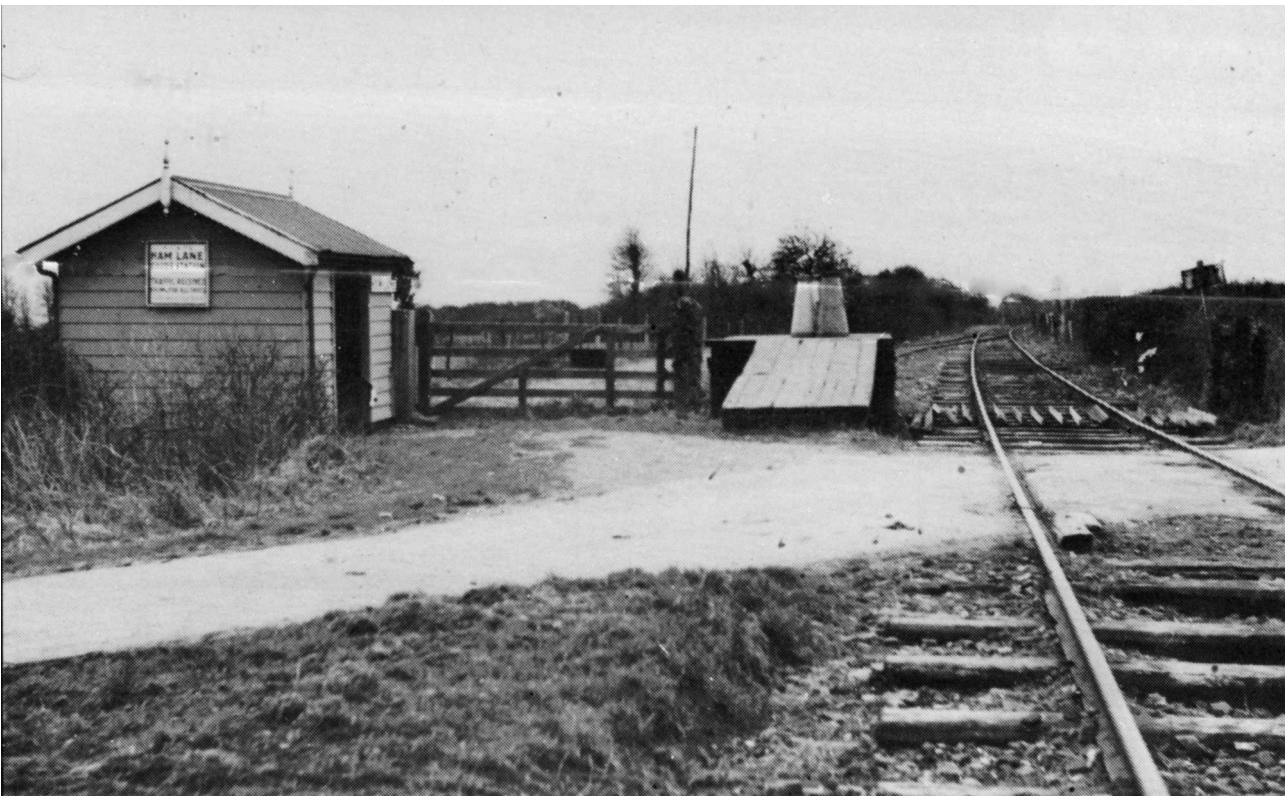


YCCART 2023/Y7

Gradiometer survey at Blackey Lands, Ham Lane, Kingston Seymour

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCART)**

General Editor: Vince Russett



'Can you tell a green field, From a cold steel rail?'

Ham Lane station on the WC&PLR, 1937, in the corner of Blackey Land (Strange 1989)

Kingston Seymour, Gradiometry survey, Blackey Lands, 2023, Y7, v1

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Abstract

The gradiometer survey did not indicate significant evidence of occupation or industry, as might perhaps be expected from the field name. Apart from the large area affected by the construction, use and removal of the early 20th century light railway on the eastern side of the field, modern features such as grypes, other features of demonstrable post-Roman and pre-Domesday date are present, but difficult to understand without further work in other areas as comparanda.

Acknowledgements

A Heritage Lottery Grant enabled the purchase, by YCCCART, of a Bartington Gradiometer 601 without which this survey could not have been undertaken.

