



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd

Modern living in an historic environment

**A programme of fieldwork at (Lower) Benefield Castle,
East Northamptonshire, 2018**

(SM 1015535)

Iain Soden

Benefield Castle

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Summary

Three archaeologically-monitored test pits showed that part of the Scheduled Monument of Benefield Castle, Lower Benefield, had previously been stripped in places to natural geology. No buried archaeological features were located. A modern rubble and topsoil bund was re-spread by machine to restore a level, pre-2005 ground surface in the same area. There were no pre-modern finds.

Introduction and background

Scheduled Monument Consent was granted to the owner of Lower Benefield Castle to remedy long-standing unauthorised works which took place within the monument of this medieval Ringwork. Lower Benefield Castle lies in the purview of the Grade II-listed Manor Farm, Lower Benefield, currently being conserved and restored by the same new owner. The unauthorised works took place under previous, unrelated ownership.

The Scheduled Monument in question is Benefield Castle (Monument number 1015535). It lies adjacent to Manor Farm at NGR: SP 98719 88460. A summary of knowledge on the castle, together with a presentation of its surveyed earthworks, is set out by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME 1975, 18-19 and plate 6). The adjacent Manor Farmhouse was the subject of a recent Heritage Asset Survey (Prentice and Soden 2017).

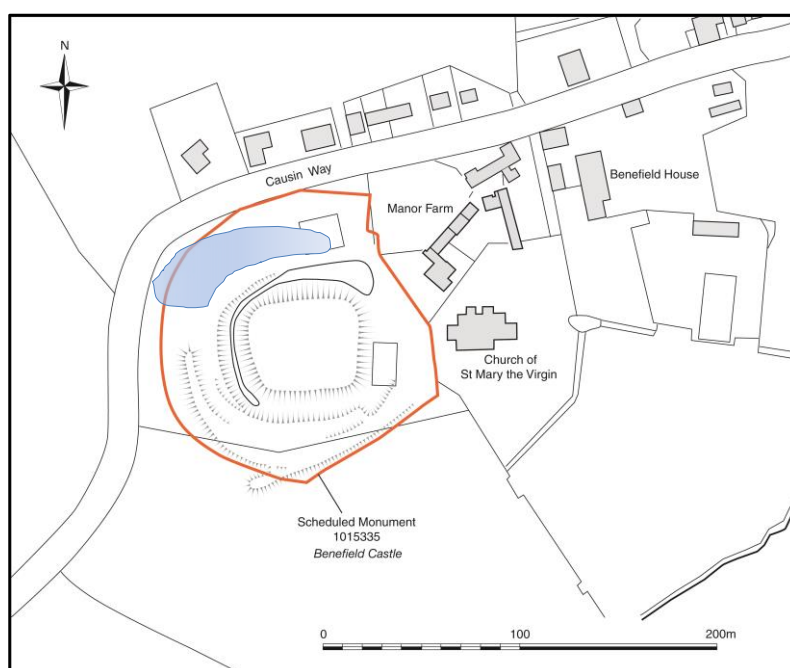


Fig 1: The Scheduled Monument of Benefield Castle. Earthworks as surveyed by the former Royal Commission (RCHME 1975, 18; fig 29). Drawing by Andy Isham. The area specifically addressed in this report is toned blue.

Benefield Castle

Pre-application advice was given to the landowner by Dr Andy Hammon, Inspector of Ancient Monuments, Historic England, who lent his support to the landowner in respect of his wish to restore a former trackway and reverse the most deleterious earthmoving of the unauthorised previous works by a previous landowner (Historic England Reference PA00814785 of 14 June 2018).

The works constituted:

- a. Re-instatement of a former, mapped trackway
- b. Re-instatement of material from a long sinuous modern bund on the site
- c. Dismantling one of two unauthorised sheds, the second to remain

Advice given required two tasks to the archaeological works.

1. Archaeological test pits to be dug in order to assess the state of existing soils-disturbance and the state of preservation of the former trackway which was part of the Scheduled Area, and, if necessary, allow for design alterations in creating the new trackway
2. Archaeological monitoring of the re-spreading of the bund

In accordance with this, a Written Scheme of Investigation (WSI, by Iain Soden Heritage Services, and dated 6 August 2018) was prepared and vetted as part of seeking Scheduled Monument Consent for the works. That WSI was approved as part of the consent.

