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Building survey and Excavation at The Hermitage, Little Doward, Herefordshire



**Report prepared by
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EHE 1910**

Herefordshire Archaeology
Environment, Planning and Waste
Places and Communities Directorate
Herefordshire Council

Building survey and excavation at The Hermitage, Little Doward, Herefordshire

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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.

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Summary:

In September 2010, the masonry remains of a 19th century parkland feature called "The Hermitage" were recorded by scaled drawing by Herefordshire Archaeology staff. The Hermitage or Hermit's Hut was built as part of the 19th century parkland of Wyastone Leys House, a pleasure ground for the then owner Richard Blakemore. Richard Blakemore was a South Wales Iron Master who constructed the deer park that encloses Little Doward and its Iron Age hillfort in the first half of the 19th century.

The structure comprised a single cell, single storey, building approximately 4m long and 3m wide constructed of roughly coursed, un-bonded, local stone. The building had a chimney constructed within the thickness of its northern wall and a funnel shaped entranceway within its southern elevation.

The entire structure had been cut into the counterscarp bank of Little Doward Hill-fort. Overtime the rear, (northern) wall of the structure had started to fail and was in danger of collapse. Working in partnership with the Woodland Trust and Herefordshire Council, the Overlooking the Wye Heritage Lottery Fund project funded the repair of the structure. In March 2011 Herefordshire archaeology staff and stone mason, Chris Hodges, took down the portion of wall which was under threat of collapse. After the structurally unsound length of wall had been dismantled the opportunity was taken to record the archaeology of the rampart bank that was exposed. This excavation provided evidence of the construction of the counterscarp and evidence of the landscape prior to the construction of the prehistoric enclosure.

Disclaimer: It should not be assumed that land referred to in this document is accessible to the public. Location plans are indicative only. NGRs 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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Introduction

This report (EHE 1910), provides an account of an outline building survey and small scale excavation of “The Hermitage” or Hermit’s Hut, carried out by Herefordshire Archaeology. The site is owned and managed by The Woodland Trust. Overlooking the Wye Heritage Lottery Fund project is funding the repair of the structure.

The Hermitage was constructed as part of a 19th century landscape park and pleasure-ground by Richard Blakemore, an iron master who owned Wyaston Leys House approximately 2km to the west of the site. The Hermitage comprises a single storey, stone built, single cell building, built into the counterscarp bank of Little Doward Hillfort.

The fieldwork comprised the outline survey of the structure in plan and elevation by measured drawing. The survey included the recording of any structural details which may provide evidence concerning the original appearance of the structure.



Figure 1: Map indicating the location of the study area within the county

Aims and objectives

The Hermitage was constructed during the 19th century as part of a parkland and pleasure ground. The structure was purposefully built into the Hillfort counterscarp bank in order to only make it visible if approached from certain directions, using a network of walks and carriage-rides associated with this designed landscape. The site of the hermitage had become overgrown with large ash trees growing out of the floor and smaller shrubs and ferns covering a substantial part of the site. The roots from this vegetation have displaced much of the top courses of stonework and in places appear to have substantially reduced the height of the original walls. The

northern wall, which survives to a height of 2.4m had begun to bow in both the horizontal and vertical plane and was in danger of collapse.

The trees which were growing directly out of the structure were removed during 2009 and 2010. The site of the Hermitage falls within the area designated as a Scheduled Ancient Monument (No. 26), due to its location in relation to the Hillfort. As such any works within or close to the structure require archaeological recording and monitoring.

The structure was surveyed during September, in order to record the surviving outline of the walls, the extent of the area of bulging and any other surviving archaeological details. In March 2011, The area of bulging wall was taken down under archaeological supervision and the section of rampart revealed cleaned and recorded. Two Kubiena samples were taken and sent for detailed geoarchaeological (pedological and sedimentological) analysis. This analysis provided significant information concerning the construction of the hillfort counterscarp bank and the buried land surface over which the rampart was built.

Background history and previous archaeological work.

The archaeological knowledge of the site has been reviewed and additional features recorded as part of a walkover survey conducted in early 2007 (Rimington, 2008: Herefordshire Archaeology Report 229).

The monument has been the subject of a detailed measured survey by the English Heritage measured survey team during early 2009. The report from this survey has been published in the English Heritage Research Department Report Series no.72-2009).

Little Doward Hill-fort has been the subject of one, earlier, archaeological excavation. In October 2009 a platform (located at SO 5394 1598) within the annex area was investigated after a veteran beech tree had been blown over and the root plate unearthed pottery fragments. This confirmed the use of the platforms for the construction of buildings with the presence of post holes and internal surfaces (evidenced by the preferential dissolution of the underlying limestone within the interior of the structure). It also identified a midden deposit that yielded evidence of bone processing and manufacturing with the presence of bone dice and a toggle made of antler tine.

Geology, topography and land-use

The site is located on the summit of the Little Doward with steep slopes on all sides. The summit of the hill is 221m OD and is marked by an Ordnance Survey triangulation point on the northwest section of the hillfort's rampart. The hillfort has been constructed on a southeast facing slope and the lowest part of the enclosure is 160m OD. The east part of the enclosure is surrounded by vertical cliffs. The site occupies a commanding position on the Little Doward overlooking the River Wye towards Monmouth.

