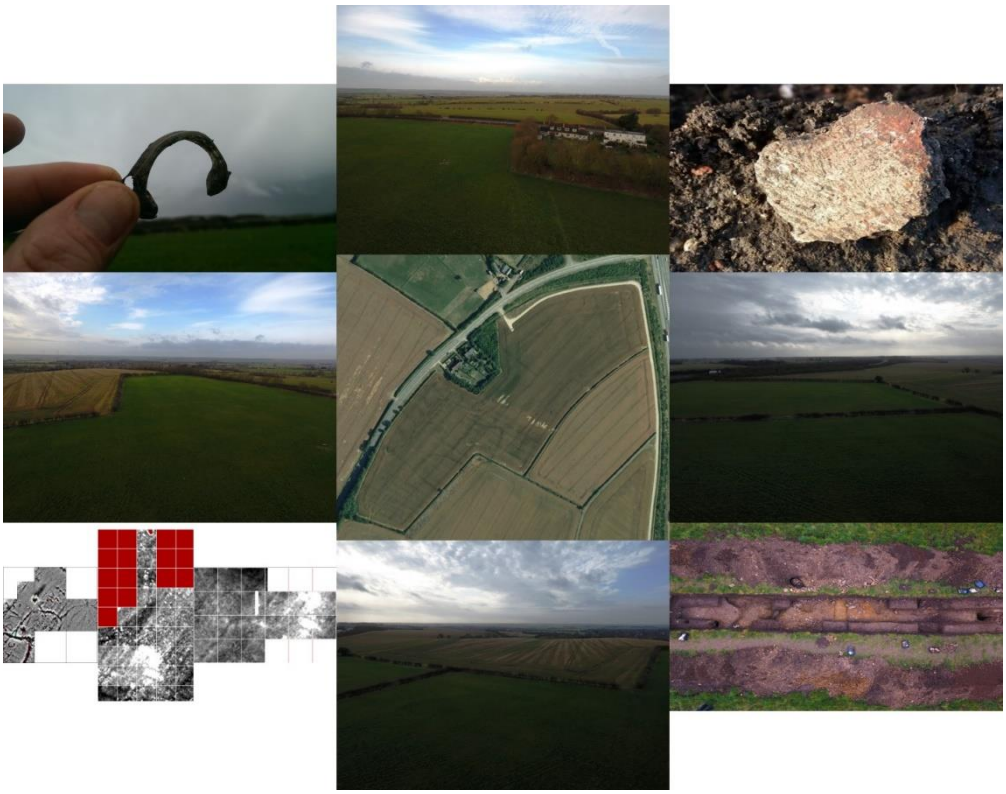
SAWTRY HISTORY SOCIETY

SUMMARY OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS CARRIED OUT ON HILL TOP, ALCONBURY WESTON



Archaeological Investigations:

Excavation undertaken by Dr J R Garrood
Geophysical Survey by Sawtry History Society
Field Walking Survey by Sawtry History Society

Excavation Undertaken by Dr J R Garrood

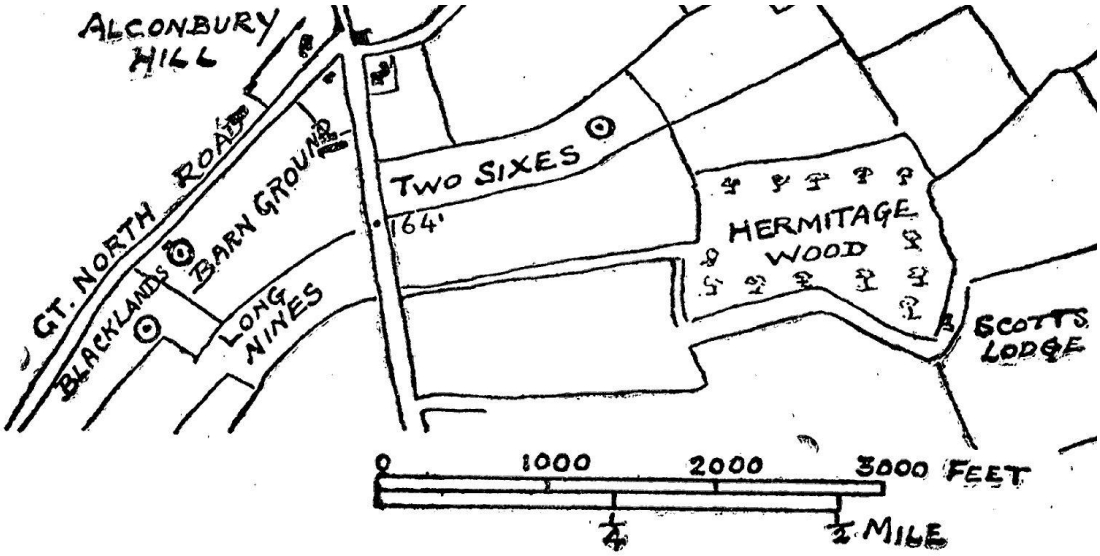


Figure 1: Locations of Garrood's investigations on Hill Top (Garrood, 1946:205)

