An Archaeological Evaluation at Hockleton Farm Shropshire, 2010

by
H R Hannaford

Shropshire Council

Archaeology Service Report Number 276

April 2010

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT HOCKLETON FARM, SHROPSHIRE, 2010

by
H R HANNAFORD MIFA

A Report for

Mr and Mrs Lewis,
Hockleton Farm

Archaeology Service
Shropshire Archives,
Castle Gates, Shrewsbury, SY1 2AQ
Tel: (01743) 255352 Fax: (01743) 255355

Shropshire Council

CONTENTS

SUMMARY

In February 2010 the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council, carried out an archaeological field evaluation of land at Hockleton Farm, Chirbury, Shropshire. There are proposals to create a new farm track around the edge of a motte and bailey castle that lies in a field immediately to the south of the farmyard, and to carry out repairs to erosion to the castle earthworks. The evaluation comprised a geophysical survey of the site and the excavation of a number of trial trenches on the line of the proposed new track. The geophysical survey identified a number of below-ground features both within the and beyond the visible castle earthworks. The trial trenching identified a number of features in a trench to the northeast of the bailey, one of which produced medieval pottery of 12th – 14th century date from a charcoal rich deposit which produced a radiocarbon date of between 1290AD an 1420 AD. The assessment has recommended that an archaeological watching brief should accompany the construction of the new track.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Hockleton Farm, near, Chirbury is situated in southwest Shropshire, about 25km southwest of the centre of Shrewsbury (NGR SO 2744 9995). The farm lies on the southeast side of the B4386 Shrewsbury to Montgomery road. In a field adjacent to the farm on its southeast side are the remains of a motte and bailey castle. The motte and bailey castle is a scheduled Ancient Monument (No. 19927, "Motte and bailey castle 80m south east of Hockleton Farm").

1.2 The castle comprises a well defined 'motte' approximately 25m in diameter at its base and 4m high. On the northern side of the motte lie the earthwork remains of a roughly triangular shaped bailey with maximum dimensions of 40m E-W by 30m N-S, and defined on its northern and western side by a 2m high scarp. A 6m wide gap on the northern side is thought to represent the original entrance to the bailey. The motte and bailey are presumed to be surrounded by an approximately 4m wide ditch. When in use, a timber tower is likely to have stood on the top of the motte, whilst domestic buildings and stables would have been located within the bailey

1.3 The present occupiers of the farm are currently seeking to deliver a Management Plan to protect the motte and bailey castle under a Higher Level Stewardship Agreement. The Management Plan requires the upgrading of an existing farm track on a new alignment in order to reduced vehicle erosion to the monument. The monument will then be fenced off from the track, and a program of earthwork repairs undertaken. The upgraded track will be 4 m wide, increasing to 6m at the corners/ gateways and will run for approximately 250m around the northwest, northeast, and southeast sides of the monument. The track will consist of a graded stone surface laid in a 'trough' excavated to the top of the sub-soil (approx. average depth 0.5m). A French drain will be constructed in the base of the trough and it will be lined with a Teram geotextile membrane.

1.4 Because of the archaeological significance of the site, it has been considered necessary to undertake a programme of archaeological work to accompany the construction of the track and the earthwork repairs. Phase 1 of this programme comprised a pre-works archaeological site assessment, which consisted of a geophysical survey of the castle and its immediate environs, and trial excavation on the alignment of the upgraded farm track. A brief for this assessment was produced by the Shropshire Council Historic Environment Countryside Advisor (Wigley, 2009).

1.5 The Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council was commissioned to carry out the Phase 1 pre-works site assessment and this report details the findings of the assessment.

2 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

2.1 The aim of the Phase 1 site assessment is to provide information that will enable the archaeological character of the castle's immediate environs to be determined before work on the upgrading of the farm trackway commences.

2.2 The Phase 1 objectives were to:

a) To locate any archaeological features and deposits within the study area.
b) To assess the survival, quality, condition and relative significance of any archaeological features, deposits and structures on the proposed new alignment of upgraded trackway.
c) To identify and recommend options for the management of the archaeological resource, including any further archaeological provision where necessary, particularly with reference to the line of upgraded trackway.

