FAS

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS
SCORTON QUARRY, SCORTON
RICHMONDSHIRE

POST-EXCAVATION ASSESSMENT REPORT
March 1997

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PROJECT SUMMARY

Large scale rescue excavations in advance of gravel extraction have revealed the remains of an early Iron Age enclosed settlement (6th-3rd Century BC) and an extensive field system/enclosure pattern from a later Romano-British agricultural landscape (2nd-4th Century AD). Little survives of an earlier prehistoric ritual monument (4th Millenium BC) apart from a short length of a heavily truncated cursus ditch.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd gratefully acknowledge the support and help of various colleagues. In particular we would like to thank Mr G.Fyles (Senior Estates Surveyor) and the site manager Mr D.Stephenson (Tilcon Ltd) for their encouragement and patience during the fieldwork. We are grateful to Mr N.Campling and staff of the Archaeology Section, North Yorkshire County Council for the help and advice we recieved during the field project. During the excavation Mr Peter Topping and Prof. Carver provided valuable guidance for the excavation strategy.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The site was investigated at the invitation of Tilcon Ltd who had previously obtained licence to extract sand and gravel from the field (planning permission decision C1/34/6A). The proposed works constituted Phase 5 (west) of the quarry development plan, the last area to be quarried in the current concession.

The purpose of the investigations at Scorton Quarry was to record the archaeological remains on the site in advance of gravel extraction. A programme of works was implemented which followed a brief prepared by Field Archaeology Specialists Ltd and agreed by the County Archaeological Officer (Appendix A). The brief specified a sequence of archaeological investigations which would be implemented both during and after topsoil stripping.

The objectives of the archaeological programme, which were designed to complement, where possible, the previous investigations at the quarry, included the complete mapping of the native Romano-British field system and enclosure pattern; the characterisation of the earlier prehistoric landscape; and an assessment of the relationship of one to the other.

1.1 SCOPE OF REPORT

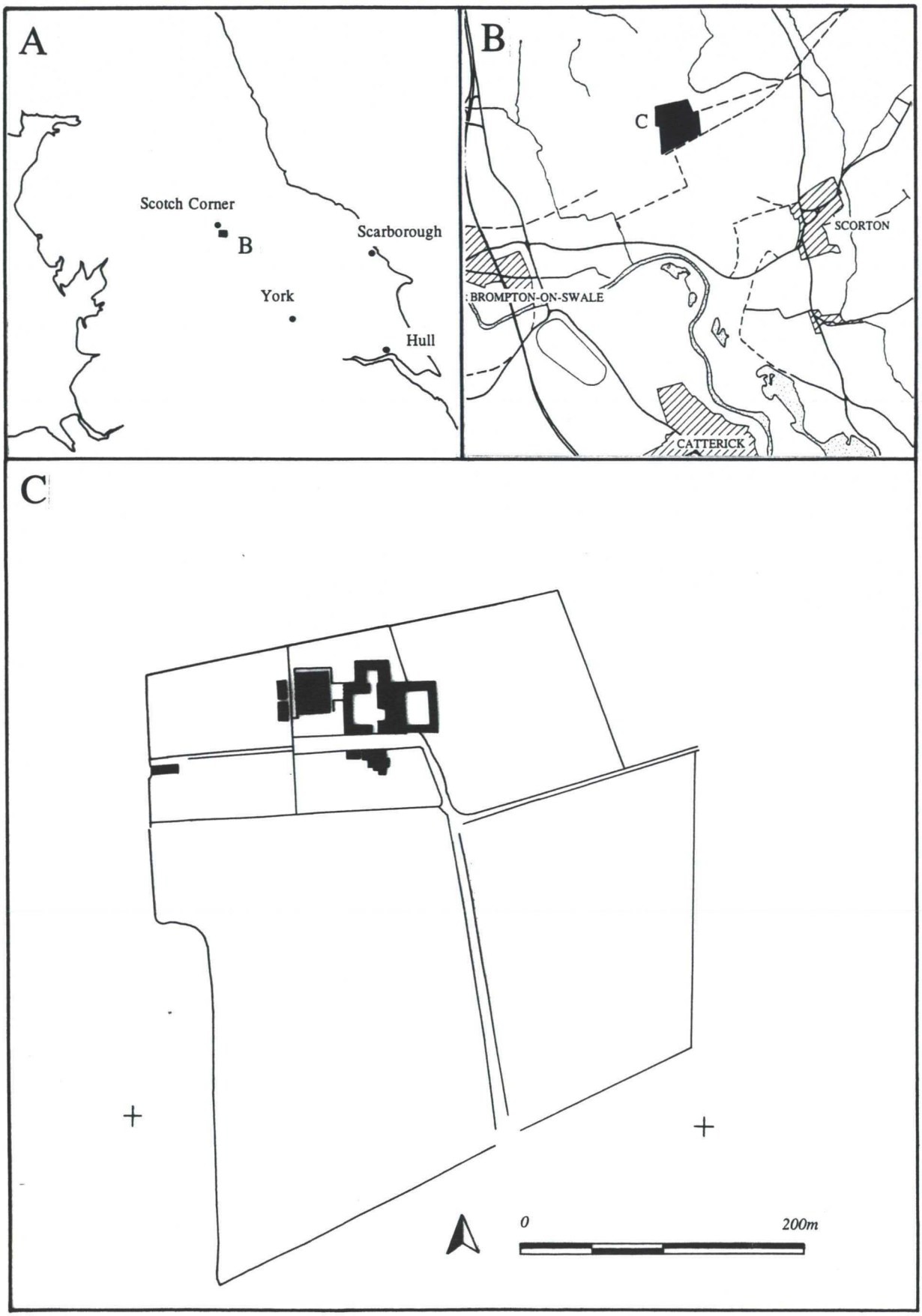
This report outlines the preliminary results of the excavations from Int.3 and assesses the importance of the discoveries from Int.2 and Int.3 for full post-excavation analysis, these recommendations are presented below (Chapter 6.0).

