

RESCUE EXCAVATIONS IN THE MEDIIEVAL VILLAGE AT BALLIDON:1986

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INTRODUCTION

The medieval village earthworks on the southern side of Ballidon are among the most impressive in Derbyshire. Comprising house-platforms and two prominent hollow ways, they, together with the surviving Norman church, form the principal features of this shrunken settlement (Pl. 1) (Hart, 1981: 129; Fig. 10:2). The history of Ballidon is extremely difficult to reconstruct. The site is not mentioned in a recently discovered late-Saxon charter, issued during the reign of King Edgar, though it lies within the territory defined by this document (Brooks *et al.*, 1984). In 1066, according to Domesday Book, four carucates were held there by Leofric and Leofnoth: the boundaries of their estate may have continued as those of the medieval chapelry and the later civil

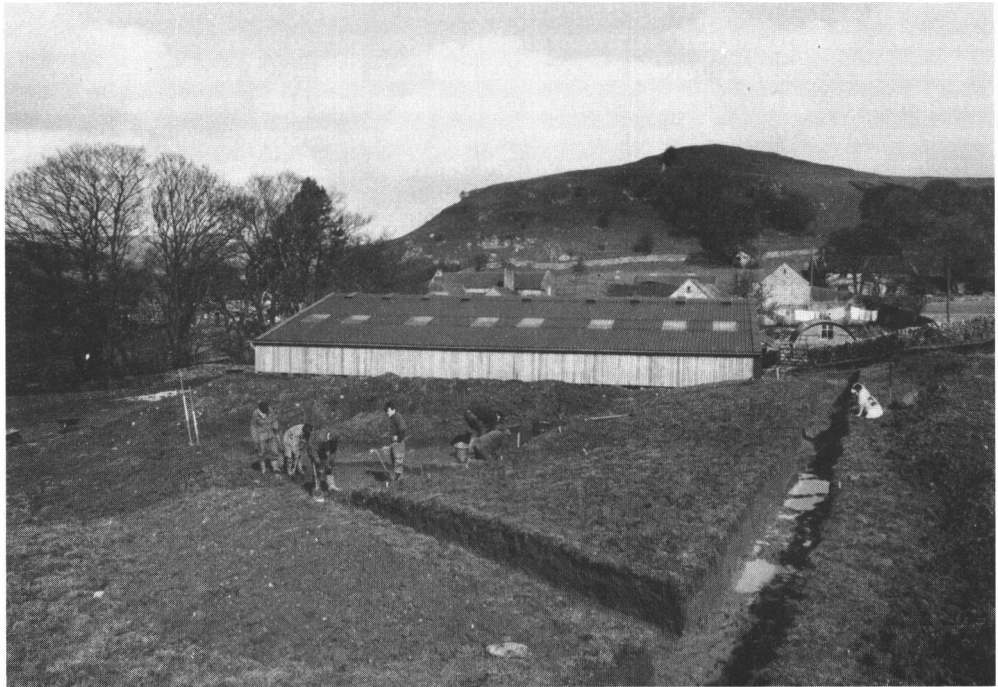


Plate 1 Medieval village, Ballidon: general view of the site, looking northwards across the earthworks towards the White Peak escarpment

