MEDIEVAL EARTHWORKS AT ARLINGTON, SUSSEX

By G. R. Burleigh

This paper describes the earthworks of buildings and fishponds at the shrunken village of Arlington, Sussex, and compares the earthworks with the evidence of an estate map representing the topography of Arlington in the early 17th century.

INTRODUCTION

The earthworks west of Arlington church (TQ 543075) were first recorded many years ago,[1] and some of the evidence for the site was briefly mentioned in a recent paper.[2] The interest of the site lies in the fact that medieval settlement earthworks in Sussex have not often been described in print,[3] and Arlington is fortunate in being depicted cartographically before the village had been reduced to its present size.

Arlington village is situated on low-lying Weald Clay in the Cuckmere valley, about three miles south-west of Hailsham, and today comprises the church of St. Pancras (with pre-Conquest features), and about a dozen scattered houses. The size of the settlement has hardly altered since the mid-19th century, and not much since the early 17th century, although the population of the parish itself has increased considerably. (Figs. 1 and 2).

An area approximately 100 x 110m immediately SW of the churchyard is defined by an earthen bank on its NE and NW sides, and has a rather irregular surface, particularly at its N end. This area was apparently disturbed by military gun and hut emplacements during the last war, and the site of at least one gun is easily recognisable. East of this area the foundations of a medieval structure associated with probable 12th century pottery were uncovered in the garden of the Old School House. (Fig. 2).

There is preserved at Barbican House, Lewes, " *A Perfect and Exact Survaye of the Glebe land belonginge to the Parsonage of Erlington*," made by Edward Gyer and dated September 1629. It depicts buildings in perspective and gives field names. The scale is $3\frac{1}{5}$in. to 40 (unspecified unit).[4] The map shows the village of Arlington as it was in 1629, comprising St. Pancras church and about 10 or 11 houses or cottages. It is of considerable interest because it records the existence of three of these houses, including the Parsonage House, in the field where there are now only earthworks to betray the former presence of buildings (Pl. 1, Fig. 3).

THE EARTHWORKS

On entering the field, called " Upper Sluice " on the 1629 survey, from the east, between the churchyard and the Old School House, containing 6.70 acres (2.711 hectares), one first encounters to the left (i.e. south) the area which has been disturbed by army installations (*supra*). North of this disturbance, on the other side of the farm track, the boundary of the churchyard continues W towards the Cuckmere for about 35m, gradually turning NW, and then sharply NNE.

[1] A. Hadrian Allcroft, *Downland Pathways* (London, 1924), 61.

[2] G. R. Burleigh, " An Introduction to Deserted Medieval Villages in East Sussex," *Sussex Archaeological Collections* (hereafter abbreviated to *S.A.C.*), vol. 111 (1973), 79.

[3] A recent exception being C. F. Tebbutt, " Two Newly-Discovered Medieval Sites," *S.A.C.* vol. 110 (1972), 31-36.

[4] Sussex Archaeol. Trust, E/17, Accn. 1153. The map was deposited with the Society in 1965 by Mr. D. H. de Pass of Polhills Farm, Arlington. The scale is actually in half-chains, and should therefore read $3\frac{1}{5}$in. to 20 chains or 12.8 in. to one mile.

