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**An Earthwork on Rodborough Common, Gloucestershire: a
review of the evidence**

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Notes

AN EARTHWORK ON RODBOROUGH COMMON, GLOUCESTERSHIRE: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

Summary

An earthwork situated on Rodborough common has been variously interpreted as a late Iron-Age/early Romano-British *oppidum* boundary, a rampart of a military camp dating to the Roman conquest period, and the boundary of a medieval agricultural enclosure. A review of the evidence for these interpretations indicates that a medieval date of origin for the earthwork is most probable. It is, however, suggested that the earthwork enclosed a larger area than previously suspected, and a tentative reconstruction of the former extent of the enclosure is offered.

Introduction

Rodborough common, in Rodborough parish, Gloucestershire, covers *c.* 136 hectares of a promontory (centred on O.S. Nat Grid SO 850035) situated between the Stroud and Nailsworth valleys *c.* 1 km south of the urban centre of Stroud (Fig. 1). The promontory rises to a height of *c.* 190 m above O.D., where the plateau at the summit is formed of Upper Inferior Oolite limestone (O.S. Geological Survey of Great Britain, Sheet 234, Gloucester, 1972). On the plateau enclosed areas surrounded by the common represent encroachments. The largest encroachment is situated towards the southern end of the common and lies immediately west of the main road running across the plateau. Unlike the other encroachments (e.g. Over Butterow, Little London and Rodborough Fort) it has no name. Its northern portion contains a housing estate served by a road called The Hithe, while to the south more housing is served by an unnamed private road. The pattern of landholding in this encroachment has been the subject of regular surveys since the Minchinhampton and Rodborough tithe award of 1839 (Glos. R.O., P 272 SD 2/1: copy of Rodborough tithe map). Stages in the development of landholding during the period 1839–1976 are shown on Fig. 2, which demonstrates that, with the exception of comparatively minor alterations to the north and west, the external boundaries of the encroachment have remained largely unchanged for 150 years. An earthwork located on the common and adjoining the north-west boundary of the encroachment has provoked much archaeological interest and comment and forms the subject of this paper.

Description of the earthwork

The earthwork (centred on O.S. Nat Grid SO 8497503250) is aligned south–north and comprises a bank with a ditch to the east. The earthwork measures *c.* 90 m in length and curves slightly eastwards at its northern end. In May 1996 the bank and ditch were covered with turf, which was overgrown in places with small trees and scrub vegetation, and the ditch was partly infilled. The structure of the monument has been investigated by excavation, which established

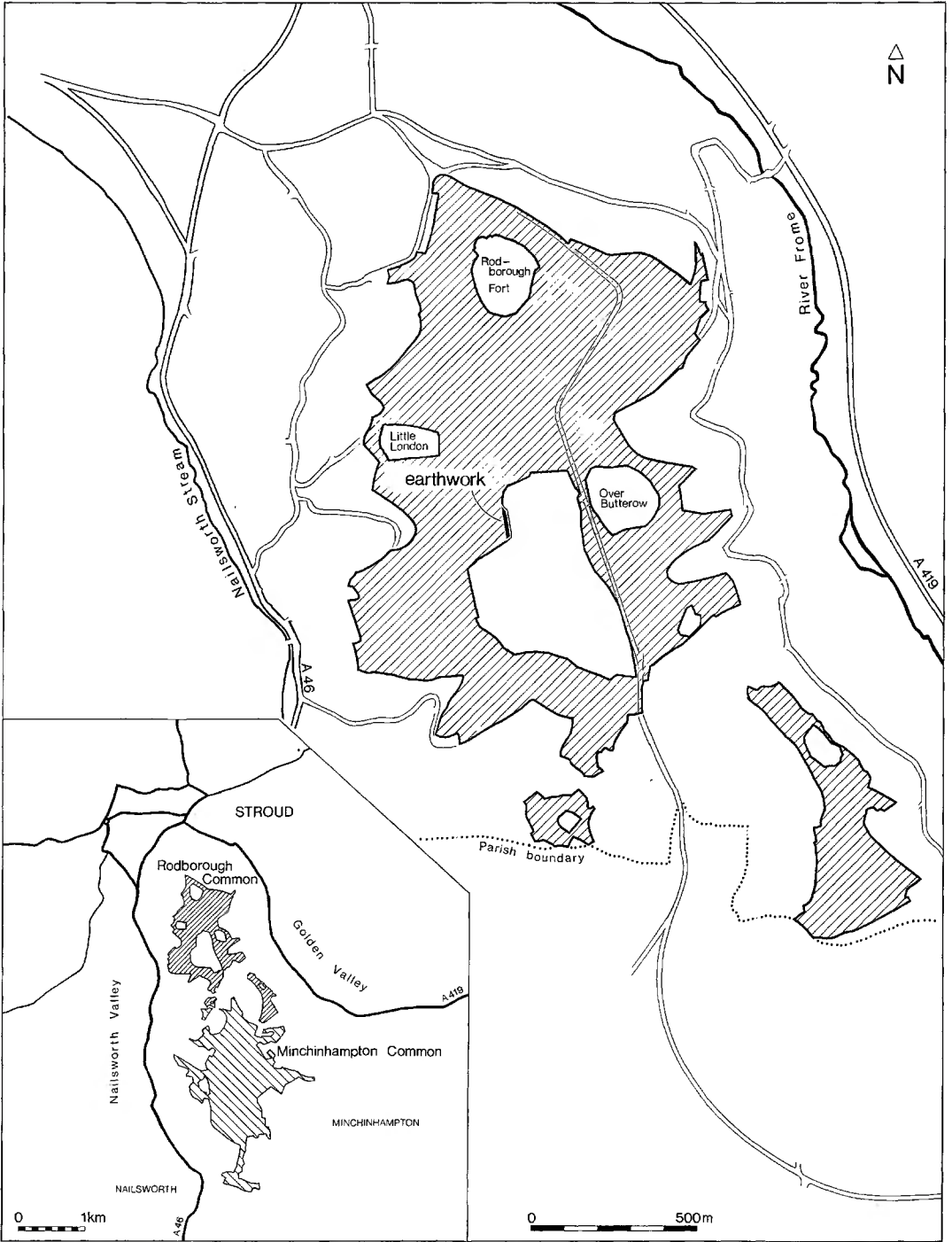
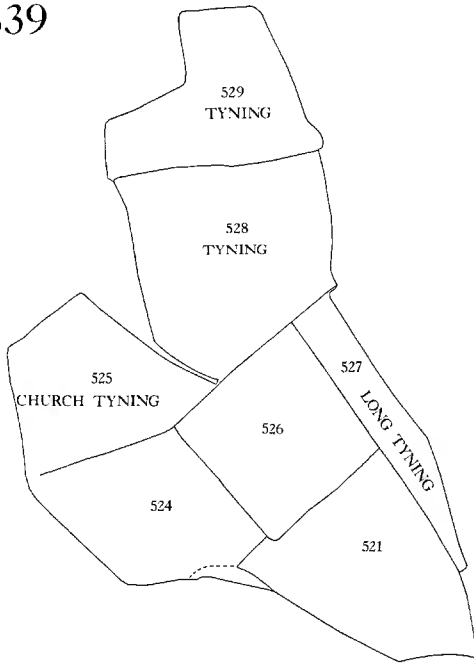
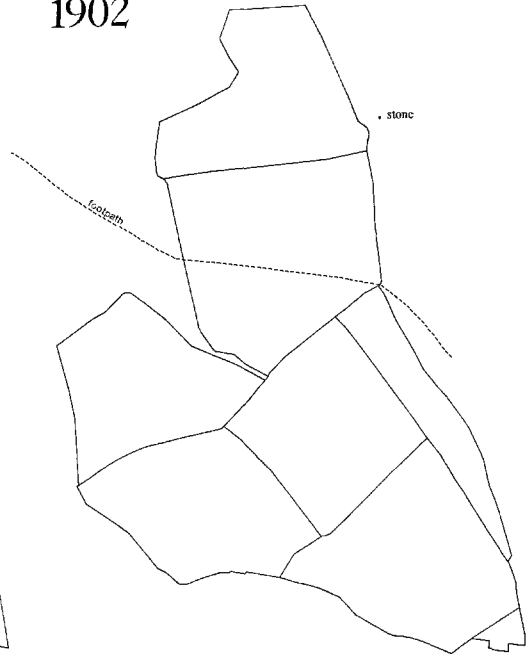


