

AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY OF THE MANOR HOUSE AND GARDENS, STANTONBURY, MILTON KEYNES.

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The manor, once the main residence in the medieval village, was rebuilt in more splendid isolation in the seventeenth century, but in little over a century was abandoned, destroyed by fire and demolished. Although some archaeological investigations took place when gravel was extracted from the area of the adjacent village in the 1960s, the earthworks of the manor were not recorded in any detail. Hence, in March 2002, archaeologists from English Heritage selected Stantonbury as useful location to carry out a rapid-survey training exercise. This paper provides a record and interpretation of the visible archaeological features in the area of the former manor house and its associated gardens. It is based on a survey of the remains, principally earthworks, and an examination of documentary material, including letters, indentures, account books and other documents from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

The earthwork remains of the manor and associated features cover an area of approximately 4.8 ha and were assessed at 1:2500 scale; Level 2 standard (as defined in RCHME 1999, 3–4.)

LOCATION & TOPOGRAPHY

The site of Stantonbury Manor lies on the south side of the upper valley of the River Great Ouse, about one kilometre to the north of the urban fringe of Milton Keynes. The earthworks extend across permanent pasture on the northern slope and base of a promontory which projects into the river valley from modern Stantonbury. It is bounded to the south by the Grand Union Canal (which cuts across the promontory on the 75m contour), to the west by a canalised section of the river, and to the north by a large artificial lake created by gravel extraction in the 1960s (Fig. 1).

The underlying geology of the promontory is Blisworth Limestone with areas of variegated mudstones and silts. Limestone obtained from these deposits is a feature of the local field boundaries and some buildings, including the ruined church of St. Peter, which stands towards the northern end of the manorial earthworks. The upper slopes are overlain by typical calcareous pelosols. The lower slopes of the promontory, including the area containing the manorial earthworks and the church, are formed of drift deposits of sand and gravel, overlain by peloalluvial gley soils on higher ground and alluvium on the valley floor.

AN OUTLINE HISTORY OF THE MANOR

The history of the medieval manor is documented in several published works, most notably the Victoria County History of Buckinghamshire (Vol. 4, 462–464), and is effectively summarised elsewhere (Mynard 1971, Croft & Mynard 1993). Only a brief synopsis is required here to set the scene for more detailed researches into the post-medieval manor.

Stantonbury is a narrow, linear parish of only some 326 ha (806 acres) crossing the limestone ridge and the valley side on a north-south axis. Throughout the medieval and early post-medieval period, the township was co-extensive with a single manor, first recorded under the name ‘Stantone’ in the eleventh century. ‘Stantone’, derived no doubt from ‘Stone Tun’ (settlement) implies use of the local building stone, but may also hint at visible remains or reused materials from the extensive Roman settlement, excavated in advance of quarrying in 1957–8, which lay less than one kilometre to the north west (Woodfield 1989, Croft & Mynard 1993).

At the time of Domesday the population included seven villeins and three bordars, and there was a mill. The area of meadow in the township was slightly under half that of the arable, which

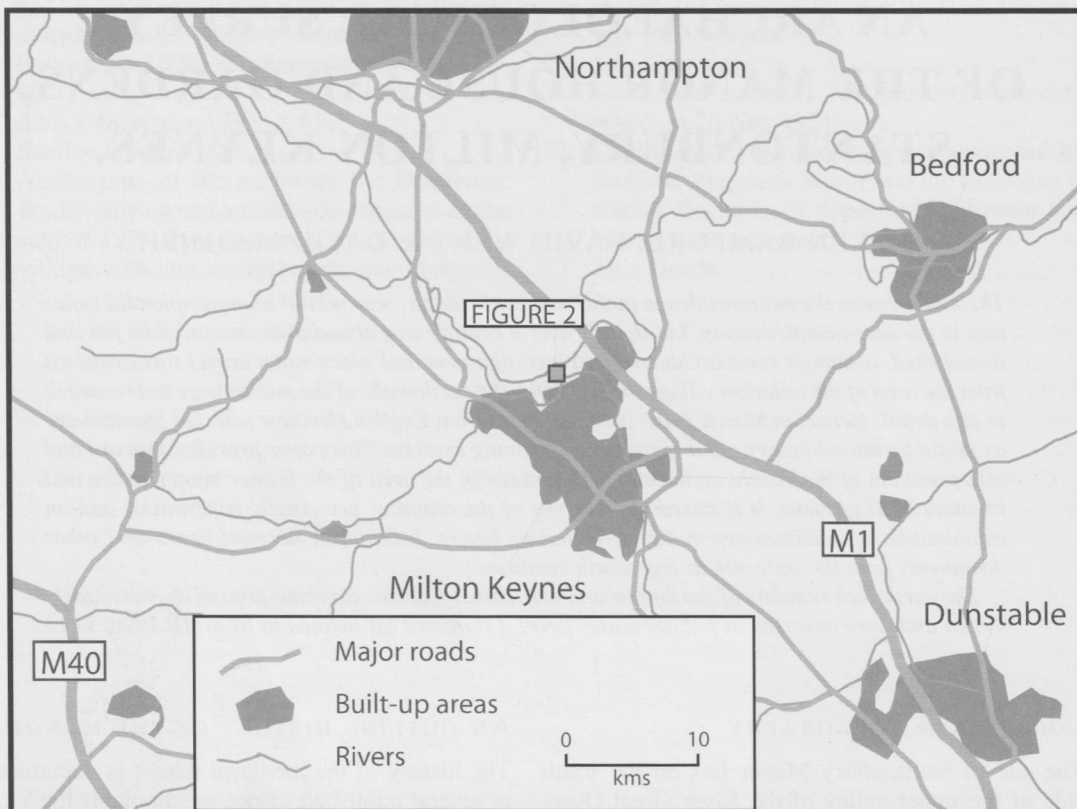


FIGURE 1 Location map.

was measured in terms of the number of plough teams needed to cultivate it: two for the demesne lands and three for the lands of the tenants, with potential for another half team. In 1202–3 the manor passed to Simon de Stanton, also named Simon Barre (or Barry), and his descendants retained the manor, which came to be known as Stanton Barry or Stantonbury, until the family name died out in the late fourteenth century (Lipscomb 1847, 345). In the early fifteenth century it passed to William Vaux and, although forfeit to the crown when his son, Sir William, was attainted in 1461, was restored to his grandson, Nicholas, who was knighted for his service to Henry VII in 1487 and created Lord Vaux of Harrowden in 1523.

Between 1490 and 1509 Sir Nicholas embarked on a policy of enclosing his estates in Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire, converting arable

to pasture to capitalise on the rising price of wool. In Stantonbury it was claimed that this enclosure led to the depopulation of the parish, depriving at least forty people of work and home. He was indeed prosecuted following the report of Wolsey's Commission in 1517, but petitioned successfully for the King's pardon (Beresford 1954, 131–2, 194). The parish lands remained thereafter predominantly pasture and meadow, with only a few acres under plough (VCH Bucks 4, 462).

Sir Nicholas' son, Thomas Lord Vaux, sold the manor in 1535, and it passed through several hands, including those of the Crown, before arriving in the possession of Avice, wife of Edmund Lee, in 1577–8. Avice outlived her husband and died seized of the property in 1599, which then passed to her daughters, Dorothy and Mary. They subsequently married Sir John Temple and John Claver respec-

tively, and the manor was divided between them in or around 1618. Mary's portion was later conveyed to the Temples, whose son, Sir Peter, sold the manor to Sir John Wittewronge in 1653.

