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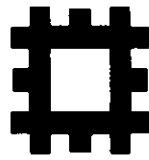
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Okehampton Military Camp, Okehampton Hamlets, Devon

M. Fletcher, S. Probert

DRF 1

SURVEY REPORT



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Okehampton Military Camp, Okehampton Hamlets, Devon An archaeological survey by English Heritage

County:	Devon
District:	West Devon
Parish:	Okehampton Hamlets
OS Map No:	SX 59 SE
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Surveyed:	October-December 2001
Report by:	M. Fletcher, S. Probert
Surveyors:	M. Fletcher, S. Probert
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INTRODUCTION

This report details the results of an archaeological field survey of the features visible within the inner and the outer perimeters of Okehampton Military Camp. The survey was undertaken between October and December 2001 by the English Heritage Archaeological Investigation Team based at Exeter, Devon.



Fig. 1. Air Photograph showing Okehampton Camp in 1946. © Crown Copyright.

DESCRIPTION

Okehampton Camp, an active military training base, occupies the exposed north and north-eastern slopes of a moorland spur located between 335m and 373m above OD. It comprises the main occupation area and an outer buffer zone. The original camp built in 1893-94 (Artillery Ms map, 1933) covers approximately 23 hectares of sloping ground. It has been subjected to several phases of partial reconstruction - this coupled with subsequent additions and demolitions have effaced a great deal of the old land surface. Sub-surface features have been disturbed by ground-works, including an extensive water supply and foul drainage systems as well as the provision of camping grounds and hard standing areas. The outer zone (of approximately 24 hectares in total) consists of a belt of largely undeveloped moorland on the north, east and south sides of the camp. It has been put to a number of uses, principally water management and picketing for horses, however, with the exception of the eastern part which was originally occupied by nine blocks of stables and ancillary buildings it has escaped large-scale surface disruption.

The camp occupies a small portion of a rectilinear 19th-century pastoral field system which itself overlies a well-preserved medieval arable landscape. The majority of the remains within the camp relate to this earlier period which, by inference from documentary sources, seems to have been relatively short-lived. Traces of two structures as well as vestiges of the field boundaries and cultivation ridges lie amongst the widely spaced military buildings. The medieval element is visible as low banks and scarps interspersed with the fragmentary remains of narrow ridge and furrow ploughing. The surviving cultivation ridges are best preserved in the southern half of the camp and also in the outer zone immediately to the north and south of the main part of the camp.

While there is no surface evidence of activity earlier than the medieval period within the camp the outer zone possesses a well-defined prehistoric sepulchral monument.



Fig. 2. Donn's map of Devon 1765.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORICAL AND CARTOGRAPHIC EVIDENCE

Okehampton Camp lies wholly within the boundary of the former Okehampton Park which was emparked at sometime between 1296 and 1306 (Fig. 2). The emparking of some 1660 acres of the north-western facing hillside is concluded to be the reason why the farmsteads and fields were abandoned. Austin (1980) describes this area of relict earthworks thus: 'a fossilised medieval agrarian landscape extending for about 2km in a band 1km wide between 275m and 400m OD along the north-west flank of the moor. At least seven deserted farmsteads or small hamlets lie within a contemporary field system of about 80 ha. A network of trackways running between the enclosed fields linked the farmsteads and provided access both to the moorland pastures above the settlement and to the valley below'.

The Tithe Map indicates that in 1841 the area was unenclosed common land; no earthworks or features are depicted on the map so although most of the medieval field boundaries were

extant, none were in use. A rectilinear layout of substantial field hedges and drystone walls was imposed on parts of this ancient landscape at some time before 1886 (Ordnance Survey 1:2500 scale First Edition plan). This Ordnance Survey (OS) plan reveals that the area currently occupied by the camp was already defined and was apparently in use by the military. Eight military boundary stones delimit this area which contained a few widely spaced buildings. In addition the plan depicts a number of banks forming part of the extreme south-eastern part of the medieval field pattern and a 19th-century field boundary. The OS Second Edition 1:2500 plan dated 1906 (revised in 1924) shows the early phase in the development of the camp (Fig. 3).

