

Two previously unidentified Motte and baileys within east Devon

by
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Although the earthwork features atop Bushy and Buckerell knaps have previously been recorded, their antecedents have remained enigmatic. Over the years suggestions for the origins and usage of the earthworks have varied from prehistoric to modern and from natural knolls to barrows and defensive outworks. Perhaps the only element of discussion to be consistent was, these features were not convincing as medieval castles. Between 2002 and 2004 the Heritage Lottery funded, University of Exeter and Devon County Council joint run Community Landscapes Project (CLP) carried out a detailed survey using volunteers that provided information that has led to the belief, these were indeed the remnant earthworks of two opposing medieval motte and baileys.

Bushy Knap ST131010 is a natural knap/knoll sitting at the southern-end of a ridge that divides the Devon parishes of Awliscombe and Buckerell. At the opposite northern-end of the 800m long ridge is a second natural knap known as Buckerell Knap ST127014. Bushy knap is situated at the highest point of the southern edge where the ridge is widest (90m), however Buckerell Knap although the narrowest (30m) point is the highest point on the ridge as a whole. The land slopes away relatively steeply in all directions with the villages of Awliscombe (east) and Buckerell (west) linked by a footpath, which crosses over the width of the ridge running directly past the earthwork features of Bushy Knap. Both Buckerell and Bushy are natural Knaps, which have been artificially scarped and both show signs of robbing from the centres of the mounds.

Buckerell Knap

monument ID 1848

Planning shows the top is flat and has a kidney bean-like profile and is 25m x 15m stands just under 3m in height above the 1st inner base-court to the south, but twice as high when measured from the northern, western or southern sides. The mound base is approx. 55m in diameter. An encircling base-platform (varying between 4-7m across) to the mound breaks the natural slopes of the Knap and is thought to be the result of artificial steeping the sides of the motte-like mound. At the southern extent is the inner base-court, which is 19m x 20m long making it appear almost square and level and separated from the motte-like mound by a 6m wide ditch. The Outer-base court, un-like the inner-base court, is not level, but follows the natural north to south downward slope of the ridge. The lack of levelling has also resulted in a lower outer ditch height that is only 4m wide but much steeper in the cut. Where the outer ditch run around the outside of the inner court to the east it has been overlain by the creation of a parish boundary probably in the 12th century.

Bushy Knap

Monument ID 11509 + 75239

Planning at Bushy Knap shows the base of the motte-like mound to be approx. 65m in diameter at the base 25m in diameter on the levelled top and approx. 4m high. The area of the bailey-like feature is kidney-shaped and approx. 50m x 35m. Still visible is earthen banking and a 6m break (suspected entrance) which appears on opposite the

motte-like feature with the Buckerell/Awliscombe footpath running immediately by. There are signs of disturbance to the south and north of the features, however these have been explained as marl pits and associated loading platforms.

The positioning of a motte and bailey atop Buckerell Knap has all the defensive requirements of an early post-conquest setting dealing with the Southwest uprisings of 1067-9, as suggested for Castle Neroche, Somerset. (Davidson, 1971-2). A build at such a time could implement Ralph de Pomeroy and his brother William de Cheever since the majority of their holdings are situated in the east of Devon and cluster densely around this location. The employment of the natural prominence in height, steep gradient of the sides and narrow approach has been offset by the addition of a second, perhaps later, bailey to give greater living space. In stark contrast the positioning of a motte and bailey atop Bushy Knap whilst having the benefits of space to accommodate a better-known single bailey design, has clearly given little consideration to defence. Unlike Buckerell it does however, also profit from an incredible view-shed all the way to the south coast of Devon and may well have had the added opulence of an attached deer-park directly below.

This leads to the conclusion that Buckerell was the initial post-conquest motte and bailey and well situated to protect the land and health of the Pomeroy family. Later during less turbulent times a new or second motte and bailey was built, perhaps by the same persons but certainly by those with enough money to make such grand gestures, was created with all the lavish trimmings more as a stately home required of land gentry of the time.

Bibliography

Davison B.K. 1971-2, 'Castle Neroche: an abandoned Norman fortress in south Somerset', Somerset Archaeol. Natur. Hist. 116: 16-58