Wittewronge was a gentleman of Flemish parentage, knighted in 1640 and later High Sheriff of Hertfordshire. He was confirmed in possession of Stantonbury in 1658, four years prior to being created a baronet under the title of the manor (VCH Bucks 4, 464; Lipscomb 1847, 347). His principal estate was in Hertfordshire, and he settled the manor of Stantonbury on his eldest son, also John, when the latter married Clare Alston in October 1664. In the same year he also began work on the building of a mansion in Stantonbury for the newly married couple. The younger John Wittewronge succeeded to his father's titles in 1693, though not to the Hertfordshire estate, which passed to his

younger brother James (Cussons 1879, 352). On his death in 1697, the title and the Stantonbury estate were inherited by his son, another John, the third baronet, who served as member of parliament for Aylesbury and later Wycombe until his death in 1722 (VCH Bucks 4, 464). His heir, the 4th baronet, had been forced to flee abroad in 1721 having 'barbarously murdered one Joseph Griffith, a mountebank' at the Saracen's Head in nearby Newport Pagnell (Lipscomb 1847, 347). On his return around 1727 he sold his interests in Stantonbury to Sarah, Duchess of Marlborough. In 1743, coincidentally in the same year that the 4th baronet died from wounds received in a drunken brawl in the Fleet debtor's prison, the house at Stantonbury was damaged by fire (ibid, Mynard 1971, 20). Thomas Jefferys' county map indicates that the mansion still stood in 1770 (Plate 1), but in 1791 it

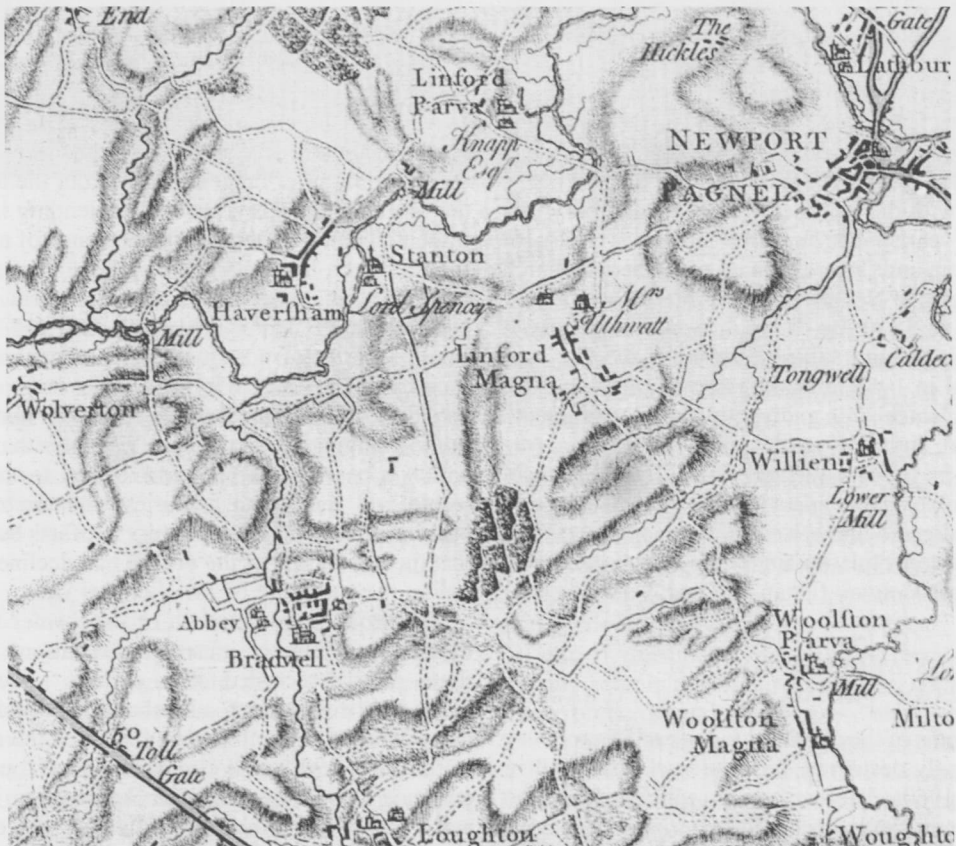


PLATE 1 Extract from Thomas Jefferys' 1770 map of Buckinghamshire, depicting the church and principal house at Stantonbury.

was finally demolished by the Duchess' descendant, the 2nd Earl Spencer (Croft & Mynard 1993:155, VCH Bucks 4, 464).

Only four houses remained in Stantonbury parish in 1736 according to Lipscomb (1847, 345). In addition to the manor, the others were perhaps two substantial farmhouses known as Stantonbury and Stanton Low, and a lesser farm, Stanton High. Of these only the former (now Stantonbury Park Farm) still exists, situated about one kilometre south east along the Wolverton Road. The other surviving building is St. Peter's church, adjacent to the manor site, first mentioned in 1181 as part of an endowment by William and Ralph Barry to Goring Priory. No attempt will be made here to provide a detailed description or history of the church, which is the subject of separate studies in progress (Woodfield, forthcoming). Suffice it to say that the present roofless two-cell structure originated in the early to mid twelfth century, if not before, and subsequently underwent various alterations, including the addition of a thirteenth century north aisle (demolished in the sixteenth century). The church served a small congregation of some 40 parishioners in the mid nineteenth century (Musson and Craven 1853, 200–1) but its ultimate decline began in 1857 with the incorporation of Stantonbury into a wider parish serving the railway workers of Wolverton, and the creation of a new parish church (St. James') at New Bradwell in 1860. Despite renovations in 1910, by the mid twentieth century it was in decay and subject to vandalism. The roof collapsed in 1956 after the removal of the twelfth century chancel arch and various interior fittings to St James', and what remained of the structure was left as a partly consolidated ruin (**Plate 2**). Subsequent problems of neglect and erosion are currently being addressed through a programme of investigations and consolidation under the direction of Milton Keynes Council (Brian Giggins, pers. comm.).

PREVIOUS ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATIONS OF THE MANOR AND VILLAGE

The remains of the medieval village of Stantonbury were largely destroyed during gravel quarrying in the mid 1960s. The earthworks which marked the site were, however, recorded in aerial photographs taken in 1947 and subsequently plotted by Mynard (1971). **Figure 2**, based on Mynard's plan, shows the village lying between two roughly parallel east-

west roads. The southern road appears to have been the main street and its line is now represented by a metalled track leading past the church. Immediately to the north of the church the sites of at least six homesteads could be seen as large, irregular building platforms separated by interconnecting hollow ways, and to the east of these, along the south side of the northern road, was a series of smaller, rectangular paddocks or tofts.

The encroachment of gravel workings towards the site of the village in 1956 prompted concern, and both the newly formed Wolverton Archaeology Society and the Inspectorate of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works made several unsuccessful attempts to gain access for excavation over the following decade. In 1966, when the workings reached the village site, permission was finally given for an archaeological watching brief during the process of destruction. Although conditions were difficult in the extreme, Mynard and a party of volunteers were able to retrieve a substantial quantity of pottery from the house platforms, to record the plan of one house in some detail and to note aspects of the archaeological sequence elsewhere.

The main sequence of pottery recovered from the watching brief ranged in date from the tenth to the fourteenth century, probably extending into the fifteenth century, although the presence of a single fragment of a hand-made Saxon bowl suggests the possibility of a settlement here as early as the eighth or ninth century (Mynard 1971, 17–24). A small quantity of post medieval pottery was also found near the church. In general the range of pottery fits quite well with the documented history of the site although Mynard (*ibid*, 23) notes that occupation appeared to have been limited to the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and the relative paucity of late fifteenth century artifacts suggests that the population of the village had declined long before the enclosure by Sir Nicholas Vaux.

