

# SWALEDALE ANCIENT LAND BOUNDARIES PROJECT

Sixth Interim Report (1989 season)

## INTRODUCTION

The archaeological richness of Swaledale has only come to be recognised in recent years, as a result of the air photographs taken by Robert White of the Yorkshire Dales National Park, and the work of the Swaledale Ancient Land Boundaries Project. This project has been studying the numerous ancient land boundaries visible on the moors and dalesides. On the moors, there are small cairns and short stretches of walling of a type familiar in other moorland areas of northern England, but there are also long ruined walls marking out large-scale land divisions. On the daleside, in present-day farmland, there are substantial remains of an older pattern of smaller fields, many of them roughly rectilinear, and numerous associated settlement sites. Most of these are oval platforms cut back into the hillside, on which may be seen the sites of one or more buildings - 'house-platforms'. Our work, which has mainly involved attempting to date these features, has mostly been concentrated on the dalesides and moors of the zone between Reeth and Healaugh, on both banks of the Swale.

## THE 1988-89 SEASON

Financially, we were a little better off this season, with an increased grant from Yorkshire Dales National Park. Also, in October 1988 Andrew Fleming won a Samuel Locker Award for his work on the land boundaries of Dartmoor, being awarded the sum of £5000 to devote to research expenses. It was decided to use up to £500 of this money on the 1989 Swaledale season. In fact, taking into account the employment of an assistant, Sarah Johnson, in autumn 1989, rather more than this was spent. Some Samuel Locker award money was also spent in paying for a rapid survey of the woodlands of Swaledale by Tom Gledhill in October/November 1989.

Our main field season was from July 5th-28th, and involved three main activities. With a team of about a dozen volunteers we continued the excavation of an enclosed settlement site ENE of Healaugh, and examined two critical wall junctions on Calverside, the name we use for the moorland zone immediately south and east of Calver Hill, just west of Reeth. Catherina Maschler and Pär Connellid, from the Department of Human Geography of the University of Stockholm, did detailed mapping work on substantial parts of Calverside and Harkerside (the moorland zone on the other side of the dale, between Grinton Lodge Youth Hostel and Maiden Castle). We also concluded our survey of elm pollards in the Healaugh-Ellerton area, and, as mentioned above, a rapid survey of Swaledale's woodlands was carried out.

We continued our policy of publicising the project's work whenever we were given the opportunity to do so, by means of public lectures and guided walks. This year there was an exhibition of photographs of Swaledale's archaeology, sponsored by the Yorkshire Dales National Park and the Swaledale Festival. It featured air photos by Robert White and ground photos by Andrew Fleming, and was held in Grinton Church. The exhibition was also shown at the meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in Sheffield in September and is currently displayed in the Department of Archaeology and Prehistory in the University of Sheffield.

This year, for the first time, we held an Open Day, on Sunday, July 9th, when visitors were invited to see the excavations near Healaugh. Judging by the numbers who took this opportunity, the Open Day must be judged a success, and we hope to hold another in 1990.

### Calverside

As a result of this year's work, we are now able to say a good deal about the sequence of land boundaries on Calverside, especially in the eastern zone, around Riddings Rigg, the shoulder to the east of Calver Hill between Healaugh and Arkengarthdale. Strictly, it is not really possible to put the isolated cairns and stretches of walling into this sequence, and they have been omitted from the illustration presented here (fig. 1). The earliest wall in the sequence (phase I) appears to represent an external boundary for a large parcel of land whose core apparently lay to the north of Riddings Farm. Only one wall, which joins the main boundary from the south, gives us a hint of how this land may have been laid out. Probably also 'early', though not necessarily contemporary with phase I, are three walled enclosures (A, B, and C). B and C have been robbed out in antiquity (B probably in phase II). The ring-cairn/s are in a zone of small cairns and short stretches of walling which invites comparison with Harkerside (see below) and also with other parts of northern Britain where these kinds of site are normally assigned to the Middle/Late Bronze Age.

Phase II (the Reeth field system) looks like a much more ambitious version of phase I; possibly phase I was actually unfinished. The Reeth system consisted of a number of major walls heading out from the Reeth area in a NW direction, ending on a 'head wall' in the same zone as the phase I head wall, a bit of which was re-used. At the same time or shortly afterwards, walls laid out on the same rough axis were also laid out beyond the head wall, as far as a small beck to the west. Most subdivision of the Reeth field system apparently occurred on its eastern side, in the zone apparently used previously, and it looks as if some earlier walls and structures may have been re-used. It's impossible to go into details here.

