

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE STANFORD TRAINING AREA, 2000–2

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SUMMARY

A survey of the Ministry of Defence's Stanford Training Area (STANTA) covered both arable land and wooded areas. The results give a useful insight into the archaeology of central Breckland, especially with regard to earthworks concealed by woodland.

The tally of fieldwalking finds is less impressive than that from the more northerly STANTA Extension (Davison 1994). This is probably because the present survey covered much less arable land, almost all of which was peripheral to the former settlements which lie under grass. Had it been possible to examine all of the river valley terraces upon which settlements lay, finds more closely comparable to those from the Extension might have been made; results from Langford and West Tofts offer some hints of this. The low level of finds on the surveyed arable reflects the former regime of heathlands, warrens and 'brecks', only one area, in the north-east corner of the surveyed area, appearing to be an exception.

The limitations imposed upon the scope of the woodland survey prevented fuller examination of earthworks surviving on areas of grassland. It may be possible at some future time to complete that aspect of the work, but a comprehensive future fieldwalking survey seems altogether less likely.

Introduction

This survey was undertaken during the years 2000–2002 by the authors on behalf of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology as part of a data collection and assessment exercise, forming an element of an Integrated Land Management Plan for the Ministry of Defence. The work was carried out in two parts. All freehold woodland was searched in order to record any upstanding archaeological features concealed there and the arable land within the area was surveyed by fieldwalking. These limits of the survey were established to take account of damage caused by destumping in the woodland and the continuation of ploughing on the arable land.

Methods

The woodland rapid identification survey was carried out by walking through the woods at a maximum of 50m intervals, mainly during the winter months when underlying vegetation — nettles, bracken and brambles — had died down, allowing better ground visibility. Survey was, in the main, confined to the woodland although some features noticed there which extended onto surrounding grassland were recorded in full. Early and more modern maps and aerial photographs were consulted as accompanying background.

The fieldwalking survey was also undertaken largely during the winter months, although cropping of some vegetables permitted limited walking during the late summer. Sugar beet crops allowed the winter season to be prolonged into early spring. The survey was carried out using the transect or line-walking method at intervals of 20m. Where a concentration of finds was encountered closer inspection, at intervals of 10m or less, was employed. The finds, after cleaning and labelling, were submitted to Dr Andrew Rogerson (pottery and tiles) and Dr Peter Robins (flints) for final identification. Maps and documentary evidence were also examined where relevant.

The areas of survey differed in extent. The woodland was examined throughout STANTA, including the northward extension into parts of the Hilborough and Clermont Estates. This extension had been fieldwalked at the time of its incorporation within STANTA in 1987–8 and a full report has already been published (Davison 1994). There was obviously no need to repeat that part of the exercise, and fieldwalking was confined to the arable parts of STANTA proper.

The woodland survey

In all 180 sites, many of them multi-featured, were recorded. One hundred included elements of enclosure; 52 included linear features, with 35 tracks; 22 were mounds; 27 depressions; and 21 included some form of water management. There were also 22 described as 'miscellaneous'. It is obvious that such a lengthy and heterogeneous list cannot be presented in full here, and so only the outstanding features will be described. Full results can be found in the Norfolk Heritage and Environment Record (HER), and are recorded in the (unpublished) report prepared for Defence Estates East, West Tofts and the Norfolk Museums and Archaeological Service.

The fact that there are so many features surviving reflects the undisturbed nature of much of the STANTA surface, especially within the original core area. Even before 1942 there were areas of apparently undisturbed heathland and scattered areas of woodland. Since then much of the landscape has been 'fossilised' under grassland while the arable has been restrained within the framework of 1940s hedgerows.

Some features were omitted from the survey. Woodland boundaries were not normally included unless they were important in terms of form, or were shown on early maps; most were considered to be little different from field boundaries and have been omitted. No ancient woodland exists within STANTA. Roadside boundaries have been ignored unless they formed part of an adjacent system. Drainage ditches were not included unless they appeared to form part of an extensive or unusual system. Boundary features within or near woodland and extant on current Ordnance Survey maps were surveyed when of appropriate form but were only noted if part of a larger system. Bracketed numbers refer to the map (Fig. 1).

Enclosures

These appear mainly to have been former field systems, perhaps enclosures for stock, or possibly of arable land. Most are fragmentary. The more significant examples are as follows:

(1) Cressingham (HER 37585)

Lying in Southwater Plantation and neighbouring woodland to the east. There is a series of internal banks and ditches which appear, from map evidence of 1603 (NRO C/Ca 1/14) to be, partly at least, enclosure boundaries. To some extent these equate with the Horse Fair and Cow Fair of 1777 (NRO WLS LXI/7/1), which, in turn, can be referred to a medieval fairstead mentioned in 1446 (NRO 187A 10/12/82).

(2) Madhouse Plantation, Tottington (HER 37031)

There is an unusual feature with a ditch embanked on either side running roughly west-to-east and turning north at its eastern end. A map of 1774 (NRO WLS XVII/4) shows the west-to-east line as that of New Stow Path, within a common, with the north-eastern projection as a track, although its form suggests part of an enclosure boundary.

