

# TWO INLAND SITES WITH "IRON AGE A" POTTERY IN THE WEST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE

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In spite of the essential difference in character of the two sites to be described, it has been considered advisable, in view of the similarity of the pottery from both, to report them seriatim. There is little doubt that the Iron Age pottery from both sites can mainly be relegated to the same period, thereby providing ample proof of the spread of the Iron Age A culture into the West Riding of Yorkshire.

## AN IRON AGE OCCUPATION SITE AT GRAFTON.

THE SITE [O.S. 6 in. Yorkshire (North/West Riding) Sheet CXXXVIII, S.E.] Grafton Hills, 3 miles south south-east of Boroughbridge, in the West Riding of Yorkshire, is—or was—a saddle-shaped hill rising to a height of just over 250 feet O.D., one of several eminences in the area which, coinciding with deposits of coarse sand and gravel, rise fairly abruptly above the boulder clay which fills the low-lying Vale of York to the north and east (Fig. 1, 1). The western summit is occupied by the village of Marton, separated by a narrow saddle from the higher eastern part, on the northern slope of which lies the village of Grafton (Fig. 1, 3). Less than half a mile to the east, the present York—Boroughbridge road follows the course of the Roman road from *Eboracum* to *Isurium*, the latter site now occupied by the village of Aldborough, just over two miles north north-west of Grafton Hills. At the foot of the hill, adjacent to the Roman road, is recorded<sup>1</sup> the discovery in 1776 of a Roman mile-stone, now in the Aldborough Museum, and nearby, apparently alongside and west of the road, a tumulus known as Deuil Cross yielded a number of presumably Anglian cremation urns during demolition about 1756.<sup>2</sup>

Large scale gravel digging, carried on until a few years ago, has entirely transformed the contour of the eastern half of Grafton Hills, and practically the whole of the area has been turned over or obscured by redeposited quarry débris, but no archaeological material was reported during these extensive operations. During a recent visit to the site, however, on the original northern slope of the hill Mr. B. W. J. Kent observed in a quarry face the exposure of an unexcavated section, his attention being attracted by a

<sup>1</sup> Hargrove *History of Knaresborough* (1832), 256, fig. 2. Cf. Ecroyd Smith, *Reliquiae Isurianaë*, 46, pl. xxi, 5.

<sup>2</sup> Hargrove, *op. cit.*, fig. 1. The site is indicated on the O.S. 6 in. sheet, the spelling Deuil Cross being adopted.

clearly defined black deposit overlying the natural gravel. Closer inspection of the section revealed potsherds of Iron Age character, together with a small pair of bronze tweezers, and similar pottery was picked up from the talus below the section.

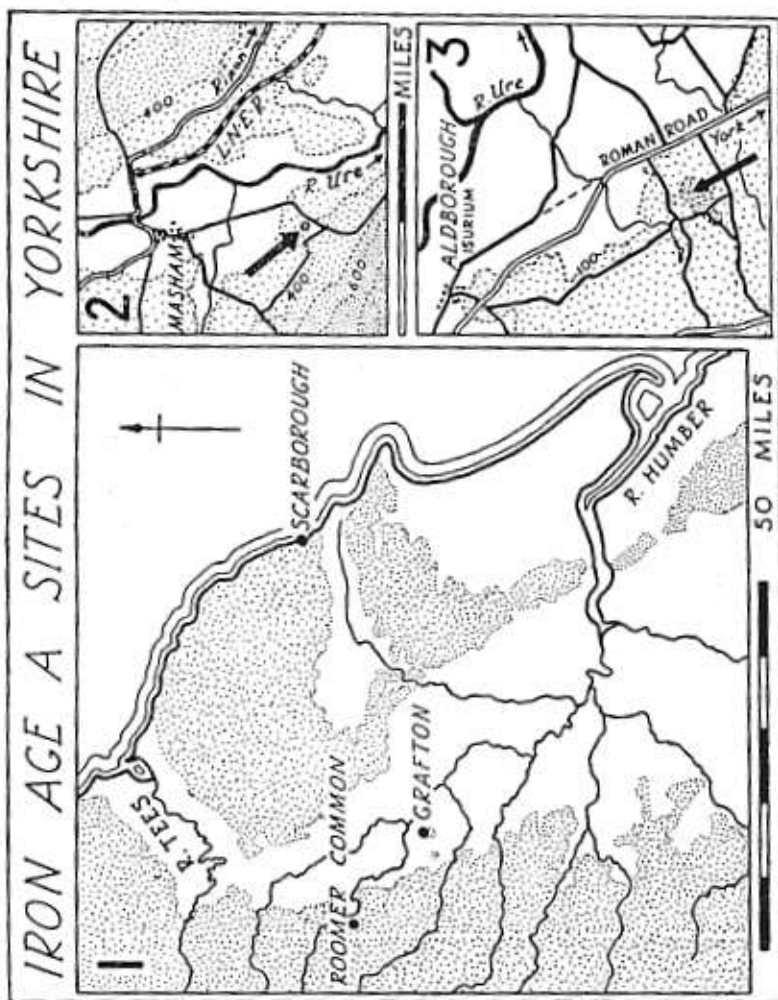


FIG. 1.

