



View of site in 2022

ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESK-BASED ASSESSMENT OF LAND AT MERE HOUSE, MEREWORTH, KENT, ME18 5NA

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Front cover: 2022 aerial photograph of the site

Figure 1. KCC mapping

Figure 2. OS Site Plan

Figure 3. LIDAR

MAP 1. Andrews & Dury, 1769

MAP 2. Ordnance Surveyors Drawing

MAP 3. Mereworth tithe map 1840

MAPS 4-6. OS mapping

Plates 1-3. Aerial Photographs

Plates 4-12. Site photographs

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 In June 2023 Rebecca Parr carried out a rapid archaeological desk-based assessment for SWAT Archaeology of available data on land at Mere House, Mereworth in Kent.

1.2 Historic mapping, aerial photographs and the HER records were studied and shows that little by way of archaeological activity has been recorded within 500m of the proposed development area (PDA).

1.3 The principal elements of the archaeological survey involved the creation of a record and description of any known archaeological and historical sites within the environs of the PDA together with an analysis and interpretation of the site's origins and historic development.

1.5 A review of Historic OS mapping has been made and the Pevsner Architectural Guide (*Kent, East and East Kent 2012*) was consulted as was the National Heritage Register for England.

1.6 This report consists of a descriptive report accompanied by aerial photographs and annotated plans and maps.

2.0 HISTORICAL/ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

2.1 Location

The Proposed Development Area (PDA) is in the village of Mereworth, which is west of Maidstone (Figure 2). The historic core of the village lies to the east, north east where the church of St Lawrence and the estate of Mereworth castle to the south east of the church and circa east of the PDA in an area known as The Cross. The PDA is Mere House, a Grade II listed building set in extensive grounds. To the west of the village was the estate of Yotes.

2.2 Historic Background

Based on historical mapping it appears that the house was previously called The Rectory.

Hasted a late 18th century historian, comments that:

“The parsonage-house lately stood at a small distance north-eastward from Mereworth-house; but obstructing the view from the front of it, the late lord le Despencer obtained a faculty to pull the whole of it down, and to build a new one of equal dimensions, and add to it a glebe of equal quantity to that of the scite and appurtenances of the old parsonage, in exchange. Accordingly, the old parsonage was pulled down in 1779, and a new one erected on a piece of land allotted for the purpose about a quarter of a mile westward from the church, for the residence of the rector of Mereworth and his successors.”

Mereworth House mentioned above is now known as Mereworth Castle. The PDA house, Mere House, is exactly one quarter of a mile from the church and given its previous name as The Parsonage or The Rectory, it can be assumed the PDA and the building referred to above are one and the same.

Additional research identified that Thomas Scheemakers a sculptor was apparently an architect as well. In 1779 Lord Le Despencer of Mereworth Castle engaged him to design the portico for the Parsonage House at Mereworth, Kent. (<https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/term/BIOG45272>).

The KCC HER map (Figure 1) shows that the majority of HER records are for listed buildings located in and around the village of Mereworth. The PDA, Mere House, being one of those listed buildings (The Rectory - TQ 65 SE 253). In addition, within the PDA is recognition of the landscape at Mere House (TQ 65 SE 275).

Due to the building’s designation as a heritage asset, this will be covered by a separate Heritage Statement.

2.3 Historic mapping

A rapid map assessment of OS historic mapping shows that in the Andrews Dury map of 1769 (MAP 1) the area of the PDA was open fields being part of the wider agricultural landscape belonging to Mereworth Castle and is prior to the building of the present house around 1780. By 1797, MAP 2 shows the present building in place with the lake to the south. In the wider area to the east is Mereworth Castle and to the west at Yotes Place, both sites show extensive landscaped gardens. There is no indication on this drawing that that is the case at the PDA. To confirm the building as The Rectory (designated 271) the tithe map (MAP 3) from 1840 shows the landowner and occupier is The Honourable and Reverend Sir Francis Stapleton Baronet (Glebe). Around the house, the tithe map shows

paths. Land designated 270 north of the house is referred to in the tithe as the Upper Garden and area designated 268 is listed as 'paddock, stables and garden'. With area 267 described as a pond. Area designated 269 is the thin strip on the north-south axis, adjacent to the PDA as is called 'The Walk'. The area beyond this to the east is under separate ownership.

