

Three possible new decoy pool sites in North Somerset: a discussion document

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The pool on Congresbury Great Moor, 1736-9

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Abstract

Three sites are suggested that may once have been decoy pools, although of perhaps less formal types than the grand and well-documented versions seen in the work of Payne-Gallwey (1886). In each case, however, they seem to have been overlooked.

Acknowledgements

The author is grateful for the availability of maps and documents through the Somerset and Bristol Record Offices and the British Library.

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleve Archaeological Research Team (YCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.

Site locations

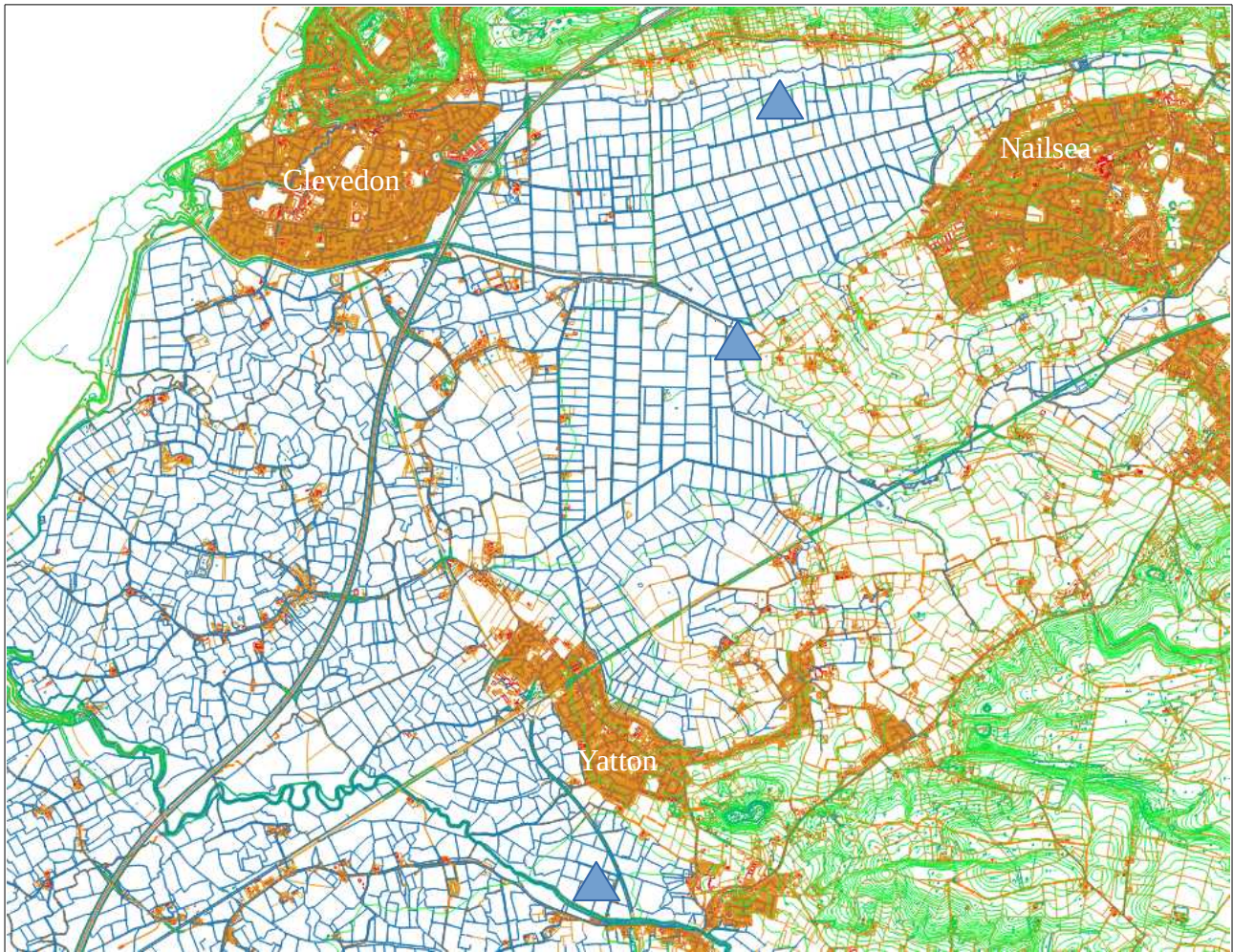


Fig 1: Locations

The northernmost site is on Tickenham Moor, at ST44117113. It lies within the area of the Tickenham, Nailsea and Kenn Moors SSSI (designated 24 March 1995). The central site is next to Nailsea Wall, at ST44046921. The southern is on Congresbury Great Moor, at ST42756428, within the Biddle Street, Yatton SSSI (designated 06 September 1994)

Land use and geology

All three sites are on the alluvial clays of the Northmarsh, and all are currently in use as permanent pasture. The Tickenham site is adjacent to a public footpath; the Nailsea site is inaccessible; that at Congresbury can be seen from the northern river bank walk of the Congresbury Yeo.

Historical & archaeological context

MacDonnell (1984), in his gazetteer of Somerset decoy pools, identified two types of decoy pool. One is the traditional square body of water with netted pipes, into which large numbers of waterfowl could be enticed by the use of a decoy dog, and then killed (for further detail, see Payne-Gallwey 1886).



Fig 2: A large netted decoy in use

Some splendid examples of these survive at Clapton-in-Gordano and Kenn, in North Somerset, and YCCCART have surveyed what remains of the one at Claverham: (ycccart.co.uk/index_htm_files/Duck%20Decoy%20Claverham%202010%20Y19%20version%202.pdf)

A second type, made much later when shooting waterfowl was the preferred option, are smaller and rounder, often with a small central island.

The former, especially where there remain complex earthworks or extensive documentation, have been studied and published; the latter, hardly at all.

