



Cambridge Archaeology Field Group

***Field walking and metal detecting at
Belham Hill, Childerley Estate***

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Investigations at Belham Hill, Childerley Estate

The National Archaeological Identification Survey (NAIS) for South-West Cambridgeshire is an Historic England project covering an area from Fenstanton down to Royston. It uses a combination of aerial photography and airborne Lidar (laser scanning) to identify possible archaeological features in the area. Part of the results for Belham Hill on the Childerley Estate are shown in Figure 1.

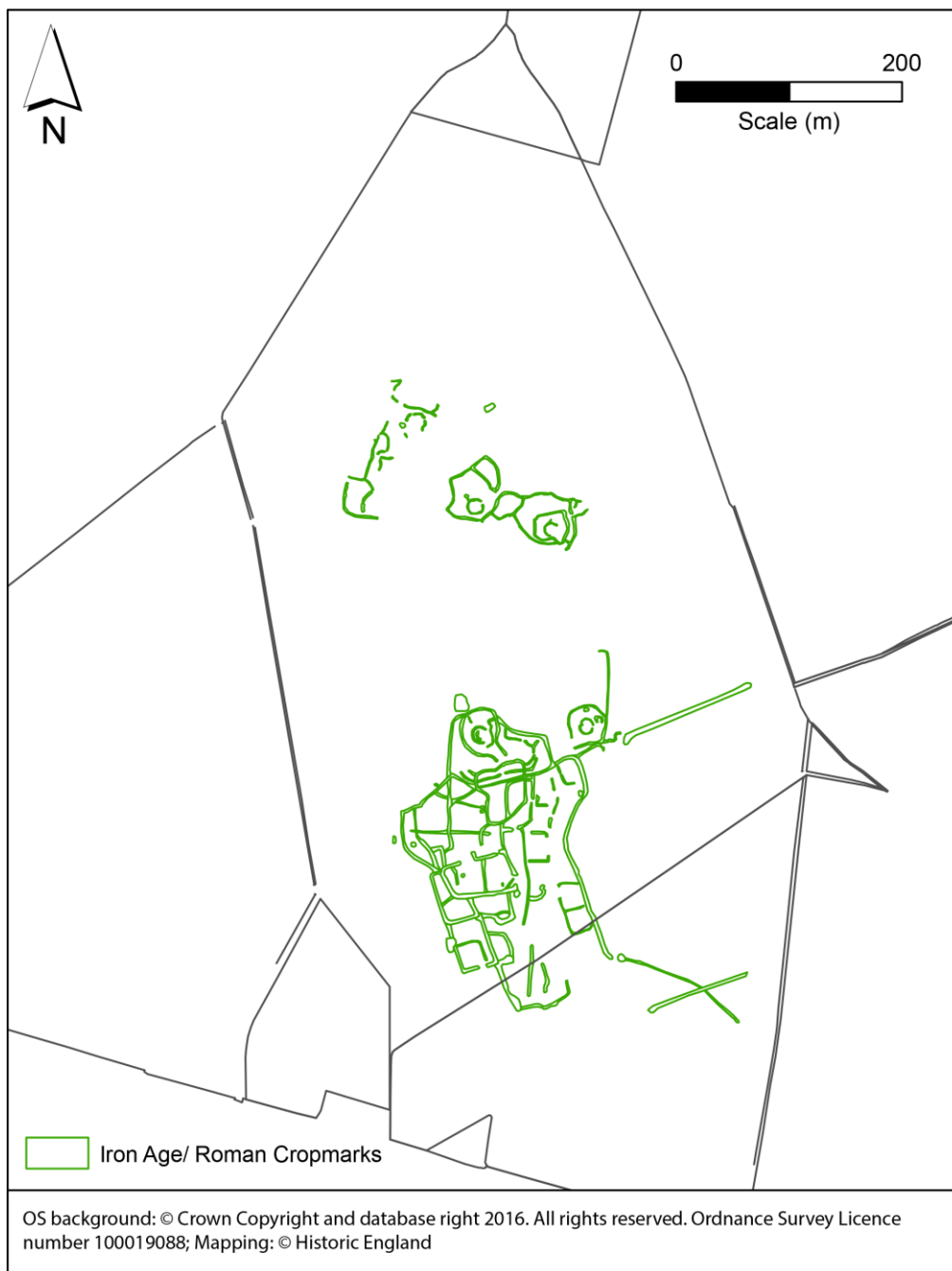


Figure 1. Part of NAIS survey area showing field features identified at Belham Hill,

