

Interim Archaeology Report

July 2024



Plover Hall

Plover Hall Interim Report – July 2024

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1.0. Introduction

The fourth season of excavation focused on land at Plover Hall, Greta Valley, Teesdale, opening an area approximately 18m by 18 m located across two anomalies visible as slight earthworks, in July 2024.

2.0. Background

Three Late Bronze Age metalwork Hoards have been found close to Plover Hall, Bowes, Co Durham. The Gilmonby hoard was found in 1980 during drainage works and then in 2015 and 2016 two more hoards were recovered from a neighbouring field by metal detectorists. The landscape into which the hoards were deposited is an area interspersed with springs, the wetland location a common factor in Bronze Age metalwork hoard deposition.

In 2020 a small geophysical survey was undertaken in the field adjacent to where the 1980 hoard was identified. This provided positive results and as a result two successful applications were made for grants to support the start of the investigation of the Prehistoric Archaeology of the Greta Valley.

The Aims of the project have been to:

- Undertake the first major investigation of the land on which the Gilmonby Late Bronze Age Hoard was found, using geophysical survey and small-scale excavation
- To recover material from archaeological features for dating, to evaluate if any activities were contemporary to the hoards. The dating of the features will contribute to the construction of a chronological framework for Teesdale

Four seasons of fieldwork has been undertaken including over 70ha geophysical survey both south and north of the River Greta, drone survey, metal detector survey and the intrusive investigation of a burnt mound, two cairns, and possible later prehistoric occupation.

The fourth season which this interim summarises targeted an area with two oval anomalies identified on the geophysical survey and could be seen on the ground as slight earthworks.

3.0. Topography and Geology

The site is in open fields north of Plover Hall, with the land gently sloping northward towards the River Greta, a tributary of the River Tees. A number of springs are present across the area, which run north south into the river and the land is pasture used primarily for grazing sheep. The site is an approximate height of 265 OD and is situated close to the A66, the main routeway that crosses the North Pennines. To the south are Barningham Moor and Arkengarthdale. To the west is Cumbria accessed through the Stainmore Gap. To the east is Greta Bridge and Stanwick-St-John (see figure 1).

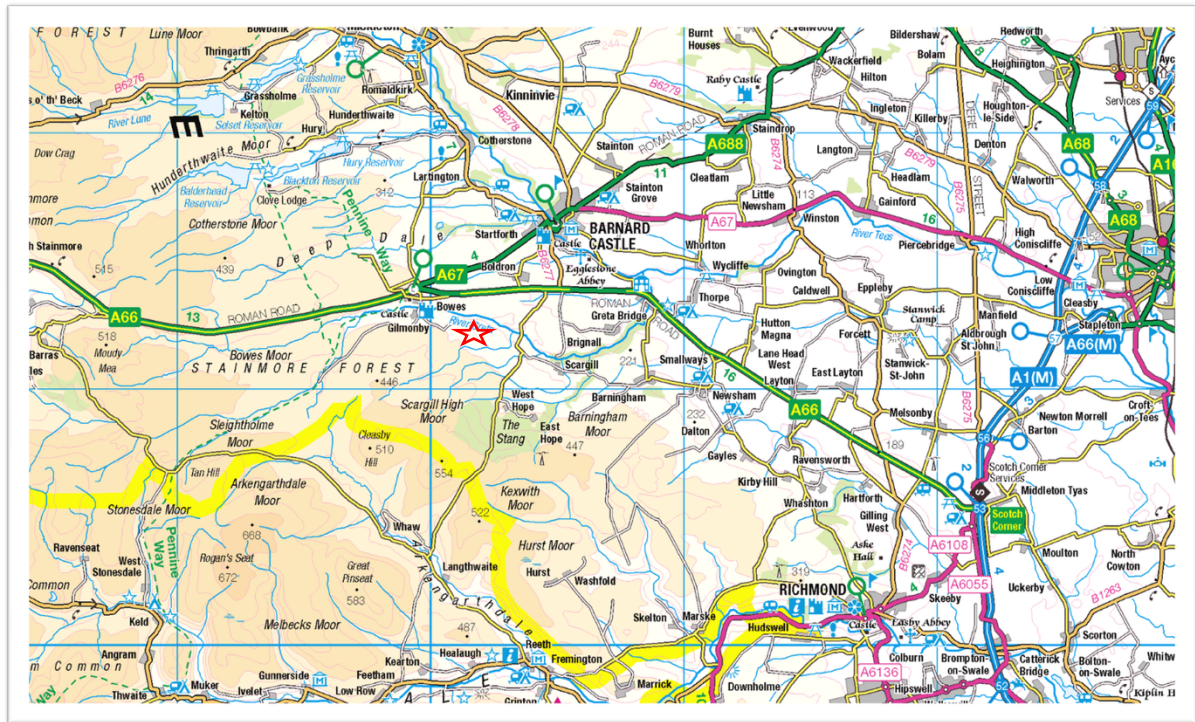


Figure 1: Location of Greta Valley and the area investigated indicated by a red star (Digimap)

The underlying geology of the site comprises limestone, sandstone, siltstone and mudstone of the Alston formation. These formed between 337 and 328 million years ago during the Carboniferous period. These are overlain by sedimentary superficial Diamicton till deposits of the Devensian, formed between 116 and 11.8 thousand years ago during the Quaternary period.

