

Archaeological Field Survey Report



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CAESAR'S CAMP, BROMLEY, GREATER LONDON

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CAESAR'S CAMP, BROMLEY

GREATER LONDON

NMR NUMBER TQ 46 SW 5

REQUEST SURVEY

JULY 1997



RCHM
ENGLAND

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1. INTRODUCTION

In July 1997 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England undertook an archaeological survey in the grounds of Holwood House, Bromley, Greater London. This work was undertaken at the request of the Cambridge Archaeological Unit and comprised topographic and geophysical surveys in a defined area of just under 2 hectares (4.94 acres). The geophysical survey was undertaken by Geophysical Surveys of Bradford on behalf of the RCHME.

The survey area lies to the north-east of Holwood House, in the south-eastern part of the late Iron Age fortification known as Caesar's Camp (NGR TQ 4235 6365) and spanning the presumed line of its defences. The existing interpretation hints that the eastern ramparts of this fortification were levelled in the late 18th century during the development of the Holwood estate by William Pitt (but see conclusion below). The present survey is needed in the context of construction of a new road, part of a large redevelopment of the Holwood estate, and the specific aim was to locate, if possible, the course of the defences.

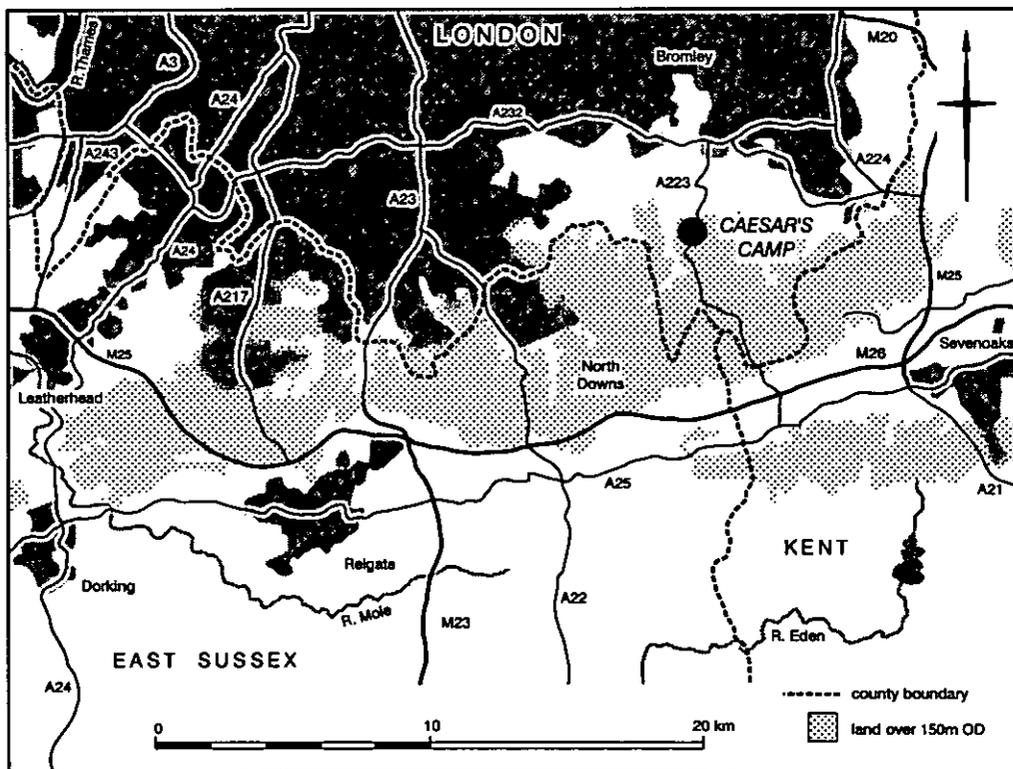


Figure 1
Caesar's Camp,
location map of
the site

From the outset it was apparent that July is the wrong time of year for survey due to vegetation growth preventing access and visibility. The survey, therefore, took place only in a horse paddock forming the eastern section of the defined area, although even here the eastern fringe on the natural scarp edge was inaccessible due to thick scrub and undergrowth. The smaller area closer to the house was not surveyed because long grass rendered identification of subtle features impossible. Nevertheless it is notable how this area is both level and significantly higher than the horse paddock; a natural slope, enhanced by artificial scarping, defining its edge. This is probably the result of creating a level platform for the house and garden in the early 19th century and would have involved significant alteration to the Iron Age earthworks. In the horse paddock, grass growth was low and conditions were ideal for survey.