(3) Wretham (HER 37036)

A network of banks lying between Cornells Plantation and the road may represent former sheepfolds or be associated with Wretham Warren.

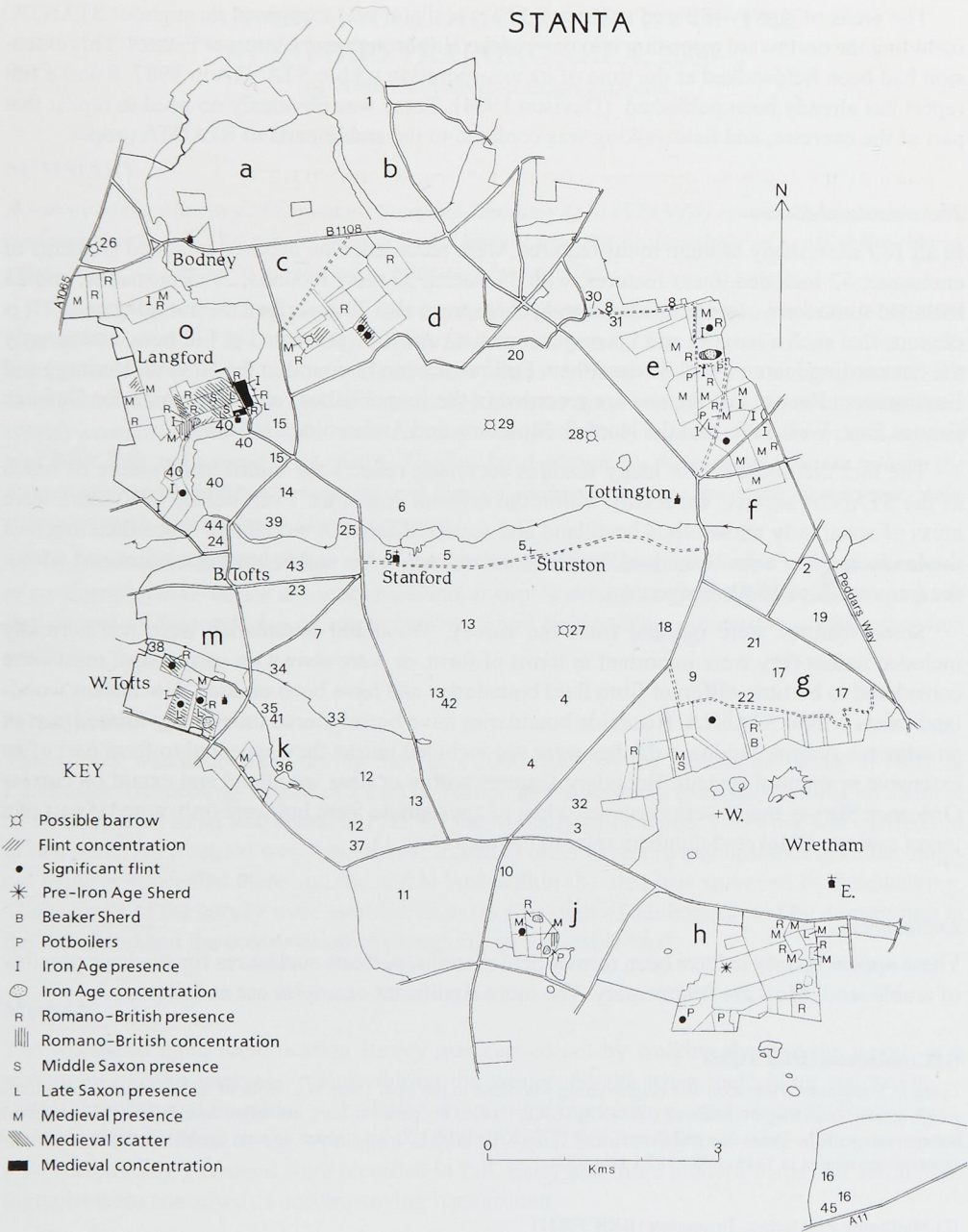


Fig. 1 STANTA survey 2000-2: summary plan

(4) Sturston/Wretham and Stonyhollow Strip (HER 37049)

A part-parish and part-warren boundary, a multiple-bank feature, is accompanied by a series of rectangular or rectilinear enclosures, some incomplete and some, including two near-parallel linear ditches, which appear discordant to the others. These are probably not all of one date. Nothing is shown on early archive maps but some are marked on Faden's map (1779) and early Ordnance Survey maps.

(5) Stanford (HER 14447), Stanford/Sturston (HER 37057), and Sturston (HER 2730)

The first of these consists of ditched enclosures near Stanford church, including the remains of a probable moat. The second is a parish boundary with adjacent linear and enclosure earthworks, including a possible medieval road line as shown on a map of 1781 (NRO WLS XXIX/16 416 x 6). The third is an extensive area of slight earthworks, including ditched enclosures and linear features, probably associated with the post-medieval Sturston Hall, rather than the earlier medieval village, of which a moated platform survives.

(6) Three-Cornered Cover, Stanford (HER 37586)

Here there is a series of incomplete banks, enclosures and linear features to the north of Watering Farm.