Realising the significance of this discovery, Mr. Kent arranged to conduct an excavation of the site with the assistance of Mr. H. J. Stickland and the writer. Permission to excavate was generously granted by Mr. G. Barley, on behalf of the Grafton Parish Council, and assistance in digging was kindly given by Miss Elizabeth Begg (now Mrs. R. B. K. Stevenson) and Mr.

Geoffrey Watson. Finally, Prof. C. F. C. Hawkes has examined a selection of the pottery recovered, submitted at his request, and his comments have been incorporated in the present paper; his interest and assistance are gratefully acknowledged.

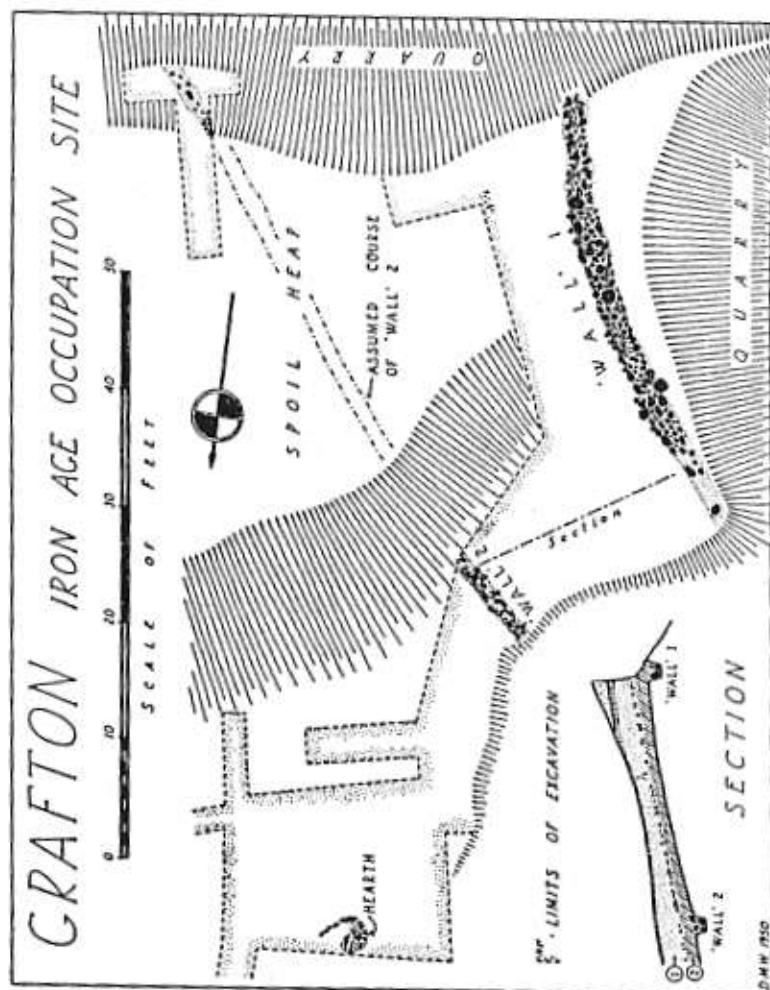


FIG. 2.

#### THE EXCAVATIONS. (Fig 2).

The results of excavations carried out in the vicinity of the exposure originally observed by Mr. Kent are unfortunately soon described, for the extent of ground left undisturbed after gravel digging proved to be extremely limited. To north, south and west, the area was confined by old workings and on the east the

undisturbed strata were buried beneath a heavy accumulation of quarry débris, up to 11 feet in depth, which although contributing to the preservation of the little that remained of archaeological interest yet by reason of its depth limited the amount of excavation possible with the labour available.

