

The Archaeology of Fernworthy Forest, Dartmoor, Devon

A New Survey

***Supplement:
the Lakeside area and
Lowton Farmsteads***

December 2013

Southwest Landscape Investigations



Dr Phil Newman MIFA, FSA

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Moor than meets the eye
Landscape Partnership



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Summary

This report, and the survey from which it is derived, was undertaken to provide supplementary information to an archaeological survey of Fernworthy Forest published in July 2013 (Newman 2013). The present report focuses on the area immediately surrounding Fernworthy Reservoir not included in the first report. However, the earlier document should be consulted for contextual and historical background.

The prehistoric structures in this area have over the past 140 years or so been subject to much archaeological investigation, including excavations in the 1930s, and this aspect is discussed in conjunction with the survey results to offer context for the character of the remains as they appear today. Contemporary photographs of past archaeological activity have also proved very useful and are presented alongside the surveys. Although limited historical background for the medieval/post-medieval sites was included in the earlier report, no further research has been carried out for the current survey.

The main purpose of the fieldwork has been to produce large scale surveys of all surviving structures, following the same methodology as that described in the first report. A statement of significance, further research and management priorities are included and should be read in conjunction with those of the earlier report.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Kit Hancock and Mark Baxendale of SWLT, and Serina Rouse of DNPA, who cleared the overgrown sites in preparation for survey in a thorough and sensitive manner. Thanks also to Andy Bailey of the MTMTE team and the Chagford volunteers for clearing the brashings from the farmstead at Higher Lowton. Anthony Clarke of the Dartmoor Archive kindly granted permission to reproduce Figs 6, 7, 8, 9, 13, 14 and North Devon Record Office gave permission to reproduce sections of the 1798 map in their possession (Figs 20 and 23). Survey assistance was provided by Lynne Newman.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This supplementary survey was commissioned by DNPA and SWLT in response to recommendations made in the Fernworthy Forest survey of July 2013 (Newman 2013). In particular, research recommendation 6.1, which suggested that there is a need to:

- Expand the archaeological survey to include areas currently managed by SW Lakes Trust and also parts of Methel. This would necessarily exclude submerged areas but future droughts may give rise to opportunities to further explore that area, including hut circles, field walls, reaves and a cist/barrow.
- Clear vegetation from Higher and Lower Lowton and carry out detailed survey of the farmsteads (Newman 2013, 68)

Later in 2013 the opportunity to act on this recommendation was taken unexpectedly early when, during the moderately dry summer, the water receded to reveal most of the submerged features at Methel. A survey was

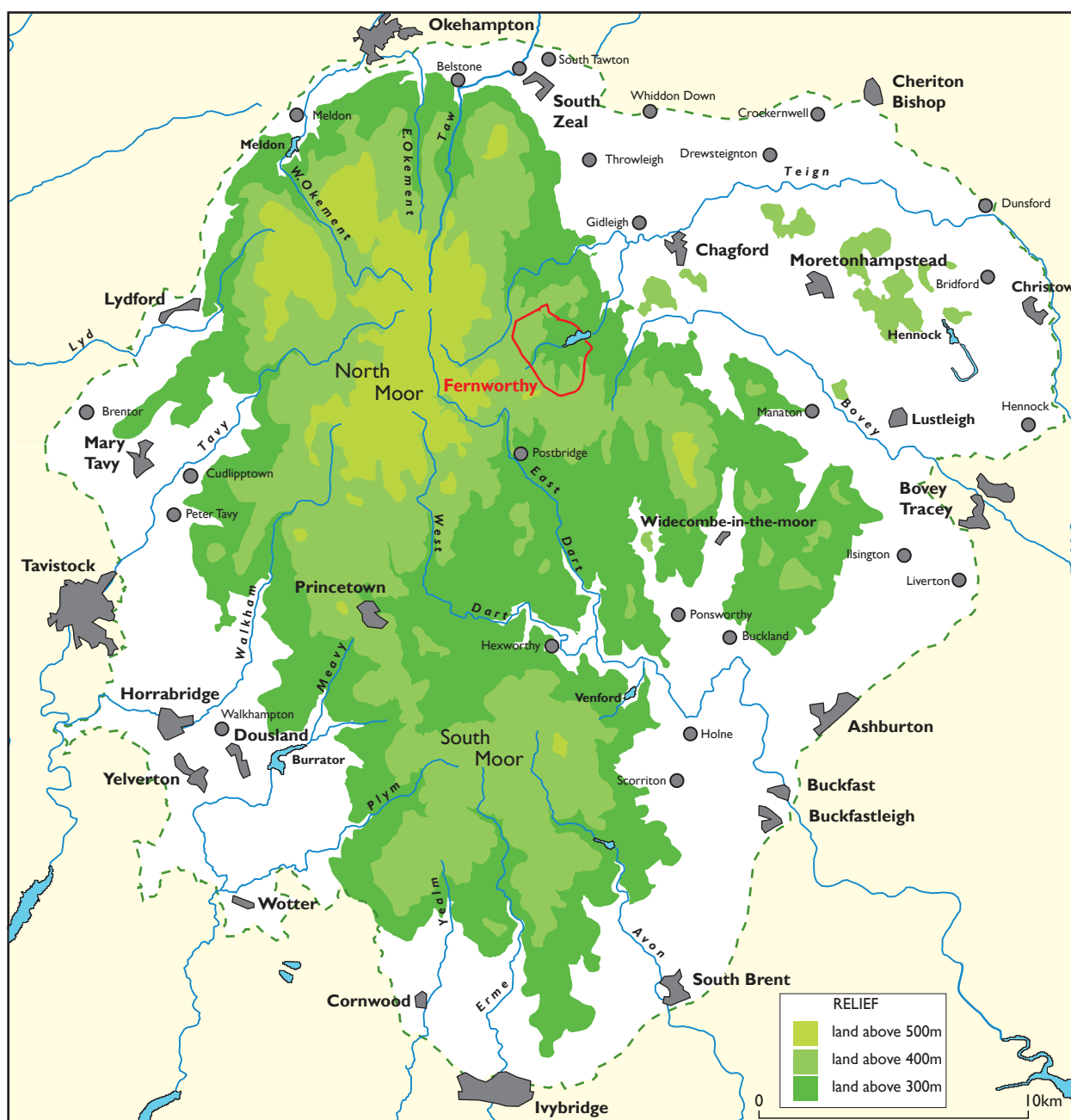


Fig 1 Location map showing Fernworthy Forest within Dartmoor National Park, Devon.

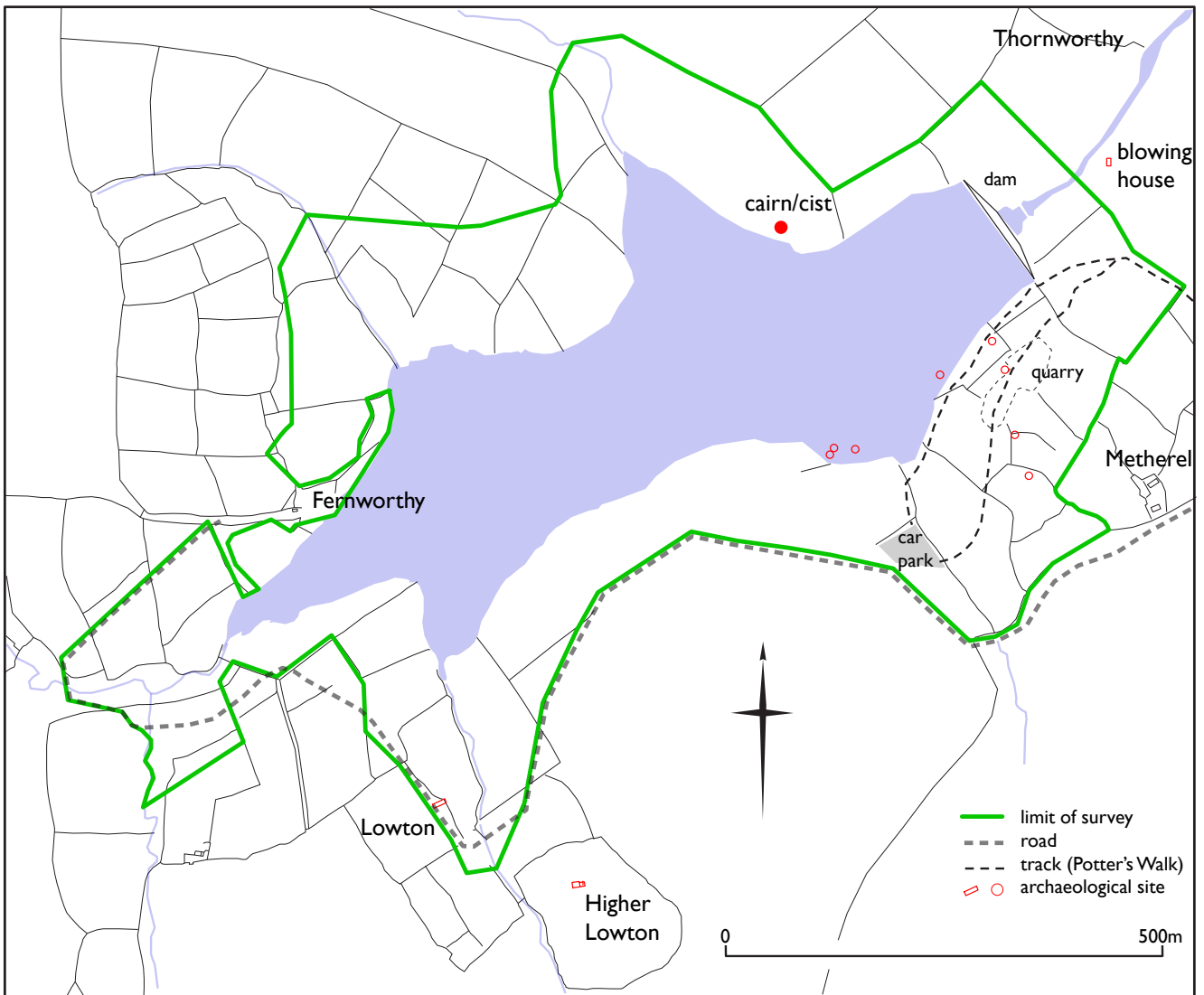


Fig 2 Map showing the area of the survey, i.e. land managed by SWLT.

commissioned to include the exposed archaeological sites, plus those surrounding the lakeside area and the two Lowton farmsteads. The survey was carried out between September and November and the combined reports represent the most detailed and comprehensive archaeological record of the entire Fernworthy Estate so far undertaken. Together these reports have been designed to inform the processes of the DNPA's partnership project, *Moor than meets the Eye – the story of people and landscape over 4000 years*, as set out in the 2013 report. The methodology of the survey follows that described in the earlier report (Newman 2013, vi). The majority of the individual sites have been surveyed at a scale of 1:200; these include the eight Methereel Hut circles, both Lowton Farmsteads and the tinnery's mill below the dam at Methereel. The Thornworthy cist is presented at 1:100 scale.

