



Chichester and District Archaeology Society

Geophysical Survey

Prebendal School playing fields – April 2014



1. Summary

During April 2014, Chichester and District Archaeology Society conducted a resistivity survey of the Prebendal School playing fields. The objective was to see if any traces of a large defensive ditch could be found outside the walls. Although the River Lavant now flows through this area, it is believed that the river channel was moved in the post-Roman period.

This survey revealed a damp linear feature approximately 60 metres from the base of the Chichester city walls.

2. Background

Members of the Chichester and District Archaeology Society have been heavily involved in the Chichester Walls Project since inception in 2007 when support for bid for funding was given. This became a Heritage Lottery Fund sponsored project that commenced in 2009 and included archaeological excavations outside the Chichester city walls in the south west quadrant. During this excavation the bases of two bastions were exposed. The excavation also discovered that the ditch in which the River Lavant now flows had been re-cut several times.

Subsequently, the vestigial remains of further bastions were discovered during an excavation in 2013.

Cunliffe has suggested that in association with strong walls, the Chichester defences might also have included an external ditch. Approaching the walls, this would have had a steep entry, and a shallow exit, so that a killing ground was created in front of the walls from which it would be difficult to escape.

Chichester District Council own the land immediately at the foot of the walls in the south west quadrant, but the land further away to the south side of the river Lavant is owned by Prebendal School and is used as playing fields. Figures 1, 2 and 3 demonstrate that this area has been open and undeveloped for a long time. The images provide a good record at approximately 100 year intervals for almost 300 years

Figure 1.

1738 engraving of the south-west quadrant of Chichester

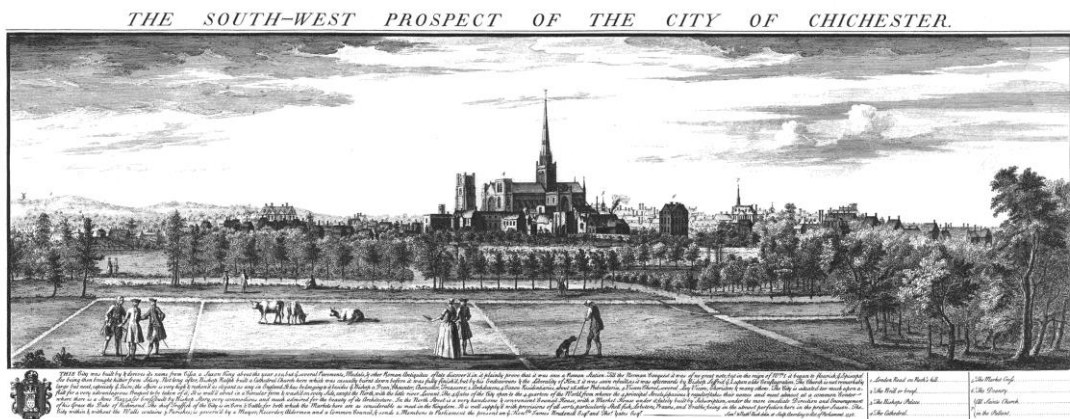


Figure 2.

