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Edited by Spencer Carter

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Council for British Archaeology: Yorkshire Group

The group is a charitable organisation funded entirely by our members' and affiliates' subscriptions. This organisation aims to advance the education of the public in archaeology, to advance and assist in research, to provide information and to encourage widespread participation in archaeology throughout society. It brings together those interested in archaeology in Yorkshire and accordingly supports local societies, works with other partners in heritage and environmental conservation, encourages and publicises relevant research and advertises opportunities for education and participation. It sponsors, undertakes research and supports other individuals or organisations through modest grants. The organisation also provides advice and information, and campaigns on heritage issues within the historic Ridings of Yorkshire, from the Tees to the Humber, and from the Pennine moors to the east coast, in order to raise the profile of archaeology in the minds of decision-makers. These aims are fulfilled through advocacy, working behind the scenes to protect and enhance the historic environment, together with our annual symposium, other meetings, newsletters, a website, electronic communications, and the Archaeological Forum Journal.

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About FORUM Yorkshire

FORUM is an annual journal where community, independent, professional/commercial and academic archaeologists (and practitioners in complementary fields) can report their research or extend discussions about archaeological and allied issues. A range of contributions is invited including long (3000–6000 word) or short (2000–3000 word) articles, shorter notes (up to 2000 words), site summaries, and preliminary or full research fieldwork and project reports. Longer papers may be considered and requests should be submitted to the editor. We also accept reviews of books or articles related to the archaeology and heritage landscape of Yorkshire. Contributions are welcomed from students, voluntary and community-based groups, independent practitioners, providers of training and education, commercial organisations and academics. FORUM is *semi-peer reviewed* meaning that contributors (and the editor) may request independent, specialist review of articles that are submitted for consideration. FORUM is dated and published retrospectively for the prior calendar year and distributed around February to subscribed members.

The geographic scope of this journal is Yorkshire including areas that were part of Yorkshire prior to the 1974 boundary reorganisation. Contributions on archaeology which is not located in Yorkshire (or its previous boundaries) but is immediately adjacent or pertinent to it may be considered. Authors are requested to contact the editor prior to writing such an article.

Contributions may be on any period of archaeology and the human past relevant to the geographic scope outlined above. A copy of the full editorial policy may be obtained from the editor. However, it should be noted that the editor reserves the right to request changes to the paper, to make changes that maintain the house style and to request feedback from independent (anonymous) reviewers as considered appropriate.

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Back copies

A very limited supply of *New Series* back copies is available to newly subscribed CBA Yorkshire members and non-members¹. Enquiries, including overseas customers, should be emailed to: secretary@cba-yorkshire.org.uk.

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Discovery and Excavation of a Roman Estate Centre at Whirlow, South-west Sheffield

Clive Waddington

Corresponding author

Archaeological Research Services (ARS) Ltd.
Angel House, Portland Square, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1HG, UK
clive@archaeologicalresearchservices.com

Keywords Roman, Villa, Brigantes, Whirlow, Sheffield

Abstract

An excavation took place at Whirlow Hall Farm during July and August 2011 over the buried archaeological remains of a rectilinear enclosure identified by geophysical survey. A trench was located over the western entrance into the enclosure and a second trench was located over two narrow parallel linear ditch features to the north-east of the enclosure. The enclosure ditch revealed two phases of use with the second phase including the construction of a low dry stone wall against its inner face. An extensive area of stone metalling was identified across the interior of the enclosure together with post-holes for a timber entrance structure. Inside the enclosure part of the stone foundation wall for a substantial rectangular building was discovered positioned parallel with, and immediately inside, the western perimeter ditch. A beaten earth and partly flagged floor survived in the interior of this building and this produced a small sherd of Roman pottery. The floor layer has not yet been fully excavated and most of the building lay beyond the limits of the excavation trench.

The ditch fills and metalling produced a diverse range of Roman pottery dating from potentially as early as the late 1st century AD, but is mostly 2nd century AD in date. Sealed below the Roman metalling was a pit that revealed evidence for in situ burning and contained an assemblage of late Iron Age 'conquest period' pottery hinting towards an earlier Brigantian farmstead on the site. Charred hazel wood has provided a radiocarbon date of Cal AD 67–136 (68% probability) for this pit. Only one of the flanking ditches of a linear track-way survived in the second trench. The trench revealed a straight and shallow ditch heading in the direction of the eastern entrance to the Roman enclosure.

