

## A SURVEY OF THE EARTHWORKS AT HILLS AND HOLES PLANTATION, MARHAM, NORFOLK

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### SUMMARY

*This brief report offers a description and plan of a recently discovered moated site, which lies on the fringes of the Nar valley, close to the former wetland edge. In addition, documentary evidence is presented, which allows the site to be identified with a 13th-century fortified manor, described in a number of original sources as Marham or Belet's Castle. The earthwork, which is now a Scheduled Ancient Monument, lies in private woodland; there is no public access to the site.*

### Introduction

Between 1981 and 1988 large parts of the Norfolk Fens, including the Nar valley, were subjected to a detailed and wide-ranging landscape survey by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit (Silvester 1988, 1991), as part of the English Heritage-funded Fenland Project. The majority of this fieldwork was carried out on the arable land which is characteristic of so much of the modern Fenland landscape, and generated a wealth of new archaeological data (Hall and Coles 1994). In a number of instances, however, extant earthworks were recognised on some of the small patches of permanent pasture and woodland which have avoided conversion into arable. A previously-unknown earthwork at Marham (Silvester 1988, 125) was one of these sites, and is the subject of this article. Subsequent to the survey phase, some of the best preserved sites, including the Marham earthwork, were selected for further study, with a view to formulating management strategies to ensure their long-term survival. This phase of work, known as the Fenland Evaluation Project and carried out by the Norfolk Archaeological Unit, was also funded by English Heritage, and resulted in the scheduling of the Marham earthwork site. It is the data which were gathered as part of this process which form the basis of this study.

### The Earthwork

The site is located at TF 7054 0954, at a height of 8m OD, and is entirely contained within a small area of woodland known as Hills and Holes Plantation. The presence of peaty soils immediately to the north-west indicates that, prior to reclamation and improvement, the site would have lain close to the wetland edge. An indication of nearby contemporary activity is provided by a scatter of Late Saxon and medieval pottery, immediately adjacent to the Shouldham road (Silvester 1988, 125). Other Middle Saxon, Late Saxon, and medieval finds have also been reported from the surrounding fields. In addition, the well-preserved earthworks of Marham's Cistercian Nunnery, which was founded in 1249, may be found c.300m to the north east, close to the site of Holy Trinity church. A further church, St. Andrew's, once stood 200m to the south-east of Holy Trinity, whilst the remnants of a further moat may be found around the present Marham Hall, to the south of the modern village (Silvester 1988, 121). As might be expected on a site covered in woodland, the earthwork is very overgrown and inspection on the ground extremely difficult. Despite these problems, it proved possible to produce a plan of the site, by means of offsets from a grid established across it. The main points of interest are described below.

