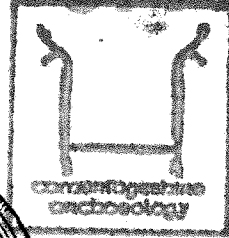
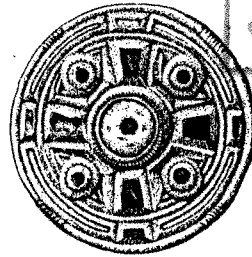


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Archaeological Field Unit

Archaeological Evaluations at South Farm, Upton.

T. Sutherland

1995

Cambridgeshire County Council

Report No. A62

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South Farm, Upton.**

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1995

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SUMMARY

In April 1995 an archaeological evaluation was carried out, in advance of the A1 road widening development, by the Archaeology Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council. The site lies adjacent to the Little Chef, Upton (TL 1841/7896), 19 km south of Peterborough, 8 km to the north-west of Huntingdon, and 1 km to the east of the village of Upton, Cambridgeshire.

One hundred and fifty metres of trenching was located to intersect the possible extensions of a rectilinear archaeological field system associated with the prehistoric and Roman settlement of Monk's Wood Farm, Sawtry, identified from aerial photographs (Cox 1995; Pelling & Leith 1992).

A very limited amount of artefactual evidence was uncovered in the trenches which suggests that the site has been used mainly for agricultural purposes throughout its history. The topsoil and subsoil produced no artefactual material whatsoever.

Forty two features were isolated in the base of the trenches, eighteen of which were identified as being of archaeological interest. The remainder were investigated and found to be geological in origin. Of the eighteen features, eleven or just over 61% were excavated, the remainder being identifiable as previously recorded anomalies, (e.g. two pipe trenches) or were comparable in terms of alignment and fill to the other excavated features.

The earliest archaeological features on the site appear to be the two very similar 'U' shaped cuts which are almost certainly truncated field drains or boundary ditches. Due to the presence of an abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery in each, and the lack of pottery from anywhere else on site, it would appear that these features may date from this period. The presence of Romano-British pottery in this area probably relates the Romano-British settlement at Monks Wood Farm, Sawtry. Many of the linear features, identified in the aerial photographs, have very similar north, north-westerly/south, south-easterly alignment to those on the site. These features proved to be eighteenth century in date.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION AT SOUTH FARM, UPTON, BY THE A1, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

1. INTRODUCTION

In April 1995 an archaeological evaluation was carried out, in advance of road widening developments, by The Archaeological Field Unit of Cambridgeshire County Council on an area of land to the south of the Little Chef Restaurant, and to west of the A1, Cambridgeshire (TL 184/789, O.S. field number 3600). One hundred and fifty metres of trenching was excavated in the north-east of the field which belongs to South Farm, Upton. The location of the site and the position of the trenches are illustrated on Figure 1. The trenches were located primarily to intersect the extensions of linear cropmark features recorded on the opposite side of the A1 at Monk's Wood Farm (Cox 1995).

2. GEOLOGY, TOPOGRAPHY AND LAND USE

The underlying geology is Boulder Clay (British Geological Survey 1985).

The site lies 19 km south of Peterborough, 8 km to the north-west of Huntingdon, and 1 km to the east of the village of Upton. The excavation area runs parallel to and 10 metres to the west of the northbound carriageway of the A1 trunk road.

The site lies at 48.00 m OD., is generally very flat, and is presently under arable cultivation.

Part of the site had been recently disturbed by the excavation of two large construction trenches for the removal of service pipes which ran parallel to the A1. The depth of these features was known to be well over 1m deep and so they were neither investigated nor disturbed in any other way (Fig 1).

3. METHODOLOGY

Four trenches were machine excavated using a 1.6m wide toothless bucket. Two were 50m long by 1.6m wide and ran in a north-westerly to south-easterly direction and the remaining two were 25m long by 1.6m wide, and ran in a north-easterly to south-westerly direction.

Any archaeological features were then recorded on plan, and a sample excavated. The sections and base of the trench and features were cleaned, photographed and recorded.