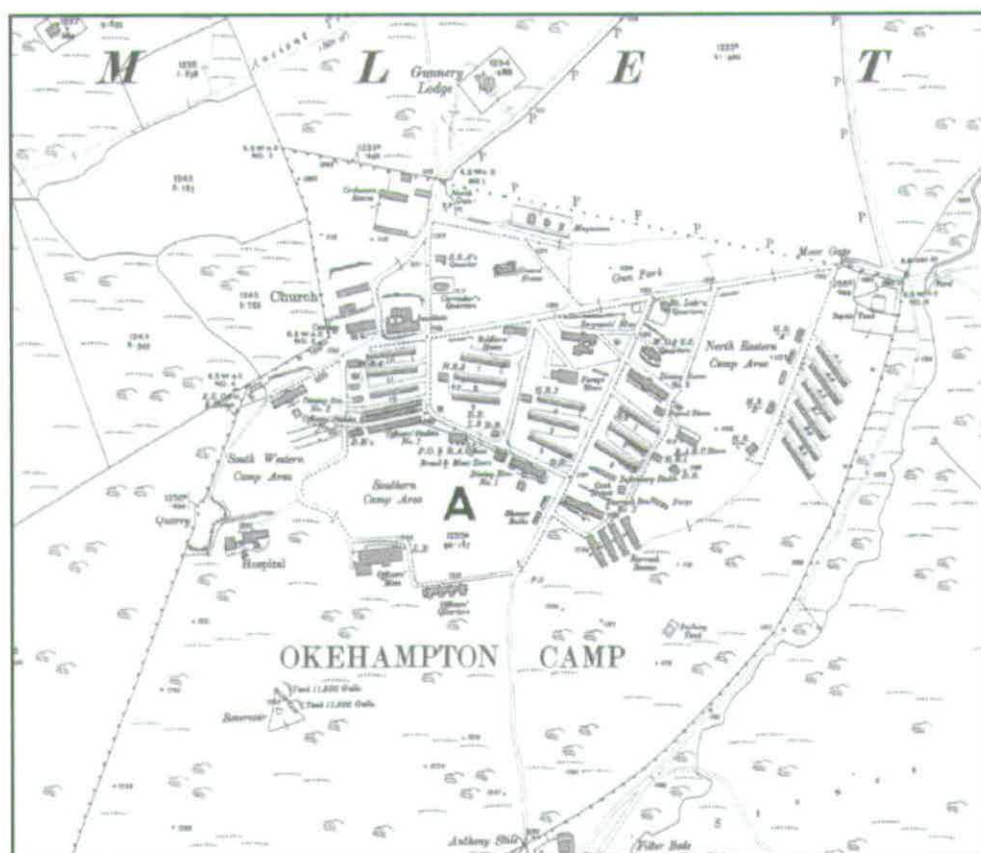


Fig. 3. Ordnance Survey map 1906, revised in 1924.

THE SURFACE REMAINS

The Prehistoric Period

A previously unrecorded well-defined, but disturbed prehistoric sepulchral monument lies in the former picketting area midway between St Michael's Bungalow and Moor Gate. It survives as a flat-topped, apparently earthen mound some 20m by 18m and 0.8m high. The inner core has been dug into, perhaps the product of an unrecorded excavation. Spoil from the interior has been dumped on the southern crest and also the edge of the mound. There is no evidence of any stones or boulders within the mound although three large boulders lie on the south-eastern side. A smaller stony mound, which is almost certainly a prehistoric cairn, lies in farmland on the opposite side of the Moor Gate road. These features are unusual survivors within a cultivated area; neither appears to have been ploughed thus supporting the theory that the earlier medieval occupation of this area was relatively short lived.

There is no evidence for contemporary settlement activity within the holding though Bronze Age hut circles and linear field systems are visible 1km to the north-east on the northern flank of East Hill.

The Medieval Period to Emparkment

The general hiatus of human activity between the end of the second millennium BC and the end of the first millennium AD which is apparent over most of Dartmoor is also present in this area of Okehampton Common. The moorland fringes are ready testament to the flurry of agrarian activity that took place during the 13th century when farming reached new heights - in all senses of the word - on Dartmoor. Only during the late 18th and early 19th centuries were farms established at higher altitudes and in more adverse conditions on Dartmoor. Traditionally ascribed to population pressure and an increased need for agricultural products this period of expansion was rarely consolidated and was immediately followed by a period of contraction. The current interface between farmland and open moorland is often marked by the remains of abandoned medieval field systems and small settlements.

Abandonment at Okehampton appears to have been accelerated by its emparkment (above) though there is evidence from earlier surveys (RCHME field survey, 1992) that limited agricultural activity carried on, at least in the west of the area, into the 14th century.

