



A geophysics survey of the grounds of Aberleigh, Hall Farm, Arborfield

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Authors: Tim Lloyd, Nigel Spencer and Andrew Hutt MCIfA

Distribution:

Sir David Bell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading

Berkshire Archaeological Society Council

Alison McQuitty, Ann Griffin, Anne Harrison, Andrew Hutt,
Barrie Randall, Catherine Petts, Gail Eaton, Griselda Truscott Wickes,
John Chapman, Tim Lloyd, Trevor Coombs,

Berkshire Archaeology Research

Mrs Lindsey Bedford, Dr Steve Clark, Mr David Cox, Mrs Janet Firth, Dr
Richard Firth, Mrs Anne Harrison, Mrs Gill Holmes, Mrs Debbie Slay

Arborfield Local History Society (ALHS):

Mrs Diana Thorne, Mr Barry Salter

Berkshire Archaeology: Mrs Fiona MacDonald

Summary:

This is a report on a geophysics survey and analysis of photographs of the grounds of Aberleigh built by University of Reading in the 1960s. We surveyed this area because it is believed to be the site of three other buildings: Arborfield manor which probably dates from the 13th or 14th century, a manor house built by Edmund Standen in 1603, Arborfield Hall built in 1832, and a camp of Nissen huts built as part of a military base built circa 1943

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Vice Chancellor Sir David Bell for granting permission to survey the site

All members of BAS and BARG who worked on the site

Google inc. for the use of satellite photographs

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1.4. Change control

This document is under the control of the authors.

1.5. Change history

Issue	Date	Comment
01	21/11/2017	First draft
02	15/1/2018	Contains changes following a review by the authors
02.1	10/3/2018	Google attribution updated

1.6. Changes forecast

Changes will be made in response to comments by reviewers.

2. Site location

Aberleigh is located next to the River Loddon to the north west of Arborfield Cross. Arrow shows grid ref: 474889,167913. The building labelled “Boat House” is actually the approximate site of “Aberleigh”.



Figure 1: Location of the site (©StreetMap).

3. Geological and topographical background

The sedimentary bedrock geology is London Clay Formation - clay, silt and sand. The site is alongside the River Loddon on Alluvium - clay, silt, sand and gravel (British Geological Survey).

The current house, Aberleigh, faces approximately SE and is about 50 metres from the channel of the river. The latter is much silted up. The gardens at front and rear are mainly laid to lawn with trees and shrubs planted in beds. A gravel drive leads off the main access road. To the NE there is a lawned area bordered by trees and shrubs that was once a formal garden. To the SW a cultivated field is separated from the gardens by an area of rough grass. See figure 3.

The wider site includes remains of a disused mill, the original Arborfield church and various cottages and agricultural buildings associated with Hall Farm. This is now part of the University of Reading Agricultural Research department.

4. Historical and archaeological background

The Arborfield Local History Society have been researching Arborfield Hall, the remains of St Sebastian church and other buildings related to the old village of Arborfield in and around our study area. Their website records the results of their work (<http://www.arborfieldhistory.org.uk/>) and provide insights to support the notes in this section.

4.1. Historical timeline

There may be the remains of five buildings on this site.

The earliest is a medieval manor house which may have been constructed in 13th or 14th centuries and whose whereabouts is unknown. The evidence for this is that the nearby church of St Bartholomew was built in the 13th century, most likely by the lord of the manor, which suggests the manor house is not far away. The 16th century will of Thomas Bullock includes a description of the manor house which suggest it was fairly substantial (Ditchfield and Page 1923: 200-203)

In 1589, the manor was sold to Edmund Standen and passed to his son, William Standen, who rebuilt the house in Jacobean style in 1603. A stable block was added in 1654. Little is known about this manor house; the associated stables and a laundry bearing a date stone of 1654, were demolished in 1927. This manor house remained in the Standen family for nearly 200 years. In 1730, it was sold to Pelsant Reeves, a [Master in Chancery](#), and remained in the Reeves family. It was described as ruinous by Mary Russel Mitford in her book *Our Village* published in circa 1830.

George Dawson, a descendant, demolished the old manor in 1832 and, in 1837, commissioned a new hall which became known as Arborfield Hall. In 1842 he sold it to [Sir John Conroy](#), Controller of the Household of the [Duchess of Kent](#).

In 1855 the estate was bought by John Hargreaves and he made further extensions to the house, including a ballroom (later demolished) in 1885.

In 1926, it was purchased at auction by Guthrie Allsebrooks, a water engineer who wanted to buy the mill but had to buy the house as well. He converted the mill to produce electric power to supply the house and surrounding farm buildings.

During the Second World War, Arborfield Hall was requisitioned for war use and Arborfield Hall camp built nearby. The Hall was occupied by the Royal Air Force and in 1943-44 became the headquarters of the 2nd Advanced Air Depot Area (2nd. A.A.D.A.) of the U.S. 9th Air Force. This unit had been formed in autumn 1943 at Bushey Park in north London, and moved to Arborfield on December 15th that year. There were about 50 officers and 200 enlisted men. They departed from the Hall on June 15th 1944, going into Normandy over Omaha Beach (Arborfield Local History web site).

After the war, the condition of the hall was described as shocking and the Arborfield Hall camp was used as emergency housing until 1953 when houses in Arborfield village had been built (Arborfield Local History web site).

In 1955, the University of Reading purchased the estate and demolished the house. Aberleigh was built on the site in the 1960s.

4.2. Evidence of these houses

The sites of the medieval and Standen manor houses are unknown. Arborfield Hall is shown in photographs and limited plans but only small remains are now visible. These include a boat house built where the rear garden meets the former river bank.

4.3. Previous archaeological fieldwork

In April 2017, a team from the Berkshire Archaeology Research Group (BARG) carried out gradiometer and resistivity surveys of the area of the garden at Aberleigh known as the rose garden. This produced the results shown in Figure 2. The dark anomaly may represent the remains of a corner of Arborfield Hall. This is now to be treated as a joint project involving both BARG and the Berkshire Archaeological Society.

