

DISPERSED SETTLEMENTS ON THE SOUTHERN MENDIP ESCARPMENT THE EARTHWORK EVIDENCE

Graham Brown



Dispersed Settlements on the southern Mendip Escarpment - the Earthwork Evidence

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SUMMARY

An analytical survey of the southern escarpment of the Mendip Hills identified the earthwork remains of several dispersed farmsteads with associated track-ways and fields. Evidence of industrial activity was also noted. Pottery evidence would suggest that some of the farmsteads date to at least the 12th century although some may have earlier origins, possibly as seasonal settlements. The morphological similarity and regularity of spacing between the farmsteads would suggest that several were part of a planned expansion from the valley settlements. In the centuries following their abandonment, other farmsteads were established on the escarpment, but their fortunes were mixed since some were soon abandoned.

In many cases, the remaining farmsteads on this southern hill-slope are the survivors of a periodic colonisation and contraction that has probably occurred over several millenia onto land that has been termed marginal, but which nevertheless was an important resource, not only for pasture, but woodland and occasional arable cultivation, but also mineral extraction.

CONTRIBUTORS

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This report has benefited by the discussion and help from several individuals. Richard Broomhead discussed the results of his survey of Rodney Stoke parish and provided information of St Augustine Abbey's involvement at Draycott. Anne and Richard Porter kindly provided me with a copy of their publication 'Yesterday in Easton'. Chris Webster from the Somerset Historic Environment Record provided copies of plans of Lower Hope and Dursden. The archivist at Wells Cathedral Library provided documentation for Easton. Krysia Truscoe supplied the aerial photographic transcription of the Easton area and discussed her analysis of the Mendip escarpment. Deborah Cunliffe and Elaine Jamieson drew the illustrations for publication. Finally, Elaine Jamieson and Mark Bowden read and commented on an earlier draft of the report.

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I. INTRODUCTION

During the winter and spring of 2006-7, Archaeological Field Investigators from English Heritage undertook the survey of the earthwork remains of several dispersed settlements on the southern escarpment of the Mendip Hills between Wells and Rodney Stoke. The survey forms part of English Heritage's Mendip Hills AONB project (Jamieson 2006; fig 1). The first area investigated was the northern extremity of the tithing of Easton in the parish of Wells St Cuthbert Out where five farmsteads, together with routeways, field systems and enclosures, were identified on the edge of the plateau; they all lie on the western side of Ebbor Gorge in an area known as Hope and Dursden. This area is approximately 500m south-east of the settlement of Ramspits, which was the subject of detailed research in 1989 (Pattison 1991, 95-106; NMR: ST 54 NW 41). Further surveys were carried out at two locations on the escarpment above Rodney Stoke. The first site was of a small farmstead that lies to the east of Stoke Wood in Bryants Field, while the other was on the western side of the parish where evidence of another farmstead and several out-buildings, field systems, enclosures and quarry scoops were recorded on the northern side of New Road.

The survey and analysis of this dispersed settlement pattern, together with previous research at Ramspits and sites elsewhere, provides further evidence of the medieval and later settlement pattern on the Mendip Hills.

The steeply rising land of the southern escarpment forms the northern limit of a large expanse of former wetland of the Axe valley. Clustered along the bottom of the escarpment are several nucleated settlements, which were undoubtedly the principal focus of settlement in the region throughout the medieval period. In general, the ground rises steeply from about 30m OD at the base of the Hills to about 250m OD on the plateau. Several small valleys and gorges punctuate the escarpment and provide routeways onto the higher ground; the most notable in the survey area is the deeply incised gorge known as Ebbor Gorge where several caves with evidence of human use attest to the prehistoric activity in the area.

The geological form of the escarpment follows the contours; there are three distinctive bands of carboniferous limestone beds that extend along the upper reaches and onto the plateau. In the east, the Easton settlements lie mainly on Clifton Down limestone apart from the southern Hope settlement, which lies on Hotwells series. This limestone outcrop overlies the Clifton Down limestone. Further north-west, in Rodney Stoke, both settlements lie on Burrington Oolitic limestone. The area below these three bands of limestone, from about the 260m contour to an area just south-west of the modern settlements, is comprised mainly of red-brown silty mudstone of the Mercia Mudstone Group (Keuper Marl) (British Geological Survey Wells, sheet 280). Significantly, this Keuper Marl was the most intensively cultivated during the medieval period.

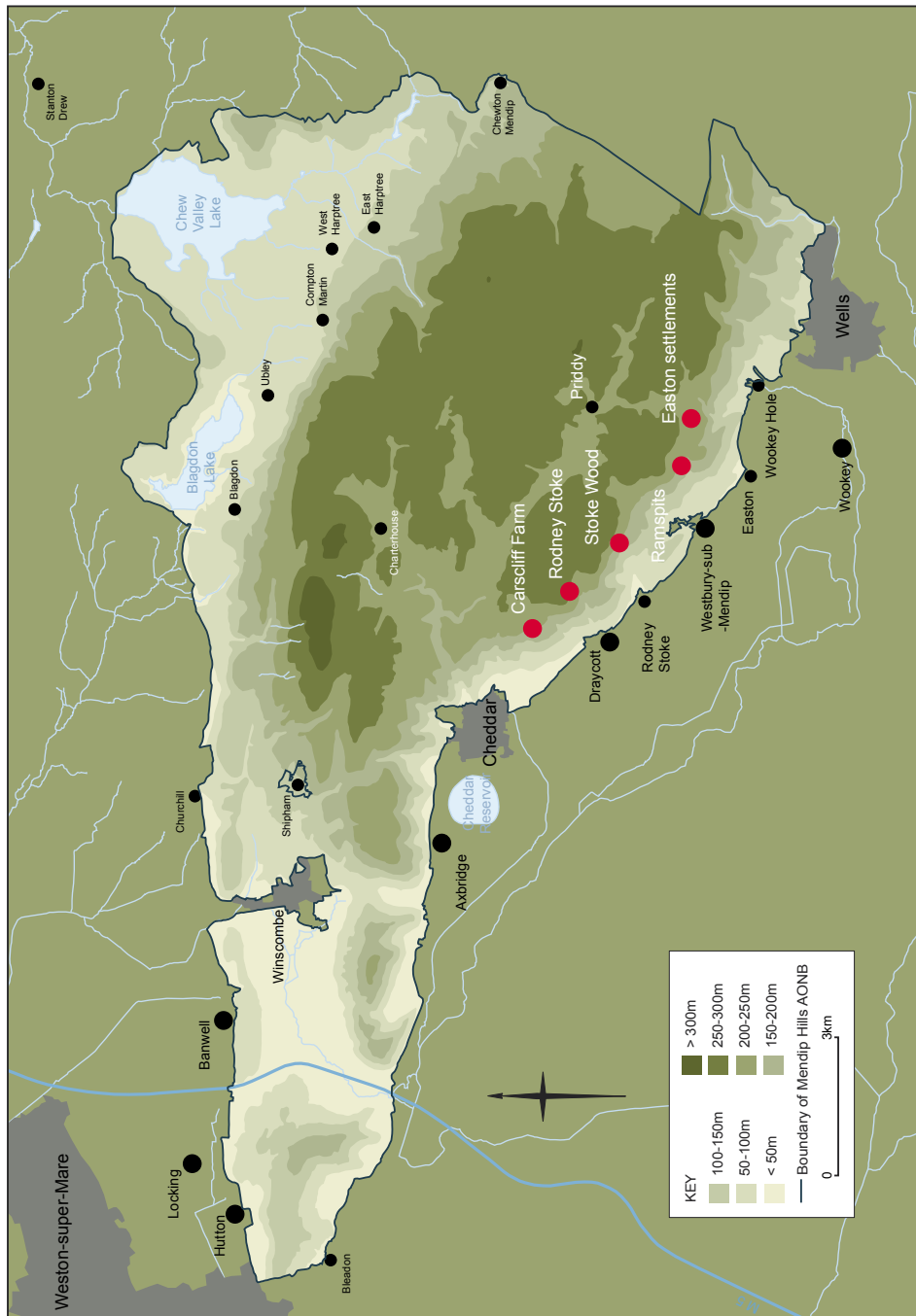


Figure 1 Location of settlements on the southern Mendip escarpment.

2. PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Archaeological investigation of the deserted settlements on the southern Mendip escarpment has largely been confined to earthwork surveys and sketch plans apart from an unpublished excavation of an Anglo-Saxon building near Carscliff Farm (ST 47825224) in the parish of Cheddar. In the area to the west of the Ebbor Gorge, A and J Everton produced a sketch plan showing the settlement, the communication pattern, and field boundaries at Hope and Ramspits. At Hope they identified 'at least two buildings within a platform scraped out of the hillside, from which came 12th-13th century sherds, and an associated holloway'. Their plan also differentiates between what they considered to be pre-18th century field walls and those of late-18th century date (NMR: ST 54 NW 38; MSRG Annual Report 19, 8).

The Evertons also plotted a settlement at Dursden, which comprised rectangular building platforms and associated rectilinear fields. The topsoil had been removed from two fields exposing a scatter of flint, pottery and metal objects. The flint included implements dating to the Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age; there was also a polished stone axe and some possible Bronze Age sherds. Most of the pottery, however, dated to the 12th and 13th century, and was presumed to be associated with the Dursden settlement. Intriguingly the Evertons also mention the ruins of late 17th -19th century buildings and field walls to the south where work was continuing (Archaeol Rev CBA 13 1967, 23-4). No further reports were published on this site, but it was probably the farmstead in Andrews Green field.

