

GREYS COURT
Rotherfield Greys
Oxfordshire

Level 1 Archaeological Survey

GREYS COURT

Level 1 Archaeological Survey

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INVESTIGATION REPORT SERIES
AI/21/2002

County: Oxfordshire
District: South Oxfordshire
Parish: Rotherfield Greys
NGR: SU 72 83
NMR No: SU 78 SW 19

Survey, report and drawings by: Mark Bowden

©copyright English Heritage

2002

Applications for reproduction should be made to English Heritage, NMR Services (01793 414600)

English Heritage, National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ

Introduction

Survey genesis, methodology and scope

A brief, Level 1 archaeological survey of the Greys Court estate was requested to complement the architectural survey being carried out by English Heritage Architectural Investigation. This archaeological survey was undertaken over two days, 21st-22nd February 2002. All parts of the estate were visited but the Lordship of the Manor of Rotherfield Greys estate (Greys Green and Shepherd's Green) was not included. No sawpits and not all quarries and ponds were noted – these are covered by Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 21).

Features noted in the course of this survey are listed below, numbered in the sequence in which they were encountered in the field. Where applicable, they are cross-referenced to their numbers in the existing National Trust archaeological survey (Matthews and Wainwright 1990). All maps mentioned, with the exception of the 1960 OS 1:10560, are reproduced by Matthews and Wainwright.

The park at Greys Court is registered by English Heritage as a Park and Garden of Special Historic Interest, Grade II (Ref No 2098), though the Brickfield area and the part of Lambridge Wood within National Trust ownership is excluded from the Register.

Topography

Greys Court lies on the chalk (with localised clay deposits) plateau of the Chilterns, approximately 3km to the west-north-west of Henley-on-Thames. The present park occupies a high point in the local topography at over 120m OD, with a steep valley to the west and south debouching into lower-lying slopes to the east and dropping down to the Thames. The Court itself lies on the lip of this valley and has a slight combe to the east, while the park rises gently behind it to the north. Beyond the valley to the west the ground rises again towards the Chiltern escarpment. To the north of the park the ground stretches away almost level for a considerable distance. Like much of the Chilterns, this is a well wooded landscape, particularly to the north and west of the park. The settlement pattern is a woodland one, with isolated farms and hamlets around 'greens', rather than nucleated villages. The transport network also reflects this pattern, with numerous small lanes, tracks and paths.

Gazetteer

Features shown on Fig 1.

- 1 A south-facing scarp, 3m wide and up to 0.4m high crosses the combe to the north of the Lodge. In the bottom of the combe it is a low bank or causeway, 8.3m wide, though the backscarp is barely visible. There is another, very slight earthwork, also barely visible, to its south. Overall the two banks are 17.6m wide. This bank fades into the natural slopes at either end and no clear continuation is visible. It is in alignment with feature **25**, but it is not clear whether this is significant or coincidental. This feature could be a very degraded fragment of park boundary, or a road causeway.
- 2 A ditch or hollow way (NT 428), continuing the line of the ha-ha to the south of the Court. Its greatest dimensions, where it crosses the little combe to the

