

The Search for ‘Granby Castle’ (aka ‘The Sutton Roadside Mystery’)

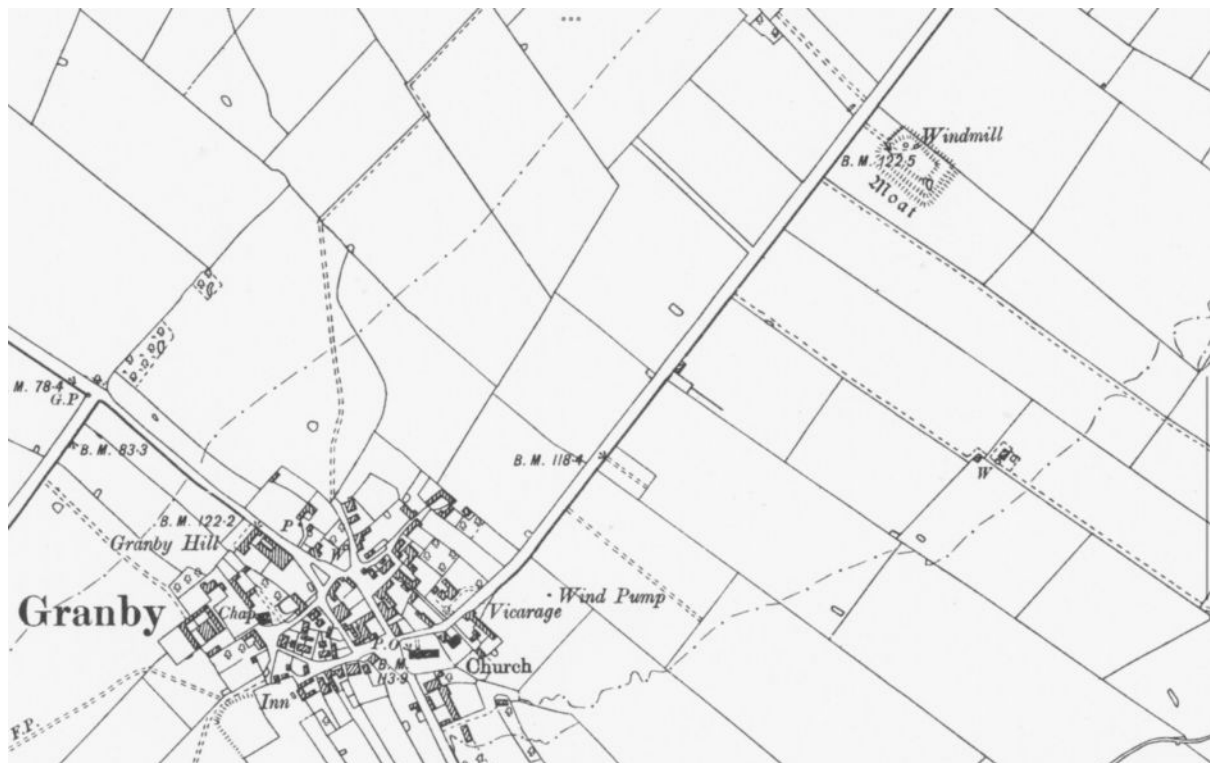
**A Joint Project between
The Granby and Sutton History Group and The Field Detectives**

Phase 1 – Historical Background and Results of Geophysical Survey

Prepared by Stuart Humphreys, August 2024

Historical references to the site

The site of the former windmill on the south side of Sutton Lane, halfway between Granby and Sutton, has long been of interest to local historians. This extract from an Ordnance survey map of 1899 clearly shows (top right) the moat on the site of the then windmill on Sutton Road.



In the mid-19th Century the Bingham historian Andrew Esdaile noted:

‘When the Romans had this country, there is reason to think a Roman road went from Bottesford Roman Station by Granby, probably to the Margedunum at Willoughby on the Foss Road.

