

HEREFORDSHIRE
COUNCIL

Herefordshire Archaeology
Conservation and Environmental Planning
Planning Services
Environment Directorate
Herefordshire Council

Cherry Hill, Fownhope: A vitrified fort sequence

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.47

Report prepared by
Tim Hoverd

Contents

Summary
Introduction
Aims and Objectives
Location and Geology
Previous Research and Records
Methods
Results
Discussion and Conclusions
Archive
References
Acknowledgements

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.

Cherry Hill, Fownhope: A vitrified fort sequence

Herefordshire Archaeology Report No.47

Herefordshire Archaeology, May 2004

Summary

A topographic survey of the Iron Age hillfort at Cherry Hill, Fownhope (HSM 909 (SAM 11)) was undertaken by Herefordshire Archaeology. The aims of the survey were to produce an accurate plan of the monument and associated features, and to record areas of vitrification on the defensive circuit.

A plan of the earthworks was produced at a scale of 1:500. Field observations during the survey and other site visits suggest that the primary phase fort was involved in some form of major power struggle resulting in its total destruction through burning. A second fort was then constructed on the site. However, much of the bedrock beneath the line of the first phase defences was so badly affected by the intense heat during its destruction that the builders of the second fort had to construct the western and northern defences on a new line.

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.

Figures contain material from the Ordnance Survey. The grid in this material is the National Grid taken from the Ordnance Survey map with the permission of the Controller of Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This material has been reproduced in order to locate the site in its environs.

Contact details: Herefordshire Archaeology, PO Box 144, Hereford, HR1 2YH
Copyright Herefordshire Council 2004

Introduction

For many years it appears that local people have noted areas of what seems to have been intensive burning at various locations within Cherry Hill Camp, the earthwork remains of an Iron Age Hillfort. However this has never been formally documented (no reference in SMR records for HSM 909). It has long been assumed that these areas of burning relate to industrial scale lime production during the post-medieval period.

However, following a site visit it was noted that much, if not all, the burnt material, (bedrock), appeared to be closely associated with the defensive circuit. Also the nature of the burnt material was such that it excluded explanation through industrial process. Large areas of the northern, and eastern ramparts appeared to have been constructed of vitrified bedrock. Large quantities of this material had over time been displaced and tumbled into the northern quarry ditch and down the steep eastern scarp.

The extent and nature of the vitrification suggested two hypotheses:

1. That the defensive circuit of Cherry Hill Fort was constructed out of nodular limestone which was then vitrified in order to strengthen this building medium; -a technique claimed to have been employed at some hillforts in northern Britain.
2. That the fort was purposefully destroyed by what must have been a huge conflagration, reaching temperatures high enough to melt limestone.

Both hypotheses imply a certain uniqueness, (at least regionally), for the monument as there are no known parallels for either vitrification as a construction method or the slighting of a hillfort on such a huge scale.

Due to the monument's increased importance, it was agreed with the land-owner and English Heritage that Herefordshire Archaeology should conduct a detailed survey of the earthworks and map the extent of vitrification.

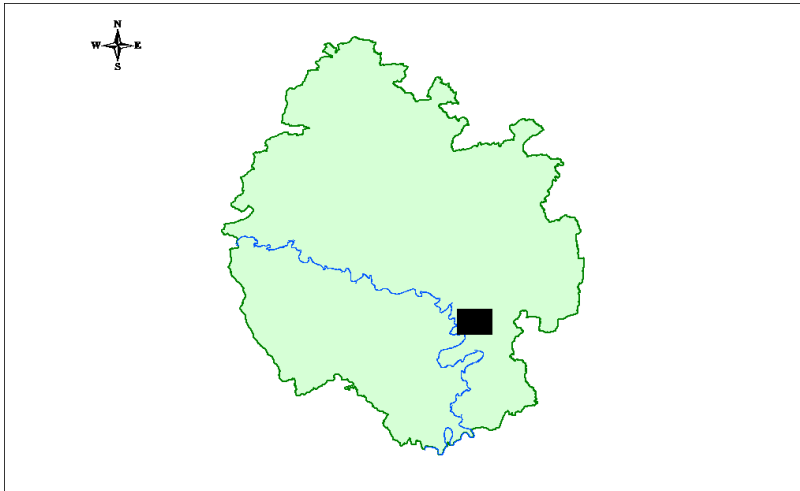
Aims and Objectives

The aims of the survey were:

