

**Thorntree Hill,
Walton**

Excavations 1991

Summary

October 1991



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

Excavations at Thorntree Hill, Walton, 1991

Summary

Excavations in advance of opencast mining were undertaken at a cropmark enclosure site at Thorntree Hill, Walton, near Wakefield (SE 370168). The excavations, supported by developers H.J. Banks Ltd, were carried out by West Yorkshire Archaeology Service during July and August 1991.

The site at Thorntree Hill was first recognised from the air in 1974. The cropmark photographs show three enclosures, the clearest feature being a sub-rectangular enclosure measuring c. 50m by 40m (Fig. 1, B). This was flanked to the west by a D-shaped enclosure (Fig. 1, A), while an additional possible sub-rectangular enclosure extended to the south (Fig. 1, C).

A further evaluation of the site and surrounding landscape was undertaken by the Archaeology Service in the form of a gradiometer survey, the results of which enhanced the cropmark details. In particular, the ditch forming the north side of Enclosures A and B continued to the east, beyond the threatened area.

It was decided that strategically placed trenches would be sufficient to provide a basic understanding of the origin and development of the site. Six trenches were dug to a level below the ploughsoil using a JCB, giving a total area of 830m² covering ditch intersections, possible entrances and internal areas.

Ditches

The ditches survived to varying depths, from 0.25m to over 0.80m, and from 0.44m up to 2m wide. The ditches were cut into laminated sandstone bedrock, a task which probably required metal-tipped tools. The D-shaped Enclosure A is likely to have been the primary feature, with its ditch over 0.50m deep and over 1m wide being joined by the ditch of the large sub-rectangular Enclosure B, of similar dimensions on its northern and western sides. In contrast the southern and eastern ditches of Enclosure B were over 0.80m deep and 2m wide. A third possible enclosure (Enclosure C) joined with the ditch of Enclosure B, the dimensions of the ditch narrowing towards its entrance terminal to the south. This ditch was cut at its southern terminal by a narrow shallow ditch which ran across the width of this enclosure. The southern perimeter of Enclosure C was unlocated, and may have run beneath the modern hedgerow, while the eastern side which seemed to show as a cropmark was not found by excavation.