Fig. 1 Location of Rodborough common.

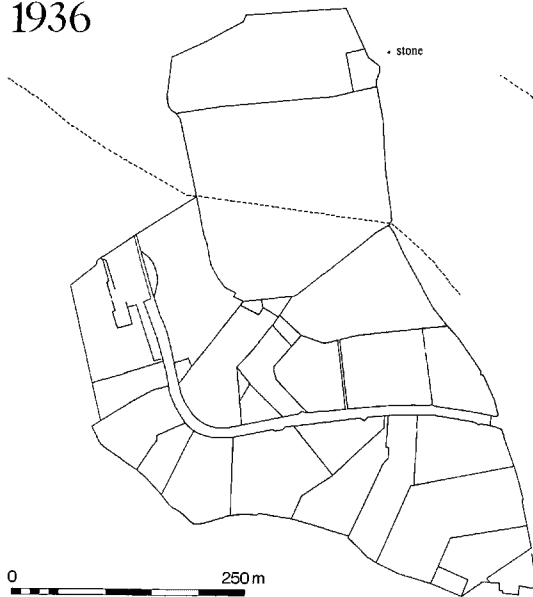
1839



1902



1936



1976

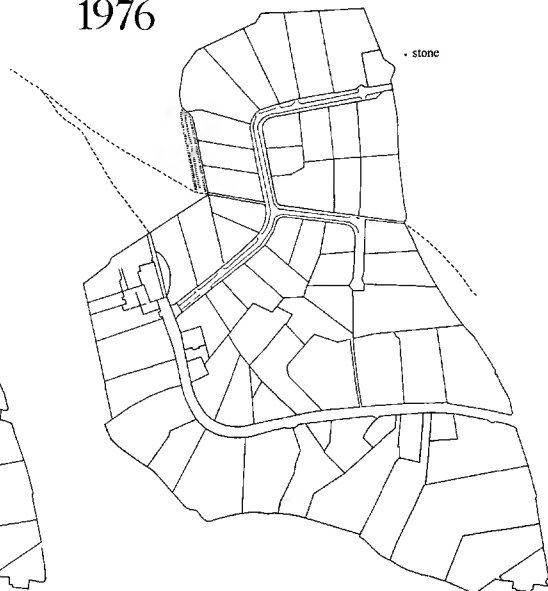


Fig. 2 Stages in the development of boundaries within the encroachment adjoining the earthwork, 1839–1976. Plans based on Rodborough tithe map (1839), O.S. County Series maps (1902, 1936) and O.S. National Grid Series map (1976).

that the bank measures *c.* 1.2 m in height by 8.5 m in basal width, and that the 'V'-shaped ditch with a squared cleaning-slot at its base measures *c.* 5.18 m in width by 2.28 m in depth (Clifford 1937, 290 and fig. 2). A claim that the earthwork once comprised a double bank and ditch (O'Neil and O'Neil 1952, 26–7) would appear to derive from the presence of the encroachment boundary running alongside.

