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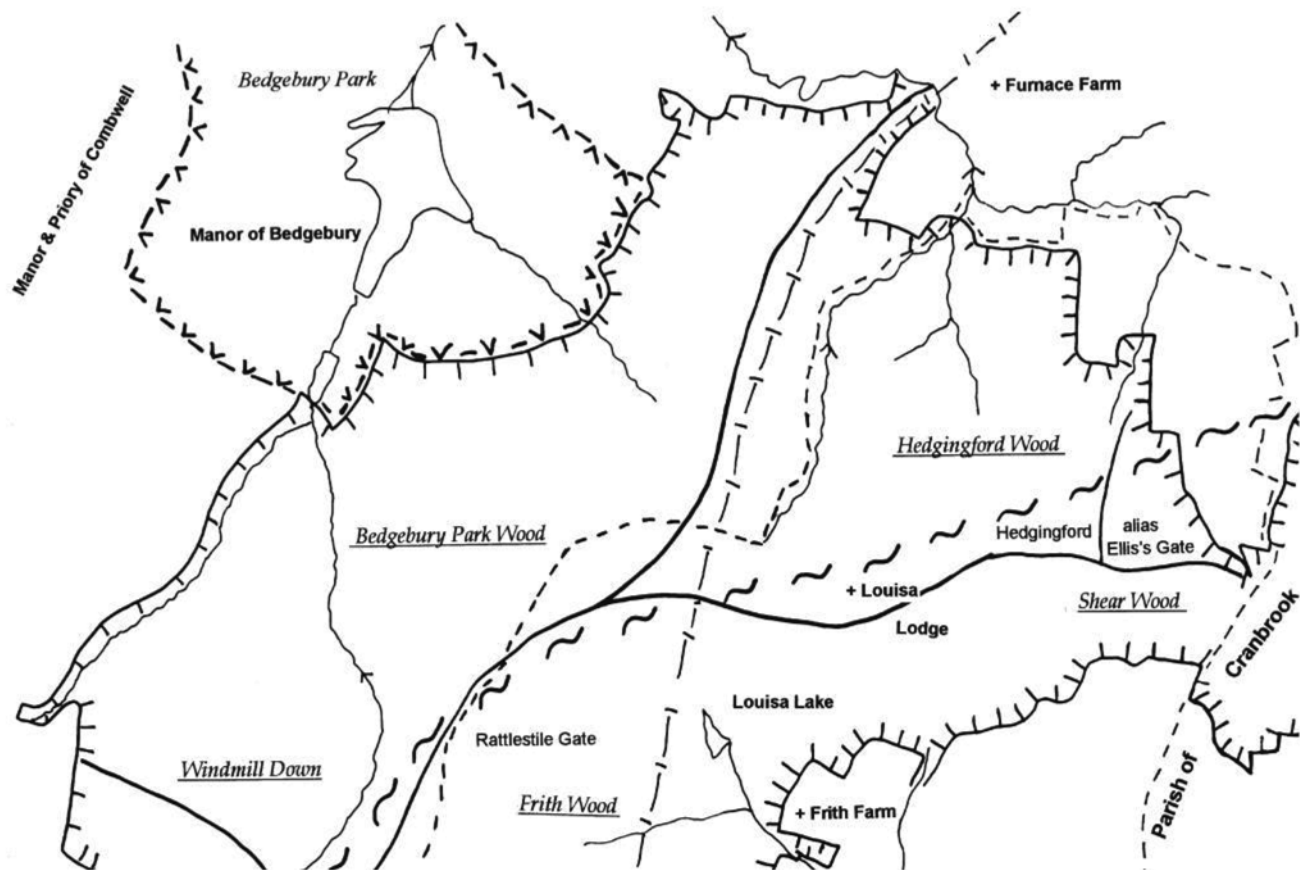
AN INITIAL INVESTIGATION OF AN EARLY ROUTEWAY AND BOUNDARY, POSSIBLY PREHISTORIC, IN BEDGEBURY FOREST

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A two-year community archaeology project funded by the 'Local Heritage Initiative' investigated some of the archaeological features in Bedgebury Forest on behalf of the Forestry Commission. Local volunteers undertook archive research and fieldwork in 2006/7 under the guidance of the authors to identify and record the history of Bedgebury Forest. This paper presents some of the findings of the project and in particular describes in detail a linear multi-ditched and banked earthwork which runs in an almost continuous line from the south-west corner of the Forest at Flimwell (E. Sussex) north-east towards Hartley on the edge of Cranbrook parish. Branching from this feature are other linear earthworks.

