

Archaeological Field Survey Report



Royal Commission on the Historical
Monuments of England
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TIPTOFTS MANOR, ESSEX

by Moraig Brown

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TIPTOFTS MANOR,
WIMBISH, ESSEX

NMR NUMBER TL 53 NE 47

REQUEST SURVEY

MARCH 1996



RCHM
ENGLAND

RCHME (CAMBRIDGE)
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1. INTRODUCTION

In March 1996 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England surveyed earthworks associated with Tiptofts Manor, near Saffron Walden, Essex (NMR Number TL 53 NE 47; SAM Number Essex 20685). This survey was carried out at the request of English Heritage, and was designed to tie in with excavation and extensive refurbishment of the Manor House, which was not surveyed at this time. The project was the responsibility of staff of the Archaeological Field Office in Cambridge.

Further copies of this report are available from the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon, Wiltshire SN2 2GZ.

Tiptofts (TL 569 374) is an isolated moated house, situated in the parish of Wimbish 0.5km south of the village of Swards End and 0.5km north of the hamlet of Cole End. The site is on gently sloping ground at an altitude of 110m above OD, and commands reasonable views in all directions across the relatively flat surrounding area. The earthworks are preserved in pasture and along field boundaries; beyond the surveyed area the land is under predominantly arable agriculture. The surface geology consists of clayey soils overlying a chalky till subsoil (Soil Survey of England & Wales 1980).

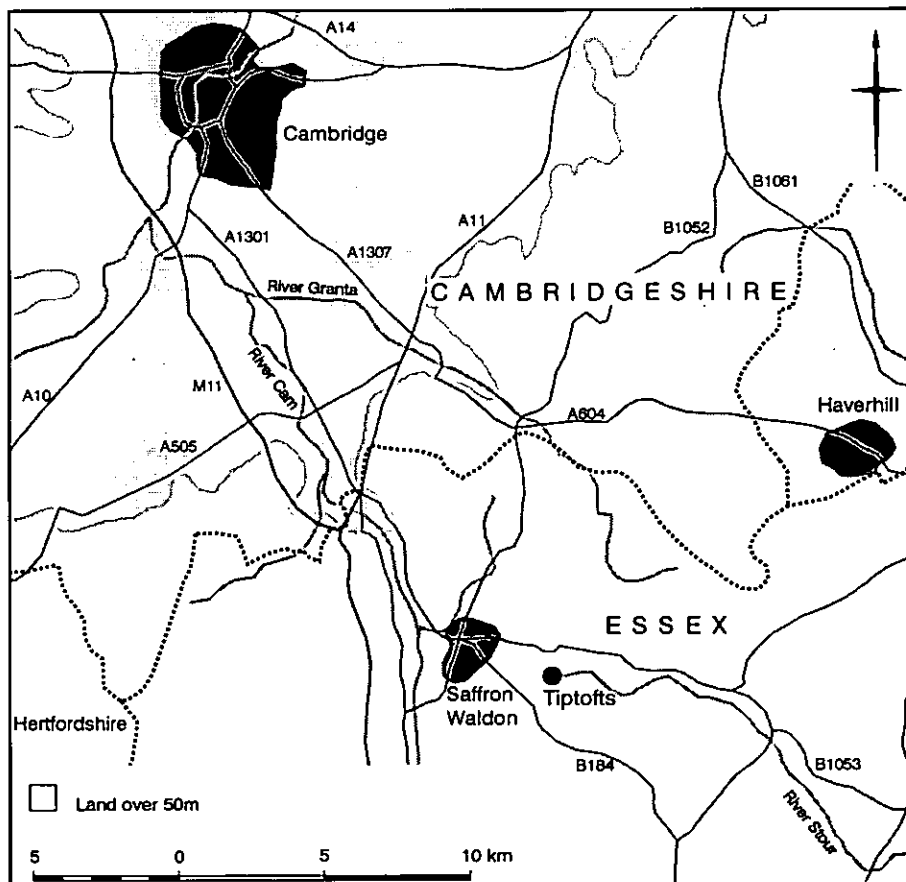
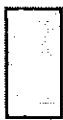


Figure 1:
Location
map



Tiptofts is privately owned. The house is a Grade I Listed Building and some of the earthworks, comprising the moat and three fishponds, are Scheduled Ancient Monuments (SAM Essex 20685).



