

AN EARTHWORK AT WARREN WOOD, LITTLE MARLOW, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE.

JOHN LAKER

An earthwork in Warren Wood, Little Marlow, although known for many years, had not previously been surveyed. The survey shows that this rectangular earthwork is attached to a larger one. Such double enclosures in the Chilterns are thought to be medieval, although no firm dating evidence was obtained during the survey.

INTRODUCTION

Between 2005 and 2007, Archaeology In Marlow (AIM) carried out the 'Recording of Marlow and District's Ancient Monuments' project (ROMADAM) with funding from the Local

Heritage Initiative (now Heritage Lottery Fund). This funding, dependent on public participation and training, enabled research and survey on four earthworks in the area, including one at Warren Wood (Fig.1).

The Warren Wood earthwork is at c.100m OD

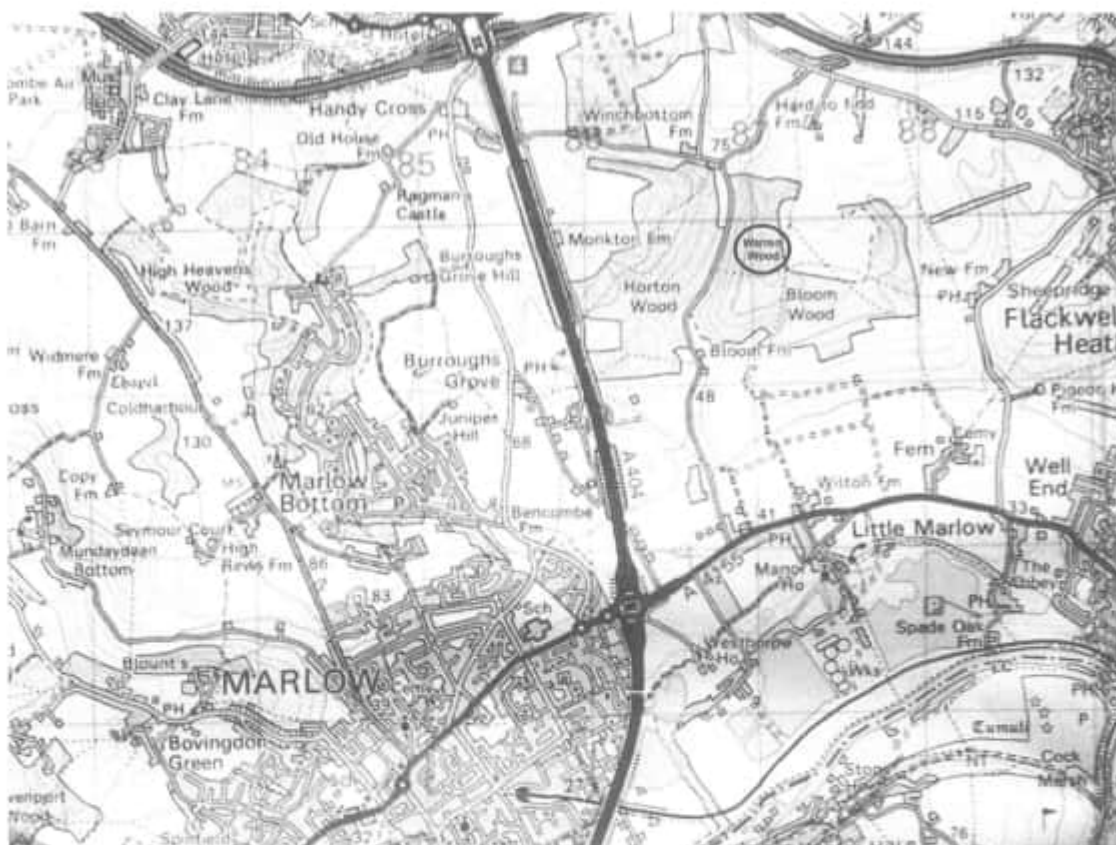


FIGURE 1 Location of Warren Wood Earthwork (Ordnance Survey Licence No. 100044133)

east of Winchbottom Lane and a mile east of Marlow (Fig. 1: SU 873 897). It lies on a plateau of glacial sand and gravel from the Anglian stage of the Quaternary Period, over Upper Chalk (BGS 1996). It is near the brow of a hill and just north of a footpath running east-west from Winchbottom Lane to Sheepbridge Lane. The wood to the north of this footpath is called Warren Wood, while to the south of the path it is known as Bloom Wood. The wood contains beech, sessile oak, ash and holly, with a liberal covering of brambles and ferns. The earthwork was first recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1935 (CAS 1176) but is first shown as an earthwork on the OS 1994 1:50,000 series.