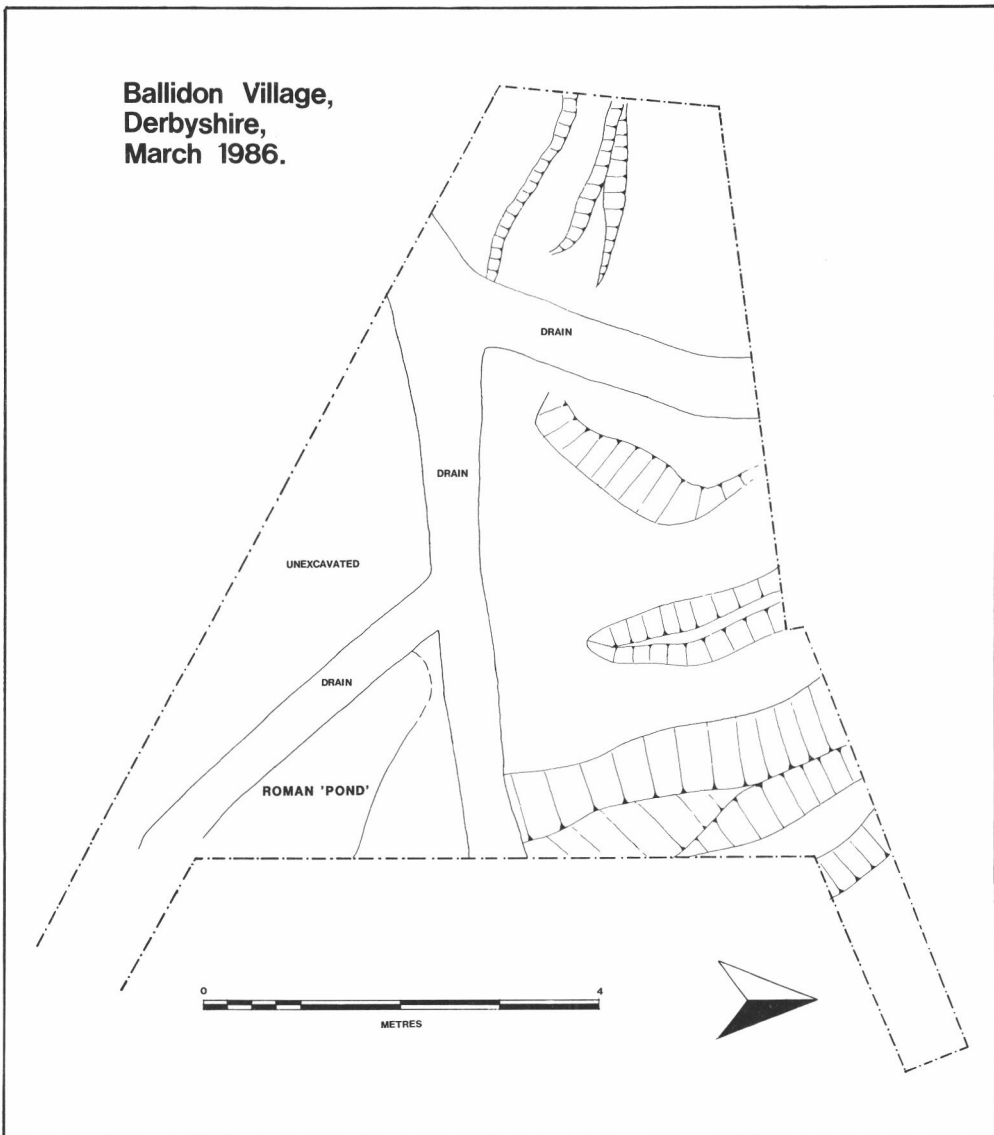


Fig. 1 Medieval village, Ballidon: plan of the excavated area showing the principal features

parish (Brooks *et al.*, 1984: 155f.) We have only the sketchiest outline of the subsequent development of the settlement. As a result, the earthworks situated on either side of the modern road are usually assumed, for no real reason, to belong to the age of the great contraction of rural settlement, the late-thirteenth or fourteenth centuries.

In March 1986, under less than favourable circumstances, the opportunity arose to examine one area of the village earthworks. Mr Tom Stafford of Cow Close Farm received permission to enlarge his silage facilities, and arranged to excavate a large pit towards the northernmost part of the earthworks. Mr Stafford kindly allowed us to investigate the threatened area before the

excavation of the silage pit began. As a result, a small archaeological excavation, lasting ten days, was carried out in appalling weather conditions.

THE EXCAVATION

The aim of the excavation was to discover: (i) the chronology of the settlement in this part of the site; and (ii), if possible, any features which might help to interpret the extensive earthworks.

The threatened area was a hollow which, on the surface, looked as if it might have been a crew yard (for assembling cattle) adjacent, on its south side, to a substantial croft. Initially, two test trenches (A and B) were cut across this hollow; subsequently, a triangular area, measuring approximately 7.0 x 8.0 x 8.0 metres was excavated between them (Fig. 1). The results do not justify a detailed report in this *Journal*. Here we offer a summary of our findings, and shall include any further analyses in the archive report deposited with the Peak Park Joint Planning Board and the County Sites and Monuments Record, as well as in the full report on the neighbouring site at Roystone Grange.

Traces of three periods of activity were discovered. The earliest (Phase 1) was a disturbed grey-black clay feature, within which were twelve sherds of second- to fourth-century Romano-British pottery. This feature is difficult to interpret, but its fill suggests a pond or spring that subsequently dried up, which would account for the hollowed out configurations of the spot. The medieval phase (Phase 2) was less in evidence than was expected. Two shallow ditches and related banks, designed to define and, perhaps, drain the area, probably belong to this period. There were also some signs that during Phase 2 the shale natural had been scarped, though no pits or post-holes were found. A number of medieval potsherds was directly associated with these features. These sherds are predominantly fourteenth-fifteenth century in date, and include a high proportion of Pennine Gritty Wares, which do not occur at the twelfth-thirteenth century grange excavated nearby at Roystone (Hodges *et al.*, 1982). (The medieval pottery will be considered more fully in the Roystone Grange report.) Lastly (Phase 3), a fine stone-lined drain and two side-drains crossed the hollow. A depth of two metres was recorded in one place, from the base of the drain to the top of the upcast from it. The network of drains was probably constructed in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries, when intensified land management, best illustrated by the many new fields created at this time, was stimulated by the so-called Agricultural Revolution. On such a view, the drain may be seen as an illustration, however modest, of a truly enormous investment made to improve and increase agricultural production in these fields (which also resulted in the stone walls on the adjacent Ballidon moor).

DISCUSSION

The discovery of traces of Romano-British activity here was surprising, though settlements of this date are thickly dotted about the southern White Peak (Hodges and Wildgoose, 1981). By contrast, the medieval remains were disappointing. The pottery indicates the chronological breadth of medieval settlement hereabouts, but shows that the crew yard (if the hollow may be interpreted as such) witnessed most activity in the late Middle Ages. As a result, it is tempting to interpret the Ballidon earthworks as a whole as the remains of the fifteenth-century village, and not, therefore, as evidence for the great fourteenth-century recession. Only further survey and excavation can clarify this hypothesis.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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