

Twyford village earthworks

HISTORIC LANDSCAPE REPORT / June 2011

Including HS2 high-speed rail line Impact Assessment

**Buckinghamshire
Archaeological
Society**



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Report number
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Compiled by Peter Marsden from field survey notes made in March 2011 by Michael Farley.
This is report number BAS/HBG/Twyford/2011-02.

1 THE SITE

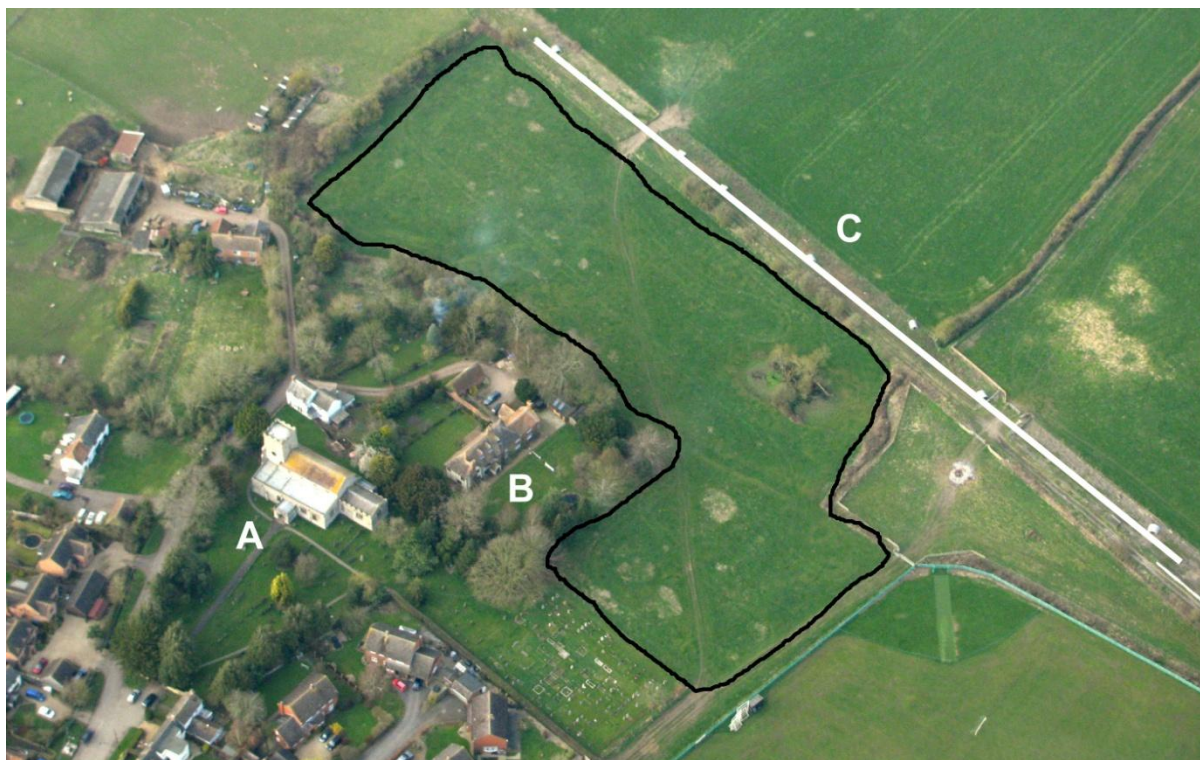


Figure 1: The northern end of Twyford village seen from the air. The area of earthworks is outlined in black, with the old railway line (C) beyond it. The new high-speed line would follow re-use and widen the old line at this point. The parish church (A) is left of centre, with St Mary's House (B) to its right. PHOTO: MIKE FARLEY.

1.1 Geographical location

The centre of old Twyford village is the Parish Church of the Assumption, at UK National Grid Reference SP665266. Air photographs show earthworks in fields to the north and south-east of the old village centre, with the most significant immediately to the north-east of the church. Large areas of medieval ridge-and-furrow also indicate the Twyford's former open fields.

1.2 Historic context

The village of Twyford dates from Anglo-Saxon times and is recorded in Domesday Book (1086).¹ The Parish Church of the Assumption has a Norman doorway and is listed Grade I.² The nearby St Mary's House, listed Grade II,³ was owned until 1951 by Lincoln College, Oxford, which had held the rectorship of the parish since 1475.

