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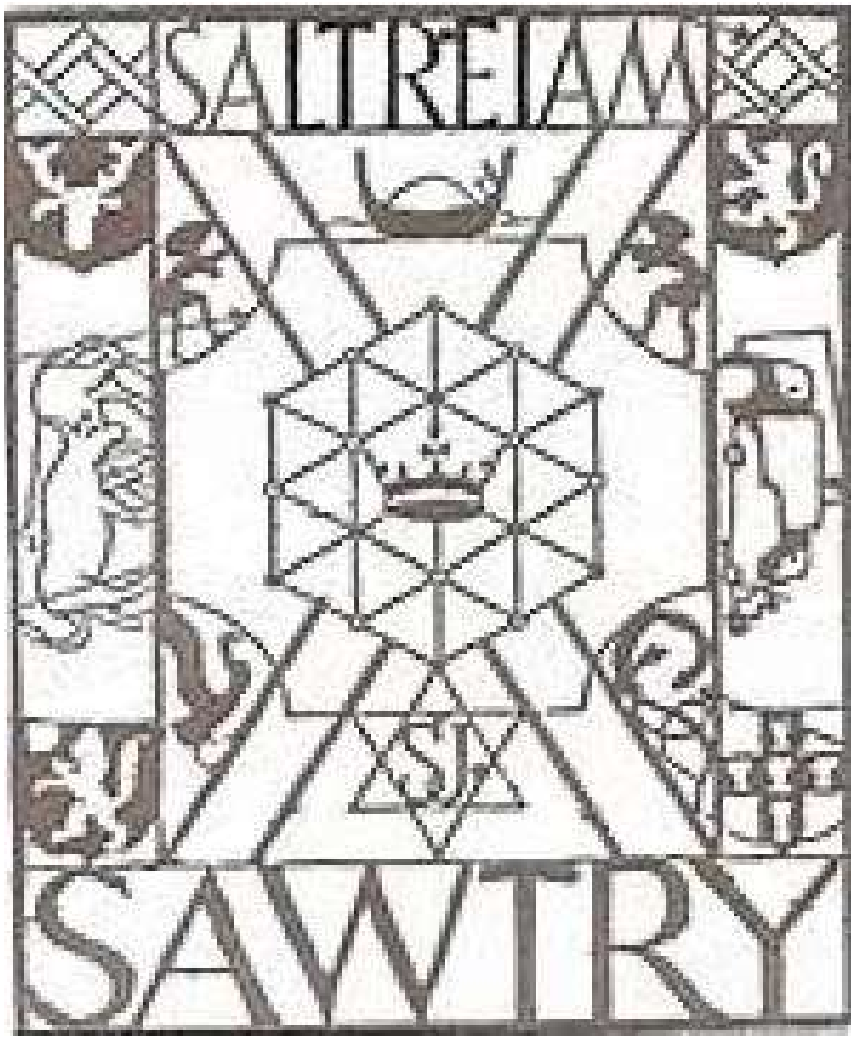

FIELD WALKING SURVEY INTERIM REPORT
SHS17-1_IR-5

FIELD WALKING SURVEY (30 SEP AND 6 OCT 17) - HILL TOP, ALCONBURY WESTON

13 December 2021

by

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& Phil Hill BA(Hons)

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SHS gratefully acknowledges the help and assistance of the following:

Kay Chapman	Landowner
John Steele	Tenant Farmer
Philip Smith	Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG)

Participating volunteers

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No:**	
Project name	Field walking survey of Hill Top field in Alconbury Weston	
Short description	A field walking survey was undertaken in the central area of the site where the coins and metal artefacts finds plot suggest a concentration of activity spanning several centuries. This survey encompassed the area of recent magnetometry and earth resistance surveys, in an endeavour to identify further evidence of structures and settlement activity.	
Project type	Field walking survey	
Site status	N/A	
Previous work	1. Desk-top research into previous archaeological investigations undertaken by local and commercial archaeologists prior to 2009. 2. Desk-top analysis of the results of metal detecting undertaken by the Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) from 2009 to 2018. 3. Geophysical magnetometry survey, 24 Feb 17. 4. Geophysical earth resistance survey, 7-8 May 17.	
Current land use	Arable farming	
Future work	Geophysical survey and excavation	
Monument type/ period	Iron-Age/Romano-British, *circa* 100 BC to AD 410	
Significant finds	N/A	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address	Hill Top, Alconbury Weston	
Study area	21,600m^2 (2.16ha)	
OS grid reference	TL18374 77628	
Height OD	48m	
PROJECT CREATORS		
Organisation	Sawtry History Society	
Project brief originator	Sawtry History Society	
Project design originator	N/A	
Director/Supervisor	Phil Hill	
Project Manager	Kevin Redgate	
Sponsor or funding body	Sawtry History Society	
PROJECT DATE		
Start date	30 Sep 17	
End date	6 Oct 17	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content
Physical		
Paper		
Digital	SHS Archaeological Digital Archive	SHS Archaeological Digital Records and Media
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Field Walking Survey (30 Sep and 6 Oct 17) - Hill Top, Alconbury Weston	
Serial title & volume	N/A	
Author(s)	Kevin Redgate & Phil Hill	
Page numbers	011, plus 4 Annexes	
Date	13 December 2021	

