

**Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project,
Archaeological Investigations 1: Moccas Hill,
Moccas Park**

December 2013



Report prepared by Tim Hoverd

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Herefordshire Nature Trust Parkland Project,
Archaeological Investigations 1: Moccas Hill,
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NGR: SO 337 233
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Herefordshire Archaeology is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, maintains the county Sites and Monument Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects.

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Summary:

The investigations within Moccas Park formed part of a larger project entitled: The Herefordshire Nature Trust Parklands Project. This project involved the recording of ecological and archaeological / historical features within parklands across the county. Ecological and archaeological assets were recorded by volunteers under professional supervision in order to enhance and update the data held within the Biological Record Centre and The Historic Environment Record. The final Phase of the project included the more detailed investigation of a range of parkland features within Moccas Park, Brampton Bryan Park and Haye Park.

The investigations within Moccas Park comprised the detailed survey and partial excavation of a small earthwork enclosure on Woodbury Hill and the detailed survey and excavation of a section of park pale.

The small enclosure appears to represent the earthwork remains of a late or post medieval stock enclosure. The section of park pale investigated revealed that the pale was constructed on a pre-existing field terrace. This appears to be associated with a clearance cairn which was excavated during the project and is likely to date from the Bronze Age.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. National Grid References are accurate to approximately 10m. Measured dimensions are accurate to within 1m at a scale of 1:500, 0.1m at 1:50 and 0.02m at 1:20m

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1. Introduction

This report provides an account of a series of investigations at Moccas Park, Herefordshire, (NGR SO 337 233). This is the first in a series of three reports looking at archaeological features within three different parklands within Herefordshire. The investigations within Moccas Park were based on the recognition of features recorded during two walk over surveys, one conducted in 2003 (*An Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Moccas Deer Park*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 67) and a second in 2006, (*Woodbury Hill Wood, Moccas, A Woodland Survey*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 236).

Moccas Park is located on the north facing slopes of Dorstone Hill and is managed as a National Nature Reserve. The post-medieval park was enlarged to spread over the top of the hill (known as Woodbury Hill) and may have reached the Peterchurch to Dorstone road within the Golden Valley.

Woodbury Hill was planted as coniferous woodland in the mid 20th century and has been managed as a commercial woodland ever since. It has recently been purchased by the Woodland Trust and is gradually being returned to parkland.

2. Aims and Objectives

The aim of the works at Moccas was to record in more detail selected features whose presence was noted in earlier walk-over surveys and to investigate these features by limited archaeological excavation.

The objectives of the project were:

- To survey and investigate the small enclosure, located on the top of Woodbury Hill, in order to establish its likely date and use.
- To accurately survey and investigate a linear earthwork feature, tentatively previously recorded as a length of medieval park pale.
- To enhance the understanding of the use of Parklands including the varieties of land-use within them at various times throughout history.

