



ENGLISH HERITAGE

STRATTON PARK
Biggleswade, Bedfordshire

A moated site and associated
settlement earthworks

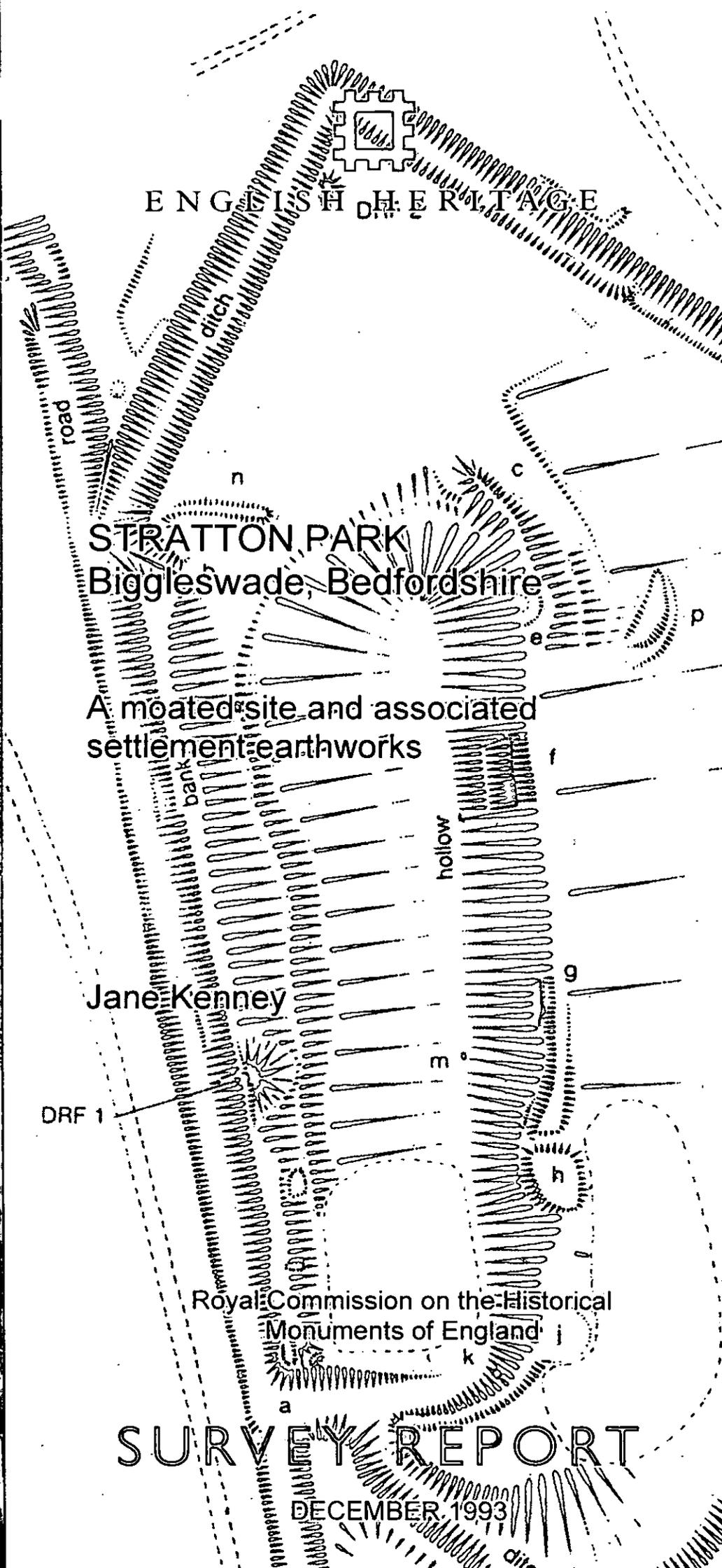
Jane Kenney

DRF 1

Royal Commission on the Historical
Monuments of England

SURVEY REPORT

DECEMBER 1993



STRATTON PARK MOAT
AND ASSOCIATED EARTHWORKS,
BIGGLESWADE, BEDFORDSHIRE
AN ARCHAEOLOGICAL SURVEY BY RCHME
TL 24 SW 3 and 21
DECEMBER 1993

