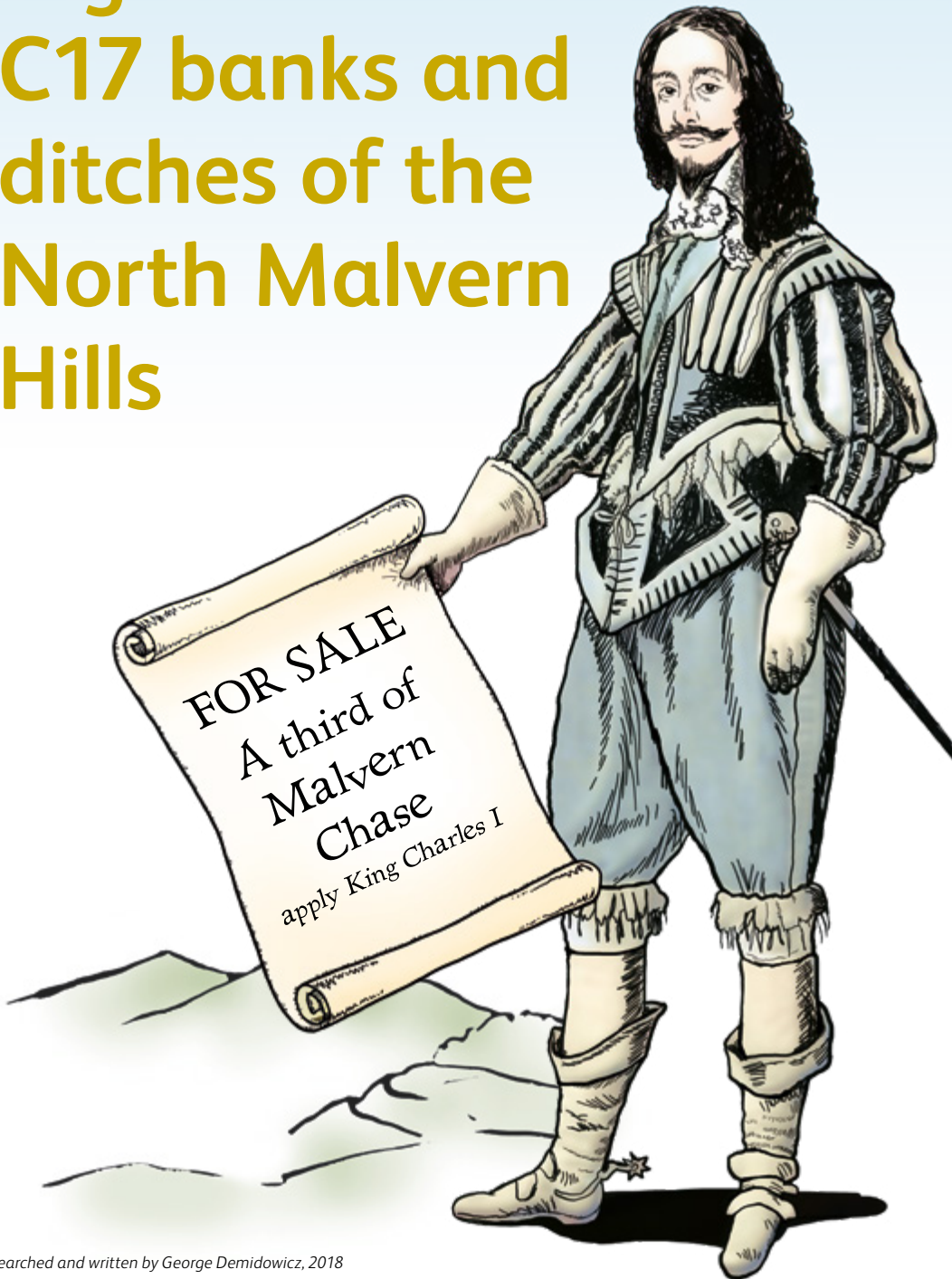


A guide to the C17 banks and ditches of the North Malvern Hills



Banks and Ditches on the Northern Malvern Hills

Anyone who has walked onto the Malvern Hills cannot fail to have noticed the massive bank and ditch which follows the main ridge. It is variously called the Shire Ditch or Red Earl's Dyke and its origin and function are still shrouded in mystery. This impressive earthwork so captures the imagination that less prominent boundary banks that rise and fall over the slopes of the hills have gone largely unremarked. They represent an additional layer in the historic landscape of the Malverns, and in contrast to the Shire Ditch, their date and purpose is known.

