

EARLY FIELD SYSTEMS AND ENCLOSURES ON SELBORNE HILL

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ABSTRACT

From the Middle Ages onwards Selborne Hill has been used as common pasture and woodland and has formed a key resource for the settlement of Selborne and its surrounding farms. During the winters of 1999, 2000 and 2001 a survey of earthworks lying within the woodland on Selborne Hill was undertaken for an MA thesis in Field Archaeology at King Alfred's College, Winchester. This study revealed the existence of early field systems which predate the documented land use indicating a landscape very different to that of the medieval common pasture and woodland. During subsequent winters further fieldwork has been carried out in order to produce a more complete picture of a landscape of prehistoric and Roman fields and enclosures. This survey suggests that the extent of pre-medieval land use and settlement close to Selborne and across the Clay-with-flints of the eastern Hampshire may have been previously underestimated.

INTRODUCTION

This archaeological landscape survey focuses on Selborne Common (centred on SU 735333), an area of 98ha (243 acres) of wooded common land owned by the National Trust, lying 0.5km to the west of the village of Selborne in east Hampshire (Fig. 1). Beyond the boundary of the common, limited survey work was also undertaken to add detail and context to the archaeology of the main hilltop block which is under consideration here.

Historic documents held in the archives at Magdalen College, Oxford (MCA), Gilbert White's House, Selborne (GWA) and by the National Trust (NTA) make it clear the common land on Selborne Hill, characterised primarily by wood-pasture, has an ancient origin.

Customary rights allowing grazing and wood collecting are claimed in charters relating to Selborne Priory from the 13th century (Macray 1891, 16, 55, 150) and are thereafter referred to in various manorial records (e.g. GWA 'An Agreement to enclose part of Selborne Wood' 1757) through to the commons registration process of the late 1960s (Commons Registration Act 1965). It is apparent that 'commoning' in the form of livestock grazing and wood-manship has been predominant for nearly a thousand years ensuring the continuity of a stable semi-natural habitat structure. It is not unreasonable to project these rights backwards and to suggest land use and habitat continuity from the later centuries of the Saxon period. The result is a relatively undisturbed land surface that has protected earlier archaeological features and landscape patterns. Having been under the ownership of the National Trust since 1932 and subsequently designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in the 1950s, the site now has a range of additional statutory protection and has avoided the impacts of modern intensive land management and stands out as an area that offers good archaeological and earthwork preservation. This protection also means that, unless consent has been granted, intrusive investigations are not permitted. This survey relied almost entirely on observations of the land surface, although there was an opportunity to look at a ditch in cross-section in one of the many tree throw-holes.

Above the steepest slopes on Selborne Common inconspicuous earthworks reveal episodes of land use that predate the common wood and pasture of the early Middle Ages (Fig. 2). These earthworks are mainly lynchetts and low banks, which mark out a field system that was clearly once extensive across the

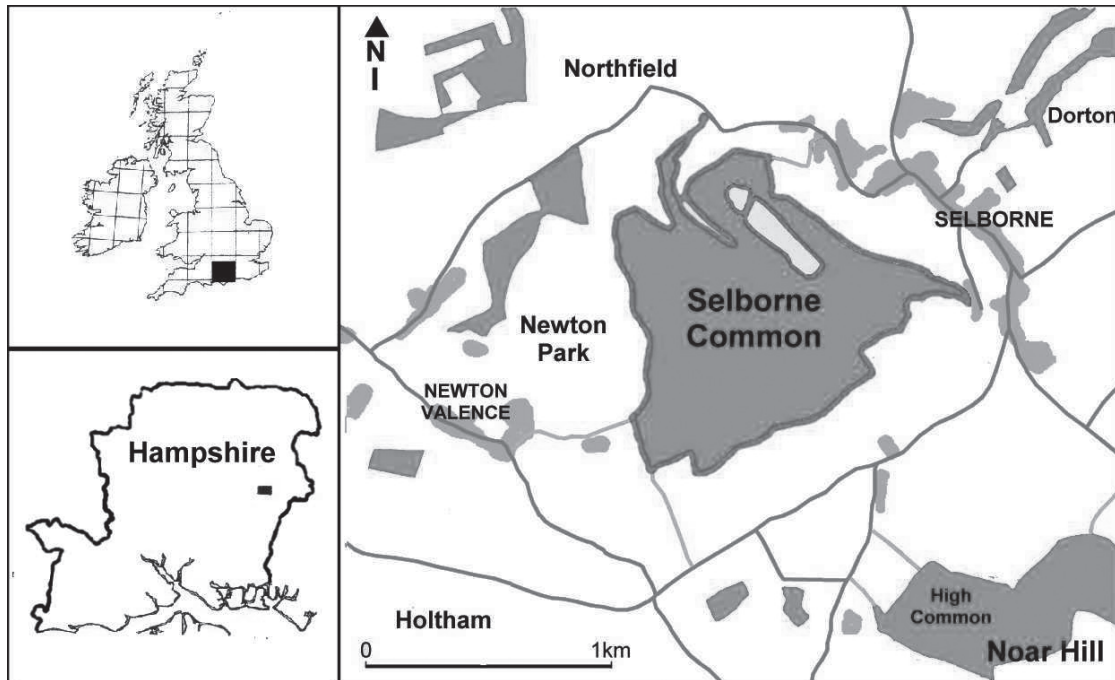


Fig. 1 Selborne Common, site location with surrounding woodland and settlements

wider landscape beyond the modern limits of Selborne Common. While a substantial area of subtle earthworks has been protected and preserved by the common land, beyond the boundary these features and the early land use patterns have been largely obliterated, blurred or buried. The wooded hilltop acts as a window through which the arrangement of this early landscape and its topography can be reconstructed. The fieldwork looked closely at the stratigraphy and morphology of the earthworks from which there is good reasons to believe that the preserved pattern marks out the remnants of prehistoric and Roman fields and enclosures. Boundary features, enclosures and pits relating to medieval land use which overlay and cut across the earlier landscape on some parts of the site have proved important for the purposes of relative dating.

Although fragmentary remains and isolated features survive in the wider landscape and appear in the archaeological record (for example contour lynchets at SU720325, 1km west of Selborne Common (Hampshire Historic

Environment Record 17398)) and lynchets at SU722339, 1km north-west (HHER 17405), large blocks of prehistoric field systems have not been detected along or directly adjacent to the Hangers in east Hampshire. A key factor here is the limitations of aerial survey along the eastern margin of the Hampshire chalkland. Extensive deposits of Clay-with-flints (Fig. 5) and the wooded nature of this landscape obscure much of the archaeology that might normally be visible (Shennan 1985, 73. Moffet 1988, 11–23). Recent work for English Heritage (Young 2011) has revealed previously unrecorded tracts of prehistoric Celtic fields in east Hampshire, but mostly across chalkland to the south-west of the Selborne area. Within woodland along the Hangers, fieldwork is more suitable for detecting early earthwork remains (Ball 2001; Webb 2001; Berkshire Archaeological Services 2006, 23).

The significance of woodland in the pre-conquest landscape is not in dispute; there is little doubt that woodland and waste was extensive across the district at the end of the



Fig. 2 Plan of early field patterns preserved within the study area on Selborne Hill. Medieval and post-medieval bank and ditch boundaries around the common land and internal enclosures are marked by a thick line

Saxon period when the Domesday survey was undertaken (Welldon Finn 1962, 322–3). This is supported by documentation relating to assarts (woodland clearances) during the 13th century that accompanied the disafforestation of substantial tracts of the royal forest of Woolmer and Alice Holt as it was reduced to a core area on the Lower Greensand and Gault Clay to the east (Yates 1979, 93–112). The dominance of woodland, forest and waste in Selborne's local history has encour-

aged a mistaken belief that the modern-day remnants of semi-natural ancient woodlands have unbroken primary, prehistoric origins. This is reinforced by the fact that Selborne has been archaeologically 'quiet' for prehistoric and Romano-British settlement, in comparison to downland landscapes where a number of early field systems and settlements sites, such as Chalton (Cunliffe 1973, 174–90) and the landscape radiating out from Danebury (Palmer 1984) are well researched.

The fieldwork on Selborne Hill has successfully subjected an area of woodland, hitherto considered archaeologically 'blank', to a detailed survey and demonstrated a sense of the intensity of land use prior to the re-establishment of woodland during the post-Roman period.

METHODOLOGY

As noted above, Selborne Common is principally under woodland and scrub of varying densities, which poses major constraints upon the methods and accuracy of earthwork surveying (Bowden 1999, 138–9). Most of the earthworks only become visible and measurable when the ground vegetation has died down during the winter. Much of the fieldwork predates the general availability of LiDAR (Light Detection and Ranging), which has since proved to be a very effective tool for detecting earthwork archaeology in woodland, for example Savernake Forest (Bathe & Ramsay 2010, 186–256). Given the constraints and the large area that needed to be covered the survey commenced with a thorough walk-over survey to determine the extent and general patterning of the earthworks. Measurements were then taken across the woodland from control points at the margins, or from accurately mapped features within the site, to form a grid for plotting the surface archaeology. As the complexity of the earthworks and grid developed, re-surveying was a necessary element of the fieldwork to confirm the positions, patterns and stratigraphic relationships. Features were mapped in the field at a scale of 1:1250. The accuracy of Global Positioning Systems (GPS) in this environment is variable and limited, although some of the original plotting has been confirmed or adjusted recently with a handheld 'Garmin eTrex vista' GPS in open areas, or where the woodland canopy is thin. It was only where accuracy was between 5m (the best that could be achieved) to 15m that GPS has been used to support the survey. This survey corresponds to a 'Level 2 Landscape Survey' (Bowden 1999). As far as cartographic precision is concerned, it has to be stressed that although the maps give a relatively accurate picture of the patterning of

earthworks across the Common, they may not have been precisely plotted.

During subsequent visits, new features were (and are) often recorded because of changes in vegetation density. For example, where dense 'thicket-stage' ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) has developed into open 'pole-stage' stands, previously hidden surface features often become visible. Very dense scrub and ground vegetation did prevent good observation in a few areas, so much so that future fieldwork will certainly bring to light additional archaeological elements and features.

From the fieldwork and the mapping it is possible to determine some relative chronologies and a broad understanding of the landscape stratigraphy. In a few cases where medieval charters or later documents and maps are sufficiently detailed, tentative dating can be applied to earthworks associated with the management of the common land and the surrounding landscape. Most of these documents are held at Magdalen College, Oxford. The college succeeded to the lands and manor of Selborne in 1486 when Selborne Priory closed; the documents have been translated by Macray (1891). Other records concerning Selborne Common, mainly post-medieval, have found their way into the archives of the Hampshire Record Office, the National Trust and Gilbert White's House, Selborne.

GEOLOGY & TOPOGRAPHY

Rising 100m above the village, Selborne Hill, on which the Common is located, lies at the northern end of a series of steep tree-clad chalk escarpments and promontories which, together with a companion chain of woodlands running along the Upper Greensand escarpment 1km to the east, form the 'Wealden Edge Hangers', more commonly known as the 'East Hampshire Hangers' (Fig. 3). Selborne Hill, lies between the villages of Selborne to the east and Newton Valence to the west. Selborne Common is very roughly triangular in shape, with the western border following the Selborne/Newton Valence parish boundary, the north-eastern boundary running along the foot of the chalk escarpment and the south-

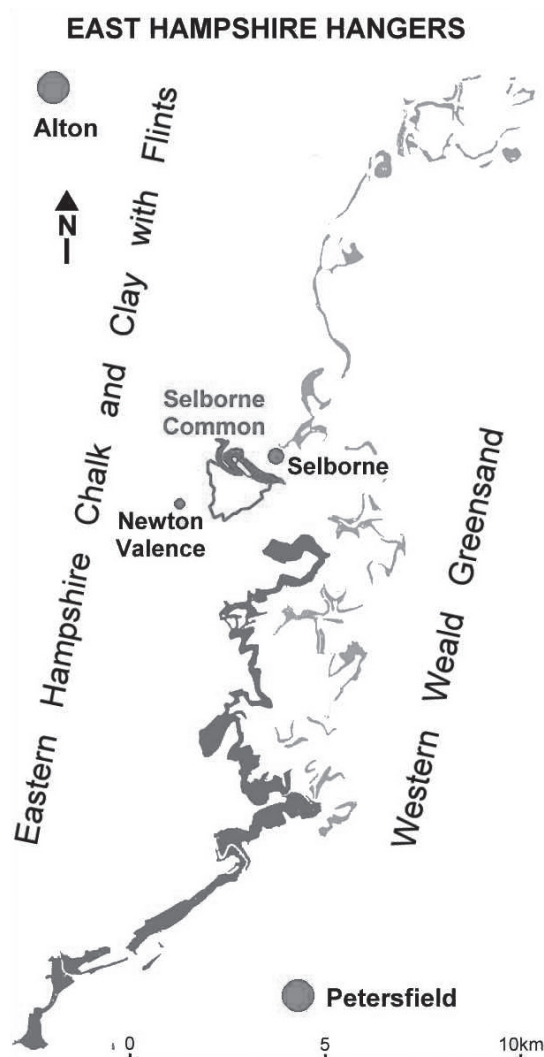


Fig. 3 Selborne Common and the East Hampshire Hangers lying along the chalk and greensand and escarpments

eastern border overlooking a broad shallow dry valley which separates Selborne Hill from Noar Hill. Each side of the 'triangle' is around 1.5km in length.