2.3 Methodology

2.3.1 In order to achieve these aims and objectives a programme of archaeological activities were carried out. These activities included a geophysical survey and trial excavation. A brief for the work was prepared by Shropshire Council's Historic Environment Countryside Advisor (Wigley, 2009b).

2.3.2 Geophysical survey. A detailed geophysical (magnetometry) survey was carried out by Archaeological Surveys Ltd. across the study area (see section **4.1** below and separate survey report – Sabin and Donaldson, 2010). Data was collected at 0.25m centres along traverses 1m apart using a Bartington Grad601-2 gradiometer. Permission for the geophysical survey has been included within the Scheduled Monument consent granted for the development. The geophysical survey will be undertaken in accordance with English Heritage guidelines "Geophysical Survey in Archaeological Field Evaluation" (EH 2008) and the Institute for Archaeologists guidelines and codes of conduct.

2.3.3 Trial excavation. The sample excavation comprised the excavation of four trial trenches. The location of the trenches was determined by the results of the geophysical survey, and was agreed in advance with the client, the Historic Environment Countryside Advisor, Shropshire Council (SC), and English Heritage.

2.3.4 The trenches were excavated by machine to remove topsoil to a maximum depth of 0.50m or until the top of undisturbed archaeological deposits were encountered (when at a lesser depth). After the removal of the topsoil the trenches were cleaned by hand and examined for features. A sample of archaeological deposits and features found within the trenches was excavated stratigraphically by hand in order to fulfil the aims of the investigation.

2.3.5 A sample of earth and charcoal from a feature located within one of the evaluation trenches was submitted to SUERC for radiocarbon analysis (see section **4.2.3** below and Appendix 1)

2.3.6 The trenches were backfilled on completion of the excavations.

3 ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

3.1 A settlement may have been established at Hockleton in the 8th or 9th century, as the Saxon kingdom of Mercia expanded westwards. The settlement is recorded as *Elchitun* in the Domesday Survey of 1086, although it had been 'waste' at the time of the Conquest in 1066. The castle at Hockleton forms part of a larger group of five motte and bailey castles in the area around Chirbury which are likely to have been established in the late 11th or early 12th century. The castles were certainly in existence by 1225, when Henry III commanded that their defences be refortified during a period of increased tension with Llywelyn ap Iorwerth, Prince of Gwynedd. However, the motte and bailey at Hockleton is likely to have fallen out of use by the late 13th century. (Wigley, 2009a)

3.2 An assessment of the material held within the Shropshire HER was made as part of the preparation of the Management Plan for the monument. This revealed that the aerial photograph plots produced by the RCHME as part of the Marches Upland Mapping Project suggest that a second, larger outer enclosure may be situated beyond the bailey. Aerial photographic evidence indicates a substantial curved bank on the north-western side of the castle, set back from but running parallel to the hedge. To the north, a well defined hollow way runs through the entrance into the bailey. Examination of historic edition of the Ordnance Survey map indicates that this feature was used as a farm track in the late 19th century and is now followed by the line of a public footpath. A small area of narrow ridge and furrow between these two features probably represents post-medieval ploughing. (Wigley, 2009a)

3.3 To the southeast of the castle, much of the remaining area of the field is covered by an extensive tract of broad ridge and furrow of probable medieval date. Aerial photographs suggest that this respects the castle earthworks, providing important stratigraphic information about the castle and surrounding medieval land use. (Wigley, 2009a)

3.4 There have been no known previous archaeological interventions at the site.

4 THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

4.1 The geophysical survey

4.1.1 A magnetometer survey of the study area was carried out by David Sabin and Kerry Donaldson of Archaeological Surveys Ltd. on behalf of the Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council.

4.1.2 The survey results indicate the presence of a number of anomalies considered to have archaeological potential. A probable former ditch surrounding the motte was located, and other positive anomalies that may indicate either cut features or earthworks were located within the bailey area. Positive and negative linear anomalies were clearly associated with extant earthworks and a ditch within the north western part of the site. A negative linear anomaly extending to the north from the edge of the motte ditch appears to correlate with a shallow holloway or track and may indicate the presence of stone. A number of other linear and discrete positive and negative anomalies were located beyond the motte and bailey earthworks and these have been classified as uncertain in origin. To the south of the motte, a series of parallel positive anomalies correlate with the ridges of a ridge and furrow field system. Other anomalies of agricultural origin include those created by vehicle ruts and magnetically thermoremnant material used in ground make-up. (Sabin and Donaldson, 2010)

4.2 The trial excavations

4.2.1 Four trenches were laid out along the proposed line of the new track (see Figure 1; A - D). The topsoil was removed from all four trial trenches with a tracked 360^{o} excavator equipped with a smooth 1.6m ditching bucket. The trenches were then cleaned by hand and archaeological features and deposits were sampled and recorded.

