

Lenham Archaeological Society

7.7 Ring ditch dig 2011

The spring of 2011 was incredibly dry the farmer was on the local Meridian programme demonstrating how the soil was like dust and the winter wheat plants were on the verge of dying . However , in this withering wheat the enclosure ditch was showing dark green and a distinct ring ditch appeared in the south part of the enclosure .

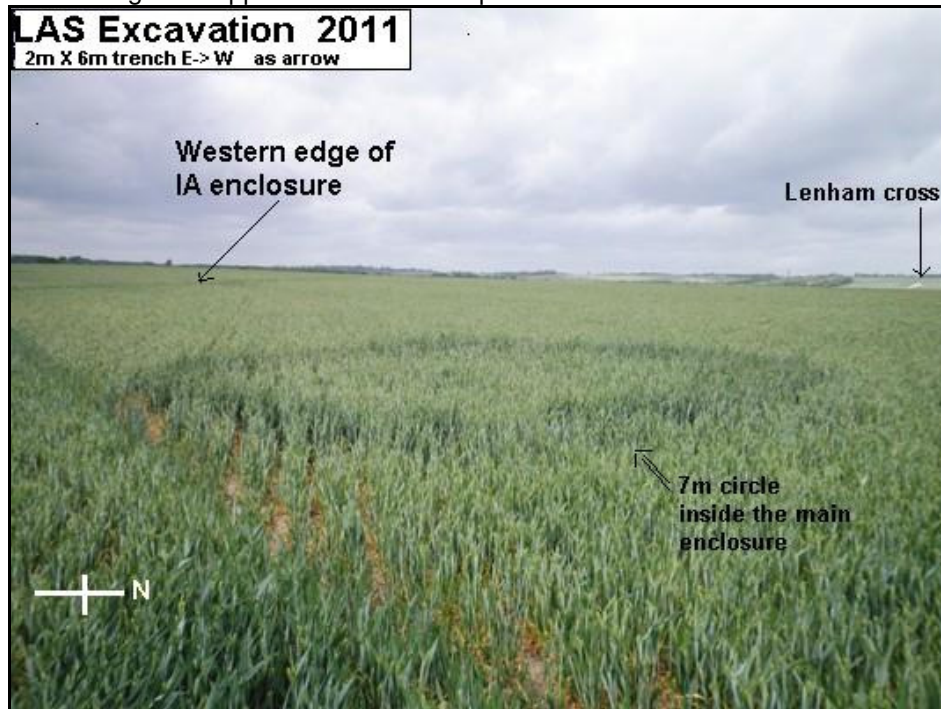


Fig62

The ring was located at TQ 9070.5025 , Google Earth reading 51°13'09.58"N and 0°43'44.92" E .

There was a dark blob in the middle and a squarish darker area towards the east . The crop mark was visible just 30m inside the IA enclosure in April 2011, 7m across, also visible was the line of the enclosure ditch as in 1999 & 2008 aerials and with closer inspection we found the same round feature visible on those aerials as well . The dark green wheat growth was band was 1m wide .



Fig 63

View looking NE towards Mount Castle farm ,the buildings are visible in the top left of the picture and the line of the eastern edge of the IA enclosure can be seen top right.

The exact GPS reading was monitored and a white plastic dish was hammered onto the surface of the field. After harvest the dig was opened on Frid. 26th August 2011.

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It was planned to cut a trench east → west across the circle to include the slightly off centre mark. (The trench actually dug was 6m X 2m)

Distance from outside edge to outside edge = 7.5m Dark green growth area was approx 1m in width. It has later shown again on the 2113 aerial .

