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Hommage à Roger AGACHE

pour 35 ans de prospections aériennes dans le Nord de la France

Jimmy
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**“COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY”
- AN AERIAL PERSPECTIVE OF RECENT
DEVELOPMENTS IN LEICESTERSHIRE, ENGLAND**

Robert Fred HARTLEY *

Résumé

En 1973, 3 archéologues travaillaient à plein temps dans le comté; en 1992, ils étaient 29 dont 11 permanents. Ce sont plus de 10 000 sites qui sont recensés. Sur ce total, 1 200 ont été repérés par la photographie aérienne dont 80 % par un chercheur amateur, James Pickering. Dans le Leicestershire, ce sont surtout des sites médiévaux et post-médiévaux qui sont représentés par des reliefs de terre qui correspondent à des établissements créés entre le IXe et le XVIIIe siècle. Le travail de James Pickering a aussi porté sur la période préhistorique, dans des zones inhabitées avant la conquête romaine.

Abstract

In 1973, there were three full-time archaeologists in the county; in 1992, they were 29, eleven of them, permanent. Over 10 000 sites have been observed, 1 200 of which through aerial photography, and 80 % of the latter by an amateur researcher James Pickering. In Leicestershire visible sites are chiefly medieval and post-medieval earthwork remains corresponding to settlements created from the IXth to the XVIIIth century. However, James Pickering's work has shed light on the prehistoric period before the Roman invasion.

Zusammenfassung

1973 waren 3 Archäologen im Herzogtum vollbeschäftigt. 1992 waren es 29, davon 11 permanent. Mehr als 10 000 Stätten wurden gefunden, 1 200 dank von Luftaufnahmen. 80 % stammen vom Amateurforscher James Pickering. In Leicestershire handelt es sich hauptsächlich um mittelalterliche und spätmittelalterliche Stätten, die Siedlungsgründungen zwischen dem 9. und 18. Jahrhundert entsprechen. Die Arbeit von James Pickering beinhaltet auch Funde aus prähistorischer Zeit noch vor der römischen Eroberung.

The author is the Assistant Archaeological Survey Officer for Leicestershire, England, and has been involved in surveying and recording the area's archaeological sites since 1979. He has, in addition, been involved in archaeological air reconnaissance over a wide area of Central and Northern England.

The county of Leicestershire lies at the heart of England, and has as its focus the City of Leicester. The Romans chose Leicester as the site for a regional capital nearly 2 000 years ago, and it has retained its prominence as an administrative and market centre to the present day (fig. 1).

In 1973 there were three full-time archaeologists in the County. There was no formal record of archaeological sites, apart from the records of the Museums Service relating to its collections. About 100 sites had been given statutory protection as Ancient Monuments. There was a collection of aerial photographs of sites at Cambridge University.

During the next ten years, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England built up an archive of new discoveries by duplicating the photographs taken by a local amateur aerial archaeologist, Mr James Pickering. This archive was based in London, but a further set of duplicate photographs allowed the establishment of another archive at Leicestershire Museums, in a growing collection of information which became the County Sites and Monuments Record. Copies of the Cambridge University photographs were also purchased for local use.

