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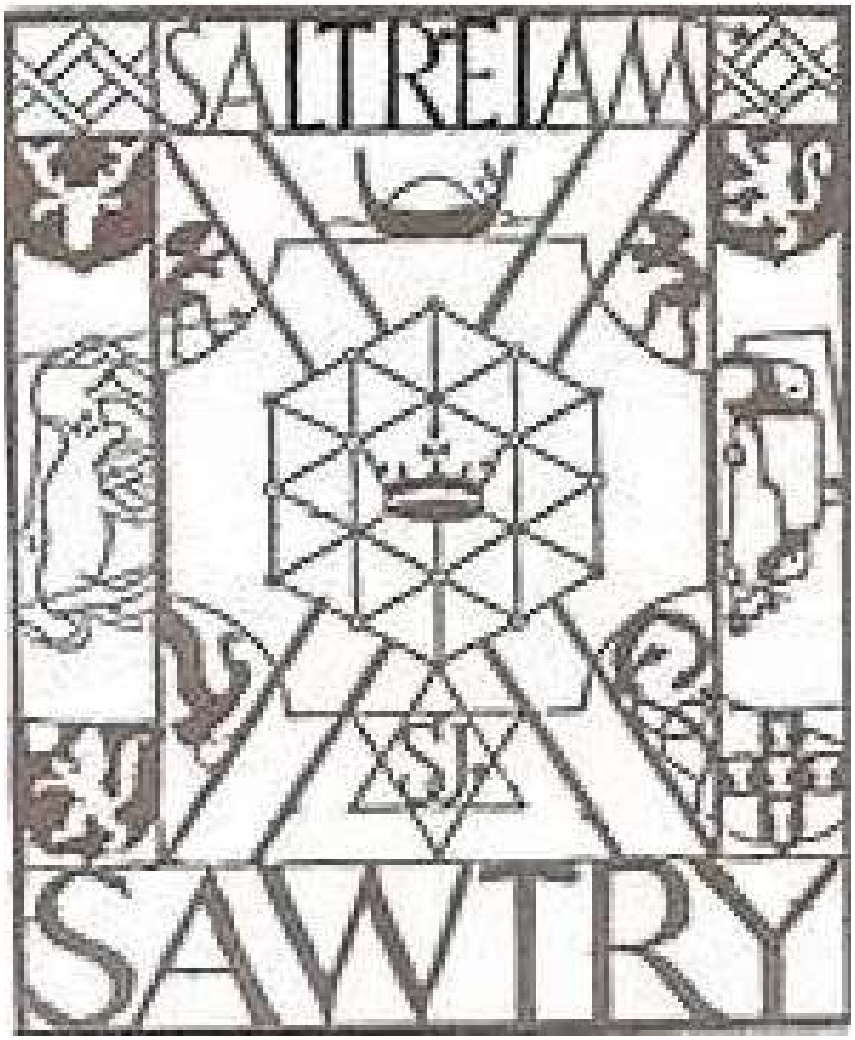

ARCHAEOLOGICAL RESEARCH INTERIM REPORT
SHS17-1_IR-2

RESEARCH OF THE RESULTS OF METAL DETECTING CARRIED OUT BY THE LANDOWNERS HISTORICAL RESEARCH GROUP (LHRG) (2009-2018) - HILL TOP, ALCONBURY WESTON

12 July 2021

by

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& Phil Hill BA(Hons)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SHS gratefully acknowledges the help and assistance of the following:

Richard Ashford	Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG)
Philip Smith	Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG)

OASIS REPORT FORM

PROJECT DETAILS	**OASIS No:**	
Project name	Metal detection of Hill Top and Long Nines fields in Alconbury Weston.	
Short description	Sawtry History Society archaeologists undertook desk-top analysis of the results of metal detecting undertaken by the Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) from 2009 to 2018.	
Project type	Desk-top research	
Site status	N/A	
Previous work	Desk-top research into previous archaeological investigations undertaken by local and commercial archaeologists prior to 2009.	
Current land use	Arable farming	
Future work	Geophysical survey, fieldwalking survey and excavation	
Monument type/ period	Iron-Age/Romano-British, *circa* 100 BC to AD 410	
Significant finds	Iron-Age/Romano-British coins and other metal artefacts	
PROJECT LOCATION		
County	Cambridgeshire	
Site address	Hill Top, Alconbury Weston	
Study area	119,600m^2 (11.96ha)	
OS grid reference	TL18374 77628	
Height OD	48m aOD	
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	Oct 18	
End date	Jun 19	
ARCHIVES	Location	Content
Physical		
Paper		
Digital	SHS Archaeological Digital Archive	SHS Archaeological Digital Records and Media
BIBLIOGRAPHY		
Title	Research of the Results of Metal Detecting Carried Out by the Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) (2009-2018) - Hill Top, Alconbury Weston	
Serial title & volume	N/A	
Author(s)	Kevin Redgate & Phil Hill	
Page numbers	016, plus 1 Annex	
Date	12 July 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. In 2009 the Landowners Historical Research Group (LHRG) commenced a programme of metal detecting on both Hill Top and Long Nines, that is still ongoing. LHRG are a local group of conscientious metal detectorists who have fostered a good working relationship with the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and the British Museum. Enthusiastic hobbyists working closely with landowners and archaeologists, they are meticulous in their detecting strategy and in the recording of finds. Each find is plotted to a ten-figure National Grid Reference (NGR), giving a margin of error for each find-spot within $1m^2$; thereby enabling accurate spatial representation of finds across the survey area, giving reliable diagnostic concentrations and scatters. The reputation they have earned during the past ten years of local detecting has resulted in a close working association with commercial and academic archaeology practitioners; including, Oxford Archaeology East and Professor Stephen Upex.

