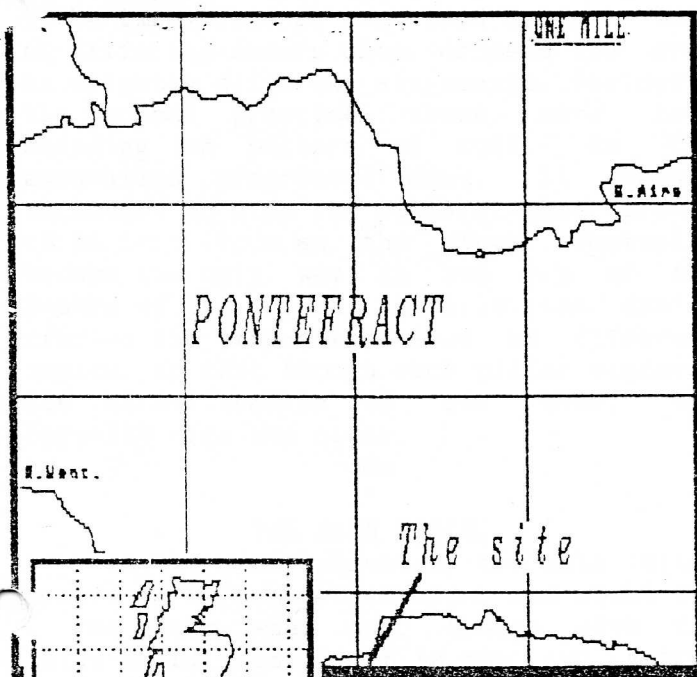


THORPE AUDLIN EXCAVATIONS 1987

E. Houlder and D. J. Hedges.

The Pontefract and District Archaeological Society has had connections with Thorpe Audlin village since 1959, when a note in the Society NEWSLETTER mentioned the discovery there of Roman pottery and coins. The present work began in 1982 when Mr. Don Barratt found large numbers of late Roman coins in the field just south and east of the river Went crossing. Two seasons of work resulted, which have been reported on elsewhere. (1) The present excavation arose from the discovery from the air of a large quadrilateral enclosure in the field immediately south and west of the river Went crossing. The aim of the present work was to section the cropmark, determine its nature and purpose, and give training in excavation techniques to members.

POSITION OF THE SITE



The square on the small map is the area in the large map.

SITE LOCATION.

The site is situated just south of the river Went, and to the west of Roman road 23b. Its National Grid Reference is S.E.474166. It occupies rising ground in full view of the Went crossing and is well-placed strategically.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

The mounting of even a small excavation today calls for complex logistical operations if the work is to be done to the best modern standards. The dig reported on below could not have taken place without the assistance and hard work of the following people:-

Bob Evison, society Chairman, who led a precise survey of the field which was so accurate that the cropmark ditch was exactly sectioned; no small feat! David Hedges, who acted as assistant director, and in addition supervised the non-photographic recording, and the finds-processing. Mr. Lister, the farmer, who allowed the work to take place, and assisted by building a photo-tower from bales! All the volunteers who took part, many having their first taste of excavation.

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FIELDWALKING.

The field in question has yielded many tantalising traces of Romano-British civilization over the last seven years. Field-walking led by David Hedges has produced fragments of querns, pottery, fragmentary tegulae and imbratae, and even hypocaust box-tiles. Aerial photography, on the other hand has been unusually reticent, and other than the large quadrilateral cropmark already alluded to, has yielded no significant data.

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THEORIES.

The nature of the fieldwalking finds has led to speculation that the field contained a small Roman Villa. Other small sites, farmsteads rather than villas, have been discovered in the past at Wentbridge, (1966) and Womersley, (1969).

The site is not ideal for a villa, however, being on a north-facing slope, and close to the substantial settlement excavated in previous seasons. Recently Mr. D. N. Riley, the well-known aerial archaeologist, has produced some tentative evidence for late fortlets guarding the river-crossings along the Roman north road (Margary 28b) which passes only metres away from the site. The present work has been unable to prove or disprove this theory.

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THE EXCAVATION.

A trench ten metres by two metres was opened perpendicular to the direction of the cropmark. Because of the accuracy of the original survey, it exactly cut the ditch which proved to be ten metres wide!

Complete emptying of the ditch proved to be impossible as two land-drains, both of differing modern date, crossed the area on slightly different alignments. Following the normal practise, these were left standing on pillars of soil. As the excavation progressed down, it became necessary to step the pillars; this proved to be fortuitous as the steps eventually became the only way in and out of the centre of the ditch. Luckily the drains crossed the excavated area at different angles, so that though each pillar obscured the stratification on one side, the opposite area was clear.