During his reign King Charles I was in severe financial difficulties and in constant dispute with Parliament, whose agreement was needed to levy taxes. With no recourse to Parliament Charles I attempted to raise revenue by exploiting the Royal Forests and his rights enjoyed on private Forests or Chases such as Malvern. This was shared between the neighbouring lords of the manor from Great Malvern, Mathon, and Cradley in the north to Bromesberrow and Berrow in the south. The Crown had, however, maintained its right to take the 'venison and vert', that is the deer and greenery, including the timber. The plan to raise income for the royal coffers was for the King to relinquish his right to the 'venison and vert' over the whole Chase in exchange for enclosing a third of the area. This, the 'King's Third' could then be leased or sold. The other 'two thirds' remained in the ownership of the neighbouring manorial lords and was left open for the commoners to graze their stock as from time immemorial. In 1628 the Chase was surveyed so that a third of each manor, not necessarily in a single enclosure, could be allotted to the king. The proposal to enclose a part of Malvern Chase inevitably met with resistance, but it appears that much of the work of enclosure of 'disafforestation' was completed in the 1630s.

Although a map of the northern half of the Malvern Chase has survived (c.1633) showing the 'King's Thirds,' it was not appreciated until recently that the 'Thirds' that were created at this time still survived in many places on the Malvern Hills enclosed by banks and ditches. The 'King's Thirds' were not confined to the hills, but were also created on the flatter parts of the Chase east of the main ridge, most notably on Castlemorton Common (Fairoaks Farm and Broomhill). The clearest banks and ditches lie on the hills north of the Wyche cutting. Here the 'King's Thirds' were carved out of the manors of Great Malvern, Leigh, Cradley, Mathon and Colwall. By coincidence the best preserved and complete enclosure occupies the northern half of the Worcestershire Beacon, the

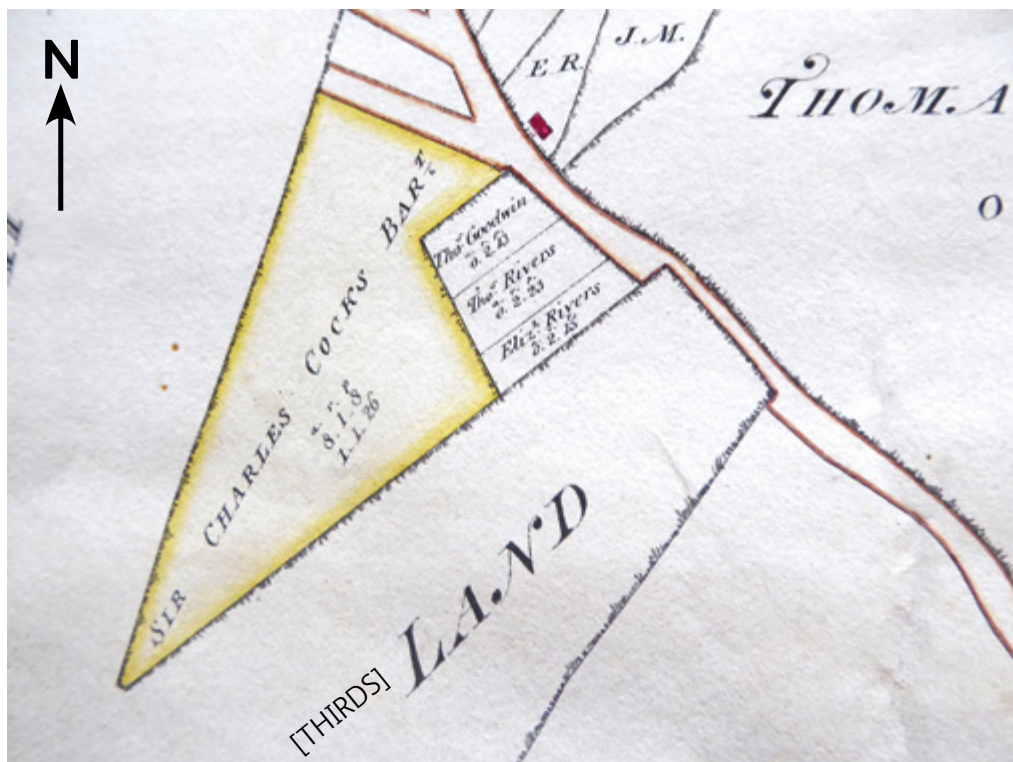
most popular destination for visitors to the Malvern Hills. The ditch was normally dug on the outside of the enclosure, the bank on the inside, so marking clearly what was within the 'King's Third' and what lay in the commoners' 'two thirds'.

