GLOSSOPDALE & LONGDENDALE ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

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GLAS is a member of the Greater Manchester Archaeological Federation and the Council for British Archaeology

Report for the Derbyshire Historic Environment Record on a hillfort of presumed Iron Age date at Mouselow, Dinting, Glossop SK 028 955

Summary

Mouselow is currently listed on the HER (no 6115) only as the site of a probable Norman ringwork castle, the motte and ditch at the eastern end of the summit being a Scheduled Monument. There is evidence from the township name and observations by antiquarians in the C18th and C19th that the castle had been built within a hillfort, presumably of Iron Age date, but the castle alone has been excavated, and although the NRHE (PastScape) records that "(*the castle) is believed to be on the site of an Iron Age hillfort with triple ramparts",* there has been a lack of sufficient current evidence to confirm this beyond doubt. However, GLAS has now produced Lidar images which show clear evidence of earthworks outside the ringwork and not associated with it and which are consistent with the earlier observations.

Background.

Mouselow, or Castle Hill, altitude 279 metres, is a prominent feature overlooking the confluence of the River Etherow and the Glossop Brook and close to major north-south and east-west routes. It is the best defensive site in the area, having steep sides on the north and south and a plentiful water supply from springs on its lower slopes, and it would have been the obvious location from which to oversee and control Glossopdale and central Longdendale, or for a prominent site for ceremonial purposes.

The hill lies in the ancient township of Dinting. This settlement-name is believed to be of Celtic origin, a rare survival nationally but one of a group in this area, and the din- prefix in Celtic languages is associated with hillforts.

The first documentary evidence of a fortification was noted by local historian C.H Chambers: *" In a paine of the Court Baron 1709 a field belonging to Wm Martins of Hadfield is called Ye Castle (Parcel 7 no 37)"* (Chambers index, Glossop Heritage Trust). However, it is difficult to tell whether this and other early references are to the Norman ringwork, to an earlier and larger structure around it, or to both, and whether local traditions, first set down in the C19th, of a "British camp" on the hill, relate to the ringwork, at least one local author of the time believing that it was earlier than Norman – *"It is of round form, surrounded by a trench, and appears to be an ancient British or Saxon castle"* (Robinson, Longdendale Historical & Descriptive Sketches 1863).

T. Barlow, writing in 1899 in a local paper, the Advertiser, of a visit in 1861, also described in detail the round motte, semicircular ditch and heavily-quarried bailey of the Norman fortification, but like Robinson thought it was from a much earlier period - *"As this remnant of the fosse, and the heaps of rubble that lie around, are almost the only signs of man's design or workmanship we can trace, in the*

present state of the ruins, I am led to conclude from what they indicate, that this reputed " castle " was neither more or less than a British dun, of the age known to archeologists as the Stone Period, and that it existed some centuries before the Roman conquest, and the beginning of the Christian era." Bettenhill, the C19th farm on the north-east side, may be "Brettenshill" or Britons' Hill, there being no other obvious derivation, but if this reflected a traditional local usage it cannot, in view of the above, be assumed that this refers to a hillfort rather than to the castle.

The first reliable recorded observation is from the Reverend John Watson, a local antiquarian who was the first to publish descriptions of the Melandra Roman fort and Buckton Castle. He described *"Mouselow Castle"* as a *"large Saxon fortification on top of a very high hill.....On top of it there was a strong fort surrounded by a wall, the whole encompassed by three large ditches. The ascent being small towards the south-west, the strongest works were raised on that side; on all other parts the hill is exceedingly high and steep. The earth on top of the hill is exceedingly irregular, and has been robbed of most of its stone to build houses and make fence walls."* (Archaeologica Vol 5 1777 pp 89-90).

Watson visited before the summit enclosure was planted with trees in the 1780s, and before more intensive dairy and arable farming activity driven by the needs of the new industrial population which might have led to levelling of earthworks. The land around the hill was probably enclosed no earlier than the late C16th – early C17th and would initially have been just rough grazing for sheep.