‘In the field where Granby wind-mill stands, there is the remains of an old road, pointing to Bottesford; by the side of this, and on which the mill stands, is about an acre of land, which has very deep broad ditches around it, the entrance is from the road.’¹

¹ Esdaile, Andrew, ‘Rutland Monuments’, Bingham 1845

Esdaile returned to this subject in his second pamphlet on the local area:

‘Lord de Encourt resided at Granby, the place where his house was, I think, is where the present Wind Mill is; it has a high and deep dry moat around it. I am inclined to think it Roman before he built on it; perhaps some Roman remains left induced him to build on it.’²

A hundred years later, a couple of articles in Nottinghamshire periodicals (unnamed but photocopies are held in the Granby archive at Bingham Library) speculated on the origins and design of ‘Granby Castle’. The first such article, in 1940, stated:

‘It is clear beyond all question that a castle of sorts once existed there, and convincing evidence of its existence can still be seen... The windmill, to which reference is made [by Esdaile], disappeared well within living memory and its site is perfectly well known. There, undoubtedly stood the ‘caput’ or chief residence of the powerful Deyncourts, who flourished from the time of the Norman conquest until the family died out through failure of male heirs in the 15th century.

‘The castle occupied a site lying back from the main road from Granby to Elton exactly on the boundary line between Granby and Sutton well hidden from the view of casual passers-by... Its most perfect and unmistakable moat enclosed an area of approximately 150 feet by 100 feet – the narrow end facing the present high road. The ground surface is broken by grass covered hillocks but whether these hide the foundations of the fortified building or merely those of the windmill is a question which can only be resolved by excavations. Beyond the moat at the farthest end from the Elton road are some broken lines which may indicate the boundaries of an outer court or bailey, but this again is a matter for the spade to disclose. If and when such investigations are made, the foundations of the mill and these outbuildings are sure to be revealed and it is possible that any remains of the castellated structure – if any such were left – would be utilised in its construction.

‘What the castle was like, by whom, and at what period it was erected, and when it ceased to exist are all matters concerning which local records are silent.’³

The article deduces that the ‘castle’ was most likely built in the 12th century during the reign of Henry II (1154-89), citing the plausible theory that Ralph Deyncourt (d 1183) built it as his new seat in Nottinghamshire after having gifted his original manor house for use as the abbey upon his founding of Thurgarton Priory in 1135.⁴ Alternatively, it may have been built in the latter part of Henry II’s reign by Walter Deyncourt – presumably meaning the son (b.1110, d.1168) of the original Walter Deyncourt (b.1043, d.1103) who had fought with William the Conqueror.

² Esdaile, Andrew, ‘Bingham, With Some Account of... Bingham’, Bingham 1851

³ ‘Granby Castle’, [title of periodical unknown], 24 February 1940

⁴ Possibly the castle was built during the reign of King Stephen (1135-54).

The castle is described thus:

‘It would probably have had a strong tower encircled by a strong stockade on the inner side of the moat and would have been built for strength rather than for comfort. If it dated from the quieter days of the latter part of the reign of Henry II it would have gone a little way towards reversing those qualities and have combined the growing demand for light and comfort with defensive strength. As now the chief seat of the Deyncourt’s it would possess residential as well as military accommodation, but it could never have been of any great size for it must have been contained within the limits of the moat. In fact, the circumscribed area of the site is disappointing when the importance of the family is born in mind.’⁵

The second article on ‘Granby Castle’ appeared in 1946. This noted that:

‘The chief seat of de Aincurt was at Braunestone amid his Lincolnshire possessions, but Granby was by far the most valuable manor of his in Notts. And ere long his descendants made their residence in this parish and erected a castle for themselves.

‘Of this abode nothing but the moat remains. It stands a little back from the Elton road at its junction with the road that divides Sutton from Granby, and Wm. Stevenson classed it as a homestead moat of the time of Edward the Confessor.’⁶

‘The castle may perhaps have been erected about 1135 when Ralph de Aincurt, founding Thurgarton Priory, gave his mansion to it and sought a new house elsewhere. These earthworks may have attracted him, but in any case Granby was the chief seat of the family for many generations. Possibly it was little more than a crenelated residence, but the enclosure has land enough for a bailey or court, there is a mound which may mark the site of a keep, and a second mound upon which a windmill stood until a few decades ago and, having regard to the time of its erection, the probability is that the castle was a stronghold with a drawbridge and other defences.’⁷

Returning to Esdaile’s speculation that a Roman building of some sort – perhaps a villa as part of a farmstead or a shelter for soldiers close to the Fosse Way – it is plausible that its foundations were used by the Deyncourts on which to construct their ‘castle’.

