Archaeological Field Survey Report

FRAMLINGHAM MERE, SUFFOLK

by Moraig Brown & Paul Pattison

ROYAL COMMISSION ON THE HISTORICAL MONUMENTS OF ENGLAND

RCHM
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FRAMLINGHAM MERE, FRAMLINGHAM, SUFFOLK

NMR NUMBER TM 26 SE 1

REQUEST SURVEY

OCTOBER 1997

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RCHME (CAMBRIDGE)
Brooklands
24 Brooklands Avenue,
CAMBRIDGE, CB2 2BU

Framlingham Castle across the Mere in 1998 (NMR: BB98/01031)

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1. INTRODUCTION

In October 1997 the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) carried out a survey of the earthworks of the Mere at Framlingham Castle, Framlingham, Suffolk (NMR Number TM 26 SE 1; SAM Number Suffolk 3), following a request from The Suffolk Wildlife Trust, who part-funded the work. The RCHME survey was carried out in advance of an extensive programme of cleaning and restoration of the Mere, with the intention of locating the former shorelines and any associated archaeological features. The Mere is owned by Framlingham College and managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust.

Framlingham lies in north-east Suffolk, some 20km west of the North Sea and 20km north-east of Ipswich (Figure 1). The town is situated upon rising ground at the south-eastern limit of the Suffolk uplands. The castle dominates the town on high ground at its northern fringe, overlooking the River Ore. The Mere (NGR TM 284 636) occupies a broader part of the river flood-plain, which narrows to the south in the town, and the valley steepens to the north above Little Lodge (NGR TM 283 644). In times of heavy rainfall, water enters the area of the Mere and drains only slowly southwards along the river channel. Flooding has occurred frequently in the past. Other water sources feed the Mere, including a small stream which drains from the north-east through the castle defences.

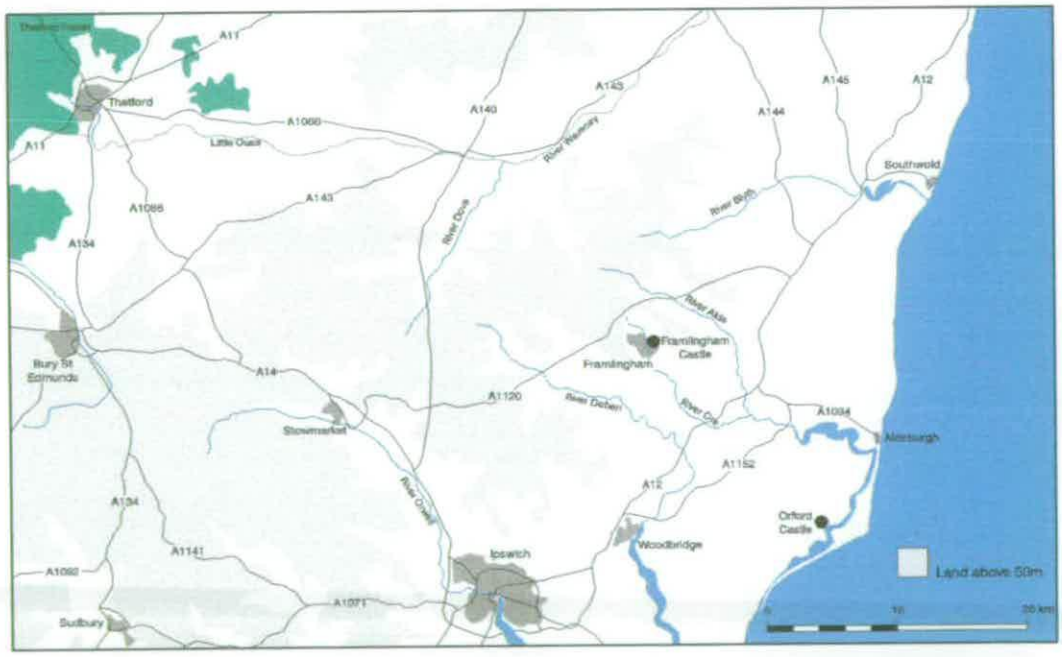

Figure 1
Location map

In recent years the Mere has been fenced and a grazing regime re-introduced into the meadows which surround the open water. At the time of survey, the large drainage ditches which separate the meadows were deep and relatively full of water. In contrast, the flat bed of the Mere was heavily silted and contained no more than 30cm of water. This enabled a much more detailed survey than would otherwise have been possible, as only small areas

of unsafe ground were encountered, notably at the southern end of the Mere, close to the outfall of the River Ore. Numerous tree stumps were visible across the bed, many from trees living at the beginning of the 20th century. The current dry period and consequent accessibility of the Mere bed provide a good opportunity for environmental sampling which might reveal evidence concerning the original form and nature of the Mere, and its subsequent history.

2. BRIEF HISTORY OF FRAMLINGHAM CASTLE

The history of Framlingham Castle is well-documented but of the Mere, immediately below its walls, much less is recorded. The following account of the Castle is taken from Raby & Baillie Reynolds' 1959 guide to Framlingham Castle.

