

# South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group

in association with the  
**Oxfordshire Buildings Trust**

## Specification for a geophysical field evaluation at

**ASCOTT PARK,  
STADHAMPTON, OXFORDSHIRE  
June 2013**

**Ian Clarke**

### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 Ascott Park is centred at SU 611 981, close to the village of Stadhampton and about 12 km south-east of Oxford. The park is owned by Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) who commissioned Oxfordshire Buildings Trust (OBT) to carry out extensive historical and archaeological research, preparatory to improving public access and the opening of an Historical Trail in 2010. The history of the post-medieval occupants of Ascott Park, the Dormers and their successors, and the problems surrounding where they lived, has been ably summarised by John Sykes of OBT (Sykes 2008/2012). William Dormer commissioned a new house c.1660, complete with formal avenues and gardens laid out in the latest fashion, but the house accidentally burnt down in 1662 when close to completion and was never rebuilt. Despite much recent research, the precise location of this house remains uncertain.
- 1.2 The South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group (SOAG) has accepted an invitation from John Sykes of OBT to consider further fieldwork at Ascott Park, with the primary aim of confirming the location of the 1662 house. **This specification covers a preliminary geophysical survey to assist with the formulation of a proposal for further archaeological work within an agreed research framework.** The proposed survey will merge with one carried out in 2007 by Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics (AAG), extending it to the west, north and east. The primary purpose of the new survey is to see whether there are any rectilinear anomalies suggesting a substantial building in these peripheral areas. It will also enhance the important 'courtyard' area of AAG's results by placing it in a wider context. A secondary (detached) survey in the north-east corner of the park will attempt to locate the site/ground plan of the lost medieval chapel.
- 1.3 This specification has been prepared in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists 2011: *IfA Standard and Guidance for archaeological geophysical survey* and with the helpful assistance of the local archaeological curator: OCC Planning Archaeologist, Richard Oram.

### 2 EARLIER WORK

- 2.1 In 2007, Mark Bowden of English Heritage (EH) led an archaeological survey and investigation of Ascott Park on behalf of OBT (Bowden & Rardin 2007). The survey elucidated the post-medieval history of the park, of particular interest here being those features relating to the extensive remodelling of the site at the time of the building of the new house by William Dormer. Mark Bowden confidently locates the house on an axial alignment with the main avenue and gateway, at a rectangular hollow (or cellar) (21) fronting a linear earth bank (or terrace) (22) and overlooking formal gardens to the south. The numbers in brackets are identifiers from the EH report, included for cross-referencing.
- 2.2 Also in 2007, a geophysical survey was carried out by Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics (AAG). Earth resistance and magnetometer techniques were used to survey much of the area of the 17<sup>th</sup> century gardens, including the earth bank (22) and hollow (21) thought by EH and OBT to be the location of the 1662 house. Both methods detected important archaeological features: the magnetometry showed linear

features relating to the garden layout and possible rubble spreads; the resistivity gave better results for both garden and possible building remains (Ainslie *et al* 2007). In their report, the Ainslies propose that "...areas of probable rubble and linear features...north of the earth bank" (22) indicate a large house arranged around a rectangular courtyard, perhaps open to the east. This is thought unlikely by Mark Bowden who interprets the area as an 'entrance courtyard' for the house (Bowden & Rardin 2007, p16).

