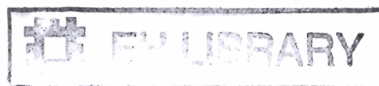


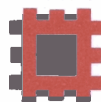
DOWDESWELL, GLOUCESTERSHIRE AN ASSESSMENT OF EARTHWORKS AT UPPER DOWDESWELL

Michael Fradley





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SUMMARY

In May 2007 English Heritage's Archaeological Survey and Investigation team undertook a brief field examination of a group of earthworks in Dowdeswell, Gloucestershire. Three suggested Iron Age or Romano-British enclosures in Dowdeswell have been identified since the 19th century. These monuments are represented by surviving earthworks of varying quality and completeness; all recorded as sub-rectangular in plan, with the largest example located at Lower Dowdeswell (SP 0032 1993), with the two smaller camps 300m to the S (SP 0065 1909) and 600 metres to the SW (SO 9984 11913) respectively.

The interpretation of the largest earthwork was questioned in the 1970s, and was subsequently discredited as an archaeological feature. The two examples to the S continued under their traditional interpretations as camp enclosures and were Scheduled as such. Analysis by the Inspector of Monuments for the region in 2006 has subsequently brought the E enclosure's interpretation into question, and it is in this context that the Archaeological Survey and Investigation team undertook a Level 1 survey of the earthworks at Dowdeswell.

BACKGROUND

Dowdeswell is located 5km E of Cheltenham in Gloucestershire. Today it consists of the two small settlements of Upper and Lower Dowdeswell, both situated on the S side of the Chelt valley. The origins of the settlement can be traced back to the medieval period with the Church of St. Michael and All Saints at Lower Dowdeswell (SP 0012 1991) dating back to the 12th century, alongside more recent secular buildings of the 16th to 20th centuries. Upper Dowdeswell (SP 0061 1921) lies 800m SSW of Lower Dowdeswell and stands nearly 50m higher up the valley side, again with buildings dating back to the 16th century. Earthworks representing the surviving elements of ridge and furrow of probable medieval date have been mapped from aerial photography from a number of fields surrounding Lower Dowdeswell, while a series of large agricultural strip lynchets of similar date have been recorded W of Upper Dowdeswell (NMR SP 02 SW 67, NMR SP 01 NW 34). A significant portion of the area between Upper and Lower Dowdeswell is presently covered by the 19th-century landscaped park of Dowdeswell Court (Registered Parks and Gardens 5156).

The three reported earthwork enclosures lie in the vicinity of these two settlements. The largest enclosure was immediately E of Lower Dowdeswell, while the two smaller enclosures were located immediately S and 500m W of Upper Dowdeswell. This area is considered to have been on the route of the multitude of trackways which made up the Jurassic Way, a prehistoric route that saw increased use during the Iron Age and roughly followed an outcrop of Jurassic Limestone between Lincoln and Glastonbury (O'Neill 1966, 48-9; Taylor 1979, 32, 184).

The N enclosure appeared to have developed from an enhanced natural position, with large, sharp scarps defining its S and W boundaries. However, re-evaluation of the site by RCHME field investigators in the 1970s led to the interpretation of the site as a non-antiquity, and what earthworks had been identified were instead seen as geological or the remains of re-deposited material (NMR SP 01 NW 1). Although an undated bank of approximately 300 metres on a SE-NW alignment was noted on the W side of the supposed camp, investigators highlighted the lack of any earthwork or other feature on the S and E sides of the camp where the ground level is more gentle, and where defensive earthworks would be necessary to create a perimeter.

The enclosure situated S of Upper Dowdeswell (Scheduled Monument GC41B) is defined by banks on its E and W side. There is no trace of a bank on the S or N side of the enclosure, so the monument today survives as two parallel earth banks. The Scheduled site includes a small area on the W side of the W bank at its S end, although no earthwork is thought to survive in this area. It had been suggested as far back as the 19th century that this supposed enclosure may have had a non-military function such as for holding livestock (Witt 1880, 204).

