

EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF AN ENCLOSURE WEST OF
SHARPERTON EDGE IN COQUETDALE, NORTHUMBERLAND
AND ON THE COURSE OF THE ROMAN 'LINK ROAD' TO THE EAST,
CARRIED OUT BY *HOLYSTONE HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY GROUP*

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Holystone History and Archaeology Group (HHAG)



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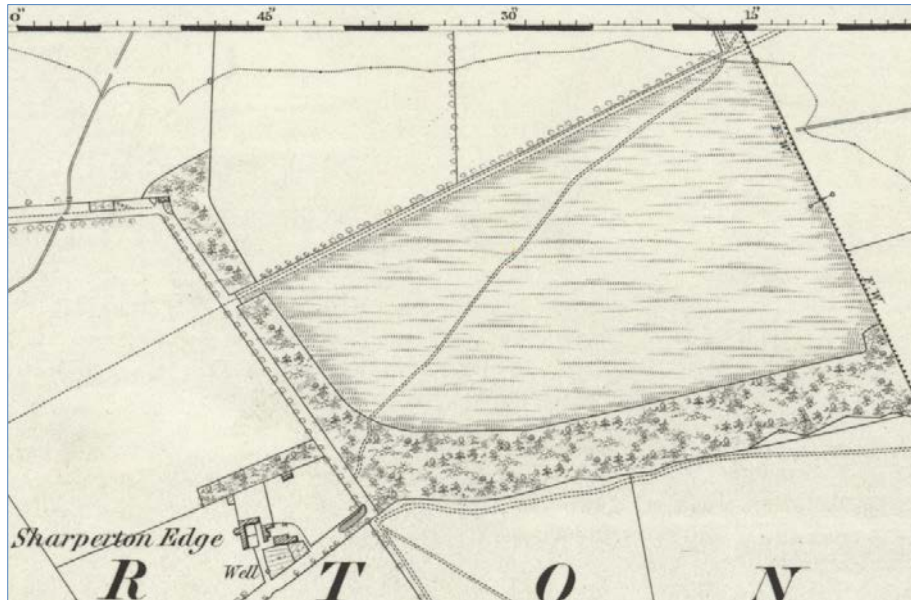
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(g) Trench 3 photographs

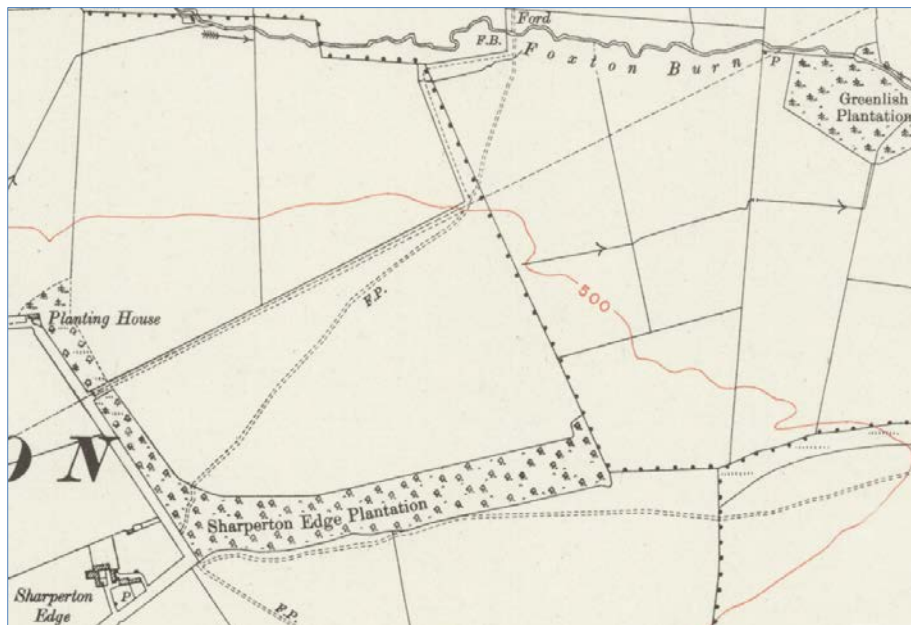
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1. INTRODUCTION

The fieldwork described continues an investigation into the Roman history of Coquetdale which commenced with excavations on the course of the Roman Link Road in 2018. While those excavations established the character and course of the road over Holystone Common, questions remained over the route of the road past Holystone village, as well as over the Coquet and to the east where, although marked on historic and modern editions of the Ordnance Survey series, its course had never been proven by geophysical prospection or excavation.



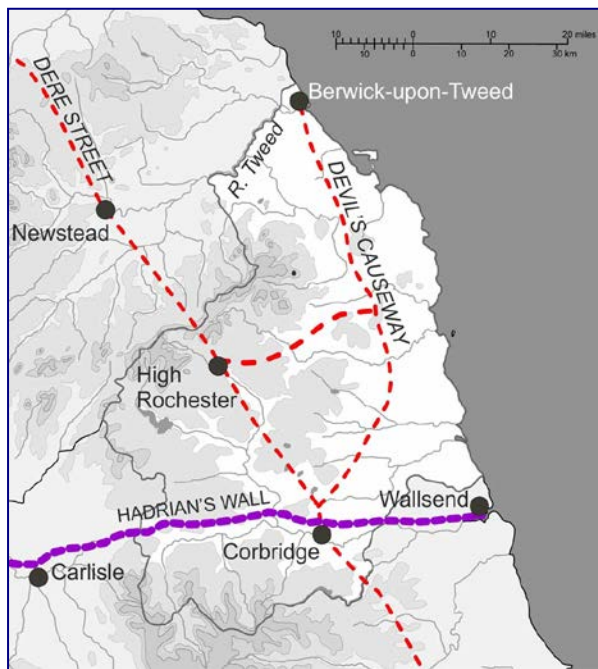
Illus. 01 & 02: The course of the Roman road shown north-east of Sharperton Edge on the First (1863, above) and Third (1923) editions of the Ordnance Survey Series.



While the High Rochester to Bridge of Aln link- or branch-road has been described for more than two centuries, originally by Smart in 1826 (see below) but most comprehensively by McLauchlan (1864a & b) and Richmond & Askew (1937), little investigative fieldwork had taken place upon it prior to the

recent excavations of 2018 and 2022, with work on the Coquetdale to Alndale parts of the route apparently restricted to a single trench excavated by Hunter Blair in 1936 (op. cit. 51-3 & see Collingwood 1937, 228). Here the road was found to comprise "a single layer of large rough cobbles, laid upon clean sand and 22ft 3inches wide. Larger stones were arranged as kerbing at each side, while a rib of heavy stones, laid on edge, ran down the centre and projected six or eight inches above the existing surface of the roadway" (Hunter Blair in Richmond and Askew, 1936, 51 – 53). Hunter Blair lists other occurrences of the central rib feature in Britain and abroad, including Italy and North Africa, noting that "its general purpose, to control undue movement of the metalling upon a wide and resilient road, is clear enough" (op. cit. 52).

Following the discovery that a short stretch of the road some 1.1 km west of Lanternside had been uncovered by human action sometime between 2003 and 2009 (Jones 2015), the course and character



Illus. 03: Map of Northumberland showing the courses of Dere Street, The Devil's Causeway and the road of current interest linking them running east from High Rochester.

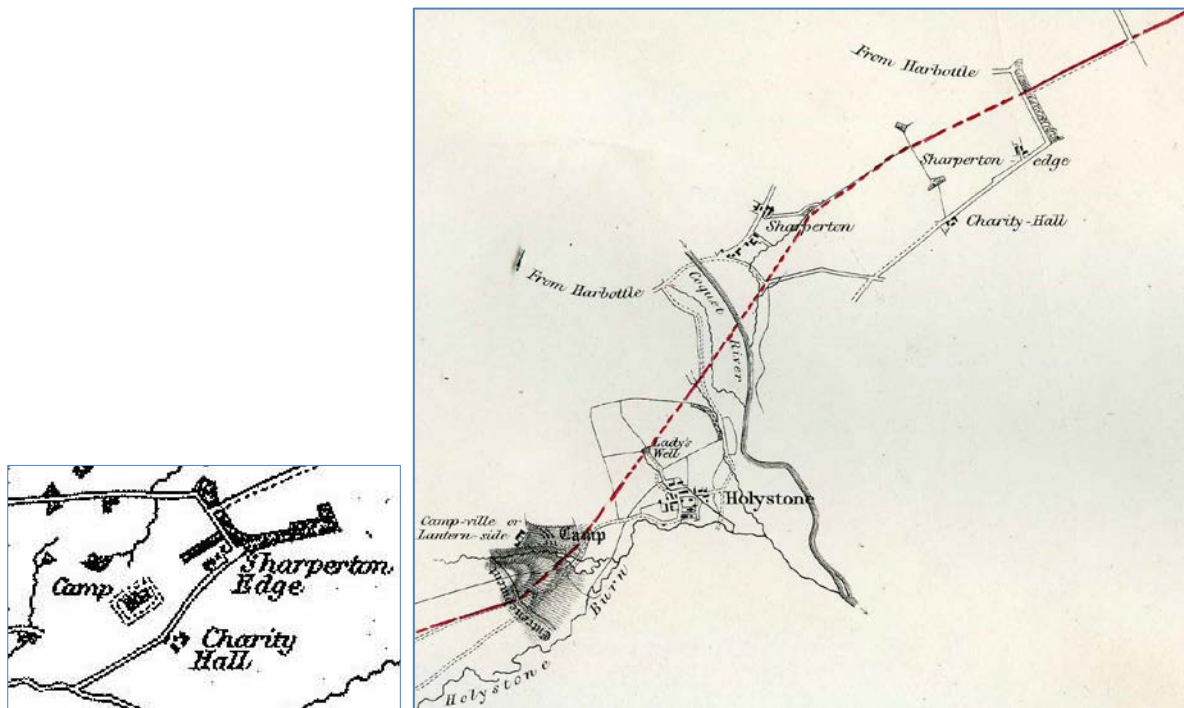
of the Roman road over Holystone Moor was confirmed by excavation in 2018 which revealed, in addition to expected features, a number of previously unrecorded or exceptional ones. Notable in this regard was the discovery of a stone bank supporting the downslope side of a terraced cutting for the road surface and, at its west end, a bedrock outcrop extending into the roadway in such a way as to impede traffic upon it. The roadway itself was found to vary between 6.3 and 7.70 m, but 6.30 -6.40 m is most common, the greater measurements being found adjacent to the stone banked section suggesting that the road may have spread onto and eventually incorporated the latter in a continuous platform. The central spine was the most prominent feature of the road surfaces, being found in all trenches, always at or very close to the centre line of the road. In addition to kerbs and the central spine, an additional feature of the road surfaces, which were otherwise uniformly of rounded sandstone cobbles laid in a single course, were apparent joints seen in the road surface, taken as likely to represent phases of construction, or different teams of builders.

While the course of the road past Holystone, over the Coquet and past Sharperton remains open to doubt, in 2022, circumstance afforded the opportunity to confirm its route east of Sharperton by examining sections of the road north-west and east of Sharperton Edge Farm, where the landowner had been observing the road for many years in The Ladyship and East Moor fields, respectively. In addition to doubts over the course of the Roman road, another issue thrown up by the 2018 work on Holystone Common concerned the lack of known Roman stations on the course of the Link Road and

the possibility that such a site lay concealed by an enclosed coppice known as The Ladyship on Sharperton Edge Farm. Enquiries following the 2018 work had led to an association being made (see Carlton 2018) between The Ladyship and a site mentioned in *An Account of a Roman Road in Northumberland*, by John SMART of Trehwitt (Smart 1832), the relevant section of which reads,

“a little to the eastward of which [Sharperton], on an eminence called Chester-hill, is an encampment, nearly square, occupying about two acres, and equidistant between the two branches [Dere Street and the Devil’s Causeway]. It then passes through the grounds of the villages of Burradon and the Trehwhitts. When taken up, in front of my house, I measured the breadth at fourteen feet” (PSAN 1832).¹

Following Smart’s account, the ‘encampment’ at Chester hill appeared for the first and, apparently, only time on Greenwood’s County map of Northumberland published less than two years later, in 1828. McLauchan disputes the identification of the current Ladyship plantation with Smart’s Chester-hill, so it does not appear in his description of the course of the Link Road, nor on his accompanying plan produced in 1854,² nor indeed on the first edition of the Ordnance Survey series (surveyed in 1856 but incorporating McLauchlan’s data and notes) or on any subsequent edition.



Illus. 04 & 05: ‘Camp’ shown (above left) by Greenwood (1828) but not by McLauchlan (1854).

¹ During the course of the current investigation Roger Miket informed the author that Adam Welfare had previously also made the association between The Ladyship and the ‘Chester hill’ of Smart’s account, leading to a site visit sometime in the 1970s when brief exploratory excavation by spade was undertaken within the Ladyship coppice with no significant results.

²² ‘Memoir Written During A Survey of the Eastern Branch of Watling Street in the County of Northumberland, from Bewclay, near Portgate on the Roman Wall, to Berwick upon Tweed, Together with a Branch Extending from High Rochester to Whittingham’; Surveyed, By Direction OP His Grace The Duke of Northumberland, K.G., Patron of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, in the Years 1857, 1858, and 1859 (McLauchlan 1864a & b).