1.2 LOCATION AND LAND USE

The site lies at the north end of the Vale of York, on the north side of the River Swale approximately three kilometres north of Catterick village and two kilometres northeast of the Roman town of Cataractonium, at NGR NZ 238/009, in the parish of Scorton, Richmondshire, (Fig.1). The site lies within two fields immediately to the south of The Grange Farm covering the west end of OS parcel 0004, and parcel 8200 but also including an adjacent strip of land to the west, 75m wide, up to the edge of the haul road. A hedgerow which had separated this extra strip from field 8200 was dug out during the stripping phase.

The site is situated across the 61m contour on an old river gravel terrace of the Swale which overlies a solid geology of sandstone and marls. The covering soils are consistent with the Brickfield Series, a slight to moderately stoney loam, 0.30-0.35m deep (Sizer & Brignall 1993).

The investigations were carried out during 1995 and 1996, comprising two sessions of metal detecting (Int.17), three sessions of mapping and excavation (Int.3), and a short preliminary watching brief (Int.15) carried out in advance of complete stripping (Appendix B).



General location map Scorton Quarry

Fig. 1

The total area stripped during these sessions covered an area of just over 7.5 hectares (Fig.2).

The site lies next to a dismantled Second World War airfield and immediately north of a former branchline of the LNER railway. Only one structure from the airfield survives, a small nissan hut, located beyond the southwest corner of the site.

Just inside this corner of the site was a dump of farmyard debris partly obscuring the truncated remains of an old clinker built farm track that formerly ran in a northwesterly direction to Banks House Farm.

Before excavations commenced a large subsoil spoilheap, covering the additional strip of ground west of field 8200, was removed.

No upstanding earthworks were visible in the field prior to soil stripping, although further west Schadla-Hall (see below) had reported the presence of a bank and the truncated remains of ridge and furrow type earthworks. Similar ridge and furrow earthworks survive east of The Grange Farm, in OS parcel 0008. Before stripping the field was being used as pasture and previously had been used for growing cereal crops.

A new site grid was laid out for Int.3, aligned along magnetic north and with a theoretical origin beyond the southwest corner of the site. The height of each station was calculated with reference to the nearest Ordnance Survey trig. point.

