

THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

Horsley Hall, Marford

ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT



CPAT Report No 402

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R J Silvester
October 2000

Report for David A Griffiths Partnership

The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street, Welshpool, Powys, SY21 7DL
tel (01938) 553670, fax (01938) 552179

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checked by	N.W. Jones	<i>N.W. Jones</i>	30/10/00
approved by	R.J. Silvester	<i>R.J.S.</i>	30/10/00

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The Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

7a Church Street Welshpool Powys SY21 7DL

tel (01938) 553670, fax 552179

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1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the beginning of August 2000, the Contracts Section of the Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust (henceforward CPAT) were invited by the David A Griffiths Partnership of Rossett, near Wrexham to submit a quotation and specification for undertaking an archaeological evaluation in advance of a proposed housing development and the restoration of the parkland and historic gardens at Horsley Hall near Marford, north-east of Wrexham. CPAT's quotation was accepted by the Partnership's clients at the end of September and the work was undertaken during the following month.
- 1.2 The desk-top study involved research at the National Monuments Record held by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales at Aberystwyth, the regional Sites and Monuments Record held by CPAT at Welshpool, the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth, the Flintshire Record Office at Hawarden and the Denbighshire Record Office at Ruthin. The field visit was conducted after the completion of the desk-top element.

2 The History and Nature of Horsley Hall

- 2.1 Horsley Hall (centred at SJ 365550 and also in the past known as Horseley) lies in the township of Allington in the parish of Gresford, its gardens straddling the historic border between Flintshire and Denbighshire. Historic Gresford itself lies some 1.7km to the west, while Wrexham is some 5km to the south-west (fig. 1).
- 2.2 Successive halls have been built on the gently shelving lower slopes of Marford Hill which is constrained as a spur between the Dee to the east and its converging tributary the Alyn to the west. The views from the site extend over the Dee Valley and the Cheshire Plain beyond.
- 2.3 No date has been determined for the site of the first hall at Horsley. No references to a dwelling on the site nor to an estate centred on it have been encountered in any of the secondary documentation relating to the area (e.g Palmer 1903; Pratt 1992). The emergence of a house on this site, then, is likely to have occurred late in the medieval period. Palmer, the early 20th-century historian and the main authority for the Wrexham region suggested that a house was constructed there by the son of Dafydd Hen of Burton, and dead reckoning could put this event sometime in the early 15th century.
- 2.4 A descendant, Thomas Powell, who was the first of perhaps eight generations who went by that name and who was constable of Holt Castle, is believed to have built 'Plas y Horsli', about 1540, reportedly a timbered building with a moat around it. Nothing is known of this house or its moat (though see para 2.7 below). The moat is not even recorded in Spurgeon's list of moated sites in Clwyd and no details as to its size, shape and location are available. If indeed its construction was contemporaneous with Powell's new hall in c.1540, it is a very late example of the elaboration of a gentry house for the purposes of status.
- 2.5 As local gentry the Powell family established themselves in the region. The second Thomas Powell, reputedly knighted, was High Sheriff of Denbighshire in 1591. His son fulfilled a similar role in 1616, and his grandson, another Sir Thomas was High Sheriff of Denbighshire in 1639 and of Cheshire in 1640. One who died in 1706 was created Baronet of Horsley and Birkenhead. On the basis of this role call of appointments to positions of authority it should be anticipated that the status of the Powells would be reflected in the size and appearance of their hall.
- 2.6 In 1792 the property was acquired by John Hughes of Wrexham from a junior branch of the Powell family.

- 2.7 Horsley Hall was purchased by Frederick Potts, land agent to the Duke of Westminster, between 1856 and 1866. It is generally claimed that around 1875 Potts constructed a new house on the site, (but see below para 4.5). It is reported by Palmer that Potts demolished most of the old moated hall including a 'groined crypt in order to alter the entrance to [his] new hall', and also retained a fine stone 16th or 17th-century fireplace (fig. 9). Like its smaller predecessor, the new house, of red brick with stone dressings, lay along the contours on a north-west/south east alignment. It faced south-westwards towards the rising ground of Marford Hill. In front of this was a wide drive. A stable block and ancillary buildings lay immediately to the north.
- 2.8 In 1898 Potts's son sold the hall to Alfred Ashworth, another High Sheriff of Denbighshire. Between 1907-12 (though c.1904-6, according to Hubbard) the house was remodelled in "Jacobethan" style and much enlarged, by G.H. Kitchin for Mr Philip Ashworth (figs 4 and 6).
- 2.9 Lord Wavertree purchased Horsley in 1917 and made further changes to its design, and also added formal terraced gardens in front of the hall. Lloyd has suggested that including the service wings and stables it was "one of the largest places ever built in Wales".
- 2.10 The building was sold in 1934 and intended for demolition. However at the commencement of the Second World War the army acquired the site. The hall and its accompanying gardens were modified with nissen huts, garages and military buildings added to it landscape.
- 2.11 The army finally vacated the site in 1955 and then, for a short period, it became a private school.
- 2.12 Most of the hall itself was finally demolished in 1963. The ancillary buildings were abandoned in ruins and the gardens overgrown.

