

EARTHWORK IN STAVERTON FORD PLANTATION, DARTINGTON,  
DEVON  
REVIEW AND SURVEY



EARTHWORK IN STAVERTON FORD PLANTATION, DARTINGTON, DEVON  
REVIEW AND SURVEY

By Stewart Brown Associates

2018

*SUMMARY*

*An archaeological survey was carried out on an earthwork site in Staverton Ford Plantation, Dartington. At present, prior to any excavation, the site is interpreted as of probable medieval date and its likely purpose is as a hunting lodge or warrener's lodge, although earlier origins cannot be ruled out. Previous surveys and descriptions of the site carried out in 1980 and 2000 are reviewed.*

THE PROJECT

Dartington Hall Estate commissioned a review and survey of an earthwork site interpreted as the remains of a medieval hunting lodge in Historic England's scheduled monument description (the site is listed as a part of the scheduled monument referred to as the 'deer park' - List Entry Number: 1020870; Appendix 1, below). The work was carried out to better understand the monument in order to inform its future management.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE EARTHWORK

(Fig. 1)

**Prehistoric**

The area immediately surrounding the site contains four other earthwork sites whose origin dates from prehistoric and Roman times. In North Wood, there are three Iron Age hilltop enclosures, two at least of which were re-used in the Romano-British period (Historic England List Entry Number 1020381). In Chacegrove Wood, there is another hilltop enclosure of prehistoric date (Historic England List Entry Number 1020553). In addition, prehistoric flint finds, dated provisionally to the Mesolithic Period, have been collected from fieldwalking in a nearby field (Gloyns 2015). Moreover, Staverton Ford, an ancient crossing of the River Dart, lies only 250m to the northwest. The ford is said to have lain on an important prehistoric trackway (Joce 1911 and 1931).

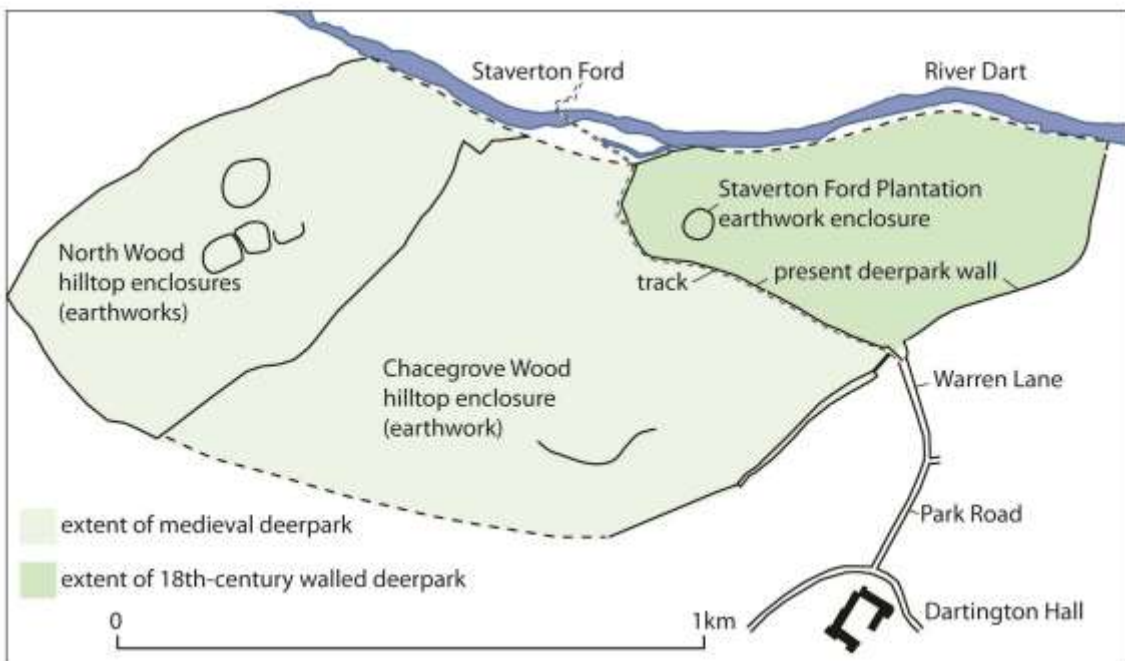
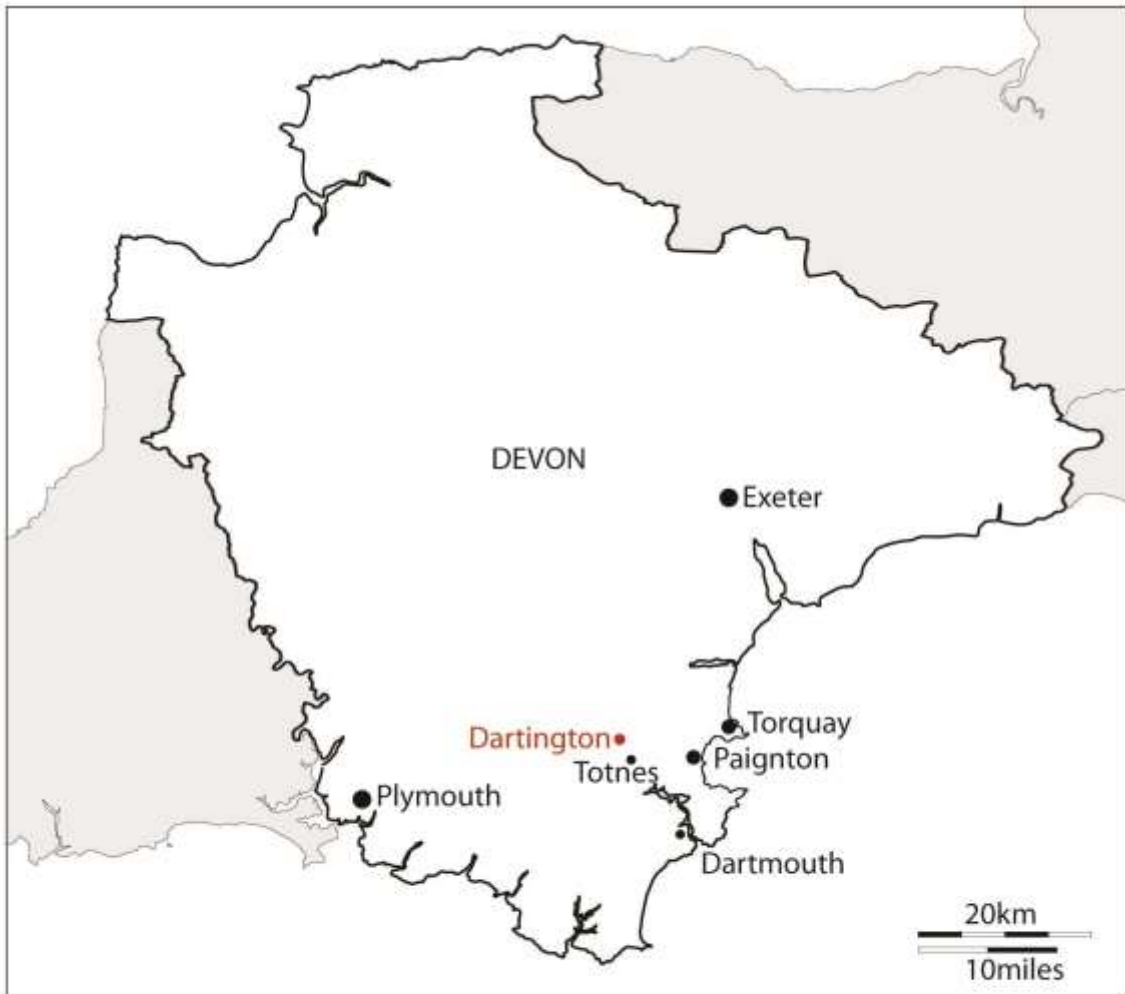


Fig. 1 Location of the earthwork enclosure site.