1.3 TIMETABLE

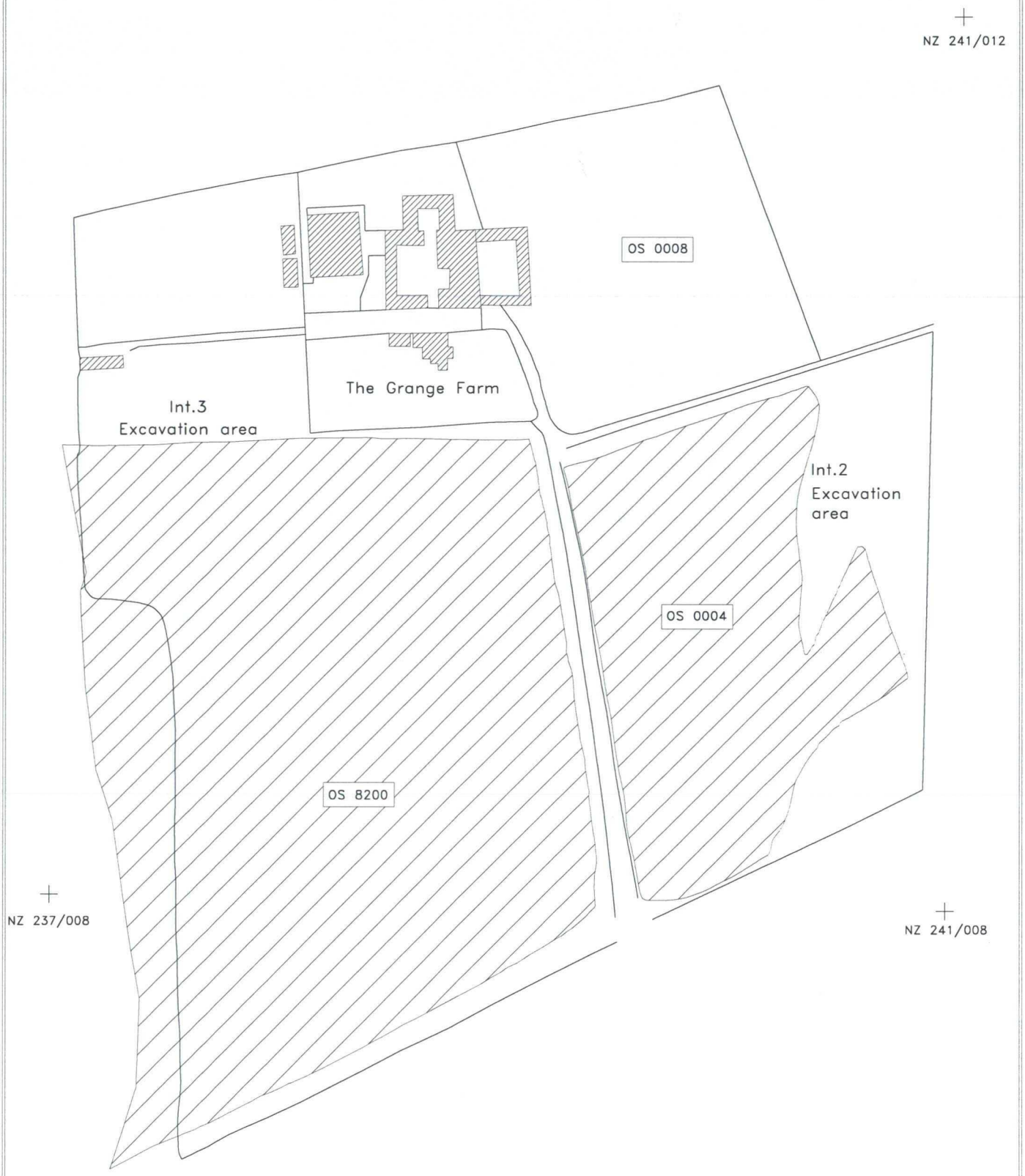
In general the work schedule was timetabled by MAFF regulations concerning the stripping of topsoil. The first session of work covered the four weeks between the 13th September - 9th October 1995 during which an 80m wide corridor was stripped, metal-detected and excavated along the eastern side of the site. Investigations were completed during two further sessions from the 23rd April - 21st June and from 16th September - 19th September 1996, which were timetabled to avoid the worst of the dry, dusty conditions of mid summer when excavation conditions were poor.

The short watching brief was carried out on the 13th March 1996.

2.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Although no frmal programme of evaluation was undertaken on this site it was possible to carry out limited evaluation works in advance of the full scale soil stripping to establish the extent and condition of the potential archaeological remains.



Areas excavated, Int.2 & Int.3 | 0 100m | Fig. 2

Reports of previous investigations at the quarry were collated and a list of earlier interventions compiled (Appendix C); the extent of any archaeological remains was investigated through a review of the aerial photographs and sample area metal-detection; and finally the depth of strata was investigated by exploratory cuttings.

2.2 PREVIOUS INVESTIGATIONS

Archaeological discoveries made over a number of years at different locations in the quarry have shown the depth of activity and the attraction of the gravel terrace to previous occupants.

In 1975 Shirley Thubron (Richmondshire Excavation Group) cut a section across the cursus at NZ 240/005, (OS parcel 211), just south of Int.3, and recovered a small quantity of Roman pottery from the topsoil (Int.18). The following year another length of the cursus was stripped and mapped, between NZ 234/010 and NZ 236/008, (Int.19).