Bedgebury Forest occupies an upland plateau dominated by extensive coniferous plantations on former ancient coppices, woodland and wooded heath. Traces of the former woodland and heathland cover can be seen around the edge of the Forest and in small pockets along streams and valleys. On its east and south-east sides are deeply incised valleys occupied by gill woodlands. To the north-west lies Bedgebury Park, an eighteenth-century park developed from a Tudor deer park. The National Collection of coniferous trees is located at Bedgebury – the pinetum started by Sir Alexander Beresford-Hope in the latter part of the nineteenth century. The highest point reaches 120m OSD and the lowest 60m OSD. The Forest straddles the water catchment ridge between two major river systems; that of the River Medway via the Rivers Teise and Beult to the north and the River Rother and the Jury Gut, draining towards Romney Marsh to the south (**Fig. 1**).

The underlying geology is predominantly Tunbridge Wells Sandstone, together with Wadhurst Clay and Ashdown Sand of the Lower Cretaceous Hastings Beds forming part of the Wealden Series. The sandstone gives rise to poor, acidic soils which have been a major factor in the presence of woodland and woody heath on this site from earliest times.



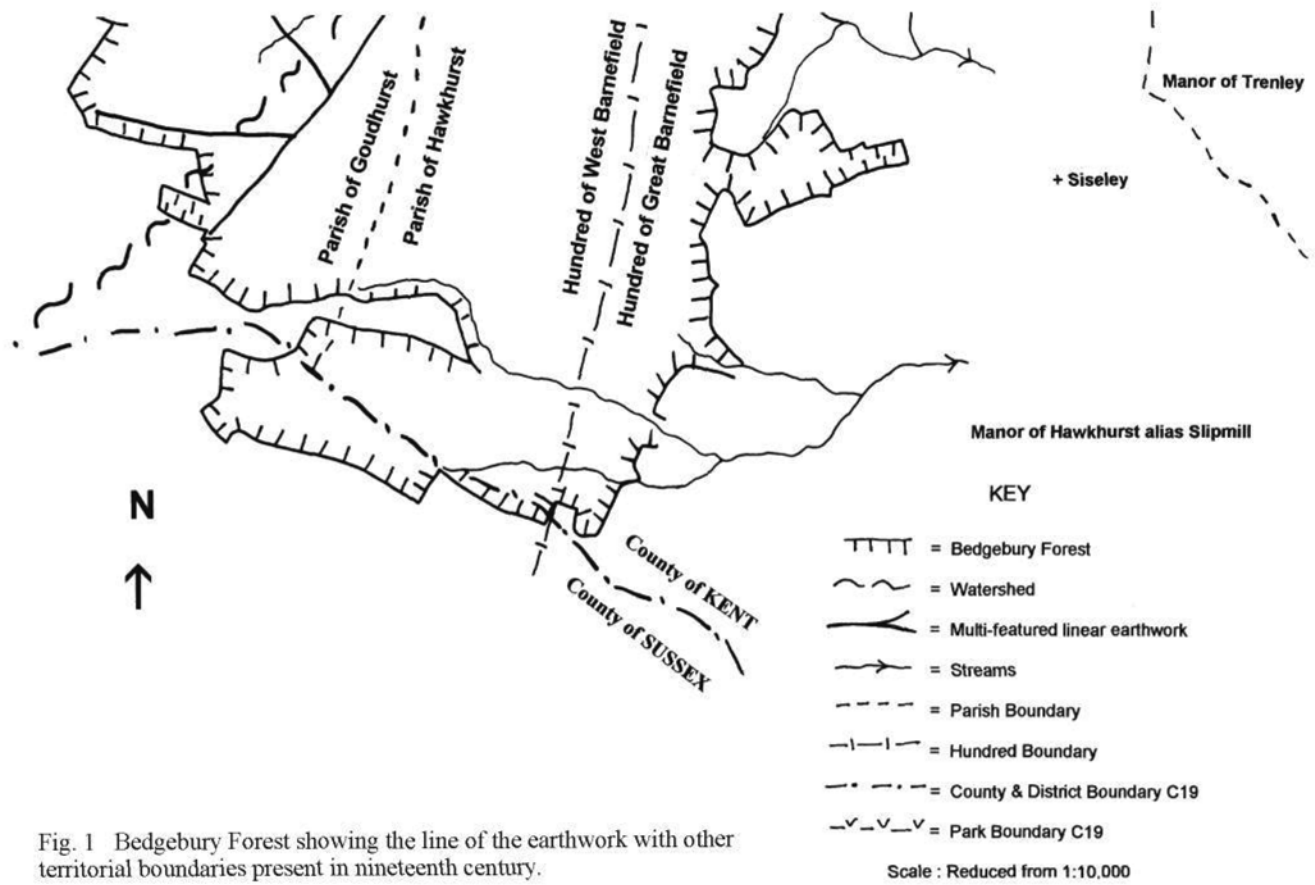


Fig. 1 Bedgebury Forest showing the line of the earthwork with other territorial boundaries present in nineteenth century.

