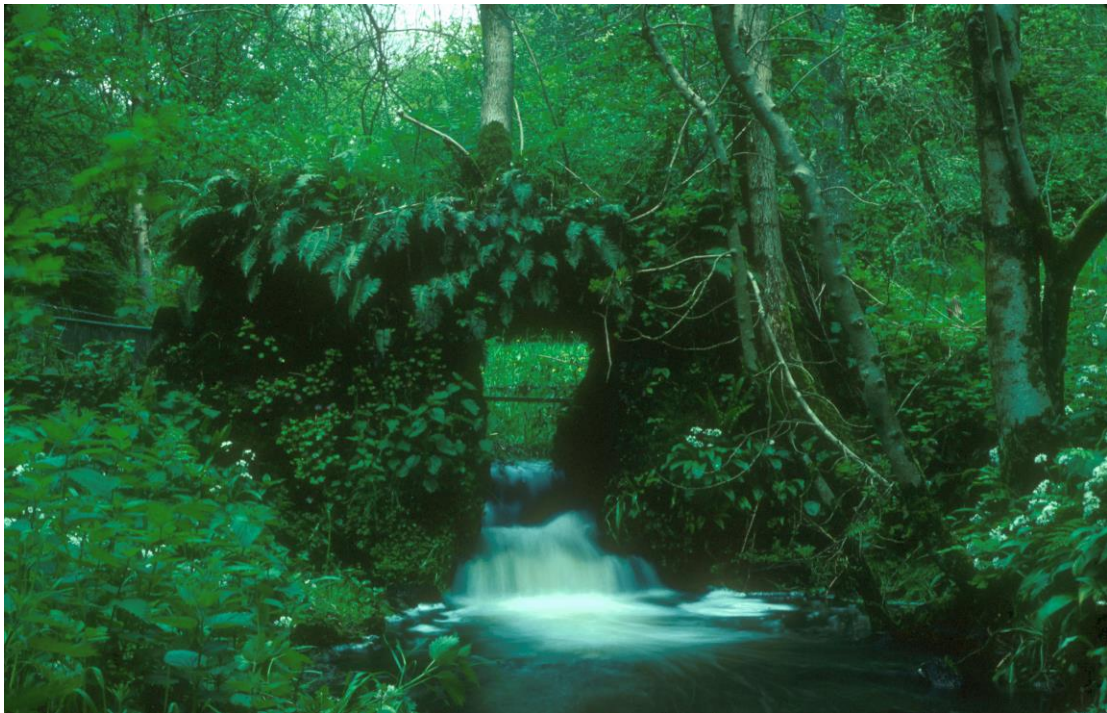


YCCART 2019 / Y13

Cheddarford Mills, Charterhouse: a possible early horizontal mill?

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The stream below the mills, running out of a field that includes the stream as water for cattle

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Abstract

After an attempt by Somerset Wildlife Trust (then Somerset Trust for Nature Conservation) to dig a pond on the stream in Long Wood uncovered obviously old walls previously not visible, the author identified the site as one of the Cheddarford Mills, previously serving Charterhouse-on-Mendip as grist mills, and carried out an earthwork survey in 1988. A note on this was published in PSANHS (Russett 1988: 225), but the survey itself has not been published before.

Acknowledgements

This site could not have been surveyed without the kind permission of Somerset Wildlife Trust, the owners and managers of Long Wood, and Chris Billingham, the warden of the wood.

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.

References beginning SRO refer to documents in the Somerset Record Office (now Somerset Heritage Centre), Taunton.

