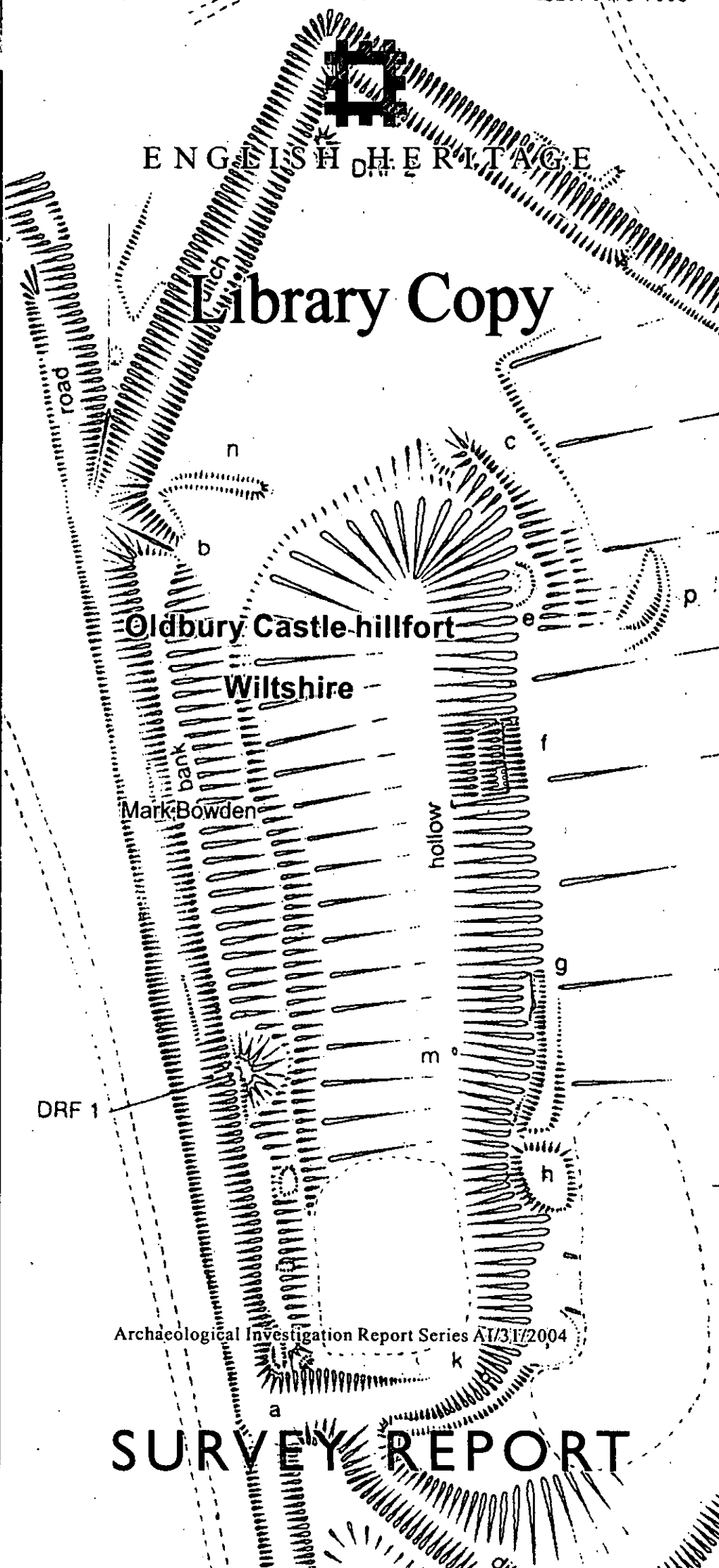




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Oldbury Castle hillfort

Wiltshire

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Archaeological Investigation Report Series AT/31/2004

SURVEY REPORT



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**OLDBURY CASTLE HILLFORT,
WILTSHIRE**

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Surveyed by: Mark Bowden, Guy Salkeld and others
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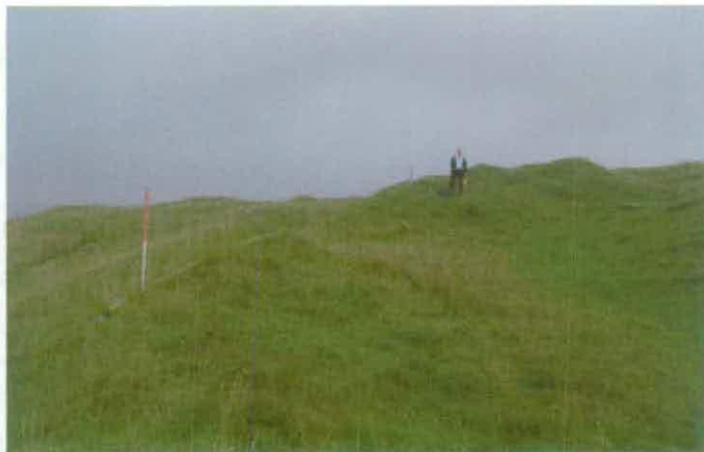
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Introduction

Oldbury Castle (SU 049 692) is a hillfort situated at about 250m OD on the ridge of Oldbury Hill or Cherhill Down, 5km west of Avebury. The defences are bivallate, except on the north-western side, and enclose approximately 9ha. The highest part of Cherhill Down consists of Upper Chalk with irregular patches of Tertiary clay-with-flints, some of which, according to Cunnington (1887, 221), has infilled large sink holes in the Chalk. Also of note is a single sarsen block lying in the bottom of the inner ditch at the west end of the hillfort (Fig 1). The soil, of the Icknield series, is shallow and well drained.

