

CASTLE HILL DENBY DALE, WEST YORKSHIRE

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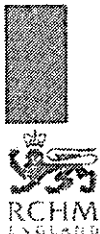


Archaeological Field Survey Report

CASTLE HILL, DENBY DALE WEST YORKSHIRE

by Moraig Brown





CASTLE HILL,
DENBY DALE, WEST YORKSHIRE

NMR NUMBER SE 20 NW 2

INDUSTRY AND ENCLOSURE IN THE NEOLITHIC

FEBRUARY 1996



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1. INTRODUCTION

In February 1996 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England surveyed the remains of an enclosure on Castle Hill, Denby Dale near Huddersfield in West Yorkshire (NMR Number SE 20 NW 2). This survey was carried out as part of the Industry and Enclosure in the Neolithic Project, a national survey seeking to produce a corpus of Neolithic flint mines and enclosures in England. The project was the responsibility of staff of the Archaeological Field Office in Cambridge.

Castle Hill is situated at NGR 2037 0695, 2.5km south-west of Denby Dale and 5km south-east of Holmfirth. It lies at 320m above OD, facing south-east on gently rolling hills. Thurlstone Moors and the Peak District National Park are only 6km to the south-west (Figure 1).

The geology of this area comprises grey mudstones, siltstones and sandstones with coal measures (Soil Survey 1980).

The remains of the enclosure occupy part of a large, stone-walled field which is currently under pasture. However, the field was under plough until fairly recently, resulting in the destruction of much of the enclosure; the surviving earthworks are scheduled (SAM West Yorkshire 1246).

