

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY REPORT

# STRATASCAN™



Project name:  
**Land off St Helens Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire**

Client:  
**CgMs Consulting**

Job ref:  
**J9684**

**April 2016**

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Survey date: <b>22nd - 23rd March 2016</b>	Report date: <b>April 2016</b>
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Version number and issue date: <b>V2</b> <b>27/04/2016</b>	Amendments:



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## 1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A detailed gradiometry survey was conducted over approximately 6.34 hectares of grassland. An area of prehistoric or Romano-British settlement activity has been identified, and is made up of a number of small enclosures, linear features and backfilled pits. A small oval-shaped enclosure may be associated with the settlement, though its exact origin cannot be determined with confidence. Evidence of ridge and furrow supports information from the desk-based assessment of the site forming part of the agricultural hinterland of Benson from the medieval period onwards. The remaining features are modern and include scattered magnetic debris, underground services and magnetic disturbance from nearby ferrous objects.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

### 2.1 Background synopsis

Stratascan were commissioned to undertake a geophysical survey of an area outlined for residential development. This survey forms part of an archaeological investigation being undertaken by CgMs Consulting.

### 2.2 Site Details

<b>NGR / Postcode</b>	SU 618 912 / OX10 6RU
<b>Location</b>	The site is located in the south of Benson, Oxfordshire. St Helens Avenue forms the north-eastern boundary while the A4074 bounds the site to the south-west. To the north-west lies a plot of allotments.
<b>HER/SMR</b>	Oxfordshire
<b>District</b>	South Oxfordshire
<b>Parish</b>	Benson
<b>Topography</b>	Mostly flat
<b>Current Land Use</b>	Pasture
<b>Weather Conditions</b>	Overcast, dry
<b>Soils</b>	The overlying soils are known as Sutton 2 which are typical argillic brown earths. These consist of well drained, fine and coarse loamy soils over gravel with a calcareous matrix (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 4 Eastern England).
<b>Geology</b>	The underlying geology comprises siltstone and sandstone of Upper Greensand Formation. Superficial river terrace deposits of Northmoor

	Sand and Gravel Member, Upper Facet – sand and gravel, are recorded across the site (British Geological Survey website).
<b>Archaeology</b>	<p>Extract from ‘Land off St Helens Avenue, Benson, Oxfordshire – Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment’ (CgMs Consulting, 2016):</p> <p><i>“This desk-based assessment has established that no designated heritage assets occur within the study site, and no non-designated heritage assets are recorded on the site.</i></p> <p><i>However, the study site’s location on river terrace gravel deposits in close proximity to the River Thames suggests a favoured location for early settlement and farming activity (i.e. Prehistoric and Roman). There is extensive evidence of Prehistoric and Roman settlement in the surrounding area, but as yet no evidence that any activity extends into the study site. Any evidence, if present, has the potential to be of county-wide significance.</i></p> <p><i>The study site is likely to have formed part of the agricultural hinterland surrounding the Early Medieval, Medieval and Post-Medieval settlement of Benson (historically Bensington). Historic mapping demonstrates that the study site continued as agricultural land throughout the Post-Medieval period up to the present day. Any archaeological evidence dating to these periods is likely to derive from agricultural practices and would be of no more than local interest. A low potential for significant archaeological evidence from the Medieval and more recent periods is identified.”</i></p>
<b>Survey Methods</b>	Detailed magnetic survey (gradiometry)
<b>Study Area</b>	c. 6.34 hectares

### 2.3 Aims and objectives

To locate and characterise any anomalies of possible archaeological interest within the study area.

## 3 METHODS, PROCESSING & PRESENTATION

### 3.1 Standards & Guidance

This report and all fieldwork have been conducted in accordance with the latest guidance documents issued by Historic England (2008) and the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (2002 & 2014). The works were also conducted in accordance with a WSI submitted to the Local Authority on the 29<sup>th</sup> February 2016.

Stratascan Ltd are a Registered Organisation with the CIfA and are committed to upholding its policies and standards.

### 3.2 Survey methods

Due to the moderate potential for prehistoric and Roman remains, detailed gradiometer survey and the moderate potential for prehistoric or Roman remains, detailed magnetic survey was used as an efficient and effective method of locating archaeological anomalies.

More information regarding this technique is included in Appendix A.

