

ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF BAT'S HOGSTYE, NEAR ALDERSHOT

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ABSTRACT

Bat's Hogstye, an earthwork west of Aldershot, has been subjected to analytical survey with the intention of determining its age and purpose. In addition, unpublished findings from an excavation of the site in 1953 are discussed. The earthwork is thought most likely to represent a mid-19th century military redoubt.

GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND PRESENT LAND-USE

The earthwork known as Bat's Hogstye is located within the Aldershot Training Area, part of the Ministry of Defence Estate west of Aldershot (SU 84685152) (Fig. 1). It lies on a low, north-facing spur between two small streams in an area of Eocene sands of the Bracklesham Group but specifically on a patch of the Swinley Clay Member. The site is on lowland heath which supports a mosaic of coniferous and deciduous woodland with scrub and acid grassland. The land at Aldershot is now only used for dry training exercises (no live ammunition).

BACKGROUND

This small, rectangular enclosure has attracted archaeological attention in the past but the date and purpose of its construction has remained uncertain. It was examined and surveyed as part of an overview of the above ground archaeology of Hampshire (Williams Freeman 1915, 61–64, 355). The survey shows an internal area of about 0.5 a (0.2 ha) surrounded by four banks and three ditches with an entrance towards the east. At that date the earthwork enclosure was relatively complete with only some damage to

the western side. The entrance was recorded as leading onto a track which curved southwards back along the dry ground on the ridge. After some discussion of possible parallels a tentative identification as the 'triple-walled dun' of the 'chief in later Celtic times' was made (*ibid*, 63) and the suggestion of a prehistoric origin has been repeated with increasing certainty in more modern works, for example 'the site of an ancient pre-Roman encampment (Cole 1980, 379).

In 1953 the site was subjected to limited excavation by Second Lieutenant J P C Kent of the Royal Army Service Corps who was based at Aldershot Barracks; he sought and was granted sponsorship from the Hampshire Field Club and was clearly an experienced archaeologist and is said to have been well thought of by A W G Lowther. Although the excavation remained unpublished some letters and an interim report were deposited at Hampshire Record Office (H R O 215M85/31/1).

Kent recorded that the enclosure complex was in good condition on the north and south sides and the southern portion of the east side but that the remainder had been 'quite obliterated'. He was of the opinion that the gap through the eastern side was relatively recent and no surface sign of any original entrance could be identified. He also notes that an apparent fourth ditch inside the innermost northern bank was secondary in nature since it cut through the original banks at the north-west angle. Kent set a trench across this feature and exposed a 'considerable straight-sided trench, 3 ft 10 in (1.2 m) in width and at least 5 ft (1.5 m) deep. For some unexplained reason, this trench had been filled in, not with the loose sand of its upcast, but with a light yellow gravelly clay. It is likely that this is a military



