

Lenham Archaeological Society

Hollingbourne, Roman finds. TQ 8360.5520

(This report was written and published in our Second journal “Discovering Ancient Lenham 2008”. Since then the farm has been sold and we have been unable to return. It certainly is an interesting and important site for anyone else wishing to investigate. I have left the report much as it was first written.)

Although Hollingbourne is some six miles from Lenham, we have become involved in finding sites there because one of the farmers phoned one day in August, 2006, to say a building had appeared on one of his meadows! He meant, of course, a parch mark of its outline that had burnt out because of the extremely dry spell. Never before had it appeared, not even in the summer of 1976, but the reason may well be that the line of poplar trees along the northern boundary have grown enormously since then and now dominate the water table and had depleted it.

Our resistivity of the first building we found is printed in our last Journal, just making the deadline for publishing. The room plan was drawn by Dennis Rayfield. Here is a photograph of the crop mark looking south from the Poplar trees:-

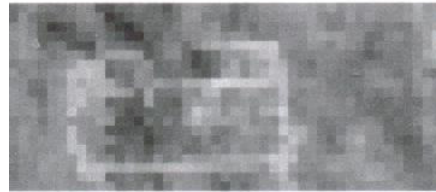
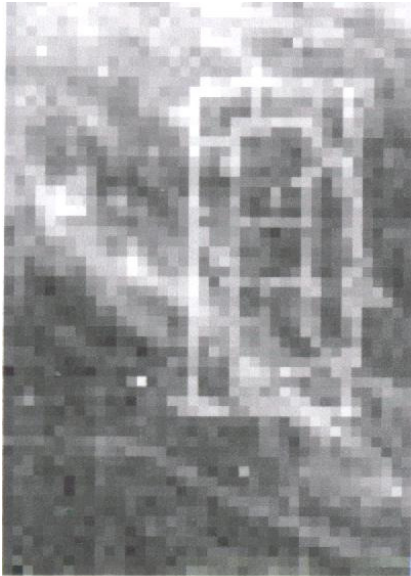


Scale is conveniently shown by the Land-rover.

Hollingbourne is in a similar position to Lenham. They, and the intervening village of Harrietsham, all have streams rising from the spring line of the Downs and all three have enough evidence to show they were important in Iron Age, Roman and Saxon times. The Domesday Book lists all three and it also mentions Allington (Alnoitone) in Eyhorne Hundred (that of Hollingbourne). Allington had 3 sulungs (600 acres) and a church.

In later literature the manor of Elnothington is mentioned and has subsequently got 'lost'. Allen Grove was a past curator of Maidstone Museum and lived in Hollingbourne. He wrote an article on “The Lost Manor of Elnothington” in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, 1983, and supposed that the lost church of Elnothington stood at Broad Street. This church was not mentioned in Archdeacon Harpsfield's Visitation of 1557 so he presumes the church was by then derelict.

As we were measuring out the position and dimensions of the crop mark, the farm steward pointed out a second one 60m away and at right angles to the first. Here is the resistivity print out of them both :-



Each small square = 1m and the pale spots are high resistance the darker areas low resistance

Some people put the high resistance as black (all one has to do is reverse on Paint) But with the walls showing as white gives a better representation of how the parch marks showed in the grass

The owner was keen to help with digging using a machine. He lifted the topsoil carefully from 1m x 2m slot with his JCB and just 25cm under the surface was a rag-stone wall, 70cm wide 30cm deep resting on clay subsoil.



Digging the slot across the parch mark



Resultant wall, 70cm wide, of rag-stone and flint

Traces of mortar were visible in upper part of the wall, only. Two pieces of grey fine Upchurch plus sherds of Grog ware , and a piece of iron slag were retrieved. The footings were amazingly clean with only very small fragments of tile.