2.0 THE PREHISTORIC ARCHAEOLOGY

2.1 Thornworthy cairn and cist [6613]

This Bronze Age burial site is located on the north side of Fernworthy Reservoir, just a few metres from the water's edge on the landward side of the perimeter footpath, though is easily overlooked by passersby, especially when under summer vegetation.

2.1.1 Previous research

The cist was 'opened' by S H Slade in 1879, who was later joined in the enterprise by William Pengelly, and a detailed account of their digging activity was published in 1880 (Pengelly 1880, 365-71).

Although today having the appearance of a ring cairn, when Slade and Pengelly first encountered the site they reported a single mound of stones and earth, about 30ft diameter and four to five feet high, which 'sloped pretty uniformly in all directions'. The hollowed centre we see today is clearly a result of their digging though an investigation of the cairn's structure did not form part of the dig strategy, which focussed initially on a central stone cist. A second smaller cist which they uncovered within the cairn was unfortunately rifled by persons unknown before Slade and Pengelly were able to excavate it themselves. The sum total of finds from both burials was one sherd of an urn and various pieces of flint. The stones of the smaller cist were later removed by Pengelly and re-erected in the basement of Torquay Museum. There it sat until 2004 when it was moved to a new permanent location at the DNPA's High Moorland visitor centre at Princetown.

The surviving cist was surveyed and photographed by R H Worth in 1936, though the barrow was not described or surveyed (Worth 1937, 75-6, pl 3.1 & 5.2), and by Butler in 1997 (1997, 64).

2.1.2 Field evidence (Figs 3 & 4)

The disturbed cairn, although now turf covered, was constructed from stones which, according to Slade, varied in weight between 7 and 56lb [3.17kg and 25.4kg] (Pengelly 1880, 365). The current form of the cairn, following the 1870s intervention, is an approximate ring representing the hollowed remains of the mound. It is unclear what happened to the material removed from the hollow, as no spoil heap is present, but it is likely that it was simply thrown outwards around the peripheries of the mound. Consequently the mound diameter is now larger than its original form, which Pengelly reported to be approximately 30ft (9.1m) and 4-5ft (1.2-1.5m) high, whereas the dimensions of the surviving spread are between 11.3 and 13.5m diameter by 0.6m high.

The remaining cist is located centrally within the disturbed mound and comprises a stone box made from four partially buried, edge-set granite slabs forming an approximate rectangle. The two shorter end slabs bridge the interior space between the parallel longer sides. The interior dimensions are 0.98m by 0.52m long by 0.63m deep and the orientation of the long side is 48°. The cover stone remains tilted at an angle, propped by two small stones resting on the slab of the north side, allowing the interior of the cist to be exposed. It is an unevenly shaped stone and lies partly buried on the NE side by a mound of earth/stone.

The second smaller grave was to the SE of the central example, though no trace of its location is visible. A large partially buried, turf-covered slab of 1.6m long by 0.8m lies isolated on the floor in this position today, but how or if it was associated with either cist was not recorded.

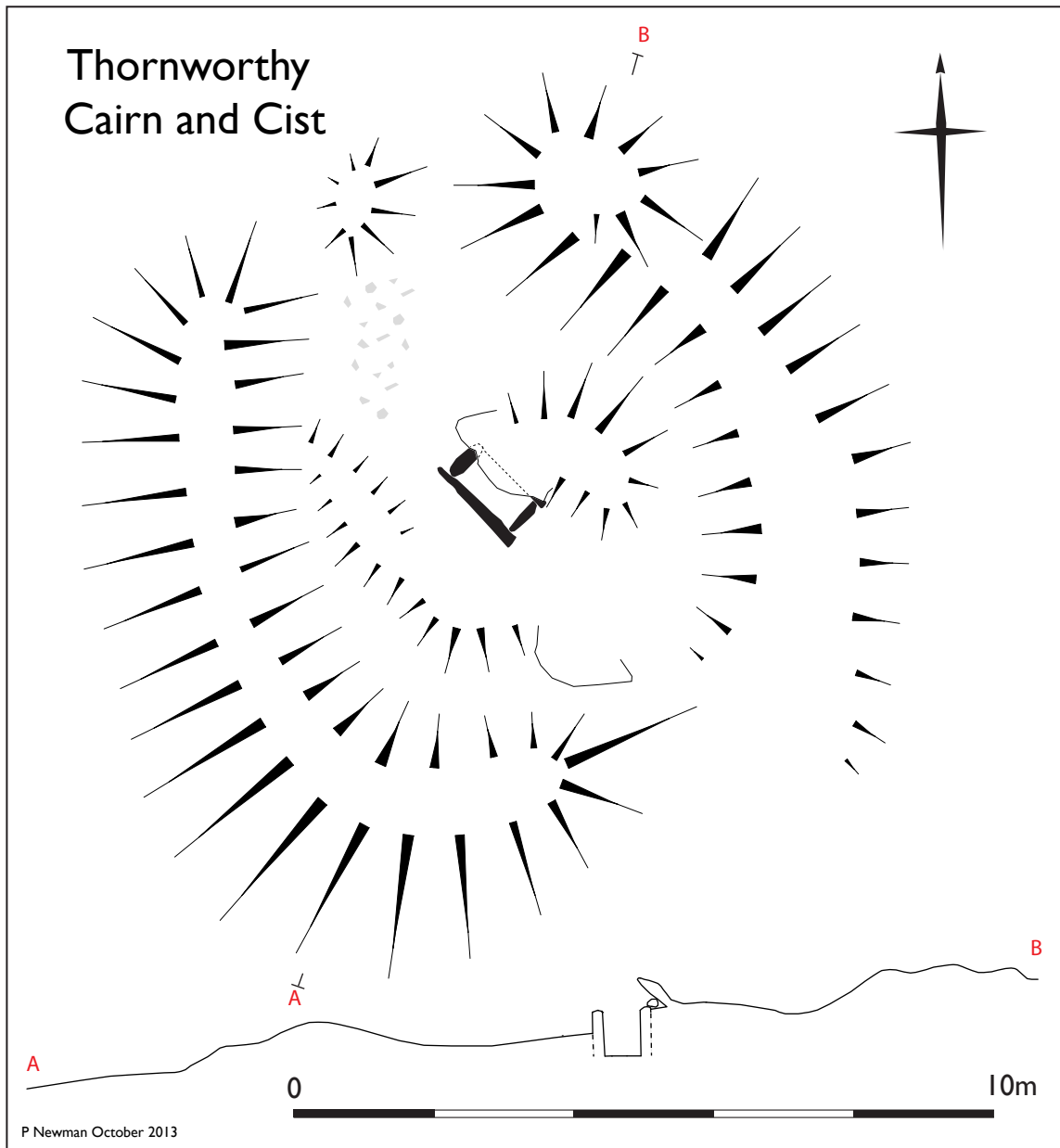


Fig 3 Thornworthy cairn and cist 1:100 scale plan.



Fig 4 Photo of the Thornworthy cist December 2013.

2.2 Methereel hut settlement

This dispersed prehistoric settlement lies spread over an 3.8ha area on the northern slope of Methereel, south of the modern reservoir. There are seven certain hut circles and an eighth circular feature, which may be a cairn or a hut. Four of these circles, including the (?)cairn were submerged by the rising waters of Fernworthy Reservoir during the 1930/40s, however, their location, relatively high within the flooded area, allows them to become exposed regularly during dry summers, such as that of 2013. Several of the huts were excavated by the Dartmoor Exploration Committee (DEC) in advance of the reservoir construction during the 1930s but the shells of the structures remain *in situ* (see below).

All of these huts are at the larger end of the scale for Dartmoor examples and all are notable for the massive slabs of granite incorporated into their walls, a feature of huts generally in this locality. All of the huts have suffered some stone robbing in the post-prehistoric period, with the exception of [6625] which appears not to have been touched before the 1930s excavations.

Associated with the prehistoric dwellings is a series of field boundaries, whose construction also includes large slabs of granite. It is likely that most of these walls were refurbished by medieval and post-medieval farmers, who also added new field boundaries, but the orientation of the field system as a whole has fossilized the coaxial layout of the prehistoric boundaries to some extent. However, some sections of walling appear not to have been reused, and retain their prehistoric character, such as that attached to the north side of hut [6695], while others built in a drystone style, are clearly post-medieval in origin.

Early OS maps depict a double stone row extending in an ESE direction leading uphill to one of the huts [6625]. This feature later proved to be a walled lane associated with the hut, comprising parallel walls set approximately 4.7m apart and built from large boulders [61336]. On approaching the hut the walls flare out to form a funnel shape within which the hut is located. Only the final 20m of these walls survive in a buried condition, comprising a subtle bank with some stone protruding, whereas along the section that is normally submerged, the soil has been washed out, demonstrating the mass of the individual boulders.

2.3 Previous research

GW Ormerod was the first to note the existence of these huts in 1864, recording that:

there are six huts measuring from 23 to 30ft in diameter, - five are of the usual description, the sixth having the walls built from horizontal layers of stone (Ormerod 1864, 303).

A more detailed description was provided by S H Slade, whose notes were published by William Pengelly in 1880 (Pengelly 1880, 365-74). He seemed unaware that Ormerod had alluded to these huts only 16 years earlier, claiming that no previous record of them existed. However, he gave very precise locations for all eight of the surviving hut circles and provided measurements plus details of construction and condition (see individual hut descriptions below), which provide a useful comparison over 130 years later. Slade also mentioned that an elderly lady who lived nearby retold of her father destroying several huts within nearby cultivated areas.

Archaeological excavations under the direction of R Hansford Worth and the Dartmoor Exploration Committee (DEC) took place in August 1934 and April and August 1936, in advance of the valley being flooded by the reservoir, when five hut circles were excavated (1-4 and 6). Of these, four huts (3, 4 and 6) would ultimately become submerged, whereas huts 1 and 2 remain on dry land. Hut 5, also became submerged but was not excavated (see Worth 1935, 119-27; 1937, 143-50). This was one of the first excavations of hut circles on Dartmoor where photography was used as recording device and a number of photographs of huts before and during excavation

