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# AIR PHOTOGRAPHY OF THE REMAINS OF OLD GARDENS IN BRITAIN

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## Résumé

Les vestiges des jardins détectés grâce aux anomalies phytologiques ont été pendant longtemps ignorés par la plus grande majorité des archéologues de terrain britanniques, n'étant étudiés que par quelques spécialistes. Il est maintenant devenu clair que de tels restes sont très répandus et subsistent souvent sous forme de micro-reliefs terrestres alors que la maison qui leur était associée a complètement disparu. Sur certains sites, les traces des jardins dissimulent parfois ceux des précédentes périodes d'occupation; à cause de la suppression des monastères par le roi Henri VIII, c'est devenu la règle générale sur les sites monastiques. La plupart des jardins du début du XVIIIe siècle ont habituellement été labourés, mais ils peuvent maintenant être détectés à travers le sol et les anomalies de terrain. Mêmes les jardins des XIXe et XXe siècles révèlent leurs secrets quand les motifs des parterres décoratifs réapparaissent sous les pelouses modernes par temps de grande sécheresse.

## Abstract

The physical remains of gardens were for a long time ignored by the majority of British field archaeologists, being studied only by specialists. It has now become clear that such remains are widespread and often survive as earthworks where the associated house has totally disappeared. Garden earthworks will sometimes overlie and obscure those of earlier phases of occupation of the same site; because of the Dissolution of the Monasteries by King Henry VIII this is common on monastic sites. The large formal gardens of the earlier XVIIIth century have usually been ploughed up, but can now be traced through soil and crop-marks. Even XIXth- and XXth- centuries gardens have secrets to reveal when the designs of decorative parterres reappear in modern lawns in times of severe drought.

## Zusammenfassung

Die physischen Reste von Gartenanlagen wurden lange Zeit von einer Mehrzahl der Archäologen auf britischem, Boden ignoriert, und lediglich von einigen wenigen Spezialisten untersucht. Es ist nun klar geworden, dass solche Reste weitverstreut und noch in Form von Landreliefs aufzufinden sind, während die ihnen assoziierten Bauten vollständig verschwunden sind. Einige Stätten verbergen durch das Relief manchmal die vorhergehende Siedlungsperiode. Bedingt durch die Klosterauflösungen von Heinrich VIII ist die Auffindung auf den Klosterstätten sehr einfach geworden. Der Grossteil der aus dem Beginn des 18. Jahrhunderts stammenden Gärten war gewöhnlich bestellt, kann aber heute zwischen Boden und Bodenabweichungen wieder aufgefunden werden. Ebenso geben die Gärten des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts ihre Geheimnisse die Bodendekoration betreffend frei, da diese während grosser Trockenperioden unter dem Rasen aufscheinen.

The remnants of old gardens is not a subject to which the majority of field archaeologists in Britain paid much attention until very recently - say ten years ago. It had seemed to be a field for specialists, for garden historians. But surveys by the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and by others have now

proved that this is not so (see appended bibliography). Garden remains are relatively common and, in the nature of things, tend to be laid out on top of, or in the midst of, archaeological remains of other periods. It is therefore essential to be able to recognize and interpret them, and here air-photography makes its usual vital contribution.

In a few places a ruined house and its abandoned gardens survive together sufficiently intact to be instantly intelligible. Thus, at Bradgate House

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in Leicestershire (fig. 1) we see (below the ruins of the house abandoned in 1719) a large rectangular garden divided by axial paths into four quarters and surrounded by a raised walk. A bridge leads on to a slightly less formal garden in which two large level spaces are separated by a central raised walk. A similar arrangement, but on a smaller scale, is seen to the right of the house. Beyond these formal gardens a number of irregular enclosures cluster together and incorporate water features probably surviving from an earlier phase.

This complex of house and garden-remains is given definition by its surviving walls. When only earthworks survive, we require extreme lighting conditions, with the sun low in the sky, in order to see and understand them fully. At Strixton in Northamptonshire (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.3; cf. RCHME, 1979, fig. 126) the scale is modest; the most distinctive garden feature is a sunken garden (east of the church) with a raised circular bed at its centre. At Wakerley in the same county (RCHME, 1975, pl. 20, fig. 112) the raised walk on the south side of the 17th-century formal garden is in two tiers, and several areas south of the house appear to be divided by tree-lined paths, probably trained to provide shady walks.