Until the 1950s the earthwork could be traced for an additional 80 m southwards and measured a total of *c.* 170 m in length (Rennie 1959, 25 and fig. 1). At the junction of the extant and the levelled sections of the earthwork was a slight gap through which passed a footpath first recorded on an Ordnance Survey map published in 1884. The gap, which still carries the footpath at the southern end of the extant bank, was at one time interpreted as an entrance



Fig. 3 Photograph, dated 16 June 1948, looking north-west and showing the northern part of the encroachment before its development for housing. The extant portion of the earthwork is visible centre left on the external edge of the walled area. The southern portion, visible inside the walled area, has since been built over. Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs, AN 43: copyright reserved.

causeway contemporary with the construction of the earthwork (O'Neil and O'Neil 1952, 27) but this was subsequently disproved by excavation which showed the ditch to be continuous (Rennie 1959, 27).

To the south of the footpath the earthwork began to be levelled during the 1920s, following the addition of part of the common to the encroachment (Burton 1928, 314). The remnant of the earthwork within the newly-encroached area was recorded on an aerial photograph taken in 1948 (Fig. 3) before it was finally destroyed by housing development during the 1950s. The former alignment of this part of the earthwork is marked by the route of a driveway to a private house (Fig. 4) called Pen Y Bryn.



Fig. 4 Photograph, dated 8 April 1964, looking north-west and showing part of the encroachment developed for housing. The extant portion of the earthwork is visible; its former southern continuation is marked by the route of a driveway to a house. Cambridge University Collection of Air photographs, AIO 1: copyright reserved.

Historiographical review

The earliest certain reference to the earthwork dates to the late 19th century when Playne (1872, 287; 1877, 214) included the earthwork in his list of prehistoric camps: it was then noted that only a short length of the earthwork had survived levelling by cultivation. Other descriptions of the period (Dorington 1881, 13; Witts 1883, 42) were probably influenced by Playne's reports. In the 20th century the earthwork was first described by Burton (1928, 313–14) who interpreted it as the western boundary of a non-defensive enclosure but made no conjecture as to its former extent and date of construction.

In 1936 a trench was opened across the earthwork near its northern end (Fig. 6) by Elsie Clifford in the initial phase of a programme of excavation which included the sampling of two other large earthworks (The Bulwarks and Amberley Camp) on Minchinhampton common (Clifford 1936 and 1937). At Rodborough a *terminus post quem* for the construction of the bank of the earthwork was provided by sherds of early Roman pottery, which were accompanied by abraded fragments of 'Belgic' (i.e. late Iron-Age) pottery interpreted as residual material deriving from earlier activity (Clifford 1937, 291 and fig. 2). In interpreting the results of her work at Rodborough and Minchinhampton, Clifford (1937, 300) argued that the earthworks were constructed together as a group during the late Iron Age, and that they functioned as the 'Minchinhampton complex' of boundaries defining a 'loosely-knit Belgic *oppidum*, designed to enclose village-groups and farm-lands'. For the earthwork at Rodborough such an interpretation cannot be reconciled with the Romano-British *terminus post quem* established by Clifford herself for the construction of its bank.

In publishing the results of her work on the 'Minchinhampton complex', Clifford made no comment regarding the original extent of the earthwork at Rodborough. The question was, however, addressed during investigations of the earthwork and its locality during the 1950s. Surface traces of slight banks and the evidence of an aerial photograph showing a rectilinear crop mark led O'Neil and O'Neil (1952, 26–7) to propose that the earthwork once enclosed c. 8 acres (3.24 hectares) of land to the east of the then extant bank. In addition, O'Neil and O'Neil reinterpreted the earthwork as the defences of a military camp of the Roman conquest period. Their interpretation was accepted by the Ordnance Survey, which described the area as a 'Roman Camp' on its 1:10,560-scale map of 1954 (the edition did not show the earthwork). The same designation is found marked on recent Ordnance Survey maps, such as the 1:10,000-scale map of 1984 which also shows the earthwork with the description 'enclosure'.

Opportunities to test the Roman camp hypothesis followed soon after its publication when housing development to the east of the earthwork prompted archaeological investigation. In 1953 an 'occupation level' observed within a foundation trench yielded a quantity of late Iron-Age/early Romano-British pottery and animal bone (Clifford 1964a, 145): the precise findspot of the material is not known. Excavation on a larger scale was undertaken in 1954 and 1955 by D.M. Rennie on behalf of the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate of the then Ministry of Works (Rennie 1959). Trenching located a ditch dating to around the mid 1st century A.D. (Ditch I), which was stratigraphically earlier than a second ditch (Ditch II) equivalent to the southern and eastern boundary of the Roman camp postulated by O'Neil and O'Neil (for plots of Ditches I and II see Fig. 6). Like O'Neil and O'Neil, Rennie interpreted Ditch II as a continuation of the earthwork, but her interpretation of its date and function differed radically from theirs. Ditch II produced no dateable finds during excavation but, because it was later than, and unrelated in alignment to, the Roman Ditch I and also because there was circumstantial evidence for medieval occupation in the vicinity, the earthwork was reinterpreted as a medieval agricultural enclosure sited by chance on an area containing earlier occupation, Clifford's Roman finds from the bank of the earthwork being

residual in character (Rennie 1959, 33–5). For reasons which are unclear, Rennie's reinterpretation of the earthwork has been ignored by the majority of subsequent commentators, most of whom have preferred to view the monument as a pre-medieval construction.

