

The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: A Fieldwork Survey

By TIM COPELAND

SUMMARY

This paper examines the linear characteristics of the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch in the light of aerial photography, fieldwork and documentary evidence. Two contiguous phases for the construction of the monument are proposed. The function of the systems is seen as political and economic rather than military. The dating of the Grim's Ditch is examined, and settlement patterns discussed. Its purpose is seen as a defining the boundaries of an Iron Age community against the threat of aggressive neighbours during a time of political instability.

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INTRODUCTION (Fig. 1)

The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch (or Dyke) comprises a series of earthworks constructed between the valleys of the Glyme, Evenlode and Windrush, in the parishes of Charlbury, Spelsbury, Enstone, Kiddington, Glympton, Wootton, Woodstock, Hanborough, Freeland, North Leigh, Ramsden, Finstock and Cornbury. The earthworks usually take the form of a bank of a dump or mound type, a berm, a ditch, and possibly a 'palisade trench' associated with the sequence and in front of the ditch. They are situated at the interface between the valley and plateau relief of the Jurassic limestones of the Cotswold foothills, and the low-lying clay vales of the Thames Valley. The construction of the Grim's Ditch is usually assigned to the first quarter of the 1st century AD.

The Ditch, the name of which is Anglo-Saxon, is first recorded as a boundary to the lands of Eynsham Abbey in 1005.¹ It also appears as an element demarcating the

¹ H.C.D. Cooper, 'The Saxon Bounds of Eynsham', *Top Oxon*, vii (1961); *Place-Names Oxon*, 5.

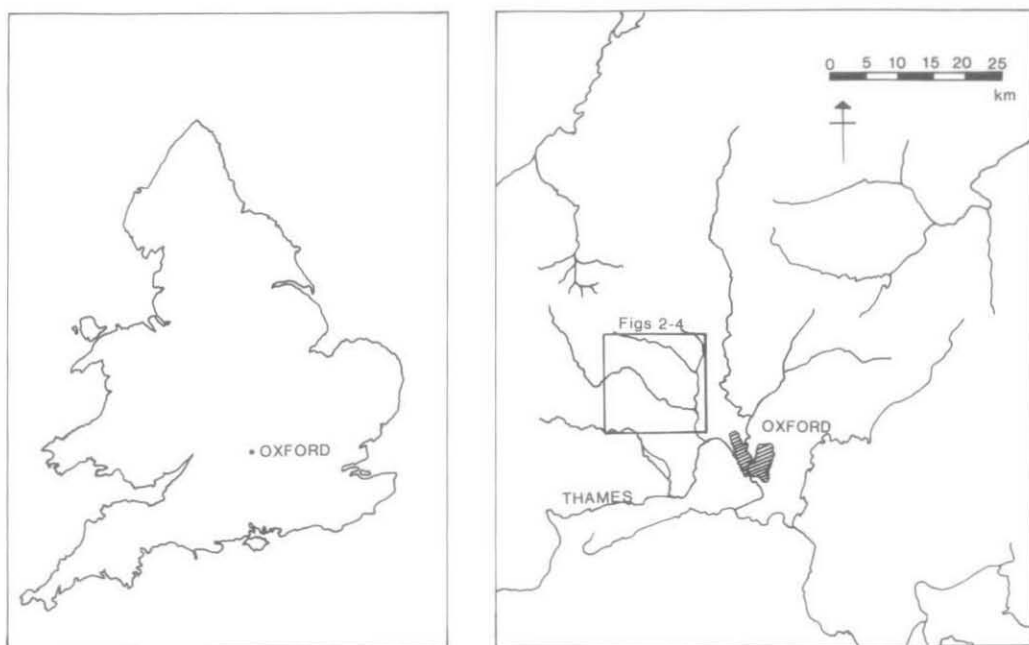


Fig. 1. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: Location map.

bounds of Wychwood Forest in 1300.² The earthworks attracted the attention of antiquaries and archaeologists from the 17th century onwards, but it was not until Crawford's work that their full extent was recognised.³ Excavations have been carried out on some of the sections,⁴ but since Crawford's appraisal the linear characteristics of the monument have been neglected.

THE FIELDWORK SURVEY, 1983-4

The present study was designed to examine the course of the Grim's Ditch in the light of evidence that has accumulated since Crawford's paper, especially the results of aerial photography. The examination of the aerial photographic cover was undertaken (1) to extend the known lengths of the Ditch and locate any lengths previously unrecorded, (2) to examine the area within the known course of the Ditch to locate traces of settlement or earlier earthwork features, (3) to examine an area 5 km. wide outside the known course of the monument. Any resulting discovery was to be examined on the ground. A complimentary review of documentary evidence was also undertaken.

The study has been subject to various constraints. The concentration of archaeological activity on the Thames Valley gravels has been to the detriment of the study of

² J.Y. Ackerman, 'The Ancient Bounds of Wychwood Forest', *Archaeologia*, xxxvii (1857), 424-40.

³ O.G.S. Crawford, 'Grim's Ditch in Wychwood, Oxon', *Antiquity*, iv (1930), 303-15.

⁴ These are detailed in Fig. 2 and the Appendix.

the upland areas to the N. Little systematic fieldwork has been attempted on these areas of higher relief, with the result that little is known of the full range of Iron Age or Roman settlement patterns. Whilst aerial photographic cover is extensive, the main surveys comprise vertical exposures not specifically intended to locate archaeological features. Intensive agricultural practices have destroyed stretches of the monument, and quarrying and village expansion are further masking its course.

Fig. 2 and the detailed inventory (pp. 288–92 below) indicate the distribution and status of the previously known and recently discovered boundary elements of the Grim's Ditch (Sections 1a to 1m); possible boundary elements (Sections 2a to 2d); known internal elements (Sections 3a and 3b) and possible internal elements (Sections 4a to 4c).

THE DESIGN AND RELATIVE CHRONOLOGY OF THE GRIM'S DITCH (Figs. 1 and 2)

It is proposed here that two distinct, but not necessarily continuous circuits were constructed:

Circuit One (Fig. 2): elements 1a–1g, and possibly 2a, appear to enclose partially an area of c. 13 sq. km. defining the high ground that forms the watershed of the tributary stream of the Glyme that drains the landscape S. of Ditchley. To the W. the earthworks enclose the flanks of the ridge of high ground falling to Charlbury.

Circuit Two (Fig. 2): elements 1h–1m, and possibly 2b–2d, partially enclose an area of c. 80 sq. km. with the axis of the features being the River Evenlode.

Both circuits appear to focus on access to permanent sources of water in an area of limestone.

