

METRIC SURVEY OF A POSSIBLE NEOLITHIC  
ENCLOSURE ON GITTISHAM HILL, DEVON  
In the Footsteps of Peter Orlando Hutchinson Project

By Hazel Riley



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OASIS PROJECT NO: 153165

### ABBREVIATIONS

AONB Area of Outstanding National Beauty

DRO Devon Record Office

EH English Heritage

GPS Global Positioning System

HER Historic Environment Record

NMR National Monuments Record

OS Ordnance Survey

POH project In the Footsteps of Peter Orlando Hutchinson project

RICS Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors

SAM Scheduled Ancient Monument

### FIGURE LIST AND IMAGE ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Photographs and plans by Hazel Riley

Front cover POH project team clearing the site before survey could take place

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## ABSTRACT

A large scale survey of an earthwork enclosure, comprising two concentric, circular banks, on Gittisham Hill, East Devon, was undertaken as part of the *In the Footsteps of Peter Orlando Hutchinson* project, run by the East Devon AONB. The segmented nature of the enclosure banks and its relationship with a Bronze Age round barrow which overlies the inner bank, indicate that the enclosure could date from the Neolithic period.

## INTRODUCTION

The survey at Gittisham Hill is part of the *In the Footsteps of Peter Orlando Hutchinson* project, run by the East Devon AONB and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Sid Vale Association (Keith Owen Fund), Devon County Council, East Devon District Council and Natural England. This project, building on the work of the recent Parishscapes project (East Devon AONB 2010), aims to raise awareness of landscape change, to help conserve and enhance historical features and to continue the legacy of volunteer study and involvement in landscape heritage ([eastdevonaonb.org.uk/IntheFootstepsofPeterOrlandoHutchinson](http://eastdevonaonb.org.uk/IntheFootstepsofPeterOrlandoHutchinson)).

### Location, topography and geology

The enclosure lies c 250m to the SE of the summit of Gittisham Hill, at an altitude of 248m OD, in the parish of Gittisham and within the East Devon AONB, at SY 1476 9627 (Fig 1). Gittisham Hill is a long, narrow ridge of heathland which overlooks the valley of the River Otter at its north end and Sid Vale at its south end. The ridge top of Gittisham Hill is formed from rocks of Cretaceous age, mudstones, sandstones and limestones of the Upper Greensand and Gault formations (British Geological Survey [bgs.ac.uk](http://bgs.ac.uk)).



Fig 1 Location map

Together with Farway Hill, Burnt Common and Broad Down, Gittisham Hill is part of the ridge which forms an important routeway across the area, linking the settlements of Sidford and Sidmouth, Ottery St Mary and Honiton. The enclosure and round barrows on Gittisham Hill lie at the heart of an extensive prehistoric ceremonial landscape which has been the subject of study since the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **SITE NUMBERS**

Enclosure: part of Scheduled Ancient Monument 101252; EH NMR SY19NW 26; Devon HER MDV 15899

Round barrow on enclosure: part of Scheduled Ancient Monument 101252; EH NMR SY19NW 22d Devon HER MDV 10936; Hutchinson 26

Round barrow east of the enclosure: part of Scheduled Ancient Monument 101252; EH NMR SY19NW 22c; Devon HER MDV 10935; Hutchinson 25

### **PREVIOUS WORK**

The round barrows on and east of the Gittisham Hill enclosure were mapped by the OS in 1806 (Fig 2). In 1869 Kirwan partially excavated the large round barrow which lies just to the east of the enclosure. The central part of the mound, a cairn of flints, was not disturbed and no artefacts or burials were found (Kirwan 1870, 299; Hutchinson 1880, 126). At about the same time, Hutchinson located the barrow which overlies the enclosure, but the enclosure was not identified at that time (Hutchinson 1880, number 26).

Norman Quinnell discovered the enclosure, during fieldwork for the OS Archaeology Division in early March 1982, when it was described as 'barely perceptible under tufty grass and bracken' (EH NMR SY19NW 26). He surveyed the enclosure later on that month, after the vegetation had been burnt for management of the heath, and interpreted the earthworks as a Bronze Age ritual monument with a round barrow overlying the inner bank (EH NMR SY19NW 26).

