

Notes

EVALUATION OF COTTON HENGE, RAUNDS

The cropmark known as Cotton Henge (NGR SP983726; Northants. S.M.R. Site Number 1725/1/0) comprises two concentric ditches, the outer ditch being slightly elliptical with a major NW-SE axis of 75 m and a minor axis of 70 m, and an inner ditch *c.* 21 m in diameter (Fig 1). During 1993 the monument was evaluated by metric survey, geophysical survey and excavation. The work was carried out by the Central Archaeology Service and Ancient Monuments Laboratory of English Heritage. Previously the site had been fieldwalked and surveyed by Northamptonshire Archaeology as part of the Raunds Area Survey. The most extensive surface flint scatter from anywhere within the Raunds area was found at this general locality (S. Parry, forthcoming).

Sited on the Northampton Sands with Ironstone of the valley side, Cotton Henge appears to form part of the Neolithic and earlier Bronze Age complex of burial and ceremonial monuments otherwise located on the terrace and floodplain of the river Nene at West Cotton, Stanwick and Irthlingborough. When projected *c.* 600 m eastwards, the axis of the Long Mound at West Cotton passes through Cotton Henge (Windell *et al.*, 1990, 15).

PROJECT OBJECTIVES

The project was designed (Humble, 1993) to:

- 1) evaluate the condition of the archaeological levels
- 2) establish the form and date of the monument
- 3) appraise methodologies of cropmark sampling
- 4) provide results of relevance to the current Raunds Area Project study of the Neolithic and Bronze Age landscape.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

Excavation demonstrated a close relationship between topography, the depth of ploughsoils and

the severity of truncation to the archaeological features: on the higher contour areas, the overburden is as little as 0.2 m, ranging to over 1 m downslope. Medieval furrows run approximately N-S across the monument, terminating on the southern side at a furlong boundary. With the exception of the outer and inner ditches, few archaeological deposits appear to survive, and within the trenches all of the discrete features detected by the magnetometer survey proved to be tree-throw holes. Few finds were recovered, and despite an extensive programme of sieving and flotation, no samples suitable for radiocarbon dating were recovered, and the potential of the site for palaeo-environmental reconstruction is low.

The close correlation between the geophysical survey and the results of excavation appears to confirm that, unlike 'classic' henges with one or more entranceways (Clark, 1936, 30-1), the outer ditch circuit is unbroken. In their surviving truncated forms, within Trench 1 the outer ditch was *c.* 2.4 m in width and *c.* 1 m in depth, and the inner ditch was *c.* 1.8 m in width and *c.* 0.45 m in depth: both ditches are of V-shaped profile with flat bases. In accord with the contours, the surviving dimensions of the outer ditch were less in Trench 3 and greater in Trench 4. Soil sections through the ditches did not provide clear evidence for the former presence of banks or mounds, although the sieved stone fractions from a transect of test pits cut through the overburden along the axis of Trench 1 (for methodology see Bradley, 1984) suggests that the area within the inner ditch may have been mounded, and that an internal bank may have been associated with the outer ditch.

The characteristics of flint artefacts found within the ditch fills are compatible with a Neolithic date, but it has not been possible to establish the relative sequence of construction and use of the two enclosure ditches. The ditches had been backfilled, quite possibly as single episodes, and these acts appear to represent the purposeful decommissioning of the monument.

