# BOROUGH HILL, WALTON-UPON-TRENT — IF NOT A HILLFORT, THEN WHAT?

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*SUMMARY*

*Previous suggestions that earthworks on Borough Hill might belong to a prehistoric hillfort are disputed. Rather, it may be that a Roman fortification stood there, though other rectilinear earthwork-enclosures in the Derbyshire stretch of the Trent Valley, notably The Buries near Repton (probably an artificial rabbit-warren), point up the possibility of some later context, a variety of which is explored briefly, ranging from Early Medieval (Anglo-Saxon, Viking or British) to Post-Medieval. Detailed and critical study of Borough Hill, as of analogous earthworks and cropmarks locally, is surely desirable.*

## BOROUGH HILL — *STATUS QUO* AND CONTENTION

Borough Hill, centred at SK 210175 and lying within the parish of Walton-upon-Trent near the southern tip of Derbyshire, has long been labelled 'camp' on Ordnance Survey maps. The recent statutory protection of much of the hill (as Scheduled, or National, Monument 29916) has arisen from a belief that its earthworks constitute evidence for a 'univallate hillfort' of the final millennium BC, said to be 'a rare and well-preserved example of the type' for this part of Derbyshire (as it would be for much of Midland England if correctly appraised). However, there are grounds for caution over this classification as 'hillfort', or indeed any attribution to prehistory, which had not been wholly endorsed by earlier authorities, albeit previous published references to these earthworks are few and brief. In fact, the Ordnance Survey (in the person of A.L.F. Rivet) excluded Borough Hill from their pioneering effort to compile a definitive listing of earthworks of the Iron Age as known in southern Britain at 1962, thereby apparently dissenting from its interpretation as a hillfort of any form. On the other hand, Hogg included Borough Hill, though diffidently, in his index of 'all known hill-forts' (1979, 12, 155 — ascribing it to 'Barton in Needwood' [*sic*] and so, by implication, erroneously to Staffordshire); while Challis and Harding specified it as a 'defensive hill-top' in itemizing the contents of their map of hillforts lacking in closely definable structural features (1975, 47, fig. 90).

The present writer is more overtly opposed to its identification as a hillfort, contending simply that the impression of an oval enclosure encompassing a hogbacked eminence of about 4.7ha and, at first sight, appearing to form what might be regarded as a hybrid between a 'cliff-edge or promontory fort' and a 'contour fort' (Avery 1976, 8–9; and see, for example, Allcroft 1908, chs 3 and 4; Forde-Johnston 1976, ch. 3), is probably an illusion (though, in fairness, it should be noted that both Hogg's 3.0ha and the 7.5 acres of Challis and Harding can probably be presumed to exclude the area to north-east of the substantial cross-bank described below, perhaps giving the putative hillfort more the

character of a contour-work). But this is not to suggest that Borough Hill was never capped by some form of earthwork-enclosure, and the task here is to attempt a provisional definition of its apparent form, and hence endeavour to deduce something of the range of possible dates that might be fitting.

## BOROUGH HILL — OBSERVATIONS FROM A BRIEF ENCOUNTER IN THE FIELD

First, it has to be acknowledged that some particulars of the following assessment of Borough Hill will not be easily appreciated in the absence of a comprehensive and carefully judged plan of the variety of artificial and natural features that ought to be marshalled in making my case. At best, it is suggested that Fig. 1, adapted from Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Sheet SK 2017/2117 of 1965 and not claimed to provide a reliable record of the finer points of the earthworks, should help the reader to follow the gist of the arguments presented.[1] Self-evidently, then, one problem in addressing this site is that its earthworks seem never to have been described systematically by any informed field-archaeologist, at least not in print; and this fundamental deficiency cannot be rectified by my own brief acquaintance with the place, initially undertaken during lulls in the course of conducting a 'watching-brief' over the digging of a number of small holes for the installation of a new water-pipe across the turf-covered interior of the 'hillfort' (as marked on Fig. 1), the whole exercise occupying a single, short, December day in 2001 (see pages 240–1 in this volume), and reinforced by a more leisurely perusal of its environs in September 2003.[2] First impressions though they be, and unsupported by the graphical presentation of fresh metrical data that would be essential for any blow-by-blow analysis of the topography of the hill, it is nevertheless hoped that the various field-observations outlined briefly below, picking out some of the salient points, will be sufficient to contest what seems to be a misconception that is in danger of becoming official dogma.

On the ground, it is evident that an escarpment forming the western flank of the hill (B in Fig. 1, to which A and C–E below also refer) is a natural river-cliff, where the eastern margin of the floodplain of the Trent (which now passes little more than 100m from the foot of the scarp, at perhaps 15m below its top) has, at some remote time, bitten into the edge of an undulating plateau of Mercia Mudstone, creating the only slope at any point on the hill that might warrant the adjective steep. The scarp lessens in height as it sweeps around the northern end (C), where a tributary valley, named The Dumps, enters the plain from the south-east. There seems no reason to suppose that any part of this western and northern scarp has been steepened artificially, while a low and broad bank running along much of its western crest (not represented truly in Fig. 1) appears to be a headland relating to ridge-and-furrow cultivation; though, admittedly, it *could* be that an earlier bank has been reduced in stature through use as a headland. Secondly, it is merely the hollowing of a highway, Catton Road, that now defines much of the eastern side of the 'monument', though that road *could* follow the line of a former ditch, provided this has been infilled for over 100m across what is, in effect, the neck of a promontory, where earthworks would normally be expected to have figured strongly in the make-up of any recognized form of hillfort (i.e. in the vicinity of the group of farm-buildings and cottages near the centre of Fig. 1, where no hachures are shown along either side of Catton