The 1867 OS historical mapping (MAP 4) shows little changes with the path around the house remaining and any gardens around the house appearing informal except for the area to the north of the house known as the Upper Garden, which appears more formally laid out. There appears a change in 1895 (MAP 5), whereby the footprint of the house suggests that it was extended on the southern side. By 1938, adjacent to the north west of the house is now a separated rectangular area of unknown use (MAP 6).

The 1946 AP shows this rectangular area which does not appear to be in any different use compared to the area around (Plate 1). The PDA on the eastern side of the house appears grassland with lines possible representing informal paths. The area to the north of the house contains more trees. The 1960s aerial photograph (Plate 2) shows changes in the area north east of the house with what appears to be a nursery, vegetable growing area. This was possibly created following the loss of the area known as the Upper Garden to the north which has been separated from the PDA and now contains a new vicarage. It was probably in this period the Mere House changed its name from that of The Rectory. East of the house at the southern end of the new area mentioned above is the rectangular structure which is located north of that of the present pool. It is unclear what this is. Plate 3 from 1990 shows the nursery area which the structure now covered by trees. South of this area a new pool has been built and the area of the nursery no longer in use and grassed over. Only the extreme northern part of this area has continued in use as a fruit and vegetable growing area as seen in plate 12.

3.0 ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

3.1 The PDA sits within an area of High Archaeological Potential. The HER records show that HER record in the study area is dominated by listed buildings and scattered farmsteads. The below ground archaeology in Mereworth is sparse and is likely due to the lack of archaeological opportunities to investigate. Regarding below ground archaeology, there is one record circa 800m to the

south west in the ground of Mereworth Castle was found in Antiquity a Roman Barrow site (TQ 65 SE 4).

3.2 The garden at Mere House is in the Kent HER as a landscape record (TQ 65 SE 275). The Kent Garden Compendium Survey from 1997 provides the following information concerning the garden from when it was surveyed in 1993. They record the garden as period II, which is Non historic 1939-1960. It was recognised as an informal/romantic/naturalistic garden with importance of 2/3 (2 = of country/Local interest and importance; 3 = Specialist Interest only (plants/features)). Overall, the survey granted an Entry/Grade in Kent Survey of Moderate Importance.

3.3 The HER listing provides the following timelines:

1837 to 1901: Victorian garden laid out.

1958: Additional garden laid out.

1987 to 1997: Earthwork bund created to reduce road noise.

3.4 There is a large perimeter bund on the southern and western edges of the park, which is well away from the PDA. The bund measures 400 metres x 80 metres x 2.5 to 8 metres high. It was created to reduce road noise and is now planted with trees and is on the southern side of the large pond. It is thought to be the largest private earthwork in Kent. The Victorian Garden appears to have been one of extensive lawns with the odd tree. The additional large walled garden nursery area laid out in 1958 to the north east of the house no longer exists in use except for a small area at its northern end as seen in the aerial photographs. Several trees have grown in that area immediately north of the swimming pool and a hedge added.

3.5 The LIDAR (Figure 3), shows disturbance in the area just to the north of the current pond and identifiable is the existing small rectangular feature of the existing pool equipment. The raised paving around the current swimming pool also shows up. South of the house the rectangular area that is showing as flat with no features and is the location of the croquet lawn. The LIDAR also highlights the banks around the house where the house sits at the lower ground level. The area of LIDAR in the far north of the PDA also shows disturbance from the use of this area for fruit and vegetable growing.