Three types of agricultural activity survive:

- Structures
- Field systems
- Cultivation strips

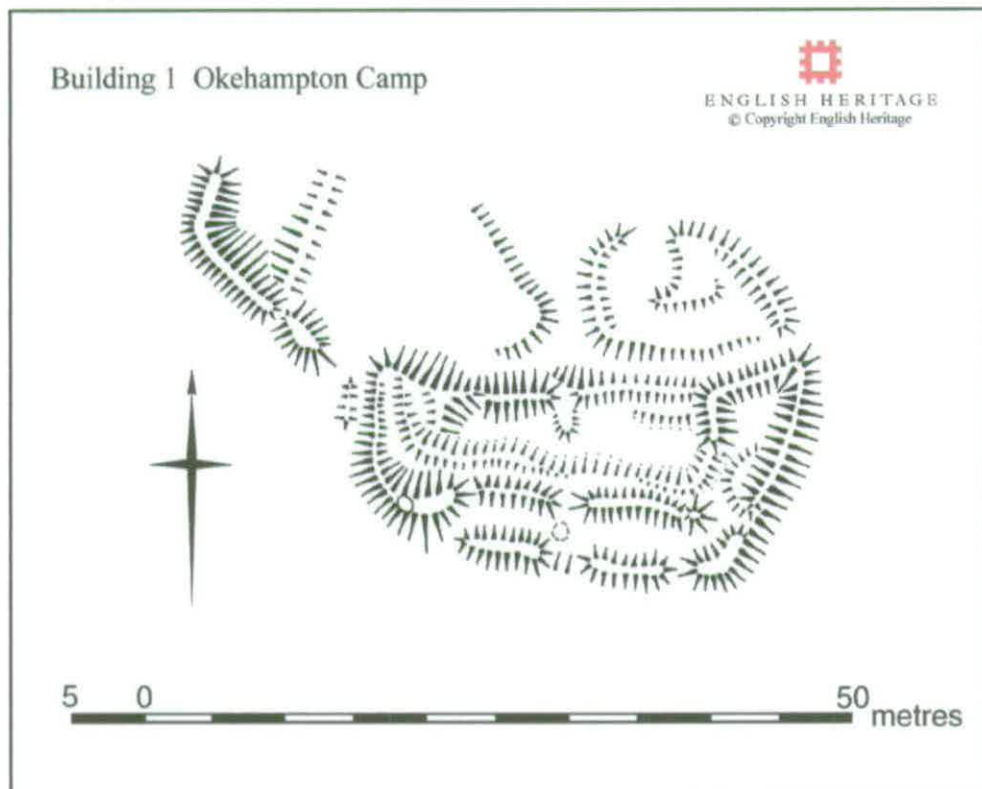


Fig. 4. 1:500 scale English Heritage survey of 'building 1'.

Structures

Building 1 lies immediately south of the officer's quarters. It was located on APs and described as two longhouses by R.Daggett in 1979 (Sites and Monuments Record: SX59 SE 46). It occupies an exposed position - open to the prevailing south westerlies - at 374m above OD and now comprises a narrow sub-rectangular structure, which has a second bank along its southern and western sides. A denuded sub-circular feature of uncertain function is attached to the northern side. The detailed survey (Fig. 4) reveals that the structure has been disturbed and

almost certainly refashioned as some banks overlie others. The basic outline measures 20m by a maximum 6m wide internally with turf-covered earth and stone banks on average 2m wide and 0.5m high. The interior, which is apparently raised at the west end, and also some of the banks, have been disturbed by later activity though the date and nature of this disturbance are unknown. There are no clearly defined entrance gaps although a path cuts through the centre of the structure reminiscent in form to a longhouse.

Although little survives in the area it is clearly linked to at least one earthen bank - part of a contemporary field system.

Building 2 is bisected by the northern boundary fence and consists of a slight hollow measuring 2.2m by 3.1m inside the camp with an additional 3.3m of the structure outside. The interior and full extent of the structure are largely obscured by debris resulting from the construction of the obstacle course. This building is an outlying element of a well-defined settlement investigated and recorded by Linehan (site 53A). An embanked trackway leading to this settlement is cut by the 19th-century field system and also by the camp boundary fence such that only a short length of bank, formerly the eastern side of the track, lies within the camp.