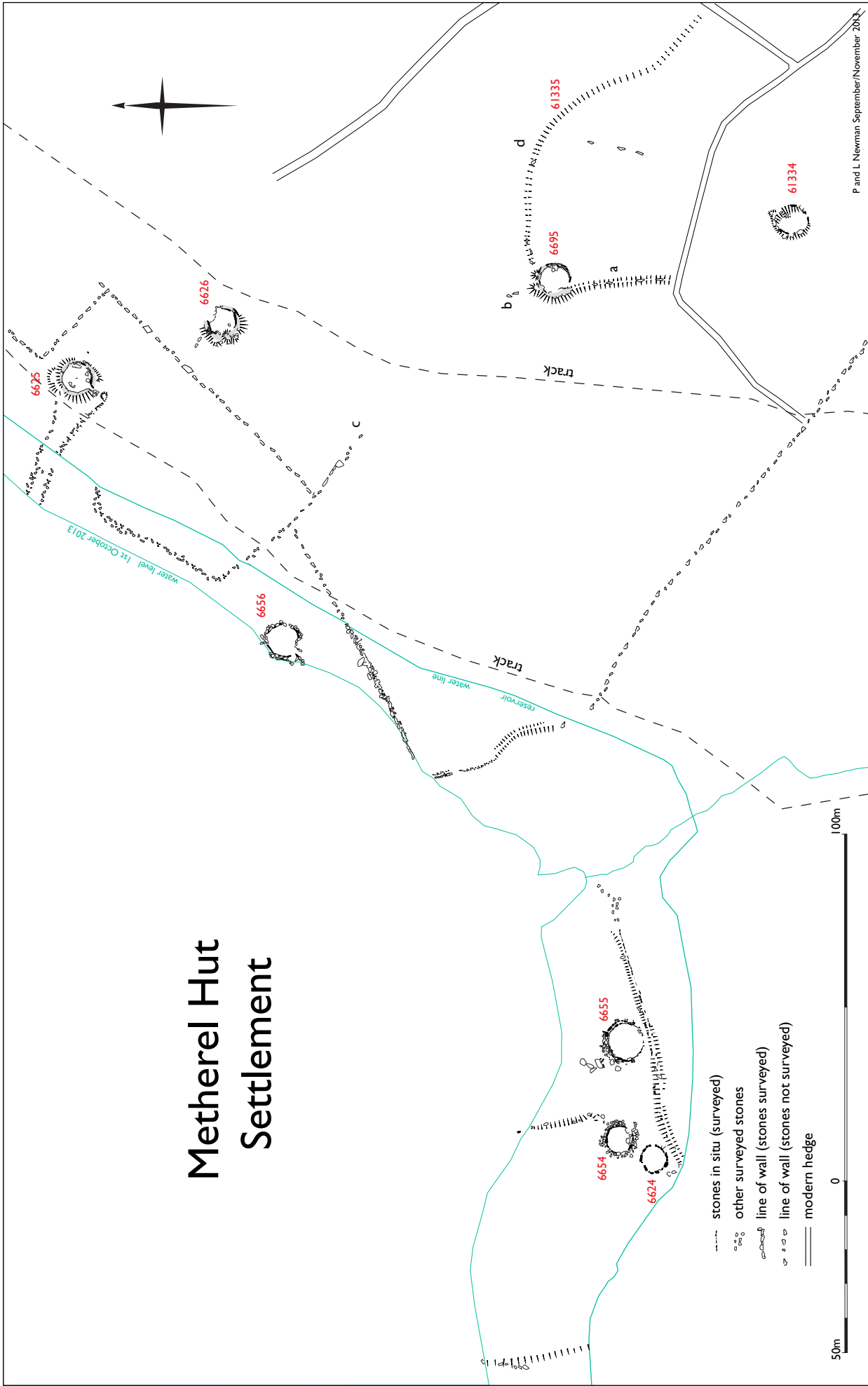


Fig 5 The Metherel hut settlement 1 : 1000 scale plan.

survive in the *Dartmoor Archive*, including several showing visits by members of the Devonshire Association.

Several finds were retrieved during the excavations, including flints and pottery associated with the earliest origins of the huts in the 2nd millennium BC. Also, tin stones, slag, pottery and charcoal from some of the huts and a coin from Hut 3 strongly suggested re-occupation by tanners in what Worth suggested was the Tudor period (Worth 1937, 145).

2.4 The Hut Circles

(R H Worth's numbering system is shown by the letter W followed by a number, e.g. (W5) in brackets. Dartmoor HER numbers appear in square brackets.

Hut [6624] (W5)

This hut sits just below the high water line of the reservoir. It was not excavated by the DEC although the published report offers no explanation as to why. The walls are constructed from a single ring of randomly shaped boulders, some with spaces between. The internal diameter is between 6.6m and 7.3m and the stones stand up to 1.1m high. Unlike others in the group, the structure does not appear to have been terraced into the slope and there is a lack of tumbled stone associated with the site. It is not clear if this material once existed and was robbed in the post-occupational period or if the surviving stones represent the totality of the structure. The only likely entrance was through an opening between two stones on the eastern side of the circle.

Hut [6625] (W1) Figs 5, 6 & 19

This hut was excavated by the DEC, though it lies above the upper level of the reservoir, and survives 21m SE of the water line. However, it is clear from the excavation report that Worth believed this hut would be submerged.

Photographs taken during the excavation (Fig 6) show a series of large slabs, that once made up the inner walls, had been stripped of turf and were leaning outwards. Today, however, these slabs are upright forming a consolidated wall, so it is likely the remains represent a certain amount of restoration, although in places walls have been left in a tumbled state and the interior contains much loose stone.

The hut circle was built using the edge-set slab construction method, where adjacent, touching upright slabs form a circle, to make up the interior wall. Only the inner faces of most of the slabs are currently visible, while the exterior surfaces are covered by an earthen bank. Worth's section drawing (Worth 1935, Fig 13) shows that a drystone wall was constructed around and touching the exterior of this circle, although this is no longer discernible, covered by the earthen bank. The bank is substantive, up to 3.5m wide in places, giving the hut a quite massive appearance.

Approximately 50% of the inner wall remains *in situ*, forming the north and west arcs of the circle and standing to approximately 1m high. On the SE side much of the wall has tumbled. Comparing the modern plan (Fig 19) with that of the 1935 excavation plan (Worth 1935, Fig 11), it is clear that these tumbled slabs were not removed by the excavators and probably remain in the position they were found.

A clear entrance is situated on the SW quadrant of the building, comprising a 0.76m-wide opening through the walls, lined on both sides by single, *in-situ* upright slabs. Some fallen slabs lying outside the entrance could have formed an extension to this lining.



Fig 6 Hut 6625 photographed during excavation in 1934 (DA 107160).

Hut [6626] (W2) Fig 7

This hut was also excavated by Worth but remains well above the water line. In his report he commented that the hut had been severely disturbed by quarrymen, and probably felt justified in excavating it despite the knowledge that it would never be submerged. Indeed the hut was threatened by the presence of a granite quarry, a source of stone for the dam, only metres to the east, which may also have provided some urgency.

The hut is located at the foot of a steeply-inclined, curving, artificial scarp, created by the imposition of a trackway to serve the quarry slightly upslope of the hut, and a substantial spoil heap of waste material emanating from the granite quarry to the east of the track. A photograph of the excavations (Fig 7) shows that this heap was absent in 1934 and clearly arrived later. Although the dumped material appears to have mostly avoided the hut, the NE sector of the wall is partly buried.

Only a few of the original slabs that formed the wall remain *in situ*, but those that do are quite massive, including one triangular example of over 1.7m high. The internal diameter across the measurable points of the floor is 7.3m. The walls are badly disturbed with much fallen and loose stone surrounding the standing slabs and the position of the entrance has not survived.

Hut [6654](W4) Fig 5, 8, 10

This hut, now submerged beneath the reservoir, was excavated by Worth in 1936 (Worth 1937, 44-7), who commented that the walls were of the 'usual type'. However, this is the hut which S H Slade had described as having 'the peculiarity on one side of the walls being laid in courses' (Pengelly 1880, 372) repeating a similar observation by Ormerod 16 years earlier (Ormerod 1864, 303). The excavation of this hut was captured on at least one photograph (Fig 8).



Fig 7 Hut 6626 photographed during excavation in 1934 (DA 000027).



Fig 8 Hut 6654 photographed during excavation in 1936 (DA 107216).

Approximately 75% of the walls survive *in situ*, comprising end to end edge-set slabs and some irregular boulders forming a circle with an internal diameter of 7.3m and remaining to a little under 1m in height. A probable entrance opening survives on the SE portion of the circumference. There is also a large amount of fallen stone surrounding the inner circle. This probably once formed an outer layer of the walls, in courses as described by earlier writers. However, the soil which bound these stones together has been completely eroded by their underwater location and they now lie in a random scattered fashion.

Hut/cairn [6655](W6) Figs 5, 9, 11, 12

This 'hut', also among the submerged examples, is the largest of the Metherehuts, with an internal diameter of 9.8m and following the results of Worth's 1936 excavations, has proved to be the most unusual of the group causing some suspicion that it may not have been a hut at all.

The method of construction is unusual, with an inner and an outer ring of slabs of which the inner is lower than the outer by up to 0.8m in places (see also Hut 6585 in Newman 2013, Fig 27 and 29). Worth believed he had identified a third, inner stone circle on the floor of the site, although only three stones are depicted on his plan and they do not survive. The excavations failed to produce any domestic artefacts and the removal of a large flat slab within the floor area exposed a pit containing charcoal, interpreted by Worth as an interment pit. He concluded that this circle represented the remains of a cairn rather than a dwelling.

The northern arc of the structure is better preserved than that of the south, with most of the inner wall surviving and a fair portion of the larger outer boulders are still in place; others are present but displaced. On the south side, much of the inner ring survives though the outer ring has been mostly removed.

Although supported by some writers (e.g. Turner 1990) since the original publication, Worth's conclusions have never been thoroughly re-examined, yet the evidence offered for this structure being a cairn rather than a dwelling is not overwhelming and contrary observations might be relevant. The different construction method of the walls could be explained as a variant hut type, possibly associated with a more advanced timbering for the roof support and the lack of domestic finds need not be significant as huts excavated in this period often produced few finds. The only available photograph showing the appearance of the site prior to excavation (Fig 9) shows the circle did not have a central fill, and when Slade described the hut in 1880 the walls were quite clearly bare. Had this been a cairn it would need to have been completely emptied of its interior contents of soil and stone sometime since the Bronze Age to survive in this state, which would be extremely unusual. There is no mention in the report as to whether the site had suffered previous interventions, as is the case with the majority of cairns. A re-assessment of this site, and that at Lowton, in the light of more recent discoveries at Dartmoor hut circles could prove fruitful.



Fig 9 Cairn/hut 6655 photographed during a field visit prior to excavations in 1936, date of photo unknown. The central figure is likely to be R H Worth (DA 107213).



Fig 10 Photo showing hut 6654, September 2013 (Phil Newman).

Fig 11 Photo showing cairn/hut 6655, September 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 12 Photo showing the double-skinned wall on cairn/hut 6655, September 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 13 Cairn/hut 6655 photographed during excavations in 1936 (DA 000063).

Hut [6656] (W3) Figs 5, 14 & 15

This hut is the lowest-lying of the submerged examples and the last to be revealed in dry weather. In 2013, although much of the walling was exposed, the water did not retreat enough for a complete survey (Fig 15). Fig 5 shows the stones that were exposed at 1:1000 scale.

The hut was among those excavated by Worth in 1934, and at least three photographs of the hut survive from before work commenced (e.g. Fig 14). Apart from the anticipated prehistoric artefacts retrieved, an assemblage of medieval pottery, tin stones, tin slag and charcoal from a more recent stratum of the hut floor, strongly suggested that the hut was used for some purpose associated with tin working during the medieval or post-medieval period. A worn coin of Henry VII, also found in the hut, provided a probable date for the activity of around 1540 (Worth 1935, 124-5, Fig 22 & 23).

The hut was built from the usual ring of end to end granite slabs and these are clear along the NE curve in the pre-excavation photographs, and many of the stones shown in this view survive *in situ* today. However, along the SE quadrant few of the slabs remain in place, where the wall comprises a random spread of boulders. Along the southern sector most of the stones are now missing, and for the surviving sections of wall much tumbled stone surrounds the exterior. The interior diameter of the circle is between 8.5 and 8.9m. The entrance depicted by Worth on the SW survives in part with the western upright slab of the door lining remaining in place.