* Leicestershire Museums Service
County Hall
Glenfield
GB - LEICESTER LE3 8TB

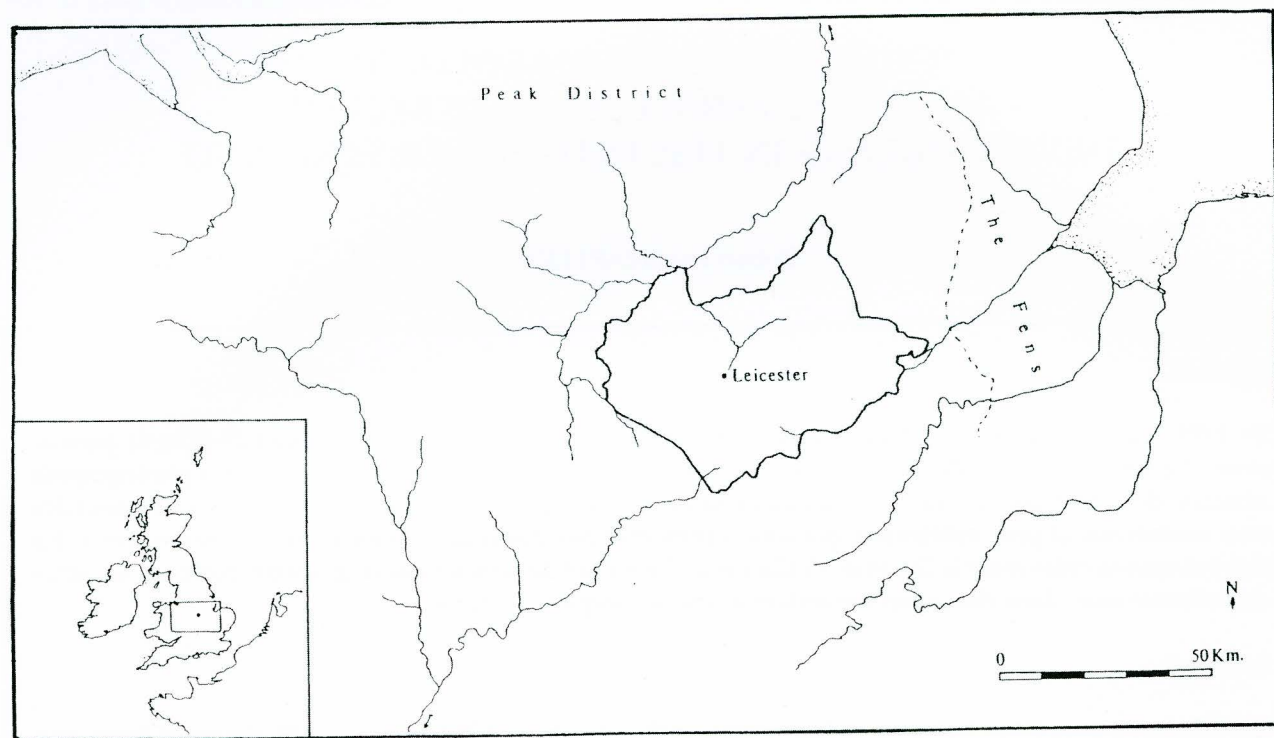


Fig.1 : Leicestershire and its Region.

In 1992 there are 29 full-time archaeologists in Leicestershire, 11 of them permanent. In addition there have been up to 80 workers on short-term contracts, on excavation sites.

There are three main reasons for this growth :

- 1°) - The establishment of the County Sites and Monuments Record.

- 2°) - The decision that archaeology should be "a material consideration" in deciding planning applications.

- 3°) - The decision that developers should pay the cost of archaeological evaluation, and if necessary, excavation or preservation, of archaeological sites.

The Leicestershire SMR now contains details of over 10000 sites (fig. 2), and is used daily in the determining of planning decisions. Aerial archaeology has been of great value in providing evidence of sites of interest, and the archive of aerial photographs now contains about 12000 views.

Of the total of about 1200 sites recorded solely by aerial photography, about 80 % were contributed by the amateur researcher, Mr James Pickering (fig. 3). The remainder come half from a national survey programme - that of the Cambridge University, and half from myself as a local full-time archaeologist.

In terms of archaeology, the importance of Leicestershire lies chiefly in its Medieval and Post-Medieval earthwork remains - that is to say fea-

tures created from the IXth to the XVIIIth centuries and subsequently abandoned and given over to pasture land (fig. 4). This fossilised landscape preserved much evidence of Medieval arable cultivation strips, and other features, into the XXth century.

