

## 5. THE SPADES MIRE, BERWICK-UPON-TWEED

### *Description*

THE Spades Mire is a linear earthwork running from E. to W. on the northern side of Berwick-upon-Tweed (fig. 1). At present it consists of a ditch which is visible from

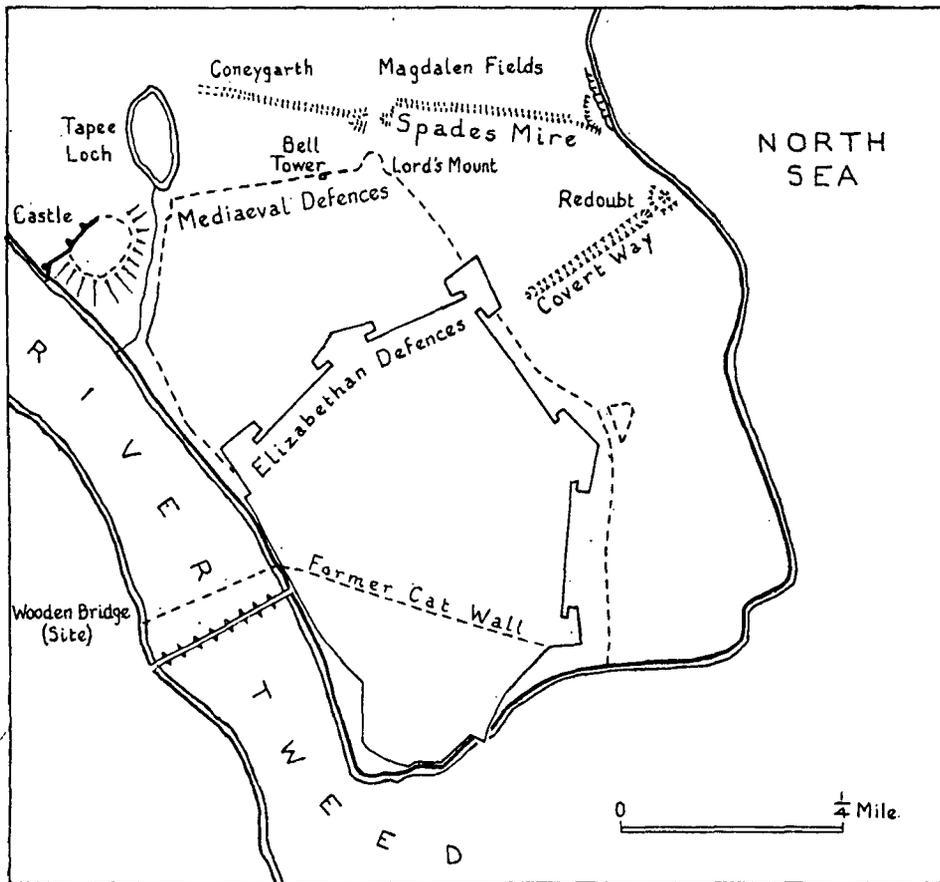


FIG. 1. The relationship between Spades Mire and the medieval and Elizabethan defences of Berwick-upon-Tweed

<sup>1</sup> *P.S.A.S.*, LXXXI (1946-7), 191-2. National Museum of Antiquities, HD 743.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid.*, LXXXII (1947-8), 279, fig. 3, No. 7. HD 792.

NT 99645366 to NU 00185362, but originally it extended further in both directions. To the W. its course is represented by a dip in the railway cutting at 99565368, and this would bring it close to the edge of the Tapee Loch (or Pond) which formerly occupied part of the neck of land and which was the source of a mill outflow down to the present Castle Dean Park.<sup>1</sup> On the E, the ground to seaward of the extant portion looks like ditch filling and the same impression is given by its appearance when viewed from the bathing pond immediately to the E. Thus the Spades Mire sealed off the peninsula on which the town of Berwick stands, running from the sea to the Tapee Loch, beyond which the ground fell steeply to the River Tweed.

