

## Ravensdale Park; A Conservation Area Character Appraisal

### Historical Description

The first reference to a deer park at Ravensdale is in the Inquisition Post Mortem of Edmund, the King's brother in 1296/7<sup>1</sup>, although it had obviously been established a few years before this. It lay within an area that was known as the ancient area of Duffield Frith, which had connections with "forest laws" since the Norman Conquest of 1066 and had been held by the de Ferrers family from about 1071 until 1266. By the end of the fourteenth century Ravensdale Park was one of seven deer parks within Duffield Frith, the nearest being Mansell Park immediately to the west. By then Ravensdale Park was sufficiently important and distinct as to contain the royal lodge of Ravensdale, which was the main hunting and residential lodge for Duffield Frith<sup>2</sup>. Documentary evidence illustrates the site's importance, revealing that the lodge was visited by John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and son of Edward III, on several occasions between 1362 and 1376 when documents are written from Ravensdale<sup>3</sup>. Defined by a deer-proof 'park pale' - usually a wooden fence atop a substantial earthen bank accompanied by an internal ditch - by 1540 the boundary of the Ravensdale deer park was some 3 miles long enclosing an area of some 636 acres (MapInfo - measured off OS 1:2500) (450 acres - Archaeology Desk-Based report.<sup>4</sup>) Deer remain in the Park until at least 1563, when the pales and lodge are recorded as being 'in reasonable repair'<sup>5</sup>, but by the mid-seventeenth century Ravensdale had ceased to be a deer park. The unenclosed heath and woodland landscape of the deer park appears to have been subject to piecemeal, irregular encroachment. This created the pattern of field enclosures within the circumference of the former park pale that is largely evident on the Tithe Map of 1847<sup>6</sup> and, allowing for the subsequent removal of several field boundaries, in the present day landscape. Today the field pattern within the park is recognisably different to the regular field systems found outside of the pale, giving the present pattern of enclosures within the park its own particular characteristics due to having been enclosed at a later date<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Calendar of Inquisitions, Vol. III, PRO

<sup>2</sup> Cox, J. C. 'The Royal Forests of England' p.183, & p.187

<sup>3</sup> Armitage-Smith (ed), 'John of Gaunt's Register', Camden Society, 3<sup>rd</sup> Series, xx-xxi

<sup>4</sup> Richmond, A. 2001 'Archaeological Contribution to an Environmental Statement - Mercaston Quarry, Ravensdale Park, Derbyshire', Phoenix Consulting: p.10

<sup>5</sup> DL 44/116 PRO

<sup>6</sup> Tithe Map and Award. Derbyshire County Record Office

<sup>7</sup> Richmond, A. op.cit.

EDR: 4698  
SDR: 24232

## **Character Appraisal**

### **Summary introduction**

The case for designating a conservation area rests on whether the area in question meets the test of being:

“An area of special architectural or historic interest the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance”

Ravensdale is undoubtedly an area of special historic interest. The aggregate extraction company and the landowner opposing designation do not dispute this. The more subjective part of the test is whether it has sufficient special "character" to merit preservation or enhancement through designation. The Planning Authority believes that the land, which makes up the historic unit of Ravensdale Park, has a distinct character, recognisably different from the surrounding agricultural land. This is a combined result of measures taken to create the park, to develop it while in use as a deer park and to convert it to conventional agricultural use, following the abandonment of its use as a deer park with woodland management. The surviving physical features of the medieval deer park today are many. The position of the royal hunting lodge, chapel, and plateau on which they stood above a pool, and the site of a documented medieval mill have been identified together with the park pale, park gateways, a medieval trackway and a medieval deer course with associated features. These features, in aggregate, constitute a rich historic landscape the character of which it is desirable to preserve or enhance.

