Decoding an Elite Landscape: Power and Patronage at Hailes, Gloucestershire

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The hamlet of Hailes, Gloucestershire, is best known as the site of one of the last Cistercian monasteries founded in England. Yet, before the development of a house which would provide the mausoleum for the Earls of Cornwall and a shrine for a relic of the Holy Blood, Hailes was the site of a church and castle built by Ralph of Worcester during the tumultuous political climate of 'the Anarchy'. Worcester's church still stands today, immediately north of the main focus of abbey buildings, but the location of his castle has until now been uncertain. This paper reveals that the earthworks surrounding the 12th-century church are not the remains of Worcester's castle, as has previously been believed. Instead, his fortification was probably inserted into the pre-existing Iron Age enclosure of Hailes Camp, around half a kilometre away. Together, church and castle formed a bipartite power base for the lord who had seized land from Winchcombe Abbey during a period when rights of land tenure were uncertain. While the castle occupation was short-lived, the church was later incorporated into the abbey, serving various parochial functions and perhaps even acting as an improvised gatehouse chapel.

The present-day hamlet of Hailes, Gloucestershire is located on the River Isbourne, a north-flowing tributary of the Warwickshire Avon, approximately 3km north-east of the town of Winchcombe (NGR: SP05053008). The settlement today features only a handful of farms and other buildings, but is relatively well-known as the site of one of the last Cistercian houses founded in England. A daughter house of Beaulieu in Hampshire, Hailes Abbey was established under the patronage of Richard, Earl of Cornwall who had vowed to build a monastery after narrowly escaping shipwreck on his way home from Gascony in 1243. He had been granted the site by the king in 1245, monks entered the church in 1246 and it was dedicated in 1251 (Denholm-Young 1947, 50; Burton 1994, 150). The monastic precinct has provided the focus for numerous programmes of archaeological research, including two programmes of excavation, as well as geophysical and topographic surveys (eg Bazeley 1899; Webster and Cherry 1974, 1976; Brown 2006). These efforts undoubtedly provide a significant insight into the development and eventual suppression of the abbey, but the focus of research toward the 13th-century and later monastery has been at the expense of other elements of Hailes' historic landscape.

In addition to its famed abbey, Hailes possesses important evidence from earlier in the medieval period, in the form of a 12th-century church located immediately north of the road and the main complex of surviving monastic buildings (Fig 1). The church is best-known for its impressive wall paintings which probably date to the 13th century (Edwards 1981), but written sources suggest that it was constructed together with a castle by Ralph of Worcester at some point between 1139 and 1148. The reference to the development of a contemporary castle and church has proved something of a red herring for previous researchers, with the assumption that the two were located in close

proximity apparently taken without question by several successive commentators. This paper will demonstrate that this premise is probably erroneous, and that earthworks previously noted near the 12th-century church more likely represent part of the monastic *vallum*, as well as at least one routeway which accessed the precinct from the north. Analytical earthwork survey hints instead that Ralph of Worcester's castle was some way removed from his church, and was rather situated within the Iron Age enclosure of Hailes Camp (Fig 1). In order to understand these developments, it is first necessary to review previous research traditions, elements of which have created much confusion regarding Hailes' medieval landscape.

Hailes: Archaeology and History

Hailes first appears in the documentary record in Domesday Book, where it is listed as one of five estates held by William Leofric. The estate appears to have been both extensive and well-populated, comprising 11 hides and 32 individuals. The location of this settlement has not been identified archaeologically, but is presumed to be somewhere in the location of the 12th-century church. Hailes next appears in written sources within the *Landboc* of Winchcombe Abbey, where an account details that during the unstable political climate of King Stephen's reign, Ralph of Worcester seized land at Hailes and built a castle and a church (*Landboc*, 65). These activities are dated by the entry to between 1139 and 1148, although the church was not consecrated or given parochial rights until 1175 due to the Abbot of Winchcombe's continued objection to what was viewed as an illegal appropriation of land (Alston 1900, 9–10). It has been suggested that Worcester could have used his stronghold at Hailes in order to blockade Winchcombe during his dispute with the abbey (Donaldson 2001, 30-1), although there is little convincing evidence to support such a premise.