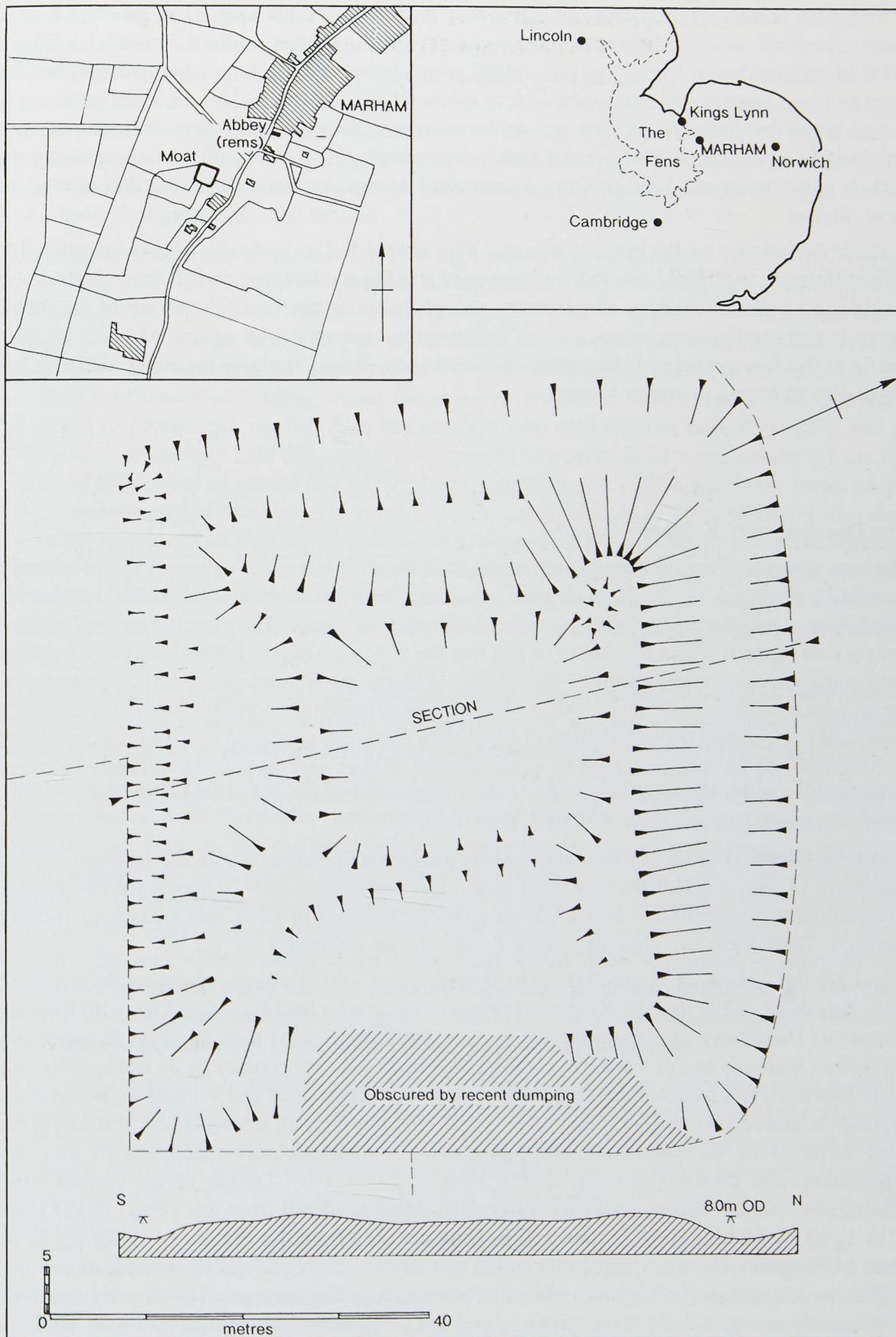


Fig. 1  
Earthwork at Hills and Holes Plantation, Marham.

The main feature of the site is a moat which measures *c.* 80m square and survives around almost the whole of its circuit, apart from the central section of the southern arm which has been filled in with modern rubbish. The moat ditch, which is entirely dry, is nowhere more than *c.* 1m deep and has, presumably, been subjected to much silting. There is, however, more variation in the width of the ditch; the eastern arm achieves a maximum width of 17m, while the western arm is only 11m across. This second arm has a narrower, subsidiary ditch running along the bottom of the main cut. It is, perhaps, a secondary feature designed to aid the drainage of the moat ditches.

The area enclosed by the moat measures *c.* 50m square and its surface is highly irregular. The survey suggests that this is due to the presence of a collapsed building, which used chalk rubble and tile in its construction, on the northern part of the moat platform. The extent of the rubble suggests that the building, or complex of buildings, measured *c.* 30m square. Mounds of chalk debris at the four corners of the rubble spread, which stand 1m above the moat platform, are suggestive of turrets or corner towers.

### **The Documentary Evidence**

Marham was already a substantial settlement in 1086 with a total valuation of £3-9s-3d and a recorded population of 78, in each case attaining the third highest total in the hundred of Clackclose. One church was also recorded in Domesday Book. The community was divided among four lords of whom the Abbot of Ely was the most significant. Each of the other holdings bore some previous relationship to the Abbey. William de Warenne held half a carucate (60 acres) which had been held by the Abbey before 1066. Hermer de Ferrieres held 20 acres which were said to be within the jurisdiction of the Abbey and were measured in with its return. Hugh de Montfort had 26 sokemen, held by a subordinate, Walter, and these had previously belonged to the Abbey. A further sokeman of the Abbey had been transferred to Warenne with six acres from the church (Brown 1984, 8, 15.13, 1.15, 1.23, 9).

In later medieval times Marham retained its prosperous position within the hundred, having the fourth highest individual assessment in the Lay Subsidy of 1334. There were two notable additions to the community: the Cistercian nunnery, founded in 1249, and a castle or fortified mansion. There were two churches, Holy Trinity and St. Andrew's.

