5. MATERIALS: SITES AND ASSEMBLAGES

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents those sites and assemblages selected for petrographic analysis within Leicestershire. A brief overview of the geology of Leicestershire and the wider East Midlands is provided (section 5.2), followed by a section on site selection (section 5.3) and background information for each site selected for analysis. These are the A607 Rearsby Bypass (section 5.4), Melton Road, Syston (section 5.5) and Castle Donington (section 5.6). This is followed by a summary of the chapter (section 5.7).

5.2 The Geology of Leicestershire and the East Midlands

The solid geology of the East Midlands (Figure 5.1) is fairly complex and varied. The main geological elements are the Triassic mudstones, Permian and Triassic sandstones, Great and Inferior Oolite, Lower Lias clays and Middle Lias clays. These latter clays run in a band north-east to south-west through the centre of the East Midlands including much of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Northamptonshire (Cooper 2006). In the north-western area, including Derbyshire, Millstone Grit series, Carboniferous Limestone series and Lower Westphalian coal measures are found. The eastern and north-eastern areas, mainly in Lincolnshire but also including parts of Nottinghamshire, contains Oxford clays and Kellaway beds, Amptill clay, Kimmeridge clay and Coralian clay, Lower Cretaceous deposits and chalks (Cooper 2006; http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html). Other solid geological types are present but are much more spatially restricted. One geological unit which is

mentioned with some frequency within the ceramic reports as well as being the presumed source of the Group XX axes is the Charnwood Forest area which contains granodiorite outcrops. These geologies are indicated in Figure 5.1 below.

