THE HUDDERSFIELD AND DISTRICT ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

THE CASTLE HILL ANNEXE PROJECT

SUMMARY REPORT

Excavations 29th March - 26th April 2017

Background

Between the 29th March and the 26th April, members of the Society participated in small-scale excavations within the so-called annexe of the hillfort, an area to the north-east of the hillfort proper, outside the Scheduled Area (Figs 1 & 2). The purpose of the excavations was to investigate areas and features that had previously been excavated by W.J. Varley in 1947, with a view to clarifying the nature and date of what he recorded. The re-evaluation of this area was also aided by topographical and geophysical survey carried out in the last 25 years.

An excavation method statement, endorsed by both Historic England and WYAAS, had originally proposed investigations in three areas, which were to be stripped with the assistance of a mechanical excavator supplied by the farmer. However, due to wet weather at the beginning of the project it was not safe to deploy the machine and so the scope of the work was reduced to two hand-dug trenches. These trenches targeted a linear earthwork bank, which Varley had supposed represented the north-eastern defences of the 'annexe' (Varley's Trench 18), and an area of curious geophysical anomalies that fell within an area of Varley's Trench 17, in which he had claimed to have found a sunken-floored structure of Iron Age/medieval date.

The search for the sunken-floored structure

The only internal feature reported by Varley from his 1947 excavations in the annexe was a two-celled sunken floored structure in Trench 17, which he interpreted as being of Iron Age date, re-used in the medieval period. It seems likely that Varley's positioning of his Trench 17 was for the purpose of investigating visible earthworks, particularly as this was a departure from his strategy (at that time) of targeting the earthworks of the supposed defensive circuit.

The investigation of the Trench 17 area (HDAS's Trench 17A), targeted an area between two depressions which were believed to be a consequence of subsided backfill in Varley's trenches. However, the removal of the turf and topsoil revealed a trench pattern that is inconsistent with that recorded by Varley. Rather, excavations revealed a series of narrow slit trenches, one stepped to a depth of 1.2m, which had been loosely backfilled with natural sandstone flags (Figs 3 & 4). The earliest finds from these features were of 19th-century date, and would suggest that they had been infilled well before Varley took an interest in the area. In positioning the 2017 excavation between the two earthwork depressions, it was thought that the investigation would reveal an unexcavated area, close to the place where Varley recorded his sunken-floored structure, but this was clearly not

the case and it is now considered that the 1947 trench lay further to the north-west. What the encountered slit trenches actually represent is open to speculation, but their form and the date of the finds from them suggests that they had not been dug as part of Varley's campaign. It is conceivable that Varley saw the subsidence resulting from some of these trench fills and interpreted them as being earlier in date than they actually are. The slit trenches probably account for the geophysical anomalies found in this part of the site, and it is conceivable that they might represent prospection excavations related to an adjacent quarry. Interestingly, whilst Varley's drawn record of his sunken-floored structure in Trench 17 is quite persuasive, his photographs reveal a site more consistent with the results of small-scale quarrying. However, other undocumented explanations cannot be discounted. One explanation could be the use of the site by the military. One possibility is WW1 practice trenches, as were, for example, encountered at Old Oswestry hillfort. Whilst there is no known records for such WW1 activity on Castle Hill, the military's interest in the site can be demonstrated for a much earlier period. In 1825 the army used the hilltop for night-time manoeuvres, as reported in the *Huddersfield Chronicle* (Note 1), but whether this involved ground disturbances is unknown.

Investigating the annexe defences

Varley's report of his excavation through the supposed annexe defences (Trench 18), recorded a bank retained by both inner and outer revetments, which he interpreted as an Iron Age box rampart, similar to those recorded around the hillfort proper. To the north-east of his rampart he recorded the existence of a shallow ditch, with a burnt deposit at its base. This evidence was used to make a persuasive case (albeit undated) for the existence of an Iron Age annexe, an interpretation that was not tested when Varley returned to Castle Hill for his final campaign between 1969 and 1972. The Society's 2017 investigation of the same earthwork (Trench 18A), was to the north of Varley's investigation. It revealed an earth bank that had been consolidated by stones, but only on its south-western face (Figs 5 & 6), with no evidence for a box rampart. Moreover, the earth that formed the bank was seemingly derived from the two ditches found running along the south-western side of the earthwork, there clearly being no evidence for an outer ditch.