2. HISTORY OF TIPTOFTS MANOR

The first mention of Wimbish is in the Domesday Book when it passed from Aethelgyth, who held it as a manor before 1066, to Ralph Baynard, a major landholder in Essex. It appears to have been a fairly major manor, valued at £20 in 1086 (Domesday Essex 69b).

By the 14th century the manor of Wimbish was owned by the Fitzwalter family. The sub-manor of *Cymays* was held by the de Wauton family for most of the 14th century, and this appears to have been renamed Tiptofts, probably during the ownership of the manor by John Tippetoft (or Tibetot) between 1348 and 1367 (Fowler 1923, 218-9). The first recorded reference to Tiptofts by name was in 1403 when it was called *Typtotes* (Reaney 1935, 547).

It is possible that the manor house also dates from the middle part of the 14th century (RCHME 1916, 352). It consisted of an aisled hall with a solar wing to the north and a service wing to the south, a common form of this date and location. It was substantially altered during the 16th to 19th centuries; much of the original detail has been destroyed, though the major structural elements remain.

The manor passed from the de Wautons to Sir John Mordaunt by marriage. It is said that Tiptofts was a meeting place for the Gunpowder Plot conspirators; Henry, Lord Mordaunt, the then owner of Tiptofts, was implicated in the plot and imprisoned (Wiseman 1954, 16).

The property was given to Brasenose College, Oxford, by the will of John, Lord Mordaunt, dated 3/11/1563 (Middleton 1889, 649). The terms of the will included a stipulation that it be

'...for the maintenance of three scholars, to be nominated by his executors and afterwards by his heirs for ever.'

(Wiseman 1954, 15).

A terrier dated 1611 lists the buildings and fields associated with the estate: the Manor House, two barns, a hayhouse, stable and cart shed and possibly a dovecote apparently ranged around a courtyard; an outer courtyard was next to a cow yard and orchard (Brasenose College a).

In 1611, the Tiptofts estate covered an area of 247 acres, including a mixture of pasture, arable, meadow and woodland (Brasenose College a); by 1746 this had increased to 325 acres (Brasenose College b), and by 1840, appears from map evidence to have grown even further (ERO a).

An estate map dated 1746 provides details of the Manor and its immediate environs, as well as the extent of lands attached to Tiptofts (Figure 2). The buildings within the moated area consisted of the Manor House and an L-shaped building in the south-eastern corner. Rectangular garden compartments or beds occupy the north-eastern and south-western corners of the platform, and a causeway across the centre of the eastern side marks the position of the present bridge. A farm, consisting of three long ranges around the *Farm*

Yard, is shown north of the moat, and two further buildings were located in the *Cow Yard* further east; the western limit of the *Cow Yard* was defined by what appear to be two ponds. A further seven ponds were located primarily along field boundaries to the north, east and south of the moat.

