



Location: 1.13 miles (1.81 km) NE of Grassington, North Yorkshire (SE 014 654)

Main period: Bronze Age

Access & ownership: The small henge monument at Yarnbury lies 1.13 miles (1.81 km) north-east of Grassington, North Yorkshire. The site is marked on the Ordnance Survey Map (Landranger Series, sheet 98) and measures c. 20 m in diameter. The site lies in rough pasture c. 140 m from the road. It is in private land but accessed by a right of way. Lying within the Yorkshire Dales National Park, visitors can visit the site under the right to roam policy.

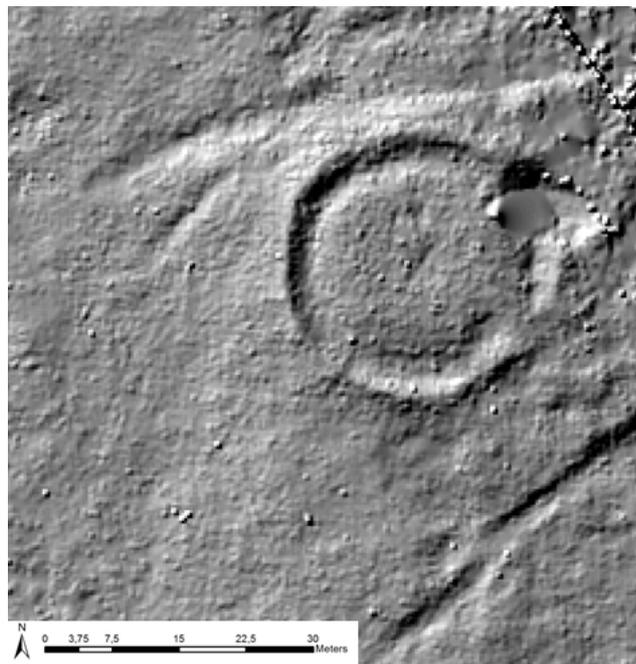


Fig 1. Terrestrial laser survey of the Yarnbury henge, 2013

Yarnbury henge monument consists of a well-defined circular bank with an internal ditch which together enclose a flat central area that is accessed by an entrance to the SW (Fig. 1). The internal ditch clearly shows that this is not a defensive site and therefore it is assumed to have had a ritual or religious function. The site is described and accepted by Harding and Lee (1987) in their review of henge monuments.

The site was first described by the local antiquary Arthur Raistrick in 1929. He referred to it as an enclosed cremation cemetery – a type of monument associated with human cremation burials and dating to the earlier part of the Bronze Age (c. 2000–1400 BC). Raistrick did not record any previous excavation at the site. There was, however, an excavation later in 1964. There are no surviving plans or sections surviving from this excavation and the brief report in the *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* simply describes the ditch as rock-cut and the bank as being of simple dump construction (Dymond 1965). Interestingly, however, the report also mentions locating a pit in the centre of the monument and that this pit resulted from an excavation ‘earlier this century’; that is the early 1900’s. How the excavator could have been so certain of the date of this robbing is unknown unless Raistrick, who was still alive at the time, had been aware of it and had passed on the information.



Fig 2. Collared Urn and fragment (top) in Manchester Museum and fragments from the same vessels from the 2014 excavations. Top photographs courtesy of Debbie Hallam.

In Manchester Museum there is a near complete Bronze Age Collared Urn (dating to around 2000–1600 BC) and fragments of a second Collared Urn that are documented as coming from Yarnbury, near Grassington, and having been excavated in 1922–3 (Fig. 2). The records do not mention the henge nor do they give any further details of the findspot. The pots are of a type normally associated with cremation burial, so if they had come from the henge and if Raistrick had known of them (as he almost certainly would have done) then this might explain his 1929 interpretation of the site as an enclosed cremation cemetery. Raistrick could not have recognised the site as a ‘henge’ as the term was not introduced into the archaeological lexicon for a whole class of monuments until 1932 by Kendrick and Hawkes.

Excavations by Bradford University in 2014 (Gibson forthcoming) reopened Dymond’s trench; this confirmed that the ditch was rock cut and that the bank was of dump construction. It also located the central pit and found that Dymond’s exploration had not gone more than 10cm deep into the backfill of the pit. The opportunity was taken to excavate the rest of the backfill and fragments of pottery were recovered. These proved to be sherds from the Collared Urn and Collared Urn fragment in Manchester Museum so we can now be sure that these pottery vessels came from the Yarnbury henge. In addition some burnt flint and a few fragments of cremated bone were also recovered.

Post excavation work is still underway but preliminary pollen analysis suggests that the monument was built in an area of open grassland with some sedge and pine growing nearby. The area had also been stripped of turf before the henge had been built.

References

- Dymond, D.P. 1965. Yorkshire Archaeological Register, 1964. *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 41, 323–4
- Harding, A.F. with Lee, G.E. 1987. *Henge Monuments and Related Sites of Great Britain. Air Photographic Evidence and Catalogue*. Oxford: BAR British Series 197
- Kendrick, T.D. & Hawkes, C.F.C. 1932. *Archaeology in England and Wales, 1914-1931*. London: Methuen & Co.
- Raistrick, A. 1929. The Bronze Age in West Yorkshire. *Yorkshire Archaeological Journal* 29, 361 & 364
- Pastscape: http://pastscape.org.uk/hob.aspx?hob_id=48403

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