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HURSTBOURNE PARK: IMAGE AND REALITY

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ABSTRACT

The first mansion house and park at Hurstbourne Priors belonged to the Priory of St Swithun, then to a series of gentlemen and finally to John Wallop first Earl of Portsmouth. It was demolished in the late-18th century and its appearance is known from visitors' descriptions but principally from a map by Isaac Taylor and two paintings by Jan Griffier the younger. Some writers have accepted these as accurate representations. Geophysical survey and visual inspection of the topography now suggest that the house was neither as large nor as perfectly aligned with the surrounding landscape features as the paintings indicate. Artistic licence has led to misunderstanding of the house's situation.

INTRODUCTION

Until its recent demolition, the mansion of Hurstbourne Park was situated on a hill-top overlooking the valley of the Bourne Rivulet. It was built in the last decade of the 19th century, and was the latest in a series of houses in the park. Its predecessor, built around 1780, occupied the same site, and was itself a replacement for an earlier mansion on a low-lying site further south, beside the rivulet and near the church of Hurstbourne Priors (Fig. 1). This early mansion was demolished when the 18th-century house was built, and precise knowledge of its site has been lost. There is a considerable amount of documentary evidence for it, but archaeological investigation suggests that the image presented by the documents is at variance with the reality of the house and its setting. This article will consider both types of evidence and attempt to draw a conclusion.

THE MEDIEVAL BACKGROUND

The medieval manor, called simply Hurstbourne, comprised the modern parishes of Hurstbourne Priors and St. Mary Bourne, and was one of the many possessions of Winchester Cathedral Priory. Until the advent of leasing, during the 15th century, the manor was administered by a bailiff under the supervision of a steward from Winchester who visited regularly. There was a group of buildings which would have been clearly seen by travellers along the Bourne valley – the farmhouse with its barns and stables, the church, the residence of the prior and his guests, and a mill where the local tenants were bound by custom to grind their corn (WCL Hurstbourne account rolls). The prior's residence consisted of a hall and chamber, a stable and a gate-lodge (Roberts 1992, 107). The hall would have been big enough to accommodate, though not necessarily overnight, the large number of people attending the courts which were held there for much of the medieval period (Deveson 1998, 125). In 1332 the prior was allowed to enclose a deerpark there, and when the estate was sold in 1558, it included a lodge as well as the manor house (*CPR* ii, 263; *VCH* iv, 288).

Dr Stevens, the 19th-century historian of St. Mary Bourne and Hurstbourne Priors, was responsible for two misunderstandings, which have been accepted without question by several later authorities, about the medieval manor house of Hurstbourne. The first misunderstanding was that it was called 'The Grange', for which he gave two references, dated 1255 and 1386 (Stevens 1895, 109, 183, 299). The former is an assize roll, containing a presentment for

