

At the recent Hearing ISH2, we were hoping to raise the issue of the important Prehistoric and Romano-British site west of Broomfield. However, we noted that the ExA intended to discuss above ground historic assets only. We have therefore asked our expert witness [REDACTED] to write the attached report instead.

Our concern is that survey work by the Applicant has not yet taken place in our area. We understand from Essex County Council that it will take place shortly. However, we strongly believe this should have taken place much earlier so that adjustments to the proposed alignment can be made if necessary. In our earlier submission, we proposed a slight change to the route to better protect the site. We believe this in line with EN-5 which requires avoidance to be considered wherever possible as the first stage in the Mitigation Hierarchy. We request the ExA not to recommend approval of the application unless and until it is completely satisfied that our site will be protected.

## Dragons Foot (Drakesfutt) — Prehistoric and Roman ritual temple site

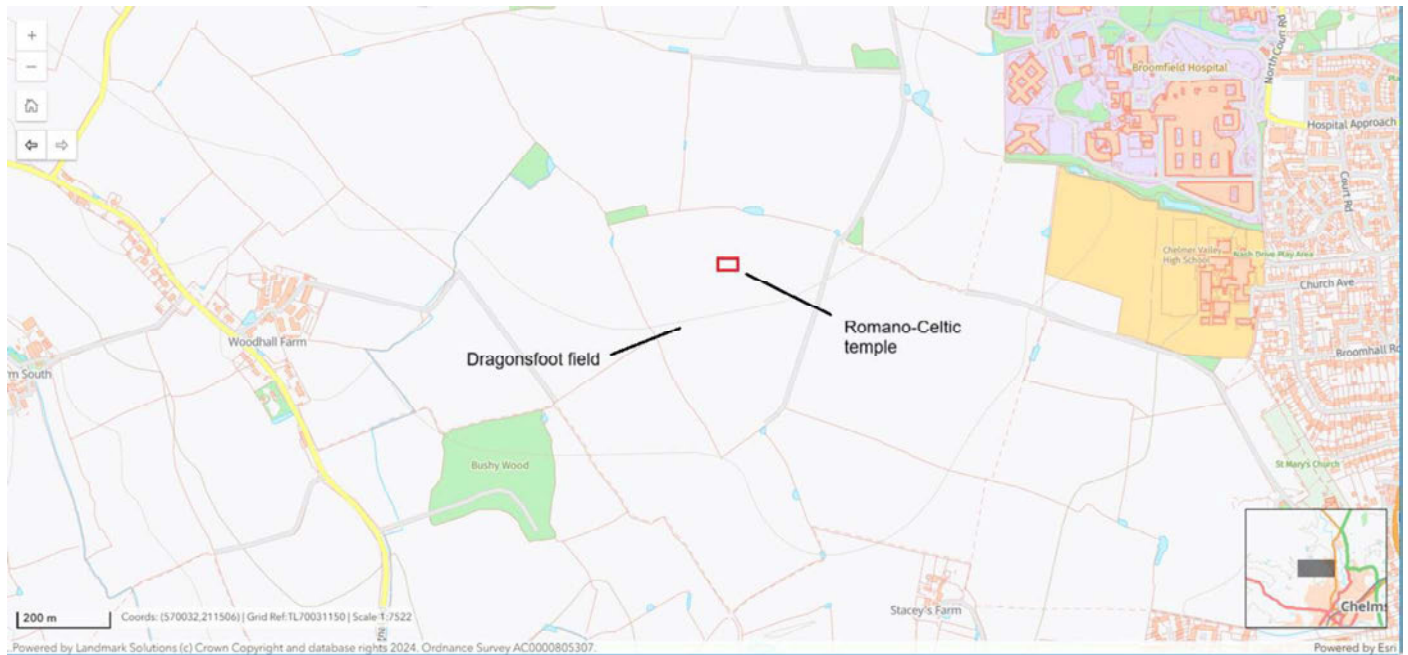


Fig.1 Dragonsfoot field and temple (courtesy MagicMaps Defra 2026)

This report deals with aspects of the Dragonsfoot ritual sites importance regionally and in the national landscape. It briefly outlines the sites significance as a source of evidence for the poorly understood religious/ritual practices of our prehistoric and Romano-British ancestors. The report deals in turn with:

