



GIRTON FIELD EXCAVATION 2007

PRELIMINARY REPORT NOVEMBER 2008 BY BRIAN RILEY; MAHG

GIRTON FIELD

There is an area in Girton Field which we expected to be an ancient settlement. Cropmarks on the aerial photographs show a number of arcs and irregular lines and a curved line which could at one time have been part of a boundary.

The area concerned is towards the Northern limit of Girton Field. Along the North field boundary due to the ploughing headland effect the ground level in Girton Field is approximately 600 mm higher than in the adjacent field. It is likely that the settlement continued north but is masked by the increase in ground cover within Girton Field and may have been affected by ploughing in the adjacent field.

The straight lines, as seen elsewhere on Carrington Farm, also run across the area, seemingly unconnected with the settlement and therefore presumably dating from a different period.

ANTICIPATED LAYOUT

To obtain further detail a magnetometry survey was carried out in September 2007 by the Colchester Archaeological Group. The survey picked out 1 of the 6 straight cropmarks, but increased the detail and overall length of the curved line. It also revealed a number of 'blobs' which it was thought may be pits. We compiled a plan using both information provided by both the aerial photographs and magnetometry survey data. There was significant conformity but one apparent difference, where the survey line seemed most likely, and was used as the primary data.

It was clear from the over-lapping lines that there had been many phases of activity.

EXCAVATION

We were permitted to dig between crops during the period September to November 2007, although the ploughing date was brought forward unexpectedly, losing 2 weeks of excavation time at the end on this period.

TRENCHES

The following trenches were excavated:

- A. To locate and identify possible pits.
- B. To intersect a number of linear linear anomalies of varied plan shapes.
- C. Initially, to confirm the exact location of Trench A in relation to cropmarks.
- D. As an aid to work in Trench B.
- E. To run from the centre of the circular anomaly, and
- F. As an aid to work in Trench E.



TRENCH A AND TRENCH C

Generally in Girton Field, the gravel layer lay close to the underside of the topsoil and so was easily exposed. Over the length of Trench A however, the gravel was covered by a layer of silt, which in the dry conditions of the time was very solid and hard to excavate.

Consequently the trench was dug shallower than intended as trowelling was difficult.

Cropmarks indicated that at least 5 features would cross the line of the trench. To intercept one of these (CFG8), and so confirm our exact location, a deeper, narrower, trench was excavated (Trench C). In Trench A, at a relatively shallow depth, pottery sherds were found and the sides of the trench were extended to expose more possible finds. Sherds were also recovered in the upper levels of Trench A, but in neither case was any specific context for these finds evident. Trench C was later extended at right angles by machine to intercept CFG1.

With regard to the prospective 'pits', it was determined that these would be difficult to excavate so two deep cross trenches (A30 and A40) were opened. From these eventually the pit was exposed and was found to be 1.2 metres deep. The backfill at the deepest point was of a very unusual pale grey, almost white in colour, consisting of gritty, powdery material (similar to that later found in smaller volumes elsewhere in the Girton Field dig site; a solitary example was also found within the South Field excavations). Two apparent Mesolithic flints were found within this fill and others in close proximity. The upper levels here were found to be very disturbed as CFG1, 4, 10, and likely others all across Trench A, at various angles close to this point. Elsewhere in Trench A the silt layer was not penetrated so no other features were found. Notes on features in Trench C are as follows:

- CFG8; this showed as a faint cropmark on plan, presumably incomplete, similar to a reverse question mark. It was located at quite a depth in Trench C. Its origin is unknown.
- CFG7; encountered whilst excavating to locate CMG1. The features overlap and are at a similar depth. By observation of the backfill CFG7 appears to be the earlier of the two. It has no cropmark or magnetic variation associated with it so its plan shape is not known, but judging by its age and width it is likely to be a straight line. It is speculation only, but as straight lines CFG3 and CFG5 appear to connect to cropmarks in the South Field, similarly, CFG7 could be a feature associated with CFS1.

TRENCH B AND TRENCH D

Whilst excavating Trench B, after 9 metres from Trench A, the silt layer became thinner and the head of the gravel was revealed by machine. The sought after features did not however appear immediately as, over time, some gravel had been dragged back over the feature by ploughing, etc. A narrow pilot trench was opened by hand along one edge of the main trench which revealed the features to basically the same alignment as anticipated.

The features exposed in Trench B were as follows:

- CFG1; the end of this feature was located within Trench B and was found to be rounded. A short distance away it crossed the route of CFG2 and, by observation of the fill; CFG1 appeared to be the earlier feature. This was later confirmed when finds from this area were dated. A section was excavated at context B4 where the feature



re-crosses Trench B. But here later disturbance of the outer slope had occurred. Trench C was then extended to intercept the feature and it was found at context C400, overlapped by the previously unknown feature (CFG7).

The feature appears to be a ring ditch of 24 metres diameter with an opening starting at C16. Its size appears to rule it out as a round house, so its origin remains currently unknown. A note of caution should be added; the layout is as anticipated and apparently proved as based upon the magnetometry results. There are however a few cropmarks in the vicinity which give a different layout, but without changing its overall size, etc.

- CFG2; this was located at context B10 and has a 'V' shaped profile. Both cropmark and magnetometry results show a semi-circle which, if a full circle of 13 metres diameter, would re-cross Trench B near CFG4. Initially no sign of it could be seen here, but after a heavy soaking it was revealed within the actual CFG4 profile, still having a 'V' shaped cross section.
- CFG3; a straight line on plan, this feature was located at context B20. The north side was intact but to the south side the top of the natural gravel had been removed for a distance of approximately 3 metres and the surface disturbed (context B22 & B26), including a shallow pit (context B24).