There is a further description by J.C. Cox in the Victoria County History (1905): *"Mouselow Castle is the name of a round hill about a mile to the north of Glossop. On the top of its wooded summit is an intricate earthwork. The present confused condition of mounds renders the suggestion of any scheme or plan of its original construction almost an impossibility, save that there are fairly obvious traces of a double rampart - and on the east, a triple rampart - encircling an oval formation about 350 feet in extreme diameter. All that can be safely said of its date is that Mouselow Castle was probably a Celtic fort to some extent reused during the Roman occupation."*

A section through the motte, ditch and counterscarp bank on the summit was excavated in 1963-4 by Joe Scott and extended in 1984-5 by Glynis Reeve, and their reports form the basis of the Scheduling of the motte, ditch and bank. Although both appear to have believed that there was a hillfort on the hill, no evidence of it was discovered in the area they investigated, and the contour survey carried out in 1985 was restricted to an area close to the summit.

Since that time regular grazing of the summit enclosure has ceased, and the uncontrolled growth of ground cover combined with the already-heavy tree cover has made it very difficult to see and follow surface features within the enclosure even in winter. When viewed in winter from the south-east (North Road) (Fig 8) a horizontal linear feature is clearly visible running below the line of the presumed Norman ditch, and Glynis Reeve's 1993 booklet, "Castle Hill - Glossop's Other Fort", contains what appears to be a photograph of it captioned *"Shallow outer rampart on north-western face",* but it is now, due to growth of vegetation, difficult even to locate on a walkover and even more difficult to follow round the hill.

The Lidar images

In February 2016 a member of GLAS produced from Environment Agency data a DTM and a DSM vertical Lidar image of the hill and its surrounds, and subsequently a 3-D DTM oblique image from the north-east. These show, in particular, three groups of features:

1. On the north-east side, on the DTM images (Figs 1 and 3), there is a broad shallow curved depression, about 10 metres below the presumed Norman ditch. This correlates with the linear feature visible from North Road. About 15 metres further down, bisected by Hilltop Road, is a much broader depression, concentric with the higher one, beyond which is a crescent-shaped bank or mound partially cut through by the road. From ground level, this feature appears at the centre to stand 3-4 metres above the surrounding land.

2. On the south-west side, on the DSM images (Figs 2 and 4), in the fields beyond the summit enclosure there are faint traces of at least two large concentric curving features. Although they are not apparent at close range or on air photos, or on a contour map derived from the Lidar at 0.5 metre intervals (Fig 5), they have been observed, as faint parallel lines, by GLAS members from Melandra on the other side of the valley,

3. To the south, immediately east of Hilltop hamlet, are what appear to be two parallel embankments, about 30 metres apart and 275 metres in length, running east of Hilltop Road just below the ridge which runs due south from Mouselow, and pointing towards the summit. Viewed from the north from ground level (Fig 11) they can just be made out, the height differences from this viewpoint being less than 1 metre, but they appear much more prominently in a view from lower ground to the south-east (Fig 12). They appear on the Lidar to lead, beyond the point where they would intersect with the ramparts, onto a single embankment or causeway which then curves to the north-east and climbs up to the summit.

Discussion

Reeve, in her 1993 booklet, says that *"Excavation of the summit suggests a Bronze Age burial mound was sited on the northern end and subsequently cut through.....by the ditch of an Iron Age hill fort*" that this ditch was re-dug by the builders of the Norman ringwork and excavated by her in 1984-5, and that *"it is the remains of this ditch which are so clearly visible today on the northern side of the summit."* For this reason she then describes the shallower feature below it as an "outer rampart."

However, her filed reports which form the basis of the Scheduling and the HER make no mention of any evidence dated to the Bronze Age and, although they do record indications that the ditch had been recut, do not adduce any evidence that the original ditch was of Iron Age date, hence the Scheduling description which says only that *"A line of turf found within the ditch indicates that it was heightened at some point and that it must therefore have been recut. This shows there to have been at least two phases to the fortification of the site."* The two phases of use may therefore have both been within the mediaeval period. The DTM Lidar image also shows clearly that this ditch, and the shallower ditch below it, are not at all concentric. In the absence of any further evidence, the reasonable conclusion would seem to be that this ditch was originally dug during the Norman period and was re-cut at some point during the active life of the fortification.

