

EHER 9194

Field to South of Sewage Works at Bures St Mary

National Grid Ref: TL919333

Background

Situated to the South of the Sewage works and North of a bend in the river Stour. The Tithe Award Map of 1838 shows this field as two meadows both owned by Smallbridge: the upper part containing the crop marks is shown as Meadow Field (609) and the lower alongside the river as Five Acre Meadows (608). The area to the West of Meadow Field was also Meadow Field (606) but owned by Bures Hall. The 1905 O/S map shows the same field boundaries with Five Acre Meadows labelled 'Liable to floods'. Gravel extractions took place in Meadow Field (606) prior to 1960 which destroyed the Western End of the crop mark which would have extended into this area. The Gravel workings are now a fishing lake and the area 9194 is currently meadow.

Previous Surveys

Crop marks in the northern half of 9194 are clearly visible on aerial photos taken by Ida McMaster in the 1970s and 80s (these are listed in the References and Bibliography section of these reports).

On p. 7 of CAG Bulletin Vol 14 1971 the cursus monument is shown on map 5 with the following ref: *South of new sewage works (Site A) TL91883325 (35ft approx..)* *One small ring is enclosed within 'cursus' ditches which are about 70ft apart. At their north-western end is a possible long barrow outline.* On p. 35 of the same publication Felix Erith describes the 'levelled longbarrow feature' by the sewage works as *Length 210 feet as estimated from photograph. Associations: Parallel lines (cursus?) intersect this feature at an angle of 100 degrees. A ring ditch is between the parallel lines to the east.*

In CAG Bulletin vol. 27 1984 p. 27-9 McMaster gives a further description of the cursus feature:

It is curious that directly opposite across the River Stour on the Suffolk side at Mount Bures (sic – should say Bures St Mary) is a small classic cursus of the Springfield type complete with its similar inner ring ditch.

See below for 2 aerial photos taken by Ida McMaster of the Bures cursus site



The following is an extract from an extensive analysis of the 'Bures St Mary cursus' in : *The Archaeology of Constable Country* (Brown, Knopp and Strachan p.15)

The surviving length of the cursus is around 190m, with a width of c. 24m. The cropmark appears to have two entrances, the first on the southern boundary at the eastern terminal. In addition the site encloses a circular pit (c. 5m in diameter) and a ring-ditch (c. 10m in diameter), both positioned on the central line of the cursus towards the western terminal. The site is situated just above the flood-plain of the north bank of the river, running along the 20m OD contour. The cursus has a WNW-ESE orientation, it lies within a meander, and 'cuts-of' the neck of the enclosure, enclosing and overlooking, the area of flood-plain within the meander.

According to Suffolk Archaeology Unit there have been no recorded excavations of any of these features to date.



Image taken from Flash Earth of Bures Cursus with cursus picked out in blue (Marriott, 2013)

Analysis of the Cropmarks

Cursus monuments have long been regarded as belonging to the later Neolithic; however, a growing body of evidence now indicates a much earlier date (eg Barclay A & Harding 1999). Locally, the cursus at Springfield in the Chelmer valley is likely to have been constructed in the late fourth millennium BC. (Buckley, Hedges & Brown 2001, 101-162).

The northern side of the Bures cursus appears to run in a fairly straight line with an apparent entrance toward the eastern end. (Brown, Knopp and Strachan, 2002) The southern side has a slight change in alignment east of a second possible entrance. This pattern of one straight side the other less so is a widespread phenomenon seen in the layout of many cursus monuments (Barclay and Harding 1999, 2). It is unfortunate that the west end of the cursus has been destroyed, however, the occurrence of a ring-ditch and a large pit towards the eastern terminal would indicate a focus of activity at this end. The extensively excavated eastern terminal of the Springfield cursus revealed a large circle of postholes within the monument, whilst further north in eastern England in the Ouse valley the elongated monuments at Brampton and Godmanchester both have internal ring-ditches suggesting foci at their eastern ends.

The position of the cursus, running as it does along the line of the 20m contour and appearing to cut off the neck of a meander in the River Stour parallels the position of the Springfield cursus and more generally the position of other cursus monuments (eg. Barclay and Harding 1999, 5). It has been suggested that the now deeply incised Stour course was once shallower and that *when in use*

the Bures cursus may well have formed a clear earthwork defined alignment running across a neck of dry land surrounded on three sides by water and marshy ground, a setting which would have been particularly striking during winter flooding. (Brown, Knopp and Strachan, 2002).

It has further been suggested that linear features such as the 'cursus' have an early prehistoric date and a ritual or funerary purpose eg. Long mortuary enclosures. Parker Pearson states that cursuses may have been used as ceremonial gathering places and date from c. 3000BC. He conjectures that an alignment of NW to SE, as in the Bures cursus, was related to astrological features such as the 'minor moonrise' at midsummer. He also postulates that the proximity to a major bend in the River Stour may also be significant in the siting of this feature. (Parker Pearson, *Bronze Age Britain* 1993)

In 2005 Nigel Brown and Helen Saunders published a draft document from which the following relevant information is taken. The Bures oval cropmark referred to is the possible longbarrow feature at Cowlins Farm.
A remarkable oval open-ended structure with rows of large internal pits or post-holes lies across the river from Bures cursus. The Bures oval cropmark may be presumed to be amongst the earliest monuments in this part of the valley, contemporary with, or perhaps pre-dating the Bures cursus. The cursus lies about 350m to the north across the river, both monuments are located at a similar height around the 20m contour line. The two constructions would have been invisible (assuming there was no extensive tree cover). It seems likely that their use may have been linked, their similar orientation and siting reflecting symbolic associations with the river, and perhaps patterns of human movement within the valley. Over time a linear sequence of monuments was developed across the neck of a meander, parallel to the Bures cursus on the other side of the river. (Brown & Saunders 2005 p. 3)

The site of the Bures cursus is low lying, but a feature such as the raised bank of the long barrow at Cowlins would have been clearly visible across the river. The site of Wormingford Mere to the East would also have been visible, although surrounding tree growth would make the actual water invisible. The best view of the monument complex along the Stour would come from the hilltop (Clicket Hill) directly above the Bures cursus, where all these features could have been viewed with one sweep of the eye.



View from Clicket Hill towards 9194 site of cursus (green field in centre of photo, beyond the first hedge line) – Photo E Mead 3.12.13



View from just East of the Cowlins site looking across Stour towards site of Bures cursus (in field just beyond the trees in centre of photo) Photo E Mead 3.12.13

Richard Marriott in his Interim Report on Cursus Alignments in the Stour Valley concludes that the alignment (of the Bures Cursus) did not match any simple astronomical measurement, nor did it appear to coincide with any currently existing feature on the landscape. Photos were taken along the axis to Westward and Eastward. The field was recently mown pasture (June 26th 2013). The tall copse to the West of the field obscures any distant features. On Pic F may be seen a greener marking running in the general direction of the cursus. It is worth noting the apparent terminal ditch is not at right angles to the lines but skewed some 25° clockwise.



Bures Alignment looking WNW



Bures Alignment looking ESE