

# Community Archaeology Survey of an Enclosed Settlement at Rattenraw Farm, Redesdale October 6<sup>th</sup> –8<sup>th</sup> 2018



NORTH OF THE WALL  
**TYNEDALE  
ARCHAEOLOGY  
GROUP**



## **Introduction and Acknowledgements**

A level 3 Survey of the Iron Age/Romano-British enclosed settlement at Rattenraw Farm (site R00) was carried out from 6<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> October 2018, by volunteers from Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group (NOWTAG) and Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership.

The level 3 survey follows an earlier level 1 survey of this site, which was carried out by members of NOWTAG in February 2018. The principle aim of this level 3 survey was to more precisely measure and record the extent and dimensions of the enclosed settlement at site R00 and give a clearer picture of the internal structures within the settlement. The results of the survey are discussed in this report.

Over the course of three days, from 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> October 2018, volunteers took part in the survey, which was organized and run as a training opportunity and volunteer event, forming part of Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership's 'Lost Redesdale' community archaeology project.

The event was led by a team of members of NOWTAG, comprising Phil Bowyer, Andy Curtis and Martin Green. Unfortunately, due to weather conditions, the survey could not be finished on the 8<sup>th</sup> October as planned, and was instead completed by members of NOWTAG on the 10<sup>th</sup> October.

16 volunteers took part in the survey, learning new skills in archaeological surveying techniques and contributing to our understanding of Redesdale's heritage. Their contribution is much appreciated. Participants included: Phil Bowyer, Andy Curtis, Martin Green, Nathalie Brown, Bill Pointer, Elaine Vallack, Anne Telfer, Geoff Robinson, Sue Robinson, Malcolm McCallum, Alan Gray, Pauline Grainger, Pauline Hogarth, Roisin Hogarth, Richard Wilson and Katy Wilson.

Special thanks go to Phil Bowyer, Andy Curtis and Martin Green for their generosity, expertise and patience in training the inexperienced volunteers and leading the survey.

Special thanks also to Susan and Dennis Salt for their kindness, support and enthusiasm in welcoming us to their farm and hosting this event.

This survey report has been compiled on behalf of Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership and Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group by Andy Curtis, Martin Green and Phil Bowyer.

**Karen Collins**

***Revitalising Redesdale Heritage & Engagement Officer***

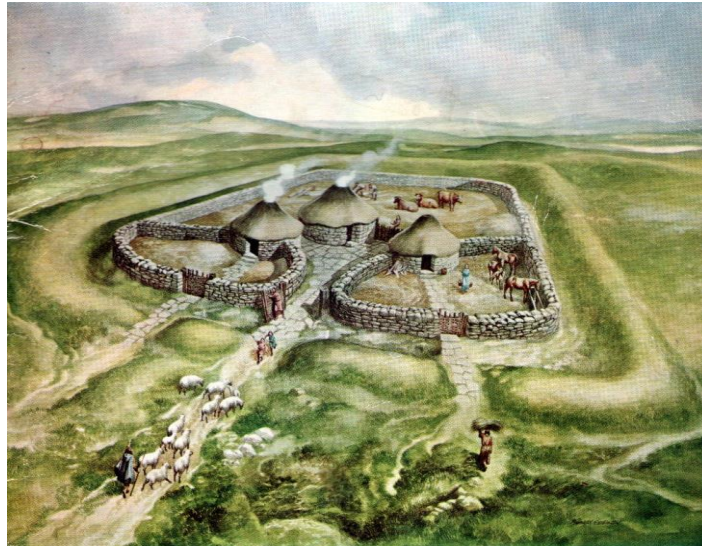
## Archaeological Context

The so-called, one-man Royal Commission, George Jobey, produced a survey of Northumberland's rectilinear settlements in 1960. He showed that there was a form of small stone-built enclosed farmstead, dating to the late Iron Age and Romano-British periods, common along the Tyne and Rede river valleys (Jobey 1960). Many more were revealed by aerial photography along the corridor of Hadrian's Wall as discovered by Tim Gates (Gates 2004). The same types of rectilinear farm also dotted the fertile coastal plains of Northumberland where they have mostly been disturbed by later ploughing or settlement, here perhaps more likely to be timber-built and often only visible on aerial photographs as crop-marks or after excavation. Settlements of a similar age from the Cheviot uplands were more irregular in shape, or even unenclosed, with roundhouses often scooped into the hillside.

Quite what were the driving factors that led to the population moving out from their more communal and at least partially defensive hill-forts into the countryside are not known. Conditions of peace were clearly a necessity. The arrival of the Romans has been implicated in this (the *pax Romana*) and also in the shapes of the settlements and stone building. However, rectilinear enclosure along with stone buildings seems to have become part of the native life even before the Romans arrived. It appears to have been established by the early Iron Age and to have continued in use until at least the 3rd century AD with the only major structural change being a move towards building in stone during the Roman period.

The surviving farmsteads are small, probably originally based on family groups, and show evidence of mixed agriculture, stock rearing and the growing of arable crops. In many places where they are common, their distribution implies even greater population numbers and a division of the suitable land, than the farms which were established much later and dot today's landscapes. However, it may be unlikely that all known sites were occupied at the same time.

The standard features of the settlement form are the rectilinear enclosure enclosing an area of roughly 30 by 50m. The enclosing wall is often of orthostat construction, sometimes with an external ditch for drainage. An east facing entrance is common, as is a pair of hollowed and enclosed yards divided by a causeway leading to a cluster of three or four stone-built roundhouses situated towards the rear. Space behind the huts perhaps provided safe storage for fodder well away from animals kept in the yards. The typical plan is shown by the settlement at Riding Wood, west of Bellingham. An evocative reconstruction of that settlement was used on the cover of Jobey's *Field Guide to Prehistoric Northumberland*, published by Frank Graham in 1974.



**The Romano-British Settlement at Riding Wood – reconstruction by Ronald Embleton from cover of *A Field Guide to Prehistoric Northumberland Part 2* (Jobey 1974)**