3. Location, Topography, Geology and Land-use

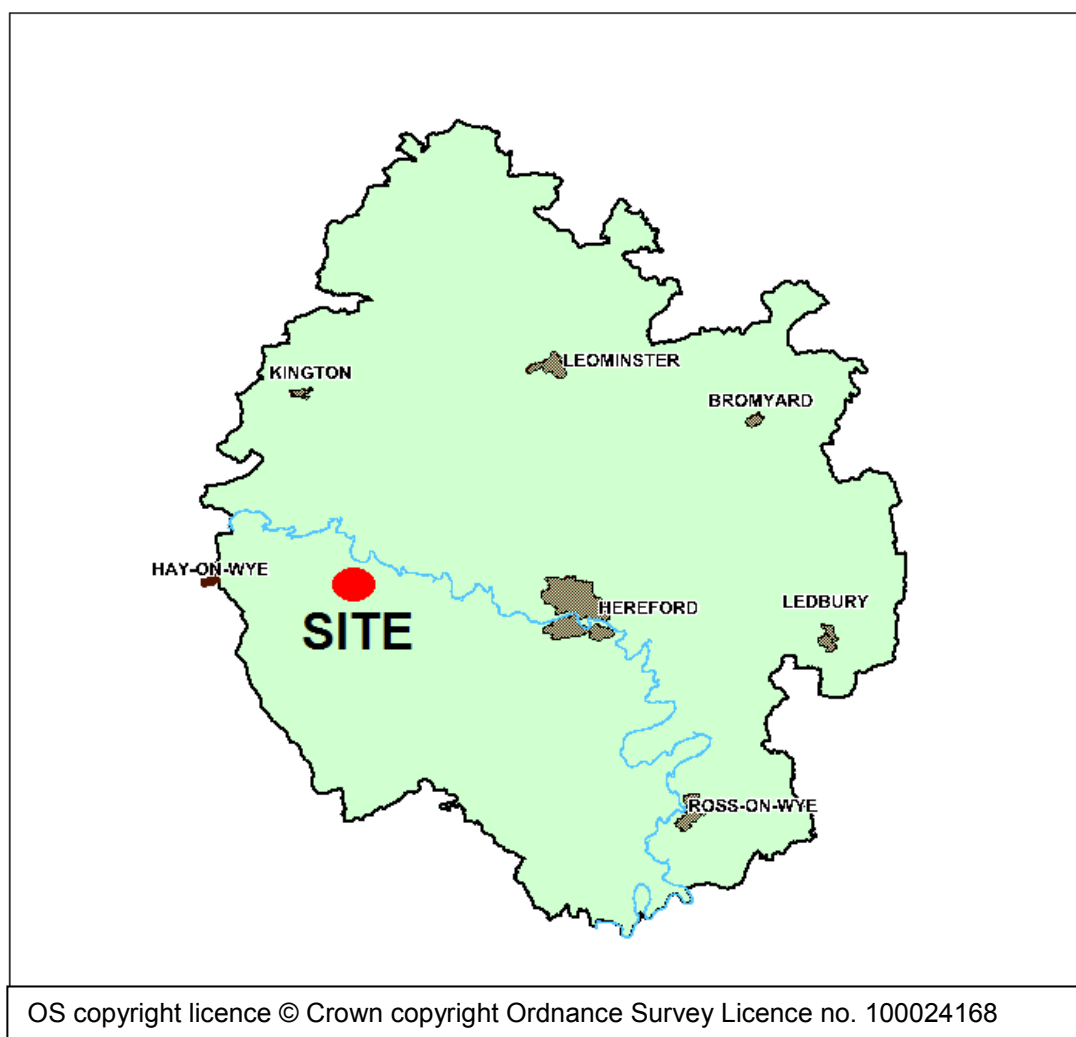


Figure 1: Location of the site within the County of Herefordshire

Moccas Park, Location and Setting

Moccas Park is located approximately 17km to the west of Hereford City. It has an area of over 139ha and covers much of the north east facing slope of Dorstone Hill and forms the “historic core” of the parkland. This area is managed as a National Nature Reserve. The post-medieval park continues over top of Woodbury Hill.

The solid geology under Moccas Park comprises Old Red Sandstone of the Raglan Mudstone series. Overlying this is a variety of fluvio-glacial deposits associated with the late Devensian glaciation. Soils are typically slightly acidic reddish loams. (Harding and Wall, 2000, 22-4)

The Soil Survey Classification identifies the Lower Park and the Eastern Extension as being of Class 1, the lower slopes of the Upper Park and the Plateau as Class 3 and the steeper slopes in the Upper Park as Class 4g and Class 5. The park is grazed by sheep, cattle and deer and is

managed as a National Nature Reserve. The hill top (Moccas Hill Wood), is currently outside the boundary of the National Nature Reserve.

For further details concerning the paleo-environment, trees, flora, fauna (including invertebrates), estate management and natural environmental conservation, readers are referred to “Moccas: an English deer park”, (edited by Harding and Wall., 2000).

The Historic Landscape Characterisation for Herefordshire lists the study area as a retained parkland.