It was as though the site had been stripped bare at some stage in history. The clean, no rubble footings may explain why the resistivity printout was so distinct. There was only 1 ohm difference between the walls and the surrounding soil. The resistivity was done at the optimum time, when the dryness of the wall was still prominent yet had received a good soaking of rain, and the surrounding soil had taken it up like a sponge. No tile or tesserae pieces were found in a slot made in the centre of the building either.

Some people may, therefore, try to argue then that it is not Roman as no tile has been found. But the distinctiveness of the 'playing-card' plan is indisputable. The building appears to have been set with its floor level equal to the present soil level or

even above it. Perhaps this led to complete recycling of the brick and tile, recycled as hardcore for making farm roads across the soft ground as well as for other buildings. There are dozens of missing villa farmhouses in this part of Kent. Perhaps many, like this one, were set quite high in the ground, which explains why they were so efficiently robbed to foundation level, ploughed out and dealt the final blow with modern sub-soiler ploughs. Fortunately this landowner has never used such destructive machines and the field is going to continue as pasture land.

The western end of building 2 appears to have a curve outwards as if there was an apse. Further resistivity done on the south side of the building indicated that there could have once been another aisle so could it possibly have been a church? Early Roman churches often had the altar at the western end and there is a missing church of Elnothington (Allington) to find



Back-filling Bull inspecting the site!



View from villa site to Little Allington

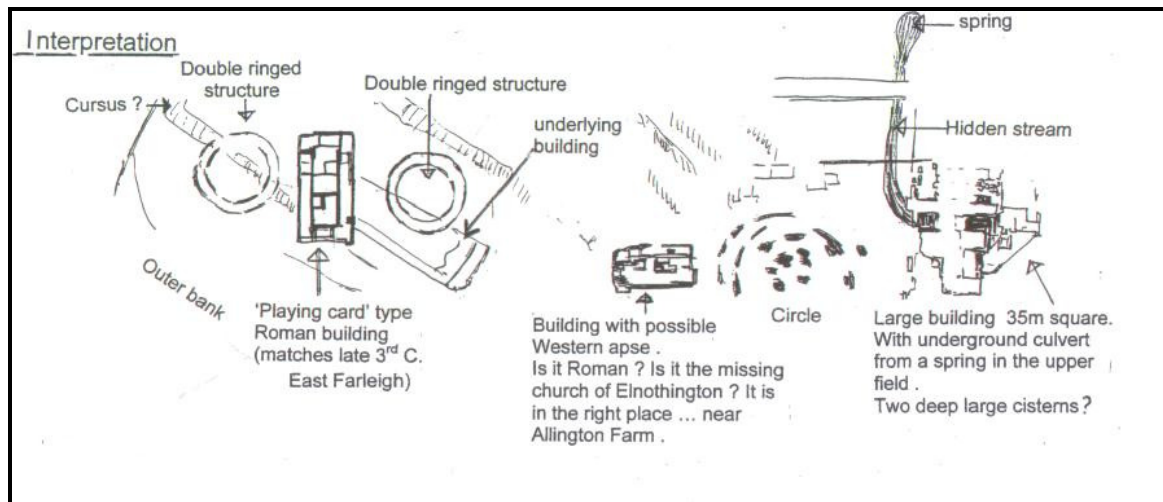
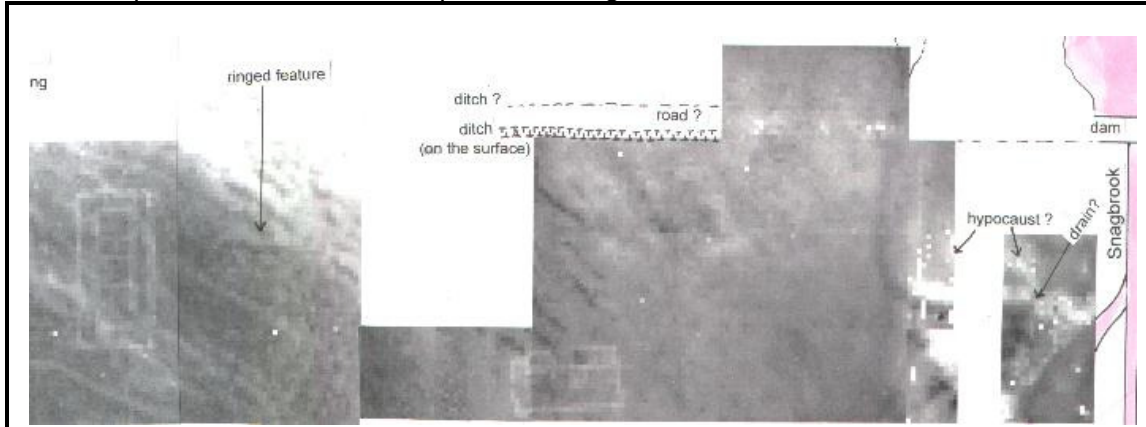
The extent of the resistivity features was surprising and the site was quite obviously important in prehistory. The large Iron Age industrial settlement near Snarkhurst Wood is only 1km distant. The brook is called the Snagbrook meaning snake and pronounced Sny-eeg and there is possibility of many more prehistoric features in the land towards Snarkhurst. The hill behind Allington shows concentric rings as if it were once a promontory fort .