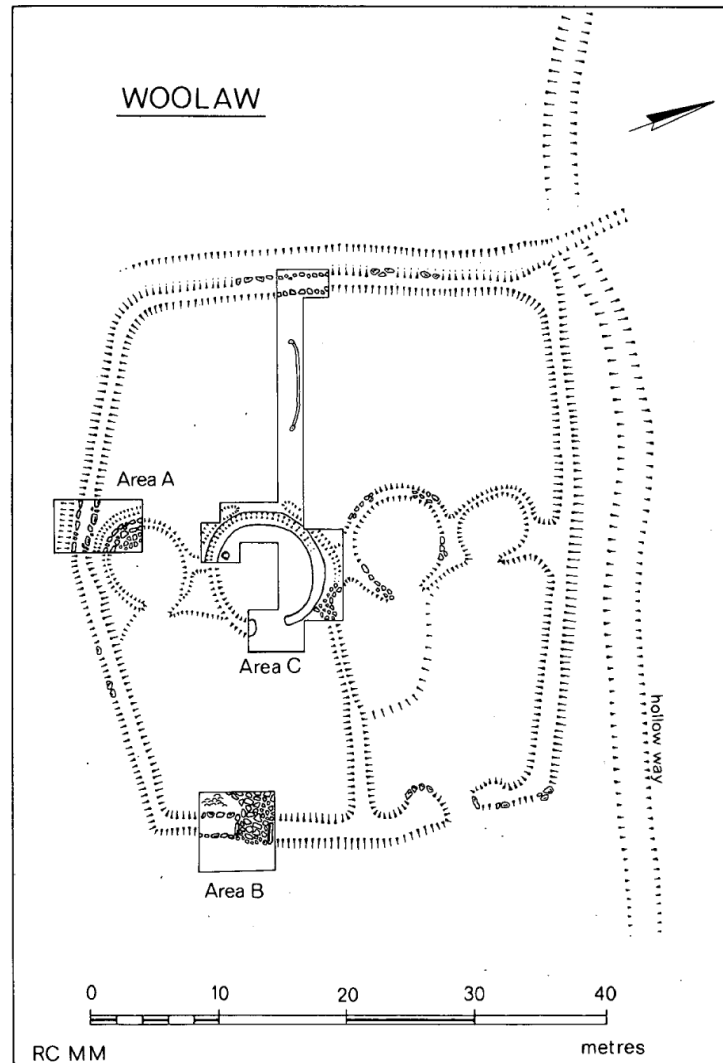
Excavation of a few such settlements has shown that the stone-built houses were often a later phase of building after the mid-second century AD, preceded by roundhouses of timber construction in the first century (Jobey 1973). The enclosed yards were often cobbled and crossed by a centrally-placed paved path. The enclosure entrance would have been a timber gateway with a gate pivoted on a single inset socket stone. Huts were on average 6m internal diameter with a wooden door that sometimes closed against a raised threshold. The huts would have had a conical roof, presumably thatched, carried by rafters or purlins with the outer ends resting on the hut walls or on timber uprights placed around the inside face.

Some huts show evidence of internal wattle screens, central hearths, stone furniture, paving of floors, storage pits and wall nooks. Small finds are usually few: native pottery, glass pendants and beads. Quern stones and spindle whorls are indications of agricultural activity and iron slag and coal may reveal small-scale exploitation of local resources. Coins seem unlikely to be found, as are fragments of more refined Roman pottery.

The residents of such farmsteads were clearly arable farmers and herdsmen. Arable cultivation is indicated by associated field systems, stone clearance and areas of cord rig. Whether these activities were just subsistence or provided excess produce for taxes or trading with nearby Roman forts is not known. Nor is the reason for them apparently being abandoned, perhaps following withdrawal of the Roman military in 367AD. The relationship of the settlement here described to the nearby Roman Fort at High Rochester and its proximity to Dere Street and the putative Roman bridge across the Rede are clearly points of major interest.

Charlton & Day published their excavation of the Romano-British settlement at Woolaw in 1978. They described it as one of the finest examples of Romano-British rectilinear stone-built settlement in Northumberland and it has many similarities

with the one described here, although with four roundhouses distributed across the centre of the enclosure, interlinked by a dividing wall. The settlement at Woolaw (NY 8151 9845) is about 400m S of River Rede at 215m above sea level, with extensive views to the N, W and E.



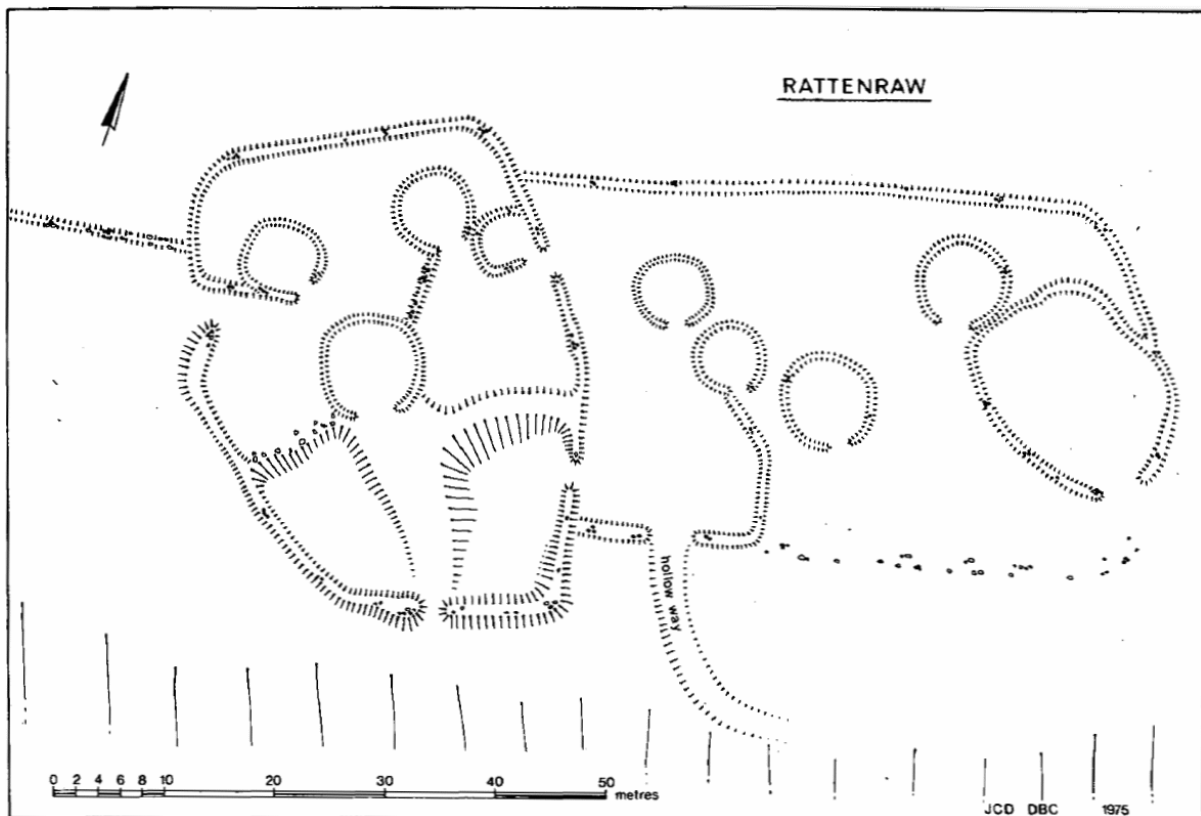
**Enclosed Settlement excavated at Woolaw. Drawing from Charlton & Day.**

The enclosure had two entrances on the E side with paved pathways leading across a pair of cobbled yards. Little dating evidence was found but the few finds pointed to the final phase of occupation in the second century AD. In the vicinity of the settlement there were several vestigial field walls constructed of boulders along with areas cleared of stones providing evidence of cultivation. Proximity to medieval settlements at Burdhope and Evistones however made it impossible to associate agricultural activity with the R-B period.

