

Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd

**INVESTIGATION OF ANTIQUITY
FIND SPOT:
LOWER FARM,
MARKYATE, HERTFORDSHIRE**

*on behalf of the Historic Environment Section,
Hertfordshire County Council*



By
Jonathan R. Hunn BA PhD MIFA

February 2006

ASC: 768/MLF/1

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Site Data

<i>ASC site code:</i>	MLF	<i>Project no:</i>	768
<i>County:</i>	Hertfordshire		
<i>District:</i>	Dacorum		
<i>Village/Town:</i>	Nr Markyate		
<i>Parish:</i>	Markyate		
<i>NGR:</i>	TL 0647 1685		
<i>Extent of site:</i>	1m x 3m		
<i>Present land use:</i>	Arable (setaside)		
<i>Planning proposal:</i>	N/a		
<i>Extent of development:</i>	N/a		
<i>Planning application ref/date:</i>	N/a		
<i>Client:</i>	Historic Environment Section, Environment Dept County Hall Hertford SG13 8DN		
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Figure 1: General location (scale 1:25,000)

Summary

In February 2006 Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd undertook an investigation of the location of a significant metal detecting discovery. A decorated copper alloy flagon or jug believed to be of 1st century AD date had been discovered on land at Lower Farm, Markyate. ASC was commissioned by the Historic Environment Section of Hertfordshire County Council to investigate the nature of the find and any associated features. It was established that the flagon had been buried adjacent to a pre-existing boundary, and that no other associated artefacts were present. Its subsequent breakage was almost certainly due to the action of ploughing. Further fragments of the vessel were recovered c.2.5m to the west of the original findspot.

1 Introduction

1.1 In February 2006 *Archaeological Services and Consultancy Ltd* (ASC) carried out an evaluation on a site to the east of Markyate (NGR TL 0647-1685: Fig. 1). The project was commissioned by Stewart Bryant of the *Hertfordshire County Council Historic Environment Section* (HES), and was carried out following consultation between all interested parties.

1.2 *Reason for Work*

The work was undertaken to examine the findspot of a copper-alloy flagon or jug (Plate 1) that had been discovered by Duncan Hillyard, a local metal detector enthusiast. The discovery was reported to the Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire Finds Liaison Officer, Julian Watters, who had in turn alerted the HES. The principal concern was that the find might be part of a larger assemblage, which would be vulnerable to potential looters and agricultural disturbance.

1.3 *Setting*

1.3.1 The findspot is located in a large unploughed arable field some 100m south-east of Lower Farm in the parish of Markyate, Hertfordshire, not far from the county boundary with Bedfordshire (Fig. 2). The findspot lies about 500m north-east of the village of Markyate. The immediate area is devoid of any distinguishing features.

1.3.2 The findspot is situated on gently sloping terrain, more or less on the edge of the plateau overlooking the Ver valley at an altitude of 157m. The river Ver lies about 0.6 km to the south west and the old course of Watling Street is not much further away. The soils of the area are derived from Plateau drift and Clay-with-flints which are ascribed to the Batcombe Association. This is a *'fine silty over clayey and fine loamy over clayey soils with slowly permeable subsoils and slight seasonal water logging . Some well drained clayey soils over chalk. Variably flinty'* (Soil Survey 1983).