There are about 80 Deserted Medieval Villages, including some of the best examples in Great Britain. These were created in about in the IXth century AD and depopulated between the Xth and the XIXth centuries. In addition, almost all the existing villages have around them some earthwork evidence of movement of shrinkage of the settlement area.

Aerial archaeology has been a vital tool in recording these complex earthwork remains of villages, field systems and many other features, particularly at a time when agricultural change has seen the disappearance of huge areas of earthwork features in the last fifty years.

The other great achievement of aerial archaeology in this area has been to discover, through the study of crop marks, a hitherto unsuspected distribution of Bronze Age and Iron Age sites across the whole county, as we shall see shortly.

The local establishment of archaeology seems quite impressive, but to justify its existence it must still appeal to the interest and goodwill of the public, which brought it into being in the first place.

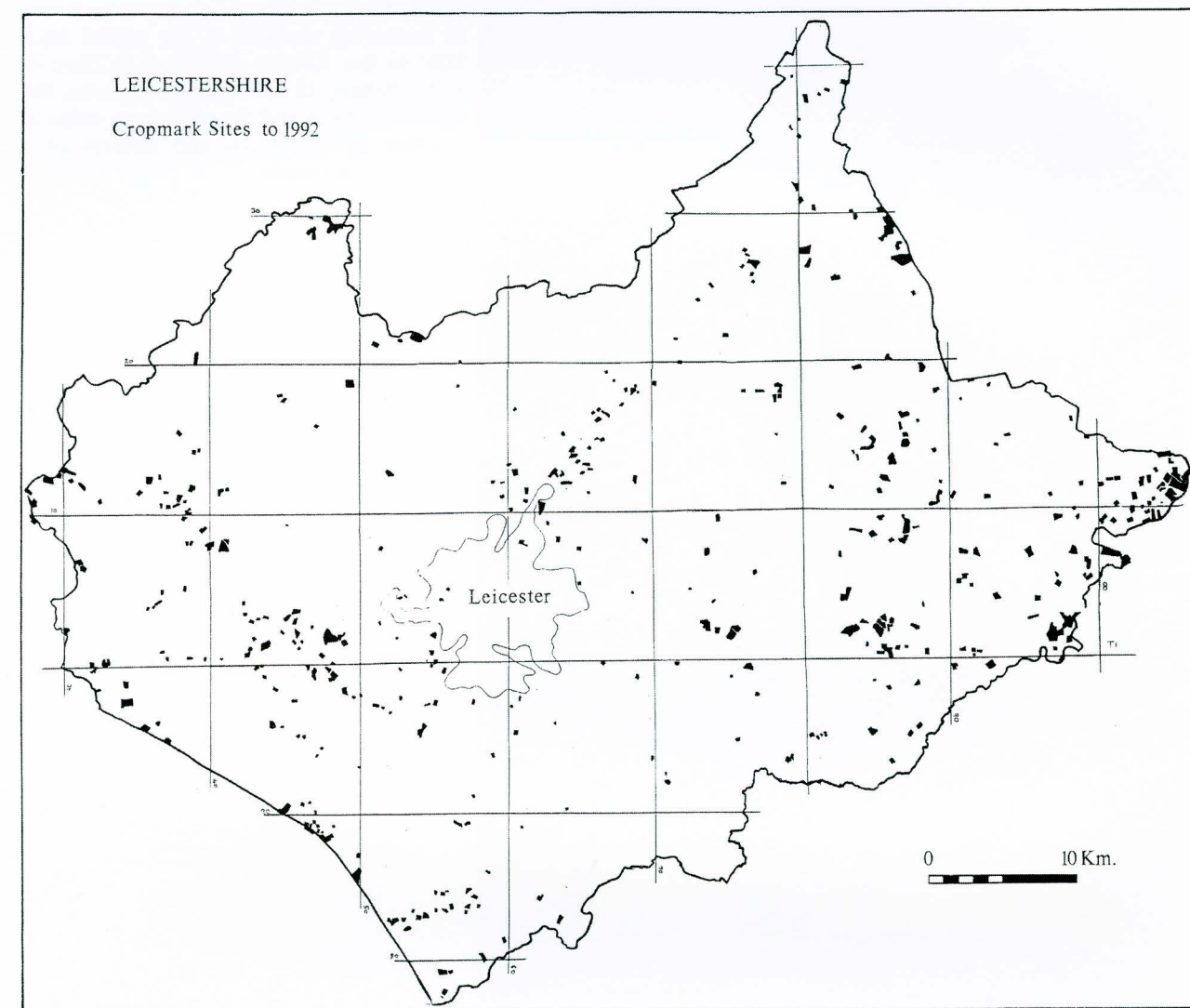


Fig. 2 : cropmark sites recorded in Leicestershire prior to the end of 1992. Nearly all to these are pre-roman sites, proving that the area was largely settled and farmed during the Bronze Age and Iron Age periods.



Fig. 3 : the most eminent amateur archaeologist in Leicestershire is James Pickering, who has discovered the majority of the County's known cropmark sites.

