The Ravensburgh Castle Project

Ravensburgh Castle Hillfort

- project update

Is our understanding of hillfort function any further forward?

Ian Brown University of Oxford
Location - Chiltern hillforts
Ravensburgh Castle - wooded site
William Stukeley drawing July 1724
Ravensburgh Castle plan – James Dyer 1976

Fig. 1. Ravensburgh Castle: general site plan.
Steep western defences to steep-sided valley
High eastern ramparts to less steep approach
Wooded interior today
Sunday excursions 1900
Western defences 1900 – Very different from today....
The excavations 1964-1975 and Ravensburgh Castle Project

• Excavations by John Moss-Eccardt and James Dyer 1964 and James Dyer 1970-75 covered areas of the southern part of the site, sectioning the ramparts and the SE entrance.

• No excavation report was produced.

• Contact with Hillfort Study Group resulted in Ian Brown taking on task of producing report on these excavations and undertaking further work on hillfort - the Ravensburgh Castle Project.
The Ravensburgh Castle Project

• AIMS:
  • To write up past work.
  • To undertake earthwork and geophysical surveys.
  • To consider long-term research.
Ravensburgh Castle excavation sites James Dyer
1964-75
Ravensburgh Castle past excavations
Ravensburgh Castle Project earthwork surveys 2013-2014
Ravensburgh Castle western defences earthwork survey 2013

- Double line of ramparts.
- Significant ditch.
- Possibility of vestiges of counterscarp or terrace below.
Main western ramparts
2014 earthwork survey

- Fine entrance with interned and out-turned banks.
- Banks and outworks protecting entrance.
- Access via hollow way to cwm below.
- Three ramparts to NW corner.
- Possible blocked entrance.
- Large mound – possible tumulus?
- Double line of ramparts to north.
Fine out-turned bank NW entrance
Banks and outworks protecting entrance
Access via hollow way to valley below
Three ramparts to NW corner
Possible blocked entrance NW corner
NW Entrance – Possible tumulus?
Double line of ramparts to north
Is our understanding of hillfort function any further forward?

- Hillforts have some or all of the following:
  - Occupy strategic and commanding positions in landscape.
  - Control access and economic, social and natural resources.
  - An element of status and display.
  - Have some ritual significance.
Ravensburg Castle - Functions

- Commands landscape.
- Controls upland farming resource.
- Controls access – Icknield Way to S.
- Element of status and display – NW entrance.
- Element of ritual – Burwell spring to S.
Iron Age sheep? North Ronaldsay Ram
Ravensburgh Castle – the future

- Completion of earthwork survey.
- Geophysical surveys.
- Further investigations.
- Completion of report.
- Further excavation?
- Possibility of long-term landowner/English Heritage management plan for hillfort.
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