Plate 1: Original finds recovered by D. Hillyard

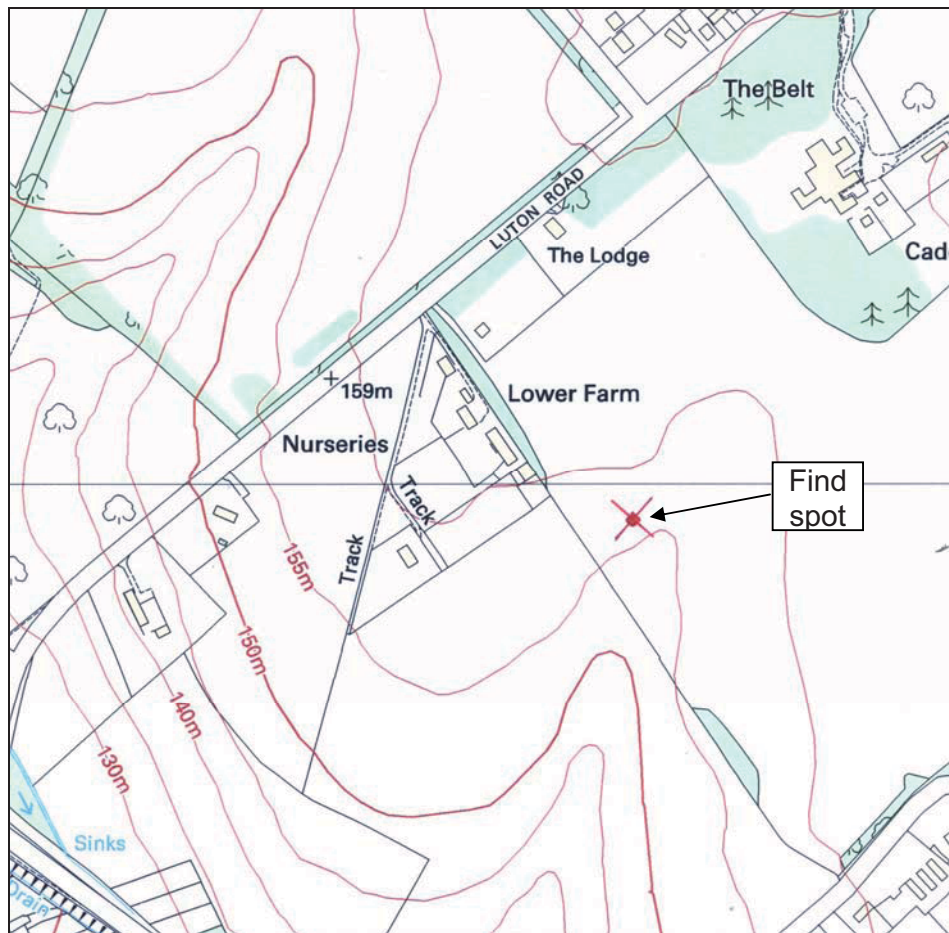


Figure 2: Site location (scale 1:5000)

2 Aims and Methods

2.1 Aims

The aim of the investigation was to establish whether the find was part of a larger assemblage, such as a burial, or was an isolated deposit. In addition, it was hoped that a context could be established for the find itself.

2.2 Methods

A five-metre square was stripped of plough soil around the area of the findspot, which could still be clearly identified in the ground (Fig. 3). Four 20m long trenches were then excavated using a mechanical excavator fitted with a 1.6m wide toothless ditching bucket, on each side of the stripped area. The area of the findspot and associated features were manually cleaned and recorded.

2.3 Standards

The work conformed to the requirements of the HES, to the relevant sections of the Institute of Archaeologists' *Standard & Guidance Notes* (IFA 2001) and *Code of Conduct* (IFA 2000a), to the Association of Local Government Archaeological Officers East of England Region *Standards for Field Archaeology in the East of England* (ALGAO 2003), to current English Heritage guidelines (EH1991; EH 1995), and to the relevant sections of ASC's own *Operations Manual*.

3 Archaeological and Historical Background

SMR = Sites and Monuments Record

3.1 Early Prehistoric (before 600BC)

Little is known of the early prehistoric period in this area. The available evidence is dominated by Palaeolithic flint artefacts, found during 19th century quarrying operations (SMR 0543,1307, 1308,1855 and 2262). A Mesolithic tranchet axe is also recorded (SMR 0544). No Neolithic or Bronze Age artefacts are known from the area.

3.2 Iron Age (600BC-AD43)

This early and middle Iron Age is poorly represented in the archaeological record, although this is likely to be largely a result of lack of fieldwork undertaken in the area. For a useful overview see Bryant (1995). For the late Iron Age the evidence points to a landscape that was probably largely under cultivation, similar to the Roman period.

