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# Little Hangman and Challacombe Common, Exmoor National Park: Two possible earlier Neolithic enclosures on western Exmoor

Hazel Riley

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



# LITTLE HANGMAN AND CHALLACOMBE COMMON, EXMOOR NATIONAL PARK

## Two possible earlier Neolithic enclosures on western Exmoor

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NGRs: SS 5851 4806 and SS 7036 4322

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## **SUMMARY**

Little Hangman lies on the north-western edge of Exmoor National Park, within the parish of Combe Martin, Devon. The hill is a significant local landscape feature with a distinctive conical shape and dramatic coastal position. An enclosure on Little Hangman was discovered during the Exmoor National Mapping Programme (NMP) survey. It was interpreted as a prehistoric enclosure and tentatively ascribed to the Neolithic period. Given its potential importance, in 2009 English Heritage's former Archaeological Survey and Investigation team (Exeter), at the request of the National Trust Regional Archaeologist and the Exmoor National Park Archaeologist, carried out an analytical earthwork survey and photographic record of the site and undertook research to establish its chronological and cultural context. Morphologically, the enclosure on Little Hangman shares many characteristics with two hilltop monument types found in South West England: Neolithic tor enclosures and Cornish 'cliff castles', promontory forts usually attributed to later prehistory. This report combines the evidence from Little Hangman with the results of rapid survey work looking at another Exmoor enclosure - a small rectangular enclosure on Challacombe Common - to suggest that the western part of Exmoor was important in the landscape of the earlier Neolithic period in the South West.

## **CONTRIBUTORS**

Hazel Riley coordinated and carried out the fieldwork (assisted by Rebecca Pullen), undertook the background research, and wrote the report. Photographs were taken by Hazel Riley and Rebecca Pullen, and drawn illustrations were prepared by Philip Sinton, Rebecca Pullen and Hazel Riley. The author would like to thank Rebecca Pullen for collating the text and illustrations and for formatting the report. Mark Bowden and Rebecca Pullen also provided helpful comments on the text.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The National Trust arranged access to the site and a team of volunteers undertook a large amount of gorse clearance on the western side of the enclosure on Little Hangman. Rob Wilson-North facilitated the survey of the enclosure on Challacombe Common.

## **ARCHIVE LOCATION**

The report, survey drawings and archive photography will be deposited at the Historic England Archive, The Engine House, Fire Fly Avenue, Swindon, SN2 2EH.

## **DATE OF SURVEY AND RESEARCH**

Rapid survey of the enclosure on Challacombe Common was undertaken in January 2009, and detailed analytical earthwork survey of Little Hangman was carried out in May 2009. Contextual research and draft report text was prepared in 2009; the report was finalised and published in 2016.

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Front cover: Little Hangman (centre left) and Combe Martin (foreground). NMR 24930/10,  
12-FEB-2008 © Historic England

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# INTRODUCTION

## Location

Little Hangman lies on the north-western edge of Exmoor National Park, within the parish of Combe Martin in Devon, and is centred at SS 5851 4806 (Fig 1). The hill is a significant local landscape feature, both from the land, where it is a popular destination on the cliff walk from the town of Combe Martin, and from the sea, where its distinctive conical shape makes it a natural day mark on the eastern approach to Combe Martin Bay (Front cover).