This shows a series of ditched and circular features, typical of settlements dating to the Iron Age/Roman period, lying to the north of the old A428 road. Historic England asked if Cambridge Archaeology Field Group (CAFG) could field walk the Belham Hill area to see whether there was any surface evidence to back up these interpretation results. The Childerley Estate has been a target area for CAFG over a number of years, with the active support of the Jenkins family.

Location and topography

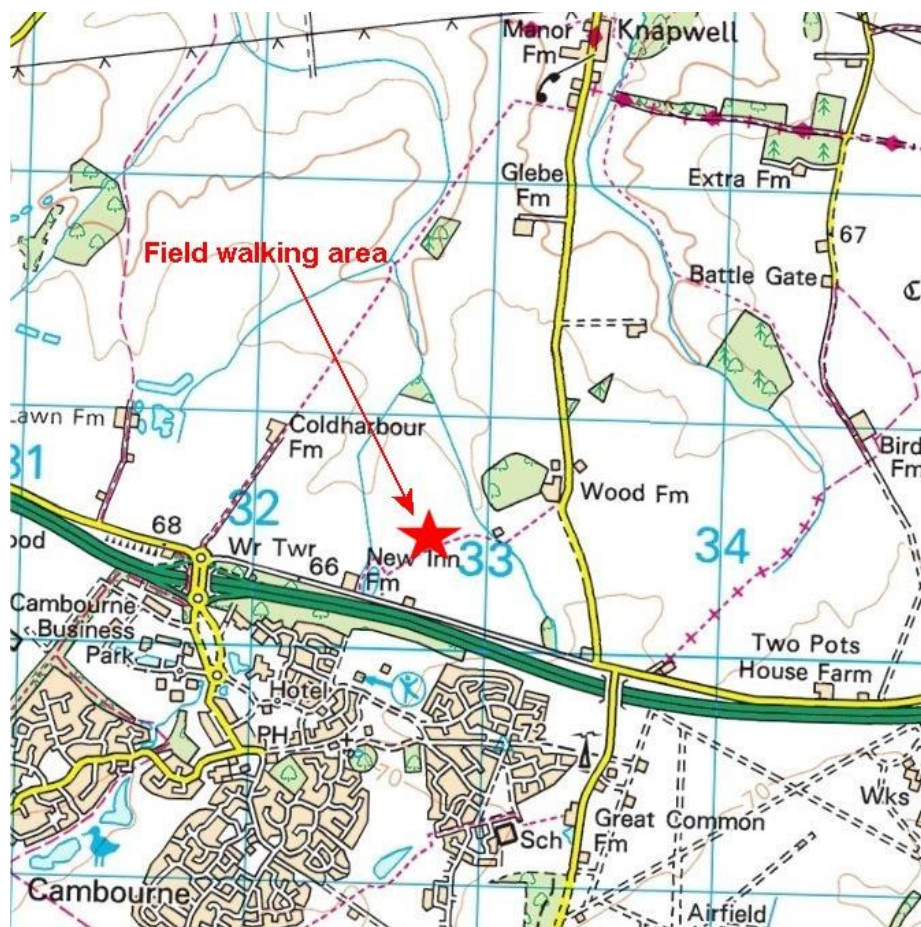


Figure 2. Area map showing places in the vicinity of our field walking.

The Childerley estate lies mainly in the parish of Childerley but extends westwards into the parishes of Boxworth and Knapwell. The eastern boundary of the estate corresponds to the parish boundary with Dry Drayton while to the north is the parish of Lolworth. The southern boundary is marked by the modern A428 road from Cambridge to St Neots, while the town of Cambridge itself lies about 9km (5 miles) to the east.

