

Chapel House Wood Landscape Project

Interim Report 2011

1. Overview

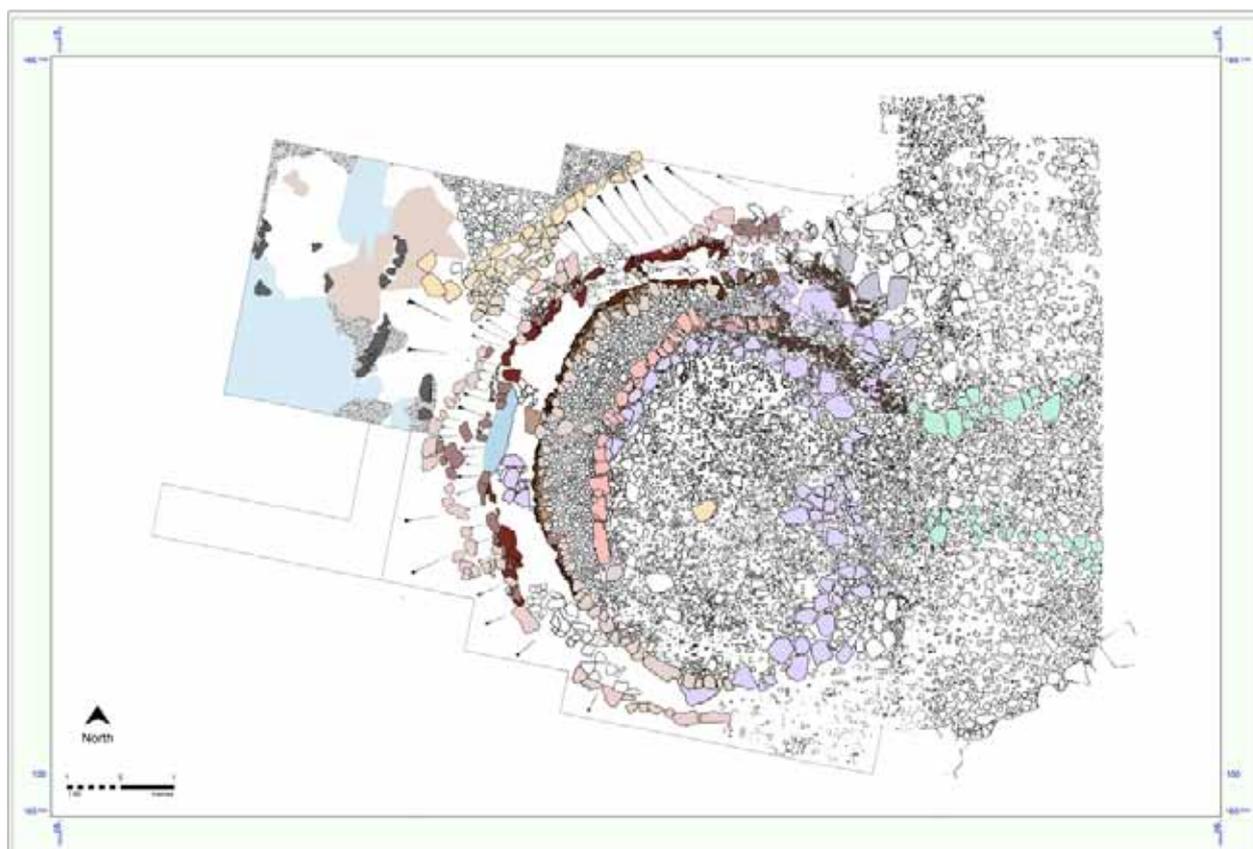
1.1 The crew

In addition to local volunteers and archaeology students from Bradford, Exeter and Newcastle Universities, we were joined this year by three end-of-high-school students who were thinking about applying to study archaeology at university, or were waiting to take up places. On the managerial side, Don Henson, Rebecca Jarosz and Aidan Pratt again provided invaluable assistance with supervision and logistics. Finds recording was undertaken by members of the Upper Wharfedale Heritage Group, and we extend our grateful thanks to all for the help provided.

1.2 The project

A milestone was reached with the completion of work on platform DF – signified conclusively by the exposure of bedrock. Preparations began for the move to platform DG, to follow up the indications that have emerged so far for metalworking on the site. Jenny Morgan completed her Masters dissertation on the animal bone at York University, thanks to Professor Terry O'Connor for help in setting this up. This will be the final year of Dales LEADER funding, many thanks to all concerned for the valuable support that the fund has provided.