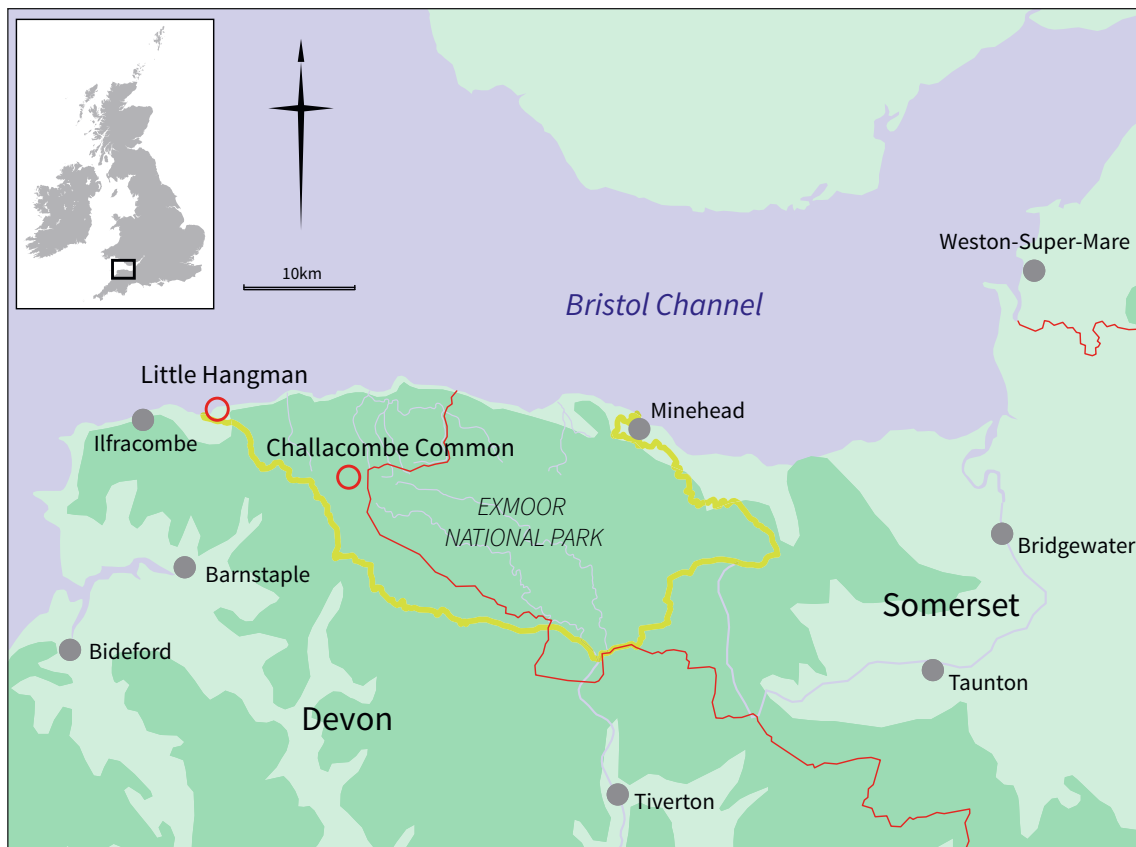


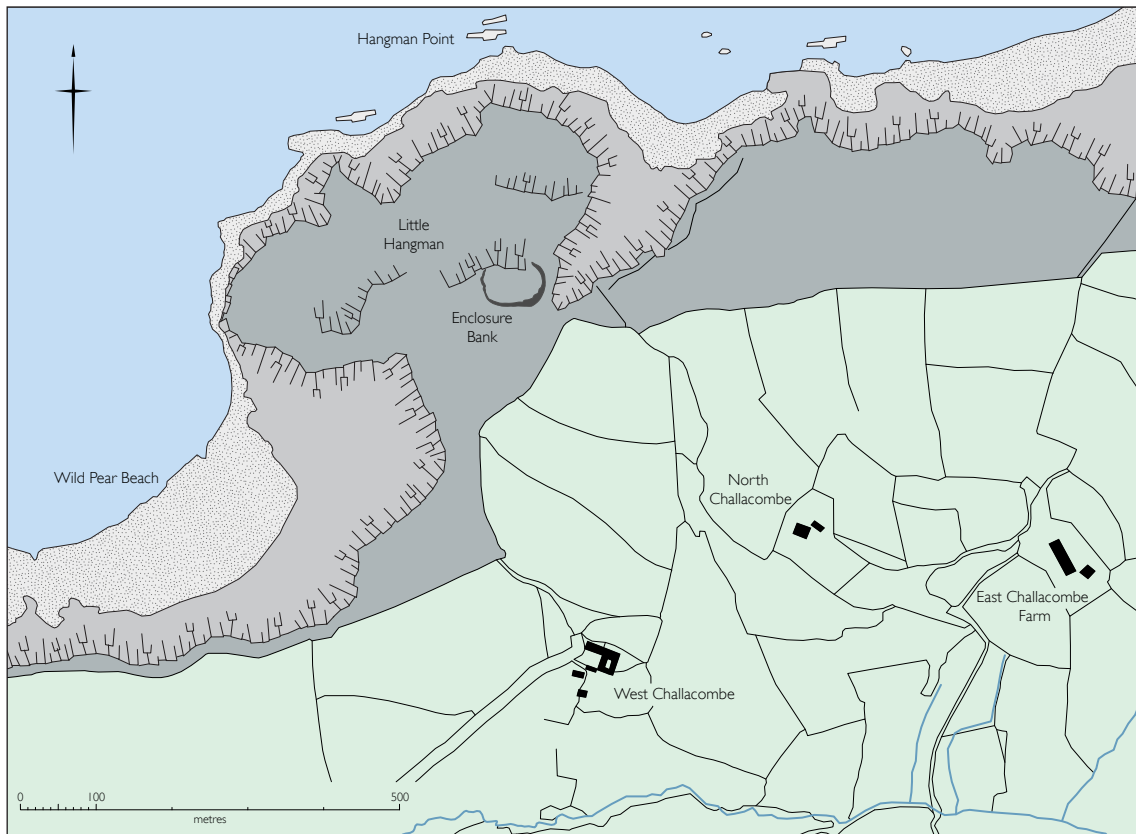
Figure 1: Location map

## The survey

An enclosure on Little Hangman (NMR SS 54 NE 105) was discovered during the Exmoor National Mapping Programme (NMP) survey (Hegarty and Toms 2009) (Figs 2 and 3). It was interpreted as a prehistoric enclosure and tentatively ascribed to the Neolithic period. Given its potential importance, English Heritage's Exeter Archaeological Survey and Investigation team, at the request of the National Trust Regional Archaeologist and the Exmoor National Park Archaeologist, carried out a 1:500 scale analytical survey of the site alongside research to establish its chronological and cultural context (Riley 2009). The survey was undertaken



Figure 2: Vertical aerial photograph of Little Hangman, the enclosure bank is visible encircling the crown of the hill. NMR OS/89114 frame 653, 04-MAY-1989 © Crown Copyright. Ordnance Survey



Background mapping based on Ordnance Survey data. © Crown Copyright 2016. OS 100024900.

Figure 3: Map of Little Hangman and the farmland to its south-east. © Historic England, drawn by Philip Sinton

using Trimble 5800 series differential GPS equipment. The data gathered was transformed to the Ordnance Survey National Grid using Trimble's integral OSTN02 transformation package and the resulting plot was enhanced by graphical methods. The north-western sector of the site could not be surveyed due to dense gorse cover. A photographic record of the site was taken. The results of the earthwork survey are presented as Figure 9 in the Resource Assessment section, below.

The research included reference to published and unpublished archaeological reports and surveys. Material in the North Devon Record Office and Athenaeum, Barnstaple, was also consulted.

Combined with the results of survey work looking at another Exmoor enclosure - a small rectangular enclosure on Challacombe Common around 12km ESE of Little Hangman (*see* Discussion, below) - it can be suggested that the western part of Exmoor was important in the landscape of the earlier Neolithic period in the South West.

### **Geology, topography and land use**

Little Hangman is formed of the north-westernmost outcrop of the Hangman Grits, here characterised by the Little Hangman formation, some 100m thick deposit of silty shales, and siltstones with cross-bedded grey sandstones (British Geological Survey Sheet 277, Ilfracombe).

It lies in the north Devon and west Somerset mining district, a large area which contains low temperature mineral deposits. On the coast at the north-west edge of this area extensive lead mineralization occurs, together with zinc and small amounts of copper, mainly in the Lester and Wild Pear Slates. The lead deposits are rich in silver, with the major deposits to the north and east of Combe Martin. The ores are mainly argentiferous galena (lead sulphide). Recent work has suggested that the ore bodies at Combe Martin are lenticular and discontinuous rather than occurring in lodes with a distinct trend. These are syngenetic in origin, forming at the same time as the sedimentary rocks were being laid down by the venting of mineral rich hot fluids onto the seabed. The main ore bodies therefore occur in the same plane as the bedding of the country rock, with a small amount of later mineralization in the crosscourses (Beer and Scrivener 1982). Extensive outcrops of Roadwater limestone occur to the west of Combe Martin.

