Swerford Castle
Oxfordshire

Topographic Survey Report

oxford archaeology south

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Swerford Castle, Oxfordshire

Topographic Survey Report

Written by Anne Kilgour Cooper

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Table of Contents

Summary

In March 2012, Oxford Archaeology undertook a topographic survey at Swerford Castle on behalf of Natural England. The aim of the survey was to identify and record visible historic features, extant archaeology and relevant topology. In addition it was hoped that the data could be used to identify relationships between features in the study area and features identified from earlier excavations carried out in 1938 and 1956. These features have been identified as dating from the 12th century. The survey identified a number of features on site, some relating to the motte and bailey, some to the outer bailey, and some to agricultural use.

1 Introduction

1.1 Location

1.1.1 Swerford Castle is situated to the north east of Chipping Norton, within the village of Swerford, and is centred on NGR SP 372 311. To the south of the castle is Swerford Church. The site is bordered to the north by the River Swere, and to the east and west by private gardens (Figure 1).

1.2 Topography and geology

1.2.1 The site is on a high point with good views across the landscape to the north, east and west. The site consists of a motte and bailey castle, and a field to the north, which slopes down towards the River Swere, where the river is fordable (Figure 11).

1.2.2 The underlying geology of the site is Marlstone Rock Formation (ferruginous limestone and ironstone), and Dyrham Formation (siltstone and mudstone interbedded) (British Geological Survey Geology of Britain Viewer: http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html).

1.3 Scope of work

1.3.1 The topographic survey covered an area of approximately 2 hectares comprising a motte and bailey castle with an uncultivated pasture field to the north.

1.4 Archaeological and historical background

1.4.1 Swerford castle was scheduled in 1949, National Heritage List entry number 1014748. Excavations have been carried out at Swerford Castle in 1938 and 1956 by Jope. Their aim was the identify the structure of of the motte and compare it to the one at Ascot Doilly (also spelt Doilly, D'Oily and d'Oilli in various sources). Pottery and metalwork were discovered during the excavations.

1.4.2 The earliest documentary evidence for Swerford is in the Domesday book - "Robert holds 5 hides in Surford..." and Swerford is mentioned as being part of the manor of Hook Norton (Open Domesday). There is almost a complete absence of any record of Swerford in the twelfth century, and in 1200 it is not clear who is the rightful holder of the manor. In the thirteenth century, the castle at Swerford is not mentioned at all.

1.4.3 The castle's design suggests that it could have been constructed any time during the century following the Conquest. Most probably during the civil unrest between Stephen and Matilda. In 1120 the second Robert D'Oily married Edith Forme, who's son was the Earl of Gloucester, Henry I's eldest illegitimate son. When Henry died in 1135 there was civil war between Matilda, his surviving legitimate child, and his nephew Stephen over the right to the throne. The D'Oily's may well have been drawn into the conflict as Edith's son was Matilda's half brother and his allegiance would have lain with her. Swerford castle may have built to protect the road over the River Swere to Hook Norton. It would have also helped to protect their land against their neighbour, the aggressive William Chesney of Deddington (The Early History of Swerford). The position of the castle next to the church may indicate a manorial purpose as well as a military purpose. The church is dedicated to St Mary, suggesting a twelfth century foundation and again indicating that the castle was built in the twelfth century.

1.4.4 When Henry II succeeded to the throne in 1154 he ordered the destruction of all private castles, and it seems likely that Swerford was levelled as a result (Ditchfield, 1903). This would explain the lack of documentary and occupational evidence from the thirteenth century.

Map regression

1.4.5 An assessment of superceded Ordnance Survey maps dating from 1889-1994 demonstrate the site has changed little over the years, remaining as a motte and bailey with a field to the north (Figures 2,3,4). Alfred Beesley produced a plan of the castle in 1830-1850. It is not very detailed, but clearly shows the motte and bailey, and some outlying earthworks to the west (Plate 2). The site plan produced by Jope is not as accurate as the OS maps, and cannot easily be georectified to the recent survey work (Figures 5 and 6).

2 Survey Aims and Methodology

2.1 Aims

2.1.1 The objective of the topographic survey was to ensure preservation by record of any historic earthworks present, identify any potential areas of archaeological interest not easily apparent through general walkover techniques and to highlight any areas of the site that required monitoring.

2.2 Methodology

2.2.1 A specification was prepared for Natural England, and during survey the site was divided into two distinct areas for logistical purposes (Figure 7).

- Area 1 – the inner area of the castle encompassed by the motte and bailey, and an outer bailey to the east
- Area 2 – the area outside of the motte and bailey, which slopes down to the north

2.2.2 During the first visit the whole site was walked to identify earthworks within the study area. These were indicated on a map of the area for future reference. Features within Area 1 were photographed and recorded and a partial topographic survey was carried out.

2.2.3 Subsequent visits were undertaken to complete the survey in Area 1, to photograph and record features within Area 2 and undertake a topographic survey of Area 2.

2.2.4 A Leica TCRP 1205 total station (TST) and a Leica GPS 1200 were used for the survey. In areas of poor mobile 'phone signal, Post Processing Kinematic (PPK) survey was used on the GPS. The GPS was used to set up two station points on the site in areas of good mobile 'phone signal - OA 1 and OA2, which were then used for setting up the TST. OA 1 is situated outside the scheduled area next to a telegraph pole and OA 2 is within the scheduled area close to a boundary wall. Permission was sought from English Heritage before siting the station within the scheduled area. Short traverses could be used to access areas that were not visible from the station points and were not suitable for GPS survey.

2.2.5 During visits to the site, tree cover and undergrowth hampered the survey in some areas, although the leaves were not out at this time and there was very little ground vegetation. This enabled most of the features to be seen relatively easily. Due to considerable rain fall there were areas of flooding close to the river, which restricted the extent of the survey in some areas.

2.3 Processing methodology

2.3.1 The three dimensional survey data were downloaded and processed using Leica GeoOffice before being exported into AutoCAD 2004. Hachures were added to show slope gradient and depth of features. Where possible, gaps in the survey, caused by the tree cover, undergrowth and flooding were extrapolated. When checked, the maximum error in the majority of the survey data was within the limits of accuracy the survey was conducted at (1:200). The PPK survey had some points with larger errors, and these points have been used with caution.

2.3.2 GIS was used to produce a Digital Terrain Model (DTM) enabling the site to be viewed 'three dimensionally' (Figure 11). This was achieved by a modified iterative finite difference interpolation based on a grid cell spacing of 0.75 Metres. Areas not covered by the survey were 'masked' out using the site boundary polygon.