In phase III a new wall was built, to the SE of the phase II head wall, and running between two major boundaries of the old Reeth system. The southern ends of these may have continued in use. This new wall can be linked with the Healaugh system because there is a single boundary running out to join it from the head wall of the Healaugh system, which emerges from the daleside enclosures onto the open moors just west of Riddings Farm. Further west, three walls on the same axis must also belong to the Healaugh system. One of them slighted enclosure A, but there also seems to have been a 'field' out here, its boundary including a short stretch of the enclosure and a stretch of one of the phase II walls, its SE end apparently robbed out and re-aligned.

Immediately west of the area on fig. 1 (that is, NNW of Healaugh), is a complex area of walls which are much more difficult to get to grips with; a little more careful work may do the trick. The basic features are fairly similar to those on Riddings Rigg, however; there is a zone of cairns and fragmentary walling, there are suggestions of curvilinear 'head walls', and there are coaxial walls (that is, walls which share an axis of orientation. It may be that this is basically an overlap area between two different communities, and this is causing extra complications. Further west still, in the Cleasby area, there is also considerable chronological depth, as pointed out in last year's report. Eventually there is no doubt that we shall be able to compare and contrast these areas, and show how similar processes occurred here in roughly the same order.

### Harkerside

A great deal of progress, held up only by time and bracken growth in part of the area, was made on Harkerside this year. We managed to map the bulk of the cairns and walls in the zone between Grinton Lodge Youth Hostel and the line of grouse butts (SE 031980) SW of Deer Park. Fig. 2 shows part of the area which we mapped, near a prominent linear earthwork, to show the general character of the material here. One of the most striking features on Harkerside is the zone of clearance cairns, small fields, irregular enclosures and fragments of walling stretching for 1½ kilometres, from the area of the Youth Hostel to the shooting butts SW of Deer Park. This zone contains two ring cairns; one of this year's notable discoveries was a new one near the Youth Hostel, to add to the existing one marked on the 1:25,000 map as a 'hut circle'. It seems that this is a zone which has seen some cultivation; much of it lies on a relatively flat natural shoulder, some 300-350 m above sea level. Further up the slope, another shoulder at nearly 400m a. s. l. also has one or two irregular 'fields' and a kidney-shaped enclosure. All this material is comparable with that found on the moors of southern Scotland, North-East Yorkshire and Derbyshire, where clearance cairns, fragmentary field-walls and ring-cairns seem to form a recognisable 'Middle Bronze Age' (c. 1700-1200 BC) horizon of upland cultivation and herding.

Running through the zone of cairns and short walls are the long walls of the Harkerside field system/s. These long walls are very impressive. On the eastern side of the map they run over Howe Hill from near the Youth Hostel, a distance of 1½ km, with individual wall lengths of 700 m; further west they scale a very steep hillside in dramatic fashion. The relationship between these long walls and the material described above is problematic. The fact that the long walls have few cairns near them might suggest that most of the cairns were robbed out by the long wall builders, and thus pre-date the long walls. Also, just north of Howe Hill one of the long walls stops on an enclosure wall. However, far more short walls run up to the long walls than are slighted by them. As on Calverside, it looks as if some small-scale fields and enclosures pre-date the long walls, others are contemporary with them, and yet others may be early ones re-used and adapted by the long wall builders. However, an interesting difference from Calverside is that on Harkerside there is no evidence that the long walls end on a 'head wall'. A further useful piece of stratigraphic information is that the linear earthwork post-dates the ancient walls.

## Healaugh site A

Here (SE 021992 approx., some 300m ENE of Healaugh and on land enclosed at the present day) is a group of six or seven house-platforms enclosed within a bank or wall to form a settlement enclosure with an entrance on the southern or downhill side approached by a hollow-way. The area includes old field-banks, other enclosures and one or two house-platforms not within enclosures.