Excavations have sampled the proposed Circuit One of the Grim's Ditch at Charlbury Quarry, Model Farm, Kiddington, and Callow Hill, and the proposed Circuit Two at Woodleys, Blenheim and North Leigh (Fig. 2). The 'pre-Ditch' surface was identified at Model Farm,⁵ Kiddington⁶ and Blenheim⁷ as a layer of red earth on top of natural cornbrash, which was seen as evidence for cultivation; at Callow Hill the land-surface sealed below the banks of the earthwork yielded slight evidence, in the form of the low humus content of the soil, that the area had supported light vegetation.⁸

Excavation has also shown a similarity of cross-sectional design on both circuits, although there are variations that might be explained by postulating different gangs working on different sections (Table 1). These investigations have also demonstrated that the circuits have a contrasting post-constructional history. Cuts across the proposed Circuit One indicated that the ditch feature had been deliberately, though not completely, backfilled shortly after construction,⁹ whilst sections across the proposed Circuit Two indicate that the feature was allowed to silt up naturally.¹⁰ Only at Woodleys, where the Arncott to Charlbury Gas Pipeline cut the feature, was a recut suggested, although the section drawings are unconvincing on this point.¹¹

⁵ D.B. Harden, 'Excavations on the Grim's Dyke, North Oxfordshire', *Oxoniensia*, ii (1937), 80.

⁶ Ibid. 79.

⁷ Ibid. 81.

⁸ N. Thomas, 'Excavations at Callow Hill, Glympton and Stonesfield, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, xxxii (1957), 16.

⁹ Harden op. cit. note 5, 91; Thomas op. cit. note 8, 26. An unpublished excavation report of work at Charlbury Quarry also supports this statement (Oxford Archaeological Unit).

¹⁰ Harden op. cit. note 5, 91. D. Fine, 'An Excavation on the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch at North Leigh', *Oxoniensia*, xli (1976), 16.

¹¹ R.A. Chambers, 'The Archaeology of the Arncott to Charlbury Gas Pipeline, Oxon, 1972', *Oxoniensia*, xliii (1978), 42.

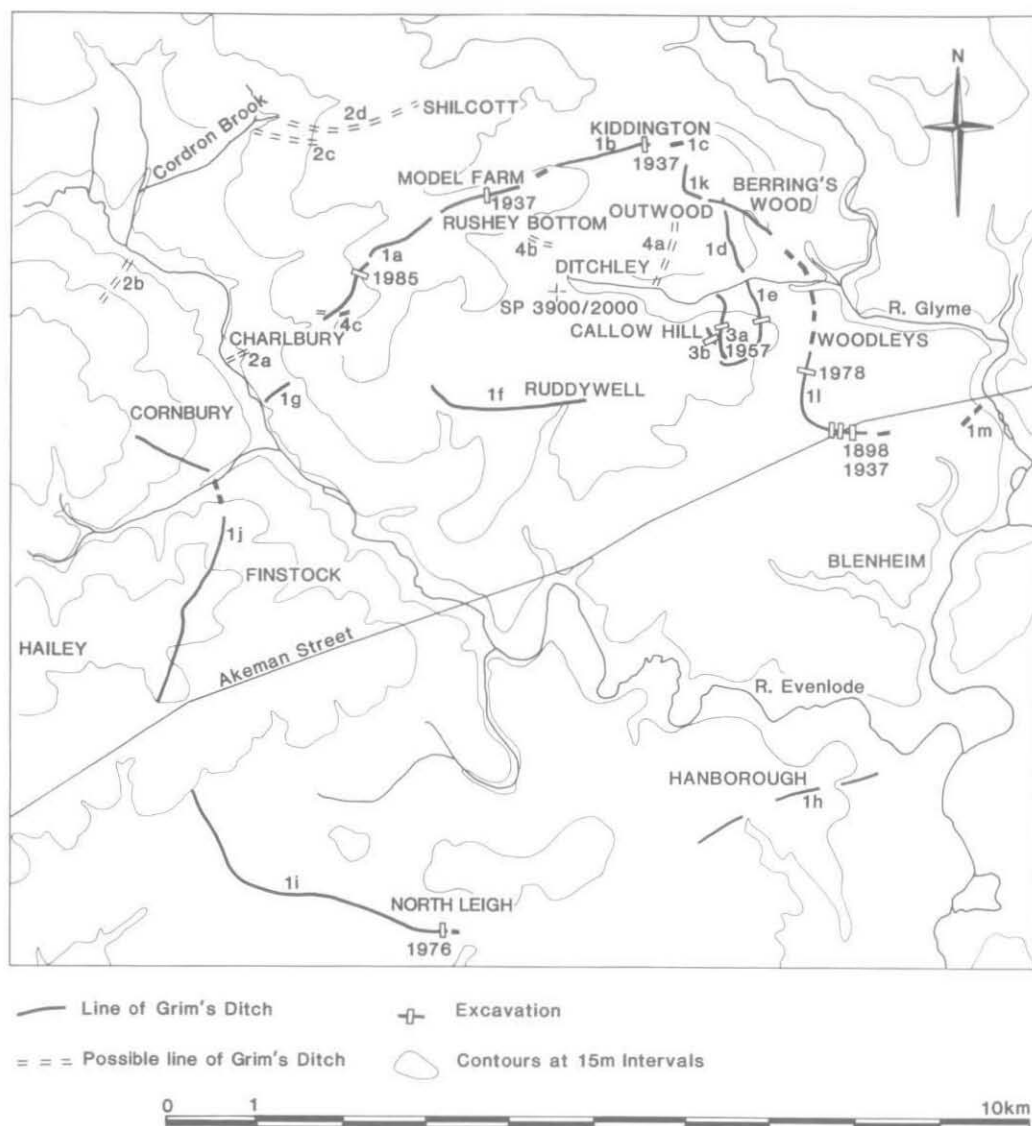


Fig. 2. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: Results of the Survey of 1983-4. The numbering of the section and summary of excavations refers to the inventory on pp. 288-92.

The relative dating of the circuits is indicated by a series of aerial photographs taken over Outwood in 1935 (especially Allen/Ashmolean 598 and 600), where Circuit Two can be seen to cut Circuit One at SP41152085. The sequence of construction can be postulated as follows (Figs. 3a and 3b):

a) *Phase One*: the Circuit One elements are constructed, and deliberately backfilled after a short period of time. These earthworks are still prominent in the landscape, and their partial backfilling indicates that they remained significant features demarcating areas of land, implying that their usefulness as a boundary continued after filling.

b) *Phase Two*: the elements of Circuit Two are constructed to enclose a larger area, and are allowed to reduce naturally with no attempt to reconsolidate them. The lack of maintainance of the Phase Two features might lead to the conclusion that the purpose of demarcating land in this way was defunct a short time after the Phase Two elements were completed.

Considering the similarity of the cross-sectional design of both phases (Table 1), it is likely that Phase Two followed shortly after Phase One, and that Phase Two was directly consequent on the destruction of Phase One, and coincided with its disuse. The similarity of design also indicates that both phases are part of the same tradition.

It is difficult to assign the earthworks within the circuits of the Grim's Ditch to either phase. Only those at Callow Hill (3a and 3b) are known to be contemporary with the Grim Ditch system. The earthwork in Kingswood Brake (4a) is of questionable date, even though identified by Lane Fox as being part of Grim's Ditch.¹² The bank in Rushey Bottom (4b) is also undated and as yet has no obvious relationship with any known element of the Ditch. The ditch seen in the S. face of Charlbury Quarry (4c), and apparently cutting a Phase One element, might be an internal partition of Phase Two.

