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# **Lords Wood Enclosure, Whitchurch, Herefordshire**

## **A Measured Earthwork Survey**

February 2012



**Report prepared by  
Christopher Atkinson and David Williams**

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# **Lords Wood Enclosure, Whitchurch, Herefordshire**

## **A Measured Earthwork Survey**

**Monument Number 12074**

**NGR: SO 55295 14690**

**Event Number: EHE**

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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. The County Archaeologist is Dr. Keith Ray.

***Herefordshire Archaeology  
PO Box 230  
Blueschool House  
Blueschool Street  
Hereford  
HR1 2ZB***

## ***Introduction***

This report provides an account of a measured earthwork survey of Lord's Wood Enclosure, Lord's Wood, Whitchurch, Herefordshire (SO55261471) carried out on \*\*-\*\* February 2012. This sub-circular, embanked earthwork enclosure is located at the south end of Lord's Wood, a Forestry Commission managed woodland. The site has previously been subject to trial excavations by the Monmouth School Archaeological Society. These were carried out in 1949-50 and the pottery retrieved indicates the site was occupied between 1<sup>st</sup> – 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, in the Romano-British period. The trenches from these excavations were not backfilled and are still evident today.

Surviving earthwork enclosure sites like this are nationally rare and therefore this site is of national importance. Improving our understanding of this site will contribute to the study and story of settlement in the Roman period.

The site was identified at an early stage of the Heritage Lottery Funded Overlooking the Wye (OtW) Project as a potential project site within the scheme. It was not selected as a primary target for the project and was put on a reserve list. The OtW project, which has run from 2008 – 2012 identified sufficient funding to address some reserve sites and this has enabled to production of a new detailed survey plan of the site to help improve our understanding of the site and guide its future management.

## ***Aims and Objectives***

The aim of this project is to produce an updated detailed measured survey of the Lord's Wood Enclosure site and provide a commentary to accompany this. The objectives to achieve this aim are;

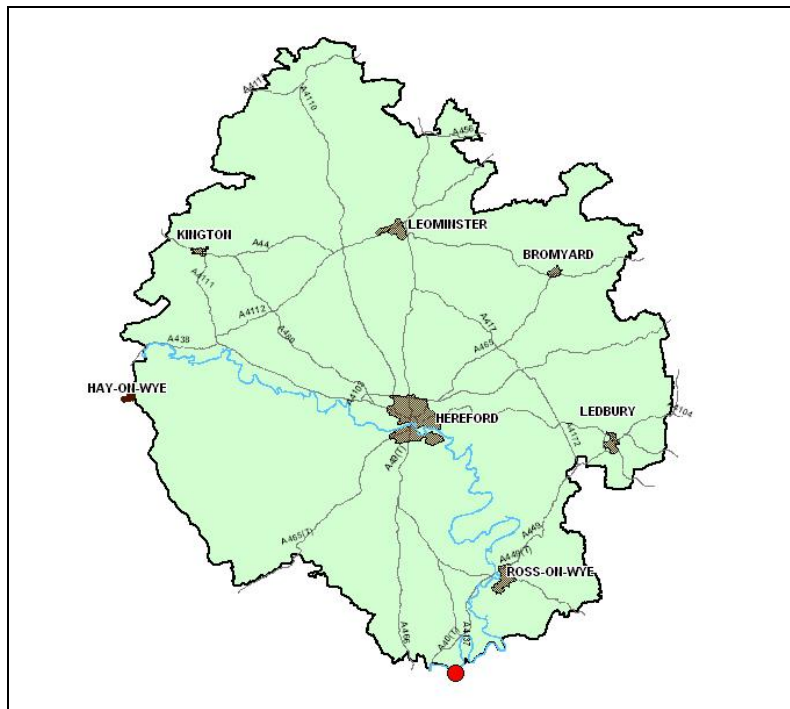
1. Provide a summary of previous work undertaken on the site.
2. Carry out a detailed measured survey of the enclosure and its immediate environs to record the ramparts, ditches, internal features and 1949-50 excavation trenches.
3. Provide a commentary to accompany the measured survey.

During the fieldwork phase of this project it was evident that erosion was continuing around the 1949-50 excavated trenches as a result of them not having been backfilled. As a consequence, as well as the trenches being recorded on the measured survey, photographs were taken in order to clearly show the current extent of the erosion.

