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MOUNT PLEASANT, DORSET
A SURVEY OF THE NEOLITHIC 'HENGE ENCLOSURE' AND ASSOCIATED FEATURES

Martyn Barber

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SUMMARY

This survey involved the interpretation, transcription and recording of all significant archaeological features seen on aerial photographs at and in the immediate environs of the 'henge enclosure' known as Mount Pleasant on the outskirts of Dorchester, Dorset.

The survey followed observation of previously unrecognised features visible on photographs taken in 2003, as part of English Heritage's annual aerial reconnaissance programme. Assessment of historic photographs in the National Monuments Record (now English Heritage Archive) collection at Swindon demonstrated that many of these 'new' features had been photographed before, but that despite the significance of the site, and the amount of work undertaken in the vicinity over the years, no systematic analysis of the aerial photographic evidence had ever been undertaken.

Among the key features discussed are additional entrances into the henge enclosure, evidence for external ditches, enlarged or heightened banks, and a possible approach to the River Frome, along with a number of previously unrecognised ring ditches outside the enclosure.

CONTRIBUTORS

The transcription and report were prepared by Martyn Barber. New English Heritage reconnaissance photography was taken by Damian Grady, while additional aerial photographs were provided by Francesca Radcliffe. The plan of the key soilmarks and cropmarks (Fig. 6) was originally prepared by Deborah Cunliffe for publication in Barber 2006.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Natalie Burley of the Archive Support team at English Heritage retrieved the bulk of the photographs from the archive. Francesca Radcliffe kindly supplied numerous photographs of her own, and allowed the reproduction of one of them (Fig. 8) within this report. Peter Woodward of Dorset County Museum, Dorchester allowed access to relevant archive material held by the museum. Professor Geoffrey Wainwright kindly provided information on the use of aerial photography during his own excavations at the site. Within English Heritage, Jonathan Last read and commented on the contents of this report.

The photograph on the from cover is a detail of 23704/21, 1st September 2004, © English Heritage.NMR.

ARCHIVE LOCATION

English Heritage Archive, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon SN2 2EH.

AMIE uid numbers cited in the text are unique reference numbers for individual monument records within the English Heritage archaeological database. These records can be accessed either by through the English Heritage Archive (contact details above) or

they can be consulted online through Pastscape (www.pastscape.org.uk) or the Heritage Gateway (www.heritagegateway.org.uk).

DATE OF SURVEY

The initial transcription was prepared in 2004 and the report initially drafted in 2004-5. It was substantially completed in 2008 and finalised in 2014.

CONTACT DETAILS

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INTRODUCTION

Analysis of aerial photographs taken in 2003, as part of English Heritage's aerial reconnaissance programme, suggested the presence of a number of previously unrecognised features associated with the 'henge enclosure' at Mount Pleasant, Dorchester, Dorset, best known through the excavations undertaken there over four decades ago by Geoffrey Wainwright (Wainwright 1979). An assessment of other photographs in the National Monuments Record (now English Heritage Archive) collection at Swindon showed that many of these features had in fact been photographed on previous occasions, in some instances as early as the 1930s.

As a result, it was decided to analyse and map all visible soilmarks, cropmarks and earthworks in the immediate vicinity of the enclosure. Given the likelihood of more extensive mapping of the broader region as part of a National Mapping Programme project (South Dorset Ridgeway Mapping Project: Royall 2011), it was decided to concentrate mainly on features more likely to be associated with earlier rather than more recent periods, and also to focus on a relatively restricted area around the monument. Consequently not all of the features described in this report have been mapped, although most are illustrated. Summaries of the main findings have already appeared in the Prehistoric Society's newsletter 'Past' (Barber 2005a), English Heritage's 'Research News' (Barber 2005b), and in more detail in the Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society (Barber 2004). A more detailed reassessment of Conquer Barrow, which adjoins the Mount Pleasant enclosure but is largely invisible to aerial photography, can be found in Barber *et al* 2010 (also online at http://english-heritage.academia.edu/MartynBarber).

THE ENVIRONS OF MOUNT PLEASANT

The henge enclosure itself lies on a low spur running approximately east-west and which is situated between the valleys of the Frome (to the north) and the South Winterbourne (to the south) (Fig. 1). These two watercourses converge a couple of kilometres to the east, near the village of West Stafford, and then continue east as the Frome until meeting the Piddle, and subsequently reaching the sea as such at Poole Harbour some 25km east of Dorchester as the crow flies.

The enclosure's earthworks broadly follow the 70 metre contour around the hill on the north, east and south, but head across slightly higher ground on the west. The highest point of this part of the ridge – peaking at circa 79 metres – above O.D. – lies within the western half of the enclosure and not at its centre. To the southwest of Mount Pleasant, the ground slopes fairly gently to circa 65 metres above O.D. before rising again at Frome Hill to 75 metres, a round barrow ('A', Fig. 6) sitting atop the highest point. Beyond this, the land falls away on all sides towards the Frome and the South Winterbourne.

At Mount Pleasant itself, the ground falls away sharply to the north and more gently but still markedly to the east and south. To the west, the ridge continues into the modern town of Dorchester. For the purposes of this report – and in particular the mapping from aerial photographs – the site is effectively bounded by the A352 to the south and the railway line to the north and, to the east, the point at which the two converge. The western extent of the mapping is the field boundary separating Mount Pleasant from the Came View housing estate. The entire area mapped, including the henge enclosure and the adjacent ring ditches and round barrows, is currently in use as arable land – aerial photographs show a variety of crops in recent decades – something which is, of course, continuing to erode the buried features and remnant earthworks, yet at the same time offering ongoing opportunities to record cropmark and soilmark evidence from the air. Mount Pleasant is the only one of the large 'henge enclosures' – the others being Avebury, Durrington Walls and Marden, all in Wiltshire – to remain under the plough.

In Wainwright's (1979, 1-4) excavation report, Dr FW Anderson of the Institute of Geological Sciences described the local geology as follows:

"*The site lies on Upper Chalk, here a soft flintless chalk. The Geological Survey map records the area of the camp as 'bare chalk'. Frome Hill, a third of a mile ESE has a capping of Pebble Gravel, one of the relict patches of Eocene sediments found scattered over this area and probably of Bagshot age… There is a strong presumption that at one time Mount Pleasant also had a capping of Eocene sediments. Evidence for this lies in the material filling solution pits in the chalk.*

The enclosure itself sits on Upper Chalk. Frome Hill, the area containing the two scheduled round barrows to the southeast of the henge, has been mapped as a patch of sandy clay – Bagshot Beds – up to 400 metres across. However, excavations and aerial photography suggest a broad scatter of clayey and sandy patches right across the ridge.

These are numerous and contain either a coarse limonitic quartz sand, sometimes cemented into a hard rock, or a fine white marl quartz sand rather like a brickearth. The solution pits were therefore almost certainly formed when the chalk had a covering of Tertiary sands… There are fragments of Sarsens on the site. These are relicts of the Bagshot beds, but could have been brought to the site from nearby."

Fig. 1 – An oblique view of Mount Pleasant and its environs, viewed from the north. Mount Pleasant itself is just left of centre. In the foreground are flooded water meadows associated with the From, while further flooding can be seen to the south, including flooded water meadows associated with the South Winterbourne. Conquer Barrow is partially visible beneath the trees just above the centre of the photograph. 58/RAF/2687/0413 24 January 1959 English Heritage RAF Photography.

The henge enclosure itself is scheduled (DO 624), although currently the scheduled area does not reflect its full extent, particularly on the northern side. The two round barrows closest to the summit of Frome Hill are also scheduled (jointly as RSM 33536), although only one has been taken out of cultivation. In both cases, the available aerial photographs show that only the mounds, and not their surrounding ring ditches, fall within the

scheduled areas. Conquer Barrow, the large mound which sits at the henge enclosure's western end, is also scheduled (DO 397). All other features mapped and described in this report currently lie outside the scheduled areas associated with these monuments.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL LANDSCAPE

At the time of Wainwright's excavations, Mount Pleasant appeared to be a relatively isolated prehistoric earthwork. A few round barrows were known – the massive Conquer Barrow and the two smaller mounds on Frome Hill – but the nearest major contemporary or near-contemporary monument was Maumbury Rings, an unusual henge circa 1.8 km due east. A little further afield – circa 4 km WSW – lies the early Neolithic causewayed enclosure and middle Neolithic bank barrow at Maiden Castle. Since Wainwright's excavations were published, a considerable amount of excavation in and around Dorchester has uncovered several major monuments contemporary with or a little earlier than Mount Pleasant.

Maiden Castle (Sharples 1991)

The causewayed enclosure at Maiden Castle (AMIE uid 451864), circa 3.7 km southwest of Mount Pleasant, lies beneath the defences of the Early Iron Age hillfort. A Neolithic presence on the hill was long suspected (Oswald *et al* 2001, 11) but not confirmed until Mortimer Wheeler's excavation campaign in the 1930s, and it was examined again during the 1985-6 excavations undertaken by Niall Sharples. Only a few ditch segments have been uncovered, so it is by no means definite that the causewayed enclosure matches the extent and shape of the first phase hillfort, but this seems a plausible assumption.

The causewayed enclosure featured two concentric circuits of interrupted ditch spaced up to 15 metres apart. The inner ditch enclosed an area of some 8 hectares. A bank barrow, built in a more or less east-west alignment, crossing the enclosure earthworks on their western side, measures some 546 metres in length and up to 17.5 metres in width, the long linear mound being flanked by a ditch on either side, each circa 5.5 metres wide and 1.5 metres deep. The barrow mound actually comprises 3 distinct segments, each on a slightly different alignment. It has been suggested that it may have started life as a long barrow located just outside the causewayed enclosure, though this remains conjecture at present. Recent re-evaluation of available radiocarbon dates using Bayesian analysis (Whittle et al 2011, 164-193) suggests that for the enclosure, construction began in the 36th century Cal BC and that the site may have been in use for no more than one or two generations. Dates from the eastern and central section of the long mound suggest it belongs to the 35th century Cal BC, and that the outer ditch at least of the causewayed enclosure had become filled up before the mound was constructed.

Greyhound Yard (Woodward et al 1993)

A late Neolithic timber monument (AMIE uid 1147728) just under 2 km WSW of Mount Pleasant was discovered when excavations in 1984 encountered 21 substantial post-pits arranged in a gentle arc. The pits had been dug up to 2.8 metres into the chalk, suggesting that the posts – all probably oak – may have stood up to 6 metres above the ground.

Similar post-holes found to the east indicate that the monument may not have been perfectly circular in shape. At least 290 metres across, it would have included a small coombe (now effectively lost beneath modern Dorchester) which ran north to the floodplain of the Frome. Radiocarbon dates from charcoal and antler found within the post-holes suggest that the monument was constructed in the first half of the third millennium BC, probably broadly contemporary with the construction of the henge enclosure at Mount Pleasant, but some centuries before the latter's own timber palisade.

Maumbury Rings (Bradley 1976)

Located circa 1.8 km due west of Mount Pleasant, Maumbury Rings (AMIE uid 451848) survives as a substantial earthwork within Dorchester (Fig. 2), though it owes its survival chiefly to its re-use and re-building in the Roman period, when it was converted into an amphitheatre.

Fig. 2 – The broader environs of Mount Pleasant, which can be seen to the right of centre. Left of centre, within Dorchester, are the earthworks of Maumbury Rings. Top left is Poundbury Iron Age hillfort. RAF 540/1775/0148 15th January 1956. English Heritage RAF Photography.

Today the site comprises an embanked enclosure, oval in shape and measuring circa 66 metres by 49.5 metres internally. The long axis is orientated NNE by SSW, and the bank, which stands up to 9 metres high, is breached by a single entrance at the NNE end. A large stone was discovered just to the west of this entrance in 1846.

Excavations were undertaken between 1908 and 1913 by Harold St George Gray, but were never fully published, a detailed report not appearing until more than 60 years after the excavations ended (Bradley 1976). Gray was able to demonstrate the presence of a circuit of deep shafts, which would have been some 52 metres in diameter, with an entrance causeway up to circa 15 metres wide. Roman adaptation of the site had removed all traces of any ditch, although there is strong circumstantial evidence for one. Whether it preceded or succeeded the shafts is open to debate. The shafts, probably around 45 in all with a suggested typical spacing of 3 metres, had a maximum diameter of 3.7 metres at the level of Roman disturbance, but narrowed to as little as 61 cm at the bottom. Of the shafts that were fully excavated, estimated original depths varied between 9 and 11.7 metres. Quantities of later Neolithic material culture, demonstrating some patterning in sequence of deposition, were recovered from most of the excavated shafts. Radiocarbon dates obtained from antler picks – one from the base of Shaft 1, the other from near the top of Shaft 3 – suggest that the shafts at least, if not the monument as a whole, may have been broadly contemporary with the main earthwork phase at Mount Pleasant.