3 Results

3.1.1 The results are displayed in Figures 8 and 9

3.1.2 The features identified in Area 1 were:

- *12*: A roughly triangular mound at the south east of the site (photo 1). The narrower end is to the south, with the widest part at the northern end measuring 12m across. The feature measures 17.5m north to south. The southern end has a gradual slope. The northern end has a much steeper and well defined slope. The eastern side of the feature slopes down to a track which runs along the east of the site. On the north-west slope of the feature, occasional stones are visible through the grass, which is of a poor quality, suggesting stones beneath the surface.
- *13* and *14*: Two features that may be associated. *13* is the western of the two features (photo 2). It is a sub rectangular raised mound, measuring 6.3m by 4.5m with a flat top. It slopes steeply down to the west with a sharp break of slope, and has a more shallow and gentle slope to the east. The grass on the western and southern edges is more yellowed, suggested stonework under the surface. There is mole damage to the north and north-east. *14* is the larger of the two features (photo 3). It is roughly semi-circular, measuring 12.5m by 9m. It has a very steep slope down towards the track to the east with a sharp break of slope. The north-western slope is shallower and more gentle. The top of the mound is moderately flat to the

south and west. The grass on the eastern slope suggests something substantial under the surface, possibly stonework.

- *15*: A feature consisting of a kidney-shaped mound measuring 28.3m north-west to south-east, and 18.5m at its widest point (photo 4). The mound has steeply sloping sides to the east and west, with a more gentle slope to the north and south. On the south of the mound is a raised embankment roughly 9.5m in diameter and 0.75m wide. The embankment appears to be of stone construction. The area within the embankment drops down slightly, before rising up again. There is a tree on the raised area. The north of the mound is much less well defined and more irregular as it slopes down to the north. This feature will need further monitoring due to possible root damage.
- *16*: A kidney-shaped mound on the north-east of feature *17*, measuring 26.3m by 35.4m (photo 5). It has very steeply sloping sides and a flat top, which measures 14m by 9.1m. There is evidence of a footpath winding anti-clockwise up the mound from the north-western edge for about 22m (photo 6). It stops where the bottom of the mound meets the central area of feature *17*. There is a large tree growing on the top of the mound on the north-western edge, and the slope to the north has considerable undergrowth cover. There is some erosion of the mound around the tree roots which has exposed stones, indicating an earthen and stone construction. This feature will need further monitoring due to erosion and root damage.
- *17*: An irregular circular shaped raised area in the south-west of the site, enclosing an area roughly 45m from east to west, and 36.5m from north to south (photo 7). It is surrounded by a rampart which measures up to 15m wide and up to 8m from the bottom of the exterior ditch (feature *18*) to the top of the rampart. The top of the rampart is flat along most of its course. The outside of the rampart slopes down steeply, whereas the inside has a much shallower and shorter slope. The rampart has tree cover to the north-west, and the east, and has undergrowth cover to the south. The trees have caused erosion with their roots, and where this occurs a considerable amount of stone can be seen (photo 8). Several pathways have been created up the rampart postdating its construction, probably by visitors to the site, or may be indicative of livestock use. On one of these pathways on the north-east of the rampart, some coursed stone can be seen (photo 9). This indicates that the feature is at least partially constructed out of stone. The area within the rampart is flattish, with a few humps and bumps, although no features were discernible among them during site visits. This feature will need further monitoring due to erosion and root damage, and damage from visitors or livestock.
- *18*: A bank and ditch around the outside of features *16* and *17* anticlockwise from north-west to south-east (photo 10, 11). It has been truncated to the south-west by the churchyard (photo 12). The distance across the base of the bank is around 18m. The north-western terminus of the bank has a flattened area with stones visible on the surface.

3.1.3 The features identified in Area 2 were:

- *1-7*: A series of ponds and possible ponds running west to east next to the stream, which is situated to the north of the site. Ponds *1* and *7* are well defined. Pond *1* is in the north-east of the site (photo 13). It is semi-oval in shape, measuring 26m by 10m and has a well defined bank around it. The pond was partially flooded during visits to the site, and the bank showed some signs of recent erosion due to the water. Pond *7* is in the north-west of the site and is the best preserved of the ponds

(photo 14). It is semi-oval in shape, and measures 28.7m by 18.3m. It has been cut in to the slope of the hill to the south, and has had banks constructed to form its northern, eastern and western extents. There are two breaks in the northern bank between the pond and the stream, forming inlets for the water when the level of the stream increases (photo 15). They have been constructed so that water can flow into the pond when water levels rise, but not flow out again when levels return to normal. The bottom of ponds *1* and *7* were noted during the site visits to be flooded or waterlogged, and there was an area of recent collapse on the southern bank of pond *7* and the southern bank of pond *1*. Ponds *2-6* are much less well defined (photo 16, 17, 18).

- *8*: A possible platform to the south of pond *7*. It is roughly triangular in shape and measures 15.4m by 9m. It has a roughly flat top and fairly gently sloping sides.
- *9*: A curvilinear raised embankment to the south of pond *7* (photo 19). It runs south from pond *7* for 24m before turning a right angle and running west. The bank is 6.5m wide. The extent of the feature is unknown, as it continues in to the garden of a neighbouring property.
- *10*: A ridge or embankment running from south to north from *11*, 53m to the stream at the north of the field. At the stream it forms a bank between two possible ponds – *3* and *4*. The top of the feature is relatively flat, measuring approximately 4.5m across. The feature is better defined at the northern end and the southern end than in the middle.
- *11*: A possible rectangular structure consisting of four mounds, one at each corner (photo 20). It is aligned north south and is situated at the southern end of feature *10*. The north-west mound measures 2.1m by 2.3 has a roughly flat top and well defined edges. The north-east mound measures 2.4m by 3.6m has a roughly flat top and is well defined. The south-east mound measures approximately 3.2m by 2.6m has a roughly flat top and is well defined. The south-west mound measures approximately 3m by 3.1m has a roughly flat top and is well defined. The poor quality of the grass on these mounds indicates that there may be something under the surface, possibly stonework.
- *19*: An area of ridge and furrow ploughing in the north-east of the field. It runs north-east south-west and is poorly defined. Some of the ridge and furrow is within pond *3*. The ridge and furrow has been truncated by modern disturbance that runs roughly from east to west across the site. Some of the ridge and furrow ploughing only became apparent once the survey data had been processed and it showed up in the resulting topographic image.
- *20:* A linear break of slope, identified during data processing. It runs east-west from the corner of a property boundary on the west of site, and is visible for 60m. It can be seen most clearly on an aerial photograph of the site, taken in 1972-73 (plate 1).

