

## Interpretation

The Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey conducted on Batford Field, on the corner of Common Lane and the Lower Luton Road, produced strong anomalies consistent with a large rectangular building constructed of brick or stone. The results also provide evidence of remnants of structures to the south, closer to the Lower Luton Road, and evidence of an earlier road layout.

It is important to point out that the large rectangular feature on the north side is not the remains of the Bonny Boys Farm buildings, as shown in the Tithe and Ordnance Survey maps of the nineteenth century. This cartographic evidence shows the buildings of Bonny Boys Farm abutted the road and were situated within an area of around 30 by 30 metres on the corner of the Lower Luton Road and Common Lane. Photographic evidence (see Figure 1 below) which shows how much narrower the Lower Luton Road once was has also confirmed that the majority of the Bonny Boys Farm buildings (or what remained of them at the time) would have been destroyed with the extensive widening of the Lower Luton Road in the twentieth century. The Bonny Boys Farm buildings would have originally covered an area now beneath today's Lower Luton Road and this explains the demolition rubble which can be seen on the south side of the GPR survey results.

The road and crossroads visible on the GPR survey appear to have a relationship with the large rectangular building as they are on the same alignment. They also relate to other features in the landscape and to the cartographic record. The road on the GPR survey which runs north-south and to the side of the large building leads directly to the ford and may meet up with Common Lane further to the north. On the Church Commissioners map of 1799 there is a strip pattern of fields to the north of the Lower Luton Road and to the west of Common Lane. The field furthest to the west (see Figure 2 below) which abuts Bonny Boys Farm has been cut through by Common Lane. The eastern edge of that field correlates with the road running south-north in the GPR survey; this might suggest that this road dates from the same period as the establishment of the strip fields or earlier.

The substantial rectangular brick or stone building on the north side of the survey is much larger than any of the buildings of the Bonny Boys complex and has a size of approximately 30 metres by 15 metres. As stated above, the building is situated further north than Bonny Boys Farm but to the south of the farm boundary which can be seen in the 1799 map. It stands alone, unlike the farm buildings and is also on a different orientation to the buildings of Bonny Boys Farm. The large rectangular building is, however, on the same orientation as the road

and crossroads which can be seen on the GPR survey which might suggest that they were in existence at a similar time.



**Figure 1:** This photograph (after Harpenden & District Local History Society 1980), of unknown date, from *Bygone Harpenden* (Harpenden & District Local History Society 1980) shows that the Lower Luton Road was once no more than a track. This can be seen to the left of image. A comparison to today's street scene would appear to indicate that Batford Field once stretched to approximately where the centre of today's road is, which means that a large part of the buildings which were once in that portion of the field have been obliterated.



**Figure 2:** The road in this image cuts through the strip field and its eastern edge was perhaps once the edge of the field. The road revealed by the GPR survey is further to the east again but respects the original width of the strip field suggesting it was in situ at the same period as the establishment of the strip fields or earlier. North is at top of the image; not to scale (after Church Commissioners' Map, 1799. Westminster Abbey Library and Muniments).

The large building discovered by the GPR survey does not appear on any cartographic document and from this and the above evidence, it can be concluded that it must pre-date the farm buildings of Bonny Boys. An extensive search has been conducted at Hertfordshire Archives to ascertain if there was an earlier brick or stone building in this position in the post-Medieval era. There was not.

Since at least 1658 Bonny Boys Farm and Batford Mill have been considered a single entity. The documentation at Hertford shows this and most recently the 1840 Tithe Map shows the mill and farm still had the same owner, indeed on the map an area brace symbol indicates they are part of the same land parcel. Therefore, if there had been a substantial dwelling house within the Batford Mill / Bonny Boys Farm complex, the expectation would be that it would be included in the paper record.

An indenture—between John Hobbs, miller of Batford Mill and John Butterfield, blacksmith of Lilley (1<sup>st</sup> part) and John Watson, yeoman of Wheathampstead (2<sup>nd</sup> part)—from 1658 states that there once was a dwelling house belonging to Batford Mill, and the same document gives a description of its position:

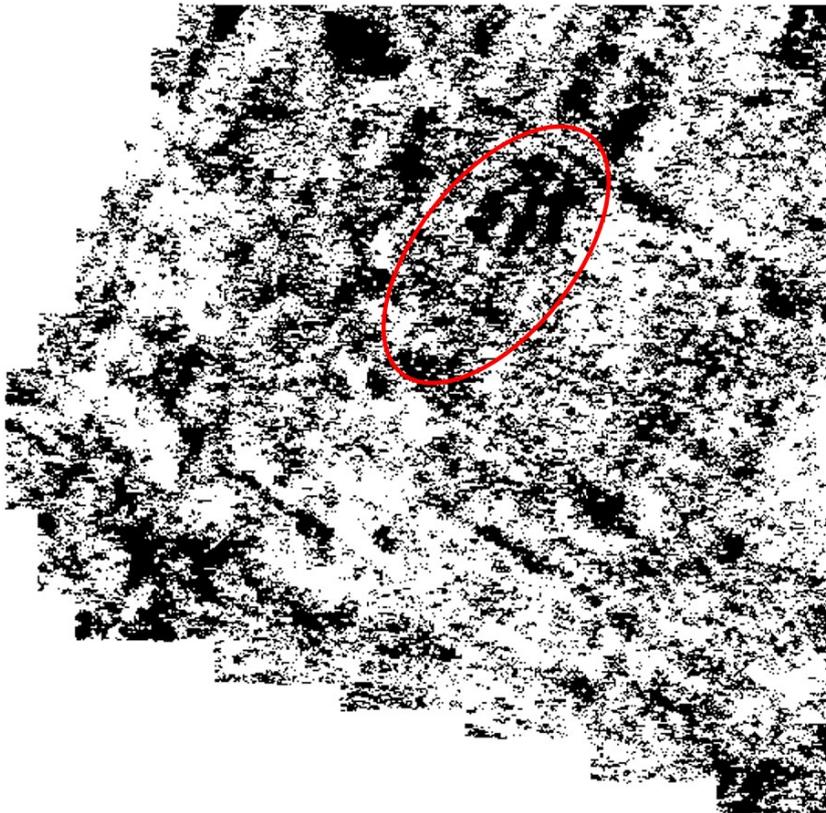
‘one meadow plott [sic] being att [sic] the south side of the river there between the old and the new river there and abutting on the said mill house on the east and upon the comon [sic] towards the south ...’ (D/EB1640T5, HALS).