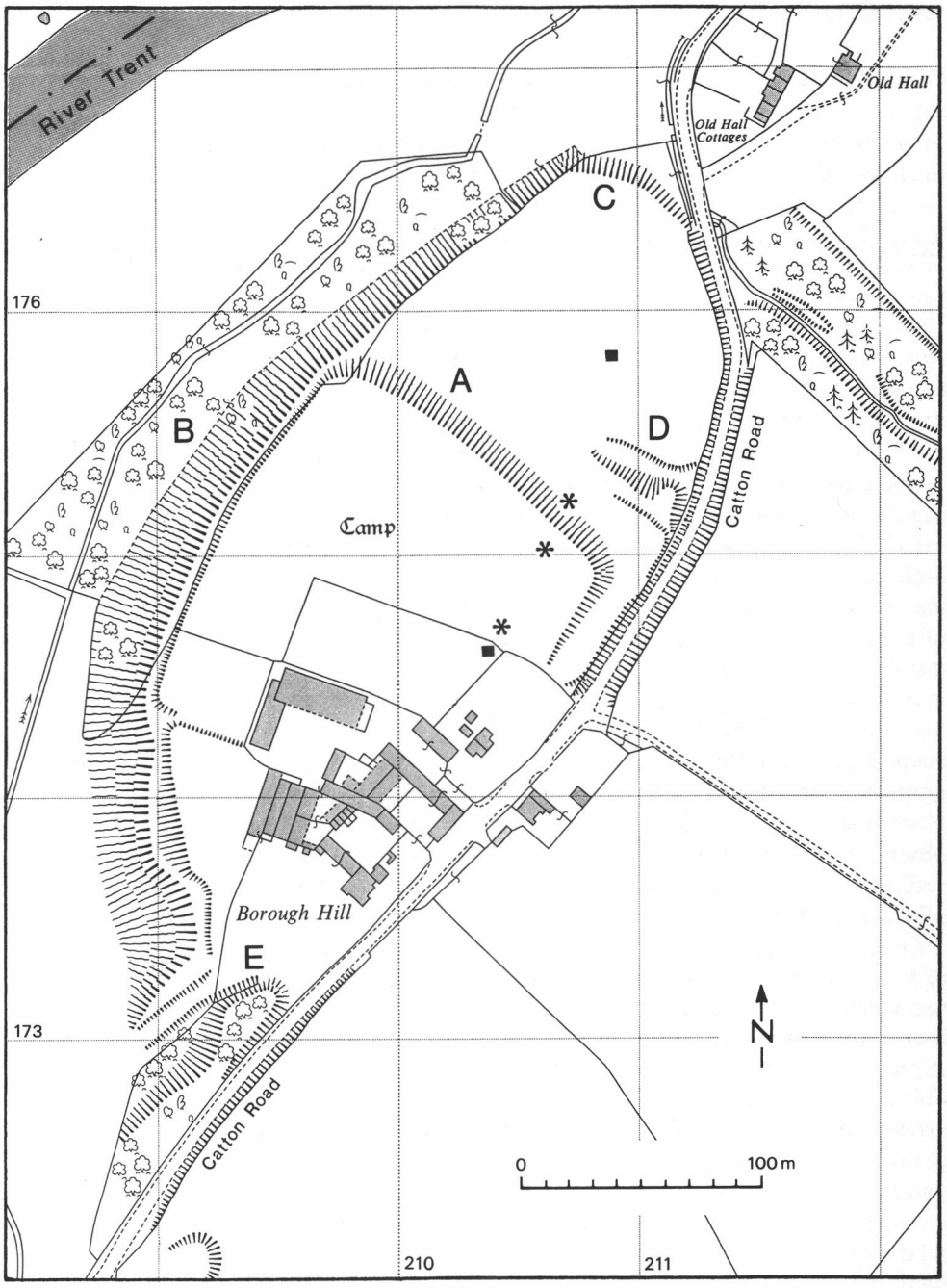


Fig. 1: Borough Hill, Walton-upon-Trent: extract from Ordnance Survey map of 1965 with some extraneous detail erased, letters added to aid reference to particular locations in the accompanying text, and the River Trent, being the boundary of Derbyshire with Staffordshire, shaded at top left. In addition, the positions of the five small holes opened in 2001 (see page 240 of this volume) are indicated by asterisks (where supervised archaeologically) and squares (unsupervised). Originally published at 1:2500, but here at 1:3000. *Reproduced by kind permission of Ordnance Survey, © Crown Copyright NC/04/100020618.*

Road). Thirdly, the absence of banks in connection with what has been regarded as the sunken corridor of an eastern entrance (D) seems to rule out its interpretation as an inturned gateway of the type found in many genuine hillforts; although this *could* once have provided a point of access on to the summit from a deeply-hollowed portion of Catton Road, its irregularities may result as much from quarrying as from any intention to contrive a complex form of gate-passage. Fourthly, a postulated southern entrance (E) could well comprise nothing more significant than terracing and hollowing of a former line of Catton Road, actually circumventing the supposed hillfort rather than giving access to it. Finally, the lack of a ditch along the north-eastern foot of a prominent cross-bank, apparently the strongest artificial feature on the hill (A), can perhaps be taken to suggest that this was created largely by enhancing a natural scarp, possibly emphasized by lynchet-formation, rather than by any more elaborate construction intended as a defensive measure; though, again, later ploughing *could* have obscured such a ditch, while there is clearly a low bank atop the scarp (not represented in Fig. 1), and this looks unlikely to be attributable to plough-ridging.