The 2017 excavation has demonstrated that the earthwork and ditches were actually much later than Varley supposed. Well stratified pottery sherds from the core of the bank and one of the ditch fills has been dated by Dr Chris Cumberpatch to between the 11th and 13th centuries. As these were the only finds from these features, it is reasonable to suppose that the bank and ditches are medieval or later in date. Interestingly, a medieval or early post-medieval date is consistent with the earthwork's correspondence to a boundary shown on William Senior's 1634 map of Almondbury (Fig. 7), where it seems to reflect a boundary separating the lands around Castle Hill (part of the Ramsden estate), from the common pasture.

The Finds

Apart from the medieval pottery, most of the finds recovered in 2017 reflect the recreational use this part of Castle Hill saw in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, before it was fenced off for grazing livestock. These finds predominantly comprise fragments of ceramic vessels and clay tobacco pipes, with lesser quantities of vessel glass and metalwork. There were also a small number of plastic items, including two mid-20th century Huddersfield Corporation transport tokens, the values of which were 2*d* and 3*d* (Fig. 8).

Acknowledgements

HDAS is grateful to the members who participated in the excavations (see below: Note 2). The excavations were planned by a committee comprising: Jo Heron (chair), Linda Beever, John Bowen, Nick Brook, John Cross, Colin Dunn, Gillian Hoyle, Ian Sanderson (WYAAS), John Smithson and Ian Roberts. The Society wishes to express its gratitude to the farmer, Mr David Griffiths, and the Kirklees Council Castle Hill Ranger, Julian Brown, for respectively allowing and facilitating the excavation work. The Society is especially grateful to John Cross for his day-to-day supervision and recording, and his negotiations with Mr Griffiths. Thanks are also due to Colin Dunn for his survey work, Stuart Wilkinson for metal detecting, and Jo Heron for co-ordinating the processing and recording of the finds, as well as chairing the Steering Group. HDAS is grateful to Paul Gwilliam, for creating a black and white photographic archive of the site, and would also like to acknowledge Dr Chris Cumberpatch for his report on the pottery, and Archaeological Services WYAS and Dianne Alldritt, for the processing and analysis of the soil samples. The excavations were directed and reported by Ian Roberts.

Further information

The final archive report is available from HDAS or at the West Yorkshire HER:

> Roberts, I., 2019, Castle Hill, Almondbury: Archaeological Trial Trenching in the 'Annexe', unpublished archive report, Huddersfield and District Archaeology Society

A short note has also been published in the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal*:

> Roberts, I., 2020, 'Castle Hill, Almondbury: A Further Investigation of the Annexe', *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 92, pp.154-160.

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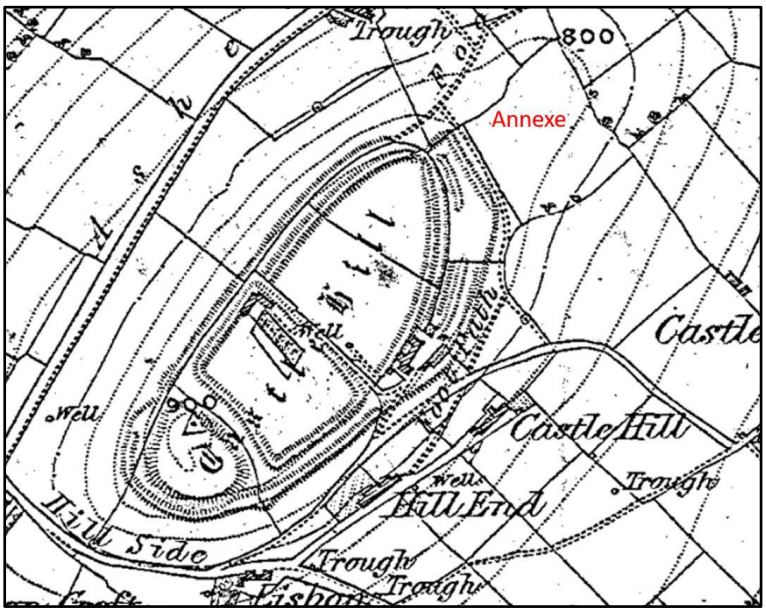


