

RECORDING AND UNDERSTANDING *The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hills*



Bicknoller and the Trendle Ring. The long, thin fields around the village are the remnants of enclosed medieval strip fields. The Trendle Ring, an Iron Age enclosure, lies on the edge of Bicknoller Hill and looks out across the Doniford valley towards the foothills of Exmoor.

(NMR 21958/02)
(© English Heritage.NMR)

THE HISTORIC LANDSCAPE OF THE QUANTOCK HILLS

The historic landscape of the Quantock Hills is the man-made landscape: for thousands of years people have lived and worked on and around the Quantock Hills and their actions have influenced the way the hills are now, at the beginning of the 21st century. From Bronze Age burial monuments, some 4000 years old, to monuments of the Cold War which are only 40 years old, the historic landscape of the Quantock Hills is rich and diverse. In order to enhance our understanding of both the extent and nature of this historic landscape, English Heritage, Somerset County Council and the Quantock Hills AONB Service set up a project, which began in 2001, to record the archaeological remains on the hills. English Heritage staff have mapped the archaeology from air photographs and visited, surveyed and photographed numerous sites. This leaflet presents an overview of the results of this work and contains some of the new photographs and drawings undertaken by English Heritage staff during the survey, and the reconstruction paintings by Jane Brayne which were commissioned for the project by the Quantock Hills AONB Service. *The Historic Landscape of the Quantock Hills* by Hazel Riley, published by English Heritage, details the results of the survey work and places the story of the Quantock Hills in its regional and national context (see back page).



NEOLITHIC	BRONZE AGE	IRON AGE	ROMAN	MEDIEVAL	POST-MEDIEVAL
4500 BC	2000 BC	1000 BC	0	AD 500	AD 1540
				AD 1900	



Re-creation of a Bronze Age burial ceremony at the platform cairn on Higher Hare Knap. (© Jane Brayne)

THE BRONZE AGE LANDSCAPE

Stand anywhere on the open heath of the Quantock Hills and you will never be far from a Bronze Age barrow or cairn.

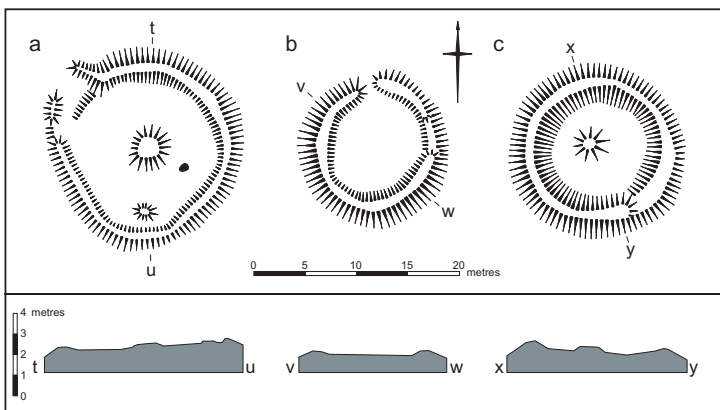


Platform cairn, Hurley Beacon (Hazel Riley)

There are over 100 of these monuments on the hills, marking the burial places of people who used the land 4000 years ago. Many of the monuments were placed along the western edge of the hills and are still dominant features in the landscape, like the platform cairn on Hurley Beacon. This flat-topped cairn was used as a site for beacon fires in historic times and is part of a group of Bronze Age burial monuments which form a linear barrow cemetery, stretching for nearly 2km from Hurley Beacon to Dead Woman's Ditch. Although none of the barrows and cairns on the Quantock Hills have been the subject of modern excavations, studies of the monuments themselves, together with artefacts and other evidence from excavations elsewhere, provide us with the material to re-create the landscape, rituals and atmosphere of these sites during the Bronze Age.