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THE MAIN DITCH.

At the spot excavated, the main ditch proved to be ten metres wide, and about 1.5 metres deep when dug, though with the build-up of topsoil, it is now two metres deep. It exhibited the normal features of a large ditch left to silt up naturally, with the addition of some evidence for a re-cut or partial clearance many years after its original construction.

Finds in the primary and secondary silting were all much abraded, and consisted of shards of late Roman wares, fragmentary pieces of Roman roof-tiles and hypocaust box-tiles, and the extremely friable fragments of a lava quernstone. (see below for more detailed information on the finds.)

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EARLIER PHASES.

Most surprising was the evidence of several earlier phases of activity on the site. The aerial photograph showed such a definite cropmark for the main ditch that the excavators felt that this was probably

became clear that several earlier, and smaller ditches crossed the area, and were each cut by the main one, indicating that the latter was the latest phase of activity.

The earliest phase was a small ditch running SW/NE which had silted naturally during a long period of time. This had been cut by both sides of the main ditch, and was only seen in transverse section. When the silting of this ditch had completely filled it, several stakes were erected in its fill, as well as a small hole being intruded into it nearby.

Following this, and a considerable time later, the area above the small ditch was covered with a layer averaging 16cms of cobbles. The area excavated was too small for the exact purpose of the cobbles to be elucidated, but their packing and nature suggested some form of trackway or path. Certainly, they were only seen at the south end of the site, but much more work will be needed before definite conclusions can be reached.

The final phase was the digging of the large ditch whose cropmark was the *raison d'etre* of the dig. The ditch cut the cobbled area cleanly, suggesting that the 'track' was already buried when it was dug. The finds suggest that the main ditch was originally dug in late or sub-Roman times, at a time when a nearby substantial building was in decay. The location of the majority of the finds in the primary and secondary silt, chiefly on the north side, may tentatively indicate the rough position of the building.

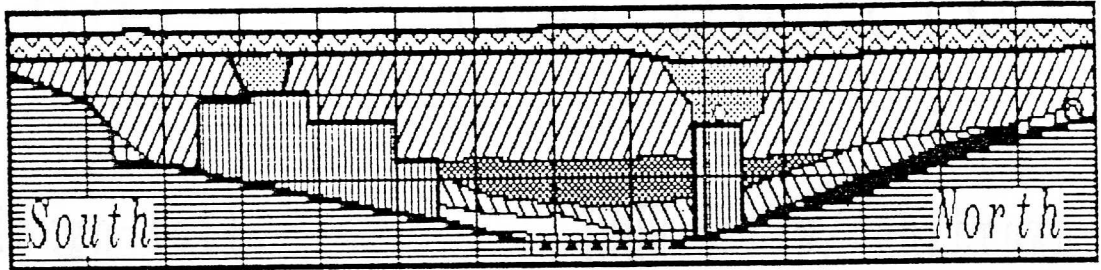
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BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE PHASING.

1. The SW/NE ditch.
2. The erection of a palisade in the filled top of (1), with the digging of at least one small hole.
3. The construction of a cobbled track or floor above these, after the decomposition of the palisade.
4. The digging of a massive ditch ten metres wide and at least 1.5 metres deep, and cutting all previous features.
5. The re-cutting of part of the centre of the main ditch.

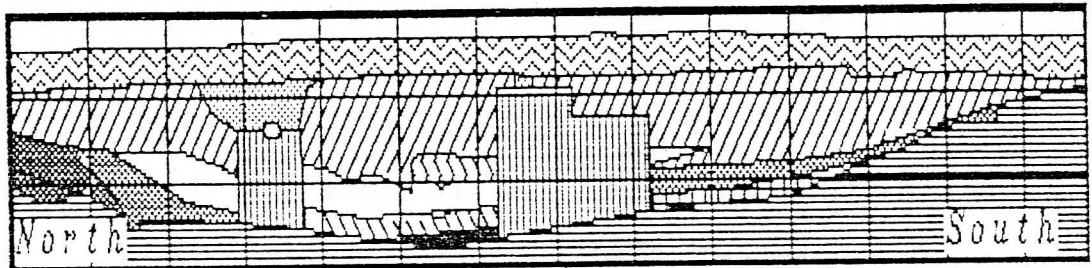
CHRONOLOGY.

The only securely-dated finds are the late Roman sherds and accompanying construction-debris. The fact that these items were in the bottom of the main ditch leads to the conclusion that that this latter ditch is probably late Roman (ie fourth century) or sub-Roman.