2. **Site Details**.

2.1. **Event Number**. N/A.

2.2. **Location**. The site consists of Hill Top and Long Nines that covers an area in excess of 8 hectares. 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. Situated on the west edge of a 45m contour, the site has commanding views of Ermine Street to the east, the Alconburys and Alconbury Brook to the immediate south, and the lowlands west of Ermine Street in all directions (Figures 2.2 and 2.3).

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

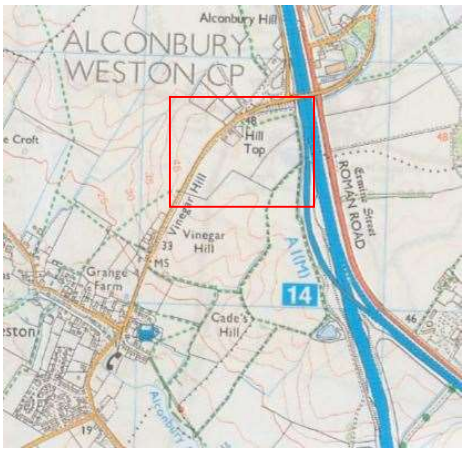

Figure 2.2: Site relative to Alconbury Weston (Ordnance Survey, 2006)

2.3. **Site Reference Points**. The Site Benchmark (SBM) has been set on the edge of the tree line adjacent to the south corner of the residential gardens at NGR TL18374 77628 (Figure 2.3). Grid Alignment Points (GAP) are set 20m north, east, south and west of the SBM in order to facilitate development of a site grid (see Annex A).

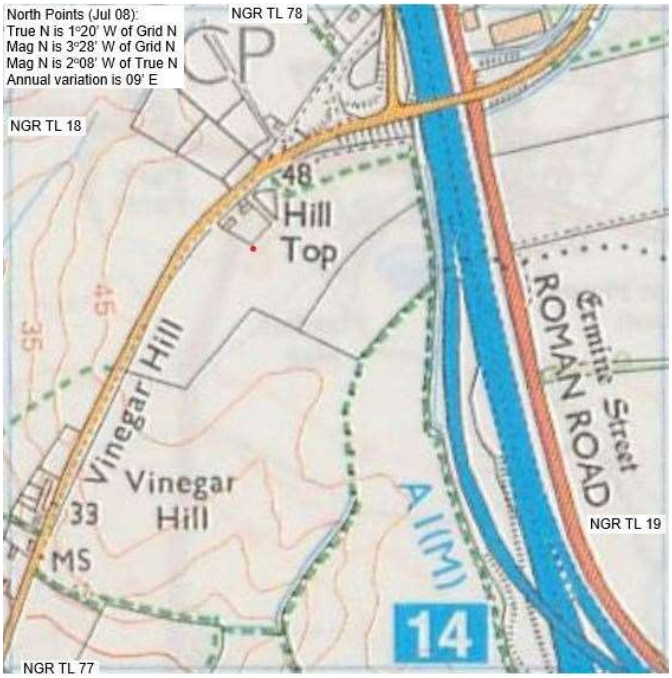

Figure 2.3: Hill Top site with SBM in red (Ordnance Survey, 2006)

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 Alconburys. The bedrock is Oxford Clay Formation-Mudstone with Oadby Member-Diamicton superficial deposits, above which is a varying depth of plough-soil (Figure 2.4).