Tickenham

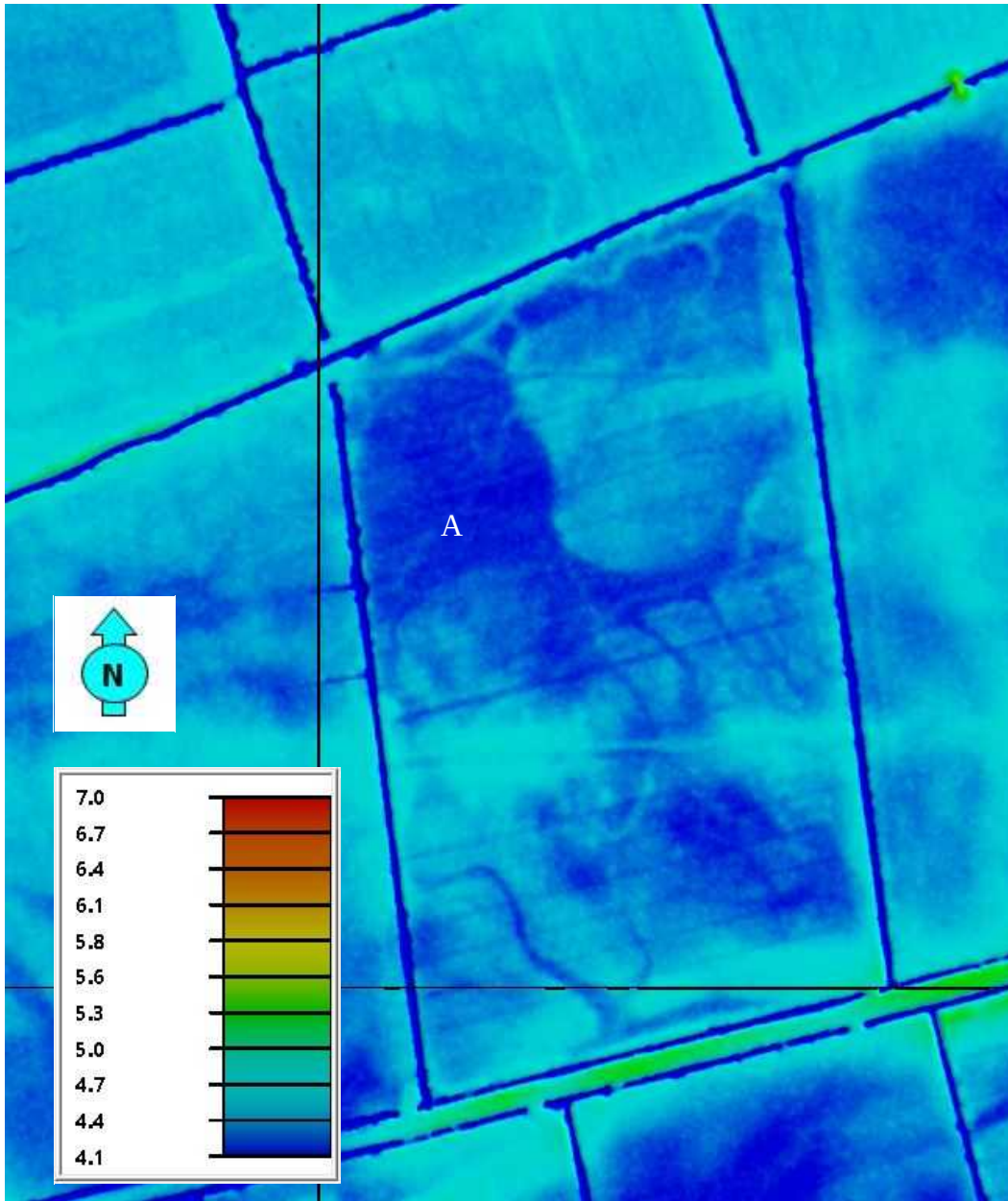


Fig 3: Lidar scan of Tickenham Moor: scale is in metres AOD

There is a single reference to 'decoy fowl' known at Tickenham.

When Codrington's only daughter Jane became engaged to Sir Richard Bampfylde in 1742, the Marriage Settlement included 'All those farms called Tickenham Court Farm and Nash Farm, coppice wood, Chief Rents, *decoy fowles* and the Royalty of the Manor of Tickenham, and cottages in the parishes of Tickenham, Nailsea, Bourton and Wraxall' to the value of £6000 (Franks 2000).

While it is just conceivable that these 'decoy fowles' may have come from elsewhere, the inclusive wording implies the fowl arise from Tickenham itself.

In the medieval period, the Cartulary of St Mark's Hospital Bristol states:

Charter of Nicholas son of Roger...to..St Marks Hospital, Bristol..the right of digging peat on his moor of Tykeham and of cutting and collecting sedges and rushes for their use...They may have three men working there daily...when others are accustomed to dig and cut, but they shall not despoil his heirs crops or meadow, if, through his industry...the moor should be brought into cultivation or meadow

so clearly peat digging was taking place on the Moor at this time (pre-1262). As can be seen in modern Somerset, peat diggings usually flood after abandonment, so some earthworks should survive of this practice on Tickenham Moor.

It is suggested that the squarish pool (A) on Fig 3 (although it was possibly created by peat digging) was converted to a decoy by adding two pipes (seen as two funnel shapes to the west of the potential pool).

If this was a decoy pool, it probably went out of use at the time of Inclosure, when all the straight ditches around it originated, in 1813.

The earthworks today are very wide and shallow (c0.3m deep), but can be seen clearly in winter.



Fig 4: The earthwork today: The white arrow indicates the edge of the pool: it bends round into the southern 'pipe', where the lower area is marked by rougher vegetation.

Nailsea

This is probably an example of MacDonnell's second type of decoy, for shooting.

The current Kenn River is entirely artificial, it's course having changed at least twice.