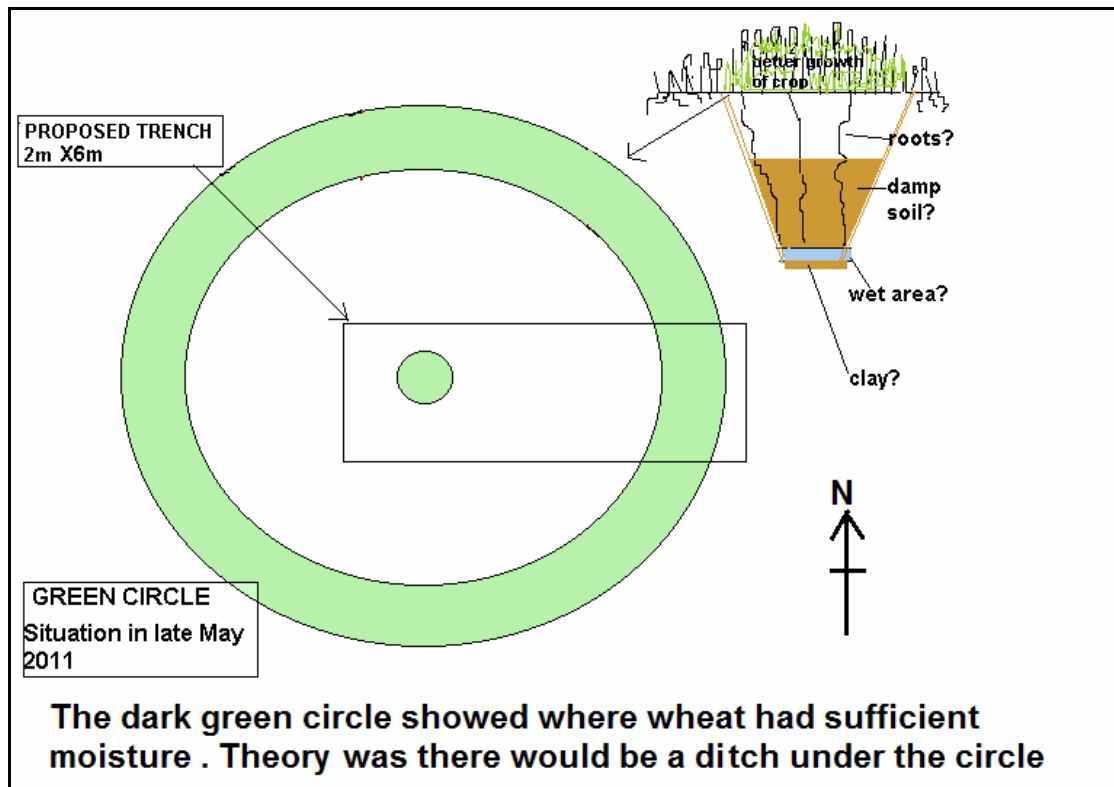


Fig 64

The diagram is guess work, on what might be expected. But one thing that was not expected was growth of large horse mushrooms, for by August the fruiting bodies had appeared along the outside edge of the crop mark like a giant fairy ring . One digger was convinced that the mushrooms had caused the difference in growth like a fairy ring but then the evidence is that the enclosure ditch had also been with much darker wheat growth ...it **had** to be that the hyphae were tapping and underground source of moisture . The field had billions of spores of this species *Agaricus bisporus* which is common in cow shed muck which is yearly spread on this field as fertiliser . It would be extremely rare for such a fungal ring to grow so perfectly in a field that was ploughed every year and the width of the wheat growth would still suggest a ring ditch rather than a fungal caused ring. Fairy rings are usually very narrow and have a wiggly outline.

Proof was not obtained until the trench dug showed these hyphae at a depth of over 1m . The hyphae were so robust that they look like white strands of fibrous string .



Fig 65

Growth of hyphae at a depth of over 1meven worms burrow to this depth too . P 30

Excavation :- As the dig proceeded no distinct ditch seemed to be in evidence and the soil was so dry and the sandy soil was like concrete. The use of a pick-axe was essential. This was a little worrying as features and items might be damaged by this necessary heavy handed approach. Only after photographing the profile was there any clear difference between the top 30cm of plough soil and the underlying soil . All *seemed* a homogenous mix of good sandy soil down to a depth of some 65cm. Iron Age and Romano-British finds interspersed the complete 5cm depth . No earlier finds were encountered except 2 stray blue & white china sherds near the surface and a debatable sandy ware jug handle at 45 cm depth In order to take a better photo of the profile it was cleaned off with a spade . It was noted that in doing so an extremely hard prominent area that had proved difficult to trowel, was smoothed off flush as if this was the original mound .

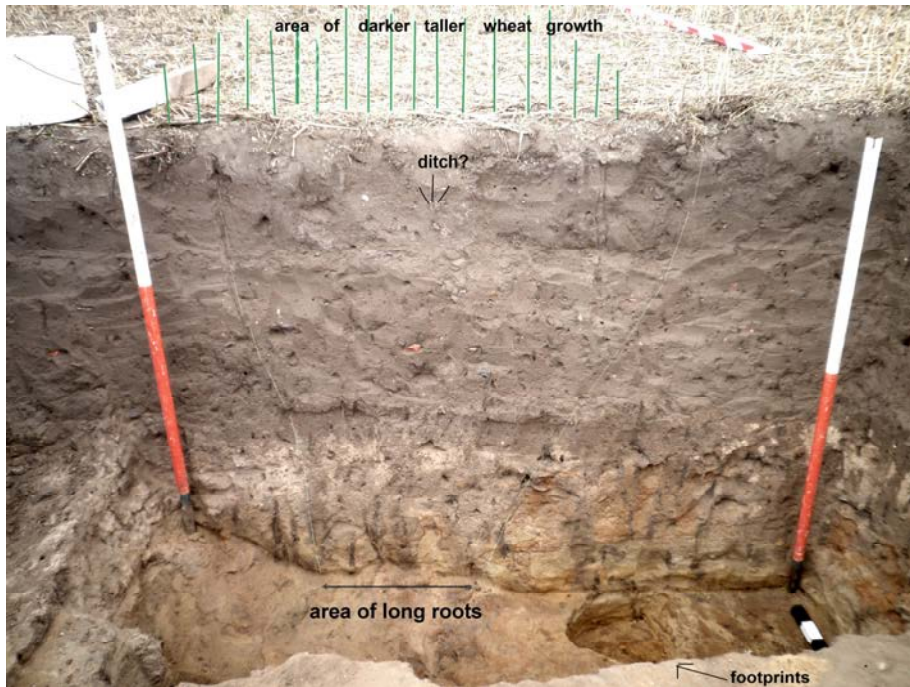
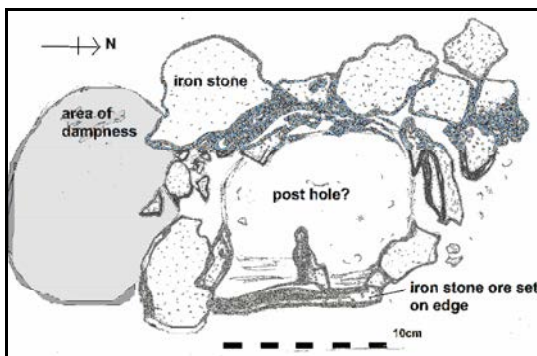


Fig 66

Presence of a ditch the soil above the sandy worm holed layer is not distinctive.

The centre of the crop mark circle proved to be a box made of pieces of iron stone some stood on edge . It appeared to be either a burial cist (one minute scrap of bone) or a post hole . There were many white hyphae but apart from that the only clue as to why it showed a dark wheat growth spot in the crop mark was a damp depression on its south side .

