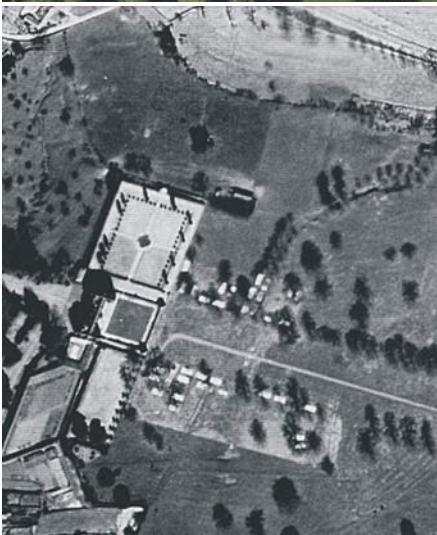


The lost buildings of Montacute House...still lost despite our best efforts!



For the past four years SSARG have taken part in the Council for British Archaeology's annual Festival of Archaeology at the end of July, working along with the National Trust to try and locate lost buildings and gardens at Montacute House. On 27th July we will again be returning to Montacute to continue our search which has, unfortunately, not been too successful so far!

We time the event to coincide with the July Farmers' Market to take advantage of the maximum number of visitors. Every year we have an information display and carry out a geophysical survey over an area where documentary evidence suggests there used to be a structure which has long since vanished.

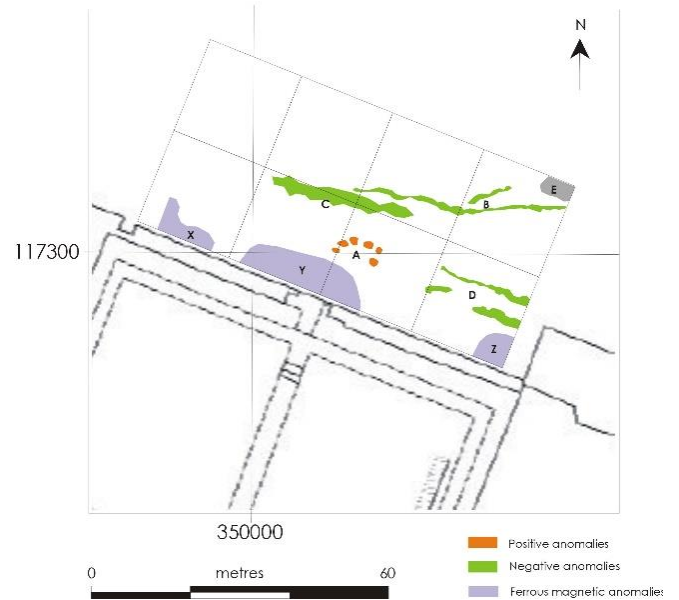
2014...

In 2014 we undertook a 0.75ha gradiometry survey plus a smaller resistivity survey to try locate an outer courtyard plus lost gatehouse in the field to the east that used to be the main approach to the house.

The survey results suffered from heavy interference and we subsequently discovered that the area had been the site of a Second World War army camp! The more modern intrusions completely masked the signs of any earlier archaeology. The resistivity results were also inconclusive.



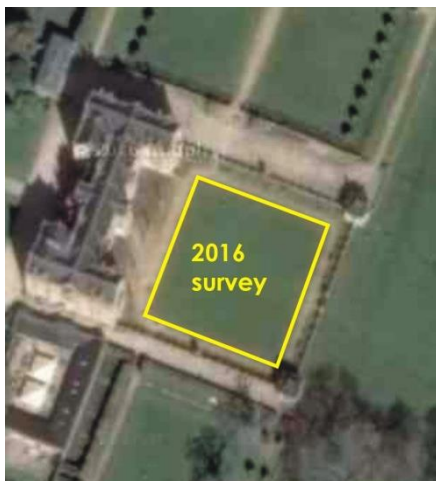
Location of lost courtyard gradiometry survey



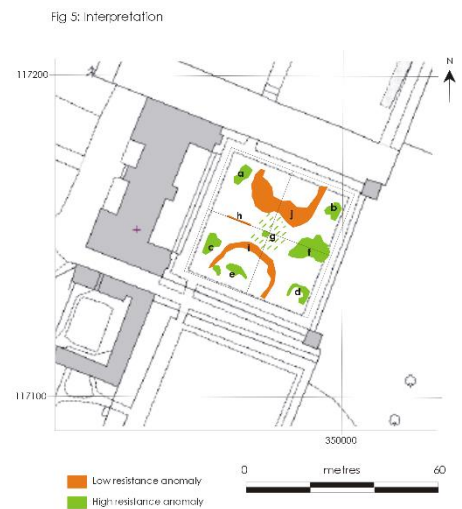
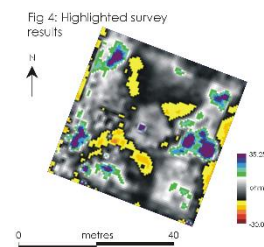
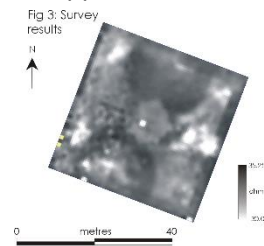
WWII army camp

2015...

In 2015 the House Historian asked if we could try and locate the site of a banqueting house which they believed has been located to the north of the North Gardens. We carried out a gradiometry survey in the field below the North Garden wall, and a very small resistivity survey in the northeast corner of the lawned area. This time it was the resistivity survey results which suffered although the gradiometry fared better. We picked up what appeared to be an old trackway... but no sign of the



banqueting house!



Banqueting House survey areas

Interpretation of gradiometry survey results

2016...

In 2016 we had a change from trying to find lost buildings and carried out a resistivity survey on the lawn right outside the main entrance to the house to look for previous garden features. This time the results were a bit clearer and we seem to have picked up areas of buried stone. It is possible these were associated with some sort of former garden features, or even the demolition of the gate house we were looking for in 2014. We definitely picked up the site of a fountain which used to be in the centre of the lawn.

2017 & 2018...

In 2017 and 2018 we had two attempts at surveying the North Garden lawns. In 2017 it was too wet, and in 2018 it was too dry. We did manage to complete the survey in 2018 but the soil was baked too dry for any archaeology to show... although we did pick up a leak in one of the garden water pipes!

2019... Third time lucky!

In 2019, undaunted by our lack of success the past two years and spurred on by the National Trust, we will be returning to the North Gardens for hopefully the third and final time. Let's hope this year will be the weather will be not too wet and not too dry but just right!



It's also worth mentioning that our work at Montacute is not just about the survey. An important part of our presence there is to engage members of the public by involving them in the surveys, and promoting SSARG and archaeology in general. Last year we invited the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society and Mick Aston's Young Archaeologists to come along too, and will be doing so again this year. It's thanks to SSARG volunteers and Montacute House that we are able to support the Festival of Archaeology in this way. Although it's a few months away yet, if you'd like to come along and help out it's never too early to let us know! And maybe this year we will finally find something!

Liz Caldwell