In 1976 Tim Schadla-Hall (on behalf of the Dept. of the Environment) investigated a putative hengiform earthwork between Int.3 and Banks House Farm (Int.20), (OS parcel 6284). The presence of the henge was discounted , more suprising was the absence of evidence for the cursus, but linear ditches were contacted running at right angles to the supposed line of the cursus which contained Romano-British pottery, showing there had been "considerable Roman and post-Roman activity in the area".

In 1977 David Greenhalf (on behalf of the Dept. of the Environment) investigated a ring ditch cropmark site on the western edge of the quarry, at NZ 2331/0002. Excavation confirmed the results of a geophysical survey (carried out by Bradford University, Int.12), revealing an important Early Bronze Age Beaker burial within a flattened barrow (Int.13). None of the bone survived but the central burial, contained within a crushed beaker, was placed on the remains of an oak coffin. Around the ring ditch was a scatter of postholes and pits, described as an "occupation site". Associated with the burial was a (?) contemporary pit alignment, which was itself stratigraphically cut by a later ditch containing a small amount of Iron Age pottery.

A short watching brief carried out nearby by Paul Chadwick (North Yorkshire County Council) at NZ 231/001 (OS parcel 40) during topsoil stripping located a broad shallow ditch over 30m long running in a northwesterly direction, in a similar alignment to the cursus (Int.21). No datable material was recovered from the ditch during the watching brief, but a prehistoric date was suggested.

In 1978 Peter Topping (Dept. of Adult Education, University of Newcastle Upon Tyne), cut a section across the northern end of the cursus, in the field adjacent to Int.3, at NZ 2334/0097. This trench did not locate the missing northern terminal but it did demonstrate a sequence of re-cutting within the cursus ditch and identified a deposit of makeup, 0.32m thick, running along the avenue between the flanking ditches (Topping et al 1982), (Int.14). The overlying topsoil had also contained

a small quantity of Romano-British pottery.

Between 1994-1995 Field Archaeology Specialists investigated a cropmark site east of The Grange Farm, at NZ 240/009, (OS parcel 0004), (Int.1 & Int.2) and discovered the remains of an extensive Romano-British agricultural landscape consisting of various intersecting rectilinear features (Copp 1996).

2.3 AERIAL RECONNAISSANCE

A series of aerial photographs covering the fields south of The Grange Farm and taken since the Second World War identifies a number of cropmark sites. Four oblique photographs from the Cambridge University Collection and the National Monument Record Office are of particular interest - CUCAP DQ77 and DQ74, and NMR 1678/157-8.

Aerial photograph DQ77: The rectilinear pattern of cropmarks visible within Int.2 continue further west. Also identifiable in the southeast corner of the field is a heap of (?) farmyard debris, but enclosing the west end of the rubbish heap is a faint cropmark of a small sub-circular structure, perhaps the ring-ditch of a roundhouse.

Aerial photograph DQ74: The presence of the eastern cursus ditch and a segment of the central avenue is suggested by the broad alignment of the monument crossing the landscape. Closer inspection of this photograph also reveals an additional cropmark along the western edge of field 8200, running towards the hedgerow. The faint cropmark suggests a number of ring-ditches perhaps associated with straight linear ditches.

Aerial Photographs NMR 1678/157-8: Both prints are near vertical shots of Int.3 with the image of a large dark rectangular cropmark shadow visible at the north end of the field which had been tentatively identified as a potential Roman Villa site.

2.4 METAL-DETECTION

The survey conducted during the first session of fieldwork, covering an area 50 x 200m along the eastern edge of Int.3, was undertaken to assess the amount of plough damage to archaeological deposits. This corridor was selected for intensive survey since it overlaid a group of archaeological features, some of which had already produced fragments of Romano-British metalwork within Int.2.

Metal-detection had produced a small number of metal objects recovered at the base of the ploughsoil but none were present when the survey was repeated over the same area at Horizon 2 (the subsoil surface). All the objects were attributable to items of modern farm machinery (bolts, broken plough share) and farming paraphernalia (chisel shanks, fencing nails and wire), none of the items were indexed or retained for further study.

2.5 EXPLORATORY CUTTINGS

Two cuttings were investigated before and during the full scale stripping of the area. Initially a long trench was opened along the eastern edge of Int.3 down to the Horizon 2 surface, to confirm the presence of archaeological features crossing from Int.2 and to establish the thickness of ploughsoil and the depth of archaeological stratification near the farm track. At this time the topsoil was dumped against the track to form a protective "bund" along the road.

In addition a section was cut and hand cleaned against an eroded quarry face along the southwestern edge of the excavation area, coincident with the edge of the haulage road, in order to investigate the condition of the cursus. Archaeologically the results were unsatisfactory as the cursus ditch was not located, but the cutting did demonstrate that the old quarry workings had been previously backfilled in this corner.