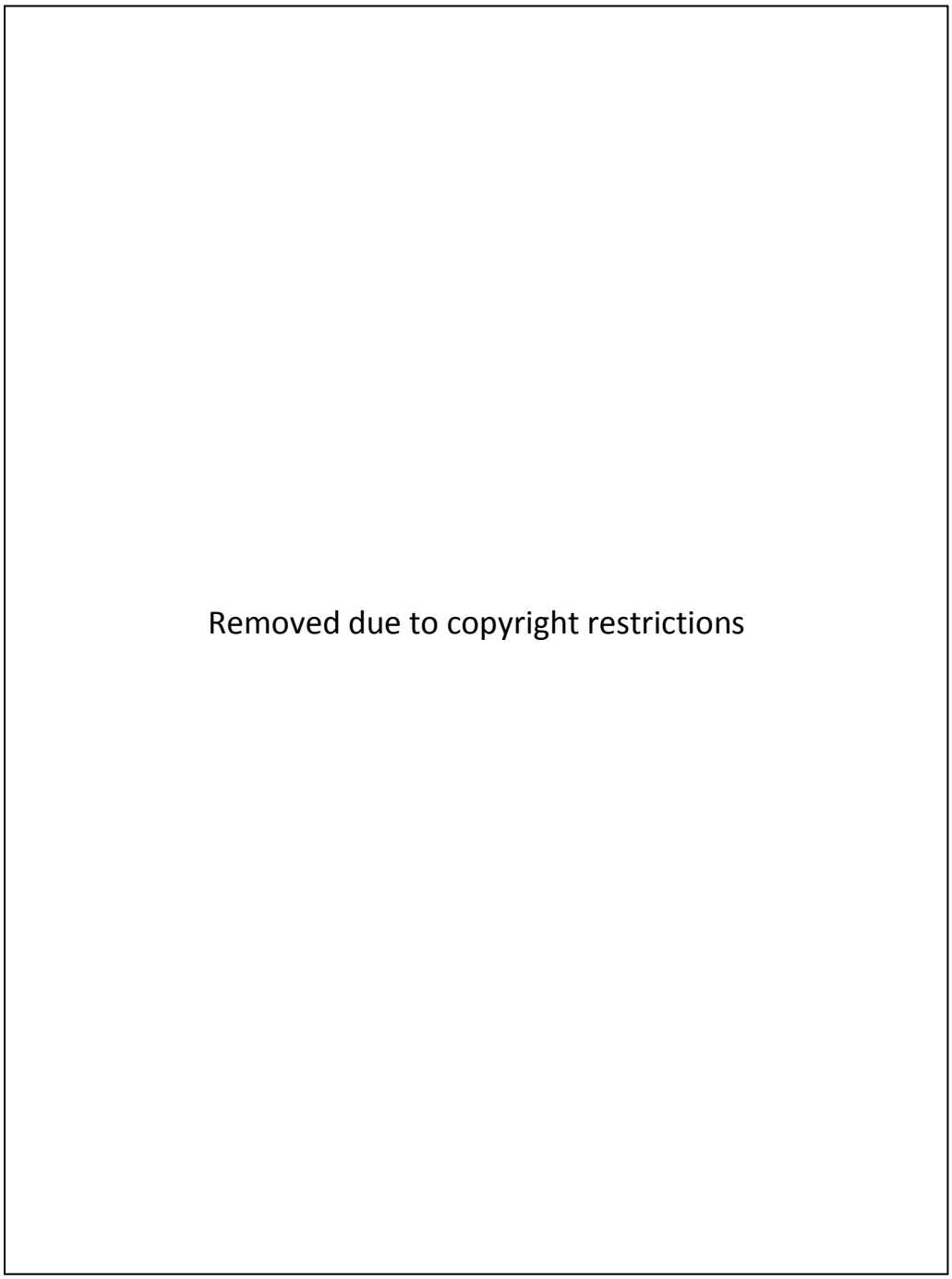

Figure 5.1 Solid geology of the East Midlands. Charnwood area is indicated in red. (Cooper 2006: Plate 2)

The superficial drift geology of the East Midlands (Figure 5.2) is generally comprised of alluvium, glacial sands and gravels, river terrace sands and gravels and diamicton tills. Occasional blown sand (possibly of loess origin), peat and lacustrine clays are also present (Cooper 2006; http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html).