Along with details of the excavation, Charlton & Day also published the results of a survey of some 25 km<sup>2</sup> of Upper Redesdale. There was little evidence for pre-Iron Age settlement but another 14 sites of both the irregular (Cheviot-type) and rectilinear R-B settlement (North Tynedale-type) were found, proving a pattern of

dispersal of such sites along both sides of the Rede similar to the situation found in the North Tyne valley.

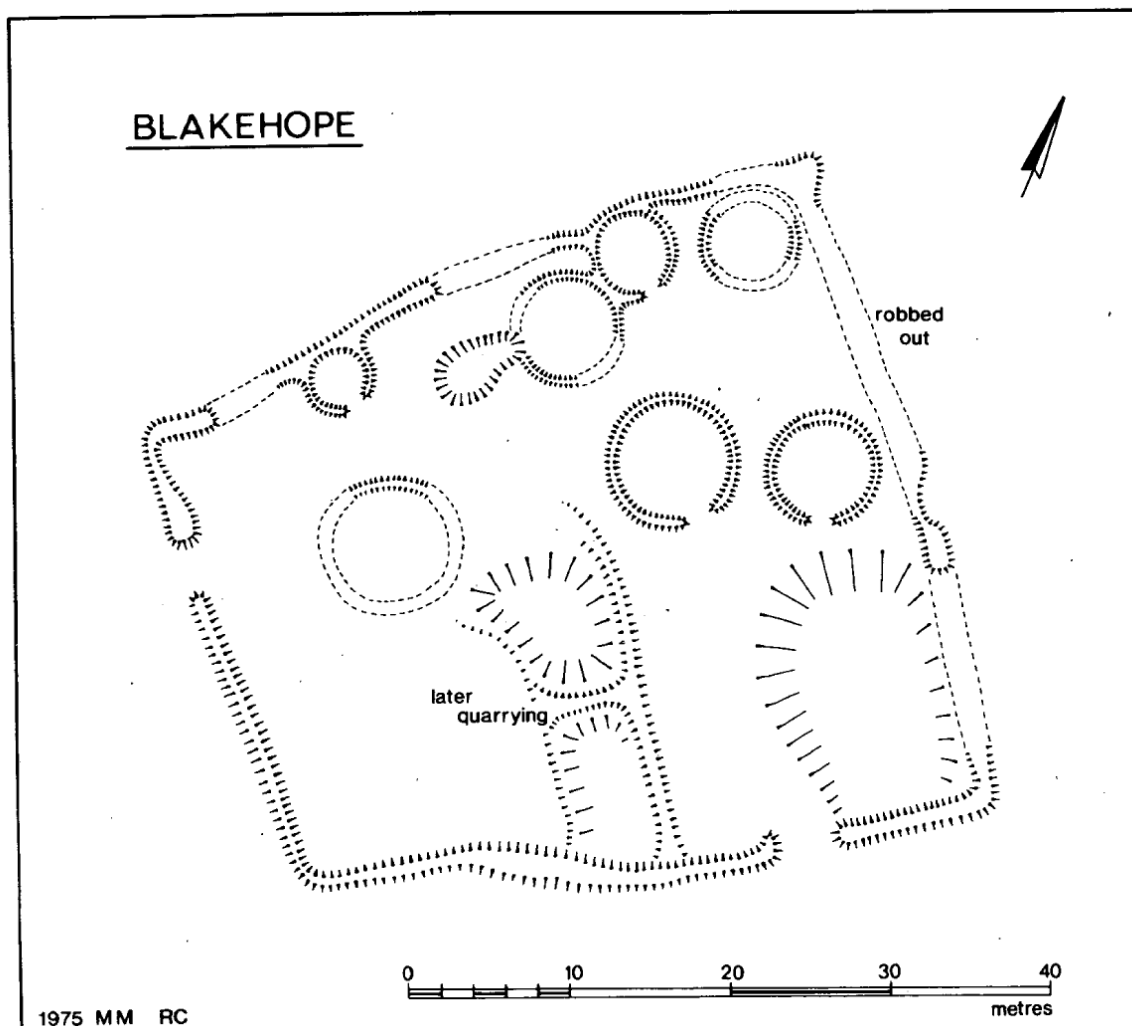
Close to the R-B settlement described here, two rectilinear settlements were newly described in their survey, one to the west of Rattenraw farm-house, close to the Rattenraw Burn (in the same field, 570m SE) and another on Blakehope Fell (1km in the same direction, south of Rattenraw farm-house. Both of these monuments were scheduled in 1994 (list entries [1008994](#) and [1009372](#)).



**Enclosed Settlement west of Rattenraw farmhouse. Drawing from Charlton & Day.**

The settlement west of Rattenraw farm-house (NY 8470 9512) lies on an east-facing spur above Rattenraw Burn at approximately the same height as our settlement. It is sub-rectangular in shape, 40m by 30m, surrounded by a stone and earth bank, 2-4m wide and 1.5m high. A 2m wide entrance on the S side may be the original entrance, above the burn valley, and leads into the interior between two sunken yards. There are three stone-founded roundhouses, one placed centrally of 8m in diameter, and two further back, 6m in diameter. All have entrances facing SE. Outside the original enclosure to the E there are a further 4 huts (6-9m in diameter) with entrances again to the SE and a larger, low-banked enclosure (24m x 20m) at the eastern end. These features are all surrounded by traces of a low earthen bank with an entrance in the S side leading to a hollow-way leading into the steep valley of the Rattenraw Burn. These features are considered to be contemporary with the main settlement and indicate its expansion to the east.

The field system we traced from our new settlement approaches this larger settlement but evidence of a separate field system or cord rig cultivation at this site cannot now be seen and traces of it may be occluded by medieval ploughing immediately to the N and E.



**Enclosed Settlement 350m south of Rattenraw farmhouse. Drawing from Charlton & Day.**

The settlement recorded in the survey by Charlton & Day at Blakehope, 350m S of Rattenraw farm-house (NY 8512 9482), is of the same sub-rectangular shape, 43m by 40m surrounded by a stone and earth bank, 1.5-2m wide and 0.5m high. The enclosure walls on the E and N sides have been robbed of stone and the whole enclosure is of a denuded condition. There is a 3m wide entrance on the SE side with a sunken yard on its E side. It is suggested that the similar yard on the W side has been partly removed by later quarrying. At the rear of the enclosure there are remains of seven stone-founded roundhouses between 5 and 10m in diameter. Those houses adjacent to the NW wall may again be indication of expansion of the settlement during the period of its occupation.

Northumberland HER has a record (Reference Number: N8322) for a prehistoric field system with cord rig close to the location of the Blakehope settlement which, it suggests, may have been used by the people who lived there (Topping 1989). This does not appear to be visible on the ground although probable cord rig can be made out on Google Earth images, extensively damaged by vehicle tracks caused by former farming practice.

