

Fig 1 Borough Hill: Site plan.

# Further Evaluation at Borough Hill, Daventry, Northants

By

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## SUMMARY

*Archaeological evaluation of an area within the hillfort at Borough Hill Daventry, revealed evidence of late Bronze Age and early Iron Age activity as well as a small amount of late Iron Age or Roman pottery. Notable amongst the finds from this excavation was a socketed axe which probably dates from the late Bronze Age, Ewart Park Phase*

## INTRODUCTION.

The British Broadcasting Corporation constructed a Transmitting Station on Borough Hill in the late 1920's, and the associated masts, aerials, and other radio installations extended over most of area occupied by an unusually large Iron Age hill fort (Fig 1). Two main archaeological evaluations have been undertaken within the hill fort in recent years, one in 1983 and one in 1991, necessitated by proposed reconstruction work by the BBC. In addition a small evaluation was carried out in 1992 by Northamptonshire Archaeology where new supports were planned for the last remaining mast. The results of this work are included in this report.

A number of Iron Age features were located in the interior of the fort in 1983, during excavations carried out on behalf of English Heritage. The results of this work have since been published (Jackson 1993/4). A description of the hill fort is included there, partly based upon the detailed survey carried out by the Royal Commission for Historical Monuments which lists the earlier finds from the site and describes the later history of the hilltop (RCHM 1982).

By 1990 the BBC had plans to replace many of the existing installations and in advance of this work commissioned the evaluation which is the main

subject of this report. The fieldwork was carried out in the early winter months of 1991, but by the summer of that year the re-building plans were abandoned and all but one of the many masts, towers, aerials, etc, have since been dismantled (Soden 1993). The area occupied by a smaller fort at the northern end of the hilltop is still used as a golf course, but apart from the compound areas, the rest of the site is now owned by Daventry District Council and is being converted to parkland. Grateful thanks are due to Allan Williams who assisted with the site work and drew the illustrations for the evaluation report. The illustrations in this report are by Allan Williams (Figs 2-6) and Alex Thorne (Figs 1, 7-8). Brian Dix kindly read a draft of the report and his comments are appreciated.

## PROGRAMME AND METHOD

### THE SPECIFICATION

The requirements of the specification in 1991 were principally to dig evaluation trenches where the new radio installations were to be sited, but also to enable the date or nature of known Roman and other archaeological features to be assessed.

There were plans to build 27 new towers on the site, with the four legs of each tower set in pits ranging in size from 4 to 6 metres square. It was planned that the around area of one leg of each tower should be excavated down to the natural bedrock (Trenches A-H, J-N, P-Z, AA, BB, and CC), and a further 16 trenches, each 1.6 metres wide, but of varying lengths, were to be excavated at particular points across the site (Trenches 16-31). Most of these trenches were sited on the line of a proposed new feeder run (Trenches 16, 20-23, and 25-31. The topsoil from all the trenches was

removed mechanically, using a J.C.B. excavator with a ditching bucket. The square tower trenches were numbered alphabetically, to relate to the BBC plans, and other trenches were numbered numerically. The trenches excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 1992 are numbered NA 1-3. In this publication details of the individual features are given in an appendix at the back of the report.

ploughing had increased the depth of overburden. This was particularly relevant where the bedrock consisted of silt or sand rather than rock. Most of the archaeological features found during the evaluation survived only from the surface of the bedrock, and where surviving above this level they were not easily identified. An exception occurred in Trench B, at the northern end of the contour fort, where two distinct levels of ploughsoil survived (Fig 4). It is possible that the lower level is of Roman date.

SURVIVAL

Daventry parish was enclosed in 1801 and Borough Hill was then divided into fields. Subsequently most of the area was ploughed and in the early 19th century intensive efforts were being made to level the earthworks by ploughing (Baker 1823). Prior to this time the hilltop had been used intermittently as a racecourse. In general from 20 to 25cms of humic soil occurred below a surface of coarse grass in 1991 but in many areas 19th century, and possibly earlier,

LATE BRONZE AGE AND IRON AGE OCCUPATION (FIG 1)

The majority of the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age features located in 1991 and 1992 lay to the south and east of the BBC compound (Fig 1), in the same general area as those recorded during the evaluation in 1983 (Jackson, op.cit.).

TRENCH V.

Quarrying?. The bedrock in this trench consisted of mixed sandy silt and sandstone together with seams of ironstone layered vertically. The surface of the bedrock was disturbed, possibly by

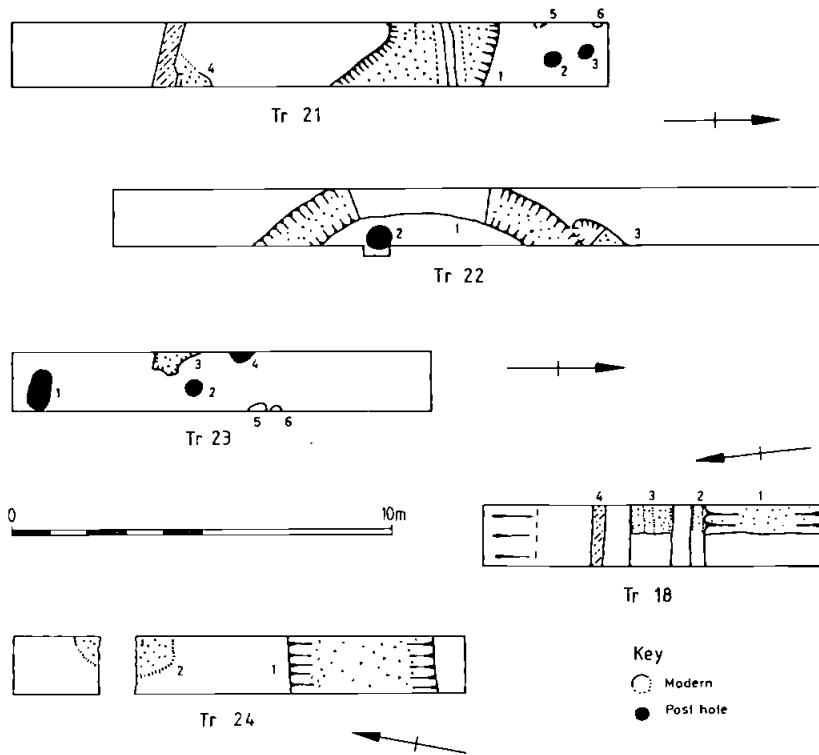


Fig 2. Borough Hill: Trench plan.