TABLE 1: THE CROSS-SECTIONAL ELEMENTS OF THE GRIM'S DITCH

Location	Bank Width (m.)	Berm Width (m.)	Ditch Width (m.)	Depth (m.)	Palisade Trench
Model Farm (1a)	6.5	1.5	6.5	1.4	Y
Kiddington (1c)	5	1.5	5.8	1.5	N/E
Callow Hill, Dyke 'C' (1e)	4	3.25	6.75	1.4	N/E
Blenheim Park (11)	13.5	—	13.5	1.75	Y
Woodleys (11)	N/E	N/E	6.8	1.7	N/E
North Leigh (1i)	7(?)	4(?)	4(?)	1.6	N/E
Charlbury Quarry (1a)	N/E	N/E	0.8	0.96	Y

N/E=Not excavated.

Y=Yes

Linear earthworks are difficult to date absolutely, and in the case of the Grim's Ditch this is compounded by the highly fragmented nature of the small amount of pottery retrieved, and the fact that very little of it is firmly stratified. Despite the difficulty of establishing a secure chronology for the pottery from the small available sample, the evidence suggests that the Ditch was probably constructed in the late Iron Age, and that Phase Two fell into disuse in the early Roman period. The critical

¹² A.H. Lane Fox, 'On Flint Implements from Oxfordshire and the Isle of Thanet', *Journal of the Ethnographical Society of London*, n.s.i. (1869), 3-10.

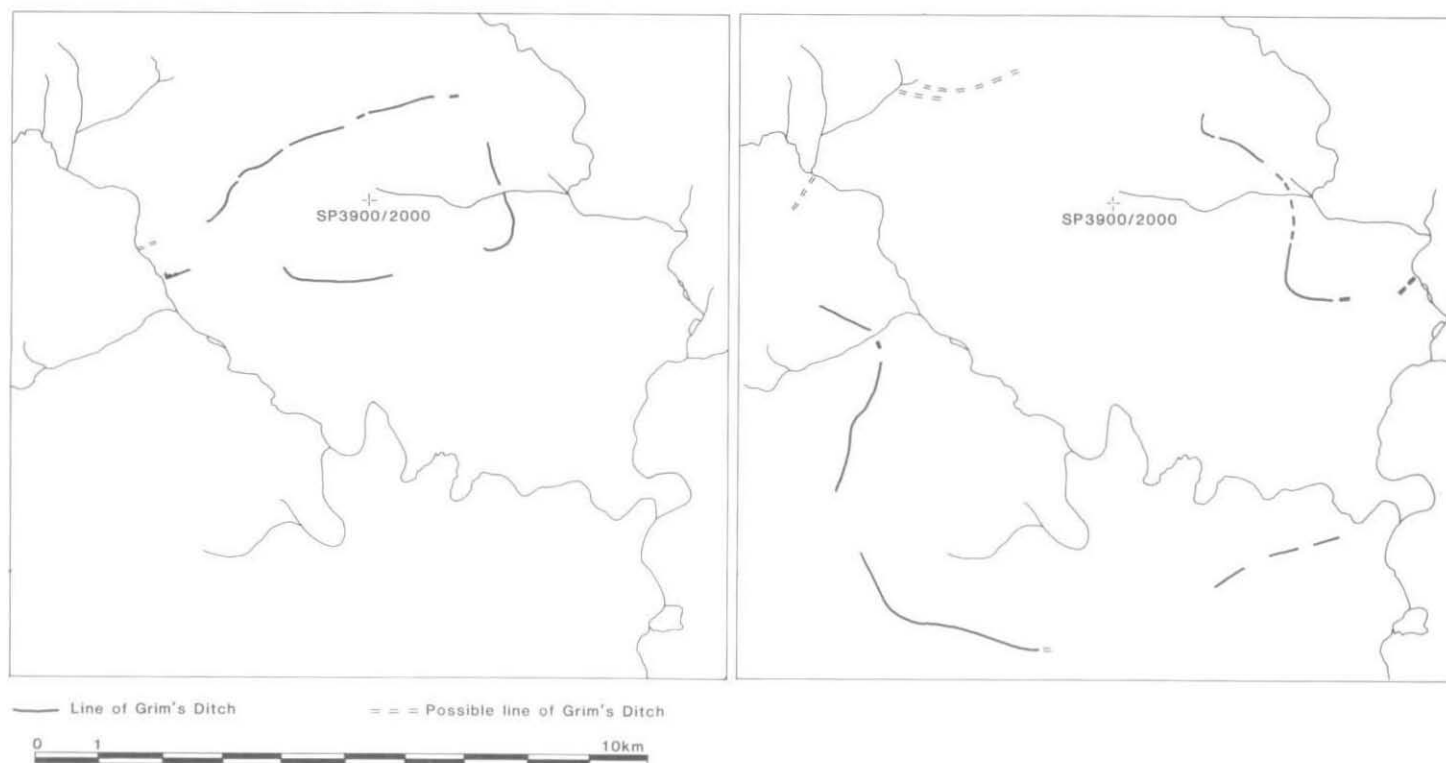


Fig. 3. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: (a) The proposed Phase One; (b) The proposed Phase Two.

evidence comes from the excavations at Blenheim where an Iron Age occupation layer was found under the tail of the bank of the Grim's Ditch, and early Roman pottery appeared in the lower fill of the ditch.¹³

DISCUSSION (Figs. 2, 3a and 3b)

The Grim's Ditch involved the commitment of a large amount of labour towards the demarcation of big areas of land. Little is known of its builders or function; commentators have based their speculations on the incompleteness of the earthwork, its defensive properties, and the nature of the monument's adaptation to the landscape.

Incompleteness of the earthwork: Although this study has increased the number of the known sections of the Ditch, large gaps still remain in the circuits. These might be due to modern agricultural, industrial and settlement activity, although Crawford, in 1930, attributed the gaps in what he considered to be a continuous earthwork, to medieval agricultural practices.¹⁴ Whilst excavation might detect further stretches of the Ditch, there is a strong possibility that the gaps between known stretches were never filled with the earthwork, either because of the presence of natural obstacles made it unnecessary, as proposed by Harden¹⁵ and later Harding,¹⁶ or because the Grim's Ditch was never completed in either phase. The possibility that Phase One was incomplete finds some support by analogy with the large gaps in Phase Two. If the construction of the earthwork proceeded from known landscape features (the River Glyme, the River Evenlode and Akeman Street) and was abandoned before completion, the gaps would be expected to occur midway between these features. This appears to be the case with the Phase Two earthwork.

Even so, the hypothesis of incompleteness is qualified by the possibility that the Grim's Ditch was constructed in short stretches separated by gaps for access. At Charlbury Quarry the remnants of the ditch were seen to be just 60 m. long, although the ditch feature could be detected continuing on either side of the stretch. The 'butt ends' located at Model Farm (1a), Kiddington (1b), North Leigh (1i), and Outwood (1k), are further evidence for the form of the earthwork being 'causewayed' in this way.