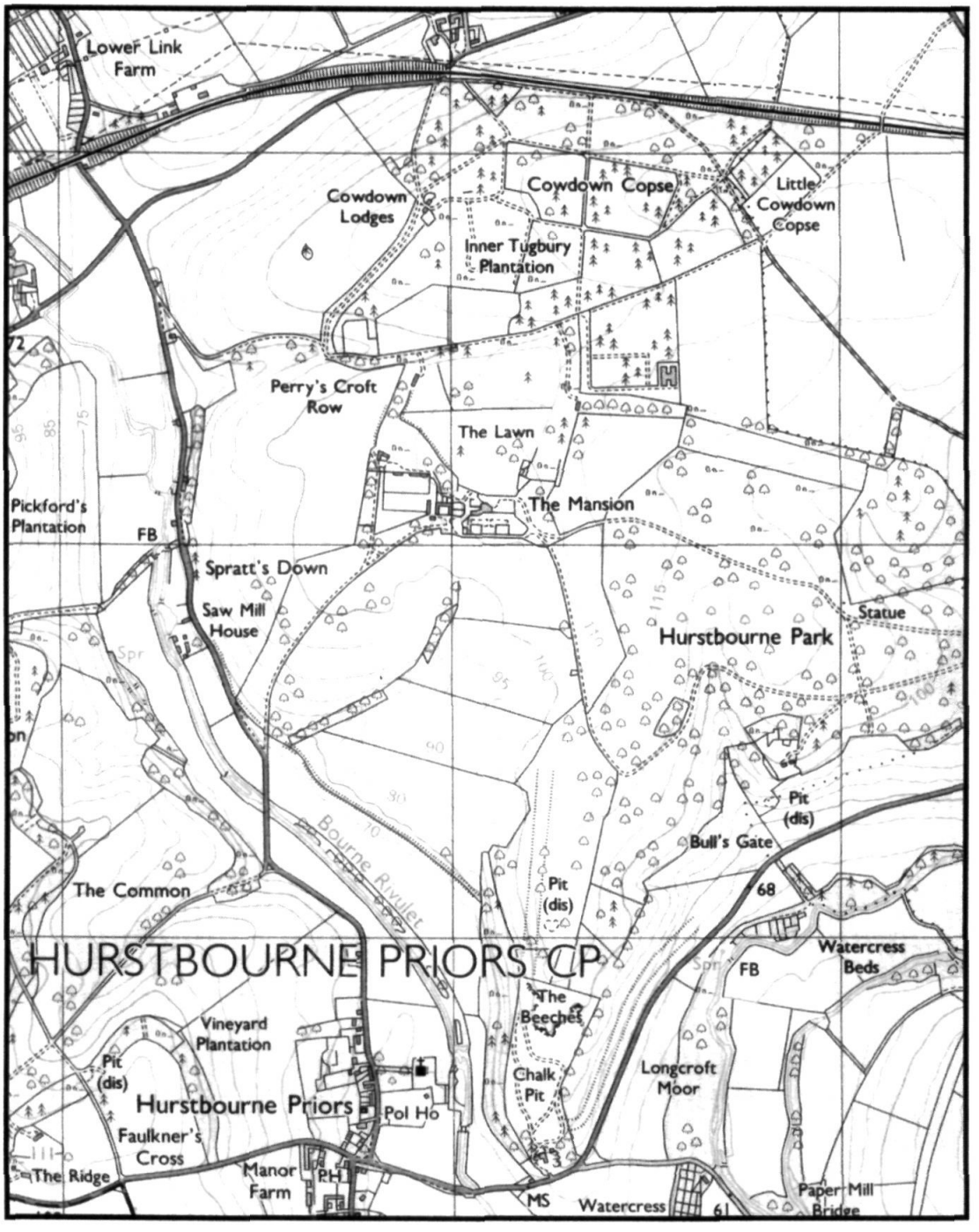

Fig. 1 Hurstbourne Park location map

theft from a 'grangia' of the Hospital of St. Cross, to which the church and rectorial glebe land of Hurstbourne Priors were appropriated. The latter is the hospital's custumal, which has a clause allowing the tenants of the glebe to collect a customary sheaf of barley at the 'grangia'. In both cases, 'grangia' should clearly be given its normal translation 'barn'. The hospital did not maintain a permanent establishment in Hurstbourne; indeed, it paid a small annual rent for a place in which to hold a court for its tenants (Stevens 1895, 111). The rectory house was in neighbouring Whitchurch, where the church was also appropriated to the hospital.

Stevens's second misunderstanding concerned the location of the manor house. He had seen a painting of the prior's former residence, transformed (as he thought) into a 17th-century mansion, with the Bourne Rivulet diverted to provide a water feature in front of it (Stevens 1895, 182–3). This was one of a pair of paintings by Jan Griffier the younger (Hedley and Rance 1987, facing p 16; Harris 1995, 197). Stevens's description was followed by *VCH,* which interpreted it to mean that the rivulet ran underneath the house, immediately east of Hurstbourne Priors church (*VCH* iv, 287). This has been accepted by the Ordnance Survey, the National Monuments Record and Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record, who all locate it in that position (Fig. 2; OS NGR SU 44014669; NMR SU 44NW 15; Hants SMR SU 44NW 15, no 28). There is, however, reason to doubt both the position and the transformation of the manor house, at least, into the mansion of the painting.

MANOR HOUSE TO MANSION: DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

When the priory was dissolved, the demesne farm was granted to John Milles and the manor house and park to Ellis Wynne, the bailiff appointed by the Crown to oversee the vacancy. After two further grants, the house was sold, along with the rest of the Hurstbourne estate, to Sir Robert Oxenbridge in 1558, and was described at that time as 'a fayre manor house' (*VCH* iv, 288). Sir Robert had property in Sussex, but lived with his family at Hurstbourne, and was buried in the church there in 1574 (Stevens 1895, 141–2). It is very unlikely that the prior's hall and chamber had not, by then, undergone a degree of alteration to make them into a convenient house for a gentleman. Such alterations are known to have taken place at the neighbouring manorial farms of Whitchurch and Overton around 1500 (Roberts 1996, 93; Deveson and Roberts 1999, 216–20). Hurstbourne is even more likely to have been upgraded as both Henry VIII and Elizabeth each spent a night there, in 1535 and 1569 respectively (*LPFD* vol 8, 392; Chambers 1923, vol iv, 85).

During the rest of the 16th century and the first part of the 17th, the estate was leased to various tenants, and finally sold to Sir Henry Wallop in 1636. In a survey of the estate drawn up in connection with the sale, the house was described as a 'mannor or capitall howse', with the normal range of outbuildings, including a brewhouse (HRO 15M84/1/1/1; 15M84/2/1/10/1–2; 15M84/3/1/1/128). Surrounded by gardens, orchards and fields, it was probably a substantial, though not a particularly grand house, of the period. Sir Henry's principal residence was at Farleigh Wallop, to which he and his descendants demonstrated their allegiance by choosing to be buried in the church there (Stevens 1895, 169–77). However, the house at Farleigh Wallop burnt down in 1667, and the family moved to Hurstbourne, which was already the larger house. Tax had been paid on twenty-six hearths at Hurstbourne in 1665, but on only seventeen at Farleigh Wallop (Hughes and White 1991, 197, 218). There is, however, no documentary evidence to support a complete rebuilding of Hurstbourne in the late-17th century. In fact there are strong indications that the house remained substantially unchanged for another hundred years.