Allington Avenue 'long barrow' (Davies et al 2002)

Located circa 600 metres due west of Mount Pleasant, with the Flagstones enclosure (below) midway between the two, is a monument discovered during excavations in 1984-87 (AMIE uid 1147983). Two east-west aligned and broadly parallel ditches were found, each comprising interconnecting pits, with a total length of around 75 metres. For most of their length the ditches were around 10 metres apart, but this expanded to around 14 metres to the east. It was impossible to deduce from the ditch fills whether or not there had been external banks or an internal mound. A single radiocarbon date suggests that the ditches belonged somewhere in the last few centuries of the fourth millennium BC. A feature described as a 'bipartite ring ditch' was constructed over the eastern end of the monument in the Early Bronze Age, while two conjoined ring ditches near the western end also belong to this late third or early second millennium BC phase. Although the Neolithic ditches were described in the excavation report as representing a long barrow, several problems were noted with this classification.

Flagstones (Smith et al 1997)

This is a substantial Neolithic ditched enclosure (AMIE uid 983955) located just 400 metres west of Mount Pleasant (Fig. 3). Around half of it was excavated in 1987-88. The enclosure itself appears to have been near circular in shape, around 100 metres in

diameter, and defined by a single circuit of pits or ditch segments of varying length, depth and spacing. The chalk walls of four of the segments featured engraved designs, while human burials – one adult plus two child inhumations (and bones from a third) were found in the primary silts of three further ditch segments. Radiocarbon dates suggest that the enclosure was constructed in the late fourth millennium BC.

Fig. 3 – Left of centre, the Flagstones enclosure in the process of excavation. At the foot of the photograph, again just left of centre, are the trees which obscure Conquer Barrow. JRB 3425/08 10th July 1987.

In the early second millennium BC, a barrow was constructed at the centre of the enclosure – a central grave covered by a mound and surrounded by a ditch from which, presumably, the mound material was quarried. The grave contained what was probably a crouched inhumation, described as being a young adult male.

Conquer Barrow

The most conspicuous earthwork in the vicinity, this lies on the western edge of the henge enclosure itself, and stands up to 8 metres above the modern ground surface. Conquer Barrow (AMIE uid 453934) was the feature that first led to speculation about the Mount Pleasant enclosure being of potential Neolithic date, as the mound appeared to overlie, and therefore post-date, the enclosure's earthwork bank (Piggott & Piggott 1939, 158, and below p44). Wainwright too considered it to have been built on top of the henge enclosure bank, although others, partly on the basis of Wainwright's own

excavated evidence, have disagreed (e.g. Sparey-Green 1984; Pitts 2000, 280-1; Barber *et al* 2010).

MOUNT PLEASANT: A HISTORY OF INVESTIGATION

Place-names

Published discussions of the place-names 'Mount Pleasant' and 'Conquer Barrow' are few in number, and offer little help in understanding the monuments and their more recent history. The English Place-Name Society's volume covering the region (Mills 1977) found no mention of Conquer Barrow prior to its appearance on Ordnance Survey mapping of 1811, while for Mount Pleasant the suggested interpretation was "*a complimentary name for productive land"* which, though eminently plausible, appears to be an assumption offered in the absence of any documentary evidence. It is perhaps worth noting the presence of Conygar Hill just over a kilometre to the southwest of Conquer Barrow, raising the possibility that the latter name may also have originated with rabbits. Thomas Hardy felt that the name of "*the fine and commanding tumulus called Conquer Barrow…seems to be a corruption of some earlier word*" (Hardy 1890, 79), though he neglected to mention what he thought that word might have been. According to Edmund Blunden, Hardy had considered naming his house at nearby Max Gate after the barrow, while Davies adds that the drawing-room window at Max Gate had been placed so as to frame Hardy's view of Conquer Barrow (Davies 2011, 5, 52-3). Finally, RCHME (1970, 54) noted that a sloping shelf on the mound's western side "*could be due to interference, perhaps deliberate remodelling connected with the name 'Mount Pleasant*" – in other words, Conquer Barrow might have seen service as a prospect mound, which might imply that 'Mount Pleasant' also referred to the mound rather than the hilltop.

Historically, Conquer Barrow lay on the boundary between the neighbouring parishes of Fordington and West Stafford, but it is unclear if the mound itself performed any function (e.g. as a meeting-place) in addition to being a very prominent boundary marker.

Antiquarian Notes

Despite the size of Conquer Barrow and the extent of the enclosure, Mount Pleasant seems not to have attracted antiquarian attention until the later 19th century. The first written description appears to be that by Charles Warne, published in 1872 in his 'Ancient Dorset', though the site had received a brief mention in his 1867 account of Vespasian's first British campaign. Warne's two previous volumes on the archaeology of the county, published in 1865 and 1866, make no mention of either Conquer Barrow or Mount Pleasant. It may, then, have been Warne's consideration of Vespasian's advance that prompted his inspection or re-evaluation of these sites.

Warne's brief 1867 description runs as follows:

"*At the distance of twelve miles or thereabouts, a day's march from Bindun, we find situated on elevated ground immediately overlooking the River Frome, one mile east of*

Dorchester (the Roman Durnovaria), and near to a large tumulus known as 'Conquer Barrow' (significant name!), the vestiges of a large rectangular encampment, which I hold to have been Vespasian's Camp, thrown up and occupied by him preparatory to his advance on the fortified heights of Dunium [Maiden Castle]" (Warne 1867, 392).

In 1872, as already noted, Warne's account of the site was slightly lengthier:

"*A casual observer would not, perhaps, notice any indications of a Camp at this spot, so slight and indistinct are they; but the practical antiquary may by a little discrimination recognize the vestiges of earthworks, which are portions of more extensive entrenchments. This was indubitably a Roman Castra, situate at Frome, in the parish of Stafford, about one mile East of Dorchester; and not far from a tumulus which bears the significant appellation of Conquer Barrow, and now constitutes a marked point in the parliamentary boundaries of the ancient borough of Dorchester. This mutilated Castra lies on the summit of some gently rising ground, which has been for ages under cultivation, and hence it cannot be a matter of surprise that only faint indications remain of a military work that afforded a temporary sojourn, as I believe, to Vespasian's army in his march on Dunium, at a period not far short of nineteen centuries ago.*

"There is sufficient evidence, however, to warrant the conclusion I have formed, and this ancient earthwork may challenge, even in its defective state, by its historical associations, a measure of interest uninspired by remains of a similar and more perfect character.

"On the south-west side are visible portions of a vallum which alone has escaped the destructive agency of the plough, but taking the remnant as a guide, the original rectangular plan can yet be made out at favourable times and seasons, with distinctiveness enough to convince the antiquary that we here have the site of a Roman Castra.

*"I was informed by an intelligent tradesman of the village that a sword and a few other ancient relics were found here not many years ago" (*Warne 1872, 150-1).

No further details as to the nature of this sword and relics seem to survive, although it is worth recalling that two Anglo-Saxon inhumations were found during Wainwright's (1979, 181-3) excavations.

The Piggotts and Atkinson

The first published archaeological survey was that undertaken by Stuart and Margaret Piggott in the late 1930s, although a depiction of the enclosure earthworks had been appearing on Ordnance Survey maps since the late 19th century, possibly as a result of Warne's identification of them. The Ordnance Survey showed much of the bank around the enclosure's southern perimeter as an earthwork, with notable gaps to the southeast and southwest. In the Piggotts' survey of 'stone circles and earth circles in Dorset' (Piggott & Piggott 1939), they referred to the undertaking of fieldwork and surveys in 1936 and

1937 "*while in certain instances use has been made of air-photographs to which Mr. O.G.S. Crawford has drawn our attention"* (ibid, 138).

The Piggotts' plan of the Mount Pleasant earthworks again showed the course of the bank around the southern perimeter of the enclosure, but with the addition of traces of an internal ditch either side of the southeastern gap in the earthworks. This gap they identified as an original entrance, their survey indicating that neither bank nor ditch crossed it. The southwestern gap visible in the course of the bank was not remarked upon. They also noted remnant earthworks to the north of the modern east-west field boundary – a slight scarp to the northeast, which would appear to represent the outer face of the enclosure bank; and a similar scarp to the northwest, just north of Conquer Barrow, in an area protected from cultivation. Both had been noted by the Ordnance Survey previously.

The Piggotts' paper appears to represent the first published discussion of Mount Pleasant in a possible Neolithic or Early Bronze Age context. The whole concept of the 'henge' as a distinct class of prehistoric monument was itself just a few years old (Kendrick, in Kendrick & Hawkes 1932, 83-98), but neither Kendrick's original chapter (ibid.) nor Grahame Clark's (1936) discussion and gazetteer had mentioned Mount Pleasant. However, its potentially early date had already been noted, even if nothing had appeared in print. The Piggotts stated in a footnote that "*Mr. Crawford first drew attention to its peculiar relation to the round barrow* [i.e. Conquer Barrow]" (Piggott & Piggott 1939, 158). This presumably means that O.G.S. Crawford believed the barrow lay on top of the enclosure bank, and therefore must be later in date. Crawford had been aware of this since at least the early 1930s, and later claimed that the site had been left off the Ordnance Survey's 1932 'Map of Neolithic Wessex' by mistake (Crawford 1953, 169).

The Piggotts' descriptive account of the site is brief. They noted that the "*earthwork has apparently been of formidable proportions, enclosing an oval area of 1200 feet by 900 feet. It appears to have the ditch inside the bank, and there is an original entrance to the southeast. The internal ditch suggests a non-defensive structure of the 'Henge' class, and this is strengthened by the fact that on the west a large round barrow, known as Conquer Barrow, which has not itself been ploughed, stands actually upon the denuded rampart, implying that the earthwork is of earlier date… These facts, taken in conjunction, justify the inclusion of the Mount Pleasant site as a possible Early Bronze Age monument of the type represented in Wessex by the second period at Avebury or Durrington Walls; the southeasterly entrance suggesting…the original existence of another to the northwest, thus distinguishing it from the allied single-entrance monuments of which Maumbury Rings is typical. Excavation alone can prove or disprove these very tentative suggestions*" (ibid.).

This hypothesis concerning entrances relates to the simple classification scheme for henges established in the years immediately following Kendrick's invention of the henge idea (Kendrick & Hawkes 1932, 83-98). It had quickly become accepted that henges could be divided into two classes – those with a single entrance (Class I), and those with two

opposed entrances (Class II). It was clear to the Piggotts that a single entrance was visible at Mount Pleasant on its southeastern side, where the earthworks survived best. However, they also noted that Class I henges tended to be orientated to the northeast, while Class II henges were normally aligned on a northwest-southeast axis (Piggott & Piggott 1939, 140-1). Hence the suggestion that as Mount Pleasant clearly featured a southeastern entrance, it should lie within Class II and thus possess a second entrance to the northwest, irrespective of whether or not one could be observed. Of course, neither henges in general nor Mount Pleasant in particular would turn out to be so predictable.

The Piggotts' Early Bronze Age dating of such sites rested at the time on rather limited evidence. By the late 1930s, few had seen excavation of any quality, while crucial aspects of contemporary material culture were poorly understood. For example, Grooved Ware pottery had only just been identified as a distinct ceramic tradition (in Warren *et al* 1936), although its significance and precise chronological limits were far from certain. Consequently, placing the 'earth and stone circles' in time was not straightforward. The Piggotts noted a Grooved Ware sherd from Maumbury Rings, plus a range of flint types from the same site which were "*in complete agreement with an Early Bronze Age dating*" (ibid., 141). The highland stone circles and lowland earth circles were attributed ultimately to different strains of 'Beaker Folk' (Brittany and Holland/Rhine respectively), "*the idea of the open circular temple being common to all sub-groups of Beaker folk*" (ibid., 142). Indeed, even Grooved Ware pottery was being tentatively assigned to a Dutch origin – "*its makers may well represent a slightly earlier move along the same routes as the Dutch beaker-folk*" (ibid.). They concluded that "*Whatever may be the absolute dating, there seems every likelihood that the stone and earth circles represent distinct though allied strains, and that the series cannot be earlier than the Early Bronze Age in inception…*" (ibid.).

Twelve years later, the cultural and chronological placement of henges was still a matter for debate, while the date and function of Mount Pleasant was less certain than it had seemed to the Piggotts. Richard Atkinson (1951, 104-5) included it in his list of henges, but within the category of 'Doubtful Sites'. Atkinson (1951, 86) also presented evidence that the alleged orientation of enclosures accepted as Class II henges was less clear-cut than previously believed. However, despite the ongoing absence of excavation, there had been some progress:

"*It consists of an approximately circular ditch with external bank, about 1200 ft in diameter, surrounding the top of a low hill overlooking the S. bank of the River Frome. There is a well-marked entrance on the SE. side, and about three-quarters of the circuit can be traced on* [RAF] *air-photographs. The latter also suggest the presence of a mound or barrow at the centre, which can just be seen on the ground. The ground on the NW. side slopes steeply, and a second entrance here may have been totally obliterated by cultivation and soil-creep. A very large round barrow, known as Conquer Barrow, stands on the bank on the W. side*".