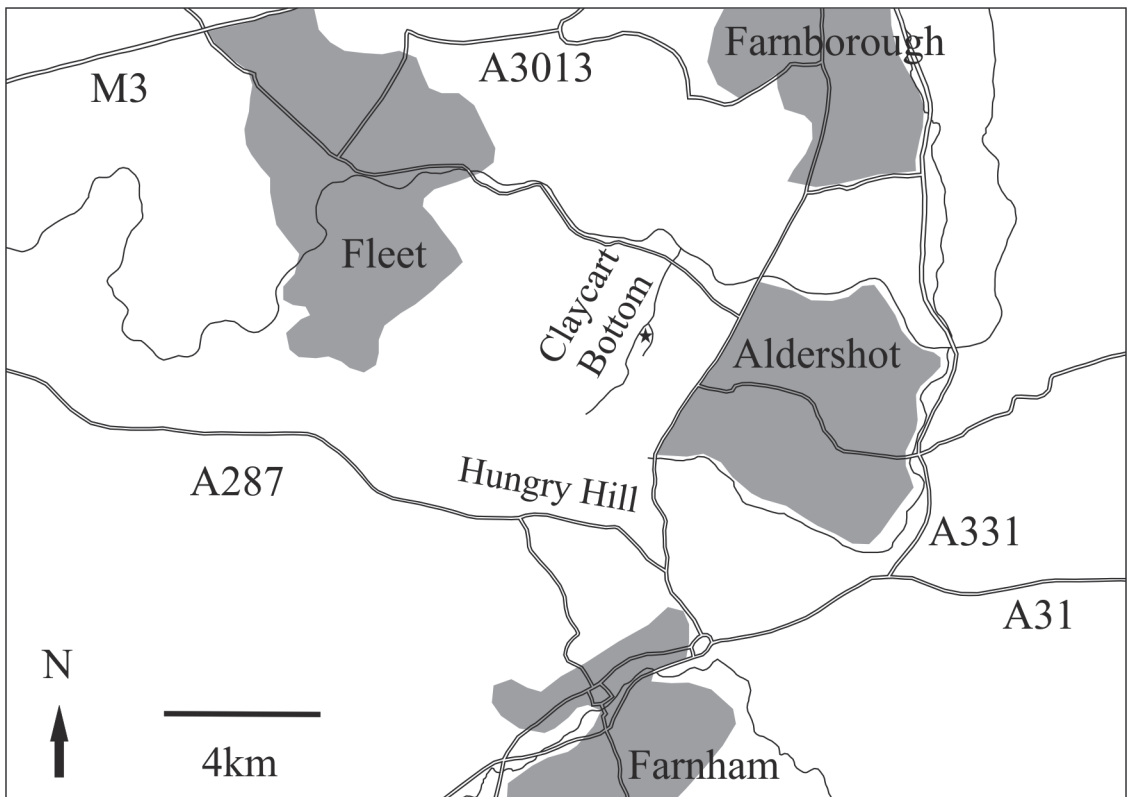


Fig. 1 Location of Bat's Hogstye – the site is marked with a black star

trench of 19th century date'. The only artefact recorded was a 'Mesolithic flake found lying on an original turf-line. Kent also speaks of a trench 40 ft (12.2 m) long which had reached the 'centre point of the site' and, given the internal dimensions of the enclosure, presumably did not involve the surrounding complex of banks and ditches. He records a complete lack of building or occupational debris and concluded that Bat's Hogstye could not be the site of a recent dwelling and surmises a Saxon or Norman date, whilst Lowther, with whom he appears to have corresponded, suggested to him that it might have been a 'game preserve'. Kent clearly intended to undertake further work 'as weather and duties' permitted but, if he did excavate further, no record has been found. A lecture to Farnham Museum Society in 1970 by a Mr Wardale of the Ordnance Survey and summarised in their Newsletter

(Day 1971) adds the suggestion that, since some of the ditches appear to be dead-ended, the monument may have been a maze.

The site was damaged by forestry operations in 1995 (Hampshire HER) but that activity was discouraged and the site does not appear to have been further harmed. In view of the relative fragility of the site given the loose sandy nature of the earthworks David Graham of the North-East Hampshire Historical and Archaeological Society suggested that an analytical survey might both provide a benchmark of the present condition and inform future management.

ANALYTICAL SURVEY

The Level 3 analytical survey was undertaken using an amended version of the tape and