- north of the Lodge, are 6.2m wide and 1.1m deep. Westward of this point it has a slight intermittent bank on its south side, and the path running parallel to its south is hollowed. Eastward the ditch continues through the edge of woodland and the path running parallel to it to the south is again hollowed. Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 22) considered this ditch (as well as the hollowed path to its south) to be a hollow way and a former course of the old Henley road, as shown on the 1768 map. While this is probably correct, the 1768 map is not sufficiently accurate for the attribution to be certain.
- 3 Two possible pondbays occupy the bottom of the combe to the south of 2. The back wall of the upper one is 1.4m high and distinct. All the other earthworks are much slighter and more spread. The upper pond (if such it is) measures *c* 16m east-west by *c* 12m transversely and appears to be rectangular. The lower pond, which is much more doubtful, is too indistinct to survey.
 - 4 This area exhibits very faint traces of narrow ridge-and-furrow, on various alignments. There are also possibly old plot boundaries but no relationship between boundaries and cultivation could be seen. All have been disturbed and smoothed. The ponds (NT 426) shown on the 1960 OS map survive, two of them currently holding water.
 - 5 Two ponds (NT 426) retained by massive dams, formal in appearance. They look like ornamental parkland features, despite their proximity to large chalkpits. There is no demonstrable chronological relationship but the ponds could be older than the adjacent chalkpits. It is also possible that these ponds originated as chalkpits themselves and have been subsequently modified. The dam of the lower pond is 0.8m high externally, 1.1m internally. The dam of the upper pond is 2.1m high externally (i.e. into the lower pond), 1.3m internally. The upper pond had an island. The lower pond is D-shaped and about 25m across. The upper pond is sub-rectangular and about 40m long. These ponds have relatively recently been brought within woodland; the trees should be removed.
 - 6 Extant, water-filled ponds (NT 426) of less formal character – probably stock ponds created from chalkpits. There is a very slight earthwork bank to the south of the more southerly pond, probably an old hedgeline. The existing hedgeline to the south-west of these ponds is apparently of some antiquity and is approximately parallel to another old hedgeline, 33.
 - 7 A bank with ditch to the east (NT 427), 8.2m wide overall, forms the western edge of a block of woodland. The bank is *c* 0.9m high and smooth to the west, facing the Court, while the ditch is relatively rough in appearance (this may be due to burrowing animals, however). There is a break in this bank where a ‘vista’ (NT 430) cuts through the wood. (The forward, western, edge of the wood is now formed by a screen of evergreen shrubs.) The bank ends at the north-western corner of the wood but the ditch continues to the north corner. Matthews and Wainwright’s statement that this feature ‘looks very much like a trench for a sunk fence’ (1990, 22) is misleading. This feature is first clearly shown on the Tithe Map.
 - 8 Areas of parkland ploughed during and/or shortly after the Second World War (aerial photographs: CAP 8062/51-3, 18-June 1952; CAP 8112/21-7, 2-May-1953). Much of the park had also been ploughed in the 18th century, according to a survey of 1781 (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 34).
 - 9 A slight, straight bank – a field boundary, probably not of great antiquity.

- 10 A lynchet (NT 429), spread to *c* 6m wide and up to about 0.5m high, runs through the length of the wood from north-west to south-east. It is cut at one point by a small hollow, probably a chalkpit. There may be a second lynchet running parallel to the north-east of this, ending near the westernmost corner of the upper pond **5**.
- 11 A hedgebank parallels the current fence about 5m to its east. This continues around the corner to the north where it becomes more substantial – a bank and ditch (see below – **15**). Another branch shoots off from the corner and runs parallel to the road before turning sharply back on itself (NT 423). It is lost at a point where it is crossed by a modern fence. This is a woodland or nursery enclosure documented in the 19th century (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 20).
- 12 A very large quarry pit (NT 424).
- 13 The estate boundary (NT 441) is formed by a very small hedgebank, which skirts around the edge of
- 14 Another large quarry pit (NT 424).
- 15 Woodland bank and ditch (NT 422), *c* 4.5m wide overall, the bank standing up to *c* 0.5m high, is the continuation of **11**. Matthews and Wainwright describe this feature as a sunk fence (1990, 20) but this is unconvincing due to both its morphology and its position.
- 16 There are more chalk pits in this area but the boundary bank **13** is lost.
- 17 Prospect mound (NT 418; Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 17-18): it has an overall diameter of 29.5m. The hole in the top of the mound, which looks fresh, is not quite central. The height of the flat-topped mound from the bottom of the ditch is 2.2m. The external depth of the ditch is about 0.7m. There is a causeway on the northern side but this is slightly irregular and may not be an original feature. The view to the Court is currently obscured by trees on **27**, etc. The planting on the mound is not very old, though there are older trees surrounding it. (The positioning of this mound on the 1960 OS map (Provisional edition 1:10560) appears to be slightly incorrect.)
- 18 A series of linear ‘bank and ditch’-like scoops merge at their northern end with a large quarry (NT 419). This does not appear to be a ‘formal’ structure of the type tentatively suggested by Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 18) but a series of quarries and/or ponds along an existing boundary, perhaps an extension of **33**.
- 19 Woodland bank (NT 420), a continuation of **15**. Matthews and Wainwright describe this as a park boundary (1990, 19) but this is not convincing as it is too slight.
- 20 The boundary bank (in continuation of **13** – NT 441) reappears, apparently, from under the spoil heap of a small quarry. The ditch is on the south side. The bank is up to 0.4m high maximum. There are concrete marker posts set in the bottom of the ditch. To the west of **21** the ditch switches to the north side.
- 21 A woodland bank springs off **20**.
- 22 Continuation of **20** (NT 441): the bank is intermittently visible but the ditch is the more prominent feature. Its relationship with quarry pits is uncertain. The bank reappears more strongly at the bottom of the slope, with a couple of coppice stools on it. The OS have applied the legend ‘Grim’s Ditch’ in antiquity type (e.g. 1st edition 6inch 1883; Provisional edition 1:10560 1960) to this boundary. In reality the present surface feature is no more than a very small and apparently insignificant hedgebank. Matthews and Wainwright