Individually, these several objections may seem trivial, and certainly not insurmountable; but, cumulatively, they are quite at variance with the interpretation suggested by others, undermining recognition of what may be termed any 'normal' category of hillfort.

## BOROUGH HILL — A ROMAN FORTIFICATION?

It might be argued that much of the array of earthworks now to be seen on Borough Hill represents remnants of medieval and/or Post-Medieval agricultural usage, albeit perhaps modifying some pre-existing scheme, which might have incorporated some form of enclosure that has thereby become difficult to perceive on the ground. However, this should not prevent the attempt to disentangle earlier patterns from among the present palimpsest. Thus, if bank A is allowed to guide the eye, a squarish shape, *c.*140–150m across and enclosing around 2ha, can be recognized within Fig. 1, and this could measure up to the outline of certain Roman military fortifications, be it temporary camp or more-permanent fort (e.g. Collingwood and Richmond 1969, chs 2 and 3; Jones 1975, ch. 4; Breeze 1983; Welfare and Swan 1995). As identified (and it cannot be denied that less-symmetrical shapes are possible, extending south-westwards to about the letter 'E' on Fig. 1), this would occupy much of the highest part of the hill, its north-eastern side marked by bank A, which is noticeably straight with curved, or rounded, ends, dominating the layout of the recognizably artificial features, and surely antedating the far-slighter ridge-and-furrow that runs parallel to its south-western, i.e. upslope, side but perpendicular to it on the north-east. Even the apparent want of a ditch outside bank A need present no serious obstacle to this interpretation, as witness other such sites (*ibid.*, 3). This enclosure would obviously have been most easily entered via the flattish saddle of land at the midst of its south-east side, where comparatively recent buildings and related closes are sure to have obscured any earlier features.

Potentially analogous Roman installations in Derbyshire can give some idea of the relatively great size of this possible camp/fort on Borough Hill, the most readily appreciated earthworks being those of *Navio*, at Brough-on-Noe in the heart of the Peak District, with internal area estimated to be *c.*0.55–0.65ha (Dearne 1993, 135–50), and

*Ardotalia*, at Glossop and near the western fringe of the Peak upland, enclosing little over 1.0ha (Petch 1963, fig. 1). In this context, it may be pertinent to note that the top of Borough Hill commands a panorama out towards the west, overlooking the Trent's floodplain, beyond which lay the Romans' Ryknild Street, passing within 1km of the hill, from whose western escarpment a considerable length of that road might have been in view (Margary 1957, 38 — this stretch of Ryknild Street ran between *Letoceto* and *Derventio*, respectively some 15km and 24km distant from Borough Hill, at Wall in Staffordshire and at Derby). So, can it be that, below the unmistakable traces of cultivation, Borough Hill harbours a forgotten Roman post? If so, it would not be hard to imagine circumstances conducive to its establishment (e.g. Jones and Mattingly 1990, maps 4:23, 4:31, 5:11); but it would be inappropriate to speculate further along those lines here.

This recalls a brief statement made over a century ago, that 'between the Old Hall and Borough Hill farm are the remains of a *Roman Encampment*, and around the farm premises human skulls and bones, evidently of ancient date, have been frequently dug up' (Bulmer 1895, 835 — *cf.* Haverfield 1905, 262; and see Fig. 1 here for location of Old Hall, not far from the northern foot of the hill). Of course, there can be no confidence that Bulmer's opinion of 'the remains' arose from a similar analysis of the earthworks as my own (always assuming that he did not borrow it from another), and it may be surmised that the name of the nearby village, 'Walton', centred 1km to the north-east of Borough Hill, had some part in his reasoning, for it might have seemed quite acceptable then to construe that name as a clue to the former existence of 'a Roman fortification or wall' nearby (e.g. Davis 1880, 67; Allcroft 1908, 293). Quite recently, it was still thought 'noteworthy' that many *walh* places lie 'close to Romano-British sites or to early Anglo-Saxon burial sites' (Cameron 1988, 234; and this is bound to make Bulmer's information on the human remains seem as frustratingly meagre as those on his 'Roman encampment'), but various other views on 'Walton' have often been entertained (e.g. Davis 1880, 67; Smith 1956.ii, 242–4; Cameron 1959, xxii, 667; Ekwall 1960, 494–5; Gelling 1978, 93–5; Cameron 1996, 44–7), and this factor cannot be invoked seriously in support of Roman origins for Walton, let alone Borough Hill (see also page 250).

The Roman theory might receive a boost if it could be shown how the position of Borough Hill relates to the network of Roman roads round about Walton. Connection with Ryknild Street would have necessitated a river-crossing, and the most promising prospect for this seems to lie at *c.*2.5km downstream, or north-east, of Borough Hill, where a Roman cross-country route, approaching from the general direction of Leicester and inferred from a combination of cropmarks, earthworks, tracks, paths and boundaries (Liddle and Hartley 1994),[3] would have encountered the Trent at approximately SK 223195 (assuming its channel in the early part of the first millennium more-or-less matched that of today), close to the spot (SK 224194) where a bivallate cropmark has evoked thoughts of a separate Roman fort (*ibid.*, 186). However, a crossing some 2km, or even further, to the north-east was formerly favoured (Brown 1862, 209; Molyneux 1869, 15–20), while Wardle (1994, 10) has noted a hollow-way running down into Walton from the east and evidently aiming for the location of the present river-bridge (SK 214182), suggesting that there may have been an historic crossing-point — bridge, ford or ferry — situated scarcely 1km from Borough Hill.