### **The park pale**

The line of the park pale for Ravensdale deer park survives today in recognisable or traceable form for 88% of its original length<sup>8</sup>. In a number of locations the ditch and bank survive together as visible surface remains<sup>9</sup>. In other locations the ditch has been infilled, but will probably survive as a buried archaeological feature. Where the bank survives as a visible earthwork it varies in height between 0.3 and 2.5m, and in width between 1.0 and 8.0m. The boundary is characterised in places by a hawthorn hedgerow with holly and

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<sup>8</sup> Caroline Skinner 2003 English Heritage Monument Notification Description

<sup>9</sup> Duffield Frith Research Group: Survey of Ravensdale Park 2001 – Copies held by Derbyshire Sites and Monuments Record and Dr. Caroline Skinner, English Heritage East Midlands Region Designations Team

some hazel and blackthorn with Oak, Ash and Crab Apple (with occasional Field Maple, Sycamore, single Beech and Sweet Chestnut). The boundary is seriously disrupted at the northwestern side by the former gravel extraction and restoration. The boundary is also the administrative boundary of Ravensdale Parish, with the exception of a short section at Ravensdale Farm where the Parish boundary lies to the west of the farm. A significant proportion of the park pale is being Scheduled as a nationally important example of this kind of feature <sup>10</sup>.

### **The park gateways <sup>11</sup>**

The northern and southern gates were located in relation to a medieval trackway running north to south through the park, the northern gate being near Park Hill Farm and the southern gate close to the site of the mill and pond. Logically the south gate would have been the main point of access to the park from Tutbury Castle, the caput (i.e. main residence) for the Honour of Tutbury. There is thought to be a south-eastern entrance near Hunger Lane where the park boundary banks are offset. This could have provided access to the medieval village of Mugginton. East to west routes through the park are thought to include the Shakesdon Gate at the west end of the park where the park boundary bank is offset and opposite a potentially old lane north of Shuckton Manor Farm. A potential eastern entrance, where the park boundary is offset, is adjacent to Old Covert (Ling Hill) Wood. This may be the Corkley Gate. Shakesden and Corkley Gates are mentioned in expense accounts of 1313-1314. The park gate locations are being Scheduled as part of the park pale scheduling <sup>12</sup>.

### **The medieval trackway <sup>13</sup>**

From north to south following the central valley of Ravensdale there are indications of a medieval trackway. This route may have pre-dated the formation of the park <sup>14</sup> and probably continued to serve as a routeway during the park's life. The 1773 Enclosure of Hulland Ward describes "Ravensdale Park Road" as 21 feet wide and as being "an ancient lane between ancient enclosed lands" <sup>12</sup>. This is still locally known as "Ravensdale Park Road", and can be traced along much of its route in the field pattern as a sinuous, narrow, linear

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<sup>10</sup> Caroline Skinner op. cit.

<sup>11</sup> Cox, J. C. op.cit., p.188

<sup>12</sup> Caroline Skinner op. cit.

<sup>13</sup> Duffield Frith Research Group op.cit.

<sup>14</sup> Richmond, A. op. cit.



route. Today the route enters the northern end of the park down an existing terraced track from Mugginton Lane End, part of which is **being** Scheduled as a nationally important example of this kind of feature <sup>15</sup>. This heads towards Lawn Cottage turning southwards into the park where it is seen now as a grass terrace. At Lawn cottage it becomes a green sunken lane, with dense mixed species hedgerows, through to Park Farm, south of which remnants of a double hedgerow indicate its former route. A portion of the latter section unfortunately has been ploughed-up although former tenants remember the sunken road and double hedgerows. A footpath now follows the majority of the route.

### **The deer course <sup>16</sup>**

Running north - south for approximately 1 mile through the centre of the park following a narrow valley is a linear double-hedged enclosure about 80 yards wide. This feature has been identified by a national authority to be an outstanding example of a medieval deer chase, thought by him to be the best preserved and earliest known example of a deer course surviving in Britain <sup>17</sup>. As an organised spectator sport deer coursing is thought to have been established by the 14<sup>th</sup> century. In sites such as this deer would be chased down a long hedged or walled strip by greyhounds. Having placed wagers on the dogs, to follow the proceedings the spectators would occupy a vantage point within clear sight of the finish and /or follow on horseback outside the course. At the finish the deer would often be allowed to escape from the course back into the rest of the park. At Ravensdale the line of the double hedges, indicative of this feature of the sport, are virtually intact. Later hedges about the double hedged linear feature in a dislocated fashion but mainly do not cross it, underlining its medieval origins. Towards the northern end close to the probable course start is an area, "Black Lawn" <sup>18</sup>, which may have served as a deer collecting area. Overlooking the southern end of the course, adjacent to the site of the Lodge, on the eastern crest of the valley is the probable site of a viewing platform. Beyond the southern end of the chase there is also an open area into which deer may have been allowed to escape<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Caroline Skinner op. cit.