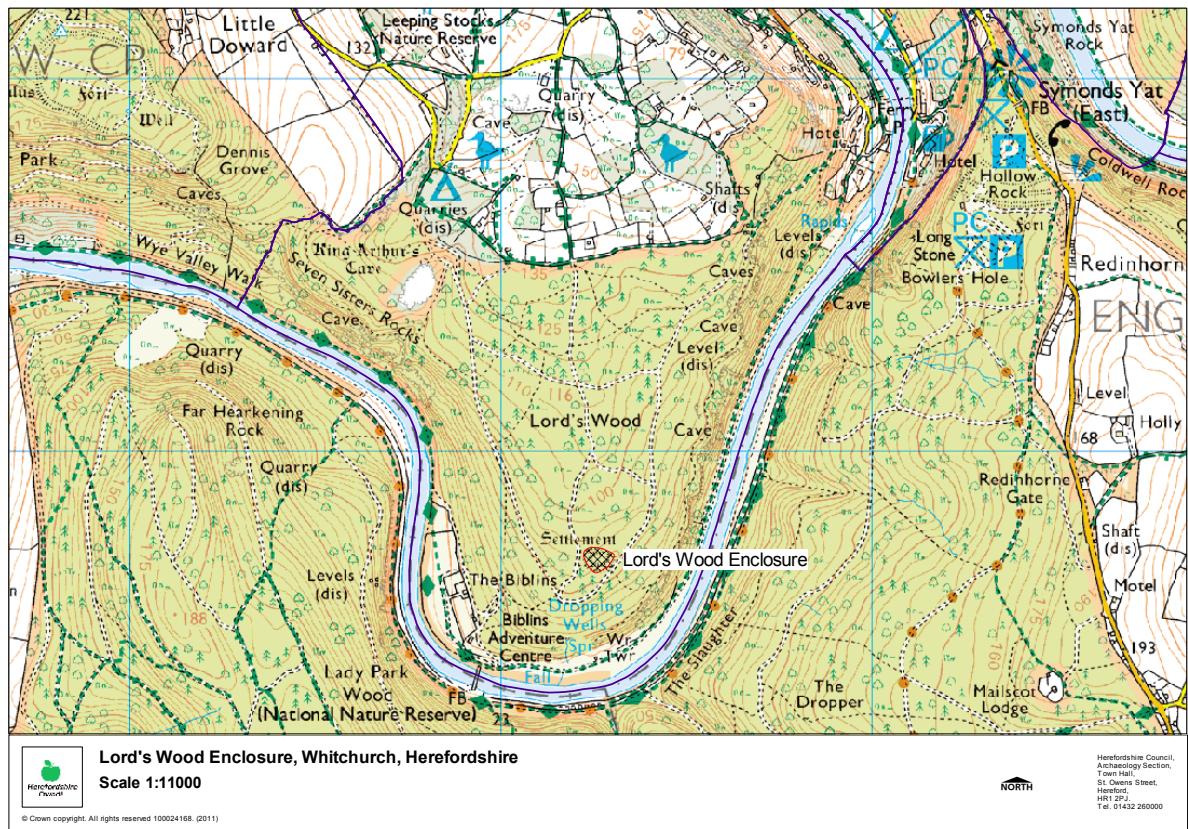
## ***Location, Geology and Land Use***

The site is located at SO55261471, within the parish of Whitchurch, Herefordshire. The site is a hilltop enclosure occupying the south end of a small plateau (85m above Ordnance Datum). The River Wye encircles the

east, south and west sides of this plateau and if the landscape was open the enclosure would overlook the river. To the north of the site the ground steadily rises to form the hilltop known as the Great Doward.



**Figure 1:** Location of Lords Wood Enclosure in relation to the main towns and city in Herefordshire. © Herefordshire Council



**Figure 2:** Site location and its immediate environment. © Herefordshire Council

The geology is carboniferous limestone and the overlying soil is of the Crwbin series. This soil type consists of very shallow well drained loamy soils over limestone, often found on steep slopes; limestone pavements and other rock exposures are common. It is of note that in agriculture this type of soil is preferred for stock rearing use and is considered to have a high grazing value (SSEW 1983).

The site is within Forestry Commission managed woodland that is largely dominated by conifer trees. The enclosure is excluded from the conifer planting and is occupied by beech, younger trees and coppiced trees. There is very little ground vegetation of the site and the earthworks are readily discernible.