Unusually, this hut was built on a slope with no apparent attempt to level the interior. Huts of this size and character in this group, and on Dartmoor generally, were usually cut into the slopes, however slight, to provide a level floor that is lacking in this example. This anomaly is visible in both the early and modern photographs (Figs 14 and 15).



Fig 14 Hut 6656 photographed sometime before excavation in 1934. Date of photograph unknown (DA 001425).

Huts [6695] and [61334] Figs 5, 16 and 17

Part of the Metherel settlement lies outside the area affected by the construction of the reservoir, in modern fields to the east. Although now apparently disused and subject to the encroachment of scrub and self-seeded conifers, these fields remain approximately in the condition they did in the 1930s before the land below was flooded. The area contains two hut circles, neither of which featured in Worth's investigation other than to acknowledge their existence on the site plan (Worth 1935, 120). Both huts appear to have been robbed of some stone but the surviving walls are protected by a turf covering. These huts have notably levelled interiors, where hut [61334] has a drop of 1.1m on the eastern upslope side between the floor and the exterior and the same on hut [6695] is 0.8m. The latter is situated at the T junction of two contemporary enclosure walls. One of these (a on Fig 5) may be traced from a later enclosure wall 35m to the south to connect to the western tangent of the hut. Another wall (b) probably continued this northern alignment where vestiges of it may be traced near the hut on the north side. Beyond this point the area has been much disturbed, although the wall may be traced again at point (c) to the NW. A third section (d) of wall [61335] extends from the NE quadrant of the hut and follows a sinuous course to the east, then to the SE, before fading out. The character of these walls is of stony earthen banks surviving up to 0.6m high.

Fig 15 Photo showing hut 6656 during survey in September 2013 (Lynne Newman).



Fig 16 Photo showing hut 6695 shortly after vegetation clearance in November 2013 (Phil Newman).



Fig 17 Photo showing hut 61334 shortly after vegetation clearance in November 2013 (Phil Newman).

Metherel

Submerged Hut Circles

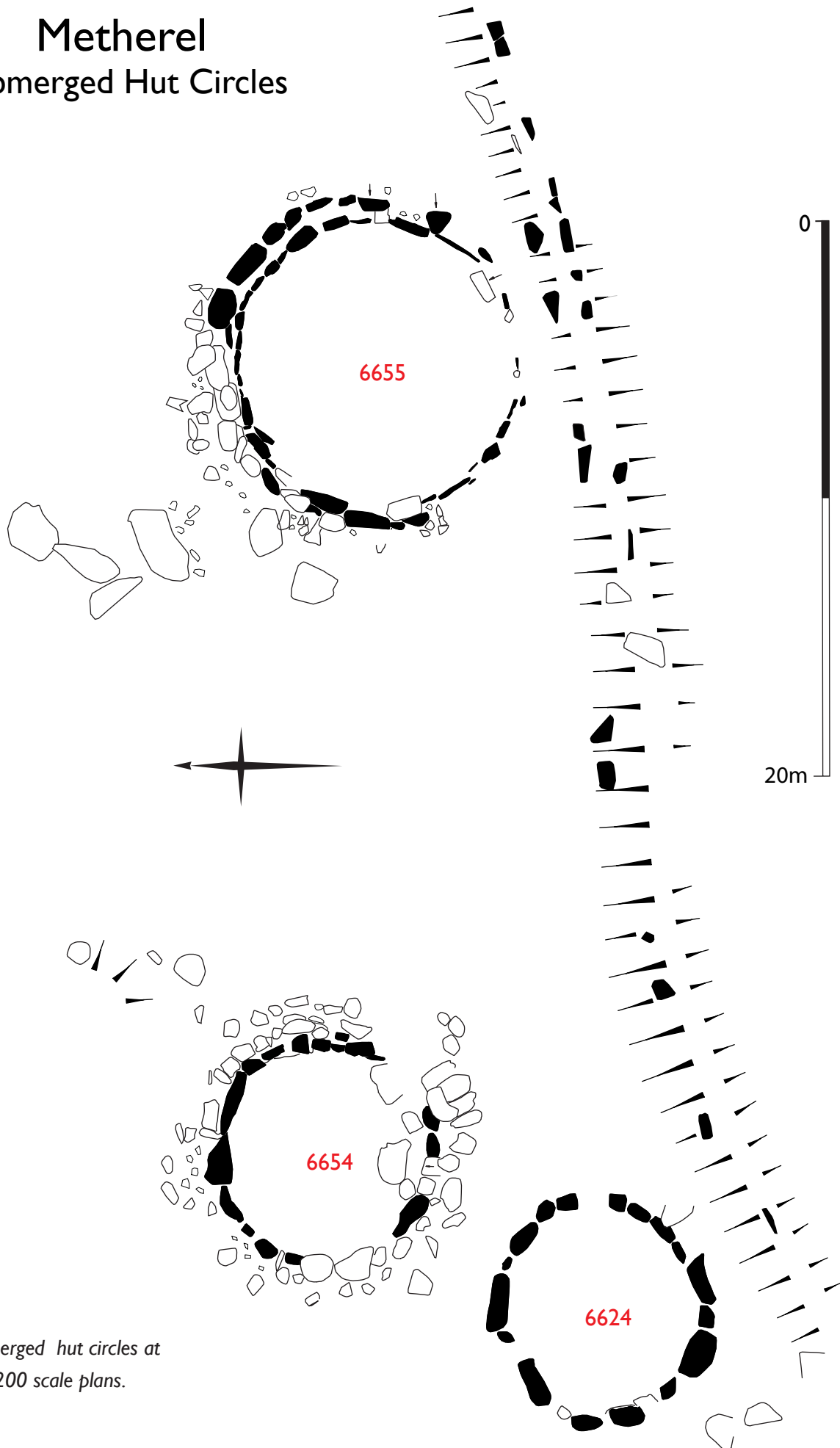
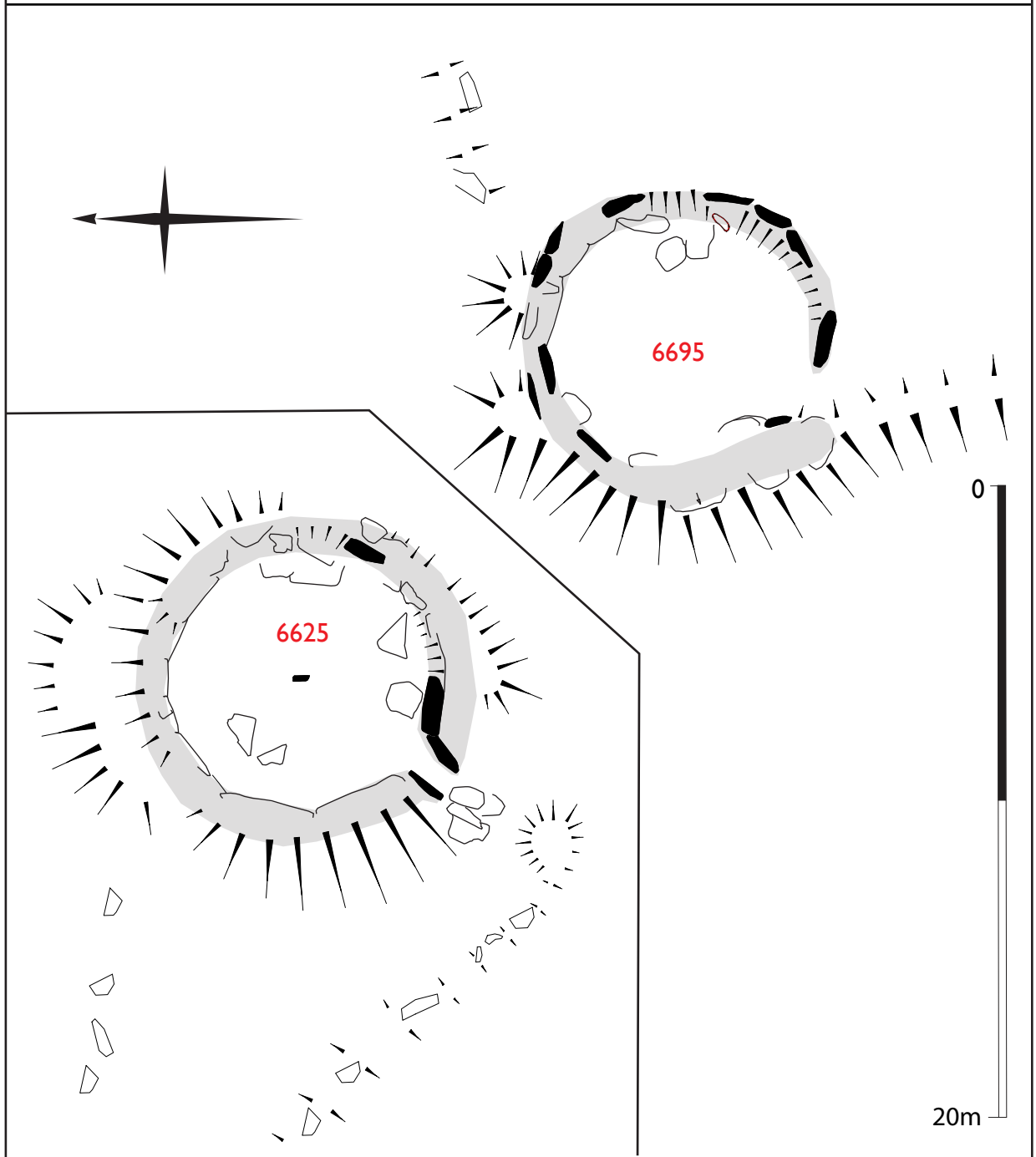
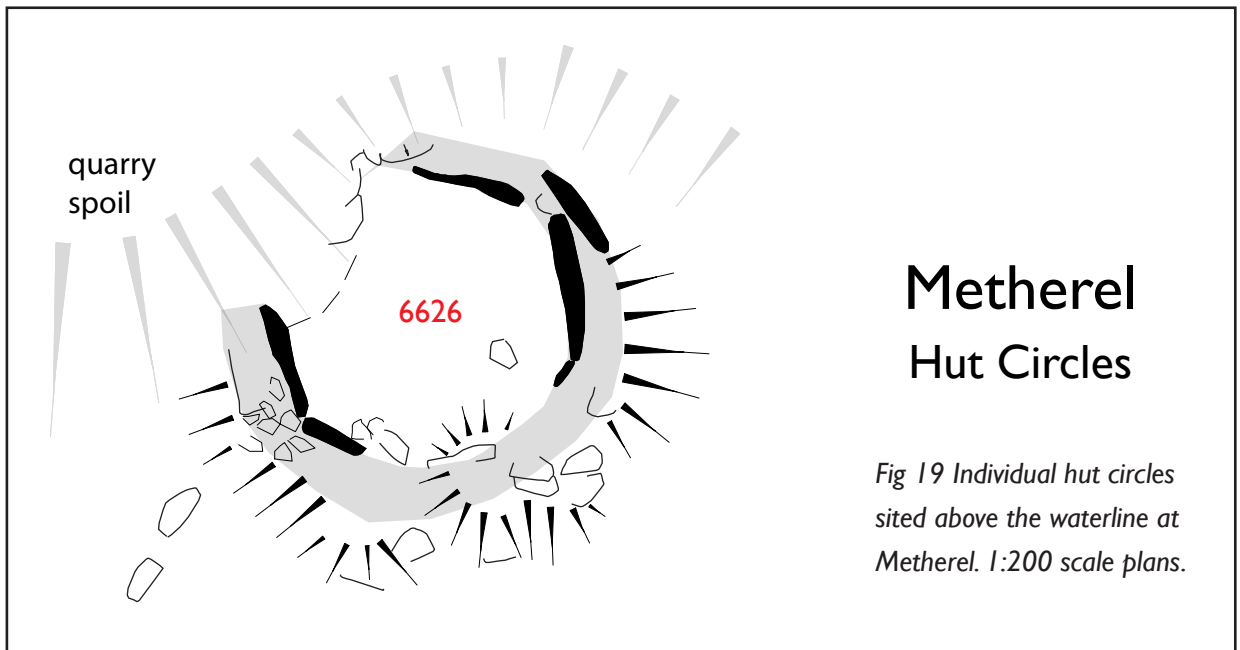


Fig 18 Submerged hut circles at Metherel. 1:200 scale plans.