Introduction

Whirlow Hall Farm (Fig. 1) is situated approximately 8km to the south-west of Sheffield city centre (NGR SK 3123 8318). As part of a project to investigate the archaeology and history of the farm a geophysical survey was undertaken in April 2011. It unexpectedly revealed the buried remains of a large rectangular enclosure with opposed entrance causeways on its east and west sides in 'Hall' field, south of the current farm buildings (Fig. 2). The enclosure was only partly revealed as the perimeter ditch was found to continue south of the field under

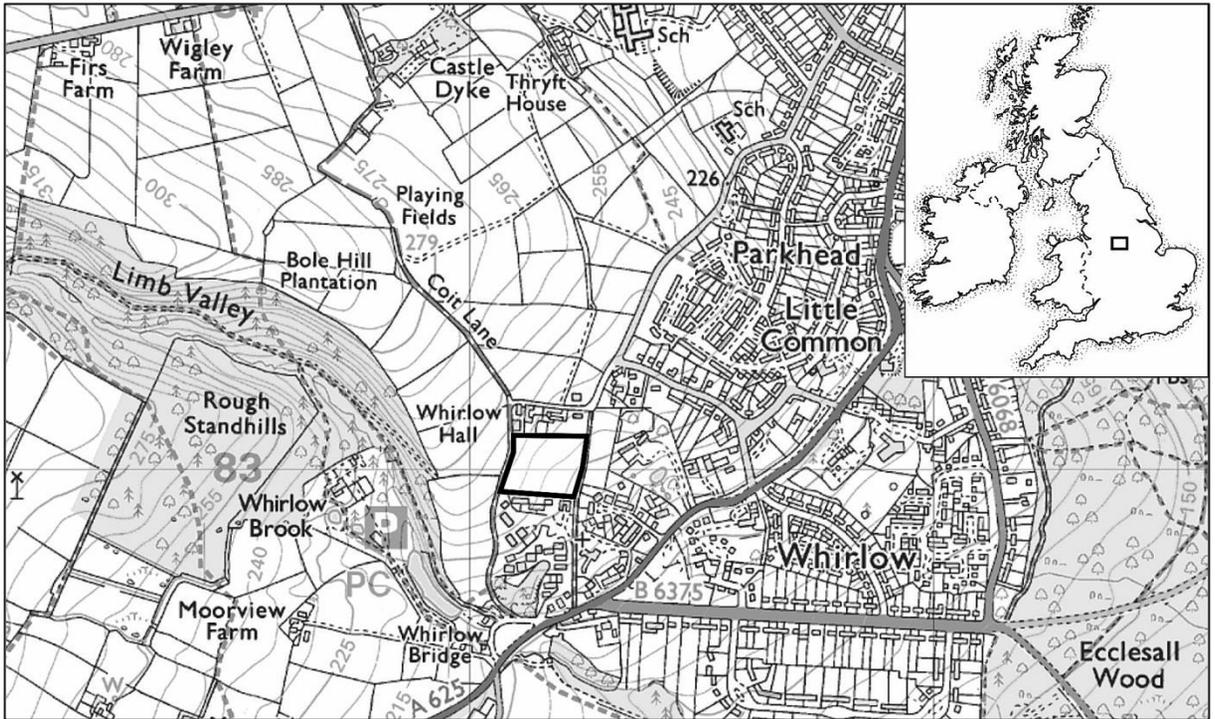


Figure 1 Location of Whirlow Hall Farm (lower centre).

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the gardens and houses of a modern housing estate. The fully visible side measures approximately 70m in length indicating an enclosed site of some size and of notably larger areal extent than the more usual rectilinear enclosure sites which typically have sides between 15m and 30m in length. The parallel flanking ditches of a trackway were also revealed leading towards the eastern entrance of the enclosure. A targeted excavation encompassing the enclosure's west entrance and the outlying double ditched trackway was undertaken over a three week period in June–August 2011 in order to gain an understanding of their date and function.

The enclosure is located on the north side of the upper Sheaf valley on a south-east facing slope. A stream course used to occupy a small channel in the lower eastern part of the field below the enclosure but this has since been culverted and now runs underground. Being located on gently sloping ground the enclosure occupies a dry and free draining position and is sheltered from the prevailing south-westerly wind as it is tucked below the ridge which forms the east side of the Limb Valley. The site would have originally commanded extensive views south over the head of the Sheaf Valley and east down the length of the Sheaf Valley. To the west views would have been limited by rising ground and to the north the view would have extended for around 500m to the shoulder of the hillside. Despite being located at 235–240m OD the site occupies a locale attractive for settlement and agricultural activity. The underlying geology consists of Rough Rock Sandstone, which is a coarse-grained feldspathic sandstone and the overlying soil is classified as a freely draining slightly acid loamy soil.