It is also reasonable to assume that the ringwork, which was a fairly basic type of fortification, was surrounded (or partly surrounded) by just a single ditch. Any man-made defensive features outside that ditch must therefore belong to an earlier structure. However, neither Watson nor Cox, although probably reliable observers, seem to have considered the possibility that they might be looking at two distinct structures from different eras, so their descriptions of a fortification with three ramparts or ditches should be read as including the rampart and ditch of the ringwork.

What Cox is describing on the east side is therefore consistent with the DTM Lidar images, which show very clearly the horseshoe-shaped Norman ditch and bank and below it two much broader crescent-shaped ditches and ramparts. On the west, whilst Watson refers to *"the whole encompassed by three large ditches"* Cox reports just a double rampart. However, Cox's observation may well have been made after deep quarrying on the west side, which had started some time between 1857 and 1879, had destroyed the presumed western end of the Norman bailey and therefore any rampart and ditch surrounding it.

The quarry was accessed from a track cut into the north side of the hill. It may be an entirely recent feature, but the possibility that a length of it runs through a re-used ditch, or that the walls of the bailey on the north-west side sat in whole or in part on an earlier rampart, cannot be discounted.

If the traces of the outer ditches visible on the Lidar were projected into a regular oval, they would indicate a fort of about 500 x 400 metres in total extent (Fig 6). However, the hill is wedge-shaped, with the point projecting towards the north-east, and it is likely that the shape of the fort reflected this. In addition, as Watson observed, the ground fell away steeply on the north side and even more so on the north-west and south, making artificial defences less necessary there, but the slope on the south-west was negligible, there being west of Hilltop a secondary summit (now partly quarried away) of 256 metres, plus the ridge running due south. Watson's observation that "the strongest works were raised on that side" is therefore unsurprising.

In addition, it would have been necessary, on the north-east side, to defend the spur of land adjacent to Bettenhill Farm. It is most likely, therefore, that the fort was basically ovoid in plan with a flattened base, broadest to the south-west, and with the strongest fortifications there and on the north-east. However, the earthworks on the south-west appear to have been very substantially degraded, presumably by human action, since Watson saw them, and any ramparts on the steep north and south-east sides will additionally have been vulnerable to erosion; there appears in particular to have been a very substantial loss of ground from the south-east side. The double ditch and rampart on the north-east side appears therefore to be the best-preserved part of the fort, the outer rampart still standing 3-4 metres above the surrounding land.

If the ramparts were of simple ovoid plan, they would enclose a summit area of around 5-7 hectares or 12-15 acres, a similar size to the forts at Fin Cop, Gardoms and Markland Grips (12 acres) or Mam Tor (15 acres). However, the presence of the two parallel embankments running alongside and east of Hilltop Road suggests a larger and more complex structure. It is apparent, especially from the oblique 3-D Lidar (Fig 3), that these features do relate to the ramparts on the north-east side, but their full extent and purpose is unclear. At first sight they appear to be a defended approach corridor to the fort, but logically such an approach would have been along the summit of the ridge now followed by Hilltop Road, not below it. They also do not appear from the contour map (Fig 5) to be part of an extension of the fortifications to the secondary summit.

Conclusion

Historic England's Pastscape entry for Mouselow Castle describes it, quoting the VCH, as *"earthwork remains of a possible medieval motte and bailey castle...(which) is believed to be on the site of an Iron Age hillfort with triple ramparts."* However, although belief in the existence of a hillfort appears to have been shared by those who have excavated on the hill in recent times, and it is described as such on other internet sites, it is recorded on the HER only as the site of the castle, and it was not included as a hillfort in the North Derbyshire Archaeological Survey in 1981. There has of late been a dearth of hard evidence to confirm the observations of the C18th and C19th antiquarians, who had the advantage of seeing the site before the advent of afforestation, intensive farming, and then the growth of dense ground cover in the last 30 years, which have destroyed or obscured some of the things that they could see.

Taken together, however, the DSM and DTM Lidar images confirm these earlier accounts, and in addition reveal a linear feature running below the ridge to the south which has not previously been identified. It would be reasonable, therefore, to amend the HER to record Mouselow as the site of a bivallate hillfort, presumably Iron Age, within which an early-mediaeval ringwork castle was later constructed.