- 2.3 In 2009, an excavation was organised by OBT and directed by independent archaeologist Brian Dix. A number of trenches were opened to examine remains of the 17<sup>th</sup> century formal gardens, the terrace (22) and hollow (potential house site) (21). Dix's report summarises the results and findings, but he is unable to offer any firm conclusion regarding the location of the 1662 house (Dix 2012). His long Trench 7 that sectioned the bank (22) and western end of the hollow (21), revealed clear evidence for a robbed-out surrounding wall in the hollow and possible flagstone floor, but Dix records that the deposits in the hollow were notably clean and that: "There was no evidence for burning or demolition nor of a quantity of remains consistent with the demolition of a substantial and largely complete building...". The limited finds of pottery and glass from the terrace bank: "... suggest an 18<sup>th</sup> century *terminus ante quem*." He proposes that the archaeological evidence: "...is consistent with the creation of a former basement or cellar *in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century...*[but] *that the project was unfinished, and possibly abandoned at an early stage*" (my italics). Dix suggests that the 1662 house was perhaps located elsewhere and that the hollow may represent a second attempt to build a new house sometime in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century. An area of "building rubble" east of the hollow (21) and towards the 'granary' (34) is suggested as worth investigating as a possible site (Dix 2009).
- 2.4 The results of the 2009 excavation may be usefully compared with those of an earlier excavation in 1969 by Susanna Everett and colleagues, when a long trench also sectioned the bank (22) and hollow (21) but at the eastern end. Here significant quantities of rubble, mortar, burnt tile, ash, charred wood and melted lead were found within the bank. Rubble, brick, tile and mortar were also found in the hollow immediately north of the bank but the rest of the hollow was relatively clean. On the south side of the hollow a coursed limestone and mortar wall 0.9m thick was revealed surviving to a height of c.2m, but no evidence was found for a wall on the north side of the hollow. Everett concluded that: "It is certain ... there were no buildings in the hollow to the north of the bank". (Everett 1969).
- 2.5 One other possibility, put forward in response to Dix's findings, is that the house might have been located at the southern end of the main avenue, looking across a formal garden towards the terrace; in which case the hollow could be the site of a grotto/pavilion (Clarke 2011).

### 3 DESIGNATIONS

- 3.1 The park is owned by OCC and work can only be carried out with its written approval and with the knowledge and agreement of the tenant farmer.

Management of the smallholding estate is the responsibility of Carillion Capita Symonds (CCS), Property and Facilities, Cuffas Lea House, 3500, John Smith Drive, Oxford, OX4 2WB.

Contact: Ruth Kerry                      01865 780222      [ruth.kerry@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:ruth.kerry@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Conservation of the archaeology is the responsibility of the Historic and Natural Environment Team, Speedwell House, Speedwell Street, Oxford, OX1 1NE.

Contact: Richard Oram                      01865 328944      [richard.oram@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.oram@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

- 3.2 The park is on the EH Register of Historic Parks and Gardens registered Grade II, list number 1001086, and various buildings and structures are also listed Grade II or II\* (for the full list see Bowden & Rardin 2007 or the EH website).

The regional archaeological curator is English Heritage (South East), Eastgate Court, 195-205 High Street, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 3EH.

Contact: Ciaran Mac Culloch              01483 252033      [ciaran.maccullagh@english-heritage.org.uk](mailto:ciaran.maccullagh@english-heritage.org.uk)

- 3.3 EH (South East) has confirmed that the survey does not require Scheduled Monument Consent (Section 42 Licence).

#### 4 SURVEY LOCATION

The primary survey grids are shown in the attached Fig 1 in yellow outline. Twelve grids are proposed extending the AAG survey to the west, north and east. Several grids are partial, being truncated by tree lines to the north and by the boundary of Ascott Park Cottage and a fence line to the south. A control grid is recommended (see 5.2 below) which is outlined in black. Four detached survey grids (to locate the chapel site) are shown in Fig 2. Further grids may be added at the discretion of the survey Team Leader.

#### 5 METHODOLOGY

5.1 Best results were obtained by AAG using earth resistance. Since this search is primarily for building remains or rectilinear features representing robbed-out walls and foundations, it is proposed to use earth resistance only for the extended survey. Should a likely building ground plan be detected then magnetometry and/or additional resistivity scans at higher (0.5m interval) resolution, can be added for that area of interest, at the discretion of the Project Leader.

5.2 A **TR/CIA resistance meter** will be used to ensure compatibility of results with those of AAG. The meter will be matched to raw, or minimally processed (e.g. edge matched) data from the AAG 2007 survey but, in view of recent weather patterns, there is a risk that the new survey will encounter ground moisture conditions sufficiently different as to negate the overall result. To guard against this, Ainslie Resistivity Survey Grid 10 will be rescanned and analysed first as a control. This grid is outlined in black in Fig 1.