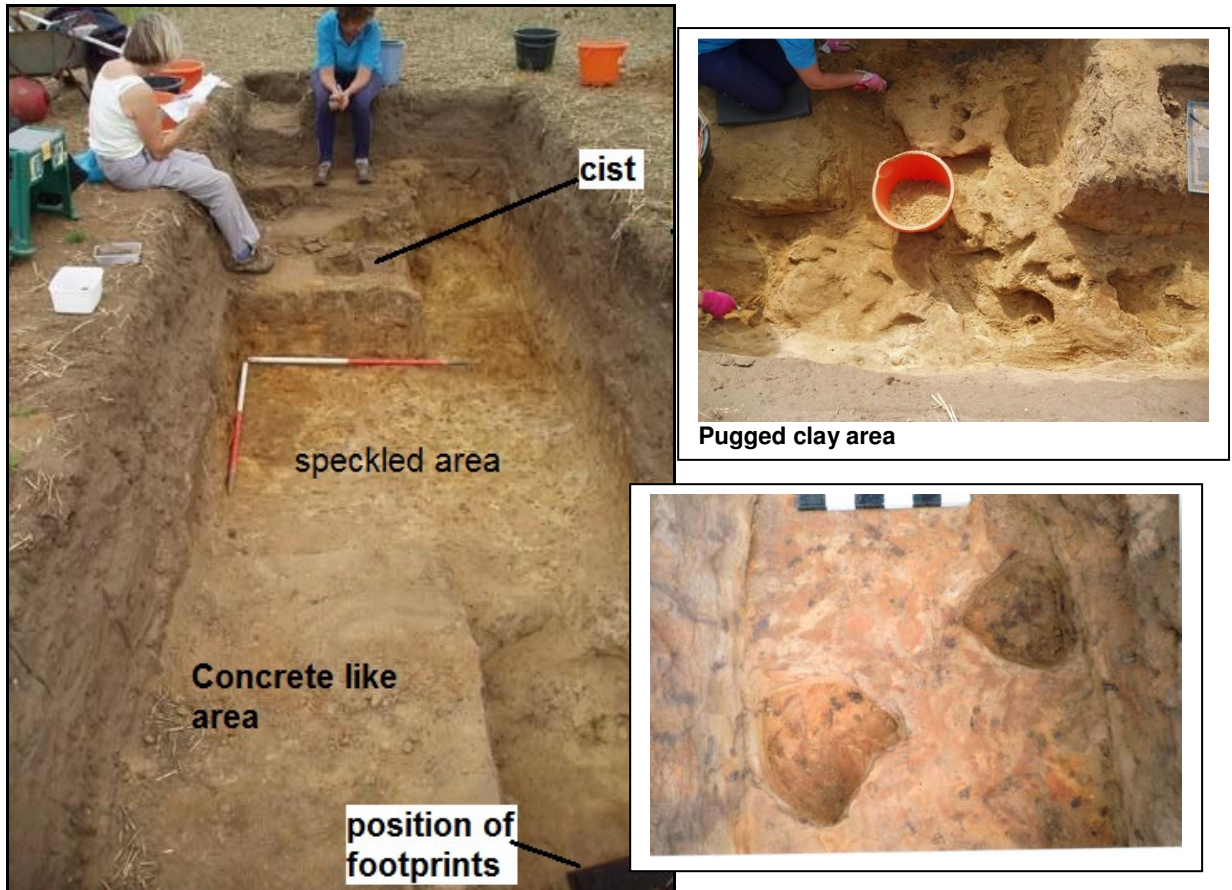


Post hole (or cist ?) drawing Fig 67



Photograph of 'post hole' fig 68

Digging down on the southern half of the trench the mottled layer had a curious layer of solidified sand beneath it (very hard like concrete) that had slots in it that at first looked like rabbit burrows but were not .



Figs 69-71

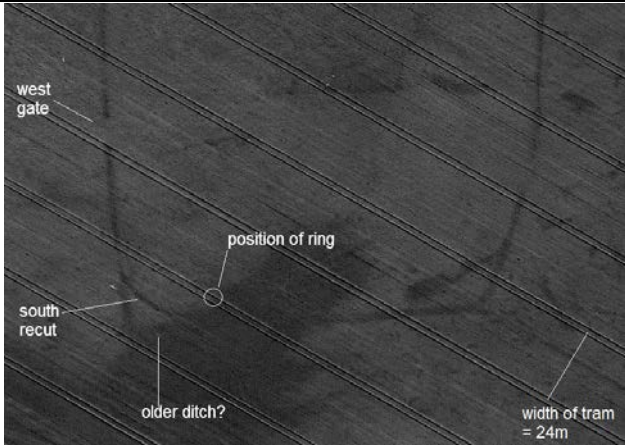
Cow prints in base of trench 110cm depth

Only after filling in was it worked out what these footprints were (sadly the farmer had needed the field back at short notice for seeding.) They appeared to match slots of cow foot prints in mud as if round a pond . Comparison with modern cows prove they were equivalent to a small breed like a Dexter or of young steers . It was a great pity that plaster casts were not taken (our error) Another complication of this site is that the southern most ditches appear to have been recut with the enclosure rounded off to improve defence. So the revamped main bank was probably what was confusing things . Revisiting this area and more excavation is imperative as precise dating (by Thermoluminescence) might establish the sequence and date of these defences i.e. when was the original ditch/bank made and when was the recut in relation to the Roman incursions ? Did they attack this particular IA camp ?

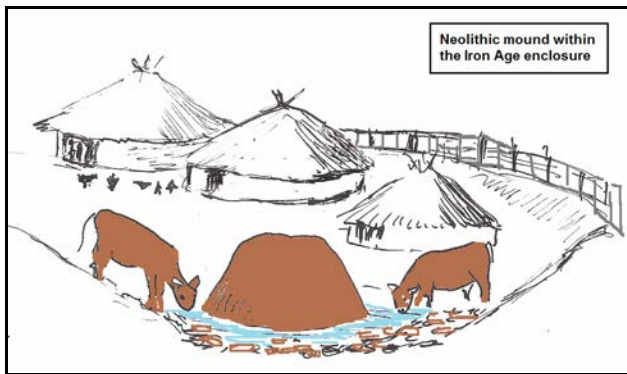
The difficulty in digging this ring ditch was made extra difficult by the hardness of the sand . A feature never encountered before in all the other digs but they were never quite so dry . It would seem that there is smectite clay mixed with the sand that causes this effect, (Greensand) changing it to consistency of concrete and preserving the cow footprints .

Because the main enclosure ditch was only 8m south from this ring ditch the recut (where the corner was rounded off) has added to the problem and we think the bank encroached across the ring ditch central mound .