2. Completion of work on platform DF



Interim site plan for platform DF

Work this year concentrated on the front portion of the building platform, and several of the large paving slabs on the northern arc were lifted to look for any signs of earlier structures. Beneath one of the slabs we found a patch of charcoal pressed into the soil (stratification as secure as this is extremely rare on this site!), but it turned out to be oak and of little use for dating. A collection of snail shells from beneath the paving was shown by its size range to be a natural death assemblage, rather than the remains of someone's meal.



Cross-section through the two shallow gullies

A possible post-position (far too shallow to be graced with the term 'posthole') was recorded beneath the line of the rubble bank (context 35) which had been removed around the northern arc of the platform. Although its interpretation is not conclusive, and it does not immediately fall into a coherent pattern with similar features recorded last year, it suggests additional complexity to the site and demonstrates the extremely ephemeral nature of surviving evidence. Two arcs of closely-set cobbles, running underneath some of the paving, appear to represent drainage gullies. Larger boulders along the front edge of the platform suggest an approach that funnels either side of an isolated square area of paving.



The likelihood of two phases of construction on the platform has now increased, as has the potential significance of its final dismantling and clearance as a deliberate act rather than casual abandonment. The rubble bank may have been constructed over some of the paving as a 'bund' to protect the platform from stones rolling down the hillside from the limestone outcrop above. The gap between this and the hillside filled up with context 36/40, a mixture of stones and discarded bones (possibly as a single act of back-filling although this is still being considered), and the bund proved its effectiveness when a block of limestone crashed down and came to rest against it.

3. Finds

The range of finds included the by now familiar scatter of animal bone, and also small fragments of slag and clinker across the front of the platform. No structures associated with metalworking have yet been identified, and it may be that this material represents the edge of a scatter centred on neighbouring platform DG.

3.1 Animal Bone

Work on the 2008-9 material by Jenny Morgan concentrated mainly on the large quantities of bone coming from the gap between the bund (context 35) and the hillside, represented by context 36/40. A domestic assemblage has been identified comprising cattle, sheep, pig and horse, with wild species including deer, hare and a single wild boar bone, along with probably intrusive species such as fox, rodent, hedgehog and toad. The presence of dogs was indicated only by gnawing marks on some of the bones. Cattle dominated the domesticated species, and the age profile shows that both they and sheep were kept into old age to provide milk and wool respectively; their use for meat is indicated by butchery marks and burning. The animals appear to have been well looked after, and there was little evidence of injury or disease. One notable exception was the indication on a young bovine metatarsal of a painful abscess that drained into the joint (Morgan 2010).