3.0 RESEARCH AGENDA

Intervention 3 occupies a strategically important position linking some of the previous excavations with the discoveries of the current campaign. Recent excavations at the quarry have given the site a new personality, due in no small part to the opportunity of mapping large surface areas.

Evaluation results suggest that Int.3 contained a varied archaeological landscape with a native Iron Age/Romano-British settlement and field system overlying an earlier ritual landscape, possibly containing funerary monuments.

Cursus monuments, constructed towards the later part of the early Neolithic period (end of the 4th millenium BC) have a wide distribution, although they occur in four main regional groups (Harding 1995), generally situated along river valleys and chalk downlands (Whittle 1992). The function of these monuments is poorly understood although it has recently been suggested that their construction reflects the early communal allegiance of previously autonomous communities (Harding 1995). The significance of the cursus monuments in the development of ritual landscapes, which included later acts of burial, is well documented (eg. Gibson 1994) and is also reflected in the concentration of ring-ditch cropmarks from the southern end of the Scorton cursus terminal.

Little is known about the Iron Age landscape of the Catterick area. Enclosed settlements of presumed Iron Age date have been located by aerial photography, although nothing is known of their internal detail or development.

However, recent excavations at the south end of Catterick racecourse have revealed a small multi-phased settlement covering 0.50ha. consisting of an enclosure ditch containing ring-ditch type structures, dating from the late Iron Age (Moloney 1995). Excavations at Thorpe Thewles, in the Tees Valley, a type site for the study of Iron Age settlement patterns in the area, showed how this

settlement grew over a number of phases, to a point where it ultimately out-lived and spread beyond the limits of the enclosure ditch (Heslop 1987).

In the later Roman period and particularly during the expansion of the Roman town of Cataractonium in the 4th century, when it appears to be a prosperous town supplying sites in the area with Romanised material, particularly pottery (Wilson 1995), the rural landscape may have been consolidated or re-organised in order to meet the demands of the growing town.

4.0 EXCAVATION STRATEGY

The purpose of an excavation strategy is to match the results of the programme of evaluation against a research agenda in order to identify what archaeological information is to be recorded (Carver 1990). The elements of the excavation strategy involved a programme of thorough surface mapping and selective sample excavation within Int.3. The broad objectives of the strategy were;

- to characterise the components of the ritual landscape and any associated funerary monuments
- to investigate the nature and character of the Iron Age settlement
- to complete the recording of the native Romano-British field system / enclosure pattern and characterise the villa complex
- to establish the relationship between the different landscape features

During the fieldwork operations a set of working procedures were followed, the *Field Research Procedures* (Carver 1990, 1993) and all records of archaeological observation made over the course of the excavation were held within a structured archive (Appendix D).

4.1 EXCAVATION PROCEDURE

The area was stripped of topsoil and the subsoil surface cleaned with a 32 ton back-acting excavator fitted with a large eight foot toothless ditching bucket. The subsoil surface, made-up of a variable sand, gravel and clay fraction was named Horizon 2, and was the depth at which the archaeological strata was defined. Topsoil was removed with either the ditching bucket, or a mechanised box-scraper but only to a depth 0.10m above Horizon 2, the remainder being carefully peeled off with the ditching bucket. All the soil stripping was carried out under archaeological supervision.

On the Horizon 2 surface the outlines of all archaeological contexts and features were identified with plastic tags and were located using a total station theodolite. Pre-excavation plans were drawn on site from the co-ordinate list and using the on site tags as reference markers. Over 6,300

data points were surveyed during the excavations.

The excavation area was sub-divided into twenty-three planning quadrants with each pre-excavation plan, drawn to a scale of 1:100, covering a quadrant 80 x 50m.

Archaeological deposits were investigated either by sample excavation, careful surface cleaning or a combination of both methods. Selected features were hand excavated at Recovery level C (Table 1). A package of record cards was created for each feature excavated, including context card(s), a drawn section or profile (1:10 scale), and a hachure plan (1:20) drawn on A1 or A4 drafting film. A series of colour prints recorded the excavation sequence.

Where excavation was deemed inappropriate, feature or context intersections were hand cleaned by trowel and any observed alterations to the sequence, alignment or shape of the deposits were retrospectively annotated onto the series of pre-excavation plans.

The quantities of records held in the archive are presented below (Table 2).

4.2 ENVIRONMENTAL SAMPLING

The potential for the study of the environmental history of the site is limited by the nature of the soil and its underlying subsoil strata and the character of the archaeological remains. Previous studies have already shown that certain classes of environmental remains are absent (eg. pollen) or poorly preserved (eg. bone, molluscan), (Hall 1995). The site is situated on freely draining river gravels with a local watertable no higher than 1.50m below the subsoil surface (Minshall 1993). The presence of such well drained soils and aerated archaeological deposits, liable to hydromorphic activity precludes the preservation of a wide range of environmental data.

