

# METTINGHAM CASTLE: AN INTERPRETATION OF A SURVEY OF 1562

by EDWARD MARTIN

THE IMPRESSIVE RUINS of Mettingham Castle lie just to the south of Bungay, in north-east Suffolk. The castle is in the extreme south-west corner of Mettingham parish, adjacent to what was Mettingham Green. The site is entered from the north through a dramatic gatehouse, which leads to two conjoined moated areas or baileys, the northern of which is partially surrounded by a stone curtain wall. Between the two baileys is a small, roughly quadrangular moat containing the remains of a stone tower or keep. This inner moat is broader and less regular than the surrounding ones and may be a survival from something earlier, perhaps a small homestead moat that was on the site before the castle was built (Fig. 18).

A licence to crenellate was granted in 1342 to Sir John de Norwich (*c.* 1299–1362), apparently as a reward for his long military service. He served in many campaigns against the Scots and the French from 1322 onwards; he was Admiral of the coast from the Thames northwards 1335–37 and was Lieutenant to the Seneschal of Gascony in 1338; he also fought at Crecy, 1346, as a banneret in the first division. Sir John was summoned to Councils in 1342, 1358 and 1359, and in 1360 he was summoned to Parliament, whereby he is held to have become Lord Norwich (G.E.C. 1936, 763–66). The Norwich family died out in the male line on the death of Sir John's grandson, another Sir John, whilst abroad in the King's service in the winter of 1373. The property then passed to a cousin, Catherine de Brewse. On Catherine's death in 1380, as a nun at Dartford in Kent, the estate was administered by trustees, with the intention of settling it on the College of Secular Canons that her uncle, Sir John de Norwich, had founded at Raveningham in Norfolk in 1350 (Knowles and Hadcock 1971, 432). But before any transfer could be effected the castle was attacked and ransacked on two successive days by rebels in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 (Powell 1896, 24). That was in June; in July the same year Catherine's trustees leased the castle for three years to her cousin and heir, William de Ufford, second Earl of Suffolk (Copinger 1911, 196). This was presumably done with the intention of safeguarding the castle from further attack. However William died shortly afterwards and in 1382 the trustees finally transferred the castle to the College at Raveningham, though the canons did not actually move to Mettingham until 1394 (V.C.H. *Suffolk*, II, 144–45).

In 1535 the College at Mettingham consisted of a Master, nine Fellows and fourteen boys being maintained and educated. In 1542 the College surrendered to the Crown (the last Master was Thomas Manning, suffragan Bishop of Ipswich and former Prior of Butley) and was regranted to Sir Anthony Denny of Cheshunt in Hertfordshire. In 1563 the castle was sold to Sir Nicholas Bacon of Redgrave, the Lord Keeper, who had had the property surveyed by his own surveyor, John Hille,<sup>1</sup> the previous year. This survey<sup>2</sup> gives a valuable word-picture of the site (Fig 20).

In 1562 the castle was surrounded by a 30ft high stone wall, 3ft thick, but this was already decayed in places. It was entered through a stone gatehouse (Pl. VIa) with a room above the gate. On the east side were lodgings for the porter and other servants, then 'utterly decayed', whilst on the west side there was a stable with stone walls, but roofless. Within the gate there was a base court 258 × 152ft, with a mansion house on its south side and stone walls on the other three sides.