<sup>16</sup> Letter from Dr. Christopher Taylor FBA FSA (Historic Parks and Gardens Advisory Panel, English Heritage) 20<sup>th</sup> Feb. 2003 – on DCC file 5763.14

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, C. 2003 'Deer Courses'. Document produced for English Heritage

<sup>18</sup> Field names on survey map by Duffield Frith Research Group op. cit.

<sup>19</sup> Letter from Dr. Christopher Taylor (Historic Parks and Gardens Advisory Panel, English Heritage) to Duffield Frith Research Group, March 2003.



### The hunting lodge and chapel site

Originally, the site of the hunting lodge was believed to lie near the north-west corner of the park. The Tithe Award map of 1847 showed field names in this area of Near Lodge and Far Lodge. These are thought to possibly indicate that a smaller lodge or lodges for the 'parkers'<sup>20</sup> or keepers at Ravensdale may have once stood here. Recent archaeological investigations, including surface collection and geophysical survey<sup>21</sup>, have indicated the presence of a high-status building or buildings in the south-east of the park associated with a range of medieval pottery and metalwork finds. The site is located on a level shoulder of elevated ground overlooking the southern end of the deer course and close to where the southern gate would have been. By 1313-14 historical documentation indicates that the lodge was associated with a chapel as repairs are recorded to both Ravensdale Lodge, its roof, and painted glass for the chapel<sup>22</sup>. In 1314 reference is also made to the creation of a pale to enclose the lodge and chapel<sup>23</sup>. Recent aerial photographic<sup>24</sup> coverage reveals cropmark evidence for a bank and ditch enclosing an area of just over 0.8ha around the site of the high-status building or buildings. This enclosed area is now taken to be the site of the royal lodge and chapel, and is **being** Scheduled as a nationally important example of this kind of feature<sup>25</sup>. The combination of evidence for a royal lodge and chapel within its own enclosure, occupying a vantage point for viewing the chase and its finish and commanding a view of the ornamental ponds underlines that this was a high-status landscape created and maintained for the leisure pursuits of the medieval nobility and those of elevated social standing.

### Water mill and pond

A mill site in Mercaston is listed in Domesday Book<sup>26</sup>. There are many documentary references that in c.1230 Serlo de Mungay and Nicholas, Prior of Tutbury, made an exchange which gave Serlo de Mungay the right to make a fishpond and Mill in Ravensdale<sup>27</sup>. Documentary references continue through to a deed of 1662 that mentions a water

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<sup>20</sup> Cox, J. C. op. cit., p.24

<sup>21</sup> University of Manchester Archaeological Unit 2000 'Hill Top Farm, Ravensdale Park, Derbyshire: Resistivity Results' DCC SMR Reports Cat. No.: 667

<sup>22</sup> PRO. DL29/1/3 quoted in Cox, J. C. The Royal Forests of England

<sup>23</sup> PRO DL29/1/3 - 1314

<sup>24</sup> www.old-maps.co.uk service, Landmark Information Group Ltd. and Ordnance Survey

<sup>25</sup> Caroline Skinner op.cit.

<sup>26</sup> 'Domesday Book, Derbyshire'. 1978 Phillimore

<sup>27</sup> I. H. Jeayes 1906 'Catalogue of Derbyshire Charters' Number 2718 and A. Saltman (ed) 1962 'Tutbury Cartulary'. Number 273



powered corn mill in Ravensdale Park<sup>28</sup>. Today there is to the south of Schoolhouse Farm, right at the southern edge of the park, a defined area of wet ground on the north side of Mercaston Brook believed to be the site of the medieval ponds and the mill as shown on Burdett's 1791 map<sup>29</sup>. This area, known as Mugginton Bottoms, is part of a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest and is also **being** Scheduled as a nationally important example of this kind of feature<sup>30</sup>. The low wet ground is now a mixture of tall fen and marshy grassland with abundant herbs and rushes. The central area is most acidic and nutrient-poor creating an outstanding valley mire dominated by hummocks of bog mosses with narrow buckler-fern and common cotton grasses.

