

The Manor and Deer Park of Torpel

by Frances Crowther

The mediaeval manor of Torpel was one of the most extensive in the Soke of Peterborough, comprising areas of the parishes of Bainton, Ufford, Ashton, Helpston, Maxey and Barnack. No place-name commemorates it and its exact location is unknown, but the name Torpel Castle has recently been given to massive stone foundations in Lawn Wood, Bainton (TF 10700525). However, earthwork-remains in a field to the east of this may represent the site of the manor house, and the bounds of the mediaeval deer park can also be deduced.

The earthworks (centred TF 111054; fig. 20a) lie on flat land south of the River Welland, just over 15 metres above OD. They were formerly in Ufford, but are now in Bainton parish, at a point where the line of the Roman Road, King Street, is distorted, apparently to accommodate the earthworks. The site is described as a ring and bailey on modern OS maps, but appears to be the site of a manor house with adjoining enclosures. It occupies a roughly rectangular field of some 4 hectares, and is surrounded by a bank up to 1 metre high. A break in this bank on the western side may be recent, but the entrance on the eastern side is probably original. A hollow-way leads to the earthworks in the southern half of the site. The bank on the southern boundary is also broken by trackways.

The interior may be divided into four areas. The northern third, which is bounded by a scarp up to 1 metre high, contains no visible features, apart from a depression in the north-east corner. The central part is occupied by at least 9 rectangular depressions surrounded by low banks, probably the remains of fairly recent farm buildings. The largest depression, to the west, is perhaps the site of a large barn, and the field was known as Barn Close on a map of 1799 (NRO). In the south-east there is a flat area bounded by the hollow-way on the north and by banks on the other three sides. The remains of at least one long rectangular pond can be seen along the east side. The south-west is occupied by a roughly oval, flat-topped mound, and foundations of a former building are still visible on top of it. It is bounded on the north, west and south by a scarp up to 2.5 metres high, with a flat-bottomed ditch some 5 metres wide and a bank up to 1.5 metres high outside it. To the south-west and south there is an outer bank and ditch,

beyond the main enclosure, mutilated by tracks entering the site from the south. Fragments of mediaeval pottery, including Stamford ware, have been found in the plough soil of the adjacent fields.

The deer park (fig. 20b) was made in 1198 when Roger de Torpel paid 100s. for enclosing his woods of Torpel, La Hage, Ravenesland and Cricklecroft. In the fourteenth century it is said variously to be of 60 and of 92 acres. Its limits may be detected from field boundaries on the 1799 map and from place-names. It contains Lawn Wood (TF 105053) and Rough Ravens (TF 106056), and is bounded on the east by King Street and on the south by Hilly Wood. The field in the south-east corner of this area was known as Old Parks on the 1799 map (TF 111050). Although the outline of the park is apparent from this, there is no trace of a boundary bank.

Within Lawn Wood (TF 10700525) are the remains of a stone building some 20 metres square, with walls 1.75 metres wide, still standing to a height of 1 metre. The dressed stone has been robbed out and all that remains is the limestone rubble core of the walls. At the south-west internal corner the lower part of a semi-octagonal attached shaft, probably for vaulting, remains. Immediately to the east (TF 10740525) there is a pond. The building, described as a lodge on the OS 1:2500 map, has become known as Torpel Castle. There are references to a lodge at various times, for example in a grant of 1554.

Within the deer park of Torpel there are thus two interesting sites, both possible locations for the manor house. Although the stone-walled structure in Lawn Wood is impressive, the earthwork site must also have been important, to judge both from its extent and from the fact that it stood on King Street. Local tradition states that the boundary stone which stands in the hedge between the remains of the manor house and King Street has been moved from its correct place. There are records of disputes during the sixteenth century over the boundary between Helpston and Torpel Manor in Ufford. Possibly the earthworks are the site of the original manor house while the building is the remains of a deer park lodge. Only excavation could make the position clearer.

Bibliography

- Northamptonshire Past and Present* V, 1975, 231-2.
VCH Northamptonshire II, 1906, 460-535.