- (1990, 26) note that while most of this boundary was probably laid out in woodland, accounting for its sinuous course, the western end, different in nature, was laid out in agricultural land which has only been wooded (in recent times) since the 19th century.
- 23 A strong lynchet, about 1.3m high, runs north-south. It stands alone so is arguably perhaps a trackway rather than a cultivation terrace (and has certainly been used as a track recently). Two further recent tracks or paths, higher up the slope, have formed slight negative lynchets, whereas this is a built, positive lynchet with the 'track' above it. However, at the ends the lynchet appears to return sharply into the natural slope, with no sign of access ramps, militating against the trackway interpretation. There are several old coppice stools in this area. Matthews and Wainwright record a 'series' of lynchets in this area (1990, 24 – NT 434) and note that this was agricultural land in the late 18th century on map evidence.
 - 24 A woodland bank, almost certainly a continuation of **19**, is lost on the slope but near the angle is 5m wide overall with the bank standing up to 0.4m high. The ditch is to the south. Beyond the angle to the south the feature is 6.9m wide overall and consists of a lynchet, 0.5m high, slight ditch and bank. The bank is *c* 1m high to the west. The feature has been destroyed at its southern end at the edge of a plantation of laurel.
 - 25 A ditch or hollow way (NT 435), measuring 4.5m wide and *c* 0.4m deep, has a modern fence in the bottom. Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 24) interpret this as part of the old Henley road. It might, alternatively or additionally, be a continuation of the boundary **24**.
 - 26 The ice house (NT 432), recently restored and thatched and now with an iron fence around the perimeter, sits within a hollow up to 1.5m deep – possibly a former quarry, as Matthews and Wainwright suggest (1990, 23).
 - 27 A former quarry(?) formalised as a pond (NT 426) – a sub-square hollow about 30m across. The east and west sides are built up as substantial banks and the west side has been re-used as part of a field boundary (see **28** and **29**). The north side is a sharp cut, the south side gradually shelving. Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 23) draw attention to the proximity of this pond to the icehouse and suggest that it supplied some of the ice – might this account for the shelving nature of the southern edge? There are traces of formal planting on the banks in the form of large, regularly spaced tree stumps. At its southern corner is a hole (NT 431), measuring approximately 3m by 1.5m, with brickwork in its east side. If this feature was a pond, this structure may have been a sluice or similar water control installation.
 - 28 A former field boundary survives as a small hedgebank, 1.5m wide by about 0.3m high maximum.
 - 29 A former field boundary survives as a lynchet, now a double-lynchet trackway with an overall width of *c* 4m and overall height of *c* 0.5m.
 - 30 Holly screen.
 - 31 A circular ditched space (NT 433), partly embanked (on the side opposite the Court) with two 'wing' ditches extending to north and south for *c* 34m and 32m respectively; the ends of the 'wings' return to the west, slightly curved, for *c* 10m and 8m respectively. The 'wing' ditches are *c* 3m wide and about 0.4m deep. The interior space, including the bank, is 23m in diameter. The bank is 1.3m high internally, 1.6m externally where it is biggest, in the centre and fades to either side to end opposite the 'wings'. The surrounding ditch is