4.2.2 Trench A This trench was located on the northern boundary of the site to investigate an earthwork along the northern edge of the field. The trench was 7m long by 1.6m wide. Removal of between 0.2m of topsoil at the north end of trench and 0.5m at the south end revealed the natural subsoil of yellowish brown sandy clay (Fig. 2a; 4). The natural subsoil dropped down to the south and at the southern end of the trench this lay beneath a thin deposit of grey waterlogged clay silt (5). A large but shallow pit (3), 4m long but just 0.1m deep cut into the subsoil along the eastern side of the trench; the fill comprised dark greyish brown sandy silty loam (2) similar to the topsoil and produced a single small sherd of green glazed medieval pottery (of 13th -14th century date), though the feature appeared to be of modern origin. A small rectangular pit (07) lay at the north end of the trench also filled with a sandy silty loam (6) and also appeared to be of recent origin.

4.2.3 Trench B This trench was 21m in length and was located along the eastern boundary of the site where the line of the proposed new track passed close by the northeastern corner of the castle bailey. The trench also was located to investigate a pit-like and a linear anomaly identified by the geophysical survey. The natural subsoil (Fig. 2b & c; 22) comprised a light yellowish brown clay, and lay beneath 0.2m – 0.3m of topsoil (8). The natural was cut by a sub-rectangular feature (18) filled with a dark greyish brown charcoal-rich silt (17). The southern edge of this feature was cut by second small pit (16) filled with a greyish brown sandy silt. Another large irregular-shaped feature (21) up to 5m wide was also cut into the natural. The main fill of this feature comprised a very dark grey charcoal-rich silt (20) which produced three conjoining sherds of a coarse medieval cooking pot. The fill was excavated to a depth of 0.75m below the ground surface, when excavation ceased due to waterlogging. A sample of the fill was sent for radiocarbon analysis, giving a date between 1290AD and

1420AD (95% probability) and 1305AD – 1360AD and 1385AD -1405AD (68% probability). A shallow patch of dark grey sandy silt (19) 0.1m thick filled the upper part of the feature.

A number of stone-filled field drains (9, 11, & 13) cut across the tops of these features and the natural subsoil.

4.2.4 Trench C This trench was located on the line of the track where it ran past the southeast side of the castle and was 20.5m in length. The proposed new track here would cut across a low, spread earthwork bank 0.15m in height, thought to represent a ploughed down former field boundary. The topsoil (24) was between 0.25m and 0.3m in depth and came down directly onto the subsoil of light yellowish brown clay (27). The only feature seen in the subsoil was a stone-filled field drain (26). The earthwork bank was composed of topsoil, with no visible structure.

4.2.5 Trench D Trench D was located along the approximate line of track to the south of the castle, and was also sited to coincide with the line of a geophysical linear anomaly of uncertain origin. The trench was 15m in length; the topsoil (28) was seen to increase in depth from 0.25m at the east end of trench to 0.4m at its western end (the ground slopes down here from west to east). The topsoil came down onto the natural subsoil of light yellowish brown clay (29) in the east end of trench. This was seen to overlie the bedrock of brown and dark grey shale (30) which emerged in the western half of the trench. The linear anomaly followed and is likely to have been caused by the interface between the edge of the clay subsoil and the underlying bedrock. No archaeological features were seen in this trench.

4.3 Discussion

4.3.1 The shale bedrock, which has been exposed in recent excavations in the southwest corner of the farmyard, was seen to lie immediately beneath the topsoil at the summit of the hill to the south, in the trial trench (trench D) excavated to the south of the castle. Much of the fabric of the motte, which is exposed in erosion scars, appears to comprise a mixture of gravel derived from this shale and the clay subsoil.

4.3.2 The earthwork along the northern boundary of the study area, tested by trench A, appears to be comprised partly of the natural topography and possibly partly from a slight holloway running from the northwestern corner of the field up through the castle bailey to the southern part of the field. There was no sign of a man-made bank in the trench.