Fig 1. Inner ditch and outer rampart at the west end of the fort; the flat sarsen block can be seen in the ditch bottom, to the right of the figure



Archaeological survey and investigation of Oldbury Castle was requested by the National Trust in advance of repair works to erosion scars at various points around the ramparts. The survey was undertaken by the EH Archaeological Investigation team based at the NMRC, Swindon, during the late Spring and Summer of 2004. The survey encompassed only the area of the hillfort and included none of the other extensive earthworks on the Down.

History

The hillfort is divided between the parishes of Cherhill and Calstone, the boundary running along a former fenceline following the cross-rampart. The hill is known as Cherhill Down and Calstone Down and presumably formed part of the grazing land of those communities in historic times. There are two dew ponds on the down and another within the fort, and rectangular enclosures (now surviving only as cropmarks) on the lower slopes, some of which at least are probably sheep pens of medieval or early post-medieval date (see Smith forthcoming). There are also, a short distance to the south of the hillfort, some earthworks that are most plausibly explained as 'pillow mounds', indicating rabbit farming, also in a medieval or early post-medieval context. The hill has also been extensively quarried, mainly

for flint. A plausible context for this is the turnpiking of the Bath Road and the quarries probably date mainly from the 18th and 19th centuries, though a much earlier origin is possible. (Similar dates and purposes for the quarries near the hillforts of Barbury and Liddington have been suggested.) A hill figure in the shape of a white horse was cut on the northern escarpment, below the north-east corner of the hillfort, in the late 18th century (see Fig 3c and d). The obelisk at the western end of the hillfort was built in 1845 by Lord Lansdowne, ostensibly to commemorate his ancestor, Sir William Petty (Fig 2). The motive may have

Fig 2. Plaque on the Lansdowne Monument



been more probably to indicate the extent of his own importance by creating an eye-catcher visible from his house at Bowood and from much of the surrounding area, though W Cunnington (1887, 213) states that it was built to commemorate the birth of the Prince of Wales. The area surrounding Oldbury saw

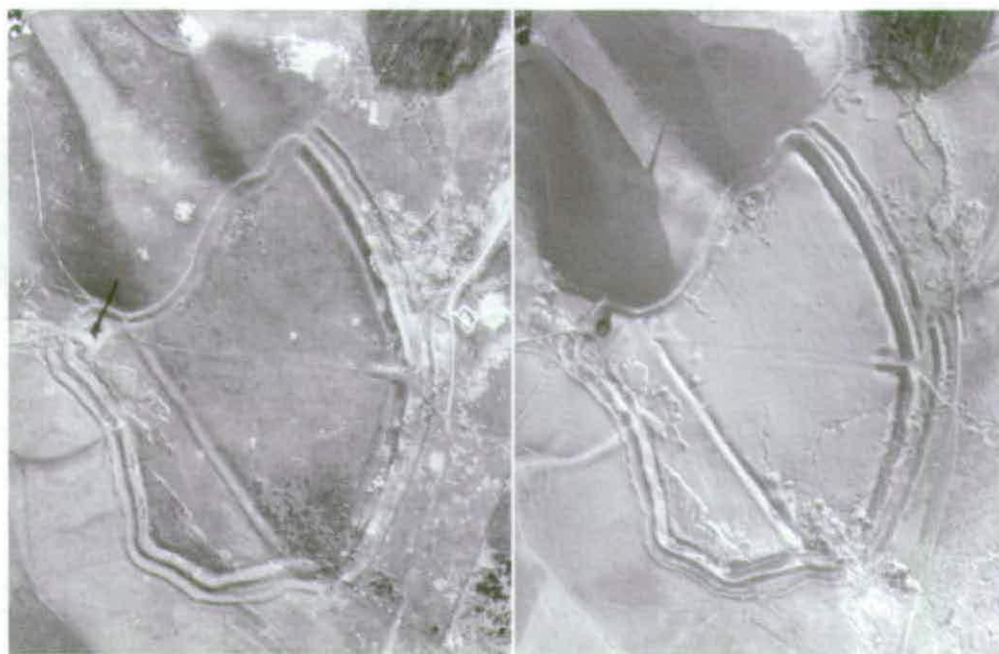
considerable military activity during the two World Wars. This included the construction of reservoirs within White Horse Plantation for the military airfield and camps at Yatesbury. Aerial photographs of 1946 (see, e.g. Fig 3a) show evidence of the passage of many vehicles and other activity on Cherhill Down close to the fort and it is probable that the fort was affected by this to some degree.

Previous archaeological research

For such a large and prominent hillfort, Oldbury has received surprisingly little attention from archaeologists. Richard Colt Hoare surveyed and described the earthworks (1821, 97, pl VIII). The activities of flint diggers rather than antiquaries in the 18th and 19th centuries recovered some interesting finds, though there were also some cursory excavations (Cunnington 1887; 1894). The finds recovered span an era from the Neolithic to the Post-medieval, with almost all periods represented. Aside from an excavation in 1930 (VCH 1957, 53), no further intrusive researches are recorded. The site was surveyed for the 1st edition OS 25-inch map in 1885, and re-surveyed and recorded for the OS Archaeology Division by J Palmer in 1968 (NMR no SU 06 NW 27). Aerial photographic transcription of the area as part of the Avebury World Heritage Site Project was undertaken in 1996 (Helen Winton pers comm; Small 1999) and geophysical survey of a large part of the interior of the fort took place in the same year (Payne forthcoming). The survey reported here is the first detailed investigation of the earthworks (Fig 4).

Despite the lack of formal research it has long been understood that Oldbury is a particularly complex monument. The recent geophysical survey and current earthwork survey have only added to that complexity.