Within the area excavated, the gravel subsoil, overlain here and there by deposits of natural sand, was found to slope with a gradient of about 1 in 5 towards the north-east, and immediately above was a thick deposit of black occupation soil (level 2) varying somewhat in thickness but about 12 ins. in average depth, the exposure of which, emphasized by recent rain, had first directed attention to the site. The blackened nature of the soil was obviously due to constant burnings, and much charcoal<sup>1</sup> together with large numbers of cobble-stones, many split or disintegrated by heat, was recovered. Animal bones were fairly abundant<sup>2</sup> and a considerable amount of fragmentary pottery, which may be identified as Iron Age A (p. 388 below) occurred throughout the layer, but most abundantly in the vicinity of Wall I. To north and east the density of burning diminished and both pottery and bone turned up less frequently; it was clear that the area of concentrated occupation, lying for the most part to the west of our site, had already been destroyed during quarrying operations.<sup>3</sup>

At the base of, and covered by, this black layer, two stone-packed trenches (Walls 1, 2 on plan) had been excavated into the natural gravel, but it was not possible to recover their relationship or extent, owing to the presence of old quarries which had destroyed their continuation on north-west and south-east. Their purpose, in their mutilated condition, was far from clear, but they may possibly be identified as the foundations for timber walling or palisades, on the analogy of similar features recovered, e.g. during the excavation of the native site at Birdoswald, in Cumberland, in 1932.<sup>4</sup> To the north-west, the trenches were 19 feet apart as existing, their courses diverging, up to 27 feet apart, towards their south-east termination. Neither maintained a straight course, the southern trench, Wall 1, the only example fully uncovered, assuming a gentle curve on plan. Both trenches were U-shaped in section, rather narrower at the bottom than at the top, with floor and sides unevenly cut; the trench, Wall 1, varied in width at the lip from 13-28 ins. and from 11-19 ins. in depth, the proportions of the other, Wall 2, being rather less, about 13

<sup>1</sup> Identified as ash, elm, holly, oak and willow or poplar.

<sup>2</sup> Identified as ox, both young and adult animals; horse, pig and sheep or goat. In one place were found parts of the articulated skeleton of a young sheep or goat, probably about a year old.

<sup>3</sup> It is of course now impossible to estimate the extent of the Iron Age occupation on the hill, but it should be noted that a second exposure showing layers of soil, presumably derived from surface clearing preparatory to gravel digging, has produced pottery (Fig. 3, 25; Fig. 4, 7) similar to that from the site excavated. It lies immediately south of, and below, the Ordnance Survey pillar which now occupies the highest surviving point of the hill.

<sup>4</sup> *Trans. C.W.A.A. Soc.*, xxxiii (1933), 246, fig. 1.

ins. wide at the lip and from 10-13 ins. in depth. The stone packing consisted of cobbles and boulders derived from the local gravel deposits on the hill; the earthy filling in the interstices of the stones contained charcoal, bones, and pottery right to the bottom. It was evident, therefore, that these stone-packed trenches could not be considered primary features of the Iron Age occupation of the site for prior to their excavation a certain amount of occupation débris had already accumulated, to become included in the material of the filling.

The only other feature requiring mention was a small hearth, a shallow scoop about a foot deep cut in the natural sand and filled with cobbles and much charcoal, which occurred just within the northern limit of the excavation. The burnt material contained a few scraps of calcined and unburnt bone, and a single carbonized hazel-nut.

Overlying the occupation layer (level 2) save in the southern part of the area excavated was a scatter of cobblestones which steadily increased in number on the downhill slope until in the cutting immediately south of the hearth they formed a substantial paving, two or three cobbles in depth. A few sherds of pottery, in character similar to those recovered from the underlying black material, were incorporated in the cobbles at this point and it is inferred that this stone scatter, whatever its significance, represents a late stage in the Iron Age occupation of the site.

These lower levels were finally buried beneath a deposit of loose brown gravelly soil, between 18 ins.—3 feet in depth, which extended over the whole area investigated. Occasional sherds of Iron Age or Roman pottery were scattered throughout this material, together with a fragment of Roman tile, as well as many small pieces of disintegrated limestone. The Roman pottery included fragments of second century Samian forms 31 and 37 and coarse ware sherds, all, especially the Samian, being very worn, while in contrast to the abraded condition of these early pieces, fragments of later pottery, including part of the base of a calcite-gritted cooking pot and a colour-coated beaker, occurred in fresh condition. This enveloping deposit (level 1) has not been satisfactorily explained; it was superimposed directly on the surface of the cobbles (on top of which a few pieces of a Roman flagon were lying) or else, in their absence, on the surface of the black occupation material beneath. There was nothing to indicate any lapse of time between the cessation of the Iron Age occupation and the commencement of accumulation of this superimposed material which, in the absence of later pottery, appears to have taken place during Roman times and perhaps, from the varying conditions of the sherds, over a protracted period. The presence of a single tile fragment can do no more than hint at the possibility of a building of Roman date in the vicinity, with which the material of level 1 might be equated. If the possibility of direct continuity of occupation, or at least usage, of the hill from Iron Age into

Roman times is to be considered, the indications of stratification, with the significance of level 1 unexplained, must be treated with reserve. It is unfortunate, in our present state of knowledge of the Iron Age in West Yorkshire, that the pottery cannot throw any additional light on the problem (see p. 394 below).