Objectives

The aim of the archaeological fieldwork (See Fig below) was as follows:

- To machine-dig under controlled conditions three archaeological test-pits to assess the extent of a previous trackway and illustrate a. Its relationship to underlying layers and b. the extent of damage done to it when a nearby bund was created.
- To ensure that the re-spreading of the existing bund by machine does not do any harm to the monument and that the reinstatement of the former trackway would thus leave the monument without further disturbance.

Research Agenda

The relevant background research agendas have been published by Cooper (2006) and Knight et al (2012) – and appertaining to items 7g and 7.4. The interactive version of this can be found at:

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/Main>.

The castle has been variously depicted on historic maps since at least c1810. However, there was very little detail shown until 1886 and the 1st edition Ordnance Survey.

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Fig 2: The castle and village as mapped for the Ordnance Survey surveyors' edition (sheet 269), 1810



Fig 3: The tithe map showing the castle (moat) and village 1848/50 (NRO map 4610)

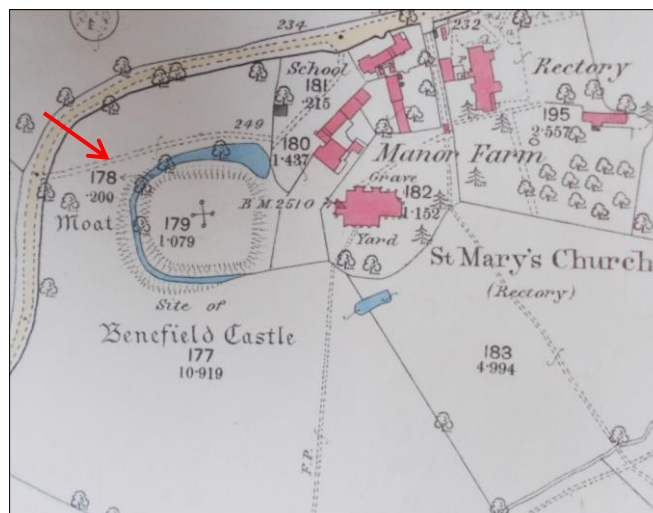


Fig 4: The castle moat, earthworks and part of the village, mapped for the Ordnance Survey 1st edition, 1886. A northern trackway from Causin Way is shown for the first time (here arrowed), and thereafter repeatedly depicted.

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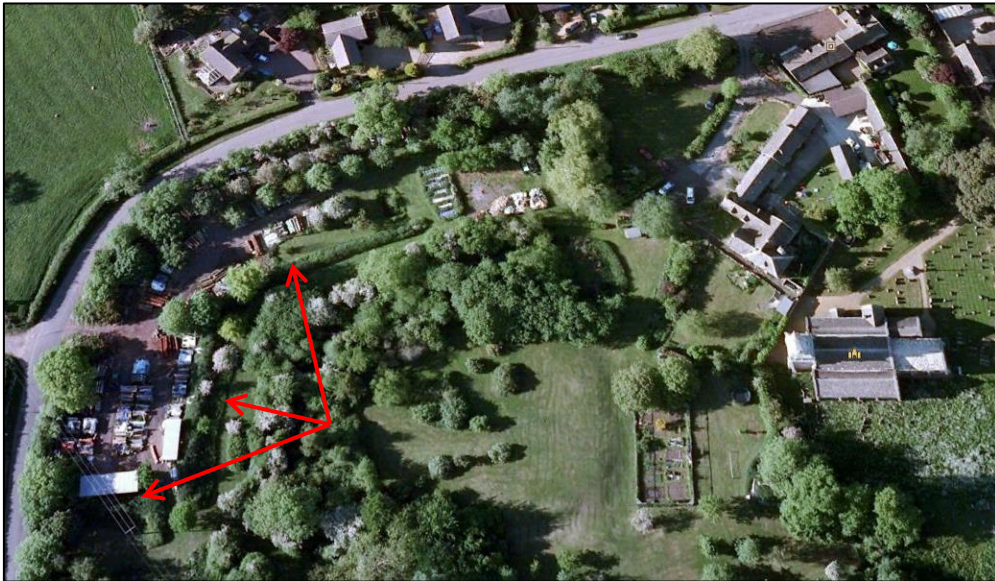


Fig 5: The castle as depicted on a satellite view of 2005, the first year the bund (arrowed) was in existence (it is not present on a 2004 satellite view). Note the density of buildings and vehicles to its north and west. With acknowledgement to Google Earth timeline



Fig 6: A Lidar image of the castle which shows the 2004/5 bund (arrowed) removed (spread flat and compacted) as part of the current works. Thanks to Bryn Gethin, Archaeology Warwickshire, with acknowledgement to <https://houseprices.io/lab/lidar/map>

Methodology

The work was carried out in accordance with ClfA regulations and guidelines ([Code of Conduct](#), Chartered Institute for Archaeologists).

