

BERRY POMEROY DEERPARK WALL

Evaluation trench inside wall section 1.21

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SUMMARY

An evaluation trench opened against the inside of the deerpark wall showed that the wall was built directly on the ground and has no foundations. There was no large ditch along its inside as sometimes found next to deerpark walls elsewhere, including along another section of the Berry Pomeroy deerpark wall's circuit where earthwork remains survive. A small drainage ditch of about the same date and running parallel with the wall was found 3m inside it. The ditch however measured only 1m wide and 0.5m deep and would not have been large enough to have formed part of a barrier preventing deer from escaping the park. The wall overlies a soil deposit which may be an ancient buried ploughsoil.

THE PROJECT

The wall is currently undergoing repair and conservation works which will soon affect wall section 1.21 (wall sections are defined in the Condition Survey by Philip Hughes Associates 2011/20012 – see References below). The wall in this area has suffered partial collapse and in many places leans outward at an appreciable angle. It is thought that the accumulation of soil against its inside, which has resulted in a ground level of about 1m higher than that along its outside, may be contributing to the overturning of the wall. A scheme to remove the pressure on the wall by digging away some of the soil is therefore being considered. Since such a clearance would affect any surviving buried archaeology, an evaluation trench was opened to investigate the depth and nature of archaeological deposits. The results of the investigation will assist planning of the conservation works and ensure that that minimum damage is done to archaeological remains. An archaeological watching brief is to be maintained during any future groundworks alongside the wall.

The trench was opened on 24th February by mechanical digger under archaeological supervision.

DESCRIPTION

The trench

The trench was located at the SW corner of the field known as West Summerhill, nearby a presently dilapidated shed (Figs. 1 and 2). It was 1m wide and up to 1.15m deep. It located undisturbed geological deposits at depths of between 0.5m and 0.9m. It was decided to excavate a little further into the geological deposits in order to provide a clear and unambiguous profile of the division between archaeological and natural, geological deposits. Section drawings were made of the two sides of the trench (Fig. 3).

The wall

The deerpark wall leans out at this point to an angle of about 20 degrees. The wall is built of limestone rubble which is occasionally brought to course (Fig. 4). An observation made in 2014 during a site visit a little further to the east showed that it has red earthy clay in its core which may form part of its original construction. The wall was built directly on the ground with no foundation or plinth, at least on its inside.

Archaeological deposits (Fig. 5)

Inside the wall, the trench exposed three archaeological deposits. The uppermost is modern topsoil comprising mid brown aerated clay with organic content (1). The second is a light brown aerated clay containing many large and small stones (2). This extends down to the bottom of the wall face, showing that it accumulated against the inside of the wall from the time of its construction until fairly recently, ie it spans a very long period stretching from medieval times until almost the present. It shows no observable variation, so it is not possible to distinguish differences in its make-up relating to different times. Some of the stone may possibly have come from the wall but there is no distinct layer of collapse. It infills a ditch dug parallel with the wall 3m inside it (4). The ditch was evidently dug at about the time that the wall was constructed.

The lowest deposit is a mid brown aerated clay containing small stones and some silt (3). This extends southwards beneath the wall so must be earlier than it. It is either an ancient buried topsoil or ploughsoil, the latter being the most likely considering the depth to which the soil had accumulated (up to 0.32m - deeper than would be expected for topsoil). If this is indeed a ploughsoil, it demonstrates that the ground round about had been tilled for some time before the wall was built. It would not be surprising if cultivation of the area extended back to Norman, Saxon, or even Roman times, since Roman finds have been discovered in the Berry Pomeroy area (Brown 1998, 6).

Geological deposits

Underlying the archaeological deposits are undisturbed geological deposits comprising stony brown clay (5a) and stiff red clay (5b). Layer 5a probably comprises weathering deposits on the surface of the stiff clay.

Finds

No finds were retrieved from the excavation.

