

LOOKING INTO THE PAST

Archaeological work at Canons Ashby has revealed some surprising medieval finds.

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Exciting discoveries have been made underneath the earth at Canons Ashby. A geophysical survey has revealed the remains of a medieval village, a priory and perhaps even a castle lying beneath the grounds of the Northamptonshire property.

The discoveries were made by staff, volunteers and visitors taking part in an extensive geophysical survey of Canons Ashby's parkland under the guidance of professional geophysicists. Further surveys were then carried out by the team of geophysicists and the results have amazed everyone.

The priory cloisters and associated structures show up clearly on the survey and a medieval village appears in detail, making it easy to identify at least 25 dwellings so far. Individual house plots can be made out as well as the edges of a ridge and furrow field system – an early form of ploughing common in medieval times.

However, the biggest cause for excitement is what lies beneath a mysterious mound to the north of the house. The geophysical surveys suggest that a large structure, such as a wall, skirts the edge of the mound. Along with more features found in the surrounding area, this could indicate an early medieval castle – perhaps a motte and bailey (a form of castle on a raised mound).

Rachael Hall, the National Trust Archaeologist who supervised the geophysical work, says: "We've always understood that there was once a priory and a village at Canons Ashby but we never knew much detail about them. The remains of what could be a castle were, however, a huge surprise to us and we're currently looking into the best way to investigate the area further. We can't say what's there for certain at this stage, but the geophysical survey results are very interesting indeed."