This area at the south end of the park is suggestive of areas of designed features created and maintained in high-status medieval parks throughout England. Given Ravensdale's sometime royal ownership and the proximity of the royal lodge, chapel and deer course it would not be surprising if the landscape within view of the lodge, including the ponds, was designed and maintained to some extent for ornamentation<sup>31</sup>.

#### **General Notes on the Character of the Landscape**

The area enclosed by the park pale is one of gently rolling hills with very little level ground and just the occasional small plateau. This is part of a landscape associated with moderate to steeply sloping valleys and slopes created by an underlying geology of Permo- Triassic sandstone. Differential erosion along the slopes, particularly the west facing slopes has created a series of visually prominent rounded undulations and hillocks. Eighty percent (MapInfo 81.5 % measured off 1:2500 OS) of this landform within the park is undisturbed; the majority of disturbed land being a result of sand and gravel extraction in recent decades. The landscape at Ravensdale was probably chosen for the establishment of a deer park partly because of its topographic and vegetational characteristics. The uneven, hilly ground combined with the scrubby, heathland vegetation probably made it ideal for game management. The occurrence of a small valley of the necessary length running through the landscape viewable from a suitable vantage point may also have influenced the selection of the park's location. At the same time, it is likely that the land enclosed within the pale was of less agricultural value than that found in neighbouring areas. A survey of

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<sup>28</sup> Kedleston Deeds: Bundle 2 (6), National Trust

<sup>29</sup> Burdett, T. 1791 Survey of Derbyshire

<sup>30</sup> Caroline Skinner op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Taylor, C. 2000 'Medieval Ornamental Landscapes' in *Landscapes (2000)*, pp 38-55

1614 stresses the poor, "barren" nature of the soil <sup>32</sup>. The emparkment would have effectively excluded agriculture from the area. There are no traces of medieval arable agriculture in the form of fossilised strip fields or ridge and furrow within the park. In contrast, traces of open field agriculture have become preserved in the field systems around the medieval village of Mugginton to the immediate south east of the Park. Following disafforestation around the middle of the seventeenth century the transition from park to broader agricultural use could begin. The result has been a landscape defined by the former park pale in which the pattern of field enclosure is different and distinct from that of the surrounding landscape <sup>33</sup>.

### **Negative Features and Opportunities for Enhancement**

The extensive extraction of sand and gravel in the north west quarter of the park, which increased in the 1980's, has damaged this part of the historic landscape. With a sensitive restoration plan it may be possible to reduce some of its impact. However, unless the previously extracted area can be filled (which is unlikely) then this area will never be restored to its original landform. Containment of the mineral extraction within current limits would minimise the impact on the rest of the area to the point where the site does not lose its historic and visual integrity.

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<sup>32</sup> PRO DL44/943

<sup>33</sup> A. Richmond op.cit.



