



Westbury Moated Sites 2012

Volume 2

Bratton

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Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society



Abstract

The moated site at Bratton was subject to a geophysical survey by magnetometer and twin – probe resistance in June 2012. The total area was encompassed by four grid squares of 20m each. The magnetometry was unresponsive. The resistance survey clearly distinguished the moat from the inner platform and showed the platform to contain a structure. This structure appeared as timber slots rather than masonry, although the actual wooden structure itself may have been supported by a stone footing as found in the 1946 excavation. The structure was about 20m north – south by 8m across, with curved ends, which may have been as a result of the collapse of the footings of the gable ends. The west wall was clearly apparent, but not the east side. There also appears to be post holes inside the structure, which may have represented wooden props for supporting a roof.

Acknowledgements

Sincere thanks go to landowner Mrs Pepler in giving permission and access to the field in order to undertake the geophysical survey.

Thanks goes to Wiltshire Archivist Mr Steve Hobbs FSA, Archivist at the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, English Heritage for their continued support as well as the granting of a Section 42 license.

Thanks go to the Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society volunteers led by Dr John Oswin and Owen Dicker, as well as the Westbury Heritage Society and members of Westbury U3A.

Also to Robin Holley and to Stella and Alison Maddock (Bratton History Association).

Special thanks go to Dr Richard Haddlesey for his advice and support

This project was made possible by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

This survey is one of a trilogy undertaken on moated sites in the vicinity of Westbury, Wiltshire in summer 2012. The survey was undertaken by Mat Charlton and members of the Westbury Heritage Society, along with members from the Westbury U3A Archaeology Group in conjunction with the Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society. The project was organised and coordinated by Mat Charlton. John Oswin MA PhD CSci FGS provided the technical supervision.

The survey was undertaken with the permission of English Heritage, Scheduled Monument number 1019753, under section 42 licence number SL00032130.

1.2 Location and Conditions

The site under investigation lies within the village of Bratton near Westbury, Wiltshire centred on ST 90998 52726 shown in figure 1.1.

The moat is on the very northern edge of the village, at the bottom of the slope, next to the road to Steeple Ashton, on gravels and clay drift overlying the Gault Clay below the chalk and greensand of the northern edge of Salisbury Plain, on the southern side of Trowbridge Vale (BGS sheet 281). Such soils would be good for retaining water.

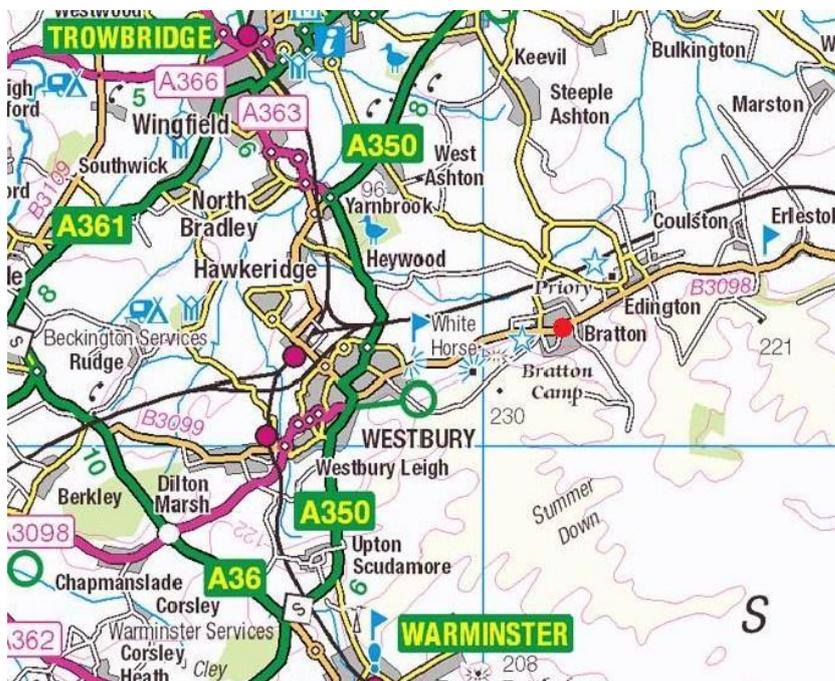


Figure 1.1 Bratton located east of Westbury. Copyright Ordnance Survey 2012

Bratton itself is a small village in Wiltshire, just east of Westbury on the north edge of Salisbury Plain, with approximately two thirds of the parish lying on chalk downs to the south, rising to a height of over 750 ft. The northern section of the parish is low-lying clay land, with hedge-enclosed fields. Between chalk and clay lies a belt of Upper Greensand, and the village of Bratton is located at a point where springs emerge from the porous Greensand between the meadow land of the clay vale and the arable and down land above.