- **What's in a name? Dragonsfoot (Drakes futt) - a rare Romano-British temple site**
- **Dragonsfoot– a unique prehistoric temple site adopted by the later Roman-Celtic temple – the unique prehistoric votive pits**
- **Evidence for ritual site aligned with equinox within solar calendar**
- **Dragonsfoot's association with the life-giving waters**
- **400+ year resort to the site**
- **Watersheds, boundaries – Dragonsfoot in the wider landscape**

## What's in a name? Dragonsfoot - a rare Romano-British temple site

The field with the Dragonsfoot site at its centre is today known as 'Dragonsfoot'. Its earliest recorded name is Drakes futt (1771).

Place and fieldnames are perhaps *'the most extensive and complete corpus of information...regarding the early phases of settlement history and their inhabitants'* (Semple and Jones 2013 p2).

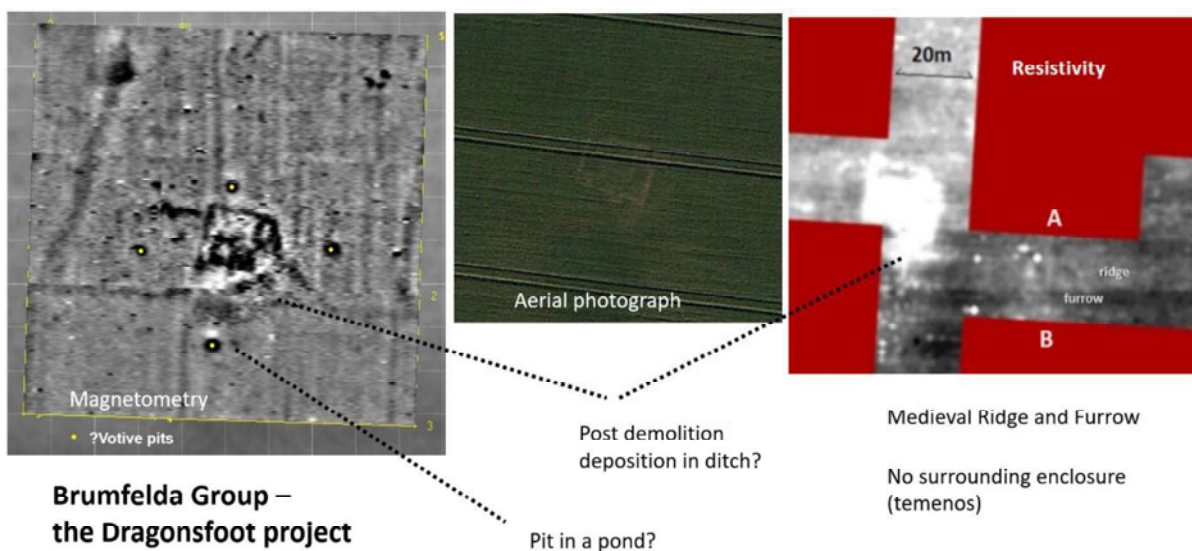
Drake or Dragon is of ancient ritual significance:

Dragon names are associated with ancient monuments found in the landscape in the early-medieval period (pre-1066). Semple (2013 p6) suggests the *'association between dragon and barrow was a more widely held belief or superstition and not a device contained solely within the legend and text of Beowulf.'*

Such naming practice derives from Anglo-Saxon early medieval associating such sites with mystical properties, as places of authority, wonder as well as treasure:

*'These wall-stones are wondrous — calamities crumpled them, these city-sites crashed, the work of giants corrupted.'* (Exeter Book 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century)

Geophysical survey evidences the presence of temple structures and ritual landscape positioned centrally within the Dragonsfoot field (Figs 1 and 2).



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Fig.2 Geophysical and cropmark evidence...votive pits indicated

The principle sub-rectangular feature presents the classic form and proportions of a Romano-Celtic temple (Fig.3).