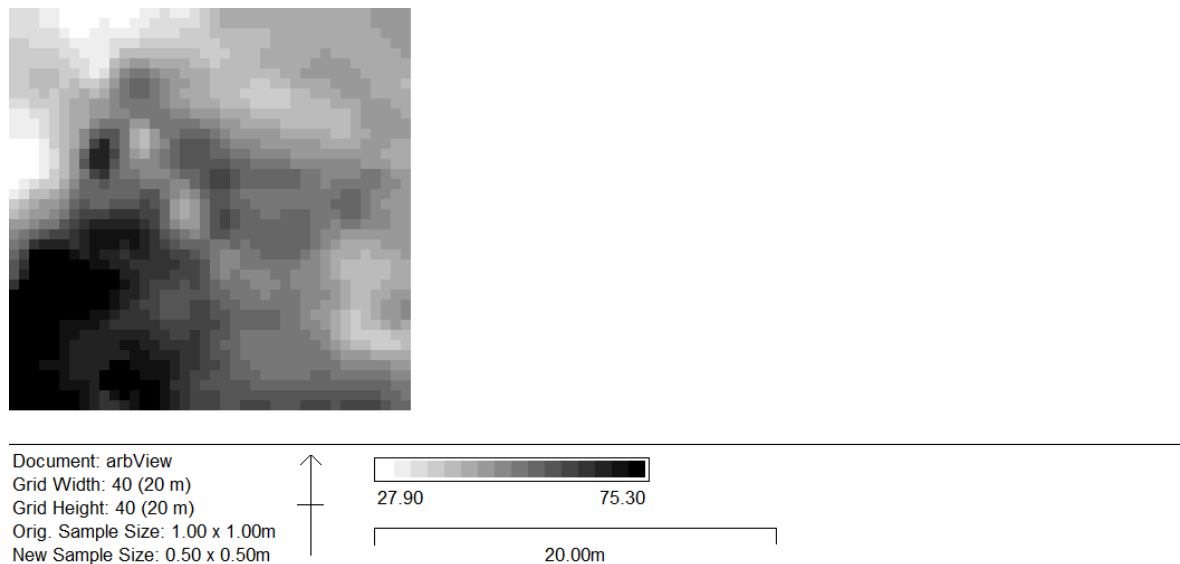


Figure 2: Results of a resistivity survey of the garden to the east of Aberleigh

5. General and specific aims of the fieldwork

The aim of this fieldwork is to carry out a non-intrusive and non-destructive geophysics survey of the grounds of Aberleigh and the field immediately to the west.

6. The program of work

6.1. Activities

The activities comprised an on-site resistivity survey and a desk based analysis of photographic evidence

The survey started by laying out 10m x 10m survey grids in the grounds surrounding Aberleigh aligned with the house using one of the corners of the house as a temporary bench mark. The steps leading to the River Loddon were marked on the grid to help position the 1832 building.

Data from the grid squares was collected using a Frobisher TAR-3 resistance meter.

The survey results were processed using Snuffler, a software package developed by Sussex University (Sussex 2006). The house, grounds and grid were drawn in DraftSite CAD so that the resistivity results, aerial photographs and building plans could be layered and interpreted.