1. **Introduction**.

1.1. Hill Top has provided tantalizing evidence of a potentially significant Romano-British settlement through the antiquarian investigations of Dr J R Garrood MD in the 1932, and the developer led commercial archaeological evaluations of the both the Archaeology Section of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCCAFU) and Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) 1990s. This evidence has been significantly reinforced, not just by the quantity of coins and metal artefacts detected during the period 2009 to 2018, but by the presence of numerous artefacts of high status and significance within the metal finds assemblage.

1.2. This survey, consisting of two field walks carried out on 30 Sep and 6 Oct 17, followed on from the recent geophysical magnetometry and earth resistance surveys in an endeavour to identify further evidence of structures and settlement activity.

2. **Site Details**.

2.1. **Event Number**.

2.2. **Location**. The site consists of Hill Top field and Long Nines field to the south-east. It is located west of the A1 and east of Vinegar Hill in the centre of Alconbury Weston Civil Parish (Figure 2.1), and centrally in the northern half of National Grid Reference (NGR) square TL1877 (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

Figure 2.1: Site relative to Alconbury Weston (Google Earth, 2016)

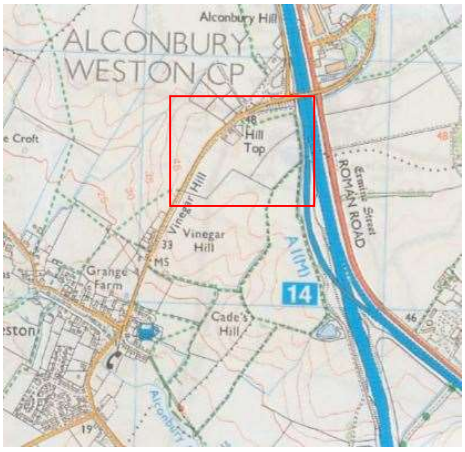

Figure 2.2: Site relative to Alconbury Weston (Ordnance Survey, 2006)

2.3. **Site Benchmark (SBM)**. This has been set on the edge of the tree line adjacent to the south corner of the residential gardens at NGR TL 18374 77628, as shown by the red dot (Figure 2.3).

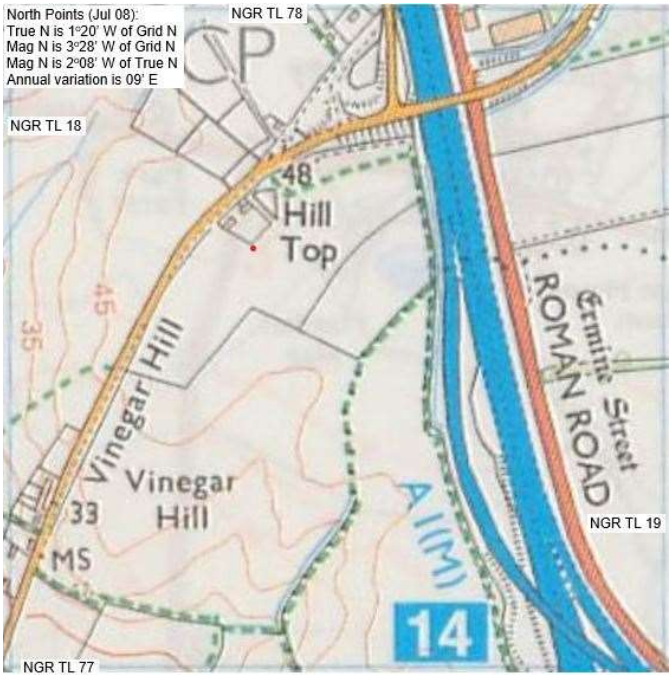

Figure 2.3: Hill Top site with SBM in red (Ordnance Survey, 2006)

2.4. **Site Grid**. The site grid can be found at Annex A.

