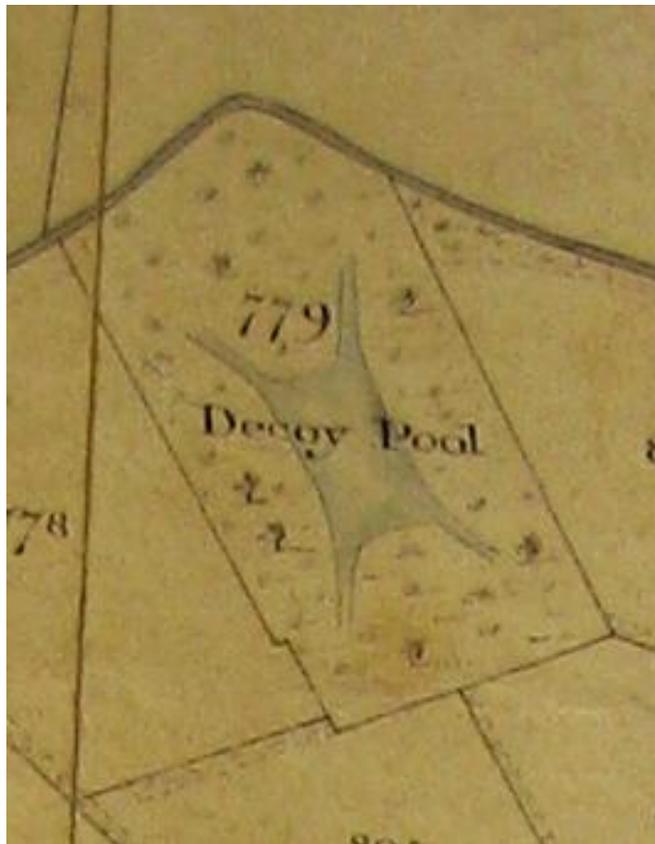


**YCCCART 2010 /Y19  
North Somerset HER 2012/191**

**Manual Survey of Duck Decoy at Claverham Court Farm**

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM & CLEEVE  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH TEAM (YCCCART)**

General Editor: Vince Russett



*Sturge's Survey, 1821*

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## **Abstract**

*In 2006, Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) manually surveyed the remains of a duck decoy situated on Kenn Moor, in Claverham, Yatton, North Somerset. The site is on private land, and is not open to the public.*

## **Acknowledgements**

YCCCART are most grateful to the owners, the Atwell family, for allowing us access to their field, and also to Vince Russett, for editing this report.

## **Introduction**

YCCCART is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across North Somerset, supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

The objective of the Community Archaeology in North Somerset (CANS) teams is to carry out archaeological fieldwork, for the purpose of recording, better understanding and management of the heritage of North Somerset.

For further information, see <http://cansnetwork.co.uk>

## Site Location

The village of Claverham is situated in the parish of Yatton, North Somerset, about 15 miles south of Bristol, and 1km. to the north-west of the A370 Bristol to Weston super Mare road. The duck decoy lies on Kenn Moor in a pasture field, at O.S. ST4367 6763, approximately 700m. north-west of Claverham Court Farm.



*Figure 1: Duck decoy at Claverham*

## Land Use and Geology.

The underlying geology of the field in which the duck decoy is situated is Mercia mudstone overlaid by peat or in some places mixed silts and gravels. The field is down to rough pasture.

## Historical and Archaeological Context.

The term 'decoy' is derived from the Dutch word for a duck cage. Duck decoys are known in this country at least from the 13<sup>th</sup> century, utilising marshy land that was not fit for other purposes. A shallow pond was dug, with several narrow channels known as 'pipes' leading off, which were covered with nets supported by hoops of withy. The wild ducks were fed