The sub-rectangular earthwork enclosure W of Upper Dowdeswell is the most complete of the three earthworks. It is known locally as 'The Castles' (Scheduled Monument 31183), and has been known

as such at least as far back as 1671 (Smith 1964, 170). It has a perimeter of around 1km in length and encloses an area of about 5.25 hectares with an enclosing bank surviving on three sides, having been eroded away down the valley on the E side of the enclosure. A large ditch survives on the W side and a small section of the N side where a small, slight bank is extant on the outer side of the ditch. The ditch appears to have survived to this extent since the later 19th century (Witt 1880, 203; Burrow 1919, 76). Internally the enclosure has been subject to extensive ploughing, and is subdivided almost centrally into N and S sections by a modern field boundary, which in turn overlies an earlier low lynchet. No known excavation has taken place within this enclosure, although surface finds now deposited in Gloucester City Museum recorded Romano-British pottery scatters in the N section which included Samian Ware dating to the 1st century AD, and medieval sherds in the S section (NMR SO 91 NE 6). A 'tank' of some form was noted in the S section, and it was implied that this may be linked to a spring on the E side of the enclosure (Witt 1880, 203). The enclosure has been classified as Romano-British in date, partly due to the proximity of the small Romano-British town at Wycomb, near Andoversford, less than 3km to the E (Burrow 1919, 76).

ANALYSIS

Initial inspection of the enclosure S of Upper Dowdeswell by the Archaeological Survey and Investigation team confirmed that there was no evidence of a N or S bank to this enclosure, and that the extant banks may have formed part of a perimeter boundary to the camp W of Upper Dowdeswell. This speculation was given more credence when a large linear bank was found to survive N of Upper Dowdeswell, running from SE to NW. This bank had formerly been interpreted as the W perimeter of the large, discredited enclosure E of Lower Dowdeswell. Overall these features gave the impression of a large, E-facing boundary, related in some form to the earthwork enclosure W of Upper Dowdeswell. The scale of this potential perimeter enclosure drew interesting parallels with the suggested oppidum site of Bagendon 13km south of Dowdeswell (Clifford 1961).