Robert Creighton's map of Chichester 1838

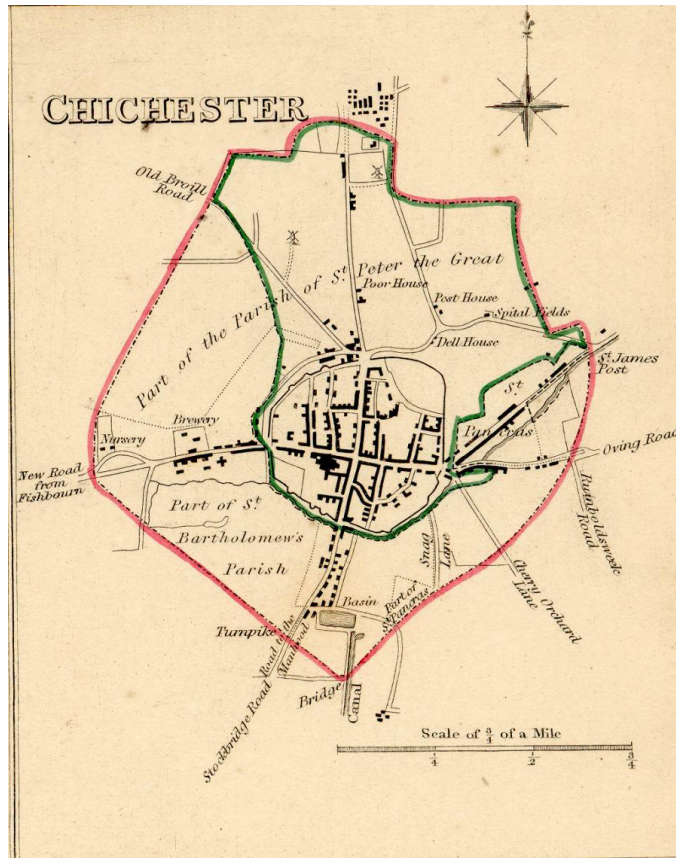


Figure 3.

Aerial photograph of the south-west quadrant of Chichester taken in 1920



<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/default>

© copyright English Heritage

Copyright CDAS

No part may be republished without permission of the Society

3. Site Access/ Health and Safety

The Prebendal School is responsible for the playing fields. The project was discussed with the Bursar before it started. The Health and Safety risk assessment was prepared.

4. Method

These surveys utilised the following equipment:

1. Geoscan RM15 D Resistivity meter that CDAS was able to purchase as a result of generous donations for this purpose from the Chichester District Council Coastal Pathfinder Project and the Chichester City Council.
2. Electronic Theodolite. Previously purchased by CDAS as the result of a generous grant from the Chichester Harbour Conservancy.

Grids measuring 30m x 30m were laid out over the area to be surveyed. The base line for the grids was set parallel to the fence between the playing fields and the River Lavant on the western end of the playing fields. One end of the line was established on the northwest corner of the board marking the edge of the long jump pit. The other end of the line was the northern end of the car park fence. This distance is slightly over 100 metres. Three grids were setup long this line starting from the long jump pit end. The bearing of this line was 300 degrees magnetic.

Lines for walking were laid out at 2 metre intervals. Walkers started in a roughly northerly direction taking readings every metre, and returned in a southerly direction, proceeding through the grid in a zigzag fashion.

The data collected were downloaded to a laptop computer (Steatite model R15D) loaded with the Geoplot 3 program supplied by Geoscan Ltd. Subsequent data processing was carried out using this computer and software. The images were transferred onto another computer for ease of report writing.

5. Volunteer Participation & Training

Between Thursday 3rd April and Saturday 5th April 2014, CDAS spent 3 days on the site. 20 members were involved in the survey providing 22 man days of resource. Three members set up the survey grid on Tuesday 2nd April.

6. Survey Results

Figure 4 shows the area surveyed. It extended to the edge of the playing field, following the Avenue de Chartres as it curves round the roundabout. The location of the current pavilion can be seen, and the survey extends up to the concrete plinth in front of it.

Familiar features can be seen on the playing fields, including:

- The football field markings which can be clearly seen.
- The cricket square with its all-weather pitch.
- The long jump pit can be seen at the top of the plot

At the eastern end, the survey stopped approximately 50m before the elevated walkway from the car park to the city.

Figure 4 also highlights the other features observed. These include:

- The grid like feature that has been interpreted as the septic tank that services the pavilion.
- A possible water pipe servicing the outlet near the cricket square. However, the groundsman, believes that the water feed comes from the meter in the car park area and not from this pipe.
- A curved pipeline or track way running under the cricket square. We have no indication what this might be.

Figure 5 shows the old track ways from local maps superimposed on the plot. The green images from the 1930s show a track way running vertically down the plot, and the location of the old cricket pavilion, which can still be seen in aerial photographs from the 1950s.

There is a promising trace shown as a pale horizontal band in Figure 5 where we would expect the vallum to be located. It is about the right distance from the walls; a “willing eye” could interpret the plot as showing a steep entry and a shallow exit as one would expect. However in Figure 6 late 19th century (orange) and 20th century (blue/purple) maps show track ways in the same location.