RING CAIRNS AND RITUALS

The Quantock Hills contain many examples of special types of Bronze Age funerary monuments, such as the triple barrow overlooking Hare Knap, the great platform cairns of the western scarp and ring cairns. These are circular banks of earth and stone which sometimes enclose a small mound. Excavations elsewhere in the south-west have shown that ring cairns were not used for burial but some other ritual connected with the funeral ceremony was carried out at these sites. Did they mark the site of the funeral pyre itself? Cremation burial was the usual form of interment during the Bronze Age and the cremated remains were often placed in urns like the one found in a ploughed field near Broomfield.



Ring cairns on Wills Neck (a,b) and Withyman's Pool (c). (© English Heritage)



The Broomfield urn. (Elaine Jamieson)



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THE IRON AGE AND ROMAN LANDSCAPE

The Quantock Hills contain a large number of enclosures which date from the later Bronze Age, the Iron Age and Roman periods. Some of these enclosures are the well known hillforts which survive as earthworks at Dowsborough Camp and Ruborough Camp. As well as functioning as places of refuge in times of stress, the investment in labour required to construct the hillfort earthworks meant that they were also symbols of power and prestige. Many of the smaller enclosures were settlements, containing houses and agricultural buildings, or stock enclosures, others were concerned with ritual. The large numbers of sites which survive on the southern



The ploughed over enclosures at Higher Castles (bottom left).
(NMR 21531/04) © English Heritage.NMR)



Life in the Iron Age at Higher Castles, Broomfield. © Jane Brayne)

edge of the Quantock Hills, around Broomfield and Kingston St Mary, both as earthworks and as cropmarks, visible on air photographs, show that the landscape was well-populated here by the end of the first millennium BC. The people who lived and worked on the hills were self-sufficient farmers who kept cattle, sheep and pigs and grew arable crops. Some were craftsmen, specialists in making pottery, jewellery, or iron tools. The presence of small deposits of iron and copper ore in the area around Broomfield and Kingston St Mary, the fertile south-facing slopes and the fast-flowing streams which drain the combs made the southern edge of the Quantock Hills attractive to Iron Age and Roman farmers.



The central part of the Roman mosaic at Yarford.
(University of Winchester)

ROMAN SITES AND FINDS

When some of the cropmark enclosures were excavated as part of a project carried out by the University of Winchester, the results were often surprising. A Roman villa, complete with mosaic floor, was uncovered on the edge of an Iron Age enclosure at Yarford near Kingston St Mary. This is one of the most westerly Roman villas in Britain and its discovery has doubled the number of known Roman villas on and around the Quantocks (the other is near Spaxton). The main room of the villa had a mosaic floor with a cantharus motif (wine-mixing vessel), associated with Bacchus and appropriate for the dining room. An archway probably opened from this room onto a terrace, with stunning views over the Vale of Taunton beyond. The Yarford mosaic dates from the 4th century AD, and was perhaps made by artisans from the workshops at Ilchester. A further recent discovery of a large hoard of Roman silver, including coins dating from the 4th century AD, near West Bagborough, has, like the Yarford villa, added significantly to our knowledge of the Roman period in the Quantock Hills.



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Re-creation of the manor house at Kilve in the early 14th century.
 (© Jane Brayne)

THE MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPE

The evidence for the medieval landscape of the Quantock Hills is rich and diverse. The wealth of the landowning families is reflected in the surviving medieval fabric of churches, chapels and manor houses. At Kilve a substantial part of the late 13th- or early 14th-century manor house still stands. The evidence



Kilve in the early 21st century. (AA 048499) (© English Heritage.NMR)

from the building, together with studies of historic maps and documents has allowed us to re-create the manor house and its enclosure as it may have looked in the early 14th century. At the heart of the house was the great hall, open to the roof. At the upper end of the hall were apartments for the lord and his family, including a private chapel. To the lower end of the hall and screened from the hall by a wooden partition, was the service accommodation and a kitchen, detached from the main building because of the risk of fire. The manor house lay within an enclosure, often defined by water: at Kilve, streams and large fish ponds formed part of the boundary.