The contour map of the area shows that Selborne Common (Fig. 4) lies partially over a north-east facing escarpment which rises from 130m to 200m above Ordnance Datum (OD). This steeper part of the site is known as Selborne Hanger. At its northern end the Hanger turns

westwards where it is incised by a narrow, steep sided dry valley known as Coneycroft Bottom. This valley forms a narrow embayment behind and parallel to the main escarpment, thereby turning the northern end of the Hanger into a promontory. The steep hanger escarpment and valley sides, with gradients greater than 1:5, occupy about 20ha of the site. Behind, and to the west of the escarpment, a narrow plateau runs back towards Newton Valence. It gently slopes away north and south into broad dry valleys which are occupied by neighbouring arable fields and some pasture. The greater part of the Common is located on this plateau and the gentle slopes behind the Hanger and Coneycroft Bottom. Selborne Hill is, in effect, the eastern end of a low flat 3.5km long ridge, which runs back at an approximate right angle to the chalk escarpment. The hilltop settlement and farmland of Newton Valence lie upon the western end of this ridge.

The solid geology of Selborne Hill (Fig. 5) consists of calcareous Middle Chalk overlaying Lower Chalk with a capping of acidic Clay-with-flints drift deposits. At its deepest the clay cap is probably around 3m to 4m. The chalk beneath seems to undulate considerably and comes very close to the surface of the plateau clay in places. As the plateau begins to slope away the clay cap thins and is replaced by shallow calcareous 'rendzina' soils on the hillsides (NTA Biological Survey, 1982).

ANCIENT LANDSCAPE PATTERNS

Across Selborne Hill and within the boundary of the common land, the outlines of early fields and enclosures are traced out by a network of linear surface features. Earthwork stratigraphy, particularly at the margins of the site where an old bank and ditch marks the boundary of the common land, demonstrates that this set of fields is part of an early landscape pattern predating the documented medieval and recent land use where extensive and unenclosed wood-pasture existed in combination with woodland and coppice compartments. Except for three long-standing internal enclosures, which still exist, there is no documentary evidence to indicate that the broad rolling

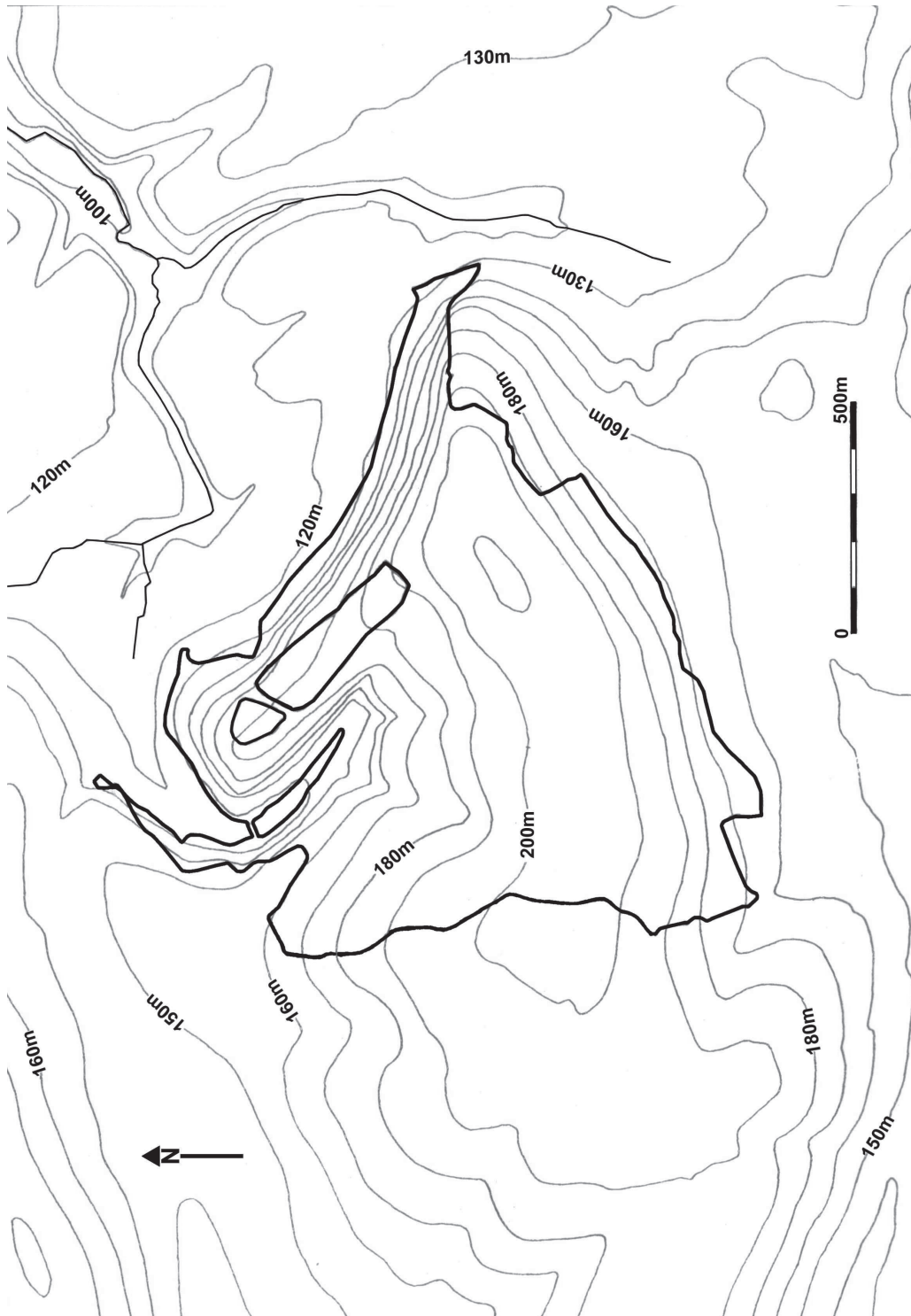


Fig. 4 Contour map of Selborne Hill



Fig. 5 Geology of Selborne Hill (above) and the wider east Hampshire area (below)

hilltop was subjected to long-term cultivation during or after the Middle Ages. For the most part, the field system and features described here are those that cannot be accounted for in the records that survive from the 13th century onwards, or from maps beginning in the 17th century. Until now this earlier landscape has been unrecognised and overlooked, mainly because of the dense woodland and scrub which covers most of the site.

With woodland and scrub hindering visibility, only short sections of earthworks and glimpses of other features are revealed. Casual observation does not encourage the impression that there is a complex pattern of early land division. However, despite the difficulties of fieldwork in a woodland environment, a picture of a former landscape of fields and enclosures defined by lynchets and low banks has emerged (Figs 2, 7 & 14). In addition to this extensive field system, a possible prehistoric barrow (Fig. 9) and two previously unrecognised 'cross-ridge' earthworks have been investigated. The arrangement of large pits (mainly quarries for chalk) scattered across the centre of the common land suggest that they are associated with the early field system rather than, as might be supposed, more recent chalk digging activities by 'commoners' exercising their common rights (Fig. 13). At the northern end of the Hanger, a field known as 'Coneycroft', one of the three modern internal enclosures, occupies the space within an earlier and larger enclosure defined by a degraded ditch and bank, which itself appears to overlie faint traces of strip-like cultivation (Fig. 18). Here, the earthwork stratigraphy seems to show at least three phases of land use. While the pre-medieval landscape is the main theme of this paper the field-name and surviving archives for Coneycroft have encouraged speculation about land use during the Middle Ages and this is explored in relation to the earthworks.

The layout of the early field system surveyed on Selborne Common, now preserved as upstanding and often very slight linear earthworks is depicted on Fig. 2. Across this part of the hill, the woodland protects a set of former fields and enclosures which have similarities to those described by Richards (1978, 38) as 'aggregate' or 'accreted', i.e. individual fields being a variety of shapes and sizes and arranged

in discrete groupings. These field groups (Fig. 6) are described in turn below. With the preservation being good enough to allow blocks of fields to be distinguished, separately created clusters of fields radiating out from a core, and possibly primary, hill-top units are evident. This may indicate that land division and demarcation developed in a gradual or episodic fashion.

There are signs that some fields underwent subdivision along the southern slope where a belt of strip-like fields and terraces developed along the upper margins of larger enclosures (Fig. 7). Overall the field pattern across Selborne Hill is quite different in character to that of the medieval and recent agrarian landscape known from maps and documents, and from the remnants surviving in today's countryside beyond the boundary of Selborne Common. When the common land itself came to be defined, possibly from the 13th century onwards, the new boundary bank which still functions as the legal boundary, cut across numerous earthwork boundaries and is a key aspect of the landscape stratigraphy and critical for relative dating.

THE HILLTOP PLATEAU

The fossilised fields stretching out along the plateau on the highest part of Selborne Hill and roughly corresponding with the Clay-with-flints that caps the hilltop stand out as a 'core' grouping within the study area (Fig. 6). At the eastern end of the plateau, individual fields have a square character which changes to a more rectangular form in the central area. They are set out within and along a number of east-west linear boundaries that align with the low curving ridge and contours extending along the hilltop. The field system continued westwards along the plateau beyond the modern boundary of the Common, but to what extent and in what form is unclear because of intensive cultivation across this westerly extension of the hilltop.

Linear, axial earthworks

The linear boundaries marking the northern and southern edges of the 'plateau' fields are

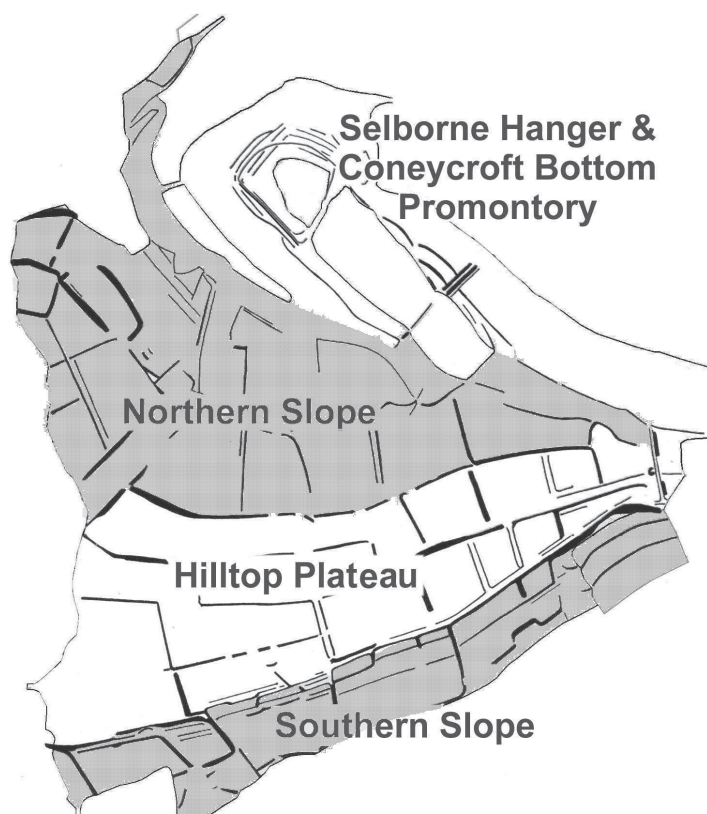


Fig. 6 Field groups/blocks

principally represented by lynchets, which vary in form and height along their lengths. Marking the northern side of the 'plateau' block is a sturdy 850m long lynchet boundary of between 1 and 3m in height. Although, at first sight, it appears to be a single continuous bank, a number of gaps and changes in height break the linear uniformity of the earthwork, particularly where cross boundaries intersect or chalk pits have been excavated against the lynchet.