On Bryant's map (1825), the wood containing the earthwork is shown as The Grove or Broom Wood. On Lipscomb's 1847 map (Lipscomb 1847) it is also 'Broom' Wood. Warren Wood is first named on an 1870 OS map. Bloom Wood, rather than 'Broom' Wood, first appears on an 1883 OS map.

In Domesday, Little Marlow is assessed as having woodland for 1000 pigs (Williams and Martin 2002, 419) indicating significant wooded areas.

In 1975, the earthwork had two separate visitors. One, Roger Carter, made a rough sketch of the southern enclosure and noted the presence of tile and pottery within it. Carter also sketched the rim of a medieval cooking pot, said to be thirteenth century, which he found at the site (letter in CAS 1176). The other, David Wilson, made similar observations and noted two flint walls (Boarder pers. com.). In 1978 Boarder's own report included a more detailed sketch of the southern enclosure and showed a small length of N-S flint wall adjacent to its northern side. He also collected tile and pottery which he thought similar to that from Fillington Wood, West Wycombe, a medieval earthwork (Parker and Boarder 1991). None of these finds have subsequently been located, but a photograph of the sherds found by Boarder is included



FIGURE 2 Pottery sherds found in Warren Wood inner enclosure by Arthur Boarder in 1978

here (Fig.2). In his notes Boarder described the site as 'Reputed to be a manor house, area was known as Lissmore Gardens'. The name 'Lizmar Gardens', adjacent to Winchbottom Lane, has subsequently been noted pencilled on a map owned by the wood's owner. This name is further discussed below.

Apart from Boarder's hachure sketch, there had been no detailed survey of the earthwork.

THE SURVEY

A contour survey of the southern, roughly rectangular, enclosure was carried out using a dumpy level, taking height readings at one metre intervals along fifty-nine parallel rows, one metre apart. The readings were transferred to a spreadsheet and converted by Oxford Archaeology into a graphic (Fig.3). The surrounding area was then examined in more detail. It became clear that the surveyed enclosure was joined to a second, larger and

roughly oval enclosure on its north side. As the original contour survey method was time consuming, the outer enclosure was surveyed using offsets from the previously established baseline, with tapes and an optical square, at five metre intervals to produce a hachure drawing. The initial, inner enclosure contour survey, was then converted to a hachure drawing and the two drawings amalgamated (Fig. 4).

The interior of both were fieldwalked, but produced only two pieces of tile, probably roof tile, not closely datable (Fig. 4: T1 and T2). A metal detector survey produced only recent material.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ENCLOSURES

The enclosure first surveyed (the inner enclosure) is an irregular rectangle, approximately 50 metres across, enclosing about 0.2 hectares. The outer enclosure butts up to the inner enclosure and is more oval than circular, having a maximum width