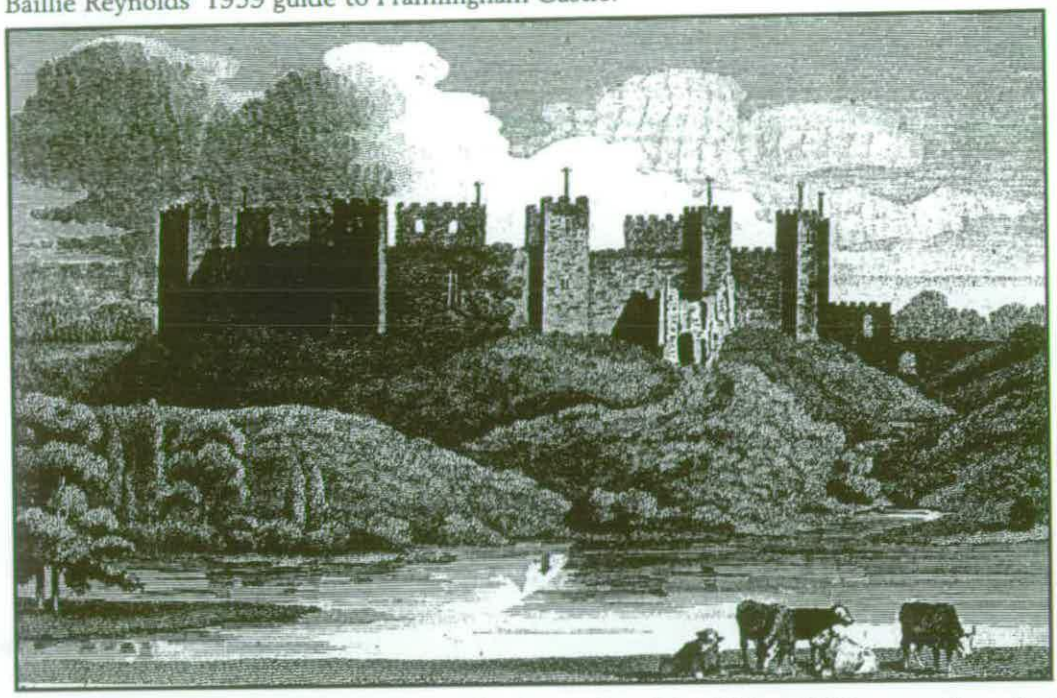

Figure 2 *Framlingham Castle across the Mere: a rare late 18th century view by Isaac Johnson* (Pembroke College b)

The manor of Framlingham was granted to Roger Bigod in 1100 or 1101, soon after which the first castle was probably constructed. The earthworks of this earth-and-timber castle originally formed two enclosures; a roughly oval mound which contained the main castle buildings, and a larger, irregularly-shaped bailey to the south and south-east. Both are defined by deep ditches with internal banks, with counterscarp banks evident in some areas.

Roger's son, Hugh Bigod, was made Earl of Norfolk by King Stephen in 1140, but soon deserted Stephen to support Henry II. His allegiance to Henry wavered and the King besieged Framlingham Castle twice, in 1157 and 1173, and subdued Bigod, after which the King ordered the castle to be dismantled. Hugh was succeeded in 1178 by his son, Roger, who appears to have immediately begun rebuilding the castle in stone. It is not clear exactly what the interior of Roger Bigod's new castle looked like, though the surviving curtain wall, with its thirteen towers, is certainly of this date. There are also traces of earlier stone buildings in the curtain wall, which was constructed in sections to accommodate them. The second bailey (traditionally known as the Lower Court) also dates to this phase. The new work was completed by 1213 when King John was entertained in the castle. The first record of the Mere is possibly that of 1270, when a fishery valued at 5 shillings is mentioned in an extent of the manor (Ridgard 1985, 19). It is, therefore, likely to be part of Roger Bigod's rebuilding.