This survey would also not have been carried out without the willing permission of the landowners, Mr P and Mrs D Kingcott and Jane Bell.

The authors are grateful for the hard work by the members of YCCCART in performing the surveys and Vince Russett for editing.

Introduction

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) is a Community Archaeology team working across northern Somerset.

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 location



Fig 1: Location of Longworth



Fig 2: Location of Blackey Lands

The survey site is a field, roughly a truncated triangle in plan, around NGR ST38396673. It

lies on the south side of Ham Lane, about 330m SW of Ham Farm, in the parish of Kingston Seymour, formerly in the County of Somerset, now the Unitary Authority of North Somerset.

Land use and geology

Blackey Lands (strictly *Blackey Lands Six Acres*: Kingston Valuation 1848, an unusual private indexed version of the Kingston Tithe Apportionment) lies entirely on Tidal Flat Deposits (TFDs), dominated by the meters thick partly oxidised alluvial clays of the Wentlloog deposits, often leading to waterlogging in winter. This clay has been bored to peat at 5.5m below field level at the SE corner of Rushy Ground (British Geological Surveys 1961, and see YCCART 2023b).

There is no public access to the survey area, but it can be seen in its entirety from the public highway of Ham Lane, to the north. The field was cut for silage, followed by grazing in 2023.

Historical & archaeological context

Blackey Lands Six Acres forms part of the complex around Longworth off Ham Lane (see Gilbert 1996; YCCART 2023a).

Field names involving the word 'black'- are often assumed to refer to a darker soil in the field, revealed by disturbance or ploughing. Such darker soil can be evidence of earlier occupation, the soil being coloured by charcoal and other waste products of occupation and / or industrial activity. The soil in the survey fields was not subject to sufficient disturbance to judge in 2023, and it should be borne in mind that Kingston also possesses a group of fields off Middle Lane with 'Bleak' elements in their name, and that much earlier forms of both will need to be sought to settle the matter.