The surviving ditch (fig. 2) is 900 ft. long and is interrupted by a road at NT 99875364. The road itself is quite modern, but old maps indicate that a path preceded it and the fact that there is a change of alignment at this point suggests that there was always an entrance here; the re-entrant on the W. of the road, to the S. of the ditch, appears to be the result of fairly recent quarrying and its lying on the axis of the western portion of the ditch is fortuitous. To the W. of the road the ditch is now some 30 ft. wide and up to 10 ft. deep, to the E. only 3 ft. deep and narrower, but these were not its original dimensions, as is shown both by the excavation described below and by the wavy outline of its edges. Immediately to the W. of the road the ditch has at some time been widened to make a pond. At present there are mounds on both sides of the ditch. Those on the N. appear to be the result of agriculture, but on the S. there is a probable fragment of rampart, 130 ft. long, 40 ft. wide and 10 ft. high, at the seaward end (00275360), the bank on the S. side of the eastern sector of the ditch looks like a flattened rampart, and there is another possible fragment W. of the road at 99835363. The Ten-Foot Survey of 1852 adds no further fragments and shows the ditch filled at its present western extremity.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless the Spades Mire appears originally to have been a defensive work, facing north, with the rampart to the S. of the ditch subsequently removed.

This impression is strengthened by the relation of the work to the medieval and Elizabethan defences of the town (fig. 1): it appears to be irrelevant to either and somewhat obstructive. The medieval defences date from the early fourteenth century; their predecessors have never been satisfactorily located but were probably slight.<sup>3</sup> It seems likely that the defences of the thirteenth century Scottish burgh followed the same line as the Edwardian defences, especially since Berwick was then more important than it has ever subsequently been.<sup>4</sup> It is, of course, possible that the Spades Mire may represent either the thirteenth-century defences or the fortification hastily raised by Edward I,<sup>5</sup> but either hypothesis would make the defended area rather too large.

The relation of the extant earthwork to the rig and furrow of the fields is also significant. On the air photograph (Pl. LIX)<sup>6</sup> the ditch appears to antedate the rigs, both in the field to the N. and in the present school hockey pitch to the S.,<sup>7</sup> and in this it contrasts with the

<sup>1</sup> Speed's Map. 1610. The name Tapee Loch does not appear in any early source, but the lake was there in medieval times - cf. Scott, J., *Berwick-upon-Tweed* (1888), 434. 'Tapee Pond' appears on the Railway Plan (1839) deposited in Northumberland Record Office.

<sup>2</sup> This filling possibly dates from the construction of the railway shortly before (Scott, *op. cit.*, 420).

<sup>3</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, 25; Colvin, H. M. (ed.), *History of the King's Works*, II (1963), 563; cf. *Chron. Lanercost*, 173, and also Fereday, R. P., unpublished Southampton University thesis (1957), 4.

<sup>4</sup> Fereday, *op. cit.*, 43.

<sup>5</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, 27; Colvin, *loc. cit.*

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to Northumberland County Council and to B.K.S. Air Survey Ltd. for permission to reproduce this photograph.

<sup>7</sup> The oblique air photograph reproduced in Beresford, M. W., and St Joseph, J. K. S., *Medieval England, an Aerial Survey* (Cambridge Air Surveys, II, 1958), 177, shows the hockey pitch rigs extending a little E. of the limits of the pitch; this extension is not visible on the vertical photograph reproduced here.

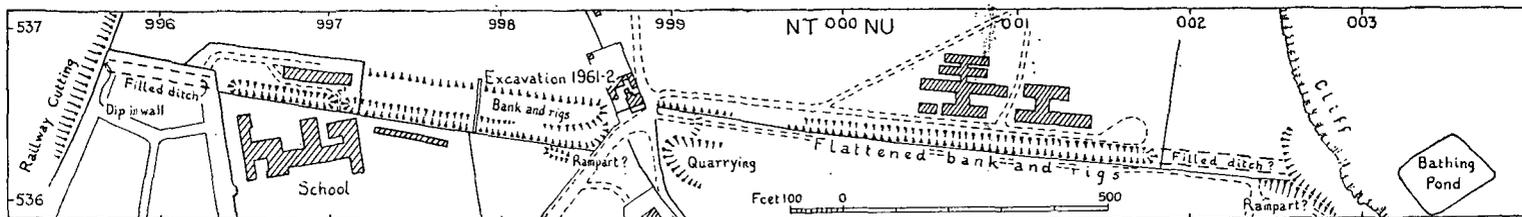


FIG. 2. Plan of Spades Mires (based on the O.S. 1/2500 plans with the sanction of the Controller of H.M. Stationery Office, Crown Copyright reserved)