The following diagrams drawn here hopefully make the situation clearer:-



Position of ring ditch only 8m from main Ditch , new cut possibly disrupted and flattened it



Possible scenario in Iron Age with mound and cows before the main ditch/bank was recut

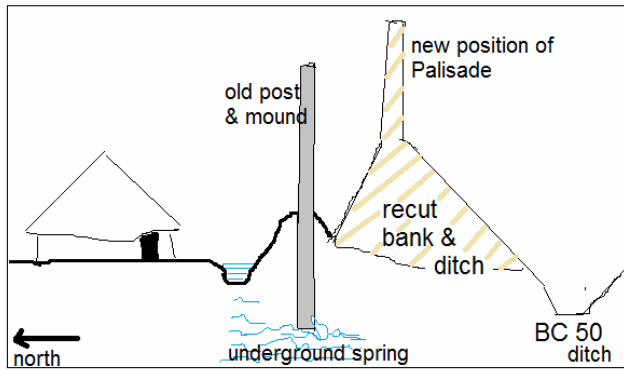


Fig 72. Appearance after the recutbut the single post was lost and the mound became flattened .

Why the ring ditch still appeared in extreme drought was that the fungi mycelia still 'knew' the way to the underground water/,moisture and only those in direct contact with moisture in the circular ditch thrived that year and also helped the wheat to survive as a much darker growth . ----->>>
 It is possible the fungi also help in conducting moisture and providing available soil nutrients in **all** the crop marks visible on this field . So the increase and clarity of the crop marks, say in 2013, is possibly due to the very dry conditions experienced in the SE over the past few years .

Attempts
 To
 explain
 the
 changes
 in
 the
 southern
 bank
 and
 ditch

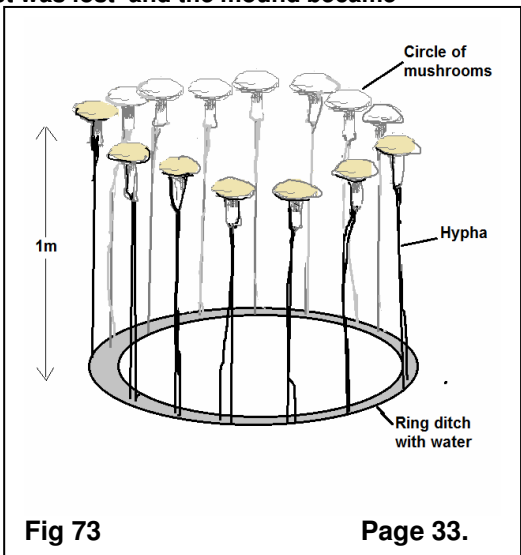


Fig 73

Pottery Finds from the Ring ditch dig:

1. many pieces of iron slag, interspersed through all layers
2. countless pieces of iron stone from the underlying natural iron pan
3. many pieces of peg tile

But pottery on the very bottom occupation level was all IA grogware :-



Fig 74 . Grog ware pot sherds & also a few pieces of Pot boiler (top right)

As these sherds were all of the Iron Age grogware type it points to a conclusion that the occupation layer was late Iron Age as previous deduced but it would also be interesting to see if thermoluminescence can accurately pinpoint more closely .If these pots were fired in the decade 60-50 BC it might substantiate whether it were likely that Caesar was the cause of their frantic refurbishment of the defensive bank and ditch . Was he the instigator of their fears ? Did he march through the Greensand corridor ? Further studies on this site might give answers to these questions .

8. Surrounding areas and investigations

8.1. Mount castle Farm

An investigation was done in 2000AD by KAS under Brian McNaughton . Pottery sherds and iron slag were found in a ditch dug for a new water main . Much iron slag was also found and heading west is a section of farm track that looks like a Roman road connecting across to Kiln Wood Lenham .There is a lost section on the older maps. What Jim Thomas of Mount Castle cottage also found was a sequence furnace structure . They were smelting iron on this area of Mount castle side too .

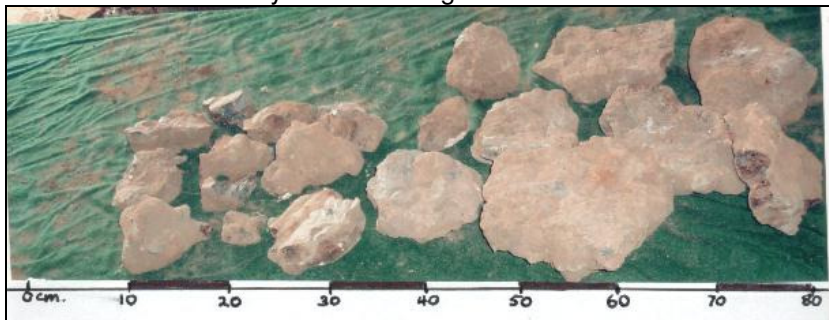


Fig 75 .Collection of baked clay with iron slag coating (part of a smelting kiln) that came from Mountcastle area near the Cottage , found by Jim Thomas.

Jim Thomas of Mountcastle Cottage has since found some more pottery some of which is drawn here :-

