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THE EXCAVATIONS ON THE SITE OF ICKWORTH MANOR

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SUMMARY

A LIMITED EXCAVATION to locate the site of Ickworth Manor (IKW 001) found that preservation was only moderate. Some information about the development of the house, prior to its demolition *c.* 1710, was gained and, using this, an attempt is made here to interpret Lord Hervey's 1844 parch mark plan. On the basis of this, it is suggested that Ickworth Manor was a substantial building, comparable in size and appearance to Kentwell Hall, near Long Melford.

INTRODUCTION

Ickworth Manor house, the original seat of the Hervey family, was demolished in *c.* 1710 to make way for a new house. The site (SAU. no. IKW 001, grid reference 8130 6110) has long been known to lie in Manor Field, within Ickworth Park, at 92m above sea level, on the crest of a slope running down to the river Linnet to the south and west. To the north and east the ground is relatively level. The subsoil is boulder clay. The present Ickworth House stands some 350m to the north-west and the church 100m to the west.

A limited excavation (Fig. 9) was undertaken by the Suffolk Archaeological Unit, with the permission of the National Trust, in the spring of 1982 to locate the remains of the old manor and to assess their state of preservation. The excavation was principally an exploratory one to assess the potential of the site and was not primarily intended to provide evidence to supplement the meagre documentary record. A secondary aim was to throw light on the plan of parch marks in Manor Field, made by my great-great-grandfather Lord Arthur Hervey during the exceptionally dry spring and summer of 1844 (Hervey 1849), and on a rectangular enclosure showing on air photographs of the site (Fig. 9).¹

THE EXCAVATION

Initially, two trenches of 2m × 5m were opened on the brow of the hill. A number of insubstantial walls were located but it was decided that the area exposed was too small to be properly understood. An area of *c.* 20m × 20m was therefore stripped of its topsoil mechanically, cleaned off by hand and planned, revealing a more comprehensive set of walls (Fig 10). Selected small areas were then excavated to elucidate specific problems. A machine-dug trench was also put across the northern enclosure ditch and two smaller areas were stripped of top-soil to test our theories about Lord Hervey's plan.

The quality of preservation was found to be not as good as expected. Not only had ploughing removed all floor levels and reduced all walls to their footings but some areas of the site, notably the cellar, had been extensively robbed. Furthermore, the building turned out to be far more complex than anticipated and, given the limited scale of the excavation, it was not possible to make more than a preliminary attempt at unravelling it.

Nevertheless, a number of phases of development could be distinguished. The earliest of these consisted of two short lengths of ditch (Fig. 10,R,S), both *c.* 50cm wide and 50cm deep