## SAWLEY AND THE BURIES — SALUTARY ANALOGUES?

Attractive proposition as it may be, a Roman origin for the earthwork upon Borough Hill must not be allowed to take root as a new received doctrine in the absence of supporting evidence. It is necessary to be mindful that others have found cause to backtrack from similar deductions of possible Roman military construction in respect of other roughly-rectangular earthwork-enclosures in the Trent Valley, as inferred solely from superficial indications. One such earthwork, of low relief and comprising bank with external ditch, is situated on a slightly-elevated spot beside the northern edge of the floodplain at Sawley (SK 475313). Following its detection from the air in the 1960s, this enclosure was initially said to be 'closer in its planning to a Roman fort than to any other type of earthwork' (Todd 1967). However, that statement was accompanied by a simplistic plan of a slightly-trapezoidal enclosure with featureless interior of little more than 0.5ha, omitting various details that remain evident on the ground, including several low, but distinct, mounds lying both within and outside the enceinte (i.e. besides the supposed 'tutulus' — *ibid.*, 165).[4] Despite the rumoured recovery of 'fragments of Roman pottery. . .from the rampart' (StJoseph 1969, 105 — to whom too 'the earthwork generally resembles Roman military construction'; while Jones [1975, 176] thought it 'likely that it belonged to the first century AD'), Todd was soon to realize that its 'marks of military planning' might as easily be construed as conveying a 'general similarity to certain seventeenth century earthworks' (Todd 1973, 31, 141 note 33 — evidently referring specifically to one of several Civil War redoubts in the Trent Valley around Newark, Nottinghamshire), eventually concluding that 'its date is uncertain' (in Pevsner and Williamson 1978, 314), perhaps because he knew of an excavation there in 1975, which produced only 'a small sherd of Medieval? pottery in the filling of the ditch' (Waters 1978).[5]

Air-photographers have recorded numerous rectilinear enclosures among the multiplicity of cropmarks that characterizes much of the length of the Trent Valley, and it has frequently been assumed that many of these enclosures relate to settlement of the Iron Age and/or Romano-British centuries (e.g. Smith 1977; O'Brien 1979; Whimster 1989, ch. 6). Viewed on the ground, most of them are unrecognizable because their banks and ditches have become flattened by agriculture, so that the few examples to survive as upstanding earthworks need to be treated as a precious resource, worthy of close examination in the field, since they can perhaps shed light on some of those known solely from cropmarks. Besides that at Sawley, an earthwork-enclosure known as The Buries, occupying a slightly raised, and hence relatively dry, portion of the Trent's floodplain between Repton and Willington (SK 298278),[6] is relevant here, not least because it too, being virtually rectangular in outline, with low bank and external ditch encompassing some 52x38m,[7] was predictably once regarded as 'beyond doubt, a genuine relic of military occupation, and probably a vestige of the Romans' (Bigsby 1854, 3–5, with diagrammatic plan as fig. 33;[8] *cf.* Molyneux 1869, 23 — claiming that a 'small Roman sword was obtained' from this 'curious entrenchment' or from the 'circular mounds within it' in the 18th century, though others have supposed this 'to be a myth', perhaps arising from the discovery of a Viking sword some 600m to the south in 1839 — Simpson and Auden 1913, 87; *cf.* Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 39–40; 2001, 55–7, fig. 4.7). Notably, Haverfield (1905, 261) repudiated that hypothesis, while other contexts for the

construction of The Buries have seemed plausible to some (e.g. by the Danish army in the 9th century — Hipkins 1899, 3; Ward 1905, 276; Cox 1905, 386 note 2; Fraser 1943, 33; or as a medieval cattle-refuge during floods — Simpson and Auden 1913, 93; MacDonald 1929, 15). However, none have argued a case convincingly by virtue of the configuration of the earthworks, including the fact that the enclosure lacks any obvious point of entry; so that the sum of its record in the literature leaves this monument poorly understood, notwithstanding repeated antiquarian investigation in search of clues to its date and function (Bateman 1861, 93; Molyneux 1869, 260; Simpson and Auden 1913 — claiming 'to disprove its Roman origin').