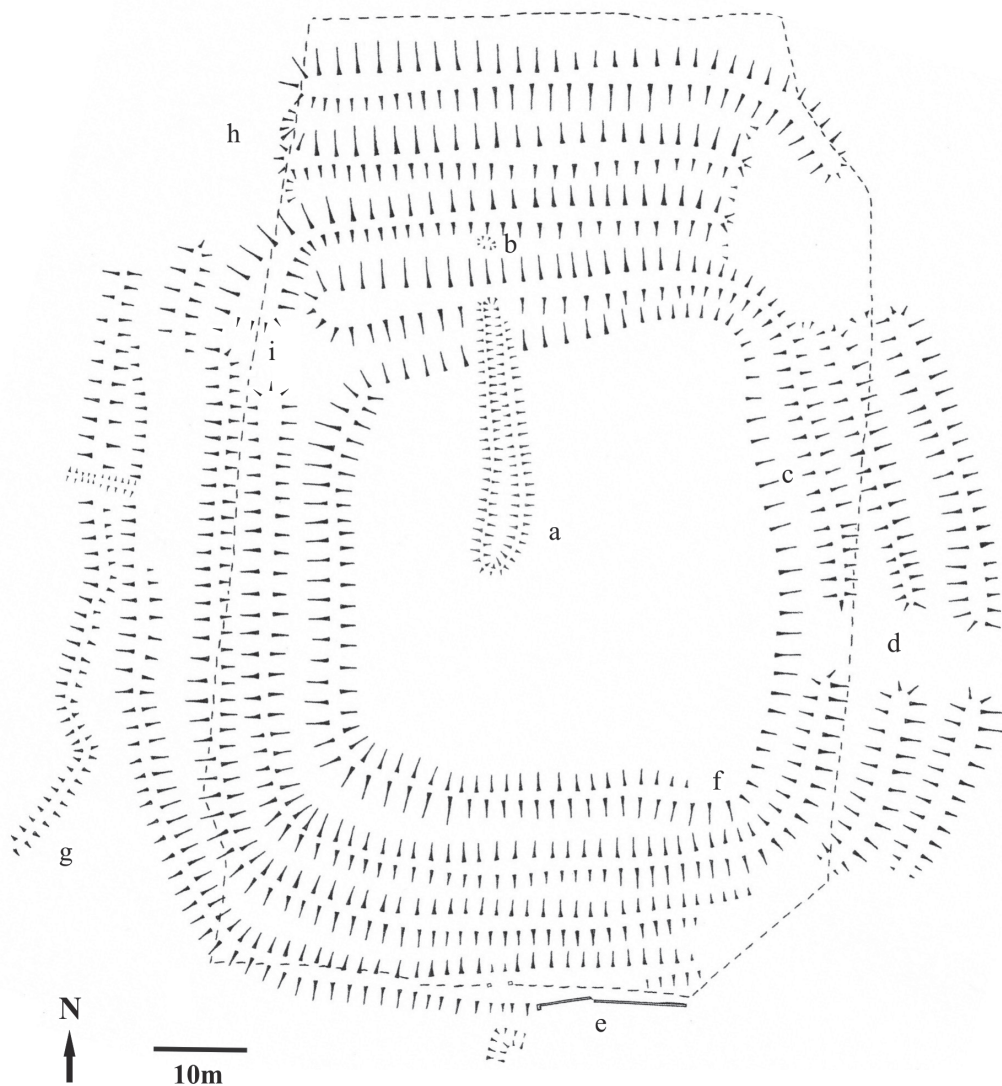


Fig. 2 Analytical survey of Bat's Hogstye

offset methodology (Bowden 1999, 62–63). Two 'fixed points' were created at either end of a east / west baseline across the centre of the enclosure and offset tapes were set by compass perpendicular to this baseline across the earthworks.

The results of the survey are shown in figure 2. Overall the monument measures approximately 100m north – south by 90m east – west

with the area within the earthworks of the boundary complex being about 45 m square. The only feature in the interior is a small ditch (a) running from close to the centre into the inner ditch on the northern leg of the surrounding earthworks. The upthrow from digging this small ditch has been piled on either side and, although very narrow for an archaeological trench, this may represent the

location of the intervention by Kent described above

The northern leg of the boundary complex is well preserved and comprises a series of four ditches and four banks starting with a ditch bounding the interior and a bank the exterior of the complex. Excavation by Kent located a straight-sided trench in the base of the inner of these ditches and on the same alignment. However it is not clear whether the ditch is an original feature with the trench cut into it at a later date, or whether the ditch simply results from slumping of the banks on either side into the trench. The height of the banks varies but at best the top of the bank stands about 1.2 m above the base of the ditch. There is a small pit (b), of unknown purpose, in the second ditch opposite the end of the ditch detailed above.

At the north-east corner of the enclosure all except the inner ditch and bank are missing; the ends of the outer banks and ditches do not appear to have been cut but it is not clear whether or not these earthworks were originally continuous. The land in this corner is poorly drained and it may be that the earthworks were breached in order to drain standing water from the area.

The eastern leg of the boundary complex is less well preserved and is now within scrubby conifer woodland. In addition to the inner ditch (c) only a total of three relatively slight banks could be located; any ditches between them may have become infilled or may never have existed. The inner ditch may represent a continuation of the trench located by Kent. The three banks, but not the inner edge of the inner ditch, have been breached (d) possibly to provide for vehicular access. Further damage has occurred at the south-east corner with the ablation of the two outer banks. At this point and further west outside the boundary complex are the remains of a series of brick buildings (e) and other constructs which have impinged upon the earthworks and may have been responsible for some of the damage in this area.