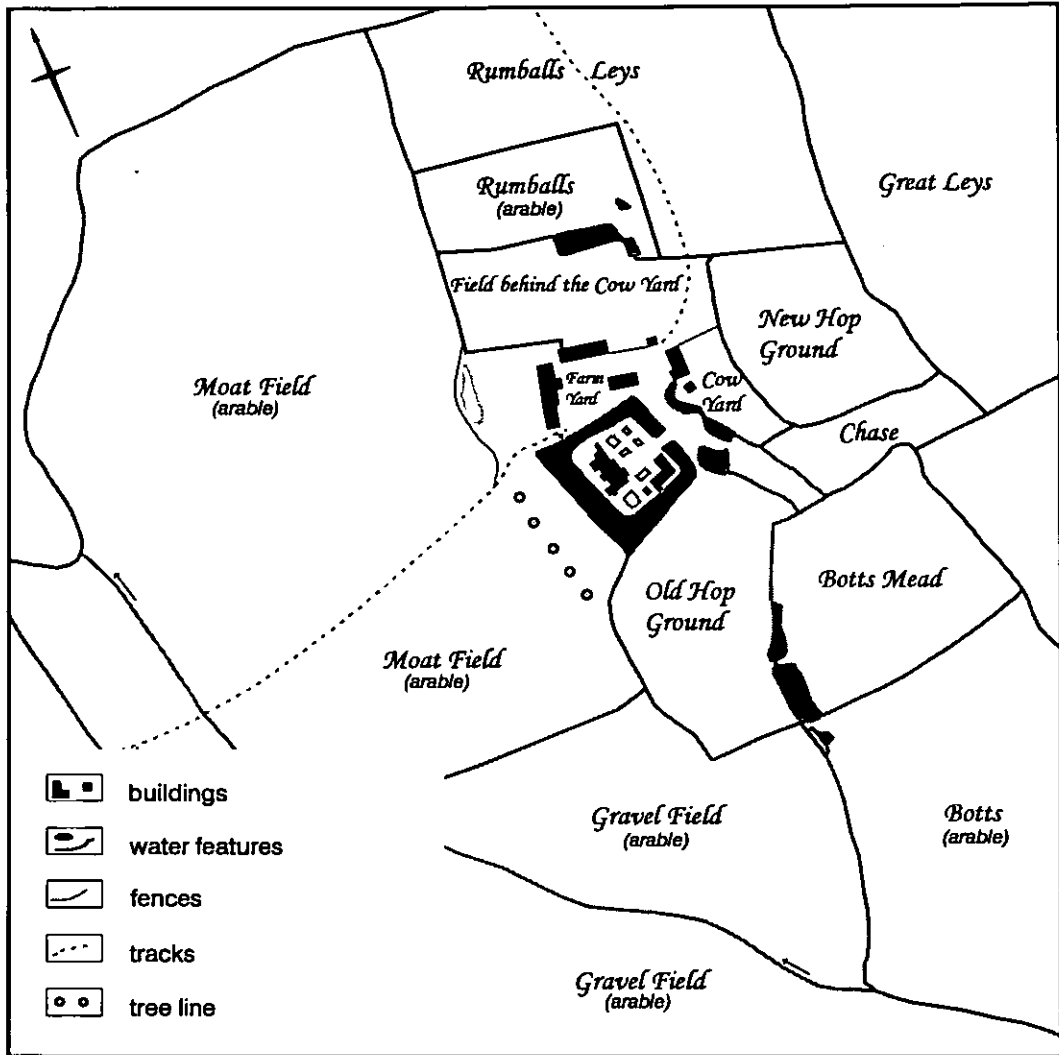


Figure 2:
Tiptofts in
1746 (After an
anonymous
plan of 1746
held at
Brasenose
College)

Although the 1611 terrier is only in the form of a list, the description of the buildings, yards and fields correlates so closely with those on the 1746 map, that it is probable that the landscape had undergone few, if any, changes.

The estate remained relatively unchanged by 1840, though some of the more distant fields had been sold and others had been acquired (ERO a). The estate remained in the hands of Brasenose College until 1994 when the moat and the fields immediately north, south and east were sold; Brasenose College still owns other parts of the original estate.

