

Oxfordshire

William Wintle and David Griffiths.

Geophysical Survey at Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, Oxfordshire

Introduction

Oxford University Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE) has a long tradition of archaeological training and research at Cogges Manor Farm in Witney (Rowley and Steiner 1996). Work between 1986 and 1994 included excavation adjacent to the buildings and also building recording and analysis. More recently, in 2013, 2014 and 2017, students from the OUDCE's Post-Graduate Certificate in Archaeology and MSc in Applied Landscape Archaeology courses have undertaken field survey training and research in fields to the south and south-west of the manor house (Wintle 2016, Wintle 2017). These field survey courses were directed by David Griffiths and the geophysical surveys were taught by Olaf Bayer, Tony Johnson and William Wintle. This report provides a short summary of the geophysical surveys.

Cogges Manor Farm

Cogges Manor Farm and its associated buildings lie east of the river Windrush and the town of Witney lies to the west. The site contains earthwork features of the early medieval period such as a double moated enclosure which is the location of an earlier manor house. Surviving medieval buildings include the parish church, St Mary the Virgin, and the old Vicarage, which contains elements of a twelfth-century Benedictine priory. To their east lie the buildings of Manor Farm with a manor house and farm buildings located around a yard (Rowley and Steiner 1996, 1).

The farmhouse and surrounding fields are a Scheduled Ancient Monument (Oxfordshire County SAM 183). The geophysical survey was performed in compliance with a Section 42 Licence issued by Historic England.

Magnetometer Survey

Figure 1 illustrates the extent of the magnetometer surveys in 2014 and 2017. Between 2014 and 2017 a number of changes took place to the field boundaries. In the south-west the fences subdividing three small fields had been removed to form one large field. The southern field, originally one large field, had been subdivided into three smaller fields.

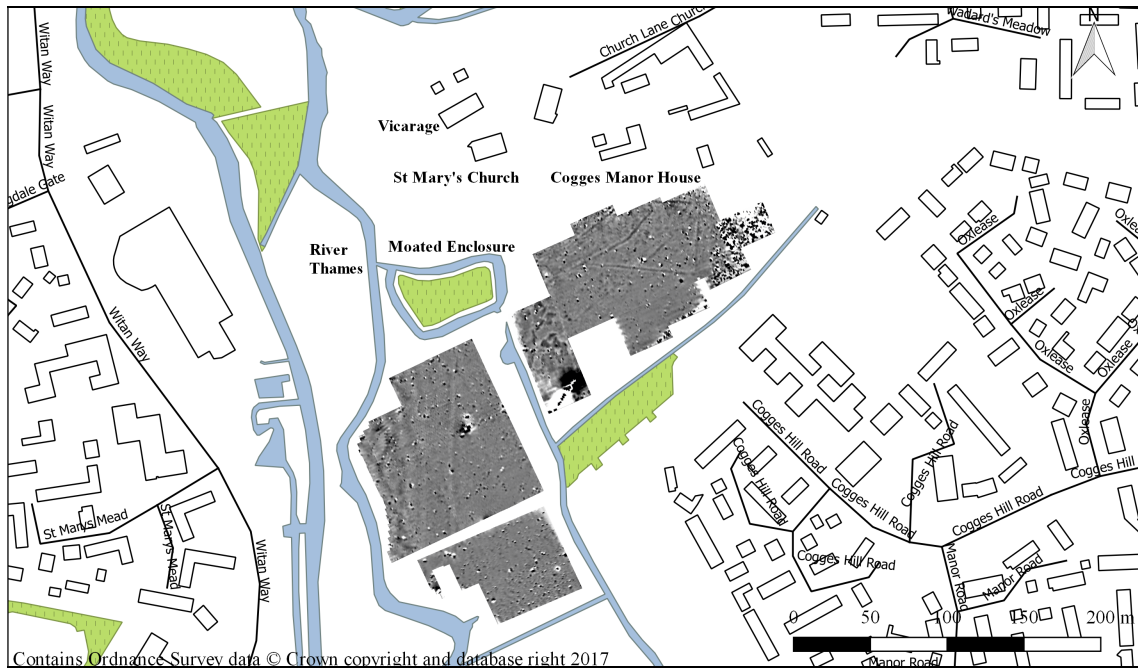


Figure 1 – Magnetometer Surveys at Cogges Manor Farm, Witney, Oxfordshire

Starting firstly in the west, figure 2 shows the 2017 survey in what had originally been two small fields and the earlier 2014 survey further south. Clearly visible are three north-south features – the eastern two showing mostly as a negative anomaly and the western mainly as a positive anomaly. Apart from this and some possible features in the west near the river bank, the survey area is largely featureless. There is one intense magnetic anomaly near the centre which is most likely caused by a large piece of ferrous metal, and also a scatter of small ferrous objects.

