

**Multi-period Excavations
at
Catterick Race Course, North Yorkshire**

An Interim Report
By Colm Moloney

NYCC HER	
SNY	12070
ENY	313
CNY	1784
Parish	1015
Rec'd	?1996

West Yorkshire Archaeology Service

11 January (1995) → 1996?

Summary

The excavations at Catterick Race Course identified multi-phase occupation spanning 4000 years. The earliest evidence from the site consisted of a Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age burial cairn and a group of associated pits. Subsequently a large enclosed settlement was located to the east of the cairn. This settlement dated to the Late Iron Age/Roman period. Further activity in the Roman period is attested by the construction of a large amphitheatre which incorporated the cairn in its construction. The final phase of activity consisted of a 6th century Anglian cemetery which produced 44 inhumations.

Introduction

During the Summer of 1995 the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service was commissioned by Northern Aggregates, through their consultant Mike Griffiths, to undertake the excavation of part of the interior of Catterick Race Course. The excavation was required as a planning condition imposed by North Yorkshire County Council as part of the planning permission for sand and gravel extraction. The excavation was undertaken in accordance with a specification prepared by Mike Griffiths and Associates.

Location and Geology

The site consisted of 2.8ha located at the southern end of Catterick Race Course, bounded by the flat track to the north and by the hurdle track to the south, east, and west. The Race Course is located to the south of Catterick Bridge and half a mile to the north of Catterick village. Situated on the Swale floodplain, the underlying geology consisted of gravel with occasional deposits of alluvial silt. The ground was at its highest at the west end of the site and fell away to the east where it gradually levelled out at 60m OD.

Aims and Objectives

The excavation was designed to record and interpret the nature of the previously identified enclosure. A number of geophysical anomalies located to the east of the enclosure which had been tentatively interpreted as sunken-featured buildings were to be investigated also.

Therefore it would seem likely that the bank represents the foundation of a large timber amphitheatre which had an internal paved area encircling the arena. No evidence has thus far been recovered for the position of the entrances.

Further Roman activity has been identified immediately to the east of the amphitheatre. Three cobbled floor surfaces were identified within the south-west corner of the site. Of these, two were particularly well-defined (one was certainly enclosed by a ditch or possible 'drip gully') and would seem to reflect discrete floor surfaces. In plan, the largest of these measured some 8m by 7m. The third surface was truncated by Anglian graves and, more significantly, by a number of enclosure or boundary ditches.

The deposits above these appeared to be mixed with a significant proportion of Romano-British wares included with a coarse hand made pottery of probably local origin. A full analysis of finds in relation to stratigraphy would be required to appreciate the importance of these features, though the possibility of Romano-British occupation cannot be ruled out.

As with the cairn a well preserved podsol was preserved beneath the amphitheatre bank and this was thin sectioned to allow a full analysis of the pre-amphitheatre environment and how this compares or contrasts with the pre-cairn environment. The surface of the podsol was evident as a thin dark band of soil which was stratified between two thin layers of iron pan.

Enclosed Settlement

Aerial photographs of the area, taken in the 1970s, showed a rectangular enclosure of c 0.5ha which appeared to contain evidence of at least two circular features, thought to be roundhouses. Later geophysical work, undertaken in 1984 by English Heritage, further defined this enclosure and, in addition to confirming those already suspected, clearly pointed to a third 'roundhouse' within the enclosure area. Subsequent trial trenching showed that part of one of the circular structures had survived to a depth of c 0.3m. In addition, ceramic material from the fill of this feature suggested a second century Romano-British date for the site.

Excavation has significantly enhanced this view. The complete floor-plans of four 'roundhouse' structures were excavated. Two of these contained recognisable floor surfaces with evidence for hearths. The depth of these deposits was shown to exceed 0.8m and suggested very significant roundhouse constructions. However, despite numerous finds of ceramic (and stone, slag and bone) the date of construction remains equivocal, a late Roman/early Anglian date seems most likely - although a late prehistoric/pre-Roman date cannot yet be ruled out.

A number of other, less complete, circular features were also revealed in addition to a rectangular post-built structure. Finally, a series of cobbled floors were exposed at the south-west corner of the site. These appeared to have pre-dated the ditched enclosure boundaries and were thought to be Romano-British in date.