4.0 DISCUSSION

4.1 The design and access statement list a number of proposals concerning the house and for a new pool house. The proposed pool house is located in an area immediately north of the existing swimming pool that currently contains a much smaller pool equipment shed. This area consists of a number of trees/hedges that have grown since. Consequently, it is unlikely that there is any archaeology in-situ. Any features from the time of the modern nursery section of the garden would be considered of low/local significance.

4.2 With regards to the ground level house alternations, these are considered in turn.

i) The additional of new proposed steps to the front elevation either side to the main entrance from ground level to the lower ground floor (Plate 6).

ii) Proposed patio on the rear of the property reducing the sloping grass banks and the addition of steps on the north east and south east corners and lowering the grass level of the adjacent lawn (Plates 7-10).

iii) Proposed masonry steps and landing platform at the base of the exiting bridge for the lower ground floor access (Plate 10).

4.3 The proposed works around the house are in areas that would have been archaeologically disturbed during the construction of the house. It is likely that the lawn levels were also altered and laid out during this time. With the excess soil from the lower ground levels. Consequently, it is unlikely that there will be any archaeology in situ in the area immediately around the house. In addition, the garden in 1958 was laid out informally and naturistically and therefore it is unlikely that there will be garden features from that time in the area of the lawn. To the north east in the area previously used in the 1960s as a plant/vegetable area, which is no longer in use there would have been low level disturbance from the cultivation as well as brick foundations from now demolished greenhouses.

4.4 The need for, scale, scope, and nature of any further assessment and/or archaeological works should be agreed through consultation with the statutory authorities should they be required.

5.0 PARAMETERS

5.1 The archaeological survey was conducted using on-line data from Historic England and other agencies.

Rebecca Parr, PCIfA. Dated 7th June 2023



Figure 1. HER mapping (site outlined in red)

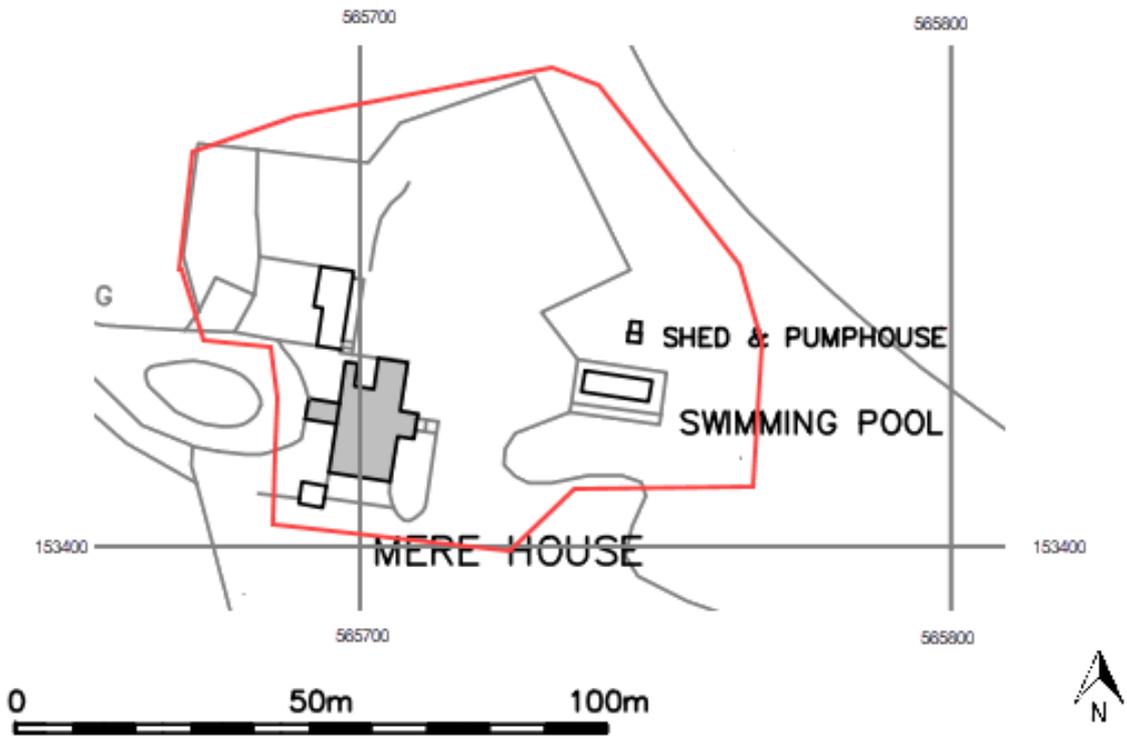


Figure 2. OS mapping (site outlined in red)