The southern edge of the 'plateau' block is less uniform because there are sections of closely spaced lynchets on parallel alignments. Along this edge examination and mapping was difficult owing to the dense holly and brambles, so in some places paths were cut through the scrub to determine the presence and location of the boundary features. At the eastern end there is a double lynchet that clearly defines a

track that ran along the southern edge of a set of square and sub-rectangular enclosures. The upper scarp along this lynchetted track is little more than 0.5m high, while the lynchet on the lower side is appreciably deeper, forming a 2m scarp. The central and western parts of the southern boundary are more complex as the double lynchet gives way to a band of multiple banks and narrow terraces on the down-slope side – these are described more fully below in the section on the 'Southern Slope'.

With a few exceptions the boundary earthworks that mark out individual fields and enclosures across the level plateau area are generally insignificant and easily overlooked. They are often only detectable as slight changes in ground level and breaks of slope little more than 0.2 – 0.3m in height, but because of their linear character they can be traced, with perseverance, running through areas of dense

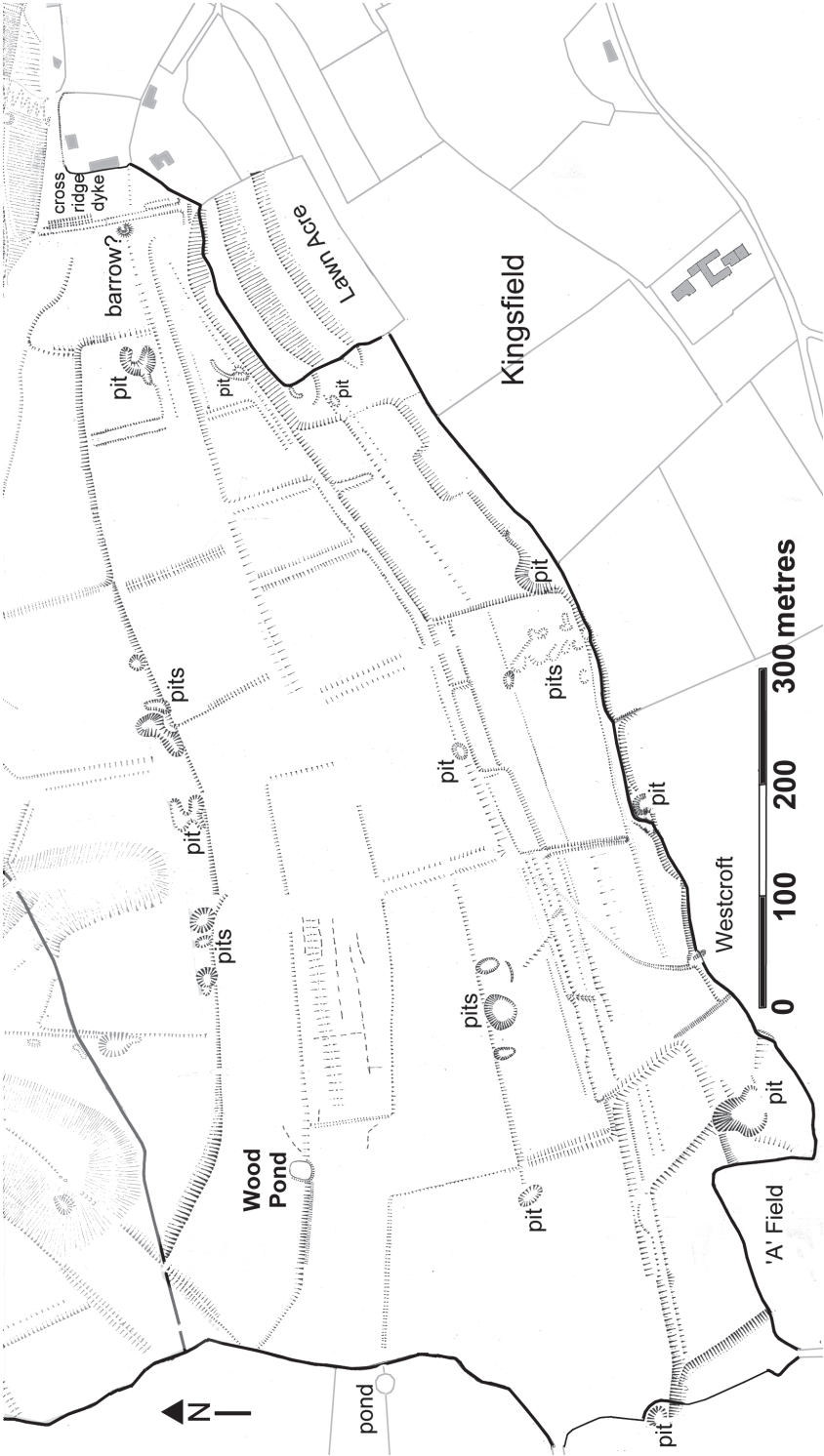


Fig. 7 Plan of earthworks marking the field system on the plateau core area and southern slope along with pits and the barrow and ditch at the eastern end



Fig. 8 Lynchet earthwork running up to Wood Pond looking from the west

scrub. Recently, as scrub has been cleared and grazing reintroduced, sections of an earthwork marking the central spine of the plateau field complex has become more accessible. There are indications that this defines a central ridgeway of about 20m width that extended westwards for at least 400m and possibly as far as 800m from the eastern end of the plateau.

Not all lynchets and banks along the plateau are weakly defined features, some display very upstanding profiles. For example, the 100m section of lynchet running west from Wood Pond forms a strong 2m scarp with a low ridge or bank and an irregular shallow ditch running along its upper edge (Fig. 8). A bowl forming a dewpond cuts into the lynchet. The importance of ponds as drinking places for livestock depastured on Selborne Common is recorded from the 13th century (Macray

1891, 52), therefore it is reasonable to suggest a Saxon or medieval construction date for the dewpond. The pond's position may well have been carefully considered to take advantage of the older linear earthwork to help catch surface water runoff.

At the narrow eastern end of the 'plateau field block' the three principal east-west linear lynchets define two rows of fields. Despite having a large chalk pit excavated on its southern margin, the last field in the northern row was originally a distinctly square enclosure accompanied and bypassed by a lynchetted track on its southern edge. The southern row terminates as an elongated, tapering and open-ended enclosure. As the plateau widens to the west, the northern and southern linear boundaries move apart as they follow the contours along this broader section of the plateau. To

the east side of Wood Pond, where this block of fields is over 300m wide, the lack of discernable cross (north-south) boundaries suggest a rectangular plot in contrast to the square pattern of enclosure at the eastern end of the plateau. At the very western end of the plateau area some of the boundaries may have been lost, or are too slight to allow a complete and confident reconstruction of the field layout.

Cross boundaries and enclosure morphology

The internal cross boundaries running perpendicular to the linear lynchets and banks take the form of both shallow lynchets and very low flattened and often broad banks. At the eastern end the low cross-banks are between 6m and 20m wide. They could be considered as broad headlands or baulks, or perhaps more plausibly as lanes or droveways between the fields, possibly being originally defined by paired hedges or fence-lines. There are some very vague topographical indications that these wide ridges 'opened out' into the lynched track flanking the southern edge at the eastern end of the plateau fields, lending merit to the idea that they served as access tracks as well as boundaries. Cross boundaries were difficult to detect in the western part of the block, so the recorded field pattern here is probably incomplete. Where all the surrounding boundaries can be traced, they describe square and rectangular enclosures of between 0.6ha and 1.4ha.

Ploughing took place during World War II to the east of Wood Pond and across the centre of the plateau block in an area now occupied by an open grassy glade. The commoners were permitted to plough 3ha in an effort to eradicate scrub for the improvement of the grazing (Tavener 1957, 36 and former commoner E. Lucas, pers. comm.). This probably accounts for the ploughed down appearance of the eastward extension of the 'Wood Pond' lynchet in comparison with its upstanding counterpart on the west side of the pond (see above), which lay outside the area ploughed in the 1940s. Periodically when the vegetation has been grazed down in this glade another east – west ridge is visible and may indicate a lengthways subdivision of the rectangular plot to the east of Wood Pond.

Cross-dyke and barrow

The eastern end of the outer margins of the field system closely follows the topography as the plateau tapers to a spur. A shallow linear ditch or 'cross-dyke', 140m long, runs across the ridge and appears to act as a terminal feature to the 'plateau' field block, preventing it extending fully to the end of the spur (Fig. 9). Each end of the ditch is well-defined and terminates where the hill abruptly steepens. A vague path, probably not contemporary with the cross-dyke, once continued down the Hanger slope from its northern end on a zig-zagging alignment for 20m to join two other down-slope paths.

For most of its length the 'cross-dyke' is a shallow broad feature, no more than 0.5m in depth and between 5m and 8m in width. At the southern end however, the ditch becomes slightly deeper and more pronounced, resembling a shallow hollow way. It terminates with a splay where the mouth of the ditch opens out onto a terraced track running across and forming a stop to the dyke. The track presumably acted as an access way running past the southern end of the cross-dyke from the field system on the west side out onto the spur on the east side. It is not clear how far the track extended along the spur because a modern house and garden now occupy this section of hillside.

There is a single low 10m wide flattened-down bank flanking the eastern side of the ditch at its northern end. The presence of a former parallel bank on the eastern side of the ditch is further emphasised by a section of a slightly more upstanding and narrower bank at the southern end. The bank appears to be missing along the central part of earthwork having been either levelled, removed or possibly not constructed in the first place.

Along the western side of the ditch, just south of the midway point, is a hollowed-out, sub-circular horseshoe shaped mound that opens into the cross-dyke. A major feature in the centre of the earthwork is a large depression in which stands a 100–200 year old beech tree (Fig. 10). There are a number of lesser cuttings and depressions on the side of the cross-dyke that complicate the topography of the mound further.