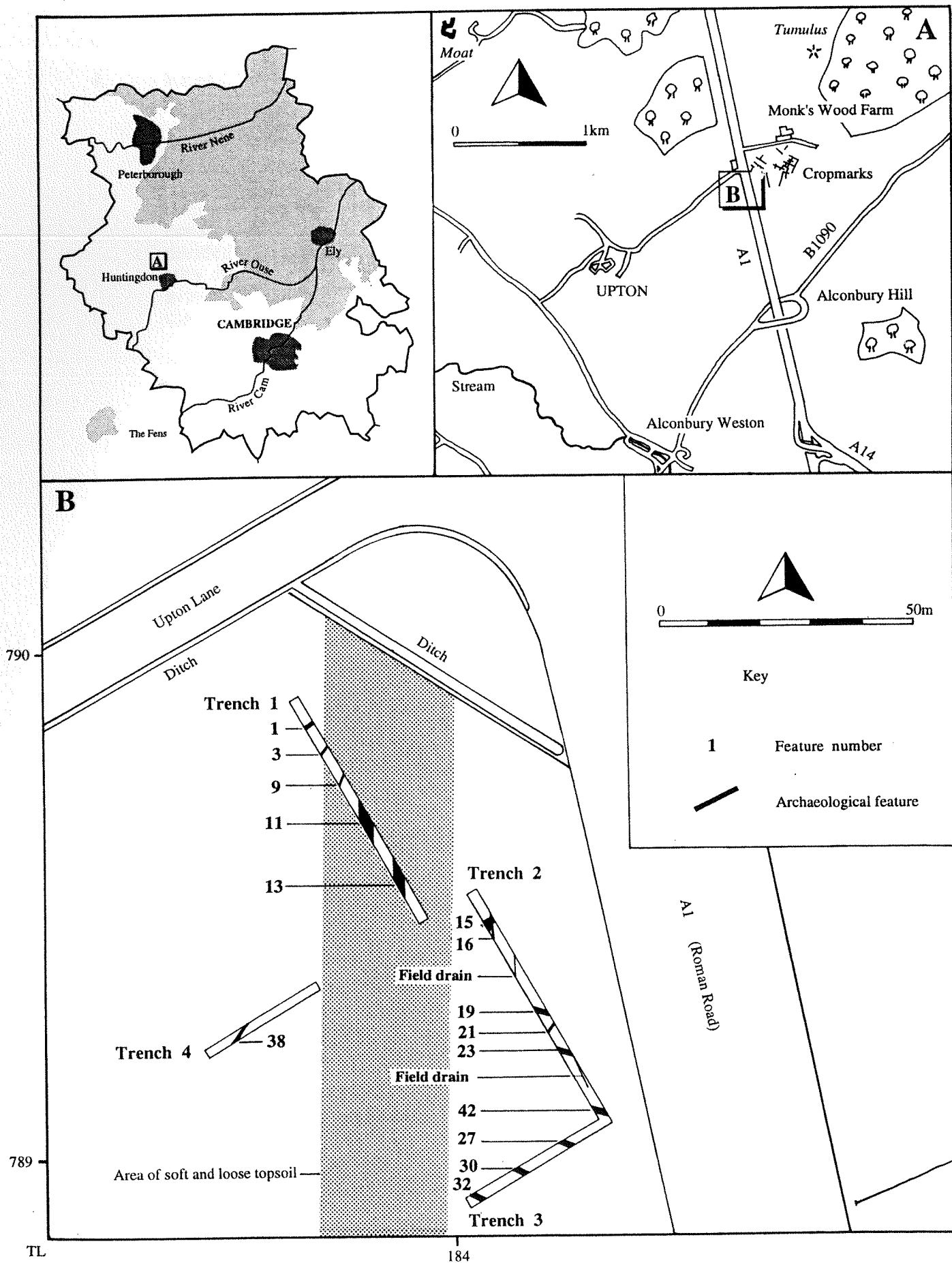


Figure 1 Location plan showing archaeological features in the site area

4. RESULTS

The site was covered with a 0.30m thick, dark greyish brown silty clay topsoil which contained an abundance of flint, chalk, sandstone, and occasionally, quartz pebbles. This was divided by a diffuse boundary and lay over a 0.20m thick layer of light olive brown silty clay which contained considerably less, and much smaller, stone inclusions. This again was divided by a diffuse boundary and lay above a very mottled, pale yellow, silty clay which contained very many fine grains of chalk, chalk and flint gravel and pebbles. This could then be seen to fade into the natural boulder clay. The topsoil and subsoil produced no artefactual material.