3.0 THE SECOND MILLENNIUM AD: MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL FERNWORTHY

3.1 Farmsteads

Fieldwork undertaken for the Fernworthy Forest report (Newman 2013) revealed the survival of a number of medieval/post-medieval farmsteads including Lowton and Higher Lowton, neither of which had received any previous archaeological attention. At the time of the earlier survey, vegetation coverage of both farmsteads prevented investigation but it was recommended that clearance should take place so that the work could be completed. With the clearance done, survey was undertaken in November of 2013. The following reports cover only the results of the measured surveys. A more detailed examination of the documentary and cartographic evidence, together with a discussion of the historical landscape context are covered in the first 2013 report.

3.1.1 Higher Lowton Farmstead [6651] Figs 20-22, 24, 28

Although the site of Higher Lowton had been recorded on OS maps from the 1880s onwards, no modern field recording of the ruins had taken place. The Dartmoor HER and NMR entries are based only on those early OS depictions, whilst some modern writers (e.g. Hemery 1983) have assumed the buildings had been destroyed or overwhelmed following afforestation in the 1930s. However, although the area has been intensively planted with conifers, with the current crop now reaching maturity, a search for the buildings as part of the Fernworthy Forest survey (Newman 2013) revealed that the remains do survive, despite extensive damage.

The house and outbuildings are on the east side of Lowton Brook, sited within the enclosure referred to as the Nursery on more recent OS maps, and just a few metres from a north-south forest track at an altitude of 367m AOD. The buildings and a small area around them were cleared of trees by the Forestry Commission in spring 2013 and the debris removed by the Chagford volunteer group.

Cartographic evidence

An estate map of 1796 (NDRO B170/102) depicts a rectangular building with an entrance on the south side and a secondary, slightly narrower structure attached to the eastern end. A third, later extension, existed at the far eastern end of this range. There is a small enclosed yard shown on the south side of the building range and a

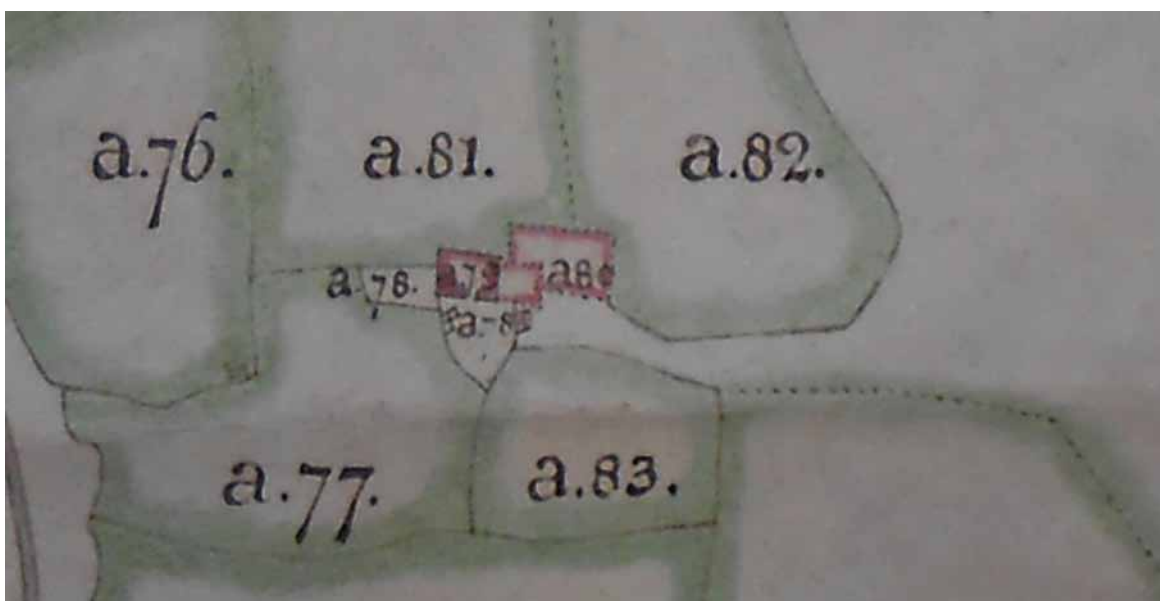


Fig 20 Higher Lowton farmstead as depicted on the estate map of 1798 (NDRO B170/102) .

smaller yard or possible garden on the western end. Access to the farm was via a walled or fenced lane running up the slope to the east, heading through the enclosed land and opening onto the Little Newtake and the slopes of Lowton Tor.

The earliest Ordnance Survey depiction of the ruins is of 1886 where the house is shown as an elongated building with a square partitioned chamber at one end. As to the enclosures, only the outer boundary wall is drawn, which reflects more or less what survives today, as most of the internal boundaries drawn on the earlier map are completely effaced. It has been mentioned elsewhere that stone from the outlying farms of the South Teign valley was robbed to construct the newtake walls in the 1790s (Newman 2013, 51), but had this been the case at Higher Lowton, some trace of the wall footings would survive. In their absence, it therefore seems likely that many of these field divisions were built from less enduring materials, such as hurdles or timber.

The buildings

The footprints of two attached rectangular structures survive, probably representing the first and second described on the map mentioned above. No trace of the third, that to the eastern end of the range, can now be identified; its location is occupied by an extremely large Sitka spruce with extensive roots forming a raised mound. Although badly disturbed, a stone wall representing the yard to the south of the house has survived in places, although at the time of survey it's wall was partly obscured along its western edge by a felled tree and brashings.

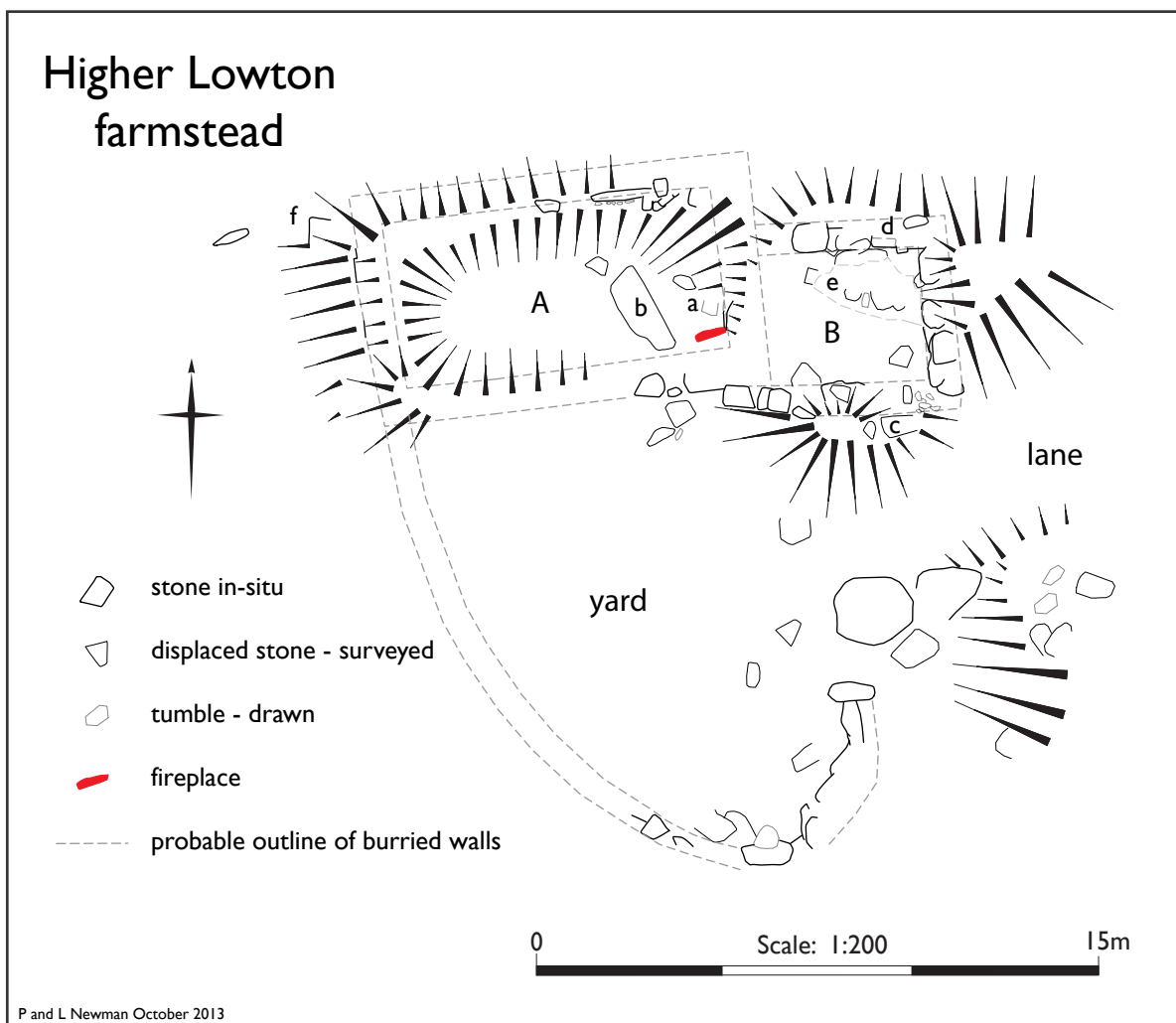


Fig 21 Higher Lowton farmstead 1:200 scale earthwork survey.



Fig 22 Photo showing Higher Lowton farmstead in September 2013 following vegetation clearance (Phil Newman).