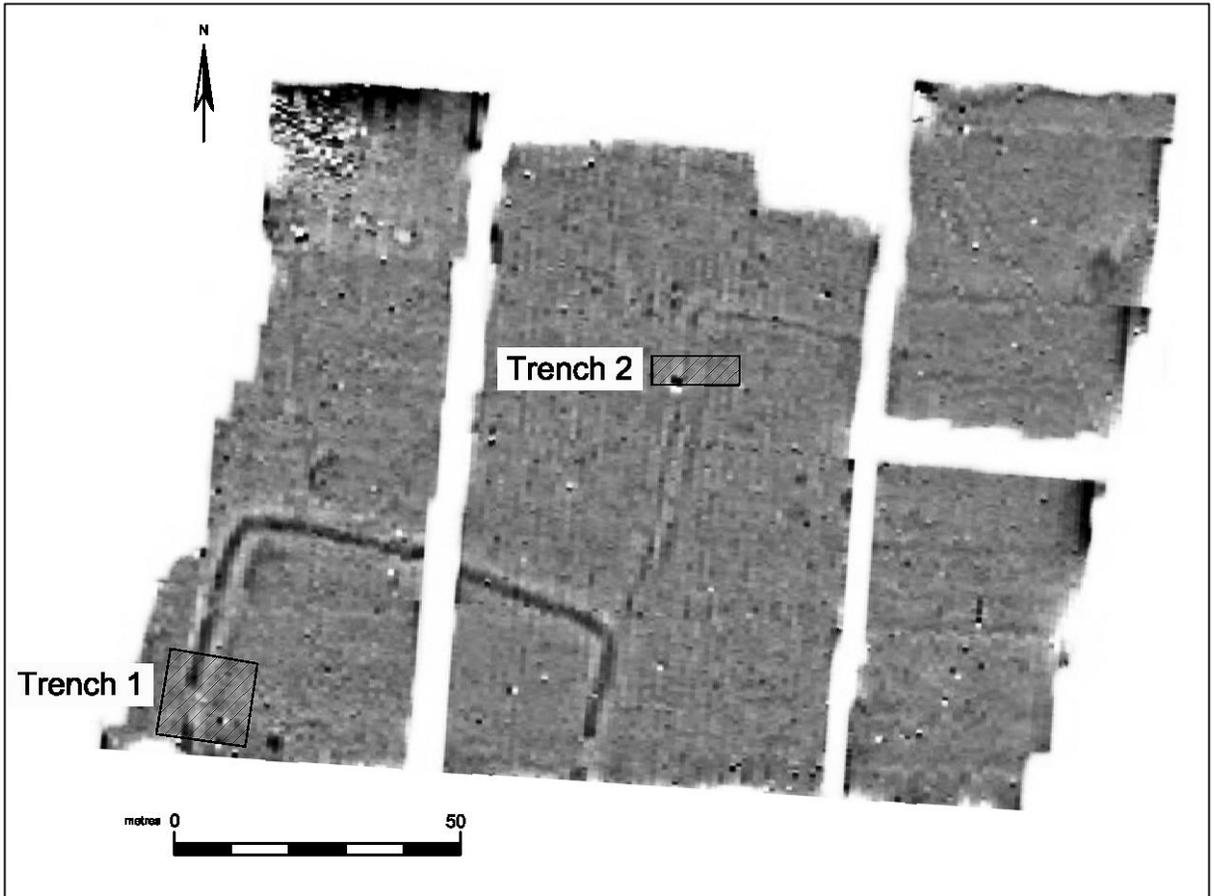


Figure 2 Geophysical survey results showing the ditches of the rectangular enclosure and trackway and the location of the two excavation trenches.

Excavation

The Enclosure

Trench One measured 15m by 15m and was located over the west entrance causeway of the enclosure. A topsoil and subsoil extended over the site to a depth of 0.25m–0.32m which contained pieces of Roman and post-medieval pottery, clay pipe fragments, coal, slag (metalworking debris), glass and occasional sandstone. On removal of the soil overburden the upper archaeological horizon was reached which comprised the truncated remains of structural features including walls, metalling and post holes as well as the perimeter ditch fill (Fig. 3). These features are remarkably well-preserved considering that they are only covered by a shallow soil. The soil depth is greater downslope than upslope and careful observation of the current ground surface suggests that the ground had been scooped into the hillside to provide a more level area for the enclosure. This accounts for why the upstanding sections of wall survived *in situ*. The current ground surface therefore subdues the subsurface topography of the enclosure and this means that it is possible that preservation of features may be better still further downslope in the eastern half of the enclosure. Two sections were cut across the enclosure ditch: one was placed over the northern ditch segment and one was placed over the southern ditch segment (Fig. 3). The section over the northern ditch segment measured 2m wide and extended over the full width of the ditch which averaged