1st BC to 5th century AD  
artefacts/ceramics

Dense CBM including  
tegula/imbrex, tile with  
several combed designs

Fig.3 Artistic representation of a typical Romano-Celtic temple

Historic England (2026a) describes such temples:

*'In view of their rarity and their importance in contributing to the complete picture of Roman religious practice, including its continuity from Iron Age practice, **all Romano-Celtic temples with surviving archaeological potential are considered to be of national importance.***

The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain project identifies at least 51 such temple sites nationally, Historic England suggest there are probably double that number. Dragonsfoot (as indicated Fig.4) would be the 52<sup>nd</sup> such site. Our understanding of the nature and practice of Roman-British religion is poor. As such Dragonsfoot itself, without further complexity identified, presents as a rare site of Romano-British ritual activity.

#### **Dragonsfoot – a unique prehistoric temple site adopted by the later Roman-Celtic temple – the unique prehistoric votive pits**

Detailed examination of the geophysical evidence for Dragonsfoot reveals further evidence suggesting unique aspects of the Dragonsfoot site when compared to others nationally (Fig.5). Firstly a landscape of four features probably votive pits or monumental post holes surround the sub-rectangular Romano-Celtic temple structure. The temple structure appears to face south-east. The votive pits, however, are on a different alignment to the roughly square temple. Secondly a depression is present immediately to the south of the temple structure, which despite being infilled by centuries of ploughing regimes laterally across the field remains visible suggesting this was the site of a significant pond or large pit respecting the temple site and its votive pits.

