

## The Yorkshire Antiquarian Club 1849–c.1860

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The Yorkshire Antiquarian Club was formed in York in 1849. Between that date and 1855 club members undertook a series of excavations on Bronze Age and Iron Age funerary monuments in various parts of the East and North Ridings of Yorkshire. This paper explores the origins, activities and eventual demise of the club, and seeks to place it within its contemporary archaeological context.

The origins of the little-known Yorkshire Antiquarian Club, both in terms of personnel and activities, are intimately associated with the early history of the Yorkshire Philosophical Society. It is necessary, therefore, to begin this paper with a brief exploration of that particular context. The Yorkshire Philosophical Society (hereafter YPS) was founded in York in December 1822, very largely prompted by the discovery of the Kirkdale ‘bone cave’, near Pickering (North Yorkshire, 30 miles north-east of York), in July 1821 (for an account of the origins and early history of the YPS and the role of the Kirkdale cave, see Orange 1973; see also Rubinstein 2009). Its first annual report, published the following year, defined the general object of the society as ‘the promotion of Science in the district for which it has been instituted’, and its more particular object being ‘to elucidate the Geology of Yorkshire’ (YPS *Annual Report* 1823: 5–6). In order to pursue these aims, one of the first acts of the YPS was to establish a museum in Low Ousegate, to be known as the Yorkshire Museum (see Pyrah 1988), in which geology predominated. However, the society also recognized that, ‘... though the illustration of Geology is the principal design of the Yorkshire Museum, it will be open also to other objects of Scientific Curiosity, and will be a proper Repository, it is conceived, for those Antiquities, with which the County, and particularly the City of York, is known to abound’ (YPS *Annual Report* 1823: 6–7).

From 1826 the YPS employed a part-time museum keeper and the society’s report for that year noted the appointment of geologist John Phillips (1800–1874), who ‘has undertaken to give his attendance at the Society’s rooms during nine months of the year, for three days in each week’ at £60 per annum. He was also responsible for overseeing the work of seven part-time curators across the natural sciences. Phillips held this post in various guises until 1853, frequently combining it with other paid employment, often at some distance from York. Throughout this period, however, he continued to live in the city and be closely involved in the society’s affairs. In October 1853 he became deputy reader in geology and then, in 1860, professor of geology in the University of Oxford. It was only with his removal to Oxford that Phillips withdrew from active involvement in YPS business.

Sometime shortly after 1826, the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved (1769–1858) was appointed as honorary part-time curator of antiquities. Both men were locally well known in their respective fields. Phillips, nephew of the ‘Father of British Geology’, William Smith, is perhaps so well known as to need no further introduction here (for appreciations see Davis 1882; Morrell 2005; and Sheppard 1933). Wellbeloved, however, is another matter. Radical theologian, educationalist, social reformer, archaeologist and historian, Wellbeloved was born on 6 April 1769 in London, the only child of John and Elizabeth Wellbeloved. After an early, abortive career as a draper’s assistant, he attended Homerton Academy and then New College, Hackney, was ordained into the ministry in 1791, and the following year moved to York. Here he became assistant to the Unitarian minister the Rev. Necome Cappe at St. Saviourgate Chapel. On Cappe’s death in 1801 he became minister, a post he held until his own death in 1858. During his early years in York, Wellbeloved’s fame as a preacher and theologian spread: in 1803 he became Divinity tutor at the Manchester Unitarian Academy, which moved to York on condition that Wellbeloved took up the appointment. Under his direction, the college proved a modest training ground

for dissenting students, ministerial and lay, achieving influence across northern England. On Wellbeloved's retirement in 1840, the institution returned to Manchester and then moved to London, before finally settling in Oxford. Almost from his first arrival in York he became a leading light in the uncovering of the city's archaeology and history, and was a founder member of the YPS. After failing to establish a York Antiquarian Society in 1813, he was instrumental in forming the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club some thirty-six years later. Charles Wellbeloved died, aged 90, in 1858, and was buried in the cemetery attached to St. Saviourgate chapel. (For further details, see obituary notice in *Yorkshire Gazette* 11 September 1858; see also Kenrick 1860; Orange 1973; and Peacock 1971).

The infant YPS also established a library:

by means of which, persons of various pursuits in different parts of the County, may be enabled to consult Books, on the subjects of their respective studies, which it might not be convenient for them, individually, to purchase; and, for that purpose, a Collection will by degrees be made, of the Transactions of Philosophical Societies, Journals of Science, and Works on Arts, Antiquities, and Natural History, especially those parts of it which relate to Mineralogy and Geology (*YPS Annual Report* 1823: 6).