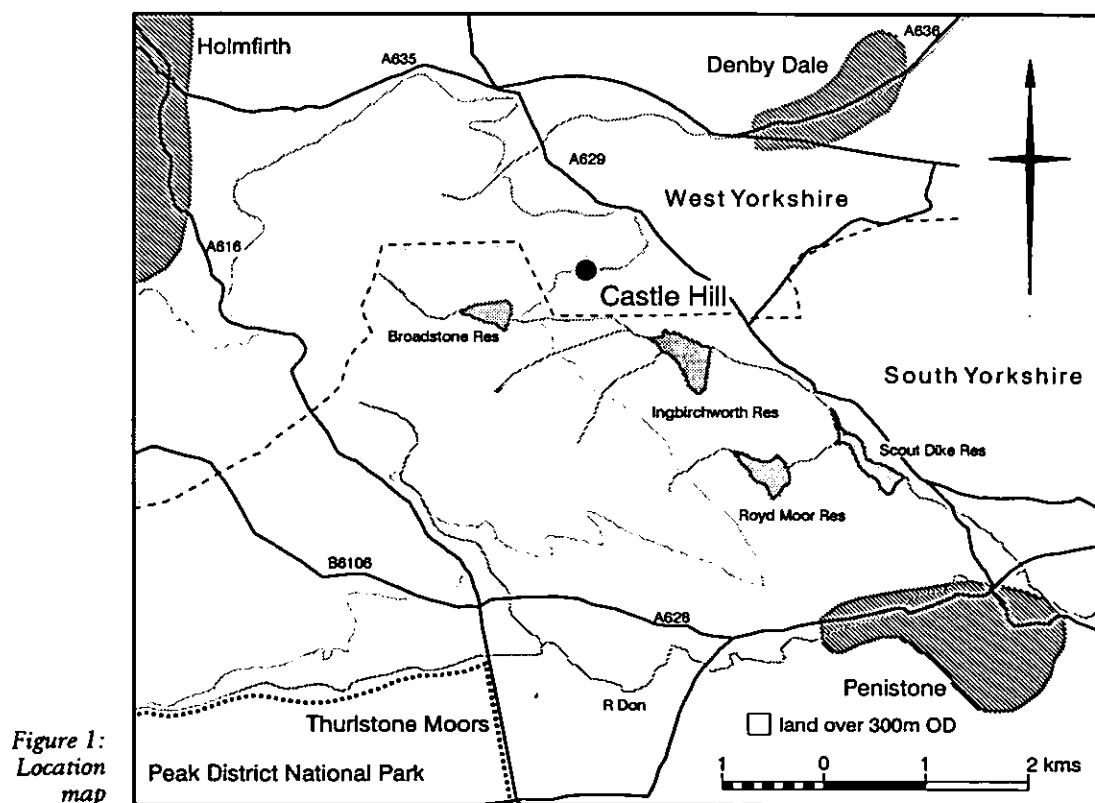


Figure 1:
Location
map

2. ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

This isolated site has excited little interest in the past. The first known surveys date to the middle of the 19th century (Ordnance Survey 1854; Morehouse 1861, 4 (reproduced as Figure 2)). Morehouse's plan recorded the western side and parts of the southern and northern sides and also suggested a rounded course for the eastern side. However, the eastern half of the enclosure seems to have been levelled by this time and on what grounds his interpretation was made is not clear: nothing survives above ground in this area today. The enclosure is not shown on a map of 1804, nor is the quarry which existed immediately south of the enclosure in 1854 (Denby Dale Enclosure Map 1804; Ordnance Survey 1854).

Some localised surface collection took place on the site in the early 1970's and an excavation was intended (Gilks 1974, 1), but there is no record that it took place. The material collected was predominantly flint, though two fragments of polished stone axes were

recovered; one Group VI (Great Langdale) and one Group XV (Lake District) (Moorhouse 1973, 199). The flint assemblage comprised mostly waste flakes and tools, including scrapers, knives and leaf-shaped arrowheads (Gilks 1974, 4). The conclusion of this limited investigation was that there was probably settlement on the hill during the Later Neolithic/Early Bronze Age period, though whether the enclosure also dates to this period is not clear (Gilks 1974, 8).

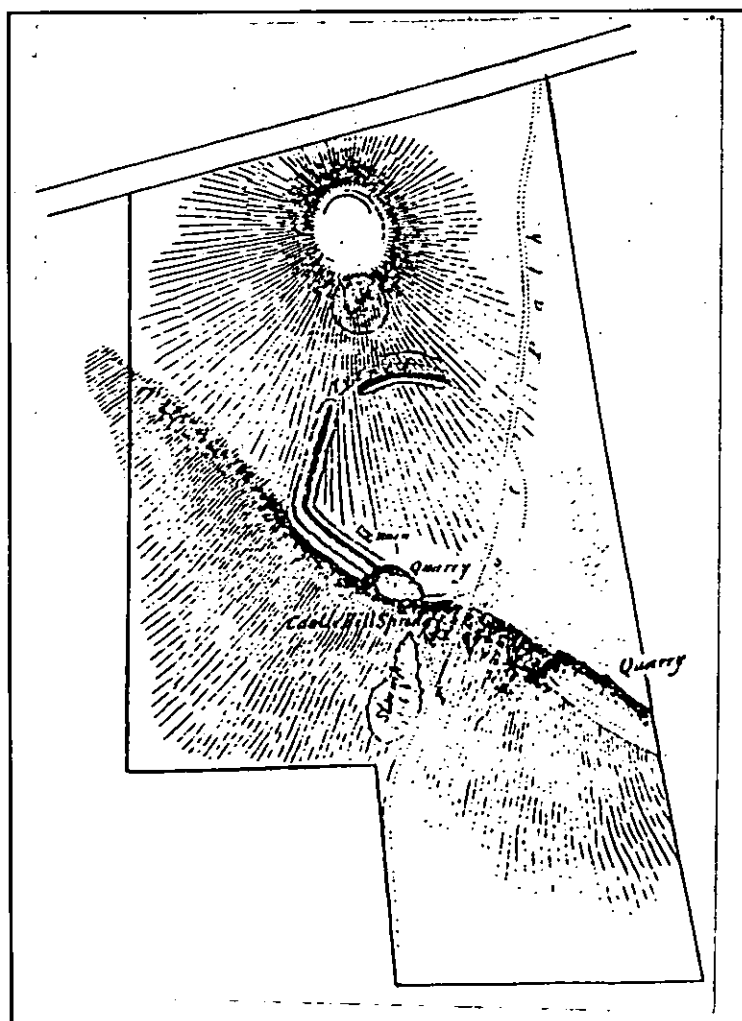


Figure 2 Castle
Hill in 1861
(Morehouse
1861)

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

For all letters and words in bold in the text please refer to Figure 3.