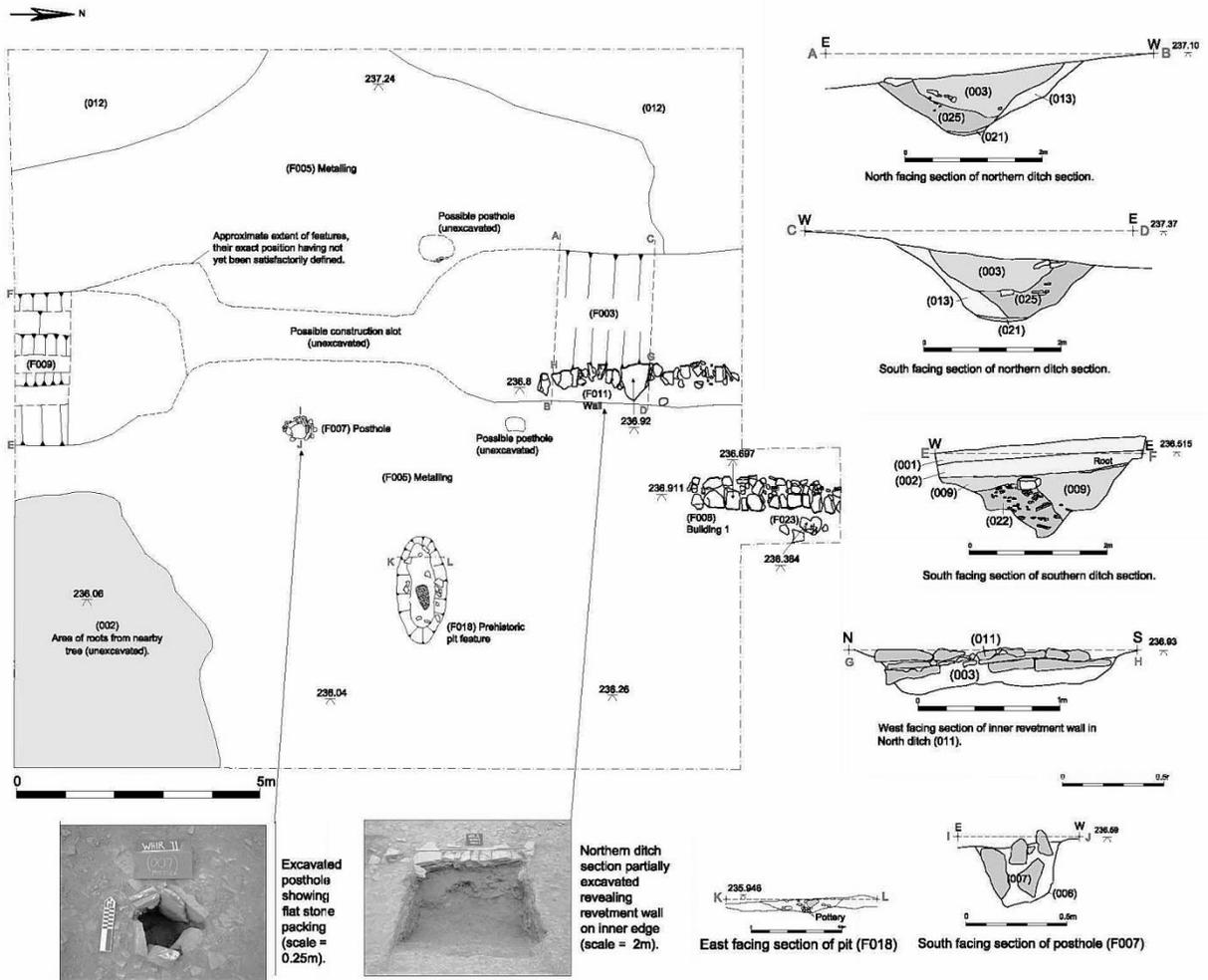


Figure 3 Plan of Trench 1 showing the Roman period remains.

3.1m in this area. The ditch had a maximum depth of 1m from the top of the archaeological horizon and was cut through the natural sandstone brush layer and into solid bedrock. This section revealed two phases of ditch use. The original ditch, which was the largest, had a wide v-shaped profile with a flat base (Fig. 4). The primary ditch silt produced small fragments of hazel, birch and oak charcoal. A single entity fragment of hazel was submitted for radiocarbon dating and this produced a date of 2155 ± 30 BP (SUERC-36826), which calibrates to 358–94 Cal BC at 95.4% probability and 350–121 Cal BC at 68% probability. It is possible that this sample is from residual material that was already old when it became incorporated into the fill of the ditch. However, it is also possible that this date does relate to the initial phase of the ditch. If the latter is the case then it suggests that the original enclosure was Late Iron Age in date. Because this date is Late Iron Age it means it falls on the calibration ‘plateau’ which explains why it has such a large date range.