In 1302 the Abbess of Marham (who held freely from Earl Warenne, whose feudal overlords were the Abbot of Ely and the King) and William Belet (who held by right of his wife from the Honour of Haughley) were the principal lords in Marham (Feudal Aids III, 398). It seems that the fees of Warenne and de Ferrieres came to be held in the 13th century by de Bekeswelle, and on 18 October 1258 an agreement was made between William Belet and William de Bekeswelle. Belet quitclaimed, on consideration of a payment of 100 marks, all lands held by him which had been forfeited by de Bekeswelle through rebellion, retaining only tenements in Marham, Shouldham, and Barton (Bendish) (NRO, Hare 1, 232 x F4r). Details of the various Belet holdings in Marham appear on a particularly fine illuminated roll from this period (NRO Hare, 2213 194 x 5). On this Belet is shown as holding not only from the Honour of Haughley in the name of Margaret, his wife, but also from the heir of de Bekeswelle, for the service of one pair of gloves each year. A further small piece had been acquired by purchase. His tenantry consisted of eleven freemen, twenty-seven villeins, and twelve cottars, and he and his wife held the advowsons of both churches.

William Belet and his heirs received licence to crenellate his house at Marham on 9 June 1271 (Calendar of Patent Rolls, 1266-1271, 540). He argued, in 1274-5, that in time of war the castle would protect the surrounding country and the neighbouring religious houses from destruction by the King's enemies (Blomefield 1739-75, 4.121). This favourable view of the castle was not shared by Sir Robert de Ufford and Sir Ralph de Saundwyg, who reported in 1277 that it was to the prejudice and nuisance of the king and country (Calendar of Miscellaneous Inquisitions, I, 329, 1089). In 1313, Blomefield states, an Inquisition on Sir Ingelram Belet recorded that he held a castle in Marham ditched around.

The fortification of the house had been the high point of Belet influence in Marham, a grant of a market, a fair and right of free warren having been made to William Belet in 1260. After the death of Sir William the various holdings were divided. It appears that Ingelram was a younger son and that he held that part of the Belet lands which had been held from the de Bekeswelles. The other portion, held from the Honour of Haughley, passed to the elder son and this branch is shown as holding, under the name of Bygot, in 1346 (Feudal Aids III, 507). According to Blomefield, Sir Ingelram had one son who died without issue in 1322-3, and in 1365-6 John de Denham held this manor, subsequently known as Belet's or Denham's, from the Abbess of Marham at an annual rent of twenty-two shillings. By 1385 it was in the hands of the Abbess and convent of Marham. The other Belet manor descended to Thomas Darrel who died lord of the manor of Old Hall. The Valor Ecclesiasticus of 1535 (379) shows that John Spelman was lord of the manor of Old Hall in Marham, and the family still had this manor at the time when Blomefield was writing. At the Dissolution the Abbey and its possessions, with Belet's or Denham's came to the Hare family of Stow Bardolph and after this amalgamation became known as the manor of New Hall.

The eventual fate of the Belet castle is obscure. It is not mentioned in any post-14th-century document that has so far come to hand. To identify the site it is necessary to depend, therefore, on the interpretation of incidental topographical references in post-medieval documents.

A Valor and Farm of 1542-3 (NRO, Hare 2250 x 3) records closes called 'Denhams', 'Upperwalles' and 'Netherwalles' apparently grouped together as one rented unit, and listed quite distinctly from the Abbey Yards, where walls or the remains of walls might be expected. 'Netherwalles' and 'Overwalles' appear also in a survey of Newhall dated 1566 (NRO, Hare 2254 195 x 3). Netherwalles is described as a close of eight acres of meadow and pasture lying to the east of a road (King's highway) with a 'drift passage' (*chasea* or *droveway*) on its north western side, and with a piece called Long Yard to the west. Common of Marham and Shouldham lay to the north west of the group and was probably approached by the drift. Overwalles is described as being four acres of land (arable) on the opposite side of the same road. There were messuages to the north of both Nether- and Overwalles.

The road mentioned in the description can be identified from an entry in a court book of Newhall for 25th March 1576 (NRO, Hare 2228 194 x 6) which repeats the description and names the road as Southgate. The location of these closes, therefore, was in the southern part of the village, Southgate being the name of the street leading away southwards towards Fincham. The document of 1542-3 suggests a location for Denham's Closes in the immediate neighbourhood.