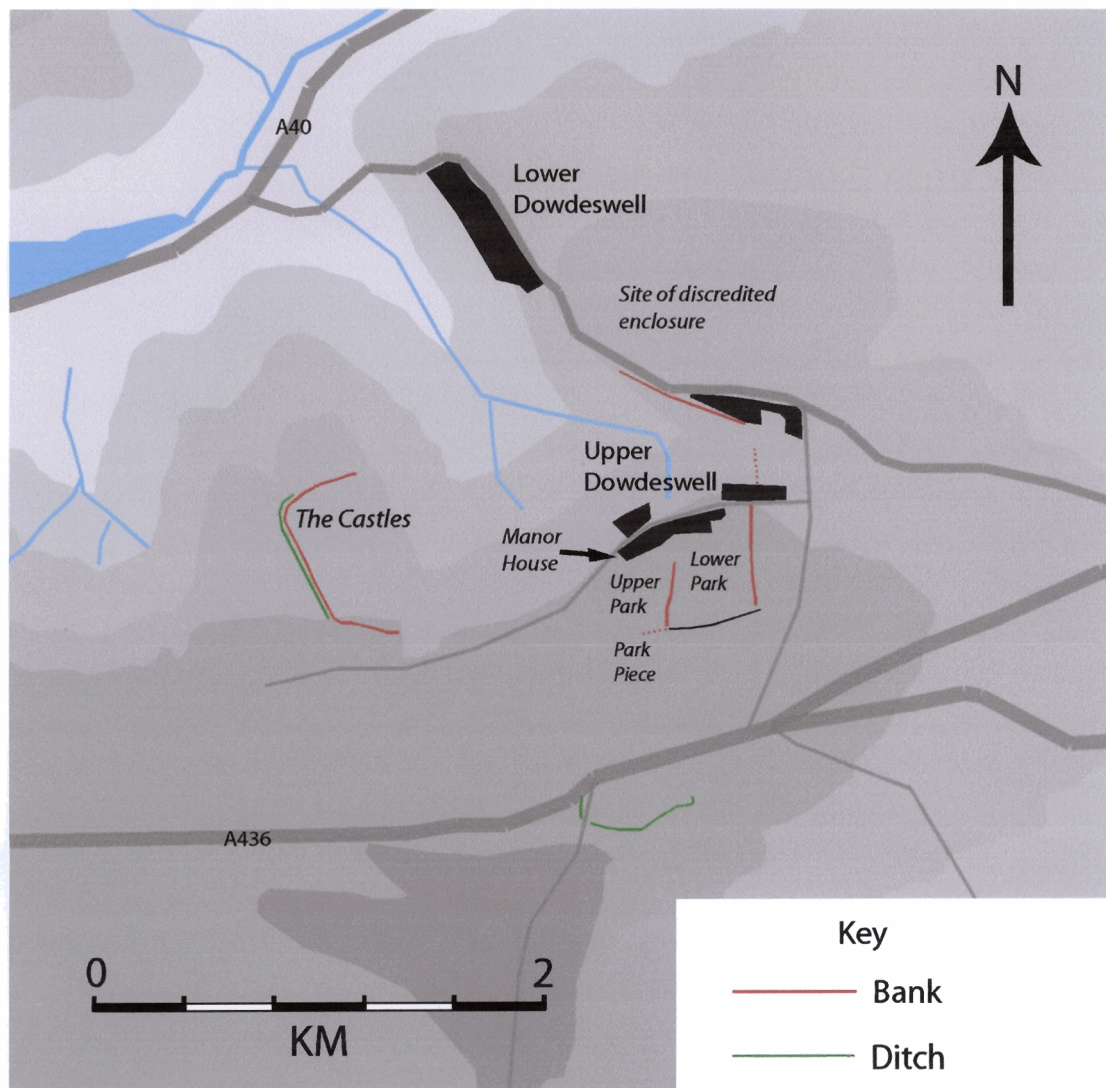


Figure 1. Dowdeswell. The ditch system alongside the A436 has been destroyed by quarrying.

The enclosure banks S of Upper Dowdeswell sit just inside a modern field enclosure. The area

between the banks is used as the village cricket pitch, with some small paddock enclosures on the SW side used for grazing horses. Fields on the E, S and W sides of the enclosure are under arable cultivation. A drystone wall defines the S end of the field containing the two banks, while the properties and gardens of Upper Dowdeswell mark the N side. The two banks are not perfectly parallel, with the E example the straighter and longer, running nearly 210m in length. The W side of the latter bank stands to a height of around 1-1.5m, but between 3-5m in height to the E, forming a distinct lynchet. The bank is around 2-2.5m wide at its base and 1-1.5m at its top. At both the N and S end of the bank the earthwork has been damaged, and there is no conclusive evidence as to whether the bank would have originally terminated at these positions, continued further, or else changed direction.



Figure 2. An oblique aerial photograph of Upper Dowdeswell from the SSW in 1956. The ditch system in the foreground was subsequently destroyed by quarrying. Upper Dowdeswell is situated in the top left corner of the image, with the Manor House visible at the left-hand side of the settlement. The two earthwork banks are visible as field boundaries leading south from the village. (SP0018/2) © Crown copyright. NMR.

The W bank is about 150m in length, with a portion of its N end running through into the present gardens of Upper Dowdeswell Manor House. The bank varies in height from 1.5-3m on both sides with no evidence of a lynchet as with the E bank, and measures 1.5-2m across its top and 2.5-3m at its base. There is the suggestion of a former ditch on the E side of the bank, but this has been caused by the natural fall of land towards the W, creating a ditch-like depression. At its N end the bank terminates neatly, but is in a poor condition at its S end where aerial photography suggests that it may join a low, degraded lynchet which runs at 90° to it and continues for a short distance to the W (SP0018/2/ 22.04.1956 HAW; Fig 2). This appears to continue the line of the drystone wall which defines the S end of the modern field, rather than the earthwork bank itself turning W. Near

the centre of the bank a small, brick-built reservoir head is extant on the W side (SP 00552 19052) and is built into the earthwork itself.