By the 1990s the vegetation was once again obscuring the enclosure. In autumn 1991 it was 'defined by bracken and vegetation' and in November 1992 the enclosure was 'difficult to make out in bracken growth' (visit by C J Wardle, Devon HER MDV 15899; Simpson and Noble 1993, 16). A proposal that the Gittisham Hill enclosure



*Fig 2 OS map of 1806 showing the barrows on Gittisham Hill and Farway Hill*

should be scheduled was made in 1993 (Simpson and Noble 1993, 6) and in 1996 it was scheduled (EH National Heritage List for England 1014252). In 2003 the site was difficult to define under long tussocks of grass and only the west part of the enclosure was found (East Devon Heathlands Archaeological Survey report).

The Gittisham Hill enclosure was considered in a major reassessment of the Farway barrow complex; its relationship to the barrow was discussed, with a suggested date for the enclosure as the earlier part of the Bronze Age (Jones and Quinnell 2008). A field visit by Phil Planel, Pete Youngman and the author in December 2011 located the barrow but the enclosure was not visible under dense vegetation. In early spring 2013 POH project volunteers cleared the vegetation and most of the area was carefully cleared with a line trimmer.

## THE SURVEY

### Survey method

The fieldwork was carried out on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2013, following intensive clearance work by the POH project team, volunteers and a skilled contractor (Front cover). This clearance showed the details of the earthworks for the first time since the discovery and survey of the enclosure in 1982. The vegetation is such that the earthworks could only be surveyed in the cleared areas (Fig 3).

The earthworks which make up the site were surveyed at a scale of 1:250 using survey grade differential GPS (Fig 4). Two section lines were surveyed across the enclosure to record the profiles and heights of the earthworks (Fig 6). The GPS-derived geodetic WGS84 coordinates were transformed to the OS National Grid (OSGB36) using the OS grid transformation (OSTN02) in Leica's GPS post-processing software. Observation times were based on those recommended by the OS and the RICS in order to obtain accurate heighting information (OS 2010; RICS 2010).



*Fig 3 Looking NE along the SE part of the enclosure showing how the vegetation masks the earthworks where clearance has not taken place*

## Description of the earthworks

The site comprises two elements: a circular enclosure and a round barrow. The enclosure is defined by two concentric banks. The profiles (Fig 6) show the slight nature of the banks, which appear to be composed of earth or turf with a small amount of stone visible in places. The banks are well defined to the south and west of the enclosure where the outer bank is 2m wide, 0.1-0.3m high, the inner bank is 3-4m wide, 0.1-0.3m high and they are 2m apart (Fig 5). The banks have a segmented appearance, with distinct rises and falls along both the inner and outer banks. These do seem to be an original feature of the enclosure rather than later disturbance of the earthworks. A gap through the outer bank just to the right of the barrow coincides with a gap in the inner bank (which has been modified by recent disturbance) and could be an original entrance into the enclosure (Fig 7).

The inner bank has been disturbed to the north and east of the enclosure, although a small cleared area does indicate that it continued through the east side. The outer bank is well defined and its orientation indicates that the enclosure was intended to be a complete circular feature in the landscape (Fig 8). This is confirmed by the RAF aerial photograph (1946-1949) which shows the enclosure as a complete, circular monument. The segmented nature of the banks can also be seen (Fig 9).

A small round barrow lies in the SW part of the enclosure; it is a flat-topped, circular mound, 12m in diameter and 0.5m high. The top of the mound has been disturbed by animal burrows. The barrow clearly overlies the inner bank of the enclosure (Fig 10).