The western structure (A) has an approximately rectangular footprint made up of earthwork banks, representing the footings of ruined walls, with a small amount of *in-situ* stone still visible in places on both the interior and exterior. The building's foundations were built on levelled ground cut lengthwise into the slope, with the eastern (higher) end having a substantial drop of 0.6m represented by a scarp. The northern and western banks are slightly clearer than that on the south but the interior of the building now takes the form of a clear elongated hollow. The internal dimensions were approximately 8.8m by 4.3m and the thickness of the walls was 0.8 - 0.9m. The position of an entrance has not survived, though is likely to have been on the southern side facing the yard. Evidence of a probable fireplace survives on the eastern end (a) where one flat slab remains upright, though mostly buried and set into the wall; an elongated narrow stone (b) 2.45m long by 0.94m wide with a flat surface lies on the ground in front of it and would have made a suitable lintel.

The second building (B), attached to the eastern end of the first, has more stone walling surviving *in situ*, especially on the eastern and northern walls, where a revetment of up to 1.2m-high is built against the slope, with much stonework remaining in place. The internal dimensions are 4.4m by 3.8m with average wall thickness of 0.8m. A probable entrance (c) was situated in the southern wall at the eastern corner where a likely stone door lintel of 1m long by 0.6m wide, fallen and part buried, sits amid the rubble on the floor. A large mound on the exterior of the south wall probably represents, collapsed wall material from the building and possibly part of the yard wall, depicted on the 1796 map in this approximate position. In the north wall an apparent cavity of 0.7m wide 0.3m deep exists at ground level, though it is uncertain whether this was part of the original construction or has been caused by collapse of the masonry.

The survey plan has revealed that the footprint of building B does not quite align with that of the one to which it is attached (A), with the southern wall protruding slightly. Although very little of the stonework from A survives *in situ*, what does remain suggests a very slight difference in orientation of the separate structures. It seems very likely that B was added to A at a later date.

To the south of the buildings are the vestiges of a small yard. A wall constructed from boulders, including some

large examples, extends from the SW corner of building A to form a loop, which probably connected to the exterior of building B, with a gateway on the eastern side to provide access to the lane. However, much of this has been destroyed or displaced by the conifers and parts of the western wall are obscured by a felled tree. This suggested layout of the yard therefore remains to be confirmed but does approximately conform with that depicted on the 1798 map (see Fig 20; NDRO B170/102).

3.1.2 Lowton [103100] Figs 23-25

This farmstead sits on the west side of Lowton Brook, north of Higher Lowton at the slightly lower altitude of 355m AOD. The earliest cartographic evidence is of 1798 (NDRO B170/102), but later OS depictions and the field evidence surviving today suggest the site was much altered in the 19th century. Like Higher Lowton, HER records have been based solely on early OS depictions.

In 1798 (Fig 23) the site comprised a rectangular house, oriented WSW-ENE with an entrance on both long sides. A second, smaller building, was sited just a few metres to the south and a third, squared structure is depicted to the north. The southern two buildings were contained within a small but angular yard. The yard wall incorporated the eastern end of the main building and the western and southern walls of building two. However, there was also an alleyway giving access past the western end of the main building. The third, square building was attached to two enclosure walls forming a T junction on the northern exterior of the yard. A track leaves the southern end of the yard and curves east for a short distance to the brook, where a ford or bridge may have existed.

The depictions on the 1825 map of Fernworthy (DuCo 1825) and the Dartmoor Forest Tithe Map of 1839 vary little from that on the earlier map, although the annotation on that of 1825 mentions that the site is a ruin.

By 1888 when the 1st edition 25-inch map (Fig 24) was published, the site, by then long abandoned, had changed considerably. The yard walls had been radically altered to form a narrow regular shaped enclosure with an evenly rounded northern end and tapering sides, converging almost to a point at the southern end. Only one building, the house, still existed, depicted as a ruin, and all the details of the yard walls and other structures had been removed since the Tithe Map was surveyed in 1839.

In the 20th century when the reservoir perimeter road was installed, its course overlay the western side of the



Fig 23 Lowton farmstead as depicted on the estate map of 1798 (NDRO B170/102) .

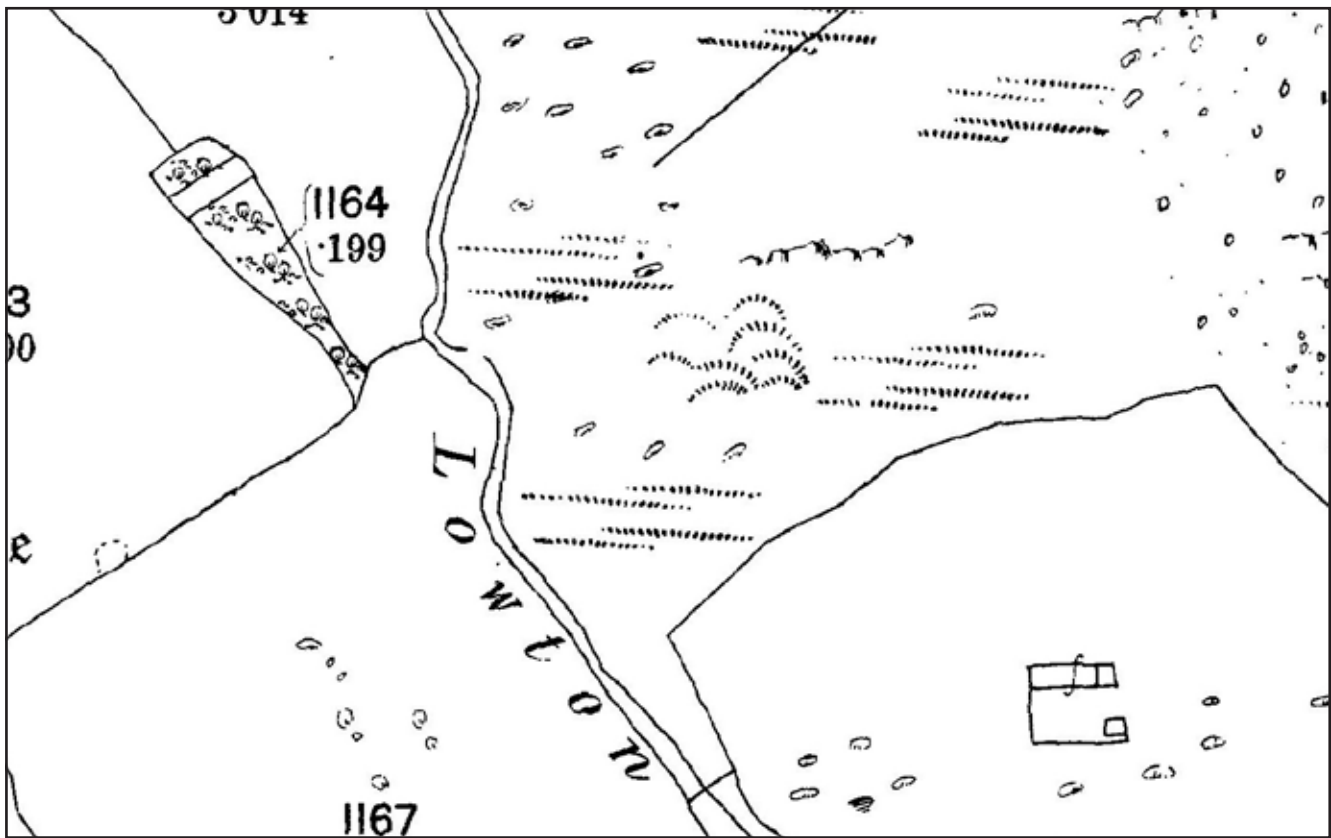


Fig 24 Ordnance survey 25-inch depiction (1886) showing Lowton (top left) and Higher Lowton (bottom right).

yard wall obscuring it completely. Modern maps therefore simply depict the surviving wall on the eastern side and no representation of this small ruined farmstead survives on current OS mapping.

Building remains

The farmstead sits near the bottom of a slope, where an elongated approximately level terrace accommodated the yard and its buildings. This terrace may be artificial or, possibly, was a natural feature enhanced by the builders. The western edge of the terrace is defined by a steep modern scarp resulting from the creation of the perimeter road in the 20th century and this has buried the western side of the yard and buildings.

The most striking feature of this site is an upstanding granite drystone wall that defines the eastern and northern section of the terrace and yard and its layout conforms approximately, with slight deviation, to that depicted on the 1888 OS map. This is a well-built wall, which for the most part remains to its original height of approximately 1m. Its squared top is still well defined and its style and condition tend to reflect its late (post 1839) construction.

Near the northern end of the yard are the remains of the WSW-ENE oriented building as depicted in 1798. It is likely that only about half the building is currently visible, as the western end is buried beneath the modern scarp described above. Parts of the two long walls survive as low parallel linear banks, approximately 5m apart and 0.3-0.4m high, emerging from the base of the scarp. A stony line joining the eastern ends of the two banks at right angles, probably represents remains of the end wall.

Immediately south of the building, a cluster of stones arranged in an 'L' shape (a) may represent the walls of an external structure but too little remains *in situ* to be certain and the location does not coincide with anything depicted on the early maps. There are also traces of a stone revetment (b) extending south from the western