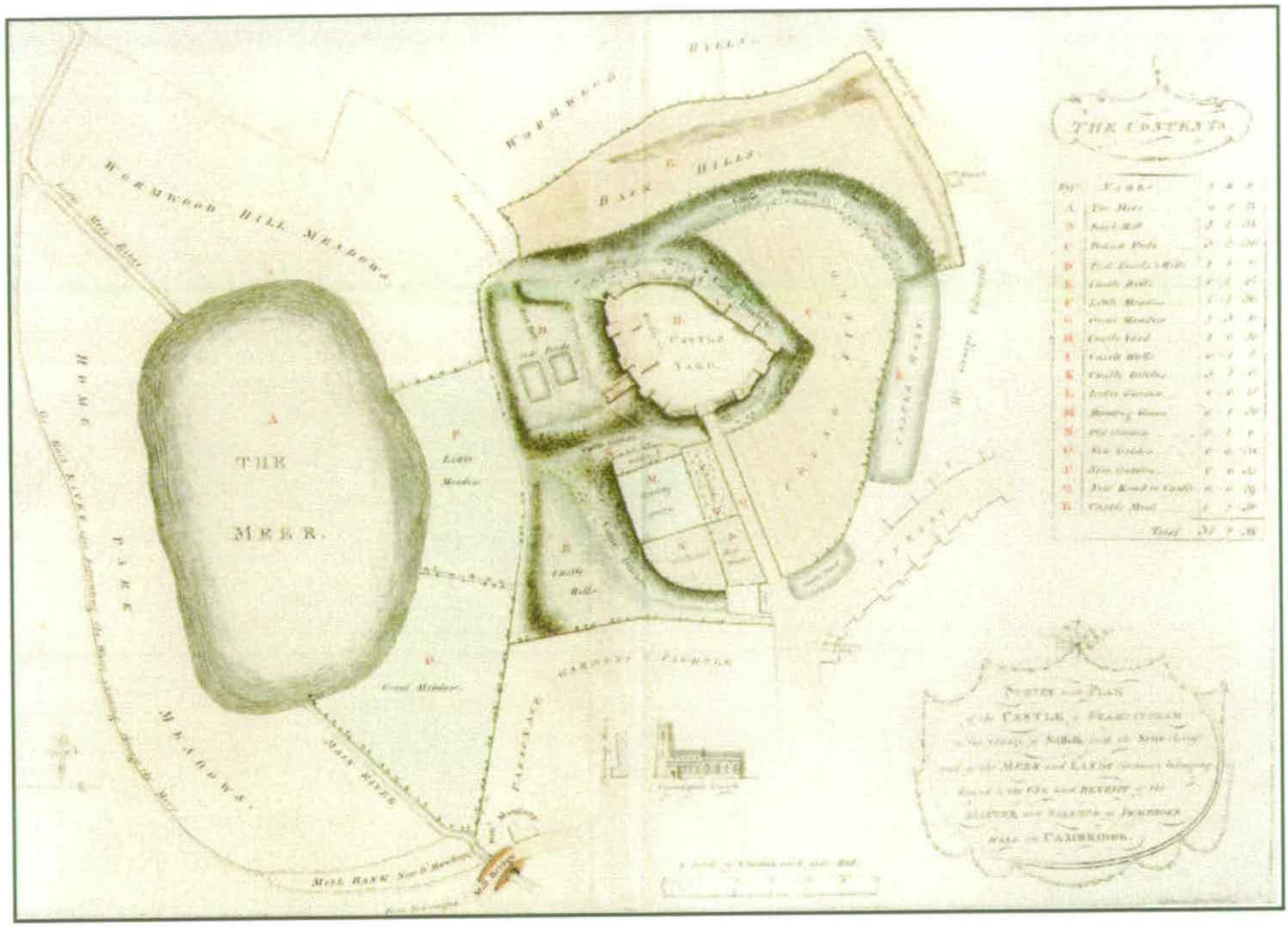

Figure 3 *Framlingham Castle and Mere in 1789; the leat is shown extreme left and meadows surround the mere* (Pembroke College b)

The Bigod line ended in 1306 with the death of the fifth earl, and Framlingham Castle was for a time under the direct control of the King. The estate passed through several hands over the succeeding years until 1397 when Thomas Mowbray became the first Duke of Norfolk and was granted the estate. Thereafter Framlingham was the chief seat of the Dukes of Norfolk. Towards the end of the 15th century the estate passed to the Howard family who were made Dukes of Norfolk in 1483. The Howard family carried out extensive repairs at Framlingham, including the construction of several elaborate brick chimneys, most of which had no associated fireplaces, and were simply for ornament. The Howards were also responsible for the reconstruction of the bridge which replaced an earlier lifting bridge, traces of which survive.

In 1547 Henry VIII seized the castle and upon his death it reverted to Edward VI, who in turn gave it to his sister Mary in 1553. Mary stayed at Framlingham after the death of her brother, when the succession was still not clear, and during the summer of 1553 thousands

of her supporters were encamped about the castle. Following the accession of Queen Mary, Framlingham was returned to the Duke of Norfolk.

After 1572 the importance of Framlingham Castle waned and it was let to tenants; a survey dated 1589 mentions that many of the buildings were in a poor state of repair. In the first years of the 17th century it was used as a prison for recusant priests and in 1635 the Castle and its estate were sold to Sir Robert Hitcham, who bequeathed it in 1637 to Pembroke College, Cambridge (Suffolk Record Office a). Hitcham stipulated that the buildings of the castle be demolished and a poorhouse built. The poorhouse went out of use in 1837.

In 1913 responsibility for Framlingham Castle passed to the Ministry of Works, and since 1984 it has been in the care of English Heritage.

