



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON LANDAT RAVEN HALL ROAD, RAVENSCAR NORTH YORKSHIRE



General view of the site showing the excavation in progress

Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society  
Report 44  
In association with  
Staintondale and Ravenscar Local History Group



# ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS ON LAND EAST OF RAVEN HALL RAVENSCAR NORTH YORKSHIRE

By

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**SITE: LAND TO THE EAST OF RAVEN HALL ROAD, RAVENSCAR**

**NATIONAL GRID REF**      NZ 980 014

**SAHS SITE CODE**         RS12

**Summary**

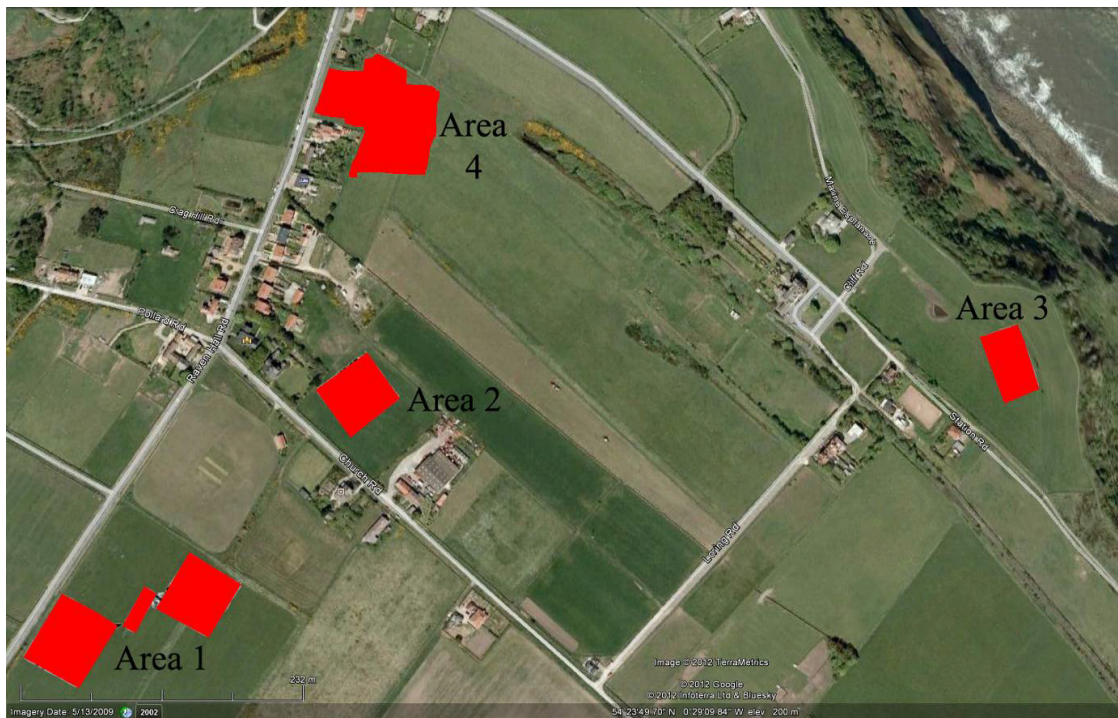
*Trial trenches were excavated in a field east of Raven Hall Road in order to test a number of anomalies which had been shown in geophysical survey. The features were found to be geological rather than archaeological and appear to be due to periglacial activity.*

**List of text drawings and photographs**

1.     Areas covered by the geophysical survey
2.     Area 4 – interpretation of the geophysical features
3.     Location of the trenches
4.     Photograph of the finished level in Trench 1
5.     Plan of Trench 2
6.     Photograph of the finished level in Trench 2
7.     Photograph of the finished level in Trench 3

## 1.0 Introduction

1.1 In March 2012 a fluxgate gradiometer survey of several areas at Ravenscar was undertaken by the Landscape Research Centre on behalf of the Staintondale and Ravenscar Local History Group. The survey formed part of the Ravenscar Barrow Project and was funded under the auspices of the North York Moors, Coast and Hills LEADER programme, as part of the Small Scale Enhancements Scheme. Section 42 licenses were applied for and received from English Heritage for those four of the five survey areas which contained Scheduled Ancient Monuments.