### **Past Fieldwork**

There are several sources of existing information for the site:

1. This site is listed on the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record:  
SMR 12074  
Grid ref SO55 14  
Parish Whitchurch, Herefordshire  
Type Fort/settlement (43AD – 409AD)  
Description "Settlement". Large circular earthwork ring marked on OS. Small oval or triangular univallate enclosure in Lords Wood, described by Bridgewater as a RB fortified settlement. Excavated by Monmouth School Arch Soc. Finds date from C1-3 AD & possibly C4. No report has been published of the excavations carried out by the Archaeological Society of Monmouth School in 1949-50. In this article Elizabeth Taylor has put together a report with the help of Mr A.L Sockett (director of excavations, 1950) using his original notes and original drawings and plans of the excavations. A description is given of the trenches opened and the finds found.
2. The site is noted in the Woolhope Club Transaction for 1884 (p.218). After visiting the Severn Sisters Rock "about a quarter of a mile from the river is an oval space enclosed by a single entrenchment (an eight feet ditch with an eight feet embankment)...It is supposed to be an ancient British cattle keep – or very possibly a British residence"
3. The site was the subject of trial excavations undertaken in 1949-50 by the Archaeological Society of Monouth School. No account of the excavation was published at the time. A report was produced by Ms Elizabeth Taylor (1997) with the help of Mr A L Sockett who took over the excavation in 1950. The finds recovered from the excavation date the site to between the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> AD.

In total six trenches were excavated:

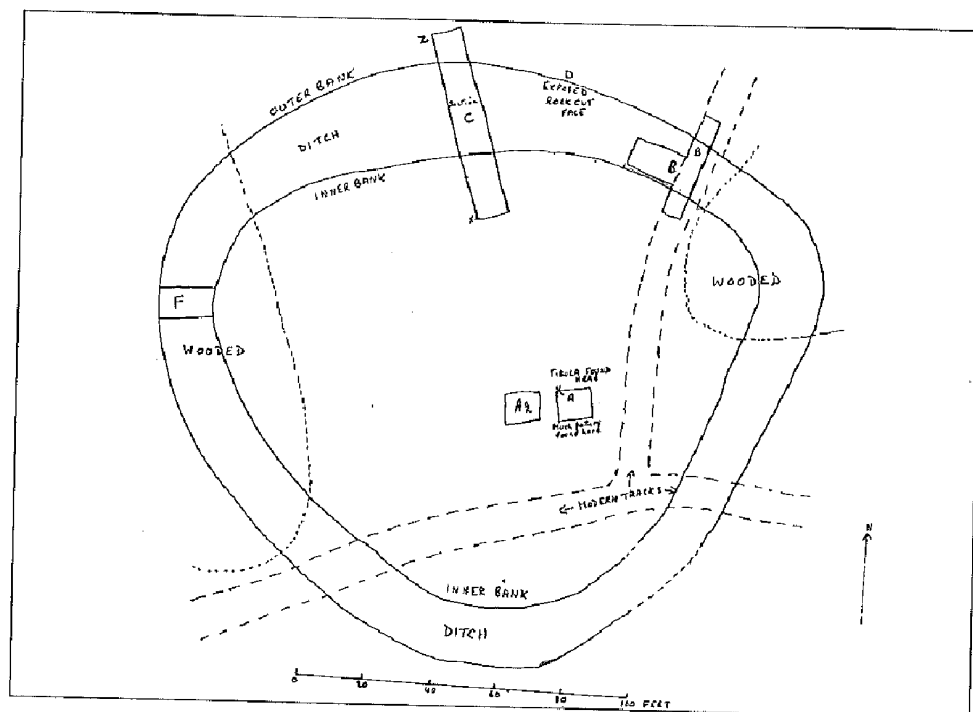


Figure 3: Sketch plan of the site from 1949-50 excavations (Reproduced from Taylor, 1997)