Framlingham Mere,
Framlingham, Suffolk

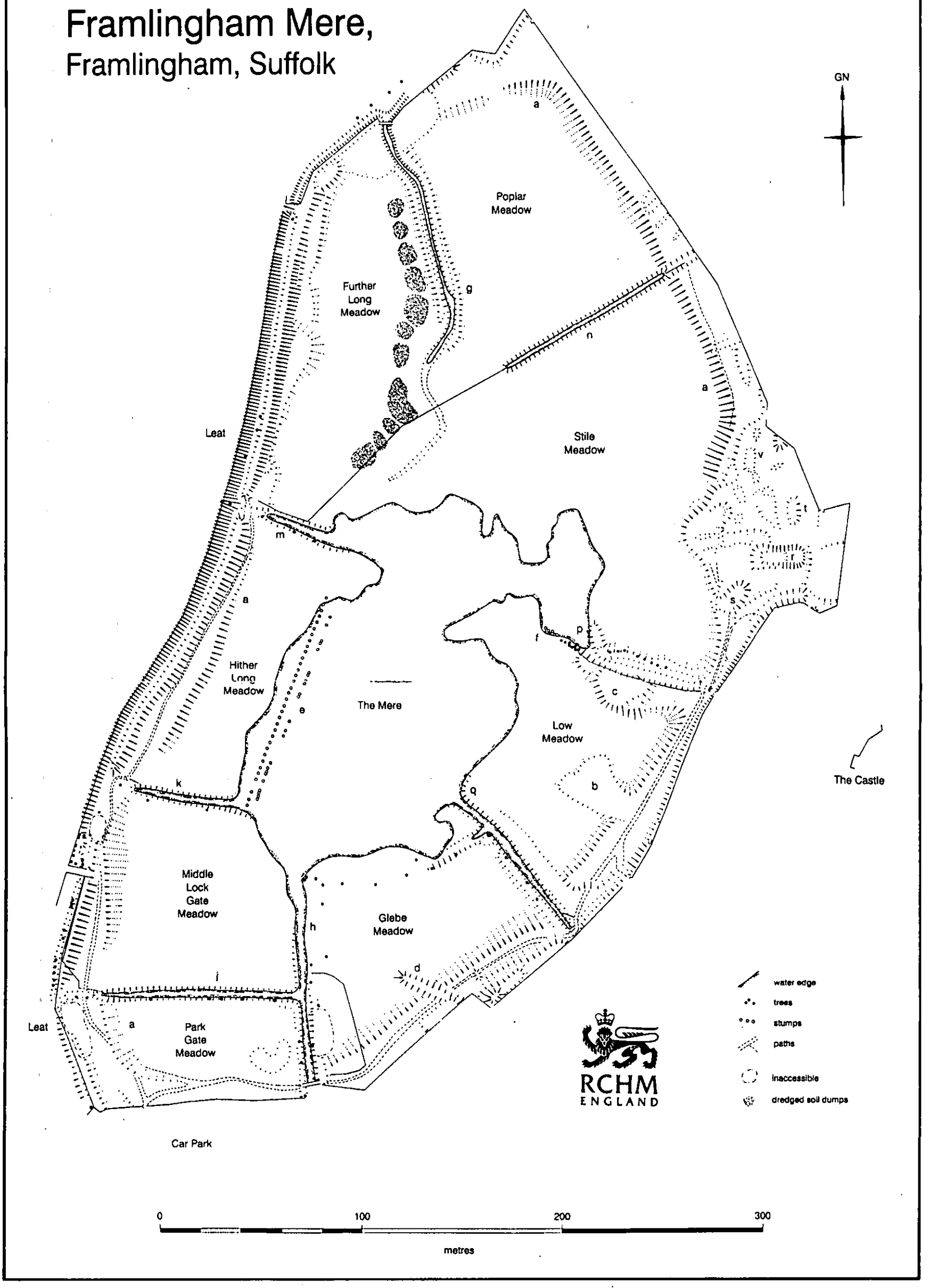

Figure 4 *RCHME survey plan, surveyed at a scale of 1:1000*

3. ARCHAEOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION

Summary

The main archaeological feature recorded during the survey is the scarp defining the former shoreline of the Mere (hereafter, the 'old shoreline'). Associated features include a leat running along its western side and fishponds to the east. Several water channels radiate into the present Mere, breaking up the surrounding ground into a series of meadows.

Letters and words in **bold** in the text refer to features on the main survey plan which depicts all archaeological features (Figure 4). Figure 5 is a simplified schematic plan of the main archaeological features.

The Mere

The old shoreline of the Mere is quite clearly defined by a single intermittent scarp, **a**, broad and gradual, surviving up to a maximum height of 1.0m. The scarp defines an elongated kidney-shaped area of 9.38 hectares (23.18 acres). In general, the scarp survives best to the west and north-east, while part of its southern side has totally disappeared. Despite its variable condition, the scarp has an overall cohesion and it is probably the original extent of the Mere. It appears to be an artificially dug feature.

On the eastern side, immediately below the Lower Court of the Castle, two slight 'platforms' project from the old shoreline into the original Mere. Given the nature of the vegetation in this area – high rush and sedge – it was very difficult to ascertain the exact shape of these features, which are considerably abraded. The southern one, **b**, is irregular in shape and measures 28.2m by 20.4m by 0.3m high. The northern one, **c**, is also irregular and measures 58.5m by 28.4m by a maximum of 0.5m high. Mid-way along its length there are two slight parallel scarps defining an area 23.1m long by at least 13.5m wide by 0.2m high, possibly marking the site of a structure. For instance, a dovecote is known to have existed somewhere in the Mere by 1386-7 (Ridgard 1985, 11).

One more earthwork projects from the old shoreline; in **Glebe Meadow**, a slight bank, **d**, measuring 35.5m by 9.0m by 0.5m high, heads out for 15.0m into the original Mere. This may be the remains or base of a small boat landing or jetty. Although there are occasional medieval references to small boats on the Mere (Ridgard 1985, 12), this is probably a much later feature; it is at an awkward angle to the old shoreline and appears to overlie it. Moreover, some 20.0m of its length lies outside the former Mere.