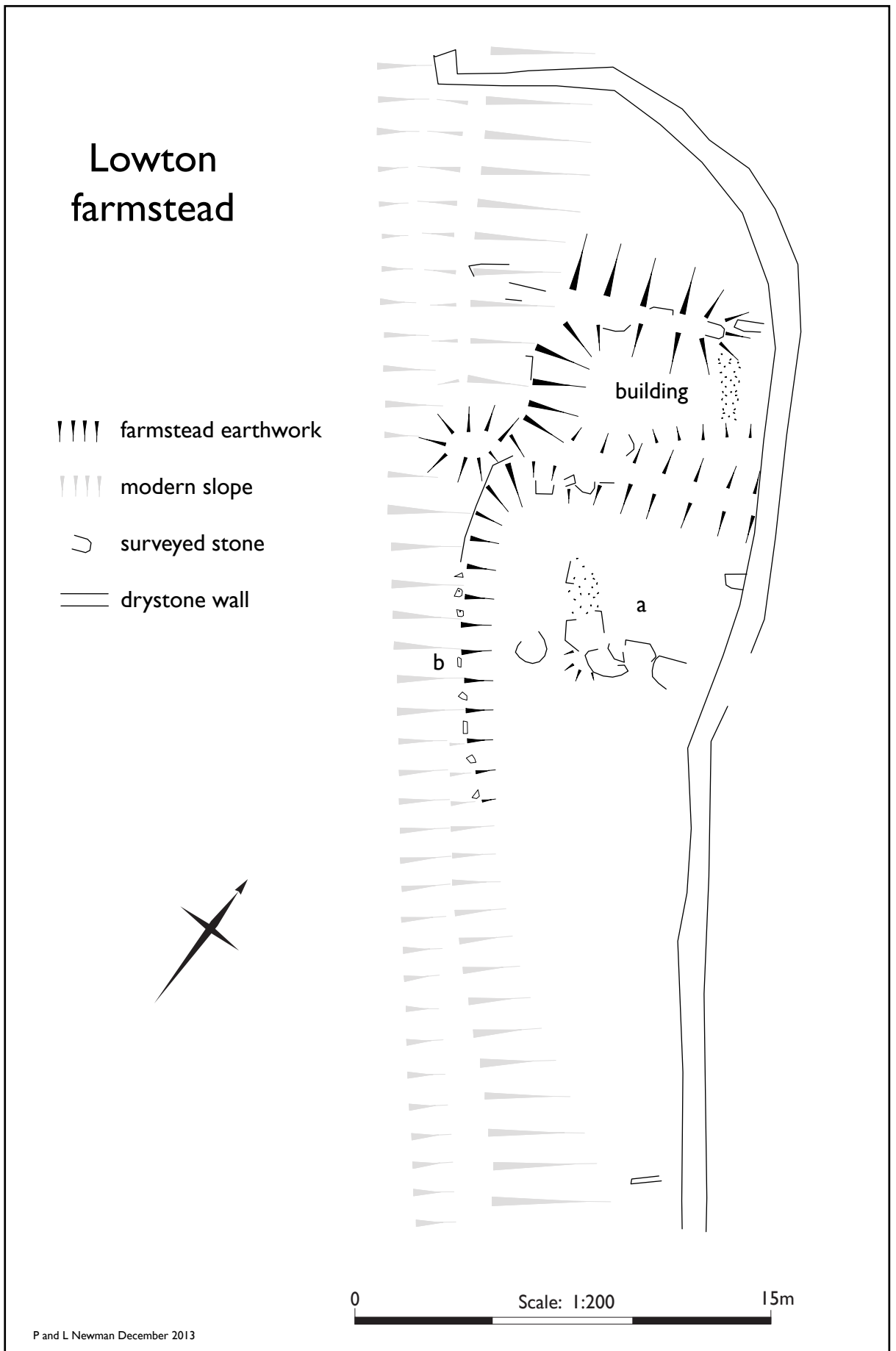


Fig 25 Lowton farmstead 1:200 scale earthwork survey.

end of the house, though it is partially buried by the modern scarp and severely disturbed by the roots of a clump of trees growing from within the scarp.

3.2 Thornworthy blowing house [6694] Figs 26 and 27

This building is located below Fernworthy dam on the southern valley floor of the South Teign river. The site was first noted by William Crossing who stated that there was two buildings and at least one mouldstone (Crossing 1912, 259). R H Worth confirmed its authenticity as a tin smelting site when he reported the recovery of slag, revealed during the digging of a pipeline by Torquay Water Works (Worth 1929, 403). However, he also assumed that the imposition of the pipeline was responsible for the disappearance of the mouldstone observed by Crossing (Worth 1940, 213) and made no mention of a second building. The only previous survey known of this site is a thumbnail plan which appeared on the Fernworthy information leaflet (DNPA 1976) but no information has yet come to light which might provide a date for the structure.

3.2.1 The building

The surviving rectangular building sits at the foot of the slope just a few metres from the river. The surrounding area is stony and there is evidence of tin working in the locale with several stony waste heaps typical of a stream works nearby. The building is within deciduous woodland and much of the stonework and the surrounding terrain is covered by a dense blanket of moss.

Three walls survive (west, north and south) to a maximum height of 1.25m constructed from large rounded granite boulders, slightly sunken at the southern end to accommodate a small slope and oriented approximately north to south. The eastern wall has been robbed, though its

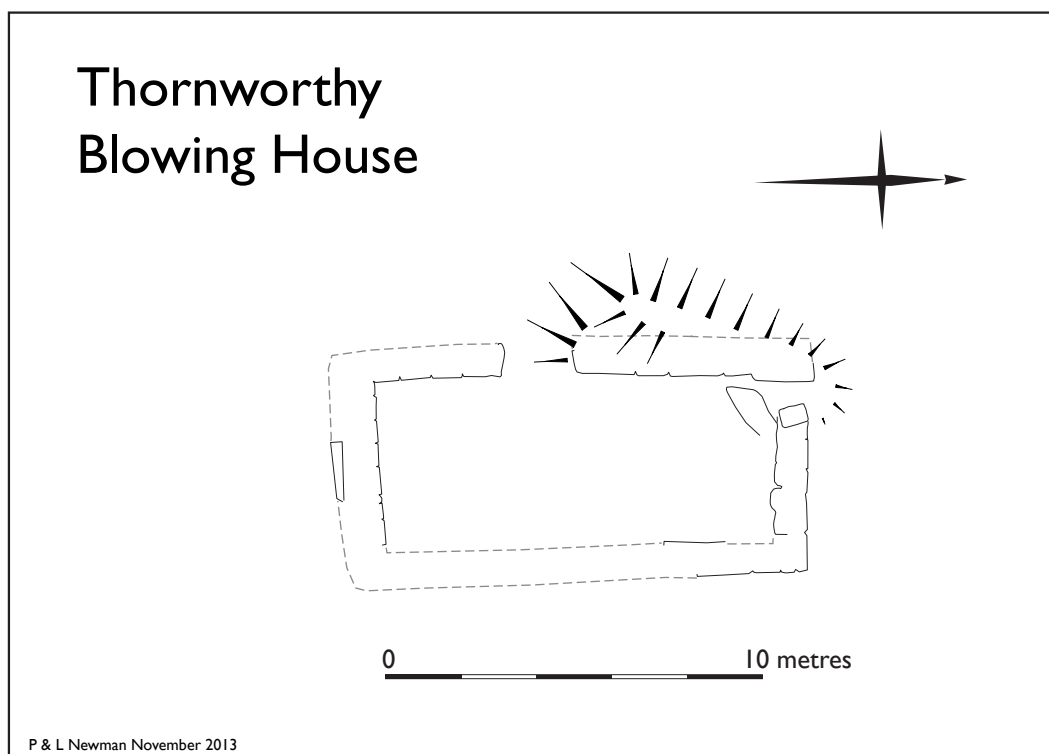


Fig 26 Blowing house near Thornworthy 1:200 scale survey.

footings are still visible in places. An opening, assumed to be the entrance, is located in the north corner of the structure, where a 1.9m-long rock lying across the opening may be assumed to be the fallen lintel. The floor is approximately level though prone to waterlogging resulting in it being very soft. There is no obvious wheelpit and no furnace structure survives, while any traces of a leat to divert water to the site would have been effaced by the construction of Fernworthy dam. This means that Crossing's missing mould stone and the report of tin slag recovered from the pipe trench remain as the only evidence that this was ever a tin smelting site.

Approximately 20m SW of the blowing house, an assemblage of stones and boulders bear some resemblance to one corner of a structure (not surveyed). It may be a coincidence that these rocks are so arranged or they may be associated with the streamworking processes that occurred here but it is also possible that these remains represent what Crossing interpreted as a second building (1912, 259).



Fig 27 Photo showing the blowing house viewed from north-east (Phil Newman).

4.0 SIGNIFICANCE

As this survey was designed to complement the earlier survey of Fernworthy Forest, the following observations should be read in conjunction with those of the earlier report (Newman 2103, 62-6).

4.1 Prehistoric archaeology

Antiquarian interest

The combined archaeological legacy of the Fernworthy estate has fascinated archaeologists since the earliest days of the discipline as practiced on Dartmoor and, within a relatively small area, offers a detailed and varied insight into their activities. GW Ormerod was one of the earliest observers to record the antiquities of Chagford district and certainly one of the first to publish his Dartmoor observations in a learned journal¹. Also, although Spence Bate's investigation at Two Barrows in Manaton (Spence Bate 1872) had set a precedent, the excavation of the Thornworthy cairn, by Slade and Pengelly in 1879 was within the vanguard of the earliest barrow digs on Dartmoor to be recorded and published (Pengelly 1880), however unsatisfactory the outcomes may have been in today's terms. To find two stone cists covered by a single small barrow was very rare and the removal of one of them to a museum was unprecedented, although others would follow.

Slade's work recording the hut circles at Metherel (Pengelly 1880) reflects a keen eye for detail and his notes and observations stand up well over 130 years later. Although the purpose of hut circles as dwellings had been established by earlier writers, the total extent of this archaeological resource on Dartmoor was only just being realised by the time Slade, Pengelly and others were at work, and the excitement at what they were recording is palpable in their writings.

The Dartmoor Exploration Committee (DEC) was very active at Fernworthy in the late 19th century, where their work reached a zenith during the investigation of Froggymead in 1898, but by 1906 their activities had diminished as the initial momentum of the group faded. However, by the 1930s the Metherel huts were under threat from the impending construction of the dam and subsequent flooding of the reservoir, and the DEC was revived under the leadership of R H Worth in 1934. The excavations he directed at Metherel represent the last of the antiquarian style excavations on Dartmoor, most work thereafter, particularly at prehistoric sites, would be directed by professional or university based archaeologists. Although the Metherel excavations were fairly routine in terms of prehistoric finds, the discovery that Bronze Age dwellings had a useful life long after the prehistoric period, occupied by 16th-century tinnerns and others, gave a new dimension to their study.

Although representing only a small portion of Dartmoor National Park, Fernworthy has played a disproportionately significant role in the discovery of its past.

Hut circles

The importance of the hut circles at Metherel was mentioned in the earlier Fernworthy Forest report (Newman 2013), which included a note on their significance, probable dating framework and archaeological context. The inclusion of these eight huts brings the total known within the estate to 45, arranged into six identifiable groups. The spatial distribution and constructional character of the Metherel huts are similar to those at the western settlement at Lowton where they also have in common their association with probable contemporary field boundaries or reaves in the vicinity. Like those elsewhere at Fernworthy, most of the huts have been robbed of stone to some extent, although [6625] appears to have remained relatively intact. All of the huts at Metherel are large in Dartmoor terms constructed from, in some cases, very large slabs of granite, reflecting the surface

geology of this sector of the moor and emphasising how Dartmoor hut circles vary greatly in size and character depending on the location and the available resources.

The interpretation of site [6655] (above) and hut [6585] (see Newman 2013, Fig 27 and 29) remains open to question. Worth's suggestion, based on slim excavated evidence, that [6655] was a cairn not a hut, and that hut [6585] should also be candidate for cairn status because of its similar construction technique, flies in the face of landscape evidence, which suggests both had origins as hut circles. Also, the construction style that includes an inner circuit of edge set stones, believed to be unusual in Worth's time, has since been noted elsewhere in association with different wall styles, on Holne Moor for example, where it was believed to support an inner timber wall cladding (Fleming 2008, 106).

4.2 Post-medieval

The significance of these farmsteads has been discussed in the earlier report in the light of the wider survey (Newman 2013, 64 & 66). However, although in poor condition, the two farmsteads of Lowton and Higher Lowton surveyed for this report contribute significantly to our understanding of the farming landscape in the post-medieval period, demonstrating the size and character of small subsistence farms built on marginal areas of high Dartmoor in this period. We still require dating for these sites, which will only come from documentary research or archaeological excavation. Although we know they were abandoned by the late 18th century, their origins are not known.

5.0 FUTURE PRIORITIES

The following recommendations only apply to sites discussed in this report. For general priorities reference should be made to the earlier report (Newman 2013, 68).

5.1 RESEARCH

5.1.1 Prehistoric

Archaeological excavation of any of the prehistoric sites described above would have limited use given the scale of the interventions already undertaken by R H Worth in the 1930s. However, as mentioned above, the interpretation of site [6655] and [6585] would benefit from re-evaluation and further investigation.