2. DESCRIPTION and INTERPRETATION

(For letters and names in bold used in the text, see Fig 2 unless specifically stated otherwise)

The Iron Age defences

Along the south-eastern side of the area surveyed are a series of low earthworks A, B and C which originate from the natural scarp edge and ascend the slope towards the house. The more northerly part of A is a scarping of the natural slope with a slight terrace at its base (not surveyed) beyond which the slope resumes. It leaves the scarp edge towards the south, becoming a low, spread bank, up to 35m wide, aligned diagonally across the contours and leading into a belt of mature trees and scrub. Earthwork B is similar, excepting that the initial scarp is sharper and more obviously artificial, up to 1m high, but towards the south becoming a low broad bank leading into the scrub. Finally, C appears to be another scarping of the natural fall of the hill.

These earthwork features are not easy to interpret and in size and eroded form could be dismissed as products of the natural erosional processes on the hillside. However, if this is so, then their parallel alignment diagonally across the contours is unusual, and even harder to explain is their bank-like form with a fall away from the natural slope of the hill. In this case they could be the levelled remains of the Iron Age defences, formed by a combination of scarping the natural slope of the hillside, and constructing rampart banks across those sections not directly on the scarp edge. Unfortunately there is no support for this idea from the geophysical survey, which yielded no significant anomalies in this regard (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1997, 2).

Other earthworks

A second focus of interest in the surveyed area is a series of low earthworks along the northern strip. The most significant is a small enclosure D, roughly 20m square, its perimeter defined by an inward-falling scarp 0.5m high, supplemented by a slight outward-falling scarp on the south-east. The interior is therefore slightly sunken. In the south-western corner is a low mound, possibly over the remains of a small building. Other earthworks extend from this enclosure towards the north-east, including E and F, perhaps also remains of enclosures, and a low bank/scarp G which extends beyond the survey area along the side of a dry valley; it is probably a former land boundary. On its southern side, a shallow rectangular depression H, 19m by 9m, looks very much like a small pond which is partially infilled. Finally, cut into the scarp G is a neat circular hole J, 4.2m across and 0.6m deep; probably a well. Several of these features registered significant anomalies during the geophysical survey (Fig 3 A and E) (Geophysical Surveys of Bradford 1997, 1-2).

This group of features is probably the remains of a small farm, settlement or specialised park buildings. It is undocumented, not appearing on any of the maps of Holwood between the late 18th century and the present day, nor in other documentation as reproduced in the previous archaeological and historical assessments (Pre-Construct Archaeology 1996; Land Use Consultants 1995, 1996). In the light of this, there are two possibilities. It may be the remains of a relatively modern, short-lived agricultural settlement but given the regular mapping coverage this is unlikely. More probably it predates the estate improvements of the late