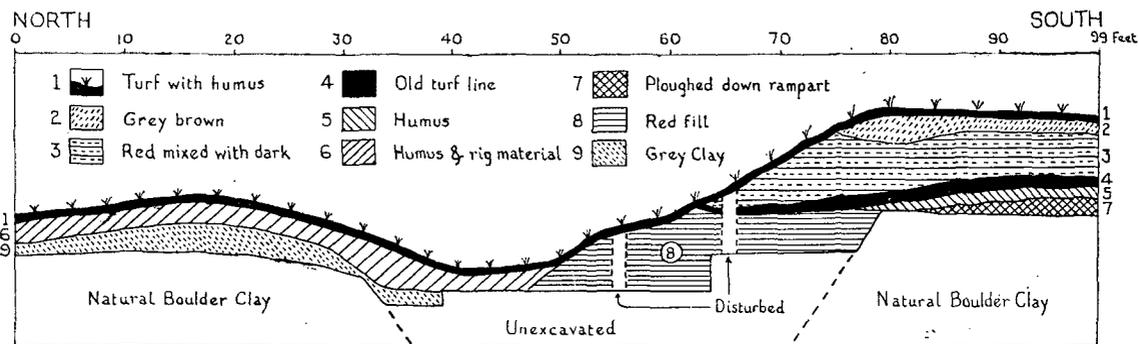


FIG. 3. Section across Spades Mire

sixteenth-century Covert Way, which appears to entrench on the rigs to the N. of it.<sup>1</sup> The possible flattened rampart E. of the road is itself ploughed into two rigs.

#### *Documentation*<sup>2</sup>

Among documentary sources, the deeds of Magdalene Fields (in the possession of the Borough) would probably be valuable if they were available for consultation; they might explain why the Spades Mire never seems to have served as a boundary – though the nineteenth-century Tithe Redemption Map<sup>3</sup> appears to show its eastern half separating two pieces of property. Failing this, it must be assumed that the western part of the work served as a 'syke', or unploughed area, separating parcels of land ploughed in different rigs but having the same owner. There is no evidence that it was used as a drain.

The maps of 1822,<sup>4</sup> 1788,<sup>5</sup> 1769,<sup>6</sup> 1745,<sup>7</sup> 1725,<sup>8</sup> 1610<sup>9</sup> and 1604<sup>10</sup> show no sign of the Spades Mire. There is, however, a reference to it in the Guild Book of 1659 (= 1660), where 'a cawsey to be made from the gibbet to Spades Myre' is mentioned.<sup>11</sup> In 1649 Lord Mordington, who owned property in this area, had a dispute with the Corporation about a dyke which he had made, but this appears to have nothing to do with the Spades Mire.<sup>12</sup> Scott<sup>13</sup> quotes a list of citations for June 1616, including the following:

23. The highway between Castle Hill Dike and Spades Mire is grown narrow and impassable in winter, which might be amended by clenging [=cleaning] the watercourse in the Calf Hill which has never been rightly clenged since it was cast.<sup>14</sup> The water is turned down to the Castle Mill and it is supposed that the Miller has to do with the bringing it through the Horseman's Batt.

The mill indeed appears on the 1788 map, but the MS. of the only extant Court Book of the dates covering 1616 (1605-37) includes no such list of citations in the Borough archives. It must represent either an error in date or a reference to a Court Leet Book now lost.

A map of about 1570 among the Cecil Papers at Hatfield House,<sup>15</sup> shows the Spades Mire extending from the edge of the pool to the sea (Pl. LX). It shows the western section by a single line, then an angular projection (this may be an earlier form or distortion of

<sup>1</sup> The narrower rigs to the S. of the Covert Way probably represent more recent ploughing and so are irrelevant to the issue.

<sup>2</sup> I am grateful to the late Town Clerk of Berwick-upon-Tweed for allowing access to the borough archives and to Mr F. M. Cowe, who has put a great deal of his own material at my disposal.

<sup>3</sup> Inland Revenue Tithe Redemption Office, Q 50294, 1847 (also in Northumberland Record Office). The area of Berwick Grammar School and the field immediately to the N. were purchased from the Duke of Northumberland by the Education Committee in 1932. Neither the Committee nor Alnwick Castle Estates Office has deeds of any antiquity relating to this property. I am grateful to these bodies for furnishing this information.

