

CPAT Report No. 1337



Old Radnor Field System

TOPOGRAPHICAL SURVEY



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Summary

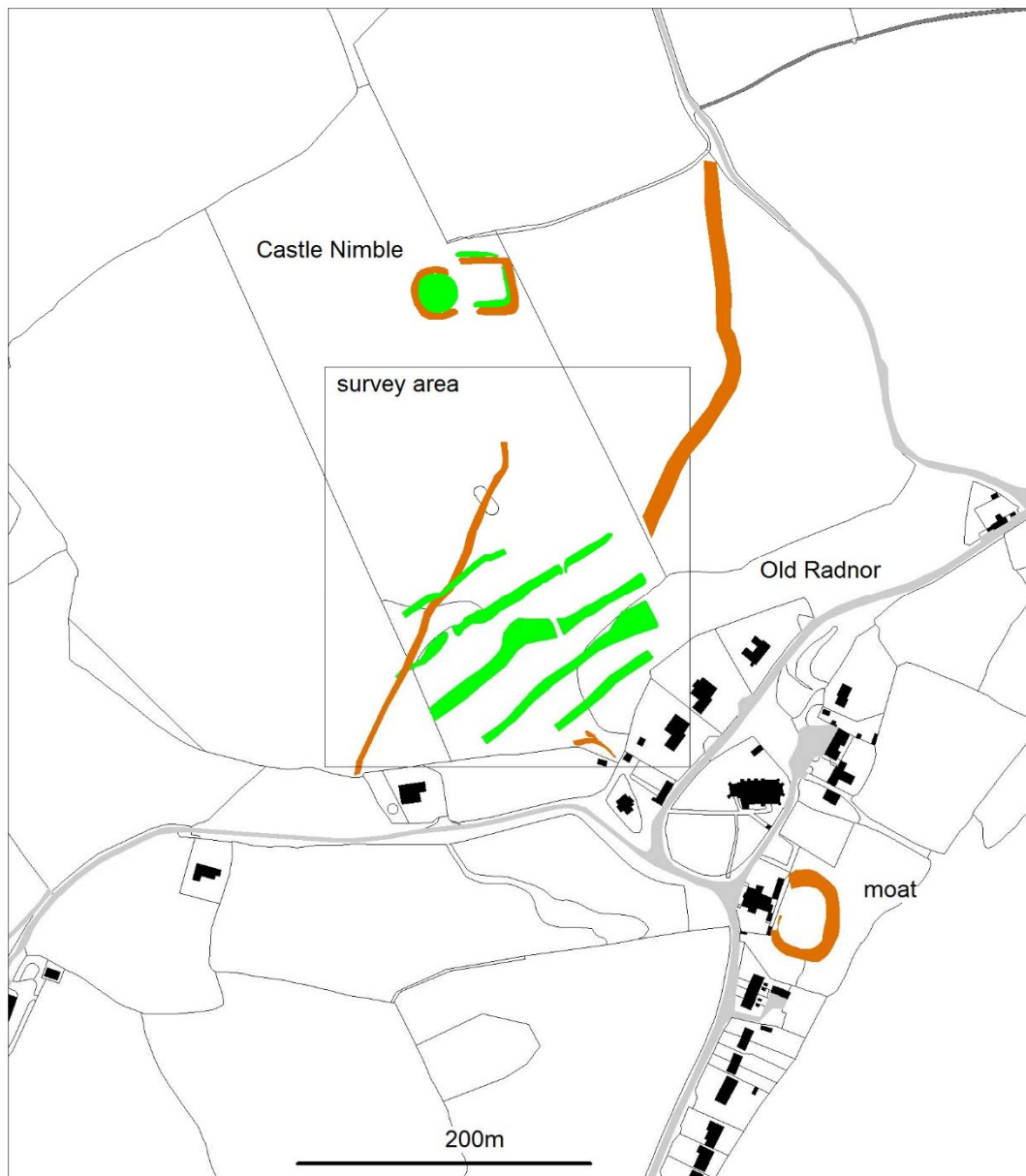
An on-going project, focusing on the Walton Basin in eastern Radnorshire, commenced in 2012/13 and was designed to address a number of pressing management issues relating to agricultural usage and development affecting the important multi-period archaeological resource within the area. While previous survey and excavation has concentrated on the important complex of prehistoric monuments, as well as limited work on a number of Roman sites, the study was extended during 2014-15 to include an investigation of a series of putative medieval earthworks occupying the slopes below the village of Old Radnor.