RCHME: Dorset Inventory

Although Atkinson stated that much of the enclosure circuit was visible on air photographs, no mapping or sketching of the aerial evidence appears to have occurred. Even the RCHME survey published nearly two decades later (1970, 505) added little to the plans produced by the Piggotts or the Ordnance Survey, concentrating as it did on what was visible to the ground-based surveyor. One noteworthy feature, however, was that whereas those previous surveys showed an absence of surviving earthworks on the southwest side, the RCHME survey 'joined the dots', using a broken line to suggest that both bank and ditch were originally continuous at this point. There is no suggestion of earthwork survival here, so this may have been due to the Piggotts' earlier speculation about the likelihood of an opposed entrance to the NW.

Fig. 4 – Extract from an RAF vertical from 1949, part of the run examined by the RCHME in the search for the 'mound' allegedly spotted by Atkinson. No mound is visible, and neither is the penannular ditch around 'Site IV'. However, part of the palisade, not discovered until 1969, is clearly visible. RAF 58/271/5131 28th June 1949. English Heritage RAF Photography.

The RCHME were, however, more sceptical about the alleged 'mound or barrow' observed by Atkinson: "*It has been suggested that another barrow…existed at the centre of the enclosure but the traces are very slight"* (ibid., 504). Elsewhere they refer again to one of the RAF aerial photographs which "*suggest* [a] *former mound here but no clear traces remain on the ground*" (ibid., 451). Atkinson had not stated which photographs he was referring to. RCHME referenced two sets of verticals, taken on 17th January 1947 (see Fig. 7) and 28th June 1949 (Fig. 4). It is presumed these were the photographs seen by Atkinson. On neither set of photographs is there a ring ditch to be seen, and neither is

there anything else within the interior of the henge enclosure identifiable as a possible barrow. The same applies to other extant RAF aerial photographs from this period. This problem is discussed in further detail below (see page 30).

The RCHME description of the Mount Pleasant earthworks was the most detailed prior to Wainwright's account, the latter's excavations coinciding roughly with the former's publication. Designated West Stafford (24), the RCHME inventory entry is as follows:

"*Enclosure, oval, probably a Neolithic 'henge' monument…, lies across a low hill called Mount Pleasant with gentle slopes on all but the N. where the fall, to the R. Frome, is steeper. The enclosing bank only remains on the S. side and the whole site has been heavily ploughed except for the coppice around Conquer Barrow, a large, much disturbed, mound apparently built on the bank at the W.*

"The bank is of loosely-packed chalk and earth, spread over a width of 50 ft. or more, and, where best preserved, stood about 5 ft. above the old ground surface. Within the bank was a shallow ditch generally 50 ft. to 60 ft. wide. The simple causewayed entrance at the S.E. is certainly original.

"Air photographs indicate that when complete the enclosure measured internally about 1150 ft. (E. to W.) by 1000 ft., and covered 12 acres. The area and the position of the existing entrance suggest that it was probably a 'henge' of Atkinson's Class II and would therefore have had an opposed entrance to the N.W., but there are no indications of such an entrance…" (RCHME 1970, 540).

Conquer Barrow was described as follows:

"[It] *is about 90 ft. in diameter and lies on the W. bank of the enclosure at the highest point of the hill… It has a flat top 24 ft. across and on the E. is 7 ft. high above a shelf 24 ft. wide, possibly representing part of the original top of the bank, from which there is another drop to a 'berm' immediately above the inner ditch. On the W. the mound falls 15 ft. without a break to a very disturbed sloping shelf up to 30 ft. wide. A bank 2 ft. high and 10 ft. across runs up to the outer edge of this from the S. This shelf could be due to interference, perhaps deliberate remodelling connected with the name 'Mount Pleasant'. Conquer Barrow is probably a Bronze Age round barrow since its situation on the bank of a Neolithic enclosure has parallels (e.g. Robin Hood's Ball, Shrewton, Wilts.). It is shown without the 'henge' on I. Taylor's one inch map of Dorset (1765)*" (ibid.).

Wainwright's Excavations 1969-71

Mount Pleasant really owes its place within Neolithic studies to the campaign of geophysical survey and excavation undertaken at the site by Geoffrey Wainwright between 1969 and 1971, work which was published in some detail in 1970. Those excavations demonstrated that the earthwork traces still surviving on the ground

represented the remnants of an enormous enclosure with a complex history beginning somewhere in the first half of the third millennium BC.

The earthwork enclosure was shown to comprise a substantial ditch with outer bank, the overall dimensions being around 370 metres east-west by 340 metres north-south. Two entrances, lying to the east and southeast, were identified on the ground, while geophysical survey undertaken in 1969, prior to the start of the excavations, indicated the presence of two more, to the north and the west. Both of these were quickly confirmed during the 1970-71 excavations.

Geophysical survey within the interior detected the presence of a penannular ditched feature, dubbed 'Site IV', and almost certainly erroneously identified with the barrow 'seen' by Atkinson (see below, p30). The excavations confirmed 'Site IV"s penannular form, with a north-facing entrance. Within its penannular ditch was a complex arrangement of timber and sarsen structures. Five near-concentric rings of post-holes had been laid out around north-south and east-west aligned central 'aisles', while stone holes and sarsens suggested the former presence of a 'cove' – a rectangular sarsen structure usually open on one side, in this case the south-facing side – plus a few outlying stones.

Geophysical survey also led to the discovery of a narrow ditch running within and concentric to the enclosure's inner ditch. Numerous trenches across it in 1970 and 1971 showed that this ditch had once supported a palisade of massive timbers perhaps standing up to 6 metres high, and enclosing an area measuring circa 270 metres east-west by 245 metres north-south (Fig. 5). Only two entrances were identified through this palisade. Located to the east and north, opposite the respective entrances through the enclosure bank and ditch, each was flanked by even more substantial posts. However, despite their monumental nature, these entrances appear to have been no more than a metre wide.

In terms of date and overall sequence, it seems likely that the henge bank and ditch were created in the centuries immediately preceding 2500 BC, during the currency of Grooved Ware pottery. The western entrance was drastically reduced in size during the late 3rd millennium BC, an episode broadly associated with the deposition of a highly decorated flanged bronze axehead. 'Site IV' appears to originate somewhere between these two events. It seems to be most closely associated again with Grooved Ware, but the precise sequence of development at 'Site IV' is open to debate. Wainwright suggested that the ditch and timber settings came first, with the sarsens replacing the timbers after a few centuries. However, equally plausible alternatives have been offered (e.g. Pitts 2000, 285; Pollard 1992). The palisade was constructed around 2000 BC, give or take a couple of centuries, and was more closely associated with Beaker pottery. This palisade appears to have been deliberately destroyed, perhaps not too long after its construction. Some posts were removed while others were burnt in situ. Evidence for continued activity at the site included the presence of sherds of Early and Middle Bronze Age pottery, while Iron Age, Roman and Saxon episodes were also attested.

Fig. 5 – Surface traces of Wainwright's trenches, as photographed a few months after his excavations ended. The course of the palisade is particularly clear. SY 7089/2/772 11th December 1971 6566/7.

After 1971

Since the end of Wainwright's excavations, and their publication in 1979, Mount Pleasant has occupied a prominent place in discussions of the Neolithic and Bronze Age period in 'Wessex'. The published excavation data has provided opportunities for occasional re-evaluation of the site and its functions (see e.g. Barrett 1994, 98ff; Thomas 1996, ch. 7). Work at the site itself has been quite limited, although the environs of Dorchester have been the focus for considerable fieldwork over the past thirty years or so, often with some impact on the understanding of Mount Pleasant.

The only fieldwork carried out in the vicinity of the enclosure itself was a watching brief with some fieldwalking undertaken in 1986, prior to the laying of a water pipeline immediately south of the enclosure. In the field containing the southern half of the henge,

the pipeline appears to have been routed to pass as close to the scheduled area as possible, presumably in order to reduce the length of pipeline needed. It is clear from the archaeological fieldwork project archive (held by Dorset County Museum, Dorchester) that at least one alternative route, taking the pipeline further south and well away from the enclosure, was considered, though it is unclear why this option was not followed. The pipe trench dug in 1986 ran diagonally from the southwest corner of the field containing the southern half of the enclosure, heading ENE to the point where the north-south boundary to the east of the enclosure experiences a slight change in direction. Passing through this north-south boundary, the pipeline then turns roughly north to run parallel with the field boundary towards the water trunk main close to the railway line.

The published report on the archaeological observations along the route noted hat:

"*Where the pipeline crossed the arable fields around Mount Pleasant… an easement area of 10 m width was surveyed by intensive fieldwalking… This included a 10 m wide access to the pipeline route from the West Stafford Road. This easement area was stripped of topsoil prior to pipe laying, and there was some opportunity to record archaeological features in plan and by excavation in addition to section in the pipe-trench*" (Woodward 1986, 177).

The site notebook, in Dorchester County Museum, offers a little more detail, although for some of the relevant days it is, disappointingly, empty. The entry for Friday 24th January 1986 states that:

"*For the area from Allington Ave to the place where it will cross the road the trench is being cut straight down into the natural chalk, so that any features will only be visible in section. The part where it passes by Mt Pleasant, on the other side of the road, the 10m easement area is being stripped onto the natural then the pipe trench is being cut thro' this. So in this section any features should be visible in plan*".

Woodward (1986) lists several features observed in plan along the course of the pipeline, plus a summary of the fieldwalking results, with additional information provide in the project archive.

Interestingly, a contributor to the Modern Antiquarian website added the following comment to the site's entry for Mount Pleasant:

"*Back in 1985 I undertook a watching brief to see what turned up at Mount Pleasant in Wessex when Wessex Water stripped a 10m wide area to put in an 18 inch pipe. The area they stripped ran from the bottom left hand corner to the top right and passed over the part of the bank. Oddly enough very little turned up apart from a clearer picture of the bank and ditch*".
(http://www.themodernantiquarian.com/site/8217/mount_pleasant.html.entrydate16September2001)

Neither published report nor archive make any mention of the pipeline impinging on the henge bank or ditch. In any case, the enclosure's internal ditch was some distance from the easement area. The relationship between the pipeline, its course clearly visible as a cropmark on subsequent aerial photographs, and the henge and other features will be discussed later.

Most of the features noted in the pipeline trench were recorded in plan rather than being excavated. Consequently little or nothing is known about their likely date or function. A small collection of late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age lithic material was recovered, broadly contemporary with and comparable to the much larger assemblage recovered during Wainwright's excavations. Woodward (1986) noted two main concentrations of lithic material – one to the southeast of the enclosure, the other centred on the north side of the ridge, where the pipeline approaches the railway line. The report seems to imply surface survey and/or collection well beyond the 10 metre easement, though it is unclear from either the published report or the project archive if this was indeed the case.

MAPPING AND INTERPRETATION

The enclosure and its environs have never previously been mapped from aerial photographs. Since 1979 all published plans appear to have been based upon the one featured in Wainwright's (1979) excavation report. While this clearly owed much to excavation and geophysical survey, it is equally clear that the analysis of aerial photographs played little part in its creation (Wainwright *pers. comm.*). Furthermore, although Wainwright referred to a contour survey being undertaken, there is no mention of any interpretative survey focused particularly on delineating the visible extent of the earthworks. It is presumed that his plan of the course of the banks and ditches is based on an interpretative assessment of the contour survey combined with data from the geophysical survey – which comprised 26 transects; it was not a comprehensive survey of the enclosure – and excavation trenches.

Survey methods and techniques

The principal sources of photography used were the NMR (now English Heritage Archive) collections of vertical and oblique aerial photographs, plus additional oblique photographs supplied by Francesca Radcliffe (see www.francesca-radcliffe.com), a Dorset-based aerial photographer whose images proved invaluable in interpreting a number of the key features at the site. Although aerial views of Mount Pleasant are contained within the Cambridge University Collection (CUCAP - http://www.geog.cam.ac.uk/cucap/), in this instance they offered no additional detail beyond that contained in the English Heritage and Francesca Radcliffe collections of photographs. Extant mapping and survey of the site as published by the Ordnance Survey, RCHME (1970) and Wainwright (1979) proved essential aids to both rectification and interpretation of the aerial photographs.