FURTHER EVALUATION AT BOROUGH HILL, DAVENTRY

ploughing, but some 50 sherds of a fine thin-walled vessel of probable early Iron Age date were distributed along a seam of disturbed ironstone, an association that suggests the stone may have been deliberately extracted. A socketed axe was found on the surface of the bedrock in the trench (Fig 7). At the time of the evaluation it was difficult to tell if deep quarry pits, perhaps backfilled with stone and silt, occurred in the trench, so a deeper cutting was eventually made mechanically. It was clear from this sondage that the top of the vertical seams of iron rich stone had at some stage been removed, but there was no evidence of deep quarrying.

*Comment*

Two other socketed axes were found when buildings were erected in the B.B.C compound in 1932. The axes were said to have been found close together at a depth of 5 to 6ft. (Edgar 1932).

*TRENCHES NA 1 & NA 2*

Three trenches were excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 1992, prior to the stays for a radio mast being replaced. (Soden 1993). Two of the trenches exposed archaeological features. Trench NA 1 was sited near the southern defences and revealed two pits one of which contained a quantity of Late Bronze or Early Iron Age pottery. Trench 2 was located close to the features recorded in 1983 and revealed a number of shall pits or post holes containing sherds of Iron Age pottery.

*TRENCHES 21-23.*

Features of late Bronze-early Iron Age date were found in three trenches sited just north-east of the BBC compound (Figs 2 & 4). The features include a curving ditch (possibly a drainage gully

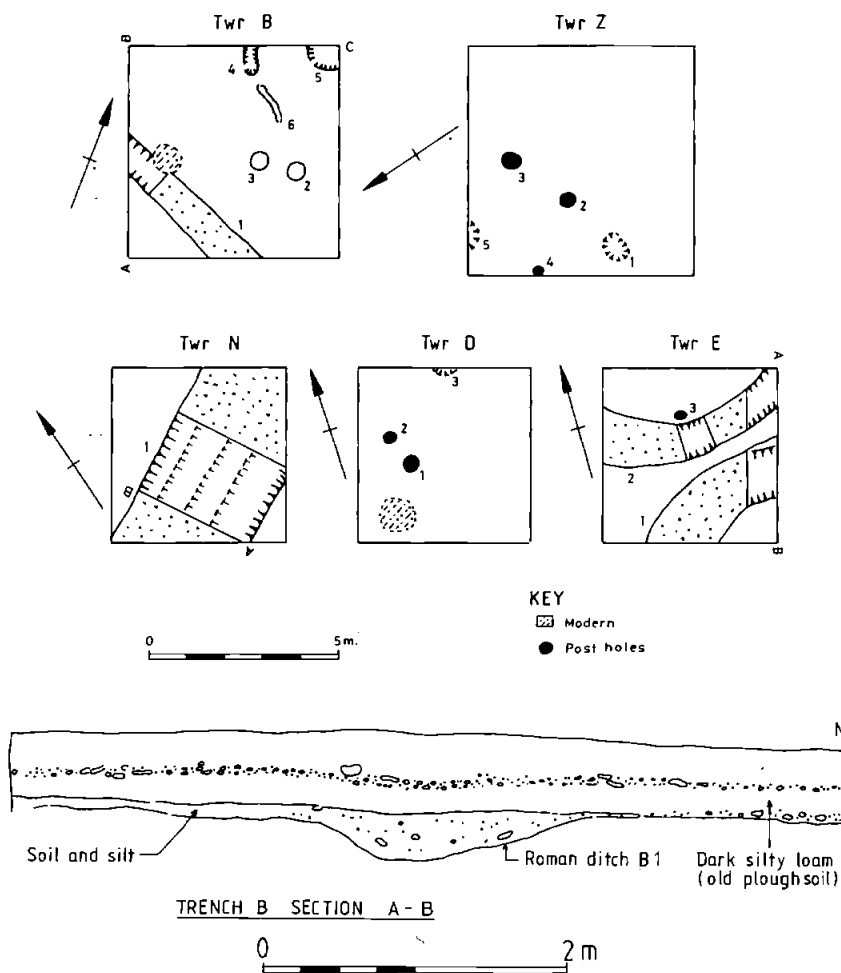


Fig 3. Borough Hill: Trench plans and section of Trench B.

associated with a round house), a 'boundary' ditch, and at least five post holes. One of the post holes held a post more than 30cm in diameter

**TRENCH Z.**

Pottery of late Bronze-early Iron Age type was recovered from three post holes or small pits in this trench (Fig 3). The features are situated some 270 m, north of the Iron Age occupation recorded in Trenches 21-23.

**FEATURES OF PROBABLE IRON AGE DATE (FIG 1)**

**TRENCHES 27-31.**

Further trenches were required along the line of the proposed feeder run to assess the density of features between Trenches 21-23 and Trench Z. A total of eight widely scattered features were located in these trenches but most were of uncertain date and form. The features include two unusually deep post holes.

**TRENCH B.**

A few small sherds of early Iron Age pottery found in this trench may indicate contemporary occupation or activity at the northern end of the contour fort. A number of shallow, but undated, features were found cutting the bedrock, and it is possible they

are of this phase (Fig 3). They were overlain by an old ploughsoil of probable Roman date (p.)

**TRENCH D & E.**

Two undated post holes were recorded in Trench D and one in Trench E. (Fig 3)

**THE DEFENCES.**

Trenches T and 17. (Fig 1).