The stone-walled mansion was entered through a double-storeyed porch with a lead roof. The porch led into an aisled hall (46ft long by 30ft wide, the aisles being 6ft wide) with an

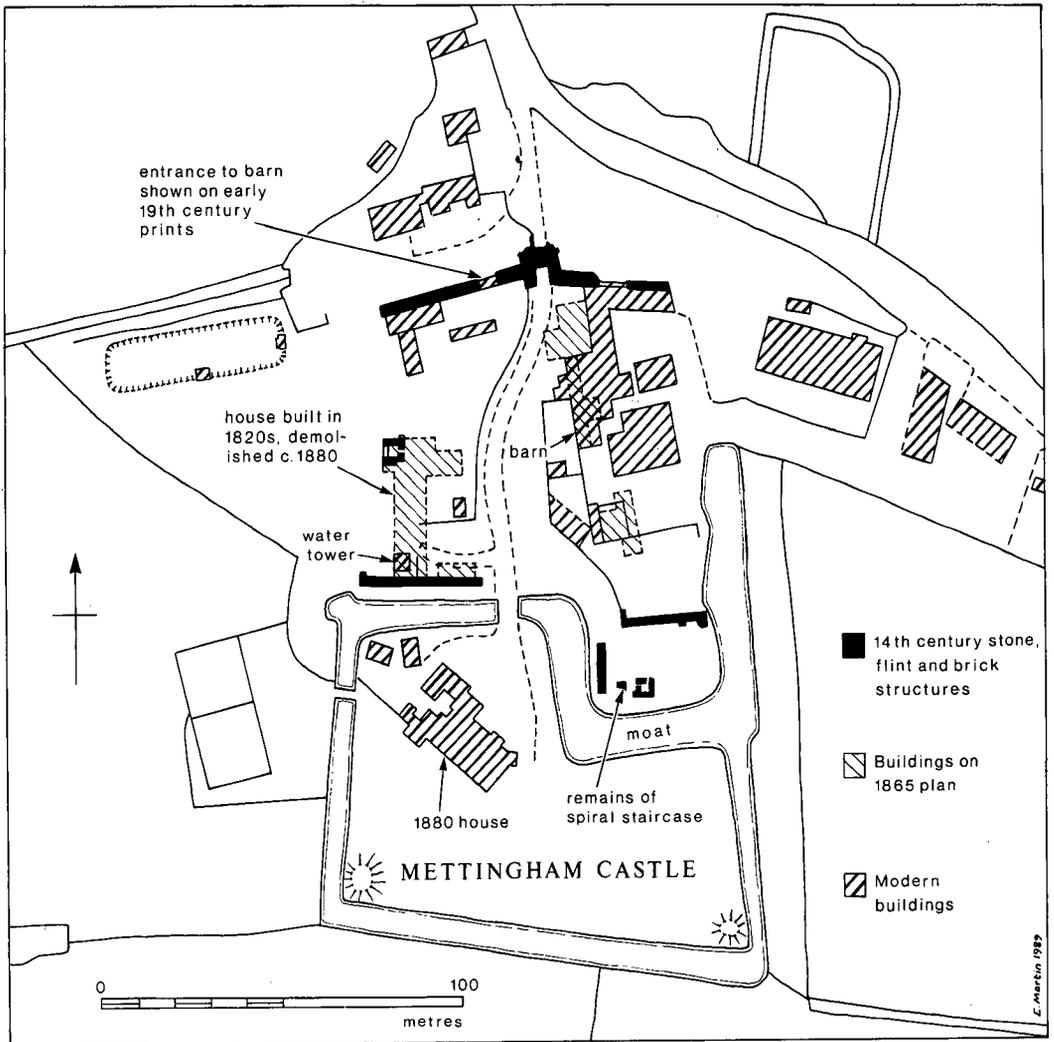


FIG. 18 – Mettingham Castle, showing the buildings that existed in 1969, together with the buildings shown on a map of 1865.

'open roof' covered with tiles, the aisles having lead roofs with lead spouts and gutters. The floor was paved with bricks and on the north side there was a chimney. At the end of the hall there was an oak-floored parlour, with a chimney on its east side and a stone bay-window on the south side, overlooking a little court that was separated from the moat by a stone wall. The parlour had a wainscot ceiling with carved and gilded 'knoppes' hanging down, and around the room where the gilded arms of the last Master. Above the parlour was a room with a chimney and a window looking out into the little court. Adjoining the east side of the parlour was a roofless and decayed vestry, which had had two rooms above it.

