

A survey of Hillbury Camp, Puttenham Common and a LiDAR image of a field system to the east

Puttenham Common area was the subject of an historic landscape survey - part of the County Council's and Surrey Archaeological Society's joint project to identify 'Areas of Special Historic Landscape Value' in Surrey. A topographical survey of Hillbury Camp was carried out in 2001 as part of that project.

Hillbury Camp, on Puttenham Common, is a univallate earthwork, listed, on no clear grounds, as Iron Age in the county Historic Environment Record and by English Heritage. The camp (SU 9115 4680) is sited at the extreme west end of an east/west sandstone ridge, covers about 2ha (5 acres) and has a defensive circuit consisting of a single bank and ditch earthwork that runs on the fort's north, east and south sides (see topographical survey (Fig 1) and LiDAR image (Fig 2)). The circuit does not continue on the west side either because the ground here drops away very steeply (Fig 1: E) and no defences were thought necessary or because soil slip has removed any trace of such defences. However, there is a slighter concave bank (Fig 1: C) set back on the west side, but this appears to be a later addition perhaps to re-use the site as a stock enclosure. To revert to the fort's defences, of the three sides that do survive, the north and south sections are positioned to take advantage of the sloping edges of the ridge while the east section cuts across the flatter ground at the top of the ridge. At this point the bank is about 12m wide and 2m high with an outer ditch 8m wide and now just under 1m deep. There are a number of modern footpaths cutting the ramparts, but the original gateway is likely to have been at one of two points along the defences (Fig 1: A and B).

The only surveyed features with a definite date are, firstly, the series of pits (Fig 1: D) dug across the centre of the western half of the interior of the fort. These were excavated in the 1940s, during the Second World War – older local residents mentioned that they were for anti-aircraft guns and search lights – and, secondly, the very slight bank running along the top of the western edge (Fig 1: E), which is recent and marks a modern fence line.

The hillfort was partially excavated in 1887 by two Victorian antiquarians – F James and F Lasham – whose brief report (more of a note) was published in volume 12 (1894) of *Surrey Archaeological Collections*. All it says is that they opened a trench across the (later) west bank and another across the fort's east bank, neither of which produced any finds other than 'a few ashes and a small animal bone at a depth of three or four feet'. If nothing else this presumably means that the ditch was at least that deep below the 19th century ground level. They also 'cut a trench' at the centre of the fort, again finding nothing apart from 'a worked scraper and some flint flakes, but no trace of pottery'.

Outside the camp to the east the accompanying LiDAR image shows the remains of an extensive field system along the ridgetop (and elsewhere). This system is not visible at ground level, given the current vegetation cover and, as with Hillbury, the date of the fields is unknown. They do show, however, that at some stage in the past what is now heath and oak wood, was then an intensive agricultural landscape.

In the 1870s another local antiquarian – the Rev. C Kerry, curate of Puttenham – found Roman pottery and the remains of a 'pavement' just to the east of Hillbury as well as other Roman sites elsewhere on the common and a few years later F James also found pottery in the same area close to Hillbury itself. There is little doubt that Puttenham Common contains

the remains of one or more Roman farmsteads, though again a modern excavation is needed to establish the details and whether, as seems possible, the field systems are also Roman in origin.

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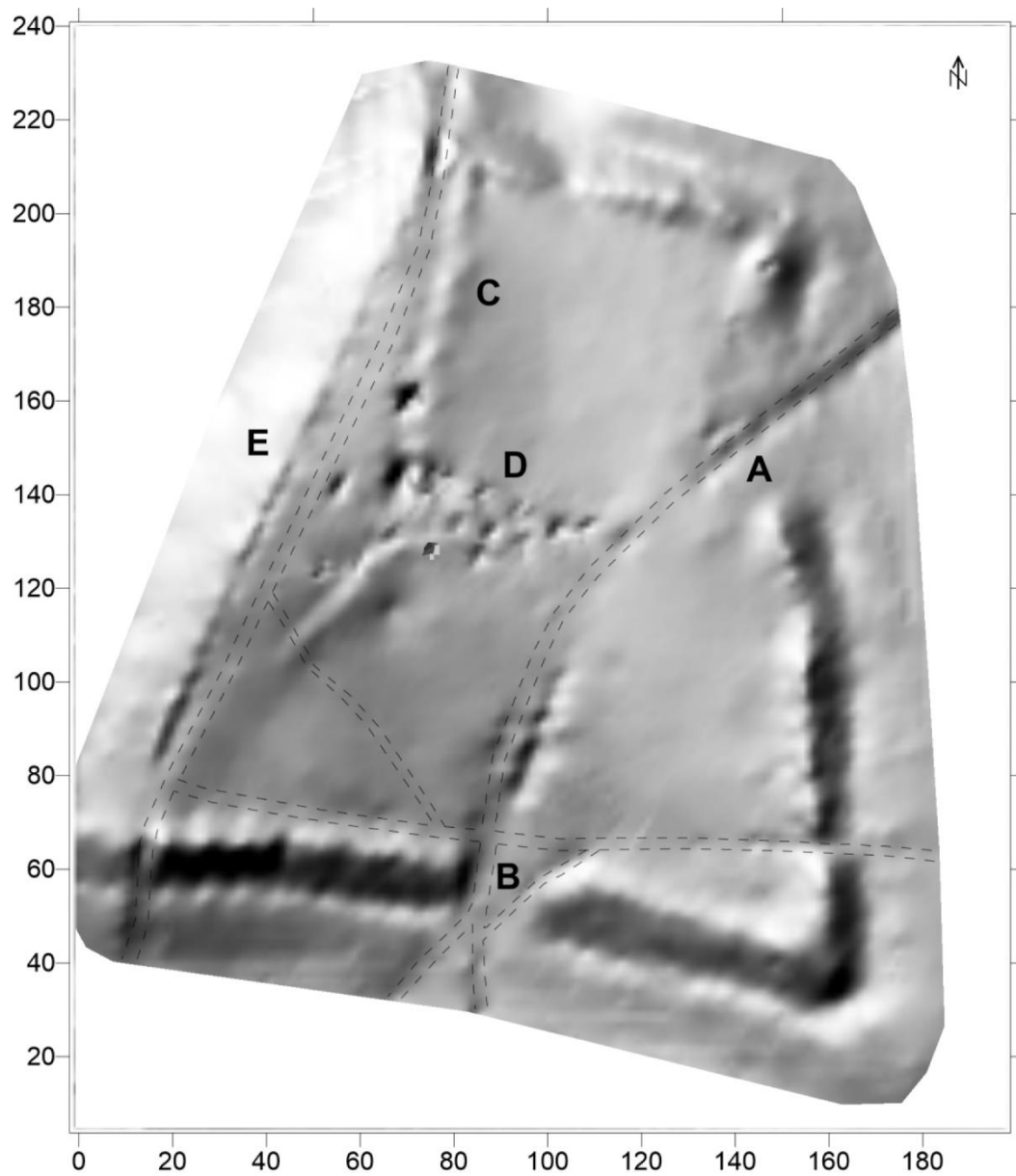