An inner ditch was revealed in Trench T sited some 20m west of the slight hollow defining the line of the main ditch at this point. Subsequently a trench was cut to examine the area between the two ditches (Trench 17) and a third defensive ditch was located. The ditches were not excavated but the innermost ditch was 4.4m wide at the surface and the central ditch 7m wide. There was a spacing of approximately 6m. between each of the ditches, giving an overall width of approximately 33m for the three ditches and two spaces between. No post holes were located between the ditches.

The surface appearance of the central ditch suggests it was either deliberately levelled with material from the rampart or was filled when the surviving, and possibly the latest phase, of ditch was dug. Only one internal ditch was located by the Southern defences during the evaluation carried out in 1983 (Jackson, op.cit.), so the pattern of banks and ditches on this side of the fort appears to be as described by Morton in the early 18th century (Morton 1712).

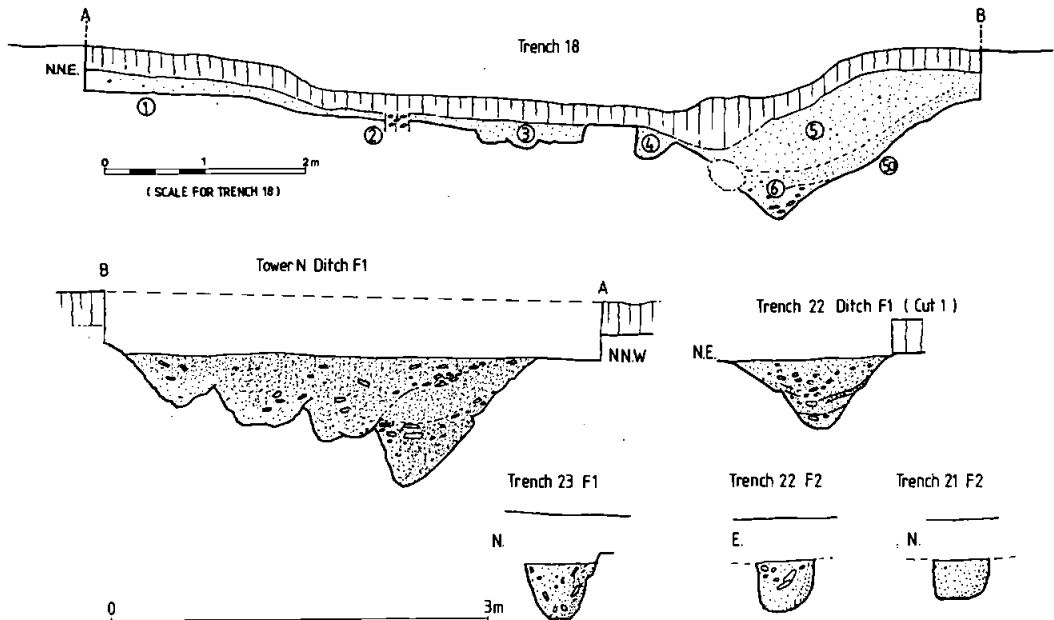


Fig 4. Borough Hill: Various sections.

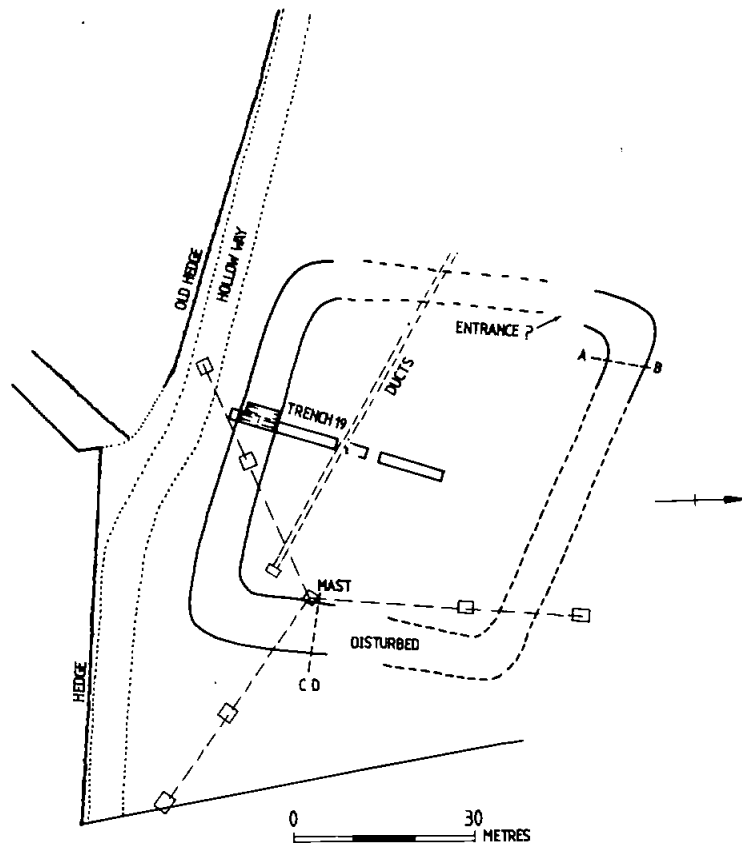


Fig 5. Borough Hill: Plan of the satellite enclosure.

THE SATELLITE ENCLOSURE AND FEATURES  
SITUATED TO THE SOUTH-EAST OF THE DEFENCES  
(FIGS 1, 5 & 6)

Morton (*op.cit.*) described the earthworks of a so-called smaller fort, situated on a spur some 250 yards south-east of the defences. The ditch enclosed an area of approximately 50m x 45m and was said to have been in the form of an 'oblong square', with an internal bank, and entrances in the east and the west sides. Later antiquarians copied Morton's description of the earthwork, although by the early 19th century the ditch was said to have been almost levelled (Baker *op.cit.*).

The site of the enclosure was not easily recognised in 1991 because much of the ground surface was undulating due to modern disturbance. However a trial trench across a likely hollow was successful in locating the ditch and its line could then be traced along most of the south and east side of the enclosure, as well as at the north-west corner.