Over time the ditch filled in with sediment and this is represented by a secondary fill comprising a coarse-textured sandy silt with angular sandstone inclusions (Figs 3 and 4). This fill contained three pieces of chipped flint which included a microlith, scraper and retouched blade, all Mesolithic in date and which are clearly residual material. Partly overlying this fill and located on the inner side of the ditch was another secondary fill that

contained coarse sandstone slabs laid horizontally as a foundation for a stone revetment wall that had been constructed on the inner lip of the ditch (Figs 3 and 4). This wall survived up to a maximum of three courses (0.27m in height) and consisted of thin flat slabs of the local sandstone that had been roughly shaped and laid so as to form what would have been a dwarf wall running along the top of the inner edge of the ditch. Although the wall had a vertical and carefully made face it only averaged 0.5m wide and could not have served a defensive function. Its purpose seems to have been to physically demarcate the edge of the ditch so as to prevent accidental falls as well providing a decorative feature around the entrance area. The scale of both the ditch and the wall indicate that the enclosure perimeter was never intended to be defensive. Instead it seems to have served as a settlement boundary, yet one sufficient to prevent unwanted access by livestock and perhaps other animals. The upper ditch fill comprised a fine silt with tumbled flat sandstone slabs which had come from the upper courses of the revetment wall. It remains inconclusive whether the site was intentionally levelled on abandonment but the single and homogenous final fill of the ditch with what appears to be pushed-in wall material suggests this could have been the case. Roman pottery recovered from this upper fill has been dated to the late 1st and/or early 2nd century AD.

The section over the southern segment of the enclosure ditch was positioned against the south baulk of the trench (Fig. 3). This section measured only 1m wide. It revealed a ditch measuring 3m across with a maximum depth of 1.11m from the start of the archaeological horizon. The excavation of the ditch fill was not able to be completed in the time available and so understanding of the ditch stratigraphy remains incomplete but it appeared to show a similar sequence as the section over the northern ditch segment. Its upper ditch fill also contained Roman pottery of late 1st to early 2nd century AD date as well as some earlier native ceramics from the late pre-Roman Iron Age or early Roman period.



Figure 4 (Top) Excavated section across the northern segment of the enclosure ditch showing the original cut for the first phase ditch, and beyond the section the top of the sandstone walling on the ditch's inner edge and its associated tumble within the ditch fill, looking east (scale: 2m).



Figure 5 (Right) View of stone foundation wall for a large building and associated floor surface to its left, looking south (scale: 2m).

The entrance causeway was able to be defined by the position of the two ditch terminals, although in both cases the terminals themselves were slightly indistinct and only further excavation will allow their precise form to be identified. The causeway measures approximately 4.5m wide and was reinforced with a tightly compacted metallated surface, which showed evidence for multiple phases and repairs, and which extended across the interior of the enclosure. Occasional sherds of pottery were found within the metallating including sherds of late pre-Roman Iron Age to early Roman period native fabrics, Roman Grey Ware and a sherd of Samian Ware, the latter being 2nd century AD in date. Below the metallating within the entrance causeway a narrow construction slot was identified linking the terminals of each entrance causeway. This slot, measuring approximately 4.5m long by 1m wide, was not able to be excavated during the time available but it remains possible that it provided a foundation trench for a timber that may have been used to help support timber uprights for a gateway arrangement or that it represents an earlier palisade slot on the same line as the enclosure ditch. A possible unexcavated posthole was identified on the north-east corner of the entrance causeway together with a definite and well-preserved posthole (F007) located in the centre of the entrance causeway on the alignment of the rear edge of the enclosure ditch. The space for the post measured 0.2m by 0.34m and it seems that the timber contained within it functioned as a central gate stop for a double gate arrangement, and may also have supported a roofed gateway. Only further excavation of the gateway area will resolve how the gateway structure was constructed and how it functioned.

An important discovery on the site was the survival of a section of upstanding stone wall foundation which was exposed for a length of 3m before it continued into the northern baulk of the trench (Fig. 5). The wall measured up to 0.6m wide and survived up to two courses in height and was constructed without mortar from roughly dressed coarse sandstone blocks of a type not native to the site. The wall measured a maximum of 0.6m in width and 0.29m in height. This wall was straight and made from roughly dressed coarse sandstone blocks of a type not native to the site. The wall appears to be the foundation wall for a substantial rectangular building, probably with a timber superstructure, positioned parallel to the western enclosure ditch. The interior of the building is well-preserved and comprised sandstone flags set into a compacted earth, or 'beaten earth', floor which produced a small sherd of a gritty oxidised ware dating to the 2nd century AD or later.

