

BENINGBROUGH HALL,
NORTH YORKSHIRE
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY AND
INVESTIGATION OF THE POST-MEDIEVAL
PARK AND GARDENS

Abby Hunt



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Beningbrough Hall, North Yorkshire: an archaeological survey and investigation of the post-medieval park and gardens

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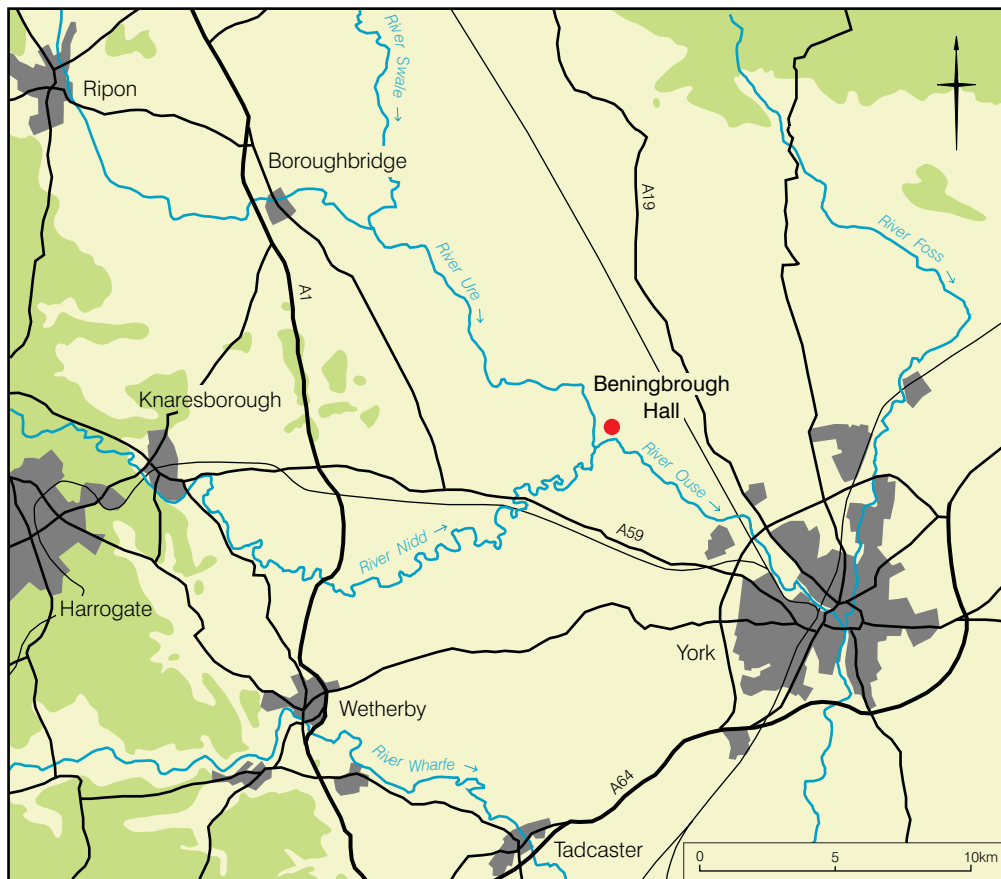
Summary

Between March and May 2006, English Heritage's Archaeological Survey and Investigation Team undertook an analytical field survey of a strip of former parkland to the south of Beningbrough Hall, North Yorkshire. The National Trust commissioned the survey in response to surface damage being caused by agricultural vehicles. The earthwork remains to the immediate south of Beningbrough Hall demonstrate the use of the land for agriculture, settlement and as part of a larger designed landscape. There was no obvious evidence for any pre-medieval activity, but fragmentary remains of ridge and furrow indicate that parts of this parkland were ploughed in the medieval period. The present Beningbrough Hall dates from 1716 and documentary evidence demonstrates that it had at least one predecessor, whose location is discussed. A c1720 sketch of the formal garden associated with the 1716 house still survives. Various slight earthworks relate to this and later garden schemes. A sinuous ha-ha established in the late 19th century, itself a modification of an earlier ha-ha, separates the present formal garden from former parkland beyond.

1. Introduction

In April and May of 2006, English Heritage carried out an archaeological investigation of part of the garden and former parkland to the south of Beningbrough Hall in North Yorkshire following a request from the National Trust. Beningbrough has been owned by the National Trust since 1958 and the house and gardens are open to the public. The Hall is protected as a Grade I listed building (LB 332094) and the surrounding grounds are on the English Heritage Parks and Gardens Register (reference 2059). The Hall is situated near the confluence of the Rivers Ouse and Nidd, on the inside of a bend in the River Ouse and at the edge of the floodplain, and its estate is bounded by that river on the west and south (Figure 1). The Hall lies 1.5km to the north-west of Beningbrough village, which lies on the northern bank of the Ouse.

The present Beningbrough Hall dates from 1716. It is known from documentary evidence to have had at least one predecessor, which is believed to have stood around 250m to the south-east of the present Hall, although its precise location is open to question, as discussed in this report. To the south of the Hall, a sinuous ha-ha (listed as LB 332101) separates a formal garden adjacent to the house from former parkland beyond. Remains of ridge and furrow, in widely separated locations and in varying condition, indicate that much of this parkland were ploughed in the medieval period. Other earthworks relate to earlier garden designs.



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Figure 1
Location map

The analytical field survey was undertaken at the request of Mark Newman, the National Trust Territory Archaeologist (North), to clarify the nature of the earthwork remains and to inform future management of the site. The majority of the former parkland within the survey area is currently under pasture and has been regularly treated with slurry to provide lush grazing, although parts of it have been ploughed within the last 50 years, as evidenced by aerial photography (Ordnance Survey 1965a & b). In order to access the rich alluvial soil in the southern part of the estate, large farm vehicles have traversed the land immediately to the south of the Hall. A combination of wet weather and underlying clay in this area often results in very deep wheel-ruts, which pose a potentially serious threat to surface and sub-surface archaeological remains.