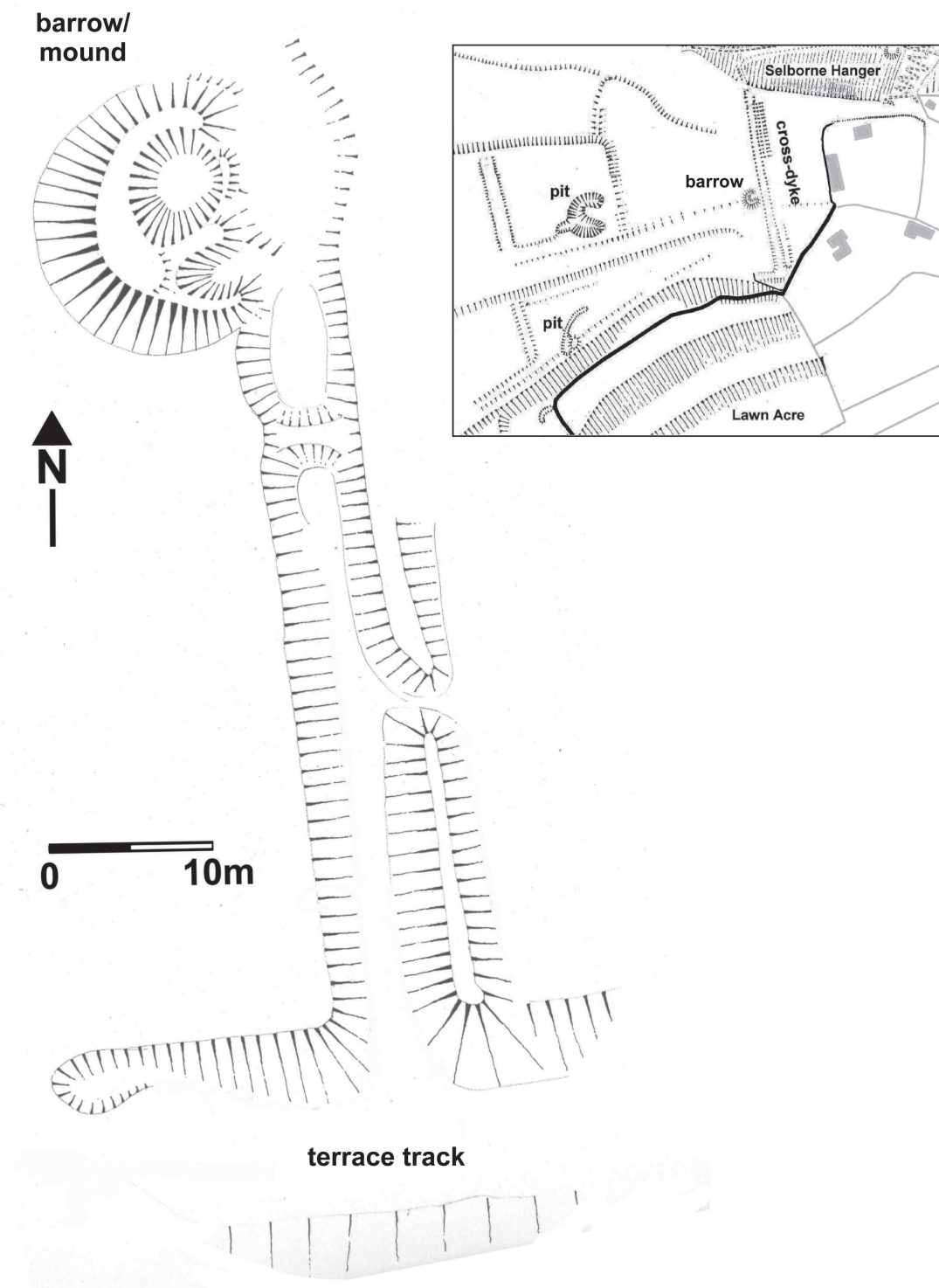


Fig. 9 Plan of barrow and southern end of cross-dyke with inset location map



Fig. 10 Circular 'barrow' earthwork viewed from the north showing central depression

The mound is 16m in diameter and at its highest point on the southern part of the rim it stands at 2m high. There is no sign of a ring ditch around the base. Bare patches indicate that the mound is constructed with Clay-with-flints, possibly coming from one of the numerous pits cut into the plateau. In all likelihood this is a small barrow that has been mutilated by an antiquarian investigation and predates the tree growing in its centre. The cross-dyke has cut into the mound, indicating that it post-dates the barrow, although because of damage to the mound the sequence cannot be confirmed.

Although trees and scrub now obscure the hilltop spur and the views from it, in earlier times when the high ground was more open the mound and cross-dyke would have been in a very prominent position enjoying a panorama across the western Weald. There would have also been a line of sight along the ridgeline of Selborne Hill and along to the promontory at the north-west end of the Hanger. In a more

open landscape the mound probably benefited from all-round visibility. If it is prehistoric and predates the field system, the barrow may have acted as a focal point for the axial boundary and double lynchet track running through the centre of the 'plateau' field block. Examination of the eastern terminals of the east-west field boundaries suggests that they curve round in a way that is respecting the 'cross-ridge' ditch; there is no evidence that cultivation or the field pattern cut through or across this large prominent boundary.

SOUTHERN SLOPE

The field pattern preserved along the south-facing slope of the hill takes the form of a set of irregular and loosely trapezoidal-shaped enclosures with a distinct band of strip cultivation along the upper northern margin where closely spaced contour lynchets mark out terraces and trackways. At first sight, and

in isolation, the strip cultivation could easily be ascribed a medieval date, although, their stratigraphy suggests a comfortable fit with the broader fossilised field pattern.

Upper terraces

Despite patches of dense scrub making accurate surveying difficult, the alignment of a complex arrangement of scarps and cross-banks was plotted along the upper slope. A band varying between two to four terraces, together with lynched tracks form an irregular linear pattern along this upper margin. The terrace strips vary in width from 6m wide to 35m wide. It seems that lengthways sub-divisions and realignments of the long boundaries have created the very narrow cultivated strips which, in some instances, may have also acted as paths or access tracks. Individual terrace plots terminate with slightly diagonal scarps and ridges, which signify the point where the plough was turned about. These earthed-up ridges act as subdivisions across the terraces and perhaps marked a change of ownership and/or cropping. Reflecting the intensity and duration of cultivation and the gradient, the lynchets that flank these terraces vary in height and scale from very minor 0.1m high features to scarps that rise more than 1m in height. Whether some of the units of terracing were used for habitation is uncertain – the strongly sub-divided rectangular platforms along the central section are of interest in this respect, although none display obvious surface evidence of occupation.

Lower slope

The larger field units below the band of terraces are flanked by sizable lynchets or broad flattened banks running down-hill at a slight diagonal to the slope. There is a marked change in the down-slope alignments that disrupts the symmetry of the hillside pattern – the western block have boundaries aligned to the south-east, while the eastern set of fields run almost north – south. Below the conspicuous terracing on the upper slope, faint contour lynchets indicate that the lower sections of the larger field-units were subdivided and ploughed in rectangular blocks or ‘lands’.

Earthworks at the margins of the Common

Today fields at each end of the southern perimeter of Selbourne Common cause the modern boundary to turn uphill at 90 degrees to the contour alignment (Fig. 7). Lawn Acre and ‘A’ Field, have the hallmarks of medieval assarts that were carved out of the corners of the common waste. Here the bank and ditch marking the edge of the common land crosses over and cuts through a number of contour lynchets, thus highlighting in cross-section the profile of earlier scarps and terraces (Fig. 11).

Across Lawn Acre, two lynchet scarps and three terraces are visible at the eastern end of the Common. They once extended a little further along the slope – the ends of the two lynchets tail off in a curve where the plough was pulled round and now form prominent earthworks on the common land side of the boundary. The earliest map of the common from 1618 (the ‘Draft Map of Selborne Wood’, (MCA 131/41)) shows the line of the boundary between the field and the common on its modern alignment and provides a *terminus ante quem* for the construction of the ditch and bank which has cut through and shortened the terraces by around 20m. Continued cultivation in Lawn Acre until the late 19th century (HRO, 9M71) has changed the alignment of the lynchets and they no longer line up with the fossilised end sections on the common.

Along the next section of boundary to the south-west, some of the arable strips of the adjacent medieval common field (Kingsfield) could well have been orientated ‘end on’ and may have once extended further up the hillside, the modern boundary having again cut across the ends of the strips. One strip looks to have terminated higher up the slope than its neighbours, creating a recess in the alignment of the lynchet just inside the common’s boundary.

Further along, at the western end of the lower slope, some of the early boundaries preserved on the common land appear to have relationships with ploughed down ridges and soil marks on adjacent arable land. Aerial photographs of Westcroft and its neighbour, ‘A’ Field, forming one large arable field, show some of these



Fig. 11 Looking south-eastwards at the eastern boundary of 'A' Field. In the centre of the picture the down-slope bank crosses an earlier field boundary highlighting the profile of the contour lynchet. Within the common the lynchet is well preserved while on the field side it has been virtually ploughed away

linear soil-marks running up to the boundary. The air photographs that capture and hint at these external field patterns are limited, but a set (RAF Odiham 135/92) that partly cover this area are worthy of attention (transcribed to Fig. 12).

Two of the linear soil-marks define former hedge-lines that divided Westcroft into three fields (they were removed in the mid 19th century) and a third is the former hedgerow boundary that enclosed 'A' Field, which was grubbed out in the 1960s. These boundaries were mapped in 1678 for the Lewis Andrews survey (MCA, CP/3/15 & Map 23) and again in 1842 for the Tithe Award (21M65/F7/201/1&2). At least a further four linear soil marks indicate that Westcroft had once been set out into long rectangular fields and smaller square enclosures, a pattern that had disap-

peared by the time of Lewis Andrews' survey of 1677. Three of the soil-marks continue on the common as linear earthworks, possibly indicating that medieval encroachment had happened on the lower slope. Access to a large chalk pit seems to have influenced the arrangement at the corner point where Westcroft, and 'A Field' meet. To the east, in the field formerly known as 'Hither Westcroft', three linear soil marks terminate below a large sinuous lynchet running along the northern margin. Here the border of the common land aligns itself with this substantial lynchet, the bank and ditch boundary meanders along the face of the older embankment which it clearly post-dates. During the Middle Ages this large lynchet earthwork was already a major feature in the landscape and marked a practical margin between the fields and common wood.

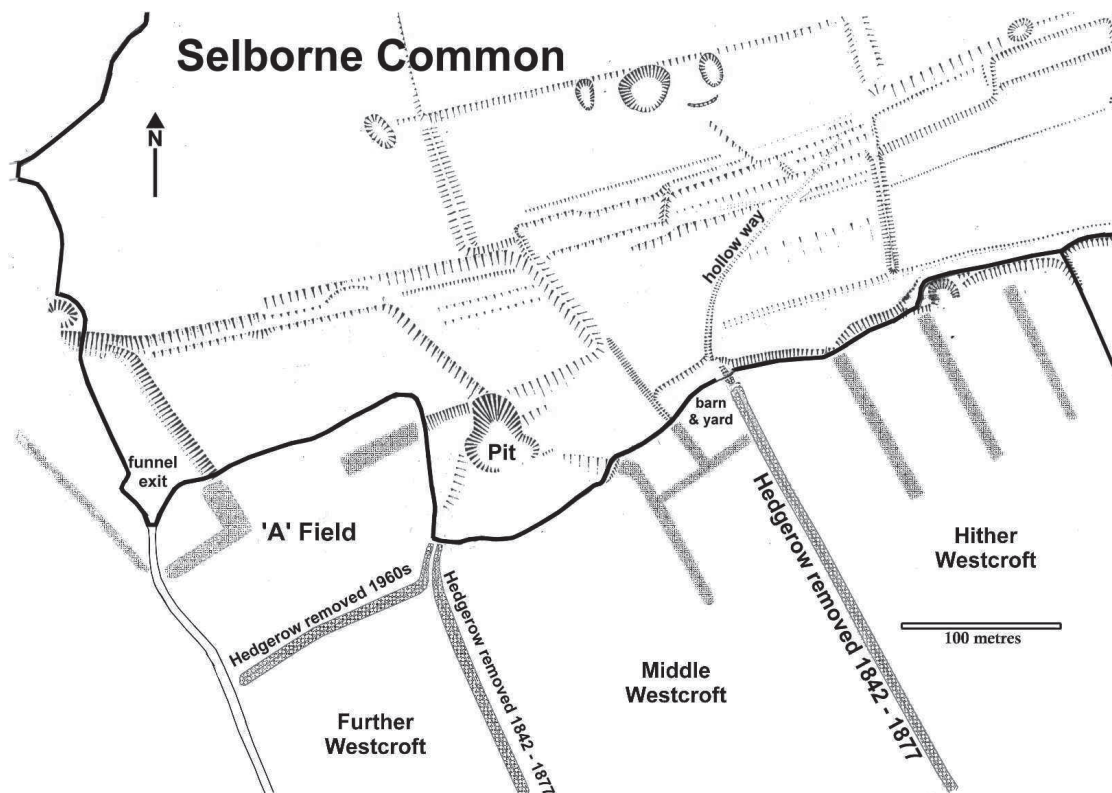


Fig. 12 Detail of earthworks and field system in south western corner of Selborne Common with field boundary and trackway alignments across Westcroft and 'A' Field which are visible on air photographs and in the field as plough-levelled earthworks

Like Lawn Acre, two lynchets have been cut through and are now emphasised in cross-section by the earthwork bank around the margin of 'A' Field (Fig. 11). In this field the lynchets have been almost completely plough-levelled by medieval and later cultivation. Unlike Lawn Acre, these truncated lynchets can be considered to be elements of the older prehistoric/Roman field system and part of the large field units along the southern slope. Clearly the old field pattern did not influence the setting out of the medieval assart-shaped field in this corner of the common and by the Middle Ages the earlier field system lying along the hillside seems to have been no longer relevant.

Along with the neighbouring assarts and the sinuous common land boundary indicating medieval land allotment, the 'funnel exit'

at the south-west corner of the common is a distinctive structure found at the margins of common land dating to the Middle Ages. It too has no apparent relationship to the earlier field pattern and earthworks, despite the fact that they form very clear and prominent lynchet scarps along this section of hillside.