In addition to the Everton's fieldwork, there are also two un-dated and un-published plans of Lower Hope and Dursden, which are held at the Somerset Historic Environment Record (fig 2 & 3). The Dursden plan is particularly useful, since it shows the settlement before it was levelled. There are what appear to be two buildings, presumably stone-walled, set parallel to one another and measuring c14m x 7.5m and 13m x 7.5m. The northern building is more wedge-shaped and has a sunken area on its western side. On the eastern side there is a rectangular platform measuring 11.5m x 7m, which was possibly another building stance. A hollow-way is also evident on the western side.

In 1989 the RCHME undertook an analytical earthwork survey of the area known as Ramspits, which lies above Westbury. The survey identified three farmsteads, two of which date to the medieval period; several trackways; and field systems including a complex of medieval strip lynchets and post-enclosure fields. Documentary sources would suggest that the farmsteads were deserted by the mid-15th century, but the associated landholdings survived into the late 18th century when new farm buildings were established within a sub-square enclosure (Pattison 1991, 95-106).

Further west, at Rodney Stoke, Richard Broomhead produced a plan of the earthworks of what he described as a 'deserted medieval hamlet' (Broomhead 1989, 178). The surveyed area was confined to a prominent building stance and excluded the field boundaries and evidence of cultivation. The site was also surveyed in 1964 by the Bristol and Avon Archaeological Group, although no plan has been published (NMR: ST 45 SE 46). Broomhead produced another plan the following year of the settlement earthworks

of a farmstead near Stoke Wood as part of a parish survey. This plan was also used in conjunction with aerial photographs to produce a plan of the wider area, which included 'several small enclosures' to the north of the farmstead as well as a probable 'Celtic' field system. A test pit was dug in one of the enclosures where a single sherd of medieval pottery was recovered (Broomhead 1990, 225-27; NMR: ST 45 SE 72).

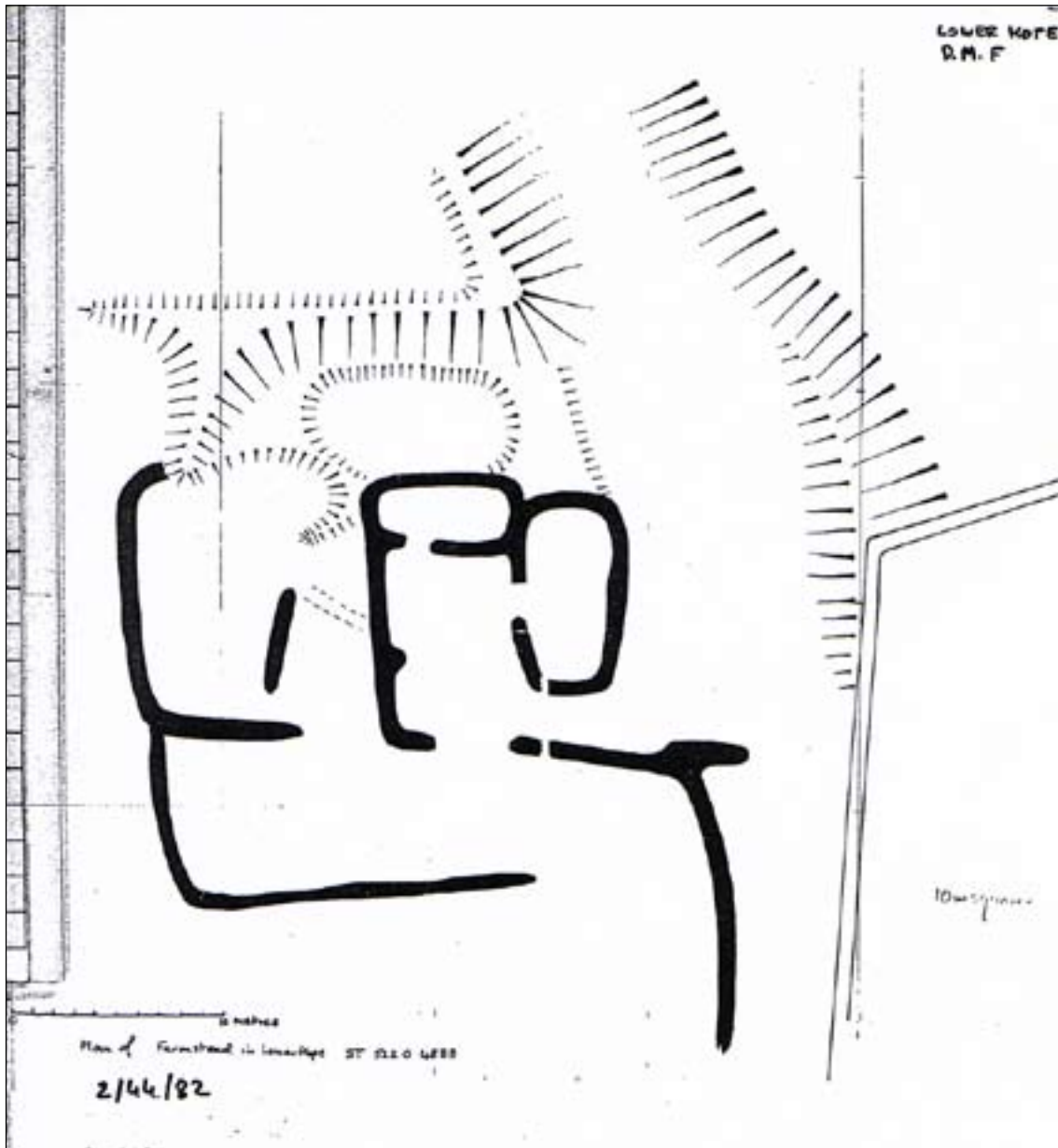


Figure 2. Earthwork survey of Lower Hope (courtesy of Somerset Historic Environment Service).

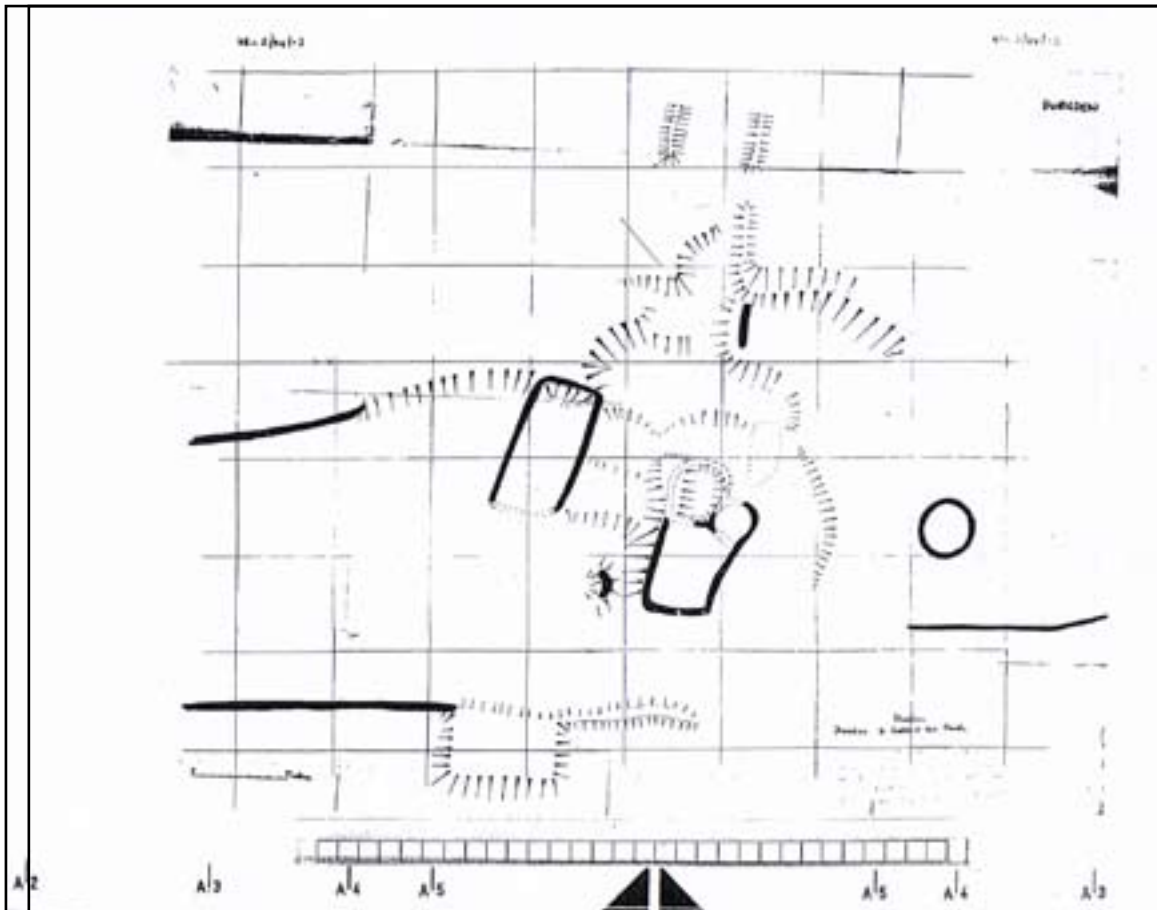


Figure 3. Earthwork survey of Dursden (courtesy of Somerset Historic Environment Service).

3. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Easton

Although Easton is not specifically mentioned in the Domesday Survey, it was undoubtedly in existence at this time since it is mentioned in a charter of 1065 when Edward the Confessor confirmed certain lands to the Bishop of Wells (*Cal Man Dean & Chapter* I, 429; Sawyer 1968, 1042).

During the later medieval period Easton was divided between three estates. In the east was the manor of Milton, which was held from the Bishop by the eponymous landowner and included the area known as Hope (Thompson 1895, 260). Another was held by the Cistercian monastery at Stanley (Wilts), while a third was held by the Vicars Choral of Wells Cathedral.

In the late 12th century Stanley Abbey held a hide of land at Easton (Birch 1875, 243). The acquisition of further land here by the white monks appears to have been on a piecemeal, rather fragmentary nature, since some grants were for the whole of an individual's holding while at least one was for as little as $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre. There is also a reference to a mill and the wall of a grange (ibid, 258). In 1291, in the taxation of Pope Nicholas IV, the estate was valued at £3 5s (Astle *et al* 1802). In the abbey's only surviving Ministers' Account, which dates to 1527-8, the grange was valued at £2 (TNA: PRO SC6/Hen VIII/3958). In 1537 the estate was sold to Sir Edward Baynton from Bromham (Wilts) and five years later it was granted by Richard Palmer (who had held it from the late abbot for a term of fifty years), to Philip Gregory (SRO: DD\SAS/C795/PR/261).

In the 14th century the Bishop of Wells established the College of Vicars Choral and endowed them with several estates in Somerset including '... a messuage, one carucate of land, 24a of wood and 26s 8d rent in *Welleslegh, Dultcote and Eston* ...' and in addition 'a messuage, 10a of land and $\frac{1}{2}$ a meadow in *Eston*' (*Cal Man Dean & Chapter* I, 379). The Easton estate was to remain in the College's hands until the mid 19th century (Hill 1999, 287). A rent roll dating to 1545, which was compiled by the bailiff of the manor of Wells, or Canon Barn, notes the receipts from its various holdings including Easton (presumably the Vicars Choral estate). There is also mention of a second estate 'late of the Abbot of Stanley' (Wells Cathedral Archive, ADD/4001).

Evidence of cultivation and settlement at Easton is provided in an account of 1343-44 when the Bishop of Wells received tithes from his manors, which included oats and corn from his 'fee of *Eston* ..., the brethren's fee in *Eston* [presumably from Stanley Abbey], and the fee of Sir Philip de Milton ...' Within the bishop's manor oats were received from seven men from Hope and *Hadesdone* [Dursden?] (*Cal Man Dean & Chapter* I, 253). In 1402-3, there is further evidence of settlement at Hope when three tofts were given by John Wiking and Isabelle Tanner of Wells to the Carthusian monks of Hinton Charterhouse (Hasler 1995, 91). This was probably the same Isobel Tannere who gave three houses and 6a of land at Wookey to Witham Charterhouse in 1379 (Scott Holmes 1969, 127). Two of the tofts at Hope included 30a of land and 4a of woodland;

they were held by John Goundenham and his wife, Agnes, and William Nyle and his wife, Joan. The third toft provided an annual rent of six shillings and had 12a of land and 2½a of meadow; it was held by a certain Robert, his wife Matilda, and Isabelle ate Heye. The wood at Hope was described as being ‘... next to Milton ...’ (Hasler 1995, 91). In 1535, the *Valor Ecclesiasticus* records an estate at *Hopp* [Hope] belonging to Hinton Charterhouse, which was valued at £2 a year (the same value as Stanley’s estate in 1527-8) (Caley 1810, 156). The Charterhouse was suppressed on 31st March 1539, and from the first account following the Suppression it is clear that there was only one tenement at Hope which was in the tenure of John Wilmot (*Cal L& P Hen VIII*, 14, pt 1, 637; Brett 2007, 13-14). This small estate was probably the area indicated by the ‘Hope’ field names on the Tithe Award map and where there are the earthwork remains of three farmsteads (SRO: D/D/RT 370).

Forty-two years after the Suppression the lay subsidy of 1581 lists seven named individuals at Easton, two of whom paid £3 5s, while the remainder paid either £4 6s 8d or £5 8s 4d (Webb 2002, 71), but where these individuals lived is unknown.

There is little documentary evidence for Dursden during the medieval period; however, it was undoubtedly in existence by the late 13th century from the pottery evidence. In addition, Nicholas de *Duddesdene* and Henry his son were witnesses to a grant of land in Priddy in the 13th century to the monks of Bruerne Abbey (TNA: PRO E 326/2970). By 1750, the Dursden estate was owned by the Tudway family and included land in Easton as well as in neighbouring Wookey, Priddy and Westbury; it amounted to a little over 62ha (SRO: DD/TD/20 item 94). In Easton, the estate included a toft, three closes, as well as a close known as Dursdown, in total amounting to 16a. There was also a coppice wood above Wookey Hole (*ibid*).

Rodney Stoke

Rodney Stoke is recorded in the Domesday Survey when it was held by Roger Whiting from the Bishop of Coutances (Thorn & Thorn 1980, 5:4). There was land for 5 ploughs, half of which was held in demesne. The estate also included a mill, meadow and extensive pasture. There was also a substantial amount of woodland (1 league long × 1 furlong wide which, according to Rackham’s formula would be equivalent to about 2.5km × 240m (Rackham 1980, 113)), much of it presumably lay on the escarpment and plateau of the Hills. The population at this time, twelve individuals, was similar to Westbury, but significantly smaller than neighbouring Cheddar, which was held by the king (Thorn & Thorn 1980).

Throughout the remainder of the medieval period, Rodney Stoke was in secular hands. In 1216 the manor was granted to Sir Osbert Giffard and sometime during the reign of Edward I it passed to Sir Richard de Rodney in whose family it remained until the 17th century when it passed to Lord Chandos through marriage (Collinson 1791, 602-7). Some of the Rodney family were prominent in regional and national politics; for example, one of them was sheriff of the county from 1317-19, while another was a steward in the royal household in the 12th century (*ibid*, 603).

4. EARTHWORK SURVEY AND INTERPRETATION

Easton

The surveyed area lies on the eastern side of Deerleap road, at the northern extremity of the tithing of Easton in the parish of Wells St Cuthbert Out (fig 4). On the western side of the road, in Westbury-Sub-Mendip, are the settlement remains of Ramspits. Within the surveyed area are the earthworks of five farmsteads which are set within a landscape dominated by the low scarps defining field systems, stock enclosures and trackways. Since the field systems, in part, appear to be integral to those at Ramspits, the western side of Deerleap will form part of the overall analysis of the area.

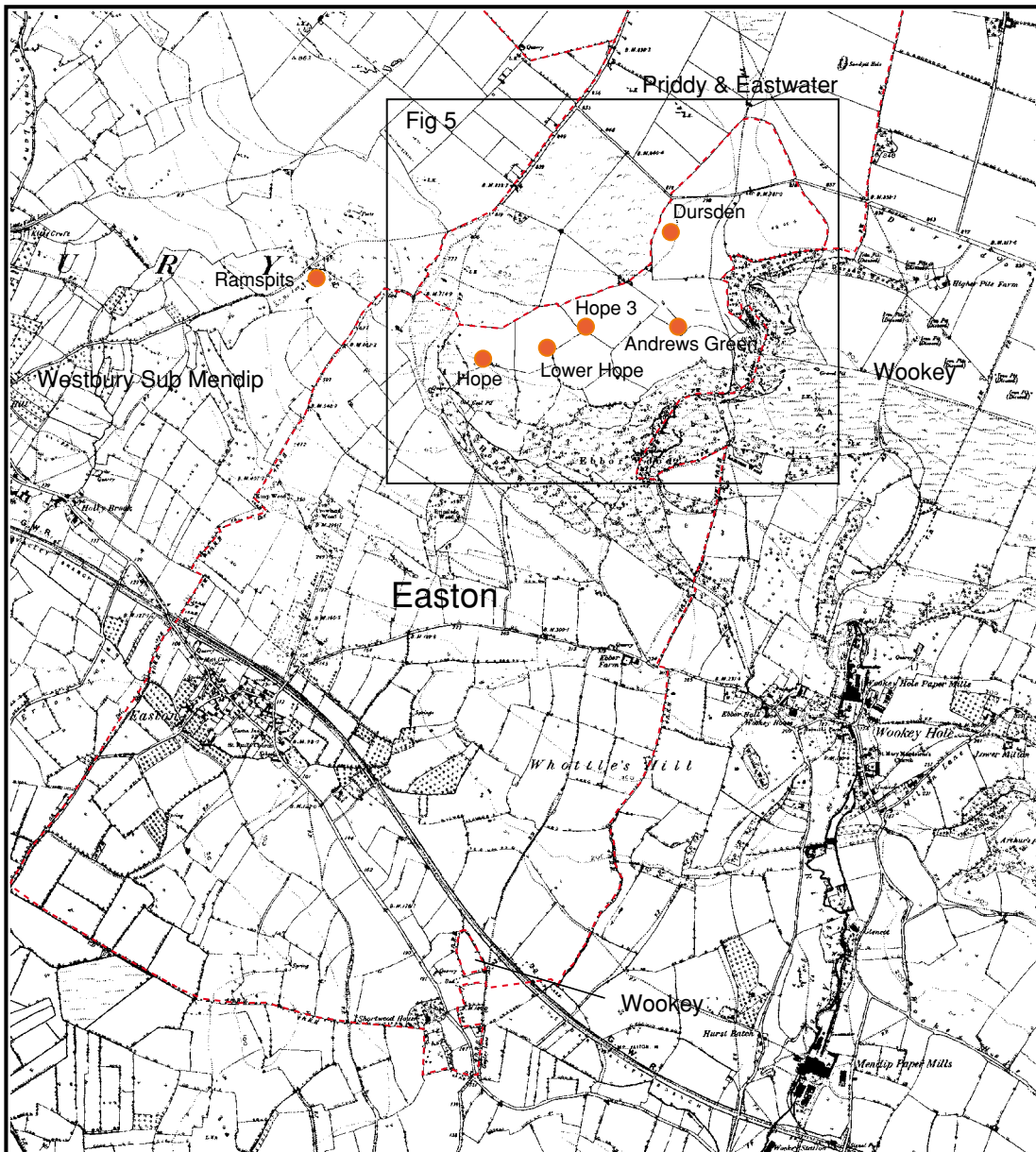


Figure 4. The tithing of Easton showing the location of the surveyed farmsteads

Field names from the Tithe Award map indicate that three of the farmsteads lay within the former Hope estate, while the other farmsteads are in fields known as Andrews Green and Dursden (fig 5), although none are shown as being in existence at this time.