Several lengths of ceramic field drains were uncovered, running in a northerly or north, north-easterly direction. These represent the some of the most modern agricultural features of the site. Each section of pipe is 'U' shaped, measures 0.30m long, 0.08m in height, 0.085m wide and has walls 0.015m thick. The pipes are well formed with little evidence of distortion in either width or length. No evidence of base plates were found below these pipes, and no cut could be seen in the topsoil or subsoil associated with their deposition. They may originally have had wooden base plates (Tom Doig, pers. comm.), although no evidence for these were found.

Forty two features were isolated in the base of the trenches, eighteen of which were identified as being of archaeological interest. The remainder were investigated and found to be of geological origin. Of these eighteen, eleven or just over 61% were excavated, and the rest were comparable to other features previously excavated, in terms of alignment, size, and fill.

4.1 Trench 1

Trench 1 was positioned in the north of the site and ran north, north-west to south, south-east. It contained five archaeological features.

The first feature encountered was that of a 0.4m deep and 0.75m wide 'U' shaped linear cut **2**, which ran in a north-east to south-westerly direction. It was filled with (1), an olive coloured silty clay which was moderately stony in its upper fill. This feature could be seen to be truncated by the plough soil but could be seen in the subsoil unlike any of the other features. It contained no artefactual evidence.

The second feature consisted of a 0.55m deep, 0.35m wide vertical sided, flat bottomed linear cut **4**, which ran in a north-east to south-westerly direction (Fig 2). It was filled with (3), a very mottled, moderately stony, yellowy grey, silty clay which had many large stones in the middle portion of its fill. This feature contained no artefactual evidence.

The third feature consisted of a 0.3m deep, 0.7m wide 'U' shaped linear cut **49**, which ran in an almost northerly direction (Fig 2). It was filled with (9), a dark greyish brown very hard clay which contained very few small flint stones. This fill contained one abraded, thin walled body sherd of Romano-British pottery (as yet undated).

The fourth feature consisted of a 1.7m wide linear cut, which ran in a north, north-west to south, south-easterly direction. It contained a very mottled fill (11), which was not excavated.

The fifth feature consisted of a 1.4m wide linear cut, which ran in a north, north-west to south, south-easterly direction. It also contained a very mottled fill (13), which was not excavated.

4.2 Trench 2

Trench 2 was positioned 10 metres to the east of Trench 1, on the same alignment. This was done in order to avoid various disturbed areas associated with earlier services. The alignment was continued in order to check for linears continuing from the opposite side of the A1 trunk road. The trench contained seven archaeological features and one of uncertain formation.

The first of these features consisted of a very irregular cut **48** which ran approximately north-east/south-west. It had very uneven, shallow sides and an uneven rounded base. It contained a very sandy orange fill (15), with areas of blue /grey clay on its northern side. It may have been cut by a different feature on its northern side but as the fills were diffuse this was not possible to confirm with any certainty. Due to the nature of the cut and the fill of this feature it could be of natural origin.

Feature **48**, was cut by a 0.2 metre wide linear feature (16), which ran in an almost northerly direction. Its fill (16), which was very similar to that of (3), was not excavated due to time constraints.

The third feature in the trench consisted of a field drain made of ceramic pipes described above. It ran in a northerly direction.

The fourth archaeological feature consisted of a 0.35 metre deep by a 1 metre wide, very steep sided and flat bottomed linear cut **47**. It ran in a south-east to north-westerly direction and contained a mottled fill (19), which could be separated into five vaguely distinguishable fills:

- 19A: a 'U' shaped, dark grey silty clay,
- 19B: a similar 'U' shaped, dark grey silty clay,
- 19C: a very mottled lens of yellow chalky clay,
- 19D: a band of dark grey silty clay, and
- 19E: a band of yellowish brown silty clay.

A very small, and very abraded piece of thin walled, Romano-British pottery was found in the fill (19B), of this feature.