Location

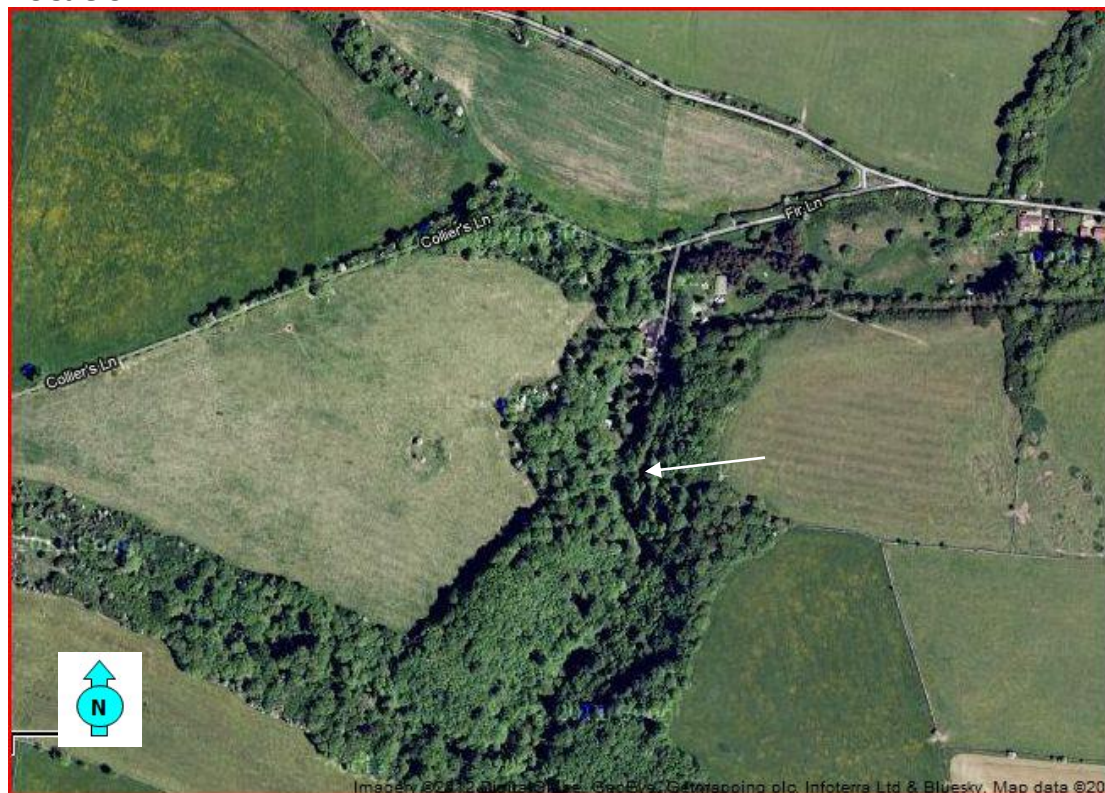


Fig 1: Location of the mill complex: it lies in the centre of the photograph, in Long Wood
The mill complex lies on the apparently un-named stream that runs from Blackdown into Long Wood, immediately south of Lower Farm (now Longwood Grange). As the only reliable stream of any size at Charterhouse, this became the main mill site for the Charterhouse area. The site is owned by Somerset Wildlife Trust, which gives permissive access. The site can be reached by public footpath through the adjacent field to the east. **Please note there is no public access through the grounds of Longwood Grange (Lower Farm).**

Geology and Land Use

The site of the mill complex is on the Black Rock Limestone, a dark Carboniferous Limestone, although the stream exists because it runs over the impermeable Limestone Shales, which outcrop in Colliers Lane to the west of Longwood Grange.

The site is in ancient woodland, which is maintained as a woodland nature reserve.

Historical & archaeological context

A water mill was recorded in Hydon (one of the several medieval names for Charterhouse-on-Mendip) in 1539 (Ministers Accounts, SRO T/PH/VcH 6), and must have been monastic (or earlier) since the whole site was owned by Witham Priory from 1181 when it was granted by the king, to the Dissolution in the 1530s. Previous to this, entries in the Red Book of the Exchequer in 1156 refer to the whole estate as 'Ceddreford': the eponymy of the mills implies their centrality to the estate, possibly even before 1181: Burgess speculated that the mill might have had a horizontal wheel (Burgess, undated: article in the Burgess archive) and he may be right: there appears to be no discernable wheel pit.

Among the grants to Ralph Hopton in 1541, of properties formerly belonging to the dissolved Priory of Witham, was

..Hidon Grange, with all the land and pastures and the water mill.

Hidon Grange was almost certainly Lower Farm, and the specification of 'the water mill' agrees with the ministers accounts: there was only one water mill at the time. By 1660 (SRO DD/GB 46), Gore family accounts specify two mills, which is confirmed in a lease of 1699 (SRO DD/BR py 17).



Fig 2: Lower Farm and associated buildings on the 1761 map.

