

# Archaeological Field Survey Report



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## WANDLEBURY HILLFORT, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

by Paul Pattison and Alastair Oswald

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WANDLEBURY HILLFORT,  
STAPLEFORD, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

NMR Number TL 45 SE 2

REQUEST SURVEY

June 1994 - October 1995



**RCHM**  
ENGLAND

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*Watercolour of Wandlebury and Gogmagog House c.1801 by R. Relhan*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

In June 1994 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England began a large-scale earthwork survey of Wandlebury hillfort, as part of a student training project in collaboration with the Department of Archaeology at the University of Cambridge. This fieldwork formed part of the first season of a three year programme of research undertaken by the university, which included excavations outside the scheduled area and geophysical survey both outside and within the ramparts (Gdaniec and French 1994 and forthcoming). The earthwork survey was completed by RCHME staff in December 1994 and the surviving buildings associated with the former Gogmagog Hills House were examined briefly in October 1995.

Wandlebury lies 2km north-east of Stapleford village in the north-eastern corner of Stapleford parish in South Cambridgeshire (NGR TL 4940 5343), at a height of 74m OD, towards the southern end of the Gogmagog plateau. These low hills of Middle Chalk are locally prominent and provide commanding views, notably over the hinterland of the Fens and the valley of the Cam. The panoramic prospects which may have existed in the past are now restricted by tree plantations, except to the south where the view has been deliberately maintained.

The site and its environs have been managed since 1954 by the Cambridge Preservation Trust as a nature reserve and rural amenity area, with the buildings let as private accommodation. The hillfort defences are largely clad with mature trees and some scrub and undergrowth but the interior retains some of its more open character, inherited from the post-medieval pleasure grounds, of a sweeping lawn with scattered specimen trees and shrubs. An orchard has been restored recently in the north-western part of the interior.

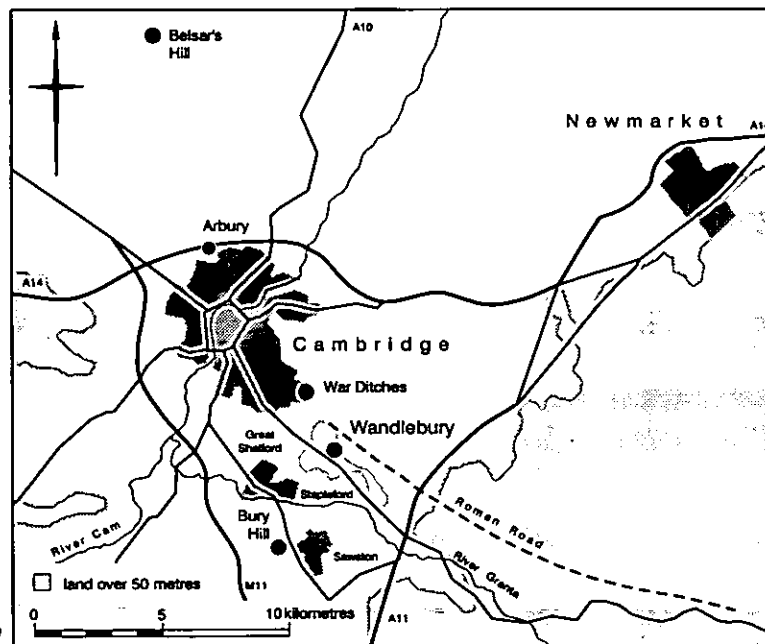


Figure 1  
Location map

## 2. WANDLEBURY and THE GOGMAGOG HILLS

Wandlebury appears in the tenth century Chronicle of Ramsay Abbey in the form *Wendlesbiri* and although it is uncertain whether or not there was settlement at that time, it was a hundred meeting place where land pleas were occasionally held between the tenth and twelfth centuries. In the *Historia Eliensis* it appears as *Wyndilbury*, an important meeting place of nine hundreds in the reign of Stephen (1135 - 1154) (VCH Cambs 8 1982, 227; VCH Cambs 2 1948, 40).

At an unknown date the chalk downs around Wandlebury became known as the Gogmagog Hills, a name which has continued to the present day. The name is linked to a Celtic giant cult, knowledge of which either persisted locally or was resurrected by Cambridge students in the sixteenth century. The earliest known instance of the name is on Saxton's map of 1576 (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1943, 35) and in the early seventeenth century John Layer recounted....

*'I could never learn how these hills came to be called Gog Magog Hills, unless it were from a high and mighty portraiture of a giant which the schollars of Cambridge cut upon the Turf or superficies of the earth within the said trench, (ie the hillfort) and not unlikely called it Gog Magog, which I have seen, but is of late discontinued.'*

(VCH Cambs 2 1948, 40)

Layer clearly believed that the Cambridge scholars cut and scoured a chalk figure at Wandlebury. The giant is also recorded by an Elizabethan author, Joseph Hall, writing c. 1605 (Heichelheim 1939, 87) and subsequently by the local antiquary William Cole who may have seen it as a boy around 1724 (Gover, Mawer and Stenton 1943, 35).

The figure was lost in the eighteenth century but interest revived in the 1950's with the apparent discovery and excavation of the now notorious 'hill figures' of Gog Magog on the slope immediately south-west of the hillfort (Lethbridge 1957; Lethbridge and Tebbutt 1959). More recent geophysical survey of the alleged figures has not discovered any evidence to support their existence (Fidler 1995 unpub).

### 3. HISTORY

The majority of land in Stapleford belonged to the Bishopric of Ely by the 1030's. In 1135 the bishop assigned these lands to the prior and monks of Ely. Most of it remained an Ely holding, as the manor of Stapleford Bury, until the Dissolution and from 1541 was included in the endowments of the Dean and Chapter of Ely. It remained so until transfer to the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1870. However, before 1135 a fraction of the Ely estate was detached to form a second, smaller manor held as ½ a knight's fee of the Bishopric until after 1600, and known from the mid-fourteenth century as Sternes. This manor, which included Wandlebury, was acquired by Francis, 2nd Earl Godolphin, in 1734 (VCH Cambs 8 1982, 229-30).

In 1086 there were 120 sheep recorded in Stapleford and throughout the medieval and much of the post-medieval periods Wandlebury formed part of an area of open downland east of the common fields, dedicated to sheep husbandry, which in the thirteenth century may have been called the Moor (VCH Cambs 8 1982, 232). Prior to enclosure of the parish in 1811 it was known as Stapleford Heath (CUL MS Plans R.6.7.). The area of sheepwalk, reckoned traditionally as 500 acres and in 1740 as 547 acres, comprised the central area of the Gogmagog Hills and can be equated with much of the later Gogmagog estate and the Gogmagog golf course. There were occasional disputes among manorial lords and tenants about the sheepwalk and the numbers of beasts allowed, both in the medieval and post-medieval periods. In 1741 Lord Godolphin struck a beneficial deal with the Dean and Chapter of Ely, who claimed sole ownership of the Heath, whereby it was divided into equal portions of 274 acres to be held in severalty, and to accomodate 300 beasts each. This was effectively an agreement to Inclose although actual Inclosure of the parish did not occur until 1812, and was by private agreement (VCH Cambs 8 1982, 233).

The post-medieval development of Wandlebury probably began in the later seventeenth century. The downland hereabouts and eastward to Newmarket had become associated with equestrian pursuits from the later sixteenth century. According to Defoe, around 1685:

*'King James II caused a spacious stable to be built in the area of this camp, for his running-horses, and made old Mr. Frampton, whom I mention'd above, master or inspector of them. The stables remain still there, tho' they are not often made use of.'*

(Defoe 1724, 78)

This Mr Frampton was Tregonwell Frampton, a colourful character of the time, trainer, gambler and sometime keeper of the king's racehorses who in the mid 1720's operated the stables under lease from the Dean and Chapter of Ely.

The existence of stables is borne out by Celia Fiennes who passed this way on her journey north in 1697.....

*'to Hodmogoge (Gogmagog) hills which looks at a distance like a long Barn, but when you approach near you see it a great fortification or ruines of a Castle with great trenches one within another, and all the buildings there is only a long string of Stables to keep the kings hunting horses; the hill is of a great height from whence you have a great prospect of the whole Country and of Cambridge....'*

(Morris 1982, 77-8).

The acquisition of Sternes manor in 1734 by Francis, 2nd Earl Godolphin was almost certainly connected with the existing stables and their proximity to Newmarket. He may have been active at Gogmagog before this date, apparently keeping horses there: his famous Godolphin Arabian came to Gogmagog in 1730 (Arts Council 1974) and in the correspondence of Horace Walpole the dates given for the construction of the house are 1729-1735 (VCH Cambs 8, 231). A map of 1740 depicts the circular area of Wandlebury and describes it as 'The Garden with the Yards and Buildings'(CUL CC Map 12334). It is probable, then, that the old manor house in the village of Stapleford was replaced by a new one, at Wandlebury, by the early 1740's. The stables were probably also extended and embellished.

Godolphin died in 1766 and Lysons (1808, 73, 257) recorded that the house was rebuilt by his successor, Lord Francis Godolphin Osborne. This accords with a date of 1767 on the bell in the cupola of the north stables.