It is true that when John Wallop inherited the estate at the age of seventeen, in 1707, he was about to embark on the fashionable 'grand tour' of Europe, where he was introduced to new architectural ideas (*DNB* 1899, 155). It was once thought that Hurstbourne was redesigned by Thomas Archer, a gentleman architect who worked at Chatsworth for a short time (Whiffen

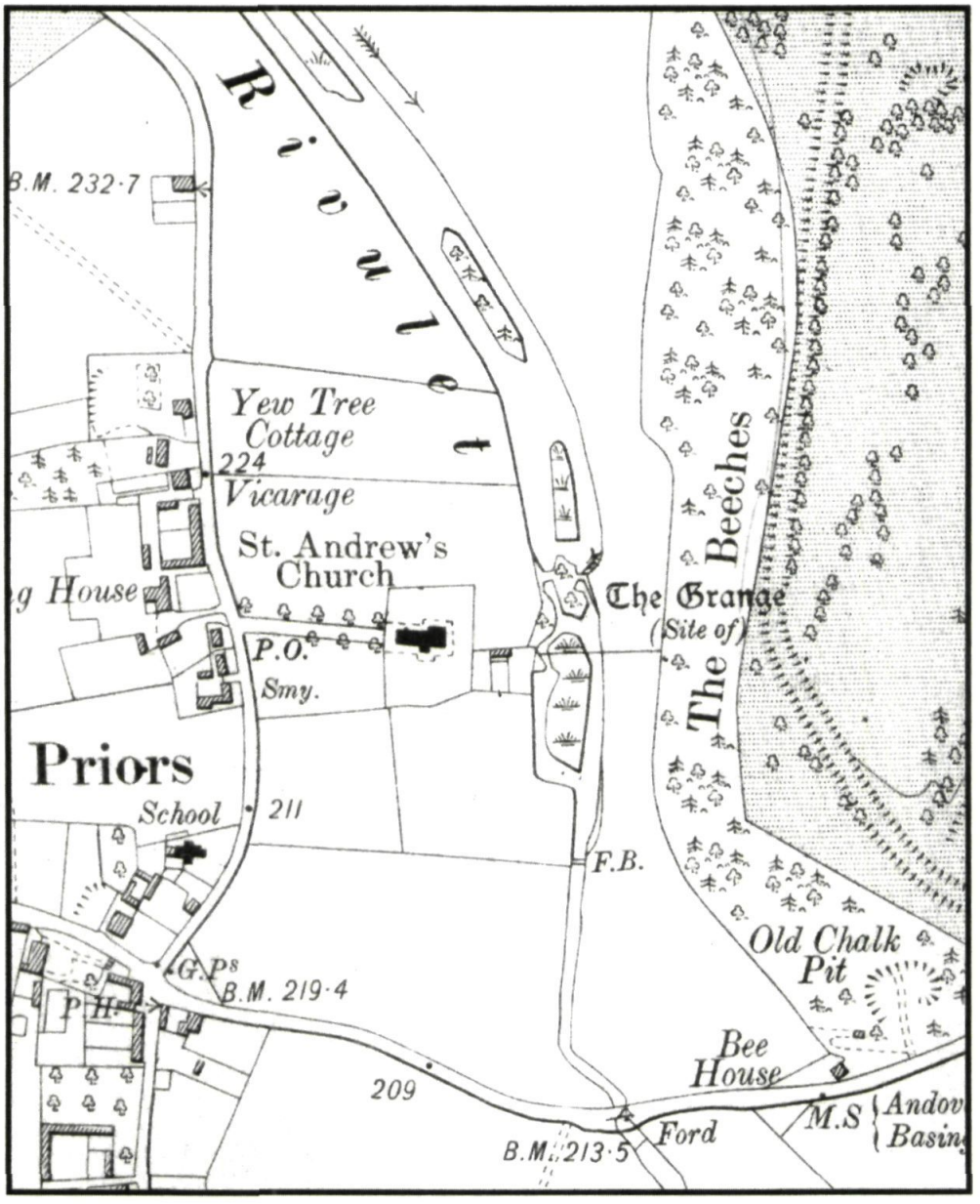

Fig. 2 Location map from OS 1911 edition, showing The Grange

1950, 7, 28, 43; Hocking 1991, 2–4). The suggestion was prompted by two designs by Archer for Hurstbourne, dated 1712, which are known from two small plans reproduced in the 18th century by Dr George Clarke. Clarke was warden of All Souls' College, Oxford, and a considerable patron

