



**Herefordshire  
Council**

April 2013

**A Rapid Recording Survey of Pathways and  
Trackways in Fishpool Valley, Croft Castle,  
The Croft Estate.  
Herefordshire**



**Report prepared by**

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**Herefordshire Archaeology Report No. 325**

**Herefordshire Archaeology**  
Conservation and Environmental Planning  
Planning Services Regeneration Directorate

Herefordshire Council



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# **A Rapid Recording Survey of Pathways and Trackways within Fishpool Valley, Croft Castle, The Croft Estate. Herefordshire**

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EHE 2158**

**HAR 325**

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**Herefordshire Archaeology** is Herefordshire Council's county archaeology service. It advises upon the conservation of archaeological and historic landscapes, supports the maintenance of the county Sites and Monuments (Historic Environment) Record, and carries out conservation and investigative field projects. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

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## **Summary**

*This report has been produced in accordance with a Written Scheme of Investigation agreed between The National Trust and Herefordshire Archaeology in order to record the course, nature, and extent of a series of paths, walks and carriage-rides which exist within Fishpool Valley on the Croft Estate.*

*The National Trust has begun the management of areas within Fishpool Valley with the aim of the partial restoration of areas within it to a post medieval landscape park. The carriage-rides, paths and walks were an intrinsic part of this designed landscape. The National Trust have expressed an ambition to understand the layout of these route-ways and if practicable open some lengths of them as way-marked walks.*

*The survey identified twelve lengths of route-way which survive as earthworks within Fishpool Valley. These appear to contour around the valley sides at different heights in order to benefit from a diversity of viewing points taking in either landscape views or overlooking specific features and buildings.*

*Whilst many of the route-ways were found to have been cut by later features, e.g. quarries, some survive for considerable distances and could be reinstated as walks accessible by visitors. The re-opening of some lengths of route-ways, particularly through areas where the Trust has begun the restoration of the pre 19<sup>th</sup> century park would greatly enhance the experience of walking through and understanding the subtleties of the form and design of Fishpool Valley.*

*This survey has highlighted the subtle complexity of the designed landscape features within the base of Fishpool Valley which in order to understand better will require further research.*

**Disclaimer:** It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGR's 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 1:20.

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## **1. Introduction**

This report (EHE 2158) provides an account of an archaeological survey carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology at Fishpool Valley on the Croft Estate. The fieldwork element of the work was undertaken in April 2013.

The report firstly sets out briefly the aims and objectives of the project, describes the location, and provides an outline historical background. The report goes on to describe the progress and results of the survey, and concludes with an overview of the results of the project.

## **2. Aims, objectives and methods for the study, including reporting**

This Report has been produced following a written request from the Countryside Manager for The National Trust in Herefordshire. Herefordshire Archaeology has been requested to survey, using hand-held GPS equipment the routes of all historic carriage-rides and / walks within Fish-pool Valley on the National Trust property of Croft Castle. The data recorded will be put into a GIS programme in order for the National Trust to:

- Facilitate their protection during forestry operations
- Provide options for opening sections of carriage-ride up as walks for visitors to the property
- Gain a more detailed understanding of how the post-medieval, designed landscape was developed and used within Fish-pool Valley

In addition to the mapping of the carriage-ride earthworks, a commentary concerning the condition of the carriage-rides together with the recording of any related features (viewing platforms etc.), has also been requested in order to ascertain whether sections of these could be re-established as routes for visitors to the property.

### 3. Location

The Croft Castle Estate is a National Trust property that has been in its ownership since 1957. The Croft Estate covers approximately 720ha and is located 7km north-west of Leominster in North Herefordshire. The property extends across 5km of the upper slopes of a south-facing hillside, from Bircher Coppice in the east to the River Lugg at Aymestrey in the west. The Croft Castle estate currently straddles the civil parishes of Aymestrey, Lucton and Croft with Yarpole. The Croft Estate is known nationally for the complex and prominent Iron Age hillfort of Croft Ambrey. More locally, the estate is known for its fine, castellated mansion and associated parkland.