The grounds to the south of the former village have seen a number of small excavations, all of them poorly recorded. The earliest known are those of Alfred Bullard, a local antique dealer, who dug in places to the south and west of the church in the early 1930s and claimed to have found the entrance to a tunnel between Stantonbury Manor and Bradwell Abbey. Bullard's discoveries prompted further sporadic investigations, and in 1939 the local history class from the Workers Education Association dug into a circular mound to the



PLATE 2 View of the ruined church of St Peter.

south west of the church. They concluded that it was of artificial construction, but no details were recorded or published. In 1955 G K Tull dug several trenches in and around the dilapidated church, revealing the foundations of a demolished west tower underlying the buried footings of a later north-south wall, which perhaps marked the eastern boundary of a post-medieval courtyard (Mynard 1971, 22).

DOCUMENTING THE OLD MANOR HOUSE

There is no surviving estate map of Stantonbury Manor, nor any large scale map of a sufficiently early date to show details of the manor house and its immediate surroundings. Some information is, however, contained in documentary records.

The earliest document to describe the medieval

manor is an *Inquisition Post Mortem* of 1326 which lists a capital messuage, garden, dovecote, a broken-down water mill and three acres of ash wood. The valuation of the demesne lands at this time accounted for perhaps 114 acres out of the total of 800 acres in the parish (Mynard 1971, 19). From 1547 onwards many of the details of the condition and tenure of the manor are recorded in original documents in the Spencer Archive¹ and in papers of the Wittewronge family². The following account is based on these sources unless otherwise specified.

Several documents dating from the sixteenth century refer in general to messuages, edifices, gardens, orchards and dovehouses, tenements, tofts and cottages. A Licence of Alienation dated 1565 is a little more specific, listing two messuages, ten tofts, a water mill, two dovehouses and four

¹ Deposited in Northamptonshire Record Office

² Held in Hertford Record Office

gardens, but makes no particular mention of a manor house. The Use of a Fine between John Temple and Ed. Dayrell, dated 1617/18, lists two messuages, six tofts, two watermills, two dovehouses, three gardens and three orchards.

Documents of the early seventeenth century are more useful, in that they include reference to a manor house and its appurtenances. According to a deed of 1618/19 relating to the division of the manor between the daughters of Edmund Lee and their husbands, the portion to be held by Mary Claver included: '... all that the manor house of Stantonbury with the dovehouses barnes stables backsydes courts orchards and gardens theretofore belonging, and the three watermylles under one roof ...'. This same portion was conveyed to Sir Thomas Temple of Stowe, father of John Temple, in 1621, including:

'... all the capitall messuage with the appurtenances called or known by the name of the manor house of Stantonbury ...together with the dovehouses barnes stables buildings orchards gardens yards and easements thereunto appertaining ...' and ...' those three water mylles under one rooffe with the appurtenances in Stantonberry ... and all fluegates dammes fleames waters proffits and advantages thereunto belonging, and the moytye of the messuage with the houses gardens and backsydes thereunto belonging late in the occupacon of one — Weste of Stantonberry'

A fine between the same parties (in Latin) refers to two messuages, ten tofts, three watermills, two dovehouses, two gardens and two orchards. The manor house was at this time let to and in the occupation of Viscount Purbeck, who was described as a lunatic under the care of Dr. Napier, rector of the nearby parish of Great Linford (VCH Bucks 4, 464).

In 1635 Sir Peter Temple, son of John Temple, married Elianor Tyrriil, and the manor, with 'the Capitall messuage or manor house', was settled on him. Later, when he came to sell the manor to Sir John Wittewronge in 1653, he had first to revoke certain indentures, and the wording of drafts for the necessary deeds, dated around 1651 and held in the Hertfordshire Record Office, suggests that he was then living in the manor house. There are references to '... the Capitall messuage or dwelling

house of mee (or of him), the said Sir Peter Temple in Stanton ...' as well as to the edifices, barns, stables, dovehouses, orchards, gardens, courtyards and backsides belonging to it, and to '... three water corne mills under one rooffe.' Among various scraps of paper on which Sir John recorded sums paid or owing in relation to the sale, there is a list headed 'The names of the lands Sir Peter had in his hands' which included, among other things 'The House gardens and wilderness'. Sir John evidently bought some of the furnishings, also, since one of the accounts relates to '... severall things of howsehod stuffes goods wood and other things at Stanton ...' purchased from Sir Peter.

The deed of settlement drawn up on the marriage of Sir John Wittewronge's son in 1664 includes reference to

'... all that cappital messuage or Mansion House of and in the said manor now or late in the possession of the said Sir John Wittewronge ... and all and singular Houses, Edifices, Buildings, Barnes, Stables, Dove houses, Courts, Yards, Orchards, Gardens and Backsides thereunto belonging, and also all those three Water Milles under one roof, and the Millhouses thereunto belonging ...'.

From the various documents in the Wittewronge and Spencer archives it is therefore possible to construct a picture of the manor estate in the period between 1547 and its settlement on John Wittewronge II in 1653. Although none of the documents between the fourteenth century inquisition post mortem and the indenture of 1621 refers specifically to a manor house, one of the two messuages listed in the License of Alienation of 1565 may have been such a house, even if not occupied by the lord of the manor at the time. It is certain, however, that when Sir John Wittewronge acquired the estate, the manor house in Stantonbury was an elaborate holding with associated gardens and orchards, dovehouses, barns, stables and courtyards.

There were, of course, other properties attached to the manor. No more than two messuages, including the manor house, are mentioned in any of the seventeenth century documents dated before the settlement of 1664. Two messuages in addition to the manor house are, however, recorded in the deed of settlement itself:

'... all that messuage or tenement heretofore in the tenure possession or occupation of Thomas Hurst, and all that messuage or tenement now or late in the tenure or occupation of Stephen Holwell ...'

and the papers relating to the revocation of indentures by Sir Peter Temple in 1650 also refer to '... the ... parsonage appropriate to Stanton ...'. Some or all of the six or ten tofts listed in the Use of a Fine of 1617/18 and in the documents relating to the conveyance of John and Mary Claver's portion of the manor to Sir Thomas Temple may have been abandoned homesteads, but it is likely that there were still a few cottages in the parish, occupied by workers on the estate and farms. An indenture of 1551, relating to the conveyance of the manor to John Coke, and a deed of exchange of the same year refer to an unspecified number of cottages, and the indenture of 1618/19 relating to the division of the manor lists a 'cottage close'.

THE NEW MANSION 1664–68

It is clear from the documentary record that the building work which was begun in 1664 was a remodelling and extension of the existing manor house. There is no complete or coherent description of the new house, nor any surviving depiction or plan of it, but there are two documents which contain incidental references. One is a set of building accounts for the period 1665–1666 (modern calendar) which relate solely to the work at Stantonbury; the other is Sir John's personal account book, which also contains entries relating to this work. The details which these provide suggest that the house may have been similar in some respects to the one which Sir John had earlier built for himself at Rothamsted, also around the core of an existing sixteenth century house. The external appearance of the seventeenth century part of Rothamsted Manor remains little altered, although it was extended in the nineteenth century in neo-seventeenth century style, and many of the interior fittings, such as panelling and fireplaces, although of sixteenth and seventeenth century date, were brought from elsewhere and installed around 1900 (Pevsner 1992, 160, VCH Herts 2, 304–306).