In 1761 (see Fig 2 above), a whole complex of buildings are shown. It is noticeable, however that many of the buildings have black hatching: it is not clear what this signifies here or at other sites on the map. The 1761 map has a number of alterations and these are not always consistent. The attached survey nowhere mentions a mill – south field 't' is simply 'Th'east barn and Rick Yard'.

The building attached to the open southern field marked 't' on the map is on the site of the upper building in the survey below: nothing is marked on the map at the locality of the Lower Mill, probably meaning that it had gone out of use some time between 1699 and 1761, although it was well enough preserved for the Rev Skinner to recognise it as a mill in the 1820s.



Fig 4: Lower Farm and associated buildings on the 1842 map.

By the 1840s, when the stream was shown running in the leat, there is no indication of anything at the lower site, and the stream appears to have been diverted from the upper mill, since it is now shown emerging from the field south of the house.

When the Mendip flood of July 1968 swept through the garden and yard of Lower Farm, it washed away earth and revealed hundreds of finds of every period, from late Iron age pottery, Roman pottery and other finds, 12th century glazed pottery from Pill, medieval and post-medieval pottery of every

date, and many other objects (Russett 1988b: 226). The 1068 charter of Compton Bishop mentions a '*sundran wyrth*' (detached enclosed farmstead) somewhere in this area (Grundy 1932 Appendix: 165), and in view of the artefactual evidence, the documentary evidence, the survey and the eponymy of the site, it seems likely Lower Farm is the site of the said *wyrth*, and this may have knock-on effects for dating the origins of the mill.

Survey objectives

The objectives of the survey were to record the standing remains, to give some management advice to the landowners, and to record and establish what archaeology remained, and what were the remains of the spoil heaps from the non-archaeological clearance.

Methodology

The site was surveyed at a scale of 1:200 using tape and offset, and the resulting inked-up office and publication copy was scanned in 2007.