Few archaeological features appear to survive as earthworks in the area between the two banks, possibly the result of land improvements for the cricket ground or earlier agricultural activity. The SW corner of this area is marked by a large cluster of open surface quarrying pits (SP 0056 1898); this interpretation has been questioned in the past (Burrow 1919, 76), but appears to be correct on the assessment of the present survey. Very slight linear earthworks may be traces of former ridge and furrow running from N to S within the cricket field. At the N end of the cricket pitch a small lynchet is evident dropping down into the rear of the Village Hall land plot (SP 0066 1917). Within the Village Hall plot are surviving traces of at least two low banks, again running roughly N to S, and which may be traces of orchard banks or ridge and furrow.

To the N of this enclosure between Upper Dowdeswell and Lower Dowdeswell is the long bank discussed above which had previously been interpreted as the W perimeter of the large N enclosure. This spread bank survives best where it meets the modern road (SP 0053 1949) and measures about 1m in height and about 2m across its base. It is less evident to the NW where it runs alongside the road, and is equally slight to the SE where it may have been damaged by property development on its N side. Importantly, in the field of rough pasture between the end of this bank and the E bank of the site S of Upper Dowdeswell was a low earthwork bank which suggested that the two earthworks may have previously been connected. Unfortunately access to this field was not available during the survey, and this possible feature and other traces of earthworks in the field could not be investigated in more detail.

A further piece of evidence that appeared to bolster the interpretation of a large continuous boundary outlined above was the presence of a large U-shaped ditch enclosing an area of nearly 5 hectares on the S side of the A436 road. This feature has been largely removed by surface quarrying and subsequent landscaping during the latter half of the 20th century, but is recorded on an oblique aerial photograph held at the NMRC (SP0018/2/ 22.04.1956 HAW; Fig 2). However, the simplistic relationship with the banks discussed above is brought into question by significant differences; the most apparent being that this feature consisted of a large ditch with no conclusive evidence of an associated bank, in direct contrast to the banks without ditches to the N. The ditch system also appeared to enclose the crest of a spur of land which falls away to the E and S, and there was no evidence from aerial photographs or field investigation that this feature continued any further N and connected to the earthwork banks S of Upper Dowdeswell. There is a good archaeological case therefore for considering this monument as unrelated to the Scheduled Monuments to the N.

Documentary research following the field survey of the site has provided evidence that has questioned the interpretation of the site altogether. The 1838 tithe award map for Dowdeswell recorded the field between the banks as 'Lower Park', the field to the W as 'Upper Park' and the

field to the S of that as 'Park Piece' (GRO: GDR/T1/69; CBR/C5/8/5). This evidence suggests that this area may have previously formed part of a park or garden, and reconsidering the earthwork evidence in this light would suggest that this is the case. There is no convincing evidence that the banks S of Upper Dowdeswell were connected to the ditched enclosure to the S in either form or orientation, while the suspected bank that may have linked them to the bank further N is likely to be the remnants of a former field boundary shown on the 1838 tithe map. The bank further N may well form part of the landscaped park and garden attached to Dowdeswell Court in Lower Dowdeswell (Registered Park and Garden 5156), and was notably smaller than the earthwork banks at Upper Dowdeswell. The earthworks S of Upper Dowdeswell therefore appear to form a self-contained site.



Figure 3. Upper Dowdeswell Manor House in the early 18th century from the NE. Young woodland plantations can be seen S and E of the house, and the W earthwork bank can be seen between the trees and the walled garden extending up to the lane.