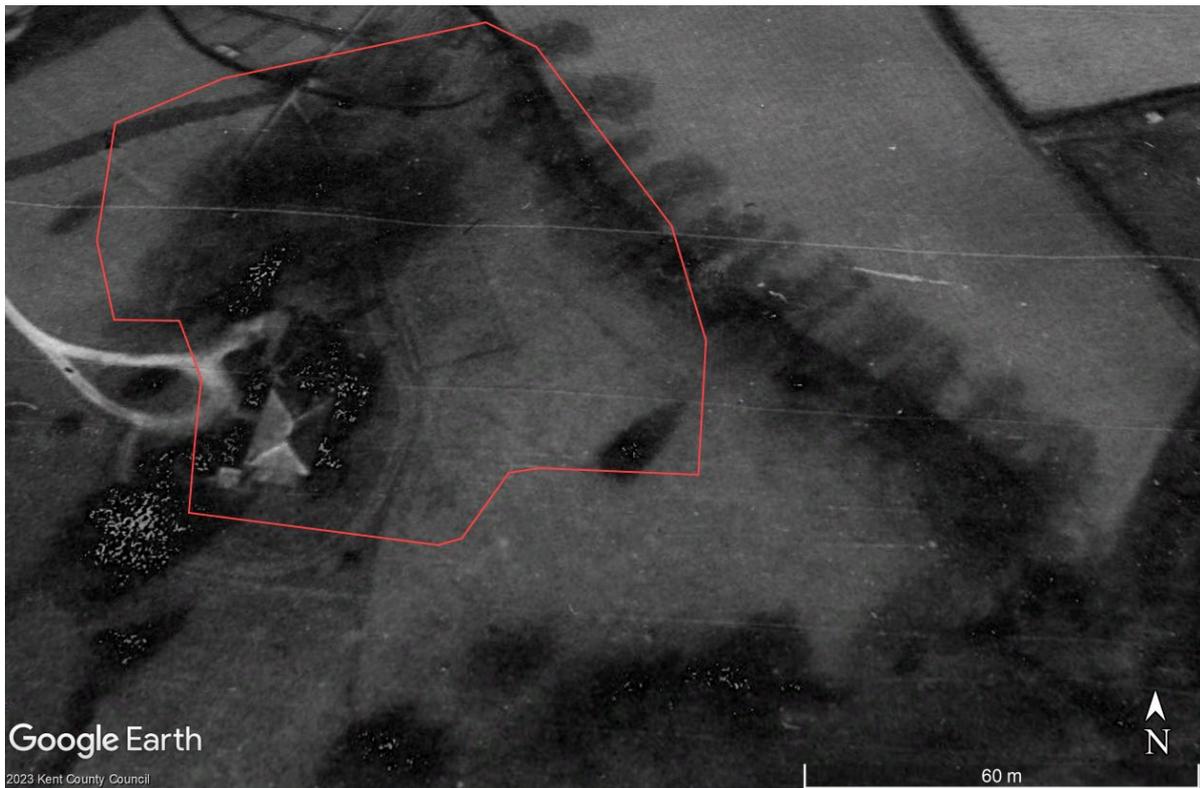


Plate 1. Aerial c.1946 showing extent of site.



Plate 2. Aerial c. 1960 showing site.



Plate 3: Aerial photograph c. 1990



Plate 4. View of Site (looking east)



Plate 5: Existing pool equipment shed.