Methods and constraints

All archaeological features identified on the aerial photographs were mapped using a compilation of photographs. Those displaying the clearest cropmark, soilmark and earthwork detail were scanned and then rectified using the AERIAL rectification programme, with visible archaeological detail then transcribed within Autodesk Map. Control information for the rectification was taken from digital copies of the 1:2500 scale Ordnance Survey maps covering the area. Digital contour data (supplied at 1:10,000 scale) was used to increase the accuracy of the mapping in relation to the topography. The target accuracy was ± 2 metres, which was achieved in all cases, although some problems were encountered. The topography of the hill containing the site, the distance between suitable control points, and the fact that some suitable control – e.g. junctions of field boundaries – had shifted over time means that accuracy is variable within that ± 2m framework across the site. On occasions it was necessary to use archaeological features mapped from one photograph as control points for rectifying another, something which was necessary to achieve rectification but which is less than ideal when aiming to reduce

potential errors. Such problems were further compounded by the sub-division of the hilltop and its slopes into a number of separate fields. Variations in cropping regimes meant that only part of the site featured visible archaeological features at any one time.

In some instances it was possible to plot individual features from more than one source, although a number of key features are visible clearly on only one photograph, or on one day's photography. On most occasions only one field was showing cropmarks when photographed. Those taken on 28th June 2000 are probably the best of the few that show the whole enclosure at once, but generally more detail for component parts of the site was visible on photographs taken on other occasions. A related difficulty concerns the problem of reconciling cropmark and soilmark information. While most (but by no means all) features photographed as cropmarks have also been recorded as soilmarks, and vice-versa, there are occasional variations in shape and size. This can also be observed on occasions for cropmark photographs taken at different stages of a single growing season. A good example is the southwestern section of the enclosure's internal ditch, between the western and southwestern entrances. As a soilmark it generally appears markedly narrower than when seen as a cropmark.

An additional difficulty concerns features of 'natural' origin. The fields containing the site are clearly home to a number of pockets of clay and sand, as noted earlier, as well as solution holes. These have a tendency to affect crop growth under certain conditions, producing their own cropmarks, probably masking completely some archaeological detail in the process as well as obscuring the form and extent of other features. In a number of instances it is impossible to determine from aerial photographs alone whether some cropmarks are of archaeological or natural origin. Generally, anything presumed to be 'natural' rather than anthropogenic in origin has not been mapped. The difficulty here is that some of these features may have had some significance to those who used the hilltop and built the enclosure, as demonstrated by the deliberate incorporation of a solution hole in the ditch of a henge at Damerham, Hampshire (Barber & Wickstead 2014).

Overall, photographic coverage of the site from the immediately post-war RAF survey verticals down to the 2004 English Heritage reconnaissance obliques is generally good, with useful coverage also from other sources including some inter-war photographs in English Heritage's Crawford Collection and more recent Ordnance Survey verticals.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES

Each component of the complex is described below, with broader discussion reserved for later. Where appropriate, grid references and the unique identifier (uid) of the resulting entry in English Heritage's AMIE database (accessible through Pastscape: www.pastscape.org.uk) are also provided. The AMIE uid for Mount Pleasant and the most directly associated features is 453935. The main features discussed are shown on Fig. 6

The henge ditch

Wainwright's (1979, fig. 3) site plan depicted the ditch as a continuous feature save for the four entrances he had identified, and defining an area measuring circa 370 metres east-west by 340 metres north-south. He described the enclosure as oval-shaped, although the long straight section of the southern side, which had helped to fool Charles Warne into thinking the enclosure was rectangular, actually gives it more of a D-shaped outline.

Wainwright's excavations across the ditch focused particularly on the terminals of the west and north entrances. Only at the western entrance were complete sections cut across the entire width of the ditch, and here it proved to have been extended some time after construction, resulting in a narrowing of the entrance causeway. The excavations showed the ditch varying between 8 metres and 14.5 metres wide, and also very irregular in depth – "*composed of a series of intersecting pits, interspersed with unexpected spurs and ridges of natural chalk*" (Wainwright 1979, 35). The cropmark evidence suggests that this irregularity, at least in terms of width and straightness of edge, is a feature of the ditch throughout its circumference.

Almost the entire circuit is visible as cropmarks, and overall the course and general extent are pretty much as depicted, rather schematically, by Wainwright (1979, fig. 3). There are four notable exceptions, excluding the previously identified entrances. These exceptions are the area closest to the clump of trees covering Conquer Barrow; in the immediate vicinity of the east-west field boundary that crosses the centre of the enclosure; the 'new' fifth entrance; and one problematic area to the north. The first two need not be of any archaeological significance – they occur close to the edges of the fields, beyond the limits of the crop, which would explain the absence of a cropmark – while the third is discussed in more detail below. As for the fourth, at a point around 80 metres from the eastern terminal of the northern entrance, several photographs suggest a marked narrowing of the ditch, while some, particularly those taken in 2001, hint that there may be a very narrow interruption or causeway at this point. On many others, however, it appears continuous. Interpretation is complicated by the existence of a substantial darker patch on many photographs, suggesting either the presence of a deeper pocket of soil (a colluvium-filled hollow, maybe) or a large pocket of clay, perhaps, which obscures evidence for the course of both bank and ditch in the area between the railway cutting and the enclosure's inner palisade.

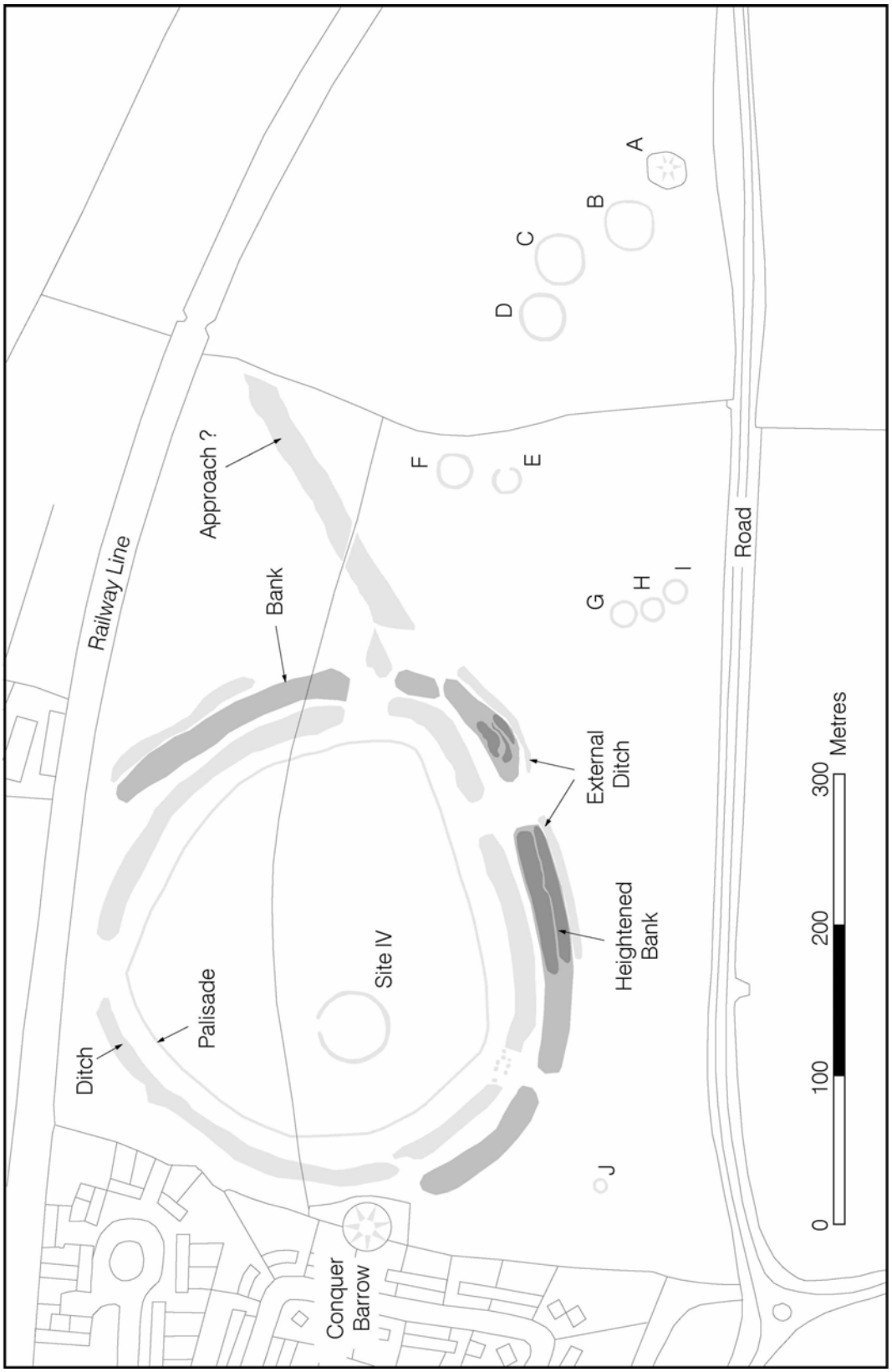

Fig. 6 – Principal features identified from aerial photographs. Background detail – roads, railway, field boundaries etc. are also taken from aerial photographs.

Fig. 7 – This extract from an RAF vertical of 1947 (with south to top) provides a particularly clear view of the enclosure in its surroundings. The earthworks are even clearer when this photograph is viewed, along with the next overlapping frame, through a stereoscope, providing a three-dimensional view. Features known only through cropmarks, such as the palisade trench and 'Site IV', are not visible (compare with Fig. 6), but the variable height of the bank, various entrances, barrows 'A' and 'B', and the possible 'approach' from the Frome can be picked out with ease. Note also the probable bomb crater close to the railway line. RAF/CPE/UK/1934/5082 17th January 1947. English Heritage RAF Photography.

Generally speaking, the cropmark and soilmark evidence suggest a ditch varying in width between 9 and 18 metres, with a few markedly narrower points. Everywhere that the bank is visible there is clear evidence for a berm between bank and internal ditch. The

width of this berm varies throughout the enclosure circuit, from a maximum of around 15 metres near the western side of the entrance to an apparent minimum of around 2.5 metres along the southern side.

The entrances

As noted earlier, until Wainwright's excavations, Mount Pleasant was known to have a southeastern entrance and speculated to possess a northwestern one, in accordance with prevailing ideas of henge morphology. Wainwright confirmed the presence of the former and demonstrated the absence of the latter. Instead, he identified additional entrances to the west, north and east, confirming that both eastern and southeastern could "*be seen on the ground*" (Wainwright 1979, 35), while the other two were discovered through geophysical survey. Both of the latter are in fact clearly visible on the 1947 RAF aerial photographs (see e.g. Fig. 7), while the western entrance's southern bank terminal can clearly be seen on 1930s (and later) photographs.

Wainwright (1979, 35) noted that the causeways between the ditches, as estimated from geophysical survey or measured on the ground, were as follows: north – 40 metres; west-5 metres; southeast – 20 metres; and east – 30 metres. These seem approximate (or rounded up/down) but tally closely with those measured from the AP transcription, where the same four causeways measure circa 39 metres, 5 metres, 21 metres and 29 metres respectively.

The fifth entrance

A notable feature of photographs from the 1940s onwards is a distinct narrowing of both bank and ditch at a point on the enclosure's southern side, somewhat west of centre. Wainwright's excavations had already shown that the original western entrance had been substantially narrowed in the Early Bronze Age; the RAF and Ordnance Survey vertical APs raised the possibility that something similar may have happened elsewhere on the circuit, obscuring the position of a fifth entrance. This speculation was confirmed by a series of photographs taken by Francesca Radcliffe during the 1990s (Fig. 9). Not only did these show clearly for the first time a marked break in the course of the bank and ditch at the suspected location, but also offered an explanation as to why this had previously been so difficult to spot.

The cropmark evidence indicates a substantial discontinuity in the line of the ditch, suggesting a causeway some 26 metres wide. That causeway is occupied by a series of large, irregular pits, each measuring 2 to 3 metres across and seemingly forming two broadly parallel lines. It is debatable whether these could be regarded as blocking the entrance – there is clearly enough space between the pits for people and animals to have passed through comfortably, in contrast to the entrances through the palisade – but it does seem likely that over the years these pits have tended to produce less well-defined

cropmarks, blurring into one another and giving the impression of a continuous, if narrower, ditch.

Fig. 8 – One of Francesca Radcliffe's oblique views, this one from the summer of 1996 clearly showing the 'new' southwestern entrance, which can be seen towards the bottom left, with the irregular pit-like features visible between the ditch terminals. 'Site IV', the palisade, and other features discussed below are also showing clearly. FR 198-30, 5th August 1996, © Francesca Radcliffe.

