

BLAKEMORE

Cattistock, West Dorset

ST 59360198

Previously unrecorded earthworks of a small deserted hamlet lie on the E side of the Frome St Quintin to Cattistock road just S of Higher Chalmington. The remains occupy a triangular spur of land on the valley side overlooking the River Frome. On the N and W sides of the spur the ground falls steeply into the valley while on the S there is a narrow, flat-bottomed cleft before adjacent high land. Land use consists of rough pasture which around the base of the spur is very boggy. The present road approaches from Chantmarle and takes a marked detour before resuming its projected line 150 m further N. In doing so it goes around former properties comprising the E side of the settlement as if to confirm their antiquity. This situation applied also in 1839 when the area occupied by the earthworks was enclosed by one field called 'Blackmoor Mead'¹. In Hutchins history of the County it is recorded that there were several manors in the parish of Cattistock in Medieval times: one, "Blakemore, now only a meadow, was, as Higher Chalmington, in which it was included, a member of the manor of Sydlington, and by the customary of Milton seems to have been a small manor"². That Blackmoor Mead is the site of Blakemore seems inevitable. Numerous, coarse sherds broadly of C12-C14th date were recovered or observed during survey, especially on low ground around the foot of the spur, perhaps indicating midden dumps.



The settlement plan is tailored to fit into the difficult topography. A trackway, a fore-runner of the present road which lies 45 m to the E, cuts across the neck of the spur. On the N, its course is lost beyond the village earthworks but it may have headed towards Chantmarle Lodge and be under the modern road. To the S, the modern road to Cattistock probably utilizes its line. For most of its course through the settlement the trackway is terraced into the spur. It has a prominent scarp on the E, 1-2 m high, and a slighter scarp on the W. On the S it crosses the head of a narrow cleft as a ledge falling to the W. The trackway is between 3 and 5 m wide except where erosion has narrowed it at one point to under 2 m.

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Former properties are represented by sub-rectangular enclosures bounded by banks or scarps. East of the trackway properties are arranged consecutively along it, with property (1) occupying the highest point on the spur. To the W a central property occupies another high point with a string of smaller enclosures framing it on three sides; they are on slightly lower ground. There is abundant evidence to show that the spur has been shaped and terraced to form more level areas for occupation. Property (1) is rectangular, enclosing an area of c. 0.17 ha. An elongated hollow, containing subdivisions may represent one or more structures. It occupies the SW corner and has direct access to the trackway.

Property (2) occupies lower ground at the head of the cleft to the S. It is also rectangular but smaller at c. 0.09 ha. The SW third of the area is occupied by a large, sub-rectangular platform formed by cutting into the hillside on the E - its rear scarp is c. 1.25m high. It is probably a building stance and is placed in a similar position to the hollow inside property (1). Slight scarps running E-W and perpendicular to the main axis occur inside the toft behind the platform; they may be former sub-divisions.

Property (3) lies N of (1) and adopts a more irregular form; again it is on lower ground. There is a prominent building hollow terraced into the spur with a rear scarp 1.3 m high. It has direct frontal access to the trackway. Behind it are a series of scarps and to the N there is an enclosed area of c. 0.04 ha. It is triangular in shape and may be part of property (3) or be a separate small croft.

Beyond (3), at the northern limit of the site, several slight N-S scarps have cut the main trackway. They run upslope towards the present road and have obscured any further settlement remains which may once have existed. They may relate to the removal of post-medieval field boundaries or be former holloways ascending the neck of the spur.

W of the trackway property (4) commands a central position on the spur. In plan it is oval and is bounded by a massive outward-facing scarp 1.75-2 m high, which in places is a natural slope that has been

artificially steepened. There is an intermittent internal scarp of very low elevation. The area enclosed is c. 0.2 ha. Three large embanked hollows c. 0.40m deep are situated against the trackway, forming a block 40 x 20 m. They may represent three individual structures or the three cells of a building range: in the W half of the enclosed area slight E-W scarps could mark individual boundaries of three holdings (they are aligned on the divisions between building hollows) or be the remains of ancillary structures or gardens.

To the S, tucked into the cleft below the spur are the remains of two more properties, (5) and (6). They may originally have spanned the base of the cleft in a similar manner to number (2) but have been truncated by the shallow, silted ditch of a probable, former field boundary. This feature runs down the cleft from the terraceway part of the track for c. 85 m. From its mid-point a scarp runs S from it for c. 12 m: this seems to be the boundary of a coppice which existed W of it in 1839¹. Property (5) has clear internal detail with two small possible building hollows, a platform perhaps indicating a third structure and a small "yard" area. (6) has no clear features remaining and could be a croft belonging to property (5) rather than a separate property.

The tip of the spur has been enclosed by a bank, surviving in a spread condition and standing to a height of 0.6 - 0.8 m. This enclosure (8) has a rectangular platform, probably a building site, in an elevated position against its E side. To the S, is a long strip of land (7), c. 80 x 15 m, following the S lip of the spur. It is unclear whether its bounding scarps are Medieval in origin or whether they relate in part to a former field boundary shown on the 1839 map¹. NE of (8) an enclosure (9) has a building-like hollow at its ~~NE~~ end. It seems possible that enclosures (8) and (9) did not serve a domestic function; they may have been small paddocks containing barns. There are several other features along the NW border of the spur: hollows at (10) and (11) may be the location of former structures. A terrace at (12) may be the site of a track providing access between the main trackway and features (8) to (10). Close to (11) the boundaries of properties (1) and (4) splay sharply outwards as the trackway passes between them: this may be the site of an

outgang over which structures represented by features (10) to (11) were later placed.

Blakemore is a small deserted Medieval settlement comprising perhaps about half-a-dozen individual units. It is situated on well drained elevated land above a poorly drained valley and had access to a wide range of habitats. The dominant nature of properties (1) and (4) both in plan and on the ground cannot be disputed; it is possible that they represent an earlier core around which other structures accumulated or that they have some social and economic pre-eminence. A good working model would have (4) as the capital messuage of a small manor with tenant properties gathered around it. The massive scarping around (4) and its oval plan could point at a pre-medieval origin for this element.

REFERENCES

- (1) Cattistock Tithe Map and Award 1839. Dorset Record Office
- (2) J Hutchins, **The History and Antiquities of the County of Dorset**, 1870 (3rd edition), vol 4, p 3.