2.5. **Geology**. The site sits on the west edge of a plateau on the 45m contour that overlooks the broad Alconbury Brook valley. The bedrock is Oxford Clay Formation-Mudstone with Oadby Member-Diamicton superficial deposits, above which is an unknown depth of plough-soil (Figure 2.4).

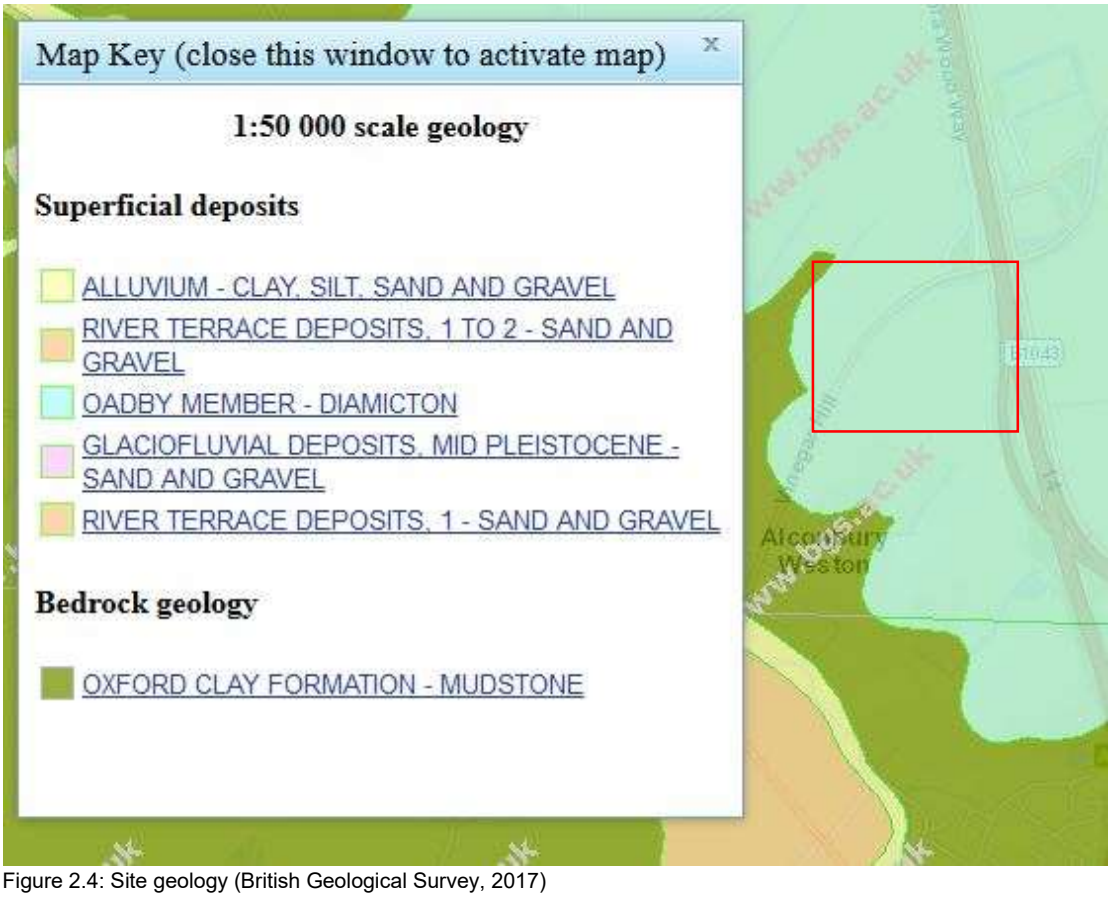

Figure 2.4: Site geology (British Geological Survey, 2017)

2.6. **Protection**. The site is not protected or within a conservation area.

2.7. **Land Use**. The two fields that comprise the site were used for arable farming and, as such, subjected to modern farming methods including ploughing and harrowing for crops, and deeper mole ploughing for drainage.

2.8. **Utilities**. An active branch of the ex-government fuel oil pipeline (now under private ownership) runs through the west end of the site, whilst a medium pressure gas pipeline runs through the site on a north/south alignment west of the Hill Top cottages. There is also a short low voltage (230V/480V) supply line serving the new barn in the berm enclosure and a low voltage supply line to the north of Hill Top Cottages that serves a sewage kiosk; suggesting that there is an underground sewage tank at the northeast of Hill Top Cottages (see Figure 2.5).