In the early nineteenth century, Britton and Brayley (1810, 131) recorded that:

*'The house is an irregular brick building, originally intended as a hunting box, and established for rearing and breeding horses.....The gardens, which, during the minority of Lord Osborne, were greatly neglected have been lately improved; and many trees have been planted. Near the centre is a small fish pond, which is supplied with water by a large forcing machine worked by horses, that raises it from a well 201 feet deep. All the water for domestic purposes is also obtained from this well.'*

Gogmagog House, also known as Gogmagog Hills, remained with the Lords Godolphin and their descendants until the death of George, Duke of Leeds in 1894, thereafter changing hands several times until its acquisition by the Cambridge Preservation Trust in 1954.



#### 4. ARCHAEOLOGICAL HISTORY

An exceptionally early though brief account of Wandlebury, dating to c. 1211, appears in the *Otia Imperialia* by Gervase of Tilbury. He recounts a legend in which Wandlebury figures as an entrenchment approached through a single entrance guarded by a ghostly warrior (Goetinck 1988; Lethbridge 1957, 2-3). This might later have been taken to mean a hill figure.

In the seventeenth century Camden described Wandlebury succinctly but usefully as '*girt with a threefold rampire*' (Gough 1806 ii, 226), a description which accords well with both the late seventeenth account of Celia Fiennes, '*...great trenches one within another..*' (Morris 1982, 77-8) and the early eighteenth century one by Defoe...

*'As I said, I first had a view of Cambridge from Gogmagog Hills: I am to add, that there appears on the mountain that goes by this name, an antient camp, or fortification, that lies on the top of the hill, with a double or rather a treble rampart and ditch, which most of our writers say was neither Roman nor Saxon but British.'*

(Defoe 1724, 78)

By the early nineteenth century a radical modification to the remains of the hillfort was noted by Lysons...

*'Vandlebury, it is circular, and at present consists of a lofty vallum, and a ditch: it had formerly two other ditches, which were levelled for Lord Godolphin's gardens and plantations.'*

(Lysons 1808, 73)

There have been several finds of human remains outside the hillfort on the south-east and east (Figure 2). In 1967 the remains of two individuals were discovered during the extension of the former cricket pitch, just outside the south-eastern defences, and apparently others had been found when the pitch was established some eighty years earlier (Bevis et al 1967, 107-9). Close by in 1976 (TL 4949 5325) storm damage revealed remains of a further five skeletons buried in a long shallow pit. There were no associated artifacts, but the burials were thought to be of Iron Age date given their proximity to the hillfort. It was suspected, though difficult to prove due to the disturbance caused by the trees, that the skeletons had been mutilated and thrown in on top of each other. At least three were male and one had suffered a sword-cut on the chin (Taylor and Denton 1977, 1). Finally, in the early 1970's a large bell-shaped pit containing human and sheep bones presumed of Iron Age date, was revealed beneath an uprooted tree at TL 4957 5340, 25m east of the hillfort defences (Cambs SMR 09264).

Finds from inside the hillfort begin with Roman coins discovered in 1685 during the construction of a cellar (Gough 1806, ii, 226). In 1975, observation during the construction of a service trench on the southern side of the hillfort interior, near the present bridge (TL 4945 5332) recovered only a few residual Iron Age sherds, but illustrated very clearly the extent to which the eighteenth century gardens had affected this area. Also of interest were

two large pits containing Medieval (*sic*) pottery, which were interpreted as tree pits (Taylor 1976).

In 1993 a watching brief recorded two undated linear features at approximately TL 4955 5310, some 200m south-east of the hillfort (Alexander 1993).

The only known major excavations within the hillfort, conducted in 1955-6 by Cambridge University students directed by Professor JGD Clark, comprised an area of Wheeler box-trenches immediately inside the inner rampart on the north-eastern side, with a section across the defences leading from it (Hartley 1957). Evidence of occupation in the third century BC was recovered from features sealed by the inner rampart, and the ramparts themselves were thought to date to the late first century BC or early first century AD.

The area of the recent excavations by Cambridge University lies in Varley's Field adjoining the north-eastern side of the hillfort and is currently under pasture. The first two seasons have revealed evidence for an extensive Early/Middle Iron Age unenclosed settlement in the southern part of Varley's Field, east of the hillfort and pre-dating it (Gdaniec and French 1994). Only a fraction of the ceramic assemblage found by Clark and Hartley survives; re-examination of this suggests that many of the pits sealed by the ramparts may be contemporary with the earlier unenclosed settlement. Evidence of earlier prehistoric activity was also recovered in considerable quantities of worked flint and fragments of two stone axes.

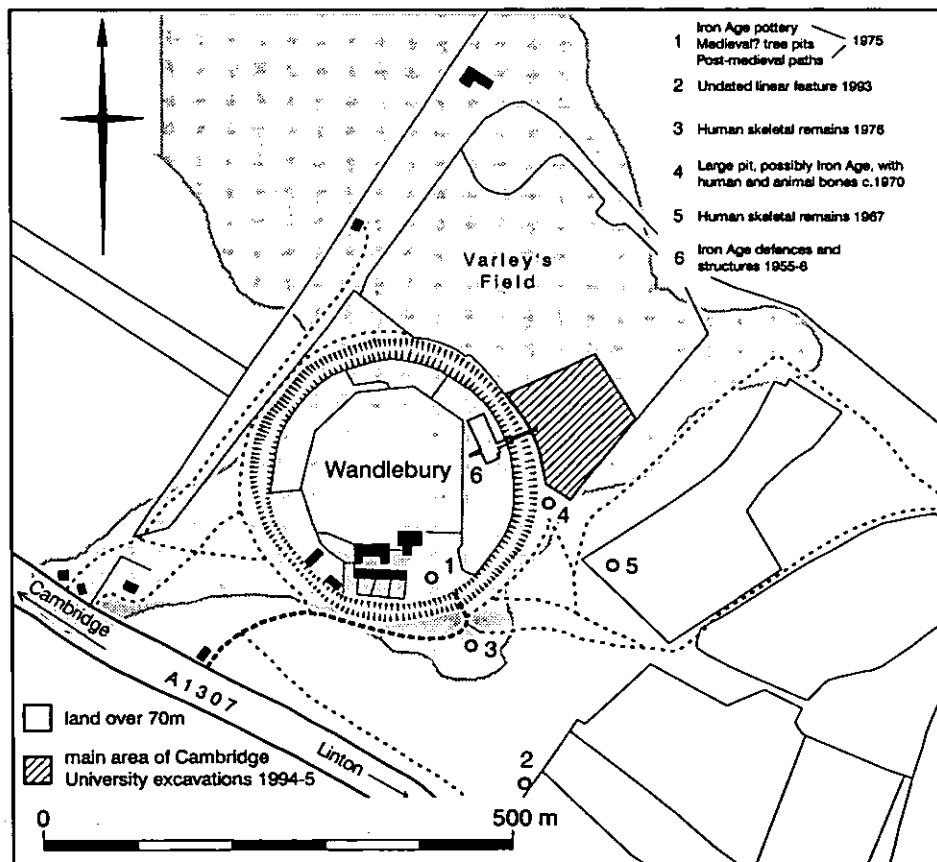


Figure 2  
Archaeological  
finds in the  
vicinity of  
Wandlebury

## 5. THE HILLFORT

(For letters in bold used in the text, see the relevant Figure).

### Description of the earthworks (Figures 3 and 4)

Wandlebury is remarkable for its almost perfectly circular plan, which bears no relation to the natural topography. Despite the extensive post-medieval modifications to the earthwork to create a garden, there is no evidence that its basic form was ever anything other than perfectly circular. In its final Iron Age form it comprised two concentric banks and ditches and a counterscarp bank. Hartley's original interpretation of the evidence from the 1955-6 excavations suggested two or three phases in the development of these defences, commencing with a single timber box rampart and a steep-sided U-shaped ditch. After a long period of abandonment, a second phase may have involved the replacement of the box rampart and the re-cutting of the ditch to form a shallower 'punice' style defence with an external counterscarp bank, to which an inner circuit, comprising a timber-faced dump rampart and a deeper V-shaped ditch, was added in a third phase. Alternatively, this inner defence may have been contemporary with the changes to the outer ditch necessitating a lower box rampart on the outer bank (Hartley 1957, 7, 11).

Cunliffe (1974, 229-32) has re-assessed the evidence, arguing that neither of Hartley's interpretations is wholly correct. He suggested that the first phase box rampart was probably replaced by a similar, more massive timber structure, but the associated ditch probably retained its original form at that stage. In the third phase, Cunliffe envisaged an inner timber-reveted dump rampart and the re-cutting of the outer ditch, but without any superstructure at all on the outer bank (Figure 4).

The addition of the inner circuit reduced the diameter of the interior from c. 268m to c. 218m and its area from c. 5.64ha (13.94 acres) to c. 3.73ha (9.22 acres).

The surviving earthworks are dominated by the deep ditch of the outer circuit, which maintains a fairly constant width of 11.5m but ranges in depth from 1.8m to 2.7m. The outer rampart was substantially levelled during construction of the post-medieval gardens, its slight remains surviving up to 0.5m high and 7.5m wide at base. The counterscarp bank ranges generally from 0.4m high and 5.0m wide to 1.8m high and 12.0m wide. In the south-eastern sector the counterscarp bank has been cut back and reformed into a level platform a, 20m by 5m, which may be the base for a post-medieval building or garden feature. It is approached obliquely through an entrance between offset terminals of the re-shaped counterscarp.