The Tithe Map of 1841 (NRO E15) shows two fields, Upper Dunhams (No. 200) and Lower Dunhams (No. 194), lying together to the west of the street, which would have been called Southgate in former times. Immediately to the south was a place called Hills and Holes (No. 199). A short distance south eastwards was a feature referred to as 'The Fish Pond'. Other fields

to the west (nos. 180, 181, 184, 192, and 201) were identified as parts of Button Fen, implying former marshy land which could be identifiable as the common pasture of 1566. The survival of the Dunham (Denham) name implies a connection with the old Belet holding, and the position of Hills and Holes (still surviving as the name of a plantation containing a rectangular earthwork) immediately to the south suggests that this should be regarded as the site of the 13th-century castle. 'Netherwalles' seems, almost certainly, to be a descriptive name applied to this site. 'Overwalles' may be read as the close 'opposite the walls' in the sense that 'over' could mean 'over against' (*ad oppositum*). As it was arable in 1566 it is unlikely that there were any building remains there, whereas Netherwalles was described as pasture.

A recent work on the Abbey of Marham and its cartulary (Nichols 1974) includes a hypothetical map of medieval Marham, and identifies the remnant of a moat at the present Marham Hall as the site of the Belet castle. It certainly lies to the west of the former Southgate; in the face of the evidence presented here, however, it seems unlikely to have been the site of Belet's fortified house. The author appears to have been unaware of the earthwork discussed here. The Marham Hall moat may have been that of the Old Hall.

### Conclusions

Shortly after his initial discovery of the earthwork at Hills and Holes Plantation, Silvester suggested that the application of the term 'castle' to the site was not necessarily appropriate, and that the remains might be better described as those of a fortified manor (Silvester 1988, 125). In this assessment he was surely correct; the castles at Castle Rising and Castle Acre provide ample illustration of the difference in scale between these two classes of monument. On the other hand, a comparison of the site plan from Marham with those of other earthworks discovered by Silvester in the Fens (1988, 167), shows that the former was not just another moated site. This was clearly also the view of the 13th-century inhabitants of the area, whether William Belet (arguing that the site would protect the surrounding countryside) or Sir Robert de Ufford and Sir Ralph de Saundwyg (arguing that it threatened the King's Peace). It appears that there was an acceptance that the site, at least for a time during the later 13th century, was one of some strategic importance. It is hoped that this short article will serve to bring the site, which until recently was entirely forgotten, to wider notice.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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### DR JOHN COLLINGES OF NORWICH, 1623-90

by A.S. Hankinson

That two of Norwich's finest buildings, the Assembly House and the Octagon Unitarian Chapel, are by the same architect, Thomas Ivory, is well known. Less familiar is an earlier link between the two sites: the house was home to Dr John Collinges, chaplain for nearly forty years to its Hobart owners; and it was he who founded the Presbyterian congregation which built him a chapel where the Octagon now stands. Collinges was of more than local fame in his day, but he has no memorial in Norwich.<sup>1</sup> A full biography would need to discuss his theology and his voluminous writings<sup>2</sup> against the context of the stormy times in which he lived; the following sketch attempts merely to put together some of the scattered references which substantiate his presence in Norwich and to show his human side.

Born in 1623 at Boxted, Essex, Collinges attended Dedham Grammar School under the puritanical influence of Rogers and Newcomen. Although his father<sup>3</sup> died in 1638 leaving 'little above £50 a year'<sup>4</sup>, he proceeded a year later to (staunchly puritan) Emmanuel College.<sup>5</sup> In 1645 he was 'a constant preacher' in the house of Isaac Wyncoll at Bures, Essex, whose eldest daughter Elizabeth he married, and moved to St. Saviour's Vicarage, Norwich, in 1646.

That September he was, in his own words, 'invited by Sir John Hobart... to take my chamber in his house whilst I discharged my ministerial office in the city and to take some oversight of his family as to the things of God'. Sir John died within months; his widow, Lady Frances, herself an ardent Puritan whose nurse had been a Huguenot, was to have a powerful influence on Collinges.<sup>6</sup> Not only did she retain him as her personal Chaplain but 'set apart one chamber in her own house to which she had given the name of "The Ministers Chamber"' and:

...at no small charge converted some less useful lower rooms of the house into a Chappel... conveniently capacious of more than 200 persons. Here she obliged me to preach a Lecture every week and to repeat one or both of my sermons every Lords Day at night after the more publick sermons were finished in the Town...for 16 years...continued to a very full auditory, and to the great advantage of many younger persons, and of those who had not such advantages as they desired in their own houses for hearing again what they had been hearing in the day time. A work of piety the more remarkable for this, her Ladyships Chappel (lying in the way to that field [Chapelfield] where the younger persons were formerly wont to profane the latter part of the Lords day by idle walks, discourses and recreation) intercepted many of them and proved a bait to allure them...into a further reverence for the Sabbath, and...to bring them to a further acquaintance with God.