Dr Garrood's principal excavation was of a rubbish pit in Blacklands (Figure 1). The pottery assemblage from this pit offers good evidence for continuous occupation from the late Iron Age through to the fourth century AD. The excavation site for this assemblage is in close proximity to crop marks visible on the 2016 Google Earth image (Figure 2) that resemble ditched enclosures. If an association were proven it could be the point of nucleation for wider settlement activity on Hill Top.

Figure 2: Garrood's excavation relative to crop marks (Google Earth, 2016)

Geophysical Survey - Magnetometry

The survey covered an area of 8,400m^2 (0.84ha).

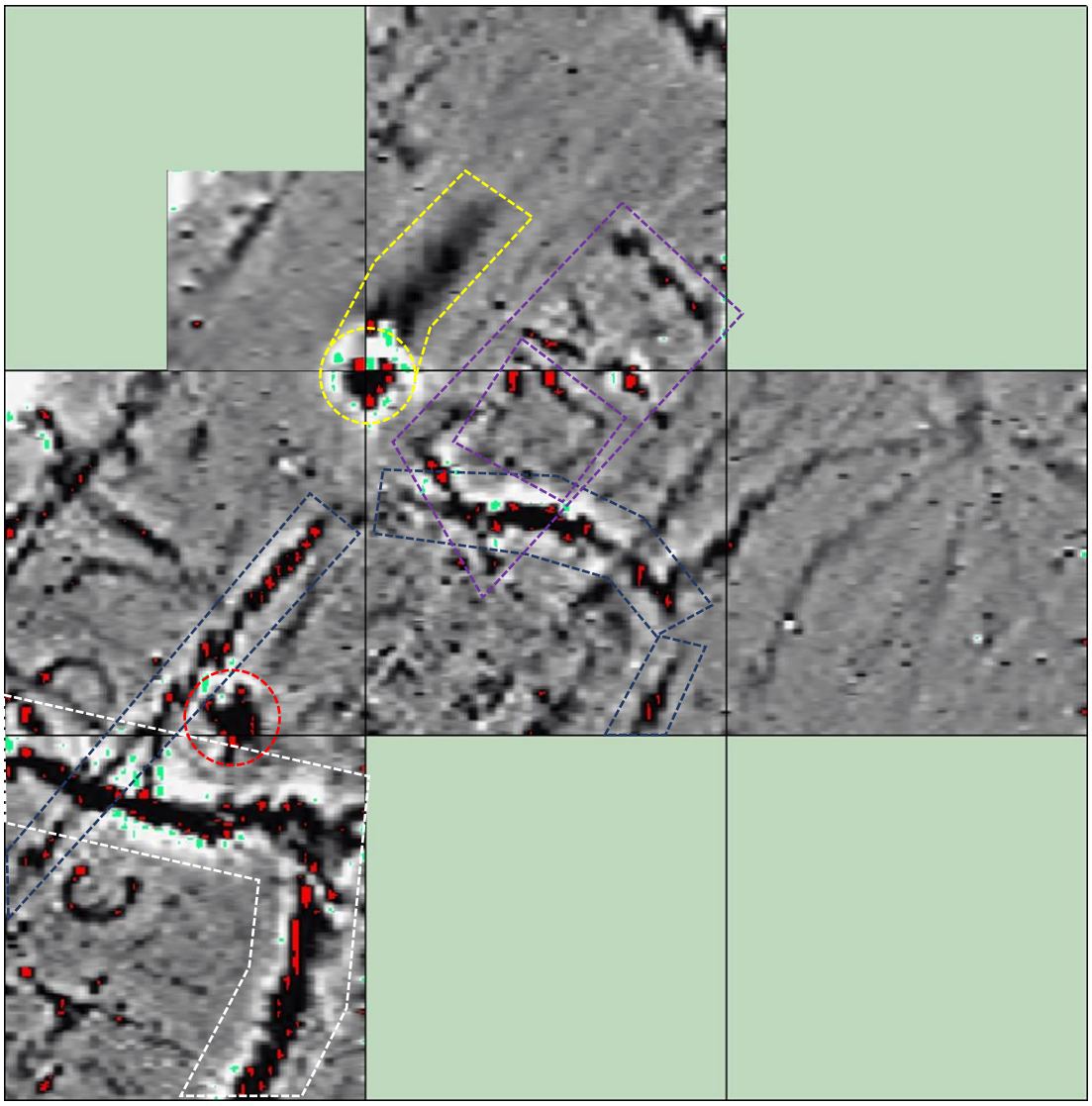


Figure 3: Magnetometry survey results, 40m x 40m grid squares (Wood, 2017)