The study area is part of the Carboniferous limestone series. The summit of the hill is underlain by the Crease limestone, Lower Dolomite and Lower Limestone Shale layers. Further down the slopes are the Tintern Sandstone Group and Quartz conglomerate that sit on the unconformity with the sandstones of the Lower Old Red Sandstone.

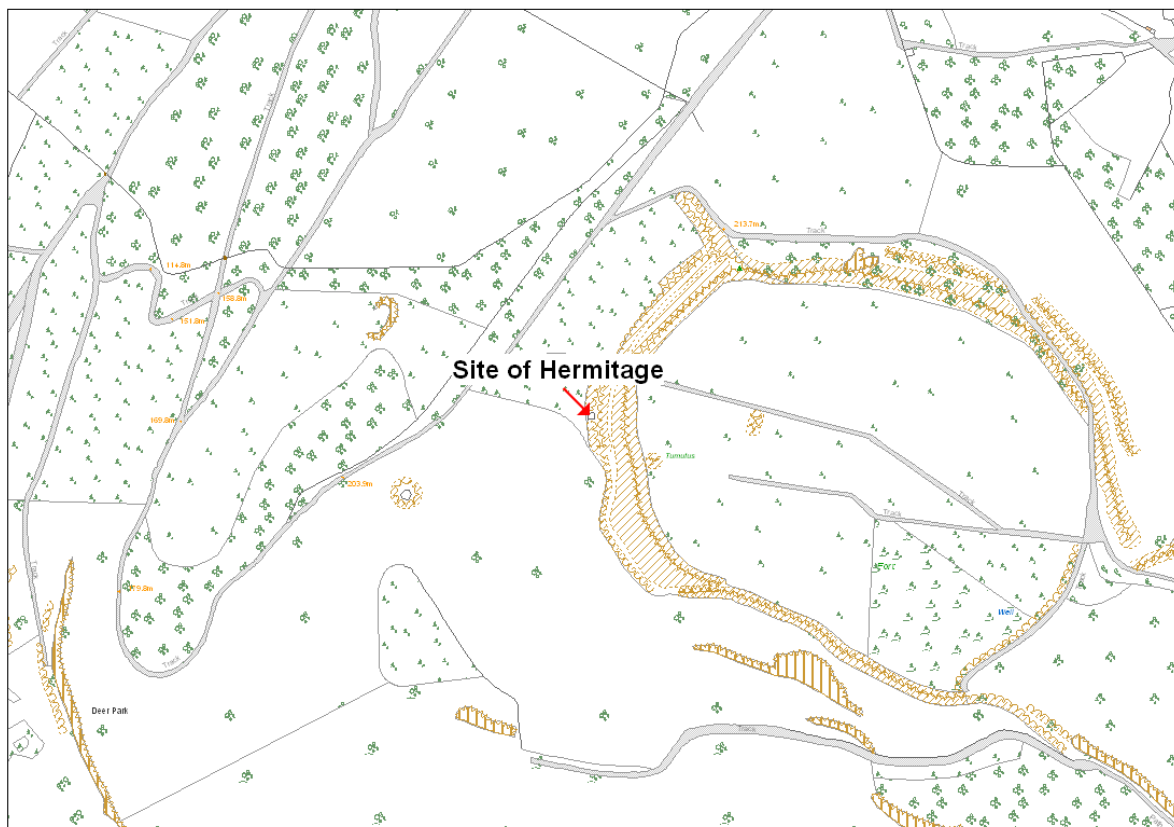


Figure 2: Location of Hermitage in relation to the Hillfort defences.

The hillfort and its close environs has been cleared of the former conifer woodland cover and is the subject of a wood pasture and limestone grassland restoration programme. Brash from the removal of the conifer trees was not removed from site.

The building survey

The survey took place on the 21st September 2010. Each elevation was drawn to a scale of 1:20 the wall tops and present ground surface height were recorded together

with any other architectural details. A plan was produced at 1:20 at approximately waist height, where the height of the walls allowed. If the walls were at a lower level they were included on the plan.

The single cell building comprises a 2.7m by 3.9m room which has a chimney constructed within the thickness of the northern wall (at the north-eastern corner of the room). The chimney appears to have been capped by the placing of loose rubble and a slab on its top at some point – presumably to stop earth and vegetation filling it and to stop walkers falling down it. Within the structure the parts of a cast iron fire back remain *in-situ*. This shows signs of intense heating and would appear to have been heavily used over a prolonged period of time.

The structure appears to have had a pent roof, sloping down from the northern wall, (which is still approximately 2.5m high in places), to rest on the southern wall which stand at a height of approximately 1.65m above the present ground surface. It is likely that the roof was clad in stone tiles (see below).

Within the western elevation there is a 0.2m wide opening for a single light window. This appears to be narrow but potentially quite tall. Small fragments of clear glass are apparent within the opening. Light was fed to this small opening by a curved splay, cut into the rampart of the Hill-fort. This may have provided more light than the size of the window opening might suggest.

The curved window splay mirrors the curved splay leading to the doorway in the southern elevation. Here each curving splayed wall is almost 6m in length to form a rapidly narrowing passage into the structure. No woodwork attributable to the original structure survives and no metal fixings etc were recorded during the survey which could shed light on the internal arrangement of the hermitage.