DISCUSSION

It is perhaps surprising that no large ditch was found inside the wall since earthwork remains from one survive along another section of the wall at the east end of the park near Afton (Fig. 1). This may be because only parts of the wall were provided with an inner ditch, or perhaps because this part of the wall's circuit dates from a different period when a ditch was not required as a feature of the deerpark's perimeter. It is possible that ditches were dug in some

areas and not others since it is thought that the wall is likely to have been built by different tenants of the manor, and that this accounts for the differences which exist in construction method and style along its length (Brown 2012, 10-11). It may be that some of the tenants provided a ditch whilst others didn't. Alternatively, the parts provided with a ditch might date from earlier than those with no ditch, indicating that the lengths of wall without a ditch enclose an extension to the original park. Figs 1 (reproduced from Brown 2012, Fig. 1) and Fig. 6 (reproduced from Brown 1998, Fig. 8) show two possible circuits for the original park boundary. It is not possible at present to be sure which of these is correct. More evidence is needed from excavation and observation of the wall's construction at different points to build up a fuller picture. Hopefully, more relevant evidence will be forthcoming from the watching brief to be maintained during groundworks alongside the wall (mentioned above), and from another watching brief which will record variation in the construction of the medieval wall during the present programme of repair and conservation works to the wall itself.

References

Brown, S. 1998 *Berry Pomeroy Archaeological Survey for Presentation*, unpublished report funded by English Heritage.

Brown 2012 Parts 2 and 3 in *Condition Report - Berry Pomeroy Deer Park Wall* by Philip Hughes Associates 2011, revised 2012.