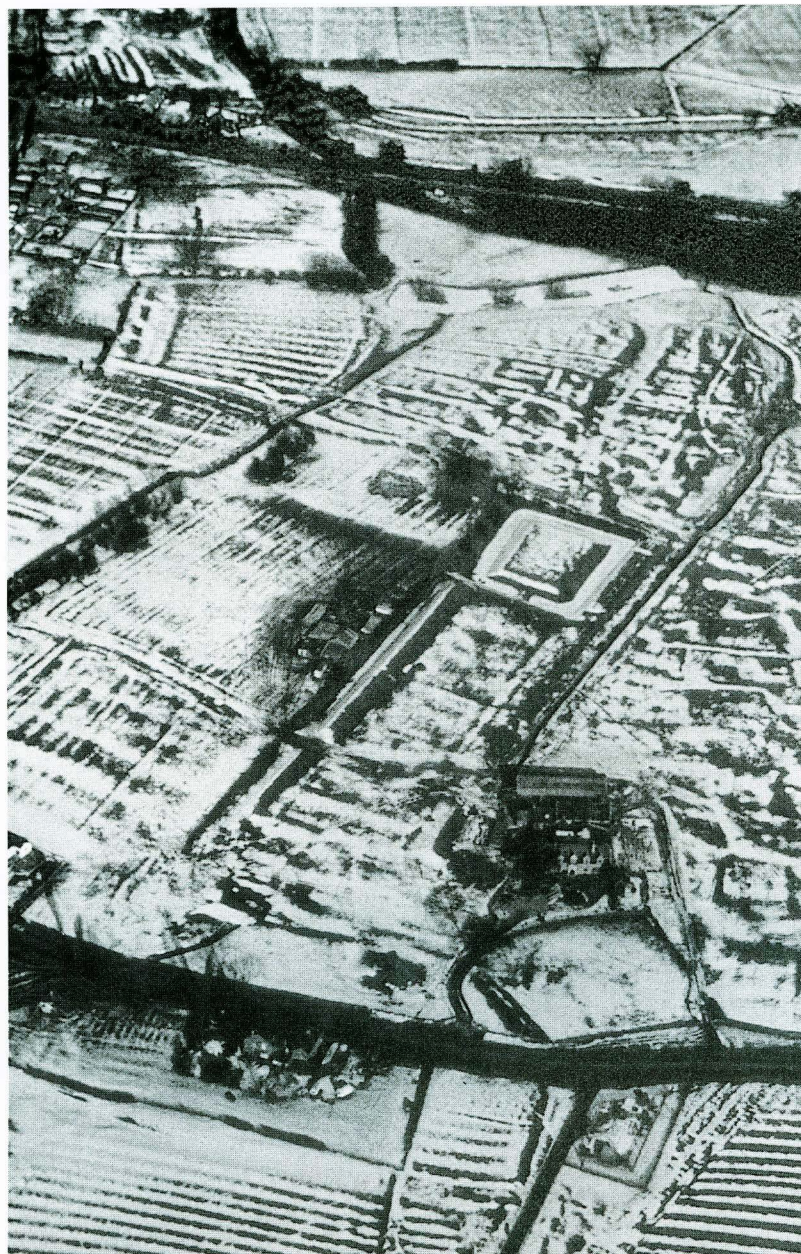


Fig. 4 : the landscape of Leicestershire is rich in earthwork remains of the period from IXth to the XVIIIth century A.D. Here at Kirby Bellars, 15 km N.-E. of Leicester, the site of a village and its cultivation strips is overlain by the moats and terraces of a XVIIIth century park.

