

GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY REPORT

STRATASCAN™



Project name:
Sharpness, Gloucestershire

Client:
Avon Archaeology Ltd

November 2014

Job ref:
J7386

Report author:
James Slater BSc (Hons)

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Field team:

**Robert Knight BSc (Hons),
Andrew Bateman, BSc (Hons),
Ben Stevens, Jack Larner, Christian Adams**

Techniques:

**Detailed magnetic survey –
Gradiometry**

Project manager:

Simon Haddrell BEng(Hons) AMBCS PIFA

Survey date:

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Report written By:

James Slater BSc (Hons)

Site centred at:

SO 673 013

CAD illustrations by:

Rebecca Davies BSc (Hons)

James Slater BSc (Hons)

Post code:

GL13 9NG

Checked by:

David Elks MSc AIFA

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1 SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A detailed gradiometry survey was conducted over approximately 80 hectares of arable and pasture land at Sharpness, Gloucestershire. Ridge and furrow has been identified in the north and east of the survey area, along with evidence for a former field boundary visible on mapping from 1881 to 1972.

Possible archaeological cut and earthwork features are present in various locations across the site but seem to be isolated and could be of natural or agricultural origin. Large areas of amorphous variation forming generally linear patterns could represent further ridge and furrow, and a linear anomaly could be related to a former field boundary.

The remaining features are all modern in origin and include agricultural activity, strong magnetic debris, modern buried services, disturbance associated with field boundaries or metallic objects, scattered debris and a pond drainage feature.

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 Avon Archaeology Ltd.

2.2 *Site location*

The site is located close to the River Severn near Sharpness, Gloucestershire at OS ref. SO 673 013.

2.3 *Description of site*

The survey area is approximately 80 hectares of arable and pasture land. The land to the west of the B4066 is generally arable, and the fields to the east are mostly pasture. Topography was gently undulating across most of the site.

2.4 *Geology and soils*

The underlying geology is Raglan Mudstone Formation, formed of Mudstone and Siltstone (British Geological Survey website). There is no drift geology (British Geological Survey website).

The overlying soils are known as Hodnet which are typical stagnogleyic argillic brown earths. These consist of fine and coarse loamy soils. (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 5, South West England).

2.5 **Site history and archaeological potential**

The following is taken from a desk-based assessment undertaken by Andrew Young, Avon Archaeology (2014):

“The history of human activity in the area prior to the Middle Ages is restricted to a handful of documentary sources, most notably those referring to the presence of a pre-Conquest monastic foundation, possibly as early as 8th century AD, located in the vicinity of the former Oldminster Farm.

Despite this apparent absence of activity and settlement prior to the middle ages it is clear from a very large number of recorded sites and modern archaeological investigations elsewhere along the Severn Estuary that human settlement has been intense and continuous along the margins of the estuary since at least the Neolithic period, some 6000 years ago”.

A substantial number of Medieval and Post Medieval ditches are thought to enclose areas of ridge and furrow in the region around Saniger Farm (Pastscape, 2014).

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 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. 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 near Sharpness, Gloucestershire 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 Two patches of scattered magnetic debris in Field 28 related to a former field boundary visible on mapping from 1881-1972.
- 2 Widely spaced parallel linears mainly across the northern and eastern parts of the site, with small areas in the west, related to ridge and furrow.

3.2 Possible Archaeology

- 3 Positive point anomalies in Fields 1 and 6, positive linear anomalies in Fields 2, 4, 7, 9, 10, 18, 20 and 21 and a group of positive amorphous features in field 20. These are all possible cut features of archaeological origin but are very isolated and could also be natural or agricultural.
- 4 Negative linear anomalies in Fields 8, 10, 22 and 28. These are all possible archaeological bank or earthwork features but could also be natural or agricultural.
- 5 Extensive areas of amorphous weakly magnetic variation, possibly representing areas of ridge and furrow, but could also be natural in origin.
- 6 Positive linear anomaly in Field 10, possibly related to a former field boundary not visible on available historic mapping.

3.3 *Other Anomalies*

- 7 A positive linear anomaly in Field 28, with an unknown origin and no recognisable archaeological form. It is probably modern in origin.
- 8 Closely spaced parallel linear anomalies generally in the north and south of the site, representing modern day agricultural activity.
- 9 An area of strong magnetic debris in Field 2 related to a former pond visible on mapping from 1888 to 1995.
- 10 Strong bipolar linear anomalies representing modern buried services.
- 11 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.
- 12 Strong magnetic debris in Fields 2, 9 and 19 associated with disturbed or made ground. 12a in Field 1 relates to bank features visible on the surface.
- 13 Scattered magnetic debris in Field 2, of modern origin.
- 14 A number of magnetic 'spikes' (strong focussed values with associated antipolar response) indicate ferrous metal objects. These are likely to be modern rubbish.
- 15 A linear anomaly bisecting Fields 23, 26 and 27, which is possibly related to drainage associated with the pond in field 23.

4 CONCLUSION

The survey at Sharpness, Gloucestershire has identified ridge and furrow features in the north and east of the site, and two patches of scattered debris relating to a historic field boundary from 1881. These are the only probable archaeological features and suggest an agricultural landscape since the medieval period. There are both positive and negative anomalies in isolated areas across the survey area which represent possible archaeological cut or earthwork features respectively, however it is not possible to determine their origin with any degree of confidence. Extensive areas of amorphous variation forming generally linear patterns could relate to further ridge and furrow activity but could also be geological in origin, and a possible former field boundary exists in field 10.

