

CROPMARKS AT BROMPTON-BY- SAWDON, NORTH YORKSHIRE AIR PHOTOGRAPH ASSESSMENT

David Knight



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**CROPMARKS AT BROMPTON-BY-SAWDON, NORTH
YORKSHIRE.
AIR PHOTOGRAPH ASSESSMENT
SPECIAL PROJECT**

David Knight

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SUMMARY

The cropmarks of an Iron Age settlement east of Brompton-by-Sawdon, North Yorkshire, were first photographed by Derrick Riley in 1974. Subsequent photography by Cambridge University, Professor Dominic Powlesland, the RCHME and English Heritage (National Monuments Record: as recent as June 2011) added significantly to the detail of the original coverage.

The site, which fell into bordering photography from the North York Moors National Mapping Programme and Assessment, arose specific interest when structural elements were noted on several phases of photography. The site was deemed important enough to warrant this Special Project investigation and report.

CONTRIBUTORS

Mapping and recording for this assessment was carried out by David Knight of English Heritage's Air Survey & Investigation team.

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CROPMARKS AT BROMPTON-BY-SAWDON, NORTH YORKSHIRE: AIR PHOTOGRAPH ASSESSMENT

I. Introduction

The village of Brompton-by-Sawdon sits on the southern edge of the Tabular Hills, on the north side of the Vale of Pickering, North Yorkshire. The village is one of several located along the A170 road from Pickering to Scarborough (fig. 1). A little over 200m to the east of Brompton-by-Sawdon is the site of a potentially much earlier settlement. The site is visible as a series of linear cropmarks and parchmarks and was first photographed by Derrick Riley in 1974, with subsequent oblique photography by the RCHME and English Heritage (NMR), Dominic Powlesland, and Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs (CUCAP) between 1976 and 2011.