Of particular note is the strong linear anomaly in the bottom left survey square (white dotted line) and the two strong circular anomalies - one immediately north of the aforementioned linear anomaly (red dotted line) and the other at the top left grid square juncture with an associated smear to the northeast (yellow dotted lines), all of which correspond with crop marks visible on Google Earth imagery (Figure 2).

Also, of interest are: the strong narrow linear anomalies (blue dotted lines) that are suggestive of a rectangular feature - the northwest element of which truncates or is truncated by the previously mentioned linear anomaly marked in white; the C-shaped feature in the bottom left survey square and the (possible) apsidal feature at the southern edge of the left-centre survey square - although this could just as easily be a truncated ring feature; a series of linear anomalies (purple dotted lines) that form a potential rectilinear feature, with a square feature within - the southern corner of which truncates or is truncated by the linear anomaly marked in blue; and the spidery anomaly in the right-centre survey square, which appears to be geological and may relate to natural drainage or run-off from a surface water source resulting from the high-water table.

Geophysical Survey - Earth Resistance

The first survey covered an area of 12,000m^2 (1.2ha).
The second survey covered an area of 7,200m^2 (0.72ha).

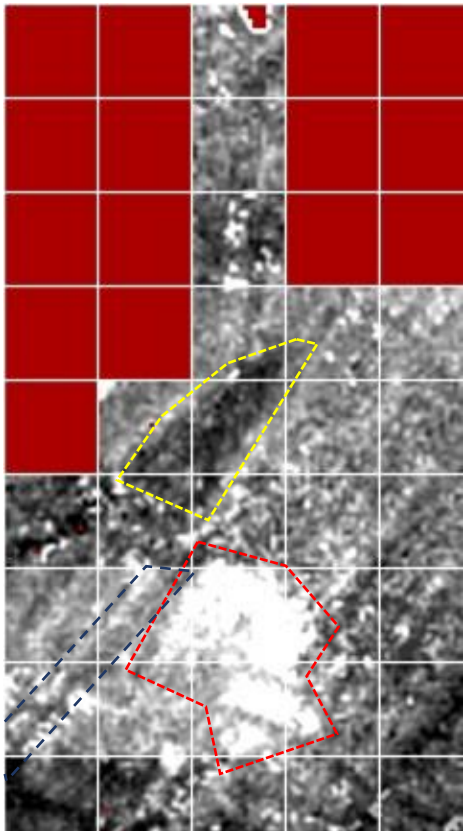


Figure 4: First earth resistance survey results, 20m x 20m grid squares (Hill, 2018)

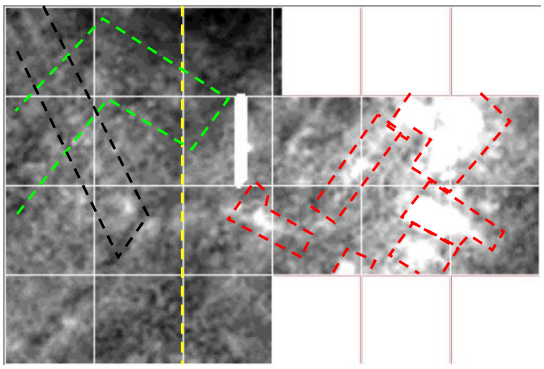


Figure 5: Second earth resistance survey results, 20m x 20m grid squares (Hill, 2018)

In Figure 4, high resistance results are shown as white and low resistance results are in black. Anomalies of significance are the large mass of high resistance (marked in red) in the centre survey squares of the second and third rows up - this was interpreted as compacted building rubble or (with a little optimism) an intact floor, and the spread of low resistance (marked in yellow) that coincides with the spread of magnetic response marked in yellow in Figure 3. The weaker low resistance linear anomalies running northeast-southwest align with modern ploughing and are probably evidence of deeper ploughing activity, however, the weak low resistance linear anomaly (marked in blue) partially coincides with the linear response marked in blue in Figure 3. Similarly, the weaker low resistance linear anomalies running northwest-southeast align with medieval ridge-and-furrow visible in the Google Earth imagery in Figure 2. There are two other stronger low resistance linear anomalies that, whilst aligned with plough marks, have a slightly different nature to them which could suggest they are archaeological; a northeast-southwest linear in the right survey square of the second row up and a northwest-southeast linear in the left survey square of the bottom row.