3.3 Roman (AD43-c.450)

The present village of Markyate lies c.6.5km south east of the Roman small town of *Dvrocobrivis* (Dunstable) and c.12 km north west of *Verulamium* (St Albans). Both were important settlements in the Roman period, and the present Markyate High Street follows the line of a major Roman road, now known as *Watling Street*, which linked the two Roman towns.

The work of the *Manshead Society* in Dunstable and the present author in the area around St Albans has shown that the landscape was predominantly characterised by dispersed farmsteads exhibiting varying degrees of Romanisation (Hudspith 1995, 134-8; Hunn 1995, 80-5). There was a cemetery to the north of Markyate (Simco 1984, 96, 99) and an inscription of a religious nature is recorded from the site of a later Benedictine nunnery at Markyate (SMR 1465).

3.4 Saxon (c.450-1066)

Little is known of the area during the Saxon period. The earliest physical evidence of this period is an 8th-century belt-mount found in the garden of the old vicarage at Markyate (SMR 1306). The nature and extent of settlement at Markyate during this period is not understood, and Markyate does not appear in the Domesday survey (1086).

The parish of Markyate is a 19th century creation, formed out of portions of the parishes of Flamstead, Caddington, the detached hamlet of Humbershoe in the parish of Studham, and a detached portion of Houghton Regis (Page 1908, 186).

At the time of Domesday survey, 1000 swine were recorded in Flamstead, suggesting the presence of a significant area of woodland (Morris 1976, section 22.1). Caddington was an ancient demesne of the Crown, but in the reign of Edward the Confessor the Bedfordshire portion was held by Edwin of Caddington, who passed it onto his son Leofwin (Page 1908, 187). He passed it on in turn to the Canons of the church of St Paul (*ibid.*), who then held all of Caddington. At the time of Domesday

survey both the Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire entries for Caddington record a relatively low ratio of woodland to ploughland (Williams & Martin 1992, 377, 567).

3.5 Medieval (1066-1500)

Markyate developed during the medieval period and was centred at the junction of *Watling Street* and the road from Berkhamsted to Luton. The earliest mention of its name dates from the early to mid 12th century (Gover *et al* 1938, 47) when there were references to the foundation of a priory (Page 1908, 186; Doggett 2002, 143-54).

3.6 Post-Medieval (1500-1900)

Markyate still retains an attractive High Street with several 18th buildings surviving (Pevsner & Cherry 1977, 246) and is described as the best surviving example of a nucleated street village in Hertfordshire (Munby 1977, 86).

The church of St John the Baptist was founded in the 18th century at the north-west end of the High Street, in the grounds of Markyate Cell. In the post-medieval period *Markyate Street* became a stopping place for drovers bringing their cattle from Wales to London (Bonser 1970, 190). During this period *Watling Street* became an increasingly important thoroughfare.

In the second decade of the 19th century Telford improved *Watling Street* as part of the London to Holyhead Road (Branch-Johnson 1970, 106). The village became a minor stopping place for coaches and in 1900 there were six public houses and five beerhouses (Jolliffe & Jones 1995, 100). The oldest public house is *The Sun*, which was first recorded in 1605 but may be earlier.

3.7 Modern (1900-present)

The construction of a bypass in 1957 helped to preserve much of the present Markyate High Street (Pevsner & Cherry 1977, 246). The village has expanded to town-like proportions, with greater density of housing and expansion to the west and south west of the High Street.

