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Watgrove, Great Chalfield, Wiltshire Earthwork Survey

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Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



WATGROVE, GREAT CHALFIELD, WILTSHIRE

EARTHWORK SURVEY

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SUMMARY

A survey of earthworks centred on 'Watgrove' field, Great Chalfield, was carried out by English Heritage (EH) in 2014 as part of the National Archaeological Identification Survey West Wiltshire Pilot Project, examining the archaeology of the A350 corridor. It mapped a series of previously unrecorded features. A mound close to the former course of the Lenton Brook shares similar characteristics with cropmark barrows discovered elsewhere during the aerial mapping stage of the project and is, potentially, the last vestige of a prehistoric burial mound. Further earthworks provide evidence for the medieval and later land-use of the area and, in particular, its connection with Great Chalfield Manor. These include: a complex of small platforms and hollow-ways, possibly the remains of small farmstead; a pillow mound, part of a medieval or post-medieval rabbit warren and relict field boundaries of a variety of dates. The most recent features comprise a system of post-medieval and later ditches and channels, incorporating a sheep dip.

CONTRIBUTORS

The survey was carried out by Nicky Smith and Elaine Jamieson of EH's Assessment Team West. Figures 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8 were produced by Sharon Soutar.

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INTRODUCTION

In September 2014, English Heritage's Assessment Team (West) undertook a detailed survey and investigation of earthwork remains centred on a field called 'Watgrove', near Great Chalfield Manor, Atwood in Wiltshire. The earthworks, which had not been identified previously, were discovered during ground examination of a possible 'deserted medieval settlement' (NRHE 208097) and a walk-over inspection of other features recorded by Aerial Investigation in the wider area around Great Chalfield Manor. Both the initial visit and the survey formed part of EH's National Archaeological Identification Survey (NAIS) West Wiltshire (Lowland) Pilot project (NHPP 3A4:3, RASMIS 6303).

Location, topography and geology

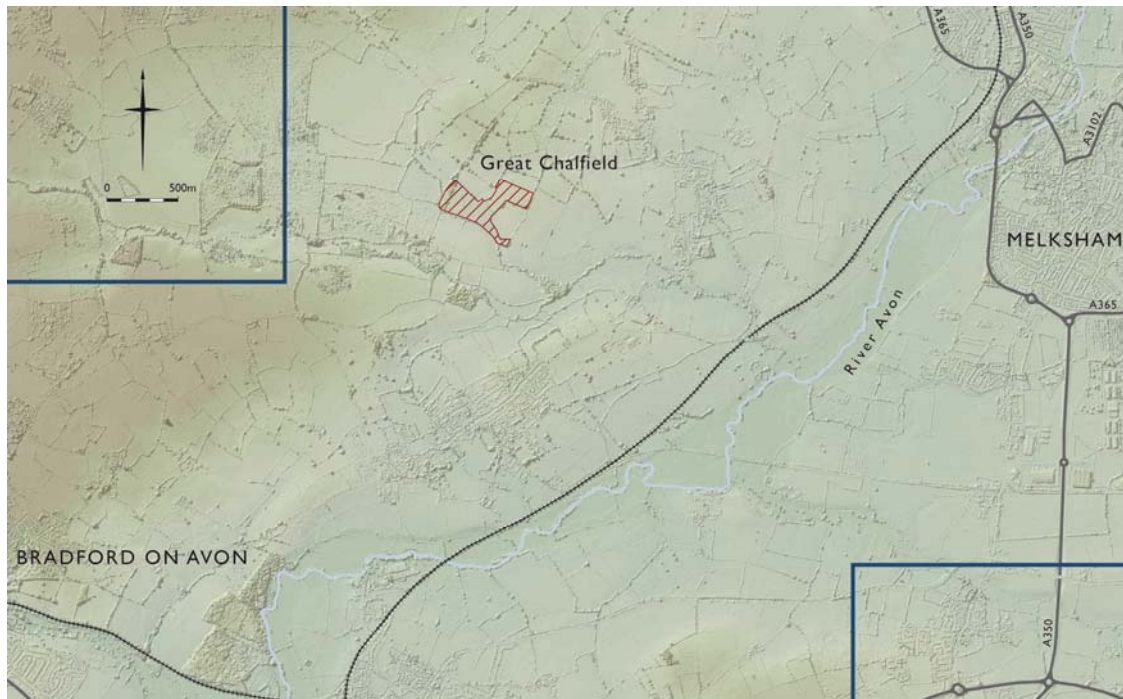


Figure 1: Location plan showing the survey area hatched in red. The blue line delimits areas outside the NAIS West Wiltshire project area.

