

## **An Earthwork Survey at Torpel Manor Field, Cambs.**

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### **Summary**

This note reports a detailed analytical earthwork survey of the medieval settlement site of 'Torpel Manor' in Bainton CP, in the City of Peterborough (Cambs). It sets out a description and basic phasing of the earthworks recorded as they stand at present. A more detailed report will be submitted for publication in a national journal in due course.

### **Introduction**

An analytical earthwork survey was conducted in November 2012 at the site of Torpel Manor (TF 1115 0541), a medieval fortified site located in Bainton civil parish in the City of Peterborough authority. This work forms the starting point for a process of HLF-funded historical and archaeological research at the site by a local community group in conjunction with staff from the University of York and University Centre Peterborough. The site has been under the ownership of Langdyke Countryside Trust since 2009, but has not previously been subject to any substantive level of research.

The survey area consisted of a single field presently under pasture, and measuring roughly 3.4ha in area. Its boundaries consist of fencing and hedges with some sections of rubble stone banks beneath. The modern parish boundary between Bainton and Helpston runs down the east side of the field, as does the former Roman road known as King Street. Earthwork preservation in the survey area itself is very high, with a relatively low level of modern interference or agricultural improvement, other than a small paddocked area at the north end of the field. This is in stark contrast to the evidence in all the surrounding fields, which have been levelled by agricultural improvements.

### **Survey Method**

The field survey was undertaken by Dr Michael Fradley and Dr Steve Ashby on 16-17 November 2012, in good but overcast weather, utilising a Leica differential GPS unit. Earthworks features were observed visually by the surveyors, and recorded using the dGPS, and the downloaded results were drawn up and annotated by hand at 1:1250 scale, incorporating some readings taken using hand-and-tape methods. The final survey model was then drawn up using Adobe Illustrator.

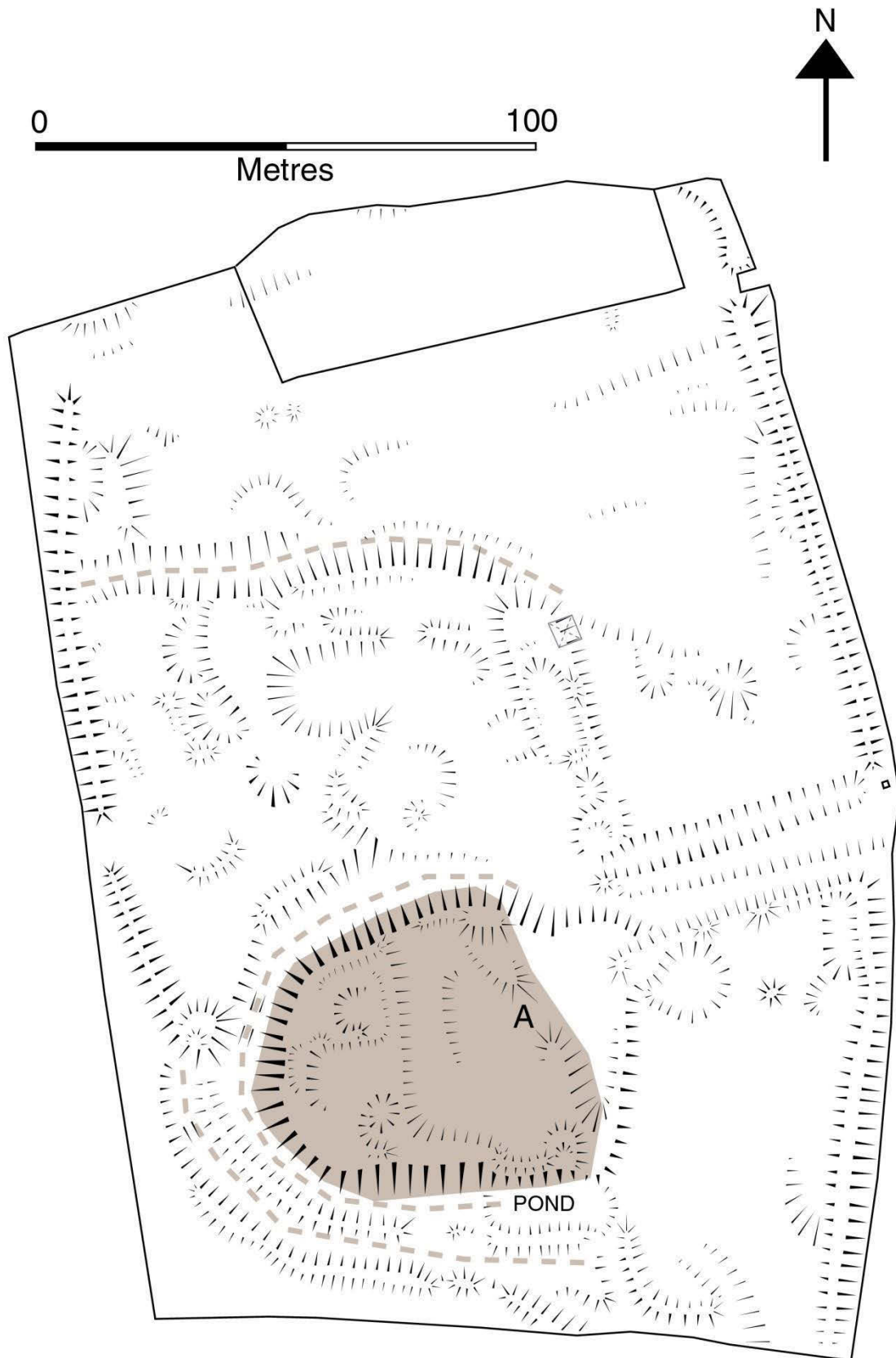
The objectives of the survey were to better characterise the topography of the site, to construct a tentative chronology for the features recorded, and to inform the planning of future work, including geophysical investigation on the site, and wider landscape survey (fieldwalking and test-pitting) beyond the scheduled area.