Bedgebury Forest has its origins going back to at least the Medieval period and possibly earlier. The name 'Forest' is however a modern appellation by the Forestry Commission and does not refer to a medieval hunting 'forest' such as those that can be found further west in Sussex.¹ The origin of Bedgebury as a woodland landscape stems from its possession by the early medieval royal estates located in Holmesdale, the North Downs and along the north Kent Coast. Bedgebury Forest lies at the termination of two large Wealden commons close to the historic county boundary with Sussex and it straddles two 'Jutish' lathes and several manorial swine pastures or dens (**Fig. 2**). These are discussed in more detail below.

In the medieval period the northern part of the Forest belonged to the Bedgebury family, who probably took their name from the location. In 1424 Bedgebury passed by marriage to the Colepepper Family when Agnes, sister of John de Bedgebury, married John Colepepper. The southern part of the Forest, comprising Frith Wood and its associated gills, formed part of the holdings of the Abbot of Battle as part of the Royal Manor of Wye and remained so until the Dissolution.

By the early part of the sixteenth century Bedgebury itself had acquired a park and was visited by both Henry VIII and Elizabeth I during 'progresses' through the Weald.² Bedgebury Manor and Park remained with the Colepeppers (Culpeppers) until c.1661 when they were passed by Thomas Colepepper to Sir James Hayes.³ The mansion was rebuilt by Hayes 'a short distance from the ancient mansion'.⁴ After the death of Sir James Hayes in 1782, the Bedgebury Estate passed through a number of court cases and owners before eventually, in 1836, it was purchased by Field Marshal Viscount Lord Beresford. He married his widowed cousin Louisa Hope and Bedgebury then passed to his stepson, Alexander Beresford-Hope. A landscaped park was re-instated at Bedgebury, the house was clad in sandstone and the pinetum established. In the mid-nineteenth century Lord Beresford and his heir gradually acquired surrounding lands and woods, including Frith Wood in the southern part of Bedgebury Forest.⁵

After the Dissolution of the Abbey at Battle, the lands in the south and east of Bedgebury were granted and sold to numerous lay landowners, including Sir John Baker of Sissinghurst. Sir John Baker is recorded as owning and operating a furnace in 1574 and 1588, which lay at a distance from Cranbrook (TQ 736 325).⁶ In 1541-52, Sir John was also granted the adjacent Manor and former den of Morehouse, alias Slipmill, to hold by knight's service, which he then conveyed in 1619-20 to Henry Carey, Lord Hunsdon, who was also the Lord of the Royal Manor of Wye. Lord Hunsdon sold the den of Hawkhurst, alias Morehouse, to Sir Thomas Finch of Westwell, who in 1633 became the Earl of Winchelsea on the death of his mother. Slipmill, alias Morehouse, then descended in 1769 to George Finch Hatton of Eastwell.⁷