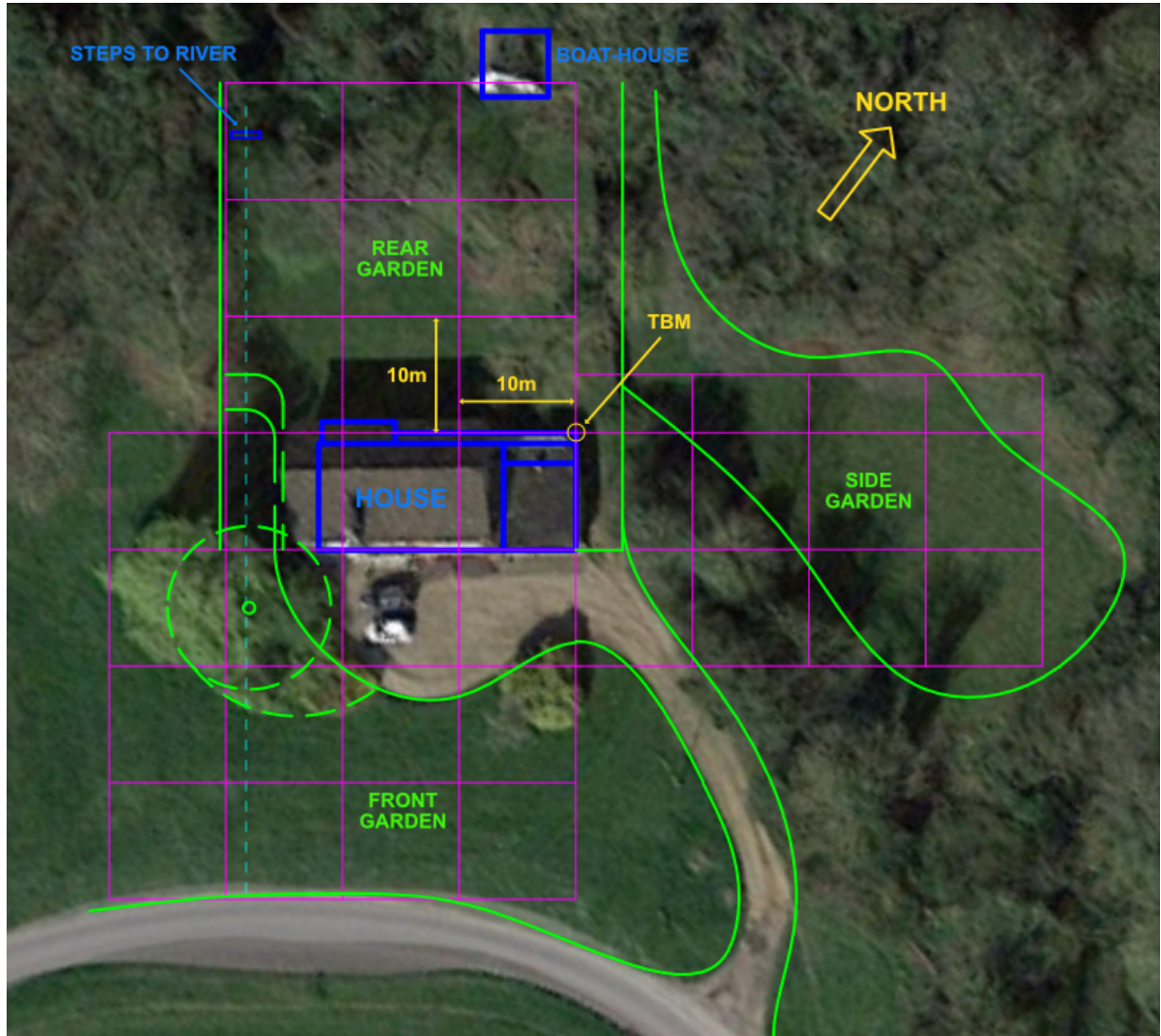


Figure 3: Plan of area surveyed showing the grid and existing buildings overlaid on an overhead satellite image (Imagery ©Google, Map data ©Google 2018)

6.2 Results: garden to NW (rear) of house

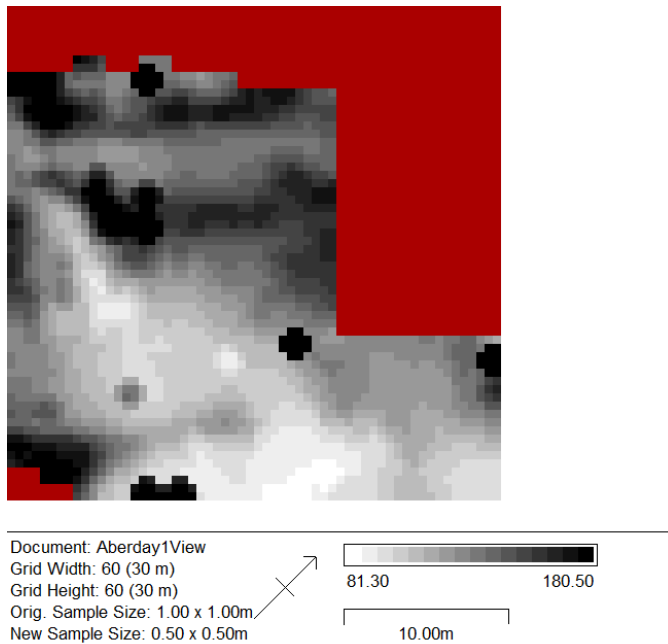


Figure 4: Resistivity plot of rear garden

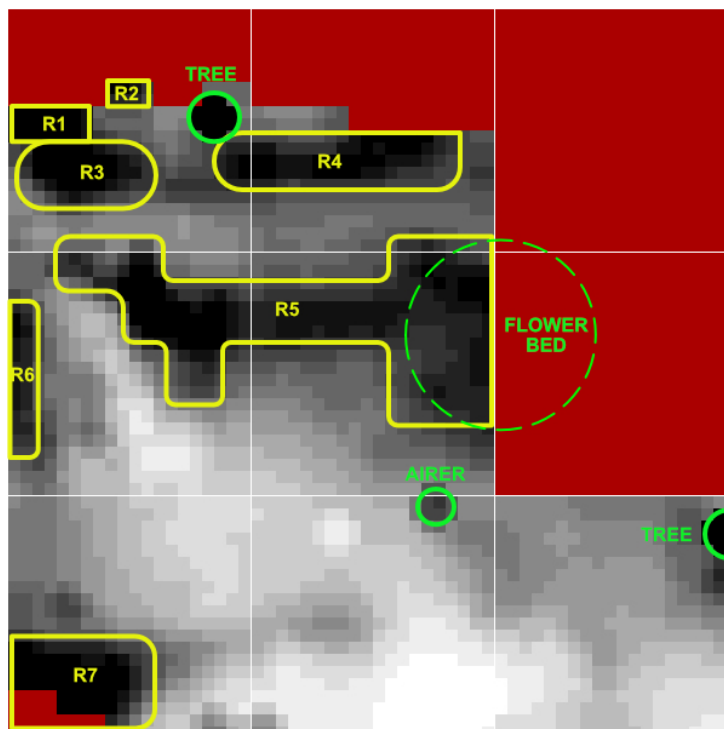


Figure 5: Anomalies detected

The anomalies detected were:

R1 – the top of the steps down to the river

R2 – is associated with the steps

R3 & R4- two linear anomalies at the top of the river bank which may be part of the same feature.

R5 - a parallel anomaly which blurs into the flower bed and cesspit at its east end

R6 & R7 are in planted areas.

