
Swanborough Tump

by Sarah Semple¹ and Alex Langlands²

Swanborough Tump is situated in the ancient parish of Manningford Abbots, close to the western boundary of the hundred of Swanborough (SU 1300 6010) (Figure 1). The Tump presently comprises a low mound, positioned in an area of woodland,

immediately adjacent to the Pewsey to Manningford Bruce road. Despite the mutilated condition of the monument, no evidence for any antiquarian intervention has emerged. The Tump is thought to be the marker for the meeting-place of Swanborough

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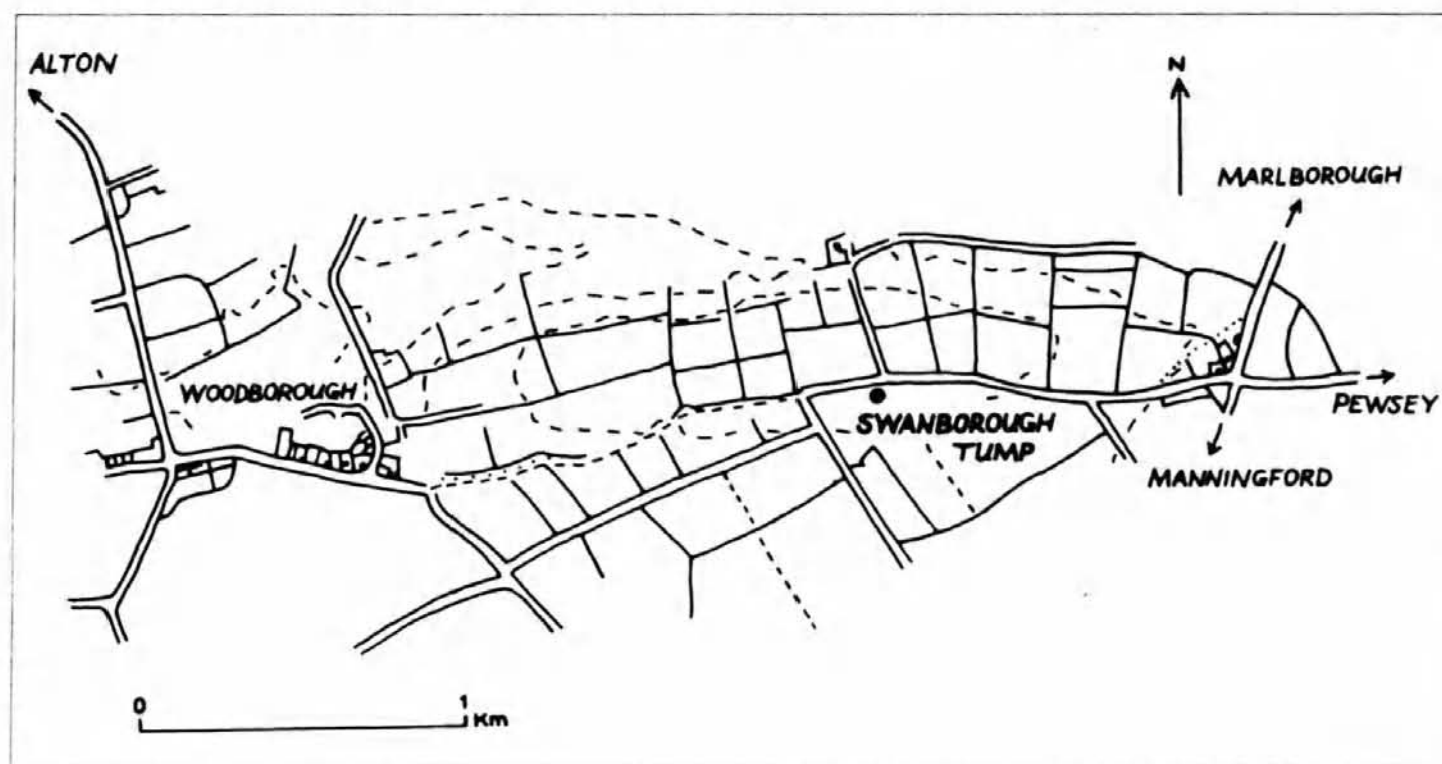


Fig. 1. Location of Swanborough Tump

Hundred. In August 1999 a survey of the mound and surrounding earthworks was undertaken by the authors to provide an accurate record of the monument and to investigate the extent and arrangement of the remains.

