

**YCCCART 2019/Y14**

**Geophysical and terrain modelling survey at Towerhead, Banwell, 2019**

**YATTON, CONGRESBURY, CLAVERHAM AND CLEEVE ARCHAEOLOGICAL  
RESEARCH TEAM (YCCCART)**

*General Editor: Vince Russett*



*The resistivity team vs a stack of wood*

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## **Abstract**

*Banwell Society of Archaeological requested that YCCCART investigate the location of the demolished Elizabethan house at Towerhead. Resistivity and terrain modelling surveys have confirmed the documentary references to the site as being in the former orchard to the north-east of the current house. A small remnant of the building survives in the field wall between the garden of the house and the field to its east.*

## **Acknowledgements**

A Heritage Lottery Grant enabled the purchase, by YCCCART, of a Geoscan RM 15 resistivity meter without which this survey could not have been undertaken.

This survey would also not have been carried out without the willing permission of the landowner, Mr J Hutson, and the request of Banwell Society of Archaeological to investigate the site.

The authors are grateful for the hard work by the members of YCCCART in performing the surveys and Vince Russett for editing.

## **Introduction**

Yatton, Congresbury, Claverham and Cleeve Archaeological Research Team (YCCCART) is one of a number of Community Archaeology teams across northern Somerset, formerly supported by the North Somerset Council Development Management Team.

Our objective is to undertake archaeological fieldwork to enable a better understanding and management of the heritage of the area while recording and publishing the activities and locations of the research carried out.



## Site location



*Fig 1: Site locations looking south. The current house is to the right of site 2.*

## Location

Towerhead House lies at ST41215942, next to the A368, in the extreme east of the parish of Banwell - the Tower Brook, marking the parish boundary with Winscombe, is 200m NE of the house.

## Land use and geology

Site 1 is a field used for grazing. The site is within the Mendip Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and Towerhead House is Listed Grade II. The gatepiers (see below) are similarly Listed (separately) at Grade II. Site 2 is a maintained garden lawn next to the house. The field is in private ownership, and there is no public access. While site 1 can be seen from the A368 Towerhead Road, **this road has no public footpaths alongside, and walking on it is extremely dangerous.**

The entire site lies on the Mercia Mudstone Group.

## Historical & archaeological context



Fig 2: Towerhead House c 1806 (courtesy of Banwell Archaeological Society)

The history and archaeology of Banwell has been extensively published elsewhere (La Trobe Bateman 1998, for example), but Towerhead has been largely overlooked. Collinson simply refers to the 'hamlet called Tower-head, below the bishop' park' (Collinson (3): 567 (1791)).

Its name derives from the name of the adjacent boundary stream, the '*ture broc*' of the 1068 Banwell charter, it's own name probably from the OW '*twrch*' (a boar) (M. Costen *pers comm*), and the name of the brook and adjacent hamlet seem to have co-evolved into the current names.

Two documents are important in the history of this site. Knight (1902: 425) described it:

*The palace was, however, not the only episcopal residence in the parish. Godwyn, who was Bishop of Bath and Wells from 1584 to his death in 1590, built himself a summer retreat at Towerhead, three-quarters of a mile to the east of the church, at the foot of the northern slope of Banwell Park. Rutter describes the house as 'a large substantial structure, in the Elizabethan style,' adding that 'it still retains much of its original character.' The old house was, however, entirely pulled down about sixty years ago, and a new building erected to the south-west of it, among trees of remarkable beauty. Two of these standing close to the house—one of them a noble tulip tree—were*



*greatly damaged by lightning during a storm in the spring of 1901.*

*No doubt much of the material of Godwyn's summer residence was used in the new building. In the modern farmhouse, however, few vestiges of ancient workmanship can now be seen. There are some old stone doorways, and there is one oaken studded door. But there is no paneling, no carved mantelpiece, no decorated ceiling. Almost the solitary relic left visible by the builders of sixty years since is the sculptured stone alluded to by Rutter, which may be seen in the outer wall of the house. It bears upon a shield the Bishop's arms, impaling those of Bath and Wells, with the motto, WYN GOD. WYN. ALL.*

