

A Second Roman Villa in Bradford?

Geophysical survey at Budbury Farm, Bradford on Avon, 2013

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Background

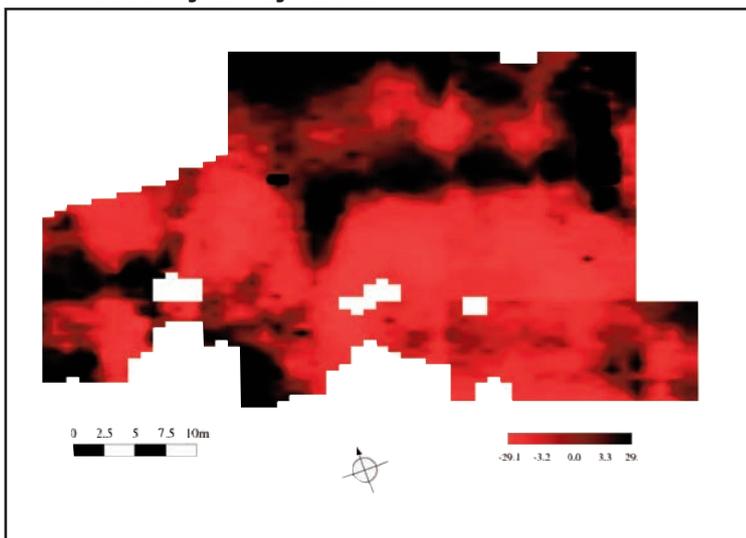
Budbury Farm is located in the Budbury area to the North of Bradford on Avon. Budbury is situated in an area of Oolitic limestone and is the site of an Iron Age hillfort. It has been the subject of several excavations during the 1940s, 1960s, 2009 and 2012. The St Laurence School Roman villa is situated approximately 0.5km to the North-West. Roman and Medieval finds have been recorded in the Budbury area since the early 1800s. Bradford on Avon Museum Research Group has been investigating Budbury and, in an attempt to extend our knowledge of the area, Budbury Farm was chosen as a suitable site for geophysical survey due to the comparatively large open area of land currently belonging to the property.

A geophysical survey was carried out at Budbury Farm, Bradford on Avon in April 2013. The work was conducted by Dr John Oswin, of BACAS, assisted by members of Bradford on Avon Museum Research Group. The aim of the work was to supplement Bradford on Avon Museum's research into the early origins of the town and comprised both resistivity survey and profiling of the lawn in front of Budbury Farm house.



Figure 1
Resistance survey in progress.

Figure 2
Resistivity Survey results.



Resistivity survey

The resistivity survey was carried out using a TR/CIA twin probe resistance meter (see Figure 1). A baseline was set up just inside the right stone pillar leading into Budbury Farm and a tape run along to the corresponding pillar opposite at the other end of the property. 20m x 20m grids were marked out and readings taken every 0.5m, along traverses 1m apart, starting at the SW corner of Grid 1.

Two complete grids were surveyed across the site W-E and then the area to the south of the grids up to the boundary fence line was surveyed.

Resistivity results

The resistivity results (see Figure 2) appear to indicate that there is evidence of walls/building in the South West corner and West side of the site. Shrubs and trees obscure part of the area so it was not possible to survey all the way along the boundary fence line. A building is shown on the 1901 OS map which is probably the building showing on the resistivity results to the West of the site.

The results also show a possible building in the centre of the site, which may have had a range of rooms running off under the gravel path and towards Budbury Farm house. This will be discussed below.



Figure 3
Profiling instruction.

Profiling

The resistivity meter has an attachment which allows vertical sections to be profiled to obtain a 'worm's eye view' of underground, using a series of thirty probes (see Figure 3). Two sections were profiled.

Profiling results

The results of Profile 1 (see Figure 4) appear to show a vertical view of several wall lines, although these do not appear to have shown up in this area on the resistivity results. These walls are approx 0.5m deep and resting on bedrock. The results of Profile 2 (see Figure 5) suggest 4 wall sections, again approx 0.5m thick and resting on bedrock.