The bank and ditch of the inner circuit were also levelled for the post-medieval gardens: Clark's excavation suggested that when first cut the ditch was 5.4m deep, but by the eighteenth century its depth had been reduced to 3.0m by silting. Despite the deliberate levelling, the ditch can still be traced as a slight but regular depression, on average 0.2m deep and 11.0m wide, but reaching a depth of 0.5m on the northern side. The rampart is no longer visible, except for an 80m stretch on the northern side of the hillfort which survives

WANDLEBURY, CAMBS.

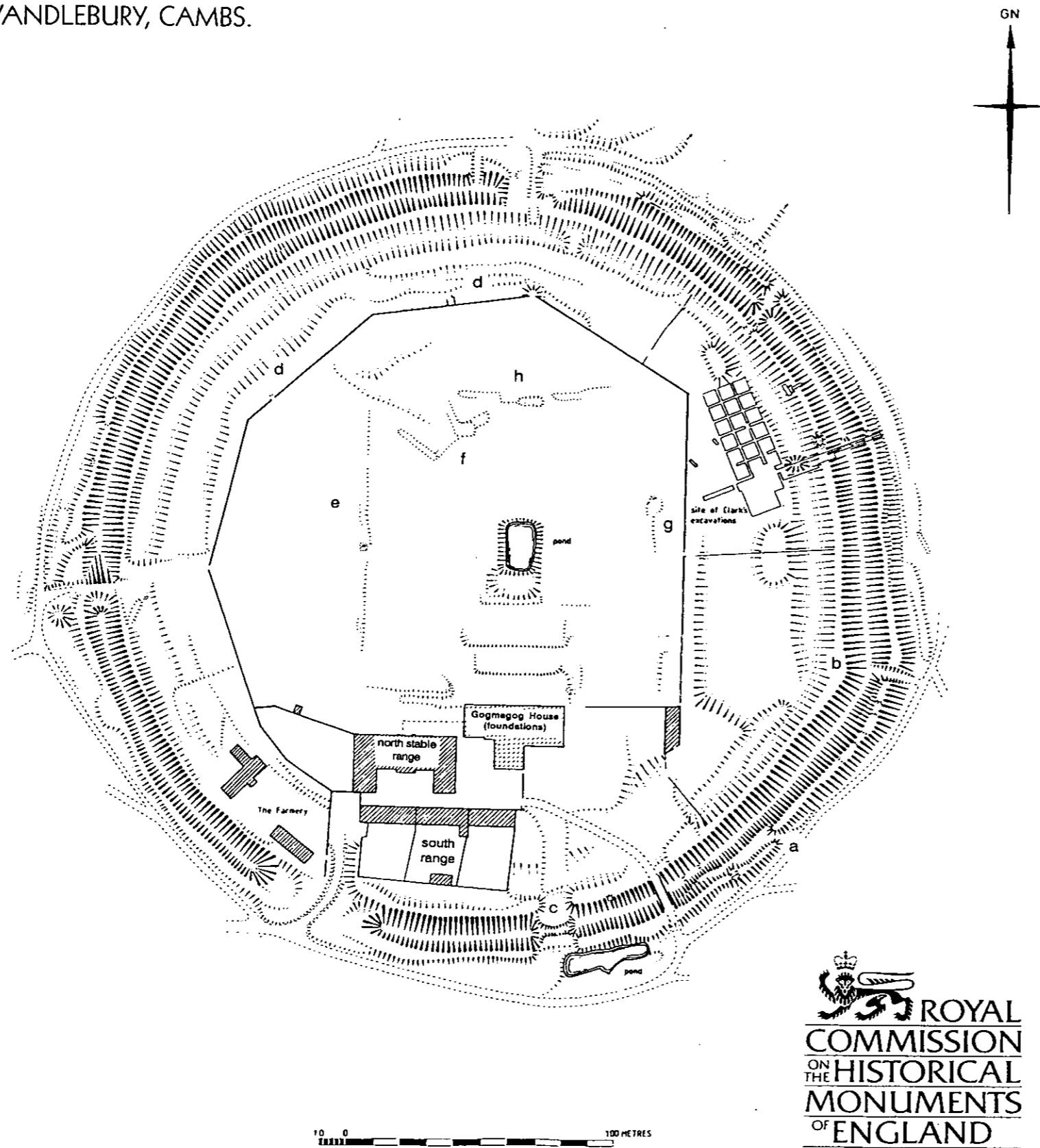


Figure 3 RCHME earthwork plan, original at 1:1000



as a very slight earthwork. Two plantations, immediately to the north and south of Clark's excavation trenches, stand on slight mounds which may also incorporate remnants of the rampart.

There are several interruptions in the course of the surviving ramparts, most of which are demonstrably post-medieval (see below). However the wide entrance on the south-west, where a post-medieval drive crosses the defences towards the stable yard, is usually considered as an exception. Although the earthworks at this point are almost entirely obliterated over a distance of 37m, there are clear indications that each arm of the ditch formerly continued for at least 10m, and the cutting through which the drive passes suggests that the inner rampart extended at least as far as its edges. Nevertheless, it has generally been assumed that this must be the position of the Iron Age entrance (Hartley 1957,2).

During the RCHME survey it became apparent that on the east-south-eastern side of the hillfort at b the gently curving line of the defences straightens to form an obtuse but distinct angle, the only variation in Wandlebury's striking circular plan. The counterscarp bank increases steadily in size towards the apex of this angle, at which point it is higher than the outer rampart itself. The counterscarp bank straightens for a distance of about 25m, this section showing signs of disturbance. This change of angle is apparent even in the levelled inner ditch, where there is a hint of a break with a rounded terminal to the south, possibly indicating the former existence of a causeway. The overall impression is that b may be the site of a blocked entrance.

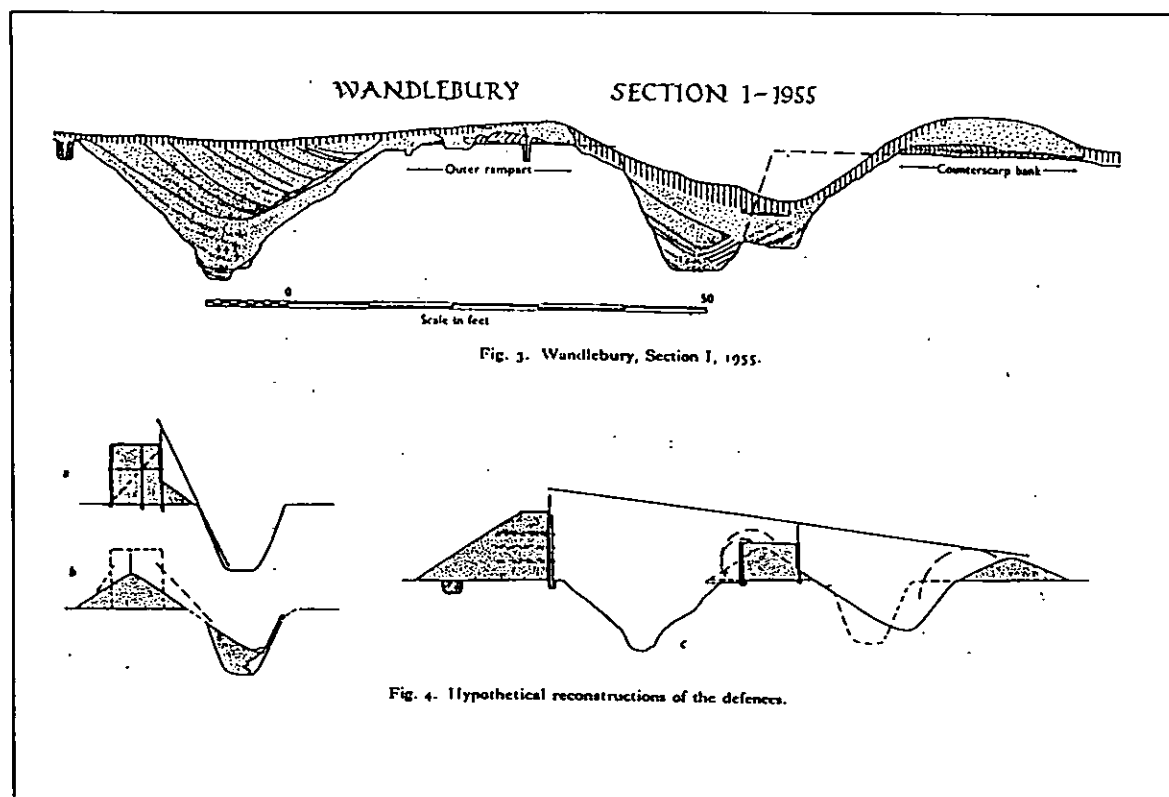


Figure 4  
Sections of the  
Wandlebury  
defences (from  
Hartley 1957)

### Interpretation and Discussion

Perhaps the most significant result of the RCHME survey is the recognition of the possible blocked entrance on the east-south-eastern side of the hillfort, a conclusion resting on the coincidence of three factors: an anomalous angle change, an increase in size of the counterscarp bank, and the apparent terminal in the inner ditch. The date of this putative blocking is unknown but may be connected with the post-medieval gardens. The blocked entrance was probably the only original entrance since it is the sole anomaly in an otherwise perfect circle and the account of Gervase of Tilbury, if we choose to take it literally, states that there was a single entrance. The causeway on the south-west favoured by Hartley cannot be ruled out but the inconclusive evidence of the earthworks does suggest it to be a later, probably medieval or post-medieval modification.