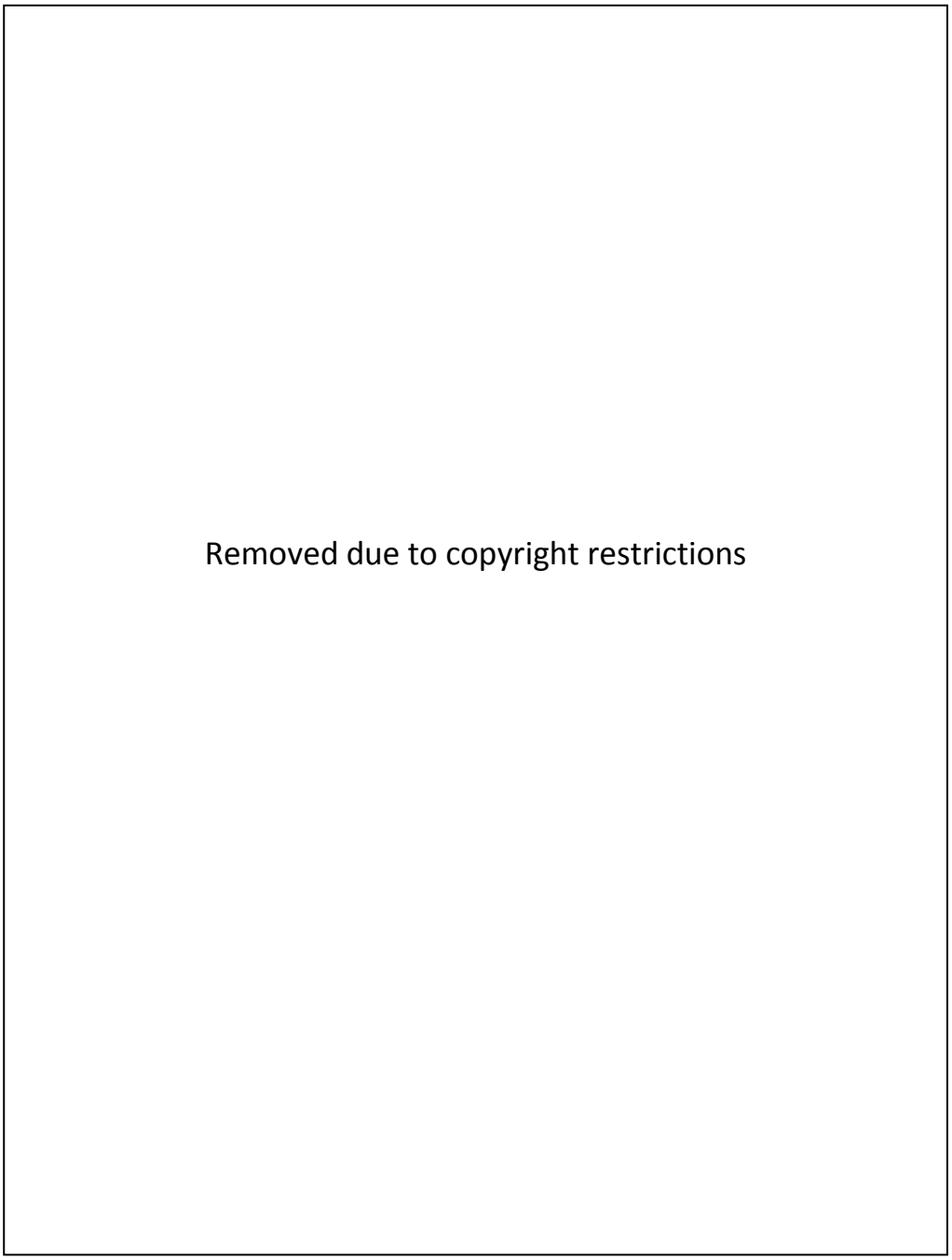

Figure 5.2 Drift geology of the East Midlands (Cooper 2006: Plate 3)

Topographically, the area covered by the East Midlands (Figure 5.3) has its highest area in the north-western corner of Derbyshire with heights between 300 meters and 600 meters above sea level frequent and some parts exceeding 600 meters (Cooper 2006). Much of Leicestershire, Northamptonshire and Nottinghamshire range from 100-200 meters above sea level, except where the river valleys and their flood plains occur. Lincolnshire, except for a band of higher ground in the north-east of the county, lies between 100-150 meters above sea level (Cooper 2006).