### THE POTTERY.

The pottery recovered from the occupation layer can be grouped into three classes, a classification based on the character and quality of the fabric. It may be pointed out at once that, stratigraphically, all three classes appear to have been in contemporaneous use, representative sherds occurring together throughout the black stratum and in the filling of the packing trenches. Whatever conclusions, reflecting the range and nature of the occupation at Grafton, that can be derived from a study of the pottery must therefore be based on the evidence of the sherds collectively, without arguing from the prior incidence of any one of the three classes to be described.

*Class 1* (Fig. 3)<sup>1</sup> Based on a count of individual sherds, this group is numerically by far the largest, and consists of fragments of vessels which appear for the most part to be of fairly large size. The paste is moderately well fired, grey in the core and normally dark greyish-brown at the surface, presenting a dull "leathery" shine which is typical, save where secondary burning in use has produced a matt surface, reddish or buff in hue. Grit is plentifully embodied in the paste, much of it large enough to produce marked irregularities on the surface; but in most cases the surface grits have burst out during firing, presenting a pitted, "corky" appearance which is the most obvious feature of this class of pottery, and which links it closely to that characteristic of the Early Iron Age site on Castle Hill, Scarborough.<sup>2</sup>

The fragmentary condition of the sherds recovered permits no more than a few general remarks concerning the pottery forms represented. The rims show varying degrees of flattening and are normally more or less everted, joined by a gently constricted neck to a swelling shoulder which is usually present even when there is little or no neck. Ornament, where present, is restricted to finger-tip or finger-nail impressions, placed diagonally along the top of the rim (1, 2), or on the face or outer lip of the rim (3-5; 11-16) or, more rarely, on the shoulder (6-8). It does not occur in the hollow of the neck, nor on applied bands of clay. The peculiar double moulded lip (9), probably due to mere accident, and the heavy rounded rim with crude internal finger impressions (10) are exceptional. Bases (24-28) are flat, with fairly sharp or rounded angle.

<sup>1</sup> Of the sherds illustrated, all are from layer 2, save 2, 3, 6, 11, 13, 16, 21, 25-6 from disturbed soil.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch.* lxxvii (1928), 179-200. The pitted surface of the Scarborough pottery is well illustrated on pl. xxi, 3,7.