## **Medieval**

### *The Dartington manor*

Dartington is first mentioned in a charter of 833 AD. The manor belonged to William of Falaise at the time of the Domesday survey of 1086. It then passed through a succession of owners and tenants until the early 20th century, when it was broken up and sold off. In 1925 the remaining 800 acres was bought by Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst. It is now managed by the Dartington Hall Trust.

### *The medieval deer park*

The medieval deer park is first mentioned in 1325/6, when it is said to have enclosed 100 acres and was stocked with deer, but might have been in existence by 1293 when William Martin was granted free warren. Keepers of the park were appointed by the crown during periods in which the estate was held temporarily by the king, in 1387, 1509, 1514, and 1544. There is no deer park shown at Dartington on Saxton's map of Devon in 1575, nor on Speed's map of 1610, whereas the deer park at neighbouring Berry Pomeroy is shown on both. The park would seem to have deteriorated to a point where it was no longer regarded as functioning.

The Historic England scheduling description identifies a sequence of development of the deer park based on surviving earthwork remains; 'In the early 14th century, a chase of about 90 acres (about 36ha) was enclosed in North Wood, being extended to the east several times to create a complex park of approximately 315 acres (about 127ha). At its greatest extent there were two wooded chases, a semi-wooded coursing park at the east end, and two open pastures'.

There are two main areas containing earthwork remains from the medieval deer park boundary. One area, to the west, encloses what is now North Wood. The other, to the east, encloses North Park, with a linear extension running south-westward from the north end of Warren Lane. The scheduling includes the earthwork site in Staverton Plantation, which is interpreted as remains from a hunting lodge.

In the early 18th century, the deer park was revived for a short period as a scenic feature to ornament the setting of the house, rather than being an economic venture as the medieval park had been. The construction of the present deer park wall is recorded in a building

contract of 1738. The deer park is not shown on Donne's map of Devon (1765) whereas other deer parks are, including that at nearby Berry Pomeory. A map of 1803 shows that the park contained no established woodland, and a written description of the same year refers to the park as 'a large field dignified with the name of Park'. In the early 19th century, the park was given over to farmland and parcelled into fields and coppice plantations. The tithe map of 1840 shows a field boundary encircling the east and south sides of the earthwork (Fig. 8). The tithe award of 1839 describes the land to the southeast of the boundary as arable and that to the northwest as forestry plantation.

### PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEYS

A short article on the site was published in 1980 in the Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society (Silvester 1980). The article described the site as a 'platform enclosure', the date and purpose of which are obscure, and states that it had been recognised as an archaeological site only in 1978. The article includes an earthwork survey (Fig. 2).

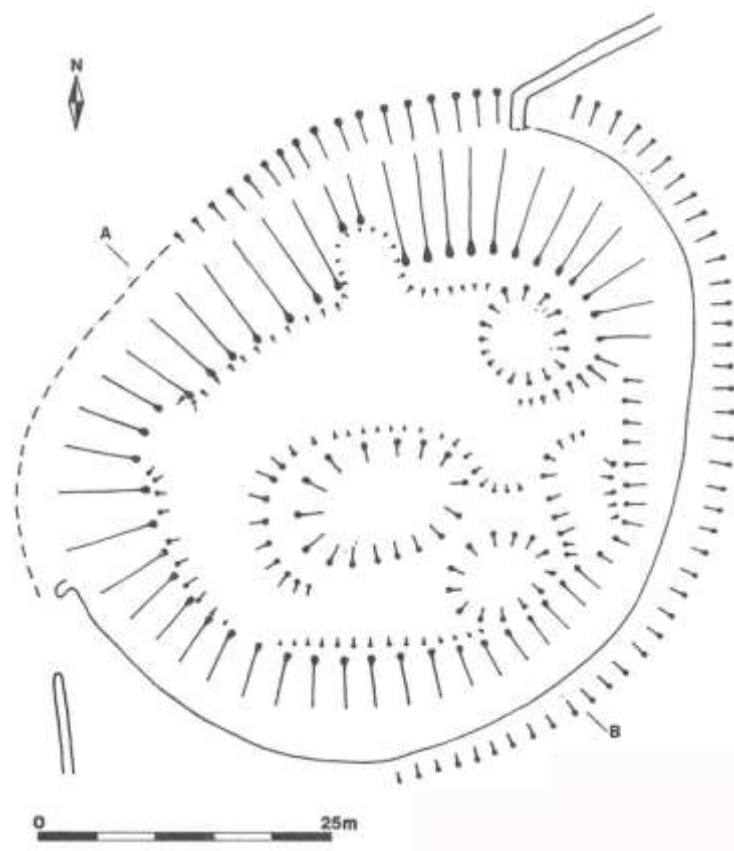


Fig. 2 Plan from Silvester 1980.

Further consideration was given to the site by Robert Waterhouse in the year 2000 when he produced notes for the Devon Rural Archive regarding the development of the deer park at Dartington and its features (Waterhouse 2000, unpublished notes). Robert's notes formed the basis for the subsequent English Heritage listing (2002), which he was asked to compile. A second earthwork survey was made about this time by presently unidentified surveyors (Fig. 3; provisionally ascribed to Robert Waterhouse, c.2000).

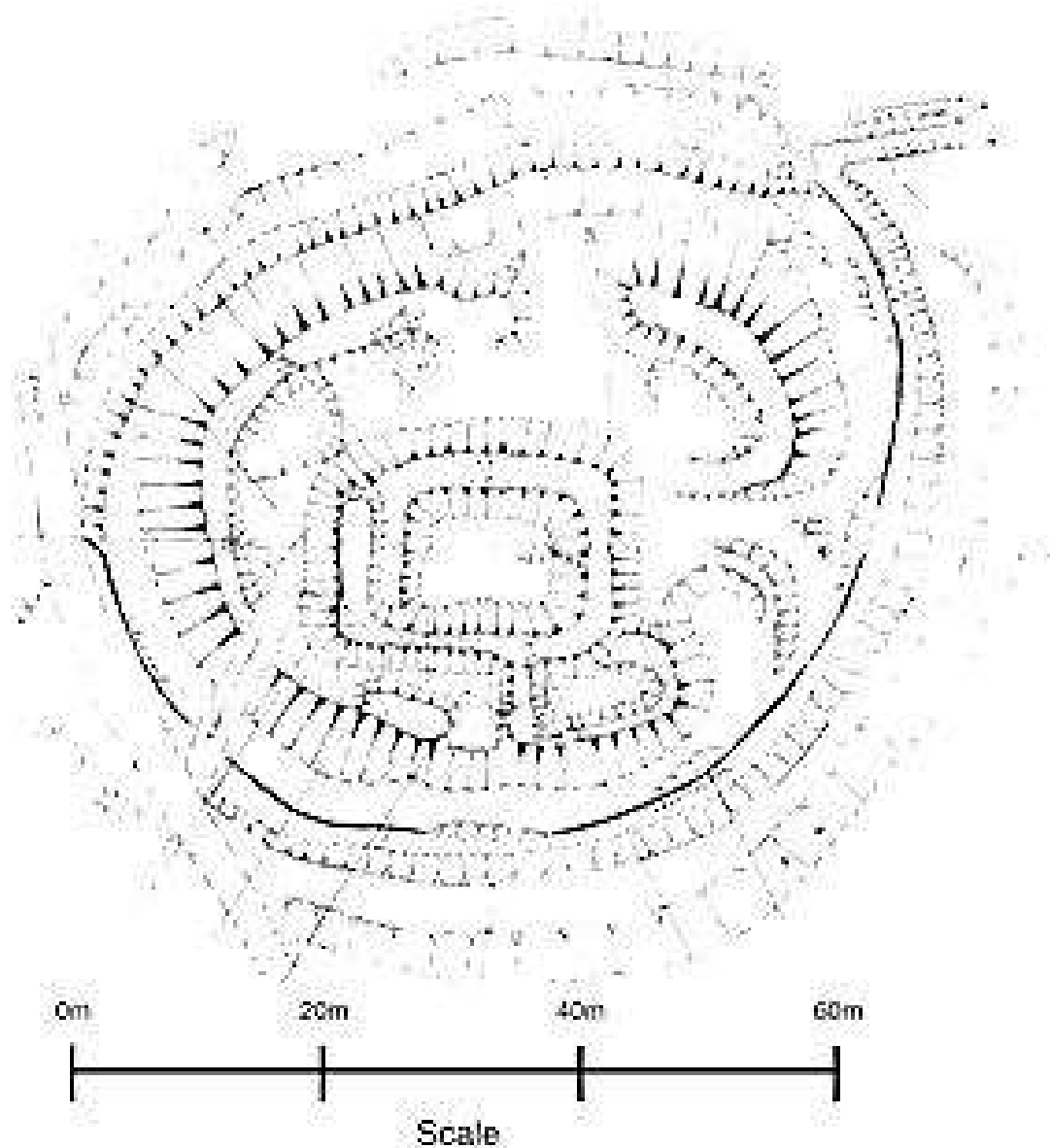


Fig. 3 Survey carried out c. 2000



THE 2018 SURVEY (Figs. 4-6)