The chalk escarpment behind the Upper Greensand belt has set a limit to the village settlement to the south. The eastern boundary of the parish has been determined by the course of the stream originating in Luccombe and Church Springs, known as the Milbourne and later as the Stradbroom, and by a steep slope of the downs (see Fig. 1.2). The medieval name "Milbourne" has led to the section of West Lavington to Westbury road which runs east-west through the centre of the village being given the name of "Melbourne Street". The western boundary of the parish largely follows a ridge between two dry valley systems.



Figure 1.2 Map showing the moated site. Copyright English Heritage 2012.

The site is in a paddock. Its western edge has been affected by laying hardcore for a track way. There is a new house built right up to the southern edge of the moat, and the edge of the road just encroaches on the eastern outer edge of the moat.

Vegetation on the site was well controlled, although there were items of horse jumping furniture spread around the site. None of these impeded the survey. The small area of the paddock to the north of the moat was not surveyed.

1.3 History of the Site

Early references which possibly relate to Bratton and Dilton come from the Domesday survey which describes the wider “Westberie”, held by the king, having been held before the Conquest by Queen Edith, of which a smaller portion is held by William Scudet. The second reference refers to William Scudet as holding the same portion of land (“Wesberie”) as a servant of the king. The population at this time for both Bratton and Dilton may be estimated as between 80 and 100. Poll-tax payers in 1377 numbered 149 in Bratton. There were 20 acres of meadow, 4 acres of woodland and two mills on Scudet’s estate.

In 1086 the king held the manor of Westbury, as successor to Queen Edith. Subsequent fragmentation of the manor included grants by Henry II in the 12th century which gave rise to manors which included that of Bratton. In 1256, at the death of Walter Pavely who held the manor of Westbury, the hamlet of Stoke was still part of the manor. In 1368 Stoke and Milborne were included in the holdings and assets which were allotted to two of the granddaughters of Sir John Pavely, who was a descendant of Walter Pavely. These holdings descended by inheritance until Charles, Lord Stourton, owner at the time, was executed in 1557 for the murder of Thomas Hartgill, at which point the lands were forfeited to the Crown. In 1570 the estate, now known as Westbury Stourton, and continuing to include land in Bratton, was granted to Edward Dyer who conveyed it to Stephen Whitaker, also in 1570 and it passed to Stephen's son Henry in 1576. The estate passed by sale and purchase to Sir James Ley, created Earl of Marlborough in 1626 (Wiltshire Council 2011).

Other land in Bratton was held in the early 13th century by Geoffrey de Mandeville and by Richard de Anesy (Dauntsey). The de Mandeville estate passed through succession to the widow of John de Mandeville in approximately 1336, and was conveyed in 1361 to the Bonhommes monastery at Edington, which had been founded in 1358. The Dauntsey estate was also granted to the house around the same time, both donors confusingly referring to their ‘manor of Bratton’. The Bonhommes acquired and held further land in Bratton until the Dissolution.

The manor of Bratton was granted to Sir Thomas Seymour of Sudeley Castle, Winchcombe, Gloucestershire in 1543 but after his execution in 1549 the estate reverted to the Crown until granted to Richard Knollis and Richard Swale.

In 1960 the three separate settlements of Stoke, Melbourne, and Bratton were still distinguishable. Stoke, or Little Stoke, lay around the church, which suggests that the church was probably once the centre of a village, or hamlet, not, as now, on the fringe. Melbourne lay along the stream as it flows from the point called Stradbrook, and along Melbourne Street. Bratton is thought to have been the district around the Court House which stands at the junction of Lower Road and Court Lane. It is possible that the house may have once been the court house of the manor of Bratton which was purchased by the Marquesses of Bath (VCH Vol VIII p.161 col 1).

North of the Court House lay the earthworks of a moated site, which may have been the site of the earlier manor house (VCH 1965).