A 14-ton 360-degree machine with wider than normal tracks was deployed to dig the test pits and spread the bund. A wide toothless ditching bucket was used under archaeological control throughout.

Archaeological fieldwork was by Iain Soden and Joe Prentice.

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Test Pits

Each of the three test pits measured c2.5m x c1.6m in plan at the surface and was a maximum of 600mm deep. Their eventual locations were chosen to best reflect the course of the former trackway and to assess where possible the proposed course of the new one, all subject to on-site impediments and the potential soil modification which was thought to have taken place in the creation of the adjacent bund. None of the test pits targeted a known medieval castle-related feature.

The up-cast of each test pit was stored temporarily adjacent to each and at the end of fieldwork was machine-backfilled, to restore the ground level, but only after consultation with Dr Andy Hammon at Historic England.

The location of the test pits was measured into the site by means of a manual taped offset which also took in the northern plot boundary adjacent to Causin Way and the curving bund earthwork on the south, to be removed shortly after.

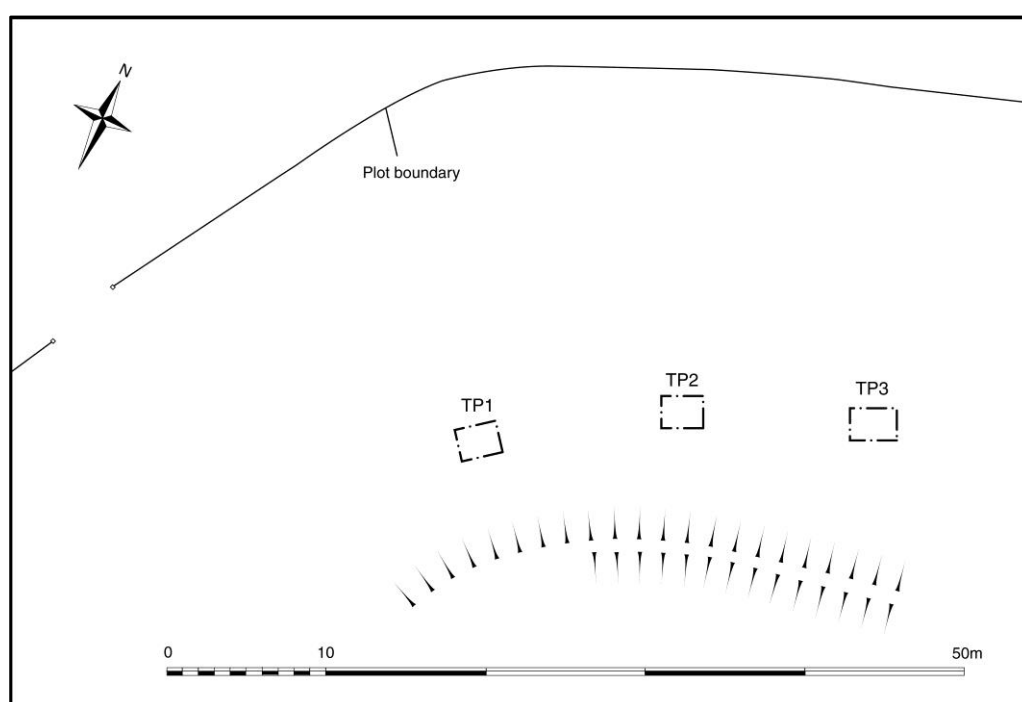


Fig 7: The test pits relative to the gateway (mapped repeatedly since 1886), the Causin Way roadside plot boundary and the bund which was removed shortly after. Reduced from 1:100 field measurements. Drawing by Andy Isham.

- *Test Pit 1* measured 2.5m x 1.6m at the surface and was 600mm deep.

The soil build-up sequence revealed was as follows:

- 0-400mm Modern rubble and road-planings/scalpings
- 400-500/600mm Compressed topsoil with much rubble
- 500/600mm Natural grey-buff clay with water-worn cobbles

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Fig 8: Test Pit 1 looking north west; scale 1m

- *Test Pit 2* measured 2.5m x 1.6m at the surface and was 500mm deep.