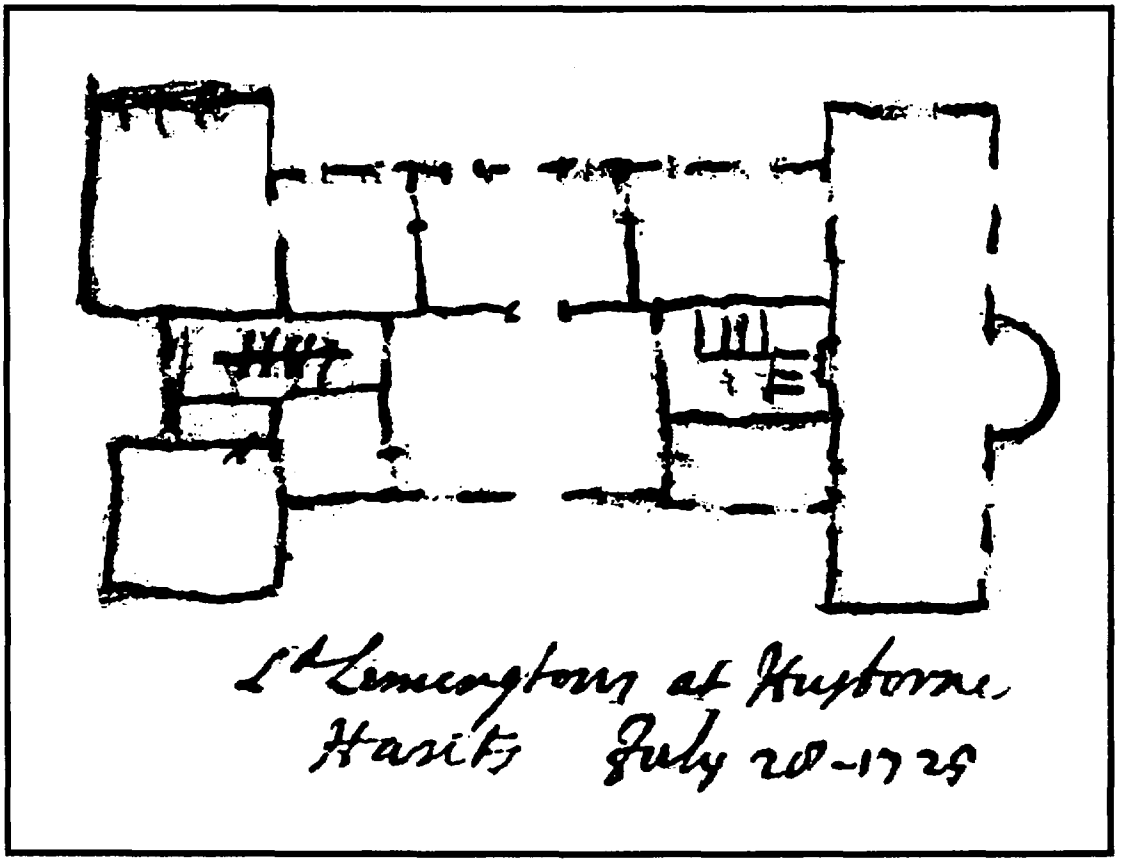

Fig. 3 Dr. Clarke's sketch of Hurstbourne, 1725

and connoisseur of architecture. His drawings show a baroque palazzo and a staircase which does not match the staircase in the palazzo plan (Colvin 1964, nos 106–7). However, these were not the only designs for Hurstbourne. Dr Clarke also made a rudimentary sketch of a plan for Hurstbourne by an Italian architect. It seems likely that this was sketched from a complete set of drawings, executed slightly earlier than the Archer plans, since a friend of the architect, who was named only as 'Giacomo', had to remind John Wallop in 1711 that he had not paid for them (Colvin 1964, no 199 and plate 124). 'Giacomo' may have been Giacomo Mariari, an architect who worked in Rome between at least 1711 and 1718 (Sicca 1986, 141; Blackett-Ord 2001, 85, 99).

Dr Clarke sketched Hurstbourne again, in 1725, five years after John Wallop had been created Viscount Lymington. The title of this sketch, 'Lord Limington's at Husborne, Hants, July 28, 1725' implies an actual rather than a proposed house (Fig. 3; Colvin 1964, no 200 and plate 126). It appears to have been originally a simple rectangle but had been extended with projecting corner rooms at one end and a single long room at the other, lit by a bow window, or perhaps a garden door. Staircases led from either side of the central entrance hall. Clarke had just visited Lord Lymington in 1725 when he wrote,

'I confess I was very much pleased with [Hurstbourne], being in some measure a judge of the improvement, by having been often at it before the alterations were begun' (BL Egerton MS 2540). The implication is that the alterations were recent, which may account for the comment of another traveller, John Loveday, in 1736 that the house looked 'rather new' (Markham 1984, 242). A directory which seems to display more local knowledge than is usual in such sources, suggested that the remodelled house had wings, but 'wings' is too grand a description for the extensions shown in Clarke's sketch (*HD* 1792, 937). Wings are, however, implied in the description by yet another traveller, Jeremiah Milles, who wrote in 1743 that 'there are handsome offices on each side' (BL Add MSS 15776, fo 270). They must have been added after Clarke's visit.