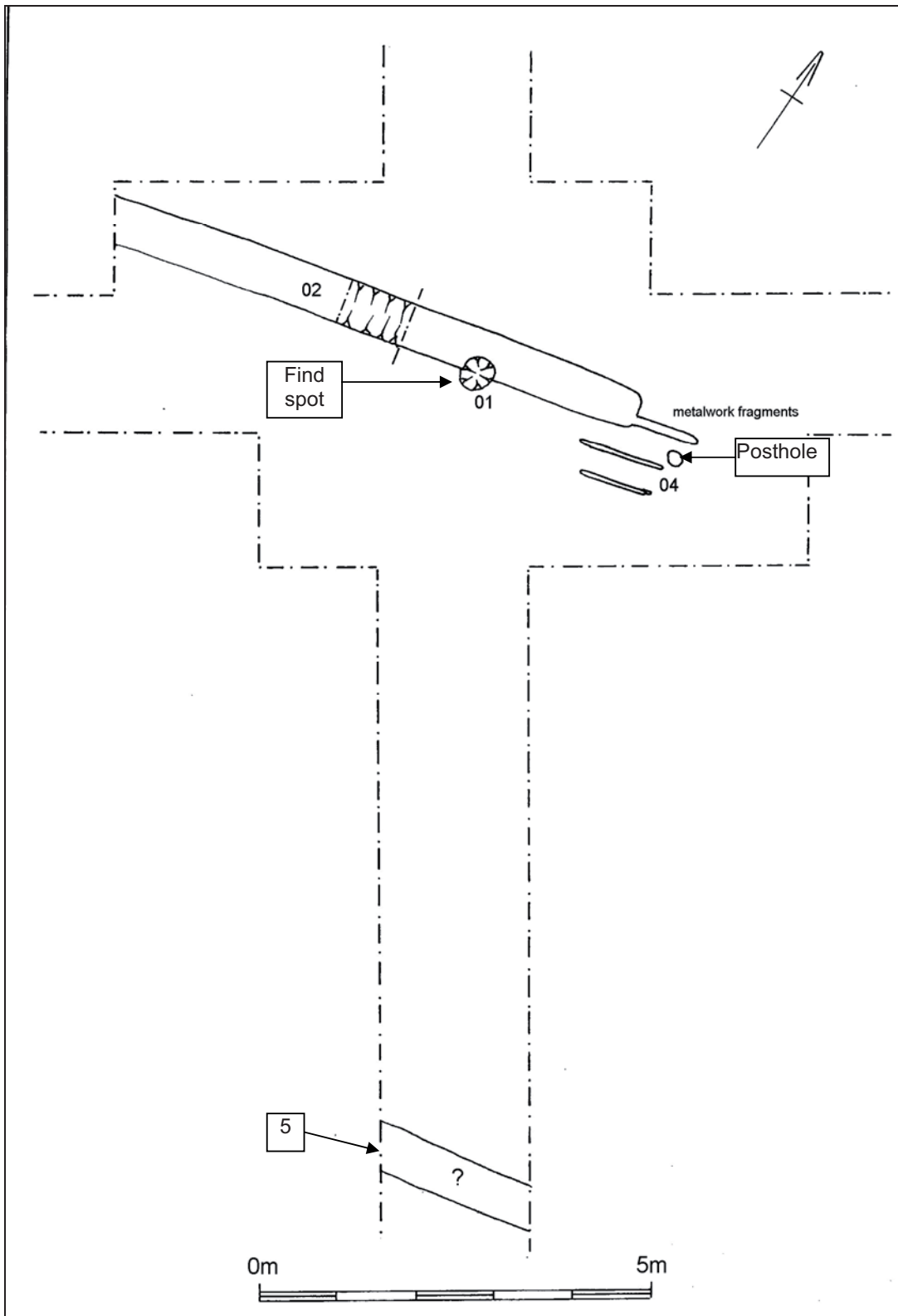


Figure 3: Trench plan (scale as shown)

4 Results

4.1 Methodology

Ploughsoil was mechanically removed from a five-metre-square area centred on the original findspot, and the area was cleaned by hand. Trenches were then excavated outwards from the original square area, in order to locate any further features or artefacts (Plate 2). The original area was later enlarged at its north-west and south-east corners to define a linear feature.

Several features were discovered and these will be described in turn.

4.2 The Findspot [01]

This was clearly defined as a circular depression 0.4m in diameter and *c.*0.1m deep below the level of the ploughsoil (Plate 3). It was filled with topsoil mixed with corn stubble. It had been partly cut into the natural strata, which comprised flinty clay, and partly into a less stony dark greyish soil which was later identified as the upper fill of Ditch [02].