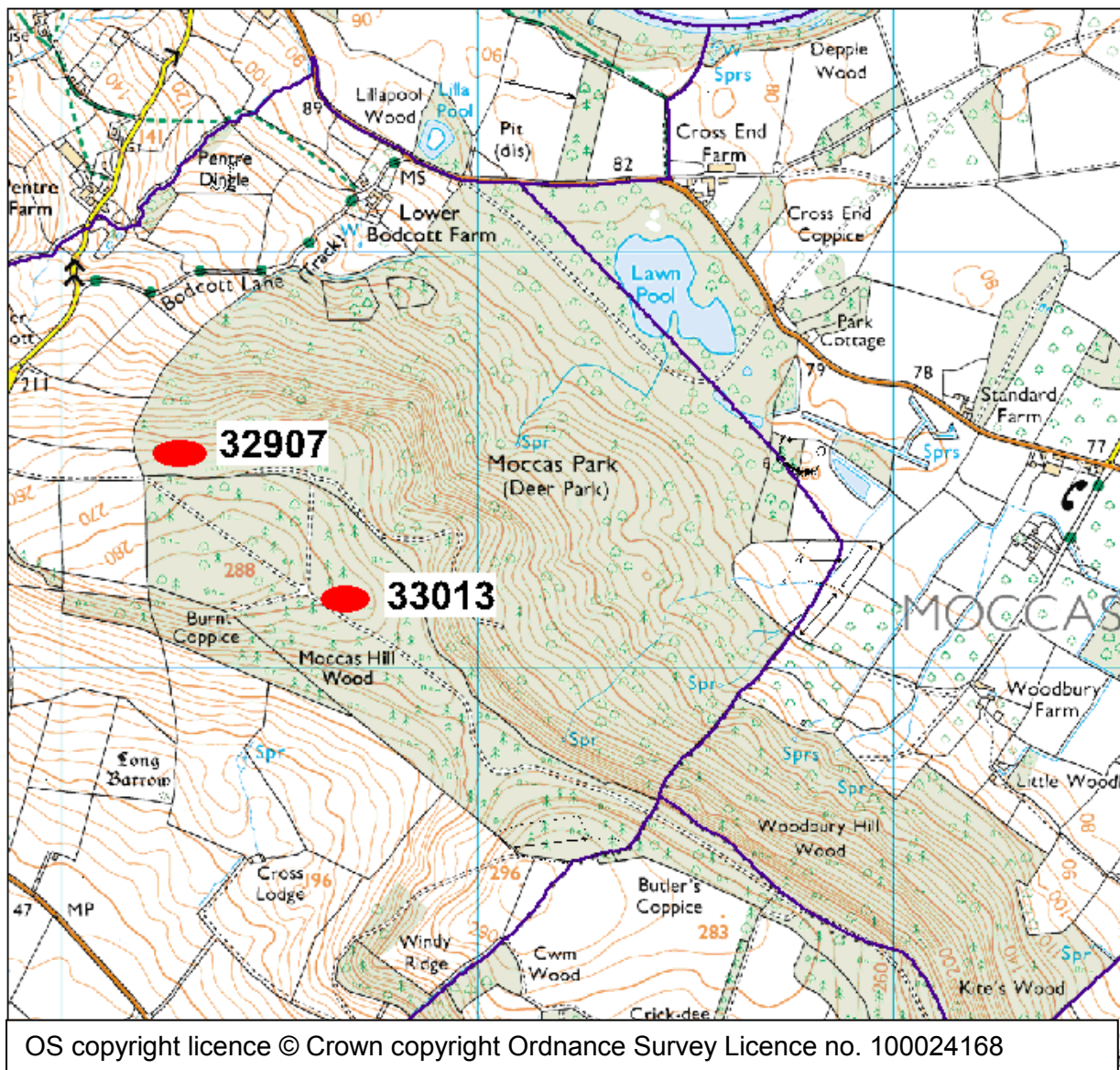


Figure 2: Location of sites investigated within this report.

4. Methodology

Each site was surveyed using a Leica 905 Total Station instrument. This not only recorded the shape and scale of the earthwork but also the topography within its immediate environs. Sections across each feature were excavated by hand in order to retrieve data concerning the construction of the features, the character of the features and any evidence of their use and date.

Full written and drawn records of all excavated contexts were be made in accordance with best archaeological practice. Archaeological deposits, which are not excavated, will be recorded to the maximum extent possible. Records included the overall excavation area and phase plans, as appropriate.

All on-site recording was be undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Institute For Archaeologist's *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Excavations* (as amended 1999).

A continuous unique numbering system was operated. Written descriptions were recorded on proforma sheets comprising factual data and interpretative elements.