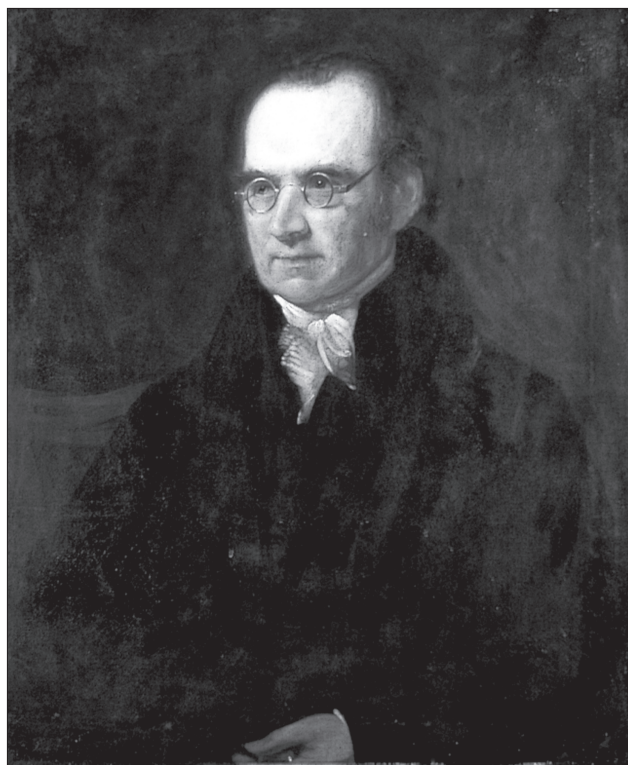


Figure 1. Charles Wellbeloved, 1769–1858, by Chester Earls (© York Museums Trust, York Art Gallery).

Although geology was initially the prime preoccupation of the YPS, gradually, over the ensuing twenty-five years, archaeology assumed growing prominence in the society's affairs. Chronologically, the archaeological impulse derived from five main sources: first, the acquisition by the society of the site of St Mary's Abbey, York, in 1827, for the construction of a purpose-built museum and adjacent botanic garden; second, the holding of the foundation meeting of the British Association for the Advancement of Science in York in September 1831, hosted by the YPS; third, the growing number of archaeological excavations undertaken in York, particularly between 1834 and 1840, as a consequence of major redevelopment projects; fourth, the formation of the York Archaeological Society in 1842; and fifth, the holding of the 1846 annual meeting of the Archaeological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland in York, again hosted by the YPS. Above all else, this meeting was responsible for moving archaeology up the agenda of the society's activities.

Following on from the above, the YPS recognized the increased importance of archaeology among the objects of the society. In its 1848 annual report, the council anticipated that the 'growing taste for Natural History and Antiquities within the County will attract Members to a Society established with a view to encouraging such pursuits' (*YPS Annual Report* 1848: 16). Henceforth, archaeology was accorded an equal place with Natural History among the activities of the society, no longer among the other subordinate 'Objects of Scientific Curiosity'.

Cumulatively the above events led directly to the founding of the short-lived Yorkshire Antiquarian Club (henceforth YAC) in York in June 1849. The prime forces behind this move were the Rev. Charles Wellbeloved, William Procter (1818–1880), a well-connected and respected York surgeon, the by-now nationally eminent geologist John Phillips, and John Thurnam (1810–1873), who shortly afterwards (1851) left his post as medical superintendent of The Retreat, York, to take up a similar appointment

at the Wiltshire County Asylum in Devizes (although he continued to be involved with YAC affairs, making frequent trips back to Yorkshire to participate in club excavations). All of these individuals took a keen interest in archaeological matters, and had been actively engaged in excavation in and around York for a number of years prior to the establishment of the club, especially Wellbeloved, who has been described as a ‘sort of public guardian of the antiquities of York’. Furthermore, they were all leading, very active figures in the YPS.

Perhaps a little surprisingly, given their overlapping interests and the potential for rivalry and conflict, the Yorkshire Philosophical Society welcomed the creation of YAC and looked forward to a close working relationship (YPS *General Council Minutes* 2.10.1849: 372). Although no formal link existed between the YPS and YAC, which was ‘wholly supported by independent funds’ (YPS *Annual Report* 1850: 8), there was considerable overlap in terms of membership

of the two organisations. The YPS also heard and published its excavation reports; its museum received ‘all the specimens given to, or discovered by the club’ (Sheahan and Whellan 1856: 622); and, after its disbandment, kept its minute book (which may be more properly described as a *post-hoc* excavation record than a minute book in the accepted sense).

From the beginning the club dedicated itself to field archaeology, to the accumulation of ‘facts’ and cultural material, which was to be achieved through the medium of excavation. The club existed to promote:

The accurate knowledge, and the careful preservation of the antiquities of the county of York; to make researches by the opening of, and excavation into, barrows and other earthworks; and to watch the progress of public works, such as railways, sewers, foundations of buildings, &c (club rules quoted in Sheahan and Whellan 1856: 622).

Like many contemporary groups, a self-conscious need for justification is detectable, a need to legitimate their work and to promote the gravity and worthiness of their subject. In explanation of the significance of that work, particularly as regards excavation, Procter, the club’s lifetime secretary, wrote:

In many cases we have no other means of arriving by analogy and comparison at a knowledge of the habit, rise, customs and ethnology of a people long since passed away; and no other clue to the real age and period of numerous remarkable structures. To such the attention and examination of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club has been especially directed (Procter 1855b: 176).