4.3 Ditch [02]

This feature was 1.0m wide and 0.54m deep and oriented east-west (Fig. 3; Plate 4). It was filled with a deposit of dark greyish brown silty clay, with manganiferous staining and occasional flint pebbles.

The stripped area was extended in order to trace the extent of this feature. Its terminal was located *c.*2m east from the original find spot.

4.4 Ploughmarks [04]

Three striations were observed at the east end of the ditch, aligned parallel to it. They were *c.* 1m long and varied between 80 and 100mm wide (Plate 5).

During cleaning of the extended area, several fragments of metalwork were recovered *c.*2.5m east of the original findspot (Plates 6 & 7). The largest piece came from the widest ploughmark at the interface between its fill and the modern plough soil.

A small feature 0.2m in diameter, possibly a posthole, was also noted but was not excavated.

4.5 Ditch [05]

A linear feature was recorded in the south-east trench (Fig. 3). It was aligned east to west, ran parallel to Ditch [02] and was located *c.*10m south-east of the original find spot. It could not be investigated within the time available, but is interpreted as a ditch and was of similar width to Ditch [02].

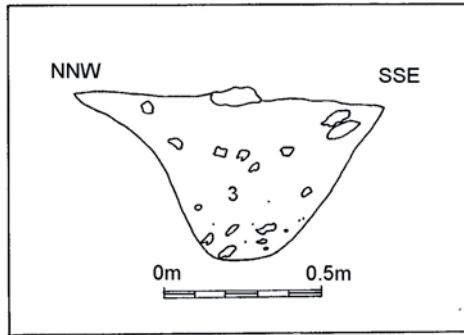


Figure 4: Section across Ditch [02]



Plate 2: General view of site under excavation



Plate 3: Detail of findspot [01]

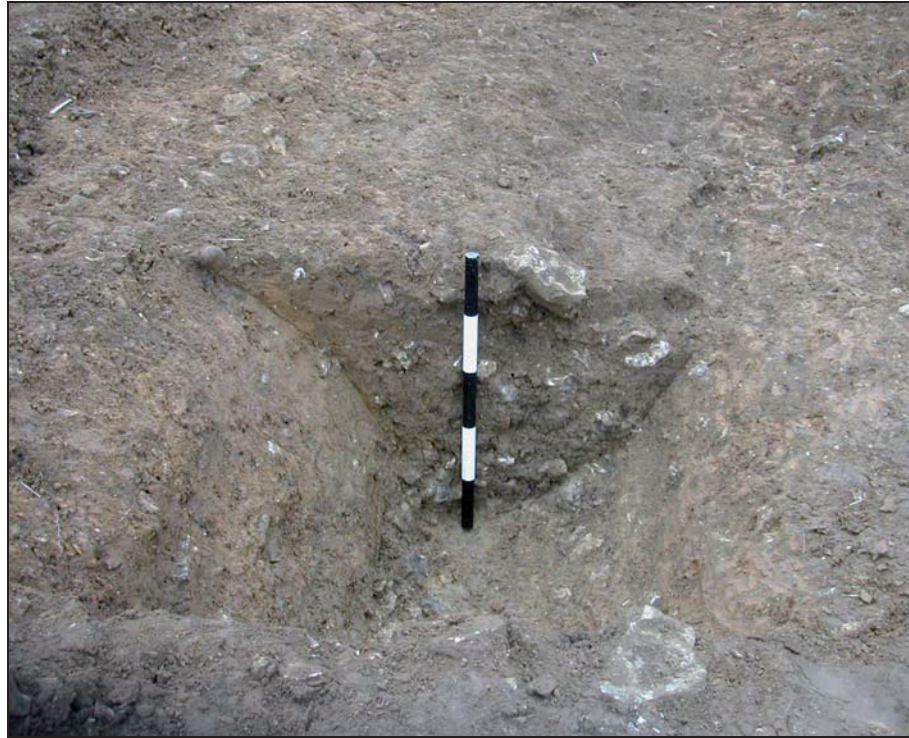


Plate 4: Section across Ditch [02] looking east



Plate 5: Detail of plough marks [04]