The meeting place of Swanborough Hundred is indicated by the hundred name, *Swaneberga hundred* 1086 Exon DB (Gover *et al.* 1939, 317). The *Liber Monasterii de Hyda*, a 15th century document (Edwards 1866), preserves a land charter of AD 987 for Manningford Abbots, an estate running south from Swanborough Tump (Sawyer 1968, 865). In the attached set of estate bounds written in Old English *swanabeorh* (swan + beorh: 'barrow, hill or mound of the peasants or common men') is mentioned, a reference to Swanborough Tump. The Tump therefore, is presumed to be the late Anglo-Saxon meeting place for Swanborough Hundred (VCH 1957, 182; VCH 1975, 5, 106).

The monument is positioned on a long low natural rise at the junction of two routes (Figure 1). The north-south path to the east of the monument, known locally as Dragon Lane, is of uncertain date. The northern section from Cocklebury Farm to the Tump is unlikely to predate the Kennet and Avon Canal and Cocklebury Farm. The southern section leading to Manningford Bruce may be earlier. The east-west route may however, form part of a long distance communication linking Burbage to Pewsey and continuing west to Woodborough and possibly

Etchilhampton (Figure 2). The antiquity of the Burbage to Pewsey section is suggested by a number of references evident in pre-conquest charter material. The existence of the road is indicated also in the charter for Manningford dated to AD 987 (Sawyer 1968, 865), where the OE bounds running east from Swanborough Tump in the direction of Pewsey travel along the *weges* (way or road). The bounds then depart from the road continuing in a north-east direction along the *smalan granan paeth* (small . . . path), eventually meeting the *bradan wege* (broad way or road), represented by the modern north-south route from Marlborough to Manningford. West of Swanborough Tump, the mention of a *stanford* in the AD 941 charter bounds for Beechingstoke (Sawyer 1968, 478) provides possible pre-conquest evidence for the continuation of the Burbage to Pewsey to Swanborough route west to Woodborough. The existence of a modern place-name *Harepath Farm* located on the outskirts of Burbage, on the course of the Pewsey to Burbage road, may be further evidence of the road's pre-conquest importance as a major thoroughfare. The route may also have passed in immediate proximity to the suggested late Anglo-Saxon meeting place, Etchilhampton Hill (see Tinkfield Farm, Gover *et al.* 1939, 313; Aliko Pantos pers. comm.). Pewsey functioned as an important settlement in the 9th century and the route may be of this period if not earlier.

The Tump is located in Frith Copse, woodland probably no earlier than the 19th century; the earliest record being *Frith Coppice* c.1840 TA. To the north is Swanborough Field and there is some suggestion of a second barrow in this field in the vicinity of the Tump (Beaven pers. comm.).

An earthwork survey was undertaken at a scale of 1:100 (Figure 3). A long low earthwork was identified oriented north-east to south-west. The long mound is partially truncated at its north-west end by the road and has two definite summits. Two lobes are visible, positioned either side of the south-west end. The survey indicates some destruction or intervention may have taken place in the past creating the unusual shape of the mound to the north-west. The twin summits suggest either further undocumented intervention towards the centre, or that the monument comprises two mounds built in immediate proximity. A comparable pair of round barrows is located on Roundway Hill. These are visible as a single long

mound, but intervention in the 19th century demonstrated the presence of two monuments (SU 0150 6480).

The use of a Neolithic long barrow as an early medieval meeting place is evidenced at Knightlow (Warwickshire) and the selection of Bronze Age round barrows is an attested phenomenon e.g. Mutlow (Cambridgeshire). A late Anglo-Saxon construction date for some meeting mounds, evidence for a purposeful and politically driven period of monument construction in the 10th and 11th centuries, is plausibly argued by Adkins and Petchey (1984, 243-151). The erosion of a considerable portion of Swanborough Tump by the Pewsey to Woodborough road could be used to argue for a *terminus ante quem* of the 9th century, but damage in more recent centuries cannot be ruled out. The survey presents an accurate record of the form and extent of the monument at the present time. Its structure and the date of its construction still remain to be established.

