

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY REPORT

STRATASCAN™



Project name:

Land East of Northampton Road, Brackley, Northants.

Client:

Albion Archaeology

December 2013

Job ref:

J6141

Report author:

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Techniques:

**Detailed magnetic survey –
Gradiometry**

Survey date:

2nd - 4th December 2013

Site centred at:

SP 591 381

Post code:

NN13 7DD

Field team:

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1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A detailed gradiometry survey was conducted over approximately 9.8 hectares of agricultural land. Within the survey data, a number of clear, positive anomalies have been identified as being of archaeological origin. These include curvi-linear and circular features, located in the north, and ridge and furrow ploughing across the western side of the survey area. There are also a small number of linear and curvi-linear anomalies, possibly indicating cut features and a spread of positive point features indicating the presence of pits. An area of possible pit features is also present in the north of the survey area.

There is also a modern electrical service located to the north of the site, as well as areas of magnetic disturbance, isolated magnetic spikes and natural geological variation. A modern field boundary or ditch is also present in the south east of the survey area.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 *Background synopsis*

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

2.2 *Site location*

The site is located on the north western outskirts of Brackley, Northants. at OS ref. SP 591 381.

2.3 *Description of site*

The survey area is approximately 9.8 hectares of agricultural land, currently under pasture, with a west to east downhill slope running across the site. The northern and southern areas of the site are divided by a hedgerow and hedgerows also surround the site on all sides. A small area of the site in the north east corner was unsurveyable due to dense foliage. The site sits between the A43 road to the east and Northampton Road to the west.

2.4 *Geology and soils*

The underlying geology is Taynton Limestone Formation - Limestone, Ooidal. (British Geological Survey website). There is no recorded drift geology (British Geological Survey website).

The overlying soils are known as Aberford which are typical shallow, locally brashy, well drained calcareous fine loamy soils over limestone. There are also some deeper calcareous soils in colluvium (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 6 South East England).

2.5 *Site history and archaeological potential*

The following has been taken from the Written Scheme of Investigation provided by Albion Archaeology (Albion Archaeology 2013):

“The desk-based assessment identified the presence to the north of the site of a number of undated burials and other features, found during construction of a petrol station in 1990. Iron Age pottery was found in association with the burials but they were thought to be later in date.

The assessment also identified the presence of ridge and furrow earthworks in the northern part of the site. These represent the remains of the pre-Enclosure open field system, and may also mask features of earlier date.

Since then, evaluation on the Brackley Sawmills site on the western side of Northampton Road has identified further features of definite Iron Age date, including postholes and a ditch terminus. Thus, it is now thought much more likely that there is a focus of Iron Age activity at or near the northern end of the development site.

To the north of the Sawmills site, an evaluation in 2012 identified part of a mid to late Iron Age settlement likely to be connected with the activity at the Sawmills, and including a number of probable roundhouses (Northamptonshire Archaeology 2012).

On the south side of Turweston Road a recent evaluation (ULAS 2013) has identified mid to late Iron Age settlement and some evidence for early Saxon activity. While some of the activity was associated with fluvial deposits at the southern end of the site, the main focus seems to have been to the north, near to Turweston Road.”

2.6 Survey objectives

The objective of the survey was to locate any features of possible archaeological origin in order that they may be assessed prior to development.

2.7 Survey methods

This report and all fieldwork have been conducted in accordance with both the English Heritage guidelines outlined in the document: *Geophysical Survey in Archaeological Field Evaluation, 2008* and with the Institute for Archaeologists document *Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Geophysical Survey*.

Detailed magnetic survey (gradiometry) was used as an efficient and effective method of locating archaeological anomalies. More information regarding this technique is included in the Methodology section below and in Appendix A.

2.8 **Processing, presentation and interpretation of results**

2.8.1 **Processing**

Processing is performed using specialist software. This can emphasise various aspects contained within the data but which are often not easily seen in the raw data. Basic processing of the magnetic data involves 'flattening' the background levels with respect to adjacent traverses and adjacent grids. Once the basic processing has flattened the background it is then possible to carry out further processing which may include low pass filtering to reduce 'noise' in the data and hence emphasise the archaeological or man-made anomalies.

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

1. *Destripe* (Removes striping effects caused by zero-point discrepancies between different sensors and walking directions)
2. *Destagger* (Removes zigzag effects caused by inconsistent walking speeds on sloping, uneven or overgrown terrain)

2.8.2 **Presentation of results and interpretation**

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

3 **RESULTS**

The detailed magnetic gradiometer survey conducted at Brackley, Northants. has identified a number of anomalies that have been characterised as being either of a *probable* or *possible* archaeological origin.