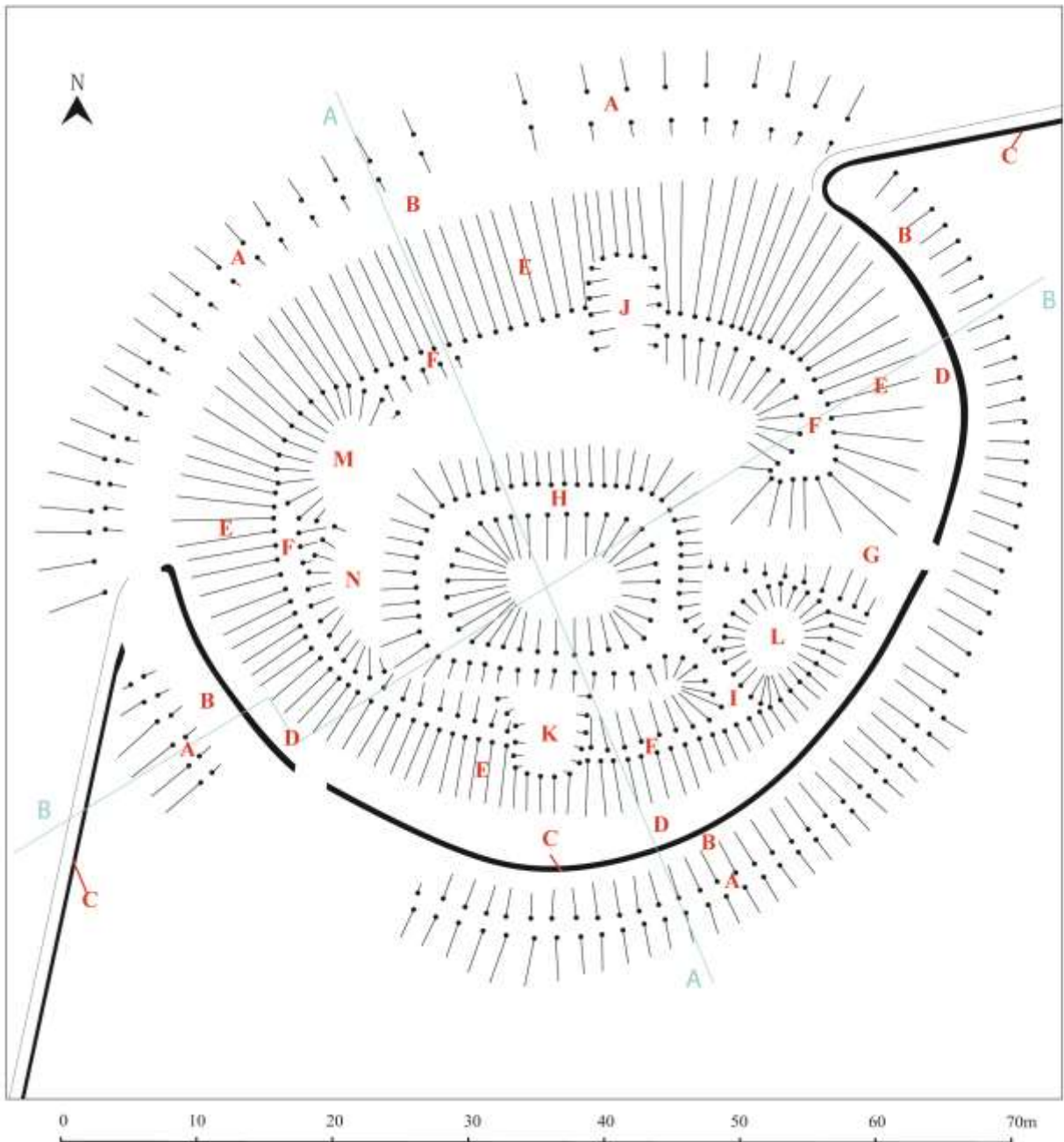


Fig.4 The 2018 survey plan.

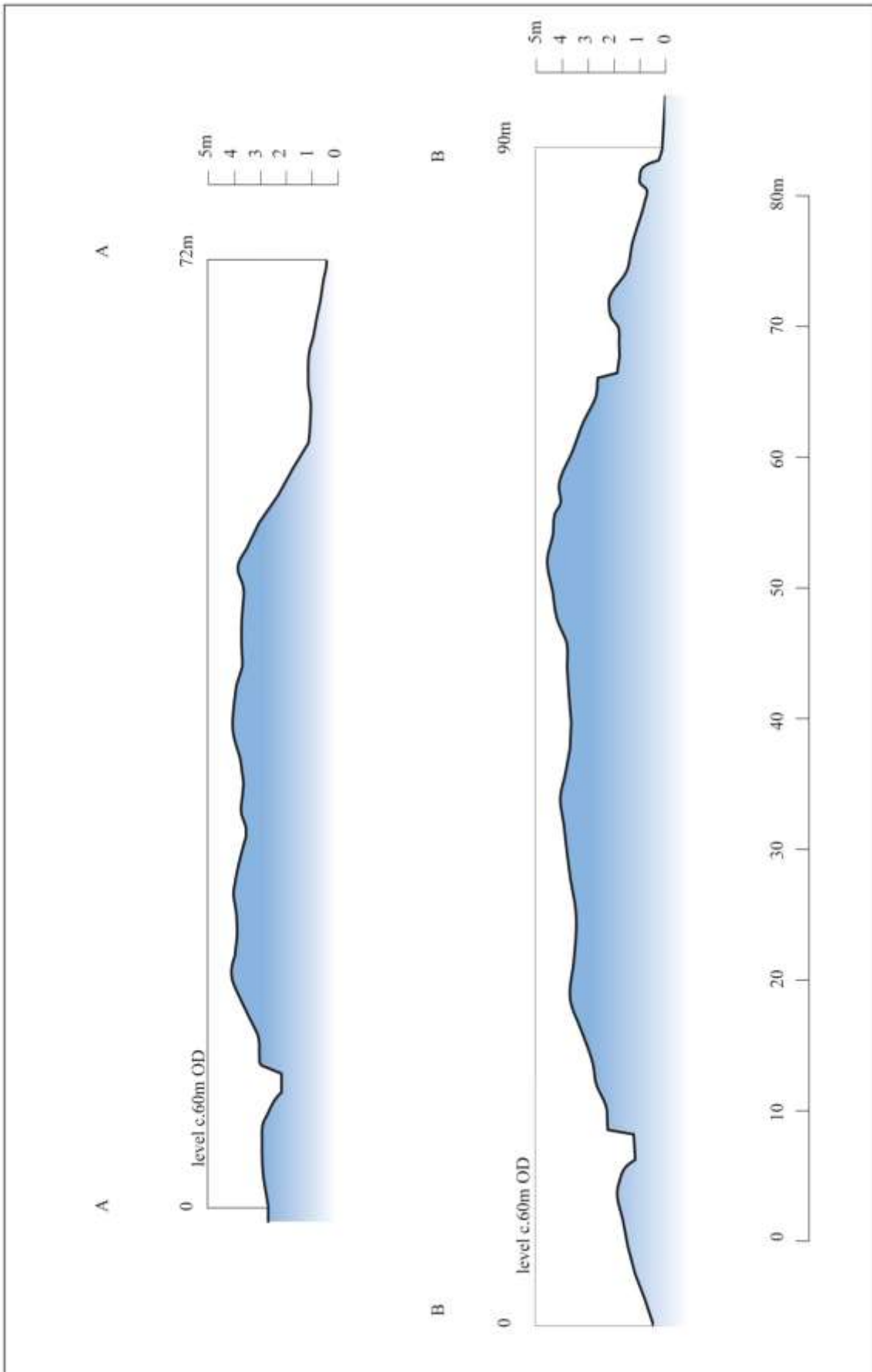


Fig. 5 Transect profiles AA and BB..