A moat and associated enclosures at Stratton Park, Biggleswade, Bedfordshire

1. INTRODUCTION

North of Stratton Park Farm, near Biggleswade, is a sub-rectangular moat (TL 207 437), to the north-east of which is a paddock containing various earthworks. Both the moat and associated earthworks are scheduled (SAM 11541). Bedfordshire County Council requested a detailed survey of the paddock to provide an accurate plan for management purposes. The absence of a previous plan of the earthworks, and the need to understand their relationship to the moat, made a survey of the site particularly important. It will also contribute to the understanding of the area surrounding the medieval village of Stratton, excavated by Bedfordshire Archaeology Unit (Shotliff 1991, 1992). The earthwork survey was carried out by a team from the RCHME Cambridge Field Office in December 1993.

The survey area covered the whole of the paddock, which lies north-west of Dunton Lane, at about 40m OD. A stream, channeled in a ditch, runs along the north-eastern edge of the field, which is now used as pasture for horses. The moat is depicted on the OS 1:2500 map of 1974 (OS (a)), and as it is heavily overgrown a new survey would be unlikely to contribute additional detail or accuracy to the plan. It was, therefore, decided to exclude the moat from the present survey, though a description of its present condition has been included below.

The History of Stratton

The medieval village of Stratton, a large part of which has been excavated (Shotliff 1991, 1992), lay to the north of the Stratton Park moat. The village lay 300m to the east of a Roman road, on a low ridge of glacial gravels, surrounded on most sides by boulder clay (BGS (a)). It is recorded in the Domesday Book, and the excavations revealed features dating back to the tenth century. A phase of middle Saxon occupation was discovered, concentrated to the west of the later village (Shotliff 1992), which was laid out along a street running roughly north to south (Shotliff 1991). At the northern end of the excavated area is a second, ploughed-out moat, which appears to date to the fourteenth century. The southern end of the excavations, west of the Stratton Park moat, revealed the stone foundations of a Tudor house (Shotliff pers comm). There have been no excavations of the southern moat, and documentary evidence is slight, so its date cannot be securely established at present.

Stratton Park House was originally built in the sixteenth century, though rebuilt and enlarged in the seventeenth century, with further alterations in the nineteenth (McDowall 1958). Presumably the park was created simultaneously with the original construction of the house. Stratton Park Drive, originally the drive to the house, followed its present line by 1838, and the park was entirely under grass by this date (BRO (a)). However, most of the estate has been ploughed since its sale in 1910 (BRO (b)), destroying surface earthworks; only the Stratton Park moat and the earthworks to the north-east have survived. Stratton Park House was finally demolished in 1960, after being used as an army barracks during the Second World War, and then as a huge chicken house (Webb, date unknown).

2. DESCRIPTION

The Moat (plan sheet 1).

All aerial photographs referred to throughout this report are held by the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon, unless otherwise indicated.

The moated site (TL 24 SW 3) is sub-rectangular in shape with an entrance causeway in its southern side. It is generally very well preserved, the only obvious disturbance being minor landscaping of the north-eastern corner for a garden. However, the moat and the area immediately around it is very heavily overgrown by trees, brambles and ivy, making a detailed inspection of the site difficult.

The site has overall dimensions of 76.0m by 75.0m, with an internal area of 0.3 hectares. The moat is up to 2m deep with an external bank along the northern, and part of the eastern sides, reaching up to 1m in height. The sides of the moat are steep, about 30 degrees, and the bottom appears to be fairly flat, and still holds water to a depth of over 0.5m. The causeway, about 4.5m wide, seems to be an original feature, and lies towards the western end of the southern side of the moat, between the slightly offset terminals of the ditch. The platform is generally level, and not noticeably raised above the surrounding ground surface, though it was not possible to take level readings to demonstrate this. There is no visible evidence of buildings on the platform, but the dense undergrowth makes identification of slight scarps almost impossible. The existence of buildings is not inevitable as some moats appear to have been used as stockyards, orchards or gardens, and on excavation provide no evidence for structures (Clarke 1984, 49, 59). The platform of the moat has been used as an orchard since 1838 (BRO (a)), if not before. It was recorded as an orchard in 1910 (BRO (b)), and aerial photographs show it was not overgrown until relatively recently (OS/67144 frame 031, 5-JUN-67); many of the apple trees still survive.

