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Kirk Smeaton
 Quarry,
 North Yorkshire

E of Windhill Plantation

ABRAMSON, P (1989)
 (WYAS RA 24)

Trial Excavations 1989



West Yorkshire
Archaeology Service

Trial Excavations at Kirk Smeaton Quarry Extension Site, North Yorkshire

(Grid Reference SE 5120475)

Introduction

Following a geophysical survey of a proposed quarry extension site in March 1989, staff of the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service (WYAS) were requested by CSL Surveys (Planning Consultants) to undertake limited archaeological excavations on land belonging to their client, Drinkwater Saby (Fig. 1).

Several anomalies that appeared on the geophysical survey were pre-selected for investigation by staff of

the North Yorkshire County Council Archaeology Unit (Fig. 2), and these were located in the trenches opened by the WYAS.

The excavation was undertaken on 25th, 26th and 27th October 1989 by three officers of the WYAS. The ploughsoil was machine-stripped using a 70" wide ditching bucket on a JCB, kindly provided by Drinkwater Saby.



Fig. 1: Location of the proposed quarry site and the approximate position of the survey.
(Scale 1: 3000)

Aims

The object of the excavation was to determine the nature of the anomalies recorded on the geophysical

survey and to retrieve evidence which may have helped resolve their date and function.

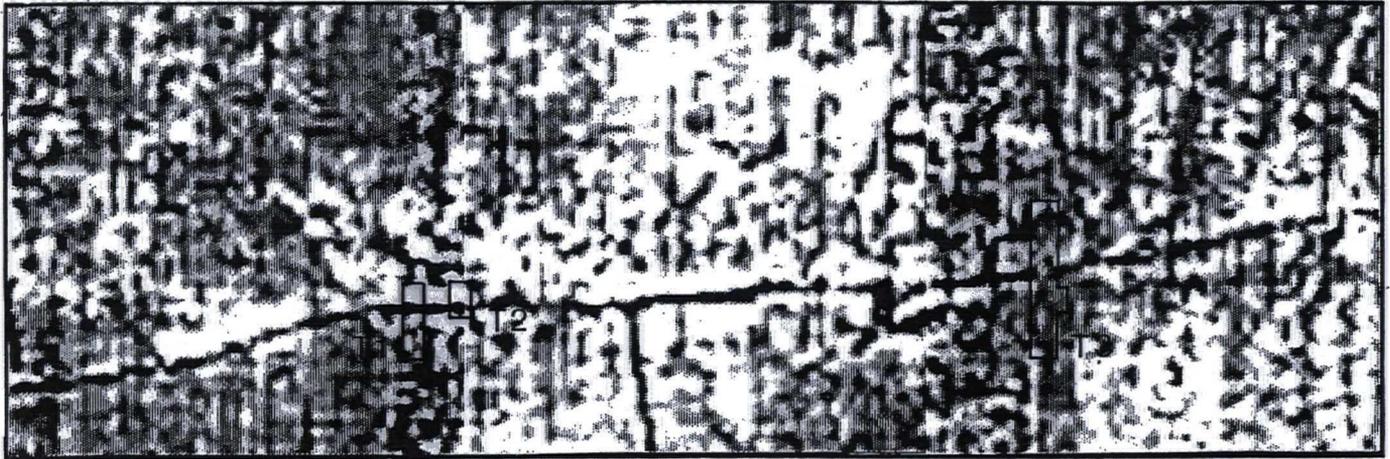


Fig. 2: The location of the three trenches in relation to the geophysical survey. (Scale 1: 1000)

Description

Trench 1 (Fig. 3a)

This was the most westerly of the three trenches. It measured 10 by 2m and revealed a segment (004) of an east-west orientated ditch. This feature shows on the survey as a continuous dark line stretching across the full length of the survey area.

The line of the ditch was ascertained and it was then excavated using the JCB. The east section of the ditch was cleaned, photographed and recorded (Pl. I).

Depth: One metre from the top of ploughsoil to the bottom of the ditch

Profile: Almost 3m wide at the top, tapering down to a U-shaped bottom with sides at roughly 45 degrees.

Fills: A mid-brown primary silt (005) was sealed by a band of limestone rubble in a red-brown sandy matrix (006). Sealing this was a stone-free layer of mid-brown sand (007). The sharp contrast between this fill and the rubble beneath it could either reflect the primary and secondary silting process or indicate a recut into the ditch fill. Immediately adjacent to the band of fine sand was a shallow scoop filled with small stones in mid-brown soil (008).