Fig 3. Vertical aerial photographs of Oldbury; a, 14 Apr 1946 (RAF 106G/UK/1415/4069); b, 1 Dec 1952 (RAF 540/958/4147); c, 10 Apr 1973 (OS 73070/118); d, 28 Apr 1989 (OS 89094/149)



a

b



c

d

Description and interpretation of the earthworks

Position

Oldbury has been classed as a ridge-top hillfort (by e.g. Forde-Johnston 1976, 78-80), one of a numerous group, but in fact its topographical location is rather unusual and therefore deserving of consideration. There is equally high or higher ground in the immediate vicinity of the fort, to the north-east in White Horse Plantation, and to the south-east further along Oldbury Hill (262m OD). The eastern part of the fort occupies a slight saddle between these points, at the head of a combe which curves down to the north-east towards the lower-lying ridge that leads eastward to Knoll Down. The south-western and northern ramparts of the fort lie above steep slopes, especially severe on the north side. These natural topographical features have to some extent dictated the layout of the fort. In Colt Hoare's words, the plan 'is very irregular, humouring the hill in its numerous sinuosities' (1821, 97). The western end of the fort lies above a slight drop to the lower part of the ridge, but its position is not dictated by the topography. The height of the interior of the hillfort varies between about 235m and 258m OD. The lowest point is in the south-west and the highest in the north, with another high point in the south-east. This convoluted topography, combined with the size of the fort, ensures that from no point in the interior is it possible to see the whole circuit of the ramparts. This makes the hillfort seem even larger than it is. Being inside the fort can be, in fact, a very disorientating experience.

Despite this, views out from the fort are spectacular and very extensive in all directions, except for a narrow segment in the south-east, blocked by the higher end of the ridge. The fort today is particularly conspicuous in the landscape because of the Cherhill or Lansdowne Monument, which stands at its western corner (see Fig 5).

Pre-hillfort earthworks

There are a number of features on the hill which probably or definitely pre-date the hillfort. There is a possible long barrow (Cunnington 1872) immediately to the west of the hillfort and a round barrow just outside the eastern rampart (neither barrow surveyed). Other barrows certainly existed in the vicinity (e.g. Cunnington 1860; 1887, 215) though there is confusion as to their location. It is unclear, for example, whether the barrow in which a large Bronze Age urn was found (Cunnington 1860) is the one now visible just outside the eastern ramparts; the written description and the map (Cunnington 1887, opp 214) disagree and it is not certain, though it is likely, that it is the map which is incorrect. Of more immediate significance to the hillfort, perhaps, are a number of linear ditches, probably of late Bronze Age date.

These will be discussed further below. There is also a cross-ridge dyke, possibly contemporary with the hillfort, nearly half a kilometre to the west.

The ramparts

The ramparts are clearly of several phases, some of which are unfinished.

The eastern ramparts of the hillfort form a distinct and deliberate façade, being higher than the ramparts around the rest of the circuit. In plan they appear to describe an almost perfect arc of a circle, though in fact they do not; there is a significant angle change at the entrance (a). Unlike the south-western and northern ramparts they are not dictated by the topography. On the contrary, they deliberately ignore it, dipping noticeably towards the main eastern entrance in the centre of the façade, which lies at the top of the combe. In fact the centre line of the combe is about 50m north of the entrance and there is a faint suggestion in the height and shape of the inner rampart here (b) that there might have been another entrance passage at this point, blocked in antiquity. The inner eastern rampart is up to 3.0m high internally (though mostly about 2.2m high) and stands 7.0m above the base of the inner ditch. The outer rampart is almost 3m high but is exceptionally thick for much of its length and has an unusual double crest. Palmer (NMR SU 06 NW 27) explained this as the result of heaping up material from both sides, which certainly seems to be the case. He also noted the relatively slight, narrow outer ditch (and the 'causewayed' nature of the outer ditch to the south-west (see below)) and commented that 'the constructional anomalies leave no doubt that the outer rampart of the hillfort was never completed'. The only sign of a counterscarp to the outer ditch is immediately outside the entrance (c).

There are traces of a possibly unfinished third rampart outside the eastern defences. These comprise a length of low bank (d), 0.4m high, and a slightly more substantial bank (e), up to 1.6m high, outside the entrance. Neither of these shows any sign of an accompanying ditch but they do not appear to be merely quarry upcast. In fact the former is cut by some small quarry hollows.

The eastern defences of the fort are generally in good condition though there has been extensive animal burrowing in the past, to the south of the entrance, particularly in the inner rampart. There are also some recent-looking cuts (f) in the outer rampart to the north of the entrance. These might be the result either of unrecorded antiquarian trenching or of 20th-century military activity.