<sup>4</sup> Wood, John, *Plan of the Town of Berwick 1822* (in *Wood's Town Atlas*, 1823).

<sup>5</sup> Terrot, Captain Charles, *Plan of Berwick-upon-Tweed*, 1788 (P.R.O.W.O. 78/1172/2).

<sup>6</sup> Armstrong, *Plan of Berwick* (1769).

<sup>7</sup> Printed in Scott, *op. cit.*, facing 142. No copy of this map appears to exist.

<sup>8</sup> *A Plan of Berwick-upon-Tweed*, 1725 (B.M. K.32.46).

<sup>9</sup> Speed's Map, 1610.

<sup>10</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, facing 327.

<sup>11</sup> *Guild Book*, 81, f. 9 (in possession of the Corporation). Printed in *Extracts from the Minute Books of the Guild and its Committees*, n.d., 35.

<sup>12</sup> *Letter Book B* (Corporation of Berwick), entries of 21 and 27 May and 2 and 27 June, 1649; cf. *Report on MSS in Various Collections*, Hist. MSS. Commission, 1901, 17.

<sup>13</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, 307.

<sup>14</sup> i.e. dug out – Craigie, *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, 1, 454-5.

<sup>15</sup> Cecil Papers (Maps) I/22, copied as B.M. P.S.I./4231 Map 186 h.i.; cf. I/25. I am grateful to the Marquess of Salisbury and the Trustees of the British Museum for permission to reproduce part of this map. Another similar map is partly reproduced in Beresford and St Joseph, *op. cit.*, 178; also in Tenison, E. M., *Elizabethan England*, II (1931), 16.

the 'bullwarke' described below), then what appears to be a bridge or causeway (probably connected with limekilns), and finally a double line to the sea cliffs.

An entry of about 1536 in a document in the Public Record Office<sup>1</sup> refers to what must be the Spades Mire as existing at an earlier date:

A declaracion of the Circuytte of the wawlles of the town and Castelle of Barwicke – item furth of the same Bell tower standing on the corner of the wawlles is a posteron to issue in a Bullwarke adoinynge into the same which – was made in haist by Master Candisch in time of neid of duffet for the scoring and defending of the said North parts of the towne and specially of a great large castyn<sup>2</sup> dyke called the Sterlinge dike towart the see wherein a great company of ennemyes might ells sauely lye without danger of thordenaunce of the town.

Richard Candish was Master of the Ordnance in Berwick in 1522 and 1523.<sup>3</sup> The 'Bullwarke' as shown on the 1745 map is certainly of an odd shape for a date in the 1520s<sup>4</sup> but might have been subsequently altered. The 'Sterlinge Dike' sounds very like the Spades Mire; why its name should have changed and what either name may mean remains a mystery.<sup>5</sup> The 'Bell tower' referred to is obviously the corner tower of the walls, not the present Bell Tower. The 'Bullwarke' is presumably the cause of the raised ground immediately to the N. of the Lord's Mount (or Murderers' Tower).

#### *Excavation<sup>6</sup>*

In 1961 it was decided to cut a trial section across the Spades Mire with the intention of establishing its relationship to the rig and furrow on its N. and S. sides and of investigating the slight rise in the ground on the southern lip of the ditch from 997536 to 998536. The position of the cutting is shown in fig. 2: it was 99 ft. long, 6 ft. wide in its deeper parts and 3 ft. wide in the shallower lengths. Work was continued in 1961 and 1962 when opportunity offered, but had to be abandoned before the ditch bottom was reached owing to the difficulty and expense of making the cutting safe. The section so far as it was excavated is shown in fig. 3.

On the S. side, layer 7 was barren of finds but resembled a ploughed-down rampart; no sign of palisading was found, but since the trench here was only 3 ft. wide the evidence is not conclusive and any revetment may have lain further S. Layer 8 was obviously deliberate filling of the ditch and may account for its wavy outline on the S. side. Since the thirty-eight fragments of pottery which this layer yielded range from the thirteenth to the eighteenth century,<sup>7</sup> the filling must have been carried out in the latter period, or later. Layer 5 yielded two thirteenth-century sherds and one undateable clay pipe stem. Layer 4

<sup>1</sup> P.R.O. E 36/173 (MS., printed in *History of the Berwickshire Naturalists Club*, XLV, 177–86). I am grateful to Mr F. M. Cowe for pointing this out.