3 The gardens

- 3.1 The gardens of Horsley are reported to have been laid out by Kitchin for Phillip Ashworth when the house was remodelled in the Edwardian period (figs. 6 and 7). In the main they lay to the north-east and south-east of the hall, and downslope from it. They survived the demolition of 1963, but have been 'quarried' since. A baroque gateway, for instance, moved from Great Buckingham Street, London was blown down in 1978 (fig. 8). What remains of the gardens are now heavily overgrown and almost inaccessible. A full study has been published in the regional Register of Historic Gardens by Cadw (1995), and there is no doubt additional information in the archive at Cardiff that formed the basis of that compilation.
- 3.2 The proposed development will impact on that part of the gardens that lay immediately to the south and south-east of the house (see fig 3). Some terracing is evident in this area.

4 The evidence of the maps

- 4.1 Palmer cites John Norden's *Survey of Bromfield and Yale*, prepared in 1620, as a source of information on the Horsley estate, and it is conceivable that the survey refers too to the house itself. It has not been possible to track down this source but it is almost certainly a written survey, probably surviving as a manuscript in the British Library or a similar national repository.
- 4.2 No large-scale plan or drawing of the Powells' timbered house has been identified. There is a very small, stylised drawing of Horsley Hall on a 1787 manuscript map of the Trevalyn Estate. This adds nothing to our knowledge of the site, though for reasons that are unclear it is the only building on the map that is depicted in bird's-eye view rather than plan fashion. Further small-scale

manuscript maps from 1790 and 1817 also add very little. The latter does however confirm what is shown on the later Tithe map, namely that there were ancillary buildings behind (i.e. to the north-east of) the timbered hall and that the complex was approached by a drive that ran straight down the slope from the direction of Gresford to the south-west. This drive now lost can still be seen as a 'ghost' in the setting of the trees on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1872.

- 4.3 The Tithe Map of 1844 (fig 2a) cannot be used as a totally accurate depiction of the layout of Horsley Hall and its immediate environs for its purpose was to identify tithe areas and their boundaries. Furthermore the general level of mapping required by the Tithe Commissioners did not approach the accuracy of the Ordnance Survey surveyors, thirty to forty years later. Nevertheless it is clear from the 1844 map that the outline of the building is a tolerable depiction of what was there and also, confirming other scraps of information, that Potts's new hall was constructed on exactly the same site.
- 4.4 The map of 1844 reveals no convincing evidence of the moat. The only possible feature that might be of relevance is the up-turned L-shaped feature to the north-west of the hall (arrowed on fig 3a). One arm of it appears on the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map but it had disappeared by the time of the 2nd edition. There is no explanation of this feature in the tithe apportionment, and it is conceivable that it could have been a standing body of water, long abandoned. In this connection the drive approaching the hall should be noted. It is perpendicular to the aforementioned feature and leads not to the hall itself but to what appear to be ancillary buildings behind it. A moat 60m long would not be implausible: some in Maelor such as Halghton Hall are larger. But the overriding factor here is the L-shaped features location in relation to the hall as it was shown on the 1844 map, for the latter could not have been set within any moat that incorporated the feature. The alternative, that the 1844 does not show the timbered house, but a successor that was built on a slightly different spot, does not accord with the information given in section 3 above.
- 4.5 If the assumption that Potts was responsible for the demolition of the timber hall in around 1875 is correct this should mean that not only the sketch plan on the 1844 Tithe map but also the more accurate 1st edition plan of 1872 (fig. 2b) should show this building. However, the Ordnance Survey plans of 1872 and 1899 are almost identical in form and this strongly suggests that Potts's new building had already been erected or at least was in the course of construction by 1872.
- 4.6 The 3rd or revised edition of the large-scale Ordnance Survey plan of 1911 (fig. 3d) shows the plan of the larger hall resulting from Kitchin's remodelling, and also confirms his extensive works on the gardens of the hall.
- 4.7 No detailed plans (i.e. to a scale of 1:2500 or greater) of the later (post-1917) work on the house have been identified. Nor is there any evidence that the numerous military installations were ever mapped, other than those shown on modern Ordnance Survey mapping. It is possible, however, that there are details in obscure government archives.