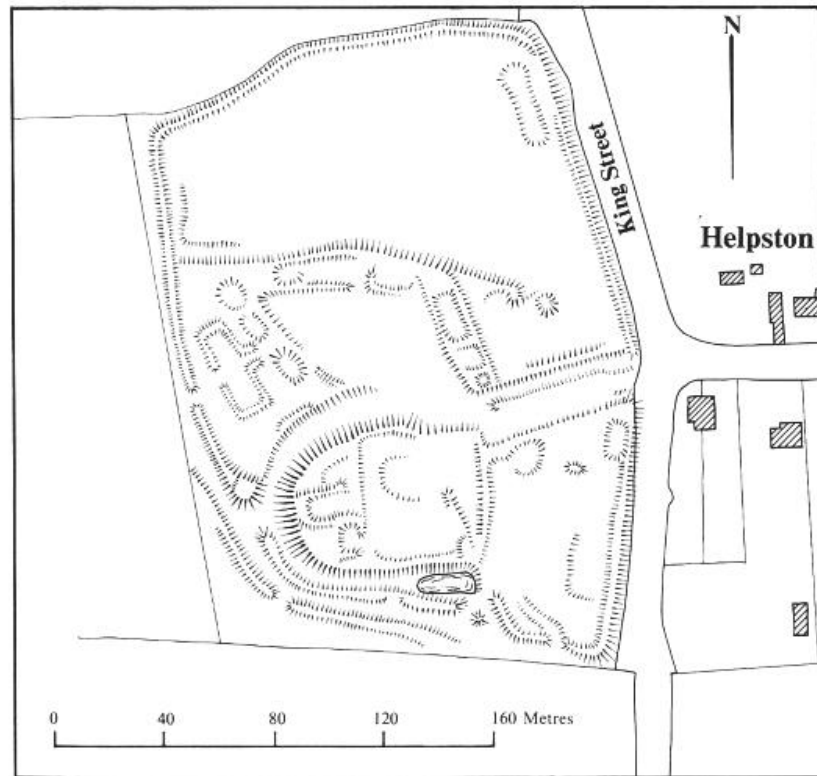


Fig 20a Plan of the manor of Torpel, Bainton

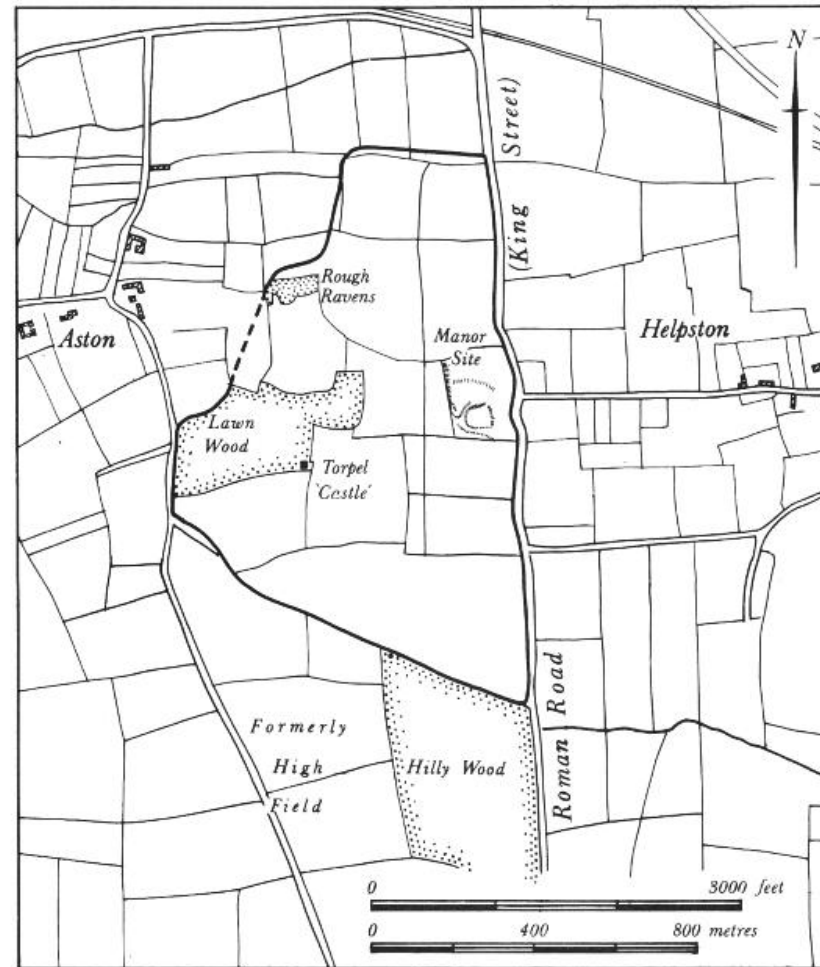


Fig 20b The manor and deer-park of Torpel, Bainton (park shown in heavy outline)