



THE INVESTIGATION OF A PRE-HISTORIC SQUARE ENCLOSURE AT RACECOURSE ROAD, SEAMER MOOR, SCARBOROUGH



General view of the site showing the excavation in progress

THE INVESTIGATION OF A PRE-HISTORIC SQUARE ENCLOSURE AT RACECOURSE ROAD, SEAMER MOOR, SCARBOROUGH

By Christopher Hall

&

John Hinchliffe

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Site Report 40

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1. INTRODUCTION

The site which is the subject of this report is a rectangular earthwork enclosure on Seamer Moor about 3.5km west of Scarborough and just north of the A170 Racecourse Road.

This enclosure has been referred to by antiquarians and historians for over two hundred years and until recently it has been assumed to be Roman. However, despite the presence of a large number of archaeological remains in the area, no serious ground investigation of this feature had been carried out.

This report presents the findings of ground investigations carried out by the Society in February and March 2008, 25 September to 4 October 2009 and 23 to 26 September 2010.

2. GEOLOGY TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND-USE

Seamer Moor is situated on rising ground to the north of the villages of Seamer, Irton and East Ayton, on the north side of the Vale of Pickering. Geologically it is part of a chain of hills known as the Tabular Hills which stretch along the northern edge of the Vale for around 50 kilometres and divide this lowland area from the extensive uplands of the North York Moors to the north. The underlying geology consists of calcareous sandstone of the Middle Oolite, and the soil cover is Rivington 1, well drained coarse loamy soils.

The particular hill of which Seamer Moor forms part rises gently from the Vale for a distance of about three kilometres ending on the north at a steep, wooded escarpment which swings round to the east to overlook the coastal plain. To the west, a deep, steep-sided ravine called Forge Valley separates the Moor from the continuation of the Tabular Hills further to the west.

Though the 'moor' name indicates this area was historically open, uncultivated ground, the area has supported a mixture of arable and pasture fields since the middle of the last century

The site under investigation occupies a small spur of elevated land to the north of Racecourse Road/Stepney Hill, (A170) around which the road, rising from Scarborough, curves on the south and east. This spur of land was enclosed on the west and north by a double ditch, though the greater part of this has now disappeared. The eastern side of the spur forms part of the scarp slope of the eastern outliers of the Tabular Hills. From the descriptions by antiquarians and from cartographic evidence, the site is known to have been occupied by a square

enclosure of unknown date, origin and use, although since the second half of the twentieth century there have been no significant upstanding earthworks.

3. HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

In 1798 Thomas Hinderwell (who was of the view that there was an inland Roman defensive alignment starting at Weaponness Hill - now known as Olivers Mount) refers to camps on Seamer Moor.¹ He says their principal parts are in the form of parallelograms or long squares (sic) with double ditches. He goes on to say that on the south-east part of the moor were (then) many tumuli, some square, but most of them had been ploughed up since the enclosure.

The Whitby historian George Young in 1817 referred to the former existence of three small square enclosures on Seamer Moor of which the only one surviving in Young's time was the present site described as adjacent to the Ayton to Scarborough road.² The enclosure is first shown on Knox's map of the environs of Scarborough published in 1820 at a scale of approximately 2 inches to the mile³ on which the square shape of the earthwork is visible. In his later work of 1855, in which the map is republished, he states 'On this hill is a small camp, and many old fortification mounds and ditches, also tumuli...'.⁴

The enclosure is clearly shown on Hinderwell's "Sketch of the Ancient Encampments on Seamer Moor Previous to the Inclosure" (figure 1) of 1824 published by Spratt in 1989.⁵ The archaeological feature in question is the left hand square enclosure above the V-shape, which is presumably Hinderwell's way of indicating how the land forms a spur here. The site is shown as a very distinctive square feature and seems to have a ditch and rampart, but it should be noted that the dimensions of this sketch are not accurate. Hinderwell marks some other enclosures attached to the enclosing earthwork to the west but these are not shown on later maps. The earthwork or dyke itself is shown on later maps, and in fact some sections still exist as a surface feature.