The house at Stantonbury was built of brick with

stone dressings, and references to work on 'ye greate building' and 'ye returne building' suggest that it consisted of a central block with at least one wing. At least two halls are mentioned in different entries: 'ye greate hall', which was wainscotted and paved, with stone steps at the entrance, and 'ye Old hall' with a chimney, passage and buttery. Payments were made for the construction of six cantilevers in the Great Hall, presumably to support a gallery. Other entries refer to arches, pillars and wainscoting in 'ye Hall', which might be the Great Hall or another. A separate entry in Sir John's personal account book refers to the 'new lesser hall' at Stanton, in connection with the provision of locks for two doors, but it is not clear whether this was a third apartment or a reference to the old hall, newly diminished in status in relation to the now completed Great Hall. There are also references to 'ye folkes' hall' (presumably the servants' hall).

The building also included a 'gallery' with 'shaftes' (presumably pillars), evidently on the upper floor since there is a reference to tiling the roof of it³; at least two parlours, 'the middle parlour', which was also wainscotted, and 'ye little parlor' which had a 'roome over it' (there is separate reference elsewhere to 'the chamber over the parlour'), a study (one entry refers to 'seeling ye studdy') and a vaulted cellar.

At Sir John's Rothamsted house there is a loggia known as 'The Arches', now glassed in and panellled, and there may have been a similar feature at Stantonbury, since an entry in the building accounts for November 1665 refers to 'carrying ye tyles into ye arches in ye wett weather'. Entries in Sir John's personal account book for September 1667 and April 1668 refer to 'the Balcony' and the purchase of lead for the balcony, but it is not clear whether this relates to Stantonbury or Rothamsted. The only feature resembling a balcony now at Rothamsted is the flat roof of a porch on the south front of the house, which is surrounded by a nineteenth century balustrade said to have replaced an earlier one (Pevsner 1992, 159–160).

The progress of work on and relating to the building of the house can be followed to some extent in the account books. Preparations seem to have begun in 1664 with digging of clay for bricks in February, and the making of bricks and tiles continued at Stantonbury throughout the spring and

³ On the second floor of Sir John's house at Rothamsted there is a long gallery under the roof (VCH Herts 2, 1908, 306)

summer of that year. In the following October a Mr. Macklyne (who seems to have been the architect and master builder) was paid '*for drawing the plott of my intended building*'.

The first record of work on site is in February 1665, starting with payments for the construction of a lime kiln and the making of wheelbarrows, and in March a man was paid for making hods and ladders. The records suggest that sand and stone were quarried locally and in quantity, chiefly in the earlier stages of the work. Between April and November 1665 a total of 219 cartloads of sand were dug, and a payment for the digging of a further 27 loads was made in the following May, followed by payments for a further four and eight loads in July and September respectively. The quarrying of a total of 649 cartloads of stone is recorded between April and June 1665, and in June men were paid for '*filling up the pitt*' (quarry?). Much smaller loads of stone were quarried or 'gathered' in November of the same year and in June and September 1666, and it is possible that some of this was for yard or garden walling. Entries for October 1666 included payment for six perches (30m) of walling in the back courtyard⁴ and for four days work on '*the dry walls*'. Much of the stone quarried and carted to the site was probably used for making lime. Large quantities of lime were burnt between March 1665 and the following August, tailing off towards the end of the year, and there was further burning of lime recorded between May and August of 1666 (probably for plaster, since a large quantity of hair was purchased in May of that year).

The first payments to the builders, '*Christopher Bishop and Partners*' and '*Mr Macklyn and Partners*', were made towards the end of April 1665 and in May workmen were '*throwing earth into the new building*' and '*carrying earth into ye house*' – possibly to make up the platform. Construction of the shell of the new structure seems to have been largely complete by late summer, since there is a reference in August to work on the cornice of the

great building and the floor of the return building. By November of the same year the roofing of the building was evidently in progress. In that month Christopher Bishop and Partners were paid for tiling '*ye greate house ... ye gallery ... and ye old house*' and there was also a payment for work on the gutters. This seems to have been before the construction of the cellar, since the first reference to the latter is in January of the following year, when workmen were paid for the laying of foundations for the pillars. There is another reference to the pillars and arches of the cellar in the following April. Some of the entries clearly relate to the remodelling of the old house. There was a payment in September 1665 for '*takeing downe ye windowes & stopping them up*', and in November 1666 '*for inlarging ye chymney in ye Old hall and 3 dore wayes in ye hall, ye passage and ye buttery*'.

Bricks and tiles continued to be manufactured locally throughout the main period of building, and in July 1666 a final payment of £5 5s was made to the brickmaker, as the balance owing '*for burning 201000⁵ bricks this year at Stanton*'. Some of the stone used in the building was evidently being brought in ready dressed, as '*five score and five feete*' (32m) of 'coynes' (quoins) were purchased in April 1665, although in the same month two masons were also paid for dressing old freestone⁶, and another payment to two masons was made in May.

Other materials purchased and brought in included timber, nails, tile pins, iron and lead. Sawn boards were purchased in March and June 1665, and there were regular payments for large quantities of boards (sometimes specified as elm), heart lath and sap lath between November 1665 and July 1666. The greatest quantity of nails of various sorts and sizes was bought between March and August 1665, but there were further payments for nails and also tile pins in the following November. Another payment of £10 for nails in May of the following year appears to have been a settling of the

⁴ This corresponds closely to the probable length of the wall exposed in 1955, and may relate to Lipscomb's report that part of the west end of the churchyard was 'taken into the court of the Mansion-House' (1847, 349).

⁵ This figure seems much too high, and is probably a numerical transcription of 'twenty and one thousand' i.e. 21,000. Where the number of bricks paid for is specified, the rate seems to have been around 1s for 50. The total sum paid to the brickmaker in 1666, including the final payment, was £23 5s 5d indicating a figure in the region of 23,250 bricks.

⁶ The 'old freestone' may have been from the old building at Stantonbury, but could equally have been bought in from elsewhere. In the Spencer archive there is a receipt acknowledging payment for 'squared and wrought stone' bought by Sir John Witlewonge from a man in Norfolk. This is, however, dated 1655, well before the building work at Stantonbury.

balance owing, but a payment for 10000 lath nails was made in the July 1666. In March 1665 £24 8s 11d was paid for iron for the building at Stanton, and 25cwt of iron was brought to Stanton in the following June. Three loads of lead (presumably for the roof, or guttering) were carted in September 1665, and £60 paid on account for lead in October. Further payments were made to the same man, presumably for lead, in January, March, April and October 1666.

Most of the payments for specified works in 1666 relate to work on the interior, and the purchase of materials for this. Payments to the builders were much less frequent, and mostly of smaller sums. The balance owing to the brickmaker, Brigeman, was paid in July of that year, and the last recorded payment to the bricklayers was in the following October. John Bell, a glazier, was paid relatively small sums in August 1665 and July 1666, and a much larger sum (£15 14s) in full in October 1666, which suggests that most of the glazing was done by that time. There was a payment to the painters in March 1666 and for work on the stairs in the Folks Hall in October, and sporadic work on the interior evidently continued until at least the Autumn of 1668; payments were made in April of that year for the paving the great hall, and the laying of stone steps going into the hall, and in July and September for the wainscoting of the middle parlour and great hall.

THE EARTHWORK SURVEY (Figure 3)

The site of the manor house, outbuildings and yards

The survey revealed distinct evidence for substantial buildings immediately to the west and south of the ruined parish church – the areas commonly identified as the likely position of the seventeenth century mansion.

To the west of the present churchyard wall the ground has been built up to form a large, rectangular platform (**A**) about 35m across. This is bounded on the north side by a scarp 1m high, on the east side by a sizeable ditch, 4m in width and 0.6m deep, and to the south by a fragmentary rubble wall which runs westward from the south west corner of the churchyard. The northern scarp has suffered some recent damage, probably during the quarrying of the surroundings in the 1960s, but the basic

shape of the platform is still very similar to that shown on post-war aerial photographs, in which it appears as the most southerly of the raised building plots defined by the intersection of village hollow ways (as shown in **Fig 2**). Buildings clearly once stood on this platform, evidenced by slight scarps defining two sides of a rectangular raised area to the south east and three sides of a smaller platform towards the centre, but in our view these earthworks are most probably the remains of a courtyard associated with the manor house, perhaps including the location of one of the two dovecotes mentioned in the records. We can be certain that they do not represent the principal ranges of the seventeenth century mansion, or indeed the position of its earlier medieval and post-medieval predecessor. This certainty is based on the much clearer evidence for a large building to the south of the church.