**No parallel has been found for this arrangement of features on any other recorded Romano-Celtic temple site.**

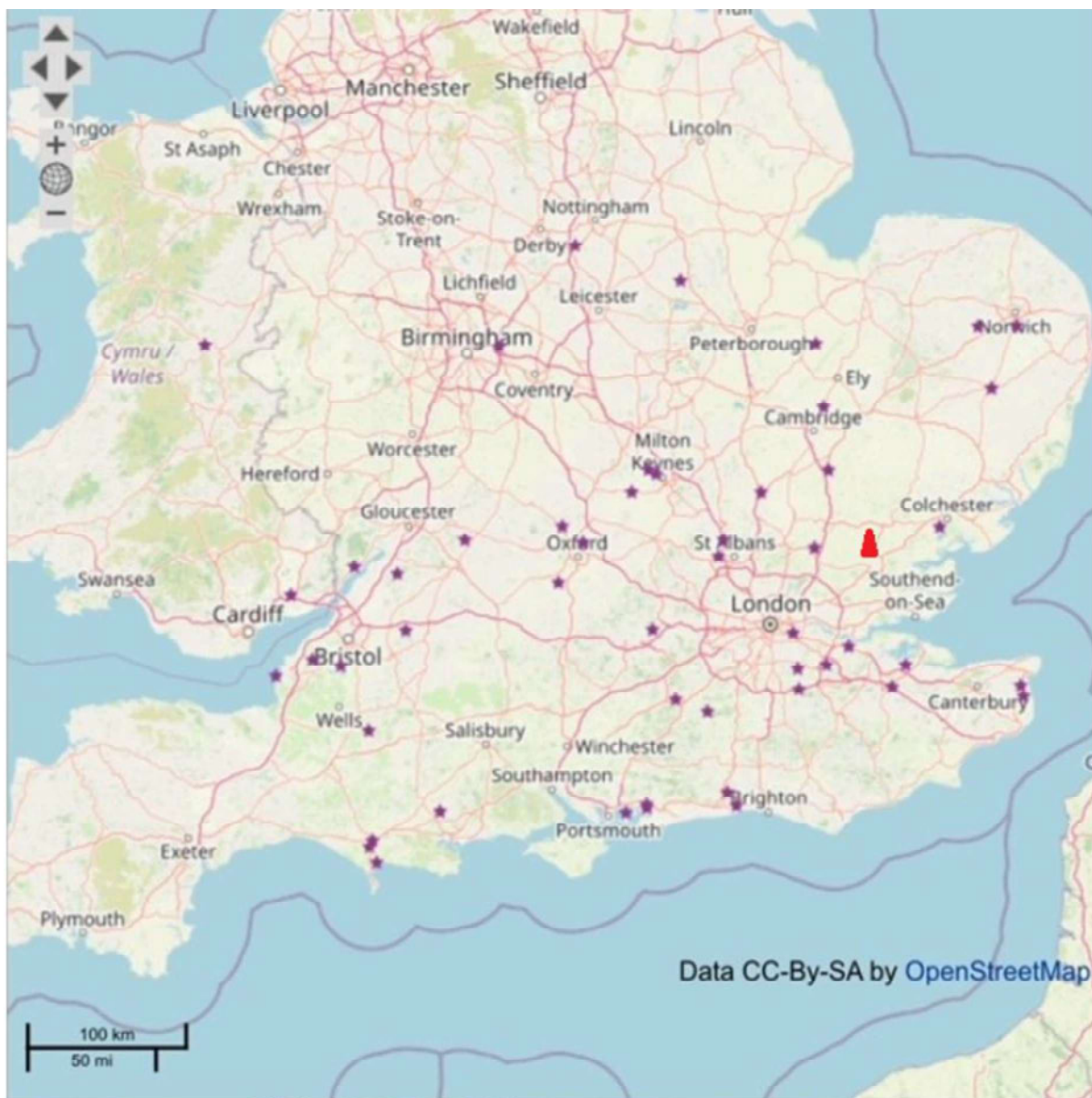


Fig.4 Mapping of Romano-Celtic temple sites – Dragonsfoot added. (courtesy The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain: an online resource)

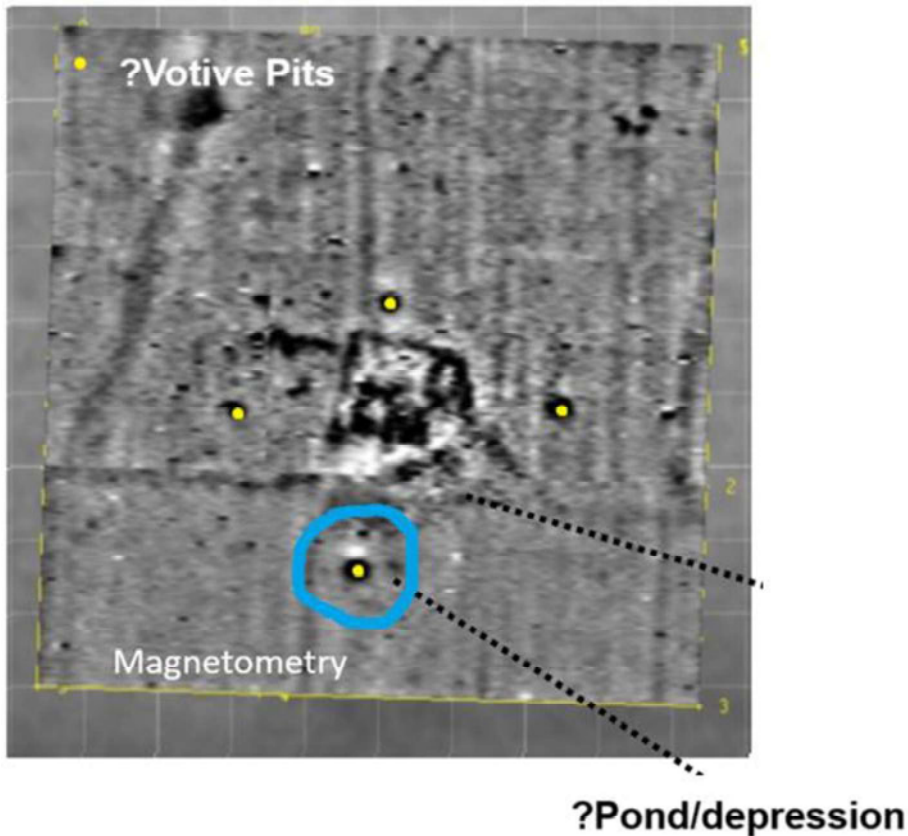


Fig.5 Dragonsfoot votive pits and pond/depression

The temple structure itself appears to respect the existence of the votive pits and pond while shifting its alignment from them to face south-east.

The votive pits appear approximately 3-4m in diameter. Elsewhere votive pits on Romano-British sites such as Great Chesterford in Essex have been found to be several metres deep (Medlycott 2011).

The pits misalignment with the temple structure suggests prehistoric ritual activity that predates the initial construction of the temple structure. Moreover, the alignment of the pits and pond appear to relate the prehistoric ritual landscape both to the solar calendar and the hydrology of the wider landscape as explained below.