In 2004, a historic landscape survey of Beningbrough Hall and its estate, undertaken by Ed Dennison Archaeological Services Ltd (EDAS), highlighted the potential for the survival of archaeological features within this area (Dennison and Richardson 2005a & b). Analysis of documentary evidence, followed up by a walkover survey, resulted in plans of inferred and visible archaeological features within the parkland, based on the Ordnance Survey (OS) 1:2 500 scale map. Other previous research has been limited to a number of studies of the standing buildings and small-scale excavations and watching briefs undertaken as and when improvement and repair works have been carried out around the estate (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 6-7). The report on the historic landscape survey contains a detailed account of the documentary and cartographic sources available and reproductions of various items (Dennison and Richardson 2005a). In view of this, no documentary research was

undertaken by English Heritage beyond the reappraisal of historic maps and plans. The 2006 field investigation, which covered an area of c10 hectares (25 acres) at the north end of Ferry Ings and to the south of Beningbrough Hall (Figure 2), was carried out in detail to Level 3 standard (as defined in RCHME 1999, 3-4). To support the field survey, aerial photographic coverage for the area was also consulted.



Figure 2
Map of the
Beningbrough Hall
environs showing the
area of the English
Heritage survey

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2. Summary of the documented history of Beningbrough

The ownership of land in and around Beningbrough during the medieval period is somewhat obscure. It is known that land in the area was granted to St Leonard's Hospital in York in the 10th century by King Athelstan, with further grants in the 12th century. In 1284, the Hospital was licensed to create a deer park on their lands at Beningbrough, enclosing two land parcels with a combined area of approximately 156 acres (63 hectares). This has usually been assumed to equate to a deer park depicted to the north-east of the Hall on Jeffery's map of 1775. What appears to be the same park is depicted on the OS First Edition map (Ordnance Survey 1852; Figure 3) and annotated as 'Beningbrough Old Deer Park'. However, the deer park mapped by the OS enclosed an area of some 247 acres (100 ha), and none of the potential sub-divisions within it can easily be equated to the documented area. This indicates that either the monastic deer park was actually located elsewhere or that subsequent expansion of the monastic deer park has left its original core indefinable. The remainder of the monastic landholding would have been cultivated or grazed during the medieval period. There would undoubtedly have been a grange associated with this farming, presumably close to or within the deer park, but the location of this too remains uncertain. A farm with the name Beningbrough Grange, which was not investigated in 2006 and has no designation to indicate architectural or historical importance, lies within the 'Old Deer Park' mapped by the OS. This would seem to be an obvious candidate for the site of the monastic grange, a theory preferred by the Victoria County History (Page (ed) 1923, 161). However, it is common for the name 'grange' to be attracted to post-medieval farmsteads in the general vicinity of the monastic site, so the name does not in itself confirm the location of the medieval grange or the deer park.

Following the Dissolution of the Monasteries in the late 1530s, the monastic lands and the grange passed into secular hands, entering the possession of the Bouchier family in 1557 (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 6). Ralph Bouchier was living at Beningbrough by 1576 and by this time had either rebuilt the grange or built a new house, possibly on a different site. Evidence from Hearth Tax records show that the house was substantially enlarged, or possibly rebuilt again, between 1662 and 1665, as the number of taxable hearths increased from six to eleven (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 21-2).

The present Hall at Beningbrough was probably constructed between 1710 and 1716, at that time still in the hands of the Bouchier family. In c1720 Samuel Buck produced a sketch partially showing the layout of a formal garden compartment adjoining the southern front of the Hall. Through various marriages, the estate passed into the ownership of the Earle family in 1761 and then into Dawnay family, with whom it remained until it was sold in 1916. During this period Beningbrough Hall appeared on a number of maps, including Jeffery's map of Yorkshire (1775), an estate plan dating to 1841 and the various editions of OS maps (Ordnance Survey 1852; 1893; 1909). These depict changes in the layout of the gardens and parkland. The Hall and its estate were bought in 1917 by Lady Chesterfield, after a brief spell of ownership by a Cambridgeshire farmer. Lady Chesterfield established a successful



ENGLISH HERITAGE

Benningbrough Hall 4

Figure 3 Extract from the 1852 Ordnance Survey First Edition 6-inch map (surveyed in 1848)

stud at the Hall and undertook the restoration of the formal gardens flanking the terrace to the south of the house (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 25). During the Second World War airmen from the Royal Canadian Air Force, based at the nearby bomber base in Linton-on-Ouse, were billeted at Beningbrough Hall, whilst Lady Chesterfield decamped to Home Farm. Lady Chesterfield returned to the Hall in 1947 where she remained until her death in 1957, at which point the estate went to the government in lieu of death duties, passing to the National Trust a year later (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 26).

3. Description and interpretation of the field remains

The field remains within the area surveyed, to the south of the Hall, are relatively sparse and degraded, a consequence of 20th century ploughing and earlier deliberate landscaping (Figure 4). Most of the remains represent the last surface vestiges of a sequence of landscaping schemes, but some relate to agricultural activity and settlement on the site which pre-date these schemes.