The church built by Ralph of Worcester still stands today, situated immediately north of the most prominent ruins of the Cistercian abbey. The building possesses a simple plan comprising a nave, chancel and south porch. It seems that the chapel was remodelled and refurbished in the late 13th century by the nascent monastic community, who furnished the interior with a series of wall paintings (Edwards 1981). The location of the castle at Hailes mentioned in the *Landboc*, however, is far less clear, and it has been confused and

Fig 1
The location of the 12th-century church and Hailes Camp in the local landscape, and the position of Hailes in southern Britain (inset)

conflated with the development of the later abbey. Although not shown on the Ordnance Survey (OS) First Edition of 1884, the OS First Edition Revision of 1902 depicts a series of ditches, the largest of which extends from approximately 130m north of the parish church, forming a curving arc until it meets a fence-line around 145m east-south-east (Fig 2). In this corner, a linear ditch projects in a north-westerly direction for 140m, with a small break in the bank three quarters of the way along its length. At the northern extent of the large ditch a further ditch is recorded projecting southward for 50m before turning south-eastwards for 12m and matching the alignment of the opposite corner of the circuit. Together these ditches form a D-shaped enclosure labelled 'Site of Castle'. The feature had apparently been mapped several centuries earlier, as it is depicted as a curving tree line on Ralph Treswell's 1587 map of Hailes, where it appears to be cut by a trackway leading to the church (National Archive, TNA PRO MF/1/59).

Although never subject to significant archaeological investigation, the association of the D-shaped enclosure with the castle built by Ralph of Worcester appears to have been a widely-held belief by the end of the Victorian period. In addition to the 'Site of Castle' label on the OS First Edition Revision, in his assessment of Hailes church WT Alston (1900, 9-10) states that '*the meadow adjoining the church contains the earthworks of Ralph's castle*'. This interpretation has been perpetuated by a number of subsequent scholars (eg Renn 1968, 199), and is even detailed in the English Heritage scheduling for Hailes Abbey, which confusingly identifies the remains as a 'ringwork' castle despite the form and scale of the earthworks bearing no resemblance to this type of monument (NMR 328158). This new research demonstrates that the association of the earthworks to the north of the 12th-century church at Hailes with a castle is erroneous, as it will be shown that Ralph of Worcester's fortification was in fact constructed at Hailes Camp approximately 500m to the west. The most likely interpretation of the D-shaped feature, discussed in detail below, is that it once formed part of the boundary to the monastic precinct, although akin to Worcester's church, its ultimate origins may precede the development of the abbey altogether.

The confusion regarding the site of the castle is not the first of its kind in the Hailes area, as revealed in what is ostensibly the earliest map of Hailes Camp, derived from a plan made by Sir Henry Dryden in 1840 (Gloucestershire Archives, D9125/2/5420). Dryden's measured plan depicts an enclosure with a

Fig 2
OS First Edition Revision of Hailes, published in 1902. The curving ditch encircling the 12th-century church is labelled 'Site of Castle'

single rampart and ditch, and also includes profiles of four sections of the rampart. Compared to the modern earthworks of Hailes Camp, it is immediately apparent that Dryden's plan bears at best only a very rough comparison, and the orientation of the sketch is incorrect. Although these errors may stem from oversights on the part of the surveyor, it is almost certain that Dryden mistakenly surveyed the earthworks of the univallate hillfort known as Beckbury Camp, a monument located approximately 670m south-east of Hailes Camp, and broadly similar in overall form. It is possible that Beckbury Camp was known as Hailes Camp during the 19th-century, or alternatively Dryden may not have been aware of the monument in Hailes Wood, and instead surveyed the more visible and easily-accessible earthworks of Beckbury. The history of research at Hailes has therefore suffered from contributions which have muddled our understanding of the area's landscape development, with the D-shaped enclosure mistakenly associated with the 12th-century castle, and Hailes Camp itself also misidentified. The current research is able to clarify this confused picture, and shows that Ralph of Worcester probably constructed his church and castle at distinct locations – his castle on the hill within the pre-existing enclosure of Hailes Camp, and his church in the valley below.