Defence: The slight bank and ditch do not seem in themselves to be daunting obstacles. No trace of a palisade has been found surmounting the bank; however, the proposed Phase One ditch was backfilled, and such an activity was likely to destroy any evidence of such a feature, while erosion or ploughing-down of the bank could have destroyed evidence elsewhere. The bank and ditch might have been effective in halting wheeled vehicles, but would have been no deterrent to a determined force of footmen.

The 'palisade trench' traced in places in front of the ditch is problematic. Although its presence has been detected in some cuts (Table 1), other sections have failed to locate it. It is possible that these were not extensive enough to find it, or (if the palisade were intermittent) were cut between its constituent parts. Features that have been considered as evidence of such a structure have a varied form (Table 2). At Model Farm¹⁷ and Blenheim,¹⁸ a 'small' V-shaped ditch behind a slight counterscarp was

¹³ Harden op. cit. note 5, 83.

¹⁴ Crawford op. cit. note 3, 308.

¹⁵ Harden op. cit. note 5, 75.

¹⁶ D.W. Harding, *The Iron Age in the Upper Thames Basin*, 57-8.

¹⁷ Harden op. cit. note 5, 80.

¹⁸ Ibid. 81.

detected, whilst at Callow Hill a truncated V-shaped ditch was found. (The large variation of the dimensions of this feature from the other proposed 'palisade trenches' might indicate a different phase of construction, perhaps earlier.) At Charlbury Quarry the excavator identified the bottom of a trench in front of the ditch.¹⁹ Unfortunately the stratigraphy that might demonstrate the relationship of the 'palisade trench' feature with the ditch of the Grim's Ditch has usually been destroyed or eroded. At Model Farm Harden considered that it might be a modern field boundary trench,²⁰ and only at Blenheim was he able to deduce that it was probably contemporary with the Grim's Ditch System, but not necessarily an integral part of it.²¹

TABLE 2: THE DIMENSIONS OF THE REMAINS OF 'PALISADE TRENCH'

<i>Location</i>	<i>Width (cm.)</i>	<i>Depth (cm.)</i>	<i>Distance from ditch edge (m.)</i>
Model Farm	50	25	3.75
Blenheim	75	20	3.0
Callow Hill	110	75	6
Charlbury Quarry	35	12	not available

Harding proposed that this 'palisade trench' would have acted as a further barrier to wheeled vehicles,²² while Thomas thought that it might have been constructed to keep animals out of a partially filled (Phase One) ditch.²³ Presumably this argument might also be extended to the silting Phase Two sections. However, a palisade might not necessarily have been of a military nature, even if it was continuous, but rather a barrier to stop livestock escaping from the interior of the demarcated area and keep unwanted predators out. Parallels can be found in medieval park pales, where the ditch is also internal to the fence, providing a means of keeping livestock in the park. In either case, a vast amount of timber and labour would have to be expended on this feature if it existed in front of each section of the Ditch.

A further possibility, in the absence of firm evidence for uprights in the trench, is that the feature acted as a laying-out marker during the construction of the Grim's Ditch, even though such marker trenches are usually found beneath the structures whose construction they guided.

Entrances to the area enclosed by the systems have not been subject to systematic research. Little is known of the relationship between the major pre-Roman and Roman Akeman Street and the Ditch, although Grundy and Haverfield concluded that the Grim's Ditch at Blenheim (11) predated the Roman Akeman Street which crosses it in the Park.²⁴ The relationship between the presumed pre-Roman Meareway and the Ditch at Model Farm (1a) is also unexplored, yet since there is no undulation in the track at this point it must be suspected that the Ditch respected the track, and 'butt-ends' existed either side of it. Otherwise the only known means of access are the 'causeways' described above.

¹⁹ Unpublished excavation report, Oxford Archaeological Unit.

²⁰ Harden op. cit. note 5, 80.

²¹ Ibid. 81.

²² Ibid. 58.

²³ Thomas op. cit. note 8, 26.

²⁴ G.B. Grundy and F. Haverfield, 'A Note', *Proc. Soc. Ant.* 2nd ser. xvii (1898), 333-5.

A further problem for the military interpretation of the Grim's Ditch is the area enclosed, either partially or fully, in either phase. In Phase One c.13 sq. km. are contained within the circuit, and 80 sq. km. in Phase Two. The notion of defending the perimeter in either phase without garrison points (and the only possibility is the destroyed 'camp' at Model Farm)²⁵ is difficult to accept.

Adaptation to the landscape: The Phase One Ditch shows a high degree of adaptation to the landscape, whereas parts of the Phase Two course seem to show a marked disregard of the relief. In Berrings Wood (1k), the Ditch runs below the crest of the ridge that it is facing. South of Cornbury (1j) it crosses an incised valley, and S. of North Leigh (1i) it utilizes a clay vale, avoiding high ground. The lack of adaptation to relief in Phase Two would appear to be due to the larger scale of the Grim's Ditch in more varied relief, and might account for the possibility that the Cordron Brook formed part of the circuit between (2b) and (2d).

Evidently the only reasonable interpretation of the Ditch is along the lines of Fine's:²⁶ that it was constructed to demarcate and define a political territory, and perhaps to control economic access to it. Such an interpretation implies centralised control, either by a person or by groups of people, to organise the construction of such an expansive system of earthworks.

SETTLEMENT PATTERN (Fig. 4)

The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch remains an enigmatic landscape feature. Whilst the two phases of the Ditch proposed here imply a large area of human activity, it remains impossible to relate this to settlement patterns.

The limited evidence for Iron Age settlement within the circuits may merely reflect the sparsity of archaeological fieldwork within the area. The Grim's Ditch could, however, reflect a process of change from a dispersed pattern of middle Iron Age settlement to a more intensive pattern later reflected in the numerous Romano-British villas in this landscape. The Iron Age brooches, coins and pottery from the North Leigh villa indicate some measure of continuity. However, the archaeological study of such sites relies on old or incomplete excavations (N. Leigh, Stonesfield, Ditchley), or on excavations which have not been published in full (Lee's Rest). Earlier occupation could lie below these later structures, or await discovery close by. Positive indications of this possibility were found at Callow Hill, where a Romano-British villa appears to have succeeded a late Iron Age settlement, itself associated with a bank, ditch and 'palisade trench' (3a), in the third quarter of the 1st century;²⁷ and at Lee's Rest where an early 1st-century palisade – ditch – bank sequence enclosed wooden buildings, and occupation continued until the 2nd or 3rd century.²⁸

THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

Hingley has proposed that Iron Age settlement in the Oxford Uplands, the area in which the Grim's Ditch is situated, may have occurred in a broken and wooded landscape in

²⁵ First Edition O.S. Map (1833).

²⁶ Fine op. cit. note 10, 12.

²⁷ Thomas op. cit. note 8, 11–53.

²⁸ R.E. Linnington, 'Excavations at Lee's Rest, Charlbury'. *Top Oxon*, viii (1962).