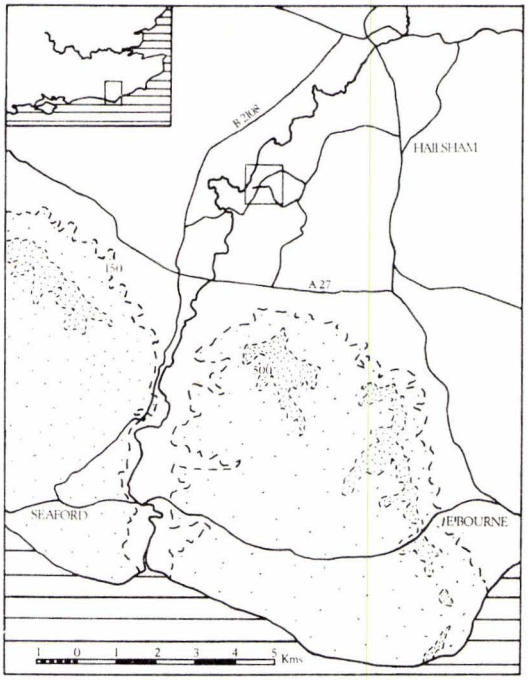


FIG. 1. General location map. The site of Arlington is within the square shown

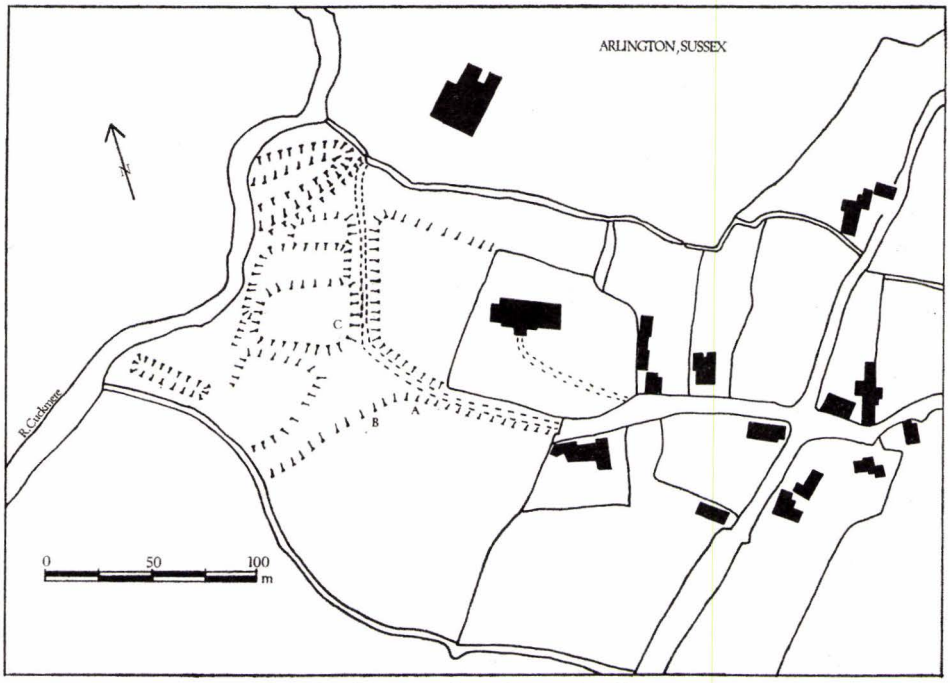


FIG. 2. The shrunken village of Arlington

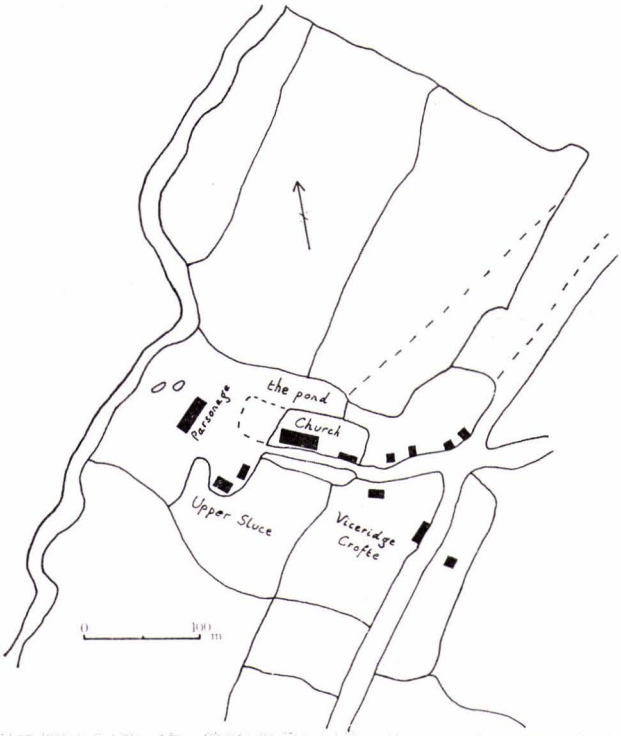


FIG. 3. Detail from Edward Gyer's map of 1629

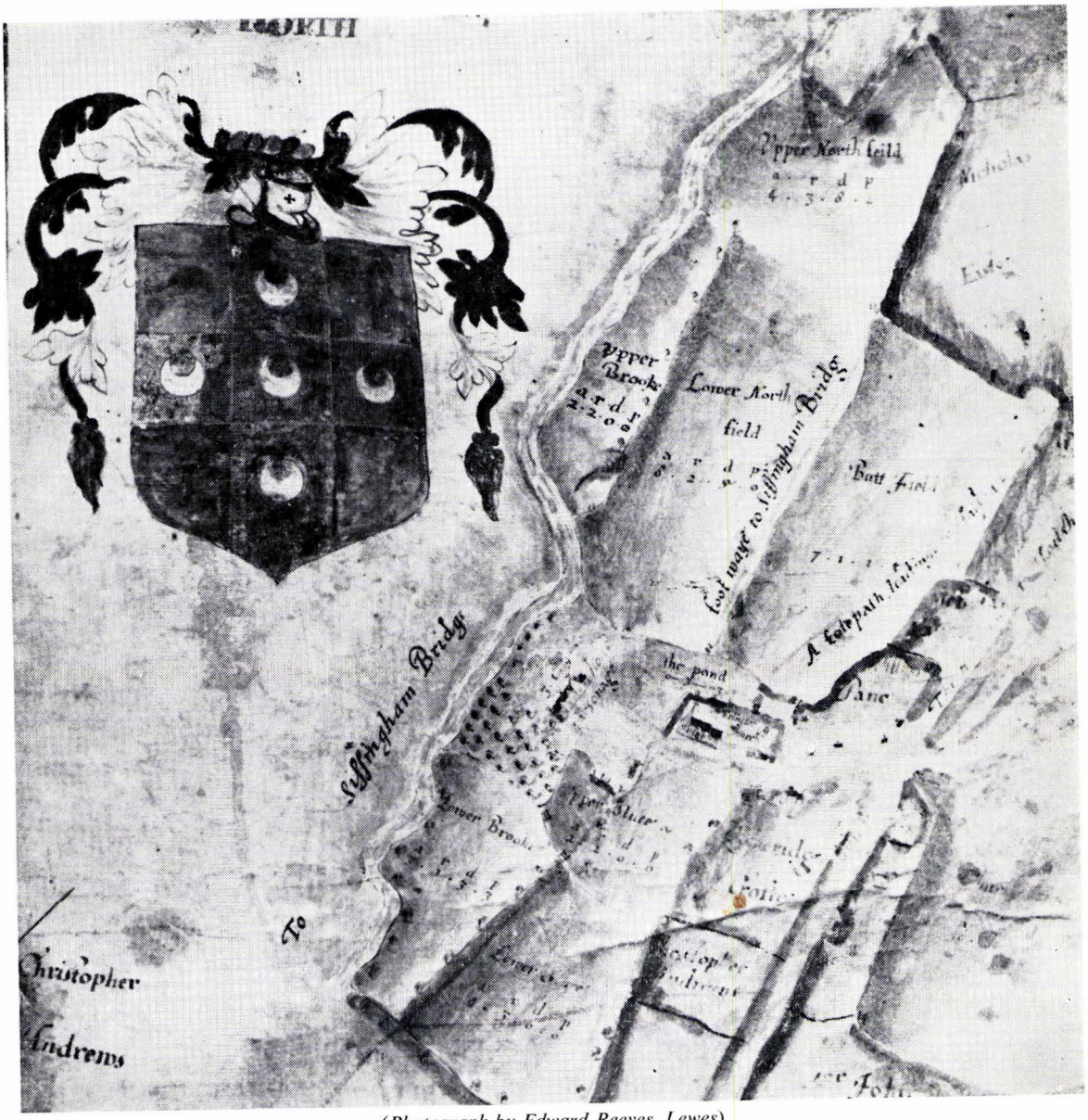
Opposite the SW corner of the churchyard (A on Fig. 2) is a small circular mound which appears to have been a modern gun emplacement. This area of modern disturbance is bounded, parallel with the farm track by which the field is entered, by a low bank which curves SW around the gun site and runs down to the edge of the field, here delineated by a drainage ditch. At the point where there is a field gate, there was also an entrance in the early 17th century.

To the W is a further earthen bank running NNW. This has been cut into at its southern end but on inspection showed no evidence of structures or pottery. After about 50m this bank curves W towards the river and, turning SW again, ends before it reaches a belt of trees and bushes which line the river side here. The W part of the field has a sub-soil of alluvium rather than Weald Clay.

Between the gun emplacement and the NE angle of the second bank, just described, two buildings are shown on Gyer's survey (B on Fig. 2). Neither of these buildings stands today, and indeed had decayed by last century, and there is no trace of them on the ground.

