

BARBURY CASTLE

**An archaeological survey
by the
Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England**

BARBURY CASTLE
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY REPORT
NMR no: SU 17 NW 8



Parish: Ogbourne St Andrew/Wroughton
Unitary authority: Swindon

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INTRODUCTION

Location, geology and soils

Barbury Castle (NMR No SU 17 NW 8: NGR SU 149 763) is a bivallate hillfort situated on the northern escarpment of the Marlborough Downs overlooking the head of the Thames Valley and the modern town of Swindon. It now lies within the Barbury Castle Country Park, owned by Swindon Borough Council, an area rich in archaeological remains and downland flora. The visible archaeological remains extend beyond the bounds of the Country Park.

The hillfort itself lies on a ridge of Upper Chalk at 260m OD. A substantial deposit of Clay-with-Flints extends from the eastern entrance of the fort to the south and east. Immediately below the fort to the north, west and south-west the ground drops steeply and Middle Chalk outcrops. Seams of flint, perhaps lying at the interface between Middle and Upper Chalk, have been extensively quarried. To the north is a wide rolling plateau of Lower Chalk above a further escarpment dropping to the greensands, gaults and clays of the Vale.

The fort therefore lies at the interface between an upland and a lowland zone. This division in topography is reflected in the soils, which are shallow, well-drained and calcareous on the Downs and predominantly clayey soils, seasonally waterlogged, in the Vale. This positioning was appreciated by Stukeley:

‘This mighty camp stands on one of the western eminences of this ridge, running east and west; very steep to the north and west, separating the high ground or downs from the fertile country below, which ... lies under the eye like a map, as far as the Welsh hills beyond the Severn ... it is indeed a fine scene of woods, towns, pastures, rivers and valleys ... and the whole [ridge] is well planted with stout camps and frequent, the eyesore and terror of the plain’ (1776, 140).

Previous investigations and interventions

Several excavations have taken place at and around Barbury since the cursory diggings of Colt Hoare in the 1800s (though there may have been earlier episodes of barrow opening in the area), notably in 1870-5, 1886 and 1933. However, these investigations have either not produced a great deal of information or have not been adequately recorded. Several chance finds have been made, particularly as a result of military activity on the site during the Second World War and, unfortunately, due to illegal metal detecting. The Ancient Monuments Laboratory of English Heritage undertook a geophysical survey of the whole interior of the hillfort in 1996 as part of their Wessex Hillforts Project.

The present survey

The RCHME was requested to undertake a large-scale earthwork survey of the hillfort in 1998 by Swindon Borough Council, whose Countryside Rangers are responsible for the management of the site. The survey was desired to underpin a proposed management plan for the hillfort which is expected, in turn, to inform the management of the site for future years. Information is also needed to interpret the site to the public. In addition to the Council's needs there were strong academic reasons for undertaking the survey:

- 1 the site is of considerable archaeological and historical interest but is not well recorded
- 2 the archaeological landscape surrounding the fort is well preserved and also deserving of further study, which must start from the fort, and
- 3 earthwork survey would complement and give context to the results of the AML's geophysical survey.

The earthwork survey was therefore undertaken as a partnership between the RCHME and Swindon Borough Council, with three of the Council's Countryside Rangers assisting with the fieldwork. Barbury Castle was also used as a focus for the RCHME's activities for National Archaeology Day (25 July) 1998 when over 1000 members of the public visited the site for guided tours and other activities, and about 50 of them assisted with the detail survey.

The survey was undertaken at a scale of 1:1000. Control was established with a Wild-Leitz co-axial EDM running Mathshop software. The six-station traverse and detail control scheme incorporated two existing permanent survey markers:

- 1 a stone or concrete block in the inner rampart crest approximately 55m south of the east entrance
- 2 a brass survey rivet set into an earthfast stone bearing an OS benchmark on the inner rampart on the north side of the western entrance.

The fence around the east and south-east sides of the fort, planks inserted in the inner rampart in the 1970s to mitigate the effects of erosion, and two existing interpretation boards at the fort entrances were also supplied electronically. All earthwork detail was supplied into the control plot using tape-and-offset methods and, in the interior, plane table with a Wild RK1 self-reducing alidade.

The survey was restricted to the fort itself and the immediately contiguous features.

DESCRIPTION

Summary

Barbury Castle is a bivallate fort, with a third outer escarpment on the north side (but see below). There is a forework outside the east entrance, well preserved on the south but seriously reduced to the north where it has been ploughed (a process already begun by the early 19th century (Colt Hoare 1821, 41)). Beyond the hillfort to the west is a round barrow, and another small mound interpreted as a barrow lies immediately outside the outer escarpment on the north-west. Flint quarrying, which occurs all along the hillside on approximately the 250m contour line, has damaged the ramparts on the north side. A large pond lies immediately adjacent to the counterscarp on the south-east side of the fort. The interior of the fort is full of slight earthwork features, and geophysical survey has indicated a considerable density of sub-surface disturbance. Though some of these features, both surface and sub-surface, are due to recent activity, the likelihood is that much is due to the prehistoric occupation of the site.

Barrows adjacent to the fort

There is one probable well-preserved disc barrow about 100m to the north-west of the hillfort's west entrance. It lies on a fairly steep west-facing slope, consists of a low mound (with some evidence of disturbance), a ditch and an outer bank, with a maximum elevation of 0.8m, and is approximately 30m in diameter, though it is not a regular circle in plan. Colt Hoare described it as a 'Druid' barrow (1821, 41). Passmore, however, watched 'a flint digger turn over nearly all the central area' without finding anything, and concluded that it was probably not a barrow but a tree planting ring (*Wilts Archaeol Mag* 49 (1940-2), 240). Tree planting rings in this area are generally confined to scarp tops, are larger in diameter and have sharper earthworks than this feature; for these reasons Colt Hoare's interpretation is preferred.

A small circular mound, approximately 12m in diameter and 2.0m high, and with a distinct disturbance in the top, lying immediately to the north of the fort's north-west ramparts, has also been interpreted as a round barrow (Grinsell 1957, 204). While this is a possible explanation it is by no means certain. The feature is indicated on Colt Hoare's plan (1821, pl VIII) but is not noted in his text where he describes the 'Druid' barrow and two others in the bottom to the west. The area immediately surrounding this feature has yielded considerable surface finds of Romano-British pottery (see below) and the mound could conceivably be of Roman date, though what function it might serve in that context is unclear.

