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Identifying the meeting place of Binsted Hundred near Arundel, West Sussex

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Place name evidence for the location of the meeting place of Binsted Hundred, suggesting that it was in Binsted, in or near Hundred House Copse, is augmented by LiDAR imagery showing a 'domed hillock' in the copse and the adjoining field, and an adjacent 'hollow way'. Many features of this site match those typical of Hundred open air meeting places. Courts connected with Arundel Forest, organising the pasturing of animals in the Forest and their removal for the close season, may also have met there, a possibility linked to the later name, 'Avisford', for the Hundred.

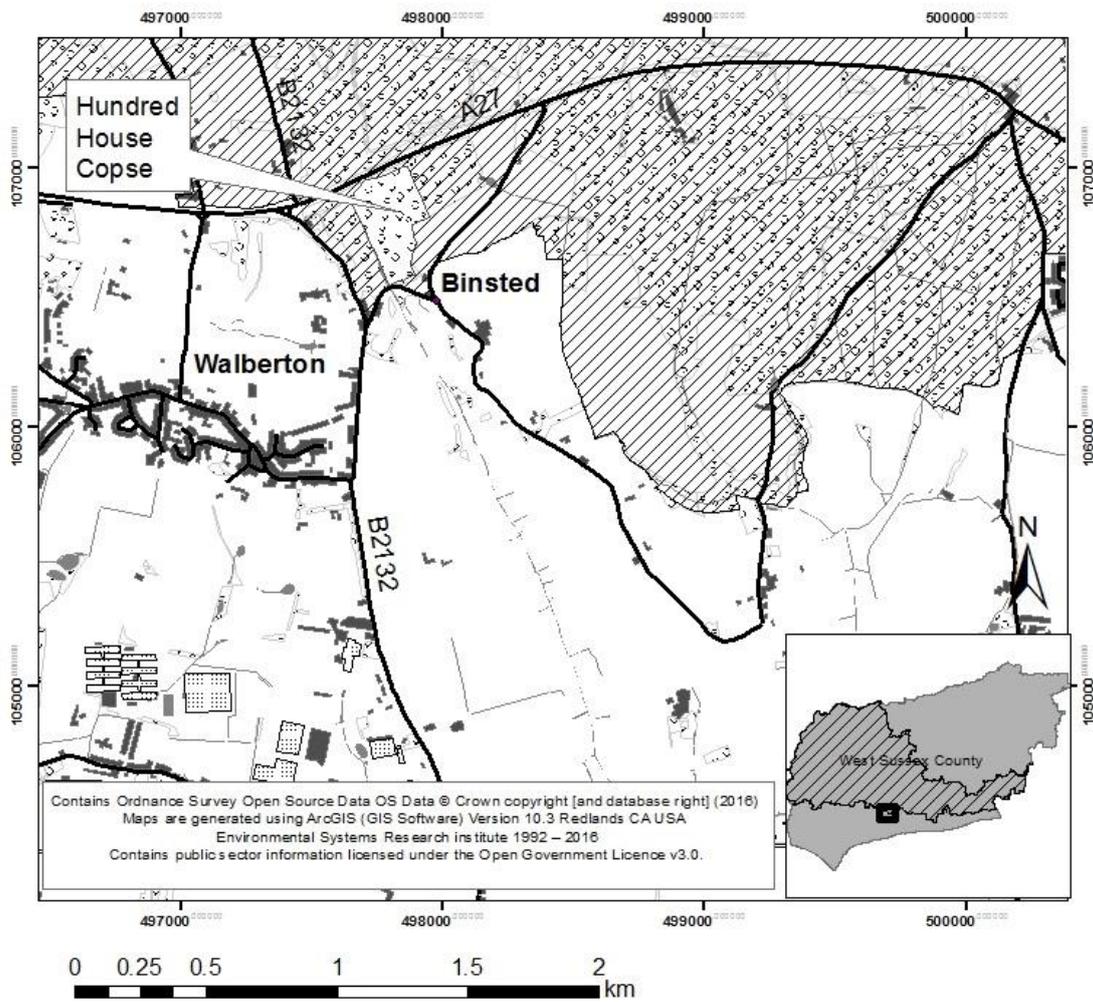
INTRODUCTION

The existence of a wood within Binsted Woods called Hundred House Copse (SU 978066) has suggested that the meeting place of Binsted Hundred, or moot, was somewhere nearby, but its exact location has not been known. As the Victoria County History says, 'The original meeting place of the hundred was evidently near the crossing of the Binsted Brook on the boundary between Binsted and Walberton, where the place name Hundredhouse Copse is recorded c.1875' (Warne 1997, 102). The name also appears on the tithe map of 1838, as does 'Hundred House Field' for the adjacent field (West Sussex Record Office, TD/W15).

