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The Chronicle Hills, Whittlesford, Cambridgeshire

Christopher Taylor and Ashley Arbon

The extensive late prehistoric and Roman site at Whittlesford, first discovered in the early nineteenth century, is re-examined and re-interpreted.

This paper has three aims. To publish the historiography of a little understood archaeological site in Whittlesford that has been misinterpreted in the past, to describe the results of a Local Heritage Initiative Project and to examine some of the problems with interpretation that have emerged from this site that is typical of so many elsewhere in Britain.

Setting

The extensive site, now entirely under cultivation and known generally as the Chronicle Hills, occupies some 30 hectares (80 acres) of land along the western edge of Whittlesford parish, close to its boundary with Thriplow (Figs 1–3). It lies on Middle and Lower Chalk, between 22 metres and 35 metres OD, within and on the eastern side of the valley of the Hoffer Brook (TL 453472). The latter is a small north-flowing tributary of the River Rhee. Its shallow, although well marked, valley at this point is formed by the brook cutting through the slight north-facing escarpment formed by the Melbourn Rock that is situated at the junction of the Middle and Lower Chalk. Except where it crosses the valley to the south, the Melbourn Rock is visible in the modern arable cultivation as a broad white band some 20 metres to 30 metres across. Immediately below it is a narrow outcrop of chalk marl, the uppermost strata of the Lower Chalk that occupies the base of the valley. The Middle Chalk above is capped with thin patches of glacially-derived material that includes coarse gravel and small pieces of 'foreign' rocks (Worssam & Taylor 1969, pp. 42, 133; Geological Survey 1952).

The Hoffer Brook rises well to the south on the flatter open land there. However, its flow is greatly enhanced by water from two areas of springs that lie opposite each other in small embayments in the main part of the valley at the base of the Melbourn Rock. These are known as Great Nine Wells on the Thriplow side of the valley and Little Nine Wells on

the Whittlesford side. Because of the impermeable nature of the chalk marl, water also seeps from the base of the Melbourn Rock both up- and down-stream from the Nine Wells, producing an area of almost permanently damp and even waterlogged ground along the valley bottom and on its lower slopes.

Early post-glacial freeze-thaw action in this environment led to the development of ground-ice hollows, or 'pingos' along the whole length of the Hoffer Brook valley below the Melbourn Rock, beyond it on the flatter wet ground to the south and, in places, even on the valley crests and adjacent hilltops where some waterlogging also occurred as a result of a perched water table created by the impervious chalk marl (Taylor 1981a). These ice hollows were once a series of interlocking and overlapping roughly circular peat-filled depressions bounded by low banks or 'ramparts'. With a few exceptions, where the largest of the hollows survive as water-filled ponds, modern agriculture has now destroyed all the fine detail and the ground is marked by very uneven hollows with circular patches of peaty soil surrounded by lighter raised edges (Figs 3 & 4).

The result of this geological and geomorphological past is that the valley of the Hoffer Brook is characterised by impeded drainage. Despite modern efforts to improve it, the area remains markedly damp, especially when compared with the dry chalk and gravel of the upper valley sides and the higher land beyond. This situation was clearly recognised in earlier times when the whole of the valley bottom was known as Got Moor in Whittlesford parish and The Moor in Thriplow (CRO R60/24/2/76, Q/RDC/65). The small copse called The Quave, close to the brook, takes its name from the 'quaking land' resulting from the deep peat deposits there (Reaney 1943, pp. 98, 220). The name Fen (now Fern) Wood also recalls the nature of the underlying soil in the valley bottom.

There are, however, two important exceptions to this overall picture of ill-drained land, where the remains of the ground-ice hollows would have been expected but are not visible. The first place is immediately downstream of Little Nine Wells, on the eastern side

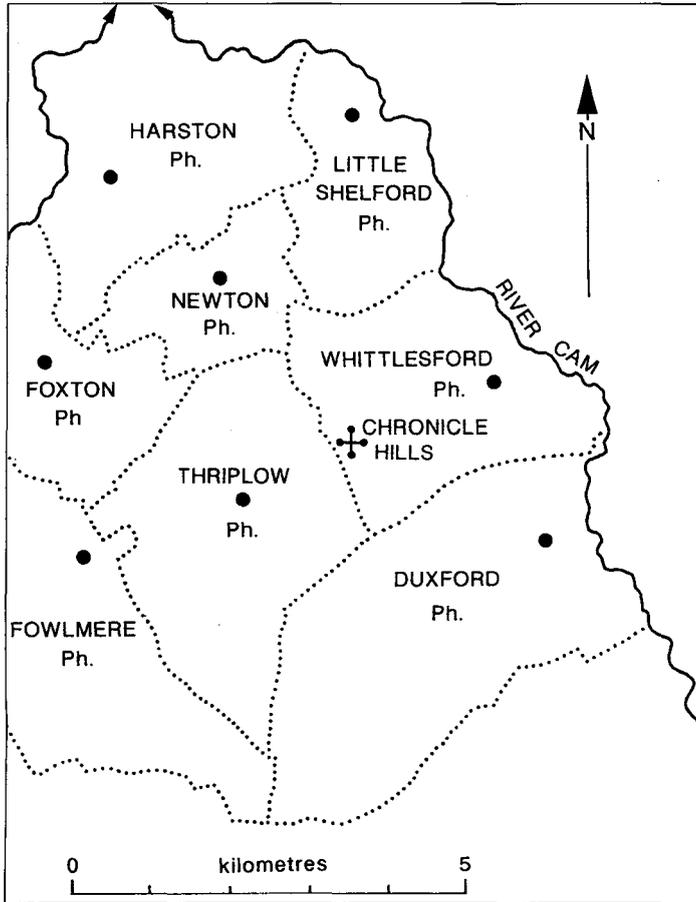


Figure 1. The Chronicle Hills, location.

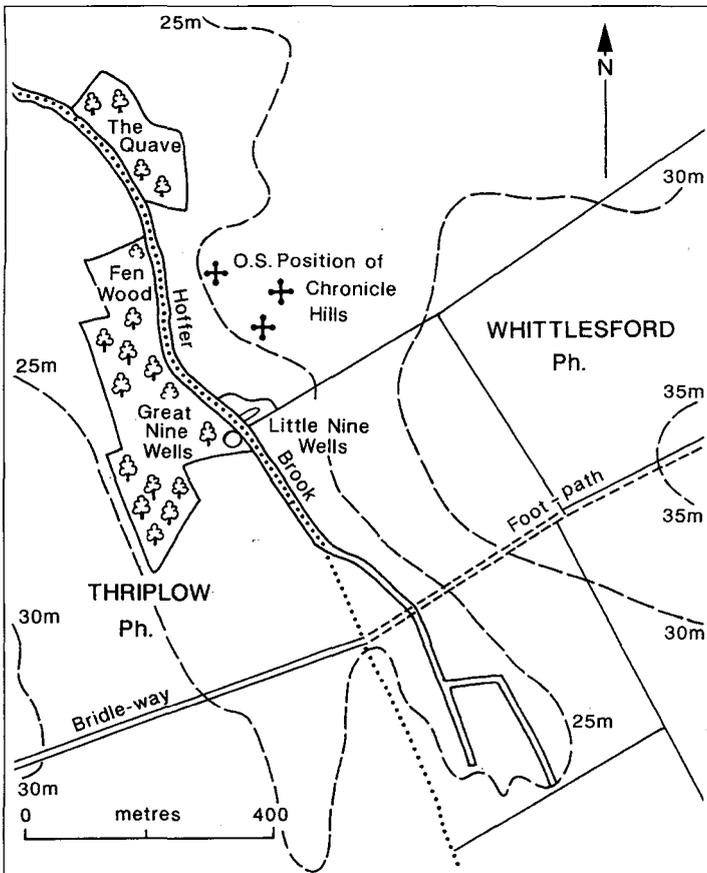


Figure 2. The Chronicle Hills, setting.

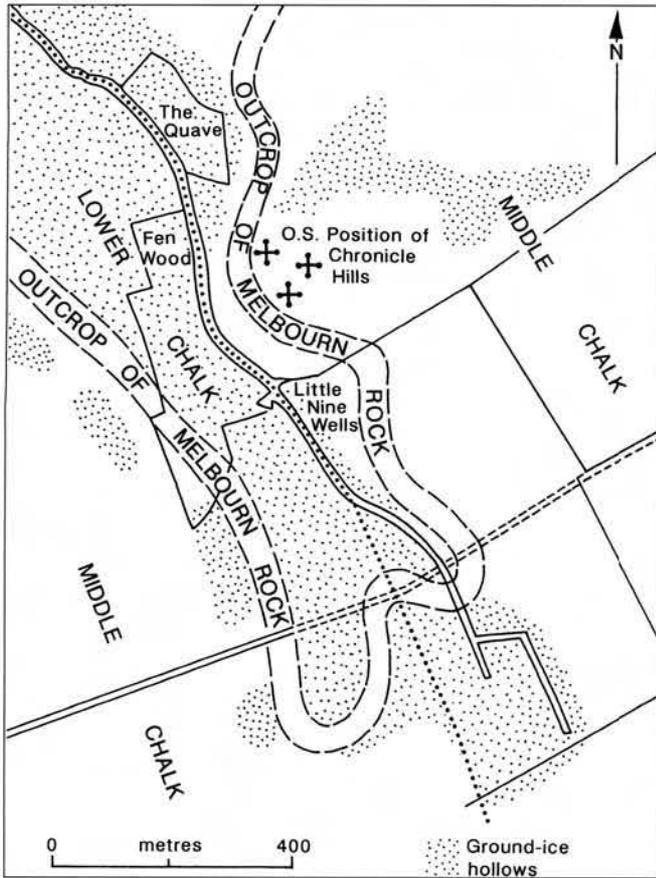


Figure 3. The Chronicle Hills, geology and geomorphology.



Figure 4. The Chronicle Hills, aerial photograph of main area of crop marks from the east. The almost completely filled in ground-ice hollows are visible in the valley bottom below. BPN 10 Copyright reserved Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

of the brook, where, in a broad band for a distance of some 170 metres between the stream and the bottom of the Melbourn Rock, no trace of the hollows can be seen either on the ground or on aerial photographs. The second place is just upstream of the Little Nine Wells where a narrow terrace-way, also at the base of the Melbourn Rock, appears to have destroyed the hollows that must once have existed here.