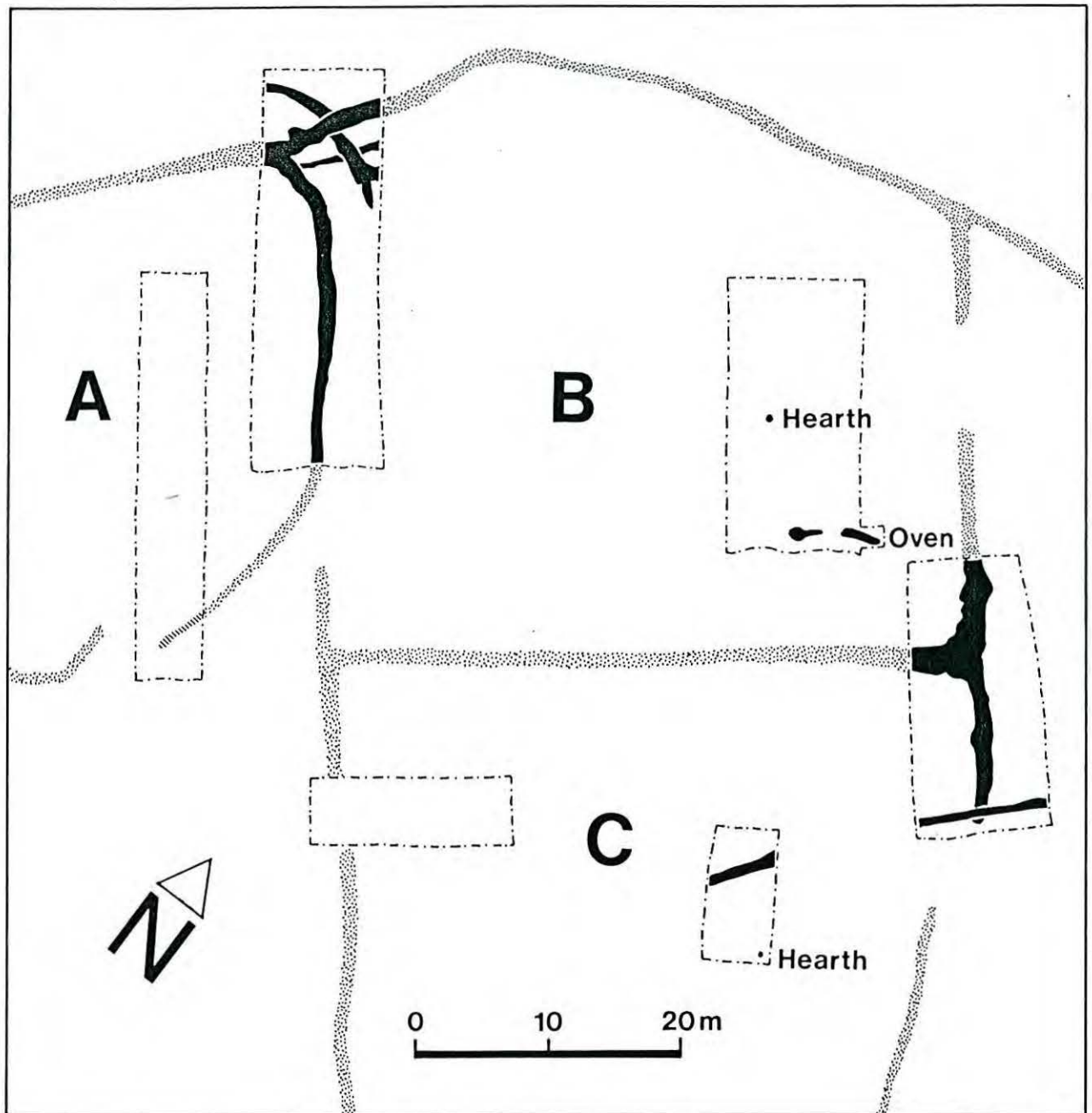


Fig. 1. Thorntree Hill, Walton. Plan of cropmarks and excavated features.
 Key: stipple = cropmark; black = exposed soil mark; shaded = cropmark not visible in excavated area.

In addition to the enclosure ditches, a possible palisade slot was located at the north-west corner of Enclosure B, along with other shallow ditches. The very similar fills of all these ditches may represent one phase of contemporary, or near contemporary use, with no evidence of recutting.

Internal Features (Fig. 1)

Little evidence of internal features survived within the excavated areas of the enclosures, except for traces of two small hearths, a keyhole shaped feature of unknown use, and a well-preserved oven, possibly used as a corn drier. The oven was of a simple, narrow rectangular type with daub roof and stone lining; a concentration of charcoal at one end may indicate the position of the stoke-hole.

Finds

A large deposit of Roman pottery was discovered in the fill of the Enclosure A ditch where it was joined by Enclosure B. The amount and variety of pottery indicates a domestic origin, suggesting that a settlement was close by. Sherds of samian, Black Burnished ware, coarseware and mortaria were recovered, all apparently of 2nd or 3rd-century origin. In addition to the pottery, only a single whetstone and a few pieces of possible slag were found. However, some of the charcoal fragments from the oven should be identifiable to species.

Conclusion

The excavation did not provide clear evidence of the sequential development of this site. However, the concave curve of the east side of D-shaped Enclosure A may indicate that this was the primary feature, possibly relating to a nearby settlement. The large sub-rectangular Enclosure B might then have been added, followed by the third possible Enclosure C. The presence of the oven suggests that some small-scale agricultural processing was undertaken on the site.

Although Thorntree Hill was probably a very minor isolated Romano-British farm, excavation on this type of site is essential in order to provide a balanced picture of the working environment of the ordinary Romano-British farmer, rather than restricting work to more important and impressive sites.

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