Wandlebury is widely referred to as the 'only true hillfort in the region', reflecting a feeling that it represents the easternmost outpost of the straightforward military functional logic apparently evident in Wessex hillforts, as opposed to the intangible 'strangeness' of many East Anglian examples. The extraordinary precision of the circular plan is all but ignored by most previous studies, many of which (including Fox 1923; Cunliffe 1974) simply mention its shape, without attempting to explain it, while Hartley described the regularity as a natural consequence of the fairly level topography.

However, recently this striking circularity has been seen as unusual and significant in terms of reasoning which may have little or nothing to do with military concerns and be less readily comprehensible; Evans (1990; 1992) questioned why the builders of Wandlebury chose not to create a contour fort which would make best military use of the location, given that the function of the hillfort has always been discussed in terms of its defensive capability and strategic location, notably in relation to the Icknield Way and the Cam Valley. In fact, Little Trees Hill, a promontory 0.7kms to the south-west, would offer a more typical naturally defensible location than the plateau on which Wandlebury lies. On three sides of the hillfort, the ground is level or actually rises a few metres. The south-western defences stand between 5m and 20m back from the crest of the natural slope, and the early rampart further back still, even though the crest of the moderately steep natural slope would be the most obvious and efficient place to build in terms of both purely military logic and typical hillfort design. This raises the question of the unusual addition of the later circuit to the interior, if indeed its construction was a response to military necessity as Hartley suggested. The most straightforward explanation - that a rampart with a circumference shorter by some 280m would entail less labour - would seem insufficient, given that the construction of the new rampart, together with the fairly massive counterscarp bank, must in any case have been a vast undertaking in terms of time, effort and social organisation.

Another local example of siting which is illogical in military terms is the newly discovered ploughed out Iron Age fort at Bury Hill, 4.5kms south-west of Wandlebury (figure 1), which occupies the end of a low spur above the River Cam but is overlooked, by a rise some 15m higher, which lies to the north-east (Taylor et al 1994). The phenomenon of hillforts whose location or design seems to make little strategic sense or to reflect the primacy of other

considerations has been recognised elsewhere in East Anglia (Martin 1991) but has seldom been discussed in detail, though it may to some extent undermine the conventional concept of hillforts as forts (Bowden and McOmish 1987; 1989). Even those 'typical' hillforts which do occupy strategic positions often 'over-develop' their defensive characteristics for symbolic reasons, such as the display of wealth and power (Cunliffe 1984, 30) or to emphasise the exclusiveness and isolation of the interior (Hill 1993, 1995). Furthermore, a recent discussion of the evidence for warfare in the Iron Age has noted that the peaks of hillfort construction and elaboration appear to coincide with the periods when weapons were actually less common (Sharples 1991). The whole concept of advanced militarism and fortification, which is essentially based on Medieval and later models, is at least open to question and perhaps totally inapplicable to the Iron Age.

Evans (1990; 1992) also observed that Wandlebury is one of a number of near-circular monuments on the fen-edge and its hinterland (figure 1), and more importantly may be the 'twin' of the lowland fort at Arbury, some 10kms to the north. Though lacking in artefactual or scientific dating evidence, Arbury had many superficial similarities with the early phases of the Wandlebury earthworks: it was univallate with a diameter of c. 290m, and a U-shaped ditch profile. Furthermore, if the RCHME's identification of a blocked entrance on the east-south-eastern side of Wandlebury is correct, it is interesting to note that the extraordinary monumental gateway at Arbury also lay very slightly south of due east.

With an overall diameter of 315m, Wandlebury is considerably larger than any other circular Iron Age enclosure in Britain. Given the dominance of Wessex type-sites and models in the development of hillfort studies, it is perhaps not surprising that our understanding of circular enclosures, of which there are few in Wessex (Yarnbury, Figsbury and Old Sarum, all in Wiltshire, being more or less circular examples), has hardly been advanced. To the two or three very precisely circular sites in Cambridgeshire mentioned by Evans can be added Warham Camp and South Creake in northern Norfolk (Rickett 1991), of which the former is located on a fairly steep hillside (Gregory and Rogerson 1991, fig 49). There are numerous other circular forts outside Wessex, particularly in Cornwall, Northumberland and indeed the brochs and wheelhouses of the Atlantic Iron Age in Scotland, and the raths and cashels of Celtic Ireland. Evans (1988), discussing concentric earthworks in the Neolithic period, has pointed out that in most cases it is anachronistic and fundamentally misguided to assume a prehistoric concern with architectural design as we conceive of it, or with mathematical geometry. He argues that the visual appearance of circularity on the ground, rather than in plan, is far more likely to have been important to prehistoric designers. With this in mind, it may be that sub-circular enclosures such as Belsar's Hill, which is frequently called a 'ringwork' in modern archaeological literature, shared a fundamentally similar design. However, in the case of Wandlebury and several other precisely circular earthworks, there is an undeniable concern for geometric precision, which cannot be easily explained in terms of strictly functional logic.

Circular ritual monuments of earlier prehistory, such as henges, are regularly discussed in terms of the symbolic importance of their form; equally, the ethnographic record is peppered

with examples of circular settlements structured according to cosmological or ideological principles. It is an anomaly resulting from the historical development of Iron Age studies that straightforward functional explanations have almost invariably been applied and accepted without question (Hill 1993). Several recent approaches have used models derived from ethnographic sources to seek to develop more complex discussions of Iron Age settlements. These have generally concentrated on artefactual evidence, arguing that the differential distribution of 'rubbish' around settlements, rather than being straightforward haphazard disposal, resulted from deliberate deposition structured according to symbolic principles (Hingley 1990; Hill 1993; 1994; Fasham 1994; Parker-Pearson in press). The form of the enclosing earthworks appears to have been an integral aspect of this symbolic code, not only by defining zones in the interior but also in their own right; angle changes and in particular entrances seem to have been significant points (Bowden and McOmish 1987; Hill 1993; 1994, figs 2.3-4). Fleming (1972) has observed that a perfectly circular enclosure has only two inherently significant points: its centre and its entrance. This may to some extent constitute an explanation for the unparalleled free-standing monumental gate structure at Arbury (Evans 1990; 1992) and the slight but distinct angle change coinciding with the putative blocked entrance at Wandlebury. However, to deal with the ramparts thus in isolation perhaps overstates their importance; the houses (though Clark's excavations did not positively identify any) may have been an integral part of a more complex settlement lay-out, for example similar to the circular palisaded villages of the Yoruba, whose houses are sited so as to form the spokes of a wheel representing the sun (Kamau 1976).

It is possible that Wandlebury in one sense can be seen as the culmination of a regional tradition of circular monuments. In the Thames Basin the well-known Later Bronze Age bi-vallate enclosures such as Mucking North and South Rings, Springfield Lyons and Lofts Farm, and a single possible example at Stoke-by-Nayland in Suffolk (Martin 1991, 47), may have echoed the form of Neolithic henges (Collis 1977; Parker-Pearson forthcoming). The apparently perfectly circular earthwork at War Ditches, now destroyed, some 2kms north-west of Wandlebury, is poorly understood but may be of relevance. Early excavations (McKenny-Hughes 1903) suggested a construction date in the fourth to third centuries BC - contemporary with the building of Wandlebury - but later excavations recovered only Early Bronze Age material, suggesting that an earlier monumental enclosure, possibly a henge or a forerunner of the enclosures in southern Essex, may have been re-used in the Iron Age (Lethbridge 1949; Evans 1990, 33-4). A relatively high number of Neolithic axe fragments have been found in the vicinity of Wandlebury, including two in the recent excavations (Gdaniec and French 1994; forthcoming) which may indicate the importance of the area in that period.

In the light of the recent work mentioned above (Hill 1993, 1994, 1995; 1994 Fasham 1994) on the role of ritual and symbolic behaviour in Iron Age depositional processes, a re-consideration of Clark's findings is overdue. Many questions are left unanswered in Hartley's account, which the final report on the current excavations will certainly be in a better position to review.





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## 6. POST IRON AGE USE

There is very little evidence for the use of Wandlebury following the Roman conquest. However, finds of Roman coins and pottery suggest some form of activity within the ramparts (Gough 1806, ii, 226; Hartley 1957, 8; Cambs SMR 04636A). The name Wandlebury was romanticised in the nineteenth century as Vandlebury and although the link with the Vandals is fanciful the style of the burials found outside the hillfort is hardly diagnostic: they are as likely to be Anglo-Saxon in date as Iron Age. The potential importance of Wandlebury in Anglo-Saxon times is underscored by its status in the tenth century, when land pleas were held there. It appears to have been an important meeting place, for which there may have been buildings.

Medieval pottery has also been found within two large pits interpreted as tree pits (Taylor 1976). If this is true then it hints at an ornamental aspect to the use of the old fort. The fortifications may also have formed a convenient penning during the use of the surrounding hills as sheep pasture: semi-permanent shelters and fencing may have existed.



