

MEMBERS' ACTIVITIES

13th January 2014

Report by Pauline Shinn

Crop Marks in the Stour Valley and Beyond

The evening began with a dramatic musical accompaniment to the pictures of the sunrise over Lodge Hills on the morning of the December Solstice taken by Sally Bartrum.

Andrew White began by saying the survey group started with five members which gradually expanded in size and with CAG approval set out initially to survey an area in Wormingford known as Metlands.

In the middle of the Metlands area is a Mere lying in a bowl between Clicket and Sandy Hills. In size it is 12 acres and circular probably formed by a kettle hole - trapped ice melting to form a lake - there are 112 similar ice melt lakes in East Anglia.

The Metland Cursus crosses the field behind the Mere. The River Stour has since altered its course, but the original route would have given convenient access to the Cursus, which is open at either end so making this a possible processional way. Ring ditches surveyed by Ellie Mead follow the line of the Cursus and are scattered across the site.

Bronze and Iron Age material was found in spoil being dug for the laying of a pipe line, by Birmingham University students in fields not far from the Mere site.

From a southern boundary of an area called Weston Green, since disappeared from modern maps which bordered on Smallbridge Hall Mark Curteis and Ellie Mead surveyed the ring ditches, 10 in number with pits and one pre-historic enclosure. The linear arrangement of ring ditches appear to cut off the neck of the meander of the Stour. This is a characteristic of a number of sites within the Valley including the Cursus sites, as a result it is generally believed Cursus Monuments have some connection with death and may represent ceremonial ways in which the dead are carried to their place of interment. Stonehenge is one of the best examples .

Together, Sally Bartrum and Anna Moore traced the Crop Marks from Staunch Farm fields to the Bures St Mary Cursus. Following the 20metre contour line the Crop Marks are a continuation of those at Metlands, with the exception of a gap before Cowlins. Again running close to the course of the river. The oldest feature in the landscape here is the Barrow, interpreted as a Longbarrow or Mortuary enclosure. Charcoal found in the ditch fill in 2011 was dated to 3,570 BC.

Also on the Cowlins fields are ring ditches varying in size. One of these was excavated by Ida McMaster of CAG, in 1974 contained the cremated bones of an adult male. A larger ring ditch, nearer to Bures excavated by Ida McMaster in 1967 measuring 87ft across contained a barbed arrowhead and a scraper.

The estimated date of a Bronze Age Circular Barrow is between 2000 BC and 750 BC, so the Longbarrow predates them by some 2000 years. A late Neolithic/early Bronze Age flint axe was also found on this site, but not close to any of the features by the farmer in the 1980's.

Phillip Cunningham took to the floor to show us a video of the flight in a light aircraft he and Francis Nicholls arranged giving the visual aspect of finding crop marks from the air. None visible on this occasion, but we had a brief glimpse of Marks Hall where the excavations are continuing.

Howard Brooks completed the talk on our Monuments by posing the questions were the Cursus always astronomically aligned or perhaps instead to something in the landscape. Could it be that the Mere also had some ritual significance with the Metlands Cursus.