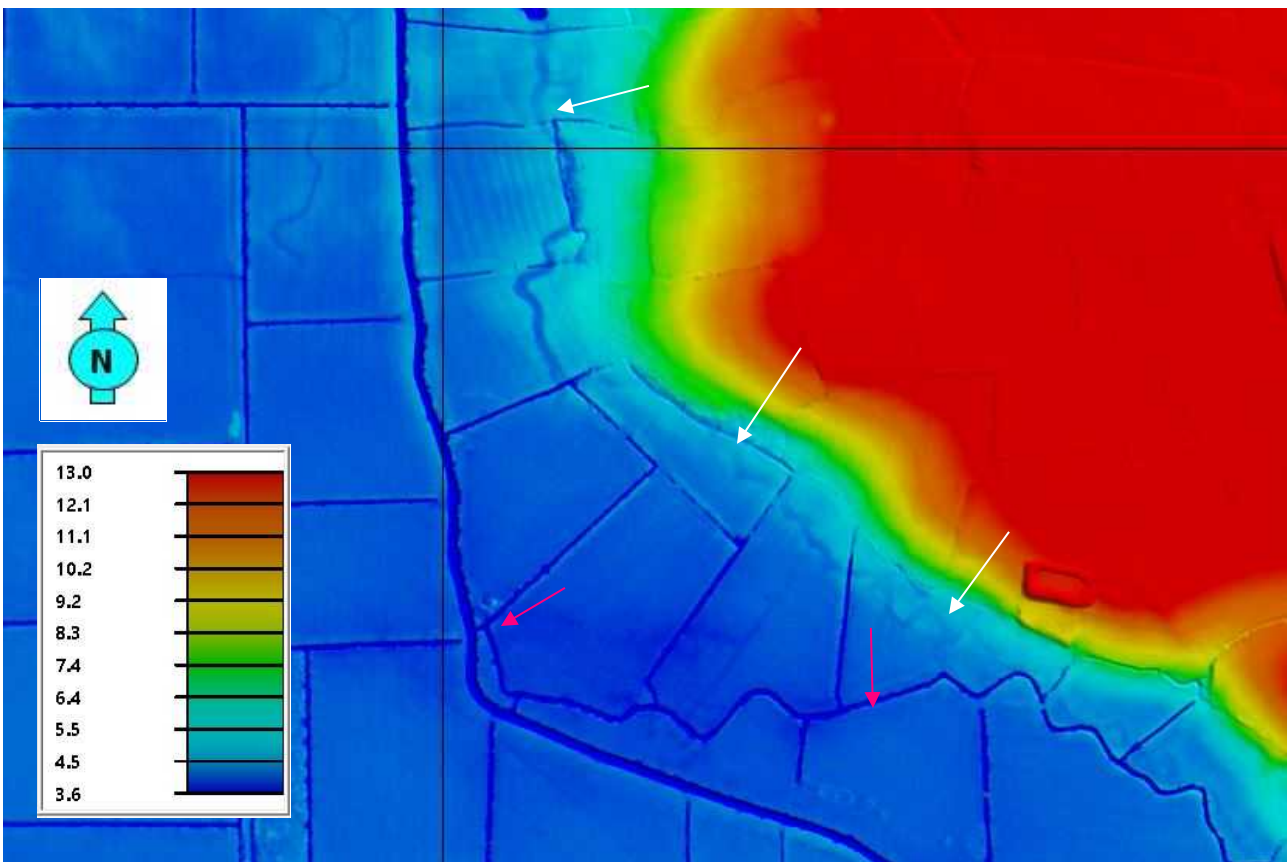


Fig 5: The Three Kenns

The earliest Kenn appears to be a natural catchwater drain around the base of the high ground at West End, Nailsea (white arrows in Fig 5): a newer course, formerly the Nailsea / Kenn boundary (red arrows), and the modern course, which does not appear on Day and Master's Somerset map of 1782.

At the northern end of the earliest course, close to Nailsea Wall, part of it seems to have been dug out for a (short-lived) decoy, seen on the 1809 OS draft 1" map of 1809 (Fig 6), and on the 1822 Greenwood map of Somerset (Fig 7). Note that the current course of the Kenn is not shown on the earlier map.

There does not appear to be any other reference to this decoy: its outline, including the small island, is clear on lidar (Fig 8).

MacDonnell recorded two other possible decoys, at Chelvey and Midgell just a few hundred metres further up the Kenn, so this was clearly a live idea in (say) around 1800.