The estate lies on a heavy clay soil which is derived from boulder clay overlying chalk and, as seen during the wet winter/early springs, can become waterlogged very easily. The ground falls from c70m high in the south to 45m in the north-east of the estate. The field at Belham Hill is surrounded on three sides by drains and by the old A428 road and a fishing lake at New Farm to the south, as shown in Figure 2.

What previous knowledge is there in the area concerned ?

The immediate area of Belham Hill, which lies some 250m north of the old A428 road, has very few recorded entries on the Cambridgeshire HER. Those that exist mostly refer to the landscape and architecture around Knapwell village, which lies nearly 2.5km north-north-east of our field walked area. Others cover the new settlement of Cambourne immediately to the south of the old A428 road.

CAFG field walking programme

The field walking programme for Belham Hill started in the Autumn of 2016 with the field rough scraped prior to harrowing and drilling. The usual format of walking transects 10m apart in the direction of the cultivation lines was used, the lines being approximately parallel to the eastern field boundary. Finds were picked up and bagged every 10m, with the bags attached to canes marking their position. Subsequently the bags were tagged and the positions of the canes recorded using a hand-held Garmin eTrex GPS to produce a list of OS co-ordinates for mapping.

Results of the CAFG field walking

Pottery and building material from most periods were recovered, as shown in Table 1. The column labelled “Unc” are pieces that could not be positively identified but could contain more Roman period pieces. There were seven items including 2 pieces of lava quern stone and 3 pieces of slag listed under the heading “Others”. Appendix 1 shows comparative pottery distributions for the major classification types.

Pottery pieces					B/T pieces		Flint			Other
Pr/Sax	Rom	Med	PMed	Unc	Rom	PMed	Glass	Struck	Burnt	
0	98	1	47	24	4	74	9	9	5	7

Table 1. Total number of pieces found in each category.

Figure 3 shows the plot for only the Roman pottery finds over the field, with the size of the spot related to the number of pieces found at each point. This clearly shows an area of concentrated finds from the Roman period, with relatively few Roman finds found elsewhere in the surrounding area of the field.