**Figure 1: Areas covered by geophysical survey shown red**

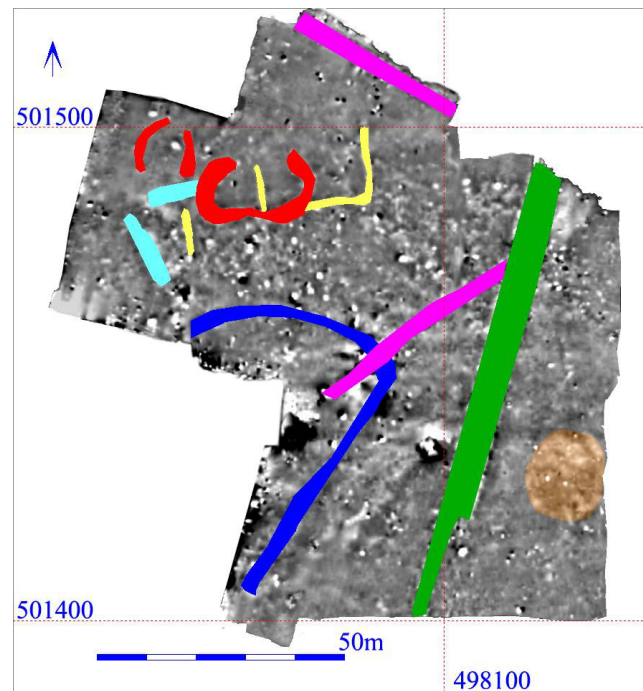
Reproduced from Report on a fluxgate gradiometer survey carried out at Ravenscar, North Yorkshire (background from Google Earth)

- 1.2 Four of the areas the survey focused on were sites of known burial mounds. The fifth and most northerly referred to as Area 4 (see Figure 1 above), contained no previously known archaeological sites but proved to be the most interesting in terms of the anomalies detected. In particular the survey suggested the presence of two apparently superimposed features – two conjoined semi-circular anomalies circa 13m in diameter and a possible rectangular enclosure c 25m across west-to-east (no northern limit was detected).
- 1.3 Over the periods 8 to 12 November and 16 to 19 November 2012, Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society working in collaboration with Staintondale and Ravenscar Local History Group carried out a series of trial excavations in Area 4 in order to test the archaeological potential of the anomalies shown in the geophysical survey.

## 2.0 Aims and Objectives

- 2.1 The overall objective of the archaeological work was to establish the character and date of the semi-circular and rectangular features suggested by the geophysical survey.

## 3. Historical and Archaeological Background



**Figure 2: Area 4 – interpretation of the geophysical features**  
Reproduced from Report on a fluxgate gradiometer survey carried out at Ravenscar, North Yorkshire

- 3.1 The following interpretation of the anomalies found in the geophysical survey and described in paragraphs 3.2 to 3.6 is taken direct from the report prepared by the Landscape Research Centre (with some modifications) and use of this material is hereby acknowledged. The anomalies were colour coded to ease identification and discussion and are shown on Figure 2 above.
- 3.2 *The most obvious is the strong linear anomaly running north-south through the eastern part of the survey indicated in green. This relates to a trackway which leads south from the gate into the field. On the ground, it is represented by at least two raised areas along its length.*
- 3.3 *The linear and curvilinear anomaly in blue is almost certainly natural, a fissure in the underlying limestone. The southernmost magenta linear anomaly is a drain leading away from the houses to the south-west, as it is associated with a number of iron drain covers along its length. The northernmost linear magenta feature is represented by a low ridge on the ground, and appears to be modern in origin, as it parallels the field boundary exactly. On the ground this is represented by a slightly raised feature and is a field track which is shown on the 1852 1:10,560 scale Ordnance Survey map. The cyan anomalies, while potentially archaeological, could equally be geological in*