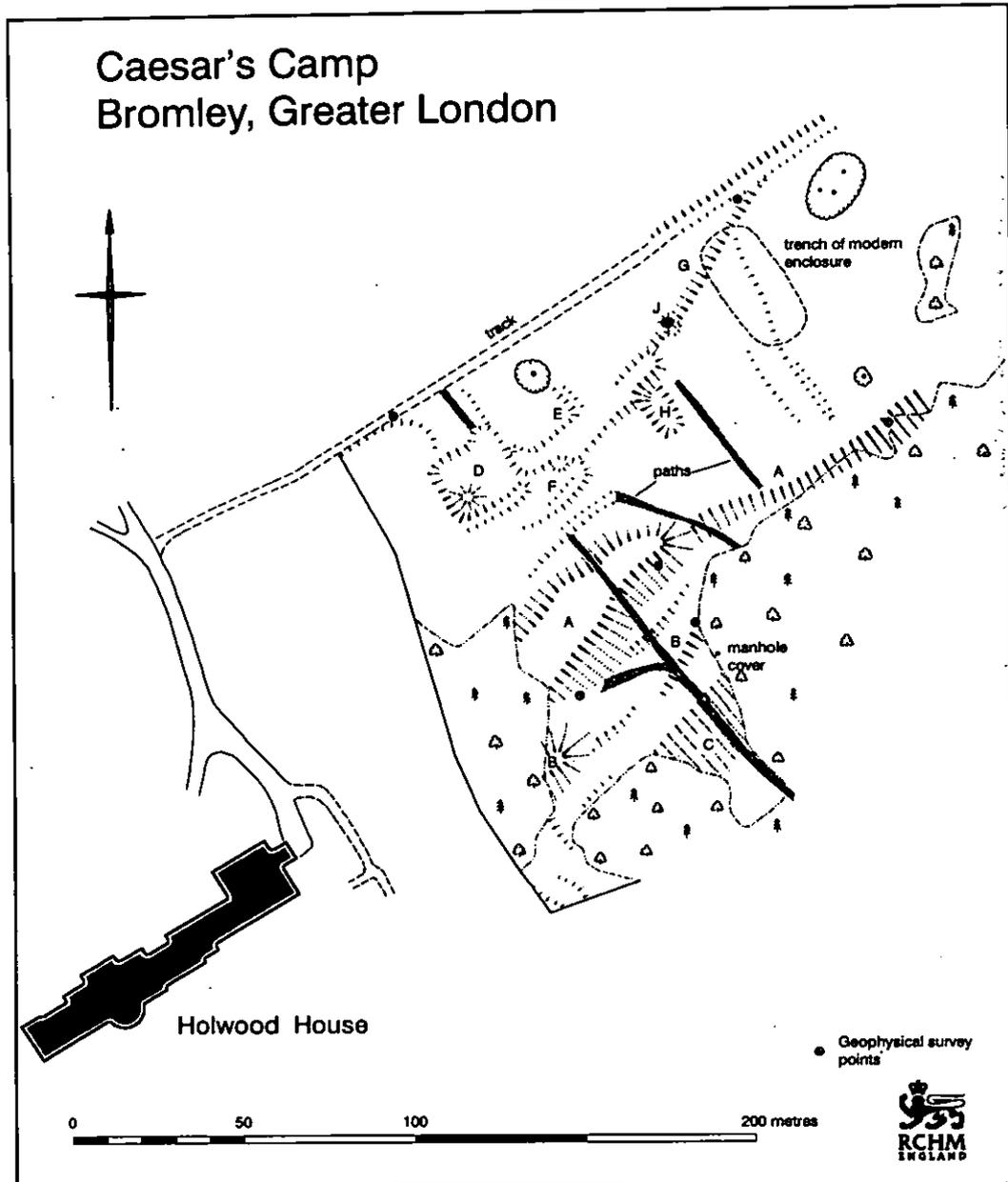


Figure 2
Caesar's Camp,
RCHME plan of
earthworks surveyed
at 1:1000 scale

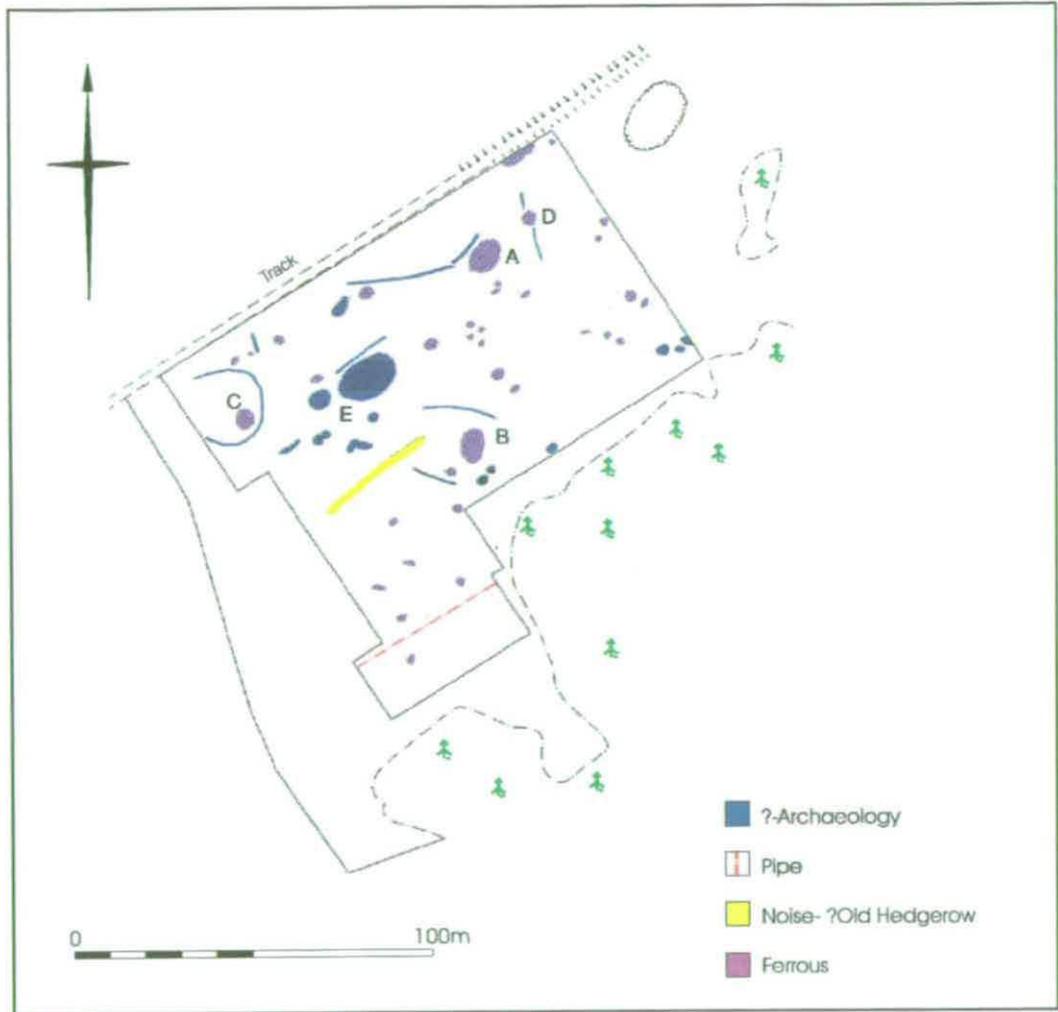
18th century. In this case, it could be specifically associated with the estate prior to these great improvements, and it could even be medieval, in which context the proximity of a medieval tile kiln should not be overlooked (GLSMR 070659).

