

Lenham Archaeological Society

Stumbles Field , East Lenham

When flying across East Lenham in the Spring of 2005 , I clicked the shutter on the farm House and moat but I was surprised to see features so clearly in Stumbles Field to the west of the moat. On several older aerial photographs there were vague lines but this particular day they showed quite sharply. On ground level the field is seen to have two divergent banks that splay out in a triangular form and according to the Barr family that own it, these banks have always been there. Certainly no ploughing has taken place in modern time and the field is shown as pasture on the 1660 map. Our investigations show that it could have been sheep pasture 2000 years ago..... almost exactly as it is now .



Stumbles looking west, showing some of the ditch marks.

Cross hatching within this triangle are straight intersecting ditches making distinct rectangles of various sizes. Although the field had some land drains put in by Andrew Barr's grandfather , the pattern of these particular ditches does not match the usual pattern for drainage. Was the structure old watercress beds? Medieval water meadows ? Fish ponds ... or and older structure of Iron Age or even Neolithic date ? It might even be a combination of different ages.

We know that a culvert was constructed in 1970's to connect the deep ditch on the northern field edge to the Stour stream on the south. With the drought this year its line can be seen clearly. But this distinct line was not picked up by either our resistivity or the ground radar that we carried out earlier in 2006.

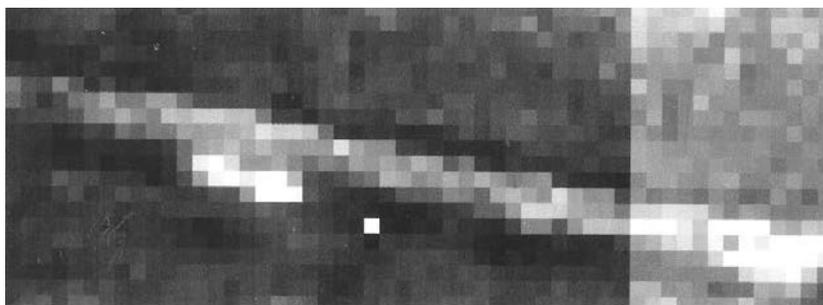


parch mark of drain looking north to the Cross on the hill.

The resistivity survey (using a machine that registers the resistance and therefore the hardness of underlying soils) showed the farm road across the eastern edge of the field.

This road showed clearly with a 3m hard centre and deep ditches either side, not unlike a Roman road! But was it? It leads to the old "Bone " mill as locals know it. This was once a water- driven mill that functioned in the 19th- early 20th C as a bone mill for processing bone meal. It is possible that it was originally a flour-mill but it is difficult to find any literature about it. The stones from this mill building were recycled in the 20th C as a new wall to the church yard, and some of these stones are made of Bethersden marble . One stone left behind in the field is well shaped and has slot or Lewis hole cut into it for lifting purposes. Romans were known to use such methods for lifting the stones so could the original building have been Roman? (Something else for us to investigate.)

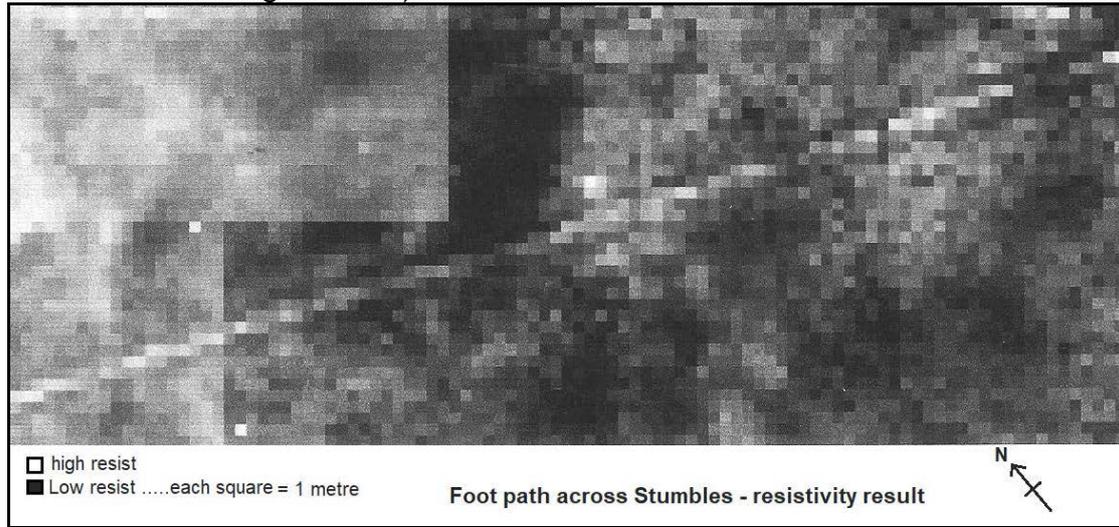
Resistivity of the road leading down to the Bone Mill :-