TIPTOFTS MANOR, ESSEX

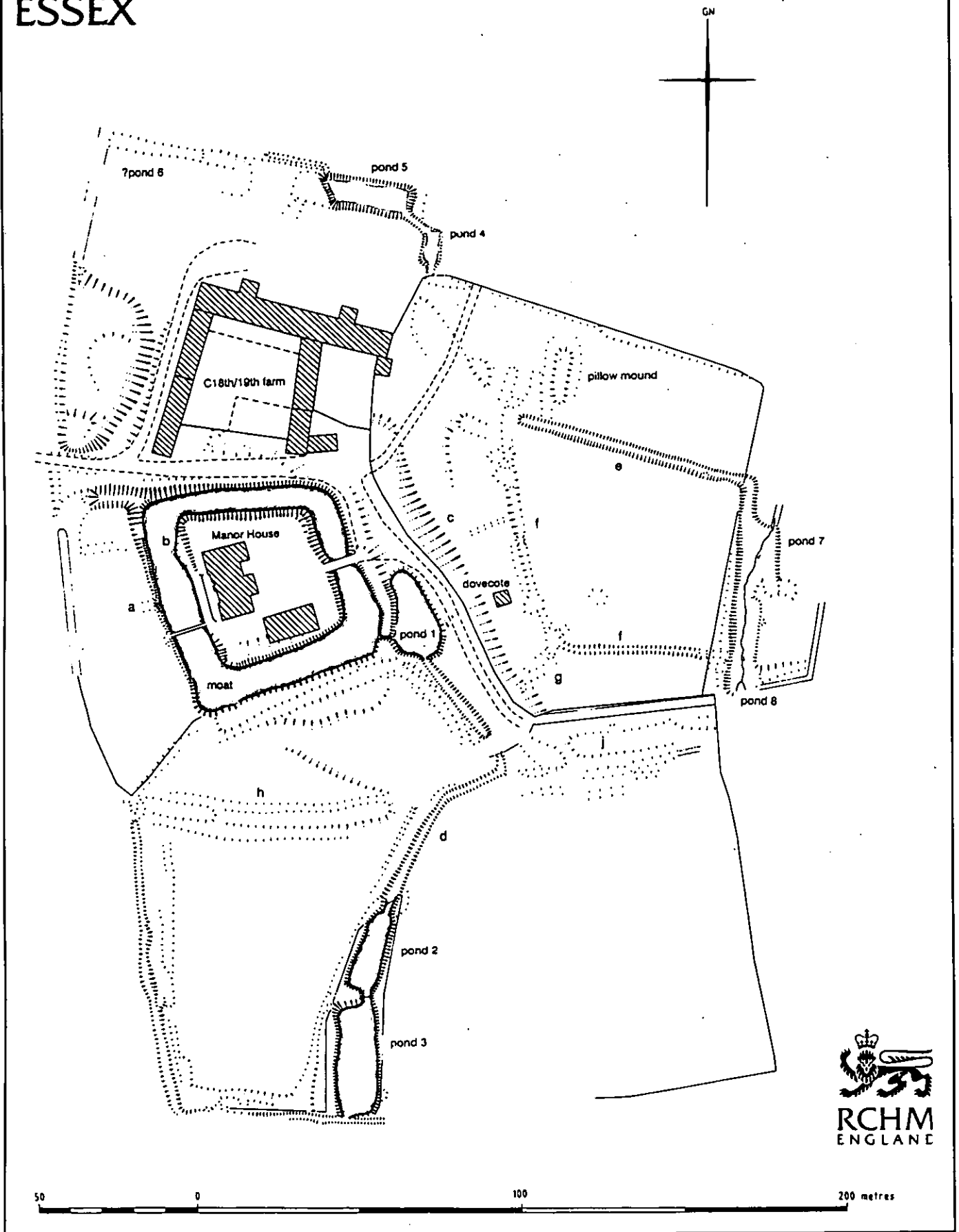
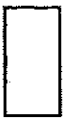


Figure 3: RCHME survey plan (surveyed at 1:1000 scale)



3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

For all letters and words in **bold** in the text please refer to Figure 3.

The Medieval landscape at Tiptofts centres around the moat surrounding the 14th century Manor House. The pasture fields around the moat preserve several ponds, five of which still contain water, mostly around the edges of the fields. In addition, a dovecote survives to the east of the moat, and the remains of an 18th/19th century farm to the north. Other features present in the landscape include a possible pillow mound, the remains of field boundaries, some prominent ditches as well as other, less easily categorised earthworks.

The Moat

The quadrangular water-filled moat measures 68.0m north-south by 65.0m transversely. It defines a platform 41.7m north-south by 38.0m transversely (0.16ha) which is reached via a brick bridge at the centre of the eastern side and a concrete footbridge on the western side. The northern and western arms of the moat are deeper (2.2m compared with 1.3m) and more strongly defined than the southern and eastern arms due to the natural fall of the ground to the south; a low bank, 58.0m by 7.9m by 0.4m high defines the southern, downslope; side.

A scarp alongside the western side of the moat marks its line as shown on the 1746 estate map (Figure 2); similarly, towards its western end, the northern arm diverges slightly from the water line, also marking the 18th century course. A ditch, 8.2m wide by 1.7m deep, leads westward from the north-western corner of the moat for 18.0m before it is blocked; there are signs that it continued before turning southward into the field boundary. The function of this ditch is not clear, but it related to a phase of the moat prior to 1746 because the estate map of that date does not show it; it is possible that it collected water for the moat.

Outside and perpendicular to the moat, roughly half-way along its western side and in line with the centre of the house, is a ditch-like feature (a), 5.0m by 3.5m by 0.1m deep, which corresponds with a slight angle change in the external face of the moat; this may mark the position of an earlier bridge.