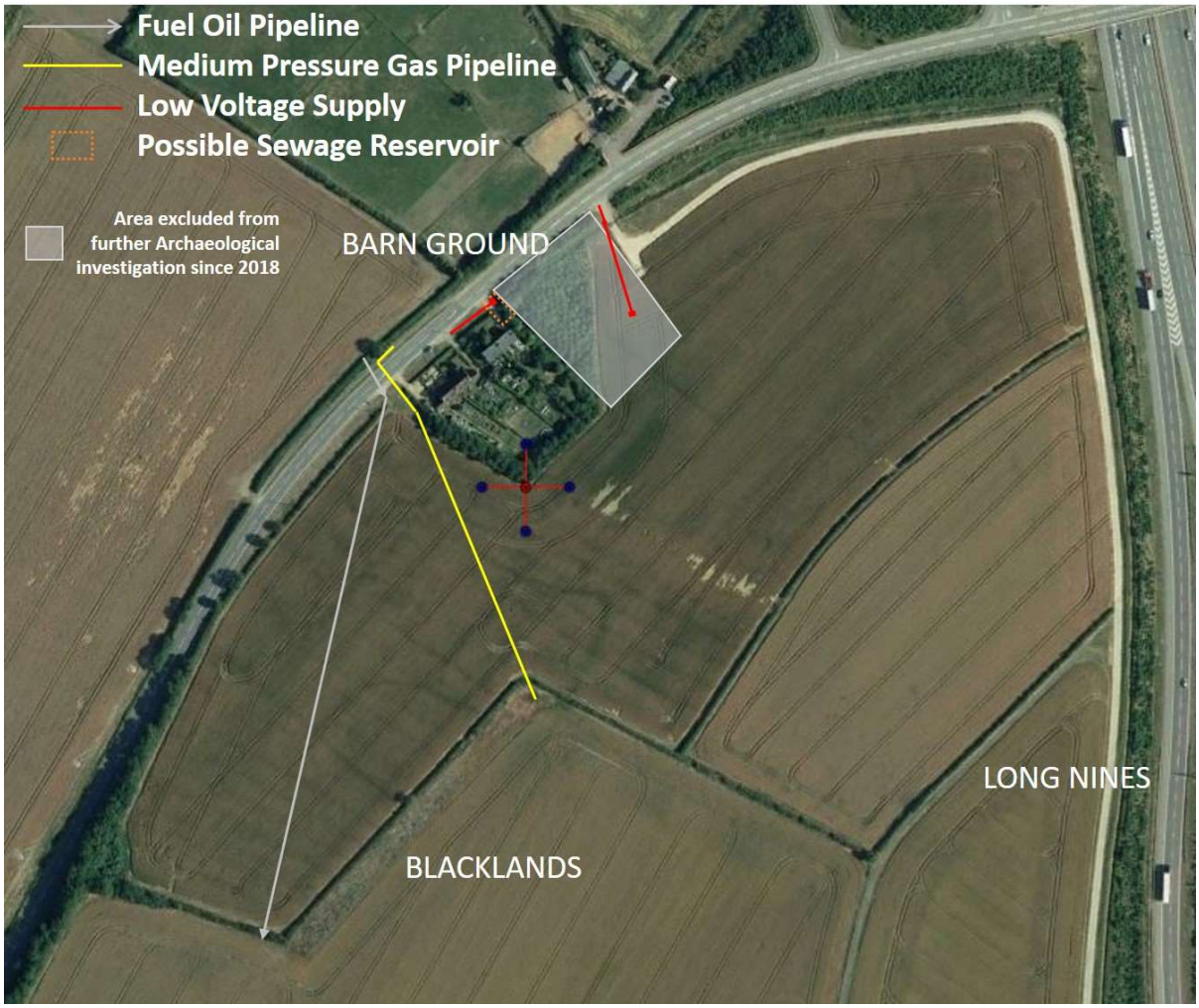

Figure 2.5: Utilities (Google Earth, 2016)

2.9. **Historical Background**. In 1932 Dr J R Garood MD, a local antiquarian of the Cambridgeshire & Huntingdonshire Archaeological Society (CHAS), began investigating the fields of Blacklands and Barn Ground (the previous field names of the field now known as Hill Top) as part of a wider investigation of Iron Age and Roman-British settlement sites on Alconbury Hill. Further archaeological investigations were undertaken by the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCCAFU) in 1991, 1992 and 1995 in advance of A1 widening. Archaeological investigations were also carried out by Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) in 1996 also in advance of A1 widening. Since 2009 the two fields of the site have undergone methodical metal detecting which has produced a considerable volume of Roman artefacts ranging from coins to high status jewellery spanning four centuries of Roman occupation. Incidental to the metal finds was a wealth of ceramic artefacts including pot sherds, Ceramic Building Material (CBM) and

tesserae. Sawtry Archaeology, under the auspice of Sawtry History Society, has undertaken periodic, and ongoing, archaeological investigations since 2017.

