

Half a Henge?

Continued efforts to find a villa at Priston produced a surprise discovery

The Spring 2017 season at Priston concentrated on Pensdown Hill (Figure 1) and the flat col to the south of it, to the north of Great Croft, the site of our original survey in 2007; the field which Bill Wedlake had explored in the 1950s with our predecessor society. As usual, our time was limited, in this case to before the cows were to be let out on the grass, and it was not possible to complete the survey in that time. Nonetheless, the most likely area was covered both by resistance and magnetometry, with the latter extending up the slopes to the hill top.

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On the flat portion of the field, both instruments picked up indications of a pond, possibly with buildings either side of it. However, reference to the first-edition Ordnance Survey map showed that the pond continued until recent times, although its date of digging is not known. There were also signs of buildings in a couple of places along the western edge of the field, next to the lane down to Priston Mill.

There were features which did not show on the maps, though. Both resistance and magnetometry discovered separate new features. Resistance showed half a rectangular enclosure disappearing off into Great Croft Field to the south – and disappear it did, as there had been no signs of it in our original survey. The black lines of the enclosure seemed too thin to be substantial walls, but they were straight, with right-angle joins. The northern line had been cut by the pond, so it must have been an early feature. The plot is shown in Figure 2.

Within the area defined by the enclosure described above was another half – feature also truncated by the field edge. This was sub-circular, some 30 m long and now 10 m wide, so possibly 20 m originally, and there was some internal structure. This was too big to be a round house, so it was assumed to be a small enclosure, probably prehistoric, but with unknown purpose. We speculated that it might be a small henge. Figure 3 shows the magnetometer plot, while figure 4 gives a close-up of the henge.

Neither of these features had shown in Great Croft, but the ground level in that field was some half metre lower than that where we were, so it is likely that the southern portions of both of these features have been ploughed away in times past.

Figure 1

View from the top. Looking south across the survey area from Pensdown Hill.