Writing in 1961, but without reference to Rennie's work at Rodborough published only two years before, Clifford modified her 1937 interpretation of the 'Minchinhampton complex' of earthworks to suggest that it represented a series of defensive ramparts which were 'probably the work of Caractacus and his followers' constructed during A.D. 43–7 (Clifford 1961, 157–63). Thus, Clifford reinterpreted the 'Minchinhampton complex' as a military system of strategic importance and brought its date of construction forward from the late Iron Age to the earliest years of the Romano-British period. This reassessment of the evidence has gained limited recognition; indeed, several authors (Herbert 1976, 218; Cox 1992, 62) have continued to refer to the earthwork at Rodborough as an Iron-Age construction, presumably in deference to Clifford's interpretation of 1937.

In the past twenty years there have been two reviews of the evidence relating to the Rodborough earthwork and its locality. The first, undertaken by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments during the 1970s, accepted the post-Roman dating of the earthwork advanced by Rennie but suggested that Rennie's Ditch I had probable Roman military associations (RCHM 1976, 98). The second review by Avery (1993, 2, 306–7) has concluded that the earthwork probably *did* function as part of a Roman camp. Such differences of interpretation underline the uncertain nature of the evidence relating to the earthwork. It may be for this reason that, alone of the 'Minchinhampton complex', the earthwork at Rodborough has not been designated a Scheduled Monument in spite of an appeal that this should be done urgently (Saville 1980, 30).

Finds from the excavations conducted by Clifford and Rennie at Rodborough are in the custody of Stroud District Museum: no excavation records appear to have been deposited with the finds (pers. comm. S. Hayward, curator). A reassessment of the pottery assemblages has confirmed the late Iron-Age/early Romano-British character of the material, the latest sherds dating to c. A.D. 70 (Clarke 1982, 213). It is convenient at this point to note that several commentators (Clifford 1937, 291; Clarke 1982, 213) have identified the locality of the earthwork as the findspot of two important fragments of late Iron-Age metalwork now in the British Museum (BM 1925, 146: fig. 169). While those fragments appear to be broadly contemporary with the occupation to the east of the earthwork, and they undoubtedly came from somewhere on Rodborough common (Green 1949, 189), the exact location of their discovery is not certain.

A review of the date of the earthwork

The dating of the earthwork to the 1st century A.D. is difficult to disprove since no later finds were recovered during excavation of the extant bank. There must, however, be serious doubt that the dating is correct because the interpretations which assigned the earthwork to this period have been discredited by surveys of archaeological evidence undertaken at national level. Clifford's (1937 and 1961) 'Minchinhampton complex' of earthworks is not included in the corpus of sites in England which are now recognized as *oppida* (Cunliffe 1976; Millet 1990, 21–9). The existence of the Roman camp at Rodborough postulated by O'Neil and O'Neil (1952) has not been recognized in a recent survey of Roman camps in England (Welfare and Swan 1995). Therefore, Rennie's interpretation of the monument as the boundary of a medieval enclosure deserves attention, and indeed it appears to be supported by what is known of the locality during the medieval period and by the morphology of the earthwork itself.

There have been several studies of the historic landscape of the parishes of Minchinhampton and Rodborough (Watson 1932 and 1939; Herbert 1974 and 1976). Documents demonstrate that their medieval commons were covered by extensive tracts of beech woodland which, although carefully managed as a valuable economic resource, were subject to intermittent encroachment to provide space for agricultural land and dwellings. That at least one large enclosure was present within the woodland at Rodborough during the medieval period is suggested by a custumal of *c.* 1170, which recorded the presence of a clearing called *magna roda* close to the boundary between Rodborough and Minchinhampton (Herbert 1974; 1976, 218 and footnote). An enclosure delimited by the earthwork under discussion would not, therefore, be out of place on Rodborough common during the medieval period.

The internal ditch of the extant earthwork is a strong indicator of medieval construction, since within the medieval rural landscape a range of enclosures delimited by banks with internal ditches functioned for a variety of purposes (Crawford 1953, 189–97). In Gloucestershire only one other example of such an earthwork, at Short Wood in Coberley, has been excavated (Clifford 1964b; Darvill 1981). As at Rodborough the latest finds from the bank of the Short Wood earthwork belonged to the Roman period, making precise dating difficult: at both monuments the dearth of medieval finds may be presumed to reflect a low level of medieval activity in the areas sampled by excavation. At Short Wood the earthwork was comparatively slight and its precise function is uncertain. At Rodborough the large size of the bank and ditch may indicate that it was constructed to protect adjoining woodland from activity within the enclosed area and to ensure that further, casual incursions into the woodland were prevented by the establishment of a permanent boundary.