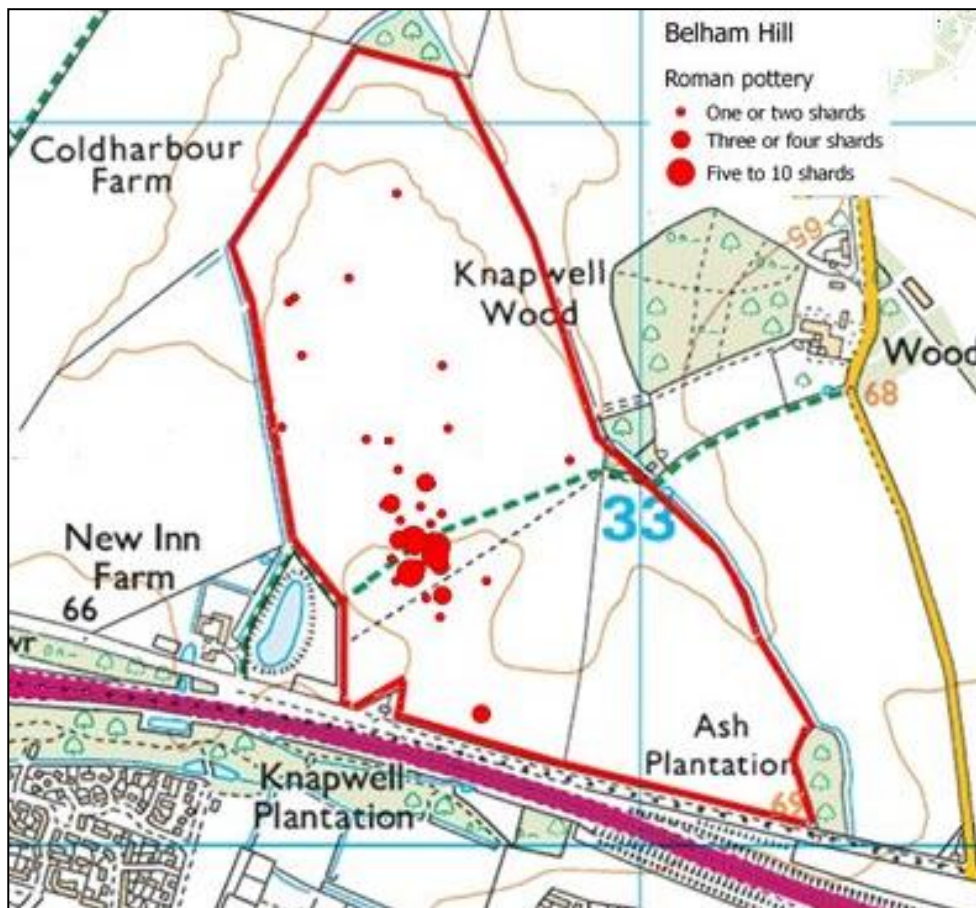


Figure 3. Area map showing the plot of Roman pottery finds.

Comparison with the Historic England Lidar/aerial plot in Figure 1 shows that the area of Roman pottery concentration coincides very well with the ditched features shown in the lower area of the field. The area of smaller ditched features to the north of the field does not correspond with any significant concentration of Roman pottery. .Due to the isolated and vulnerable nature of the site, it was decided to carry out a metal detector sweep of the area showing the highest density of pottery finds with the aim of acquiring additional dating evidence if possible. The weather conditions at the time and the state of cultivation of the field meant that conditions were not ideal but Appendix 2 lists the finds recovered.

Pottery finds evaluation.

Although the pottery recovered by our field walking is mostly abraded smaller pieces, it is possible to do some analysis of the pottery types found. Although a full analysis has not yet been carried out, it is possible to draw some conclusions. Table 2 compares the probable Roman type quantities, listed by description, found during the field walking.

Description	Total	Description	Total
Samian	1	Red - (fine)	1
Colour coat	1	- (coarse)	40 (1 base, 15 rim)
Shell tempered	11 (4 rim)	Buff/pink	5
Black/burnished	1	White/parchment	1
Grey - (fine)	1 (base)	Mortaria	0
- (coarse)	26 (4 base, 4 rim)	Unclassified	12

Table 2 Summary of probable Roman pottery types found by this field walking.

The definitions by colour, such as Grey, Red, Buff/pink and White etc. refer to the outer surface colour so that a piece labelled Red may have a grey coloured core.