- Trenches A and A2 were located near the centre of the enclosure and consisted of two small square area excavations with a maximum depth of 0.46m. Within these trenches evidence of Roman occupation was uncovered that included Romano-British pottery, roof tiles and part of a box tile. Iron objects were also in evidence in the form of iron slag, nails and a knife blade. A bronze fibula was also recovered from just below the ground surface.
- Trench B was located on the northern perimeter next to the modern trackway, but the area proved to be so disturbed it was abandoned.
- Trench C was also excavated on the northern perimeter, c.50ft to the west of Trench B. This trench cut through the inner bank, the ditch and the counterscarp bank down to the limestone natural. No finds were recovered from the inner bank, but a scatter of pottery was recovered from the inner side of the bank. Within the natural limestone, underlying the inner bank were two possible stake holes. The ditch was cut into the natural limestone to a depth of 2m and although the upper fills were devoid of finds, the lower fills, including the base silt, contained Romano-British pottery and a single sherd of a black burnished ware jug also of Romano-British period date. The counterscarp was shown to consist primarily of limestone fragment of various sizes.
- Trench D consisted of small cut mid-way between Trenches B and C and it confirmed the continuation of the rock cut ditch.

- Trench F was excavated across the ditch on the west side of the enclosure. It showed that the ditch was 2m deep and 4.40m wide but no finds were recovered.