Topographic Survey of Hailes Camp

Topographic survey at Hailes Camp identified numerous earthworks representing several probable stages of construction (Fig 3). The promontory enclosure is defined by an outer ditch running from its north-western side, eastwards around the upslope side and around to the south-western corner (Fig 3, feature 'a'). This varies in depth from being no more than a terrace on its north-western side, to approximately 0.8m in depth around parts of its northern and eastern sides. A small counter-scarp bank was created on the outer side of the ditch along its northern edge, and a double ditch was constructed at some stage along the southern edge of the enclosure. A section of low internal bank was created along the eastern side of the enclosure, measuring up to 0.4m in height, with two small entrances present (Fig 3, feature 'b'). The overall enclosure is sub-divided by an internal ditch (Fig 3, feature 'c') measuring approximately 7m wide and 0.6m in depth with no evidence of a distinct crossing point. The outer section had no evidence of internal activity with the exception of a shallow ditch leading out of the western side of the enclosure, which features a small, bulbous terminus at its eastern end (Fig 3, feature 'd'). This ditch leads out at a point where a small section of the inner sub-division of the enclosure has also been separated by a ditch, creating a small 'island' (Fig 3, feature 'e'). There is little evidence of internal activity in this inner section of the enclosure, apart from a further sub-division in its south-western corner formed by a shallow ditch, with two circular divisions at its northern end (Fig 3, feature 'f'). To the south-west, along the increasingly steep downslope, was a further small enclosed area (Fig 3, feature 'g') with a small internal bank. Its outer ditch adds to the overall complex to create a short triple-ditched section across this area of the enclosure.

The evidence from earthwork survey at Hailes Camp indicates several probable stages of construction, although few stratigraphical relationships can be assigned absolute dates. It is conjectured that the outer enclosure ditch is among the earliest stages of activity, although the partial bank constructed along its eastern edge is probably a later addition. The whole enclosure was then sub-divided, and then two elements of the inner circuit were subject to a further sub-division. It is not possible to associate any of these developments conclusively with a firm date, although it seems probable that they occurred at some stage between the Iron Age and the late medieval period. The innermost enclosures (Fig 3, features 'f' and 'g') are arguably the most likely to have been constructed in the medieval period, but whilst 'f' superficially resembles a motte-like structure, it does not differ in ground level from its potential enclosing bailey (c). The type of fortification at Hailes is therefore hard to categorise; it could conceivably be interpreted as a ringwork, although it is not a well-defined or well-defended example. The two circular pits on the north side of 'f' may relate to the two sides of an entrance structure; feature 'e' is unusual and difficult to explain, although it could possibly represent a tower or some sort of entrance structure.

Morphologically, Hailes Camp shares some characteristics with the medieval castle at Richmont, East Harptree on the Mendip plateau of Somerset. Like Hailes Camp, Richmont was apparently remodelled out of an existing triangular Iron Age promontory fort, and perhaps significantly, written sources attest that it was the focus of conflict during 'the Anarchy', when it was held by William de Harptree in 1138 and later taken by King Stephen (*Gesta Stephani* I, 31; Potter 1955, 44; Brown 2008). Compared to sites such as Richmont, however, there is far less evidence of