Little Hangman is a conical hill with a small, flat-topped summit at nearly 220m OD (Fig 4). The land slopes very sharply away to the sea to the west, north and east; the southern slopes are slightly less steep. The views out from Little Hangman are wide ranging: across Combe Martin Bay along the north Devon coast to the west; along the cliffs to Hangman Hill and Holdstone Down to the east and inland across the valley of the Challacombes to Combe Martin set out along the Umber Valley (Figs 5 and 6).





Figure 4: The conical hill of Little Hangman, looking east from Lester Cliff with Wild Pear Beach in the foreground. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen



Figure 5: The view west from Little Hangman. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen



Figure 6: The view east from Little Hangman. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen

Little Hangman lies within an area defined as High Coastal Heath in Exmoor's Landscape Character Assessment (Preece 2007). This is characterised by an open landscape of rich semi-natural heathland, interspersed with gorse and bracken; undulating plateaux, rounded moorland hills and rugged coastal cliffs; a sense of the sea with wide skies and distant views across the Bristol Channel to Wales, a sense of elevation and exposure to the elements due to the steep sea cliffs, and a sense of solitude created by the inaccessibility of the cliffs (Preece 2007, 19). Little Hangman was purchased by the National Trust in 1984 and is currently periodically grazed by sheep.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Little Hangman was part of the manor of Combe Martin in the medieval period and was used as common land by the townspeople. A document dating from the late medieval period gives us evidence as to the use of Little Hangman at this time, and also some evidence as to the dates of the relict and current field boundaries and field systems in the area. In 1531 Little Hangman, Hangman Hill and Girt Down were the subject of an inquiry held at Combe Martin. This established that the people of Combe Martin had, for as long as anyone could remember, held the right to graze their sheep and cattle on Little Hangman and Hangman Hill, and that the attempts of successive owners of West Challacombe manor to fence off and enclose the area were an offence.

John Vellacott of Kentisbury was 83 years old when he gave evidence. He said that he could remember 60 years ago (around 1470) when there was no hedge, ditch or gate separating the common lands of Girt Down and Hangman Hill. Another greybeard of the parish, Walter Dennett of West Down, aged 71, remembered how, about 60 years ago, John Orchard (of West Challacombe) had asked the people of Combe Martin for permission to cultivate part of Little Hangman, and they had given him that permission (Gregory 1979, 9-10).

Risdon, writing in the early 17th century about West Challacombe Manor, records that:

“near this place [West Challacombe] there mounteth up a hill to a great height, fast upon the cliff of the sea, where in a hole, infinite numbers of doves do frequent, called by a peculiar name of the place, Cliff-culvers” (quoted in Toms 1902, 34).

The enclosed fields of West Challacombe border Little Hangman, implying that it has been associated with that farm for many years, an arrangement which was formalised by the time of the tithe award in 1843 when the area is recorded as pasture under the holding of West Challacombe.

The farm house at West Challacombe has recently been recognised as an important, high-status dwelling in the medieval period (Richardson 1993; Blaylock, S 1996; Blaylock, S R 2004). The property was owned by the Challacombe family at this time and by around 1400 there was a house with a central hall and two wings. A new hall with a magnificent roof was built between the two wings (Fig 7). The false hammer beam roof structure has given a dendrochronological date for the felling of the timbers to between 1449 and 1474 (Blaylock, S R 2004). Even earlier, a cruck barn on the eastern side of the house dates to around the first half of the 14th century.

In 1475 Joan or Jane Orchard of West Challacombe married John Prouz of Chagford, the new hall and its roof perhaps commemorating this propitious marriage: certainly the Prouz family were of some substance at this time. West Challacombe remained in the Prouz family until the mid 17th century. In the 18th century the house and holding was subdivided and run by the Crang and Lerwill



Figure 7: The 15th-century false hammer beam roof at West Challacombe Manor farm house © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen

families. It remained so until the late 19th century (Berry 2002, 2-3).

In 1992 the National Trust acquired West Challacombe Farm and its holding which adjoins their land on Little Hangman. The two areas were the subjects of archaeological surveys by the National Trust (National Trust 1984; Berry 2002). As part of the Exmoor National Park, Little Hangman was examined by the CRAAGs (Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset) aerial photographic survey and by the RCHME field survey (McDonnell 1985; Riley and Wilson-North 2001) but it was not until the NMP survey of the aerial photographic evidence that the enclosure was discovered (Hegarty and Toms 2009, 35-8). Little Hangman has been designated as one of Exmoor's Principal Archaeological Landscapes following this discovery (Fyfe and Adams 2008; Balmond 2015a, 133-5).

The post-medieval history of Little Hangman is intimately connected with the extraction of minerals from mines in and around Combe Martin. Silver-lead ore was mined at Combe Martin from at least as early as the 13th century. The mines were worked by the Crown or its appointees from 1292 until the late 17th century when the royal privilege was removed. After this, the rights to the silver-lead ores at Combe Martin lay with the owner of the soil.

The fragmented and discontinuous nature of the lenticular ore bodies (above), together with some difficulty in smelting the ore, meant that production from the

Combe Martin mines was intermittent (Claughton 2004).

In the late 18th century large iron deposits began to be worked at Wild Pear Beach and on Girt and Holdstone Downs. Swete, writing in 1796, noted that the lead mines 'had been discontinued for some years', but he saw the iron mine being opened up below Little Hangman on Wild Pear Beach (Claughton 2004, 15).

During the 19th century many attempts were made to work the silver-lead mines around Combe Martin; this included the mine at West Challacombe (Fig 8) between 1873 and 1878, when at least three companies were involved. The mine at West Challacombe was probably worked in the late medieval period, indicated by an area of earthworks of early mine working along a tributary stream of the river UMBER south of West Challacombe manor. These mine workings were described as 'largely obliterated' in 1997, although the spoil heaps of an adit were noted as being of irregular shape, suggesting they were tipped from hand-barrows, although this not indicative of great age as tramways were little used in the area (Claughton 1997, 92).

In the latter half of the 19th century there was a boom in iron mining in north Devon and this stimulated interest in the deposits around Combe Martin. In this part of the parish the Hangman Hill Iron Mining Company (1867) and the Girt and Holdstone Downs Mining Company Ltd (1875-6) were short lived ventures (Claughton 2004, 28-9).