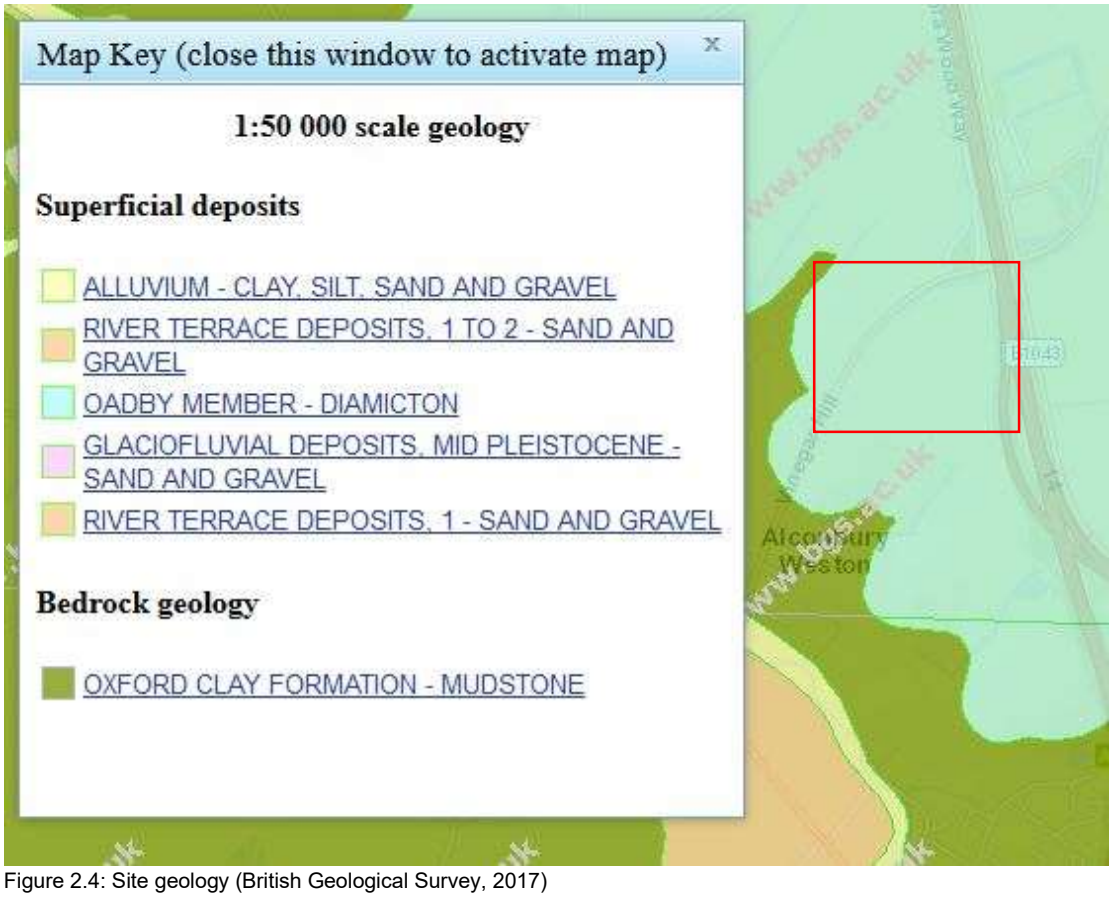

Figure 2.4: Site geology (British Geological Survey, 2017)

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. From early 2018, Hill Top was held as grassland for hay and sileage.

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).

