

# Pots, Ducks and Drakes

## Following a pottery trail in Trudoxhill

Jude Harris

The provision of five star accommodation for ducks has acquired a certain notoriety of late, but can it have archaeological significance? Two years ago in a field in Trudoxhill, south-west of Frome, a project to create a duck paradise in the form of a large pond and island revealed a quantity of post-Medieval pottery sherds in the excavated topsoil (see Figure 1) along with large quantities of burnt organic matter. This is in an area where it would seem that pottery production was well established, particularly in nearby Wanstrow where considerable evidence of post-Medieval kilns has been recorded.

A site visit by Naomi Payne, then Historic Environment Officer, Somerset Archaeology, Anna Booth, Somerset Finds Liaison Officer, and David Dawson, an expert on local post-Medieval pottery encouraged us (John Oswin, Owen Dicker and Jude Harris) to undertake a geophysical survey. However, a large hole, gradually filling with water, had already been excavated for the pond and a large amount of topsoil redistributed as infill in the field, so we were unsure as to how much useful archaeological information could be extracted.

It was clear that the area at the top of the field, which had an entrance onto an old lane, would be the most likely to show interesting results and we surveyed this area with the Bartington 601/2 twin fluxgate gradiometer, a task accompanied by a gaggle of curious onlookers – pilgrim geese, call ducks and Australian black swans (see Figure 2).

We followed this up with the Bartington Magnetic Susceptibility Meter MS/2 (Magsus), which operates like a metal detector, detecting minute magnetic anomalies, and on this site it allowed us to continue the survey close to the fenced off area alongside the pond a deterrent to Mr Fox but also to the particularly sensitive nature of the fluxgate gradiometer. An alarming amount of numbers are generated with the Magsus (1600 over a 20 m square!), which have to be written down and then painstakingly re-entered later in front of the warm glow of the computer screen.

The results from the gradiometer revealed an intensely magnetically active area at the top of the field (see Figure 3) with signals swinging from black (very positive) to white (very negative) in rapid order. The outline feature looks like circular patch of intense burning (a likely kiln) with a line (flue) heading away from it to the south-east. The results of the Magsus confirmed this possible kiln at the top of the field and demonstrated the high readings extended under the fenced off area, commensurate with a gribble spread.

The pottery sherds studied were identified as East Somerset ware, a very common type of fine red earthenware of late 16th to 18th Century date. At least a quarter had been overfired, allowing the glaze to penetrate the cracks and many showed voids which could cause the vessels to shatter in the kiln. The combined evidence indicates a high likelihood that this was a post-Medieval kiln site.

### Acknowledgements

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**Figure 1 below left**  
The topsoil revealed quantities of post-Medieval pottery sherds in burnt organic material

**Figure 2 right**  
The Bartington 601/2 twin fluxgate gradiometer at work in the field, with the fenced off area of the duck pond behind and its nosy inhabitants in the foreground

**Figure 3 below**  
The magnetometry survey results overlaid on the field, showing intense activity at the western end, by the gate onto the lane (the duck pond is in the top green segment of the field, but this satellite photo was taken before the work commenced)