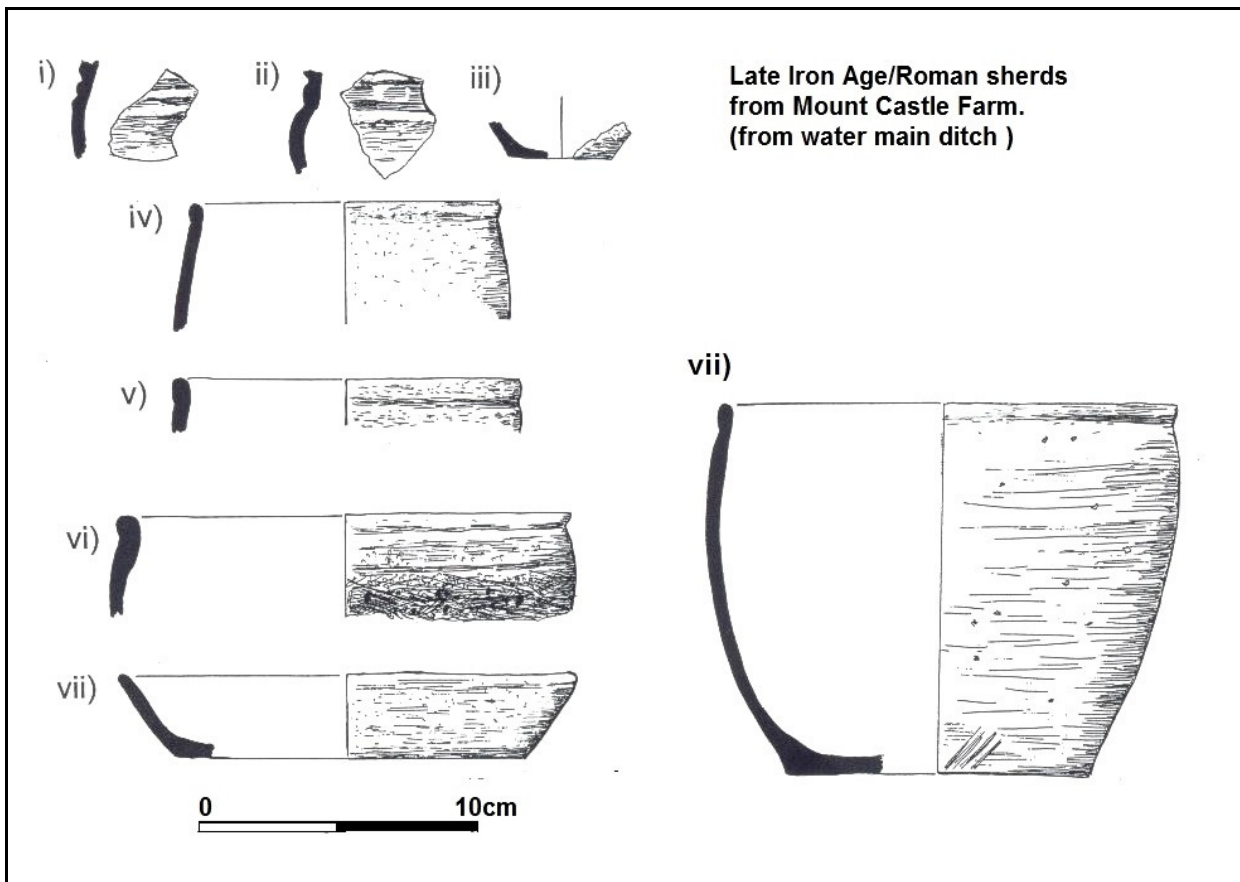


Fig 76 When compared with others found on the Iron Age enclosure these are remarkably similar . No doubt they are all 1st Century AD in the Romano-British age of flux soon after the invasion , some IA and some with Roman influence . After all, some might have lasted and not been broken until the 2nd Century.
 The pots drawn i) ii),and iii) are all smooth fabric with little fill and are cordoned beakers that match several found on the IA site to the south . The others are with grog tempering. But what is noticeable in some of the pots in both places , the grogware is not coarse like typical Iron Age but has been ground as fine as sand. Both places have some very thin ware with remarkably thin section and wide curve as if they are platters . Strange because the nearby Mars(h) wood has been labelled *Pating Forestal* on the Drury 18th Century map instead of Lenham Forstal .(see p 18) The only interpretation of that name seem to be Latin = *patina* or plate . Perhaps complete plates were found at one time ?

8.2 Lenham Forstal field . = Barnfield on 1841 tithe map

This was extensively field walked and metal detected by LAS in 2003 . The field was gridded off and the square systematically searched . It was established that there were three kiln sites at the northern end where there was much terracotta softish brick shards That area was once called Brickyards so one assumes they were brick kilns but strangely they had greenish glazed pilasters supporting the firing floor . This natural glazing only usually occurs when the kiln is used more than once so it was not a common method of brick production.

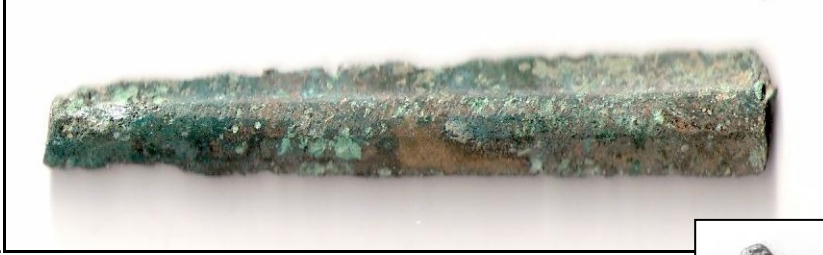
Excavation was halted when the trenches became flooded but further investigation might prove important especially westward in the next field as the bank is on the sand – gault boundary and ideal for kilns .

Littered across the Forstal field were numerous **red sandy ware sherds**.

They matched many on Chapel field but could have been later, even medieval, as it is difficult to date when the same clay is used .

Most interesting additional finds were the following :-on **page 36**

1. **Fig 77.** Bronze Age rapier blade of cast bronze , possibly made in the area



2. 1st century Romano British brooch
3. Honorius Siliqua
4. Other Roman grots .
5. King John silver penny.
6. Several worked flints Mesolithic
7. Neolithic . and Palaeolithic flints
8. Saxon stirrup mount **Fig 78**



Fig 78 Drawing of the Saxon Stirrup Mount



Fig 79 . Barnfield as viewed from Forstal road looking N W , see the map on page 40 .

ROMAN

Most of what has been noted so far is Late Iron Age . But the Roman insurgence and influence followed and as far as can be deduced living continued in this area and expanded . It is possible that there is much Roman to be found on the gault clay to the north particularly under Wheatgratten wood which was also known as Mars Wood . To the North of that there is a square feature that always shows as a crop mark . It is on the heavy sticky gault clay. LAS did field walk and metal detect that feature at TQ 9145.5099. A bronze pony bit was found , Celtic design , could be Late Iron Age , could be Roman .