While there would appear to be no reference to the earthwork at Rodborough in the medieval documents these do record the extensive earthwork located on Minchinhampton common known today as The Bulwarks. As discussed above The Bulwarks forms part of the ‘Minchinhampton complex’ of earthworks sampled by Clifford during the 1930s and dated by her to the late Iron-Age/early Romano-British period. A custumal of *c.* 1300 suggests, however, that The Bulwarks, then called ‘the fosse’, played an important role in the management of the medieval landscape. Surmounted by a fence, ‘the fosse’ functioned as a boundary demarcating the woodland on Minchinhampton common from agricultural land to the east (Watson 1932, 253–4; 1939, 77). Interestingly, a medieval date for The Bulwarks was suggested (Crawford 1925, map facing page 7) several years before the medieval records mentioning ‘the fosse’ were published. Indeed, morphologically, The Bulwarks bears a strong resemblance to woodbanks of the medieval period (as described by Rackham 1986, 98–100). The evidence strongly suggests that, in addition to the earthwork at Rodborough, the date and interpretation of another element of Clifford’s ‘Minchinhampton complex’ is in need of review. Pending such a reassessment it can be suggested that all the large earthworks forming the ‘Minchinhampton complex’ may ultimately be recognized as medieval constructions which divided the woodland of the commons from adjoining areas of land use.

It may be worth noting here that surface evidence of the former woodland in Rodborough and Minchinhampton survives on both commons. There, many areas are littered with small oval depressions (measuring *c.* 2–3 m across) with adjacent mounds which individually represents the sites of fallen trees (see Fig. 4, where many examples are visible). The true nature of the depressions, which have also been noted densely scattered on Selsley common, King’s Stanley, and Westridge, North Nibley, was recognized by some early commentators (Willmore 1925, 293; Burton 1928, 318). These features have at various times been interpreted as cooking-pits (Guise 1865, 49–50), pit-dwellings (Playne 1872, 277–93), burial places (Hay 1945) and features of geological origin (Clifford 1937, 288–90; Lindley 1957, 155; Clifford 1961, 157).

Rennie's excavations of 1954–5 reconsidered

While Rennie's (1959) interpretation of the date and function of the earthwork is supported by the available evidence some aspects of the excavations of 1954–5 are questionable. Most importantly there are some reasons to doubt the identification of Ditch II as the continuation of the earthwork and thus the presence of a *c.* 8-acre enclosure to its east. Before examining the evidence for Ditch II it should be noted that there are several pieces of information which may be relevant to the study of the earthwork.

Firstly, the earthwork may have been mentioned in Samuel Rudder's description of Rodborough parish published in the later 18th century (1779, 629), where he postulated that the place-name Rodborough was derived from a '*Berg, or Camp, by which the road is carried*'. Rudder's road can be identified as the road running north–south across the plateau of Rodborough common. In the late 18th century this represented the most important route within the parish, forming part of the road to London from the cloth-producing areas of Stroud (Herbert 1976, 218). Since no other monument resembling a 'camp' is known in Rodborough parish there is a high probability that Rudder's comment concerns the earthwork under discussion. This was certainly the view of the antiquary Witts (1883, 42) in the late 19th century; he had no doubt that the earthwork was the feature referred to by Rudder.

Rudder's comment is of great interest since it raises the possibility that, in the later 18th century, the earthwork was well preserved and delimited an enclosure whose eastern boundary lay *c.* 250 m east of the extant bank and close to the road across the common. Indeed, his comment appears to describe the present relationship of the road with the eastern boundary of the encroachment adjoining the earthwork, rather than Ditch II which lies 80 m or more distant from the road (see Fig. 6). As recorded on the tithe map of 1839 (Fig. 2) the eastern boundary of the encroachment had two small protuberances which might be interpreted as marking the former presence of the earthwork where it adjoined points of access into the enclosure. The locations of these protuberances can be identified. The southern one no longer survives but its site carries the footpath first recorded by the Ordnance Survey in 1884. The northern protuberance is now infilled with a house called Milestone Cottage: its large size is difficult to explain as a simple entrance into a field.

The field names recorded by the tithe award of 1839 may also be relevant to the study of the earthwork. Four of the fields then comprising the encroachment had names incorporating the element 'Tyning' (see Fig. 2: the names of parcels 521, 524 and 526 in the southern part of the encroachment were not noted in the tithe award). Since 'Tyning' can be understood in the sense of 'enclosure' (Smith 1965, 180) it is tempting to identify the fields so named with areas enclosed by, or closely associated with, the earthwork. The fact that the distribution of the fields whose names incorporated 'Tyning' was more extensive than the enclosure formed by Ditch II provides further grounds for suspecting that the earthwork once enclosed a larger area. Therefore, the interpretation of Ditch II as the continuation of the earthwork requires closer examination.

It is clear that the excavations of 1954–5 were undertaken in difficult circumstances and that some areas of construction were not available for investigation. The main excavation trenches are located on Fig. 6: only four trenches (A–D) were excavated across Ditches I and II to the east of the then extant earthwork. In a trench placed at Site E in the apparent 'gap' dividing the earthwork in 1954–5, the turf and topsoil were removed to expose the earthwork's ditch which does not appear to have been excavated. Crucially, the excavations produced no firm evidence to prove a junction of Ditch II with the then southern or northern end of the earthwork, as Rennie's plan (1959, fig. 1) might at first glance suggest.



Fig. 5 Photograph, dated 11 June 1950, showing the crop mark feature equivalent to Ditch II. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England), 58/RAF/503, frame 503-4; © Crown Copyright/MOD.

The supposed junction of Ditch II with the southern end of the earthwork is especially problematic. Indeed, Rennie (1959, 26–7) was careful to point out that, although portions of Ditch II were revealed during her excavations as a crop mark visible at ground level, no evidence for its alignment could be observed in the area next to the southern end of the earthwork. Part of the missing alignment may, however, be represented by a crop mark visible on an aerial photograph taken in 1950. The photograph (Fig. 5) shows Ditch II with what appears to be a return running north of the earthwork's then southern terminal (see Fig. 6 for a plot of the alignment). This evidence suggests that Ditch II represents a feature unrelated to the earthwork.

