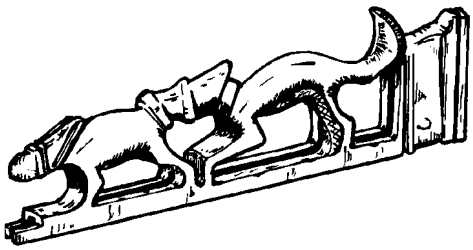
Ampthill & District Archaeological



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Comparing the Northampton Archaeology Unit's Excavation Results with the Geophysical Survey of the Ampthill Castle Site

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Points to consider when comparing the ADALHS geophysics with the excavation by the Northampton Unit in Ampthill Park.

The excavation was primarily aimed at the location of the manor house/castle, using the resistivity scan to locate where to dig the trenches. Figure 1 shows the location of the excavated trenches with the 1567 building plan superimposed on the resistivity scan.

Trench 1

This trench immediately picked up some of the probable beam slots (Photos 1, 2 & 3) indicated by the scan and produced some 16th/17th century green glazed pottery, a Medieval iron arrow head, and some pottery which later on in the excavation was identified as Saxon. The slots were immediately below the current turf line and with the exception of three probable post holes no further excavation took place in the trench (Photo 4).The excavation of this trench firmly established that the lines shown on the scan were archaeological features; i.e. beam slots as opposed to football pitch lines. Outside the trench (Photo 5), enhanced grass growth extended the lines to the north and west as suggested in the scan, other lines consistent with the scan were also evident in the grass. The question which was not answered is; where did the Saxon pottery come from? A close look at the resistivity scan and the subsequent magnetometer scan shows an earlier ditch running under Trench 1 which was not identified in excavation. This is not surprising as the trench was closed down early in the programme as soon as the probable beam slots were exposed. Pottery from an earlier ditch would have been residual at the time the beam slots were produced. The latest artefacts in the beam slots can only be safely used as dating evidence. There is no illustrated evidence of material or earth moved by vermin. The author watched as the green pottery was recovered and saw no intrusions.

The other trenches were not located on the rectangular feature thought by the ADALHS to be the manor house /castle. (See figure 1).

Trench 2

This trench was cut through what appears to be the end of a large ditch or moat at a point where some high resistance points were evident suggesting “rubble” in the infill. This trench was the scene of the greatest archaeological activity and revealed some interesting features: some were contemporary with the 15/16th century building we were hoping to find, including some brickwork. There was also evidence of two possible walls which were not orientated to the expected walls of the manor/castle. The walls were of insubstantial sandstone and could well have belonged to an outhouse or outside kitchen, normal for that period. There was considerable evidence for burning and bones from cooking. The brickwork suggested in the excavation report as a fireplace was not supported by a substantial chimney which would have been essential in a site within the main building. Trench 2 is in the ideal position for an outside kitchen within the bass court. (see Figure 1).

The profile of the ditch suggested by the scan was not identified by the excavation, but again the trench was not taken to bedrock.

Trench 3

This trench was located at a point where the geophysics indicated low resistance. Very well excavated it revealed a large ditch with evidence of Mediaeval material. If as predicted by the ADALHS there was an earlier moated building on the site this would fit in very well.

Trench 4

The evidence from this trench supported the information from Trench 3 and the theory that the area was made up with rubble from an earlier building. Time and labour restraints did not allow the full potential of the area to be realised.

There appears to be no evidence to support the orientation and position of the castle suggested in the draft excavation report. The suggestion that the lower base court range followed what appears to be a wide ditch or

moat in the resistivity scan is not plausible and the walls are somewhat remote from the main buildings on the 1567 plan. The topographical evidence does not appear to fit with the Northampton suggested orientation of the building in any way.

It should also be noted that ADALHS produced pseudo-sections across the main features, these were ignored as apparently they were not understood.

As an historical note: Colvin in his *Kings Houses 1485 - 1660* shows a chapel in the ground floor of the proposed castle alterations in the "acute angle" of the building. The only possible way to have an east window would be with the orientation as suggested by the resistivity survey.

It should also be noted that the resistivity plot shown in the draft report was produced by the Northampton Unit using data supplied by this Society in the November following the excavation. *(Reprocessed earth resistance survey data Fig 3.)* The data was manipulated, this is perfectly acceptable as a principle but it did not give a very good result. The picture is blocky and the finer details have been lost, for instance, there is no sign of a ditch through trench 1, which is evident on the ADALHS resistivity survey, and very obvious on the magnetometer survey. If any working plot was referred to during the excavation it must have been the one supplied by the ADALHS, as the plot shown in the Report could not have been produced prior to November when the data was requested.

Observation

The first draft copy of the report showed the survey in reverse, i.e. the black was white and vice versa, this could explain why excavations concentrated on low resolutions rather than high which would be more logical when trial trench archaeology is employed. The director could have misread the plot. It should be noted that the resistivity report clearly states the way it should be interpreted.

