

An Excavation at Castle Hill, Godstone

by M O'CONNELL and R POULTON

Introduction

The excavation undertaken at Castle Hill between 12 and 14 May 1982 was directed and carried out by Martin O'Connell and Rob Poulton of the Conservation and Archaeology Section, Planning Department, Surrey County Council.

The aim of the excavation was to confirm the existence of an external ditch on the eastern side of the earthwork and to retrieve any dating evidence in advance of the construction of the A22 Godstone Bypass (South). Accordingly a small trench (1.5 x 5.0m) was opened by hand and limited to the point (EF on fig 2) where disturbance by the contractors was thought most likely to occur.

The Site

Castle Hill (fig 1) lies to the south east of the parish church of Godstone and immediately to the east of Leigh Mill, (TQ 3632 5082).

The site is a small promontory fortified by simply cutting off the end of a steep sided spur of the lower greensand with a rampart and ditch (fig 2), the precipitous character of the natural slope obviating the necessity for earthwork defences on the western perimeter. The area enclosed is 0.3ha. There are indications of an original entrance on the southern side of the rampart.

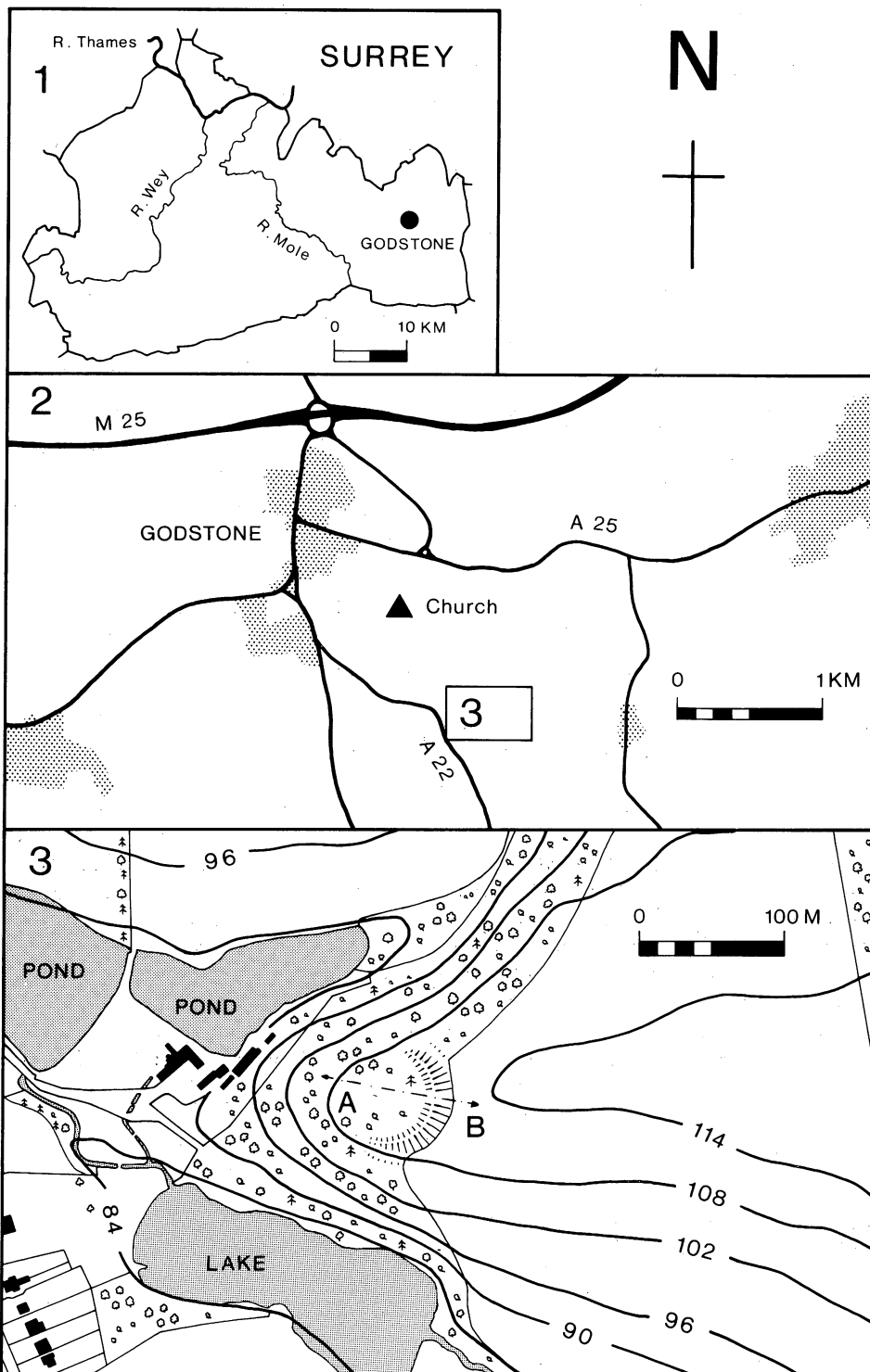
Castle Hill is a scheduled Ancient Monument (Surrey No 54) but the external ditch which should logically have continued around the eastern side of the rampart is partially outside the scheduled area. On the Tithe Map of Godstone (1842) both the rampart and ditch were enclosed within a plot of land known as Castle Hill Wood but later alterations in the field boundaries resulted in the exclusion of part of the ditch from that plot while subsequent agricultural activity must be responsible for obscuring the line of the ditch.