6.3 Results: garden to NE side of house

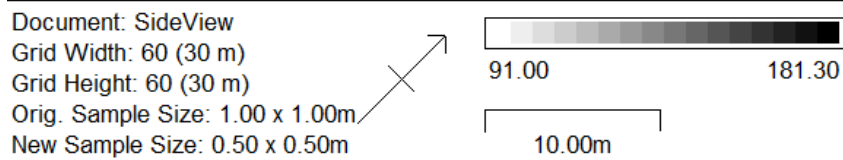
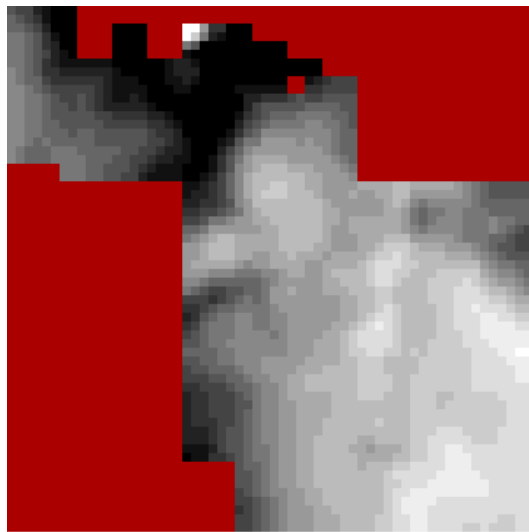


Figure 6: Resistivity plot of side garden

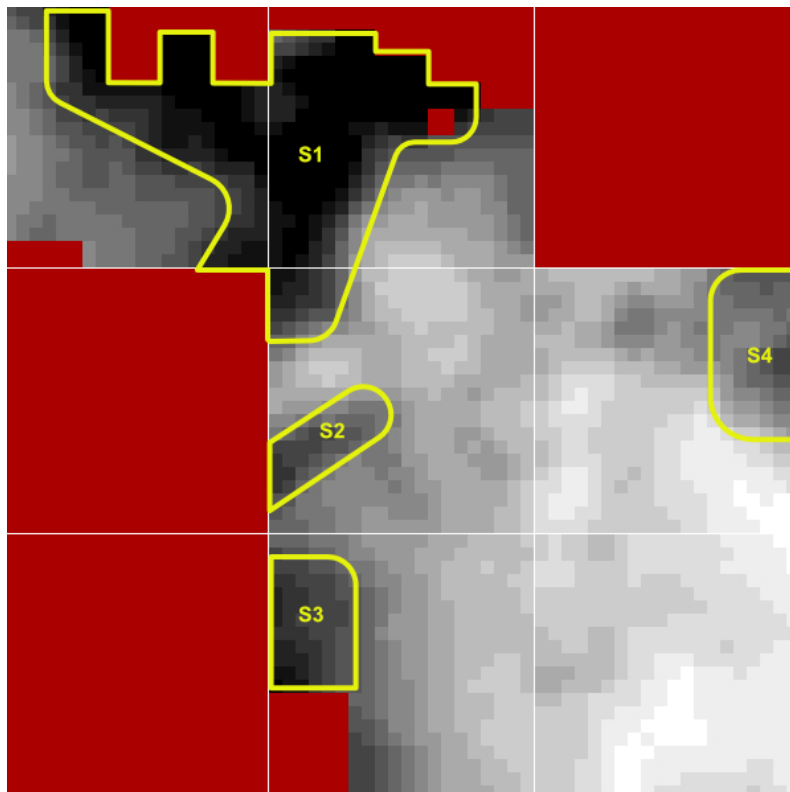


Figure 7: Anomalies detected

A number of indistinct anomalies were detected. S1-3 may be features while S4 is on the edge of planting.

6.4 Results: garden to SE (front) of house

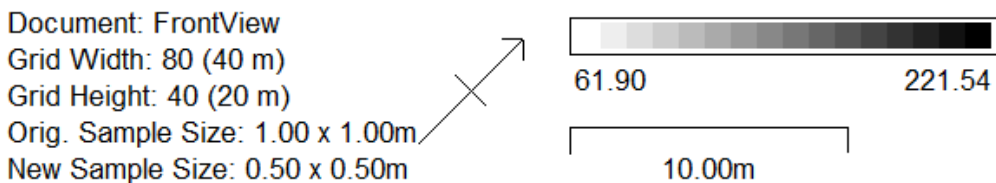


Figure 8: Resistivity plot of front garden

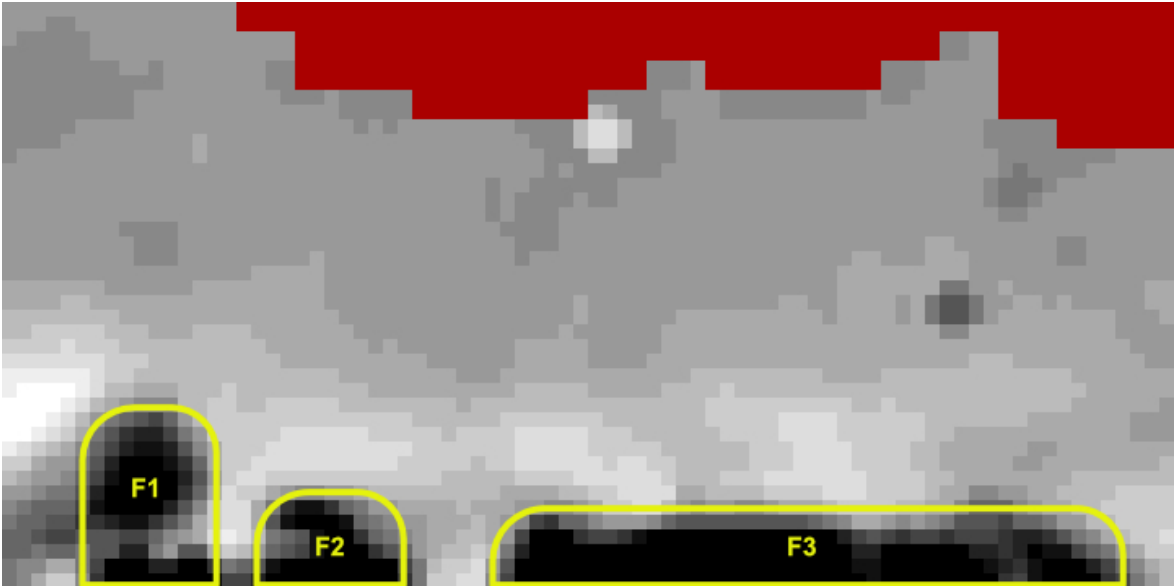


Figure 9: Anomalies detected

F1-3, along the edge of the road, were the only anomalies detected.