Apart from a terse and unsubstantiated assertion in the obscure medium of a journal relating to part of East Anglia (Crompton and Taylor 1971, 119 note 17 — i.e. obscure from a Derbyshire perspective anyway, and reciprocated in note 12 here), the most appealing interpretation of The Buries seems not to have been considered hitherto: *viz.*, as a constructed rabbit-warren, or conyger — as much in need of high and dry land as would be any enclosure for cattle, though less in need of an entrance-causeway through the ditch. This explanation is brought to mind by a combination of two factors. First, there is a group of mounds, including some round and some elongated, within the enclosure (and these have been repeatedly targeted by antiquarians, without useful result); for mounds of either shape might have been built to accommodate rabbits — i.e. as 'pillow-mounds' (Sheail 1971, 40–2; Williamson and Loveday 1988; Henderson 1997, 108). The three 'long and straight mounds' lie parallel to the long axis of the enclosure, appearing integral with its design; the two 'circular mounds' lie more-or-less on that axis, though they might easily antedate the enclosure (Simpson and Auden 1913, 83–5, 88–9, with plan as fig. 1). Moreover, both long mounds and enclosure are aligned with, and probably comprise enlargements of, ridges created during a period of cultivation, presumed medieval (the 'landing' of *ibid.*, 85); and it is important to observe here that the earthworks of this ridge-and-furrow, of relatively low relief but by no means insubstantial and apparently well preserved, can now be seen on the surface of this and adjacent pasture-fields, as also on air-photographs, to pass beneath the more-pronounced earthwork of the enclosure, extending some way beyond it in all directions.[9] This surely confirms the impression gained by Simpson and Auden (1913, 85) that 'the sharpness of the mounds generally. . .tells against the view that the site [i.e. the earthwork] is an ancient one', and it may be noted that it is also in keeping with the range of Late Medieval and Post-Medieval objects recovered by their excavations of 1910 (*ibid.*, 88–9, 91–4).[10] Second, there is the name, for 'buries' is among the 'normal terms' once applied to what we now call pillow-mounds, appearing in Post-Medieval documents and remaining in currency in some parts of Britain 'until recently' (Haynes 1970, 148; Williamson and Loveday 1988, 295).[11] The enclosing of a warren is said to have occurred in many places (Sheail 1971, 44–7; Williamson and Loveday 1988, 292, 297), and it has been suggested that embanked enclosures with restricted internal area, perhaps comparable to the *c.*0.2ha of The Buries, may have been for 'breeding and feeding. . .within the larger warren territory' (Henderson 1997, 105).[12] Although, in the present state of knowledge, analogous conygers, large or small, cannot be demonstrated locally, it is noteworthy that enclosures of a similar order of size to The Buries are not uncommon among those cropmarks in this region that are usually ascribed to the final millennium BC or the ensuing period of Roman influence, as remarked above. Short of excavation,

it is generally difficult to decipher the sequence of such enclosures relative to the equally-flattened ridge-and-furrow which, on some of the same air-photographs, can be seen to coincide with them. Nevertheless, it seems reasonable at least to question whether some of the enclosures known only from cropmarks were constructed far later than has often been supposed, whether for rabbit-farming or for any of a variety of other possible agrarian purposes.

Be that as it may, interpretation as a conyger-enclosure might also account for the unrecorded mounds at Sawley. Although no inter-relation with ridge-and-furrow is evident there, the proximity of a group of apparent fish-ponds is perhaps indicative of a tract of land that was closely managed at some point in the medieval and/or Post-Medieval centuries, opening the way to various other possible explanations of this rectilinear enclosure too.[13] Furthermore, an episode of similar usage cannot be entirely ruled out even in respect of Borough Hill at Walton, for there may be no evidence of internal mounds there, and its suspected rectilinear enclosure may have been of considerably greater extent than the two others discussed above, but it seems that the closely-related name-element 'burrough' can also sometimes signify a conyger (Williamson and Loveday 1988, 295; and see note 19 here). Just as for Sawley and The Buries, documentary research might pay dividends, but these are matters that cannot be pursued at present.

## BOROUGH HILL — VARIOUS MEDIEVAL OPTIONS

A range of other post-Roman possibilities, most of them less than likely to respond to documentary inquiry, should also be pondered apropos of Borough Hill, and it should be owned straight away that this train of thought was set in motion through conversations with Stuart Losco-Bradley as long ago as 1983, for he was given to wonder whether this place might have been a successor to the Anglo-Saxon settlement at Catholme (his excavation of which was then recently completed), situated just 1.7km to the south-west, on the opposite side of the Trent in Staffordshire, and perhaps abandoned shortly before the 10th century (Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 103; Losco-Bradley and Kinsley 2002, 123).[14] One option is to consider whether Borough Hill might have made a suitable location for an Early Medieval fortification, maybe a Mercian *burh*, which is one of several possible meanings to be had from the name-element 'Borough' (e.g. Smith 1956.i, 58–62; Ekwall 1960, 74–5; Gelling 1978, 143–4; Cameron 1988, 112–14; cf. Cox 1905, 386, taking it to indicate 'pre-Norman occupation'). There may have been a 'major boundary' passing through this neighbourhood in the 7th and 8th centuries (Hart 1977, 47, 52–3, fig. 2), but Mercian fort-building reached new heights in the decades either side of AD 900, and not all of those that are documented as being built then can now be pinpointed on the ground (Bond 1987, 112). This was a time of fluctuating fortunes and boundaries within Mercia, when Tamworth, *c.*14km south of Borough Hill, has been dubbed a 'frontier town' between 'English and Danish Mercia', while Derby, 24km to the north-east, changed hands more than once (Stafford 1985, 111–15, 136–8; Walker 2000, chs 4 and 5). What is more, the distribution of place-names can be inferred to support other evidence that, for some time, this part of the Trent Valley was 'on the shifting edge of the Danelaw' (Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 112; *cf.*, for example, Hill 1981, 32–61; N. Price in Graham-Campbell 1994, 125–42), and some would

evidently see Borough Hill perched upon the very border of the Danelaw at one stage (Stafford 1985, fig. 53). Such circumstances offer a variety of contexts for the construction of defences in this period, making an enclosure on Borough Hill seem as likely an initiative of Vikings as of Saxons.

