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**ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF LAND
AT TANCRED GRANGE, SCORTON,
RICHMONDSHIRE, NORTH YORKSHIRE**

SE
(NZ 243998)

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**A report to the Kilvers Minerals and Waste Management
Planning Consultancy**

(REVISED)

CONFIDENTIAL

29,1,2000

**ARCHAEOLOGICAL APPRAISAL OF LAND AT
TANCRED GRANGE, SCORTON, NORTH YORKSHIRE
(SE 243998)**

1 Instructions were received from Kilvers Minerals and Waste Management Planning Consultancy for the preparation of an archaeological appraisal of land at Tancred Grange Farm Scorton to form part of an Environmental Impact Statement in support of an application to renew Planning Consent for the extraction of sand and gravel. In the absence of a formal specification, a general methodology for this work has been agreed with the client after informal discussion with the County Archaeologist. This report has been prepared by Percival Turnbull of this Practice.

THE SITE

2 The site occupies several fields in the direct vicinity of Tancred Grange farmhouse and is centred approximately on (National Grid Reference) SE 243998. The land is flat with a slight general slope towards the River Swale which lies to the south and west; at its closest point the river is only some 150 metres from the development site with which this report is concerned. The site is well drained, sitting on the sands and gravels of the Swale Ure system at a general height of around 55-60 metres above Ordnance Datum. Much of the surrounding land has already been excavated for sand and gravel.

3 The land is currently under agriculture use. Two fields (marked **A** and **B** on the accompanying plan) are under plough and planted with winter cereals. Neither of these parcels of land bears any surface indication in the shape of earthworks or other relief of possible archaeological significance.

4 The remainder of the land (**C** and **D** on the plan) is under grass and appears to have been so for at least fifty years. This land formed part of the Second World War airfield and still bears strong traces of its former use. These may most clearly be seen in the field immediately north of Tancred Grange where wartime buildings are now in agricultural use and where traces of paths and road are here and there evident beneath the turf. The buildings themselves are of a standard prefabricated form and of no real interest in themselves. The site has plainly been levelled and graded to allow the construction of the airfield structures and there is absolutely no trace of any relief feature which might be earlier in date than the mid-twentieth century.

5 In general terms the historic landscape of the immediately surrounding area is based upon that of the Middle Ages, very considerably altered during the Enclosure process of the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and then subjected to further large-scale alterations in the course of military use during the Second World War and to large scale sand and gravel working since then. Little remains locally of historically significant landscape features within the area of the present study; the historical value of the visible landscape may be considered to be very low. Tancred Grange itself is a nineteenth-century farmhouse which did not exist at the time of the 1857 Ordnance Survey map when the whole of the area was occupied by a series of fields (*Grange* is a common farm-name locally and apparently without

particular historical significance there are six Granges' within three kilometres of Tancred Grange)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

6 The centre of the mediaeval village of Scorton (classed as a two-row village with green a characteristic Northern type of mediaeval settlement) lies about 800 metres to the north-east of the study area. This suggests that the development area was probably within the field system of the mediaeval village but there is no landscape feature which might have survived from the earlier period and there is in any case no reason to expect any mediaeval building or other structure on the site.

7 The development site lies approximately 1.5 kilometres north east of the centre of the Roman and early post-Roman settlement of Catterick. The Catterick complex of military sites, civil settlements and cemeteries is extensive and complicated and potentially of great importance to an understanding of (especially) the early post-Roman centuries. The main area of activity is separated from the development site by the River Swale which forms a fairly obvious natural boundary. There is, however, Roman activity as part of the Catterick complex of sites on the north bank of the Swale at Brompton while the possibility of peripheral Roman activity at Tancred Grange should not be discounted entirely: there is nothing to suggest that such activity continued so far to the east. Similarly, the recently-discovered Anglian inhumation cemetery at Catterick Bridge (Phil Abrahams pers comm) also on the north bank of the Swale appears to relate to the late Roman and early post-Roman activity in the Catterick area and there is no particular reason to expect either settlement or burial of the period at Tancred Grange 1.5 kilometres further east.