The difference in soil conditions at the time of each earth resistance survey is clearly evident in the results (Figure 5); especially in the ten survey squares east of the yellow dotted line which were a revisit of squares surveyed in the first earth resistance survey. With a greater degree of moisture retention in the ground the original high resistance mass, whilst visible in the results again, was defined with better clarity. This not only identifies high density and compacted areas of building rubble, but also suggests possible building footprint(s) with associated linear features indicative of walls, as marked in red on Figure 5. In the six new

survey squares, there are several weak low resistance anomalies that are also of potential interest: a diagonal linear (marked in white) that has association with a short high resistance linear anomaly immediately to the east - both of which appear to relate to the strong magnetometry response previously mentioned and correspond accordingly with the crop mark visible on Google Earth (Figure 2); two linear forming a right-angle (marked in green); and another diagonal (marked in black) which aligns with gas markers - one off the verge of Vinegar Hill road and the other at the inverted corner of the field boundary with Vinegar Hill.

Field Walking Survey

The field walk was carried out over two days and covered an area of 21,600m^2 (2.16ha).

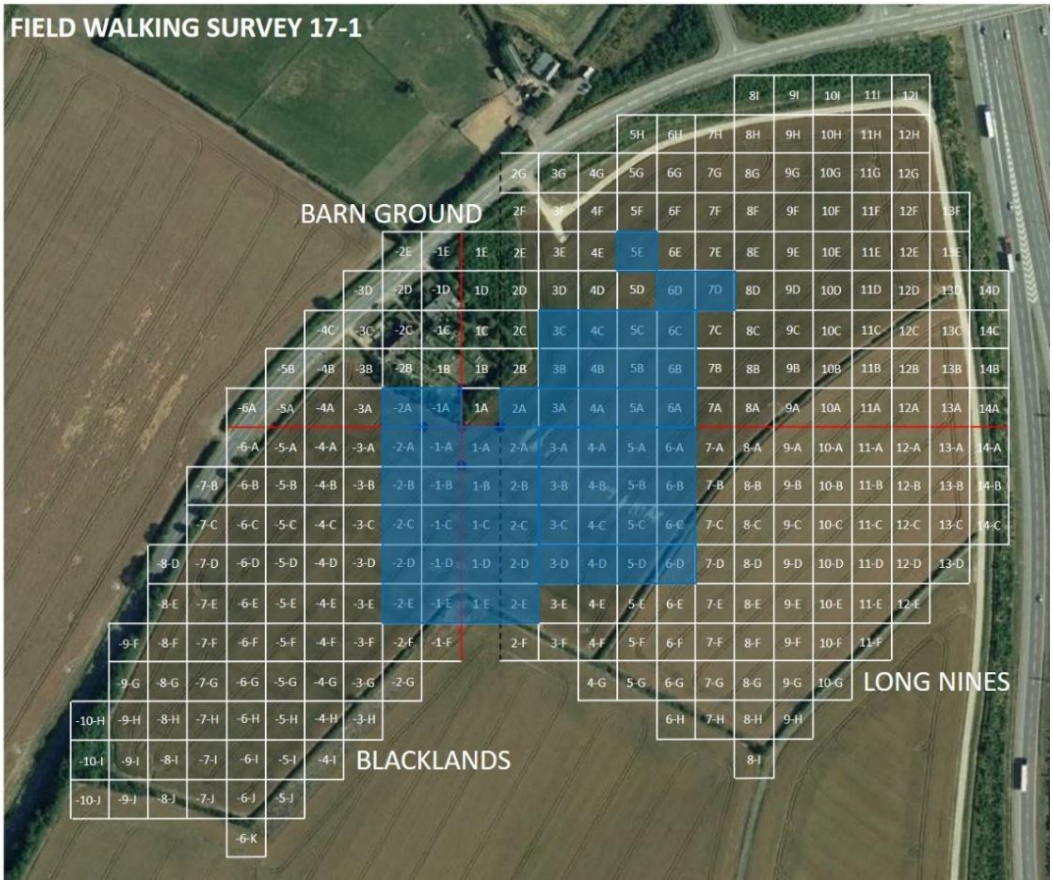


Figure 6: Site grid with field walk area highlighted (Google Earth, 2016)

Each 20m x 20m survey square was walked, untimed, by one person with the criteria of maximum coverage and recovery as briefed; all pottery, metal items and *tesserae*, and diagnostic items only of ceramic building material (CBM), stone building material, mortar, plaster and *opus signinum*.