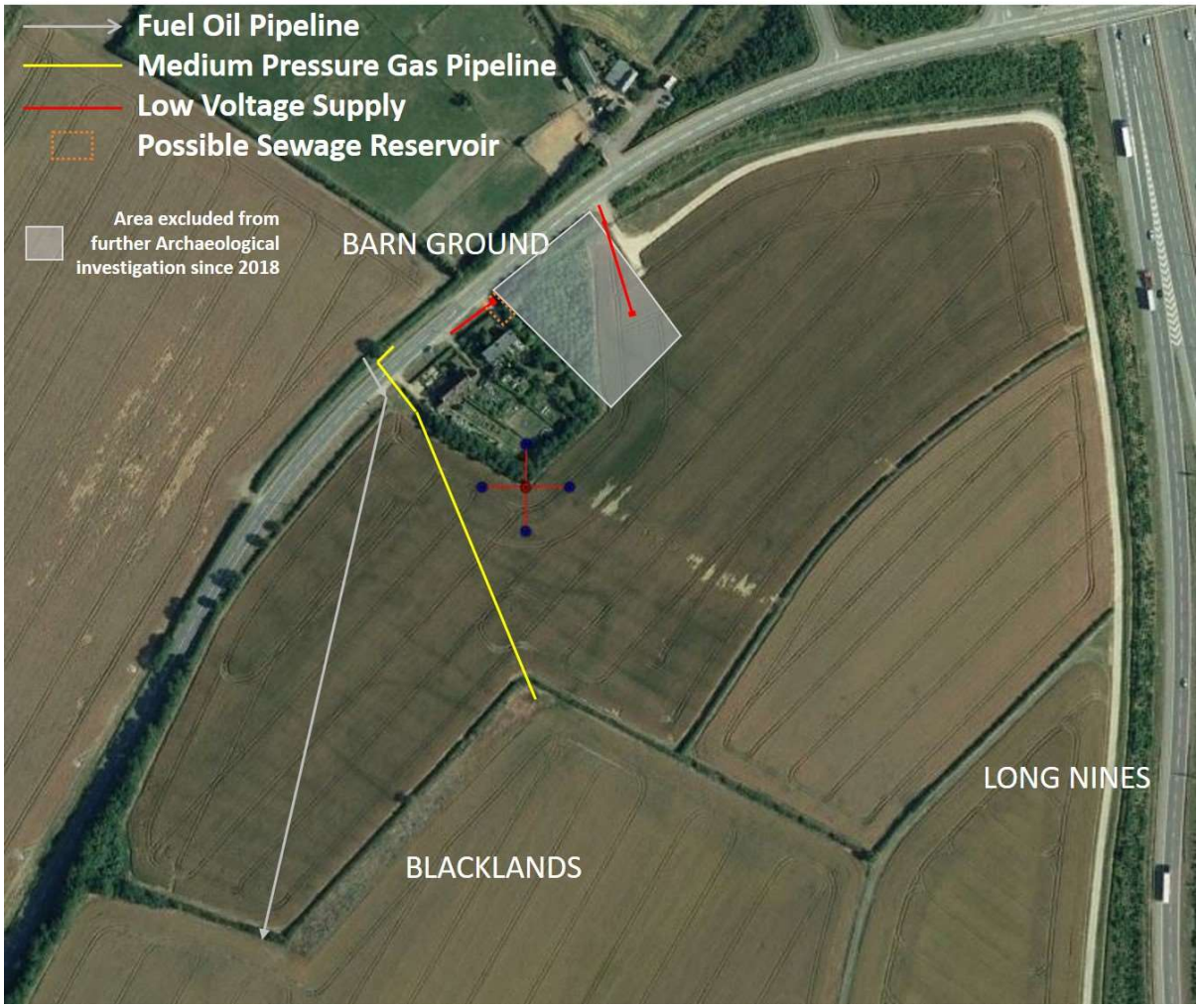

Figure 2.5: Utilities (Google Earth, 2016)

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, CBM and tesserae. Sawtry Archaeology,

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

3. **Aims and Strategy**.

3.1. **Aims**. The aim of this research is to analyse the results of metal detecting undertaken by the LHRG on Hill Top and Long Nines fields from 2009 to 2018. Analysis of the results will contribute to the understanding of the extent, nature, status and duration of Romano-British settlement at Hill Top, Alconbury Weston. Specifically:

3.1.1. Whether settlement consisted of a single building or several buildings and, if multiple buildings, whether settlement was nucleated or dispersed.

3.1.2. The period of Romano-British settlement and duration of occupation, and whether it was continuous or phased.

3.1.3. The purpose, nature and status of settlement on Hill Top, and whether there are any unique functional spaces or complexes; for instance, is the site a *mansio* or lesser status roadside way-station, a villa, a religious complex, or one of industry or manufacturing.

3.1.4. Placement of the site within the contemporary landscape in respect of local rural settlements and the nearby towns of *Durovigutum* (Godmanchester) and *Durobrivae* (Water Newton).

3.1.5. Whether there is evidence towards the supposition of an Imperial Estate in the fens.

3.1.6. An understanding of the site's relationship with the road and river communications networks (Ermine Street, secondary roads connecting Leicester and Dorchester, and the river Great Ouse) in respect of trade, commerce and/or industry.

3.1.7. The origins of Romano-British settlement; whether this evolved from a pre-existing Iron-Age settlement or developed independently as an adjunct or supplant and whether, subsequently, it was abandoned when Roman administration withdrew in AD 410, or did settlement continue and adopt Anglo-Saxon identity.

3.2. **Strategy**. Finds data was recorded in tabulated format and as a spatial plot in order to determine site evolution and activity through analysis of quantification and scatter patterns.

4. **Results**. LHRG undertook metal detecting on Hill Top and Long Nines from 2009 to 2018. Over the course of this period, LHRG recovered a total of 562 Roman coins, 9 Iron Age coins, 20 Roman *fibulae*, 3 Iron Age *fibulae*, 10 Roman brooches, 1 Iron Age brooch, 64 miscellaneous Roman metal objects and 1 miscellaneous Iron Age metal object.

5. **Analysis**.

5.1. **Finds**.

5.1.1. The chronological and spatial distribution of finds are recorded in order to determine a clearer understanding of site occupation, development and activity. Table 5.1 is a quantification of finds by century, whilst Table 5.2 provides a chronology of Iron Age and Roman periods represented by datable coins within the assemblage.

Table 5.1: Quantification of finds assemblage by century

Item	Quantity by Century						
	Iron Age		Romano-British				
	1st Century BC	1st Century AD	1st Century AD	2nd Century AD	3rd Century AD	4th Century AD	Date Unknown
Coin (Gold)	2						
Coin (Silver)		1	3	5	8	8	
Coin (Bronze)	3	3	5	13	94	426	
Fibulae	3		10				10
Brooches		1	4		2		4
Metal (Miscellaneous)	1					1	63

(compiled from Ashford, 2019)

Table 5.2: Chronology of Iron Age and Roman periods represented by datable coins

Century	Period	Celtic King/Roman Emperor/Period
Iron Age >1 BC	58-51 BC	Gallic Wars
	45-10 BC	*(Corieltauvi Tribe)*
Iron Age 1 BC-AD 1	10 BC-AD 10	Tasciovanus-Rues (*Catuvellauni Tribe*)
Iron Age AD 1	9-40	Cunobelinus (*Catuvellauni Tribe*)
Roman AD 1	14-37	Tiberius
	38-42	No Coins Recovered
	41-54	Claudius
	54-68	Nero
	69-79	Vespasian
	80	No Coins Recovered
	81-96	Domitian
Roman AD1-2	97-116	No Coins Recovered
Roman AD 2	117-138	Hadrian
	138-140	Antoninus Pius (Faustina Major)
	138-161	Antoninus Pius
	161-175	Marcus Aurelius (Faustina Minor)
	161-180	Marcus Aurelius
	177-192	Commodus