Viewed in this light the supposed junction of Ditch II with the northern end of the earthwork deserves close scrutiny. In the absence of crop-mark evidence for a northern continuation of the earthwork Rennie suggested that a slight bank and ditch represented the northern portion of Ditch II and tested her theory by excavation at Site D. The rather vague account of the results obtained there (Rennie 1959, 27) does not inspire confidence that a large ditch was observed at this location. In addition, Rennie omitted to mention the presence of a field boundary on the alignment of the 'earthwork', which perhaps accounted for the feature she saw. A modern boundary may also account for a ditch observed within a sewage-trench dug adjacent to the then southern end of the earthwork, since this was stated to be 'immediately inside the boundary wall of the field' (Rennie 1959, 25).

It must, therefore, be emphasized that conclusive evidence for the presence and character of Ditch II was obtained at Sites A, B and C well to the east of the earthwork. Excavation at Site A revealed a ditch measuring *c.* 6.42 m in width by 1.85 m in depth (Rennie 1959, fig. 2). These dimensions are similar to those obtained from the ditch of the extant earthwork by Clifford, but Ditch II had a more open profile and lacked a basal cleaning-slot. The morphological evidence for equating Ditch II with the ditch of the extant earthwork appears to be indecisive.

Thus, evidence for Ditch II representing the continuation of the earthwork is not strong and in one respect may be contradicted by the crop-mark record. If not part of the earthwork under discussion the function and date of Ditch II is open to question: since no alternative explanation for the feature can be offered here its nature must remain obscure.

Another aspect of the 1954–5 excavations which requires discussion concerns the evidence for post-Roman occupation associated with the earthwork. Rennie (1959, 35) stated that the earthwork was depicted on a print of the late 18th century, which showed an earthwork enclosure associated with a house. Examination of the print (Lysons 1797, plate 3) reveals, however, that the earthwork is not depicted (it being out of view on the crest of Rodborough hill) and that features shown can be located from the surrounding topography in the encroachment now called Little London (Fig. 1). Although not directly relevant to the earthwork under discussion the print provides documentary evidence for another earthwork enclosure on Rodborough common for which a post-Roman origin is possible.

Despite Rennie's misinterpretation of the print there is evidence to suggest that some form of medieval or post-medieval settlement may have been located close to the earthwork. Firstly, the title award of 1839 records that one field of the encroachment adjoining the earthwork was called 'Church Tynning' (Fig. 2). While the name might indicate former glebe land, or commemorate the surname of an owner, it could alternatively reflect the memory in 1839 of a structure located in this area, especially since it probably once contained a hollow way earthwork which is now preserved on the common adjacent to the western side of the encroachment (Fig. 6). Presumably a feature of medieval date, the hollow way is aligned with the north-eastern boundary of 'Church Tynning' and its destination can be projected close to the southern end of the earthwork (as it was preserved until the mid 1950s). It is, therefore, tempting to identify a potential area of post-Roman settlement in this locality.