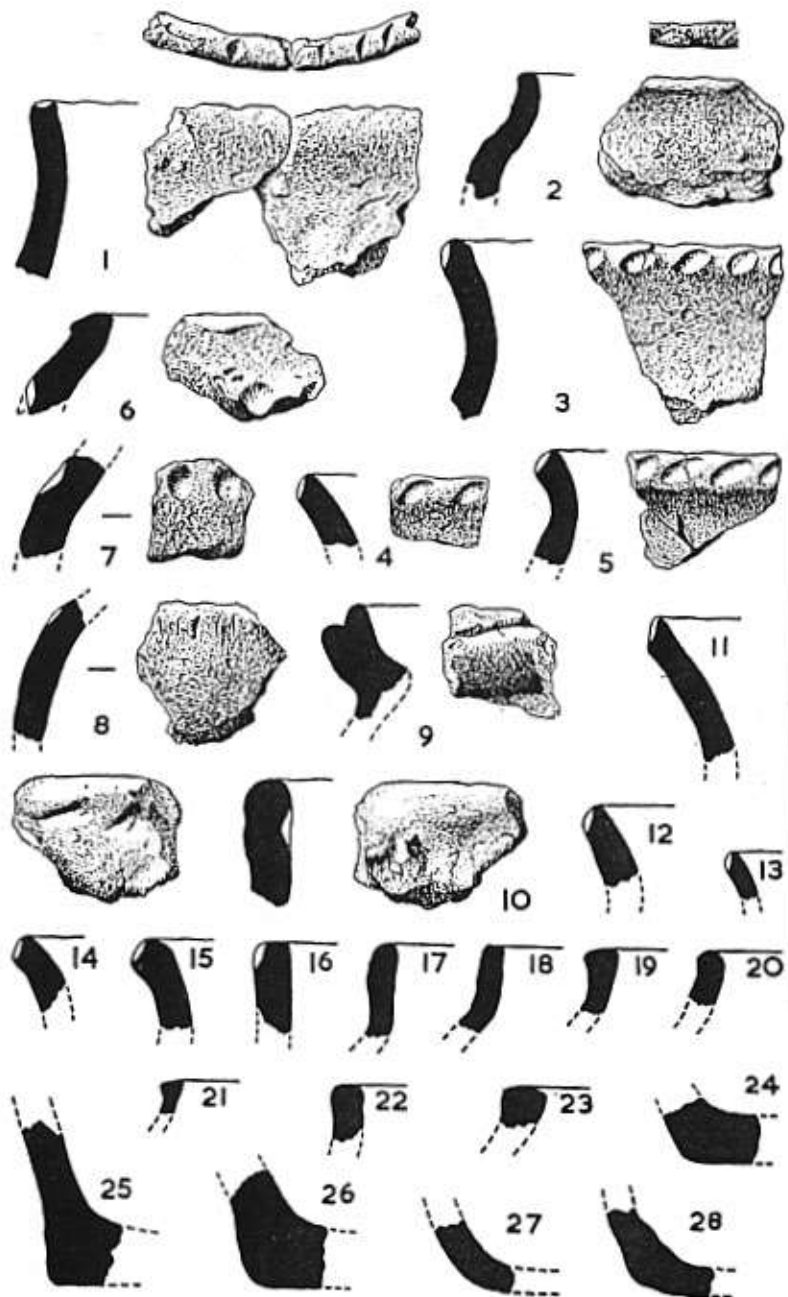


FIG. 3. Grafton: Class 1 Pottery ( $\frac{1}{2}$ ).

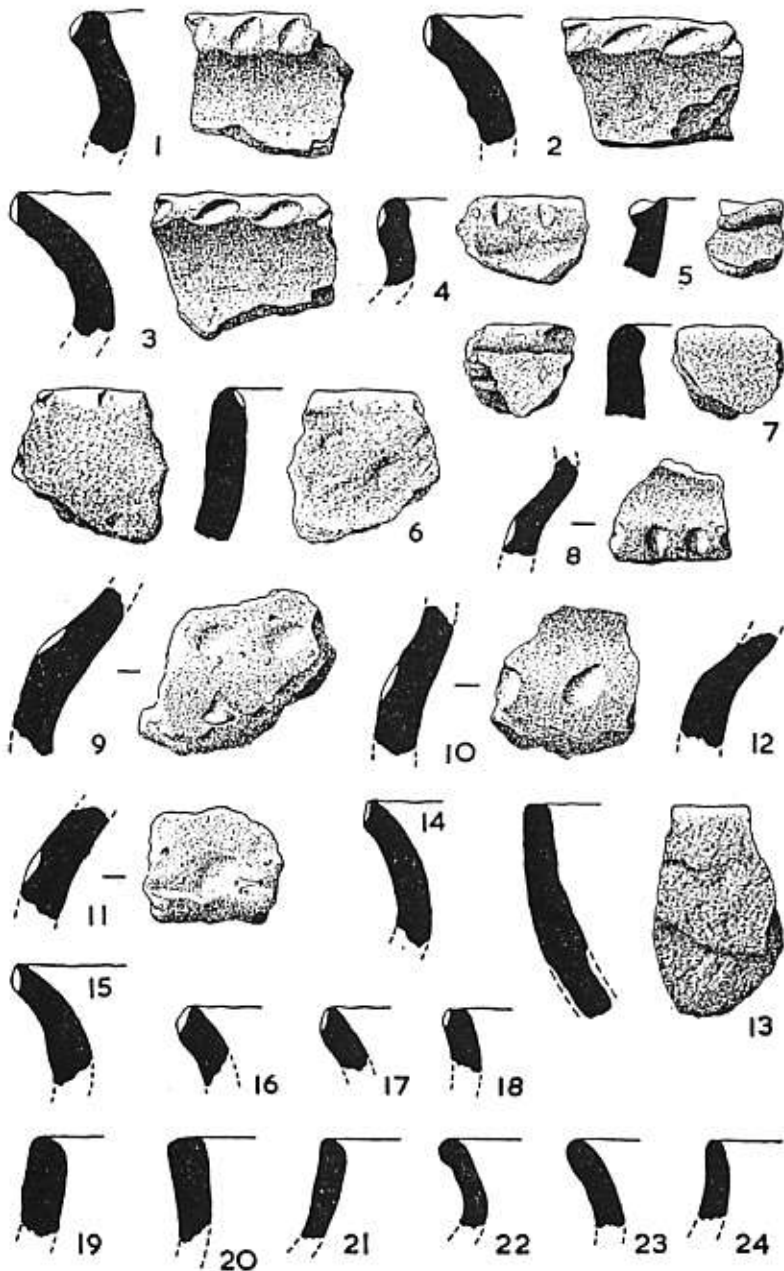


FIG. 4. Grafton: Class 2 Pottery (†).