To this end a small-scale topographical survey was undertaken with the assistance of local volunteers with outreach as its primary objective. The results of the field survey have successfully mapped out the full extent of the earthworks occupying the slopes below the village of Old Radnor. We now have a clearer understanding of the phasing of the numerous features on site and in doing so, it has also been demonstrated that there is good preservation of the lynchet field system. Presently the fields are under pasture and unless there is a substantial change in farming practice the site is not vulnerable.

It is clear that the Walton Basin Project as a whole has had a very positive impact in the dissemination of information to, and engagement with, the local community.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The current project, focusing on the Walton Basin in eastern Radnorshire, commenced in 2012/13 and was designed to address a number of pressing management issues relating to agricultural usage and development affecting the important multi-period archaeological resource within the area. The project initially focused on developing a methodology for assessing the vulnerability and level of threat from agriculture to both upstanding and buried archaeology (Jones 2013) and continued in 2013-14, undertaking a number of small-scale excavations with local volunteers.



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Fig. 1 The location of the survey area. Features highlighted green are upstanding earthworks, those in brown are ditches, trackways or holloways.

- 1.2 While previous survey and excavation has concentrated on the important complex of prehistoric monuments in the Walton Basin, as well as limited work on a number of Roman sites, the study was extended during 2014-15 to include an investigation of a series of presumed medieval earthworks occupying the slopes below the village of Old Radnor (Fig. 1). The opportunity was again taken to involve a number of volunteers from the local community together with students from Kington High School and Worcester University, to the extent that this element of the project was conducted with outreach as its primary objective.
- 1.3 The series of linear earthworks (PRN 122807) had already been roughly mapped from aerial photographs (Fig. 2) and LiDAR, although it was clear that a ground survey would be helpful in confirming their form, extent and survival, as well as assessing their significance and vulnerability.



Fig. 2 Aerial view of the field system earthworks in 2004. The topographical survey recorded the earthworks in the 'Great Biddins' field right of centre in the view. Photo CPAT 04-c-0173.

2 Topographical Survey

- 2.1 The topographical survey was conducted over a three-day period in February 2015. Local volunteers and students were instructed in the use of total station digital surveying using a Leica TC500 in conjunction with Penmap survey software, as well as the descriptive and photographic recording of archaeological earthworks.



Fig. 3 Local volunteers recording the earthwork lynchets. Photo CPAT 3983-0002

- 2.2 The main earthworks within the survey area consisted of a series of five lynchets (PRN 122807), located on the upper slopes of the 'Great Biddins' field each aligned east-north-east to west-south-west and with separations of between 25m and 30m. The lynchets (Fig. 7, F1) are fairly well preserved, in places surviving to a height of 0.8m.



Fig. 4 The view looking north across the series of lynchets towards Castle Nimble.
Photo CPAT 3983-0034

- 2.3 The lower part of the field also contains a prominent glacial terrace (PRN 122803), below which there are a series of sinuous former stream channels (PRN 122800 – not illustrated within our survey). The glacial terrace, aligned east-north-east to west-south-west, has in places been enhanced by the formation of a lynchet (F2 and F3) and associated terracing earthworks (Fig. 7 - Terrace 1 and Terrace 2).