Last year, excavation of one of the house-platforms revealed an oval building, measuring some 9m by 5m, with an entrance at the eastern 'end' of the oval and a well-paved floor. Since it was clear that the building had a predecessor, we came back this year and our efforts were well rewarded. We were able to show that there had been a circular house (a 'hut-circle') on the platform. It was 6m in internal diameter, with a thick, well-made stone wall, a paved floor, and an entrance in its eastern side, from which a roughly paved pathway led towards the entrance of the enclosure. This circular building was converted into the oval one which we discovered in 1988. To make the alteration, much of the southern arc of the hut-circle's wall was removed, and a masking wall was built in front of the its northern arc. The paving of the original house was retained, and the new revetment walls were built in the 'post and panel' style of the original hut circle. So this is unlikely to be a case of 're-occupation' of a former house-site; a deliberate decision was made to change to an oval house. Interestingly, the paving which floored the eastern side of the new oval house included two joining pieces of the broken basal slab of a rotary quern, in a way which recalled the use of an old saddle quern on the floor of the earlier circular house. Is this coincidence, or was incorporating querns in the floor a traditional local way of bringing good luck? Cereal farmers may have needed a bit of that, in Swaledale!

We are grateful to Professor Keith Branigan for identifying the pottery as mostly second century in date. Included on the site are a few scraps of Samian, and a handle and parts of the fabric of an amphora, which must have come from a high status site receiving foreign imports, perhaps fish paste from the Iberian peninsula.

Of course, our one sherd of Late Neolithic or Bronze Age pottery could have come from anywhere. However, there was a substantial arc of rough walling cum scree revetment immediately behind the northern arc of the hut-circle wall, which had paving-slabs beneath it. There was distinctly 'dirty' earth and a burnt stake-hole below the paved floor, which included a re-used saddle-quern as mentioned above. It is likely that there was at least one earlier phase involving a timber structure or structures, and it must be an exciting possibility that on this site we are seeing the Iron Age/Romano-British transition.

That this could be the case is suggested by another line of evidence. This year, we cut a trench through the western wall of the enclosure. The wall turned out to be a substantial one, low but broad, and carefully faced, not unlike the sections of 'head wall' excavated on Calverside in 1987. The wall was not built on a lynchet, although a small negative lynchet seems to have formed below it, outside the enclosure. As soon as we knew the character of the enclosure wall we tried to trace it from surface indications. This is interesting. It looks as if the western wall was robbed out, and also slighted by the oval house-platform just below the one which we are excavating. Furthermore it seems possible that what would originally have been the curvilinear eastern wall of the enclosure may have been overridden by the straightish field-bank which is now to be found here, running beside the modern field-wall. It is possible that we are seeing here a late prehistoric walled settlement of circular stone-footed buildings being replaced by an unfenced group of oval Romano-British structures - perhaps a

symbol of more peaceful conditions following the Roman conquest of the region. Further work should settle the issue.

### **The dalesides**

In 1989 as in 1988 the present-day fields were kept under as much surveillance as possible, in different light conditions. Colour slides taken with a zoom lens will provide a useful resource for further study. We are noticing more and more cases where there is an obvious sequence (one field-bank supplanting another, two field-banks side by side in a situation where both can't have been in use at the same time, and so on). This will help with future analysis.

### **Tree management and woodland history**

Previous readers of these interim reports will know that we have also been attempting to study Swaledale's ancient elm pollards, an important and so far overlooked feature of the local heritage. These trees, which are often found on boundaries, are under threat from Dutch elm disease and the chain saw. This summer we managed to find the resources to 'complete' the inventory of pollard elms in the Healaugh-Ellerton zone. We now have records of about 100 trees. We also managed a rapid survey of woodlands in the dale, in October/November 1989. Woodland history and tree management in Swaledale need detailed study by a trained expert. Ideally, one would like to see a doctoral thesis on the subject. However, failing that, the least we can do is to publish a short interim paper highlighting the main facts as they appear to be, and drawing attention to the opportunities here.

### **Future work**

At the time of writing (January 1990), active steps are being taken to obtain a post-doctoral research fellowship for work on pollen analysis in Swaledale, and a SERC research studentship for work on woodland history and tree management.

The immediate tasks ahead of the Project are clear enough. It now seems very likely that the Healaugh site will produce a sequence of buildings spanning the late Iron Age/early Roman transition, and that there are corresponding changes in the character of the enclosure; an attempt must be made to relate the surrounding field pattern to this sequence. We hope to return for a further three week season from July 4th to 27th inclusive.

