

# RECENT PREHISTORIC AND ROMANO-BRITISH MATERIAL FROM THORPE, NEAR ASHBOURNE, DERBYSHIRE

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With a contribution from  
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## INTRODUCTION

The material has been collected mainly from erosion areas and paths on Thorpe Cloud and from rabbit burrows, badger setts, cow scrapes and mole heaps on Thorpe Pastures over a number of years prior to 1998, when this paper was compiled.

## ROMANO-BRITISH SITES

Three Romano-British sites are recorded in this immediate area (Fig. 1): Thorpe Pasture SK 158513; Thorpe Cloud SK 152511; and Lower Thorpe Cloud SK 153509 (Makepeace 1985, 130, fig. 44; 1998, 129–30).

The Thorpe Pasture settlement is the largest, comprising a series of ‘celtic’ fields, enclosures and possible platforms. The main site lies at the head of the ‘Waddell’ with the ‘celtic’ fields lying in the valley and on the eastern slopes to the south. Later field boundaries ignore the earlier ones.

On Thorpe Cloud a number of revetted platforms lie on the south-western and north-eastern parts of the tor with a few others on the spine of the ridge to the south (SMR, North Derbyshire Archaeological Trust [NDAT] 2490; see also Guilbert 1995, for alternative view). The quantity of pottery from this site (several hundred sherds) implies more than casual use. Either these platforms are domestic or they were used for some other unrecorded purpose. At present the activity suggests domestic rather than, for example, ritual use.

The lower settlement site lies close to Thorpe Barn where there is a rectangular terraced enclosure and associated terraces or lynchets.

Romano-British pottery has been collected from all of these sites, though considerably more has come from Thorpe Cloud, and comprises Samian, Derbyshire ware and colour-coated, buff and grey wares. Similar sherds from the lower site were found together with a fragment of lead sheet and two pieces of smelted lead. This may suggest that they were collecting lead ore and smelting it for ‘resale’ or for their own purposes, or perhaps both (Makepeace 1998, 108–9).