The forework

The forework consists of a rampart up to 0.9m high fronted by a ditch 0.8m deep, the maximum height of the top of the bank from the ditch bottom being 1.9m. The entrance appears to have been on the south side where there is a gap approximately 6m wide;

although the north part of the forework has been ploughed down there is no other sign of an entrance. In plan the forework appears to be sub-rectangular and it sits at an odd angle to the hillfort defences. In addition its northern rampart is cut by the outer ditch of the hillfort defences, and raised sections in the outer hillfort rampart seem to indicate its position. It is therefore certain that the forework pre-dates the outer hillfort defences, providing evidence either that the hillfort defences themselves are of two phases (as might be expected) or that the forework pre-dates the hillfort altogether, representing a pre-existing enclosure which has been re-used. A shallow trench, probably a Second World War slit trench (see below), cuts the forward slope of the forework rampart.

Entrances

The hillfort has two entrances, east and west, as is common among the larger Iron Age hillforts in southern Britain. Both appear to be simple gaps in the ramparts without elaboration, though there is some indication of inturning to the inner rampart terminals at the west entrance (and this is shown on Colt Hoare's plan (1821, pl VIII). However, both entrances have clearly been widened in relatively recent times, the east entrance now being almost 10m wide; the ends of the ramparts have been 'chiselled' off and the ditch terminals partly infilled. This modification, which is particularly severe at the east entrance, could have removed any evidence for mural chambers, for instance, but no such features are suggested by Colt Hoare or Maskelyne (1886). The sarsen stones now visible at both entrances cannot be facing stones; they must be part of the internal rampart structure which has been exposed by the widening of the entrances.

The road passing through the fort is one route of the 'Ridgeway'. Through the west entrance, which is on the edge of a considerable slope, it is slightly hollowed, while the road through the flat approach of the east entrance shows no earthworks, except for a series of slight transverse ruts, possibly the result of heavy vehicle traffic.

The ramparts

The ramparts and ditches are massive and generally well preserved. The following dimensions are maximum recorded heights: interior slope - 3.8m; top of inner rampart from bottom of ditch - 8.0m; top of outer rampart from bottom of inner ditch - 5.6m; top of outer rampart from bottom of outer ditch - 3.6m; counterscarp of outer ditch -2.0m.

The inner rampart has a narrow top. It has a number of 'steps', or distinct changes of height, which conform generally to the natural topography over which they lie. The top of the outer rampart is much broader and shows considerable signs of disturbance, including what appears to be quarrying of its outer face, which may suggest that it was revetted or faced with blocks of harder chalk, flint or sarsen; some sarsens and large flint nodules are visible around the site. As with the inner rampart, there are numerous changes of height around the circuit of the outer rampart but again, except as noted above in relation to the forework, they do not seem to be archaeologically significant. The outer ditch has a small counterscarp bank, up to 0.8m high, for a considerable part

of its southern circuit and for short stretches on the north. However, on the north side there is also a berm of fluctuating width, beyond which is a single, outward-facing scarp approximately 1.8m high. This might be an unfinished third rampart but its significance is discussed further below. Both it and the outer rampart have been severely damaged and truncated by later quarrying. Breaks of slope visible at many points around the circuit seem to indicate the position of the old ground surface where it has been cut by the ditches and overlain by the ramparts.

There are three later breaches cutting diagonally through the ramparts, two on the north side and one on the south. Those on the north are very well developed and have created deep cuts in the ramparts accompanied by substantial causeways in the ditch bottoms. That on the south, which leads towards the pond, is less pronounced. The date of these breaches is uncertain; they pre-date the earliest clear aerial photograph (SU 1476/15: 8-Aug-1933) and though neither the plans of Maskelyne and Colt Hoare nor an estate map of 1752 (AO 719 (B)) show them, this does not preclude the possibility that they are older than the 19th century.

On either side of the west entrance the outer rampart has been partly or completely removed. On the south side the rampart top has been razed for a distance of approximately 20m. This was done before 1933 (air photo SU 1476/15). (There is a faint suggestion that a similar fate has befallen the inner rampart at the same place). On the north side the whole rampart has been bodily removed and a flat area created measuring about 15m by 15m, with an area of disturbed earthworks on its outer, western, edge. This is the result of military activity during the Second World War (see below).

A very large hollow, 3.5m deep, - probably a pond - and some quarries lie adjacent to the outer rampart at the south-east corner of the fort. This is shown, albeit rather ambiguously, on Colt Hoare's plan and appears on the estate map of 1752 (AO 719 (B)), though it appears to have been a rather smaller feature at that date than it is now. The current pond is distinctly sub-rectangular, rather than circular.

Some slight scarps, less than 0.3m high, lie outside the north-eastern ramparts. They have no clear relationship with the ramparts and may be elements of a field system; they are of unknown date, with the exception of one on the lip of the outer ditch which appears to mark the line of a recent fence.

The interior

The hillfort interior is divided by the track which runs between the entrances. This track has clearly migrated back and forth over the years and its present and former courses are marked by a series of linear scarps, up to 0.4m high, forming a band up to about 35m wide at their greatest extent. Several of these scarps overlie earlier features, mainly circular hollows, some of which might be hut circles.

There are approximately 35 probable or possible hut circles visible on the surface. They

tend to cluster towards the east, and particularly the south-east, part of the fort. They vary in form from simple hollows, 0.3 - 0.4m deep, to terraces with crescentic backscarps and front aprons of similar elevation. No entrances are discernible but in some cases the form of the earthwork shows approximately where they must have lain; they tend to face towards the back of the fort rampart. In a few instances hut circles are cut by later features, notably the scarps of the central trackway, and in one case one hut circle appears to be cut by another hut circle. Geophysical survey has recovered signs of at least six other possible hut circles which are not visible on the surface.

There is a substantial but flattened and mutilated mound, approximately 17m in diameter and up to 0.5m high, in the north-eastern quadrant of the fort and just below the highest point of the interior. This is probably a round barrow. No ditch is visible and geophysical survey does not suggest the presence of such a feature; nevertheless, this provisional interpretation of the mound is considered to be reasonable. Two further, smaller mounds, one in the north-west part of the site and one in the south-west, are also considered to be possibly the remains of round barrows but on much more doubtful evidence. They are 10m and 8m across respectively, though the latter appears to be elongated to approximately 10m east - west. They are both less than 0.3m high. Again there is no sign of surrounding ditches on the surface or on the geophysical survey results.