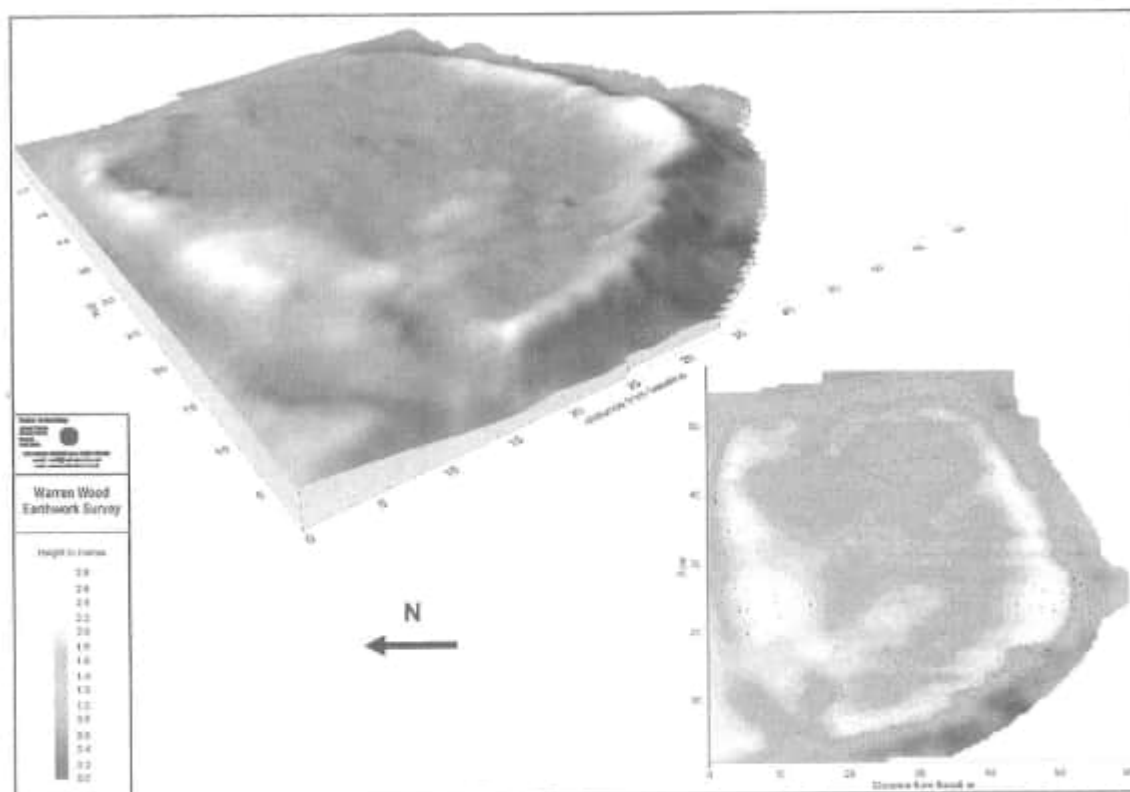


FIGURE 3 Warren Wood showing inner enclosure; produced for AIM by Oxford Archaeology

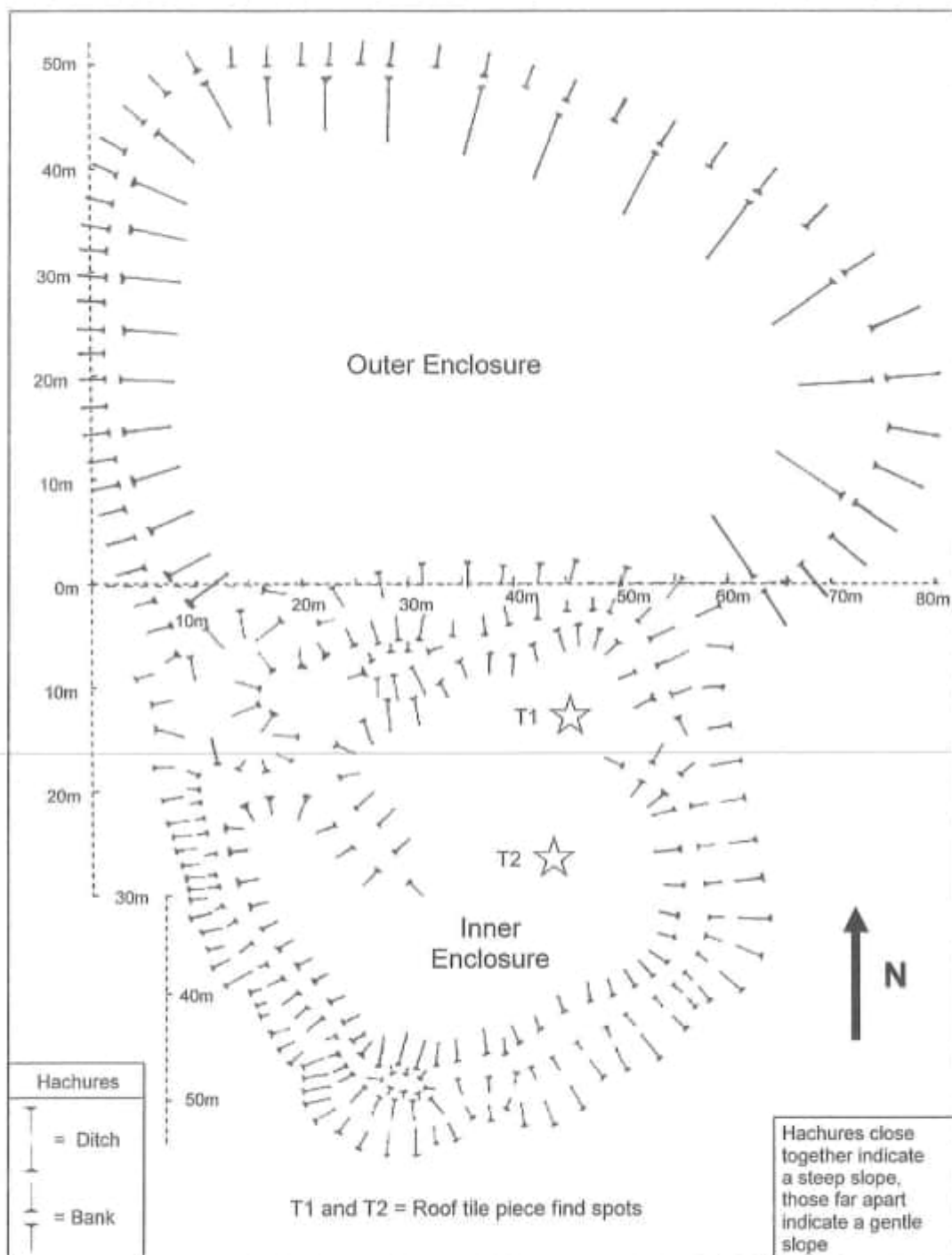


FIGURE 4 Survey of earthworks; tile findspots indicated

of 74 metres and a minimum of 50 metres, enclosing about 0.3 hectares.