8 The main features of archaeological importance which are known to exist in the area of Tancred Grange are prehistoric features associated with the Scorton *cursus* a major Neolithic ceremonial field monument of considerable importance (marked [1] on the plan). It is the most important component in a complex prehistoric landscape of ritual or ceremonial sites constructed between approximately 3,000 and 2,000 BC which also includes a recently-identified henge (a circular ceremonial earthwork) at Catterick. Discovered by aerial photography in 1949 it has nowhere been recorded as a relief feature at ground level but has been known only as truncated features visible as cropmarks on various aerial photographs dating back as far as the 1940's. Virtually the whole of the Scorton *cursus* has since been destroyed by quarrying: all that survives is within the present study area. The site is not scheduled as an Ancient Monument but has nevertheless considerable regional importance and since the *cursus* is a fairly rare class of monument some national importance. All available aerial cover, vertical and oblique, has been examined in the course of this appraisal: probably the most useful is in the Cambridge University collection, reference number CUC DQ68. The *cursus* consists of a pair of parallel ditches (with evidence for a median bank of upcast gravel) stretching for some 2.1 kilometres to the south-east from a point immediately north of Banks House, Scorton. The southern end is immediately to the south east of Tancred Grange: it is closed and unambiguously represents an original *terminus*, this end of the monument though fairly well recorded by aerial photography has now been entirely destroyed by the extraction of gravel.

south of the Scorton road. It is likely that the northern end of the monument (the exact location of which is not clear) was long ago destroyed by quarrying somewhere north of Banks House. A pair of ring ditches (marked [2] on the plan) is visible on aerial photographs of the southern end of the monument: these presumably represent ploughed-out barrows directly associated with the *cursus* and are likely to have been only a visible part of a larger number of satellite features originally associated with the linear monument. Another of these might be represented by the rectangular feature marked as [3] on the plan immediately outside the northern boundary of the study area. An additional ditch ran from the *terminus* towards the Swale: this is outside the application area but may be one of a greater number of such associated ditches.

9 Certain detailed features of the Scorton *cursus* now largely destroyed are visible on aerial photographs. The median bank, presumably constructed of gravel material upcast from the flanking ditches, is clearly visible at the southern end of the *cursus* (immediately outside the study area). The presence of this on more northerly parts of the monument has been confirmed by excavation (Topping 1982; Harding not dated). Also at the southern end of the monument (in the area of the application site) is evidence for a second parallel pair of flanking ditches which might represent either an additional period of construction (on a slightly different ground plan) or a refinement of the design of the *cursus* monument. These 'double' sets of ditches are unusual and of considerable interest: any chance of establishing their relationship to the monument as a whole should be regarded as important. It seems probable that both bank and ditches will survive in the study area.

10 Apart from aerial photographs, the main source of information about the Scorton *cursus* is a small-scale rescue excavation carried out in advance of quarrying in 1978 (Topping 1982) which showed it to be damaged by ploughing but still to retain evidence of the original central bank as well as of associated minor features (a pit or post hole and another cut feature) and of recutting of the *cursus* ditches. Since then, other opportunities have been afforded for small scale examination of parts of the monument. Records have been made of sections (or partial sections) of the *cursus* by the University of York (Field Archaeology Specialists) in 1996 and 1997: the latter, north of the application area at NZ 243002, produced no evidence of ditch recutting (in contrast with other records of the ditches). Salvage recording by Dr Jan Harding (report not dated but 1998) at a location very close to the last gave a partial section across the monument: the median mound was again observed and the ditches on either side of it were found to survive to a depth of little under a metre, with evidence for two periods of recutting: the ditch to the south west, however, seems to have been the additional flanking ditch visible on the aerial photographs, not the main ditch recorded by Topping. All records of the *cursus* so far have tended to confirm the poor capacity of local soils for the preservation of organic material and archaeoenvironmental evidence.

11 The portion of the Scorton *cursus* which survives at Tancred Grange (where it crosses the grassed areas C and D) is effectively the only surviving part of what was once a prehistoric ceremonial monument of considerable size and importance.

FIELDWALKING

12 As part of the process of appraisal detailed fieldwalking was undertaken of the areas of the application site which were under plough (areas A and B). The aim was to explore the possibility of archaeological remains surviving as scatters of artefacts but not visible on aerial photographs as cropmarks. It was anticipated that any remains surviving as soil-marks (e.g. the truncated fills of pits or ditches) would also become visible by this means. Fieldwalking was carried out by Percival Turnbull and Deborah Walsh of this Practice at the beginning of October 1999 immediately after the field had been ploughed and rolled. The surface of the field was available as a fine fresh tilth without any vegetation cover. 100% of the area was therefore available for inspection. Conditions were bright and dry and ideal for the purpose. It was considered that given all of the circumstances the fieldwalking was highly valid and likely to produce reliable results.