There are a number of quarry scoops up to 1.6m deep immediately behind the ramparts nearly all the way around the circuit; one on the north side, an oval feature slightly detached from the rampart and 1.4m deep, has the appearance of a pond. A number of slighter linear or amorphous mounds and hollows scattered across the interior are difficult to interpret.

A further set of more sharply defined features, some rectilinear and some circular, are interpreted as resulting from the military re-use of the site during the Second World War (see below - Appendix 1).

DISCUSSION

Before the hillfort (Fig 2.1)

If Colt Hoare's 'Druid' barrow is indeed a barrow, as seems likely (despite Passmore's doubts), and if the small mound adjacent to the north-west ramparts is a barrow, which seems more questionable, we might expect there to have been other barrows nearer to the crest of the ridge. Those two survivors would in effect be the tail end of a barrow cemetery, the main components of which lay in the area later occupied by the hillfort. The new survey seems to have found evidence that this is the case in the presence of three low mounds, one of which at least can plausibly be interpreted as a round barrow; it is false-crested and could have been viewed from the lower ground to the north before the construction of the ramparts.

There are many other barrows in the vicinity of Barbury Castle along the escarpment edge: three in the bottom about 200m west of the fort and others on Hackpen Hill further to the south-west; others on Burderop Down to the east and a possible ploughed-out pair near the foot of Burderop Down at SU 1577 7666 (SU 17 NE 12; air photographs SU 1576/32-3). It is curious that there are no signs of further barrows along the ridge immediately to the east of the fort, though this might be explained as a genuine gap in the distribution occasioned by the presence of Clay-with-Flints, or as an apparent gap caused by cultivation from later prehistory onwards. This ridge is, however, crossed by a bank and ditch (beyond the area of the present survey) which could be interpreted plausibly as a Bronze Age territorial boundary, though it is currently recorded as a medieval or later feature (SU 17 NE 20).

The forework at the east entrance of the fort is definitely earlier than the outer vallation and might conceivably be earlier in origin than the fort altogether - possibly a late Bronze Age settlement enclosure, though without further research this idea must remain merely speculative. In favour of this interpretation is the fact that the forework is oddly aligned to the fort; against it is its exposed ridge-top position which would be unusual for such a settlement. Many enclosed settlements of later Bronze Age date are known on the Marlborough Downs (Gingell 1992).

A curious feature of Barbury is the scarp which runs around the north side of the defences outside the outer ditch. This might be interpreted as an unfinished third rampart but it does not have the characteristic 'lumpy' appearance of an unfinished earthwork. An alternative explanation may be that it is a field lynchet not directly connected with the hillfort, but again this seems unlikely - it is decidedly curvilinear unlike most such lynchets. A third, and perhaps more plausible explanation is that it is the remnant of an earlier enclosure overlain by the hillfort. There is no direct stratigraphic evidence to confirm this. On the other hand Colt Hoare was of the opinion that this represented part of an earlier work (even though his *absolute* dating was wide of the mark (1821, 41)) and it has been suggested that 'the slightly "wandering" line and varying width of the outer rampart on the south-eastern and southern sides' could also indicate that it was following an earlier earthwork (Graeme

Kirkham pers comm). There is an indication that this feature was originally a bank rather than just a scarp; for a length of about 30m near the eastern end it has a distinct though slight (less than 0.3m high) backscarp. A number of other hillforts on this escarpment, and elsewhere in Wessex, seem to have been preceded by slighter hilltop enclosures; the most relevant in this context include Rams Hill, Uffington, Liddington and Segsbury (Lock and Gosden 1997, 76).

The hillfort (Fig 2.2 and 2.3)

The bivallation of the ramparts and the density of features in the interior places Barbury firmly in the class of 'developed' hillforts. This density of features is much higher than that recorded by magnetometry at neighbouring hillforts such as Uffington, Liddington and Oldbury (Andrew Payne pers comm).

That the hillfort defences are of at least two phases seems to be demonstrated by the forework which is clearly cut and overlain by the outer line of defence. This confirms what might be expected - that a 'developed' hillfort, probably in use over many decades or even centuries, should show signs of its 'development'. The inner and outer ramparts differ in the width of their crests. The outer rampart, furthermore, appears to have been severely robbed or quarried in some subsequent period, in such a way as to suggest that it was revetted or faced with desirable materials - sarsen, large flint nodules and/or blocks of 'clunch' or hard chalk. The outer rampart may, therefore, have had a very different appearance originally.

The density of occupation within the fort has been demonstrated by both geophysical and surface survey. The results of the two do not coincide: magnetometer survey does not generally resolve assumed house emplacements visible as hollows or scarps - if these hollows had become silted up with ploughsoil they *would* be detectable magnetically (Andrew Payne pers comm). At Barbury geophysical and earthwork survey provide complementary detail, demonstrating that the two techniques combined provide a much more complete picture than could be obtained by using just one of the methods. Earthwork survey picks up near-surface evidence that cannot be easily detected magnetically while the magnetometer detects features no longer visible on the surface. One implication may be that generally the geophysical technique is showing features of earlier phases, as well as deeply cut and deeply buried features.

The magnetometer survey shows that many of the hollows, particularly in the south-east part of the fort, have discrete positive anomalies (probable pits) associated with them, lending weight to their interpretation as house sites (though given the density of pit-type features this pattern could be coincidental).

Military digging in 1939-45 exposed pits containing early and middle Iron Age pottery (Meyrick 1947, 260), further sherds were recorded (*Wilts Archaeol Mag* 66 (1971), 197), and a penannular iron ring cased with bronze - a possible terret ring - has been found (Grinsell 1957, 94) but no other definitely Iron Age finds from the site are recorded (for the hoard of ironwork see below). No pottery which would have been recognised as

'late' Iron Age was recovered; the sample is tiny, so no emphasis can be placed on this, but abandonment of the hillfort in the 1st century BC would be consistent with the evidence for other 'developed' hillforts.