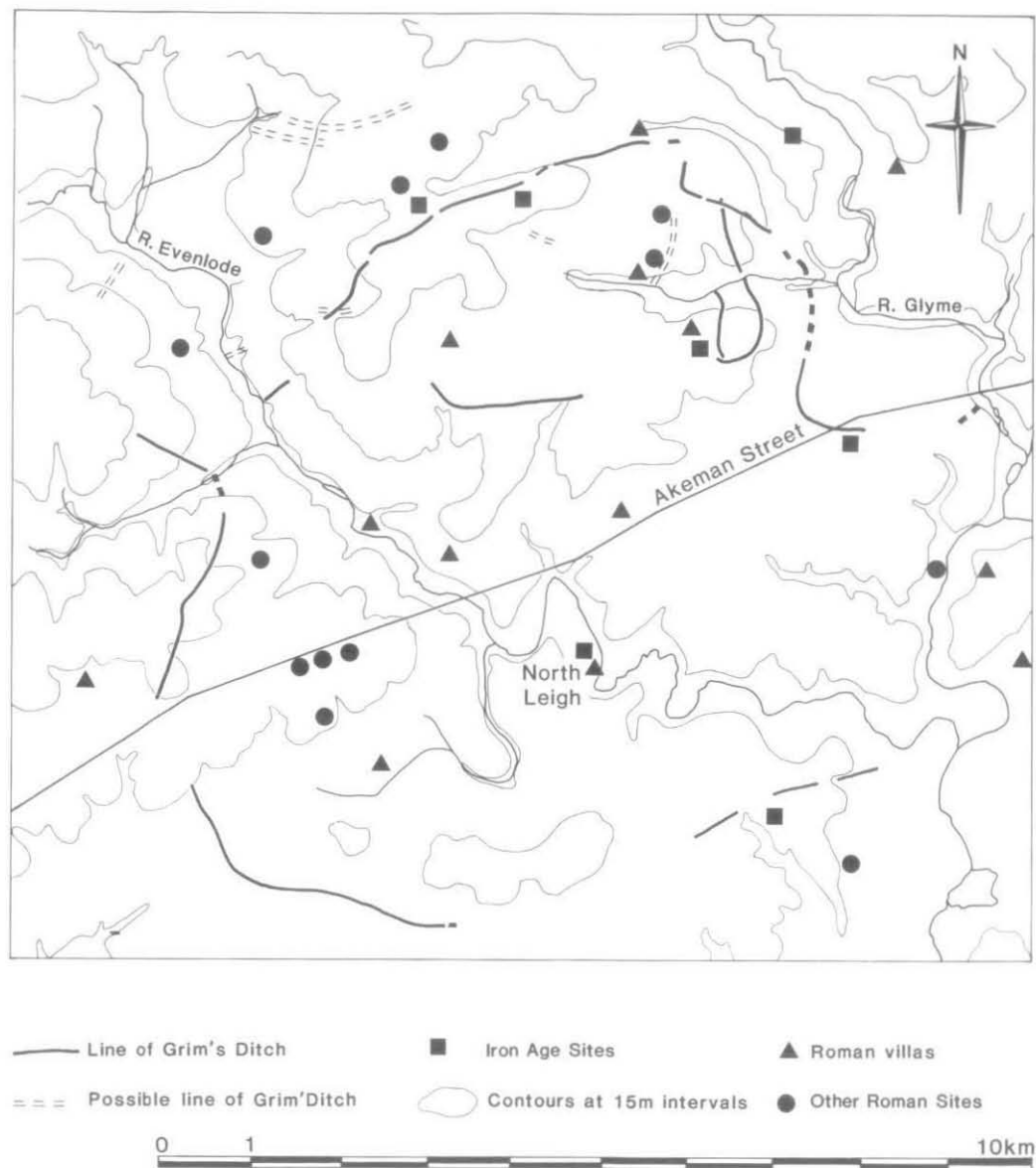


Fig. 4. The North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch: Iron Age and Romano-British settlement. [cf. below, p. 313 Fig. 9.]

which social groups settled and existed in partial isolation from one another.²⁹ By the first quarter of the 1st century AD, the date accepted here for the Grim's Ditch complex, it became necessary to define the territory of the settlements in an overt expression of territorial control by building a system of dykes. This implies close control over the area, and control over a considerable resource of manpower, particularly in the construction of the proposed Phase Two earthworks. This definition of territory also indicates a period of potential, or actual, political instability in the region. Coinage points to instability during this period, reflected in the split of the Dobunni, whose territory lay to the W. of the Cherwell, into northern and southern factions, and possibly a similar split in the Oxfordshire Thames Valley area.³⁰ At about the same time the Catuvellaunian expansion from the E., the result of a much stronger, more unified, tribal power-base, was a potential external threat to the area.³¹ It is impossible to ascertain whether the builders of the Grim's Ditch were a local or regional faction of the Dobunni or Catuvellauni, led perhaps by a noble family with political ambitions, or a group allied to neither tribe, although speculations have been made.³² However, the aggressive tendencies of these major tribal groupings would have been an important influence in the need to define the area of power in the Oxfordshire Uplands.

At Cassington, 5 km. S.E. of the Grim's Ditch, the unfinished Iron Age enclosure on the eastern bank of the Evenlode has also been assigned to this period, and may be the military element in this pattern of response to external threat and possible internal factional instability.³³ Interestingly, two structural phases were detected at the Cassington enclosure. The first, dated by finds to the 1st century BC or 1st century AD, comprised the construction of the enclosure, after which its fortifications were allowed to silt into the ditch without any repair.³⁴ The second phase, dated to the second quarter of the 1st century AD, saw the repair of the defences, which were levelled almost immediately afterwards.³⁵ The ditch was allowed to silt naturally throughout the Roman period. Case speculates that the earlier phase was constructed in response to the Catuvellaunian threat of the early 1st century, and suggests that it represented an enclave of clansmen adhering to the Catuvellauni in a potentially hostile environment. The second phase is attributed to the Claudian invasion.

The Grim's Ditch is a more extensive conception than the Cassington enclosure; whilst the phases proposed for the Cassington structure might be paralleled in the Grim's Ditch phases, the larger scale of the Ditch, and the longer timespan needed in its construction, perhaps need an interpretation which takes this into account. It is proposed here that the construction of the Grim's Ditch was a process beginning with the delination of the core of the territory (Phase One), perhaps in response to an external threat of tribal instability, and continuing with the definition of the hinterland of this core (Phase Two) which was left incomplete, possibly because the Claudian

²⁹ R. Hingley, 'Towards Social Analysis in Archaeology: Celtic Society in the Iron Age of the Upper Thames Valley', in B. Cunliffe and D. Miles (eds.), *Aspects of the Iron Age in Central Southern Britain* (1984), 82.

³⁰ L. Sellwood, 'Tribal Boundaries Viewed from the Perspective of Numismatic Evidence', in Cunliffe and Miles op. cit. note 29, 202.

³¹ W. Rodwell, 'Coinage, Oppida and the Rise of Belgic Power', in B. Cunliffe and T. Rowley (eds.), *Oppida in Barbarian Europe* (1976), 265.