There is one other clear break in the enclosure circuit worth mentioning here, although it concerns the bank and not the ditch. It occurs on the southeast side, between the eastern and southeastern entrances. This is a persistent feature on aerial photographs. However, there appears to be no corresponding break in the ditch (although there are problems here – see below), raising the possibility that the ditch has subsequently been extended across an original causeway. Alternatively, this break was being utilised at least until the 1950s, as aerial photographs show tracks passing through it. It may, therefore, be a relatively recent feature, although arguably the nearby eastern entrance would have offered an easier means of access through the earthworks.

The bank

It proved impossible to identify the complete circuit of the enclosure bank from aerial photographs alone. The resulting plot, drawn from cropmark, soilmark and earthwork evidence across a range of photographs tallies well with Wainwright's (1979, fig. 20) plan

of the earthworks. The only real exception concerns the northwest sector, between Conquer Barrow and the northern entrance. In this area, the bank, denuded by ploughing, is also obscured (from above) by vegetation and the presence of field boundaries.

The area east of the northern entrance is also a little problematic. This stretch of bank is also 'missing' from Wainwright's plans. It is worth noting that the aerial photographic evidence for the bank dwindles at about the same point that the ditch appears to narrow (see above, p22), although as already noted this is an area where visibility is obscured as well as being the steepest part of the slope. Furthermore, photographs taken from the north show a clear rise in ground level above the railway cutting at the extreme north of the site, suggesting that not only did the bank continue in some form, but that it was also cut by the railway line (as suggested by Wainwright 1979, 35).

Like the ditch, the bank is irregular in form and width throughout its course. It varies between 16 and 23 metres across, with the extremes tending to occur close to terminals. There is a clear correlation between bank and internal ditch in terms of location and width of causeways, with the exception of the 'new' southwestern entrance, where the gap in the bank seems markedly narrower than that through the ditch (circa 13 metres, compared to 26 metres between the ditch terminals).

The southeastern part of the henge earthworks has long been recognised as the most prominent, and presumably therefore best-surviving portion of the enclosure's circuit, although the reason for such apparently differential erosion has not been clear. The greater height of this stretch is still evident on the ground today, but is best appreciated when viewing overlapping pairs of the RAF and Ordnance Survey vertical APs through a stereoscope. It seemed possible, therefore, that the greater height of the bank here may have been an original (i.e. prehistoric) feature of the enclosure rather than purely an accidental product of erosion.

The likelihood that this is indeed the case was demonstrated clearly by photographs taken in September 2004 (Fig. 9). It is particularly apparent in the area to the east of the southeastern entrance, where a markedly white stretch of bank is cut by an axial scar and ends with clear curved terminals some 67 metres west of the southeastern entrance. However, the enclosure bank can be seen to continue beyond these terminals towards the 'fifth' entrance. This suggests that the bank in this southeastern corner has perhaps been heightened at some point in its history, the axial scar possibly indicating that material has been piled up on the existing bank from both sides, something that might explain the presence of a cropmark in this area representing an external ditch (see below).

Similar evidence is also apparent on the more southerly of the two stretches of bank between the southeastern and eastern entrances – in fact, between the southeastern entrance and the break in the bank noted earlier. There are also hints in some photographs (e.g. FR 198/22, not reproduced here) that the same may have happened immediately south of the western entrance. In contrast, there is no evidence, from the aerial photographs at least, that anything similar occurred anywhere along the northern

circuit of the bank, from Conquer Barrow around to the eastern entrance. However, it is worth pointing out the possible presence of a stretch of outer ditch in the northeastern sector (see below).

Fig. 9 – The earthworks photographed in 2004. The possibly heightened sections of bank are clearly visible, as are their terminals, with the axial scar running through the longer section. The line of the 1986 pipeline can also be seen passing very close to the southern edge of the bank. English Heritage Archives 23601/32 1st September 2004.

The outer ditch

Stretches of what appear to be a ditch (or ditches) outside the bank are visible in three places – along the southern side of the enclosure, more or less matching the position and extent of the higher section of bank; a second stretch running from the eastern terminal of the southern entrance towards (and possibly curving around) the break in the bank; and alongside part of the bank in the northeast sector. Their approximate lengths are 105 metres, 92 metres and 120 metres respectively. In all three cases this possible outer ditch is markedly narrower than the inner ditch, generally varying between 6 and 10 metres wide.

None of the photographs indicate any trace of possible outer ditch from a point level with the western end of the higher southern bank up to the western bank terminal. If an outer ditch accompanied the bank between Conquer Barrow and the northern entrance, it would not be visible on aerial photographs – it would for the most part lie beneath the

field boundary and the gardens of adjacent properties to the west, while to the north it would have been lost to the railway cutting. Any northeastern section of outer ditch would, if it existed, lie largely in an area obscured by what appear to be 'natural' cropmarks (see above, p22) as well as again being partly lost to the railway cutting. However, the absence of any hint of an outer ditch along the southwestern stretch of the enclosure earthworks suggests that we need not expect a complete circuit to have existed.

The palisade

Although frequently producing cropmarks, with occasional photographs showing almost the complete circuit, there is nothing to add to Wainwright's (1979, 48-64) account of this feature. Virtually the whole circuit appears to have been traced from a combination of geophysical survey and excavation (more than 30 trenches were dug to examine it), the course of the cropmarks matching extremely closely with Wainwright's plan. Only two entrances through the palisade were found by Wainwright – one directly opposite the northern entrance into the enclosure, and the other opposite the eastern entrance. Both proved to be remarkably narrow, the eastern entrances featuring post holes just centimetres apart, while no visible gap existed between the post holes at the northern entrance. It seems likely that the above-ground passage between the terminal posts was in both cases something less than a metre. Even taking into account the much larger size of the terminal posts and their accompanying ramps, such entrances are unlikely to be visible as cropmarks unless conditions were markedly drier than on any of the occasions photographed to date. Consequently it is hardly surprising that no additional breaks in the palisade were observed on the aerial photographs.

In the northwest quadrant of the enclosure, the 2000 photography shows a narrow linear feature running inside and more or less parallel to the palisade (Fig. 10). This linear cropmark is around 40 metres long and some 10 metres from the palisade. It also appears to be narrower than the palisade trench. Its northern end seems clear – it simply ends as a visible feature. Its southern extent is less certain – it cannot be traced with any certainty south of the east-west field boundary that crosses the enclosure interior. Equally, it cannot be determined whether if actually terminates on this boundary or stops somewhere in its vicinity. Consequently it is impossible to say whether it is more likely to belong with the palisade, the field boundary, the enclosure, or indeed anywhere else in the last 5 millennia or so. This is unfortunate, as apart from 'Site IV' and the palisade, it is the only cropmark feature within the enclosure that is probably not of 'natural' origin.

Finally, it is worth noting that although the discovery of the palisade was a major feature of Wainwright's excavations – it was first identified during the 1969 geophysical survey, and its investigation was a major objective of both the 1970 and 1971 excavation campaigns – it had been photographed as a cropmark on at least two earlier occasions (contra Wainwright 1979, 4). The southernmost stretch is visible on 1949 RAF vertical photographs – in fact, it is partly visible on one of the RAF aerial photographs referred to

by Wainwright (1979, 4: RAF 58/271/5130, 28th June 1949 – the overlapping pair of Fig. 4). The southwestern and southeastern sectors are also visible on two oblique views in the English Heritage Crawford Collection taken in the 1930s (Fig. 11).

Fig. 10 – Extract from an oblique taken in 2000, looking roughly southeastwards across the enclosure from the northwest. The palisade and enclosure ditches are showing particularly clearly, while 'Site IV' is also visible towards top right. Note here the possible length of narrow ditch running parallel to the palisade, just below and right of centre. The feature has, to date, only been seen on photographs taken on this day in 2000. English Heritage Archives NMR 18766/12 28th June 2000.

'Site IV'

As already noted, there are some complications concerning the discovery of this site. The RAF photographs cited by RCHME and Wainwright do not show it as a cropmark, raising questions about what Atkinson was actually referring to when he claimed to have identified a barrow within the enclosure. 'Site IV' is clearly visible as a cropmark on some other RAF vertical APs – for instance a set taken on 27th April 1948 – so there is a possibility that an error occurred in quoting photo references. Unfortunately, Atkinson did not give any photo references. RCHME (1970, 504) did, as did Wainwright (1979, 4). Indeed, both referenced the same RAF verticals, none of which show the 'Site IV' ring ditch, despite the latter's assertion to the contrary.

The RCHME inventory entry does give the impression that the photographs were looked at, though the comment "*RAF VAP CPE/UK 1934: 5082-3 suggest former mound here but no traces on the ground*" suggests that while they thought they could see something, it wasn't a penannular ditch (Fig. 7 is one of these photographs). In any case, Atkinson did not describe the feature as a penannular ring ditch – he, like the RCHME, referred to a 'mound' or 'barrow' and claimed to have seen some trace on the ground. It is possible, therefore, that Atkinson misinterpreted something that he saw on aerial photographs, perhaps one of the solution holes – there is, interestingly, a large amorphous feature visible as a cropmark or soilmark on many of the available aerial photographs close to the centre of the enclosure, just south of the east-west fence line. However, 'Site IV' is not at the 'centre' of the enclosure, and no mound, however slight, has ever been observed there. It seems likely that when Tony Clark's geophysical survey registered the presence of the 'Site IV' ditch, it was assumed to represent whatever Atkinson thought he had seen.

Fig. 11 – An oblique view dating from somewhere between 1933 and 1939, part of the Crawford Collection held by the English Heritage Archive. The line of the palisade is clear, 'Site IV' less so. English Heritage Archive SY 7189/2 1933-39/375.

With the aid of one of the AP interpreter's most valuable tools – hindsight – 'Site IV' can actually be observed on the previously-mentioned 1930s photographs. However, the traces are vague enough to ensure that one has to know where the site is to be able to make it out (e.g. Fig. 11). It is far more clearly visible on RAF vertical APs taken on 27th

April 1948, 7th May 1948 (Fig. 12) and 15th January 1956, as well as on Ordnance Survey verticals taken on 14th April 1968 (see Appendix I for full photo references).

It is perhaps worth pointing out that only the ditch surrounding 'Site IV' has regularly produced a cropmark. None of its internal features – the post holes, the sarsen stone holes, or the later Iron Age and Roman features encountered in excavation – have shown as either cropmarks or soilmarks, while nothing of definite archaeological origin is visible in the immediate vicinity either. 'Site IV' remains an apparently isolated feature in the enclosure's interior. In fact, almost all the enclosure's interior is devoid of anything that can be regarded as being of certain or probable archaeological origin. Many of the irregular splodges visible as cropmarks and soilmarks are likely to be of 'natural' origin, i.e. caused by the patches of clay or sand, or solution holes, known to exist across the hilltop. Only excavation would be able to determine whether any of them are archaeological features, or whether any of the natural features were of cultural significance during the Neolithic.

Fig. 12 – The penannular ditch of 'Site IV', among other features, as captured by the RAF in 1948. Extract from RAF 541/7/3085 7th May 1946, English Heritage RAF Photography.

The round barrows and ring ditches

Prior to examination of the aerial photographs, three round barrows were known in the vicinity of the enclosure. The best-known, Conquer Barrow, lies on the western side of the enclosure and is obscured by trees. In addition, a pair of round barrows ('A' and 'B'), circa 350 metres ESE of the enclosure had already been identified and scheduled as earthwork mounds, although only 'A', which has been removed from cultivation, now survives as a recognisable earthwork. Aerial photographs ranging in date from the 1930s to the 1990s have revealed cropmark traces of an additional seven ring ditches, all presumed to represent plough-levelled round barrows, and one possible small ring ditch. All ten of these features are described below:

'A' – SY 71498970 (AMIE uid 453975): the only earthwork round barrow other than Conquer Barrow, this circular mound lies within a polygonal fenced area and is thus protected from cultivation. No ring ditch has been identified as a cropmark on available photographs, although one might be expected, especially given the presence of one around its near-neighbour 'B'. The evidence for the latter suggests that if 'A' does possess a surrounding ring ditch, it may well lie close to or outside the boundary of the scheduled/unploughed area.

RCHME (1970, 451) described 'A', listed as West Stafford 20, as a bowl barrow circa 55 feet (circa 16.75 metres) in diameter and 6 feet (1.8 metres) high, the mound said to be 'irregular'. The Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division (field visit 21st November 1979) recorded a mound 16 metres in diameter and 2.3 metres high, while an English Heritage scheduling revision note in 2000 offered something closer to the earlier RCHME measurements – 16 metres diameter and 1.8 metres high.