The members saw themselves very much as ‘working archaeologists’ as distinct from mere dilettante collectors: indeed, a fundamental principle was that no member, nor YAC itself, should possess a collection of their own (Sheahan and Whellan 1856: 622). The beneficiary of this rule was the YPS museum, which agreed to display the club’s material as a distinct collection, ‘separately’ from its other exhibits, and ‘from time to time to make available such additional cases as may be required to receive additional specimens’ (YPS *General Council Minutes* 2.10.1849: 371).

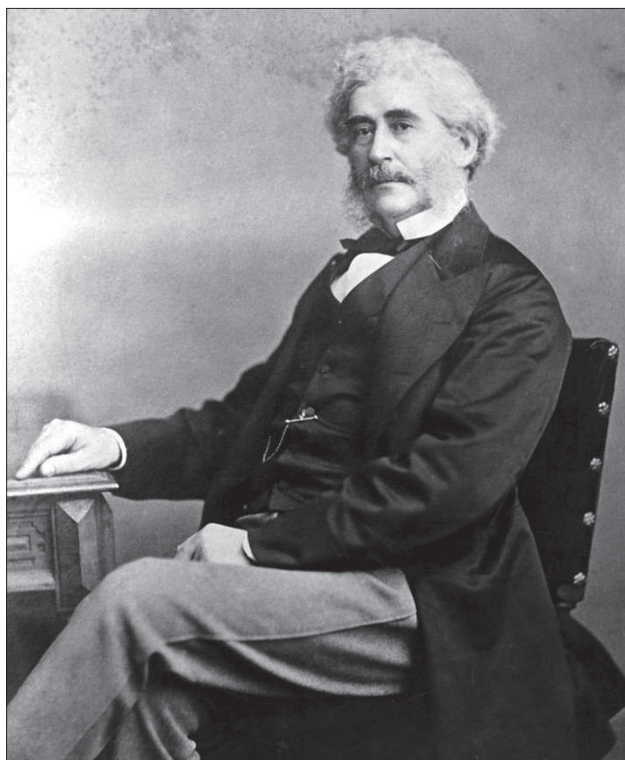


Figure 2. John Thurnham, 1801–1873 (© Wiltshire Heritage Museum, Devizes).



The formation of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club coincided with the beginning of a period of intensive barrow openings in England, when such activity became a widespread and respectable pastime. Locally, that period, ca 1840–1870, saw the large-scale excavations of, among others, Thomas Bateman, James Ruddock, William Greenwell, and John and Robert Mortimer (for an overview, see Marsden 1999). It also coincided with the establishment of county archaeological societies, which followed in the wake of the foundation of two national organisations: the Archaeological Association in 1843, and the Archaeological Institute in 1845. Whilst this is not the place to go into details, it should be noted that all this activity was taking place within the context of a predominantly acquisitive culture engendered by Victorian capitalism.

Like most of these societies, the club's membership was largely drawn from two dominant social groupings: the emerging, urban-based middle classes, and the county clergy. And, like its counterparts, it encouraged, and depended upon, an active and participatory membership (see Levine 1986: 40–69). Unfortunately, no membership details for the YAC appear to have survived for the early years; in the mid-1850s membership stood at around eighty (Sheahan and Whellan 1856: 622), mostly drawn from York itself, but with a scattering across the three Yorkshire ridings. Based in York, this later concentration of membership in the city is not surprising, since by this date the club had largely ceased excavating and was confining its activities to lectures (see below).

Between 1849 and 1855 the club was actively engaged in the opening of prehistoric barrows in the historic East and North Ridings of Yorkshire. Somewhat surprisingly, given the amount of readily available archaeology in York, the group, concentrating all its efforts on this particular class of field monument, pursued its activities in an exclusively rural setting; presumably, this served to emphasise the regional, as opposed to local, context of its operations, and legitimised the use of 'Yorkshire' in the club's title. It was also indicative perhaps of the fact that others were engaged in the pursuit of York's past and, therefore, the club, not wanting to be accused of 'poaching', turned its attention to what, at that time (and particularly on the Yorkshire Wolds), was a relatively neglected aspect of the region's archaeology.

At least forty-six sites were excavated between August 1849 and September 1855 under the direction, either separately or in various combinations, of Procter, Phillips, Thurnam and an otherwise unknown Mr. C. M. Jessop (Procter 1855b: 176). Table 1 provides a chronological analysis of the club's activities:

Area of operation	Date of excavation	Sites excavated
Acklam Wold, East Yorkshire	14 August 1849	3
Hutton Cranswick, East Yorkshire	27 August 1849	1
Driffild, East Yorkshire	28 August 1849	1
Danes' Dale (Danes' Graves), East Yorkshire	29 August 1849	6
Skipwith Common, East Yorkshire	September 1849	10
Acklam Wold, East Yorkshire	October 1849	8
Huggate, East Yorkshire	October 1849	4
Thixendale, East Yorkshire	October 1849	2
Thorganby Common, East Yorkshire	April 1850	1
Arras, East Yorkshire	May 1850	3
Prior Rigg, Ampleforth, North Yorkshire	19 September 1850	2
Aldro, East Yorkshire	August 1853	4
Sowerby, North Yorkshire	September 1855	1

**Table 1.** The excavations of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club (sources: Procter 1855a: 24–25, 1855b: 176–189; *Yorkshire Gazette* 18.8.1849: 4, 1.9.1849: 3, 1.11.1851: 6).