### 3.3 Processing

The following schedule shows the basic processing carried out on the data used in this report:

1. *Destripe*
2. *Destagger*

### 3.4 Presentation of results and interpretation

The presentation of the data for each site involves a plot of the minimally processed data as a greyscale plot and a colour plot showing extreme magnetic values. Magnetic anomalies have been identified and plotted onto the 'Interpretation of Anomalies' drawing.

When interpreting the results several factors are taken into consideration, including the nature of archaeological features being investigated and the local conditions at the site (geology, pedology, topography etc.). Anomalies are categorised by their potential origin. Where responses can be related to very specific known features documented in other sources, this is done (for example: Abbey Wall, Roman Road). For the generic categories levels of confidence are indicated, for example: probable, or possible archaeology. The former is used for a confident interpretation, based on anomaly definition and/or other corroborative data such as cropmarks. Poor anomaly definition, a lack of clear patterns to the responses and an absence of other supporting data reduces confidence, hence the classification "possible".

## 4 RESULTS

The detailed magnetic gradiometer survey conducted at Benson has identified a number of anomalies that have been characterised as being of *probable* archaeological origin. The following list of numbered anomalies refers to numerical labels on the interpretation plots.

### 4.1 Probable Archaeology

- 1 A significant number of positive linear and curvilinear anomalies, some forming sub-rectangular enclosures. The anomalies are indicative of former cut features, and are likely related to an area of prehistoric or Romano-British settlement.
- 2 A sub-circular positive anomaly in the north-west of the area. This is likely to be related to a small ring ditch.
- 3 A large number of small, discrete, positive anomalies across the site. These are indicative of former cut features, such as backfilled pits, and provide further evidence of prehistoric or Romano-British settlement activity. Anomaly 3a, in the north of the area, appears to form an alignment of pits.

## 4.2 Possible Archaeology

- 4 A weak, positive curvilinear anomaly in the south-east of the site. This is possibly related to a small, oval-shaped enclosure, though the weakness of the response makes further interpretation difficult.
- 5 A weak negative linear anomaly running across the site. This is indicative of a possible former bank or earthwork of archaeological origin, however it may also be related to an underground service, such as a plastic pipe.

## 4.3 Medieval/Post-Medieval Agriculture

- 6 A series of widely spaced, parallel linear anomalies across the south-east and east of the site. These are indicative of medieval or post-medieval ridge and furrow cultivation.

## 4.4 Other Anomalies

- 7 Small areas of weak scattered magnetic debris across the west of the site. These are likely to be modern in origin.
- 8 A high amplitude linear anomaly in the north of the area (Anomaly 67) and a negative linear anomaly in the south (Anomaly 7a). Both anomalies are related to underground services, such as pipes or cables. Anomaly 7a is likely to be related to a plastic (or other non-ferrous material) pipe.
- 9 Areas of magnetic disturbance are the result of substantial nearby ferrous metal objects such as fences and underground services. These effects can mask weaker archaeological anomalies, but on this site have not affected a significant proportion of the area.
- 10 A number of magnetic 'spikes' (strong focussed values with associated antipolar response) indicate ferrous metal objects. These are likely to be modern rubbish.

# 5 DATA APPRAISAL & CONFIDENCE ASSESSMENT

Greensand geologies generally provide a good response for gradiometer survey, while river terrace deposits of sand and gravel can provide variable results. Despite the variable results often provided by river terrace deposits, the data across the site displays a high contrast between archaeological anomalies and the background magnetic response, though the responses are weaker in the south-west corner. From this high contrast, it can be determined that the survey has been effective and that the superficial river terrace deposits across the site are conducive to magnetic survey.

A weak linear anomaly in the west of the site is visible, though it is unlikely to be of archaeological origin. The feature lines up directly with the traverse direction, and is more likely to be an artefact of data processing than a real feature.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The survey at Benson has identified an area of settlement activity, comprising a number of linear anomalies, small enclosures and a large number of pits. Given the extensive evidence of prehistoric and Roman settlement in the surrounding area, it is likely that the settlement identified is prehistoric or Romano-British in origin. A weak, oval-shaped anomaly may be evidence of a small enclosure, however the weak response of the feature makes further interpretation difficult. Evidence of ridge and furrow cultivation indicates that the site has been used for agricultural purposes since the medieval period, and corresponds with information from the desk-based assessment whereby the study site is likely to have formed part of the agricultural hinterland surrounding the early medieval, medieval and post-medieval settlement of Benson. The remaining features are modern in origin and include underground services, areas of weak scattered magnetic debris and disturbance from nearby ferrous metal objects, such as fencing.