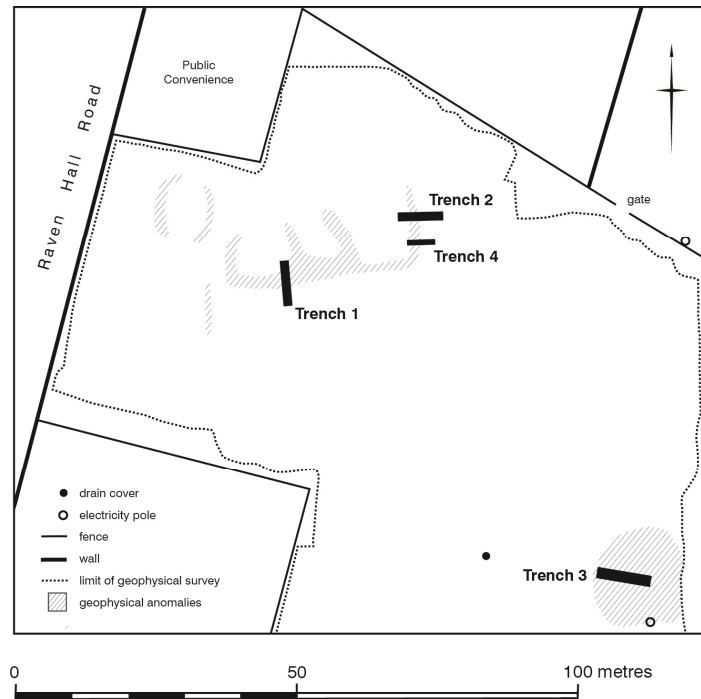
*origin, as the northernmost equates to the location of a natural ridge across the field.*

- 3.4 *The remaining anomalies were considered to be potentially more interesting, although enigmatic. There are two distinct categories, indicated in red and yellow. The red anomalies are potentially the most intriguing, and thus difficult to interpret, features detected in any of the surveys. They are made up of two semicircular features, each 13m in diameter, which are joined together in the south. There is no apparent join in the north. The ditches of this feature are wide considering the diameter (between 2 and 3m), and as such placing an interpretation is problematic. It is possible that it is a natural feature, but if so it is an unusual one. Just top the north-west is a smaller set of two curvilinear anomalies (they may join in the north, but this is unclear).*
- 3.5 *The anomalies in yellow are all linear, and share a similar alignment, which might imply contemporaneity. It is possible that the eastern two are linked, potentially forming part of a square or rectangular enclosure, but this cannot be ascertained due to the position of the semi-circular anomalies.*
- 3.6 *Finally there is a potential circular anomaly in the south-eastern part of the surveyed area indicated in orange. Although only a very weak magnetic signal, it is possible that this could relate to the ditch of a previously unknown round barrow. It is 15m in diameter, which is similar in size to the known barrows in the area. However, there was no visible mound on the surface at this point, so the interpretation remains tentative.*
- 3.7 The rectangular enclosure represented by the yellow is particularly intriguing in the light of the discovery at Ravenscar in 1774 of a stone block with a Latin inscription recording the construction of a “tower and fort”. This is generally accepted as evidence of the presence at Ravenscar of a Roman “signal-station”; part of a coastal defence system constructed c AD 370 which includes sites at Huntcliff, Goldsborough, Scarborough and Filey. The stone was found by workman digging for the foundations of Ravenhill Hall – now the Raven Hall Hotel, some 200m north of the present site.
- 3.8 Knox, writing in 1855 refers to a barrow about ‘2 furlongs’ south of Raven Hall’ in an enclosure of 30 acres ‘taken from the moor’. Smith says that Meridian Airmaps 76/72, numbers 103 and 104, at a scale of 1:10000 and dated 16.8.1972, show a clearly defined circle, about 19 meters diameter which she thinks may be the barrow referred to by Knox though the exact position is unclear. However it was thought that the anomaly marked as an orange circle may represent the remnants of this feature.

#### **4.0 The excavations**

- 4.1 This archaeological excavation was carried out in accordance with a Project Design for Scheme of Archaeological Evaluation agreed with the National Trust’s archaeological consultant though on setting out the trenches the orientation of trench 2 was changed.
- 4.2 Three trenches were excavated the locations of which are shown in Figure 3. Trench 1 was oriented north - south and measured 8 m by 1.5 m. This trench was designed to test the circular anomaly shown in red on Figure 2. The plough soil came straight down on to the natural surface at a depth of 200mm. The natural surface consisted of an angular broken sandstone pitched at varying angles. Following discussions with geologists it was considered that

this was an area of decay and disturbance at the interface with the solid geology which would have occurred as a result of periglacial activity. A broad



**Figure 3 Location of the trenches**

band of a more sandy, stoneless material was originally thought to be a feature but no cut was found and was interpreted as a fluvial feature resulting from the peri-glacial activity.