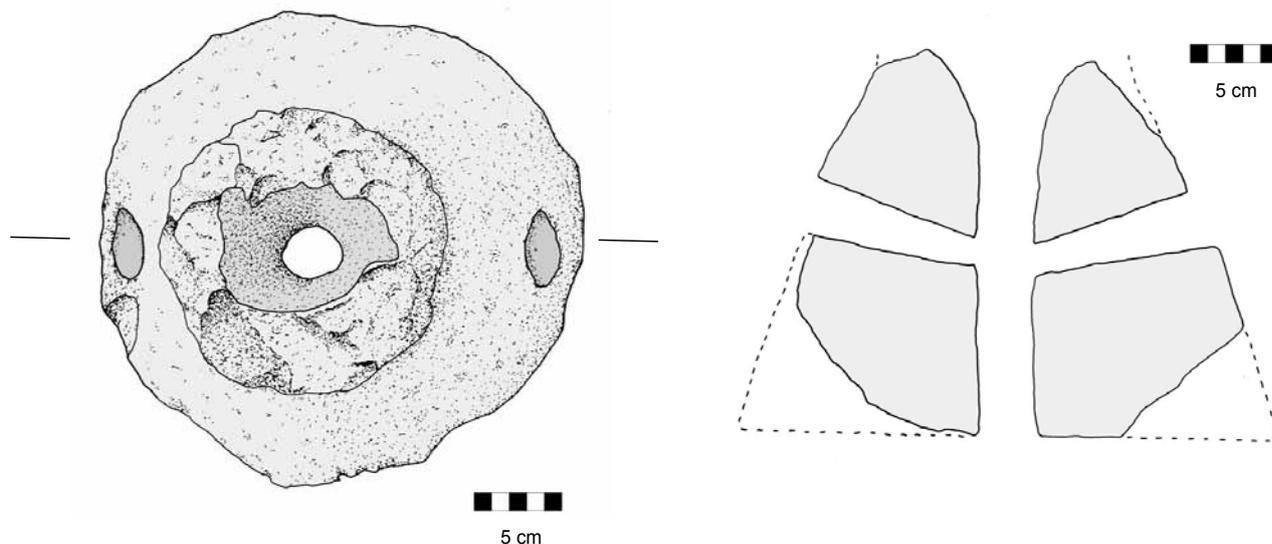
3.2 Metalworking evidence

Several items representing metalworking were reported in last year's interim (Martlew 2010). The potential focus for this activity has yet to be identified, but geophysical survey suggests that platform DG may represent one metalworking area. As a preliminary to the excavation of this platform next year, soil samples were taken from just beneath the turf layer on a 2m grid across the platform and adjacent area. Magnetic material was recovered from samples in suspension, dried and weighed. Under the microscope the majority of the material could be seen to be fragments of iron-rich sandstone. Some had been heated to the point of vitrification, and among the mineral fragments a few spherical metallic globules were seen. This evidence may suggest the early stages of working an iron bloom, but the quantities of material recovered so far do not indicate precisely where this may have been taking place.



Metallic droplets. The largest is c. 1mm diameter

CHW11DF010AA beehive quern top-stone

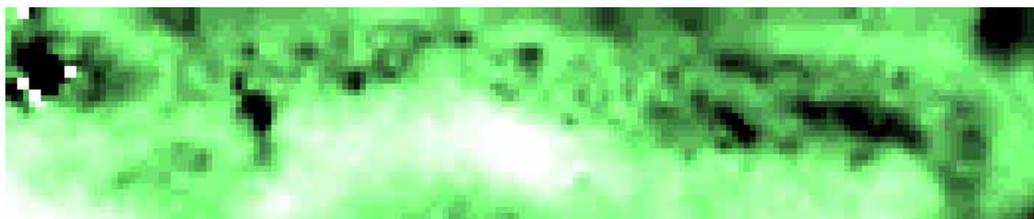


3.3 Quern

The rotary quern top stone is of a double-handled type, similar in shape to an example of unknown provenance in Skipton Museum. Its presence among the rubble making up the front of the platform does not suggest any kind of deliberate placement, unlike the fragment found near the centre of the platform last year. This may be further evidence for the deliberate levelling of the site when it was abandoned, but that's still under investigation. As with the other top-stones from the settlement this quern was severely damaged in antiquity, but no detached fragments have been recognised so far during our excavation.

4. Geophysical Survey

In continuing investigations of earthworks around the area of the settlement, earth resistance surveys were carried out over a large and apparently artificial platform, where a (timber?) building may once have stood. The results, without being startlingly conclusive, do add further evidence in support of a building at this location – perhaps a long barn (built into the hillside at the right-hand side of the plot, below) with an adjacent yard (the low resistance area left of centre on the plot). We will investigate this further in the coming seasons.



Processed plot of earth resistance survey. Light areas represent low resistance, dark areas high resistance. (The plot is 90m long, with North to the right)

5. Radiocarbon dates

Three further dates have been obtained from excavations in the project area (quoted at 2σ):

1. SUERC-36383	heather charcoal (DF)	2115±30	204 – 49 calBC	93.1%
			342 – 328 calBC	2.3%
2. SUERC-37452	animal bone (DF)	1955±30	39 calBC – 90 calAD	88.8%
			100 – 124 calAD	6.6%
3. SUERC-37453	human bone (DA)	1345±30	640 – 716 calAD	85.4%
			744 – 769 calAD	10%

Sample (1) was collected from the bottom of context 36/40 in the 'gully' between the bund and the hillside, and suggests that the construction of platform DF took place during the last couple of centuries BC. Sample (2), from the top of context 36/40, indicates the continuation of activity on the platform at least into the late first/early second century AD. Both of these dates corroborate other evidence from the site, although some precision is actually lost through the process of calibration to produce the calendar dates quoted above.

Sample (3) is from site DA, the boulder-cairn lower down the hillside below the settlement. The late date is particularly interesting: it places the death of this individual right at the time of the proposed annexation by Northumbria of what might have been an independent 'kingdom' of Craven (Wood 1996). There are problems in the interpretation of the evidence, and it certainly does not prove continuity of settlement on this site from the Roman period. It is not entirely clear at this stage whether the individual was British or Anglian, Christian or pagan, although the re-use of existing prehistoric sites for pagan burials is not unknown. It does, however, provide circumstantial evidence for nearby occupation during this little-known but critical period, which is otherwise extremely hard to identify in Craven.

6. References

Martlew, R. 2010 *Chapel House Wood Landscape Project. Interim Report 2010* available at http://ydlrt.co.uk/chw_2010__interim.pdf

Morgan, J. 2010 *The analysis of the faunal assemblage recovered from Chapel House Wood, Upper Wharfedale*. Unpublished dissertation for the degree of MSc in Zooarchaeology, Department of Archaeology, University of York.

Wood, P.N. 1996 On the Little British Kingdom of Craven *Northern History* 32, 1-20

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