The ditch itself was excavated on the south side (Trench 19) and was found to be surprisingly deep for the size of the enclosure (almost 3m. deep below the modern surface) (Fig 6). The lower filling largely consisted of loose sandy rubble, and it was necessary to widen the trench mechanically before

sectioning the layers. The excavated trench (Trench 19) was continued into the interior of the enclosure for 28.5 m. from the inner edge of the ditch but no internal bank survived and no features were found in the interior. No dating evidence was found in the ditch or in the interior of the enclosure.

*Comment*

An Iron Age enclosure of comparable form, with a ditch of similar depth, was excavated near to the Hunsbury hill fort, Northampton, in 1986 (Jackson 1988/9). It possessed a substantial gateway at the entrance with a possible guard house and look-out tower inside. An earthwork of uncertain date was also said to exist outside the hill fort at Rainsborough Camp in south Northants. (Baker *op.cit.*).

THE HOLLOW WAY AND PARALLEL DITCHES (Figs 1, 2, & 4)

A substantial bank and ditch still survive as an earthwork along the southern side of the contour fort, presumably because the bank was used as a public footpath or bridleway in the early 19th century, when the rest of the defences were being levelled by ploughing. The line of the footpath leaves the defences at the

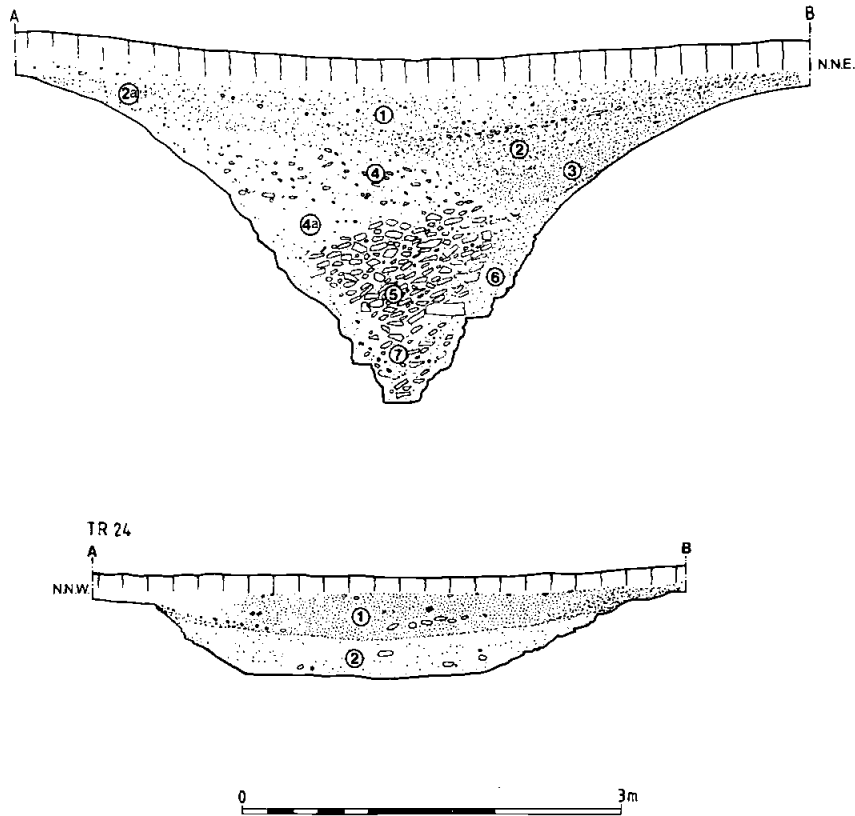


Fig 6. Borough Hill: Sections; The satellite enclosure ditch and the hollow way (Bakers Trench).

south-east corner and continues as a hollow way along the north side of a hedge line. Further to the south-east it passes just south of the satellite enclosure (Fig 5). In the early 18th century Morton said there was an interval (entrance ?) in the defences at the south-east corner, and he recorded a ditch at this point running along the line of the hedgerow.

A new tower was due to be sited near the line of the hollow way and a trench was therefore cut at right angles to its alignment (Trench 18). A ditch, some 1.4m deep, was located beneath the hedgerow on the south side and other shallow features, which may be ditches or fence lines truncated by the hollow way, were found parallel it. None of the features was dated but the main ditch is almost certainly that described by Morton and could be Iron Age in date. It may be significant that the enclosure to the east is sited parallel to the hedgerow.

#### THE DITCH IN TRENCH N (Figs 1, 3, & 4)

A ditch located in Trench N, some 70m north-west of the satellite enclosure, is evidence of further activity on this spur of land. The ditch, which was up to 1m deep in the bedrock, had

been re-cut on at least three occasions. The only dating evidence from the ditch was a single sherd of Iron Age pottery in an unusual (for the site) hard and gritty fabric.

#### THE ROMAN BARROW CEMETARY (Fig 1)

A Roman barrow cemetery was sited within the defences of the contour fort, and a building of the period is located within the smaller fort to the north. The barrow cemetery is the largest of its type in the country. A total of 18 barrows were recorded by Morton in the early 18th century, but a century later Baker listed only 14. Most of the barrows were aligned along the contour, from south-east to north-west. According to Baker's plan and description they were relatively small and closely spaced. The barrows were excavated by Baker in the early 19th century and were found to contain urns of Roman date. The vessels and their contexts have been fully described by Brown (Brown 1977).

The barrows have been levelled and spread by ploughing and other ground moving and in 1991 their line could only be seen as a barely discernible low ridge. A proposed new tower and feeder

run were due to sited on the ridge and four barrow ditches were located in evaluation trenches at this point (Fig 1 & 3, Trenches E and 25). No buried surfaces were revealed but the position of the trenches did not coincide with the centre of any of the barrows. Where sampled the barrow ditches were relatively shallow, up to 70cm deep below the modern surface.

*OTHER ROMAN FEATURES.*

The only other feature of Roman date was a shallow ditch in Trench B, at the north end of the contour fort (Figs 1 & 3). A small amount of pottery of early Roman date was found both in the ditch and unstratified in the spoil heaps. In this trench a layer of small stones separated the top soil from a layer of silty loam overlying the Roman ditch. The loam, which was undated, may represent later Roman ploughing.