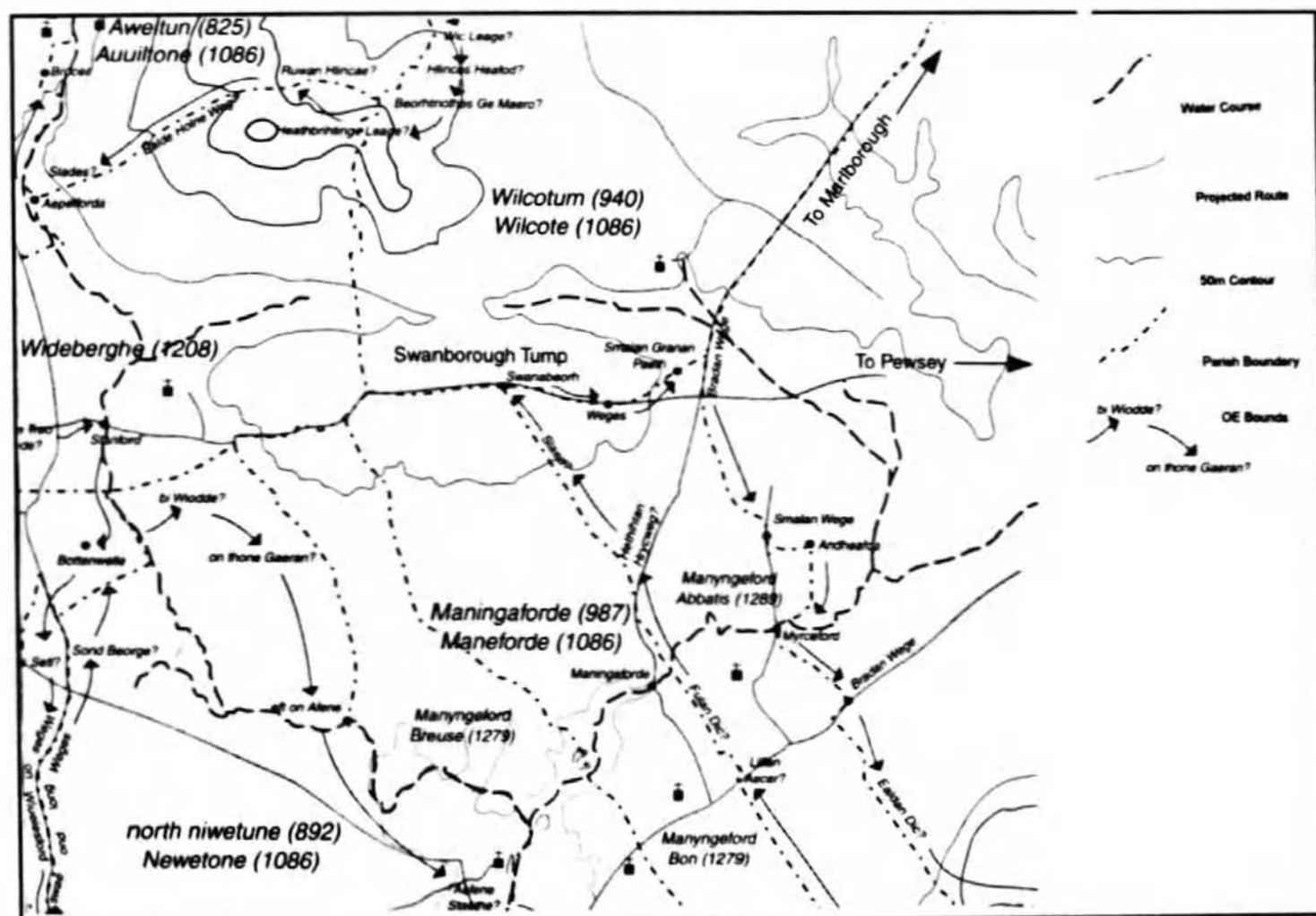


Fig. 2. Possible routeways demonstrated through documentary evidence