Although the sites of few Viking fortifications can be affirmed (Hall 1995, 13–15; Richards 2000, 29–31), the best known, because most-intensively investigated, of them is located a mere 13km to the north-east of Borough Hill, at Repton, occupying a strikingly similar site and situation, looking out over a stretch of the Trent and its floodplain from a vantage on the south-eastern shoulder of the valley, at or near the western limit of the eventual area of the Danelaw. Admittedly, the pre-existing monastery and 'royal mausoleum' at Repton would have imparted an obvious significance to that site at the arrival of the Vikings (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 36–7; 2001, 49–52),[15] but it takes no great leap of imagination to suppose that the discovery of 'ancient human bones' at Borough Hill farm (to which reference has already been made) is suggestive of a cemetery, which just might indicate that this site was also a burial-place of some importance by that time.[16] With an enclosed area believed to have been little over 0.4ha, the 'D-shaped enclosure' at Repton was barely a quarter the size of that identified superficially on Borough Hill, evidently standing open to, but well defined by, a low north-facing river-cliff, just as a Borough Hill enclosure might have been open against its western escarpment (Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 1992, 40, fig. 2; 2001, 57–60, fig. 4.5 — telling how 'this type of earthwork. . .on the bank of a river. . .is well evidenced in the Viking period in Scandinavia' — *cf.* Richards 2000, 31).[17] Something broadly similar has been suggested at Derby, alongside the River Derwent, but there possibly of greater duration, perhaps 'almost 50 years' (Sparey-Green 2002, 143), as compared with the single year, 873–4, of the Viking occupation at Repton; though some might say that a date early in the 10th century would offer a more acceptable context for most Viking fortifications in this region than one late in the 9th (Roffe 1986, 111).

A contrasting option is prompted by the reading of the 'Walton' name that has lately found favour among etymologists, as denoting a settlement or community of Welshmen, or Britons, forming an enclave among the Anglo-Saxons (Cameron 1980; 1996, 44–7; Gelling 1988, 251). This can introduce the possibility that a rectilinear enclosure of a similar order of dimensions to those considered above as befitting a possible Roman work on Borough Hill, but of similar age to one that might have been built by Anglo-Saxons or Vikings, could actually have been a British creation of those turbulent times, rather than being inspired by intruders of any origin.[18] Comparable enclosures have been recognized in the Welsh Marches, close to the western border of Mercia, where they are reckoned to belong to the 9th or 10th century (principally on account of a radiocarbon date from the example that comes closest in size and shape to the apparent Borough Hill enclosure, at Cwrt Llechrhyd, in the Wye Valley — Musson and Spurgeon 1988, 97–102); and it has been speculated that some of them, including Cwrt Llechrhyd, may have been 'Welsh imitations' of the Saxon *burhs* of Wessex and Mercia (*ibid.*, 107–8). Then again, others have cast doubt on this view, adducing archaeological and historical evidence for regarding some of the relevant enclosures (though not necessarily Cwrt Llechrhyd) as 'medieval manorial earthworks' attributable to the centuries following the Norman Conquest (Arnold and Huggett 1995).

In its turn, that manorial alternative can elicit a further possible context for the erection of earthworks on Borough Hill, by way of its juxtaposition to Walton Old Hall, said to have been built in the 16th century (Craven and Stanley 2001, 230–1). Given that Walton occurs in post-Conquest copies of Anglo-Saxon charters (Cameron 1980, 9), that it was a royal manor when *Domesday Book* was compiled (Stenton 1905, 297, 331), and that 'manor' is another of the possible senses of the 'Borough' element (see references given above), it is not inconceivable that a manorial precursor to the Old Hall stood atop the hill, perhaps within some form of enclosure, as attested elsewhere at various dates (e.g. Taylor 1978, 5, 12; Steane 1985, 35–6, 58–61; Welch 1992, 124; Richards 2000, 54–5). As it happens, Richards (*loc. cit.*) cited Catholme as an example of an Anglo-Saxon settlement that did not 'develop into a manorial complex', at least not where established in the midst in the first millennium; but, harking back to Stuart Losco-Bradley's ruminations upon the demise of Catholme, can it have developed in just such a manner by removing to Borough Hill?

As a final gloss on these several medieval options, it should not be forgotten that no matter who was responsible, be they native or invader, for the construction of any stronghold on Borough Hill, be it pre- or post-Conquest, could have re-used the site, and therefore probably adapted the earthwork, of a Roman fortification (*cf.* Sparey-Green 2002, 142–3).

## UNSATISFACTORY CONCLUSIONS

None of this comes close to viable archaeological evidence for the age of any visible features of Borough Hill, and it should be clear enough that the purpose here has been merely to air a range of possibilities. Neither is it intended to deny that Borough Hill *could* have been crowned by a defensible enclosure at some point in prehistory, for the local topography certainly suits it to such a usage, facilitating dominance over its immediate neighbourhood on all sides bar the south-east, where the ground rises gently away from the saddle (though this siting would, of course, be equally appropriate to a Roman defensive work [Jones 1975, 45–6; Breeze 1983, 47; Welfare and Swan 1995, 7–8] or to one of later origin). The site-name too might be considered just as apt to somewhere of prehistoric significance as to any of the historic possibilities mentioned above (see sources already listed), but Mills's (1998, 402) summation of *burh*, the Old English for 'fortified place', from which modern 'borough' is derived, encapsulates the frustration of seeking the meaning of that name in this instance: thus 'variously applied to Iron-Age hill-forts, Roman and Anglo-Saxon fortifications, and fortified houses, later to manors or manor houses and to towns or boroughs'.[19]

However tempting it may be to search for prehistoric potential in the earthworks upon Borough Hill, it would seem best to conclude that later developments of one sort or another have overwhelmed any remains of that era. Hence, it is here contended simply that the present superficial form of the hill does less to support the proposition that any part of its earthworks relate to a prehistoric hillfort than to suggest that they might result from any, or indeed several, of a number of later possible constructions, Roman to Post-Medieval. No matter that this is an unsatisfactory conclusion, leaving all questions unanswered, the contrast between views proffered here and those held by some other people seems sufficient to justify the drafting of this provisional account of Borough Hill,

in the hope that a fresh awareness of the latent interest of the site may provoke the debate that would seem necessary to promote action in the field.