Areas of cord rig have been noted in association with fields recorded by Tim Gates at Netherhouses East & West, The Butts and Blakemans Law, and have also been identified close to rectilinear sites at Woolaw, Woolaw East, Fairney Cleugh 2, Rattenraw, Buteland, Blakehope, Belling Law (also noted by Jobey 1977), Ottercops Burn and Meadowhaugh (cited by Ferrell (1992).

Our site, R00, (NY 8437 9559) is some 4km SE of Woolaw in a similar situation on a level terrace at 195m altitude below Kellyburn Hill, 500m to SW, which rises to 239m, a lower spur of Brownrigg Head. The River Rede is 500m to the north, crossed by the former line of Dere Street (and putative Roman bridge) about 1km ESE.

The frontal yards on R-B rectilinear settlements are likely to have been for the keeping of stock so some pasture land would have been necessary. In this context the hollow-ways on the steep slope directly to the S of our settlement may hint at the regular movement of stock to higher ground on Kellyburn Hill beyond the lower field boundaries. On the hill is another area of good grassland showing evidence for stone clearance in linear assemblages of boulders and irregular clearance cairns. Close to this activity there are three small oval enclosures of enigmatic appearance but whether these can be directly associated with the R-B settlement is only conjecture. 300m NW on the neighbouring farm of Ashtrees is the deserted medieval settlement at Kellyburn, one of several known in Upper Redesdale.

Pollen analysis from a few sites in Northumberland has indicated extensive woodland clearance during the late Iron Age and early Roman periods. This is accompanied by an increase in the presence of cereal pollen.

Cord rig was first recognised on air photos in the 1980s and Northumberland is one of few places in England where it can be seen on the ground as visible earthworks (Gates 2004). Distinct from ploughing, the soil is thrown into narrow ridges 1-1.5m wide by the use of hand-tools. Its chronological range is unknown but probably extends from the Bronze Age well into the Roman Iron Age and possibly beyond.





**Cord rig close to the R-B settlement R00 on Rattenraw Farm**

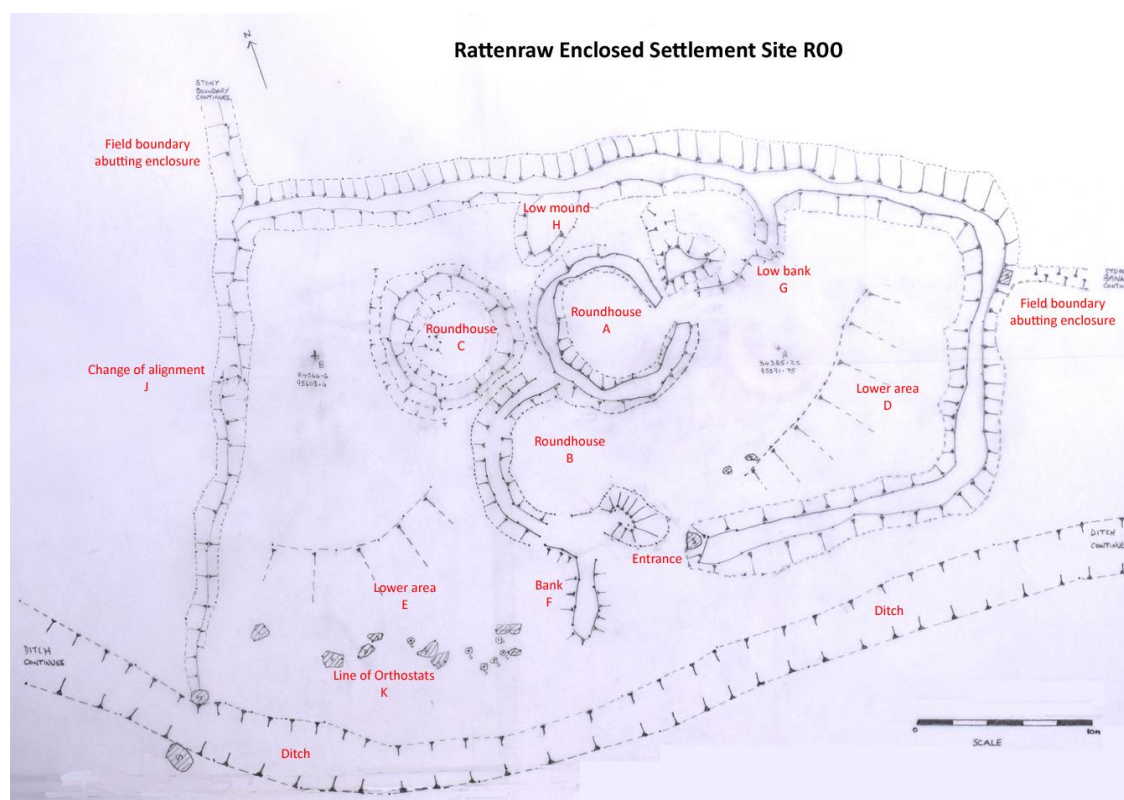
Seeds recovered from excavation of similar native settlements appear to indicate only small scale, intensive, subsistence cultivation (van der Veen 1991).

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- Topping, P (1989) *The context of cord rig cultivation in later prehistoric Northumberland* in M. Bowden, et al., eds. *From Cornwall to Caithness: some aspects of British field archaeology*, p.145-58.
- van der Veen, Marijke (1991) *Arable farming in north east England during the later prehistoric and Roman period: an archaeobotanical perspective*. PhD thesis, University of Sheffield.

## Results of the survey

When the site was first recorded in 2017 nearly half of it was covered in dense reedy grass that made it difficult to discern detailed features, particularly in southern parts of the enclosure. Since then, thanks to the efforts of the owner Dennis Salt, the extent of the reeds has been reduced enabling us to discern certain features more clearly. In 2017 we were unable to identify any entrance into the enclosure and we had interpreted one barely visible area of a fourth roundhouse. We now believe that there are three roundhouse structures, not four as previously thought, and we have identified the location of a probable entrance on the southern side of the enclosure.



**Fig 1. Annotated plan drawing of Enclosed Settlement R00**

A larger copy of the plan drawing is included as Appendix 1.

The external dimensions of the enclosure measure 43m E-W by 28m N-S at its maximum. Roundhouses A and B are stone-founded structures, with internal diameters (from top inside edges of their banks) of 6.5m and 7m respectively. The surviving stony banks are up to 0.5m high and about 1m wide, excluding tumble. The structures abut each other on the southern edge of A and northern edge of B (See figure 3 below).

The remains of the southernmost arc of roundhouse B are lower and not very discernible in dense reed cover although on the alignment of the probable continuation of the arc there is a wider, probably disturbed, 0.3m high mounded

area adjacent to what we now believe to be the entrance into the enclosure (See figure 4 below).



**Fig 2. Roundhouse A from east. Ranging poles indicate probable entrance.**

Note that the remains of the stony bank are lower on its southern arc, on the right of the photo. The gap indicating the probable entrance is east facing and is today 1.5m wide.



**Fig 3. Northern arc of roundhouse B abutting roundhouse A**



**Fig 4. Probable entrance with mound adjacent to terminus of roundhouse B arc visible between ranging poles.**

The tumble from the mound today leaves a reduced gap of just 1m to the upright orthostat marking the eastern side of the entrance, figure 5.