4.3.3 The evaluation elsewhere has demonstrated the potential and actual survival of below-ground medieval features within the study area. These features may be associated with the motte and bailey castle or with associated settlement at Hockleton. The geophysical survey in particular has identified below ground anomalies that are likely to form part of the structure of the motte and bailey castle. It has also identified features outside the castle bailey on the line of the proposed track, which when tested by the trial excavation, proved to be of medieval date. Specifically, the pit and linear geophysical anomalies located in trench B proved to be man-made features, one of which produced 3 conjoining sherds of medieval pottery of 12th -14th century date and a radiocarbon date from charcoal in its fill of mid to late 14th century date.

4.3.4 No significant archaeological features were identified in the trial trenches C and D to the southeast and south of the castle.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 For the major part of its route, the line of the proposed new track does not appear to impact on significant archaeological features. The exception to this a 30m section of the track along the northeastern side of the castle bailey which runs across a number of man-made features of later medieval date. These archaeological features are cut into the natural clay subsoil, the top of which here lies at a depth of between 0.25 and 0.3m below the present ground surface.

5.2 It is recommended that if the excavations for the proposed new track are limited to the depth of the topsoil (which varies in the areas sampled to between 0.25m and 0.5m in depth) or to a maximum 0.5m where the topsoil may be deeper, then an archaeological watching brief would provide an adequate mitigation strategy for the work. Provision of time and resources should be made for the recording of any archaeological features revealed during the groundworks.

6 REFERENCES

Cathcart King, D J, and Spurgeon, C J, 1965: "The Mottes in the Vale of Montgomery", Arch. Camb. CXIV, pp69-86

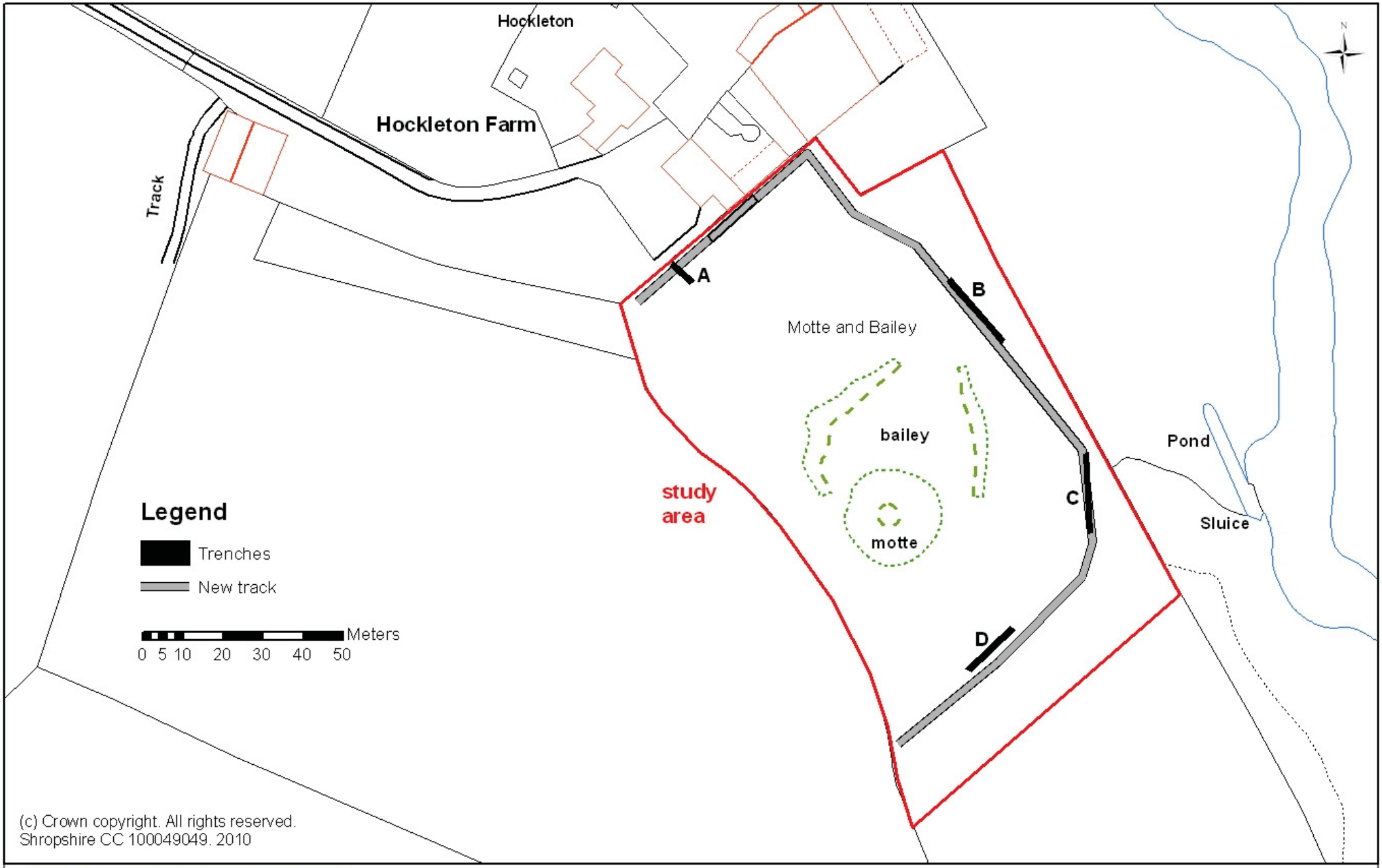
Sabin, D, and Donaldson, K, 2010: *Hockleton Motte, Chirbury, Shropshire: Magnetometer Survey Report*, Archaeological Surveys Ltd. Ref. No. 313