The Paddock Earthworks

For relationship to the moat see plan sheet 1, for detail of the paddock see plan sheet 2. All bracketed letters refer to the latter sheet. Few of the earthworks can be clearly seen on any of the aerial photographs, but the best photograph is Aerofilms/91/Col/114 frame 1429, 20-AUG-91, held by the Bedfordshire SMR.

The paddock is covered with earthworks (TL 24 SW 21) representing various phases of use. A fence is shown crossing the paddock on the 1974 map (OS (a)), and its line can still be detected on the ground. North-east of the old fence-line the field has been confused by modern tracks and constructions, but the remainder of the field appears largely undisturbed by recent activity. Park Lane Farm has destroyed part of the south-western end of the paddock, confusing the relationship between the earthworks of the paddock and the moat.

A 1.0m high bank along the eastern side of the moat runs inside the western fence of the paddock, and has a

parallel shallow ditch, 0.2m deep, on its eastern side. East of this is a ditch or hollow-way (a), up to 0.5m deep, which runs roughly north to south, and curving south-west at its southern end. Both this feature and the bank of the moat are cut at their northern ends by a long, pond-like feature (b). This is 1.1m deep on its steeper, southern side; its northern side is more gradual and only 0.4m deep. The eastern end of feature b is rounded, and the western end has been destroyed by Stratton Park Drive. Feature a seems to continue to the north of b, as a shallow linear hollow, also cut by Stratton Park Drive.

East of Park Lane Farm is a platform (c) with an east-facing scarp reaching 0.6m in height. The scarp is generally steep and well defined, and turns west at its northern end before fading. Despite its height cultivation ridges, up to 0.3m high, about 7.0m wide, and aligned south-west to north-east, cut across the southern part of feature c. These ridges are themselves cut by a small, kidney-shaped pond (d), 0.6m deep. The north-facing scarp, 0.4m high, running transversely across the platform, may define the northern boundary of this furlong, and a bank (e) up to 0.4m high, probably formed a headland to the east. There is no clear evidence of other ridges to the north in this area, so these features probably represent the northern edge of a furlong extending further south and west. Where bank e turns to form the corner of the furlong the corner itself is occupied by a small, sub-circular pond, 0.5m deep. Both the bank and the furrows appear to have been overlain by the western bank and ditch of a rectangular enclosure (f), though there is no trace on the ground of the furrows east of this boundary.

In the north-western part of the paddock there is well defined ridge and furrow, reaching 0.3m in height, and varying between 11.0m and 7.0m in width. Though later activity has confused the line of the furrows to some extent, it seems probable that originally the western headland of the furlong ran along the eastern side of feature a. The furlong appears to have been shortened in association with the construction of a series of small enclosures. A new headland formed to the east of a transverse ditch (g), 0.3m deep, to the south-west of which two shallow gullies may represent the tips of furrows running parallel to the ditch. This suggests a reorientation of the ploughing regime in this area, using one of the existing ridges as a headland.

A well-defined ditch (h) forms a south-eastern boundary to the ridge and furrow, and the north-western side of some of the enclosures, and is abutted near its south-western end by feature g. Ditch h has steep scarps up to 0.5m in height, despite being disturbed by later activity, and aerial photographs suggest that it continued north-east into the next field. The line of the ditch is just visible on some photographs (541/148 frame 3038, 31-AUG-48; CPE/UK/2169 frame 2066, 24-JUN-47). Adjacent to ditch h is a square enclosure (i) defined by banks and scarps up to 0.4m high, though its south-eastern side is disturbed by modern concrete slabs and drains. A well-defined bank (j), 0.3m high, extends south-west from the southern corner of this enclosure to feature a, which it overlies. To the north of bank j are the patchy remains of narrow furrows, less than 0.2m deep and about 5m in width, which run south-west from enclosure i. Two furrows change direction slightly at their western ends and become wider; the southern most of these continues west across feature a. Other slight scarps west of feature a suggest that all the ridges may originally have extended almost as far as the

moat. A small, sub-rectangular feature (k) in this area, formed of banks and scarps up to 0.3m high, may be the remains of a building. The enclosed area is level, and the scarps are generally well defined, but the relationship between this and the ridge and furrow is unclear.