Historiography

The significance of the Chronicle Hills as a place where material from the ancient past has been found has long been appreciated. The name, a corruption of *Crockelhull*, the hill or place where pottery has been found, is recorded as early as 1398 (Reaney 1943, p. 98). The detailed archaeological history of the site began in 1818, soon after the Parliamentary enclosure of the medieval open fields of Whittlesford had taken place. Until then the higher eastern side of the Hoffer Brook valley was the western edge of both Stone Hill and Bar Fields, two of the three large open fields of the parish. The indented boundary between these arable fields and Got Moor lay roughly along the outcrop of the Melbourn Rock (Fig. 5; CRO R60/24/2/76). This supports the geomorphological evidence that most of the bottom and the lower sides of the valley were too wet for cultivation in the medieval period and that they were meadows.

The Enclosure Act for Whittlesford (49 Geo III c 99) was obtained in 1809 and the land of the parish was probably divided and enclosed soon afterwards (Fig. 6). Of the 1617 acres that were enclosed, over half went to Ebenezer Hollick, the then lord of the manor and the major landowner (VCH 1978a, pp. 266, 269). Amongst Hollick's allotments were all of Got Moor, until then the parish meadow and pasture, a large part of the former Bar Field to its north-east and the north-western corner of the former Stone Hill Field adjacent to Got Moor (CRO R60/24/2/76). According to two identical contemporary accounts (*Cambridge Chronicle* 1818; *Gentleman's Magazine* 1819), at some time in mid 1818 Hollick began to 'improve' some of his land here. As part of the work he employed labourers 'to level' the Chronicle Hills, then said to consist of three 'ancient tumuli' as well as two other mounds. The three tumuli are described as being 'upon Got Moor' while the implication is that the other two also lay there.

The alleged location of these mounds is important for, even today, their precise position is uncertain. Some facts are clear but much has to be disentangled from unsatisfactory contemporary descriptions and later interpretations. Hollick's 'improvements', perhaps seven or eight years after enclosure, are unlikely to have been on his land within the former Bar and Stone Hill Fields, where the dry chalk and gravel soils had been arable for centuries and required little in the way of major changes. The improvements are much more likely to have been within Got Moor

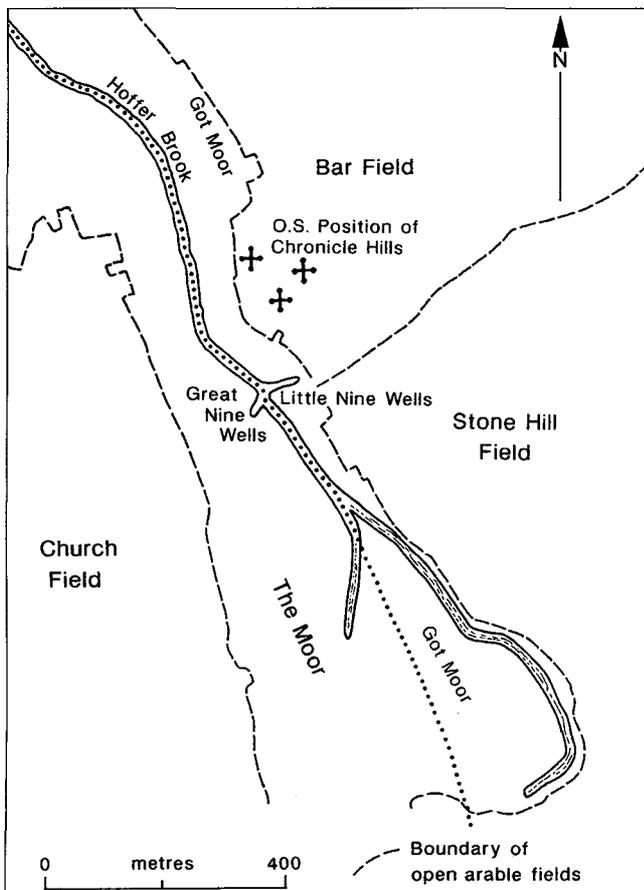


Figure 5. The Chronicle Hills, medieval fields and meadows.

where the uneven ground, deep peat-filled hollows and poor drainage prevented cultivation. Whether the 'tumuli', or barrows, actually lay within Got Moor is not clear from these early descriptions. However, it should be noted that barrows only rarely survive undamaged within medieval fields. They have usually been flattened or ploughed away with the result that they are now visible only as ring ditches. While there are occasions where groups of barrows have remained intact within medieval open fields (RCHME 1975, Woodford (2-4)), it is not a common occurrence. Yet, as will be discussed below, all later accounts and cartographic depictions locate the principal barrows on the hilltop above the valley.

That Ebenezer Hollick's improvements were in the ill-drained valley bottom of Got Moor can be seen in the existing system of deep drains to the south-west of the site. These, which can be dated from map evidence to between 1812 and the early 1830s, replaced the old course of the brook there (CRO R/60/24/2/76; OS 1836). They were thus probably created by Hollick, who went bankrupt in 1825 and died in 1828 (VCH 1978a, p. 260). They were clearly constructed to improve the drainage of the waterlogged valley, perhaps especially after the flattening of the former ground-ice hollows.

The two accounts of the destruction of the barrows, written within a year of Hollick's improvements, also give details of their relationships, form and contents as well as of other nearby features. There were three

tumuli 'upon Got Moor' set along the western side of (and might have been the foundations of) a flint and pebble wall that was said to be aligned north to south. The barrows were thus probably in a straight line. However, as these barrows were also described as on the northern side of the brook, when actually they must have lain north-east of it, they were probably aligned north-west to south-east. The wall, which was 30 inches (0.75 metres) wide and four rods (20.25 metres) long, had 'abutments' (buttresses or wall stubs?) on its eastern side.

The middle of the three barrows was alleged to be eight feet (2.5 metres) high and 27 yards (24.7 metres) in diameter. Although heights of barrows are consistently over-estimated even today, if these dimensions are correct then it was a large barrow. It is difficult to compare its size with others in Cambridgeshire but a rapid assessment of the diameter of some 70 odd barrows and ring ditches recorded in the county produced an average of 19 metres (eg RCHME 1972; Fox 1923; PCAS *passim*). Most were between 15 metres and 22 metres and only nine were as big or bigger than the largest Chronicle Hills barrow. Only five had recorded heights anywhere near it. The results of an examination of barrow sizes in south Dorset might also help to place the Chronicle Hills barrow in context. Of the 872 barrows there, the average diameter was found to be 54 feet (16.5 metres) and, if the 70-odd special barrows there (discs and bells etc) are ignored, the majority of round barrows in south Dorset

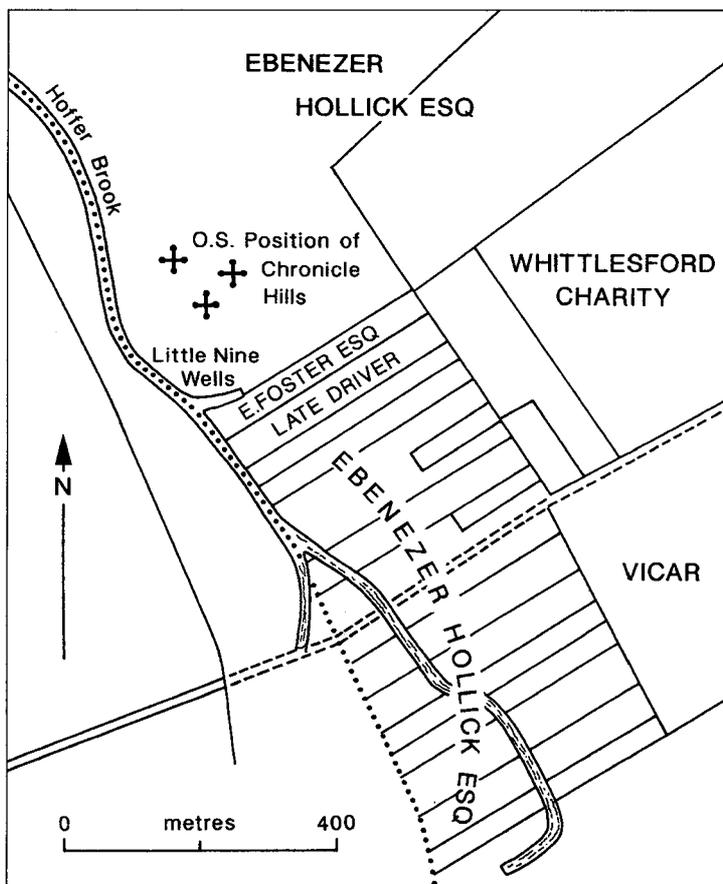


Figure 6. The Chronicle Hills, allotments on enclosure.

are between 30 feet and 50 feet (19 metres to 15 metres) across (RCHME 1970, pp. 423–4). Thus this barrow at Whittlesford was larger than most recorded in south Dorset and almost certainly one of the largest in Cambridgeshire, a fact not hitherto appreciated.

This central barrow contained four human skeletons lying on their backs 'about two feet (0.6 metres) from the bottom'. This probably means that they were well above the old ground surface and not perhaps in a primary position. The smaller, lower barrow to the north (probably north-west) contained huge quantities of small animal bones, described as 'lemmings' (and likely to have been of fairly recent date). Neither this mound, nor the southern (south-eastern) one, also described as 'lower' than the central one, apparently contained burials. What were described as 'broken pieces of terracotta with red and black glazes' were certainly found in the central barrow and probably in all three of them. Some 12 rods (60 metres) to the east (north-east?) of the wall was an 'ancient well', made (or lined?) with clunch, 9 feet (2.7 metres) in diameter and filled with flint and tiles 'of curious shape, so formed to lap over each other'. Some had a hole in the centre and 'it was believed that they had been used in an aqueduct'. Two horns of 'bucks or elks' were also found in the well.

About 100 yards (91 metres) to the north (north-east) of the three barrows were two more, described as mounds. Both contained a 'chamber' or pit constructed of, or lined with, flint and pebbles. These chambers were four feet and five feet (1.2 metres and 1.5 metres) square and both were eight feet (2.4 metres) deep. No dimensions of these barrows were given, but as there were two feet (0.6 metres) of the mound above the chamber, it seemed likely that, unless they were even larger than the centre barrow of the south-eastern group, the pits were cut down well below the original ground surface. Each chamber contained two inhumations. In one, the larger of the two lay on top of the smaller and both skeletons were on an oak 'platform' that was associated with nails (perhaps a box or coffin?). Also on the platform were traces of a bronze vessel and the blade of a knife or dagger of an unspecified metal. In the other chamber a skeleton in a 'sitting position' (a crouched burial?) with an iron spearhead also had another skeleton on top of it. Iron nails were noted there but no wood. Both chambers were surrounded by a circular wall (of flint?) two-and-a-half feet (0.8 metres) thick, three feet (0.9 metres) high and 22 feet (6.7 metres) in diameter (apparently beneath the mound on the old ground surface). Because of the lack of Roman coins, the conclusion reached for the date of all five barrows was that they were 'rather Celtic than Roman'.