- only 0.2m deep at the back (west) but to the front is 5m wide and about 0.8m deep. There are signs of formal planting (stumps) around the perimeter of the platform but not in the centre. Two standing trees (a form of laurel?) at the end of the southern ‘wing’ perhaps also represent ‘original’ planting. In the 19th century there was an orchard behind this feature and within the holly screen to the north (Tithe Map 1844; OS 1st edition 6inch 1883). The modern trees should be taken off and perhaps replaced with more sensitive planting, depending on the results of further research.
- 32 Possible location of an obelisk (NT 421), a very slight earthwork as described by Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 20). However, the woodland bank **15** does not clearly bend around it as they suggest. The major bend in this feature is several metres further west and possibly relates to a pre-existing boundary marked by **18** and **33**.
- 33 A pond alongside an old, but still partly extant, boundary is about 25m long, 4m wide and up to 0.7m deep. This is possibly a quarry re-used as a stock pond. The features at **18** are possibly a continuation of this boundary, which is approximately parallel to the boundary at **6**.
- 34 There are three or four very large old pollards in this area, suggesting its use as wood pasture in the past.
- 35 A slight, curving, south-facing lynchet, up to 0.4m high, has been formed by vehicle tracks.
- 36 A very slight, ploughed out hollow, is about 35m long by about 10m wide – possibly a quarry and/or pond.
- 37 A spread bank (NT 439) with a more pronounced face to the west, is c 7m wide and about 0.3m high to the west. It lies under the current fence to the south of the Court drive, but at the time of survey was not apparent to the north of the drive. Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 25), however, saw it to the north of the drive and concluded that it was an earlier feature. The bank runs southwards to the natural break of slope and then continues, apparently, as an east-facing lynchet running diagonally downslope to the south-west, ending close to the present field gate. Its relationship to the present Henley road is unclear but Matthews and Wainwright (*ibid*) thought that it continued as the hedgebank bordering the north side of the road. This seems to contradict their conclusion that it pre-dates the road.
- 38 A very slight ploughed-over linear hollow with traces of a bank to the west is aligned approximately on the Court. It is cut by the hedgebank of the modern road. The elevation of this feature is no more than about 0.2m.
- 39 Ridge-and-furrow, very slight – the ridges are 3-4m wide.
- 40 There are some large pollards and standards, including specimen trees, in this area, reflecting perhaps two periods of use, as wood pasture and as ornamental parkland.
- 41 A slight lynchet runs along this steep, west-facing slope – an old boundary represented by a line of trees on the 1960 OS map. On the 1st edition 6inch map of 1883 the area above the lynchet is shown as wooded. This feature does not appear to continue into the next parcel to the south.
- 42 This side of the combe has been ploughed, recently(?).
- 43 There is a hollow way alongside, and to the east of, the present road. The 1768 map shows the road here as a broad swathe emerging out of Greys Green to the south.
- 44 A hedgebank, c 2m wide and 0.4m high, runs under the current fence.