To the south-east of enclosure i is a rectangular enclosure (f) defined by banks up to 0.3m high, which may have abutted Dunton Lane. A gap of about 7m in the northern corner of the enclosure may represent an entrance. At the corners where enclosures f and i nearly meet there is a narrow gap of less than 2m between them. Between enclosure f and ditch h there appears to have been two small rectangular enclosures (l) divided by a low bank, 0.3m in height, though the north-eastern side of this feature is not well preserved. The south-west to north-east alignment formed by bank j and parts of the enclosures f and i appears to continue in a disturbed north-facing scarp (m), up to 0.4m in height.

In the south-western part of the paddock is a bank (n), 0.3m high, with a ditch along its northern side, which overlies the ridge and furrow, but follows the same alignment. The western section of the ditch reuses a furrow, but further east it becomes a separate ditch, less than 0.2m deep. This ditch turns north at its eastern end and runs into a hollow, 0.4m deep, on the old fence-line. Bank n and its ditch also overlie parts of enclosure f.

A broad curving gully or hollow-way (p) runs almost north-east to south-west from the eastern fence of the paddock towards the rectangular enclosure. At its eastern end it is very slight, 0.25m in depth, but further west the northern scarp is well defined and reaches 0.5m in height, with a back scarp, 0.4m high. The south-western end of this feature is lost under the remains of a modern trackway (q). Feature p is cut by a ditch (r), up to 0.6m deep, which runs west from near the eastern corner of the paddock, and turns two right angles before running into feature h. This is a recent field-edge drain, as it is related to a fence running north from the eastern corner of the paddock. This fence is shown on the 1974 map and is visible on aerial photographs by 1946 (106G/UK/1712 frames 3027, 4050, 29-AUG-46), but is not shown on the 1901 County Series map (OS (c)). It is not known when this field impinged on the paddock, which otherwise appears to have been the same shape since 1838. Two oval mounds lie to the west of the middle section of feature r, the south-western one is 0.6m high, and the north-eastern one 0.3m high. Though there is a clump of trees and a building in this area on certain aerial photographs (106G/UK/1712 frames 3027, 4050, 29-AUG-46; OS/69059 frame 137, 4-APR-69), neither seem to be in quite the right positions to account for the mounds.

The northern block of ridge and furrow and feature h are cut by three roughly parallel ditches (s), up to 0.3m deep, which run north-west to south-east; the western most ditch has a section of bank on its western side. These are very similarly aligned to fences appearing on the aerial photographs (106G/UK/1712 frame 4050, 29-AUG-46; 541/148 frame 4054, 31-AUG-48; OS/72417 frames 274, 275, 6-OCT-72), and are probably modern features. Other similarly aligned scarps are probably related to the modern track (q), which ran just east of the old fence-line. A gate provided access to the field from the Dunton road, just east of the old fence-

line. The southern end of the track is clearly defined, but it disturbed further north, and probably followed a shallow ditch, 0.3m deep. There is little evidence of the track after it crosses feature h.

The aerial photographs show considerable building activity east of the old fence line, mainly on either side of track q, but also further east. The eastern corner of the paddock was also divided up by several fences, visible on aerial photographs in 1969 (OS/69059 frames 137, 163, 4-APR-69; HSL/UK/7682 frame 858, 8-APR-69 (held by Bedfordshire SMR)) which may account for some of the disturbance. Most of the small scarps and hollows near the old fence-line are probably also related to the modern activity. A line of tree holes and banks up to 0.5m high along the side of Dunton Lane indicate the presence of a hedge, which is shown on both First and Second Edition County Series maps, 1884 and 1901 (OS (b) and (c)). The avenue of trees lining Stratton Park Drive on the Second edition map was not detected, and presumably ran just outside the present northern boundary of the paddock, closer to the drive. These trees survived until 1948 (541/148 frame 4053, 31-AUG-48), but was largely destroyed by 1950 (BEN/CT/1576 frame 5057, 23-AUG-50). It is more difficult to explain the absence of earthworks related to the tree-round also shown on the Second Edition map. It should be centred just north of the south-eastern corner of enclosure i, but apart from a small number of tree holes there is no evidence of this landscape feature, which presumably, was not enclosed by the usual bank.