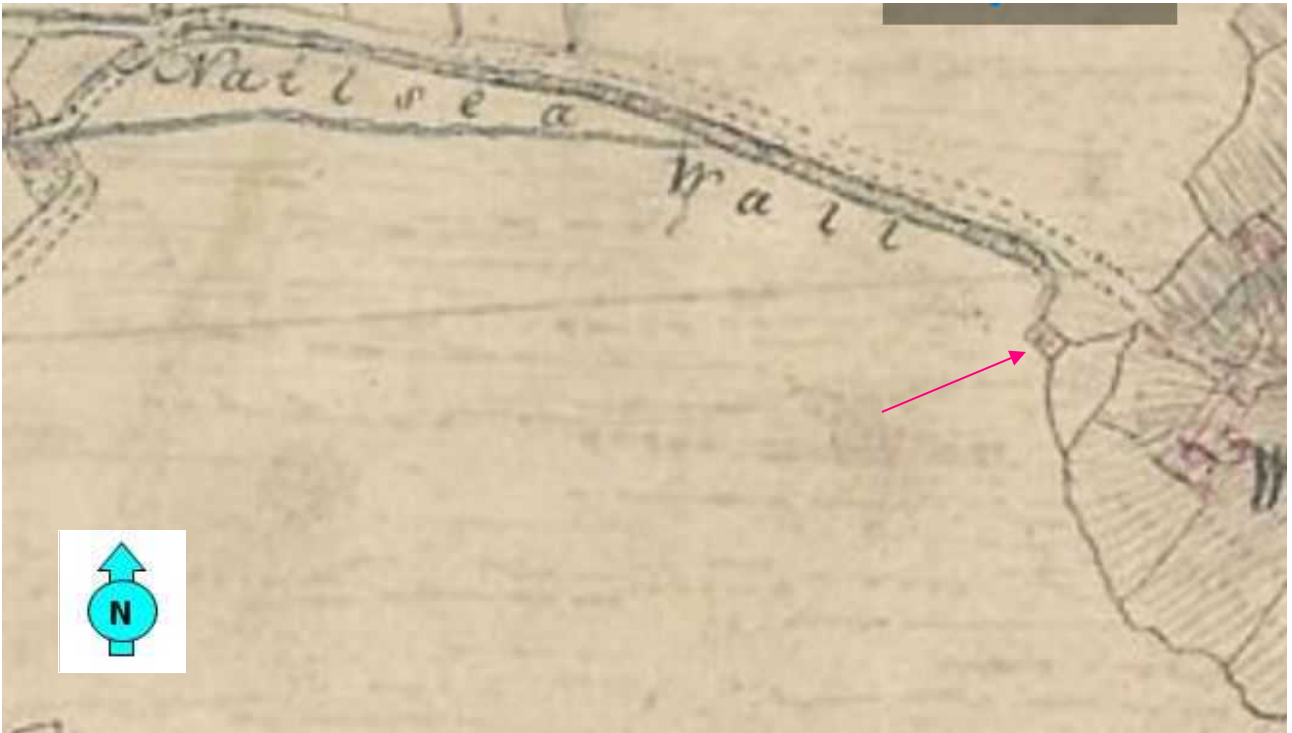


Fig 6: Nailsea site on OS draft map of 1809 (arrowed)