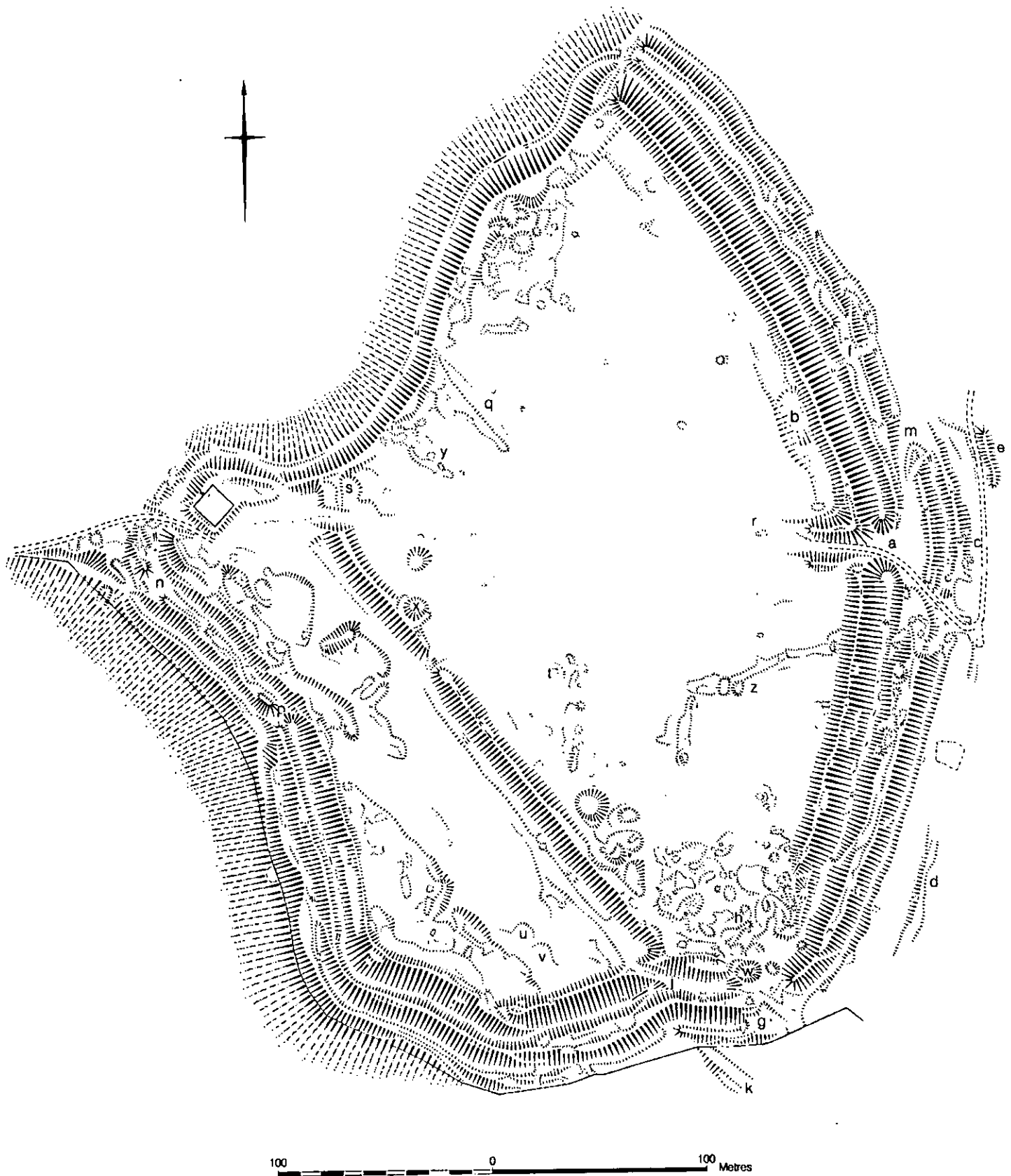


Fig 4. Earthwork survey plan, reduced from original at 1:1000

The northern defences of the fort are, in Palmer's expressive phrase, 'nominal'. The inner rampart has little substance but the appearance of strength has been created by scarping the natural slope steeply and throwing forward a small but externally impressive counterscarp, which survives intermittently. The counterscarp is 6.5m at most below the crest. The position of this rampart is dictated by the topography – it occupies the break of slope from the plateau of the ridge top above a very steep scarp slope overlooking Cherhill and Yatesbury to the north. However, it is worthy of note that one of the late Bronze Age linear ditches (Wiltshire SMR SU 06 NE 806), running along the crest of the ridge from the east, approaches this escarpment edge and perhaps extended along it. The hillfort defences here could be following the line of this pre-existing feature.

The west end of the hillfort is formed by a ditch, up to 3.3m deep internally, cutting across the narrow neck of the ridge. The area that would have been occupied by the inner rampart has been much disturbed, mainly by the construction of the obelisk. As Palmer notes, this occupies a false crest, but the position of the hillfort defences was apparently determined not by this, but by a pre-existing linear ditch (Wiltshire SMR SU 06 NW 695) which climbs the steep southern slopes of the hill at this point.

The south-western defences of the fort are particularly ragged, having been extensively damaged by quarrying and burrowing animals. They are more substantial than the northern ramparts but on a much smaller scale than the eastern façade – maximum height measurements for the inner rampart, 1.8m high internally, and inner ditch 6.4m below the rampart, for instance; generally the southern defences are more massive towards the east. For a distance of about 90m the outer ditch on this side, as noted by Palmer, 'consists of a number of pits separated by causeways of undisturbed ground.' This suggests that the work is unfinished, but also gives a clue to the working methods of the builders. Like those on the north side, the position of the south-western defences is, in part at least, dictated by the topography – they follow a break of slope from the plateau to the steep slopes above Calstone. However, this break of slope is much less clearly marked than the one on the north side of the hill, this being the dip slope. The ramparts could, and at one time did, take a different – higher – line. Because these ramparts are relatively low on the slope, dipping to about 135m OD at the extreme southern corner of the fort, the ramparts linking them to the eastern façade are forced to rise at a sharp angle up the contours. This in itself is somewhat anomalous and raises questions about the design and phasing of the fort's defences. In this sector too, as on the eastern façade, the outer bank has a double crest for part of its length.

At the southern end of the eastern façade is an area of particularly intrusive quarrying, interrupting the line of the defences. The inner and outer ramparts come to an abrupt end,

but this does not seem to be a result of quarry disturbance. Rather, it looks like an original feature, again perhaps suggesting an unfinished project. Alternatively, it is possible that there was another entrance at this point, suggested also by the presence of a substantial counterscarp bank (g) screening the gap. However, the former suggestion is strengthened by the existence of a slight bank (h), almost lost amongst the quarry upcast, which seems to indicate that construction work on the continuation of the inner rampart in this area had begun. There is a similar slight continuation of the outer rampart. Immediately to the south of this area are two sharp changes of angle in the defences (j) and this is coincident with the eastern end of the internal cross-rampart.

