

The Toot

Investigating Oldbury
Camp: an Iron Age fort at
the heart of a medieval
village



A big thank you to everyone who supported the dig!

This project would not have been possible without the hard work of a fantastic volunteer team, many of them local to Oldbury. Particular thanks are due to the Oldbury landowners and tenants, who provided access to the site and gardens, as well as refreshments! In addition, funding and support from Heritage Lottery Fund, South Gloucestershire Council, Horizon Nuclear Power and Historic England, all contributed to making this a successful venture. Finally, thanks to all the villagers of Oldbury-on-Severn, particularly the team at the Community Shop, for being so welcoming to the DigVentures team. Thank You!

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HORIZON
NUCLEAR POWER

Archaeology at Oldbury Camp



*An intrepid team of scientists!
Dr Tim Kinnaird with volunteers
John and Ken*

Oldbury Camp, locally known as The Toot, is an ancient hillfort, right in the heart of Oldbury-on-Severn. The site has special legal status as a Scheduled Monument, due to its remarkable preservation. The banks of the monument stand up to 2m high in places, but the details of when it was built, and why, have remained a mystery.

That was until 2015, when local volunteers began a two year project as part of A Forgotten Landscape to find out how old the monument is and why, unlike most hillforts, it is not on a hill.

To help us understand this special site we examined it from all angles. Geophysical and geoarchaeological surveys investigated what lay beneath the surface, whilst topographic survey captured the banks and ditches in detail for the first time. Aerial photos and lidar data gave us a view of the site from above.

In 2017 we had the chance to delve a little deeper with a community excavation led by DigVentures. Over two weeks 68 volunteers excavated trenches in the banks themselves, as well as test pits in gardens around the village.

Despite hundreds of hours of volunteer work, Oldbury Camp was not going to give up its secrets easily. We found that the site had very little datable material. There were few finds, and not enough organic material for radiocarbon dating either.

Only one option for dating the site remained: Optically Stimulated Luminescence (OSL) dating – a cutting edge scientific technique. So, with the help of scientists at the University of Stirling, we got to work.



Dating the Toot



*This is what scientific dating looks
like on-site...*

*As OSL dating measures exposure to
light, sampling needs to be done in
the dark!*

The basic principle behind OSL dating is that certain small particles, like quartz or feldspar, make it possible to calculate when a soil was last exposed to sunlight. If we could pinpoint when the former land surface under the bank was last exposed to sunlight, then we could work out when the fort was constructed.

Amazingly, that information is stored in soils for hundreds and thousands of years. All we had to do was carefully collect soil samples and send them to the lab for analysis.

We have been able to establish that Oldbury Camp was built in the Late Iron Age. Even more specifically, we now know that the rampart bank dates to between 100BC and 20AD. This confirms The Toot's place within a particular group of Iron Age monuments known as bivallate hillforts (forts with a double ring of banks).

The fort's location on a low-lying island, surrounded by marshland, puts it in a good strategic position, and at least five more Iron Age hillforts are known in the local area, with a few more on the opposite side of the Severn.

What is particularly rare about Oldbury Camp is its location at the heart of the later village. The Iron Age monument has been included in the medieval layout and later development of Oldbury-on-Severn.

The Toot's impressive survival means that research can continue. Perhaps one day, future generations will be able to add to the story of this enigmatic and unusual monument.

You can access all the data and reports associated with investigations at Oldbury Camp on the DigVentures website:
digventures.com/oldbury-camp/



The village and the Old Forge

A series of test pits dug in gardens around the village suggest that the settlement developed around the hillfort from the 17th century.

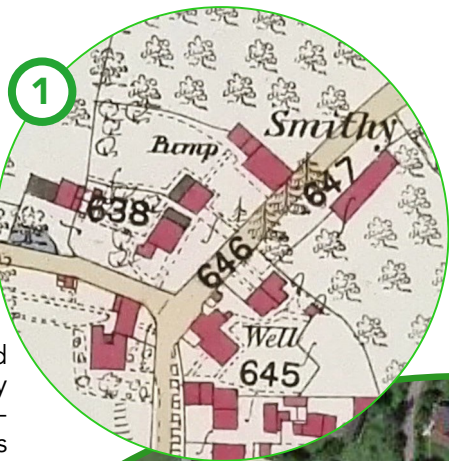
Lots of 17th ceramics were found at Roman Cottages, Rose Cottage and The Old Forge, but not at High Chimneys or Westend Lane, which suggests that this area developed later. Before the village, the fields were ploughed or used for grazing (ridge and furrows are still visible in some areas).

1 Map from 1881

The layout of buildings at The Old Forge on Camp Road haven't changed since this map was produced – you can still see the smithy building sitting perpendicular to the road and the houses slightly further back.

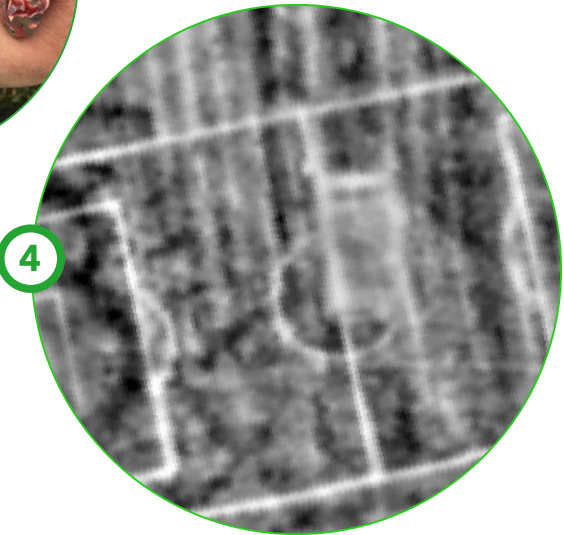
2 Old Forge garden

The front garden test pit revealed a cobbled yard buried under 1m of garden soil! Pottery suggested the yard dates to the 16th century - very practical for carts and horses needing repairs from the resident blacksmith!



3 Pottery in the garden test pits

Ceramics dating to the 11th and 14th centuries across the whole area, probably having been spread about by ploughing.



4 Old football pitch

The geophysical survey undertaken by the A Forgotten Landscape volunteers revealed now invisible lines from a football pitch and the wicket from a cricket pitch... a bit of more modern archaeology!



High Chimneys

The Old Forge

Roman Cottages

Rose Cottage



0 100m

The banks and ditches

Oldbury Camp is surrounded to the north by a double ring of two banks (shown in orange on the map) with one ditch between the banks and another outside the outer bank. The village developed around it, with Camp Road running along the ditch to the west and old field boundaries circling the monument. Excavation revealed that the fort was constructed in the Late Iron Age, but produced very little evidence of how it was used at that time. One explanation for the lack of evidence might be that use of the fort was short lived or may never actually have been occupied.

6 The northeast corner

The bank and ditches survive best here – it's the only area where both are still visible, and you can see them quite clearly standing on the track at the end of West End. Test pits excavated in this area revealed how the bank was constructed and how it was capped hard red clay.

7 Rim of a pottery vessel, shown at actual size

Found in the upper layers of the ditch, the fragments are very worn and abraded as a result of being in an active plough soil in the medieval period. Though they date to the Iron Age, it is likely that they were only introduced to the site when the field was fertilised.



8 Slice through the bank

This image below shows the level of the original ground surface against a section through the bank (shown above). The profile of the the banks and ditches are shown on the same image. The OSL dates tell us that the Toot was built in the late Iron Age and soil analysis also revealed that the bank had been constructed relatively quickly by digging the ditch and using the natural clay spoil to create the bank.