## 7. THE LATE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY STABLES

Very little is visible of the original stable buildings. However, in 1950 it was noted that the middle part of the southern wall of the south stable block was built of red brick, in contrast to the rest of the building (NMR 1950). The hipped dormers in the roof of this building are probably c. 1700 or earlier. Taken with Celia Fiennes description of a long building, this suggests that the early stables may have been incorporated into an eighteenth century rebuilding. Similarly, the nature of any house which may have existed alongside the stables is unknown but it is possible that it may have been a modest lodge for a manager.



## 8. GOGMAGOG HOUSE (Figures 3, 5 - 8 and appendix)

### The eighteenth century

Of Gogmagog House, which was demolished in 1954, only a low revetted platform remains above ground. Plans and elevations were drawn in May of the same year (Cambridge Preservation Trust 1954) and in 1950 a note of its architecture was made by the RCHME: the house and stable buildings were dated generally to the mid/late eighteenth century, with nineteenth century additions and alterations. The red brickwork in the centre of the south stable range was considered possibly of the early eighteenth century (NMR 1950).

The eighteenth century house was deliberately built in a central position in the southern half of the hillfort and astride its north-south axis. Two stable ranges still stand to the south-west of the house site, with a stable court between them originally entered through strong gates at the eastern and western ends: all the gate piers survive. The south range is a long, low building with dormers. The north stable range is a much more elaborate, winged structure of two stories with a central arch and a mid/late eighteenth century roof incorporating a tall cupola with a clock and a bell, the latter dated 1767. There are also several cross-mullioned windows on the ground-floor, typically of late seventeenth/early eighteenth century date. The evidence is therefore, somewhat confusing.

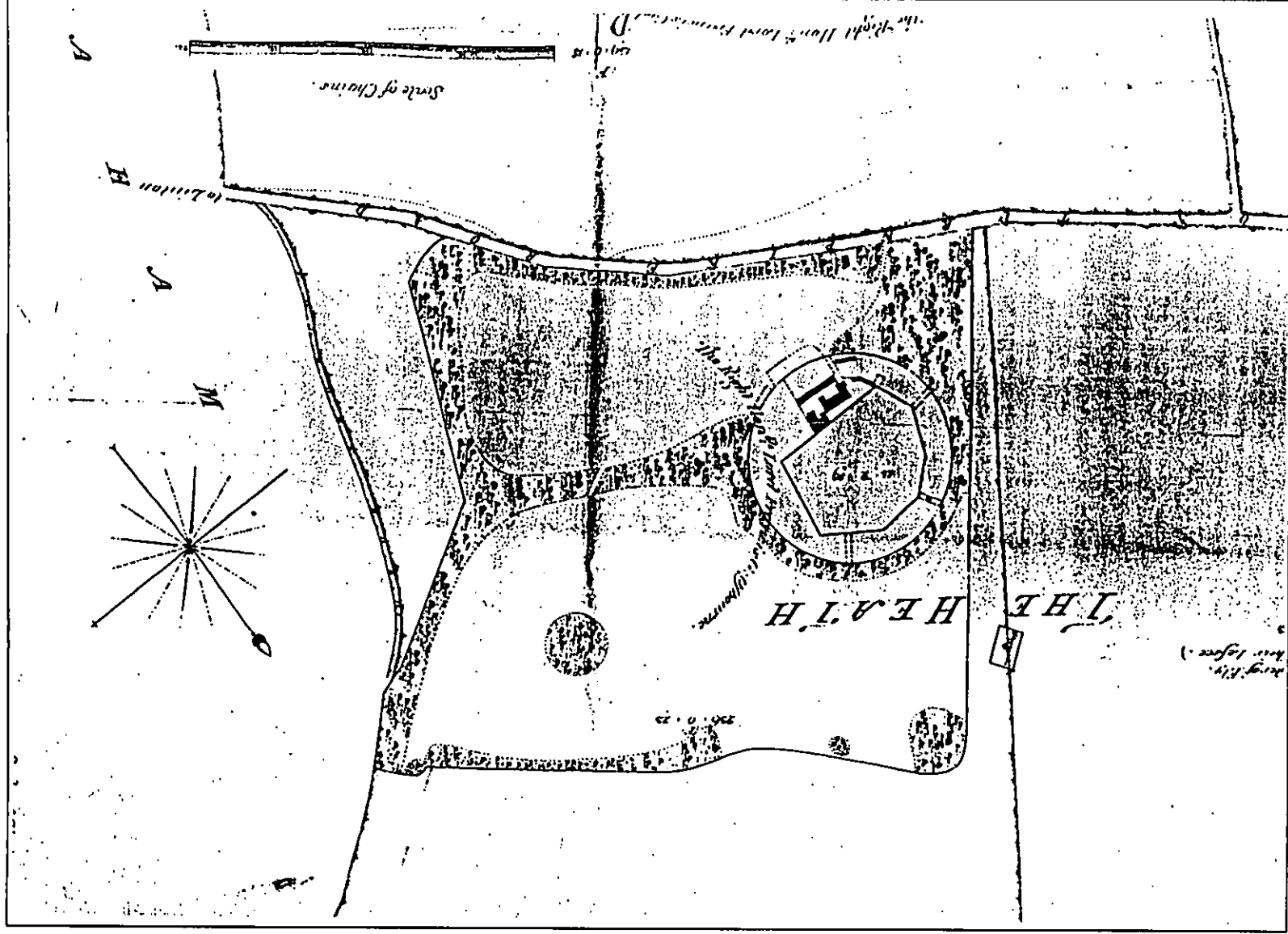
On a survey plan of 1740 the house and stables were approached by a drive leading eastward from the Cambridge to Linton road, to two entrances on the southern arc of the hillfort (CUL CC Map 12334). At that time, the main approach was probably that at C, the western of the two which led across the hillfort earthworks to the house: the bridge has been removed but the outer ditch is constricted to a width of only 3.5m by projecting earthworks which are the remains of abutments. The former drive is visible as a slight hollow, cut down through the remains of the outer rampart, leading towards the house. This approach was replaced by the present bridge 40m to the east sometime between 1902 and 1925 (Ordnance Survey 1902 and 1925). The second approach crossed the defences south-west of the stables and afforded independent access to them: it is shown as a gate on the 1740 plan.

Two other buildings of unknown function, probably of the eighteenth century, are shown immediately west of the stable ranges on a map of 1812 (CUL MS R. 6. 7), on the site now occupied by buildings called The Farmery. A building occupies the site of the southern of the two.

### The gardens

The house had a main aspect to the north across the interior of the hillfort which was enlarged by the levelling and infilling of the inner rampart and ditch and the slighting of the inner face of the outer rampart, a considerable piece of landscaping. Bricks and a clay pipe found in the fill of the inner ditch during the 1955 excavations suggest a date in the earlier eighteenth century for this enlargement (Hartley 1957, 8). That it occurred prior to 1740 is apparent from the 1740 plan which shows the circular outline of Wandlebury and records the internal area of 'The Gardens with the Yards and Buildings containing 13 acres 3 rods

Figure 5 Inclosure plan of Stapleford Heath, 1812 (after CUL MS Plans R. 6. 7)



37 perches' (CUL CC Maps 12334), a figure which agrees closely with the present internal area of 13.94 acres as calculated from the RCHME survey. The extremely flat appearance of the whole interior is probably the result of this landscaping episode and low scarps around the north-western side of the garden wall, where the ground slopes away naturally, may mark its margin.

The appearance of these gardens is unknown but they were unusual, framed by the circle of the remaining hillfort defences. It is hard to accept that the garden wall is a primary feature as there is no logic in the levelling of the inner rampart to create space and views only to negate those gains by building a wall immediately, just inside its line. There are, however, two possibilities: firstly, that the wall is original and deliberately divides the interior into two spaces, an inner more private garden surrounded by a smaller strip with perimeter paths and secondly, that the wall represents a change of mind resulting from a need for more practical space, possibly for grass paddocks in the outer area. Such a change could, for instance, have resulted from the rebuilding by Lord Godolphin-Osborne after 1767.

The asymmetry of the garden wall may be the result of an alteration to its eastern side, the original course perhaps a series of short straights just inside but following the line of the levelled hillfort defences. Support for this idea is given by the acute angle of the southern gable of a small stable, 40m east of the house site, and the slight scarp of a former boundary heading south-west from the stable, extant in 1885 but gone by 1901 (Ordnance Survey 1886 and 1902). By 1812 the garden wall followed most of its present course, with the exception of a stretch extending the line of the north elevation of the house westward, clearly and emphatically separating the stables from the garden area and ensuring privacy (CUL MS R.6.7.). The major part of garden wall is extant, built in yellow stock brick to a height of 3m.

A garden constructed around 1740 would have followed the contemporary trend towards the natural, with few formal elements and the circularity exploited. Much of the interior may have been down to lawn from the outset and the pond noted in 1810 (Britton and Brayley 1810, 131) may be original: the present pond is a modern re-cut but the scarp on its southern side indicates the site of a longer, broader feature. There may have been informal planting and perimeter walks: during the excavations of 1955-6 a perimeter path of flint gravel and mortar with low, dressed flint retaining walls was located over the infilled inner ditch and another of chalk and cinder on the crest of the rampart (Hartley 1957, 8). Fragments of similar flint edging for a path were observed during the present survey in the outer ditch just east of the northern causeway. The outer ditch may have been designed as a secluded, wooded walk.