AN EARLY ROUTEWAY AND BOUNDARY IN BEDGEBURY FOREST

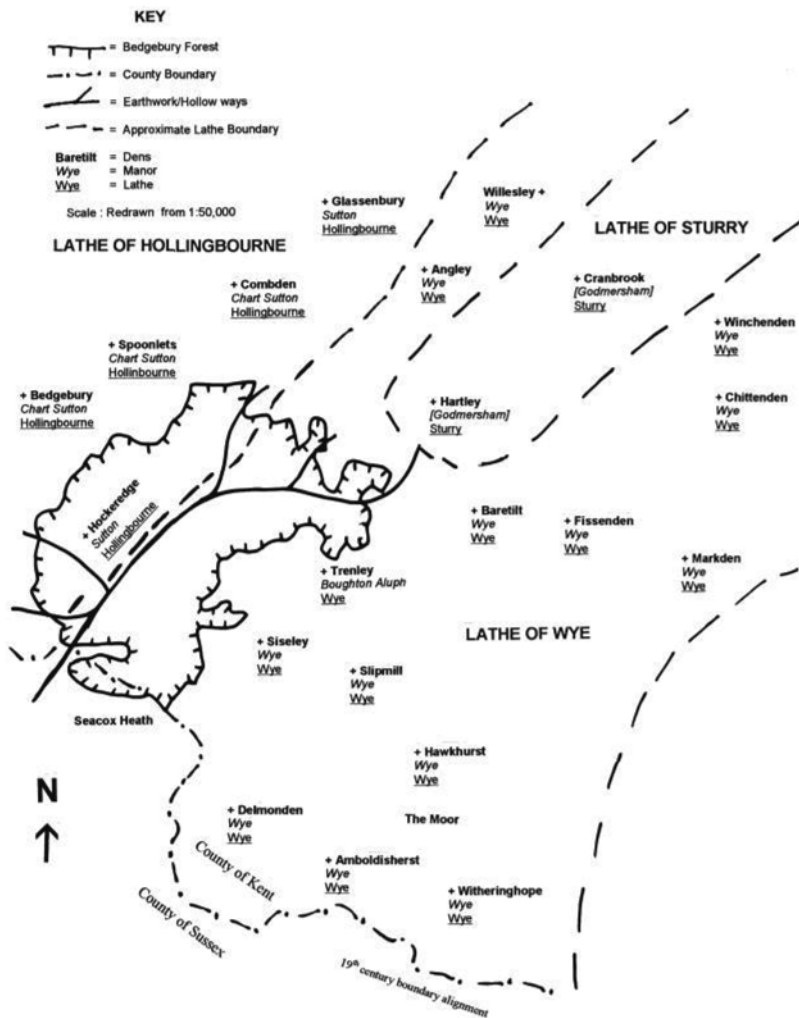


Fig. 2 The Location of the Commons and Dens around Bedgebury Forest.

Description of the linear earthwork

The linear earthwork with its associated banks and ditches, together with the linear earthworks branching from it was the main archaeological feature to be recorded by the volunteers. The measured sections in **Figs 3 and 4** show its varying nature along its course. It is an almost continuous

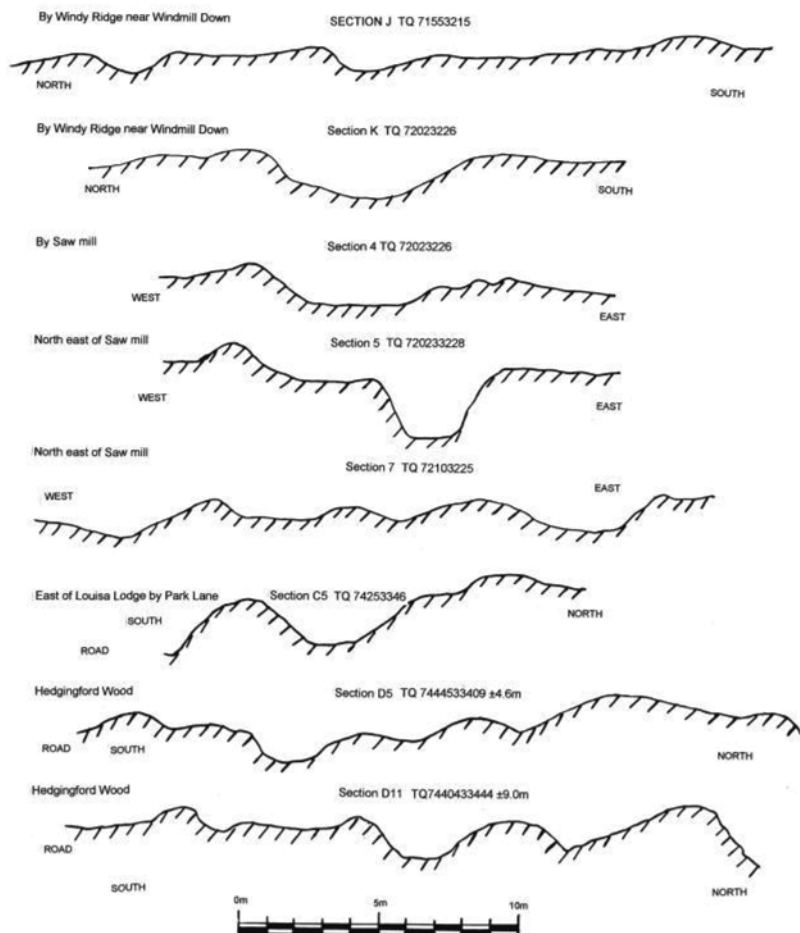


Fig. 3 Selected measured sections across the linear earthwork in Bedgebury Forest.

earthwork through the Forest from the south-west corner at Windy Ridge near Flimwell, eastwards to Louisa Lodge (Fig. 1). There is a break just before the Lodge where the earthwork could not be traced in the very dense undergrowth and possibly where it has been damaged in the past by forestry operations. The earthwork then appears again along the main route into the Forest on the northern side of Park Lane before it then disappears in the vicinity of Duke's Wood at TQ 7460 3345. At the south-west end near Windy Ridge another linear earthwork joins this main