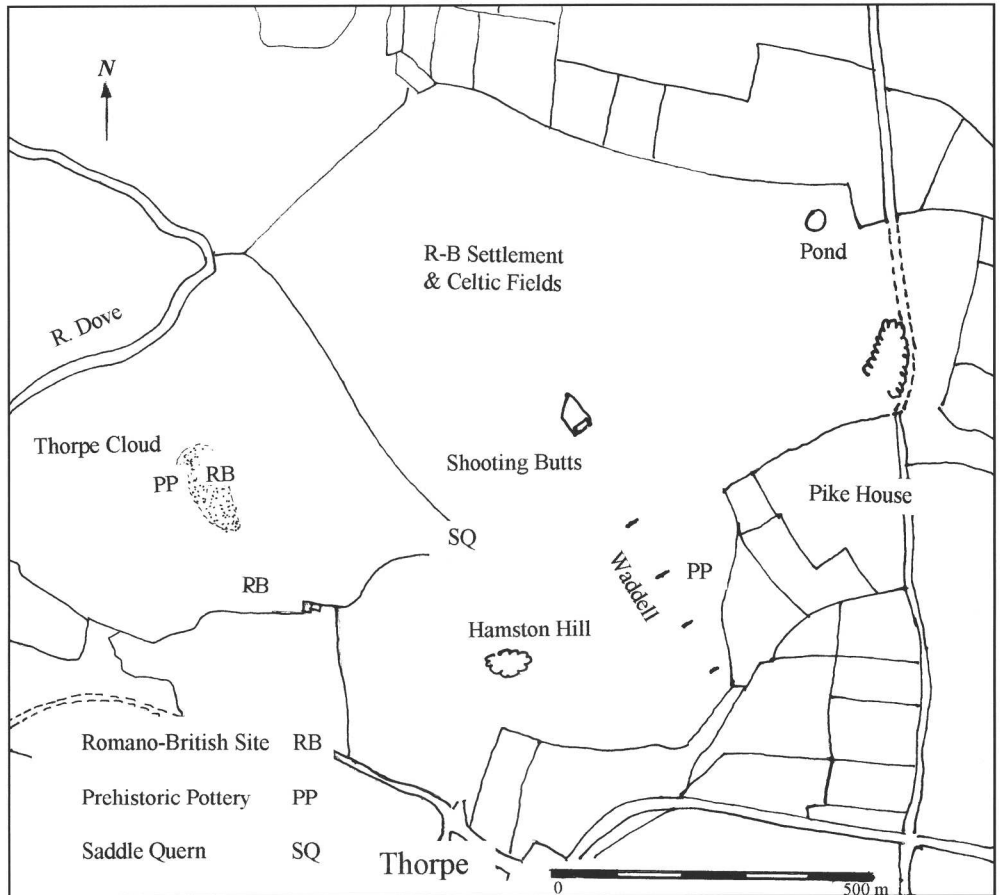


Fig. 1: Thorpe environs.

## PREHISTORIC SITES

### Thorpe Cloud

All the prehistoric material found by the author consists of flint/chert artefacts and debitage and coarse pottery sherds, plus a piece of haematite. The material has come from areas at or close to the top of Thorpe Cloud, where it overlooks Dove Dale. A prehistoric hand-made sherd was also found in 1994 (Guilbert 1995, 82).

Other archaeological material from Thorpe Cloud includes an early Anglo-Saxon brooch (Alvey 1982, 87) and a Roman coin of Severus Alexander (SMR, NDAT 2628), indicating the long term attraction to people of this particular geographical feature at the southern end of Dove Dale.

From the wall at the base of Thorpe Cloud, near to Thorpe barn, the author also found a gritstone saddle quern (SK 154509).

### Thorpe Pastures

Both prehistoric sites lie on the eastern side of the small valley known as 'Waddell', which runs northwards from the Peveril Hotel. The northern site lies close to the old shooting

butts at *c.* 215m OD (SK 158511), whilst the southern is on the north-western edge of a small sloping shelf overlooking the valley at SK 159509, close to the '300 foot' shooting marker. These sites were located by examination of scrapings from badger setts, cow scrapes and rabbit burrows.

At the upper site flint and a few Romano-British sherds have been found whilst at the southern site only prehistoric pottery, flint and a few bones have been recovered. The Romano-British pottery may have come from some manuring process and be associated with the field system and settlement further up the valley to the north.

#### *Thorpe Pasture Upper Site*

The flint consists of approximately 60% flint to 40% chert. One possible Mesolithic blade and a side scraper are the main diagnostic flint 'tools'.

The chert is of varying quality ranging from very poor through to fine cherts of the types found around Ashford near Bakewell. The flint is mainly blue-white to light brown and mainly comprises core fragments and trimmings with some burnt flint.

The Romano-British pottery consists mainly of Derbyshire ware together with one flanged bowl sherd with lattice decoration (Gillam 1970, fig. 31: Type 308).

#### *Thorpe Pasture Lower Site*

A small amount of flint and chert was found in the form of core waste and flakes with one possible Mesolithic blade, a point and a chert scraper. The prehistoric pottery is described below.

### **The prehistoric pottery**

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#### *Thorpe Cloud*

The material is not illustrated and comprises the following:

- three non-joining body sherds *c.* 5 × 5cm, mid to light brown in colour with darker core. Inclusions very large (up to 6mm) of igneous rock and some limestone. Sherds unabraded.
- four body sherds in a dense sandy fabric with crushed quartz filler. One sherd thickens out for base of possible rounded or globular jar. Colour – light brown exterior, dark brown core and interior.

There is no conclusive evidence as to the date of these hand-made sherds.