The precise plan of the fort, its primary purpose, and the original scale of its fortifications, are however impossible to determine from visual evidence alone. In particular, it is not clear without intrusive investigation whether the access track to the quarry, constructed after 1857, was an entirely new construction or whether for part of its length it took advantage of an existing ditch and rampart; and the extent and purpose of the linear embankments or ramparts to the south, below Hilltop Road, is not at all clear.

Roger Hargreaves

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All Lidar images were produced by Stephen Whiteley

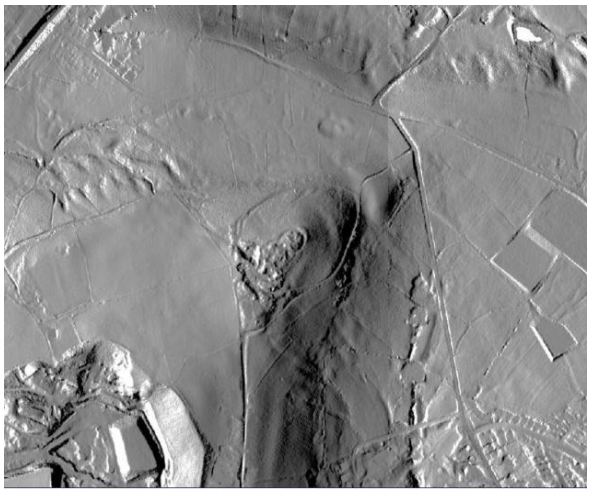

Fig 1 DTM Lidar image

Fig 2 DSM Lidar image

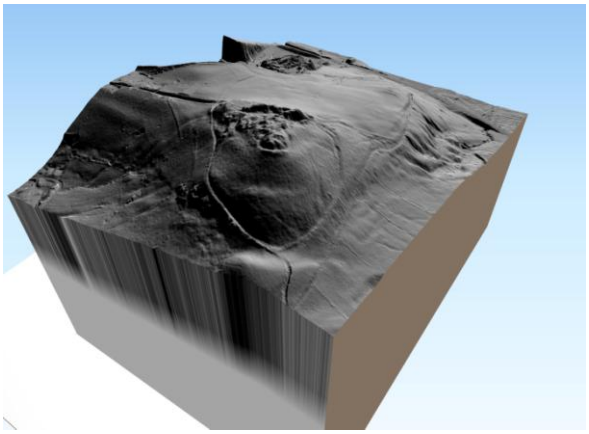

Fig 3 3-D DTM Lidar image looking SW (2.5 x vertical)