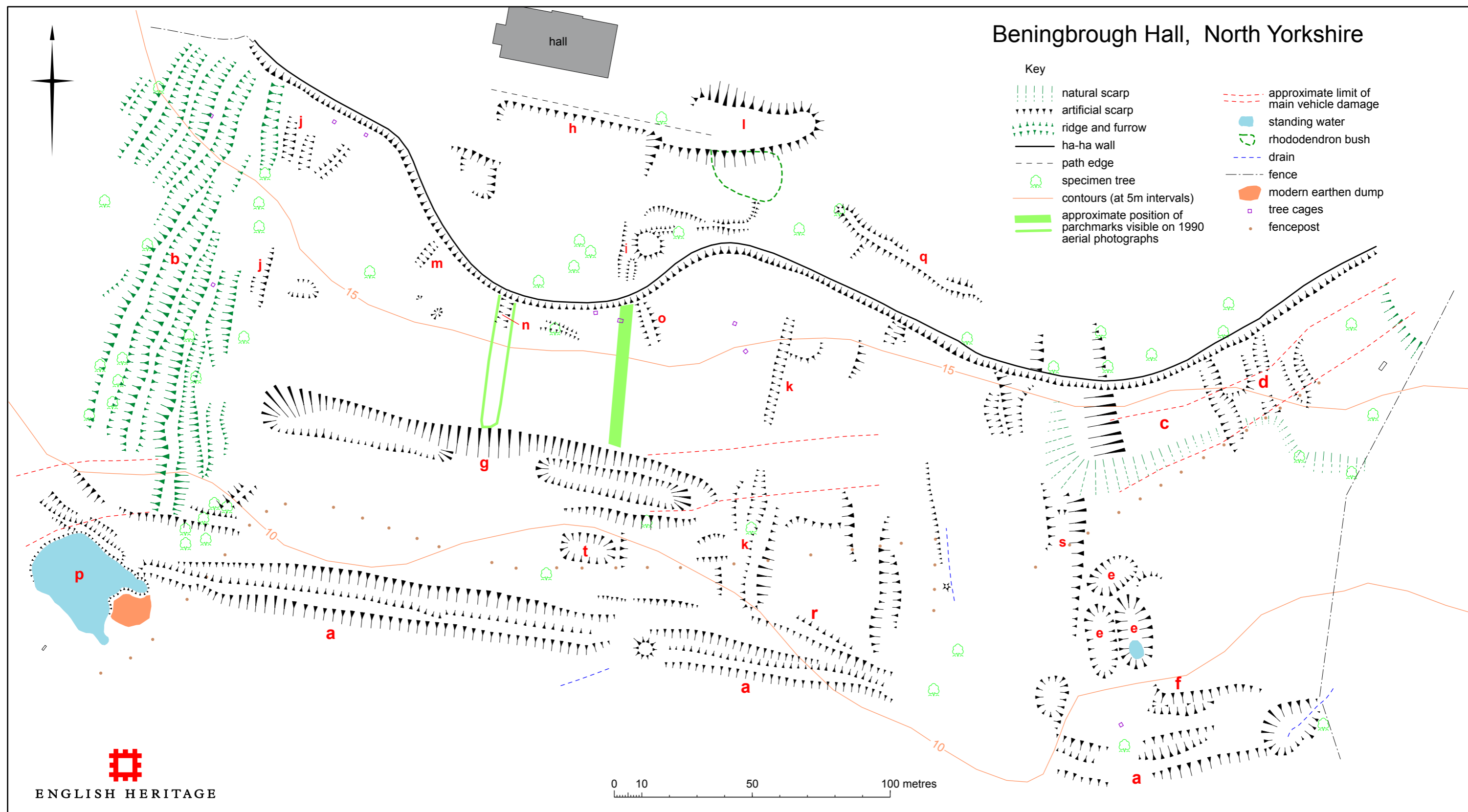
The letters used in the following text refer to annotations on Figure 4.

The landscape up to 1716 (Figure 5)

A bank and ditch (a), interrupted by various other features, defines the southern edge of the survey area. This earthwork undoubtedly corresponded to a boundary in the mid-19th century; a fence is shown following the line of the bank on the First Edition OS 6-inch map surveyed in 1848 (Figure 3) although it is not depicted on later editions. West of the survey area, a narrow brick-lined conduit exposed over a distance of c20m and evidently continuing at both ends appears to correspond to the line of the earthwork (a). The brick is of mid-19th century type. However, the origins of earthwork (a) may be earlier, for its alignment is parallel to the ornamental canal which is probably part of the 1716 designed landscape (see below). At the eastern edge of the survey area the earthwork curves to the south, apparently respecting features possibly originally associated with a 16th-century house (see below), which might also support a post-medieval origin. Yet the earthwork could be earlier still, for there are signs that this stratigraphic relationship results from a modification of earthwork (a) (see below). Furthermore, what seems to be a headland associated with the broad ridge and furrow at the west of the survey area, which itself appears to have been erased by landscaping associated with the canal, seems to respect the bank and ditch, suggesting that they are the earliest earthworks in the sequence, and therefore perhaps of medieval date. In terms of function, the bank and ditch follow a change in ground level, effectively the edge of the flood plain, as the ground rises more steeply to the north. The positioning of the feature thus suggests that it may have functioned as a field boundary, dividing ploughlands on the slope from pasture on the flood plain, and perhaps as a form of flood defence. On the other hand, the fact that the ditch is on the upslope side of the bank is not immediately suggestive of a flood defence, but is more consistent with a leat (that is, a channel for directing water to another feature). It is also possible that it may have defined the edge of the lands held by St Leonard's Hospital or may even have defined the deer park (discussed below) within the monastic land holding, since the form of the earthwork would be equally consistent with a deer leap.

Evidence of early agriculture, in the form of degraded ridge and furrow, can be seen at the west end of the survey area (b). The earthworks are much better preserved immediately to the west of the area surveyed in detail, where the ridges survive up to 0.4m high. In addition to the broad width of the ridges (on average around 10m), which is generally indicative of a medieval date, the majority of the ridges curve slightly at the northern end, a result of the

Figure 4
English Heritage earthwork
survey plan, reduced from
original 1:1 000 scale



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use of teams of oxen to pull the plough, which is another indicator of a medieval date. Such agriculture may have related to the monastic grange, occupied by the Bouchier family from 1557 onwards, whose location has not been adequately identified. The good survival of the ridge and furrow indicates that the area was taken out of cultivation, probably in the late medieval or early post-medieval period. The easternmost ridges, which are slighter and do not display the pronounced curve, may be later modifications of the medieval strip fields, possibly associated with tree planting in this area. Further east, although the former existence of ridge and furrow must be suspected, there are no conclusive earthwork traces, this absence almost certainly brought about by deliberate levelling for the post-medieval garden schemes.