A 3.5m wide strip of the metallating layer was removed across the eastern edge of the excavation trench to identify whether any archaeological remains survived below this level. An elongated pit measuring 2.25m long by 1.1m wide and 0.2m deep was identified in which *in situ* heating had taken place, as evidenced by the fire-reddened stones and the scorched sides of the pit. The pit fill contained a substantial assemblage of late Iron Age native pottery. Small fragments of charcoal were recovered from the pit fill which included small fragments of hazel, oak and *prunus* (cherry tree family). A single entity fragment of the short-lived species hazel was submitted for radiocarbon dating and this produced a date of 1890±30 BP (SUERC-36830), which calibrates to Cal AD 55–219 (95.4% confidence), but probably Cal AD 67–136 (68.2% confidence). This suggests that Brigantian occupation of the site could have occurred immediately before or after the Roman invasion of the north which took place around AD 68 under the governorship of Cerealis. This date also provides a date after which the site was remodelled along Roman lines. This *terminus post quem* will be useful in developing a more detailed dating sequence for the site when future excavations take place.

The Trackway

Trench 2 measured 10m by 5m and was located approximately 50m from the north-east corner of the enclosure (Fig. 6). The trench was positioned over the two parallel flanking ditches identified by the geophysical survey. Here the topsoil and subsoil together measured up to 0.64m deep being considerably deeper than the soil further upslope overlying the west side of the enclosure. The soil contained metalworking debris throughout in the form of coal and slag, together with broken clay pipe, glass and post-medieval pottery. The western ditch ran across the width of the trench on a north to south alignment consistent with the geophysical results. The eastern ditch