Illus. 06: The unmarked 'Ladyship' site shown SW of Sharperton Edge, NNW of Charity Hall on the 1st edn. Ordnance Survey plan (1863).

Illus. 07: (below) in an aerial view taken from the south-east during fieldwork.



Philipson summarises and re-examines McLauchlan's thoughts on Smart's 'Chester-hill' in the following account of landholdings and place-names in the vicinity of Sharperton Edge, derived from a forthcoming paper on the wider township:

McLauchlan writes: "about 200 yards northwest of a farmhouse called ... Burrowdon East Bank we find a field called Chester's; and adjoining it on the west, in the next farm, are three other fields called Chester's Though we cannot hear that it ever bore the name Chester Hill, it is evident that this is the spot where we should look for Mr Smart's encampment".

In this he seems to be mistaken. Firstly, Smart clearly states that the eminence is only a little east of Sharperton village and he goes on to make separate mention of the further course of the road where it passes through Burradon. Secondly, there is some additional map evidence that Chester-hill is the hill where the excavated settlement lies. A 1632 map for the Earl of Newcastle³ shows Sharperton as a nucleated settlement with only two main village fields: a 'West Field' on the Harbottle side of Sharperton main street, and on the east 'Ebre Field', consisting of Cocklow, Chester and Ebre, all being worked as open fields.

³ NRO 782/13, a copy from the Welbeck Atlas.

Dippie Dixon records a 1724 survey of Ogle family lands,⁴ noting field names 'Ebry Field lesser', 'Ebry Field greater', and 'Cocklaw Field', a total of 367 acres. High Cock Law is shown on the first edition OS map (surveyed 1863) as the name of the eminence to the south of the Rothbury road at the south-eastern limit of the township, and still has that name. To make up 367 acres from here we need to go to the far north west of Sharperton township. The implication then is that Chester-hill lay half-way between the two extremities of the town fields.

In 1760 the landowners in Sharperton had agreed to a complex land swap on the grounds "*that the lands mostly lie interspersed amongst each other, and that it would be manifestly for the advantage of the parties to have their several shares laid all together in one plot for the better inclosing and improvement thereof*".⁵ A plot of two acres and four perches called Chesterheads was owned by Michael Potts, and lay "*in and amongst the other grounds*". Regrettably, we do not have a plan to show the plots before or after redistribution, as that might have enabled us to categorically link Chesterheads with Chester-hill. What is certain is that the former was allotted to Robert Storrer who apparently was awarded land on the south west side of the hill.

The name Chester-hill does not resurface on any subsequent documents which have come to hand, neither in the 1804 sale of the manor of Sharperton by the Duke of Portland to Sir John Buchanan of Ridele,⁶ nor in the 1847 Tithe Apportionment award which names every plot of land in the township.

The suggestion remains that an area of the township known in 1632 as Chester correlates to the Chester-hill where Smart professed to having seen an ancient camp, and is in the same area as Chesterheads which Robert Storrer acquired in 1760, and that this lies on the hill where the dig was carried out in 2022.

Ladyship

Arguing against the identification of the dig site as Chester-hill is the fact that the 1847 Tithe Apportionment map records field names which make no mention of Chester around the hill-top site.⁷ Fields on three of four sides are named Ladyship, or in one case Low Ladyship. The present field boundary walls clearly date from after the 1760 inclosure, so it might be thought that the names are even earlier. How that area of the hill came by the name Ladyship is uncertain. It could refer to Our Lady, in which case it might be pre-reformation.

The next field to the south of the copse, thus making up the fourth quadrant on the hill top, is recorded as Chantry Field. This is a puzzle as there is no local chantry, nor any record of a bequest to a chantry, while the nunnery at Holystone was a priory.

Charity Hall

In 1720 Reverend John Tomlinson bequeathed land at Sharperton as an endowment for the poor of Rothbury (Hope Dodds 1940, 446). In 1760 the charity must have given up some of the original holding as it was awarded a portion of land owned by Gabriel Redhead known as Cartington Acre and Redhead was awarded three roods of land elsewhere. The farmstead of Charity Hall does not appear on earlier maps and was surely founded as a dispersed settlement outside the village to be more convenient for working the newly allotted farmland. Sharperton Edge first appears during the same period.

Julian Philipson, Holystone, September 2022

⁴ Probably SANT/GEN/EST/3/5 (missing from shelves at Woodhorn since 2019).

⁵ ZFC/E/1/1.

⁶ 02862/36.

⁷ DT414/M.

Further impetus for the investigation of The Ladyship site came with the discovery by local historian and metal detectorist, Ian Glendinning, of artifacts with Roman provenance in the area between the presumed enclosure site and the projected course of the Roman road to the north. These finds, verified by Roman finds specialist Lindsay Allason-Jones, included horse harness components, brooches and a coin of Hadrian from close to the course of the road.

Despite knowledge of these finds of attested Roman origin, it was never seriously entertained by the investigators that The Ladyship/Chester hill 'encampment' was constructed and used as a Roman fort or fortlet. Rather, it was considered likely that the site originated as a native iron age settlement which, if not forcibly-abandoned at the onset of Roman occupation, may have survived to serve the Roman army in a client capacity. Such a finding would go some way to explaining the apparent total lack of permanent Roman installations on the course of the Link Road and, indeed, their almost-complete absence from the much longer and likely-contemporary Devil's Causeway to the east.

Thus, the principal research questions were established, as follows:

Can the course of the Roman 'Link' Road be proven in the environs of Sharperton Edge farm, specifically in the areas made available for investigation north of the Ladyship and east of the farm?

Where the course of the road can be proven, is it of the same character as found to the west, on Holystone Common and, if not, what does this suggest about its method of construction and use?

Are there any surviving remains within or around the current Ladyship plantation suggestive of an iron age enclosure?

If so, was this a defensive enclosure or undefended native farmstead/stock enclosure?

Should remains of an inhabited enclosure be uncovered, is there any evidence for Roman occupation or other activity there, or of significant Roman influence in the form of unusual numbers of types of finds?

It was proposed to approach these questions by means of invasive and non-invasive archaeological sampling.

2. FIELDWORK IN 2022

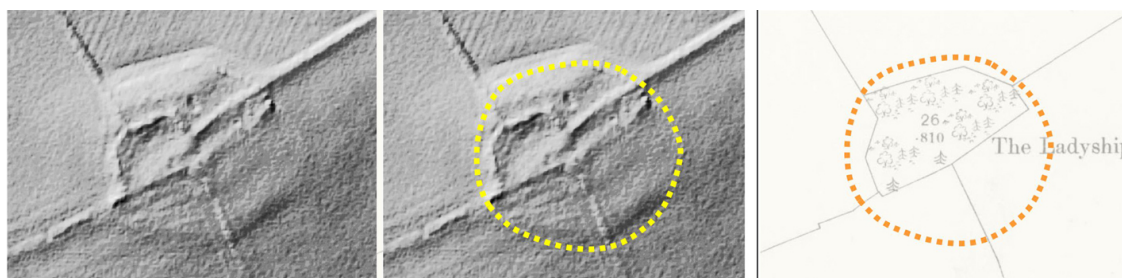
By the Winter of 2021-22 funding for a limited field investigation had been secured by HHAG from Tarmac's Harden Quarry community fund through its manager, Mr Gareth Williams and preparatory work commenced. Initially, this focussed on determining suitable locations for excavation on the presumed course of the Roman route east of Sharperton Edge by visiting and discussing it with Mac Young and other local land-users familiar with the terrain. The suggestion was raised during these visits that the course of the Roman road lay just to the south of its projected line, on the route of a parallel, modern trackway separated from the presumed line by a parallel ditch and bank. While there is certainly some sense in suggesting that the Roman road would have been used as footings for a modern track – as presumed by the line projected on the current Ordnance Survey plan - the presence of a stony ridge, or possible agger on the north side of the bank & ditch arrangement seemed to indicate that the Roman road survived here, rather than under the modern track. On this basis, backed-up by slight cropmark evidence of the road as it enters the adjoining field to the east (see

Google Earth aerial view of the East Moor, 2006 – Illus. 08, below), it was determined to search for it on this line. Upon inspection it was clear that recent drainage works had in places encroached upon the presumed course of the road here and damaged it. This led to the decision to choose a site for the first of a series of trenches at the far east end of the East Moor, east of the turn to the north of the modern trackway and beyond modern drainage works. Two other sites further west were also chosen, one avoiding drainage works and one, close to the west end of the available open ground, where drainage works had cut through the centre of the perceived road remains.



With respect to the Ladyship site west of Sharperton Edge farm, information provided by Mac Young as well as Alan Scott of Alwinton who, with his brother Frankie had been involved in ploughing the ground for many years, suggested that the Roman road here, north of the presumed enclosure site, had likely been removed by that process. Alan recalled that the plough turned up unusually large quantities of loose stone over the projected course of the road.

An opportunity to test the survival of the road and putative associated features, such as ditches, as well as to ascertain whether any traces existed of an enclosure around the Ladyship site, presented itself with the involvement of the Roman Roads Research Association which, through its President, Mr Dave Armstrong, offered to carry out geophysical survey of the site. Although delayed by the Great Storm Arwen which caused several trees to fall in the survey area and made others unstable in late November 2021, survey work was subsequently carried out by James Lyall on March 23rd 2022, with Dave Armstrong and other members of RRRG present, supported by members of HHAG. The survey focused on what was postulated as the south-east quadrant of the putative enclosure boundary, immediately south and east of The Ladyship, leaving un-surveyed the north-east quadrant as well as the entire west side of the enclosure which lies outside the Sharperton Edge farm boundary. An additional, related survey area to the north focused on the projected line of the Roman road running east-west across the north part of a large field which extends north from the north side of The Ladyship plantation to an Enclosure-period hedge-line beyond the projected course of the Roman road.



Illus. 09: Lidar survey of The Ladyship showing projected approx. extent of the suspected enclosure.

The results of geophysical survey carried out in March, 2022 provided no evidence to support the existence of the Roman road which, as suggested by local informants (see above) seems to have been ploughed-out across this area. Nor was any indication provided of road-side ditches which, although a common feature of Roman roads elsewhere, were not found in excavations carried out on the course of the Link Road on Holystone Common in 2018. In contrast, however, sufficient anomalies were found

on the plot produced from geophysical survey on the south-east side of The Ladyship plantation (see Illus. 14, below) to support further, invasive investigation of the suggested Chester-hill enclosure site south of the Roman road. The geophysical survey plot (produced by James Lyall) showed a substantial linear feature running south south-west from the south-east corner of the plantation, gently curving to the west, with a more substantial, also gently-curving branch which appears to represent a different phase of construction forking from it to the south-west some 40 m south of the plantation boundary. It is presumed that these linear features form part of the south-eastern boundary, perhaps built in two or more phases, of a ditched-enclosure representing Smart's Chester-hill 'encampment'. North of the more prominent linear (ditch) feature in the west part of the area surveyed, at the west end of a field running east from the farm, the survey plot additionally revealed apparent traces of a possible square-shaped feature, made up of a northern E-W branch and an eastern N-S branch, each around 8 m long, with a suggestion of disturbed ground or features within it. In the absence of any other significant anomalies revealed by the survey it was determined to sample the three features described above, namely the long, gently-curving linear feature [A], the more prominent SW-NE linear feature [B] joining it in the middle of the survey area, and the apparent square feature [C] within the interior of the suspected enclosure. Accordingly, three sites (Trenches 2-4) were chosen on the basis of the geophysical survey plot and measured in on the ground before excavation commenced using a mechanical excavator, expertly handled by Mac Young and Kevin Milburn, to remove overburden, following which HHAG volunteers carried out detailed hand-excavation.

Excavation work began on the Roman road (*Trench 1a-c*) north-east of Sharperton Edge on May 18th and commenced later on the same day at the Ladyship site to the west. Formal excavation work ceased on May 25th but recording continued until May 28th, following which the trenches were back-filled.

