

# **GALLANTRY BOWER: EXCAVATION 2023**

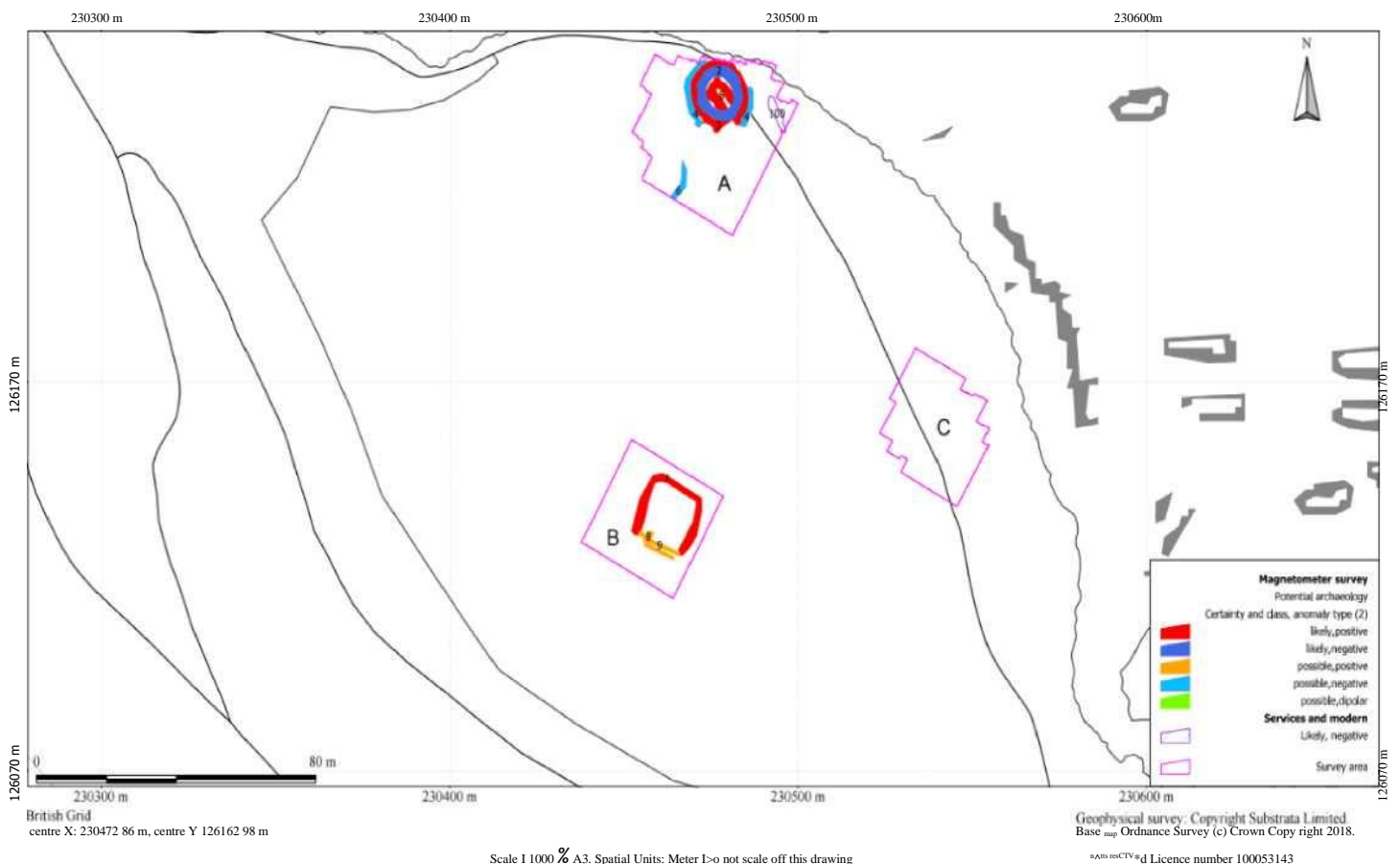
**By Chris Preece with a contribution from Roger Taylor and  
Henrietta Quinnell**



## BACKGROUND

In 2021, Substrata were commissioned by the North Devon Coast Area of Outstanding Beauty (henceforth NDCAONB) to carry out a geophysical survey of the scheduled monument and surrounds at Gallantry Bower as part of the Monument Management Scheme (henceforth MMS), funded by Historic England in partnership with Devon County Historic Environment Team (DCHET). The monument (a presumed bowl barrow) and two other areas of adjoining potential archaeology were surveyed by magnetometer (see Fig. 1). One of these (Area B) suggested a sub-square feature, possibly a somewhat unusual enclosure of uncertain date (Edwards and Trick, 2022). This corresponds with details on the HER (see below).

