

BODIAM CASTLE, SUSSEX (Fig. 4)

The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, at the request of the National Trust, has recently carried out a survey of the remarkable earthworks that surround Bodiam Castle, Sussex (TQ 785256).¹ The purpose of this note is partly to publish the result but also to present the problem of interpretation which the work has generated.

The history of the castle itself is well known. It was constructed by Sir Edward Dalingridge in 1385, allegedly replacing an earlier manorial residence still marked by a moated site lying almost 1 km to the north. Dalingridge was a person of some substance who not only assisted Edward III in the French wars but served as a member of ten parliaments and was Keeper of the Tower of London and Governor of the City in 1392–93.

The manor of Bodiam passed to the Lewknor family in 1470 and Sir Thomas Lewknor's Lancastrian leanings led to the siege and capture of the castle in 1483 and to its subsequent forfeiture. The Lewknors were restored to their lands by the Tudor succession until the failure of the male line in the 1540s led to the division of the manor. From then on the castle and its lands passed through a number of hands but there is no direct evidence for the use of the castle as a residence by any of the later owners. This assessment is confirmed both by the absence in the fabric of evidence for later adaptation as well as the range of material finds made in excavations there.

The Commission's survey has established without doubt that the majority of the extensive earthworks around the castle are the remains of elaborate gardens and water features all intended to enhance the visual appearance of the building. The problem lies in assigning a date to them.

The castle itself is, of course, surrounded by a broad moat. Though access is now via a bridge and outer barbican from the north, there were originally two entrances. One from the N. end of the W. side via a bridge to the outer barbican and thence to the principal N. gate, and the other from the centre of the S. side across a bridge to the postern gate. The castle stands slightly to the S. side of the centre of the moat and the wide N. end of the latter is not only wedge-shaped but effectively forms part of a string of ponds once extending up the hillside to the NW. and to the E. The two ponds to the W. are both badly damaged by recent activity. They occupy a natural valley, were both also wedge-shaped and have traces of terraced walk-ways on both sides. A third pond lies to the E. of the moat and is now also badly damaged. A further pond may have existed to the S. again, but this area has been used for dumping spoil dredged from the moat on at least two occasions in the present century. Other water features lie to the S. of the castle. The most substantial is the large former pond latterly known as The Tiltyard, which is possibly a remodelling of a medieval mill-pond documented in 1386. To the E. and separated from this pond by a large flat-topped bank is a smaller pond previously interpreted as a medieval harbour. Though it has been altered, certainly at its S. end, in this century, there can be no doubt that it has always been a pond and could never have been connected to the river. To the N. of this pond, between it and the dam of the castle moat, is an area of disturbed earthworks. The site is alleged to be that of a water-mill but a much better interpretation is that it is the site of a bridge crossing a watercourse which led to yet another, smaller, pond to its E.

The castle and its moat thus form the centre of an elaborate modification of the whole landscape involving the creation of a number of ponds and sheets of water whose positioning has an ornamental impact. More interestingly it is also clear that this modification was at least partly connected with the manipulation of visitors around the site to experience views whose components continually change. Thus, the main approach to the castle from the W. would have been along the S. side of The Tiltyard pond, giving distant views of the castle across water, thence along the causeway between ponds where only the upper part of the castle was visible, and crossing between further areas of water over a bridge. At this point the climb to the moat dam must have had, indeed still has, a dramatic effect, as the whole castle seems to rise up out of its moat. The visitor, if not using the postern gate, was then directed E. along the moat dam, then N. along the moat and the one or perhaps two ponds to the E. and finally back W. on the northern edge of the moat. At the NW. corner of the moat the approach