Fig 7: Nailsea site on Greenwood's map of 1822

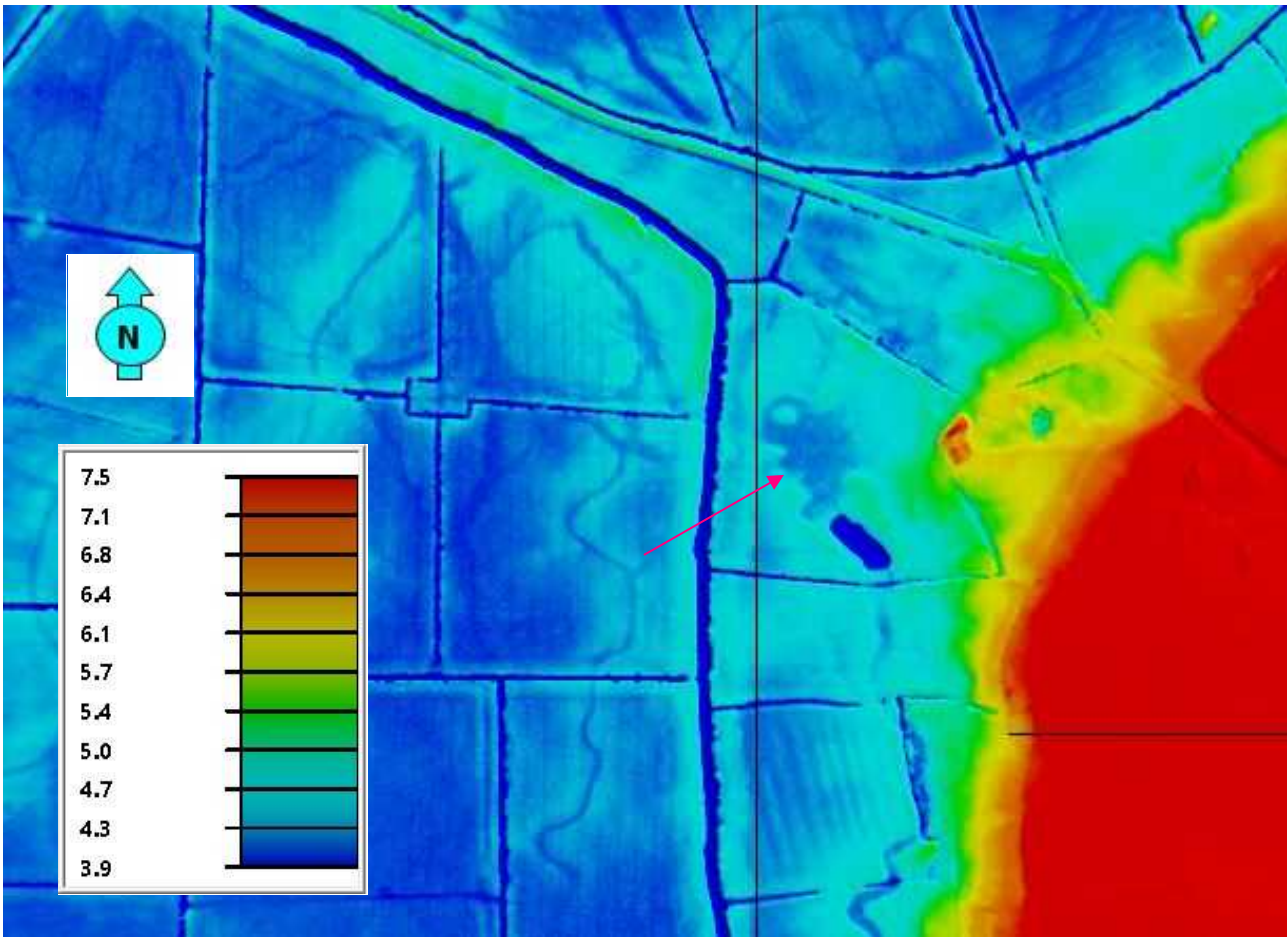


Fig 8: Nailsea site on lidar (arrowed)

There is no identifiable structure in the field on the Nailsea Tithe Map of 1844.

Congresbury



Fig 9: Congresbury Great Moor 1736

deWilstar's Congresbury map of 1736 shows a large pond in the middle of the moor, but it was only recently that I appreciated the pond was filled with ducks: no other body of water is shown this way on the deWilstar maps.



Fig 10: The ducks on the pool, Great Moor

Whatever the origins of the pool on Great Moor, it has clearly been deliberately augmented with artificial leat and race. The water emerging from Hurst Pool is apparently warmer than most: the Hurstpool Rhyne has to be keeched up to 3 times a year (Richard Ivens, *pers comm*). An earlier, probably natural, system can be seen on lidar (Fig 11 below).