### **Evidence for ritual site aligned with equinox within solar calendar (Figs 6-7)**

The alignment of the eastern and westernmost ?votive pits are exactly east and west. This equates to the position of sunrise and sunset on the Spring and Autumn Equinoxes (when hours of daylight and darkness are equal) carrying with it clear connotations that they are deliberately placed to mark these points in the social and agricultural calendar.

Their west-east orientation **also has topographical relevance in the wider landscape** in that the Dragonsfoot site is positioned on a south facing plateau promontory representing the watershed of two river systems the Can and Chelmer which converge where the nearest Romano-British town of Caesaromagus (Chelmsford) was

sited. This argument for the sites relationship with river systems is further supported when one considers the hydrological significance of the alignment of the northern and southern votive pits.



Fig.6 The alignment of Dragonsfoot pits with the tip of the triangular Dragonsfoot field.



Fig.7 The alignment of the western and eastern votive pits with the Spring equinox

### **Dragonsfoot's association with the life-giving waters**

The Dragonsfoot field today is roughly triangular. The evidence of the geophysical survey and its identification of ridge and furrow ploughing regimes extending across the field east to west suggests the current field boundaries are of great antiquity.

The alignment of the northern and southernmost votive pits runs through the southernmost tip of the triangular field. This is the point where the boundary ditches of the field to east and west converge. The Dragonsfoot site occupies a field representing the boundary between the watersheds to the west feeding the Can river valley and east feeding the Chelmer valley. Evidence for prehistoric to medieval settlement in central Essex is concentrated in river valley locations as reflected in the positioning of settlement to this day. The Dragonsfoot site presides over the watershed boundary between the Can and Chelmer valleys to its west and east respectively. It is a location where ancient valley territories, later enshrined as parishes would meet.

It is suggested the positioning of the votive pits was deliberate so as to respect this hydrological and social significance. In that sense the site serves the wider landscape and likely was a ritual landscape with its catchment descending down to serve the territories of settlements of both river valley systems to its west and east while in the distance to its south it overlooked the confluence of the same river systems at their eventual

junction in Chelmsford.

### 400+ year resort to the site

The evidence of artefact recovery from extensive campaigns of fieldwalking and metal detecting surveys portrays a site which was operating at least between the 1<sup>st</sup> and late 4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Pottery fragments abound across the site. Similar quantities of ceramic building material (Romano-British tegula and imbrex roof tile) and notably hypocaust tile has been recovered from the site stretching across an area ranging from the north-east corner of the Dragonsfoot field to close to its north-western boundary. The hypocaust tile is particularly of note as this suggests underfloor heating regimes which are rarely found on Romano-Celtic temple sites elsewhere.

The evidence of coin recovery is also informative. This has been used to construct a Reece period graph Fig. 8. This indicates a recovery profile which is broadly consistent with the coin assemblages recovered from comparable Romano-Celtic temple sites, with the exception that the Dragonsfoot assemblage contains an unusually high number of coins in Period 1 (before the AD43 Roman invasion of Britain). The assemblage then continues consistently until the end of the 4th century AD. Such evidence corroborates the interpretation of the votive pits as evidence of ritual use of the site that pre-dates the construction of the Romano-Celtic temple. Taken together the evidence suggests a site that was long-lasting and regularly in use as a place of assembly, ritual practice and perhaps political and market activity during its 400+ years life. Surely a meeting place that bound the communities of the opposing watersheds to it.