³² Harden op. cit. note 5, 125.

³³ H.J. Case, 'Cassington 1950-2: Late Neolithic Pits and the Big Enclosure', in H.J. Case and A.W.R. White, *Settlement Patterns in the Oxford Region: Excavations at Abingdon Causewayed Enclosure and Other Sites* (1982), 136.

³⁴ Ibid. 134.

³⁵ Ibid. 137.

invasion made such territorial definition obsolete. In both cases the massive communal nature of the earthworks' construction might be seen as a means of establishing and expressing a centralised authority.

The success of a local aristocracy in building a pre-conquest foundation of effective political and economic control might be reflected in the early origins of some of the Romano-British villas within the boundaries of the Grim's Ditch. This development might have been enhanced if the Iron Age community was strongly pro-Roman, resulting in the palatial structures at North Leigh and Stonesfield.

CONCLUSION

Sustained research is required to locate organised human activity and relate it to the Grim's Ditch, particularly the patterns of occupation that might indicate the political and social structure responsible for the construction of the earthworks. Phase Two of the Grim's Ditch comprises the largest sub-circular territorial enclosure in the British Isles of any period, and for this reason alone it deserves attention.

APPENDIX: THE ELEMENTS OF THE GRIM'S DITCH

The elements of the Ditch, located on Fig. 1 and analysed in Tables 1 and 2, are named after the nearest topographical feature, the PRN designation referring to the Primary Record Number allocated to the element in the Oxfordshire Sites and Monuments Record. Six- or eight-figure numerals in parenthesis are Ordnance Survey grid references, whilst designations prefixed by RAF, FAS or AS are references to the appropriate aerial photograph in the RAF (1947-49), Fairey Aviation Services (1963), or Astral Surveys (1981) cover of Oxfordshire.

Known and Extended Boundary Elements

1a Sandford Mount to Ditchley House: RAF SP31NE; FAS 6125/ 11.057; PRN 8912/8910.

From a point E.N.E. of Sandford Mount (SP36701958), a broad, ill-defined, but continuous dark mark can be traced to Town Quarry, Charlbury. This ploughed-out feature was visible as a ditch, truncated by soil-stripping in section in the N.E. face of the quarry at (SP 36911991), and to the edge of the then quarry land as a dark mark in plan.³⁶ With the extension of the quarry, the feature was excavated at (SP36962065).³⁷ The ditch was found to have been backfilled shortly after construction. The remains of a shallow and narrow ditch was located in front of the Grim's Ditch. Pottery diagnosed as late Iron Age was recovered from the fill of the ditch. A fieldname 'Grim's Ditch Piece' is centred on (SP371200).

The Grim's Ditch appears again under the Charlbury-Ditchley road, running N.E. to Hill Farm: the ditch surviving on the N.W. At (SP37452050) the Ditch cuts, or is overlain by, the crop-marks of an early field system (PRN 13217).³⁸ The feature has been heavily ploughed above Hill Farm, but in an unpublished survey Leggatt detected a small gap at (SP37852063).³⁹ The Ditch is cut by a track, the presumed pre-Roman Meareway, and reappears at Model Farm, where the First Edition of the O.S. Map (1833) records a 'Camp'. This may explain the bulge in the line of the Ditch at this point. West of Model Farm the feature continues as a marked depression N. of a slight bank to near Ditchley House. At several points between (SP38002085) and (SP38752100) its course is crossed by tracks which might be using original gaps in the earthwork, since the

³⁶ T. Copeland, 'Charlbury: Grim's Ditch', *C.B.A.9 Newsletter*, xiii (1983), 120-22.

³⁷ Unpublished excavation report, Oxford Archaeological Unit.

³⁸ T. Copeland, 'Charlbury: Hill Farm', *C.B.A.9 Newsletter*, xiii (1983), 122.

³⁹ Oxfordshire County Museum, S.M.R.

termini of the ditch of these sections are rounded and have the appearance of butt-ends. At (SP38782105), the 'ha-ha' feature might be part of the Grim's Ditch (although on a slightly different alignment) which has been partially backfilled from the remains of the bank and revetted with a wall.

Harden⁴⁰ sectioned the earthwork at (SP38422092). He located a layer of red soil below the bank of the Grim's Ditch which he identified as likely to be a 'pre-Ditch' cultivation layer. An 'occupational floor' was found in this red layer consisting of 'carboniferous material', trodden clay and refuse. The refuse contained sherds of indeterminate pottery, but two were identified as being of an Iron Age date. A 'palisade trench' was discovered to the N. of the ditch. Harden concluded from the stony fill at the bottom of the ditch that the feature had been deliberately backfilled soon after construction.

1b. Ditchley Drive: PRN 8910.

The feature appears as a low tree-lined bank crossing the lawn E. of Ditchley House (SP39152118). The bank then runs N.E. under the drive until it diverges to run alongside and S.E. of the metalled road, ending in a 'butt-end' at (SP40252151), where Harden sampled it,⁴¹ locating the ditch to the N. of the bank. Again he located the 'pre-Ditch', red cultivation layer. Some Roman pottery was found S. of the bank, and the upper layers of the ditch fill contained indeterminate sherds of Roman pottery, tile and some food bones.

1c. Kiddington: RAF SP42SW; FAS 6125/ 12.038; PRN 8910.

This now ploughed-out section, visible only as a stone scatter centred on (SP 40552152), and about 100 m. long, was regarded by Harden as 'doubtful' because of its apparent discontinuity with other elements of the known feature, particularly Outwood (1k below).⁴² The discovery of a new section of the Ditch (1d below) indicates that (1c) is part of the proposed Phase Two circuit.

1d. Round Brake. Allen Ashmolean 598 and 600; FAS 6125/ 11.064, 6125/ 12.037.

This ploughed-out element can be seen on aerial photographs from (SP41162087) running down to Pool Bottom (SP41451990). It is cut by (1k) just E. of Outwood at (SP41152085). Since no trace of the Ditch can be seen N. of (SP41162087) curving towards (1c), it is likely that a gap in the circuit occurred at this point, and this undefined area was later delimited by (1k).

1e. Callow Hill Dyke C.: PRN 1286.

A heavily ploughed bank and ditch running upslope from Pool Bottom (SP41621983) and curving S.W. to terminate in a pronounced 'hook' at (SP41151892). It was sampled by Thomas at (SP415193), where the ditch was found to be E. of the bank.⁴³ He found that the ditch fill in its lowest levels was hard packed and homogenous, and concluded that it was a deliberate throw-back from the bank shortly after construction. Only four sherds of pottery were recovered, three of Iron Age date (two from the spread of the bank and one from the old land-surface away from the bank) and the fourth, from the top of the stony layer in the ditch, of grey Roman pottery. Beneath the bank the 'pre-Ditch' layer of red soil was detected again, though diagnosed as the results of light vegetation.

1f. Ruddywell, Lee's Rest: RAF SP31NE; AS 394.