**Fig 5. Southern perimeter of enclosure looking east**

5m west of the orthostat shown in figure 5 marking the eastern side of the probable entrance is a 4.5m length of 0.25m high stony bank (bank F) aligned north-south that could have functioned as part of the structuring of the enclosure entrance, possibly helping to create a 'pinch-point' to control the movement of livestock into the enclosure (See figure 6 below).



**Fig 6. Bank F viewed from orthostat at east side of the probable entrance**

The ranging pole on the right indicates the mound near the south-east end of roundhouse B. The pole on the right indicated the southern end of stony bank F. The southern end of bank F aligns with the line of large boulders that may indicate the western section of the southern perimeter of the enclosure (See figure 7 below).

Our assessment of the location of the enclosure entrance is supported by an area of sunken ground immediately beyond the entrance in the eastern part of the enclosure. Such sunken or 'scooped' areas are characteristic of many enclosed settlements and are attributed to the long-term effects of livestock churning up terrain they have occupied and periodic clearances of accumulated manure.

It is further interesting to note that the area of the enclosure west of bank F is also lower-lying. There is today a gap of 3m between the easternmost of the line of boulders and bank F, raising the question as to whether this may have constituted a further entrance into an area used for livestock at some stage of the settlement's history.



**Fig 7. Line of large boulders along southern side of enclosure.  
From east on left, from west on right.**

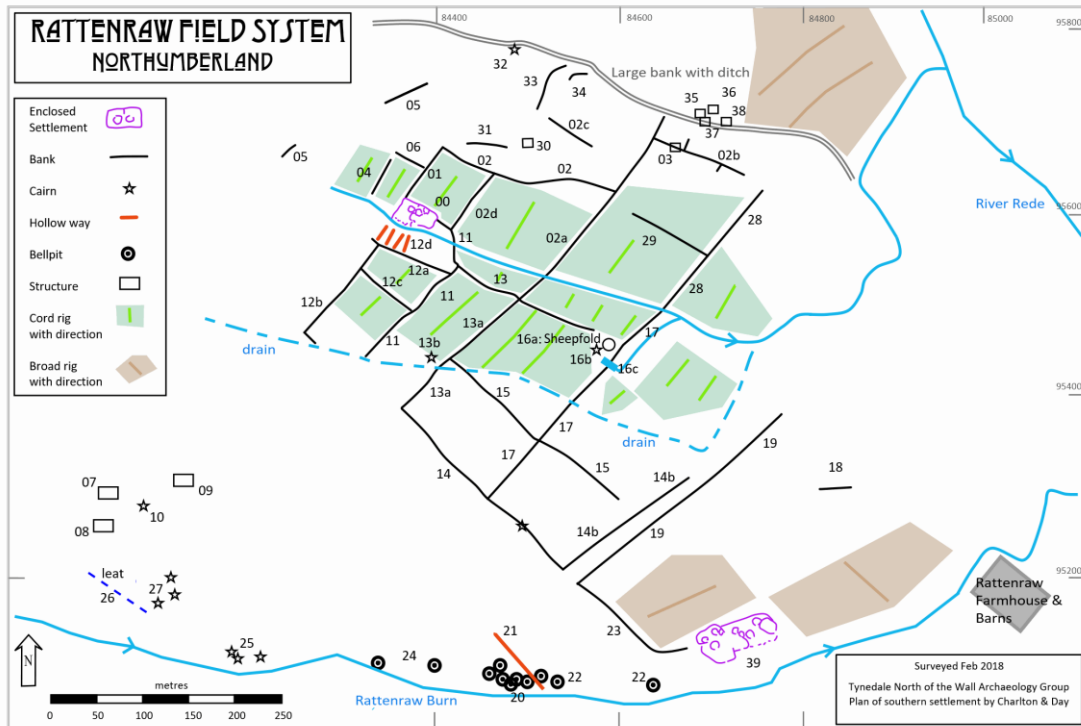
Today the southern side of the enclosure lies very close to an extensive ditch. Although there are indications of mechanical digging along the ditch, the slightly sinuous course of the ditch suggests that such activity served to augment an existing ditch rather than create a new drainage ditch. We are currently unable to determine whether the ditch, which is indicated as a watercourse on OS maps, post-dates the settlement. Some 30m east of the settlement a field boundary, that runs to and abuts the eastern perimeter of the enclosure, is seen to continue north of the ditch.

Our Level 1 walkover landscape survey in February 2018 indicated that the extensive field system both north and south of the settlement is almost certainly contemporary with the enclosure and therefore sequencing of the ditch and field boundary would also clarify the relationship between the settlement and the ditch.

The presence of four parallel hollow-ways on the slope immediately south of the ditch, immediately west of the western edge of the field system and adjacent to the enclosure, further supports our assessment regarding the entrance location. Figure 8 below, compiled from the results of our earlier level 1 survey, shows enclosed settlement R00 within the adjacent field system. Note that the hollow ways are at the western edge of the field system. A larger figure is included in the Appendix.

The perimeter of the enclosure is abutted at two points by field boundaries. Near the north-east corner a length of field boundary running from a junction of boundaries

from both north and south of the settlement abuts the eastern enclosure bank (See figure 9 below).



**Fig 8. Rattenraw field system with enclosed settlements**



**Fig 9. Field boundary abutting eastern perimeter bank**



**Fig 10. NE corner of enclosure bank.**

At the north-west corner of the enclosure a boundary that forms part of the northern part of the field system abuts (See figure 11 below).

The remains of the western enclosure bank are lower and narrower than the northern and eastern banks. There is an apparent slight change in alignment of the western bank, indicated J on the plan drawing above (See figure 12 below).



**Fig 11. Field boundary abutting NW corner of enclosure.**





**Fig 12. Change in alignment J along western enclosure bank.**

To the north and east of roundhouse A there is a low stony bank and a stony mound, marked G on the plan drawing. The low stony bank runs initially south from the northern enclosure wall and turns west towards the probable entrance to roundhouse A. Adjacent to the western end of this low bank there is a stony mound which appears to extend back towards the northern enclosure bank, although the presence of dense reeds makes it difficult to discern with precision. Figure 13 below shows the bank, the ranging poles indicating the section abutting the northern enclosure bank.



**Fig 13. Low stony bank G.**

Just north of roundhouse A there is a low platformed mound which appears to abut the northern enclosure bank.

Positioned close to the western edge of roundhouse A and the north-west edge of roundhouse B is roundhouse C, which appears to have different structural characteristics. Its low bank is surrounded internally and externally by shallow ditches and the roundhouse seems characteristic of ring ditch structures. The diameter of the bank is 6.5m. Both the internal and external ditches are about 0.5m wide and today are only partial arcs. We recorded a small very low mound of 0.6m diameter near the centre of the roundhouse.