Grid length:	<b>30m</b>	Grid width:	<b>30m</b>	Configuration:	<b>0.5m twin</b>
Dir. 1 <sup>st</sup> traverse:	<b>North/C'wise</b>	Traverse mode:	<b>Zig-zag</b>	Traverse interval:	<b>1m</b>
Sample interval:	<b>1m</b>				

5.3 Survey baselines are aligned with the British National Grid (Ainslie *et al* 2007). Survey key-points will be located in advance to within +/-0.1m using differential GPS.

#### 6 SITE CONDITIONS, RESTRICTIONS, ACCESS AND FACILITIES

- 6.1 This is open parkland with two standing buildings: the dovecote [33] and 'granary' [34], both listed.
- 6.2 The park is sensibly level in the area of interest, with various low earthworks as described by Bowden & Rardin (2007).
- 6.3 A public footpath and the Historical Trail pass through the area of the survey.
- 6.4 The privacy of the occupants of Ascott Park Cottage must be respected.
- 6.5 Access is along Ascott Lane, past Piccadilly Cottage and off to the right between the farm buildings.
- 6.6 By prior arrangement with the tenant farmer, there is parking on site at the farm buildings.
- 6.7 By prior arrangement with the proprietors, the nearest toilet facility is at the Crazy Bear Farm Shop, Bear Lane, Stadhampton.

#### 7 REPORT PREPARATION AND DATA PRESENTATION

7.1 Post-fieldwork analysis and reporting will be carried out, as far as is practicable, in accordance with the EH and IfA standards and guidance listed below in Section 13 GENERAL STANDARDS.

7.2 In accordance with *IfA standard and guidance for geophysical survey*, Clause 3.4.8 and as further amplified in Annex 2, the report must contain as a minimum:

- Non-technical summary
- Introductory statements
- Aims and purposes of the survey
- Methodology
- Results

- Conclusions
- Plans/plots
- Index to and location of archive
- References and bibliography

In particular, this survey relies on successful merging and matching of new data with that from the AAG 2007 survey. The post-processing used to achieve this must be clearly stated and the areas covered by the two data sets must be distinguishable in the report.

7.3 In terms of results and plots, the report must contain as a minimum:

- Survey grid location (1:2500 minimum)
- Plot(s) of minimally processed data (1:1000 minimum)
- Minimally enhanced X-Y traces of magnetic data (where appropriate)
- Plot(s) of enhanced data (1:1000 minimum)
- Interpretation diagram (1:1000 minimum)

These plots must be in greyscale but may be supplemented by additional plots in colour if these can be shown to materially aid interpretation. All plots must be annotated with the post-processing and graphical enhancement used, and must include north arrows and scale bars indicating the range and magnitude of the data.

7.4 Digital data must at all times be backed up to at least two sets of portable media, stored in physically separate locations.

7.5 In addition to the software-specific raw data and plots, the digital archive must include a copy of the raw data in XYZ format.

## 8 PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION

8.1 Within a maximum of six months, copies of the report will be circulated (as a minimum) to the following interested parties:

- Oxfordshire Buildings Trust (John Sykes *et al*)
- Historic Environment Record (Oxford)
- English Heritage (South East)
- Mark Bowden – English Heritage, Swindon
- Roger Ainslie – Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics
- Brian Dix – Independent Archaeologist

8.2 An interim report will be published in *CBA South Midlands Archaeology*.

## 9 COPYRIGHT

Under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 and with the agreement of the *South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group*, the copyright of all written and graphic material in this specification and in any subsequent reports, remains with the authors and originators.

## 10 MONITORING PROCEDURES

10.1 Monitoring of the fieldwork will be by *South Oxfordshire Archaeological Group* and will be carried out by the Ascott Park Project Leader, Ian Clarke.

10.2 Monitoring of the reporting stage will be by the local curator: OCC Planning Archaeologist, Richard Oram.

## 11 HEALTH AND SAFETY

- 11.1 Health and Safety on site must comply with the relevant legislative standards and be in accordance with the *SOAG Health and Safety Policy*. A Risk Analysis will be carried out in accordance with the Institute for Archaeologists: *IfA Risk Assessment Template and Guidance Notes* and rating system.
- 11.2 There must be a minimum of two operators on site at any one time, but three to four are recommended for ease and speed of operation, and for ensuring public safety.