*Near the house is a large walled garden, over the doorway of which there was until lately a finely carved lintel. The foundations of Godwyn's house can be traced in the short turf of the orchard to the north-east of the farm; and in the walls of some of the out-buildings are a few blocks of dressed stone. In one spot is a hollow, which has proved very difficult to fill up, and which is believed to mark the site of a well. Across the foot of the orchard, now buried under the turf, is an ancient road.*

*Bishop Godwyn is said to have constructed a causeway from his house to the church, "for the more convenient attendance of his family." This causeway, a high, raised foot- path, was demolished by the way-wardens in 1811 for the purpose of widening the road; but some traces of it may still be seen behind the hedge during the first half of the way from Towerhead.*

*The Bishop cannot have spent long at this summer residence, for he lived only six years after he had been appointed to the see.*

It was earlier described by Rutter (1829: 135):

*Towerhead House, supposed to have been erected by Bishop Godwyn, as a summer residence, about the year 1584. It is a large substantial structure, in the Elizabethan style, and retains much of its original character, including the front porch, over which is the Bishop's arms, impaling Bath and Wells, with the singular motto, 'Godwyn-wyn God wyn all.'*

*This prelate resided chiefly at the palace at Wells, during the winter, and at his mansion at Towerhead during the summer months; having had a raised causeway, about a mile in length, formed from his country residence, to the church, for the more convenient attendance there of his family.*

*Whilst the bishop resided here, he married a third wife, when upwards of seventy years of age and very infirm.*

*A noted courtier of Elizabeth's reign coveting the manor, palace, and park of Banwell, always considered as the most valuable appendage to the See of Bath and Wells, and being well aware of the queen's dislike to the marriages of her clergy, represented it to her Majesty as a heinous offence, that the bishop had married a*

*girl of twenty, with a large portion, to whom he had conveyed Ralf the bishopric, although he was at the time of his marriage gouty and unable to stand: the courtier finally begged that the Bishop might be deprived of his possessions at Banwell, and that they might be granted to himself by lease for one hundred years.*

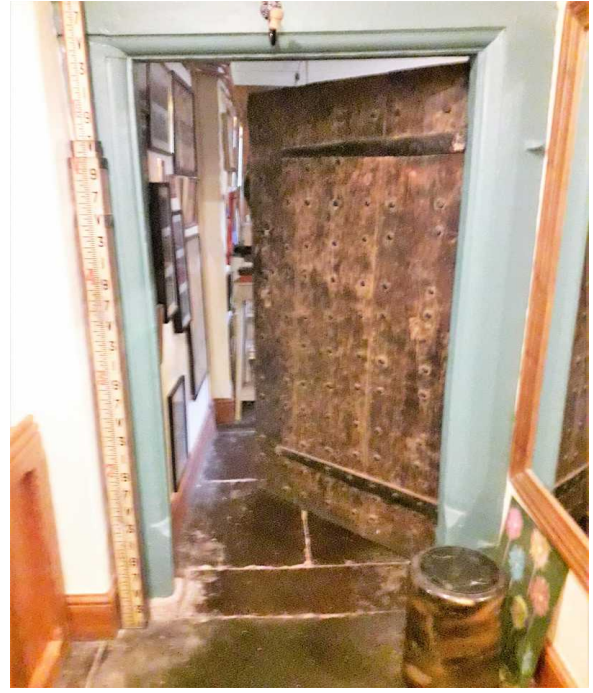
*The queen's favourite, the Earl of Leicester, defended the character of the prelate; and the Earl of Bedford assured the queen that, 'though he knew not how much the Woman was above twenty, yet he did know that her son was near forty.' This rather irritated than soothed the queen, who replied 'Majus peccatum habet' (he hath the greater sin). 'There are three kinds of marriage: first, of God's making, when two young folks are coupled; second, of man's making, when one is young and the other is old; and third, of the devil's making, when two old folks are married, not for comfort, but for covetousness, and such is this of the bishop's.'*

*The good prelate was much perplexed by this sudden tempest, and withstood several severe messages from the queen; and fearing that he should lose his favourite manor of Banwell, relinquished that of Wiveliscombe for 99 years, and by this means purchased his peace.*

The salient points of the documents are that Knight states that the old house was entirely pulled down about sixty years ago so c1842. and a new building erected to the south-west of it. He also states that across the foot of the orchard, now buried under the turf, is an ancient road. This causeway is also mentioned by Rutter, who dates the old house to about 1584 and describes it as a large substantial structure, in the Elizabethan style. The emphasis on the structure being 'large' is not borne out by the painting (Fig 2 above), which shows a single-pile building.