Along the western side of the Mere are two parallel lines of willow stumps, **e**, extending for some 108m within the Mere's present boundary. The stumps are regularly spaced – especially the western line – and of a uniform size and condition. These appear to be the remains of a revetment to the Mere bank, whose willow stakes resprouted once they had been inserted into the ground. A second series of willow stumps, **f**, whose line is continued

by surviving trees, occurs on the east side of the Mere. These run for 24m north-west from the tip of the northern platform, c. Although the date of both revetments is unknown, a 19th century date seems probable, particularly given the straight nature of the Mere's western shore towards the end of that century (Ordnance Survey 1883). It may also be the western shoreline shown on Isaac Johnson's map of 1789 (Pembroke College b).

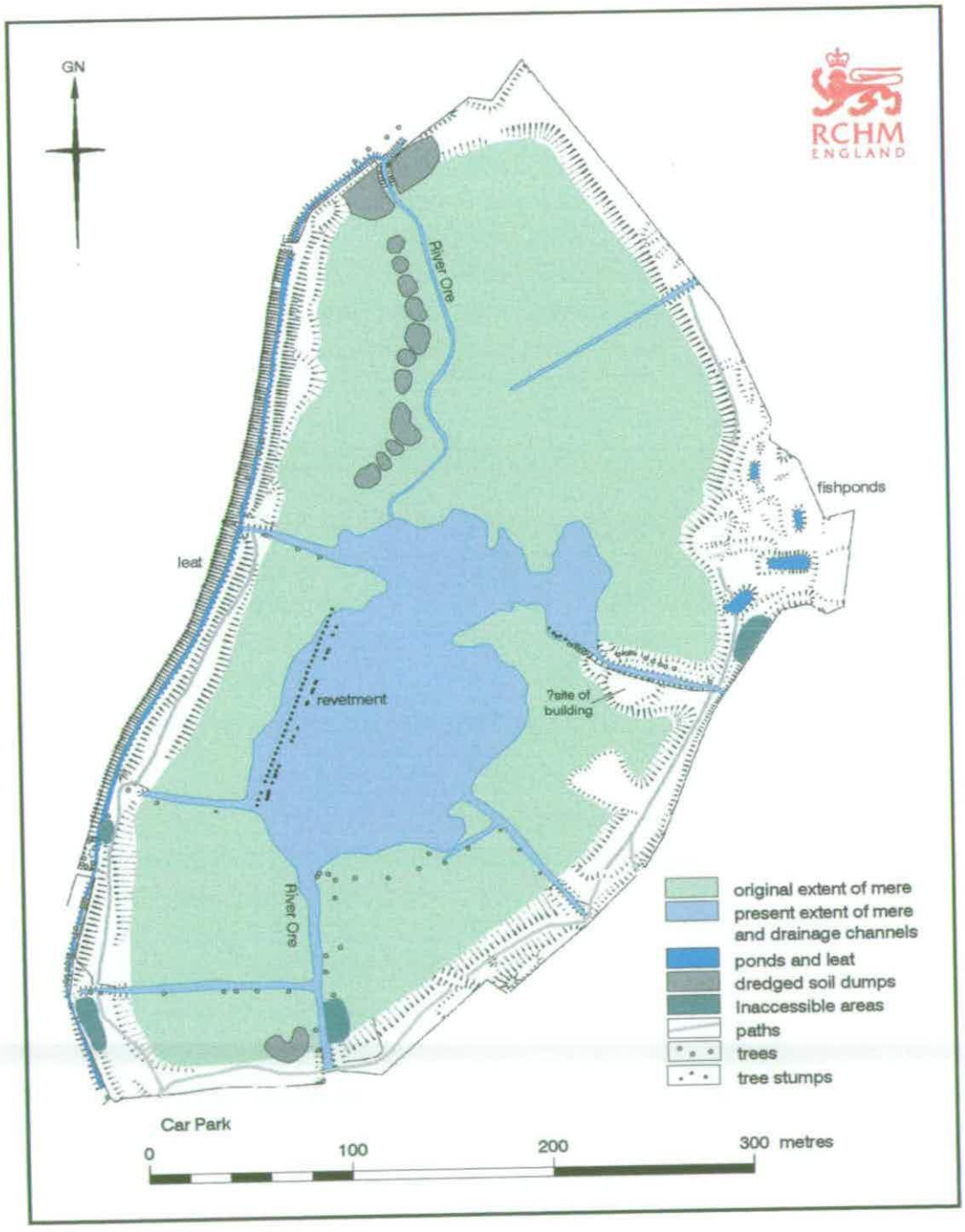

Figure 5
RCHME schematic interpretation plan of the Mere

The meadow drainage channels

The area of the former Mere is divided into eight meadows by the River Ore and six other drainage channels. Each channel is straight, except the in-coming river, and all still contain some water for part of their length: indeed, they are better maintained than the Mere itself. The channels are cut through the old shoreline and were probably originally linked to land drainage features outside the Mere, notably a leat along the west side (see below) and a large ditch at the foot of the castle earthworks, just outside the survey area. These channels were, and indeed remain, an essential component of the meadows. Mature willow trees occur frequently along their sides.