(7) Stanford/Lynford (West Tofts) (TL 84809370)

Banks represent an extensive pattern of enclosures shown on the Stanford Tith Map of 1839 (NRO MF 751).

Linear features

These are some of the most impressive earthworks recorded. They include parish boundary banks and ditches, some of them probably ancient, and multiple banks which represent former trackways and warren boundaries. The parish boundary earthworks are usually well-preserved, sometimes following old trackways (? procession ways) and sometimes meandering through woodland. Some particularly good examples of these are the Little Cressingham–Tottington boundary by Deal Wood and Blackbreck Covert (HER 37030) **(8)**, the bank and ditch of the Tottington–Wretham boundary (HER 37033) **(9)**, the Wretham and Croxton bank (HER 37041) **(10)** and the Croxton–Stanford bank with a track (HER 37589) **(11)**; the Stanford and Lynford (West Tofts) spread bank (HER 37590) **(12)**; the Stanford and Sturston bank (HER 37046) **(13)**, the Ickburgh (Langford)/Hilborough (Bodney)/Stanford boundary marked by low spread banks (HER 37068) **(14)**, the Ickburgh (Langford) and Hilborough (Bodney) complex boundary, including a double ditch (HER 3707) **(15)** shown on Plate 1, and the Bridgham–Brettenham boundary (HER 37075) **(16)**.

Warren boundaries as separate features are found associated with Blackrabbit Warren, which has a well-defined western boundary (HER 37032, 37034) **(17)**, and with Sturston Warren, which has a north-eastern boundary (HER 37051) **(18)**.

Linear features incorporating parish and warren boundaries include the Wretham–Tottington boundary (HER 37032) **(19)**, the Stanford–Sturston boundary (HER 37046) **(13)**, the Sturston–Wretham boundary (HER 37049) **(4)** and the Hilborough (Bodney)–Tottington boundary at Redan Covert (HER 37062) **(20)**.

Tracks

As already seen, trackways are often associated with earthwork boundaries but some are sufficiently distinct to be considered separately. One is in Tottington between TL 90579401 and TL 90289341, at Doublerow Plantation (HER 37587) **(21)**. It survives as a broad ridge and is shown as a road or track between Thompson and West Wretham on maps from the 18th century onwards, and was said to be new in 1774 (NRO WLS XVII/4). A second example is in Wretham



Plate 1. The Ickburgh (Langford) and Hilborough (Bodney) boundary, including a double ditch (15)



Plate 2. A section of the Icknield Way north-west of Stanford (25)

at TL 89809300 (HER 37591) **(22)** where low ridges correspond to a track shown on Ordnance Survey maps. A third is in Stanford (HER 37588) **(23)** where a broad ridge matches a former road shown on a map of 1771 (NRO PTR 3/4758/5). A similar broad ridge, also in Stanford, (HER 37592) **(24)** also appears as a track on the same map.

The most striking feature of this type is the hollow way in Stanford (HER 1398) **(25)** with a causeway extending across a valley (Plate 2). It is between 7m and 12m in width and was shown as a road still in use on Faden's Map (1797). It is generally held to be a section of the Icknield Way.

It is worth remembering at this point that these tracks are merely those associated with woodland. Extensive areas of grassland have not been examined for tracks, enclosures or linear features. In the 19th century, before the advent of the motor car, the heaths were crossed by many tracks used by horses and carts, some of which may still be traceable. Something of this is reflected in a Breckland novel, *This String First*, set in the late 19th century (Home 1935).

Mounds

Undulations produced by periglacial action are not uncommon in Breckland. Natural mounds formed in this way can be disconcertingly similar to artificial mounds, in particular barrows. Of the 22 mounds noted in the survey, only four appear plausible barrows. Others, though listed, are thought to be too small or to be of too irregular shape to be totally convincing. The probable barrows are as follows.

A mound at Hilborough (HER 24739 c2) **(26)** is *c.* 20m in diameter and 0.8m in height. It is close to and partly cut by a roadside fence, although the road itself curves westward as if to avoid it. An example at Eagletower Plantation, Stanford (HER 37052) **(27)** is 25m in diameter and 0.6m in height, with a flattish top. A third is in Tottington, just to the north of Westmere Strip (HER 37065) **(28)**; it is 20m in diameter and 0.5m in height. The fourth is in Stanford (HER 37066) **(29)** and is nearly circular, with a diameter of 19m and a height of 0.7m.

Depressions

Apart from natural depressions of periglacial origin, there are numerous extraction pits scattered over the surface of STANTA. Most of these are probably of 18th- or 19th-century date and are clearly related to occurrences of chalk or deposits of clay or gravel and have no indications of associated activity. They do not merit more than passing attention. There are few sites of more than routine interest, two of them in Deal Wood in the parishes of Little Cressingham and Tottington (HER 37027, 37029).