The difference between *probable* and *possible* archaeological origin is a confidence rating. Features identified within the dataset that form recognisable archaeological patterns or seem to be related to a deliberate historical act have been interpreted as being of a probable archaeological origin.

Features of possible archaeological origin tend to be more amorphous anomalies which may have similar magnetic attributes in terms of strength or polarity but are difficult to classify as being archaeological or natural.

The following list of numbered anomalies refers to numerical labels on the interpretation plots.

3.1 **Probable Archaeology**

- 1 Widely spaced curving parallel linear anomalies probably related to ridge and furrow.
- 2 Roughly circular and curvilinear positive anomalies, indicating cut features of an archaeological origin. These are probably ring ditches or enclosures.

3.2 Possible Archaeology

- 3 Positive linear and curvi-linear anomalies indicative of possible cut features of archaeological origin. These may be ditches or field boundaries.
- 4 Regular positive point features indicative of areas of pitting of an archaeological origin.
- 5 Area of weak, positive anomalies possibly indicative of cut features of an archaeological origin.

3.3 Other Anomalies

- 6 Linear anomaly related to electrical service and associated concrete base.
- 7 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.
- 8 A number of magnetic 'spikes' (strong focussed values with associated antipolar response) indicate ferrous metal objects. These are likely to be modern rubbish.
- 9 Area of amorphous magnetic variation, probably of a natural geological or pedological origin.
- 10 Linear anomaly related to modern field boundary or ditch.

4 CONCLUSION

The site is considered to have a moderate archaeological potential due to its location within an Iron Age/medieval landscape, and the survey has indicated areas of probable and possible archaeology across the survey area. These anomalies include numerous curvi-linear and roughly circular anomalies that are indicative of ditches, field boundaries and enclosures, as well as areas of pitting. Ridge and furrow ploughing is also present across the entire western side of the survey area, and the undulations in the ground caused by this activity were clearly visible on site.

To the north of the survey area, an area of concentrated curvi-linear and roughly-circular features indicate the presence of ring ditches and enclosures, whilst a number of pit features are also present. These features go some way to corroborating the hypothesis "*that there is a focus of Iron Age activity at or near the northern end of the development site*" stated in the W.S.I (Albion Archaeology 2013).

In the east of the survey area, weaker linear features and an area of weak positive anomalies are indicative of possible field boundaries and cut features of an archaeological origin. Within the southern extent of the survey area, there is a further roughly-circular anomaly and a pair of curvi-linear anomalies, although due to their isolated nature further interpretation is difficult, but the presence of similar features on the site they are likely to be archaeological in origin.

The other anomalies visible within the survey data are thought to be modern or natural in origin. These include an electrical service and associated concrete base in the north west of the site, as well as areas of magnetic disturbance, isolated magnetic spikes and natural magnetic variation spread throughout the survey area. A modern field boundary is also visible to the south east of the site.

5 REFERENCES

British Geological Survey South Sheet, 1977. *Geological Survey Ten Mile Map, South Sheet First Edition (Quaternary)*. Institute of Geological Sciences.

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British Geological Survey, n.d., *website*:
(<http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/home.html?Accordion1=1#maps>) Geology of Britain viewer.

Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983. *Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 6 South East England*.

English Heritage, 2008. *Geophysical Survey in Archaeological Field Evaluation*.

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APPENDIX A – METHODOLOGY & SURVEY EQUIPMENT

Grid locations

The location of the survey grids has been plotted together with the referencing information. Grids were set out using a Leica 705auto Total Station and referenced to suitable topographic features around the perimeter of the site or a Leica Smart Rover RTK GPS.

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. A SmartNet RTK GPS uses Ordnance Survey's network of over 100 fixed base stations to give an accuracy of around 0.01m.

Survey equipment and gradiometer configuration

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 using an appropriate instrument.

The mapping of the anomaly in a systematic manner will allow an estimate of the type of material present beneath the surface. Strong magnetic anomalies will be generated by buried iron-based objects or by kilns or hearths. More subtle anomalies such as pits and ditches can be seen if they contain more humic material which is normally rich in magnetic iron oxides when compared with the subsoil.

To illustrate this point, the cutting and subsequent silting or backfilling of a ditch may result in a larger volume of weakly magnetic material being accumulated in the trench compared to the undisturbed subsoil. A weak magnetic anomaly should therefore appear in plan along the line of the ditch.