Plate 1: The Hermitage looking north through the splayed entrance.



Plate 2: The Hermitage looking east showing the bowing north wall and angle of pent roof.

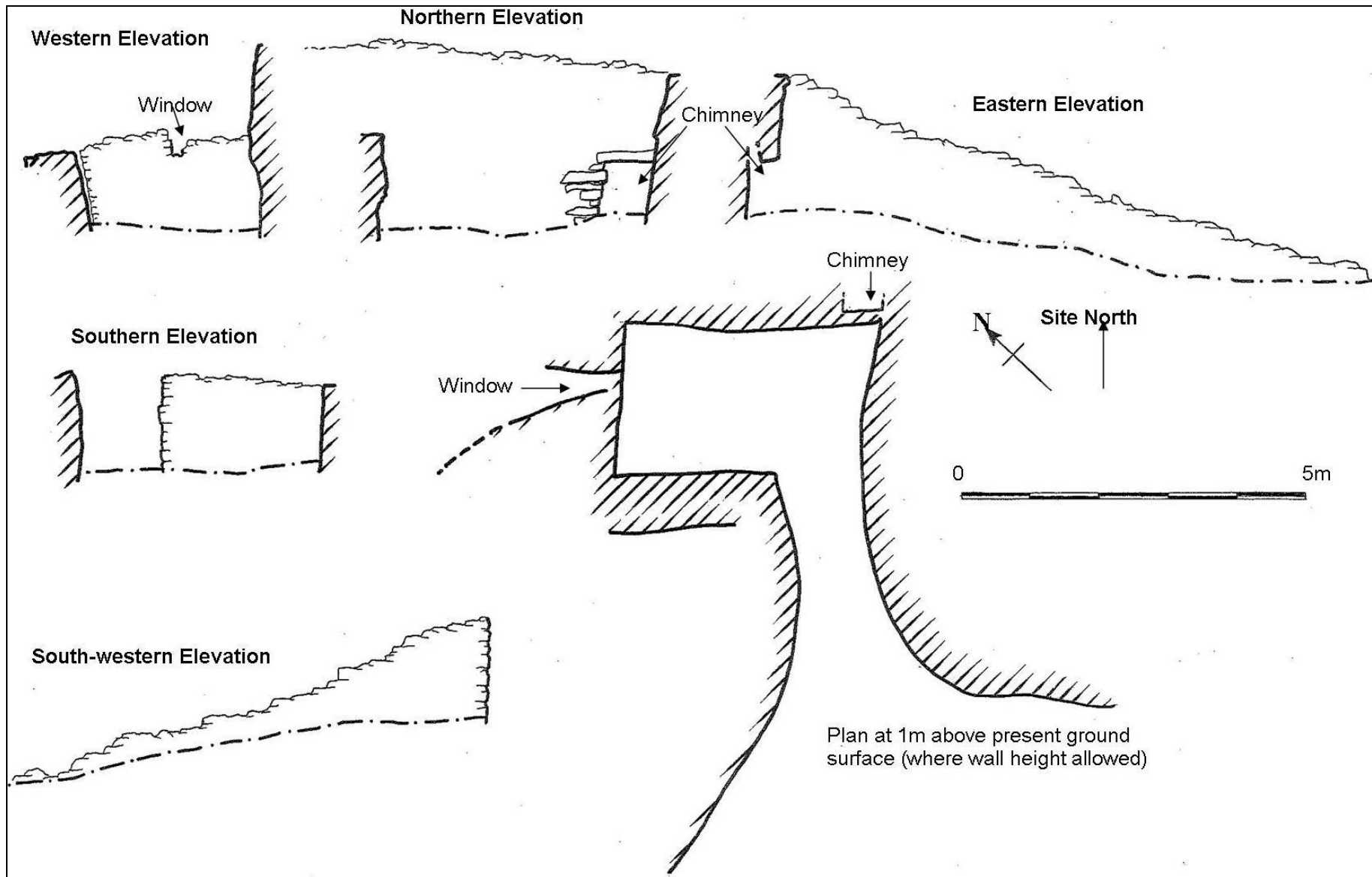


Figure 3: Elevations and plan of Hermitage.

N.B. elevation direction is site north.

The Excavation.

The excavation was undertaken on the 3rd March 2011. The northern wall of the Hermitage had begun to bow in both horizontal and vertical planes. Remedial works were needed in order to stop the wall collapsing and causing damage to the rest of the structure. The works comprised the removal of a section of the northern wall of the hermitage, the cleaning back of the rampart material behind it and the excavation of the original footing for the Hermitage. After cleaning and recording two Kubiena samples were taken for more detailed pedological analysis, (see appendix 1)



Plate 3: Rampart section after cleaning and the removal of part of the northern wall.