## 12 INSURANCE

SOAG uses insurers recommended by the Council for British Archaeology.

Certificate Number: 000259 Policy Type: Archaeology & Heritage  
 Agreement Number: 24765101CHC Expiry Date: 31/03/2014  
 Insurance Agents: Towergate Risk Solutions, Fareham  
 Insurance Providers: Aviva Insurance UK

## 13 GENERAL STANDARDS

English Heritage 2008 : *Geophysical survey in archaeological field evaluation*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition,  
<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/publications/geophysical-survey-in-archaeological-field-evaluation/geophysics-guidelines.pdf>  
 Institute for Archaeologists 2011: *Standard and Guidance for archaeological geophysical survey*,  
<http://www.archaeologists.net/sites/default/files/node-files/Geophysics2010.pdf>

## 14 REFERENCES

- Ainslie R, Ainslie S & Oatley C, 2007 *Ascott Park: survey using magnetometry and resistivity*, June 2007, Abingdon Archaeological Geophysics, unpubl. report for OBT
- Bowden M & Rardin A, 2007 *Ascott Park, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire: analytical earthwork survey of a 17<sup>th</sup> century park and garden*, Archaeological Survey and Investigation Report, English Heritage Research Department Report, Series 93/2007, [http://services.english-heritage.org.uk/ResearchReports/Pdfs/093\\_2007WEB.pdf](http://services.english-heritage.org.uk/ResearchReports/Pdfs/093_2007WEB.pdf)
- Clarke I, 2011 *A new theory on the location of William Dormer's 'new' house at Ascott Park*, unpubl. note for OBT, dated 1 March 2011
- Dix B, 2009 Letter to J Griffin Esq, Hon. Sec. OBT, dated 7 October 2009, regarding Ascott Park, Stadhampton: archaeological investigation
- Dix B, 2012 *Archaeological excavation at Ascott Park, Stadhampton, Oxfordshire, August 2009*, unpubl. report for OBT
- Everett S, 1969 Trial excavation at Ascott Park, OCC HER record: PRN1797
- Sykes J, 2008 *The mystery of where the Dormers and their successors lived in Ascott Park*, unpubl. OBT report, March 2008
- Sykes J, 2012 *The mysterious later history of Ascott Park*, OBT report, February 2012. Copy deposited in the Oxfordshire History Centre, Ref. D11/483

## 15 DOCUMENT HISTORY

Issue	Date	Change
1	18/03/2013	1 <sup>st</sup> draft
2	08/04/2013	As first submitted to OCC.
3	07/05/2013	Clause 3 expanded; Clauses 1.3 and 7-10 added. As approved by OCC.
3.1	30/05/2013	Ainslie Grid 9 corrected to Grid 10 in clause 5.2 and BNG Eastings corrected +30m in Fig 1 and Fig 2. Header on p1 changed from May/June to June. This Clause 15 added.
3.2	05/09/2013	Annex 1 added.

**Fig 1. Ascott Park 2013 – Extended Survey Location (30m grids)**

Twelve survey grids shown in yellow to west, north and east of AAG survey. Control grid in black. Truncate survey at tree lines and property boundary of Ascott Park Cottage. South-west corner of control grid is at BNG: SU 61130 98260 (or 461130 198260)  
*(Image: from AAG survey report, Anslie et al 2007)*



**Fig 2. Ascott Park 2013 – Detached Survey Location (30m grids)**

Four survey grids shown in yellow in north-east corner of park.

Truncate survey at park wall and property boundary of Piccadilly Cottage.

South-west corner of grid layout is at BNG: SU 61310 98290 (or 461310 198290)

(Image: Google Earth)



## ANNEX 1

### A further extension of the geophysical survey at ASCOTT PARK STADHAMPTON, OXFORDSHIRE September 2013

#### 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The geophysical survey outlined in the Specification Issue 3.1 of 30-May-2013, was completed 17-20 June 2013 by SOAG volunteers under the leadership of Gerard Latham. The data from the 2007 survey by AAG and the new survey were successfully merged for the main survey area (Area 1). An examination of the results suggests that a further expansion of the Area 1 survey would be beneficial to achieving the primary aim outlined in Clause 1.2. Under the provision of Clause 4 of the Specification, this Annex 1 proposes additional rows of grids to the east, west and south to extend the combined survey by another 30m. No further grids are proposed for the detached survey area (Area 2). All provisions of the Specification will apply to this additional survey and must be adhered to.