Incidentally, there is a similar theory that All Saints’ church in Granby was built on the site of a former Roman villa. That would certainly explain the discovery of a (now long lost) Roman sacrificial altar in the churchyard in 1851 during roadworks to widen Plungar Lane.

⁵ *ibid*

⁶ Edward the Confessor reigned from April 1043 to January 1066, implying the building was Anglo-Saxon rather than Norman

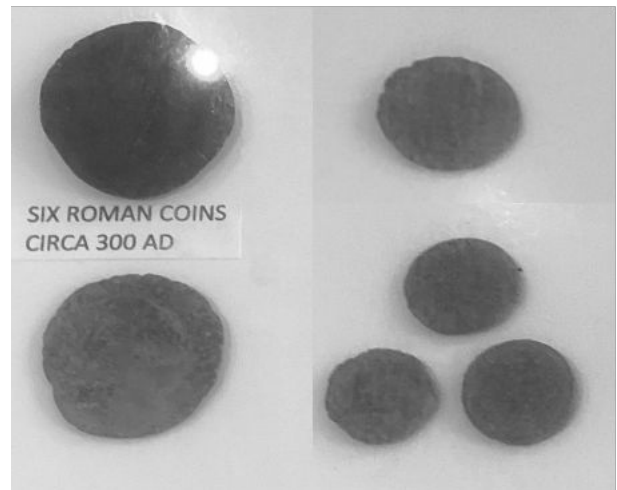
⁷ ‘Notts. Villages: The Story of Granby With Sutton’, [title of periodical unknown], 14 December 1946

Post-War activity on the site

Quite possibly the field in which ‘Granby castle’ is located has changed hands several times since the Belvoir Estate auction in 1920. Nowadays, it forms part of the land farmed by the Horncastles; previously it was owned by the Hopewells.

Several stories have circulated in the parish in regard to the site. One was that a one-time owner of the land became so irritated by visitors enquiring about Granby castle – possibly they were spurred on by the above newspaper articles – that he ploughed any remains of any structure into the earth and was fined by the authorities for this destructive act. Another claim is that the earthworks were actually trenches dug during the Second World War.

What we do know, courtesy of enquiries made of Mr & Mrs Hornbuckle by Jane Morris, a member of The Field Detectives, is that a metal detecting survey of the site was carried out relatively recently, in 2015. This unearthed six Roman coins (pictured), two Edward I silver pennies circa 1247, a George II farthing c1756 as well as coins from the reigns of subsequent British monarchs. This collection of coins is held by the Horncastles.



Photographic images of the site

The Field Detectives have kindly provided this Google Earth Pro image of the site.



This appears to show a circular structure, presumably the former windmill, surrounded by earthworks, possibly the castle’s moat.

Helpfully, more detail is discernible from the detailed LIDAR image, again provided by The Field Detectives, overleaf.



Sutton Lane runs from bottom left to top right, the Watchorns' farm is left of centre and a ridge & furrow ploughed field to the south of Sutton is shown top right. In the centre of the image is the circular structure, apparently surrounded by rectangular earthworks. The area in question, contained within the confines of the field, appears to be approximately an acre in size, consistent with Esdaile's estimate.

The field is not currently cultivated but used for grazing cattle. From a distance it appears to comprise a series of mounds and hollows, as per the photograph below taken from Sutton Lane in the direction of Belvoir Castle.



Protection of landowners' rights

It is important to emphasise that any proposed investigations of the site will proceed only upon the following strict conditions:

1. **Access.** Any access to the site would be of a nature (e.g. intrusive/non-intrusive investigations) and at times expressly permitted by Mr & Mrs Hornbuckle.
2. **Treasure.** The purpose of the project is for the Granby and Sutton History Group and The Field Detectives to better understand the history of the site – specifically the origins of the Norman ‘Granby Castle’ and of any Roman building that pre-dated it. Accordingly, we would forfeit any claim, in favour of the landowners (the Hornbuckles), to ‘finds’ and ‘treasure trove’, should any be discovered during the project. We would, however, request permission to be able to borrow such items to display during local history talks and other such events.