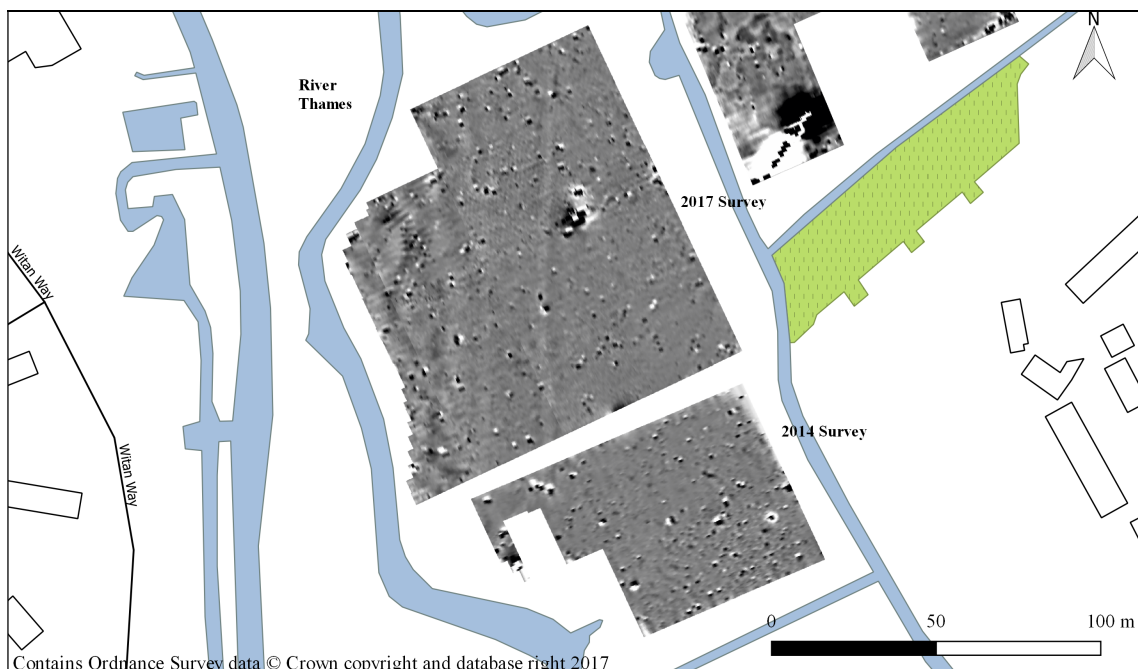


Figure 2 – Magnetometer Survey in south-western field

Turning next to the southern field, most of which was surveyed in 2014. In 2017 five grids were laid out along the southern boundary, four contiguous grids were placed in the middle part of the new subdivision and one grid was located in the eastern subdivision, adjacent to the resistivity survey. The 2014 and 2017 surveys are shown in figure 3. There is strong magnetic interference along the southern boundary and in the eastern grids.