#### 2 INITIAL RESULTS

- 2.1 The initial results for the Area 1 survey are shown in Fig 3 attached. The greyscale plot is of minimally processed earth resistance data, with white showing high resistance and black low resistance.

In Clause 2 of the Specification, four separate hypotheses for the location of William Dormer's new house were outlined. For convenience, these are indicated in Fig 3 and can be briefly listed as:

- |    |   |   |
|----|---|---|
| H1 | A compact, four-square house in the hollow, with a terrace.   | Mark Bowden (EH) 2007,<br>John Sykes 2008 and Trad. |
| H2 | A house 'elsewhere', perhaps towards the granary area, with the hollow representing a 2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt in the early C18. | Brian Dix 2009/2012                                 |
| H3 | A large courtyard house north of the terrace.<br>(In Fig 3, the H3 logo is in the proposed 'central courtyard'.)                | Roger Ainslie 2007                                  |
| H4 | A compact, four-square house at the south end of the avenue.  | Ian Clarke 2010                                     |

The survey provides new evidence to assist in ranking these four hypotheses in order of probability.

- 2.2 An initial appraisal of the geophysical evidence, both positive and negative, has suggested the following provisional conclusions:

- 2.2.1 There is no geophysical evidence to support H4.
- 2.2.2 The high resistance area interpreted by Ainslie as 'probable rubble' around a 'central courtyard', appears more likely to be a response from the near surface geology and soils, i.e. a 'background' response. If correct, the geophysical evidence for H3 is much weakened. A further 30m extension of the survey to the west would provide more background context to support this. This will usefully take the survey up to the watershed that feeds the fish ponds.
- 2.2.3 There is little geophysical evidence to support H2 but it cannot yet be ruled out. The enlarged earth resistance survey has revealed no new anomalies that could reasonably be interpreted as evidence of a large building. The magnetic disturbance around the west side of the 'granary' building, which Ainslie (2007) suggests may be brick rubble and "...could indicate an earlier building in that vicinity", may be associated with former courtyard walls and buildings belonging to the earlier manor house; the close proximity of this location to the early manor is notable and would support this. We might also reasonably expect some magnetic disturbance from the construction, modification and partial decay of the 'granary' building itself; a similar, though smaller, disturbance is apparent around the dovecot. A further 30m extension of the survey to the east is advisable to enlarge the background context and complete coverage of the western area where a house might conceivably have been built. An interesting curvilinear, high resistance anomaly in the south-east corner of the survey area would be included by this.

2.2.4 On a balance of probability and based purely on the geophysical evidence (positive and negative), H1 appears the most likely location for the house. In light of this, and given the close integration of house and garden architecture that developed from the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, especially for 'new build', it would seem sensible to take this opportunity to extend the survey southwards to cover the rest of the formal garden terracing; this would ensure we have the 'big picture' of the architectural plan and make a valuable contribution in its own right to the study of the site.

### 3 PROPOSED ADDITIONAL SURVEY AREA

The proposed survey grids are shown in Fig 3. The four northernmost grids to the east and west of the existing survey are considered essential to provide additional data to support conclusions regarding H3 and H2. The increased coverage will assist in assessing the background response, which appears to vary in part due to geology but also probably from levelling and terracing in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The remaining grids around the south-west corner are a sensible provision to complete the survey of the 17<sup>th</sup> century formal gardens and will materially assist in understanding the development of the site, especially if H1 should prove to be the correct location for the house.

### Fig 3. Ascott Park 2013 – Further Extension to Survey

Additional survey grids shown to east, west and south of combined AAG/SOAG survey. Truncate new survey at fence and wall lines (shown with dashed lines). SW corner of combined survey (white dot) at BNG: SU 61070 98140 (or 461070 198140) (*Geophysics image: Gerard Latham 2013 - Initial Ascott Park 1.jpg*)