At the lower end of the hall was a pantry, with walls of stone covered with tiles, and a buttery, ceiled and paved with stone. Beyond these were a larder and a wine cellar. Stairs next

to the hall door led to a decayed gallery, on the south side of which were seven guest chambers – four with chimneys and two with garderobes, all of which were above the service rooms. At the end of a 53ft long entry was a kitchen with a boiling house at its west end.

Outside the west end of the kitchen there was a bakehouse yard 108ft long by 32ft wide. On the south side of the yard were a slaughter house and other offices ‘lately pulled down’, and at the west end a bakehouse, brewhouse, and malting house, all decayed. On the north side of the yard was a storehouse with an oak floor and a place to keep apples. Adjoining the north end of the storehouse was a ‘fayer house . . . called Cynnyehalle’. This was 22ft long by 18ft broad and had a chimney and glazed windows, with a little buttery and another room adjoining its west end. Over the ‘halle’ and buttery were two rooms, one with a chimney and a garderobe. Adjoining them at the west end was a ‘chamber to laye malte in’, with a stair descending into the malthouse.

The ‘olde castell inclosed withe a mote by it selfe, from the mansyon house’ was ‘utterlye decayed’, with ‘dyvers of the walles fallen downe’, but there was still a ‘fayer chimney of freestone standinge with two great barres of Iron holdinge up parte of it’. The ‘castell’ was said to measure 80ft in length by 50ft broad; these measurements approximate to the internal dimensions of the existing keep ruins.

The inner orchard (1¼ acres) lay ‘south of the Colledge’ and was enclosed within the moat. It contained fruit trees and was divided into compartments with quickset and box hedges. Here had been many ‘fayer arbors and many small gardens’. There were also four ponds which served to preserve fish caught on weekdays until they were needed on Fridays. West of the Colledge and north of the Bowling Alley was the great orchard (1¾ acres). This contained pears, apples, wardenes [cooking pears] and plums. At its northern end was a fishpond, then containing but a few bream and perch. The moat also contained a few roach, bream, tench and perch, but they were said to be ‘sore distroyed with an otter and some pickerell’ – however Hille thought that this could be remedied if the moat was ‘scowered’ and then restocked.

This survey raises several important questions. Firstly, when and by whom was the mansion built? The survey seems to indicate a late medieval building that was then empty and partially dilapidated, but still largely roofed and with most of its wooden floors intact. The aisled hall structure suggested a type of building that was more typical of the 14th century than later (Smith 1955). The fact that the arms of the last Master of the Colledge were displayed in the parlour makes it clear that the mansion had housed part or all of the Colledge and had not been erected by Sir Anthony Denny when he acquired the property in 1542. The Colledge is frequently said to have been housed within the moated keep or tower; however we know that this was ‘utterly decayed’ in 1562, only twenty years after the dissolution. The mansion could have been built by the Colledge some time after it came to Mettingham in 1394, but, as described, there is nothing specifically ecclesiastical about the building and, surprisingly, there is no mention of a chapel or cloisters. In fact it sounds much more like a substantial manor house. If it was in origin a secular mansion it could only have been built by the Norwich family pre-1374, and if this was the case what was the purpose of the moated keep, and was it earlier or later than the mansion?

The subsequent history of the mansion is not altogether clear either. The house would appear to have been still there in the mid 17th century when the antiquarian William Blois (1600–73)<sup>3</sup> visited it and recorded the visible heraldry:

Mettingham. In the Castle. Ye coate of Norwich. Founder of the Colledge. The coate of Ufford qrd. with Beeke & ye Crest. Robt Ufford Patron of ye Colledge. Richard Shelton Priest, Mr of ye Coll. Many matches of Shelton. Some of Brewse, as Hansard, O. lion ramp. purple emp. with Br. Tilny with Br. etc.<sup>4</sup>