The latter is an unusual, if not unique, feature of Oldbury. It is a substantial rampart (up to 1.5m high internally, 4.8m externally), fronted by an apparently slight ditch (no more than 0.5m deep externally), running in a very straight line across the hillfort and joining the western defences. The relationship between this feature and the other defences of the fort is, of course, crucial to understanding the sequence of building. Unfortunately, at either end of the cross-rampart it has been disturbed by later trackways, fencelines and quarrying activity, and the relationships are not clear. Judging by the earthworks where the inner eastern rampart meets the cross-rampart, it would be possible to make a case for suggesting that the cross-rampart is a later addition, sub-dividing the hillfort. However, evidence from the outer defences and features external to the hillfort suggests a different sequence. The most compelling evidence is a linear feature (k), probably a linear ditch or a field boundary (perhaps also incorporating a trackway) beyond the hillfort's outer ditch. The ditch of the cross-rampart seems to take its position and its alignment from this feature, though they are now physically divided by the hillfort ramparts. If this is correctly identified as a linear ditch or similar feature, it gives a strong presumption in favour of the argument that the cross-rampart is a primary feature and that the hillfort was subsequently extended by the construction of the southern and south-western defences. Corroborative evidence is given by some anomalies within the defences themselves. First, there is the sharp angle in both inner and outer ramparts just where the cross-rampart joins. There is no topographical necessity for such a change of line and it is best explained as an original corner of the fort, with the southern ramparts subsequently springing off from it and forming the other, re-entrant, angle. Secondly, the outer ditch of the southern defences is interrupted by bank (g), apparently a counterscarp bank that belongs to the southern extremity of the eastern defences. Though this relationship could be explained by either feature being primary, or by simple carelessness on the part of the builders, it is probably best explained as the ditch butting up against a pre-existing counterscarp. The relationship therefore is that observed by Colt Hoare, who noted that a 'bank and ditch intersect the area of the work [hillfort], perhaps the remains of a more ancient agger' (1821, 97). Subsequent commentators have generally, and it seems rightly, followed Colt Hoare's lead.

Entrances

There is only one clearly original entrance to the fort and this is in the centre of the eastern façade (a). There is a gap in the inner rampart with long intumed banks on either side (but no indication in the earthworks of 'guard chambers'). There is now also a gap in the outer rampart almost opposite, but slightly to the south of, the one through the inner rampart. This forms an oblique approach, utilised by a current track, which superficially appears to be original. However, a slight rise and dip in the current track suggests that this may be a later breach through a once-continuous rampart. It is likely that the original approach was through a gap in the outer rampart with considerably overlapping terminals, some 50m further to the north (m). This would indicate that the approach to the hillfort was directly up the centre of the combe from the north-east.

There is currently a vehicle track through the western end of the hillfort, immediately to the south of the obelisk. There may have been an original entrance at this point. Colt Hoare's plan (executed before construction of the obelisk) shows what could be an original entrance but the gap in its current form does not look like an Iron Age entrance. Only a slight return to the terminal of the inner rampart on the south side of the gap and the sarsen block (see Bowden 2001, 3) suggest it. The earthworks are now so badly disturbed that it is impossible to be certain.

As noted above, the ramparts at the southern end of the eastern façade terminate as if at an entrance; there is a substantial length of counterscarp bank here, and there is a current track through the ramparts at this point. However, on balance it seems likely that this represents unfinished work rather than an original entrance. There is, also noted above, a possibility that there is a blocked entrance in the eastern façade. This would have provided a direct way into the fort from the top of the combe but the evidence is tenuous at best.

There are two breaches (n & p) through the outer rampart on the south-west side of the hillfort but neither of them is an original entrance nor, indeed, a major entrance at all. However, one of them (p), which occurs at a point where there is a major change in levels in the ramparts, was in use as a vehicular access route in 1946 (RAF106G/UK/1415/4069-4070 – see Fig 3a).

Interior

Occupation of the interior of the hillfort has been attested by numerous finds over the last two hundred years and more. Colt Hoare recorded that the hillfort 'appears to have been made use of as a place of residence as well as of defence, for the labourers in digging for

flints within its area, throw up numerous fragments of animal bones and rude pottery, the certain marks of habitation' (1821, 97).

In 1887 W Cunnington brought together accounts of numerous finds made 'in and around' the hillfort, partly from excavations made at his own instruction in hollows on the eastern side of the fort. He also included a report of excavations in 1875 by H Cunnington, who recovered from a pit 'within a few yards of the Lansdowne Monument' a small early Iron Age bowl, a weaving comb, a bronze ring and animal bones. Another pit 'within a few yards', opened later, yielded pottery, a quemstone, hones, worked flints, animal bones and charcoal.

In 1890 a pit 'about 100yds south of the monument' yielded a complete pot and fragments of two more, three loomweights and animal bones (Cunnington 1894). The pots are undecorated forms of the type now known as 'saucepan pots' and dated to the 4th century BC.

Another pit, excavated in 1930, contained a loomweight, early Iron Age sherds and a bone point, while a fifth pit, excavated at some time in the later nineteenth century but not previously recorded, yielded two haematite-coated sherds. The base of a wheel-thrown vessel and a la Tène III brooch of Colchester type have also been found on the hill, probably within the fort (VCH 1957, 53). Finds therefore span the whole Iron Age sequence and there are also finds of later date, including Romano-British pottery and Roman coins, and a penannular brooch of the 5th-7th centuries AD, medieval pottery and a post-medieval (16th-18th-century) ring-dial (Cunnington 1887).

The geophysical survey (Payne in press) recovered evidence for a number of features within the hillfort. Earthwork survey has added a few more, though it is doubtful whether many of them relate to the Iron Age occupation.