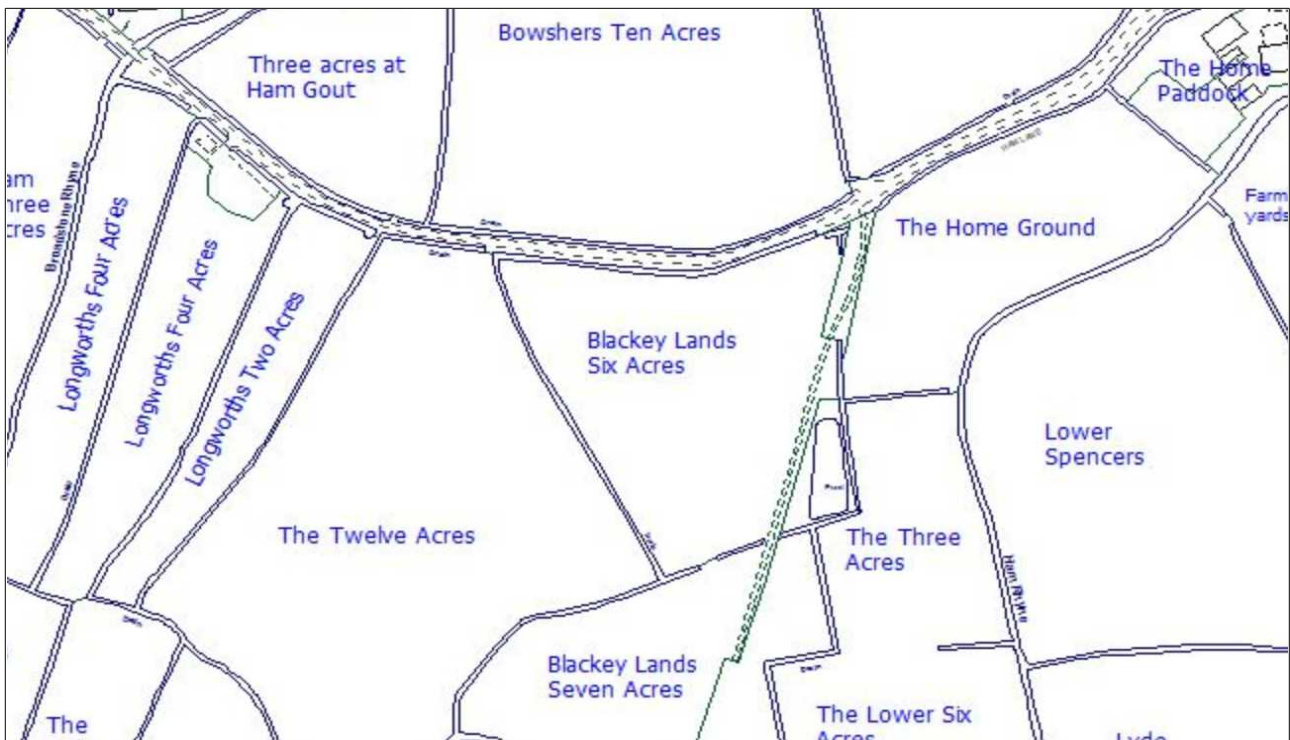


Fig 3: Field names in the Longworth and Blackey Lands area (1840-48)

The problems of illustrating historical landscape change from place-names are well-illustrated by the above (Fig 3).

While Blackey Lands may be an indicative field name, many names in Kingston (and elsewhere in the Northmarsh) are very simple descriptive terms such as The Twelve Acres (field size) or Lower Spencers (ownership), so deductions from place names regarding landscape change and development are made from a very small element of the whole, which means extra care must be taken not to exaggerate such deductions.

The Blackey Lands field names have been included by Gilbert (1996) within the complex of Longworth, suggesting previous domestic / industrial activity that has (especially given the finds of Roman occupation by the former oxhouse at ST38126693) previously been

automatically assumed to be of Roman date, but in view of the immense thickness of TFDs laid over the Roman landscape in Kingston, this assumption should perhaps be more cautiously applied.

Fig 3 illustrates that the 'Ham' place-name element becomes more common moving west towards the sea, as well as indicated by Ham Rhyne and Ham Lane both leading to the area.

All imply an area name 'Ham' (see Fig 4).



Fig 4: 'Ham' area of Kingston 1784 (SHC DD/MKG/12/3/1)

On the 1784 map of Kingston, the words 'Ham Comⁿ Meadow' (top centre of Fig 4) indicate an area of as yet unenclosed land (although it is entirely enclosed by 1840: Kingston Tithe Apportionment SRO D/D/rt/A/465).

The word 'Meadow' has a special landscape meaning - 'pasture put aside from grazing in the spring for the cultivation of hay', a vital component in the over-wintering of stock at a time of year when other fodder is scarce.

In this context, 'Ham' is also an important name (also seen at, for example, Bleadon Ham) derived from *OE* 'hamme' meaning 'pasture or meadow in a watery place, or in the bend of a river'.

Blackey lands lies in the lower right of the map: see Fig 5.



Fig 5: Blackey Lands 1784 (SHC DD/MKG/12/3/1)

Note from Fig 5 that Ham Lane is called 'Common Lane', and that a third field is called 'Blakkeland' (Bleaky Lands' by 1848).

Within the field itself, the whole eastern side has been disturbed by the building c1897 of the track and its corridor of the Weston, Clevedon and Portishead (Light) Railway, which functioned, albeit thought of largely as a tourism attraction, until 1940 when the railway was closed and much of the track lifted, although standing fences survive in the eastern side of the field, and there are clearly other elements in south of the field, as shown by the gradiometry results (see below).

At the north-eastern end of the field, and partly overlapping into the field to the east, were the buildings of Ham Lane station, so grandly named: the illustration on the cover, (looking south from Ham Lane), shows the station building and the truck bed used as a platform, with two old 17-gallon milk churns (weighing 90kg each when full).

The current surface appearance of the field is illustrated in the lidar mapping of the site (Fig 6 below). This shows the existence of a set of parallel grypes running SW-NE across the field, with a central grype running across at right angles, and a small pond at its south end.

Kingston Seymour - Blacklands lidar



Fig 6: LiDAR image. Courtesy of Richard Pearson. Copyright Environment Agency

The old railway track shows as a clear almost-straight feature on the east side of the field, and there is a railway borrow pit in the south-east corner of the field.

Survey objectives

This survey was undertaken to further investigate the archaeology of Kingston Seymour. An important historical point that the current landscape at Kingston Seymour, but especially the landscape beneath that and revealed by gradiometry, looks to be post-Roman and probably pre-10th century, and is therefore something extremely unusual in landscape studies, although probably not uncommon in the Northmarsh and the Somerset Levels.

