

Project name:

Wretchwick Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Client:

**Orion Heritage** 

**July 2015** 

Job ref: J8355

Report author:

**Thomas Richardson MSc ACIfA** 

# **GEOPHYSICAL SURVEY REPORT**

Project name:

Wretchwick Farm, Bicester, Oxfordshire

Client:

**Orion Heritage** 

**Gradiometry** 



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Survey date: Report written By:

12th-19th May, 26th-29th May,
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# **SUMMARY OF RESULTS**

A detailed gradiometry survey was conducted over approximately 91.7 hectares of mixed grassland and agricultural land. A number of former enclosures have been identified, along with a number of anomalies which may be related to the deserted medieval village mentioned in the Setting Assessment of the site. Further linear anomalies and possible former pits may be of archaeological origin, though the linear features may be of agricultural origin and the latter may be natural. Evidence of ridge and furrow, former field boundaries and modern ploughing indicate a largely agricultural past. The remaining features are natural or modern and include a service, land drains, scattered magnetic debris, an area of made ground and 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 Orion Heritage.

### 2.2 Site location

The site is located to the east of Seelscheid Way (A4421), Bicester, Oxfordshire at OS ref. SP 597 212.

### 2.3 Description of site

The survey area is approximately 131 hectares, however areas of crop, overgrown vegetation, and a field containing livestock reduced the surveyable area to approximately 91.7 hectares. Details of the ground conditions and any obstructions for each field can be found in Appendix A. The site is generally flat.

### 2.4 Geology and soils

The underlying geology is Peterborough Member – Mudstone (British Geological Survey website). There is no recorded drift geology (British Geological Survey website).

The overlying soils for the majority of the site are known as Wickham 2, which are typical stagnogley soils. These consist of fine loamy and fine silty over clayey soils. An area of Denchworth is also present in the south-west of the site. These are typical pelo-stagnogley soils, and consist of clayey soils with similar fine loamy over clayey soils (Soil Survey of England and Wales, Sheet 4 Eastern England).



### 2.5 Site history and archaeological potential

A Setting Assessment conducted by CgMs (2014) shows that the site covers land surrounding and to the east of the deserted medieval village (DMV) of Wretchwick (SAM number: 1015549), which survives as earthworks. The assessment shows extensive ridge and furrow earthworks across much of the survey area, with no other recorded monuments within the survey area. This would suggest a high potential for medieval agricultural remains, with limited potential for further settlement activity relating to the DMV.

# 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 Chartered Institute for Archaeologists document Standard and Guidance for Archaeological Geophysical Survey.

Given the potential for medieval activity, 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 B.

### 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:

(Removes striping effects caused by zero-point discrepancies 1. Destripe

between different sensors and walking directions)

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.

### **RESULTS** 3

The detailed magnetic gradiometer survey conducted at Bicester 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 Negative linear and rectilinear anomalies in Fields 15 and 23. These are indicative of bank or earthwork features, and are likely to be archaeological in origin. The exact origin of these anomalies is not known, however their scale (approximately 175m from south-western to north-eastern points) suggests they are likely to be former enclosures or field boundaries.

### Possible Archaeology 3.2

- 2 Positive linear anomalies in Fields 19 and 20, adjacent to the known DMV. These are indicative of former cut features, and may relate to the DMV.
- 3 A positive anomaly in Field 19, adjacent to the known DMV. This is indicative of a former cut feature, and may relate to the DMV or be natural in origin.
- 4 Positive linear anomalies in Fields 8, 16, and 18. These are indicative of former cut features, and may be of archaeological or agricultural origin.
- 5 A negative linear anomaly in Field 13. This is indicative of a former bank or earthwork feature, and may be of archaeological or natural origin.



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> 6 A large, mottled positive anomaly in Field 6. This may relate to a plough damaged archaeological feature, or more modern activity.

> 7 A number of small discrete positive anomalies across the site. These are indicative of small former cut features, such as back filled pits, and may be of archaeological or natural origin.