The 'King's Thirds' on the northern hills was purchased by Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, and passed through several owners such as the Strodes, the Lyttons, William Robinson (Lytton) and Richard Warburton, who sold to Thomas Hornyold in 1768. The Hornyolds were owners until 1919, but had already by 1879 agreed to dedicate their land for public use in anticipation of 1884 Malvern Hills Act.

By the 19th century the Hornyolds had leased their 'Thirds' on the northern hills in various parcels. For the first time fences and hawthorn hedges were introduced onto the hills in order to prevent their tenants' sheep and cattle straying onto the commoners' 'two thirds'. Iron posts and rails and the odd hawthorn tree can still be seen today, their modern equivalent today being the electric fences that contain the stock within shifting areas of stinting. Without this control the animals would be a nuisance to local residents and a danger on the roads and we would soon lose the open aspect of the hills to natural woodland regeneration.



c.1633 map of the "King's Thirds" on the Worcestershire Beacon. Courtesy Worcestershire Archive and Archaeology Service.



Map showing the triangle of Leigh's 'two thirds' on End Hill, finally enclosed in 1778. Courtesy of Eastnor Castle (see Photo G).

The land over which you will travel when following this leaflet, is under the jurisdiction of the Malvern Hills Trust. The Malvern Hills Trust, owns, protects and manages the unique cultural heritage, wildlife and geology of this iconic English landscape for the benefit of the local community and the hundreds of thousands of visitors who come each year. They have been caring for the Malvern Hills and surrounding commons since they were established in 1884 by an Act of Parliament, and are a registered charity.

Long lengths of the banks and ditches can be followed safely but great care is necessary in some areas as they can be steep, slippery and overgrown with bracken and bramble. They should only be attempted if confident, although undoubtedly easier than digging them in the first place! The guide points out the most visible sections, but does not suggest a circuit, which requires careful navigation. This alternative is available on the Walking in the Malverns website: www.visitthomalverns.org/things-to-do/walking/



Malvern Hills Trust

malvern hills
Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty

Supported by the AONB Sustainable Development Fund

Malvern Hills Trust is the working name of the Malvern Hills Conservators (registered charity 515804)