Methodology

The survey of the fields was undertaken during the period May and June 2023 by teams from YCCCART using a Bartington Grad 601-2 (gradiometry)

The completed surveys were downloaded to a TerraSurveyor programme and the resultant composite adjusted using the following filters:

- Colour - Red Blue Green 2
- Band weight equaliser
- Grad shade
- Destriped
- Despiked Clip
- SD2

The report was written in Libre Office 5 Writer.

Photographs were taken by members of YCCCART and remain the copyright of YCCCART.

Results

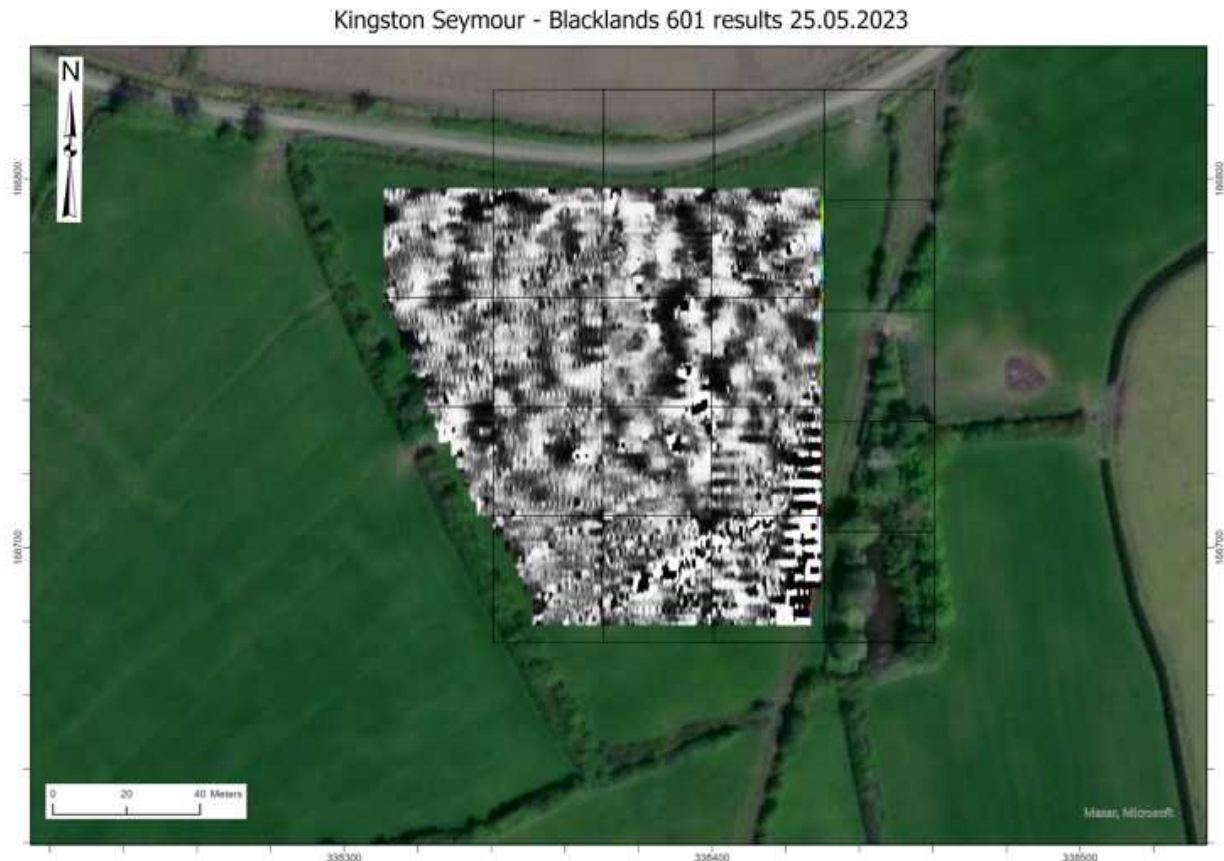


Fig 7: Gradiometry survey (mono) within Blackey Lands

Firstly, nothing in the gradiometry results, or observation in the field, revealing features possibly contributing to the field name, has been recorded.

In the southern part of the field, parallel lines of probable grypes can be seen, partly overlain by dumped soil, possibly in connection with the construction of the adjacent railway. Faint traces of others can be seen further north in the field, and these coincide with grypes seen in the lidar (Fig 6).