The existence of an outwork on the east and the absence of one on the west was explained by Colt Hoare in topographical defensive terms - the steep approach from the west negated the need for a barbican to defend the entrance (1821, 41). It may be, however, that the east entrance was regarded as the principle entrance and had to be screened for symbolic purposes as much as for defensive ones. The orientation of hillfort entrances has been discussed recently by Hill (1996, 110). A symbolic or cosmological aspect to entrances facing east and west is likely, reflecting some such oppositions as sunrise/sunset, life/death, front/back, sacred/profane. It is perhaps worthy of note in this respect that the visible house sites cluster to the east, and particularly the south-east, of the site, leaving much of the western end and northern side apparently empty; however, the geophysical survey does not show this pattern. The concentration of apparent houses to the south-east may therefore reflect patterning in a late phase of occupation or, more prosaically, it may reflect differential use of the two ends of the hillfort in subsequent periods, with the western end being more heavily ploughed than the east; the fort is known to have been subdivided by fences in the past (and the geophysical survey may indeed show traces of these). No definite house entrances are visible at Barbury but in about 15 cases the general form of the earthworks gives some indication of where the entrances must have been. The houses do not seem to conform to the expected Iron Age pattern of entrance orientation to the east or south-east; rather, so far as can be seen, entrances face the rampart. This has the effect that while about six houses do face south-east as many as eight or nine may face west or north. This is a very different pattern from that seen at many hillforts and smaller enclosed settlements where house entrances face relentlessly east or south-east regardless of practical considerations. However, other sites in Wessex which are exceptional in this way include, significantly, the 'developed' hillforts Danebury (Hants), Maiden Castle and Pilsdon Pen (Dorset) (Hill 1996, 104; see also Oswald 1997). It should be noted that although these building stances are all referred to here as 'houses' it is acknowledged that they are probably not all human dwellings as such.

Barbury is intervisible with Liddington and Uffington hillforts further east along the escarpment. It has sometimes been assumed that these forts were positioned on this scarp edge because of the existence of the 'Ridgeway' as an ancient trading route. There is, however, no evidence that the 'Ridgeway' is as old as has been claimed. The positioning of these forts has more to do with their liminal position on the edge of the downs overlooking the plain - it is the topography itself which has influenced their planners. Major trade routes are likely to have been along rivers in this period (Sherratt 1996).

While the field systems on the Berkshire Downs are restricted in date largely to the Roman period (Bowden *et al* 1993) those on the Marlborough Downs have a much longer currency, beginning in the Bronze Age and running through to the Roman period (Gingell 1992, 155). The well preserved field system on Burderop Down extends westwards towards the fort. Some slight scarps just outside the outer ditch on the

north-east side of the fort may be part of this system but no chronological relationship with the fort can be discerned. Fort and fields may be broadly contemporary and the latter may 'belong' to the former but this is not certain.

Barbury was therefore a substantial defended settlement, probably combining domestic, agricultural, military and sacred functions, placed so as to be able to dominate and exploit the resources of the surrounding downs and the vale to the north. It was probably occupied for several centuries in the mid-1st millennium BC.

Roman and later use of the site (Fig 2.4)

Some features which post-date the hillfort cannot be assigned to any particular period. These include the quarries on the outer rampart and the diagonal breaches through the ramparts. Clearly the purpose of such paths is to create access to the interior of the fort but for what precise reason, and why they were deemed necessary in addition to the original entrances, is unclear. Very similar diagonal breaches are seen through the ramparts of many other hillforts, such as Yarnbury (Wilts) and Maiden Castle (Dorset) (where one path leads from lower ground to the north directly towards the Roman temple). Most of the later features can, however, be placed in sequence.

The Roman period

Although there is no structural evidence on site, revealed by either earthwork or geophysical survey, which can be assigned to the Roman period, numerous chance finds of Roman material attest to activity on and around the site at this time. Much Roman pottery has been found, particularly in an area immediately outside the north-western ramparts adjacent to the small mound (SU 17 NW 7) (*Wilts Archaeol Mag* 68 (1973), 135; 70-1 (1975-6), 136; 81 (1987), 142; Swanton 1987, 10; *Swindon Messenger*, 19 April 1996; Graeme Kirkham pers comm). The assemblage consists largely of Savernake Ware with very little Black Burnished Ware and no imports; it is a typical domestic assemblage, of late 1st-century to early 2nd-century date, of cooking pots with a few storage jars; there are also a few later storage jars from the west Swindon kilns of mid-late 3rd-century date (Chris Chandler pers comm). Two coins of the later 3rd century are also recorded from the same area (SU 17 NW 5 and 33).

There are no records of Roman pottery being found inside the fort but there have been three significant finds of Roman date which are believed to have come from the interior: a brooch (Grinsell 1957, 94, 132.3), a silvered bronze spoon with 'VERECUNDA' scratched on the bowl and the lower part of a rotary quern (*ibid*, 94). The brooch is a Colchester Derivative type of the later 1st or early 2nd century while the spoon is probably of later date. A hoard of iron tools found on the site before 1875 has been attributed to the Iron Age (200-50BC) (MacGregor and Simpson 1963) but recent study has suggested that this may be a late Roman votive deposit (Mark Corney pers comm). Taken together the spoon and the iron hoard suggest ritual activity at the fort in the later Roman period as both may have liturgical or votive uses. It is tempting to suggest the presence of a temple, such as have been found in other hillforts, but neither earthwork nor geophysical survey have revealed any evidence to support this idea.

Although the well-known hillfort temples, such as that at Maiden Castle (Dorset), are substantial masonry structures, the possibility of a slighter timber building, leaving little surface or sub-surface trace, must be borne in mind.

There is some further evidence for activity in the Roman period in the area immediately surrounding the fort. Enclosures at the foot of the hill to the north, surviving as earthworks in pasture, have yielded Romano-British finds though the earthworks themselves are considered to be of medieval or later date (SU 17 NW 5). In fields immediately to the west and north-west of these earthworks, soilmarks reveal the presence of further rectangular enclosures (SU 17 NW 6; air photographs SU 1476/8, 9, 22, SU 1477/4/117-126, 5). Again the dating is doubtful but the discovery of Romano-British material in the ploughsoil may point to their period of construction and use (Mark Corney pers comm). About 500m south-west of the fort the burial of a middle-aged woman has been excavated, dating to about AD300 (TWA 1986, 17). In the wider landscape Barbury overlooks the newly discovered Roman ritual complex at Abbey Meads, Swindon. The downs are known to have been exploited heavily for agriculture in the Roman period; the field system on Burderop Down and Barbury Down, for instance, even if established in the Iron Age, could still have been in use in the Roman period.