13 Initially the site was walked using the technique of 'linewalking' (Fasham *et al.* 1980: 31) at intervals of 4 metres. This relatively close spacing was selected because of the anticipated low overall density of material. Lines were walked from north to south and all material not clearly of modern origin was collected for initial assessment. There proved, however, to be very little material of even initial interest. So unproductive was the method that it was exchanged for one of random walks (in order better to take advantage of variations of light and shade). In this manner a total of twelve man-hours were spent in fieldwalking the arable areas of the application site. It is considered that this amounted to intensive fieldwalking and a very thorough cover of the available area.

14 During the whole of the fieldwalking not one single item of archaeological significance was recovered. Given the size of the site, the considerable general density of archaeological features in the Scorton area, the conditions and the nature of the soils it was felt to be very surprising that at the very least no mediaeval pottery was recovered. Such material might be expected to have been deposited within the topsoil by agricultural activity, if by nothing else, and can usually be regarded as ubiquitous. The results were reminiscent of those similarly completely negative from the Grange site, about 800 metres north of Tancred Grange (Brigantia Archaeological Practice 1997). It is difficult to avoid the suggestion that there is at work some post-depositional factor which is serving to mask surface archaeological traces in the area. It should also be remembered that the types of features most likely to exist in the area—pits and ditches of the Neolithic and early Bronze Age periods—are not likely to be rich in durable artefacts which might be anticipated to survive in the topsoil as the features become progressively truncated by ploughing.

DISCUSSION

15 It is clear that the main archaeological significance of the proposed development site at Tancred Grange lies in the presence of the main surviving fragment of the Scorton *cursus*. This is a monument of considerable importance concerning which significant questions remain outstanding. The *cursus* runs through Areas C (especially) and D, as shown on the plan. Working of these two areas would destroy lengths of the two main *cursus* ditches but would not involve the removal of a

complete section across the monument much of the central area between the ditches would remain unaffected Nevertheless the planned extraction would destroy the integrity and coherence of the surviving part of the *cursus* It is not entirely clear if the additional pair of flanking ditches evidenced both immediately to the south east of the development site (where aerial photographs show them to the south of the Scorton road in an area since quarried away for gravel) and to the north (where they have similarly been destroyed by recent quarrying) run through the affected areas but the balance of probability is very strongly that they do not enough is known of these features and the opportunity for the recovery of any information about them and about their relationship to the monument as a whole should be regarded as important It is recommended that arrangements be made for the archaeological recording of at least one good section across the affected parts of the *cursus* It would be highly desirable if this could be undertaken as a separate formal archaeological excavation rather than as a watching brief during extractive operations A priority should be the recovery of samples from any deposits with the potential to provide pollen macrofossil or other forms of archaeoenvironmental evidence

16 There remains a possibility that other minor features associated with the *cursus* might survive as truncated features cut into the surface of the gravel both in areas C and D adjacent to the main monument but also in the arable areas A and B where any information about the archaeology is lacking (or seems to be negative) These areas might be amenable to geophysical prospecting (most likely to the use of gradiometry) A suitable approach might be to commission initial geophysical sampling of these areas to determine the viability of the technique (it would be reasonable to start from a known cropmark feature) to be followed by a more intensive programme of geophysics and sample excavation if initial results appeared to justify this It is recommended that a programme of archaeological evaluation be undertaken along these lines