3. DISCUSSION

The date of the Stratton Park moat is uncertain as it has not been excavated, and no finds are known to have been recovered from it. There is also little early documentary evidence for the site; the Domesday references give no locational details to suggest where the eleventh century manor was situated (Coleman pers comm). The dating of unexcavated moated sites is problematic. Very few have been excavated, in 1980 only 3% of known sites in England had received any sort of excavation (Clarke 1984, 49), making dating by analogy difficult. Dated moats range from the twelfth to the eighteenth centuries, but the large majority are medieval (Clarke 1984, 49, 54). These are dated between the mid twelfth century and the fifteenth century with a peak in their construction in the thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries (Wilson 1985, 8, 28), and it is likely that the Stratton Park moat falls within this period. Unfortunately its chronological relationship to the fourteenth century moat to the north cannot yet be demonstrated.

The earliest surviving map of Stratton Park is the 1838 Tithe Map (BRO (a)), which unfortunately shows few details. The moat is listed as a garden and orchard, and it still functioned as an orchard when sold in 1910 (BRO (b)). On the Tithe Map only the northern and part of the eastern sides of the moat are indicated separately from the boundaries of the garden, and nothing is shown in the paddock.

Fortunately there are many stratigraphic relationships evident between the earthwork features, which can suggest a rough phasing of the site: the moat and possibly contemporary features, including a furlong of ridge and furrow; headland e with its associated ridges; the sub-rectangular enclosures and related features, and finally miscellaneous later features, including modern activity.

Though few features have a direct relationship to the moat there are suggestions that this was constructed before the sub-rectangular enclosures. Gully a and platform c are cut by ridge and furrow related to other major features, suggesting that they belong to an early phase of activity. The relationship of these to the moat cannot be demonstrated, but it might be assumed that they are roughly contemporary. Gully a appears to be a hollow-way, but the function of platform c is unclear. It is very large for a building platform, and may be an earlier enclosure. The only feature with a direct relationship to the moat is ditch b, which cuts the eastern bank of the moat. Ditch b is on the same alignment as hollow-way h, and both may have been aligned on an original furrow. It seems likely that ditch b is contemporary with the enclosures, but this cannot be proved. Feature k may be the remains of a building, but whether it is related to the moat, the enclosure phase, or later activity is unclear.

Alignments of linear features, slightly curving south-west to north-east across the site, seem to be of considerable significance. The majority of the ridge and furrow follows this alignment, as do features b and h. Parts of the sub-rectangular enclosures form a similar line with bank j and scarp m, bank n is nearly parallel, but does not curve, and gully p is only slightly askew from this alignment. Interestingly Dunton Lane follows the same alignment and, therefore, may be of some antiquity. The distinctive curve of these

parallel features suggests that these are echoing earlier cultivation ridges which originally covered the whole paddock area. This putative furlong may have had a headland against hollow-way a, and Dunton Lane may have formed the southern boundary. The ridge and furrow associated with bank e could represent an early sub-division of this large furlong, as it cuts platform c, but is overlain by the rectangular enclosure.

Subsequently the furlongs east of the moat appear to have been significantly altered and partially enclosed. Feature h seems to have been converted from a furrow into a hollow-way, if it had not functioned as one before this, and ditch g divided northern part of the furlong, which was then reploughed in its new form. At about the same time the sub-rectangular enclosures were formed, based in part on the earlier ridges. The ridge and furrow west of enclosure i, also seems to belong to this phase. Feature p, may have been a hollow-way leading to the enclosures, but it is generally very eroded, and could relate to the earlier activity.

If the general impression, that the enclosures are later than the moat is true, this does not preclude the possibility that the moat was still in use when the enclosures were constructed. Similarly aligned enclosures were discovered in the southern part of the excavated area (Shotliff pers comm), providing the possibility that enclosures spread east and west from the moat. More work is necessary comparing excavated and surface evidence, but if both eastern and western enclosures are shown to be contemporary the dates of fourteenth to fifteenth century obtained for the excavated enclosure ditches (Shotliff pers comm) might be applied to the earthwork remains.