The external face of the western arm is almost vertical, and it is possible that it was once revetted, matching an extant brick revetment opposite, on the western side of the platform. The moat platform, between 0.2m and 0.5m higher than the surrounding ground level, is almost level, with a slight fall to the south. A length of brick revetment, 28.8m long, runs along roughly half of its western side. This revetment rises from a height of 0.3m at the southern end to a maximum of 1.2m by the concrete bridge and then falls to 0.6m at its northern end; at both ends it curves into the platform. A brick arch in the revetment marks the presence of a drain roughly half-way along its length. This revetment, and also the possible matching one, is 18th century or later, since it defines a post-1746 extension of the platform (see below).

Behind the moat revetment, the northern half of the western edge of the platform is defined by a narrow shelf (b), 29.0m by 2.2m, and up to 1.6m lower than the main platform. The inner edge of this shelf is defined by another brick revetment in front of the house which is continued by a steep scarp further north. Together, revetment and scarp almost certainly mark the original edge of the platform (see Figure 2).

The Manor House is situated close to the centre of the western side, with an outbuilding in the south-eastern corner; no other buildings survive on the platform. Its date and original form is not known, and for this reason, an architectural survey of the building is planned. However, the results will not be available before this report is completed.

The Ponds.

There were originally eleven ponds at Tiptofts; five still contain water and a further two (possibly three) survive as earthworks. All but one are rectilinear in shape, and most are paired; all have signs of some form of water access. All are located along field boundaries north, south and east of the moat, with the exception of one near the moat's south-eastern corner; their main characteristics are given in Figure 4. Of those surviving, five are known to have existed in 1746, at which date the estate map showed nine ponds (7 and 8 were not depicted).

Figure 4 Table showing pond characteristics

	Size	Depth	Shape	Water-filled	Paired with
1	28.5mx7.3m	0.2m-1.2m	Pear-shaped	Yes	None
2	26.5mx7.7m	1.0m	Rectangular	Yes	3
3	37.4mx12.2m	1.4m	Rectangular	Yes	2
4	12.2mx5.5m	1.3m	Rectangular	Yes	5
5	32.0mx12.0m*	0.9m	Rectangular	Yes	4
6	(see below)				
7	19.0mx13.8m	1.3m	Rectangular	No	8
8	30.8mx9.1m	1.5m	Rectangular	No	7

* Originally 38.0mx12.0m

Pond 1, now pear-shaped and considerably lower at its northern end than the well-defined southern end, was roughly rectilinear in 1746 (Figure 2). No traces of the original line of this pond survive, but it was evidently extended to the north some time after 1746.

Pond 5 has been partially infilled at its western end, but the original line survives as a slight scarp no more than 0.1m high. Immediately west is a slight depression defining an area 13.0m wide by at least 8.5m long; the northern side is carried on as a slight ditch, 45.5m by 5.0m by 0.6m deep. This may be the remains of a further pond (6). A small triangular pond is shown on the 1746 estate map north-east of ponds 4 and 5, in an area not surveyed by the RCHME.

East of the moat, a long linear scarp (c), 119.0m long by 1.5m high, defined both the western edge of the *Cow Yard* in 1746, and the eastern side of two connected ponds shown at the same date (Figure 2). These have evidently been infilled and the scarp straightened since a slight scarp, 6.5m long and 0.2m high, which crosses the track from pond 1, may mark the southern limit of the ponds.

Ponds 1 to 3 receive water from the moat; pond 1 via a narrow, now concrete-lined culvert from the moat's southeastern corner, pond 2 via a long, narrow drain (d), once field boundary, 3.5m wide by 1.2m deep, connecting ponds 1 and 2, and pond 3 via a narrow culvert, now partially dammed by a concrete block, between it and pond 2. At the southern end of pond 3 a shallow ditch carries water away along the field boundary. In 1746 a small pond existed immediately south of pond 3 (outside the survey area); this has been destroyed by arable agriculture.

There is no obvious water source for ponds 4 and 5, but since they still contain water it is probable that they are at least partially spring fed. Pond 5 empties into pond 4 via a narrow ditch, 8.5m by 3.1m by 0.7m deep, and it in turn empties into the water-filled field boundary to the south. A narrow ditch, 19.5 by 1.3m by 0.4m deep, probably the remains of a field boundary, abuts the present north-western corner of pond 5.