Some elements of the old building (and probably much rubble stone, although this cannot be shown since modern Towerhead House is completely rendered over- see Appendix 1 below for the List Description of the modern house) were incorporated into the modern house (see Fig 3 below).

These include the 'WYN.GOD.WYN.ALL' shield, currently in the northern wall, a plank door with iron studs and hand-made long hines, and the stone gate posts at the modern entrance, which appear to be those depicted in the 1806 painting (Fig 2 above). Certainly, the Historic England List description dates them as 'Late C17/early C18', although unlike certain features in the house, it does not discuss their possible re-use at the modern site, and so presumably HE are unaware of the existence of the painting. Otherwise, details in the painting agree with the assumed date (the three front gables, the hood moulding over the multiple pane windows and the square door frame set in its own slightly projecting gable). The two chimneys on or behind the east end of the house perhaps imply domestic activity at the rear. The section of wall remaining at the west of the building in the field boundary shows the building was of Carboniferous Limestone and other rubble, some dressed into squared-off blocks. The thin nature of the roof cover implies tiles rather than thatch, as would be expected of a high-status building at this time.



*Fig 3: Remnants of the old house.*

*Top left a shield with the Bishop's arms, impaling those of Bath and Wells, with the motto, WYN GOD. WYN.*

*Top right the oaken iron-studded door*

*Left the stone gate posts are said to be from the old house and are shown in the 1806 picture*

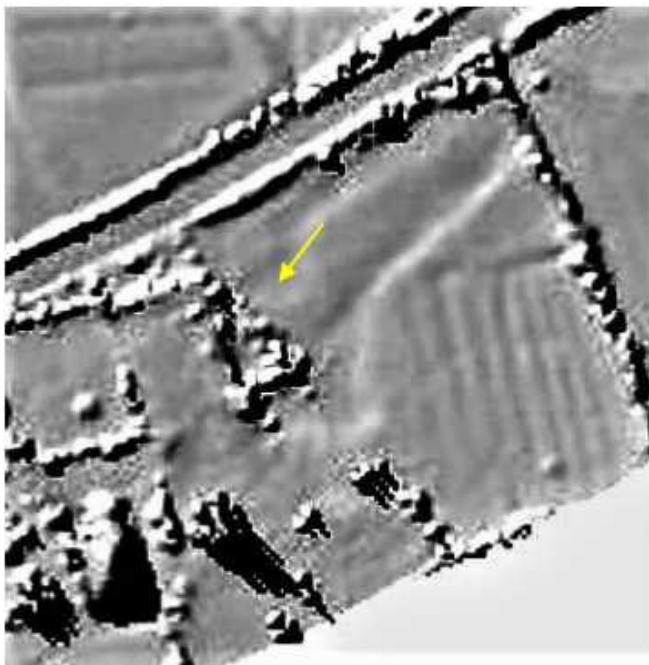
The Banwell Tithe map (see Fig 4 below) is a re-purposed map of 1834 (the Tithe Commutation Act was not passed until 1836), and clearly shows a structure to the north-east of the current site of Towerhead House. Notably, it is the north-east structure that is coloured as a dwelling (red): a square at the site of the current house is left open, so Towerhead House was either under construction in 1834, or had not yet become inhabited. This does perhaps raise some issues about whether the oak door in Fig 3 above may not relate to a separate earlier structure (perhaps non-domestic) on the current site of Towerhead House.



A few more clues come from a commission to study the apparent sacking of, and theft from, the old Towerhead House when Bishop Godwin died (Hembry 1951: 98). It described the house as having a hall, a great chamber, a parlour with a little chamber above, two more little chambers, a study, a kitchen, a larder, a backhouse and a dairy, and a well which served it outside. All sources imply that the old Towerhead house was demolished about 1840. It was thus depicted on the Tithe Map (see Fig 4 below) in the last few years before its removal.