(30) Cressingham

This is a series of linked depressions, with another single one nearby. The main feature is 65m in length and 10m in width extending from east to west, narrower at its western end, and linked to an east-to-west ditch with a bank joining it to the western boundary of the wood. The main depression has four linked hollows at right-angles to the south. The westernmost of these is 60m long and 8m wide, the easternmost *c.* 50m long and 12m wide. The two intermediate depressions are 8m wide and 40m in length. A few metres to the south is a long east-to-west hollow, 23m in length and not obviously linked but extending as far as the distance between the extremities of the intermediate depressions. Water still stands in parts of these features. The ridges between the intermediate depressions are 0.5m higher than the surrounding woodland. The Threxton Tithing Map of 1840 (NRO MF 752) and an 1844 map (NRO Hil 3/35b) show an irregular pond in this area. The features may be a regularisation of this pond, perhaps to form fishponds, or for wildfowl. Neither suggestion is entirely convincing, however.

(31) Little Cressingham/Tottington

Lying on the parish boundary, this consists of a T-shaped length of bank, the east-to-west part being a continuation of the parish boundary bank, the north-to-south section marking the edge of a wood shown on Faden's Map (1797). To the north-east of the junction of these banks is a broad hollow, possibly the site of a pond shown on the Tithe Map. Within this is a series of concentric low banks, 4m apart, of oval shape. This feature measures *c.* 40m north-to-south and *c.* 32m east-to-west (HER 37029). There is a patch of calcined flints or 'potboilers' in the south-west of the site. These features defy interpretation although they appear completely artificial; the potboilers suggest a prehistoric presence.

(32) Wretham, Cornell's Plantation

This is an east-to-west line of small sub-rectangular depressions *c.* 3m square and *c.* 6m deep (HER 37035). The westernmost pit has been truncated by the woodland boundary bank, which suggests that they are not recent. No convincing evidence for flint-quarrying was seen and their purpose remains unknown.

Water features

These are all valley-floor earthworks, usually ridging with separate ditches 5–6m apart.

(33) Lynford (West Tofts)

Here there are three ridges and flanking ditches in a valley-floor carr, probably constructed for planting trees.

(34) Lynford (West Tofts)

There are two areas of ridging in Great Carr with a north-to-south orientation north of the stream and parallel to the stream to the south.

(35) Lynford (West Tofts)

There are two small ridges areas with a rectangular pond between.

(36) Lynford (West Tofts)

There is a system in Watering Carr, downstream from the dam of West Tofts Mere (HER 37045). The ridges are parallel to the stream but water-logging made total investigation unsafe. However, the name of the wood, and the 1845 name of Water Heading (NRO MF 752), suggest a possible area of floated water meadows.

(37) Stanford/Lynford (West Tofts)

Ridges, within and adjacent to an irregular hollow in which there is a pond, are in four different alignments and were probably designed to manage drainage for tree-planting.

(38) Lynford (West Tofts)

A system in Iron Carr is divided by an east-to-west ditch. In the north there are four parallel ridges. This lies to the west of West Tofts water meadows (HER 31157) and may be associated with them, but ridging for tree-planting is a more likely explanation.

(39) Buckenham Tofts Park

This important ditched earthwork (HER 37593) is a sinuous linear hollow which forms a rough divide between the valley floor and higher ground to the north. It is 5m wide and up to 1.3m deep, and is unbanked to the south. This is probably a 19th-century flood control system.

(40) Ickburgh (Langford)

A second linear earthwork (HER 37594, 37595), probably intended to distribute flood water from the Wissey through substantial drainage channels on either side of the river. It is 6m in width and both channels mark the edges of the flood plain. A sluice, brick culverts and an aqueduct form part of the system, and the work appears to be of mid-late 19th-century date.

Other features

At Brick Kiln Covert, Lynford (West Tofts) (HER 37044) (41) is a complex of irregular pits and channels, presumably near to or incorporating a brick kiln as the name suggests. It has not been fully investigated because of flooding. At Sturston (HER 37047) (42), three sub-circular depressions with spoil banks are c. 4m in diameter and over 1m in depth, with a ramped access. These may possibly be pits dug for flints though an old military purpose should not be ruled out.

Parkpond Covert, Buckenham Tofts Park, Stanford (43) is an oval wood divided from north to south by a causeway crossing a natural hollow. To the west of the causeway is an L-shaped pond with an outlet sluice on its north-western edge. The outflow cuts a broad bank surrounding the pond. A mound to the north-east of the causeway may have served as a prospect hill. It is probable that this is part of 'The Park' shown on an undated map of c. 1700 (NRO Petre Box 8)(HER 30497).

Seven sherds of medieval pottery found in Buckenham Tofts park, Stanford (HER 35825) (44) were obviously a relic of the deserted village, very long abandoned. Three additional sherds were of Iron Age or Early Saxon date. (Sturston moated platform remains to be mapped; it appears larger than shown at present and is part of the medieval and post-medieval earthworks of this long-deserted village. In Tottington two moats — one a simple rectangle (HER 5065), the other a much more complex feature with platform, fishpond and associated enclosures (HER 5064) were not mapped as both lie within grassland and, were like Sturston, outside the parameters of the present survey.)

The arable survey

This, as already mentioned briefly, omitted Management Units A, B, C, and parts of D which had been surveyed previously. The areas of arable land are all peripheral to the central core of grassland and are treated here in clockwise order, beginning with the remaining portion of Unit D.