*Class 2* (Fig 4).<sup>1</sup> The paste of this pottery, being both harder and heavier, is superior to that of Class 1; it contains less grit and lacks the "corky" appearance characteristic of the first group. Although some sherds possess some grit, it is never abundant and sometimes seems to be entirely absent. On the other hand, the paste is noticeably strengthened by what looks like sand, tiny quartzitic-looking grains evenly worked in with the clay and giving the whole a feel that is unmistakable. The normal colour is brownish-grey to black, although sometimes the surface exhibits a different shade of colour from the interior, being then rather warmer in tone. The most obvious case of this is a surface made red by deliberate application of something that presumably contains oxide of iron, and is thus within the broad category of haematite ware, although not, of course, in the strict sense of pottery with a carefully prepared slip coating of haematite burnished to present a strong red lustre.

Prof. Hawkes, referring to the classification of the Little Woodbury, Wilts., pottery<sup>2</sup> points out that such Grafton pieces cannot be compared to Brailsford's Class B, ("fine . . . . . with a glossy red haematite slip") but are at best only of his Class D, ("smooth red-faced"), where the redness is merely due to the clay containing ferruginous salts that would be known to turn red when fired. Moreover, whereas all that Class D pottery at Woodbury was relatively smooth, no clear dividing line can be made at Grafton between these red-surfaced sherds and Class 2 pottery as a whole. In other words, the Grafton pottery must all be described as coarse (like the Woodbury Class A) and, taken together, regarded as undistinguished Iron Age A coarse pottery, ranging from red-faced to quite ordinary pieces.

The same range of rim forms as of Class 1 is represented although the rim and neck profile appears more gentle, and crude rounding of the rim seems to be more frequent than flattening. Ornament, consisting of finger-tip or finger-nail impressions, is present and seems on the whole more restricted; where it occurs it is applied to the outer lip, not the top, of the rim (1-4; 14-18) and it is also present on the shoulder (8-11). The bowl form (13) is unusual, but can be paralleled at Scarborough.<sup>3</sup>

*Class 3* (Fig. 5).<sup>4</sup> This is a small group and comprises the best of the Grafton pottery; in paste and finish it is distinctive, the clay better levigated and of closer texture with smooth even surfaces. The surface colour varies from brown through grey to black. A few sherds, including the base fragment figured (6) is of black-surfaced ware and invites comparison, for what it may be worth, with the "smooth dark" pottery of the Little Wood-

<sup>1</sup> Of the sherds illustrated, all are from layer 2 save 2, 3, 5, 7, 14, 22-3 from disturbed soil.

<sup>2</sup> P.P.S., xiv, (1948), 2-3.

<sup>3</sup> Arch. lxxvii (1928), 192, fig. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Of the sherds illustrated all are from layer 2, save 3, 5 from disturbed soil.

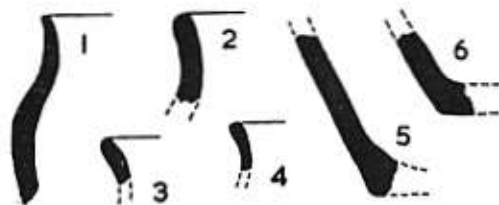


FIG. 5. Grafton: Class 3 Pottery (4).

bury series<sup>1</sup> which is apparently not earlier than the middle of the 3rd century B.C. There can be no certainty, even if the comparison is valid, that this dating would apply equally in the north of England; on the other hand it may be so and then might imply that the occupation at Grafton continued until such times as fresh traditions of pottery making were introduced into Yorkshire in the hands of the Iron Age B charioteers of the East Riding. Leaving this consideration on one side, however, the general character of this Class 3 pottery clearly corresponds to the "superior Hallstatt ware" at Scarborough and thus fits comfortably into place besides Class 1.

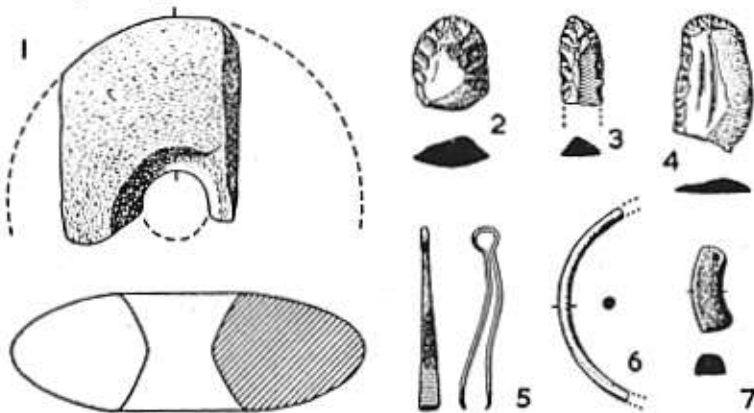


FIG. 6. Grafton: Small Finds (4).