Although the banks have eroded and the ditches have accumulations of leaf litter, the height differentials in the inner enclosure are still significant. On the south and western sides there is difference between the top of the bank and the base of the ditch of between 1.6 metres and 2.2 metres in the south-west corner. In other places the earthworks are scarcely visible. The outer enclosure has lower banks than the inner one. The greatest differential between bank and ditch is 0.5 metres, but the bank is almost invisible to the naked eye on its eastern side.

FINDS WITHIN THE ENCLOSURES

The flint wall noted by Arthur Boarder was not seen during the survey. Only two pieces of tile, noted above, were found in the inner enclosure and no tile or pottery in the outer enclosure. The metal detecting surveys found only relatively modern artefacts – coins, cartridges, etc. However, the pottery previously found by Boarder (Fig. 2) certainly appears to be medieval, as do the sherds previously found by others.

DISCUSSION

The finds previously made within the enclosure indicate a medieval date. Although Boarder's source for the name 'Lissmore Gardens' is not known, Little Marlow had a manor called 'Losemere' (VCH 1925, 82). A little to the west of Winchbotton Lane, however, is Monkton Farm, likely to have been associated with Monkton Manor, another of Little Marlow's manors.

It seems likely that the inner enclosure was constructed first, around a lodge or house, with small stocks of wild, or domestic animals. The outer enclosure, which appears to be secondary, may have been added to hold an increase in stock. In all probability, the banks of both structures were originally higher and the ditches deeper. Fencing of some type may have run along the banks.

Pike (1995) discusses a number of Buckinghamshire Chiltern earthwork enclosures surviving in woodland. He notes:

The average size and shape of these enclosures resemble a largish moat about 150m x 75m.

None has been excavated and their function must remain conjectural. ... All the enclosures are situated at a height of between 155m and 190m OD ... All the enclosures lack documentary evidence. Many of the enclosures contain subsidiary enclosures either within the principal one or alongside it, suggesting a house site. Interestingly, at least three of the enclosures have produced iron slag, indicating industrial activities ... These enclosures can perhaps be interpreted as the centres of small woodland settlements, with the principal dwelling and out-buildings situated within the smaller enclosure, where there is one. The larger "bailey enclosure" would have, perhaps, afforded protection to a small domestic herd from wild animals, such as deer and wild boar...

Since Pike's article, the enclosure at Brays Wood, The Lee, similar in size to Warren Wood, has been described in more detail by Secker (2005). Like that at Warren Wood, the inner or main enclosure of these Chiltern earthworks is typically rectangular.

Some months after the survey, a notice board interpreting the earthwork was erected at the site.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- British Geological Survey, 1996, *London and the Thames Valley*.
Bryant's map 1825
CAS: Buckinghamshire County Council, Sites and Monuments Record.
Lipscomb 1847. *The Hundred of Desborough, Bucks', History and Antiquities of the County of Bucks*, Vol 3
Parker RF and Boarder AWF 1991 A medieval settlement at Fillington Wood, West Wycombe. *Recs Bucks* 33, 128–139
Pike A 1995 Earthwork enclosures in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns, in Holgate R *Chiltern Archaeology: recent work*. The Book Castle, Dunstable, 118–123
Secker D 2005 A survey of earthworks and structural remains at Bray's Wood, The Lee. *Recs Bucks* 45, 65–73
VCH 1925 *Victoria County History. A History of Buckinghamshire* III.
Williams A & Martin GH 2002. *Domesday Book – A Complete Translation*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Archaeology in Marlow is extremely grateful to: The Local Heritage Initiative (LHI) who awarded the ROMADAM Project, (Recording Of Marlow And District's Ancient Monuments) a grant of £22,605 to survey four earthwork sites close to Marlow; the Mash Brothers for allowing us to have access to their land; Sandy Kidd (Senior Archaeologist for Buckinghamshire) for his advice and help; Arthur Boarder for providing his 1978 report, his advice and his photograph; Mike Farley for his advice and

consultation work; Oxford Archaeology for advice and for producing the Warren Wood graphic; David Wilson for advice and use of the notes from his 1975 investigation; Trevor Bownass for lending us his Dumpy Level and staff; David Axworthy for his research work; metal detectorists Eddie Mitchell and John Bird; AIM members, Dave Greenwood, Gerry Platten, Dave Axworthy, Ray Balkwell, Liz & Mike Miller, Keith & Sally Bracey, Ann Pitwell, Peter Ricketts, Mike Hyde and the Ford family and the many other members of AIM and the public who helped on the project in other ways.