The enclosure

An L-shaped bank and ditch define the western and southern sides of the enclosure, while a slight terrace cut into the hill slope probably marks part of the northern side. These remains occupy a small area of more gently sloping ground which is situated just below and sheltered by the top of the hill to the north, and immediately above a natural crest giving way to steeper ground on the south (Fig 4). This crest is formed by an underlying seam of rock which has been quarried for stone (see below). There are extensive views from the site up and down the valley from west through south and around to east.

Morehouse's plan suggested that the remainder of the circuit adopted a curving line linking with the two surviving straighter sides, in which case the complete enclosure would have measured approximately 90m by 90m.

On the western side the bank is low and broad, measuring 52.0m by 13.0m by a maximum of 0.4m high. A slight outward ditch, at greatest 4.0m wide and on average 0.3m deep, runs alongside for 44.0m. The flat and slight appearance of the bank and ditch, particularly towards the northern end, is the result of a recent attempt to level the site (David Cook, pers comm). At its southern end, the western bank turns south-east for 34.0m along the crest of a naturally steeper slope; here it is more prominent, up to 5.0m wide and between 0.3m and 0.7m high, rising from the south-eastern end. Although it is possible that a ditch formerly existed outside the bank here, it is unlikely because of the steepness and height provided by the natural slope. At present, the remains of former stone quarries scar this area and have created a ditch-like effect along the slope below the bank. Traces of a berm, up to 3m wide, are visible between the bank and the quarries, particularly towards the western end.

The northern side of the enclosure is marked only by a slight rectangular terrace cut into the slope. Measuring 8.9m in width and only 0.2m in height, it can be traced for 33.0m along the hillside.

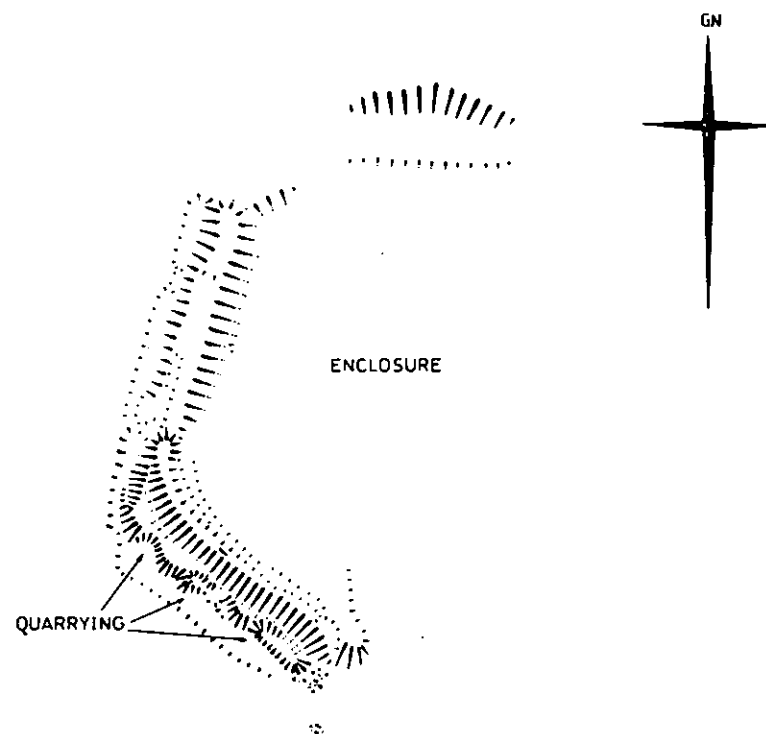
The quarries

The quarrying consists of a series of irregular excavations following a seam of rock aligned north-west to south-east along the hillside. There are three main quarry hollows beneath the enclosure, the smallest measuring 3.2m by 2.0m by 0.3m deep, while the largest is 13.6m by 3.3m by 1.2m deep. More traces of quarrying survive roughly 100m to the south-east and 500m to the north-west, both areas along the same steep slope.