Immediately below the present topsoil and turf (001) was a stony layer of loose dark soil, (002). It would appear that this represents material deposited along the back of the wall in order to fill in any gaps between the wall at this height and the rampart. This overlay (004) a tree root bowl, which had truncated the top of the rampart (deposits (003) and (005)). The tree root bowl also cut into a re-deposited yellow clay deposit (006) which made up a significant proportion of the rampart. Deposits (007), (008), (009), (010) and (011) represent distinct dumps of re-deposited natural forming

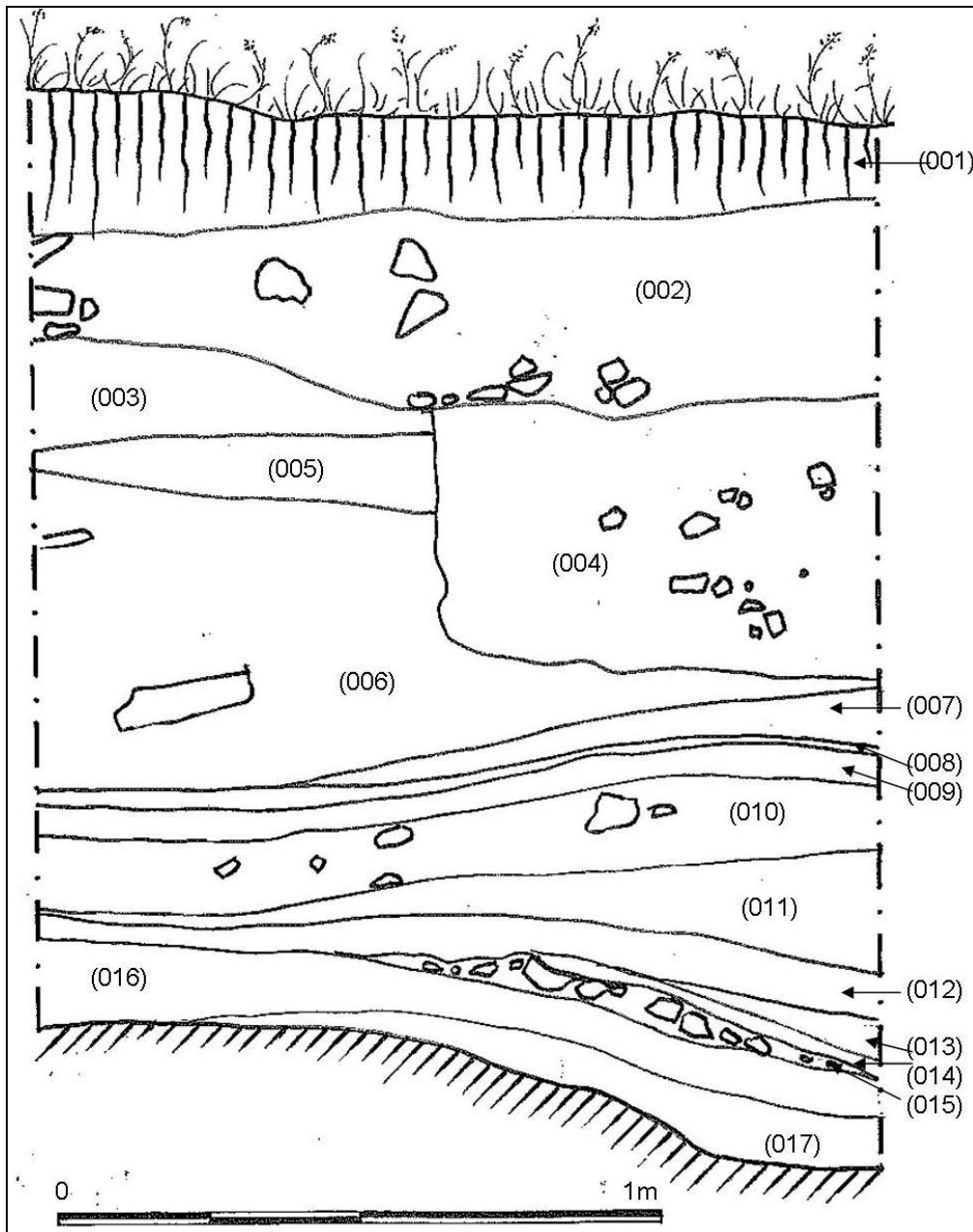


Figure 3: The section exposed after the removal of part of the north wall of the Hermitage.

the lower rampart material. Context (012) is a compact silt with clearly defined structure, which may indicate a shallow compressed buried soil and a turf horizon. It is possible that this could represent soil material, possibly even turves, laid over the earlier, natural deposits in order to construct a consolidating platform at the base of the rampart.

Context (012) sealed three successive fills of a natural gully or small watercourse, (013), (014) and (015). The differing nature of these deposits suggest that they have been imported from a variety of local sources and were purposefully deposited within

the gully in order to level the ground surface in preparation for the construction of the rampart. Layers (016) and (017) represent the natural ground surface buried beneath the make-up for the rampart.

The cleaning and recording of this section has provided a rare opportunity to examine in detail the construction of the counterscarp bank of an Iron Age hillfort. It has illustrated the complexity of such a construction and the way in which different deposits can be altered by post-depositional forces. In addition it has provided an insight into the site prior to the construction of the rampart.