**Fig 14. Roundhouse C viewed from NW.**



**Fig 15. Roundhouse C showing internal ditch.**

## Discussion

The survey and recording of enclosed settlement Rattenraw R00 undertaken by community volunteers has provided us with a detailed description of the visible surface features of the site. This has enabled us to identify the probable entrance to the enclosure along its southern perimeter. It has also led us to revise the assessment of the number of roundhouse structures within the settlement from four to three. Further it has identified distinct structural differences between roundhouse C and the stone-based roundhouses A and B. We have also been able to identify areas within the enclosure that appear to have been used by livestock.

There remain significant unanswered questions concerning the site, including:

### 1. **Chronology of the site.**

The form of the site makes it highly probable that it was built and occupied at some time within the Iron Age or Romano-British periods. The proximity of Dere Street and the Roman fort at High Rochester could lend support to the view that the extent of arable activity indicated by the surrounding field system with its extensive cord rig would have been related to requirements arising from the Roman occupation. The likelihood of these circumstances does not however eliminate the possibility of pre-Roman or post-Roman occupation of the site.

### 1. **Relationship to nearby enclosed settlement sites.**

Similar considerations of chronology apply to the two scheduled enclosed settlement sites on Rattenraw Farm. (list entries [1008994](#) and [1009372](#)). Was there contemporary occupation of the three sites, or was construction and occupation sequential? Charlton and Day identified an extension on the enclosed settlement west of Rattenraw farmhouse, suggesting a sequence of construction within the settlement. At site R00 are the apparent structural differences between round house C and roundhouses A and B also indicative of a sequence of construction and occupation?

### 2. **Relationship of site R00 to the ditch adjacent to its southern perimeter.**

The proximity of a prominent ditch immediately south of the probable entrance to the enclosure raises questions. If the ditch was contemporary with the occupation of the settlement, and if the hollow-ways upslope to the south of the ditch are indicators of livestock having been driven into the enclosure, this does not appear to be particularly conducive to the functionality of arrangements. There are indications that the ditch has been augmented. Although the ditch does have the appearance of a largely natural feature, there are examples of features of comparable length and depth having been artificially created.

### 3. **The western enclosure bank.**

The remains of enclosure bank along the western side of the settlement is noticeably lower and narrower than the northern and eastern banks, and the eastern section of the southern perimeter bank. There are also signs of a slight change of alignment part way along the western bank. Whilst it could be suggested that this may be

indicative of the western part of the enclosure, including roundhouse C, having been constructed and occupied earlier or later than the eastern side it must be noted that the structure of northern bank is consistent along its full length.

#### **4. The western section of the southern perimeter.**

There is today no visible bank associated with the line of large boulders that may indicate the remains of the western section of the southern perimeter. There are indications of short sections of stony banking immediately adjacent to the ditch, but these would appear to be consistent with either upcast from, or a small retention wall for, the ditch.

#### **Further Investigation**

It is hoped that there will be an opportunity for selective excavation at the site in due course. We suggest that when determining the project design for such work consideration be given to what scope there may be for excavation to address some of the above questions.

Other possible targets for excavation could include:

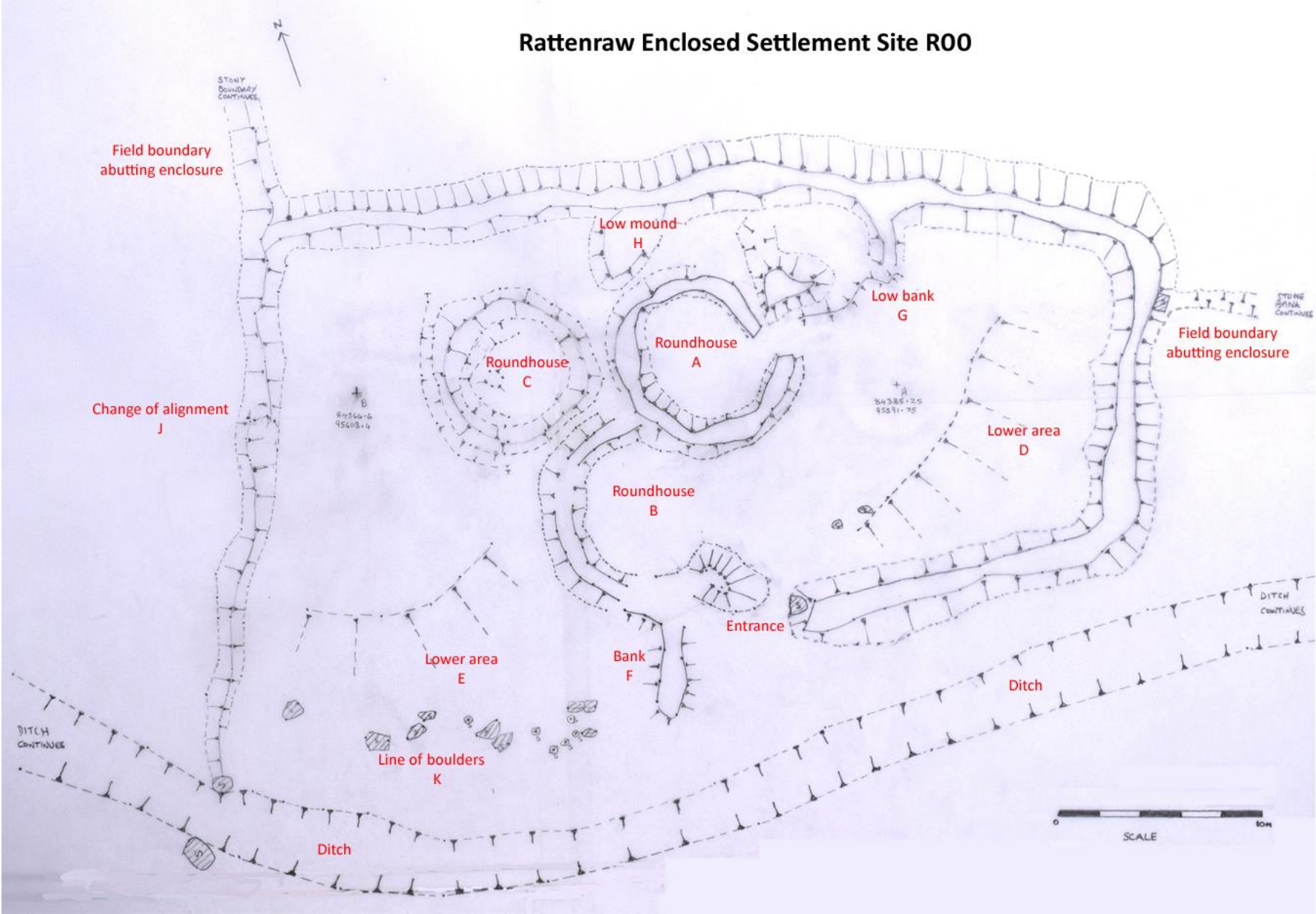
- Roundhouse C trench across bank and ditches,
- Trenches across gaps between roundhouses A and C, and roundhouses C and B.
- Trenches at the junction of bank F with roundhouse B, and junction of roundhouses A and B.
- Investigation of the raised area inside roundhouse C for remains of possible hearth.