The Moated site at Bratton

Moated sites are rare in Wiltshire with only 48 examples recorded (Aston and Lewis 1994), although Aberg recorded 53 (Aberg 1978). Few of these moated sites are on chalk with rare examples such as West Chisenbury (RCHM 1976 & 1991 1976). The majority of these moated sites tend to be placed in remote corners of parishes on clay uplands (Williamson 2003, 75). In Wiltshire this tends to be on the fringes of the clay vale such as at Hilmarton and Lyneham. It is also interesting that so few moats are recorded in the wealthiest parts of the county during the medieval period such as Bradford, Trowbridge and Melksham (Aston and Lewis 1994).

The moated site lies to the north west of the village of Bratton (ST91005271) and is a scheduled monument (no SL00032130).

The site is described on the Wiltshire Heritage Environment Record (HER) as a homestead moat, with some damage due to ploughing (see Fig. 1.3). There is evidence of earthworks which still survive in the surrounding fields, in particular to the east. The area enclosed by the moat is square, measuring 72m across, flat-topped and rises 0.8m above the surrounding area. The sides of this island slope steeply into the moat which is 1.3m deep and between 5m and 8m wide. The moat is lined with clay in order to hold water but is now dry. Surrounding the moat is a low bank up to 1m high and 2m wide. To the east the bank supports a hedge bank adjacent to the road. To the west the moat has been partially filled with stone to protect it from a track which crosses at this point, but it survives as a buried feature (Wiltshire SMR 2012).



Figure 1.3 The moated site at Bratton, Wiltshire (ST91005271). Copyright M Charlton

The Court House, Bratton late 15th century

The Court House lies south of the moat in Bratton and is a timber-framed building with a thatched roof, which stands on a stone plinth. The earliest part may date back to the late 15th century and it may have begun as a through passage open hall house. It is a fine example of a timber-framed house, once occupied by the Whitaker family (English Heritage 2012). Manor courts were also held here (WCH 2012).

2 Method

2.1 *Gridding*

An area 40m by 40m was laid out. The baseline was fixed in the south-western corner of the moat (ST 90994 52708) and ran east by 40 metres. The survey area comprised four grid squares of 20m each. This just encompassed the platform within the moat, half of the width of the southern moat, most of the width of the eastern moat, almost to the road hedge, the northern moat including its outer bank and on the west, the moat out to the point where it was overlain by metalling. These four squares encompassed very nearly 100% of the visible monument.

2.2 *Magnetometer*

The magnetometer survey was done with a Geoscan FM256 fluxgate gradiometer. The moat and platform made for an uneven site, which made it difficult to walk at a constant pace, so the smaller magnetometer was used, and in manual mode, taking readings at 2 per metre along traverses 1 m apart. With only four squares to cover, time spent on the magnetometer survey was minimal. The magnetometer is illustrated in figure 2.1. There were 800 data points per grid square.



Fig 2.1 Geoscan FM256 magnetometer being operated by John Oswin

2.3 *Twin-Probe Resistance*

The resistance survey was carried out with a TR/CIA twin – probe device, using 0.5 m separation of the moving probes. The TR meter is illustrated in figure 2.2. Readings were taken at 2 per metre along traverses 1 m apart, giving 800 data points per grid square. A zig – zag pattern was walked, but the TR automatically sorted the output to parallel data.

2.4 *Software*

Data from both instruments were downloaded to a BACAS laptop running Windows XP professional by BACAS proprietary software. The magnetometer data was then further refined by passing through a bacas proprietary zero – median destripe package. These data were then fed into INSITE v4 for mapping and processing.



Fig2.2 TR/CIA twin – probe resistance meter being operated by members of the U3A

3. Results

3.1 *Magnetometer*

The magnetometer output is shown in figure 3.1. The site was generally unresponsive to magnetometry, and visible features were spurious, either discarded metal or proximity to metal objects, or on the western edge, high anomaly caused by the metalling of the track.