The main focus of attention was directed towards the Bronze Age round barrows of the Yorkshire Wolds, which formed such prominent landscape features at this time; and which were coming under increasing threat of destruction from agricultural operations as the area underwent a radical transformation in land-use from pasture to arable cultivation in the years following parliamentary enclosure. Twenty-six (56%) of the excavated sites were in this area. Of these, twenty-one (81%) were geographically confined to the adjoining parishes of Acklam, Huggate and Thixendale, on land belonging to the Willoughby family of Birdsall.

Why such concentration? The answer to this question lies in the activities of local YAC (and YPS) member the Reverend Thomas Rankin (1783–1863), curate of Huggate and North Dalton (1821–1863), noted for his meteorological and antiquarian researches (see Orange 1973; Briggs 1981: 2–6). Through his friendship with the Willoughby family, Rankin was able to act as an intermediary and obtain permission to excavate; indeed, a surviving notebook (private possession; Harrison in preparation) makes clear that Rankin was also responsible for identifying particular barrows for excavation.

As can be seen, YACs most intensive period of activity occurred in 1849, when a total of twenty-seven sites were examined (71%). Thereafter, until the club's demise in the late 1850s/early 1860s only eleven sites received their attention (29%). The reasons behind this initial burst of activity followed by a long period of relative quiescence are not known, but were probably related to lack of patronage.

In general terms, sites which occupied agriculturally productive land, such as those on the Yorkshire Wolds, were opened in the immediate post-harvest months of August, September and October, when access was relatively unrestricted, prior to the recommencement of the farming cycle. Sites on economically non-productive land or in pasture, such as those on Thorganby Common, could be examined more or less at leisure.

Procter published the results of all thirty-eight excavations in summary form in 1855 (Procter 1855a: 24–25; 1855b: 176–189). These reports are remarkable in that he discusses a large number of excavations in a short space (twenty-six pages), without illustrations, in varying degrees of detail (but usually very superficially), and with no apparent knowledge of stratigraphy. Fortunately, however, it is possible to supplement these reports with a rather fuller, much more informative manuscript account – this time supported with sketch location plans (probably derived from the relevant OS 1:10 560 first edition sheets, which were being published at this time) and illustrations of selected artefacts – which exists in the library of the YPS (YPS Accession No. 2766, Class No. Y913. (This untitled and unpaginated

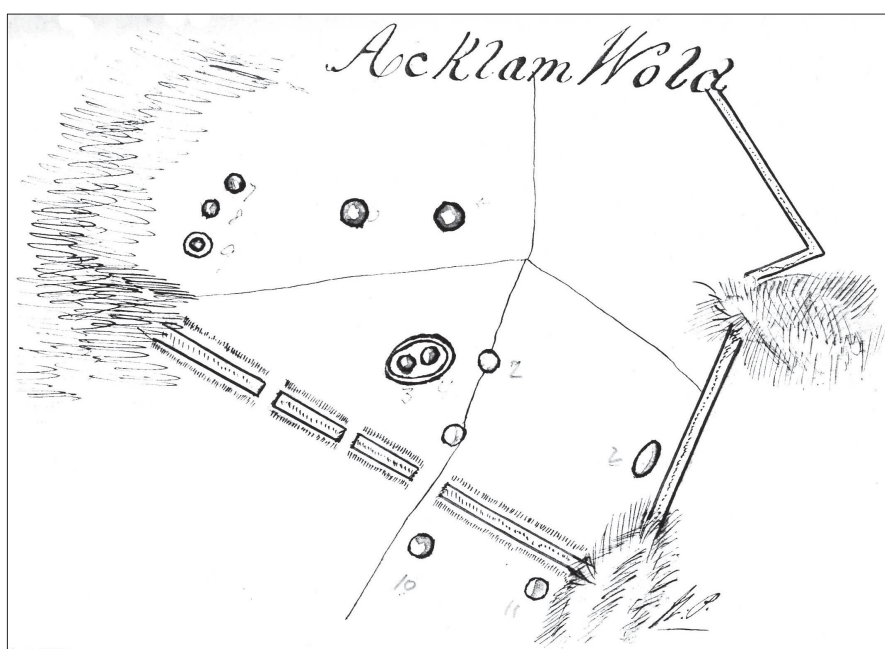


Figure 3. Plan of Acklam barrows (source: Procter ms; © Yorkshire Philosophical Society).

document is the so-called ‘minute book’ referred to above). This sixty-page ms account was written by Procter sometime around 1864, from now lost earlier (possibly field) notes. By reconciling these two sources, it is possible to analyse the internal logic of the reports, and examine the linkages between the assumptions employed by the excavators, the stated observational record, and the interpretative account. By doing so, some conclusions as to the nature of the work undertaken by the club during this period, their methodology, and the state of contemporary archaeological thought in respect of barrows and burials can be drawn.