5 Ground survey

- 5.1 The remains of Horsley Hall and its gardens are heavily overgrown, making access difficult and in places, near impossible, particularly during the summer and autumn months.
- 5.2 The site of the hall is discernible on a level shelf with less invasive vegetation. Floor levels, occasional piles of bricks and in a few places short stretches of standing brick walls remain to indicate the general position of the hall, but it is not possible on this evidence alone to define the outline of the former building.

- 5.3 The remains of the stable block and other ancillary buildings to the north of the hall are more in evidence. Chimney stacks survive to full height, though rather precariously. The layout of the gardens is relatively untouched though as noted above some furnishings have been removed, demolished or have collapsed.
- 5.4 The amount of disturbance related to the successive rebuildings of the hall during the later 19th century and the earlier part of the 20th century, coupled with the extensive works associated with the military occupation during the war have created a landscape where it is impossible to detect anything that might be associated with the sub-medieval hall. To distinguish the various military and non-military elements in the vicinity of the hall site is also difficult but could probably be achieved by a detailed, measured survey.

6 Protected elements and designations

- 6.1 As far as can be ascertained no part of the hall or its environs are statutorily protected. The joint dovecote and gazebo in the gardens to the north-east of the hall was originally listed but this has apparently now been demolished. It is not known whether the listing has been repealed.
- 6.2 The gardens of Horsley are recorded in Cadw's *Register of Landscapes, Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest*. The register has no statutory power but its sponsors anticipated that it would "help owners, local planning authorities, developers, statutory bodies and all who are concerned with the protection of this part of the national heritage, to make informed decisions about sites on the Register".

7 Photography

- 7.1 No known photographs of the timbered building have been identified.
- 7.2 Potts's building, front and rear, is shown in two photographs that illustrate the 1891 volume by Ellison Powell.
- 7.3 The NMR holds a collection of 61 photographs going back to 1906, but with some of more recent origin though prior to the demolition of 1963. These are mainly shots of the exterior of the hall, though there are a few of the interior, notably the inscribed 16th-century fireplace. A small sample are reproduced in this report by permission of the National Monument Record and are Crown Copyright.
- 7.4 Vertical aerial photographs of the hall and its gardens, prior to the demolition of the former, are held in the National Assembly of Wales archives in Cardiff. They show the well-wooded environs of the hall and of course the building itself, but add nothing to our knowledge of the earlier buildings on the site. For copyright reasons they have not been reproduced in this report

8 Conclusions

- 8.1 Few records relevant to Horsley Hall and its lands appear to have survived the frequent changes of ownership that have been inflicted on the estate since the late 18th century. No detailed plans or surveys have been identified, and the only ones of the timbered house are the small-scale depictions on the Tithe Map of 1844 and probably the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map from 1872.

- 8.2 It is certain that the early hall was demolished and its site re-used for the much larger brick building of the later 19th century. No clear indications of the moat surrounding the house appear on any of the maps, and the only suggestions that can be made as to its location must be treated as speculative. Furthermore the scale of the building works from the later 19th century through to the earlier 20th century, the landscaping for the gardens, and the subsequent works undertaken by the military during and after the war have completely altered the landscape of Horsley Hall. It is thus hardly surprising that no surface traces of the moated site can now be identified. By way of a caveat it must be noted here that such is the scale of the invasive vegetation that it was impossible to undertake a truly comprehensive examination of the area.
- 8.3 It is conceivable that sub-surface remains of the house or more likely the moat might survive beneath the foundation level of the Victorian structure or the grounds immediately around it, but there is no substantive evidence to support this hypothesis.

9 Acknowledgements

- 9.1 Thanks are due to the staff of the National Library of Wales, the Flintshire Record Office and the Denbighshire Record Office for accessing information held in their archives; to the staff of the National Monument Record in Aberystwyth and the Sites and Monuments Record in Welshpool for information, and in the case of the former for permitting the reproduction of the photographs of the house, under Crown Copyright conditions and particularly to Mr M Parry of the NMR for arranging access to the aerial photography held by the National Assembly of Wales; and to Mr Parry and Mr D Pratt for advice.