In the south-east corner of the survey, there are clear indications of interference / reactions from structures relating to the railway, probably (given the distance from the known rails) relating to former fencing of the railway corridor.

Otherwise, features in the survey are reflecting the natural patterns within the TFDs. As discussed elsewhere, previous surveys have worked in areas where the post-Roman alluvium just reached, and natural patterns tended to be swirling, whereas in Kingston, any such patterns have been covered by frequent, possibly even daily at times, depositional episodes, which is why such patterns do not show up there.

What we see, then, is not the current landscape, but by definition, must be earlier: what we see is not the Roman landscape either, but by definition, must be later.

So our results are illuminating that most mysterious of things, a wetland landscape of post-4th but pre-10th date, i.e what we used to call Dark Age, something which has not been considered elsewhere.

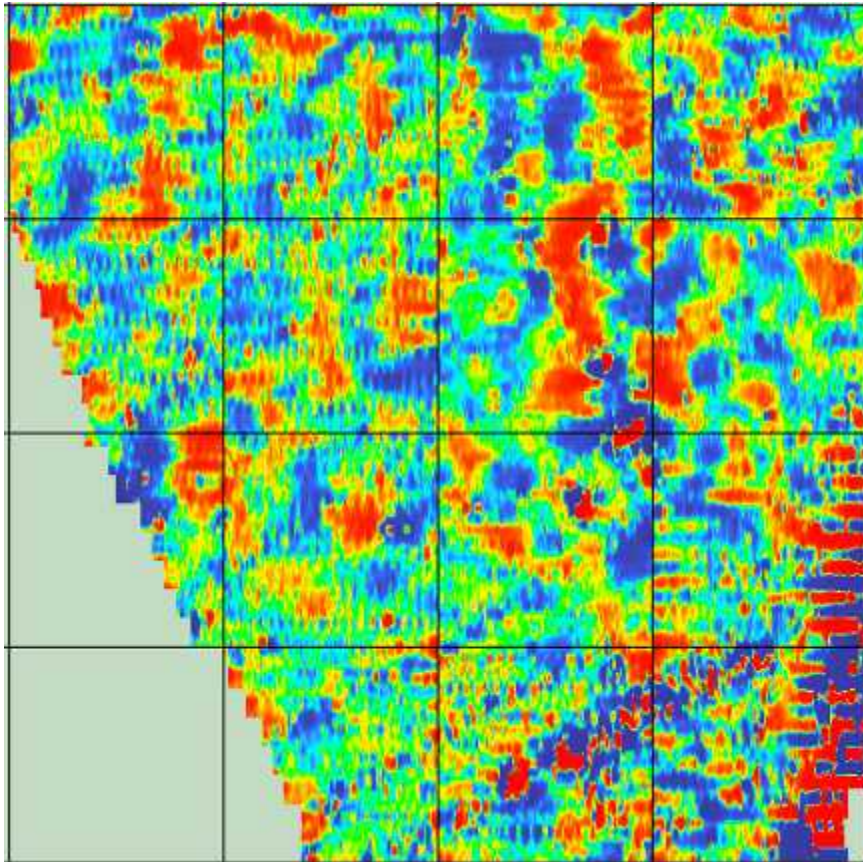


Fig 8: Gradiometer results from Blackey Lands (colour)

This enlarged version of the survey results shows very distinct types of response, although we need more data to make confident interpretations.

There can be little doubt that given the range of magnetic response, features seen are real and probably anthropogenic, but we cannot yet be certain of what they are.

This form of uncertainty is inevitable in inspecting, as we are in Kingston, a landscape and history that has previously been little studied, certainly in the Northmarsh and generally elsewhere.

It also means that interpretation of these early studies (YCCCART 2021; YCCCART 2023a; YCCCART 2023b) will change, or at least be optimised, in future.

Some help in these interpretations may be gained by examining the axonometric display of the data (see Fig 9 below). In this case, the infill of the grypes in the south end of the field with more highly magnetic material implies that this fill was indeed part of the works connected with the railway.

The central area of high responses is also clear, although interpretation, at present, is not.