#### Geology:

The solid geology comprises limestones and siltstones of the Silurian series (Earp and Hains, 1971). There are localised colluvial deposits in the dry combes and stream-fed valleys. The bedding planes of the often friable rock are evident in numerous quarries on the property. The soils are of the coarse silts of the Munslow Association (Ragg et al, 1984). Excavations in the vicinity of Croft Castle between 2001 and 2004 demonstrated both the thinness of soil cover over bedrock in many locations and the gleyed nature of the colluvial deposits within the valleys.

### 4. Background history and previous historical and archaeological works

The name Croft is Old English meaning “the enclosure” (Eckwall, 1960, 131). Aubrey’s *Monumenta Britannica* (c1690), was a largely haphazard compilation of antiquarian notes. He did however visit Herefordshire on a number of occasions, (he owned land within the county), and his comment “*At Crofts-parke is a large Campe with two great Ditches, called the Ambry: from whence (there) is a lovely Prospect*” is no doubt based on first-hand observation, since he is known to have sold his property at Stretford to Bishop Herbert Croft in 1663 (Barber, 1975,20). As such, Aubrey’s mention of the double bank and ditch at Croft Ambrey is one of the first published records of an “archaeological” observation in the county.

Croft was rendered “Crofta” at Domesday, and appears then to have been a relatively small settlement (one plough in lordship, two ploughs and six household heads) in keeping with the compact size of the later parish, Bernard held the land from William of Ecouis, and Edwin was said to have held it in the time of King Edward the Confessor (see Thorn and Thorn, 1983: 14,5).

Very little is well documented about the medieval Croft family, or its estates. Sir Hugh de Croft was named in the list at the tournament at Dunstable in 1308, and was present at the parliament at York in September 1314 (Croft, 1949,22). William of Croft was Sheriff of Herefordshire in 1425 (Croft, 1949, 36). Richard Croft was Sheriff in 1470-1, 1476 and 1485, and in the latter year was also Receiver in the King’s Household (ibid,40). The family was closely allied to the Mortimers of Wigmore and Ludlow and to the house of York. Croft Castle is first mentioned as such among a list of Herefordshire castles in William of Worcester’s *Itineraries*, in 1497 (Goodbury,2000.6.3). The most illustrious family head was Sir James Croft, who, amongst other appointments, was Controller of the Queen’s Household in 1570



(Croft, 1949,56). It was during his lifetime, in 1536, that John Leland mentioned seeing the fortified manor at Croft from a distance. The Inventory of the property of Sir James Croft, produced at the time of his death in 1590, identifies a number of rooms and structures including a hall, a gallery at least one if not two gatehouses and numerous private apartments (Goodbury, 2000, 2002)

Sir William Croft was a prominent Royalist in the early seventeenth century. He was one of the few of the Herefordshire gentry, and the only head of a major household, to have been killed during the Civil War. He was killed in a skirmish at Stokesay in 1645. His younger brother, Herbert Croft became Bishop of Hereford in 1661, having gained a reputation for loyalty to the Royalist cause, for personal bravery and for outspokenness during the years of the Commonwealth.

The Croft family heavily mortgaged the estate in the early years of the eighteenth century. Eventually the mortgages came into possession of both mansion and estate. During the remainder of that century, the Knight and Johnes families were in ownership and occupation. In 1799, Somerset Davies purchased the house, having already acquired significant parts of the estate land. The Davies and later, Kevill-Davies family remained in ownership and occupation throughout the nineteenth century, eventually selling in 1923 to Sir James Croft, the 11<sup>th</sup> Baronet (Goodbury,2000).

### **Statutory constraints:**

The principal statutorily defined and protected area of the estate from an historic environment standpoint is the Scheduled Ancient Monument, Croft Ambrey hillfort (SAM Herefordshire 76). The mansion and St. Michael's church are listed (Grade 1) as buildings of Architectural and Historic Interest. The 18<sup>th</sup> century stable block around a courtyard and the Gothick Wall are also listed (Grade II). The remaining historic environment designation is the inclusion of Croft Castle in the Register of Historic Parks and Gardens. The park is described as "A landscape park with notable survivals of sweet chestnut plantings of probable C17 date associated with a country house". The Register reference is GD1875. The park is graded II\*.