<sup>2</sup> As p. 358, n. 14.

<sup>3</sup> Scott, *op. cit.*, 116 (Robert for Richard) and B.M. MSS. add. 24965.

<sup>4</sup> I am grateful to Mr Iain McIvor for pointing this out in a letter.

<sup>5</sup> Mr Rivet has suggested to me that the name Spades Mire could be derived from Spayad or Spayd, meaning a male deer in its third year (*O.E.D.*, ix, 532) and Mere meaning a boundary, i.e. a deer fence. This seems possible, but it is suggested that (a) the use of the work as a boundary probably postdates its use as a fortification, (b) the name Spades Mire seems to be as old as Sterling Dike (which is still unexplained).

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to the Headmaster of Berwick Grammar School and to Northumberland Education Committee (the owners) and their tenant for permission to excavate; to H.M. Ministry of Works for permission to excavate a scheduled monument and for meeting the considerable expense of making the cutting safe; to the Geographical and other departments of the school and to the County Surveyor for the loan of equipment; to many volunteers, members of the school, for their labour; and to Mr I. McIvor for archaeological advice.

<sup>7</sup> I am grateful to Mr B. G. N. Edwards and Mr D. Shaw for help with the identification of pottery and clay pipe fragments. The finds are now in my possession but it is hoped that ultimately they may be placed in the town Museum.

produced fifteen finds, extending down to the nineteenth century. Layers 3 and 2 are entirely modern, representing the make-up for the hockey pitch.

On the N. side layer 9, which appears to have been scraped from the ditch bottom, rests on the natural grey boulder clay; it may be significant that a probably thirteenth-century sherd lay actually on the natural surface. The layer itself yielded eleven finds dating down to the seventeenth century (a clay pipe bowl resembling Type 6a, 1630-90),<sup>1</sup> but it is possible that it was deposited in medieval times and that the later material was introduced by ploughing or other disturbance. Layer 6 was composed of ploughsoil and the sixteen finds from it range from the fourteenth century to modern times. The stratification thus confirms that the ditch antedates the ploughrigs, or at least those on top of layer 9.

### *Conclusions*

In the circumstances these can only be tentative. The excavation, albeit incomplete, does tend to confirm the impression that this was a defensive work, facing N., and that the ditch antedates the rig and furrow. This in turn, taken in conjunction with the occurrence of a thirteenth-century sherd on the natural surface under layer 9, suggests the middle ages for its original construction, but no evidence was forthcoming to provide a closer dating.

If this conclusion is accepted, two further questions require an answer. The first is the date at which the rampart as a whole was flattened. From its relation to the known medieval defences of the town, whether we regard them as purely Edwardian or as originally the thirteenth-century Scots defences, it seems likely that it was done when they were raised. A possible alternative date is that at which the medieval wall was mounted with artillery; certainly a rampart here would have created a large area of dead ground where the 'ordnance of the town' could not penetrate. Secondly, it should be asked why, when the rampart as a whole was flattened, certain stretches should have been kept. The part overlooking the shore commands it and therefore any attempt to infiltrate the defences by advancing along it. It could thus serve in the same way as the later Bell Tower was used after the medieval fortifications were abandoned in the sixteenth century,<sup>2</sup> and the sixteenth-century Redoubt provides a further analogy, i.e. to give early warning. For the other fragment of rampart there is no obvious explanation; while its situation might suggest that it was simply the upcast from the pond referred to above, its general appearance does not bear this out.

Further work is evidently required and so far as excavation is concerned it should clearly be on a larger scale than can be sustained by local resources. Beyond this, the adjacent rig and furrow in Coneygarth and Magdalene Fields urgently needs to be plotted before it is destroyed for the construction of playing fields, swimming baths, ring roads or other purposes.

### *Acknowledgments*

In addition to those mentioned in the footnotes I should like to thank the following: Mrs A. L. Hutchinson for typing the report and my wife for reading it in MS., Mr S. Willy, F.S.A. SCOT., for redrawing the figures, and Mr A. L. F. Rivet, F.S.A., and in particular Dr K. M. Kenyon, C.B.E., F.S.A., for their encouragement and for reading the report in typescript.

K. G. WHITE

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. News Letter*, VII, No. 13, Sept. 1961, 58.