45 Ridge-and-furrow, very slight – the ridges are *c* 4m wide.

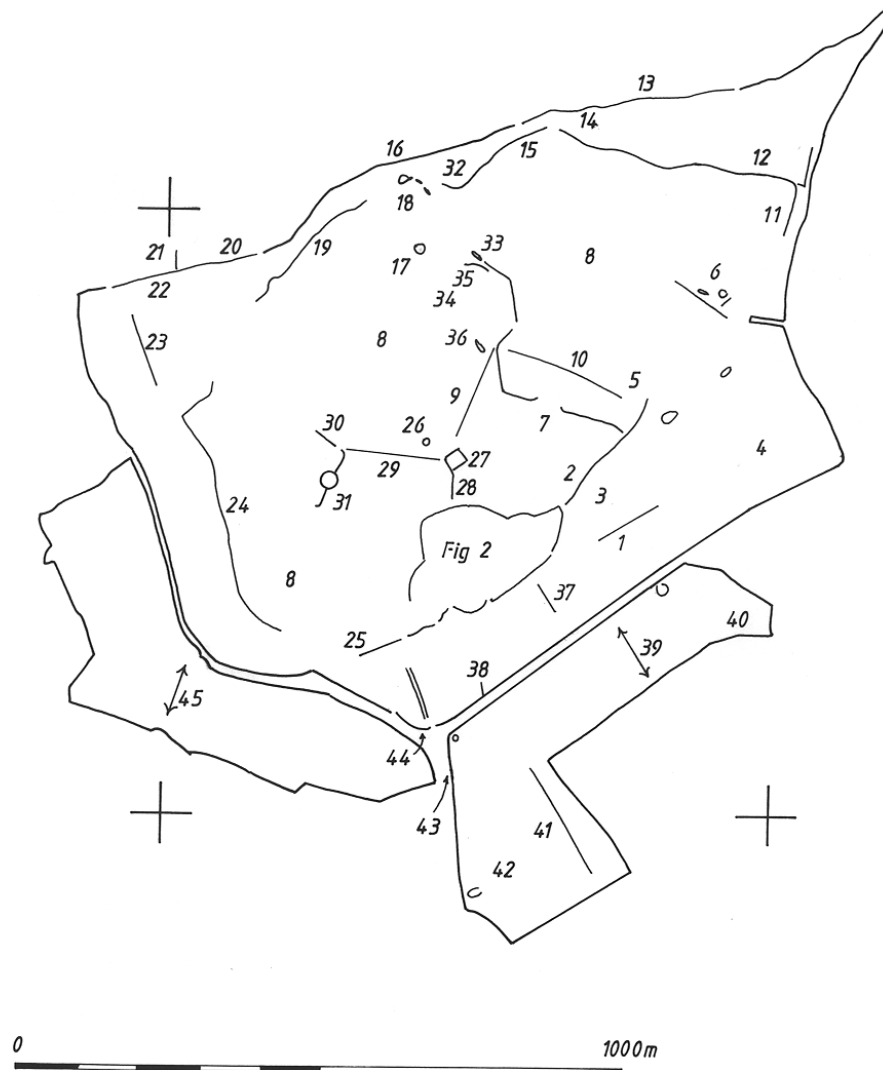


Fig. 1 Sketch survey of features in the park. © English Heritage

Features shown on Fig 2

- 46 A track, part of the arrangement of drives shown on the Tithe Map, is a continuation of **49** (see below).
- 47 Scarp, continues to the west across the present entrance.
- 48 A lynchet (NT 438), over 1m high, is broken by the passage of a hollowed track (NT 437).
- 49 A number of more-or-less parallel scarps suggest multiple hollow ways (NT 436). One of these, linking to a causeway to the south (NT437), follows the line of a drive shown on the Tithe Map of 1844 (Matthews and Wainwright

- 1990, 25). The others are presumably previous alignments of the older roads, similar to
- 50 Further hollow ways (NT 436), partly blocked and filled in, are probably part of the old road system pre-dating the re-alignment of the Henley road (see Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 25).
 - 51 A mound, semi-natural(?) – some modern building materials are visible.
 - 52 A massive lynchet, c 2m high, forms the corner of a level farmyard.
 - 53 Track, relatively recent.
 - 54 Lynchet, up to 1.5m high.
 - 55 A scarp, c 1.5m high, continues the line of the ha-ha. According to Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 30-1) there were fishponds immediately to the west of the ha-ha at this point, now filled in (NT 499). No reference is given and there is now no sign of these ponds, with the possible exception of a very slight, south-facing scarp.
 - 56 A bowling green or croquet lawn (?) – carefully graded long scarps above and below have been used to create a flat area. Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 32) refer to it as a croquet lawn and imply that it was constructed in the early 20th century, but give no reference. The southern scarp corresponds broadly to the line of the northern curtain of the medieval complex.
 - 57 A ha-ha (NT 415) surrounds the Court buildings. It was probably created in the mid-18th century, and certainly by 1781. Part of its southern alignment is thought to follow the former line of the Henley road (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 16). If this is so it must post-date 1768, when this road line was still in use. The ha-ha is described by Matthews and Wainwright (*ibid*). The pond (NT 426) on the north side still holds water. The small outward-facing scarp along the north side is probably no more than a plough step caused by the mid-20th century cultivation of the park.