The 2018 survey was carried out using a level with compass gradations around its base for sighting, long tapes, ranging poles, and a level staff. The results comprise an annotated plan showing the principal earthwork features (Fig. 4), and two transect profiles across the site (AA north to south; and BB west to east; Fig. 5, the vertical scale is shown at 200% for clarity). A second, coloured plan shows post-medieval and modern intrusive features (Fig. 6). The height above sea level (Ordnance Datum) shown on the two profiles is given as an approximate figure (c.60m OD) since the Ordnance Survey contour map, which places a contour of 55m around the bottom of the ditch and spot height for the top of the mound (59.7m) are at variance (the mound actually rises between 2m and 3m above the surrounding ground level rather than almost 5m as suggested by the Ordnance Survey; Fig. 9). The survey was carried out in September following clearance by strimming of non-woody plants (leaving ferns). The site presently lies within a forestry plantation and has piles of cut wood and underbrush on it.

#### **Early features** (Fig. 4, A-L, and Fig. 5)

The outermost feature is a bank (A) with a ditch inside it (B). The bank survives up to 0.35m high and is on average 5m wide but has been eroded or levelled in places such that it is now scarcely visible. The ditch is on average 2m wide by 0.7m deep around the south and east sides of the site where it has been narrowed on its inside by the construction of a stone-revetted field boundary bank (C & D; see Later features, below). The ditch along this part of its course has also probably become partially infilled with silt owing to erosion of its sides, and so is now appreciably shallower than it was originally. The ditch on the north side is no longer visible since it has been infilled and is now obscured beneath a modern forestry track (see Later Features, below). Inside the ditch is an oval-shaped mound (E) measuring 60m W-E by 49m N-S which survives between 2m and 3m high. The ground surface on which it stands follows a natural slope downward from south to north toward the River Dart. At the top of the mound is a platform ringed by a perimeter bank (F) with an inturn on its east side which may mark the position of an original entrance (G). The bank survives on average 1.5m wide and 0.2m high but is hardly visible in places. Set a little further south than the centre of the platform area are remains from a rectangular structure (H) with a spur wall/bank extending from its southeast corner to the perimeter bank (I). The building remains comprise a broad bank of collapsed material on average 7m wide by up to 0.5m high surrounding a somewhat uneven hollow area inside. The shape of the bank is sub-rectangular (with rounded corners), but its outline is not consistent and difficult to plot precisely. The approximate

dimensions of the presumed underlying structure are 20m by 12m. The spur to the southeast appears continuous with the earthwork remains of the building.

Five other sub-rectangular or round hollow features up to 10m in diameter survive around the edge of the platform (J-N). Four of these cut across the line of the perimeter bank (J, K, L, M) and are therefore interpreted as later in date and not related to structures lying within the platform; Feature N lies just inside the perimeter but is less well defined than the others. All could be small stone quarries or tree-holes, ie hollows created by the uprooting of large trees (although one, J, has been previously interpreted as a cutting containing the abutment for a bridge; Waterhouse notes 2000, Historic England scheduling description 2002).

### Late features (Fig. 6)

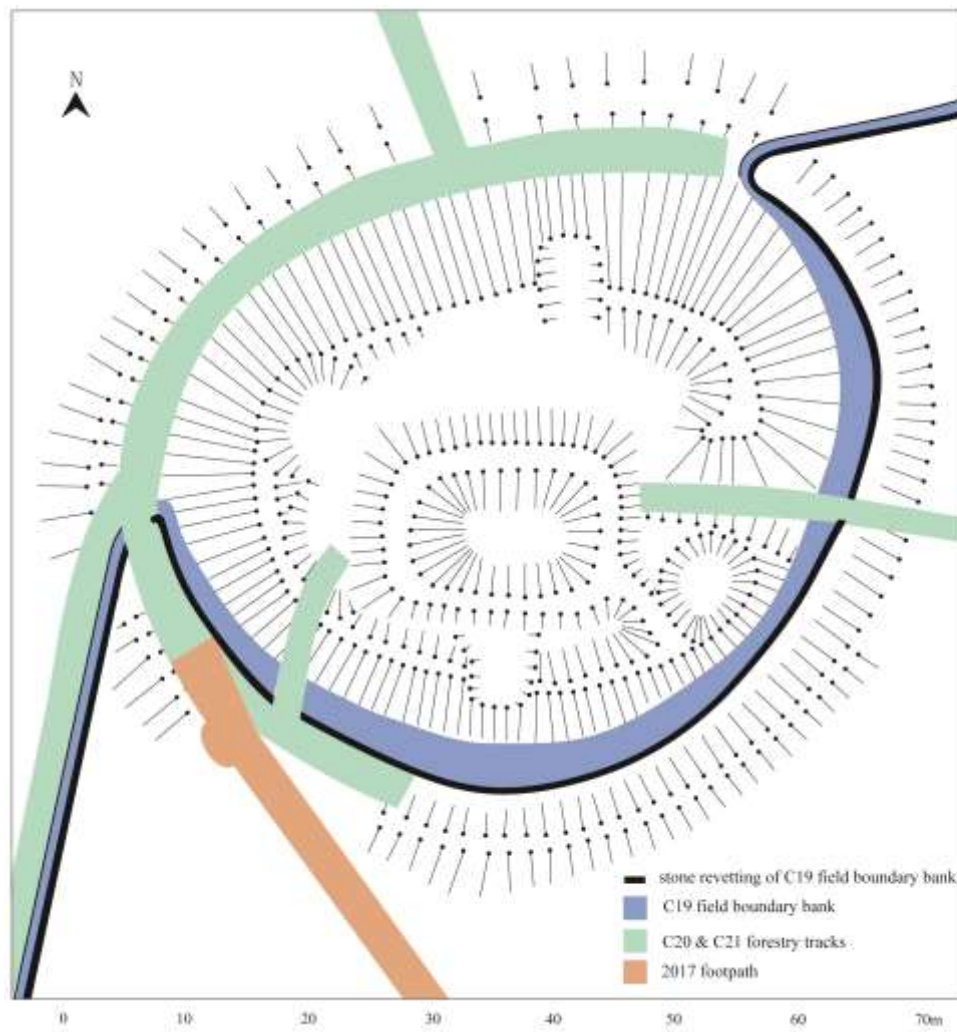


Fig. 6 Plan showing post-medieval and modern features.

The stone revetting along the south and east sides of the mound is a continuation of that facing the field boundary bank which runs up from the river (Fig. 7). The boundary is shown on the tithe map of 1840 as well as more recent OS maps (Figs 8 and 9). It probably dates from the late 18th or early 19th century when the early 18th-century deer park was divided up into fields for agricultural use.

The stone revetting is a rather crude, sloping facing of the earth bank made up partly of stones set in an upright position rather than being laid horizontally as in a wall (typical of post-medieval field banks in the area). The revetting is made up mostly of local sandstone but also contains some slate and fairly frequent limestone.

