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**Plompton Borrow Pit,
North Yorkshire**

**Trial Excavation
June 1990**



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

GRID REF SE3515 5396 - TAILEN FROM WYAS

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Trial Excavations at Plompton Borrow Pit, North Yorkshire

Introduction

On Wednesday and Thursday, 13th and 14th of June 1990, officers of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service undertook trial excavations at the site of the borrow pit at Plompton in North Yorkshire. The excavation arose as a result of a gradiometer survey on the site in May 1990. By mid-June work on the pit had already commenced but Tarmac surveyors had left an area which roughly corresponded with the position of an anomaly discovered during the geophysical survey (see Figs 1 and 2).

Aim

The aim of the exercise was to locate, record and determine the nature of the large rectangular anomaly recorded by the gradiometer survey, and if possible, to obtain evidence that would indicate its date and function.

Method

Tarmac kindly provided a JCB with a bladed ditching bucket, and in accordance with the aims outlined above, trial trenches were positioned to locate a north-south orientated ditch, and possibly associated internal pits. Three trenches were cut along a north-south axis, with two of them joined by a north-south trench (Fig 2).

The ploughsoil was approximately 20cm deep and rested directly on a weathered gritstone with occasional outcrops of bedded gritstone. A ditch cutting through bedrock was observed in all three of the east-west trenches. The pits on the other hand were not evident and could not be located in the limited time available. It is suggested that they may be several metres to the north of the area pre-determined by the Tarmac surveyors in which the trial excavations were restricted.

Results

Three sections across the major ditch were excavated and information regarding its profile and fills was obtained (Fig 3).

The ditch was c. 0.60 metres deep from the top of the ploughsoil and in all instances cut through the natural gritstone. Section 1 shows a flattened base whereas the other

profiles are more rounded. A uniform fill of a mid-brown sand devoid of any artefacts filled the ditch in sections 1 and 2 but the third section was slightly different. This exhibited a dual filling of a mid-brown sand sealed by a grey/black sand with charcoal inclusions. A quantity of bone and pottery was retrieved from the upper fill together with a small amount of corroded iron, stone and glass.

The Bone

Seventeen fragments of animal bone were recovered from the grey/black filling of ditch section 3. The species represented are:

Horse - maxilla with 4th premolar and 2nd molar - elderly

Cattle - single molar tooth, broken, 1st phalanx freshly broken

Sheep/goat - pelvis fragment - young

Red deer - antler tine

It is not possible to conclude from the bone assemblage the period the material was deposited.

The Pottery

Fourteen fragments of pottery and one fragment of tile were recovered from the grey/black filling of ditch section 3. The potsherds represented at least four vessels, all attributable to the 15th or 16th century. The best represented vessel is an imported stoneware drinking mug, made at Raeren in the Rhineland. The type was imported to England in the later 15th and early 16th centuries.

Stone

A thin, micaceous stone fragment with a worn surface and rounded edge. The smoothness of one of the surfaces and the appearance of the round edge suggest a working of the stone rather than natural weathering.

Discussion

As mentioned above, all of the finds were restricted to the upper fill of ditch section 3 and their presence is regarded as significant with respect to the dating of the filling of the ditch.

Four aspects of the material are noteworthy with respect to its integrity:

The tight date range of the assemblage,

The unabraded nature of the sherds,

The lack of modern contaminants, and

The spatially restricted nature of the assemblage which precludes deposition by plough action.

Taken together these indicate that the deposit is likely to be contemporary with the upper filling of the ditch. If so, then the dates for the pottery, and the Raeren drinking mug in particular would suggest that the upper level of the ditch was open during the early 16th century or later.

No material was recovered from the primary filling of the ditch, and it is therefore not possible to obtain a date which approximates to its cutting and subsequent period of use prior to the start of the backfilling.

Conclusion

The trial trenches were positioned to enable an investigation of selected anomalies which appear on a gradiometer survey of the area. An anomaly identified as a ditch was located in three sections and excavation showed it to be rock-cut with an average depth of 0.60 metres. No finds were present in the primary fill, making a date for the cutting of the ditch impossible to ascertain. In the secondary filling of ditch section 3, however, a quantity of artefacts including several pottery sherds was present, and their date range suggests that the upper level of the ditch was open in the post-medieval period.

During the stripping of the ploughsoil an attempt was made to locate anomalies suggestive of internal pits. These could not be located and a shortage of time prevented a more wide-ranging search in the area to the east of the major ditch described above.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Dave Berg and Stuart Wrathmell of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service for providing information on the animal bone and the pottery.