About 250m to the south-east of the Hall, a platform on the edge of the floodplain (c) is described on the OS First Edition map as 'Site of the Old Hall or Manor House' (Ordnance Survey 1852). The evidence on which this identification was based is unclear, but the building may have been the monastic grange, or the larger house perhaps newly built by Ralph Bouchier before 1576, or indeed the even larger house possibly built between 1662 and 1665. As a result of the very deep rutting caused by modern agricultural activity, there are numerous fragments of brick and mortar visible on this platform. Some of this may be modern hard-core which has been imported to create a more stable access track for agricultural vehicles, but some of the material appears to be of an earlier date. Previously, traces of a wall exposed in the side of the ha-ha ditch, which cuts through the platform, have

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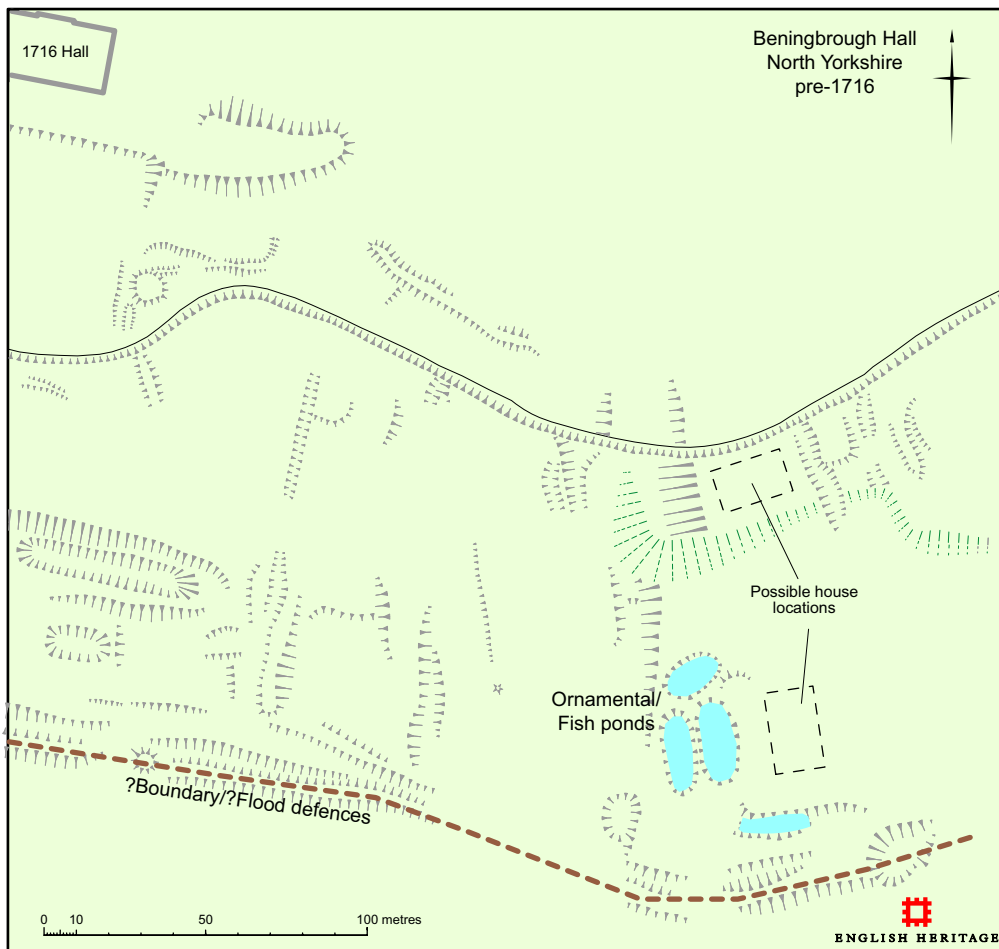


Figure 5
Plan of features in the survey area possibly dating to the 16th and 17th centuries

also been noted (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 49), apparently confirming that a building of some kind once stood here. In terms of the earthwork traces, a series of slight linear earthworks here (d) share the same alignment, which differs from the alignment of all the features that can be confidently related to the later designed landscapes.

On the lower-lying ground to the south of the platform are three shallow, pond-like depressions (e) with an equally slight stretch of ditch, or possible fourth pond (f), to their south-east. Some features, possibly the remains of a former enclosure, show up in this area on aerial photographs and there is a remote possibility that the earthworks and cropmarks may represent the site of a third house (Ordnance Survey 1965a & b; Meridian 1972a & b). However, the evidence is far from conclusive and the exact form of the features is by no means clear. Dennison's observation that the ornamental canal appears to be aligned on and perpendicular to this arrangement of ponds, and is potentially part of a pre-1716 designed landscape (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 49), is perhaps less significant than has been suggested. In part, the apparent plan relationship stems from the similar choice of location for both water features, at the edge of the flood plain, while the new survey shows that the canal is not strictly perpendicular to the alignment of the ponds. Nor is the canal perpendicular to the early house platform. On the other hand, within a probable early 16th-century garden at Sheriff Hutton, North Yorkshire, is a pair of parallel, linear water features associated with the castle, which are neither parallel nor perpendicular to the main structure (Dennison (ed) 2005, 122-136). In addition, aerial photographs support the earthwork evidence that the canal at Beningbrough did not extend any further to the east, which would have meant that it terminated some distance from the postulated house sites. It seems more plausible that the pond-like features represent a set of ornamental fishponds, perhaps forming a component of larger formal gardens associated with the more convincing house site to the north. The ponds lie just within earthwork (a), tentatively identified as an early boundary, flood defence or leat (see above). If the pond-like depressions are fishponds, it would not be unusual to find an associated channel designed to supply them with water. However, earthwork (a) appears to deviate from a straight line to skirt around the pond-like features. It is possible that the short stretch of east-west ditch (or pond) (f) actually represents the original course of the ditch of earthwork (a) and that the latter was reconstructed on a different alignment slightly to the south when the ponds were introduced. Alternatively, if earthwork (a) is associated with the 1716 designed landscape, it may be that its course bowed southwards to respect the ponds, suggesting that they may have been retained as a garden feature after the demise of the house they were perhaps designed to accompany. Parallels for the retention of earlier water features within later gardens are numerous.