Plate 6: Location of proposed ground floor steps at the front of the house



Plate 7: Location of curved steps of new patio in south east corner



Plate 8: Southern end of new patio



Plate 9: Area of proposed new patio, rear of the house



Plate 10: Area of proposed new patio



Plate 11: Towards the pool area from the walled garden



Plate 12: vegetable area at the northern end of the walled garden

HISTORICAL MAPPING



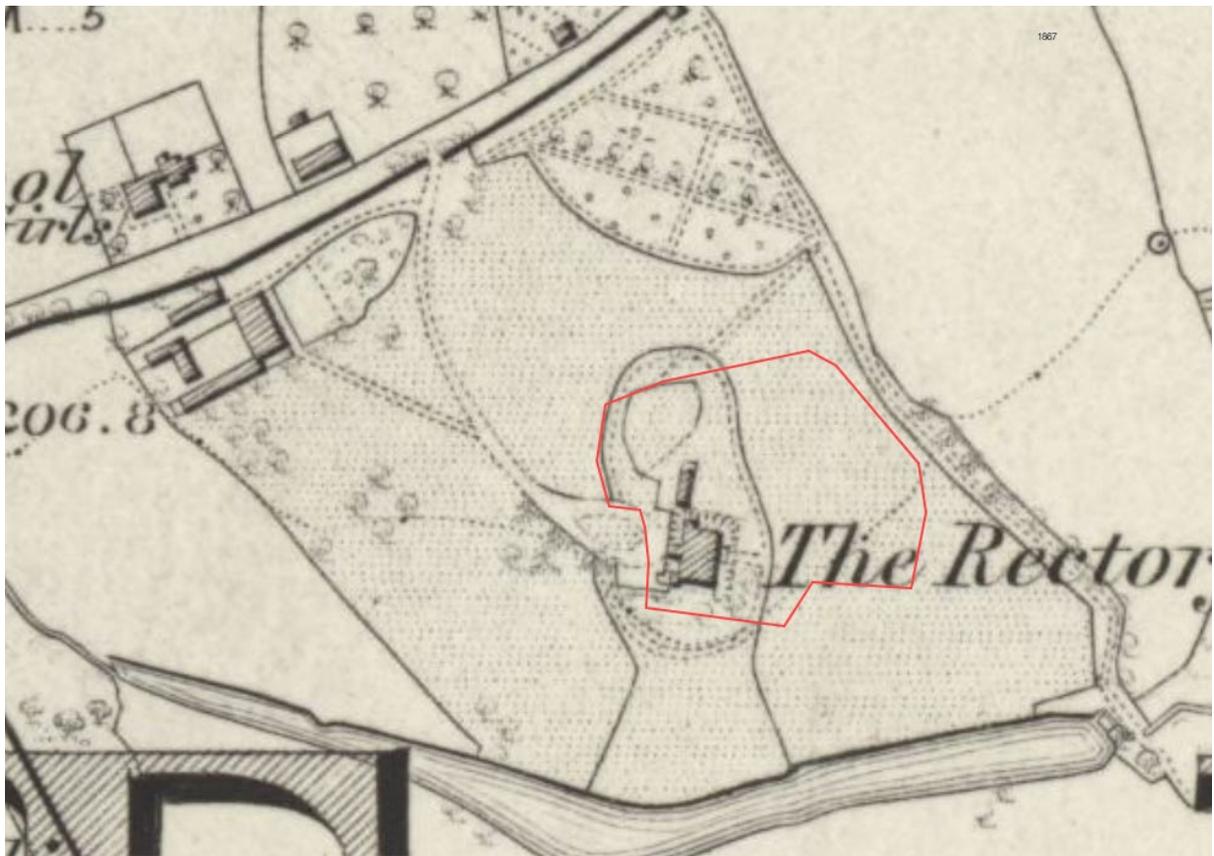
MAP 1. Andrews Dury map of 1769