Malvern Hills Trust, Manor House, Grange Road, Malvern, Worcestershire WR14 3EY

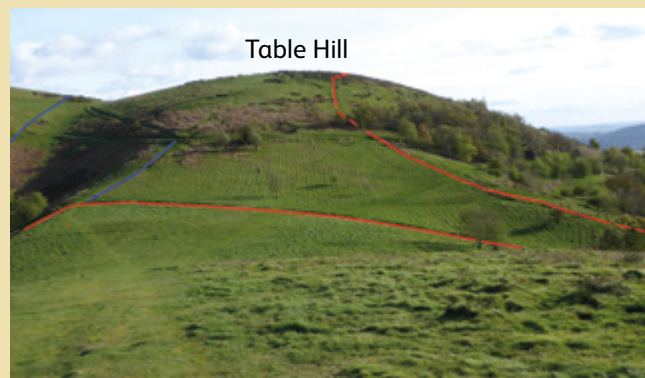
01684 892002

www.malvern hills.org.uk

info@malvern hills.org.uk

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F End Hill provides the best vantage point for the banks and ditches that lie in the saddle between its summit and Table Hill and within the valley that descends to the Clock Tower on North Malvern Road. This valley was once known as Newcombe Slade and was allocated to the 'two thirds' common of Great Malvern. The banks and ditches in the lower part of valley were destroyed by quarrying. The larger part of End Hill, North Hill and Table Hill was included in the 'King's Thirds', the banks and ditches defining manorial boundaries or divisions between the 'King's Thirds' and the 'two thirds' common.



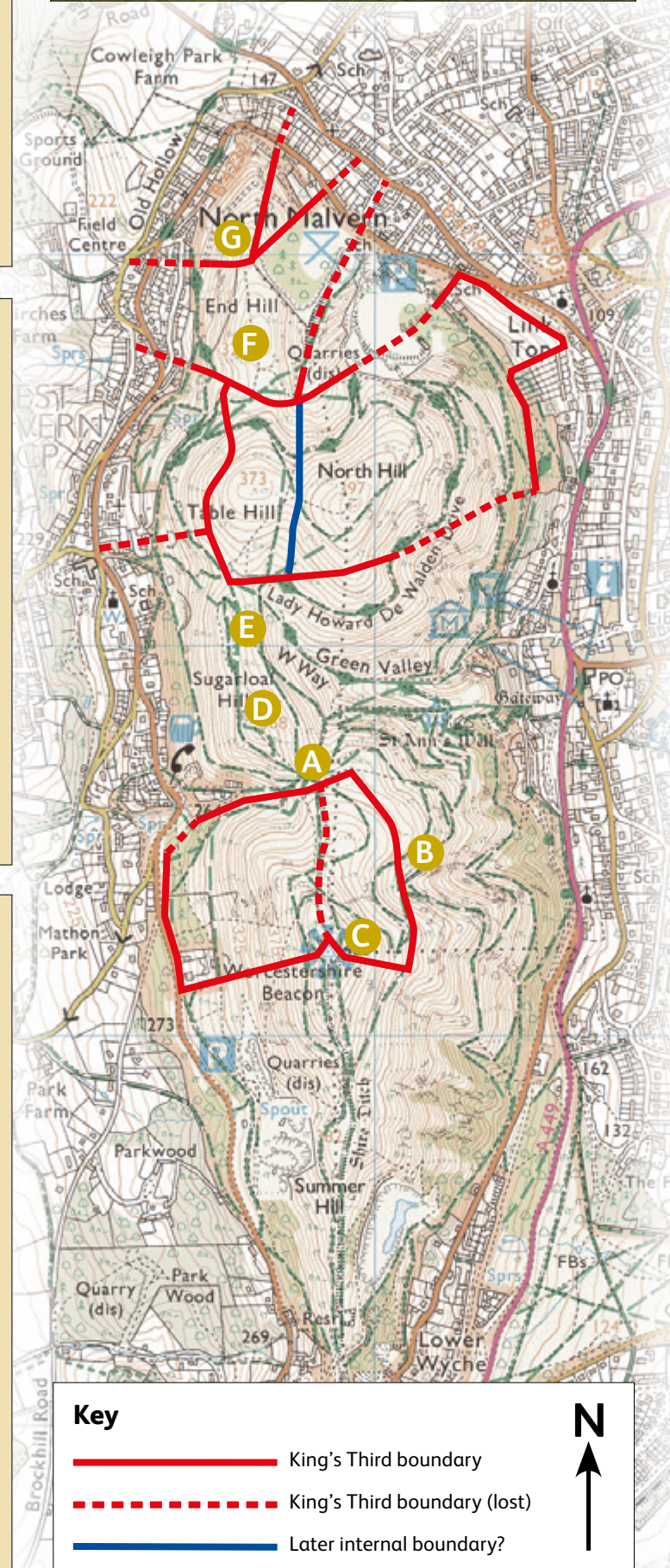
E Continue along the Sugarloaf ridge until it descends towards Table Hill. The banks and ditches that enclosed Table Hill are more easily seen as a result of the clearance of gorse on Table Hill in the autumn of 2017. The small quarry has removed a section of the bank and ditch but it continues eastwards and onto the flank of North Hill (see D below).