## **Results**

In what follows, the description of the earthworks will be broken down into three basic phases of activity, based solely on the available earthwork evidence, although settlement development on the site was in reality almost certainly more complex.

### **Phase 1**

The first readily identifiable phase of activity visible on site was the construction of a large, flat-topped mound c.2-3m higher than the surrounding ground level at the south end of the site (fig.2) which at present is still partially surrounded by a relatively shallow ditch measuring 6-10m wide. This appears to be the remains of a fortification, apparently built in a ringwork form. The early form of the ringwork has been masked by subsequent development, particularly its redevelopment and extension on the east side of the monument that will be discussed below in phase 2. The original castle would have been embanked with a rampart, and traces of the banks on the east side of the first phase of the castle survive as levelled earthworks, between which the entrance to the original structure has been recorded (fig 1: A). The internal features otherwise surviving in the interior of the mound are likely to date to later phases of occupation, although early and pre-castle phases are likely to survive archaeologically as sub-surface features. The ringwork was surrounded by a ditch which again survives as an earthwork on all but the east side of the castle, due to the extension and infilling of the ditch on that side.



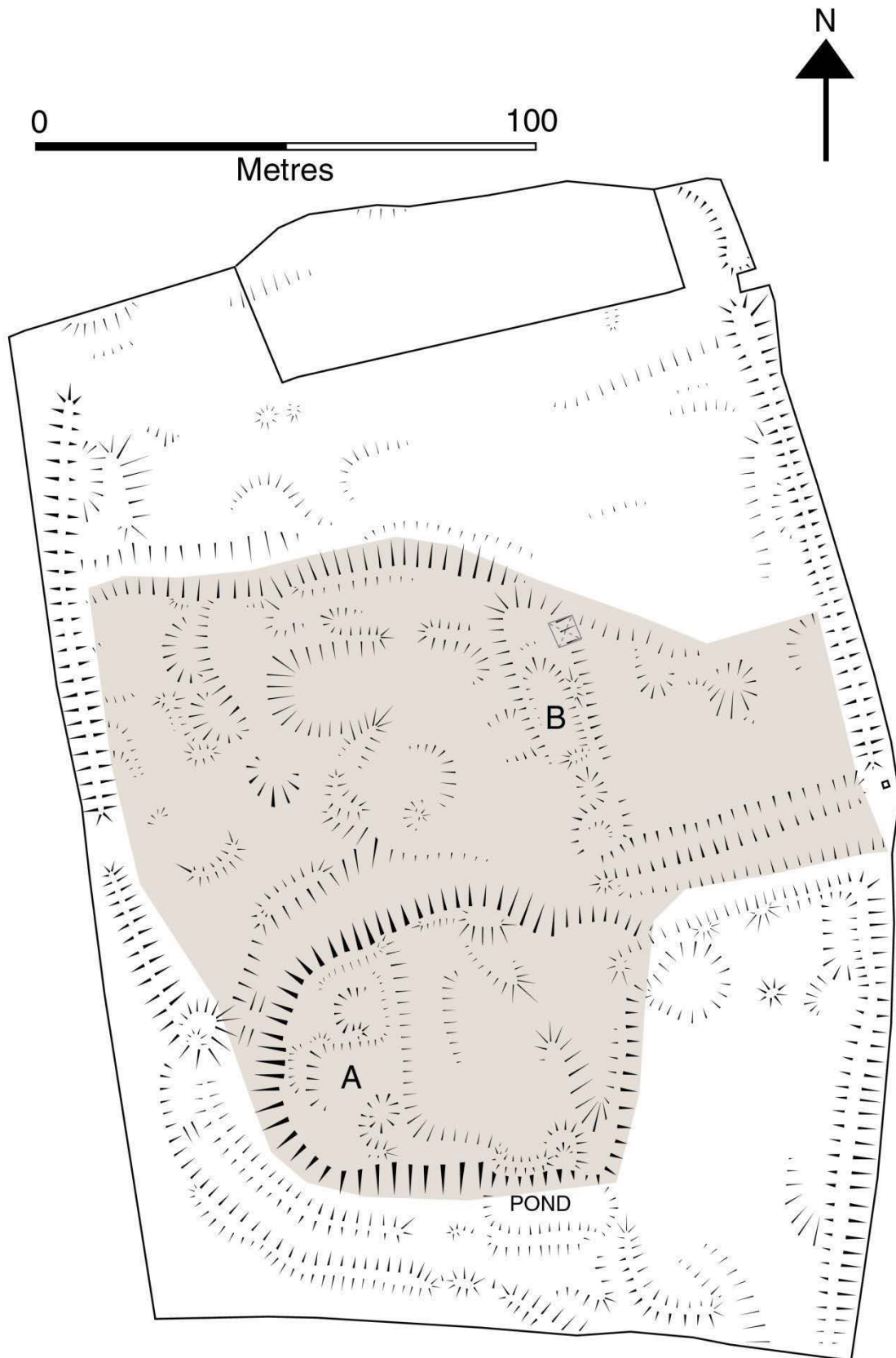
**Fig 1: Torpel Earthworks: Phase 1 (shaded) (Drawn by Michael Fradley)**

An enclosed court or bailey may have been constructed on the north side of the ringwork, although its form and extent can only be conjectured. To the south-west and south of the ringwork are the remains of a double-ditch; the outer ditch measures c.6m wide and may have continued north and connected to the surviving portion of substantial (c.8m wide) ditch that is situated about 60m north of the ringwork. It is unlikely that these large ditches relate to one of the later phases, as there is no other evidence of substantial boundary ditches being created in these periods, where instead ditches were apparently infilled. Again the internal features surviving in this area relate almost certainly to later occupation, but again earlier activity may survive archaeologically as sub-surface features.