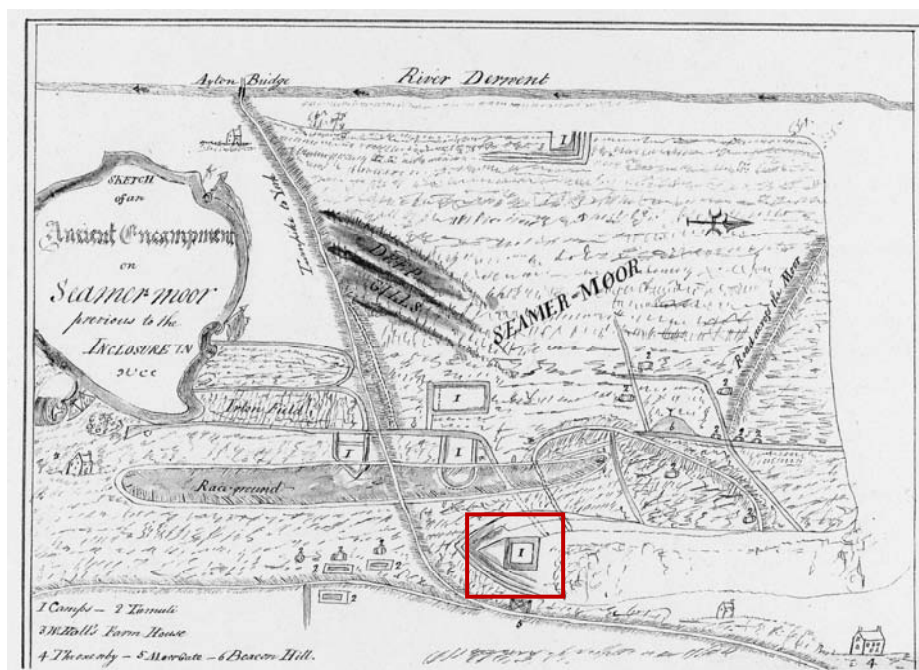


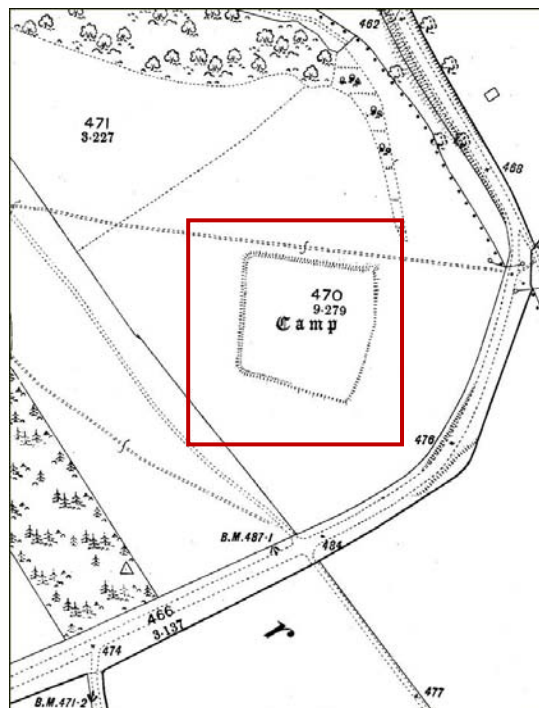
Figure 1. Hinderwell 1824 - "Sketch of the Ancient Encampments on Seamer Moor Previous to the Inclosure" showing the site outlined in red

The Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 Scale published in 1854 (figure 2) is the first really accurate map of the area and this map shows the enclosure as a fairly robust earthwork, almost square with rounded corners. It is marked as 'Camp – supposed Roman'. The double ditch ('Intrenchment') is shown but none of the other enclosures shown on Hinderwell's sketch map are there. The north and west sides of the enclosure under investigation seem to consist of rampart and ditch, the other sides rampart only.



Figure 2. Ordnance Survey 1:10,560 Scale (enlarged) published 1854 showing the site outlined in red

The OS 1:2500 Scale map published in 1893 (figure 3) shows the feature as an upstanding earthwork though perhaps less robust than in 1854 especially on the east and south sides. The ditch seems to have gone from the north and west sides. Interestingly the word 'camp' appears in gothic font which means that at this time Ordnance Survey thought the feature was either pre- or post-Roman



**Figure 3
Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Scale
published 1893**

By the time of the 1912 1:2500 map, the earthworks are shown by a pecked line and the feature marked 'earthwork' (in gothic font again) 'site of' - this does not mean that the earthworks had gone entirely by then, it could just mean that they were not significant enough to meet the criteria for being shown as drawn features on the map— eg they were less than 3' high. The 1928 1:2500 map is almost identical though a footpath near the site has moved. This is the last 1:2500 map to refer to this feature.

No trace of the enclosure was visible when the site was visited by J. G. Rutter and Raymond Hayes in 1960 and this is reflected in the Ordnance Survey 1:10,000 scale map published in 1972.⁶ However in very low light in the late afternoon of 10 February 2008 the enclosure was seen by C W Hall and J Hinchliffe as a very low earthwork.