3. EXCAVATIONS CARRIED OUT ON THE PROJECTED LINE OF THE COQUETDALE-ALNDALE ROMAN LINK ROAD NORTH-EAST OF SHARPERTON EDGE

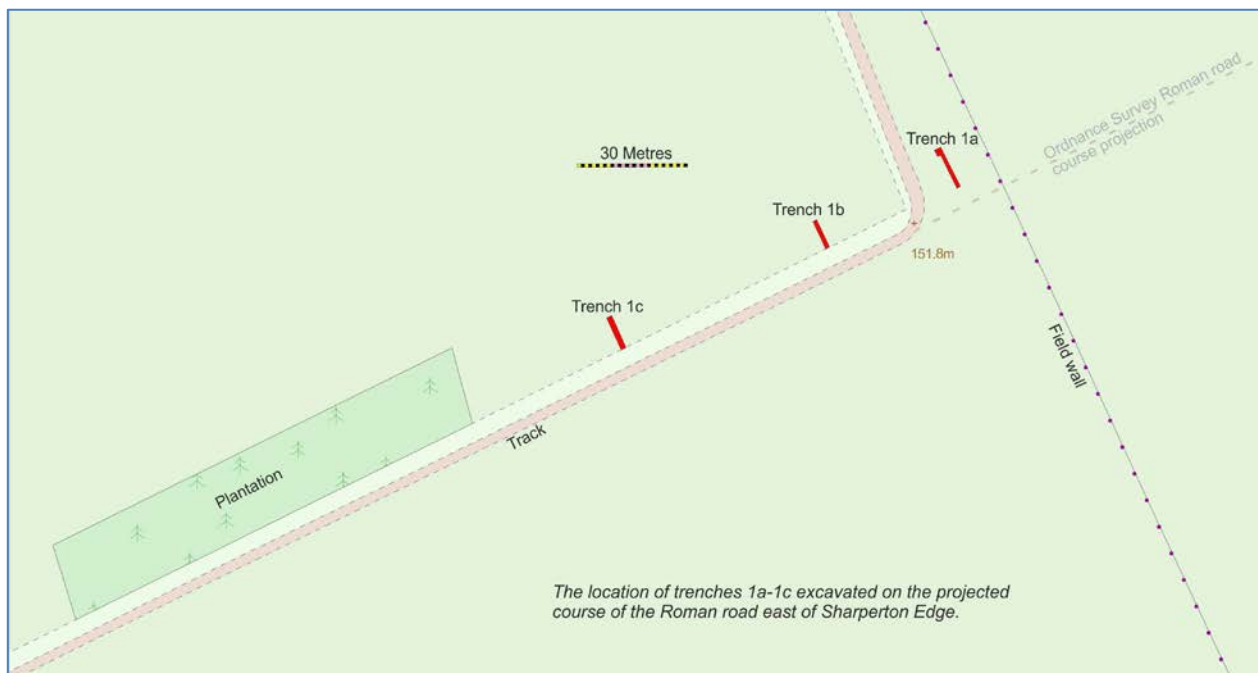
The excavations north-east of Sharperton Edge (centred on NGR: NT 97550 04950) were carried out where it was postulated, on the grounds of earthwork and limited cropmark evidence, that the course of the Link Road runs alongside rather than underneath - as projected on the current Ordnance Survey map - the northern edge of a modern trackway extending eastwards from a c-road bordering the farmstead through a field of improved rough pasture known as Sharperton Edge East Field, entering the latter through a long-established field gate on the south-west side and exiting at a drystone wall boundary with Burradon grounds to the north-east. The trackway bends sharply to the north 30 m or so from the drystone eastern boundary wall, but the course of the road remains visible as a cropmark as far as the next field boundary (see *Illus. 08*, above and *Illus. 27 & 28*, below), beyond which it crosses a small stream and heads for the north side of a small coppice known as Greenish Plantation.



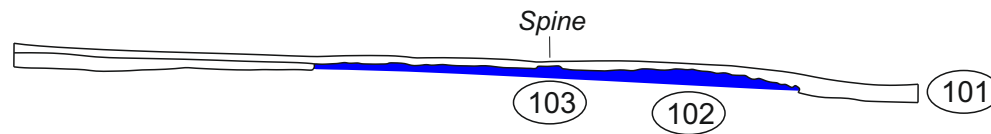
Illus. 10 & 11: Westward views of trackway (left) on the position of the OS projection of the Roman road, with parallel ditch-&-bank features (right) to the north.

Within the area of investigation, Sharperton Edge East field, several areas were available for investigation on the north side of the modern trackway, while other areas were rendered impossible to investigate due to the presence of strips of woodland, including modern conifer plantations, which are likely to have damaged or destroyed those parts of the road. The area chosen for investigation was at the east end of the field both east and west of the point at which the modern trackway turns northwards, close to the eastern boundary. In this area the modern trackway exists as a slightly incised holloway occupying the south part of a wide terrace which also includes the Roman road, and seems to have been cut into the prevailing slope which descends from the south. Thus, the south side of the modern trackway is defined by a c. 0.70 m high, 60-degree step onto the trackway platform which is deeply rutted in places and about 6 m wide. The trackway is bordered on its north side by a ditch some 1 - 1.5 m wide, beyond which is a bank some 1.5 – 2.3 m wide. The bank contains a number of mature trees, principally of hawthorn and ash, the roots of which are degrading it. Where it turns to the north near the east end of the field, the width of the road narrows and its outer cut bank disappears, while the inner bank loses its ditch. East of its turn to the north traces of a ditch on the same line as the east-west ditch to the west suggest that this feature, at least, may once have continued eastwards and may, therefore, be an earlier feature. North of the bank the terrace containing the modern trackway, ditch and bank extends a further 6-7 m before dipping to the north, resuming the profile of the natural slope also seen on the south side of the modern trackway.

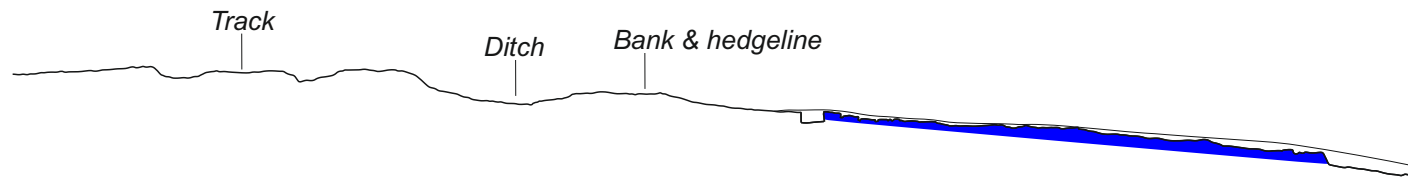
As noted above, the question immediately arises as to why the modern trackway, which appears to be of relatively modern, perhaps Enclosure-period date, is built to the south of the Roman road rather than upon it. There is no obvious answer to this, but it is possible that the modern trackway was deliberately positioned to avoid damaging the Roman road, its course having been identified by the early 19th century by local antiquarians, or positioned there because the Roman road was seen to be in poor condition, slumping downhill to the north and not considered to offer a sound base upon which to build a modern road. Alternatively, the south side of the Roman road may once have marked a field or property boundary, defined by the existing bank and ditch described above, which constrained the positioning of the trackway.



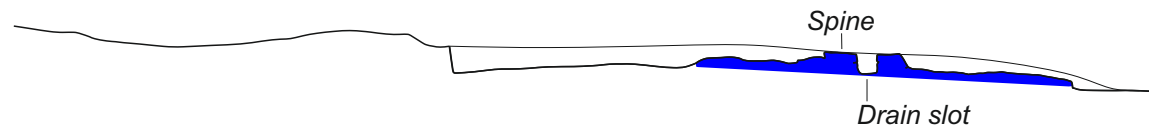
Illus. 12: Location Plan of Trenches 1a-1c at the east end of East Moor.



Illus. 13: Trench 1a
NE Facing



Illus. 14: Trench 1b
NE Facing



Illus. 15: Trench 1c
NE Facing



Illus. 13-15: North-east facing sections of Trenches 1a - 1c showing Roman road surface profiles (blue fill) and associated ground surfaces.

Excavation through the course of the modern trackway was impossible as it remains a designated through-route for wheeled vehicles, but a trench on its projected route east of its turn to the north was proposed in order to ensure, as seems almost certain, that the Roman road does not lie underneath. On finding the Roman road in its expected position to the north this was not completed, but there remains some merit in opening such a trench, both to prove that road remains do not lie on this projection and to detect any signs of a putative road-side ditch related to the northern projection.

Sections of the Roman road were examined in three trenches named Trench 1 a, b & c (see *Illus. 12*, above). Trench 1a, 12 m long and 1.5 m wide, was 10.5 m from the East Field eastern boundary wall; Trench 1b, 8.15 m long and 1.10 m wide, was a further 38 m to the west, thus 50 m from the eastern field boundary; Trench 1c, 9.5 m long by 1.5 m wide, was a further 61.65 m west, its west side some 43.7 m east of the fenced boundary to a small, modern conifer plantation.

In **Trench 1a**, 12 m long and 1.5 m wide, the final 1.5 m of its north end widened by 0.90 m to the east, the road surface was seen from 4 m north of its south end to 1.68 m from its north end, a total length of 6.32 m within which it dipped gently but markedly to the north. It survived as one course of large stones, 0.52 m max. diam. but mostly 0.15-25 m Maximum diameter (max. diam.), 0.10-15 m below the turf. Some metalling survived between larger stones and in places above them, notably in the central and north parts of the road where it was in the form of small, rounded pebbles 0.01-08 m max. diam. The road surface was sharply cut, perhaps by plough, at the south end beyond which was a deposit of loose stones, generally smaller than those used to construct the base deposit of the road, but with a few larger stones below, all embedded in a soil matrix. It is suggested that these might represent a planned but abandoned continuation, or rerouting of the road to the north, but perhaps more likely that they may be the remains of a supply of stones placed in preparation for use in road construction, but never used, perhaps because of their intermediate size between base stones and metalling.

No kerb is visible to the south side of the road, where it may have been removed by ploughing or deliberate robbing, but in the east part of the northern edge of the road are four stones, two protruding to just below turf level, which seem to form a straight end to the road surface, although this line does not continue westwards. Beyond this apparent line is more stonework, similar in appearance to that seen beyond the south side of the compacted road surface (see above), being a mass of small stones, consistently 0.07-12 m max. diam., also embedded in topsoil. This is of distinctly different character to the make-up of the compacted road surface with its base layer of large, flat stones and may also be the remains of a dump of stone placed in preparation for construction, but never used (in much the same way that bands of stone can sometimes be seen alongside stone walls, where they were abandoned by wallers having been found unfit or unnecessary for their intended purpose).

No signs of ditches were apparent in the excavated area, but as noted above there remains to the north-east a slight linear impression of a possible ditch in line with the modern ditch on the north side of the modern trackway to the south-west. It is possible, therefore, that both this light impression and the modern ditch to the west are remnants of an earlier ditch line, a possibility which certainly merits further investigation.

In **Trench 1b**, 8.5 m long and 1.10 m wide, the road surface was seen from 0.28 – 7.07 m north of its south end, giving a surviving Roman road width of 6.79 m. At the north end is a single, large stone 0.48 m max. diam. but rather thin and flat, so not a kerb-stone. Elsewhere, just below existing ground level was a surface of larger stones, 0.30-40 m max. diam. infilled with smaller, mostly rounded cobbles up to 0.13 max. diam. In the centre, at 3.6 m from the south end, were two large stones in line with the SW-NE projection of the road, perhaps part of a possible central 'spine', with another raised to the

level of the ground surface just to the south. Beyond this is an area of possible metalling over larger, underlying stones and north of this, beginning 5.3 m from the south end, the surface of larger stones begins to fall away quite markedly towards the northern edge of the road surface. The road edge here is marked by a very large, deeply-embedded kerb or revetment stone of 0.54 m max. diam., with other, smaller stones of max. dim. 0.21 and 0.30 m, respectively, to either side, forming a convincing 'edge'. This reveting and slumping-away of the roadway downhill suggests a similar method of construction to that seen on Holystone Common some 3 km to the south-west, in 2018, where it was apparent that a terrace to accommodate the roadway had been constructed along a natural slope by digging into it from the side and casting earth outwards to form a flat surface which, over time, had compressed, leading to slumping of the outer or downslope part of the road surface. The large kerb stone here appeared to anticipate this process and fulfilled the same function as a more substantial stone revetment on the downhill side of a section of road through Holystone Common.

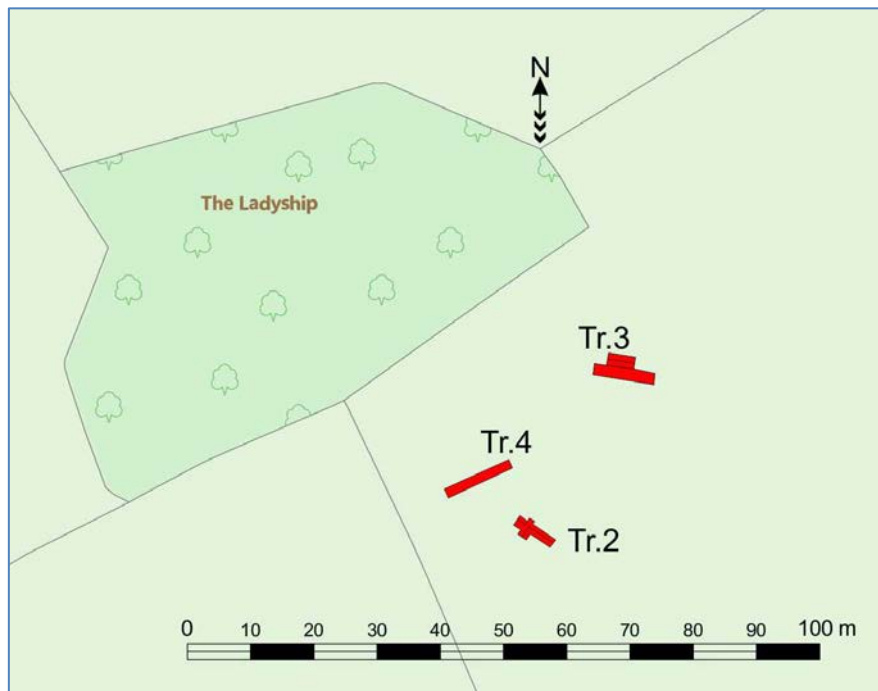
The bottom of the apparent 'agger' or terrace here was 0.30 m from (i.e. within) the northern edge of the trench and ran up to the northern edge of the bank separating the Roman road from the modern trackway, the edge of the bank being some 0.80 m south of the trench end.