It is obvious that building 1 is an integral part of the pre-emparkment landscape, not only is it linked to a field boundary but it is approached by one of the trackways that service the various settlements within the field system. The role of this structure is uncertain. Whilst superficially resembling a longhouse it stands in isolation in an extremely exposed position. Solitary buildings are without parallel in this type of landscape and it most likely represents the surviving element of a settlement formerly occupying the site of the Officer's Quarters and HQ building. Its function, perhaps defined by its exposed location and aided by analogy with the excavated structures at Meldon Quarry, is probably that of an outbuilding (Austin, D 1989) rather than a dwelling. One of the Meldon structures measured 11.6m by 3.8m internally and was interpreted as a dairy or a building used for storage. Two other buildings (each internally 11m long) are thought to have been sheds or barns. The nearest parallel in terms of size is the rectilinear enclosure of unknown function within one of the hamlets in the Okehampton Park group (site 58).

Building 2 is perhaps easier to interpret. Its diminutive size traditionally precludes its use as a dwelling and its proximity to the well-preserved settlement to the north of the camp suggests that it too is an ancillary building, perhaps a barn or a dairy.

The Field System

Parts of the camp overlie the medieval field pattern and although much has been effaced enough survives to provide a general impression of the type and form of enclosure.

The boundaries are almost without exception defined by cornditches, turf and stone banks with a ditch on one side. The banks measure on average 1.5m wide and, within the outer zone, stand around 0.5m high. The ditches vary between 0.8m and 1.3m wide and are about 0.4m deep. Within the camp it is rare for the banks to be more than 0.3m high and the ditches are universally absent – almost certainly having been infilled.

The field system is best described as agglomerated; the fields vary in size and are of irregular and inconsistent shape. There are two major influences on the field pattern not just within Okehampton Camp but within Okehampton Park as a whole, the southern park boundary and access routes.

While Donn's map (Fig. 2) is somewhat small scale and generalised it depicts the southern Park boundary as following the line of the Moor Brook and extending on this alignment across

Okehampton Common. It then turns to the north-west above the West Okement River. It seems highly likely that part of its course is fossilised by the wall which forms the boundary of the southern zone of the camp from Moor Gate around to the south-western corner of the holding. There is no ground evidence in the now unenclosed moorland to the south of the camp to suggest the former presence of the park boundary. While the park boundary is specifically linked to the establishment of the Deer Park in 1296 -1306 it is obvious from the ground evidence that the medieval field system that predates the park conforms to the latter's southern edge. The fields fitted into the rather smooth outline of the park and there is no evidence to suggest that they ever extended beyond the current southern edge of the enclosed land. This is in direct contrast to other areas of abandoned medieval settlement and cultivation on Dartmoor which, without exception, present a very irregular boundary with the open moorland.

This presents two possibilities. The first is that the medieval settlements and their associated field systems were 'planted' in a defined area (later to be cleared for use as a Deer Park) in an attempt to foster agriculture during the 13th century. The second possibility is that the settlements were not cleared after the area was emparked and they were allowed to continue to develop their field systems up to the park boundary during at least part of the 14th century.

The second influence on field patterns is the need to provide access routes both between the individual settlements and from the Okehampton hinterland to the open moor which during the medieval period was a valuable source of summer grazing. The trackways that traverse the area possess the same irregular traits as the field boundaries and meander from moorgate to settlement. On average 9m wide they do not possess the distinctive hollowing at the verges and central raised area suggestive of great or prolonged use. Access was, however, an important issue and would have been addressed during the planning of the field systems. It is interesting that within the camp the orientation and positioning of several of the roads appear to have been influenced by the underlying medieval field pattern.

The cultivation strips

Austin (1980) identified three types of medieval ploughing within the former boundary of the Okehampton Park. Two are represented within the camp while the third may exist immediately to the south and west:

- Type 1 comprises varying numbers of narrow (sic) ridges, which lie clustered in long units defined by low banks. These clusters usually lie across the contour and curve away westwards at the downslope end in a reversed 'J' shape.
- Type 2 comprises large rectangular nearly square groups of narrow, straight ridge and furrow. The groups are set at right angles to each other and vary from 100m to 270m in length.
- Type 3 are represented by long curving sweeps of narrow ridge and furrow which lie generally along the contours but are less formalised than the other types and can be up to 320m long. In places the curves end on the downslope against the lynchets.

The type 1 form is clearly defined in the south-western part of the camp. Here ridges are visible as four, possibly more broad and substantial and earthen banks or baulks. They are on average 0.5m high and 7 wide and are oriented north-south with a slight 'J' curve on their downhill sides. This area has apparently not been developed by the military except as a temporary camping ground. Several small linear earthworks branching off the larger baulks may provide witness to this use. Aerial photographs reveal that in about 1985 trees were planted on narrow ridges to create two small plantations. The eastern plantation of eucalyptus trees has subsequently failed but the western plantation of Scots pine is now established (Fig. 3).