Wigley, A, 2009a: *Management Plan for Mr & Mrs Lewis, Hockleton Farm. Mon. No. 19227 - Motte and bailey castle 80m south east of Hockleton Farm*, Shropshire Council

Wigley, A, 2009b: *Brief for Phase 1 of a programme of archaeological work on land at Hockleton Farm, Chirbury, Shropshire*, Shropshire Council

ABBREVIATIONS

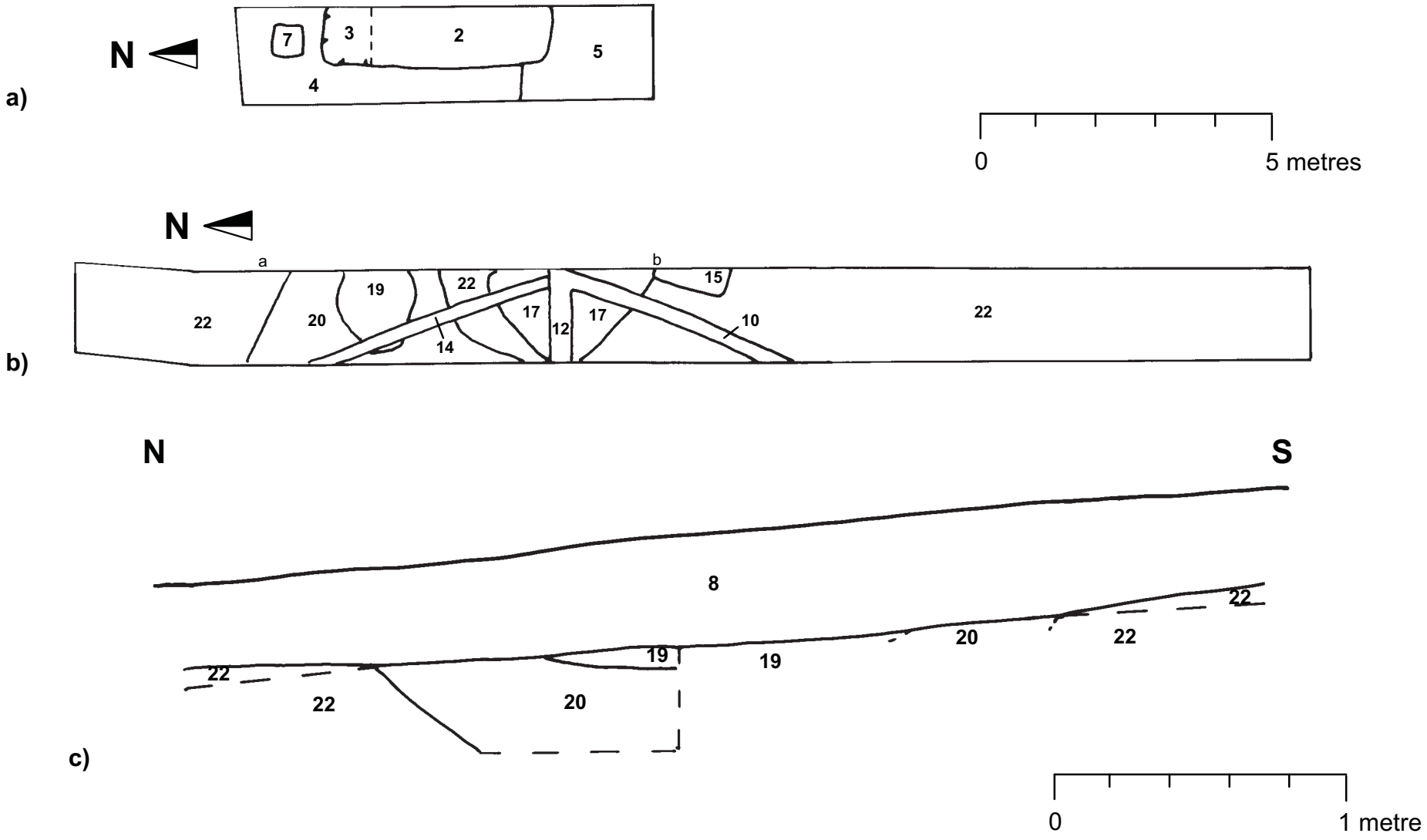
ASSC	Archaeology Service, Shropshire Council
CBA	Council for British Archaeology
HER	Historic Environment Record, Shropshire Council
OS	Ordnance Survey
PRO	Public Record Office
SA	Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates, Shrewsbury
SUERC	Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
TSAHS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society
TSAS	Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological Society