Plate 4: The northern wall after re-building

LITTLE DOWARD HILLFORT, HERMITAGE REBUILD (LD 11)

Geoarchaeology of the Rampart Section

by *Michael J. Allen, PhD, MIFA, FLS, FSA*

version AEA 089.2.01
15th March 2011

for:-

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Little Doward Hillfort, Hermitage Rebuild (LD 11); *Geoarchaeology of the Rampart Section*

Two contiguous plastic monoliths of 0.28m and 0.58m length taken through the rampart section behind the eastern wall of the Hermitage by the excavators were provided for description and geoarchaeological reporting. Sedimentological and pedological description was undertaken to provide a geoarchaeological record and to define and outline the rampart constituents (contexts 006, 007, 008, 009, 010 and 011), the nature of the putative buried soil (012) and pre-rampart deposits (013, 014, 015, 016 and 017).

Site background

Lying on a moderate slope with a south easterly aspect overlooking the Wye valley, the site lies within managed woodland, but the majority of the hillfort itself has been recently clear felled. The hilltop supports shallow loamy brown ranker soils of the Crwbin Association over Carboniferous limestone (Finlay *et al.* 1984).

The outer rampart (counterscarp bank) behind the eastern wall of the Hermitage was exposed during works associated with rebuilding a dry stone wall. The section revealed a clear profile of the rampart to bedrock and a small gully. The outer rampart behind the eastern wall of the Hermitage was previously wooded, and tree root holes (context 004) were present in the section.

Aims

The aims of description were to provide a geoarchaeological record and attempt to amplify and define the main contexts, as sampled, and provide a project consistent geoarchaeological record (see Allen 2009). Description and interpretation were undertaken in particular to :-

- define the nature of the putative buried soil horizon
- define the geoarchaeological potential of the sequence
- subsample for magnetic susceptibility (as and if appropriate)
- subsample the buried soil in a kubiena tin and consideration for soil micromorphology (as and if appropriate)
- provide a geoarchaeological assessment and full sediment and subsample logs, and costed recommendations

Methods

The face of the undisturbed sediment in the monoliths was cleaned carefully before description to expose an unweathered surface and attempt to reveal any soil or

sediment structure. These latter crucial pedological elements are usually poorly observable in monoliths and are undoubtedly best observed and recorded *in situ* on site. Descriptions were recorded moist following nomenclature outlined by Hodgson (1976), and munsell soil colours recorded in natural light.

To aid in characterising the sequence a rapid simple programme of magnetic susceptibility measurements were made on 10g samples of air dry sediment >2mm retained in demagnetised 10cc azlon pots, and measured using a Bartington MS2B meter coupled to a dual frequency MS2B coil. For this rapid magnetic susceptibility profile measurements were only recorded at low frequency (LF). Three measurements were made of each sample and the average (mode) recorded (Tables 1 and 2).

Magnetic Susceptibility

Magnetic susceptibility enhancement may be due, at one level, to pedogenic activity and enhanced biological activity in top soils, enabling the differentiation between topsoil and 'subsoils' (Tite & Mullins 1971; Allen 1986; Allen & Macphail 1987), and vegetation types the topsoil supported to be inferred (Allen 1986; 1988). The principals are summarised elsewhere (e.g. Allen 1986; 1988; 1990; Clark 1990). Anthropogenic activity, such as burning, may result in enhancement (but at different orders of magnitude than that created by environmental or pedogenic enhancement) may be detected and related to past soil regime or vegetation type.

Sampling

The sequence was subsampled in 10mm band-widths at 5cm intervals for pollen and magnetic susceptibility (see below and Appendix 1). An attempt to subsample the putative buried soil sequence (012 and 011) was not successful due to the strong small ped structure and uncohesive nature of peds and the deposit.

Condition of the sample

The monolith samples were provided as well labelled, clearly marked and well wrapped samples. The sediments were intact, in generally good condition and the sediments were, on the whole undisturbed; only the dried crumbly deposit at the top of the lower monolith (essentially context 009) was loose dried disturbed sediment crumbs.

Geoarchaeological record

The monoliths were contiguous, with the short (0.28m) monolith sampling the upper section and the longer (0.58m) sampling the lower rampart section (Fig. 1).

The rampart section is locally complex (Figs 1 and 2), but is divided in to three main elements; rampart, buried soil and pre-rampart contexts. The full geoarchaeological record is given below, with summary interpretation of each layer and their context

description. Some contexts, particularly within the rampart, which were clearly recorded by the archaeologists, were less obvious in the small 102mm wide window of the monolith.

Little Doward Hill-fort
Hermitage re-build
Section of rampart behind eastern wall of hermitage