A strategy for the recovery of environmental samples was adopted following on-site discussion with environmental specialists from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York (Dr A. Hall), and the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham (Dr S. Stallibrass).

The data sources for environmental archaeology which remain on the site are the deposits within feature cuts, and the biologically and chemically stable materials that they contain - the carbonized plant macrofossils. There is no way in which a satisfactory environmental reconstruction of the site can be made from such limited investigations, but the available data sets (cereal grains and weed seeds) will provide interpretable evidence from which we can reconstruct the range of resources exploited by earlier agricultural communities.

Table 1 **DATA RECOVERY LEVELS**

LEVEL	EXCAV DEF.	FIND	CONTEXT	FEATURE	APPLICATION
A	machine removed	kept by feature	not recorded	sketched	turf, topsoil
B	machine & shovel scraped	kept by context	perimeter sketched/ located, tags >0.50m	location, shape, record photo	turf, topsoil, ploughsoil
C	shovel scrapped, coarse trowel	context / m²	location, tags <0.50m, description, record photo	location, shape & description, record photo	ploughsoil, features, horizon def.
D	trowel or shovel, scraped & sieved	3-D	shape, location, tags <0.20m, description, record photo	location, shape & description, record photo	features, buried soils, horizon def.
E	fine trowel	3-D, coded plans	shape, location, tags <0.10m, description, sequence of record photos	location, shape & description, record photo	graves, burial chambers
F	removal of soil block, located to mm	3-D, find location record	shape, location, description, sequence of record photos	location, shape & description, record photo	finds complexes

Table 2 **RECORDS HELD IN ARCHIVE Int.2 & Int.3**

YOO		**INDEX TO FIELD FILE**	**Site**: Scorton Quarry	
CODE		DESCRIPTION	RECORD & FORMAT	
		Indices	INT.2	INT.3
YO1		Index of notebooks		
YO2		Index of contexts	X	X
YO3		Index of features	X	X
YO4		Index of structures	X	X
YO5		Index of drawings	X	X
YO6	.0	Index of photographs	X	X
	.1	Index of film processing	X	X
YO7	.0	Index of finds		
	.1	Index of finds by context	721	577
	.2	Index of finds by grid square		
	.3	Sample Register	X	X
	.4	Artefact Register		
	.5	Finds Storage Register		
YO8		Index of geophysical data files		
YO9	.0	Index of survey stations		
	.1	Index of co-ordinate files		
	.2	Index of topographic files		

CODE		DESCRIPTION	RECORD & FORMAT	
			INT.2	INT.3
YO10		Index of interventions		
Y1		Notebooks	X	X
		Contexts		
Y2	.0	Context Record	208	427
	.1	Skeleton Record		
	.2	Coffin Record		
	.3	Masonry Record		
	.4	Timber Record		
		Features		
Y3	.0	Feature Record	190	365
	.1	Auger Record		
Y4		Structure Record		
		Site drawing		
Y5	.0	Legend		
	.1	Pre-excavation plans & hachure plans	119 A4/A1	123 A4/A1
	.2	Maps		
	.3	Sections & profiles	124 A4/A1	198 A4/A1
		Photographs		
Y6	.0	Black and white negatives		
	.1	Colour negatives		
	.2	Colour slides (films)	10	5
	.3	Colour enprints (films)	1	11
	.4	Black and white prints		
		Indices	INT.2	INT.3
		Finds		
Y7	.0	Finds Location Record		
	.1	Artefact Record		
Y8		Record of geophysical data files		
		Topography		
Y9	.0	Record of .RAW data file		
	.1	Record of .FLD data file		
	.2	Surface Reconnaissance Record		

5.0 PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS INT.3

5.1 EXCAVATION RESULTS

There were no finds from the ploughsoil except a small amount of debris recovered from metal-detecting, which was described but not kept. A total of 365 features and 427 contexts were recorded but this includes a list of five features which were allocated duplicate numbers. Features and contexts were labelled using a continuous numbering system, the sequence of features began with F1 and contexts with C1000. Not all the features and contexts listed were defined on the Horizon 2 surface, a few were discovered only after further surface definition or under excavation conditions.

The range of feature types identified and a list of duplicate features is given below (Table 3). A total of 188 individual features were excavated, representing 52% of the total population. These features produced 577 finds which have been listed elsewhere on an index (Y07.1). The majority of the finds were ceramic, (522 or 90.5 %), although other materials are present - stone, metal, slag, and a quantity of bulk soil samples taken for environmental analysis.

