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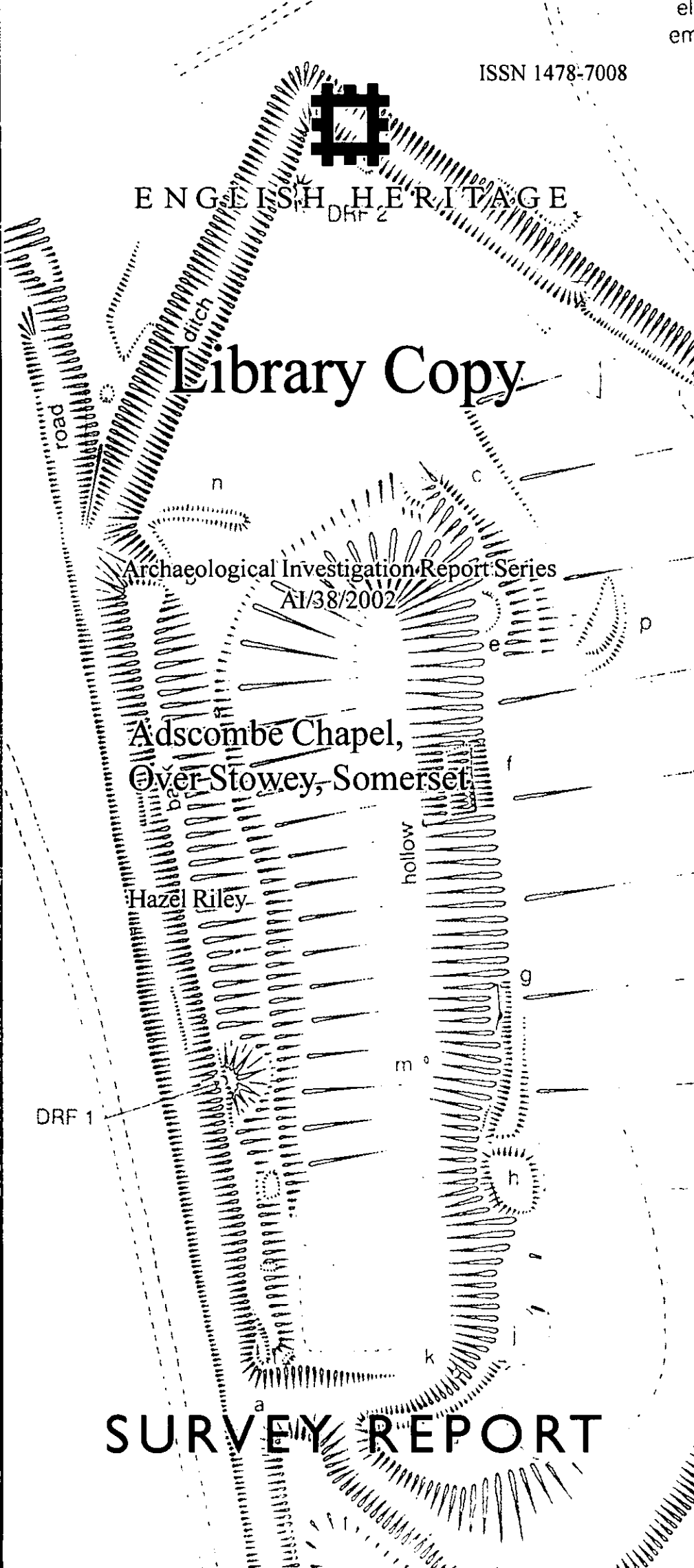
Archaeological Investigation Report Series
AI/38/2002

Adcombe Chapel,
Over Stowey, Somerset

Hazel Riley

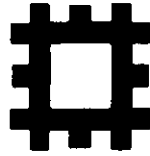
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SURVEY REPORT



Archaeological Investigation Report Series

AI/38/2002



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Adscombe Chapel, Over Stowey, Somerset

An archaeological survey by English Heritage

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District:	Sedgemoor
Parish:	Over Stowey
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Summary

A ruined chapel, east of Adcombe Farm, and the earthworks surrounding it, were the subject of a survey by English Heritage. The chapel probably dates from the 13th or 14th centuries and is mentioned in documents dated to the 16th century. The earthworks represent the remains of a manorial complex, belonging to the Rich family in the 17th and 18th centuries. Some slight earthworks may be the remains of an earlier field system, possibly of prehistoric origin.