The magnetic survey was carried out using a dual sensor Grad601-2 Magnetic Gradiometer manufactured by Bartington Instruments Ltd. The instrument consists of two fluxgates very accurately aligned to nullify the effects of the Earth's magnetic field. Readings relate to the difference in localised magnetic anomalies compared with the general magnetic background. The Grad601-2 consists of two high stability fluxgate gradiometers suspended on a single frame. Each gradiometer has a 1m separation between the sensing elements so enhancing the response to weak anomalies.

Sampling interval

Readings were taken at 0.25m centres along traverses 1m apart. This equates to 3600 sampling points in a full 30m x 30m grid.

Depth of scan and resolution

The Grad 601-2 has a typical depth of penetration of 0.5m to 1.0m, though strongly magnetic objects may be visible at greater depths. The collection of data at 0.25m centres provides an optimum methodology for the task balancing cost and time with resolution.

Data capture

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.

APPENDIX B – BASIC PRINCIPLES OF MAGNETIC SURVEY

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.

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.

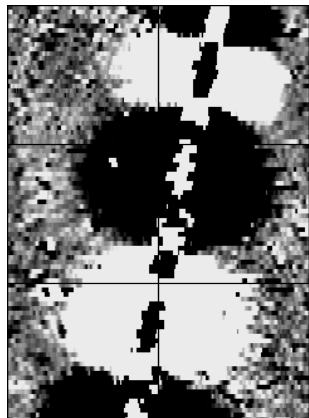
Silting and deliberate infilling of ditches and pits with magnetically enhanced soil creates a relative contrast against the much lower levels of magnetism within the subsoil into which the feature is cut. Systematic mapping of magnetic anomalies will produce linear and discrete areas of enhancement 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.

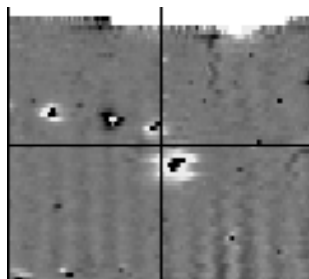
APPENDIX C – GLOSSARY OF MAGNETIC ANOMALIES

Bipolar



A bipolar anomaly is one that is composed of both a positive response and a negative response. It can be made up of any number of positive responses and negative responses. For example a pipeline consisting of alternating positive and negative anomalies is said to be bipolar. See also dipolar which has only one area of each polarity. The interpretation of the anomaly will depend on the magnitude of the magnetic field strength. A weak response may be caused by a clay field drain while a strong response will probably be caused by a metallic service.

Dipolar

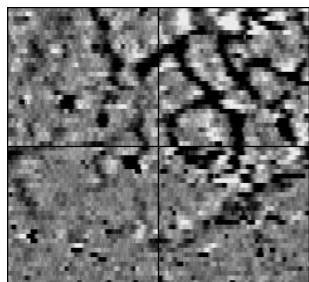


This consists of a single positive anomaly with an associated negative response. There should be no separation between the two polarities of response. These responses will be created by a single feature. The interpretation of the anomaly will depend on the magnitude of the magnetic measurements. A very strong anomaly is likely to be caused by a ferrous object.

Positive anomaly with associated negative response

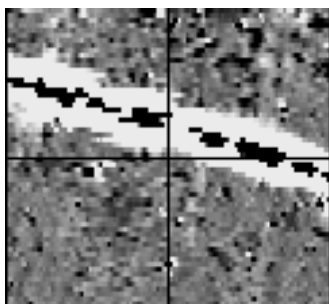
See bipolar and dipolar.

Positive linear



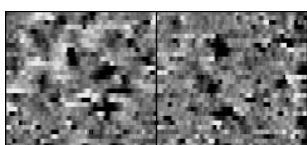
A linear response which is entirely positive in polarity. These are usually related to in-filled cut features where the fill material is magnetically enhanced compared to the surrounding matrix. They can be caused by ditches of an archaeological origin, but also former field boundaries, ploughing activity and some may even have a natural origin.

Positive linear anomaly with associated negative response



A positive linear anomaly which has a negative anomaly located adjacently. This will be caused by a single feature. In the example shown this is likely to be a single length of wire/cable probably relating to a modern service. Magnetically weaker responses may relate to earthwork style features and field boundaries.

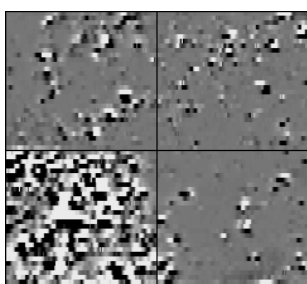
Positive point/area



depressions in the ground.