Early medieval

There is considerable evidence for early medieval activity in and around Barbury Castle in the form of artefacts and, possibly, human remains. At the hillfort itself a scramasax of 6th- or 7th-century date was found before 1934 with fragments of several others, smaller single-edged knives and a spearhead; in 1939-45 human skeletons buried in the rampart were found by American troops and these have been assigned an early medieval date (Meaney 1964, 265) though on what evidence is unclear. Colonel Burne recorded that:

‘To the consternation of the archaeologists ... [US Army] soldiers brought up bulldozers to Barbury Castle and began deliberately to demolish the *vallum*. When human bones were found in the excavating bucket, they deemed it time to report an unusual occurrence. Mr Alexander Keiller went out at once to the site and was in time to photograph a section of the *vallum* which showed that the parapet had at some time been heightened by a few feet’ (1950, 399).

Burne argued that this heightening of the rampart was done by the Britons prior to the Battle of Beranburgh, so the dating of the skeletons to the same period may be due to his influence. Some (but apparently not all) of Keiller's photographs survive (Alexander Keiller Museum, Avebury, No 20000584), showing that it was on the north side of the west entrance that the skeletons were found; these surviving photographs do not show evidence for the heightening of the rampart, however. It should also be noted that a fragment of human skull has been found more recently on the outer rampart to the south of the east entrance (Lynne Simpson pers comm).

Barbury Castle, the lower ground to the north or the ridge to the south-east, is the traditional site of the Battle of Beranburgh in 556, a possibly indecisive encounter between the Saxons under Ceawlin and Cynric, and the Britons. The battle was

discussed by Maskelyne (1886, 191-3) who believed it to have been a great Saxon victory, but later writers have emphasised that victory was not achieved until Dyrham in 577 (e.g. Entwistle 1994, 77). There seems to be general agreement, however, that the battle was fought near, not at, the hillfort. The OS have placed it at SU 147 768, 500m north of the fort, while Burne argues that it took place 750m south-east of the fort on Smeath's Ridge (1950, 402). The Battle of Ellandun, decisive victory of Egbert of Wessex over Beornwulf of Mercia in 825, is also believed to have taken place at Wroughton (Smurthwaite 1984, 36-7).

Medieval and post-medieval

There is little evidence for activity at Barbury between the pagan Saxon period and the Second World War. The enclosures (SU 17 NW 5) to the north of the fort have already been mentioned; a further enclosure overlying the field system on Burderop Down is also of medieval or later date and there seems to have been a small medieval settlement at what is now Barbury Castle Farm (SU 17 NE 6). Quarrying for flint has been undertaken, tracing a seam around the ridge just below the hillfort and impinging on the ramparts at places on the north side. The flint was possibly required as roadstone for the Swindon to Marlborough turnpike which crosses the Down 700m east of the fort (Cossons 1959, 262, 270). If this is so the quarries date to later than 1762. Quarrying was still taking place in the early 20th century (*Wilts Archaeol Mag* 49 (1940-2), 240). There is no evidence to suggest prehistoric flint extraction at Barbury.

The pond at the south-east side of the fort certainly existed by 1752 but has been enlarged since. Its sub-rectangular shape may indicate that the enlargement was the work of the Cruse family of Imber, who were known for their square ponds (D Field, Salisbury Plain notebook, NMRC).

The Second World War

The fieldwork undertaken in the course of this survey has shown that a number of earthworks can be interpreted as the remains of military activity in the Second World War. In particular, the fort seems to have been utilised as part of the anti-aircraft defence scheme for Wroughton airfield and Swindon, in a type of warfare which could not have been envisaged by the original builders of the fort. See Appendix 1 for further details.

MANAGEMENT ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER WORK

Barbury Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (No 28109).

This important hillfort is in the ownership of Swindon Borough Council and lies within a Countryside Park which is overseen by the Council's Countryside Rangers and the tenant farmers, who are also resident wardens. This level of protection for the site has proved its value repeatedly as the wardens have countered illegal metal detector use (see *Swindon Messenger* 12 April 1996, for instance), and abuse of the ramparts by off-road vehicles, trail bikes and mountain bikes on numerous occasions (Lynne Simpson pers comm). The generally good condition of the earthworks is a tribute to their care of the site, and sensitive stocking and management.

There are some erosion scars on the ramparts (Fig 3) but these are much less serious than they were in the 1970s before intervention by Wiltshire County Council, then owners of the site (aerial photographs SU 1476/1-6 (1967) and SU 1476/27/135-9 (1970), for instance). The work done by the County Council has been of variable success, some of the repairs having turfed over well while others are still actively eroding. Most of this work seems to have involved the use of planks staked with steel pegs but in one area, on the outer face of the inner rampart south of the east entrance, stones held in place with wire netting have been employed. The continuing problem of active erosion could be addressed by physical intervention but this should only be done according to current best practice (see Jones 1998 and references therein) and with full archaeological supervision and recording.

Signs informing the public of restrictions of use (particularly in regard to barring bicycles, etc, from the ramparts) and promoting respect for the site should be more prominent, but at a distance from the earthworks themselves. However, ultimately public care for the site will only come about through improved education and information. The information boards on site should be updated and consideration should be given to producing a leaflet informing the general public about the site and explaining its significance.

Further archaeological research should include:

- 1 Earthwork survey, possibly based on aerial photographic transcription, of the whole of the Countryside Park and, if possible, of surrounding areas of archaeological interest. This would serve to set the hillfort in its landscape context, to map the field system as it extends westward from the well-preserved earthworks on Burderop Down to the barely discernible scarps near the hillfort, and to address the question of the dating of the linear earthwork which crosses the ridge.
- 2 Geophysical survey of the interior of the outwork at the east entrance of the fort, to test whether there are sub-surface features which might help to elucidate its history.
- 3 Sample geophysical survey squares or transects along the apparently 'blank' ridge top to the east of the fort to test whether there are any features of potential archaeological interest here which have been flattened by ploughing, and to

establish the line of the linear earthwork which is known to cross the ridge.

4 Further targeted aerial photography, particularly of the earthworks along the escarpment between the hillfort and Burderop Down and, when conditions allow, of soilmarks/cropmarks to the north of the escarpment.

5 A programme of systematic surface artefact collection over the arable land in the vicinity of the hillfort followed up, ideally, by limited excavation, to provide secure dating for features revealed by soilmarks/cropmarks (especially SU 17 NW 6).

Any excavation on and around the hillfort itself, other than the minimal intervention necessary in association with any repair works, should be contemplated only after the further survey activities outlined here have been undertaken and the results evaluated.