A hollow-way curves north-eastwards up slope from the middle of the Westcroft boundary and cuts through several terraces creating an unconformity across the pattern of earlier fields on the hillside. This is associated with a 'barn and yard' situated at the edge of the common (recorded in the Tithe Award, 1842 (21M65/F7/201/1&2)). It was a route across the common that was in use until the early 20th century and linked this distant and detached area of arable land at Westcroft to the main farm holding at the north end of Selborne village (1st & 2nd (1877/1910)

edition Ordnance Survey 1:2500 maps) allowing the movement of livestock, equipment and materials between the sites.

NORTHERN SLOPE

Bounding the northern side of the 'plateau' field area, a distinctly different set of irregular and sub-rectangular fields occupied the north facing slope of Selborne Hill extending in an arc from the top of the Hanger escarpment, around the south-western side of Coneycroft Bottom to the north-west corner of the Common (Fig. 14). Where the ground slopes towards Coneycroft Bottom and its side valleys, well-developed lynchets mark the edges of these enclosures, while on the flatter areas low weathered-down banks form some boundaries. Here the enclosures are appreciably bigger than the more regular and rectangular fields on the plateau, 1.5ha to 2.3ha being the size range of the discernible and complete sub-rectangular plots. There are also discrete areas of smaller plots and strip fields along the western edge of the Coneycroft valley. The medieval boundary that cuts across the earlier pattern of fields at the western edge of the common land is stratigraphically significant as extant medieval documents date the construction of this earthwork. Also, an internal bank and ditch running from Newton Park towards the Wadden is known to have been constructed

in 1757 to create a compartment in the north-west corner where underwood/coppice could be grown away from the attention of commoner's livestock (GWA). This boundary also cuts through several linear earthworks that mark early field margins.

The eastern and central section

At the eastern end above the Hanger escarpment, one lynchet curves and deviates away from the north-eastern corner of the 'plateau' field block, reinforcing an impression that the strong lynchet earthwork marking the boundary between the northern slope and the plateau was a key, and perhaps early, lineament. The lynchets striking off northwards from this east-west linear run onto the spurs between three valleys that rise up from Coneycroft Bottom. The individual field units fit into and respect the topography, each being an irregular shape with a combination of straight borders defined by lynchets and curvilinear margins that follow valley edges.

Another significant feature of this area is a distinct line of large pits (Fig. 13) stretching out below the lynchet marking the boundary with the plateau. As with many pits on the higher parts of the hill they are deep enough to reach the chalk below the Clay-with-flints cap. Their position suggests that they respect the linear boundary making it possible that they are broadly contemporary and integrated with

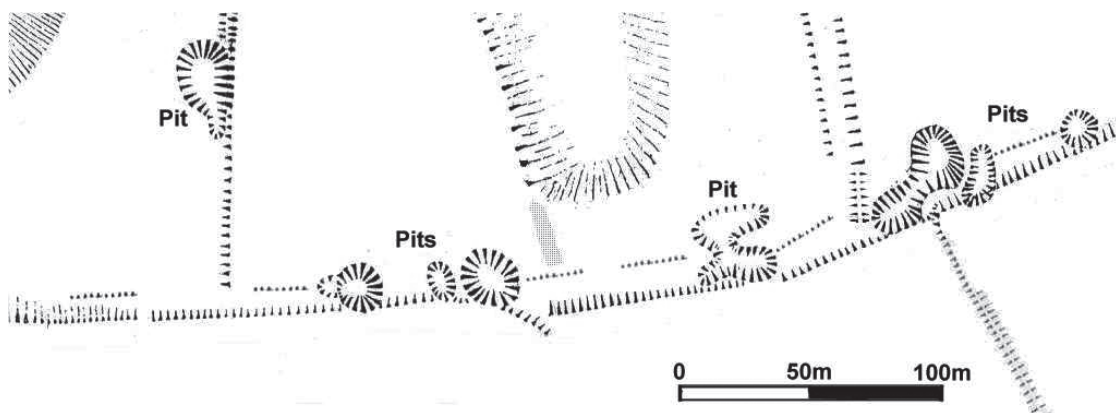


Fig. 13 Line of pits along the margin of the plateau fields and the northern block. A faint and fragmented ridge below the main lynchet boundary suggests a track running along the lower slope

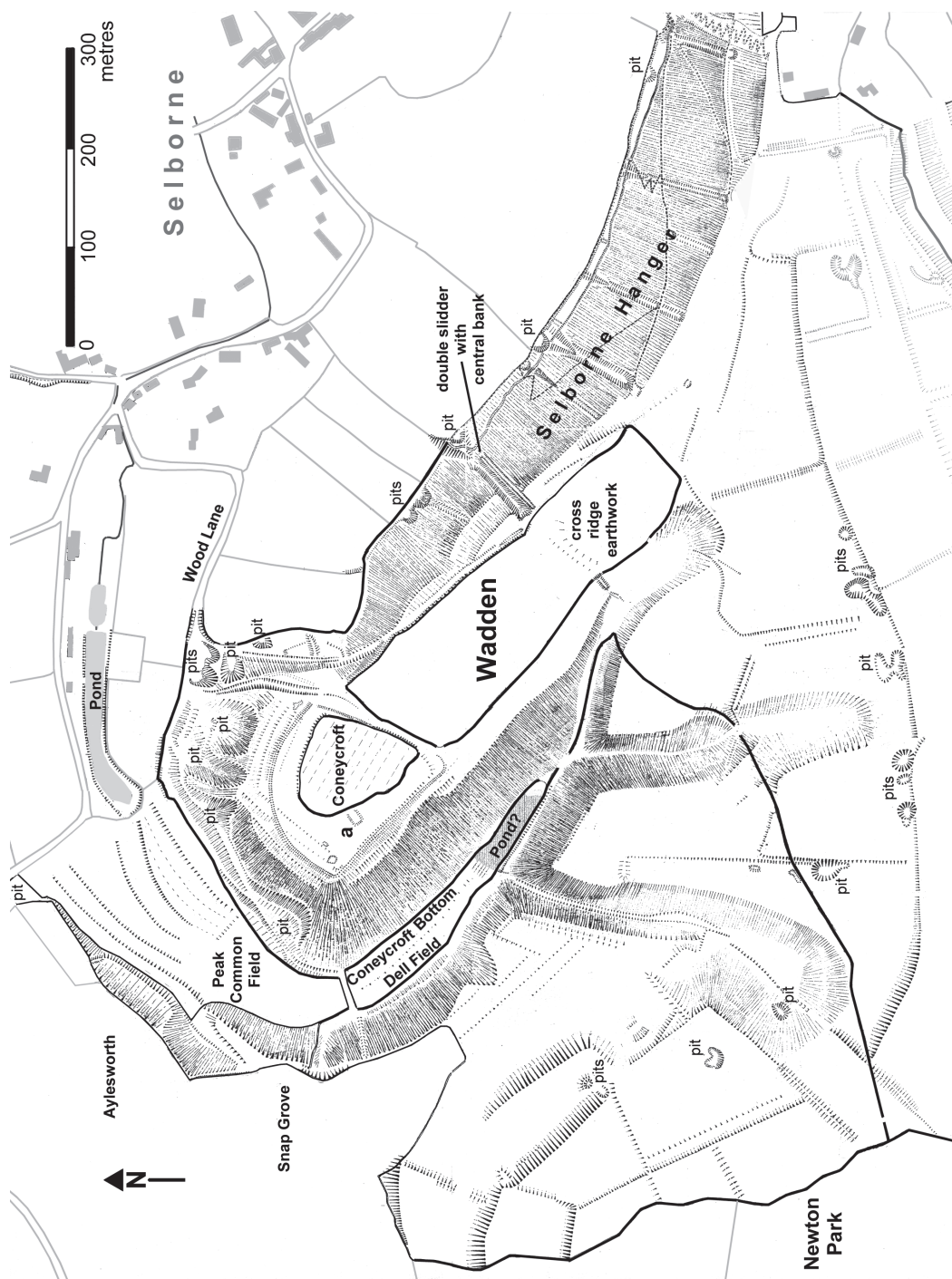


Fig. 14 Plan of Northern Slope, Selborne Hanger and Coneycroft Bottom promontory showing earthworks marking out field system along with pits and the enclosure and rectangular feature (a) at Coneycroft, and cross-ridge dyke and slider at the Wadden



Fig. 15 Occasionally woodland rides and areas clear of scrubby vegetation highlight sections of earthworks. Here a short section of a lynchet marking the northern edge of the 'plateau field block' is visible in a clearing

early agricultural activity on the hilltop. Chalk quarrying alongside and in close proximity to early cultivation across the clay cap is likely as the acidic clay soil required routine 'marling' to maintain fertility.

North-west field block

The north-west corner of Selborne Common embraces a distinct block of early fields where sizeable lynchets of up to 3m mark some boundaries, suggesting an intensive and long-lasting cultivation phase on this part of the hill. There are six incomplete sub-rectangular enclosures lying within the woodland that are sliced through by the modern western boundary of the Common – they clearly show that this field pattern extended westwards onto land now under modern cultivation. The bank and ditch marking the boundary of the common is a characteristically medieval earthwork, being sinuous, broad and upstanding. It marks the parish border and forms the eastern boundary of Newton Park. A medieval charter of *c.*1250 documents an agreement for making a ditch between the wood belonging to Selborne Priory and the land of Robert de Pontelarche, the lord of the neighbouring manor of Newton (Macray 1898, 42). Further documentation in the form of a royal grant to the lord of Newton manor in 1251 relates to the wood of Newton being made a park 'enclosed with ditch and hedge' (VCHH 1908, 26). By this date the early fields were apparently forgotten and the landscape described in the mid 13th-century agreement with Selborne Priory is one where the long-practiced customary rights of common grazing and wood gathering extended over the waste and woodland shared by the two adjacent manors of Selborne and Newton (Macray 1898, 42). In a wood called Pleasure Row, 400m to the west of the common, a small section of the ancient field system reappears in the form of contour lynchets marking the long edges of rectangular plots (Fig. 21).

Along the north-eastern edge of this block of fields, ancient agricultural activity appears to have pushed to the very edge of the flatter areas above the steep-sided Coneycroft Bottom. The margins of cultivation are marked along

the top of some of the steeper valleys by breaks of slope and positive lynchets which merge with the valley sides. Above the valley on the south-west side of Coneycroft Bottom a small cluster of linear earthworks seem to be out of character with the rest of the field block. Defined by weak lynchets, several terraces running along the top of the valley edge are possibly accounted for by a later episode of cultivation when temporary 'intakes' taken from the common waste formed a limited and perhaps short-lived outlier of medieval tillage. Further along this valley rim to the north, below the neighbouring fields known as 'Snap Grove' and 'Aylesworth' (HRO 21M65/F7/201/1&2), cultivation has taken place on the scraps of flatter land above and running down the slope. Their proximity and pattern suggest an association with the 'Peak Common Field', on the valley floor below. Although this is now pasture, the old arable open-field layout is preserved by sturdy lynchets separating long, narrow terraces (Fig. 16), which were still in cultivation at the end of the 19th century (HRO 9M71).

Although outside the boundary of the common land, Dell Field in Coneycroft Bottom, an area of enclosed pasture lying at the south-eastern end of the valley, is part of the National Trust estate. The Tithe Award, 1842 (HRO 21M65/F7/201/1&2), shows this as an arable field in the 19th century, while earlier records give indirect indications that the enclosure was in existence in the 17th century (MCA). Defined by low ridges, baulks and ditches, cultivation was evidently conducted in the form of two long strips along the valley floor, acting, in effect, as an extension to the strip cultivation in Peak Common Field. A broad ploughed-down ridge running across the valley floor and a very short upstanding end section, marks the position of a dam at the south-east end of Coneycroft Bottom. Behind the ridge a wet boggy area of 0.2ha represents the former extent of the pond bay. The lack of medieval or later records for a pond at this location means close dating is not possible, although the dam is cut by and therefore predates the ditch and bank around Dell Field, which was probably a functional boundary before 1757 (GWA).