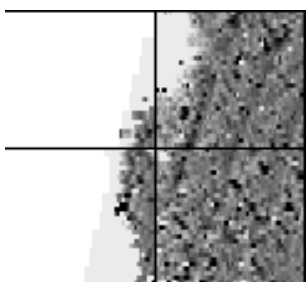
These are generally spatially small responses, perhaps covering just 3 or 4 reading nodes. They are entirely positive in polarity. Similar to positive linear anomalies they are generally caused by in-filled cut features. These include pits of an archaeological origin, possible tree bowls or other naturally occurring

Magnetic debris



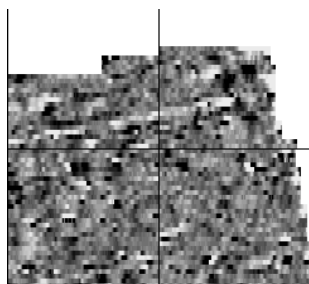
Magnetic debris consists of numerous dipolar responses spread over an area. If the amplitude of response is low ($\pm 3\text{nT}$) then the origin is likely to represent general ground disturbance with no clear cause, it may be related to something as simple as an area of dug or mixed earth. A stronger anomaly ($\pm 250\text{nT}$) is more indicative of a spread of ferrous debris. Moderately strong anomalies may be the result of a spread of thermoremanent material such as bricks or ash.

Magnetic disturbance



Magnetic disturbance is high amplitude and can be composed of either a bipolar anomaly, or a single polarity response. It is essentially associated with magnetic interference from modern ferrous structures such as fencing, vehicles or buildings, and as a result is commonly found around the perimeter of a site near to boundary fences.

Negative linear

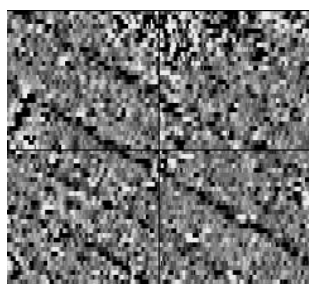


A linear response which is entirely negative in polarity. These are generally caused by earthen banks where material with a lower magnetic magnitude relative the background top soil is built up. See also ploughing activity.

Negative point/area

Opposite to positive point anomalies these responses may be caused by raised areas or earthen banks. These could be of an archaeological origin or may have a natural origin.

Ploughing activity



Ploughing activity can often be visualised by a series of parallel linear anomalies. These can be of either positive polarity or negative polarity depending on site specifics. It can be difficult to distinguish between ancient ploughing and more modern ploughing, clues such as the separation of each linear, straightness, strength of response and cross cutting relationships can be used to aid this, although none of these can be guaranteed to differentiate between different phases of activity.

Polarity

Term used to describe the measurement of the magnetic response. An anomaly can have a positive polarity (values above 0nT) and/or a negative polarity (values below 0nT).

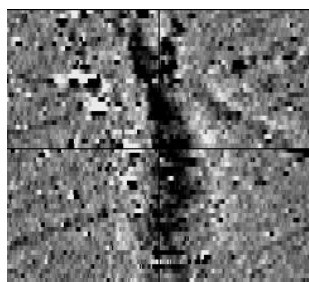
Strength of response

The amplitude of a magnetic response is an important factor in assigning an interpretation to a particular anomaly. For example a positive anomaly covering a 10m² area may have values up to around 3000nT, in which case it is likely to be caused by modern magnetic interference. However, the same size and shaped anomaly but with values up to only 4nT may have a natural origin. Colour plots are used to show the amplitude of response.

Thermoremanent response

A feature which has been subject to heat may result in it acquiring a magnetic field. This can be anything up to approximately +/-100 nT in value. These features include clay fired drains, brick, bonfires, kilns, hearths and even pottery. If the heat application has occurred in situ (e.g. a kiln) then the response is likely to be bipolar compared to if the heated objects have been disturbed and moved relative to each other, in which case they are more likely to take an irregular form and may display a debris style response (e.g. ash).

Weak background variations



Weakly magnetic wide scale variations within the data can sometimes be seen within sites. These usually have no specific structure but can often appear curvy and sinuous in form. They are likely to be the result of natural features, such as soil creep, dried up (or seasonal) streams. They can also be caused by changes in the underlying geology or soil type which may contain unpredictable distributions of magnetic minerals, and are usually apparent in several locations across a site.



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