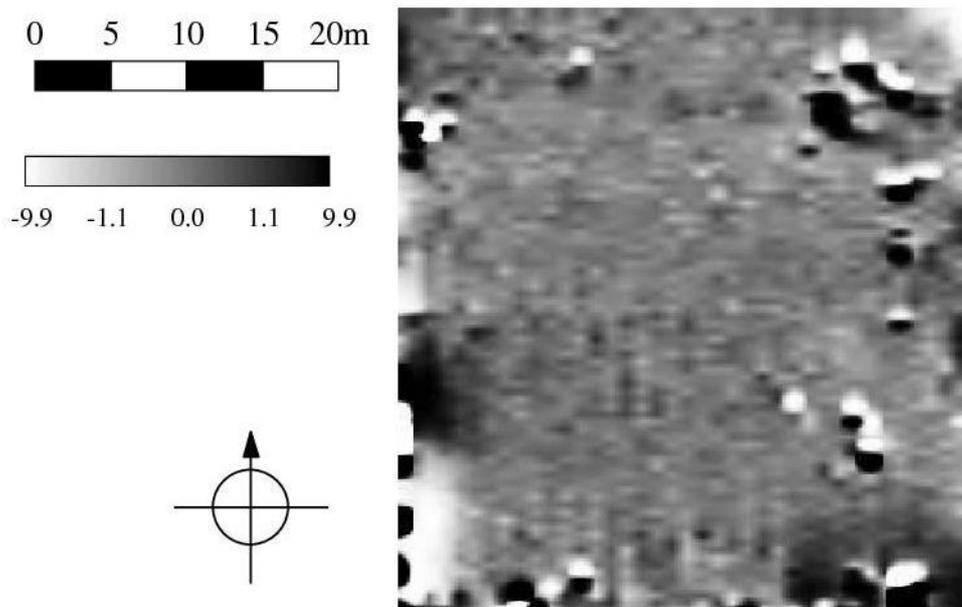


Fig 3.1 Showing the magnetometer output

3.2 Twin – Probe Resistance

The resistance output is shown in figure 3.2. The moat bottom shows clearly, particularly on the eastern side, as higher resistance. Resistance is also a little higher than on the platform on the southern and northern sides. The western side is masked by the metalling of the track.

The principal feature is sub – rectangular, with a straight western side some 20 m long and bowed ends, providing a structure about 8 m wide. This seems to be defined by beam slots rather than by masonry, although the actual wooden structure itself may have been supported by stone footings. This is corroborated by a small excavation in 1946 which found evidence of stone footings containing mortar, of which samples were sent to the Geological Survey and Museum and suggested the foundation layers of a building.

The structure was about 20 m north – south by 8 m across, with curved ends, which may have been as a result of the collapse of the footings for the gable ends. The eastern side of the building is not visible. There is a possible sequence of post holes within the building, one in the centre of the building, one to the north, slightly offset, and a pair to the south. It is possible that the offset posthole to the north is one of a pair: that would be more symmetrical; but a second post hole is not visible.

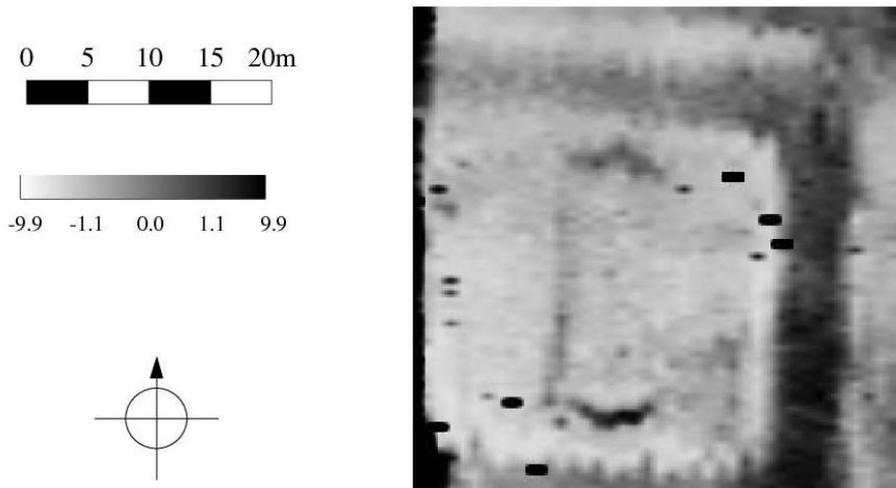


Fig 3.2 Showing the resistance output

The anomalies show up as positive, but are too narrow to be masonry, although they may represent stone footings which were typical of the open hall houses of the 14th century. One would normally expect negative anomalies for the slots, but that is not universal, and it is possible that these may be slots for a timber building.