The most striking feature discovered by the geophysical survey is a ditch extending in a sinuous line from the northern side of the east entrance to a point about half way along the northern ramparts, therefore cutting off the high northern corner of the hillfort. The northernmost part of this ditch is visible as an earthwork (q), and a very slight elongated hollow (r) just inside the entrance may also mark its line. (It can also be seen on some aerial photographs, e.g. RAF540/958/4146-4147 – see Fig 3b.) The most prominent earthwork associated with this feature, however, is a low bank (at q). Interestingly this lies on the south-west, or *outside*, of the ditch. Possibly this ditch forms part of an enclosure pre-dating the hillfort,

the other side lying somewhere below the northern and north-eastern defences of the fort. In support of this idea, it is noticeable that the northern intum of the main entrance is slightly different in character from its southern pair, being higher and more clearly integral with the main rampart (however, whether this is due to the original design or to later damage is not certain). Also, there is a distinct change in the character of the northern defences at the point where the geophysical ditch meets them – the rampart is present and 0.7m high to the west but absent to the east. Alternatively, the ditch could represent a later sub-division of the fort; this could date within the Iron Age or to a later period, Roman or early Medieval. Given the find of a 5th-7th-century penannular brooch, one of two from the Cherhill area, coupled with the proximity of the fort to the terminal of the Wansdyke on Morgan's Hill, Payne (in press) suggests that the small enclosure in the northern quadrant of the fort might be a post-Roman construction. However, the observation that the bank is outside the ditch argues against the 'enclosure' idea. A third alternative is that this ditch is part of a late Bronze Age linear. It would join the known linear (Wiltshire SMR SU 06 NE 806) at its northern end but where it might extend to the east is unknown.

The magnetometer survey also recovered up to 20 circular gullies and more than 150 pits, mostly towards the eastern side of the hillfort. It is not certain whether this zoning is significant or whether it is a factor of differential damage or soil depth. Clear evidence of deliberate zoning has been identified at some hillforts and smaller Iron Age enclosures, but the evidence at Oldbury is not conclusive. The geophysicists also identified a road corridor, defined by an absence of features, running more or less along the line of the current track from the eastern entrance towards the Lansdowne Monument. The circular features are interpreted as being the remains of houses of Iron Age date. While this is no doubt generally true, comment should be made on a group of three particularly large circles near the northern side of the fort. These are approximately 16m in diameter, while the majority of the house circles are 10-12m in diameter. The three larger circles are in close proximity to some earthworks (see below) that might be of 20th-century military origin and it is at least a possibility that the circles could date to the same era, being the footprint of a searchlight battery. An alternative possibility is that they are the ditches of small Bronze Age barrows; this is less likely as barrow ditches, being quarries for mound material, tend to be broader. However, these structures are not outside the known size-range for Iron Age houses, so that explanation should perhaps be preferred. The footprints of the Iron Age houses overlap in several places; two or more phases of settlement activity are represented. No entrances were visible.

The earthworks recorded within the interior relate mainly to 18th- or 19th-century quarrying, though some may also result from 20th-century military activity. However, there are a number of small, slight hollows scattered across the interior, some of which might be Iron Age pits. This suggestion is supported by the observations of the 19th-century antiquaries who apparently

found Iron Age pits by noting hollows on the surface. No definite house platforms were seen; there are four possible ones (s, t, u, v) but none of them is convincing. None of them matches the possible house circles seen on the geophysical plots. Hollowing immediately behind the rampart at the southern corner of the fort might be the result of Iron Age quarrying for rampart material, though this is in an area of extensive later quarrying.



Fig 5. Quarries in the south-western part of the fort

The quarrying (Fig 5) lies in bands more or less along the contours and is presumably following seams of flint. The apparently haphazard digging of deep cone-shaped hollows is probably explained by the deposits of Tertiary material containing flint, lying in solution hollows in the chalk (Cunnington 1887, 221). However, flint was not the only material being extracted. Chalk was also taken and an 'Old Sand Pit' is marked on the 1st edition OS 1:2500 map (1886) (w). This map also indicates the extent of quarrying in the mid-nineteenth century, especially in the southern corner of the hillfort where a small rectangular 'Chalk Pit' is marked in an area that has been extensively quarried out; whether the more extensive quarrying is later or whether the mapped 'Chalk Pit' represents the final phase of this activity is uncertain, but earthwork and aerial photographic evidence (see Fig 3d) supports the latter interpretation. Pastoral activity is also represented in the earthworks – cut partly into the back of the cross-rampart is a small dew pond (x). This is smaller than the usual Wiltshire dew ponds and is not shown on Colt Hoare's plan, so might be relatively late.

A number of small circular hollows with crisply-defined, steep sides but apparently without spoilheaps can be seen within the fort. These are certainly of recent origin and are possibly bomb craters. Behind the north-western rampart is a set of earthworks (y) consisting of a

crescentic bank with other mounds and hollows. This also appears to be recent but does not seem to result from quarrying; it could be a military earthwork, perhaps designed to cover the western entrance to the fort. Almost uniquely for Oldbury, this earthwork complex is not cut by quarry hollows. As noted above, the three large circles discovered in the magnetometer survey lie about 50m to the east of this earthwork.

An earthen bank (z), with very little sign of an accompanying ditch, lies in the eastern part of the hillfort. It is cut by a track and, in three places, by quarry pits and is overlain by their spoil. It turns an abrupt angle at one point, for which there is no topographic reason as it is on almost flat ground. Its date and purpose are obscure, though clearly it pre-dates the quarries.

Discussion

It is possible to suggest a phasing for the hillfort defences (Fig 6), though some features cannot be fitted into the scheme with certainty, if at all.

The first recognisable constructions on the hill, apart from the barrows that are probably of the later Neolithic to earlier Bronze Age, are the linear ditches. These fit within a late Bronze Age context, where they form major, and clearly very important, land boundaries. There were also, conceivably, one or two pre-hillfort enclosures (see below). It is suggested here that the linear ditches recorded in the Wiltshire SMR as SU 06 NW 695 and SU 06 NE 806 may be parts of the same feature, connected along the scarp edge. The newly recorded possible linear (k) approaching from the south-east, it is suggested, joined 695-806. The first phase hillfort occupied the angle between these linear ditches and was built by enhancing the existing ditches along the north-facing scarp and by the cross-rampart, and by joining them with a curved, east-facing façade of massive proportions.