A summary of field walk finds is given in Table 1, whilst Figure 7 gives a spatial distribution of finds by type and quantity per survey square (Hill, 2018).

Table 3.2: Summary of field walk finds

Item	Quantity	Weight Kg	Average Weight Kg
Pottery	1176	11.62	0.01
CBM	733	38	0.05
Tesserae	2365	70.85	0.03
Iron	2	1.1	0.55

(compiled from Hill, 2018)

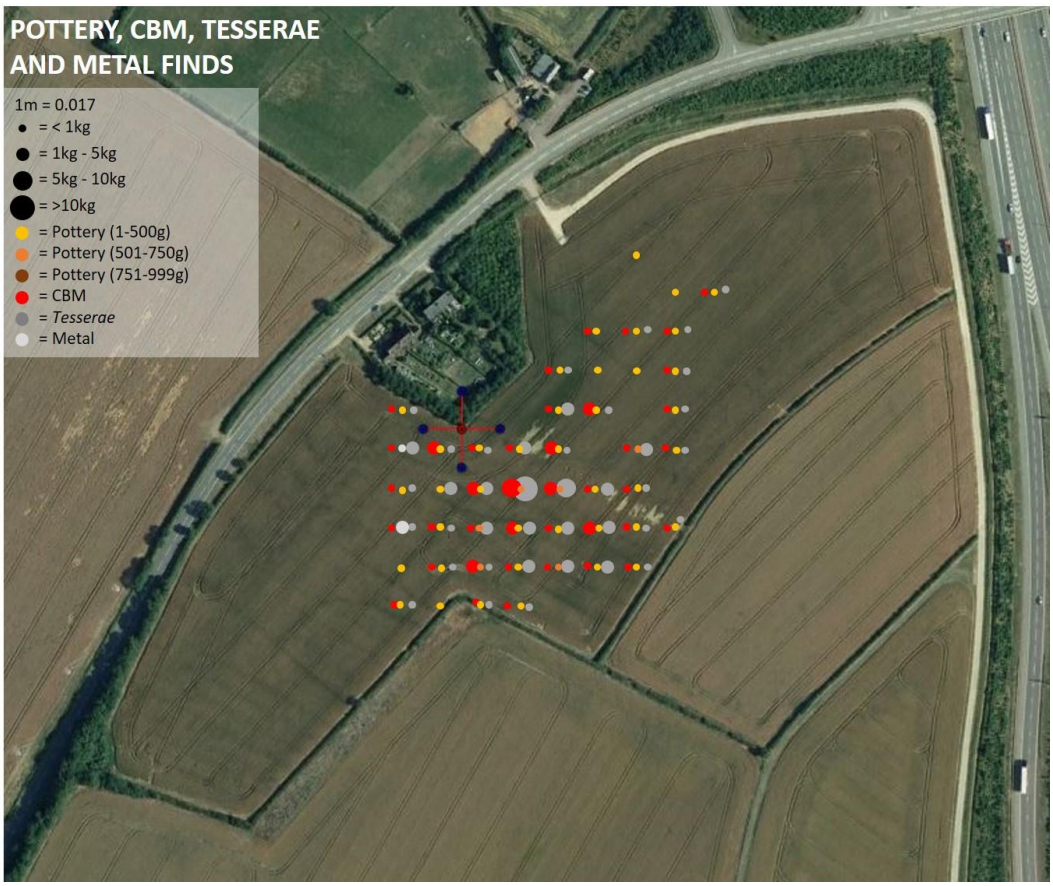


Figure 7: Field walk finds by survey square (Google Earth, 2016)

Of note, is the survey square that produced the second highest concentration of *tesserae*, one of the highest concentrations of CBM and a concentration of pottery greater than 0.5Kg, is the northern of the two survey squares containing the high resistance mass anomaly interpreted as compacted building rubble, whilst the survey square immediately to the west produced the greatest concentrations of both *tesserae* and CBM and also a concentration of pottery in excess of 0.5Kg. Furthermore, three of the remaining four survey squares containing more than 0.5Kg of pottery are closely associated with the strong magnetic anomaly that is coincidental with the crop mark (as marked in white on Figure 3).

Bibliography

Garrood, J.R. 1946. 'Romano-British Settlements at Alconbury Hill, Huntingdonshire', *Transactions of the Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society*, VI(VIII), pp. 203-208.

Google Earth. 2016.

Hill, P. 2018. Email to Kevin Redgate, 29 April.

Wood, D. 2017. Email to Kevin Redgate, 25 February.