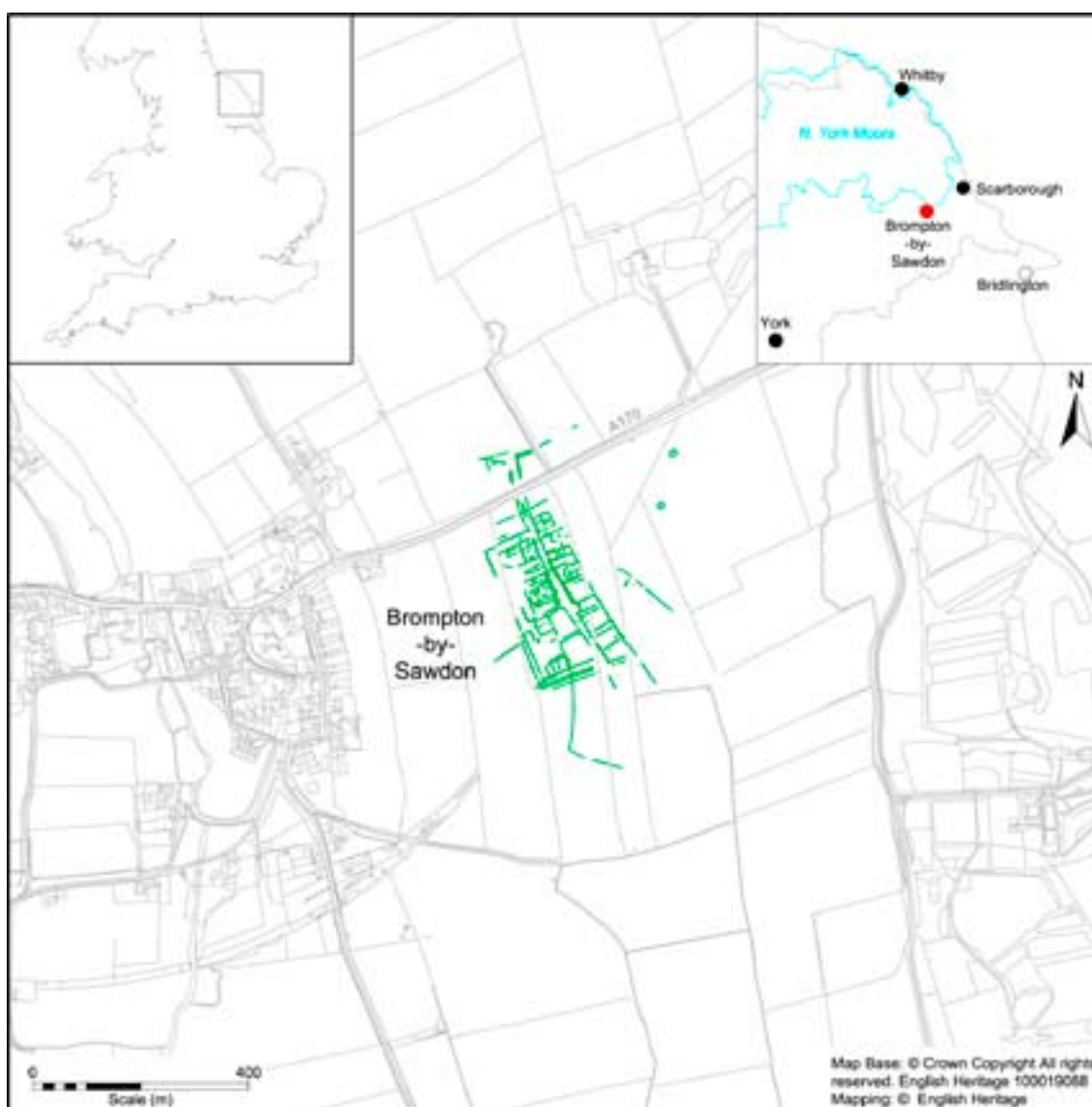


Figure 1. Location and transcription of the cropmark landscape east of Brompton-by-Sawdon.

The archaeological context for the site is uncertain because, unlike the surrounding areas of the Howardian Hills, the Yorkshire Wolds, the coastal zone and part of the North York Moors National Park, the Tabular Hills and the Vale of Pickering have yet to be subjected to a thorough aerial photograph assessment.

2. Archaeological Features

The aerial photography for Brompton shows cropmarks extending approximately south-south-east from the A170 for at least 430m (fig. 2). These cropmarks are broadly interpreted as representing the buried remains of a trackway (fig 2: A) flanked by enclosures and other settlement features. The trackway is intermittently visible as two parallel ditches extending for the full length of the settlement, possibly terminating or making a rightangled turn, north of the present road.

A series of enclosures, up to 40m deep, flank the trackway on its eastern side. These enclosures appear to back onto a single linear ditch, visible only as a discontinuous cropmark (fig 2: B), which marks the eastern limit of the settlement. The individual enclosures are defined by various perpendicular cropmarks extending between the trackway and ditch, though these are generally too fragmented to be certain of individual enclosure dimensions. At the northern end of these enclosures the cropmarks become less coherent but a high degree of subdivision is suggested (fig 2: C), perhaps indicating a domestic nucleus. Central to this area is the cropmark of a sub-circular enclosure (fig 2: D) measuring c.33m in diameter with internal pits, suggestive of a different, probably earlier, phase of activity at this site. Further multi-phased activity, including a possible recut of the trackway with an adjacent square enclosure, were also noted (fig 2: E).

The enclosures flanking the western side of the trackway, while predominantly rectilinear in form, are more complex than those to the east. The settlement is also deeper on this side with the enclosures extending over 100m west of the central track (fig. 2: G). The southern and northern borders to the settlement are clearly displayed in this area. The north-west boundary abuts the trackway and extends west before making a 'L-shaped' turn towards the south (fig 2: G). Although the cropmark is fragmented, the western boundary of the site appears to extend for approximately 280m towards the south, where it adjoins a complex southern boundary; the whole enclosing a considerable area of 2.7 hectares.

An isolated square enclosure with an internal width of 27m (fig. 2: H), sits centrally to this western division of the settlement, containing several small pits. A possible double-ditched access route, extending from the central trackway, appears to abut the north-east corner of the square enclosure, and may also continue to the west as an alternative route to the settlement (fig. 2: I). The cropmark evidence to the south is much more sparse, displaying an intermittently visible series of rectilinear enclosures and linears, including an irregular ditch which extends for at least 183m outside the settlement (fig. 2: J). Again this feature appears to relate to a different phase of the site.

The north-west element of the settlement is confused by a large area of high water retention causing a darker cropmark which masks the archaeological features (fig. 2). The

focal point of the settlement, consisting of a group of structural elements representing at least two buildings lies adjacent to the masked area. Perhaps the most well-defined of these buildings is aligned along the western element of the central trackway (fig. 2 inset: K). This structure measures approximately 30m in length by 6.4m wide, and appears to display at least four internal partitions. A possible narrower structure, more irregular in plan, abuts this building to the south. A further negative cropmark was noted to the south of these buildings, in the same alignment and also extending parallel to the trackway for 16m, though no return was visible suggesting this to be a stand-alone wall.



Figure 2. Cropmarks of a late Iron Age 'ladder' settlement illustrating a continuation into the Roman period.

