

SHORTER CONTRIBUTIONS

WHEN IS A HENGE NOT A HENGE?

by *Edward A. Martin*

Ever since 1951 Suffolk has been credited with a Class I henge monument, that at Stratford Hills, Stratford St Mary (Atkinson 1951; S.A.U. index no. SSM 011). The term 'henge' was adopted by archaeologists earlier this century to describe a group of more or less circular enclosures, typically with an external bank and internal ditch, with either one (Class I) or more (Class II) entrances. Like their eponym, Stonehenge, they are thought to have had a ritual function and appear to date from the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age.

The Stratford example no longer survives as an earthwork, but was photographed from the air, as a crop-mark, by J. Bradford in 1947. Since then the cropmark has been re-photographed several times. It consists of a broad penannular ring with an entrance on the south-east side. There seems to have been considerable confusion as to the size of the cropmark: Professor Atkinson (1951) published it as having a 40ft wide ditch; F. H. Erith (1962) measured the cropmark on the ground and found that it had an external diameter of 89ft, the ditch being 12ft wide and the entrance 9ft wide; in 1969, however, Aubrey Burl published it as having a diameter of 190ft! The aerial photographs held by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit would seem to confirm Erith's measurements.

The small size of the Stratford henge, 89ft as opposed to an average henge diameter of over 200ft (Burl 1969), is the first factor which arouses suspicion as to the true nature of this site.

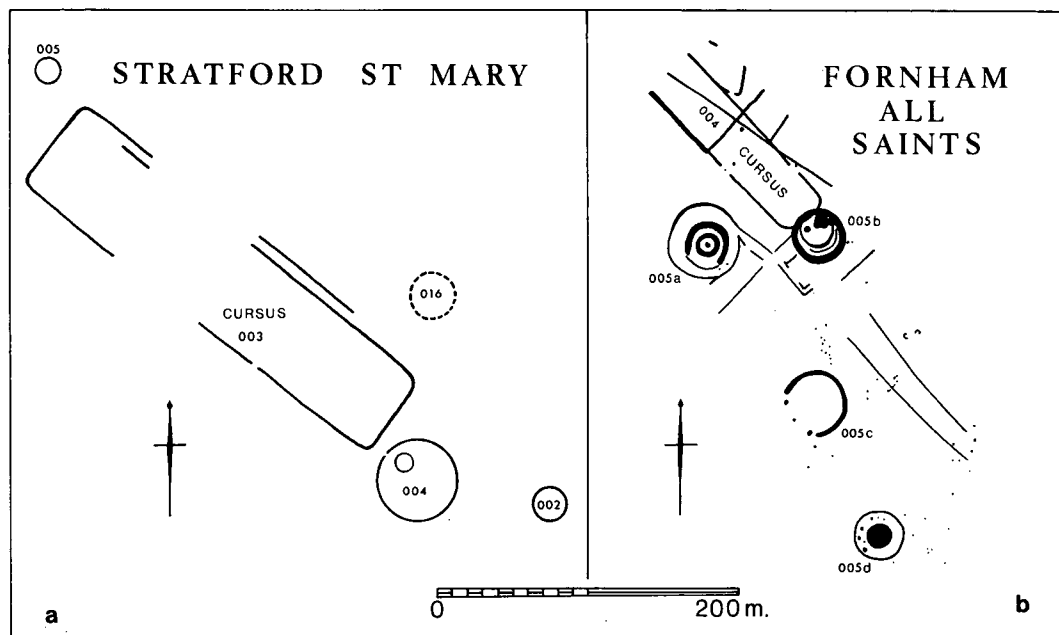


FIG. 34 — Cropmarks at Stratford St Mary and Fornham All Saints (based on photographs held by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit).

Secondly a cruciform feature was noted within the henge, one arm of which pointed towards the entrance (Erith 1962 and McMaster 1971). Thirdly the field in which the cropmark lies was recorded as *Mount Field* on the 1837-39 Tithe Map of Stratford St Mary.

Recent excavations on a medieval mill-mound at Great Linford in Buckinghamshire have shown that this consisted of a 'C' shaped ditch about 30m (100ft) in diameter surrounding a mound, within which there was a cruciform feature, with arms about 4m (13ft) in length, cut into the gravel sub-soil. This cruciform feature was shown to have contained the horizontal supports or 'cross-trees' of a post-mill, a type of windmill (Zeepvat 1980).

The similarities between the Stratford and the Great Linford sites are obvious. The final touch is provided by the field name; 'mount' is commonly used in East Anglia as a term for a mill-mound, e.g. Mill Mount in Helmingham (S.A.U. index no. HLM 007) and *Mount Field* otherwise *Mill Field* in Rede (RDE 002). Put together these factors strongly suggest that the Stratford henge is in fact a mill-mound, an identification which is further supported by the fact that the site is located on the top of a hill.

To make amends for having disposed of Suffolk's only henge it is perhaps worthwhile to draw attention to the large ring-ditch (SSM 004) at the south-east end of the Stratford St Mary cursus (SSM 003; Fig. 34a). The ring has a diameter of approximately 50m (165ft) and appears to have a narrow entrance on its north-west side. Within the ring and near the entrance there is another, smaller, ring with a diameter of about 10m (30ft).

Atypical ring-ditches (FAS 005a - d) also occur at the south-east end of the Fornham All Saints cursus (FAS 004; Fig. 34b). Ring FAS 005a appears to consist of a broad horse-shoe shaped ditch, with a diameter of about 30m (100ft); across its entrance there appears to be a slight ditch or slot and within it is a small broad circle with a (?) central pit. Enclosing the whole complex there is a roughly circular narrow ditch with a diameter of about 50m (165ft). Ring FAS 005b consists of a broad ring, about 35m (116ft) in diameter, which overlaps the end of the cursus. In the interior there are two partial (?) rings and several pits. This ring was trenched by A. R. Edwardson of Moyses Hall Museum in 1960, who found 2nd - 3rd century Roman pottery and a coin of Marcus Aurelius in the secondary siltings of the ditch (Edwardson 1960). No detailed account of his work, however, survives. Ring FAS 005c consists of a broad horse-shoe shaped ditch, approximately 40m (130ft) in diameter, with what appear to be pits at each end of the ditch and in the middle of the entrance. Ring FAS 005d has a dark central circle (? the remains of a mound) and a thin outer ditch, approximately 30m (100ft) in diameter. There appear to be several pits between the central circle and the outer ring on the west side.

In size and morphology the Fornham rings have much in common with the hengiform monuments, which are also adjacent to a cursus, at Dorchester in Oxfordshire (Atkinson *et al.* 1951). Henge monuments occur in association with cursuses in six cases, and with small hengiform monuments in a further two cases (Burl 1969). The purpose of henges and cursuses remains unclear, other than something vaguely defined as 'ritual'. The evidence from Thornborough in Yorkshire, where a henge overlies a cursus, suggests that henges are later than cursuses, though they both have a Neolithic background. The frequent occurrence together of these two types of 'ritual' monuments does suggest something more than coincidence and implies some sort of link between them. In the light of this connection, and their henge-like features, one should, perhaps, regard the Stratford and Fornham rings as henges or hengiform monuments.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to Judith Plouviez and Tom Loader for the original plottings of the Fornham and Stratford cropmarks.

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