Where stratified deposits were encountered a Harris matrix was compiled during the course of the excavation.

Hand drawn plans were drawn at a scale of 1:20 or 1:10 as appropriate.

The site grid and plans were accurately tied into the National Grid.

A register of plans was kept.

A register of sections was kept.

A full digital photographic record, illustrating in both detail and general context the principal features and finds discovered was maintained. The photographic record also included working shots in order to illustrate more generally the nature of the archaeological work.

Upon completion of the excavation, the trenches were backfilled by hand and where appropriate, turves replaced.

5. Current Knowledge

The two features chosen for examination within Moccas Park for the purposes of this project, had both been recorded as archaeological sites / features of significance during walk over surveys undertaken in 2003 and 2006.

A series of four small terraces orThe lynchets were recorded within the Upper Park area. These followed the contours of the hill and were very eroded. The highest recorded lynchet (HSM 32907), surmounts a low ridge and runs to the north and west towards Dorstone Gate. Approximately 20m down slope from this upper lynchet there is another (HSM 32901), and approximately 30m down slope from this is a third, (HSM 32912). The lowest lynchet, (HSM 32914) appears to be associated with a further lynchet topped by a modern hedge. This further

lynchet continues to the west of the park boundary. This continuation indicates that the field system is likely to pre-date the Deer Park.

The upper-most lynchet (HER 32907) comprised an earthwork terrace or lynchet with a possible ditch at its base and bank along its crest. This was the only terrace / lynchet to have a bank along its top and a possible ditch at its base. It was therefore desirable to investigate this feature in order to understand its development and construction. It was hoped that by doing so, additional detail concerning the use and development of the park would be forthcoming.

During the walk-over survey of Moccas Hill Wood, (also known as Woodbury Hill), in 2006 a small, (35m long by less than 20m wide), sub-rectangular enclosure was recorded, HSM 32986. This was located on the hill top approximately 25m to the south of a small pond or pool. Although outside the boundaries of the medieval Deer Park; it was hoped that this structure would provide information concerning either, the type of land management apparent prior to this part of the hill being taken in to the park during the 18th and / or 19th centuries, or, the use of the enclosure within the parkland.

Further information regarding additional features can be found in the Herefordshire Archaeology Reports which were produced as a result of the walk-over surveys: *An Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Moccas Deer Park*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 67, Hoverd 2003 and *Woodbury Hill Wood, Moccas, A Woodland Survey*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 236, Hoverd 2006.

6. Field Survey Results

Fieldwork was undertaken between 29th August and 11th September 2013. A total of five Herefordshire Nature Trust volunteers took part in the survey and excavation under the supervision of two members of Herefordshire Archaeology Staff.

Site 1: The enclosure (HSM 33013).

The earthwork remains of a banked and ditched enclosure were recorded during the 2006 woodland survey. This comprised a single bank with an external ditch measuring a maximum of 42m long and 13m wide. Only the northern portion of the enclosure survives as the remainder has been destroyed by the insertion of a forestry track during the mid 20th century. The bank survives to a height of 0.6m from the base of the external ditch and has a maximum width of 1.55m. The ditch has almost completely sited up but survives as a subtle earthwork approximately 1.6m wide and 0.2m deep. The enclosure is not a regular shape, (see figure 3) but appears to have a straight south eastern side, a kinked north-eastern side and an angled return on its north-western side.

The bank appears as a well preserved earthwork approximately 1.2m wide and 0.5m high whilst the external ditch appears as a 1.3m wide and 0.2m deep earthwork. Two trenches were excavated across this enclosure. Trench 1 was located on the north-eastern side, over the bank and ditch and this comprised a 4m long by 1m wide hand dug trench. Trench 2 was located within the enclosure (roughly centrally) and comprised a 1m square test pit.