Anyway, it remains unsatisfactory that this and other earthwork-enclosures in southern Derbyshire should be so poorly served by detailed archaeological survey and interpretation. Welcome as it may be that Borough Hill has been afforded the official protection against gratuitous damage that any standing earthwork deserves, whatever its date or purpose, it will by now be manifest that meticulous contouring and informed analytical survey of the whole hill ought to precede further discussion, in the expectation that this could advance understanding, for it seems ill advised to go so far as Cox in declaring that these earthworks 'have been so interfered with by roads, buildings, and enclosures, that it would be useless to speculate on their original plan' (1905, 387). Beyond that, it has already been acknowledged that interrogation of documents (should anything relevant survive) might help in elucidating at least the later stages of what could well have been a long sequence of activity, while geophysical survey might tell something of what lurks below the turf. Ultimately, however, if it is to become better understood, some archaeological excavation would surely be expedient, perhaps most usefully aimed initially at obtaining evidence for the date of construction of the principal surviving line of earthwork, bank A. Until that has been achieved, it will be necessary to keep an open mind to the variety of possibilities sketched above, while further options may occur to others, either from reading these notes or, better, from inspecting Borough Hill for themselves.

## NOTES

[1] Earlier editions of Ordnance Survey mapping at a similar scale, including those of 1883 and 1923, cannot satisfy the present purpose, for hachuring there depicts only a small polygonal 'camp' towards the southern end of the summit (as illustrated in Cox 1905, 387). In the 1965 edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500, and hence in Fig. 1 here, that small 'camp' is represented among a greater number of hachures situated to the west of the buildings of Borough Hill farm, many of which were already in existence by 1883 and may, or may not, have been constructed over an eastern portion of that earthwork, so that its dimensions could once have exceeded its mapped extent of approximately 70m north-south by 45m west-east. This is still to be seen in the field as a slight bank, which could easily have been added to the southern side of the squarish enclosure identified in this paper, perhaps being made or modified in the course of some form of relatively recent landscaping; and it is noticeable that no ridge-and-furrow is evident on this patch of ground whereas it is plain to see, running roughly west/east, in the adjacent, south-western, corner of the squarish enclosure. It remains a puzzle why the largest earthwork, A in Fig. 1, lying to the north of the farm-buildings, was not recorded in the earlier Ordnance Survey maps, for it is hardly credible that it should have come into existence only during the past 80 years, especially having regard for Bulmer's turn of phrase, that the 'remains' of the 'encampment' lay 'between the Old Hall and Borough Hill farm' (1895, 835), implying that he meant my bank A — *cf.* page 245.

[2] This was undertaken in the company of Daryl Garton and David Walters, to both of whom I am indebted for discussion of particulars and for encouragement to put these thoughts on paper.

[3] This reference was drawn to my attention by an anonymous well-wisher.

[4] So the Sawley enclosure remains as much in need of detailed and inquiring metrical survey as does Borough Hill, notwithstanding Todd's mention of 'a contoured survey prepared by

students' (1967, 165 note 2). As given in the text here, its internal area has been estimated from paced measurements (*c.* 70x75m) in the field, which tally well with *ibid.*, fig. 6.

[5] This enclosure was still referred to as 'the Roman site at Sawley on the north bank of the River Trent' by Burnham and Wacher (1990, 222), though they surely would not have done so had they been aware of the information reviewed here, and this highlights the danger of giving greater emphasis to the original conjecture than to the eventual retraction. More recently, Turbutt (1999, 196–7) has discussed it in the context of 'Roman forts', while conceding that this identification 'has not yet been conclusively demonstrated'.

[6] The Buries sits upon what appears to be an 'island' of gravel (*cf.* Simpson and Auden 1913, 86 — stating that 'gravel is about 18 inches below the surface') amid an expanse of alluvium (in 2003, the writer watched the machine-digging of holes for poles to carry electricity-cables across pasture-fields to the south, some within 250m of The Buries, showing there to be alluvial clays of almost 2m thickness). It currently lies to the south of the Trent, and immediately east of an abandoned river-channel, so conceivably sat beside the north bank, or between channels, when built (Hipkins 1892, 3; 1899, 2; Cox 1905, 386; and see Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, fig. 4.2 ).

[7] These dimensions are taken from the 1969 edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Sheet SK2827/2927.

[8] Beware of the plan of 'Repton Camp', i.e. The Buries, in Hipkins 1899, pl. 4, which lacks a scale and was probably derived from Bigsby 1854, fig. 33, but has evidently been drawn in mirror-image, so that west is there labelled 'E' and east is 'W'.

[9] The importance of this sequence, enclosure over ridge-and-furrow, to comprehending The Buries means that this is yet another of Derbyshire's monuments that awaits adequate and empathetic field-survey. In any case, if correctly interpreted as a conyger, this is such a fine example of the phenomenon that a detailed, contoured record of it would seem highly desirable. By the same token, The Buries seems thoroughly deserving of statutory protection against any kind of disturbance likely to arise from unsuitable land-use (its current, regular trampling by cattle can but hasten degradation), and it is crucial that the area of ground thus protected should be considerably greater than that covered by the enclosure itself, so as to preserve its inter-relation with the ridge-and-furrow earthworks in a fit state for study.