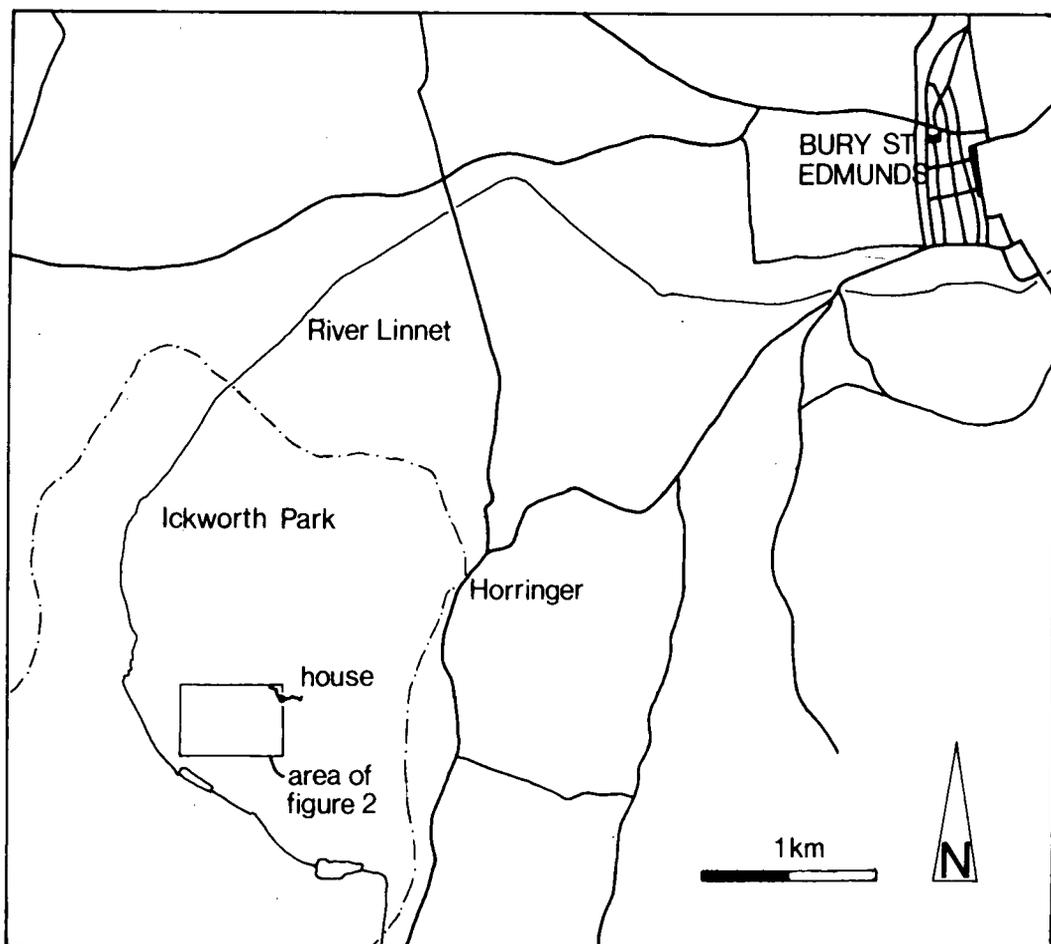


FIG. 8 — Location map.

with a U-profile, which were picked up in the bases of trenches dug to sort out later phases. Both produced large quantities of mainly 13th-century pottery and more medieval pottery was found in the topsoil, along with a 14th-century jeton. Both these ditches were stratigraphically earlier than the earliest identified building on the excavation.

This earliest identified building was characterised by a number of insubstantial wall footings of large flints set in creamy mortar which were revealed when the area was cleaned (Fig. 10). As they were only 30cm wide and *c.* 25cm deep, it seems that they were dwarf-walls, designed to take the sill-beam of a timber frame. The surviving dwarf-walls do not form a coherent plan and it is possible that more remain to be uncovered, while others have been obliterated by later brick walls and cellaring. Some may even have been destroyed by ploughing.

The use of brick marks the next phase. On account of ploughing and robbing, these walls survived only as footings. They must belong to a number of different periods of construction but it was not always possible to determine either the function or the relationship of each footing. The brick walls seem generally to have expanded and augmented the existing timber frame. Only rarely, as where the construction of the cellar necessitated a stronger wall, did a brick wall actually replace a flint and mortar one.