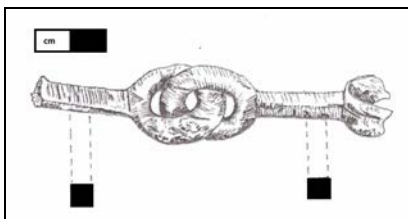


Fig 80. Snaffle Bit . Copper alloy . Late Iron Age or early Roman , Celtic style, connection to the outside rings is broken . Typical jointed snaffle (design still used today)

9. Roman coin Distribution .

During all the years LAS had field walked , surveyed and excavated on this site a number of Roman coins were found .Before this time in the last two decades of the last century many metal detectors, who were kindly allowed on the fields by the farmer had found a great many also . But it would seem these were not always declared at the time and it was before the days of PAS. Suggestion was made that local detectorists could join up and help assess this amazing number of coins and therefore help deduce more about the site. The three outstanding metal detectorists who did so were Derek and Val Butcher and Ted Godfrey . Many of these Roman coins would be classed (by detectorists) as “grots”. Ted did not know which Emperor or Century they came from, but with the help of Andrew Richardson (KCC Finds Liaison Officer as he then was), dates have been assigned to them all. The only one that was very distinct to the less trained eye was the Faustina . Even though part of the coin was missing one could see her bun and see that it was a woman.

The coins seem to lie in an apparent line across Cherry Gardens field as if there was a road crossing the IA site in the direction of the mill on the Stour . Another apparent line heads south towards Hubbards Farm where another few 3rd Century coins were found , disturbed by the new railway. LAS excavation of the gate of the Iron Age enclosure in 2006 discovered a mass of iron slag running through the gateway as if it had been placed there for a road. Also, many people observed that looking east along that coin line one can see a darker line of soildarkened by the increased amount of iron slag so often used for Roman road surfaces. It becomes obvious that the recording of indecipherable Roman grots (and other finds) is so important for deciphering the line of roads . For some reason many detectorists felt they were the *only* ones to have been working these fields and sounded surprised when they realised how many other coins had been found . When all the finds are collated the picture emerges. Looking again at the eastern side of Mouldstone Gate field, Ted seemed to think that the line of coins ceases towards Pekas House , but it does it ? One local resident has found a 3rd C coin in her back garden and LAS discovered a Honorius silver siliqua when field walking/surveying Lenham Forstal field.

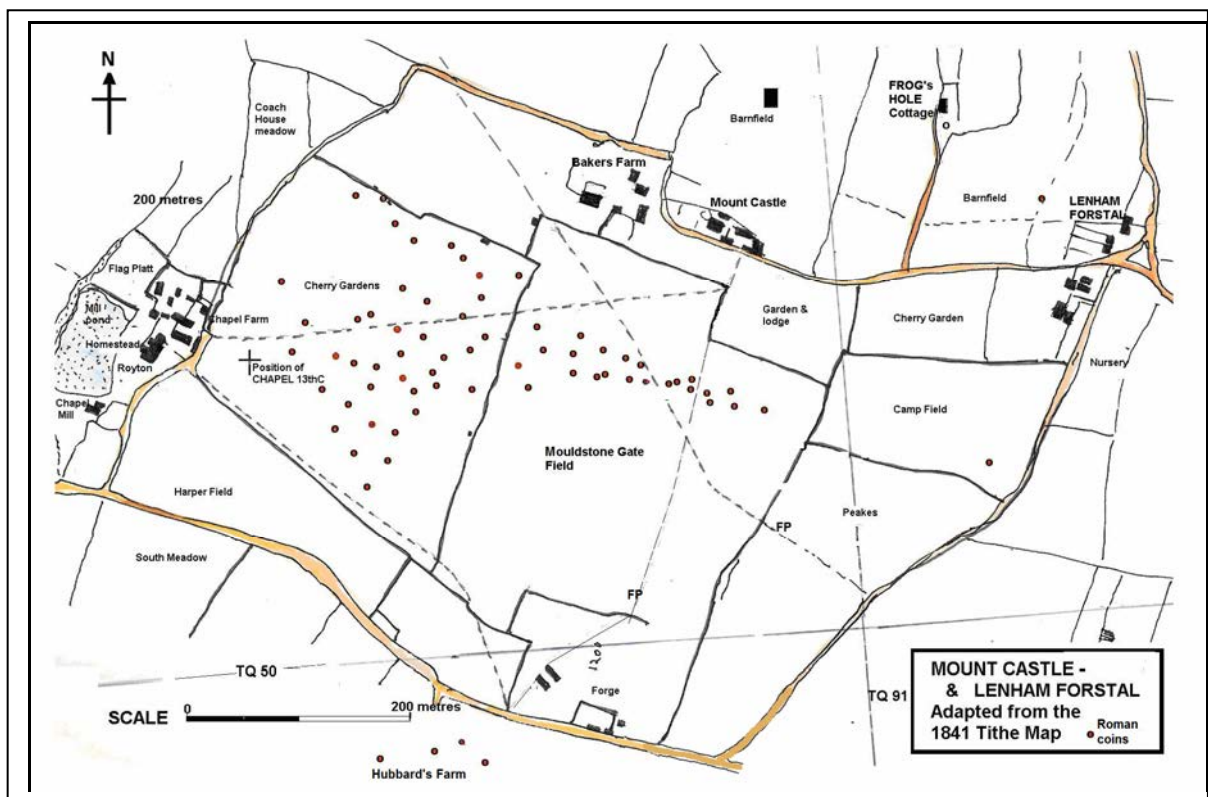


Fig 81 approx . coin distribution

Earliest Coin found is
Emperor Domitian
An As .
Date 81-96 AD
(Finder Ted Godfrey)



Fig 82

Latest is Honorius
silver siliqua
mint mark Aquilea (Italy)
Date 402-408
(Finder – Vivienne Wilson)



Fig83

The following are Ted's coins starting with the Roman grots .
As you will see on these it is very difficult to determine what Emperor and date they are others
are clearer .



Fig 84

Fig 85



Coins of more
reasonable condition
photographed by Ted
Godfrey the finder





House of Constantine Constantinopolis mint illegal

All the coins featured here were collected by Ted Godfrey. But the numbers in total not recorded might be as many again . It would be nice if other finders added their information to the list .