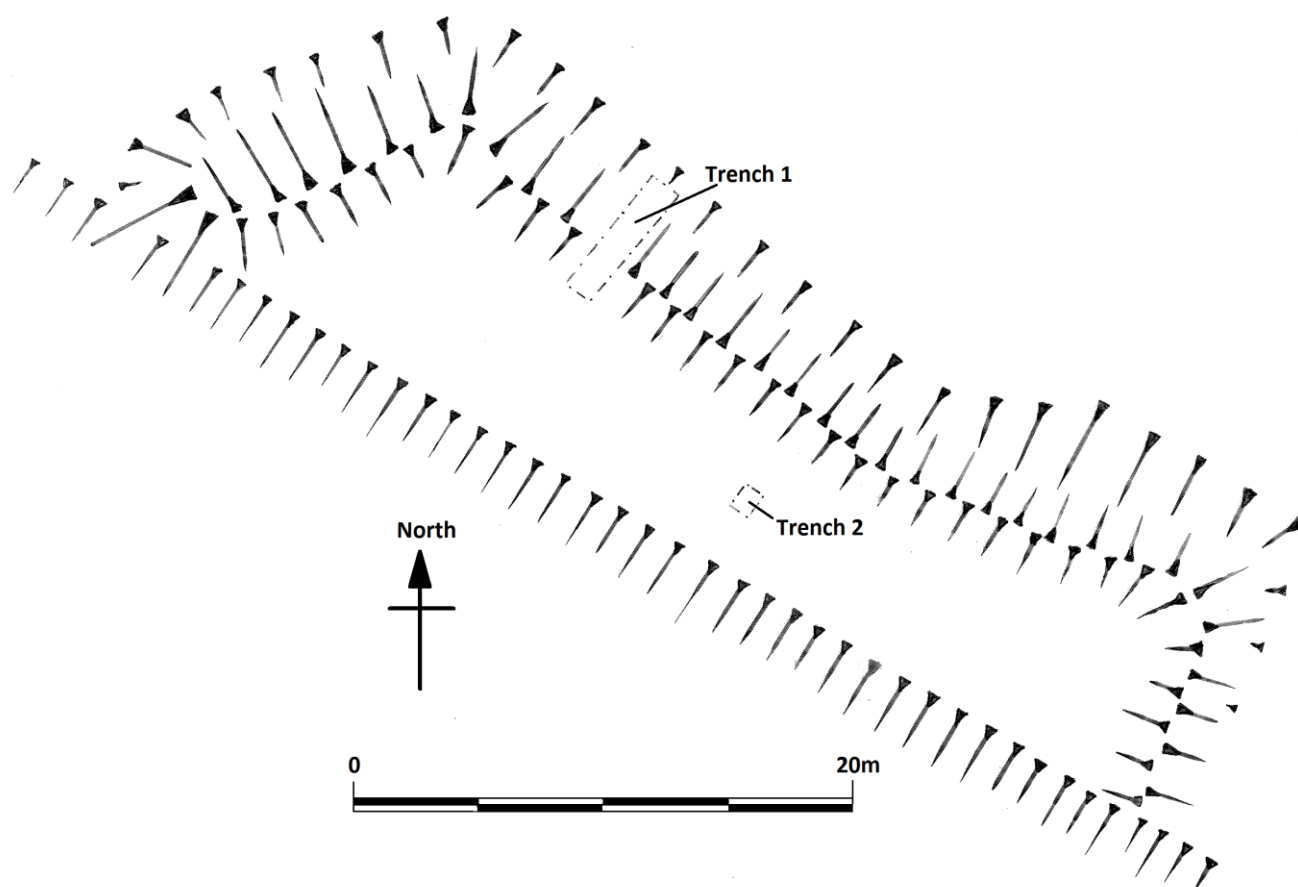


Figure 3: Earthwork plan and trench locations.

Trench 1 revealed that the bank was earthen and was constructed using material generated when constructing the ditch. The scale of the ditch was never huge, approximately 1.4m wide and 0.35m deep, (see figure 4). No artefacts were recovered from the trench, a small quantity of charcoal fragments were recorded from the primary fill.

Trench 2 also failed to produce any information regarding the date or use of the enclosure. Again a small quantity of charcoal fragments were recovered but nothing of archaeological significance. The soil profile within the trench suggested that the internal ground surface of the earthwork had been raised by the importing of local soil which was apparent as a 0.35m thick layer of re-deposited natural.