P Abramson

June 1990

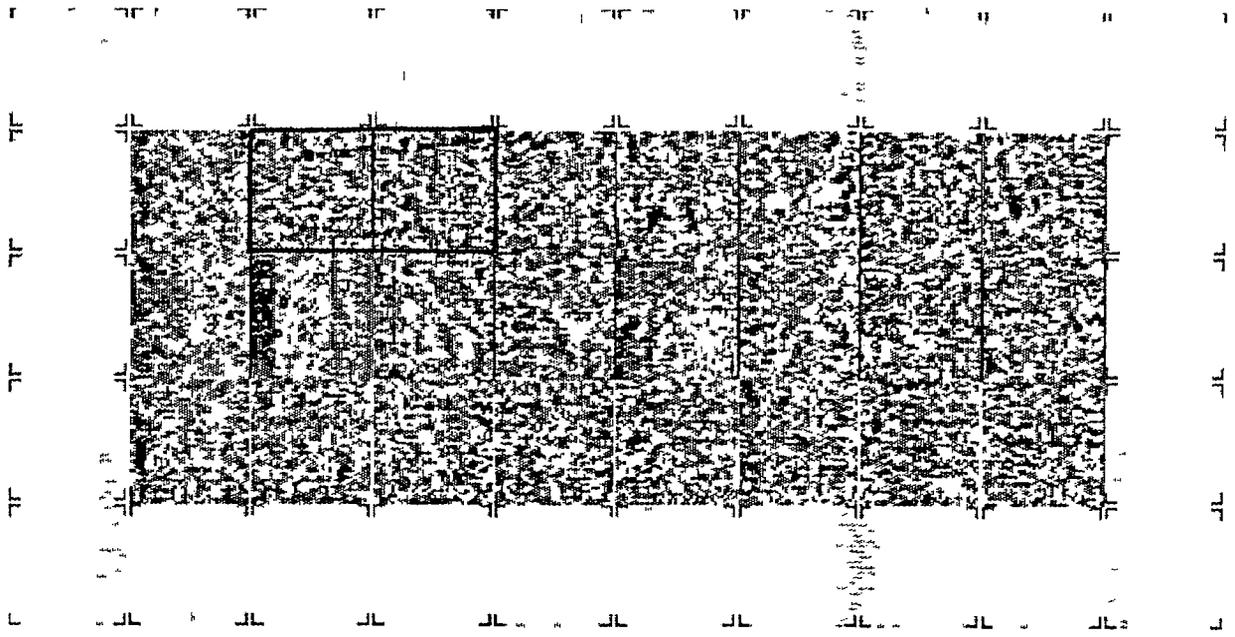


Fig 1 A print-out of the geophysical data showing an anomaly in the boxed area

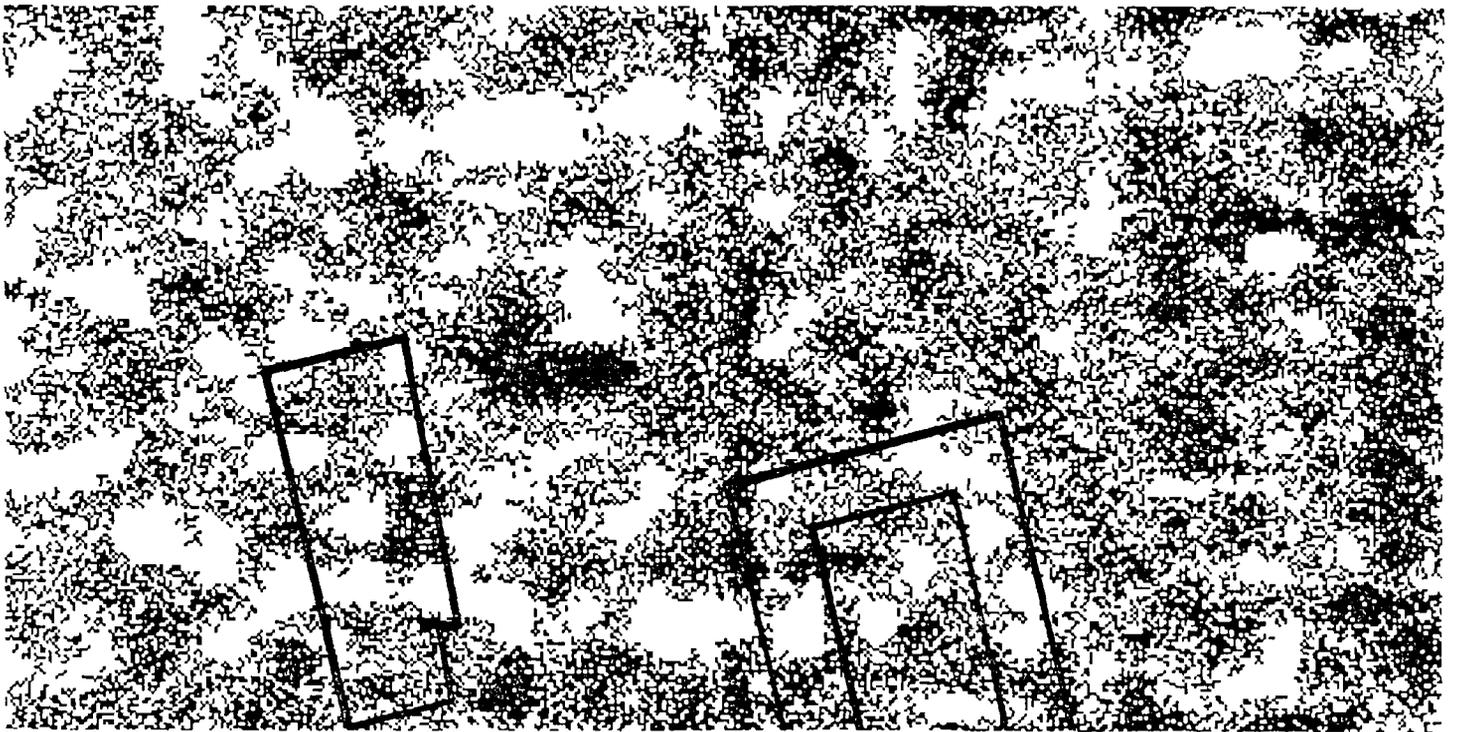