A diffused soil and crop-mark can be seen running against the pattern of post-glacial fluvial features from (SP39401850), above Ruddywell, to (SP38001845). In its course between the two points it deliberately negotiates the heads of two dry valleys. Steed (1961) described the remains of a massive stone bank running S.W. to N.E. above Ruddywell, all traces of which have now been ploughed out.⁴⁴

1g. Baywell: RAF SP31NE; FAS 6125/ 11.043; PRN 8911.

A prominent bank climbs from above the Evenlode (SP35911841) along the N.E. side of a broad dry valley to the Charlbury-Witney road. It can be seen as a soil-mark above the road to (SP36211871), where it is masked by modern buildings. The aerial photographs clearly show the ditch to be downslope of the bank and on its S.E. side.⁴⁵ Harden dismissed this stretch as 'doubtful', probably because the ditch was seen to be on the opposite side of the bank to the then other known elements between the Evenlode and the Glyme.⁴⁶

1h. Hanborough. RAF SP41SW; FAS 6125/ 6.036, 6.034, 6.106.

This section has been badly damaged by the landscaping of Eynsham Park Hall, gravel-quarrying N. of Church Hanborough, and the recent sprawl of the villages of Freeland and Hanborough. Cooper⁴⁷ identified a stretch of ditch, running S.W. to N.E., centred on (SP41501375), from the charter-boundary of 1005: *thanon on haethfield on tha ealdan dic*: 'then on to the open heath to the old dyke'. He positioned the feature from the detail

⁴⁰ Harden op. cit. note 5, 79.

⁴¹ Ibid. 78.

⁴² Ibid. 78.

⁴³ Thomas op. cit. note 8, 18.

⁴⁴ V. Steed, 'The Bounds of Wychwood Forest, Part One', *Top Oxon*, vii (1961).

⁴⁵ Copeland op. cit. note 36, 122.

⁴⁶ Harden op. cit. note 5, 78.

⁴⁷ Cooper op. cit. note 1.

of an estate map of 1769. The Grim's Ditch immediately S. of Cook's Corner is now ploughed-out, but can be seen on the RAF cover at (SP41501375). No further trace of the monument can be seen until a wide, silted ditch appears S. of Hanborough Manor House (SP42511411), although a large ditch seen in section in the eastern face of a landscaped gravel pit at (SP41751380) might indicate its course. The line continues as a diffused linear crop-mark that follows the northern slope of a dry valley, disappearing at (SP43251421) on a bluff above the Evenlode.

II. Hailey: PRN 8912.

From Turley Farm (SP35211381), Crawford traced the feature to (SP38321250), noting a wide gap S. of Akeman Street where the monument had been destroyed by quarrying.⁴⁸ The Grim's Ditch curves in a south-easterly direction and leaves the limestone for the Oxford Clay with its lower lying land. It terminates at (SP38021240), S. of North Leigh, where Fine cut the feature and recognised a small gap which he diagnosed as an entrance.⁴⁹ Fine did not recover any datable finds from his section, but was able to conclude that the ditch had silted over a long period.

Ij. Cornbury and Ramsden: RAF SP31NE; AS 381, 370.

From Tower Light Gate (SP345181) a crop mark runs south-easterly downslope S.W. of Cornbury House to the Lakes at (SP354176). It crosses the valley, and climbs through Little Park to Ash Pollard (SP353165). Crawford traced the feature southwards from Ash Pollard to White Oak (SP34771457), where Akeman Street crosses the line of the Ditch.⁵⁰ This stretch of the monument bears the name 'Hulwerke'. Throughout this section the feature is ploughed-out, except for an element at Mount Pleasant (SP35001600), where it is possible to see the bank S. of the ditch.

Ik. Berrings Wood-Outwood: RAF SP42SW; FAS 6125/12.038; Allen/Ashmolean 598 and 600; PRN 8910.

From (SP41802041) in Berrings Wood the feature is very prominent, running below the crest of the ridge that it is facing. It is ploughed-out where it crosses into Outwood but cuts (1d) at (SP40152085), as can be seen from the Allen aerial exposures. The ditch is a marked feature in Outwood, until it terminates in a 'butt-end' at (SP40802090). Throughout its course the ditch is to the N.E. of the bank. RAF SP42SW indicates that in 1947 the tree growth in Outwood respected the line of the feature W. of the 'butt-end'. The presence of the ditch was confirmed in a water trench in November 1983 at (SP40622090), when a round-bottomed ditch was revealed. The ditch was c.5 m. wide and 1 m. deep, its stratification showing no signs of a recut, and had silted naturally. The feature turns N., and its line is detected in a dip in the hedgeline at (SP40602100). It continues as a partially filled ditch to (SP40652130).

The lack of adaptation to the relief of the area, shown by this stretch of the earthwork in running below the crest of the ridge in Berrings Wood, might be explained by the necessity to demarcate an area between (1c) and (1d) left undefined in Phase One. A course determined to cut (1d) at its terminus, at a point near (SP40152085), would require the earthwork to run in a north-westerly direction in Berrings Wood, rather than climb the ridge to the N.

II. Blenheim-Woodleys: Grundy and Haverfield 1898; Harden 1937; Chambers 1978; PRN 8910.

The Grim's Ditch is at its most upstanding in Blenheim Park at (SP42601830), where it is cut by Akeman Street. Grundy and Haverfield sectioned it in 1898,⁵¹ and Harden cut it in two places.⁵² Harden located a 'palisade trench' to the N. of the ditch and identified the red 'pre-Ditch' cultivation layer. He found that the ditch was considerably wider here than in other sections (see Table 1), and dated it as contemporary with a gully and 'hut' beneath it. Both features contained Iron Age pottery. However, it is difficult to ascertain the relationship between these features from his drawings; it is equally possible that the ditch cut these features, rather than the features being backfilled to smooth out the profile of the ditch. A *terminus ante quem* for the Grim's Ditch construction is given by two sherds of late 1st- or early 2nd-century pottery found above the primary fill of the ditch. Harden concluded that the ditch had silted over a long period.

The ditch curves N.W. and continues in a northerly direction until it runs under the Charlbury-Woodstock road and the Stonesfield-Woodstock road. In the angle formed by these highways, at (SP42181882), the ditch was examined during the laying of the Arncott-Charlbury gas pipeline.⁵³ The cut failed to expose the bank of the Grim's Ditch, only the ditch being revealed. Although a recut was postulated here by Chambers, the drawings of the section are not clear on this point. The feature runs northwards alongside a track to Woodleys Farm. It has been preserved between two quarries and continues to (SP42251990). It can be traced to (SP42102020), where a feature identified as a pillow-mound probably forms part of its course.

⁴⁸ Crawford op. cit. note 3, 307.

⁴⁹ Fine op. cit. note 10, 14.

⁵⁰ Crawford op. cit. note 3, 308.

⁵¹ Grundy and Haverfield op. cit. note 24, 334.

⁵² Harden op. cit. note 5, 80.

⁵³ Chambers op. cit. note 11, 43.

1m. Field Barn: FAS 6125/10.032

The aerial photograph confirms Crawford's identification of the Ditch as a crop-mark running from the Chipping Norton road (A34) at (SP437183) to terminate above the Glyme at Stratford Bridge (SP44251860).⁵⁴

*Possible Boundary Elements***2a. Lee Place:** AS 393.