INTRODUCTION

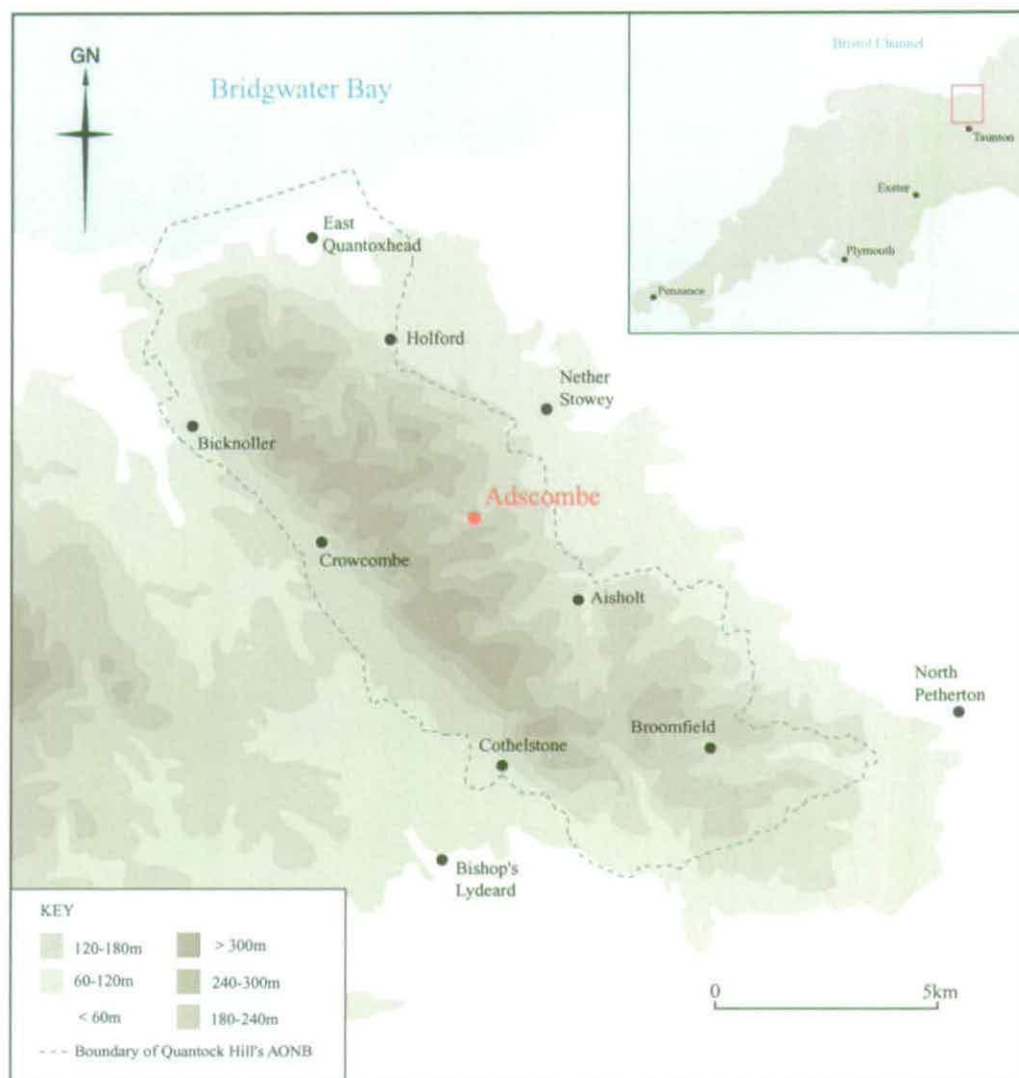


Fig. 1. Location plan

Location

Adcombe Chapel lies 200m east of Adcombe Farm, in the parish of Over Stowey, Somerset, centred at ST 1841 3778 (Fig. 1). The chapel is at the top of a fairly steep slope, at an altitude of 145m, overlooking Quantock Combe (or Seven Wells), on the Cutcombe Slates of the Devonian period (British Geological Survey, sheet 295). The field belongs to Adcombe Farm and is currently used as pasture.