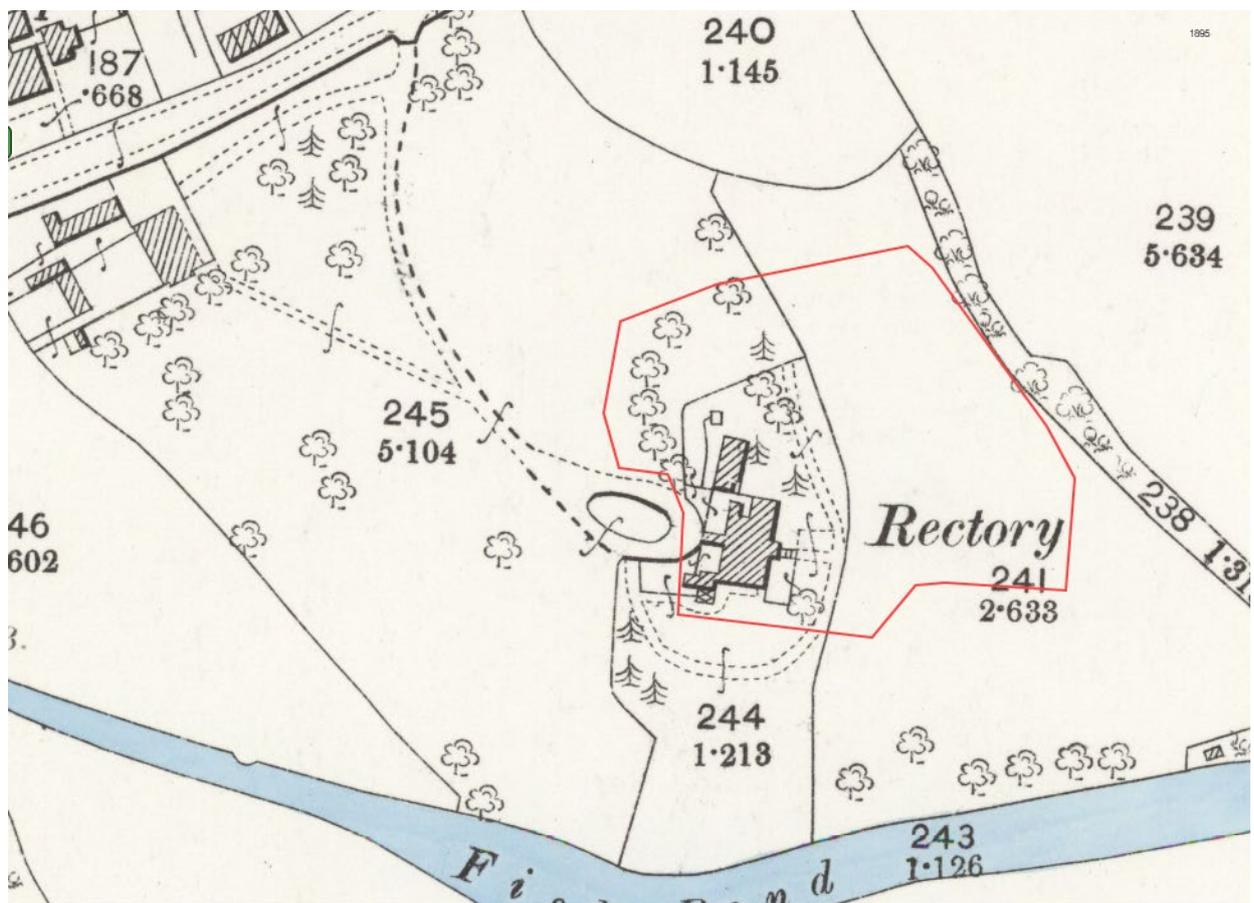
MAP 2: 1797 Ordnance Surveyors Drawing



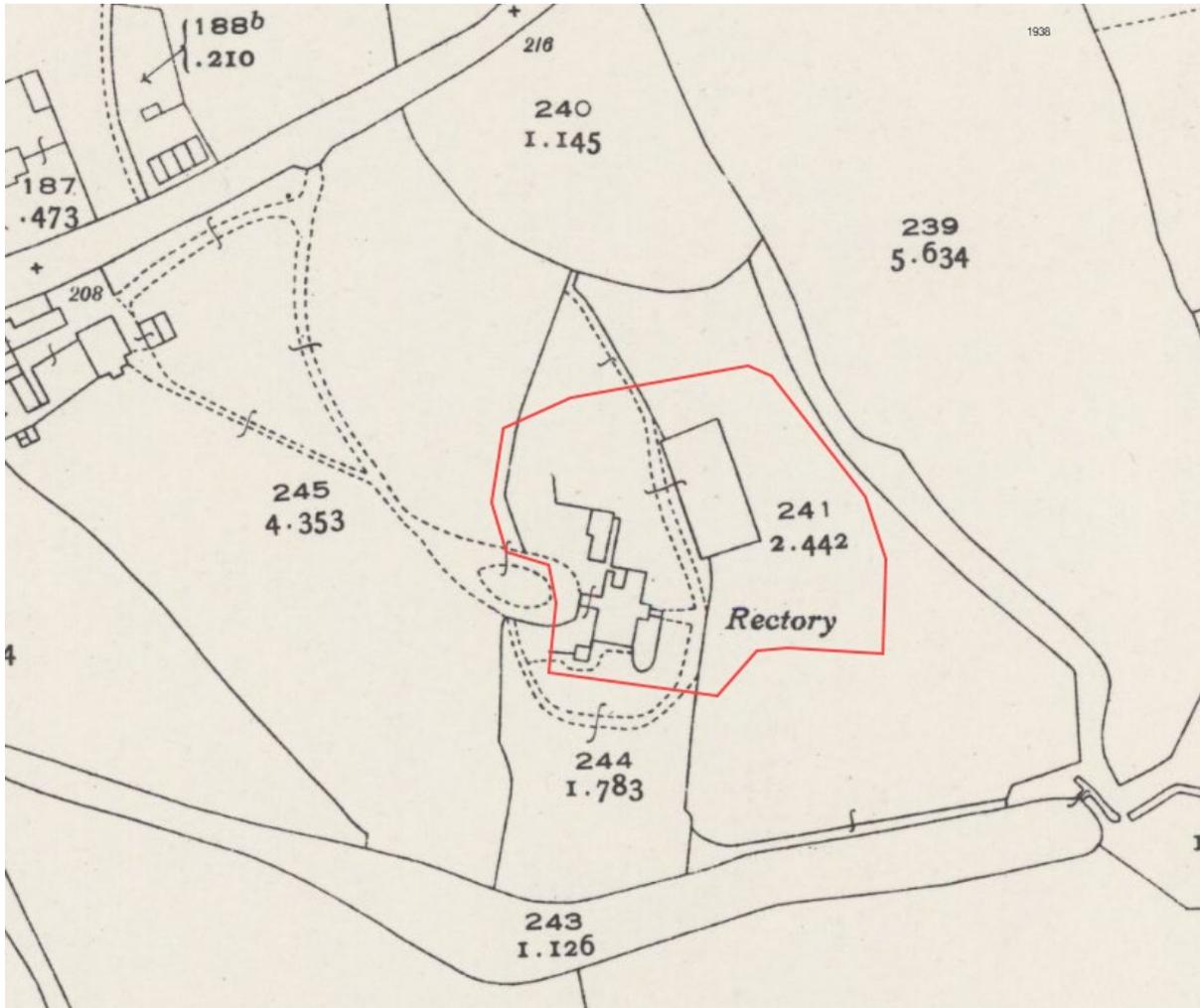
MAP 3: Mereworth tithe map 1840



MAP 4. OS map of 1867



MAP 5. OS map of 1896



MAP 6. OS map of 1938



Figure 3: LIDAR 1m DTM (Environment Agency)