Century	Period	Celtic King/Roman Emperor/Period
	178-191	Commodus (Crispina)
	193-211	Septimius Severus (Julia Domna)
Roman AD 2-3	198-217	Caracalla
Roman AD 3	218-234	No Coins Recovered
	235-238	Maximinus
	238-244	Gordian III
	245-252	No Coins Recovered
	253-260	Valerian
	253-268	Gallienus (Salonina)
	253-268	Gallienus
	260-269	Postumus
	268-270	Claudius II
	269-271	Victorinus
	271-274	Tetricus
	273-274	Tetricus II
	275-285	No Coins Recovered
	286-293	Carausius
Roman AD3-4	286-305	Maximianus
Roman AD 4	306-337	Constantine
	317-326	Crispus
	337-340	Constantine II
	337-350	Constans
	337-361	Constantius II
	350-353	Magnentius
	360-363	Julian II
	363-364	Jovian
	364-378	Valens
	367-383	Gratian

(compiled from Ashford, 2019)

5.1.2. As the site has only been subjected to modern ploughing since the latter half of the 20th century, the condition of coins and metal artefacts recovered is considered to be the result of pre-deposition circumstances and soil chemistry, rather than artefact migration through bioturbation and/or plough-action.

5.2. **Data**.

5.2.1. Table 5.1 shows a significant increase in coin circulation in the third century followed by a near five-fold spike in circulation in the fourth century. It also shows there was a higher silver to bronze coin ratio of 60% in the first century, reducing to 38% in the second century, 9% in the third century and 2% in the fourth century, and that *fibulae* were no longer in use by the second century. This could suggest greater wealth within a smaller community during the earlier centuries, and lesser wealth within a larger more active community in the later centuries. Also, of interest, is the apparent cessation in the use of *fibulae* to fasten clothing from the second century onwards. Although ten of the nineteen Roman *fibulae* are dated, they are all dated to the first century, whereas the use of brooches appears to be more of a constant from the Iron Age through to the third and fourth centuries; which could suggest a change in fashion for either aesthetic or practical reasons.

5.2.2. The general concentration of Iron Age coins and metal artefacts in the vicinity of the crop marks (Figure 5.1) is a strong indicator of continued settlement that remained nucleated within this area of the site until into the 2nd Century. Irrespective

Figure 5.1: Iron Age metal finds - 1st century BC to 1st century AD (Google Earth, 2016)

of whether these crop marks are in their original form or are reflective of re-cutting in the early Romano-British period as the native occupants adopted a Romanized lifestyle and culture, they are invariably of Iron Age origin. The northeast enclosure measures 61m by 55m and the southwest enclosure measures 55m by 49m (although it is highly likely this is truncated by the field boundary and was a larger dimension) giving enclosed areas of 3,350m^2 and 2,400m^2 respectively. These are comparable to the late Iron Age enclosure at Itter Crescent, Peterborough that measured 59m by 54m, covered an area of 3,100m^2 and contained three

roundhouses (Henley *et al*., 2012: 17). It is conceivable, therefore, that the nucleated Iron Age settlement on Hill Top consisted of three to six roundhouses.

5.2.3. The 1st and 2nd Century coin and metal artefact scatters (Figures 5.2 and 5.3) give good evidence that there remained continued activity within and in the vicinity of the enclosures, with dispersed activity across the site to the east. Of the eight 1st Century coins recorded, three were located within the cropmark enclosures and a fourth was closely associated with them, whilst there is a distinct cluster of five 2nd Century coins within or directly associated with the northeast enclosure. Garrood's excavation of Samian and early Romano-British pottery sherds, directly associated with Iron Age sherds (Garrood, 1946: 203-208), further support a continued nucleated occupation in the two enclosures, whilst evincing transitional occupation and Romanization of the native Celts.

Figure 5.2: Romano-British metal finds - 1st century AD (Google Earth, 2016)

Figure 5.3: Romano-British metal finds - 2nd century AD (Google Earth, 2016)

5.2.4. Although the 3rd Century coin and metal artefacts scatter (Figure 5.4) also shows continued activity within and in the vicinity of the enclosures there is a significantly dense cluster of coins approximately 50m north of the northeast enclosure that suggests the focus of occupational activity has shifted away from the enclosures and the Iron Age origins; perhaps symbolically completing the Romanization transition. There are also other smaller clusters of coin density that may indicate other foci of occupational activity.

Figure 5.4: Romano-British metal finds - 3rd century AD (Google Earth, 2016)

5.2.5. The scatter of 4th Century coins and metal artefacts (Figure 5.5) indicates widespread activity across the entire site with multiple densities of occupational activity; including within the cropmark enclosures. The realigned nucleus of the site suggested in the 3rd Century continues to be evident in the 4th Century density of coins and metal artefacts. It is also apparent from the manner in which the 4th Century scatter wraps round both the Vinegar Hill houses and gardens, and the inverted corner in the south boundary with Vinegar Hill field, that the extent of 4th Century activity on Hill Top is far wider reaching, encompassing well beyond these modern boundaries.

