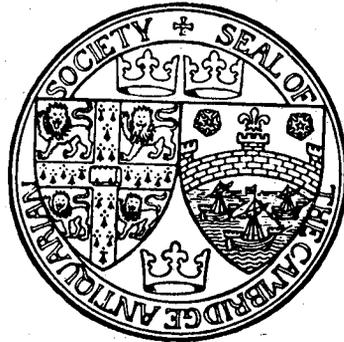

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(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

Volume LXXX

for 1991



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A Relict Garden at Linton, Cambridgeshire

A.E. Brown & C.C. Taylor

In March 1987, the writers carried out a survey of the so-called fishponds at Little Linton farm, Linton, Cambridgeshire. The work was done by students attending a course in archaeological field survey run jointly by the Department of Adult Education, Leicester University, and the Cambridge University Board of Extra-Mural Studies. The landowner, Mr S. Taylor, not only willingly granted permission for the survey but gave considerable help and encouragement to the project throughout.

The alleged fishponds at Little Linton lie in the valley of the Linton branch of the River Cam, immediately adjacent to this river on gravel at 12m above O.D. They are situated immediately to the north of a small sub-rectangular medieval moated site, itself 80m north-east of Little Linton farmhouse (Fig. 1).

The site consists of a small rectangular island surrounded by two concentric rectangular ditches and now almost totally obscured by trees and undergrowth. The ditches are normally marshy, except in the north-western corner where there is a small area of standing water. The island, only 24m x 10m, is flat-topped and has in its centre some fragmentary wall foundations in 19th-century brick, associated with a paved area of similar bricks and considerable quantities of Welsh roofing slates. Its surrounding ditch is between 14m and 17m across and 1.5m deep. This ditch is crossed by three causeways, two on the west side and one in the south-eastern corner, all of which appear to be secondary features. Beyond this ditch is a flat-topped bank, 8m across on the north and between 3m and 5m wide elsewhere. A shallow ditch across its west side near the north-western corner is probably recent. Beyond this lies the outer ditch, 17m wide and up to 2m deep. Immediately to the north is a small rectangular depression or former pond with a shallow extension to the

west. There is no indication of how water entered or left the ditches.

The 1st and 2nd editions of the Ordnance Survey 25-inch plan (1886 and 1903) show the site, in outline, much as described above, but with the ditches water-filled (Fig. 1). However, only one of the causeways across the inner ditch, that on the south-west, is depicted. In addition, a small rectangular building, 2m by 2.5m overall, is shown in the centre of the island. This was presumably a summer-house, now represented by the brick foundations. Another similar-sized structure stood on the outer edge of the outer ditch near its south-western corner. Local tradition claims that this was a boat-house. The Ordnance Survey plan also marks 'sluice' on the outer ditch on the south side and another opposite on the northern edge of the main medieval moat. These are no longer visible but are said to have been linked by a brick culvert, apparently enabling water to enter the site from the moat to the south.

The only other notable feature of the site is the existence, within the relatively recent tree-cover and undergrowth, of seventeen very large yew trees. Their age is unknown but where still standing upright they comprise trunks of some 0.5–0.75m in diameter made up of as many as four separate linked trunks which spring from the ground level. The position of these trees may be significant. Three stand on the central island, all close to the corners. The north-western one, though still alive, has fallen and may have been slightly displaced by the construction of the causeway to its north. A further eleven yews stand on the intermediate bank, ten of which are set on its outer edge and one on the inner. Another three stand on the outer edge of the outer ditch on the north and west. The land to the west of the site is now divided between parts of two paddocks, both