In **Trench 1c**, 9.5 m long and 1.5 m wide, the road surface was seen from 2.90 – 8.15 m north of its south end, giving a surviving Roman road width of 5.25 m. At the south end, a slot revealed that the apparent agger, or terrace was here entirely of earthen construction until the beginning of a road surface 2.90 m to the north, which started a little raggedly, with stones up to 0.36 m max. diam. interspersed with cobbles 0.10-16 m max. diam. A more continuous, compacted surface began from c. 3.5 m from the south end of the trench, comprising a single layer of stones mostly over 0.35 m max. diam., with one very flat stone of 0.54 m max. diam. only 0.05 m below current ground (turf) level. While those closest to the centre of the surviving road are very close to ground level, north of a point 5 m from the south end of the trench the depth of overlying topsoil increases and the road surface lies 0.18-28 m below current ground level (bgl). Beyond the central section of large, flattish stones up to 0.54 m max. diam. is a distinct row of rounded field stones, of 0.33 – 40 m max. diam., centred on a line 5.65 m from the south end of the trench. Although some may have slumped since being laid, these are set on edge and closely arranged to form a continuous feature across the trench, similar in appearance to the central spine feature seen on excavated parts of the Link Road to the west. Caution should be exercised here, however, due to the presence of a field drain cut along the line of this apparent 'spine' feature, which appears likely to have disturbed it. However, information supplied by landowner-farmer Mac Young and investigation along the route of the drain – visible on the surface as a one of a series of parallel, upstanding linear earthworks - suggests that this was a very narrow, machine-made drain cut which seems not to have been used for its intended purpose, as it is likely that the ground was considered too stony to lay the intended drain. Thus, the level of disturbance seems not to have been very significant, perhaps just enough to displace some of the 'spine' stones slightly from their original edge-on positions. The line of stones described protrudes by 0.05-10 m above the current ground surface, as do several more such stones along the same line to the west, suggesting that the 'spine' feature here is continuous over some considerable distance.

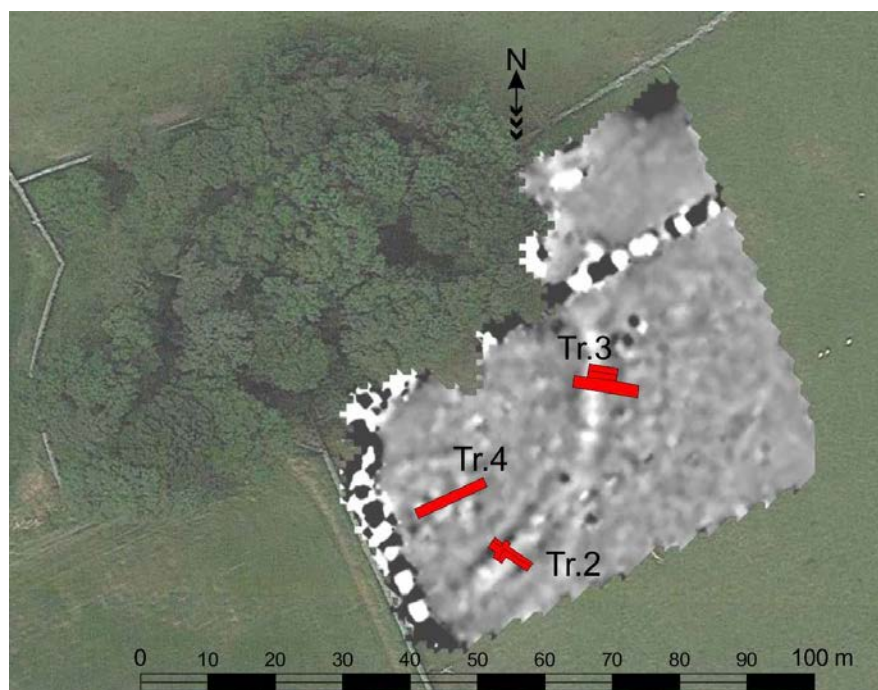
North of the suspected 'spine' feature the road surface changes to a well-packed and embedded surface of smaller stones 0.12-28 m max. diam. at a lower level than the spine, some 0.12-15 m bgl. This ends in slightly-ragged fashion 8.15 m north of the south end of the trench where sub-soil was encountered at 0.16 m bgl. The north edge of the agger or terrace is not clear here, but the ground surface falls away with the natural slope beyond the road surface.

4. EXCAVATIONS CARRIED OUT ON THE SUSPECTED 'LADYSHIP' ENCLOSURE SITE

Excavations (centred on NGR: NT 96727 04194) on the site of the suspected enclosure commenced with the use of a mechanical excavator to open three trenches, of which Trenches 2 & 3 (*Illus. 18-21*) were placed over geophysical anomalies interpreted as the likely courses of ditches, while Trench 4 (*Illus. 22 & 23*) was sited within the enclosure over an anomaly suggestive of a small enclosed area, perhaps a round-house or part of an open, bounded yard.



Illus. 16: Position of evaluation trenches excavated on the south-east side of The Ladyship coppice, shown in relation to the Ordnance Survey base map.



Illus. 17: Positions of evaluation trenches 2-4 transposed upon a geophysical survey plot of the site from March, 2022.

TRENCH 2

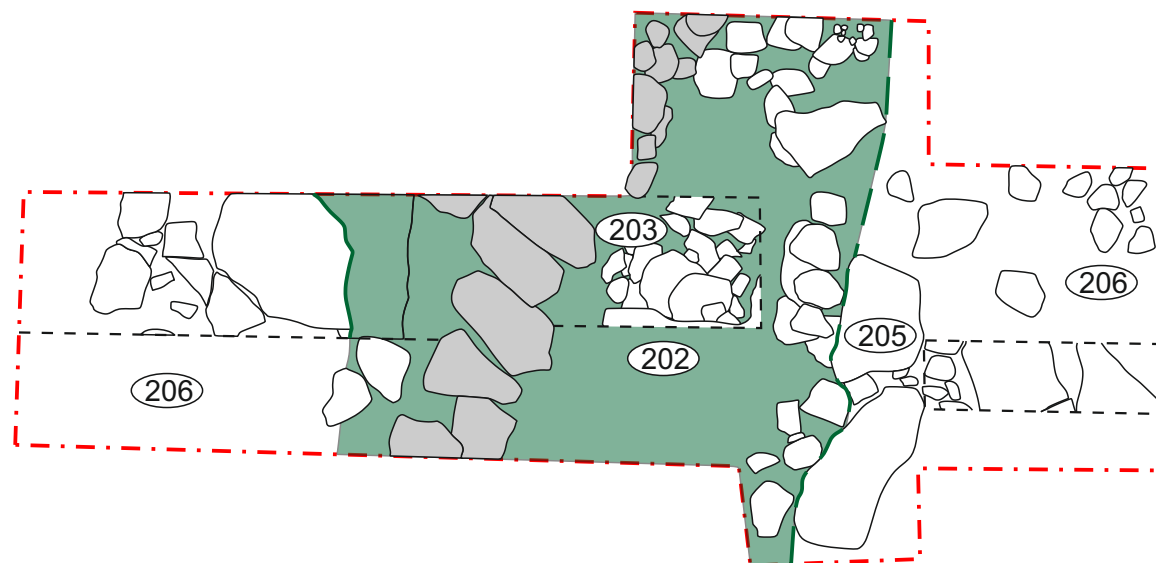
Trench 2 was opened in the south-west part of the area examined by geophysical survey to examine a linear feature which appeared to form part of the south-east boundary to the suggested late prehistoric enclosure.

Below the turf and topsoil [201] was a stony deposit [202] comprised largely of large boulders made of both field stones and quarried material, within a loamy matrix. This fill deposit ended rather suddenly at a depth of some 0.60 m bgl, revealing the upper surface of the principal ditch-fill deposit [203], upon which was found the only artefact recovered from this trench, a very small fragment of blue polychrome glass with remains of overlaid white banding. Sitting within [202] on [203] was a layer of large, flat stones [205] measuring up to 0.80 m long and around 0.35 m thick which formed a distinct layer across the upper fill of the ditch and may have served as some kind of pathway or causeway across it. The likelihood is that this is a relatively modern feature, certainly post-dating the primary ditch fill and probably occurring when the latter had settled to create a secondary, remnant shallow ditch on the course of the original, perhaps in the medieval or post-medieval period. Removal of this stone-built feature revealed the primary ditch fill [203] consisting of lenses of sandy loam interspersed with spreads of rocks, the latter more prominent in the bottom of the fill from c 1.6 m bgl. This mixed fill continued to the excavated depth of the trench and appeared likely to represent a single backfilling episode. It is suggested that this was probably constituted from material excavated during the cutting of the enclosure ditch, subsequently used to create an internal bank parallel to the ditch which was later pushed back into the enclosure ditch in an episode of backfilling. The cut of the ditch [204] was seen to be steep-sided and, on its south side, rock-cut, creating a feature some 3.2 m wide and 2.10 m deep bgl. On its north side the secondary boulder fill [202] extended up to the surface, with large boulders appearing just below turf level, and appeared to be arranged as a form of revetment upon the natural bedrock and boulder clay, thereby forming both the northern edge of the ditch and inside face of the rampart. The natural deposits through which the ditch was cut were seen to be a mixture of sandstone bedrock and some overlying boulder-clay on the northern inner side of the ditch. The yellowish sandstone was somewhat friable and had, where possible, been split along natural bedding planes and cracks to create the ditch.

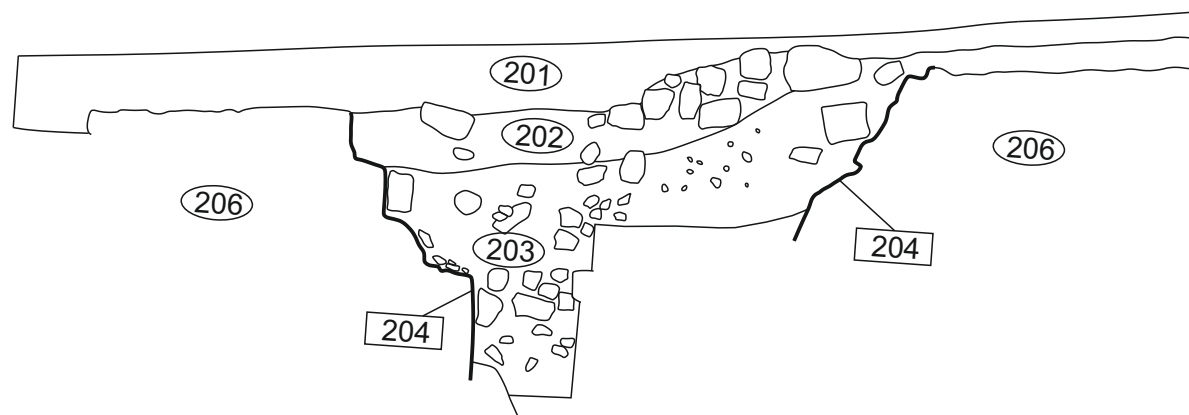
TRENCH 3

Trench 3 was opened in the north part of the survey area to examine the linear feature presumed to be the ditched boundary of a late prehistoric enclosure.