Discussion

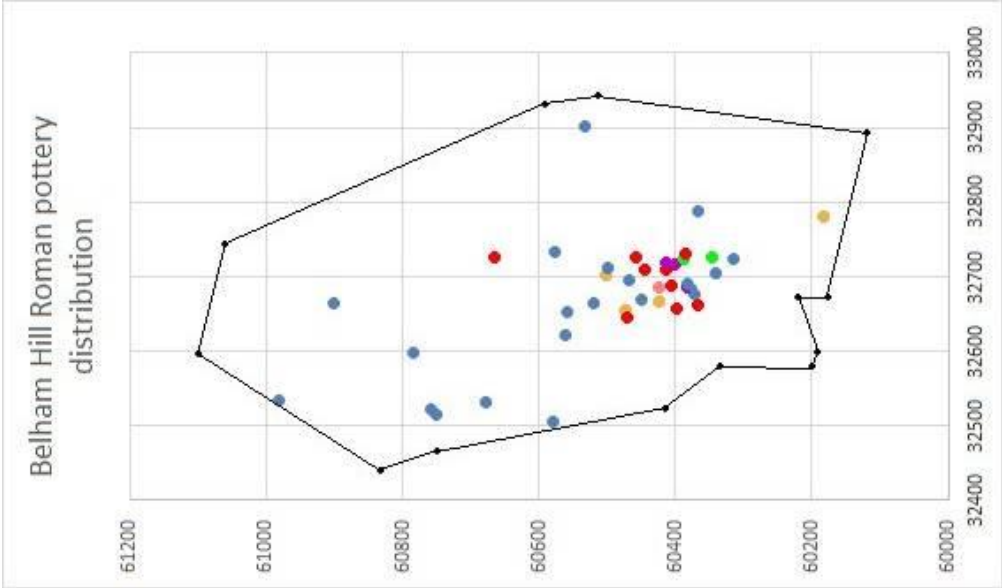
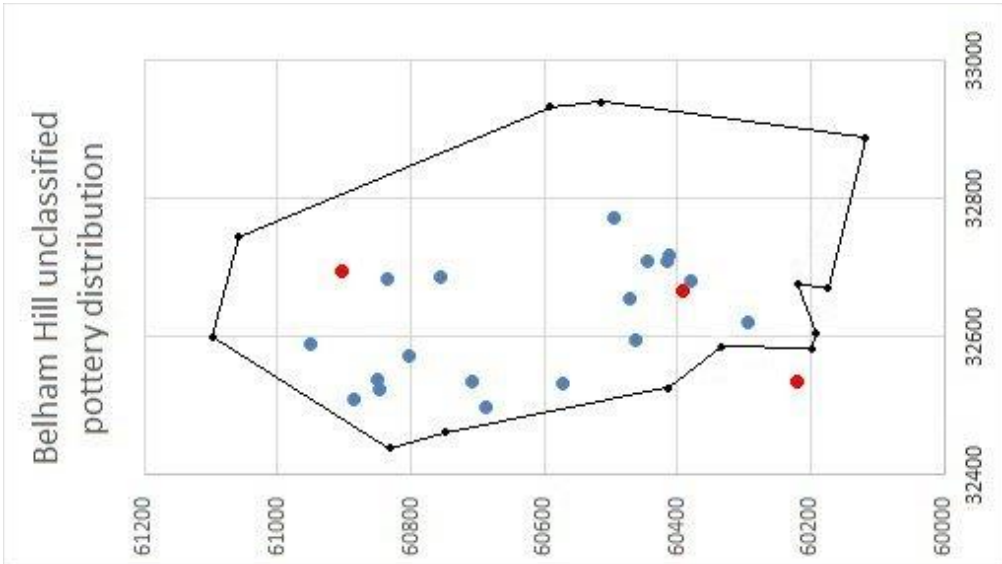
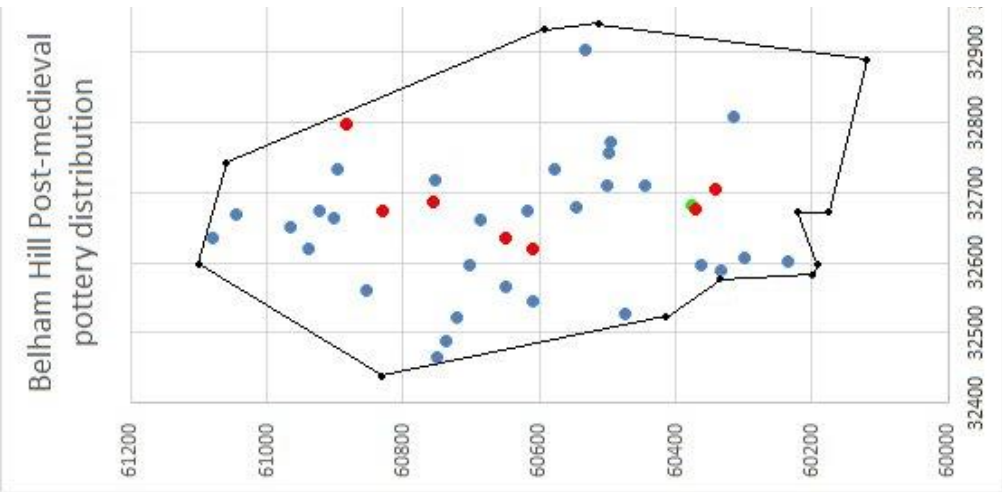
Although absolute identifications by an expert have not been obtained at present, a first impression is that the pottery does not suggest that this is a high status Roman site. The absence of significant quantities of higher status pottery, like Samian and Nene Valley colour-coat, is typical of many field-walked Roman farm sites in this area. The lack of high value coins recovered by metal detecting would also tend to reinforce this view (see Appendix 2). There is a lack of medieval finds which suggests that the site was only occupied in the 3rd/4th C (from the coin evidence) and deserted thereafter.