Great Chalfield is one of a pair of hamlets, 'Great' and 'Little' Chalfield, which form the southern part of the civil parish of Atworth. They are situated amid rich farming country, approximately three miles south-west of Melksham and three miles north-east of Bradford-on-Avon. The earthworks, centred at NGR ST 864634, lie 400m north-east of Great Chalfield Manor and form part of its estate. The main concentration falls within 'Watgrove', though further earthworks are found in 'Crooked Wood Lays' field, immediately to its north.

Both fields are owned by the National Trust and managed as permanent pasture grazed by sheep. The area lies at the confluence of several small tributaries which flow south and east to join the Wiltshire Avon. The low-lying terrain, which spans the valley of the Lenton Brook, is flat or gently undulating, ranging in height between 40m and 50m OD.

The underlying geological composition of the locality may have been a determining factor in the choice of settlement sites. The fields surveyed overlie sandstones, siltstones and mudstones of the Kellaways Formation, which give rise to slowly permeable, seasonally wet and slightly acidic loam and clay soils while, immediately to the south, the manorial centre is situated on Jurassic Limestone of the Cornbrash Formation and its lime-rich alluvial soil (British Geological Survey 1:50,000 map; UK Soil Observatory 1:250,000 Soilscape map - www.ukso.org).

The manorial complex is of classic layout, with the manor house situated adjacent to the parish church. It was once defended by a moat and a high outer wall with semi-circular bastions, the remains of which still survive north and south of the house. Two medieval stew-ponds were also prominent features to the south of the manor house, until they were filled in to enlarge the orchards in c1890 (Floyd 2014, 15). The buildings at Great Chalfield have undergone various phases of rebuilding and alteration. The earliest fabric survives in the parish church of All Saints and the gate house, which both date from at least the 14th century. The manor house has been extensively rebuilt and the earliest parts of it date from the 15th century. The Old Brew House overlying the course of the moat shares this 15th-century date, indicating that this was a time of extensive remodelling, when the moat was partially filled in at the same time as the medieval manor house was rebuilt (Floyd 2014, inside cover, 4-11, 14).

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Documentary evidence for a small settlement at Chalfield appears from an early date. The name 'Chaldefelde' is first mentioned in an Anglo-Saxon charter of 1001, when Athelwin's boundary here delimited part of extent of the monastery and manor of Bradford-on-Avon, which King Ethelred granted to the Abbess of Shaftesbury (Jones 1907, 19-23). Shortly afterwards, a manor named 'Caldefelle' is listed in the Domesday Book (1086) as being in the possession of Arnulf. It then paid tax for two and a half hides (of which one and a half were in demesne). It included half a mill, six acres of meadow, six acres of woodland, eight acres of pasture and land for two ploughs. Just five inhabitants were listed: a serf and four bordars. The value of the manor had decreased dramatically, from four pounds to fifty shillings, since before the Norman Conquest, when Wallef had held it. A further manor of similar size and value in the same village, also held by Arnulf but in the possession of Godwin prior to the Norman Conquest, was listed immediately below 'Caldefelle' (Pendruddocke Wyndham 1788, 263; Thorn, C & F 1979, 25). These manors later became 'Great' and 'Little' Chalfield, although it is not certain which was which.



Figure 2: The parish church of All Saints, Great Chalfield, which dates from at least the 14th century.

Water has long been important in shaping the landscape of Great Chalfield. In 1086, the two hamlets at Chalfield shared a mill powered by a leat off the Chalfield Brook, which runs through both manors. There was further mention of a mill in 1280, following a dispute between the lords of the respective manors. Walter de Chaudefeld, Lord of Little Chalfield, complained that William de Percy of Great Chalfield had made a pond which caused the site of Walter's mill to be flooded and made a path he used to carry hay from a meadow near the pond impassable. The watermill was an enduring feature of the manorial landscape at Great Chalfield, with a miller being mentioned in 1439 and 1501-2, a corn mill recorded in 1645 and a corn mill to the east of the manor depicted on a map of 1834 (Figure 3). The mill evidently fell out of use during the 19th century and by 1900 it had been replaced by cottages. (Chettle *et al* 1953, 59-66)

The manorial history of Great Chalfield is complex. It descended through the female line for much of the early medieval period and, from the 13th century onwards it had a long and turbulent association with the de Percy family. During the 15th century it was claimed by several descendants of the de Percy's, eventually falling to Thomas Tropnell, a local lawyer and landowner. This heralded a period of extensive modernization, when Tropnell rebuilt most of the manorial buildings, including the manor house, which was completed by c1480. Following Thomas Tropnell's death, in 1488, his estate continued to be held by the Tropnell family until the Eyre family acquired it by marriage in 1550 (Floyd 2014, 18).

The most notable event during the later history of the manor occurred during the Civil War, when it was occupied by a Parliamentary garrison of 200 men with 100 horses and it endured a brief siege by Royalist troops in April 1645. Following the Civil War, the manor changed hands frequently. In 1649, it was sold for £3,900 to Thomas Hanham of Wimborne, Dorset. It was sold again, in 1673, to John Hall, a wealthy clothier from Bradford-on-Avon. For much of the 18th century it was in the possession of the Dukes of Kingston (whose main estates were in Nottinghamshire) until it was purchased by Robert Neale, a wealthy clothier from Melksham, in 1769. The house was let out when it was owned by the Neale family and similarly by the Fuller family, who bought it from them in 1878. During these periods the buildings fell into disrepair and some were demolished before complete restoration was undertaken by Robert Fuller, from 1905 onwards. In 1943 Robert Fuller gave the house, garden and immediate surroundings to the National Trust but Great Chalfield remains the family home of the Fullers' grandson Robert Floyd (Floyd 2014, 23).





Figure 3: Estate map of Great Chalfield in 1834 showing the manor house and its surroundings (reproduced by kind permission of Mr Robert Floyd)

Figure 4 (inset facing): General survey plan of Hargrove (reduced from 1:1,000)

EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION

Oval mound

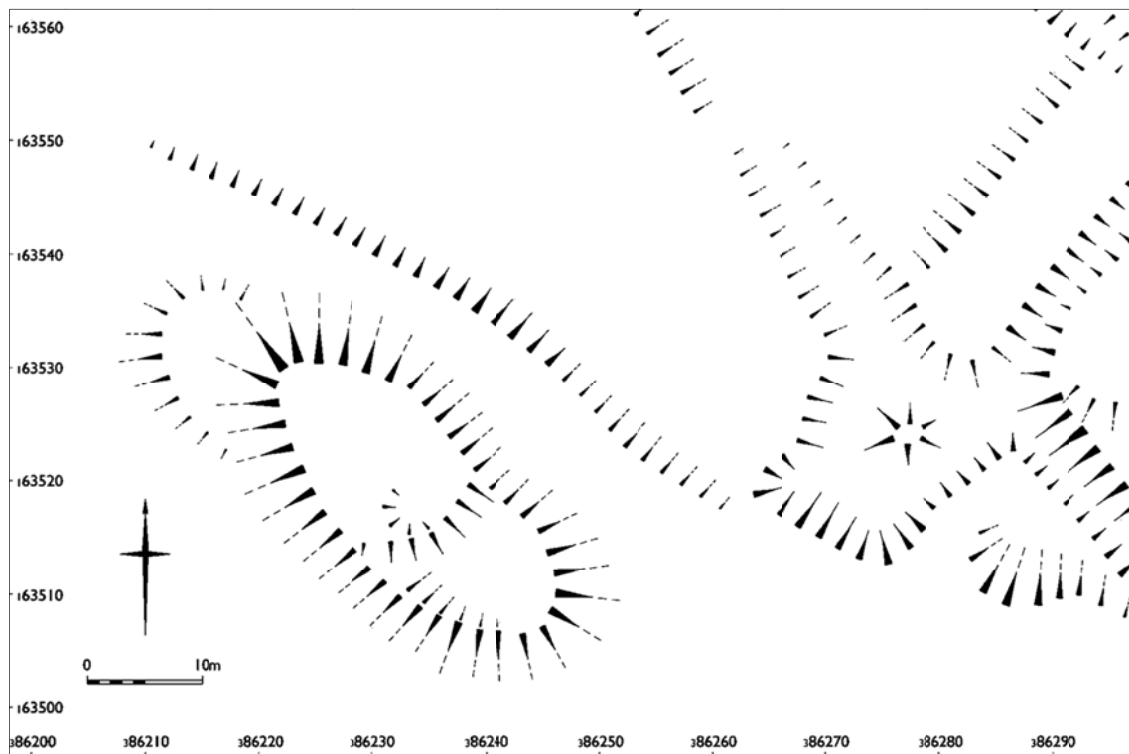


Figure 5: Detail of the oval mound

A spread oval mound (Figure 4, a), which lies close to a spring head and the former course of the Lenton Brook, may be the earliest feature in Watgrove. It measures approximately 45m long x 25m wide and stands up to 0.7m high, yet it has been overlooked in the past due to its indistinct profile and the absence of any surrounding ditch. The date and purpose of the mound is uncertain, but it does not appear to be a natural feature, since it lies isolated on a level floodplain and is not consistent with the surrounding topography. It is possible that it is composed of up-cast material from adjacent water management features (see below). However, its location, its size, plan and general form raise the possibility that it could be the remains of a prehistoric burial mound. The distribution of Neolithic long barrows in Britain shows a noted and widespread focus on rivers and watercourses, a pattern which is reflected in Wiltshire. Similarly, Bronze Age round barrows tended to avoid higher ground in favour of lower slopes. Within the wider West Wiltshire project area, a number of ring ditches have been recorded lying on floodplains in close proximity to water, often at the confluences of rivers and streams, suggesting that a riverine location was significant in their siting (Carpenter & Evans 2014, 14-16). Parallels with the mound at Great Chalfield may be found in ploughed-out features recorded as

cropmarks during the aerial mapping stage of the project. For example, at Frying Pan Farm, c2km to the east of Great Chalfield, a ring ditch and an egg-shaped enclosure may have enclosed a pair of mounds close to a confluence of the River Avon (NRHE 1432364). At Hunt's Hall Farm, c1km south-west of Great Chalfield, a pair of conjoined ring ditches (NRHE 1578511) lie on a slope above a stream. Further examples include: NRHE 1579369 and 157431 (the only round barrow within the project area to survive as an earthwork) (Carpenter and Evans 2014, 14-18).

Pillow mound

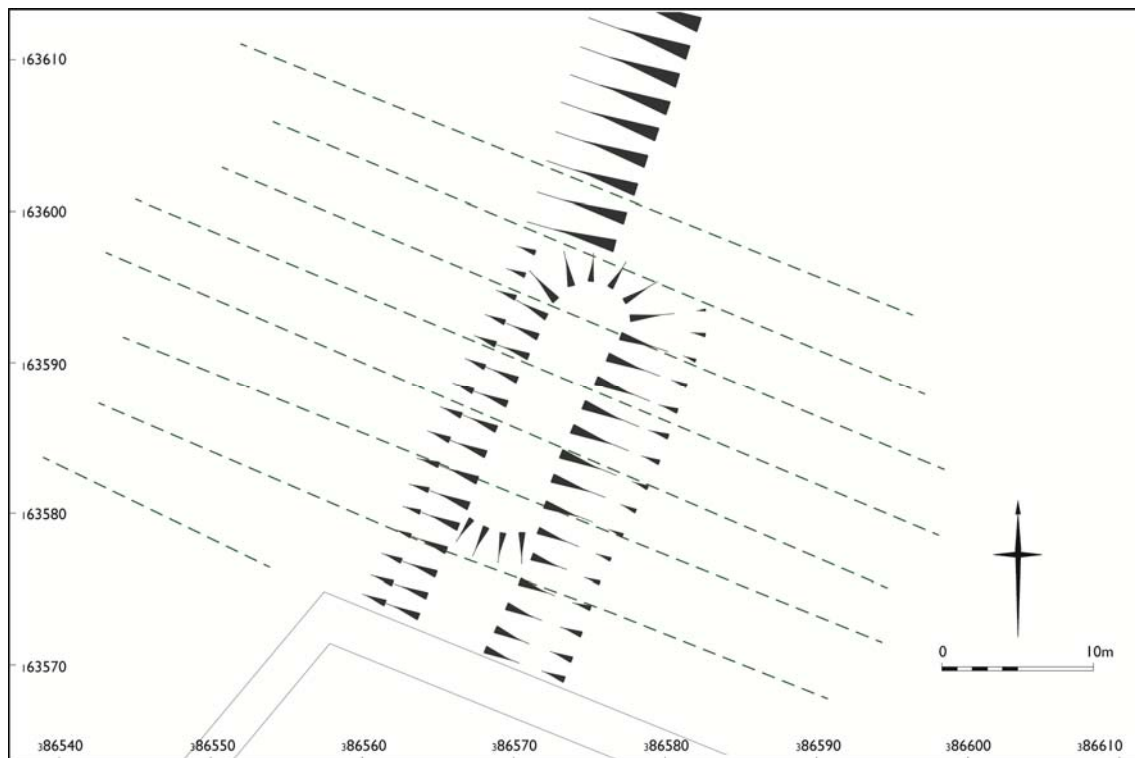


Figure 6: Detail of the pillow mound, lynchets and ridge and furrow in Crooked Wood Lays.

In Crooked Wood Lays, there is a further mound (b on Figure 4). It is sub-rectangular in plan, c30m long x c8m wide and stands approximately 0.3m high. A narrow surrounding ditch is evident on all but its southern end, where it is truncated by the current field boundary. The mound has been constructed on top of a lynchets (c), which is a prominent feature bisecting the field and the ridge-and-furrow overlies both lynchets and mound (see below pp12-13).

The existence of this mound was already known by the National Trust but it was not recorded in the National Record of Historic Environment (AMIE) and its purpose and origins were not clear. Its sub-rectangular plan and its general form are highly characteristic of a pillow mound, which would have formed part

of a rabbit warren of medieval or post-medieval date. Construction of pillow mounds on top of former field boundaries appears to have been common practice and is seen elsewhere, for example on Minchinhampton Common and Barrington, Gloucestershire (Smith 2002, 28). This earthwork relationship clearly demonstrates the antiquity of the field lynchet, which must have been disused by the time the warren was created. The former existence of a rabbit warren in the vicinity is confirmed by the presence of five field names containing the name 'Conygree', immediately to the west, on the estate map of 1794 (Figure 7).

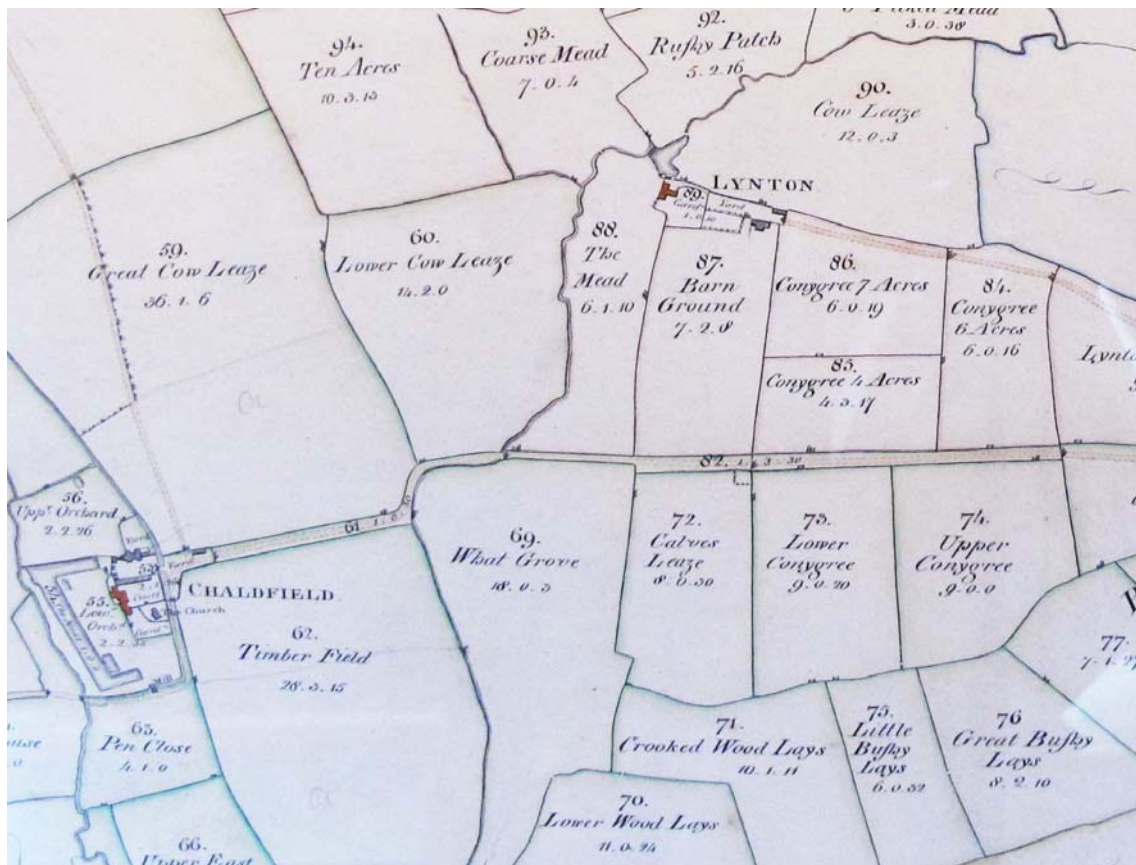


Figure 7: A Map of the Maner and Parish of Great Chaldfield in the county of Wilts belonging to Miss Grace-Elizabeth Neale 1794 (6 chains to one inch). North is to the right of the image (reproduced by kind permission of the National Trust).

Possible settlement

In the far eastern tip of Watgrove, which extends as an elongated spur, a small complex of earthworks (d on Figure 4) was discovered lying close to the Lenton Brook. These earthworks comprise two well-defined sub-rectangular platforms (Figure 8, a), the remains of three larger platforms (Figure 8, b) with short lengths of hollowed access-ways (Figure 8, c) running between them. All are set

into the natural west-facing slope. The complex is bounded on its northern side by a 0.7m high scarp (Figure 8, d) and an equally substantial lynchet (Figure 8, e) (on its western side. An elongated sub-rectangular mound (potentially the remains of a further pillow mound) (Figure 8, f) partially overlies the lynchet and a veteran oak pollard (Figure 9) stands at its southern end.

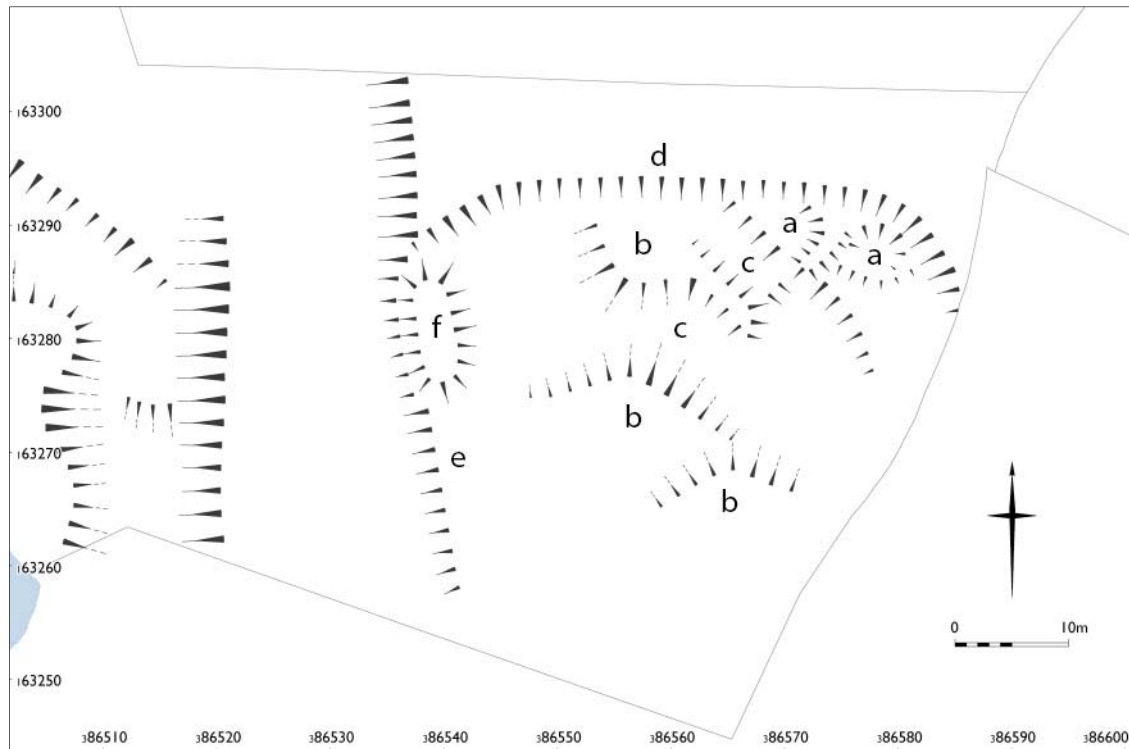


Figure 8: Possible settlement earthworks in the eastern tip of Watgrove.