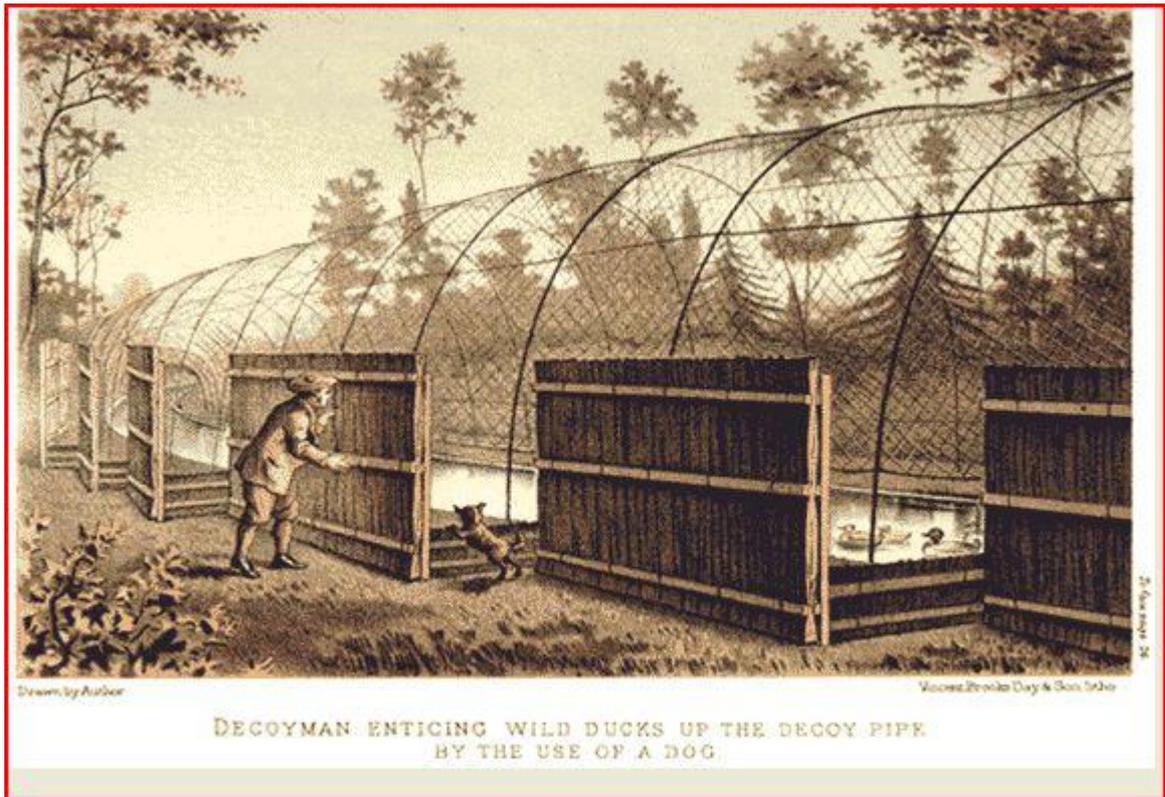


Figure 2: from Payne-Gallwey, 1886 "The Book of Duck Decoys"

with grain to keep them on the pond and when required they would be lured into the opening of one of the netted pipes. This was done by a small red or brown dog, trained to run to the far end of the pipe while looking out at intervals between short reeded fences placed parallel to the pipe. Seeing the small red animal repeatedly appearing and disappearing between the fencing caused the ducks to imagine that it was a fox. Their instinct then was to keep the enemy in view, so they would follow the dog to the narrow end of the pipe, where the nets would be dropped over them and they could be caught. The decoy man would then prepare them for eating or for market.

Duck decoys are very productive; there are records of between 500 and 3000 ducks being trapped in one season. The decoy man usually lived near the pool to prevent poaching and had access to a boat; he paid rent in kind, of his own catch.



Figure 3: "A Lincolnshire Decoy – end view." Drawn from the original by W. Lubbock

The Claverham Court decoy was first recorded in 1750 when the common was enclosed. It was mentioned in the 1810 Act for Inclosing Lands in Wrington, Yatton and Kenn. Earl Poulett agreed to maintain it and other Moor Wall works, following on from the owners of an ancient tenement. The draining of the moor, together with the growing popularity of shooting parties in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries with the accompanying noise of the guns, disturbed the wild fowl and prevented them from re-populating the pond, and it was finally filled in 1841. As with other structures on the moor, only some indentations are now visible. The 1750 Enclosure papers show that the 32 acres containing the pool had been allotted to Samuel Wilmott, tenant of Claverham Court, who was followed by Thomas Nicholls and then Bishop Gregory in 1821.

A copy of Sturge's map of 1821 (see title page) shows a four-pipe pool centred in the middle of the field, but no evidence of the water feed to the pool. The Little River to the north lies at least 1 metre below the surface of the field, and there is a leat nearby, but there is no evidence that it fed the pool.