It would appear that the enclosure was never used for industrial or domestic purposes. The small background scatter of charcoal fragments within both trenches, could have been deposited by wind action and therefore may be completely un-related to the enclosure. This albeit, negative evidence together with the location of the enclosure may suggest that it was primarily used to corral stock. The enclosure is located approximately 20m to the south west of a small pool. This appears to be natural (although dredged and possibly enlarges at some point in time) and appears on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey Mapping of 1886, (although the enclosure does not).

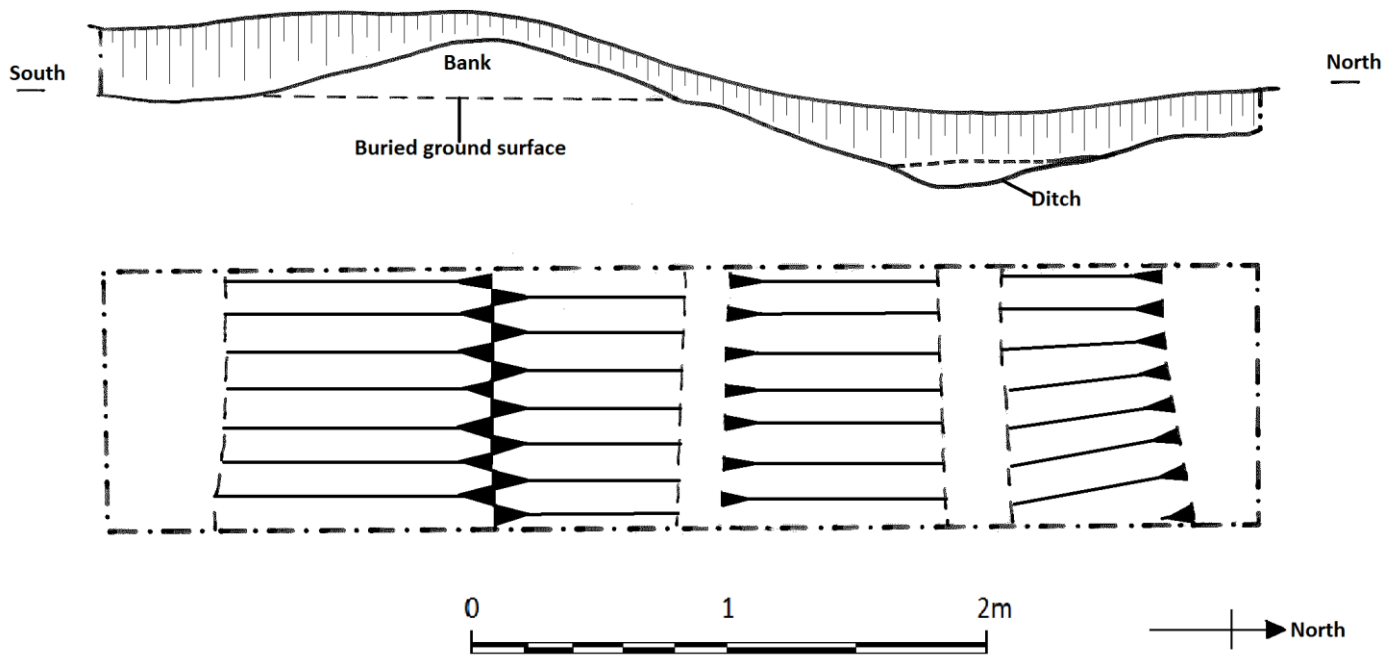


Figure 4: Section and Plan of trench 1 showing detail of the bank and ditch.

It is therefore suggested that the enclosure represents the earthwork remains of a stock corral used for the checking of grazing stock on what was the open hill. As this feature does not appear on the early maps it is unlikely that it relates to the time that this area was incorporated into the park and therefore an estimated date of late or early post medieval is suggested for this feature.



**Plate 1: Trench 1
under excavation
over the enclosure
bank and ditch.**

Site 2: The Park Pale



Plate 2: Showing the trench running over the park pale, looking north-west.

A 1m wide and 5m long trench was excavated by hand over what had previously been recorded as a redundant length of park pale (HER 32907, Figure 2), which appeared to sit on top of a terrace. It was decided to investigate this feature in order to confirm that it was part of an early park boundary and to also investigate the nature of the terrace on which it stands.