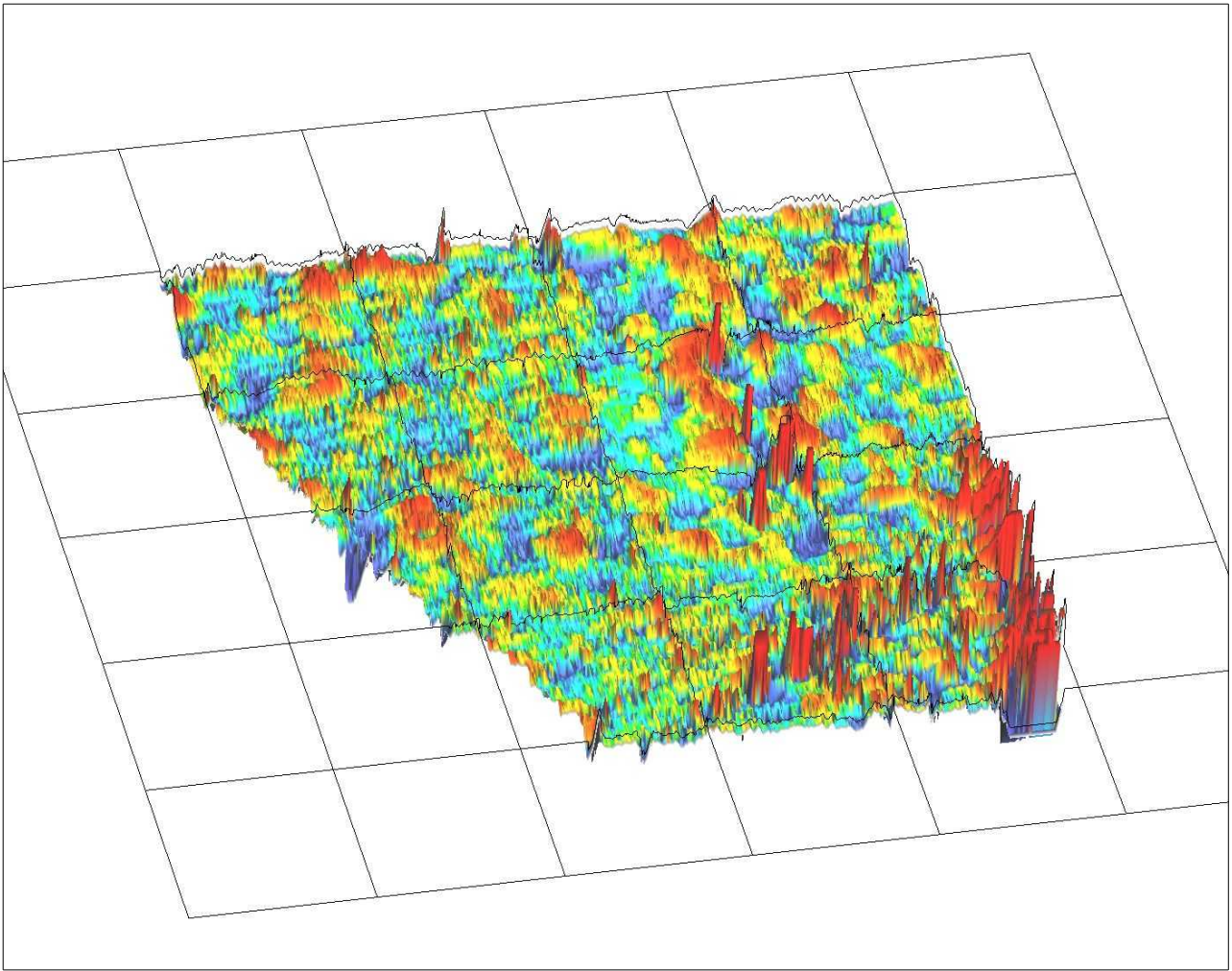


Fig 9: Axonometric display of gradiometry at Blackey lands

Examination and survey of areas where the depth of TFDs is intermediate between those seen in the main part of Kingston and those in (say) Kenn will help to elucidate these responses: such surveys are intended in the near future.

Recommendations for further work

As referred to in the text above, much further gradiometer surveying of land in this deep TFD area is necessary to establish baseline survey interpretations.

