

NOTES

CIVIL WAR EARTHWORKS EAST OF ALTON

Abstract

Three recently-discovered earthworks of probable Civil War date, in the vicinity of Isington, are described and discussed in their probable historical context.

Red Cap Copse, Isington (SU 786 322) (Fig 1 no 1, Fig 2)

Close up against the steep malmstone north-facing escarpment, and constructed of materials quarried from it is an elevated horn-work of Dutch design with the two horns pointing east (Duffy 1979, 90–3). It would have been effective in dealing with hostile forces advancing up Crocken Hill from Holt Hatch or Amisford bridge; a weak point in the steep hangers to the north and east of the Binsted plateau.

The mount measures 62.50 by 37.50m and has its maximum elevation of 4.50m at the horns between which the main gun would have been placed. There is a slight hollow in the centre of the mound behind the horns where the powder would have been stored, and a mud-work along the top of the most vulnerable southern side overlooked by the hanger. Against the north side of the mound is a raised half-hexagon work with the whole in turn enclosed by a trapezoidal mud-work.

A quite common medium-bore Saker capable of delivering a 5¼ lb ball had a range of 2170 yards at 10 degrees elevation (Eldred 1646), enabling it to reach the main Alton-Farnham road with ease from this point. Larger guns had an even greater range. The sconce-like elevation of this earthwork would also give its gun slightly greater reach, and with the hanger behind it and considerable tree cover it would have been an effective concealed battery.

Cathams, Isington (SU 782 423) (Fig 1 no 2)

To the west of Red Cap Copse, in a ploughed field called Cathams, infra-red aerial photography has revealed another less elevated rectangular gun battery mound facing north east, with a diamond-shaped mud-work bastion of *c.* 3 ha attached to that side (Fig 3). Very little is visible on the ground apart from a slight hump marking the battery. There is, however, a very short length of the east side of the mud-work bastion preserved in a field boundary.

Kings Close, Isington (SU 782 425) (Fig 1 no 3)

Kings Close lies immediately north of and adjacent to the Cathams fort. It appears to be an unfinished flanked redoubt of *c.* 6 ha with only one surviving ravelin; that at the south-west corner. In the centre of this is a mound. This may have been intended for an artillery piece, but could equally be a later piece of garden landscaping for the house to the north, for which the southern part of the redoubt acts as a garden.

Historical Background

The autumn of 1643 saw a great deal of military activity to the west of Farnham, with Royalist forces active from that direction against the recently established Parliamentary garrison in that town (Godwin 1904, 109). On 30th October the severely under-strength forces of Sir William Waller in Farnham were reinforced by the Yellow, Green and Red regiments. Combined with his original force there were in total 29 companies of infantry besides horse and dragoons (Godwin 1904, 109). Friday 3rd November saw the combined force march west from Farnham

