

A Proposal in MAP2 Format: The Isle of Wight Medieval Landscape Project

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1 Background

1.1 Description of the area to be examined:

- i. **Location:** The area of interest is the Isle of Wight. There are currently 35 sites that have been suggested by Beresford ([Beresford 1954](#); [Beresford & Hurst 1971](#)) as being Deserted Medieval Villages (see table 1). One of the aims of the project is to clarify how many of these really are DMVs, and how many of the DMVs have archaeological remains. It is also an objective of the project to try and discover any unknown DMVs, if they exist, using field survey, aerial photography, and limited excavation.
- ii. **Period and type of site:** Deserted medieval settlements.
- iii. **Condition of the sites:** Largely unknown at present. Where earthworks are known to exist some have been largely ploughed out (as at East Ashey), some have been destroyed by landscaping (as at Gatcombe), others appear to be largely intact (as at Stenbury). The condition of those sites newly identified or located by this project will be assessed.

1.2 Previous work:

- i. **Previous archaeological work:** An undergraduate dissertation of 1987–8 ([Sly 1988](#)) with preliminary evaluation and discussion. As part of this dissertation some of the earthworks were surveyed using tapes and/or a plane table at East Ashey, Stenbury and Watchingwell. The site at Woolverton is the only one that has been excavated (partially) in 1952 by Major G. Fowler.
- ii. **Site Archives:** As far as is known no report of the Woolverton excavation was published, although an interim report is in the files of the DMVRG (now the Medieval Settlement Research Group). Locating the site archive for Woolverton (if one exists) is one of the objectives of the project. The SMR has been extensively consulted for all the sites.

	Site	Grid Reference
1	<i>Abla</i>	Unknown
2	Afton	SZ 358869
3	Alvington	SZ 475886
4	Ashey, East	SZ 584883
5	Atherfield	SZ 470793
6	Barnsley (Bernardsley)	SZ 608903
7	Billingham	SZ 485818
8	Briddlesford	SZ 547900
9	Compton	SZ 376851
10	Durton	SZ 522883
11	Fairlee	SZ 506904
12	Haldley	SZ 494852
13	Hale	SZ 544846
14	Hardley	SZ 632866
15	Heasley	SZ 547857
16	Kern	SZ 578866
17	Kingston	SZ 478814
18	Knighton	SZ 566867
19	Loverston (<i>Levegarestun</i>)	SZ 494838
20	Luccombe	SZ 583798
21	Moor Farm	SZ 533825
22	Nettlecombe	SZ 526782
23	Nunwell	SZ 595875
24	<i>Orham</i>	SZ 643882
25	Pan (Penna)	SZ 506904
26	Preston	SZ 598914
27	Scotchells	SZ 582833
28	Standen, West	SZ 506874
29	Stenbury	SZ 525790
30	Swainston	SZ 441878
31	Thorley	SZ 367892
32	Watchingwell	SZ 447884
33	Week	SZ 537778
34	Woolverton	SZ 623867
35	Yafford (<i>Heceford</i>)	SZ 447819

Table 1: Deserted Medieval Villages on the Isle of Wight known in 1968. *Italics* indicate a lost name.