*Fig. 5. Air photograph showing the new plantations and building 1.
(Photograph Frances Griffith 1985.
©Copyright Devon County Council.)*



The type 2 form is visible as fragmentary ridges in the northern part of the camp - notably in the area of the obstacle course. The vestigial cultivation ridges scattered within the camp occur on differing orientations, this would suggest that a number of separate plots existed. The boundaries or headlands of these plots have been effaced or are obscured. The former area of cultivation now clustered on and around the playing field in the north of the camp is composed of long broad ridges with narrow ridges between. (This appears to be an amalgam of Austin's type 1 and 2)

There is no evidence for the presence of Austin's type 3 cultivation ridges within the camp though some survive to the west and south of the hospital.

The Medieval Period from Emparkment

Our understanding of the remains associated with this period are dependent upon whether settlement was allowed to continue following the establishment of the Deer Park. If it was then there is little to distinguish them from those of the earlier period and if permanent human occupation ceased there would have been little development other than the establishment of a park pale along what was probably the edge of former cultivation. The park pale itself does not appear to have been a substantial feature.

The field evidence coupled to analogy with other parts of the moor suggest that some or all of the settlements continued in use after the adoption of the area as a deer park.

Fig. 6. Air photograph showing an area (near the camp) of broad rig with narrow rig lying in between. (Photograph Frances Griffith 1987. © Copyright Devon County Council.)



The 16th to 20th centuries

Disemparking in 1538 seems to have no effect on the archaeological record in the area of the camp. During the 19th century the area of the former park was re-enclosed with the substantial drystone wall that forms the southern camp boundary today. At the same time within the park a new, regular field pattern was established largely using walls rather than banks. It was onto this landscape that the camp was imposed.

The military presence has obviously had a great impact on an area that has witnessed several phases of construction and redevelopment. This has effaced much of the underlying landscape leaving only vestiges of field boundaries and cultivation strips. The camp area formerly included the field immediately south of Moor Gate that has now been returned to grazing. This field exhibits a large number of earthworks of military origin. The outer zone remains largely undeveloped though some divorced military earthworks are visible. Chief among these is the infilled former bathing pool south of the HQ building while a number of shallow air-raid shelters lie to the south of the hospital. Other military earthworks include a weapons pit, possibly the site of an anti-aircraft gun, several small target butts and numerous slit trenches. Most military features located in the outer zone do not impose on the earlier remains and the earthworks of the stables blocks on the east side are clearly visible though disturbed.

CONCLUSION

The importance of the area occupied by Okehampton Camp lies in the fact that the earthworks form a small but significant part of an extensive two phase medieval landscape that is rare on Dartmoor. The impressive remains of the cultivation strips bounded by earthen banks and interconnecting trackways are significant indicators of the structured and settled community, which at some stage in history abandoned the area.

METHODOLOGY

The archaeology was surveyed using Trimble dual frequency GPS. The resulting survey was adapted to fit the 1:1250 scale AutoCAD drawing supplied by the Defence Estates. The survey was also digitally produced at 1:2500 scale and fitted to the basic scale Ordnance Survey plan. The buildings were graphically surveyed

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Austin D et al 1980 Excavations in Okehampton Deerpark 1976- 78 *Proceedings of the Devon Archaeological Society* 36, 1978.

Linehan C 1996 Deserted sites & rabbit warrens on Dartmoor, Devon. *Medieval Archaeol* Vol 10 113-144

