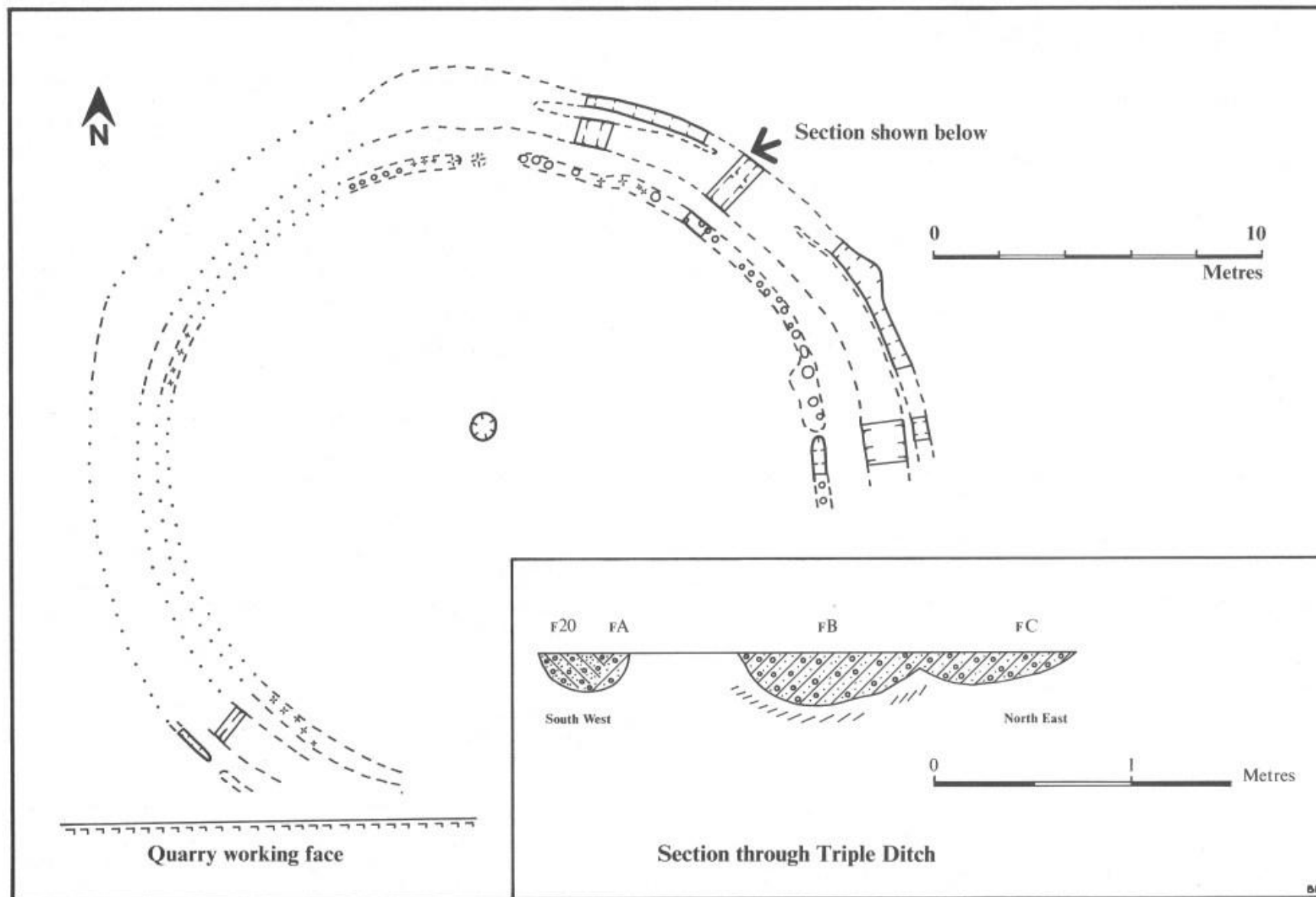


Fig 6 Plan of the triple ring-ditch at Maxey