Management Unit D

This area consists of eight fields in a compact cluster south of Bodney Camp. Only five sherds of pottery were found here. Three were Romano-British and probably represent a thin scatter emanating from a centre near Hopton Point within the STANTA Extension. One slightly unusual sherd was a very worn piece of Central Gaulish decorated Samian Ware. Two sherds of medieval glazed Grimston ware occurred at the extreme western end, possibly outliers of activity in the Wissey valley.

Worked flints were found in varying quantities; most were of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age although two, a side scraper and a core, were considered to be Neolithic. There are two areas of greater intensity, though they hardly warrant the term 'concentration'. One was in the vicinity of a low sandy mound in the south-western field (HER 35867) which may be the remnant of an Early Bronze Age barrow (HER 35830). This would not be implausible given the proximity of the Cressingham barrow group. The second area was the field just to the north of the site of Bodney Warren Lodge (HER 35866). Here a notable knife or sickle blade and an adze or chisel blade were among a number of scrapers and cores.

The soils here are generally typical Breck sands, with some evidence of chalk near the surface in the western fields. The absence of marked activity after the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age is, therefore, not entirely surprising. Much of the area lay within what was Bodney Warren

since at least medieval times. A reference dated 1500 (NRO Phillips 574578 x 3) gives the limits of the warren as running from 'fishpondyke' (? on the Wissey) to a furrow leading between the mounds (barrows) called Copdowe hylls and onto the way from Stanford to Threxton. The Register of Thetford Priory (Dymond (ed.) 1995, 1996) records repairs to the Warren Lodge between 1499/1500 and 1521/22.

Faden (1797) shows a large warren with a lodge within it extending south to Stanford Warren to the east of Langford. Bryant (1826) shows the northern boundary clearly and has the lodge outside the warren to the east. Boundaries have probably changed from time to time, but Unit D has been associated with the warren since c. 1500 at least.

Management Unit E

This area is part of the parish of Tottington, cleared in 1942, and was formerly occupied by two farms. West Mere Hall (Farm) was to the north of West Mere and appeared on Faden's Map. East Mere Farm was on a site now covered by military buildings to the east of this. Unit E is in the extreme north-east corner of STANTA, close to the line of Peddars Way which cuts across the most north-easterly field. With the exception of the north-western edge, which is sandy like Unit D, the soil here is heavier with patches which are distinctly clayey. In a wet winter and spring one field at least proved too water-logged to bear heavy machinery, so delaying cultivation. Pits are quite numerous in the area. It is similar to areas of land in the STANTA Extension immediately to the north which proved more intensively exploited (Davison 1994).

A wide scattering of worked flints was found, thinning out to the north-west. Most were of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age but there was an Early Neolithic laurel leaf in the most north-easterly field (HER 36256) and a Mesolithic or Early Neolithic core in the south-east (HER 36261). There were also two areas where 'potboilers' or calcined flints were found in the most southerly fields (HER 36261, 36262); these are prehistoric but of uncertain age and purpose.

The pottery discovered is far more interesting. An Iron Age concentration occurred close to a large pit. Forty-nine sherds, mostly flint-gritted but with two in a dark reduced fabric, were recovered, including a jar rim and one with a pattern of impressions made by a stick or bone. A slight scatter was found to the north and south of the site; one of these scattered pieces is profusely flint-gritted in a hard dark grey fabric and might be Early Neolithic. A Romano-British site overlaps the Iron Age concentration to the west. It is not strong: only 29 sherds were found, almost all of them in greyware. Again, a scattering of outlying finds occurred.

The presence of these sites, especially the Romano-British, might be explained by the proximity of the Peddars Way. The existence of a slightly stronger medieval site with roughly the same centre is not easy to account for, however. East Mere Farm was not shown on a map of 1774 (NRO WLS XVII/4) and in any case it lay further to the west. It is unlikely that 32 sherds of pottery would accumulate around a pit, assuming it to have been of that date. It is most likely to have been dug for marl in the 18th–19th centuries (HER 36257).

The 1774 map shows West Mere Farm. There was then a tongue of common land extending northwards from the riverine common land, past West Mere, containing 107 acres. To the north of the common by the rivulet running through Tottington were smaller fields called 'breaks', and still further north were larger ones called Three Hill Break (99 acres), West Field (57 acres) and West Field Break (44 acres). The northern fringe of this area was occupied by Warren Break, the Heath (191 acres) and the Plain in the north-west corner. This, apart from the one farm, shows

no sign of settlement and the field names suggest earlier extensive agriculture and a warren. A surprising feature was the scarcity of pottery around the 19th-century site of East Mere Farm.

Management Unit F

This area lies to the east and south-east of Unit E. Apart from the northernmost field, close to E, the soils are uniformly sandy and pits are less in evidence. There are fewer signs of human activity here, the most promising field being the one to the north of Lowster Hill where there is a barrow. A faint scattering of Iron Age finds occurs around the wooded hill (HER 35873). Despite the proximity of the Peddars Way only one sherd of Romano-British pottery was found in the entire Unit. The only noteworthy worked flints are a patinated flake knife which showed later retouching (HER 36274), and one Neolithic scraper. The remainder are of the usual Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, or even later, vintage.