**Figure 4 Earthwork to the enclosure showing up in low light.
The cane and flag show the north-west corner**

By the winter of 1999/2000 when an aerial photograph was taken (not reproduced here – see www.getmapping.com) the field had been subdivided approximately north-south. Fortuitously the photograph was taken just after the western field had been cultivated (the cultivator is still visible in the top north-west corner) and the greater part of the enclosure clearly shows as a soil mark indicating that there must still be some sub surface survival of the enclosure which had been disturbed by the plough. No obvious features within the enclosure appear on this air photograph.

4. GROUND INVESTIGATIONS

Ground investigations in 2008 took the form of both non-invasive survey and ground intervention through trial trenching across the supposed line of the enclosure ditch – Trench 1.

In 2009, a further 6 trenches were excavated mostly in the interior of the enclosure in order to test the geophysics and to try to establish more information about the enclosure and its use. As the site referencing system was carried over from the 2008 works, these trenches were numbered 2 to 7 inclusive. Trench 2 was re-visited and enlarged in 2010.

4.1 Non-invasive survey.

A resistivity survey was carried out using a Geoscan RM15-D resistance meter and a magnetometry survey using a Geoscan FM256 fluxgate gradiometer both on a 100 metre by 80 metre grid with two additional 20 by 20 metre squares at the north. This work was done with the assistance of Frank Clough.

On the resistance survey the enclosure ditches are clearly evident. There are generally higher resistance readings alongside the ditches, possibly due to the drainage effect of the ditch. Areas of high resistance occur towards the eastern end of the northern ditch on the side within the enclosure (which seems to be contained within a faint rectilinear anomaly) and on the north side of the southern ditch. The central zone of the enclosure shows some enhanced resistivity which may be geological but could indicate some occupation. In the southern part of the eastern ditch there is an area of higher resistance which may indicate the position of an entrance. In the southern corner of the enclosure is an area of low resistance but this seems rather large to be a pit and is possibly geological. In the enclosure, located just inside the northern ditch there is a faint suggestion of a circular feature but, at over 20m diameter, it seems unlikely to be a structure.

There was no clear evidence for human occupation of the enclosure.

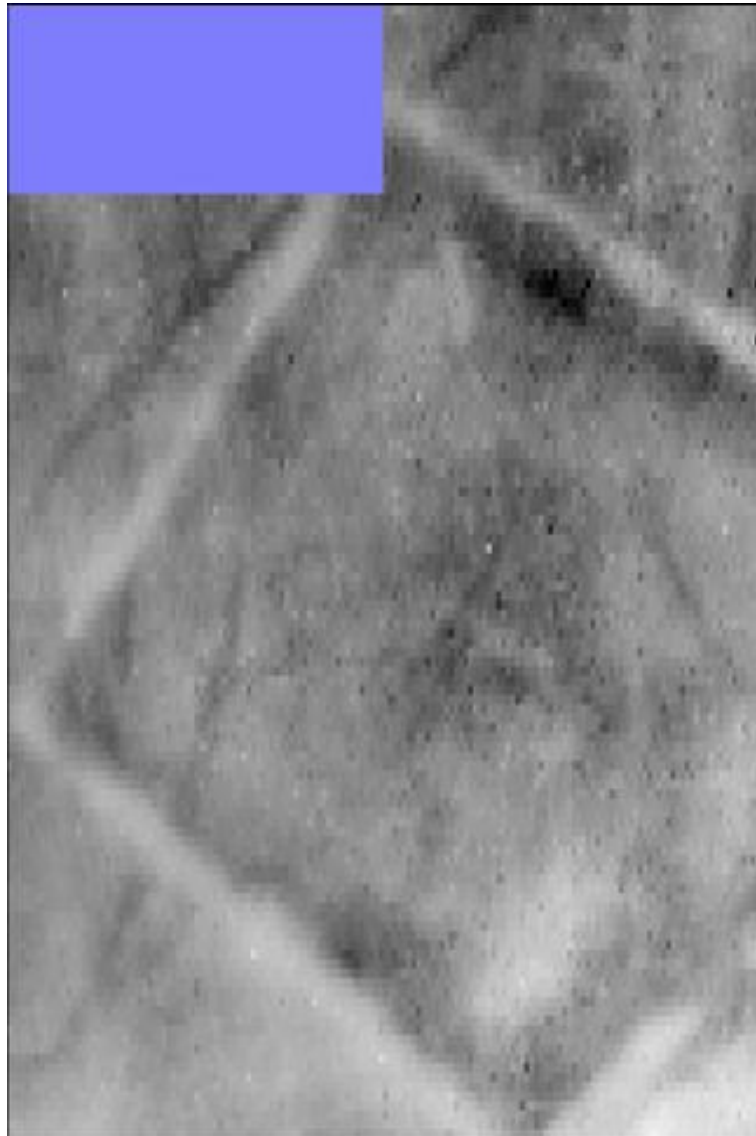


Figure 5 Resistivity - processed results shade plot

On the magnetometry survey, the signal strengths are generally quite weak, but again the enclosure ditches are clearly visible. There are some other linear and curvilinear features which seem to be independent of the enclosure and may relate to an earlier occupation although another suggestion is that these are geological since the calcareous sandstone is susceptible to fissuring. An indication of ferrous metal was thought to be modern debris and there is one possible indication of a hearth or area of intense heating some metres inside the Southern ditch close to its mid point.