3. **Methods**.

3.1. **Survey Area**. The survey area consisting of fifty-four 20m x 20m squares was established from the site grid as shown at Figure 3.1.

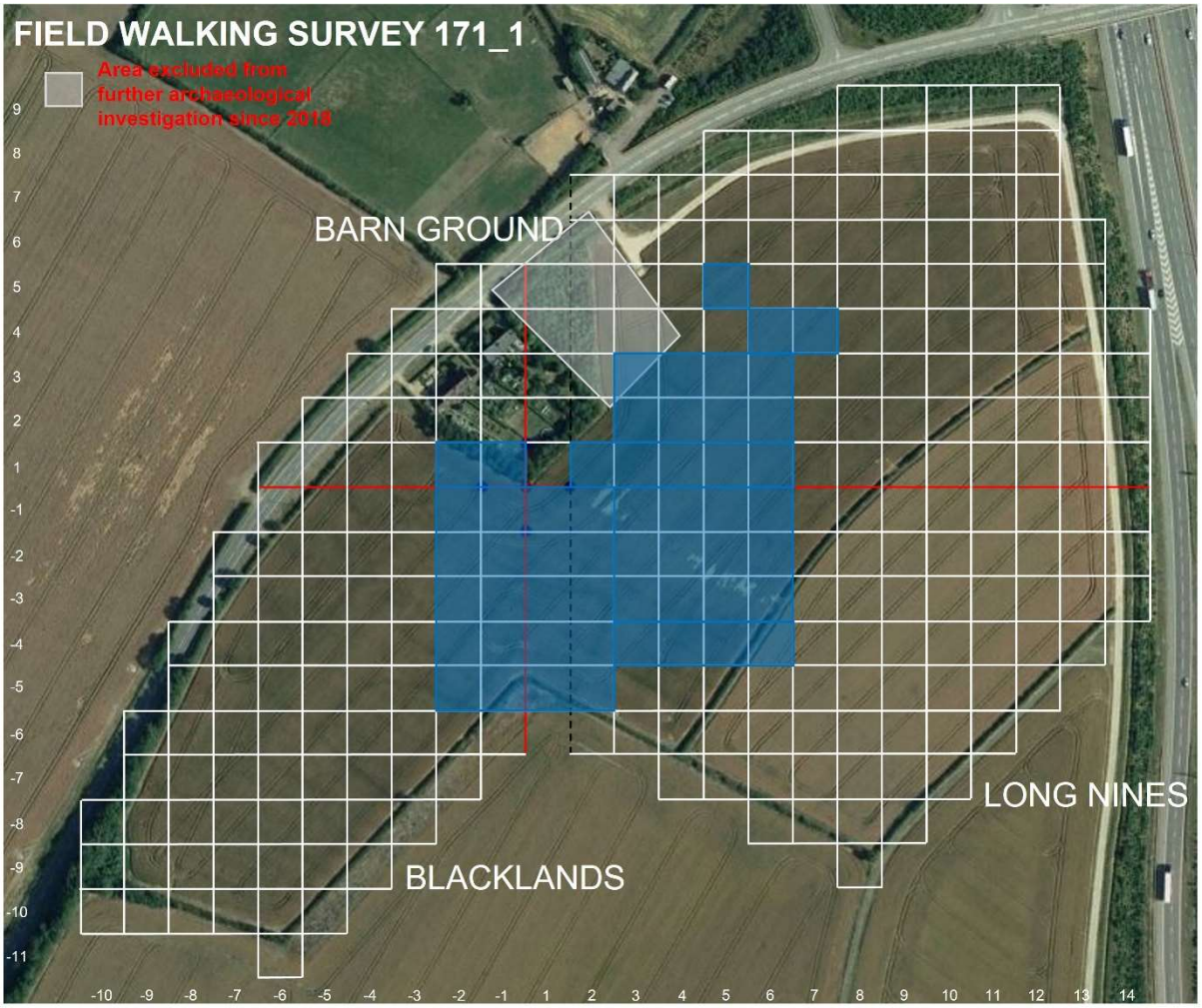

Figure 3.1: Site grid with survey area highlighted (Google Earth, 2016)

3.2 **Field Walking Survey**. The survey was carried out with each grid square being surveyed by one person walking a series of zig-zag traverses. Surveys were untimed with a 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*. The Survey Record Sheet is at Annex B.

4. **Results**. The results of the field walk are summarized in Table 4.1, whilst Figure 4.1 gives a spatial distribution of finds by type and quantity per survey square. A detailed record of field walk finds is given at Annex C.