The scatter of medieval and later pottery suggests no more than agricultural manuring. The land was quite distant from Tottington and therefore unlikely to have seen intensive cultivation. As sheep were a common element in Breckland farming from quite early times it is likely that tating by the flocks would have been the chief source of manure, so making the spread of pottery unlikely.

Management Unit G

This is a very large area fringing the northern side of Wretham Park. Most of it lies within the former parish of West Wretham, a deserted medieval village, but the four eastern fields belonged to East Wretham. The soils are uniformly sandy ranging from pale reddish-brown to occasional black in colour. There are a few loamy patches, some areas of clay-like consistency and others of a gravelly nature. Deep pits, probably for marling, dot the landscape, but some were for gravel extraction. All are dry.

The whole area is characterised by an extreme scarcity of pottery, odd sherds occurring on only three of the seventeen fields. There is a fairly even spread of worked flints, most of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date although some may well be even later and at least one is more obviously Neolithic. The only really outstanding piece is a plano-convex Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age Beaker-type knife found north of West Wretham village and north-west of Mickle Mere (HER 35881). The next field to the east had a large concentration of flints and also yielded a rim sherd of the same approximate date as the knife (HER 35879).

The only other field with any quantity of sherds was one north-west of West Wretham (HER 35876). One sherd of possible Middle Saxon pottery is of interest; if correctly identified, it reflects a possible foundation date for West Wretham. The remainder consisted of a faint scatter of medieval and post-medieval dating. Faint traces of Romano-British activity elsewhere (two scattered sherds) are worth noting (HER 37242, 35879).

Very few flints were found in the three most easterly fields; this may relate to the presence of Blackrabbit Warren immediately to the north, but is more likely to be because of modern agricultural practice. Vegetable and root crops require a fine stone-free soil and stone-picking has obviously been carried out here.

Documents in King's College, Cambridge, have made it possible to reconstruct the manor of West Wretham in 1612 (Darby and Saltmarsh 1935). Then the most intensively cultivated area lay south of an east-to-west line just north of Mickle Mere, Hill Mere and Rushmere. To the north and west was the less heavily cultivated Outfield (Brecks). To the north and west again

lay heath. The First Land Utilisation Map of the early 1930s shows all under cultivation, barring two western fields which were classified as Heath, Moor, Common or Rough Pasture. Given this situation in post-medieval times, medieval activity is scarcely likely to have been different. The four fields in East Wretham belonged to that manor and were peripheral to that village centre and close to a warren: this might well account for the absence of pottery.

Management Unit H

Cultivated in the 1930s, this was taken over in the 1940s as a grass satellite to Honington and, later, Mildenhall airfields. Later installations included runways and dispersal hard standings; some of the latter remain, as do some airfield defences. From 1943 to 1945 it was used by the USAAF after which it was gradually run down, becoming a Polish resettlement camp (Bowyer 1979). Parts were then returned to agriculture, the present boundaries being controlled by the airfield layout. Soils are generally sandy but there are pockets of heavier clayey soil, circular in form in a linear pattern. It is possible they may be infilled craters.

Once again there is a general distribution of worked flints, apart from two fields in the south from which, on this occasion, nothing of any kind was found and two fields in the north-east corner which yielded only pottery. The flints are all of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age date; the most significant was in a field at the extreme south-west corner. This is a plano-convex knife or strike-a-light; its pointed tip is heavily abraded suggesting use, or re-use, as a strike-a-light (HER 37245). It is Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age (Beaker) in date. A soft piece of probable pre-Iron Age pottery, with fine grits and surface voids probably from leached calcareous inclusions, was found near the western edge (HER 35883) but accurate dating is impossible.

There were three areas of 'potboilers'; one was in the south-east corner near a group of four World War II pillboxes and were of rather large size (HER 35884), two others were in the south-western corner (HER 36269, 37245), one of them in the same area as the knife. All three are rather unusual as potboilers are commonly found near sources of water, whereas each of these locations is particularly dry.

There is a marked east-west divide in pottery distribution. Romano-British and medieval pottery both occur only in the east. This is the area which was part of the manor of East Wretham and presumably represents the outer aura of finds from that centre. One Late Saxon sherd was found in the extreme north-eastern corner (HER 35886). The Romano-British sherds are few and, like those in Unit G, represent scatters from unidentified sources. The western portion of Unit H, in West Wretham, was part of the manor of Wretham Thorpe in 1612. This manor was probably centred near the present Thorpe Farm. It appears to have been separately listed in Domesday Book (Brown 1984, 22, 23) but it never became a separate parish. Distance from the centre of manorial activity probably accounts for the dearth of pottery here.

The Unit is remarkable for the survival of airfield defences. Four pillboxes lie on the eastern side in a group: two are hexagonal and conventional, two are less so. Four more are on the western side, two conventional and two of unusual form.

Management Unit J

This is a compact area of six fields to the north-west of Fowlmere (HER 35599). The soils are sandy loam with some orange-tinted gravel at the north-eastern end and occasional patches elsewhere. The soil at the south-westerly corner is fine and there is a patch of clay-like consistency around a pool.