3.2 Interpretation

3.2.1 The features identified during the survey can be divided into four broad categories (figure 10). Those relating to the motte and bailey, those in the second bailey, those relating to agriculture, and those of unknown use.

3.2.2 The motte and bailey consist of two features *16* which is the motte, and *17*, the bailey, with a surrounding bank and ditch *18*. The bailey is defended on all sides by a rampart with a steep outer face, which can clearly be seen in figure 11. A substantial bank and ditch would have run around it from the north-west to the south-east, but this had been

truncated to the south-west in 1925 by the extension of the graveyard. It seems likely that the motte had been circular in shape when constructed. An excavation carried out in 1956 by Jope ascertained that there had been a ditch between the motte and bailey which had been filled in with material from the motte, leading to its current kidney shape. The date of this infilling is unknown.

3.2.3 The entrance to the bailey is on the north-west, just to the east of the motte (photo 21). At this point the bank and ditch end, and there is an area of disturbance on the bank, which has numerous stones visible on the surface . It may be that some form of entrance structure lay here.

3.2.4 Jope's excavation in 1938 discovered that the bailey rampart was constructed of earth with a layer of piled stone six feet thick on the outer face, and his excavation in 1956 aimed to determine the structure of of the motte and compare it to the one at Ascot Doilly [*sic*] which had a tower on it. Jope discovered that the motte was built of "...fair-sized stones from the local Great Oolite formation..." (Jope, 1956). The excavation found no trace of any stone-built structures on the motte, suggesting that the tower was not built from stone. No post-holes were discovered on top of the mound, and Jope has suggested that the motte may have had a wooden tower, which had rubble piled around it to stabilise it, without the need for large posts to be sunk into the motte.

3.2.5 Pottery and metalwork discovered during the 1938 and 1956 excavations by Jope were of the same type found at Ascott d'Oyley Castle. The pottery indicates that the castle was is use from perhaps as early as the late eleventh century, although the main use seems to date to the early and mid twelfth century. This could possibly link it to a period of civil unrest between King Stephen and Empress Matilda (also know as Mathilda and Maude) in the years 1135-1154. The excavation discovered only one occupation layer and "...nothing typical of the thirteenth century..." (Jope, 1956) indicating that the castle had fallen out of use by then.

3.2.6 Within the ditch to the south-west there is reportedly evidence of a slight hollow way, which is believed to date to the period after the castle fell out of use (Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record). The hollow way was not visible during site visits due to a substantial covering of leaf litter.

3.2.7 There are reportedly a number of platforms within the bailey marking the possible locations of stables, kitchens, store rooms and other structures (Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record). These were not particularly visible during visits to the site, although some features became apparent once the topographic data had been processed (figure 11).

3.2.8 The second bailey consists of features *12*, *13*, *14*, and *15*. The bailey is formed as a raised platform of material cut from the slope of the hill. It measures 32m north to south and 19m east to west. It has no outer ditch. It is within this bailey that a dovecote and windmill are believed, by Jope, to have been located. Feature *15* may be the possible location of the windmill, as it was noted during visits to the site that this area was not at all sheltered from the wind. The feature has a raised area in the middle, which may have been from the tree that was removed in around 1923, and mentioned in Jope's 1938 excavation report. Certainly there was a mill at Swerford, as it was mentioned in 1258, as Reginald Fitzpeter, Lord of the Manor of Swerford claimed the rights to force the Oseney Abbey tenants in Hook Norton to grind corn at his mill (Jope, 1956), although there is no mention of whether this was driven by wind or water.

3.2.9 Features *12*, *13*, and *14* may be other structures from the time when the bailey was in use, and features *13*, and *14* may either be related to *15*, if it was indeed the windmill, or may be the location of the possible dovecote.

3.2.10 It is possible that features *12, 13, 14, and 15* may be part of a defensive outwork in the outer bailey, providing additional defence for the castle. Further investigation of these features, such as geophysics or excavation, would be needed to confirm their use.

3.2.11 The features within the field to the north of the castle mostly relate to agriculture, some of which relate to the medieval period, and some to the enclosure of the land.

3.2.12 There are a series of ponds, and possible ponds, features *1* to *7* running along the course of the river, an area of ridge and furrow, *19*, at the north-east of the field and a bank at the west of the field, *9*. Ponds *1* to *6* may be the result of natural flooding of the river, or may have been enhanced to promote pooling of water for agricultural use. Pond *7* is of deliberate construction, and has been designed so that when the river level rises water flows in to the pond, but cannot flow back out when water levels drop again. Feature *9* may relate to this pond, as a spring is shown in this area on the first edition OS map. Feature *9* may be directing water to ensure that the spring remains in the same place. This would help keep water in the pond at a good level.

3.2.13 The area of ridge and furrow in the north-east corner of the field is mostly visible on aerial photographs of the site and on the topographic survey data (figure 11). Some of it was not visible on the ground during site visits. The ridge and furrow extends in to one of the possible ponds – feature *3,* indicating that this may be as a result of natural pooling of water. The ridge and furrow has been disturbed by feature *10,* and by modern works on the site, which can be seen as a line of manholes and a footpath running west to east across the site. It was noted during visits to the site, that this area was warmer and more sheltered than to the south of the site, making it suitable for growing crops.

3.2.14 Feature *8,* is of unknown date and use. Feature *8* is close to a manhole and a telegraph pole so may be an area of modern disturbance from utility works. Further disturbance from utility works can be seen at the north-east of the site where it partially truncates the ridge and furrow.

3.2.15 Features *10, 11* and *20* match almost perfectly with former field boundaries seen on the first edition OS map. *10* follows a north-south field boundary, which has some trees indicated on it. *11* sits on the junction of three former field boundaries, including features *10* and *20*. The feature is more defined than *10,* so the junction may have been of a more substantial construction than the north-south boundary. Feature *20* follows the line of a former east-west field boundary which can be seen on the first and second edition OS maps. Feature *10* truncates the earlier medieval ridge and furrow ploughing, as can be seen on plate 1 and figure 11.

3.3 Further monitoring

3.3.1 Damage has occurred to several features at Swerford castle, due to root activity, trampling by visitors and livestock, weathering, and erosion. Overall, the monument appears to be stable, but it would be worthwhile monitoring features such as the motte, the bailey, and feature *15* - the possible mill site, as they have experienced the greatest root and erosion damage.