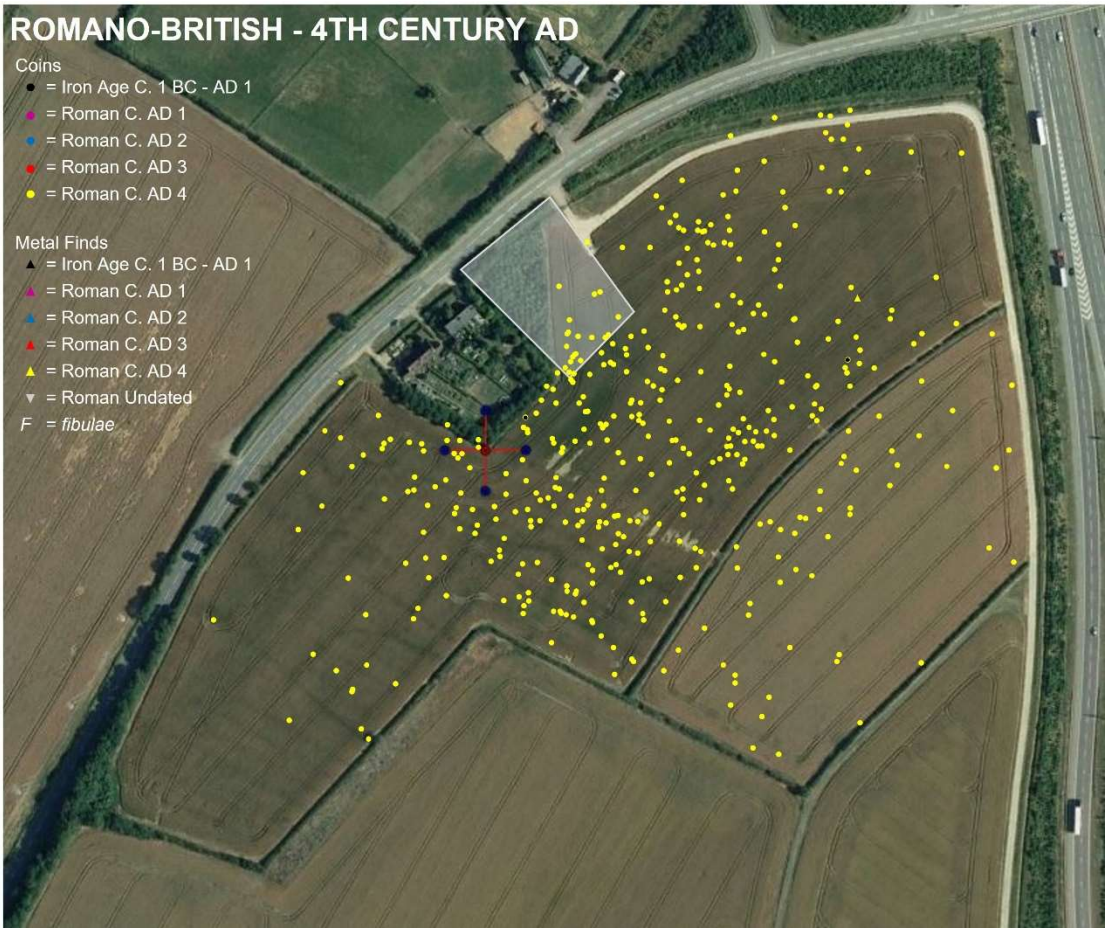

Figure 5.5: Romano-British metal finds - 4th century AD (Google Earth, 2016)

5.2.6. The final scatter to consider is that of the undated Roman metal artefacts (Figure 5.6). This also indicates widely dispersed occupation activity with a significant concentration within the northeast enclosure. One set of interesting observations are the apparent linear clustering of coins and metal artefacts evident in the combined results to the northeast of the houses, southwest of the enclosures and across Long Nines (Figure 5.7). These could be indicative of tracks to Ermine Street or, in the case of the southwest linear, a track to Alconbury Brook and Margary's (57) road to Leicester.

Figure 5.6: Romano-British metal finds - undated (Google Earth, 2016)