4.2 Excavations



Figure 6 Location of trenches

Trench 1 excavation, 2008

Excavation carried out over the period 15 to 20 March 2008 consisted of a single trench located over the predicted alignment of the ditch and bank forming the northern side of the enclosure. Initially the trench was 20 metres long by 2 wide, but it was extended by a further 2 metres and, over this length widened to 4 metres in order to pick up more of the interior of the ditched enclosure.

This trench revealed the presence of a substantial ditch F1002 (figure 7) cut into the natural rock, the sides being about 35° from the vertical. This ditch had a width at its top of 4.7 metres reducing to about 0.8 metres at its bottom – it was not possible to fully excavate the bottom of the ditch due to adverse working conditions. The depth of the ditch was about 2.3 metres. There was no evidence of the associated bank

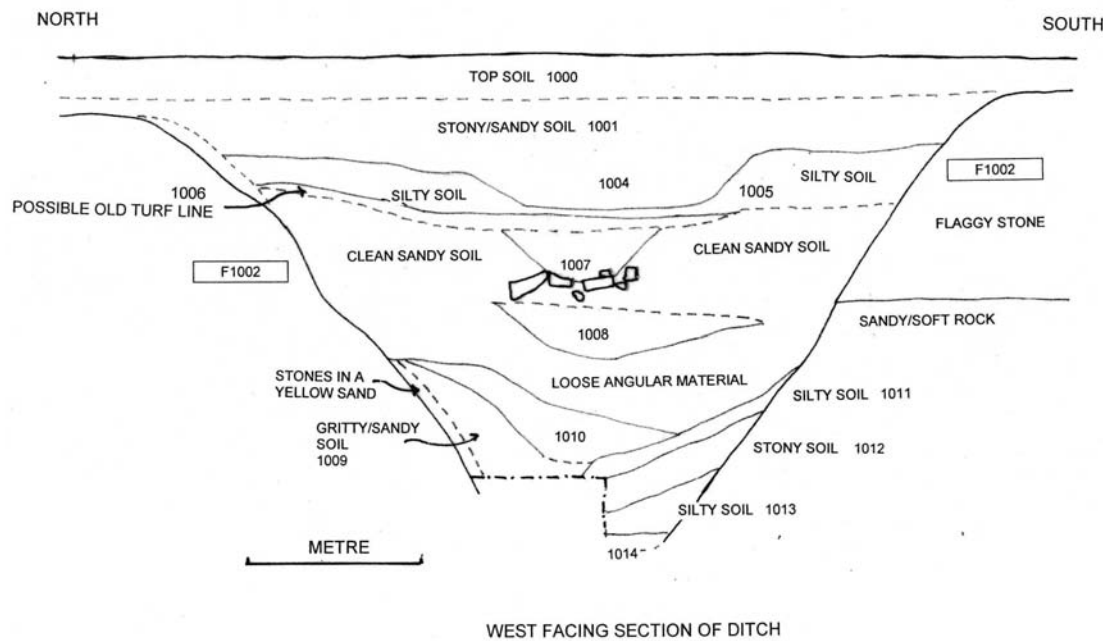


Figure 7 The west facing section of the ditch

The bottom of the ditch, which was nearly level, consisted of loosened rock containing silty material which must have percolated in following the loosening of the rock during the cutting of the ditch. After the ditch was cut, the next stage in the development of the structure was that the bottom of the ditch began to infill naturally in a series of well defined slumps; the fill consisting of silty soils presumably resulting from the weathering of the ditch sides and rampart (1014 and 1013) whilst the stonier deposits 1012 and 1010 probably represent sporadic collapse of the ditch sides with associated collapse of part of the rampart into the ditch as the structure assumed a more stable angle of repose. Silty soil 1011 seems to represent a period when the initial decay of the ditch sides had stabilised, which is likely to have been only few years after the construction of the ditch.