Appendix A. Bibliography and References

British Geological Survey Geology of Britain Viewer:
http://mapapps.bgs.ac.uk/geologyofbritain/home.html

Ditchfield, P. H., 1903, Memorials of old Oxfordshire, Bemrose and Sons Ltd, London

Jope, E. M., 1938, Castle Hill, Swerford, in Oxfordshire Archaeological Society reports for the year 1938 no. 84, pp85-93

Jope, E. M., 1956, Castle Hill, Swerford:
www.history.bluerow.co.uk/motte_and_bailey.htm

Open Domesday:
www.domesdaymap.co.uk

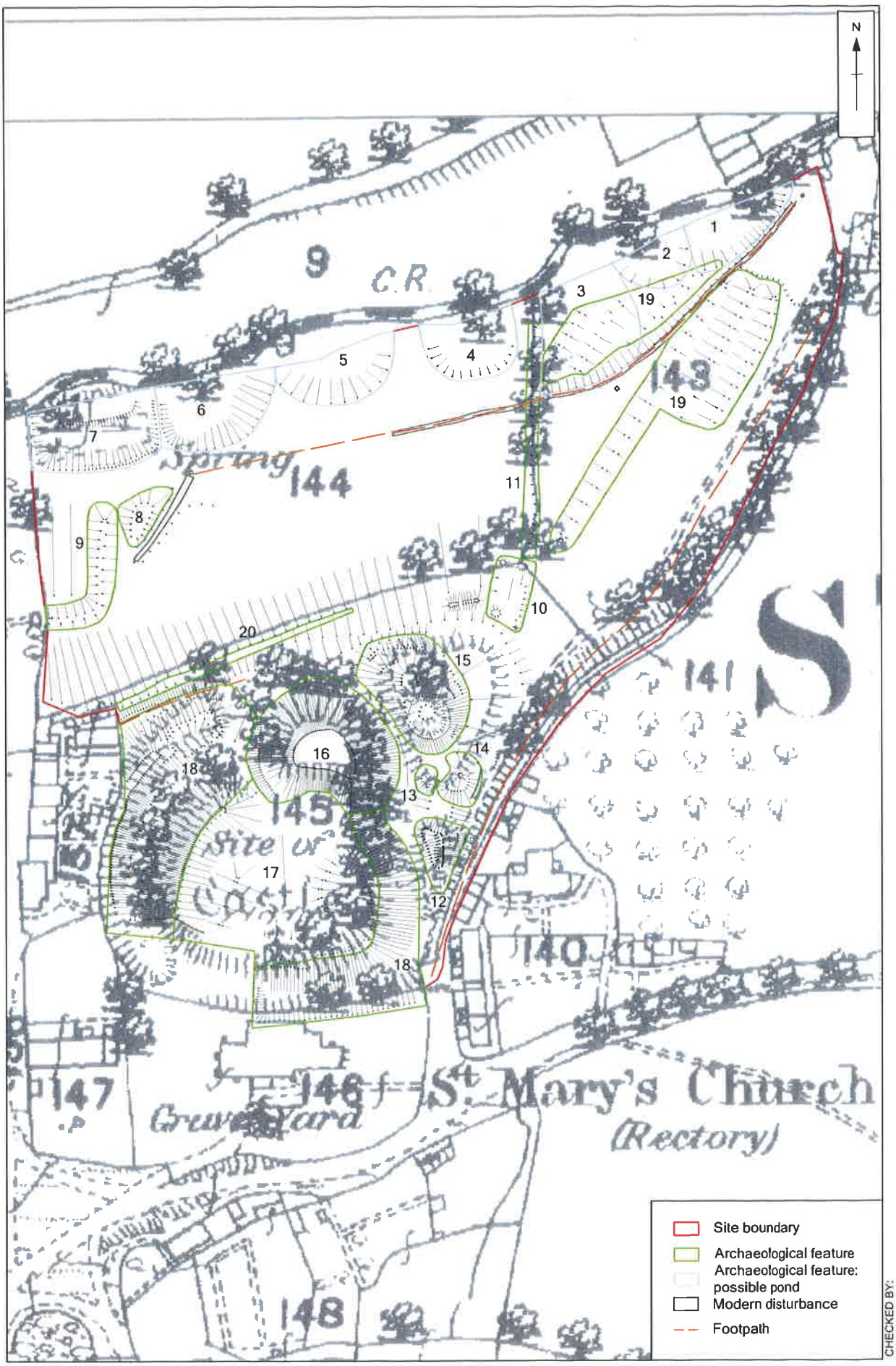
Oxfordshire Historic Environment Record monument report,

The Early History of Swerford:
www.wospweb.com/site/Swerford/Swerford-Castle.htm

Appendix B. Summary of Site Details

Site name:	Swerford Castle
Site code:	SWERFOT
Grid reference:	SP 372 311
Type of project:	Topographic survey
Date and duration of project:	March 2012, 4 days
Area of site:	2 hectares
Summary of results:	In March 2012, Oxford Archaeology undertook a topographic survey at Swerford Castle on behalf of Natural England. The aim of the survey was to identify and record visible historic features, extant archaeology and relevant topology. In addition it was hoped that the data could be used to identify relationships between features in the study area and features identified from earlier excavations carried out in 1938 and 1956. These features have been identified as dating from the 12th century. The survey identified a number of features on site some relating to the motte and bailey, some to the outer bailey, and some to agricultural use.
Location of archive:	The archive is currently held at Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford OX20ES and will be deposited with the relevant museum in due course.