#### OTHER FINDS. (Fig. 6).

A small number of flint implements, flakes of flint and chert, and part of a cylindrical mace-head were recovered during the excavations. It is possible that some of the flakes represent a lithic industry practised during the Iron Age occupation but the more determinable pieces clearly indicate initial visitation, at least, of the hill during the earlier Bronze Age.

1. Fragmentary mace-head with hour-glass perforation. The material<sup>2</sup> is a quartz-rich sandstone, probably from the

<sup>1</sup> Class C of Brailsford's classification.

<sup>2</sup> Kindly identified by Mr. J. Hartley of the Department of Geology, Leeds University.

Carboniferous Yoredale series in origin, but presumably selected from the local drift (From layer 1).

2. Thumb scraper, shewing fine scale pressure flaking (From layer 2).

3. Narrow blade, fractured at one end, with long sides trimmed by pressure flaking. This type of implement is uncommon, but a similar example occurred in the mound of the Quernhow barrow, near Thirsk, containing primary cremations with food vessel pottery.<sup>1</sup> (From disturbed soil).

4. Flake, trimmed at end and along one side by pressure flaking. (From surface of natural sand below layer 2).

A disc of sandstone, 3 ins. in diam. and 0.7 ins. thick, with the edges roughly trimmed, was found in layer 2 (not illustrated).

The following objects of bronze and jet were associated with the Iron Age occupation layer.

5. Bronze tweezers, 1.8 ins. long. Such implements are known in the Late Bronze Age<sup>2</sup> but occur only rarely in Iron Age A contexts.<sup>3</sup>

6. Segment of bronze bracelet, quite plain, circular section, 0.1 ins. in diameter.

7. Curved fragment of jet, sub-rectangular in section, smoothly finished on all but the flat under-surface. The ends are now likewise trimmed smooth, but it is possible that this piece is a portion of a broken bracelet, the fractured surfaces having been recut.<sup>4</sup>

CONCLUSIONS. As long ago as 1923, the excavation at Castle Hill, Scarborough, revealed the existence there of a settlement of the original Iron Age settlers into Britain from the Netherlands at some time before 400 B.C. For lack of any evidence to the contrary, it has been assumed that these Scarborough people maintained a precarious foothold confined to the coast, possibly preserving their individuality for only a short time before becoming merged into a vague and ill-defined general East Yorkshire Iron Age that lasted until the arrival of the Arras charioteers in the third century B.C. Indeed, the Scarborough site itself seemed to shew a merging of pottery traditions for whereas the forms and ornament there were clearly intrusive and brought in by the newcomers, much of

<sup>1</sup> *Antiq. Journ.*, xxxi, (1951), 21, fig. 8, 3.

<sup>2</sup> E.g. the Llangwyllog, Anglesey, hoard. *Evans Bronze*, 192, fig. 229.

<sup>3</sup> M. E. Cunnington, *All Cannings Cross*, 119, pl. 18, 11.

<sup>4</sup> The use of lignite or similar material for bracelets goes back to the Late Bronze Age in N. England, e.g., Heathery Burn Cave, Co. Durham, and can be linked with an extension of the so-called "flat-rimmed pottery", well represented over most of the E. Riding, into Ireland (Hencken, Ballinderry Crannog No. 2, *Proc. R.I.A.* xlvii, Section C, No. 1, 21-27). It may be worth noting here that the urn from Lastingham quoted as typical of this class of pottery (Elgee, *Early Man in N.E. Yorks.*, 83, fig. 30), shows the peculiar "corky" texture which may represent a long standing pottery tradition in E. Yorks., and which is a feature of much of the Iron Age pottery at Scarborough and Grafton.

the fabric was of a distinctive "corky" texture which has been suggested as a long-standing pottery tradition in the eastern parts of Yorkshire from Neolithic A and Early Bronze Age times;<sup>1</sup> and it is reasonable to suppose that the Scarborough settlers may well have taken on a native element, presumably women, who, while making their pottery in alien forms, yet preserved their own peculiar fashion of working up and firing the pot-clay.

The evidence of the pottery from Grafton, however, demonstrates that this Scarborough group of settlers was not content to remain in stagnation on the coast, but penetrated inland to establish a perfectly recognisable version of the general British Iron Age A culture in favourable country along the western edge of the Vale of York. Moreover, the pottery recovered from the excavation of the Roomer Common tumulus (below, p. 396) clearly indicates the presence of people of this same culture extending up into the Dales of the West Riding, although how soon after the foundation of the Grafton settlement remains uncertain.