Table 4.1: 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

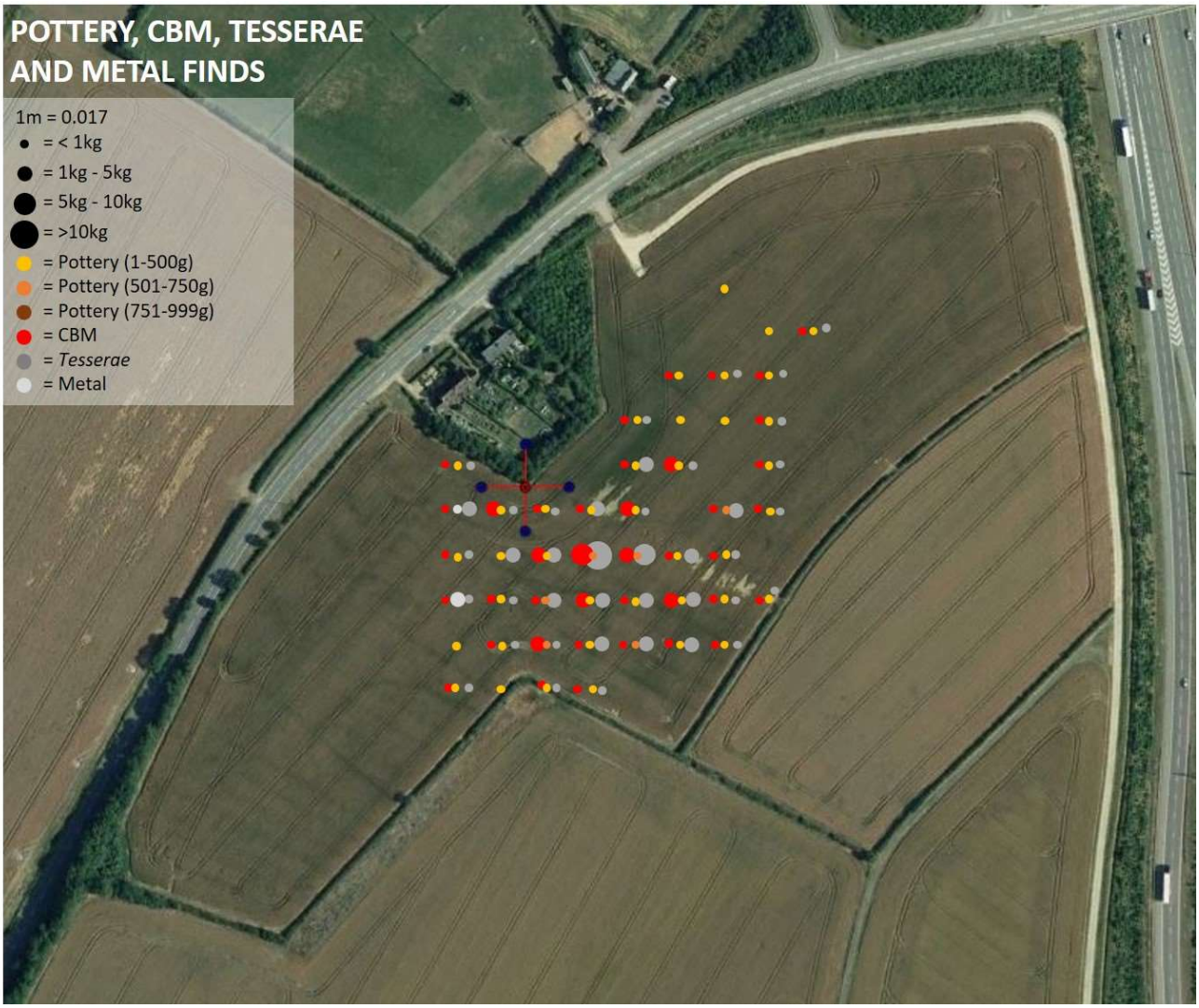

Figure 4.1: Field walk finds by survey square (Google Earth, 2019)

5. **Analysis**.

5.1. **Pottery**. A simple analysis, only, of the pottery finds was undertaken. Figure 5.1 shows the concentration by weight of pottery sherds in each site grid square. Of particular note are the results for grid squares 2,-2 and 3,-2, and 1,-3 and 1,-4, which contained the greatest quantities of pottery sherds. These squares align with geophysical survey results that are highly suggestive of one or more buildings (Redgate & Hill, 2021a: 5 and 2021b: 6). The other three squares with higher concentrations of pottery sherds (4,-1, -2,-1 and 5,-1) are coincidental with indeterminate geophysical survey results; whilst their accumulation could be archaeological, it could also be the result of ploughing.