#### *Thorpe Pastures*

- Three similar sherds (Fig. 2, 1–3) are probably from the same vessel: one with a slightly everted flat-topped rim and possible neck cordon (1), a second rim sherd (3) and a body sherd (2) with an applied cordon and three horizontal grooves below, the cordon bearing a finger nail impression. The vessel is likely to be part of a Deverel-Rimbury type of urn of Middle Bronze Age date. Urns of this type are known from cremation cemeteries at Coneygre Farm, Nottinghamshire, and Pasture Farm, Lincolnshire (Allen *et al.*, 1987). It is possible, therefore, that this urn originally contained a cremation.
- A rim sherd (Fig. 2, 4) from a second, possibly ovoid vessel, has a flat rim with a row of sub-triangular (possibly bird bone) indentations immediately below the top. The

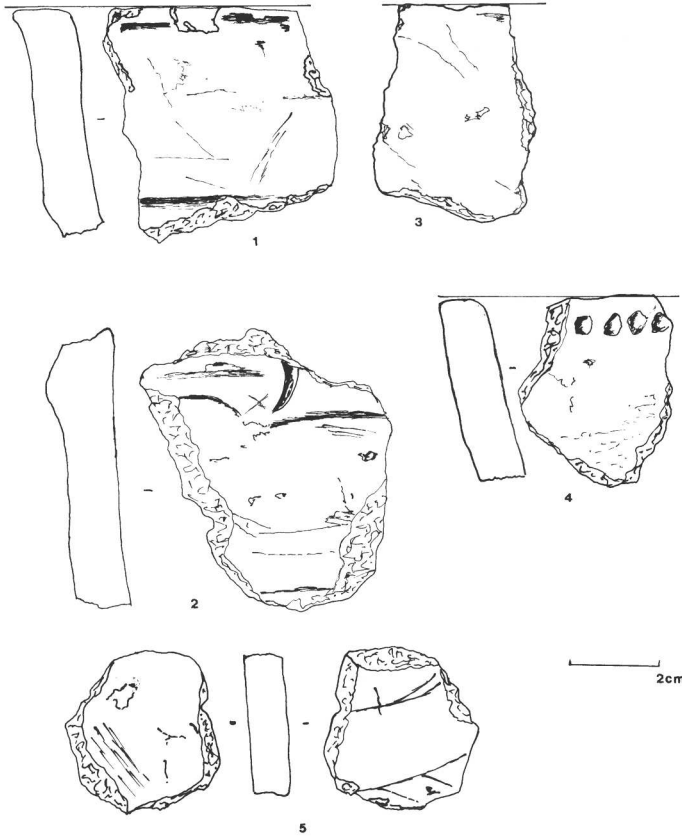


Fig. 2: Thorpe Pasture, prehistoric pottery.

vessel maybe of Bronze or Early Iron Age date. A vessel with similar decoration was found at Dowel Cave (Bramwell 1959, 107).

- An enigmatic sherd (Fig. 2, 5) is burnished on one surface and the other has possible incised line decoration. It is unclear which surface is the exterior and which is the interior.
- Another sherd (not illustrated) has a burnished exterior with traces of an internal burnt deposit and is possibly of Iron Age date.
- Three unabraded sherds (not illustrated) have grog and lumps of soft filler which could be mineralised Derbyshire Toadstone (R. Firman *pers. comm.*).

There are the remains of up to four vessels in this collection from Thorpe Pastures. One is Middle Bronze Age in date and the rest are possibly of Bronze or Iron Age date.

## CONCLUSION

This is an area which seems to have had long and sustained settlement from the Mesolithic through to the present day. The prehistoric pottery from Thorpe Cloud may represent burial but that from the Pastures could represent either settlement or burial, although no cremated bone has ever been found.

The southern site does not appear to have been damaged in any way, although there are field banks of the Romano-British field system coming up to the crest of the terrace on which the site lies.

Around Thorpe there are large areas of well-preserved medieval rig-and-furrow. On the southern side of Hamston Hill, behind the Peveril Hotel, is a series of parallel stoney banks which may be medieval or perhaps earlier.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks to Shelia Elsdon for examining the prehistoric sherds from Thorpe and for her valuable comments and report. The drawings are based on her sketches. All the archaeological material will be deposited eventually in Sheffield City Museum.

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