APPENDIX 1

Barbury Castle and the Second World War

by Mike Anderton

Military activity in the Wroughton area

Wroughton airfield and the nearby RAF hospital were both built in 1939 and remained active throughout the war (the hospital being supplemented by a US Army hospital at Burderop in 1943-4). The airfield provided a site for 'dispersal', where aircraft were maintained, repaired and 'crated up' for use elsewhere. Protection for this important activity was provided by four Vickers light anti-aircraft guns located at the cardinal points of the airfield's perimeter. Additional anti-aircraft cover was provided by a heavy anti-aircraft site 3km to the north-east of Barbury Castle. This gun site was placed to provide cover against enemy aircraft approaching Swindon from the south, and also to target aircraft attracted by a bombing decoy site located 2km to the south of the hillfort. However, in addition to these tasks it could be brought to bear on any enemy aircraft approaching Wroughton.

The area around the hillfort was therefore within a 'bombing alley'. It would appear that the *Luftwaffe* used the same local area-identifiers as the RAF - three clumps of trees (Willis and Hollis 1987, 222) and the hillfort on the ridge. Bombing occurred throughout the area (Wroughton History Group 1997). The airfield in particular was attacked on numerous occasions (Dunscombe and Hicks 1997, 40-1; Grey 1997, 57); bombers were seen regularly during their approach to Swindon (Cook 1997, 42) and in February 1941 the Marine Mountings factory at North Wroughton was bombed, killing sixty people (Hicks 1997, 129).

Additional protection, against aircraft flying over the bombing decoy to the south of the hillfort and using the 'covered' approach for low-level attacks over the ridge, could have been provided by further gun emplacements at or near Barbury Castle. Oral and documentary evidence (Wroughton History Group 1997) points to the airfield's Home Guard unit (later supplemented by the US Army) as the suppliers of this cover. This unit was referred to as 'the unit on the hill' and appears to have been sited at the hillfort (though there are also gun emplacements on Burderop Down (Gingell 1992, 40)). Support for this interpretation is provided by the field evidence recorded during the RCHME survey.

The physical evidence

Several features at Barbury Castle appear to be of 20th-century military origin.

There are three rectilinear features situated within, and tucked below, the northern hillfort ramparts. They measure about 7m by 5m overall and are defined by slight but sharp banks up to 0.3m high; their interiors are barely lowered beneath the surrounding ground surface. There is a further possible feature of the same type in the north-east sector but this is extremely ephemeral, consisting only of a sub-rectangular depression about 0.1m deep. There are two larger pits. One to the south of the east entrance measures about 10m by 6m overall. It consists, apparently, of a back-filled pit with a

sharply defined smaller side pit (about 2m by 3m) in its north-west corner. The second lies alone in the south-west sector of the fort interior. It measures 14m by 10m overall and consists of two rectilinear pits, a shallower one on the west and a deeper one (up to 0.8m) to the east. These appear to be contemporary features.

Four narrow rectilinear trenches are visible. One, about 0.2m deep, is located outside the east entrance and is cut into the outer face of the forework bank. (There is possibly a similar feature concealed among the confused earthworks outside, and just to the north of, the west entrance). Three others are located in the hillfort interior, two close to the rectilinear features described above in the northern sector, and the other closer to the centre of the site. These are about 1.0m deep.

A large L-shaped trench lies near the western end of the track through the fort; more than 0.5m deep, its sides are well defined though subject to erosion in places. (Another, much slighter, depression faces this on the other side of the track).

Two large circular craters are also visible within the hillfort, one towards the south side and the other in the north-east sector; the latter is 1.6m deep. There is possibly a third, much slighter, near the centre of the site and on line between the others, and a fourth on the line of the outer scarp to the north-east.

Both hillfort entrances have been widened, as described above. Analysis of aerial photographs suggests that although this may have begun before the War, at the east entrance at least, most of the work took place during the War (SU 1476/15 (1933) and RAF verticals 106G.UK.1415.3298/9 and 106G.UK.1648.5043/4 (all 1946)). At the west entrance the flattening of the outer rampart was certainly done during the War, on the evidence of the same aerial photographs, Keiller's photographs, and Burne (1950, 399-400). Why the US Army found it necessary to remove the rampart is not known.

Discussion

The craters, probably made by bombs, provide the clearest evidence that Barbury Castle was in a vulnerable area requiring protection from the air, as well as from the threat of ground attack by paratroops. The other physical remains described here give a clearer idea of the use of the hillfort by the units recorded by Wroughton History Group (1997).

The widening of the hillfort entrances was probably necessary for access by the Queen Mary lorries commonly used on the airfield. The widened entrances were then covered from ground attack by the installation of external cover-fire trenches and the L-shaped trench inside the west entrance, which would give a second line of fire into the cleared area outside the entrance.

Attack from the air was countered by the rectilinear features, which are identifiable as gun-pits; their sides would have been built up with sandbags. They are approximately the same size as Lewis gun emplacements seen elsewhere in Britain. While not effective against aircraft at high altitude, they could deal with low-flying aircraft and could double-up as ground defence positions.

Of the two larger pits, the one located near the east entrance is also a Lewis gun emplacement. Its small attached pit may well have contained an observing instrument (ORLIT) which could judge the height and fire-angle for incoming planes. In general these instruments were not used for Lewis guns but for larger guns, and they were placed at a short distance from the gun in order to give a clearer view of the incoming target. This helps to confirm the status of the larger pit in the south-west sector; it is of the same dimensions as light anti-aircraft gun emplacements elsewhere in Britain (Lowry 1996, 60-1). Consisting only of a main gun-pit and a secondary, deeper, area for ammunition storage, this emplacement would have required the assistance of a nearby ORLIT. In view of the nature of the guns stationed at the airfield, a Vickers gun is the most likely candidate for use in this pit, the alternative being a Bofors 40mm.

The slit trenches in the interior would have provided shelter for the gun crews.

The pits on the northern side provided anti-aircraft fire against low-flying aircraft from the south and south-east, and doubled as cover for the west entrance. In similar fashion the one or, possibly, two pits near the east entrance could deal with aircraft approaching from the south-west and cover the entrance. The larger emplacement in the south-west sector was positioned to fire at aircraft approaching from the east, south or west, or flying up and over the ridge from the north. The exact date of installation and period of use of these gun emplacements is not known; they do not appear on any of Keiller's photographs, which are also undated but which must have been taken between 1943 and 1945.

Such gun-pits were ephemerally built (Lowry 1996, 61), often consisting of no more than earthworks and sandbags. They are therefore difficult to identify as field remains but through an examination of the morphological structure of the features, and the comparison of these with known contemporary military structures, the true nature of these remains can be uncovered. Barbury is not the only hillfort to have been utilised in this way; Cissbury (Sussex) also has earthwork remains of anti-aircraft gun emplacements.