Archer's association with Hurstbourne, apart from the two plans, is now considered doubtful (Colvin 1995, 78) but it is probable that he designed Marlow Place in Buckinghamshire for Lord Lymington around 1720 (Colvin 1947, 8–9). In 1733 Lord Lymington rebuilt Farleigh Wallop, which was the residence named in his title, and where he and his wife were eventually buried (Pevsner and Lloyd 1967, 227–8). However, they did not live in either of the new houses. Farleigh Wallop was leased to tenants almost from the date of its rebuilding (HRO 15M84/3/1/1/94, 104, 108–9) as also was Marlow Place, at one time possibly to Frederick, Prince of Wales (Colvin 1947, 8). Lord Lymington was prominent at the Hanoverian court, and active in Hampshire politics, particularly in the general election of 1734 (Surry 1979, 217, 220). He held numerous official appointments, mainly in south Hampshire and the Isle of Wight (DNB 1899, 156). Hurstbourne was not very convenient for these, but his presence may have been required only on ceremonial occasions. He and his wife appear to have lived mainly at Hurstbourne – seven of his ten children were baptised in the church there between 1721 and 1729 – and he probably had a London house as well. It is evident that he began to consider grand designs for Hurstbourne from around 1710, but by 1725 had remodelled rather than rebuilt Sir Henry Wallop's manor house. The initiative for improving the house was once ascribed to Bluet Wallop, Lord Lymington's elder brother (Watney 1928, vol 1, lxii). But he died intestate and unmarried in 1707, aged only twenty-three, and hardly had time for building.

It has been suggested that the course of the Bourne Rivulet at Hurstbourne was redesigned in the early-18th century, based on analogy with Archer's design at Chatsworth for a grand cascade (Hocking 1991, 2). The Chatsworth cascade is at a right-angle to, and separate from, the rivulet. It is difficult to see anything similar in the present topography of Hurstbourne. There is, however, the evidence of Isaac Taylor's map of Hampshire, published in 1759 (Margary 1976, 8) and of the two Griffier paintings, of which there are two sets. One hangs in the present Lord Portsmouth's collection at Farleigh House, the other at Audley End House, where it is recorded in an inventory of 1797 as 'Two views of (old) Hursborne in Hants, Lord Portsmouth's seat, by Griffier' (Audley End Inventory, no 33). The inventory was taken on the death of Sir John Griffin Griffin, who had inherited Audley End from his aunt Elizabeth Countess of Portsmouth, second wife of the first Earl. The Audley End canvases are dated *c.* 1755, and are thought to be copies of those at Farleigh which have been dated to 1748 (Griffin 1836, 130; Harris 1985, 197, 306). Art historians are divided on the dates between which John Griffier the younger was active, but the 1748 paintings fall within the period on which they agree (Waterhouse 1994, 155; Turner 1996, vol 13, 647). Family tradition from the 18th century onwards is strongly in favour of the identification of the house as Hurstbourne House.

It is shown as a large building in a mixture of styles, the central portion quite plain, but flanked by projecting pavilions in a more baroque style (Fig. 4). A rectangular water feature, issuing from a grotto, stretches northward from the garden front, which is laid out with the grass plats and gravel walks typical of the early-18th-century garden style. An avenue leads into the distance from the opposite side, which presumably contains the entrance. In several respects the paintings accord with the description of the grounds