The hillfort was subsequently 'developed' by the construction of an outer rampart and ditch and by extending the enclosure to the south-west, beyond the line of the cross-rampart. The exact sequence is unclear and two scenarios can be suggested. Possibly the eastern façade was made bivallate first. Alternatively, the extension may have been constructed and then the whole eastern and southern sides made bivallate. The fact that the outer

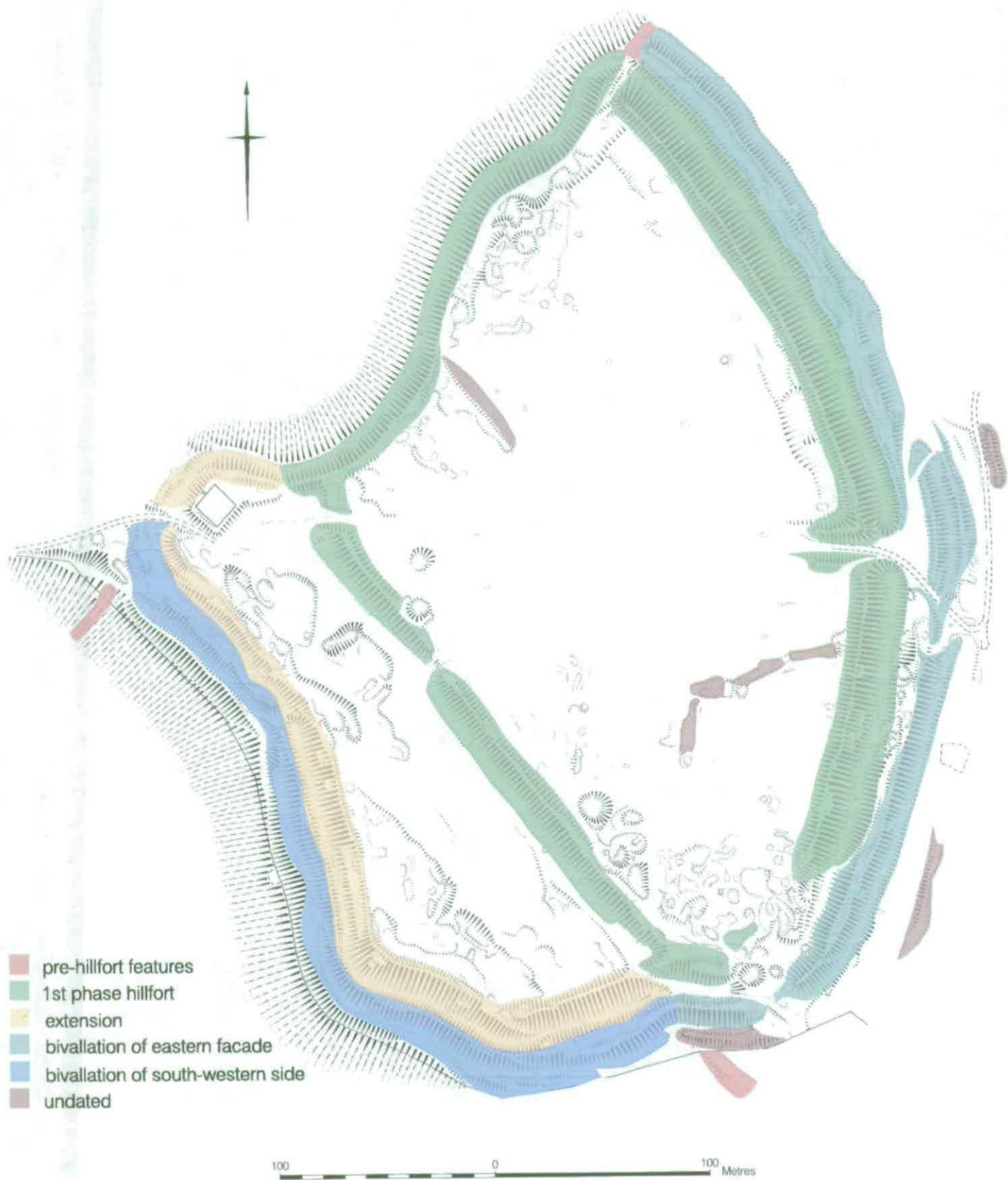


Fig 6. Phase diagram

defences are apparently unfinished all round and that the 'double-crested' of the outer rampart appears in both parts, might favour the latter hypothesis. Apparently similar, double-crested outer banks have been noted at other hillforts – Bullsdown (Hants), Maesbury (Somerset) and Bratton Castle, for instance (Forde-Johnston 1976, 150-1). Although the extension of the hillfort took it beyond the linear originally chosen to demarcate it, the western extremity of the hillfort was still marked by the line of linear 695. The 'causewayed' nature of the outer ditch on the south-western side suggests perhaps some form of 'gang', or independent group working.

Where the ditch found by geophysical survey fits into this scheme is unknown but it could pre-date the hillfort, either as an enclosure or as part of another linear ditch; alternatively it could be broadly contemporary with the hillfort, or later. Also of uncertain date are the isolated lengths of bank beyond the eastern façade and the bank within the south-eastern part of the interior (**d**, **e**, and **z**). It might be suggested that the banks (**d** and **z**) form part of an enclosure pre-dating the hillfort, but this is unlikely as the form of these earthworks differs considerably.

The other features found by geophysical survey – ring gullies and pits – are also difficult to fit precisely into the chronological framework though probably they date generally to the Iron Age. The overlapping ring gullies, evidence for more than one phase of activity, accords with the 'developed' nature of the hillfort. The presence of some larger buildings (if that is what they are), amongst the 10-12m diameter round houses, requires explanation. Is there a chronological difference, or are they buildings with a different, perhaps communal, function? Or do they represent social differentiation, something that usually seems to be absent from hillforts? Only further research, including perhaps excavation, could answer this question.