Figure 1: Site location



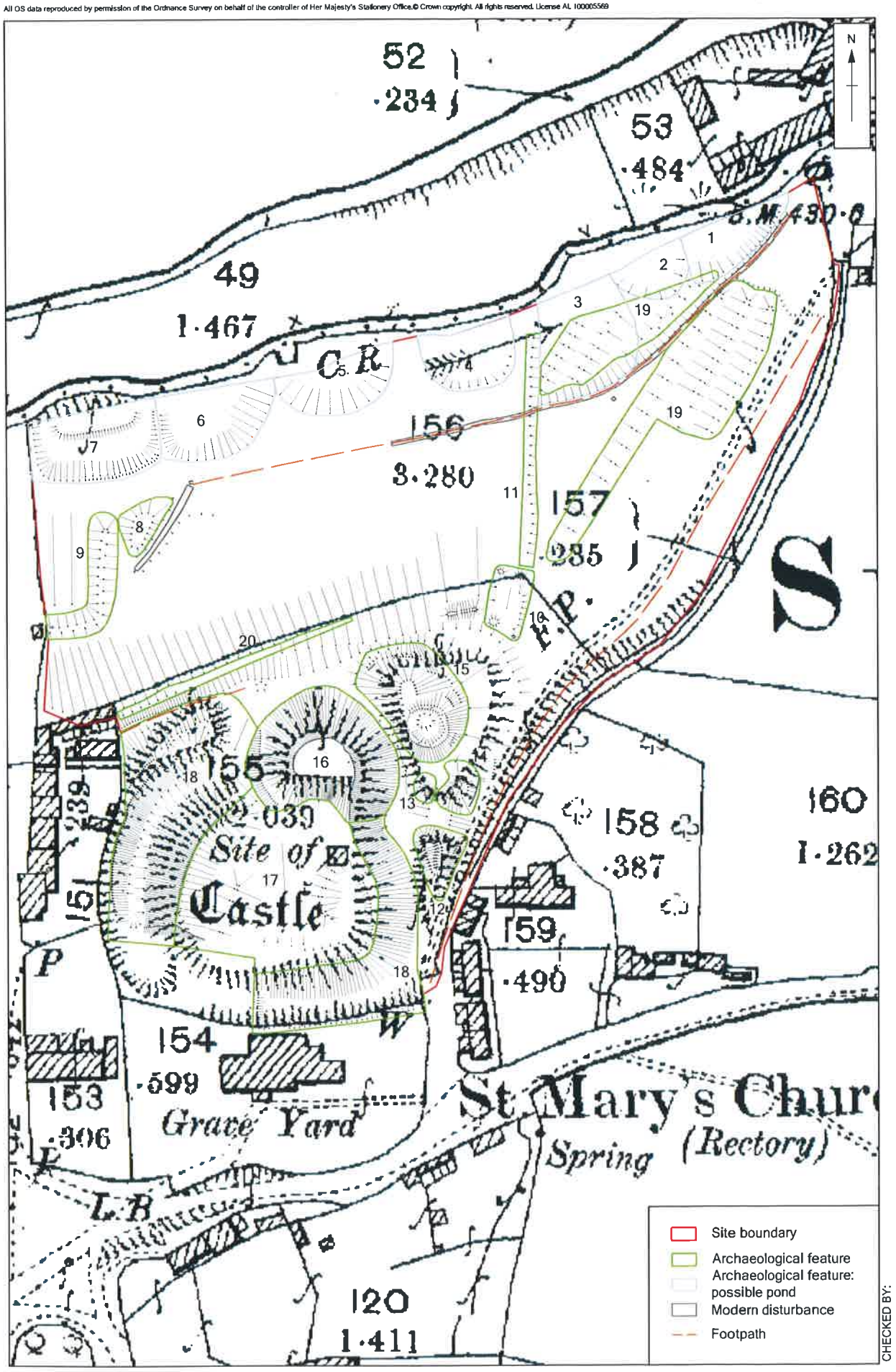
S:\PROJECTS\Swerford Castle\010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\Swerford_120612.dwg(Fig 2 first edition OS)*SWERF10*SWERFOT*Swerford Castle*anne.kilgour* 10 Sep 2012

Survey Data supplied by :
OA

0 50 m

Scale at A4 1:1250

Figure 2: First edition OS map with archaeological features identified during the survey



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Survey Data supplied by :
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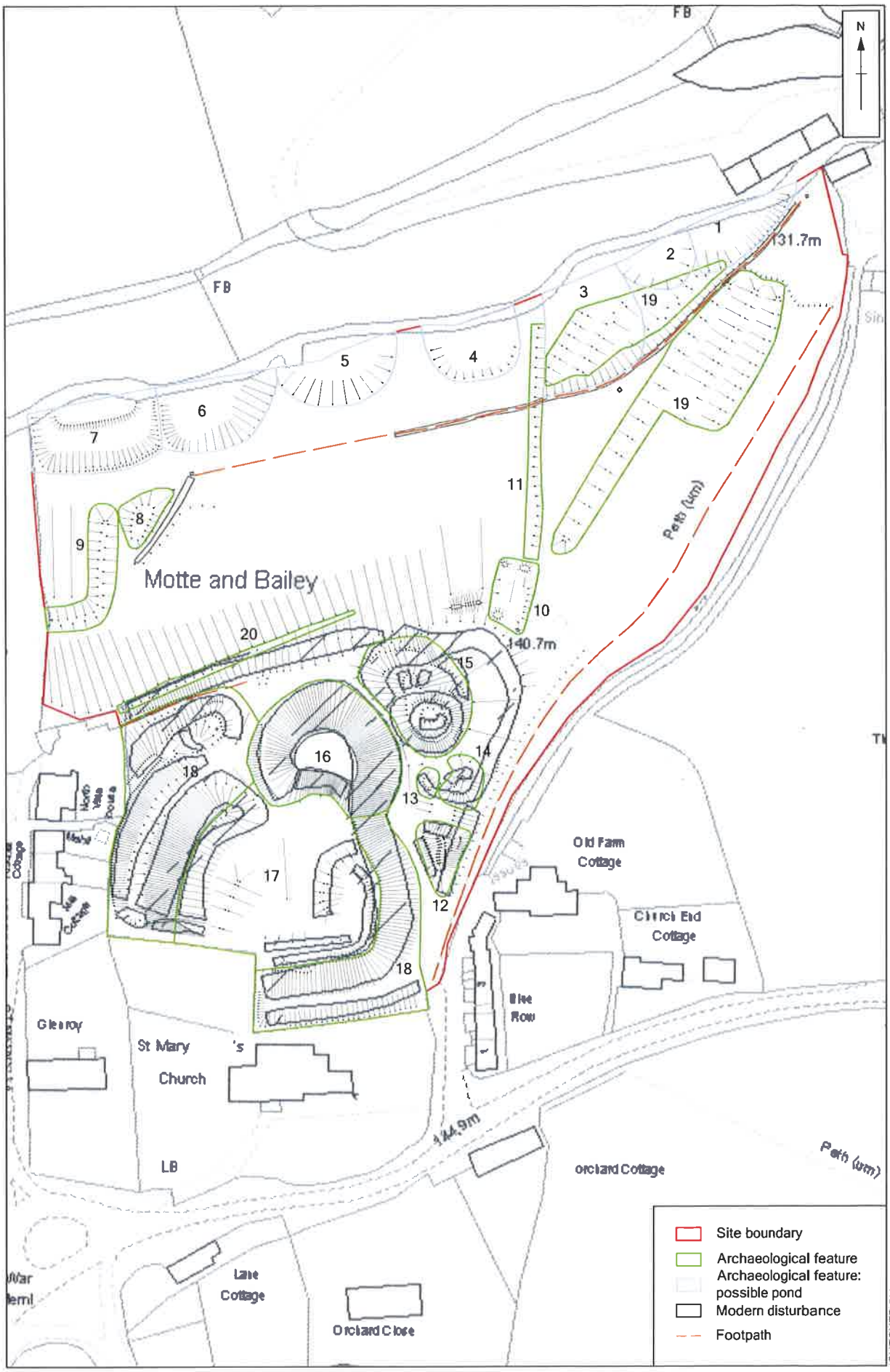
Scale at A4 1:1250