Adcombe is one of a series of small settlements along the combes and lanes to the west of Over Stowey. Aley, Adcombe and Fraim all lie within 1km of the village of Over Stowey (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Ordnance Survey 6 inch map of 1888 (Somerset 49 SW)



The survey

The survey was carried out by staff from the Exeter Office of English Heritage in August 2002. The site was recorded as part of the English Heritage archaeological survey of the Quantock Hills AONB; it also formed part of a Countryside Stewardship application. The survey was undertaken using a Leica total station EDM and completed using graphical methods. The chapel was planned at a scale of 1:100, the earthworks were recorded at 1:1000 scale and a piece of worked stone was drawn *in situ* at a scale of 1:5. The numbers in the text (n) refer to Figure 8.

HISTORY AND PREVIOUS RESEARCH

There has been very little archaeological or historical work carried out at Adcombe Chapel. In 1891 W B Broadmead drew attention to the site as follows:

On the south side of Adcombe, in the parish of Over Stowey, at the entrance of Seven Wells Combe on the Quantocks, are the ruins of a chapel, standing in a meadow sloping to the stream.

The interior measures 42 feet by 20, with rubble walls some two feet thick, but of these the west wall is alone perfect, the others being nearly level with the ground. It terminates in a gable, containing the setting of a pointed-arched window, of which the worked stone remains only on the inside. Beneath it is the rubble setting of a pointed-arched door, of which all the worked stone has been removed.

As far as can be gathered from the shape of the arches and other indications, it is, like Kilve Priory in the neighbourhood, late 13th century work.

The history of this chapel has entirely passed away from local tradition, but I find in Weaver's Wells Wills that in 1535 one Johane Broke de Overstowey leaves to 'Our lady of Addescombe j (one) shepe,' and in 1534 Eliz. Pole de Stokegursy to 'Our lady of Addescombe my best bedes,' so it was flourishing at that time. Can anyone give me any further information on the subject?

(Broadmead 1891, 239)

Gresswell published a photograph of the chapel which shows the west wall standing to roof height, and a considerable amount of the south wall still intact (Gresswell 1903, facing page 187; Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Adcombe Chapel: the west wall in 1903 (Gresswell 1903, facing page 187)

Pevsner, writing in 1958, noted that the ruins were covered in ivy, and that the west doorway with window above could still be distinguished (Pevsner 1958, 270). A visit by the OS Archaeology Division in 1965 noted that the walls of the building could be traced, but that they stood to a maximum of 0.9m high. By this time the west wall had fallen, but material from it, including the door and window mouldings, remained on the site (NMR No ST 13 NE 14). In 1984 the owner remarked that 20 years ago the west wall was still high enough to contain a window (SAM Record form, Somerset 452), suggesting that the west wall became ruinous in the late 1950s to early 1960s.

'Friar's Manor' was depicted on the OS 6" map of 1962, and the OS visit in 1965 recorded a gently sloping platform (NMR ST 13 NE 22). Gresswell, writing at the beginning of the 20th century, reported that the house and garden existed up to modern times:

...the old house (probably the dwelling place of the monks), was adorned with some fine oak beams and an old oak staircase, and also with elaborate chimney-pieces. A stone, with the date 1519, is said to have been found there.

(Gresswell 1903, 191)

Documentary and map sources

The history of the settlement at Adcombe and its chapel is complicated and incomplete. There are two main documentary sources: the earliest are the registers (or Cartulary) of Athelney Abbey, an early Benedictine foundation to the SE of the Quantocks on the edge of the Somerset Levels. Later documents, from the post-medieval period, such as wills and mortgages, refer to the sale of lands and estates. The chapel itself is referred to directly only in a few of these sources. Otherwise, the references are simply to lands at Adcombe. Maps are useful for the later history of the site, from the beginning of the 19th century onwards.

The Cartulary of Athelney Abbey contains several references to Adcombe. In the mid-13th century, Roger de Amary gave 'all of the land of Adescombe....' to the abbot of Athelney. A grant was made by John de Huppeton to the abbot and convent of all his rents and services in Adescombe (not dated, but probably also in the 13th century). William Fichet gave all of his land and wood of Adescumbe to the abbey in the 13th century (Bates 1889, 150, 151). The Cartulary also contains a reference to rents due from various lands and holdings belonging to the monastery of Athelney. 'From the lands of Adescumbe, 6sh. This rent belongs to the Monks' kitchen. And it is to be noted that Adescumbe is part of the free manor of Lenge' (Bates 1889, 163). Lenge was a manor close to Athelney itself. Elsewhere on or close to the Quantock Hills, Athelney Abbey owned Oggshole in Broomfield, and a chapel at Combe Florey, NW of Bishop's Lydeard (Gresswell 1922, 85).