[10] The stratigraphical antecedence of ridge-and-furrow cultivation must make it dubious to attempt an equation of The Buries with *le Castelbury* of 1298 (Cameron 1959, 654).

[11] But evidently not surviving in the vernacular of the Trent Valley by the mid-19th century, for others then read different meanings into the name 'Buries', assuming it to import either a fortified place, deriving it from 'burh' (Bigsby 1854, 3 — citing T. Bateman in support), or a burial-place, deriving it from 'barrows' (*ibid.*, 260; Hipkins 1892, 3); the latter notion also reflects Bateman's reputed view of The Buries enclosure as the 'boundary of the sacred area surrounding the tumuli' (first quoted in Bigsby 1854, 259), though that opinion was formed prior to his fruitless search of 1855 for 'sepulchral remains' within the enclosed 'circular mounds' (Bateman 1861, 93).

[12] Now it is appreciated that round mounds, as well as elongated ones, can constitute 'pillow mounds' for rearing rabbits, the slight but multivallate, rectilinear enclosure at Braham Farm, Ely St Mary, Cambridgeshire, with 'five small mounds' in its *c.* 0.18ha interior, seems an even more likely candidate for a warren-enclosure than when it was recorded three decades ago (Taylor 1973, 37–8, fig. 2; 1974, 59–60, fig. 23). Like The Buries, the Braham Farm enclosure 'lay on top of ridge and furrow', and yet it too was once mistaken for a 'Roman camp' (Phillips 1948, 30).

[13] The Sawley 'fish-ponds' are represented by two, maybe three, straight and parallel hollows, at least 100m in length, apparently carved out of the, now grass-grown and usually dry, loop of an old river-course that passes to the north of the earthwork-enclosure and lies a little below

its level (thereby, incidentally, making the topographical location of the Sawley enclosure seem even more like that of The Buries than may appear at first sight). Could it be that these sometime ponds, centred at SK 47433142, are the *piscaria* of *Salle*, as recorded in the 11th-century *Domesday Book*, when the Bishop of Chester had a manor there (Stenton 1905, 334)? They lie little more than 100m from the east end of the church of All Saints, which has Norman work in its fabric (Pevsner and Williamson 1978, 313–14) and is presumably one of the two that also appear in *Domesday Book*.

[14] Catton, *c.*2.5km south of Borough Hill, may have taken its name from the same root as Catholme (Losco-Bradley and Wheeler 1984, 112), and, given that Catton is included in *Domesday Book* (Stenton 1905, 301, 338), it must be considered as an alternative possible successor to Catholme, involving a move of little more than 1km to the south-east and across the Trent (Losco-Bradley and Kinsley 2002, 3, fig. 1.1C). Then again, note that Todd (1980, 49–50) has mooted the possibility of a 'connection' between Catholme and Walton-upon-Trent, but without implicating Borough Hill.

[15] Walton also has evidence, from architectural fragments, that its church, presumed to be that mentioned in *Domesday Book* (Stenton 1905, 331), is 'Saxon in origin' (Wardle 1994); but that building lies 1km north-east of Borough Hill, at the heart of the present village and adjacent to the river-bridge mentioned above.

[16] Although circumstances mean that the date of these bones cannot be known, one possibility is that they offer a glimpse of activities in the vicinity of a former Roman fortification, as witnessed at Derby and elsewhere (Kinsley in Sparey-Green 2002, 120; *ibid.*, 141). Incidentally, it has to be wondered whether this hint of a cemetery on Borough Hill has been confused in the literature with that at 'Borough Fields Farm', which is situated some 1.5km to the south-east (SK 220164), where alleged finds of 'bones and things' in the 19th century have led some to suppose there might have been an Anglo-Saxon cemetery (O'Sullivan 1901, 81; Smith 1908, 206; Meaney 1964, 220; O'Brien 1999, 90 — at least the last two authorities mistakenly attributing Borough Fields to Staffordshire) — if there is really just one possible cemetery hereabouts, which is the correct location?

[17] An internal area of 0.4ha or so can be calculated from the 'reconstructed plan' of the Repton 'winter camp', as published by Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle (1992, fig. 2; 2001, fig. 4.5), whereas they state it to be '1.46ha' (1992, 40; 2001, 59) — both figures cannot be correct, and comparison of Biddle and Kjølbye-Biddle 2001, pl. 4.1 with Ordnance Survey maps suggests that 0.4ha is reasonably near the mark. So, it can but be supposed that the Biddles' figure should read 0.46ha — were it otherwise, the enclosed areas at Repton and Borough Hill would not be greatly different.

[18] Serious consideration has even been given to the concept of a British origin, and occupants, of the 'Anglo-Saxon settlement' at Catholme (H. Hamerow in Losco-Bradley and Kinsley 2002, 127–9).

[19] It bears noting that the earliest published reference to Borough Hill, at least as known to me, has it as 'Burrow Hill' (Farey 1811, 24, 85), which can simply refer to a hill or mound/barrow rather than a fortification (e.g. Ekwall 1960, 38–9, 74–7; Gelling 1978, 133), while, once more, the possible connotation of a conyger is easily grasped. None the less, 'burrow' is here probably a mere variation upon an older use of 'borough', since 'Borough Holme' was recorded as early as the 14th century in respect of a nearby tract within the floodplain (Cameron 1959, 667 — telling also that Borough Fields was 'Burrow Fields' in the 18th century, but nothing of Borough Hill).

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