A flat strip of ground (or 'berm') behind the stone revetting, at the foot of the slope on the mound's south and east sides appears to be associated with the field boundary, since it extends only as far as the revetting and no further. It probably forms part of the boundary laid out around the foot of the mound in the late 18th or early 19th century and can be equated with the field boundary bank.

The site has been affected by 20th-century forestry tracks, some of which are still in use today. The principal track which passes the west side of the mound along part of the ditch is shown on the 1946-49 RAF aerial survey of England (available on the Devon County Council environment viewer), so is of considerable longevity. The tracks have been reinforced with stone chip metalling containing cement, slate fragments and modern ceramic artefacts. The present footpath created as part of the 2017 deer park interpretation scheme has been surfaced with further stone chip metalling, also containing slate fragments and modern ceramic artefacts.



Fig. 7 The stone revetting of the post-medieval bank surrounding the east and south sides of the mound.



Fig. 8 Extract from the tithe map of 1840, showing the field boundary.

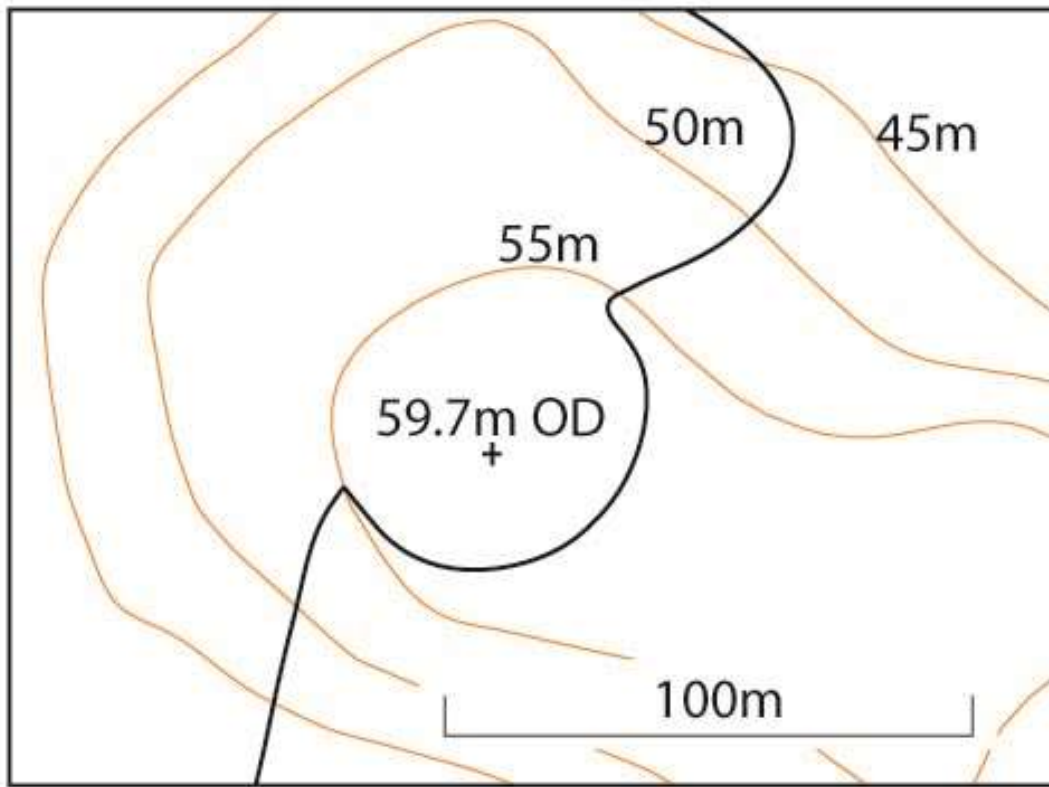


Fig. 9 Information from Ordnance Survey maps.

#### LIDAR SURVEY

An extract from the Environment Agency's Open Data Maps Lidar survey of England shows the site as a mound surrounded by a ditch (Fig. 10). A wider view from the same survey shows the site in relation to the neighbouring prehistoric earthwork sites in North Wood and Chacegrove Wood (Fig. 11).



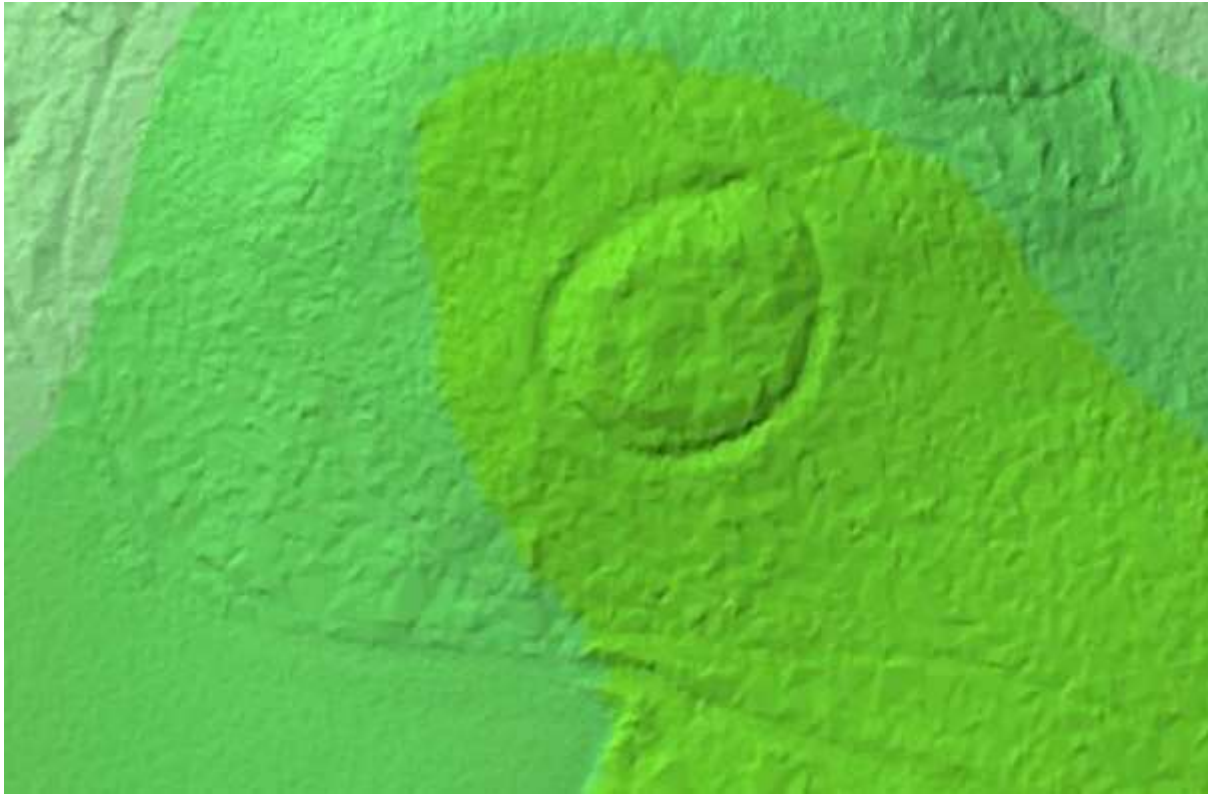


Fig. 10 Lidar Survey showing the monument, looking north.