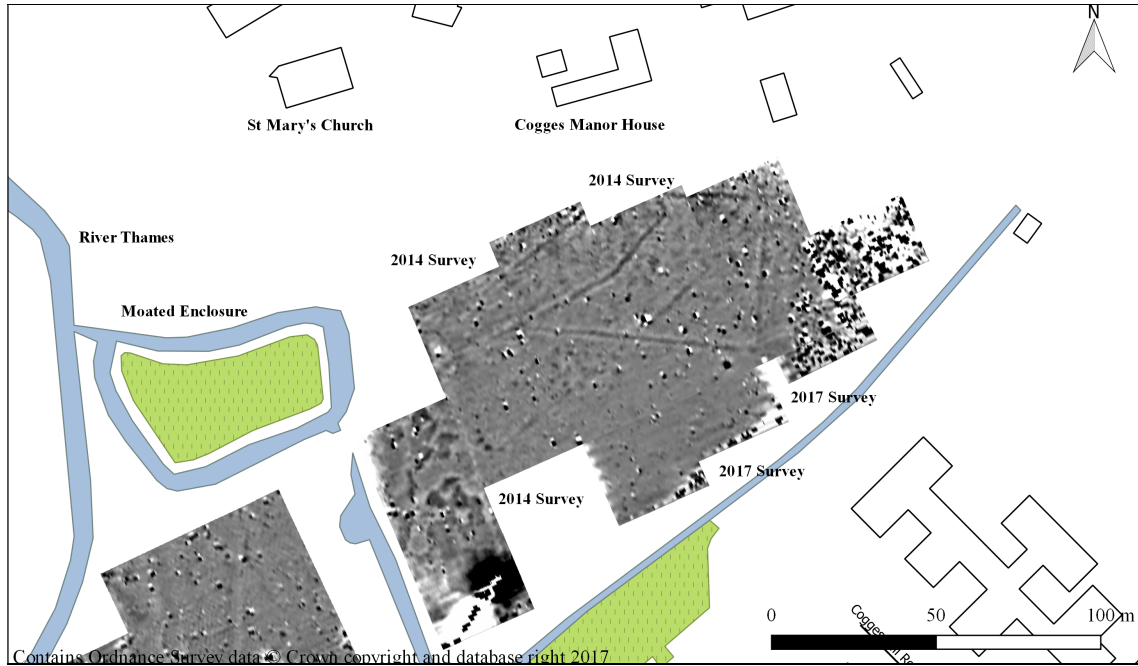
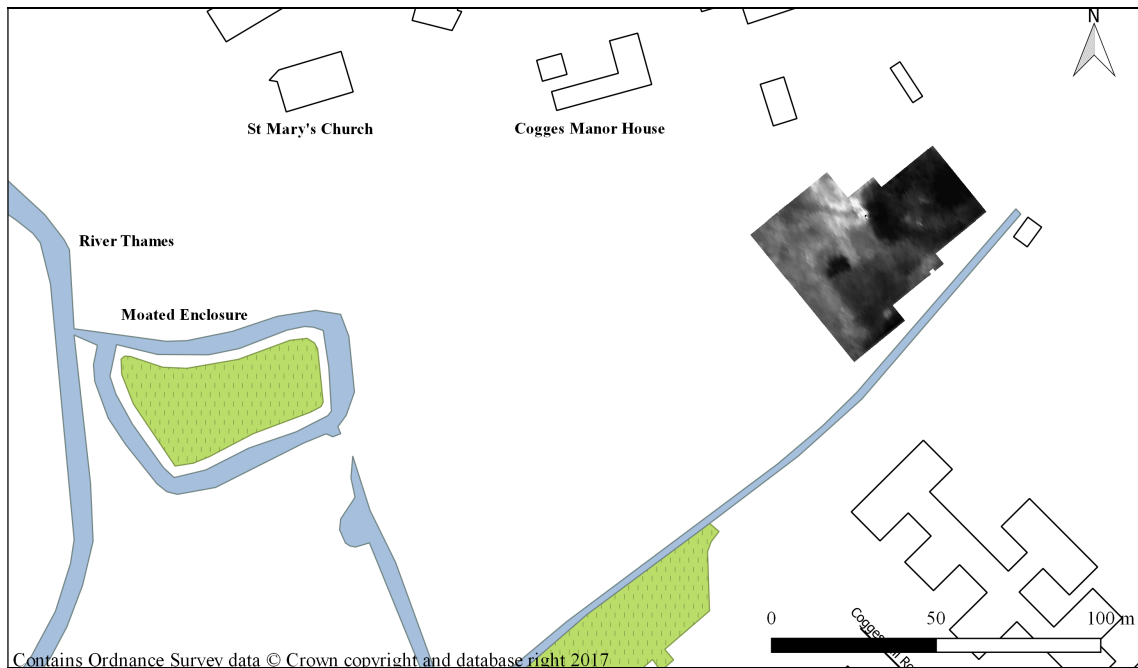


Figure 3 – Magnetometer Survey in southern field



**Figure 4 – 2017 Resistivity Survey
(Low resistance features shown as dark, high resistance features shown as light)**

Resistivity Survey

The aim of the 2017 survey was to extend the 2014 resistivity survey south and east over an area which in the nineteenth century had contained buildings and yards. Magnetic survey had recorded considerable disturbance in this area. Figure 4 shows in the west a band of medium resistance, bounded to its east by a linear band of slightly higher resistance. Further east is a large area of low resistance with an approximately circular feature of low resistance to its north. Further north are areas of medium and high resistance. The eastern third of the survey area is mainly low resistance.

Discussion

The geophysical surveys have provided useful information on possible surviving archaeological features in the fields to the south and south-west of the manor house. In the field to the south of the manor house the magnetic surveys have detected a number of linear features which may represent post-medieval drains, paths or boundaries. Two in the north of the field appear to lead towards a gate in the southern wall and a boundary in the wall. The eastern end of the field has considerable magnetic disturbance and has been investigated by a resistivity survey. This has detected linear and circular features which appear to relate to nineteenth-century activity. Despite the undulations in the south-west of the field there is no positive evidence for a deserted medieval settlement. The features suggest quarrying rather than settlement but no firm conclusions can be drawn. There is a strong metallic signal in the extreme south-west which may be a drain or water pipe. Perhaps the low elevation and the proximity to the river make this an unlikely settlement site.

The fields to the south-west are located on the alluvium of the river Windrush floodplain. The only features detected correspond to three north-south linear depressions. It has been suggested these depressions correspond to medieval or later fishponds, seventeenth- or eighteenth-century water meadow systems, or flax retting ponds, or combinations of the above. The geophysical survey has not provided any further information about their date or function. Other archaeological features may be present but remain undetected, either because there is insufficient magnetic contrast between soil and subsoil or because of the depth of alluvium close to the river.

The survey results and reports have been made available to the Cogges Heritage Trust to help inform the management of the site and its landscape.

Acknowledgements

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References

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