**RAVENSDALE PARK - Photographic record**



**1a Park Pale**



**1b Park Pale**





**1c Park Pale**



**1d Park Pale**





**1e Park Pale**



**2a Eastern Gateway**





**2b Eastern Gateway - close up**



**2c Medieval Parkway and Northern Gate (marked with red line)**





**3a Fossilised medieval trackway**



**3b Fossilised medieval trackway and double hedge**





**3c medieval trackway and double hedge**



**4a The Deer gathering area**



**4b The Deer Course looking south (in the centre of the photograph delineated by hedgerow)**



**4c The Deer Course looking northwards**





**4d The finish of the deer course (area for releasing or killing)**



**4e View of the "finishing" area of Deer course from the elevated site of the Hunting lodge and medieval chapel site.**



**5 Site of hunting lodge and medieval chapel site on elevated ground**



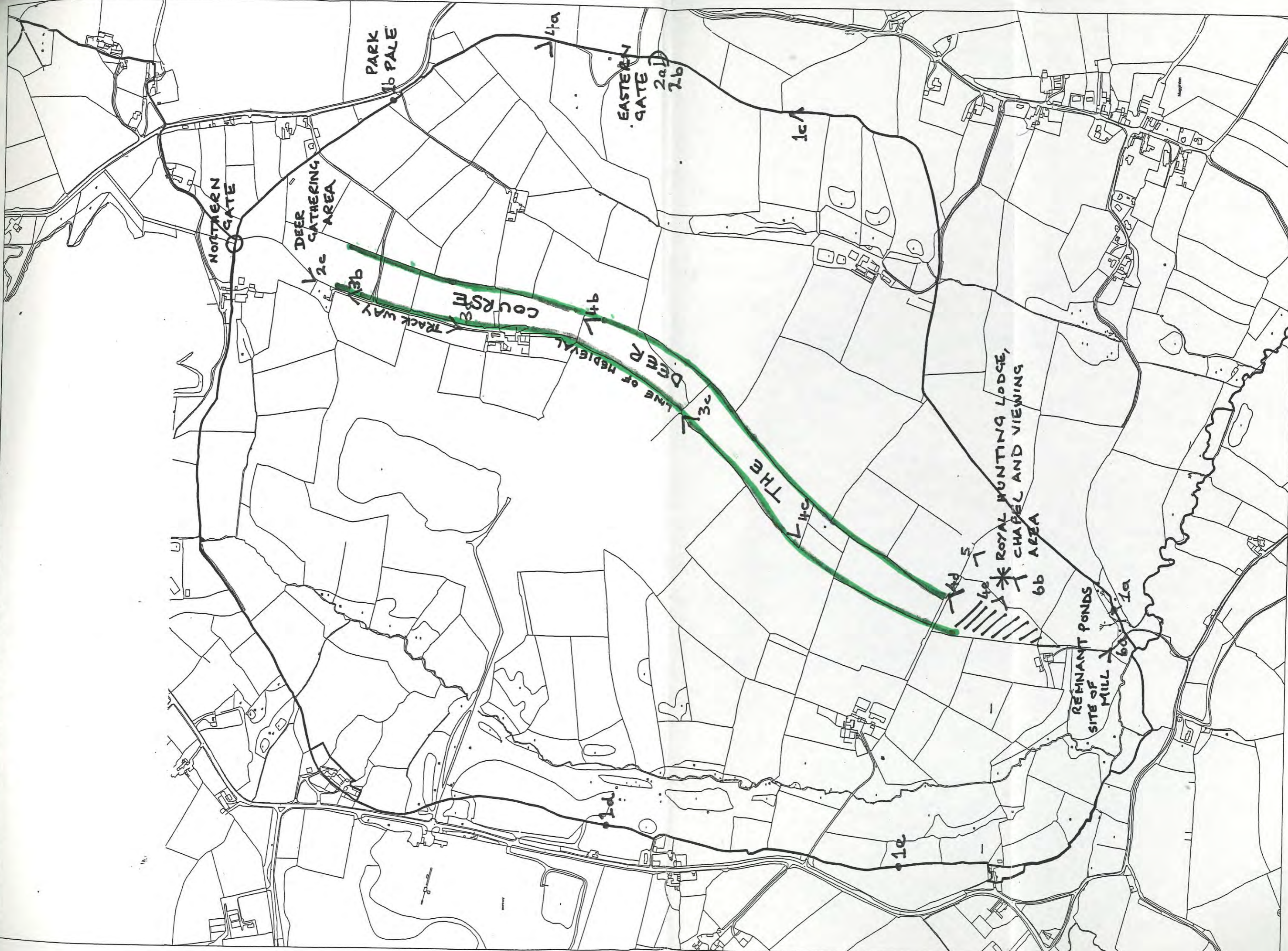
**6a Site of Water Mill pond**





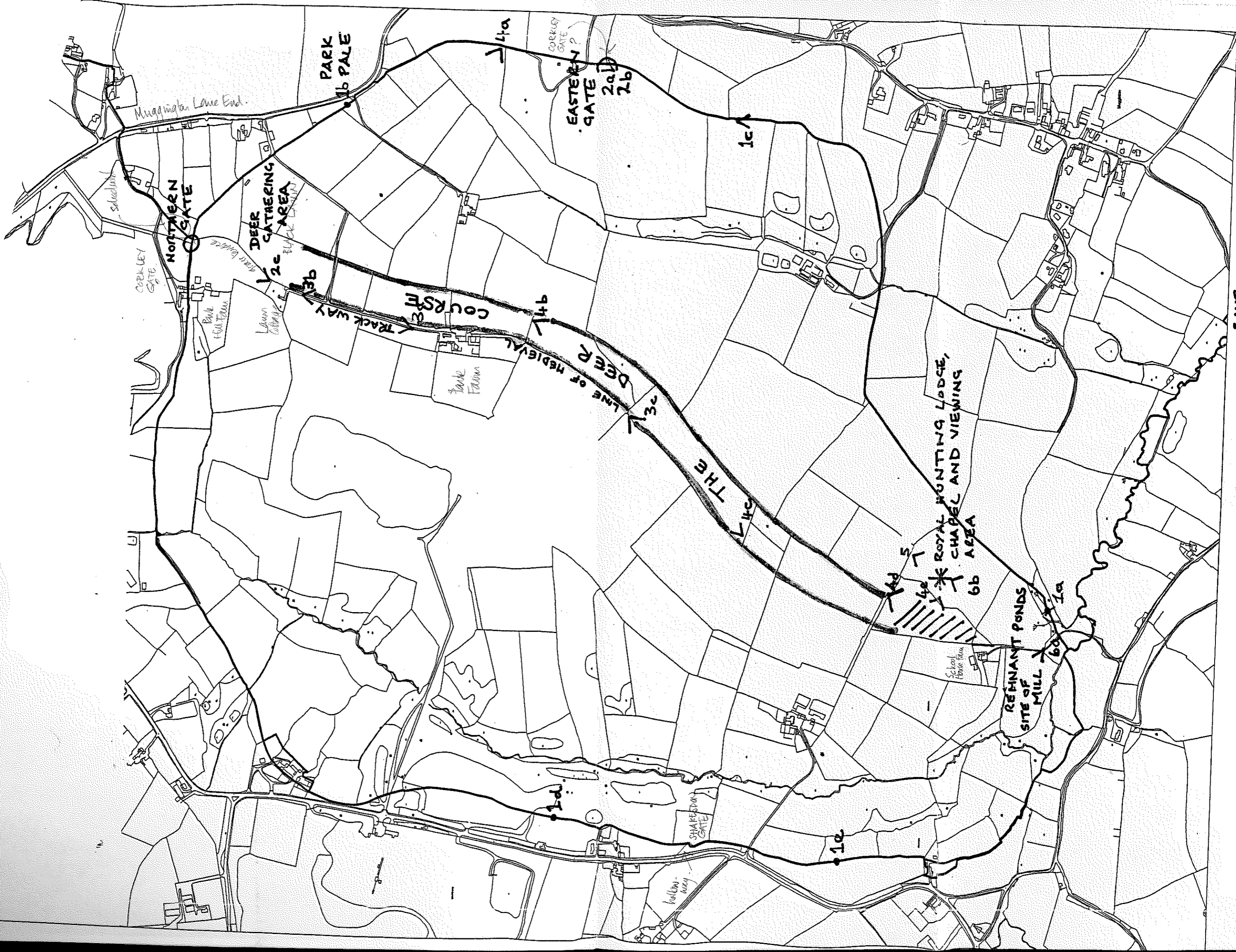
**6b Site of ornamental fishpond as viewed from the Hunting lodge and medieval chapel site (marked with red line)**





RAVENSDALE PARK  
LOCATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS





RAVENS DALE PARK  
LOCATION OF PHOTOGRAPHS





Cartley Gully

Site of lodge, chapel  
& enclosure

Sharpsdown  
Gully



PROPOSED AREAS FOR SCHEDULING BY ENGLISH HERITAGE

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