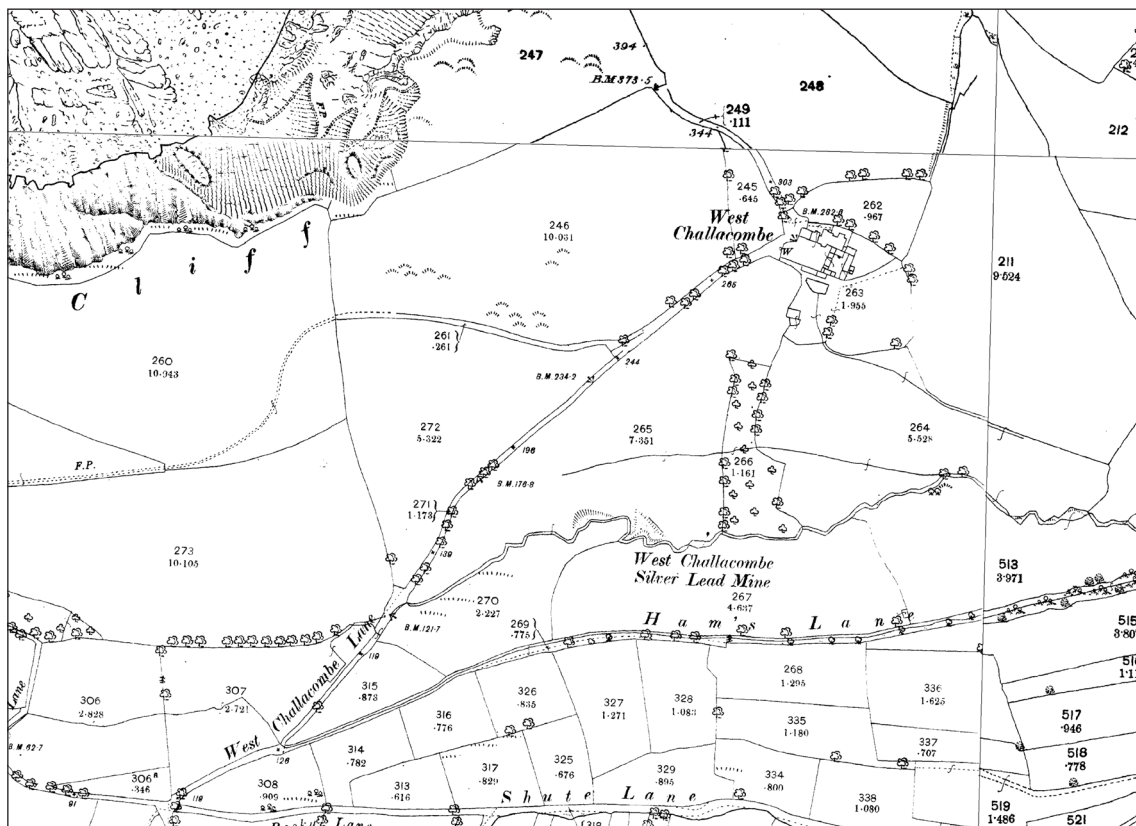


Figure 8: West Challacombe Silver Lead Mine on the OS 1st edition 25-inch map (Ordnance Survey 1889)

## DESCRIPTION OF THE EARTHWORKS

### The enclosure

The enclosure on Little Hangman is incomplete (Fig 9). A scarp some 1m high, backed by a level area, encloses the summit of the hill on the south and east sides (Fig 10). To the west the enclosure is masked by thick gorse bushes; to the north the ground shelves away steeply to the sea. To the north-east the artificial scarp merges with the steep rocky natural slopes, here marked by some large outcrops of rock which form significant tor-like features (Fig 11). A large quartz slab appears to have been set upright in the enclosure earthwork on the south (A). If it is assumed that the enclosure continues westwards towards the cliff edge below platform 6 (below), but is masked by gorse, then the enclosed area is shaped like a tear drop and measures at its widest 116m E/W by 60m N/S.

