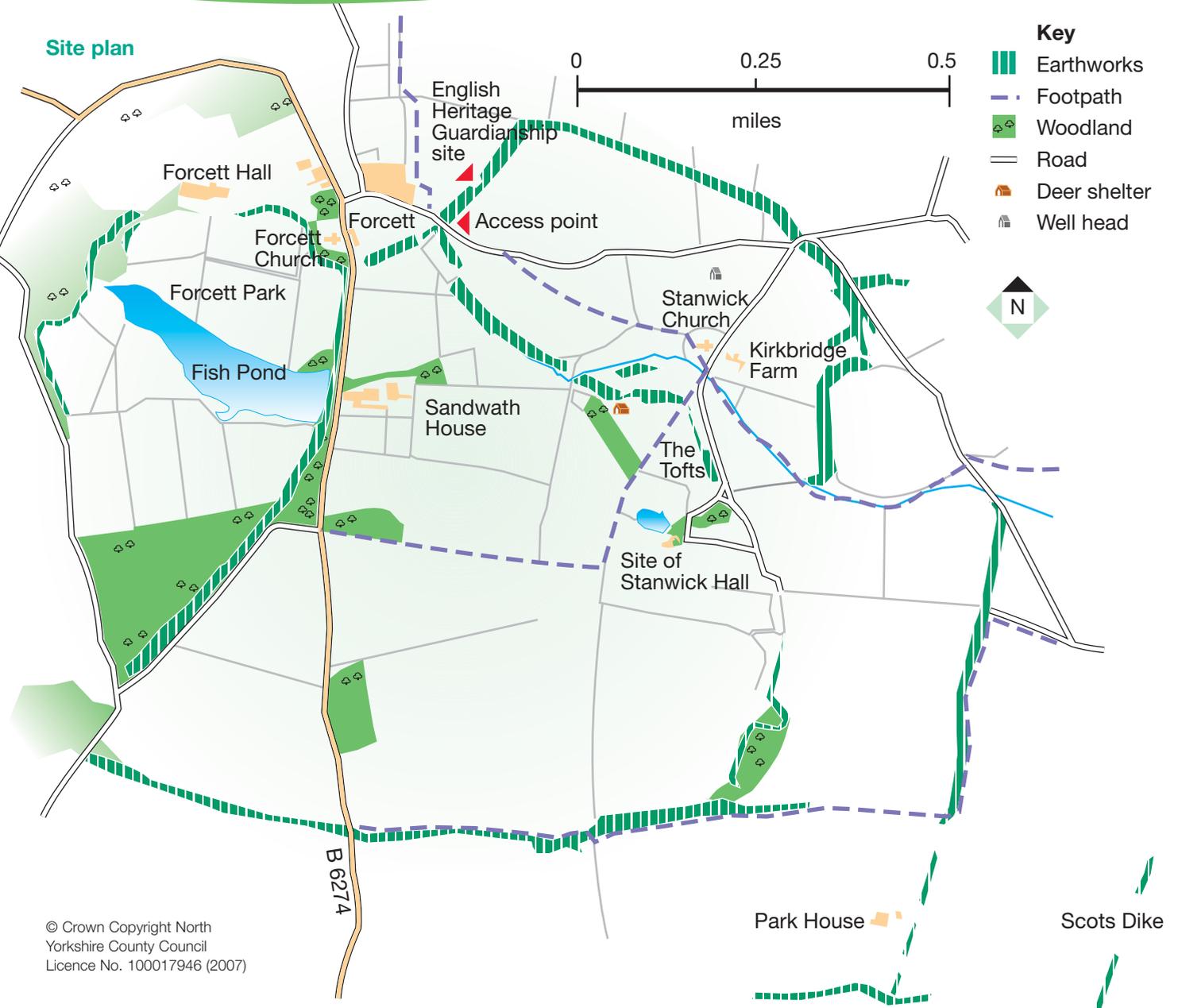




Stanwick Camp

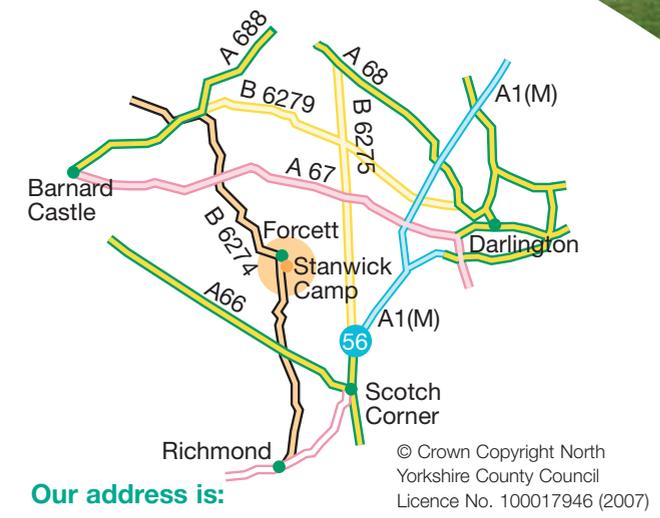
Site plan



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CountrysideService

Stanwick Camp location map



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Front cover image: Bronze mount in the shape of a horse's face found at Stanwick in 1854. © The Trustees of the British Museum



Stanwick - court and fort

2,000 years ago, the fortifications at Stanwick were probably the court and centre of power of Cartimandua, queen of the Brigantes – the biggest British tribe during the Iron Age.

Excavations unearthed luxury goods imported from France, Germany and Italy, suggesting the houses were occupied by Brigantian nobility. A hoard of metalwork found in 1854, and now in the British Museum, included a sword, coat of mail, bridle bits and axle fittings from carts. A human skull with sword-cuts and a bronze sword still in its wooden scabbard were also discovered and were probably trophies which hung above the gateway.



Bronze axle pin found in 1854

The sheer size of Stanwick was a deliberate attempt to display power and status, since it is far too large and low-lying to be defensible. But this remarkable site had begun life during the last two or three centuries BC as a group of simple farms where crops grew and sheep and cattle grazed, enclosed by low banks and ditches.

Its importance grew during the early part of the 1st century AD when Cartimandua entered into a treaty with the Romans, who recognised Brigantian independence. Her husband Venutius, however, led a resistance group and this inevitably caused unrest. In AD71, a Roman army under Petillius Cerealis was sent north to bring the territory directly under Roman rule. It is not known what happened to Cartimandua and Venutius.



Far left: Detail from stonework in Stanwick Church

Left: Part of excavated rampart at the English Heritage Guardianship site

Stanwick Camp, as it is commonly called, encloses an area of 300