Other local religious houses were also endowed with land in the area. A large tract of land in and around Ramscombe was given to the alien priory of Stogursey in the 12th century (Gresswell 1903, 187). Alice de Bonville, in 1219, gave land and 300 acres of wood in the parish of Over Stowey to the Hospital of St John in Bridgwater (Gresswell 1903, 188).

As early as 1317 the de Lyf family are mentioned in connection with what sounds like Adcombe:

Grant in tail by Robert Fitzpaine to Walter de Lyf and Lucy his wife, with reversion to garantor, of land on Cantokes in the parish of Over Stowey, lying between the road from Aply to Truscombe, and the hill of Cogerhulle, with the use and profit of the water at Cogercombe.

(Gresswell 1903, 190)

The connection is made in the 1327 Lay Subsidy for Somerset, a list of people in the county

whose goods were worth ten shillings or more. Four inhabitants of Adescombe were wealthy enough to be included: Lucia la Lyf; Henric atte Hele; Waltero atte Wetere and Gilberto Butul (Dickinson 1889, 140). In 1389 Adescombe is mentioned in an argument between the abbot of Athelney and Richard Lyf about tithes (Bates 1889, 200-1).

After the Dissolution, Adescombe was granted to Bristol Corporation; by 1655 the Rich family owned the estate. It remained with the Rich family until 1761, when it was sold to John Perceval, the earl of Egmont. When the Egmont estate was sold to Henry Labouchere in 1833, Adescombe had been amalgamated with Chapel and Friam (VCH 1992, 164).

The estates of the hospital of St John in Bridgwater were surrendered in 1539, and its lands in Stowey passed to the Crown. As the 'manor of Over Stowey or Fryron', (later called 'Friam manor'), it was sold to the London merchant Emmanuel Lucar in 1544. The reference here is to part of the property of the late Hospital of St John, Bridgwater, with a mill and a mansion house, the latter in occupation of John Oliver, and a wood of 115 acres called Friars wood, lying in the parishes of Stowey, Stogursey, Nether Stowey, Crowcombe and Addiscombe (Healey 1901, 202). The estate was divided and part of it, together with an estate called Chapel, was held with Hartrow manor in Stogumber until 1758 or later. The main house of the manor of Over Stowey or Fryron was mentioned in 1538-9; it apparently stood beside Adescombe Chapel. It was the home of the Rich family in the 17th and early 18th centuries. The house was apparently dated to 1519 and contained an oak staircase and mantelpiece. The house was demolished by 1887 (VCH 1992, 163).

In 1547 Adescombe apparently consisted of two houses and a ruined tenement (VCH 1992, 160). In the late 18th century Collinson records the hamlet of Adescombe as containing four houses (Collinson 1791, 259).

The chapel and a building to the east of it are marked on the small-scale county map of Somerset of 1782, although the name Ely Green (Aley) has been ascribed to Adescombe (Day and Masters 1782). An early large scale depiction of the area (OS 1802) depicts the house and the chapel, but the detail of the latter is unclear. The tithe map of 1838 clearly shows the chapel and a building to its east. These are contained within a single, square plot, called 'Chapples house and barton'. Small plots to the east are recorded as gardens and 'Chapple orchard' (SRO 1838). By the time of the publication of the 1st edition map in 1888, the chapel is a roofless building. The site of 'Friar's Manor' is recorded to the east. The small garden plots and orchards have been removed, leaving a single field (OS 1888).

THE CHAPEL (Fig. 4)

The remains of the chapel lie on an artificial building platform, defined on its northern edge by a steep scarp 2m high, and measuring some 25m EW x 15m NS. To the north of this is a further level platform, defined by a scarp 1.5m high on its northern side and measuring 25m EW x 6m NS. This platform may have been part of a burial ground associated with the chapel, but if so its location on the northern side of the chapel is unusual (1,2).

The remains are fragmentary, but give the plan of a narrow rectangular building, measuring 16m x 7m (external dimensions) and, unusually, oriented WSW/ENE (Figs 4 and 5). The walls are built of large slabs of local sandstone, bonded with lime mortar. The best-preserved part of the structure is the western end, where the walls stand to a maximum height of 0.9m. A diagonal buttress survives on the NW corner to a height of 1.34m (Fig. 6). Part of a similar buttress survives on the SW corner. The gap in the centre of the west wall is probably the site of the original entrance. The eastern end is poorly preserved; here, the best stretch of walling is on the northern side, but it is difficult to discern the original corner of the building here.