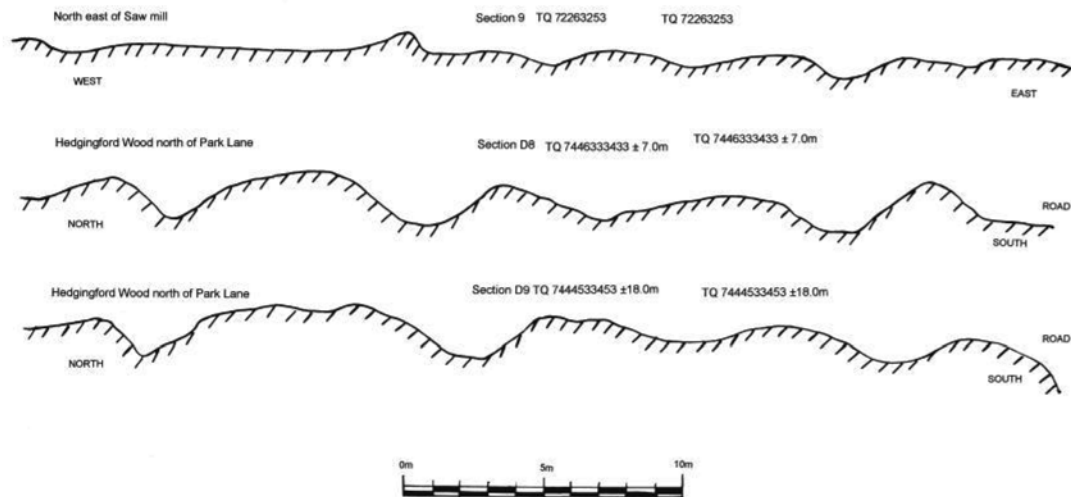


Fig. 4 Selected measured sections across the linear earthwork in Bedgery Forest.



The Earthwork near Hedgingford Wood (*Jane Davidson*)

one close to the site of the former sawmill (TQ 7199 3214). A second branch comes in from the north from Furnace Farm, passing the former brickworks and joins the main earthwork close to 'Rattlestile Gate' (c.TQ 7290 3340). Further study of the aerial photographs and historic maps suggests that there may be other associated linear earthworks in the vicinity of Hedgingford Wood (c.TQ 7430 3360).

Windy Ridge to the Sawmill: at its extreme south-western end the earthwork has been truncated by the enclosure around the water tower or reservoir. Here the earthwork comprises two ditches bounding a track with another low wide bank on the southern side. The earthwork is about 15m in width with the ditches up to 0.75m deep and 1.5m wide. The bank is less than 0.4m high and about 3.0m wide (see Fig. 3).

As the earthwork progresses eastwards it becomes more like a hollow way in character up to 1.5m deep and over 5m wide. Where another linear earthwork joins it close to the sawmill, the ditches are less pronounced and the bank now on the northern side has a sharper asymmetrical profile. The branch joining from the south-west is very much like a hollow way in its make up, and a small quarry has been dug into the side about mid-way along (c.TQ 7185 3200).



Exposure of the multiple banks and ditches by mountain bikes (*David Bonsall*)

Sawmill to Rattlestile Gate: a forest road, the sawmill curtilage and a recent water pipeline easement have destroyed the earthwork at the sawmill, but it can be located again just to the north-west of the timber shed (TQ 7200 3222). Between this point and Rattlestile Gate the linear earthwork is at its most varied in structure with up to six banks and ditches and is at its greatest size at over 60m wide. With this section the earthwork is

traversing a wide flat ridge which is over 100m OSD; the ridge forms the watershed between the Medway and Rother. A further hollow way comes in from the west joins the main earthwork, north of the sawmill.

There is considerable variation in the form of the earthwork in this section. At the southern end close to the sawmill the earthwork retains its hollow way characteristics, reaching over 2m in depth and 3m wide, with low banks on either side (Fig. 3). However, further north towards Rattlestile Gate the earthwork has broadened out and become less pronounced, but with more banks and ditches running in parallel (Fig. 4). At Rattlestile Gate the earthwork comprises a hollow way bounded by double bank and ditch complex.

Rattlestile Gate to Louisa Lodge: here the probable line of the earthwork curves from south-west/north-east to east-west and the linear earthwork from Furnace Farm joins it. At this point the fieldworkers encountered very dense undergrowth and birch re-growth which has developed after the 1987 Storm, together with young conifer plantations, which made following the line of the earthwork impossible. Examination of 1947 RAF aerial photographs, taken when much of the Forest had been felled for the war effort, indicates that the line is preserved as an extant earthwork, though possibly now degraded by subsequent forestry activity.

Louisa Lodge to the edge of the Forest along Park Lane: the last prominent section runs from the vicinity of 'Hedgingford alias Ellis's Gate' (TQ 7420 3150) eastwards along Park Lane from Hartley. The ground here slopes uphill from 100-117m OSD and the earthwork lying on the north side of the lane comprises at least two (not counting the lane itself) hollow ways with accompanying banks. At their shallowest the hollows are less than 1.0m but reach to 2.5m at their deepest with banks up to 1.0m high and over 3.0m wide (Fig. 3, Section D5). Another linear earthwork comes in from the north to join the main one at TQ 7435 3145 together with several other banks, all lying in Hedgingford Wood. On the southern side of Park Lane and running parallel with it there are traces of the remains of a further hollow way and banks in what was Great Shear Wood. These together with the earthworks in Hedgingford Wood were observed but have yet to be recorded in detail.