References

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Gilbert, P. 1996	The pre-Conquest landscape at Kingston Seymour on the North Somerset Levels: report on fieldwork 1996. <i>Archaeology in the Severn estuary</i> 7:53-58
Kingston Valuation 1848	Document in private ownership, Kingston Seymour.
Lilly, D. & Usher, G. 1972	Romano-British sites on the north Somerset levels <i>Proceedings of the University of Bristol Spelaeological Society</i> 13(1): 37-40
Strange, P. 1989	<i>The Weston Clevedon & Portishead railway</i> Twelve heads Press, Truro
YCCART 2021	Geophysical surveys at Thornworth, Kingston Seymour <i>Available at ycccart.co.uk</i>
YCCART 2023a	Geophysical survey at Longworth, Ham Lane, Kingston Seymour. <i>Available at ycccart.co.uk</i>
YCCART 2023b	Geophysical surveys at Rushy Ground, Ham Lane, Kingston Seymour <i>Available at ycccart.co.uk</i>

Authors

Vince Russett with Chris Short

Date

2023-07-11

Appendix. Day Sheet extracts

Gradiometer

Survey area		notes		readings		
Date	Grid number	size	walk direction	max	min	mean
25/05/2023	Setting out base line and grids for base line and first two rows					
	1	30 x 30	E	+10.3	-11.9	+0.4
	2	30 x 30	E	+99.9	-100	+2.3
	3	30 x 30	E	+79.1	-48.5	+2.0
01/06/2023	4	30 x 30	E	+59.2	-18.7	+0.8
	1	30 x 30	E	+26.2	-8.8	+0.6
	2	30 x 30	E	+84.3	-27.0	+0.8
	3	Partial M&R	E	+100	-100	+1.6
	4	30 x 30	E	+100	-51.8	+4.5
08/06/2023	5	Partial M&R	W	+11.2	-2.6	+2.8
	1	30 x 30	W	+96.0	-18.1	+1.0
	2	Partial M&R	W	+9.8	-1.9	+1.0
	3	30 x 30	W	+7.5	-8.3	+1.5
	4	Partial M&R	W	+11.4	-7.3	+1.3
	5	30 x 30	W	+68.8	-4.3	+2.2
6	30 x 30	W	+7.4	-6.7	+2.4	

Grid layout

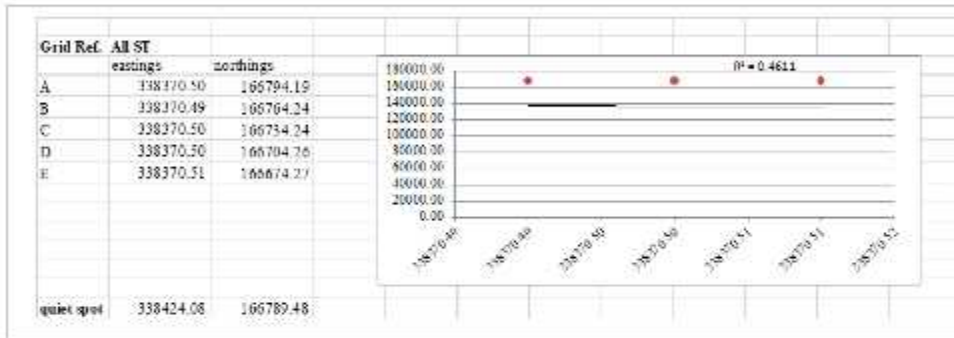


Grids and grid layout

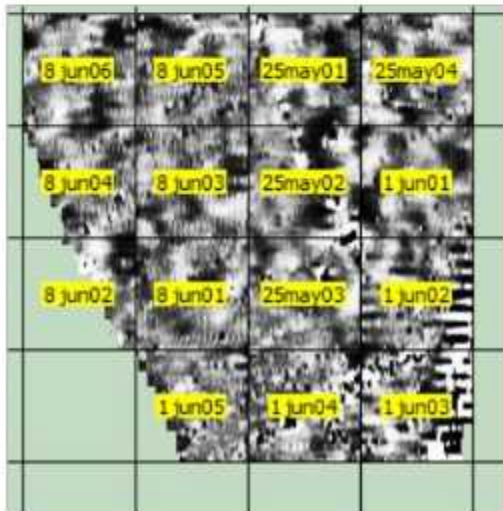
Location A –

Quiet spot –

31.5m to one paint spot on west gate post of field entrance from lane
 34.1m to two paint spots on east gate post of field entrance from lane
 GPS E338424.08, N166789.48



GPS



TerraSurveyor grids