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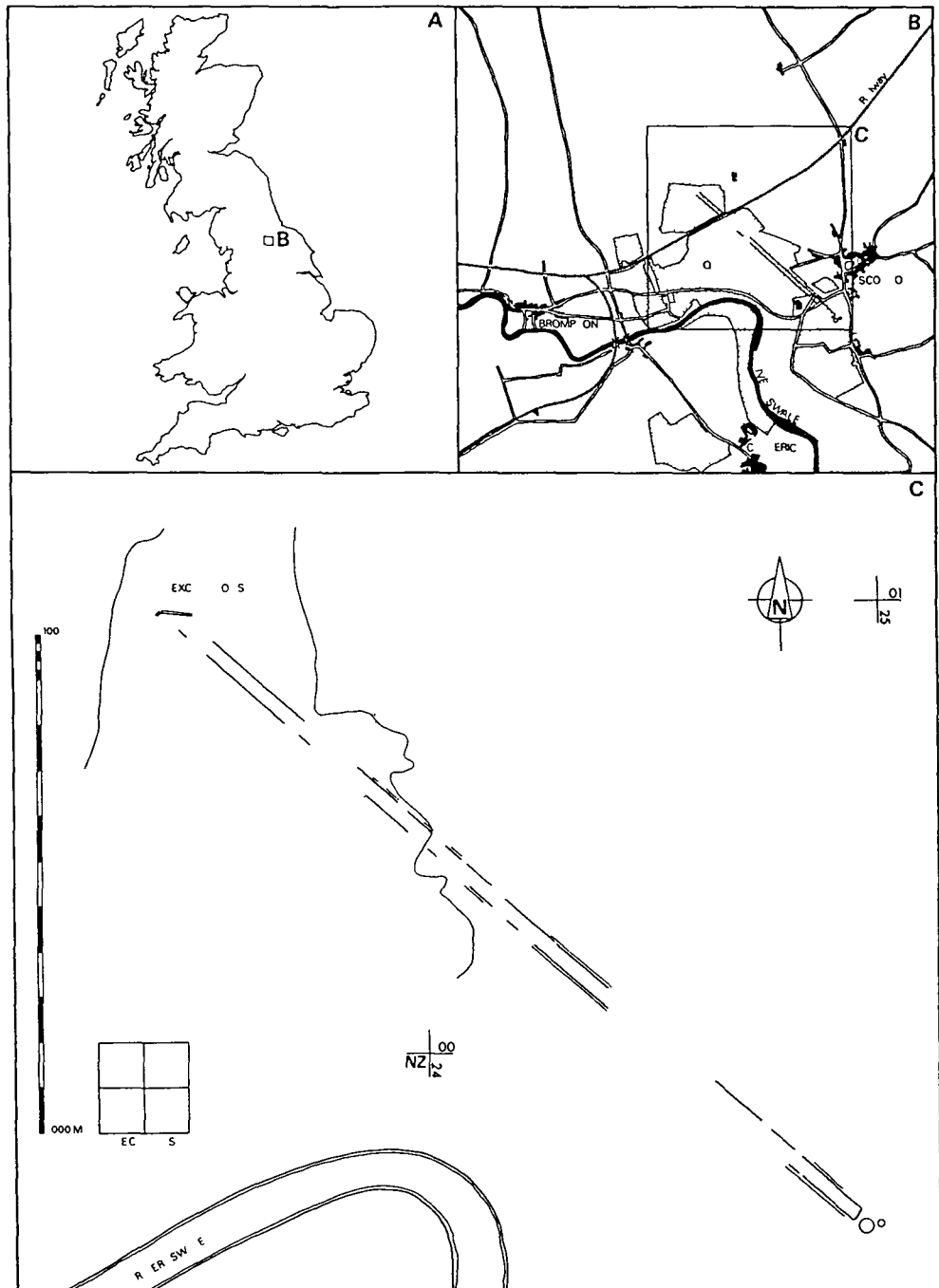
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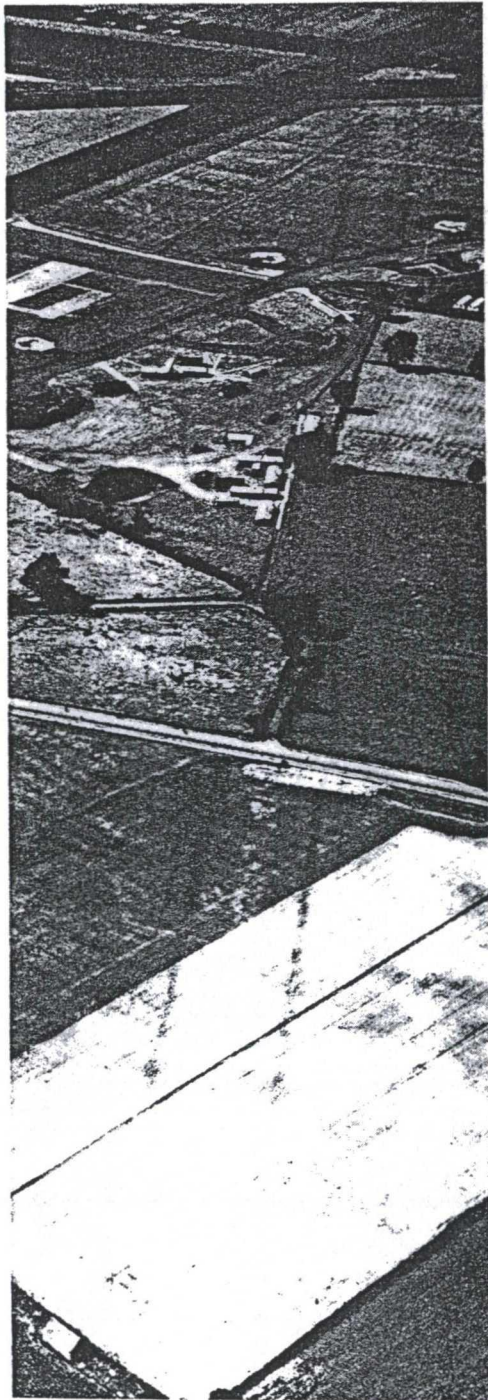
Percival Turnbull
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SCORTON CURSUS