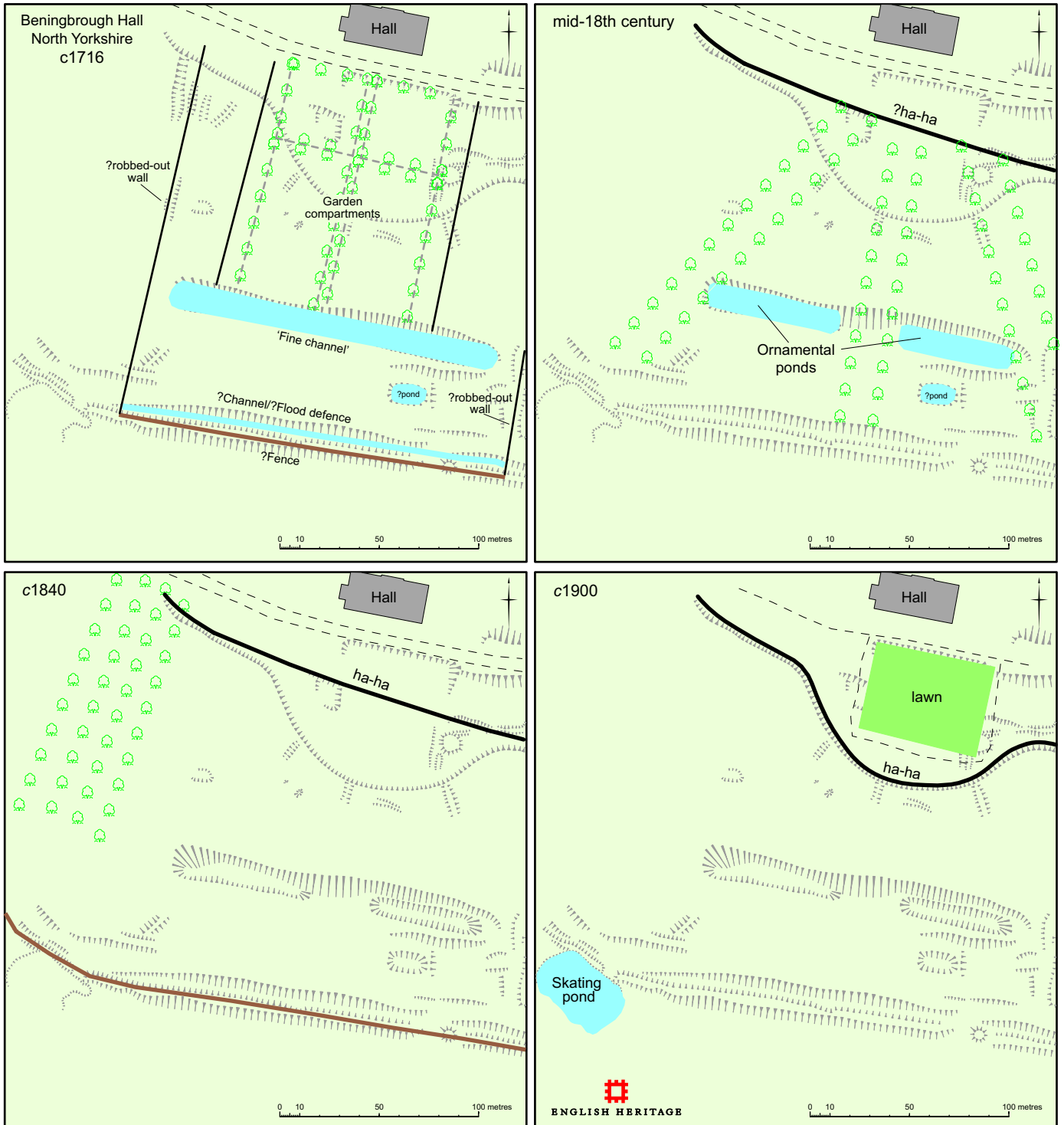
The 1716 designed landscape

The construction of the present Beningbrough Hall in 1716 brought about a major shift in the focus of the landscape. A rectangular walled garden with a formal geometric design, including an ornamental canal described as a 'fine channel', was laid out in conjunction with the new Hall (Figure 6). The principal evidence for the layout of this garden is the sketch by Samuel Buck, which dates to c1720 (reproduced in Dennison and Richardson 2005a, Figure 3). Although only the eastern half of a single garden compartment is depicted, it is most likely

that the layout was mirrored to the west of the axial path leading from the front door of the Hall. The sketch suggests that the garden compartment was of similar width to the frontage of the Hall, which would be typical of the period, but the field evidence hints that the overall width of the garden was much greater and may have equalled the length of the 'fine channel'.

Figure 6
Plans showing possible phases of garden design associated with Beningbrough Hall from 1716 onwards

The 'fine channel' (g) is the best-preserved earthwork within the survey area, still surviving as a rectangular depression 160m long and up to 0.4m deep on an east-west alignment, although somewhat degraded by later changes to the designed landscape and ongoing



agricultural activity. It is aligned perfectly parallel to the frontage of the Hall, and extends an equal distance either side of its central doorway (which could be presumed to correspond to the principal axis of the formal gardens in front) which strongly suggests that the two were constructed in the same episode. Bridgeman's plan of Stowe, Buckinghamshire, demonstrates that the garden layout associated with, and to the south of, the house in the early 18th century included boundaries and an irregular water feature which shared the alignment of the house (Fleming and Gore 1979, 99). Although the layout at Stowe is much more elaborate than that at Beningbrough, there is clearly a similarity in the overall symmetry. Given the symmetry of the design at Beningbrough, the 30m-wide gap midway along the earthwork of the channel may mark the site of a bridge carrying an axial path, although the 1720 sketch gives no indication of this.