Aerial photographs taken in August 1995 (**Plate 3**) show parchmarks outlining the buried foundations of a rectangular range aligned parallel to the southern boundary of the churchyard, with one clearly defined wing projecting southwards at the western end. The site of the recorded parchmarks is a low, raised platform (**B**), measuring approximately 45m by 20m. A southward projection at the western end corresponds to the wing seen in the parchmarks, and there is a smaller projection, perhaps a stepped entrance, or porch, towards the centre of the main east-west range. The surface of the platform is uneven, suggesting a spread of demolition material, and fragments of tile, plaster and mortar appear in molehills across this area.

Between platform **B** and the southern churchyard wall is a broad, linear hollow, eight metres wide and about 0.5m deep, defined by a north facing scarp along its southern edge. This hollow could mark the line of a driveway, although it is crossed towards the western end by a low ridge or causeway, roughly in line with the present west wall of the churchyard. The causeway appears to link the house to either the churchyard or the court to the west of it, depending on whether the boundary between the two is considered to be the present wall, or the wall whose foundations were observed overlying the remains of the west tower of the church during Tull's 1955 excavation (Mynard 1971, 22).

The shape of platform **B** and the outline plan of the building recorded from the air, correspond to

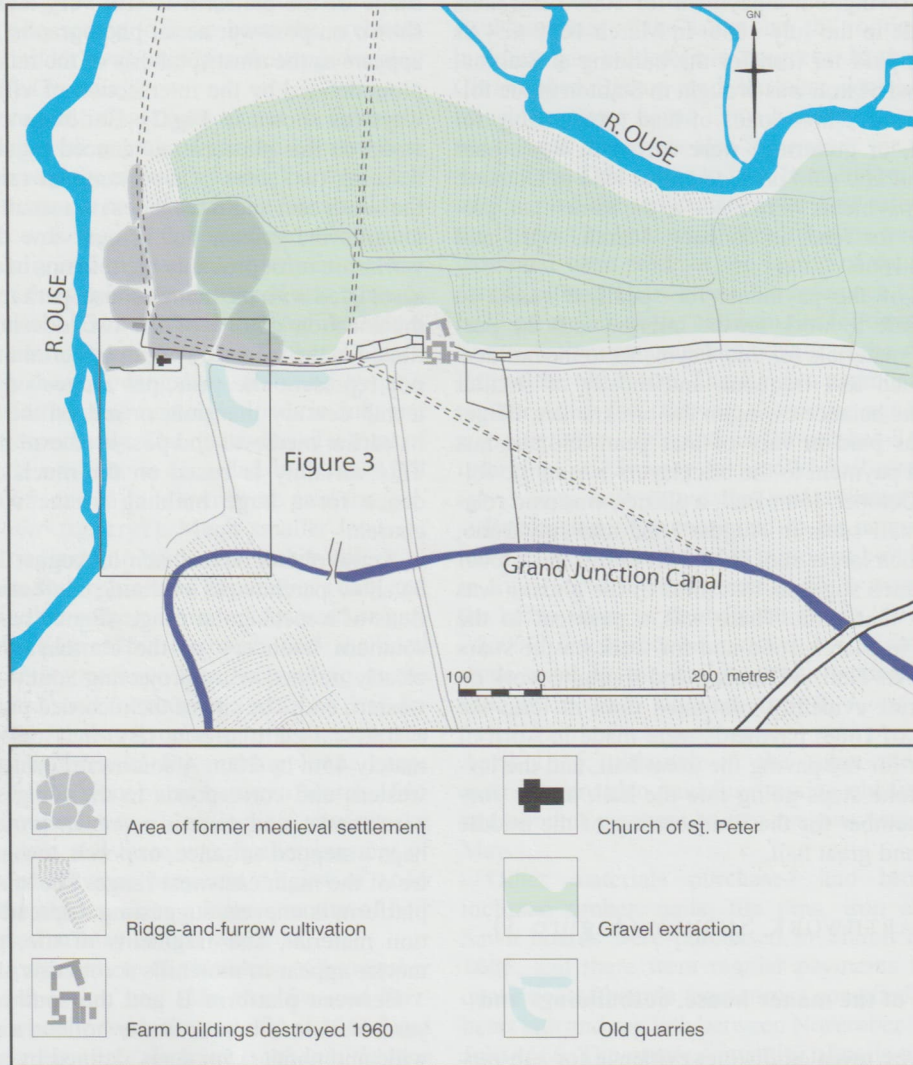


FIGURE 2 The church, manor and medieval village remains (before destruction), after Mynard 1971.

what little can be inferred from the records of the plan of Sir John Wittewronge's new mansion constructed in 1665–1668, and leave little doubt that this was the location of the house. The information gleaned from the building accounts suggests that the pre-existing manor house ('the old house') was either partially or completely incorporated within the new building, and that the mansion included a main building and a return building – the latter perhaps the pronounced wing at the western end of the

range. That this building stood on an earthen platform may also be inferred from the accounts ('*throwing earth into the new building*' and '*carrying earth into ye house*').

The 'tunnel' discovered by the amateur archaeologist Alfred Bullard during his excavations in the early 1930s may well have been the cellar which is mentioned in the accounts. Bullard did not record the location of his investigations, although there is an excavation scar towards the western side of the



PLATE 3 1995 aerial photograph showing the church and the earthworks to the south. The faint, parched, outline of buried structures can be seen on the platform to the south of the church. © Mike Farley.

platform, with a corresponding mound of spoil to the north, which may mark the site of his trench.

The garden earthworks

To the south and west of the house platform are the remains of a formal garden. This garden is divided into two parts: an area adjacent to the site of the house, characterised by well-defined and substantial earthworks, and an area to the south of this in which the earthworks are less substantial and less well preserved.

The Lower Garden

The area immediately to the south of the site of the mansion has been levelled over a distance of nearly 70m, terminating at a north-facing scarp cut to a

depth of some 1.2m into the hillside (**Plate 4**). This area (**C**) is bisected east-west by a low bank approximately 4m wide and 35m in length, and further sub-divided by shallow scarps to north and south – features which are consistent with the remains of formal parterres laid on the axis of the garden and separated by a central raised pathway. The area to the north of the of the east-west bank and nearest to the site of the mansion contains a large circular depression in the precise centre which could have been an ornamental pool or fountain.