- To produce an accurate plan of the hillfort and its immediate environs at a scale of 1:500.
- To record areas of intense burning / vitrification associated with the defensive circuit.
- To better understand the form of the earthworks and their development.

Location and Geology

Cherry Hill Fort is located at NGR: SO 5775 3520, approximately 800m to the north-west of Fownhope Church.



The fort sits on the southern end of a ridge comprising the western rim of the Woolhope Dome, overlooking the Wye valley. Much of the internal area of the fort is at an elevation of approximately 145m OD. (Ordnance Survey, 1998).

Figure 1: Site Location.

The underlying bedrock of the Cherry Hill and its close environs is of the Aymestrey Limestone Formation comprising outcrops of nodular limestone, siltstone and silty mudstone and calcareous siltstone (British Geological Survey, 1989a, 1989b). The bedrock is overlain by Carboniferous and Jurassic clay and shales. These are slowly permeable, seasonally waterlogged clayey soils, (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 3 - Midland and Western England, scale 1:250 000 Ordnance Survey 1983).

Previous Fieldwork and Records

A search of the Herefordshire Sites and Monuments Record (SMR) revealed the following records for the Hillfort and its close environs:

SMR 909 (SAM 11)
Site Name Cherry Hill Fort, Fownhope
NGR SO 5775 3520
Site Type Hill Fort
Period Iron Age

SMR 31938
Site Name Fownhope Park, Fownhope
NGR SO 5740 3560
Site Type Park
Period Post-medieval

No previously recorded archaeological investigations have been undertaken in this area.

Methods

Fieldwork was undertaken on 25th and 26th March 2002 having been granted a Section 42 Licence from English Heritage.

A topographic survey of the site was undertaken using a Leica TCR 110 Electronic Distance Meter (EDM) with a reflective prism. Observations were recorded and a plan was produced in the field at a scale of 1:500 (Figure 2).

Results (figure 2)

The detailed survey recorded a number of significant features associated with both the defensive circuit and the lay-out of the monument:

The survey has confirmed that of the three entrances apparent within the defensive circuit, only two are contemporary with the construction of the rampart. These are the northern and southern entrances. The entrance on the western side appears to have been cut through the rampart at a later date and may relate to access for woodland management in the medieval or post-medieval period.

Access is gained from the southern entrance into the fort by a causeway which crosses the internal quarry ditch. This suggests that the quarry ditch continues as a single entity from the northern entrance to the southern edge of the fort at which point it resembles a berm as the natural slope increases in steepness. A medieval or post-medieval woodland compartment boundary bank runs through the entrance, over the causeway and into the interior of the fort.

The northern entranceway has a small outwork, taking the form of a ditch, immediately outside it. This has the effect of elongating and narrowing the entrance and cuts across a natural constriction of the limestone ridge.

A large bank running to the north-east from the eastern side was recorded. This appears to have a slight ditch on its northern side and initially runs off the berm immediately beneath the eastern and southern rampart before curving to the east and then south-east as a lynchet. At the point where the bank becomes a lynchet, a smaller lynchet runs off it at ninety degrees and runs to the south-east. This smaller lynchet is cut by a charcoal burning platform. It is possible that the bank, ditch and large lynchet relate to an access way which runs up onto the berm and continues round towards the southern entrance. Before reaching the terminal of the berm / quarry ditch it turns sharply to run diagonally up the northern side of the internal quarry ditch.