The drainage channels on the eastern side of the Mere are known to have existed as divisions between meadows in 1789, when they were depicted on a survey of the Castle and Mere (Figure 3; Pembroke College b). The western channels are not shown, probably due to the fact that the meadows which they defined were not part of the estate in question, and therefore not included in the survey. By this date the Mere had shrunk considerably from its original size, though it occupied roughly twice the area that it does today. At that time **Glebe Meadow** was called *Great Meadow*, and **Low Meadow** named *Little Meadow*. All the present drainage ditches are depicted on late 19th century mapping (Ordnance Survey 1883).

The River Ore enters the former Mere on its north-western side via a meandering channel, **g**, averaging 5.5m wide by 0.8m deep to the present water level. It is flanked by low, broad banks, at best 6.5m wide by 0.5m high, probably the result of dredging. The river channel extends for 130.0m and gradually fades out. Along the western side of the channel a series of irregularly-shaped mounds, at best 1.3m high, are the remains of dredging carried out in 1992. The Ore leaves the Mere via a straight channel, **h**, 110.0m long by 4.8m wide; it is 0.8m deep to the present water level. Slight traces of a low bank along part of its western side may also be the result of dredging.

Channel j leads west from the Ore and measures 101.0m long by 4.2m wide by 0.7m deep to the present water level. Its western end cuts through the old shoreline and is continues for a further 13.9m, almost to the leat.

Channel **k** measures 54.0m long by 6.4m wide and is 0.7m deep to the present water level. Channel **m** is at least 40.0m long, 7.2m wide and 0.6m deep to the present water level. There is a break in the bank of the leat to accommodate this channel.

Channel **n** divides **Poplar Meadow** from **Stile Meadow**; it measures 95.0m long by 6.0m wide by 0.6m deep to the present water level; slight scarps carry the channel further east, across the old shoreline, for a further 15.0m. This channel is the most even and straight of all, perhaps indicating a later date of construction, though its line echoes a boundary shown on the 1789 survey (Figure 3; Pembroke College b).

Channel **p**, dry at the time of survey, is approximately 60m long and, on average, 4.5m wide by 0.6m deep. It is cut through platform c and therefore post dates any structure which

might have stood there. A particularly close-set line of mature willow trees flank the northern side of the channel.

The channel defining the southern side of **Low Meadow, q**, measures 85.0m long, an average of 7.9m wide and 0.8m deep to the present water level, which is considerably deeper here than in any other part of the Mere or surrounding channels. A low and very broad bank, at least 53.0m long by 9.5m wide by 0.4m high, runs along the north-east side of the channel; this may be the result of dredging, though it appears too substantial and regular. Towards the north-west end of the channel a subsidiary channel, 35.0m long, 7.2m wide and 0.3m deep, branches off to the south-west, almost perpendicular, but fades out in the heavy vegetation. This feature marks the late 19th century shoreline along the north-west side of **Glebe Meadow** (1st Edition Ordnance Survey map, 1883), and possibly that on Isaac Johnson's map of 1789 (Pembroke College b).

Fishponds

At its western limit the old shoreline deviates from its course around an area of higher ground which protrudes into the former Mere. At this point a small stream formerly flowed into the Mere and the tongue of land may be in part formed by alluvial silt. It contains a number of regular and irregular sunken features. The largest of these, **r**, is a rectilinear fishpond, dry at the time of survey, measuring 28.0m by 11.8m by 1.7m deep, with a slight shelf at its western end. There is similar pond in the castle ditch north of the Lower Court of the castle. The remaining features in this area are hard to categorize: the most obvious is a regular depression, **s**, measuring 18.0m by 10.4m by 0.7m deep, with a shallow channel leading to the old shoreline; **t** and **v** are slight rectilinear depressions, measuring respectively 13.8m by 7.8m by 0.8m deep and 11.9m by 4.8m by 0.5m deep. While it is not possible to define the purpose of these smaller features, the area appears to have experienced some disturbance, perhaps some infilling, so that the present remains represent only a partial plan. They are probably part of a fish-rearing complex of small ponds, channels and robbed-out building foundations, accessible from the Lower Court.

Leat

At the point where the River Ore enters the Mere, a leat is taken off it, leading around the western edge of the Mere and continuing south beyond its southern end. The leat is formed by a substantial channel or ditch with a bank along its eastern side to retain the water. The western side of the channel is cut into the natural slope, producing a very steep face, notably in its central sector where a height of 2.9m is reached. The channel itself is, on average, 2.8m wide by 0.7m deep. The retaining bank averages 7.5m wide by 0.9m high. In three locations the leat appears to have been linked to the drainage channels **j, k** and **m**, by breaches in the bank. It is not clear whether these breaches are later than the leat itself. Several large and mature willow trees survive along its edge.

In 1789 the leat rejoined the River Ore immediately north of Mill Bridge (now in Bridge Street), though all traces are now lost beneath later buildings (Pembroke College b). The location of the actual mill is not shown on the 1789 survey but the leat was probably its power source. Excess water could, presumably, be released carefully from leat to Mere via

sluices into the drainage ditches. The leat could also have carried away some water in times of flood.

There is another substantial water channel, mainly outside the survey area on the east side, its retaining bank just impinging. It appears to originate to the south-east of fishpond t and, although not surveyed or examined in detail, probably carried stream and drainage water in the lea of the castle earthworks back to the River Ore on this side of the Mere.