6.5 Field to SW side of house

By the side of the house a raised bank continues as a level platform past the boundary fence and into the adjoining field. This area was not resistivity surveyed but was investigated using a metal probe to determine the extent of areas of concrete.

These appear to consist of a wide area at the top of the bank with at least one path leading off at right angles (see Figure 10).

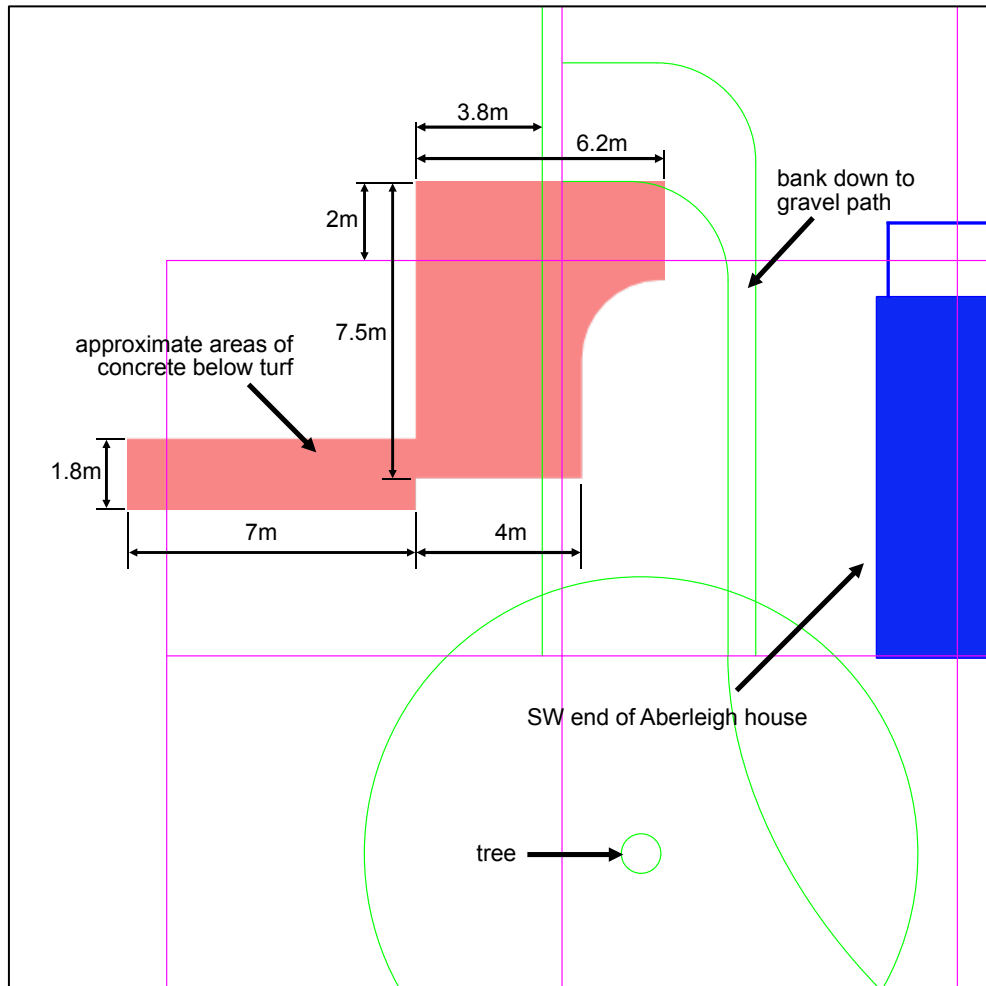


Figure 10: Area of concrete to SW of house

7. Photographic Analysis

A number of photographs have been uncovered by the Arborfield History Society showing Arborfield Hall in the decades before it was demolished.

Photos of the rear of the house show terraces and steps leading down to the River Loddon. The remains of these top steps are still visible and are shown on the plans in this report. The lower set of steps is assumed to be buried in the sediment and undergrowth that border a reduced channel.



Figure 11: Arborfield Hall from the river



Figure 12: Arborfield Hall from the river (offset view)

Figures 11 and 12 show images of the rear of Arborfield Hall. A key feature of these images is that they prove that there was a corridor from the front door (shown in Figure 14) to the garden door shown in Figure 11 and that this alignment led to steps leading to the River Loddon. These steps remain in the garden of Aberleigh (Figure 13) and are some 35m from the back of the house. Unfortunately, the offset in Figure 12 does not make it clear how deep the terraces were and therefore how close the building was to the river. Note that the SW ballroom extension had been demolished by this time.

The closest building to the river appears to be a single storey, rectangular extension with a cylindrical tower in the NE corner.

Using the steps as a base, it initially appeared likely that there would be foundations of Arborfield Hall in the garden between Aberleigh and the River Loddon and that the SW ballroom end of Arborfield Hall extends beyond the grounds of Aberleigh into land to the west which are currently laid to grass.



Figure 13: The steps from the Hall to the River Loddon, with Aberleigh in the background taken 2004 (Arborfield Local History Society website)