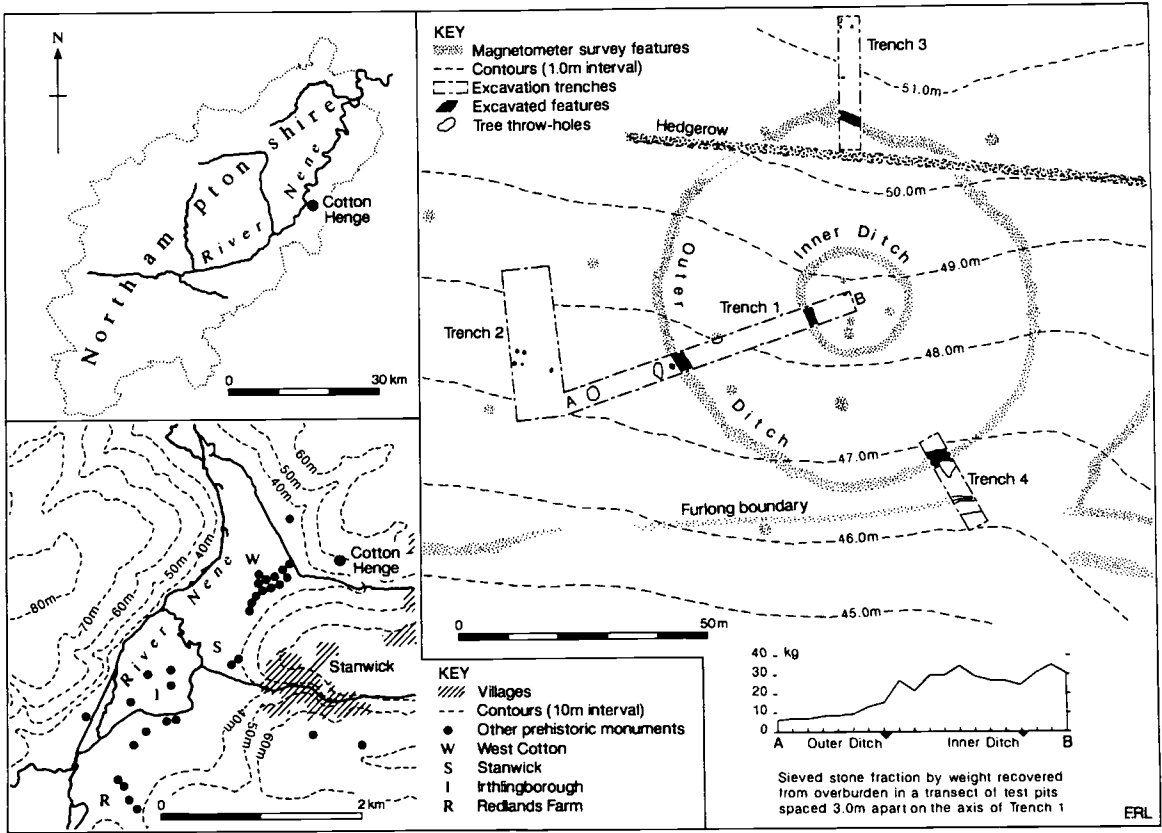


Fig 1: Cotton Henge, Raunds.

Several post-holes were examined, including an Iron Age four-post structure (dated by pottery) in Trench 2, but otherwise no evidence of date or function was found.

In conjunction with the lack of an entranceway, the relatively slight nature of the ditches and the possibility of an internal bank do not conform with the typical notion of a henge (Atkinson, 1951, 82). The monument may represent a distinctive regional variant of large Neolithic ceremonial circles, and elsewhere in Northamptonshire and the S. and E. Midlands comparable sites sharing one or more of these characteristics are known from cropmarks (G. Foard, pers. comm.; e.g. Harding, 1987, 81-3), although few have been excavated (but note Pryor *et al.*, 1985). In its local context, Cotton Henge might have provided the link between the worlds of the living and the dead, as attested by

the extensive flint scatters on the valley side, and by the wealth of monuments in the valley bottom.

An evaluation report will be copied to county archaeological staff, and full details will be provided for the Sites and Monuments Record. The results will be discussed within the Raunds Area Project monograph series (Humble, forthcoming).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Robinson and especially Aidan Allen and all who worked on site for their support, expertise and assistance. The project was funded by English Heritage.

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AN IRON AGE HILL FORT AT
GUILSBOROUGH (SP 673728)

In January 1993 an archaeological survey was undertaken by RCHME at Guilsborough, following a request from English Heritage. The work was undertaken to help to define the extent of the site which, as a result of trial excavation, is thought to be a denuded hillfort.