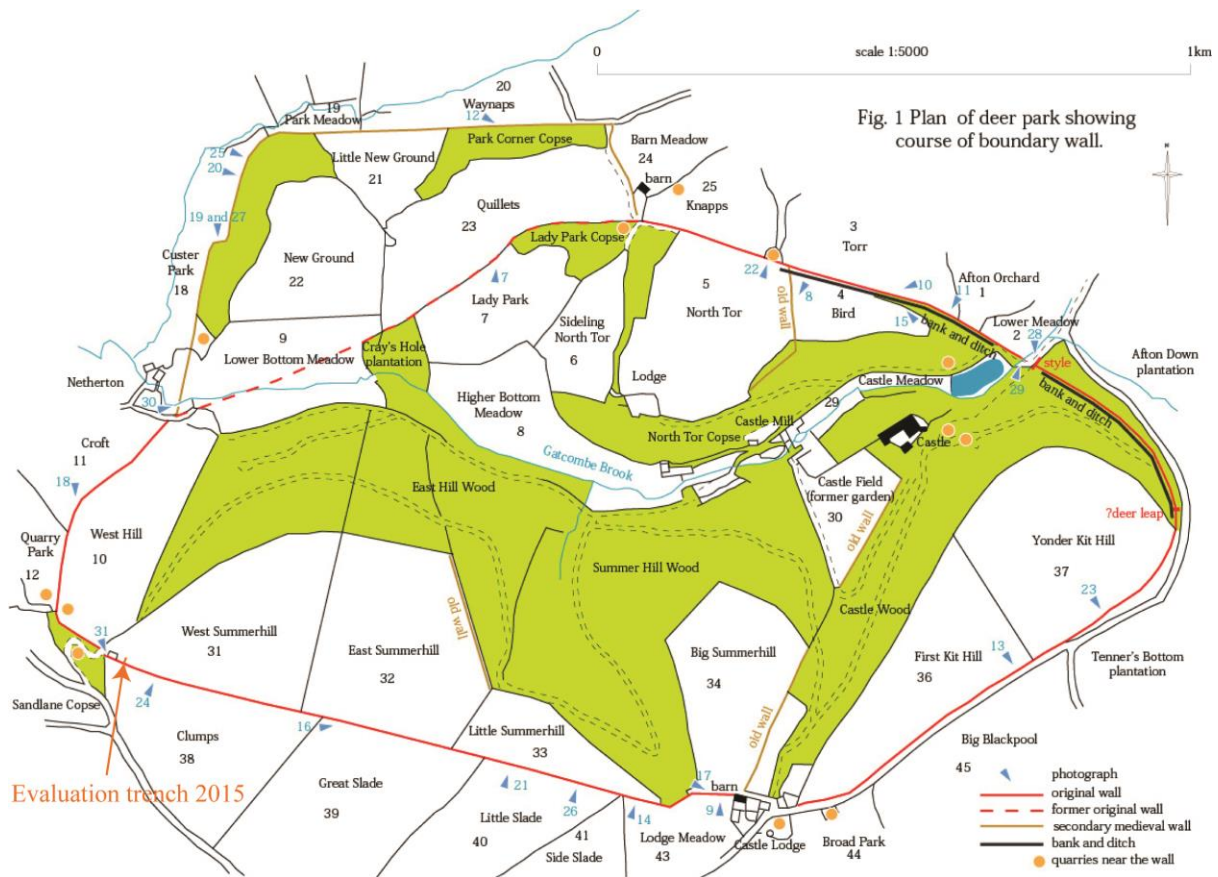


Fig. 1 Plan showing location of the 2015 evaluation trench and possible course of original deerpark boundary wall (plan reproduced from Brown 2012, Fig. 1).



Fig. 2 The evaluation trench looking south.