Discussion

Greys Court lies on relatively high ground within a woodland landscape. The dispersed settlement pattern of the area is typified by the ‘Greens’ to the south-west and the scattered farms. The successive parks have been carved out of this pattern but their actual bounds have left little obvious trace. The feature (NT 420) described by Matthews and Wainwright as a park boundary (1990, 19) is no more than a woodland bank, and a relatively small one. It is possible, or indeed probable, that the medieval deer park, first mentioned in 1283 (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 34), hardly corresponded to the present park at all. Medieval great houses did not typically lie within parks, as later ones did, but adjacent to them. The medieval park might have occupied the area to the south between the Court and Rotherfield Church, and east to the area of Lower Hernes, for instance. This idea is not apparently contradicted by the early maps. The later park has fluctuated in size and use – it may have been utilised as wood-pasture in the early post-medieval period (see below) and much of it was ploughed in the late 18th century (*ibid*).

The road pattern has probably not changed substantially since the medieval period, with one exception. The current Henley road to the south of the Court is a late re-alignment connected with park landscaping. This change took place between 1768 and 1792 on map evidence (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 16). The new road, as

far east as the T-junction at Broadplat, introduces a notable, because unusual, straight line into the landscape. The former course(s) of this road seem to be partly preserved as earthworks (e.g. **2**, **25**, **50**) within the park just to the north of the current line and close to the Court, which it would originally have served. However, whether all the earthworks attributed to it actually belong to it is not certain and further survey is required to address this question.