*THE SITE OF A BARROW AND POSSIBLE QUARRY NEAR THE BBC COMPOUND*

An undated barrow, described by Morton as the largest on the hilltop, was sited just east of the BBC compound (Fig 1). It too was excavated by Baker, but he found that it had already been disturbed, and no finds were mentioned. In 1991 there appeared to be a low rise where the barrow is located on early maps, and a new building was planned to be built immediately adjacent on the north-west. An evaluation trench was cut along the south side of the proposed building (Trench 20), but no barrow ditch was located.

*QUARRY PIT?.*

A broad expanse of dark loamy soil, some 6.5m. wide and up to 40cm deep in the bedrock, was found at the east end of Trench 20. The only finds from the soil were two small sherds of late Bronze-early Iron Age pottery and several flint flakes. Whilst the soil could be filling a shallow ditch or scoop associated with the adjacent barrow this seems unlikely. The bedrock at this point consisted of an iron-rich rubble ironstone and the soil is perhaps more likely to be infilling a shallow quarry. The nature of the filling suggests that the quarrying is not modern and is most likely to be associated with the nearby settlement.

*THE 'HOLLOW WAY' CROSSING THE HILLTOP (Fig 1).*

A feature referred to as a trench by early antiquarians crosses the hilltop from south-west to north-east, where its line can be seen crossing the Iron Age defences on the east. Remains of the so-called trench were located within the hill fort in 1991 and the feature was sectioned mechanically during the evaluation (Trench 24). It was found to be a relatively shallow feature where excavated (some 66cm deep in the bedrock), but with a broad flat bottom, some 2.2m wide (Fig 6). No dating evidence was obtained. The feature was present in the early 18th century (Morton op.cit.) and is shown of Baker's plan of 1823. Possibly it is best interpreted as a trackway or hollow way of Roman or Medieval date. The bedrock consisted of ironstone rubble in the excavated trench, and its rocky nature suggests the hollow way may have been created over a long period of time. Its narrowness may also suggest it was running through a restricted or wooded terrain.

THE FINDS

THE SOCKETED AXE  
by M Curteis (Fig 7)

A socketed axe was found lying on the bedrock in Trench V. The manufacture of side-looped faceted socketed axes, like the example found Borough Hill, is concentrated in East Anglia and the Middle Fens, and is inspired by North European form (Pearce 1984). They date to the Late Bronze Age, Ewart Park Phase, c.900-600 B.C. It has a length of 104mm, a mouth 24mm round internally, and a cutting edge of 46mm.

The axe is the most recent of several Bronze Age axes to have been found on Borough Hill. Two ribbed palstaves (held at Daventry School) were found last century and labeled as from 'Borough Hill Camp' with no other details. One is 144mm long with a cutting edge 40mm across, whilst the other is 145mm long with a cutting edge of 34mm across. They are both narrow-bladed palstaves that appear late in the development of the palstave and are associated with the Penard and Wilburton phases, c.1200-900 BC. A similar ribbed palstave possibly from Borough Hill and labeled as found 'Nr Daventry' last century has a length of 146mm and a cutting edge of 34mm across. It is held in Northampton Museum (acc. no. 1954155.79)

Two other late Bronze Age side-looped socketed axes were found during the construction of the BBC radio transmitting station in 1932 (Edgar 1932, 177-8) Both are now in Daventry School. They are described as being 'found together 5-6 feet

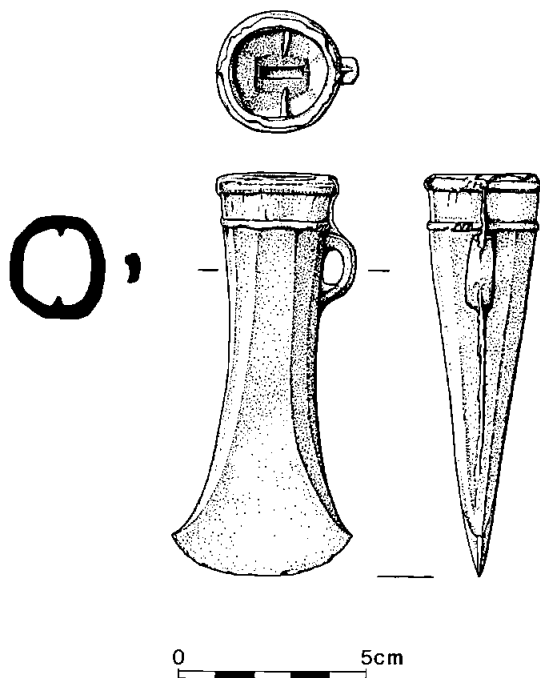


Fig 7. Borough Hill: The socketed axe.



below the surface'. One is 112mm long, mouth 26mm across with a cutting edge of 44mm across. It is faceted and octagonal in section. The other is 105mm long, the mouth is 32mm square internally with a cutting edge of 48mm across. It has three vertical ribs on its body. That both axes were buried together at such a depth would suggest they formed some kind of votive deposit. Such deposits are now being recognised at many hill forts suggesting the forts may have functioned as a ceremonial/ritual focus. A Palaeolithic axe and part of a greenish/grey polished stone axe were also found in the vicinity of the socketed axes near the summit of the hill (Edgar op. cit.). As such objects, particularly the Palaeolithic axe, predate the construction of the hill fort the possibility that such objects were curated for ritual purposes must be considered

## THE POTTERY

Approximately 232 sherds (1430g) of late Bronze Age or early Iron Age date were recovered during the evaluation work plus 22 sherds (216g) of late Iron Age or Roman date. The pottery came from the following trenches

### LATE BRONZE AGE OR EARLY IRON AGE

- Trench NA.1: 75 sherds (430g) from a large pit.
- Trench NA.2: 23 sherds (165g), mainly from small pits or post holes.
- Trench V: 56 sherds (245g), 51 sherds from one vessel, from a possible quarry.
- Trenches 20-23: 49 sherds (365g). From gully 22/1 and post holes
- Trench Z: 24 sherds (190g) From small pits or post holes.
- Trench B: 4 sherds (20g) Unstratified
- Trench N. 1 sherd (15g) From a re-cut ditch. Phase uncertain.