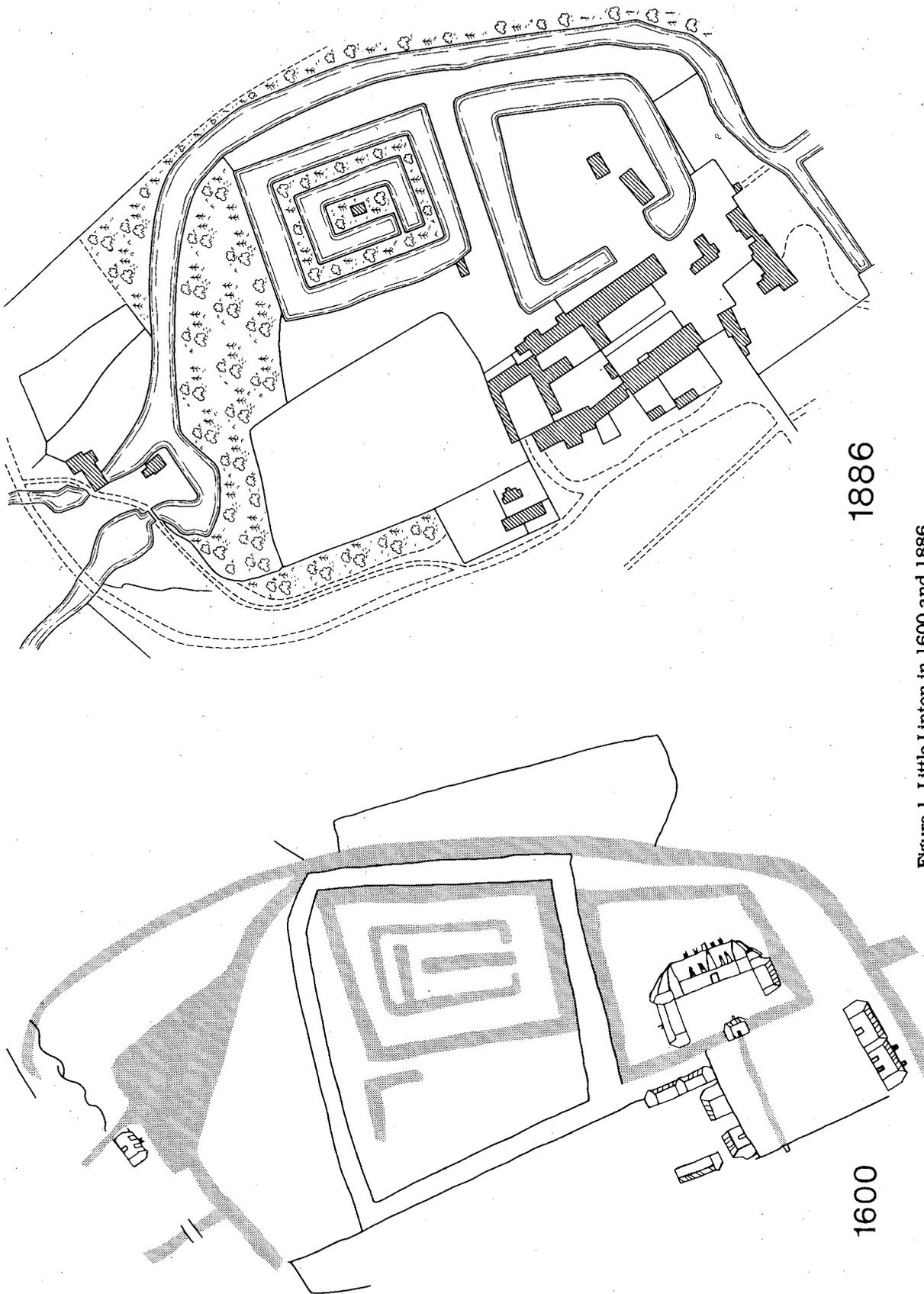


Figure 1. Little Linton in 1600 and 1886.

overgrown and featureless apart from the dividing hedge. This situation already obtained in 1886.