## Mettingham Castle - ruined building

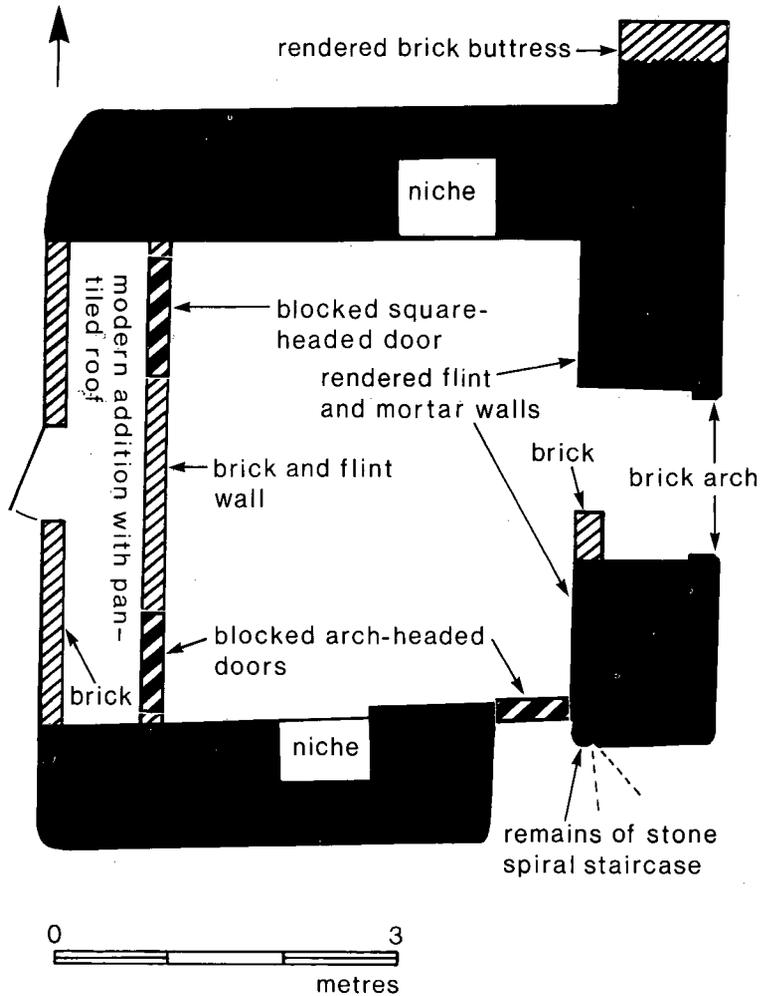


FIG. 19 – Plan of the ruined building in the northern bailey of Mettingham Castle, possibly part of the *Cynnyhalle* mentioned in the 1562 survey.

This makes it clear that arms of the 'last master' recorded by Hille in the parlour were not in fact those of the actual last master, Thomas Manning, but those of his predecessor Richard Shelton, who was Master from 1517 until his death in 1539.

An 'old house' that had served as a farmhouse for many years was demolished in the 1820s, when a new mansion was built on its site by the Safford family, 'retaining an angle of the old keep' (Suckling 1846, 175). The historian Alfred Suckling was the curate of the parish at the time and claimed to have seen the work of the Norwich family laid open, noting that 'several of the interior decorations, long hid, were found in excellent preservation, – the colours and gilding of the arms being fresh and brilliant' (Suckling 1846, 175). John Hille recorded gilded arms in the parlour of the 1562 mansion, so it is

possible that this was the house that was pulled down in the 1820s. Although a number of prints of the castle were produced, starting with one by Samuel and Nathaniel Buck in 1738, none of them show the houses within the castle walls.

Unfortunately Suckling's statement that 'an angle of the old keep' (? meaning the 1562 mansion) was retained raises another problem. An account of the site in 1865<sup>5</sup> records that:

a small portion of the inner building remains at the west end of the present house. There is still an arched doorway and a stone was found there carved with the arms of Ufford (Manning 1865, 80).