Herefordshire Archaeology
March 2011

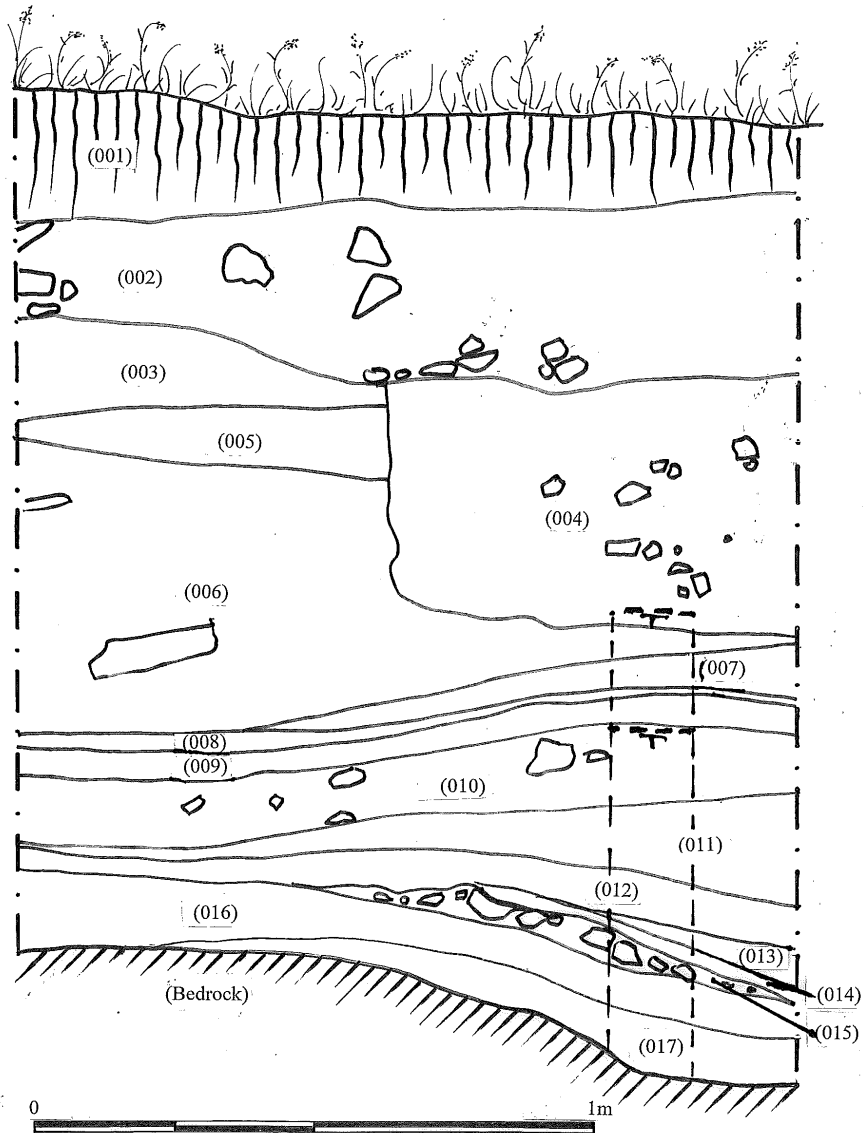


Figure 1. Little Doward Hillfort; rampart section behind eastern wall of the Hermitage (drawing Herefordshire Archaeology)

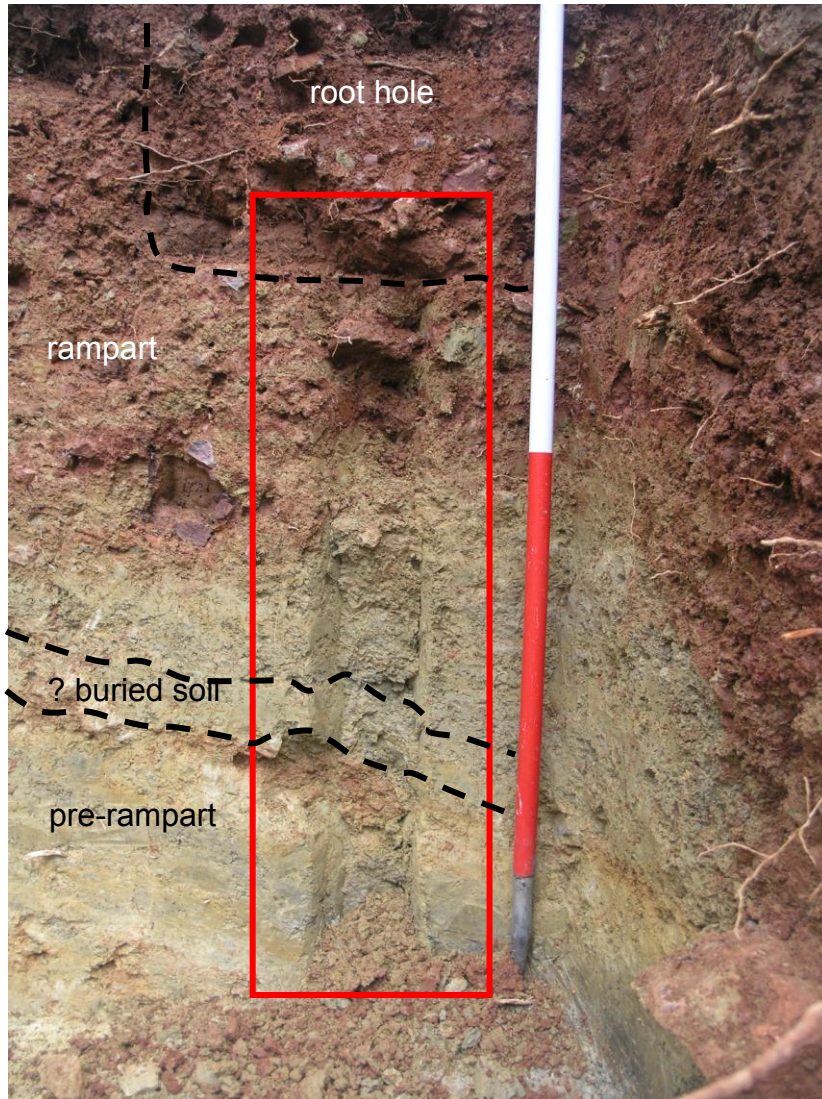


Figure 2. Photograph of Little Doward Hillfort; rampart section behind eastern wall of the Hermitage, after the monolith had been removed (outlined) (photograph Herefordshire Archaeology)