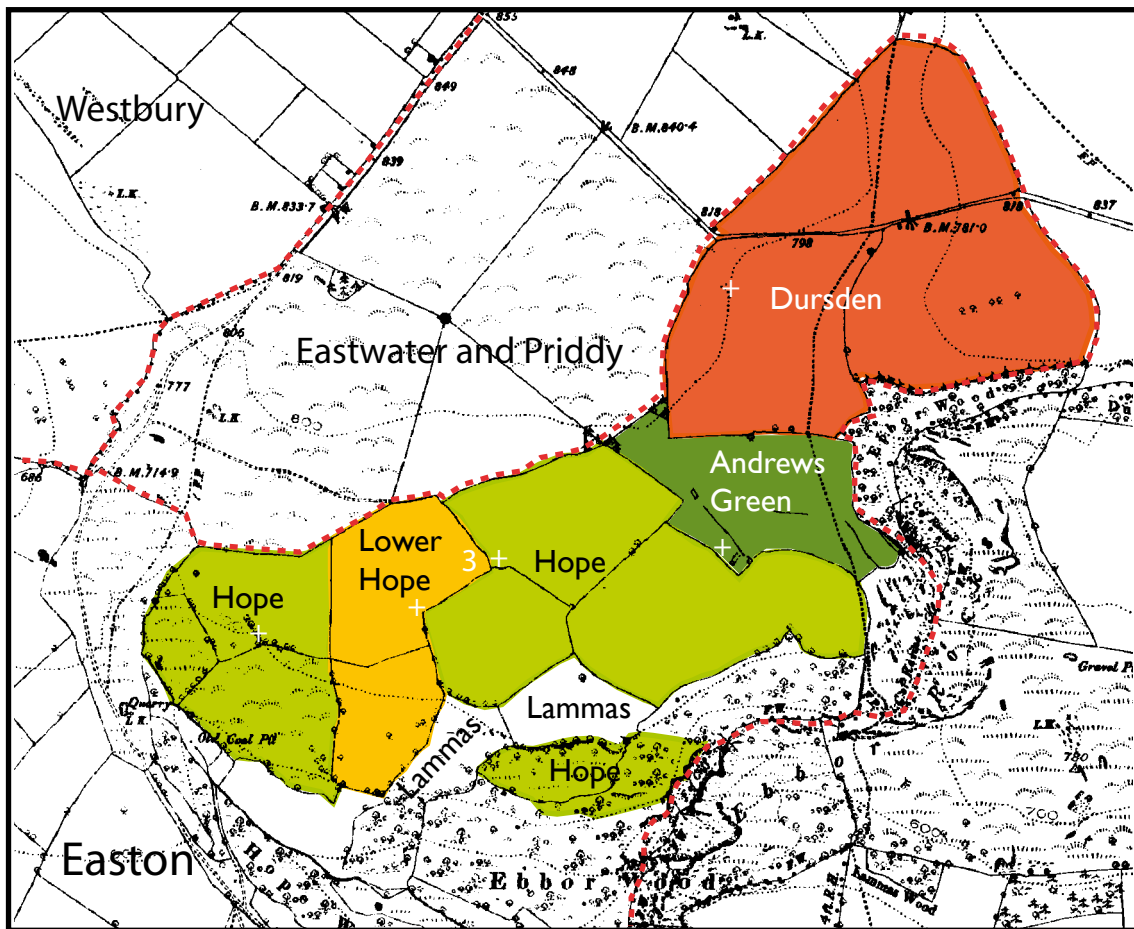


Figure 5. The areas of Hope, Dursden and Andrews Green from the tithe award map.

The Hope farmsteads

The western-most farmstead (Hope on fig 5) is situated on the edge of the escarpment beside Hope Wood (fig 6). It comprises a rectilinear enclosure measuring c20m x 30m and is defined in the north by an 'L'-shaped scarp which measures up to 1.5m high and extends from the edge of the escarpment to a hollow-way. The southern side is marked by a sinuous scarp and field ditch.

The hollow-way (a) extends 150m from the north-eastern side of the enclosure as far as a much-degraded field wall. Overlying the hollow-way at its southern end is a tumbled stone field wall defined by a scarp, which is first shown on the 1st edition OS map.

Set within the enclosure are two buildings (b and c) defined by stone and earthen banks

measuring 8m x 4m and 5m x 3m respectively. A small open area between the two may have been a yard.

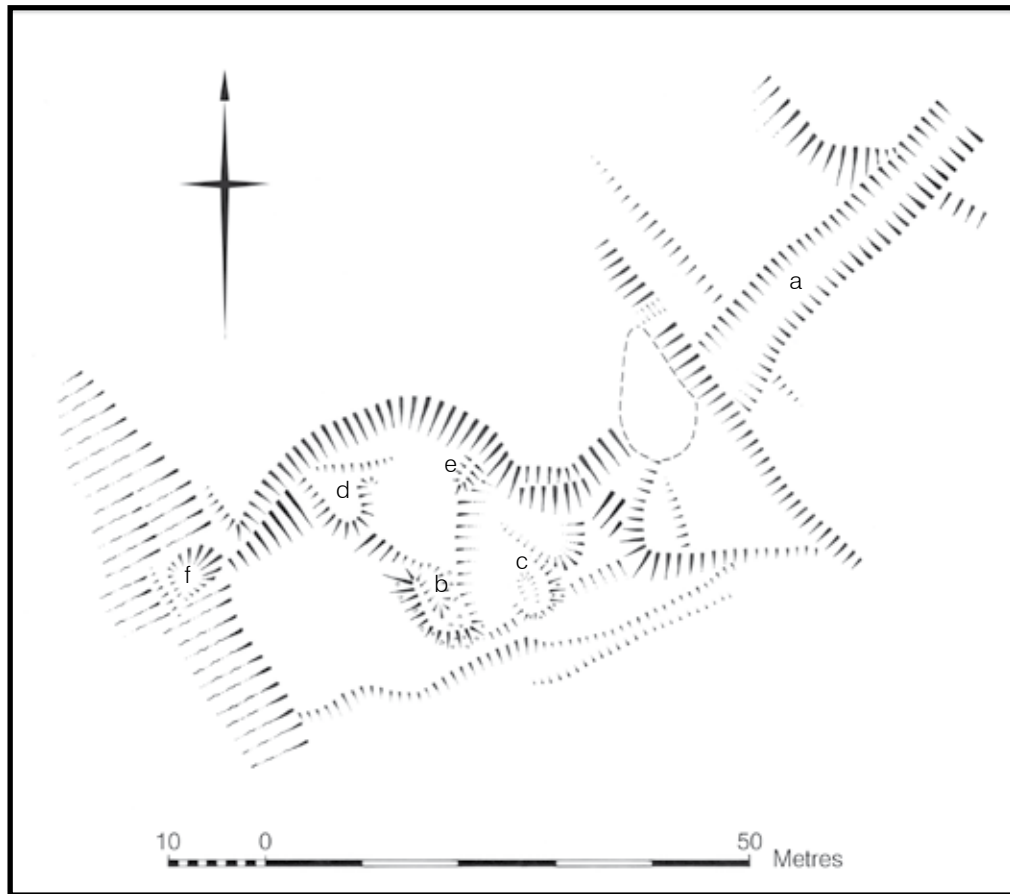


Figure 6. Earthwork survey of Hope.

Within the enclosure and abutting it in the north and north-east are two spread stony banks (d and e), which are probably the remains of a wall which, if projected further within the enclosure, would enclose another small yard.

Just below the escarpment edge is a small platform (f) cut into the natural slope.

Situated 240m to the east of Hope is another small farmstead in a field known as Lower Hope (fig 7). In a similar manner to Hope, a hollow-way extends 170m north-west from Lower Hope onto the higher ground. At its southern end, by the enclosure, the hollow-way cuts a probable 'Celtic' field lynchet (a). There is little evidence of the route-way to the south but it may have followed the line of the present field boundary.