Results

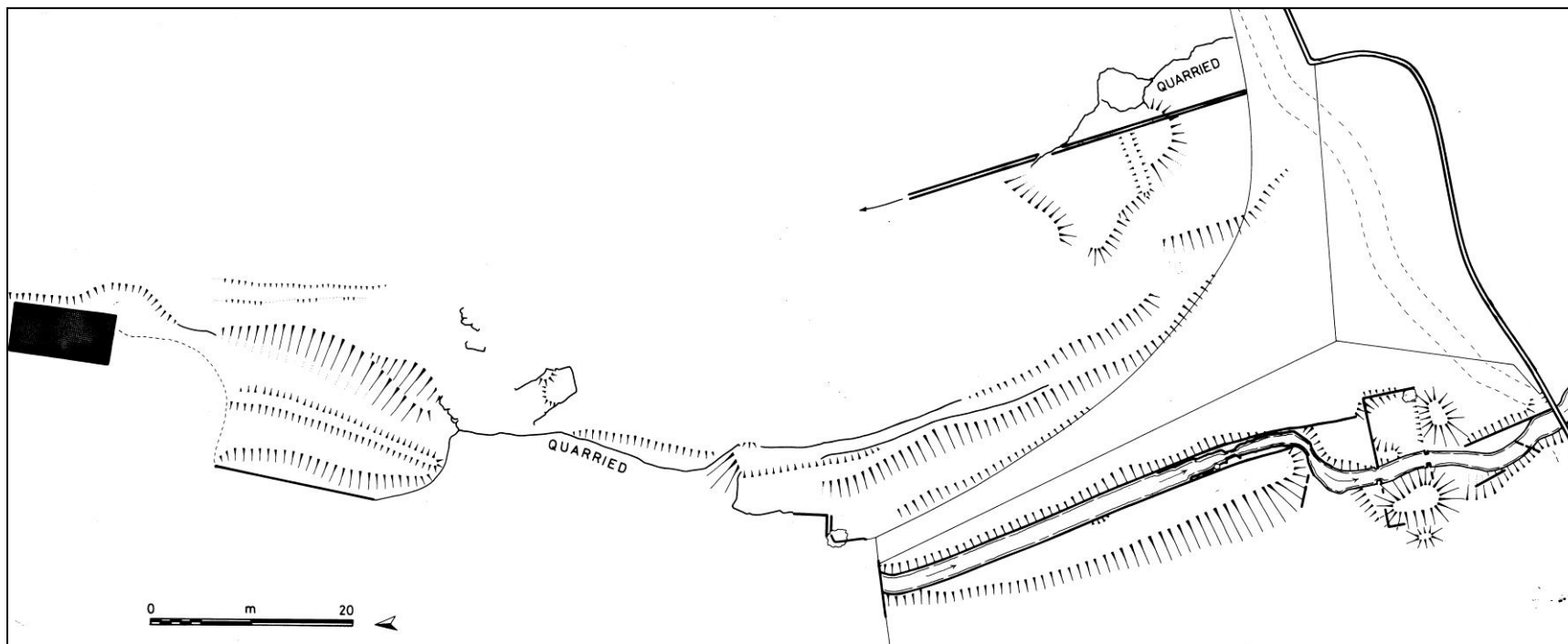


Fig 5: Cheddarford Mills, as surveyed 1988

The survey was carried out by Vince Russett during 1988. The site was quite overgrown, and some of the more subtle earthworks may have been missed, although the major features, such as the mill, the 'Abbots Pool', the leat and others should be reliable.

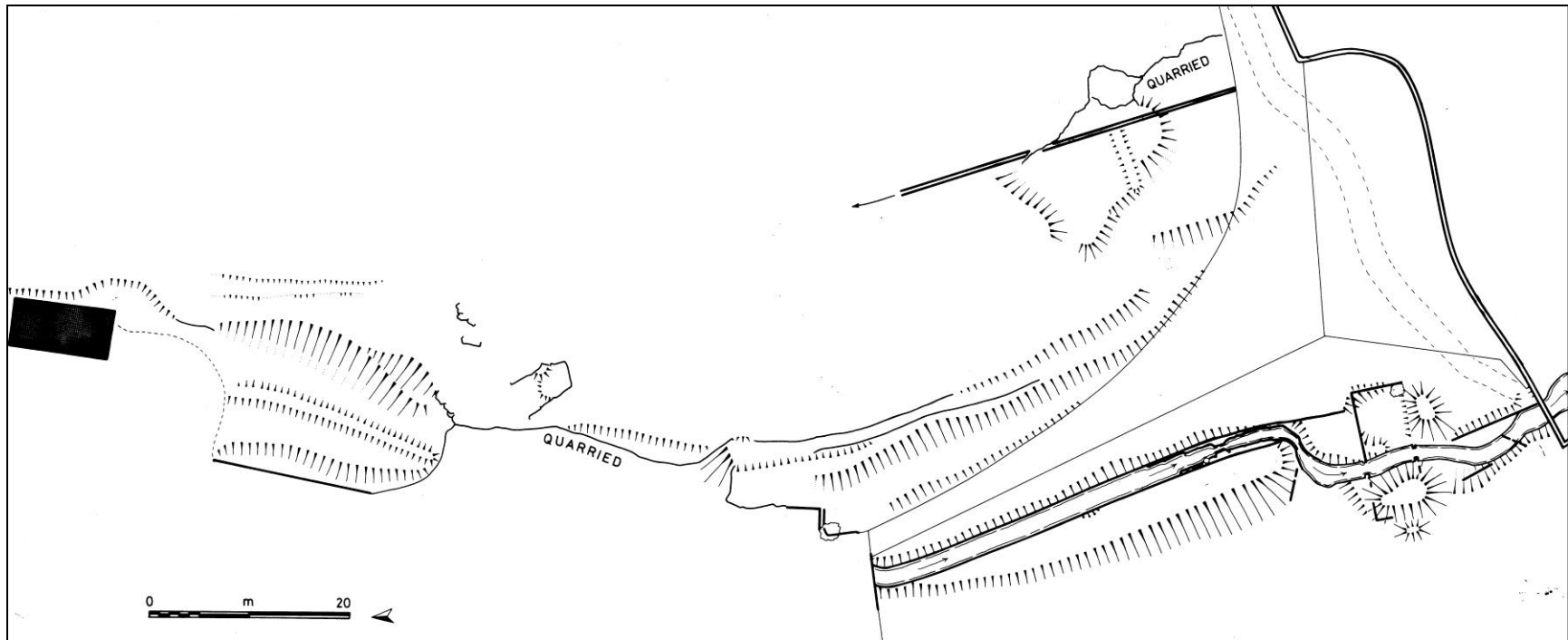


Fig 6: Interpretation of the survey

Interpretation

At the north end of the site, the black rectangle indicates a standing roofed building belonging to Longwood Grange and in use at that date. At A, a section of lynchet on the edge of the wood, with a standing portion of wall at each end, is probably a collapsed wood-edge wall: behind it further up the slope, a short section of small double-lynchet is probably the remains of a former trackway or path. In front (west of) the collapsed wall is a flattish section of ground ending in a lynchet towards the yard, supported by a section of remaining mortared stone wall. Across this flat area runs a low bank of undetermined purpose, but possibly the remains of a former leat to the upper mill.