### **Previous historical and archaeological research**

O.G.S.Croft wrote a history of the Croft family (*The House of Croft of Croft Castle*, E.J. Thurston Press, Hereford, 1949). This included mention of documentary references to the castle and estate, and notes by George Marshall on Croft Church (pp. 129-35). Elizabeth Inglis-Jones published an account of the ownership and occupation of Croft Castle by the Knight and Johnes families (in *Peacocks in Paradise*, Faber, 1950). Diana Uhlmann wrote the Guidebook for the property which was first published in 1979 and was last revised in 1990.

Dr. S. Stanford published privately a report on the Woolhope Naturalist's Field Club sponsored research excavations at Croft Ambrey between 1960 and 1966 (Stanford 1974) Advisory staff of The National Trust reported upon the archaeological and biological

conservation issues affecting Croft Ambery in the mid-1980s (Alexander, Claris and Lutley, 1985).

D.M.Young and K.A.Fretwell published historical research on the castle and estate in a volume that arose from a Manpower Services Commission Community Programme project in the mid 1980's, (*Croft Castle Park and Garden Survey, 1986-87*, Fretwell, Knox and Young)

H. Dalwood and R. Waller produced a draft report on an archaeological survey of the whole estate, (*Croft Castle Estate: Survey and archaeological management recommendations, 1992*)

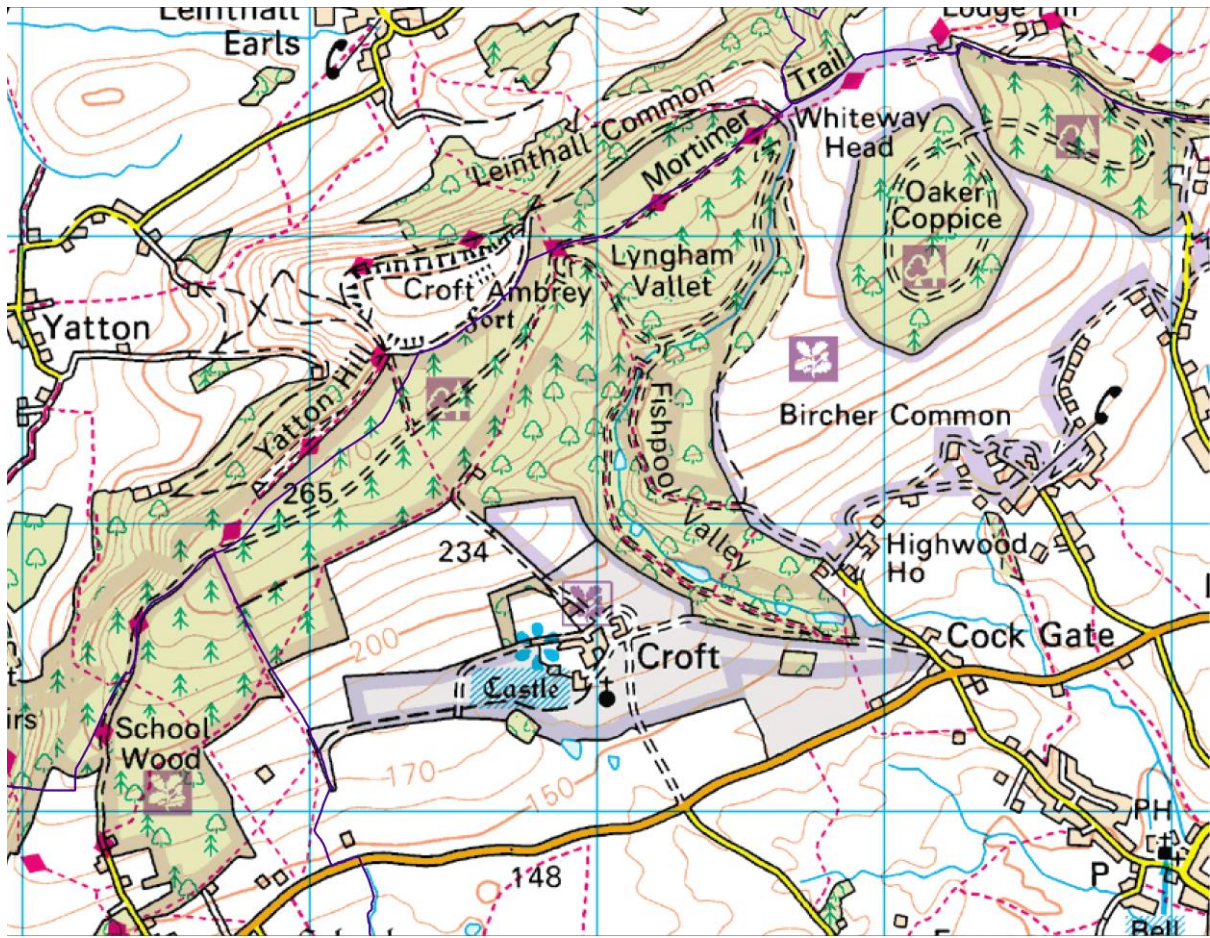
The National Trust has commissioned a series of further studies in recent years, primarily in connection with refurbishment works with the mansion itself between 2000 and 2002. Small scale archaeological watching briefs have been undertaken and reported on which include works on the refurbishment of the Carpenter's Shop as a tea room by Worcester County Archaeology Service and the laying of a new water pipe to supply field troughs by Marches Archaeology.