### LATE IRON AGE AND ROMAN

- Trench B: Ditch B1, 7 sherds (90g): Unstratified, 11 sherds, (60g). The pottery is mostly of late Iron Age-early Roman type
- Trench C. 1 sherd (5g) Unstratified. Late Iron Age or possibly earlier.
- Trench D. 1 sherd (10g) Unstratified. Late Iron Age type.
- Trench 35. 2 sherds (51g) Barrow ditch. Roman grey ware.

### THE LATE BRONZE AGE AND EARLY IRON AGE POTTERY (FIG 8)

#### FABRIC AND SHERD TYPE.

The inclusions in the pottery had largely dissolved leaving many sherds with a pitted surface. Vestiges of grog and soft sandstone did however survive and it seems clear that these were the predominant inclusions in the pottery. Traces of shell could be recognised in only three sherds and the occasional sparse quartz

and organic matter could have occurred naturally in the clay. Because of the poor survival of the inclusions it is considered too unreliable to assess the proportions of fabric types.

A feature of the pottery is the large number of sherds that derive from thin walled vessels and the distinctive fine wares. The fine wares are typified by the two illustrated rim sherds (Nos 1 & 6), and by the many sherds from a single vessel found in Trench V. Apart from these examples, sherds of this type are not numerous and there are only another seven small sherds in the assemblage (3 from Trench NA.1, 3 from Trench 21, and 1 from Trench Z).

A number of thin walled sherds are defined by the contrasting light colour of the outer face compared to the core and interior. Similar pottery has been found on other sites in the county of broadly the same date (Briar Hill and Gretton, Jackson 1974, Oakley and Corby, Jackson 1982), and may suggest a different firing technique. Sherds from some coarse ware vessels from Borough Hill are also thin walled, but often with uneven external surfaces. They also have deep voids, up to 8mm in diameter, where the inclusions have dissolved (No 7).

#### Hardness

The pottery is generally soft and only the two sherds (one from Trench N and one from Trench NA 2) are hard enough to resist scratching with the finger nail. The two harder sherds contain a greater quantity of stone grits and could represent a different fabric. Some of the sherds from Trench Z are very soft and underfired where as others from this trench have been fired to a biscuit consistency (No 4).

#### Surface finish

There is one rim sherd (No 1) with a high sheen and burnished surface (perhaps an applied slip) and other fine wares have smooth surfaces. There are also two sherds (one carinated, No 9) from the same vessel, which appear to have traces of a black slip on their surface. Apart from these examples much of the pottery is fairly soft and has been affected by weathering.

#### Colour

One of the most notable features of the assemblage is the predominance of orange-brown or buff coloured vessels. Some darker sherds tend to be grey-brown in colour but there are few of the dark grey to black colours common amongst later Iron Age pottery.

#### Form

The sherds are in general too small to assess the form of the vessels. Bases are rare in the assemblage but there is a fine ware base from Trench V which may be of omphalos form (No 8). Only one carinated body sherd is present.

#### Decoration

Decoration is sparse on the pottery found in 1991 and 1992. Rim sherds occur with decoration on the outer edge of the rim (Nos 3 & 5), which can be compared with examples from other early Iron Age sites in Northamptonshire (Briar Hill, Jackson, op. cit.; and Thrapston, note in Northamptonshire Archaeology 24, 1992, 85-6)

#### COMPARISONS AND TYPOLOGICAL AFFINITIES.

Approximately 500 sherds of pottery were found during the evaluations carried out at Borough Hill in 1983 (Jackson op.cit.).

The pottery came mainly from pits and ditches found in trenches sited just south of the BBC compound, and close to Trench V and the trenches excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology in 1992 (Fig 1). The 1983 assemblage contained some scored ware and partly because of this was dated to the early-middle Iron Age. The chief difference between the material from the 1983 evaluation and the bulk of the pottery recovered in the evaluations carried out in 1991/2 is that most of the former is harder and comes from more thickly walled vessels. The overall colour of the sherds is comparable in both groups and grog, shell, and ironstone survive in a small number of sherds.

The rim forms from Borough Hill occur in late Bronze-early Iron Age assemblages elsewhere, but they are of simple type and in themselves do not confirm a late Bronze Age date. Radiocarbon dates from the hill fort at Rainsborough (Avery et al 1968), some 18 miles to the S-S-E., suggest there was occupation in the 6th century B.C., and in their earliest phase and the two sites could have been broadly contemporary.

Pottery of late Bronze-early Iron Age date was found in the ditch of a large circular enclosure at Thrapston, Northants in 1997 (op cit, and forthcoming) but until this time no major assemblages of late Bronze Age pottery have been found in the Northamptonshire region, pottery with thin walls and colouring similar to that from Borough Hill has been found by the writer on a number of sites. These include the pottery found in pit alignments (possibly residual) at Briar Hill Farm, Northampton and at Gretton near Corby. The sherds from Briar Hill are numerous and small but unlike those from Borough Hill contain a percentage of body sherds decorated in early Iron Age styles. (Jackson, op.cit.).

Two occupation sites in the Corby area have produced similar pottery. Charcoal from Great Oakley provided radiocarbon dates centred in the first half of the first millennium as well as evidence for early iron working. (Jackson, op.cit.) Another site that has produced early pottery is Weekley Hall Wood, near

Kettering, where there was an open settlement, containing a number of four-post and other structures (Jackson 1976).

An early Iron Age site at Gretton, also in north Northamptonshire, produced a considerable quantity of pottery, dominated by carinated vessels and bipartite bowls. Radiocarbon dates from the site centre in the mid 5th and early 3rd centuries bc (Jackson and Knight 1985). There is also a large unpublished assemblage of pottery of this type from Brafield, near Northampton, stored in Northampton Museum. The nature of the pottery from Gretton and Brafield differs from the material from Borough Hill and other sites mentioned, and is almost certainly later in date. Overall the evidence tends to support a date for the Borough Hill assemblage as somewhere in the period between the 8th and 6th centuries BC.