As already noted, no location for any of these barrows was given in the original account beyond that they lay on 'Got Moor'. The Whittlesford enclosure map neither depicts nor names them and they were not recorded on the Ordnance Survey (OS) *Old Series* 2-inch map, Sheet 51, surveyed between 1808 and 1822. The re-survey of 1834–5 for the OS 1-inch map Sheet 54 (OS 1836) did indeed depict four of them

even though they had been destroyed 16 or 17 years earlier. This was probably the result of the general survey instructions, issued in 1818, that 'all remains of ancient Fortifications, Druidical Monuments ... and all Tumuli, all Barrows shall be noticed in the Plans ...' (Harley 1970). As, presumably, no trace of the barrows remained by 1834, the surveyors had to rely on information from local people regarding their former location and number. The result was that four circular hachured mounds on the north side of the Little Nine Wells, approximately on the crest of the valley, were put on the map. Given the small scale (1 inch to the mile), the fact that the mounds no longer existed and perhaps the failing memory of the informants, this was a fair attempt at depiction. But, of course, the original account of the discovery seems to have placed them on Got Moor, thus perhaps in the valley bottom, and to have described the five barrows in two groups.

The record of the next archaeological advances lay undiscovered for almost a century. Indeed the details were not even written down until the early 1880s. The new information was contained in two places. The first was in the notebooks of a local antiquarian George Maynard (1829–1904). Maynard was a member of a prosperous Whittlesford farming and agricultural engineering family. He was a passionate collector of documents and memorabilia relating to Whittlesford and the surrounding area as well as a competent painter. He was also a knowledgeable botanist and archaeologist. All of the information he gathered was eventually bound in 13 volumes of papers, often illustrated by his own delicate watercolours (CRO R85/5). In 1881 he became the Curator of the Saffron Walden Museum and his papers were subsequently deposited there, where they remained largely unappreciated until the bulk of them were transferred to the Cambridgeshire Record Office in 1958 (Carter 2004, pp. 88–90).

There are two pieces of information about the Chronicle Hills site in the Maynard papers. In a loose sheet in Volume I, George Maynard recalls, as a small boy, seeing a tessellated pavement and a hypocaust as well as part of a 'bath' with a length of lead piping. He also records finds of pottery, roof tile, 'walls of rooms', oyster shells and a 'marble vase'. These discoveries were perhaps made in the early 1840s, probably during a period of renewed agricultural prosperity. There was a concentration of both ownership and occupation of land in Whittlesford then that might well have led to further 'improvements' in the area (VCH 1978a, pp. 269–70). The exact details of these finds were not apparently written down until many years later and may not be entirely accurate. Whatever the case, it is clear that a major Roman site was found near the Chronicle Hills, although Maynard gave no actual location for it.

However, in 1877, Maynard painted a watercolour entitled 'Ploughing over the site of the Roman villa, The Quave Trees in the background' (Plate 2). The painting depicts a man ploughing the land at the bottom of a hillside that was already cultivated.

He is being watched by another man, in early- to mid-nineteenth-century dress, with a dog. This man stands on a flat, still unploughed strip of grassland with a tree-lined stream to the left. In the background is a clump of trees. Despite depicting an event that took place at least 30 years earlier, it is possible to locate the viewpoint and thus to identify the position of Maynard's discoveries. The stream must be the Hoffer Brook while the trees in the background are those of The Quave. This places Maynard's 'villa' on the ill-drained land in the valley bottom, just below the Melbourn Rock outcrop and immediately north-west of the Little Nine Wells. It also coincides with one of the two areas where no ground-ice hollows are visible. This seems to be an extraordinary situation for a Roman villa (Figs 3 & 7).

The second piece of information about the site, which has only recently been appreciated, is contained in a collection of documents, descriptions and comments about Whittlesford compiled, by a remarkable coincidence, by Anne Barker (née Maynard, 1837–1921), a cousin of George Maynard. They date from about 1880. The papers remained in private hands unread until 2000 when a selection of them was published (Strange 2000). The details of the Chronicle Hills are somewhat muddled but are nevertheless of some value in the understanding of the site. A section written by Anne Barker herself (Strange 2000, pp. 105–6) conflates the destruction of the barrows and the Roman finds made by her cousin to a single event that took place in 1818, but she adds a piece of information not recorded anywhere else. This is that the 'tumuli' were 'cleared away by Mr Hollick to fill up some of the hollows near to improve the land for agriculture'. This statement, with its confirmation that it was the ice hollows that were being levelled, and the apparent use of the barrow material as spoil to fill them, is convincing because of its detail which relates to what is now known of the landforms in Got Moor. Just as important is the implication that the barrows were not on 'Got Moor' but lay elsewhere, that is 'near', the material from them having to be taken to Got Moor to fill the hollows. In writing about the Roman 'villa', Barker repeats her cousin's description of the discoveries of a 'bath with a water pipe', but again gives another specific and convincing piece of information. This was that 'Roman tiles some with marks on them could be picked up in the fields and in the beautiful stream of water nearby called Nine Wells'. The discovery of Roman material actually around and within the stream at Nine Wells is of some importance when assessing the function of the 'villa' here.

Barker also included in her collection of papers a curious account of the Chronicle Hills and Got Moor given at the Working Men's Hall at Whittlesford in 1866 by her father, Robert Maynard (1808–83) (Strange 2000, pp. 106–9). The recitation, for such it is, was clearly for entertainment as much as for education and contains a far-fetched and imaginative picture of Got Moor in prehistoric and Roman times, with Druids, Roman Chiefs and Fierce Northmen,

all active around a 'lake' at Nine Wells. And he too conflates the discoveries by Hollick in 1818 and by his brother George much later, making them a single event. However, he also claims that the material of the 'mound' – he only records a single barrow – was 'partly used to contract the beautiful spring', that is, Little Nine Wells. This is again confirmation that the material from the makeup of the barrows was actually removed bodily and used to fill in depressions in the valley bottom. It also explains, perhaps, why it has since been so difficult to locate their actual site. It also suggests that Little Nine Wells was perhaps a pool of some size before 1818.

At first sight these nineteenth-century accounts by the Maynards might well be considered unreliable. But all three, George, Robert and Anne, were educated, intelligent people, who lived at Whittlesford for most of their lives and who must have been well acquainted with village gossip, accurate or otherwise and who certainly knew the area of the Chronicle Hills intimately. George Maynard in particular, by the time he recorded his finds, was a knowledgeable antiquarian and curator of a museum holding a considerable amount of Roman material. As such there is no reason to disregard their information about the site.

The potential value of the Maynards' record of their discoveries went unappreciated by archaeologists until the 1990s. As a result, for over a century archaeologists remained unaware of the association of the barrows with a major Roman building. The first archaeologist to describe the Chronicle Hills was Babington (1883, p. 63). His account shows well the problems of errors likely to occur in summarising previous reports. Babington noted that there were three barrows in a line but stated that 'they contained the remains of skeletons' thus implying that all had burials within them. The two north-western barrows with 'internments' in the chambers were merely mentioned in passing and the well now became 'a well or rubbish pit' that contained the red and black glazed pottery as well as the tiles. It should also be noted that Babington gave the wrong year for the initial discoveries, 1819 instead of 1818, an indication that his source material was the *Gentleman's Magazine*, not the local newspaper, an error that was repeated in all subsequent accounts. Nor did he suggest a date for the barrows. He seems to have assumed that the three south-eastern ones were Roman.

Two years later in 1885 the Ordnance Survey reached Whittlesford during work for the new 1:2500 County Series plans that were published the following year. The Ordnance Survey field records have not survived, so it is impossible to know what guided the surveyors in their work at the Chronicle Hills. They appear to have known and used Babington's work for the published plan (OS 1886), which has only three circular hachured mounds that are named as 'Chronicle Hills (Tumuli) *Human remains and Ancient pottery found AD 1819*'. That is, they too gave the wrong year for the discoveries. As already noted, Babington correctly recorded that the three south-eastern barrows were in

a line, yet the Ordnance Survey surveyors arranged them in a triangular group in exactly the same way as the earlier 1-inch map, except that they omitted one shown there. The 1886 map, which was used by every subsequent student of the Chronicle Hills, thus appears to be a compromise between Babington's account and the earlier mapping, neither of which were accurate in respect of either the number of barrows or their location. That the location of the barrows on the 1886 plan may not be correct can be seen by plotting the position of the south-eastern three barrows as shown by the Ordnance Survey against the boundaries between Stone Hill and Bar Fields and Got Moor on the Whittlesford enclosure map (Fig. 5). This shows the two south-easternmost of the three barrows lying within Bar Field while the third lies on or close to the boundary between Got Moor and Bar Field. All are located on the valley crest just above the Melbourn Rock outcrop. This is, of course, at variance with the original 1818 account that places them all in Got Moor, a position that would have been on or below the outcrop and on the valley floor, but perhaps closer to the location implied by Anne Barker. The Ordnance Survey revised the large-scale plans of the area in 1901 (OS 1901). As it was now obvious that the barrows no longer existed the depiction of the three south-eastern barrows was changed from hachured mounds to antiquity crosses but the positions were not altered, nor was the description or the erroneous date. All subsequent map revisions continued to mark the site in that way (eg OS 1956) until very recently when all reference to the site was removed (eg OS 1974, 1999).