In 2001-2 Herefordshire Archaeology were commissioned to expand upon the Dalwood and Waller survey report. The entire Estate was re-surveyed and a gazetteer of sites located by GPS, created. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray Herefordshire Archaeology Report 49, 2003)

Herefordshire Archaeology worked in partnership with the National Trust between 2001 and 2004 during which time four seasons of research excavation and fieldwork were undertaken specifically within the close environs of the Mansion. A series of reports describing these works are in preparation. (T.Hoverd and K.Ray forthcoming).

It is understood that L-P Archaeology has recently undertaken fieldwork within the walled garden, aimed at identifying and recording the formal paths.





**Figure 1: Map extract showing the location of Fishpool Valley in relation to the Croft Estate.**

## 5. Fishpool Valley

Fishpool Valley comprises a deeply incised coombe or side valley which separates Bircher Common from the Croft Estate parkland. The study area lies between 135m OD and 235m OD. The valley supports a small stream which has been dammed on a number of occasions in order to construct a series of pools. The stream and pools are fed by a series of three side valleys each with its own spring. It is believed that the pools do not represent commercial or domestic fish ponds, (for the farming of fish for consumption) but are rather part of a designed landscape, probably laid out during the 18<sup>th</sup> century in order to complement the parkland and provide a “buffer” in the form of a contrived wilderness between the more formal parkland and Bircher Common.

Historically, the valley has been largely wooded, however only very fragmentary evidence for how this woodland was managed survives, (in the form of boundary banks and internal divisions). The tithe apportionment, (figure 3), for Croft parish indicates that much of the western side of the valley describes the land use as woodland / rough pasture. It would appear that prior to the creation of a designed landscape within Fishpool Valley a small amount of localised quarrying was undertaken. Doubtless other woodland based industries



**Figure 2: The Croft Parish Tithe Apportionment Map (1839)**

such as charcoal burning and the creation of saw pits for working lumber were also created, (as recorded during the Walkover survey of 2001, Hoverd & Ray 2001).

A map regression for Fishpool Valley shows a number of track-ways and paths, not only running along the length of the valley close to its base, but also, running up some of the side valleys and following the contours approximately half way up the slope of the main valley. These, together with more modern track-ways inserted during the 20<sup>th</sup> century in order to extract timber, have created a complex series of route-ways, leading to confusion over historically significant routes and more modern tracks. Interestingly the Gwatkins map fails to record any route-ways within Highwood Bank Plantation, on the eastern side of Fishpool Valley.