The earthwork's possible origins and functions

To try and understand the origin of this earthwork it is important to see how its line has been used in the past by undertaking a form of 'historic regression' from the collation of the archive evidence (see **Table 1**). The most recent archival evidence is the RAF 1947 aerial photographs which show almost its entire length.⁸

AN EARLY ROUTEWAY AND BOUNDARY IN BEDGEBURY FOREST

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF THE TERRITORIAL BOUNDARIES RUNNING THROUGH AND AROUND BEDGEBURY FOREST IN ORDER OF ANTIQUITY

Type of Division	Description	West and North of linear earthwork	East and South of linear earthwork
Water Catchment	Physical division of ridge of hills between headwaters of two rivers	River Medway and its tributaries	River Rother, Jury Gut and their tributaries
Iron Way	Possible prehistoric routes along which iron ore and iron products were transported	Routeway	Routeway
Lathe	Originally Jutish agricultural estates, which in Weald comprised large wood-pasture commons	Hollingbourne	Wye Sturry
Den	Jutish wealden swine pastures carved from the Lathes and belonged to 'parent' manors outside of the Weald.	Manor of Chart Sutton – Bedgebury Spoonlets	Royal Manor of Wye – Siseley
Parish	Areas served by parson from parish church & to whom it paid tithes etc.	Goudhurst	Manor of Boughton Aluph – Trenley Hawkhurst Cranbrook
Hundred	10 tithings or land held by 100 families. Administered by a Hundred Court	West or Little Bamefield	Great Bamefield
Wealden Manor	Manors evolving from Dens. Held by lords in return for feudal services. Manorial tenants administered by Manorial Courts	Manor of Bedgebury	Manor of Slip Mill alias Morehouse Manor of Wye
Ownership	Division between several landowners. Present in early C19 and possibly earlier.	Bedgebury Park Estate – Beresford-Hope	Edward J. Curteis and J. Roberts
Land Use	Woodland, Wood pasture and Deer Parks	Bedgebury Deer Park and warren ?	Frith Wood and 'down'

In the nineteenth century the earthwork appears to have formed the division between two landowners; the Bedgebury Park Estate to the north belonging to Beresford Hope and to the south the woods and lands belonging to Edward J. Curteis and J. Roberts.⁹ It also marks the division between Frith Wood and Shear Wood, both anciently enclosed woodlands to the south, and possibly Bedgebury deer park and warren to the north. Bedgebury Park Wood lies to the north of the earthwork and may be the woods recorded in 1618 as 'new ground'.¹⁰ The area known as 'Windmill Down' may have been the site of the 'warren' lying close to Bedgebury Park.¹¹ This documentary evidence suggests that possibly one or two of the bank and ditches of the earthwork are either remains of woodbanks and/or park pales. The open nature of the land to the north of the earthwork compared with the anciently enclosed woodland of Frith Wood and its neighbours to the south is indicated by the fact that all the recorded hollow ways which join the main earthwork come in from the northern side; no hollow ways are recorded joining the main earthwork from the south through the enclosed woodland (Fig. 1).

Further evidence for the earthwork's origin comes from the medieval period with the partial alignment of parish boundaries and possibly the Hundred boundary along parts of the earthwork. The Tithe Maps for Goudhurst and Hawkhurst record that part of their boundaries lie along the section south of Rattlestile Gate.¹² Possibly the division of Barnefield Hundred into West and Great Barnefield may have also followed in part this alignment.¹³

However, it is in the early medieval period that the earthwork's possible greater antiquity appears more evident. As already mentioned above, Bedgebury Forest lies at the end of two early Jutish Wealden wood-pasture commons belonging to royal estates, that of the Royal Manor of Wye and that of Milton Regis. Witney in his seminal work on Jutish settlement describes these commons which eventually evolved into the Kentish lathes.¹⁴ Bedgebury straddles the common of Hollingbourne which comes in from the north and west, formerly part of the royal estate of Milton Regis, and the common of Wye from the south and east (Fig. 3). The lathe of Sturry carved from the Faversham common terminates just before the Forest. As Witney states, the Wealden common of Wye and subsequently the lathe appears to occupy the territory of the catchment of the River Rother.¹⁵ By the sixth century AD there is evidence that the Wealden commons were being broken up into smaller swine pastures attached to parent and daughter manors to the north and east of the Weald. The creation of these dens from the territories of the commons probably continued the divisions between them. The Manor of Chart Sutton lying in the Chart Hills in Hollingbourne common and subsequently the lathe had the dens of Bedgebury and Spoonlets.¹⁶ These probably lay in the northern part of Bedgebury and are now occupied by Bedgebury Park and Wood.