Summary of Results

Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Cairn

The earliest archaeology from the site dates to the Late Neolithic/ Early Bronze Age period. This consisted of a large stone mound which was reveted by large stone boulders. This cairn measured 40m in diameter and contained eight small burial chambers constructed from large river boulders. These cists were concentrated in two areas, six at the southern end and two at the northern end. Nothing was recovered from these with the exception of a deposit of charcoal in the northernmost chamber. A large amount of disarticulated human bone was, however, recovered from the surface of the mound and a human skull was recovered from the base of the cairn. A number of pits were located to the north west of the cairn associated with Late Neolithic pottery, large amounts of burnt animal bone, and flint tools.

A well preserved podsol was identified beneath the cairn make-up and this was thin sectioned to allow a full analysis of the pre-cairn environment. The surface of the podsol was evident as a thin dark band of soil which was stratified between two thin layers of iron pan.

The Roman Amphitheatre and associated features

By the middle of the 2nd century AD the Roman town of *Cataractomum* had been established about a mile to the north of Catterick Race Course. Dere Street passed within 150m of the west side of the excavation area. By the end of the 2nd century the town appears to have expanded and an amphitheatre was constructed under what is now the back straight of the Race Course. This incorporated the prehistoric cairn into its bank which measured 40m in width and 140 m in diameter. Although only clipped by the excavation trench the interior appears to have consisted of a finely cobbled surface from which the majority of the dating evidence was retrieved. The pottery from the interior included colour coated and Samian wares while the pottery from the bank consisted of grey ware, cream ware and black burnished ware. It is hoped that further survey work will define the exact nature of the interior. This is likely to take place early in 1996.

The bank was constructed of river cobbles of varying sizes in a matrix of black silty loam. It is likely that this material derived from a combination of the levelling of the burial cairn and the excavation of material from the interior of the amphitheatre. There is a notable drop in level in the area of the arena compared with the area directly outside the bank.

Some evidence for timber structure within the make up of the bank was identified. This consisted of a number of post-holes sealed by the bank and several depressions on the surface of the bank which have been tentatively interpreted as ploughed out post settings. The underlying post-holes may have held interlacing timbers which would have provided internal support for the bank. It is likely that the surface settings would have supported a timber superstructure which may have formed the seating arrangement.

Discussion

For the purpose of the following discussion, the enclosure may be loosely subdivided into three groups firstly, the enclosure boundaries, secondly, the large circular ditched 'roundhouse' structures, thirdly, the smaller/fragmentary ditched or post-built structures. The structures are discussed with reference to attributed master numbers (eg M8004) - refer to the Archive Inventory for further discussion. The structures containing cobbled floors are discussed as associated with the Amphitheatre (see above) as they have been shown to predate the enclosure ditches stratigraphically.

The Enclosure

The rectangular enclosure, 116m by 78m in plan, was found to comprise at least two main phases with the innermost ditch, M8002, being entirely replaced at some point in time by the main outer ditch, M8001. The ditch sections show a large variation in depth and width but are, typically, c 1.6m in width and 0.8m in depth. In places, a third ditching phase is also visible, although it is unclear if this completes an entire circuit of the enclosure. Some degree of contemporaneity between the ditches may also be suggested.

Entrances to this enclosure were evident at the north-east corner and along the west edge, that to the north-east, seemingly forming the 'main' access. This picture is further complicated by the expansion or continuation of the enclosure to the north and to the south-west, although contemporary field ditch boundary systems may well be indicated.

Dating evidence from the excavated ditch segments is, on the whole, poor, although the form and fabric of ceramic finds from the upper ditch fills are certainly comparable to similar finds from the roundhouse structures, M8004 and M8006 - see below, and the recutting of the enclosure ditches mirrors that seen within the excavated ditch segments of these 'buildings'. One sample of charcoal, from the north-east ditch terminal entrance, may be suitable for C¹⁴ dating purposes.

Circular 'Roundhouse' Structures

M8004. This feature represents the westernmost ringditch visible from aerial photographs and geophysical survey. The ditch, sub-square in plan with a 'diameter' of approximately 15m, over 1.9m wide and 0.8m deep, was observed to contain entrances to the east and south-west, the 'main' entrance being that to the east, with an observed gap of c 5.1m. The excavated ditch segments showed clear evidence for later recutting. The recuts were typically shallower measuring c 0.6m in depth. The respective ditch fills contained large quantities of burnt cobbles, or potboilers, with a moderate quantity of ceramic finds suitable for dating.

The internal structure of this feature comprised a 'sunken' or eroded floor surface with evidence for burning and two possible hearths. It was not possible to see further structural evidence at this level (possibly due to dry conditions), although excavation of the central floor surface revealed a (near) square arrangement of postholes, suggesting a building of about 6.2-6.5m width, with a likely entrance to the east.