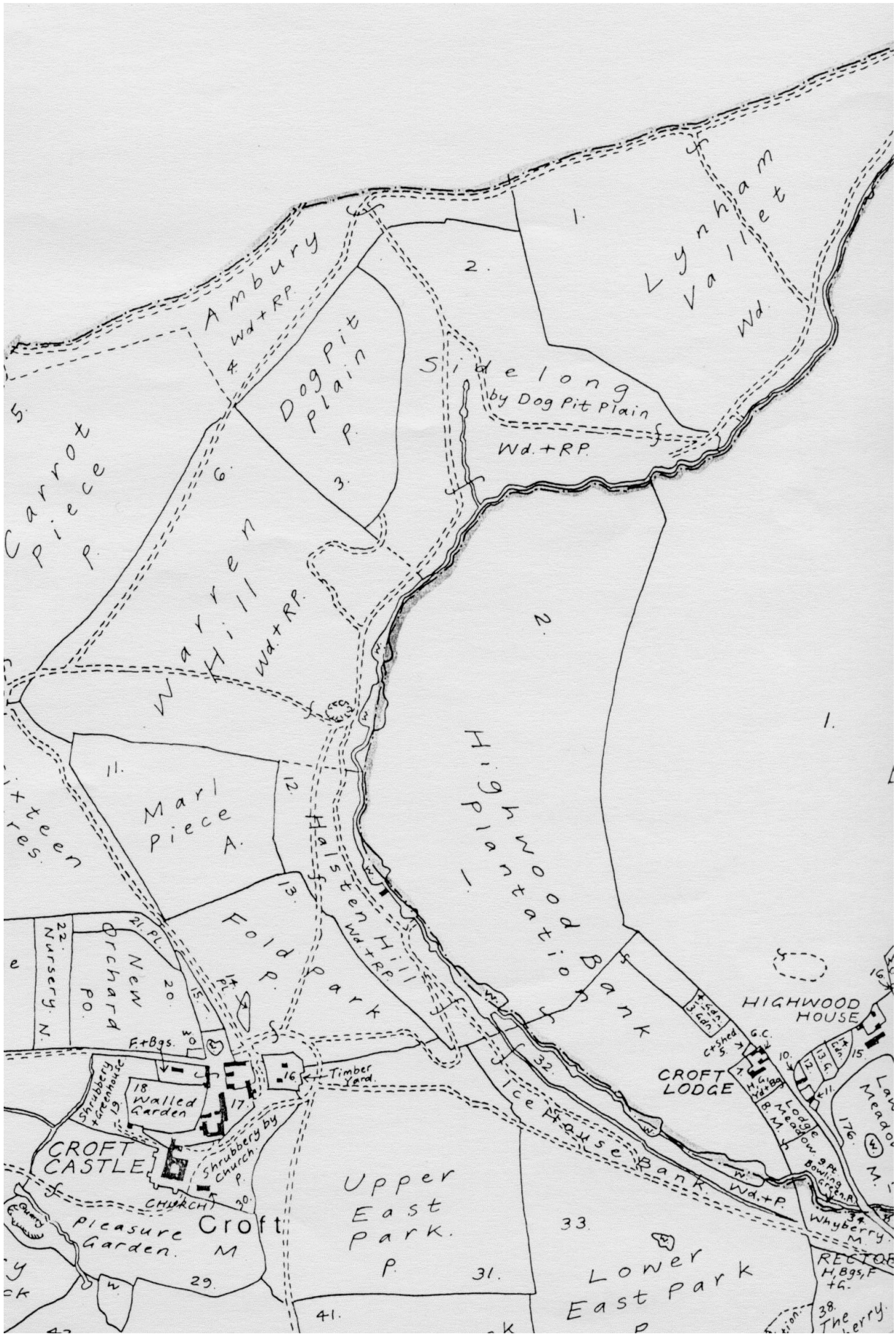


Figure 3: Extract from G. Gwatkin interpolation of the 1839 tithe map for Croft

## 6. Fieldwork in 2013

The survey was undertaken between the 5<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> April 2013, with a guided walk along many of the routes surveyed, for National Trust staff and volunteers on the 12<sup>th</sup> April. Weather conditions were good and the late snow had flattened much of the bracken making the identification and tracing of sections of route-ways within these areas easier. Where possible the course of route-ways was walked and their route recorded using a Garmin 60CSx hand-held GPS system. The results are accurate to within approximately 4m and were imported into a Mapinfo GIS programme at the end of the survey. A running commentary, relating the type of route-way, its degree of preservation and any associated features was made onto a dictaphone during the survey.