A number of the Yorkshire Wolds sites were subsequently re-excavated by John Robert Mortimer (1825–1911), who retrieved considerably more information from the barrows than did the YAC, especially in relation to their structure, burials and associated cultural material (see Table 2). In his accounts, Mortimer also records the methodology of his predecessors (Mortimer 1905: 73, 75, 86–90, 92–93, 181–185, 313–314, 316–317, 286–295). For example, Mortimer’s Barrow 248, Huggate and Warter Wold Group, 15m in diameter and 0.80m in height at the time of his re-excavation in 1882, had been opened by the club through the digging of a central excavation ‘about 7 feet [2.13m] square’ (Mortimer 1905: 314). The methodology adopted by the club was very simple and in accordance with prevailing standards: the digging of a central vertical shaft, from apex to base, whose dimensions varied in relation to the size of the particular mound under investigation, bringing little enlightenment and few artefacts. For instance, the large Acklam Wold Barrow 5, 24m in diameter and standing 3m high, was opened by ‘sinking a shaft 10ft. in length from N. to S. and 6ft. in width [3m x 1.80m], to

YAC Barrow	Procter (1855b) ref.	Mortimer Barrow No.	Mortimer (1905) ref.
Acklam Wold 1	176–177	206	89
Acklam Wold 2	177	203	86
Acklam Wold 3	177	205	87–88
Acklam Wold 4	177	204	86–87
Acklam Wold 5	177–178	208	89–90
Acklam Wold 6	Ms account only	209	90
Acklam Wold 7	178	124	90–92
Acklam Wold 8	Ms account only	207	89
Acklam Wold 9	Ms account only	124a	92
Acklam Wold 10	Ms account only	211	92–93
Acklam Wold 11	Ms account only (not excavated)	212	93–94
Acklam Wold 12	Ms account only	202	85–86
Thixendale 1	179	183	183–185
Thixendale 2	179	41	181–183
Huggate 1	178	251	316–317
Huggate 2	178	247	314
Huggate 3	178	248	314
Huggate 4	178	246	313–314
Aldro 1	179–181	178	73
Aldro 2	179–181	174	75
Aldro 3	179–181	177	73
Aldro 4	179–181	180	73
Driffild 1	184	144	286–295

Table 2. Concordance of YAC excavations and Mortimer re-excavations.

a depth of 13ft. [3.96m] to the solid chalk rock'; and at Danes' Graves, near Driffeld, 'a very careful exploration was made by sinking a shaft nearly 8ft. [2.43m] square and the same in depth through the centre' of a 'large mound with a height of 5ft. [1.52m] and a diameter of 25ft. [7.62m]' (Procter 1864: ms account). The club's aim was simply to locate any central burial within the mound, but not below it. There are no references in any of the accounts to examining areas beneath the barrows. Overall, there is great superficial similarity with Mortimer's methodology; both he and they worked within an established methodological tradition. Although there were significant differences. In many respects Mortimer *was* different, far in advance of the majority of his contemporaries (for an overview, see Harrison 2009). In particular, he was more thorough and consistent, exploring larger areas of the barrows, looking for burials cut through old land surfaces beneath the enveloping mounds, as well as recording peripheral structures and details of mound construction and composition; and his observational skills were exceptional. Above all else, Mortimer believed in thoroughness.

The YAC did not usually note structures or stratigraphical relationships; essentially, there are far too few details in the published and ms accounts to allow much in the way of interpretation of structural elements and the phasing of barrows. However, the excavators did record skeleton orientations, sex, and position of any grave assemblages relative to the skeletal remains, but not details of the graves themselves, nor any structures found therein. The unpublished ms account of Acklam Wold Barrow 4 (Mortimer Barrow 204), opened in October 1849, gives an indication of the general level of observation, as well as drawing attention to the contemporaneity of inhumation and cremation rites:

At a depth of 3 feet [0.91m] the original deposit was found, consisting of a human skeleton, the head slightly directed to the NE, placed somewhat on the right side with the face to the N. The bones of the arms were flat on the chest, those of the legs parallel with the thighs which were bent at right angles to the body. The skeleton was that of a man of middle stature ... At a distance of 1 foot [0.30m] from the skull to the N was a small vase of clay of neat workmanship ... It contained a dark unctuous looking earth evidently abounding in organic matter ... Extending from the vase to the knees which were curiously discoloured as if scorched was a large deposit of burnt human bones ... Lying upon this heap of burnt bones were the fragments of a large bone pin ... which had evidently been exposed to the action of fire (Procter 1864: ms account).