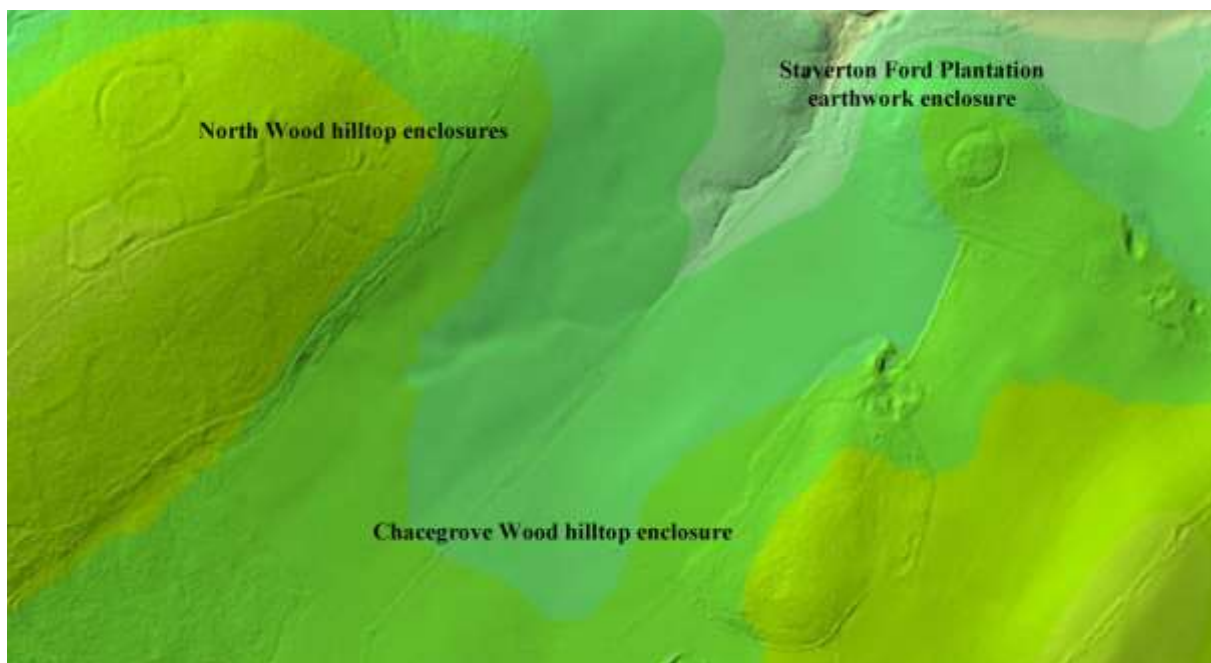


Fig. 11 Lidar Survey showing the monument and neighbouring earthwork sites, looking north.

## DISCUSSION

### *Survey*

The 2018 survey agrees with the two previous ones on the interpretation of the principal elements of the site, which comprise: the mound and ditch surrounding it; the perimeter bank surrounding the top of the mound; and the large central hollow surrounded by a bank indicating the site of a building. There are however minor differences between the three surveys regarding placement and shape of these features, but this might be expected in view of the slight and uneven nature of the earthworks. Silvester comments that the interior is irregular partly due to recent forestry activities, and the present writer concurs (for instance, a recently upturned tree stump has left a sizeable hole beneath it). The present survey agrees with that of c. 2000 in that the central hollow and bank is more rectangular than Silvester's 1980 survey, and both these surveys identify remains from a low bank outside the ditch, which the 1980 survey omits.

The main differences between the surveys are in the interpretation of possible entrances and the smaller hollows surrounding the large central one. Silvester notes that the perimeter bank has been 'breached at a number of points but the most likely entrance is on the lower, east side', where his survey shows an elongated hollow. Waterhouse says that there were entrances on the east and north, the latter with traces of a bridge abutment (Waterhouse notes, 2000, Appendix 2, below; survey c. 2000). The 2018 survey identifies an inturn of the perimeter bank on the east side (Fig. 4, G) which is interpreted as marking the main entrance. Silvester's 1980 survey distinguishes three 'well-defined shallow depressions.... and it is probable that these originally contained structures' (Appendix 3, below). The c.2000 survey and Waterhouse's 2000 notes describe an open forecourt to the north of the main rectangular building, and 'traces of lean-to buildings to its south'. The 2018 survey questions the two smaller building hollows conjectured by Silvester and the lean-to buildings suggested by Waterhouse, and interprets these simply as parts of the platform area contained within the perimeter bank, and not discrete features in themselves, although the spur wall/bank (Fig. 4, I) leading southeast from the main rectangular building could have supported a structure erected against it (the 2018 survey attempts to simplify the more amorphous features).

In addition, the 2018 survey shows four hollows which all cut across the line of the perimeter bank (Fig. 4, J, K, L, M), so these appear to be features belonging to a later, separate phase, probably of post-abandonment date. It appears that bank H encroaches upon hollows M and



N, suggesting that it is a later feature. Such a relationship could have come about if the broad bank H resulted from a long period of collapse of a structure stretching over many centuries, during which trees grew up around the perimeter of the platform, fell, creating tree-holes, which were later partly infilled on one side by the collapsed material from the building.

Precisely how the earthwork features at the top of the mound should be interpreted can only be resolved by excavation in the future.

### **Surface evidence**

Silvester's account of 1980 states with regard to possible buildings on the platform that there is 'no confirmatory surface evidence', meaning no visible structural remains or debris other than the earthworks. Waterhouse (2000) on the other hand relates that the rectangular building's 'walls were of mortared limestone and fragments of dressed red sandstone on the site survive from quoins or door jambs, while broken slates from the roof are commonly found on site'. In 2018, no traces of mortared masonry were noted at the surface of the platform, nor the architectural fragments and roofing slates mentioned by Waterhouse, although a number of small slate fragments was observed, mostly on the northern slope of the mound and along the forestry tracks, where they are associated with recent metalling of forestry tracks (mentioned above). It was also the case that in 2018 no limestone was noted at the top of the mound, in the vicinity of the rectangular building, but instead was confined to the stone revetting of the post-medieval field bank surrounding the mound's east and south sides (Fig. 4, C; mentioned above). To judge from surface evidence, the mound appears to be made up largely of loose local sandstone rubble and claysoil, both probably produced from digging the ditch.

### **Date and purpose**

#### *Possible early origins*

The dating of such earthwork sites is difficult without the aid of excavation to recover datable finds. Waterhouse in his 2000 notes suggests that the site probably has prehistoric origins, and this is repeated by A. Gray, who states that it is a medieval park lodge constructed within an Iron-Age settlement (Gray 2009, using Waterhouse's notes 2000). But Waterhouse omits this suggestion in his 2002 English Heritage list description, where he states that 'In Staverton Ford Plantation, there is a circular earthwork enclosure containing a medieval hunting lodge ...'. Silvester's 1980 account says that 'Morphologically the enclosure is

unlikely to be prehistoric or Romano-British, a medieval date being much more plausible'. Silvester and Higham back up the latter proposed dating by including the site in their published article 'Domestic Enclosures of Probable Medieval Date' (Silvester and Higham, 1980).

The Historic England website PastScape describes the site as a 'ringwork', which is a defensive bank and ditch, circular or oval in plan, surrounding one or more buildings. "Ringwork" is a term that can be used in any period. Some are interpreted as 'castle ringworks', a form of Norman castle dating from the late 11th and 12th centuries. It would seem unlikely however that this is the case with the monument in Staverton Ford Plantation since its features are too low, and one would expect a deeper ditch, higher rampart etc., although post-occupation changes can reduce earthworks substantially (Bob [Higham, castle expert, pers. comm.](#)).

The favoured interpretation amongst both past and present surveyors is a medieval site whose most likely purpose is a hunting lodge. The 2018 survey identifies only the central rectangular hollow and surrounding bank as the likely remains from a building, this being contained within a perimeter bank enclosing the platform at the top of the man-made mound. The other hollows may possibly represent buildings but there are reasons for believing otherwise (see above).

#### *Hunting lodges and warreners' lodges*

Hunting lodges vary from large establishments protected by a moat capable of accommodating a king or noble's travelling household (some of which developed into substantial country residences) to modest buildings intended only to provide temporary shelter for a hunting party, looked after by a keeper. Some had stone towers or timber grandstands from which onlookers could view the chase. A number of sites appear as hunting lodges in Historic England's list of scheduled monuments, including remains from medieval stone towers (eg Norton Tower and John of Gaunt's Castle, both in North Yorkshire), other substantial stone buildings (eg Ravesdale deer park lodge, Derbyshire; Neville Castle and Hall Garth, both in North Yorkshire; Harringworth Lodge and Dower House, both in Northamptonshire) and medieval stone buildings within prehistoric enclosures (eg Castle Ring, Cannock Chase, Staffordshire).