Fig 2 A dot density enlargement of the anomaly with the approximate position of trial trenches (approx scale 1 200)

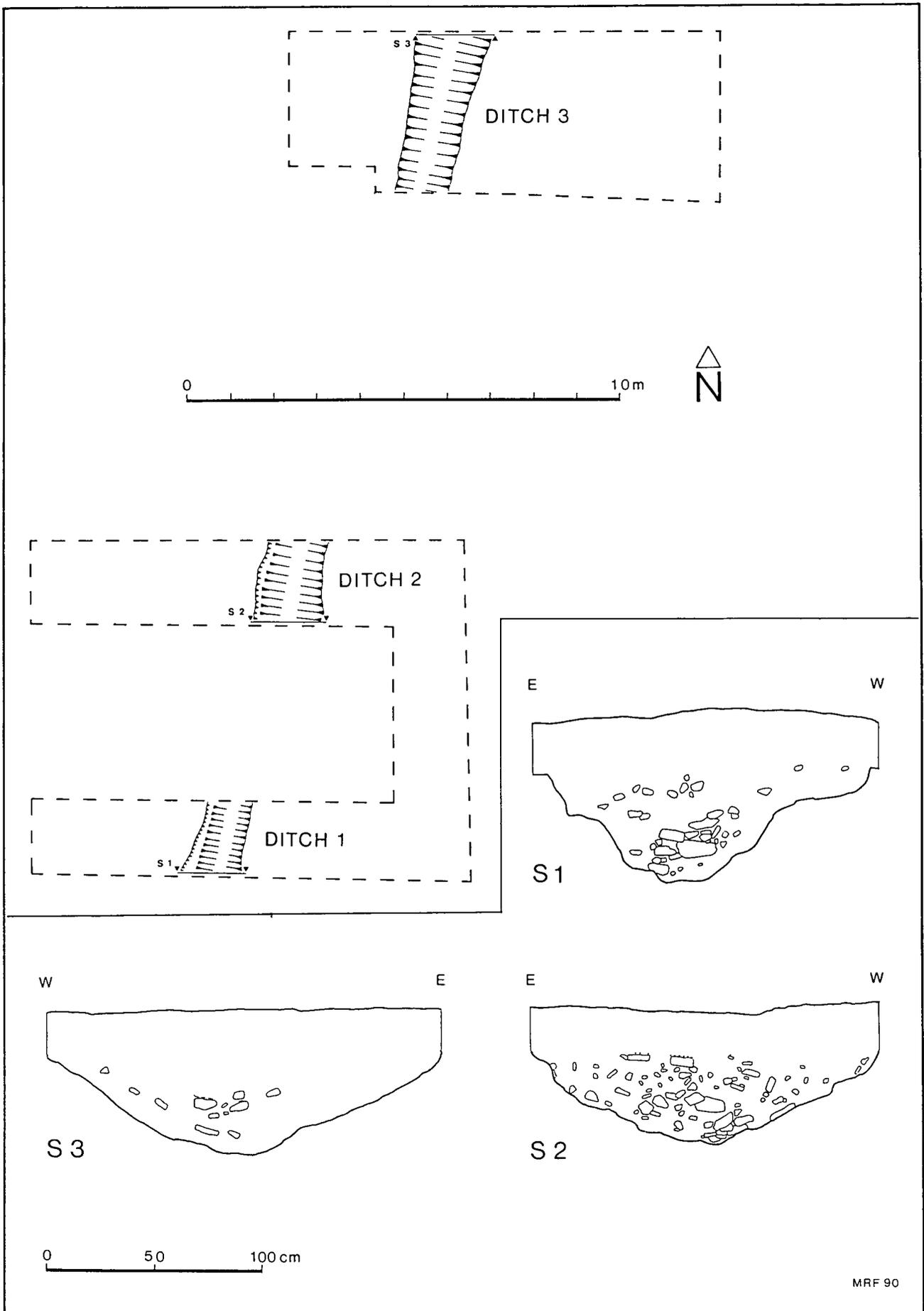


Fig 3 A plan and sections of the excavated ditch located in the trial trenches (scale 1 125)