When this house was demolished *c.* 1880 the earlier fragment was left standing and this still survives near the western edge of the northern bailey. The problem is, what was it originally part of?

This fragment (Pl. VIb; Fig. 19) consists of a roofless room approximately 20ft (6m) square, much obscured by ivy and vines. The east, north and south walls are made of mortared flint, much repaired and patched with brick. Despite this the walls are in poor condition, especially at the western end where some collapse has taken place. The east wall is 4ft 2in (1.27m) thick and the other two walls are approximately 3ft 4in (1m) thick. At the western end of the structure there are two thinner walls which serve to divide off a separate, very narrow, annexe which has a pantiled roof. The outer brick wall is fairly modern (? late 19th century) with an equally modern arched doorway. The inner wall, which appears to be older, consists of mortared flints, underpinned with approximately 6½ft (2m) of poorly-coursed brickwork on its east side. In this wall are two blocked doorways: the northern one is square-headed and blocked with modern bricks, whilst the southern one is arch-headed 7ft tall and 2ft 3in wide (2.1m × 68cm) and is blocked with old bricks.

The north wall contains a deep, arched, niche 3ft 2in high, 2ft 10in wide and 2ft 2in deep (97cm × 87cm × 66cm) and there is a similar niche in the south wall, 3ft 2in high, 2ft 7in wide and 1ft 8in deep (98cm × 80cm × 51cm). Both have brick arches and the southern one is paved with square pammets (the flooring is missing from the northern one). Also in the south wall is a blocked arch-headed doorway 8ft 3in high and 2ft 2in wide (2.5m × 65cm), which gave access to a spiral staircase, the stone newel of which still survives on the outside of the wall.

The east wall is pierced by a central arched doorway 7ft 3in tall and 4ft 2in wide (2.25m × 1.26m) which has been narrowed on the inside by the addition of a stub brick wall to enable a smaller door to be fitted. The outer edge of the doorway has a brick arch with a chamfered edge. The construction technique of this arch can be paralleled by similar brick arches on the inner face of the gatehouse and in the keep and must be mid-14th century in date. The individual bricks measure 9½in long × 4in wide × 2in thick, though there is up to ½in variation in the measurements. Most of the bricks are red, though there are some yellowish ones. The chamfer was created by cutting an edge off the bricks.

Above the doorway there is an arched window with leaded lights in a relatively modern wooden frame. There is a flat-bottomed U-shaped depression in the top of the wall, above the window and slightly offset to the north, which may be another window opening. On the exterior of the east wall, at a level between the door and the window are two brick-surrounded openings which appear to be chimney flues, one on either side of the door. Both are probably to be associated with the 1820s house, though the openings are at different heights and the bricks are different. Internally, in the angle between the east and north walls and at a height of 1.3m, there is a slightly projecting piece of brick vaulting. At the external north-east corner of the structure there is a brick buttress, rendered and lined to resemble masonry, which was probably part of the facade of the 1820s house.