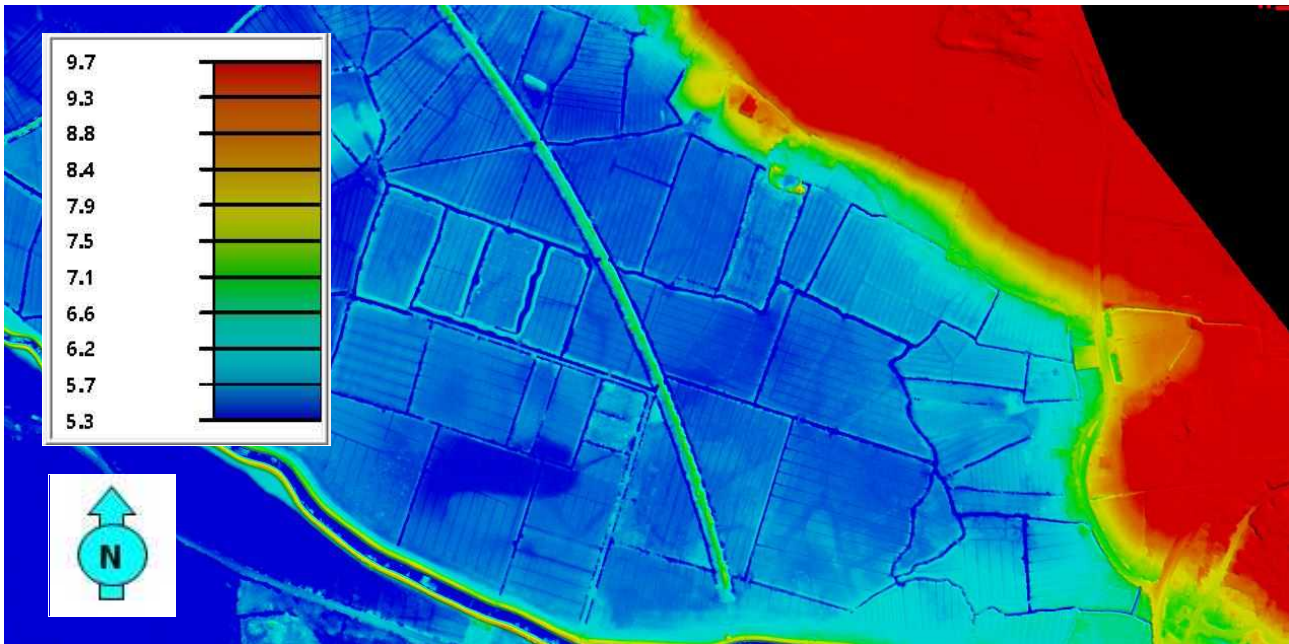


Fig 11: Palaeochannel systems on the Great Moor

That someone has gone to the expense of building a new and artificial water system for this pond (presumably Queen Elizabeth's Hospital) and that the pond is illustrated with ducks, implies a pond managed with waterfowl in mind.

Discussion

Although the documentary evidence for these three sites is thin at best, perhaps this should not be a surprise.

It does call research into duck decoys into question, though, as beginning with Payne-Gallwey, researchers (including myself) have tended to research (and publish) only those sites with notable earthworks or extensive documentation.

I wonder if the idea of the decoy actually extended further, and some lakes (like that at Congresbury, for example) were engineered for the better occupation with waterfowl, for netting or shooting.

The term 'decoy' should not really apply to these kinds of sites, but 'duckpond' lacks sufficient gravitas.

The report was written in Libre Office 5 Writer.

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Recommendations for further work

It is recommended that people should bear in mind the ideas put forward here when considering present or former bodies of water, however small.

References

Franks, D. 2000	<i>The story of Tickenham, Somersetshire</i>
MacDonnell, R. 1984	Duck decoys in Somerset: A Gazetteer in <i>Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> 128: 25-30
Payne-Gallwey, R. 1886	<i>The Book of Duck Decoys</i> London

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