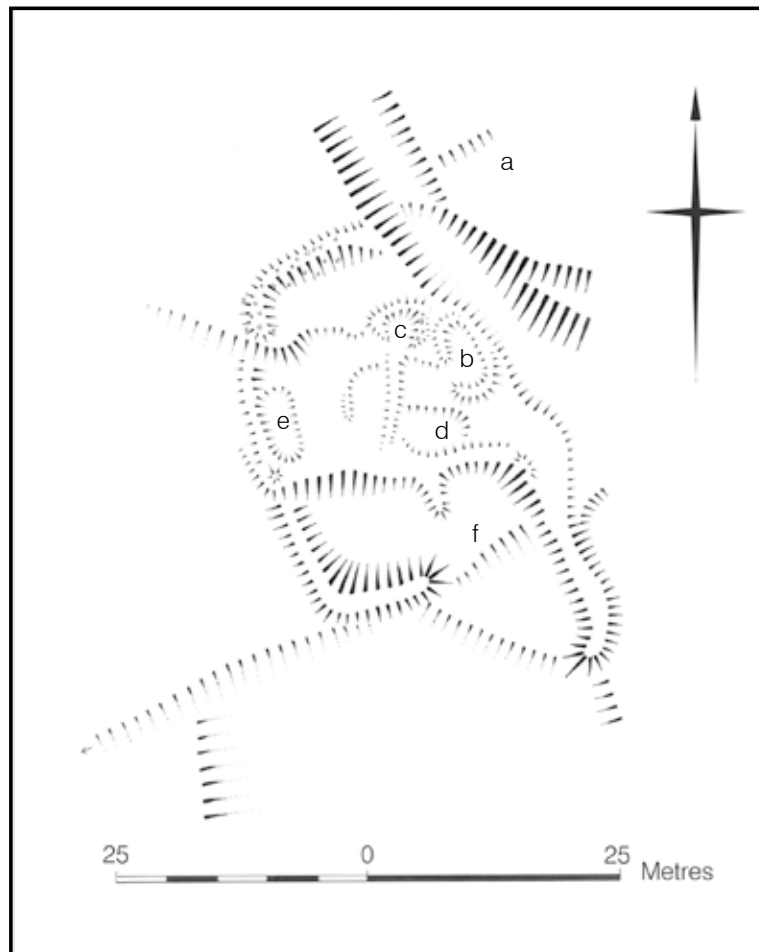


Figure 7. Earthwork survey of Lower Hope.

The farmstead itself is set within an embanked rectilinear enclosure measuring 20m x 22m, which in turn overlies a probable 'Celtic' field system (fig 11). The western side of the farmstead was possibly a former cross division in the field system, which has been enhanced.

Within the farmstead there are two buildings defined by banks, and a further two possible buildings. The larger building (b) measures 8m x 5m and has an entrance on the western side; the walls of the building are up to 0.4m high. The second building (c) is positioned at right-angles to (b) and measures 5m x 3.4m. The area formed between these two buildings was probably a small yard which is bordered in the west by a linear bank. This bank effectively divides the farmstead into two distinct parts with habitation on the eastern side and a yard or paddock in the west. Two other possible buildings

are marked by rectilinear depressions; the first (d) borders the small yard in the south and measures c6m x 4m, while the second (e) lies on the western side of the farmstead and measures 7m x 3.5m. On a ledge that extends the length of the enclosure on the higher ground to the north of building (c) is a level area which may be the remains of a small garden.

On the southern side of the farmstead is a sub-rectangular area (f) which is defined in the south by a lynchet and in the east by a slightly curving bank. This area forms a flat open space and was possibly two small paddocks. A bank extends 5m into this area from the northern side creating a sub-division.

The third farmstead (Hope 3 fig 4 & 5) was not surveyed at 1:500 since the earthworks were so fragmentary and degraded. However, their overall form was surveyed as part of the 1:2,500 plan (fig 11g) and can be seen as being similar in many respects to the other two farmsteads in that a broad hollow-way extends north-west towards the higher ground. It lies 140m east of Lower Hope and is marked by a very spread 'L'-shaped bank on the north-east side with slight amorphous earthworks in the angle of the bank.

Andrew's Green Farmstead (fig 8)

The farmstead in Andrews Green field is unlike those at Hope and Lower Hope since it is on a much larger scale and survives as a tumbled stone building. It is set within a wedge-shaped dry-stone walled enclosure that overlies the spread lynchets of a 'Celtic' field system (a). The enclosure broadens out in the north-west and measures c119m along the southern side and 30m and 60m on the south-eastern and north-western sides respectively. Along the northern side the enclosure is defined by a scarp and the remains of a wall. Elsewhere along the circuit the wall varies in height up to 0.5m high along the south side. On the southern side of the enclosure wall is a sheep-creep (b; fig 9). There are two entrances into the enclosure; the first is in the north-western corner, while the second is in the south-eastern corner near the farmstead.

Within the enclosure there are the stonework and earthwork remains of at least three buildings. The most substantial one lies near the southern end of the enclosure and measures c15m x 6m with a probable entrance in the southern corner with another near the centre on the north-western side (c). Internally it appears to be sub-divided into three rooms with a probable chimney stack on the south-western side. On the north-eastern side of the building is a spread bank, possibly the remains of an outbuilding. A sub-circular depression to the south-east of the building, that is bordered by the field wall, is a probable pond.

Situated in the northern corner of the enclosure, and beside the entrance, are the remains of a second stone building (d) which appears to be built into the perimeter wall; it measures c10m x 6m and is divided internally into two rooms by a small cross division. This building appears to post-date the construction of the wall.

A third building (e) is less substantial and is defined by an earthen bank with an entrance on the south-western side. It lies along the northern side of the enclosure on a flat,

elevated platform and measures c5m x 3m. On the same platform are slight rectilinear scarps that may define another possible building. Given the rather ephemeral nature of the remains, these two buildings may be the remains of an earlier farmstead, possibly shepherd's hut, or less substantial out-buildings.

Situated to the north of the enclosure is a large, dry pond with a slight cross division (f).

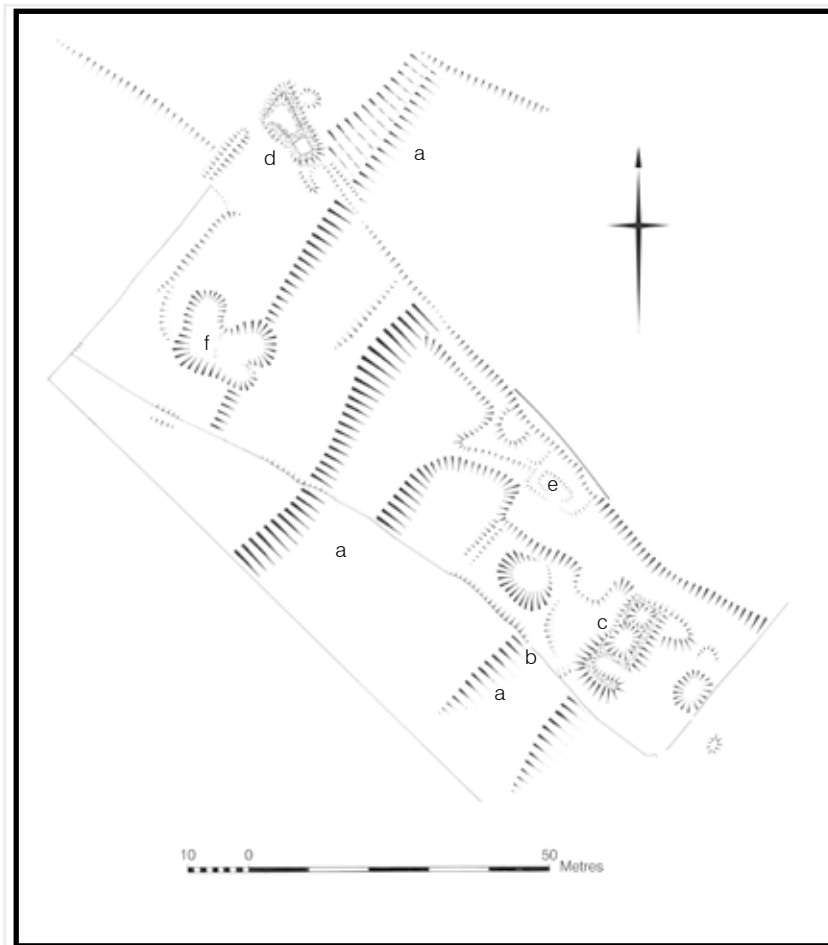


Figure 8. Earthwork survey of Andrews Green.



Figure 9 Sheep creep in the southern enclosure wall at Andrews Green.

Dursden

The much degraded earthworks close to the Dursden Drove represent those of a small farmstead known as Dursden (fig 10, 11). The earthworks are ploughed down and amorphous; nevertheless the outline of an enclosure can be seen as a spread 'L'-shaped bank in the north and the west and a scarp in the east. The enclosure measures c25m x 20m, which is similar to those at Hope and Lower Hope. Within the enclosure there are further amorphous earthworks that are so degraded as to make any meaningful interpretation impossible. Extending 70m in a westerly direction as far as a field boundary from the enclosure is a hollow-way (fig 11).

The wider landscape (fig 11)

The survey of the wider landscape at Easton incorporated the earthworks in the area of the farmsteads to the east of the Deerleap road and north of the woodland as far as cultivated fields.