10 Bibliography

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Pratt, D, 1992 Fourteenth century Marford and Hoseley: a maerdref in transition, *Trans Denbighshire Hist Soc*, 41, 25-69

Spurgeon, J, 1991 Mottes and moated sites, in Manley, J, Greuter, S and Gale, F (eds), *The Archaeology of Clwyd*, 157-172

11 Sources

Documentary Sources

Edward Hubbard's notes (*Flintshire Record Office/D/HU/137/6*)

Aerial Photographs

No easily accessible vertical aerial photographs are held by the NMR at Aberystwyth.

The National Assembly of Wales archives, Cardiff hold the following vertical photography:

1947 RAF/CPE/UK/1935/4311-3; 17/01/1947

1951 RAF/540/491/4132-33; 11/05/1951

1958 RAF/F21.58/2344/0037-38; 30/01/1958

1962 RAF/F22 58/5171/0125-26; 16/06/62

Maps

1787 Trevalyn Estate in Marford (*National Library of Wales/RMC 18*)

1790 Trevalyn Estate in Marford (*Flintshire Record Office/D/BC (addn)*)

1817 Lordship of Marford and Hosely: part (*Flintshire Record Office/D/TR/117*)

1844 Tithe Map of Marford parish, township of Allington (*National Library of Wales*)

1872 1st Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map (Denbighshire 22.13)

1899 2nd Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map (Denbighshire 22.13)

1911 Revised (3rd) Edition 1:2500 Ordnance Survey map (Denbighshire 22.13)

Other Sources

National Monuments Record, Aberystwyth

Regional Sites and Monuments Record, Welshpool

Appendix 1

HORSLEY HALL, MARFORD, WREXHAM SPECIFICATION FOR A CONTRACTED ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION BY THE CLWYD-POWYS ARCHAEOLOGICAL TRUST

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The proposed residential development involves land at the former Horsley Hall, Marford. The Wrexham Archaeology Service has advised that there are reasonable grounds for believing that there are important archaeological remains on the site and, therefore, a pre-determination archaeological evaluation has been recommended. Accordingly, a Brief has been prepared by Wrexham Archaeology Service at the request of David A Griffiths Partnership, detailing the scheme of works required.
- 1.2 The development area includes the fragmentary remains of the main Hall, together with the remains of former outbuildings. The Hall was built in 1875 on the site of an earlier moated hall dating from 1540.

2 Objectives

- 2.1 The objectives of the archaeological works are:
 - 2.1.1 to gather sufficient information to establish the need for subsequent conservation and/or additional archaeological work within the area outlined in the brief;
 - 2.1.2 to prepare a report outlining the results of the evaluation, and in particular consider the possible location of the former moated site.

3 Methods

- 3.1 Stage one of the evaluation will involve the examination of all the readily available primary and secondary documentary, cartographic, pictorial, photographic and oral sources. Repositories consulted will include the following: County SMR, CPAT, Welshpool; the National Monuments Record, RCAHMW, Aberystwyth; the National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth; Flintshire County Archives, Hawarden.
- 3.2 Stage two will take the form of a rapid field survey of the development area.
- 3.3 All archaeological sites identified will be recorded on standard site visit forms and photographed in 35mm format, including a scale in each view. Each site will be plotted as accurately as possible onto base maps.
- 3.4 Following the on-site an illustrated and bound report will be prepared according to the principles laid out in the Curatorial Brief (section 7). This will be in A4 format and contain conventional sections on: Site location, Topography and Geology; Historic Background; Field Survey; Conclusions and Recommendations and References, together with appropriate appendices on archives and finds.
- 3.5 The site archive will be prepared to specifications laid out in Appendix 3 in the Management of Archaeological Projects (English Heritage, 1991).

4 Resources and Programming

- 4.1 The evaluation will be undertaken by a small team of skilled archaeologists under the direct supervision of Mr RJ Silvester, a senior member of CPAT's staff who is also a member of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.
- 4.2 All report preparation will be completed by or with the assistance of the same field archaeologist who conducted the evaluation.
- 4.3 It is anticipated that stage one of the evaluation will be completed within 3 days, the rapid survey will be completed in one day, and the report will be completed within 3 days. A copy of the report will be deposited with the Regional SMR. The curator will be informed of the field survey timetable in order to arrange for monitoring if required.
- 4.4 Requirements relating to Health and Safety regulations will be adhered to by CPAT and its staff.
- 4.5 CPAT is covered by appropriate Public and Employer's Liability insurance.