The fifth feature consisted of a 0.37m wide by 0.10m deep linear cut **46**, which ran in a north-east to south-west direction and had gradually sloping sides and a 'U' shaped base. It was filled with (21), a dark greyish brown very hard clay which contained a few small flint pebbles. The fill contained one abraded rim sherd of thin walled, Romano-British fine ware pottery probably of a dish or platter.

The sixth feature consisted of a 0.9m wide linear band of dark soil (23), which ran in a west, north-westerly to east, south-easterly direction. Its fill, width, and orientation was very similar to that of fill (19A-E). This feature was not excavated due to time constraints and it being so similar to other, excavated features i.e. (19), (27), (30), (32), (42).

An inverted 'U' shaped, ceramic field drain, which ran in a north, north-westerly to south, south-easterly direction cut feature (23) in its upper fill and thus post dated it. A base plate was not found beneath this drain.

The last feature in Trench 2 consisted of a 0.8m wide and 0.33m deep vertical sided, flat bottomed cut **43** (Fig 2). This ran in a south-easterly to north-westerly direction and contained four differing fills (42).

42A: consisted of a 'U' shaped area of dark grey silty clay.

42B: also consisted of a degraded 'U' shaped area of dark grey silty clay.

42C: consisted of a yellowish brown band of silty clay in the base of the feature.

42D: consisted of a very mottled, very pale brown lens of silty clay.

The similarity between the orientation, and type of the cuts and fills of this feature and that of 47 and (19) is very noticeable.

4.3 Trench 3

Trench 3 was positioned in the south of the site perpendicular to, and at the end of Trench 2. It was sited here in order to investigate the increasing number of linear features in the southern area of the site and to check for additional archaeological features which may be running parallel to the A1. It was seen to contain four identifiable archaeological features.

The first of these was a an inverted 'U' shaped, ceramic field drain, which ran in a north to south direction across the trench. A base plate was not found beneath this drain.

This drain cut a 0.85 metre wide linear feature which ran in a north-westerly to south-easterly direction. Its fill (27), a dark grey silty clay, is very similar to fills (19), (23), and (42) associated with cut **47** (see above). This feature was not excavated due to both time constraints and it being so similar to other, already excavated, features i.e. (19), (27), (30), (32), (42).

Another, very similar, feature was that of a 0.87m wide band of dark grey silty clay (30), which ran in the same direction as those of cut **47** (19), (23), and (42). Due to its similarity to these other features it was left unexcavated.

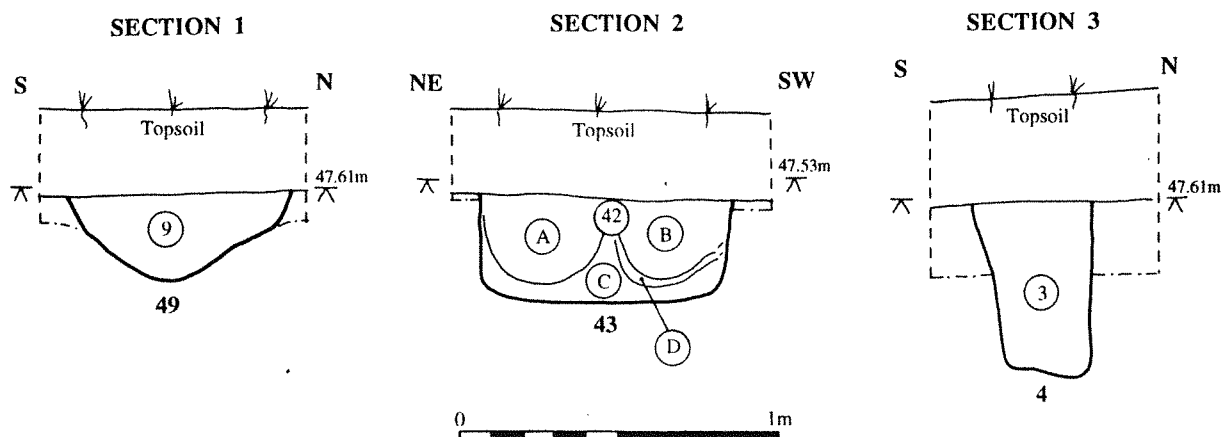


Figure 2 Sections through Roman (49), and Eighteenth century (43 & 4), ditches.