In the west there is a slight hollow-way (a) that leads from Hope Wood, through a re-entrant, towards the junction with Deerleap further north. Bordering the hollow-way on the north-western side is a slight scarp that defines a former field boundary (b). To the east of the hollow-way, again on the rising ground, is a large stock enclosure (c), which measures c110m x 30m. Internally there are two scarps, or cross divisions, dividing the enclosure into three compartments. On the northern side, between the two cross divisions, is an offset entrance. Another trackway extends from the

entrance in a north-easterly direction, skirting the edge of a second enclosure (d).

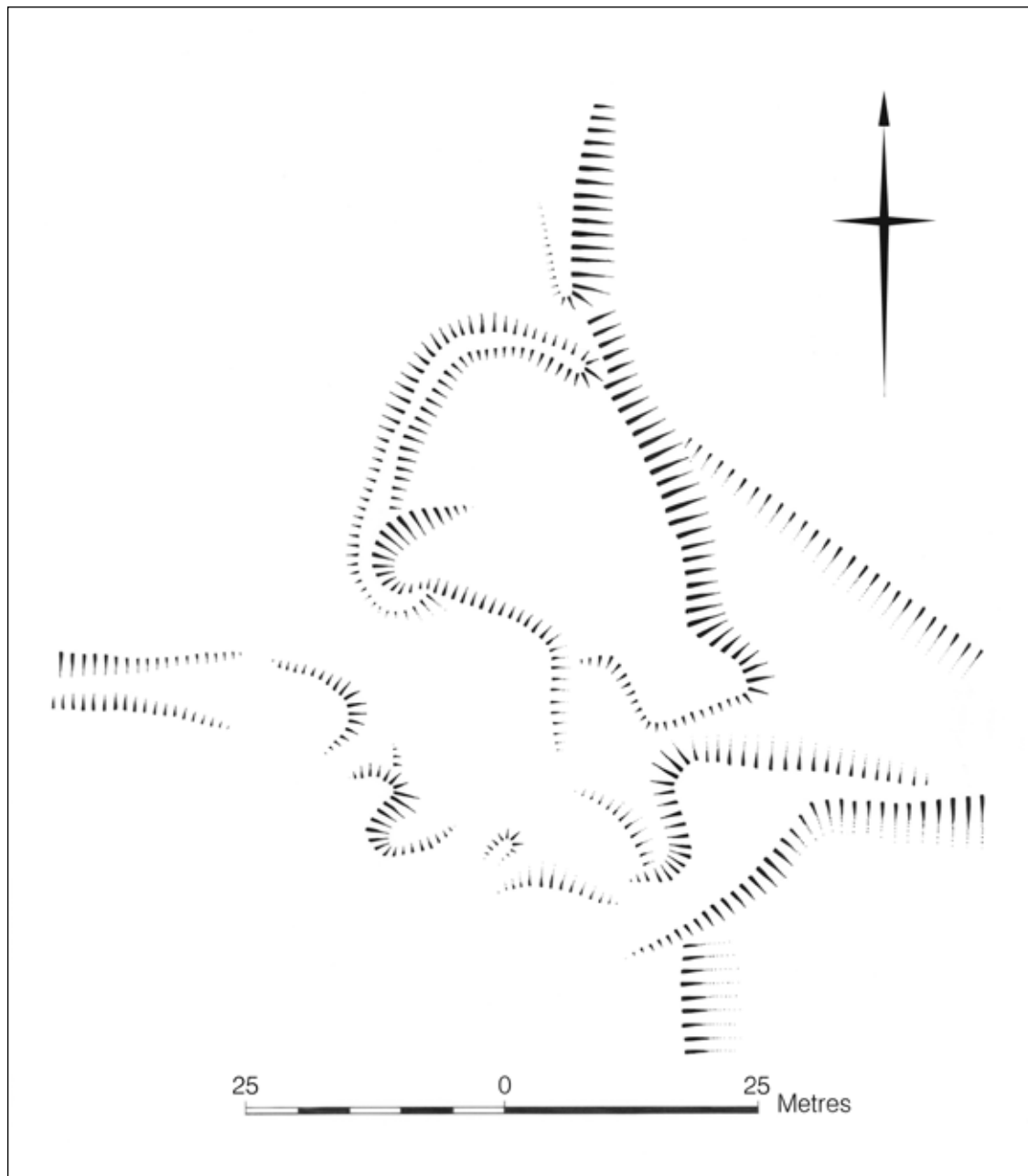


Figure 10. Earthwork survey of Dursden.

The second embanked stock enclosure (d) lies on the plateau to the east of (c). It is rhomboid in shape and covers an area of c2ha. Slight scarps on the southern and eastern sides represent trackways leading south towards Hope Wood.

To the south and south-east of the two enclosures are the farmsteads of Hope and Lower Hope (e and f respectively), with the fragmentary remains of a probable third farmstead at (g). Another farmstead, Dursden (h), lies to the south of a trackway known as the Durden Drove. Leading from all these farmsteads are hollow-ways which appear to converge on the plateau in an area that is now cultivated but which was presumably common land. It is perhaps significant that, apart from the hollow-way from Lower Hope, none of the others leads directly towards the two stock enclosures (c and d), which suggests that they may not be associated with the farmsteads.

Covering much of the remainder of the area are the fragmentary remains of lynchets, some of which are probably part of a 'Celtic' field system. The most regular pattern is the one to the north of Lower Hope, where the lynchets are set c20m apart. They extend in a north-east/south-west direction and appear to be cut by a hollow-way.

On the eastern side of the area lies Andrews Green farmstead (j). Set within an area of gorse on the northern side of the farmstead are further slight scarps which appear to define small paddocks, with another small rectilinear enclosure (k) overlying the remains of a curving stone field wall. Elsewhere within gorse are several small quarry scoops.

To the east of the farmstead is a slightly curving scarp which was probably a former field boundary (l), surmounted by small bushes. Projecting the line of the boundary in a north-westerly direction shows that it coincides with the alignment of the scarp of the farmstead enclosure, which suggests that the farmstead may overlie the former field wall.

Rodney Stoke

Stoke Wood (Bryants Field)

A small rectilinear enclosure of probable medieval or post-medieval date lies approximately 1.3km south-east of Westbury Camp in a field known as Bryants Field on the tithe map (fig 12). The enclosure lies on three prominent limestone ridges that cross the area in an east/west direction, thus creating two level terraces. Overall, it measures c70m x 75m, and is defined in the east and south by a low bank and in the north by the natural scarp-edge. The eastern bank measures 0.3m high internally, 0.1m higher than the southern bank. This discrepancy may be due to another phase of construction when this side was enhanced. The southern side curves slightly and ends at a prominent mound in the south-western corner (a). This mound appears to be a spoil heap.

There is no discernible boundary to the enclosure in the west, although there are two tracks. The first, which is embanked on the western side, lies in the northwest corner of the enclosure and extends in a northerly direction up the escarpment. The second track lies almost along the central axis of the enclosure and extends west along the contour before ascending the escarpment. On the southern side of the second track is a rectangular hollow (b) that measures c11m x 4m, possibly a building stance.

Within the enclosure, a probable building platform lies on the western side beside the open area that defines the junction of the two tracks. The building is defined by a right-angled bank (c), which is composed principally of stones. It measures c5.5m x



Figure 11. The Hope environs

4m and internally; a possible wall-face is visible on the north side. Abutting the eastern side of this probable building is a large rectangular bank (d) measuring c15m x 7m. Although the function of this feature is not entirely clear, there are at least three possible interpretations. The first is that it could be another building platform, but given that the material forming the sides (especially on the north-east corner) is composed of loose, stony material with no indication of any walling, this seems unlikely. The other possibilities are that it represents some form of stock enclosure or, less likely, quarrying.

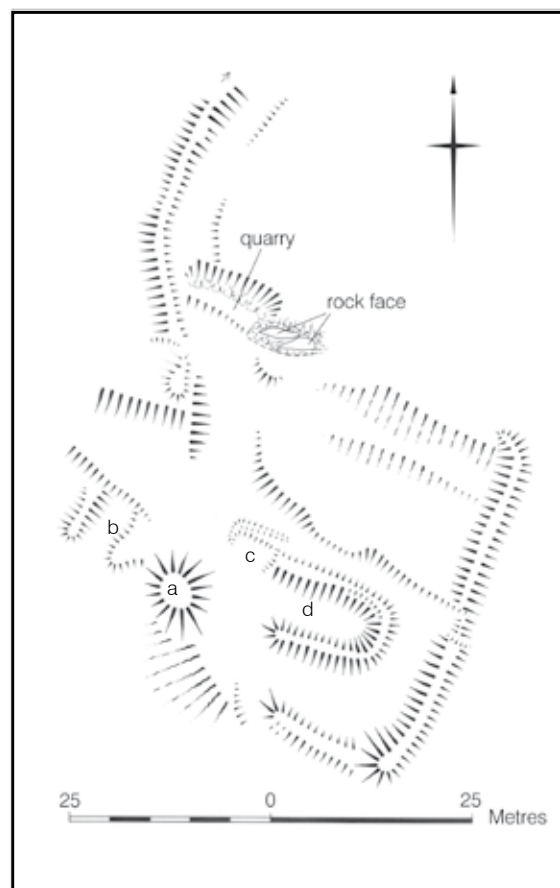


Figure 12. Earthwork survey of Stoke Woods.

To the north of the enclosure there is evidence of small-scale quarrying on the slope with a small spoil heap to the south.

The enclosure has been deliberately set in a more sheltered position on the natural scarps, despite the existence of flatter areas to the east and south. It would appear therefore that it was deliberately placed to take advantage of these scarps.