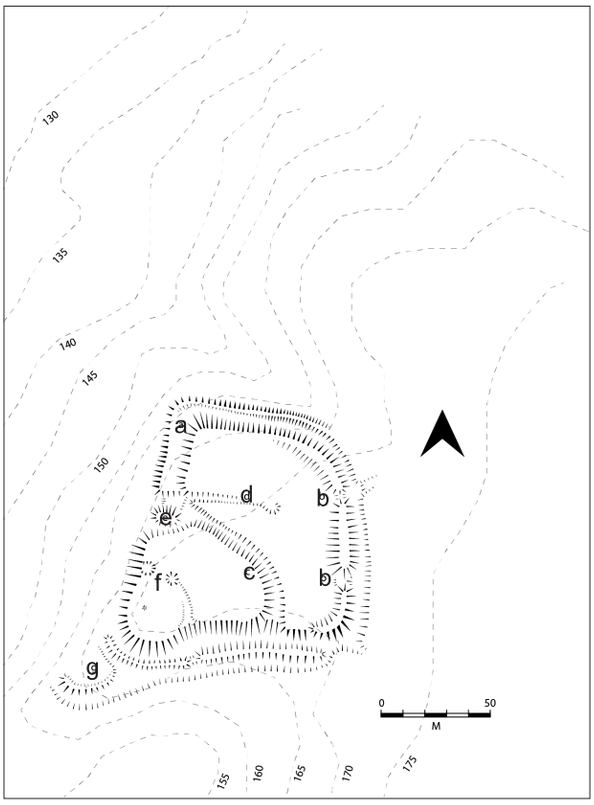

Fig 3
Figure 3: Annotated topographic survey plan of Hailes Camp (By authors)

continued elite occupation during the medieval period at Hailes Camp and there is a lack of earthworks relating to substantial internal occupation of the site. It is probably significant that the castle at Hailes is not mentioned in documentary sources after the 12th century, corroborating the evidence from earthworks which suggest that it was only retained as an elite residence for a short period. Despite its brief history of utilisation, it is probable that together with the church of unknown dedication located on the valley floor, the castle at Hailes Camp formed a bipartite power base for Ralph of Worcester from the 1130s or 1140s. The topographic survey undertaken at Hailes Camp thus raises the distinct possibility that the enclosure was used as the site of Ralph of Worcester's castle. This being the case, the next logical step is to reassess the identity of the D-shaped enclosure located to the north of Hailes church, which has previously been identified as the site of the castle. Analysis of lidar data is particularly insightful in this regard, and demonstrates that the enclosure may be identified as part of the later monastic *vallum* of Hailes Abbey.

lidar Analysis

Airborne Light Detection and Ranging (lidar) is a method of remote sensing that collects three dimensional data points by using a laser mounted on an aircraft. This method provides detailed topographic point data over extensive areas which can then be processed using a Geographical Information System (GIS) in order to produce a series of models which can illustrate archaeological features. The resolution of data available for analysis varies, but as lidar is commonly deployed in flood management schemes, coverage tends to be better in areas around coasts and watercourses. The 1m resolution hillshade model for Hailes provides a clear image of features of probable archaeological origin at Hailes and in the surrounding landscape. In addition to corroborating the results of the measured topographic survey at Hailes Camp, the lidar data is extremely informative for the subtle earthworks in the field to the north of Hailes church which are not visible to the naked eye (Figs 4 and 5). In addition to a number of linear features to the north of the D-shaped enclosure, most likely the remains of relatively recent field boundaries, lidar data also highlights earthworks of probable archaeological origin.

Most importantly for this study, lidar data for Hailes demonstrates that the ditch-formed D-shaped enclosure noted on the OS First Edition Revision of 1902 has not been entirely destroyed, but rather survives as an extremely slight earthwork (Fig 5, feature 'a'). The identity of the incomplete enclosure circuit is difficult to define on morphological grounds alone, but it is possible that it represents part of the monastic

Fig 4
lidar image of Hailes © Geomatics Group (Environment Agency)

vallum which incorporated the pre-existing 12th-century church. While this interpretation deviates from the plan of the precinct at Hailes produced by Graham Brown (2006, fig 15) on the basis of early maps and earthwork survey, it is supported by the identification on aerial photographs of an abbey barn within the enclosure (NMR 328158). It is perhaps significant, however, that unlike the rest of the abbey precinct, the earthworks forming the D-shaped enclosure are not illustrated as 'hard' features on Treswell's 16th-century survey. In this part of the complex it is therefore possible that the precinct was primarily defined by the natural topography, with paling or low walling perhaps only serving to enhance the boundary. A similar delineation of space has been noted at the Cistercian abbey of Kirkstead in Lincolnshire, where the southern and north-western precinct limits were defined by the 5m contour, with no apparent evidence of a precinct wall (Coppack and Harrison 2014, 35). Without further work the exact provenance of the D-shaped enclosure is ultimately elusive, and although the evidence indicates that it marked part of the abbey precinct, it may represent an earlier feature which was only later utilised by the Cistercian monks. In this regard it is worth considering the possibility that the monks reused a pre-existing settlement enclosure – a sizable rural community is assumed to have existed in the area by the Late Saxon period given the high population of Hailes recorded in Domesday Book – but it has hitherto remained unidentified.