Fig.3 shows the excavated area and the features mapped at Horizon 2. At the southern end of the site two smaller areas of disturbance, noted during the evaluation stage, were located. In the south-eastern corner a large quarry pit had been backfilled with a quantity of domestic and farmyard rubbish; this had partly destroyed a roundhouse structure. On the opposite side, in the south-western corner, previous gravel extraction had effectively destroyed the remains of the cursus avenue. A number of modern pits and boreholes were mapped on the subsoil surface, some were backfilled with a heavy blue-brown clay, a few cut archaeological deposits, but these were the remains of a comprehensive test pitting exercise to investigate the geological resource (Fig.4).

Fig.5 and Fig.6 show respectively the location of the sample feature excavations and the areas cleaned by surface definition.

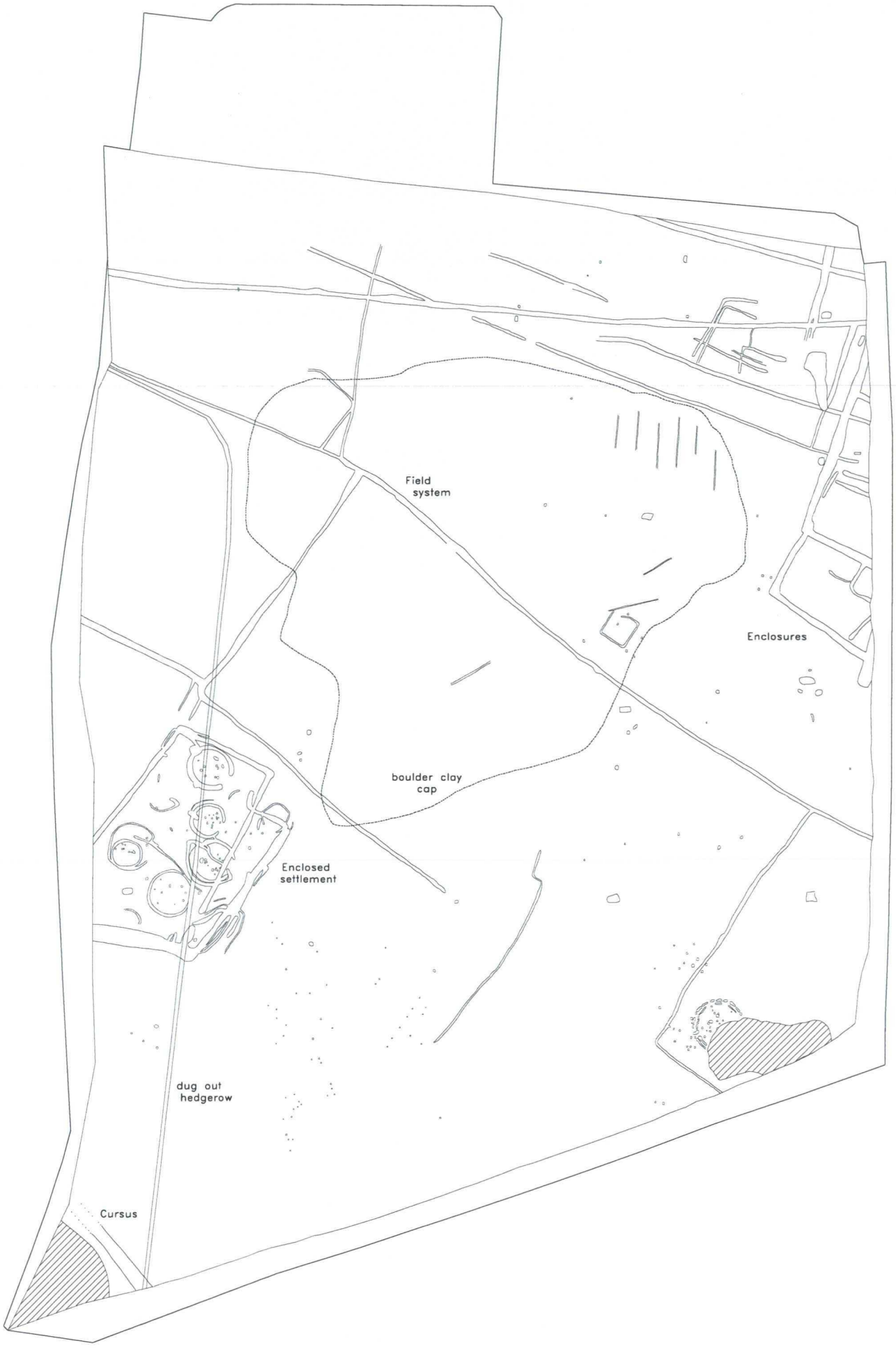
Three distinct activity areas were selected for further study.