4.0. Geophysical and drone surveys, alongside aerial photographs

A combination of magnetometry and drone surveys have been utilised to identify and target anomalies in 2024, the latter providing identification of potential settlement evidence (see figure 2). Furthermore, these anomalies were clearly visible on aerial photographs from Historic England (figure 3), which appear to show an enclosure surrounding two oval features, situated within twenty-five metres from the findspot of the Gilmonby Hoard. The archaeological features are visible from the ground as slight earthworks.

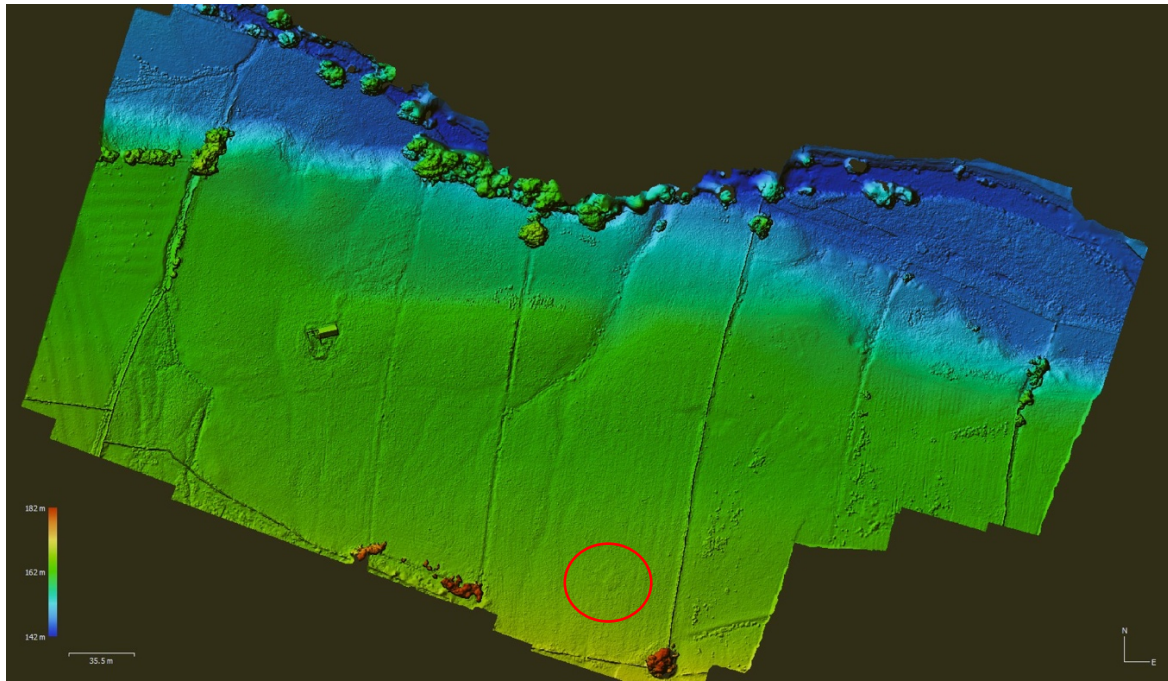


Figure 2: Thermal image with anomalies highlighted in red (A.Jansen)



Figure 3: Anomalies highlighted in black (Historic England)

5.0. The Excavation

The area opened measured approximately 18m by 18m, with trench 14 placed over some of this enclosure and one of the oval features. In the southern half of the trench the stone foundations of a structure/enclosure (1415) were uncovered (see figure 4), with an entranceway marked out by paved slabs (1418). The paved slab entranceway is comparable morphologically to the one uncovered at the Bronze Age roundhouse uncovered at Bracken Rigg, excavated by Denis Coggins in the 1980's. Within this enclosed space were stone features, although no post-holes or pits were identified in this area.



Figure 4: The paved entranceway visible top left corner and a stone feature (F1449) in the foreground (facing south)

In the north end of the trench, a large flat stone (1419), appeared to be a work surface for flint knapping, with many small chert flakes scattered around. A curving arrangement of boulders (F1408) were contained within the enclosure (see figure 5), predating and underlying deposits in the south-east of trench 14. A large stone slab measuring 1m by 0.57m appeared to curve and respect an abutting boulder that measured 1.12m by 0.58m.

One further curved arrangement of stones was identified in the north-east corner of trench 14 and continuing under the baulk. This being one of two oval structures identified on the surveys discussed above (4.0) and visible on the drone survey undertaken in July 2024 (see figure 6)



Figure 5: Boulder formation (F1408)

Medieval green glazed ware was recovered when cleaning over an area in the south-east corner of the trench.



Figure 6: The complex series of deposits. Curved structure F1424 in the bottom left corner of trench 14

6.0. Metal Detecting Survey

In July 2024 a successful metal detecting survey was undertaken, with volunteers and members of Altogether Archaeology marking out positive signals, which were subsequently dug up and recorded by GPS. A Late Bronze Age spearhead tip was among the finds identified.

7.0. The Excavation Team

Throughout the fieldwork seasons of the project, excavation works have been undertaken by volunteer members of Altogether Archaeology (see figure 7), students from Durham University (both undergraduate and postgraduate) (see figure 8 and 9) and school children on work experience with accompanying parents.



Figure 7: Members of Altogether Archaeology excavating the site



Figure 8: Recording trench 14



Figure 9: Two MA students excavating alongside Altogether Archaeology volunteers

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Following on from season 4, this year's excavation will continue investigating the same enclosure further northward. It is hoped to record more of the stone features, discern their function and recover dating evidence.