*Fig 4: Towerhead House from the Tithe Map (1834, left) and (right) georeferenced to OS data. The match is not perfect, but the work of James Poole, the map's surveyor, seems tolerably accurate*



*Fig 5: Lidar image, ultimately from Environment Agency data, through Opengov web sites*

The site of the house is indicated by the yellow arrow. The regular 'corrugation' in the lower right corner of the field are the earthwork ridges of the old orchard: a hollow-way can be seen running over the field and 'behind' (south of) the site of the building.

## **Survey objectives**

To establish the location of the demolished Elizabethan house.

## **Methodology**

### Resistivity survey

The survey of the fields was undertaken during the period 10<sup>th</sup> January to 1st May 2019 by teams from YCCCART using Geoscan RM 15 resistivity meter.

The completed survey was downloaded to a TerraSurveyor programme and the resultant composite adjusted using the following filters:

Colour - Red Blue Green  
Band weight equaliser  
Grad shade  
Destriped  
Despiked  
Clip SD2  
High Level Filter  
Periphery Match

### Terrain modelling

A survey to produce a digital terrain model of surface features was carried out using an electronic, hydrostatic level (Nivcomp), combined with computer mapping software. The technique has been described previously (YCCCART Report 2015/Y20 and appendices). Tapes were laid relative to baselines established for the RM15 survey Grid 1 Jan 17.

A zero point for the level was established 10 m along the eastern edge of the grid, and the height in millimetres at each point in the grid, above or below the zero point, was recorded electronically at 1m intervals, northerly along the X axis, (21 columns), and westerly along the Y axis, (21 columns). The data were entered into an Excel file (Microsoft) and processed using the Surfer 10 programme (kindly donated by Golden Software, California)

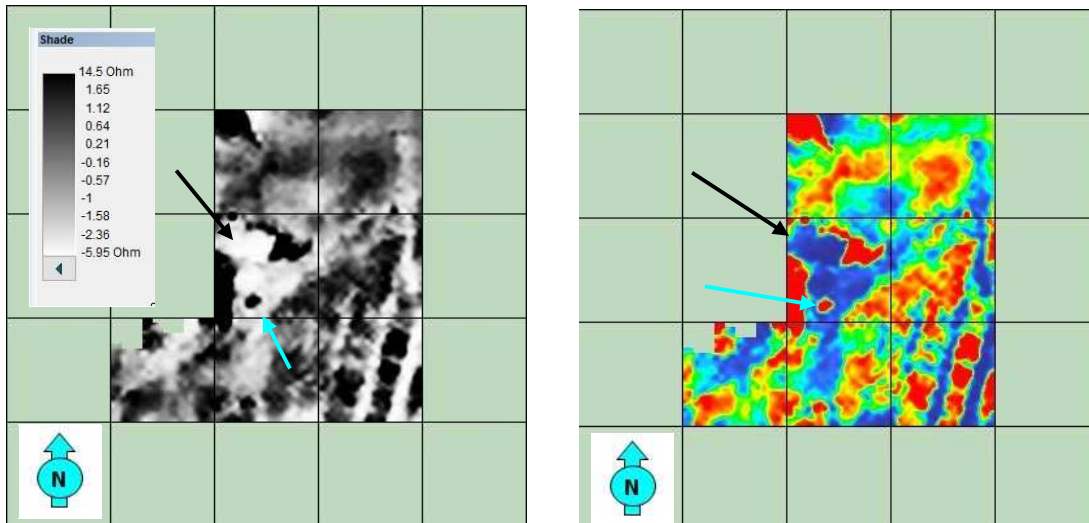
The report was written in Office 365 Word and OpenOffice Writer 5.

Photographs were taken by members of YCCCART, and remain the copyright of YCCCART.

## Results

### Resistivity

Site 1: Orchard east of current house. The resistivity results in Fig 6 clearly show part of the old house as indicated by the black arrow.



*Fig 6: Resistivity results.*

The lines in the lower right - hand side grid are the remains of an orchard. The white (left) and dark blue (right) rectangular areas are clearly the footing of the old house (black arrows). It is possible that the small circular anomaly (cyan arrows) is the external well referred to in the documents.

A coloured image alongside reflects the same anomalies.