□ High resist
 ■ Low resisteach square = 1 metre



Also the footpath crossing the field SW→.NE showed as a 2m hard surface bordered by ditches . It also shows quite clearly on the actual field and again resembles a green lane as though it was an ancient (possibly Roman ?) trackway. Careful lifting of the turf in a 0.5m line across this feature revealed a hard packed layer of flint (15cm depth) sloping off to the ditch either side . What is remarkable on the RM printout are the high spots as though the line was sited with posts . Investigation of one of these high spots revealed a pile of packed flint that could well have been packing around a post (although we do not have absolute proof and need to do more work to prove this is so and obtain some dating material)



Iron Age surface:-

In the north west corner of the field there is a 60m X20m area that gave a very high RM reading. Although records show that a septic tank was located close to Burnside cottages this was too large to be it . Besides, a parch mark shows another drain further west than this and the tank is likely beyond that.

Digging down on the area of high resistance we found 50cm of clean fine top soil with no inclusions at all, few flints and no modern or even medieval finds. Below this soil was a flint layer 10cm depth and beneath this clay with flint and finally hill wash and head clay.

The flint layer , with a fairly smooth ordered surface had scatters of charcoal and areas with Iron Age sherds . So in the absence of any other finds except one sheep jaw bone , we can assume that this was an Iron Age level, for what function (animal enclosure, house?) we still need to establish.



Late Iron Age Grogware sherds from Stumbles field.



Sheep jaw bone from Stumbles Field- associated with IA sherds

Digging in the summer of 2006

The radar survey showed some interesting areas and we compared these results with our resistivity results. The 'ditches' showed on both but there were some solid objects that were 'missed' by the RM although with a strong signal on the radar. Although we dropped six exploratory trenches we could not find these 'blips'. **But** we did get some interesting finds.

At a depth of 30cm there were patches of charcoal and flint tempered sherds.

In Trench 6 there was a narrow ditch (25cm) but it had no dateable material and there was no evidence of modern drainage pipes. As usual... we need to investigate more !



Flint tempered sherds

ditch in trench 6 (most likely modern drainage 0

Conclusions:-

Despite our time consuming efforts of extensive resistivity surveys and also some ground radar any definitive answers seem elusive.

The **eight trenches** we have cut at various points on the field reveal :-

1. An ancient straight footpath, with deep ditches either side ,that looks remarkably like a Roman route.
2. An Iron Age flint surface is in the NW corner of the field ,
3. A prehistoric surfaces 30cm down in the centre of the field

There is ample work and investigations for us to do that will keep us occupied for years to come!

We **have** managed to find an very ancient area of Lenham Village but why what and how are questions that are raised ! Oh, I forgot to mention the deep ditch along the northern boundary of the field lines up exactly with a Roman ditch discovered in the Community Centre site in 2001.

Were there any Roman buildings between Stumbles and the church? We will keep looking . Residents tell us that Lord Monckton discovered a Roman building further towards Tanyards in the next field to Stumbles,. Sadly we cannot now ever ask him what exactly he found.

CONCLUSION and PRESERVATION

Difficult to say exactly what Stumbles represents but its low lying position and nearby sluice from the Stour suggests it is ancient water cress beds .

A full modern survey of the upstanding earth works needs doing before someone inadvertently destroys them . It has ancient archaeology from a very early date and the water cress could have been harvested even in Roman times .

On the north edge of the field the resist pattern showed a very black and white chequered 'design' . That on one 'Time Team' Programme was said to denote the possibility of grave slots .We did not investigate . The possibility remains as the field beyond to the north is called Beers croft (1660 map) and it *could* be an ancient burial field for the village. It is earmarked for development and surely that needs reconsidering? If villagers of pre 1660 were interred there should they be disturbed ?

Aerial produced this year 2020 gives the most remarkable grass mark of the structure of the pattern of ditches/earth works.