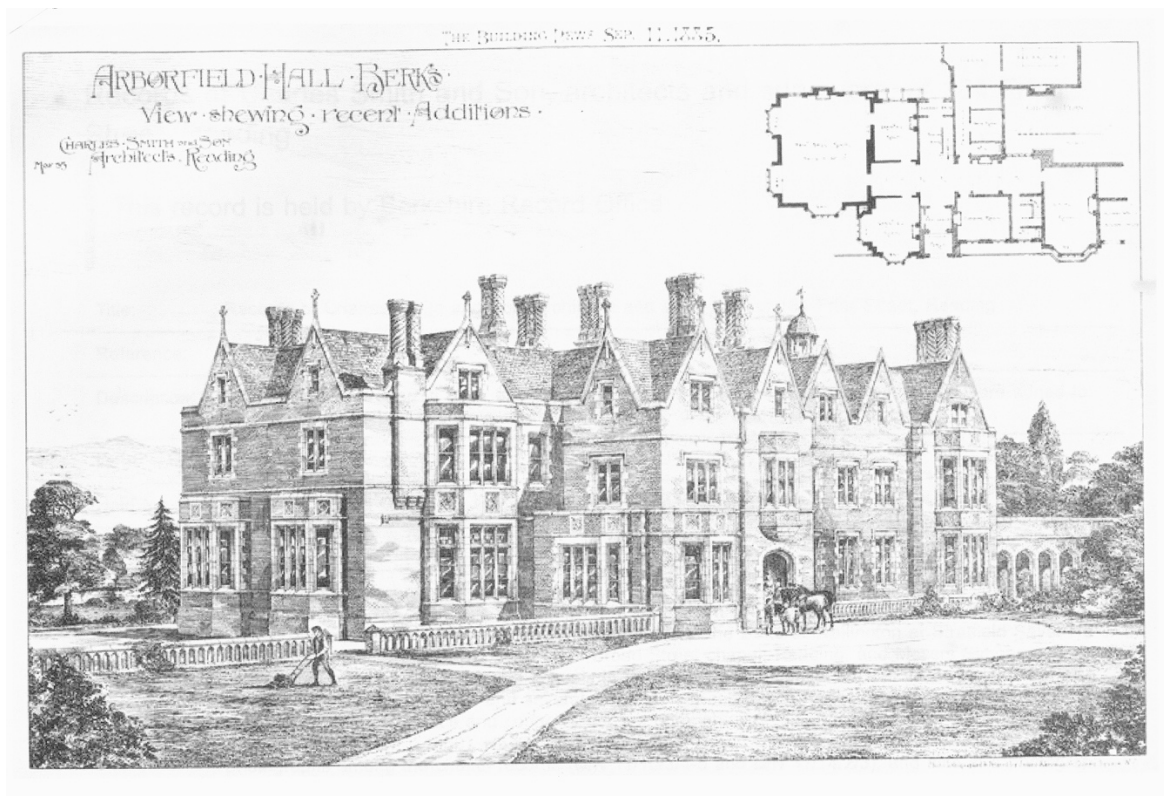


Figure 14: Arborfield Hall in 1885, records of Charles Smith and Son, architects and surveyors, Reading (Berkshire Record Office reference D/EX 1411)

The front of the house is shown in a partial plan and sketch showing alterations made around 1885, including the ballroom extension (Figure 14). Close examination of the scale that is barely visible on the inset plan suggests a 30-foot ruler. A photograph taken of a group standing in the front door (Figure 15) confirms an approximate scale and allows an outline plan to be reconstructed.



Figure 15: Group by front door (1950s?)

Figure 14 and a photograph taken in the 1940s (Figure 16), appear to show that the front of the house was located directly on the curve of the driveway.



Figure 16: Arborfield Hall from the driveway

The fact that the boat house is visible in Figure 16 suggests that the terraces at the rear of the house were wider than is implied in Figure 12. A family photo taken on the rear terrace confirms this (Figure 17 below).



Figure 17: Anne on the rear terrace with boat house

An oblique aerial view (Figure 18), taken in 1949, shows the remains of the military installations on the site, including a series of Nissan huts, and positions them with respect to the Hall. In particular, this image suggests that there was a garden rather than military installations adjacent to the west of the Hall



Figure 18: Arborfield Hall from the air taken in 1949

8. Discussion

The object of this project is to discover the position of Arborfield Hall. Figure 19 shows the survey results on a combined plan, also showing existing buildings and features.