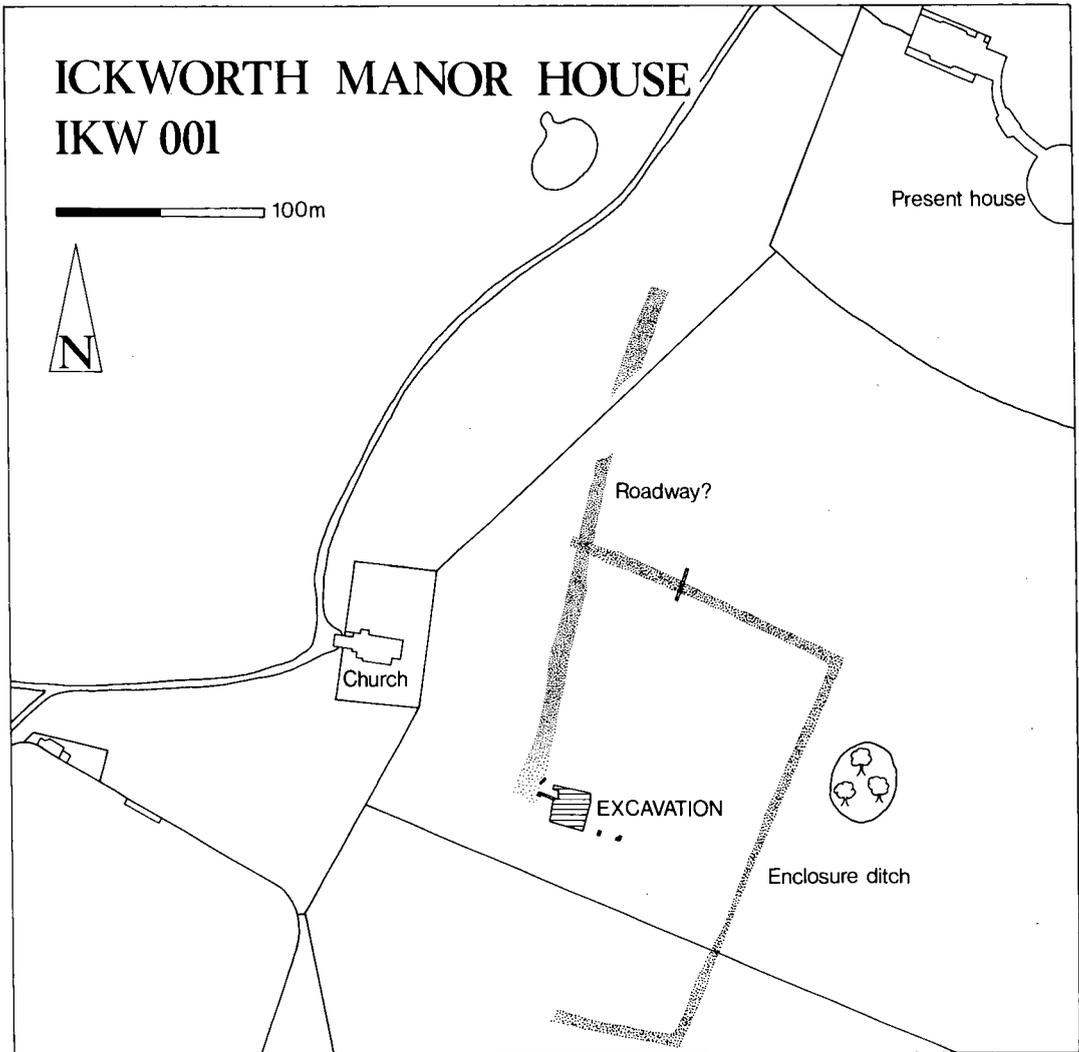


FIG. 9 — The location of the excavation.

The main brick addition was a wing, stretching west from the apparent end of the dwarf-walls and measuring 6.50m × 14m (Fig. 10,A). Its southern wall comes to an abrupt end in line with the dwarf-wall and it is possible that its line was continued to join with the chimney base/garderobe (Fig. 10,C,D) by a flimsier wall, which has been removed by ploughing.

A cellar, surviving to a depth of 1.20m, was inserted, stretching back from the main dwarf-wall, which was replaced by brick at this point (Fig. 10,B). None of the other walls of the cellar seem to have been carried above ground level. Access to the cellar was by a stair in its south-east corner and its floor was tiled with plain 13.3cm × 15.2cm floor bricks.