Fig. 1. An extract for the first edition OS mapping of 1854

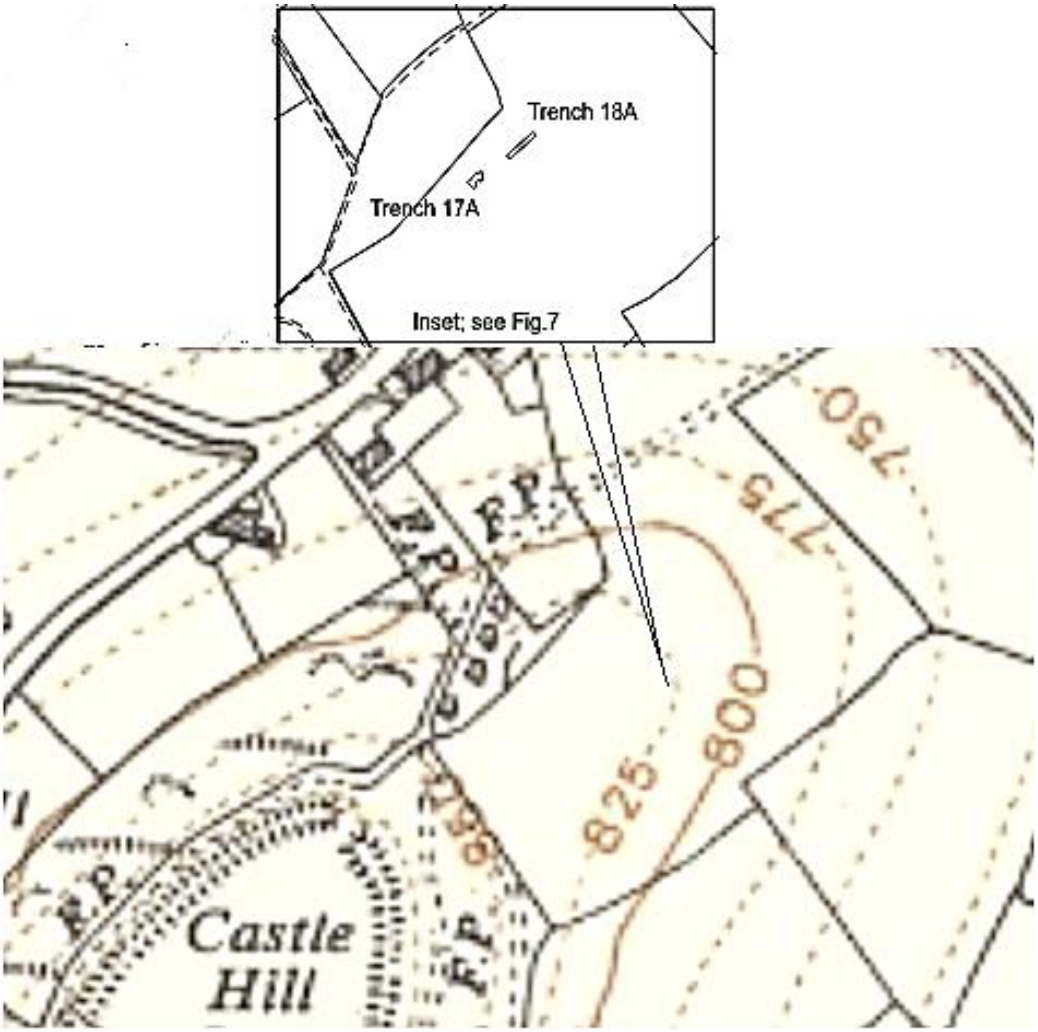


Fig.2. Locations of the 2017 trenches (17A and 18A)



Fig. 3. Intersection of two slit trenches (Trench 17A, looking SW), Photo: I. Roberts



Fig. 4. Stone flags filling the lower part of one of the slit trenches (Trench 17A: looking NE). Photo: I. Roberts



Fig. 5. The section through earthwork and ditches (Trench 18A: looking NE). Photo: I. Roberts



Fig. 6. Close up of the section through the earthwork bank. (Trench 18A: looking NE: Photo: I. Roberts