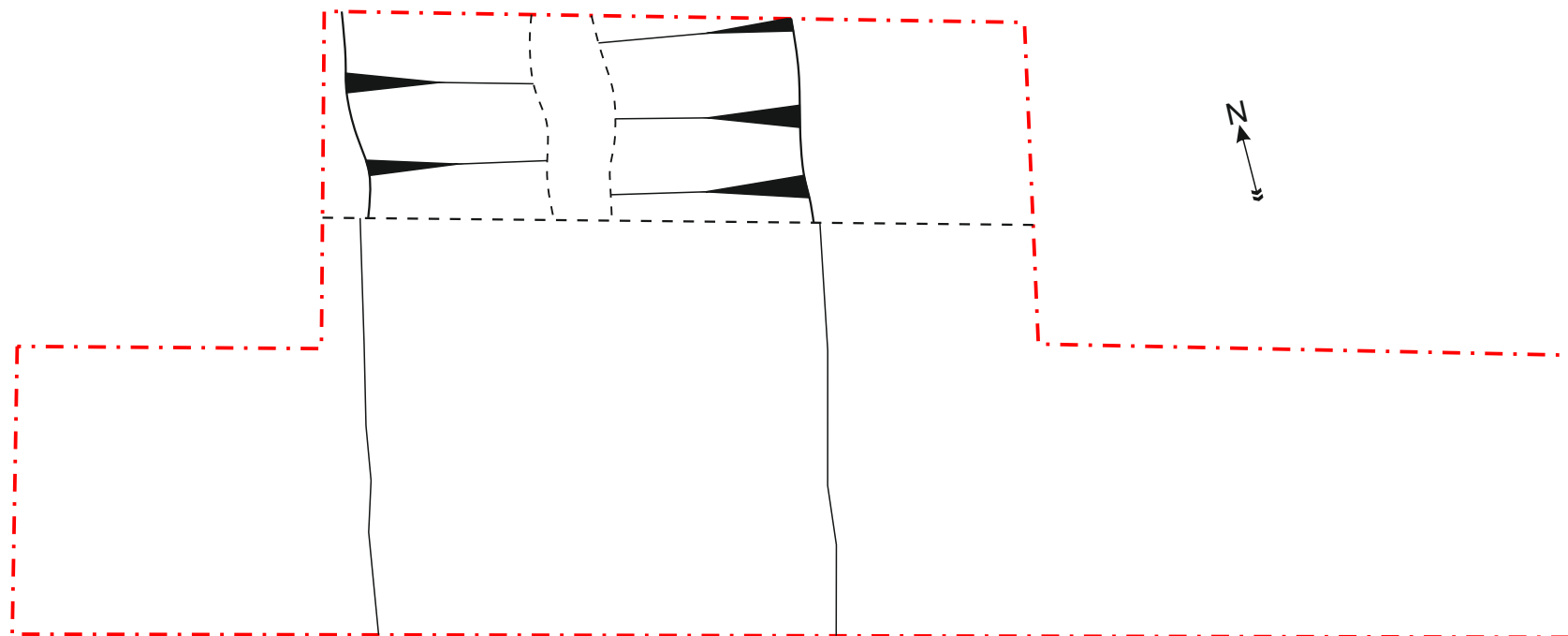
Below the rather deep turf and topsoil [301] was a brown, sandy plough-soil [302] which sealed the upper fill [303] of a ditch [307]. The upper fill [303] was a yellow-brown, medium-grained pebbly sand while the main fill [304] below it was a grey, sandy-loam matrix containing sandstone pieces and lenses of sand. The only finds from this trench, two sherds of coarse, hand-made pottery, were made in the surface and upper strata of fill [303]. The ditch-fill deposits [303] & [304] contained no organic or artefactual material and seem to represent a single backfilling episode, during which what was the inner bank of upcast material was pushed back into the ditch. Whilst not in distinct layers, many of the stones appear to have been deposited in the ditch in groups, perhaps implying that the ditch mound had been reveted with stones cut during its creation. Close to the ditch bottom was a layer of finer-grained, grey silty sand with what appears to be charcoal inclusions, probably representing a lower silting layer within the ditch prior to its backfilling. This ditch fill deposit produced a small flot comprising well-preserved charcoal of hazel, alder, oak, willow/poplar and birch, and a few charred barley grains, hazel nutshell fragments and a redshank nutlet. While not diagnostic of any particular period, these accumulations of domestic hearth waste are well-preserved and eminently suitable for radiocarbon dating, having undergone little taphonomic change since deposition (see O'Brien, Appendix 2, p.2).



0 Scale 1:50 2m

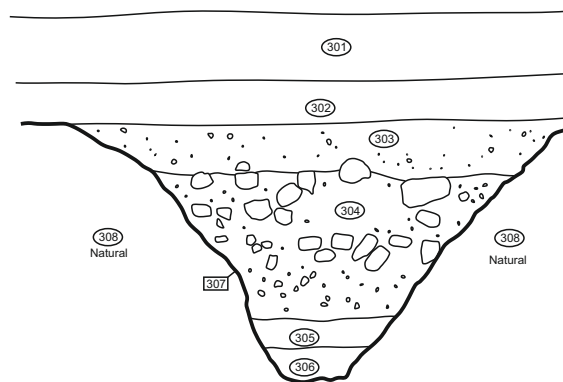


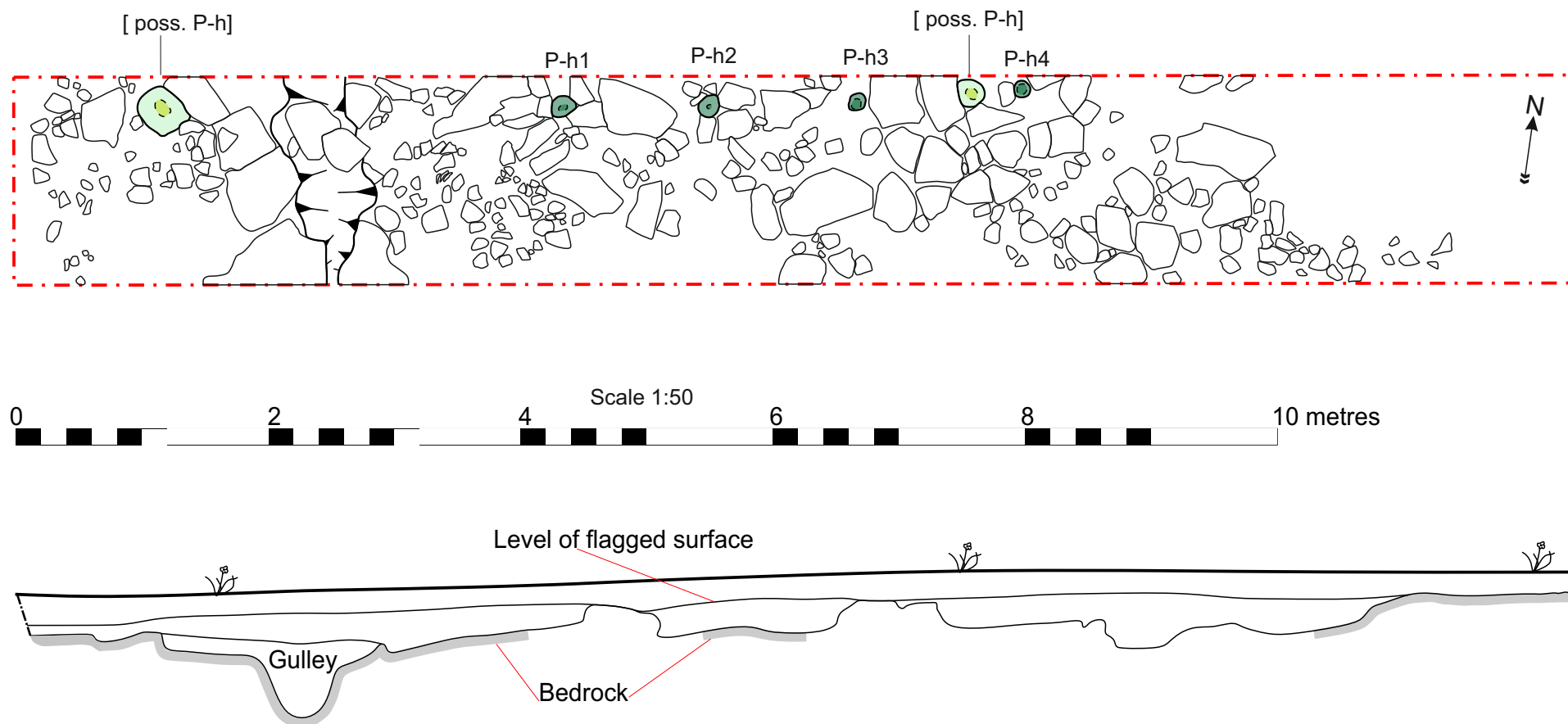
Illus. 18 & 19: Trench 2 Plan and north-east facing section drawing.



0 Scale 1:50 2m

Illus. 20 & 21: Plan (above) and south-west facing section of the enclosure ditch excavated in Trench 3.





Illus. 22 & 23: Plan (above) and south-east facing section drawing of Trench 4.

Below this deposit was the basal layer of the ditch fill material, an orange-yellow sandy deposit [306] with sandstone pieces, probably the result of natural weathering processes impacting the cut sides of the ditch [307], the steep-sided profile of which was measured at 3.4 m wide and 2.05 m deep. The natural deposits [308] through which the ditch was cut were observed to be a mixture of friable yellow sandstone and orange/yellow sandy clay.

TRENCH 4

Trench 4 was opened in the west part of the survey area to examine an apparent feature suggested by a geophysical anomaly of squarish form within the suggested late prehistoric enclosure.

Removal of the turf and topsoil overburden [401] revealed, across the central part of the trench a somewhat fragmentary but nevertheless continuous flagged surface [402] of flat stones sitting in a loam-based matrix some 0.25-35 m bgl. Both the east and west ends of this made surface [402] rested directly on sub-soil or fragmentary bedrock [403], encountered some 0.25-30 m bgl, but the excavation of an exploratory slot along the north side of the trench revealed that in the greater, central part of the trench surface [402] sat upon a deposit of mixed rubble and loam-based plough- or topsoil [404] which extended to 0.60-70 m bgl. Running across the west part of the trench some 2.5 m from the trench end was an apparent gulley feature [405] of somewhat variable width, between 0.57 – 1.10 m, and up to 1.10 m deep, filled with mixed plough-/top-soil and penetrated by small animal burrows. While the possibility remains that this is a made feature it seems more likely that it is the product of burrowing by fox or badger, perhaps enhancing a narrower gulley of human origin. In view of the apparently-disturbed, mixed deposits found to infill this feature, and bearing in mind the limited budget for post-excavation analysis, no samples were retained for palaeo-environmental investigation. East of gulley-feature [405] along the north side of the trench the remains of at least four and up to six likely post- or stake-holes [406] were uncovered running parallel with the north side of the trench within the test-slot excavated there. Two of these features were clearly round in plan, some 0.10-12 m in diameter, of tapering profile and penetrated the sub-soil to depths of c 0.10 m. These two features, set some 1.4 m apart with [406a] at the east end and [406b] on its west side, appeared to form a line with two others to the west of [406b], the remains of which were less clear, though marked by depressions and arrangements of packing stones, the first [406c] being some 1.1 m from [406b] with [406d] a further 1.2 m to the west.

5. CONTEXT DESCRIPTIONS (Trenches 2-4):

Trench 2

- 201 Turf and topsoil
- 202 Upper fill of ditch. Rocks and loam
- 203 Main fill of ditch. A mix of layers and spreads of rocks within a sandy loam matrix. Continues to the excavated depth of the trench and likely represents a single backfilling episode. This fill was also most likely to have been the material excavated during the cutting of the enclosure ditch, which was subsequently set as a bank adjacent to the ditch (and then later pushed back in to backfill the enclosure ditch). The material appeared to have been pushed into the ditch from the inner (northern) side, implying that this was the side the original bank had been located on.
- 204 Cut of ditch. Steep sided and rock-cut.
- 205 Natural. Primarily sandstone, though more clay and cobbles on the northern inner side of the ditch. The yellowish sandstone was somewhat friable and had, where possible, been split along natural bedding planes and cracks to create the ditch.

206 Layer of 'large stone 'stepping stones' within upper fill 202 across the upper fill of the ditch. These looked too convenient to have been the result of general backfilling and are likely to have been purposefully placed to allow the former ditch to be more easily crossed after it was backfilled.

Trench 3

- 301 Turf and topsoil
- 302 Medium brown sandy subsoil (seals ditch)
- 303 Upper fill of ditch. A yellow-brown medium grained pebbly sand.
- 304 Main fill of ditch. Sandstone rubble and grey sandy loam, with sandstone pieces and lenses of sand. This material represents a single backfilling episode within the ditch, when what was the upcast inner mound was pushed back into the ditch. Whilst not in distinct layers, many of the stones appear to have been deposited in the ditch together, perhaps implying that the ditch mound had been reveted with stones cut during its creation.
- 305 Layer of finer grained grey silty sand with what appears to be charcoal inclusions. This layer represents a lower silting layer within the ditch prior to its backfilling. [Sampled.]
- 306 Lower fill of ditch. A medium yellow grained sand with sandstone pieces. Possibly the result of the weathering of the natural cut sides of the ditch.
- 307 Cut of enclosure ditch. Steep sided with a flat base.
- 308 Natural. Friable yellow sandstone and orange/yellow sandy clay.

Trench 4

- 401 Turf and topsoil
- 402 Flagged surface [402] of flat stones sitting in a loam-based matrix
- 403 Natural ground or sub-surface of (?) redeposited sub-soil or fragmentary bedrock below each end of flagging [402].
- 404 Mixed rubble and loam-based plough- or top-soil extending up to 0.60-70 m bgl below [402].
- 405 Gully feature of variable width, between 0.57 – 1.10 m, and up to 1.10 m deep, filled with mixed plough-/top-soil [=404].
- 406 Line of post- or stake-holes parallel with the north side of the trench at 0.3-4 m bgl. Two of these features were round in plan, 0.10-12 m in diameter, of tapering profile and penetrated the sub-soil to depths of c 0.10 m. Two more marked by depressions and arrangements of packing stones. Two other possible post-holes were identified west of post-hole no. 1 and between post-holes 3 & 4 (see Trench Plan, *Illus. 22*).

6. FINDS

Artefactual and ecofactual finds were small in number, although further information on the latter, namely bulk samples collected from the bottom of the defensive ditches revealed in Trenches 2 & 3, awaits the completion of palaeo-environmental analysis of bulk samples.

A summary of evidence provided by five classes of artifacts, namely pottery, glass, metal, flint and other stone, is provided below, based on a tabulated description of finds presented in *Table 1*.