## **Phase 2**

The castle ringwork was heavily redeveloped in this phase of activity, where much of its embankment was levelled (possibly infilling the interior) and a roughly rectangular extension on the east side of the earthwork. The ringwork ditch was infilled on the eastern side and not replaced, indicating that substantive defensive boundaries were no longer required, and from this stage the site may no longer have been viewed as a castle in the strictest sense (and hence a 'castle' name linked to the site does not survive). It is likely that the internal earthwork arrangements of the ringwork were laid out in this phase of activity (Fig.2: A), consisting of a row of structures on the west side of the platform, and at least one structure on the south side, overlooking an open, central court.

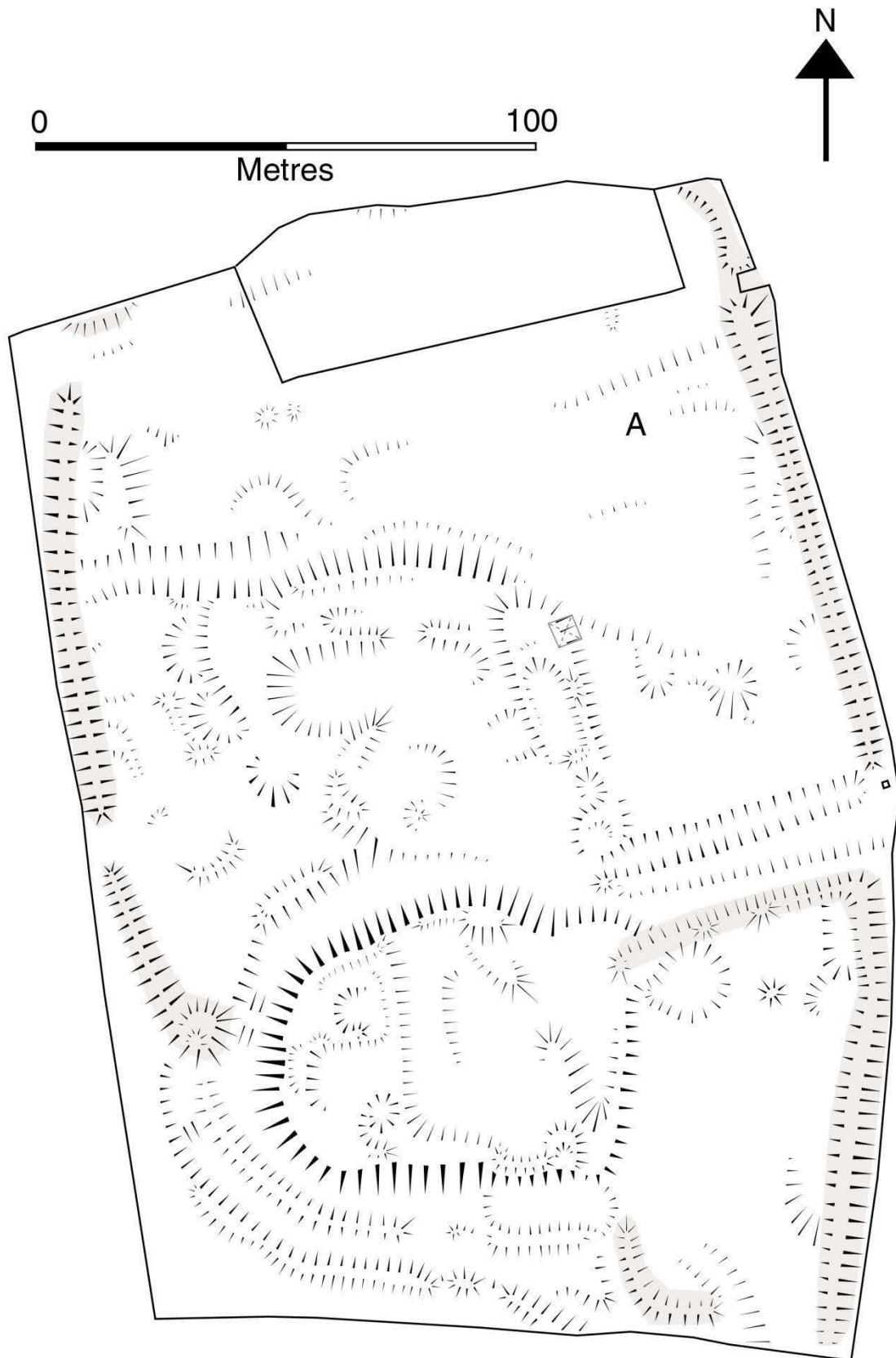
A more substantial development appears to have taken place in the possible bailey area to the north, where a large group of buildings were laid out around a court, with a second possible court to the west. These features do not have the appearance of a peasant settlement attached to the manor of Torpel, but are rather characterised by a more formal arrangement that would suggest they constitute part of a high-status complex, possibly linked to estate management. The complex includes the earthworks of a large rectangular structure, possibly a barn, on the east side of the central court (fig. 2: B).