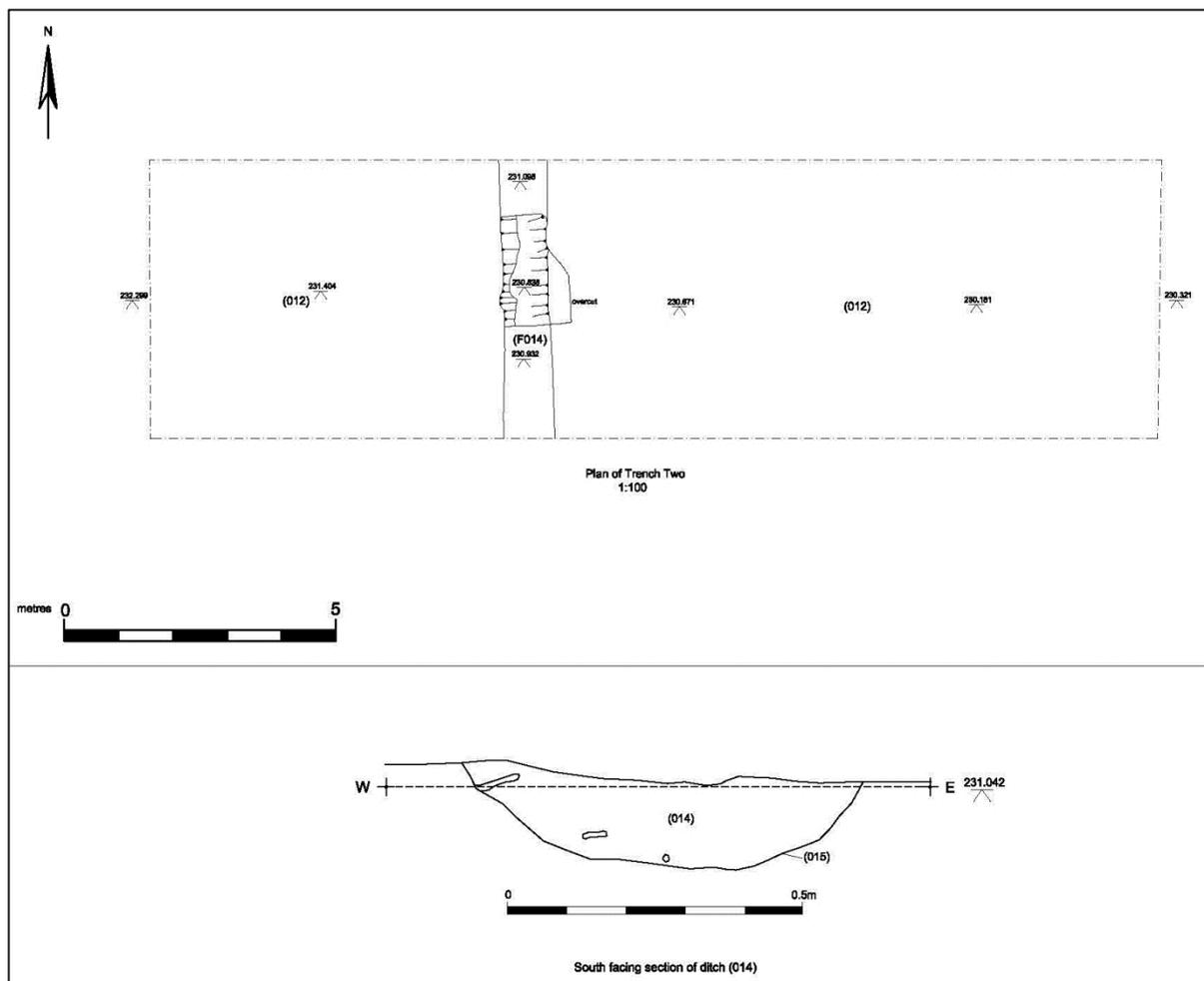


Figure 6 Plan of Trench 2 showing the shallow western linear ditch running across the centre of the trench.

did not survive as a defined feature due to having been almost completely truncated. The only indication of this feature was a vague linear band of slightly darker soil that could be seen running parallel to the western ditch approximately 4m away. The western ditch had a maximum width of 0.7m and was 0.2m to 0.24m deep from the start of the archaeological horizon with a regular concave cut. It contained a single uniform fill of silty sand and contained angular sandstone fragments and flecks of charcoal. This linear ditch and its counterpart to the east are interpreted as drainage ditches flanking a trackway. The line of the trackway can be seen to contour around the slope, presumably to avoid the wetter ground to the south and east that was occupied by the stream course that has now been routed underground. The western ditch of the trackway can be seen to parallel the eastern side of the Roman enclosure towards where the eastern entrance is located.

Pottery

The native Brigantian pottery comprises an assemblage of around 135 sherds, mostly from the fill of the truncated pit underlying the Roman metallised surface and a few isolated pieces from the upper fill of the perimeter ditch

and the metallised surface itself. At least three vessels are represented which include a fine ware jar with an everted rim and a heavy duty, bucket-shaped container, together with a further jar.

Thirty-nine pieces of Roman pottery were recovered and included Derbyshire Ware, Grey Ware, one Black Burnished Ware Type 1 sherd, one possible Samian Ware sherd and one body sherd from a Central Gaulish Samian Ware open vessel of *c.*AD 120–200. The Derbyshire Ware sherds are from jars with the only form identifiable being a cupped-rim jar, a type of vessel made in kilns around Belper from *c.*AD 140 until the mid-4th century. The vessel types are overwhelmingly jars, consistent with a rural settlement, and the presence of only one certain sherd of Samian Ware, dating to when it was most prolific in the Hadrianic-Antonine period, would be consistent with this status.

Discussion

The preliminary excavation of the rectangular enclosure at Whirlow Hall Farm has revealed a site of considerable interest, time depth and preservation. Rectilinear settlements are relatively common throughout England, being particularly numerous in lowland agricultural settings where they appear as crop marks. In South Yorkshire the majority of rectilinear enclosures are found in the east of the county on the Coal Measures, Magnesian Limestone, sand and gravel and alluvial deposits. They are less common in the uplands to the west. In these areas occasional Romano-British rural settlement enclosures occur as upstanding remains with stone banks, but these are usually curvilinear in form. Perhaps the most notable is the group of sites on and around Wharncliffe Crags where excavation at one site, Whitley, revealed a Romano-British building with double orthostatic walls and a rubble core. There were remnants of a cobbled surface outside its entrance and in patches inside. Roman ceramics comprising Grey Ware, Derbyshire Ware, Samian Ware and mortaria were found and ascribed a mid-2nd to 3rd century date (Butcher 1970; Makepeace 1985). Other than this there has been little excavation of upland rectilinear sites in recent years and so little is yet known of their chronology, form and function in South Yorkshire, West Yorkshire or the Peak District. The site at Whirlow lies at the extreme south-western margin of South Yorkshire in a transitional upland-lowland location above one of the main tributary valleys situated at the head of the Sheaf Valley.

The Whirlow enclosure measures 71m in length and probably has a similar width. However, because of the modern houses that encroach on the south side of the enclosure, it can only currently be traced for 43m in this direction. It would therefore seem reasonable to estimate that the enclosure defined a space close to 0.5ha. This size places the enclosure in the larger category for rectilinear enclosures. Other rectilinear and sub-rectangular enclosures that have been examined in South Yorkshire tend to be considerably smaller as at Barnsdale Bar (0.08 ha), Balby Carr (0.01 ha), Hazel Lane Quarry (0.23 ha), Roebuck Hill (0.05 ha), Topham Farm (0.33 ha) and Billingley Drive enclosure D, Thurnscoe (0.1 ha). The sites that probably provide the best comparanda for Whirlow are the enclosed villa site at Gargrave and the rectilinear enclosure at Oldfield Hill, Meltham, West Yorkshire, which are both defined by a bank and outer ditch, and which are of similar size and shape and close to water courses. Further afield the rectilinear enclosure at Ingram South, excavated as part of the Ingram Valley Project (Frodsham and Waddington 2004, 182-4), has revealed a substantial multi-phase Roman enclosure with a stone revetment wall on the inner side of the main enclosure ditch, echoing the discovery at Whirlow.