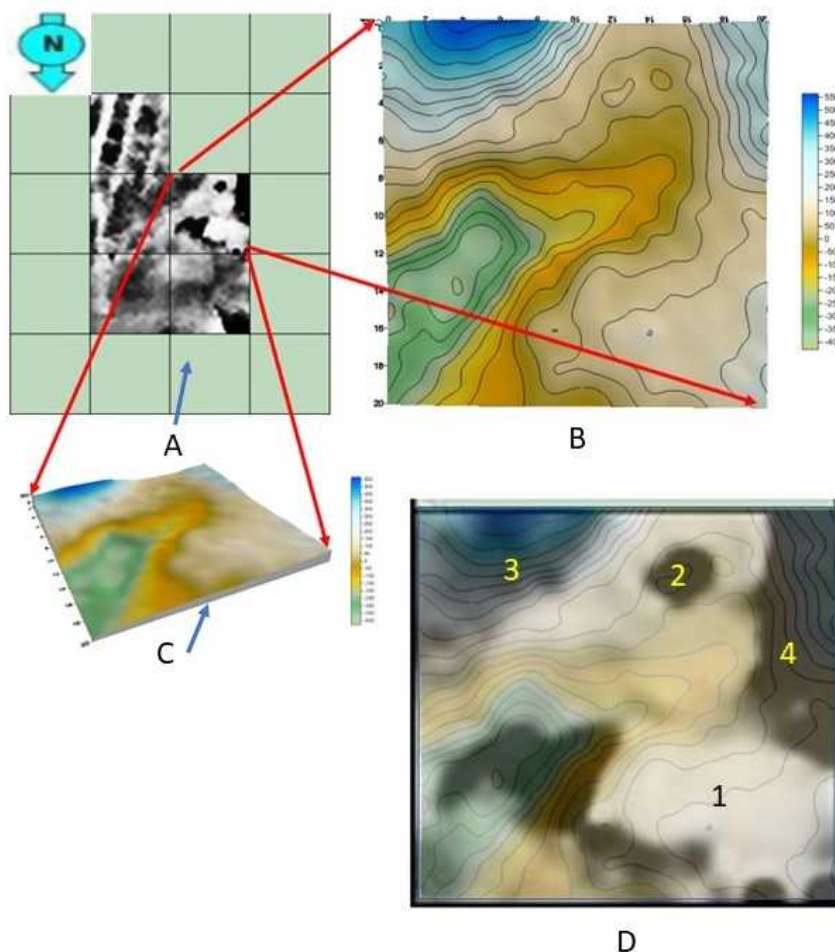
Part of the west end of the house could not be surveyed because it lay under a dump of stone and rubble, and piles of roof tiles from an adjacent demolished building. Checking this, however, it became clear that remnants of the stone wall of the old house were visible by the field boundary as shown in Fig 7.



*Fig 7: Part of the wall of the old house survives among the roots of a sycamore.*



## Terrain modelling



The results are shown in Fig 8 above. Figure 8A shows the RM15 result and its relationship with the terrain model, (B and C). In figure 8D, the terrain model contours are laid directly over the resistivity survey. There is an approximately rectangular depression (arrow, Figs 8B and C), extending south westerly from the northeast corner of the grid. An approximately rectangular area, In Fig 8D: Area 1 has a relatively flat, contoured profile, corresponding with the rectangular area of low resistance in the resistivity survey, presumed to be the old house.