The last feature in Trench 3 appeared to be almost similar to (19), (23), (42), (27), and (30). Upon excavation, however, the cut **45**, and fill (32), could be seen to be different. The north-western face of the excavated section exhibited its western side cut vertically, adjoining an almost flat base, whilst the eastern side was more rounded and sloping. Only one fill, a dark grey silty clay, was distinguishable. The cut and fill in the south, south-eastern facing section could be seen as being only 0.30 metres wide as it went further north, shown as a narrow, vertical sided, flat bottomed feature in the section.

4.4 Trench 4

Trench 4 was positioned in the west of the site and contained only one archaeological feature,

This consisted of a long narrow 0.20m band of very mottled yellowy grey silty clay (38), which ran in a north-easterly to south-westerly direction. It was seen to be similar in size, orientation and fill content to feature (3) and so was left unexcavated.

Many other features seen in this trench were found upon excavation, to be natural channels or undulations in the underlying natural clays.

5. INTERPRETATION

The earliest archaeological features on the site would appear to be the two very similar 'U' shaped cuts **46** and **49**, these are almost certainly truncated field drains or boundary ditches. Due to the presence of a sherd of Romano-British pottery in each, and the lack of pottery elsewhere on site (other than in fill (19) which lies very close to **46**), it is possible that these features date to the Roman period. The location of this pottery in this area probably relates to the Romano-British site at Sawtry, to the east of the A1 at Monk's Wood Farm. Many of the linear features, identified in the aerial photographs, have very similar alignment, to cuts **46** and **49**, that is, running north-east to south-west, and also taking advantage of the superior positions offered by the undulating landscape.

The lack of any dateable evidence in the other features, except for the ceramic drains, has been very restrictive. However, the six parallel linear features filled with (19), (23), (42), (27), (30), and (32) are unusual in that they have very steep sides and a flat base. These have been tentatively identified as late eighteenth or nineteenth century field drains which would have been hand cut with a narrow spade and possibly filled or partly filled with brushwood in an attempt to keep their bases open to running water (Tom Doig, pers. comm). The section across ditch **45**, in Trench 3, had the appearance of a ditch terminal and so may mark the most westerly point of these ditches. This would also explain why this ditch system is not seen in either Trenches 1 or 4.

The very small abraded sherd of Romano-British pottery found in fill (19), is possibly a result of the truncation of the fill of the Romano-British ditch (21) by the later Cut **47**. This could have relocated such artefacts, as Feature **47** appears to date from approximately the turn of the nineteenth century (Tom Doig, pers comm).

The three very narrow linear north-easterly to south-westerly orientated ditches, (3), (16), and (38), although very different in shape, appear to be part of a similar system of land drainage and of similar date.

The one ditch which appears to stand alone in terms of alignment, fill and orientation is that of Cut 2, Fill (1). This lies approximately 25 metres from, and has an identical alignment to, the drainage ditch which presently runs along the northern edge of the field.

The large feature found in Trench 2, cut 48 has a very sandy fill (15), and has been interpreted as a natural gully.

The two very large features (11), and (13), were excavated within the last few years and were a part of an easement trench. This could be seen by the differential surface vegetation, within the field.

6. CONCLUSION

The two, apparently Romano-British, ditches may provide circumstantial evidence for the dating of the features identified in the fields around Monk's Wood Farm, Sawtry.

As the six parallel drains are running either towards or away from the present course of the A1 and appear to be restricted to its near vicinity, they may have functioned as drainage ditches, draining the field into a roadside ditch or possibly draining water from the roadside into adjacent fields. As the Turnpike road, constructed in the late seventeenth century along the same alignment as the Roman, was in use in this period, the drainage system may have been used to drain this busy thoroughfare.

Ditch 2, which lies just below the topsoil and is aligned with the present access road to the A1 from Upton, appears to be a more recent field drain. The site therefore appears to have had a long, if not constant, agricultural use where the drainage of surface waters would have been important. The severe lack of pottery or other artefactual evidence on the site suggests that it has always been some distance from any settlement or infield system, other than in the Romano-British period.

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