4. CONCLUDING COMMENTS

The location of the Mere in the valley bottom guaranteed a good water supply. There is, however, no evidence to suggest that the Mere was, at any time, a natural lake. The scarp marking the old shoreline, revealed during the present survey, is quite clear and it appears to be a dug feature. It almost certainly defined the area of water in the original Mere. However, the entry of the River Ore is not flanked by a large dam, even allowing for alterations associated with the later leat, but rather, by a low earthwork crossing the valley at its narrowest point, just over 100m. The Mere, then, was probably always broad and shallow.

There are, surprisingly, very few accessible documentary references to the Mere. Maps and surveys are even fewer. Moreover, topographical print makers have concentrated on the castle, principally repeating and copying what has become the classic view, from the west. Despite this view being across the Mere, the water was rarely included in their work, and where it was, the depiction is manipulated as a romanticised foreground (see Figure 2). Something of the workings of the Mere might be gleaned from the manor court roles which survive at Pembroke College in Cambridge but this would involve weeks of painstaking transcription and translation. The following, a summary of available information including a broader interpretation of the Mere than has hitherto been given, is a preliminary statement; fuller understanding of the mere is not possible without a comprehensive archaeological survey of the castle and its surrounding landscape.

The Mere was probably created during or soon after the construction of the great stone castle at the end of the 12th century. In the 14th century it was referred to as *'the Great Lake beneath the castle'* (Ridgard 1985, 11) and it was still functioning as a fishery in the early 17th (Coppinger 1909, 280), although it probably ceased to be adequately maintained following decline of the castle in the later 16th century.

It has long been assumed that the main, and original, function of Framlingham Mere was one of defence (Raby & Baillie Reynolds 1959, 6). This is only partially correct, for recent studies have begun to demonstrate that the use of water around castles and other lordly residences was far more complicated and served a variety of purposes. With the construction of a stone castle in the late 12th century, the western curtain wall in particular offered an opportunity to make a powerful statement in architecture which was enhanced by the natural lie of the land. Viewed from rising ground to the west, the castle commands the landscape and this dominance was reinforced by the creation of the Mere in the valley between. While certainly enhancing the defensive capability of the castle, there is also a strong psychological element in the design, a means of both intimidation and delight. The approaches to castles were often manipulated so that visitors were taken around a sinuous route to present the castle and its surroundings in the best possible light and in such a way that the power and beauty of the castle, and consequently the wealth and status of its owner, were shown to the best advantage.

Furthermore, castles and lordly residences were closely associated with landscape and other symbolism (Stocker 1993). They are invariably set within large private parks, where deer were kept and hunted, and which contained woods, wood pasture, grassy glades, ponds and lodges. Within or close by these large parks were smaller or 'little parks' which were more akin to pleasure grounds, where walks could be taken and courtly entertainment occur (Landsberg 1996, 21-4). The landscape of medieval parks was closely tied to legend and symbolism. Ponds or lakes, supporting fish and birds, and having reflective properties, carried their own imagery. The Mere at Framlingham was probably designed, partly at least, with such matters in mind.

Examples of this kind of designed landscape are known from several castles in England: at Kenilworth Castle, Warwickshire, King John created a huge mere at the beginning of the 13th century, which almost surrounded his enlarged castle (Renn 1991, 20-1). The lake at Leeds Castle, Kent, created to accompany the new gloriette built in 1278-90, was also part of such a designed landscape (Taylor 1997, 23-4). One of the most striking examples is at Bodiam in Sussex, where the late 14th century arrangement of lakes and ponds surround the castle and force a circuitous approach which is continually dominated by the castle itself (Everson 1996a and b).

The ornamental aspect to the Mere is underscored by the presence, in the 16th century, of a garden in the Lower Court of Framlingham Castle, overlooking the Mere (Raby and Baillie-Reynolds 1959, 24). It is possible that there was an enclosed private garden here in the medieval period. From the northern corner of the Lower Court, a gate may have led to the Mere, perhaps that recorded in 1302 as *'the gate towards the fishery'* (*ibid*).

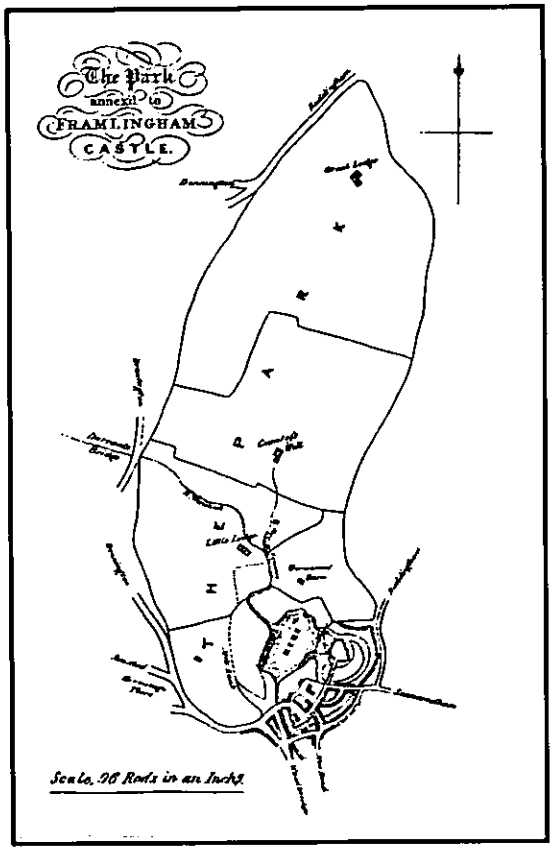

Figure 6
An interpretative plan showing the relationship between Framlingham Castle and Park in 1833, demonstrating the way in which it surrounded the Mere (Green, 1834)