This formal pattern is bordered by the two most striking features of the garden. On the east side, a massive bank (**D**) measuring approximately 70m in length and 2.5m in height, evidently served both to

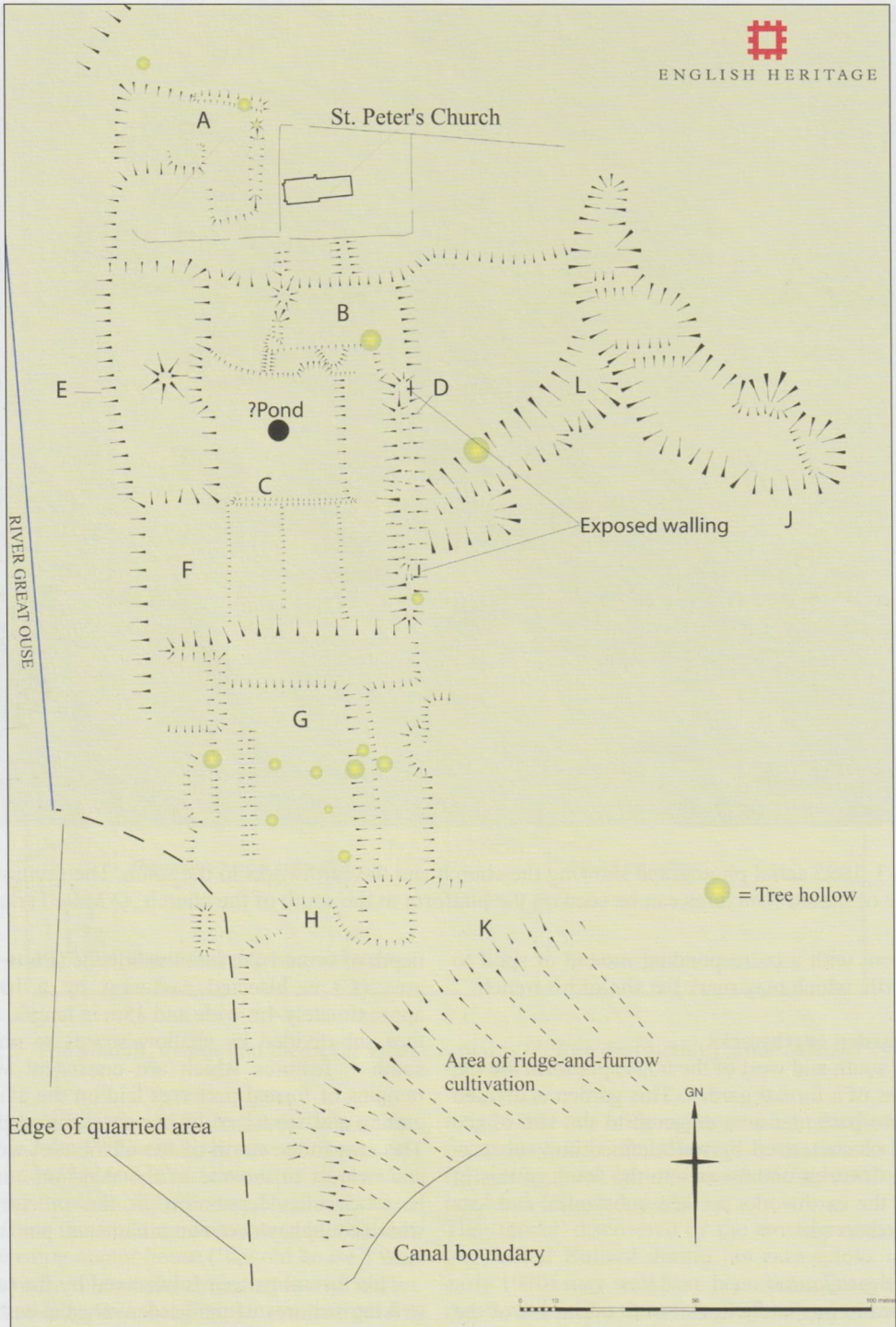


FIGURE 3 The earthwork survey.



PLATE 4 View looking south from the church. The terminal scarp at the southern edge of the lower garden platform is prominently highlighted by the shaded area, as is the bank on the east side of the terrace

enclose the garden and to act as a raised walkway from which to enjoy the prospect. Slight knolls at either end of the bank suggest the locations of relatively insubstantial arbours or summerhouses, and at the mid point of the bank a sloping, semi-circular projection probably marks the site of a flight of steps linking the east-west garden path to the flattened summit. The eastern, or outward face of the bank has a single terrace running mid-way along the slope for most of its length. This seems merely to be a product of erosion, although its position appears to reflect the line of a buried retaining wall of roughly dressed stone, now only visible in cattle scrapes at the extreme ends of the bank (**Plate 5**).

The striking feature on the other side of the lower garden, to the west, is a large area, some 60m by 20m, cut away on three sides to create a still lower terrace or sunken garden (**E**). A very slight indentation towards the south eastern corner sug-

gests the former presence of steps, perhaps associated with the central east-west path, but the evidence is inconclusive. The principal feature of the sunken terrace is a central, circular mound (**Plate 6**). This is approximately 14m in diameter at the base and 1.5m high (some 0.5m higher than the adjacent scarp), with a small flattened area on the top, about 3m across. The profile has been disturbed, probably by the excavations in 1939. These revealed that the earth used for the mound incorporated fragments of roof tile and wall plaster, suggesting that its construction post-dated the demolition of a substantial building nearby (Mynard 1971, 21). Such flat topped 'prospect mounds' were a feature of many formal gardens in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, and were often surmounted by a small arbour or belvedere, although no record survives of any evidence for such a structure having been recognised



PLATE 5 Detail of the exposed wall facing on the crest of the bank flanking the western side of the lower garden.

in 1939. A rounded spur which projects from the centre of the eastern scarp towards the mound may have supported a timber bridge.

A slight west-facing scarp separates the level interior of the sunken terrace from rough ground sloping very gently towards the edge of the canalised river some 15m further east. This intervening area appears to have been covered by upcast material from dredging operations, leaving an undulating surface which masks any traces of a small pond and narrow open drain which ran parallel with the river, as shown on nineteenth century Ordnance Survey editions. South of the sunken garden a further terraced area (F), with a broad scarp 0.7m high along the west side overlooking the river, completes the overall plan of rectangular compartments within a wider rectangular enclosure immediately adjacent to the house.

The Upper Garden

Although less pronounced than the earthworks nearest the site of the house, further remains across the rising ground to the south nonetheless retain elements of pattern and symmetry which point to a continuation of the formal garden.

A series of shallow north-south scarps extend southwards, forming the east and west sides of an avenue (G), 30m in width, aligned with the central axis of the garden to the north. At the highest, southern end, the avenue terminates in a terraced platform with a central, rectangular northward projection (H) which could have been the site of a building, situated so as to provide a view northwards over the complete suite of gardens, as well as to serve as an 'eye-catcher' from the house below. To either side of this avenue other features are indicated by fragmentary scarps and terraces, most



PLATE 6 View of the garden prospect mound from the north-east.

notably the rectangular building platform immediately east of **H**. On the west side of the avenue an erratic scarp marks the upper edge of the increasingly steep gradient from the promontory down to the river. On the east side scraps of scarps and banks combine to suggest a continuation of the boundary marked by the raised walkway (**D**) to the north, although the angularity of these features might also imply the former presence of structures in this area, possibly related to the garden. Small hollows both within and to either side of the avenue do not appear to be random, and suggest a formal plantation of trees, some of which were mapped in the late nineteenth century.

The upper, southern garden may have formed part of the 'wilderness' which Sir John listed among 'the lands Sir Peter had in his hands', which would be consistent with the pattern of many seventeenth century gardens, including those at Kirby Hall (Dix 1994, Dix et al. 1995, 295f). The deed of settlement on the marriage of Sir John's son also

lists as part of the manor 'all that ground and wood ... called the Maze or the Wilderness ... containing by estimation five acres', although the area mentioned (approximately 2ha) is somewhat larger than the 1.2ha occupied by the earthworks. In the seventeenth century the term 'wilderness' was used of areas with a formal planting of fruiting and ornamental trees and shrubs, often with a central path or avenue on the axis, although later examples might include meandering paths. Mazes were also a feature of some seventeenth century gardens and are mentioned in William Lawson's *A New Orchard and Garden* which appeared in 1618. It seems to have been usual to plant them with a variety of fruit trees, evergreens and shrubs, clipped into hedges (Hadfield 1960, 77.85). A Parliamentary Survey of the gardens of Lord Exeter's house at Wimbledon, lately in the possession of Queen Henrietta Maria, made in 1649, records that a maze and wilderness had recently been created on the site of an orchard (ibid. 68).