4 Discussion

Moated Sites

Moated sites consist of one or more ditches, which in most cases were intended to be water-filled. They performed a number of purposes from assisted drainage, serving as a fishpond, (although moats are often accompanied by separate fishponds), water for animals, and as a source of water if fire broke out in the timber buildings it surrounded. These buildings ranged from manor houses, monasteries, monastic granges to farmsteads, chapels, medieval hospitals and windmills (Wilson 1985).

The earliest phase for the construction of moated sites took place between the 12th and 14th centuries, with the heyday for moat building being the first half of the fourteenth century (Platt 2010) and then again in the 16th and 17th centuries with the renewed fashion for formal gardens (Creighton 2009). If the moat is post medieval then it may have formed part of this formal garden layout along with the associated fishpond, suggesting that it may have been constructed in order to keep out herbivorous animals such as deer, from causing damage to domestic gardens (Wilson 1985).

The main reasons for constructing a moat around a house during the medieval period was for prestige or possibly defence. The moat often surrounded an area occupied by buildings or other structures. It would serve to articulate a common architectural vocabulary expressing a common set of social ideas prominent in higher social levels and carried through to the gentry and even yeomen (Johnson 2010, 120). The earth created by digging the moat was often placed into the area enclosed to form a raised platform on which the buildings were then constructed. The size and shape of the area enclosed by the moat varies, from rectangular enclosures as well as circular or trapezoidal, and sometimes with more than one enclosure, and is often accompanied by fishponds. There are often channels to carry water into and away from the moat.

As archaeological sites, moats consist of three parts: the moat itself, the surface of the area enclosed by it, and an earlier surface under the platform derived from upcast from the moat. Under the platform, there may be remains of land use before the moat was constructed, such as cultivation or remains of earlier buildings. The structures enclosed by the moat could include a dwelling consisting of a great hall and cross wing, accompanied by ancillary buildings. The moat, even if it is now apparently dry, may still contain deposits in which conditions are suitable for the preservation of remains of the past environment such as seeds, and objects made of organic materials such as wood and leather.

The site at Bratton is the smallest of the three moated sites surveyed in the area, yet the results have provided further evidence of substantial structures enclosed within the moat, albeit of timber rather than masonry. The size of the building is some 20 m by 8 m, with curved ends possibly resulting from the collapse of the gable ends and the centre of the roof possibly supported by posts, although these may not necessarily be associated with this phase of building. There was probably an eastern side to the building, but this does not show in the geophysics.

The geological setting of this site is very similar to those at Brook and Penleigh according to the geological map, but the responses of the resistance were a little different. It may be that the base of the moat reached down through the drift to Gault clay beneath.

Excavation at Bratton moat

A report titled 'Historical Notes on the Village of Bratton made by students of Salisbury Diocesan Training College at St. Boniface College, Warminster' and written circa 1947 includes notes of an investigation of the moated site at Bratton carried out as fieldwork in 1946 by some of the students. Copies of the report are at Westbury Library and in the Local Studies Collection at the History Centre (classified as BRT.940), and also in the Wiltshire & Swindon Archives at the History Centre. Stella Maddock has transcribed the relevant section of the report as follows:

“The daily life of the manors need not here be described; it could not have differed from that described by C.C. Coulton in his ‘Medieval Village’ and many other books on the same subject. But a point of great interest is the Court House, which is undoubtedly of very ancient date whatever the date of the present building. It is most likely not the site of the manor house of the Mandevilles. Immediately adjacent to it, along the lane towards Dunge, is the faintly outlined site of a moated house of medieval date. These moated sites are interestingly frequent along the river valleys of this district, there being one at Dunge about a mile to the NW, another at Penleigh and another at Westbury Leigh. They probably represented moated farm houses of the 13th century, or small manor houses which either defended or drained their land by this device of a moat. At Bratton this may have been the site of the manor house of the Mandevilles, standing near the fresh springs. The following notes were made by the investigating party on the spot:

The moat is visible from the Trowbridge road and is in the first field beyond the Old Court House. The outer banks are 136’ 4’’ from north to south and 160’ from west to east. They enclose a raised area 71’ by 79’. The ditch between shows evidence of still being wet at certain times of the year because there are deep impressions of cattle feet which could only have been made in deep mud, and there are common marsh plants, rushes and sedges. The ditch is of a uniform width of approximately 13 ft. The bank on the south side is broken by a line of trees and bushes of the fairly rapid growing varieties such as willow and thorn. There is a break in the outer north wall but it is impossible to say whether it has been made by cattle or was an opening originally. The centre enclosure is almost flat and covered with short turf. (28/7/46).