This documentary evidence reveals that at this time the main area of occupation was immediately around the mill site at Batford and around a mill standing in a similar position to where it is today. This is the earliest documentation for the Batford Mill area and dates to the period when the earliest brick buildings were being constructed in England. If a large dwelling house had been in existence in the northern sector of the GPR survey then it would have had to have been included in this documentation.

The substantial rectangular building made of brick or stone must therefore date to a much earlier period and the only period in which buildings of this size and shape and in these materials were constructed was the Roman period.

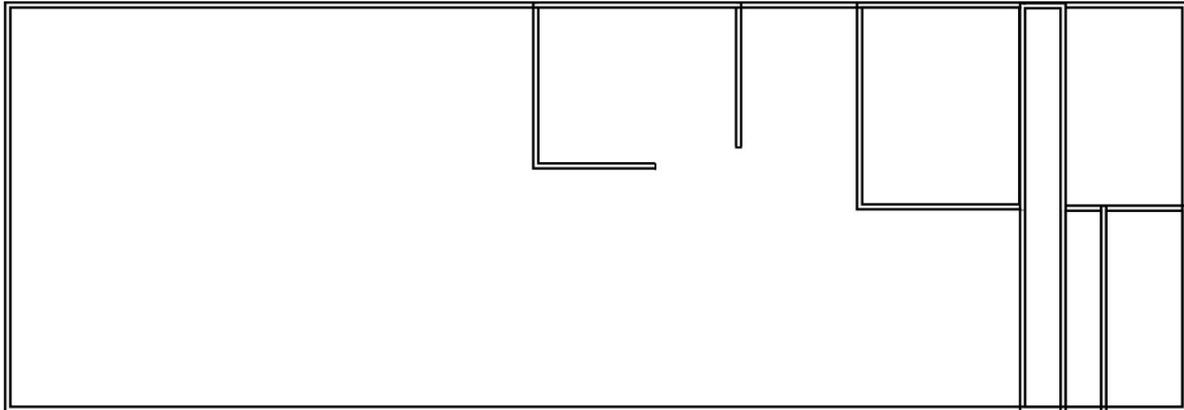
Whilst it cannot be ruled out that this building may have been a dwelling house in the Roman period, the GPR survey has also revealed some interesting internal structures (see Figure 3 below).

The layout is similar to the urban buildings excavated at Watling Court in London (see Figure 4 below). Given the structure's location close to the river, the ford, the mill, the possible pits which were picked up by the earlier what's it called? survey [give details], and the industrial area which existed in this locality in the Roman era (see Hertfordshire Historic Environment Record numbers 10493, 10538 and 10539), it is possible to suggest that the building revealed by the GPR survey may be a series of workshops or structures designed for trade. If this is the case then it is a very rare discovery and sheds important light on what was going on in Batford in this period. Cartographic evidence seems to suggest the Batford and the River Lea was a landscape of connected places and spaces. The pre-Medieval landscape seems to be characterised by roads and drove ways connecting Batford and the River Lea to the wider network of roads, settlements and drove ways.



**Figure 3 (left):** A slice from the GPR survey showing possible internal features. Features of interest are highlighted. Not to scale.

**Figure 4 (bottom):** A plan of an early Roman building found at excavations at Watling Court, London, in the 1980s. These buildings were commonly used as shops and workshops and date to the first to second century AD. Important to highlight here is the long thin corridor to the right (after Millet 1992: 111). Not to scale.



Should this structure be a Roman industrial building then it is also important to consider the deneholes nearby and the discovery which was made during the same GPR survey. A series of traverses over these depressions produced evidence of the existence of a possible shaft which extends down from the entrance of one of the holes. This and other circumstantial evidence (such as the pits mentioned above) suggests that there may be tunnels beneath. However, mining activity in the immediate area adds weight to the hypothesis that in the pre-Medieval period the area around Batford Mill was a hub of industrial activity. Further investigation is required.

The Ground Penetrating Radar survey results together with the documentary archive provide compelling evidence to suggest the building remains present beneath Batford Field are of an early date. If these features are brick built buildings and the documentary evidence does not provide evidence of a building of this size during a period when brick was favoured then the obvious conclusion would be to place a Roman (50AD – 400AD) date on these features.