M8006 This structure bears many similarities in construction to that of M8004. Entrances were observed to the east and south-west. The entrance at the east formed the main access and was cobbled in the later phases. The gap between these terminals varies from 3.5-4.8m.

Three near-circular ditches were observed, with diameters between 12-15m, the terminals of each meeting at the east entrance. The maximum depth, 0.44m, and width, c. 0.9m, of these suggests some truncation of features, but it seems likely that the foundations for this structure were somewhat shallower than those of M8004. The ditches contained a significant quantity coarse pottery, comparable to that found within M8004, and a moderate quantity of potboilers.

Internally, floor deposits were apparently sealed beneath a compacted destruction layer (context 375) at the base of which a large quantity of pottery was retrieved. The removal of this layer revealed a paved floor surface, adjacent to the east entrance, and stone paved hearth. This was dated magnetically during the excavation to AD300-450 or less likely AD1450-1490 (to 68% level of significance). Spot dating of pottery on site, however, suggested a prehistoric or pre-Roman Iron Age date. Other finds of significance include a stone ingot mould and two 'unfinished' beehive querns, one of which appeared to be set beside the hearth, to be used, possibly, as a mortar. As it has been impossible so far to positively assign a date to the pottery from typological comparisons, the magnetic date of AD300-450 would seem the most likely date for the final phase of the structure and consequently the pottery.

The recorded floor-plan shows an extensively detailed pattern, suggesting a structure similar to that revealed within M8004, perhaps with other phases of construction or a complex hearth construction. A small inner gulley and the possible remains of a dwarf wall may also be discerned. Analysis of the slag recovered from these deposits may show types of metalworking and, conceivably, the manufacture of copper (alloy) artefacts.

M8005 This structure represents the ringditch, visible from aerial photographs, to the south-east corner of the enclosure. Upon excavation this feature was observed to overlie an earlier, smaller ringditch feature to the west.

The larger ringditch is sub-circular in plan with a diameter of 15m and a single large entrance to the east (3.9m wide). The very dry conditions on site did not produce favourable circumstances for the identification of internal features or postholes and it seems likely that many of the features associated with this building have been truncated. However, post-pits were identified to either side of the entrance and postholes were suggested within the southern half of the ringditch by the location of groups of cobbles within the natural silt. No finds were recovered from the respective fills of these features.

M8007 This feature appeared to have been partly excavated, presumably during English Heritage trial work in 1984. Only half of the surrounding ringditch, with a diameter of approximately 13m, was observed to survive. Four large postholes, from which a modest quantity of pottery fragments were recovered, survived within the ringditch.

Post-built Structures and Smaller Ringditch Features

M8010 This large rectilinear arrangement of postholes which was observed to the north-east of structure M8004, suggested a timber structure of approximate dimensions 15m by 6m. No finds were recovered from the excavated features and it seems unlikely that this structure represents domestic occupation.

M8014 A number of smaller fragmentary ringditch features were observed, mainly to the south of M8004, but also to the south-west of M8006. These would seem to represent ancillary buildings although some phasing of these structures was indicated. Few finds were recovered which might prove conclusive for dating purposes.

The Anglian Cemetery

An Anglian cemetery was located in the south west corner of the site. The 44 inhumations revealed were mainly adult excepting two juveniles. The majority of the adults appear to be female on the basis of the associated grave goods although a number of male burials were present. Grave goods were of a high quality and included objects of glass, amber, various metals and ceramics. The 'female' assemblage appears to consist of glass and amber necklaces, assorted bronze brooches and fasteners, girdle hangers, rings, knives and buckles. The 'male' assemblage was less elaborate and consisted of knives, spearheads, buckles and in one example a shield from which the boss survived. A gaming piece and a spindle whorl fashioned from Samian ware were also recovered. The brooches have been dated typologically to between AD 450 and AD 550.

The Graves

Summary

A total of 44 human skeletons within graves were identified, of which 42 were excavated. The remaining two were observed in section but not investigated.

Of the 42 skeletons excavated all were located along the western edge of the site, with the majority confined to the south-western corner - the cemetery proper (36 in an area of 4779m²). Of the remaining six skeletons two were found on the northern edge and 4 at the southern edge of the cairn. Furthermore, 7 small finds composed of human skeletal remains (HSR) were recovered during the excavation of the cairn.