At the northern end of pond 7 a ditch (e), probably a water channel measures 4.7m wide by 0.9m deep; it runs north for 13.0m before turning to run west for 76.0m where it ends. Pond 8 feeds directly from the southern end of pond 7 and appears to end to the south at the present field ditch. A shallow ditch, 14.5m by 4.2m by 0.4m deep, enters the eastern side of pond 8, terminating to the east at a modern drain. These ponds are dry, though a small stream trickles from a modern drain which enters pond 7 at its north-eastern corner, through both ponds, and exits via the modern drain at the southern end of pond 8. A slight depression at the south-eastern corner of pond 7 probably marks later disturbance. Ponds 7 and 8 and the ditch (e) are not shown on the 1746 estate map, and it is probable that all three features had gone out of use by that time.

Former field boundaries

The estate map of 1746 shows the field pattern at that date, some of which has been subsequently lost. The field to the south of the moat was called *Old Hop Ground* and survives in its 18th century form today.

New Hop Ground, to the east of the moat, has been incorporated into a modern, post-1978 field (Ordnance Survey 1978), but its southern boundary, originally shared with *Chase*, and its western boundary, originally shared with the *Cow Yard*, are preserved as earthworks. A

narrow ditch (f), 2.8m wide by a maximum of 0.5m deep runs west for 52.2m from pond 8, before turning north for 90.0m; aerial photographs show this continuing a further 20.0m north and terminating against the present field boundary, though no signs of this section survive on the ground (NMR APs: 58/796/Part 2/5141-2). Several sub-circular depressions which disturb the north-south element are possibly tree holes; remnants of a slight bank to the west also survive. The short boundary between *Cow Yard* and *Chase* also survives as the disturbed remains of a slight ditch (g), 17.5m by 4.8m by 0.1m deep, linking the south-eastern corner of f and the line of the former ponds (c).

The fields south and south-east of the moat contain the remains of two more field boundaries aligned east-west. Boundary h survives as a low bank flanked by shallow ditches and is 80.0m long by 13.0m wide and no more than 0.2m high. It is clearly visible on aerial photographs (NMR APs 58/574/Part 2/5273-4) but had gone out of use by 1746. Boundary j survives as a bank and ditch, 58.2m long by a maximum of 15.0m wide and 0.2m high, but has been extensively disturbed by later activity, including the construction of buildings (NMR APs 58/796/Part 2/5141-2; OS/67049/029-30) and vehicular access. A slight gap in the bank marks the site where a water-filled ditch joined it to the former ponds to the north. Boundary f formerly divided *Chase* from *Botts Mead* and was still in use in 1867 (Ordnance Survey 1867).

The pillow mound

A low, oval mound with slight ditches flanking its eastern and western sides and most of the northern end survives 80m north-east of the moat. The mound measures 19.0m by 7.2m by 0.6m high and the ditches are on average 3.3m wide and 0.2m deep. Although slightly confused by the presence of a number of amorphous scarps to the west, this feature appears to be a pillow mound.

The dovecote

East of the moat is a dovecote, probably of 17th century origin though substantially rebuilt or restored during the 18th or 19th century. Almost square, measuring 5.2m by 4.8m, it is built of red brick in English bond under a tiled half-hipped roof, and provides between 550 and 600 nesting boxes. It is typical of Essex dovecotes of this date (Department of National Heritage 1980).

The 1746 estate map shows a small square building of roughly the same size as the dovecote, approximately 45m north-west of its present position. No structure is shown on the map at the present location, and nothing is visible on the ground at the site of the 1746 building. It is possible that the dovecote, which is known to have existed in 1602 (Middleton 1890, 650), was rebuilt after 1746 at its present location, though it is more likely that the earlier survey misplaced it.

The farm

Immediately north of the moat is a farm on the site of an earlier one shown on the 1746 estate map (Figure 2). The earlier farm consisted of three long buildings ranged around the *Farm Yard* situated to the north of the moat; the alignment of these buildings is echoed in

the present ones. Three further buildings were situated further east, two of them in the north-western corner of the *Cow Yard*. The position of the northernmost of these is preserved in the present farm, but the rest of *Cow Yard* has undergone considerable change since the 18th century, with the loss of two ponds on its western margin, the possible relocation of the dovecote, and the demolition of another building to the north.