*Fig 8 Terrain model results matched to resistivity results*

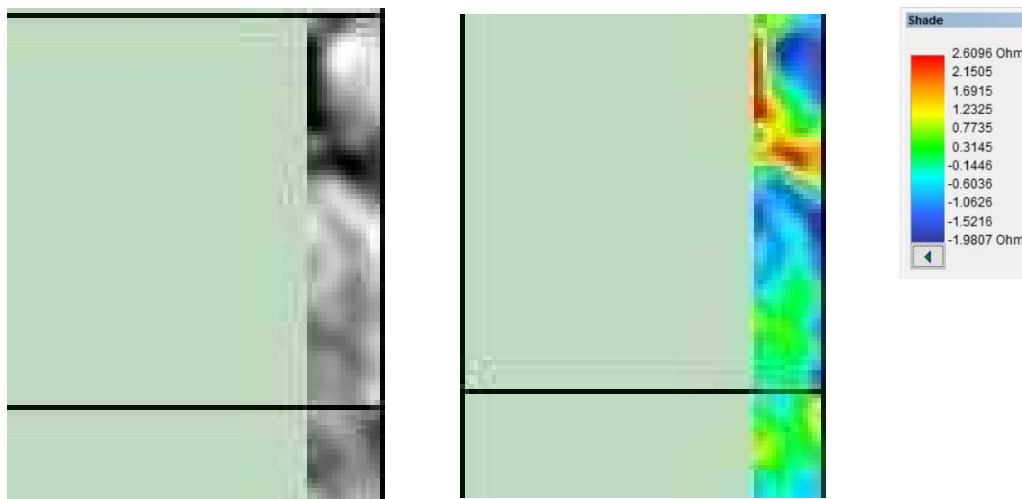
Area 2, centred over an area of high resistance, is represented by two, small, circular, slightly raised profiles, suggesting it corresponds to the approximately circular focus of high resistance in the resistivity survey.

In areas 3 and 4, at the south east and south western edges, the contours, on raised areas of the ground, outline, approximately, the high resistance of the resistivity survey.

## Comment

For the survey involving surface features, some correlations with the resistivity survey are suggested. The rectangular profile of the resistivity survey, suggesting the old house, corresponds to a relatively flat area in the terrain model. A circular profile of high resistivity in the resistivity survey corresponds with two circular, slightly raised profiles in the terrain model, and higher ground at the south east and south western edges, overlay areas of high resistivity in the resistivity survey.

## Site 2: Small lawn east of current house



*Fig 9: Resistivity results. TerraSurveyor shade view black and white and colour images. High readings are black in the top image and red below.*

The feature at the top of the results in Fig 9 is believed to be connected with drainage. No other archaeological features are evident.

## Summary



*Fig 10: The resistivity results from site 1 & 2 (See arrow) superimposed on a Google Earth image*

The resistivity survey has established that the remains of the Elizabethan house lie in the orchard to the east of the house, as recorded by Knight. This is further substantiated by a fragment of the old house wall remaining where the resistivity results indicate the structure, and to a degree by the terrain modelling results.



## Recommendations for further work

None

## References

Collinson, J. (1791)	The History of Somersetshire
Hembry, P. M. (1951)	The Death of Thomas Godwin, Bishop of Bath and Wells <i>Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society</i> 96: 78-107 (1951)
Knight, F. A. (1902)	The Sea-Board of Mendip
Rutter, J. (1829)	Delineations of The North West Division of the County of Somerset

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July 2019

## **Appendix 1 Listing details for Tower House and Gateposts**

ST 45 NW BANWELL TOWERHEAD

5/34 Towerhead House

G.V. II

House. Circa 1820, contain reset C16/C17 features. Stucco, slate roof. 2 storeys and basement, 3 windows; central doorway of about 1860. 2 panel door, margin glazed overlight under hood with pediment on scrolled brackets, glazing bar sash above, all other openings blank; pilaster strips; hipped roof on overhanging eaves; large central stack with mculded cap. North elevation; 3 storeys, 2 windows, glazing bar sashes, single storey gabled extension to left, at first floor a square panel with moulded and painted coat of arms and motto; Win God/Win All; basement door, 6 panel (top 2 glazed) under 3 light overlight (original front door reset?). Interior; curious basement, possibly 1820 resetting of features from earlier house has 4 doors with stopped ovolo moulded timber door frames, set above but not on them are moulded tudor arch stone lintels all of differing design, some with decorated spandrels; two 2 light chamfered mullion timber window frames are set between 2 basement rooms. In basement extension is a brass and lead waterpump of c.1820 in working order. This house is on or near the site of a house built by Bishop Godwin of Bath and Wells in the late C16.

ST 45 NW BANWELL TOWERHEAD

5/35 Gatepiers at Towerhead House (q. v.)

G.V. II

Gatepiers. Late C17/early C18. Ashlar. 2 square piers on low moulded plinths; moulded cornice; surmounted by very large ball finials on moulded and chamfered base.