LiDAR images of this area have now led to a much firmer identification of the outdoor meeting place where the Binsted Hundred met. Though the copse name suggests a building, this was likely to have been preceded by an open-air meeting place. Historic England uses the word 'Moot' for these: 'Moots were open-air meeting places...located at convenient, conspicuous or well-known sites, often centrally placed within the area under jurisdiction, usually a hundred, wapentake, or shire (Historic England 2011, entry 1010671).

Binsted was centrally placed within the Hundred which was at first known as Binsted Hundred and later as Avisford Hundred. Around the time of the Domesday Book the Hundred also included Slindon, Madehurst, Arundel, Tortington, Ford, Climping, Middleton, Felpham, Yapton, Barnham, Eastergate and Walberton (Fig. 1).

Fig. 1. Location map

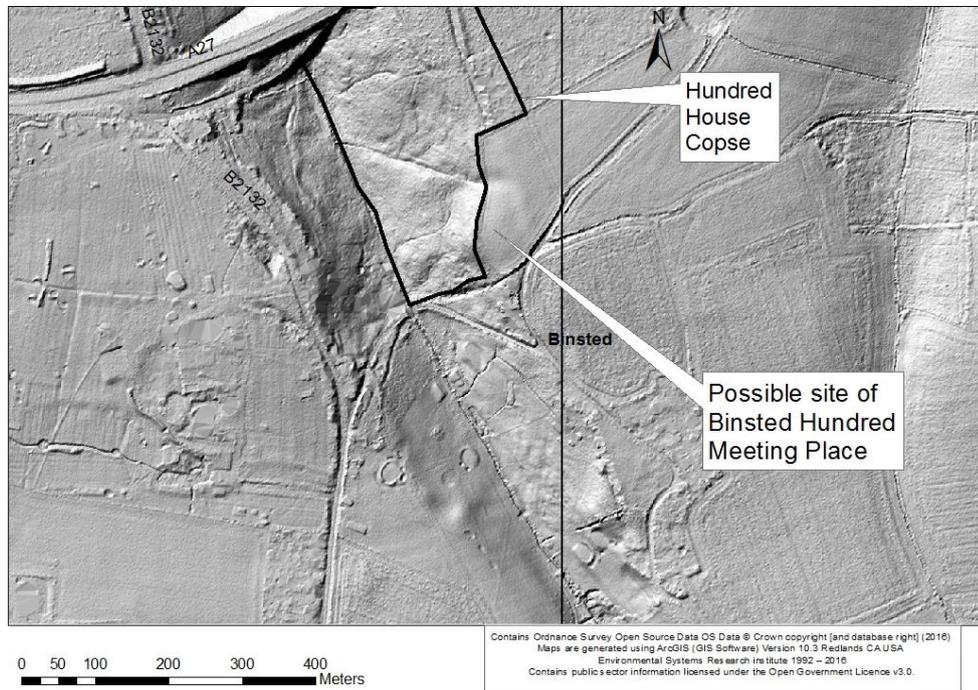


THE SITE AND ITS ‘MEETING PLACE’ FEATURES

A LiDAR image produced by the Environment Agency shows a roughly circular raised area, partly within Hundred House Copse and partly in the field to the east. A noticeable hollow way leads from the bottom of the valley up the slope to the north side of the circular area (Fig. 2).

On the ground, a sloping ‘platform’ within the woods can be seen, and a domed area within the field. It is not at first apparent that the ‘platform’ is part of the circular raised area because ploughing over the centuries has created a bank at the edge of the wood. The ‘platform’ within the woods, on the lip of the steep Binsted valley, has very old, grotesquely shaped ash coppice stools growing on it. One of these measured by a ranger on the Slindon Estate has a diameter of 2.7m (9ft). Rackham (2014, 68) states that ash coppice stools 9 feet across can be 800 years old or more. It is conceivable that these ash stools date back to the meeting place era.