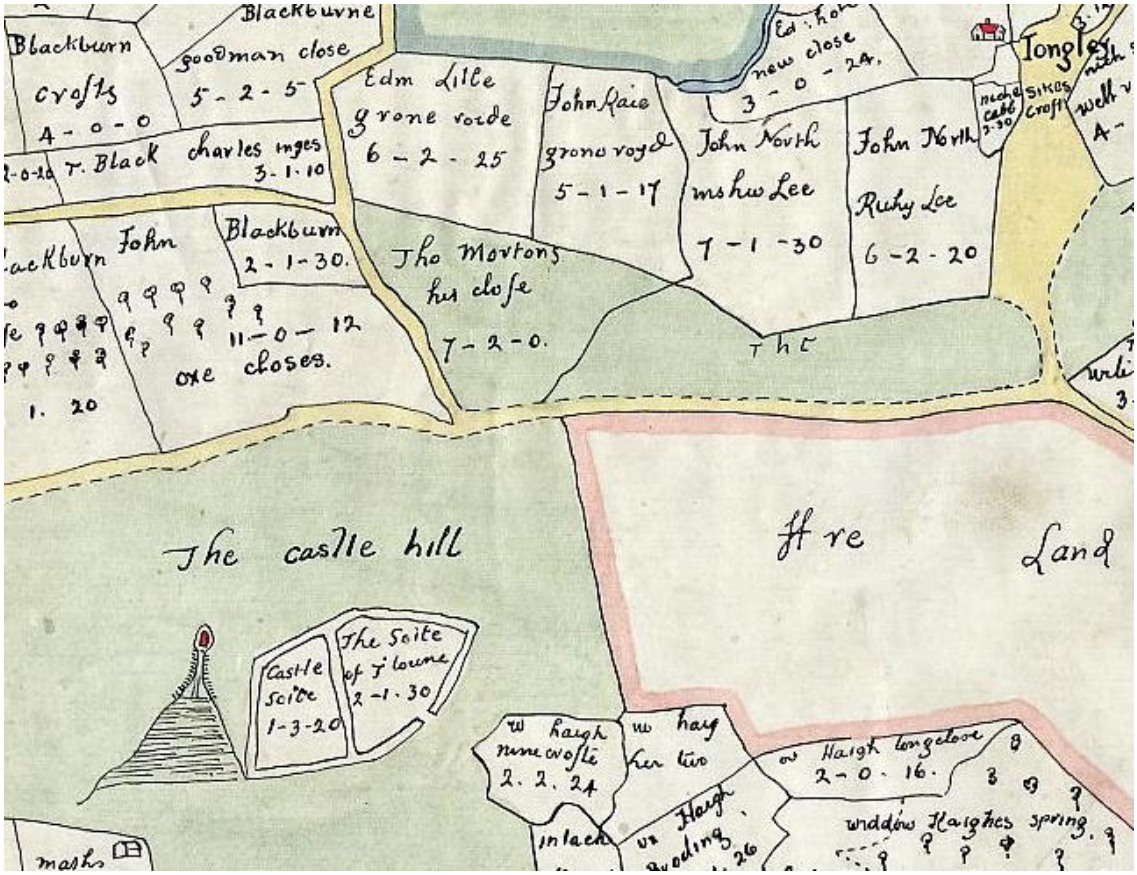


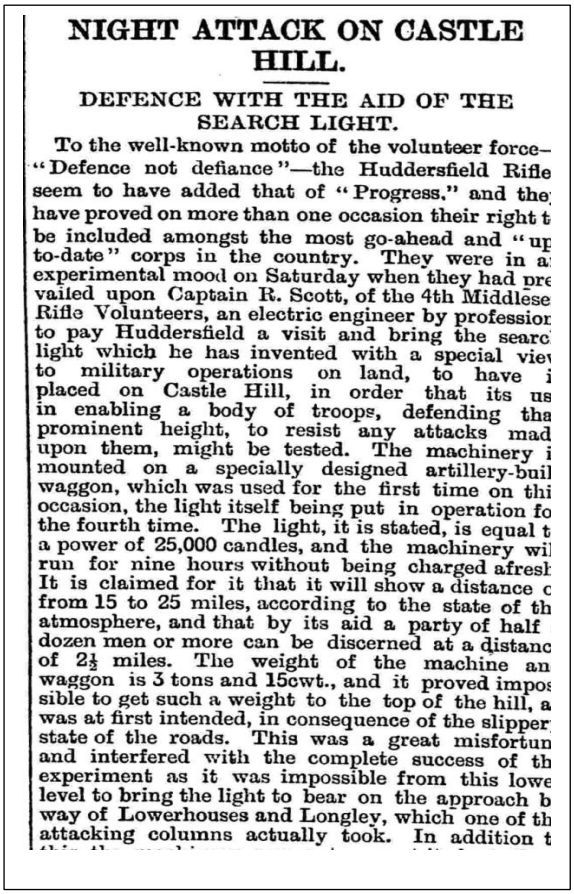
Fig.7. Extract from William Senior's 1634 'Map of Almondbury'