By and large, more emphasis is placed on descriptions of the recovered skeletal material, particularly in relation to bone deformities. This is, presumably, a reflection of Procter's employment as a surgeon and Thurnam's consuming interest in physical anthropology, particularly in the long since discredited science of craniology that explored supposed racial differences as demonstrated by variations in skull shape. For instance, in discussing a skull from Acklam Wold Barrow 1, Procter wrote:

The skull is full size being twenty-one and three-quarter inches in circumference. Its size must in part at least be attributed to the unusual thickness of the bones, that of the parietal being half an inch thick, and that of the frontal bone as much as three-quarters of an inch in thickness. The general appearance of the bones suggests the possibility of this thickness being the result of disease (Procter 1864: ms account).

Occasionally details of mound composition are recorded, but not systematically and in only superficial detail, and contrasts with Mortimer's more acute observations. Certainly, no sections appear to have been drawn. In summing up the four barrows excavated at Aldro in August 1853, Procter wrote:

With regard to the materials of which they are composed, considerable uniformity prevails: the surrounding flints and rubble form the greater part of the mounds, sometimes intermixed with clay; and, in by far the larger number of cases, this substance was found about the spot of interment and bottoms of cairns. Though this clay is found in greater quantity below the chalk, in some instances it must have been transported from a considerable distance to the barrow (Procter 1855b: 181).

He offers a little more detail in respect of two of those sites. One (Aldro Barrow 2) comprised 'layers of carbonaceous matter, mixed with unctuous matter and clay containing human bones, with a few of the horse and bird' (Procter 1855b: 180). The other (Aldro Barrow 3):

Was composed of chalk rubble, mixed with small flints and layers of clay. After digging between 4 and 5 feet [1.21m–1.52m], a peculiar efflorescent matter, covering the clay mixed with charcoal, was arrived at, and below this numerous large and flat pieces of the natural rock, laid in some order and with some resemblance to a cairn; these layers of stone were followed to some distance, but yielded no results (Procter 1855b: 180–181).

Stone-built features encountered during excavation were recognised and commented on, as with the small cairn of fire-cracked flints beneath the enveloping mound of Thixendale Barrow 2, but no interpretations advanced. However, there was no appreciation of the nature of decayed timber and turf structures: the ‘sandy soil’ of Acklam Wold Barrow 1 is suggestive of a turf-constructed mound, not recognised as such at the time.

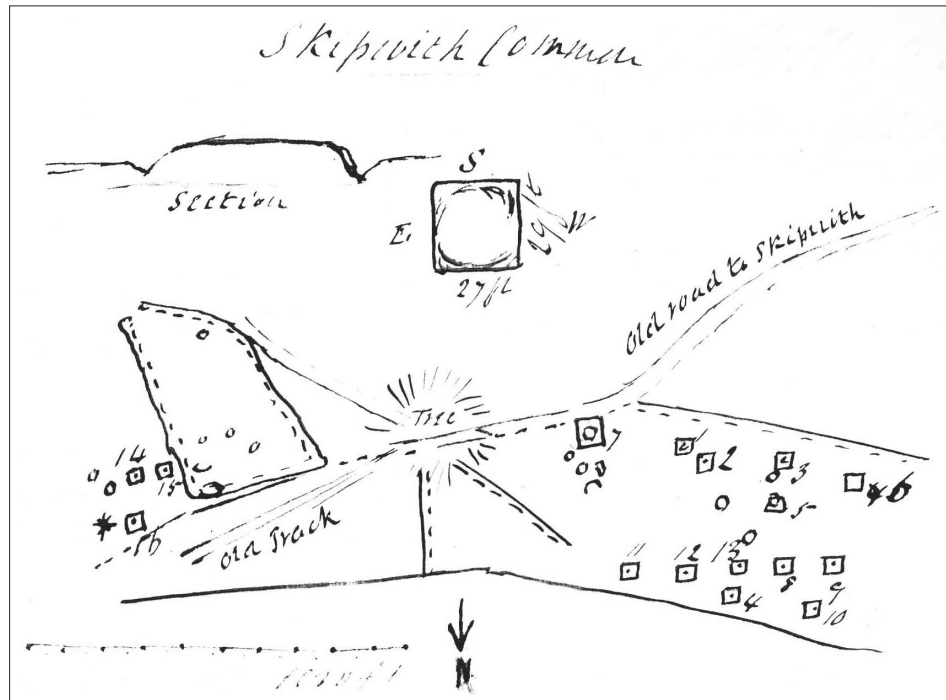


Figure 4. Plan of Skipwith Common barrows (source: Procter ms; © Yorkshire Philosophical Society).

The reports sometimes mention the presence of surrounding barrow ditches, but only in those instances where they still formed visible upstanding features. In this respect, given the excavation techniques employed, the absence of ditches was probably more apparent than real (c.f. Mortimer). However, from surface evidence alone, the club was probably the first to recognize and record the distinctive square ditched barrows of the Iron Age Arras Culture, at Arras, Skipwith Common and Thorganby Common (Procter 1855b: 182, 187–189). The fullest description occurs within the Skipwith report:

The appearance of the fossae, in which the tumuli are set, is very distinct, and the even sharp aspect of the little oval trenches remains. It was ascertained, by measure, that most of the tumuli are set in square fossae, as if the angles were more depressed than the other parts; by the compass it was clear that they had been set out by the cardinal points, north and south, east and west (Procter 1855b: 187–188).