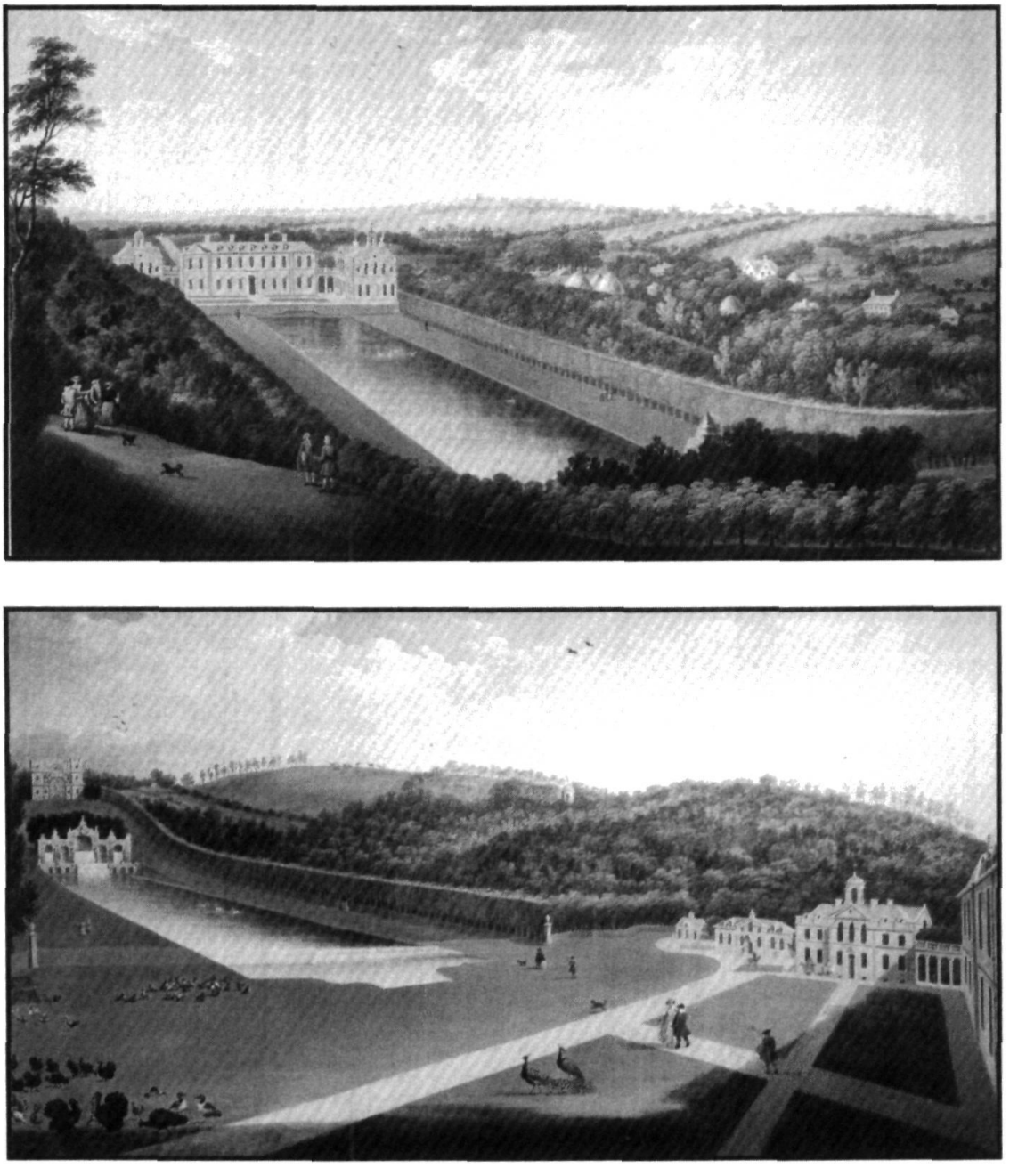

Fig. 4 Griffier paintings of Hurstbourne Park, 1748

Fig. 5 Isaac Taylor's map, 1759

given by Jeremiah Milles in 1743: 'A very long canal fronts the house, at the upper end of which is a cascade which is ornamented with some rustick work built of flint, which at a distance has a very good effect. The gardens are an insippid flat and laid out in the disagreeable old taste'. Stevens was suspicious of the topography shown in the paintings, and suggested that the mansion seems 'more elevated than one would imagine from its known site' (Stevens 1895, 182–3). The house is shown north of the church, east of the rivulet, and on high ground near the park boundary. Taylor's map, too, implies that the water feature was east of and parallel to the rivulet (Fig. 5). Stevens dismissed the topographical problem as the artist's faulty perspective, but Taylor's similar depiction of the water feature calls for explanation.

Isaac Taylor was a land-surveyor with a strong interest in antiquities, but his orthography, draughtsmanship and topographical accuracy have all been criticised, and historians are advised to use his maps with caution (Margary 1976, introd). His map of Dorset was based on more than a hundred estate surveys, but nothing is known of his methods in Hampshire, where only one estate map by him survives (HRO 33M49). Estate maps were profitable, since they were commissioned, but the return on county maps was less certain, and Taylor depended on subscribers, whose names were listed prominently around the edge of his Hampshire map. Among them was Lord Lymington, created first Earl of Portsmouth in 1743, and one of the principal dedicatees of the map, who was thanked for 'kind assistance' and 'many particular favours'. Taylor appears to have enhanced the situation of the Earl's house at Farleigh

Wallop, which is depicted north of its true location, in the centre of a small park, and approached by two avenues of trees, whereas it sat, and sits, close to a road and the demesne farm. Did he similarly enhance a rather modest house at Hurstbourne, to please his wealthy patron? Was one of the 'particular favours' the use of the Griffier paintings, on which to base his map?

By the mid-18th century, country-house painting was a well-established genre, and it is unlikely that a view of a named house could be entirely fictitious. Nevertheless, Jan Griffier the younger belonged to a school of architectural and landscape painters for whom architectural precision was subordinate to atmosphere (Harris 1985, 306). In 1776 Mrs. Lybbe Powys passed by Hurstbourne and found it 'a large and very ancient pile ... not one modern improvement about its environs' (Climenson 1899, 164). It seems unlikely that the house and garden of the paintings, although not then in the latest fashion, could have been so described. Mrs. Lybbe Powys did not break her journey there, and so the house must have been clearly visible from the road.

MILL, GARDEN AND PARK

If we conclude that the medieval manor house was remodelled but not rebuilt in the early-18th century, we must consider its likely site, 'known' but not specified by Stevens, and located by the Ordnance Survey in the middle of the rivulet, immediately east of the church. Such a situation is a most unlikely one for the prior's residence, but very plausible for the customary mill. The water is now channelled by two sluices in a manner reminiscent of a wheel-pit and by-pass, and the fall in the water-level would have lent itself to an overshot wheel. The rivulet below this point appears to have been artificially widened and squared-off on one side. Is this the feature enhanced by the creators of the paintings and map into the semblance of a canal? A 'fine sheet of water' was attributed to an earlier John Wallop, who held the manor between 1691 and 1694 (*WDH* 1859, 470). It is conceivable that the mill was demolished in his time, and the wheel-pit and by-pass turned into the small waterfall known for at least the last two centuries as 'The Cascades' (HRO TOP/173/2/5). Hurstbourne tenants still owed suit at a customary mill in the late-18th century, but the estate had a second mill which could have been used after the transformation of the first (HRO 15M84/2/1/10;15M84/1/1/2).