MEDIEVAL MANORS ON THE WEST SOMERSET COAST

The manor house lay at the heart of the lord's estates. Both the house and its immediate environs gave opportunities for the lord of the manor to display and often flaunt his wealth and power. This is apparent on the coastal strip which borders the Quantock Hills. Here there were medieval manor houses at West and East Quantoxhead, Kilve and Kilton. The estates had access to the coast as well as good farmland and large areas of upland grazing on the heath. The most favoured spot for the manor house was close to the sea and each house had a deer park, providing both food for the household and sport for the lord and his party. The deer parks were laid out for the most part on ground close to the manor houses and contained areas of woodland and wood pasture as well as more open ground. The remnants of these woody landscapes can be seen at East Wood, East Quantoxhead and Kilton Park Wood, Kilton. By this time, the pattern of landuse and settlement on the hills was similar to that of today. The open heath was common land, with settlements at the foot of the combes, giving access to a wide variety of land types, such as upland pasture, woods, meadow and arable fields.



The manors of East Quantoxhead (bottom) and Kilve (centre) on the coast.

(NMR 21902/24) (© English Heritage.NMR)



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Charcoal burners at work in Slaughterhouse Combe. (© Jane Brayne)

agricultural products, raw materials from the woods, and water for power and processing. There were tanneries at Holford, Nether Stowey and Crowcombe, and textile manufacture at Holford and Marsh Mills.

DESIGNED LANDSCAPES

In the post-medieval period, formal gardens and ornamental landscape parks were laid out, and many of the old medieval manor houses were rebuilt or refurbished on a grand scale. Court House, East Quantoxhead, was given a new frontage in the early 17th century and Cothelstone Manor was rebuilt, probably on a new site, with a new gatehouse and gateway, early in the post-medieval period. These new houses required new settings - formal gardens and ornamental parks. The Quantock Hills are exceptionally rich in the remains of 18th- and 19th-century designed landscapes, laid out with such vigour by the gentleman of the day.



The grotto at Terhill Park, shown on an 18th-century map. (Somerset Archive and Record Service)

Buildings such as the gothic folly in Crowcombe Park and the grotto at Terhill served as destinations for a stroll or carriage drive, or as a place for secret assignations after dark. Attention was drawn to the landscape itself by planting clumps of beech trees and by building tall towers in prominent places, like the Seven Sisters and the Beacon Tower on Cothelstone Hill.

THE POST-MEDIEVAL LANDSCAPE

The post-medieval landscape is one of contrasts. The tranquil landscape which inspired the Romantic poets Coleridge and Wordsworth was also a working landscape.



Open heath gives way to woodland on Black Ball Hill and Slaughterhouse Combe. (NMR 2195/07) (© English Heritage.NMR)

The oak woods were home to woodsmen and charcoal burners, and the fields around Dodington, not far from the Wordsworths' Quantock home at Alfoxton, were the scene of copper mining in the 18th and 19th centuries. The open heath still preserves the plough ridges of relict field systems, testament to a time when rye was cultivated on parts of the hills every 10 or 15 years. Rural industries grew up in the villages along the edge of the hills, using



The gatehouse at Cothelstone Manor. (AA048455) (© English Heritage.NMR)



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The blast-proof shelter on the coast north of Kilton. (AA053024) (© English Heritage.NMR)

The Quantock Hills became the temporary home for troops from north America and many Italian and German PoWs during the Second World War, with large camps at Crowcombe Heathfield and Goathurst.



THE LANDSCAPE IN THE 20TH CENTURY

Some of the most recent buildings and landscape features on the Quantock Hills are the least well-known. Without the memories of the men and women who lived and worked on the hills during the Second World War they remain as bleak, empty shells and objects of local curiosity. The tank training range West Kilton is brought to life by talking to the man who lived close to the range when he was a school boy. American tanks trundled down the narrow lanes to practice at the range, which was next door to a working farm. A target railway was built close to the cliffs and the range communication posts still stand in the fields around Kilton.

Toy made for local children by German PoW at Goathurst Camp. (Hazel Riley)



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