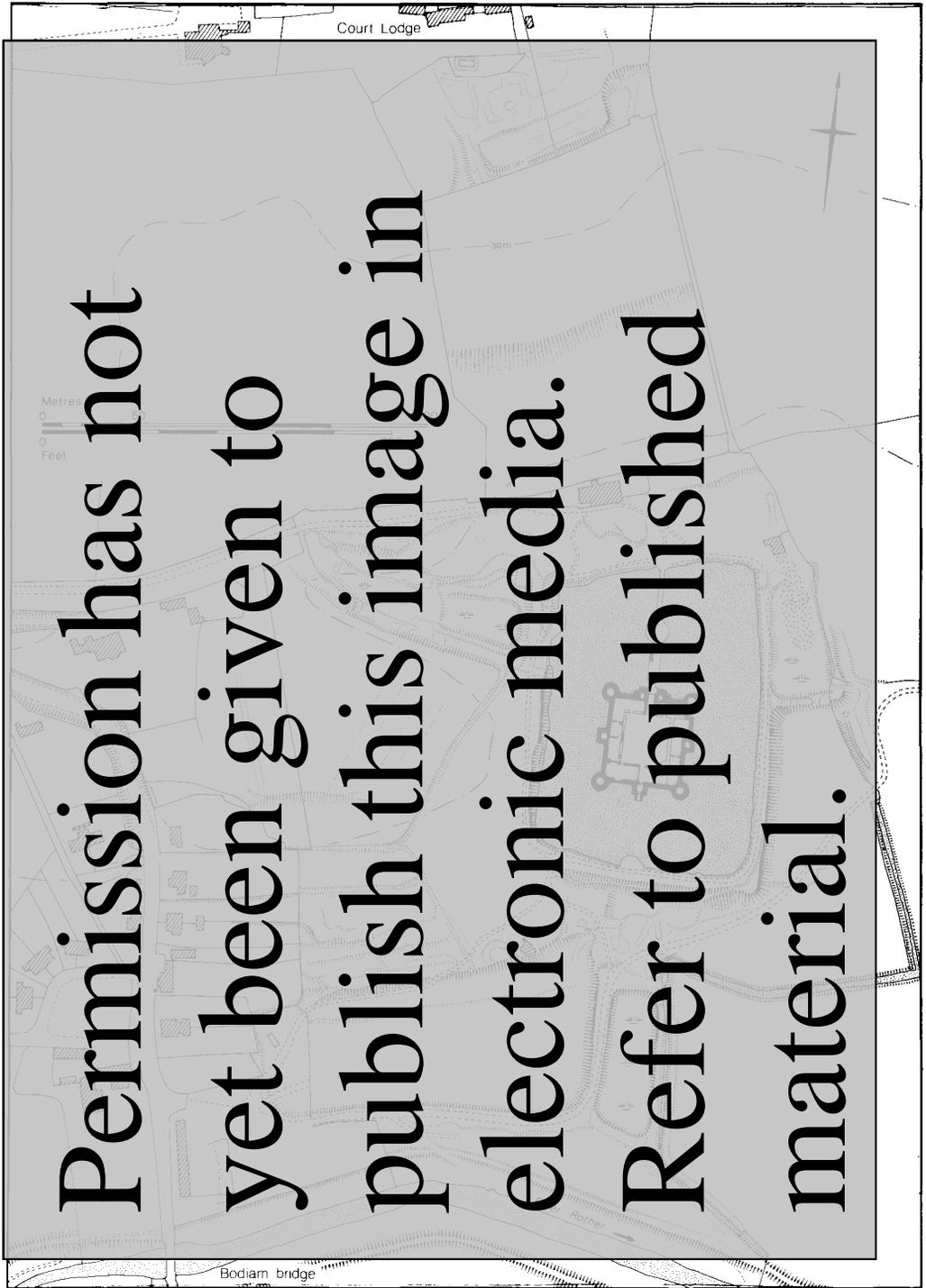


FIG. 4

Plan of Bodiam Castle and earthworks (redrawn for publication by P. M. Sinton; R.C.H.M.E. copyright)

road turned again between the moat and the two ponds to the W. and finally crossed the moat in two stages to reach the main gate of the castle.

Yet this highly contrived approach is only one element of the landscape of Bodiam Castle. On the crest of the high ridge to the N. of the castle, and some 30 m vertically above it, is an earthwork known as the Gun Garden, variously interpreted as part of a 17th-century military work or, following limited excavations in 1961, as a medieval building platform. It lies adjacent to the present Court Lodge, whose predecessor is shown on maps of 1671 and 1730 as well as on a late 18th-century engraving as a late 16th- or early 17th-century remodelling of an earlier fairly modest vernacular structure. The earthworks are now somewhat disturbed but in essence consist of broad terraces backed by what may be the sites of a building or buildings. Whatever the date of the feature (and the 'medieval' dating was the result of a very restricted excavation of the site) it is obviously ornamental and grand in scale. It is most likely to have been a garden or a pleasance containing buildings and other features but it surely must have also functioned as a viewing platform for the landscaped setting of the castle below. Whether it stood as a completely separate feature or was physically linked to the castle is now unclear. The general elongated form of the field between it and the castle suggests the latter though the present boundaries are merely hedges. The only hint lies in a long cross-scarp half-way up the field, now much degraded by ploughing.

Other earthworks recorded by the Commission notably to the W. and SW. of the main moat are not part of the contrived landscape of the castle. The terraced closes N. of The Tiltyard pond are the abandoned eastern ends of village tofts which still exist to the W. The long ditches and scarps to the NE. are the remains of a former hedge surrounding a field still in existence as late as 1898. Within it are traces of ridge-and-furrow as well as modern drainage channels.

In summary, therefore, the earthworks surrounding Bodiam Castle form an elaborate and contrived setting for the building of a coherence not previously perceived. Most striking is the use of sheets of water to create a staged landscape, not only to be passed through but to be viewed from above. Such contrivances are most familiar in both the general documentation and the physical remains of later 16th- and 17th-century gardens in England. Here might be a very Spenserian fantasy landscape. Yet in detail the documentation does not suggest a plausible context for a garden at this date. Nothing later than the early 16th century seems possible while a 15th-century date is more likely. If indeed the whole landscape setting, encapsulated in these earthworks, is of late medieval date, it perhaps adds more conclusive weight than anything else to Hohler's assessment of Bodiam as 'an old soldier's dream house'.

C. TAYLOR, P. EVERSON and R. WILSON-NORTH

NOTES

¹ The survey was undertaken by the staff of R.C.H.M.E.'s Keele Office, Messrs P. Everson and R. Wilson-North with the assistance of D. Johnston. It was carried out within a base-line and traverse framework generated with Wild total stations equipment and plotted on a Calcomp 1042 GT drum plotter. Archaeological detail was supplied using normal graphic methods. The full archive has been deposited in the National Archaeological Record (NAR no. TQ 72 NE 1).

A LATE MEDIEVAL CAST COPPER-ALLOY STIRRUP FROM OLD ROMNEY, KENT (Fig. 5)

During 1989 a copper-alloy stirrup fragment was submitted for identification to the Department of Medieval and Later Antiquities, the British Museum, by Michael Hill, Esq. of 37 Rolfe Lane, New Romney, Kent. The item was recovered by means of a metal detector from a field adjacent to the Manor House at Old Romney (TR 035253). It was identified as a fragment of a D-shaped stirrup of cast copper-alloy; only the suspension loop and guard and a portion of the arm survive. The rectangular suspension loop for the stirrup-leather is