Rodney Stoke – airfield site

Set on rising ground on the northern side of New Road, which leads from Rodney Stoke towards Priddy, are the earthwork remains of a farmstead situated on a levelled platform (fig 13). Surrounding the farmstead are a number of enclosed fields; an area of small-scale quarrying; a trackway; three dew ponds; and the fragmentary remains of ridge-and-furrow cultivation. The surveyed area is bisected by a modern fence-line that extends through the site in an east/west direction. This fence also marks the top of the escarpment. On the plateau beyond the fence-line are two tracks that are used as a glider towing track.



Figure 13. Rodney Stoke farmstead.

The platform on which the farmstead lies measures c40 x 20m and is defined on the northern and western sides by a scarp that varies in height from c0.2m to c1m (fig 14). On the southern side the scarp edge is more substantial and is slightly sinuous. The eastern side is open and defined by rock out-cropping. Cutting diagonally across the platform in a north-west/south-east direction is another rather sinuous scarp.

The farmstead itself comprises a probable dwelling house and several outbuildings. The dwelling house lies on the western side of the platform where there are the remains of a rectangular two-cell stone structure which measures c12m x 5m with an entrance

on the eastern side (a). It is orientated north/south with a cross division 6m from the northern end. Above the building is a level area, possibly a small garden, which is defined on the eastern side by a continuation of the scarp that extends north from the building. Beyond building (a) are two, or possibly three, out-buildings; the first is defined by a slight rectilinear scarp measuring c5m x 2m that abuts the bottom of the enclosure scarp (b). A more substantial example can be seen at (c), where there is another rectilinear stone building with an entrance on the southern side. It measures c8m x 4m and, in a similar manner to the building platform (b), is set against the northern scarp-edge. The third building lies on a curving scarp between (b) and (c). Finally, on the southern end of the diagonal scarp, is another possible structure (d), which measures c4m x 3m.

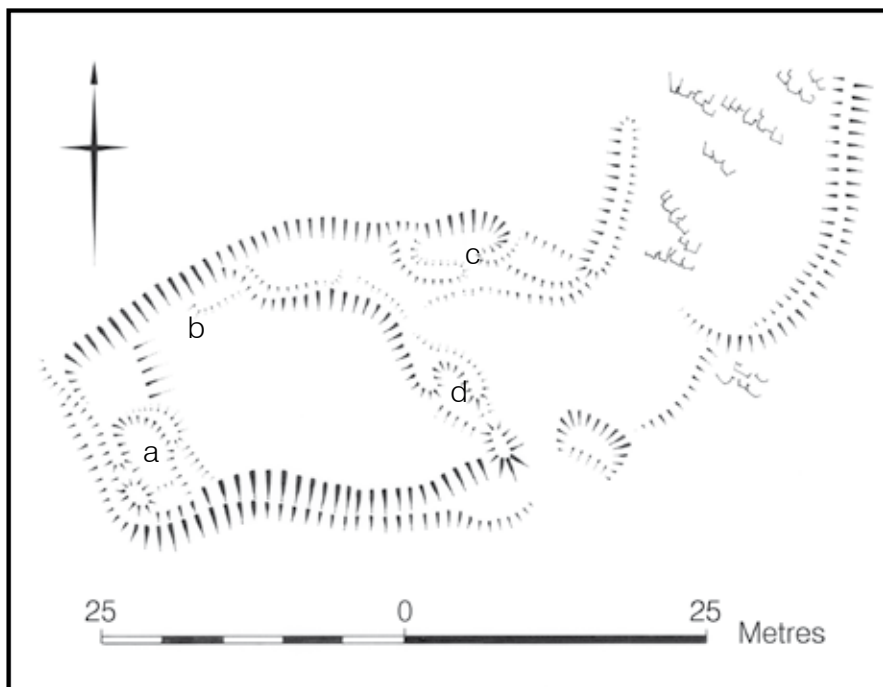


Figure 14. Earthwork survey of Rodney Stoke-airfield site.

Curving around the southern side of the rock outcrop on the eastern side of the farmstead and then extending north up the escarpment is a low bank (fig 15 e). On the plateau it turns east for a further 80m and then follows a curving course to the modern

field boundary in the south. Contained within the enclosure are the fragmentary remains of three blocks of narrow ridge-and-furrow cultivation. The blocks are differentiated by their orientation and vary in size depending on the topography. Those orientated north/south are on the escarpment, while the remainder are on the plateau. On the eastern side there is a slight variation, or change in alignment, possibly caused by a different phase of cultivation. The ridges are up to 2m wide and, at their maximum, are no more than 76m long. The sinuous nature of this enclosed area, coupled with the ridge-and-furrow being contained within it, would suggest that it was probably the result of assarting.

To the north of the farmstead is a long, linear contour trackway (f) that extends 160m north-east from an area of quarry scoops (g) and follows the course of this first 'intake'. On its northern side, the trackway is bounded by two further rectilinear enclosures with a third inter-linked enclosure further north.

The western enclosure (h) covers an area of c0.1ha and has an entrance, measuring c5m wide, on the south-western side. Contained within the enclosure is narrow ridge-and-furrow orientated north-east/south-west with the ridges set 3m apart. Overlying this cultivation in the north are two small quarry scoops. Three further scoops are evident on the northern side of the enclosure bank, which suggests that cultivation had ceased by the time the quarrying took place.

To the north-east of enclosure (h) is a second field (j), which represents an extension of cultivation. It covers an area of c0.56ha and is cut in the north by the glider tow-track. Within the enclosure are the fragmentary remains of further ridge-and-furrow orientated north-west/south-east. The western side is degraded, probably as a result of the large quarry scoop (k). This scoop also overlies a bank, which was probably associated with the bank on the eastern side of the quarry and extended south-west to meet another stone bank. On the northern side of this fragmentary bank are four further banks and lynchets set 30m apart. The southern bank (l) is defined by the remains of a stone wall in the south with the remainder marked by a robbed-out ditch. Overlying the northern end of the lynchet (m) is a further quarry scoop. On the northern side of the scoop is a 'T'-shaped scarp with another quarry scoop (n) at its north-western end. This scarp and quarry scoop may have formed the north-eastern side of three of the lynchets, thus defining three equal closes 90m x 30m.

Extending in a north-westerly direction from the quarry scoop (k) is another enclosure bank and ditch. It extends 80m before turning east for a further 160m where it is cut by the glider track. The enclosure bank overlies a slight scarp in the north, which may be later ploughing.

Three stock ponds are evident. In the west the pond (o) is cut by a stone wall. It is stone-lined and 15m in diameter. The other two ponds border the field boundary in the south. The western pond measures 9m diameter, while the eastern one is 12m. A curving scarp on the western side of the smaller pond may be up-cast from the pond. Both are stone-lined in a similar fashion to (o).



Figure 15. Survey plan of the Rodney Stoke Airfield (1:1000)

On the western side of the surveyed area are several quarry scoops (g) cut into the steep escarpment and bordered in the east and south by a curving scarp that extends as far as the stone walling. On the west side of the wall is another scarp, which was probably a former field boundary. These quarry scoops may be associated with the ochre and limestone quarrying that was taking place in the field to the south-west in the mid 19th century (SRO: A\BIB/2/16).

5. DISCUSSION

The boundaries of the parishes and tithings along the southern slope of the west Mendip Hills display similar characteristics to others elsewhere in the country that straddle land between high and low ground in that they are formed by long angular units from the higher plateau, down the hill-slope to the valley floor where the settlements lay near a spring-line or river. These land divisions ensured that the settlements had a share in the available resources (Hooke 1988, 123-51; 1994, 88). In the case of Mendip, on the low ground beyond the settlements, there were also extensive tracts of moorland. Routeways snake along the base of the escarpment linking the settlements while others extend into the moorland and onto the Hills.

Throughout the medieval period the settlements mainly comprised hamlets and farmsteads set beside an irregular field pattern (Aston 1994, 226). At Rodney Stoke the church lies isolated from the core of the modern village; however, work by Broomhead would suggest that it may have been the centre of an earlier core since he found evidence of a small farmstead to the south of the church (Broomhead 1990, 224). 19th-century maps support this and show an interrupted row of buildings extending north from the church which may reflect, in part, the medieval pattern. In contrast Draycott, which lies to the west of Rodney Stoke, appears to have been a planned nucleated settlement set along a street with back lanes on either side (SRO: Q/RDE/33). Aston (1994, 226) suggests that it probably dates to the late 13th century when the Augustinian canons of St Augustine's Abbey, Bristol, acquired land here. It had a regular two-field system with holdings apparently scattered evenly within it. At both Rodney Stoke and Draycott there is evidence of earlier settlement. Earthworks on Stoke Moor, for example, indicate that there was an extensive Romano-British settlement in Rodney Stoke and, although there is no archaeological evidence for pre-medieval settlement, the 'cott' suffix in the place-name would suggest an Anglo-Saxon farmstead at Draycott (ibid).

To the south-east of Rodney Stoke lie Westbury and Easton, both of which were in the hands of the Bishop of Wells from the mid 11th century (Sawyer 1968, 1042). Westbury will be the subject of more detailed architectural research during the project, but initial map analysis would suggest that it may have been a polyfocal settlement with centres at The Green and the church. In contrast, the small hamlet of Easton appears to have developed as a scattering of buildings around a triangular green (SRO: DD\X\BRL/I).