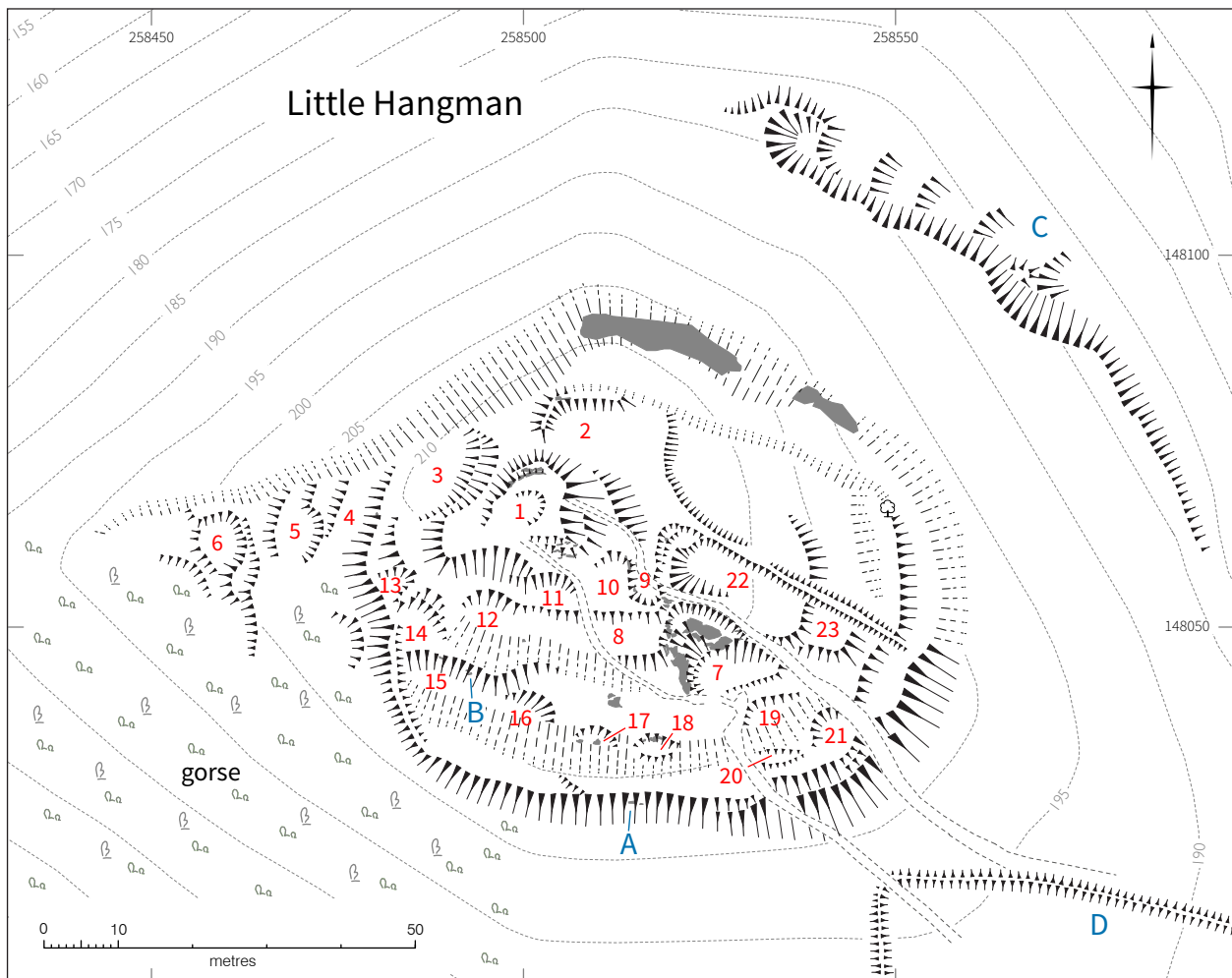


Figure 9: Little Hangman enclosure earthwork survey, 2009; reduced to 1:1000 from the original survey scale of 1:500. Artificial platforms are coded 1 to 23, other key features described in the text are labelled A to D and natural rock outcrops are shaded in grey. © Historic England, drawn by Philip Sinton



Figure 10: The enclosure on the south side of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen



Figure 11: Rock outcrops on the north-east side of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Hazel Riley

## The interior

Inside the enclosure the ground rises up to the flat topped summit of Little Hangman and the only level ground is available either on the top itself, behind the enclosure scarp or inside one of several scoops or platforms (see Figs 9 and 12).

The area inside the enclosure contains both natural rock formations and artificially created scoops or platforms. The platforms are concentrated on the southern and northern sides of Little Hangman. On the summit itself are two level areas, platforms 1 and 2 (see Fig 12). Both have been deliberately created by enhancing the natural rock outcrops. Platform 1 is at the very top of Little Hangman and forms an obvious focus for visitors to the hill. The level area is roughly rectangular, measuring 10m N/S by 8m E/W. To the north and below platform 1 is platform 2, a neat rectangular area, 8m NS by 10m E/W and in a dramatic location on the cliff edge (see Fig 12). Its west and north sides are marked by a bank, 3m wide and 0.3m high which merges with a rocky outcrop to the east and which is certainly at least partly natural in origin. To the west of platform 1 four platforms (3, 4, 5, 6) occupy the steep slopes down to the cliff edge (see Fig 4).



Figure 12: Platform 2 at the north-east edge of the summit of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen



The southern side of Little Hangman is dominated by a large outcrop of rock with a level area in front of it (platform 7) (Fig 13). The level area is 10m E/W by 5m N/S and provides welcome shelter from the weather which arrives straight from the Bristol Channel. Above this are three platforms (8, 9, 10) which lie between platform 7 and the summit. The south-west side of the hill drops down in a series of terraces which have several small platforms cut into them (platforms 11-21) (Fig 14). To the north-east of platform 7 a bank defines the north-east side of two rectangular platforms, 22 and 23. Between this bank and the north-east side of the enclosure natural scarps break the interior into three rectangular areas which slope down to the north and east.

The platforms on Little Hangman have usually been interpreted as quarry scoops (for example, Berry 2002), but given the evidence from analogous sites in Cornwall (below), consideration should be given to their date and function. Given the importance of the area for mining (above), some of the platforms may have been created during the process of mineral prospection. This process began in the area at least as early as the 13th century, and may well have its origins in the Roman or prehistoric periods (Bray 2010, 3-7). The platforms on the summit and on the seaward side do not look as though they result from prospection or extraction and the concentration of levelled areas on the seaward side suggests that this part of



Figure 13: Platform 7 on the south side of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Hazel Riley

the site was important for its views along the coast. At least some of the platforms and level areas may have their origins in the earlier prehistoric period and be for occupation, albeit not of a permanent nature, when people used Little Hangman as an important feature in the Neolithic landscape (below).

An unusual configuration of stones lies on the side of platform 15 (B) (Fig 15). This was discovered by National Trust volunteers clearing the gorse. It comprises two edge-set stone slabs placed 0.40m apart. The stone to the north measures 0.35 long x 0.20m high x 0.02m thick; that to the south measures 0.55m long x 0.30m high x 0.04m thick. The stones are positioned at a different orientation to the main trend and seem to have been deliberately sited here. However their function remains a puzzle. The two most likely functions for upright stones would be orthostats or part of a revetment, but these would be positioned behind or in front of the enclosure earthwork respectively while these stones are above the main enclosure earthwork, set in a steep scarp. This location also argues against them being part of a cist.

The enclosure on Little Hangman is probably of prehistoric date and as such it is of regional and national significance. The site has features which argue strongly that it is a tor enclosure and dates from the earlier Neolithic period (below) and if this is the case, then it is important for several reasons. Little Hangman is the only known



Figure 14: Platforms 17 and 18 on the south side of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen



Figure 15: Upright stones within the back edge of platform 15, on the south-west side of Little Hangman. © Historic England, Hazel Riley



Figure 16: Openwork on the north-east side of Little Hangman, viewed from above. © Historic England, Hazel Riley

earlier Neolithic enclosure on Exmoor. Its discovery brings the total number of tor enclosures, which seem to be exclusively found in Devon and Cornwall to 16, and it thus forms some 6% of the national resource.

### **The openwork**

A linear hollow below the north-east side of the enclosure is 50m long, 8m wide and up to 2m deep (C) (Fig 16). This is probably the result of prospecting for, or extraction of, iron or manganese which was mined in this part of Combe Martin parish in the late 18th and 19th centuries (above).