Constantine I AE3 CAESARVRVM NOSTRVM



Domitian 87AD VIRTUS AVESTI



Constantine II Caesar AE3 PROVIDENTIAE CAESS mint Trier



ANTONIUS PIUS sestertius FIDES EXECITVS



House of Constantine AE3 Constantinopolis (illegal mint)



Constantine II AE3 Nummus BEATA TRAIANQVILLITAS LYONS



Constantine I AE3



House of Constantine AE3. GLORIA EXERCITVS (mint illegal)



Constantine I AE3 Providentiae AVGG Mint illegal



Constantinell AE3 GLORIA EXERCITVS (mint illegal)



House of Constantine AE3



Constantine AE3 CONSTANTIOPOLIS (mint illegal)

Fig 86

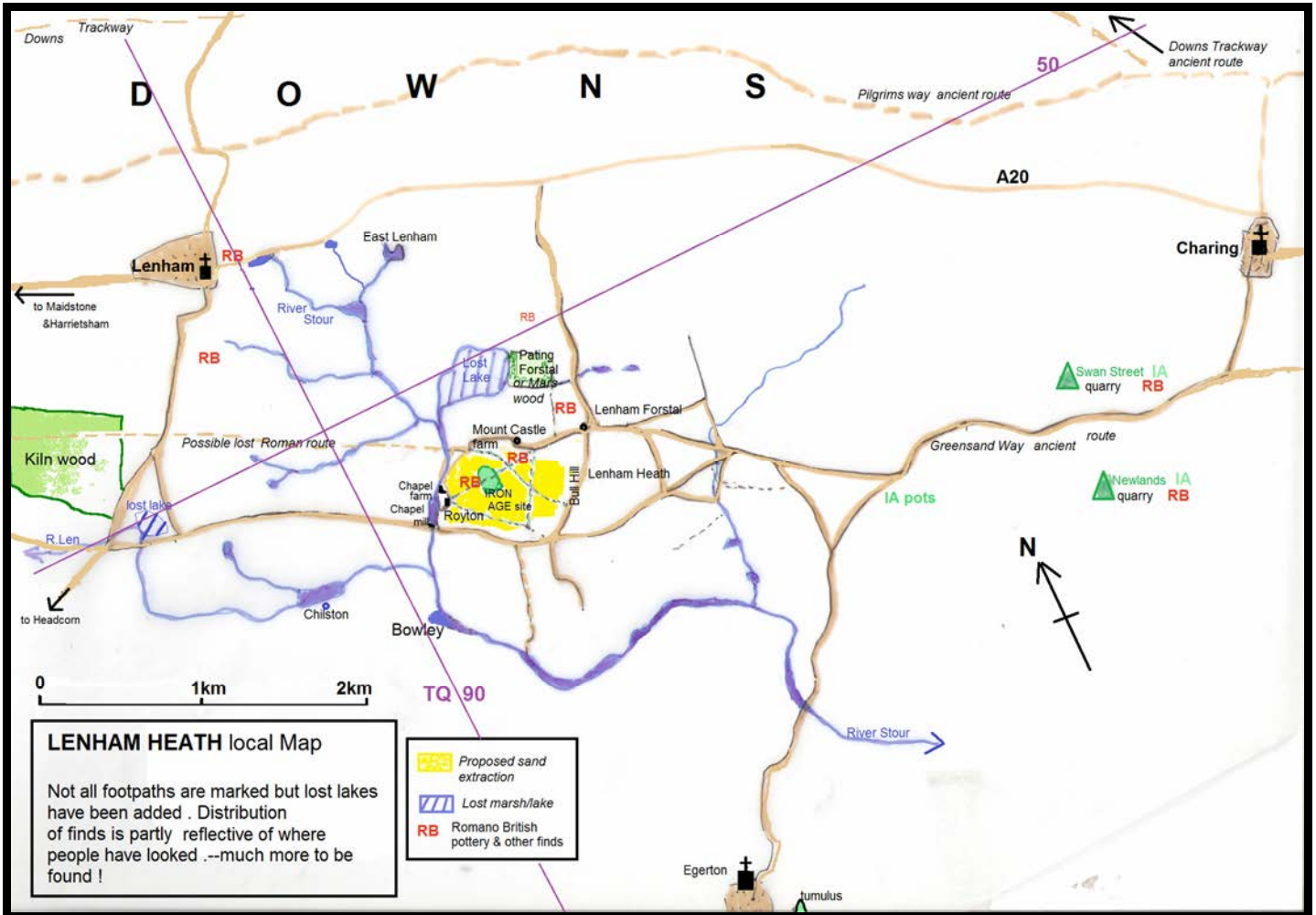
The possibility is that all these coins represent those lost from soldiers pockets as they marched along a road that existed throughout the Roman occupancy . However Ted Godfrey's observation that they seem to peter out at the eastern end of the field has an alternative solution . Recently it has been possible to survey the four acre field attached to Peaks House . Deeds show that the house was built in an empty field in 1908 . The field shows a distinct crop mark in 1960, which is not from arrangement of cherry trees . On the 1940 aerial poor growth can be seen over this same area. Magnetometry survey has not shown anything clearly but its lines match those of the crop mark . Resistivity was difficult as the subsoil showed an intensely dense area that also followed the similar lines . At the time of writing this, late Feb 2018 the team is waiting for a frost free slot to do more resistivity and an investigation . It is the right place for a temple being the highest point and the lack of surface debris *may* indicate a temenos . BUT solution is not certain as yet . **The faint shadows of rectangular shops /kiosks along the 'Coin Road' ...could also be indicative of tradesman in the approach to a Temple . If this proves to be so , another remarkable and tremendously important piece of archaeology presents itself . Perhaps The Royton site was an important centre for IA people and an important Temple site also that was then ROMANISED .**

10. General conclusions , assessment and recommendations.

10.1 The following pictures and map conclude the impressions of this site.

One cannot say for certain how much is there undiscovered , but it is an important site.

Conclusion = a multiphase site, most important being **Late Iron Age** overlain with Roman, possibly extending into Saxon and standing above prehistoric back as far as Mesolithic .



Most of the roads on this map are likely ancient although the direct Roman route between Charing and Lenham is uncertain . It is usually assumed to be a little south of the present A20. Bull hill is very deeply cut and is like a hollow way on the east of the IA site . The western projection of the Mount Castle lane can be seen in Kiln Wood to the west and looks decidedly like a Roman agger .



Fig88 Possible agger in Kiln wood



Fig 89 Hollow way of Bull Hill looking north



Panorama View looking north.