As far as the land-use is concerned the archaeological and documentary evidence would suggest that during the medieval period arable cultivation and woodland occupied the lower slopes of the Hills with pasture on the higher plateau (fig 16). The moorland, as with other moorland landscapes in Somerset, was a rich source for fish, wildfowling, and livestock grazing (Rippon 2004, 119-27). To the south of Westbury there was also one of the Bishop of Wells's deer parks (Nott 2000). This park would presumably have restricted any settlement expansion here. Elsewhere on Mendip there is ample evidence of land-use on the high plateau. In the late 12th century, for example, St Augustine's Abbey had pasture rights for 1,000 sheep and 60 draught animals in West and East Harptree 'and in the pasture on Mendip belonging to these manors' as well as pannage



Figure 16. AP transcription of the Hope area (re-drawn from NMP transcription). The red lines represent banks and strip lynchets.

for 20 pigs in woodland. They also had common of pasture 'above the road from Priddy to Burrington' (Walker 1998, 323, 338). The plateau was clearly an important resource, not only providing pasture, but it also supported an industrial landscape where lead and stone were the principal minerals that were extracted (Neale 1976, 87). In 1287, for example, the labourers of the Carthusian monks at Witham were mining lead on their grange estate at Hydon (ibid, 92). This grange was known as Charterhouse, or Charterhouse Hydon, in the later 16th century (Thompson 1930, 139).

The hill-slope settlements

On the escarpment above these valley settlements are the earthwork remains of a number of farmsteads dating to at least the medieval period, while others from this period may survive as place-names or later farmsteads and field barns. Aston suggests that some may originally have been used as seasonal settlements that later developed into permanent farmsteads (Aston 1994, 228-9). It is also clear that they all lie between the 'zone of cultivation' of the valley settlements and the Royal Forest of Cheddar on what has been described as former marginal or communal land.

Hope provides a useful example. The place-name is indicative of 'an enclosure in marsh or wasteland' (Gelling & Cole 2000, 133), an apt description of this discrete, compact estate at the furthest extremity of the parish, but nevertheless with its own arable, pasture and woodland. It is also noteworthy that track-ways from the Hope and Dursden settlements all lead onto the higher ground and not to the valley settlements, suggesting that the higher plateau was the area that was being exploited. The pottery evidence would suggest that at least one of the Hope farmsteads was occupied in the 12th or 13th century; however, caution should be exercised in this dating since none of the sites have been excavated; the pottery was merely noted in a scrape. At neighbouring Dursden pottery from a similar date was also recovered, as well as a large quantity of prehistoric material (NMR: ST 54 NW 39). In addition, the morphological similarity, the spacing between the farmsteads and the comparable size of the landholdings of the three 15th century tenants, would suggest that they were all part of a planned expansion onto the hill-slope. Whether this was at the instigation of the cathedral authorities or a secular lord is unknown.

The farmsteads at Hope each contain two buildings separated by a small yard and set within a sub-square banked enclosure. The size of the buildings is striking since they are all smaller than those at Dursden, Ramspits and Rodney Stoke (table 1). Using Dyer's figures for the size of buildings, it would indicate that those at Hope were one, or at most two bays long (Dyer 1994, 138). This would appear uncommon; work by Field in Warwickshire, for example, showed that only 2% of the buildings he studied were of one-bay, while the vast majority were three-bay structures (Field 1965, 115). This perhaps emphasises the possible seasonal origins of the Hope examples, and that they were not enlarged, despite being part of an arable farming regime by the 15th century. It also suggests that the Carthusians at Hinton Charterhouse were content to maintain the status quo here when they acquired the estate.

SETTLEMENT	BUILDING SIZE (INTERNAL (M))	REMARKS
HOPE	8X4	BOTH HOPE AND LOWER HOPE ARE SET WITHIN AN ENCLOSURE MEASURING 20X20M
	5X3	
LOWER HOPE	8X5	
	5X3.4	
DURSDEN	14X7.5	
	13X7.5	
RAMSPITS	14X7	FARMSTEAD 1
	17X5	FARMSTEAD 2
	12X5	FARMSTEAD 2. BOTH FARMSTEADS ARE SET WITHIN SUB-RECTANGULAR ENCLOSURES WITH ACCESS FROM THE NORTH AND WEST.
RODNEY STOKE - STOKE WOOD	11X4	
RODNEY STOKE AIRFIELD	12X5	

Table 1 – The size of the medieval buildings on the southern Mendip escarpment

At Ramspits the medieval settlement pattern consists of two small farmsteads, each with a dwelling, outbuildings and small yards. In contrast to the Hope settlements, those at Ramspits were set within rectilinear enclosures, rather than being sub-square. Similarly at Rodney Stoke airfield, which lay on the edge of the Forest of Mendip, the single farmstead is set on a rectilinear platform with a dwelling and several outbuildings.

How long these medieval farmsteads survived is not entirely clear. The abandonment of marginal lands is usually seen as occurring during the 14th or 15th centuries, following a peak of expansion in the 13th century (Dyer 1994, 25). This retreat was mainly the consequence of population decline and poor cereal yields. Dartmoor provides two examples of this process; on Holne Moor and Houndtor there was an expansion of cereal farming in the 13th century, followed a century later by contraction (Dyer 1994, 13-26; Fleming & Ralph 1982, 101-37; Austin & Walker 1985, 147-52). As far as the southern Mendip escarpment is concerned there is no archaeological evidence for the abandonment of the medieval settlements. Aston (1989, 121), however, has suggested that the leasing of Ramspits in the mid 15th century signifies that they may have been vacant properties at this time, and while this may be true, it is by no means conclusive and some may have survived longer. At Hope, the three tofts appear to have been still occupied in the early 15th century, and in 1535 Hinton Charterhouse was still receiving rents suggesting that the land, at least, was still being farmed in the 16th century.

Post-Medieval Settlement

The southern Mendip escarpment was also settled throughout the post-medieval period, and although some farmsteads survive, others were abandoned by the later 19th century. In Easton, for example, the cartographic evidence shows that the ruined farmstead in Andrews Green field is of mid 19th century date and was probably in existence for as little as one generation. It does not appear on the tithe map, but is shown fifty years later on the 1st edition OS map as two roofless structures. This suggests that the farm

was established during the period of High Farming in 1850-75, but was soon abandoned during the agricultural depression that followed.

Elsewhere, in the parishes of Westbury and Rodney Stoke, there is further earthwork remains of post-medieval settlement on the hill-slope. At Ramspits, Pattison (1991, 98-100) identified what he interpreted as a building dating to the 17th or 18th centuries close to a spring to the south of the two medieval farmsteads. Further north, there were also a couple of buildings of early 19th century date (one of which survives) set within a rectilinear enclosure and interpreted as a 'down barn' (ibid). Whether any of these farmsteads were merely new plantations or re-built medieval buildings is unclear.

Although the southern slopes of the Mendip Hills were an important market-gardening region during the mid 19th century (Wilmot 2000, 419), Andrews Green was probably involved in sheep farming since there is a sheep-creep in one of the walls and the size of the enclosure would have been an ideal penning. This is also perhaps emphasised by the survival of the earthworks of some of the medieval farmsteads and their fields, suggesting a shift from an arable farming economy to pastoral farming.

Field Pattern

The field pattern on the southern Mendip escarpment reflects the ebb and flow of settlement and the changing agricultural practices over millenia. For example, in the area of Hope at least three phases of stone walled field boundaries can be recognised, some of which undoubtedly over-lie 'Celtic' field lynchets.

The most recent is the rectilinear pattern of parliamentary enclosure field walls that can be seen to the north of the surveyed area in the parish of Priddy (fig 16). In the area of Hope itself, the field boundaries are more irregularly shaped and probably reflect assarting.

There are potentially two earlier field walls, one of which was later than the abandonment of Hope but the other is potentially much earlier. The former lies 40m to the south-east of an enclosure (d on fig 11), where the rubble remains of the wall are evident. The other is a curving boundary wall enclosing the area known as Dursden. The curving nature of this wall is intriguing since it encloses an area of c36ha and forms a funnel leading south into Ebbor Gorge. This enclosure is cut by the Dursdon Drove and therefore pre-dates it. The function of this enclosed area is unclear, but the curving nature of the boundary, enclosing the deep, natural gorge, perhaps defines the northern extremity of a deer park or chase, or an area of common pasture carved out on the escarpment during a phase of exploitation.

6. METHODOLOGY

The earthwork surveys at Easton were undertaken by Elaine Jamieson and Graham Brown, English Heritage Field Investigators based at Exeter and Swindon respectively. They were carried out in two phases; first, the settlements were surveyed at a scale of 1:500 using a Trimble 5600 total station EDM, with 'finer' archaeological detail surveyed using taped offsets from a control network. The settlements were then 'tied in' to the national grid using a differential GPS. Secondly, the wider landscape, which included fragmentary field boundaries, field systems and track-ways, was surveyed at a scale of 1:2,500 using a differential GPS. Features that could not be picked up with the GPS were surveyed from established control points.

The survey of the enclosure at Stoke Camp was carried out by Trevor Pearson and Peter Dunn from the Graphics section of English Heritage using a differential GPS. Taped offsets were then used to survey additional features in a similar manner to the Easton surveys. Finally, the survey at Rodney Stoke was undertaken by Elaine Jamieson and Graham Brown using a differential GPS and taped offsets. Two plans were produced; the first was of the farmstead which was surveyed at a scale of 1:500 while the other was of the whole area at a scale of 1:1000.

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