North Devon Archaeology Society (NDAS) were then approached by NDCAONB with a view to ascertaining whether it was feasible to date the structure and whether it was possible to establish possible contemporaneity with the bowl barrow (Area A). As part of the project, scrub clearance of the sites was carried out on the 17<sup>th</sup> May, 2023 with subsequent participation of MMS volunteers in further clearance and instruction and involvement in excavation techniques on the 18<sup>th</sup>. NDAS members then completed the excavation and restored the site by the 23<sup>rd</sup> May.



- Notes
1. All interpretations are provisional and represent potential archaeological deposits
  2. 'Anomaly type' is a description of the magnetic anomaly. See the report text or CIS for an archaeological characterisation
  3. Anomalies designated 'likely archaeology' have supporting evidence e.g. historical maps and/or visible earthworks
  4. Not all instances are mapped.
  5. Anomalies likely to represent recent deposits or ground disturbance, or geological and other natural deposits are not mapped unless relevant to potential buried archaeology

Fig. 1: Geophysical Survey areas (courtesy of Substrata)

## AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

The HER entry (MDV102340) for the enclosure in Area B states: “A possible square enclosure is visible as a ditched earthwork on images derived from Lidar data collected in 2007. Its date and function is uncertain and further archaeological investigation is recommended”.

This type of enclosure is not common in the area and it is important to understand it better. Given that it may require scheduling, it was proposed by NDAS that the investigation be minimal to preserve as much of the monument as possible. In line with this, just one trial trench was mooted, to be sited across the possible ditch (see attached plan). If no datable finds were made, samples for C14 dating would be taken from the primary layers of the ditch in order to date the feature.

In addition, the primary layers of the ditch would be sieved. Spoil would be examined and metal detected. This was effected as described.

Any finds were to be deposited with the North Devon Museum, following analysis. A copy of the report will be deposited with the Devon H.E.R. and it will be digitally archived with the A.D.S. The site code was GBC23.