It is interesting to note that Buck refers to the feature as a 'fine channel', as this seems to suggest that he is referring to a newly created feature. Had the channel been created from a pre-existing feature, albeit re-cut and re-defined, it is unlikely that it would have been referred to thus.

A pronounced scarp to the south of the Hall (h), which now defines the edge of the lawn, may originally have formed the northern end of the garden compartments, perhaps extending further to the west than it does now. A fragmentary linear depression (l) at the eastern side of the present lawn may represent a vestige of the path at the eastern edge of the garden compartment. A slight linear depression, approximately aligned on the centre of the hall (n), may be connected with the formal garden layout, but it is more probably connected with later tree planting (see below). However, oblique aerial photographs taken in August 1990 clearly show two parallel linear depressed features as cropmarks extending southwards from the ha-ha, at right angles to the Hall, and these seem to define the edges of the axial path depicted by Buck (NMR 1990; Figure 7). Another linear depressed feature visible on the same photographs may correspond to the wall delineating the eastern edge of the garden compartment.



Figure 7
Aerial photograph of
Beningbrough Hall
with remains of the
1716 formal garden
showing as
cropmarks. ©
English Heritage.
NMR 12018/19 SE
5158/20 05-Aug-1990.

In the foreground of Buck's sketch is what seems to be a fence defining the southern side of the garden, lying some way south of the 'fine channel.' It seems very likely that the fence may have followed the line of earthwork (a), which also runs parallel to the 'fine channel.' This plan relationship would seem to cast doubt on the theory presented above that earthwork (a) may be of medieval origin, for were that true, it would follow that the Hall and its designed landscape took their orientation from a slight and perhaps disused medieval earthwork. However, the stretch of earthwork (a) that runs adjacent to the 'fine channel' appears to have been straightened and widened. This broad section of earthwork (a) extends slightly beyond the ends of the 'fine channel', as though whatever form of barrier the earthwork supported enclosed the channel at each end.

Two slight and discontinuous linear depressions (j and k) run perpendicular to the Hall and the 'fine channel'; they are symmetrical on either side of the garden's central axis and the distance between them slightly exceeds the length of the 'fine channel' and corresponds to the straightened section of earthwork (a). These seem to delimit the overall width of the garden and may represent robbed-out wall foundations. Indeed, it is not impossible that they are the lines of the very walls depicted by Buck, if he distorted the width of the design to fit it onto the paper. On balance, it is perhaps more likely that the compartment sketched by Buck was flanked by two more compartments, each perhaps different in character, the design united by the 'fine channel' that spanned them all.

To the south of the eastern end of the 'fine channel' is a rectilinear pond (t), some 15m in length. It is in a better state of preservation than the channel, but seems to be on the same alignment, which suggests that the features might be contemporary. Its function is unclear, although it may be purely ornamental or have acted as a breeding pond for fish which were then transferred into the main channel. Its better state of preservation is perhaps an indicator that it was retained for longer than the channel and has possibly been re-used, or alternatively it may date to a later period.

Buck's sketch also shows that there was a path or track running east-west in front of the Hall's south façade. The route of this path may be fossilised in the gravel walkway which passes in front of the hall today and probably continued on along a broad flat-topped earthwork (l) which is still visible to the east of the Hall. The broad nature of the eastern end of this feature may suggest that there was a structure on top of it, though whether utilitarian or ornamental is unclear. If the linear feature (k) originally extended further north, then it would almost have intersected the eastern end of (l). This could potentially be a corner of the garden compartment, which would be a likely position for a structure.

To the east of (k) is an area of ground which appears to display more earthworks than other parts of the survey area. It is possible to interpret this as a rectilinear area defined to the north by (q), to the east by (s) and to the south by (r). If indeed this is a discrete unit, then it could be interpreted as a further garden compartment. One possibility is that it was associated with the 1716 garden and formed the Hall's kitchen garden or orchards. The present walled garden, to the east of the Hall, dates to the mid- to late 18th century (NTSMR

30845, reproduced in Dennison and Richardson 2005b), so an early 18th century kitchen garden in a location further south would not be inconceivable.

The mid 18th-century designed landscape

Documentary evidence demonstrates that by the 1760s, the landscape had once again undergone a number of changes. A French visitor to the Hall in 1768 described the 'beautiful allee of oaks in a field in front of the house – with irregular clumps of trees but making charming effect to either side of the allee' (quoted in Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 27). At this date, the Hall still faced southwards, so the description tallies to some degree with Jeffery's map of 1775, which shows two tree avenues stretching directly southwards and south-eastwards from the Hall almost as far as the Ouse. These potentially formed two-thirds of a '*patte d'oie*', a geometrical planting scheme typical of the period, although whether the third avenue had been removed by 1775 or left unplanted is uncertain. Three slight linear earthworks (m, n & o), which radiate outwards from the present ha-ha ditch but appear to have been cut by it, could be the last vestiges of the tree avenues which once extended towards the river. Although only minimal features now, their alignments correspond with the east and west ends of the 'fine channel' and with the central gap in it. The survival of these slight features may be due to the fact that they are adjacent to the ha-ha and later agricultural activity, including the movement of vehicles and stock, has tended to occur further to the south, away from the edge of the ha-ha.

The imposition of the central avenue may be linked to the apparent splitting of the earlier 'fine channel' into what the earthworks suggest to be two separate rectangular ponds with a gap of c30m separating them (Figure 6). The context for such an alteration would be to enhance the vista from the Hall and allow views along the tree-lined avenues. Alternatively, this gap could relate to the insertion of a bridge across the channel (if one had not existed in the earlier design). Once this had collapsed or been demolished, it may have created the apparent gap in the feature at this point.