We returned to the moat to try to find the foundation stones of the original building. We turfed one corner (see diagrams No. 1 and 2) and within 8’’ of the surface discovered a heap of bones. There was a strange kind of subsoil which was very hard, faintly resembling peat, and could be removed in large blocks. Below the hard surface soil was clay mixed with shell fragments. Odd fragments of shell and small pieces of stone were found. We dug to a depth of two feet when there appeared to be pure clay which had been undisturbed for many years. We made a smaller digging lower down the slope but this was pure clay almost immediately.

*We attempted digging at corner No. 3 and found layers of stone containing much shell. These layers were only a few inches below the turf. At a depth of 5’’ we found small pieces of tiling. Digging at the other corners yielded little except shell fragments. We also found the probable source of water for filling the ditch and it is possible that the break in the outer wall was there for filling purposes and was connected to the stream by a narrow ditch now used by cattle as a path. (29/7/46)
L. Hayden A. Watling*

The stone dug at Corner 3 by a subsequent party was sent to the Geological Survey and Museum at South Kensington and there seems little doubt that it did contain mortar, which would indicate the foundation layers of a house on this site.”

Unfortunately the diagrams referred to are not included in the copies of the report mentioned above. The location of the original is as yet unknown.'

“Historical Notes on the Village of Bratton made by students of Salisbury Diocesan Training College at St. Boniface College, Warminster” 1946

It is possible that the moat predated the Court house of the late 15th century see (figure 4.1), as archaeological excavation suggests that few moats were constructed as dwelling sites after 1500, which also coincides with the period when new wealth was acquired by the local gentry for the enclosure of sheep (Roberts 1962).