Cemetery proper

Grave orientation was predominantly on an east-west alignment with the head to the west. Of these east-west aligned skeletons the majority were crouched and were organised into spatially distinct 'plots' in rows running east-west.

Six of the inhumations do not fit this general pattern in the cemetery proper. Four were oriented north-south with the head to the north. Two were oriented northeast-southwest with the head to

the southwest. Three graves contained contemporary pairs of skeletons. Only one grave showed evidence of having been truncated by a later grave. The earlier being on a north-south alignment and the later skeleton oriented east-west.

The majority of skeletons in the cemetery proper had associated grave goods with a diversity in quantity and composition. With the exception of the southernmost skeleton of the cairn group no associated grave finds were retrieved.

Amphitheatre bank

No bodies were discovered in a distinct band to the south of the cairn and north of the cemetery proper. This is suggestive of an upstanding feature being present in the landscape during the Anglian period and correlates to the position of the amphitheatre bank. The position of the 4 northernmost skeletons of the cemetery proper is possibly reflective of Anglian intrusion into the outside slope of the bank.

Neolithic cairn

A total of six skeletons were located along the edge of the Neolithic cairn (two to the north, four to the south). Only one (southernmost) displayed grave goods of Anglian date. The remainder together with the seven H S R 's may represent components of the Neolithic cairn, the Anglian cemetery or a combination of the two.

Objectives

An initial analysis of the excavated graves from the site has revealed a number of distinct differences in their composition. For example, the extended skeletons do not fit the general pattern observed in the cemetery proper. These may be a reflection of variables through time, culture and status exhibited in funerary practices.

The study of the grave assemblage shall comprise analysis of, and any interrelationship between, the

- i) location, orientation and attitude of the skeletons
- ii) sex and age of the grave occupants
- iii) composition of individual grave good assemblages
- iv) dates ascribed to the burials from the grave goods

However, other important questions and considerations need to be investigated. Are all the graves Anglian in date, or could those on the cairn be contemporary components of it? Does the cemetery correlate with other cemeteries in the area? The date range of the cemetery, and any relationship of the graves to the preceding archaeological landscape shall also be investigated.

Research Potential

Catterick Race Course undoubtedly represents one of the most important and best preserved archaeological resources to be identified in Northern England in recent years. The site offers the opportunity to examine 4000 years of landscape development and man's interaction with and modification of his environment. The potential for research which the site offers is beyond the scope of this particular project, the results of which will, undoubtedly, be incorporated into many academic synthetic projects for years to come. The main objective of the present publication will be to provide a concise and integrated account of the findings of the excavation to allow further academic research to be undertaken in the future. The potential for site specific analysis and research is detailed below

- * To clarify the chronology of the site and, in particular, to identify any interphase between the main periods of activity
- * to establish the date of the cairn and to determine the nature of its construction and whether it relates to any of the pits to the north
- * to establish the nature, function and chronology of the settlement
- * to establish whether the native population interacted with the Roman population either economically or socially
- * to establish the date of the construction of the amphitheatre
- * to determine the relationship between the amphitheatre and the prehistoric phases
- * to determine the relationship between the amphitheatre and the square stone buildings to the south west
- * to determine the function of the square Romano-British buildings
- * to determine and explain the spatial extent of the Anglian cemetery relative to the extent of the pre-Anglian archaeology
- * to determine the status of the cemetery
- * to investigate any interrelationship between the Anglian population and the native population
- * to place the site in a wider landscape context

Archive Inventory

Summary

The following contains an inventory for primary archive material resulting from full-scale excavation of a site at Catterick Racecourse, Catterick, North Yorkshire, undertaken by West Yorkshire Archaeology Service (WYAS) from 19th June-22nd September 1995. This archive comprises written context sheets, hand-drawn scale plans and sections, total station instrument plans and sections, and, colour transparency and monochrome photographs. In addition, registers for the above, and such small finds and samples as were taken on site (soil, C¹⁴ dating, identification) are also contained within this archive.

The Archive

Context Records

The primary archive contains 702 context cards, 001-702, including those for individual skeletons (listed within group context 8012), but excluding the group contexts described below. The context records are in accordance with the WYAS context recording manual (1995). The 702 context cards are divided into 14 A4 blue and brown binders of 50 contexts each.

The stratigraphy of the site was, as anticipated, largely horizontal in character, and therefore, group context numbers were allocated to most primary contexts in order to define specific areas of interest, and to allow greater access to the recorded information in subsequent phases of post-excavation.