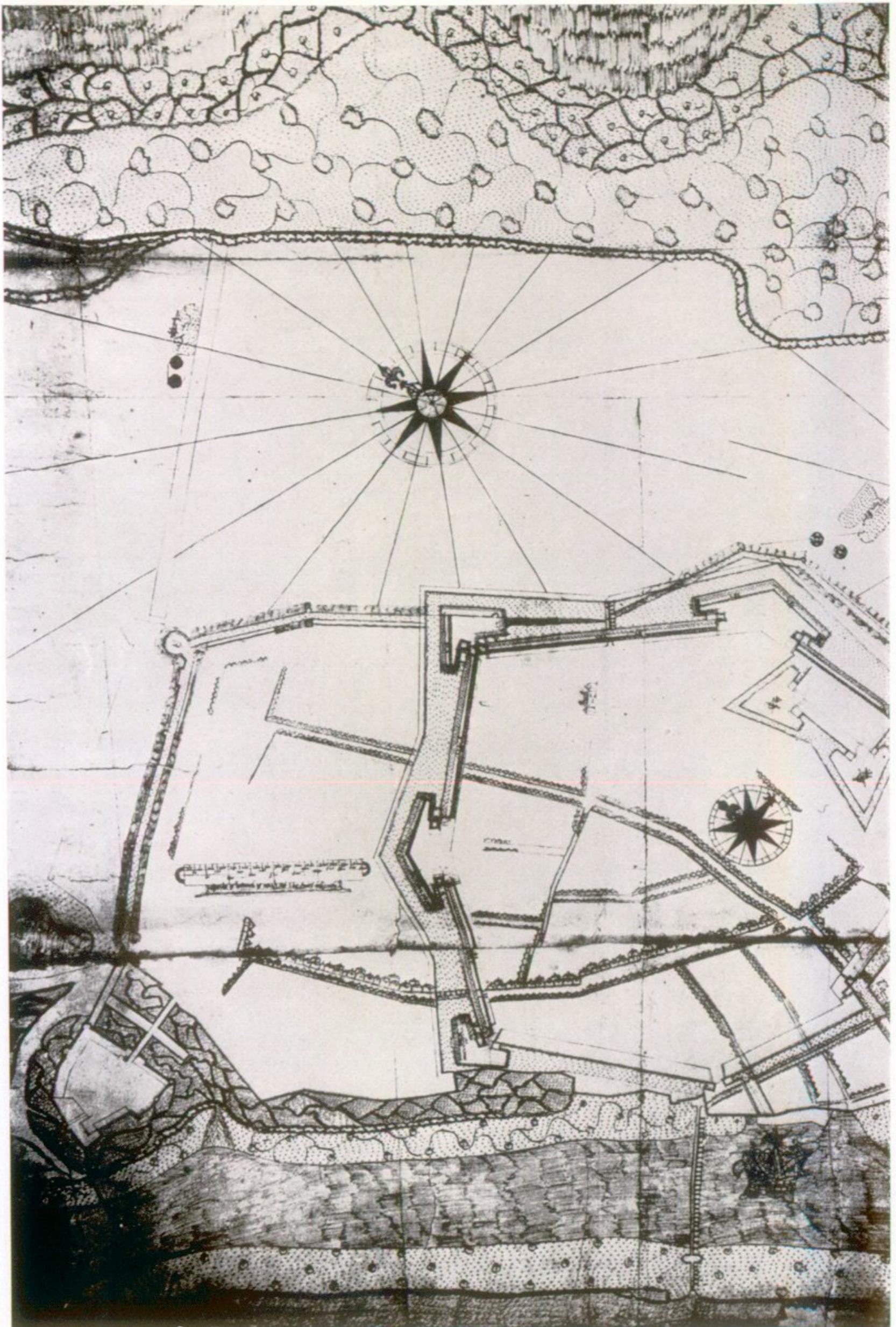
<sup>2</sup> B.M. MSS. Harley 7017 f. 147-8.



*Photo. B.K.S. Air Survey Ltd*

Air photograph (1/2500) showing relation of western portion of Spades Mire to rigs and furrows on both sides

WHITE: SPADES MIRE



Spades Mire and Berwick-upon-Tweed: part of Hatfield House map, c. 1570

WHITE: SPADES MIRE