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Fig. 8. Two Huddersfield Corporation transport tokens. The upper 2*d* token was originally blue. Photos: I. Roberts

Note 1. Extract from the *Huddersfield Chronicle*, 25th March 1825



NIGHT ATTACK ON CASTLE HILL.

DEFENCE WITH THE AID OF THE SEARCH LIGHT.

To the well-known motto of the volunteer force—"Defence not defiance"—the Huddersfield Rifle seem to have added that of "Progress," and the have proved on more than one occasion their right t be included amongst the most go-ahead and "up to-date" corps in the country. They were in a experimental mood on Saturday when they had pre vailed upon Captain R. Scott, of the 4th Middlese Rifle Volunteers, an electric engineer by professior to pay Huddersfield a visit and bring the searc light which he has invented with a special vie to military operations on land, to have i placed on Castle Hill, in order that its us in enabling a body of troops, defending tha prominent height, to resist any attacks mad upon them, might be tested. The machinery i mounted on a specially designed artillery-buil waggon, which was used for the first time on thi occasion, the light itself being put in operation fo the fourth time. The light, it is stated, is equal t a power of 25,000 candles, and the machinery wil run for nine hours without being charged afresh It is claimed for it that it will show a distance c from 15 to 25 miles, according to the state of th atmosphere, and that by its aid a party of half dozen men or more can be discerned at a distanc of 2½ miles. The weight of the machine an waggon is 3 tons and 15cwt., and it proved impos sible to get such a weight to the top of the hill, a was at first intended, in consequence of the slipper state of the roads. This was a great misfortun and interfered with the complete success of th experiment as it was impossible from this lowe level to bring the light to bear on the approach b way of Lowerhouses and Longley, which one of th attacking columns actually took. In addition t

The event roused the greatest excitement in Huddersfield and the district, and the number of spectators who traversed the various routes converging on Castle Hill must have reached well into the thousands. The various paths were in a frightfully slippery condition, and the only "casualties" that occurred either to volunteers or civilians—for they were equally liable—were the falls resulting from the treacherous state of the frost-bound roads. Between 700 and 800 members of the regiment took part in the attack. Castle Hill, as is pretty well known, is 900ft. above sea level, and is visible from all parts of the town. The defending party consisted of 200 men, under the command of Captain R. Welsh, assisted by Captain Lockwood and Lieutenants Mellor and Shaw (the latter of the Pontefract

Volunteers), and the attacking party of about 600 men was under the command of Major T. E. Hirst. Lieutenant-Colonel Liddell, Captain and Adjutant Marshall, and Sergeant-Major Gay were umpires. The defending party marched to their position at four p.m., and immediately put out day outposts. As darkness set in the defenders made dispositions for the night. Patrols were sent on the roads leading to the positions, the picquet being in a strong post, as they had clear ground for action on either flank. The position chosen was an admirable one for resisting an attack, two of the three roads leading to the hill being clear for some 50 yards. The support was in a niche in the hill, and had a clear front covering all roads leading to the position. The reserves were splendidly posted in rear of a mound, well-defined roads and pathways leading from each of these parties to the bottom of the hill. The roads to the position are very uneven, dips sufficient to give cover for any party advancing frequently occurring. The attacking force, which was divided into three parties, left the town by different routes, and at different times.

Note 2. The participating members of the Society:

L. Beever
J. Bowen
A. Brooke
N. Brook
J. Brown (Ranger)
J. Cross
P. Dewsbury
A. Derych
C. Dunn
B. Hobson
T. Ellis
P. Gwilliam
J. Heron
G. Higgs
J. Hodgson
G. Hoyle
R. Logue
B. Moss
D. Naylor
G. Naylor
A. Nocon
I. Roberts
M. Shaw
J. Smithson
R. Stocks
H. Togni
S. Wilkinson