D Ascend the Sugarloaf Hill, which lies within the 'two thirds' of the Chase that was left as common. From the summit a path can be seen following the well-preserved enclosure bank on the south slope of North Hill (red line on photo). It then headed towards Ivy Scar Rock. A later dividing bank and ditch (blue line), with some surviving hawthorn trees can be seen ascending to the saddle between Table Hill and North Hill.



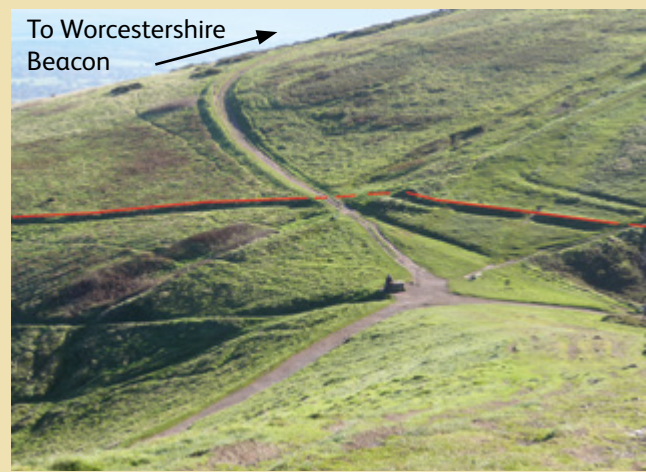
C The bank and ditch cannot be seen on the well-worn summit. It is known to have excluded the fire-bucket beacon that once stood near the site of the OS trig point so it could be accessible for lighting. The illustration overleaf from the c.1633 plan shows the beacon to have consisted of a tall wooden post, supported by two diagonal struts. A series of horizontal arms formed a ladder leading up to a large metal bucket which contained the fire. Descend eastwards from the trig point towards a bench on a wide path; the bank on the right contains the bend that was necessary to avoid the beacon after ascending the steep east slope of the hill on the Great Malvern side.



G Walk to the northern summit of End Hill. Three banks and ditches converge on this summit, the most obvious one crossing the main path at right angles and descending to West Malvern. To the north lay the 'two thirds' of Cradley common, to the south the Cradley 'King's Third'. Walk eastwards along the bank a short distance to a MHC (Malvern Hills Conservators) stone marker (yellow box on photo), at which point the bank and ditch forks to define a triangle of land that was allocated to Leigh manor's 'two thirds' common. It originally stretched all the way down to the Cowleigh Road. To the right, corresponding with the disused Tank Quarry, the land formed a narrow tongue of Leigh manor's 'King's Third'.



A This popular summit on the Malvern Hills, the Worcestershire Beacon, has the best preserved section making an almost complete circuit. The dais can be reached by ascending Happy Valley from Great Malvern or from West Malvern car park, The Dingle or Westminster Bank. Close by and in the direction of the grassy slope to the Beacon the bank and ditch can be seen to the left of a small quarry, which has removed part of it. It then cuts through the 'Shire Ditch' on the left and continues on the same line followed by a grassy path. After a rise, the bank and ditch turns sharp right off the path southwards where it can be followed fairly safely. The 'King's Third' here enclosed the north side of the Beacon, divided between the manors of Great Malvern to the east and Mathon to the west.



B Here the bank and ditch can be seen steeply descending and ascending Rushy Valley, most visible when the bracken has died down during the winter. Descend to the wide footpath contouring Rushy Valley and ascend Worcestershire Beacon by several routes available.