A further one hundred years were to elapse before the archaeological significance of this piece of field observation was to be fully appreciated (see Stead 1979: 7–11).

A number of the individual barrow accounts refer to previously unrecorded openings. Procter mentions imperfectly backfilled earlier excavations and the finding of disturbed burials. He states that the motive for such activity, undertaken in an *ad hoc* manner by farmers and local villagers during the early part of the nineteenth century, was the anticipation of unearthing ‘treasure’. In this respect, he



recounts an interesting story concerning Acklam Wold Barrow 9 (Mortimer Barrow 124a), which was not examined by the club:

as we were informed that it had been opened a few years since by a person from a neighbouring village who had dreamed on three successive nights that treasure was contained in it. Upon opening it he is said only to have found a stone cist containing a human skeleton (Procter 1864: ms account).

Like their contemporaries, the club could not put forward any close dating theories for most of the sites they excavated. With the exception of the barrows at Driffild (Mortimer Barrow 144) and Sowerby, which, because of the number of secondary Anglo-Saxon interments they encountered, were assigned to that period, all other sites were simply designated as 'British'. The criterion used for differentiating 'British' from Anglo-Saxon burials was 'that the latter people interred in large heaps rather than separate tumuli' (Procter 1855b: 189).

Interpretation was ambiguous and uncomfortable. The YAC worked on the assumption that the 'numerous earthworks consisting of trackways, dykes and barrows' that they encountered were all contemporary and represented the physical remains of part 'of an extensively populated Brigantian territory'. Beyond that, Procter could do no more than write:

The determination of the period of this Brigantian district is almost entirely a matter of speculation, but there are some facts which may guide to an approximation respecting their age. Supposing the whole series to be contemporaneous, bronze implements must have been used at that period, as is evidenced by the Celt found at [Ampleforth] Riggs. Coupled with the undoubted evidence which occurs of the contemporaneous practice of cremation and burial of the body; the extensive and complicated entrenchments mark long time and settled occupation, perhaps stretching over the whole period from very early Brigantian into Romano-British periods (Procter 1855b: 181–182).

As well as attempting to assign a date to the structures they excavated and observed, club members sought to understand the spatial relationships which they perceived as existing between the 'trackways, dykes and barrows', and to integrate the whole into an overarching interpretative narrative. In doing so, they anticipated the work of such pioneering landscape historians as W. G. Hoskins by more than a century. A particularly pertinent illustration of this approach is to be found in Procter's discussion of the sites on the high Wolds:

The line of tumuli thus examined extends across a considerable portion of the east Wolds, from Acklam to Huggate and to Arras, if that place can be included in the series. This district certainly formed part of an extensively populated Brigantian territory, which had its boundaries much farther northward and eastward; and traces of its ancient inhabitants are abundantly left in the numerous earthworks consisting of trackways, dykes, and barrows. The part, from its elevated situation, supply of herbage and water, and vicinity to the sea coast, was one well calculated to supply all the simple wants of a rude people. The well marked line of double dykes extending from Acklam to beyond Huggate, may be looked upon as belonging to the class of rural fortifications to some of which the Romans gave the name *Oppida*; constructions required by a people leading a pastoral life, who dwelt within the bounds of entrenchments surrounded by forests, and adopted at a period later than the mere pits and rings (Procter 1855b: 181).

Or this deduction from their work on Skipwith Common:

The sandy hill is the stronghold – the dykes are lines of defence – the enclosure, with openings on its sides, becomes an ancient cattle enclosure; the oval rings on its margin are herdsmen's huts; the other rings are bases of dwellings; and the tumuli are the peaceful repositories of the peasants, among whose few bones neither weapons of war nor instruments of chase were wasted (Procter 1855b: 189).

In this, Procter was echoing the work of the eighteenth century antiquarian Francis Drake, who in a paper of 1747 associated the linear earthworks of the Yorkshire Wolds with Roman defensive works. It was not until the later nineteenth century and the considered approach of J. R. Mortimer and his

associate the Rev. Edward Maule Cole that these features were seen to date to before the Roman conquest (Cole 1888, 1890; Mortimer 1905).