Bank n is later than the main enclosure phase, as it cuts across enclosure f, though it is not clear what other features it may be contemporary with. Similarly there is no evidence to determine how recent pond d might be, as it is not indicated on the maps. The hedge along Dunton Lane, as represented by tree holes and a bank up to 0.5m high, can be dated at least to the nineteenth century (SO (b)). Modern activity is represented by the track, ditch and gullies (q, r and s), and the irregular mounds and hollows east of the old fence-line.

Unfortunately the aerial photographs do not give a clear impression of the ancient landscape surrounding the paddock, however, some traces can be seen. To the south of the paddock remains of earlier field boundaries and ridge and furrow can be seen in the modern fields (541/148 frames 3037, 3038, 4053, 4054, 31-AUG-48), but most of these conform to the pattern shown on the 1838 Tithe Map (BRO (a)), and are probably later than the remnants in the paddock. The boundary running immediately west of Park Lane Farm, which appears as a fence on the 1974 map (OS (a)), but now exists as a low bank, up to 0.4m high (see plan sheet 1), seems to be part of an old boundary. This boundary can be seen on aerial photographs (OS/70437 frames 038, 039, 22-NOV-70) running north-west to south-east across the present field pattern. A roughly north to south field boundary, which forms the western perimeter of Stratton Park Farm, and further north formed the main street through the medieval village, may be a very old feature. It is approximately parallel to the Roman road, part of the White Way running from Baldock to Godmanchester (Shotliff 1991), and the village roads and boundaries followed a similar line as far back as the tenth century (Shotliff pers comm). The ridge and furrow of a large open field can be seen north of Stratton Park House. A hollow-way runs north-west to

south-east along the southern edge of this field, though it too is now visible only as a crop mark (541/148 frame 3038, 31-AUG-48; CPE/UK/2169 frame 2066, 24-JUN-47). It is possible that hollow-way h is running towards this hollow-way and originally joined it.

Parallels

Other sites in Bedfordshire exist, which, like Stratton Park, have small enclosures associated with a moat. One such site at Palaceyard Wood, Roxton, has both small and large rectangular enclosures (Brown and Taylor 1991). However, neither is closely comparable to the Stratton enclosures in size, and the smaller enclosures are less regular than those at Stratton. Many of the Palaceyard enclosures appear to be contemporary with the moat (Brown and Taylor 1991), whereas at Stratton they are probably later than the construction of the moat. Zouches Farm, Caddington, has enclosures, which do not appear to form part of a deserted medieval village, but are less regular than the Stratton enclosures. These enclosures are related to a manor house constructed in the fourteenth century (Coleman 1990).

While the Stratton Park site has demonstrated that complex relationships can be determined from earthworks surveyed in detail, this approach cannot supply a chronological context or provide much insight into the function of the features. As the parallels to the site are also unexcavated they can be of minimal interpretive value. However, once the results of the excavations of the Stratton deserted medieval village have been analysed it may be possible to fit the earthworks of the paddock into their wider context.

4. SURVEY METHOD

The survey was carried out by Al Oswald, Paul Pattison and Jane Kenney of RCHME using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM to supply the survey control. The data captured electronically on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module, transferred to a PC, and plotted on a Calcomp 3024 plotter. The details of the earthwork plan were supplied at 1:1000 scale with Fibron tapes using normal graphical methods. The report was researched and written by Jane Kenney and edited by Peter Topping and Paul Pattison. The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record in Swindon as TL 24 SW 3 and 21.