The first serious attempt to interpret the site was by Fox in 1923 (pp. 77–9, 199). He made a careful analysis of both the 1818 account and that by Babington. As would be expected, Fox made a number of pertinent observations. One was his comment that the barrows were on 'low-lying ground' and thus were not likely to be of Bronze Age date. It is not clear what evidence he had to reach this conclusion. For nowhere in his writings, or in his biography, are there any real indications of how much fieldwork he actually undertook for *The Archaeology of the Cambridge Region* (Fox 1923; 1948, A2 and A6; Scott-Fox 2002). But, fortuitous or not, at first sight it seems a sensible conclusion. However, in coming to this Fox ignored the precise, if ultimately erroneous, location of the barrows by the Ordnance Survey. He accurately described the three south-easternmost barrows as being arranged in a line and with four skeletons in the central one. He also picked up the ambiguous wording of the 1818 account that might have meant that the red and black glazed pottery was found only in the central barrow, or perhaps in all three. In addition he pointed out that, contrary to the original description, Babington, 'who possibly had access to more detailed information', claimed that all three of the south-eastern barrows contained skeletons. That Babington had more information over 60 years after the event is most unlikely and Fox perhaps was merely being polite to a fellow academic. Contrary to Babington,

however, Fox did not change the 1818 interpretation of the Chronicle Hills from being 'Celtic', that is, Iron Age. Indeed he reinforced it by references to parallels elsewhere. On the basis that no Roman coins were recorded and that the 'glazed' wares sounded similar to a sherd found at the War Ditches, Cherry Hinton (Hughes 1903, p. 480; Fox 1923, p. 136), he believed that the three south-eastern barrows were probably of the early Iron Age. He was more certain of the date of the two north-western barrows with their alleged 'chambers' and he listed a number of continental parallels from France and Switzerland, including ones with oak plank coffins, bronze vases, double inhumations and enclosing stone walls, then considered to be of the early Iron Age. Fox also listed the relatively large number of Iron Age barrows in the Cambridge region that might be compared to the Chronicle Hills (Fox 1923, pp. 76–81). The possibility of the Chronicle Hills being Iron Age was acknowledged in 1936, when they were omitted from a comprehensive list of Roman barrows in Britain including all of the then known ones in Cambridgeshire (Dunning & Jessup 1936).

The next published work on the site was by the Victoria County History (VCH) in 1938, actually written by Grahame Clark (VCH 1938, p. 289). Under the *Early Iron Age* section, Clark noted that 'In two barrows 100 yards north of the Chronicle Hills, destroyed in 1819 (sic) were two skeletons in square pebble-built vaults, lined with wood'. He wrote that one 'vault' had an oak floor and that iron nails were found in both. A bronze vessel, a dagger and spear were found. Fox's conclusion that the finds and burial details could be matched at early Iron Age sites in northern France was noted. An implication of this account was that the south-eastern barrows were not Iron Age, but Roman and would thus be included in a future VCH volume on Roman Cambridgeshire, as indeed they were (VCH 1978b, p. 168).

It was not until 1958 that another attempt was made to put the Chronicle Hills into context. This was in a paper by Jessup (1958) that drew together all the then known British material for Roman burials under barrows and within walled cemeteries. He concluded that all five barrows might have been examples of both, although he admitted that neither the grave goods nor the form of burial were typically Roman. In fact his attempts to include all the barrows within the category of walled cemeteries caused him difficulties. He thought that the wall with the 'abutments' alongside the south-eastern three barrows could have been part of such an enclosure paralleled at sites in Kent and elsewhere. Thus, with the 'slight evidence' of the glazed pottery from the central barrow, he concluded that a Roman date for all three seemed possible while acknowledging Fox's idea of an early Iron Age date. However, because he followed Babington's account and not the original one, Jessup claimed that all of them contained skeletons (Jessup 1958, p. 21).

The two north-western barrows proved harder to interpret. Jessup thought the low circular walls that surrounded the 'chambers' and apparently lay *under*

the barrow mounds were also 'walled enclosures', but he accepted that the existence of the iron spear, dagger or knife and the bronze vessel suggested an Iron Age date (Jessup 1958, p. 21). One other feature of the site that made Jessup less than certain of a Roman date for all the barrows was that they were almost the only ones then known that were not associated with a Roman settlement. He did not know, of course, of the remains discovered by the Maynards over a century before, the details of which were then still unread in Saffron Walden Museum and in private hands.

Recent discoveries and research

At the very time that Jessup was attempting to place the Chronicle Hills site in its wider setting, a chain of events began that were to change completely the understanding of it. The first was the arrival of the Maynard papers in the County Record Office in 1958, although it was some time before their contents were appreciated. Of more immediate relevance was the introduction of new agricultural methods that started in Whittlesford in the 1950s and included deep ploughing. This technique cut down some 0.2 metres to 0.3 metres deeper into the subsoil than had earlier cultivation. By the mid-1950s most of the Chronicle Hills site was being ploughed in this way. The result was that large quantities of flint, clunch, limestone and fragments of Colleyweston-type slate were turned up in places as well as, presumably, pottery that was not recognised. Much of this material was collected and carted away for use as hard core on local farm tracks.

Shortly afterwards the less obvious archaeological material was noticed and picked up although not, significantly, from the alleged site of the barrows. Amongst finds brought to the attention of one of the present writers (CT) in the early to mid-1960s were large freshly-broken sherds of Roman pottery including samian and Horningsea wares. Much of this came from a hitherto unrecognised occupation site, to the south of the barrows on the hilltop, above the Melbourn Rock. Similar pottery and at least three Roman coins, one of Carausius (287–93), as well as large pieces of polychrome wall plaster, were picked up in the valley bottom immediately north-west of Little Nine Wells in the same area as the material found by George Maynard. Although not appreciated then, this evidence suggested that there were at least two separate areas of Roman occupation on the site.

Matters were made both clearer and yet obscured by the work of Beveridge in the late 1960s. Beveridge was an experienced amateur archaeologist who was stationed at RAF Duxford in the last years of its existence as an operational unit. Over a period of two to three years he field-walked extensive areas of land around and to the north of the airfield and made numerous discoveries, including important sites comprising Mesolithic and Neolithic flint tools. But most of his finds came from on and around the Chronicle Hills site. However, the location of most of this

material is not known with any great accuracy. Almost all of the National Grid references, allegedly given by Beveridge when later asked about his discoveries, and subsequently incorporated in the County Historic Environment Record (HER), are clearly wrong. A crude map, held with the finds in the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, is apparently neither accurate nor complete although it seems to show that most of the discoveries were made on Maynard's 'villa' site. Even the brief note that Beveridge himself published gave the wrong location for most of his finds (1973). As a result the full significance of these finds, and their distribution, remained unknown.

Beveridge is said to have located four separate areas of Roman material (Cambridgeshire HER 04309, 04310, 04312, 04313–4). The most prolific was that in the bottom of the valley of the Hoffer Brook, where Maynard had recorded his Roman 'villa' (Fig. 7). Finds from here included roof, floor and hypocaust tiles, roof slates, sandstone tesserae, wall plaster and glass. Oyster shells and pottery, including samian and Horningsea wares, mortaria and at least one mid-second-century coin, were also discovered. The second area of Roman finds was south-east of the first on the hilltop just north of where pottery had been first recorded in the early 1960s. Although fewer finds appear to have been discovered here, similar Roman pottery was recorded as well as, perhaps less certainly, more tesserae and hypocaust and roof tiles. It seems that the location of this material is not entirely accurate and that it actually came from a little further south (see below). Another area in which Beveridge found more Roman pottery, tesserae, hypocaust tiles, Horningsea, Nene Valley and samian wares, mortaria and a quern stone is said to have been some distance to the south in the valley bottom, in an area of well-marked ground-ice hollows that were cut by the deep drains created by Hollick in the nineteenth century. This is an unlikely place for these finds to have been discovered and, as nothing has ever been found there, before or since, it is certain that the location is wrong and that the material actually came from further north-west on the Maynard site. The lack of accuracy is unfortunate for amongst the discoveries recorded from this alleged location is the pottery head of a female figure, possibly the goddess Minerva (Beveridge 1973; Cambridgeshire HER 04313).

Beveridge is also said to have claimed that more Roman material identical to that from the first two sites came from two other areas whose National Grid references place them on the hilltop a little to the east of where the south-easternmost barrow is depicted by the Ordnance Survey. However, despite one of them being close to an area where Roman material was later found, their locations are almost certainly erroneous and again nothing has subsequently been found here. These finds must relate to the Maynard site in the valley bottom to the west, as the compilers of the Cambridgeshire HER (04312) later noted. The conclusion to be reached from this analysis of the work of Beveridge is that, despite the apparent wide

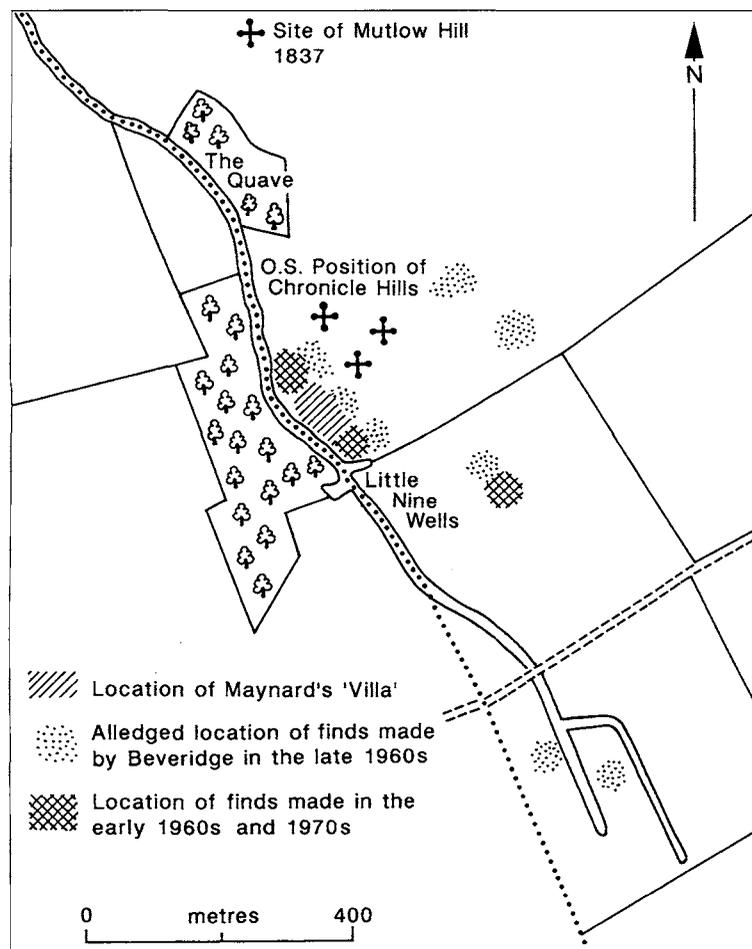


Figure 7. The Chronicle Hills, archaeological discoveries up to 1980.

distribution of finds, he probably only discovered material from two places, a major building or buildings in the valley bottom and another smaller building on the hilltop to the south-east. Both seem to have been occupied from the first until the mid- to late fourth century.