context	Depth * (cm)	Unit samples		description	
004	0-7		5cm	Tree root hole	Mixed loose yellowish red (5YR 4/6) Light olive brown (2.5Y 5/4) and dark reddish brown (2.5R 3/4) loose mixed poorly consolidated silt loam, clear to abrupt boundary
006	7-10		10cm	rampart	Olive yellow (2.5Y 6/6) compact silt, abrupt to sharp boundary
007	10-16		15cm		Dark red (2.5YR 3/6) compact silt with common small and sound medium stones, abrupt boundary
008	16-20		20cm		Loose mixed medium reddish brown (5YR 4/4) and light yellowish brown (2.5Y 6/4) blocky crumbs, silt loam, abrupt boundary
009	20-31		25cm 30cm		(2.5YR 5/4) light olive brown silty clay with common small reddish brown (5YR 4/4) sandy stone fragments abrupt boundary
010	31-42		35cm 40cm		Light olive brown (2.5Y 5/4) very loose blocky large silty clay crumbs and some small stones, clear to abrupt boundary
011	42-50/2		45cm 50cm		Light olive brown (2.5Y 5/4) blocky silt loam weak medium crumb structure, abrupt boundary – possible turf
012	50/2-60		55cm 60cm	Putative buried soil	Light olive brown (2.5YR 5/6) firm stone-free silty clay loam, well developed small blocky/prismatic structure, abrupt boundary
013	60-65		65cm	Pre-rampart deposits	Brownish yellow (10YR 6/8) loose unconsolidated fine sand/coarse silt, abrupt boundary
014+ 015	65-71		70cm		Brownish yellow to yellowish brown (10YR 6/6 – 5/6) compact silt
016	71-76		75cm		Light olive brown (2.5Y 5/3) compact silt
017	76-86+		80cm 85cm	Aneorbic pre-rampart	Greyish brown to light brownish grey (2.5YR 5/2-6/2) stiff clay to silty clay, medium blocky peds,

* depth in monolith

Magnetic susceptibility

The rapid magnetic susceptibility profile showed considerable variation and susceptibility enhancement (Tables 1 and 2). Magnetic susceptibility values in the rampart, like the sediments themselves, are highly variable. Some of the deposits are sedimentarily heterogeneous (e.g. 008 and 009), and magnetic susceptibility is similarly heterogeneous. The red and sandy components are obviously iron rich and magnetically susceptible, in contrast to the uniform light olive brown silts. Magnetic susceptibility values varied from 6 to 32 (Table 2) and these values reflected the variable nature of the infill material; largely reflecting the presence, dominance or absence of iron-rich nature of the reddish sandstone and sandy elements. The buried

soil (012) and possible buried soil (011) produced low readings (7-8) and showed no detectable enhancement. The pre-rampart deposits (013, 015, 015 and 016) showed variable results (6-17), again dependent upon the inclusion or presence of reddish colour. The results from the basal, possibly anaerobic layer (017), were again comparable to the general light olive brown silts recorded elsewhere with readings of 7 and 8.

From this cursory examination we can indicate that magnetic susceptibility has not helped in understanding the palaeo-environments, but has confirmed the iron-rich nature of the incorporated sandy and sandstone elements, and has confirmed the differences and heterogeneity of, in particular, the rampart construction.

Geoarchaeology and rampart-related deposits

Pre-rampart

The basal pre-rampart deposit (context 017) is a uniform fine-grained grey clay. There is no waterlogging or gleying evident in the sample, and the grey colour may be due to anaerobic conditions and may, in part, be enhanced by a post-depositional change in colour under the rampart and in the lower fills. This forms part of the fills of a gully underlying part of the rampart. A series of deposits of different origins; olive silts, brownish silts and brownish sands (contexts 016-013) with abrupt contacts indicate the import and dumping of material, presumably part of the first phase of the rampart construction and preparation of the slope for the counterscarp bank rampart.

Putative buried soil

Context 012 is a compact silt with clearly defined structure, and the base of the overlying deposit (011) has smaller crumb structure, which may be taken to indicate a shallow compressed buried soil and a turf horizon, perhaps overlain by disturbed soil material (upper portion of context 012). However, there is no weathering of the base of the soil into the underlying dumped layer (context 013), and this contact is abrupt. If this is an *in situ* soil then it is an immature azonal (i.e. rendzina-form) soil, and has formed over archaeological pre-rampart deposits over a very short pedological timescale. It is possible that this is soil material, possibly even turves, laid over the earlier deposits forming a consolidating platform at the base of the more varied rampart deposits.

Outer Rampart / counter scarp bank

The rampart itself comprises a complex of differing and clearly dumped fills of differing immediately local origins.