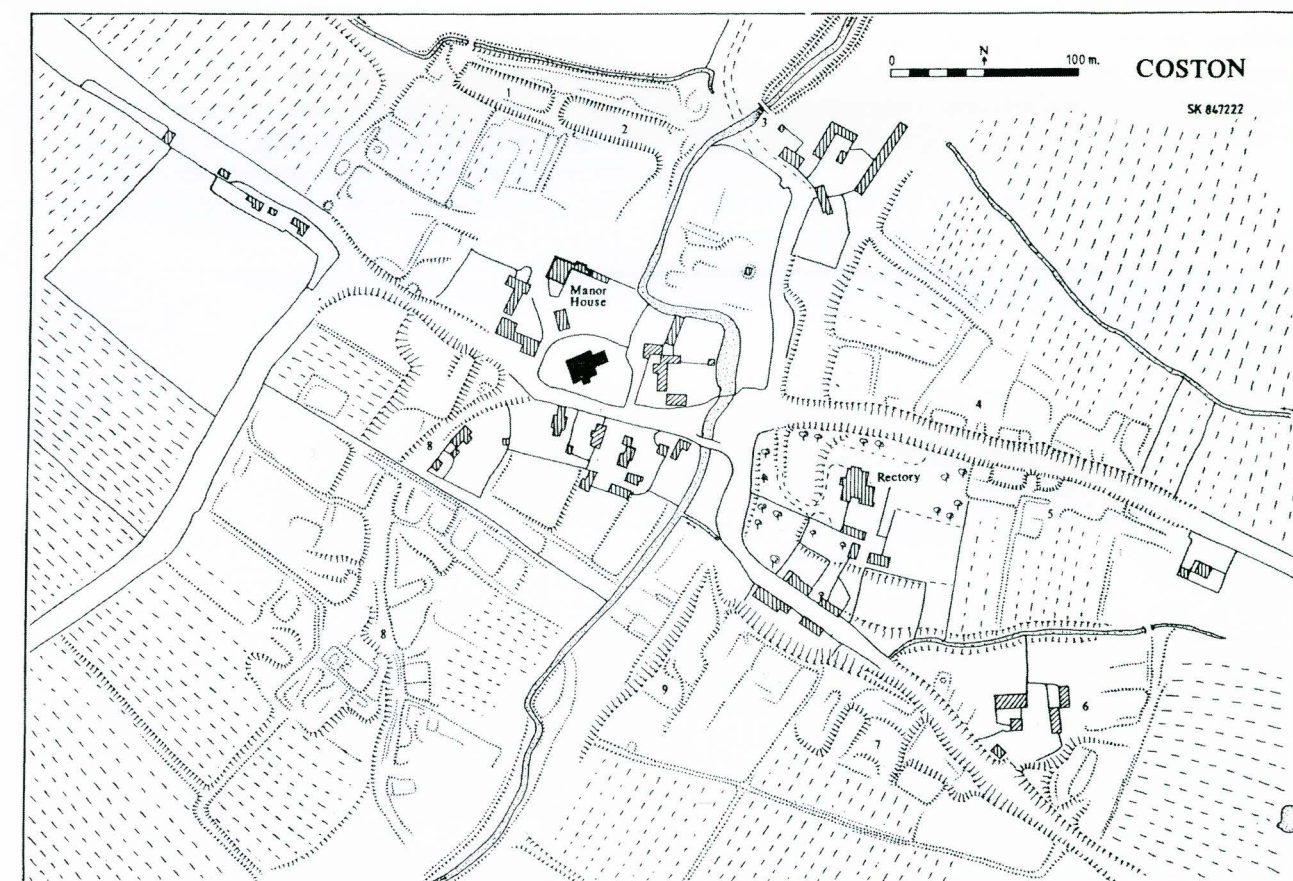
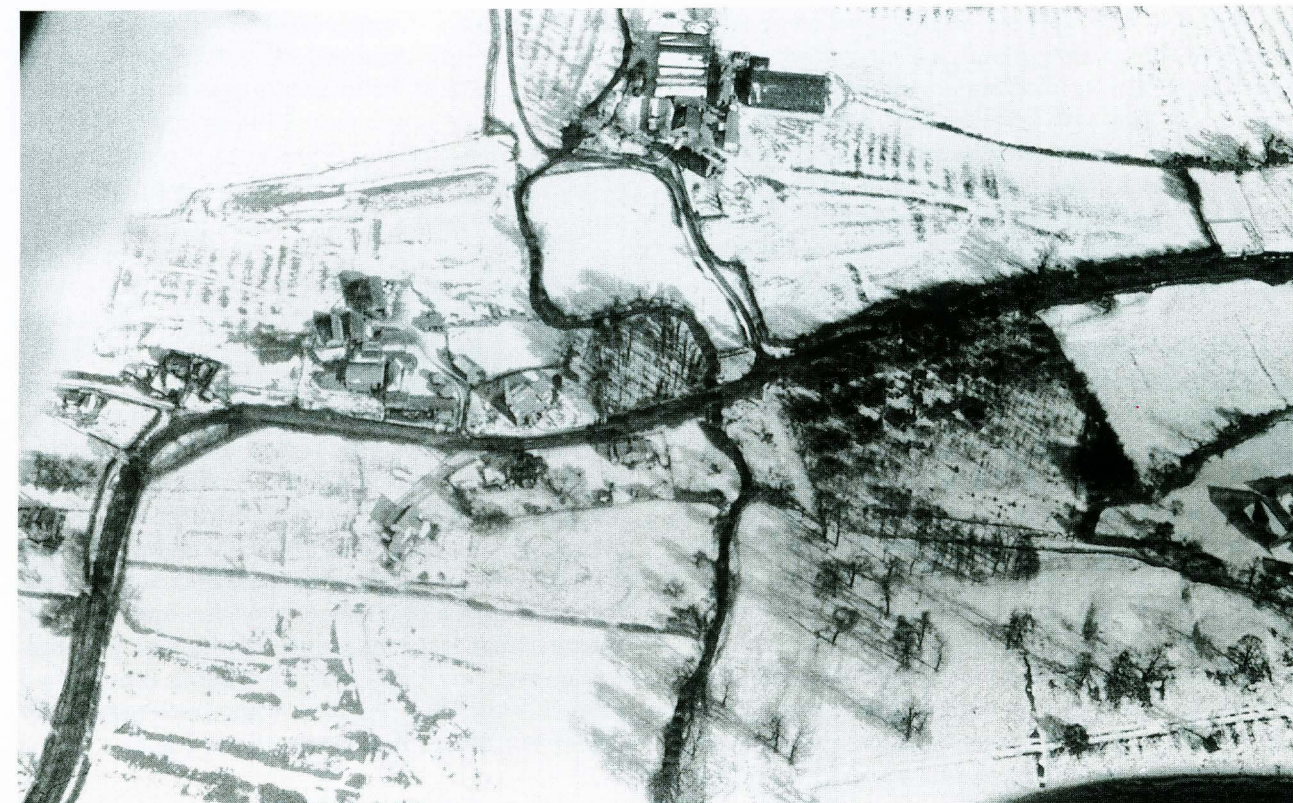


Fig. 5 : ground and air surveys should be repeatedly compared during the mapping process to record the maximum amount of detail. Winter photography of villages continues to produce new information, as here at Coston, 30 km north-east of Leicester.