The site lies on a ridge-top within the former Guilsborough Park, at c. 170 metres above O.D., with extensive views to the south and originally to the north. Guilsborough Hall, demolished in 1959, was situated immediately to the east of the site in Church Mount, with the church of St. Etheldreda a little further east.

Trial excavations in 1989 demonstrated the

former existence of a strongly defended univallate fort of the late 1st millennium B.C. The present survey has defined the defended enclosure in so far as that is now possible, using cartographic evidence, air photographs and topographic survey. The surface remains are very slight but sufficient to confirm three sides of a sub-rectangular enclosure aligned along the ridge top. It measures at least 180 m (590 ft) east to west by c. 140 m (460 ft), thereby enclosing an area of c. 2.5 ha (6.25 acres) and probably considerably more.

The northern side is now a gradual slope, representing rampart material spread over the concealed ditch. It is generally about 1 m high but towards the western end it survives in private gardens as a landscaped scarp up to 2.5 m high. The southern rampart is similar, up to 1 m high, but the south-western corner is incorporated into the prominent mound of a water tower, with part of the ditch visible beyond it. The north-western corner and the western rampart survived long enough to be captured on air photographs of 1947, but are now levelled. The unlocated eastern defences must lie buried under Church Mount.

A full report and survey plan is available in the National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon under NMR No. SP 67 SE 3.

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FIELDWORK BY PAUL PATTISON AND
ALASTAIR OSWALD FOR RCHME

FIELD SURVEY OF A ROMAN SITE AT
KILSBY

The Midland Archaeological Research Society were commissioned by R.P.S. Clouston Environmental Consultants to conduct a metal detector survey of the site of the proposed Daventry International Rail Freight Terminal, where it abuts a Roman road (for 50 metres from SP 57357245 to SP 57057290). After the

NOTES

MIDLAND ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH SOCIETY - METAL DETECTOR SURVEY.

PARISH _____ LANDOWNER _____ FIELD NO: _____
 OPERATORS _____ DATE _____

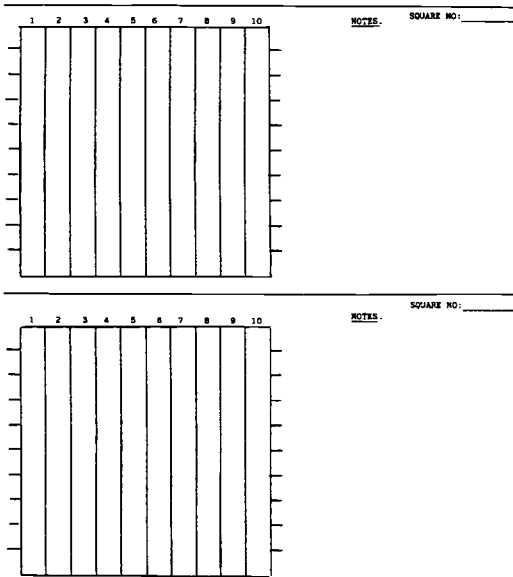


Fig 1: Recording System of Finds used by Midland Archaeological Research Society.

completion of a geophysical survey, a fifty metre strip along the Roman road was surveyed, using 50 metre lines marked at 5 metre spacings and completing 50 metre squares (see Fig 1 below). All metal finds were plotted but left in the ground. A similar survey was conducted to the north. The survey of one hectare in the area of the 1947 sectioning of the Roman road yielded a similar number of finds to the above. Permission was subsequently given to remove and record the finds. Five Roman coins (two of silver), a lead weight, an inscribed posy ring, a dress fastener and a schist are now with R.P.S. Clouston and will be deposited with Northampton Museum.

R.F.J. KINGS

MEDIEVAL FIELD SYSTEMS AT EASTON NESTON (SP 692491 to SP 697501)

In March 1994 the RCHME Cambridge Field Archaeology Section carried out a small survey in

Easton Neston parish, following a request from Northamptonshire Heritage. The survey area comprised 27 hectares of pasture north of the River Tove, 700 metres west of Easton Neston House. Within this area is preserved a small part of an extensive and nationally important tract of ridge and furrow cultivation.