The buildings of the present farm, which are all of brick construction, consist of a long barn running northwest-southeast with two north-facing (porches?); abutting this and running southwards from it are two ranges, both of more than one build, presumably for housing animals. A central courtyard is now closed off by a brick wall, though this did not exist in 1877 (Ordnance Survey 1877).

The ground to the north of the farm is very uneven and exhibits signs of disturbance though no surveyable elements remain. Aerial photographs demonstrate that there were various buildings in this area between 1946 and 1951, though these had disappeared by 1967 (NMR APs 106G/UK/635/2138-9; 58/796/Part 2/5141-2; OS/67049/029-30).

Immediately west of the main farm buildings is a large, irregular depression measuring a maximum of 59.5m by 29.2m and up to 1.7m deep. Its date and function are not known, but it is apparently of some antiquity; an amorphous feature of some significance is shown immediately to the west on the 1746 estate map and may be associated (Figure 2). The field boundary at that time curved westward to incorporate it, and it is possible that it originated as a pond, or as a quarry.

4. DISCUSSION

The surviving remains at Tiptofts, and the documentary evidence, reveal that it was a manor of moderate size and status throughout its history, and there are many similar examples in the area. The moat and immediate surroundings have not yet been dated with any certainty but the moat is probably contemporary with the earliest phase of the present manor house which in broad terms can be assigned a construction date somewhere between the late 12th century and the middle of the 14th, corresponding with the period of greatest growth in moat construction (Le Patourel & Roberts 1972, 47). A study has shown that by far the greatest number of moated sites are Medieval in origin (Taylor 1974, 87-146 in Clarke 1984, 49). It is hoped that a detailed survey of the house will produce tighter dating evidence for its construction and perhaps some insight as to how the original structure related to the moat.

Tiptofts is located in the area of densest moat concentration within Essex, the north-western 'uplands' around Saffron Walden, in the 11th century the area of densest population in Essex (Hedges 1978, 64-5). It is a typical Essex example; simple, quadrangular and lacking a causeway (these are generally considered to be later features (*ibid*, 68)). The moat itself has evidently undergone a series of minor changes in its long history, notably the provision of brick revetments on its western side and the infilling, before 1746, of a ditch leaving its north-western corner.

The enclosed area of 0.16ha fits comfortably within the accepted range of 0.04ha to 6.00ha for Essex moats (Hedges 1978, 68). In addition to the main house, there may have been other structures within the moated area and the present outbuilding along the southern side replaced an L-shaped structure in a similar location, shown on the 1746 estate map. The function of the earlier building is not known, but may have housed stables or some of the domestic and service buildings generally found on moated sites. However, the moat is clearly not large enough to include all the agricultural buildings associated with the manor and listed in 1611 (Brasenose College b) so we may expect a Medieval predecessor for the farm shown north and east of the moat in 1746.

In 1746 there were garden compartments on the moated platform; a symmetrical arrangement of four to the east of the house and several more between house and outbuilding. The former may have been a small ornamental garden, the latter perhaps providing vegetables for the kitchen. The ornamental aspect to the 18th century moat and house is further confirmed by a single avenue of specimen trees, parallel to the western arm of the moat, on the 1746 plan. The shape of the moat, with the longest and straightest side facing west, suggests that this may have been the original approach, perhaps with a bridge across the centre.

In the 18th century the immediate vicinity of the moat comprised a cluster of small fields and closes: the fields beyond these were larger and dedicated to arable production on the manor. The irregular and sinuous nature of some boundaries to the small closes is of interest

and it seems that they may have followed a natural drainage line from east of the moat via pond 1 and on to ponds 2 and 3. Many of the field boundaries incorporate ponds in a way which suggests that the two have a closely connected origin. Two ponds, 7 and 8, are not depicted in 1746 and can hardly be later. The number of ponds is unusual; together with the obvious pairing of ponds this indicates a serious involvement in fish breeding and keeping and although the ponds clearly functioned in the 18th century, their origin should be more closely associated with the Medieval manor.

Today there is no obvious water source for the moat but the closest stream issues from the ground less than 300m to the north-west (Ordnance Survey 1970). There may be several underground springs, and there would have been a carefully controlled movement of water between the moat and ponds via channels and field ditches. Most of the extant field boundaries at Tiptofts are defined by narrow, steep-sided ditches, many of which carry water. Many of these have Medieval origins but have probably been recut to fulfill modern functions.