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## Appendix A - Technical Information: Magnetometer Survey Method

### Grid Positioning

For hand held gradiometers the location of the survey grids has been plotted together with the referencing information. Grids were set out using a Trimble R8 Real Time Kinematic (RTK) VRS Now GNSS GPS system.

An RTK GPS (Real-time Kinematic Global Positioning System) can locate a point on the ground to a far greater accuracy than a standard GPS unit. A standard GPS suffers from errors created by satellite orbit errors, clock errors and atmospheric interference, resulting in an accuracy of 5m-10m. An RTK system uses a single base station receiver and a number of mobile units. The base station re-broadcasts the phase of the carrier it measured, and the mobile units compare their own phase measurements with those they received from the base station. This results in an accuracy of around 0.01m.

Technique	Instrument	Traverse Interval	Sample Interval
Magnetometer	Bartington Grad 601-2	1m	0.25m

### Instrumentation: Bartington *Grad601-2*

Bartington instruments operate in a gradiometer configuration which comprises fluxgate sensors mounted vertically, set 1.0m apart. The fluxgate gradiometer suppresses any diurnal or regional effects. The instruments are carried, or cart mounted, with the bottom sensor approximately 0.1-0.3m from the ground surface. At each survey station, the difference in the magnetic field between the two fluxgates is measured in nanoTesla (nT). The sensitivity of the instrument can be adjusted; for most archaeological surveys the most sensitive range (0.1nT) is used. Generally, features up to 1m deep may be detected by this method, though strongly magnetic objects may be visible at greater depths. The Bartington instrument can collect two lines of data per traverse with gradiometer units mounted laterally with a separation of 1.0m.

The readings are logged consecutively into the data logger which in turn is daily down-loaded into a portable computer whilst on site. At the end of each site survey, data is transferred to the office for processing and presentation.

### Data Processing

**Zero Mean Traverse** This process sets the background mean of each traverse within each grid to zero. The operation removes striping effects and edge discontinuities over the whole of the data set.

**Step Correction (Destagger)** When gradiometer data are collected in 'zig-zag' fashion, stepping errors can sometimes arise. These occur because of a slight difference in the speed of walking on the forward and reverse traverses. The result is a staggered effect in the data, which is particularly noticeable on linear anomalies. This process corrects these errors.

### Display

**Greyscale/ Colourscale Plot** This format divides a given range of readings into a set number of classes. Each class is represented by a specific shade of grey, the intensity increasing with value. All values above the given range are allocated the same shade (maximum intensity); similarly all values below the given range are represented by the minimum intensity shade. Similar plots can be produced in colour, either using a wide range of colours or by selecting two or three colours to represent positive and negative values. The assigned range (plotting levels) can be adjusted to emphasise different anomalies in the data-set.

## Interpretation Categories

In certain circumstances (usually when there is corroborative evidence from desk based or excavation data) very specific interpretations can be assigned to magnetic anomalies (for example, *Roman Road, Wall*, etc.) and where appropriate, such interpretations will be applied. The list below outlines the generic categories commonly used in the interpretation of the results.