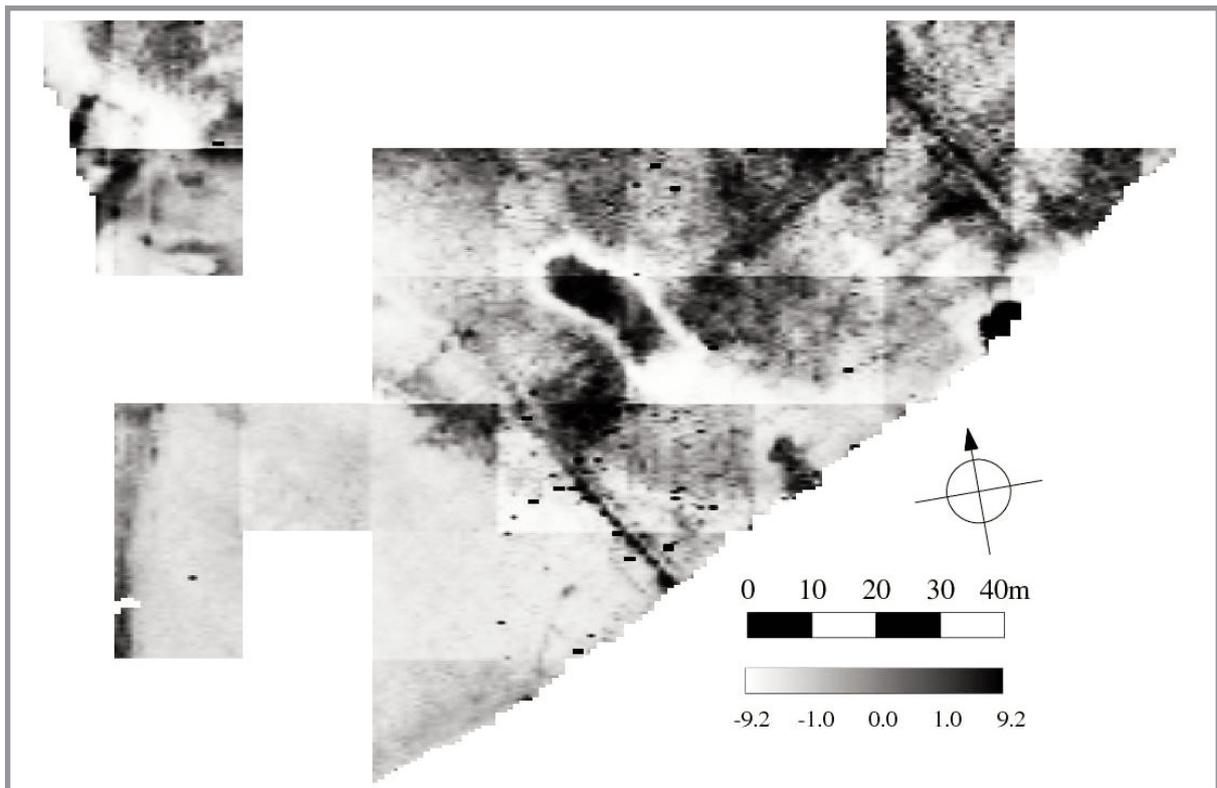
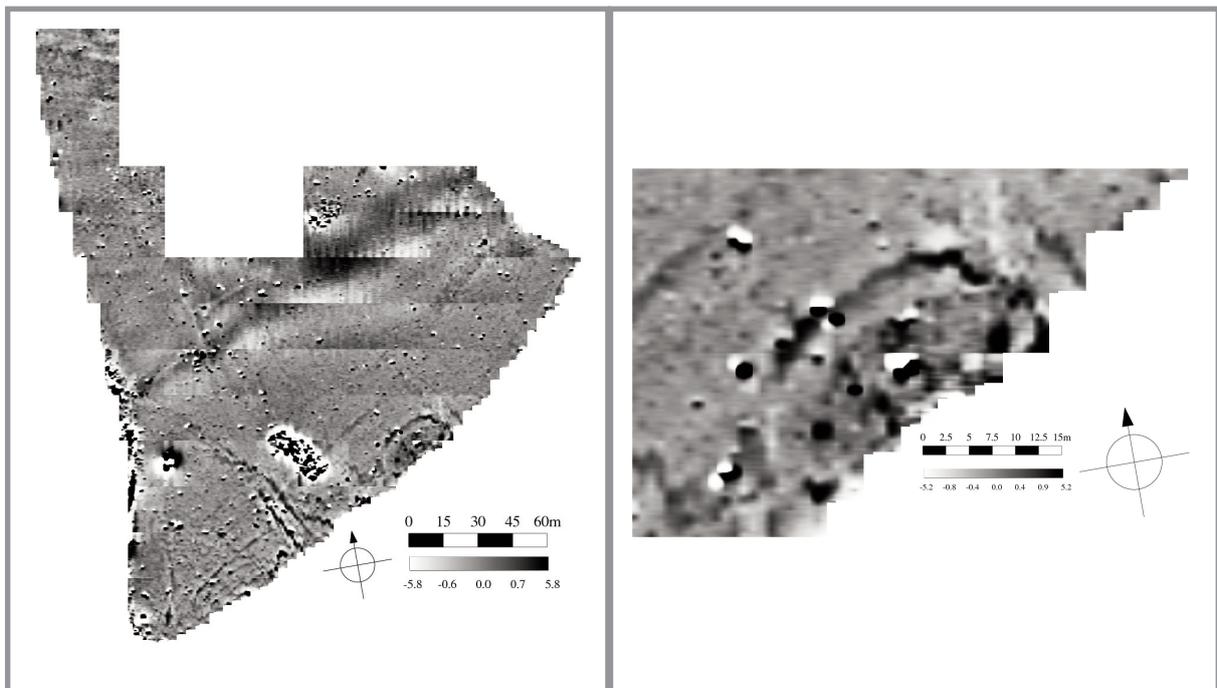


Figure 2
The resistance survey. The long, thin pond appeared to have a stone base. The rectangular enclosure can be seen heading off to the south.

Figure 3
The magnetometry survey reached the summit of Pensdown Hill, the signal left by bonfires can be seen. The survey was still short of the northern field boundary, even along the western edge. The 'henge' can be seen against the southern boundary.

Figure 4
Close-up detail of the henge, showing some internal structure. We will never know what happened in the southern part, it has vanished into thin air!



Many thanks to those stalwarts of both Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society and Priston History Society who turned out to help in what can best be called 'bracing conditions'. Thanks also to Michael Pow who let us explore, ferried us around in his Land Rover, and even joined in the survey. Also, Tim Iles again generously allowed us to park in his yard.