

EHER 9190, 9189 and 9193

LOCATION: MOUNT BURES and BURES HAMLET, ESSEX
Fields to the east of the village of Bures, on the south side of the River Stour, known as Cowlins Fields, centred on NGR TL911332

Background

The 1838 Tithe Award Map and the 1st Edition OS map (1870) show the field layout much as it is today. To the south the fields are bordered by the B1508 Colchester Road, and to the north a field boundary, consisting of a hedge and ditch, separates the fields from water-meadows and the River Stour. To the west is a track leading to Bures Mill, and the other side of the track is EHER 9265. A rectangular cropmark lies across the track. To the east is a brook which drains into the River Stour. Most of the fields lie in the parish of Mount Bures, but the western part is in the parish of Bures Hamlet.

Previous Surveys

Cropmarks in Cowlins Field are recorded in 'The Archaeology of Constable Country: The Cropmarks of the Stour Valley' (Brown, Knopp and Strachan, 2002, Figs 13, 15, 16, 17), 'Essex From the Air' (Strachan 1998, p11), Essex County Council (unlockingessex.essexcc.gov.uk), Historic England (pastscape.org.uk) (see References and Bibliography). There are very many aerial photographs of the field and these are listed in the References and Bibliography section of these reports.

Sponsored by Managing a Masterpiece, the field was field-walked by volunteers led by Colchester Archaeological Group in 2011 (Brooks 2011). A number of worked and burnt flints were found, indicating Neolithic and Bronze Age activity. A late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint adze (EHER 9189) had been found on the surface in the 1980s (Colchester Archaeological Group Bulletin 27 1984, pps 27-29; Brooks and Martingell 2011 Appendix 4).

One of the ring-ditches (EHER 9190) was partially excavated in 1974 and evidence of a probable Bronze Age cremation was found (Colchester Archaeological Group Bulletin 18, 1975, pps 9-11, 16).

The possible mortuary enclosure (EHER 9193) was partially excavated in 2011 (Colchester Archaeological Group Bulletin 53, 2013, pps 6-13), and again in 2013-14 (Colchester Archaeological Group, unpublished).

Analysis of the cropmarks

Up to 12 ring-ditches have been seen on various aerial photographs, two of them double-ditched. These represent a linear and nucleated cemetery which appears to be aligned on a possible mortuary enclosure (NMR no. TL93 SW116; no 8 on Fig 1). This was presumably already in existence and still visible in the landscape when the earliest of the ring-ditches were created. Two parallel linear ditches (no 9 on Fig 1), visible intermittently in aerial photographs, run from north-west to south-east, cutting at least two of the ring-ditches, but it is not possible to tell which were earlier. The parallel ditches have been described in the past as a possible cursus, but later opinion suggests that this is unlikely. Further cropmarks to the south show another ditch lying parallel to the pair described above, but curving round a ring-ditch to avoid it, so presumably later. The three

ditches continue towards the mortuary enclosure and converge to the north of it, before one of the ditches continues east, skirting round the mortuary enclosure. At the point where the ditches converge, three large irregularly shaped marks can be seen on some aerial photographs, and these may indicate three large pits.

Unlike other cropmark clusters in the area, there appear to be no field boundaries. On the opposite side of the river and on the same contour line as the mortuary enclosure (20m) is the known truncated cursus at Bures St Mary, Suffolk (SHER 9194). The monuments at EHER 9190 appear to link or 'cut off' a large meander in the river, a feature which has been noted in other parts of the Stour Valley (see Smallbridge Hall Farm) and in other areas.

Current status

At the time of writing (early April 2013), Cowlins Field, which contains most of the features, is under cultivation for arable crops. The field adjoining, to the north-west, which contains the continuation of at least one of the linear features is not under cultivation at present but is used for grazing sheep. A fence has been erected enclosing part of this field, which crosses the line of the linear features.

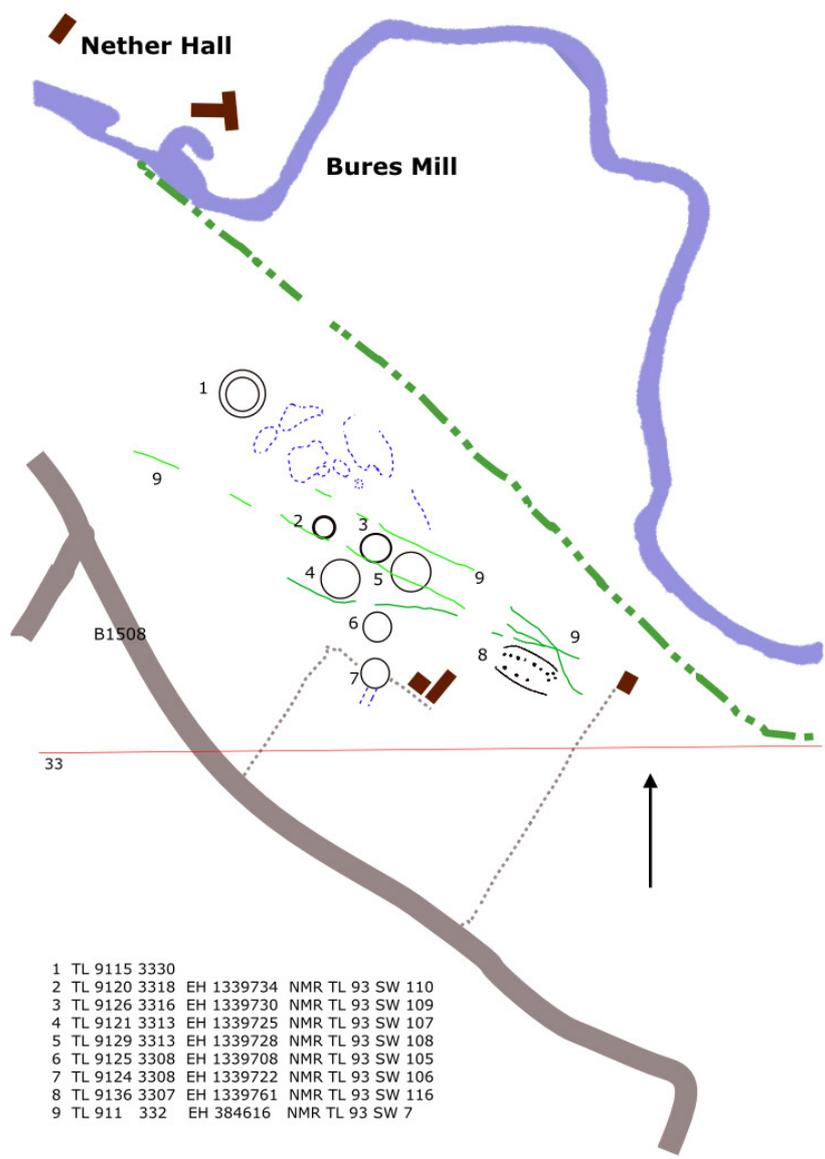


Fig 1.



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