In 1988 a BAR volume entitled *Fish, Fisheries and Fishponds in England* was published in the British Archaeological Reports, British Series (Aston 1988); this volume contains a number of county-wide studies, forming the main corpus of information on English fishponds.

Fishponds are occasionally found in isolation, though more often in association with moats (Aston & Bond 1988b, 452). In Warwickshire, a significant majority are found associated with manorial sites, especially in the north-west of the county where a large part of the settlement pattern is made up of individual manorial farmsteads and hamlets (Aston & Bond 1988a, 428), a settlement pattern similar to that of north-west Essex.

Some attempts have been made to devise classification systems for fishponds, generally based upon their morphology, and these have met with limited success (Taylor 1978). In Oxfordshire, Bond & Chambers (1988) divided the fishponds into twelve categories based upon their morphology, location and associated features, while those in Worcestershire were divided into five groups using similar criteria (Aston & Bond 1988b). The majority of fishponds are found singly, though more complex systems do exist; these are generally associated with moats or villages, and they rarely contain more than two or three ponds. Ponds associated with monastic sites are usually considerably larger than their secular equivalents. Waverley Abbey had ponds of 5.7ha and 3.6ha (Bond 1988, 96), while the considerable majority of fishponds associated with moated sites in Hampshire are small rectangular structures of less than a quarter of an acre (0.1ha) (Currie 1988, 280). The ponds at Tiptofts range from 0.02ha to 0.05ha, and the total area covered (excluding the ponds beside the *Cow Yard*, whose sizes are not known) is 0.2ha.

It has been suggested that the greater the number and the more complex the system of fishponds, the greater the number and variety of fish that could be kept (Bond 1988, 95). But why did a manor the size of Tiptofts require such a large quantity and variety of fish? It is possible that the fishponds, with the exception of pond 1 which may be earlier (single ponds attached to moats are fairly common (Aston & Bond 1988b, 452)) were dug after the

acquisition of Tiptofts by Brasenose College, who would have had a much higher demand for fresh fish than a relatively small manor would have done.

The pairing of ponds at Tiptofts is rare but not unknown, and may have been connected with the need to rotate ponds, leaving them open for up to a year in order that the bottoms could recover and the earth regain fertility. This rotation was supposed to be regular occurrence, and was probably tied into the periodic draining of the ponds for stocktaking, which at Prior More's Grange at Battenhall, Worcestershire, occurred every four to ten years (Hickling 1971, 121).

Fresh-water fish were an expensive commodity during the Middle Ages (in 1461 a Bream cost 5d compared with ¼d for a herring (Dyer 1988, 31), and the construction and upkeep of a fishpond was not cheap: in 1274, the cost of cleaning Westminster Abbey's pools at Knowle, Warwickshire, was £7 14s 11d, the equivalent of the price of a herd of 15 cattle (*ibid*, 27), though aside from stocking and cleaning, ponds appear to have required little management (Hickling 1971, 121). It is interesting to note that at Battenhall Grange, and probably elsewhere, the ponds appear to have been refilled almost immediately (*ibid*, 121), perhaps demonstrating the pressure that owners were under to make the utmost use of their fishponds.

In the context of this, the elaborate system of fishponds at Tiptofts represents a considerable investment, initially in the construction of the ponds, and afterwards in their upkeep. The location of the ponds around the edges of the fields may be the result of maximising the available space by using otherwise unusable land, or possibly as a way of utilising an already extant water source in the field boundary ditches. The association of fishponds with moated sites, and especially with manorial sites, has been demonstrated. The number of ponds, and the complexity of the system is unusual, and hints perhaps at a much greater degree of prosperity and status than is otherwise evident from the surviving field and documentary evidence.



5. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The archaeological survey was carried out by Moraig Brown, Paul Pattison and Alastair Oswald of the RCHME. Control and some hard detail was supplied using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer using Trimap software on a Calcomp 3024 plotter. Archaeological detail was surveyed at 1:1000 scale using conventional graphical methods. The report was researched and written by Moraig Brown and edited by Paul Pattison.

The site archive (NMR Number TL 53 NE 47) and a copy of this report have been deposited in the archive of the RCHME at the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ, to where further enquiries should be directed.

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