Though described on Ordnance Survey maps and plans as 'moats' and interpreted by the VCH (1948, 35) as fishponds, there can be no doubt that the site here described is a former garden though, as with most 'water gardens', it also presumably functioned as a fishpond as well. The flat central island and more particularly the flat-topped banks are all carefully constructed to be exactly level and so to form walkways or terraces of a form now well-known from the earthwork remains of gardens (RCHME 1982: Grafton Regis (62) and Thorpe Mandeville (3)). The yew trees, too, may well be part of a formal arrangement of this garden and may be the last overgrown remnants of either low hedges along the lips of the ditches or alternatively, but perhaps less likely, former individual bushes cut as topiary. The function of this site is therefore clear. The only problem that remains is to assign a date to the garden. This, however, poses considerable difficulties. Though gardens of this type are wellknown and documented, their date range is very extensive and hardly helps with the Linton site. Perhaps the earliest is that at Peterborough Abbey, apparently constructed in 1302 by Abbot Godfrey, which survived long enough to be depicted on a plan of 1721. Godfrey 'made a beautiful herber . . . and surrounded it with double moats, with bridges and pear-trees and very lovely plants, costing £25'. Judging by the 1721 plan, it consisted of a small rectangular central island, approximately 30m by 20m, on which, apparently, lay the herbarium. This was surrounded by a ditch or moat which was in turn encompassed by a bank planted with trees. Beyond this was an outer ditch whose edges were also tree-planted. Access to the island and an inner bank was by two bridges across the ditches in the centre of the north side. Associated with this garden or herbarium were various rectangular ponds to the south, described in 1721 as fishponds and having the general appearance of medieval fish stews (Harvey 1981: 12, 84). Though somewhat larger than the site at Linton, this Peterborough garden is almost identical in shape and layout.

A similar site is that at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire. The already elaborate gardens and pools there were enhanced by Henry V in 1417 by the construction of a pleasure in the marsh beyond the main lake. This was a much larger affair than at either Linton or Peterborough. A central square island, just over

1 ha (2.5 acres) in extent, contained a banqueting house. This was surrounded by a moat, a medial bank or terrace and an outer moat. The latter was connected to the lake by a water channel. By 1463, labourers were working on 'le aleyes', thus indicating that it was still being maintained as a garden (Harvey 1981: 106–7).

Another site, very similar in size and appearance, is that at Strensham, in Worcestershire (National Archaeological Record, Southampton, SO 94 SW 6). This also has a small rectangular central island 29m by 31m, surrounded by a broad ditch 12–19m across, beyond which is a rectangular flat-topped bank, an outer ditch 18–19m wide and traces of a further outer walkway. It, too, has had a stone building of some type on the island. The major difference between this site and the others described above is that the inner walkway or terrace swells out on the corners to produce what are, in effect, flat-topped angle-bastions of military form. Despite these bastions there is no doubt that the site is a former garden, the bastions being typical of other garden sites, notably at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire (Everson 1989, 109–21), and at Takley, Oxfordshire (Markham 1614, 64). Both the latter date from the early 17th century. The Strensham site is completely undated but was certainly abandoned in the mid-17th century. On the other hand, its bastioned corners can hardly be earlier than the mid-16th century (Adams 1979: figs 30 and 33).

Perhaps contemporary was the garden at Gorhambury, Hertfordshire, created by Francis Bacon in 1608. Strong (1979: 127, fig. 80) attempted to interpret Bacon's description of this garden. The whole garden was set within a square, walled enclosure bounded on the outside by birch and lime trees. Within it was first a walkway or perhaps a terrace 25ft (7m) wide, then a 'stream' or perhaps a moat, followed by a bank and second walkway also 25ft across and bordered by lilies. Within this was a square 'lake' enclosed by gilt balustrading. A bridge then spanned the lake to a central island, 100ft (30m) across, on which stood a building with a gallery, a supper room, a bedroom, a cabinet and a music room as well as a garden. Sir Roy Strong's interpretive diagram makes the central island circular, but it could equally well have been square. If so, it is almost identical in form to the gardens at Peterborough and Linton. The only difference seems to be that the 'lake' was perhaps wider than a mere moat for it contained six smaller