These earthworks formed part of a landscaped park associated with Upper Dowdeswell Manor House, which dates architecturally to the 16th century, and this relationship appears to be confirmed by an early 18th-century print of the house and gardens (Atkyns 1712, 400; Fig 2). This detailed oblique print, which views the house from the NE, shows formal walled gardens located immediately S of the manor house, with woodland plantations to the S and E of the walled gardens. Between the garden wall and the tree plantation on the E side of the house is the slight suggestion of an earth

bank, presumably the W bank discussed above in the description of the earthworks S of Upper Dowdeswell. Although the print does not suggest that the bank was used as a walkway or platform for raised planting, it does appear to show that the bank was used to separate the area of formal gardens from the wider landscaped park.

Following this interpretation it is possible to see that the lynchet created by the E bank formed one boundary of the park, while the W bank would have provided an internal boundary between the landscaped park and garden. The low lynchet noted on oblique aerial photography continuing W from the SW corner is likely to have been yet another internal division of the park. Unfortunately because of the extent of levelling and improvement within the cricket field area and impact of arable cultivation in surrounding fields very little trace of associated parkland features survive as earthworks, although it is likely that sub-surface deposits may survive throughout the park area. The lynchet separating the cricket field from the Village Hall plot is likely to be one vestige of this redundant land use. The low banks visible in the Village Hall plot are probably traces of medieval ridge and furrow, given their oblique angle to the latter lynchet; if the banks had been at right angles to the lynchet then it would have implied that they formed part of a neat, ornamental planting scheme. The quarrying pits noted in the SW corner of the cricket field area are likely to have been dug after the area had been abandoned as a park, or at least towards the end of its active use. The brick-built reservoir cover on the W bank is presumably a later addition to the park, intentionally hidden away in the bank, although the underground reservoir itself may well have been used from an earlier date.

The print of Upper Dowdeswell manor house demonstrates that the park, and therefore the earthworks, were extant by 1712 when they were in the hands of Lionel Rich who was described as having a good seat and large estate (Atkyns 1712, 400). However, the house had formerly been held by the Abingdon family which included Anthony Abingdon, a gentleman usher to Henry, Prince of Wales and eldest son of James I (*ibid*). It may be that the house and its associated park and gardens had its origins during the Abingdon family's heyday in the early 17th century, prior to the Civil War.

While this reassessment of the earthworks S of Upper Dowdeswell has led to the assignment of a post-medieval date to these features, it is important to note that this has no bearing on the interpretation of the 'The Castles' to the W. Analysis of the earthworks during the field examination confirms that the enclosure is of Iron Age or Romano-British date. The earthworks of this monument are unconnected to those in the vicinity of Upper Dowdeswell, or the areas of landscaped park connected to Dowdeswell Court and Upper Dowdeswell Manor House.

CONCLUSION

The Level 1 survey of earthworks at Upper Dowdeswell has demonstrated the archaeological features Scheduled as those of a Romano-British camp enclosure are in fact those of a post-medieval park. Unfortunately, due to the level of archaeological destruction caused by levelling, improvement and arable cultivation in the area few other potential park features were noted during the survey, and this interpretation was reached principally from the evidence of the 1838 tithe award map and the early 18th-century print published in Atkyn's volume on Gloucestershire. While the surviving banks could potentially overlie banks or lynchets of medieval or earlier date, these are likely to have been field boundaries rather than part of an enclosure complex. Potential ridge and furrow noted around the village hall appears to confirm that arable cultivation was taking place at Upper Dowdeswell during the medieval period. Despite the loss of above ground features relating to the park system, sub-surface archaeological remains could still provide further insights into its content and layout. The parallel development of parkland at Upper Dowdeswell Manor House and Dowdeswell Court to the N could provide an interesting avenue for future research, particularly in combination with more detailed documentary and architectural research into the two houses and their associated estates.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment consulted records at Gloucestershire County Council's Gloucestershire Archives centre. The National Monuments Record was also searched, along with relevant Scheduling and Listed Building records. The field examination was undertaken on 2 May 2007 by Michael Fradley. Mark Bowden provided editorial comment on the report draft.

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