A secondary large building, orientated west-south-west to east-north-east and at a right angle to the structures mentioned above (fig. 2 inset: L), measures at least 37m in length and between 7.4m and 9.6m wide. The eastern end of the range of buildings abuts the trackway with a possible walled 'corridor'. Internal divisions are visible, and a darker cropmark area at the western end may indicate sunken disturbance. A tentative further building to the south-west of the above structures is indicated by a parch mark (fig. 2 inset: M), though this feature does not appear regularly on photography. These structural elements all fall within a rectilinear ditched enclosure measuring 51m by 75m, with the buildings placed around the outer edges. Numerous pits and linears within this enclosure suggest a phased development of the site.

A small area of medieval ridge and furrow was also noted as cropmarks overlying the

settlement, as were a series of linears extending across the settlement, and although these extend parallel to elements of the archaeology, they are also aligned with the present road and are considered to be post medieval field boundaries or drains.

3. Discussion

The cropmarks at Brompton represent several phases of activity. The most anomalous feature is the large sub-circular enclosure (fig. 2: D), which in a wider regional context could conceivably be interpreted as a Bronze Age settlement or funerary monument such as an enclosed cremation cemetery. Without further evidence it is not possible to be more definitive yet it seems likely that this is the earliest feature on this site.

Evidently the most dominant archaeology at Brompton is the settlement. Although this pattern of settlement, consisting of a double-ditched trackway flanked by rectilinear enclosures, is reminiscent of settlements and field systems of the North York Moors (Knight 2011 et al) and the Howardian Hills (Carter 1995), the closest comparisons to our site can be found in the Yorkshire Wolds (Stoertz 1997) and the lower-lying fringes of the Vale of Pickering. A number of 'ladder' type settlements have been recorded only 5km to the south, stretching from Sherburn to West Heslerton, not only from aerial photographs of cropmarks but also through extensive geophysical survey and excavation (Powlesland 2003). Excavation in the Wolds has suggested that 'ladder' forms succeeded early Iron Age settlements, dating them to the late Iron Age or Roman periods (Stoertz 1997, 53). The extensive 'ladder' pattern at Thwing in the Wolds was discovered to have a Roman building on site, and similarly the villa site at Harpham appears to have been constructed upon an earlier existing settlement (Cumming 2001). The latter example provides an interesting comparison for our Brompton site, consisting of a diverse array of Roman structures of varying sizes and orientation, with excavated evidence suggesting a development from Iron Age to Roman living (Sheppard 1906). The presence of rectilinear structures at Brompton adds more weight to a Roman date for the later phase.

Although there is limited definitive Roman activity in the immediate area of Brompton-by-Sawdon, a number of sites are known within the wider context. A Roman road is thought to have extended from Sherburn to Seamer Beacon, running through the villages of Hutton Buscel and Wykeham. Traces of this road have been identified only 2km to the east of the Brompton site. Further to the east, on the Scarborough headland, stands the remains of a Roman signal station dating to the late fourth century, and only 8km away a Roman settlement was discovered in 1947 at Crossgates, Seamer. The site at Crossgates was exposed by sand and gravel extraction to reveal a 1st century fortlet with an internal settlement of huts and a possible timber framed structure of 3rd or 4th century date. This site was noted to have continued in use into the Anglian period (Rutter and Duke 1958, 14; Pye 1983, 9).

The rich agricultural soils of the Tabular Hills and upper Vale of Pickering are a likely location for Roman occupation, especially with extensive sites known to the east, west and south. Taken as a whole, Yorkshire is relatively abundant with villa sites, such as Harpham, Rudston and Kilham near Bridlington; Wharram le Street, Settrington

and Burythorpe to the south of Malton; and the more dispersed sites of Hovingham, Beadlam and Spaunton to the north of York, amongst others. The Brompton structures were originally viewed as a potential villa site, though without further evidence the cropmarks lack many of the characteristics of a typical Roman villa. There is no evidence of a 'winged' complex of buildings, nor an immediate suggestion of a courtyard appearance. The Brompton buildings do however suggest a complexity beyond that of a simple farmstead, and as Powlesland states: "sophisticated stone buildings ... were the exception rather than the rule" (2003, 28). Rather than superseding an earlier Iron Age village, the Roman structures appear to be contiguous with the ladder settlement, to the point where the partitioned building (fig. 2: K) clearly fronts along the trackway. The complexity of the north building (fig. 2: L) cannot be ignored, also abutting the trackway and with possible finer internal partitions and corridors. It is important to note that this building lies immediately adjacent to a large area of water retention preventing the formation of cropmarks, which may mask further settlement features. Only further research, such as geophysical survey, could help to determine their function and allow a more accurate interpretation of the site.



Figure 3. A breakdown and interpretation of the transcribed archaeological cropmarks at Brompton-by-Sawdon.

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