The next major advance in the understanding of the site came in 1973 when Professor St Joseph took the first of a series of oblique and vertical air photographs that continued to be taken until 1981 (CUULM BOE 27, 28; BPN 10; CPI 1, 2; Figs 4 & 8). These photographs are of value for two reasons. First, none of them show any trace of the former barrows anywhere and certainly not where the Ordnance Survey located them. A few circular features are visible on some photographs, including five arranged in a very roughly east to west line in and to the north-east of the area where the south-eastern barrows were said to have been (CUULM CPI 1, 2). But with their dark centres and white rims these features, and others in the wider area, are best interpreted as isolated ground-ice hollows of a type common there, set on the now dry but once waterlogged land above the Melbourn Rock. The second reason for the importance of the aerial photographs taken by St Joseph is that, as well as showing various indeterminate linear features, most show an area of small conjoined enclosures arranged in a

roughly L-shaped form. These lie on the crest of the gently sloping valley side, above the Melbourn Rock to the south and east of the site of Beveridge's second area of finds. Although not easy to interpret, there appears to be some form of entrance on the south-eastern side that leads into the open centre where the Roman finds were made. Amongst the various linear features visible on a number of photographs is one to the south of the alleged site of the south-eastern barrows and a track extending north-eastward across the present parish boundary with Thriplow, leading from the enclosure complex on the crest of the valley.

A major event that eventually helped in the interpretation of the Chronicle Hills site was the establishment of the County Sites and Monuments Record (now Historic Environment Record (HER)) in 1975. In the following years much of the information from Beveridge, from the old Ordnance Survey records and maps and from aerial photographs was drawn together for the first time and added to. Inevitably, however, because of the way it was compiled, there were gaps in the HER. Thus, Jessup's work was ignored and the Maynard notes remained unread. Worse, as was usual with most of the evolving HERs at that time, information was merely recorded sequentially as it came to light or was reported and given separate HER numbers based on the alleged location.

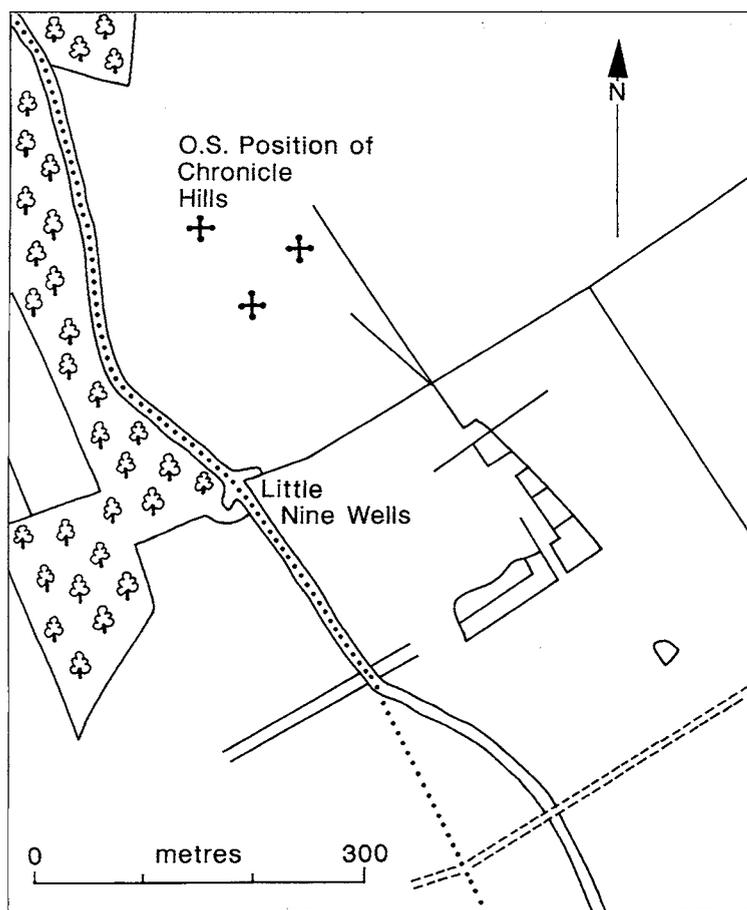


Figure 8. The Chronicle Hills, crop marks

This information was rarely if ever interpreted or correctly integrated. The result was that the Chronicle Hills site now has 22 separate record sheets and numbers, still without any reference to Maynard, Jessup or most later non-local publications (see below). This situation is not a criticism of the County HER. It is a result of the way it, and others, were conceived and set up, and how they have evolved with inadequate resources. One of the present writers (CT), working in Northamptonshire in the 1970s and 1980s, found a similar situation whereby as many as six records of mislocated finds related to a single site (eg RCHME 1979, Little Houghton (13) and (14)).

Despite these limitations, new data on the Chronicle Hills continued to be found and added to the rapidly increasing database for the site. Gradually the full extent of the material and of crop marks began to be appreciated, if not understood, and this has continued to the present. In December 1976 the staff of the then Ordnance Survey Archaeological Division, who were updating the National Archaeological Record (NMR) for the purposes of map revision, carried out work on the Chronicle Hills site. They visited the area, assessed the available evidence and made useful comments. They recorded, correctly, that there were no visible remains of the barrows, but still noted that they had been levelled in 1819 and that all contained inhumations. They also noted that of the five possible barrows said in the County HER to be visible on

aerial photographs, only one coincided with the positions depicted on Ordnance Survey maps. More usefully they suggested that the wall with its abutments noted in the original account was likely to be associated with the nearby Roman buildings. The positions of the latter were established by field-walking and indeed the existence of two separate structures was postulated on the evidence of distinct areas of building material and pottery. This material was recorded as being on a 'west slope' and the northernmost of the structures was located within ten metres of the position of the south-eastern of the barrows as positioned on Ordnance Survey plans (NMR Records: TL44NE1; TL44NE25).

A somewhat negative advance in the understanding of the site also took place in the 1970s. The knowledge of it and the richness of the finds encouraged growing numbers of local metal detectorists to visit. From the mid-1970s both the site and large areas around it in Duxford, Thriplow and Whittlesford parishes were, and still are, regularly examined by owners of metal detectors. Very little of what has been discovered has been recorded. Hearsay is that Roman coins of all dates have been found on the site and less frequently in the general area beyond, but it is difficult to quantify this information.

The scholarly understanding of the site was not advanced in these years. The VCH account of Roman Cambridgeshire (1978b *passim*) merely listed the

material recorded from the site and held in local museums and collections. For the first time since Maynard in the 1870s, the site was termed a 'villa' and located near the south-eastern barrows as depicted by the Ordnance Survey. A paper by Liversidge (1977, p. 29) on Roman burials in Cambridgeshire suggested that the three barrows at Chronicle Hills (presumably the south-eastern group) that had 'contained skeletons and fragments of red and black pottery' were of possible Roman date.

In July 1982 the site was, belatedly, scheduled as an Ancient Monument. Unfortunately, but not surprisingly or uniquely, the area that was scheduled was poorly defined. As a result large areas of ground-ice hollows were included as well as the places where Roman material had been wrongly located. However, it omitted the alleged and, probably, actual sites of all the barrows as well as that of the large Roman buildings or 'villa' in the valley bottom that Maynard had discovered and that Beveridge and the Ordnance Survey had confirmed. In effect, the only certain archaeological remains that were included in the scheduled area were the crop-mark enclosures and the Roman site within them.

The possible Roman attribution for the south-easternmost barrows was revised a few years later. Taylor (1981b, pp. 116–17) returned to the earlier interpretation and decided that they were probably of Iron Age date. This was seemingly confirmed in the same year when Whimster (1981 Pt 1, p. 33; Pt 2, pp. 392–3) at last produced a reasonably accurate description of what the barrows were and what they had contained, as well as a fair assessment of their possible Iron Age date. After examining all the then known Iron Age burials in Britain, Whimster concluded that, in the absence of comparable information, evaluation of the Chronicle Hills remained 'difficult'. He thought that the burials within the large pits or 'vaults' seemed to be reminiscent of the nearby Bartlow Hills in Essex (VCH 1963, pp. 39–43) or the La Tène III Welwyn-type graves in Essex and north Hertfordshire (Whimster 1981 Pt 2, pp. 359–77). However, the crouched inhumations and paucity of grave goods seemed to be at variance with the cremation rites in these late barrow burials. The Chronicle Hills more resembled pre-La Tène III inhumation and cremation burials under barrows, most of which are in East Anglia. In particular, Whimster noted nearby examples of these including one at Chrishall and two on Thriplow Heath (Fox 1932, pp. 79–81; Neville 1848, pp. 14–17; Whimster 1981 Pt 2, p. 292), although again all of these had only cremations. It is clear from his conclusion that Whimster did not know of the Roman material from the Chronicle Hills. If he had, his conclusions might well have been different.

Work on the site itself continued throughout the 1980s and 1990s, particularly by interested local amateur archaeologists who carried out field-walking there. A subsequent examination of the finds (Lucas 1993) pointed particularly to the remarkable size and good condition of the sherds of pottery and their high quality. Fine wares from Hadham, Hertfordshire,

the Nene Valley and Oxfordshire, generally dating from the late third and fourth centuries, were specifically noted. In 1995 two separate reassessments of the available aerial photographs were carried out (Dickens 1995; Palmer 1995). Little of major importance emerged and although some of the existing detail was refined much that now appears to be uncertain was included on the resulting maps (HER). One doubtful advance was a new interpretation of the isolated small rectangular enclosure only about ten metres across with slightly bowed sides that lay south-east of the major complex of crop-mark enclosures. Palmer's suggestion that it was possibly an Arras-type barrow seems unlikely.

In 1997 the first thorough analysis of the site as a whole was made (Taylor 1997, p. 109). This short but very useful note gave both an accurate description of the 1818 discoveries, and a new interpretation of the burials. There was no attempt to understand the three south-eastern barrows, beyond a suggestion that they were probably pre-Roman. But the 'chambers and vaults' of the two north-western ones were interpreted as deep grave pits, the wood and nails perhaps being the remains of boxes. If this was so, then the closest parallels were Roman cremations that were often in such boxes together with vessels suitable for feasts. Taylor continued: 'perhaps these [burials] had originally been of this type but had been robbed of anything valuable and possibly had later burials added, a common Anglo-Saxon practice'. This was the first time that the existence of Saxon burials on the site had been mooted. More certainly, Taylor concluded, also for the first time, that the original 'burials were part of an important Roman site that included a large villa and buildings associated with it'.

Perhaps the most valuable work on the site took place in 2003 by members of the local archaeology Rheesearch Group and which has continued ever since. In an attempt to locate the actual site of the south-eastern three barrows and to understand more clearly the valley-bottom Roman site, the Group field-walked the area to the north of the Little Nine Wells. No trace of the barrows was found but on the 'villa' site the usual pottery, tiles, tesserae and wall plaster were discovered.