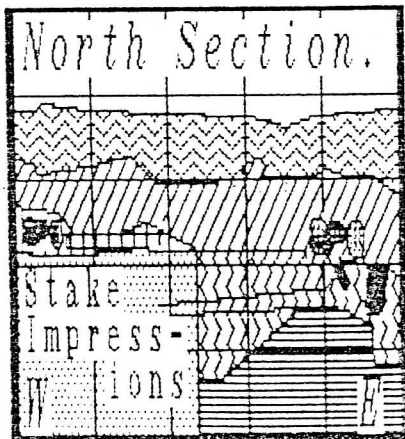


One Metre WEST SECTION

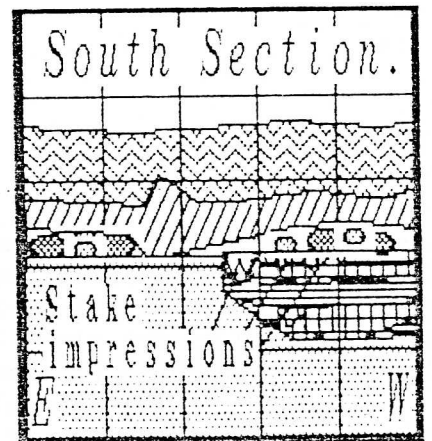
EAST SECTION.



One metre



One Metre



















One metre

THE SECTIONS.

These section-drawings are computerised versions of originals made by D.J.Hedges, and as such are to some extent schematic. However, dimensions etc. are accurate within the limits of the reproduction methods. Serious students are advised to consult the site archive in Pontefract Museum. EH/DJH.

KEY TO THE SECTIONS

	Plough-soil.		Yellow/red/brown mottled.
	Yellow-brown sandy.		Stake impressions.
	Light brown sandy soil.		Blue silt with charcoal.
	Orange-brown mottled.		Pillars left in place.
	Stone-scatter/cobbles.		Yellow-white sandstone.
	Blue-grey silt.		Unexcavated ditch side.
	Land-drain intrusions.		Blue-brown mottled.
	White-brown mottled.		Brown-orange mottled.

THE POTTERY






Twenty-five sherds of Romano-British pottery were recovered from only five of the many layers of ditch-fill excavated. As on most northern Romano-British sites, Greywares were the most common. Unfortunately, with the exception of one or two examples, it is almost impossible to determine the individual centres of production. There were, however, a few sherds of more distinct pottery-types such as the hard, gritty fabric (often described as petrified goose-flesh) known as Derbyshire Ware, the more common Calcite-gritted ware, and one very abraded sherd of Samian ware.






Also recovered from the 1987 excavations were twelve fragments of tile, including pieces of five roof-tiles (3 imbreces and two tegulae) and two, possibly three flue-tiles.

The majority of the pottery recovered can be likened to groups from kilns at Cantley, (mid-2nd to late 3rd centuries) Crambeck, (Early 4th to 5th centuries) and quite possibly Hazelwood, (Late 3rd to mid-4th Centuries). This would enable dating of the site's group to between the late third and mid-fourth centuries. It must be stressed, however, that these centres of production cover a period, between them, of the second to the fifth centuries. The notable absence of any early (other than obvious residual) material strongly suggests a period from the late third to at least the mid-fourth century.

POTTERY ANALYSIS.

The total number of sherds of Romano-British date recovered was 25, which represent a minimum number of 16 vessels. They can be statistically analysed as follows:-

LAYER	NUMBER OF SHERDS PER LAYER					PERCENTAGE SHDS PER LAYER				
	A 	4	2	1	/	7	16	8	4	/
B 	1	/	/	/	1	4	/	/	/	4
C 	1	/	/	/	1	4	/	/	/	4
G 	10	2	/	/	12	40	8	/	/	48
I 	3	/	/	1	4	12	/	/	4	16
Totals	19	4	1	1	25	76	16	4	4	100

LAYER	GREYWARE	CALCITE/G	DERBYSH.	SAMIAN.	TOTAL VESSELS PL	GREYWARE.	CALCITE/G	DERBYSH.	SAMIAN.	TOTAL % PER L.
	A 	3	2	1	/	6	18.75	12.5	6.25	/
B 	1	/	/	/	1	6.25	/	/	/	6.25
C 	1	/	/	/	1	6.25	/	/	/	6.25
G 	3	1	/	/	4	18.75	6.25	/	/	25
I 	3	/	/	1	4	18.75	/	/	6.25	25
TOTALS	11	3	1	1	16	68.75	18.75	6.25	6.25	100

NUMBER VESSELS PER LAYER PERCENTAGE VESSELS PER LAYER