View of Downs north of Little Allington. Woods are around Eden's Hole

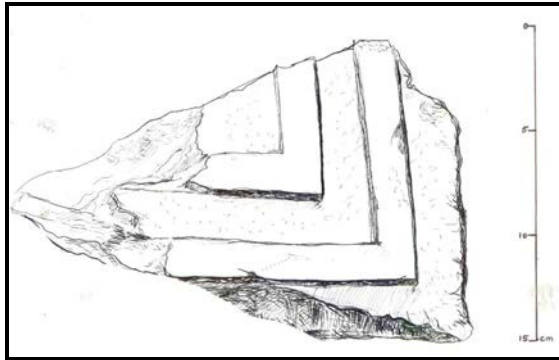
The whole area could have archaeology. It would be worth taking magnetometry readings of these fields . But we only had access to a resistivity machine and it

showed the playing card villa very distinctly. The clarity was due to very little building material bar the stone of the walls . Another theory as to why there is no tile and floors of the buildings is that periodically, heavy rain on the Downs (intervals of every 300years or so) rushes down with such force from gullies like Eden's Hole that it takes the top soil and everything with it. Evidence has been found of these catastrophic floods in the lower part of Hollingvourne,



Resistivity printout of area north of Little Snagbrook

But look at the resistivity printout. The double ringed features are not clear to all but are there. The third building is large, 35m x 35m, standing on an older curve of the stream. It appears to have very deep, sharply defined cisterns, and the resistivity readings varied from 35 ohms to 5 ohms in one rectangular structure. We did a shallow excavation on the high readings nearest the stream and revealed the footings of what appeared to be a wall made from loosely packed stones and no mortar, which could be part of a foundation layer. Lying in this wall rubble was an interesting stone :-



It is a relief carving of a double 'Greek Key' design and the stone is oolitic limestone, probably from France. We know that the Christchurch Monks from Canterbury owned this land but would they have carved such a 'pagan' design? It seems more likely to be Roman but an excavation in the mud and wetness of this site is going to prove difficult even though the walling is so close to the surface. The stones get so coated with mud it would almost be easier to clean the wall with a pressure hose! Several of the rag-stone blocks are dressed, one resembling a window sill and another a stone mortar.



Base of wall.



Carved stone being found.



**Snagbrook Stream looking north Towards the church.
There were Roman pilae in this stream .**

Perhaps that is why Allen Grove once told the owner that he thought there was a Roman Temple in the vicinity.
Now the farm has been sold but should anyone wish to investigate more , especially the bath house, it may prove to be a very interesting site.