Of much more importance were the results of a resistivity survey of the same area, carried out in two blocks. One, a narrow strip some 200 metres long, extended across the site of the northernmost of the three south-eastern barrows as depicted by the Ordnance Survey. Again no trace of the barrows was recorded. Indeed, at that point parts of two parallel ditches, perhaps a track running south-west to north-east, were noted. Further south-east the survey picked up other parts of parallel ditches, here running south-east to north-west, at least one of which was a continuation of a ditch visible on aerial photographs further south-east.

The other block surveyed lay in the valley bottom close to the brook with an extension up the valley side. This was positioned to cover the area of most prolific

Roman finds. Although the results are not entirely clear, there is no doubt that they showed the outlines of a major building complex, aligned roughly along the stream and probably less than 50 metres from it. The complex is some 70 metres long from north-west to south-east and at least 30 metres across. Some ten areas of what must have been rooms with paved or tessellated floors are recognisable together with two possible enclosed courtyards, one at each end, the one on the south-east being partly surrounded by a colonnade. Further south-east beyond the courtyard, traces of further buildings and a possible boundary wall on a different alignment suggest either earlier ranges or later additions, although modern sub-soiling appears to have damaged the remains in this area. There are indications that other buildings extended to within at least 25 metres of the Little Nine Wells. The whole complex probably also spread further north-west, as the surface finds indicate. It might also have reached the brook beyond the limits of the survey, although it is unlikely to have ranged much further to the north-east. To the north-west of the main building, within the north-western courtyard, there is a small rectangular dark area about nine metres by 13 metres with a three metre-wide colonnaded walkway on three sides and a line of columns on the fourth. This could have been a temple but its overall size is probably too small for such an interpretation (Lewis 1960; Rodwell 1980; Wilson 1975). A much better suggestion is that it was a small rectangular enclosed pool bounded by a colonnade and set in the centre of the courtyard. The latter might thus have been a garden attached to the main building.

The continued uncertainty over the position of the barrows was emphasised in 2004 when Carter (2004, fig. 2) published a map of Whittlesford parish as it was in 1812, together with former field names and old tracks. The map not only depicts the Chronicle Hill barrows as three crosses all well within Got Moor but also places them 250 metres north-west of the positions given by the Ordnance Survey.

The Local Heritage Initiative project

In 2003 the Whittlesford Society, a village organisation concerned with 'stimulating local interest, promoting high standards of planning and architecture and securing the development and improvement of features of public or historic interest' (Whittlesford Society 1975) applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a grant under the Local Heritage Initiative. The grant was intended to assist the setting up of a village archive, to help in the running of guided walks, to carry out wildlife surveys and to organise talks and educational visits. These were intended to involve pupils from the village school as well as local adults. The application was successful and the grant awarded in November 2003. One of the present writers (AA) suggested to the other (CT) that some properly supervised archaeological work, such as field-walking, which could involve relatively large numbers of people of all ages, might

be possible under this scheme and so provide both interest and education. It seemed that the one place that met these criteria and had the added advantage of academic research was the Chronicle Hills. Such a programme could be arranged both to establish more fully the nature of the site and to ascertain its actual area. Permission to walk on the scheduled area was obtained from English Heritage.

Initial fears that few people would be interested in turning out on a cold, windy, late August day in 2004 were dispelled when 70-odd arrived on the site for the first walk, together with a handful of metal detectorists. The exercise was repeated on two successive occasions in 2005, with over 40 people each time. The method used was for the walkers to advance in lines across selected blocks approximately five metres apart, collecting, bagging and noting the location of any finds while one of the leaders (CT) controlled the process and recorded the results. The finds were later examined and reported on by staff of the Cambridgeshire Archaeological Unit.

The exercise covered three separate areas (Fig. 9). The first was at the south-east of the scheduled area, south-east of the footpath to Thriplow on land sloping south-west across the outcrop of the Melbourn Rock. This area was covered to try to define the south-western and southern limits of the site. Little except the occasional abraded Roman sherd, presumably from manuring, was found, except in the north-eastern corner and along the north-eastern side of the footpath, above the Melbourn Rock. There, pottery of the first to fourth centuries, including samian, Horningsea and Oxford wares were found in some quantities as well as roof tiles, in soil conditions that were far from ideal. The presumed area of occupation covered some three hectares. No finds whatsoever were made in the ill-drained land below the Melbourn Rock, confirming that the Roman material allegedly found here by Beveridge was mislocated. Although much post-medieval pottery was recorded over the whole area, no medieval wares were found. Of particular interest were three Roman coins, found at the south-western end of the area of Roman occupation. One was of Carausius, another a mid-third-century barbarous radiate and a third probably of the fourth century. Two of these were pierced for use as pendants. Such coins are usually found in early Saxon contexts, in particular with fifth-century burials as at the cemetery at St John's College playing field in Cambridge (Fox 1923, p. 242). If this interpretation is correct, it is more possible evidence for Saxon occupation of the site.

The second area that was field-walked was to the north-east of the scheduled area, on the flat hilltop on Middle Chalk. With better soil conditions, the exercise recorded a light scatter of very abraded Roman pottery over a wide area, again presumably the result of manuring. However, in the north-west corner much more Roman material was picked up across an area of about 0.5 hectares. This included limestone rubble, roof and floor tiles, and pottery from the second to fourth centuries. The latter again included samian,

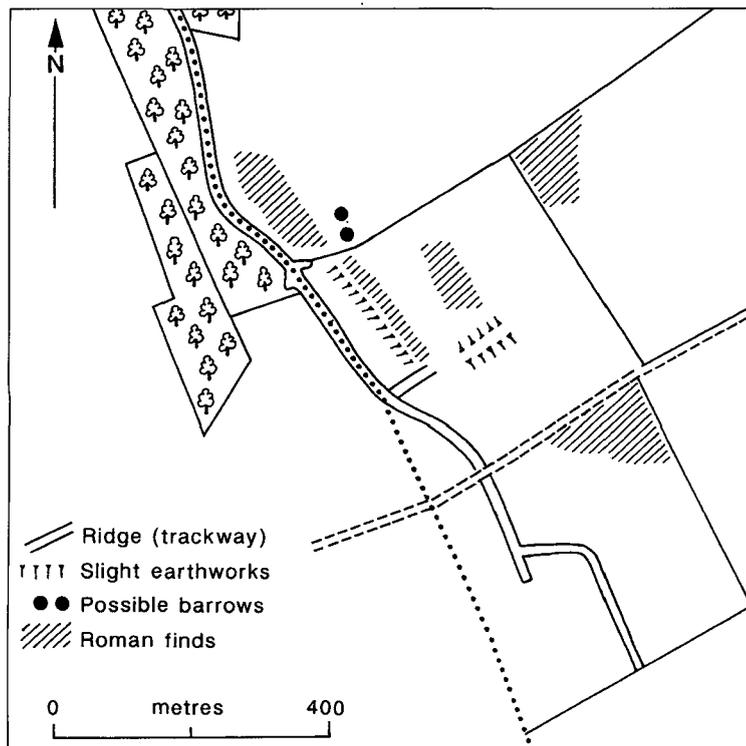


Figure 9. The Chronicle Hills, Local Heritage Initiative discoveries.

Nene Valley, Horningsea and Oxford wares. These finds indicated the former existence of a Roman building or buildings. In addition, a Neolithic polished axe of Cumbrian or Cornish origin and some worked flints were discovered. Considerable amounts of post-medieval pottery, tile, slate and coal were picked up over the whole area as well as a few sherds of twelfth to fifteenth-century date, all presumably from manuring.

The third area that was field-walked was north-west of the scheduled area. It covered the alleged site of the three south-eastern barrows and extended down the valley side and onto the ill-drained land of the former Got Moor. It thus included the site of the Roman building complex. Except for the valley bottom and the outcrop of the Melbourn Rock, a thin scatter of medieval and post-medieval pottery was recorded over the whole area that was walked, presumably again derived from the medieval and later manuring of the Bar Field. The occasional small Roman sherd must have come from similar earlier activity. No trace was found of the three south-eastern barrows at the position shown on Ordnance Survey maps, although patches of light and dark soil, gravel and pieces of chalk were noted. At least some of these coincided with the alleged 'five barrows' visible on aerial photographs but all seem to be the last remnants of ground-ice hollows, only just visible after two thousand years of cultivation (HER 04300-4). However, a little to the south-east of the Ordnance Survey position of the south-easternmost barrow, set on a small local rise on the edge of the valley and overlooking the Little Nine Wells, were two patches comprising pieces of Melbourn Rock, flint and for-

eign limestone. One was circular, 20 metres in diameter, and the other elongated, 15 metres by 20 metres, lying north-west to south-east and 15 metres apart. There was a thin scatter of Roman pottery and tile in the surrounding area. A metal detectorist claimed that both patches had produced iron nails, although none were found during the field-walking. Nothing that could be interpreted as the two north-western barrows was noted.

The finds from the site of the Roman building in the valley bottom were considerable. A strip of land, 175 metres long and 40 metres to 60 metres wide, north-west of the Little Nine Wells and below the Melbourn Rock outcrop, was covered with Roman material. This included roof, ridge and floor tiles, hypocaust stacks and box tiles as well as large pieces of limestone and flint. Small fragments of lead, perhaps from windows, were noted. Towards the south-western end of the strip, in the area of major buildings recorded by the resistivity survey, large quantities of red and grey tesserae were found. Pottery, mostly of the type recorded before and dated generally to the second to fourth centuries, including samian, Nene Valley, Horningsea and Oxford wares, as well as mortaria, extended across the whole area.

The programme of community field-walking was confined to the extremities of the site and did not extend to the centre and to the north-western side of the scheduled area, where most of the crop marks lay. To avoid damage to this area and the removal of too much archaeological material, the present writers walked this part of the site alone on two occasions in early 2006. No finds were made to the south of Little Nine Wells on the flat valley bottom below

the Melbourn Rock outcrop, where the remains of the ground-ice hollows are particularly well marked. However, a white linear feature running south-west to north-east across the parish boundary, visible on aerial photographs and heading towards the southern part of the crop marks on the hilltop above, was seen to be a ridge, 0.5 metres high, 20 metres across and 5 metres wide across its flattish top. It overlay the ice hollows and is almost certainly a former track. Its date is unknown.

Just above the valley floor, along a narrow strip of permanently damp ground below the Melbourn Rock, a continuous thin spread of Roman material only about 15 metres across was recorded, which extended for some 150 metres from just south-east of Little Nine Wells. Finds included Nene Valley and Horningsea wares, and roof and floor tiles. Together with a single sherd of late St Neots ware and some late medieval pottery, this could be interpreted as having been washed down the valley side from the Roman settlement to the north-east. However, it lay along the north-eastern edge of a very slight terrace 15 metres wide, cut back slightly into the hillside and now almost ploughed out. This terrace appears to be a former track. It may be medieval in date, but it is possible that it is Roman in origin and once had buildings along its north-eastern side. These would have been the continuation of the major buildings to the north-west of Little Nine Wells. The existence of this track explains the lack of visible ground-ice hollows here.