The 2018 Level 1 and Level 3 surveys, recording and reports for Rattenraw Farm have been entirely the work of non-professional community volunteers. We recognise that there is a need for a professional assessment of the most appropriate priorities for targeted excavation at site R00, along with appropriate training and supervision to enhance the further work of community volunteers in advancing our understanding of the settlements sites and field systems at Rattenraw Farm.

#### **Appendices**

1. Completed survey drawing of Rattenraw Enclosed Settlement (Site R00)
2. Computerised plan of Rattenraw Enclosed Settlement (Site R00) based on survey drawing
3. GIS Plan showing Settlement sites and wider field system at Rattenraw (numbered as on Level 1 survey)
4. GIS Plan showing Settlement sites and wider field system at Rattenraw (features not numbered)

# Rattenraw Enclosed Settlement Site R00



# RATTENRAW ENCLOSED SETTLEMENT

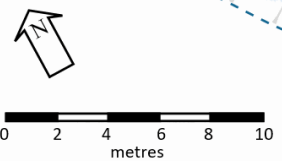
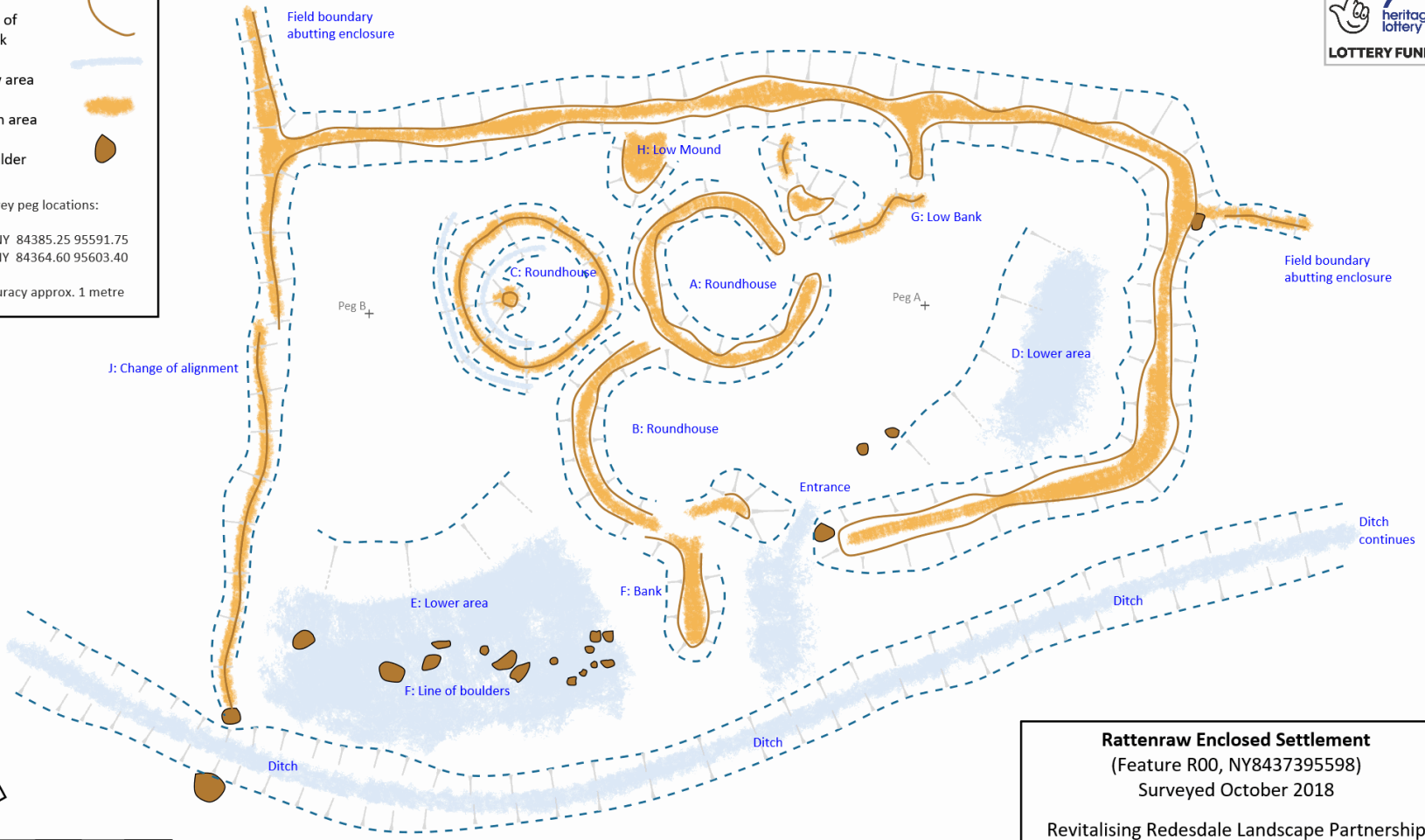