The mining remains on and around Little Hangman are of local and regional importance. Combe Martin was an important centre of silver/lead production in the medieval period and the combination of historical research, field investigation and recording, underground exploration and metallurgical research which has already been carried out in Combe Martin gives further importance to the remains on Little Hangman.

### **The relict field system**

An area of relict field system, defined by an earthen bank 2.5m wide and 0.4m high lies, on the south-east side of the enclosure on Little Hangman (D) (Fig 17). The current limit of enclosed agricultural land, part of West Challacombe, overlies the relict fields. As this enclosure is well established by the end of the 18th century (Ordnance Survey 1804-5 map); it is tempting to equate this area of relict fields with the cultivation of Little Hangman by John Orchard of West Challacombe in the late medieval period (Gregory 1979, 10).

The relict fields on Little Hangman are of local importance; the documentary evidence from the 15th century, with its stories from people whose families still live and work in the area, and the tangible remains of the high status building at West Challacombe, bring the archaeological evidence to life.



Figure 17: Relict field system on the south-east side of Little Hangman © Historic England, Rebecca Pullen

## LITTLE HANGMAN IN ITS REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

The past few decades have seen the gradual recognition of a growing number of extant archaeological sites in Devon and Cornwall which can be attributed to the Neolithic period, and, with a small number of excavations, can be placed in the earlier part of this period. These sites, known as tor enclosures because they utilise natural landforms, are sited on hilltops or other conspicuous points in the landscape. Two sites in Cornwall, Carn Brea and Helman Tor, excavated in the 1970s and the 1980s respectively by Roger Mercer, form the basis of our understanding of these sites and for the earlier Neolithic period generally in the South West (Mercer 1981; 1986; 1997). Further work by the Cornwall Archaeological Unit and the RCHME resulted in the identification of several more tor enclosures and related sites in Cornwall and on the western edge of Dartmoor (summarised in Oswald *et al* 2001, xii, 158-9). Their distribution follows the granite moors of the South West: Carn Galver and Trencrom Castle in West Penwith; Carn Brea on the Carnmenellis granite; St Stephen's Beacon and Helman Tor on the St Austell outcrop; De Lank, Roughtor, Berry Castle, Stowe's Pound, Tregarrick Tor and Notter Tor on Bodmin Moor, and Hound Tor, Whittor and the Dewerstone on Dartmoor. East of Dartmoor and south of Exmoor are the causewayed enclosures which both underlie Iron Age enclosures at Hembury in east Devon and at Raddon Hill in mid Devon (Lidell 1930; 1931; 1932; 1935; Todd 1983; Gent and Knight 1995).

Tor enclosures are characterised by their location and altitude, by the incorporation of natural landforms and by the presence of platforms or terraces forming level areas for occupation or for other activities. Little Hangman fits within this group of monuments, but at present it must remain as a possible or uncertain site. The excavations at, for example, Carn Brea, where significant quantities of flint arrow heads were found, have led Roger Mercer to see at least some of these sites as places where fighting or warfare took place in the earlier Neolithic period. Little Hangman has perhaps more in common with the Cornish 'cliff castles'. This group of sites, where a headland or promontory is defined by earthworks, is usually considered as later prehistoric – late Bronze Age and Iron Age in date - and a geographical manifestation of this age of enclosures (for example, Lamb 1980; Quinnell 1986). In a thoughtful paper, Adam Sharpe considers the Cornish cliff castles to have a much longer pedigree as important focal centres in the prehistoric landscape, analogous to tor enclosures with a date range from the Neolithic to the Bronze Age, as well as re-use later on in prehistory (Sharpe 1992).

Long barrows and related funerary or ceremonial monuments are also found across the South West. Again recent work is adding to their distribution both as extant monuments, such as those recognised as a result of the Bodmin Moor survey (Johnson and Rose 1994), and plough-levelled sites found during aerial reconnaissance work, particularly the work of Frances Griffith and the Exmoor NMP team. The cropmark sites are known as oblong ditches or elongated ditches (terminology from Loveday and Petchey 1982 and Jones 1998) and can be interpreted as the remains of plough-levelled ditched enclosures or levelled mounds with encircling ditches. Excavations show that a date in the earlier Neolithic period is

common, but recent excavations at Caldecotte in Buckinghamshire placed an oblong ditch in the Iron Age (Loveday and Petchey 1982). Four such sites have been recently discovered in Devon, three in mid Devon (Griffith 1985) and one near Kentisbury on the western edge of Exmoor (NMR SS 64 SW 73). A few examples of extant rectangular enclosures with narrow external ditches, the unploughed manifestation of these oblong ditches, still survive and have been identified at Hinton Waldrist, Oxfordshire and at Tennyson Down on the Isle of Wight (Huntingford 1936; RCHME 1979a). A similar site was discovered close to the Chapman Barrows on Challacombe Common on the western edge of Exmoor (*see* Fig 1) and was surveyed by the author in January 2009 with the help of Rob Wilson-North (Fig 18).