Field-walking along the north-eastern side of the scheduled area, on the flat hillside and across the line of the enclosures visible as crop marks on aerial photographs, produced few finds. Some abraded Roman sherds, small pieces of tile, animal bones, mostly cattle, and fragments of non-local limestone were noted but only one sherd of medieval pottery was found, in sharp contrast to considerable amounts of post-medieval wares. Conditions for field-walking were not ideal and fragments of more friable pottery might have been missed. The central strip of the area, immediately to the south-west of the main line of crop-mark enclosures, was walked under better soil conditions. Although the strip generally followed the main slope of the valley side, minor topographical variations seem to relate to aerial-photographic evidence. Thus, the south-westernmost extension of the enclosures visible on aerial photographs seems to lie on a slightly raised flat ridge, almost ploughed out, projecting south-westwards. It is possible that the ridge was man-made and created to ensure that the enclosures were on level ground. Just to the north-west, within two sides of the crop-mark enclosures, is a ploughed-down broad basin some 75 metres by 50 metres and up to one metre deep, in the centre of which is an area of dark soil. Further patches of dark soil were visible further north-west. Within this basin large quantities of Roman pottery, generally of the same type and date as elsewhere on the site, were picked up as well as a small amount of tile, stone and flint nodules. A flat stone with a 10 centimetre circular depression cut

into it, perhaps the pad for a gatepost, was also found. The areas of dark soil to the north-west produced less Roman pottery and no tile or stone.

Conclusions

What can be made of this archaeological site, the understanding of which, typically, depends upon a largely undigested mass of published and unpublished evidence, mislocated detail, inadequate summaries, conflated descriptions, multiple HER entries and numerous superseded interpretations? There are several comments and conclusions that can be put forward. Some are specifically site-related; others are of wider significance.

The first conclusion relates to the Heritage Initiative. This, the most recent work on the site, has shown the great value of community-based archaeological activities for the general public. Although that organised at the Chronicle Hills was short-lived and limited in its aims, it seem to have been of considerable value to the participants who appear to have learnt much in convivial and interesting surroundings. Nevertheless, the limitations of using large numbers of inexperienced amateurs should be taken into account when assessing the result for academic purposes.

Despite all of the work on the Chronicle Hills, one can only agree with Whimster (1981) that its interpretation 'remains difficult': indeed, more difficult than he realised (Fig. 10). The actual locations of the barrows are still uncertain. The south-eastern three seem probably to have lain further south-east than they are shown on Ordnance Survey plans, close to the edge of Got Moor, near the junction of the medieval Bar and Stone Hill Fields and overlooking the Little Nine Wells. The patches of stone noted in this area during field-walking in 2005 may be the last remnants of two of the barrows. However, the details that have come to light of the way they were levelled in 1818 and the reasons for the work would seem to make it unlikely that any convincing trace of them will ever be discovered. The whereabouts of the north-western two barrows, only 60 metres to the east or north-east of the others, remains quite unknown.

In terms of content and relationships, all five barrows are hard to interpret, the south-eastern three especially so. The size of the central one is remarkable, particularly for Cambridgeshire. It seems doubtful that the adjacent wall recorded in 1818 with its 'abutments' was part of an enclosure. On the other hand, the abutments can hardly have been the remains of a former building as this would mean that the barrows were either inside the building, or post-dated its destruction. Given the proximity of other Roman buildings immediately to the south-west, this wall is best interpreted either as the north-eastern side of a building, the abutments being buttresses or, more likely, the north-eastern boundary of a courtyard or garden extending up the hillside from the main buildings. However, this latter interpretation

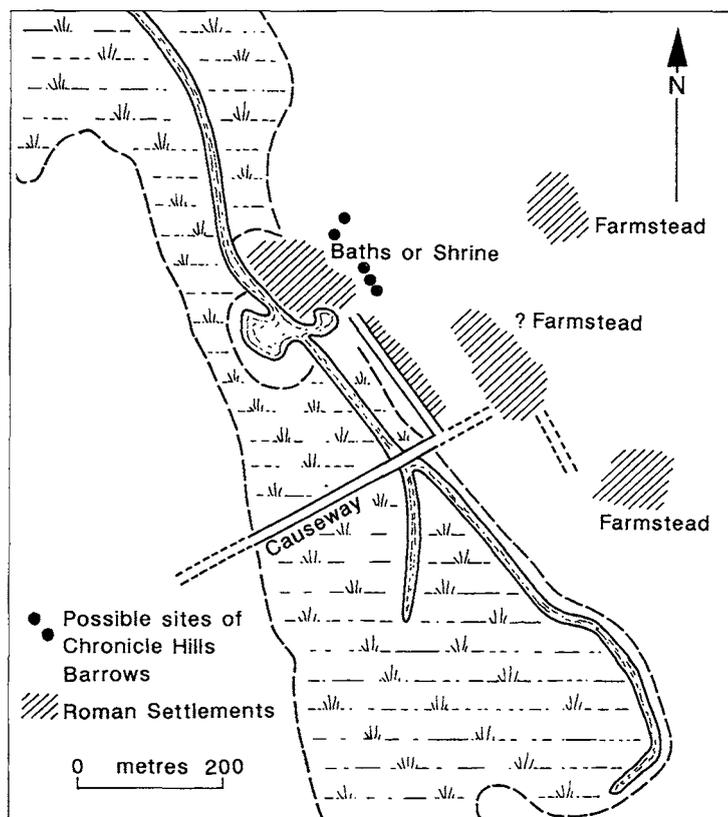


Figure 10. The Chronicle Hills, interpretative diagram of the Roman landscape.

produces further difficulties in that the north-westernmost of the three barrows is recorded as lying against the wall. Such a situation would have been unlikely if the wall was part of the Roman buildings and especially if it and the barrows were contemporary. But it is possible that earlier buildings were later extended up the hillside towards the barrows. It is clear from its plan that the complex comprised more than one phase. The barrows could pre-date this and might have been retained as they were regarded as being of special significance. They might have contained the remains of the ancestors of the occupiers of the villa or of the other Roman settlements in the area. This in turn implies that these three south-eastern barrows were either early Roman or late prehistoric in date. But, apart from the 'glazed' black and red pottery, certainly from the central barrow and possibly from all three, nothing dateable is recorded. The red 'glazed' pottery was presumably samian while the black was perhaps Rhenish, black burnished or even Nene Valley ware of late first-century or second-century date. Given the early nineteenth-century date and the circumstances of the discoveries, it is possible that cremations accompanying these 'glazed' wares were not recognised and that the four inhumations recorded only from the central barrow were secondary. This would mean that all of these barrows could well have been raised over early Roman cremation burials, very similar to others known from the region and that they were not as exceptional as has previously been thought (Fox 1923, pp. 192–9; Ladds 1915, p. 14; Liversidge 1977, p. 29; VCH 1911, p. 279).

Indeed, it is possible that their nearest parallels are the Bartlow Hills in North Essex, only just over 12 kilometres to the east-south-east (Brocklebank 1913; VCH 1963, pp. 37–45). While the great size and rich grave goods of the Bartlow Hills seems a long way from the Chronicle Hills, there are similarities that have not been previously noted. These include the fact that both groups have barrows that are larger than usual, that both have barrows arranged in a line and that both are adjacent to a major valley-bottom Roman structure, albeit neither fully understood (Neville 1853, pp. 17–21). There are also suggestions that the Bartlow Hills lay within an enclosure. A geographically nearer, but perhaps a less close parallel, is the barrow that survived until 1852 in the valley bottom of the River Granta at Hildersham. It is alleged to have been a 'perfect cone' in shape and 190 feet (58 metres) in diameter. This dimension would have made it another very large mound and is surely something of an exaggeration. It contained a Roman cremation (Fox 1923, pp. 195–6). Palmer (1924, p. 13) described it as a 'small Bartlow Hill' and reported that evidence of a Roman building had been found nearby.

As already noted, the location of the two north-western barrows remains unknown. They should have lain close to the position marked by the Ordnance Survey for the southernmost of the south-eastern group, although no trace has been found. Their date is equally uncertain. Both Fox and Whimster thought an early Iron Age date was the most likely, while Taylor went for the early Roman period with

cremations that were not recognised. If this was so, these barrows originally had cremations in boxes in large pits and thus would also have been of early Roman date. In the end, however, all that can be said safely is that all five of the Chronicle Hills barrows seem to be part of a long Western European tradition of such burials, perhaps associated with rich and influential families, that began in the early Iron Age and was continued into the second century AD by Romanised natives. Their proximity to a major Roman building is thus hardly surprising.

The evidence for Roman settlement at the Chronicle Hills comes from five separate areas. The major Roman building complex below the Little Nine Wells, in the valley bottom close to the stream, has often been called a villa. Certainly the finds, building materials of every type and pottery, as well as the results of the resistivity survey might be so interpreted. Yet its actual location makes this attribution unlikely. Set at the bottom of a slope, on a spring line, on ill-drained, permanently damp ground and with no views to the north and east and only limited ones to the west, this seems an unsuitable position for what by any standards is a large and important arrangement of high status buildings. The nature of the site, its position and especially the copious amounts of water produced from the Nine Wells, which earlier perhaps contained a lake or pool of some kind, might all rather indicate either a luxurious bathing establishment or a religious complex, or both. The nineteenth-century records of a 'bath', aqueduct and lead piping, as well as the apparent extension of buildings around and into the Nine Wells themselves, might be taken as support for this suggestion of a bath block. The apparent intentional levelling of the pre-existing ground-ice hollows to form a level area for the buildings certainly confirms the importance of their being placed deliberately on the otherwise unsuitable site. The status that the elaborate layout of these buildings indicates is enhanced by the existence of the small colonnaded structure to their north-west, particularly if indeed it was an enclosed pool within a courtyard or garden arrangement. Yet the same evidence could equally well support the theory for a religious site of some kind, connected with worship of water deities. The alleged figure of Minerva, if it did come from this site, might strengthen this supposition. Even the presumed earlier barrow burials could be the physical manifestation of a long-lasting ritual usage of the area that seems to have existed until at least the fourth century and perhaps later. The links between late prehistoric burials and ritual sites, Roman shrines and Saxon burials in Cambridgeshire have recently been summarised and it is possible that this site also illustrates these links (Malim 2006, pp. 109–12). The close proximity of baths, dwelling houses and water is not of course unknown. Such relationships, especially in areas where there are no known villas, has led to suggestions that sites like these are small spas and water-deity shrines. The building complex at Well, in North Yorkshire, with its house, bath house and plunge pool, all set in a marshy valley, has been

suggested as an example, and it certainly has some parallels with the Chronicle Hills site (Gilyard-Beer 1951).