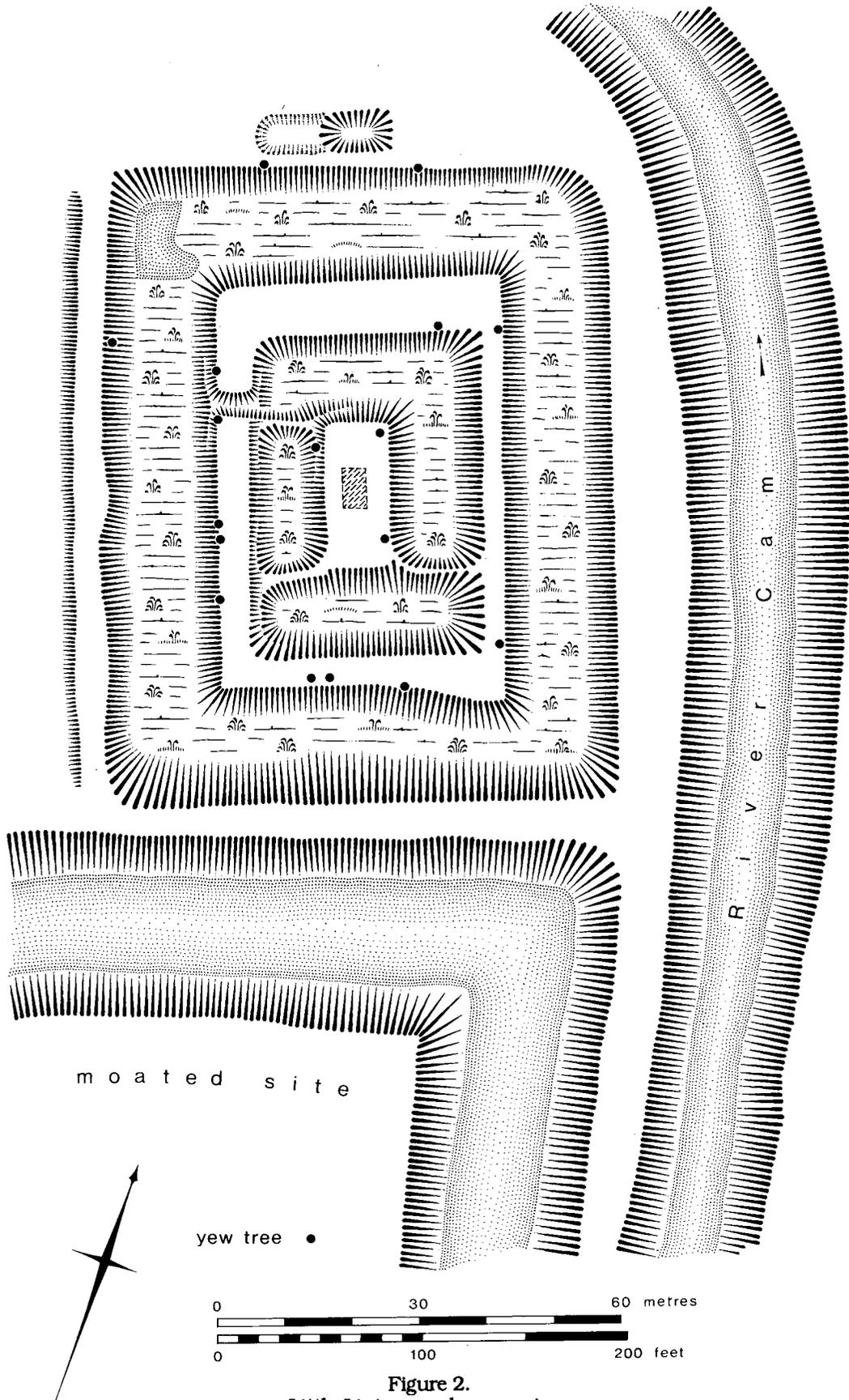


Figure 2.
Little Linton garden remains.

islands each supporting a statue of a nymph or triton and with a tree, a rock, a grotto, a mound of flower beds and a rose arbour respectively.