'B' – SY 71468972 (AMIE uid 1494065): originally recorded as an earthwork mound, the aerial photographs depict a cropmark ring ditch. RCHME (1970, 451) described 'B', listed as West Stafford 21, as a possible bowl barrow, ploughed almost flat and lying 47 yards (circa 43 metres) northwest of 'A'. Ordnance Survey field investigation (21st November 1979) recorded a ploughed-down mound circa 16 metres in diameter, and no more than 0.8 metres high. The English Heritage schedule revision of 2000 recorded the same 16 metre diameter, but a maximum height of 0.5 metres. Unlike 'A', 'B' has not been removed from cultivation, although it is scheduled.

For 'B', aerial photographs show a cropmark ring ditch which is roughly but not perfectly circular, and up to 32 metres in diameter, twice the width of the recorded mound and certainly wider than, and therefore outside, the scheduled area. The 43 metre distance between 'A' and 'B' noted by RCHME would appear to represent a measurement between the centres of each barrow. The minimum distance between the ring ditch around 'B' and the edge of the extant mound 'A' would appear to be around 21 metres. Clearly, if 'A' also possesses a surrounding ditch, this gap would be even smaller.

'A' and 'B' both lie in an area mapped by the Geological Survey (sheet 328, 1966) as Wealden Clay, suggesting that the best surviving barrows are situated on the most difficult soils, at least as far as arable agriculture is concerned.

'C' – SY 71438977 (AMIE uid 1494100): a previously unrecorded cropmark ring ditch lying 17 metres northwest of 'B' and circa 6.5 metres east of 'D'. It measures a maximum of 32 metres in internal diameter, around the same size as the ring ditch around 'B'. 'C' was first photographed as a cropmark by the RAF in 1948 (RAF CPE/UK 2491/3010-1, 11th March 1948).

'D' – SY 71408978 (AMIE uid 1494110): a previously unrecorded cropmark ring ditch lying circa 6.5 metres west of 'D'. It measures circa 27.5 metres in maximum internal diameter. Despite having a smaller overall diameter than 'B' and 'C', the ditch itself appears to be more substantial (circa 2.3 metres on average, compared with a width of around 1.5 metres for 'B' and 'C'). This ring ditch was first photographed, somewhat faintly, as a cropmark by the Ordnance Survey in 1978 (OS 78 080/015, 11th June 1978).

'D' is separated from the next pair of ring ditches, 'E' and 'F', by distances of 87 and 89 metres respectively. No cropmark ring ditches or mounds have been identified in this apparently blank intervening area, although cropmark conditions have generally been poor when this particular area has been photographed. Consequently the presence of additional barrows cannot be ruled out. In passing it is perhaps worth noting the course taken by the roughly north-south field boundary in the gap between 'D' and 'E'. West of 'D', its course turns slightly west before curving gently round to the northeast. Does this change in direction represent avoidance of something no longer extant, such as another barrow?

'E' – SY 71298981 (AMIE uid 1494128): a previously unrecorded ring ditch lying circa 87 metres WNW of 'D' and 14 metres south of 'F'. It measures circa 15.5 metres in maximum internal diameter. It is mapped as a penannular feature, with an apparent gap on the eastern side, although it is not certain if this is a genuine discontinuity.

'F' – SY 71298984 (AMIE uid 1494175): a previously unrecorded ring ditch lying circa 14 metres north of 'E' and measuring circa 20.5 metres in maximum internal diameter. It lies circa 130 metres ESE of the enclosure's eastern entrance. Both 'E' and 'F' were mapped from photographs taken by Francesca Radcliffe in the 1990s, although 'F' is faintly visible on the 1930s APs mentioned previously. 'F' was almost certainly crossed unnoticed by the 1986 pipeline (see below, p38).

Three further ring ditches, 'G', 'H' and 'I', lie in a tight cluster circa 100 metres southwest of 'E' and 175 metres west of 'D'. The area between these groups of ring ditches regularly produces 'natural' cropmarks, which may well be masking the presence of further archaeological features.

'G' – SY 71208973 (AMIE uid 1494191): a previously unrecorded ring ditch measuring circa 15.5 metres in maximum internal diameter.

'H' – SY 71208971 (AMIE uid 1494210): a previously unrecorded ring ditch measuring circa 13 metres in maximum internal diameter. It lies circa 3.5 metres south of 'G'.

'I' – SY 71218969 (AMIE uid 1494224): a previously unrecorded ring ditch measuring circa 14 metres in maximum internal diameter. It lies circa 4 metres southeast of 'H'. All three of these ring ditches were first photographed by Francesca Radcliffe in the 1990s.

'J' – SY 70818974 (AMIE uid 1494226): a possible ring ditch, previously unrecorded, and measuring circa 8 metres in maximum internal diameter. It lies circa 70 metres southwest of the enclosure's 'new' southwestern entrance and circa 140 metres south of Conquer Barrow. This is by far the least convincing of the cropmark ring ditches for several reasons – its small size, apparent isolation, and appearance of just one day's photography (by Francesca Radcliffe in 1996). However, this was also the occasion that the southwestern entrance and its lines of pits were clearly visible for the only known occasion so far.

It is possible of course that additional round barrows once existed around the enclosure. Some of the more intractable patches of clay and/or sand may be obscuring the presence of ring ditches – the ditch around 'B' for example is barely visible among the background 'noise'. The areas north of the railway line and west of the enclosure have long been beyond the capabilities of aerial photography to see anything – to the north lies the water treatment plant, covering the area between the enclosure's northern entrance and the water meadows adjacent to the Frome; to the west there now lies housing which largely dates to the 1950s, but nothing of obvious archaeological origin is visible on earlier photographs although that need not mean that nothing was ever there. South of the road, the arable fields have yet to produce any meaningful cropmarks.

The 'approach'

Among the most prominent features visible on the aerial photographs is a substantial cropmark representing a feature up to 20 metres wide and running in a northeasterly direction from a point outside the enclosure's eastern entrance (Fig. 13; see also Figs. 2, 7 and 12). It can be traced via several photographs for a distance of over 300 metres, before disappearing into the water meadows north of the railway line. Close to the enclosure, it appears as a cropmark but nearer the railway line, close to the foot of the slope, it is visible as a distinct sunken or 'hollow' feature, picked out in shadow on some of the earlier vertical APs.

Overall, it follows a very straight course, although its northwestern side is noticeably more irregular than the southeastern edge, which is markedly straight in places. Closer to the enclosure, its appearance both as a cropmark and soilmark is very similar to 'negative' features in the vicinity such as the enclosure's internal and external ditches, suggesting

that this too is a 'negative' feature, i.e. a soil-filled hollow or cut feature. Although in places, particularly along the more irregular northwestern edge, it resembles some of the larger 'natural' cropmarks visible on the hilltop, its overall form, shape and size suggest that it is unlikely itself to be 'natural' – at least, not in its entirety. The straightness of the southeastern side in particular suggests the involvement of human agency.

Fig. 13 – traces of the 'approach' as well as the outer ditches and other features captured in 2004. English Heritage Archive 23704/21 1st September 2004.

Its relationship with the cropmarks and earthworks of the enclosure is problematic. As a cropmark it appears to narrow and fade in an area marked by amorphous cropmarks of presumed 'natural' origin. The soilmark evidence suggests that it may stop short of the enclosure at a point immediately to its east, and does not connect directly with either the enclosure or any of its entrances. Instead, as it narrows at its southwestern end, both cropmark and soilmark evidence suggest that it turns slightly southwards, perhaps avoiding

the enclosure bank, while narrower linear features branch off into the enclosure through its eastern entrance and also through the gap in the bank between the southern and southeastern entrances. There is, of course, no way of determining from AP evidence alone whether any or all of these narrower, more sinuous linears are contemporary or later – perhaps much later – in date.

In the field to the east of the enclosure, there is soilmark and cropmark evidence suggesting a negative feature, perhaps a ditch, meeting the 'approach' from the southeast at right angles. The southeastern end of this feature also appears to meet another linear feature at right angles. The aerial photographic coverage of this clayey area is problematic – on the few occasions when this field has produced soilmarks or cropmarks, the view has been either partial or very oblique, and on occasions obscured by cloud shadow as well. One possibility, however, is that these features might indicate the former presence of a field system laid out at right angles to the 'approach'.

Miscellaneous tracks, ditches and field boundaries

There are a number of features, predominantly linear in form, which are difficult to relate with any certainty to any particular period in the site's history (see e.g. Fig. 8). Some of these have already been mentioned in connection with the 'approach' (above). The most notable instances are focused on the southwestern, southern and southeastern entrances into the enclosure. They may all be of relatively recent origin – all three of these entrances, plus the eastern entrance, have clearly been utilised in recent periods (i.e. the post-medieval period and in some cases definitely into the 20th century). Aerial photographs show clearly that a straight field boundary ran north-south from the enclosure's southern entrance to a still-extant gap in the field boundary bordering the road to the south. The other north-south and east-west linear fragments in the area of the southern entrance are presumably associated with this feature.

More difficult to interpret is the linear feature that crosses the southern entrance in a southwest-northeast direction, visible from the eastern end of the outer ditch and crossing the entrance area to the western end of the inner ditch segment. It appears to cross this inner ditch segment, possibly with a slight change in direction (a fraction more to the east) before being caught up in the complex arrangement of 'natural' and archaeological cropmarks in the vicinity of the eastern entrance. It is possible that it continues to the southwestern end of the 'approach', but this is far from certain.

A double-ditched feature approaching the enclosure from the east, disappearing into the latter's cropmarks close to the break in the bank, represents a trackway still clearly in use on 1948 RAF verticals.

The situation around the southwestern entrance is no less problematic than that around the southeastern one. Given the delayed recognition of this 'new' entrance, it is worth highlighting the presence of faint cropmark and soilmark evidence suggesting that this

entrance was the focus for one or more field boundaries. As for the more obvious cropmarks, a broad, irregular linear feature can be seen passing through the entrance in a southwest-northeasterly direction, narrowing considerably as it approaches the ditch causeway before fading completely from view in the vicinity of the various pits adjacent to the ditch terminal on the eastern side of the causeway. It presumably represents the course of a route or track into the enclosure, utilising the break in both bank and ditch at this point. If its line is extended to the southwest, it links directly with what was, until recently, the corner of the modern field.

Between the bank and the ditch, a narrower linear feature runs eastwards, seemingly following a course between the enclosure bank and inner ditch – i.e. utilising the berm as a route through the earthworks – before terminating at the western side of the southern entrance. A much narrower northeast-southwest linear running across the southwestern entrance, just inside the line of the bank, is difficult to relate to the other linears in this area, although there is a possibility that it is later than the broader southwest-northeast feature.

A number of narrow linear features are visible in the area west and northwest of ring ditches 'G', 'H' and 'I'. A group of three, aligned broadly southwest-northeast, may represent fragments of a double-ditched trackway circa 8 metres wide, although they do not share quite the same alignment. Another slighter pair a short distance northwest of ring ditch 'G' may represent fragments of a similar, possibly related, feature. Finally, in the southwestern corner of the southern field, the former course of the A352 now also produces a cropmark.

Possible bomb crater

Just outside the enclosure's bank and outer ditch on the northeastern side, at circa SY 71159004, is a feature showing regularly as a cropmark on more recent photographs, but as a distinct hollow on the immediately post-war verticals. It seems likely that this represents a World War Two bomb crater, presumably representing an attempt to hit either Dorchester or the railway line rather than the henge. A copy of a Luftwaffe AP on display in Dorset County Museum, Dorchester, shows a similar, fresh, crater a short distance to the east, again just south of the railway line.

The pipelines

The 1986 pipeline has already been mentioned. It has produced a cropmark of its own on several subsequent occasions. Despite the likely errors inherent in the mapping of various cropmarks from different photographs taken at oblique angles, from varying altitudes, of sloping ground, it seems quite certain that the 1986 pipeline passed across the centre of ring ditch 'F'. Occurring in an area of pockets of clayey and sandy subsoil, which have partially obscured the cropmarks, the pipeline watching brief revealed some features

associated with burning on either side of the location of this ring ditch. From the approximate location of the ring ditch itself came a small collection of lithic finds including a flint scraper and a broken transverse arrowhead of chert (Woodward 1986). However, nothing firmly identifiable as the ring ditch appears to have been spotted in the 10 metre wide easement.

The cropmarks suggest that the pipeline passed within 6 or 7 metres of the edge of the enclosure's southern outer ditch, so the northern edge of the 10 metre easement will have been quite close to this feature. It is possible that is may have passed through spread bank material, but it seems unlikely to have offered much potential for providing "*a clearer picture of the bank and ditch*" as suggested by the anonymous correspondent to the Modern Antiquarian website (see above, p18).