Fig. 2. Section of the Environment Agency LiDAR image showing Hundred House Copse, the hollow way and the possible circular meeting place mound



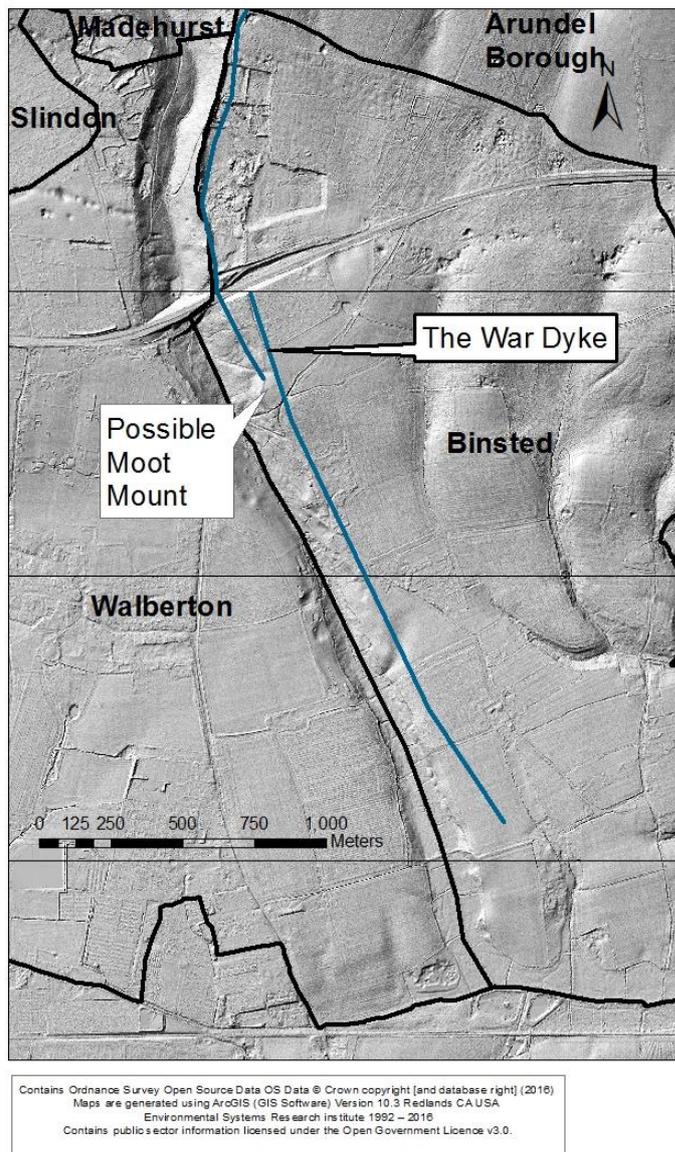
The site matches many of the features of outdoor meeting places listed by Baker and Brookes (2015). Some such meeting places are ‘domed hillocks up to 100 m in diameter...located on spurs of land protruding below crests of higher ground. The high ground is often the location of a junction of several parish boundaries, and the site is always marked by at least one well-worn holloway descending downslope beside the promontory.’ The Binsted ‘domed hillock’ appears from the LiDAR to be about 112m in diameter.

The raised area at Hundred House Copse is an area of higher ground protruding from the side of the steep Binsted Valley. The hollow way descends downslope beside it. The site is near the ancient parish boundary between Walberton and Binsted, the stream in the bottom of the valley, and the boundaries of Slindon and Madehurst parishes are not far away to the north (see Fig. 3 below).

Another feature of such sites is that they are often found on or near ancient monuments such as Iron Age earthworks. The ‘domed hillock’ is right up against the remains of the Iron Age earthwork known as War Dyke (a bank and ditch), which

passes from Little Tortington Stream in the south of Binsted, northwards to the top of the Downs. At the top of the Downs it joins a much larger, similar earthwork which descends to the river Arun. The earthwork passes through Hundred House Copse and its adjacent field from south to north. Baker and Brookes suggest that ‘The reuse of ancient monuments as assembly places might be interpreted as a dialogue with the past, conferring legitimacy and authority to proceedings or oath-taking rituals.’

Fig. 3. Parish boundaries and the Iron Age earthwork



Baker and Brookes point out other significant features often found on such sites. The steep slope of the sides of Binsted Rife valley, and the ford in the bottom of the

valley, are features often chosen to make the site recognisable. Such sites also used the reflective qualities of the valley's steep sides to make it easier to speak to large numbers of people.

Another feature of many Hundred meeting places is that they are 'located at significant points on major routes. Significant points include the intersection of two or more routes or a road and a stream (fords routinely feature in the names of hundreds and their probable meeting places), or a marked change in the direction or incline of a path.'

Scotland Lane, a mediaeval track (thought by Ivan Margary to be part of the Roman Road from Chichester to Brighton), approaches the meeting place from the east, while the hollow way formed an approach from the west. Another track, less visible on this LiDAR image but more visible on others, connects the hollow way up the other side of the valley to the present-day junction of the B2132 and the A27. There is a 'marked change in the incline' as these meet the steep Rife valley.