The remaining features are all modern in origin and include agricultural activity, strong magnetic debris, modern buried services, disturbance associated with field boundaries or metallic objects, scattered debris and a pond drainage feature.

Magnetometry results over mudstones can be of variable quality, and although there is some uncertainty over the extent of ridge and furrow on this site, the survey has picked up weaker anomalies which suggests any archaeology would be successfully represented.

5 REFERENCES

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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.

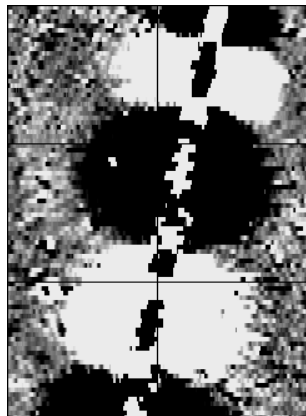
Silting and deliberate infilling of ditches and pits with magnetically enhanced soil creates a relative contrast against the much lower levels of magnetism within the subsoil into which the feature is cut. Systematic mapping of magnetic anomalies will produce linear and discrete areas of enhancement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

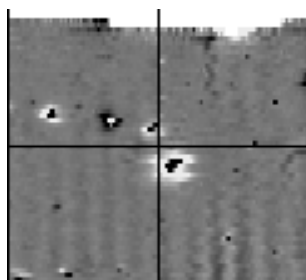
APPENDIX C – GLOSSARY OF MAGNETIC ANOMALIES

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

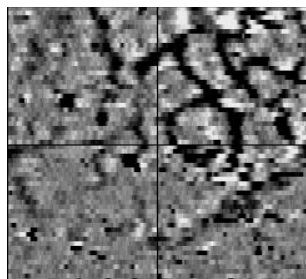


This consists of a single positive anomaly with an associated negative response. There should be no separation between the two polarities of response. These responses will be created by a single feature. The interpretation of the anomaly will depend on the magnitude of the magnetic measurements. A very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

Positive anomaly with associated negative response

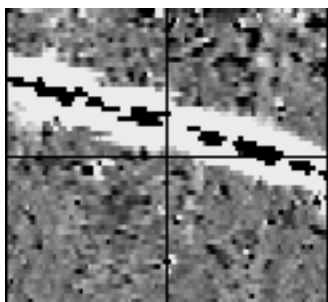
See bipolar and dipolar.

Positive linear



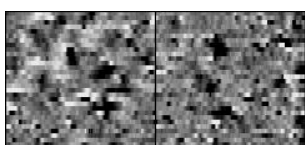
A linear response which is entirely positive in polarity. These are usually related to in-filled cut features where the fill material is magnetically enhanced compared to the surrounding matrix. They can be caused by ditches of an archaeological origin, but also former field boundaries, ploughing activity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

Positive linear anomaly with associated negative response



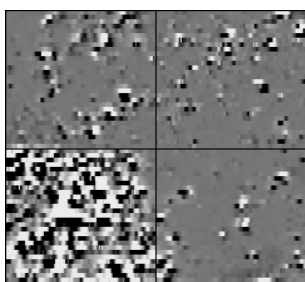
A positive linear anomaly which has a negative anomaly located adjacently. This will be caused by a single feature. In the example shown this is likely to be a single length of wire/cable probably relating to a modern service. Magnetically weaker responses may relate to earthwork style features and field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

Positive point/area



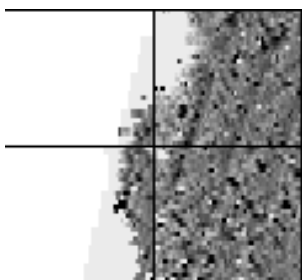
These are generally spatially small responses, perhaps covering just 3 or 4 reading nodes. They are entirely positive in polarity. Similar to positive linear anomalies they are generally caused by in-filled cut features. These include pits of an archaeological origin, possible tree bowls or other naturally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

Magnetic debris



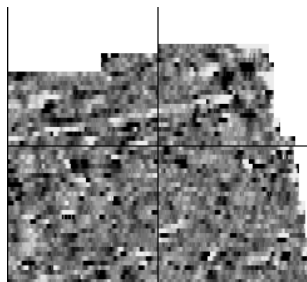
Magnetic debris consists of numerous dipolar responses spread over an area. If the amplitude of response is low ($\pm 3\text{nT}$) then the origin is likely to represent general ground disturbance with no clear cause, it may be related to something as simple as an area of dug or mixed earth. A stronger 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

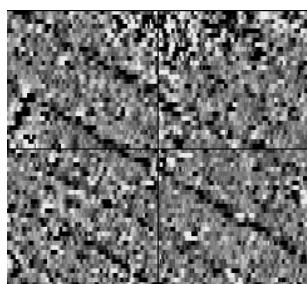


A linear response which is entirely negative in polarity. These are generally caused by earthen banks where material with a lower magnetic magnitude relative to the background top soil is built up. See also ploughing activity.

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).

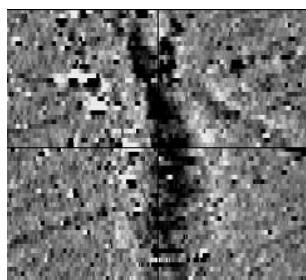
Strength of response

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.

STRATASCAN™



STRATASCAN LTD

Vineyard House Upper Hook Road Upton upon Severn
Worcestershire WR8 0SA United Kingdom

T: 01684 592266 F: 01684 594142
info@stratascan.co.uk www.stratascan.co.uk