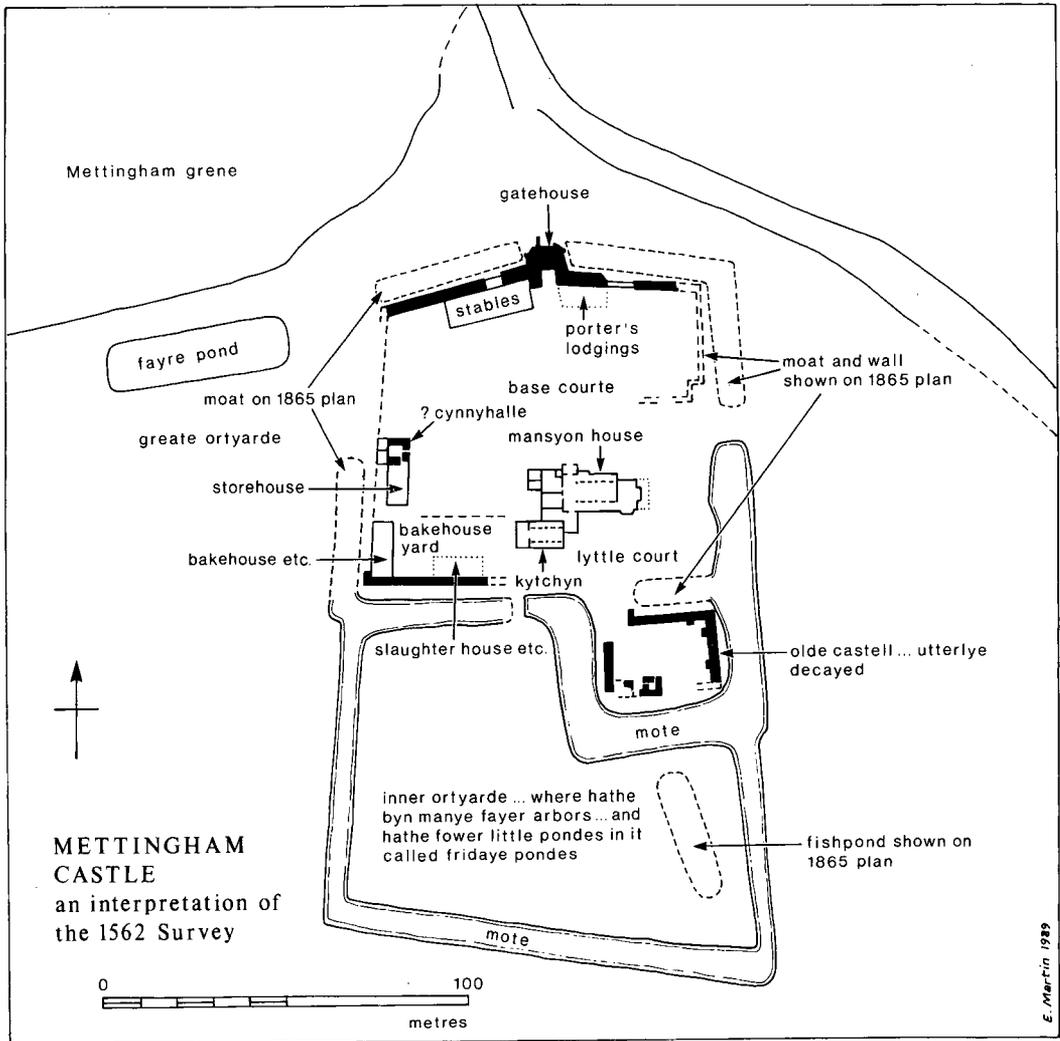


FIG. 20 – An interpretation of the 1562 survey of Mettingham Castle, together with additional details concerning the ruins and associated earthworks taken from a map of 1865.

The 1562 survey does not locate the mansion precisely, beyond saying that it was on the south side of the base court. Logically the entrance to the mansion should have faced the main entrance through the gatehouse, so in the interpretation (based on a reconstruction kindly provided by Philip Aitkens; Fig. 20) it has been placed in the centre of the south side of the base court. The little flint-walled structure, being so close to the perimeter of the castle site, is difficult to place within the mansion and must have formed part of a separate building. The most likely candidate is the 'Cynnyhalle/Cynnye halle', which was approximately the right size and roughly in the right position. However what was the Cynnyhalle? The most likely explanation is that 'Cynny' represents the Middle English prefix *kine* (from Old English *cýne*) meaning 'kingly, royal' (Kuhn and Reidy 1968). This implies that the Cynnyhalle was a detached guest apartment suitable for important visitors. The mention