The southern leg comprises four banks but only three ditches and the inner earthwork is now a bank (f). The boundary complex is again well-preserved particularly towards the south-west corner where the distance between

the bank tops and ditch bottoms is in the order of 1.5 m. These earthworks continue on the western leg of the enclosure and are approached by a bank (g) bounding a large ditch. This probably represents a field or property boundary which may well pre-date the military acquisition of the land.

At the north-west corner the earthworks end abruptly at the present fence-line but appear to have been truncated. At one point (i) the inner ditch cuts the inner bank and this is probably the observation which suggested to Kent that the inner ditch was a later addition to the complex. It is certainly difficult to understand the design of this monument but the interplay between bank and ditch, described by one commentator as 'a tendency to spiral' (Day 1971), may have been intended to enable movement around the monument without exposure to incoming fire.

DISCUSSION

Although a prehistoric origin has been ascribed to this monument there are no close parallels in the area in terms of its morphology, but the military ownership of the land and the plethora of military earthworks in the area resulting from over 150 years of activity, together with the crisp condition of the earthworks, encourage the belief that Bat's Hogstye may have resulted from army action.

The earliest depiction of Bat's Hogstye that has been found is on the Enclosure Map for Aldershot Common dated 1855 (H R O 75M97). Although parts of the Common were enclosed at this date a large lot including Claycart Bottom and the Long Valley was not allocated to landowners in the accompanying text of 1856 – this omission may relate to purchase of the land for army use. In 1853 Lord Hardinge, Chief in Staff of the British Army recommended that a large area of land should be dedicated to a permanent camp which would facilitate military manoeuvres involving different branches of the services, and at the time he expressed concern that potential areas were being enclosed (Cole 1980, 26). In 1854 the owners of Aldershot Common agreed to sell land at £12 / acre (£4.85 / ha) and by

1861 between 7,000 and 8,000 a (2,800 and 3,250 ha) had been purchased for £144, 656, split between landowners and those with a right to cut turf on the Common (*ibid.*, 29). If Bat's Hogstye is indeed military in origin it may well, therefore, have been one of the earliest structures created on the army's new landholding but a date prior to their purchase is also possible.

Use of square redoubts placed in good topographical positions was of long practice in Britain and is well described 'As the faces of square redoubts have only their own fire to trust to, not being defended by any other part, this inconvenience ought to be in some measure obviated by placing them so as to procure some advantage from their situation, that is by constructing them on heights, or having one or more sides covered by a river or morass' (Pleydell 1768, 47). Such a description matches that of Bat's Hogstye, set on a ridge between two streams. In Crowthorne Wood, Berkshire earthworks including small, approximately square redoubts surrounded by a single bank and ditch are thought to date to 1792 (Smith 1995). Early use of Aldershot Common included building a star fort and trench systems on Hungry Hill, the high ridge some 1.5km to the south of Bat's Hogstye which have been dated to between 1855 and 1863 (English 2005). They have been related to the presence at Aldershot in 1862/3 of Lt Col Jervois who was later in overall control of design and construction of the Gosport Advanced Line in the late 1850a and of the

Portsmouth forts in the next decade which closely resemble the star-shaped redoubt on Hungry Hill. A very similar earthwork to Bat's Hogstye can be found on Chobham Common (SU 99416389)– known as the Bee Garden (not to be confused with the Bee Garden in Albury Bottom on Chobham Common (SU 97426430) which is certainly of earlier and probably of prehistoric date (Ellis & English *forthcoming*). This example is triple banked and ditched with an overall measurement of 64 × 56 m and is described as 'The Spur Redoubt' on a map of the military positions laid out by Sir Hope Grant for a mock battle (Anon 1871, 319).

Whilst the present work has not provided any dating evidence for Bat's Hogstye its morphology, location, landownership and the parallel on Chobham Common provides strong evidence that this earthwork is a military redoubt probably constructed in the mid-19th century.

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