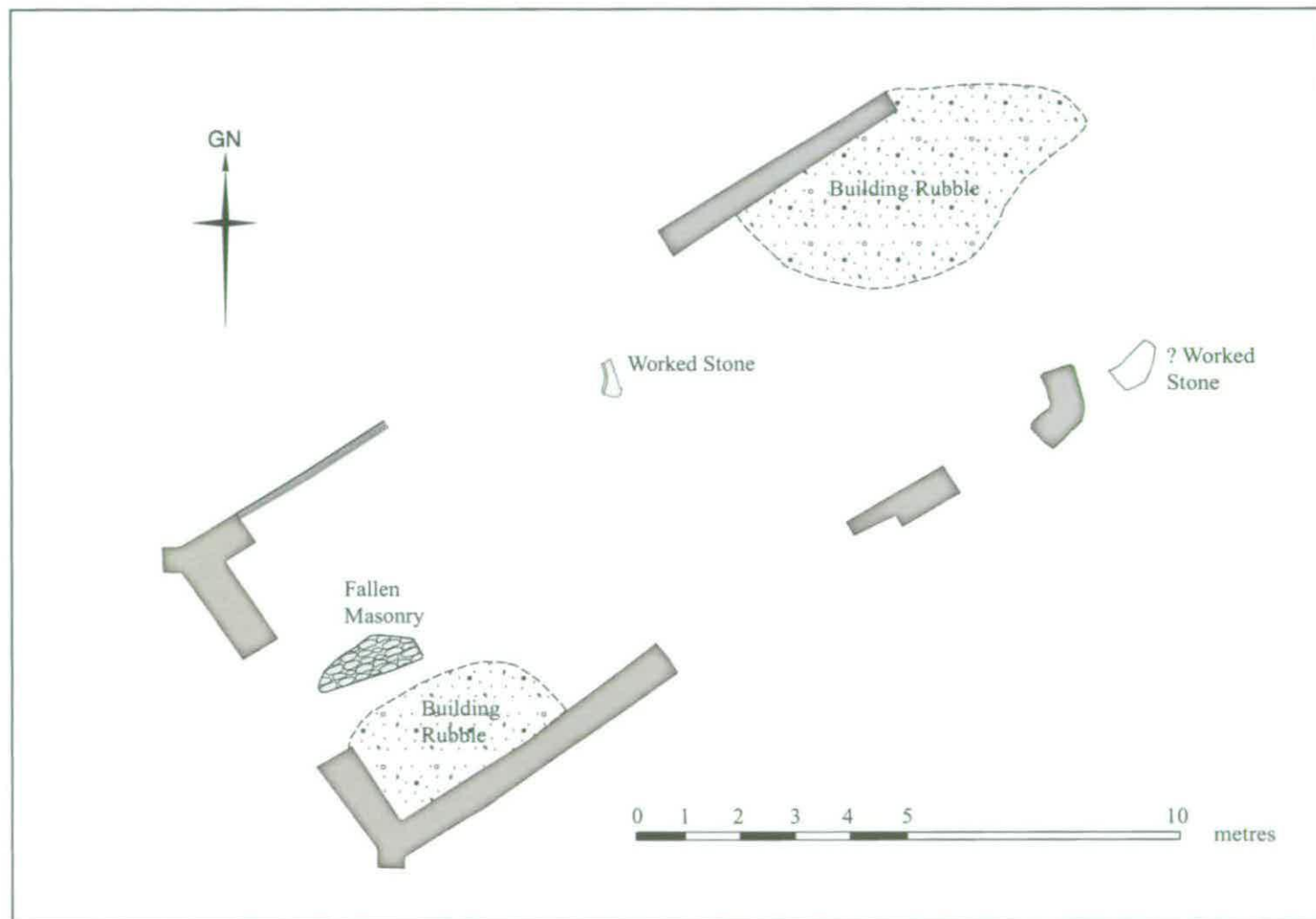


Fig. 4. Adcombe Chapel: English Heritage 1:100 plan of the chapel remains (reduced).