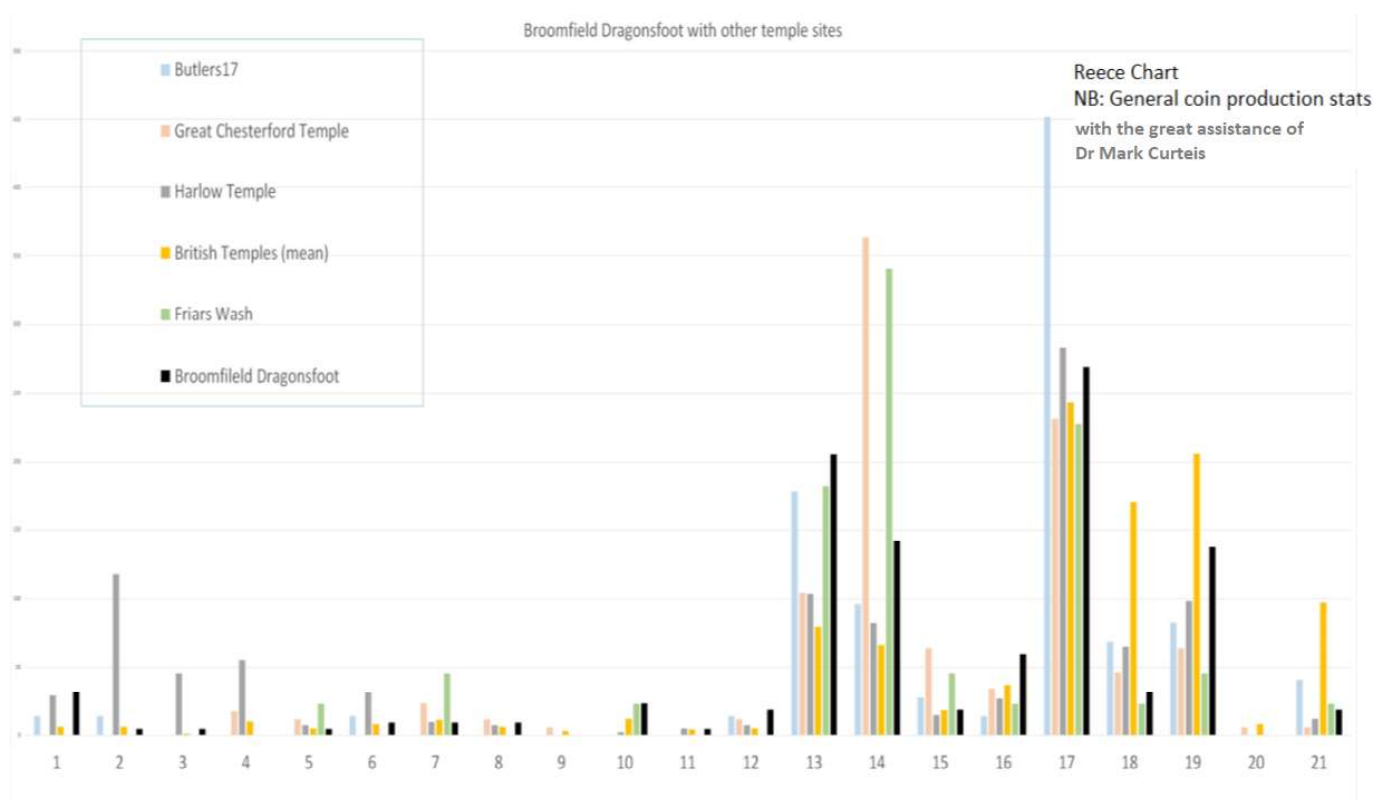


Fig.8 Reece period interpretation of recovered coin from Dragonsfoot. The high level of recovery between periods 13 and 19 reflect the greater quantity of coin generally in circulation over these periods.

## Watersheds, boundaries – Dragonsfoot in the wider landscape (Figs 9 and 10)

The existing green lane route connecting Dragonsfoot with Broomfield parish church is suspected as being a routeway that is contemporary with the evidence for the Dragonsfoot site's operation between 1<sup>st</sup> century BC and the 5<sup>th</sup> century AD. Its survival as a crucial routeway is corroborated by the evidence for materials from the Dragonsfoot site being reused in the fabric of Broomfield church. It is suspected the routeway at the time of the temple's use continued skirting along the northern margins of the Dragonsfoot field to descend into the valley of the Can where was located Roman settlement including the high status Chignal Roman Villa (Historic England 2026b). This is to an extent supported by the evidence of geophysical survey in Dragonsfoot itself.

Early settlement in Essex sees routeways habitually following the sinuous course of the valleys they occupy. Against this backdrop interfluvial routes such as this green lane passing west-east beside and immediately to the north of the Dragonsfoot site play an important role in connecting the communities of opposing valley settlements (here those occupying the Can and Chelmer valleys).