CATALOGUE OF THE ILLUSTRATED POTTERY

1. Outer face grey brown in colour with a high gloss (probably a slip); inner face smooth grey ware; section buff with some grog inclusions
2. Outer face moderately smooth orange ware; inner face orange-buff ware; section buff. Moderate voids
3. Fairly smooth grey-brown ware. Tiny voids
4. Smooth creamy buff ware. Some grog and tiny voids
5. Below the body decoration the outer face is a rough and uneven brown ware with deep voids and some stone grits; above this level the face is a smooth grey-brown with tiny voids; inner face fairly smooth dark grey ware with moderate voids; section dark grey.
6. Outer face dark chocolate brown smooth ware with many fine voids; inner face smooth (burnished?) dark grey-brown ware with moderate voids; section brown
7. Rough and uneven orange ware with many moderate to large voids; some sandstone and grog surviving.

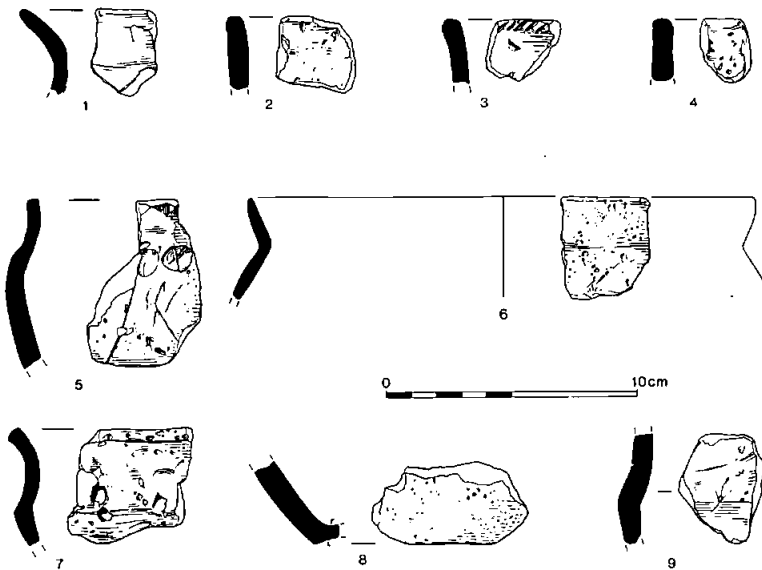


Fig 8. Borough Hill: The pottery.

8. Wall and base sherd, base possibly of omphalos form. Outer face smooth yellowish-brown to grey ware with small voids; inner face smooth grey-brown ware with many moderate voids; section yellowish-brown to grey.
9. Outer face smooth red-brown ware with patches of a black slip? Surviving, some tiny voids; inner face uneven brown ware with moderate voids; section grey-brown.

## DISCUSSION

Occupation on Borough Hill in the late Bronze or early Iron Age period has been confirmed by the evaluations, and it is possible that settlement existed in this early period on other hill forts in the region. The hill fort at Borough Hill is one of an alignment of four evenly spaced forts sited on the higher ground of western Northamptonshire (including Rainborough, Chipping Warden and Guilsborough; Jackson 1993/4, Fig 2). Further hill forts with the same alignment and spacing (8 to 11 miles) may have occurred to the north-east at Desborough and Harborough, Gretton, where Iron Age sites have been destroyed by quarrying. The important hillfort at Hunsbury, Northampton lies to the east of this alignment but with the same even spacing from the sites at Borough Hill and Guilsborough. There may have been a further alignment of forts along the Nene valley but only those at Hunsbury and Irthlingborough are known.

There has been no significant excavation of the defences at Borough Hill and their precise date is uncertain. The recent evaluations at the southern end of the fort have revealed features of early Iron Age and possibly late Bronze Age date, but it is not possible to say if the settlement is contemporary with the defences. There is evidence of occupation predating the defences from other hill forts in the region, i.e. Rainsborough (Avery, et al 1968) and Ivinghoe Beacon (Cotton and Frere 1968), and the same pattern may have occurred at Borough Hill.

It is possible that settlement on Borough Hill was concentrated to the east of the summit of the hill, and on this windy hilltop this could have been the preferred location. Animal bones had not survived in the acid soil and the only find from the 1991 and 1992 evaluations, apart from the pottery, was the socketed axe from Trench V. Finds from the 1983 evaluation however included spindle whorls, Part of a loomweight, several fragments of iron, as well as small pieces of iron slag. In the same area possible furnace remains and dross (slag?) were found in

1971 during work for new radio masts. (DOE Archaeological Excavations 1971, 11-12.) The slag is of particular interest in view of the possible evidence for ironstone quarrying found in 1991. This may suggest that the availability of iron ore was an important factor in the siting of the settlement. Slag or ironstone fused by heat has been found on three other hill forts in the region, Hunsbury, Rainsborough (op cit), and Farthingstone, (Knight 1986-7)

The defences of the contour fort at Borough Hill enclose an area of 54 hectares and it can be argued that such a large area would have been very difficult to defend. It is perhaps more realistic to see the enclosed area as a defended stock enclosure, at least in its early phase. The number of banks and ditches forming the defences apparently varied around the circuit, but it is not possible to say if they were in contemporary use. Three ditches were found in 1991 on the eastern side of the defences, but only one ditch has ever been recorded on the west side. In 1712 Morton records two ditches and three banks at the south end of the fort, and up to four ditches and five banks along parts of the east side. The evaluation has confirmed the existence of three ditches where Morton recorded this number on the east, and it is significant that the associated banks were apparently still visible in the early 18th century.