Group No	Type	Description
8001	Ditch	Outer enclosure ditch
8002	Ditch	inner enclosure ditch
8003	Ditch	Linear Boundary ditch
8004	Ring-ditch	Westernmost hut circle
8005	Ring-ditch	Hut circle in SE corner of main enclosure
8006	Ring-ditch	Hut circle in NE corner of main enclosure
8007	Ring-ditch	Hut circle to S of 8006
8008	Cairn	Kerbed neolithic cairn
8009	Earthwork	Amphitheatre
8010	Building	Rectangular timber building
8011	Building(s)	Cobbled floors of Roman date
8012	Cemetery	44 inhumations
8013	Pit Group	18 pits beneath the cairn
8014	Ring-ditch(es)	Fragmentary ring ditch type features

The group context records contain references to all contexts that appear to be within a particular group category, and are, therefore, usually the first point of contact in searching through the archive. Many contain additional material such as sketches, matrices and plan/section numbers.

Small Finds

Although not anticipated at the outset, a significant quantity of small finds were recovered, largely from the cemetery, M8012. The majority of these were beads of amber or glass type. The small finds register contains over 1500 small finds also including flint, copper alloy and iron metalwork and pottery (mainly from floor surfaces). The register within the primary archive lies in two sources (as the quantity of finds rapidly exceeded the loose sheet file method) and is in any case superseded by a later dBase record.

Samples

A total of 113 samples (numbered #1-113) were removed for the purposes of environmental sampling, C¹⁴ dating, and soil susceptibility readings (if required). These will at first be subsampled to establish suitability for full sieving. Results of pollen assessment are still awaited. A further five soil profile samples (samples #201-205) were removed by Steve Carter from deposits beneath the cairn and amphitheatre.

Photographic Record

A total of 27 monochrome and 24 colour transparency films were exposed on site. Bracketed frames were taken of all excavated features and all graves/skeletons. The films are numbered according to WYAS' photographic register, contact prints and transparencies are stored in date order. A dBase listing of photographic information is included within the present inventory. The film numbers (in date order) are as follows -

Colour,				
2943 (30th June)	2954	2959	3051	3105
2942	2955	2969	3052	3106
2945	2956	2968	3053	3108
2937	2957	2967	3050	3107 (to 15th Sept)
2953	2958	2966	3054	

Monochrome -				
2938 (21st June)	2948	2963	3055	3157
2941	2949	3057	3062	3159
2940	2950	3056	3063	3158 (to 25th Sept)
2939	2965	2952	3064	
2937	2964	3058	3065	
2947	2962	3059	3066	

The contact prints and colour transparencies are stored within a single blue A4 binder.

Drawings

The archive contains 250 scale drawings, numbered 1-253, of excavated features and sections (numbers 57, 120, and 248 were not used). These occur on large format (over 0.5x0.5m) and small format (approximately A4) sheets. The sheet numbers are denoted first on context sheets i.e. drawing 76/140 refers to sheet number 76, drawing 140. All were hand-drawn except sections 118 and 252 which were produced by total station theodolite and section 222, which is photographic (later rectification is possible). Open area phase plans were drawn according to the 10m site grid (in general at a scale of 1:20).

Publication Proposals

It is proposed that the excavation be published in the West Yorkshire Archaeology Service Monograph series. The publication will consist of the following

Summary	150 words
Introduction	150 words
Location and geology	150 words
Archaeological background	1000 words
Aims and methodology	150 words
Site Structure	6000 words
Pottery report	3000 words
Anglian assemblage	5000 words
Stone objects	500 words
Human bone	3000 words
Animal bone	500 words
Metal working residues	500 words
Flint	500 words
Discussion	6000 words
Total approximately	26600 words

Illustrations	Number
Site location placing the excavation in historic landscape context	1
Phase 1 Cairn	
Plan of Cairn and associated pits	1
Section through cairn	1
Phase 2 Enclosure	
Overall plan	1
Larger scale plans of the three buildings	3
Sections through the ditches	7
Phase 3 Amphitheatre	
General plan of amphitheatre and associated structures	1
Detail of two associated structures	2
Phase 4 Cemetery	
General plan	1
<i> Finds</i>	
Pottery (30 - 40 fragments)	2 pages
Anglian artefacts	10
Stone (5 pieces)	5
X-rays of iron objects(5)	5
Detail of decoration on beads	5

The number of photographs to be illustrated is likely to be quite high and will largely be determined by the results of the artefact analysis