The principle features recorded were lengths of earthwork described variously as route-ways, track-ways or carriage-rides. These tend to be between 1.4 and 1.8m wide and due to their locations on the valley sides, usually comprise a fairly sharp terrace following, or at a slight angle to the natural contour. Features associated with these routes were also recorded. These comprised either features constructed as part of the carriage-ride network, e.g. viewing platforms or other features relating to the designed landscape, or features which may have some bearing on the phasing and / or dating of the carriage-ride, e.g. quarries, charcoal burning platforms etc. It is clear that some quarrying may pre-date some of the route-ways recorded whilst most appears to have cut through sections of carriage-ride and therefore post-date the carriage-ride network. The same can be said for the charcoal industry within Fishpool Valley with evidence for sections of carriage-ride being used as a level base for the construction of charcoal burning platforms.

## 7. Observations

A total of 12 routes, or sections of routes, were recorded during the survey. These ranged in length from less than 40m to over 1km. The survey only recorded what appeared to be route-ways which appeared to be of some antiquity and could not have been created as part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century woodland management track network. Therefore track-ways which showed signs of having been used by motor vehicles were not recorded, (unless there was good evidence that the route was of some antiquity).

In general terms, there appears to be three carriage-rides on either side of Fishpool Valley. These comprise a top, middle and bottom of slope route-way with occasional short lengths of joining carriage ride between these principal routes. The carriage-rides utilise the pools in the base of the valley with a number running over the dams in order to link one side of the valley to the other. The close relationship between the carriage-rides, the pools and various other designed features strongly suggest that the rides were constructed as part of the designed landscaping undertaken within other areas of the parkland during the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The following section attempts to briefly describe the route, appearance and condition of each section of carriage-ride surveyed. The carriage-rides have been colour coded and the description will broadly run from the western-most to the eastern-most route.