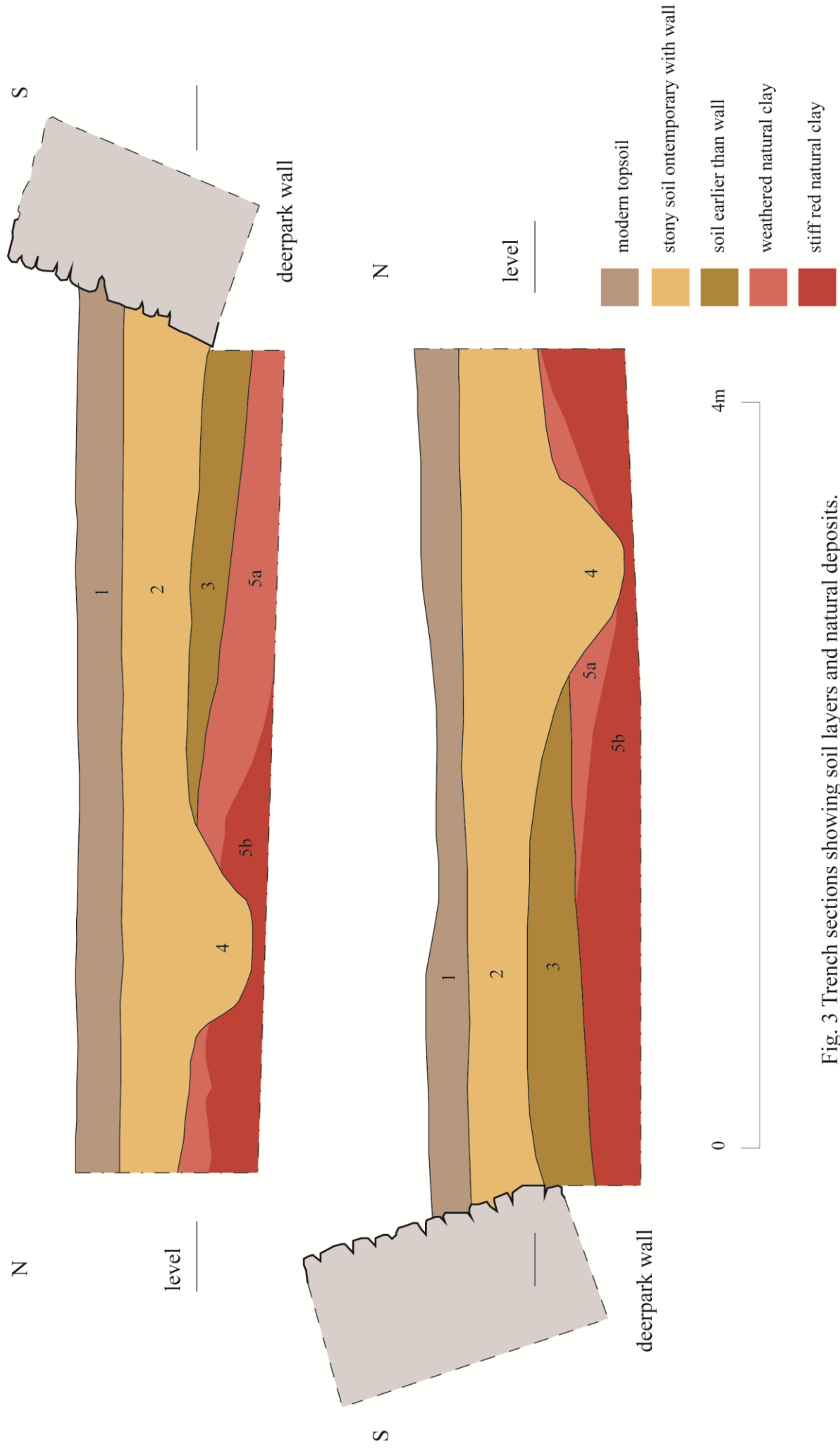


Fig. 3 Trench sections showing soil layers and natural deposits.



Fig. 4 The deerpark wall exposed by the evaluation trench, looking south.



Fig. 5 Evaluation trench opened in 2015 showing archaeological deposits above natural red clay, looking south.

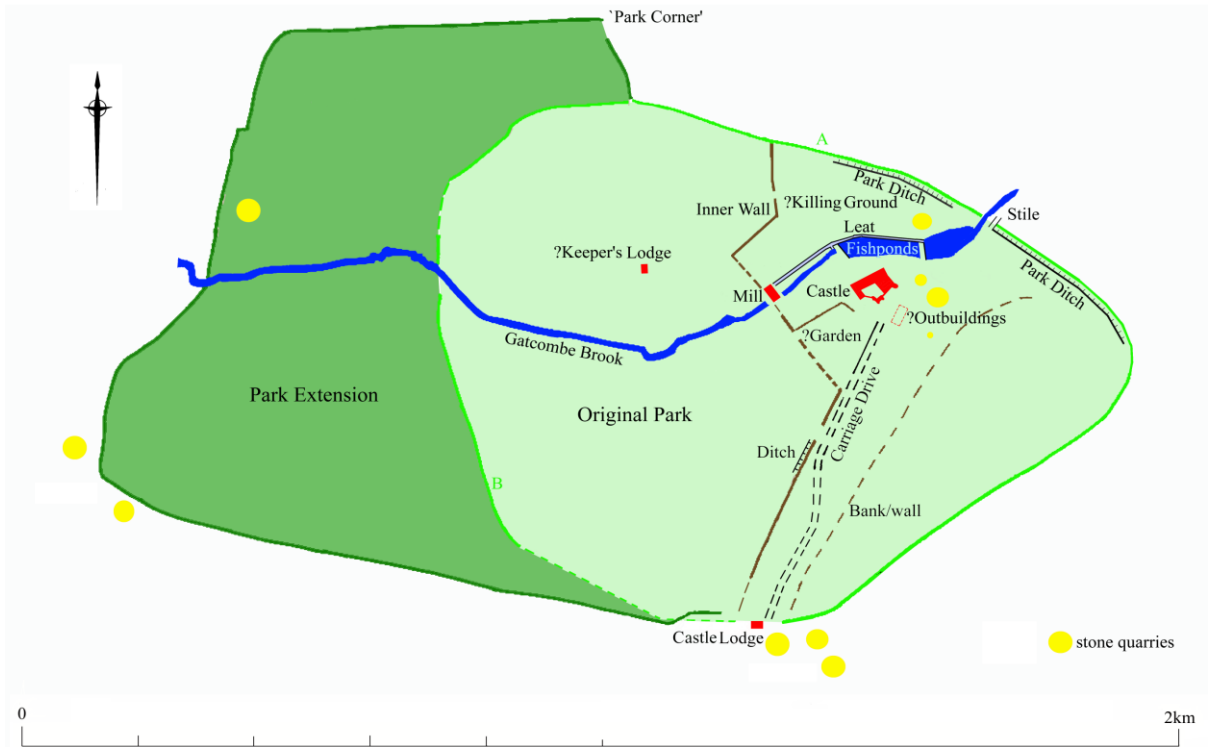


Fig. 6 Alternative possible course of original deerpark boundary wall (reproduced from Brown 1998, Fig. 8).