The area was planned at 1:2500 scale and contained parts of three major furlongs, crossed by a raised, tree-lined avenue. Cultivation ridges were well preserved over much of the area, reaching a maximum of 0.5 m in height. The three original furlongs had undergone alterations, some relating to changes in the course of a stream, which affected the ploughing regime, causing the formation of new headlands. There was also evidence for the subdivision of a furlong and the amalgamation of part of one furlong into another.

Relatively little can be concluded from such a small fragment of a much larger field system, though it is important that it has been recorded before destruction. The absence of Post-Medieval features such as greensward balks or grass ends may indicate that the cultivation ridges have not been significantly altered since the creation of Easton Neston Park in 1498.

The avenue is a raised earthwork up to 2 m high, formerly flanked by a double line of trees. It was part of a great avenue running both east and west from Easton Neston House, extending for nearly 4 km in total, and is probably contemporary with the late 17th/early 18th century house.

A full report and survey plan is available in the National Monuments Record Centre, Swindon under NMR No. SP 64 NE 54 (avenue).

FIELDWORK BY JANE KENNEY AND
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EVALUATION AT ST. PETER'S CHURCH, BRACKLEY

An archaeological evaluation was undertaken of a proposed extension to the church of St. Peter, Brackley (SP 59163730) in February 1993, on behalf of the Parochial Church Council. Two 5 m × 3.5 m trenches were excavated within the

footprint of a proposed new parish room on the south side of the church. Trench A lay to the east of the pathway out of the Norman south door; Trench B lay to the west of the path and further away from the church.

Articulated human skeletons were encountered at an average depth of 0.75 m below the current ground levels. All graves had been cut into and backfilled with the same soil, and grave cuts were often indistinguishable until the skeleton was revealed. The natural subsoil consisted of a chalky clay matrix.

Thirty graves were identified in Trench A. Seventeen of these formed the first (i.e. the latest) level of burials to be encountered. These graves occupied approximately 70 per cent of the surface area of the trench, and space was present for two further graves within this area. It is likely that the trench would originally have contained about 30 graves at this level. At least four, and probably six distinct layers of burial were identified stratigraphically and by depth below Ordnance datum. The earliest graves cut into the natural subsoil by up to 0.15 m.

Trench B was not excavated as extensively as Trench A. Nevertheless it seems clear that the density of burials was the same. Eleven graves were identified at the top level within the 1.4 m wide central strip. More burials would have been revealed at this level had excavation continued.

The earliest graves in Trench A may have been of Saxo-Norman date (11th to 12th century). Pottery of late Saxon and early Norman date was found in several later graves in both trenches, while such material was also present in the lower cemetery soils in Trench A. Burial thereafter continued throughout the Medieval and Post-Medieval periods into the 19th century.

No pre-cemetery features were identified in Trench A or in the sides of the deeply cut grave in Trench B. Only a limited exposure of the natural subsoil was possible, however, and early features could be present elsewhere. Prehistoric, Roman and early Saxon pottery was found, and the Roman brick and tile included some box flue tile fragments. These would normally be associated with a hypocaust or bath suite. Most potsherds and tile fragments were small, however, and need not be derived from the immediate vicinity of the excavations. Nevertheless the finds are consistent

with the evidence from previous excavations and chance discoveries in indicating the presence of a high status Roman site in the Old Town area.

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UNIT

OBSERVATIONS ON NORTHAMPTON MIEVEAL WALLS, ALBION PLACE TO ABINGTON STREET

A feature noticed in Beckett's Park near the foot of Albion Terrace has prompted a review of the evidence for the course of the town wall of Northampton. The supposed course of the defences follows Victoria Promenade, Cheyne Walk and York Road (RCHME, 1985). The impression from the evidence found in Beckett's Park is of a course that crosses Victoria Promenade obliquely, while comparison of old town plans suggests a line closer to Spring Gardens and St. Gile's Church.

