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School of Conservation Sciences
Archaeology and the Historic Environment Group

INTERIM REPORT

Queen's Park

Formerly in the Liberty of

West Stour (Westover)

Prepared for

Queen's Park Improvement and Protection Society

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1. Introduction

In 2003, Stephen Gadd of the Queen's Park Improvement and Protection Society (QPIPS) contacted Iain Hewitt of Bournemouth University regarding a series of linear earthworks that has been identified within the Park. The Society had already carried out a survey of these earthworks with reference to available aerial photographs (<http://www.qpips.org.uk>). Site inspection by Iain Hewitt revealed that the Queen's Park earthworks formed a number of irregular enclosures each delineated by perimeter banks with a single adjacent ditch. The earthworks were of varying states of preservation; those on the golf course were barely visible in places, whilst others ran through coppices where the tree cover had provided protection. The best preserved banks stand to a height of c. 0.75m.

The purpose of the Queen's park earthworks is not readily apparent and features of this type of are notoriously difficult to date by excavation. For this reason, it was proposed that a full survey should be carried out in order to map the extent of the earthworks, and to place them in a wider landscape and historical context. The survey comprised two elements:

- GPS survey by Dr Kate Welham (Bournemouth University);
- Desk-based assessment by Iain Hewitt (Bournemouth University).

The project was costed into a Local Heritage Lottery Fund grant.

2. Desk-based assessment

Queen's Park is situated within the bounds of the Borough of Bournemouth. However, Bournemouth is effectively a new town that developed during the mid 1800s. Prior to this, it was a small coastal settlement within the Liberty of West Stour (or Westover). The desk-based assessment has encompassed the whole of West Stour which extended from Wick (near Christchurch) in the east to Alum Chine in the west. The hamlet of Muckleshell formed the approximate northern limit of the Liberty. Until 1974, the whole of the study area was in the County of Hampshire. The Inclosure Act of 1802 set in hand a

train of developments that transformed the landscape of West Stour from a series of riverside hamlets and open heathland into an urban and sub-urban sprawl. Some areas of old common land have survived as public parks, and Queens Park is one of these. Potentially, the Park contains some of the last visible evidence of ancient land use.



A Queen's Park bank with its quarry ditch just visible to the left

2.2 Christchurch Inclosure Act, 1802

A detailed examination of the Inclosure Award (the written description) and the accompanying maps has indicated that the Queen's Park earthworks have an important story to tell. Using the evidence of the Inclosure Act Commissioners it has been possible to 'reconstruct' the landscape of West Stour as it was in the closing decades of the 1700s. It was a landscape that possessed no formal pattern of roads, but there was a number of 'ancient lanes' and cattle droves (or drifts).

The economy of the area was based upon meadows that were situated along the banks of the River Stour. These provided lush grasslands for cattle and a band of ploughlands (arable).

West of the arable fields was a number of gates or access points to a wide expanse of heathland that stretched up to and beyond the County boundary with Dorset. Members of the communities of Muscliff, Muckleshell, Throop, Wick and Pokesdown) had common grazing rights on the heathland but the times at which this resource could be used were subject to strict controls in accordance with local custom. The heathers of the heath also provided a valuable source of nectar for bees, and hives are known to have been kept in Throop until quite recently.

Gorse (furze) and turf were exploited as sources of fuel (the common right of turbary) and it was the essential nature of these commodities that persuaded the Inclosure Commissioners to set aside parcels of land so that local cottagers could continue to light their fires and fuel their bread ovens. Queen's park was one of these set aside parcels of land.

2.3 The Queen's Park earthworks

The Queen's Park earthworks are not specifically mentioned in the Inclosure Award which leads one to suspect that they had fallen into disuse by 1802. Similar earthworks have been noted on Canford Heath (Poole) and in Bourne Valley. It is known that this type of earthwork, which together form a network of irregular enclosures, tend to be associated with the controlled grazing and movement of livestock. At this juncture it is not possible to be specific about a date for the Queen's Park earthworks but a timeframe of 1500 to 1700 would not be inconsistent with the available evidence.

3. Survey and mapping of the Queen's Park earthworks

The GPS (global positioning system) survey of the Queen's Park earthworks was completed in June of this year. The data collected were combined with the information gathered from the initial QPIPS survey (see Section 1), and the initial results of the desk based assessment (see Section 2) to produce a provisional map of the extant remains in the Park. This map can be seen (along with other project information presented at the QPIPS open day in June) at the Queen's Park golf club.

4. Scope for further research

There is much that remains to be done:

- The desk-based assessment needs to be extended to take into account the evidence of the Tithe Commissioners and the work of a number of early map-makers.
- At some point in the near future there will need to be an archaeological excavation but the site needs to be carefully chosen taking into account the results of the desk-based assessment. At the time of writing, the most promising site is at the east end of the Park which was formerly known as Dean Drove Gate where there was at least one cottage in 1802. Places of human occupation tend to provide datable material, such as pottery, some of which may have found its way into the construction material of the earthworks, or their associated ditches.
- The provisional map of the extant earthworks in the Park will be updated to include the new information that is emerging from the desk-based assessment.
- To date, the desk-based assessment has concentrated on the topography and archaeology of West Stour immediately prior to the Inclosure Act. It has not been within the scope of the Queen's Park Project to include an assessment of the prehistoric context of West Stour. The evidence for prehistoric settlement of the area is attested by the settlements Dudsbury hillfort and Hengistbury Head, both of which lie on the eastern periphery of the Liberty. In addition, a number of important finds were made during the course of early 20th-century building developments. These were recorded by the amateur archaeologist JB Calkin, who was responsible for a number of small publications on the subject (*e.g.* 1966). However, there has been no thoroughgoing survey of prehistoric remains within West Stour and there is scope to carry out this challenge as an additional component of the Queen's Park Project.