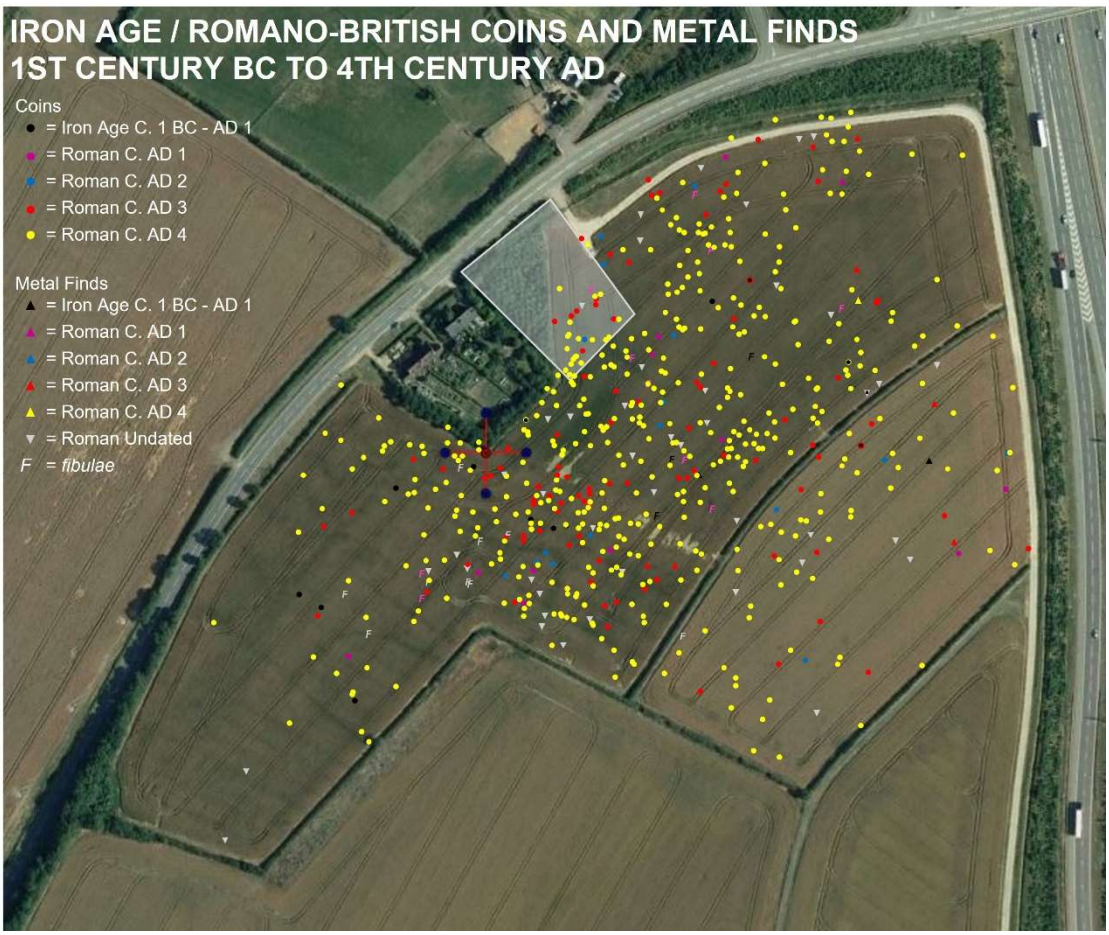

Figure 5.7: Iron-Age/Romano-British metal finds - combined results (Google Earth, 2016)

5.2.7. The quantity of the coin assemblage can also be used to assess Hill Top within a landscape perspective; comparison with other sites can offer possible interpretations of the Romano-British settlement on Hill Top. As the coin assemblage from Hill Top is the result of extensive metal detecting, any comparison can only be made with sites where coin assemblages are also the result of extensive detecting, in order to assure a balanced comparison and prevent any bias entering the results. A survey of 24 sites in Norfolk gives the percentage of coins in each of Reece's dating phases from each site which compared the percentage of coins in Phase B (AD 259-296) and Phase D (AD 330-402). Those with a higher Phase B percentage were found to be urban sites, and those with a higher Phase D percentage were rural sites (Davies and Gregory, 1991: 76, 101; Gurney, 1995:56). The coin assemblage from Hill Top consisted of Phase A (<AD 259) - 5.5%, Phase B - 15.7%, Phase C (AD 296-330) - 7.3% and Phase D - 71.5%; which clearly identifies Hill Top as a rural site - which is not unexpected. The Hill Top percentages are very similar to Woodcock Hall in southwest Norfolk which sits on the Peddars Way. It too had its origins in the Iron Age and transitioned into a Romano-British settlement; and was continuously occupied throughout the Roman occupation. Additionally, it is recorded as having had an early Roman fort and is listed by Davies and Gregory as an 'early military site' (1991: 69, 100). In order to maintain a balanced comparison, the quantity of coins in the assemblage must be considered against the area of the site in which they were found. Table 5.3 compares this metric for Hill Top with two sites from the above mentioned survey discussed by Gurney (1995: 56-59).

Table 5.3: Coin assemblage density

Site	Coins	Site Area	Coins per ha
Hill Top	562	8 ha	70.25
Brampton	1,100	30 ha	36.67
Walsingham/Wighton	4,514	84 ha	53.74

(compiled from Gurney, 1995 and Ashford, 2019)