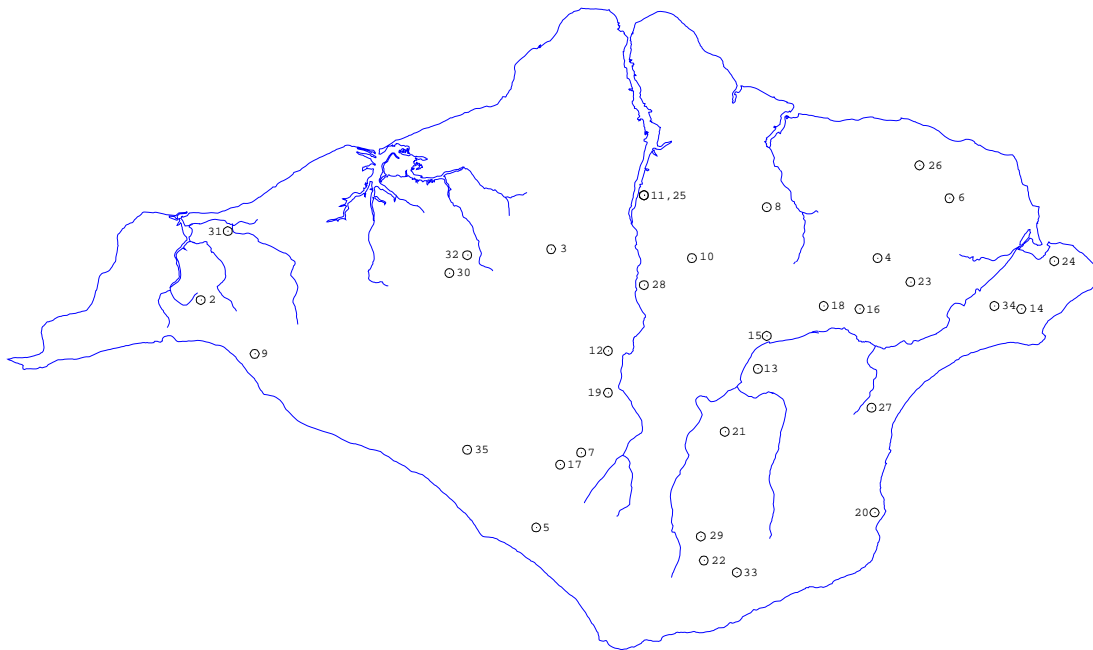


Figure 1: Deserted Medieval Villages on the Isle of Wight known in 1968 (see table 1 for site names).

- iii. **Evaluation Fieldwork:** The earthworks at East Ashey may be the remains of house platforms, with associated crofts and other enclosures. The earthworks at Stenbury include the remains of a possible medieval mill, earthworks possibly concerned with controlling the course of the stream, and some possible house platforms. The earthworks surveyed at Watchingwell are difficult to classify.

1.3 Reasons for and circumstances of the project:

- i. **Justification for carrying out the proposed work:** One of the objectives of the project is to assess the state of any archaeological remains, and any possible threats to those remains; also see section 2.
- ii. **Legal status of the sites:** The earthworks at East Ashey and the moated area at Stenbury have been designated as scheduled ancient monuments. All the sites are on private land.
- iii. **Timing of the project:** The aerial photographic element of the project could commence in Easter 1996. The fieldwork element of the project would commence in the Winter of 1996–7, at the earliest, with Easter 1997 as a more likely start date. Further fieldwork would be carried out during the University vacations, to suit teaching commitments and student teaching requirements.

- iv. **Arrangements for access:** Landowners and tenants are currently being traced, and will be contacted in the hope of arranging site visits.
- v. **Proposed reinstatement:** N/A

1.4 Archive deposition:

- i. As excavation is not part of the initial part of the project, most of the archive will be in a digital format. This will be held by the University of Southampton, the Royal Commission (NMR), and the Ordnance Survey who will be providing data to assist in the setting up of a Geographic Information System (GIS). Finds recovered by fieldwalking will be analysed at the University, and offered to the Clatterford centre on the Isle of Wight, if the landowner agrees.
- ii. N/A
- iii. N/A

2 Aims and objectives

2.1 Academic or research design:

- i. The pioneering work of Professor Maurice Beresford identified 35 DMVs on the Isle of Wight; a higher concentration than any other English county. However, these sites are almost entirely based on documentary (mainly taxation) evidence. The documentary evidence for the Island concerning depopulation is certainly plentiful, and confirms its leading position among English counties when it comes to depopulation — the first anti-depopulation Act (1488) was concerned solely with the Isle of Wight. The taxation evidence available for the Island certainly suggests decline, although there are two main problems with using this evidence. The first is that the decline appears to be across the whole Island, rather than being concentrated in those areas deemed to contain DMVs, although a major premise of this proposal is that evidence of presence or absence of DMVs is likely to be severely deficient. The second is the danger of using taxation evidence to talk about population, different taxes used different units of assessment (vills, tithings, parishes) and methods of assessment, and rates of evasion may have varied.

The documentary evidence that is available for the Island certainly suggests that depopulation occurred on the Island, and that the central government was worried about it. The taxation evidence suggests that there was an economic decline, which may be a reflection of depopulation. What is then surprising then about the Isle of Wight is the almost total lack of (at present) physical evidence

connected with desertion. At present there are no known sites with classic earthworks — house platforms, the boundary banks of crofts and the surrounding ridge and furrow (These earthworks are characteristic of the nucleated villages of the Midlands which Beresford has made so well known in his work).

This project thus has four main aims (Bersford 1980):

- Firstly it is vital to try and establish the character of medieval settlement on the Island. This is absolutely vital for as Bersford has admitted the search for the deserted village may be in vain if the settlement pattern is dispersed, rather than based on nucleated villages.
- It is also important that further work is done to establish the pattern of medieval land use for this may give us some clue as to the population of the Island. Arable farming was labour intensive in the medieval period, particularly compared to pastoral farming. A small population with little population pressure on the land, might have encouraged an early enclosure of land.
- To try and establish where and when on the Island individual medieval settlements were deserted.
- To establish the pattern, and explain the causes of any depopulation on the Island that occurred during the Medieval period.