Earlier photographs show what appears to be a second pipeline passing the enclosure somewhat further to the south. The date of this pipeline is unclear, but on the whole it appears to avoid any of the main cropmark features recorded to date.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of seven decades worth of aerial photographs – 344 images in total – derived from a variety of sources, principally the RAF, Ordnance Survey, RCHME, English Heritage, and Francesca Radcliffe, has added considerable detail and raised questions about the Mount Pleasant enclosure and its environs. The enclosure has occupied a prominent role in Neolithic studies since Wainwright's 1970-71 excavations, though these were quite limited in extent. Ironically, much of what is presented here as 'new' can either be seen on or inferred from aerial photographs taken before those excavations began. In many cases, however, interpretation of the cropmark and soilmark detail is far from straightforward.

The earthwork enclosure

Reconstructing the original form of the earthwork monument is, of course, difficult for a number of reasons. Centuries of ploughing, exacerbated by the steepness of some of the slopes, have caused considerable erosion to the banks and obscured the ditches. In some cases, the bank is difficult to trace both on the ground and from the air. Moreover, it is clear from both excavations and aerial photographs that the earthworks are of more than one phase, with some original features masked or removed by subsequent reworkings of the site.

The 1969-71 surveys and excavations established the presence of four entrances through the earthworks. Aerial photographs indicate the existence of further breaches – a causeway containing pits to the southwest; a break in the bank on the east; and a marked narrowing of the ditch to the northeast. That the southwestern entrance could have been identified earlier is clear. The bank, for example, is clearly discontinuous both on the ground and on the late 1940s RAF verticals, as well as later photography. The ditch does appear to be continuous, if narrower, on many of these images, but expectations about where henge entrances were supposed to be seems to have played a part in this discontinuity being overlooked. The APs suggest that the break in the bank is markedly narrower than that through the ditch. Although tracing the limits of the heavily eroded and spread earth and chalk bank from aerial photographs is not without its difficulties, at 26 metres the gap in the ditch is around twice the width of the gap in the bank.

There are a number of possible explanations for the pits that interrupt the causeway through the ditch. One is that they represent an attempt to block an original entrance into the henge, an attempt that was for some reason never completed. The spoil from these pits may have been used to extend the line of the bank, thus resulting in the markedly narrower gap between bank terminals. Alternatively, the pits may represent an attempt not to block the entrance but to restrict passage through it. Perhaps the pits held timbers of standing stones – maybe they represent traces of an elaborate, or elaborated, entrance structure.

Another possibility is that the pits belong to an earlier phase of the enclosure's history, perhaps marking a change of plan – a decision to feature an entrance at this point after the line of the ditch had already been marked out by lines of pits. Alternatively, they may indicate that the earthwork bank and ditch were never finished, the 'entrance' instead marking a point where bank and ditch construction were left incomplete, something that might explain some of the other irregularities visible in the enclosure earthworks. Of course, both of these explanations would require an initial enclosure phase which saw the digging of a circuit of pits, perhaps in two lines, which were subsequently replaced by the more substantial henge ditch. It is unfortunate that so much effort in 1970-71 was focused on the ditch terminals at the north and west entrances, which are unlikely to be representative of the rest of the earthwork. However, it is work noting Wainwright's Section A (1979, opposite p38), from the southern terminal of the western entrance, which appears to show a pair of pits subsequently cut by the broader ditch of the enclosure. Consequently, it seems reasonable to infer from the cropmark and excavated evidence that the enclosure ditch may have been preceded by two closely-spaced circuits of irregularly-shaped pits.

A comparable sequence – from pits to ditch – can also be inferred for other monuments in the immediate vicinity. Stuart Needham has, for example, re-examined Wainwright's published ditch sections for 'Site IV'. He noted the existence of several pits "*surviving beneath the ditch cut-line* [which] *may well indicate an original circuit formed of pits or shafts*" (Needham et al 2006, 18). Needham also pointed out that the radiocarbon dates obtained by Wainwright for 'Site IV' do not date the construction of this initial pit-defined phase – they appear to belong to the top of the pit fill, but before the digging of the penannular ditch.

Needham compared his reinterpretation of the 'Site IV' ditch sequence with that at nearby Maumbury Rings. Although Harold St George Gray had been undecided as to whether the shafts at Maumbury were sunk from the bottom of the ditch, or whether the ditch was cut through a pre-existing circuit of shafts, Richard Bradley argued in favour of the former. He suggested that cutting the ditch through the shafts would have involved "s*uch physical difficulties, even on a ritual site, that there are good reasons for preferring the other view*" (Bradley 1976, 14-14. Although the actual presence of a ditch at Maumbury Rings is conjectural because of the Roman activity at the site, the arguments in favour of one seem sound – there is simply too much material in the Neolithic phase bank for there not to have been one. However, to determine the sequence of construction on the basis if practicality not only overlooks the wealth of Neolithic monuments which might appear impractical to the modern mind, but also presupposes that both shafts and ditch were part of some original plan for the monument.

At Mount Pleasant, the gap through the bank between the eastern and southeastern entrances seems curious, given the proximity of the two existing openings. However, the break in the bank does appear to be genuine, while the aerial view of the neighbouring portion of the inner ditch is obscured. There is also a marked change in direction in the

course of the bank on either side of this break. The breach in the bank may, of course, be of relatively recent origin, a drop in height between the enhanced and original sections of bank perhaps being exaggerated by the plough, although the nearby eastern entrance would make a more logical means of entering the earthwork enclosure in more recent time – in fact, aerial photographs confirm that the latter was indeed used. Whether or not the northeastern section of ditch was ever continuous is something that cannot currently be resolved from the air. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that the narrowing of the inner ditch coincides with both the end of the external ditch and the visible extent of the earthwork bank.

It has already been suggested that the heightening of the bank around the southern and eastern sides appears to post-date the original construction of the earthwork enclosure, although Barber (2005) noted in passing one alternative suggestion – that this greater height might represent incorporation of an earlier monument within the enclosure bank. By combining the indications of greater height with the apparent presence of a ditch on either side, and taking into account the relative straightness of the southernmost stretch in particular, the possibility was raised that a long barrow or bank barrow preceded the earthwork circuit. There are a number of problems with this suggestion. For example, the straight section is not the only higher stretch of bank. Also, with regard to the flanking ditches, not only do traces of external ditch occur elsewhere, but the inner ditch at this point is clearly separated from the bank by a berm which, especially in the vicinity of the southeastern entrance, is as wide if not wider than anywhere else around the monument. The best explanation for the straightness of the enclosure's southern side is probably topographical – it is following the contours of the hill. Consequently, the greater height of the enclosure bank around the southern and eastern parts of the enclosure is regarded as belonging to a phase subsequent to the original construction of the enclosure bank.

Deciding where this apparent enhancement of the bank may lie within the site's history is, of course, not easy on the basis of aerial photographs alone. The fact that the southeastern entrance is clearly respected by this reworking suggests that it is unlikely to be contemporary with the palisade, which seems to have had no entrance at this point. It may be that this enhancement of a fair stretch of the bank pre-dates the erection of the palisade. As discussion of the 'new' entrance has indicated, rather than view the enclosure as a single-phase monument with a pre-determined design, it might be more appropriate to consider a construction process that was perhaps intermittent rather than continuous, and subject to occasional changes of plan, with some elements never being completed.

It is presumed that the outer stretches of ditch are connected with this enhancement of the bank, although again this is not entirely straightforward. An outer ditch is visible alongside the higher bank along the southern and southeastern sides of the enclosure, but also along part of the northeastern side. The earthwork remains of the bank are much less prominent there, although it is possible that the steeper slope has contributed to a greater scale of erosion. Little of the northern and western sides can be seen on APs, but it seems clear that the southwestern and western sides lack any signs of either an external

ditch or a heightened bank. It seems likely that enhancement of the enclosure earthworks was only partial, and apparently focused on the eastern and southern sides.

A plausible case can also be made for a later date for this remodelling of the enclosure. Wainwright's excavations uncovered evidence for occasional activity within the enclosure throughout later prehistory and the Roman period and beyond, most notably in the form of an Iron Age roundhouse partly overlying the eastern side of 'Site IV'. Wainwright (1979, 246) suggested that Iron Age occupation at Mount Pleasant was only intermittent on the basis of his excavations, although few unequivocal Iron Age contexts were examined, and much of the interior plus, of course, the external ditches, saw no excavation at all. Possibly, then, the higher stretches of bank represent re-use of the site in the Iron Age, perhaps analogous with the Iron Age refortification at nearby Maiden Castle. However, if correct, then this refortification was not extended to the entire circuit, seemingly offering a taller rampart facing south and east only. This might have been the intention, of course. Alternatively, plans to strengthen the entire enclosure may have been abandoned before completion.

The interior

Overall, analysis of the aerial photographs has revealed little new about the interior of the enclosure, although the presence of parts of the palisade on 1930s and 1940s APs and the problems regarding 'Site IV' underline the importance of careful scrutiny of historic collections. The palisade appears as mapped by Wainwright from excavations and geophysical survey. The evidence from his trenches suggests that it is extremely unlikely that any further entrances through the palisade might be recognised as cropmarks.

The one 'new' feature of note is the narrow linear ditch-like cropmark running roughly parallel to the palisade for a short distance in the northwest sector. At its northern end the cropmark appears to end quite abruptly. The other end is impossible to pinpoint. If it terminated on the modern field boundary then it might be possible to regard it as something of relatively recent date, but the relationship is unclear from the air. An alternative possibility is that it represents the course of an earlier, abandoned line for the palisade. In passing, it is worth noting some shallow linear ditches encountered by Wainwright's excavations, notably his cutting III, which examined the palisade trench close to the enclosure's western entrance. These were described as "*undated but are assumed to belong to an agrarian ditch system of Iron Age or Romano-British date*" (Wainwright 1979, 58-9). None of these features have been seen as cropmarks or soilmarks.

With the exception of this linear feature and the ring ditch around 'Site IV', none of the aerial photographs examined have revealed anything else that can be regarded as definitely or even possibly of archaeological origin. This does not, of course, mean that the interior was empty. That the internal features within 'Site IV' – the timber and stone settings and the later roundhouse – have not been seen as cropmarks shows that quite complex prehistoric architecture could easily be lurking unnoticed elsewhere within the

enclosure. The danger, obviously, is that continued ploughing may already have removed evidence for slighter features.

In any case, the interior is not devoid of cropmarks and soilmarks. The whole hilltop features an array of amorphous features, and on some photographs the area seems distinctly spotty. Many of these features may be of natural origin, produced by the pockets of clay or sand known to occur across the ridge from Mount Pleasant to Frome Hill and beyond; some may be solution holes, others tree-throw holes. Some appear to be more regular in shape than others – oval or near-circular – though none can be regarded as probably or possibly archaeological in origin solely on the basis of the cropmark evidence. In any case, as already noted (above), it may be the presence of one or more of these potentially natural features – a solution hole, perhaps – that contributed to the original significance of the hilltop for the enclosure's builders.

Conquer Barrow

Although the aerial photography cannot be used to say anything directly about Conquer Barrow, concealed as it is by trees and with the mound at least out of cultivation, the discussion (above) of the enclosure ditch does have some implications for the relationship of the mound to the enclosure. Wainwright (1979, 65-8) followed earlier authorities in believing that Conquer Barrow was later than the enclosure bank, prompting him to discount a radiocarbon date obtained from an antler pick found in the primary silts of the barrow's ditch. That date (BM-795: 2876-2480 Cal BC) is indistinguishable from those obtained from the primary fills of the enclosure's northern entrance (BM-792: 2881-2460 Cal BC; BM-793: 2869-2470 Cal BC). Sparey-Green (1994) pointed to additional evidence obtained from Wainwright's excavations to support the idea that the Conquer Barrow ditch, and by extension the barrow itself, must have preceded the enclosure. Arguably, however, the evidence cited by Sparey-Green shows only that the barrow ditch preceded the narrowing of the western entrance to the enclosure. The cropmark evidence complicated the picture further, by adding a potentially earlier phase of enclosure to the ditch sequence, but which has an uncertain relationship to the ditch of Conquer Barrow. There is, of course, no reason to regard Conquer Barrow as a single-phase monument. The relationship between Conquer Barrow and the Mount Pleasant enclosure is discussed further in Barber et al (2010), where it is suggested that the ditch around Conquer Barrow may well have been in place before the first phase of the enclosure earthworks.

The ring ditches

That ring ditches, presumably representing plough-levelled round barrows, exist in close proximity to the Mount Pleasant enclosure should come as no surprise. It is far from unusual for Neolithic monuments to act as foci for later ceremonial and funerary activity.

What is a little surprising, of course, is that apart from Conquer Barrow and the two scheduled barrows on Frome Hill, they should have escaped attention for so long.