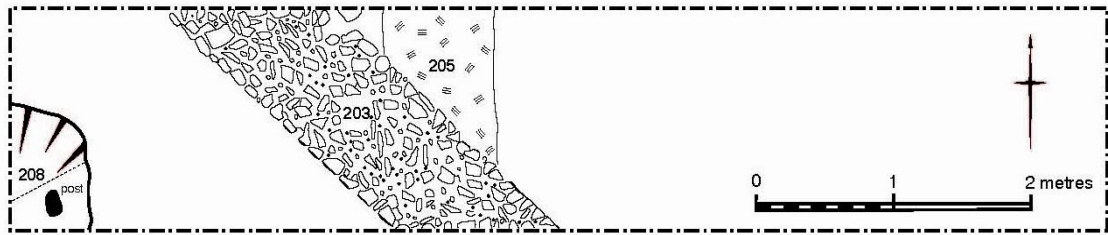
**Figure 4 Trench 1 finished surface**



- 4.3 Trench 2 measured 8m by 1.5m and was oriented east - west. This trench was designed to test the yellow linear anomaly shown in .Figure 2. The plough soil came down straight on the natural surface at a depth of between 240 and 290mm. Again, the natural surface consisted of an angular broken sandstone pitched at varying angles ie the same periglacial material as in trench 1.
- 4.4 Figure 5 is a plan of this trench. Natural material was cut by a linear feature F202 running diagonally across the trench in a north-west to south-east direction. The fill of this feature which was 825 mm wide consisted of a compacted stone within a clay/loam matrix. This feature does not follow the alignment of the yellow anomaly shown on Figure 2 and does not appear to show on the geophysical survey. It was interpreted as a late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century service trench backfilled with stone in order to protect the pipe or cable it contains – the fill was not removed for investigation. This feature was cut into a broad band of a more sandy, stoneless material similar to that found in Trench 1 running at a slightly different angle form the cut and thought to be the ‘feature’ showing up in the geophysical survey. In order to resolve the confusion caused by this inter-relationship of the two features a further trench (Trench 4) measuring 5m by 1m was opened 3.5m south of Trench 2. This confirmed that as in Trench 1 there was a stoneless fluvial material and again the geophysical anomaly was interpreted as geological.



**Figure 5 Trench 2 finished surface**



**Figure 6 Trench 2 plan**

- 4.4 Trench 3 measured 8 m by 2m and was also oriented east – west; it was designed to test the orange circular feature. The natural surface was found at a depth of 300mm and in this case consisted of a more sandy material with few stones. A cluster of stones, 304, 305 and 306 was interpreted as the result of natural deposition. An area of more loamy material, given the number 307, showed no evidence of a cut and was again interpreted as the result from peri-glacial fluvial activity.



**Figure 7 Trench 3 finished surface**

## **5.0 Interpretation and conclusion**

- 5.1 Other than the relatively modern structure in Trench 2, no archaeological features were found. The features shown in the geophysical survey which were tested by trenching are therefore geological rather than archaeological

and appear to be due to periglacial activity. Although it is disappointing that no archaeological features were found the results are nevertheless of interest.

## 6.0 Acknowledgements

- 6.1 The Society extends its thanks to the landowner the National Trust for allowing access to this site for this research excavation and in particular to its representatives, Mark Newman archaeological Consultant; Mark Bradley Coast & Countryside Manager and Mark Frain, Area Ranger.
- 6.2 The excavation was directed by the author and carried out by SAHS members Steve Bence, Gareth Davies, Chris Evans, John Hinchliffe, Siriol Hinchliffe, Mick Panton, Emma Temlett and Simon Temlett and Staintondale group members Jenny Bartlett, Howard Carr, Val Russell and Alan Walker.
- 6.3 The finds analysis was done by Chris Evans and figures 3 and 6 were prepared for publication by Trevor Pearson.