5.1.2 Post-medieval

Detailed documentary research is required to illuminate the history and origins of Lowton and Higher Lowton (see Newman 2013, 68). This should be seen as high priority in terms of any future attempts to assemble information for interpretation.

5.2 MANAGEMENT

5.2.1 The Lakeside area - Metherel huts circles and Thornworthy cist

Although visitor numbers to Fernworthy may not compare with those reservoirs in Devon more easily accessible by motor car, the place is popular in the summer and is one of only a few locations on Dartmoor where impressive pre-historic hut circles can be viewed within a relatively short distance of a car park with facilities. The site is

ideal for less able walkers wishing to view such monuments and the trackway is in part accessible to accompanied wheelchair users following Potter's Walk. It would therefore be worth the effort to improve and maintain the existing access and keep the summer vegetation off these huts, while also providing better interpretation.

The four hut circles that survive above the waterline at Metherel are all fine examples, particularly illustrative of the type and they make impressive sights for the visitor to Fernworthy. A previous attempt at directing visitors to these huts, by including them in the 'Potter's Walk' footpath, has been successful but has fallen partly into disuse. Changes to the fencing layout have made access harder and the overgrowth of vegetation has until recently deterred many from visiting huts [6695] and [61334]², which form a detour from the original track. The current situation requires the visitor to cross two high stiles to enter the field containing these huts and although marker posts exist in the field, they are difficult to see amid the hawthorn bushes and gorse that are rapidly taking a hold here, while in summer the bracken is very high. Returning to the track was originally easily achieved via a stile close to hut [6695], however, the recent addition of a second fence to the north, without a stile, means that walkers find themselves between two fences but can progress no further and have no choice but to turn back and return via the first pair of stiles to the west.

The following improvements are recommended:

- The addition of a second stile just west of the quarry would be an improvement but would still exclude the less able visitor. Kissing gates through all the fences, if thought to be appropriate in this situation, would broaden the accessibility to huts [6695] and [61334].
- Removal of some hawthorns within the field would make it easier for the visitor to locate these huts
- Reduce vegetation coverage on all Metherel hut circles, especially bracken and gorse.
- Maintain the level of vegetation coverage to allow the huts to remain visible through all seasons.

Thornworthy cairn/cist

This interesting cairn and impressive cist is very close to a track but, until vegetation was removed in November 2013, it was difficult to find and almost invisible to casual passersby.

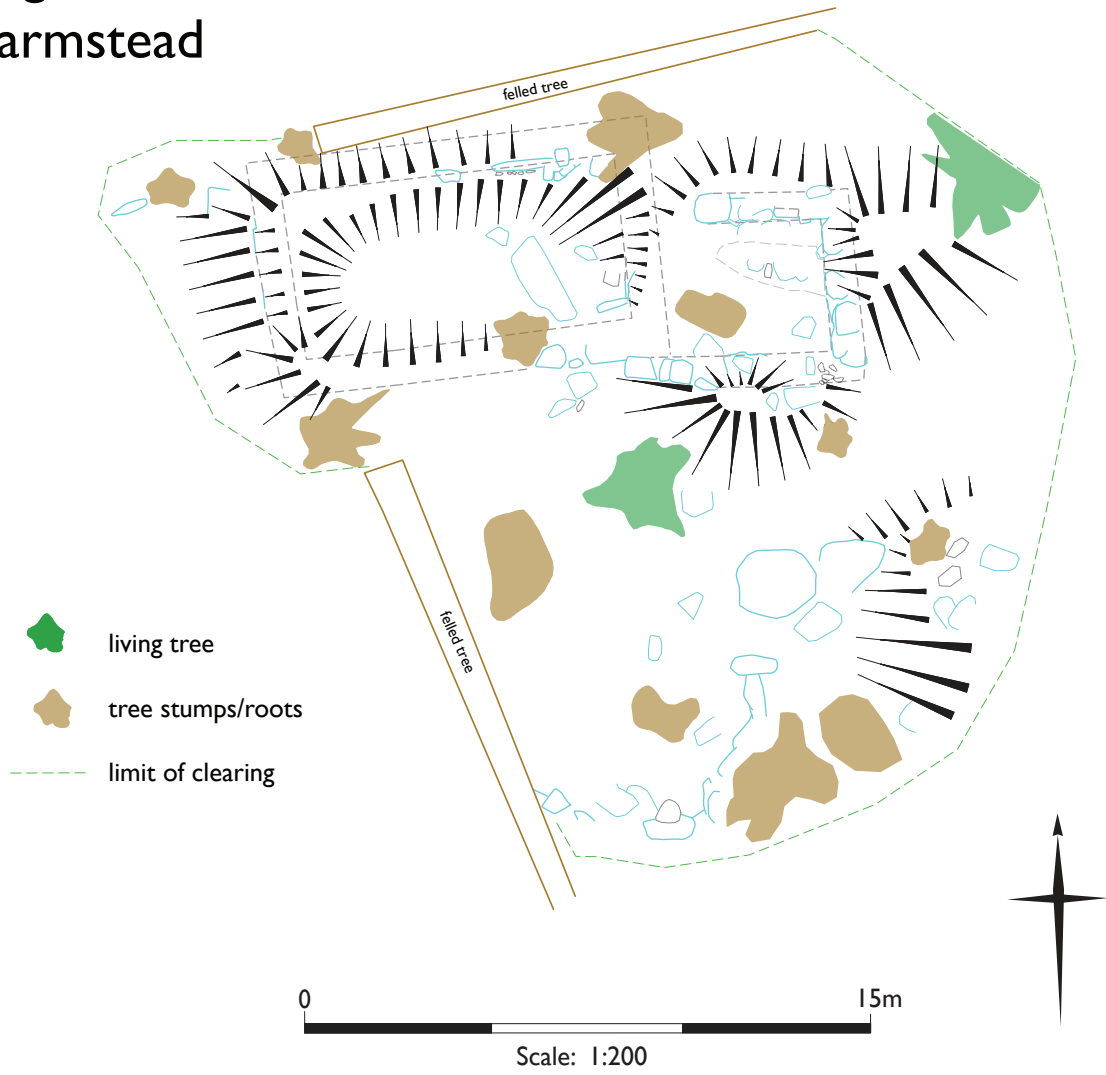
- A hawthorn is growing from within the fabric of the cairn and should be removed.
- Vegetation levels need to be maintained for the site to remain visible.
- The site should be included in future interpretation schemes.

Higher Lowton

Although the farmstead at Higher Lowton has had some clearance prior to this survey, there is still much that needs to be done for the remains to be stable.

- The trunks of two large conifers, recently felled, lie across the site and need to be carefully moved, along with some smaller saplings and piles of brushings, to make the extent of the farmstead clear of trees.
- The future felling of two additional mature conifers at the site and any in the surrounding area needs to be undertaken sensitively, preferably under archaeological guidance.
- Information about this farmstead needs inclusion in future interpretation schemes for Fernworthy.

Higher Lowton Farmstead



Thornworthy Blowing House

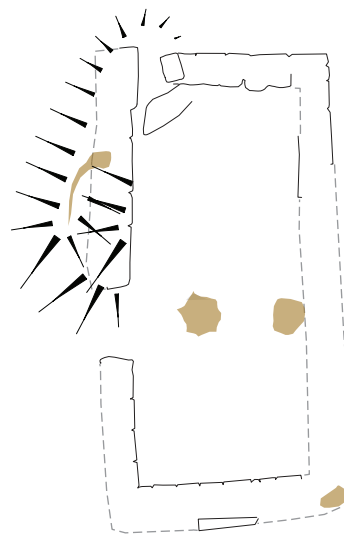


Fig 28 Plans of Higher Lowton Farmstead and Metherel blowing house showing trees and tree stumps.

5.2.2 Lowton

Although the remains have been partly destroyed at this farmstead and are not very impressive, the level of vegetation coverage should be monitored in future years and, like Higher Lowton, information about the site should be included in future interpretation schemes.

5.2.3 Metherel blowing house

The building is in a stable condition, though a tree is growing within the central area and a rhododendron bush has established itself in an old tree stump also within the floor. Various saplings are growing from within the walls. Monitoring of this vegetation is recommended.

This site probably receives fewer visitors than others in the area but information about it could be included in any future interpretation scheme.

5.2.4 Interpretation

Interpretation of all the sites recorded in this supplementary report needs to be considered in conjunction with those suggested for the forested area (see Newman 2013, 68), especially the concept of archaeologically themed walks and accompanying interpretation leaflets and signage, if adopted. Given that water levels at this reservoir drop frequently enough for some or all of the submerged sites to be visible from time to time, information about them should also be included in any interpretation.

The current system of using marker posts with coloured bands to indicate a monument in the vicinity was clearly designed to be low-key and has been used for both the lakeside and forested areas of Fernworthy. However, a first-time visitor to Fernworthy, not armed with any prior information would be unaware of their purpose while guide leaflets, available from DNPA information points, are not widely known about and in any case contain very little information of use to the public beyond site location. As many of the wooden posts are coming to the end of their lives and new survey and historic material has become available as a result of this survey, now would be a good time to install a more imaginative system of site markers with accompanying hard-copy or downloadable interpretation material for the archaeology of the whole Fernworthy estate.

6.0 NOTES and SOURCES

Notes

1. Preceded only by Rowe in 1830, although we here have to exclude the Druid-obsessed publications that appeared in the *Archaeologia* earlier in the 19th century.
2. Prior to this survey in November 2013, these two huts were completely overwhelmed by gorse and impossible to view.

Abbreviations

AOD - above Ordnance Datum
DA - Dartmoor Archive (the archive of the Dartmoor Trust)
DEC - Dartmoor Exploration Committee
DNPA - Dartmoor National Park Authority
SWLT - South-West Lakes Trust
NDRO- North Devon Record Office
MTMTE Moor Than Meets the Eye

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APPENDIX

Site Gazetteer

HER No.	NGR (SX)	Item	SM No.
MDV 6613	6674 8433	Cairn and cist on Thornworthy Down	1020058
MDV 6624	6681 8400	Hut circle. Part of the Metherel hut settlement now submerged	
MDV 6625	6704 8417	Hut circle. Part of the Metherel hut settlement	1019214
MDV 6626	6706 8413	Hut circle. Part of Metherel hut settlement	1019214
MDV 6651	6645 8339	Higher Lowton farmstead	
MDV 6654	6682 8401	Hut circle. Part of the Metherel hut settlement now submerged	
MDV 6655	6685 8402	Cairn or hut circle. Part of Metherel hut settlement now submerged	
MDV 6656	6696 8411	Hut circle. Part of the Metherel hut settlement now submerged	
MDV 6694	6720 8442	Thornworthy Blowing House	
MDV 6695	6707 8403	Hut circle. Part of Metherel hut settlement	1019214
MDV 61334	6709 8397	Hut circle. Part of Metherel hut settlement	
MDV 61335	6710 8403	A section of enclosure wall attached to hut 6695	
MDV 61336	6703 8417	Walled lane leading to hut 6625	
MDV 103100	6625 8350	Lowton farmstead	