Figure 3: Second edition OS map with archaeological features identified during the survey



Survey Data supplied by :
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Scale at A4 1:1250

Figure 4: Current OS map with archaeological features identified during the survey

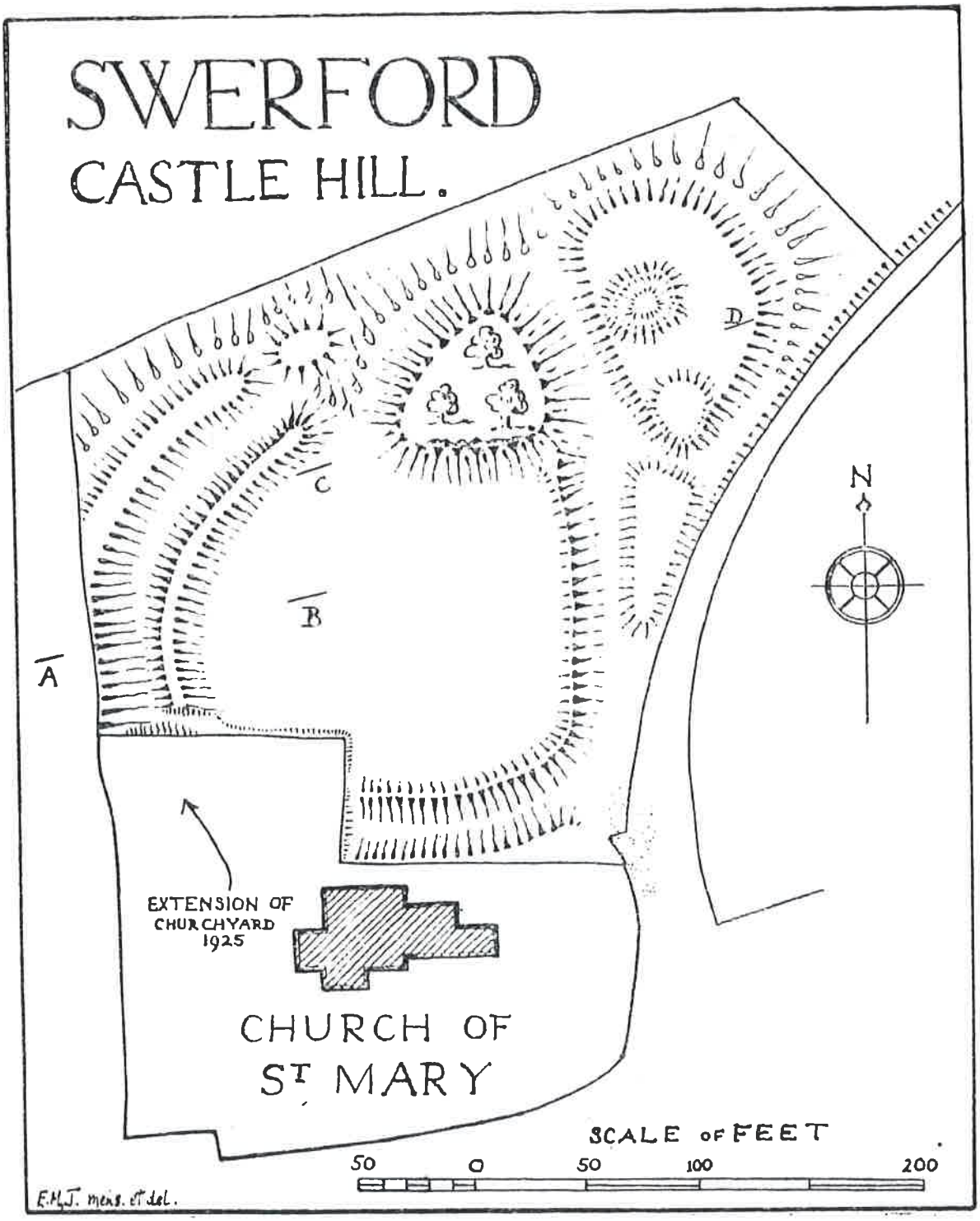

Figure 5: Jope's interpretation of Swerford Castle (from Jope, 1938)