Worked flints are found all over the area but are clustered nearer Fowlmere, where scrapers were particularly numerous. All the flints appear to be Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age. One found on the north-western field is a chopping tool possibly used as a fabricator or for breaking bones. 'Potboilers' were present close to Fowlmere. It is worth remarking that during the Woodland Survey it was noted that burnt (calcined) flints had been found previously on the eastern flank of Fowlmere (HER 5712).

The assortment of pottery on the south-eastern field is most interesting. A scatter of Iron Age sherds lies in a south-central position, while Romano-British pottery in some variety was found in a weak concentration in the north-eastern corner. Some Iron Age pottery was found on the north-eastern field and in the neighbouring one to the west, together with a couple of sherds of Romano-British pottery, one of which is Samian. It seems that an activity centre must lie somewhere within neighbouring grassland. After this, the very poor showing of medieval pottery is remarkable and is easily outstripped by the presence of post-medieval sherds. Medieval land-use must have been either very occasional or devoted largely to grazing. The activity revealed by this survey is focused on Fowlmere; despite its ephemeral nature, it is surprising to find so little medieval evidence.

A detached field of clay-like soil lies to the south-west of Unit J. A few worked flints were found but no pottery. It must have been part of the outfield of Croxton and less likely to have undergone anything more than occasional cultivation.

Management Unit K

This very limited area of sandy soil on a low terrace is some distance from West Tofts church and manorial site and the few medieval sherds in the western field indicate only light agricultural activity. The easternmost field had been recently taken in from woodland.

Management Unit M

This compact area is close to what must have been the centre of medieval West Tofts, marked by the church and the moated platform of a manorial house (HER 5148). The surviving parts of the village had been emparked in the 18th century (HER 5149) (Williamson 1998). Few signs of the medieval village remain (Cushion and Davison 2003).

One field, to the north of the stream, appears devoid of finds; it is rather wet, is on the floor of the valley and heavily laden with flint pebbles. Downstream are two fields on which floated water meadows were constructed in the late 18th century (HER 31157) (Young 1804, 396). The two fields to the south which are close to the stream have northern portions which are clayey and less well-drained. The remainder of the area has sandy soil.

Worked flints are distributed over the four southern fields. Most are of the Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age, including a thumbnail scraper from the north-western field (HER 37247). The exceptions are a Neolithic scraper and a fragment of a possible Late Upper Palaeolithic long blade from the south-western field (HER 37248) and an Early Neolithic laurel leaf from the south-eastern one (HER 36203).

A faint concentration of Iron Age sherds occurred on the south-eastern field, and there is a slight and patchy distribution of Romano-British finds. Late Saxon pottery occurs on the two southern fields, while medieval and post-medieval finds occur over all four. Clearly the earlier finds reveal appreciable valley-based activity, while Late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval pottery reflects the proximity of West Tofts.

Management Unit O

This large area can be roughly divided in two, with ten fields quite closely associated with the River Wissey while the other nine fields are, on the whole, rather remote from it with the exception of two in the extreme north-east. There is also, in the south-east, an area of grassland very close to the Wissey which conceals much of the deserted village of Langford. The soils are uniformly sandy though there is a slight element of loam-like consistency in the extreme north. There is some evidence of periglacial activity in soil patterning, while in the far south two fields impinge upon the flood plain.

Worked flints are most numerous close to the margins of a terrace overlooking the flood plain of the Wissey, especially just to the west of Langford church where scrapers, cores and a flake knife were found (HER 7617). Elsewhere the incidence is lessened downstream and on higher ground away from the river. A curious site (HER 35610) is at a point near the boundary of STANTA where flakes, including some which are retouched and others blade-like, together with a few cores occurred close to the edge of the flood plain and suggest an attempt at long-blade production. It is an odd site and these finds may be waste from modern flint-knapping, though its isolated position is rather against this.

A quantity of Iron Age sherds, not sufficiently numerous to be called a concentration, has been found on the terrace downstream from Langford church, reasonably close to a Romano-British site similarly located. One 'Iron Age' sherd from the Romano-British site is sufficiently doubtful to be classed alternatively as Early Saxon. The Romano-British site (HER 35605) is compact and produced a range of fabrics, together with a few remnants of tiles. It appears to have been established quite early and to have continued for some time. An aura of finds extends around the site.

The most significant finding in this area is the site of Langford deserted village, close to the church (HER 3871) and stretching northwards under grassland facing eastwards onto the Wissey (HER 37250). Much of this was strictly beyond the limits prescribed for the survey, but it was worth extending the search to identify the extent of the former village. The sequence of pottery began with two sherds of Middle Saxon sandy Ipswich Ware, possibly representing dispersed signs of the earliest Langford. Late Saxon pottery (Thetford Ware, St Neots Ware and Stamford Ware) was found on the actual site of the village, mingled with medieval pottery ranging from early forms, including Harling-type, through to glazed Grimston Ware and one possible sherd of Hedingham Ware and with a fair assortment of post-medieval pottery. From the centre of the concentration an aura of finds extends westwards onto nearby fields.