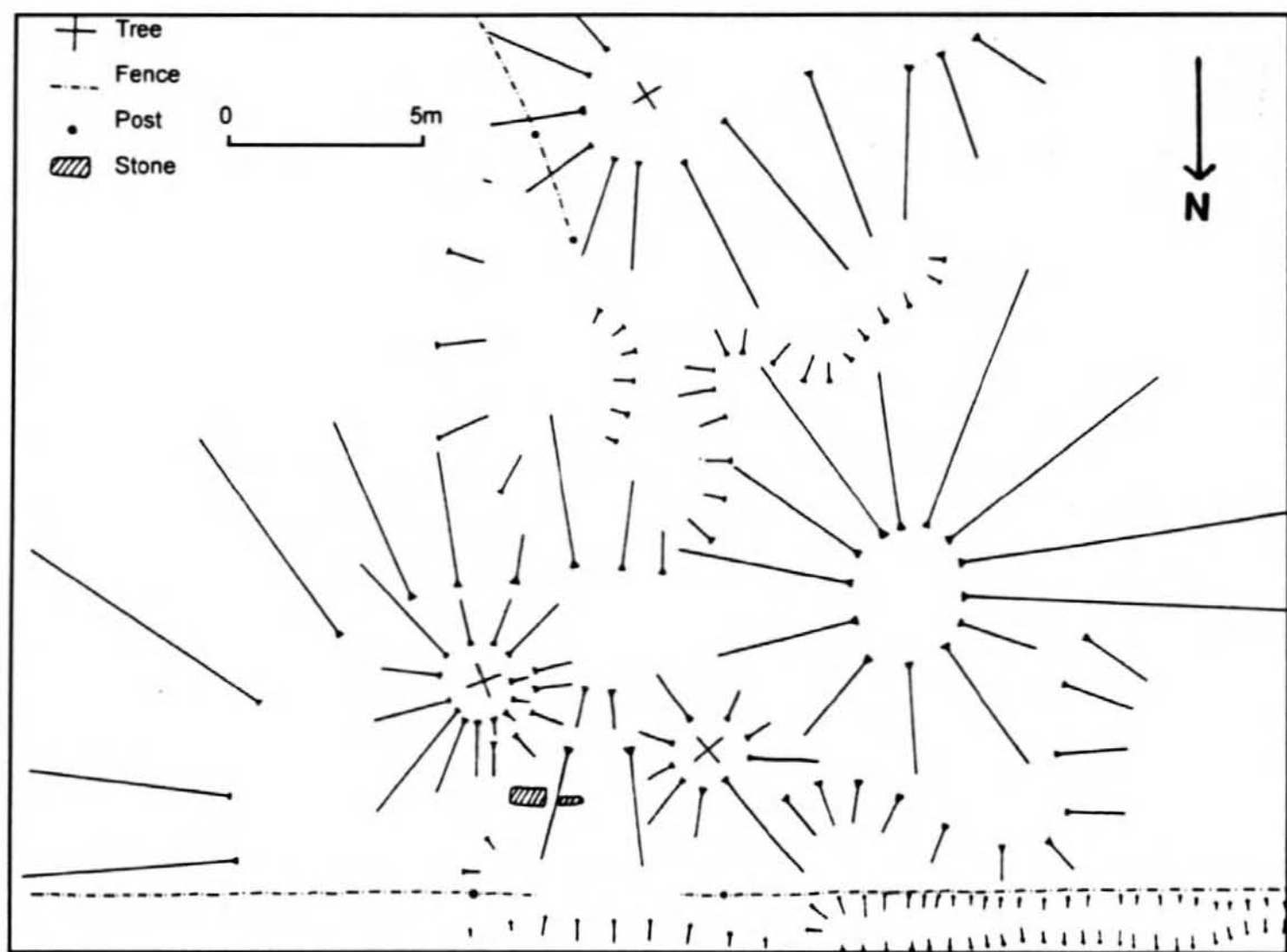


Fig. 3. Survey of Swanborough Tump

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