Canal and waterfall were both consistent with the garden style of the late-17th and early-18th centuries. At the same period, as deer-hunting declined as an aristocratic pursuit, parks began to be converted to more formal landscapes, and Hurstbourne was no exception. Avenues of trees were planted to converge on a domed structure containing a statue, which still exists. Planting may have begun in the 1690s (Lambert 2001, 2) but the first Earl is known to have been responsible for the terraces which linked the house with the rising ground of the park (WSRO E2/33/2). The statue, which may have been a souvenir of his grand tour, was probably replaced in the mid-19th century (Lambert 2001, 4) but the surrounding tufa structure is original. Tufa, an imported volcanic stone, was often used for ornamental buildings in the 18th century. A considerable quantity has also been observed in the water at 'The Cascades', where its presence supports the suggestion that the former mill-site had been converted into a grotto. House, canal, grotto, avenues, statue and a mock castle were all shown in the Griffier paintings, although in reality they could not have been visible from a single stand-point.

Another early-18th-century survival is the tower-like building known as 'The Bee House' (Mowl 1987). Mowl made tentative stylistic connections between this, Marlow Place and other Archer houses, and suggested that 'The Bee House' may originally have been a park boundary marker, a garden pavilion, or, even more tentatively, a sort of apiary. The latter suggestion, based on the name, was first made by Stevens (Stevens 1895, 183) and the true origin of the name has not been discovered. Mowl considered it unlikely, on several grounds, that the structure was a gate-lodge, although he perpetuated an error by Pevsner and Lloyd in calling it by the alternative name of 'Andover Lodge'. A garden pavilion is the most convincing explanation. Many such struc-

tures are known, with upper rooms for private parties and from which to appreciate the patterns of geometric gardens. Hurstbourne's 'insippid flat' grass plats probably replaced more interesting parterres best seen from above.

THE MANSION: ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE

The area south of the church had the field name 'Old Garden' in the 19th century (HRO 21M65/F7/147/1-2). This seems the most likely site for the medieval manor house and later mansion alike – close to the church, farm and mill, and on a flat site easily accessible from the road. Indeed, a 19th-century writer asserted that it 'stood in the centre of the valley, near the parish church' (*WDH* 1859, 470) and this is consistent with an assertion that the mansion was replaced because the second Earl's wife disliked the low-lying situation of the older house (Hussey 1941, 479). John Loveday and Jeremiah Milles both commented on this aspect of its site. The upper room of the Bee House faces directly across the area.

A concentration of debris on the west bank of the rivulet led the inspector looking for 'The Grange' in 1955 to conclude that the building was on that side (OS Comment, 1955). 'Humps and bumps' have been observed in the 'Old Garden' (Edwards 1995, pt II, i, 176). An aerial photograph shows several parchmarks, but none immediately suggests the location of the house (NMR 15154/3; Clark 2001, 4). Topographically there is a clear platform immediately south of the church, partly under a cricket pitch and partly in a meadow. However, the precise outline is indistinct, and a resistivity survey was undertaken in October 2001 in order to establish if this was indeed the house platform (Fig. 6, Area 1). It was hoped to determine the exact site, size and shape of the house, and its relationship with the rivulet and former canal. It was considered that resistivity would be more useful than magnetometry in locating such a potentially large structure. In the event, the survey did not recover evidence of the house, and although the platform appears to be made-up, it is devoid of structural features (Clark 2001, 11).

The survey was transferred to the eastern side of the rivulet, since that location accords better with the 1759 map and does not conflict with the travellers' accounts (Fig. 6, Area 2). This site produced evidence of several structural features, but none conformed with the remains of a large formal house. There were, however, some anomalies which may have resulted from the redirection of the Bourne Rivulet and from the relatively recent laying of a water pipe. There is also evidence for a small building on the eastern edge of the site (Clark 2001, 11). A further survey in October 2002 slightly further north was likewise unsuccessful in locating the house, although it revealed traces of small ephemeral features and ground disturbance probably associated with the mill (Fig. 6, Area 3; Strutt 2002, 7). It is unlikely that the house lay further north than Area 3, as it would then have been too far from the east-west road to be clearly seen by travellers. The east bank of the rivulet has therefore been ruled out as the site of the house.

There are two remaining possibilities. Either the house was in the south-eastern part of the field on the western side of the rivulet, which was not surveyed, or the foundations were so completely removed that they have left no trace detectable by resistivity. The later mansion was said to have been built largely from the materials of the old house (*HD* 1792, 937). The debris remaining from its demolition probably accounts for the scatter of stone, brick, tile and 17th-and 18th-century pottery which was visible on the edge of the rivulet in 1955 and can still be seen in the roots of fallen trees and when service trenches are dug. The platform is probably formed from similar demolition material.