We also need to complete our mapping of the Harkerside and Calverside moorland areas; we would like to invite our Swedish colleagues to return in April to complete this work, but failing that we hope to complete it ourselves in July.

This year, by personal fieldwork carried out in March or April, we intend to make a detailed study of the field boundaries and associated settlements in the fields below Harkerside and Calverside, using a combination of existing air cover, ground photos and fieldwork to produce sketch plots which will form a basis for detailed mapping in later seasons. A further objective of the spring fieldwork will be detailed study of the visible chronological

relationships (i.e where one field boundary can be seen to succeed another, where the relationship between two field boundaries shows that they cannot be contemporary, etc) and to consider the relationships between distinctive types of fields.

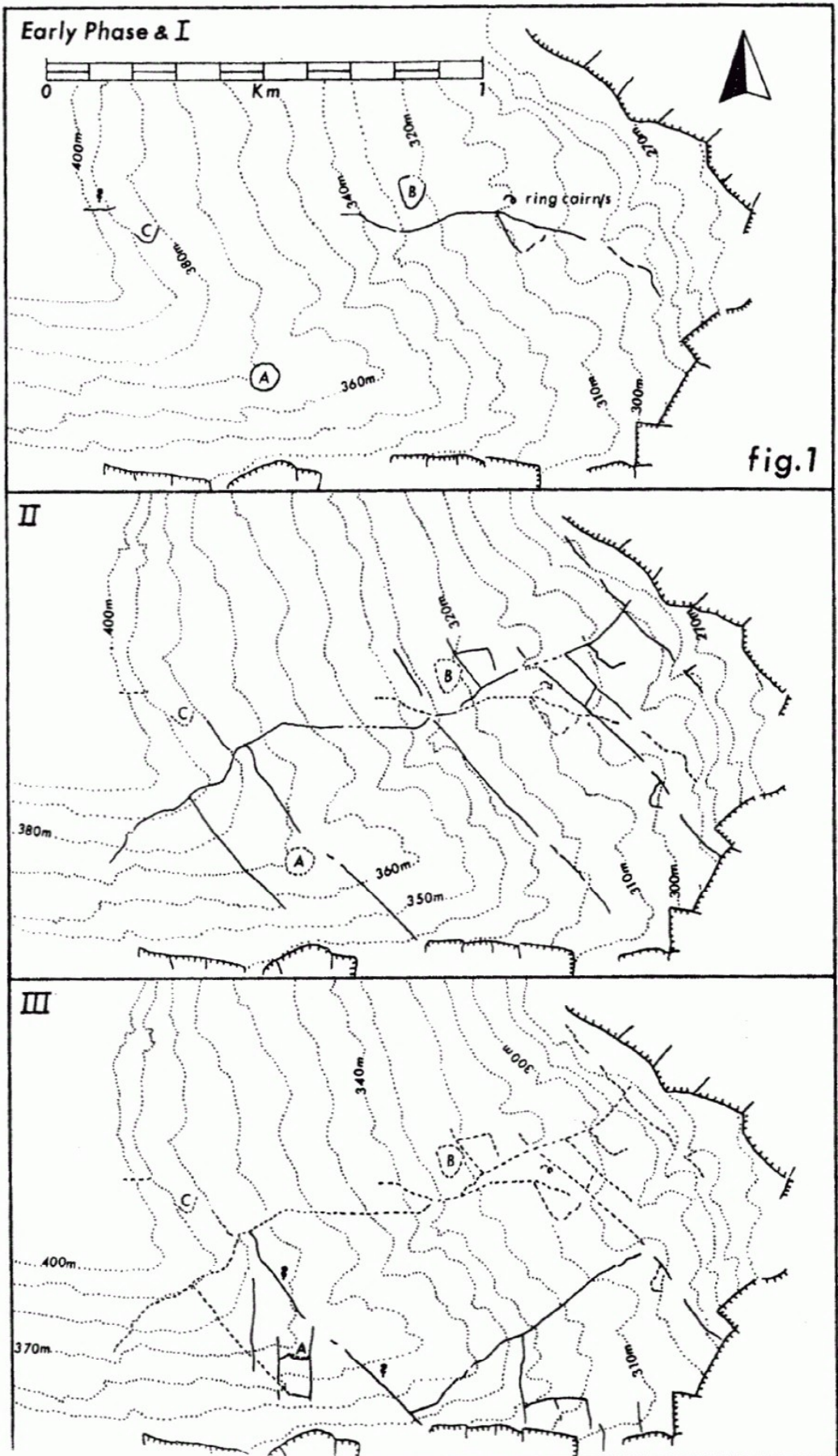
## THANKS

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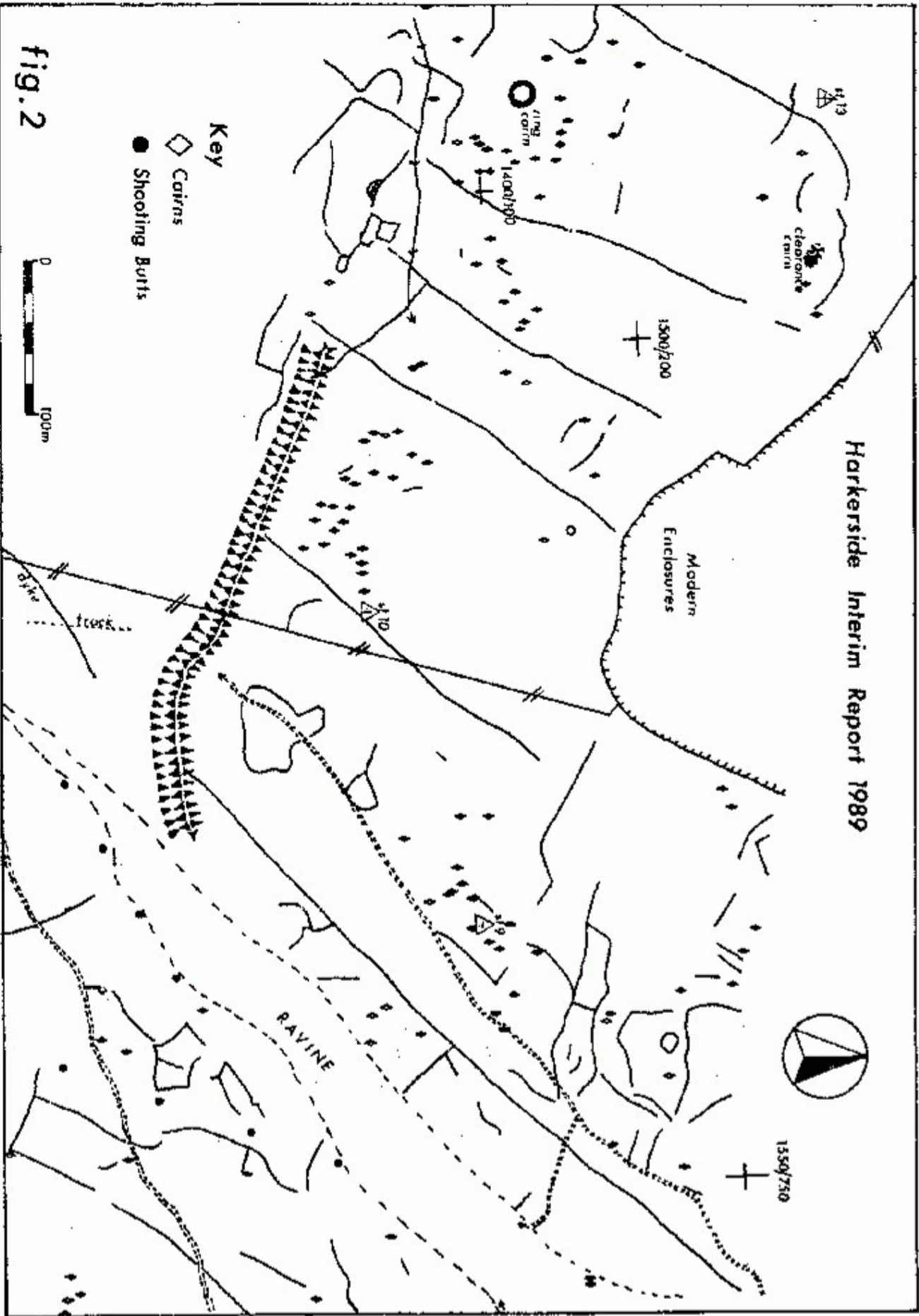