5.2. Figures 5.2 to 5.4 show the chronological distribution of pottery sherds. As the majority of Romano-British pottery types span the period (AD 43 - 409), early Romano-British (AD 43 - 200) and late Romano-British (AD 201 - 409) were determined by Samian wares (c. AD 43 - 250), Black-Burnished 2 (BB2) wares (c. AD 120 - 250) and Nene Valley Colour Coated (NVCC) wares (c. AD 200 - 400):

5.2.1. **Early Romano-British**. Presence of Samian or BB2, or absence of NVCC.

5.2.2. **Late Romano-British**. Presence of NVCC.

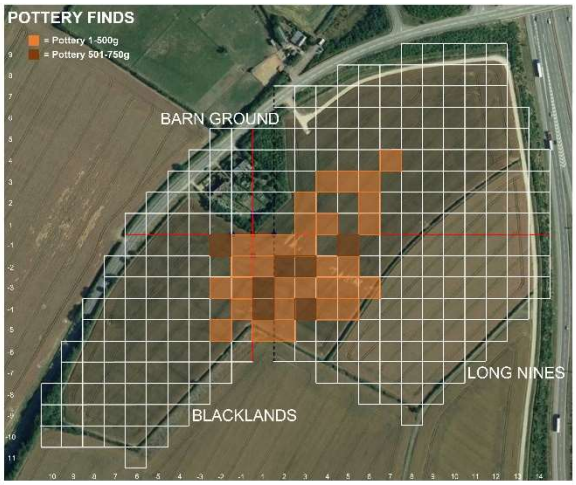

Figure 5.1 - Site grid with pottery sherd concentrations by weight (Google Earth, 2019)

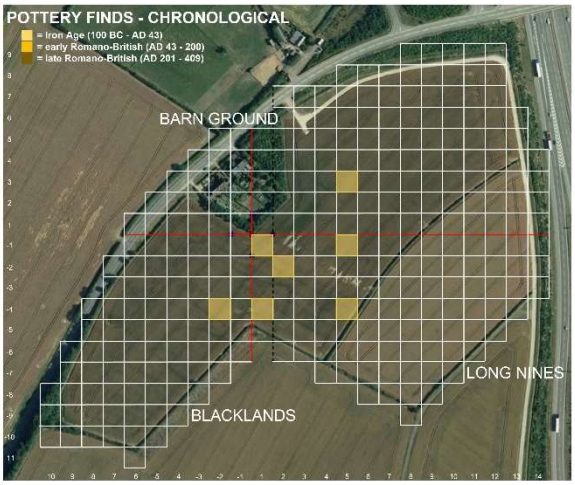

Figure 5.2 - Site grid with pottery sherd chronology - Iron-Age (Google Earth, 2019)

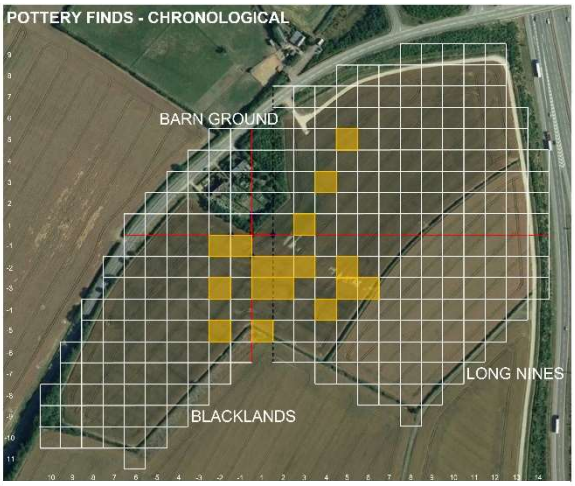

Figure 5.3 - Site grid with pottery sherd chronology - early Roman-British (Google Earth, 2019)

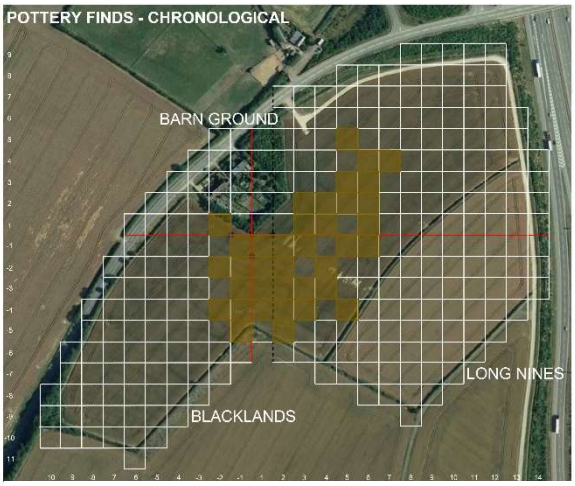

Figure 5.4 - Site grid with pottery sherd chronology - late Roman-British (Google Earth, 2019)