The medieval cultivation pattern

The pattern of ridge and furrow cultivation which supported the medieval village and was abandoned to pasture in the early sixteenth century is still extensive, and the aerial photographs taken in 1957 show that more existed to the north of the settlement and beneath the series of small rectangular paddocks or tofts between the two lanes (**Plate 7**),

before the destruction of this area by the gravel workings in the 1960s. Large areas of former furlongs survive some distance to the east of the manorial earthworks, to either side of the metalled road to Stantonbury Wharf, and truncated by the line of the canal to the south (**Fig 2**). Nearer to the garden earthworks, aerial photographs show a distinct corrugation extending southwards from the quarry **J**,

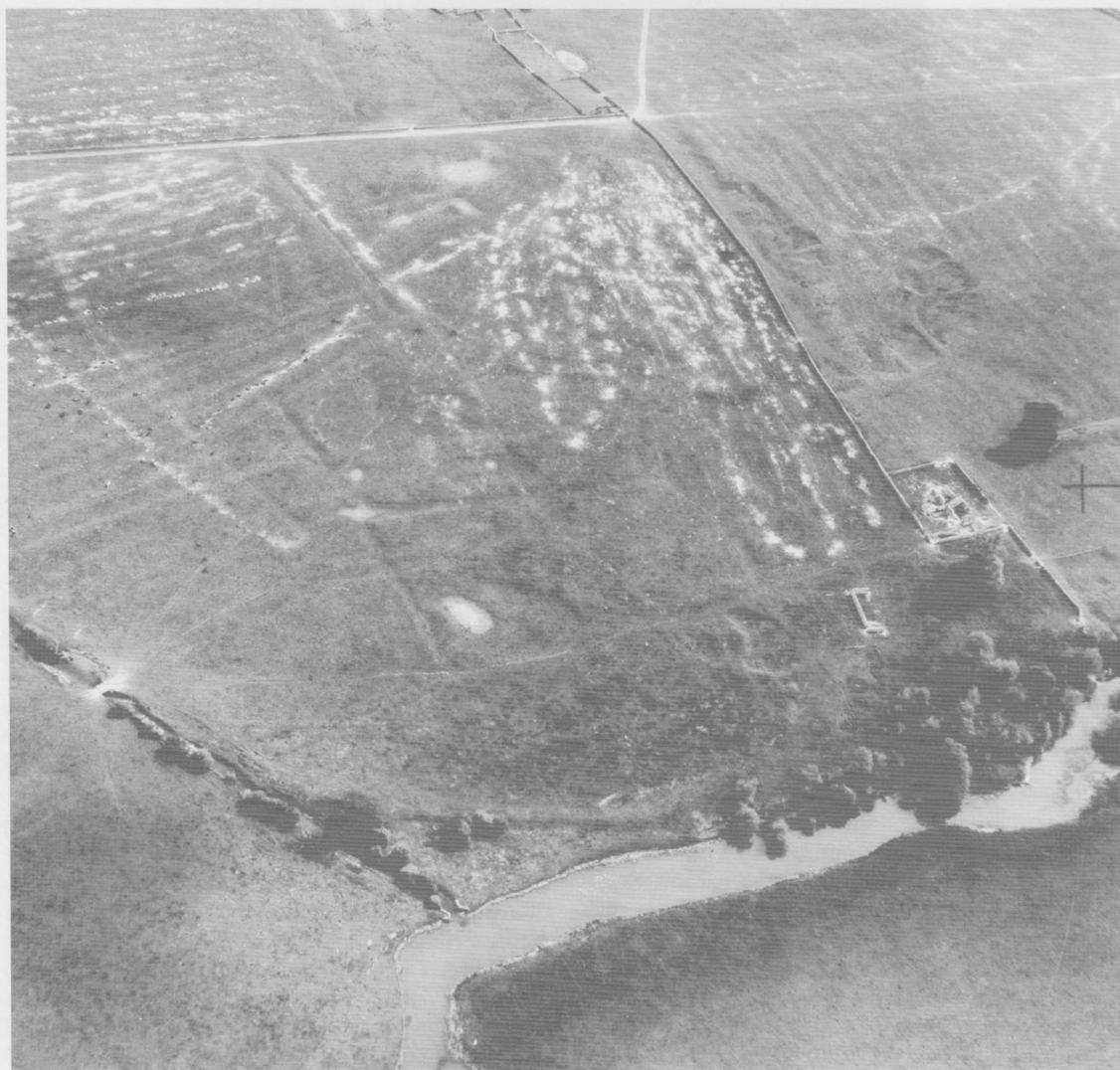


PLATE 7 1957 aerial photograph (CUCAP UO69), looking east-south-east, showing the site of the church (right of centre) with the now quarried remains of the deserted village to the left. Ridge-and-furrow cultivation cloaks the surrounding landscape. Reproduced with kind permission of The Ministry of Defence © Crown Copyright/MOD.

and to the south of the field track (**K**) which bordered a furlong now truncated by the canal.

The Quarries

Two quarries are clearly visible adjacent to the garden earthworks. The quarry to the south west of the upper garden, masked by undergrowth which did not permit detailed survey, consists of terraced hollows exposing beds of tabular limestone along the west face of the spur. These are clearly of some age, certainly earlier than an embankment (not depicted on Fig 3) built out from the quarried slope which is marked as 'rifle butts' on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map. The quarry may relate to the construction of the Grand Union Canal along the higher contour of the spur in 1799, but it is just as likely to have provided some of the local stone quarried for the new house, as detailed above.

The second group of quarry pits are located to the east of the church and the site of the manor house (see **Figs 2 and 3**). Those which lie within the survey area (**Fig 3. J**) form an irregular crescent about 55m from the garden earthworks and house platform. They range in depth from 0.5 to 1m, becoming deeper as the natural slope of the ground increases to the south. Animal scrapes in the sides reveal that they cut layers of alluvium and topsoil. The present appearance of the hollows seems to have resulted from deliberate infilling, which would account for the absence of upcast material surrounding the excavations, as well as the presence of mixed soils in the bases of the depressions. The date of the pits is uncertain, although they appear to be later than the medieval field system and it is quite possible that they were dug to obtain, or process materials used in building the seventeenth century mansion (Croft & Mynard 1993, 157). The remains of a broad hollow way (**Fig 3, L**) between the pits and the raised garden walkway may relate to the movement of materials during construction, but appear more likely to be a feature of the medieval fieldscape, truncated and overlain by the later development. The pits are crossed by two narrow and perfectly level parallel banks or causeways containing fragments of brick and stone. These are too narrow for wheeled traffic and bear no obvious relation to the site of the house, and their origins and purpose remain obscure.

The Mills and the canalised stream

The latest of the mills, mentioned in records from Domesday onwards, had evidently disappeared, or at least were no longer working, by the later eighteenth century. None is shown on Jeffrey's map of 1770 (**Plate 1**), and their location is now uncertain. The most likely site is to the west of the church, manor house and gardens, where a section of the river has been canalised and straightened to run east of its original, serpentine course, leaving a narrow island between. The purpose of this was almost certainly to create a mill stream or leat, leaving the original channel to serve as the bypass. If so, the mill (or mills) would have been situated near the confluence of the two watercourses at the north end of the island.

Fragments of limestone walling and rubble were noted in the river bank at SP 8348 4267, immediately to the west of the garden remains, confirming observations made by Local Authority archaeologists in 1980 (SMR 3808). The walling is visible in the bank at least 1m below the present ground surface and could be the remains of a revetment for the sides of the leat, or part of the mill structure.