The earthworks are recorded in the Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record (record number HER 2961).⁴

2 THE SURVEY

A brief appraisal of the earthworks close to the church was carried out on 21 March 2011 by Michael Farley for the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (BAS). This was part of a wider survey of the village by BAS members in advance of a government proposal to construct a high-speed railway line (described in short as 'HS2'), whose planned route would run to the north of the village – immediately along the northern edge of the earthworks.⁵

3 SUMMARY

The field survey noted that the earthworks include a large rectangular enclosure with a well-defined ditch and clear traces of an internal bank. The present St Mary's House, originally a medieval open-hall house, would sit within this enclosure. This suggests that the enclosure marks the manorial centre of the medieval village. The remaining earthworks indicate the extent of the medieval village to its north and east. Action is recommended to protect the site and for further archaeological investigations.

4 FINDINGS

4.1 The earthworks

Earlier field surveys in 1977 and 1981 identified the remains of a 'large house platform'. This further survey indicates that this understates the principal earthworks, which in fact delineate a large rectangular enclosure with a well-defined ditch and clear traces of an internal bank along its southern side. This has a well-defined return to the north-east, then back towards the NW.

The visible extent of this enclosure indicates that it would have extended further to the west, raising the possibility that St Mary's House, at one time the vicarage, would have sat within it. A banked and ditched enclosure seems a little grandiose for a vicarage – so it is possible that the present St Mary's House could have started life as a manor house, or at least part of the manorial complex.



Figure 2: The figure is standing on the south-east corner of the rectangular enclosure, with part of its enclosing ditch to the left. Part of St Mary's House can be seen in the background. PHOTO: MIKE FARLEY.

Elsewhere on the site there is a substantial arcing holloway (or conceivably a ditch) which begins to the north of St Mary's House and exits the site further east, to the north of a later pond near the former railway track. Other lesser earthworks are contained within the arc.

Mole hills and other disturbances to the ground were checked in the principal area but no artefacts were noted. The site is on gravel.

Air photographs of the field on the north side of the disused railway track, and therefore adjacent to the earthworks, show traces of ridge and furrow. This is just about discernible in a few places on the ground but the field has been heavily ploughed.

Since 1981 the churchyard has been extended to the south-east into the area of earthworks. The church now has permission to extend its graveyard further to the north, into the area of the rectangular banked enclosure. As there is no doubt that the earthworks form a significant part of early Twyford and are a coherent whole, this is not advisable.

4.2 Documentary sources

The county HER record indicates, under the same record number, potential further earthworks in a field on the other side of a north-south track which runs to the east of the main earthworks surveyed here. These were not checked on the ground but as the area concerned is now a playing field the survival of earthworks there may now be unlikely.

4.3 Further investigations

The earthworks should be fully surveyed. A programme of test pits would help provide closer dating. The grounds of St Mary's House should also be surveyed to identify the course of the western arm of the rectangular embanked enclosure. The history of this part of the site would be worth researching in more detail to identify its possible continuity with any manorial site.

The site as a whole has educational value. If the landowner were to agree public access, an interpretation board at minimum would be welcome. Even better would be if the parish council was permitted to purchase the land for open space.

5: Recommendations

- 5.1 'Listing': The small fields immediately east and north of the church contain well-preserved earthworks which outline the manorial centre and village of medieval Twyford. This area needs to be protected, for instance by their inclusion in a Conservation Area.
- 5.2 The church graveyard: The proposed extension of the graveyard on to the rectangular banked enclosure would certainly cause damage to what may prove to be Twyford's most important medieval earthworks. It would be most helpful if this extension did not take place.
- 5.3 The impact of HS2: The planned high-speed rail line would run directly along the northern edge of the earthworks complex. These continue right up to the edge of the old railway line fence, which here is the exact route of the new line. Any intrusion beyond this present fence, whether for construction work or to insert mitigating structures such as a high fence or large earthbank, would destroy the earthworks of this manorial centre. It is also possible that some archaeological evidence may survive beneath or beyond the old railway line.

For this reason serious consideration should be given to the diversion of the proposed HS2 line to a more northerly route, sufficiently far from Twyford that the necessary mitigation measures may not damage the historic environment they should be designed to protect.

REFERENCES

1. See Domesday Book Buckinghamshire, folio 151, column c, entry 37,1.
2. See Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society (BAS) Report BAS/HBG/Twyford/0511-02.
3. English Heritage (EH) List Entry Number 1288292.
4. The Buckinghamshire Historic Environment Record may be accessed on-line at http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/bcc/archaeology/Historic_environment_record.page
5. For a detailed map of the proposed route of the line as it passes Twyford, see the UK Department for Transport website at <http://highspeedrail.dft.gov.uk/library/maps/map-13>

ABBREVIATIONS

- BAS Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.
EH English Heritage
HER The Historic Environment Record for the county of Buckinghamshire.
HS2 The UK's second proposed High-Speed rail line, initially between London and Birmingham.