## 8.0 References

AUTHOR	DATE	TITLE
Knox, Robert	1855	Descriptions Geological Topographical and Antiquarian in Eastern Yorkshire between the Humber and the Tees. London pp 183, 197-199
Landscape Research Centre (James Lyall)	2012	Report on a fluxgate gradiometer survey carried out at Ravenscar, North Yorkshire
Rimington, F C		The History of Ravenscar and Staintondale. SAHS 1988
Smith, Margaret	1994	The Excavated Bronze Age Barrows of North East Yorkshire MA Thesis

## ANNEX 1 FINDS ANALYSIS

The finds include a number of flints. These must have been brought to the site from elsewhere as flints does not occur naturally at Ravenscar. The flint may have been brought in at any time between the prehistoric construction works carried out in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Context 101

1. Piece of glazed pottery; trapezoidal; 25mmx20mmx5mm; modern.
2. Flint; grey; drop shaped; frost shattered; 20mmx15mmx2mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
3. Flint; grey with cortex; irregular oval; frost shattered; 35mmx25mmx7mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
4. Flint; grey; spoon shaped with bulb of percussions; 45mmx25mmx10mm; waste flake.
5. Flints; dark honey coloured; triangular 4 plane surfaces; one face has faint indications of a bulb of percussion; 25mmx20mmx3mm; usable as a grooving tool.

### Context 201

1. Piece of glazed pottery; irregular; blue glaze; pictorial – two men in a boat; 36mmx15mmx3mm; modern.
2. Piece of glazed pottery; irregular; dark blue glaze; 18mmx15mmx1mm; modern.
3. Piece of glazed pottery; irregular; white glaze; green pattern; 20mmx15mmx3mm; Modern
4. Flint; pale grey; irregular; frost shattered; 25mmx15mmx5mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
5. Flint; pale grey; irregular; frost shattered; 25mmx15mmx10mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
6. Flint; mottled grey; irregular; 22mmx12mmx7mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
7. Flint; grey; oval; 35mmx20mmx5mm; possibly usable as a scraper.

### Context 207

1. Flint; pale honey colour; irregular; c.15mm; frost shattered; suspect brought by construction workers.
2. Flint; pale honey colour; irregular; c.15mm frost shattered; suspect brought by construction workers.
3. Flint; white; irregular; frost shattered; 25mmx15mmx7mm; suspect brought by construction workers.
4. Flint; honey coloured; irregular oval; 35mmx25mmx7mm; bulb of percussion on one face; waste flake.

### Context 301

1. Pottery; blue glaze inside, white glaze outside; irregular; 35mmx25mmx5mm; modern.
2. Pottery; orange glaze; cylindrical; 20mmx8mm; modern
3. Glass; transparent, irregular; 30mmx20mmx4mm; modern bottle.
4. Flint; white black veined; irregular; c.15mm; burnt flint; unknown origin.

### Summary

One piece of glass; six pieces of modern pottery; eight pieces of flint are thought most likely to have arrived on the site when drains and other services were being laid for the proposed town. Two pieces of flint are waste flakes and another two might have a use as tools. It is considered that an assemblage like this might be found in any field .

## RECENT SAHS FIELD WORK REPORTS

Interim 32	An archaeological excavation at the Newcastle Packet, Sandside	2000
Interim 33	A watching brief at the former convent school, Queen Street	2000
Interim 34	An earthwork survey of Seamer Manor House	2002
Interim 35	An archaeological excavation and watching brief at 58 Quay Street	2003
Interim36	An archaeological excavation at the former Pentecostal Church	Forthcoming
Interim 37	An archaeological evaluation at the lounge site, Harcourt Place	2004
Interim 38	An archaeological evaluation excavation at the site of the former 23 Quay Street.	2006
Interim 39	An archaeological excavation at Auborough Street, Scarborough	2010
Report 40	Investigation of a pre-historic square enclosure at Racecourse Road, Seamer Moor	2013
Report 41	An archaeological excavation at 34 Queen St, Scarborough	2013
Report 42	Archaeological investigation into a linear earthwork at Seamer Moor, Scarborough	2013
Report 43	Archaeological excavations at 60-62 Quay Street, Scarborough	Forthcoming
Report 44	Archaeological investigations on land at Raven Hall Road, Ravenscar	2014
Report 45	Archaeological Investigations at Ayton Castle, West Ayton, North Yorkshire March 2013	2013