Fig. 16 Looking southwest across Peak Common Field towards Coneycroft Bottom where old strip fields are still marked out by hedges and lynchets

SELBORNE HANGER AND CONEYCROFT BOTTOM PROMONTORY

At the northern end of the Hanger, on the spur between the north-east facing escarpment and the steep-sided dry valley of Coneycroft Bottom, a major part of the early surface archaeology has been ploughed away or buried where the two extant medieval enclosures of Coneycroft and the Wadden lie along the top of the promontory. Their use as arable fields is documented from the 17th century until the end of the 19th century (MCA, MP/2/12, 18). The Lewis Andrews map of 1678 (MCA, Map 23) shows arable strips (Fig. 17) lying within the Wadden suggesting the topography along the top of the ridge has been subjected to significant modification by ploughing and enclosure during and since the Middle Ages. Lying outside the margins of these enclosures, above the steep escarpment and the shoulder of the valley, there is some earthwork evidence of underlying and earlier land use patterns.

Earthworks surrounding the Wadden and Coneycroft enclosures

On the north-east side of the Wadden four cultivation terraces are perched on the less-abrupt upper slope of the Hanger. Although weathering and deep accumulations of leaf litter has softened their profiles, their features are distinct and show that lynchets-scarps flanked and overlooked terraces that must have been narrow at just a few metres. Above, evidence for the early cultivation pattern is almost entirely concealed by the Wadden enclosure. The lynchets and ploughed platforms that survive just outside the enclosure must be the remnants of a pattern of plots that had extended across the promontory before the medieval assart came into existence.

Three of the hillside terraces terminate at, and appear to respect, a substantial double ditch or gully feature, which descends straight down the steep Hanger in a north-easterly direction towards Selborne village. The deeper and larger gully forms a 15m wide and 5m deep trench, and although now disused this was once a major hollow-way used for driving livestock and sliding materials, such as wood

and chalk, to the foot of the escarpment. This is one of eight distinctive steep tracks or wood-slides, known locally as 'slidders' (Greenoak 1989, 279), that are spaced along the Hanger escarpment and are related to medieval and later 'commoning' activities.

It is necessary to consider the possibility that the substantial double hollow-way/slidder, clearly used by generations of commoners, was reusing an older down-slope linear earthwork alignment that was associated with the early pattern of land use along the promontory. With the other slidders being single trenches, this double trench with its central bank is out of character and points to the possibility of another purpose for this steep linear earthwork. The shallower parallel companion gully (9m wide and 3m deep) immediately on the south-east side of the deeper slider has an appearance of a large boundary ditch with a pronounced upstanding bank separating the two cuttings. Above the escarpment the alignment continues for 90m as a very plough-levelled cross-ridge earthwork extending over the Wadden enclosure which emerges as an upstanding bank (15m long) projecting beyond its south-western boundary. This appears to mark the south-eastern extent of an older land-unit that extends along the promontory.

Like the Wadden, Coneycroft 2 (Fig. 18), a small oval enclosure at the north-west end of the ridge, survives as a separate unit of land within the common land. Defined by a sinuous bank and outer ditch and by a positive cultivation lynchets on the lower sloping north and east sides this former arable field has the character of a medieval assart. Coneycroft field (0.8ha) lies within an earlier enclosure (Coneycroft 1, Fig. 18) that is bounded by an inner ditch and low flattened external bank and is 1.7ha in size forming a rough quadrant shape. The lack of plough-formed lynchets along the boundary, indicates that this older outer circuit had not defined an area of long-term tillage.

Along the north-eastern sloping edge of the older enclosure a tree throw-hole presented an opportunity to examine the profile of the ditch and bank earthwork (Fig. 18 – II, b). The section was limited to the edge of the root socket, but it showed that a flat-bottomed ditch, about 0.30m wide at the base, had been dug

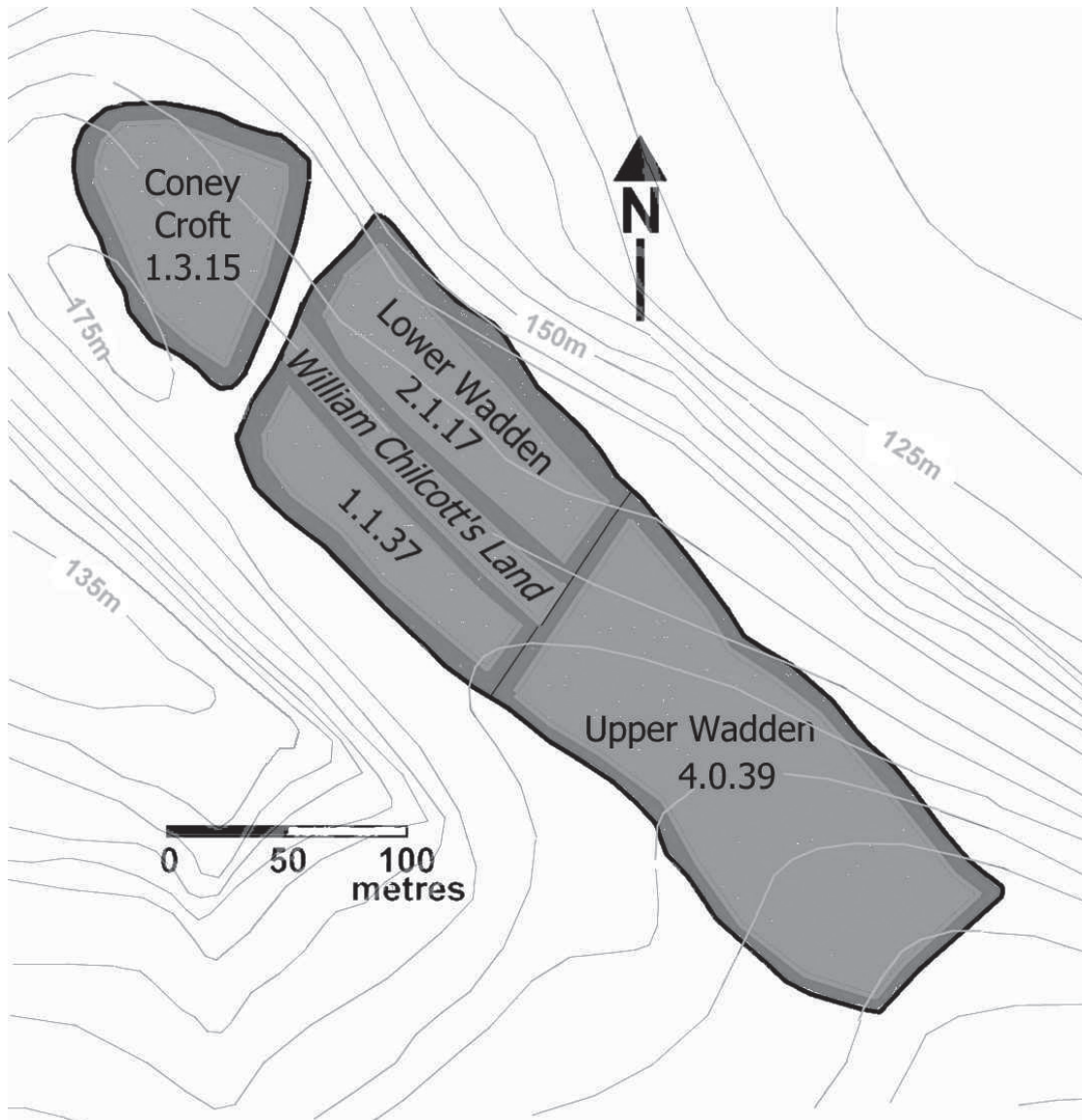


Fig. 17 Extract from map made for the Lewis Andrewes Survey of 1677 (MCA, CP/3/1) showing Coneycroft and the Wadden with remnants of arable strips. Redrawn from Map 23 (MCA)

into the chalk bedrock (Fig. 19). The lower section of the ditch penetrated the solid chalk to a depth of 0.20m, but the upper part was not clearly defined. The spoil from the ditch cut and possible later cleanings were dumped to form a bank on the outer down-slope side of

the feature. Because of weathering and infilling it was difficult to judge the original height of the ditch and bank, but it may have been as much as 1m. Further excavation will be needed to determine the feature's dimensions.

Three very minor lynchets reveal evidence

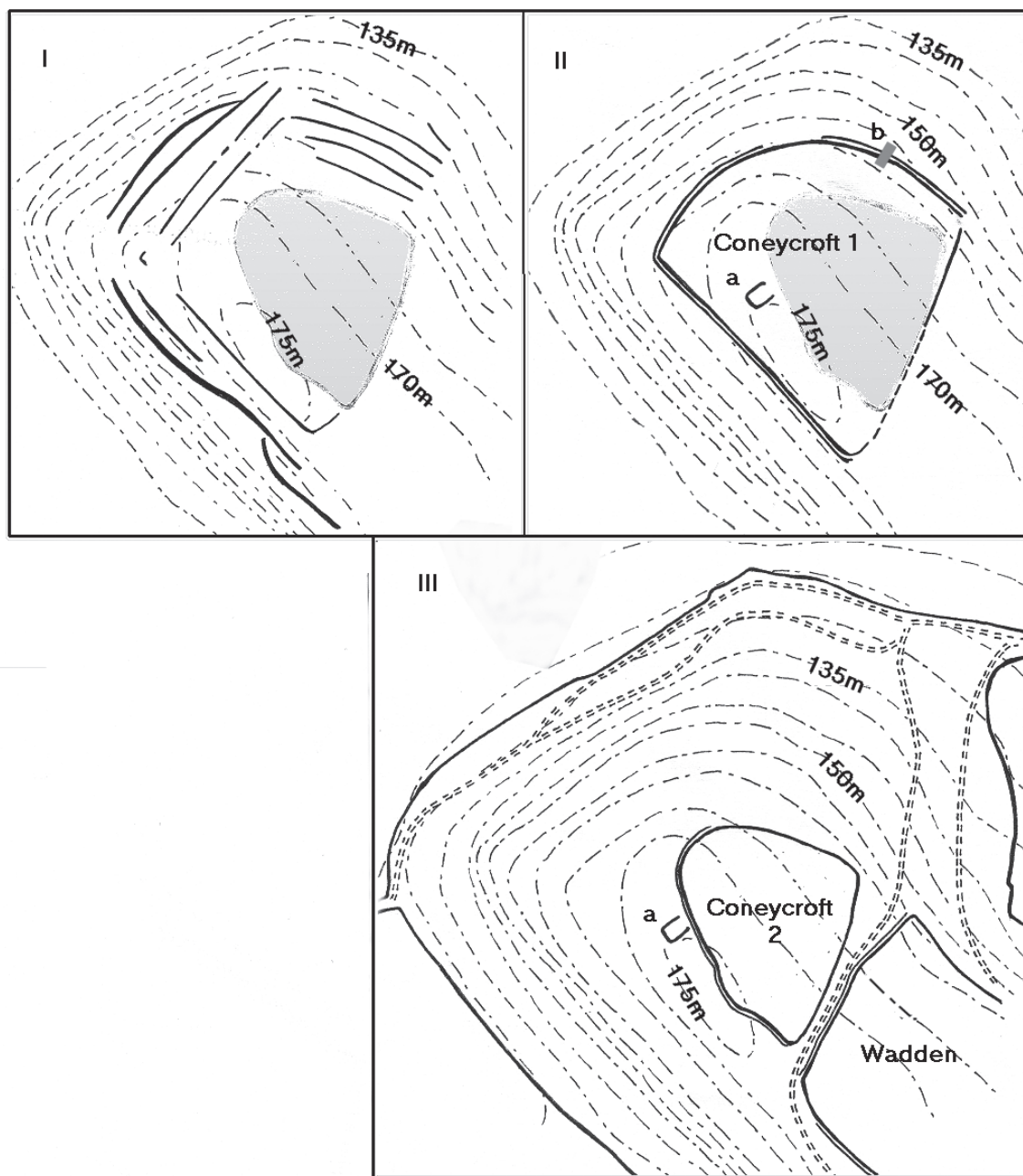


Fig. 18 Coneycroft at the northern end of the Hanger. Three phases of land use and enclosure suggested by the earthwork stratigraphy. The shaded area shows the position of the modern Coneycroft 2 land-unit. (a) A rectangular feature possibly represents the site of a building associated with the ditched enclosure – Coneycroft 1. (b) Position of section through bank and ditch (see Fig 19)