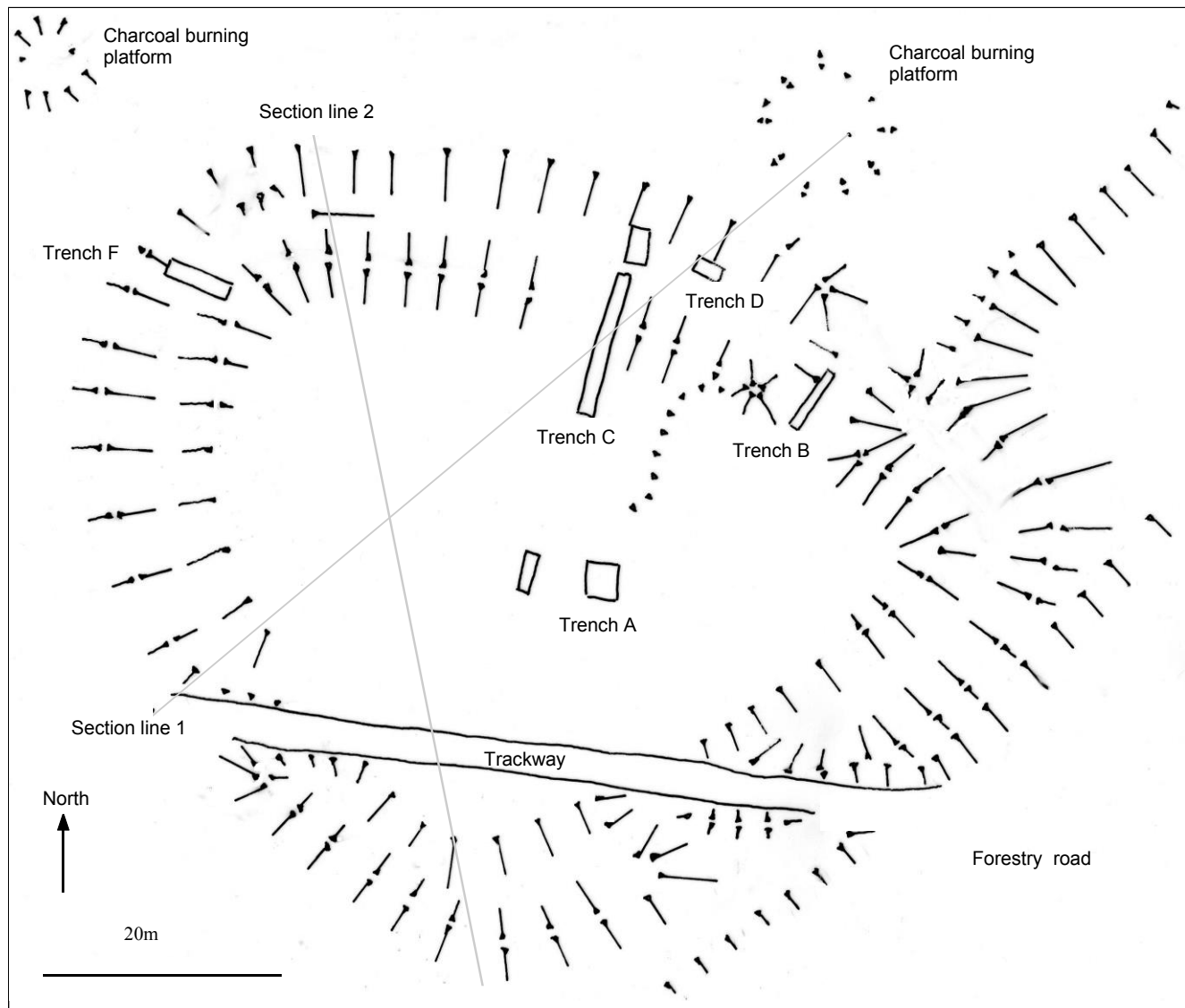
## Methodology

The measured survey of Lords Wood Enclosure was undertaken using a Leica T110 Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) with a reflective prism, and a plane table. Observations were recorded and a plan was produced in the field at a scale of 1:200. Two section drawings were produced at a scale of 1:200; these were complete monument sections, one on an east-west alignment and the other north-south.

The trenches from the 1949-50 excavation (see Past Fieldwork section) were clearly visible and were included on the survey drawing.

A photographic record was made of the enclosure and the previously excavated trenches in order to show their current state and issues of continued erosion.

The grid reference for the site was obtained using a hand held Garmin 60CSx and was SO 55295 14690 +/- 4m. The final levels were not tied in to Ordnance Datum.