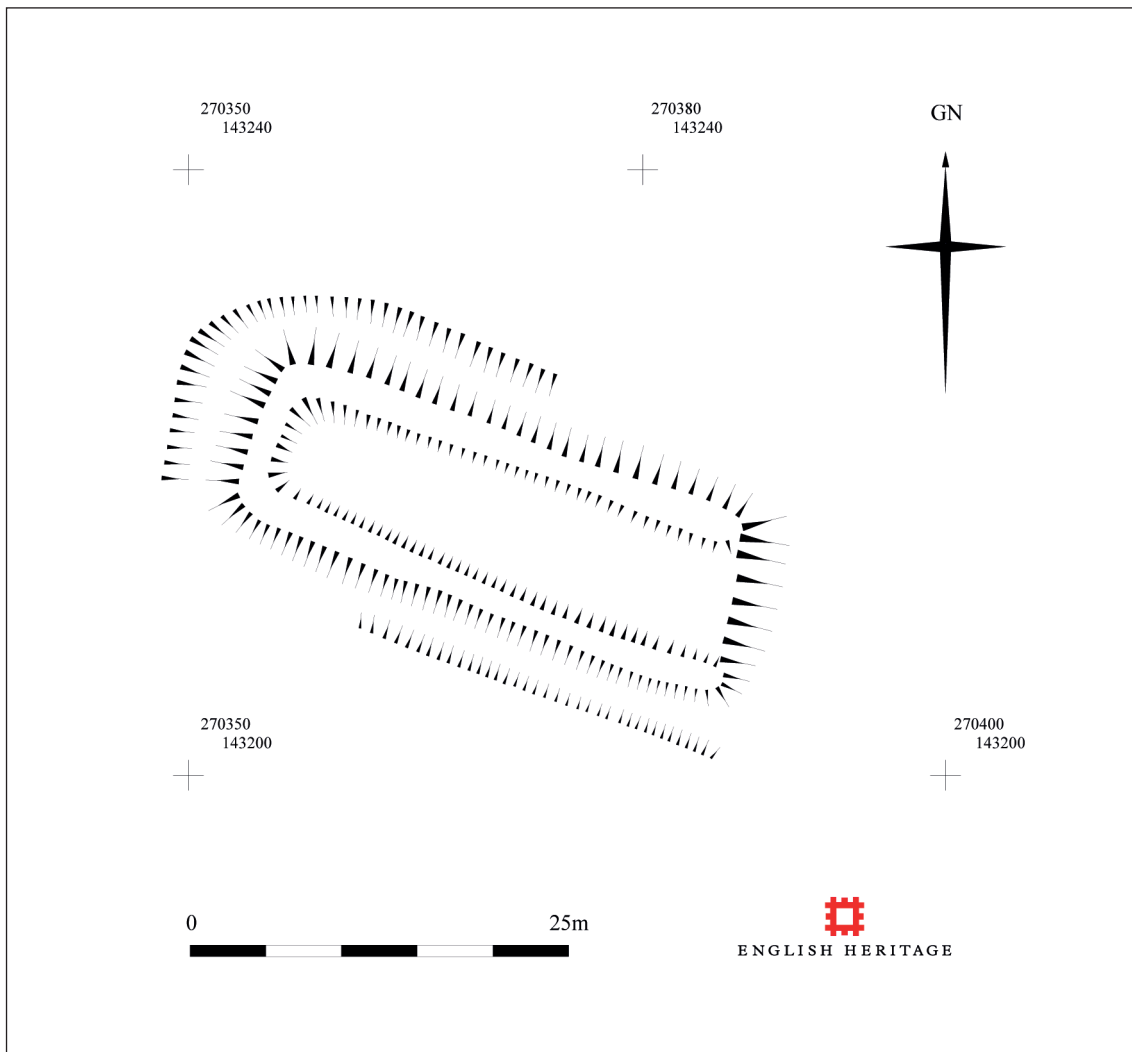


Figure 18: Survey of the rectangular earthwork enclosure on Challacombe Common, 2009. © Historic England, drawn by Hazel Riley

## The enclosure on Challacombe Common

The enclosure (NMR SS 74 SW 100) lies on open moorland at a height of c 470m OD (Fig 19). The area is characterised by vast areas of heather and grass moorland with significant areas of bracken and gorse. The topography of broad, gently undulating plateaux of rounded hills, cut by deeply incised valleys gives views both across Exmoor and out to sea, and the land use is characterised by open, rough grazing (Preece 2007, 61-2).

The enclosure on Challacombe Common is oriented NW/SE and measures overall 42.7m NW/SE by 20.4m NE/SW. The enclosure is formed by an earthen bank 4.5m wide and c 0.8m high, with a gap at the south-east end and a ditch to the north-west and south-west, 2.5m wide and 0.5m deep. The enclosure bank steps down to the ditch; this is particularly evident on the south-west side; the interior is raised above the surrounding ground level.

The remains of turf/peat cutting lie in the vicinity but the enclosure is a regular feature and is not the result of this activity; although it might be the remains of a turf stack or peat drying platform (Riley 2014, 41). It could be associated with peat cutting, but its general appearance – rather degraded – suggests that is of some antiquity rather than of more recent date. It may be a medieval/post medieval stock enclosure associated with Radworthy Farm. Radworthy, with its origins in the earlier medieval period, lies 500m to the south-west. The enclosure – a rather elongated rectangle – is not the ideal shape for a stock enclosure. It lies at the centre of an extensive earlier prehistoric ceremonial landscape of round barrows, stone settings and a standing stone (Fig 20). The enclosure is very similar in size and shape to the rectangular enclosures at Wilsford Down, Wiltshire, and Tennyson Down, Isle of Wight.

The well known mortuary enclosure at the heart of the ceremonial complex on Normanton Down and Wilsford Down, south of Stonehenge, survived as a rectangular, ditched enclosure with internal banks, orientated ESE/WNW and measuring 36m by 21m in 1949. The earthworks were virtually levelled by 1959, when the site was fully excavated, revealing an interrupted ditch and a timber structure within the entrance at the ESE end. Finds included 11 antler picks, bones of ox and sheep/goat and a sherd of a Peterborough bowl from high up in the ditch fill. One of the antler picks gave a radiocarbon date of 3510-2920 BC (Vatcher 1961; RCHME 1979b, 1).

Less well known, and hidden away in the 'Discredited Long Barrows' section of the RCHME's publication of their survey of the long barrows of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (RCHME 1979a, xxxv), is a rectangular earthwork enclosure on Tennyson Down on the south coast of the Isle of Wight. The enclosure is formed by a ditch and internal bank, oriented E/W, with overall measurements of 40m by 27m and an entrance at the eastern end. It has been identified as a mortuary enclosure (Basford 1980, 99).