These quarries are small-scale and almost certainly the result of extraction of stone for building field walls. They are depicted by Morehouse in 1861, when there was also a ruined rectangular building close by, within the enclosure (Fig 2), also shown in 1854 (Ordnance Survey 1854, Morehouse 1861). Of this building, which may have been connected with the quarrying operations or have fulfilled an agricultural function, no trace survives today.

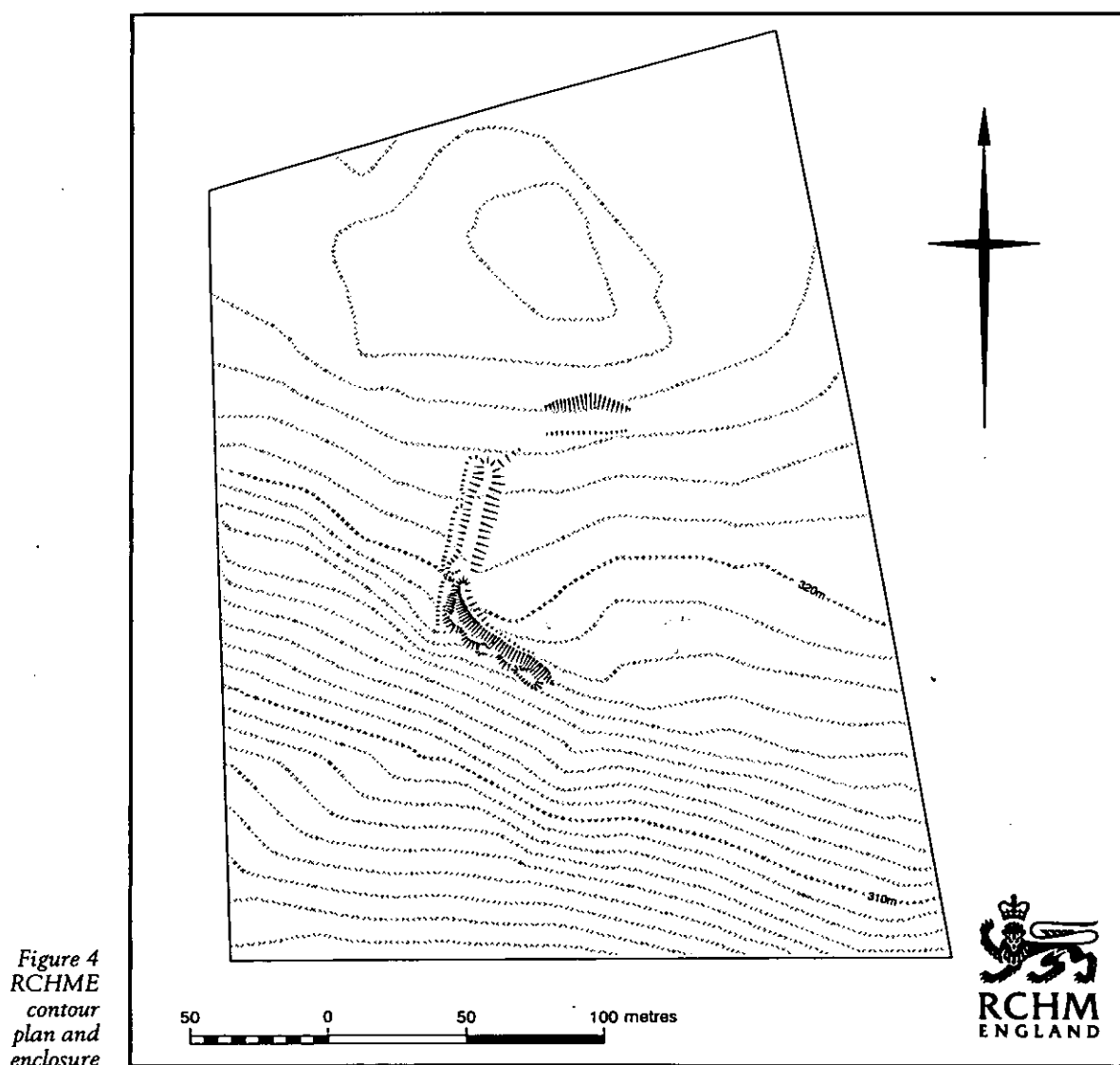


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4. DISCUSSION

Little archaeological work appears to have been carried out in this area, and the evidence is confined to isolated finds. The wider context of the monument is therefore not easy to establish. The National Monument Record has only four other entries for prehistoric sites within a 2km radius of the site, all findspots of Mesolithic to Iron Age material (NMR various records).



A modern study of West Yorkshire concentrates on Medieval and later studies but nevertheless demonstrates that there is a local concentration of Prehistoric activity around Denby Dale, with more widespread activity occurring in the north and west of the county. Within a 2km radius of Castle Hill fifteen findspots are recorded of material ranging in date from the Neolithic to the Iron Age, while beyond this the concentration is appreciably lower. Castle Hill, therefore, may have been the focus of activity in this area from the Neolithic onwards (Faull & Moorhouse 1981, maps 4 & 5).

The enclosure is traditionally thought to be Iron Age (Gilks 1974, 1), although given that there are no finds of this date from the site this appears to be an assumption. However, Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age activity on Castle Hill is confirmed by the presence of a substantial flint assemblage and two fragments of polished stone axes (Gilks 1974, 8). Most of this assemblage was found along the southern bank and following from this evidence it would seem *more likely* that the enclosure dates to the Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. However, only excavation could help to clarify the situation: at present, although there is clearly Neolithic/Early Bronze Age activity on the site, any association with the enclosure is not proven.

The enclosure may originally have encompassed an area roughly 90m by 90m, which is small, though acceptable, for a Neolithic date (Mercer 1990, 13), and easily within the size range for an Iron Age or later feature. Although the enclosure is not located in a truly defensive position, it probably fulfilled a protective function and it is clearly sited to command wide views along and over the valley to the south.