No clear entrances have been identified through the defences of the contour fort although Morton said there was a 'gap' on the south-east where a footpath or trackway probably crossed the earthworks. It is possible there was an entrance sited some 400m. north of this point where Bakers plan of 1823 shows traces of internal earthworks. In this area Morton recorded the maximum number of banks and ditches, stating that he could not record their exact number because of their complexity. It is of interest that he attributes the need for the multiple defence system in this area to the 'lie of the land' although the easiest approach to the fort is clearly from the south. The hollow way crosses the defences diagonally at this point and it is possible that this was aligned on an earlier entranceway.

## THE NORTHERN FORT AND ROMAN ACTIVITY

The date of the smaller fort at the northern end of the hilltop is uncertain, but at the intersection of the two ditch systems the ditch to the contour fort is regarded

as being the earlier feature (Edgar 1923 and RCHM 1982). A mid to late Iron Age date is therefore possible for the smaller fort. The Roman building excavated within the northern fort by Baker and Botfield in the 19th century (Baker 1823, Botfield 1858) revealed a tessellated floor but the precise nature and size of the building is uncertain. The chance discovery of a Roman ditch in 1991, some 280m to the southeast, may suggest farming or associated activities occurred over a wide area. The barrows in the Roman barrow cemetery were leveled in the 19th century, but several can still be seen as very low mounds now the BBC installations have been removed.

THE 'SATELLITE' ENCLOSURE

About 20 sites have been listed where hill forts and nearby enclosures may be regarded as a single unit because of their close proximity (Forde-Johnstone 1976). Unfortunately the small, presumably defensive enclosure on Borough Hill is undated, but it is very similar in size and character to a later middle Iron Age enclosure excavated close to the hill fort at Hunsbury, Northampton (Jackson op cit). If the enclosure at Borough Hill is Iron Age in date it may suggest that these 'lesser forts' are a feature on local hill forts, perhaps sited where a better view of the surrounding countryside was required.

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APPENDIX

Description of the archaeological features

No	Type	Diam.	Depth*	Filling and comments
A.1	Pit	60cm	23(68)	Some Ironstone and burnt clay
B.1	Ditch	-	30(80)	Dark silty loam. Sparse pot.
B.2	Pit?	50x45	30(78)	Light silty loam
B.3	Un	40+	8(56)	Spread of burnt clay and loam
B.4	Un	-	3(50)	Lumps of yellow clay
B.5	Un	-	27(75)	Fill as B.4.
B.6	Pit	-	15(62)	Some burnt and unburnt clay
D.1	P.H.	40	11(61)	Loose dark brown loam
D.2	P.H.	28	7(57)	Loose dark brown loam
D.3	Un	-	-	Stony loam. Size uncertain
E.1	Ditch	-	56(86)	Barrow ditch. Light loam
E.2	Ditch	-	43(72)	Barrow ditch. Light loam
E.3	P.H.?	27	15(55)	Light loam
L.1	Ditch	-	-	Inner defensive ditch
N.1	Ditch	-	100(1.45)	Re-cut twice. Brown stony loam
T.1	Ditch	-	-	Inner defensive ditch
U.1	Pit?	43	16(50)	Loose loam. Uncertain feature
V.1	Pit?	-	20(65)	Modern inclusions
V.2	Quarry?	-	25(70)	Linear disturbance
Z.1	Un	70x50	12(43)	Brown loam. Some pot
Z.2	P.H.	35	22(62)	Post impression, 22cm diameter
Z.3	P.H?	30x45	22(62)	Pottery and bone fragments
16.1	Un	-	15-20	B.B.C. building debris
17.1	Ditch	-	-	Central defensive ditch
17.2	Ditch	-	-	Outer defensive ditch
18.1	Ditch	-	120(155)	Light silty loam
18.2	Post trench?	-	32(67)	Light silty loam
18.3	Gullies?	-	20?	Light loam; re-cut ditches?
18.4	Drain	-	-	Post-Medieval pot in fill

DENNIS JACKSON

19.1	Ditch	-	260(292)	Possible re-cut on north side
20.1	Quarry?	-	40(65)	Dark loam
21.1	Ditch	-	-	Silty loam, partial excavation
21.2	P.H.	45	32(72)	Dark brown stony loam
21.3	P.H.	35	25(65)	Dark brown stony loam
21.4	Un	-	-	Shallow disturbance
21.5	Un	-	-	Possible P.H. in trench face
21.6	Un	-	-	As 21.5
22.1	Gully	-	70(105)	Silted and not a post trench
22.2	P.H.	65	48(75)	Post impression, 30cm in diameter
22.3	Un	-	40(75)	Gully phase?
23.1	Slot	105x50	42(77)	Small packing stones
23.2	P.H.	45	35(72)	Grey-Brown loam
23.3	Pit?	-	35(75)	Brown loam and yellow silt
23.4	P.H.	45	25+	Some packing stones
23.5	Un	-	-	Two possible post holes in face
24.1	Ditch	-	66(91)	Post-med glass in upper level
25.1	Ditch	-	-	Barrow ditch. Light loam.
25.2	Ditch	-	-	Barrow ditch. Light loam
27.1	P.H.	50	55(95)	Enlarged at bottom
27.2	Pit	70x60	12(52)	Bottom of pit?
27.3	Gully?	-	20(60)	Uneven: deeper hole on line
27.4	Gully?	-	20(55)	Light brown loam: as 27.3
28.1	P.H.	45?	(67+)	Face of trench
28.2	Un	-	32(60)	Light brown sandy silt or loam
28.3	Un	-	30(55)	Dark loam
29.1	P.H.	30	15(55)	Dark loam

Trenches excavated by Northamptonshire Archaeology

1.4	Pit	85x65	20	Brown sandy loam
1.7	Pit	150x120	45?	Abundant pot; some burnt bones
2.8	Pit	67	28	Silt or loam. Some charcoal
2.10	PH?	52x30	17	Silt or loam
2.12	Pit	90	-	Shallow feature
2.22	Quarry	-	20	Irregular shallow feature
2.32	Un	47x35	6	Silty loam
2.34	Un	45x25	5	Silty loam

\* Depth from modern surface in brackets (cm.)

Six other post holes were found in Trench 2 with diameters between 25 and 50cm and depths between 5 and 30cm. There were another three possible post holes of shallow depth.

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