Fig. No. 1

Survey Data supplied by :
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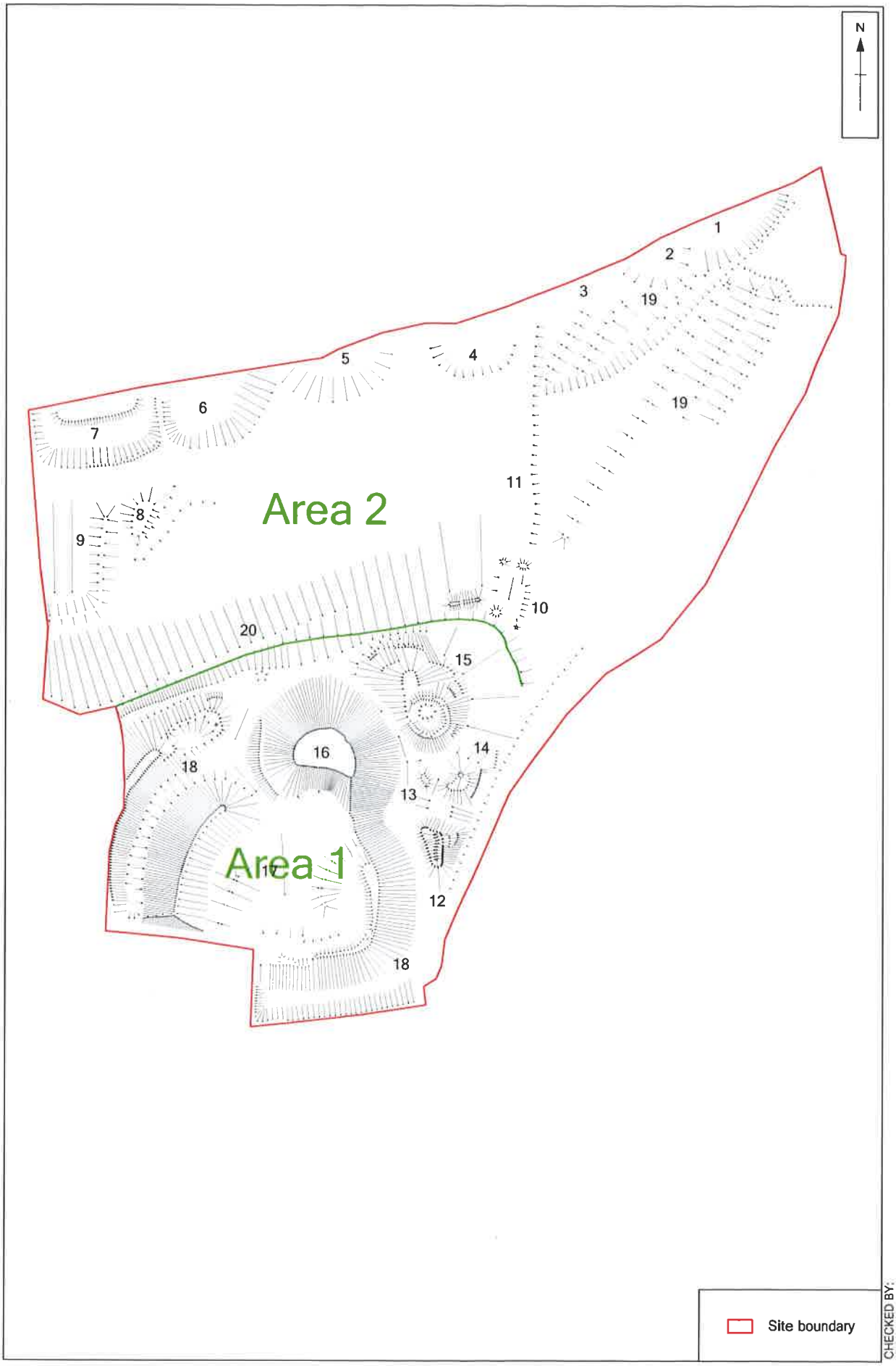
Figure 6: Jope's interpretation, with archaeological features identified during the 2012 survey



S:\PROJECTS\Swerford Castle\010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\Swerford_120612.dwg(Fig 7 area division)*SWERF-10*SWERFOT*Swerford Castle*anne.kilgour* 10 Sep 2012

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OA

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Scale at A4 1:1250

Figure 7: Site division

Figure 8: Features identified within Area 1

S:\PROJECTS\Swerford Castle\010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\Swerford_120612.dwg(Fig 9 features in area 2)*SWERF10*SWERFOT*Swerford Castle*anne.kilgour* 10 Sep 2012

Survey Data supplied by :
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Scale at A4 1:1000

Figure 9: Features identified within Area 2

S:\PROJECTS\Swerford Castle\010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\Swerford_120612.dwg(Fig 10 feature categories)*SWERF10*SWERFOT*Swerford Castle*anne.kilgour* 10 Sep 2012

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Figure 10: Categories of use of features identified during the survey

S:\PROJECTS\Swerford Castle\010Geomatics\02 CAD\001current\SWERFOT_Figure 9_DTM Swerford Castle _120612.dwg(figure 11)*SWERFOT*SWERFOT*Swerford DTM*anne.kilgour* 10 Sep 2012