Recommended approach to investigating the site

Acknowledging that any and all investigations would only be carried out with the full permission of the landowners, we make the following recommendations:

1. Undertake a **non-intrusive geophysical survey**. The survey would take a couple of days to carry out with the results being analysed by The Field Detectives’ experts.
2. Subject to the above, perform a **metal detecting survey**.

In regard to these two initial surveys, no equipment will be left in the ground overnight.

3. If appropriate, dig a **trench** to confirm the results of the first two steps.
NB. This would not be a full ‘dig’ of the site but merely a limited cross-section.

Phase 1: Geophysical survey

With the kind permission of the landowners and their family, on 7-8 August 2024 Richard Pincott, Peter and Aileen Ball and Jane Morris from The Field Detectives, supported by Jim Bettles and Stuart Humphreys representing the Granby and Sutton History Group, carried out a geophysical survey of the site. This covered 5,000 square meters⁸ (approx. 1¼ acres) centred around the known location of the former moat.

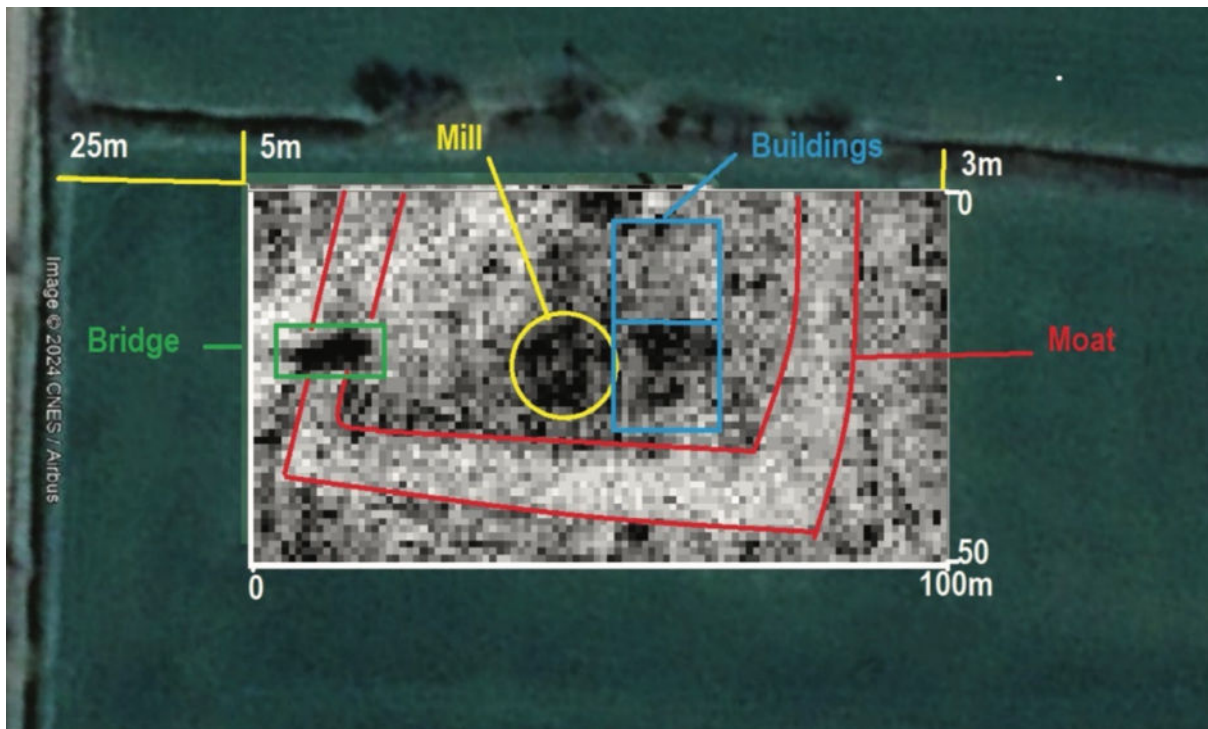
Peter and Aileen have produced a full report of the methodology and results of the survey. Essentially, the survey measured underground resistance to electrical currents, with zones of relatively low or high resistance potentially indicating ditches or remnants of buildings respectively. Expert interpretation of the results suggests that several anomalies of ‘potential archaeological interest’ have been identified. In conclusion: ‘there are some high resistance anomalies that may indicate building remains... and low resistance for the moat.’