N.W.Jones
22nd August 2000

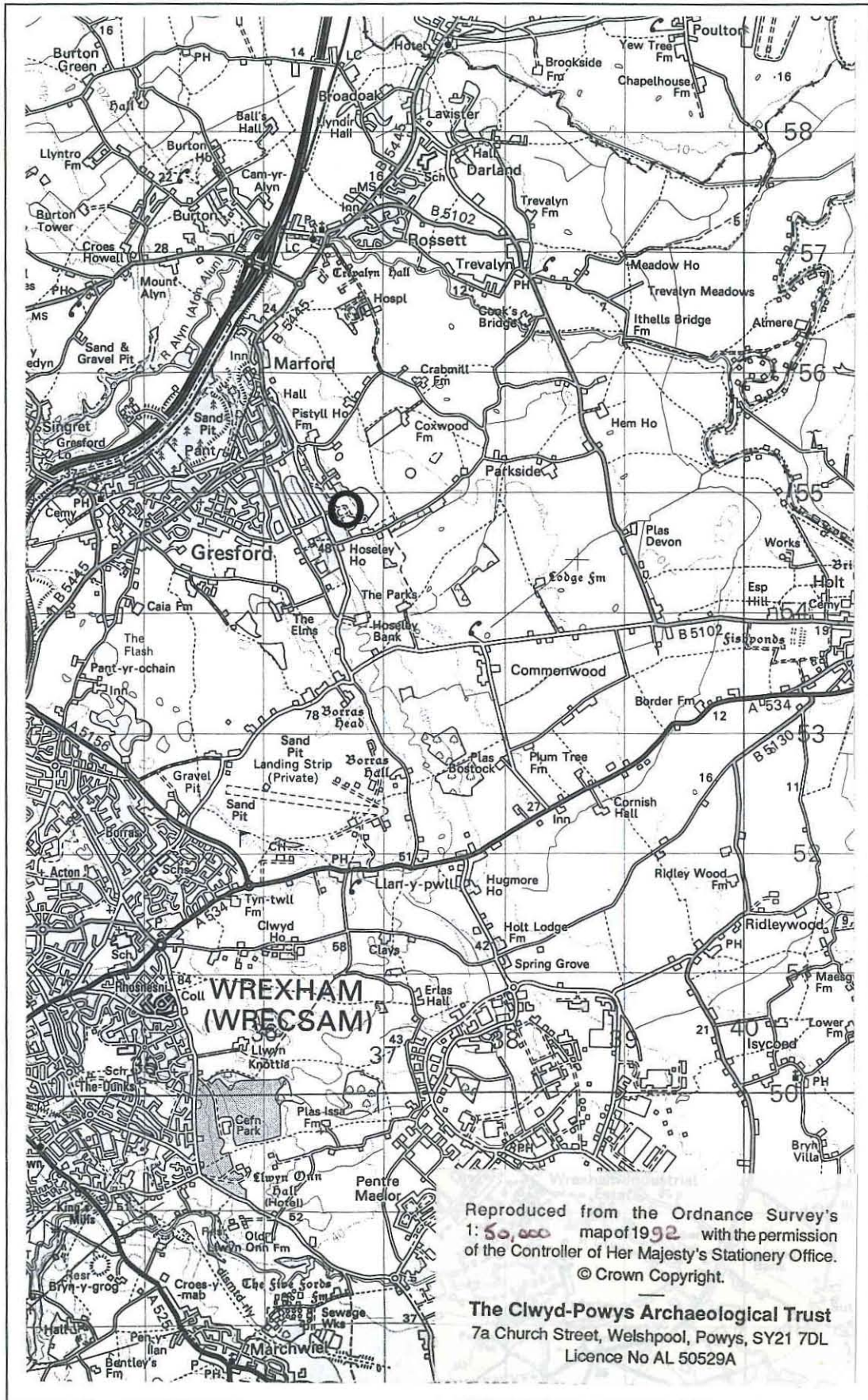


Fig. 1 Location of Horsley Hall in relation to Wrexham and the Dee Valley

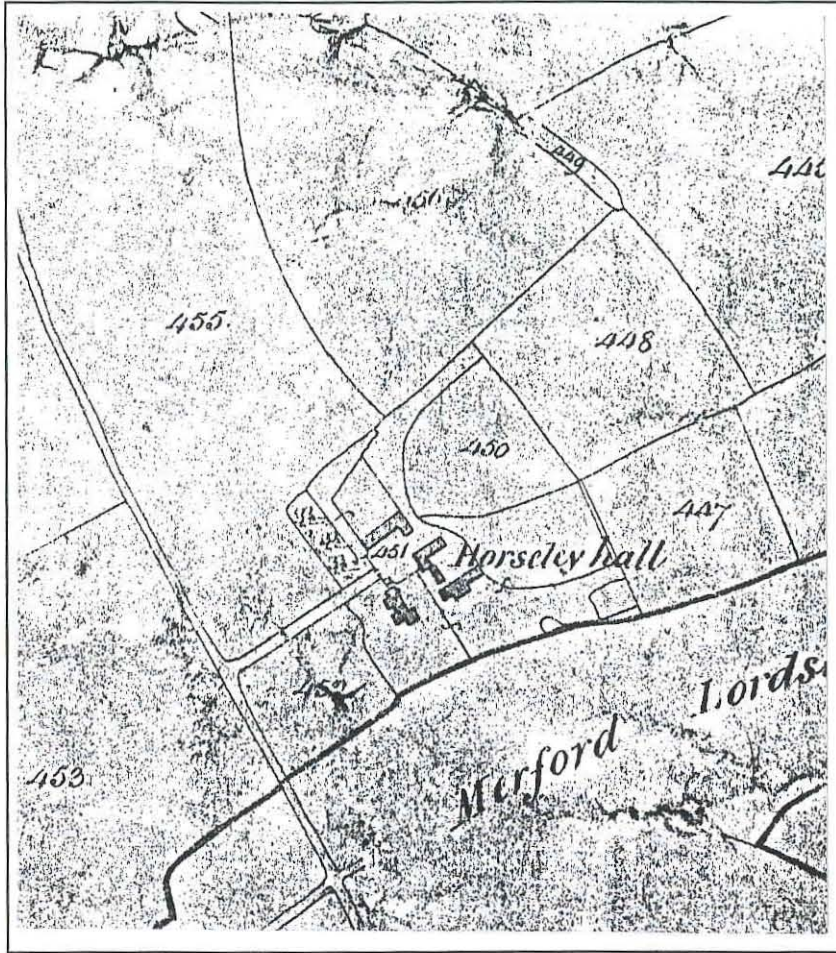


Fig 2a: Tithe Map of 1844 showing Horsley Hall

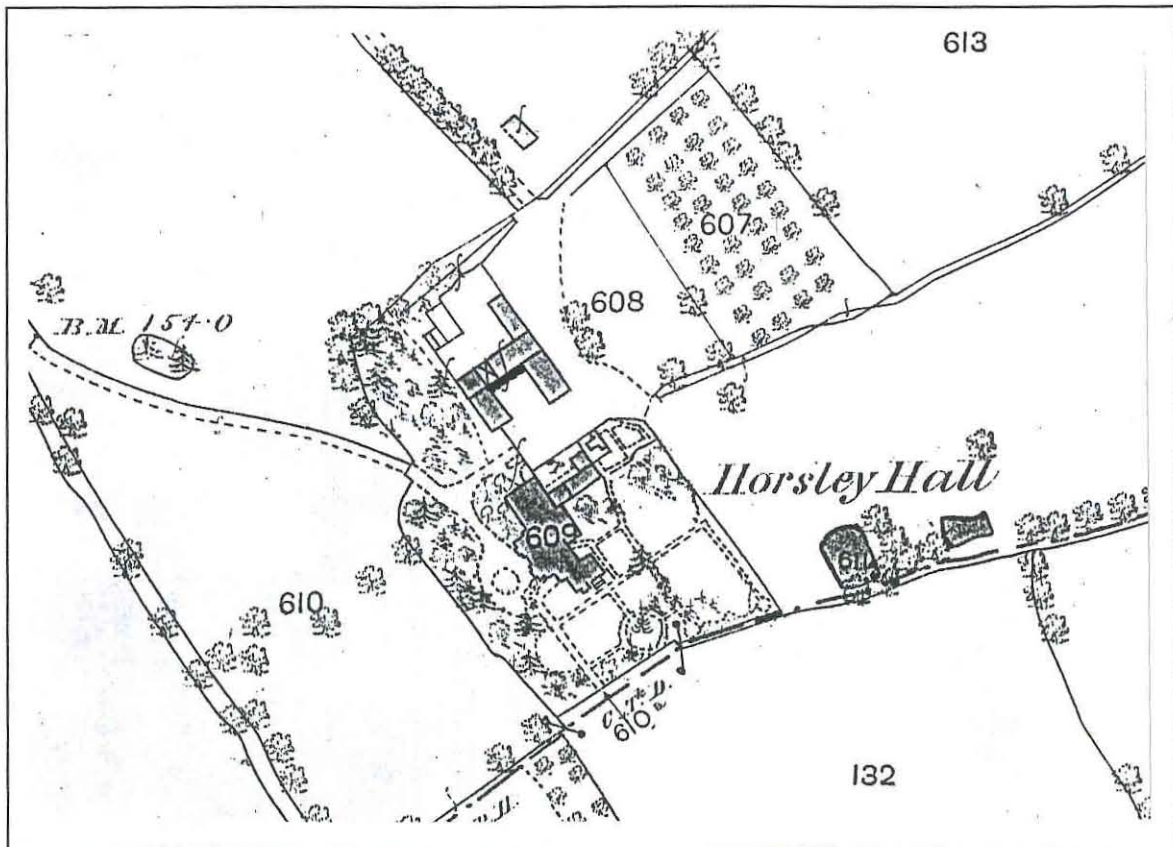