The substantial U-shaped foundation is best interpreted as a chimney base (Fig. 10,C). Butted up against the south side of this chimney base was a rectangular structure which limited excavation showed to have at least three courses of brick on its inner side, but only rubble on its outer face (Fig. 10,D). It was open at its eastern end, where it appeared to give into an open

ditch. The most likely interpretation of this is that it is a garderobe attached, as was normal, to the outside wall of the building. Garderobes are often associated with chimneys and the presence of a ditch would make it easy to empty.

A well-built drain was possibly a soakaway, as there was no sign of any channel leading to or from it (Fig. 10,E). A substantial wall apparently replaced a flint and mortar one (Fig. 10,F). Another substantial feature was an L-shaped footing, built onto the west side of the main north-south dwarf-wall (Fig. 10,G). It would seem to go with a fragmentary corner, which has been largely cut away by a later ditch (Fig. 10,H). This is probably the foundation for an entrance porch of early Tudor type. The actual foundation of this was made up of large pieces of limestone, some of which were architectural fragments. The largest was a piece of perpendicular tracery. These could have come from the nearby parish church, but it is perhaps more likely that they came from Bury St Edmunds Abbey, dissolved in 1539.

Finally, a brick culvert, probably covered with wooden boards, ran south-west through the wall line into an open ditch, next to the garderobe (Fig. 10,J). To the east of this drain the main wall had been robbed of its brick. The fact that the drain escaped this fate may mean that it was still in use when the house was demolished.

As well as these additions, a number of alterations to the brick structure can be distinguished. The most important of these was the blocking of part of the cellar. Its south-east corner, including the staircase, was carefully blocked off with rubble set in yellow clayey loam (Fig. 10,M). The walls of the blocked area, especially the topmost and facing bricks, were slightly, but not seriously robbed. The new entrance to the cellar was not located, but was probably at its eastern end.

The entrance porch was replaced by another, smaller one, set slightly further north (Fig. 10,N). Only its foundation of decayed limestone survived. Two buttress-shaped foundations were added to the back of the chimney and these probably represent the addition of a second, smaller, stack to the existing chimney (Fig. 10,K). A rough brick drain was added on to the side of the existing drain or soakaway (Fig. 10,L).

The Demolition

The house was reported to be ruinous during the 17th century and was finally demolished c.1710 (National Trust 1976, 24). The demolition appears from the excavation to have been very thorough. The facing bricks and many of the floor bricks of the cellar were removed. The resulting hole was then totally filled with rubble of brick, tile and plaster, about $\frac{1}{8}$ of which was excavated. Some of the plaster, presumably from the half-timbered phase as it bore wattle impressions, was of very high quality. Several of the bricks too were moulded in unusual ways, pointing to decorated facades and chimney stacks. Some of the material showed signs of burning, but it was neither severe nor extensive.² The open ditch (Fig. 10,Q) was also totally filled with similar rubble. Much of the western half of the site was covered with a layer of crushed brick and plaster, mixed with pale brown sandy loam.

In addition to this there were several features which could not with certainty be attributed to any phase. Chief of these was a ditch (Fig. 10,O), which postdated the construction of the earlier tower porch, much of which it totally cut away, but predated the robbing of the cellar. At its eastern end it was only c.30 cm deep but, by the time that it disappeared under the western edge of the site, it was at least 1.75m deep, with sheer sides cut into the natural clay and backfilled with only slightly mixed natural clay. It produced few finds and its purpose remains a mystery.

Equally defying interpretation was a trench, with a square profile, 60cm deep (Fig. 10,P). It postdated the blocking of the south end of the cellar and ended near to the end wall of the modified cellar. It was filled with compact gravel and so may have had a structural function.