The smaller lynchet, cut by the charcoal burning platform, appears to represent a field lynchet associated with a small field system running off this corner of the fort.

The internal quarry ditch on both the northern and western sides is unusually wide and in part, - particularly on the western side and around the northern entrance, appears to have been terraced. The terraced areas coincide with large areas of burning. Here the burning is not the vitrification of nodular limestone but the intense heating of large areas of bedrock.

The eastern rampart although almost totally eroded appears to have been made up of burned and vitrified limestone nodules, whilst the western and southern ramparts are constructed of a mix of vitrified nodules and burned bedrock.

Discussion (Figure 2)

The form of the defensive circuit is more complex than can be easily explained by the line of the present rampart, particularly on the western side. The irregular form and unnecessary width of the western quarry ditch in conjunction with the presence of so much burned bedrock on the west facing slope suggests that some form of large scale re-modelling was undertaken. The fact that the western rampart comprises a mix of vitrified stone and burned bedrock may suggest that it was constructed using material from the eastern side of the quarry ditch.

In order for this to happen the eastern side of the quarry ditch would need to have been vitrified prior to the construction of the western rampart. This suggests a sequence of slighting and re-construction.

The location of burned bedrock and / or vitrified material principally along the western rampart, the southern side of the quarry ditch close to the northern entrance and along the west facing slope of the quarry ditch indicates that there was a previous phase of rampart which ran along the top of the west facing quarry slope. This then continued around the top of the north-facing quarry ditch immediately to the south of the northern entrance and from there turned south to run along the top of the scarp on the eastern side. This circuit would enclose an area approximately two thirds the size of the present defended area.

It appears that the earlier rampart, which ran along the top of the west facing quarry ditch, had been slighted by fire causing severe damage, not only to the rampart, but also to the underlying bedrock. This made it impossible for a new rampart to be constructed on the same line as the slighted rampart. It is therefore suggested that the northern and western defensive circuit had to be enlarged in order to construct new ramparts on bedrock unaffected by intensive burning. The defensive line along the scarp edge was re-used due to its natural defensive attributes as was the southern defensive line. Both entranceways appear to have been significantly re-modelled. Such a sequence of enlargement and re-modelling would also explain why certain lengths of rampart are constructed principally from loose, vitrified rock and intensively burned bedrock.

Conclusion

The evidence of intensive burning and the fact that much of the eastern and western ramparts are made up of this vitrified material whilst (certainly as far as the western rampart is concerned) there is no evidence for burning of the bedrock beneath the rampart, strongly suggests that there is a definite sequence to the development of Cherry Hill Fort.

It appears that the fort began as a scarp edge enclosure of univallate form enclosing an area of approximately 5 acres. This enclosure was purposefully slighted and burned to such an extent and to such high temperatures that the defensive circuit was not only rendered unusable but made it impossible to re-instate the defensive line.

This survey has revealed greater complexity to the earthworks than had hitherto been suspected. Close mapping of the distribution of apparent vitrified stone revealed a fascinating history to the development of the site. A simple univallate enclosure appears at a certain point to have been deliberately set ablaze to ensure its total destruction. The fort was then rebuilt as a partly multivallate enclosure, and at least part of the earlier circuit appears to have been levelled.

Archive

- 1 Field drawing (Scale 1:500)
- 1 Inked version of the survey drawing
- This Document

References

Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 3 - *Midland and Western England*. 1:250 000
Ordnance Survey (1983)

British Geological Survey (1989a) *Solid and Drift Geology. Hereford, Sheet 215*.
London: HMSO.

Ordnance Survey (1889) *Ordnance Survey Map 1st Edition*. Southampton: Ordnance Survey Office.

Ordnance Survey (1998) *Explorer 189, Hereford and Ross-on-Wye, Scale 1:25 000*.
Southampton: Ordnance Survey.

RCHME (1935) *An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in Herefordshire, Vol. II East*.
Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England. London: HMSO.