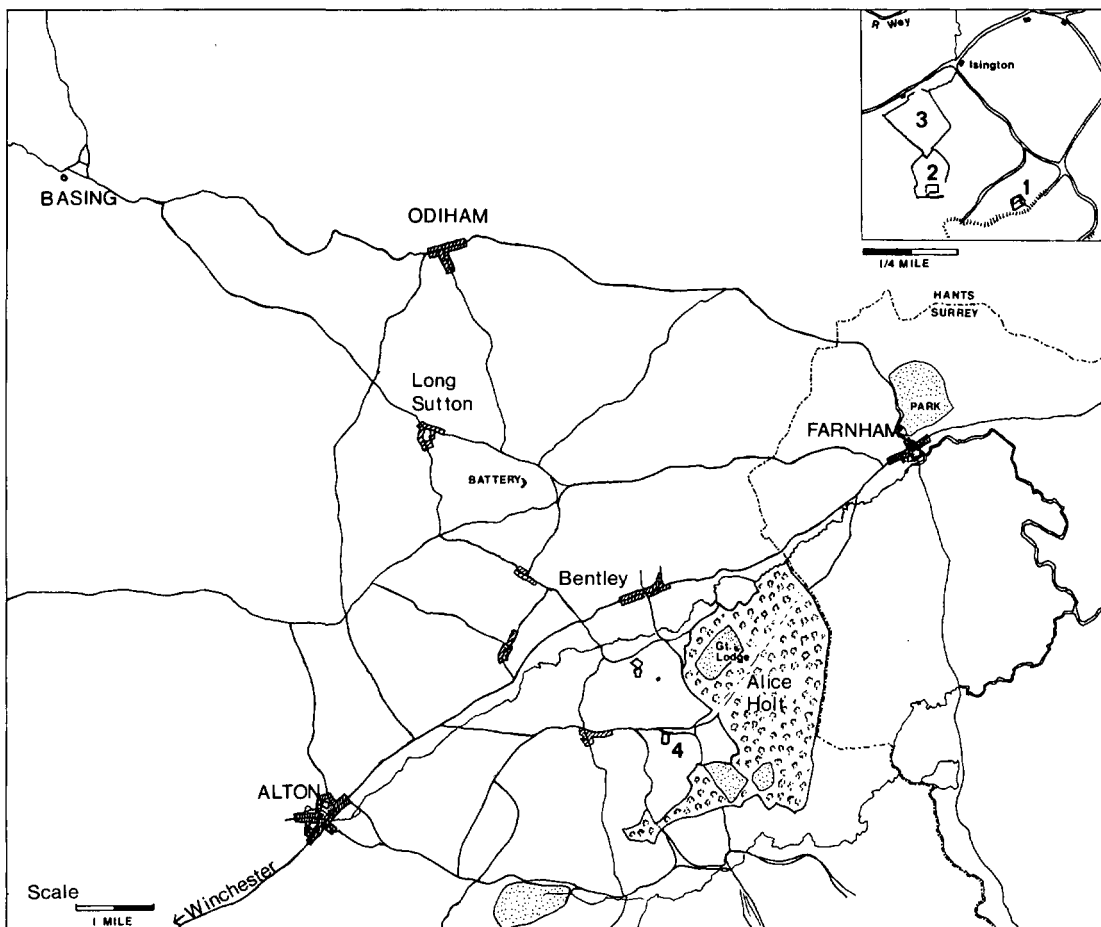


Fig 1. Map of the arena of military operations in north-east Hampshire during the autumn of 1643, with an inset plan of the Isington fortifications.

towards Alton. This force now consisted of 16 troops of horse, 8 companies of dragoons, 36 companies of foot and an artillery train consisting of 10 heavy guns and 6 cases of small drakes. Deteriorating weather, however, caused Waller to retreat to quarters on the following day (Godwin 1904, 110).

On Sunday 5th November, after a great muster in the neighbourhood of Alton, Waller moved out again and attacked Basing House the following day. Lord Hopton's Royalist force spent ten days gathering reinforcements at Winchester until an army had been raised

nearly equal in strength to that of Waller (Hopton 1902, 64). He then moved to the relief of Basing, causing the cautious Waller to retire to Farnham on the 15th. Waller began to fortify Farnham with breastworks and the like. He appealed for reinforcements, being greatly troubled by desertions due to arrears of pay. By 18th November his position was precarious in the extreme, being down to 1200 foot and 15 troops of horse (Godwin 1904, 125).

Hopton's main force was quartered at Odiham, with advance forces under Sir Edward Stowell at Long Sutton. Most of the