LOCATION MAP



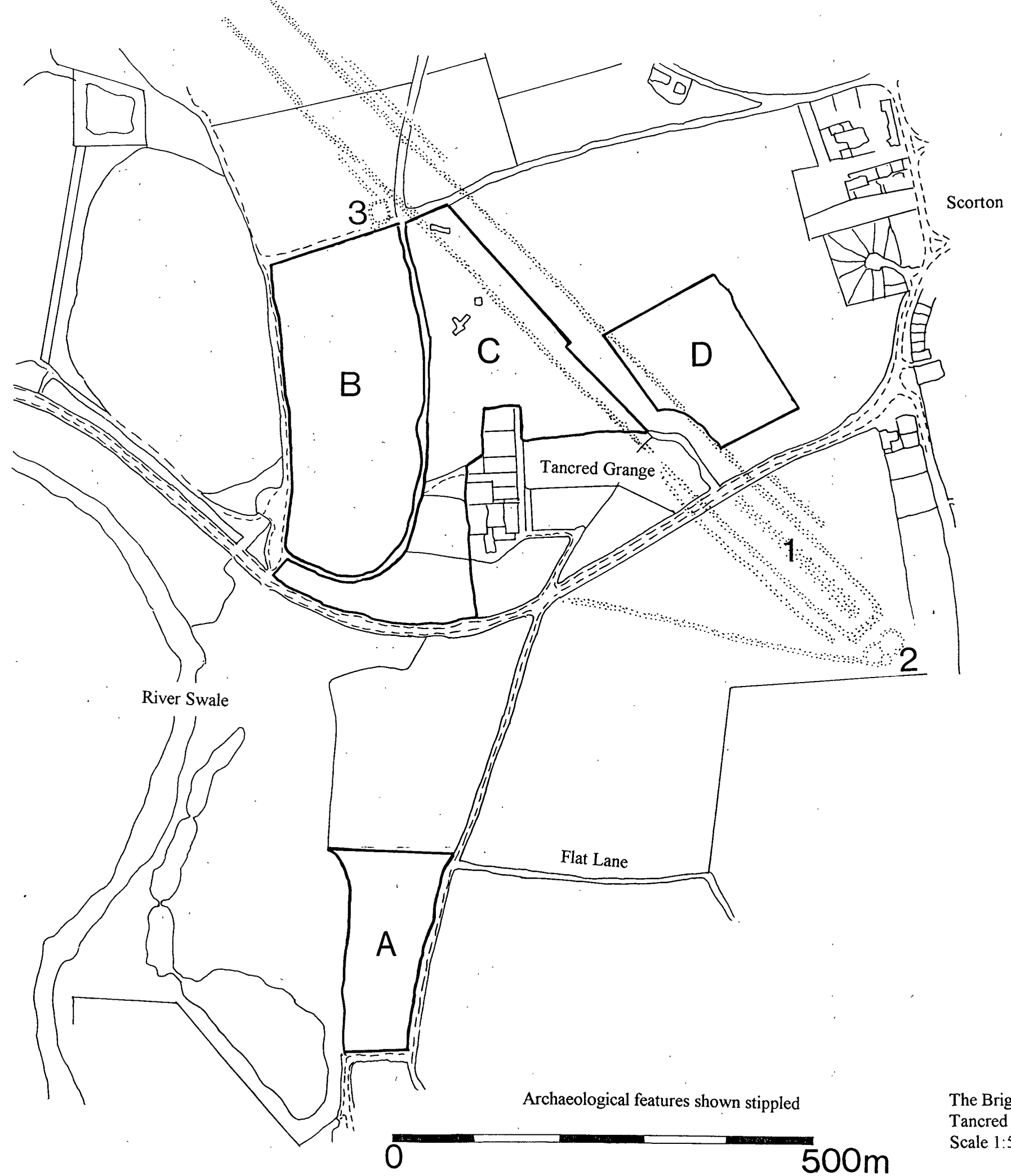
After Topping 1982



View from SE terminal showing associated ring-ditch cropmarks. Outer ditches are apparent in this area in addition to a central bleached feature which may represent a series of contiguous mounds.



View looking from the NW towards the SE terminal end. (Photos: Cambridge University Collection, copyright reserved).



The Brigantia Archaeological Practice
Tancred Quarry: location plan
Scale 1:5,000