Fig. 5 The view along the lower lynchet (F2) and Terrace (1). Photo CPAT 3983-0011

- 2.4 It is uncertain whether or not a low-lying bank and ditch (Fig. 6), east of and adjoining Terrace 1, are contemporary with the lynchet or are the remains of an earthwork pre-dating the modern field boundary (aligned north-west to south-east). Similarly the relationship between the lynchet (F2-F3) and an enclosure south of Castle Nimble (depicted on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey of 1889) is unclear (Fig. 7 see centre top – shown in part only).
- 2.5 There are a number of holloways and trackways traversing the slopes of both Great Biddins and, to the east, Little Biddins all of which appear to post-date the lynchets. The former Harpton Court Drive (PRN 33138), depicted on the 1st Edition Ordnance Survey (1889) as a tree-lined avenue traversing the slopes of Great Biddins from north-west to south-east, survives merely as a number of low-lying breaks through the lynchets. The projected line of the drive (taken from the 1889 survey) is illustrated in Fig. 7. Additional breaks in the lynchets mark the routes of the footpaths also depicted on the survey of 1889. One of the footpaths follows a causeway (of unknown origin) south from Castle Nimble (PRN 360), traversing Terrace 1 and 2 and merging into multiple routes, one of which (trackway PRN 122802, aligned north-east to south-west) is depicted in Fig. 1, within the survey area. The line of one footpath within a holloway (see Fig. 7, F4), aligned west to east and located along the summit of the field may be of earlier origins.
- 2.6 To the east, traversing Little Biddins north-east to south-west, is another broad holloway (PRN 33139). The existing records (aerial photographic plot) show this merging with the lynchets on the upper slopes of Great Biddins. However our recent field assessment has

now demonstrated that this feature is not associated (i.e. contemporary) with the field system. The holloway possibly terminates at the later field boundary (although the relationship is not entirely clear). There is a previously unrecorded small quarry located below the area of terminus. Any relationship between the holloway and the quarry would be somewhat subjective.



Fig. 6 View of the bank and ditch adjoining Terrace 1 (to the right of centre).
Photo CPAT 3983-0041

- 2.7 The earthworks of Castle Nimble (PRN 360; SAM Rd 46) lie on the valley floor to the north of the field system and had been surveyed previously, during the late 1990s (Fig. 8; Gibson 1997). Questions have been raised about what the site represents, though superficially there is evidence for a low motte, about 1.5 metres high and 25 metres in diameter to the west, with a small bailey to the east surrounded by a bank and ditch. Like a number of the other sites in the basin, its true nature can probably only be resolved by excavation (Britnell 2012, 73). A causewayed trackway (of unknown origin) now runs north to south between the motte and bailey (Fig. 8). The embanked track also forms the western side of a small enclosure attached to the southern side of the bailey. The 1889 Ordnance Survey clearly shows the boundaries of the enclosure but it is unclear as to the origins of the internal bank and ditches recorded during the 2015 field survey (see Figs 7 and 9 earthworks north of F2 and Terrace 1). Our field assessment also established that a broad linear feature (aligned parallel with the eastern edge of the bailey) located at the base of Little Biddins field was in fact another glacial stream channel and not an extension of the medieval defences. Consequently this was not digitally recorded and therefore does not appear on any of the illustrations within this report.