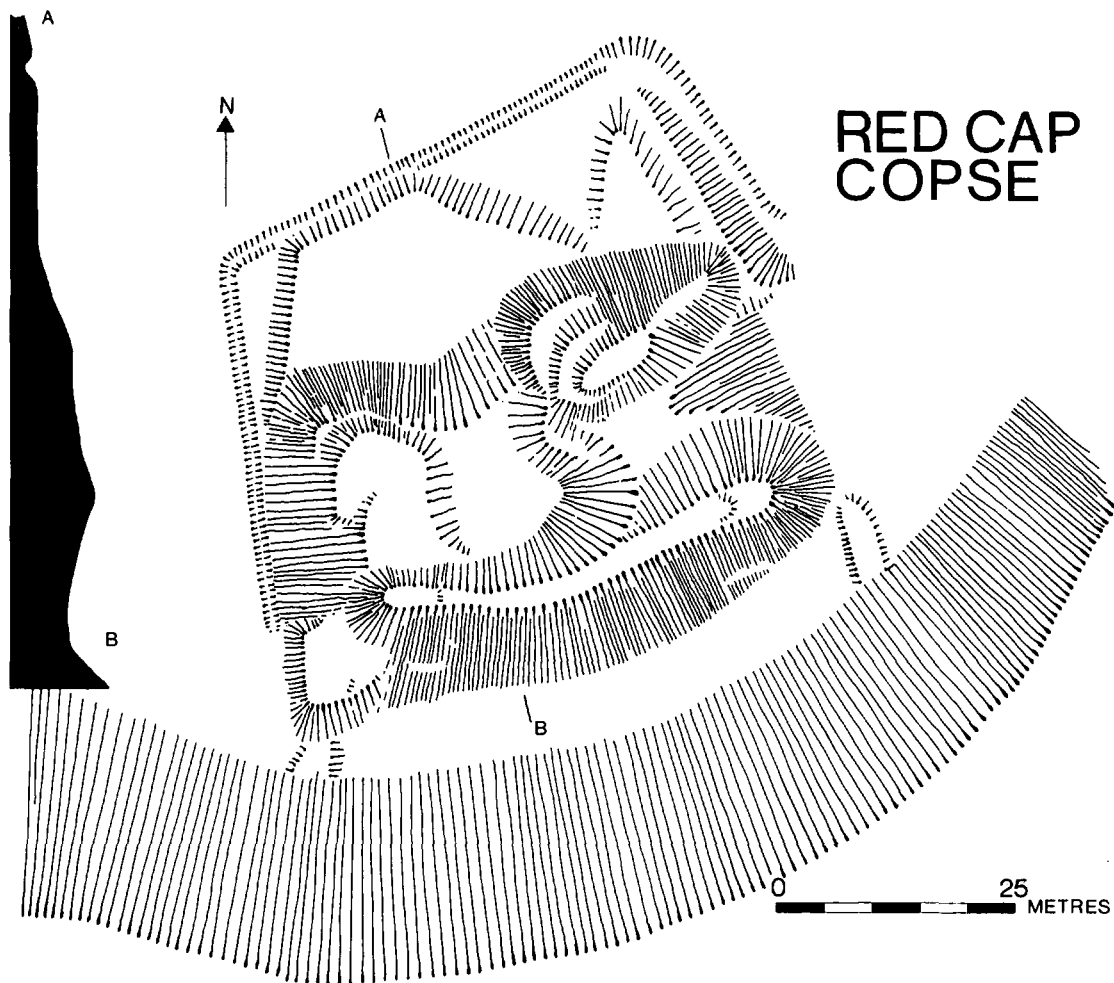


Fig 2. The hornwork in Red Cap Copse, Isington. Plan and section.

actions during this period took place to the north-west of Farnham, but Royalist forces were also active to the south-west: witness an incident on 21st November when some of Waller's soldiers hunting deer in the Great Lodge Park of Alice Holt were ambushed by Cavalier scouts in a mist and nine of them captured (Godwin 1904, 128).

Waller's position steadily improved, but defences were still being constructed around Farnham on the 24th. An attack by Hopton

from Crondall was beaten off by the Farnham castle artillery on the 27th. This was followed the next day by another unsuccessful attack, but Hopton was forced to retire to Basing on the 29th suffering from supply shortages (Hopton 1902, 66). The Royalists were now on the defensive, with Hopton transferring his operational base to Petersfield and fatally splitting his forces. On 1st December, part of his army under Lord Crawford moved into Alton and 'began to fortify that town with all

the speed he could' (Godwin 1904, 142). Hopton was very troubled by the insecurity of Alton and gave orders that should Waller move on the town. Crawford was to rejoin the main Royalist force.

On Saturday 9th December Waller sent a force towards Alton which beat up Lord Crawford's quarters and after fell back on Farnham. Cavalier scouts had concentrated their attention on the main road between Farnham and Alton, and because of this, when Waller finally attacked Alton on 12th December, he took the upper road through Long Sutton and surprised and routed Lord Crawford's garrison from an unexpected quarter (Godwin 1904, 143; Hyde 1967, 193).

Discussion

With all this military activity, one might expect to find Civil War entrenchments guarding the roads between Alton and Farnham in the Wey valley and elsewhere. As described above, such a concentration of fortifications exist at Isington on the south bank of the Wey, commanding Bentley Green and the main road beyond. The three forts are of differing designs, but in close proximity. They are, judging from the placing of the Red Cap Copse and Cathams forts, facing east and north-east as they do, almost certainly Royalist works. This notion is further supported by the name King's Close. They may be supplemented by a fourth possible fortification in and around the medieval earthworks of Bullinghurst manor, on the south side of Binsted street overlooking Alice Holt, guarding the southern route from Farnham to Alton via Binsted (see note below).

In view of the fact that Sir William Waller was able to review his forces on Bentley Green on 3rd November 1643, well within artillery range of the Isington batteries, it is unlikely that they existed then. The arrival of Hopton on 15th November gives us the earliest likely date for their construction to have commenced, although the Royalist force was mainly active further north. The new sites, together with the already known 'Battery' site at Court Gardens, Long Sutton (Fig 1), form a coherent system of defences stretching south from Hopton's headquarters at Odiham, designed to detect and stall any flanking movements by Waller on Basing and Winchester.

It is unlikely that Lord Crawford's much reduced force was capable of adequately manning these outworks. The King's Cross fort does, however, slightly overlap the Catham's one, and being unfinished may be the work of his men. If this was the case, it would be part of his defences of Alton commenced on 1st December and abruptly curtailed by the events of the 12th of that month.

References

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