Pottery

Five sherds of coarse pottery of likely iron age origin pottery were recovered from the Sharperton Edge site. These comprised a large rim sherd from the upper fill deposit in Trench 3 (*Illus. 24-i*), a base (*Illus. 24-ii*) and three body sherds from upon, within or just below the flagged floor remains in Trench 4. In addition, a single fragment of low-fired ceramic material interpreted as daub was recovered from the same broad context. While most of the pottery is coarse and gritty, there is some variation in

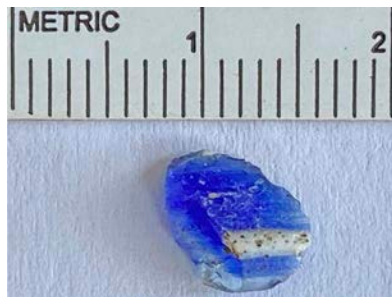
surface treatment, with some sherds apparently smoothed or burnished to create a relatively smooth surface and others left coarse. Notable in this respect is a large rim-sherd recovered from the top of the ditch-fill in Trench 3, which was smooth on the outside but extremely rough and gritty on the inside, perhaps suggesting a function similar to that supposed for Roman mortaria. No significant variation in fabric or finishes can be determined on the basis of such a small sample, but all five sherds are consistent with late-prehistoric production.

In addition, a fired clay fragment in sandy fabric with organic inclusions visible as impressions and voids was identified as daub. Externally it is oxidised orange, with a reduced grey/black core and internal surfaces. It exhibits one flattened end with finger/thumb impressions just beneath on the external surface, while a long parallel impression visible on the ?inner surface, running parallel to the flattened edge, may be a wattle impression. Max. dimensions: 41mm x 35mm x 13mm. Weight: 16 g.

As well as coarse sherds of hand-built pottery and ?daub, a number of fragments of wheel-made pottery were also recovered. In Trench 3, from the top-soil overburden above iron age levels was recovered a sherd of unglazed, wheel-made pottery in a soft, red, slightly sandy fabric which could be later medieval or early post-medieval or, just conceivably, Roman. Another, smaller fragment of similar colour, but rougher and without any indication of wheel-manufacture, may be contemporary or earlier in origin.

A very small number of highly-abraded sherds of modern (19th & 20th century) origin, probably resulting from manuring practices, were also recovered from plough-soil in most trenches. Above the Roman road surface in Trench 1 a single piece of 18th r 19th-century black-glazed earthenware was found, while in Trench 4, within the topsoil above the flagging of presumed late-prehistoric date, were found a pancheon rim with internal underglaze slip, two pieces of utilitarian white slipware and another with a whiter glaze and blue, transfer-print decoration.

Glass



A single, very small fragment of polychrome glass (see *left*) was recovered from the top of the primary fill in Trench 2. The size of this fragment (max. diams. 7.7mm x 6mm x 3mm) makes it impossible to determine the original form and dimensions of the artifact from which it came, which local precedent suggests was probably a bangle.

A small fragment of slightly-opaque, greenish glass, perhaps window glass, was found in Trench 4 but lacks reliable contextual associations and cannot securely be ascribed to a date, but appears pre-modern in origin and could represent material of Roman origin intended for recycling in the pre- or early-Roman iron age. This is consistent with a possible interpretation of a lump of glassy slag recovered from Trench 3 which, if of iron age origin, suggests that high-temperature industrial activities were being carried out in the enclosure.

The only other glass find recovered was a small sherd of bottle glass of likely modern origin, also from Trench 4.

Metal

Two fragments of iron, probably originally part of the same object, were recovered for the south end of Trench 1C on the course of the Roman road.



A number of other finds were recovered by metal-detecting around the Ladyship site and between it and the course of the Roman road to the north. Most significant amongst these was a silver denarius of Hadrian (see *left*), recovered some 20 m south of the Ladyship enclosure boundary. Another denarius of Hadrian had previously been found by the same detectorist (IG) close to the course of the road to the north.

Flint

Two worked flints were found in the general context of the remnant flagged floor [402] in Trench 4, one a core (Illus. 24-iv) with signs of small flake removal on one side, the other a crude blade or proto-blade (Illus. 24-iii), with one sharp edge but no retouch and cortex surviving on one side, suggesting limited resources. While sometimes suggested as residual from earlier periods when encountered on iron age sites, as with cup-marked stones, such finds are reported so regularly that it seems reasonable to suppose they were still being made and used in the iron age.

[Descriptions by Dr R Young]

Flint 1: Light grey mottled, secondary blade-like flint flake. Thin, plain butt, diffuse bulb. Broken transversely at the distal end. Right edge fresh. Left edge exhibits evidence for utilisation and a small notch which may be the result of a plough strike. Hard smooth grey/white pebble cortex on left edge, dorsal face. Max. dimensions: 32 mm x 14 mm x 6 mm.

Flint 2: Grey mottled flint chunk/core fragment. Struck from a larger piece. Plain butt, diffuse bulb and scar. Retains hard, grey, pebble cortex - like inclusions on some surfaces. Irregular flakes removed on all surfaces, some may be from plough strikes. Max. dimensions: 29 mm x 28 mm x 15 mm. Weight: 12 g.

Worked stone

A large, 'cup-marked' boulder (see *Illus.* 25-1 & 26-1), probably used as a mortar, was recovered from the primary ditch fill of Trench 3. As noted above, such finds are relatively common on iron age sites in the north where they are often regarded as residual, although in most cases this is doubtful. They may have served a variety of principally-utilitarian functions, such as mortars or harrs, but potentially also ceremonial uses as often mooted for such artifacts in the context of earlier periods in prehistory.

Smaller finds included two cobbles which may have been worked as whetstones (*Illus. 24-v & vi*), recovered from surface [402] in Trench 4, and a number of probable pot-boiler fragments, one of which, from the upper ditch fill of Trench 3, was retained (*Illus. 24-vii*). Also from the ditch-fill of Trench 3 was a small, faceted sandstone disk (*Illus. 24-viii*), which, if found in a Roman context might be interpreted as the lid of a small vessel(?), but in this context, if not natural is of unknown function.

[Description by Dr R Young]

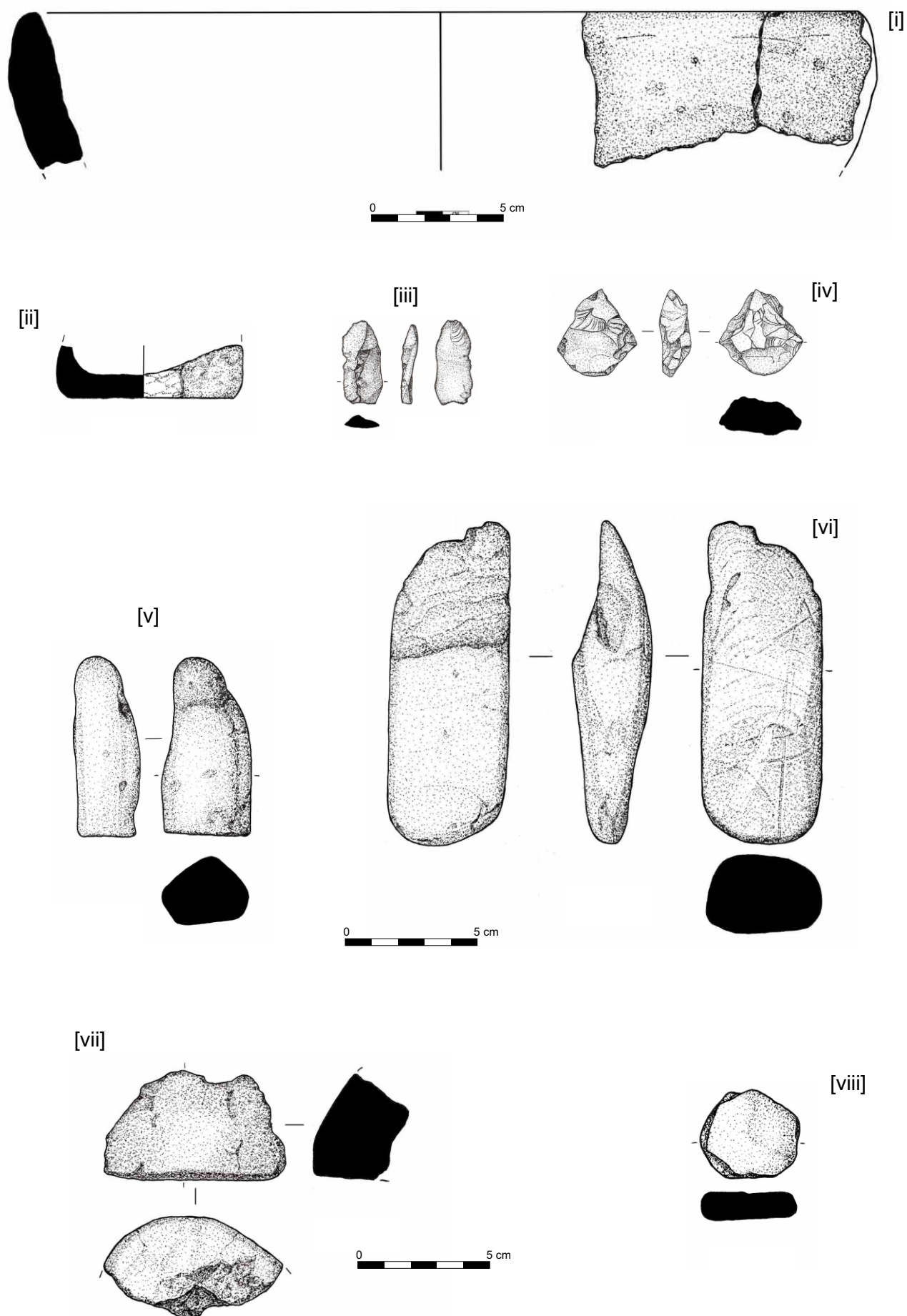
Thin, round quartz sandstone disc. Chipped and dressed on all edges. Max. thickness: 12 mm max. diameter: 35-37g. Weight: 21g. ?Stone pot lid/stopper. Such artefacts have been seen in the past as stone stoppers and they are known from the Bronze Age to the early Medieval periods. Several were recovered from excavations at the Iron Age/Romano-British settlement on Bollihope Common Co. Durham. Examples have also been recorded from the settlements at West Brunton and Fox Covert (Croom, 2012, 152-153) and the Romano- British phase at Murton High Crag (Jobey and Jobey, 1987, Fig. 16 No.1). Discs with ground edges are also known from various Iron Age date in Scotland (Henshall, 1982, Fig. 9).

Three other worked stones - a small cup-marked stone, a saddle quern and a double-faced saddle quern with cup-marks on one face - recovered from the vicinity of Sharperton Edge and held in safekeeping by Mac Young, were also recorded (see Illus. 25-2/3/4 and 26).

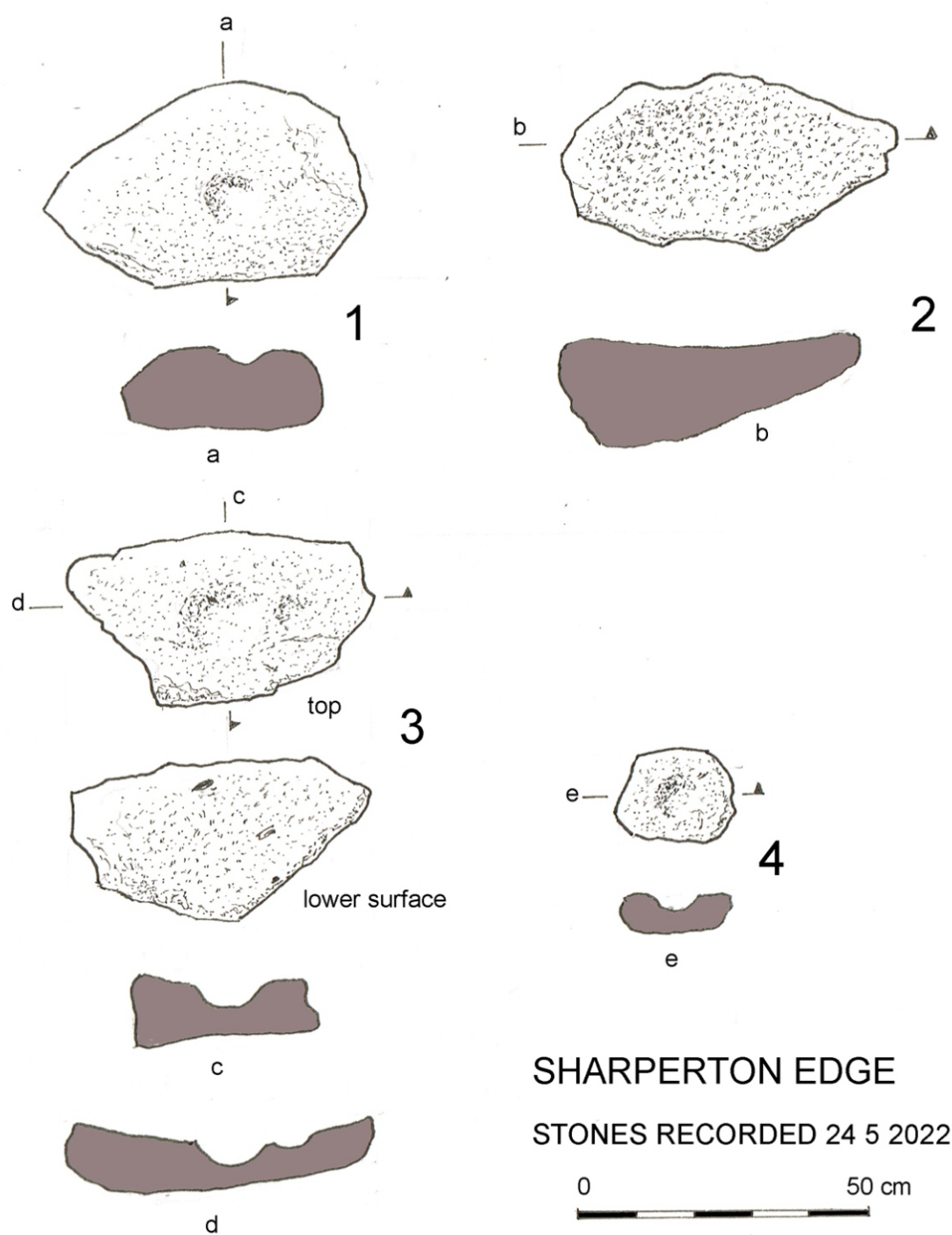
Table 1.