Fig. 5. Adcombe Chapel: view from the east



Fig. 6. Adcombe Chapel: the NW buttress

The interior of the building is littered with large stone slabs and building rubble. A large fragment of fallen masonry lies close to the doorway and appears to be part of the wall. A piece of worked stone, described below, lies in the interior. A large stone slab just to the east of the SE corner may also be worked, but it is too deeply embedded in the ground to be certain that this is the case. Several fairly large trees grow in, on and around the chapel: hawthorn bushes are growing at the base of the northern wall; elder and hawthorn grow on and around the NW buttress, and elder grows on the south wall. Ash and elder are growing in the interior, close to the south wall (Figs 5 and 6).

The worked stone (Fig. 7)

A large slab of worked stone was recorded lying within the walls of the chapel. The slab is local red sandstone, 0.97m long, 0.5m wide and 0.21m thick (overall). The stone is a section of the jamb and head of a window or doorway. The opening probably took the form of a two-centred or pointed arch-head with a simple chamfered jamb. There are no apparent glazing grooves or bar-sockets.

This is most likely to be part of the deep, pointed-arched window above the doorway in the west wall, described by Broadmead in 1891 (above and Fig. 3).

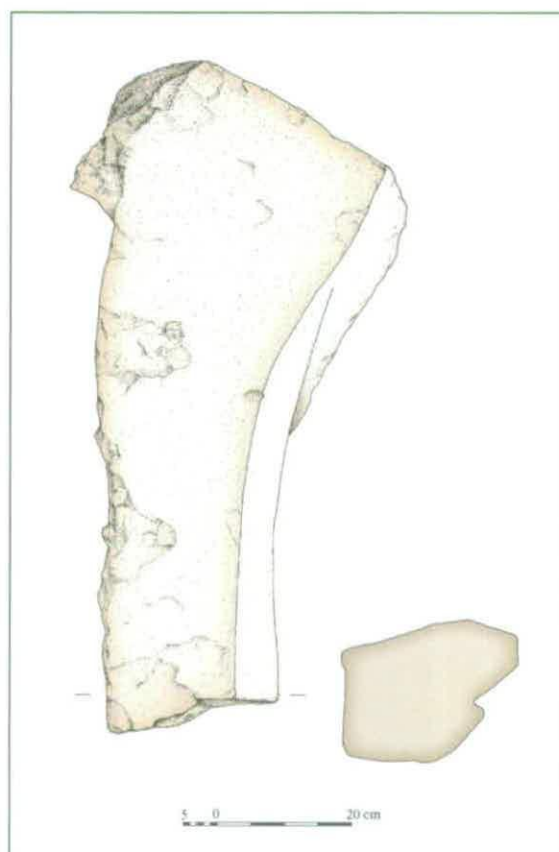


Fig. 7. Adcombe Chapel: plan and section of worked stone

THE EARTHWORKS (Fig. 8)

The earthworks at Adcombe chapel represent the remains of several phases of activity at the site. The earthworks associated with the chapel are described above. Some 40m to the east of the chapel is a well-defined platform, defined on three sides by strong scarps, up 2m high (Fig. 9) (3). The platform itself contains the remains of two building platforms, which both lie towards its southern edge. These represent the remains of 'Chapel House', the home of the Rich family and the manor house of Friarn Manor (above). Its position is confirmed by comparison with the map of 1802 (OS 1802).



Fig. 9. Adcombe Chapel: site of manor house

To the NW of the manorial remains are a series of regular, rectangular terraces which descend the slope (4). These could be the remains of formal garden terraces, associated with the manor house. Given their location backing the hollow way, they could be building plots, but the lack of any features on the terraces argues against this interpretation. Immediately below the building platform is a spread but substantial bank, which curves to the NW (5). Together with the fragmentary remains of a scarp which is preserved just to the north of the leat, this could be the remains of the boundary of the garden or grounds of the manor. Some of these scarps were still in use as field or property boundaries in 1802 (OS 1802).