## **Survey Objectives.**

The manual survey had the following objectives:

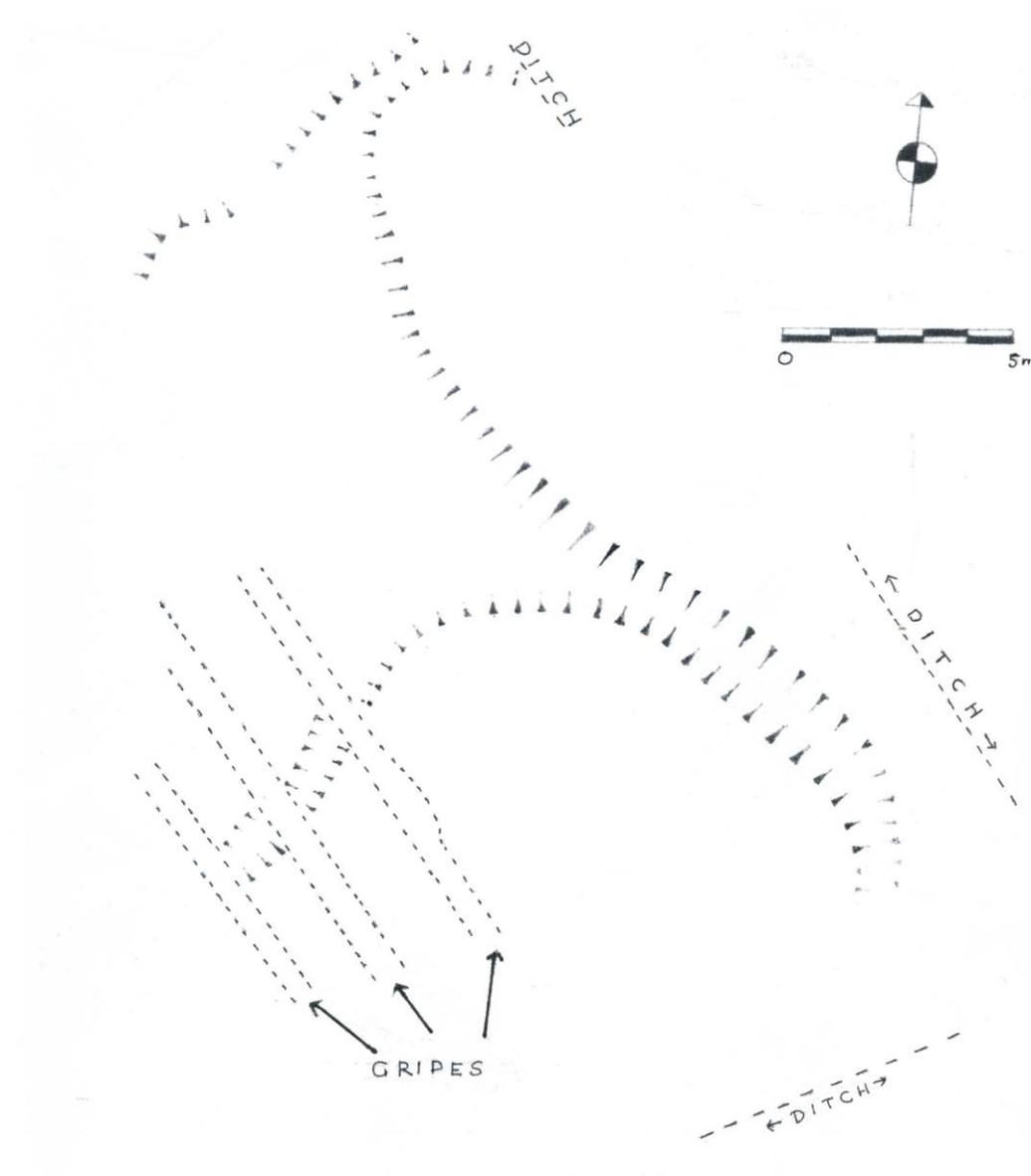
1. To record the remains of the duck decoy pool and pipes
2. To find and record the means of supply of water to the pool.
3. To further train YCCCART members in the techniques of manual survey.

## **Methodology**

A simple tape survey of the remains of the pool and pipes was carried out, at a scale of 100 to 1. The surroundings of the pool were examined for traces of an inlet channel for water to the pool. Maps, air photographs and documentation were also examined.

Aerial photographs from 1971 and 1975 reveal that Sturge's map is not accurate as to the size of the pool or to its position in the field. Close inspection of the air photographs gave no evidence of the position of a water inlet.