Summary

It is important to note that the buried soil is probably not *in situ*, but is soil material incorporated as a component of the overall rampart make-up. These obviously clearly

postdate the gully. The nature of this soil material may indicate the clearance of topsoil and turves from the locality in preparation for the construction of the rampart.

This geoarchaeological appraisal provides a basic interpretation for the deposits as revealed in section, and provides a geoarchaeological archive for the project. It cannot, however, positively confirm the presence of an *in situ* buried soil, but does suggest that one of the constituents of layers 012 and 011 may have been soil material.

Future work

Although pollen samples have been taken, the value of pollen from the some of the rampart deposits themselves is negligible as they are derived contexts (cf. Dimbley 1985). Only those from the soil material (011 and 012) and basal deposits (107) might be of value. It is suggested that these form part of the temporary palaeo-environmental site archive and be reconsidered later in 2011, in light of the full project palaeo-environmental record generated through the 2009 and forthcoming 2011 excavation.

The deposits are not calcareous enough to preserve shells, and certainly not in suitable numbers to make analysis statistically viable (cf. Evans 1972).

The undisturbed sediments and magnetic susceptibility subsamples have been discarded.

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TABLES

<i>Context</i>	<i>Depth and fill type</i>	<i>sample wt (g)</i>	<i>LF1</i>	<i>LF1 corrected</i>	<i>LF2</i>	<i>LF2 corrected</i>	<i>LF 3</i>	<i>LF 3 corrected</i>	<i>average</i>
006	10cm, rampart	10	8	8	8	8	8	8	8
007	15cm, rampart	10	33	33	32	32	34	34	33
008	20cm, rampart	10	34	34	33	33	33	33	33
009	25cm, rampart	10	6	6	6	6	7	7	6
009	30cm, rampart	10	32	32	33	33	33	33	33
010	35cm, rampart	10	8	8	9	9	8	8	8
010	40cm, rampart	10	8	8	7	7	9	9	8
011	45cm, rampart	10	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
011	50cm. rampart / ?buried soil	10	9	9	8	8	8	8	8
012	55cm, buried soil	10	7	7	7	7	8	8	7
012	60cm, buried soil	10	8	8	7	7	8	8	8
013	65cm, pre-rampart deposit	10	19	19	18	18	18	18	18
014+015	70cm, pre-rampart deposit	10	15	15	17	17	17	17	17
016	75cm, pre-rampart deposit	10	6	6	7	7	6	6	6
017	80cm, possibly anaerobic deposit	10	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
017	85cm, possibly anaerobic deposit	10	7	7	6	6	7	7	7

Table 1. Little Doward (LD 11). Magnetic Susceptibility Profile: Summary magnetic susceptibility results (χ) expressed in SI units $m^3 kg^{-1} \times 10^{-6}$

<i>fill</i>	<i>contexts</i>	<i>range</i>	<i>Mean (χ) $m^3 kg^{-1} \times 10^{-6}$</i>
Rampart	006, 007, 008, 009, 010,	6-34	17 (or 33 and 7.4)
Possible buried soil	011	8	8
Buried soil	012	7-8	7.5
Pre-rampart	013, 014, 015, 016	6-18	13.7
Possibly anaerobic deposit	017	7-8	7

Table 2. Little Doward (LD 11). Mean magnetic susceptibility results for each fill type

APPENDIX 1: Samples

Monoliths

Sample: 2 × contiguous monoliths
Upper 0-28cm; lower 28-58cm

Subsamples

Pollen (× 10) and magnetic susceptibility (× 16) subsamples removed from the monoliths are listed below.

<i>context</i>	<i>Depth and fill type</i>	<i>Magnetic susceptibility</i>	<i>pollen</i>
006	10cm, rampart		
007	15cm, rampart	✓	
008	20cm, rampart	✓	
009	25cm, rampart	✓	
009	30cm, rampart	✓	
010	35cm, rampart	✓	
	40cm, rampart	✓	✓
011	45cm, rampart	✓	✓
	50cm. rampart / ?buried soil	✓	✓
012	55cm, buried soil	✓	✓
	60cm, buried soil	✓	✓
013	65cm, pre-rampart deposit	✓	✓
014+015	70cm, pre-rampart deposit	✓	✓
016	75cm, pre-rampart deposit	✓	✓
017	80cm, possibly anaerobic deposit	✓	✓
	85cm, possibly anaerobic deposit	✓	✓

Site Archive

38 digital photographs
1 site notebook entry
18 context cards
2 sheets of field drawings
2 sheets of inked drawings
This document

Acknowledgements

Herefordshire Archaeology would like to acknowledge the help and co-operation of The Woodland Trust (land owner) and The Overlooking The Wye, Heritage Lottery Project, for their co-operation and support throughout the project.

The authors would also like to thank Chris Hodges (stone mason) for his help and company and Chris Atkinson for his assistance during the building survey.

List of illustrations

Figure 1: Location of the site within the county

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Plate 3: Rampart section after cleaning and the removal of part of the northern wall.

Plate 4: The northern wall after re-building

Bibliography

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Validation

Herefordshire Archaeology operates a validation system for its reports, to provide quality assurance and to comply with Best Value procedures.

This report has been checked for accuracy and clarity of statements of procedure and results.

Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist