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# Verlucio and Environs Project: Square double-ditched enclosure at 'The Waste', Bowood, Calne Without, Wiltshire

Mark Bowden

Discovery, Innovation and Science in the Historic Environment



**Verlucio and Environs Project:  
Square double-ditched enclosure at ‘The Waste’,  
Bowood, Calne Without, Wiltshire:  
earthwork survey**

Mark Bowden

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## SUMMARY

The surviving earthwork portions of a large double-ditched square enclosure on the Greensand ridge known as 'The Waste' at Bowood were surveyed. The site lies immediately to the west of the Nuthills Roman villa, which has underlying Iron Age enclosures. A possible Roman or late Iron Age date for the square enclosure, which is overlain by a medieval or later boundary bank, is suggested.

## CONTRIBUTORS

Survey was undertaken by the author and Olaf Bayer, who also prepared the drawn illustrations. Fiona Small carried out the assessment and mapping from aerial photographs and lidar, shown in Fig 3. Fig 6 was taken by Damian Grady. This report has benefitted from comments by Jonathan Last, Andy Payne and Helen Winton.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Historic England is grateful to Marcus Lee of the Bowood Estate for kindly arranging access to the site for survey.

## ARCHIVE LOCATION

Historic England, The Engine House, Swindon SN2 2EH

## DATE OF SURVEY

December 2018.

## CONTACT DETAILS

Historic England, The Engine House, Swindon SN2 2EH  
01793 414600; [archive@HistoricEngland.org.uk](mailto:archive@HistoricEngland.org.uk)

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## INTRODUCTION

A large double-ditched square enclosure to the west of the Nuthills Roman villa was first recognised on aerial photographs (Last *et al* 2016, 47, figs 25 and 26) and was subsequently investigated by geophysical survey (Linford *et al* 2018). It measures approximately 100m across internally and about 160m externally; the corners appear to be sharply angled. No entrances are apparent. The site is recorded as number 1578150 in the National Record of the Historic Environment.

The enclosure is centred at ST 9630 6845, to the north of Sandy Lane and the George Inn (Fig 1). It occupies the top of a ridge of Lower Greensand at about 160-165m OD and lies in two arable fields divided by a narrow strip of woodland running approximately north-north-west to south-south-east. It was noted during the surveys mentioned above that lidar indicated the survival of part of the enclosure as earthworks within the woodland strip. This was confirmed by a field visit in April 2018 and survey of these earthworks was undertaken in December of the same year.

Parts of the southern and northern corners of the enclosure survive as low fragmentary banks. At the northern corner there is also a trace of the external ditch. Both earthworks are overlain by a slightly sinuous boundary bank of probably medieval or post-medieval date which runs along the south-western edge of the woodland. Both are lost among disturbance and dumping along the north-eastern edge of the woodland adjacent to a track; however, slight scarps along the line of the track indicate the approximate position of the outward facing slopes of the enclosure bank. More recent lidar coverage also suggests very slight earthwork survival even within the ploughed areas.

*Fig 1 (following page): Location map. Contains digital surface model data derived from 90m SRTM topography data courtesy of CGIAR <http://srtm.csi.cgiar.org>; and 2m photogrammetry ©Bluesky International Ltd; Getmapping PLC. Rivers data derived from OS data © Crown Copyright and database right 2019. All rights reserved*





## DESCRIPTION

The letters in the description refer to the survey drawing, Fig 2. A small part of the eastern arm of the enclosure survives as an earthwork (a), up to 0.4m high, close to its south corner. At the foot of this bank is a slight oval hollow, probably a tree throw; there are several similar features throughout the area of woodland but these were not surveyed. The outer face of the enclosure bank is also discernible as a slight scarp (b) about 0.2m high in the track immediately to the north. Between (a) and (b) the earthwork is obscured but may still exist under leaf mould and debris. The corner of the enclosure is directly overlain by the later bank at this point. It is noticeable that there is a gap in this bank (c), approximately where the outer ditch of the square enclosure lies. To the north-west of this point, for a length of about 50m, the bank is a substantial earthwork up to 0.5 m high. Beyond this it fades and though still intermittently visible is not readily surveyable until close to the northern corner of the enclosure.

The north corner of the enclosure bank survives as a substantial earthwork (d), up to 0.5m high, in the centre of the woodland strip. Part of the outer ditch is also visible (e) with an external scarp up to 0.3m high. That the inner ditch does not survive anywhere as an earthwork is perhaps explained by the suggestion from both aerial and geophysical survey that it is generally slighter than the outer ditch (Last *et al* 2016, fig 25; Linford *et al* 2018, 4: Figs 3 and 4). A small scarp in the track (f) marks the outer face of the bank but, as at the southern end, this is separated from the earthworks (d) and (e) by a zone of disturbance and dumping. As at the south corner, the enclosure bank is overlain by the later boundary bank but here the relationship is not so clear. This bank is a very substantial feature where it overlies the enclosure bank but fades rapidly to the north-west. It is notable that there are some mature holly trees on the boundary bank but these cluster at the points where it crosses the enclosure earthworks.

A spread but quite substantial scarp is visible in the track at (g) but this has no clear connection with the other earthworks. There are other slight irregularities in the track (not surveyed), probably caused by the spreading of rubble to fill ruts.

The most recently available lidar (Fig 5) indicates that there is survival of the enclosure bank as a very slight earthwork in the fields to either side of the woodland strip but this could not be discerned on the ground at the time of survey, despite conditions being good for observation. The field to the south-west, which is shown as allotments on historic OS mapping (2nd edition 1:2500; late 19th century to early 20th century), appears remarkably flat; some undulations are visible in the field to the north-east, especially the hollow of the old sand pit shown on historic OS mapping (3rd edition 1:10,560; early 20th-century), but none of them can confidently be identified as being part of the square enclosure. The lidar evidence suggests that the enclosure bank was very substantial and might have occupied the whole area between the inner and outer ditches. This is not reflected in the surviving earthworks in the woodland strip, where the bank seems to lie immediately behind the outer ditch and to occupy only about half the available space between the ditches.

## DISCUSSION

The square enclosure has been interpreted as a temple enclosure of Romano-Celtic type, though admitted to be rather large (Last *et al* 2016, 47), connected with the Nuthills villa immediately to the east, though it has been suggested that the whole Nuthills complex might be a religious site analogous to Uley or Lydney (Linford *et al* 2018, 9). There might therefore possibly be a temple building (square, circular or polygonal) at or near the centre of the enclosure and this should fall within the woodland strip. No earthworks were observed in this area except for probable tree throw holes and other slight indications of relatively recent disturbance and dumping. However, the temple building by no means always falls at the centre of the temenos. The enclosure occupies a locally elevated position; it is about 10m higher than the Nuthills villa and would have been a conspicuous feature in the landscape.

Analogous sites are rare. The square multi-ditched and walled temenos at Gosbecks, Colchester, looks similar in some respects but is smaller at 96m overall (Lewis 1966, 132-3, fig 112, pl III); this is probably, in part at least, a pre-Roman site. Other square temenos enclosures, as at Titsey, Surrey, and Woodeaton, Oxfordshire, tend to be much smaller and surrounded by single walls (*ibid*, 134, figs 120, 121).

An alternative might be to view this enclosure as a late Iron Age rather than Roman religious site, perhaps related to the continental class of monuments referred to as *Viereckschanzen* (Murray *nd*), of which Gosbecks may be an example and Robin Hood's Arbour, Maidenhead, another (Cotton 1961). Another possible parallel is the relatively small square double-ditched 1st-century AD (later triple-ditched) enclosure at Lee's Rest, Charlbury (Payne 1993) but this is only about 40m across internally. A further example is a well-preserved sub-square earthwork enclosure in Savernake Forest, which appears to be overlain by the Roman road from Cunetio (Mildenhall) to Winchester (Crutchley *et al* 2009, 19-20, fig 9). It has been suggested that the square or rectangular enclosures found within late Iron Age complexes in southern Wiltshire and north Dorset are also related to *Viereckschanzen* (Corney 1989, 115, 125, figs 2, 4 and 6). There are differences between the Bowood enclosure and the continental sites, which tend to be single-ditched for instance (as do the other Wessex examples discussed by Corney). However, another small piece of evidence in support of the idea that the enclosure at Bowood is broadly of the *Viereckschanze* family is the large pit-type anomaly found by geophysical survey inside the north-eastern corner of the enclosure (Linford *et al* 2018, 4, feature m10); *Viereckschanzen* frequently incorporate deep pits or shafts close to their perimeters (Murray *nd*), as did the excavated rectangular enclosure at Blagdon Copse, dated to the 1st century BC-1st century AD (Corney 1989, 112-15). If a late Iron Age date is accepted it could also imply a possible connection between this enclosure at Bowood and the 'banjo' enclosures underlying the adjacent Nuthills complex (Linford *et al* 2018, fig 15); the square or rectangular enclosures at Blagdon Copse and Gussage Hill are also associated with 'banjos' (Corney 1989, 112, 120, figs 2 and 6).



There is some controversy concerning the function of *Viereckschanzen*. On the Continent it was long believed that they were religious ‘cult’ centres but it has recently been suggested that they are high status domestic dwelling sites (Murray nd); in Britain the former explanation seems to be still accepted but whether the British sites are really related to the continental ones is still not firmly established.

The remarkable multi-ditched and possibly palisaded rectangular enclosure at Fison Way, Thetford, is another possible parallel; this site measured about 222 by 165m overall and is dated to the early to mid-1st century AD (Gregory 1991) and therefore of similar date to the enclosures mentioned above. The plethora of small pit-type anomalies between the ditches at Bowood (Linford *et al* 2018, 4, figs 13 and 15, features m8 and m9) might echo in some way the multiple post holes between the ditches at Fison Way, though the clear linearity of the arrangement of postholes there is not apparent at Bowood. The presence of a broad bank between the ditches at Bowood suggests further difference in detail compared with Fison Way.

It must be admitted that the above discussion is speculative, as there is as yet no absolute dating evidence for the enclosure at Bowood and the only relative dating evidence is that it pre-dates the boundary bank, which is likely to be of medieval or post-medieval date. Nevertheless, a late Iron Age or Roman date for the enclosure seems most likely; although square and rectangular earthwork enclosures of medieval date are not unknown they are almost invariably smaller and less elaborate than this example.

The ridge on which the Bowood enclosure sits is known as ‘The Waste’ and historically as ‘Abbot’s Waste’. In 1260 this parcel of land, which was formerly part of Chippenham Forest, was granted by King Henry III to Lacock Abbey. After the suppression of the monasteries it was granted to Sir William Sharrington and descended in his family until the mid-18th century. In about 1618 King James I imparked Bowood, including Abbot’s Waste but without compounding with its owners. The issue was resolved and by 1763 Abbot’s Waste was divided into six closes, one of which contained an agricultural building (VCH 2002, 29, 117-18, 122). Historic OS maps show an L-shaped building with a walled yard enclosing a well as ‘Abbot’s Waste Barn’ (1st-3rd editions, 1:10,560 and 1:2500; mid-19th century to mid-20th century) close to the northern corner of the enclosure (Fig 6). The ‘waste’ element of the place name suggests that this ridge, which is a northerly extension of Chittoe Heath, was an area of communal grazing land. However, after the imparkment in c1618 no right of common is known to have existed. In 1769 Abbot’s Waste was sold to the Earl of Shelburne and became fully part of Bowood Park (VCH 2002, 122).

The boundary of Calne Without parish seems more-or-less to coincide with the boundary of Bowood Park to the north of Sandy Lane (VCH 2002, maps on 28 and 117). The boundary bank which overlies the earthwork enclosure might therefore be the parish boundary or the park pale, or both. The parochial status of Bowood was disputed for a long time and in 1709 Bowood Park and the adjacent hamlets were declared to be an extra-parochial liberty. The boundary may not have been established until a relatively late date, though it is shown on the earliest OS map editions. Calne parish was divided into Calne Within and Calne Without in 1890

(VCH 2002, 29-30). Park pale banks were normally accompanied by an internal ditch; not only is there no sign of a ditch here but the surviving earthworks of the earlier enclosure show that there cannot have been one.



*Fig 6: The site from the south-south-east; the location of 'Abbot's Waste Barn' is within the small brown land parcel at top centre: ©Historic England Archive 27725-039, 12th-July-2013*

The surviving evidence shows that the earthwork enclosure would have been a visible feature in the landscape until recently; it is possible that its corners were used as markers for the laying out of the boundary bank but the significance – if any – of the stands of mature holly where these features coincide is uncertain.

## METHOD STATEMENT

Survey was undertaken using a Trimble S7 Total Station Theodolite (TST) to create a base line to the north-east and four resected survey stations through the centre of the woodland. The ends of the base line were fixed to the National Grid using a Trimble R8 survey-grade Global Navigation Satellite System receiver. All detail was surveyed using the TST.

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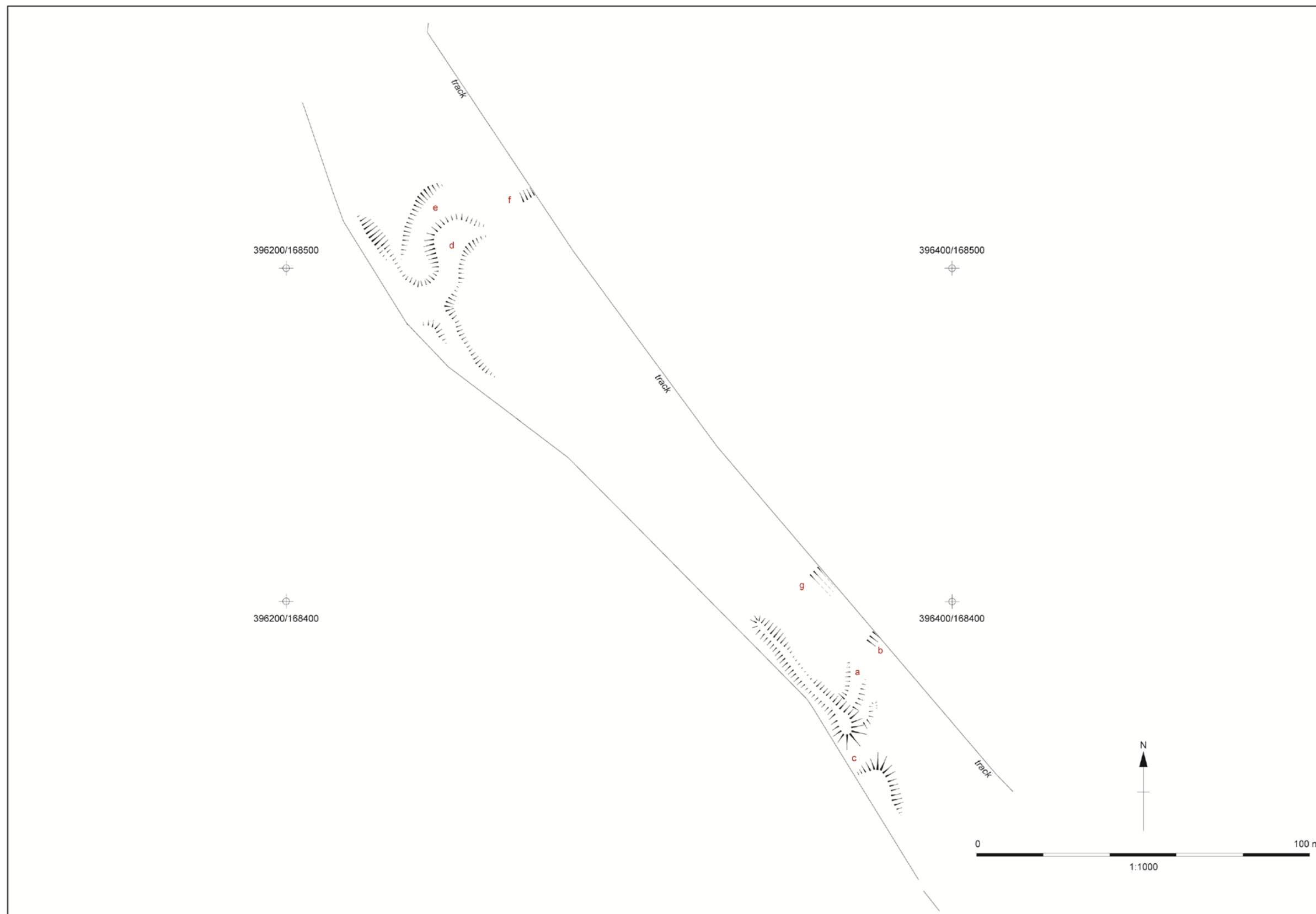
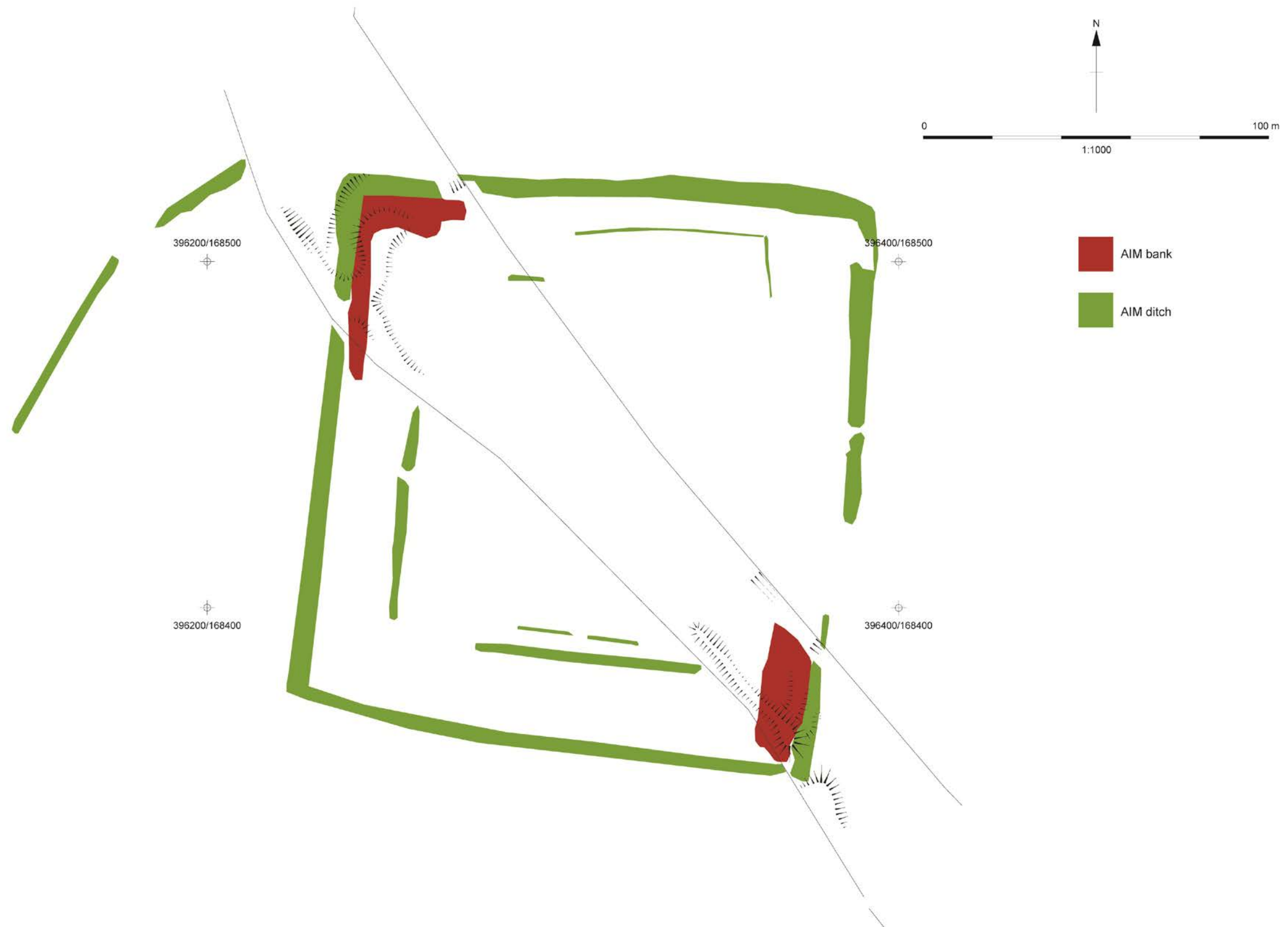


Fig 2: Survey drawing





*Fig 3: Earthworks overlaid on aerial mapping plot by Aerial Investigation & Mapping*

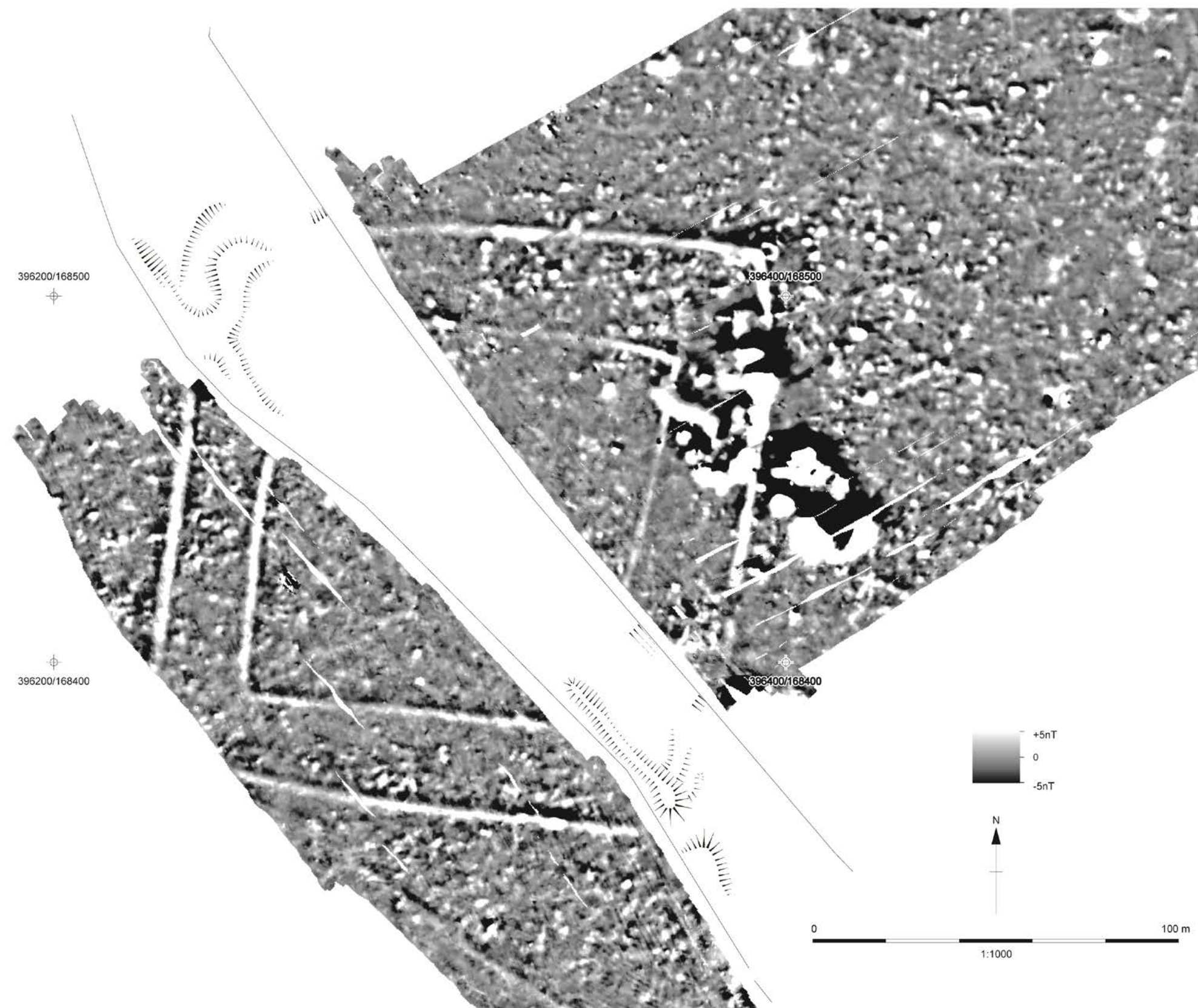


Fig 4: Earthworks and magnetometer survey results (after Linford et al 2018, fig 7)





*Fig 5: Earthworks and lidar: hillshade model derived from 1m lidar digital terrain model © Environment Agency copyright/database right 2019. All rights reserved*



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