- ii. N/A
- iii. Currently it is not known how many, if any, of the sites will be situated within areas already designated as of special interest, albeit non-archaeological. However, it is anticipated that some are likely to be part of areas of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) or Conservation Areas (CA), and it is inevitable on the Isle of Wight that most will fall within Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. The results of the project will be made available to the regulating bodies responsible for these zones so that the information can be assimilated within topics of scientific or public interest.
- iv. One of the objectives of the project is to try to establish where on the Island medieval settlements were deserted. If any clear cut examples of DMVs are discovered by the project, it will be necessary to assess any risk to those sites. If any sites are in danger excavation would be one of the possible courses of action considered. At any sites that are not at risk, small scale excavation would be considered to try and firmly date the site if this is not possible with other sources of evidence.
- v. It is likely that when the number of sites suitable for geophysical survey has been assessed, it will be possible to test and develop the most suitable procedures for this type of site. DMVs have not attracted a high level of interest among

geophysical surveyors in the past, partly because they so often exist as clear standing earthworks. Also they can be very variable in their responses due to the slightness of subterranean structure on many of them.

2.2 Publication and presentation

- i. Possible avenues of publication include the Proceedings of the Isle of Wight Natural History and Archaeological Society; Medieval Archaeology; the annual report of the Medieval Settlement Research Group. The results of the project would also be made available on the Internet, via the medium of the World Wide Web. Interim reports would be produced for each year that the report was running.
- ii. A display of the project could be arranged at a local library, for instance the Mountbatten library in Newport. Also, volunteers from local schools, and all walks of life on the Island could participate in the project.

3 Methods statement

- i. N/A
- ii. The objectives of the project would necessitate firstly examining the 35 sites suggested by Beresford as being DMVs. This program would involve trying to locate those sites that have any physical evidence of desertion. This would be accomplished with a program of aerial photogrammetry, fieldwalking (where conditions are appropriate), geophysical survey (resistivity and magnetometry techniques would be deployed where conditions are suitable), and topographic and detail survey where earthworks survive. New sites would be searched for initially by aerial survey and photography, and these techniques would also be applied to existing sites if this was felt to be useful.

The documentary evidence requires critical re-examination to try and assess just how reliable it is. The taxation evidence also needs to be looked at again, to see what it can tell us, and whether it can tell us anything about the population of the Island during the Medieval period.

- iii.
 - Aerial photograph rectification.
 - Fieldwalking: timed recovery over 3m squares within 30m grids. Graphical presentation of distribution patterns. Where large areas need to be covered and a lower resolution is acceptable, the line walking technique would be used. Statistical analysis of the results including log linear analysis and logistical regression. Partial rewalking of selected areas to help account for operator and environmental biases would be undertaken.

- Geophysical survey: resistivity and magnetometry, using Geoscan Research RM15 and FM36 instruments respectively. Production of computer generated plots.
- Topographic and detail surveying, using a Total Station.
- Integration of rectified aerial photograph, geophysical and survey data on plan.
- Creation of a GIS. It is hoped that this can be used to store all the disparate sources of information (vector and raster), and that the GIS can be linked to the taxation evidence, in the form of a relational database, and other documentary evidence, possibly coded with SGML (Standardised Generalised Mark-up Language). Once problems associated with the storage of the data have been overcome it is hoped that the GIS can be used as an analytical tool.

iv. N/A

4 Resources and programming

4.1 Staffing and equipment

- i. The core supervisory staff would be provided by the University of Southampton, Department of Archaeology. Students from the Department of Archaeology at Southampton would provide the bulk of the workforce, although this does not preclude the possibility of local volunteers being involved. The students involvement would involve a large degree of training, mainly in surveying and geophysical techniques, and it is also hoped to involve them in the processing of the data. Local volunteers would be incorporated into the project according to their skills and experience.

The number of students involved in the project would not be large unless the project undertakes excavation, no more than 15. The probable members of staff are listed below:

Mr T. J. T. Sly	Department of Archaeology, Southampton
Dr K. M. Clark	Department of Archaeology, Southampton
Mr K. Lockyear	University College London

- ii. The following members of staff would be involved with the tasks identified in the methods statement.

Aerial Photography	Mr T. J. T. Sly
Fieldwalking	Mr T. J. T. Sly and Mr K. Lockyear
Geophysical survey	Dr K. M. Clark
Topographic and detail survey	Mr T. J. T. Sly
Documentary and taxation evidence	Mr T. J. T. Sly

- iii. The equipment necessary to carry out the tasks outlined in the methods statement would be provide by the following bodies.

General surveying equipment	Dept of Archaeology
Total station	Dept of Archaeology
Geophysics equipment	Dept of Archaeology
Software for aerial rectification	Dept of Archaeology
Software for processing of fieldwalking data	Dept of Archaeology
Software for processing of survey data	Dept of Archaeology
Software for processing of geophysical survey	Dept of Archaeology
Software for development of GIS	Dept of Archaeology

iv. N/A

v. N/A

References

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