Barrow 'A' lies very close to the summit of Frome Hill, with 'B just below it to the northwest and 'C' and 'D' a little further beyond. 'E' and 'F' are situated on the saddle between Mount Pleasant and Frome Hill, while 'G', 'H' and 'I' are a little downslope and south of the last pair. Thus the visible ring ditches and round barrows are predominantly east and southeast of the enclosure. The sole exceptions are ring ditch 'J', southwest of the enclosure, and Conquer Barrow. As noted above, there are considerable barriers to cropmark visibility to the north and west of the enclosure, while the situation to the south is equally uncertain. Although the fields south of the A352 have been photographed on occasions, no cropmarks of definite or possible archaeological origin have been noted to date.

The same applies to the southern and eastern slopes of Frome Hill. Clearly, further reconnaissance might prove useful, particularly as two ring ditches have been photographed – on one occasion only to date – further to the south at Came Home Farm, while a ring ditch around 10 metres in diameter was encountered in excavations on the southern terrace of the South Winterbourne, circa 650 metres southeast of barrow 'A', close to pits of early and late Neolithic and early Bronze Age date. The ring ditch itself produced a single sherd of early Bronze Age pottery (Powell 2004).

The 'approach'

The feature advancing on the enclosure from the northeast has been referred to as the 'approach', although use as a track or routeway from the floodplain of the Frome to the hilltop is not the only possible explanation. It is, of course, hardly unknown for a henge or henge enclosure to be associated with some kind of formal, even monumental, approach. The best-known examples are the sarsen-defined Beckhampton and West Kennet Avenues at Avebury and the earthwork bank-and-ditch defined Avenue at Stonehenge, which connects that monument to the River Avon. Perhaps the most relevant here is the more recently discovered 'avenue' at Durrington Walls, not far from Stonehenge. The Durrington avenue, up to 30 metres wide and comprising a metalled surface flanked on either side by a gulley and external bank, followed a straight course from the River Avon to the massive timber Southern Circle, a total distance of around 170 metres. Interestingly, it pre-dated the enclosure earthworks which, at Durrington Walls, seem to belong to the later phases of Neolithic activity (Parker Pearson 2007; Parker Pearson et al 2005; 2006).

Of course, if the Mount Pleasant 'approach' also pre-dated the henge earthworks, it might explain the apparent absence of any clear physical relationship – or at least of one visible as soilmarks or cropmarks – between them. Another possibility, of course, is that there is no such clear physical relationship to observe. At some point, any such formal approach would have to bring those using it to the same level as the surrounding surface. Any

formal definition of its course beyond this point may have been too insubstantial to produce cropmarks or to survive prolonged ploughing. In addition, of course, difficulties in interpretation are exacerbated by the presence of the various narrower linear features weaving their way around the enclosure earthworks; the presence of external ditches; the possible existence of spread or collapsed bank material; and the existence of 'natural' cropmarks, all of which may only serve to obscure both detail and relationships in key areas.

To the east, there are hints on some obliques that a number of linear features, possibly representing field boundaries, are laid out both parallel with and at right angles to the 'approach'. The general orientation is clearly different to the recent and modern field boundaries visible on both aerial photographs and Ordnance Survey mapping. It is clearly impossible on the basis of the present evidence to do more than hazard a guess at the likely date of these features, but it is tempting to see them as possible traces of later prehistoric field boundaries, which would obviously have implications for the date of the 'approach'.

Other features

There are a number of features of recent to modern date – a double-ditched track approaching the enclosure from the east is visible on some aerial photographs, which demonstrate that it was in use in the mid-20th century AD. The presence of a probable bomb crater from the last war has also been noted. It appears as a distinct cropmark or soilmark in recent photographs, but is visible as a hollow on the post-war RAF verticals.

The principal concern here is the various features observed running into the western and southeastern entrances in particular, as well as along the southern berm and across the southeastern inner ditch. These appear to represent negative features – i.e. soil-filled hollows or ditch-like features. It seems most likely that they represent tracks or paths into and out of the enclosure though not, it seems, into the interior. They seem to represent movement to and from the enclosure, but once they have passed through the bank, that movement appears to have been channelled alongside the bank or inner ditch and ultimately out again through another entrance. As already noted, there is a possibility that the southwestern end of the 'approach' is linked to these paths, although they may merely be signifying continuing use of an already ancient feature. There is, of course, the slight possibility that the palisade was still standing when these features were in use, hence their failure to cross into the interior of the enclosure. It has also been noted that the linear entering the southwestern entrance appears to be aligned on the southwestern corner of the field containing the enclosure, something that might normally indicate a relatively recent date, although of course this depends on the antiquity of the route taken by the A352 prior to its recent readjustment.

MOUNT PLEASANT AND AERIAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Appraisal of new and not-so-new aerial photographs has provided a wealth of additional detail about the nature and environs of the enclosure at Mount Pleasant. Photographs taken over the last 15 years or so ago by RCHME/English Heritage and also by Francesca Radcliffe have ably demonstrated the need to revisit sites frequently, at different times of year, in order to capture the maximum amount of information, especially as the plough continues to bite into buried features. Moreover, the analysis of earlier photographs has underlined the value of collections of historic aerial photographs. Much of the 'new' detail presented here has been visible on aerial photographs for some time.

Ultimately, of course, there are limitations to the interpretative potential of aerial photographs – suggestions presented here about the nature and sequence of various features can only be tested properly by excavation, although geophysical survey would be of undoubted value. Nevertheless, the value of examining all available aerial photographs, even for the best-known sites, is clear. It would be interesting to know if Wainwright's excavation strategy would have been different had all the features visible on the 1930s and 1940s aerial photographs been recognised at the time.

The point has also been made that in cases like this, aerial photography is largely dependent on a destructive process – arable agriculture, and in particular ploughing – to enhance the visibility of archaeological features. It is worth noting that some archaeological features may be destroyed by ploughing without ever producing a meaningful cropmark or soilmark signature. A case in point would be the Neolithic house floors identified in recent excavations at Durrington Walls (Parker Pearson 2007), a contemporary and analogous enclosure. The house floors there have only survived in places where there was sufficient protection from the plough, for example where they lay beneath the enclosure bank. There are clearly places at Mount Pleasant where such ephemeral structures may survive to some degree, but for much of the hilltop it is only features cut into the underlying chalk that are likely to retain some physical trace of their existence.

APPENDIX 1: VERTICAL PHOTOGRAPHS

Sortie Number	Library No.	Frame Nos.	Date Flown	Film Held By
RAF/CPE/UK/1934	560	2081-2084	17 Jan 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/1934	560	5080-5084	17 Jan 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2018	606	3013-3014	17 Apr 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2081	606	4013-4014	17 Apr 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2265	8947	5074-5075	28 Aug 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2265	8947	5114-5116	28 Aug 1947	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2431	759	4254-4256	24 Jan 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2475	779	3008-3013	09 Mar 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2475	779	4081-4086	09 Mar 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2491	785	3009-3013	11 Mar 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2491	785	4009-4013	11 Mar 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2576	8943	5026-5027	12 Apr 1948	MOD
RAF/CPE/UK/2621	837	4047-4050	27 Apr 1948	MOD
RAF/541/7	857	3070-3071	07 May 1948	MOD
RAF/541/7	857	3083-3087	07 May 1948	MOD
RAF/58/271	1006	5104-5109	28 Jun 1949	MOD
RAF/58/271	1006	5127-5133	28 Jun 1949	MOD
RAF/58/271	1006	5134-5140	28 Jun 1949	MOD
RAF/58/271	1006	5161-5163	28 Jun 1949	MOD
RAF/540/1775	1713	147-150	15 Jan 1956	MOD
RAF/540/1775	1713	177-180	15 Jan 1956	MOD
MAL/57283	21522	45271	02 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57283	21522	45273-80	02 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57283	21522	45293-6	02 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57281	21524	42812	30 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57281	21524	42836-40	30 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57281	21524	42854	30 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57281	21524	42877-80	30 Jul 1957	NMR
MAL/57281	21524	42887-93	30 Jul 1957	NMR
RAF/58/2679	1883	46	23 Jan 1959	MOD
RAF/58/2687	1885	53-56	24 Jan 1959	MOD
RAF/58/2687	1885	13-14	24 Jan 1959	MOD
OS/60077	10983	27	11 Sep 1960	NMR
OS/60077	10983	121-122	11 Sep 1960	NMR
RAF/58/4652	2035	287-290	29 Aug 1961	MOD
RAF/58/4652	2035	114-116	29 Aug 1961	MOD
RAF/58/4733	2042	205-209	12 Oct 1961	MOD
RAF/58/4733	2042	136-139	12 Oct 1961	MOD
MAL/62535	21179	101798-9	24 Jul 1962	NMR
MAL/62525	21190	100022-6	30 May 1962	NMR

Sortie Number	Library No.	Frame Nos.	Date Flown	Film Held By
OS/68053	10965	32-35	14 Apr 1968	NMR
RCU/FSL/7012	9012A	55-57	19 Mar 1970	NMR
RCU/FSU/7012	9012A	773-776	19 Mar 1970	NMR
RCU/FSU/7012	9012A	785-787	19 Mar 1970	NMR
OS/71004	11257	18-19	07 Mar 1971	NMR
RCU/BKS/4724	9004	3836-3837	17 Sep 1971	NMR
RCU/BKS/4724	9004	4001-4007	17 Sep 1971	NMR
RCU/BKS/4724	9004	4015-4024	17 Sep 1971	NMR
RCU/BKS/4724	9004	4033-4040	17 Sep 1971	NMR
OS/73468	12009	7-9	01 Oct 1973	NMR
OS/78080	12321	14-18	11 Jun 1978	NMR
OS/78080	12321	54-56	11 Jun 1978	NMR
OS/79060	12371	17-22	05 Jul 1979	NMR
OS/79123	12390	249-250	15 Sep 1979	NMR
OS/89079	13442	258-262	07 Mar 1989	OS
OS/89079	13442	269-271	07 Mar 1989	OS
OS/89137	13477	452-456	05 May 1989	OS
OS/93105	14349	6	02 May 1993	OS
OS/93105	14349	32-36	02 May 1993	OS
OS/93105	14349	38	02 May 1993	OS

APPENDIX 2: OBLIQUE PHOTOGRAPHS

Photo ref (NGR & Index No.)	Film & Frame Number	Date flown
SY 7089/2-3	JRB 774/6566-8	11 Dec 1971
SY 7089/4-14	JRB 3425/5-15	10 Jul 1987
SY 7089/15	JRB 3421/18	15 Jun 1987
SY 7089/18-19	NMR 23002/8-9	06 Mar 2003
SY 7089/20-29	NMR 23601/23-32	01 Sep 2004
SY 7089/30-35	NMR 23704/18-20, 22-24	01 Sep 2004
SY 7090/1-3	JRB 3421/19-21	15 Jun 1987
SY 7189//1-2	ACA 7275/ORACLEF5-6	01 Jan 1936
SY 7189/3	NMR 169/87	04 Mar 1970
SY 7189/4-7	CAP 8039/11-14	30 Jun 1951
SY 7189/8-9	CAP 8114/67-68	02 May 1953
SY 7189/13-17	NMR 18802/1-5	28 Jun 2000
SY 7189/18-24	NMR 18766/10-16	28 Jun 2000
SY 7189/25-27	NMR 23002/5-7	06 Mar 2003
SY 7189/28-34	NMR 21852/3-9	06 Mar 2003
SY 7189/35	NMR 23601/33	01 Sep 2004
SY 7189/36	NMR 23704/21	01 Sep 2004
SY 7190/1-2	CAP 8072/50-51	25 Jun 1952
Francesca Radcliffe Obliques		
	FR 18/29	07 Oct 1989
	FR 45/32	14 Oct 1990
	FR 62/19	24 Apr 1991
	FR 80/14	15 Nov 1991
	FR 83/21-22	07 Dec 1991
	FR 96/30	08 May 1992
	FR 109/1-2	24 Jul 1992
	FR 144/6	18 Feb 1995
	FR 145/5	18 Feb 1995
	FR 149/10	01 Apr 1995
	FR 198/22, 26-30	05 Aug 1996
	FR 199/31	05 Aug 1996
	FR 212/27	02 Mar 1997
	FR 213/18	02 Mar 1997
	FR 259/13, 16, 18	28 Feb 1998
	FR 327/24	08 Aug 2004

APPENDIX 3: MILITARY OBLIQUES

Photo ref (NGR & Index No.)	Film & Frame Number	Date flown
SY 7190/4-6	RAF 30140/PSFO-0140-2	24 Jan 1959
SY 7090/4-6	RAF 30140/PFSO-0143-5	24 Jan 1959
SY 7090//9-11	RAF 30231/PFSO-0139-41	24 Jan 1959
SY 7090/12-15	RAF 30231/SFFO-0139-42	08 Apr 1950
SY 7090/16-17	RAF 30351/PFFO-0140-1	08 Apr 1950
SY 7090/19-20	RAF 30351/SFFO-0141-2	08 Apr 1950

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