Because of this, a priority of Leicestershire Museums archaeologists has been to encourage amateur involvement and public participation at all levels.

The Archaeological Survey Team, which operates the Sites and Monuments Record, regularly holds special "Archeology Days" at the Museum and provides free evening lectures during the winter. At these meetings, local researchers are encouraged to report on work in their own village, town or district (fig. 5). We also offer a free service of identification for archaeological finds.

The excavations carried out by our Archaeological Unit are widely publicised, and visitors are encouraged. Wherever possible, on-site display cabins provide background information and literature.

Amateurs are encouraged to carry out non-destructive work such as fieldwalking for flint and pottery scatters. This is an area of work where they can make a real contribution to the understanding of local history.

The greatest single amateur contribution has come from our local aerial archaeologist, Mr James Pickering. He has been carrying out aerial surveys -particularly for crop mark sites- on a regular basis for over 30 years. The great majority of this work he has funded himself, but the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments of England provided a contribution towards his costs in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Two archaeologists from the Leicestershire Museums Service -Mr Terry Pearce and myself- have worked closely with him over the last 16 years.

Within Leicestershire -which represents only about 10 % of his area of search- he has discovered over 900 sites of various sorts. Amongst these the crop mark sites are particularly important. In Leicestershire, crop marks tend to be small, isolated and ephemeral. They are thus only likely to be found by regular, frequent reconnaissance during the best conditions, guided by detailed local knowledge.

Mr Pickering's work has provided a framework for local archaeology of the prehistoric period in an area once thought to have been largely uninhabited before the Roman invasion. Just as the work of Major Allen in the Thames Valley in the 1930s provided a generation of archaeologists with sites to investigate, so the majority of recent rural excavations in Leicestershire have been on sites found by Mr Pickering.

By extending the known distribution of sites such as Bronze Age ring-ditches (fig. 6) and Late Iron Age farmstead enclosures to almost all areas of the county, he has changed our understanding of its past. He has made his thousands of photographs freely available for copying by national and local archives. My own flying programme over the last decade, partly funded by RCHME, has followed the pattern he established, and continues to produce new evidence.

I should like to describe the results of one more piece of work arising from the cooperation of

professionals and amateurs. Some years ago I met a retired mining engineer, Mr John Crocker, who was studying the history of a parish in the coal mining area of north-west Leicestershire. He had access to high quality vertical survey photographs, and noticed soil marks on them, which we interpreted as old mine shafts.

Having realised their importance, he visited the area many times when it was being mined by modern opencast methods. Together we made detailed records of the old workings revealed, and discovered the full explanation of the soil marks in the form of an elaborate series of mine shafts and workings, 30 m deep. Dating of tree-rings in the oak pit-props proved that this industry was flourishing between 1450 and 1463 AD. When the site was extended we were able to make provision for a full-time archaeologist on the site, but the fact remains that the importance of the site was first recognised by an amateur who, being retired, had time to make the repeated visits necessary to an understanding of its historical importance.

The points I should like to make in conclusion are twofold. Firstly, to argue (against the prevailing political theory in Great Britain) in favour of an integrated, local archaeological service. That is to say one which operates across a range of activities from fieldwork and recording, the planning processes, excavation and conservation of finds, through to the museum display and the classroom.

Secondly, that an archaeological service can benefit greatly from working in partnership with amateurs. While it is the responsibility of professionals to maintain standards and continuity, it is frequently the privilege of the amateur, or the researcher from another discipline, to initiate new areas of research.

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Fig. 6 : double ring-ditch at Cossington, 8 km north of Leicester, which was later excavated by archaeologists before destruction by gravel quarrying.