<i>Archaeology/Probable Archaeology</i>	This term is used when the form, nature and pattern of the response are clearly or very probably archaeological and /or if corroborative evidence is available. These anomalies, whilst considered anthropogenic, could be of any age.
<i>Possible Archaeology</i>	These anomalies exhibit either weak signal strength and / or poor definition, or form incomplete archaeological patterns, thereby reducing the level of confidence in the interpretation. Although the archaeological interpretation is favoured, they may be the result of variable soil depth, plough damage or even aliasing as a result of data collection orientation.
<i>Industrial / Burnt-Fired</i>	Strong magnetic anomalies that, due to their shape and form or the context in which they are found, suggest the presence of kilns, ovens, corn dryers, metal- working areas or hearths. It should be noted that in many instances modern ferrous material can produce similar magnetic anomalies.
<i>Former Field Boundary (probable &amp; possible)</i>	Anomalies that correspond to former boundaries indicated on historic mapping, or which are clearly a continuation of existing land divisions. Possible denotes less confidence where the anomaly may not be shown on historic mapping but nevertheless the anomaly displays all the characteristics of a field boundary.
<i>Ridge &amp; Furrow</i>	Parallel linear anomalies whose broad spacing suggests ridge and furrow cultivation. In some cases the response may be the result of more recent agricultural activity.
<i>Agriculture (ploughing)</i>	Parallel linear anomalies or trends with a narrower spacing, sometimes aligned with existing boundaries, indicating more recent cultivation regimes.
<i>Land Drain</i>	Weakly magnetic linear anomalies, quite often appearing in series forming parallel and herringbone patterns. Smaller drains will often lead and empty into larger diameter pipes and which in turn usually lead to local streams and ponds. These are indicative of clay fired land drains.
<i>Natural</i>	These responses form clear patterns in geographical zones where natural variations are known to produce significant magnetic distortions.
<i>Magnetic Disturbance</i>	Broad zones of strong dipolar anomalies, commonly found in places where modern ferrous or fired materials (e.g. brick rubble) are present. They are presumed to be modern.
<i>Service</i>	Magnetically strong anomalies usually forming linear features indicative of ferrous pipes/cables. Sometimes other materials (e.g. pvc) cause weaker magnetic responses and can be identified from their uniform linearity crossing large expanses.
<i>Ferrous</i>	This type of response is associated with ferrous material and may result from small items in the topsoil, larger buried objects such as pipes, or above ground features such as fence lines or pylons. Ferrous responses are usually regarded as modern. Individual burnt stones, fired bricks or igneous rocks can produce responses similar to ferrous material.
<i>Uncertain Origin</i>	Anomalies which stand out from the background magnetic variation, yet whose form and lack of patterning gives little clue as to their origin. Often the characteristics and distribution of the responses straddle the categories of <i>Possible Archaeology</i> and <i>Possible Natural</i> or (in the case of linear responses) <i>Possible Archaeology</i> and <i>Possible Agriculture</i> ; occasionally they are simply of an unusual form.

Where appropriate some anomalies will be further classified according to their form (positive or negative) and relative strength and coherence (trend: weak and poorly defined).

## Appendix B - Technical Information: Magnetic Theory

Detailed magnetic survey can be used to effectively define areas of past human activity by mapping spatial variation and contrast in the magnetic properties of soil, subsoil and bedrock. Although the changes in the magnetic field resulting from differing features in the soil are usually weak, changes as small as 0.2 nanoTeslas (nT) in an overall field strength of 48,000nT, can be accurately detected.

Weakly magnetic iron minerals are always present within the soil and areas of enhancement relate to increases in *magnetic susceptibility* and permanently magnetised *thermoremanent* material.

Magnetic susceptibility relates to the induced magnetism of a material when in the presence of a magnetic field. This magnetism can be considered as effectively permanent as it exists within the Earth's magnetic field. Magnetic susceptibility can become enhanced due to burning and complex biological or fermentation processes.

Thermoremanence is a permanent magnetism acquired by iron minerals that, after heating to a specific temperature known as the Curie Point, are effectively demagnetised followed by re-magnetisation by the Earth's magnetic field on cooling. Thermoremanent archaeological features can include hearths and kilns and material such as brick and tile may be magnetised through the same process.

Silting and deliberate infilling of ditches and pits with magnetically enhanced soil creates a relative contrast against the much lower levels of magnetism within the subsoil into which the feature is cut. Systematic mapping of magnetic anomalies will produce linear and discrete areas of enhancement allowing assessment and characterisation of subsurface features. Material such as subsoil and non-magnetic bedrock used to create former earthworks and walls may be mapped as areas of lower enhancement compared to surrounding soils.

Magnetic survey is carried out using a fluxgate gradiometer which is a passive instrument consisting of two sensors mounted vertically 1m apart. The instrument is carried about 30cm above the ground surface and the top sensor measures the Earth's magnetic field whilst the lower sensor measures the same field but is also more affected by any localised buried field. The difference between the two sensors will relate to the strength of a magnetic field created by a buried feature, if no field is present the difference will be close to zero as the magnetic field measured by both sensors will be the same.

Factors affecting the magnetic survey may include soil type, local geology, previous human activity, disturbance from modern services etc.

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