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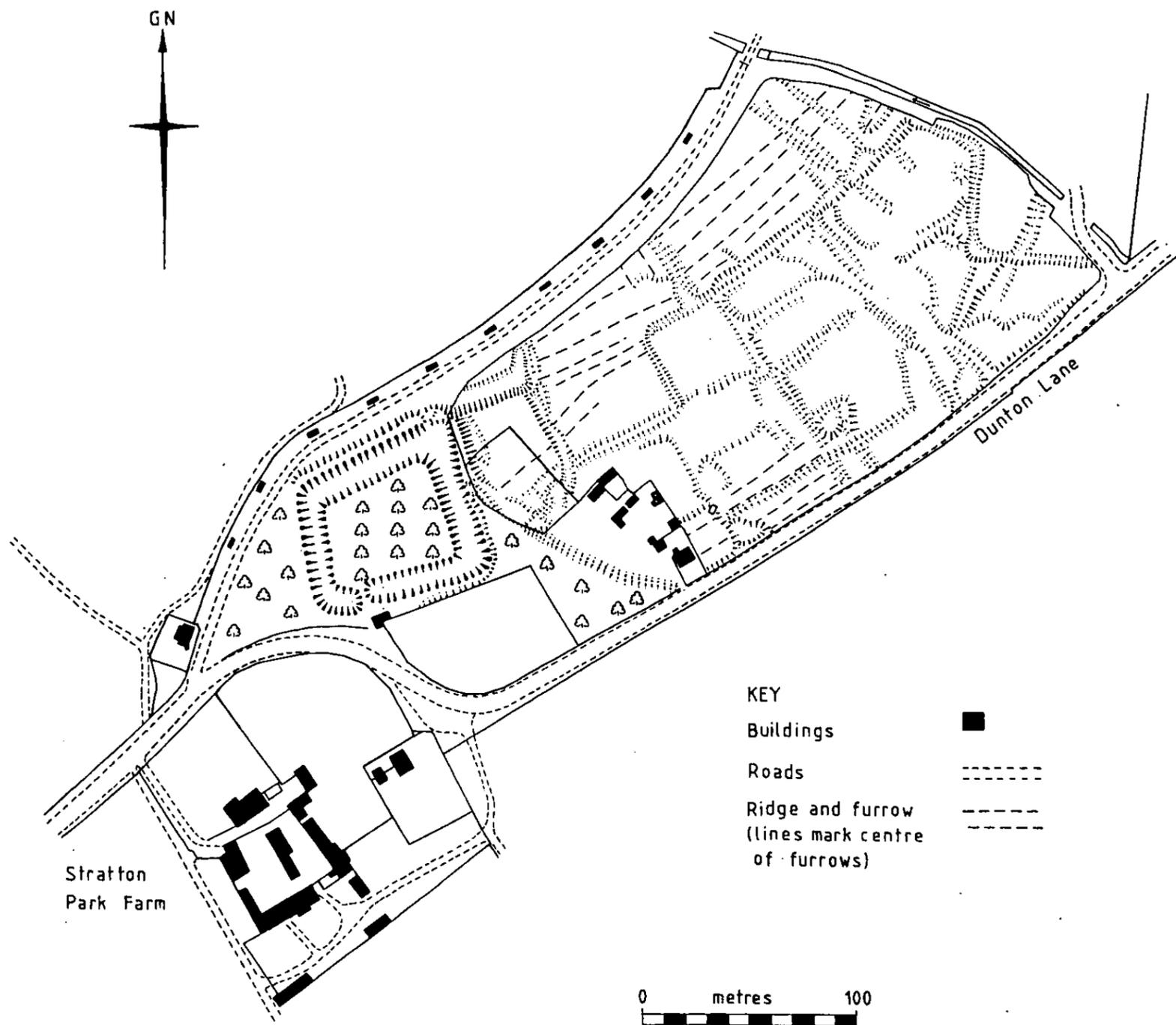
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