Although not indicated on Jeffery's map of 1775, understandably given the small scale at which he was working, it is likely that by the mid or late 18th century, a ha-ha would have been inserted to the south of the Hall, dividing the formal gardens from the parkland. This may have corresponded to that depicted on an estate plan of 1841 (reproduced in Dennison and Richardson 2005a, Figure 7a). The imposition of this boundary would presumably have required the foreshortening of the earlier formal garden arrangement and would have fundamentally altered the whole concept of how the Hall and the gardens immediately to the south related to one another. The house and much-reduced formal gardens would have been effectively cut off from the land to the south, allowing the latter to be used for grazing. The avenues recorded in 1768 and 1775 may have been planted to extend the formality of the garden beyond this putative ha-ha and subsequently retained within a less formal, more naturalistic planting scheme.

The early 19th-century designed landscape

The first detailed cartographic depiction of Beningbrough Hall and its estate dates to 1841 (reproduced in Dennison and Richardson 2005a, Figure 7a). This map shows blocks of

formal tree-planting to the west and south-west of the Hall, but only informal groves and occasional individual trees to the south, indicating that the avenues had been entirely removed (Figure 6). The 'fine channel', or the pair of ponds created within it, are also absent, presumably indicating that they had been drained. Two new areas of formal tree-planting are depicted, whose focus is a circular area of planting to the north-west of the Hall, enclosed by the ha-ha which loops back on itself. This might be an area which was planted with particularly important or unusual specimens. Surviving mature lime trees which might be in excess of 160 years old suggest that the ranks of trees to the south-west of the Hall were planted along the modified ridges of the ridge and furrow (b).

The 1841 map also demonstrates that by this date the approach to the Hall had been transferred to the northern side, with a track approaching either end of the northern façade. After this reversal of orientation, the south-facing gardens might therefore be expected to be less of a 'public statement' in their character.

The later 19th-century and early 20th-century designed landscape

Unsurprisingly, the best-preserved evidence on the ground and the most detailed in the cartographic record relates to changes in the landscape around the turn of the 20th century. Between 1892 and 1907, when the First Edition of the OS 25-inch to the mile map was surveyed and the Second Edition revised, the approach to the Hall was shifted so that access was gained via a straight drive that approached at right angles to the northern façade of the building. By 1892, the ha-ha had also been altered to bulge out in front of the southern façade of the hall, perhaps echoing the crescent of trees at the foot of the *patte d'oie*, though the avenues themselves had been removed by 1841 (Figure 6). The bulge in the ha-ha would also have created a more extensive but less formal space in front of the Hall.

By 1907, two skating ponds had been created within the grounds, one to the north of the Hall and one to the south-west (p); the latter falls within the area of the present survey and is well preserved as an earthwork (Figure 6). The northern pond is better preserved, suggesting that it was either constructed later or maintained for longer. It has serpentine edges and is still concrete lined, with pipework to supply the pond with water still surviving (Figure 8). The southern skating pond is situated just outside earthwork (a) at the south of the survey area, which suggests that it may have been positioned here to take advantage of the availability of water on the flood plain, possibly being supplied with water by the brick-lined conduit set into the ditch of earthwork (a). The northern part of the pond cuts into earthwork (a), confirming that the pond is chronologically later and does not represent the re-use of an earlier feature. The pond is fringed by mature willow trees. Some of these are planted so closely to each other that they now impinge on their neighbours. It is not impossible that the edge of the pond was retained by willow hurdling, and that some of these took root.

The area within the bulge of the ha-ha was originally lawned and a circular walk along a defined path laid out, as shown on the Second Edition 25-inch OS map, which was revised in 1907 (Ordnance Survey 1909). The earthworks visible on the lawn all relate to earlier

designed landscape schemes, with the exception of the circular mound to the south-east of the hall, adjacent to (i), which is the remains of a tree stump covered over in the recent past (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 41).



*Figure 8
The northern skating
pond at Beningbrough
Hall. Reproduced by
kind permission of
Christopher Dunn.*

4. Summary and recommendations

The earthwork remains to the immediate south of Beningbrough Hall demonstrate the use of the land for agriculture, settlement and as part of a larger designed landscape. Landscaping associated with the later garden designs and the continued agricultural activity in this area, which comprises both ploughing in the 1960s and the on-going access by farm vehicles, have meant that even the most recent earthwork remains are few, fragmentary and degraded. Consequently, there is little clear-cut evidence for chronological phases in the earthworks themselves and no obvious evidence for any pre-medieval activity.

Of the phases of land-use for which surface evidence survives, the medieval period is the most difficult to understand. Documentary evidence implies agricultural activity in the general area from at least the 10th century, when the land came under monastic ownership. However, by the very nature of agricultural activity, the broad ridge and furrow recorded within the survey area (and elsewhere) almost certainly only represents the latest stages of medieval cultivation. The location of the monastic grange is still unclear, but the 2006 survey throws up only three observations to challenge the widely accepted assumption that it stood on the site of the modern Beningbrough Grange. Firstly, it is difficult to equate the area of the documented medieval deer park with 'Beningbrough Old Deer Park' as mapped in the mid-19th century, though the 19th-century depiction seems to match that made by Thomas Jeffery in 1775, so it is possible the medieval deer park lay closer to the present Hall. In this context, the similarity of earthwork (a) to a deer leap is potentially significant. Secondly, it is not proven that either the Bouchiers' 6-hearthed house, or their later 11-hearthed house represents a shift away from the site of the grange where they initially lived, so, again, it is conceivable that the grange lay much closer to the present Hall than has generally been assumed. Thirdly, the arrangement of ponds annotated as 'Pike Ponds' on the First Edition OS map, which lie 800m to the north-east of the present Hall, seem anomalous within the post-medieval garden layouts and could represent a set of medieval fishponds, as has been noted previously (Dennison and Richardson 2005a, 32), though they appear to impinge on ridge and furrow. Such ponds could have been closely associated with a monastic grange, or a late medieval manor house, but further study of this complex and heavily overgrown area of earthworks would be required to advance this last suggestion.