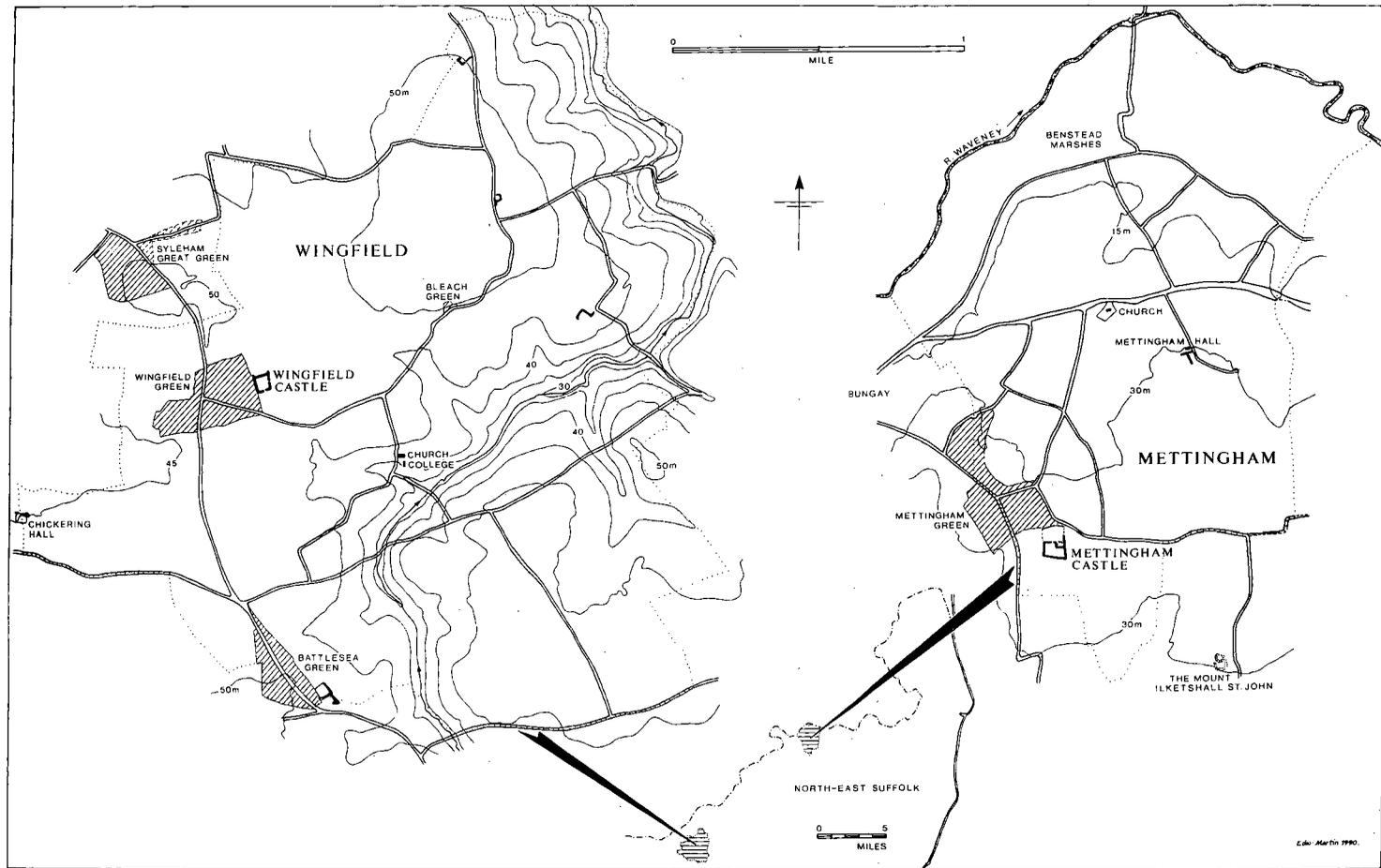


FIG. 21 – Maps showing the peripheral locations of Mettingham and Wingfield Castles in their parishes and their positions on greens, sitings which closely parallel the positions of many moated farmsteads, as can be seen at Battlesea Green.

of glazed windows, a chimney and a garderobe in the 1562 survey do certainly imply a building for human habitation. Its survival may be due to the fact that it was originally well-built and decorated, a veritable 'fayer house'.