The presence of a rectangular stone-founded building of Roman date at Whirlow represents a rare discovery, and particularly on a rectilinear enclosure site. Only a few stone-founded rectangular Roman buildings are known from rural sites in the region, the best known comparanda being some distance away in Derbyshire at Roystone Grange (Hodges and Wildgoose 1981), Carsington (Ling and Courtney 1981; Ling *et al.* 1990) and Ockbrook (Palfreyman 2001). The discovery of a Roman rectangular building within a rectilinear enclosure would seem significant as such associations have been rarely documented before, the villa site at Gargrave being

the obvious exception. It is possible that the first phase of the enclosure ditch is Iron Age in origin, as hinted at by the radiocarbon date from the primary ditch silt, but this is by no means certain as this charcoal fragment could very well be residual material. Other than this the constructional form of the second phase ditch, the walled building and metallurgy, together with the material culture from the enclosure deposits, are ostensibly Roman or Romano-British indicating that the second phase of the enclosure, at least, was constructed by Imperial hands. Therefore, it does not seem appropriate to directly compare the Whirlow enclosure to the more common and typical Romano-British rectilinear rural farmsteads which typically appear to be made and used by native Britons. The earlier activity on the site, as evidenced by the pit sealed by the metallurgy layer and containing native British ceramics, has provided a late date for this activity which could be taken to imply that native British occupation took place on the site in and around the time of the Roman invasion of Brigantia. Being located close to, or on, the tribal boundary of the Brigantes the site at Whirlow may have been of some strategic importance to both the Brigantes and the invading Roman forces. The stratigraphy on the site is complex but clearly differentiated and as further investigation takes place it should be possible to tease out a more accurate and precise chronology for the site.

The purpose of the site is not yet able to be determined with any certainty given that excavations are as yet in their infancy and only a small part of the monument has been examined. What can be tentatively suggested, however, is that pre-existing Brigantian site was rebuilt as a substantial Roman rural estate centre, or 'villa', probably in the late 1st or 2nd century AD. It contained at least one Roman stone-founded building, although given that it has been constructed close to the outer ditch this suggests that other buildings may have been packed quite tightly into the enclosure and several more await discovery. If this was the case then the enclosure could have contained a considerable number of buildings and supported a thriving population. The people who lived and used the site appear to have belonged to the Roman administration and given that the 'Stannington Diploma' (a grant of citizenship and land or money to a retiring Roman auxiliary of the *Sunuci* tribe of Belgium) was discovered only a few kilometres away it is possible to speculate that the Whirlow site may have been given as a discharge grant to an army veteran.

The landscape context of the site must also be considered as this no doubt is crucial to understanding the site's purpose. The western entrance of the site leads immediately on to an ancient hollow way that runs up the ridge towards Ringinglow where a Roman road is known to have traversed the moorlands so as to link the Roman forts at *Navio* (Brough) in the Hope Valley with the fort at Templeborough to the east of Sheffield. Although the precise route of this road has remained a topic of contention, there is wide agreement that the road traverses over the moorland somewhere in the vicinity of Rininglow. This means that the enclosure at Whirlow is likely to have been directly connected to the main communication route serving the two nearest Roman forts.

It is rare to find Roman archaeology within Sheffield's city limits and given the considerable potential of the site to shed light on the Roman period in this area, as well as to inform, educate and enthuse, it is important that the excavations on the site are brought to completion. So far we have only a partial account of the site and with further fieldwork this unexpected and highly informative site will provide a more detailed insight of life in an area that once formed the boundary of the Roman Empire and the kingdom of Brigantia.

Archives

A full archive report has been produced and is available on-line from:

<http://www.archaeologicalresearchservices.com/projects/whirlow-hall-farm>

Paper, digital, photographic records and finds are being curated by Archaeological Research Services Ltd until project completion. The archive will then be deposited with Weston Park Museum, Sheffield, S10 2TP, UK.

Acknowledgements

I would like to record my thanks to the Whirlow Hall Farm Trust and all the Trust's volunteers, together with members of The Time Travellers and to Jim Brightman, Jessika Sheppy and Karl Taylor of Archaeological Research Services Ltd for their hard work on site and making the project such a success. The Heritage Lottery Fund kindly funded the project and this allowed over one hundred volunteers and many more school children to be actively involved. Sheffield City Council, as landowners, kindly gave permission for the work to take place.

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