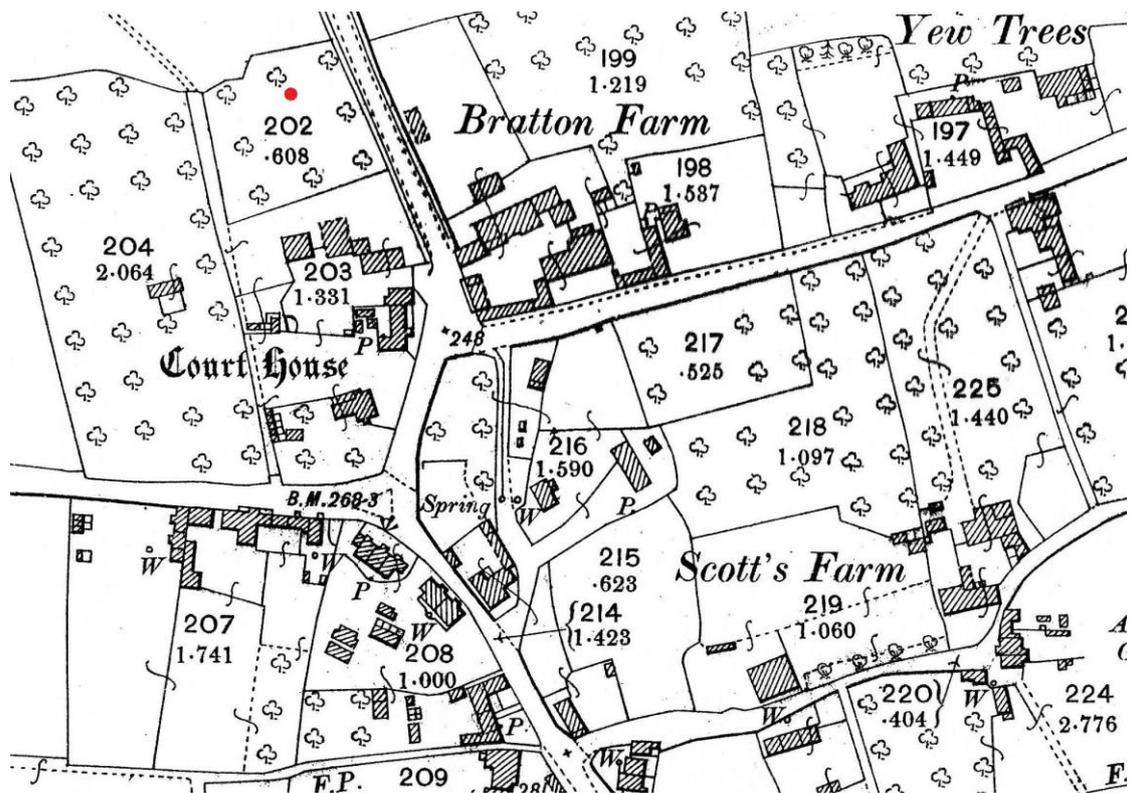


Figure 4.1 OS second edition 6" map (1901) showing the moat and Court House the moat and Court House second edition OS 6" map, 1901

In later periods, when moated structures had ceased to be regarded as status symbols or defensive purposes, they were sometimes wholly or partly filled in and new dwellings constructed in a more convenient location outside the moated area (Pastscape 2012). At Bratton however, the moat itself was left intact, indicating that the building materials may have been reused or discarded.

RCHME field investigations in 1992 of medieval settlement around the SPTA found evidence west of the moat of medieval activity with earthworks of medieval ridge and furrow as well as defined medieval settlement earthworks. To the south, traces of medieval settlement earthworks were also identified to the west of the church in

Bratton (ST 95 SW 39) and excavations in this area have produced evidence for medieval activity in the form of pottery dating from the 13th century (Pastscape 2012).



Fig 4.2 The moat at Bratton showing the position of features surrounding the site, possibly part of an earlier abandoned settlement. Copyright Wiltshire Council

It is possible that earthworks to the east of the moat (Figure 4.2) may be associated, and further surveying should be undertaken to ascertain the extent of these surrounding features and their relationship to the moated site at Bratton.

Deserted medieval villages, some of which consist of nucleated farms and cottages with a field system, were often managed communally, creating an interdependency of farm and land holders, as well as an ecclesiastical independence with their own church. The existence of hamlets and farmsteads which lay within the parishes of villages, were often not recorded before the 12th and 13th centuries, and even then, the place under discussion would have to be important enough to be mentioned (Aston 1985).

5. An Archaeological Interpretation by Dr Richard Haddlesey

BSc MSc PhD Historic Buildings Consultant

Moats, it would seem, were first added to existing sites in the twelfth century (Williamson 2010, 93). It is possible that this is the case with our site; however, the symmetry that exists between the building shadow and the moat would indicate that the moat was either built in the 14th century, or more likely, remodelled from a pre-existing Saxon site.

This would suggest an early 14th century date – the second phase of moat building – for the site illustrated by the geophysics (Fig 3.2). During the early 14th century, lesser Lords were under pressure to enforce their social status by increasing expenditure on their properties by carrying out large scale building works and surrounding them by moats (Dyer 2002, 148). Dyer suggests that often they cost more than a year's income (*Ibid*). As the following paragraph outlines, this is the most likely interpretation of the geophysics result.

Gerrard suggests only 12% of the 5,532 of English medieval moated sites have in some way been excavated (Gerrard 2003, 211). Therefore, projects like the one outlined above show the importance of continued research in this area. From the geophysics survey, it is my opinion that the site shows evidence of an early 14th century open hall house. This is based on the dimensions and the appearance of solid foundations.

The foundations would appear to be too thin to bear the load of a brick or stone structure, thus ruling out a post-medieval building, but rather suggest the foundations of a medieval open hall timber-framed building. The presence of foundations also rule out the likelihood of a Saxon dwelling as that would produce rather more post-holes and no rectangular footings.

It remains unclear the purpose of adding a moat to a site, but the general assumption is to provide modest means of defence coupled with a desire to project wealth and status at a time of over population and civil unrest during the late 13th and early 14th centuries (Dyer 1998, 106-7). Again, this further emphasises the importance of continued research of moated sites such as the one described in this report.