The 2006 investigation broadly supports the traditional identification of the site of the 'Old Hall,' but which of the Bouchiers' houses this represents remains unclear. It is conceivable that the pond-like depressions to the south of the house platform represent fishponds, perhaps forming part of a formal garden overlooked by the house. It seems unlikely, on the evidence of both earthwork survey and analysis of aerial photographs, that these earthworks represent the site of another house, but geophysical survey could potentially cast further light on this issue. Even if it were the case that a house occupied this area of lower ground, the 'fine channel' could not convincingly be linked with that house, for the channel does not extend perpendicular to the ponds and terminates some way from them. On the other hand the 'fine channel' is perfectly parallel to the frontage of the present Hall and its length makes

it symmetrical on either side of the axis of the prospect. Although it is conceivable that earthwork (a) was a leat carrying water to the complex of ponds, the same argument can be applied to it; the reverse argument, that a water channel might have determined the orientation of the present Hall and its gardens, seems impossible to sustain.

The more complete documentary record relating to the present Beningbrough Hall, particularly the sequence of maps and plans, makes the development of the landscape after 1716 considerably easier to understand, though significant questions remain unanswered. The successive redesigns of the ornamental setting of the house, each typical of its day, reflect changes in taste, as might be expected of the main residence of a wealthy and fashionable family. Specific earthworks, most obviously the 'fine channel,' can be related to the formal layout of the garden compartment depicted by Buck in 1720, whose creation was presumably contemporary in origin with the Hall itself. Though the Buck sketch is almost certainly reliable in much of its detail, it would be unwise to treat it as a perfect or total record of the garden as a whole. Ornamental canals aligned parallel rather than perpendicular to the house are not especially rare, usually occurring in locations where the topography makes such an alignment easier to achieve. This would have been the case at Beningbrough, as the slope of the ground would have made a canal perpendicular to the 1716 house impossible. Earthwork traces suggest that the gardens may have extended both east and west of the walled compartment depicted by Buck, apparently slightly beyond the ends of the 'fine channel'. Alternatively, Buck may have distorted the width of the garden compartment he depicted. It is unclear whether the supposed earlier arrangement of fishponds discussed above (perhaps itself ornamental) was retained as a garden feature on the fringe of the 1716 design; the possible realignment of bank and ditch (a) hints that this may have been the case.

The main axis of the 1716 formal garden seems to have been retained in the mid-18th century as the central avenue of what may have been a typical *patte d'oie* comprising three radiating avenues, although the only evidence for the westernmost of the three is a slight and inconclusive earthwork. Although the earliest evidence for a ha-ha is found on the estate map of 1841, it is likely that the earlier formal garden was truncated by a ha-ha when the avenues were laid out in the mid-18th century, so that the vistas extended into more naturalistic parkland beyond the formal garden.

The early 19th-century designed landscape, with its irregularly planted clumps of trees in the wider parkland, still retained some formality with blocks of regular tree-planting offset from the house to the west to provide a focus on the part of the garden contained by the western loop in the ha-ha. A shift of emphasis in the late 19th century saw the northern façade of the house become the clear focus of the designed landscape, with the tree-lined approach from the north in place by 1909. The redesign of the ha-ha to incorporate a bulge to the south approximately opposite the house demonstrates that the landscape to the south, with its views down to the River Ouse and beyond, was not neglected. The bulge in the ha-ha may in some way have echoed the outline of the foot of the earlier *patte d'oie*, although all the trees that defined both this and the radiating avenues had already been

removed by 1841. The curve of the bulge is slightly irregular and off-centre, in comparison to the near-perfect geometry of the 18th century, but this slight informality is equally in keeping with the fashion of the day.

Undoubtedly, the ongoing wear and tear caused by agricultural vehicles is adversely affecting the surviving earthworks and in places is likely to be damaging archaeological remains buried relatively deeply beneath the surface (Figures 9a & b). The platform believed to be the site of the old hall or manor house, thought to be that built by the Bouchier family either in the later 16th century or between 1662 and 1665, is being particularly severely damaged. In addition to the churning-up of the surface, compaction may also threaten more deeply buried remains, while changes in the drainage could lead to the loss or deterioration of any

organic deposits preserved in waterlogged lower levels. While the earthwork survey indicates the likely general location and orientation of the building, geophysical survey could potentially reveal more about its extent and level of preservation below ground.



*Figures 9a & b
Examples of damage
to the ground surface
to the south of
Beningbrough Hall
caused by large
agricultural vehicles
regularly traversing
this area*

5. Methodology

English Heritage is grateful to the National Trust for a grant towards the cost of this survey.

The survey was undertaken by Abby Hunt and Christopher Dunn of English Heritage's Archaeological Survey and Investigation Team. Lloyd Bosworth, an undergraduate at York University, also assisted with the field survey. The report was written by Abby Hunt, incorporating comments by Christopher Dunn, and edited by Al Oswald. The illustrations were prepared by Abby Hunt and Phillip Sinton and the photography was by Abby Hunt, with the exception of Figure 8, which is a photograph from Christopher Dunn's personal collection.

The survey was carried out within the OS National Grid using a Trimble dual-frequency Global Positioning System (GPS), which offers positional accuracy of c5cms. The base station, set up over a permanent marker (ST01), logged 8 hours of data in order to allow the European Terrestrial Referencing System (ETRS89) latitude/longitude co-ordinates to be brought in via the OS active station GPS network. A second 'roving' receiver (Trimble 5800), working in real-time kinematic mode, was used to record some of the more obvious archaeological features and hard detail. The resulting data were processed using Trimble Geomatics Office (TGO) software and the OS National GPS network website in order to convert it to OS National Grid values. This was then processed with GeoSite software and plotted out at a scale of 1:1 000 via AutoCAD. This plot was then taken into the field for checking and to complete the fine detail and features in areas inaccessible with GPS, using the tape and offset method.

A project archive consisting of the field plan, hard-copy printouts of the final electronic drawings, digital photographs and selected supporting background information has been deposited in English Heritage's public archive, the National Monuments Record Centre, where it is available for public consultation. Applications for copyright should be made to NMRC, Great Western Village, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (reference number: SE 55 NW 13).

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