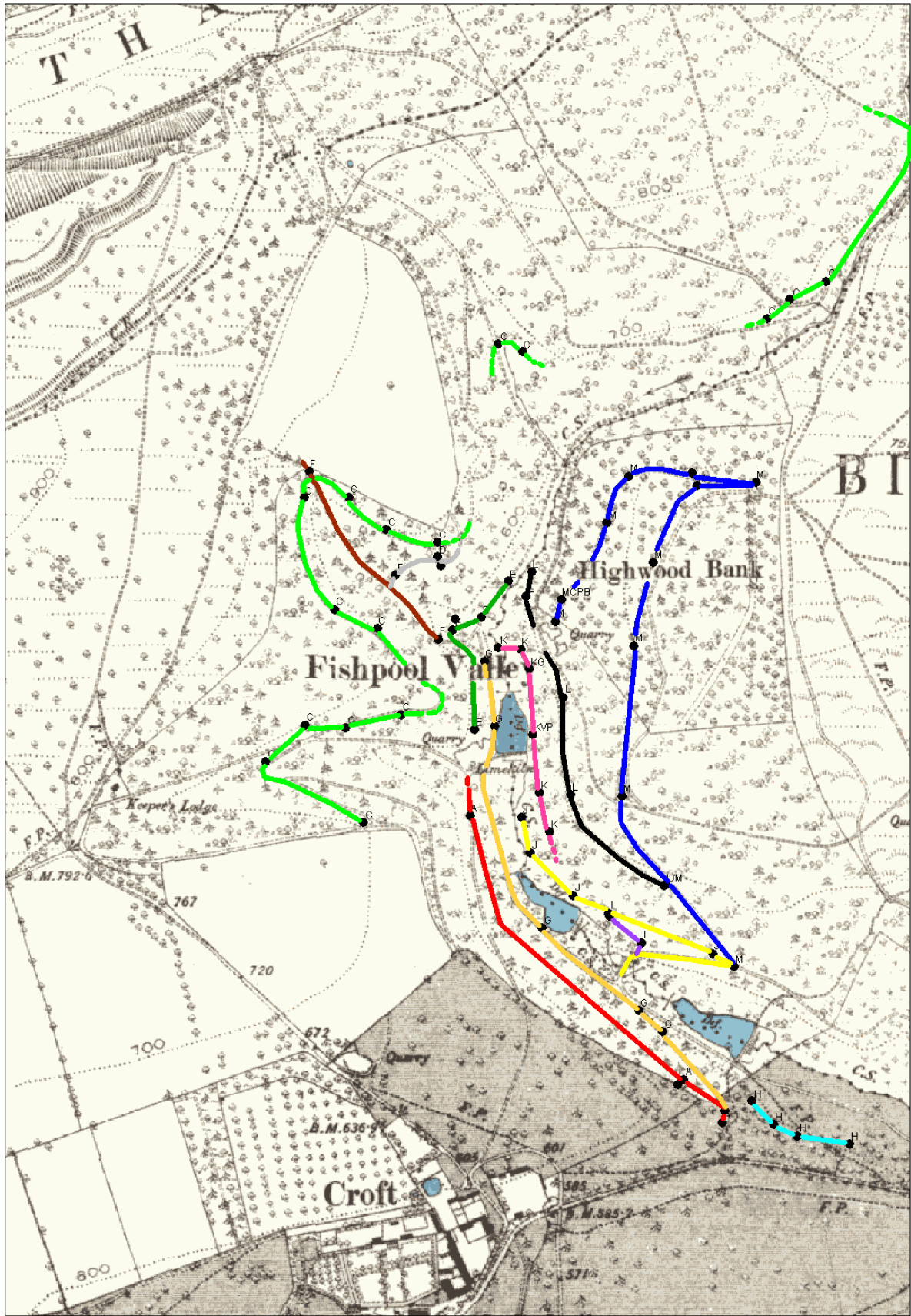


Figure 4: routes mapped and over-laid on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887.



### **1: Bright Green route close to the top of slope on the western side of Fishpool Valley.**

This contours round, close to the top of the slope and appears to be part of the route-way which leads south, across the parkland towards the mansion and present car-park area. The carriage-ride contours round all three side valleys just below the 700ft contour (on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map, figure 4), and runs through to Lynham Vallets before turning sharply to the north-west to head towards Croft Ambrey. It is in generally good condition with a sharp, well defined terrace and is the longest, continuous route recorded. The carriage-ride cannot be traced for two sections close to the top of Fishpool Valley. This is due to the insertion of a modern forestry track along the southern most length which has obscured the original route and the lack of slope and dense undergrowth along the northern-most length which makes tracing it with any certainty difficult at this time. The carriage ride has been cut through by a linear quarry on the end of the spur between the two southern most side valleys.

### **2: Brown route running on a north-west / south-east axis close to the base of the middle side valley.**

This runs along the base of the second side valley along the western edge of a small stream. It meets route one but may continue to run upslope after this. It may well meet and / or become a spur of the dark green route, route 4 which contours along the base of Fishpool Valley.

### **3: Grey route.**

This appears to be a linking route between routes 1 and 2. It is a well defined, sinuous terrace which is obscured by modern forestry track and turning area constructed just as it joins route 1.

### **4: Dark Green route.**

This contours along the western side of the upper part of Fishpool Valley close to the base of the valley. At its southern end it is cut through by the large quarry with the limekiln. It is highly likely that this continues to the south of the quarry as route 5, (the red route). Its northern end disappears under the current valley bottom track and cannot be traced further with any certainty. It is possible that it crossed the stream and becomes route 10 (the black route) to return along the eastern side of the valley.

### **5: Red route.**

This is almost certainly a continuation of route 4. It runs from the southern edge of the quarry with the limekiln to continue south at a slight angle to the natural contour. It meets the top of the slope close to the cattle grid at the eastern end of what is now the car parking area. From here it appears to have headed toward the mansion.

### **6: Dark yellow route.**

This route runs of route 5, at its southern end, to run diagonally down to the base of Fishpool Valley before roughly following the line of the modern track on the western side of the stream. It runs up the valley, past the quarry with the limekiln, and almost certainly crosses

the stream using a dam to join route 10, (the pink route) which runs down the eastern side of the valley.