These two concentrations, one Romano-British and one Saxon/medieval, represent a valley-floor distribution of the kind characteristic of Breckland. The higher ground away from the river terraces was too dry for permanent occupation unless, as in the extreme north-east of STANTA in Unit E, there was heavier soil present. Langford (the Long Ford) is an excellent description of the position of the settlement since the crossing of the valley floor is carried on a lengthy causeway; it is possible that this is an 'early' place-name (Gelling 1984, 68, 69).

Something needs to be said about the desertion of Langford. In 1334 it made a modest contribution to the Lay Subsidy but in 1449 was granted a reduction of over 21% on its payment made in that year (Hudson 1895, 286-7). Court rolls of the 1360s and 1370s give lists of between 23 and 29 tenants (NRO PTR 2, 11/12). It appears to have been a typical small Breckland community. By 1580 (NRO PTR 1, 122/38) an arbitration between lord and tenants lists far fewer names, although not all may have been mentioned and by 1603 there were 41 communicants (Whiteman 1986, 209). A lease of the manor dated 1596 refers to dilapidation of the chancel of

the church and of the parsonage house (NRO PTR 1, 122/41). A survey of Langford made before 1632 mentions the manor house and seven tenements, one of them decayed with a barn (NRO PTR 1, 125/15).

Some correspondence dated 1636 after the death of the last of the medieval family of lords suggests that an attempt was made to put new life into the failing community. Alterations were made to the church and money was requested for the repair of the decayed houses. Some new land was also broken in (NRO PTR 1, 123/11; 123/13). By 1676 Ickburgh and Langford, taken together, could only total 60 communicants between them (Whiteman 1986, 209) and by the mid-18th century the village had diminished to the manor house, then regarded as a farm (NRO PTR 1, 125/11), while the church tower collapsed in 1764 (Pevsner and Wilson 1999, 509). The church was restored in 1888 and by 1921 there were three farms in the parish.

The nine more remote fields yielded few really significant finds. The most southerly one had been recently reclaimed from the forest and displayed patches of discoloured soil, some of them mounds, probably periglacial. Finds of worked flints, overall, were rather thin. There was a small cluster in one field including five scrapers of Late Neolithic/Early Bronze Age vintage (HER 37249), while a further scatter to the north consisted of Early Neolithic flints. There was also a slight increase in two of the three most northerly fields, including scrapers and a flake knife.

The pottery finds were even scarcer apart from in the two fields in the extreme north-east; these slope down towards the terraces of the Wissey (HER 35612). In these two there is evidence of Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval activity, while in the two most easterly of the three northern fields there is a faint scatter of Romano-British sherds. These appear to relate to sources beyond the limits of the arable area, possibly neighbouring forest plantations.

Conclusions

The surveys have given a very useful insight into the archaeological character of much of central Breckland, yielding valuable information about parts that are not normally accessible. Particularly interesting has been the contrast, in fieldwalking terms, between the findings here and what was found when the STANTA Extension was walked (Davison 1994). The Extension gave a much higher return, probably because the better soils could support more intensive use. It is clear, however, that the surveys have given an incomplete picture of what lies within STANTA proper. In the areas of woodland examined it has not always been easy to decide whether a feature was significant or not. Sixty years of military use — now largely forgotten or, at least unrecorded in detail — may have produced minor earthworks of questionable validity. A good example within Brettenham is the almost trefoil-like arrangement (45)(HER 37076) of depressions which, with others nearby, might be a World War II searchlight emplacement.

The specification for the Woodland Survey meant that features within the grassland had to be largely ignored, although considerable 'surveyor's licence' was employed where a feature extended from woodland onto grassland. Lastly, a few areas of woodland within valleys were partly under water, so rendering complete survey well-nigh impossible.

So far as the arable survey is concerned, it has to be pointed out that the various areas of land covered are all distinctly peripheral to known areas of settlement. The exception to this is Langford, a village already deserted before 1942, where a slight bending of the specification boundary enabled an assessment of the former inhabited area to be made. All the other villages — Tottington, Stanford, and West Tofts and the earlier deserted sites of Sturston (early post-medieval) and Buckenham Tofts (probably late medieval) — are under grassland. As settlement in Breckland generally adhered to terraces within the river valleys, many potential discoveries

remain to be made if the Romano-British and medieval settlement areas of Langford can be taken as a guide. Something of an exception to the general rule is the multi-period site — Iron Age, Romano-British and medieval — on heavier land in the north-eastern margin, but the soils here are scarcely typical of Breckland.

The fields which yield few finds probably do so because of their distance from known centres of settlement. The extensive farming regime by which sheep grazed the more distant lands, so tathing (manuring) the soil, was also probably responsible for the scarcity of pottery. A further factor is the modern practice of stone-picking to facilitate the growth of root and vegetable crops, which also leads a marked decline in finds; some of these crops are also covered with sheets of plastic for long periods, so rendering the surface inaccessible to the fieldwalker.

Despite these drawbacks, and the limitations imposed by the terms of the surveys, the exercise has been of considerable value in highlighting the archaeological potential of STANTA.

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