Between A and B, a section of quarrying (presumably for construction at the farm) has clearly removed any archaeology on and inside the wood edge.

At B, the remaining corner of a stone building can be seen, whose footprint has been replaced by open yard. I was told informally that this damage occurred during the 1968 flood event, and a recognisable fragment of building stood there until that time. Running away through the wood from this point to the south-east is a double lynchet trackway, which seems have been replaced by a later stone-walled track on a slightly different alignment. These are heading towards complex at D (see below). Also at B, just over the fence separating Long Wood Grange from the wood itself, the stream emerges from a stone culvert under the yard. The stone-lined leat is held some metres above the valley floor by a large bank into which the leat was cut. The leat runs about 40m, then the water runs out of a break in the wall into a channel it has carved for itself at C.

At C, a small flat area lies behind the main mill building itself: according to Burgess in the late 1970s (Burgess archive in Axbridge museum), there was a shallow culvert running across this area to a central point at the back of the mill, but this was not visible in 1988. Either it was so overgrown it was missed, or the digging operations at the mill had removed any evidence. The chute by which the water reached the mill wheels is now blocked. The stream now runs through the centre of the mill building, which it has eroded, since stub foundations of the front and back walls of the mill can be clearly seen in both sides of the stream. The original mill was about 14m long and 4m wide: no internal features appear to have survived. The overgrown remains of two spoilheaps can be seen near the mill, one large one on the far side of the current stream, and a slightly small one to its south. It was confirmed at the time that this was the remains of the digging-out operations. Burgess sketched a floor layer support in the mill in the 1970s, level with the culvert, but this was gone by 1988.

The walls of the mill appeared to be of coursed stone with lime and mud mortar, and at the time had been dug out to a depth of about 1.5m.

Downstream from the wall, the foundations of a pair of converging stone footings either side of the stream appear once to have formed a pool, and I was informed that locally, this was known as 'The Abbot's Pool' (source not recorded). They were attached to the mortared stone field wall of a section of a field to the east which had been cleared of wood to give grazing animals access to water. The stream escaped into this area through a small lintelled opening, not dissimilar to the one on the other side of the watering area seen on the cover (although not as photogenic).

Above the mill site at D, a quarried area cut into the hillside was cut off by a stone field wall running towards Lower Farm, of which only the southern end was surveyed. In front of this, an irregular platform with a section of stone wall on it may be a house platform (although not 'The house at the Millgreene Gate' as in Russett 1988: this has been located elsewhere).



Fig 7: The overgrown remains of the mill, 2018

Discussion

It is most unfortunate that the inside of the building, where archaeological traces may have survived, was dug out without record: this may have held valuable clues about the origins and development of the mill.

The spoilheaps may contain artefacts misplaced from the fill of the mill. While the general story of the Cheddarford Mills can be obtained from documents, the more detailed issues of the nature of the wheel, and the date of the first mill on the site, can probably not now be answered. If as Burgess speculated, this was a horizontal wheeled mill, its origins could be well before Domesday.

The area known as 'Cheddarford' (with its various medieval spellings) seems to mean 'ford appurtenant to Cheddar', and presumably this means that it was part of the great royal estate of Cheddar before the grant to Witham. While the river at Cheddar itself drove many mills, the Cheddarford mills used one of the few reliable sources of water on high Mendip, and the coincidence of the early finds and the name imply this may have been a very early mill indeed.

References

Grundy, G. B. 1932	<i>Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> Appendix 1: The Saxon Charters of Somerset
Russett, V. 1988	<i>Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> Somerset Archaeology 1988: 225
Russett, V. 1988b	<i>Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> Somerset Archaeology 1988: 226

Author Vince Russett

Date May 2019