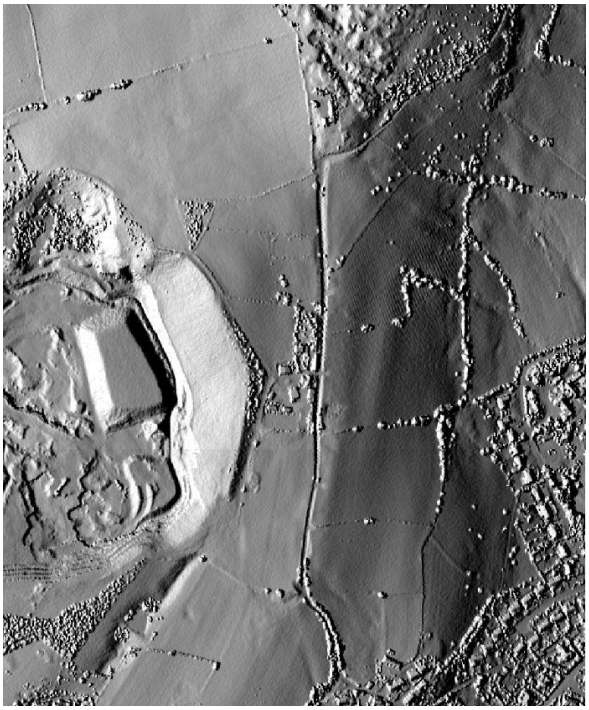

Fig 4 DSM image – south

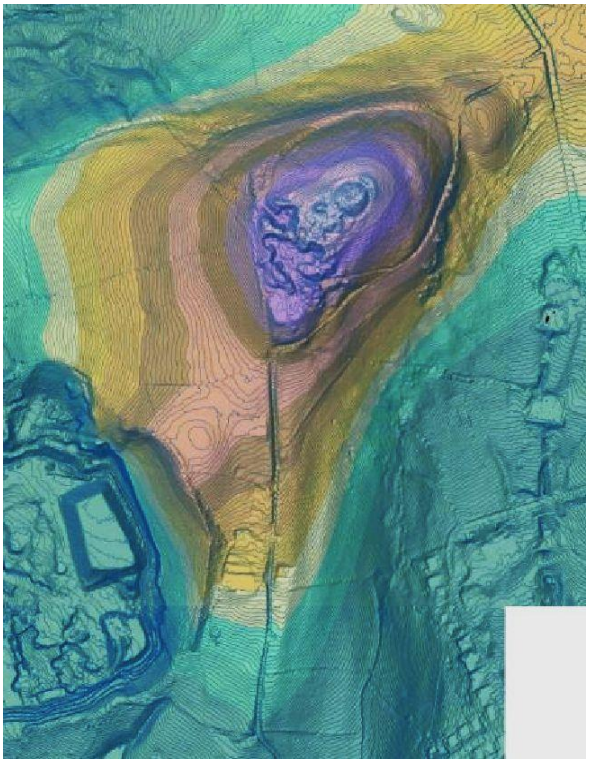

Fig 5 Contour map derived from Lidar

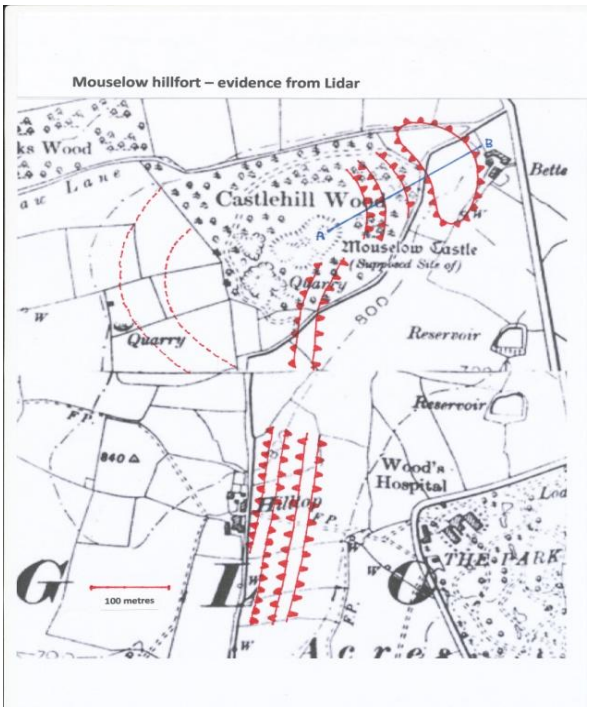

Fig 6 Plan of features shown on Lidar

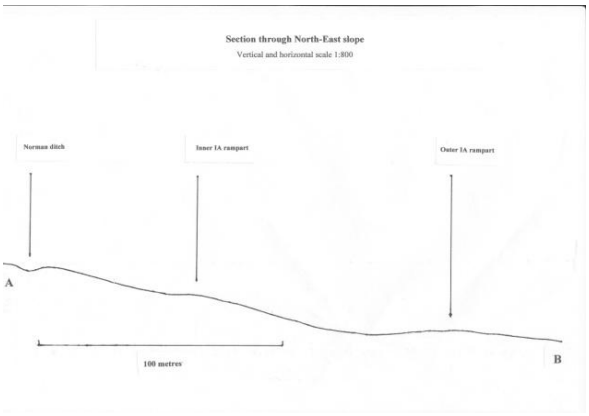

Fig 7 Section through NE slope

Fig 8 View looking NW from North Road

Fig 9 View of outer rampart from NE (along line A-B on plan)

Fig 10 Norman motte looking east

Fig 11 View along ridge to south (Hilltop on right)

Fig 12 View of Hilltop looking NW from SK 034 945 (Mike Brown)