

Easton Royal

**Earthworks
earthworks
everywhere
but where is
the priory?**

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Down a long lane after a long drive through Marlborough and Savernake Forest, lies Easton Royal Church, at the eastern end of the Vale of Pewsey. Opposite the church is a large field, stretching off into the distance, full of earthworks thought to be the site of a Trinitarian priory. The Trinitarian movement was rare in England. It was set up in 1198 to help Christians in pagan-ruled countries, and had only eleven centres in this country. Every one of them has disappeared except possibly remains in Knaresborough in Yorkshire and Easton Royal.

The Trinitarian Movement first made its presence felt in Easton in 1229, eventually providing a travellers' accommodation house, chapel and priory. The latter was built from the material of the parish church, which had been demolished as it was in disrepair. The present parish church was built in 1591. The priory buildings were consumed by fire in 1493 and in ruins at the time of its official dissolution in 1536. The building material was used to create a mansion for Edward Seymour, Duke of Somerset which was demolished in 1763.

A project to survey the field was set up in 2013 for BACAS, the Easton Royal History Group (ERHG) and the Archaeological and Historical Landscape Research Group (AHLRG). Day 1 started with a fine flourish of magnetometry, over three acres were covered, but the plot at the end of the day was blank! The field is on greensand which does not respond to magnetometry so the whole field had to be surveyed by resistance which gave a good response (*see Figure 1*), but it took three seasons to complete the work.

There is plenty of activity to be seen in the results, there appears to be a large pond in the eastern plot and possible small buildings to west. The survey reflects and clarifies earthworks visible in LiDAR imagery, but there is no obvious priory, chapel or mansion site. There are still earthworks to explore in fields to the north and south of this field, but further opportunities depend on access and sufficient time for further resistance survey.

Acknowledgements

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Figure 1

The full survey plot of the field. Map data © Google.