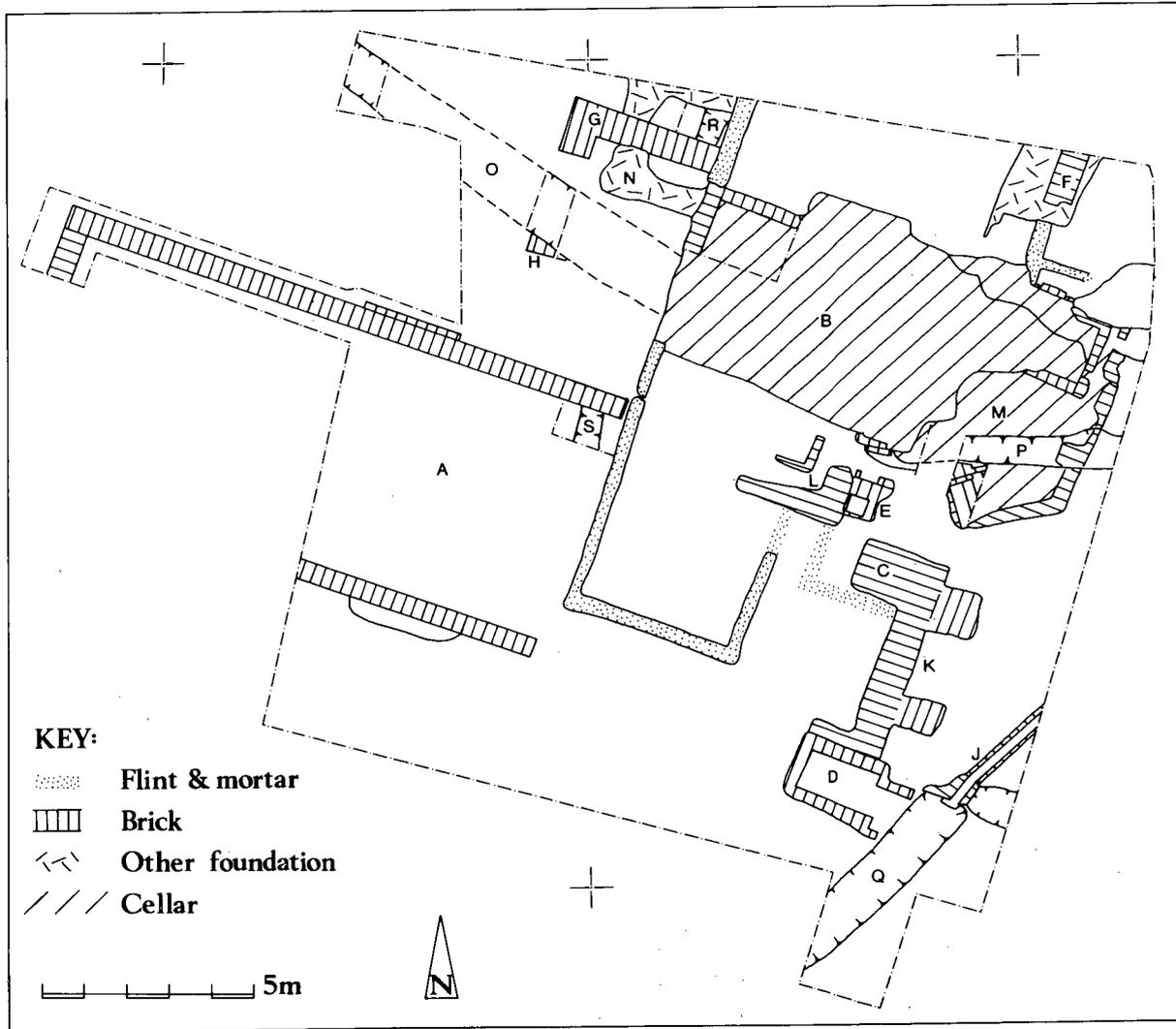


Fig. 10 — Interpretative plan of the excavation.