Of course, Framlingham Mere also had a role in the economy of the medieval manor. It was created at the southern end of a hunting park which surrounded the castle but extended several kilometres to the north. In the mid 16th century the park covered 600 acres (Figure 6; Ridgard 1985, 283). The Mere played an important part in activities within the park, attracting waterfowl and animals for hunting and hawking, but also supporting an important fishery. Freshwater fish were highly prized, not least as a mark of wealth and status, and fishponds were very much a lordly and monastic preserve. The Mere

is probably the fishery referred to in 1302 (above) and a survey of 1547 refers to fishing of the Mere, which was totally reserved for the use of the lord; small boats are also mentioned (Ridgard 1985, 9 and 12). As late as 1636, the will of Sir Robert Hitcham mentions *'the Mere and all other fishponds'* (Coppinger 1909, 280). The importance of fishing is marked today by the survival of at least two fishponds as earthwork features (one in the survey area), possibly for fish storage or breeding.

The manorial dovecote also stood on the Mere in 1386-7 (Ridgard 1985, 11), either on an island or on one of the projections from the shore noted during the present survey.

It is likely that, following the acquisition of the manor by Pembroke College in the mid 17th century, the Mere was already divided into plots of meadow around a smaller area of water. The stimulus for change was probably the dismantling of the park after 1580 (Ridgard 1985, 7) when the land was parcelled up for agriculture. However, the natural process of silting had probably been steadily decreasing the area of water for some time and of some interest in this context is a reference in the 1547 survey to fishing of the Mere which lay within the *'Newe'* meadow inside the park (Ridgard 1985, 9).

The earliest map of the Mere is the 1789 survey (Figure 3) which reveals the careful management required, encapsulated in a reference to the leat, then called the *'Back River, for preventing the water running through the Meer'* (Pembroke College b). The water content in this late phase of the Mere's use was probably determined by nature and attempts to control it and, probably, typically comprised periodic drying out and extensive flooding (Figs 7 & 8). Its effective use as a controlled fishery was probably long past. In recent years, drying out has been the norm (Ray Hardinge, pers comm).

Figure 7 *Framlingham Castle during a dry summer, with no water visible in the Mere: photograph probably taken around the turn of the 19th/20th century* (Suffolk Record Office: K404/103, with the courtesy of the Lanman Museum, Framlingham)

Figure 8
The Mere under flood with the castle in the background; photograph taken in August 1912 (Suffolk Record Office: K480/4/47, with the courtesy of the Lanman Museum, Framlingham)

The area of the Mere, as a water feature, has decreased substantially since its creation. The old shoreline, as defined in the present survey, encompassed an area of 9.38ha (23.18 acres). On Isaac Johnson's survey of 1789, it covered roughly 3.65ha (9.03 acres), or approximately 40% of its original area. By 1883 its area of 2.27ha (5.61 acres) amounts to only 25% of the medieval Mere (Ordnance Survey 1883). Today the Mere covers, at best, an area of 1.79ha (4.42 acres), 20% of the area covered by the original medieval lake.

5. SURVEY AND RESEARCH METHODS

The archaeological survey was carried out during October 1997 by Moraig Brown, Paul Pattison and Alastair Oswald. Hard detail and most features were surveyed using a Wild TC1610 Electronic Theodolite with integral EDM, using Trimmap surveying software. Data was captured on a Wild GRM 10 Rec Module and plotted via computer on a Designjet 750C Plus plotter. Further details of the plan were supplied at 1:1000 scale using conventional graphical methods.

The report was researched and written by Moraig Brown and Paul Pattison. Illustrations and the assembling of the final report was carried out by Moraig Brown, using CorelDraw 7 and CorelVentura software.

Photographs were taken by Alun Bull.

The site archive has been deposited in the National Monuments Record Centre, Kemble Drive, Swindon SN2 2GZ (TM 26 SE 1).

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a An Ordinance for settling and confirming of the Mannors of Framlingham and Saxtead in the County of Suffolk devised by Sir Robert Hitcham, Kght Monday March 20 1653

b Ground Plan of Framlingham Castle and Outworks, by Henry Preston 1883

Pembroke College, Cambridge

a Survey of the Manors of Framlingham at the Castle and Saxtead in Suffolk by Christopher Peyton, Gent., Surveyor of the Court of Augmentations 1547-8

b Surveys and plans of the Castle of Framlingham in Suffolk, with the meer and lands belonging to therto. Also of the Parsonage House, Gardens and Glebe Lands of the Rectories of Framlingham and Saxted in the said County and of the Estates, devised by the Will of Sir Robert Hitcham, Kght Taken in the years 1789-90 by Issac Johnson, Surveyor