5.2 SELECTED STUDIES

5.2.1 THE ENCLOSED SETTLEMENT

This was defined as a group of ring-ditch features (Structures 1-7) set within an enclosure situated along the western edge of Int.3 (Fig.7). Except for the south-western corner of the enclosure, which lies outside the excavation area and had already been destroyed by quarrying, the complex was thoroughly investigated.

The recently removed hedgerow separated the enclosure into two halves, although preservation of



Horizon 2 features & components

0 50m

Fig. 3

Location of preliminary test pits & boreholes

Fig. 4

Excavated features at Horizon 2

0 50m

Fig. 5

Areas cleaned during surface definition

0 50m

Fig. 6

The ring-ditch structures

Fig. 7

the archaeological remains was consistent either side of this boundary. Each of the ring-ditches was completely excavated in order to recover as much information as possible about the structures. In addition, trenches were opened across the enclosure to investigate the growth of the settlement.

The enclosure ditches belong to at least two phases, with the second phase being defined outside and slightly tangential to the alignment of the first phase. No associated bank material survived in either phase.

A variety of feature types were mapped within the enclosure, but the absence of occupation layers or floors and the lack of structural detail indicates that activity areas have been truncated. The settlement evidence comprises a number of narrow subcircular ring-ditches, 0.20-0.60m deep, delineating the edge of roundhouses (Structures 1-6) and a concentration of artefactual data contained within the backfill of the features and the nearby enclosure ditch.

None of the roundhouse structures were identical in detail or size; for example the diameters of the roundhouse platforms vary from 6.60-11.50m, and internally there is no consistent arrangement of postholes. This group of roundhouses also appears to belong to a different tradition of building than the isolated structure in the southeast corner which was constructed of two concentric ring-ditches with a substantial entrance marked by a pair of deep postholes opposite the terminal of each ring-ditch (Structure 8). Whether the differences represent chronological or functional variation is not yet established.

Within the enclosure the stratigraphic evidence demonstrates that the some of the roundhouse structures were re-built. It is also likely that a range of domestic or specialist activities were carried out within or near to the roundhouses.

Such activity will include for example crop processing, and this is represented by the discovery of a number of different types of quern stones, and the presence of charred seeds of cultivation in the bulk flotation samples. One unusual sub-triangular feature (Structure 7) was delineated by a deep gully which succeeded a roundhouse on the site and suggests a specialist working area (B.Vyner pers.com). There is also circumstantial evidence to suggest metal-working at the site. A few pieces of silvery grey metallic looking industrial waste were recovered from a roundhouse ditch (Structure 1) during flotation (see Appendix E); slag was present in another ring ditch; and a small crucible fragment came from the enclosure ditch. A short iron spike, probably a small metal punch, recovered from Structure 7 is also considered to be contemporary with the period of settlement (see Appendix F).

The domestic site produced a substantial quantity of ceramic finds from the excavation (Table 4). The bulk of the assemblage was recovered from the ring-ditches of the roundhouse structures; the terminals were particularly rewarding and contained a few large sherds from a small number of Iron Age pots. Some of the sherds were in a poor laminated condition but these have since been stabilised.

A review of the pottery indicates the importance of this substantial Iron Age assemblage (Appendix G) which contained only one residual sherd, a small piece of green glazed ware, medieval or later in date, perhaps associated with activity along the later hedgerow.

Suitable deposits for environmental bulk sampling were identified within the roundhouse ring-ditches. Three 10 litre flotation samples were removed from each of the ring-ditches, usually at the terminals and at a mid point. Where it was established stratigraphically that the gullies had been

Table 3 **LIST OF FEATURE TYPES Int.3**

FEATURE TYPE	QUANTITY	DUPLICATE FEATURES	TOTAL
Gully/ditch/slot	122	F45, F176, F188	119
Hedgerow	1		1
Field drain	8		8
Cable trench	2	F343	1
Pit	16		16
Posthole	204	F282	203
Scoop	5		5
Test pit	7		7
		Total number of features	**360**

Table 4 **CERAMIC FINDS FROM THE RING-DITCHES Int.3**

STRUCTURE No.	No. OF SHERDS	WEIGHT (g)
1	123	3807.0
2	63	1453.3
3	55	792.0
4	17	1045.4
5	21	491.7
6	15	81.6
7	18	399.4
8	13	251.0
Totals	**325**	**8321.4**