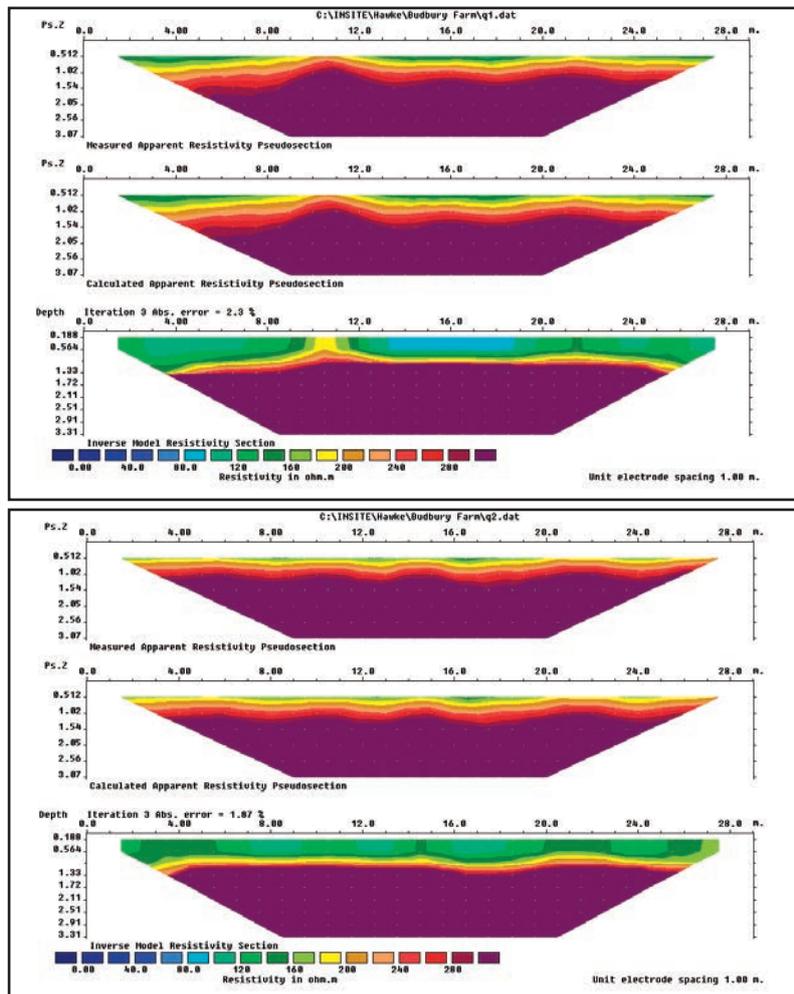


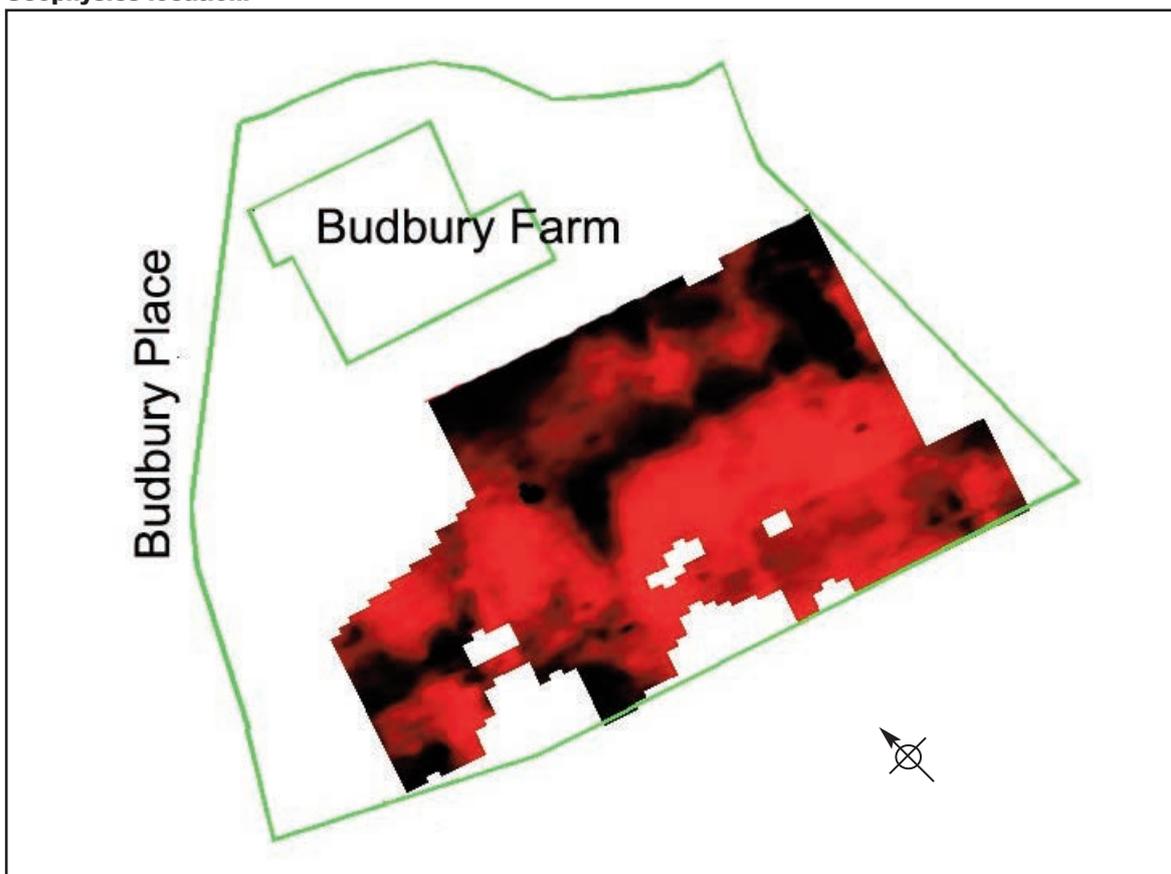
Figure 4
Profile 1.
Figure 5
Profile 2.

Discussion

The resistivity results (see Figure 6) appear to indicate the walls of several buildings, at the South-West and West side of the site. Backed up by profiling, the results may show part of a building in the centre of the site measuring approximately 30m in length with a possible wing at either end. The width of the possible building is unclear as it appears to go under the gravel path towards Budbury Farm house, although the results here may show rubble rather than extant walls. It may be that if this is a building, it is an earlier phase of Budbury Farm (possibly Medieval). However, taking into account the Roman finds discovered in this area, including building foundations seen in 1986 during a watching brief kept by local archaeologist, Adrian Powell, it is also a possibility that if this is a building, it may be a classic winged corridor Roman villa. In addition, it is in a sheltered location, South facing with good views towards Westbury; a likely spot to build a villa.

Figure 6

Geophysics location.



Future work

It would be most advantageous to put in a trench covering the area already surveyed. This would allow a sufficiently large area to be excavated and would hopefully reveal the date of the possible building showing on the resistivity results. We had intended to conduct a small excavation at Budbury Farm in October 2013 but a prolonged period of inclement weather prevented this. We now plan to dig in Spring 2014 instead, to confirm our findings. In addition, following on from the Garden Survey of the area around the St Laurence School Roman villa which I conducted for University of Bristol/St Laurence School in 2003, it would be useful to continue the garden survey in the area around Budbury Farm. In particular, the area to the East, The Wilderness, a large expanse of open land, would also benefit from geophysical survey to add to our knowledge of the Budbury landscape.

Acknowledgements

Grateful thanks to the property owners, Mr and Mrs Finnigan and family for allowing us to carry out the survey work in their garden and for their ongoing support; also to John Oswin for sparing us his time and expertise; BACAS for the loan of their geophysics equipment; Roy Canham for advice and georeferencing the results; Adrian Powell for access to his work.