hectares. (741 acres), with more than 6.5km (4 miles) of ramparts up to 5m (16ft) high made up of stone-fronted earthen banks and ditches. The banks don't look particularly high in parts, but it is worth remembering that 2,000 years of weathering have reduced them and filled in the quarry ditches. The original scale can be seen in an excavated length close to Forcett village, which can be visited. It was the rock-cut ditch and stone wall fronting the rampart which gave rise to the name Stanwick which means 'stone walls' and dates from the Saxon or Viking periods.

Post-Roman Stanwick

A long bank and ditch called Scots Dyke runs from south of Richmond to east of Stanwick and possibly as far as the Tees. Recent excavations at Melsonby cross-roads show the dyke probably went out of use between the 1st century BC and 1st century AD, matching the most important phase of Stanwick and hinting at a connection between them.

Sword and scabbard found during the excavations of 1854



An Anglo-Saxon cross-shaft with entwined beasts can be seen in the church with other fragments. The church, a Victorian rebuild on a Saxon foundation, is managed by the Churches Conservation Trust and is always open. The tomb of Sir Hugh Smithson and his wife lies inside. They built the current Kirkbridge Farm house in the mid 17th century, the farm itself probably being the site of a medieval manor house with the village close by – you can see cultivation remains as ridge and furrow field systems in many of the fields around. The family, later ennobled as the Dukes of Northumberland, built Stanwick Hall in the mid 18th century. Sadly, it was demolished in the 1920s although the walled garden, clock house and coach house still stand. These features were surrounded by a landscaped park which helped to preserve much of the archaeological remains and Forcett Park does the same.

Visiting

The fortifications are under a number of private ownerships, but many parts are accessible by rights of way. The short excavated length near to Forcett is managed by English Heritage and makes a useful starting point from which to appreciate the scale of the original earthworks. From here one needs to return to the road to connect with the rights of way or road network. The site is free and open to the public all year round.



A reconstruction of an Iron Age roundhouse at Grewelthorpe