Built into the porch of the 1880 house, and into the south face of the curtain wall to the west of the gatehouse, are a number of brick plaques bearing moulded designs – a fleur-de-lys, a double-headed eagle, a lion rampant, a swan and a saltire cross. The plaques are slightly curved, which suggests that they are in fact ornamental chimney bricks. The fleur-de-lys and saltire cross designs can be closely paralleled by similar chimney bricks at Aspoll Hall, Gipping Lone and at Ufford, where they have been dated *c.* 1530–40 (Girling 1963). The fleur-de-lys design can also be paralleled at East Barsham Manor in Norfolk, where the bricks are dated *c.* 1525 (Lloyd 1925, 324). Presumably the Mettingham bricks were originally on the chimneys of the house surveyed in 1562 and were salvaged when the house was pulled down. The presence of these Tudor bricks, together with the arms of Richard Shelton and his family in the parlour, suggests that the mansion house was refurbished or embellished (at the very least) by Shelton. Shelton's father, Sir Ralph Shelton of Shelton in Norfolk was a noted house and church builder and Richard himself apparently did much to reform the college at Mettingham. Richard Shelton was also noted locally for his skill in hydraulics, being consulted over attempts to improve Yarmouth Haven in 1528 (MacCulloch 1986, 138).

The topographical position of Mettingham Castle is very similar to that of Wingfield Castle (only about 11 miles distant), which was built in 1384 by the son-in-law of Sir John Wingfield (died 1361), another soldier and a contemporary of Sir John de Norwich. Instead of being near the church in the heart of their parishes, both castles are situated near parish boundaries and adjoin peripheral greens (Fig. 21) – positions more normally associated with the homestead moats of minor manors and free tenements, rather than principal manors. The historical record does indeed suggest that the castles are associated with late, minor, manors. In the case of Mettingham the estate appears to have been founded by Sir John's father, Walter de Norwich (Chief Baron of the Exchequer 1312–29), who was one of the land-holders there in 1316.<sup>6</sup> As late as 1346 the family's holding in Mettingham was only one of several there assessed as being a quarter of a knight's fee, and even that was not held in chief.<sup>7</sup> In the case of Wingfield, the Wingfield family do not originally appear to have had a capital holding in the parish. In 1346 the main Wingfield manor was held by Richard de Brewse, with the Wingfields only holding knights' fees in the surrounding parishes of Syleham and Fressingfield.<sup>8</sup> In both cases the castles were built by families who appear to have advanced themselves through service to the Crown, rather than from an established landed power-base. This may be a clue to the castles themselves, for neither appears to be a serious defensive work; instead they seem to have been built to impress, with imposing facades and gatehouses. In short they were symbols of success not domination, aggrandised homestead moats rather than fortresses.

## NOTES

1 For some account of John Hille see Dodd 1974, 20, 25.

2 The original manuscript is B.L. Add. MS. 1450, but a full transcript is printed in Copinger 1911, 197–200.

3 For an account of William Blois, see Blatchly 1988, 7.

4 S.R.O.I., GC 17: 755, f.31.

5 See Manning 1865; this includes a map of the site surveyed by George Baker of Bungay.

6 *Feudal Aids*, H.M.S.O. 1908, 40, 65.

7 *Ibid.*

8 *Ibid.*

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*Abbreviations*

- G.E.C.            G.E.C[ockayne], 1936. *The Complete Peerage*, ed. Doubleday, H.A. and Lord Howard de Walden. London.  
 S.R.O.I.        Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.