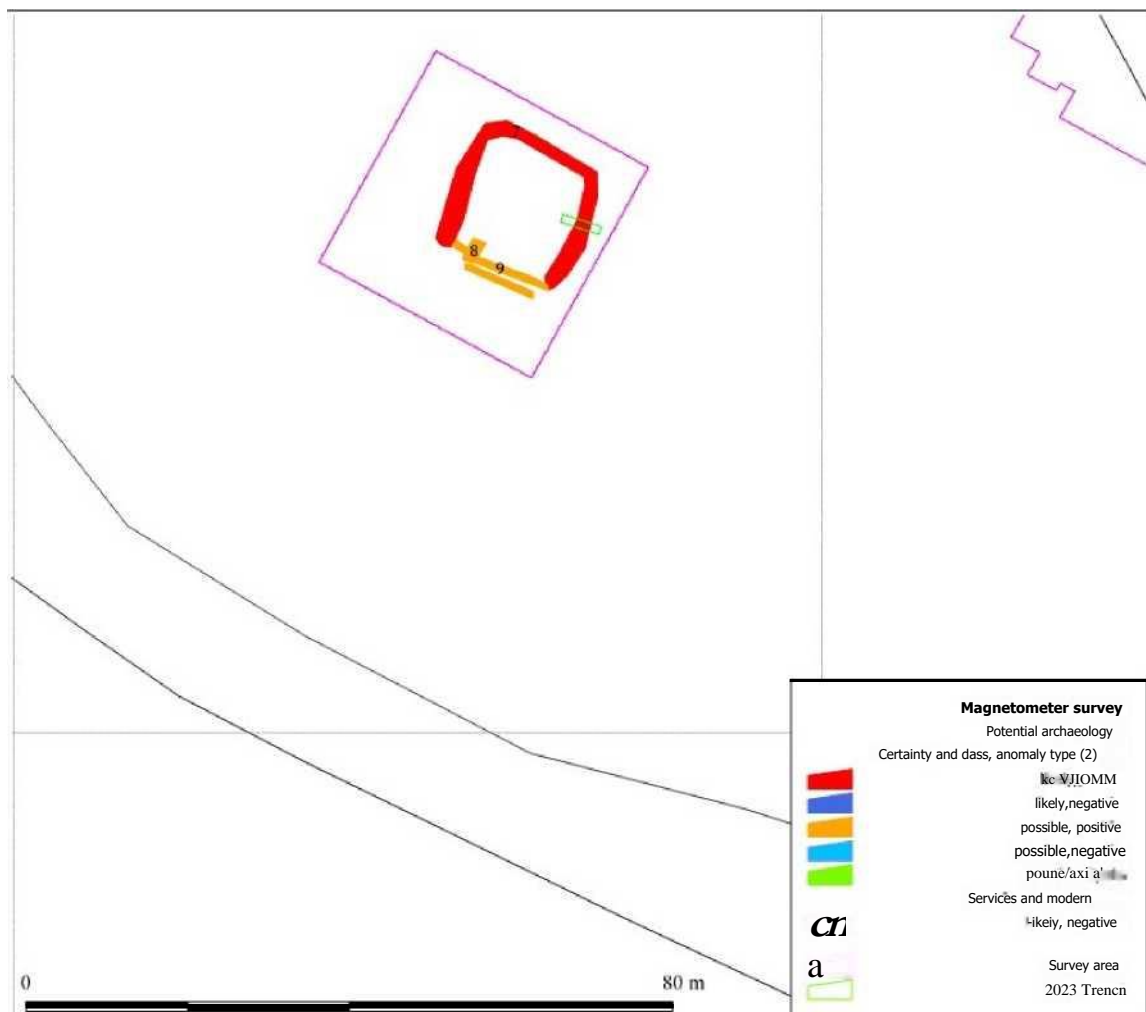


Fig. 2: Trench Plan (courtesy of Substrata)

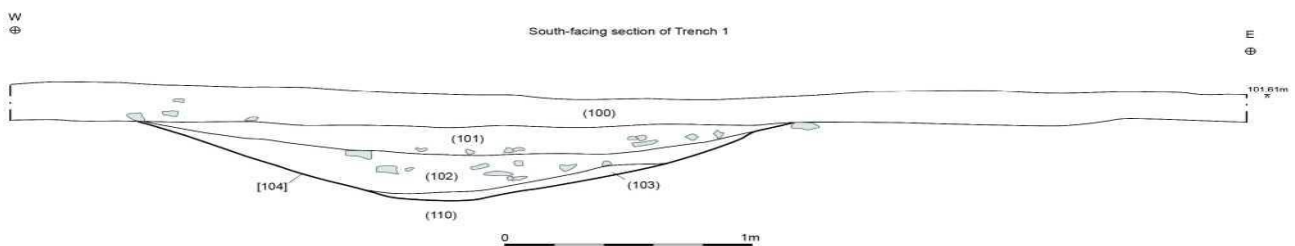
## EXCAVATION

A 5 x 1m trench was marked out by Mark Edwards of Substrata on the 15<sup>th</sup> May. This crossed the NE/SW linear of the postulated enclosure. (Fig. 2).

Beneath the topsoil (100), rooted with coastal scrub (gorse, bramble, heather etc.) the upper fill of the ditch (101) comprised a mid-brown friable sandy clay, very stony with a lot of root disturbance (Fig. 3). Beneath this was a darker brown sandy clay (102) containing decayed roots and some stones. This was the primary fill of the ditch and was bulk sampled. At the south side of the trench near the base of this fill were a number of stones, possibly redeposited from the spoil originally at the top of the ditch (Fig. 4). Some residual stones on the edge of the ditch gave further weight to this theory.

At the east end of the trench was a thin layer of redeposited natural (103), presumably the result of weathering of the sides of the ditch and/or from excavated natural.

Within this was a very small lens of grey/beige silting. Presumably the slope drained most water ingress away to the south. The natural (110) was the typical sandstone of the area, ranging from beige to orange in colour. No ceramics or lithics were found in any contexts but two possible stone slingshots along with possibly curated stone oddities were found (see below). No evidence of a bank was found to the east of the ditch but the stones in the base of (102) suggest infill from degradation of spoil or a low bank. The possibility of a palisade (revetted?) should not be excluded, given the very limited excavation. To the west (i.e. inside the enclosure) was a compacted surface (105) with lenses of grey and mid-brown clay intermingled. This was left intact.



*Fig. 3: South facing section of T1*



*Fig. 4: Stones at base of (102); scale 1 metre. North facing section.*

## **FINDS**

No manufactured finds were recovered but a number of incongruous stones were collected and evaluated by Roger Taylor and Henrietta Quinnell (see Appendix 2 below).

These were anomalous compared to other stones in the fills and it is possible they were collected by tenants of the enclosure.