**Figure 8A excavation of trench 1
In progress**



**Figure 8B –base of the ditch in
Trench 1**

Context 1011 provided some dating evidence. Three sherds of Iron Age pottery were found . More importantly however, charcoal samples from this context were submitted to SUERC for radio carbon dating and these have given a date of 110BC. +/- 30 years, ie Iron Age.⁷ An environmental sample from 1011 was submitted to Paleoecological Research Services for analysis and the following are the conclusions of their report.⁸

‘Organic remains recovered from the sub-sample were mostly in the form of small fragments of unidentified charcoal. Identifiable plant macrofossils were few and restricted to occasional charred remains of cereal grains (barley) and crop weeds (e.g. bindweed, brome, goosefoot, red/downy hemp-nettle). Traces of cereal chaff of barley and oat (a rachis segment and an awn fragment, respectively) were found, hinting that crop processing activities were taking place in the vicinity at the time of the formation of this deposit.

‘Charred rootlet, rhizome and twig fragments (possibly of heather), together with other remains including caryopses of heath-grass and nuts of sedge, probably derived from burnt peat or turves. These resources were most likely used as fuel but may also have been employed in construction.’

There then followed a period for which no dating evidence is available, when further infilling of the ditch took place to within 90mm of the current surface. Due to the lack

of strong slump lines and the presence of angular material this has been interpreted as deliberate backfilling of the ditch using material from the rampart, although context 1007 contained large, dumped stones of a geological type very different from the surrounding rock. It has been speculated that this represents the provision of a firm base to the ditch, which at this time was still about 1.25m deep, during possible use as an entrenchment during the 1642-1648 Civil Wars, but there is no dating evidence for this, nor is there any evidence of a re-cut. This phase in the development of the ditch produced no artefacts, although context 1008 contained some unusual small stones, which have been identified by Professor Peter Rawson as a fragment of jet, and arkose that has been slightly metamorphosed. Arkose is a sandstone that contains fragments of felspar and has been derived from the weathering of granite or gneiss. The specimen shows coarse grains, some of quartz, but others which are slightly pinkish in colour which suggests they are felspar. It does not match any local rock and probably derives from much further north, though its presence on site may be natural rather than due to human activities⁹. This phase was topped by a thin darker loamy material (1006) interpreted as an old turf line. At 900mm below the current surface the shallow ditch to which this turf formed the surface would be consistent with the depiction of a ditch on Hinderwell's map of 1824 and the 1852 Ordnance Survey map.

Finally the site was brought up to the present level with imported material, probably domestic refuse as it contained large quantities of bone, metal, broken bottle glass and pottery, the latter of eighteenth and nineteenth century date in 1005 and nineteenth and twentieth century in 1001 and 1000. Context 1001 contained one clay pipe bowl attributed to E. Tindall who was producing pipes in Scarborough over the period 1840 to 1877. This import of material and the final stages of the infilling are consistent with the progressive disappearance of the feature from the Ordnance Survey maps over the period 1893 to the present

Trenches 2 to 7, 2009 and 2010

Further ground investigations were carried out over six days between 25 September and 4 October 2009. The purpose of these investigations was to test the results of the geophysics and to explore the interior of the enclosure. Six trenches were excavated. As the 2008 referencing system was continued, these trenches were numbered 2 to 7 inclusive.

Trench 2

This trench was located towards the north west internal corner of the enclosure where an area of high resistance had been recorded. This trench was re-visited and enlarged in 2010. The maximum dimensions investigated were 5.1 metres north-south by 3.0 metres east-west.

At a depth of about 150mm below ground level a surface of angular calcareous grit stones was encountered (2001), the stones lying at irregular angles. This layer was sampled by excavating a 500 mm wide sondage, running north-south along the eastern edge of the trench. This revealed that the stony layer was only one stone thick and lay on a grey brown loamy material containing a fragments of iron age pottery. The stone feature was interpreted as the base of the enclosure

rampart (something which had not been encountered in trench 1), overlying a decayed vegetation surface. It is probable that evidence of the rampart survived here due to the fact that it is close to the point where the enclosure turned through 90° – the rampart would therefore have been thicker and this is borne out by the 2010 enlargement of the trench which revealed a concentration of this stony material in the south west corner of the excavation close to where the turn would be expected to be found.

An environmental sample from the decayed vegetation surface was submitted to Paleoecological Research Services for analysis and the following are the conclusions of their report.¹⁰

‘The biological and artefactual remains recovered were few and much of the former comprised clearly modern intrusive or contaminant material (e.g. rootlets). Probable ancient organic remains were restricted to a small amount of charcoal, most of which was poorly preserved and indeterminate to species but which included a small number of roundwood twig fragments, with occasional charred ‘seeds’. These remains were too few for any detailed interpretation of past human activities or natural habitats at the site. Artefactual material consisted of a small quantity of hammer scale and possible slag, which suggested some metal-working in the vicinity but was too little to imply any large-scale smithing or smelting activity, and a single fragment of ?modern glass. No microfossil remains were present.’