Fig 90

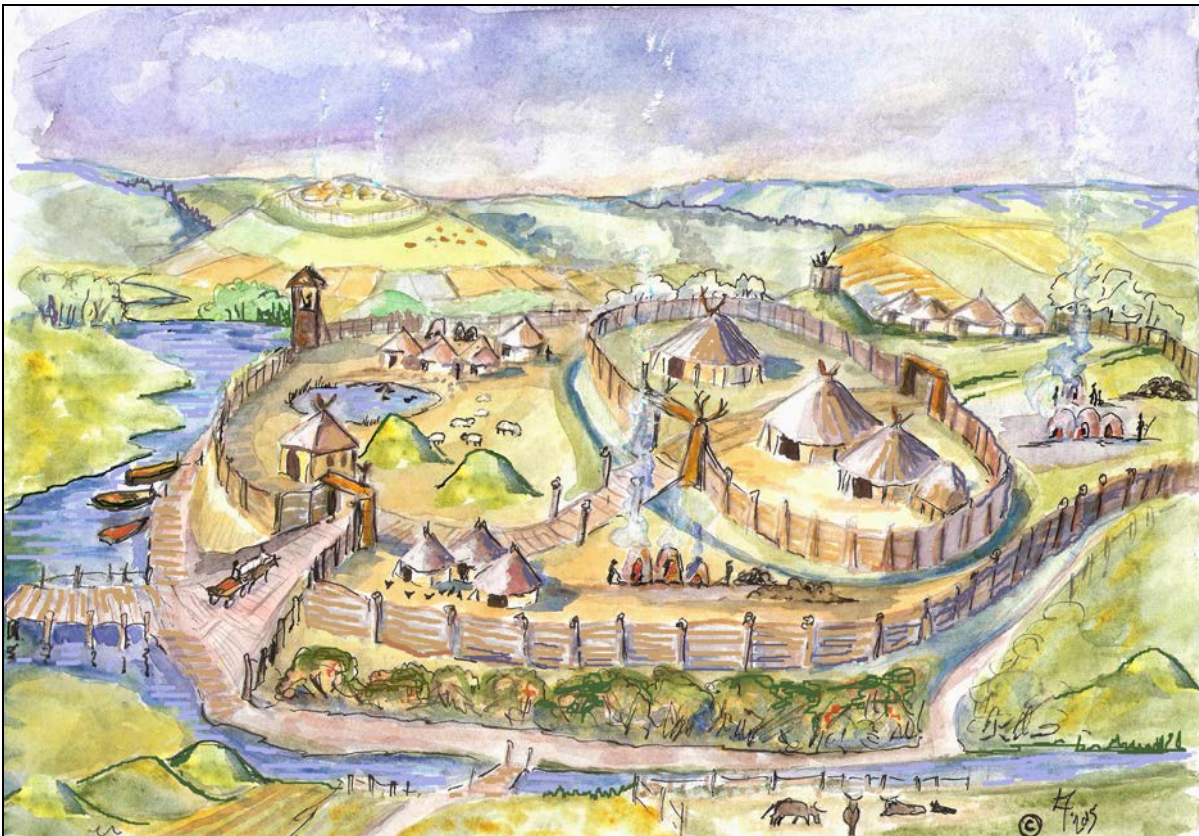


Fig 91. This imaginary image was painted in 2004 . It is not necessarily exactly how, or where things were, but it gives a valid impression . It is looking north to the Downs , the River Stour was much wider 2000 years ago and a lake existed where shown in the distance .

10.2 The importance of the site:-

As it has not previously been listed on records , and is standing right at the heart of Kent on the important Greensand Ridge, its importance should not be underestimated, with two 'highways' the Greensand Way and the River Stour .Importance also that it is largely intact , possibly has hidden information on Caesar's 2nd invasion and certainly of the 43 AD invasion, besides having interesting pottery , iron production and possible bronze casting.

Latest findings using magnetometry and resistivity suggest that there *may* be an important temple site on the adjoining higher area on Bull Hill . (On going investigation in March 2018.)

There may also be an Iron Age temple site somewhere near the 13th Century chapel.

10.3. Assessment . Most of what has been found so far depended on observations of the aerial photography , use of earth resist and a chance crop mark followed by excavation. The general problem of using geophys is that with the underlying highly dense sand , the iron pan and iron slag readings *can* be anomalous . Nothing but a complete excavation truly would ascertain the extent of all features. The recent magnetometry on the aerial building at Peaks House Bull Hill has exemplified . The

magnetometry has not shown walls that seemingly are there and the resistivity machine used could not cope with the 'out of range' readings . Another attempt is being made with a different machine .

10.4. Recommendations

If the Aggregate Company urging the sand extraction only does limited excavation, that is not enough . The site is worthy of more and as pointed out , a single magnetometry survey is not adequate. It will need all three methods to determine everything . Besides , why should sand extraction be allowed on a possibly **unique** archaeological site, part of our Nations Heritage?..... it just does not make sense . Previously the senior farmer was very interested in the site's history . It is not without possibility that the enclosure ditch can be dug carefully , items be found, then the ditch and banking be restored, grassed over for preservation of the site and grazing use for the farmer's herd of red Sussex. A permanent Archaeological site with attached small museum and display Centre is not without financial reward for the owners . We do not have a Tourist site of that type in the centre of Kent, it would benefit the whole County. This kind of project would surely be supported by the National Lottery as it would be a unique way of returning something of our Cultural Heritage .

Report 1st March 2018 by Lesley Feakes B.Sc., B.Ed ., Cert. in Practical Archaeology.

Thanks are due to the Lenham Archaeological society (Now called Lenham Heritage) and all its members who took part over the years . To Christine King , Alan Reading and Paula Jardine-Rose who Edited our "Discovering Ancient Lenham " journals in 2006 , 2008 and 2011 . To metal detectorists namely Valerie and Derek Butcher , Ted Godfrey , and Vivien Wilson whose finds were invaluable. To individual members of the KAS who helped in giving ideas, facts and produced such a helpful KAS web site and to the KCC team of Archaeologists who gave help and advice continually particularly the HER officer Paul Cuming . And lastly Keith Parfitt who encouraged me to write this report .