In the extreme SW corner of the field, which is bounded for its entire length on the W by the river Cuckmere, lies a rectangular fish-pond (TQ 54110744). This pond is dry and its bottom is thick with grass and nettles, and with small trees at its W end. This corner of the field was tree-covered in 1629 and may have been an orchard. This fishpond is not marked on Gyer's map, suggesting it may already have gone out of use by that date.

North of the second bank described above is a platform, measuring about 35 x 30m, at the E end of which, on the 17th century survey is the Parsonage House (C on Fig. 2: Pl. 1and Fig. 3).



(*Photograph by Edward Reeves, Lewes*)

PLATE I. 1629 Survey of Arlington, Sussex

The house appears to have been a substantial building.[1] To the N and W of this platform is an angular depression, probably another fishpond, and pools of water are marked in this position on Gyer's map. It is unlikely that this feature marks the remains of a moat around the Parsonage.

On the N side of this fishpond is a further, smaller, platform, roughtly 25 x 12m, which, however, was not occupied by a building on the 1629 survey. Beyond this platform, and occupying the extreme N corner of " Upper Sluice," are earthworks which at first sight seem rather confused, but which on closer examination are readily interpreted as an abandoned meander of the river Cuckmere. It is very probable that the river's course has been artificially straightened, or the meander could have been abandoned naturally. It would appear that this had happened by 1629, as no sign of the meander appears on Gyer's plan, while the field boundary seems to turn deliberately N to include this feature.[2]

Projecting from the W side of the churchyard is a large platform, approximately 60 x 50m., the edges of which are marked on the 1629 map. It was then empty of buildings but it may once have been built on, or alternatively it may have been a garden for the Parsonage House. This platform drops away on the N to what is today a rather wet patch of ground which was occupied by a pond in 1629 (Pl. 1 and Fig. 3).

DISCUSSION

The boundaries of Upper Sluice field in which the earthworks are preserved have not been altered since Edward Gyer completed his survey in September, 1629. This holds true for many of the other fields around Arlington village. We may suspect that the field boundaries existed in their present form in the late 16th century, or even earlier. The field itself is under rank grass and thorns and apparently has never been ploughed.

The 1629 map shows, as we have seen, three buildings in Upper Sluice field. This fact immediately refutes any suggestion that the earthworks are solely the remains of a water-control system, which the field name might suggest, although, as we have also seen, there were ponds in the field which we can still identify.

The earthworks are typical of medieval village earthworks on a clay sub-soil.[3] No house foundations are visible, although it should be noted that the surface of the platform where the Parsonage House stood in 1629 is uneven, as if there might be stone foundations beneath the turf. However, buildings would probably have been largely constructed of timber, since good building stone is scarce in this region. On Gyer's survey the parsonage seems to be a fine, three-gabled structure. The other two 1629 buildings in Upper Sluice are set at right-angles to each other, probably around a courtyard and are both smaller than the parsonage.

Gyer's survey seems to have been made while Arlington village was in the process of shrinking in area. Although in 1629 there were only three buildings in Upper Sluice, it seems likely that at an earlier period there had been more houses west of the church. This is suggested by the character of the earthworks and by the positions of the remaining houses on Gyer's plan.

[1] On Gyer's survey the parsonage would appear about the same size as the church, but as the buildings on his plan are drawn in perspective their size is not very accurate. Not too much notice should therefore be taken of the comparative sizes of buildings on Fig. 3.

[2] It is possible that this feature is yet another fishpond.

[3] See for example M. W. Beresford and J. G. Hurst, *Deserted Medieval Villages, Studies* (London, 1971), Pls. X and XI, which show the D.M.V.s of Lower Ditchford, Gloucs. and Rand, Lincs. The Arlington earthworks have characteristics in common with these, although of course the Arlington site is much less extensive.