Fig 2b: 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey 1:2500 Map from 1872



Fig.4: Horsley Hall in the early 20th century. From the Davies Collection in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright



Fig.5: Horsley Hall in the early 20th century. From the Davies Collection in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright

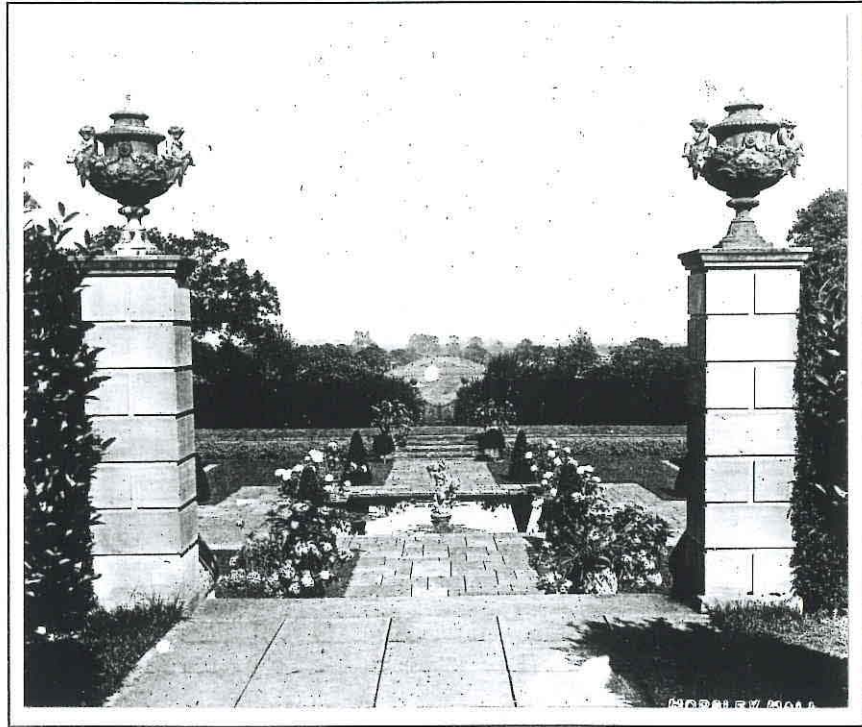


Fig.6: Horsley Hall gardens in the early 20th century. From the Davies Collection in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright

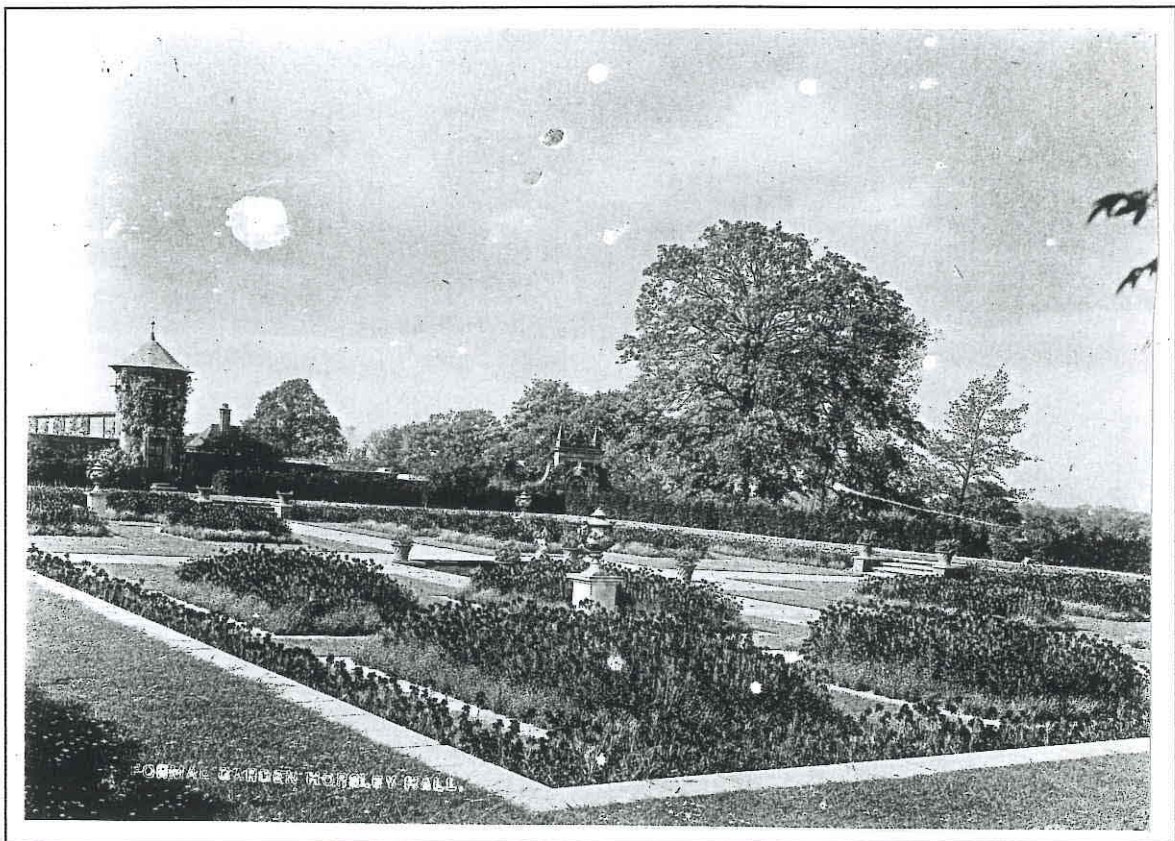


Fig.7: Horsley Hall gardens in the early 20th century. From the Davies Collection in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright



Fig.8: Buckingham Street arch prior to 1978. Photograph in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright

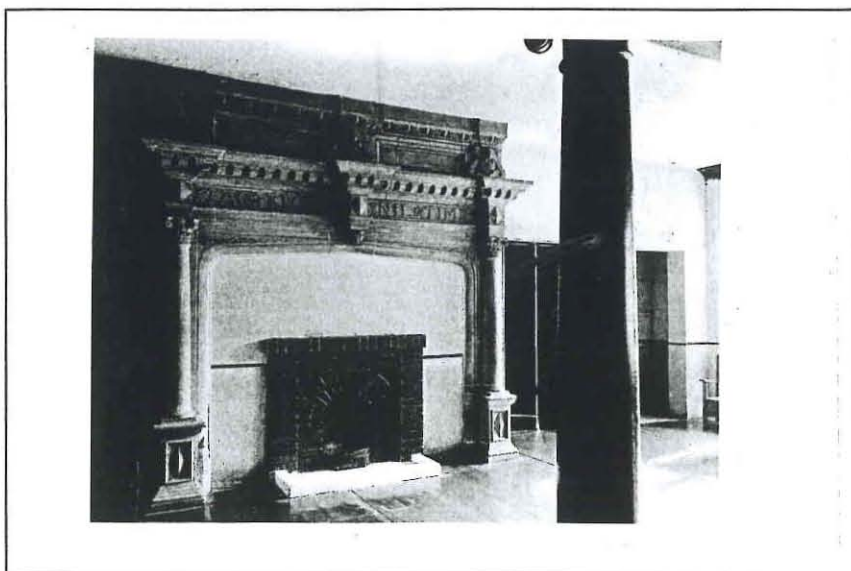


Fig.9: 16th or 17th-century fireplace in Horsley Hall. Photograph in the National Monument Record, RCAHMW, Crown Copyright