From above the River Evenlode, opposite Cornbury Park, at (SP35611897), a bank cut by the railway and the B4022 runs in a north-easterly direction to within the grounds of Lee Place (SP35751910). The feature, some 300 m. long and 1.5 m. high, was until recently (1985) surmounted by a hedgeline, but ploughing is reducing it.⁵⁵

2b. Walcot: RAF SP32SW, SP31NW; FAS 6125/11.054; AS 391, 428.

From (SP343202) on the southern bank of the Evenlode, 1 km. W. of Charlbury and 200 m. E. of the tributary junction of the Cordron Brook and the Evenlode, a wide ditch climbs alongside a small copse. The feature has been truncated on the N. by the railway, but it can be seen climbing uphill to the south for 100 m. before being ploughed out. It is observable as a crop-mark to (SP338194). The feature is not marked on the 18th-century estate maps, and its proximity to the Cordron Brook indicates that it might be a continuation of the possible line of the Ditch from (2c/2d).

2c. Shilcott Wood: RAF SP32NE; FAS 6125/11.054; AS 391, 428.

From (SP37652185), at the edge of Shilcott Wood, a ploughed-out feature cuts the green lane known as the Meareway or Saltway, and drops into the valley of the Cordron Brook, where it is detectable as a soil-mark, to (SP36102172), near Lower Taston Farm. It is possible that this feature is part of the medieval boundary to Ditchley Park, as it is an extension of the embankment around Shilcott Wood. However, the *V.C.H.*⁵⁶ and Crawford⁵⁷ considered it to be part of the Grim's Ditch, and the editions of the Ordnance Survey for the 1930s and 1940s designate it as Roman. The medieval boundary could be following a earlier line, but the bank cuts the presumed pre-Roman Meareway, indicating that it is a later feature.

2d. Coathouse Farm: RAF SP32NE; FAS 6125/12043; AS 474.

From the Charlbury–Enstone road at (SP36552155) a ploughed-out linear feature drops to Coathouse Farm at (SP35852155). West of this point the feature appears as a bank with a silted ditch to the N., the bank being 1 m. high and 6 m. wide. It drops to the valley of a tributary of the Cordron Brook, where it terminates in a marshy hollow (SP35712171). The feature forms the boundary between the parishes of Charlbury and Spelsbury, and the line is also the boundary between the Hundreds of Banbury and Chadlington. It has been known as the 'Hulwerke (or Bulwerke) under Coat', Coat being a deserted medieval village 300 m. to the S. At Ramsden (1j) the Grim's Ditch is also known as the 'Hulwerke'.

*Internal Elements***3a. Callow Hill 'Dyke B':** PRN 1286.

A bank climbs from Pool Bottom (SP41221982) and runs S. to (SP41231892). Thomas sectioned it at (SP41301930), and found the ditch to be E. of the bank. 'Dyke B' had silted naturally over a long period. A 'palisade trench' was located to the E.⁵⁸ Hearths, a cobbled surface and post-holes were recognized. Thomas concluded that the post-holes and cobbled surface were possibly contemporary with the bank, and the hearths later. Iron Age sherds occurred in the makeup and spread of the bank.

3b. Callow Hill 'Dyke A': PRN 8909.

A short stretch of earthwork aligned E.W., centred on (SP410193). It was sectioned by Thomas,⁵⁹ and the ditch was located to the N. of the bank. He concluded that the ditch had filled by Roman times, and that the 'dyke' probably had some relationship to a structure to the S. The only objects found were sherds of Iron Age and early Roman pottery, of 1st- and 2nd-century date.

⁵⁴ Crawford op. cit. note 3, 309.

⁵⁵ Copeland op. cit. note 36, 122.

⁵⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 339.

⁵⁷ Crawford op. cit. note 3, 306.

⁵⁸ Thomas op. cit. note 8, 15.

⁵⁹ Ibid. 19.

*Possible Internal Elements***4a.** Kingswood Brake: Allen/Ashmolean 233 and 597; RAF SP42SW.

A pronounced earthwork, now consisting of two parallel ditches climbing from Kingswood Bottom (SP40501985) through Kingswood Brake to (SP40552005), where it is ploughed-out. It can be traced on the aerial photographs to (SP40552060).

Lane Fox,⁶⁰ who visited the area in 1868, described the Grim's Ditch near Ditchley House (1b), and nearby villas: 'Callow Hill, Devil's Pool Villa and two together further to the north-east of Callow Hill in the area of Ditchley Park'. In a footnote he adds 'since writing the above I have examined the course of another dyke, of smaller dimensions, which runs from the neighbourhood of Callow Hill straight up to one of the sites mentioned in Ditchley Park, which is strewn with pottery, and thence to Cornbury Park. The position of the pottery strewn site, with reference to the dyke, is such as to leave no reasonable doubt of their having been connected'. Unfortunately, the 'site mentioned' is not identified, although Radford, in his report on Ditchley Villa,⁶¹ identifies the site as Pump Close (SP40242175), PRN 1722. This is almost due N. of Callow Hill, and well out of the then, and present, area of Ditchley Park. A more likely candidate for this site is a rectangular enclosure, PRN 1724, identified W. of Outwood centred on (SP40552060). The other site of 'the two together further to the north west of Callow Hill' is, as yet, unidentified. The position of PRN 1722 at the N. end of (4a) would seem to indicate that (4a) is indeed Lane Fox's 'dyke'. The reference to this smaller 'dyke' running to Cornbury Park is probably due to Lane Fox recognizing the proximity of PRN 1722 to the stretch of the Grim's Ditch N. of Outwood (1k).

Excavation would be needed to establish the date of this earthwork, as its form of two parallel ditches with a slight bank between them is not typical of the known construction of the Grim's Ditch. Steed identified this feature as a Roman road,⁶² although other stretches of her postulated course for the 'road' are most likely medieval features distributed throughout Ditchley Park (see 4b below).

4b. Rushey Bottom, Ditchley.

A high bank runs N.W. to S.E. centred on (SP39252055) in Rushey Bottom. It has been preserved as a ride in a recent plantation. The bank, c.1.5 m. high and c. 5 m. wide, was interpreted by Steed as a Roman road.⁶³ However, the remainder of her proposed line is made up of medieval park and woodland features.

4c. Charlbury Quarry: RAF SP31NE; FAS 6125/11.057.

Charlbury Quarry exhibited a ditch seen in section on its E. face (SP37051975), which was buried by rubble in 1986. A faint linear soil-mark extends the line to the N.E. The aerial cover indicates that the feature appears to cut (1a) S. of the Quarry at (SP36751965).

⁶⁰ Lane Fox op. cit. note 12, 3.

⁶¹ C.A.R. Radford, 'The Roman Villa at Ditchley, Oxon', *Oxoniensia*, i (1936), 24.

⁶² V. Steed, 'Roman Road, Ditchley to Hordley, 1957-9', *Top Oxon*, ii (1959), 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.* 5.