5.2.8. There are several buildings or activities for which such densities of coinage could be expected. One such advocation is that of a *mansio*. This is based on the proximity of the site to Ermine Street and both the Bedford and Leicester roads, and the quantity of the recovered coin and small metal finds assemblage. However, there are arguments against this. Firstly, there existed a *mansio* in *Durovigutum* from AD 120 until the late 4th Century (Green and Malim, 2017: 89-95), whilst a *mansio* has been interpreted at *Durobrivae* dating from the Hadrianic period until the late 4th Century (Upex 2008: 190); both of which are roughly 20 miles apart. There is also a *mutatio* at Sawtry at the mid-way point between the two *mansiones* (Garrood, 1943: 186; Upex 2008, 79). Without becoming fixated on a standard mileage between *mansiones* (Salway, 2001: 34; Malim, 2005: 192) the standard distance that is common is that covered by a day's travelling. As the distance between the *mansiones* at *Durovigutum* and *Durobrivae* can comfortably travelled in one day, and there is also the *mutatio* at Sawtry (mid-way between the two), it seems superfluous for there to be a *mansio* at Hill Top to cater for Ermine Street travellers. An alternate suggestion exists that a *mansio* at Hill Top would be well placed to cater for travellers on both the Ermine Street to Leicester and Ermine Street to Bedford roads, however, a similar counter-argument exists; it is but a short journey of 4 to 5 miles between Hill Top and Sawtry or *Durovigutum*, rendering the need to rest at Hill Top unnecessary. Furthermore, if there was a need for a *mansio* to serve travellers on either the Leicester or Bedford roads, it would be better located on the lower ground near where it would be more accessible from either of these roads.

5.2.9. The density of coins is also suggestive of a multi-commodity commercial or trading activity serving the surrounding dispersed rural communities and passing trade from Ermine Street, and the Leicester and Bedford roads. The possibility of a localized trade in manufacturing or repair/recycling of small bronze and iron items is not inconceivable when the twenty-three broken bronze and iron items on Hill Top, and forty-four broken *fibulae* & brooches and thirteen other broken bronze and iron items on a site approximately 1.25 miles east-northeast of Hill Top are taken into consideration (Ashford, 2019). Furthermore, a number of a number of metal artefacts (several lead dice, nail cleaners, a hobnail and a cavalry pendant), along with the nineteen *fibulae* may be suggestive of a military presence (at some point in time) on Hill Top (Allason-Jones, 2014: 468-469).

6. **Summary**. The density of coins and other metal objects on Hill Top to the south and east of Hill Top Cottages, along with the wider distribution of coins and metal objects across the remainder of Hill Top and south into Long Nines and Vinegar Hill, is a strong indicator of significant Romano-British settlement activity with continued settlement dating from the late Iron-Age. The spatial distribution of coins and metal finds gives clear indication of the site's nucleus of origin, specific foci of activity in each century and site evolution over the 1st to 4th Centuries. Figure 6.1 clearly shows

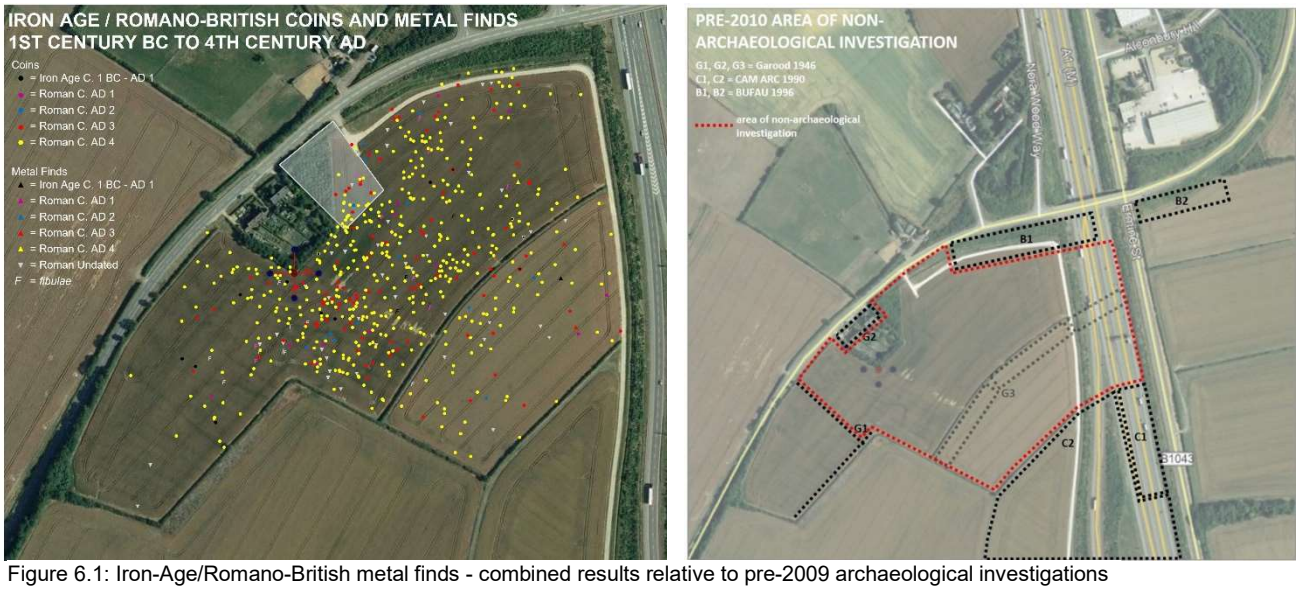

Figure 6.1: Iron-Age/Romano-British metal finds - combined results relative to pre-2009 archaeological investigations (Google Earth, 2016)

the spatial distribution falls, in the main, within the area not included in the archaeological investigations of Garrood or those of both the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council (CCCAFU) and Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit (BUFAU) associated with the A1 widening.

ANNEX

A. Site Grid.

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