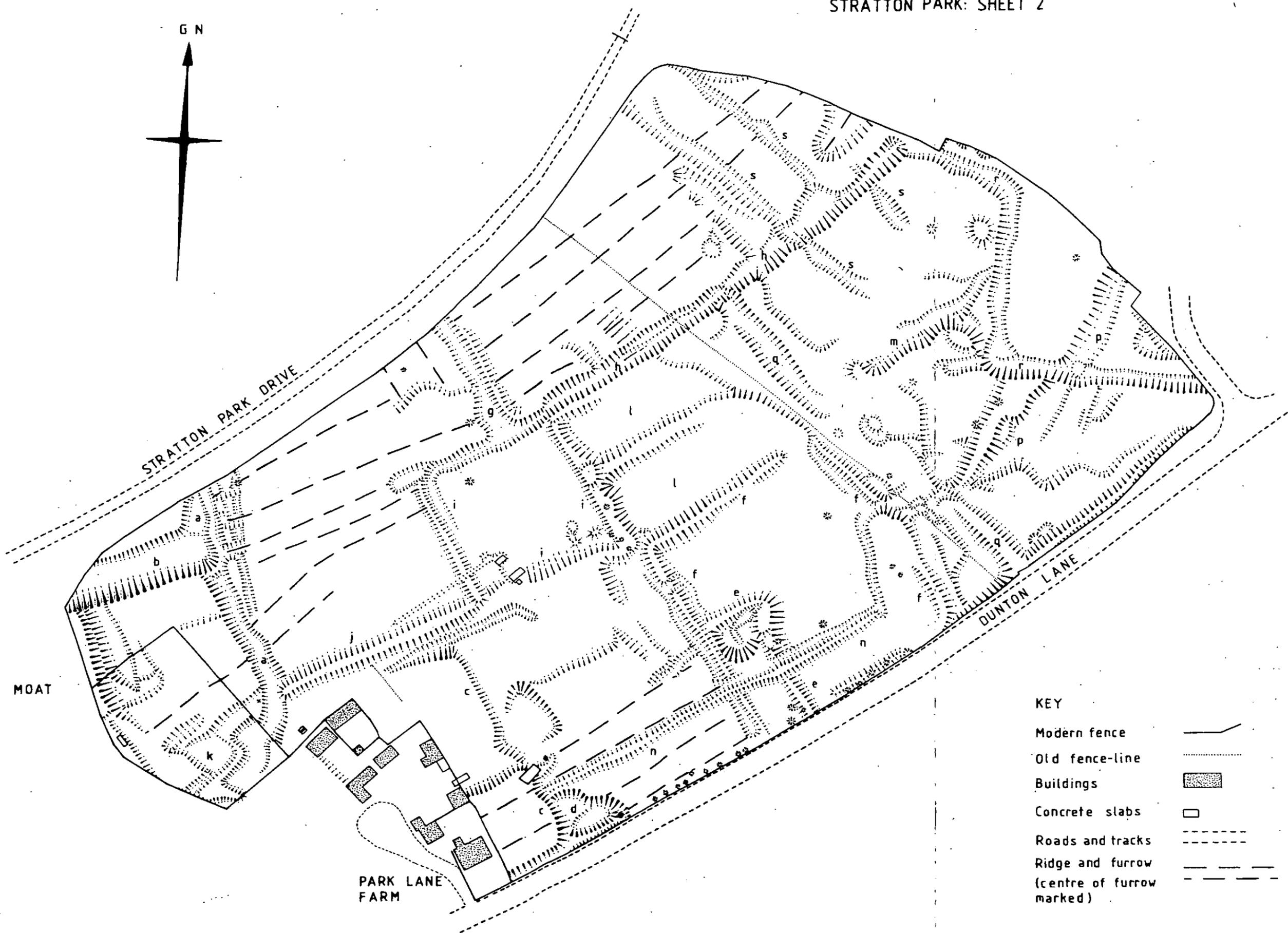
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 ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND				
SITE OF ORIGIN CAMBRIDGE	COUNTY BEDFORDSHIRE	SCALE OF SURVEY 1:2500	METHOD FROM OS MAP + SHEET 2	OS MAP No TL 24 SW
PROJECT NAME STRATTON PARK	DISTRICT MID BEDS	DATE OF SURVEY DEC-93	ASSOCIATED PLANS SHEET 2	NAR No 3, 21
SITE NAME MOAT AND PADDOCK	PARISH BIGGLESWADE	SURVEYOR(S) AO, JK		SAM No 11541
DOCUMENT STATUS ARCHIVE	NGR TL 208 438	© Crown Copyright	SHEET 1	CATALOGUE No

STRATTON PARK: SHEET 1





KEY

Modern fence	
Old fence-line	
Buildings	
Concrete slabs	
Roads and tracks	
Ridge and furrow (centre of furrow marked)	





ENGLISH HERITAGE

NATIONAL
MONUMENTS
R E C O R D

*The National Monuments Record
is the public archive of English Heritage.
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