fig. 2

HEALOUGH SITE A 1989

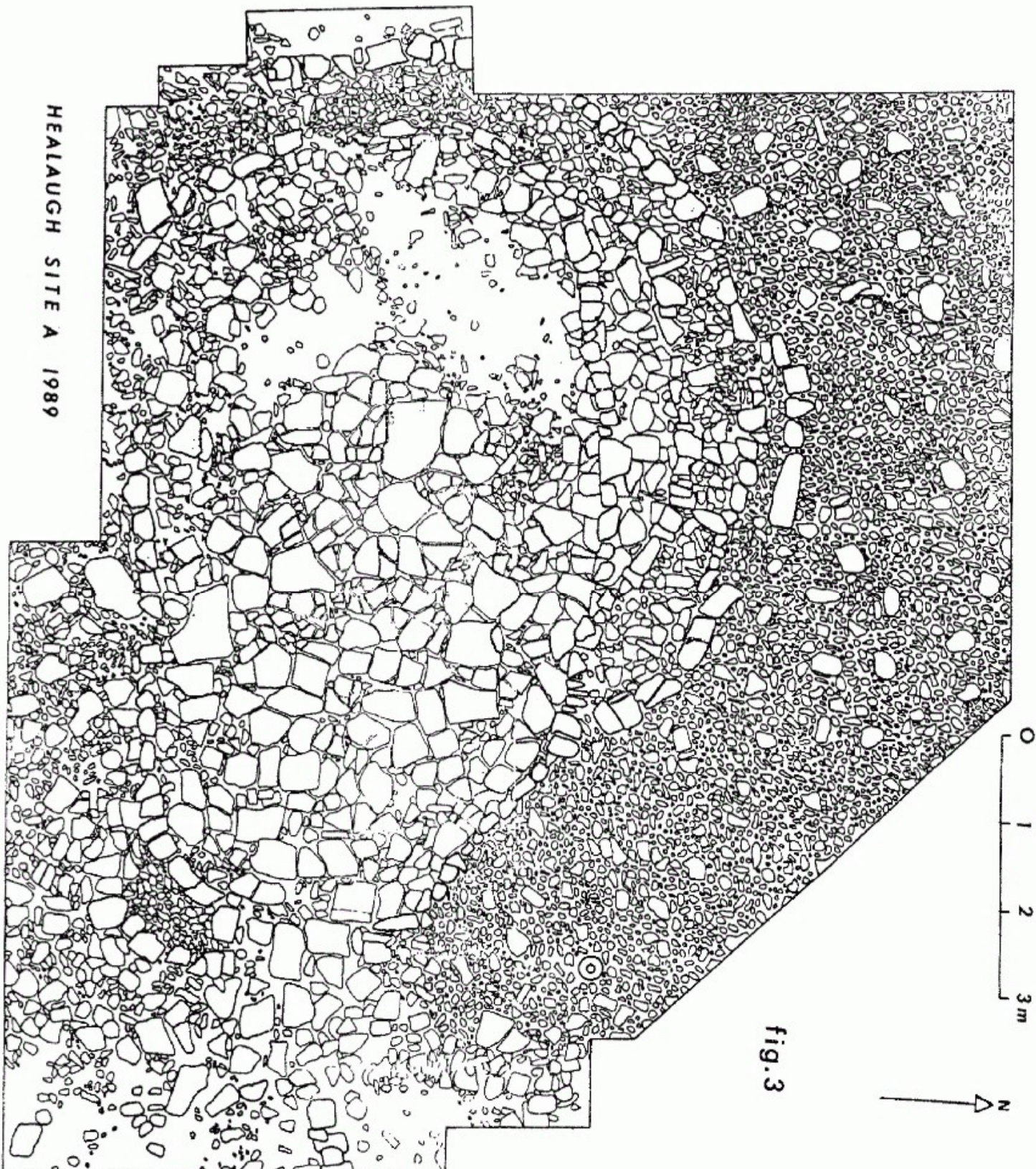


fig.3

FIG 4



HEALAUGH EXCAVATION 1989

- A. The Late Iron Age or early Romano-British 'hut-circle, with paved floor, seen from the north.
- B. The oval Romano-British house, seen from the east. It was created by demolishing part of the hut circle's wall, building new walls and extending the paving slabs further east. See also fig. 3.
- C. To convert the circular building into an oval one, a thin wall was built at the rear of the platform, masking off the broader wall of the earlier structure.