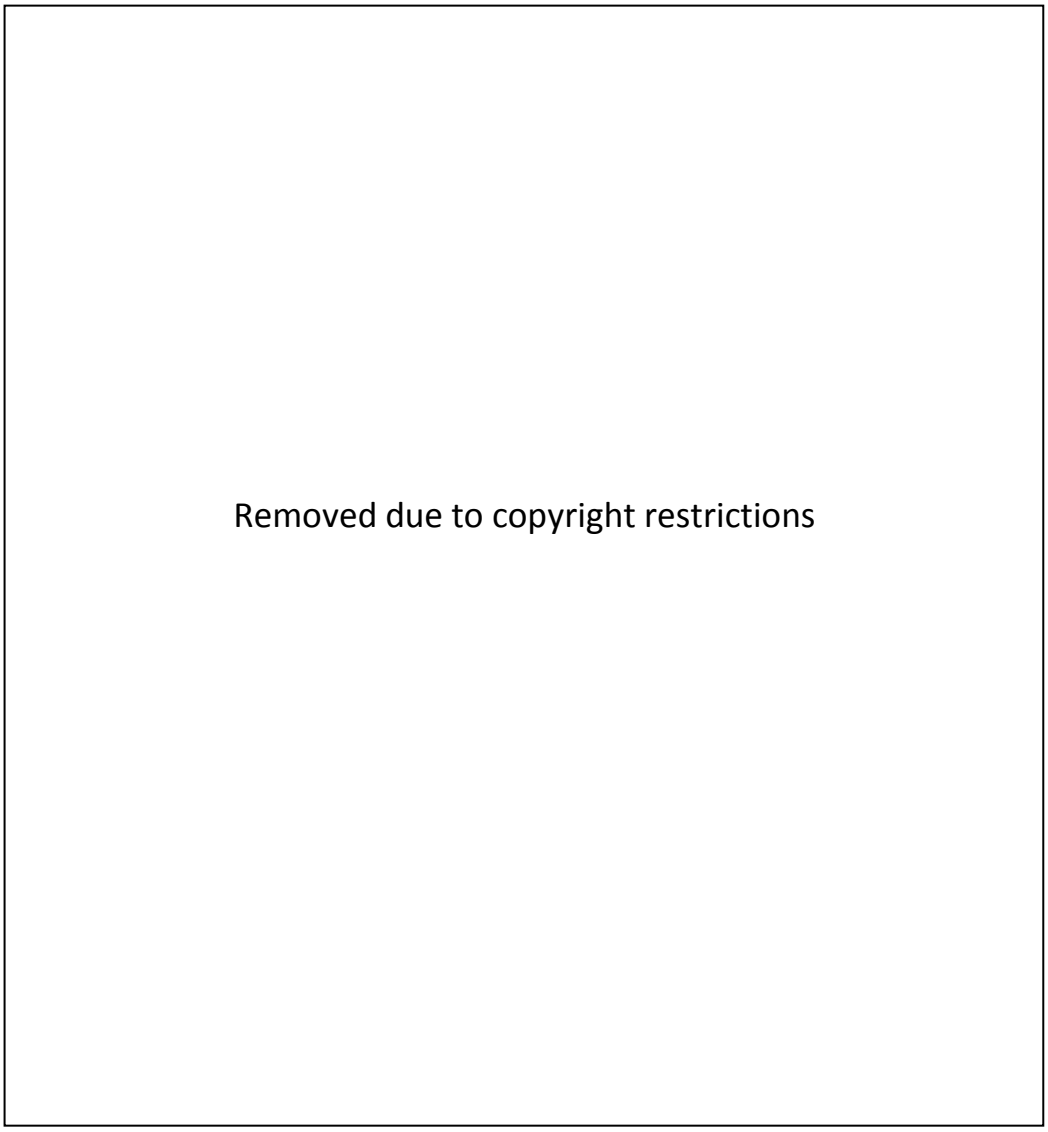

Figure 5.3 Drainage and topography including rivers of the East Midlands (Cooper 2006: Plate 4).

5.3 Site Synopsis and Selection

Three sites within Leicestershire were selected for inclusion within this study (Rearsby Bypass, Syston and Castle Donington) (Figure 5.4). The sites all contained material of Neolithic and early Bronze Age date located within sealed stratified contexts. Descriptions of the sites and their archaeological background are found below.