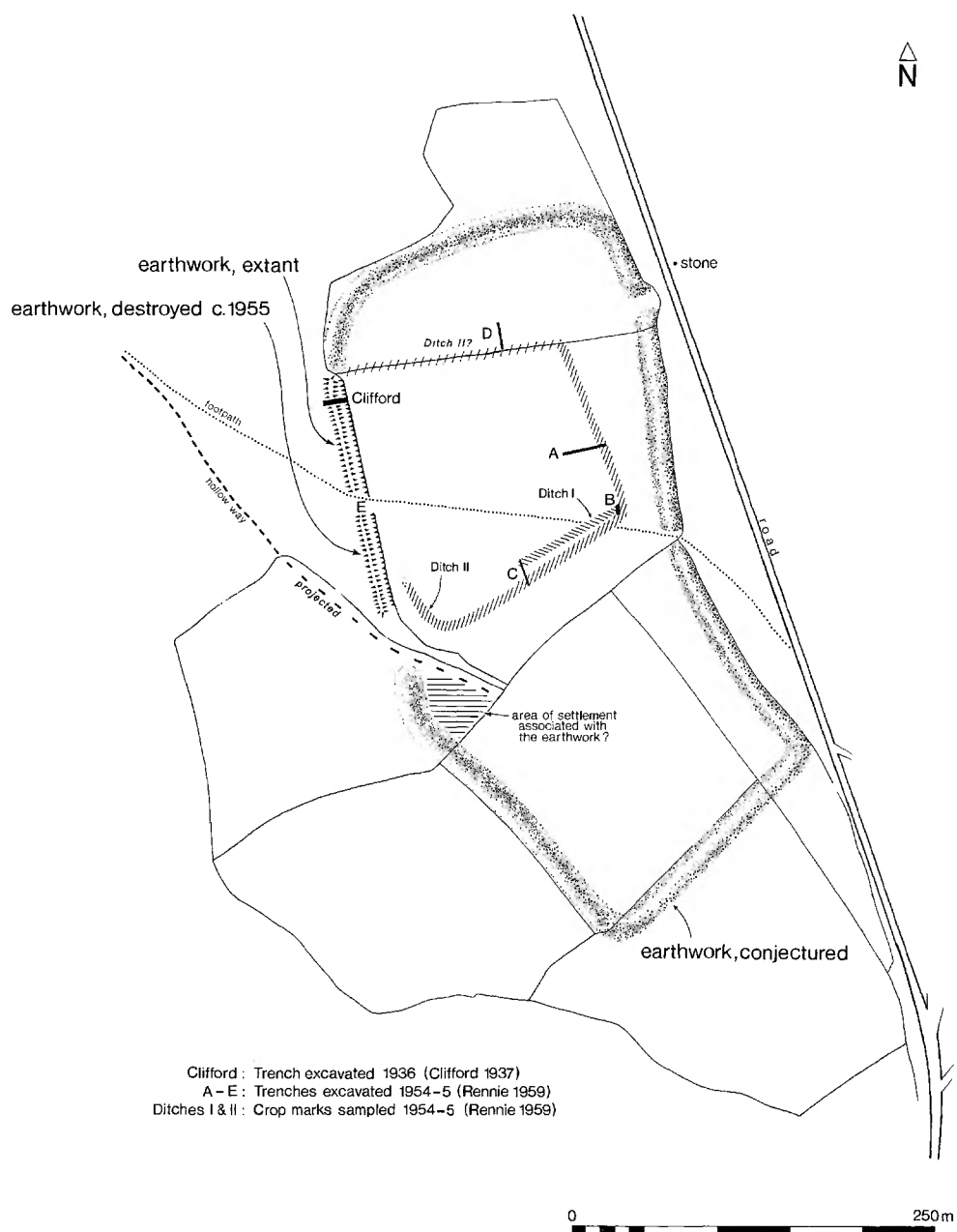


Fig. 6 Interpretative plan showing a tentative reconstruction of the earthwork. Also shown are the locations of the trench excavated across the earthwork in 1936 (Clifford 1937) and trenches (annotated A-E) excavated in 1954-5 across the earthwork and Ditches I and II (Rennie 1959). Ditch II has been plotted from Fig. 5. The footpath and hollow way have been plotted from O.S. maps and aerial photographs.

While there is no conclusive evidence for such occupation it may be of interest to note that Rennie (1959, 35) recorded finds of medieval pottery which were discovered 'to the south of the south-east corner of the earthwork'. Bearing in mind that the south-east corner of the earthwork was described as buttressed during the 1920s (Burton 1928, 313) it is possible that Rennie noted the location of the medieval pottery in relation to the upstanding earthwork, rather than Ditch II. If so, the medieval pottery was found in the vicinity of the area of settlement postulated above.

A tentative reconstruction of the earthwork

In view of the probability that the earthwork functioned as the boundary of a medieval agricultural enclosure it may be significant for our understanding of the monument that many of the medieval landholdings of Minchinhampton and Rodborough were of regular size and amounted to a virgate or a subdivision or multiplication of that unit: in Minchinhampton manor (of which Rodborough formed part) a virgate was equal to 24 acres (Watson 1932, 247). While the medieval documents rarely provide information to enable landholdings to be located precisely it is of interest that the custumal of c. 1300 recorded a holding measuring a virgate at Rodborough which was held by a certain Alexander of Rodborough (Watson 1932, 219 and 299–300). The possibility arises, therefore, that the enclosure delineated by the earthwork at Rodborough may have covered approximately 24 acres. A reconstruction is presented on Fig. 6, which postulates that the earthwork and the land it enclosed occupied an area of c. 24.2 acres. The map base used for Fig. 6 is the Ordnance Survey County Series map of 1902, when the boundaries of the encroachment closely resembled the tithe map of 1839 (see Fig. 2).

The reconstruction assumes that the original plan of the earthwork determined the alignments of many of the boundaries of the encroachment recorded on the tithe map of 1839. The assumption is based, firstly, on the fact that such a boundary runs alongside the extant earthwork and, secondly, on the possible alignment of the earthwork with the eastern side of the encroachment (see the interpretation given above of Rudder's description of the '*Berg or Camp*'). A major discordance between the tithe boundaries and the postulated plan of the earthwork can be observed to the north. There, it can be argued that a boundary once existed alongside the postulated earthwork and that the projecting, northernmost area of the encroachment represented an addition to its main part. Elsewhere the postulated enclosure of c. 24 acres fits neatly into the framework of boundaries recorded in 1839 and it is difficult to believe that the correspondence in size is coincidental. The extent of the postulated enclosure also accords quite closely with distribution of the fields containing the 'Tyning' element in their names (Fig. 2), although the absence of names for some fields recorded in 1839 means that this evidence is incomplete. Entrances are conjectured at the sites of the protuberances from the encroachment's eastern boundary shown on the tithe map. In addition, an entrance and an area of settlement associated with the centre of the western side of the reconstructed enclosure is postulated from the evidence of the field name 'Church Tyning', the presence of the hollow way earthwork, and the possible location in this area of the medieval pottery found by Rennie.

It is acknowledged that the uncertain nature of much of the evidence relating to the earthwork means that the reconstruction can only be tentative. Further information is required to clarify the extent of the earthwork and, since the documentary sources relating to the locality probably cannot resolve the question, this can only be gained from archaeological excavation. Fortunately, although much of the interior of the encroachment has been developed for housing, many of the houses are set within large gardens and areas of open ground. The reconstruction is, therefore, offered as a model which is capable of being tested by excavation at some future date.