Alternative explanations for the origin of this enclosure might be sought in a later context. For instance, it is possible that the enclosure is a sheepfold of Medieval or later date: its orientation is certainly not analogous with and pre-dates the existing pattern of drystone walls which were established by 1804 (Denby Dale Enclosure Map 1804): before this time the enclosure probably lay on open moor. Its absence from the Enclosure Map is not in itself significant. The enclosure was at one time thought to be a *vaccaria* as mentioned in the Domesday Book (NMR Number SE 20 NW 2), but this was subsequently disproved (West Yorkshire SMR Number 10).

The natural break in slope which runs for several hundred metres south-east and north-west of the enclosure, coincides with several instances of small scale quarrying (Ordnance Survey 1891), and demonstrates local exploitation of a relatively easily accessible source of sandstone, possibly during the first half of the 19th century (Denby Dale Enclosure Map 1804; Ordnance Survey 6" Map 1854). The quarries need be no earlier than this - the annotation "Old Quarry" in 1854 may suggest simply that the quarries were disused and had been opened for the singular and short-term purpose of wall building at the beginning of the century.

5. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The archaeological survey of Castle Hill was carried out by Moraig Brown and Paul Pattison. Control for the survey was supplied using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer using Trimmap software on a Calcomp 3024 plotter. Archaeological detail was surveyed at 1:1000 scale with tapes using conventional graphical methods. This report was researched and written by Moraig Brown and edited by Paul Pattison and Peter Topping. Illustrations and the assembling of the final report were carried out by Trevor Pearson and Moraig Brown using AutoCad, CorelDraw and CorelVentura software.

The site archive and a copy of this report have been deposited in the archive of the RCHME (SE 20 NW 2) at the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ, to where further enquiries should be directed.

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NMR records

SE 20 NW 1, 2, 5, 11, 13

SE 10 NE 5

SE 10 SE 4

West Yorkshire Archive Service

Denby Dale Enclosure Map 1804