**Figure 4:** Archaeological features and trench locations identified during the survey.



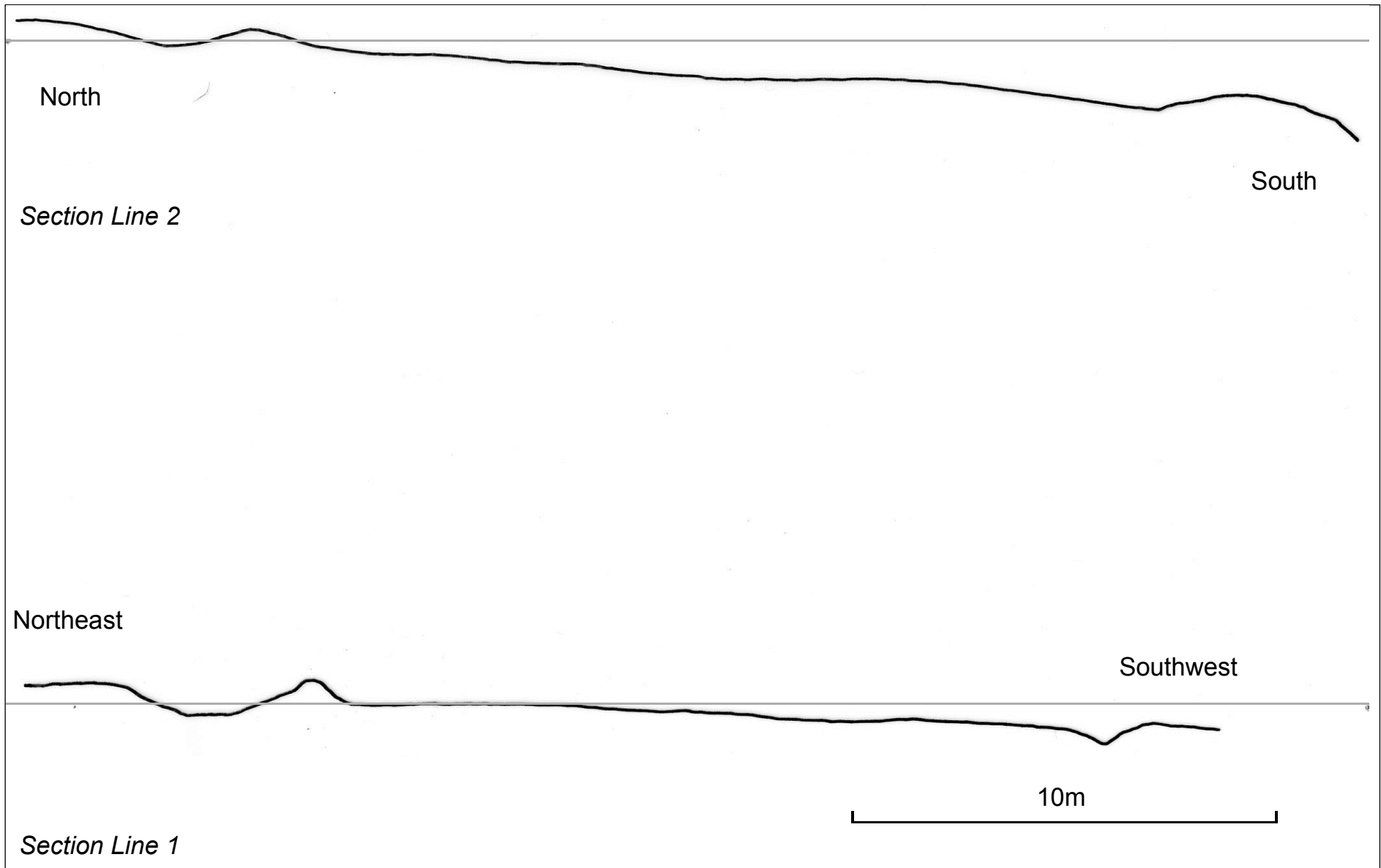


Figure 5: Cross-sections of the site



### ***General***

The form of this enclosure is unusual. Although described in the 1949-50 excavation report as “pear-shaped” (Taylor, 1997), it is more ‘triangular’ shaped (Figure 4) with its longest side to the north, at about 80m long. The southeast and southwest sides are both about 60m long. The total area of the enclosure is about 0.4 hectares. Such a triangular plan form is broadly classified as a regular D-shaped enclosure. This form is also known as a hybrid single-ditched enclosure (Whimster, 1989). Hybrid, single-ditched enclosures have been found in other parts of the Welsh Marches and are commonly quite small with 86% less than 0.35 hectares (Whimster, 1989). Therefore, this example is at the larger end of the size range.

The very regular shape and the lack of topographic constraint would suggest a high degree of design and measuring in its construction.

### ***Ramparts***

The enclosure is, except where breached by a later forestry track and the enclosure entrance, enclosed by a rampart system that is composed of an outer counterscarp bank, a rampart ditch and an inner rampart bank (Figure 4 and 5). Along the northern side, the outside of the outer bank is not clearly visible as a result of soil accumulation from the rising slope to the north of the site. There are also sections of the inner rampart, notably the south and western sections where the inside of the inner rampart is not visible.

### ***Entrance***

The monument has three breaks in the rampart bank (Figure 4). Those on the west and east sides have been formed by the construction of a forestry track through the rampart system, with the rampart being largely levelled and the material deposited in the ditch. The tracks rise over the remnant of the rampart bank therefore confirming these as later modifications to the monument and they probably occurred in the earlier part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as a result of forestry operations. The entrance in the northeast of the monument is most likely to represent the location of an entrance to the site (Figure 4). Here a single, 4m wide track cuts through both inner and outer ramparts. The 1949-50 excavations (trench B) carried out a trial excavation in this area and found the area to be significantly disturbed and the results were inconclusive. The disturbance may represent later modification of the entrance and new excavation would be required to improve our understanding of this part of the monument.

### ***Trenches***

The 1949-50 trenches have not been backfilled and as a result are in the main clearly visible (see Figure 3, Plates 1 – 8):

- Trenches A and A2 (Figure 4, Plate 1), located near the centre of the enclosure, are only visible as shallow depressions but the cut edges are clearly visible. Spoil is clearly visible on the south side.

- Trench B is located within the enclosure entrance (Figure 4, plate 2). This is shown on the site drawing (see previous work) as T shaped, but on the ground the only visible section was the north-south aligned section. This is only a narrow, shallow depression but the edges are clearly visible. There was no evidence for the existence of the east-west aligned portion of the trench. No spoil is evident.
- Trench C is the largest of those recorded and was excavated through the inner rampart and down into the base of the ditch (Figure 4, Plates 3, 4, 5 and 6). The section through rampart (Plates 4 and 5) continues to erode and the make up of the rampart is clearly visible. The trench through the ditch is still open to a depth of 0.80m and continues to erode. Substantial spoil is evident on the northwest side.
- Trench D is a small shallow excavation but its edges are clearly visible (Figure 4, Plate 7). No spoil is evident.
- Trench F (Figure 3, Plate 8) is a thin shallow trench through the ditch on the northwest side. Spoil is located on the southwest side.

### ***Interior***

The interior of the enclosure slopes slightly from north to south (Figure 5), in line with the surrounding topography. There is only one clear feature visible, located immediately west of the northeast entrance (Figure 4). This is a curving small terrace extending south for about 5m from the inside of the rampart bank. It starts at its north end as a c.0.30m drop in level from north to south and then turns to head south with the drop in level occurring from west to east.