CONCLUSIONS

The survey of the visible archaeological features at Stantonbury records several phases in the life of the manor house. The sequence begins with the fragmentary remains of the medieval settlement, which was largely depopulated by the end of the fifteenth century, and the accompanying fields, which had mainly been enclosed and converted to pasture in the early sixteenth century. Overlying them in part, are features associated with the continuing occupation of the manor house and the creation of elaborate gardens which reached their peak alongside the mansion of the Wittewronge family in the later seventeenth century. The Wittewronge's mansion, as rebuilt in 1664–66, seems to have survived as a habitable dwelling for less than 80 years and probably declined alongside the fortunes of the 4th baronet well before its destruction by fire in 1743. After the final demolition in 1791 the site of the house was not reoccupied, and this, together with the subsequent management of the grounds as pasture, has allowed the garden earthworks and other features to survive in remarkable condition⁷.

⁷ The pasture landscape surrounding the manor earthworks has seen at least one major episode of agricultural improvement in the twentieth century – evidenced by patterns of cross ploughing and/or drainage visible on aerial photographs from 1965

The evidence suggests that late-medieval manor house stood to the south of the church where it was subsequently modified and incorporated within the mansion built in 1665–6. The platform to the west of the church may have been one of its courtyards – perhaps the site of some of the outbuildings listed in documents from the early seventeenth century onwards. The site of the mansion itself is clearly defined by low earthworks, the result of deliberate terracing and the spread of demolition material, and by the buried wall foundations which were recorded as parchmarks in the mid 1990s. The layout of these features is consistent with the documentary evidence. The description of a ‘great building’ and ‘return building’ is reflected in the physical evidence for a main east-west range and a west wing projecting southwards, and there is some circumstantial evidence to suggest that the former manor house (‘the old house’) was the main component of the west wing.

Documentary sources, from the early fourteenth century onwards, consistently refer to gardens in relation to the manor, and documents dating from 1618/19 and 1621 leave little doubt that, in its later stages, the old manor house was set within more than one garden, with orchards and a ‘wilderness’. It is not impossible that the elaborate gardens represented by the surviving earthworks were made by the Wittewronges after 1666 to complement the new house, but there are several reasons to suppose that the principal features and overall design may be earlier. The combination of substantial landscaped features, such as the raised walkway, prospect mound and terraces, in an axial and rigidly geometric layout, is typical of gardens created before the disruption of the Civil War and the Interregnum. The design has more in common with the type of gardens created at Holdenby and Kirby Hall, Northamptonshire, by Sir Christopher Hatton and his descendants in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries⁸, than with the majority of those begun in the later seventeenth century which, following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, tended to follow the French and Dutch styles. Although the gardens are much smaller than those at Holdenby or Kirby, the landscaping is on a relatively ambitious scale for a manor of the provincial

gentry. It represents a considerable investment of time and money, and it might be thought that if the Wittewronges were interested enough in gardens to make that investment, they would have opted for a design in the forefront of fashion.

Another, and perhaps more significant point, is that the gardens as a whole are laid out on a central, north-south axis, aligned well to the west of the centre of the house outlined in the parchmarks. This suggests that they may have been laid out originally in relation to the earlier manor house, before it was modified and enlarged. There is no mention of the gardens in Sir John Wittewronge’s accounts of expenditure on Stanton, nor any evidence to suggest that either he or his son had a particular interest in gardening, but they may, nevertheless, have made some modifications and additions, and the fact that the mound contains building materials could be seen as evidence that it was constructed after completion of the new building.

A more likely candidate as the original creator of the garden is either Sir John Temple or his son, Sir Peter, on whom the manor was settled in 1635, and it may be relevant that two members of their family were to become well-known for their interest in the subject. Sir William Temple, a distant cousin of Sir Peter (their great grandfathers were brothers), was an enthusiastic and influential gardener, and Richard Temple, 1st Viscount Cobham, who was the grandson of Sir John’s elder brother, began the transformation of the gardens and grounds of Stowe in the early eighteenth century. Sir William is generally regarded as an advocate of the type of garden design which became fashionable towards the end of the seventeenth century, but a garden at Moor Park, Hertfordshire, which he recalled in his writings as ‘... in all kinds the most beautiful and perfect, at least in the figure and disposition, that I have ever seen’ was, as his description of it makes clear, an early seventeenth century formal, enclosed garden (Turner 1986, 18, 47,49; Anthony, J. 1991, 55).

What is certain is that the garden in its final form relates to the late seventeenth century mansion and has remained largely undisturbed since the building’s destruction in the mid eighteenth century.

⁸ The gardens at Kirby Hall were extensively remodelled and extended in the late seventeenth century, but the main landscaped features are believed to date from the time of Sir Christopher Hatton II, before 1620 (Dix et al. 1995, 346)

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SURVEY DETAIL

Survey information was captured using a Wild Leica T805 Electronic theodolite and integral EDM, with additional details of the eastern quarry and other peripheral areas recorded using a Trimble GPS. The survey results were combined using Trimble Geomatics, AutoCad 2000 and 'Key-Terra-Firma' software and are stored in digital form. The site archive and copies of the main report have been deposited in the archive of English Heritage at the National Monuments Record Centre, under record nos. NMR SP 84 SW 10 and ISSN 1478–7008.

APPENDIX: DOCUMENTARY SOURCES

Hertfordshire Record Office

- D/ELW E44 Papers concerning the sale of the manor of Stanton to Sir John Wittewronge by Sir Peter Temple 1650–1652 (mostly drafts of revocations of indentures)
- D/ELW E45 An Act for the Vesting of the Estate late of Sir John Wittewronge Bart deceased in the County of Bucks in Trustees to enable them to convey the same to the most noble Sarah, Duchess Dowager of Marlborough, the purchase thereof under a Decree of the High Court of Chancery (This quotes or cites various seventeenth and early eighteenth century indentures, including the settlement on the marriage of John Wittewronge with Clare Alstone, 1664)
- D/ELW F20 Sir John Wittewronge: A booke of Accounts of receipts and disbursements beginning at Michaelmas 1657
- D/ELW F22 Accounts of [Sir John Wittewronge's] building at Stanton beginning in February 1664/5

Northamptonshire Record Office

- SOX 391 B5 Deeds relating to the manor of Stanton, 1551–1640. (The originals are considered too fragile to be handled, but they are accompanied by a book containing transcripts in a seventeenth century hand). They include:

- Deed of Conveyance of Stantonbury Manor to John Coke 1551
 - Deed of Exchange, 1551
 - A License of Alienation granted to Regnold Wolfe, Thomas Addams and Robert Coke, 1564
 - A deed of Robert Coke to Reignald Wolfe and Thomas Addams, 1567
 - A Pardon of Alienation 1578
 - The Use of a Fine between John Temple and Ed. Dayrell, 1617–18
 - The petition between Jo. Temple et ux. and John Claver et ux. 1618–19
 - A deed of conveyance between John Claver et ux. and Thomas Temple 1620–21
 - A Fine between the same parties 1621–22
 - Release of the manor of Stanton by the Dowager Lady Temple, widow of Sir John Temple to Peter Temple, son of Sir John Temple 1635
 - Marriage Settlement of Sir Peter Temple and Elianor Tyrrill, daughter of Sir Edward Tyrrill 1635
- SOX 249 B4 Settlement on the marriage of John Wittewronge with Clare Alston, 1664
- SOX 188 Miscellaneous documents relating to finances and leases (includes papers listing sums paid or owing for the purchase of the manor of Stanton and associated goods, as well as a list of 'the names of lands Sir Peter had in his hands'.