In addition to the D-shaped enclosure, lidar also shows a ditch to the south-west, projecting further south-west than recorded on the OS First Revision and then turning a right angle to project south-east towards the parish church (Fig 5, feature 'b'). It is possible that these features also represent alignment of the former limits of the abbey, but an alternative interpretation is that they represent parts of a former system of routeways in the area of the 12th-century church. A broad south-west to north-east orientated ditch entering the precinct from the north seems to denote the route of a further, more substantial hollow way (Fig 5, feature 'c'). This feature was also apparently noted on Treswell's map of 1587 which illustrates a broad track entering Hailes from the north, heading towards the 12th-century church, although cutting through the D-shaped enclosure it possesses a slightly different alignment to the earthworks visible on lidar (National Archive: TNA PRO MF/1/59). A linear feature paralleling the alignment of the hollow way appears to be a post-medieval or modern field boundary (Fig 5, feature 'd'). Together these strands of evidence suggest that Hailes Abbey could have been furnished with an entranceway on its northern side, in addition to the main gateway which accessed the precinct from the south.

Figure 5: Annotated lidar image of Hailes. The ditches to the north of the 12th-century church are probably related to the later incorporation of the building as part of the Cistercian abbey. The extent of the abbey precinct reconstructed by Brown (2006) is shaded © Geomatics Group (Environment Agency).

If Hailes Abbey did indeed possess an additional entrance from the north, it raises the possibility that the 12th-century church acted as a makeshift *capella ante portas*, or gatehouse chapel. Such structures in monastic institutions were usually positioned between two gates or, less frequently, within the inner court close to the gate. It has already been highlighted that Hailes would represent a rather unusual addition to this corpus, but its continued parochial responsibilities are consistent with other gatehouse chapels (Verey and Brookes 1970, 396; Hall 2001, 61–92; Robinson 2006, 166). Brown (2006, 30) had previously dismissed the possibility that the earlier church at Hailes was used either as a gatehouse chapel or an infirmary chapel, and indeed the earthwork and historic mapping evidence presented here cannot be taken as irrefutable proof. Rather, the depiction on Treswell's map of an apparent routeway allows us only to speculate the way in which Ralph of Worcester's church was later used by those travelling to and from the monastic precinct, and it is likely that only through further archaeological investigation will its function as a gatehouse chapel be demonstrated with any certainty.

Conclusion

The combination of measured earthwork survey, lidar analysis and map regression adopted by this research has produced some significant findings which help to clarify the medieval sequence at Hailes. The interpretation that the heavily denuded D-shaped enclosure represents the remains of a castle built by Ralph of Worcester is now largely untenable, as it would appear that the earlier Iron Age enclosure of Hailes Camp was instead chosen as the site of his fortification. Together with a contemporary church built in the valley floor of Hailes, the castle formed a bipartite power base for Worcester, who had seized the land illegally according to the monks of Winchcombe Abbey. The evidence from both earthworks and documentary sources suggest that occupation of the castle was short-lived, but the focus of secular and religious power at Hailes was transformed in the middle of the 13th century when Richard, Earl of Cornwall established a Cistercian abbey which would later act as a mausoleum for himself and his family. In this phase the church was provided with new parochial responsibilities, and it may also have played a role in the pilgrimage experience of those visiting Hailes Abbey. Indeed, it is unlikely to be a coincidence that the church was refurbished at the same time as the ambulatory of the monastic church was being built in order to accommodate a shrine for the Holy Blood (Vincent 2001; Brown 2006, 31). It is possible that in addition to these functions, Worcester's private church may also have served as a makeshift gatehouse chapel for a routeway entering the abbey precinct from the north, though for the time being this interpretation must remain speculative. It is certainly likely that the illustrious later medieval associations of Hailes, featuring both the Earls of Cornwall and the cult of the Holy Blood, has led in the past to its earlier history being somewhat neglected. This assessment has hoped to redress this imbalance by demonstrating Hailes' impressive 12th-century history, and shows the legacy which Ralph of Worcester's lordly ambitions left for the later monastic community.

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