APPENDIX 2

Aerial photographs

The NMR holds a large number of aerial photographs, both vertical and oblique, of Barbury Castle. The following is a list of those which have proved most useful in the course of this survey.

Verticals

106G.UK.1415.3298-9, 3350-1 14-April-1946
106G.UK.1648.5043-4 10-July-1946

Obliques

SU 1476/15-16 8-August-1933
SU 1476/34-7 9-July-1958
SU 1476/1-6 4-August 1967
SU 1476/27/135-9 7-July-1970
SU 1476/55-7 2-October-1996
SU 1576/36-7 29-October-1997
SU 1476/58 12-November-1997

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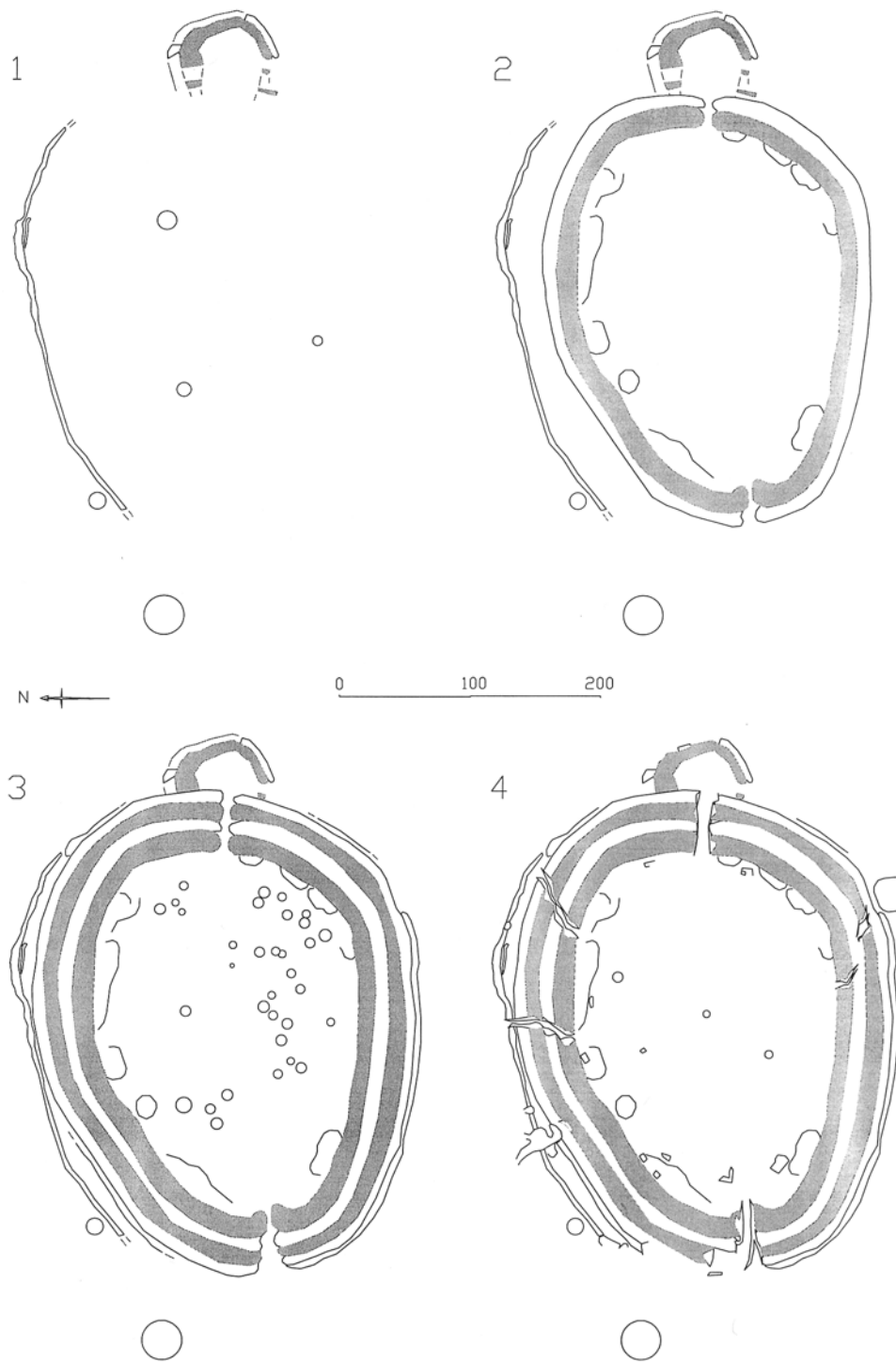


Fig 2 Provisional phase diagram showing:

- 1 Probable and possible pre-hillfort features
- 2 The hillfort – possible first phase
- 3 The ‘developed’ hillfort
- 4 Later features, including pond, quarries and paths, Second World War structures and bomb craters.