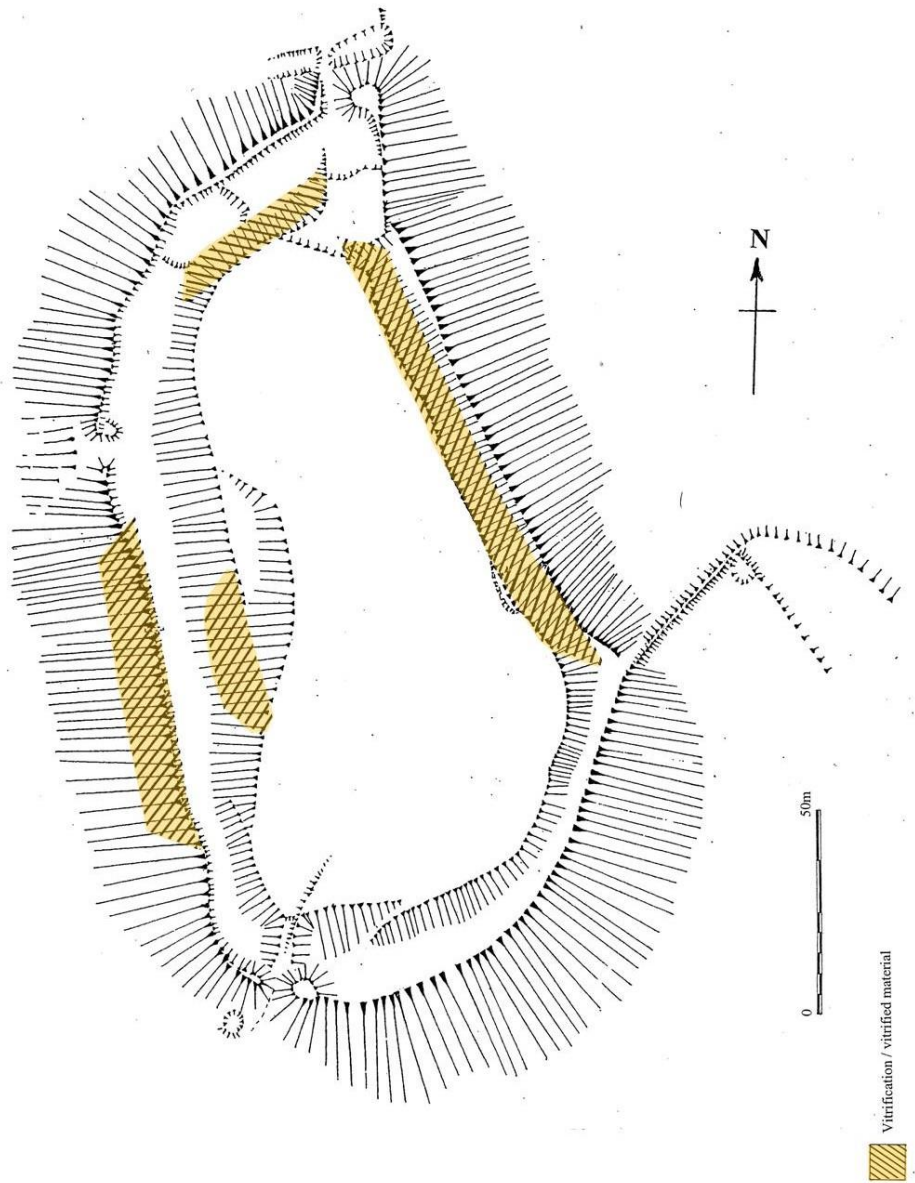


Figure 2 – Areas of Vitrification on Cherry Hill Fort

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the co-operation of the Landowner during the course of this project.

I would like to thank Paul White, Landscape Archaeologist and Robert Price, (local resident), for their assistance during the survey.

I would like to thank Dr. Keith Ray, County Archaeologist for his editorial comments in the preparation of this report.

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