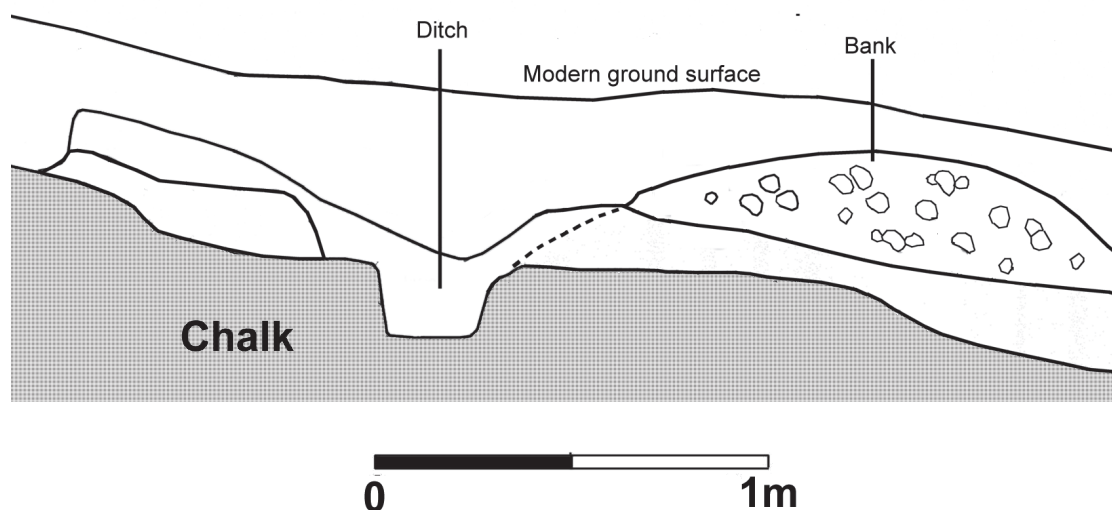


Fig. 19 Tree throw-hole section across bank and ditch earthwork on north-east side of Coneycroft

of cultivation along shallow terraces just outside the boundary of Coneycroft 1 on its north-east side. The ditch enclosing Coneycroft 1 appears to cut through part of one lynchet, with the spoil forming a bank on top of part of the same lynchet. On flatter areas along the north-west section there are very subtle traces of strip cultivation, which are cut by the boundary earthwork; beyond the outer two terraces the lynchets are more sharply defined along the steeper shoulder of the escarpment. The earthwork stratigraphy suggests a sequence of development that begins with a phase of strip type cultivation (Fig. 18 – I), followed by the establishment of an enclosure – Coneycroft 1 (Fig. 18 – II), which was then succeeded by the most recent and extant enclosure – Coneycroft 2 (Fig. 18 – III).

Between the modern field boundary of Coneycroft 2 and the older outer bank and ditch around the northern and south-western sides, part of the earlier enclosure's ground surface appears to have remained undisturbed by medieval and later cultivation. This amounts to about 47% of the surface area of the older Coneycroft 1 enclosure and forms an arc between the modern inner and older outer boundaries in which a rectangular feature (Fig. 18 II & IIIa), defined by a low

bank approximately 0.2m high, marks a small enclosure measuring 10m × 13m lying on a north-east/south-west alignment. Whether the bank originally surrounded a structure is uncertain; it may possibly have been a small enclosure or pound for livestock management. There are no obvious stratigraphic associations to indicate if this rectangular feature was originally positioned just outside the boundary of the present-day field (Coneycroft 2), or within the circuit of the older enclosure (Coneycroft 1). Although somewhat tenuous, the south-western boundary of Coneycroft 2 appears to take a line that avoids the earthwork. No evidence of additional structures or earthworks was observed in Coneycroft 2, but they could have been ploughed away or buried by cultivation.

DISCUSSION

Identifying the early agricultural landscape

While aerial photography has revealed significant clusters of 'Celtic' fields on the central Hampshire chalkland, the non-wooded landscape around Selborne has produced limited evidence for early agriculture and settlement. The upland chalk immediately to the

west is generally covered with homogenous blankets of Clay-with-flints (Fig. 5), while valley floors tend to be filled with colluvial deposits. Much of the lower lying land has been cultivated intensively throughout medieval and modern times, which if not removing early landscape patterns altogether, have rendered them virtually invisible. Between the blocks of woodland, traces of early fields do appear, often as short flights of lynchets or as vague soil marks where the chalk is exposed on hillsides. From the air the narrow belt of Upper Greensand to the east of the chalk escarpment displays few clear early field patterns; its fertility and gentle topography having encouraged heavy cultivation in recent times. It is only where pasture, woodland or waste has been retained that relatively extensive areas of prehistoric and Roman surface archaeology remain in an upstanding state.

The larger blankets of Clay-with-flints seem to have been unattractive to farming throughout the Middle Ages and are generally recorded as being woodland and wood-pasture, often as acidic heaths, waste and common land until enclosure ensued during the 18th and 19th centuries (Chapman & Seeliger 1997, 149–151). Suggestions that these areas were avoided during prehistory is therefore understandable. However as Moffit (1988, 17) comments, in a few areas there are hints of early field systems irrespective of soil type. Even so, until recently the apparent lack of evidence has discouraged thorough investigation.

The suggestion that early farmers avoided the Clay-with-flints where it was more than 0.3m thick (Cunliffe 1973, 175; Richards 1978, 38) is reinforced by a farming industry which today regards these soils as difficult to work, being wet, cold and acidic (Shennan 1985, 27). With applications of chalk being vital for free working by the plough and with the higher land often rising to altitudes of more than 120m OD, considerable skill was required to maintain the Clay-with-flints in a productive state (Hall *et al.* 1911, 74, 75). Despite these modern reservations, later prehistoric and Roman agricultural activity across these soils should not be ruled out.

The fossilised field system on Selborne Common provides evidence that some of the

Clay-with-flints in east Hampshire was exploited for arable agriculture at an early date and during these periods field systems did extend beyond the thinner soils over the chalk onto higher tertiary deposits. Indeed a much more extensive pattern of prehistoric fields and settlement can now be envisaged, one that was spread across the whole landscape. This survey points to intensive land division and land use on a site where the clay over the chalk is restricted to a hill-top cap, but where its depth can reach more than 0.5m. Rectifying acidity could be achieved by spreading chalk dug from pits at the edge of the clay cap or by digging down through the clay to the chalk which was never more than 3–4m below.

Barrow and cross-ridge earthworks

Other prehistoric monuments also appear to be under-reported in this landscape where woodland, soil type, topography and damage combine to make their detection less than straightforward. Although heavily mutilated, probably by antiquarian investigation, the postulated Bronze Age barrow at the eastern end of the Common is likely to be one of the oldest upstanding earthworks on the site and appears to stand as a lone example of this type of monument on Selborne Hill (Fig. 20). Along the Hangers generally, barrow mounds are not as frequent as they are across other nearby zones, such as the western Weald heathlands or on the open and less wooded areas of the South Downs (Fasham & Schadla-Hall 1981, 29).

The 'cross-dyke' earthwork and barrow on the eastern spur of the hill (Fig. 9) might, by association, be contemporary. However, because it appears to cut across the eastern rim of the mound, the cross-dyke could post-date the barrow. The cross-dyke appears conventional in the sense that it crosses a narrow neck of land between two steep slopes and forms a boundary to a parcel of land that corresponds with the eastward projecting promontory beyond the hilltop field system. Houses and gardens now conceal any obvious signs of early activity or settlement that may have extended along the spur.

At the east end of the escarpment the good state of preservation of the cross-dyke contrasts



Fig. 20 The barrow earthwork profile viewed from the south

with the 'cross-bank', which has been substantially levelled by centuries of cultivation, but crossed and closed off the promontory at the north end of the Hanger. Down the north-east face of the steep escarpment a possible extension of the cross-ridge boundary alignment now takes the form of a disused hollow-way/wood-slide, which incorporates a ditch and bank. The linear earthwork rising up the face of the escarpment and the cross-ridge bank could have been conspicuous along the sweep of the hillside when viewed from the east. The cross-ridge earthwork is in a position where it connects with the upper end of the Coneycroft Bottom coombe, thus taking advantage of the topography to create a promontory enclosure. Although the promontory has been subjected to medieval and post-medieval ploughing and enclosure, which has obscured earlier patterns of land use, stray pottery sherds recovered from the woodland floor suggests activity and possible settlement at this end of the escarpment during the middle Bronze Age (H. Rees, pers comm.).

The 'cross-dyke' class of monument seems to be underrepresented on the many promontories of the East Hampshire Hangers escarpment. In fact, on the Wheatham Hill spur to the south of Selborne, a large cross-

dyke ditch and bank had until recently lain unrecognised (Ball 2001), pointing to the under-recording of these monuments.

Fields and enclosures

The arrangement of fields into blocks that apparently do not align with a broader landscape-scale coaxial pattern is normally described as being an *aggregate* field system and these tend to occur between, or at the edge, of larger cohesive field systems (Richards 1978, 37–40; McOmish *et al.* 2002, 56). While both cohesive/coaxial and aggregate/accreted field systems have been mapped in some density along the South Downs to the southwest (Young 2011), the survey failed to detect large tracts of coaxial fields in this part of east Hampshire. The Selborne Hill complex seems to have developed as the result of activity by a community that lay at some distance from these and other blocks of cohesive fields, such as those recorded around Danebury (Palmer 1984) and across the Hampshire Downland to the west (Royall 2013). The field system at Selborne may post-date the era of large-scale, co-aligned field patterns described widely across southern England, or that aggregate systems need not necessarily always be adjacent to, or near, tracts of coaxial fields.

It is unknown whether the distinct blocks of fields on Selborne Hill are contemporary, although there appears to be a sequential development where groups of enclosures were laid out in a manner that respected neighbouring pre-existing blocks of fields. The irregular fields set out across the less tractable northern slopes around the northern edge of the core area seem to exemplify a phase when further enclosures were appended to the earlier 'plateau' group. Field systems with discrete internal groupings, arranged roughly within distinct topographical units defined by valleys, have been recorded on Salisbury Plain and are assigned to the Romano-British period (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 100–103). At Selborne, while the blocks of fields are arranged on a smaller scale, they do coincide with the ridges, hilltops and slopes between valleys.

Several fields in the core area display the square and rectangular character of 'Celtic' fields, although they tend to be larger than the size range often noted for prehistoric fields of 0.2 to 0.5ha (Taylor 1975, 27). This might suggest that the field pattern mapped here corresponds to a time during the later prehistoric and Roman periods that was characterised by advances in plough technology and cultivation practices and may account for field sizes that were larger than in earlier phases of landscape division (Richards 1978, 49). The ubiquity of often substantial lynchetts across the site confirms that the parcelling up of land for cultivation was a driving force and seems to have been undertaken in distinct phases of land division. No sign of earlier underlying landscape patterns or groups of fields less than a hectare and co-axial in arrangement were detected by the fieldwork. The recovery from disturbed ground surfaces of (unstratified) Middle Bronze Age pottery (H. Rees, pers. comm.) indicates that there was activity across the hilltop during the late 2nd Millennium BC. Early enclosures and field patterns could have been erased by later prehistoric agriculture, or they may have been incorporated into the landscape pattern recovered by this survey, but remain undiscovered.

Field morphology, comparative analysis, relative dating from earthwork stratigraphy

and a few stray late Iron Age and Roman sherds (H. Rees, pers. comm.) combine to suggest that there was agricultural activity into the early 1st millennium AD. To date, very few Roman sites and artefacts have been reported in the immediate vicinity of Selborne, although the proximity of a small Roman town at the crossing of the Chichester to Silchester and Winchester to London roads, 7km to the north at Neatham (Millett & Graham 1986), makes the existence of an exploited and developed landscape around Selborne likely. Roman rectilinear field systems, associated with a line of escarpment edge 'villa' estates, are believed to have been fossilised as medieval enclosures along the Upper Greensand outcrop 5km to the east (Lyne & Jefferies 1979, 15–16). Selborne Hill could fall within an extensively 'Romanized' agricultural zone where even the difficult Clay-with-flints were brought into use and thus extended the early field systems of the district to their maximum extent (Cunliffe 1973, 184).

Strip fields and terraces

The belt of strip-ploughing and terraces along the upper edge of the southern slope resembles medieval lynchetts and represents a distinct anomaly in the overall field layout. Documentary evidence (e.g. Selborne Priory Charters; Macray 1891, 16, 42, 55) supports an impression that livestock grazing and woodland exploitation ('commoning'), regulated by long-established manorial custom, was practised throughout the Middle Ages on Selborne Hill. Records for Woolmer Forest also infer that woodland was generally extensive across the district (Yates 1979, 93–112), having in many cases probably been re-established over former prehistoric and Roman farmland. Although there was significant clearing of woodland and waste for tillage (assarts) and enclosure (purpresture) during the 13th century (Yates 1979), the boundaries of early modern woods and commons such as Selborne Common are likely to represent the 'high-water' mark of this medieval agricultural expansion.