Another example is the surviving site at Bindon Abbey, Wool, Dorset. There, adjacent to the ruins of the medieval Cistercian abbey, is a complex of ditched features which includes a double moated site of just under 1 ha in extent, whose central island contains a penannular ditch enclosing a large double mound or prospect mound 26m in diameter and 3m high. Though these ditches may originally have been monastic fishponds, in their present form they almost certainly date from some time between 1539 when the abbey was dissolved and 1640 when the house that succeeded it was burnt down and abandoned. Documentary references to this house have indicated a date of around 1608 for the construction of what must be a water garden (RCHME 1970: Wool (3) and (43); Hutchins 1861: 353). That generally similar, but by no means identical, 'water gardens' were still being constructed later in the 17th century is clear from such places as the remarkable gardens and fishponds at Takley, Oxfordshire, which are based on a plan by Gervase Markham in 1614, the spiral walkways within the water garden of 1610 which survives at Chipping Campden, Gloucestershire (Everson 1989, 115–16), and at a number of sites in Cambridgeshire (RCHME 1968, Croyden (14); Brown and Taylor 1978, 65–7).

These examples indicate that both the general and specific form of the Linton garden has parallels ranging in date from the early 14th century to the early 17th century. Indeed, moated gardens of a generally similar type were constructed much later than this as can be seen in a local instance at Longstowe, Cambridgeshire. The rectangular single-ditched 'moat' in the garden there was actually constructed in the late 19th century (RCHME 1968, Longstowe (13)).

The Linton site itself cannot, however, be as late as this. It certainly existed as a garden in 1771–2, when the site was described as 'summerhouse, boathouse, land, orchard and fishpond' (Cambridge County Record Office (CRO) R59/5/9/166–8). It has been claimed that these 'fishponds' were constructed in 1717 (VCH 1948, 35) but this cannot be so, for the site is depicted on a map of Linton of 1600 (Fig. 1; copy in Cambridge University Library and in CRO). In detail, the map shows the medieval moat, then still complete, its island occupied by a large building, U-shaped in plan, and presumably the late medieval manor house. To the north, and set within another rectangular area bounded by what may be a continuous or

more likely a double fence or hedge, the map shows somewhat crudely the outlines of the ditches of the garden, then apparently water-filled. The outer and inner ditches are clearly visible, as is the central island. However the island is shown with an axial north to south long pond in its centre and another extending across it from near the north-western corner. There also appears to be an entrance or causeway to the island from the medial bank on the south. An L-shaped pond is shown just beyond the north-western corner of the outer ditch.

Though in detail this 1600 map is at variance with the surviving earthworks, particularly with regard to the central island, the two are close enough to indicate that the ditches existed in 1600 much as they do today. The map also suggests that they formed the eastern two-thirds of an enclosed garden attached to the medieval moated manor house. Beyond this it is virtually impossible to date the Linton site. In 1600 the manor of Little Linton, together with that of Great Linton, was held by the Parys family. The Parys family had held Little Linton since the late 14th century and had certainly lived there from the late 15th century. But after the 1560s the family lived mainly at Pudding Norton in Norfolk (VCH 1978, 85–6). This would suggest that the gardens at Linton may date from before 1560 and are possibly late 15th- or early 16th-century in date. However, given that this type of garden existed much earlier elsewhere it could also have been built by the predecessors of the Parys family at Little Linton, the Huntingfields who held the manor between around 1310 and 1362, or even the Leicester family who held it between 1265 and around 1310. Certainly Roger de Leicester had a garden at Little Linton in 1279 (*Rotuli Hundredorum* 1818, 418), though of course this does not mean that it was the one under discussion here.

Whatever the date of the construction of the Linton garden, it presumably continued to be used as a garden until relatively recently. The yews may possibly relate to a 16th- or 17th-century usage. It certainly contained a summer-house and boat-house in the late 18th century and a different summer-house and presumably different boat-house in the late 19th century. Only in the last century or so has it been abandoned.

At present, therefore, there can be no certainty as to the date or details of the development of this Linton garden. All that can be said is that, whatever the exact period of its construction, the identification of the remains as a formal garden can make a small, but

perhaps significant, contribution to the study of garden history and archaeology.

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