**Figure 2: Torpel Earthworks: Phase 2 (shaded) (Drawn by Michael Fradley)**

### **Phase 3**

A number of the internal arrangements listed under phase 2 may potentially link to phase 3, or at least occupation of structures and habitation zones continued. This final phase is marked by the construction of a large enclosure bank on the north side of the ringwork, roughly following the line of the modern field boundary, although the bank has largely been lost under arable cultivation on the north side. There is no clear evidence of an inner or outer ditch, although such a feature could have been infilled. The bank over-runs features in the possible bailey to the north, including its outer ditch, but the old ringwork still appears to be a central part of that enclosure. Only in the partially separated sub-rectangular section of the enclosure to the east of the ringwork is there clear evidence of internal features, but these do not form a readily identifiable complex that would indicate function, and includes a small ditch or hollow-way leading south of the survey area. In the northern section taken in by this enclosure are a number of very slight earthwork features (fig. 3: A). These may be so eroded because of a period of subsequent ploughing in this area, but more likely they predate the creation of enclosure of this area and could even pre-date the identified phase 1. They are therefore of significant interest, and will be a focus for future research. The function of the enclosure is unclear, although the lack of internal features may suggest a use in stock control.



**Figure 3: Torpel Earthworks: Phase 3 (Drawn by Michael Fradley)**

### **Implications and Potential for Further Work**

The detailed survey of the Torpel site has allowed important steps to be made in the interpretation of the site. The first of these is to confirm that a first major phase of occupation saw the construction of a ringwork castle. The enclosure itself was relatively large, although there is little evidence that its defences were particularly monumental. Subsequently developments saw its apparent downgrading as a castle, but its continued use as a high-status centre. This situation is confused somewhat by the final phase of development with the creation of large, apparently open enclosures around the original ringwork, but which may again be linked to large-scale stock management.

There is, therefore, significant potential for further non-invasive survey. Geophysical survey will further clarify the form, nature and extent of settlement across the site, as well as potential pre-castle features. It may also enable the layout of the original castle bailey to be identified as a buried feature. There is a suggestion that the earthwork complex at Torpel encroached upon the line of the former Roman road to the east of the site. No evidence of road-like features was recorded, although any such phenomena are likely to lie beneath the bank of the phase 3 enclosure that runs around the eastern perimeter of the site. However, looking at the overall course of the road, it is perfectly feasible that the road always passed east of the site, and that the accumulation of small changes in course over the medieval and post-medieval periods may be responsible for the road's current appearance, rather than any diversion around the Torpel site. A programme of geophysical survey is planned for the site, together with fieldwalking in adjacent fields (to be undertaken under the direction of Mr Bob Hatton, University College Peterborough), and archival research is ongoing under the direction of Frieda Gosling's History Research Group. There is also scope for further work examining the substantial masonry structure to the west of the site in Lawn Wood, for which cropmark evidence suggests sits with the bounds of some form of moat or ditched enclosure. An Interpretation Centre has already been opened onsite, and ongoing research will feed into this facility in order to communicate results with the local community.

### **Acknowledgements**

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