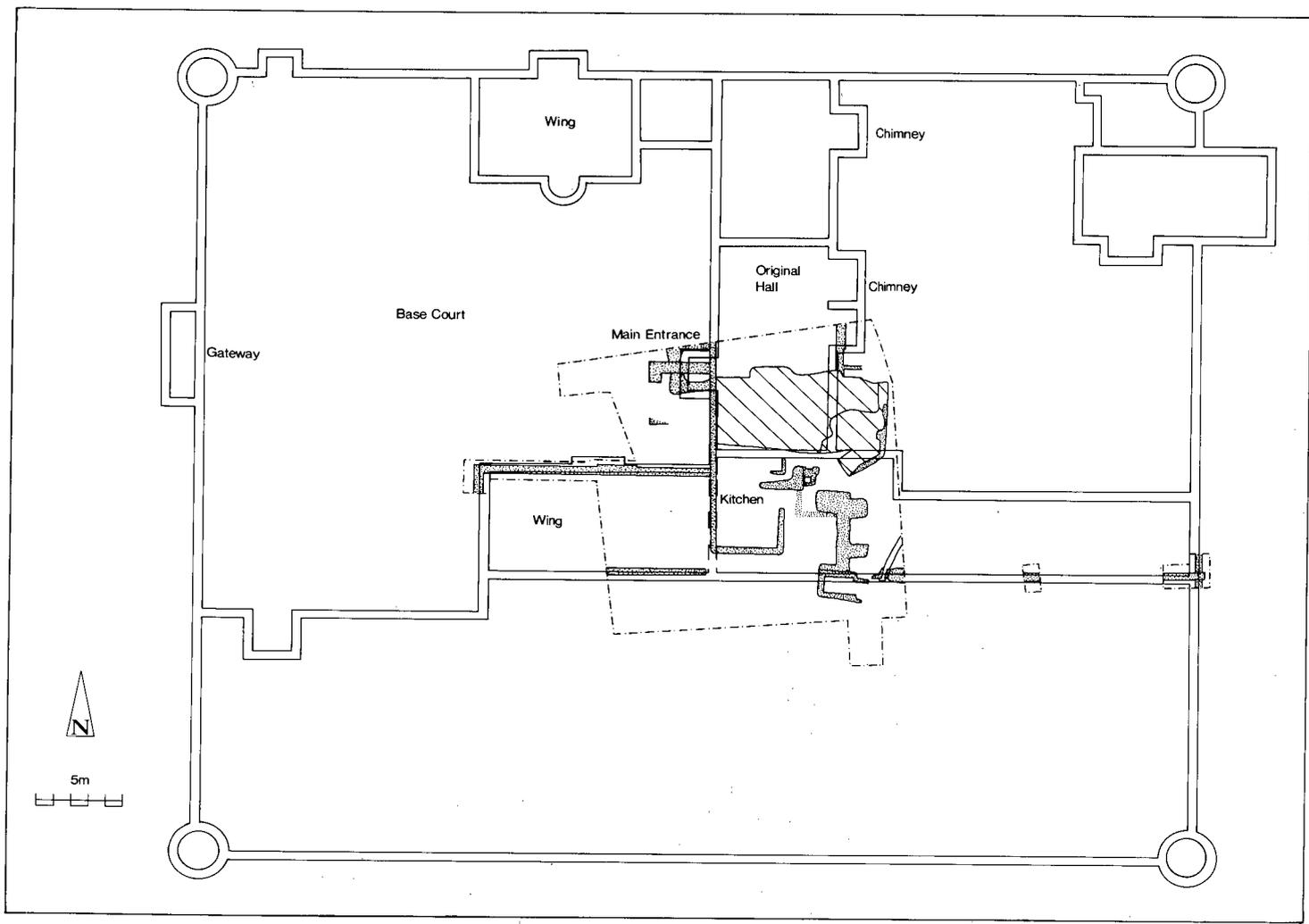


FIG. 11 — An interpretation of Lord Hervey's 1844 plan with the 1982 excavation superimposed.

The Main Enclosure Ditch

The section across it revealed that the ditch was 4.50m wide and more than 1m deep. There was no sign of any wall associated with the ditch and no dating material was recovered from it.