It is therefore my opinion that the site would indicate a substantial and well-built timber-framed building of the late medieval open hall variety. The geophysics would point to a box frame structure (more common in the south-eastern counties) of four bays, two of which would house the open hall as opposed to a cruck-frame structure (more common outside the south eastern counties) (Brunskill 2003. 133). It is

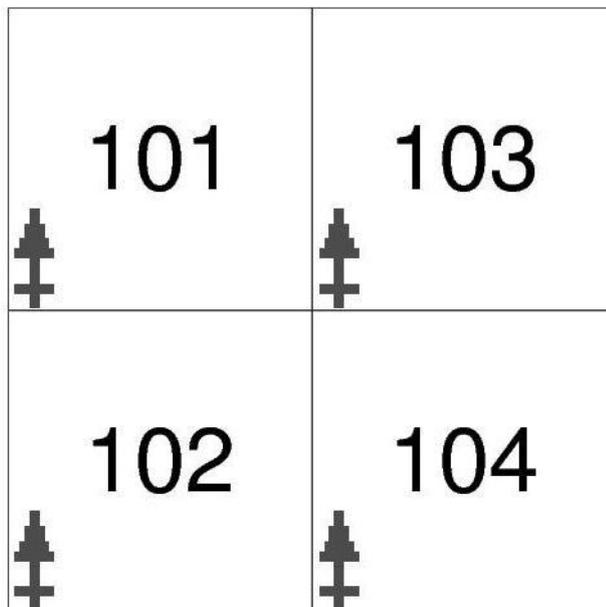
difficult to interpret any evidence of a central hearth within the geophysics results (Figs 3.1 and 3.2), however, what may be needed is a test pit to prove its existence or absence. The open hall, with central hearth, is a fundamental aspect of any pre-16th century house. Therefore, its presence would help firm up the case for a 14th century date as opposed to a Saxon or Tudor building.

My findings are based on an archaeological background and should be used in tandem with any desk based historical research carried out by the authors of this report. My interpretation then is based on a solid background in the field, but is to serve only as an interpretation and not fact.

Appendix A Gridding Details

A1 *Magnetometry*

The four grids of magnetometry were done in the order shown in figure A1. This order ensured that magnetometry and resistance were not interfering with each other. Each grid square consisted of 20 lines of 40 readings, 800 total, although there were a number of blanks, for instance on the track to the west, which was very magnetic. All grids started in the south – west corner heading north, and the data arranged in a zig – zag pattern. The files prefixed ‘m’ are the raw data, those prefixed ‘d’, have been subject to zero median destriping and are the preferred set to use.



A1 showing plan of magnetometry survey

A2 *Twin – Probe Resistance*

Figure A2 shows the plan of the resistance survey. The four squares all comprised 20 rows of 40 points, a total of 800 per grid square. A zig – zag pattern was walked, but the TR device automatically sorts the data to parallel lines. All grids started in the south – west corner, heading north. Resistance data files are prefixed ‘r’.

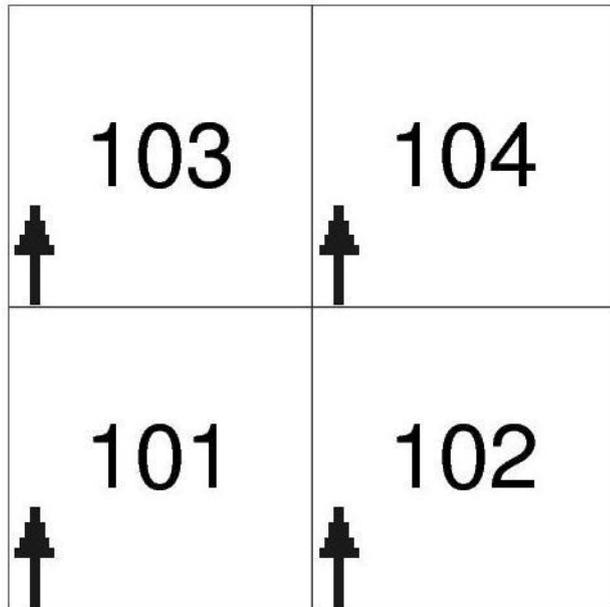


Figure A2 showing the plan of the resistance survey

An area 40 m by 40 m was laid out, the baseline fixed in the south western corner of the moat (ST 90994 52708) and ran east to west by 40 metres.

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