Removal of the rampart material at the southern end of the trench revealed further sherds of iron age pottery which could be the result of either pit digging or dumping refuse against the corner of the rampart.



Figure 9 Trench 2 looking north showing rampart base 2001 and sondage 2002

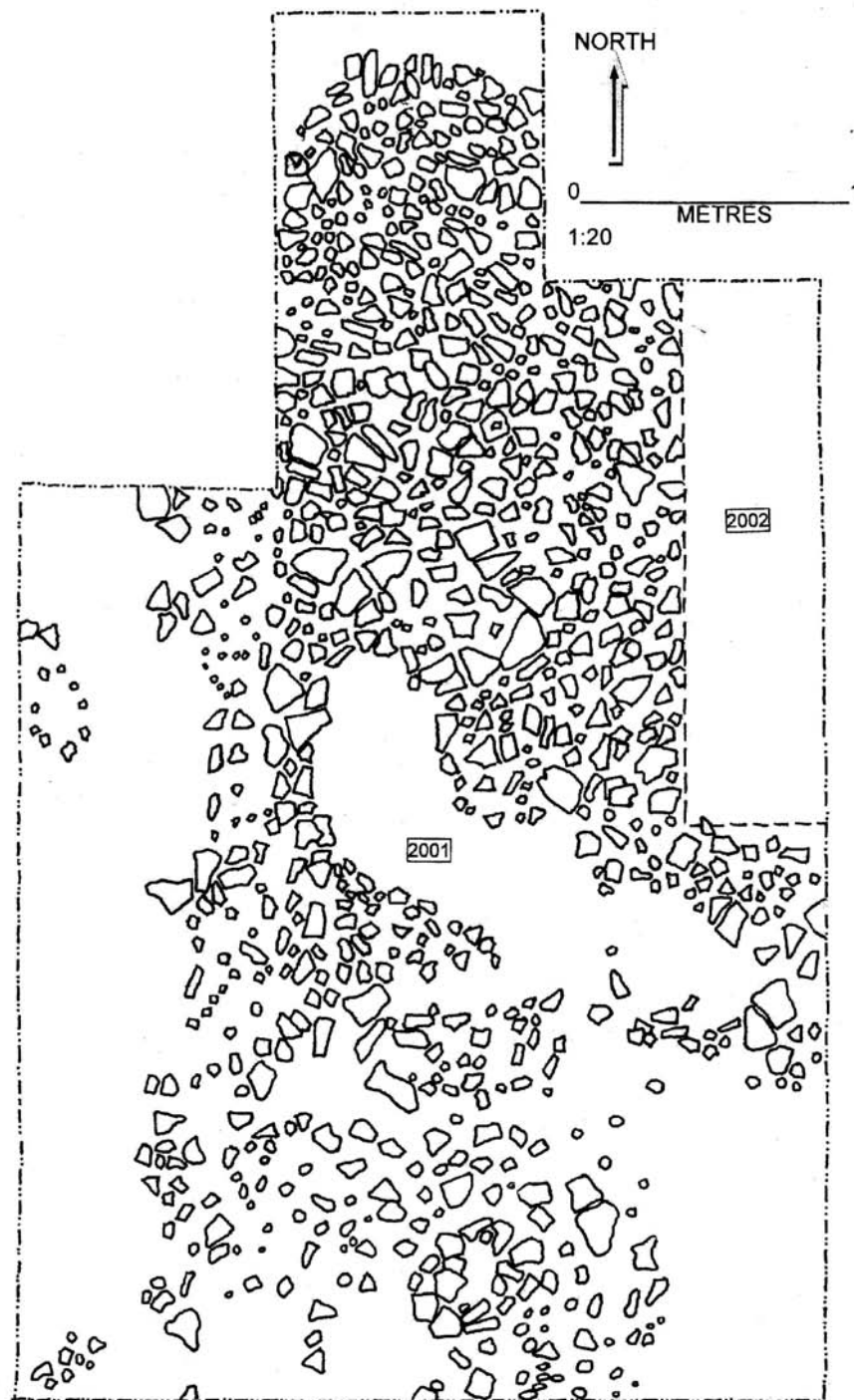


Figure 10: Plan of Trench 2

Trench 3

The location of the trench, which measured 2 metres x 2 metres, was virtually in the centre of the enclosure, above an area of high resistance. Here plough soil overlay a gritty sub-soil which immediately overlay natural at a depth of 300 mm below ground surface. The natural at this point consisted of the decaying calcareous grit.