### ***Exterior***

A number of other features are visible in the environs of the enclosure (Figure 4):

- Extending north from the entrance in the northeast of the enclosure is a terrace. It starts from the counterscarp bank to the east of the entrance, which it overlies and may represent a bank at this point. Further to the north it becomes a single drop in level from northwest to southeast of 0.40m.
- To the north and northwest of the enclosure are two charcoal burning platforms. These are circular platforms constructed into the south facing slope of the hill and about 6-8m in diameter. These are a common feature in woodlands in Herefordshire and the Forest of Dean and may relate to the supply of charcoal to nearby ironworks.
- A saw pit and some probably quarried areas were observed within the area of the enclosure, but outside the area being subject to the measured survey.

Photographic Survey



**Plate 1:** Trench A from the east.



**Plate 2:** Trench B from the northeast.



**Plate 3:** Trench C from the northeast.



**Plate 4:** Trench C showing the continued erosion of the inner rampart from the northeast.



**Plate 5:** Trench C, continued erosion of the east facing section of the inner rampart.



**Plate 6:** Trench C, excavation trench within the ditch from the east.



**Plate 7:** Trench D from the southwest showing the natural bedrock.



**Plate 8:** Trench F from the southeast.



## **Discussion**

### **General**

The monument is generally in a good condition, with the exception of the on-going erosion associated with the 1949-50 excavation trenches. The enclosure is of an unusual form, being triangular in shape. This type of form is broadly included into the regular D-shaped enclosure monument type, in which it represents a large of enclosure of this type. In form the monument displays a high degree of design and measurement in its construction and as a surviving archaeological earthwork it has significant potential to inform on the form, construction and date of this type of monument.

The rampart system is well-preserved and has the potential to retain important archaeological information. This potential has been confirmed through the 1949-50 excavations and any new investigations will be able to record structural information and take samples of buried soil horizons that will inform on the landscape at the time of construction.

### **Entrance**

The entrance in the northeast of the monument probably represents the location of the original entrance into the enclosure. Although the excavations in 1949-50 were inconclusive due to past ground disturbance, this part of the monument would merit further investigation to determine the form(s) of the entrance, retrieve additional datable material and record the relationships of the entrance to adjacent feature. In particular, the relationship with the terrace to the north of the entrance is important as this may represent a feature associated with the management of the entrance.

The only other possible entrances (where the ramparts were not complete) were where today a forestry track cuts through the enclosure. These clearly rise over remnants of the rampart bank and therefore these are considered to be of relatively recent date, probably 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### **Trenches**

The trenches associated with the 1949-50 excavation were not backfilled so remain in an unsatisfactory condition. The sides of the excavation trenches continue to erode, especially trench C across the rampart bank, and therefore in addition to disfigurement of the monument these trenches are resulting in continued loss of archaeological information. Some of the trenches are excavated into rock cut features and the rock remains exposed in the sides of them. The site is close to Biblins, which is used for youth groups. These groups use the monument and adjacent areas for activities and the open trenches present a health and safety risk to these groups. It is recommended that the trenches are re-excavated and the archaeology recorded to modern standards prior to fully backfilling.

### **Interior**

Although there is a lack of definable interior features, the 1949-50 excavations in trenches A and C have shown that there is significant survival of Romano-

British occupation deposits and therefore the rest of the site will have a high potential to yield significant archaeological information.

### **Exterior**

Most of the features identified outside the enclosure, including the saw-pits, charcoal burning platforms and quarry scoops relate to woodland management or features that are often encountered in woodland. Most of these will relate to post-medieval management of the landscape, but as with the interior of the monument the lack of significant later disturbance means that the area around the monument has potential to yield significant archaeological information on how the monument and its immediate surroundings were being used at the time of occupation.

### **Acknowledgments**

We would like to thank the Heritage Lottery Funded Overlooking the Wye team (Sue Middleton, Kate Biggs and Julie Godfrey) for commissioning this survey.

We would like to acknowledge the Forestry Commission for providing access for this survey and for their help and co-operation, especially D. Sykes and R. Beardsley.

We would also like to thank Dr. N. Rimmington, Countryside Adviser (Archaeology), Herefordshire Council, for his editorial input into this report.

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