The present-day B2132 was possibly an approach from the north and south. The Iron Age earthwork could also have been used as an approach path. The east-west Chichester-Arundel Roman Road has now been shown by the LiDAR to pass close by to the north (Carpenter et al., 2016).

THE BUSINESS OF THE HUNDRED COURTS AND THE LINK WITH THE FOREST COURT

By the high Middle Ages, Hundreds are thought to have dealt with such matters as the regulation of weights and measures, the impounding of strays, the apprehension of wrongdoers, and the upkeep of the highways. According to new research by Heather Warne, author of the Victoria County History article on Binsted (Warne 1997), the Binsted Hundred meeting place was also the meeting place of one of the forest courts associated with Arundel Forest. Arundel Forest covered a large area stretching from Arundel to the Hampshire border (Langton and Jones, in progress).

The Hundred was known as Binsted Hundred in 1086, and had its new name, Avisford or Avesford Hundred, by 1166 (Warne 1997, 102). The name Binsted derives from the OE word for 'bean' and 'stede', 'place', so 'place where beans are cultivated' (Warne 1997, fn 165). The alternative name seems to have arisen because the forest court (or 'aves' court) also met there. The change may be to do with the need for a

better identification of the meeting place naming a feature (the ford), or a preference for naming it after its function (the forest court: perhaps beans were no longer grown there).

As Heather Warne puts it, 'Binsted Hundred descended under the name Avisford Hundred, a place name which makes sense if it is derived from *aves* and *ford*, meaning 'at the ford of the aves'....Where large forests existed, meetings of people who had common in the forest took place seasonally, at the aves courts. These people would be the same members of the broad community who had the duty to attend the Hundred court. It would be convenient therefore to deal with both types of business at the same place. Such courts were often held towards the edge of forest areas because at least once a year the business was to drive the forest of the outpastured animals and re-allocate them to commoners to take home for the close season – just as they do nowadays on the New Forest.' (Warne 2005)

An older derivation of the first element of 'Avisford' is that suggested by Anderson (1939, 76), and by Mawer and Stenton (1930), from a personal name, Aefi or Aefic. The derivation personal name + ford is very common, and this remains a possibility. Warne suggests that the word 'aves' for this court connected with the Forest may derive from *aevesn* meaning pasturage or pannage, a meaning found in Smith (1987, 3). Marie Clough (1969, 2) mentions that in 1305 Arundel had 'a great forest' and that the pannage was worth £1 annually. This establishes that pannage was allowed in the forest.

Heather Warne's research into the early customs of Ashdown Forest found many documents suggesting that the 'aves' court dealt with forest regulation (Warne, 2016). For example, Daniel-Tyssen (1871, 242) quotes a custom of the Manor of Duddleswell in 1656: 'The aves rents or pannage rents are payable by foreign tenants who claim custom within the Great Park of Lancaster for their mares, cattle and swine for their liberty of running in the great park are payable only at Michaelmas.'

Warne (2016) adds: 'I find the fact that Duddleswell (the manor on the south side of Ashdown which oversaw all tenancy matters within the forest) was the site for both the Hundred and the forest courts is interesting. It means in effect, I believe, that at Avisford the forest pannage courts were probably of great antiquity and perhaps predated the Hundred courts.'

The small triangular copse at the south end of Hundred House Copse is called 'All the World Copse' in the Binsted Tithe Map of 1838. If the derivation of the name

Avisford does come from ‘aefesn’ and ford it would mean that the Moot mound and its surrounds accommodated not only the Hundred Courts but also the gathering of folks, with their animals, from all the local communities (on the south side of the forest at least), who had pasturage or pannage rights in the forest of Arundel. It would make the more modern name for the area of ‘All the World’ even more apposite.

Fig. 4. Aerial photo of the mediaeval tile kiln excavation at Hundred House Copse by Con Ainsworth in 1963–6, which also shows the Iron Age earthwork (marked by two trees in the lower field) and the ‘domed hillock’ in the upper field, possibly the Hundred meeting place (Copyright Worthing Museum and Art Gallery).



CONCLUSION

The place name evidence, together with the features and location of the site, suggest that the ‘domed hillock’ or circular raised area was the outdoor meeting place for both these courts. The ‘House’ suggested by the copse name may have been built at a later date and may be discovered by further investigation.

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The hollow way, probable moot mound and linear earthwork have all been described by the Secrets of the High Woods project for the National Mapping Programme (hollow way: Monarch 201809; mound: SHW201805; linear earthwork: SHW201807) and will be added to Historic Environment records.

Con Ainsworth's tile and pottery kiln excavation is on the National Monument Record as Tyghlers, Binsted, SMR No. 1339, Grid ref SU9791006550, Mediaeval Pottery and Tile Kiln.

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