The two sub-spherical stones (Fig. 5) may have been used as slingshot but equally as with the other finds, as curios or as playthings. The larger was from (101), the smaller from (102). They weighed 33.6g and 15.7g respectively. Two small stone spheres were found in an Iron Age context in Exeter (Farnell and Fairclough 2019, 254-5). Although their function was unknown, they noted that similar objects occur on many Scottish Iron Age sites where they have been interpreted as gaming pieces.



*Fig. 5*

The idea of gaming pieces had already been mooted on site following three finds from (102) which all had flat bases. Although natural stone, these sat upright in the style of chess pieces (Fig. 6) and had clearly been selected for some purpose, either as gaming pieces or as playthings.



*Fig. 6*

Less obvious in terms of function was a flattish stone also from (102), with a possible nodule imprint (Fig. 7) and two pieces from (101). One of these was sub-circular with a smooth, slightly domed surface on one side with nodule imprints on the reverse (Fig. 8). The other was a curious darker coloured stone with circular patterns on one side, presumably natural?



*Fig. 7*

*Fig. 8*



## DISCUSSION

Morphologically, square enclosures cover a wide period through prehistory into the Roman era and beyond. As has been pointed out, these encompass a variety of site types, including settlement enclosures, plantations, square barrows, sheepfolds and mortuary enclosures (Valdez-Tullet, Roberts et al., 2017). They are mostly known from aerial photography mapping and are predominantly unexcavated. Dating evidence is therefore scanty, although some in Wessex have been dated to the Middle Bronze Age.

Of enclosures excavated, two are worth noting: the first is that at West Amesbury, Wiltshire (20m width), dated to the Late Neolithic or later, which has a squared off north-east corner (Valdez-Tullett *op cit.*).

Another Neolithic sub-square enclosure (25-27m width) at Plantation Quarry, Willington, Bedford, contained a crouched female burial (Dawson 1996, 4-11).

The Gallantry enclosure is smaller than either of these, being approximately 17 metres in width and has a number of peculiar features, the first being a squared off north-west corner similar to West Amesbury.

The second peculiar feature of the Gallantry enclosure is the south-west side of the enclosure. The geophysics report describes this as 'Two roughly parallel linear anomalies forming a side of the enclosure. These are narrower, straighter and more subtle (than the other sides) in geophysical terms'. Fencing or a gate are possible interpretations put forward by the authors (Edwards and Trick 2022).

The Gallantry enclosure is relatively sheltered and on a slope back from the steep cliff edge. Defensively therefore, it has little to recommend it and is more likely to be a stock enclosure or possibly a small, maybe temporary, settlement. The geophysics did not identify any features within the enclosure however, which argues against the latter hypothesis although tents would leave few traces.

The C14 date (1618 - post cal 1950 AD, 95.4% probability) of Gallantry, despite the enclosure's smaller size was therefore something of a surprise. There are few parallels for isolated enclosures of this date in the literature and although a stock enclosure is a possibility, a military camp should also be considered.

**BetaCal 4.20**

**Calibration of Radiocarbon Age to Calendar Years**

(High Probability Density Range Method (HPD): INTCAL20)

(Variables:  $\delta^{13}C = -25.9$  o/oo)