Plate 6: Metalwork discovery



Plate 7: Detail of finds made during the investigation

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The copper-alloy artefacts discovered by Duncan Hillyard came from a feature 0.4m in diameter and at a depth of *c.*0.35m below the present ground surface. The investigations described in this report revealed further fragments *c.*2.5m east of the original findspot. These were almost certainly carried there by deep ploughing (sub-soiling).
- 5.2 The area around the original findspot may have been disturbed during recovery of the artefacts, and the relationship between the finds and Ditch [02] could not be established. It seems likely that the ditch was a long-established, partly silted boundary feature, when the artefact was deposited in it. Its location about two metres from the ditch terminal could have been intended to aid later intended recovery.
- 5.3 The surrounding landscape could not be adequately investigated in the time available, but the presence of the posthole adjacent to the ditch terminal suggests the possible entrance to a paddock or enclosure, protected by a fence or gate. The relationship between these features and Ditch [05] is not known, but if they were contemporary they may have formed a track flanked by ditches.
- 5.4 The absence of any other artefacts or burning in the vicinity reinforces the interpretation that the event was 'covert' rather than 'ritual' in nature. Whether it was deliberately deposited with the intention of later collection or was just discarded is not certain.
- 5.5 Romano-British settlement is not currently known in the immediate area, but Watling Street lies *c.*0.8km to the east and the headwaters of river Ver are to the ENE. Rivers and Roman roads are known to have attracted settlement and it is likely that a small Roman settlement or farmstead developed in the vicinity of the findspot.

6. Acknowledgements

The writer is grateful to Stewart Bryant, of the Historic Environment Section of *Hertfordshire County Council*, for commissioning the project. The work was facilitated by Julian Watters (Bedfordshire & Hertfordshire Finds Liaison Officer) who arranged access from the landowner, Derek Busby. Thanks are also due to Duncan Hillyard, the finder of the original metalwork, who was present during the investigation

The fieldwork was undertaken for *ASC Ltd* by Jonathan Hunn BA PhD MIFA, assisted by Justin Neal and Alex Thompson. The report was prepared by Jonathan Hunn and edited by David Fell BA MA MIFA.

7. Archive

7.1 The project archive will comprise:

1. Report
2. Site records
3. Finds
4. Site record drawings
5. List of photographs/slides
6. Colour slides
7. CDROM with copies of all digital files.

7.2 The archive will be deposited with *Verulamium Museum*.

8. Bibliography

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Appendix 1: SMR Summary Sheet

Site name and address: Field south of Caddington Hall, Lower Farm, Markyate		
County: Hertfordshire		District: Dacorum
Village/Town: nr Markyate		Parish: Markyate
Planning application reference: n/a		
Client name, address, & tel. no: Historic Environment Section, Environment Dept County Hall Hertford, SG13 8DN		
Nature of application: n/a		
Present land use: arable		
Size of application area: n/a		Size of area investigated: n/a
NGR (to 8 figures): TL 0647-1685		Site code: MLF
Site director/Organization: Jonathan Hunn / ASC Ltd		
Type of work: Field evaluation		
Date of work:	Start: 7/2/06	Finish: 7/2/06
Curating museum: Verulamium Museum		
Related SMR nos:		Periods represented: Roman
Relevant previous summaries/reports n/a		
<p>Summary of fieldwork results:</p> <p><i>Archaeological Services & Consultancy Ltd undertook an investigation of the location of an important metal detecting discovery on February 7th 2006. A decorated copper alloy flagon or jug believed to be of 1st century AD date had been discovered on land to the south of Caddington Hall, Markyate. ASC was commissioned by the Historic Environment Section of Hertfordshire County Council to investigate the nature of the find and any associated features. The evaluation established that the flagon had been buried adjacent to a pre-existing boundary without any other associated artefacts being present. Its subsequent breakage was almost certainly due to the action of ploughing. Further fragments of the vessel were recovered c.2.5m to the west of the original find spot.</i></p>		
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