A very well-preserved hollow way runs from Adcombe Lane up the western side of the field (Fig. 10) (6). The feature is 10m wide and 1-2m deep. Close to the chapel, building rubble, including stone, slate and brick, has been dumped into the hollow way. This hollow way is part of a route which runs from Adcombe Lane to Plainsfield, and was a significant feature in 1782, when it was mapped (Day and Masters 1782). The hollow way provided access both to the chapel and the manor house. At its NW end, the hollow way turns to become a route towards Adcombe Farm. The farm layout has changed, with access to the late 19th century farm buildings now via Adcombe Lane. By the end of the 19th century the farm layout was much as it is today

(OS 1888). On the tithe map the farm is smaller, and some buildings to the east of the farm house, depicted on the tithe map, are now visible as a faint rectangular earthwork enclosure. The leat which runs across the northern part of the site served Adscombe Mill in the 19th century. The stone bridge appears to be contemporary with the leat. The leat has diverted a stream which ran along the course of Adscombe Lane (OS 1802); the slight earthworks to the north of the stream (8) may be the remains of a pond which pre-dates the leat. The curved boundary (5) appears to overlie these earthworks, and an alternative explanation is that they are part of the putative early field system described below.

*Fig. 10.
Adscombe
Chapel: the
hollow way,
looking south
towards the
chapel and
manor site*



The regular, rectangular earthworks, evident to the west of the hollow way and the east of the strong scarp defining the manorial site, are the remains of field systems. Those to the east of the hollow way are part of a field system, in use at the beginning of the 19th century, and partly in use today (OS 1802) (7). The series of four rectangular fields to the east of the manor house are of particular interest (8). They are defined by slight, quite spread banks. The fragmentary scarps to the north of the leat could also be part of this field system. The large scarp defining the manorial site does appear to overlie the field system, suggesting that it is of some antiquity. Some of these field boundaries do appear on the tithe map of 1838, and the scarps may be part of 19th century field or property boundaries. The possibility remains, however, that these represent the remains of a much earlier field system, possibly of later prehistoric or Romano-British origin. If these scarps are part of an earlier field system, then the layout of the church and the manorial complex has been influenced by the layout of these fields.

DISCUSSION

The remains of the chapel and the earthworks at Adscombe represent an important survival in the medieval and early post-medieval history of the area. The endowment of land and other property to the church was important to the land-owning classes in the earlier medieval period. It is apparent from the published documentary sources that this practice was common on this

part of the Quantock Hills. Thus, in a small area centred around Over Stowey, the establishments at Athelney Abbey, Stogursey Priory, St John's Hospital in Bridgwater and St Mark's Hospital in Bristol all had an interest.

During the earlier part of the medieval period, Adscombe seems to have been a small settlement, perhaps centred around its chapel. The existence of a chapel suggests that Adscombe had its origins as a small grange of Athelney Abbey. Records for Athelney Abbey do not survive which detail this aspect of the abbey's holdings (Dunning 2001, 105, 111), but the mention that the Adscombe rents were for the monks' kitchen hints at this. The reference to a date stone of 1519 at 'Chapel House' may point to an early domestic building on this site, contemporary with the chapel.

Such a chapel, in a remote Quantocks combe, could have become a place of pilgrimage. Cleeve Abbey, a Cistercian foundation on the eastern edge of Exmoor, possessed the chapel of St Mary by the Sea, originally on the coast near Blue Anchor, but moved inland to what is now Chapel Cleeve, which became a place of pilgrimage (Dunning 2001, 83).

The photograph, early descriptions and the surviving fabric of the chapel suggest that the chapel dates from the medieval period, probably from the 13th or 14th century. The configuration of the deep window over the doorway in the west wall compares with the southern elevation of the chantry priests' house and chapel at Kilve, which dates from the early 14th century (B Jones, pers comm). From the evidence of the wills dated to 1534 and 1535, Adscombe Chapel was in use up until the Dissolution. The chapel may have continued in use for a number of years as a place of worship, for the villagers of Adscombe or for the manor house close by, although the parish church lies only 1km away at Over Stowey. Eventually, the chapel building was probably used for secular purposes, as is suggested by the tithe map and award.

It is difficult to be certain when the earliest house occupied the platform close to the church. The references to mansion houses and manors in the mid-16th century cannot definitely be ascribed to Friam manor or Chapel House. The existence of Friam House, to the north of Adscombe in Friam, recorded in 1660 and 1730, and demolished before 1833, complicates the picture further (VCH 1992, 163). However, it would seem that a house could have occupied the site by the chapel from the early 16th century. The map evidence shows that house existed in 1802 and 1838, but had been demolished by 1888. The possibility also exists that a domestic building associated with the chapel occupied the site in the earlier medieval period.