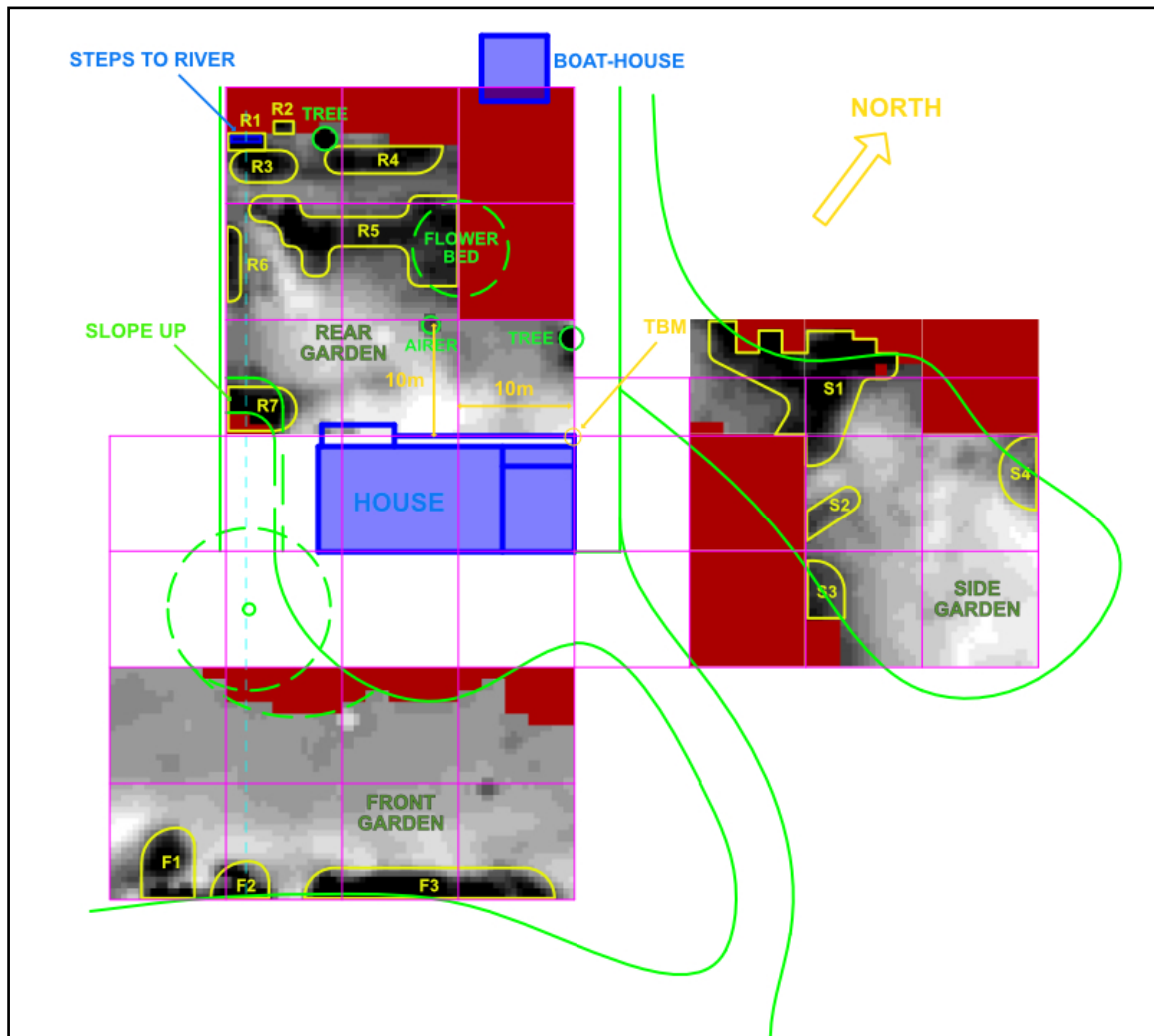


Figure 19: Combined plan of resistivity results and anomalies

Rear Garden

Some of the anomalies detected can be associated with visible features:

R1 is over the top step of the remains of a flight leading down to the river. R2 is associated with this and may be the site of a balustrade.

The two linear anomalies (R3/4) are provisionally interpreted as remains of a path along the garden terraces that can be seen on old photographs. As the dimensions of these terraces cannot be deduced from the photographs it is not possible to decide if the larger feature (R5) was a further terrace or the end of the rear extension to the Hall.

R6 and R7 are over existing planting and are not thought to be significant.

Side Garden

Anomalies S1, S2 and S3 may be the remains of service buildings known to have occupied this site. No clear plan can be deduced and there is no documentary or photographic evidence yet uncovered that would shed more light.

Feature S4 (and even S3) is probably related to the planting

Front Garden

The photographic survey suggested that this would be yield promising results. The front of the hall was probably located only a short distance from the drive so should be underneath the lawn. Unfortunately, the only anomalies detected (F1-3) are along the edge of the road and are probably noise from the road foundations. Nothing was found within the area where the Hall was expected to have been.

South West Field

This was known to have been the site of a ballroom, built after 1885 but demolished between the two World Wars. This area has several areas of concrete just below the surface so was not suitable for resistivity survey. It is possible that these are the remains of foundations and pathways constructed for outbuildings erected during WW2.

Photographic Evidence

Photographs of the house show that the rear was separated from the river by a series of extensions and garden terraces. The front was very close to the curving driveway. A top down aerial photograph, taken in March 1946, superimposed on a satellite image from Google Maps shows that the line of the current road closely follows the earlier drive but the latter widened out in front of the house. The current house, “Aberleigh”, can be seen behind the main hall but possibly on the site of the former rear extensions (Figure 20).