Why the hillfort should originally have been constrained by the pre-existing linears is a question of great interest. It is not, presumably, merely a question of convenience. Except along the northern edge, a huge amount of labour has been invested in creating the earliest ramparts, which could therefore have been constructed from scratch anywhere on the hill. The implication is that the linear ditches still had considerable significance for the original hillfort builders. When the hillfort was extended to the south-west this significance may have diminished, but it was still a factor in the layout of the western defences. This has implications for other early hillforts that were laid out over the junctions of linears, such as Quarley Hill (Hants) (Hawkes 1938), Casterley Camp (Field 2001, 61) and possibly Liddington (Bowden 2000), Scratchbury and Sidbury (McOmish *et al* 2002, 36, 58, 74). Of these only Casterley actually takes its form – like Oldbury – from the linears, though Field suggests Martinsell as possibly another and Tan Hill as somewhere where this might have happened but did not – a series of linears forms an enclosure but it has never been formalised with

ramparts. Alfred's Castle (Oxfordshire), however, might be another example (Gosden and Lock 2001, 87). As Field points out, it seems as if these hilltops or other locations where linear ditches met were significant places in the later Bronze Age and that this significance was encapsulated by enclosure in the early part of the Iron Age, even though the linears themselves lost their importance.

The original builders went to great trouble to provide a massive regular façade on the eastern side of the fort, with a central entrance and an approach apparently constrained, perhaps in a subsequent phase, to the lowest line of the combe. The fact that the angle of the ramparts changes at the entrance (a) perhaps suggests that the plan of the façade was laid out from this central point. Though principal entrances facing east are a common feature of southern British hillforts, the provision of a regular façade in this way is not. However, impressive eastern façades were often provided to smaller Iron Age enclosures of Gussage-All-Saints type. (Another common feature of these sites, incidentally, is a very irregular shape to the remainder of the circuit.) An impressive approach and an element of symbolism were at least as important as considerations of defence in the layout of this fort. The eastern façade is, of course, facing towards the constellation of Neolithic monuments around Avebury, of which Windmill Hill and Silbury Hill are clearly visible, and the banks of the henge itself can just be seen over the top of Knoll Down. Avebury itself appears to have been shunned in the Iron Age (Bowden forthcoming).

Another striking feature of the entrance at Oldbury is the pair of intumed banks, creating a 40m long passage to lengthen the already considerable route from the exterior to the interior of the fort. Though intumed entrances are not uncommon generally, they are a rarity in this region. No other hillfort on the Marlborough Downs, or indeed elsewhere in north Wiltshire, has them; the nearest example is possibly at Yambury, south Wiltshire. This could be regarded as just another example of the 'uniqueness of character' of each hillfort in the area. However, there is presumably some significance in this element of the design. Whether or not the intumed banks are an original feature of the design is not entirely clear – while the northern one appears to be integral with the adjacent rampart, the southern one looks curiously detached. This could relate to the possibly pre-existing ditch found by geophysical survey; however, it may only be due to subsequent damage. It is worth noting that the outworks of the entrance (c) now appear to be integral with the outer defences. While those defences show signs of being unfinished, the part forming the hornwork across the entrance probably is finished; this is (with one possible exception – see below) the only part of the outer defences on the eastern side of the fort that has a counterscarp bank. This might indicate that it was built first, as a freestanding screen covering the entrance. Forde-Johnston noted that the overlapped rampart entrances at Hod Hill and Hambledon Hill (Dorset) are very similar to Oldbury (1976, 238-9).

One anomaly remains – the length of bank (g), apparently a counterscarp, at the extreme southern end of the eastern façade. This overlies the possible linear ditch, lies parallel to the hillfort defences at this point and is butted uncomfortably by the outer ditch of the southern defences. Given the general lack of a counterscarp to the eastern façade – except at the entrance – this feature might be taken as additional evidence for the existence of a second entrance at this point. However, the other evidence does not support this interpretation strongly and this bank remains as an anomalous feature. It may be part of the counterscarp belonging to the defences of the south-western extension but neither its position, nor its relationship to the ditch would support this view.

The general lack of a counterscarp to the east contrasts with the evidence of a counterscarp, in places quite substantial, around the southern and south-western sides of the fort. This is not easy to explain in functional terms.

Another question concerns the reason for the extension of the fort to the south-west. This takes in an area of sloping but nevertheless usable ground. Geophysical survey indicates that there is at least one roundhouse and a scatter of pits in this area. Two of the possible earthwork roundhouse platforms (u, v) are also in this extension. This area has been most disturbed by quarrying, however, with almost a half of the original ground surface lost (see Fig 5), and it may never be possible to reconstruct the Iron Age usage of this part of the site.

Evidence of Romano-British activity on the down does not, apparently, focus on the hillfort. However, there seems to be at least a strong possibility that the hillfort was re-used in some capacity in the post-Roman period. This has been suggested by Payne (in press) and others but the earthwork evidence does not, on current understanding, provide any further evidence for this. There may have been episodes of cultivation in the interior of the fort during the medieval and later periods, explaining the smoothed nature of much of the interior and the relatively poor survival of internal features, but this has left no traces in the form of, for instance, ridge-and-furrow.

The erosion scars that gave rise to this survey are not numerous, though some individual examples are deep and clearly damaging the monument (Fig 7). More worrying is the evidence of continued burrowing and the illicit use of the earthworks for off-road vehicles (Fig 8). Unless checked, these may lead to serious damage.



Fig 7. Current erosion scars (over 1m long) and main areas of animal burrowing



Fig 8. Damage by off-road vehicles; inner rampart, north of the east entrance

Method of survey

Control was established by use of Trimble survey-grade Differential GPS. The control scheme included not only temporarily-marked survey points but 'hard' detail (the fence to the south of the site, the obelisk plinth, track edges, a sarsen boulder and isolated post stubs of former fences). Archaeological detail was surveyed into this control framework, plotted at a scale of 1:1000, by graphical methods and, in the case of the complex quarrying at the south-eastern extremity of the fort, by plane table and self-reducing alidade. Heights were obtained with a pocket level.

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