The trench, (plates 2 &3, Figure 5), was cut at right angles to the earthwork and was laid out so that it intercepted the bank on top of the terrace as well as the ditch at the base of slope.

The trench recorded the degraded remains of a bank which had been constructed on top of an artificially levelled terrace. It would appear from the siting of both the bank and ditch that the terrace was used as the basis for the park pale and therefore the size of both the bank and ditch did not need to be as large as normal.



Plate 3: The trench over the park pale looking south.

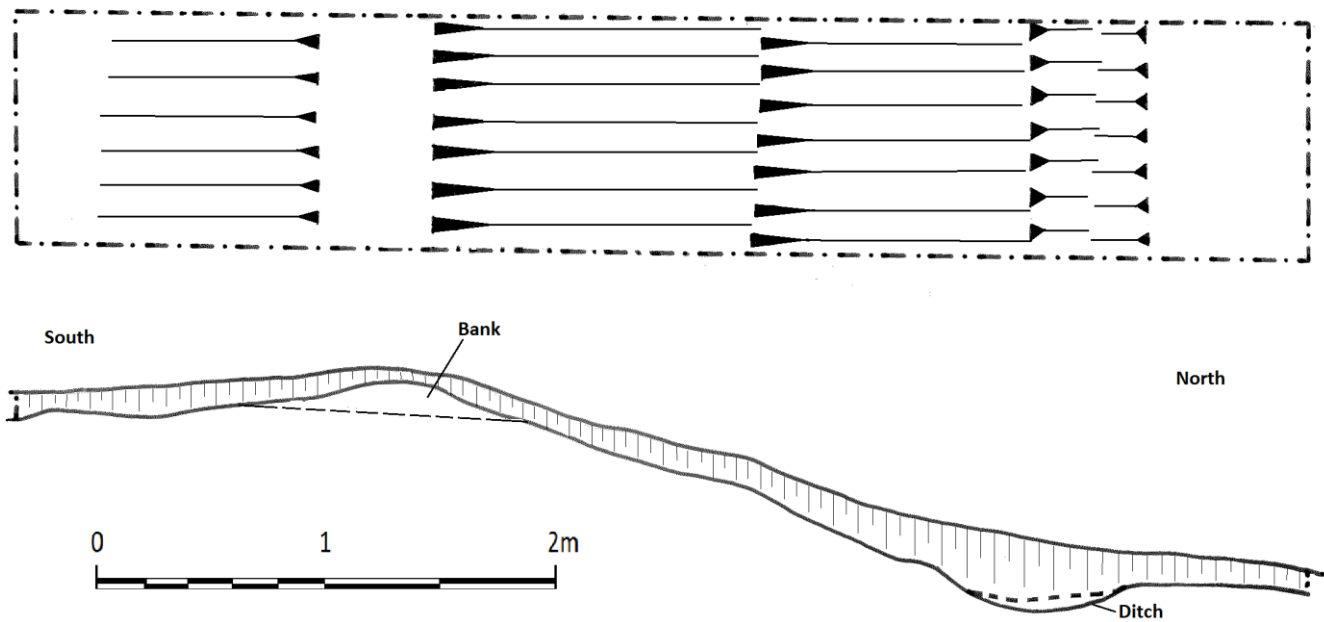


Figure 5: Plan and section of the park pale.

The remains of the bank were approximately 1.3m wide and 0.25m high with a ditch of similar dimensions at the base of the terrace. The height of the terrace is approximately 1m which provides a total height from ditch base to surviving bank top of approximately 1.5m. The profile of the bank and its overlying soil would suggest that it has been purposefully slighted / levelled after it fell into disuse.

There is no reason not to suggest that this length of pale is medieval in origin and is associated with one of the many phases of park boundary re-organisation known to have occurred.

Having established that the pale boundary had utilised a terrace which appeared to have been, at least in part, artificially created, some limited survey work was undertaken within its immediate environs. The 2003 survey had tentatively recorded a series of four terraces or lynchets within this part of the park (the one investigated here being to one at the top of the slope). It was suggested in the original report that these could have been associated with a field system which pre-dated the laying out of the medieval park.