**Laboratory number Beta-679059**

**Conventional radiocarbon age  $270 \pm 30$  BP**

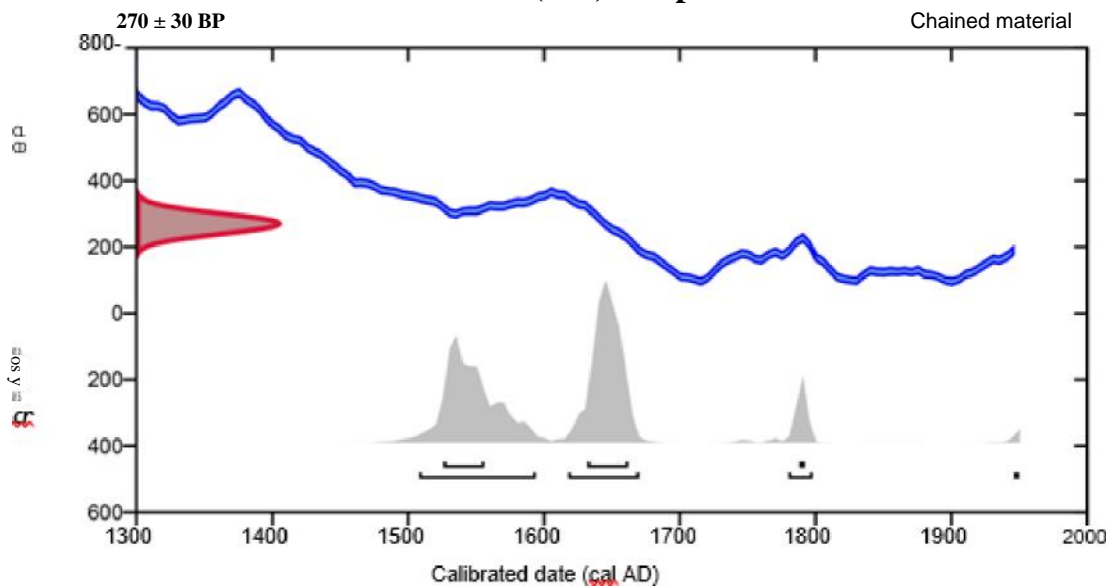
95.4% probability

(45.3%)	1618 - 1670 cal AD	(332 -280 cal BP)
(42.7%)	1508 - 1594 cal AD	(442-356 cal BP)
(7%)	1780 - 1798 cal AD	(170 - 152 cal BP)
(0.4%)	1946 - Post cal AD 1950	(4 - Post cal BP 0)

68.2% probability

(39%)	1632 - 1662 cal AD	(318 - 288 cal BP)
(26.5%)	1526 - 1556 cal AD	(424 - 394 cal BP)
(2.7%)	1788 - 1792 cal AD	(162 - 158 cal BP)

**GBC23 (102) sample 1**



**Database used**  
INTCAL20

**References**

**References to Probability Method**

Bronk Ramsey, C. (2009). Bayesian analysis of radiocarbon dates. Radiocarbon. 51(1). 337-360. **References to Database INTCAL20**  
Reimer, et al., 2020. Radiocarbon 62(4):725-757.

**Beta Analytic Radiocarbon Dating Laboratory**

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## **APPENDIX 2: STONE FINDS by Dr. Roger Taylor and Henrietta Quinnell**

(Dr Roger Taylor examined this material on July 12<sup>th</sup>, 2023)

‘The Crackington formation consists of layers of shale interspersed with those of sandstone. The finds bags contain material from the Crackington formation with varying amounts of iron carbonate. Bag (102) is the one exception as it contains a fragment with fibrous crystals of quartz, which is found in the sandstones within Crackington formation. This material will have been collected from local beaches.’

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Dave Edgecombe was the prime motivator behind this project and helped facilitate access, funding and permissions. Thanks also to the NDCAONB and Cressida Whittton of DCHET for organising MMS volunteers and to Historic England and DCHET for funding survey. Thanks also to the NDAS team: Thor Beverley, Nigel Dymond and Sarah Mcrae and further thanks to Nigel who ferried equipment to site daily. We are grateful to Mark Edwards of Substrata who accommodated our needs despite a hectic schedule and also to South West Archaeology for processing and sending off charcoal for dating as well as digitising the section drawing. Finally, and not least, thanks to the Hon. John Rous of Clovelly Estates for allowing access and excavation on Estate land.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY *Unpublished Sources***

Edwards, M, and Trick, S. 2022 An Archaeological Magnetometer Survey; Gallantry Bower Bowl Barrow (Substrata 2022 Report no. 2108GAL-R-1).

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Valdez-Tullett, A. and Roberts, D. 2017 ‘Archaeological investigation of a square enclosure on King Barrow Ridge, Amesbury, Wiltshire’, *Historic England Research Report Series no. 58. ISSN 2059-4453*

#### ***Published***

Dawson, M. 1996: Plantation Quarry, Willington; Excavations 1988-1991, *Bedfordshire Archaeology* 22, 2-49.

Famell, F. and Fairclough, P. 2019: ‘Multi-phase Prehistoric activity at Newcourt Drive, Exeter’, *Proc. Devon Archaeol. Soc.* 77, 239-269.

## CATALOGUE

### GBC23 (101)

Type	Sherds/Frags	Forms
Stone	1	Sub-circular, nodule imprints
Stone	1	Small dark stone with circular imprints

### GBC23 (102)

Type	Sherds/Frags	Forms
Stone	3	Flat-bottomed; gaming pieces?
Stone	2	Quartz frags.
Stone	1	Half of ovoid pebble/nodule
Stone	1	Flattish with nodule indentation
Stone	1	Limestone (?) pebble