### 3.3 Medieval/Post-Medieval Agriculture

- 8 Areas of widely spaced, curving, parallel linear anomalies across the site. These are indicative of ridge and furrow cultivation, and are mostly recorded as earthworks in the Setting Assessment. The ridge and furrow in Fields 5 and 20 is not recorded as earthworks.
- Two linear anomalies in Fields 19 and 20. These are likely to relate to post-9-10 medieval field boundaries not present on available mapping.
- 11 Areas of closely spaced, parallel linear anomalies across the site. These are indicative of modern agricultural origin, such as ploughing.

### 3.4 Other Anomalies

- 12 A strong bipolar linear anomaly in Field 4. This is likely to be related to a modern underground service such as a pipe.
- 13 A number of weak bipolar linear anomalies across the north of the site (Fields 5, 6, 8, 13, 15) and in Field 20. These are related to modern land drains.
- 14 A small area of amorphous magnetic variation in the centre of Field 24. This is likely to be natural, i.e. geological in origin.
- 15 A large area of strong magnetic debris in Field 23. This is likely to be modern in origin.
- 16 A number of areas of scattered magnetic debris in Fields 16 and 24. These are likely to be modern in origin.
- 17 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.
- 18 A number of magnetic 'spikes' (strong focussed values with associated antipolar response) indicate ferrous metal objects. These are likely to be modern rubbish.



# **DATA APPRAISAL & CONFIDENCE ASSESSMENT**

Mudstone geologies can give variable responses to magnetic survey. The anomalies detected correspond with the Setting Assessment, with the majority relating to medieval agricultural activity. This would suggest that the survey has been somewhat effective. However, the data is generally uniform in appearance across the majority of the site. This suggests that there is some potential for weak archaeological anomalies to be masked by geological effects.

### 5 **CONCLUSION**

The survey at Bicester has identified a number of features of probable and possible archaeological origin. Several linear anomalies, indicative of former field boundaries and enclosures, along with linear anomalies which may relate to the deserted medieval village, recorded in the Setting Assessment (CgMs, 2014) have been identified. A number of possible former backfilled pits have been identified, though their exact origin is unknown. Further linear anomalies, and area anomalies may be of archaeological origin, or relate to agricultural activity. Evidence of ridge and furrow, modern ploughing and field boundaries across the site provides further evidence that the site has largely been used for agricultural purposes since the medieval period.

The remaining features are natural or modern in origin and include a service, land drains, areas of scattered magnetic debris, an area of made ground and magnetic disturbance from nearby ferrous metal objects.



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### 6 **REFERENCES**

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(http://www.bgs.ac.uk/opengeoscience/home.html?Accordion1=1#maps) Geology of Britain viewer.

CgMS, 2014. Setting Assessment Wretchwick Deserted Medieval Village, South East Bicester, Oxfordshire

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Soil Survey of England and Wales, 1983. Soils of England and Wales, Sheet 4 Eastern England.



# **APPENDIX A – GROUND CONDITIONS & OBSTRUCTIONS**

FIELD NUMBER	GROUND CONDITIONS	OBSTRUCTIONS
1	Agricultural – arable	None
2	Agricultural – arable	Crop across field
3	Agricultural – arable	Crop across field
4	Grassland – pasture	Area of crop in north-west
5	Agricultural – arable	None
6	Agricultural – arable	None
7	Agricultural – arable	None
8	Agricultural – arable	None
9	Agricultural – arable	Area of crop in north
10	Grassland – pasture	None
11	Grassland – pasture	None
12	Grassland – pasture	None
13	Grassland – meadow	Pond in north
14	Agricultural – arable	Crop across field
15	Grassland – pasture	Pond in centre of field
16	Grassland – pasture	None
17	Grassland – pasture	Livestock
18	Grassland – pasture	None
19	Grassland – pasture	None
20	Grassland – pasture	None
21	Grassland – pasture	None
22	Agricultural – arable	Pond in south
23	Grassland – pasture	Pile of manure in west
24	Grassland – pasture	None



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# **APPENDIX B** – METHODOLOGY & SURVEY EQUIPMENT

### **Hand-held Collection**

### **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.

### Cart-Collected Data

All survey data points had their position recorded using Trimble R8 Real Time Kinematic (RTK) VRS Now GNSS equipment. The geophysical survey area is georeferenced relative to the Ordnance Survey National Grid.