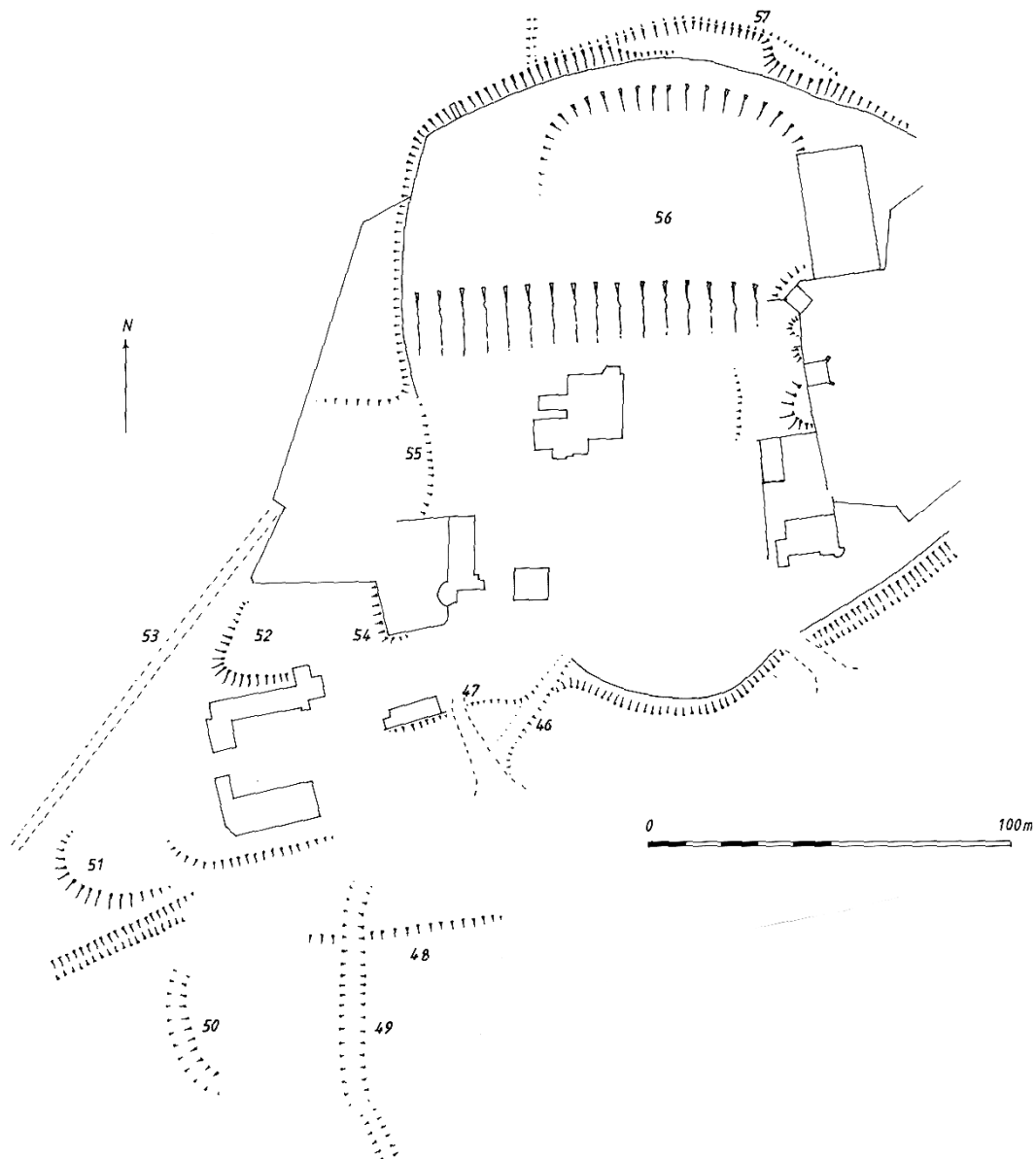


Fig.2 Sketch survey of features in the immediate environs of the Court. © English Heritage

Ornamental parkland features include the prospect mound **17** and feature **31**, which Matthews and Wainwright (1990, 24) describe as a ‘viewing platform’. This may

well be correct – it certainly commands a view of the house – but a more active interpretation might be considered. It could almost be described as a miniature theatre. No pillow mounds were found, despite a ‘Warren’ field name to the south of the park (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 34-5) but any that existed might well have been ploughed out. Some of the ponds are described here as ‘formal’ to distinguish them from the simpler stock ponds. It should be noted, however, that in other circumstances these larger ponds with substantial dams might be described as ‘industrial’, and seen as header tanks for driving mills or similar machinery. The presence of old pollards in some parts of the park suggests a time, possibly in the early post-medieval period, when the area was wood-pasture. They are not, in origin, ornamental park trees. Though there is some ornamental planting, there are not many elements of designed park landscape, strictly speaking, at Greys Court.

The numerous quarries on the estate were probably chalkpits in the main and are so named by the OS, but the existence of the ‘Brickfield’ place name, recorded as early as 1684 (Matthews and Wainwright 1990, 35), suggests that some localised clay deposits were being exploited. Some of the quarries to the south of the current Henley road are designated ‘gravel pits’ by the OS – these might relate to the building of the new road in the later 18th century. Part of this area is named ‘Gravelly Hill’ on the Tithe Map.

Recommendations

Research

Detailed earthwork survey in woodland to south of the Court Farm to resolve the question of the former course(s) of the Henley road.

Detailed earthwork survey and documentary research of feature **31**.

Further fieldwork to pursue the question of the location and extent of the medieval deer park.

Management

Remove trees from ponds **5**, Prospect Mound **17** and feature **31**. Consider replanting of feature **31** after further research into its original function and appearance.

Reference

Matthews, WL and Wainwright, A 1990 *The National Trust Archaeological Survey: Greys Court and the Lordship of the Manor of Rotherfield Greys, Thames and Chiltern Region*. National Trust.

Other specialist oblique aerial photographs held at the NMRC

NMR 15213/01-2, 23-Feb-1995