On plan, the cropmark can be seen to initially run only as far east as CFG10, but faint traces that can be seen further on indicate that this is likely to extend further and to link to CFS2, with which it has an almost exact alignment.

CFG3 was also revealed, but not fully excavated in Trench E.

- CFG4; curved on plan and the most obvious feature of the area; this was found at context B30. It was partly excavated by machine and enlarged by hand. Its profile included a section to the north where the original strata had been removed, but to a differing line than the main feature. To obtain a true profile, Trench D was opened parallel and a short distance away. The section is believed to be representative. CFG4 also shows in Trench F. All three cross sections have one common factor; that the sides and bottom are extremely steeply sloped. They are in fact so steep that they could not have remained unsupported so that its obvious purpose would have been to house a palisade or similar structure. Given the degree of curve, it seems possible that CFG4 formed part of a defensive barrier.
- CFG5; a straight line on plan, this feature was found in context B40. It was excavated mainly by machine and cleaned by hand. It appears to align with CFS9.

TRENCH E AND TRENCH F

Trench E runs from the anticipated centre of a circular feature (CFG9), the intention being to investigate the area within. Unfortunately we had to close down the dig site suddenly before personnel were available so this investigation did not take place. Other features had however been briefly investigated as follows:

- CFG6; found by chance (not a cropmark), over-lapping CFG3. Trench F was excavated to ascertain its route. It appears to be curved, possibly on a circular plan.



The backfill is of a whitish powdery soil similar to that found in the pit in Trench A. A further section (E-E) revealed CMG6 cutting across, and therefore post-dating CFG3.

- CFG9; the magnetometry survey showed this as a solid line with a diameter of 19 metres, but where it crosses Trench E two shallow pits or post holes were revealed and excavated (E8 & E 10). Time did not permit further excavation.

TIME SEQUENCE

Prior to dating of finds the following sequences can so far be identified, each sequence shows earliest first:

- CFG7, CFG1, CFG2
- CFG4, CFG2
- CFG3, CFG6, {CFG4}*

{ }* = likely, but not certain.

FINDS

A listing of the finds is set out in Table 1 below.

POT:

Sherds of pot were found to be in two categories. Firstly, they were relatively numerous in upper layers with no definite boundary i.e. A10, C, C100, C200, and C450. Secondly, there were generally few tiny fragments from lower identifiable contexts. October 2008; most pottery finds dated, some results awaited).

BURNT CLAY:

Crumbs of burnt red clay were found in many of the contexts. They are said to be typical of the Iron Age and may provide linking evidence. This is shown in the list below as 'brc'.

FLINT:

What appeared to be worked flints were found in some of the contexts.

OTHER:

A fragment of a Roman roof tile was found in B10.

Table 1:

CONTEXT	FINDS (approx. numbers)	DRAWING No.	RELEVANCE
A10	30 pot (LIA & prehistoric)	-	Upper levels of Trench A
A100	10 pot (MIA); 2 (Roman)	25, 26	Ditto, near cross trenches
A10 (200)	50 flint	25, 26	Cluster in Trench A30
A10 (300)	2 flint	25, 26	Ditto, within pale grey fill
B04	1 pot (LIA); brc	14	Section through CFG1 with later disturbance



CONTEXT	FINDS (approx. numbers)	DRAWING No.	RELEVANCE
B10	3 pot (LIA); tile	15	Section through CFG2
B16	20 pot (MIA); 4 flint; brc	15	Section through CFG1
B20	3 pot; brc	16	CFG3; finds missing
B22	2 pot (LIA)	16	Just south of CFG3
B26	1 pot (LIA)	16	Ditto; further south
B32	1 flint	18	Pit B32; flint missing 09/2008
B40	1 pot	18	CFG5; find missing 09/2008
C	100 pot (LIA + 2 prehistoric)	20, 21	From part Trench C at successive depths down to approximately 450 mm below ground level
C100	15 pot (MIA); 7 flint	20, 21	
C200	15 pot (LIA); brc	20, 21	
C250	8 pot (LIA)	20, 21	A specific area within above
C400	12 pot (LIA; brc)	20, 21	From CFG1, or CFG7, or both
C401	2 flint	20, 21	From CFG7
C500	1 pot (LIA); brc	20, 21	From upper levels of CFG8
E08	2 pot (LIA)	22	From shallow pit on line CFG9
E10	2 pot (MIA)	22	From 2 nd pit
E20	3 pot (IA); brc	23, 24	From upper levels of CFG3 or 6
E22	10 pot; brc	23, 24	From upper levels of CFG6
E30	1 pot	23, 24	From upper level of CFG4; finds missing 09/2008
F	brc	23, 24	From upper level of CFG6

Identification of pottery was carried out by Nick Lavender. MIA & LIA = Middle & Late Iron Age. Flint and some pot sherds still to be dated at time of preparing this preliminary report.

RECORD DRAWINGS

As at 09/2008 the following A4 drawings had been prepared. All are prefixed 'TCF.GF'.

NUMBER	SCALE	SUBJECT
10	1/1000	Location plan of cropmarks
11	1/1000	Ditto; including magnetometry survey results
12	1/200	Setting-out of 2007 dig
13	1/200	Layout of linear features
14 - 27	1/20	Detail plans and sections



HIDDEN FEATURES

It has been shown, as anticipated, that there are features which do not show either as cropmarks or on the magnetometry survey results. Such features crossing below Trench A or Trench B (0.9 metres) are unlikely to have been located through these sources of information. It is likely that anything substantial would have been found in the remainder of Trench B, slightly less likely in Trench E.

PROVISIONAL RESULTS (OCT 2008)

Awaiting completion of finds dating.

The likely layout of linear features is shown at figure 1.



Figure 1: Likely layout of linear features