#### **7: Light blue route.**

This is a fragmentary route which runs for approximately 70m along the contour, mid slope on the western side of Fishpool Valley. It is difficult to trace, largely due to soil slippage on the steeper parts of the slope. It is cut by a small quarry next to the "Ice House" and from there, continues across the slope before petering out. It is unclear how this stretch of carriage ride fits into the rest of the network.

#### **8: Yellow route.**

This runs off route 6, (dark yellow) and crosses the valley on top of a dam. It then describes a large dog-leg before running up the eastern side of the valley, close to its base. There is a viewing platform associated with this carriage ride, overlooking one of the pools. It is unclear where the northern end of this route is. It is possible that it either turned upslope to join route 10, (the pink route), or; it crossed the stream to re-join route 6, (the dark yellow route).

#### **9: Purple route.**

This comprises a "short-cut" between two lengths of the dog-leg on route 8.

#### **10: Pink route.**

This runs close to the base of the eastern side of Fishpool Valley, approximately 20m downslope from route 8. There is a viewing platform overlooking the top pool. The carriage ride runs directly in front of the grotto before turning west and crossing a dam. It may well join the dark yellow route, (route 6).

#### **11: Black route.**

This runs mid-slope along the eastern side of Fishpool Valley following the contour and heading north. It is covered by spoil from the quarry which is on the edge of Highwood Bank but can be traced to the north possibly connecting to route 4 (dark green). It is highly likely that this route also meets route 12 (Dark blue) on two occasions. It clearly leaves route 12 at its southern end and may well be met by route twelve at the point where both routes are cut / covered by spoil from the quarry.

#### **12: Dark blue route.**

This runs diagonally up-slope from the dog-leg on route 8 to run through Highwood Bank. It runs across the top of the hill and turns sharply to the east as it approaches the northern slope of Highwood Bank. It then doubles back on itself to run along the northern slope, before turning south and following the contour until it is cut through by the quarry. Before it reaches the quarry a charcoal burning platform has been constructed over the course of the carriage-ride. It is highly likely that route 12 joined route 11 at the point where both are disturbed by the quarrying.



## 8. Conclusions

This rapid walkover survey has shown that a complex series of walks / rides exist throughout Fishpool Valley. This survey has identified a dozen lengths of route-way suggesting that most areas of the valley were accessible using these routes. It is clear that some routes (running along the upper sides of the valley), were specifically designed to look down at selected vistas / features; whilst others appear to provide a more detailed and intimate tour of the heavily landscaped valley floor. The routes within the base of the valley are particularly difficult to follow due to the lack of slope and often subtle appearance of sections of these features.

Many of the routes are fragmentary and / or are cut by later quarrying. However, it may be possible to use some sections in conjunction with other later routes and footpaths to give visitors to the property some insight into the way in which the designed landscape of Fishpool Valley was laid out and appreciated in the mid to late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Route 1 would be an obvious candidate to at least partially re-open. This is easily accessible and would provide the visitor with views across the valley as well as introducing to the recent clearance and pasture creation prior to the Croft Grave site.

Routes 11 and 12 may also be viable if a detour could be introduced around the quarry in Highwood Bank.

Any number of routes could be "stitched together" within the base of the valley giving visitors the opportunity to understand and explore areas where the recent woodland management programme has opened up areas, making visibility better.

The valley base contains a complex series of watercourses, dams, designed landscape features, route ways and woodland management / industrial features. The recent woodland management program for this area is rapidly exposing additional features and adding detail to features already known. This area would benefit from a more detailed level of survey using a Total Station survey instrument in order to capture accurately the subtleties and complexities of this important designed landscape.

## **Appendix 1: Site Archive**

1 dictaphone tape

Mapinfo workspace file

This document

## **Acknowledgements**

The author would like to express his thanks to Iain Carter, National Trust Countryside Manager, together with all staff and volunteers at Croft Castle.

## **List of Illustrations**

Figure 1: Map extract showing the location of Fishpool Valley in relation to the Croft Estate.

Figure 2: The Croft Parish Tithe Apportionment Map (1839)

Figure 3: Extract from G. Gwatkin interpolation of the 1839 tithe map for Croft

Figure 4: routes mapped and over-laid on the 1<sup>st</sup> Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1887.

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