The resistivity scans were by the ADALHS

All photographs by the author.

The Northampton excavation report mentioned here is the last draft copy circulated. We understand that no official report has been produced for the public record although a report has been published in a local publication.

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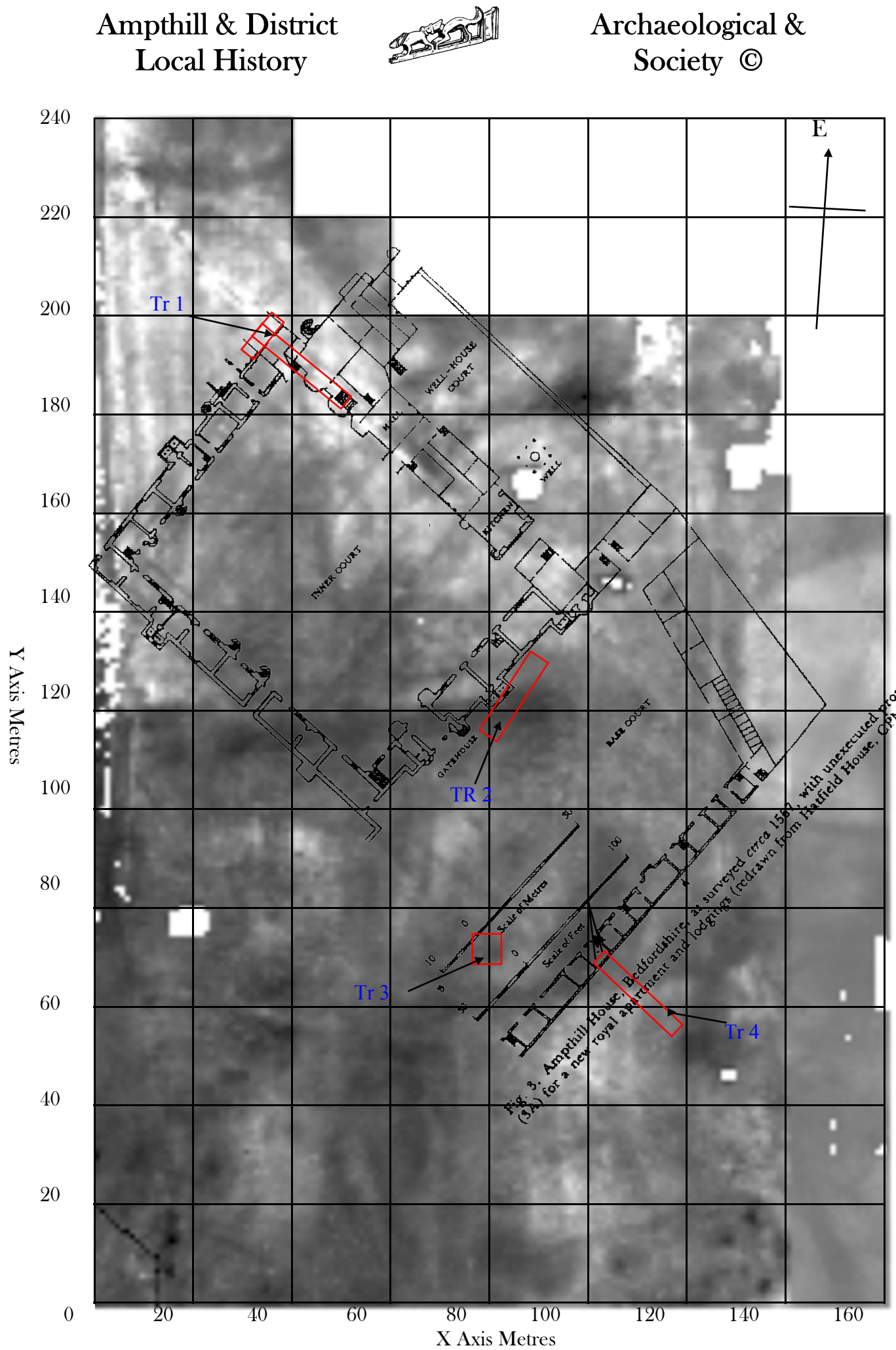


Figure 1 Relationship of excavated trenches with 1567 plan superimposed on geophysical scan



Photo 1. Trench 1. View south west after first scrape - notice beam slot shadow in soil running approx E. W. & N. S. In foreground. Enhanced grass growth continues the line. A parallel grass line can be seen to the left (South) of trench.



Photo 2. Trench 1. Part of beam slot cleaned out.



Photo 3. Trench 1. Corner of beam slot.



Photo 4. Trench 1. Final clean up of trench - not down to bedrock.



Photo 5. Trench 1. View north east showing lines in grass some weeks after turf re instatement. Note grass marks in same pattern as geophysical scan and superimposed on the 1567 house plans.