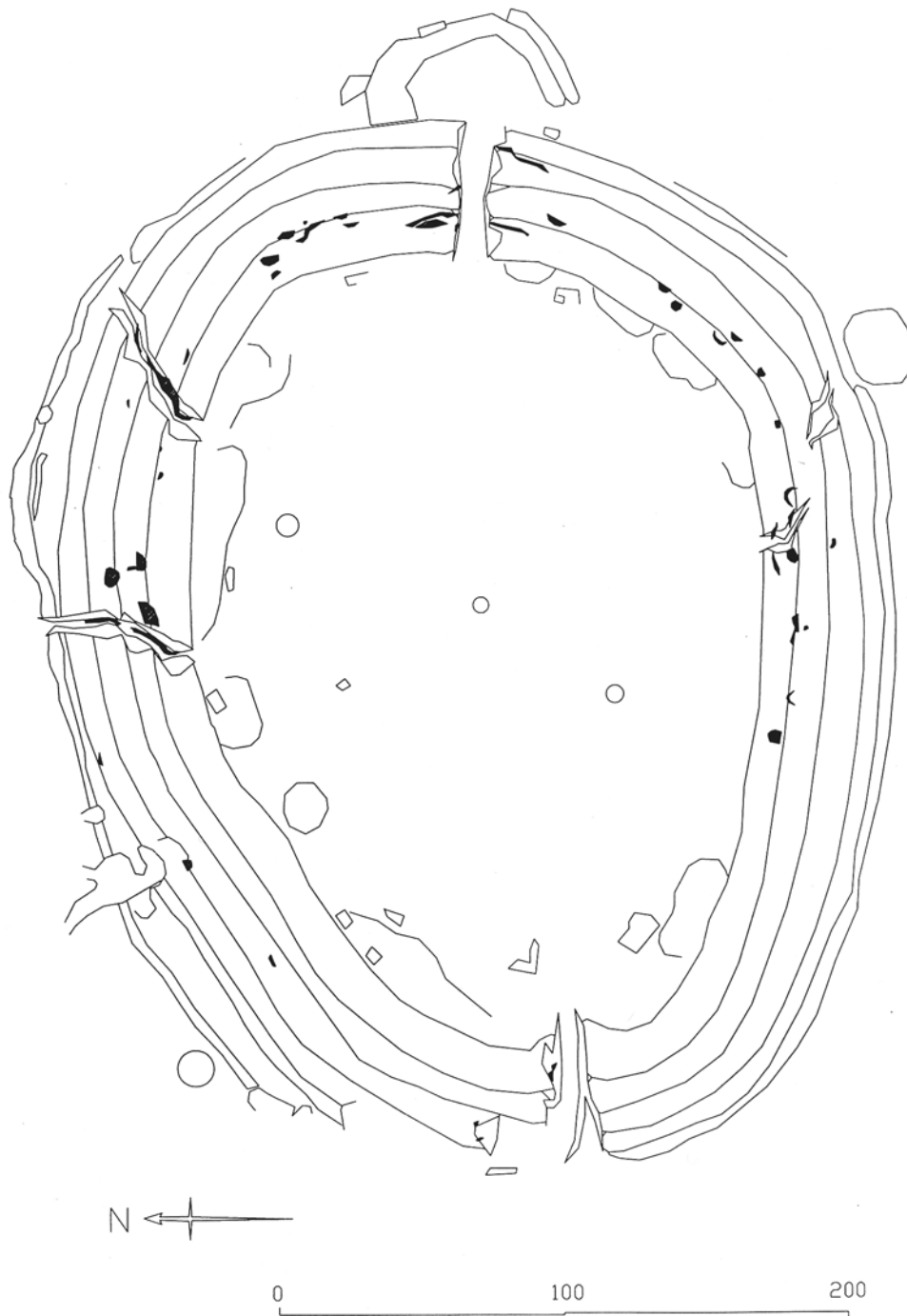
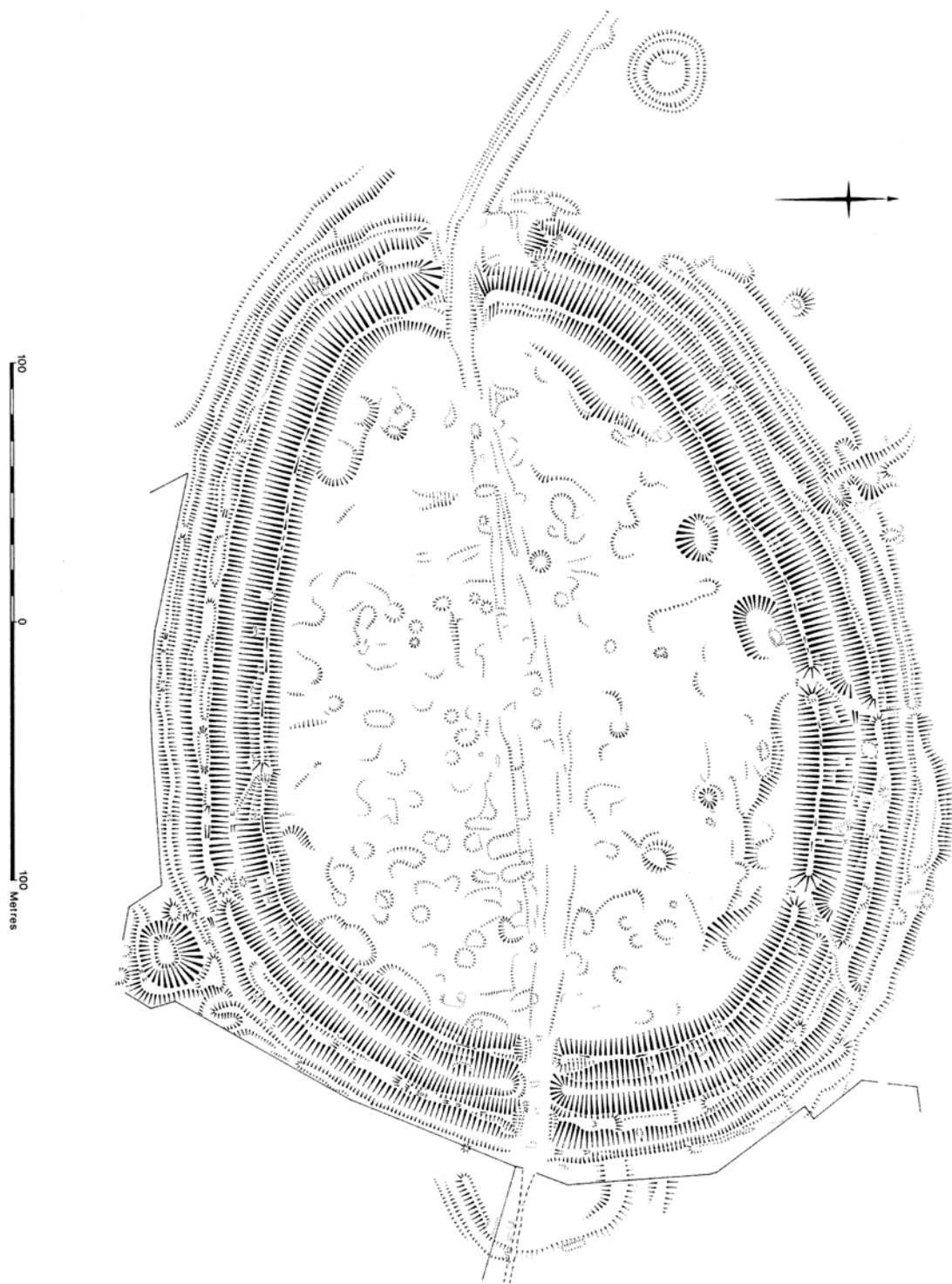


Fig 3 Areas of active erosion at the time of survey, shaded.



Barbury Castle analytical earthwork survey reduced from original survey drawing at 1:1000 ©NMR