A series of three 1m square test pits were excavated on level ground above the top terrace. The first two test pits contained an unusually deep, well mixed brown earth which was loose in character suggesting that it had been cultivated over a considerable period of time. When choosing the location of the third test pit, an area of large stones was encountered. These were cleaned off (Plate 4) and an area approximately 4m by 4m was made visible. At first the stones appeared to be fairly randomly placed. However after an initial clean it was apparent that they had been placed in a localised pile.



Plate 4: Area of stone after initial clean.



Plate 5: Cairn during excavation after removal of loose and displaced stones.



Plate 6: Cairn showing its ordered construction.

Loose and obviously displaced stones were removed in order to fully investigate the origins of this feature. It rapidly became apparent that this was a clearance cairn associated with agriculture, (areas of ground cleared of stone to aid ploughing). It became clear that stones had been purposefully arranged in discrete layers and in such a way as to form a circular mound, (Plates 5 and 6). During the cleaning and excavation of the cairn a flint Thumb Scraper was recovered from within the mound, no other finds were recorded (see figure 6). This suggests that the cairn, together with the terracing (or lynchets) formed part of a prehistoric (Bronze Age) field system which not only covered the top of Dorstone Hill, but continued down its northern side.

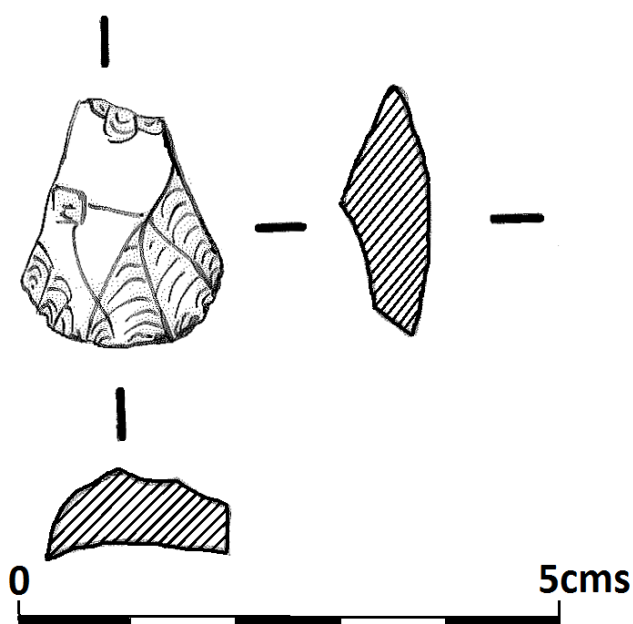


Figure 6: illustration of the flint scraper found within the matrix of the cairn.

7. Discussion and Conclusions

The archaeological works at Moccas have added considerably to our understanding of land use history. The enclosure appears to represent a rare survival of a feature associated with the open hill – an area of rough grazing for sheep and possibly cattle which has all but disappeared now due to agricultural improvement. The excavation across the park pale has not only confirmed that this was an early phase of pale but that it was constructed upon a pre-existing agricultural terrace. The terrace, (one of four identified during the walk-over survey of 2003), has now been dated to the Bronze Age or early Iron Age by the excavation of the cairn discovered during this project.

It is clear that Moccas / Woodbury Hill has a long and complex history. The existence of the medieval and later deer parks has helped preserve earthwork features which pre-date the emparking and this adds greatly to the importance of the site as a National Nature Reserve.

9. Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of Natural England and the Woodland Trust and the Chester-Masters family for giving permission for the project to go ahead on their land. Herefordshire Nature Trust (in particular Lewis Goldwater).

10. Personnel

The lead officer for the project was Tim Hoverd. He was responsible for access to the sites, Health and Safety, provision of equipment and logistics and the final report production. David Williams was responsible for volunteer supervision and on-site recording and initial post-excavation work.

11. Bibliography

Harding, P.T. and Wall, T. (Eds.), 2000, "*Moccas: an English deer park*".

Hoverd, T. 2003, *An Archaeological Reconnaissance Survey of Moccas Deer Park*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 67

Hoverd, T. 2006, *Woodbury Hill Wood, Moccas, A Woodland Survey*, Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 236

12. Archive

54 digital photographs
4 site notebook entries
12 context cards
3 sheets of field drawings
3 sheets of inked drawings
This document