The Royal Manor of Wye held twelve dens in the vicinity of Cranbrook and Hawkhurst with the den of Siseley lying close to Bedgebury Forest; the name still survives at Siseley Farm. These dens in Hawkhurst were the subject of an agreement of 1285 between the Abbot of Battle and his tenants in the Manor of Wye. In exchange for taking the den of Angley in Cranbrook as demesne land, the Abbot sold the timber rights in his remaining dens to his tenants.¹⁷ Seven of those twelve dens lay in what was to become the parish of Hawkhurst and comprised the den of Hawkhurst itself, Baretilt, Delmonden and Siseley (all still readily identifiable as places in the landscape today). In addition there was Fissenden which is recorded on the Hawkhurst Tithe Map just west of Netter's Hall; Amboldosherst (Cowden) and Witheringhope (East Heath). The last two mentioned can be identified from a perambulation of the Hawkhurst dens in 1507.¹⁸ The perambulation describes the location of the Siseley den which places it in the vicinity of Bedgebury Forest and its boundary in all probability following the edge of the former Wealden common.

The den of Trenley belonged to the Manor of Boughton Aluph which had been created out of lands of the Royal Manor of Wye.¹⁹ This den can be identified as Trenley Farm and its territory forms a spur of land in the parish of Cranbrook extending into the parish of Hawkhurst; its boundaries marked by gill streams and probably on the north side by the linear earthwork where it runs parallel with Park Lane.

Table 2 summarises the commons, lathes, manors and dens within the vicinity of Bedgebury. When these are mapped out it can be seen how the alignment of the linear earthwork forms a key division to the two main groups – Hollingbourne and Wye (Fig. 2).

However, the origins of this earthwork may go back much further in time. Witney refers to the old iron ways or routes from the iron producing areas in East Sussex and the settlements to the north and east in Kent.²⁰ Margary refers to the prehistoric iron ways in his work on Roman and pre-Roman routes through the Weald, and that these routes tended to follow the ridgeways.²¹ This would fit for the linear earthwork which runs along the highest ground within Bedgebury Forest.

Looking beyond the confines of the Forest and considering the earthwork as a possible prehistoric route, in the wider landscape context it can be seen that it aligns with other possible Roman and pre-Roman routes through the Weald. The linear earthwork which comes in from the south to join with the main one near the sawmill extends south to the line of the A21. A similar banked and ditched hollow way has been observed by the authors in the woodland on the west of the A21 – Lodgefield and Yellowcoat Woods close to the East Sussex Woodland Enterprise Centre (TQ 7160 3090). This route extends south towards the iron producing area at Beauport Park, whilst the route through Ticehurst would reach the iron-producing area at Bardown.

TABLE 2. SUMMARY OF THE LATHES, DENS AND MANORS AROUND
BEDGEBURY FOREST

Lathe and Common	Parent Manor	Other Manors	Dens	Other Places named
Lathe and common of Wye	Royal Manor of Wye		Hawkhurst in [Hawkhurst] Baretilt in [Hawkhurst] Delmonden in [Hawkhurst] Sisely in [Hawkhurst] Fissenden in [Hawkhurst] Amboldiherst [Cowden] in [Hawkhurst] Witheringhope [East Heath] in [Hawkhurst] Angley in Cranbrook Chiltenden in Cranbrook Winchenden [Farmingham] in Cranbrook Wyneslesle [Willesley] Cranbrook Markeden [Marden] edge Cranbrook	Manor of Slipmill in Hawkhurst lies within area of dens of Hawkhurst and Sisley.
		Manor of Boughton Aluph	Swattenden in Cranbrook Trenley in Cranbrook	Also Gordons Wood by Robins Wood

It may be that the linear earthwork provided a route along which the Abbot of Battle and his bailiffs could travel between his manor of Wye and his Abbey whilst still staying on or near his manorial swine pastures. However by the eighteenth century the earthwork had appeared to cease functioning as any kind of routeway as the majority of its length is not shown on the Ordnance Surveyor's Draft Drawings for the 1in. 1st Edition.²²

Conclusions

It is possible that elements of this earthwork were initially functioning in the prehistoric and Roman periods as a trackway following the high ground or ridge between two water catchments and linking the iron-

producing areas in the East Sussex Weald with the settlements in north and east Kent. As a defined track or route it then developed as a division between the early Wealden commons which in turn were broken up into swine pastures; these also appeared to respect the alignment. Thus it became not only a drove route but also a key territorial division which in this remote area in the Weald possibly needed to be clearly defined by an earthwork. Once established as a landscape element, subsequent territorial divisions also began to respect all or part of it, such as manors, parishes and hundreds. This use as a boundary was continued at a local level by marking the division between different landowners and also different land uses; on the south side an enclosed woodland – Frith Wood and its neighbours – whilst to the north possibly a wooded heath which in turn was emparked and used as a rabbit warren in the early post-medieval period, before being planted up as sweet chestnut coppice.