Water management features

A complex of partially disused water management features is concentrated along the former course of the Lenton Brook (e) which runs through Watgrove. The Brook has been diverted from this original course into an artificial channel skirting the southern boundary of the field. When this was done and the reasons for it are not certain, but it occurred before the earliest detailed map of the area, dated 1794. A shallow channel (f), c0.2m deep and now dry, runs inside the northern-western boundary of the field before joining a further channel at right angles. Its western end was not traced beyond the boundary of Watgrove, but it appears to lead from the point where the Lenton Brook has been diverted to its new course along the field's southern boundary, so it is likely to represent a further part of the original course of the stream through Watgrove. It continues south-east until it meets four other radiating channels at (g). One of these channels, (h), by-passes a further section of the dry stream course but re-joins it after flowing through a sheep dip. The remains of the sheep dip, which was dry

at the time of the survey, remain as a well-defined sub-square depression with two of its sides riveted by dry-stone walling. Further masonry structures in Watgrove are stone bridges which provide access across the water channels. The date of these bridges is extremely difficult to determine, however the position of the main crossing points have remained unchanged since at least 1794.



Figure 9: Oak pollard close to possible settlement earthworks at Great Chalfield.

Vestiges of smaller channels over much of the field may be the result of later sub-surface drainage (see Figure 13). The field continued to be the subject of intensive water management schemes into, at least, the 19th century (Figure 13), although the purpose of the multiplicity of channels and drains is not obvious today. The alignment of channel 'f' suggests that it brought water from the Lenton Brook onto the field and that via a complex of further channels, it ultimately supplied the sheep dip. This complex of features utilizing the old stream course, including the old sheep dip, was either intended to be filled with water periodically or it pre-dates the diversion of the Brook. It is possible that some of the earthworks functioned as a crude form of water meadow, with the re-aligned section of the Brook serving as a main drain. Although the system bears no resemblance to the complex bedworks found in the chalk valleys of Wiltshire, the field has been identified as a water meadow by local sources (eg Bradford-on-Avon Museum) and Great Chalfield has a potentially significant

connection by way of its association with the Duke of Kingston (above p4) who's agent is known to have constructed water meadows on the Duke's main estate in Nottinghamshire (Lowe 1798, 102).



Figure 10: The remains of the sheep-dip in Watgrove.



Figure 11: A stone bridge crossing a water channel in Watgrove



Figure 12: A bridge over the re-aligned Lenton Brook which forms the southern boundary of Hargrove.



Figure 13: Extract from an estate map of 1834, showing details of drainage work in Watgrove and surrounding fields (reproduced by kind permission of Mr Robert Floyd).

Ridge and furrow

The latest phase of earthworks in Crooked Wood Lays is extensive narrow ridge and furrow. This consists of well-defined straight ridges crossing the field lynchet and the pillow mound described above. In the western half of the field this is aligned at an approximate right angle to the drains depicted in 1834, indicating that it might have been the result of post-drainage cultivation using steam ploughing.

METHODOLOGY

Earthworks were surveyed at a scale of 1:1000 using Trimble R8 survey grade GNSS receivers. The GNSS data was processed using Trimble's Geomatics Office software. The position of the base station was adjusted to the National Grid Transformation OSTN02 via the Trimble VRS Now Network RTK delivery service. This uses the Ordnance Survey's GNSS correction network (OSNet) and gives a stated accuracy of 0.010–0.015m per point. This data was downloaded and transferred into AutoCAD 2008. The survey plot was completed in the field using graphical survey methods and the digital data was supplemented by graphical survey where tree cover precluded the use of GNSS. A digital hachured plan of the final survey was produced in AutoCAD software and completed using Adobe Illustrator.

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