The dating of the Scarborough site has recently been reconsidered in relation to the earliest Iron Age occupation of the region around the Wash, based on a study of the site at Fengate, Peterborough.<sup>2</sup> Here, it has been suggested, the absence of certain Scarborough pottery features (such as the applied plastic neck band, to signalize a feature likewise absent on the Grafton pottery) indicates an initial date around 400 B.C. for the East Anglian settlement, and on this assumption it becomes necessary to consider the occupation at Scarborough commencing at some time further back in the fifth century B.C. If the argument based on the Fengate evidence is valid, it may equally well be applied to the Grafton pottery, so that this, taken by itself, may be said to suggest a dating, for the occupation it represents, during the fourth century B.C., beginning possibly rather sooner and continuing probably considerably later. If the identification of the "smooth dark" pottery of Class 3 (above, p. 391) can be maintained, an extension into the second half of the third century at least may be looked for. The cultural isolation of the Grafton site, however, may well mean that the old Iron Age A pottery traditions persisted without change until Roman times and until material of the second and first centuries B.C. in the region can be identified, the full extent of the occupation must remain uncertain.

#### THE EXCAVATION OF A TUMULUS ON ROOMER COMMON, NEAR MASHAM.

The tumulus excavated by two of the writers (B.W.J.K. and H.J.S.) with the kind permission of Lord and Lady Swinton and the sanction of the Ministry of Works, is situated on a stretch of heather-grown common land near Masham (O.S. 6 ins. Yorkshire (West Riding) Sheet C.1 (N.E.); see Fig. 1, 2).

<sup>1</sup> P.P.S. iii, (1937), 197.

<sup>2</sup> Arch. Journ., C, (1945), 188-223.

A trial trench from the periphery to the centre of the mound revealed an encircling ditch which was previously entirely unsuspected and quite impossible to discern on the surface (Fig. 7).

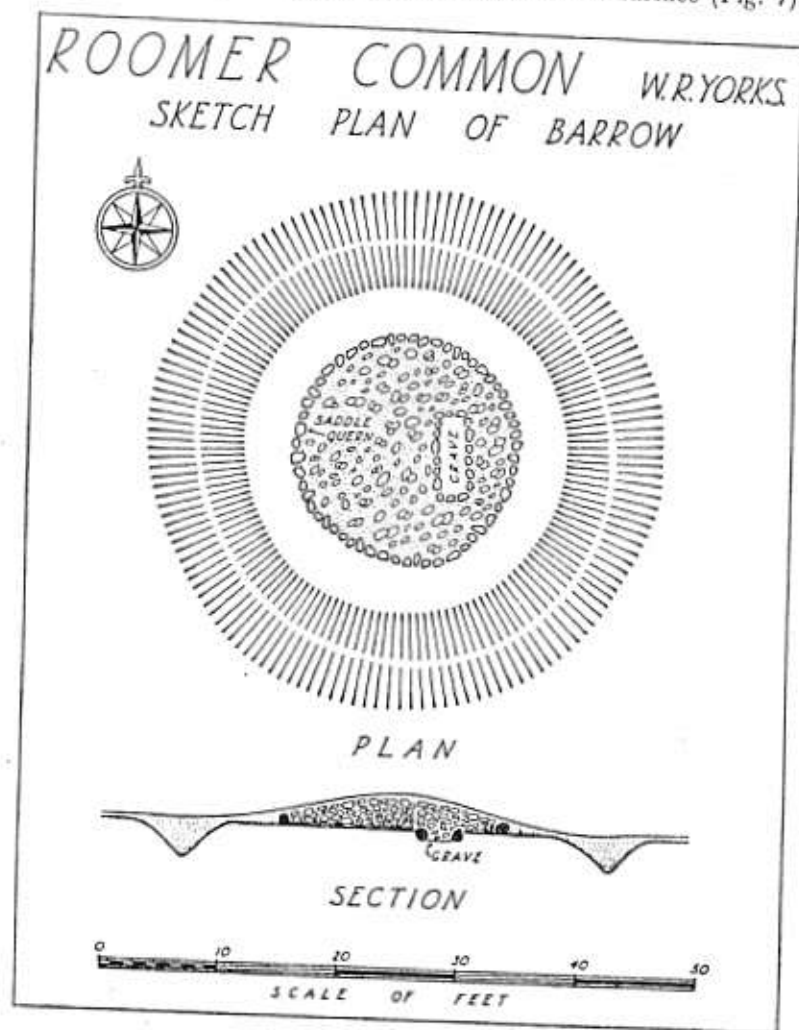


FIG. 7.

Further excavations proved the ditch to be 3 ft. 6 ins. deep, and 7 ft. wide. From the stratification of the filling, it was evident that it was filled mainly from outside the circle. This, together with the quantity of the material employed, which was far too great to have been contained on the barrow platform, strongly suggests that there was, originally, a counterscarp bank outside the ditch.