

MORLEY MOUNDS, THE HORSLEY CONNECTION

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The purpose of 'The Mound' at Morley has intrigued many. Educated guesses have ranged from its being a Roman survey post for the nearby Rykneld Street, to its acting as a Medieval meeting place for the village of Morley (Cockerton 1977, 15). However, the earliest and perhaps most persuasive argument has been that the mound was erected by the Normans, based on its resemblance to a typical motte. A truncated cone, today with trees rooted in the grassed over flanks, it rises about 7m from a base roughly 20m across to a flattened summit 3m in diameter (Pl. 1). A moat still filled with water almost surrounds it.

Early authorities assert that the mound must have been raised for some defensive purpose, although J. W. Allen has cast doubt on this idea (1954, 86). He considers it would have been too small for more than a handful of men to defend. Instead he points out that the mound is situated on the highest point of Morley Moor and suggests that it was built as a lookout post to keep track of hunting parties. However, a warlike purpose is perhaps more likely.

In 1214/15 William de Ferrers, Earl of Derby, was battling against King John's rebellious barons (Hall 1986, 36). William judged the nearby Horsley Castle to be a safe home for his wife, but in such turbulent times he would have striven to control as wide an area as possible. The castle at Duffield, before its destruction by 1266, dominated the lands to the west. To the east there was no comparable stronghold.

Here 'The Mound' at Morley would have provided a welcome extension to the 'eyes' of the garrison at Horsley, because the two are likely to have been intervisible, taking into account the height of the stone keep at Horsley. This would have enabled a line of sight to pass over the swell of Drum Hill to 'The Mound', where the occupants may also

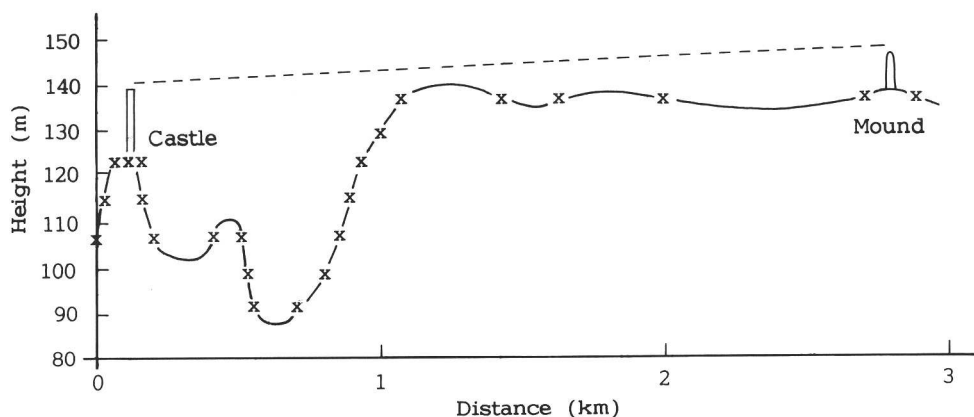


Fig. 1: Contours and sight lines between Horsley Castle and 'The Mound'.



Plate 1 'The Mound' at Morley.

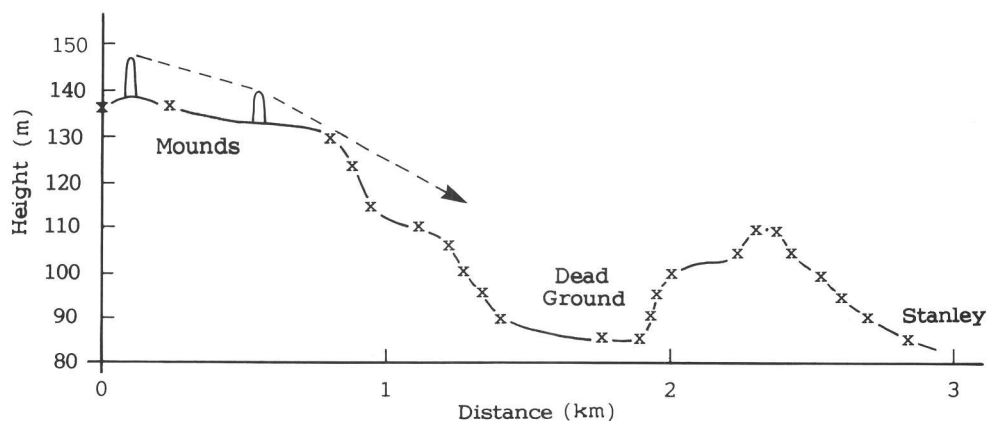


Fig. 2: Contours and sight lines between the two mounds at Morley, and eastwards towards Stanley.

have been elevated on a wooden tower. Figure 1 shows the height of the land along this sight line, plotted from the intersection of the contours on a 1:10000 map. The castle at grid reference SK 376432, is taken to be a conservative 15m high, and 'The Mound', at SK 392410, to be 8m high.

Today both sites are hidden by trees. The remains of Horsley Castle are quite difficult to find in the middle of a small wood. Not much more than the stump of a stone wall

about 3m high is left, topping a rocky ravine on the brow of the hill. 'The Mound' is in the corner of a farm field and is veiled by trees in summer. A farm track skirts a thick hedge before swerving suddenly to round the moat. The sight line between 'The Mound' and castle is now delineated by pylons of the National Grid, which pass 100m from 'The Mound' and march in an almost straight line for 3km to pass within 350m of the castle. Trees mask the full distance, but from 'The Mound' it can readily be appreciated where the top of the keep would have looked out over Drum Hill, much as today the water tower at Quarndon appears above the trees of Allestree Park.

Although there are extensive views from 'The Mound', to the east there is an expanse of dead ground hidden beyond the edge of Morley Moor. Is it possible that the second mound at Morley was raised as part of the military strategy to overlook the fields towards Stanley? About half the size of the first, this flat-topped conical hillock is in a field next to Morley Churchyard. It has no moat and an area of broken ground probably indicates where the soil was dug to raise it. Figure 2 was constructed in the same way as Figure 1 and shows the sight line between the two mounds and beyond, in the direction of Stanley village.

It must be admitted that this attempt to solve the mystery of the two mounds at Morley is no more than informed guesswork and assumes an unusually astute castellan familiar with the idea of observation and signal stations, despite there being little evidence from elsewhere of such tactics having been employed by the Normans.

REFERENCES

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