Trench 4

This trench was positioned in order to test an area of low resistance close to the south-east corner of the enclosure. The trench measured 2 metres x 2 metres. At a depth of 200 mm the natural, consisting of decaying calcareous grit, similar to Trench 3, was found. In the north-west corner a shallow, bowl shaped feature (F4004) proved inconclusive. The western third of the trench was cut by a linear feature (F4002) the fill of which was explored to a depth of 650 mm below ground level. This fill consisted of angular fragments of calcareous grit in a sandy matrix and this was interpreted as disturbed natural, possibly due to a falling tree.

Trench 5

This trench was located mid way between Trenches 3 and 5 and again measured 2 metres x 2 metres. At a depth of between 200 mm and 230 mm below ground level, decayed calcareous grit was encountered, although it was pitched at much more irregular angles than elsewhere. Following discussion with Professor P Rawson and examination of nearby quarry sections it was decided to cut a 500 mm wide sondage into this material. Although much more disturbed than elsewhere, and more sandy, the conclusion was drawn that this was natural, probably heavily disturbed by tree roots.

The trench contained one post hole and socket (F5003) consisting of seven vertically set stones around a hole approx 100 mm square cut into the natural and 100 mm deep. Excavation of this post hole produced two sherds of iron age pottery, although there was not an occupation layer associated with the post hole, this probably having been removed by ploughing.



Fig 11: Trench 5 viewed from the west showing the natural decomposed stone surface and the stones forming the sides of the post hole

Trench 6

Trench 6 was located between trenches 2 and 3 and measured 2 metres x 2 metres. At a depth of between 240 mm and 280 mm plough soil and sub soil overlay an orange brown sandy deposit with small stone inclusions. A 500 mm wide sondage was taken down to a depth of 580 mm at which point the stone inclusions became predominant. This material was interpreted as natural, but having a different nature to that found elsewhere due to the effect of water action.

Trench 7

This was a 1 metre x 1 metre trial trench outside the enclosure to test the presence, or otherwise, of an entrance. Natural calcareous grit was encountered at 200 mm - 230 mm below ground level with no other features present which may indicate the presence of an entrance here but a larger area needs to be sampled.

5. DISCUSSION

The radiocarbon dating of the organic deposits from 1011 firmly placed the date of the ditch in the late Iron Age. The structure was therefore not created as a Roman fort and there is no other evidence to support Hinderwell's assertion that it was used as a Roman defensive earthwork either on its own or as part of a series of forts.

The plough soil in all the trenches contained modern pottery mostly 19th century and early 20th century, the presence of which was thought to be the result of the import of refuse material on to the land. Below the plough soil the dating evidence points to occupation in the Iron Age but no evidence of structures has been found to date other than one post hole. To date no evidence of later occupation has been found and it is likely that if there were any it has been destroyed by ploughing. For example it has been suggested that the enclosure may have been re-occupied during the Roman period and during the English Civil war but no evidence has been discovered to support either of these assertions; at present all we can say is that the site represents an Iron Age occupation enclosure.

6. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Society and the fieldwork director extend their thanks to the landowners John & Ashley Tyson, for allowing access to this field for the carrying out of this fieldwork.

The geophysical survey benefited from the assistance and guidance of Frank Clough of Tadcaster. The equipment was loaned by Jon Kenny, Community Archaeologist with York Archaeological Trust.

The fieldwork was directed by Chris Hall and carried out by SAHS members Frank Beeley, Martin Bland, Gareth Davies, Chris Evans, Malcolm Hall, John Hinchliffe, Siriol Hinchliffe, Ron Lewis, Carolyn Milner, Vanessa Milner, Sue Ogilvy, Mick Panton, Brian Rahn, Trevor Pearson (who also carried out the GPS survey), Chris Smith, Lesley Smith, Wendy Somerville-Woodiwis & Sue Wood.

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ANNEX 1 – List and description of contexts in Trench 1

| Context | Type | Description | |
|---------|---------|---|---|
| 1000 | Deposit | Mid brown loam with stony inclusions | |
| 1001 | Fill | Mid to grey brown with large angular inclusions | |
| F1002 | Cut | Cut of ditch | |
| 1003 | Deposit | As 1001 but in trench extension | |
| 1004 | Fill | Stiff khaki brown loamy soil, buttery texture with fewer inclusions | Deliberate filling or ploughing down of bank |
| 1005 | Fill | As 1005 – second spit off | Deliberate filling or ploughing down of bank |
| 1006 | Fill | Stiff, yellowish brown silt with dark brown layer | Dark brown is turf line following natural silting |
| 1007 | Fill | Stiff yellowish brown silty deposit with stony inclusions | Natural silting |
| 1008 | Fill | Stiff to firm yellowish brown sandy, grainy | |
| 1009 | Fill | As 1008 but in north west corner more stony | Tumbled in side? |
| 1010 | Fill | Mid yellowish brown sandy with stony inclusions | |
| 1011 | Fill | Firm mid brown, stiff, angular material and charcoal lenses | Charcoal sampled. Environmental sample |
| 1012 | Fill | Yellowish brown angular and sandy material with greenish silt | |
| 1013 | Fill | Mid brown stiff silty loam | First deposition of silty material in ditch |
| 1014 | Natural | Very loose material disturbed by cutting. Silty material by percolation | |