The limited and perhaps unreliable nineteenth-century evidence for a lake at Nine Wells is supplemented by equally unsatisfactory historical and botanical information. No lake or pool is shown on the Whittlesford enclosure map of 1812 (CRO R60/24/2/76). However, on the Thriplow enclosure map of 1840 (CRO Q/RDC 65) the site of the Great Nine Wells is shown as being occupied by an oval pool some 15 metres by 25 metres. The topography of the immediate area with its basin-like form would perhaps have allowed a much larger area of water before modern drainage. The botanical evidence is also of limited value, despite the area beside the Hoffer Brook being renowned in the study of the flora of Cambridgeshire as well having been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest in 1958. All of the species recorded there, both existing and extinct, grow just as well within and around the water-filled ground-ice hollows as they would in a more extensive sheet of water (Crompton 1959).

The evidence of Roman occupation on the hilltop to the east and south-east of the Little Nine Wells is easier to interpret. The principal area of finds within the hollow of dark soil, enclosed by the crop mark enclosures, indicates a long-lasting habitation. But, despite the tesserae, it hardly seems to be a major building complex; nor do the crop marks themselves help. The almost complete lack of Roman material from them may be because they are later prehistoric in date, the pottery from that time not having survived or been found. Certainly, whatever their date, the crop mark enclosures are probably best interpreted as agricultural in function although a connection with the bath/ritual site in the valley bottom, perhaps through the provision of accommodation or stabling, is also possible.

The areas of Roman occupation to the north-east and south-east are more typical of small rural settlement sites found by field-walking over much of lowland England in that they have quantities of pottery but little or no evidence of major structures. Together with the thin scatters of abraded sherds over the whole of this part of Whittlesford parish, presumably evidence for manuring, these settlements can be assumed to have been farmsteads. The line of Roman material along the edge of the valley bottom to the south of Little Nine Wells that may or may not be associated with the terrace-way there, might be the site of yet another farmstead or again perhaps of a settlement associated with the bath/ritual complex to the north. Certainly other similar, presumably agricultural, sites are recorded in the general area. These include, further north in Whittlesford parish, Roman material from Kidmans Grove and more from just east of Camps Park, both of which sites lie close to the Hoffer Brook, and, incidentally, both of which are within an area known as Blacklands (Beveridge 1973; Carter 2004, fig. 2; CT personal knowledge). Roman pottery has also been found a little to the

south near Crow's Parlour and to the west around Thriplow church (HER 09765; CT personal knowledge). Undated crop marks, possibly of Roman farmsteads, are also recorded on the Thriplow side of the Hoffer Brook (HER 08652, 08655). Thus, whatever the function of the principal Roman occupation site in the valley bottom, it was certainly set within a wider landscape crowded with farmsteads, their associated fields and tracks.

Another point of interest to emerge from this study is the possibility of Saxon occupation of the site. The inhumations found in the centre of one of the three south-eastern barrows and those in the two north-western ones with the spear and dagger might all be secondary and thus early Saxon in date. Indeed the size of the middle south-eastern barrow might have marked it out later for special use as a burial place. The pierced coins might also suggest early post-Roman activity on the site. Given the large number of early Saxon settlements that have been discovered in Cambridgeshire in recent years, such an occupation at the Chronicle Hills would now be regarded as unexceptional. Just as important may be the fact that the barrows lay only some 100 metres from the boundary between Thriplow and Whittlesford, well below the 500 feet (150 metres) that Bonney used to define his category of Saxon burials significantly close to a parish boundary, and thus perhaps marking the limits of an early estate (Bonney 1966, p. 27; 1976). Bonney mentions in passing that Cambridgeshire is a county that seems to have a number of Saxon burials on or close to parish boundaries, but his suggestion has never been taken up seriously.

Late-Saxon activity at the Chronicle Hills might have included the use of the barrows as a Hundred meeting place. The parish was the centre of Whittlesford Hundred by the late eleventh century and a hundred years earlier a moot of Cambridgeshire notables was held there. It is possible that both the moot and the Hundred Court met at the Chronicle Hills. The lost place-name *Mutlow* at Whittlesford could refer to this meeting place although, as it occurs in both Duxford and Whittlesford contexts, it has been suggested that it lay on the boundary between these two parishes (Reaney 1943, p. 92). Meaney (1993, p. 91) thought that it might have been at the ford across the River Cam at Whittlesford Bridge. However, on an 1837 manuscript map of Whittlesford place-names compiled by Maynard (CRO R58/5/9/165), the name Mutlow Hill is shown some 400 metres north-north-west of the Chronicle Hills, close to the Thriplow boundary.

The map also shows the name Mutters Pit and Muttlers in the same area and in the nineteenth century there was a Muttlerway in Newton parish that ran south-east through the open fields there towards the Hoffer Brook (Carter 2004, fig. 2; Meaney 1993, p. 91; VCH 1982, p. 186). There is nothing on the ground or on aerial photographs to suggest former barrows or mounds at the place indicated on Maynard's map and he, or local tradition, might have put the name too far north-north-west. Certainly other Mutlow names in the Cambridge region are located at barrows

containing Roman or Saxon burials and the Chronicle Hills would seem to be an obvious place (Meaney 1993, p. 69). The possible continuing use of the barrows for secondary burials, as meeting places, as estate boundary markers, or perhaps because of their value as places of ritual or mythological significance, may be a reason why they survived within the arable open fields of the parish until the early nineteenth century (Whyte 2003).

A perhaps less important aspect of the site to emerge relates to its subsequent land use. As would be expected, the field-walking project produced quantities of post-medieval material from all of the land documented as permanent arable in the early nineteenth century. This material presumably arrived there in manure carted out from the village. Similar but slighter scatters of very abraded small sherds of medieval pottery, broadly dateable to the twelfth to fifteenth centuries, also indicate the manuring of the arable at an earlier period. However, the distribution of the medieval pottery is not identical to that of the post-medieval material. While sherds of medieval pottery were found over the presumed area of the barrows and to the north-east – within the old Bar Field and well to the east of the crop marks towards the centre of the old Stone Hill Field – no more than half a dozen sherds were discovered over the whole area to the south-east of the barrows, above the Melbourn Rock outcrop along the western edge of the former Stone Hill Field. This might mean that this part of the land of the parish was not arable in medieval times, or that it was manured in a different way to the rest, or not manured at all. It seems unlikely that it was never cultivated until post-medieval times or that it could have been manured differently. But it is just possible that here, on the margins of the parish, the land was not permanent arable during the medieval period but only taken into cultivation periodically: a form of infield-outfield. Whatever the answer to these observations, at least new questions have been raised about medieval agriculture in Cambridgeshire that hitherto have not been asked.

Other points to emerge from this examination of the mass of information on the Chronicle Hills may have wider implications beyond Cambridgeshire. The first is that, despite the detailed field-walking in varied conditions by experts and amateurs alike, surprisingly few coins and very little metal work has been recorded from the site in recent years. Given the quantity and quality of other finds and the size of the building complex in the valley, this is curious. But this phenomenon has also been noted on other potentially prolific Roman sites. For example, the large Roman villa at Mill Hill, Castor, near Peterborough (RCHME 1969, Castor (42)), has also been systematically walked and yet has produced very few coins, and incidentally almost no figured samian ware. This has been explained by Paul Middleton, who directed the work, as the consequence of the site being stripped of this type of material by metal detectorists. The lack of coins found at the Chronicle Hills may be for the same reason.

Another matter is the answer to a question that doubtless some readers of this paper will ask. Why has there been no mention of the fact that the Chronicle Hills lie on the Ickniel Way? The reason for this is twofold, one academic, the other personal. The academic reason is that, as a result of recent research, there are now serious doubts as to whether the Ickniel Way ever existed as a long-distance route (Harrison 2003; 2005, pp. 87–115). In contrast, there is a growing body of evidence from excavations and aerial photography from all over Cambridgeshire and beyond, and, as already observed, not least from the Chronicle Hills and its immediate area, of the existence of a landscape in Roman and late prehistoric times covered by a multitude of tracks and roads (Atheny & Mudd 2003; Gibson 2005). These seem to have been set in a landscape of arable fields, not open downland, and run in every direction linking village to village and farmstead to farmstead. To pick out and to give significance to the least well-marked of these routes, which is ill-recorded even in late-medieval times and which seems largely to be a figment of popular imagination, is to continue to bolster a myth that prevents an understanding of what early landscapes were really like. The personal reason for ignoring both the Ickniel Way and the other better recorded roads and tracks that once ran to and from the Chronicle Hills is that one of the present writers (CT) has a life-time dislike of roads and tracks that can usually be described as historical will-o-the-wisps, with little basis on which to draw viable conclusions (Taylor 1979, pp. ix–xiv).

A final point worth making is that, despite all the archaeological work that has been carried out on the site at Whittlesford, large parts of its history are probably still missing and perhaps irrecoverable. This was brought home to the writers in 2006 when, following field-walking on the site, an article appeared in the *Whittlesford Society Magazine* (Arnold 2006, pp. 14–15) by a long-time villager. He pointed out that in the 1930s a stockyard and buildings for pigs were erected on the south-east side of the site close to and south-east of the footpath. These structures, he claimed, survived until the 1950s. Yet no trace of them whatsoever was picked up during the field-walking and the only record of them, other than memory, is on the air photographs taken by the RAF in 1946 where their function is unclear, their detail obscure and their exact site is actually *north-east* of the footpath (RAF 1946).

One last thought: what has been achieved by all the work on this undistinguished archaeological site? Perhaps not much, for in many respects it still remains an enigma and nothing that has been written in these pages will advance its archaeology very much in the short term. But at least this paper has attempted to collate, correct and, most important of all, to interpret the mass of information that has been put together so assiduously by past generations. For interpretation is vital. Without it, information is dead. Now at least it should be possible to move forward and to ask some new questions about the Chronicle

Hills. We are reminded of the cry of T. S. Eliot in *The Rock* (1934) 'Where is the knowledge we have lost in information?'

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Plate 2. 'Ploughing over the site of the Roman villa, The Quave Trees in the background' by George Maynard of Whittlesford, courtesy of the Cambridgeshire County Record Office.