DISCUSSION

Dating

With the exception of the two medieval ditches, the site produced very little pottery, so dating of the various building phases is not easy. On analogy with surviving buildings, the dwarf-walls could date to anywhere from the 13th to the 15th centuries. There are various factors which help to provide a slightly clearer date for the earliest use of brick. A series 1 'Boy Bishop' token, dating to the late 15th or early 16th century (Rigold 1978, 87-110), was found in a layer stratigraphically earlier than the cellar and drain (Fig. 10, B, E). If the re-used architectural fragments in the earlier tower porch foundation do come from Bury Abbey, then that cannot be earlier than 1539. Brick tower porches in general seem to date from the mid-16th century.

A Nuremburg token in the blocking fill of the cellar dates this alteration to later than the early 17th century. We know from documentary evidence that the house was demolished *c.* 1710 (National Trust 1976, 24), and this is backed up by the clay pipes from the demolition layers. On the other hand, the two coins found in the rubble fill of the cellar, a Nuremburg token and a Charles I farthing, both considerably predate the demolition date. Not too much weight, therefore, should be placed on the Nuremburg token from the earlier blocking of the cellar.

Lord Hervey's Plan

It proved possible to locate our plan on to Lord Hervey's 1844 plan of the parch marks and thus to confirm its general accuracy, though it is wrong in some details (Fig. 11). Combining the evidence of the two, it is possible to interpret tentatively the overall plan of the house. Our excavation seems to have picked up the south end of the main façade of the original hall, and possibly the service end. From this original half-timbered hall there projected two asymmetrical brick wings, with chimneys and garderobes along the back walls, giving the house a U-plan. The entrance, slightly off-centre, perhaps to line up with the original screens passage, was a tower porch. In front of the house one can perhaps see a base-court, while the rectangular foundation on the west side of what is probably a surrounding wall, could well be interpreted as a gateway, similar perhaps to that at Erwarton Hall (Sandon 1977, 134, Pl. 75).

CONCLUSION

As a result of this limited excavation, we can attempt a general picture of the development of Ickworth Manor House. The site was occupied from at least the 13th century. The earliest building found by our excavation was a half-timbered hall, aligned roughly north-south. Fragments of plaster from the fill of the cellar indicate that its decoration was of a high standard. From the 16th century onwards, a series of brick additions and alterations were made to the house, giving an imposing U-plan, comparable in size and plan to Kentwell Hall, near Long Melford. In common with many houses of the period, moulded brick decoration was used.

Documentary evidence indicates a gradual decline during the 17th century, before final demolition *c.* 1710. It is said that the original plan was to re-use the materials in the next house and the excavation has shown that the building was systematically stripped of much that could be re-useable (National Trust 1976, 25).

Shortly after he returned to Ickworth in 1702, John Hervey, first Earl of Bristol, decided to start afresh and build a totally new house, commissioning Vanbrugh (of Blenheim Palace renown) to produce a plan (National Trust 1976, 24f). From the evidence of our excavation, it seems that it was not only the neglect that the house had suffered during the later 17th century that necessitated a radical change, but also the fact that the old house was a much altered jumble of architectural periods, ill-suited to the revived classicism of the early 18th century. It is not surprising that the newly ennobled John Hervey should wish to replace it with something more befitting his status.

The future of the site

Given the damage that has already been done by ploughing (see above, page 65), it would be best if the site could remain under pasture. For, although the upper layers and walls are not well preserved, it does appear that the earlier phases of occupation — which this excavation hardly touched — are relatively intact and, for the moment, protected by later layers. There is no doubt that the site would repay more extensive excavation, which could provide much information, not only about the later house but also about the medieval origins of the site.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1 Suffolk Archaeological Unit references St. J ATR51, BVW095, PQ40 etc.

2 Cf Hervey 1849, who suggests that the house was burnt down.

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