TRENCH	CONTEXT/ POSITION	FINDS DESCRIPTION	PROVISIONAL DATE
Trench 1a	Plough-soil	1 fragment of black-glazed pottery in hard-fired reddish earthenware fabric	18 th /19 th century
Trench 1c	Plough-soil	Two fragments of iron, prob. part of a single hooked (crab-clawed) object, 6.9 x 4 x 2.2 cm thick	?
Trench 2	Surface of primary ditch fill	1 fragment of polychrome glass, 0.7 cm max. diam.), probably part of a bangle of late 1 st or 2 nd century origin. Translucent blue glass with darker blue and white inlays (similar to a fragment from Rattenraw Farm found in 2020); Silver denarius of Hadrian found during metal-detecting c. 10 m SE of Trench 2.	Late prehistoric/early Roman Roman
Trench 3	Upper part of ditch fill	1 large rim-sherd of coarse pottery, 11 cm long x max. 6.2 cm deep and 2.02 cm thick. In a light-brown fabric (int. & core) with a darker, sooted exterior. Very coarse and gritty (as from T4, flagged area) with inclusions, mostly angular (suggesting crushing) commonly over 0.35 cm and up to 0.8 cm max. diam., much more abundant on the interior than exterior, which is rather smooth, perhaps burnished, suggesting possible deliberate creation of rough interior as with mortaria.	Late prehistoric
Trench 3	Plough-soil	1 sherd of unglazed, wheel-made pottery in a soft, red, slightly sandy fabric, max. diam. 2.4 cm; 1 small, red, harder-fired but coarsely-made sherd, max. diam. 1.4 cm; 1 lump of glassy slag, max. diam. 4.2 cm.	?15/16 th century ?Late prehistoric ?
Trench 3	Upper part of ditch fill	Pot-boiler fragment, max. diam. 7 cm. 1 probable sharpening/rubbing stone in fine sandstone, 12.5 cm long, max. 3.4 cm deep, broken at one end but at the other, one end partially facetted as if by rubbing, with some grooves possibly from sharpening.	Late prehistoric ?Late prehistoric
Trench 3	Middle part of ditch fill	1 facetted sandstone disk, 3.3.-3.7 cm diam., 0.95 cm thick – perhaps the lid of a small vessel(?)	?Roman/late prehistoric
Trench 4	Plough-soil above flagged surface	1 pancheon rim with internal underglaze slip; 2 pieces of utilitarian white slipware and 1 other with a whiter glaze and blue, transfer-print decoration; 1 sherd of green bottle-glass.	All 19 th /early 20 th century
Trench 4	On a remnant flagged surface towards west end of T4	1 possible, broken sharpening stone, 7 cm long, sub-oval profile, with smooth surfaces but no obvious striations or faceting. 1 flint, 3,3, cm max. diam., with signs of small flake removal on one side, so perhaps a core.	? Prehistoric

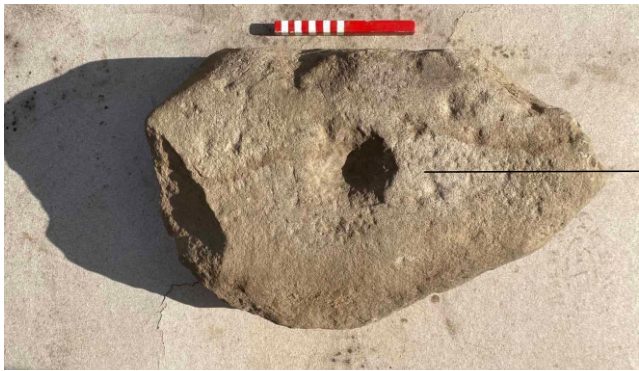
		1 flint blade or proto-blade, 3.2 cm long and max. 0.5 cm deep, with one sharp edge but no retouch, cortex surviving on the opposite side.	Prehistoric
Trench 4	Area of flagged surface	1 large body sherd of coarse pottery, 5.5 c 5.6 cm diam. x 1.6 cm thick. Red-brown ext. and blackish interior face & core, in a very coarse, gritty fabric with abundant inclusions visible especially on the exterior face, up to 0.65 cm max. diam. The exterior face carried a linear slash, perhaps an incidental mark of manufacturing process rather than décor, which divides areas of different texture (one half very gritty, the other, sandy). 2 pieces of coal; 1 fragment of preserved wood, c 4 cm long.	Late prehistoric ? ?
Trench 4	Within central flagged area	1 base sherd, 3.7 x 3.1 x 1.0 cm thick, of earthenware pottery in a moderately gritty fabric, but smoothed, sandy surfaces, with buff-red surfaces and grey core. Wall survives to a height of 0.95 cm above base int. 1 daub fragment, 4.1 x 3.4 x 1.3 cm max. thickness, in buff-orange, fine dandy fabric, part of one edge flattened, with prob. thumb impressions on one side (other side spalled, revealing light grey core). 1 small fragment of slightly-opaque, greenish glass, 1.4 cm max. diam, 0.3 cm thick, pitted and eroded but not obviously grozed along its original long edge, which appears rounded.	Late prehistoric ?Late prehistoric ?Roman
Trench 4	Below flagged surface	1 small body sherd, 2.8 x 2.1 x 1.2 cm thick, of light (i.e. not dense) earthenware pottery in a sandy fabric with orange-red exterior to c 0.5 cm and grey core and interior surface.	Late prehistoric
Trench 4	Surface or upper fill of western gulley feature	1 small body sherd, 4.2 x 3.2 x 1.55 cm thick, of earthenware pottery in a moderately gritty fabric, but smoothed, fine surfaces. Red-brown exterior to c 0.2 cm; grey core and interior surface.	Late prehistoric



Illus. 24: Drawings of finds from Sharperton Edge - pottery (i & ii); worked flint (iii & iv); possible rubbing stones (v & vi); pot-boiler fragment (vii) and faceted stone disk.



Illus. 25: Drawings [by P F Ryder] of a cup-marked stone from the enclosure ditch fill, excavated in Trench 3, and other worked stones found locally and retained at Sharperton Edge.



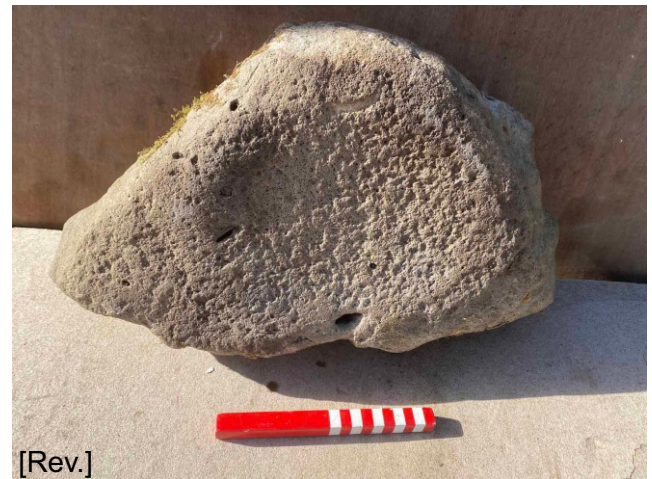
[1]



[2]



[Obv.]



[Rev.]

[3]



[4]

Illus. 26: Photographs of cup-marked stone from Trench 3 ditch fill [1] and other worked stones found locally and retained at Sharperton Edge (see also Illus. 25).

7. DISCUSSION

The excavations carried out in May, 2022 largely achieved their objectives in confirming the presence of the Roman road north-east of Sharpington Edge and an iron age enclosure to the south-west.

North-east of Sharpington Edge the course of the Roman Link Road has been confirmed along the north side of a modern trackway, the course projected on the current Ordnance Survey plan. Here it was found to survive reasonably well, though has clearly been disturbed and reduced in width by later use, landscaping and other earthworks. Sufficient remains, however, to indicate that it was built, at least in part, with a central spine, as on Holystone Common to the south-west, while the fragmentary presence of an upper, surface layer of small pebbles, notably in Tr1a, the eastern of three trenches excavated, suggests that this form of surface may also have been present throughout its course. The possibility that the current ditch separating the modern track from the Roman agger may have originated as an upslope ditch to the Roman road now seems unlikely, but may yet be tested by searching for it south of Trench 1a, beyond the eastward extent of the bank running along the north side of a modern farm track.

Illus. 27: Aerial view showing the course of the Link Road east of Sharpington Edge, East Moor.



Subsequent to the completion of fieldwork in May, 2022 new *Google Earth* aerial imagery (see *Illus. 27*, above) has become available which confirms the position of the Link Road in the position suggested by the presence of a raised earthwork visible at ground level and subsequently tested by excavation. The new aerial imagery clearly shows the route of the road running on a line several metres north of its current OS projection, being clearly visible as it runs from Sharpington Edge's East Moor boundary eastwards into Low Burradon grounds across a field of improved grassland, before fading out of view within the next arable field. West of East Moor field the course of the road is much less clear and remains so almost to Sharpington. Aerial views do suggest, however, several possible routes from the minor road marking the western extent of East Moor field (see *Illus. 28*), including one forming the northern edge of a possible enclosure boundary (but more likely a natural watercourse, as labelled on *Illus. 28*). However, none of them is particularly convincing nor can be traced for any great distance, unless perhaps continuing as field boundaries, which would entail significant remodelling of the course of the road as currently-projected. Within the south-western corner of Sharpington Edge grounds the road also fails to appear as a convincing cropmark where local informants suggest that it has been ploughed-out north of The Ladyship, where geophysical survey in 2022 also failed to locate it.

Geophysical survey did, however, appear to confirm the suspected presence of an enclosure around The Ladyship, Smart's 'Chester-hill', which subsequent fieldwork has shown to have been a defensible, enclosed settlement with deep, in places rock-cut and almost sheer-sided ditches containing homogeneous fills. Geophysical survey plot actually appears to show a defensive arrangement in the south part of the enclosure comprising two linear features, which could indicate a strengthened double-line of defensive earthworks here, perhaps in association with a causewayed entrance, or, perhaps more likely, two phases of a single-line of earthworks implying an expansion or contraction of the original enclosure. Unfortunately, the area covered by the geophysical survey does not extend



Illus. 28: Features of note and potential interest marked on a recent aerial view (Google Earth 2022).

far enough south to cover the full extent of the enclosure boundary, which presumably also extends into North Sharperton grounds to the west, so the form and extent of the south side of the enclosure remains unclear. Thus, it cannot be stated with certainty that the ditches excavated in Trenches 2 & 3 belong to the same phase of occupation, or to different phases of construction within the late Iron Age period. Artefactual finds were recovered principally from a trench (T4) within the enclosure interior which revealed a partial flagged surface, perhaps within a building or part of an open yard area (in a late iron age/Roman period native settlement at Rattenraw in Redesdale flagged surfaces appeared both within and outside 'roundhouse' structures, with those forming external yards being of highest quality). Finds associated with the flagged surface, notably coarse pottery and a fragment of burnt daub, indicate late iron-age occupation while a small glass bangle fragment suggests a level of direct or indirect association with the Roman world. Other Roman finds recovered by metal-detecting in the immediate vicinity, notably a silver denarius of Hadrian from close to the south side of the enclosure, are more suggestive of direct Roman influence upon the site which it might be speculated could have occurred during a supervised evacuation of the enclosure and infilling of its ditches, which stratigraphic evidence suggests occurred as a single-phase destruction event.