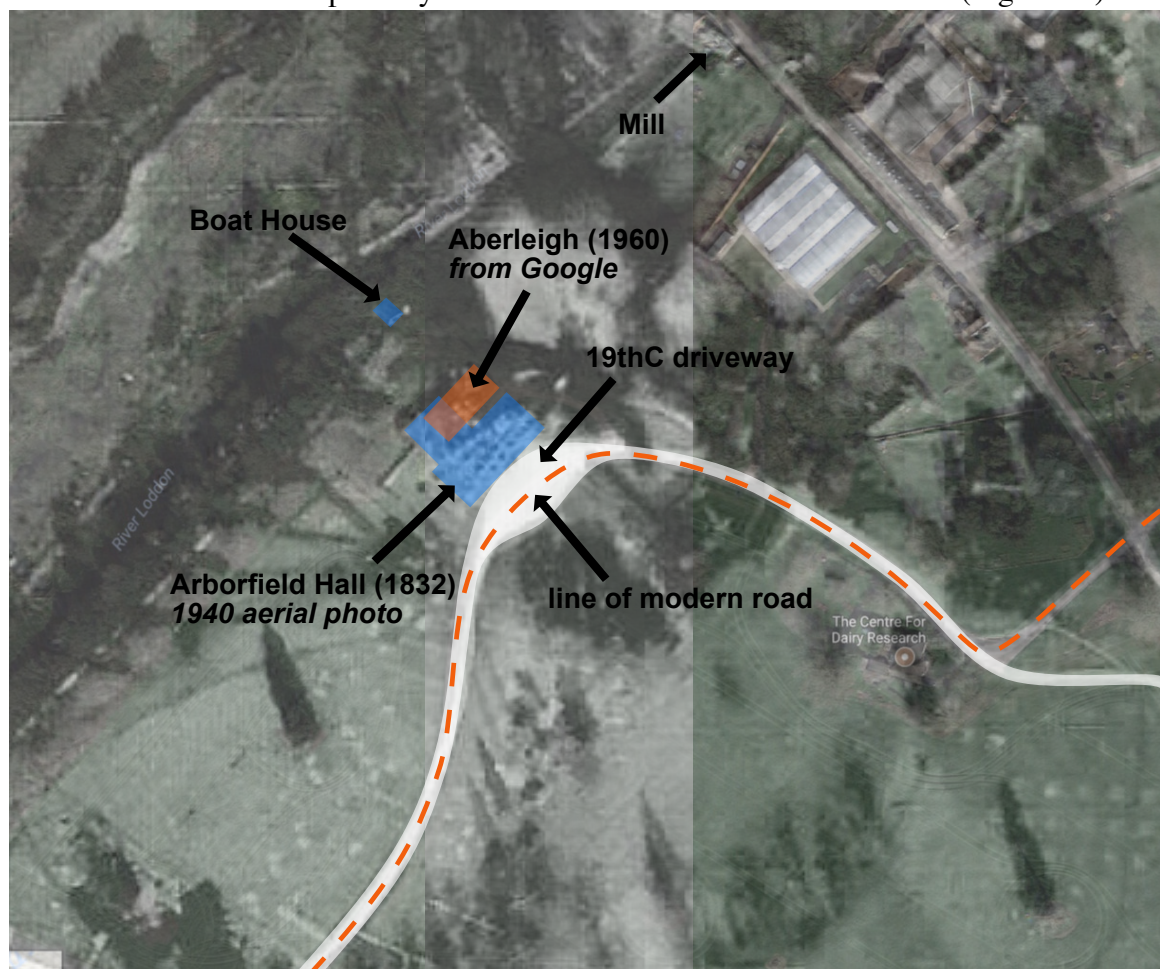


Figure 20: Aerial photos superimposed on satellite image (Imagery ©Google, Map data ©Google 2018)

Using the scale identified on the small plan in Figure 14 an approximate tracing of the hall as it was in 1885 has been created. See Figure 21 below:

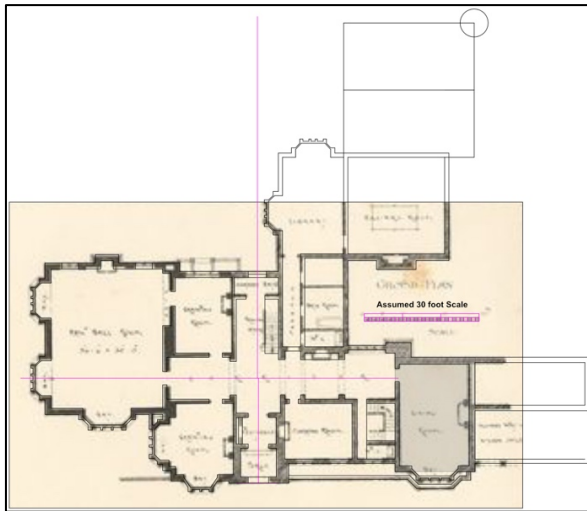


Figure 21: CAD tracing of Arborfield Hall from 1885 plan

The main building, including the ballroom and the rear wing is approximately 34 metres wide by 26 metres deep. The size of the extensions to the North and East are entirely conjectural. However, if this is now overlaid on the survey plan, with the front at an approximate distance from the curve of the modern road, it is clear that Arborfield Hall was sited almost entirely to the Southwest of the current Aberleigh house. See Figure 22 below:

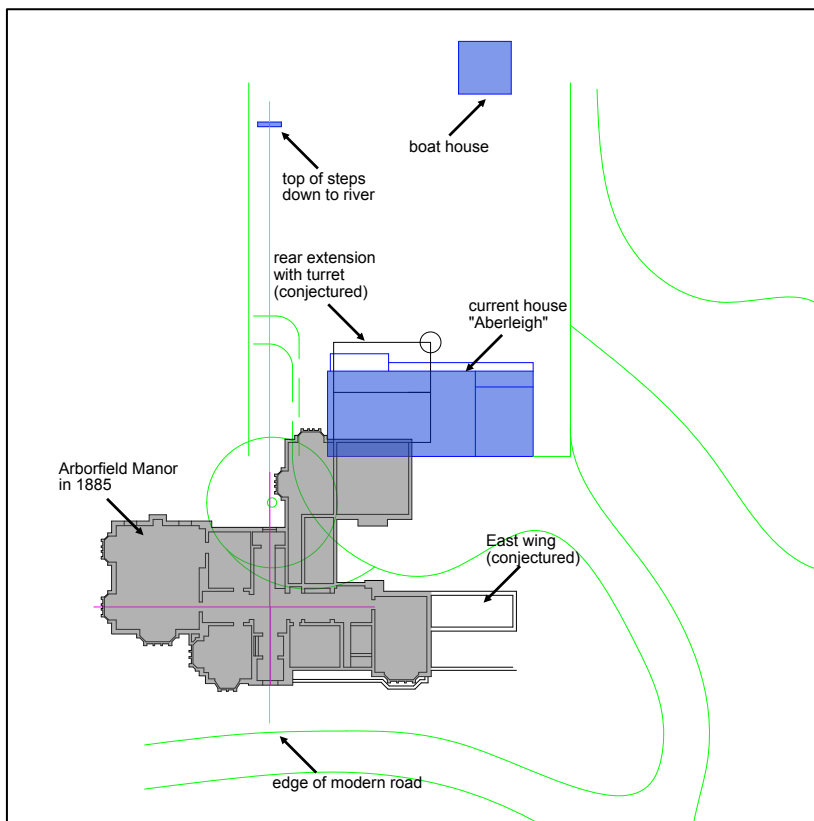


Figure 22: Reconstructed plan of Arborfield Manor overlaid on existing house and gardens

9. Conclusions

The survey was unable to detect any buried features, other than a possible garden path, that point definitively to the location of Arborfield Hall or any previous manor buildings. It is likely that Arborfield Hall was thoroughly demolished and its remains are buried too deep for resistivity survey to pick up.

The photographic study has suggested the possible location of the hall but it cannot be definitively linked to the few anomalies detected.

10. Further Research

Possible further avenues might include:

1. If further documentary evidence can be found, such as measured plans of Arborfield Hall, then these could be compared with information known so far and inform further on-site activities.
2. There is insufficient evidence to justify even small-scale excavation but a series of test pits might yield further information. These could be targeted on the anomalies in the rear garden and likely areas of the front garden suggested by the known alignment of the main entrance with the steps down to the river.

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