Minor surface features in the horse paddock include a series of slight linear depressions, generally 2.0-3.0m across, which appear to be former paths. A shallow trench defining a round-ended rectangular enclosure, 40m by 20m, is from a recent fenced paddock, presumably for horses.

The geophysical survey produced several anomalies not visible in the surviving earthworks, although their interpretation is uncertain (Fig 3 B and D).



Figure 3
Caesar's Camp,
interpretation of
geophysical survey
(after Geophysical
Surveys of Bradford,
1997)



3. CONCLUSION

In so far as demonstrating the presence of the Iron Age fortification is concerned, this survey should be regarded as inconclusive. The earthwork evidence is suggestive only, of two levelled banks and ditches (Fig 2 A and B) and a final scarping of the natural slope (Fig 2 C), albeit reminiscent of the well-preserved western section of the defences. Unfortunately only invasive techniques will provide a firm answer.

More confidence could be gained about the extent and nature of the late Iron Age fortification by a complete topographical survey, noting especially the area of interface between the well-preserved sections of rampart and the levelled sections. The natural scarp edge along the eastern and south-eastern sides might repay particularly careful examination because it is in this area where all the historic plans agree, even the anomalous plan of 1806 (in Land Use Consultants 1995), that the ramparts had been '*levelled for many years*'.

All the historic plans show that the missing section of ramparts amounts to well over half the circuit of fortification, or a third in the case of the 1806 plan. What was the context for this massive undertaking? It certainly does not seem to be William Pitt's landscaping works, although one of his predecessors, Robert Burrow, carried out extensive improvement works to the grounds in the late 1760's (Land Use Consultants 1985, 11). Yet it is difficult to see the reason, in terms of the known landscape gardening and estate improvement schemes at Holwood, for such massive levelling works. The answer may be that the earthworks were levelled much earlier or that they were of a different form on the east and south-east: careful scarping of the natural slope would have produced defences which appeared impressive enough from without. One final scenario to consider is whether the late Iron Age fortification was ever finished.

The discovery of other features within the surveyed area adds a new element to the archaeology of Holwood. The remains of a small settlement is suggested by both the visible earthworks and geophysical anomalies and is one small piece in the puzzle, helping to infill the gap between the late Iron Age and the late 18th century.

4. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The topographical survey at Holwood was carried out by Paul Pattison and Moraig Brown of the RCHME. The method was divorced survey by establishment of control stations using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer on a Hewlett Packard Designjet 750C Plus plotter. Archaeological features were recorded from these stations at 1:1000 scale with tapes using normal graphical methods. This report is by Paul Pattison, the figures prepared by Moraig Brown, Trevor Pearson and Anwen Cooper, in part with Trimmap, Autocad, Coreldraw and CorelVentura software.

The site archive and a copy of this report have been deposited in the archive of the RCHME at the National Monuments Record, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (under record no TQ 46 SW 5, to where further enquiries should be directed.

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5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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