The suggestion that the Ladyship/Chester-hill site was used by the Roman army or that a native population was allowed to remain there in return for provision of labour and security to the occupying force remains valid due to the lack of permanent Roman installations identified in Coquetdale east of Chew Green, since it is very unusual for military roads such as this to be entirely devoid of regularly-spaced forts. Such an absence could, in theory, potentially be mitigated by the use of native settlements or the incorporation of native peoples into a frontier defensive strategy managed by the Roman army. Specifically, in the case of the High Rochester-Low Learchild 'Link' road, such a strategy could have been implemented from High Rochester (*Bremenium*) and Risingham (*Habitancum*) on Dere Street to the west. Despite the existence of Roman coins and other finds of metal and glass at The Ladyship enclosure, however, there is not enough evidence strongly to support the suggestion that it continued to be occupied long into the Roman period. Rather, evidence that its ditches were rapidly infilled suggests that it may have been depopulated by or at the behest of the Roman army early in the Roman period, perhaps in the early 2nd century as suggested by two Hadrianic coins, one associated with the enclosure and another more closely with the course of the Roman road to the north.

Further work on the site would usefully define, by means of geophysical survey and excavation, the form and extent of the southern boundary of the enclosure, as well as confirming the course of the northern boundary which appears to trace that of the current Ladyship plantation. More extensive work within the enclosure would provide evidence for the timescale and nature of settlement and related activities carried out there. In the wider area, continued research might be able to determine the course of the Roman road where it is currently only partially confirmed between Holystone Common and Trewitt, as well as east of Trewitt where the details of its route are currently much more obscure. Continued aerial reconnaissance on its course might also reveal traces of Roman or Roman-period installations, as suggested above. It would be no great surprise if such work were to reveal the remains of at least one timber fort between High Rochester and Low Learchild, associated with the initial occupation of the area, while finds of rectilinear enclosures might suggest the presence of a late iron age, potentially Romanised native population, bringing into focus the relationship between the Roman army and native population in this frontier zone. While a small, rectilinear earthwork enclosure recently-discovered in moorland 400 m south-east of Sharperton Edge's East Moor, some 800 m south of the course of the Roman road (see *Illus. 28*), is likely to be of relatively modern origin, traces of others may survive where currently obscured by forestry or ploughed-out and overlain by modern field systems.

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APPENDIX 1: *Site Photographs.*

01 - view from the south towards Trench 1a which lies on the west side of a field wall marking the property division between Sharperton Edge and Low Burradon farms.

02 - Vertical aerial view of the trench following initial excavation; note probable metalling on part of the road surface and clusters of smaller stones to north and south.

03 - Vertical aerial view of the trench after completion of excavation, with metalling removed from the north part of the road surface.

04: Detailed comparative view of the road surface with and without metalling.

05 - Excavating loose deposit of small stones in the south part of the trench, south of the road surface.

06 - View from the north prior to widening the north end of the trench.

07 - View from the south with metalling removed from part of the road surface.

08 - Close-up view of metalling on the road surface.

09 - View from the north after widening the north end of the trench to reveal more of an expanse of loose, dumped stone thought to be derived either from the construction phase or due to later robbing.

10 - View from the east, showing slight raised earthwork.

11 - Oblique vertical view from the north.

12 - composite vertical view of the trench following excavation.

13 - Close-up view of south kerb from the south.

14 - Oblique aerial view from the west.

15 - View from the west showing the road platform with 'spine' protruding.

16 - Oblique aerial view from the north (inset: close-up view).

17 - Vertical aerial view showing the road surface either side of a plough-damaged central 'spine'.

18: Central 'spine' seen from the north.

19: The central 'spine' and plough damage seen from the west.

20 - Vertical aerial view of Tr.2 during excavation.

21 - Vertical aerial view of Tr.2 during excavation; note primary rubble ditch-fill partially exposed.

22 - View of Tr.2 from the south during excavation.

23 - East-facing ditch section.

- 24 - Excavated portion of the rock-cut outer face of the ditch.
- 25 - Excavated portion of the inner face of the ditch, also cut through degraded bedrock and sub-soil.
- 26 - View from south-east revealing surface of rubble-filled ditch fill.
- 27 - View from SSW of upper ditch fill.
- 28 - Removal of cup-marked stone from mid-range ditch fill deposits.
- 29 - View from south-west of the excavated ditch section.
- 30 - Fully-excavated ditch section viewed from SSW; note uniformity of fill below modern plough-soil and a darker band suggestive of an earlier plough/top-soil deposit which developed over the infilled ditch.
- 31-33 - Vertical aerial views (north side of trench uppermost) taken at stages during the excavation – note remnant flagging within areas of bedrock at either end of the trench - with Photo. 33 showing the trench after the completion of excavation.
- 34 - View of the trench from the east.
- 35 - View of the trench from the west, with gulley feature in the foreground (1 metre scale shows its floor to be 0.95 m below current ground level).
- 36 - View of post-hole 1
- 37 - Post-holes 1 & 2 at the northern edge of Tr. 4.
- 38 - Vertical view of post-hole 2.
- 39 - Vertical view of post-hole 3.
- 40 - Vertical view of post-hole 4.
- 41 - Side view of post-hole 4.



Appendix 1(a): Photographs of Trench 1a -

01 - view from the south towards Trench 1a which lies on the west side of a field wall marking the property division between Sharperton Edge and Low Burradon.

02 - Vertical aerial view of the trench following initial excavation; note probable metalling on part of the road surface and clusters of smaller stones to north & south.

03 - Vertical aerial view of the trench after completion of excavation, with metalling removed from the north part of the road surface.

04: Detailed comparative view of the road surface with and without metalling.



Appendix 1(b): Photographs of Trench 1a.

05 - Excavating loose deposit of small stones in the south part of the trench, south of the road surface.

06 - View from the north prior to widening the north end of the trench.

07 - View from the south with metalling removed from part of the road surface.

08 - Close-up view of metalling on the road surface.



09 - View from the north after widening the north end of the trench to reveal more of an expanse of loose, dumped stone thought to be derived either from the construction phase or due to later robbing.



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11



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13

Appendix 1(c): Photographs of Trench 1b -

10 - View from the east, showing slight raised earthwork.

11 - Oblique vertical view from the north.

12 - composite vertical view of the trench following excavation.

13 - Close-up view of south kerb from the south.



Appendix 1(d): Photographs of Trench 1c

14 - Oblique aerial view from the west.

15 - View from the west showing the road platform with 'spine' protruding.

16 - Oblique aerial view from the north (inset: close-up view).

17 - Vertical aerial view showing the road surface either side of a plough-damaged central 'spine'.

18: Central 'spine' seen from the north.

19: The central 'spine' and plough damage seen from the west.



20



21



22



23

Appendix 1(e): Trench 2 photographs.

20 & 21 - Vertical aerial views of Tr.2 during and following excavation

22 - View of Tr.2 from the south during excavation.

23 - East-facing, rock-cut ditch section.



Appendix 1(f): Trench 2 photographs -

24 - Excavated portion of the rock-cut outer face of the ditch.

25 - Excavated portion of the inner face of the ditch, also cut through degraded bedrock and sub-soil.



26



27



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29



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Appendix 1(g): Trench 3 photographs.

26 - View from south-east revealing surface of rubble-filled ditch fill.

27 - View from SSW of upper ditch fill.

28 - Removal of cup-marked stone from mid-range ditch fill deposits.

29 - View from south-west of the excavated ditch section.

30 - Fully-excavated ditch section viewed from SSW; note uniformity of fill below modern plough-soil and a darker band suggestive of an earlier plough/top-soil deposit which developed over the infilled ditch.



Appendix 1(h): Trench 4 site photographs.

31-33 - Vertical aerial views (north side of trench uppermost) taken at stages during the excavation - note remnant flagging within areas of bedrock at either end of the trench - with Photo. 33 showing the trench after the completion of excavation.

34 - View of the trench from the east.

35 - View of the trench from the west, with gully feature in the foreground (1 metre scale shows its floor to be 0.95 m below current ground level).

APPENDIX 2: O'Brien, C., 2023, *Palaeoenvironmental* Assessment. Archaeological Services Durham University, Report no. 5900].

1. Summary

The project

1.1 This report presents a palaeoenvironmental assessment of a bulk sample from a ditch fill and the identification of hand-recovered charcoal, taken during archaeological works at Sharperton Edge, Northumberland.

1.2 The works were commissioned by The Archaeological Practice Ltd. and conducted by Archaeological Services Durham University.

Results

1.3 The remains of charred barley grains, hazel nutshells, charcoal and burnt bone from ditch fill [305] are consistent with a small accumulation of domestic hearth waste. Hand-recovered charcoal from sample <3> comprises well preserved fragments of birch and oak.

Recommendations

1.4 The good condition of these charred plant remains suggests they have undergone little taphonomic change and are therefore less likely to be residual or intrusive material.

1.5 The following charred remains are recommended as the best options for radiocarbon dating and are ranked by their likelihood to provide a reliable date:-

Ditch fill [305]<1>

- Charred hulled barley grain (12mg), good condition
- Charred hazel nutshell fragment (16mg), good condition
- Hazel stemwood charcoal (160mg), good condition, >15 growth rings

Hand-recovered charcoal <3>

- Birch roundwood charcoal (145mg), 3 outer growth rings plus bark
- Birch roundwood charcoal (120mg), 3 wide growth rings

2. Project background

Location and background

2.1 Archaeological works were conducted by The Archaeological Practice Ltd at Sharperton Edge, Northumberland. This report presents a palaeoenvironmental assessment of a bulk sample from the fill [305] of a presumed late prehistoric enclosure ditch and species identification for ten fragments of hand-recovered charcoal from sample <3>.

Objective

2.2 The objective of the scheme of works was to assess the palaeoenvironmental potential of the bulk sample and identify the charcoal fragments. This was to establish the presence of suitable radiocarbon dating material and provide the client with appropriate recommendations.

Dates

2.3 The samples were received by Archaeological Services on 7th November 2022. Assessment and report preparation was conducted between 13th and 18th January 2023.

Personnel

2.4 Assessment and report preparation was conducted by Dr Charlotte O'Brien. Sample processing was by Henry Morris.

Archive

2.5 The site code is **SE22**, for **Sharperton Edge 2022**. The flot and charred plant remains will be retained at Archaeological Services Durham University.

3. Methods

3.1 The bulk sample was manually floated and sieved through a 500 μ m mesh. The flot was examined at up to x60 magnification for charred and waterlogged botanical remains using a Leica MZ7.5 stereomicroscope. Identifications were aided by comparison with modern reference material held in the Palaeoenvironmental Laboratory at Archaeological Services Durham University, and by reference to relevant literature (Cappers *et al.* 2006). Plant nomenclature follows Stace (2010). Habitat classification follows Preston *et al.* (2002). The residues were scanned for additional charcoal and charred plant remains, and finds such as bone, shell and industrial waste.

3.2 Selected charcoal fragments were identified to provide material suitable for radiocarbon dating and to determine the nature and condition of the assemblages. The transverse, radial and tangential sections were examined at up to x500 magnification using a Nikon Eclipse microscope. Identifications were assisted by the descriptions of Schweingruber (1990), Gale & Cutler (2000) and Hather (2000), and modern reference material held in the Palaeoenvironmental Laboratory at Archaeological Services Durham University.

3.3 The works were undertaken in accordance with the palaeoenvironmental research aims and objectives outlined in the regional archaeological research framework and resource agendas (Petts & Gerrard 2006; Hall & Huntley 2007; Huntley 2010).

4. Results

4.1 Ditch fill [305] produced a small flot comprising well-preserved charcoal and a few charred barley grains, hazel nutshell fragments and a redshank nutlet. The charcoal is both stemwood and roundwood and includes hazel, alder, oak, willow/poplar and birch. A small fragment of burnt bone was found in the residue.

4.2 Sample <3> comprises ten fragments of hand-recovered charcoal in good condition. Three are oak stemwood, and the remaining seven are birch roundwood. The birch fragments have relatively wide growth rings. Detailed palaeoenvironmental results are presented in Appendix 1.

5. Discussion

5.1 The small charred assemblages are not diagnostic of any particular period, but both comprise material suitable for radiocarbon dating. They are consistent with small accumulations of domestic hearth waste.

6. Recommendations

6.1 The good condition of these charred plant remains suggests they have undergone little taphonomic change and are therefore less likely to be residual or intrusive material.

6.2 The following charred remains are recommended as the best options for radiocarbon dating and are ranked by their likelihood to provide a reliable date:-

Ditch fill [305]<1>

- Charred hulled barley grain (12mg), good condition
- Charred hazel nutshell fragment (16mg), good condition
- Hazel stemwood charcoal (160mg), good condition, >15 growth rings

Hand-recovered charcoal <3>

- Birch roundwood charcoal (145mg), 3 outer growth rings plus bark
- Birch roundwood charcoal (120mg), 3 wide growth rings

7. Sources

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Appendix 1: Data from palaeoenvironmental assessment

Sample	Context	Context description	Volume processed (l)	Flot volume (ml)	C14 available	Rank	Notes
1	305	Enclosure ditch	17	20	Y	**	Small flot comprising well preserved charcoal (stemwood and roundwood of hazel, oak, alder, birch and willow/poplar). A few charred hulled barley grains, hazel nutshell fragments and a redshank nutlet – all in good condition. Small fragment of burnt bone also present. Nothing diagnostic
3	-	Hand-recovered charcoal	n/a	n/a	Y	**	Ten fragments of well-preserved charcoal. Three are oak stemwood, and seven are birch large branchwood with wide growth rings. Nothing diagnostic

[Rank: *: low; **: medium; ***: high; ****: very high potential to provide further palaeoenvironmental information]

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