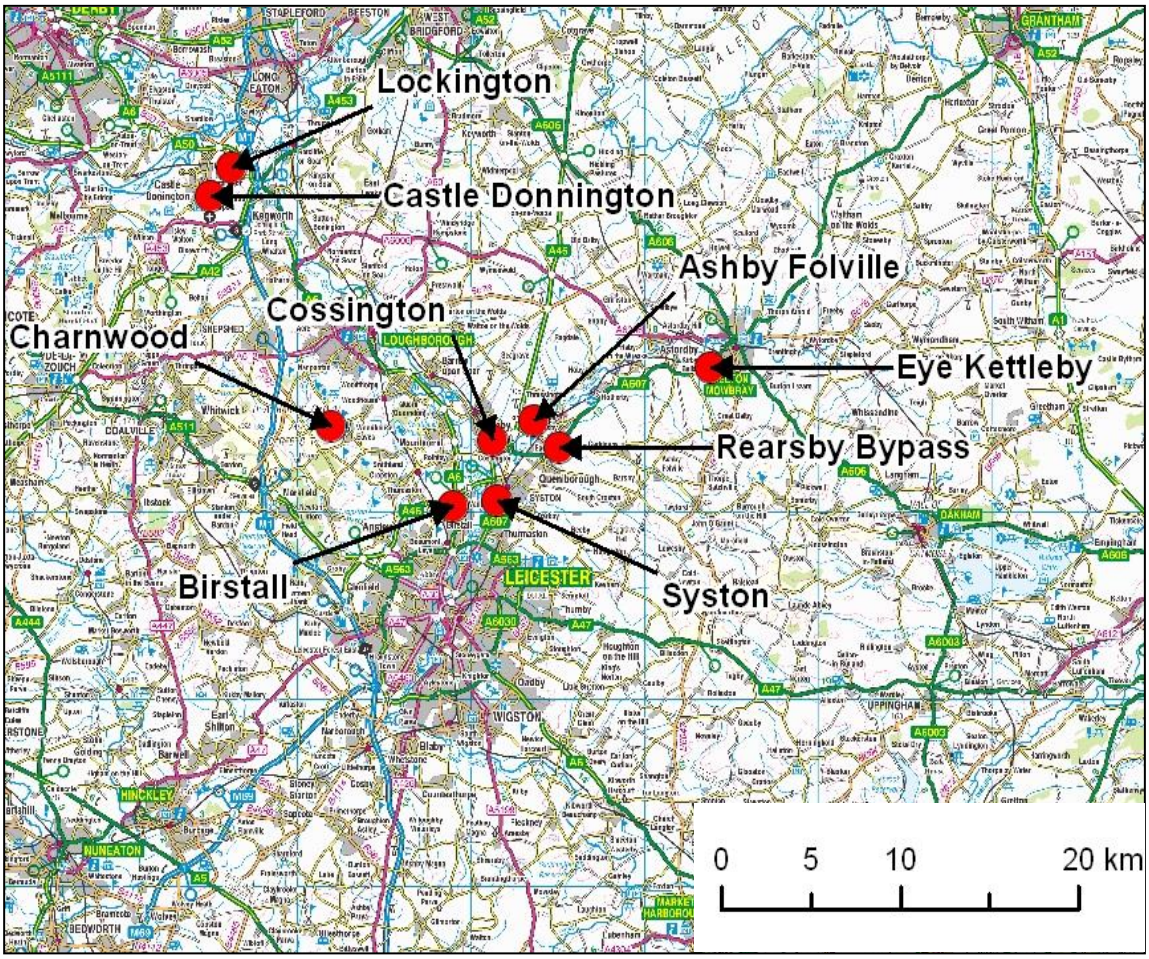

Figure 5.4 Location of the three sites selected for analysis amongst others used for comparative purposes (courtesy of D. McInnes, AECOM)

5.4 A607 Rearsby Bypass

The site is archived under Leicestershire Accession Number X.A36 2004 whilst the report reference number is ULAS Report 2007: 057. The site was one of several located during archaeological works in advance of the construction of the A607 Rearsby Bypass (Clarke & Beamish 2007), starting at Queniborough, passing to the east of East Goscote and Rearsby village and rejoining the Melton Road to the north of Rearsby. A total of six sites were found during these works ranging from Neolithic to Roman in date. The site from which the samples were taken was site 2 along the route. The site was within agricultural land on a slightly south, south-east-facing slope above the present day route of Queniborough Brook some c. 300m to the south. The underlying geology was quite a soft and sandy material making machine stripping difficult. The features within which the artefacts were recovered were shallow pits, post holes and scoops (See Figure 5.5). The possibility that some of these may have formed structures has been postulated although the site awaits further post-excavation assessment and analysis. The features were not intercutting and no complex stratigraphy was noted.

Figure 5.5 Location of prehistoric features containing Mortlake ceramics at Rearsby Bypass (Clarke & Beamish 2007: Fig 10)

5.4.1 The Ceramic Assemblage

A total of 438 sherds weighing 3165 grams were recovered from the excavation, including an earlier evaluation (Marsden 2007: 56). The ceramics selected for analysis were recovered from three pit features – [2045], [2016] and [2057]. Two of these pits, [2045] and [2057], were subjected to radiocarbon dating whilst the third [2016] did not contain suitable material. Burnt hazelnut shells within pit [2045], which also contained Grooved Ware and Beaker sherds, were dated to 2870-2490 cal BC (Clarke & Beamish 2007: 44). Further hazelnut shells and field maple charcoal recovered from pit [2057] provided dates of 3530-3350 cal BC and 3410BC- 3310 cal BC (Clarke & Beamish 2007: 48). Feature [2045] contained three fills, (2042) (2043) and (2044), though only ceramics from the first two contexts were selected for sectioning. Context (2042) contained a total of 15 sherds weighing 97 grams. The sherds have been identified as Beaker and the fabric description is a sandy fabric with grog inclusions. No decoration is mentioned within the site report although a conjoining sherd of Beaker was recovered from context (2043). Context (2043) contained 56 sherds weighing 394 grams. These included sherds from both Beaker and Grooved Ware vessels. The Beaker sherds are described as having a sandy fabric with grog inclusions and a 'scratched' decoration. The Grooved Ware is also a sandy fabric with grog inclusions and has horizontal impressed comb decoration. Pit feature [2016] contained fill (2015). The ceramic material consisted of 10 sherds weighing 12 grams all from Impressed Ware vessels of the Mortlake sub-style. The vessel was decorated with bird bone impressions and the fabric is described as containing quartz. Pit [2057] contained fill (2073). This fill contained 10 sherds weighing 61 grams. The vessels have been

identified as Impressed Ware of the Mortlake sub-style (See Figure 5.6). The sherds have either twisted or whipped cord decoration. The rims are everted and expanded. The presence of large flint inclusions is the only description for these vessels and no mention is made of the fabric otherwise (Marsden 2007: 56-62).

Figure 5.6 Vessels recovered from Rearsby Bypass (Not to scale). Vessels 1 and 2 are both Impressed Ware from (2073) and vessel 3 is from (2043) (Clarke & Beamish 2007: Fig 15).