⁸ That is, five thousand individual meter readings taken at one-meter intervals using a grid system.

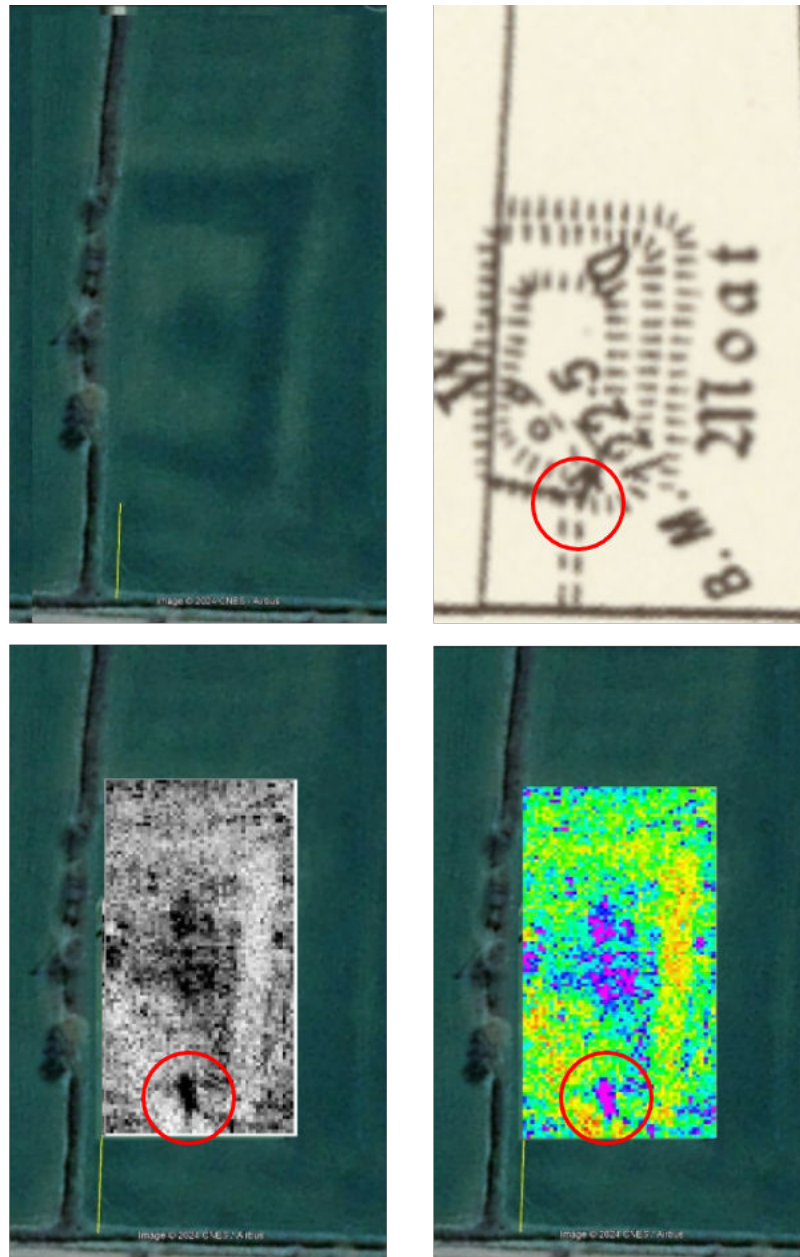
The geophysical survey in progress using marked-out grids.:



The image below shows the raw survey data overlaid on the Google Earth image (each square representing a resistance reading).



The sequence of images below highlights what perhaps the most notable feature, namely what appears to be the bridge over the moat. Its position is consistent with the path from Sutton Lane to the windmill indicated on the 1899 OS map (top right).



Next steps

The results of the geophysical survey justify continuing to the planned second phase, i.e. metal detecting survey. Before requesting permission to do so, however, some background analysis is necessary.

Firstly, The Field Detectives will make further enquiries of the landowners in regard to the 2015 metal detecting survey and, if appropriate, discuss that with the metal detectorists concerned. Secondly, the Granby and Sutton History Group will prepare a map of all known finds of Roman (and later) coins in the fields surrounding Granby and Sutton. Knowledge gained from the above will inform our approach to phase 2.

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