The sequence revealed was:

- 0-100mm Dark brown topsoil and edge of scalpings/road planings
- 100-450/500mm Rubble including tarmac pieces, kerbstone, brick, limestone
- 450/500mm Natural grey-buff clay



Fig 9: Test Pit 2, looking north, note former hardstanding behind; Scale 1m.

- *Test Pit 3* measured 2.5m x 1.6m at the surface and was 400mm deep.

The sequence revealed was as follows:

- 0-400mm Dark brown topsoil with occasional modern rubble, rutted and rammed into clay below
- 400mm Natural grey-buff clay with limestone flecks.



Fig 10: Test Pit 3, looking west; scale 1m

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Removal of the Bund

Following machine-backfilling of the test pits, the 14-ton machine was deployed to spread the bund, which in places was up to 2m high, across the former hardstanding and disturbed areas on its north and west sides. The work continued to be archaeologically monitored.

Although thought originally to be a topsoil bund, the earthwork was found to contain considerable quantities of builders' rubble, from limestone and brick, to concrete kerbstones, breeze-block, timber off-cuts, plastic piping, guttering, concrete, land-drains, ceramic pipes etc. It resembled the dumping of a former builders' compound material or direct tipping of construction waste. Topsoil had been used to seal the waste and provide a growing medium over it.



Fig 11: Spreading the bund, here about 1.2m high. Note the newly-reunified ground levels to either side.

A metal-detector was deployed to scan the newly re-spread former bund to look for any non-ferrous metallic finds in the previously disturbed up-cast. The detector was set to discriminate against the many iron-based objects which are usually present in a former farmyard. In the event there were few non-ferrous signals present, although copper, lead and probable cupric alloys (such as heating pipe-fittings, washers and a paraffin lamp grille and wick-holder) were present amongst modern builders' waste; these were not retained. There were no pre-modern finds.



Fig 12: Metal-detecting across the base of the bund

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Creation of the new access track

Because of the negative evaluation results and absence of significant archaeology, no alteration in construction methodology was necessary. In the event, the laying of the new access track on the recently-spread material was not watched. In view of the nature of the re-spread bund and the material within the adjacent test-pits, it is highly unlikely that any significant archaeology was disturbed.

Conclusions

The test pits showed that a considerable area had been previously stripped of its soils and hard-core had been introduced in places, spread directly onto the natural geology. This was not largely old hard-core related to the former (late 19th-century) trackway, but modern builders' rubble, probably related to the former recent uses to which that part of the site was put. This is believed to have included a saw-mill and wood-yard with related extensive hard-standing (see Figs 5 and 6 for former extent).

None of the test pits uncovered evidence of a surviving 19th-20th-century trackway, which appears to have been lost to the modern hardstanding. Nor did they uncover any medieval or other features cut into natural geology which might relate to the castle and its earthworks.

The removal of the 'soil' bund has taken away an unsightly modern earthwork which has for more than a decade compromised historic views across the monument. The material it contained was found to comprise not only soils scraped up from the ground adjacent but large quantities of builders' rubble potentially imported to the site for its unauthorised creation in 2004-5.

Spreading of the bund material has restored the ground levels to either side to parity.

Metal-detecting showed that no pre-modern finds lay within the former bund material.

Bibliography

Cooper N, 2006 *The archaeology of the East Midlands: an archaeological resource assessment and research agenda*; Leicester Archaeology Monograph **13**

Knight D, Vyner B, and Allen C, 2012 *East Midlands Heritage: an updated research agenda and strategy for the historic environment of the East Midlands*, Nottingham University/English Heritage

Prentice J, and Soden I, 2017 *A heritage asset survey of Manor Farmhouse, Lower Benefield, Northamptonshire*

RCHME 1975 *An inventory of the Historical Monuments in the County of Northampton; 1: Archaeological sites in North-East Northamptonshire*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

Relevant website:

<http://archaeologydataservice.ac.uk/researchframeworks/eastmidlands/wiki/Main>.

Benefield Castle

Appendix

OASIS data

Project Name	Benefield Castle; SM 101535
OASIS ID	378856
Project Type	Evaluation
Originator	Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
Project Manager	Iain Soden
Previous/future work	No
Current land use	Garden
Development type	Reinstatement of access track/earthmoving
Reason for investigation	Scheduled Monument Consent
National grid reference	SP 98719 88460
Start/end dates of fieldwork	17-09-2018
Archive recipient	Northamptonshire Archive
Study area	c0.3ha



Iain Soden Heritage Services Ltd
December 2019