The temptation in interpreting geophysical results is that “you see what you wish to see” and so some caution must be exercised in concluding that the geophysical plot shows the vallum. As has been shown, it could also be an old path or track. It may therefore not be a coincidence that it also lines up with the modern car park turn in.

7. Next Steps

Proving whether the feature shown on the geophysical survey is the vallum or a track way will require an excavation.

8. Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the following for their active support and encouragement during this project:

Ms Kerry Lanning - Bursar, Prebendal School

Chichester District Council Coastal Pathfinder Project (equipment funding)

Chichester City Council (equipment funding)

9. Bibliography

<http://www.britainfromabove.org.uk/image/epw000663>

Trevor Davies

CDAS Survey Team Leader

May 2014

Figure 4.

Survey of Prebendal School Playing Fields - April 2014

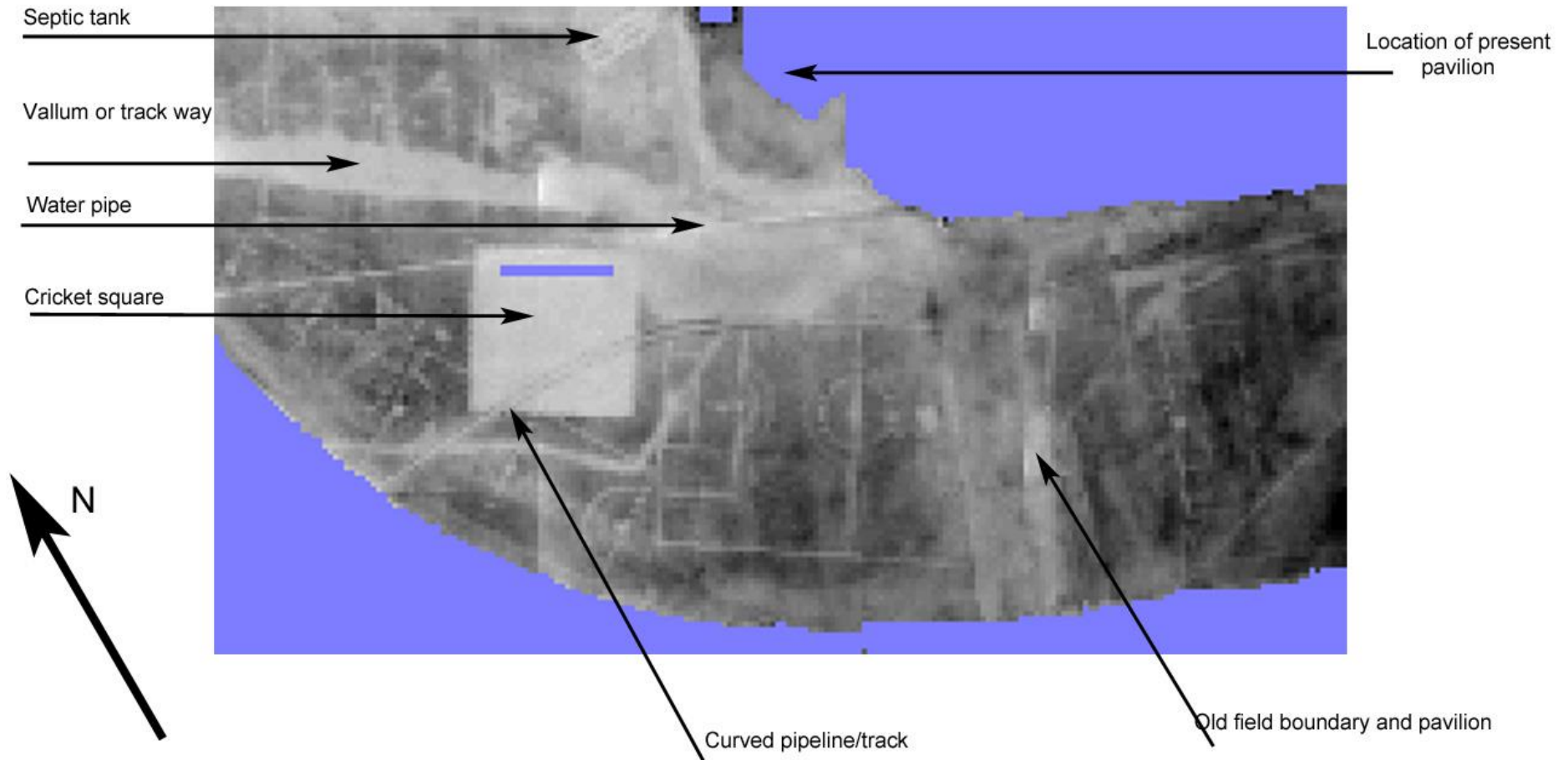
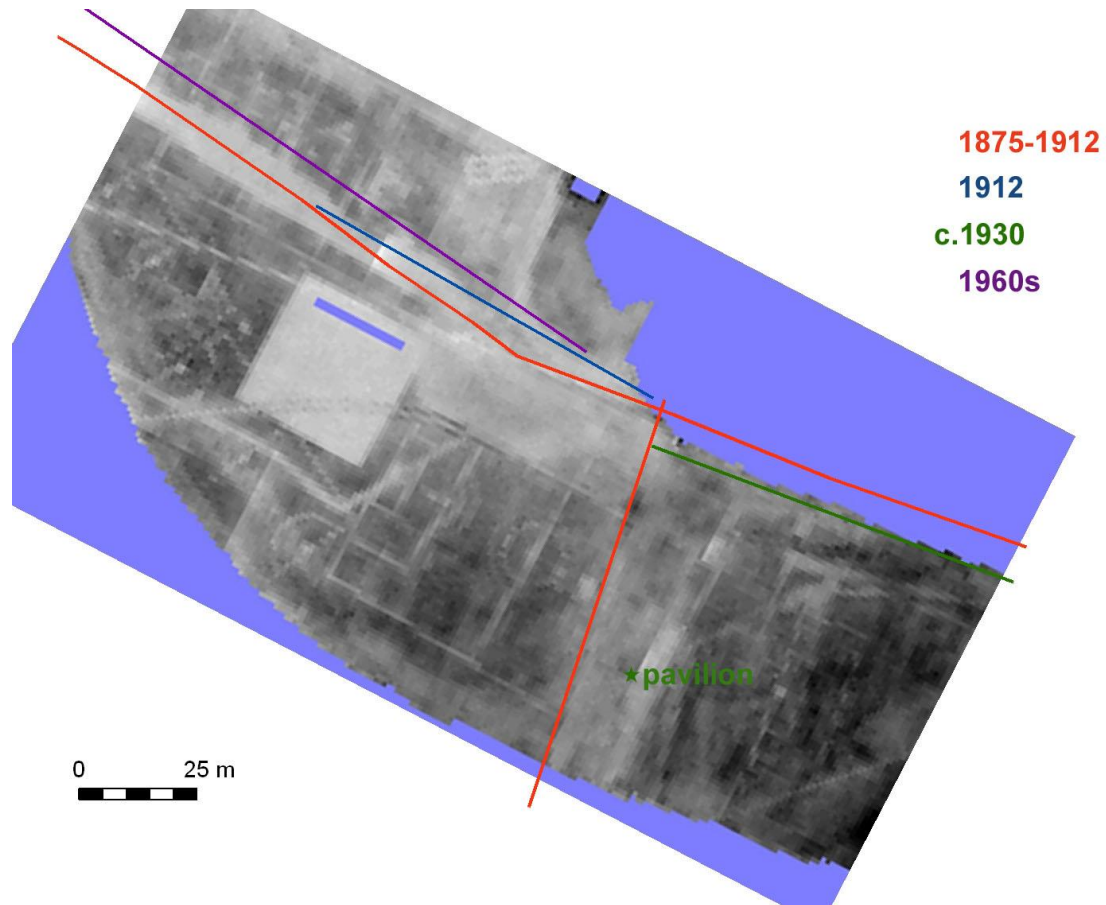


Figure 5.

Old track ways superimposed on the map of the Prebendal School playing fields



Copyright CDAS

No part may be republished without permission of the Society