Shropshire Council

Hockleton Motte 2010
Figure 1: Location of the evaluation trenches

Archaeology Service
Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates,
Shrewsbury, Shropshire, SY1 2AQ
Scale: 1:1,250



HOCKLETON MOTTE 2010

Figure 2: a) Trench A plan view, scale 1:100; b) Trench B, plan view, scale 1:100; c) Trench B section a-b, scale 1:20

Photo 1: The motte and bailey castle, looking south

Photo 2: Trench A, looking southeast

Photo 3: Trench B, feature 21, looking south

Photo 4: The castle bailey, looking north from the motte

Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre
Director: Professor A B MacKenzie Director of Research: Professor R M Ellam
Rankine Avenue, Scottish Enterprise Technology Park,
East Kilbride, Glasgow G75 0QF, Scotland, UK
Tel: +44 (0)1355 223332 Fax: +44 (0)1355 229898 www.glasgow.ac.uk/suerc

RADIOCARBON DATING CERTIFICATE

24 March 2010

Laboratory Code	SUERC-28359 (GU-21088)
Submitter	Hugh Hannaford Archaeology Service (Shropshire Council) Shropshire Archives, Castle Gates Shrewsbury Shropshire, AY1 2AQ
Site Reference	Hockleton Motte, Hockleton, Chirbury, Shropshire
Sample Reference	HM10-1023
Material	Soil Containing Charcoal: Charcoal Dated
$\delta^{13}C$ relative to VPDB	-22.6 ‰
Radiocarbon Age BP	590 ± 40

N.B.

1. The above ^{14}C age is quoted in conventional years BP (before 1950 AD). The error, which is expressed at the one sigma level of confidence, includes components from the counting statistics on the sample, modern reference standard and blank and the random machine error.
2. The calibrated age ranges are determined from the University of Oxford Radiocarbon Accelerator Unit calibration program (OxCal3).
3. Samples with a SUERC coding are measured at the Scottish Universities Environmental Research Centre AMS Facility and should be quoted as such in any reports within the scientific literature. Any questions directed to the Radiocarbon Laboratory should also quote the GU coding given in parentheses after the SUERC code. The contact details for the laboratory are email g.cook@suerc.gla.ac.uk or Telephone 01355 270136 direct line.

Conventional age and calibration age ranges calculated by :- P. Naysmith Date :- 24/3/10

Checked and signed off by :- E. Dunbar Date :- 24/3/10

Calibration Plot