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.

Technique	Instrument	Traverse Interval	Sample Interval
Magnetometer	CARTEASY <sup>N</sup> cart system	0.75m 10Hz (appro 0.125)	(approximating
	(Bartington 1000L Sensors)		0.125111)

# 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 and a CartEasyN magnetometer cart system utilizing Bartington 1000L Gradiometer sensors manufactured by Bartington Instruments Ltd. The instruments consist 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.

For cart collected data readings were taken at intervals of 0.125m along traverses 0.75m apart.

### 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 CartEasyN magnetometer cart system collects data at 10Hz which approximates 0.125m.

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 C** – 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 nonmagnetic bedrock used to create former earthworks and walls may be mapped as areas of lower enhancement compared to surrounding soils.



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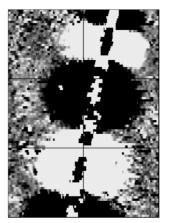
Magnetic survey is carried out using a fluxgate gradiometer which is a passive instrument consisting of two sensors mounted vertically 1m apart. The instrument is carried about 30cm above the ground surface and the top sensor measures the Earth's magnetic field whilst the lower sensor measures the same 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 D** – GLOSSARY OF MAGNETIC ANOMALIES

### **Bipolar**



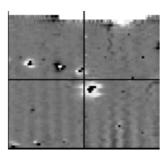
A bipolar anomaly is one that is composed of both a positive response and a negative response. It can be made up of any number of positive responses and negative responses. For example a pipeline consisting of alternating positive and negative anomalies is said to be bipolar. See also dipolar which has 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.

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### Dipolar

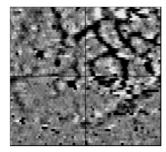


This consists of a single positive anomaly with an associated negative response. There should be no separation between the two polarities of response. These responses will be created by a single feature. The interpretation of the anomaly will depend on the magnitude of the magnetic measurements. A very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

### Positive anomaly with associated negative response

See bipolar and dipolar.

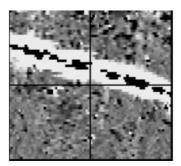
### **Positive linear**



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.

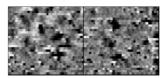


### Positive linear anomaly with associated negative response



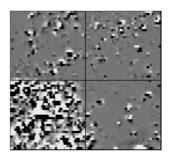
A positive linear anomaly which has a negative anomaly located adjacently. This will be caused by a single feature. In the example shown this is likely to be a single length of wire/cable probably relating to a modern service. Magnetically weaker responses may relate to earthwork style features and field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

### Positive point/area



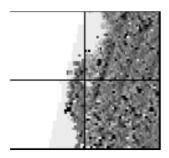
These are generally spatially small responses, perhaps covering just 3 or 4 reading nodes. They are entirely positive in polarity. Similar to positive linear anomalies they are generally caused by in-filled cut features. These include pits of an archaeological origin, possible tree bowls or other naturally 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 (+/-3nT) 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 (+/-250nT) 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.

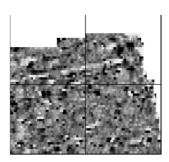
### Magnetic disturbance



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**

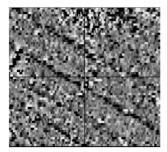


A linear response which is entirely negative in polarity. These are generally caused by earthen banks where material with a lower magnetic magnitude relative to the background top soil is built up. See also ploughing activity.

### 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 OnT) and/or a negative polarity (values below OnT).

# Strength of response

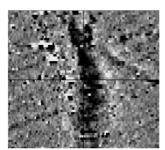
The amplitude of a magnetic response is an important factor in assigning an interpretation to a particular anomaly. For example a positive anomaly covering a 10m<sup>2</sup> area may have values up to around 3000nT, in which case it is likely to be caused by modern magnetic interference. However, the 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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