By the time the tithe map was made in the mid-19th century the village of Arlington had been reduced to its present size. The houses in Upper Sluice had decayed or been demolished, and evidence of their former presence in the field existed only in the form of grass covered mounds. Elsewhere in the village the total number of houses in the mid-19th century was about the same as in the early 17th century, but most of the houses were in slightly different positions from their predecessors. This is a phenomenon which must be common to every English village and indeed to villages in many other countries. T. W. Horsfield, the county historian, says of Arlington that it was a " small village but traditionally much larger."[1]

The county historians, T. W. Horsfield and M. A. Lower, both mention the former existence of a medieval chapel in Arlington which was attached to the prebend of Woodhorne in Chichester cathedral. They both locate this chapel at the south side of the churchyard.[2] On the 1629 map there is a building shown in the south corner of the churchyard and this presumably is the chapel (Pl. 1 and Fig. 3).[3]

The early and later editions of the large-scale Ordnance Survey plans label what was " Vice-ridge Croft " in 1629 as " Parsonage Field," and mark " Chapel (Site of) " in different positions on various editions.[4] It can only be assumed that this is because of the existence in the village of a tradition relating to the former presence of a parsonage house and chapel. Possibly from time to time evidence of former buildings was unearthed and these were identified as either the chapel or parsonage. It may be no coincidence that the supposed position of the chapel on the 1874 edition of the 25-inch survey is that of the more northerly of the two buildings standing outside the SW angle of the churchyard in 1629. Likewise on the same Ordnance Survey sheet the supposed site of the parsonage house is where medieval foundations were seen in the garden of the Old School House (*supra*).

CONCLUSION

The main documentary sources for the population of Arlington have been summarised elsewhere, and their evidence will not be repeated in detail here.[5] Suffice it to say Domesday Book and the 1327 Lay Subsidy suggest the village was always fairly small, and although the late 17th century hearth tax and 19th century censuses record a fairly large and expanding population, we know this population was not concentrated around the church but dispersed throughout the parish. Lower wrote that the church was " remote from the principal part of the population."[6]

Gyer's 1629 survey shows that the village street formerly extended further west towards the Cuckmere, while this is also indicated by the earthworks still visible in Upper Sluice. It has been suggested that Gyer was just in time to record the original size of the village before it was reduced to the area seen on the tithe map and on the first large-scale Ordnance Survey plans. It seems likely that desertion of the western end of the village began before 1629, and this may have been because the area was too wet and exposed to flooding from the river. In any event, as we have seen, Arlington village was not much larger in the medieval period than it is now, the population

[1] Thomas Walker Horsfield, *The History, Antiquities and Topography of the County of Sussex* (Lewes, 1835), vol. 1, 321.

[2] *Loc. cit.;* Mark Anthony Lower, *A Compendious History of Sussex, Topographical, Archaeological and Anecdotal* (Lewes, 1870), vol. 1, p. 11. See also L. F. Salzman " Early churchwarden's Accounts, Arlington," *S.A.C.*, vol. 54 (1911), 85.

[3] Mr. J. H. Levett of the Corner House, Arlington, has seen the foundations of a stone or flint building both in grave digging and jutting out of a bank on the S. side of the churchyard at TQ 54320742.

[4] For example, compare the 1874 25-inch sheet LXVIII.7 with the 1910 6-inch sheet LXVIII NE.

[5] *Loc. cit.* in note 2, p. 80

[6] *Loc. cit.* in note 2, p. 84

of the parish always being rather dispersed, and this may be reflected in the large number of moated sites in the parish.[1]

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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[1] The Ordnance Survey Archaeology Division have now surveyed the earthworks. An aerial photograph of the site exists showing the earthworks (R.A.F. 3G/TUD/UK) 151 (Pt. II 6095-6, 16.4.46).

A SOCIETY ANTHOLOGY 1

" I was talking with Durrant Cooper, one of the leading members of our Sussex Archaeological Society, and told him if instead of devoting a volume a year to the remains of old castles and monasteries, they would give us some facts throwing light on the social and political condition of the inhabitants in former ages, it would be a much more useful employment of their talents."

Richard Cobden, M.P., in John Morley, *The life of Richard Cobden* (1908), p. 468.

" A third of the church has been ruthlessly destroyed and those who have been concerned in the work have earned themselves lasting obloquy . . . Some blame surely attaches to the Sussex Archaeological Society, so busy with its excursions and its dinners! Did they do nothing to try to save the building, the most precious in respect of its uniqueness in the whole county? "

(This is part of an acrimonious exchange between the Society and critics of the restoration of Worth Church during which it was alleged that the Saxon chancel ' had vanished clean away.' *The Builder*, vol. 27 (1869), pp. 884, 901, 942; vol. 28 (1870), p. 662).

(*Ed. S.A.C.*)