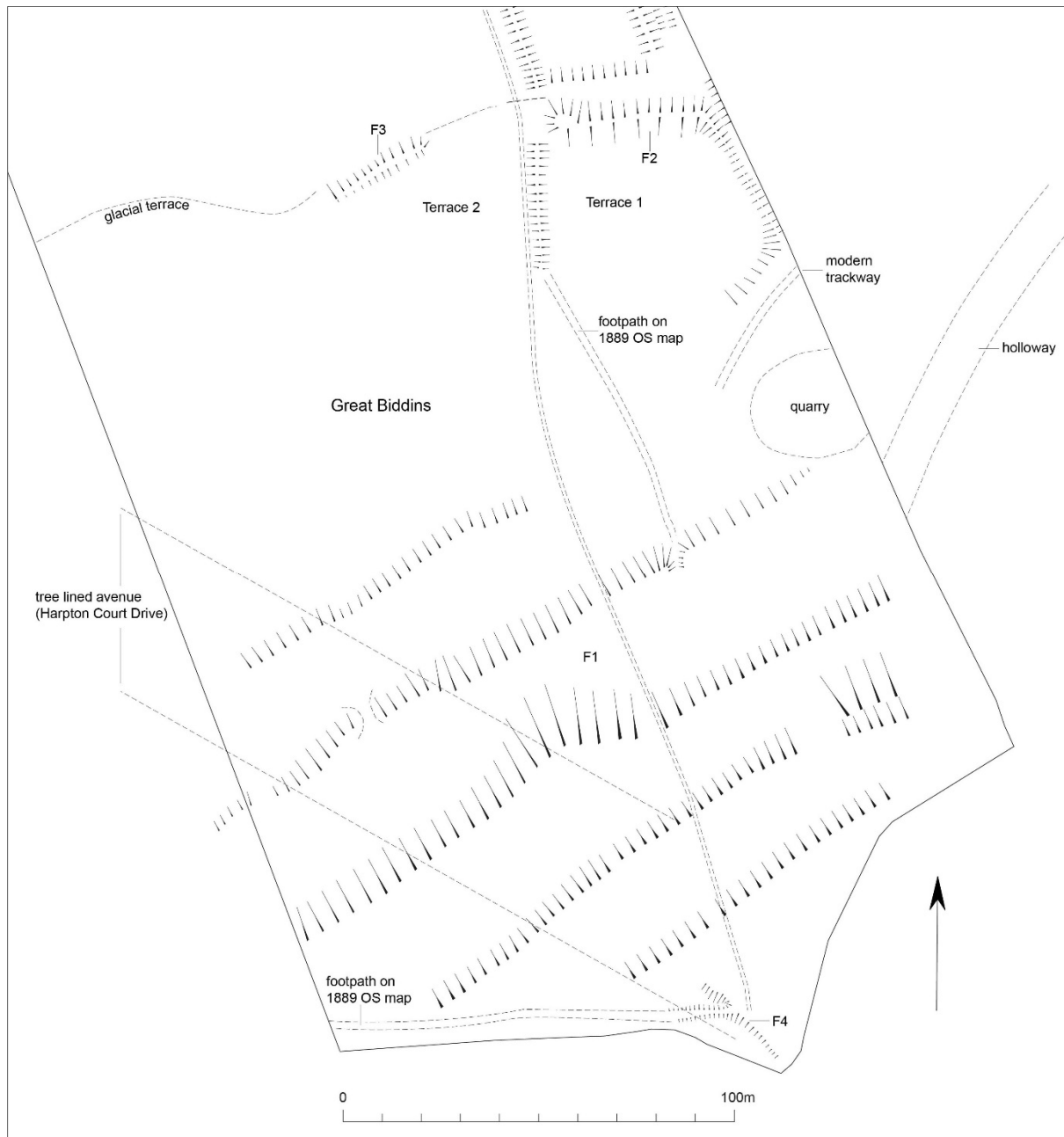


Fig. 7 Overall plan of the results of the 2015 topographical survey.