If the fossilised strips were part of a medieval field system, they were decommissioned or abandoned by the end of Middle Ages, perhaps

earlier in the wake of 14th-century pestilence and population decline (Taylor 1975, 108, 109). The southern slope was then allowed, or encouraged, to tumble back to manorial woodland and common pasture and was fixed in its current form by 1618 (MCA 131/41) when the first map of the Common appears. The strip fields and terraces alongside the Wadden, and perhaps more plausibly those faint terraces on the south-western edge of Coneycroft Bottom, may fall into the same pattern of medieval use and abandonment. There are no hints in local records however to confirm or suggest that such a change from tillage to commoning took place. Another possibility is that the terraces on Selborne Common were temporary 'intakes', those on the southern slope, for example, being an extension to the Kingsfield common field on the lower flank of the hill. Ploughing and cropping for a few years before reverting to common pasture was a general practice (Thirsk 1967, 100; Muir & Muir 1989, 85), in effect a form of infield-outfield agriculture where land beyond the regular village fields was cultivated intermittently. Further documentary research or a more thorough search for on-site dating evidence, such as pottery, is required to determine a better understanding of patterns and extents of medieval land use.

It is only at the very edge of the Common that the stratigraphy is more helpful. At the eastern end of the southern slope two lynchets with tightly curving end scarps are fossilised just inside the common land next to Lawn Acre, indicating that the medieval open field had extended a few metres further along the slope. The stratigraphy suggests that the neighbouring Kingsfield and Lawn Acre common fields were not originally bounded by the earthwork border observed today and that they simply merged with the common pasture; shepherds, fences and/or 'dead-hedges' presumably kept livestock from straying onto arable crops. Here, the common waste only came to be defined by a bank and ditch sometime after strip-field cultivation had caused the formation of the terracing.

On the basis of morphology and stratigraphy, it is likely that the band of strip fields and enclosures along the top of the southern slope

is in fact contemporary with the rest of the field system across the hill. There are examples of well developed 'strip-like' terraces that follow contour alignments and fit within field systems dated to the Roman period (the Salisbury Plain Training Area for example (McOmish *et al.* 2002, 102)). Ends of terraces that are squared off rather than curving are also characteristic of earlier prehistoric/Roman cultivation patterns (Taylor 1975, 90; Bowen 1958, 24; English Heritage 2011, 4). It is likely that soil fertility at the junction of the Clay-with-flints and the chalk made this section of hillside suitable and attractive for intensive and perhaps more specialised horticultural cropping, thus leading to heavily divided terracing. The complexity of the terraces might also indicate some settlement within or nearby, from where this intricate pattern of strips could be tended. No such occupation was obvious, although a few stray Iron Age and Roman pottery sherds (H. Rees, pers. comm.) point to settlement (and a source of manure) being close at hand.

Later earthworks and enclosures on the Northern Promontory

The Lewis Andrewes survey and map of 1677 (MCA, CP/3/15) is the first of a set of records through which the Wadden and Coneycroft enclosures emerge as relatively well documented land-units. In 1677 the shape and size of Coneycroft 2 was the same as today, while its 'state of cultivation', which was not recorded, was probably arable as it was in 1842 when surveyed for the Tithe Award (HRO 21M65/F7/201/1). Positive lynchet formation along the down-slope margins confirm that there has been a significant period of cultivation within Coneycroft 2. The name Coneycroft has promoted a long held local belief that this was the location of a medieval warren associated with Selborne Priory (White 1789, 439), while the 'croft' element in the name suggests that there may also have been a dwelling or building, perhaps providing habitation or shelter for a warrener. Whether Coneycroft 1 or 2 defines the extent of the warren is uncertain, although the weak internal ditch and outer bank enclosing Coneycroft 1 makes it the more likely candidate. If the larger enclosure (Coneycroft 1) did indeed

define a warren, it makes it one of the smaller examples, perhaps reflecting the modest status of Selborne Priory, the establishment thought to have been responsible for its construction. However, without firmer archaeological and documentary evidence, it is risky to make a case for a warren on slim etymological and local folklore grounds alone.

Selborne Common was important as a sheep-walk for many centuries (White 1789, 184; MCA Court book 76) and a sheep enclosure needs to be considered as an alternative to a warren. Some Salisbury Plain examples had an inner perimeter ditch, were of comparable size and were equipped with an internal enclosure (such as feature 'a', Fig. 18), and can be interpreted as a site where sheep were penned and segregated, or where shepherds had a shelter. Moreover, there is a sheep enclosure known as 'Cony' on Salisbury Plain (McComish *et al.* 2002, 117). These enclosures were often sited near droveways that lead from sheep pastures (McComish *et al.* 2002, 116), so the proximity of a route to the village via Wood Lane may have made such a location at the end of the Hanger suitable for congregating sheep before they were taken off the common.

The possibility that Coneycroft 1 is an earlier enclosure should not be ruled out. Similarities to the simple D-shaped enclosures are dated to the Romano-British period (Palmer 1984), but comparison can also be made to the small enclosures on the South Downs in Sussex, dated to the late Bronze Age and Iron Age (Bedwin 1978, 45).

References to a chapel of Selborne Priory 'at the Whaddene' (Macray 1891, 92, 116) have led to speculation that a small chapel may have been located on the promontory during the 13th to 15th centuries (Yates 2009, 76) and the rectangular earthwork at Coneycroft (Fig. 18, II a & III a) is a possible contender for the site. The chapel apparently suffered damage by fire and the glazing was replaced in *c.*1418 (Macray 1891, 116), but no evidence of destruction or building materials have been identified.

The wider landscape

In this part of the county it is unusual to find the earthworks of a pre-medieval landscape

intact and relatively undamaged. Recent investigations covering the east Hampshire portion of the South Downs National Park failed to produce much soilmark or cropmark evidence for extensive field systems across the non-wooded areas around Selborne, or immediately west across the elevated clay plateau (Young 2011, 139–141). The Clay-with-flints were found to be mainly 'devoid of Celtic fields', but it is unknown whether this was because of limited usage in earlier times or is a reflection of the non-responsive nature of clay soils to aerial survey (Young 2011, 74). The Hampshire County Integrated Character Assessment states that the landscape area to the west of Selborne was probably used more for pasture and woodland during prehistory and Roman times (Hampshire County Council 2012, 5), although a programme of detailed fieldwork and landscape analysis will probably detect evidence of early land allotment and land use across this zone.

The fieldwork on Selborne Common indicates the potential for woodland areas and former commons to retain archaeological monuments preserved on the surface, so long as they have not been subjected to intensive management using modern machinery. Recent surveys over ancient common land and woodland sites close to Selborne, has brought forth confirmation that an earlier landscape of fields and enclosures did extend across the wider landscape (Fig. 21). The picture is one of disembodied portions of blocks of fields, but it indicates a fieldscape extending across an area of up to 6 square kilometres. Despite intensive chalk quarrying since the Middle Ages at High Common on Noar Hill, 1km to the south, lynchets and banks are evident on the islands of undisturbed ground and across the wooded slope. When pieced together the earthworks form a reasonably coherent arrangement of fields. Likewise, smaller blocks of detached woodland, such as Pleasure Row to the west, also produce evidence confirming the extent of the former fieldscape. Across the patches of medieval/modern farmland that now separates the wooded blocks this early landscape has been substantially erased and truncated, but recent visits to small areas

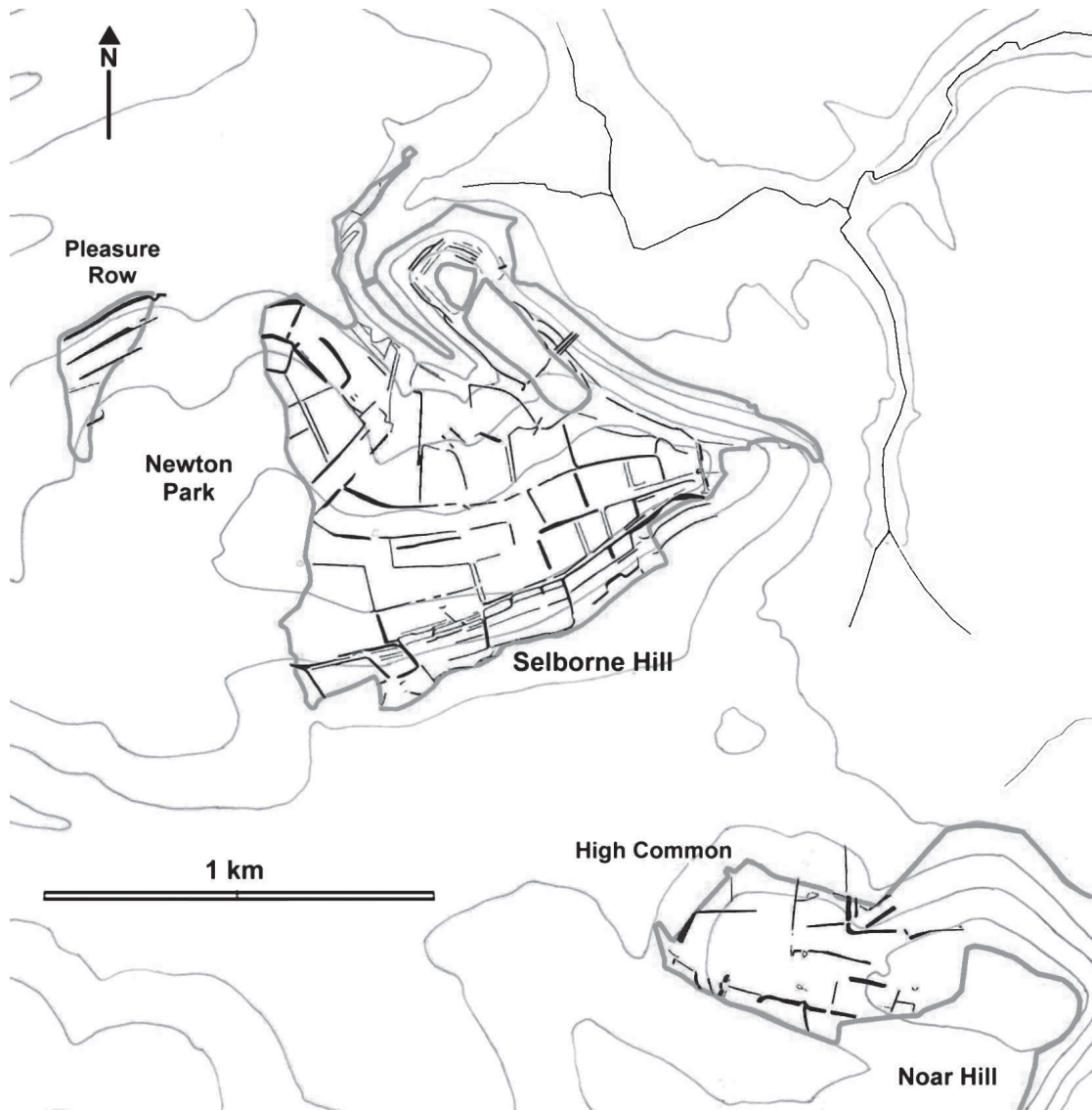


Fig. 21 Common land and woodland areas (thick outline) where earthworks survive that highlight early field patterns beyond the main study area across Selborne Hill

of woodland further west and south have almost always been successful in identifying earthwork archaeology indicative of the survival of very extensive tracts of prehistoric and Roman land use.

In light of the increasing evidence, the belief that woodland cover across the chalk and Clay-

with-flints uplands to the west of Selborne prior to the Middle Ages had never been extensively cleared can no longer stand. In fact very little, if any, 'ancient' woodland represents surviving 'wildwood'. It was during the post-Roman period that many of the tracts of woodland and manorial waste developed and became estab-

lished over former field-land and enclosures. Settlement and agriculture remained in some locations throughout the Saxon period from where a more familiar medieval landscape grew. However the notion that earlier settlement was minimal, and that before the Middle Ages this part of east Hampshire was marginal to the intensively farmed Hampshire/Wessex chalkland to the west, clearly needs further scrutiny.

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