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Fig.9 The green lane route to Dragonsfoot whose presence continues to be suggested in the Dragonsfoot field on its progress to the valley of the Can in the distance.

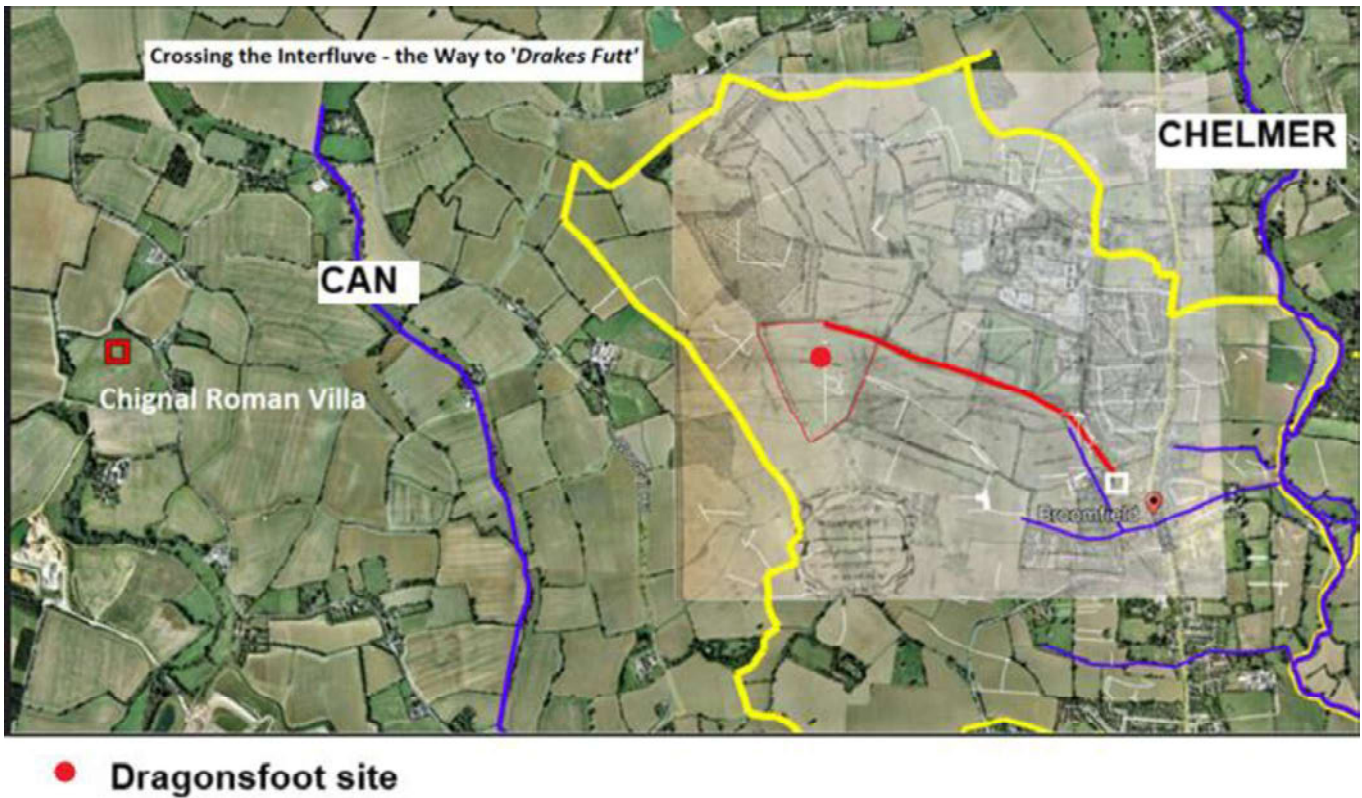


Fig.10 The Dragonsfoot site presiding over the interfluve crossing route between the Can and Chelmer valleys.

All the evidence outlined presents an interpretation of the Dragonsfoot site and its surrounds as an ancient landscape whose field boundaries may well be of prehistoric antiquity. A landscape which the prehistoric and Romano-British peoples of the Can and Chelmer regularly assembled. A place frequented by the societies of the Can and Chelmer valleys as a place of veneration, votive deposition, and to conduct the full range of social, economic and political interaction underlying their societies.



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