## GITTISHAM HILL ENCLOSURE IN THE LANDSCAPE

### Interpretation and dating

The Gittisham Hill enclosure was interpreted as a Bronze Age ritual monument after its discovery, on the basis of its location, morphology and its relationship to the round

*Fig 5 Looking NW along the enclosure earthworks on the west side of the site*



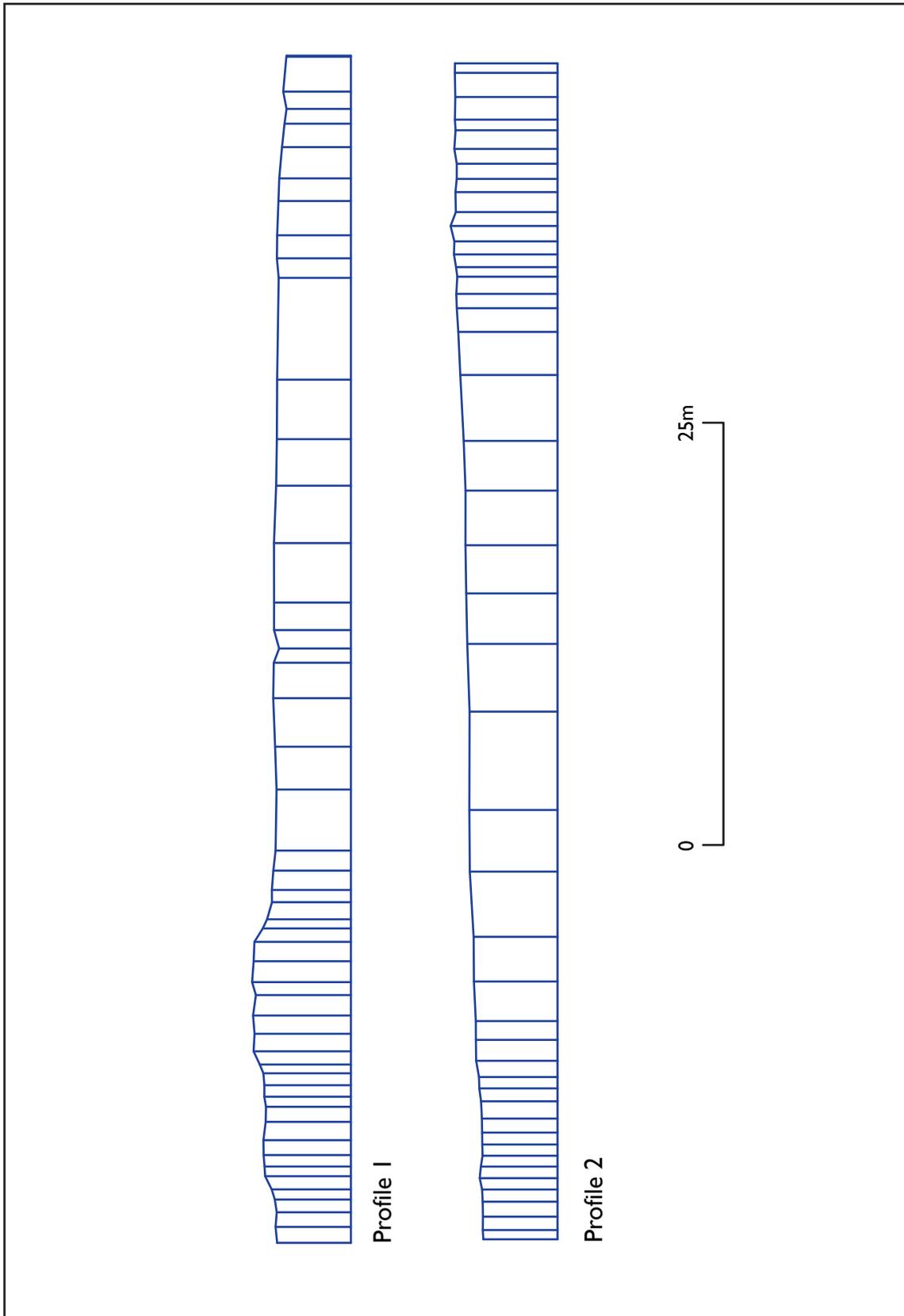


Fig 6 Profiles across the enclosure (horizontal scale 1:250; vertical scale 1:125)

*Fig 7 The outer bank south of the barrow showing the segmented nature of the bank*



*Fig 8 (right) The outer bank at the NE side of the enclosure is well defined*



*Fig 9 (below) Aerial photograph of the enclosure in the 1940s (RAF 1946-1949)*





Fig 10 The round barrow overlies the inner enclosure bank (marked by ranging pole)

barrow (EH NMR SY19NW 26). The site was considered in a major reassessment of the Farway barrow complex and it was suggested that the enclosure dates from the earlier part of the Bronze Age (Jones and Quinnell 2008, 53).