Figure 19: Detail of the enclosure on Challacombe Common © Historic England, Hazel Riley

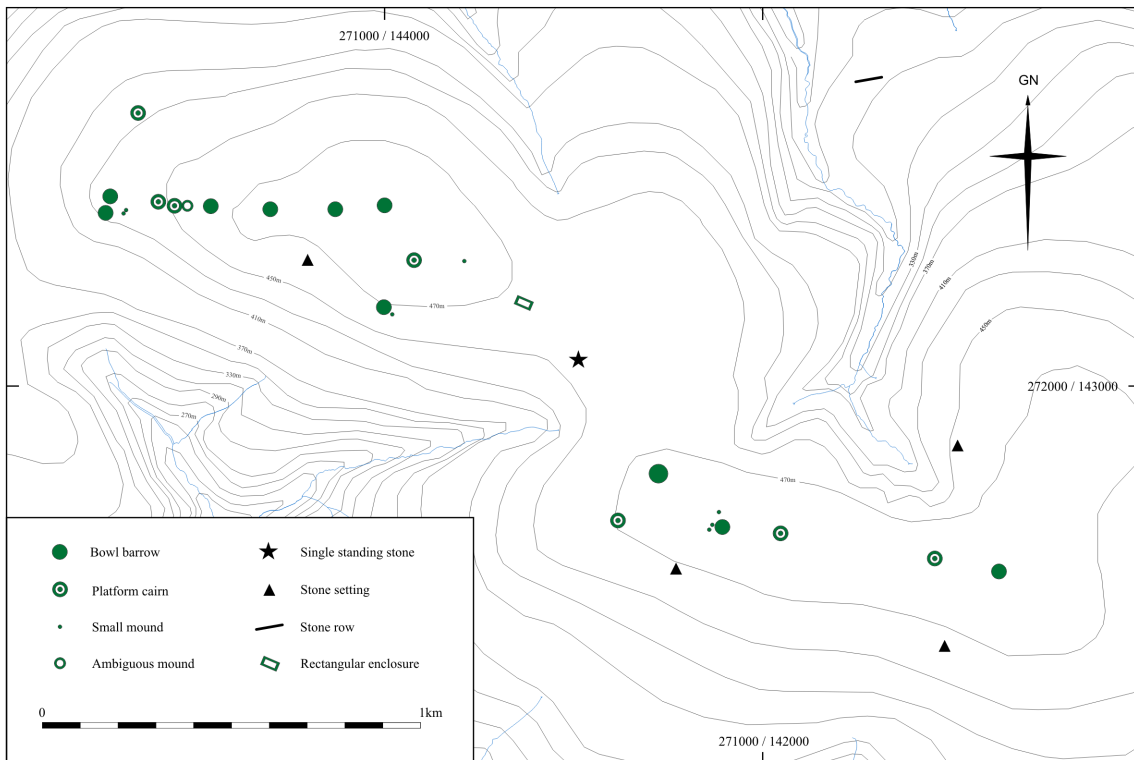


Figure 20: Monument types within the Chapman Barrows and Woodbarrow complexes on Challacombe Common. After Pullen 2009a, 23; reproduced by kind permission

## Conclusion

The current evidence from field survey, aerial photographic survey and excavations, combine to strongly suggest that the western part of Exmoor was important in the landscape of the earlier Neolithic period in the South West. The coastal location of Little Hangman is significant. Mercer draws attention to the importance of deep sea fishing in the development of sedentary communities in the later Mesolithic on the Breton coast (Mercer 1986, 41); in Cornwall the manufacture and trade of stone axes was important in the early Neolithic (Mercer 1986, 42-9). For what seems to us, still, a rather remote and obscure corner of Exmoor, the resources associated with Combe Martin Bay are from the sea: fish, shell fish and contact with other groups for trade, and with the massive resource to the south and east: the emerging grazing land that is to become Exmoor. By the Neolithic Exmoor was home to a large population of ungulates: red and roe deer, wild horses and auroch (Riley and Wilson-North 2001, 18; Siraut 2009, 13-18).

## FUTURE WORK AND MANAGEMENT ISSUES

As noted above, Little Hangman is a popular destination for walkers from Combe Martin; it also lies close to the South West coast path. Two well-trodden paths lead up from the coast path through the relict fields over the enclosure scarp and across platforms 7, 8, 9 up to platform 1 (see Fig 9).

The date and function of the enclosure on Little Hangman remains open to debate and future work should be concerned with trying to answer these questions. Geophysical survey and small scale excavations on the level areas behind the enclosure, akin to Mercer's on Helman Tor which revealed structural and occupational features and artefacts, may resolve some of the issues.

The rectangular enclosure on Challacombe Common has been the subject of a partial earth resistance survey which was somewhat inconclusive (Pullen 2009b). Further geophysical survey\* and targeted small scale excavations in and around the enclosure should be designed to resolve issues of date, structure and function.

*\*It should be noted that, since this report was written in 2009, further geophysical survey and earthwork survey work has been undertaken at the rectangular enclosure on Challacombe Common as part of an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award Project supervised by the University of Leicester and Exmoor National Park Authority (see Mitcham 2014) and through the HLF-funded Longstone Landscape Community Archaeology Project, carried out through the Exmoor Moorland Landscape Partnership (see Balmond 2015b, 15-16).*

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## APPENDIX: ASSOCIATED MONUMENT AND EVENT RECORDS

*Table 1: Concordance of monument record numbers relating to the Little Hangman and Challacombe Common enclosures*

Monument/Site name	NRHE monument uid	NMR number	ENP HER monument number	NT HBSMR monument number	NHLE list entry number and type
Little Hangman enclosure	1460177	SS 54 NE 105	MMO1635	(no record at time of study)	n/a
Linear openwork quarry, NE side of Little Hangman	616399	SS 54 NE 40	MDE8284	MNA148435 / 100655	n/a
Post-medieval field boundary bank, SE side of Little Hangman	616361	SS 54 NE 33	MDE8277	MNA148434 / 100662	n/a
West Challacombe farmstead & manor house	n/a	n/a	MDE20391	MNA107983 / 104067	1306692: listed building grade II*
Challacombe Common, possible mortuary enclosure	1043639	SS 74 SW 100	MDE12830	n/a	n/a

*Table 2: Event record numbers relating to the Little Hangman and Challacombe Common enclosures*

Event name/description	NRHE event uid	ENP HER event number
Little Hangman enclosure, analytical earthwork survey at 1:500 (English Heritage, 2009)	1589825	n/a
Challacombe Common enclosure, earthwork survey (English Heritage, 2009)	1589826	n/a
Challacombe Common enclosure, earth resistance survey (University of Bristol, 2009)	1589827	EEM14527
Challacombe Common mortuary enclosure, measured survey at 1:200 (Exmoor National Park Authority and Parracombe History & Archaeology Society, 2014)	n/a	EEM14528
Challacombe Common quincunx and mortuary enclosure, earth resistance survey and magnetometry survey (University of Leicester, 2014)	n/a	EEM14530





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