Leaving aside those discussed in relation to access to the house and stables, there are several other breaches and causeways across the defences. Two occur in due north and due west positions in such a way as to suggest that their axiality in relation to the house, garden and hillfort earthworks is the result of deliberate design. Both are broad causeways of material dumped into the outer ditch with corresponding breaks in the ramparts. The northern causeway was partially investigated in 1955-6 and found to contain large quantities of nineteenth

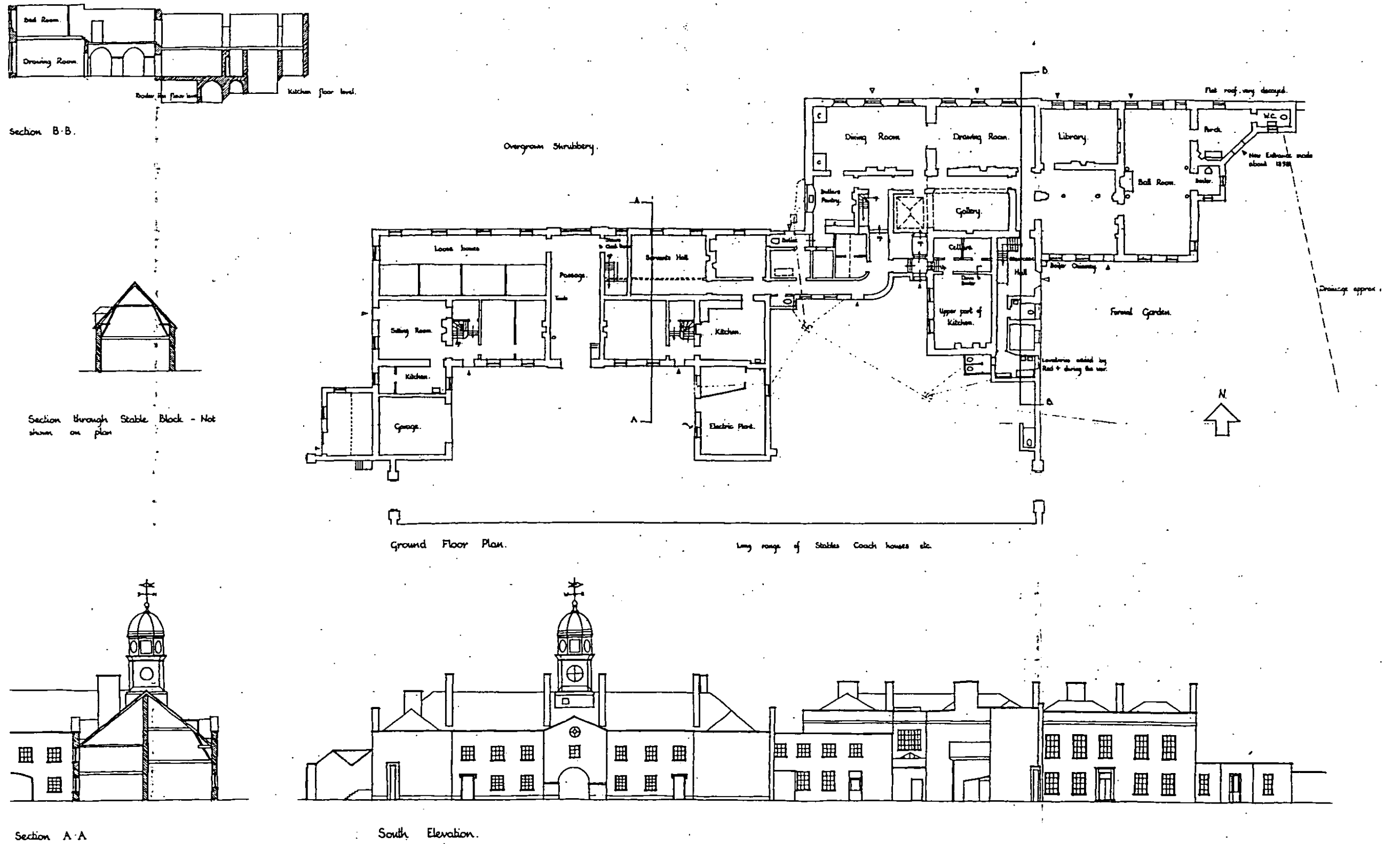
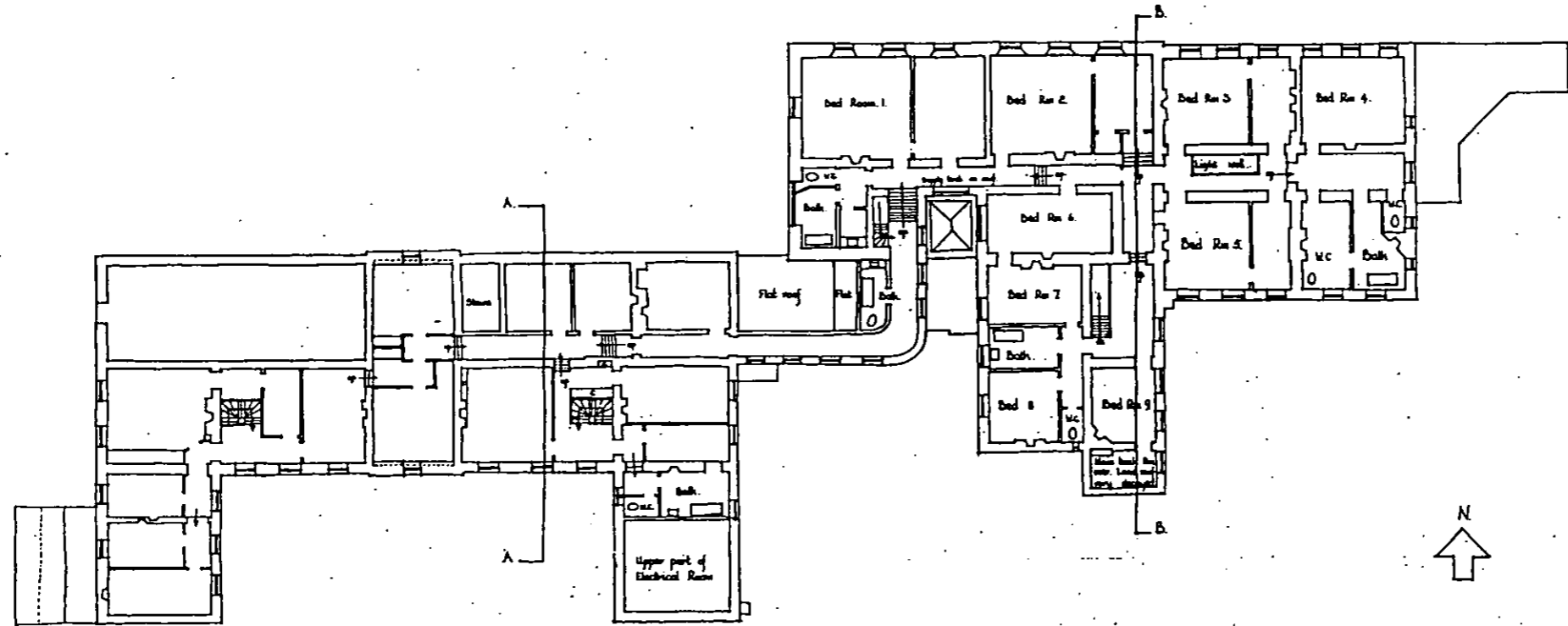


Figure 6 Ground floor plan, sections and south elevation of Gogmagog House and north stable range, 1954



First Floor Plan.



North Elevation to Garden.

Figure 7 First floor plan and north elevation of Gognagog House and north stable range, 1954



century pottery (Hartley 1957, 2), although this need not date its origin: perhaps a broader access was needed then to the glasshouses and head gardener's house which were built on the north side of the garden wall in the nineteenth century. The western causeway seems to have been constructed from material obtained from an oval hollow 0.7m deep, which cuts into the counterscarp bank immediately to the south. It may have formed a service access for the kitchen gardens and appears on the 1812 plan (CUL MS R.6.7.).

Two smaller breaks occur in the counterscarp bank, one on the north immediately west of the northern causeway and another on the east-south-east, precisely on the site of the putative blocked Iron Age entrance. Both are narrow passages 1.2m wide, reveted by stepped dressed flint walls, which may originally have formed ornamental arches over each passage. Once again the method of construction is similar to the path found in the excavations of 1955-6 and the edging noted east of the northern causeway, clearly linking these breaks with some phase of the garden.

Some 20m north of the 1955-6 excavation trenches, another break cuts obliquely into the outer bank and counterscarp bank and spoil from it forms a narrow causeway across the outer ditch.

#### The nineteenth century and after (Figures 3 and 8 and Appendix)

There were modifications to the house after 1812, principally a large extension on the eastern side. There were corresponding changes to the gardens which were adapted to centre on the extended northern elevation and which have left slight traces (Figure 3). The walled garden was sub-divided into three areas by high yew hedges (CUL Maps PSQ. x. 18. 73; Ordnance Survey 1886), which in 1912 were believed to be between 120 and 150 years old (Wilcox 1912, 382), probably only a slight exaggeration. The central feature was a lawn 120m square, with a kitchen garden and extensive glasshouses to the west, and the head gardener's garden to the north. The yew hedge survived in 1967 (Cambridge Preservation Trust 1967) but was subsequently grubbed out: its course is visible as a slight linear depression e. Midway along its western side are the fallen stones of a large pillar which formerly stood at an entrance to the lawn.