5.5 Land off Melton Road, Syston

The site is archived under Leicestershire Accession Number X.A15 1997 and the report reference number is ULAS Report 97/90 (Meek 1997). The site is located circa 150 meters to the east of the present day small watercourse. The area is geologically varied with a number of differing drift and solid typologies. The archaeological remains were discovered during an evaluation prior to a residential development. A total of nine trenches were excavated by machine (Meek 1997: 2). The archaeological results

comprised a number of undated features except for a single pit containing late Neolithic and/or early Bronze Age ceramics. Although it is possible that the undated features, mainly consisting of possible gullies and post-holes, were chronologically related to the prehistoric pit, it was not possible to establish any direct evidence for this (Meek 1997: 9-10). As well as ceramics, a number of lithics were recovered. Typologically, the flint assemblage could be assigned to the Neolithic and Bronze Age with a large proportion of flakes and retouched flakes. A long blade and four scrapers were present. The flint appears to be locally sourced (Meek 1997: 9). An evaluation on land adjacent to this site in 2004 did not identify any dateable archaeological deposits but did recover a number of residual flints which may have been broadly contemporary (Parker 2004).

5.5.1 The Ceramic Assemblage

The ceramic assemblage recovered from the Syston evaluation is only briefly described within the report. A total of 28 sherds of pottery were recovered from a single pit and came from two vessels. One was identified by Patrick Marsden as a Beaker with fingernail decoration whilst the second was identified by Rob Young as Grooved Ware although no further details are given (Meek 1997: 9). No division of sherds by typology or an assemblage weight is provided. No illustration of the sherds was undertaken.

5.6 Castle Donington, Leicestershire

The site has been archived under Leicestershire Accession number X.A198.2004 and the report number is (ULAS Report 2003: 166). The University of Leicester

Archaeological Services (ULAS) excavated a site to the south of the former Castle Donington power station between September 2003 and February 2004. The investigations revealed a multi-phased site with evidence for activity during the late Neolithic and/or early Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman and Anglo-Saxon periods (Coward 2004). A total of 16 trenches were excavated as part of a wider programme of works to establish the potential for archaeological remains to survive as subsurface features. There was no radiocarbon dating for the site. The site was located on high ground to the west of Castle Donington, with the River Trent to the north-west. The ground slopes away in all directions from the site although mainly towards the River Trent. The ULAS report states that the underlying solid geology is Triassic Mudstone and soils are Bromsgrove soils (Coward 2004: 2). The late Neolithic or early Bronze Age features were an enclosure ditch, possibly partially interrupted although no suggestion has been put forward that it is a form of causewayed enclosure. The full extent of the site was not established although aerial photographic analysis indicates the ditches continue west into the neighbouring fields (Coward 2004: 18). No internal features relating to this earliest phase on site were located and it is possible some plough truncation has occurred. The ceramics came from a butt-end of a ditch section within trench 53. The ditch was part of the interrupted ditch system identified in other trenches. No other ceramics were recovered from sections through other parts of the ditch (Cooper 2004: 9-10).

5.6.1 The Ceramic Assemblage

The ceramics were recovered from the fill (7) of a ditch terminus and have been identified as belonging to the Beaker tradition. These were the only ceramic material of this period to be found on the site. The total number of sherds was 37 and weighed 170 grams. These probably all came from one vessel. Much of the base and body was recovered and parts of the vessel rim. The rim diameter was 110mm and the base diameter was 95mm (Cooper 2004: 9). The fabric was noted as being sandy and the rim was slightly everted. The decoration comprised of horizontal bands of lines of square impressions, possibly done with a toothed comb (Cooper 2004: 9).

5.7 Summary

This chapter provides a brief description of the solid and superficial geologies of the East Midlands and the main components by county (Figures 5.1 and 5.2). Whilst some of the geologies are relatively restricted to one county, a number are widespread which can be a hindrance for narrowing down a source for a specific inclusion when it can be obtained over a large geographical area. Also outlined are the main topographic characteristics and the locations of river courses by county, which are depicted on Figure 5.3. These show how varied the geological trends, the topography and the main river courses are across the East Midlands and how each county is in relation to the surrounding natural environment. Geographically, the Rearsby Bypass and Syston sites are circa 5km distant from one another and both have Grooved Ware and Beaker within their respective assemblages. Castle Donington, whilst some distance away,

contains Beaker pottery and thus has a comparable ceramic assemblage for the petrographic study.