Okehampton Artillery Map – Ms. Skeleton Record map dated 29-07-1933

RCHME Archaeological Field Survey 1992 NMR SX 59 SE 2

Air Photographs

Fig 1 RAF AP 3G TUDUK 138 659 11 APR 1946

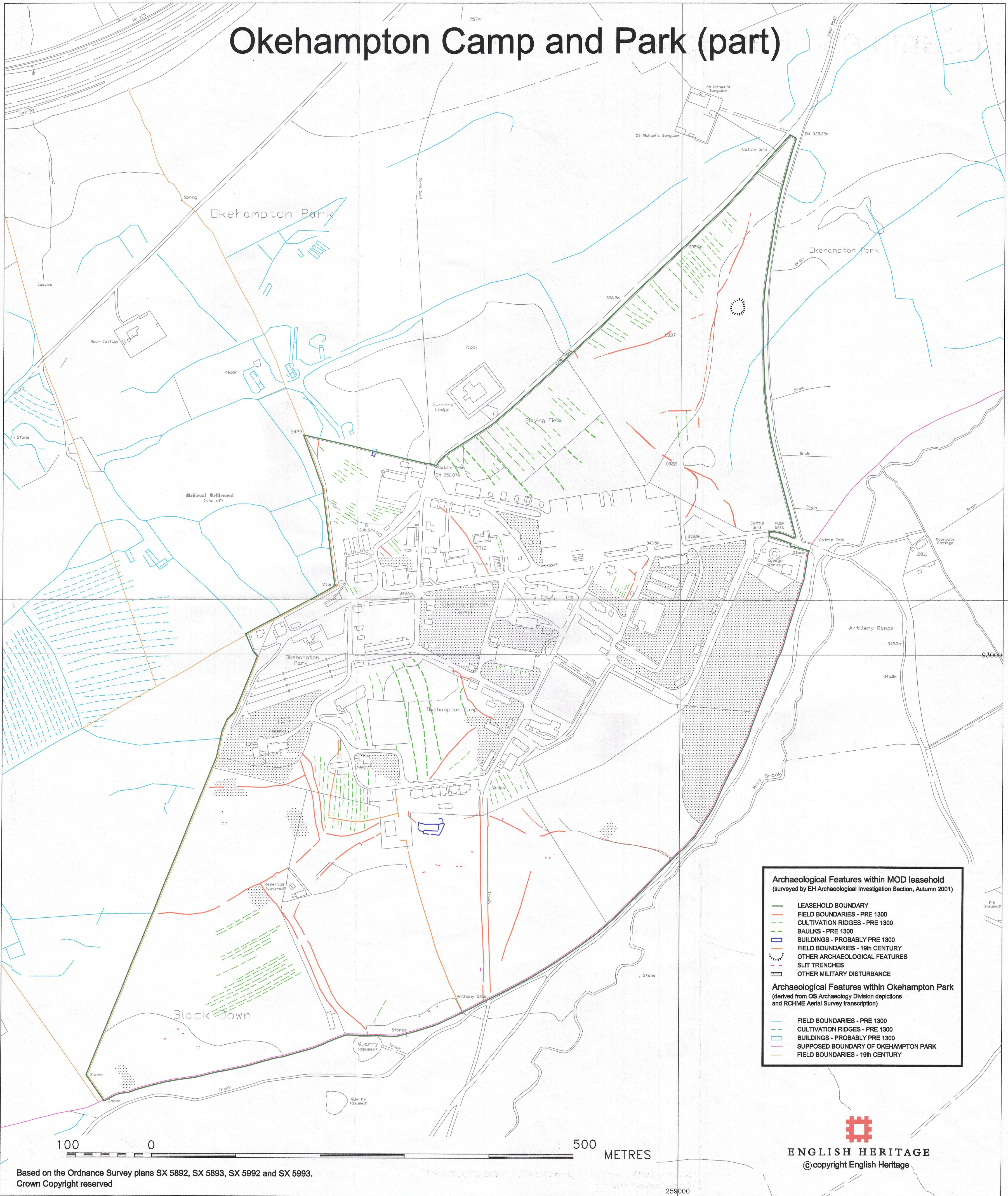
Fig 5 DAP 5469/12 05-MAR-85

Fig 6 DAP 13298/09 12-JAN-87

English Heritage National Monument Records

Okehampton Camp	SX 59 SE 82
Building 1	SX 59 SE 83
Barrow	SX 59 SE 84
Building 2	SX 59 SE 85

Okehampton Camp and Park (part)

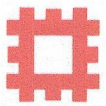


Archaeological Features within MOD leasehold
(surveyed by EH Archaeological Investigation Section, Autumn 2001)

- LEASEHOLD BOUNDARY
- FIELD BOUNDARIES - PRE 1300
- CULTIVATION RIDGES - PRE 1300
- BAULKS - PRE 1300
- BUILDINGS - PROBABLY PRE 1300
- FIELD BOUNDARIES - 19th CENTURY
- OTHER ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES
- SLIT TRENCHES
- OTHER MILITARY DISTURBANCE

Archaeological Features within Okehampton Park
(derived from OS Archaeology Division depictions and RCHME Aerial Survey transcription)

- FIELD BOUNDARIES - PRE 1300
- CULTIVATION RIDGES - PRE 1300
- BUILDINGS - PROBABLY PRE 1300
- SUPPOSED BOUNDARY OF OKEHAMPTON PARK
- FIELD BOUNDARIES - 19th CENTURY



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