Fig 1 Survey of Hillbury Camp. Modern paths are shown as dashed lines. Scale in metres.

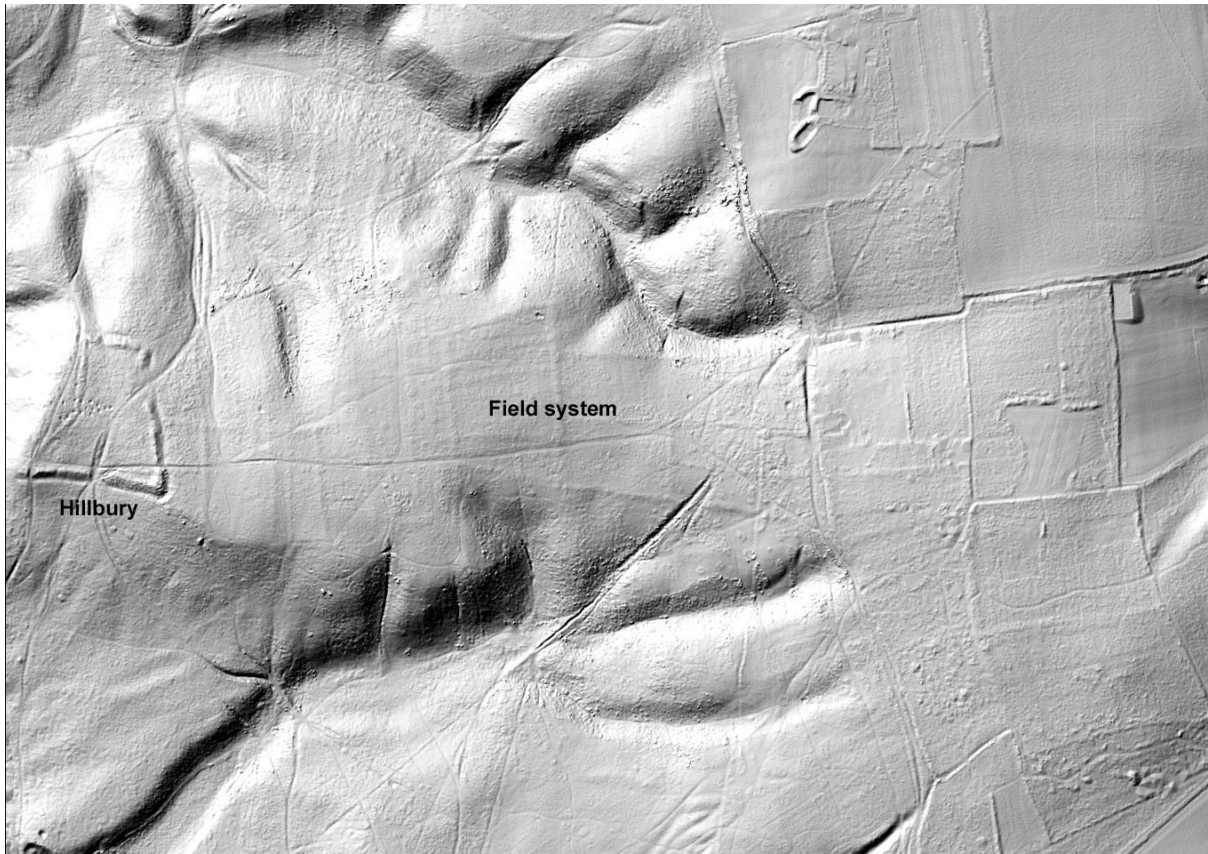


Fig 2 LiDAR image of part of Puttenham Common showing Hillbury Camp and field system (Source: <http://environment.data.gov.uk/ds/survey/#/survey>). Contains public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.