**Key**

- Top of bank
- Low area
- High area
- Boulder

Survey peg locations:  
 A: NY 84385.25 95591.75  
 B: NY 84364.60 95603.40









Accuracy approx. 1 metre

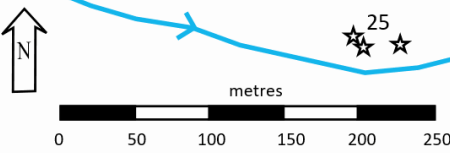
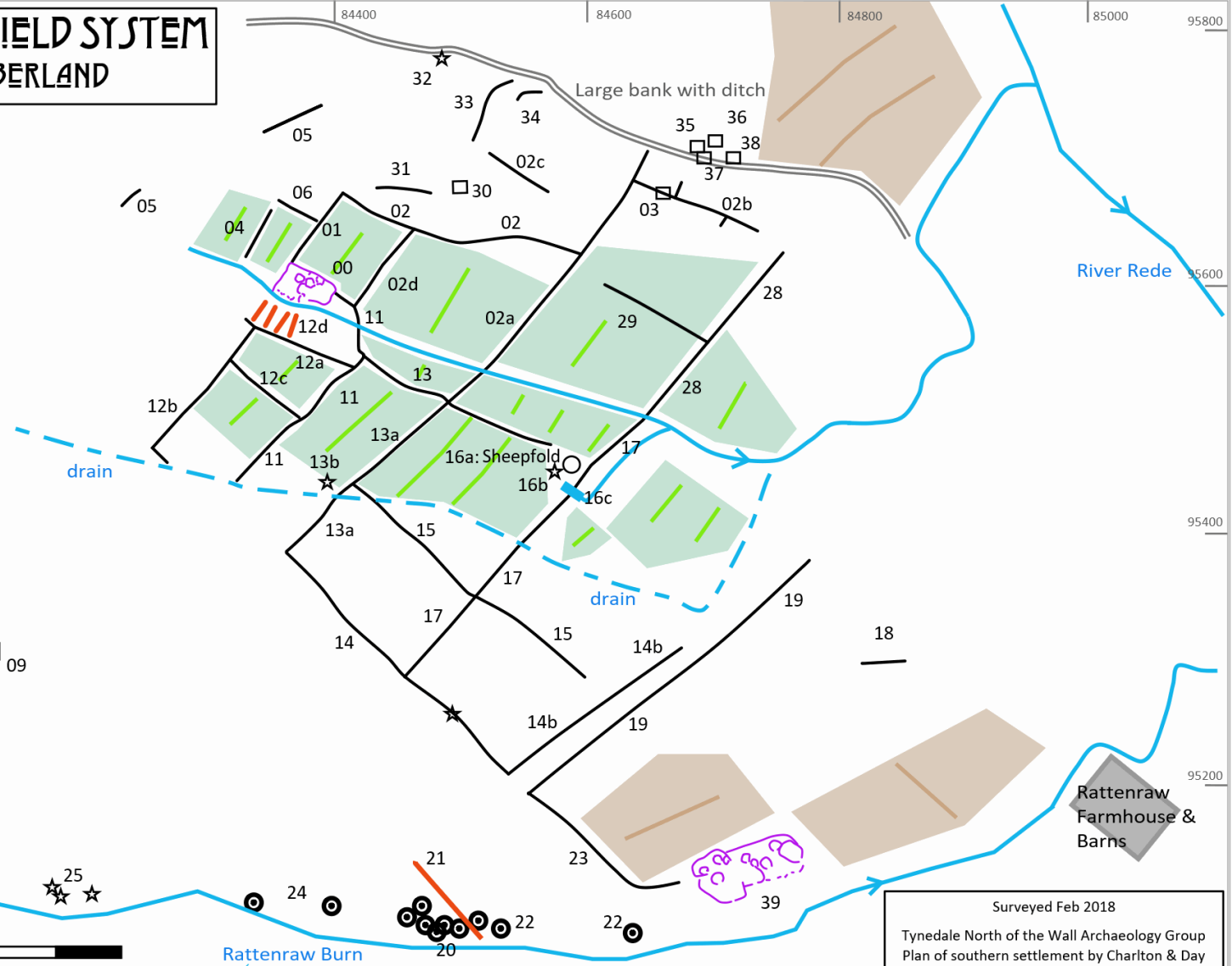


**Rattenraw Enclosed Settlement**  
 (Feature R00, NY8437395598)  
 Surveyed October 2018

Revitalising Redesdale Landscape Partnership  
 Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group









# RATTENRAW FIELD SYSTEM NORTHUMBERLAND

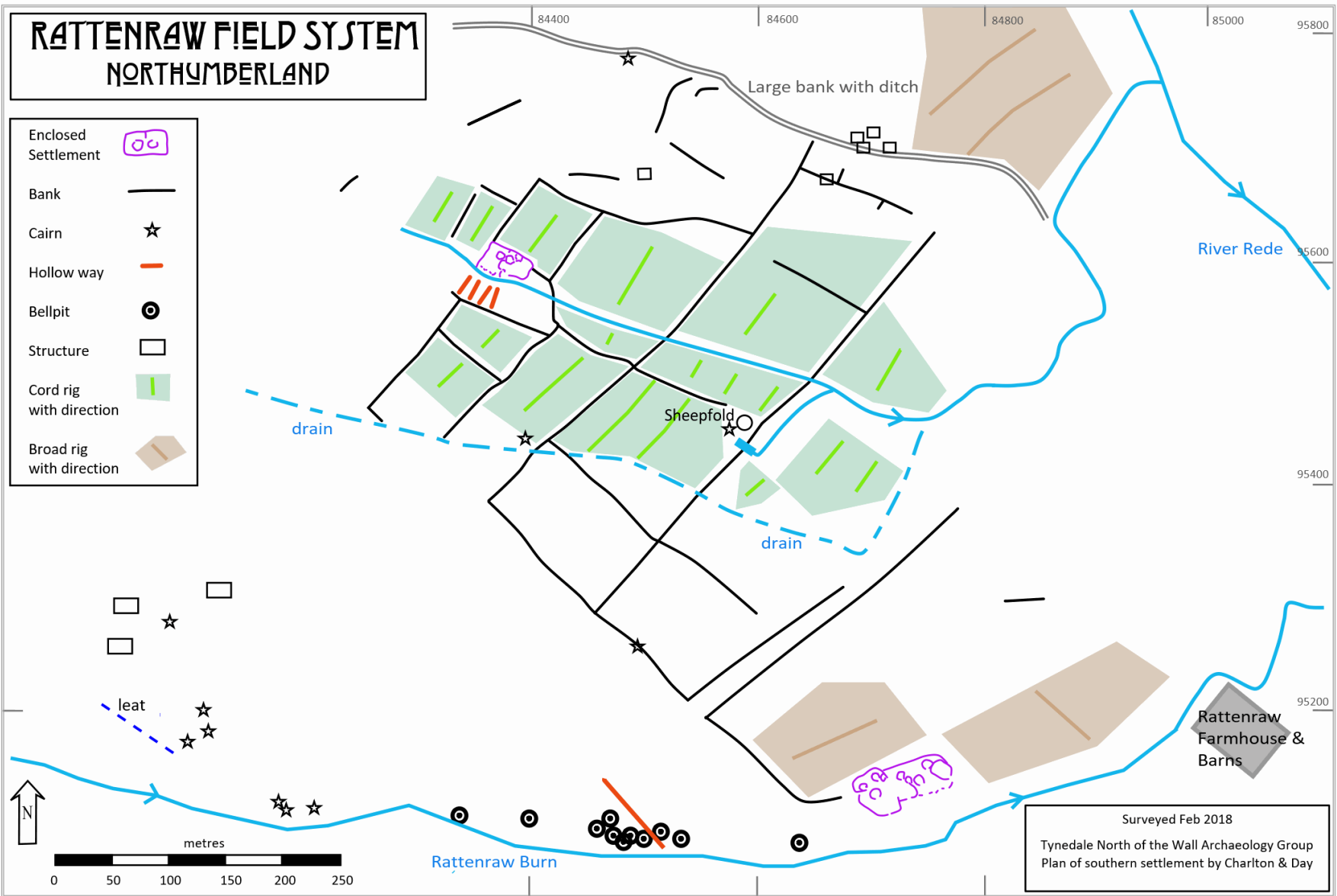
- Enclosed Settlement 
- Bank 
- Cairn 
- Hollow way 
- Bellpit 
- Structure 
- Cord rig with direction 
- Broad rig with direction 



Surveyed Feb 2018  
Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group  
Plan of southern settlement by Charlton & Day

# RATTENRAW FIELD SYSTEM NORTHUMBERLAND

- Enclosed Settlement 
- Bank 
- Cairn 
- Hollow way 
- Bellpit 
- Structure 
- Cord rig with direction 
- Broad rig with direction 



Rattenraw  
Farmhouse &  
Barns

Surveyed Feb 2018  
Tynedale North of the Wall Archaeology Group  
Plan of southern settlement by Charlton & Day