Six metres to the south of the ditch a square-cut feature (009) was recorded in soil plan. Lack of time prevented the excavation of the feature, but it was observed during the surface cleaning that a thin band of mid-brown clay (011) appeared to line its southern edge. A similar deposit was recorded on another feature in Trench 3.

Trench 2 (Fig. 3b)

This trench was located 3.5m east of Trench 1 and was required to corroborate the projected line of the ditch described above. The east section (012) was cleaned photographed and recorded (Fig. 3d). Although the profile and dimensions were similar to those in the first segment, the nature of the fills differed slightly.

The primary fill of limestone rubble (013) was sealed by a layer of mid-brown sand containing a moderate quantity of small stones (014). A shallow scoop filled with sand (015) was observed at the northern end of the section.

No other features were present in this trench.

Trench 3 (Fig. 3c)

Trench 3 was situated 70m east of Trench 2 and located the position of the major ditch as well as other features to its north and south.

The alignment of the ditch (022) was recorded, and in the time available the surface fill of limestone rubble in mid-brown sand (023) was excavated manually. Six and a half metres to its north, a linear feature (026), orientated diagonally to the axis of the trench, was filled with a red-brown clay-sand (027) to a depth of 0.10m. This was cut by a curving section of ditch (024) which was filled with a fine, mid-brown sand (025) to a depth of 0.45m.

A pit situated 1m to the south of the major ditch, initially ran into the edge of the trench, but the edge was extended to reveal the full dimensions of the pit. Excavation revealed the following sequence. A north-south orientated slot (019) with a clay lining (020) on the west side had been cut by a rectangular grave pit (016). The grave may have been disturbed by a later intrusion.

The grave contained a single skeleton orientated north/south, with the head to the north and facing the west (Pl. II). The body was crouched and rested on its right side.

The burial was located at a depth of 0.25m below the surface of the sub-soil. The fill of the grave consisted of a mid-brown sandy loam (021), and the condition of the bone was poor considering the nature of the

limestone-based soil of the locality. All but the most robust bones had virtually disappeared. Some of the teeth were in a ghastly condition but this could be due to poor dental health as opposed to poor soil preservation.

The skeleton was fully excavated, and it was established that grave goods were not present. No evidence for a surrounding barrow ditch was located in the narrow trench.

Discussion

The major ditch line recorded in the earlier geophysical survey was revealed in each of the three trenches. It was shown that the ditch was of moderate proportions, but artefacts were absent from the fill and its date could not be established. It was not clearly demonstrated whether the ditch had been re-cut, or whether the different fillings were a reflection of the normal primary and secondary silting processes.

In the most easterly of the trenches (Trench 3) other features produced further evidence of earlier human activity. The burial is most likely to be of prehistoric, or of pre-Christian date, owing to the north/south orientation of the body and its crouched position. The surviving bone was lifted, and it is possible that enough material exists to provide basic pathological information. The grave was situated 1m south of the main ditch and no direct stratigraphical relationship between the two could be ascertained.

No other graves were present in this trench, although a rectangular feature in Trench 1 (009), which remained unexcavated, was of similar proportions to the excavated grave.

To the north of the ditch, the two gullies which were sectioned were devoid of archaeological material, but cannot be dismissed as natural because of the regularity of their edges and their proximity to the ditch and the grave. From the texture and type of fillings it was clear that the earlier of the two gullies was the linear feature, whose fill was cut by gully 024. It was not possible to stratigraphically relate the two gullies to the main ditch or the grave.