The lawn contained a circular perimeter path, only a short arc of which survives as a slight depression f, alongside which were two small garden buildings: the low foundation of one survives on the eastern side at g and the site of a summerhouse as a shallow depression h on the north. Numerous specimen trees are probably of the nineteenth century, some of them possibly from the improvements attested by Britton and Brayley (1810, 131).

In the late nineteenth century there were minor modifications to the main southern approach, culminating between 1901 and 1925 with its transfer 40m eastward and corresponding changes to shrubbery around it (Ordnance Survey 1886, 1902 and 1925). Of a similar date are three formal terraces now defined by scarps 0.4m high which are depicted on a photograph of 1950 with urns on pedestals at each either end (NMR 150 neg BB75/2662). North of them is a small rectangular pond, a modern re-cut of an earlier feature. Another pond, just outside the hillfort on the south side, is probably another Edwardian addition, between 1901 and 1924 (Ordnance Survey 25").



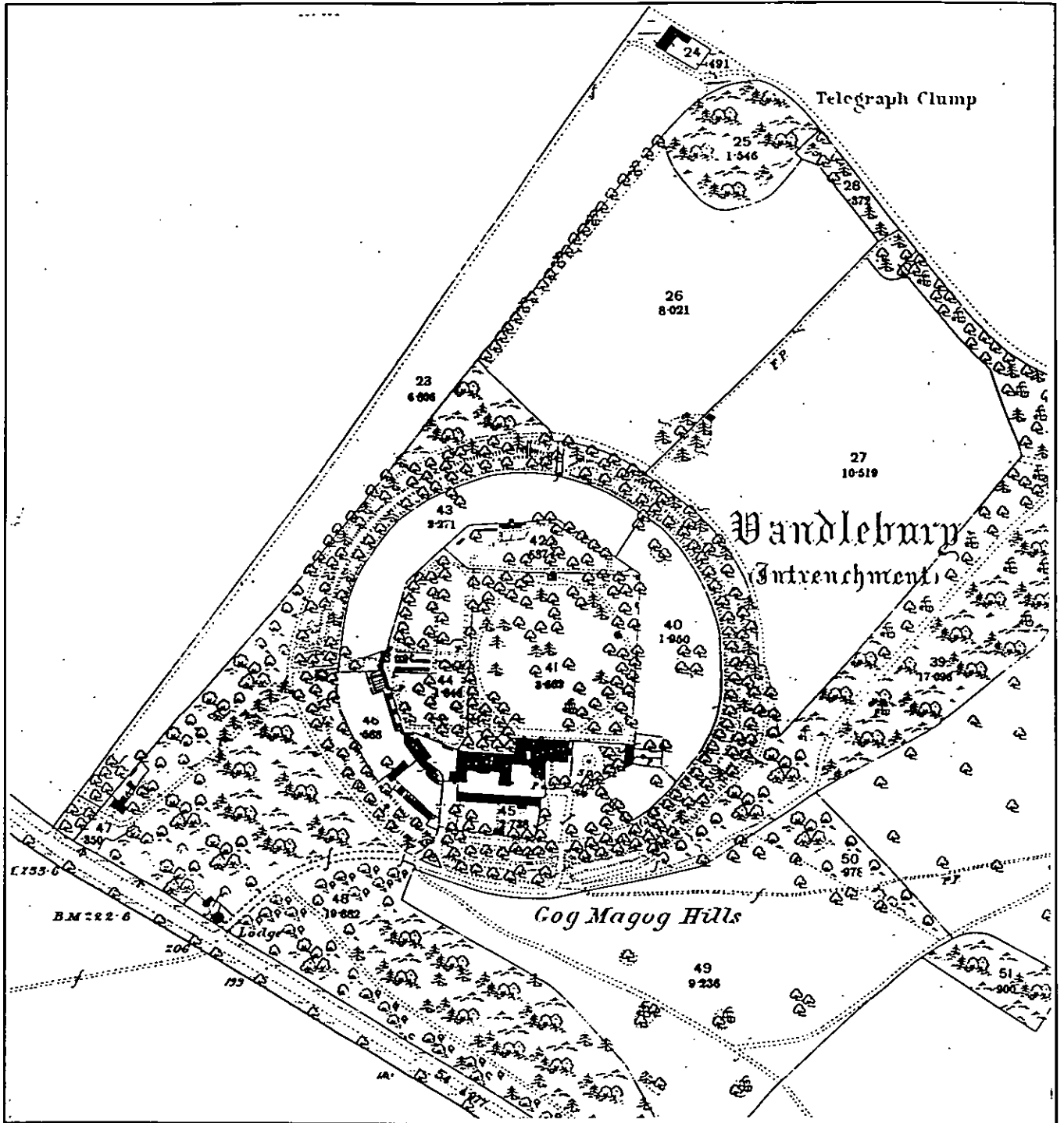


Figure 8 Ordnance Survey 1st Edition 25" sheet Cambridge 47.16, 1886 (surveyed 1885)

### Concluding Remarks

The transformation of Wandlebury into Gogmagog House, garden and stables began in the late seventeenth century. The creation of a new estate centre had a dramatic effect on the earthworks of the hillfort which became, in a much altered state, the framework for the house and gardens.

The existence of a large and quite important stable at the end of the seventeenth century is clear from the commentaries of Celia Fiennes and Daniel Defoe. The interior of the hillfort would have provided a private and easily secured paddock and training ground for valuable horses exercised on surrounding downland. It is possible that the stable building is partially preserved in the south stable range but further detailed analysis is necessary to advance this idea. The unremarkable nature of any accompanying house is evident from Celia Fiennes' silence on a subject for which she usually displayed great enthusiasm. There may, however, have been a small lodge for an appointed manager and a building is evident from the digging of a cellar c. 1685.

Analysis of the 1950 ground plans and elevations of the house is quite difficult but the plan is very much a muddled one which suggests several phases of construction: it is possible an earlier lodge was incorporated.

Although the surviving architecture of the stable blocks and records of the house do not help establish close dating for their construction, it is clear that a house with gardens was built by Francis, 2nd Earl of Godolphin, by the early 1740's. Consolidation of the estate is inherent in the agreement with the Dean and Chapter in 1740/1 regarding the Stapleford Heath (CUL CC Map 12334) and in 1742 the acquisition of pews in Stapleford church implies residence for at least part of the year (VCH Cambs 8, 231). The approach was probably always from the south: in 1801 there was a porched entrance in the southern end of the south wing (Frontispiece) - although whether it was always here is open to question, as this was the service wing before demolition (Figures 6 and 7; NMR 1950). The north front was never an entrance front, always enjoying a garden aspect but it is possible that the original entrance was in the eastern elevation.

The 2nd Earl was an important figure who held high office and Gogmagog was not his main residence; he probably lived here for short periods in the year and this was reflected in the modest nature of the house. And, as Britton and Brayley (1810, 131) pointed out, this was primarily a working establishment. Although the architecture of the stable ranges is similar to that of the house, their size and grandeur presents something of a contrast. The secure and closed nature of the stable yard with its strong gates indicates the high value, status and importance of the horses kept here.

The house was sited in a nodal position to exploit the ornamental opportunities presented by the framework of the hillfort earthworks. Although the appearance of the earliest gardens is unsure, considerable effort went into creating space for them by the removal of the inner defences of the hillfort. Initially, the levelling may have provided views out over the surrounding area, the outer ditch acting as a huge ha-ha, but by 1812 it functioned as a wooded shady perimeter walk. An idea of the setting of Gogmagog House is provided by a



watercolour painted from the south c. 1801 (Frontispiece). The plain architecture of the house is clear together with the cupola of the north stable range but the striking elements of the painting are the emphases on setting and antiquity. The house sits within the protection of the ancient fortification represented by a single rampart whose internal slope is exaggerated in height to emphasise a lofty setting. The rampart is ringed with a low close-board fence and in part by a hedge, with trees spaced along its line. The antiquity of the place is symbolised by classical ruins protruding at the foot of the rampart slope, with the existence of a copious well shown by water cascading from them.

The wider context of the house as it had developed in the later eighteenth century is clear from the enclosure map of 1812: it sat at the centre of a small landscaped park of around 236 acres which had been formed within the Godolphin share of the former Stapleford Heath. The park comprised a squarish area of pasture broken up by the undulating nature of the land and by the sinuous belts of trees, clumps and plantations which the Godolphins had established.

A change in emphasis from a working stable, periodically occupied, to a permanent residence probably took place in the early nineteenth century and is probably due to the third Lord Francis Godolphin Osborne, during whose minority the gardens had been neglected (Britton and Brayley 1810, 131). He was MP for Cambridge between 1810 and 1831 and lived at Gogmagog until his death in 1850. Most likely, he built the eastward extension and re-designed the gardens. The changing role of the house is also reflected in the encroachment of the service rooms into the north stable range (Cambridge Preservation Trust 1954). Small changes continued, notably with the addition after 1850 of a ballroom with a new, angled entrance on the east side of the house. The house and gardens continued to flourish into the present century.