A critical feature is a triangular shoulder of elevated ground projecting beyond the present embankment of Victoria Promenade, opposite Albion Terrace at SP 75766014. This may correspond to an offset in the wall shown on Speed's map of 1610, east of the foot of Cow Lane (present Swan Street), to various possible representations of this on Noble and Butlin's map of 1746, on that of Merryweather of 1770 and a bastion is shown on Roper and Cole's map of 1807. The triangle extends as much as 15 metres south of Victoria Promenade, but quickly recedes eastwards under the road embankment, suggesting that the wall crosses at an angle to the road, rather than flanking its line north or south. It is overlain by two recent cambered trackways which converge at the south edge of the feature, and by modern steps and a path on the line of Albion Place. Set into the slope and midway on the triangle is a rectangular foundation 20 × 7 metres which, if not accounted for by more recent use, could be the bastion shown on Roper and Cole (1807). Twenty metres east of the triangle is a smaller projection, mid-way on the north side of the bowling green. Although complicated by two diverging buried pipelines, a property boundary

shown on Roper and Cole overlies it, extending 8 metres S.S.E. of the road, as a low bank 4 metres broad. Unless artificial, the projection may indicate the northernmost limit of the ditch, and suggest that the ditch begins to converge with the modern road embankment forty metres north-east.

A further criterion for the course of the wall is its proximity to the junction of Spring Gardens and Derngate. Indeed Speed's portrayal of 1610 shows the wall very close to the line of Spring Gardens initially, although the latter is shown diverging half-way between Derngate and St. Giles. Cable laying near the junction of Spring Gardens and Derngate in 1975 exposed a wall, metalled surfaces and a pit which might mark the ditch (RCHME, 1985).

This is complicated by a change in the course of the wall south-west of Derngate, approximately in the position where Victoria Promenade turns north-east, to what was formerly a staggered junction with Cheyne Walk. Although the angle is not shown by Speed, it is clearly shown by Pearce in 1632, by Merriweather (1770) and Wood and Law (1847). Roper and Cole (1807) show a straight wall with a bastion at this point. Prominent ridge and furrow extends close to the road embankment here, although there are slight traces of a structure on the slope of the embankment at the present road angle (SP 75906021). However the evidence discussed above suggests that the ditch is already under the modern road at this point.

Only Noble and Butlin (1746) show any semblance to the supposed course following Cheyne Walk and York Street, but this is not convincing. The fine line depiction of 'The Old Wall' seems rather to have served the purpose of a border to the map than a reliable course. As mentioned above, Speed shows a close alignment to the lower part of Spring Gardens. Roper and Cole (1807) is similar, with the wall passing close to the rear of St. Giles's Church before curving north-east towards the East Gate. Besides the ridges observed near the angle of Victoria Promenade, prominent S.E. to N.W. ridge and furrow in Beckett's Park extends to within 10 metres of the Derngate junction and precludes a continuation along Cheyne Walk. In St. Giles's

churchyard there are a number of mature chestnut trees close to the line implied by Roper and Cole (1807). A prospect of Northampton by Buck (1731) appears to show both the deflection below Derngate and a line of trees up to and passing close behind St. Giles's Church.

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THOMAS C. WELSH

CIVIL WAR FINDS AT GRAFTON REGIS

The Midland Archaeological Research Society is continuing a metal detector survey of the fields around the village of Grafton Regis, in cooperation with Northamptonshire Heritage. The aim is to detect and plot metal objects which may be associated with the Civil War siege of 1643. Almost seven fields have been surveyed to date, each metre of which has been surveyed in 50 metre squares (see Fig 1 above). Finds to date include the handle of a 17th century surgeon's bleeding bowl, a coin weight and powder measure of 17th century date, eight hammered silver coins, a dagger chape of 15th century date, over 400 musket balls and many more metal objects and coins dating from the Roman period to the present day.

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