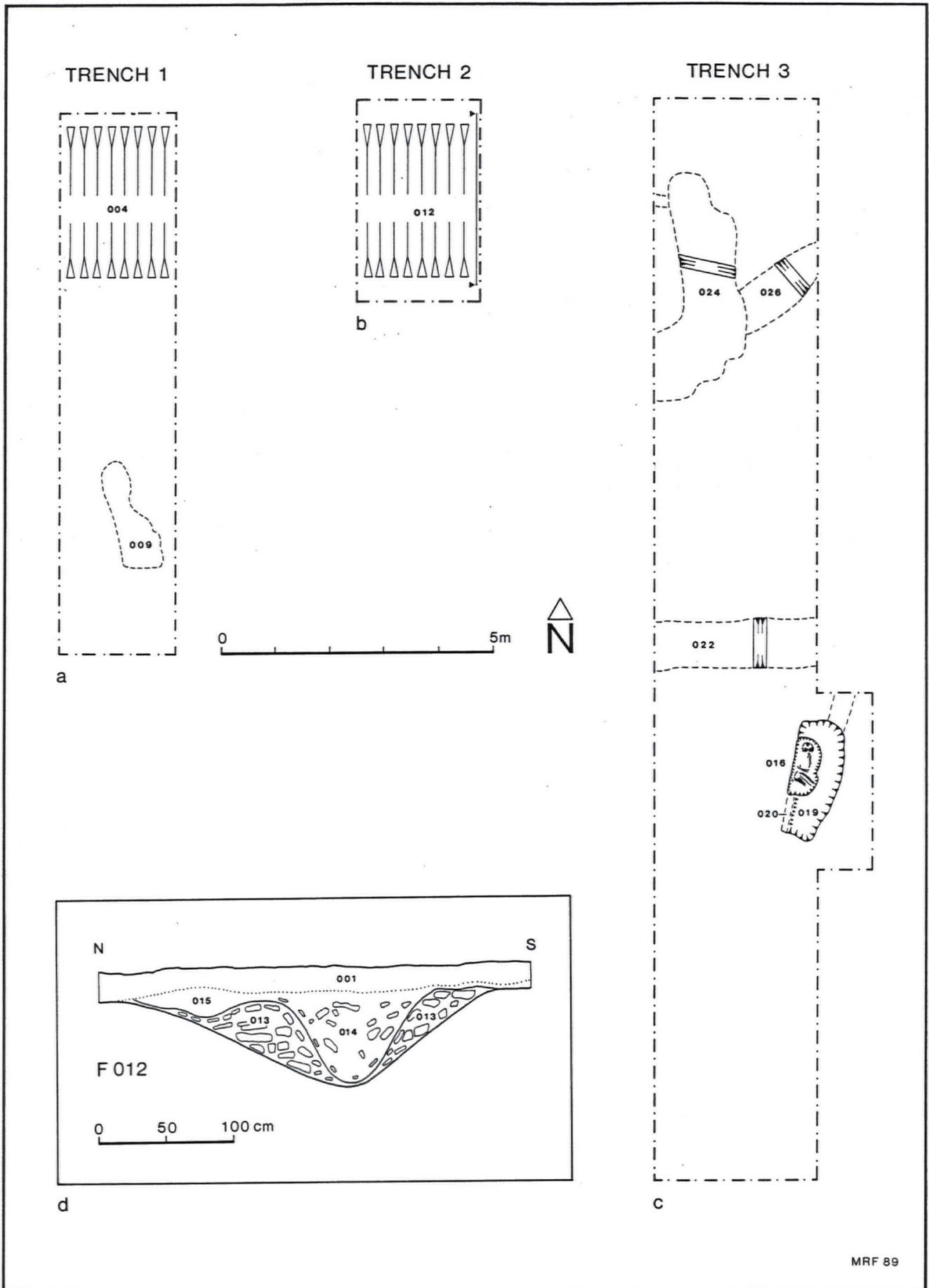


Fig. 3: The features located in Trenches 1-3 (a, b and c) and the east section of the ditch in Trench 2 (d).

Conclusion

The trial trenches confirmed that the anomalies plotted on the geophysical survey warranted further archaeological investigation.

As a result of excavation, the nature of the features was established, but the absence of any dating evidence from the ditch and gully sections was lamentable.

The presence of a crouched inhumation does not necessarily indicate intensive prehistoric or pre-Christian activity on, or close to the site, although a solitary burial is unlikely and it is possible that further graves are present. It is probable that if there were there to be any future archaeological work on the site, it would initially concentrate on discovering the extent and nature of funerary activity.

In a field to the west of the survey area, a cropmark

of a five-sided enclosure with internal features could denote an enclosed settlement site. It is not possible on the basis of a single inhumation to link the burial to the nearby enclosure, but the possibility cannot be excluded and a relationship between the two would be significant.

Dr Jacobs, of the Claro Coroners Office, was told of the discovery of the skeleton and was informed that the crouched position of the body and the condition of the bones pointed to the archaeological nature of the burial. It was further stated that due care and respect would be paid to the exhumed remains and that they would not be disposed of in an improper manner. A copy of this report with an accompanying photograph of the burial is to be sent to Dr Jacobs who wished to be informed about further developments.

Philip Abramson
November 1989



Pl. I: East section of the major ditch in Trench 1 showing the variation in the fills.



Pl. II: The crouched inhumation in Trench 3.