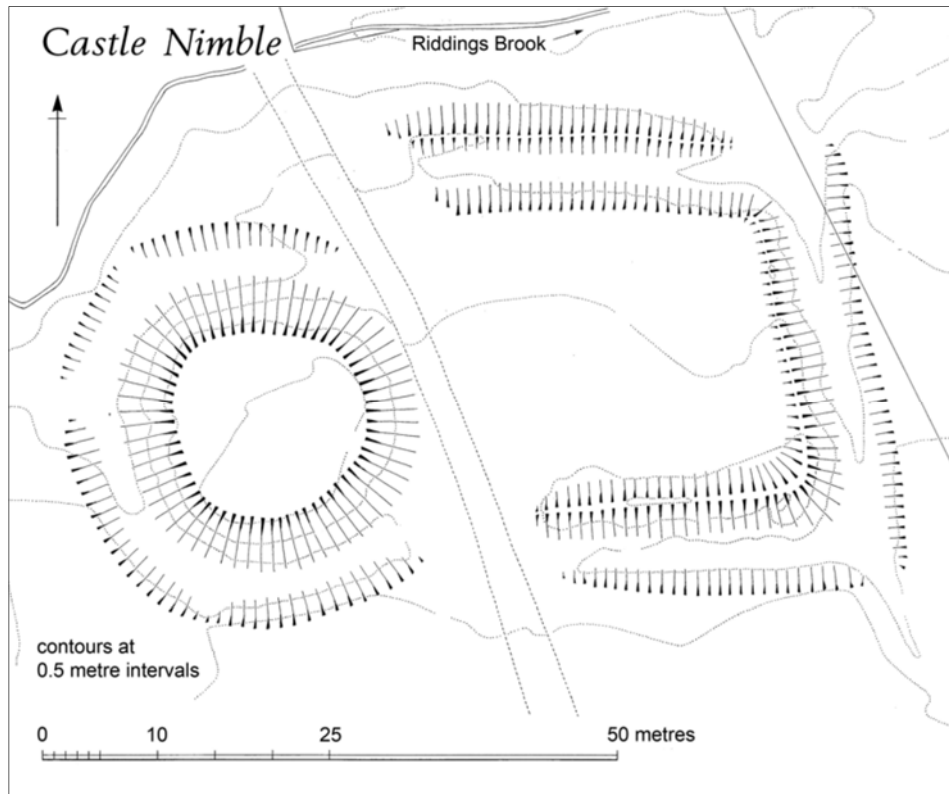


Fig. 8 The earthworks of Castle Nimble (after Britnell 2012).



Fig. 9 View of the enclosure south of Castle Nimble earthworks.
Photo CPAT 3983-0042

3 Conclusions

- 3.1 The results of the field survey have successfully mapped out the full extent of the earthworks occupying the slopes below the village of Old Radnor. In doing so, it has also been demonstrated that there is good preservation of the lynchet field system. Currently the fields are under pasture and unless there is a substantial change in farming practice the site is not vulnerable.
- 3.2 We now have a clearer understanding of the phasing of the numerous features on site, having established that all of the trackways and holloways post-date the lynchet field system. Subsequently there is a stronger possibility that the earthworks are contemporary with the shrunken settlement (PRN 5296) 300m to the east-north-east on the upper slopes of Little Biddins (Jones and Owen 1996) and therefore are likely to be of medieval origin. With the origins of Castle Nimble being somewhat unclear any association with that earthwork would be far more subjective. In addition, the bank and ditches recorded within the enclosure adjoining to the Castle Nimble earthworks are deemed to be of post-medieval origin.
- 3.3 Throughout the three days on site the project was successfully supported by enthusiastic members of the local community and students from Kington High School and archaeological students from Worcester University. Everyone involved had the opportunity to learn basic skills in the use of both total station digital surveying and descriptive recording of archaeological earthworks. Although time constraints somewhat limited what could be achieved in what is essentially an 'instructive workshop' it was felt that the legacy of the experience far outweighed the need to produce a survey that would have included a broader view of the landscape below Old Radnor. All those involved continued their involvement in the Walton Basin project partaking in the following Hindwell Excavations of 2015.

4 Acknowledgements

- 4.1 The writer would like to thank the landowner, Mr Andrew Price, The Knapp Farm, for his permission to carry out the topographical field survey.
- 4.2 The writer would also like to thank his colleagues at CPAT, Nigel Jones and Sophie Watson, for their assistance, as well as all the community volunteers and students who took part in the field surveying.

5 Sources

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