Acknowledgements

This review of the earthwork at Rodborough was prompted by an archaeological survey of Rodborough common commissioned by the landowner, the National Trust, and undertaken in 1992 by Gloucestershire County Council's Archaeology Service (Parry 1992); I should like to thank Philip Claris of the National Trust for instigating the work. Jan Wills (County Archaeological Officer) supervised the survey and offered encouragement during the preparation of this paper. I should also like to thank staff at Gloucestershire Record Office for their help with documentary evidence, Susan Hayward, curator of Stroud District Museum, for supplying information concerning finds from the area of interest, Jane Isaac, Sites and Monuments Record Officer, for information from Gloucestershire County Council's Sites and Monuments Record, and Martin Ecclestone, for commenting on drafts of this paper.

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CHARLES PARRY

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL AND LOCAL HISTORY SOCIETIES OF GLOUCESTERSHIRE

The oldest society dedicated to the antiquities of Gloucestershire is the Cotteswold Naturalists' Field Club. Formed on the model of the Berwickshire Naturalists' Club at the suggestion of Sir Thomas Tancred, the Club's first secretary, its inaugural meeting was held at the Black Horse Inn at Birdlip on 7 July 1846. The objects were 'to investigate the natural history, antiquities and agriculture of the Cotswold district and its neighbourhood',¹ by means of occasional meetings of those of congenial tastes not hampered by pedantic rules. Twenty-five gentlemen were invited to be the first members; the first annual subscription was 6*d*.

The Club clearly struck a popular note and rapidly increased in size. Within a few years it had become necessary to limit numbers to 40 as otherwise they would have been too many to enjoy the hospitality of the Cotswold wayside inns which the founders treasured. The popularity of the idea soon spread, and similar clubs were founded at Woolhope, Malvern and elsewhere.

Despite the emphasis on conviviality, the Club had a serious purpose and owed much of its success to the support of the senior staff of the recently established College of Agriculture at Cirencester. Scholarly papers were read and published in the Club's *Proceedings*, some of which recorded new discoveries, for example in the field of geology. However the twin purposes of the Club (the social and the scholarly) regularly created a tension at periods when the one was thought to predominate at the expense of the other. Thus on the retirement of the first president Thomas Barwick Lloyd Baker in 1860, his successor Sir William Vernon Guise felt the need to stimulate the production of papers for publication² and to introduce new members by extending the permitted number to 100. Some 35 years later the membership during the 1860s (apart from the leading lights) was characterised by the then president, M.W. Colchester-Wemyss, as

county squires and clergymen of the old school: one or two Professors with spectacles, and a bagful of gryphites and pygasters and pectens, and a vocabulary that would frighten owls: and last, not least, a contingent of old Indian officers from Cheltenham, tanned by the sun, and touched on the liver: and whose talk was of *elephas orientalis*, cholera morbus, and the Nizam.³

Colchester-Wemyss's article also described archaeological exploration in early Victorian times.

His brother had come home from Oxford, fired with antiquarian zeal; and he said one morning 'John, let's come up on to the Camp and have a dig to see if we can find something' . . . So they shouldered a spade each, and went up the hill, where they worked away for about an hour, with the result of turning up a piece of black pottery the size of one's hand, and some scores of coins of the Constantine period – say of the Lower Empire: most of them struck at Trèves.

Twenty years after this, the farmer who had the ground ploughed it for the first time since the Roman occupation: for it had been a rough pasture field. In doing so he turned up a pot, with a sherd broken from its side: the very sherd that had been taken off by the spade in the experimental digging just described.

Needless to say this cavalier attitude was not encouraged by the Club!

In addition to its *Proceedings* the Cotteswold Club has created two enduring monuments to its efforts. The first and perhaps the more important is the Badgeworth Nature Reserve, the only known site in Britain of *ranunculus ophioglossifolius*, adder's-tongue spearwort or the Badgeworth buttercup. First noticed in 1890, it did not appear continuously on the site until after 1911.⁴ The site attracted interest but it had no protection and it came under threat after 1930 when the property changed hands and the new owner prepared to sell the field for development. G.W. Hedley, a member of the Club, managed to buy it in January 1933 and the Club looked after it and paid for its upkeep for the next thirty years. When the Gloucestershire Trust for Nature Conservation was formed in 1961 the Club relinquished its responsibility. By that time no other English site for the plant was known. The Club had saved a species from extinction, created the first nature reserve in Gloucestershire and had advanced the cause of nature conservation in general.

The other major achievement of the Club was the publication of *Gloucestershire Flora*. The project was first suggested in 1877 by Professor G.S. Boulger of the Agricultural College.⁵ He began to collect materials for it, but he could not bring them to a state of readiness for publication and the project collapsed. The proposal was revived in 1907. Professor Boulger's 'very large ms. material' was handed to the new generation of would-be editors, appeals were made for additional information, and a series of progress reports appeared as appendices in the *Proceedings*. Hopes that a preliminary list could be published in 1923 were not fulfilled, but work continued and in 1931 a botanical sub-committee was appointed to oversee the work. An appeal for subscriptions was issued in 1939 but the outbreak of war caused plans for publication to be deferred. A new appeal with prospectus was issued in 1946; this was so successful that the print run was extended to 600 copies. *Gloucestershire Flora* was published to great acclaim in 1948 and it remains the standard work on its subject.

In the meantime, in 1946, the Club had its centenary celebration. It then numbered about 150 members, who paid £1 as an entrance fee and an annual subscription of £1. Many delegates from eminent institutions and societies paid tribute to the work of the Club in the fields of botany, entomology, archaeology, zoology and geology and especially in bringing these allied interests together for their mutual benefit. In recent years the Club's tradition of publication has fallen rather into abeyance but its social side remains vigorous.

Another society, sadly short-lived, was the Gloucester Cathedral Society. It was founded in