5.3. **CBM**. Figure 5.5 shows the concentration by weight of CBM sherds in each site grid square. Of particular note are the results for grid square 2,-2 which contained the highest concentration of diagnostic CBM, and the results for contiguous grid squares 1,-4, 2,-3, 4,-3, 1,-2, 3,-2, -1,-1, 3,-1 and 4,1 which contained a mid-range concentration of diagnostic CBM. This cluster of significant diagnostic CBM concentrations aligns closely with the higher pottery concentrations and the geophysical survey results that are highly suggestive of one or more buildings (Redgate & Hill, 2021a: 5 and 2021b: 6).

Figure 5.5 - Site grid with CBM sherd concentrations by weight (Google Earth, 2019)

5.4. **Stone BM**. Figure 5.6 shows the concentration by quantity of *tesserae* in each site grid square. Of particular note are the results for grid squares 2,-2 and 3,-2 which contained the greatest quantities of *tesserae*, and the results for contiguous grid squares 3,-4, 2,-3, 4,-3, 1,-2 and 4,-2 which contained a mid-range concentration of *tesserae*. This cluster of significant *tesserae* concentrations aligns extremely closely with the higher pottery and diagnostic CBM concentrations, and the geophysical survey results that are highly suggestive of one or more buildings (Redgate & Hill, 2021a: 5 and 2021b: 6).

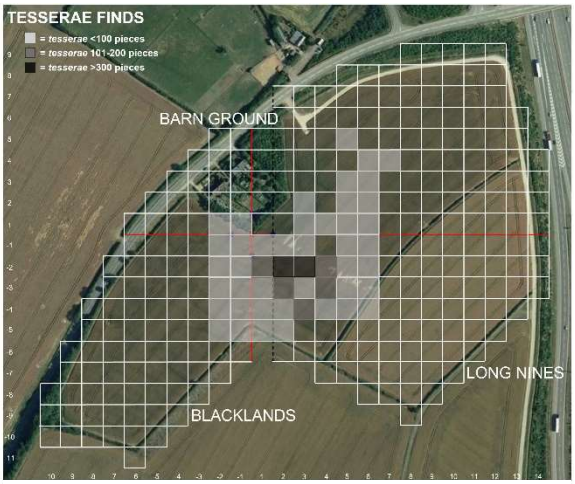

Figure 5.6 - Site grid with *tesserae* concentrations by quantity (Google Earth, 2019)

5.5. **Metal**. Figure 5.7 shows the total by weight of metal finds in each site grid square. Each square produced one item of unformed metal each which are inadequate to draw any analysis.

Figure 5.7 - Site grid with metal finds by weight (Google Earth, 2019)

5.6. The assemblages recovered showed little, if any, signs of abrasion, indicating that, as the site was only subjected to modern ploughing during the latter half of the last Century, migration through bioturbation and/or plough-action was minimal. The spatial distribution and concentrations of pottery sherds, CBM and *tesserae*, in conjunction with the earlier geophysical surveys data, provides a strong indication of the presence of one or more Romano-British buildings within the area of contiguous grid squares containing the highest and mid-range concentrations of pottery, CBM and *tesserae*, whilst the chronological

distribution of pottery sherds reinforce the strong indications of the coin assemblage (Redgate & Hill, 2021a: 5, 2021b: 6 and 2021c: 5-6) for continuous occupation on Hill Top from the first century BC to the early fifth century AD.

6. **Summary**. The field walking survey was well attended by a number of local volunteers, including Fenland Young Archaeologists Club, producing 4,276 finds with an accumulated weight in excess of 120kg. CBM finds indicate that some, if not all, buildings were tile roofed with *imbrices* and *tegulae*, incorporated a hypocaust system and had tessellated floors. The range of pottery types supports the metal finds analysis for continued occupation of Hill Top from the Late Iron-Age through to the end of Romano-Britain. Unfortunately, the field walk assemblage does not help define the nature of the settlement; although plausible options such as *mansio*, a commercial centre or a villa complex - with or without estate, cannot be discounted.

ANNEXES

A. Site Grid.
B. Survey Record Sheet.
C. Record of Field Walk Finds.
D. Description of Romano-British Pottery.

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