This initial assessment of the linear earthwork has highlighted many areas where much more detailed research is needed, both documentary and fieldwork, perhaps including exploratory excavations. It is hoped that this work will continue in the near future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The survey of Bedgebury Forest would not have taken place if it had not been for the dedicated team of volunteers. The authors would like to thank them all for their time and commitment (especially to those who undertook the field work, often in appallingly wet weather and difficult ground conditions). In alphabetical order they are: Vivienne Blandford, David Bonsall, David Brown, Jane Davidson, Debbie Dixon, Marilyn and Malcolm Dove, Charles Harding, Nick Hayward, Margaret Howard, Susan Pittman, Keith Prior, Daphne Richards, Sue Sagers, Bob Shave, Tony Singleton, John Stafford, Eleanor Tucker, Lindel Williams and John Wilson.

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ENDNOTES

¹ Bedgebury Forest lies at the end of long ridge of high ground which extends westwards to Crawley along which are located a number of ancient 'forests' such as Ashdown, Worth and St Leonard's.

² Henry VIII visited Bedgebury on 27-28 August 1538 (TNA OBS 1419) and Elizabeth visited in 1573 (Hasted 1797, vol. VII, p. 74).

³ Hasted, E., 1797, vol. VII, p. 75. Sir James Hayes was one of the founders of the Hudson's Bay Company. See, *The Story of the Hudson's Bay Company*, vol. I, 'The Company of Adventurers', by Peter C. Newman, 1985.

⁴ Hasted, E., 1797, vol. VII, p. 75. The site of the medieval mansion is reputed to lie beneath the Great Lake. However, there is a possibility that another potential site for the de Bedgebury's home may be the scheduled moated settlement at Furnace Farm approximately one mile north-east of Bedgebury.

⁵ For further details on the Beresford-Hopes at Bedgebury, see Gordon Batchelor, 1996, *The Beresfords of Bedgebury Park*, Goudhurst and Kilndown Local History Society.

⁶ Cleere, H. and Crossley, D., 1995, *The Iron Industry of the Weald*, Merton Priory Press, p. 332.

⁷ Hasted, E., 1797, vol. VII, pp. 143-144. MSS held by the former Wye College Library owned by Imperial College, London. Wye College is due to close in the summer of 2009 and the future repository of these archives is not known to the authors. See also Bannister, N.R. (1995), Wye College Estate: historic landscape survey. Unpublished report in two volumes for English Heritage at the Centre for Kentish Studies [CKS].

⁸ Kent County Council, Heritage Section, RAF 106G/UK 1439 30th April 1946 4185-4189.

⁹ The National Archives CRES 38/944/6, 19.

¹⁰ British Museum Cart. Harl. 77.D.10 1618; The authors are indebted to Jane Davidson for following up these references and to Susan Pittman for transcribing the documents.

¹¹ BM Cart. Harl. 77. F. 33 1620.

¹² CKS Goudhurst Tithe Map 1840 surveyed by J. and P. Payte, W. Gibson and J. Gill; Hawkhurst Tithe Map, 1838, surveyed by Messrs Martyr and Wright of Greenwich. See also CKS P178/28/70 Parish map of Hawkhurst, 1818, by F. Young.

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¹³ Hasted, E., 1797, *Map of the Hundred of Great Barnefield*, vol. VII.

¹⁴ Witney, K.P., 1976, *The Jutish Forest*, p. 39.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹⁶ Anglo-Saxon Charter AD 814 [BCS no. 343]; Sawyer, P.H., 1968, *Anglo-Saxon Charters and annotated list and bibliography no. 173*. 'Cenwulf, king of Mercia, to Swithnoth, his comes; grant of land near Chart Sutton, Kent, with swine pastures'. Wallenberg, J.K., 1931, *Kentish Place Names*, pp. 125-32; Cowper, H.S., 1915, 'A Wealden Charter of AD 814', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xxxi, 203-205.

¹⁷ Furley, ii (1), pp. 198-201.

¹⁸ Lightfoot, W.J., 'Notes from the records of Hawkhurst Church', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, v, 79-84.

¹⁹ Furley, ii (2), pp. 703, 710.

²⁰ Witney, pp. 1-30.

²¹ *Ibid.*; Margary, I.D., 1948, *Roman Ways in the Weald*. Phoenix House.

²² BM Ordnance Surveyor's Draft Drawings for the 1in. 1st Edition, Kent, Sheet 102.