Hunting lodges have recently attracted academic interest. Winchester University, in collaboration with the New Forest National Park Authority, is undertaking a 'Royal Hunting Lodges Project' which aims to combine archaeological investigation with historical research to better understand a number of earthwork sites in the New Forest considered to be the remains of medieval hunting lodges constructed in the 14th or 15th century by order of the king. The lodge sites most commonly consist of a platform of about 40 square metres enclosed by a shallow but wide bank and outer ditch; some show signs of significant buildings (eg Queen Bower), others not. Investigations in 2016 and 2017 suggest that there is greater variety in the nature and function of these sites than previously thought (Everille 2017).

An earthwork site in Devon which is believed to have been a hunting lodge is in the deer park belonging to Okehampton Castle, where there are remains from an L-shaped stone building and adjoining garden or yard set within a trapezoidal enclosure; the building dates from c.1300, the date of the creation of the deer park, but the site has an earlier history, perhaps as a farmstead (Okehampton Castle and Park, *English Heritage Archaeological Investigation Report Series AI/03/2004*, site 52, pp 42-51; information from Professor Oliver Creighton)

Lodges were also built for warreners, who were employed to manage small game. Perhaps the best known are the surviving examples at Thetford (Norfolk, built c.1400) and Mildenhall (Suffolk, built c. 1320), which are associated with rabbit warrens in the Breckland of East Anglia (Figs 13 and 14). A research organisation called the Breckland Society was set up in 2003 and has produced two publications: *The Warrens of Beckland* (2010) and *The Internal Archaeology of the Breckland Warrens* (2017), the latter including a chapter on 'Sites of the Warren Lodges', which describes the purpose of the lodges as 'accommodation for the warrener and family; storage for trapping equipment and carcasses; and a look-out and defence against poachers'. Both Thetford and Mildenhall lodges are rectangular, tower-like stone structures (Figs 13 and 14). The others survive only as earthworks. Earthwork sites elsewhere include a probable medieval warrener's lodge and garden set within prehistoric Dolebury Hillfort, Churchill, North Somerset; this comprises a circular stone-wall c.73m in diameter surrounding a knoll on which stand remains from a well-built rectangular masonry structure measuring c. 20m x 10m (Bowden 2009, 10 and Fig. 12; Fig. 15). This site provides a reasonably close parallel for the Dartington earthwork in both form and size, including similar dimensions of the building.



Fig. 13 Thetford warrener's lodge (photo. English Heritage).



Fig. 14 Mildenhall warrener's lodge (photo. Friends of Thetford Forest).

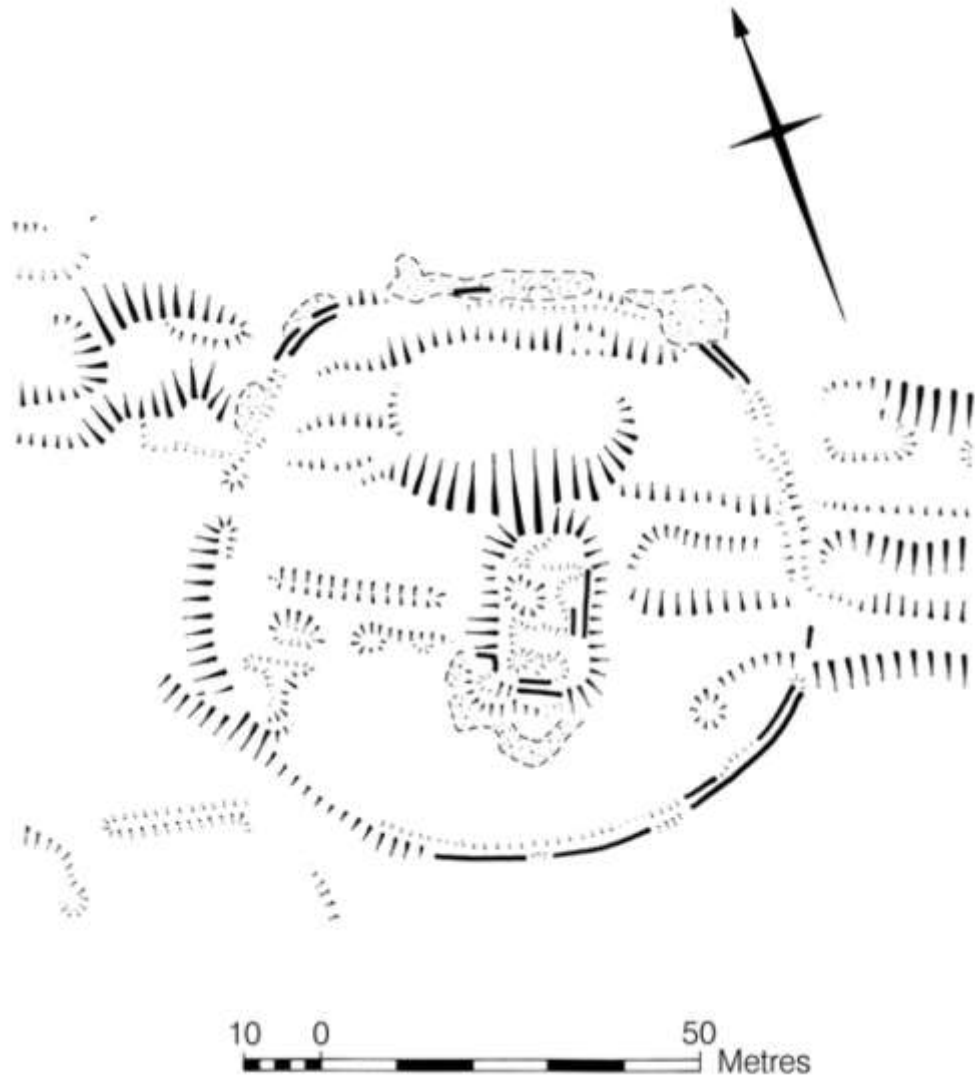


Fig. 15 Dolebury Hillfort, the circular enclosure earthwork, the probable warrener's lodge and garden.

Some Elizabethan and Jacobean surviving examples of hunting lodges and warreners' lodges were ostentatious structures, such as the three-storied and gabled Triangular Lodge built for his warrener by Sir Thomas Tresham at Rushdon, Northamptonshire, and the three-storied hunting lodge/banqueting house with circular angle turrets, also known as The Stand, at Chatsworth House built c.1582 for Bess of Hardwick.

The Dartington tithe map of 1840 shows a field named Warren along the west side of the present Warren Lane 400m to the southwest, just outside the deer park wall, but this seems too distant to have been directly associated with the earthwork.

## CONCLUSION

In order to make further progress on interpreting the site it will be necessary to carry out an archaeological evaluation (limited excavation/ trial trenching). This will require Scheduled Monument Consent from Historic England (who determine whether such an intervention is appropriate), plus further funding.

At present, the site is interpreted as of probable medieval date and its likely purpose is as a hunting lodge or warrener's lodge, although earlier origins cannot be ruled out.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks are due to Carrie Blogg of the Dartington Hall Trust Heritage Revealed Project, who initiated the project, John Channon, Estate Manager of the Dartington Hall Trust, who arranged for the site to be cleared of vegetation prior to the survey, and to Dave Robinson, archaeological site assistant, who helped with the site survey.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### PUBLISHED

- Bowden, M. 2009 'Dolebury Hillfort, Churchill, North Somerset. Analytical earthwork survey', *English Heritage Research Department Report Series* no. **59-2009**.
- Gray, A. 2009 'Devon Rural Archive. A new Research Resource' *The Devon Gardens Trust Journal*, **2**, 33.
- Joce, T. J. 1911 'An Ancient British Trackway', *Trans. Devonshire Ass.* **43**, 262-8)
- Joce, T. J. 1931 'Goatpath', *Trans. Devonshire Ass.* **63**, 307-10.
- Silvester, R. 1980 'An enclosure in Staverton Ford Plantation', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **38**, 119-21.
- Silvester, R. and Higham, R. 1980 'Domestic Enclosures of Probable Medieval Date', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **38**, 63-66.