The enclosure on Gittisham Hill is part of the Farway barrow complex. It is sited just to the south of the summit of the hill. A barrow lies over the enclosure and a second barrow is sited just to the east of the enclosure. Farway Castle, in a similar location just to the south of the summit of Farway Hill, lies 1.5km to the SE. It is a circular enclosure, defined by a bank and ditch with evidence of an outer bank in places, enclosing an inner area 50m in diameter – very similar in size to the Gittisham Hill enclosure (Riley 2011). The location of these two enclosures, at the heart of the round barrow cemeteries, suggests that they are some of the earliest elements of this prehistoric landscape.

The morphology of the Gittisham Hill enclosure does suggest an early date. The concentric banks and their segmented nature have parallels with earlier Neolithic enclosures, which can be circular or near circular (Oswald *et al* 2001, fig 4.6). The association with later Neolithic or Bronze Age round barrows is also seen at several earlier Neolithic enclosures, for example the causewayed enclosure at Combe Hill, East Sussex, lies just off the summit of Combe Hill and is flanked by three round barrows (Oswald *et al* 2001, fig 8.5), while large round barrows overlie the ditches of the well known causewayed enclosures at Whitesheet Hill and Windmill Hill in Wiltshire (Oswald *et al* 2001, figs 2.8 and 8.3).

Eight kilometres to the SW of Gittisham Hill, south of Mutters Moor and west of Sidmouth, is the earlier Neolithic site at High Peak, where excavated material includes stone axe fragments and leaf arrowheads (EH NMR SY18NW 26).

Fig 11 Tithe map of Gittisham parish 1838



The Gittisham Hill enclosure cannot be dated by the earthwork evidence alone, but that evidence, together with the context given by the High Peak material, does indicate that an earlier Neolithic date for the enclosure should be considered. Equally, the enclosure may have been constructed in the later Neolithic/early Bronze Age.

#### Medieval and post medieval history

The form and survival of this slight prehistoric monument has been influenced to a certain extent by the medieval and post medieval use of Gittisham Hill. In the medieval period the hill was used for common grazing. Rights of Common on Gittisham Hill are documented in 1257 when Richard de Lumere granted 'common of pasture throughout the whole hill of Gydesham' to the abbot and convent of Dunkeswell. The abbot and convent 'may have in the same pasture all the year in places not tilled (if they pleased) 30 beasts and 250 sheep and if they would not keep sheep there, then 40 beasts and this to be always at their own election'. These rights were leased to tenement holders in Werringstone Manor in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (DRO 49/9/1/20). This continued into the post medieval period, when quit rents of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century show that some farms had rights of common on Gittisham Hill (DRO 1077/Marker of Gittisham deposit). In 1838 Gittisham Hill or Common was owned and managed by Rev Thomas Putt at Combe House, and is 'furze etc' (Gittisham tithe map and apportionment, 1838) (Fig 11). The tracks across Gittisham Hill converge at Putt Corner and run to the south of the enclosure; one veers off to the NW and skirts around its SW edge (Fig 9).

Fuel was cut on Gittisham Hill – presumably turf or peat – by tenants of Werringstone Manor in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century (DRO 1077/Marker of Gittisham deposit). Turf or peat cutting areas have been identified on Gittisham Hill (Simpson and Noble 1993, 5). These run east-west between the enclosure and the large barrow east of the TV mast (Fig 9).

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Phil Planel facilitated the survey; Cressida Whitton and Phil Planel and provided background information.

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Fig 4 Plan of the Gittisham Hill enclosure 1:250