ANNEX 2A Finds database: pottery

[illegible]

ANNEX 2B Finds database: small finds

| Mus. Acc. No. | Context | No. of items | Material | Description/Interpretation |
|------------------|---------|--------------|-----------------|---|
| Discarded | 1000 | 36 | Glass | Fragments of 19/20th century glass. Mostly bottle and mostly coloured |
| Discarded | 1000 | 2 | Bone | 1 fragment of vertebra and 1 rib |
| Discarded | 1000 | 1 | Brass & ceramic | Masking plate for sink |
| Discarded | 1000 | 2 | Shell | Oyster shell |
| Discarded | 1000 | 4 | Iron | Fragments of corroded iron spike |
| Discarded | 1000 | 1 | Iron | Iron nail - corroded |
| Discarded | 1000 | 1 | Lead | Off cut from sheet lead |
| Discarded | 1000 | 1 | Clay | Fragment of red clay roof tile |
| Discarded | 1000 | 4 | Pipe clay | Fragments of clay pipe stem with no distinguishing features |
| Discarded | 1001 | 1 | Bone | Bone fragment showing signs of butchery |
| 2008.3.14 | 1001 | 4 | Pipe clay | 1 bowl and 3 stem fragments. Fluting on bowl possibly E Tindall 1840-1877 |
| Discarded | 1001 | 1 | Glass | Top of glass bottle |
| Discarded | 1005 | 1 | Coke | Piece of coke |
| 2008.3.15 | 1008 | 1 | Bone | Fragment of bone showing butchery marks |
| 2008.3.16 | 1008 | 1 | Stone | Jet fragment |
| 2008.3.16 | 1008 | 1 | Stone | Arkose |
| 2008.3.17 | 1011 | 1 | Flint | ??Unworked flint |
| Discarded | 2000 | 1 | Clay | Clay pipe stem |
| Discarded | 2000 | 13 | Glass | Fragments of modern bottle glass |
| 2008.3.17 | 2002 | 1 | Flint | |
| 2008.3.17 | 2003 | 1 | Flint | |
| Discarded | 2004 | 5 | Glass | Small fragments broken modern glass |
| Discarded | 2004 | 1 | Pipe clay | Fragment of clay pipe stem |
| Discarded | 2004 | 1 | Jet?? | Piece of jet left over from working |

| | | | | |
|--|------|----|-------|--|
| 2008.3.17 | 2004 | 1 | Flint | |
| Discarded | 2006 | 1 | Jet?? | Possibly unworked jet |
| 2008.3.17 | 2009 | 3 | Flint | |
| Discarded | 3000 | 4 | Glass | Fragments of modern bottle glass |
| Discarded | 3000 | 2 | Clay | Clay pipe stem |
| Discarded | 3000 | 2 | Shell | Fragments of oyster shell |
| Discarded | 3001 | 15 | Glass | Various small fragments of broken glass - modern |
| Discarded | 3001 | 2 | Clay | Clay pipe stems |
| Discarded | 4000 | 1 | Clay | Clay pipe stem |
| Discarded | 4000 | 2 | Clay | Modern ceramic tile fragments |
| Discarded | 4000 | 1 | Iron | Nail |
| Discarded | 4000 | 12 | Glass | Various small fragments of broken glass - modern |
| 2008.3.17 | 4000 | 1 | Flint | |
| 2008.3.17 | 4001 | 3 | Flint | |
| 2008.3.17 | 4003 | 3 | Flint | |
| 2008.3.17 | 5000 | 2 | Flint | |
| Discarded | 5000 | 1 | Iron | corroded nail |
| Discarded | 5000 | 1 | Clay | Clay pipe stem |
| Discarded | 5000 | 2 | Shell | Fragments of oyster shell |
| Discarded | 5000 | 1 | Bone | Bone fragment showing signs of butchery |
| Discarded | 5000 | 52 | Glass | Various small fragments of broken glass - modern |
| Discarded | 6000 | 2 | Clay | Clay pipe stems |
| Discarded | 6000 | 28 | Glass | Various small fragments of broken glass-modern |
| Discarded | 6000 | 1 | Shell | Oyster shell |
| | | | | |
| All flint bagged together and given accession No 2008.3.17 | | | | |

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