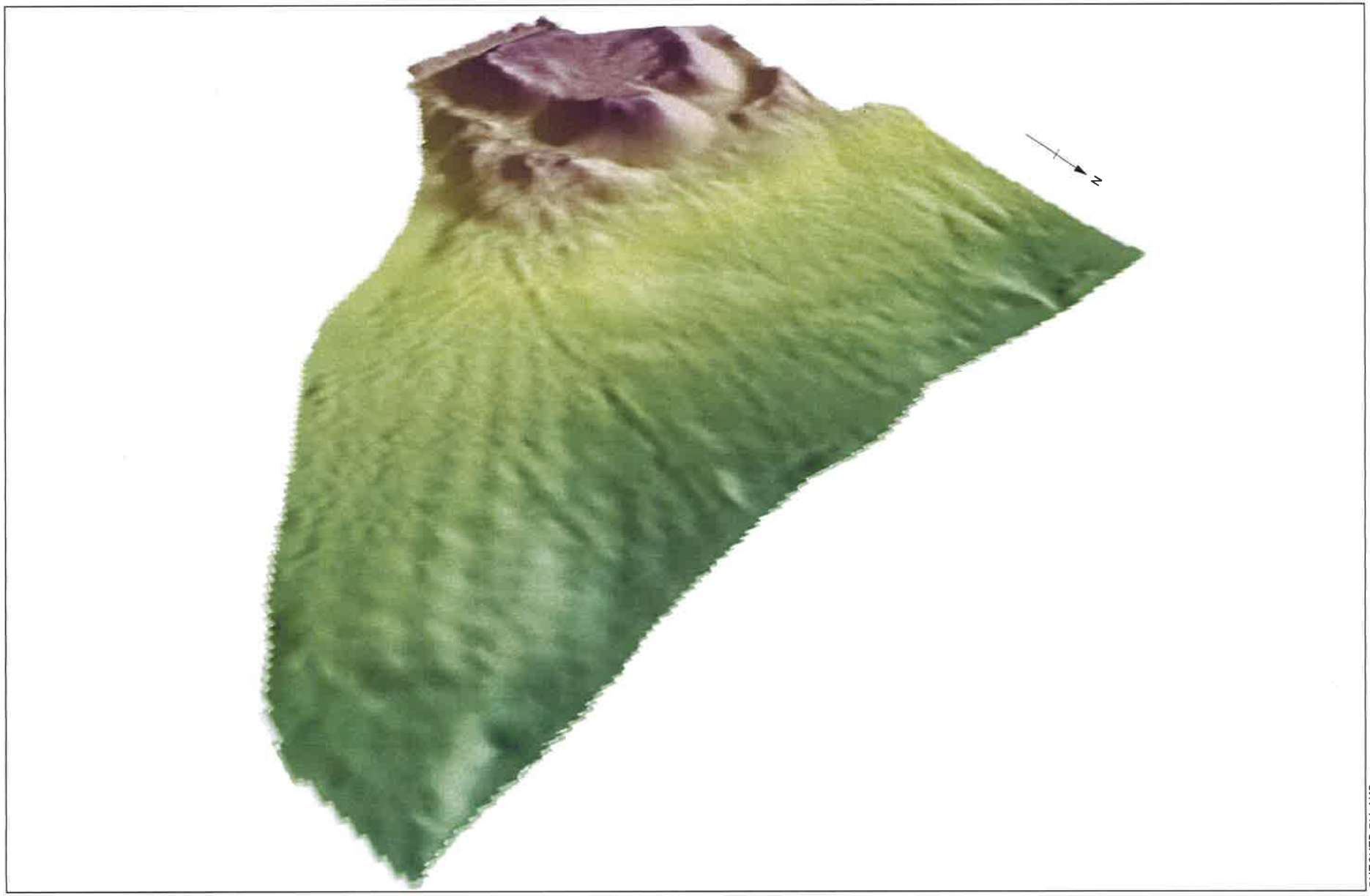

Figure 11: Digital Terrain Model derived from survey data

Scale at A4 NOT TO SCALE

Photograph 1: Feature 12

Photograph 2: Feature 13

Photograph 3: Feature 14

Photograph 4: Feature 15

Photograph 5: Feature 16

Photograph 6: Footpath on feature 16

Photograph 7: Feature 17

Photograph 8: Tree root erosion revealing a substantial amount of stone on the outside of feature 17

Photograph 9: Pathway erosion on feature 17, revealing coursed stonework.

Photograph 10: The ditch of feature 18, to the south of feature 17.

Photograph 11: The bank of feature 18, to the north-west of feature 17

Photograph 12: Truncation of features 17 and 18 by the expansion of the churchyard

Photograph 13: Pond 1, demonstrating its ability to retain water

Photograph 14: Pond 7, with evidence of waterlogging

Photograph 15: Inlet between pond 7 and the River Swere

Photograph 16: View across ponds 3 and 4

Photograph 17: View across ponds 3 and 2

Photograph 18: view across ponds 6 and 5

Photograph 19: Feature 9

Photograph 20: Feature 11, a possible structure

Photograph 21: Entrance in the north-west of feature 17, the bailey

Plate 1: Aerial photograph of Swerford Castle taken in 1972-73 by the Helicopter Training School, based in Netheravon, Wiltshire. The ridge and furrow ploughing can clearly be seen at the bottom right of the picture. Feature 10 shows clearly just above the ridge and furrow.

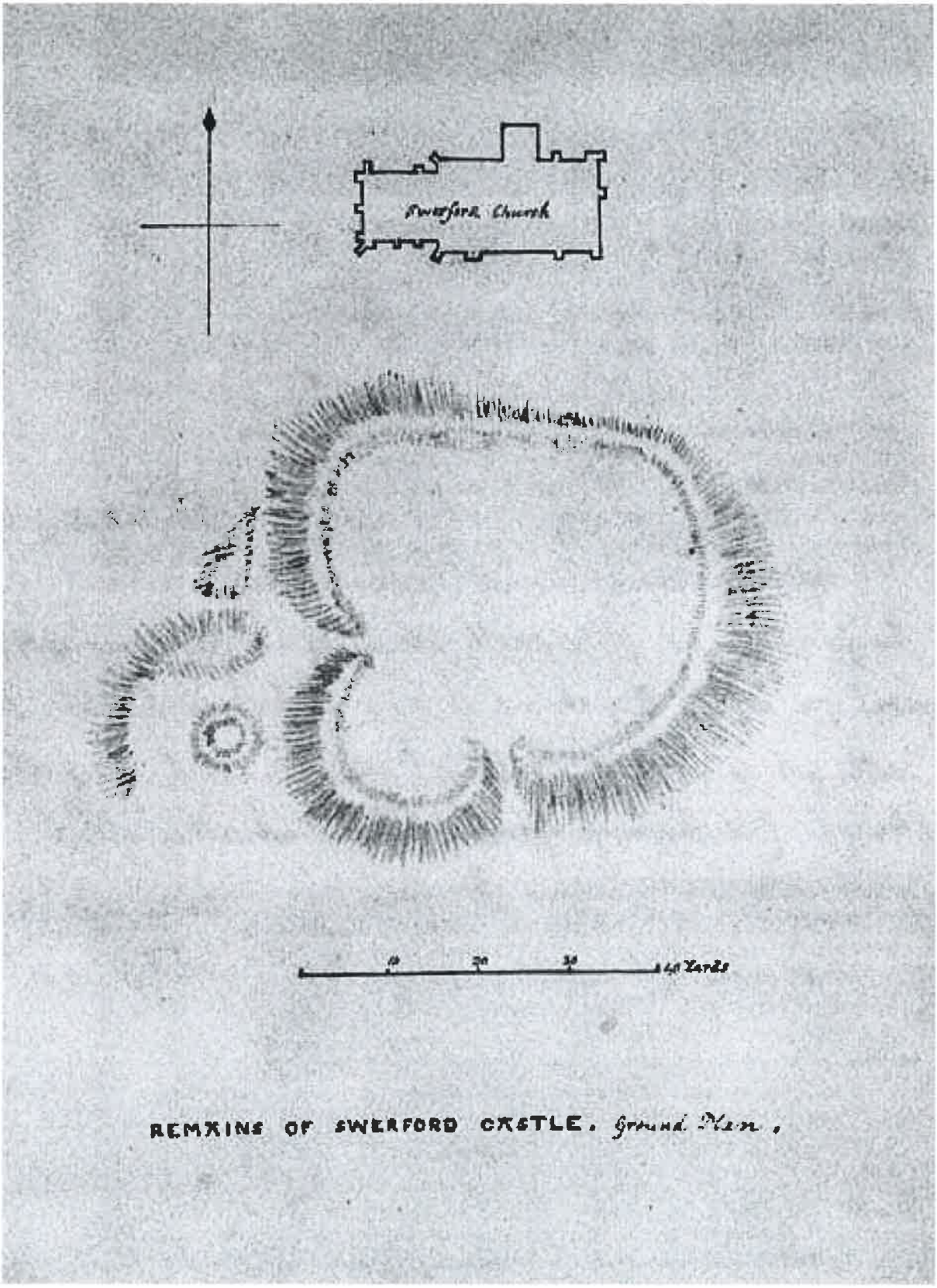

Plate 2: Remains of Swerdford Castle, plan from Alfred Beesley's extra illustrated copy of his History of Banbury Vol 3. 1830-1850

The motte and bailey (features *16, 17* and *18*) can clearly be seen, as can features *12, 13, 14* and *15* to the west.

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