The pottery distributions plotted in Appendix 1 confirm the tight cluster of Roman finds is co-incident with the Historic England aerial/lidar interpretation. The post-medieval plot shows the overall scatter of pottery and CBM typical of non-settlement areas of farming manuring practices.

Appendix 1. Comparison of pottery distributions

Key to number of pieces

- = 1
- = 2
- = 3
- = 4
- = 9
- = 10



Appendix 2. Metal detecting at Belham Hill

Find No.	Finder	Fabric	Wt. (grm)	Period	Description	PAS Unique ID
1	DS	Lead	31.3	Early medieval	Possible gaming piece or weight	PUBLIC-A2DB21
2	DS	Cu alloy	1.7	Roman	Coin - nummus of unknown date, possibly a copy c.AD220 - 402	PUBLIC-A2ABB1
3	DS	Cu alloy	5.5	Roman	Coin - possibly a nummus but of unusual size c.AD200 - 400	PUBLIC-91979C
4	DS	Cu alloy	6.7	Unknown	Possible metal working/casting waste	PUBLIC-910295
5	DS	Cu alloy	1.6	Roman	Coin - incomplete nummus possibly of House of Constantine c.AD317 - 364	PUBLIC-90C05E
6	DS	Cu rich	18.3	Unknown	Possible metal working/casting waste	PUBLIC-8FD951
7	DS	Cu alloy	2.3	Medieval	Harness ring - badly corroded, differential wear on one side	PUBLIC-8F6D8A
8	DS	Cu alloy	1.3	Roman	Coin - nummus of unknown date, possibly Valentinian I or II c.AD391 - 392	PUBLIC-918FCF
9	DS	Silver	2.1	Roman?	Undecorated finger ring - circular and with D-shaped cross-section	PUBLIC-802431
10	DS	Cu alloy	51.7	Post medieval	Barrel tap - possibly 17th/18th C	PUBLIC-7FB1BE
11	DS	Cu alloy	0.7	Roman	Coin - cut down nummus, possibly Constantine II c.AD355 - 357	PUBLIC-188B07
12	DS	Lead	6.5	Roman	Undecorated possible gaming piece or weight	PUBLIC-17E244
13	DS	Cu alloy	4.6	Roman	Coin - radiate of Carausius AD286 - 293	PUBLIC-057642
14	DS	Cu alloy	1,8	Roman	Coin - worn radiate of unknown Emperor c.AD260 - 275	PUBLIC-30E75B
15	DS	Cu alloy	1	Roman	Coin - incomplete nummus of House of Constantine c.AD336 - 342	PUBLIC-2EFD38
16	DS	Cu alloy	1,7	Roman	Coin - nummus of House of Constantine c.AD332 - 3	PUBLIC-04BC67
17	DS	Cu alloy	1.7	Roman	Coin - nummus of Constantine c.AD321	PUBLIC-15077A
18	DS	Cu alloy	0.3	Roman	Coin - fragment of a possible copy c.AD270 - 300	PUBLIC-138E2E
19	DS	Cu alloy	2.6	Roman	Coin - nummus of House of Constantine c.AD330 - 348	PUBLIC-146823
20	DS	Cu alloy	2.1	Roman	Coin - nummus of either Constantine II or Constans c.AD345 - 347	PUBLIC-133493
21	DS	Cu alloy	1.7	Roman	Coin - nummus of House of Constantine c.AD330 - 336	PUBLIC-2E842B
22	DS	Cu alloy	0.8	Roman	Coin - incomplete nummus of House of Constantine c.AD336 - 342	PUBLIC-2F8E09
23	DS	Cu alloy	1,7	Roman	Coin - corroded nummus of unknown Emperor	PUBLIC-567AEE
24	DS	Cu alloy	1.8	Roman	Coin - nummus fragment of unknown Emperor	PUBLIC-140223

The coins are mostly quite worn copper alloy pieces dating predominantly to the 3rd C and 4th C AD.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Historic England for the copy of their results which was the prime motivation for the work used in this report.

Thanks to the Jenkins family for permission to carry out the field walking on the Childerley Estate and for their continued support.

Thanks to Dominic Shelley and Suzanne Thompson for metal detecting under quite difficult dry conditions.

TCD

Version 1.0