### UNPUBLISHED

- Everille, P. 2017 'New Forest Historical Research and Archaeology: who's doing it?' paper presented to the New Forest Knowledge Conference 2017  
(<https://nfknowledge.org/contributions/excavations-at-the-royal-hunting-lodge-at-church-place>)



Gloyns T. S. 2015 'Field Walking Report 2015: Dartington Hall Estate - Staverton Ford'  
(available from the Dartington Hall website; <https://www.dartington.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Staverton-Ford-2015-report.pdf>)

APPENDIX 1 extract relating to the earthwork site from EH Scheduling listing description 2002 (by Robert Waterhouse)

In Staverton Ford Plantation, there is a circular earthwork enclosure containing a medieval hunting lodge which measures 73m across its visible earthworks. The enclosure rises 1.7m above the surrounding land and contains an earthwork of a rectangular stone building, aligned east to west and measuring 13m wide and 20m long. Its walls are from 1m to 3m wide and survive up to 0.7m high. Short lengths of wall on its south side create small additional rooms against earthworks of an ovoid stone curtain wall which measures 29m from east to west and 41m from north to south. The wall is from 2m to 3.5m thick and rises between 0.6m and 1m from the interior, falling up to 1.5m outside. An entrance 3m wide in the east side has inturns from the curtain wall 2m long, while on the north side, an entrance 2m wide has traces of a stone abutment for a timber bridge across the outer ditch. Outside the curtain wall, a sloping berm between 4m and 6m wide, falls 0.4m to the lip of an outer ditch 3m wide and 1m deep. An upcast bank is 6m wide and from 0.2m to 0.5m high. In the post-medieval period, two stone faced woodbanks 2m wide and 1m high were built up to the north and south sides of the enclosure, and limestone facing built against its south east side, forming two projecting horns, with woodland within.

APPENDIX 2 Extract from Field notes by Robert Waterhouse 2000 for Devon Rural Archive

1388-1400

.....The west end (of the deer park) contains a large ovoid embanked and ditched earthwork, probably of prehistoric origin, with entrances on the east and north, the latter with traces of a bridge abutment. A wall around the outside of the earthwork encloses a large rectangular



building with an open forecourt to its north and traces of lean-to buildings to its south. The walls were of mortared limestone and fragments of dressed red sandstone on the site survive from quoins or door jambs, while broken slates from the roof are commonly found on the site.

This structure was probably a 'standing', or lodge from which to view the hunt, the deer being driven into the west end of the park before being shot with bows in view of the standing. Lodges of this type are more common in southern and eastern England, suggesting construction by a well-connected landowner, perhaps John Holand, Earl of Huntingdon, between 1388 and 1400, although it is not impossible that the building dates from the Champernowne period, after 1559.

APPENDIX 3 text from R.J. Silvester's published article in PDAS 1980

#### AN ENCLOSURE IN STAVERTON FORD PLANTATION

The South Hams is one of the less promising regions in the county for the archaeologist searching for the surface remains of settlements. Agricultural practices have certainly obliterated many earthworks on the relatively fertile soils which must have supported considerable numbers of settlements from the later first millennium BC onwards. With hillforts such as Loddiswell Rings and Stanborough Camp, the scale of the defences had ensured their survival, while the preservation of lesser settlements is often fortuitous. The small Romano-British farmstead at Stoke Gabriel is located on a rarely cultivated limestone plateau (Masson-Phillips 1966), and the best preserved house platforms of medieval date at Ilton Castle, near Salcombe, were until recently covered by an orchard. Although aerial photography will play an increasingly important part in the recognition of plough-eroded archaeological features, one suspects that some earthwork sites still await discovery by the fieldworker. The purpose of this note is to draw attention to a newly-recorded earthwork near Totnes and consider the significance of its discovery for future research in Devon.

The site in question is a small platform enclosure (SX 795634) located in Staverton Ford Plantation on the Dartington Hall Estate (Fig. 2). On the hilltop to the west is an important group of three conjoined enclosures dated to the Roman period on the basis of finds from an unpublished excavation in 1966-67, and a separate enclosure a few metres to the north which may be their Iron Age predecessor. While these have been familiar to local archaeologists for

many years, the platform site was recognised only in 1978 even though the tell-tale line of the field boundary which curves around it is depicted on large-scale Ordnance Survey maps.

The platform is of irregular oval shape with maximum internal diameters of 44 m NE/SW and 31 m NW/SE. The best preserved section of the defences on the north side shows a scarp bank slightly over 2 m in height with an external ditch which becomes increasingly silted to the south. On the east and south sides the lower part of the bank has been cut back and faced with a stone wall, a continuation of the field boundary which runs up from the river.

Although the profile is thus mutilated the outer side of the ditch is still visible. The interior is irregular partly due to recent forestry activities, but shows three well-defined shallow depressions. A large central hollow, 11 m by 7 m, is accompanied by two smaller ones on the perimeter of the platform and it is probable that these originally contained structures although there is no confirmatory surface evidence. The bank has been breached at a number of points but the most likely entrance is on the lower, east side.

The date and purpose of the earthwork are obscure. It is sited close to the edge of a gently sloping spur above the River Dart less than 300 m from the ford which seems to have given its name to the village of Staverton on the opposite bank of the river. Although the ford itself is not visible, the earthwork commands trackways leading from it. Morphologically the enclosure is unlikely to be prehistoric or Romano-British, a medieval date being much more plausible. As such it falls within the group of sites listed in the appendix to the Dunkeswell report (see p. 63ff) and is reminiscent of the slightly larger earthwork on Castle Hill, Stowford. Any speculation about its relationship to the manor of Dartington which was in existence in the late Saxon period, and the deer-park, established by the 13th-14th century, within which it lies, is unlikely to be fruitful based on such meagre evidence.

The additional significance of the site relates to its woodland location which has played no little part in preventing its detection until now. Nor is it a coincidence that the four enclosures in North Wood, Dartington are amongst the best preserved earthworks in the south of the county. The amount of natural woodland in Devon is considerable but on the whole it is all too readily ignored by archaeologists, both professional and local, because of the problems posed by undergrowth. Yet the effort of a woodland search can often be worthwhile. The three enclosures in the Lyd Valley on the west side of Dartmoor (Silvester and Balkwill 1977) are all tree-covered and this factor has contributed to the preservation of the slight

internal features at South Longridge which would certainly have been destroyed if cultivated for any length of time. Many of the Devon hill-slope enclosures remaining in reasonable condition are similarly located.

However, the problems of discovery and survey in a wooded environment cannot be ignored. The earlier excavators at Dainton were unable to produce a detailed plan of the settlement on the Common, and although it is not explicitly stated, one suspects that the vegetation played an important part in this. More recently a survey of the fieldbanks on neighbouring Kerswell Down has been hampered by the dense undergrowth, yet without a plan it will be impossible to understand the layout of the field system and evaluate its importance. In exceptional conditions aerial photography may indicate the presence of an archaeological feature covered by woodland but is of little help in interpretation. Fieldwork is the only viable method of understanding these sites. For areas such as the South Hams where earthwork sites are at a premium the systematic search of woodland should provide valuable new information.

My thanks are due to those who helped in the survey of the site: Cara Allison, Jim Bellchambers, who also was responsible for drawing my attention to the site, and Michael Mitchell who also produced the final publication plan. Norman Quinnell and Bob Higham visited the site and have discussed it with me, although I take full responsibility for what is written above.

## References

- Emery, A. (1970) *Dartington Hall* (1970).
- Masson-Phillips, E. N. (1966) 'Excavation of a Romano-British site at Lower Well Farm, Stoke Gabriel, Devon', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Expl. Soc.* **23** (1966), 3-34.
- Silvester, R. J. & Balkwill, C. J. (1977) 'Three hill-slope enclosures in the Lyd Valley, West Devon', *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* **35** (1977) 81-84.