## Results



*Figure 4: Duck decoy at Claverham Court Farm*

About one half of the original pool was found to be visible, together with most of two of the pipes, and a short section of a third pipe. According to Sturge's map (see title page) there were originally four pipes, but the fourth pipe, along with north-west side of the pool, was no longer visible. No trace could be seen of a water inlet to the pool. The Little River lies only a short distance to the north of the pool, but as its water level is at least 1m. below the level of the field, it can hardly have been the source of a water supply. The earthworks of the decoy pool and pipes are overlaid by a system of gripes, which were seen to post-date the pool.

Aerial photographs from 1971 and 1975 reveal that Sturge's map is not accurate as to the size of the pool or to its position in the field. Close

inspection of the air photographs gave no evidence of the position of a water inlet.

### **Recommendations**

No further work is recommended.

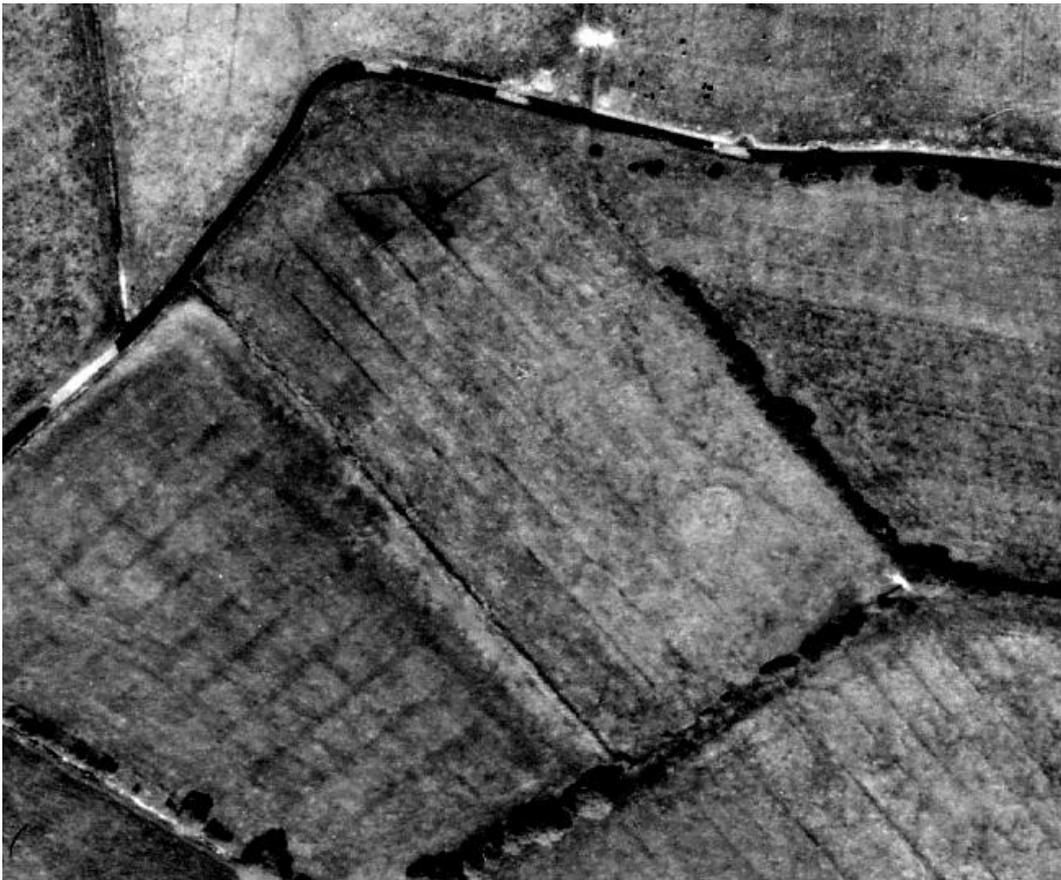
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| Sturge's Survey of Yatton,1821 | Somerset Record office, D/P/Yat 13/13                             |

Authors: Marianne Pitman and Shirley Everden  
9.3.2012.

## Appendix

- Aerial Photographs:
1. North Somerset HER, 1971 Run 43-5364
  2. North Somerset HER, 1975 0625



**Aerial Photograph: 1.** North Somerset HER. 1971. Run 43-5364



**Aerial Photograph: 2.** North Somerset HER. 1975, 0625