CONCLUSION

The prior's residence may have been completely rebuilt before the Dissolution, but there is still no documentary or archaeological evidence for its exact location. It cannot have been far from, and may have underlain, the house inherited by the first Earl of Portsmouth. Dr Clarke's comments demonstrate that this house was improved, prob-

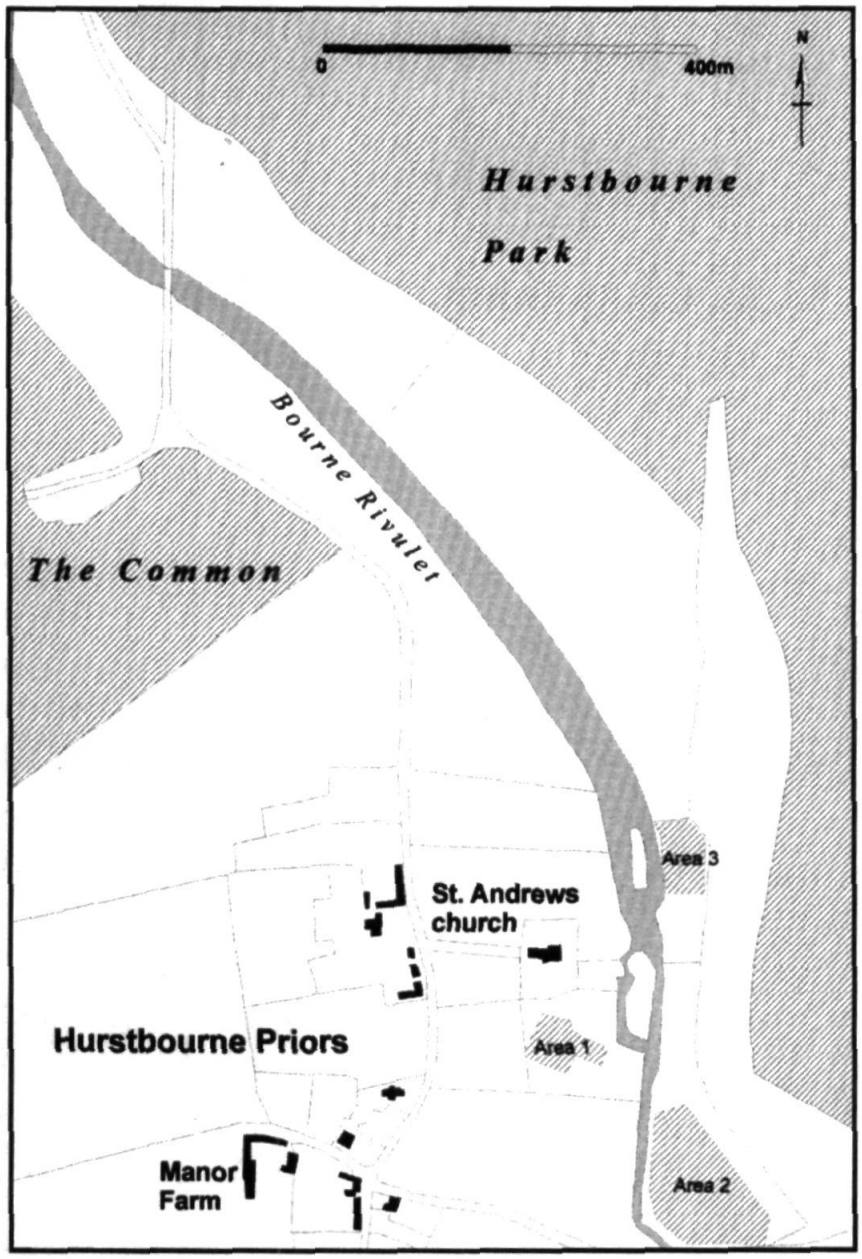

Fig. 6 Location of the 2001 surveys (Areas 1 and 2) and the 2002 survey (Area 3)

ably in the early-1720s, but none of his sketches gives any indication of the surroundings. The Earl or his immediate predecessors may already have made concessions to fashion in garden design, in the form of alterations to the rivulet, avenues of trees, statue, mock castle and grotto, and a pavilion, whether or not designed by Archer. A variety of sources testifies to the former existence of all these features, but the principal evidence for their appearance are the Taylor map and the Griffier paintings.

Failure to locate the mansion by survey on the eastern side of the Bourne Rivulet reinforces the impression that the map was based on the paintings rather than on reality. If Milles was correct, the house drawn by Clarke in 1725 was later extended by wings, but if it had been as large as the paintings indicate, it seems unlikely that it could have vanished so totally without archaeological trace. The canal was not a separate feature from the river, but a modification of it, and so the house cannot have been as precisely aligned with it as the paintings suggest. Griffier certainly enhanced the surrounding landscape by false perspective and by incorporating disparate elements into a single view. It is more than likely that he idealised the mansion and its immediate setting. Image and reality probably did not coincide, but in the absence of detectable archaeological remains, absolute certainty has eluded us.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Abbreviations
BL: British Library
HRO: Hampshire Record Office
Hants SMR: Hampshire Sites and Monuments Record
NMR: National Monuments Record
OS NGR: Ordnance Survey National Grid Reference
WCL: Winchester Cathedral Library
WSRO: West Suffolk Record Office
CPR: Calendar of Patent Rolls
DNB: Dictionary of National Biography
HD: Hampshire Directory
LPFD: Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII
VCH: Victoria County History of Hampshire
WDH: White Directory of Hampshire

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