In the 18th century Adscombe must have seemed a remote, romantic place. Samuel Coleridge, keen to move from Bristol to the Quantock Hills, tried to rent a cottage and land at Adscombe. Although Adscombe Chapel was probably the original for the chapel in his poem 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', Coleridge did not live at Adscombe, but moved to a cottage in Nether Stowey (Gresswell 1903, 193; Mayberry 2000, 58-9).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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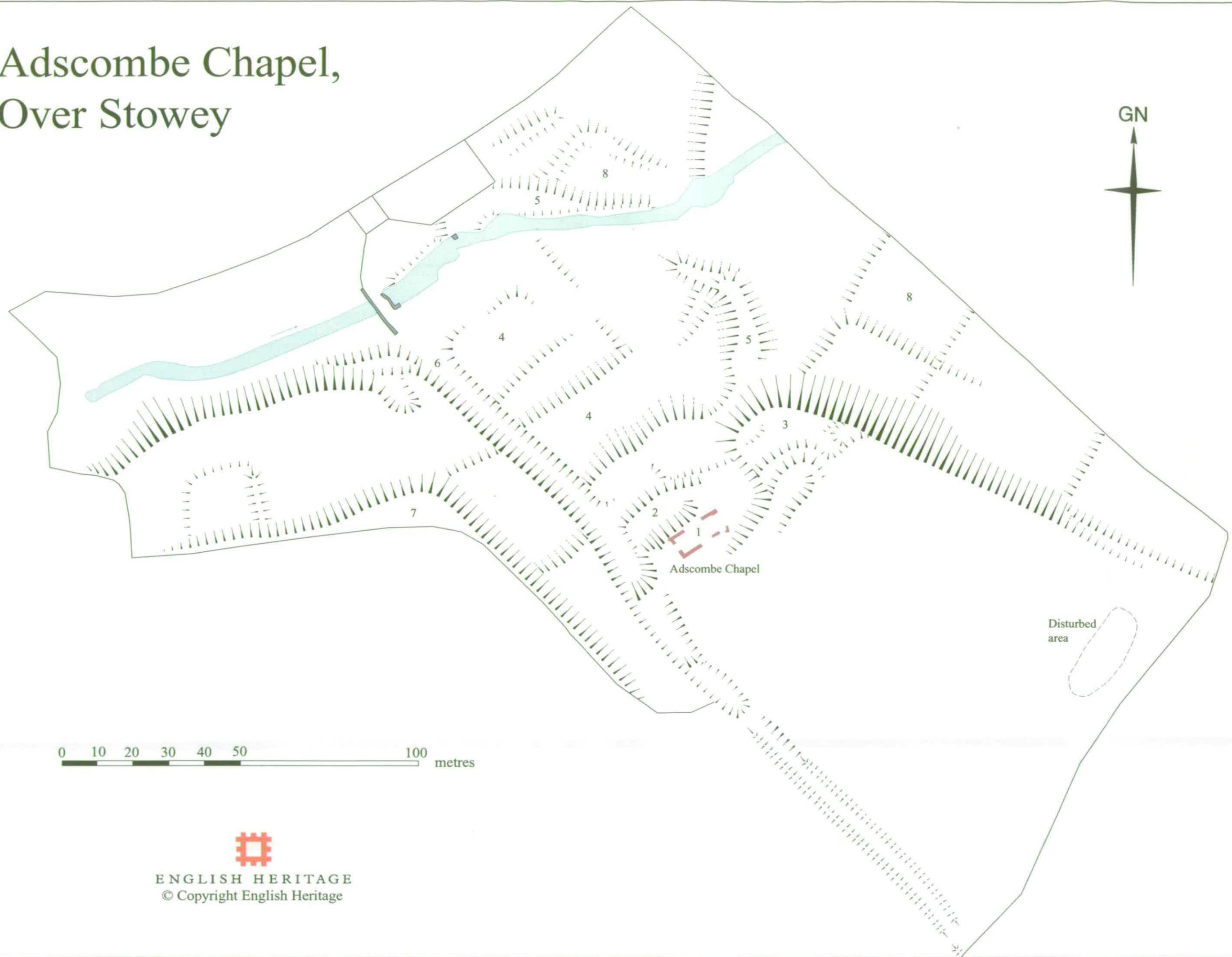
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Adscombe Chapel, Over Stowey



0 10 20 30 40 50 100 metres


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Fig. 8. Adscombe Chapel: English Heritage 1:1000 earthwork plan



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