## 9. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The archaeological survey was carried out by Paul Pattison and Alastair Oswald, and by students under their supervision. Control points, hard detail and sections of the more massive earthworks were surveyed using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral electromagnetic distance measurement (EDM). Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer on a Calcomp 3024 plotter. Most of the details on the earthwork plan were added to this plot, at 1:1000 scale, with tapes using normal graphical methods.

The major part of this account has been written and researched by Paul Pattison and Alastair Oswald, with respective emphases on the post-medieval house and gardens, and the hillfort. John Heward provided an outline of the architecture of Gogmagog House and stables and Robert Taylor helped with documentary research. The illustrations were prepared by Trevor Pearson and Alastair Oswald and a photographic record was compiled by Steve Cole. The report was edited by Peter Topping.

The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ, record number TL 45 SE 2.

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#### Map Room:

Maps PSQ. X. 18. 73.            Sale Catalogue (including map) of the Gog Magog Hills Estate, 1894.  
MS Plans R. 6. 7.                Stapleford Inclosure map, 1812.  
Views Relhan 1, no 10            Watercolour of Gogmagog House pasted into Ms volume of Relhan's work,  
c 1801

#### Manuscript Room:

CC Map 12334                    Survey of Stapleford Heath, December 1740/1, by Thomas Ware of Bury

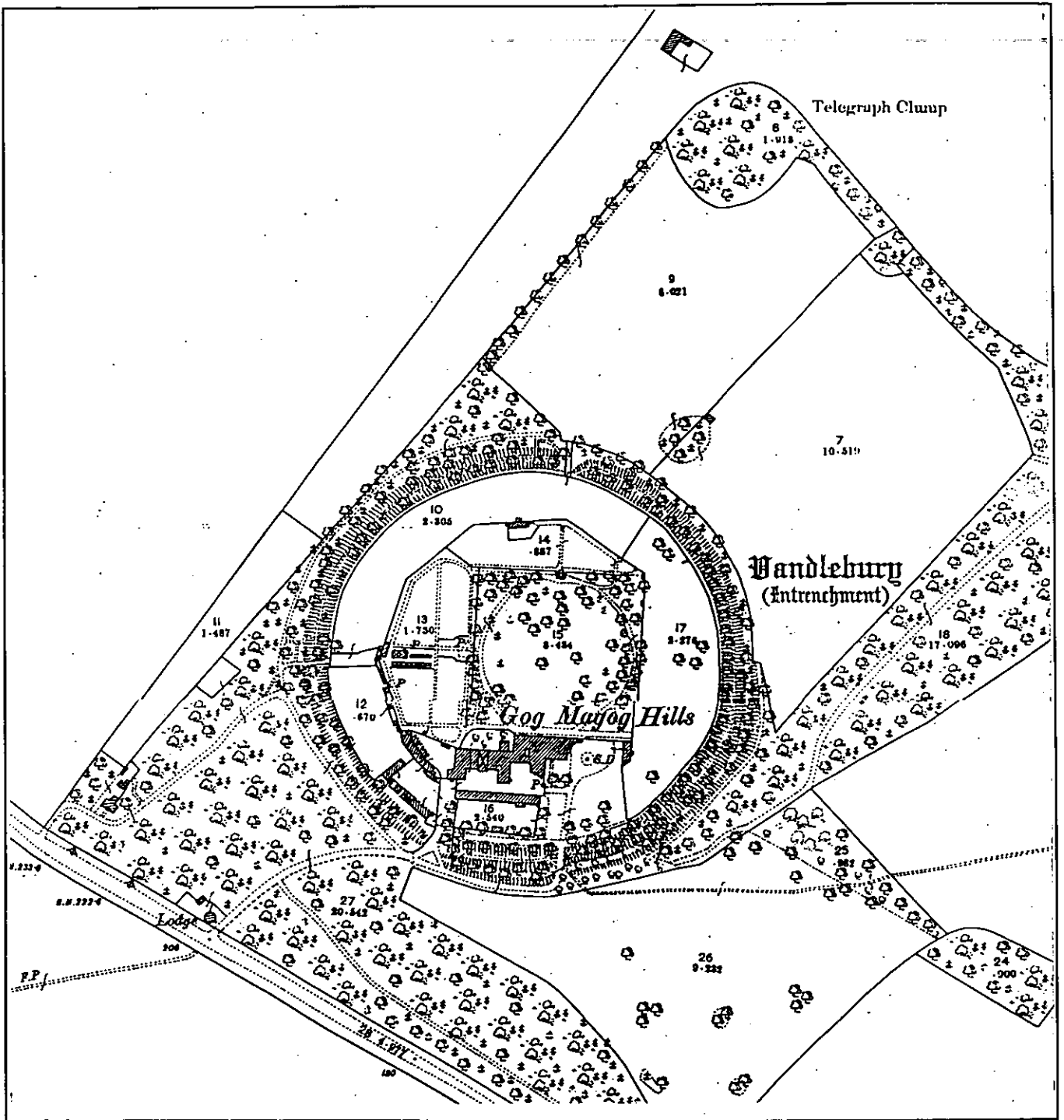
#### Cambridge County Council Sites and Monuments Register:

Record nos: 04636, 04636A, 04846, 04945, 05050 and 09264

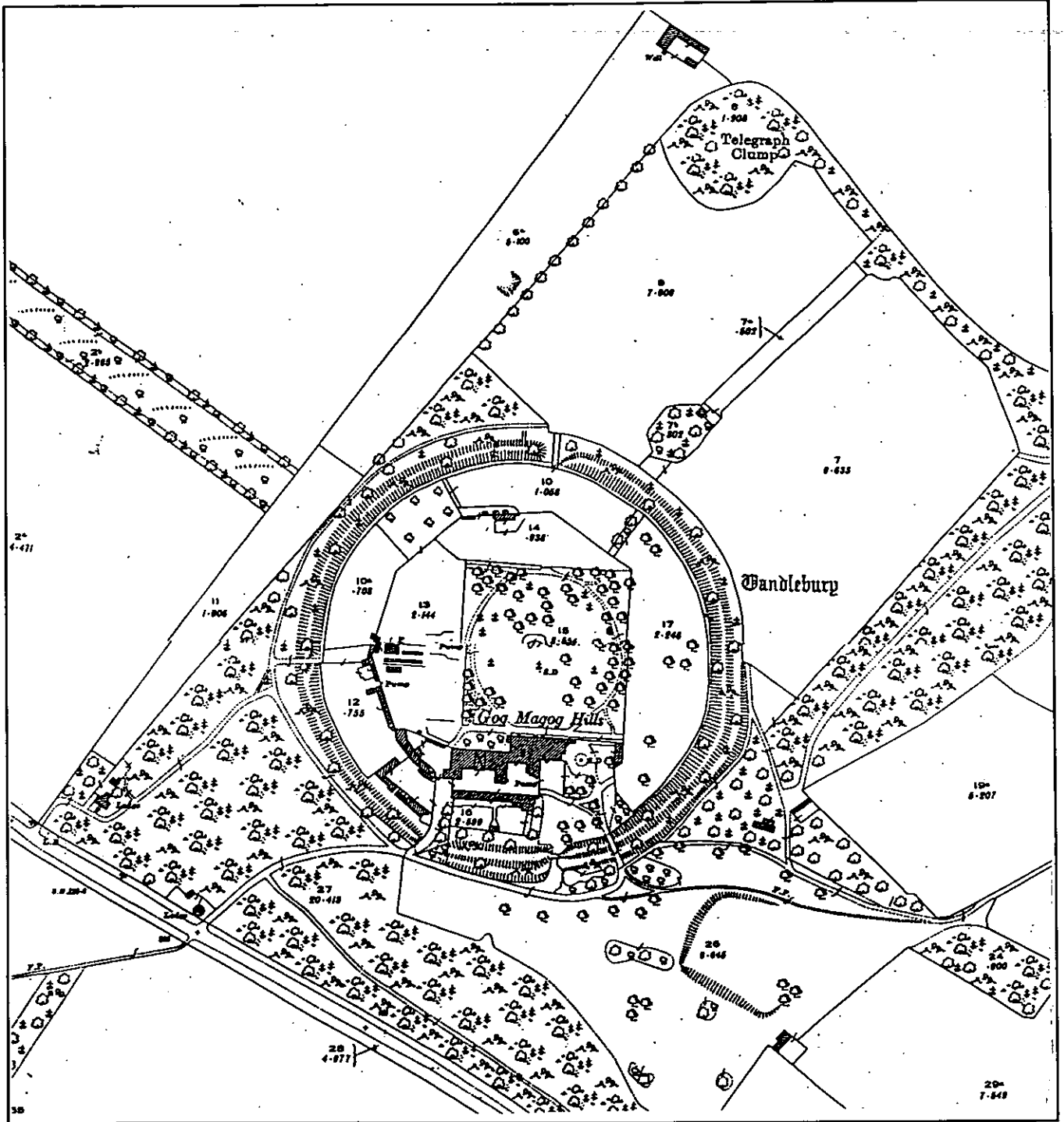
#### National Monuments Record:

National Buildings Record no. 18706: Report and sketch plans of Gog Magog Hills house and stables,  
November 1950, and photographs.





Appendix 1 Ordnance Survey 2nd Edition 25" sheet Cambridge 47.16, 1902 (revision of 1901)



Appendix 2 Ordnance Survey 25" sheet Cambridge 47.16, 1925