The last recorded excavation performed under the auspices of the YAC appears to have taken place in September 1855 at Sowerby, now on the southern outskirts of Thirsk, on the estates of Lady Frankland Russell, where they continued an investigation already begun by the landowner earlier that same month (Procter 1855a: 24–25). Thereafter, its role as an active field group dedicated to excavation ceased. In reality, this marked the end-point of the club's short career as a reasonably high profile institution. It still continued, however, to hold bi-monthly meetings in Archbishop Holgate's School Room, York, at which papers were read and artefacts exhibited, but, clearly, the impetus had disappeared along with its *raison d'être*. Despite an exhaustive documentary search, it has not proved possible to pinpoint exactly when or why the club ceased to function altogether. In general terms it had disappeared from view by the late 1850s or early 1860s. A number of possible factors can be put forward for the club's demise: the death of its leading activists; increased competition from such figures as J. R. Mortimer and William Greenwell, who were beginning their enthusiastic – and prolific – barrow opening campaigns on the Yorkshire Wolds during the early 1860s; and the formation in 1863 of the Huddersfield and District Archaeological Society, which rapidly became a county-wide force with influential patrons, and whose change of name in 1870 to the Yorkshire Archaeological Society reflected its growing prominence within the county as a whole. It is perhaps worth speculating that the club's demise owed much to Phillips' departure for Oxford; throughout its existence, he had been the main driving force behind YAC's activities, providing a great deal of focus and direction and influential leadership.

Any assessment of the work of the Yorkshire Antiquarian Club must be judged against the background of those standards prevailing at the time. Throughout its brief existence, the club was a responsible body, whose members, coming together in a fruitful and stimulating collaboration, took their work seriously. They were not interested in accumulating objects for their own sake, but, by concentrating their activities in a clearly defined geographical area, in adding to the sum of knowledge. In pursuit of this, the club displayed, unconsciously and in common with many other similar organisations, a militant localism, which was, in turn, a response to the pressures of Victorian capitalism and the wider centralising forces displayed by an increasingly interventionist state during this period. Having a developed sense of locality was to be in possession of an identity and a genealogy. To explore and uncover the past of an area was to enrich that genealogy, as well as provide an affirmation of the role of provincial culture in a society increasingly prone to defer to the emerging central authority of nineteenth century England. This contrasts strongly with the activities of many of their contemporaries, who were more interested in plundering sites in order to add to their own private collections or to supply, for a price, antiquities, as *objects d'art*, to the upper and emerging middle classes.

Again, unlike the explorations conducted by many of their more serious contemporaries, the club's

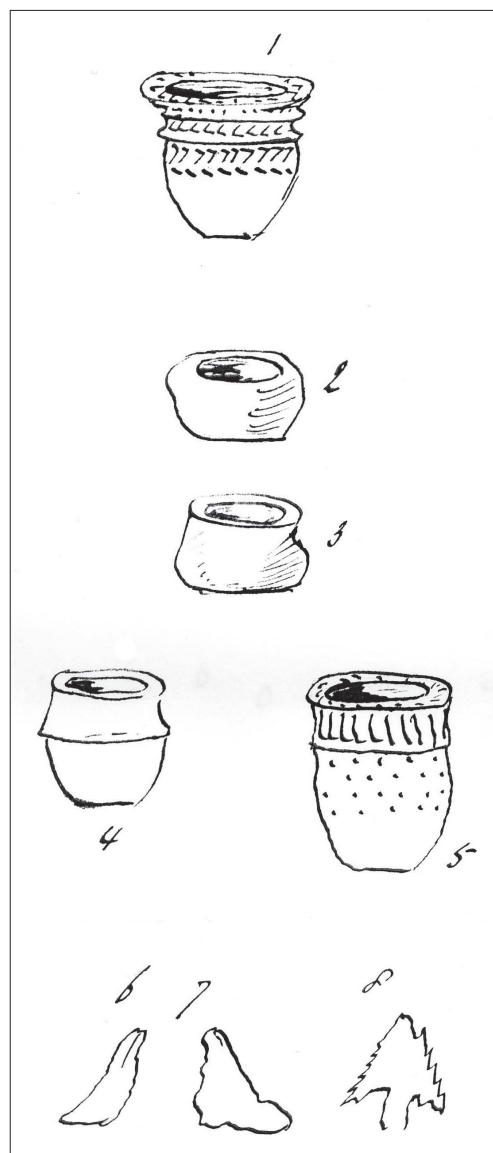


Figure 5. Artefacts from Ampleforth barrow openings (source: Procter ms; © Yorkshire Philosophical Society).

excavations, despite the inherent limitations resulting from their poorly developed methodological approach, were carefully and properly conducted, and compare favourably with the work of, for example, Bateman and, to a lesser extent, with that of Mortimer.

However imperfect, the club did, at least, keep records. These allow the individual sites to be identified with greater or lesser degrees of accuracy, provide provenanced – if not stratigraphical – contexts for the finds discovered, and, from the detailed descriptions of the skeletal material and position of any accompanying cultural material, give an insight into burial practices. (Unfortunately, however, many of the recovered artefacts cannot now be traced; those few that do survive are to be found in the collections of the Yorkshire Museum at York.) Furthermore, Procter was aware of the importance of publication as a means of disseminating to a wider audience the knowledge accumulated from their endeavours. All this contrasts particularly with the work of contemporaries James Ruddock and James Silburn, both operating in 1849–1852 in the Pickering and Pocklington areas respectively, and who both failed to keep detailed accounts of their activities.

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