Neither finds nor documentary evidence help to date the site. Most previous authorities have favoured a Norman origin (eg VCH 4, 284 and 380) with the Motte then broadly paralleled by sites such as Guildford or Farnham Castles, and related to the deserted village of Walkhampstead. Equally the site could well be accommodated within the tradition of Iron-Age hillforts (cf Forde-Johnston 1976, especially Chapters 3 and 4).

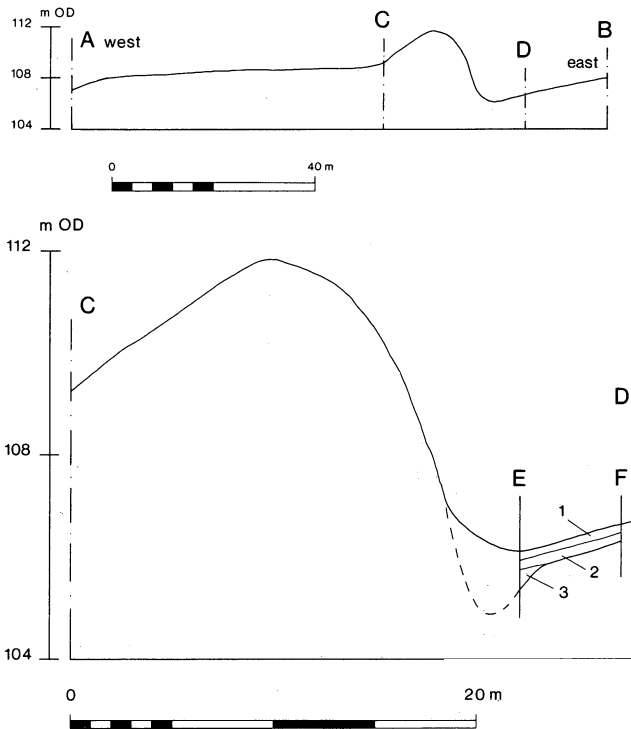
The Excavation

Archaeological investigation produced evidence of an external ditch on the eastern side of the earthwork but failed to provide any dateable material. In the event only part of the ditch was found to be outside the scheduled area and therefore only an incomplete section (EF) of the feature could be obtained (fig 2). Three layers were identified: a dark brown ploughsoil (1); a light brown sandy hillwash (2); and a similar, though sandier, ultimate ditch fill (3). At the limit of excavation it was evident that the ditch was still cutting down steeply.

In order to gain a better appreciation of the nature of the defences it was decided to level a profile through the site along the line of the excavated trench. This showed clearly the massive



1. Location of the excavated site at Castle Hill, Godstone. The contour heights given on map 3 are approximate metric equivalents for contours originally surveyed at intervals of 20ft.



2. A profile through the Castle Hill earthwork, showing the details of the excavated section (E-F). The vertical measurements have been exaggerated $2\frac{1}{2}$ times in order to emphasise the differences in slope.

nature of the defences, with a vertical drop of *c* 8.5m from the surviving top of the rampart to the estimated bottom of the ditch. Also apparent is the marked difference in ground level inside and outside the defences. The contours (fig 1) would suggest that the ground level within the defences should be lower, not higher, than outside. If the difference was created by man, then, whether achieved by levelling up or levelling down, the amount of work involved was formidable and not easily accounted for.

This small excavation has emphasised rather than resolved the enigmatic character of the Castle Hill earthwork. Only excavation on a larger scale, within the scheduled area, can hope to elucidate its date and function.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Forde-Johnston, J 1976 *Hillforts of the Iron Age in England and Wales*
 VCH *The Victoria County History of Surrey*, 4 vols, 1902-12