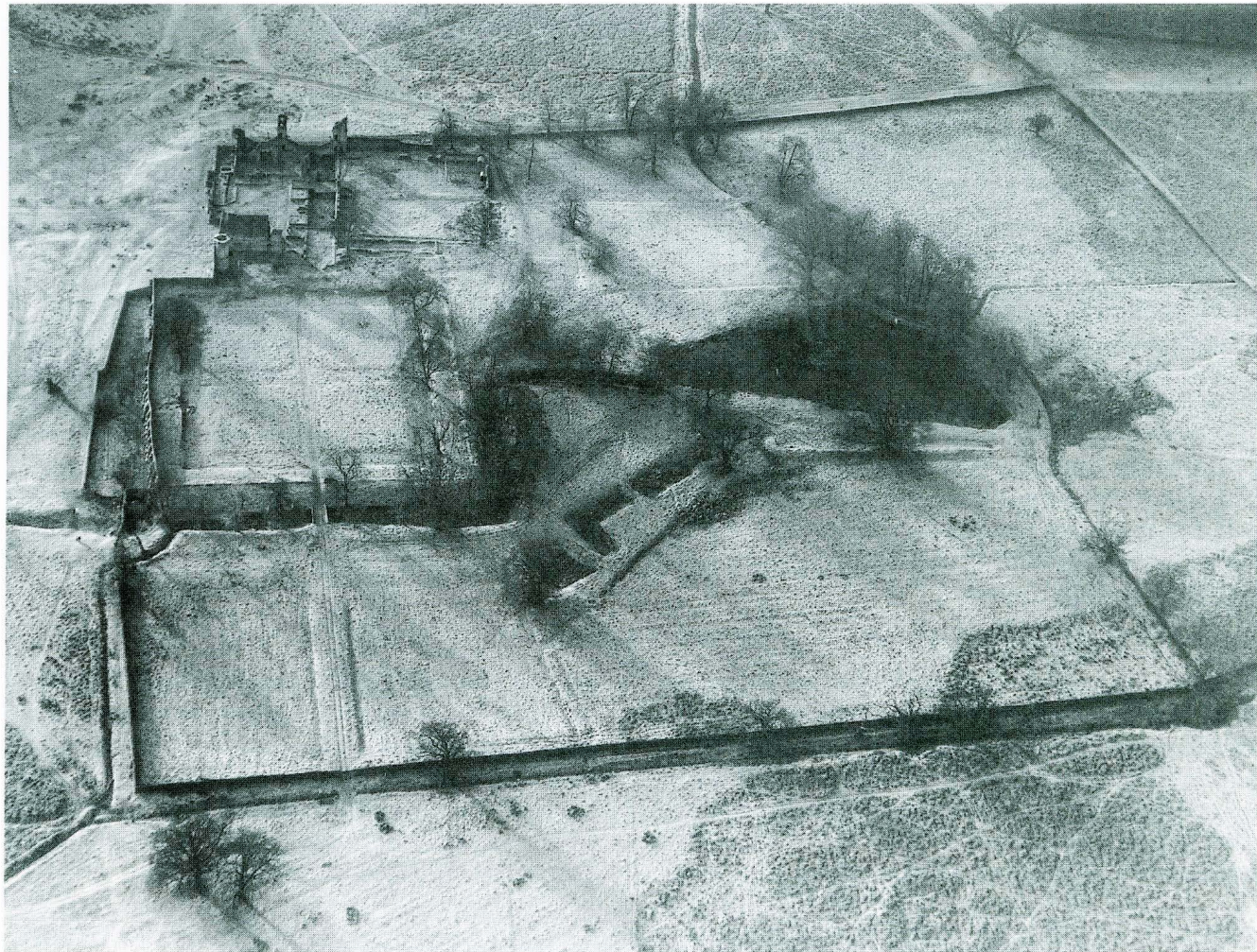


Fig. 1 : ruined house with abandoned gardens, Bradgate House (Leics). 30 January 1966. Photo : Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

When the ground is sloping, it becomes possible to achieve more elaborate effects by means of terracing. At both the sites next to be described the house originally stood on the upper side of the terraces. At Woodford in Northamptonshire (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.4; cf. RCHME, 1975, fig. 119) the upper of two terraces is flanked by raised walks from which to view the geometrical patterns of the flower beds, and a central path can be traced down two flights of steps across both terraces. At Wing Park in Buckinghamshire (fig. 2) there are again two main terraces, with raised walks, but further unterraced gardens continue below them. One of the most impressive terraced gardens, because of its fine state of preservation, is at Harrington Hall in Northamptonshire (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.5; cf. RCHME, 1979, fig. 74), where the 17th-century house was sited below a flight of five terraces. A sunken garden south-west of the house had axial paths, a central pool, and raised walks on three sides. The five terraces were linked by ramped paths in cuttings: the upper three contained ponds of various shapes; on the lower three we can see traces of paths between the beds. We also note the line of trees and tree-pits, going back to the early 18th century, lining the drive down to the house.

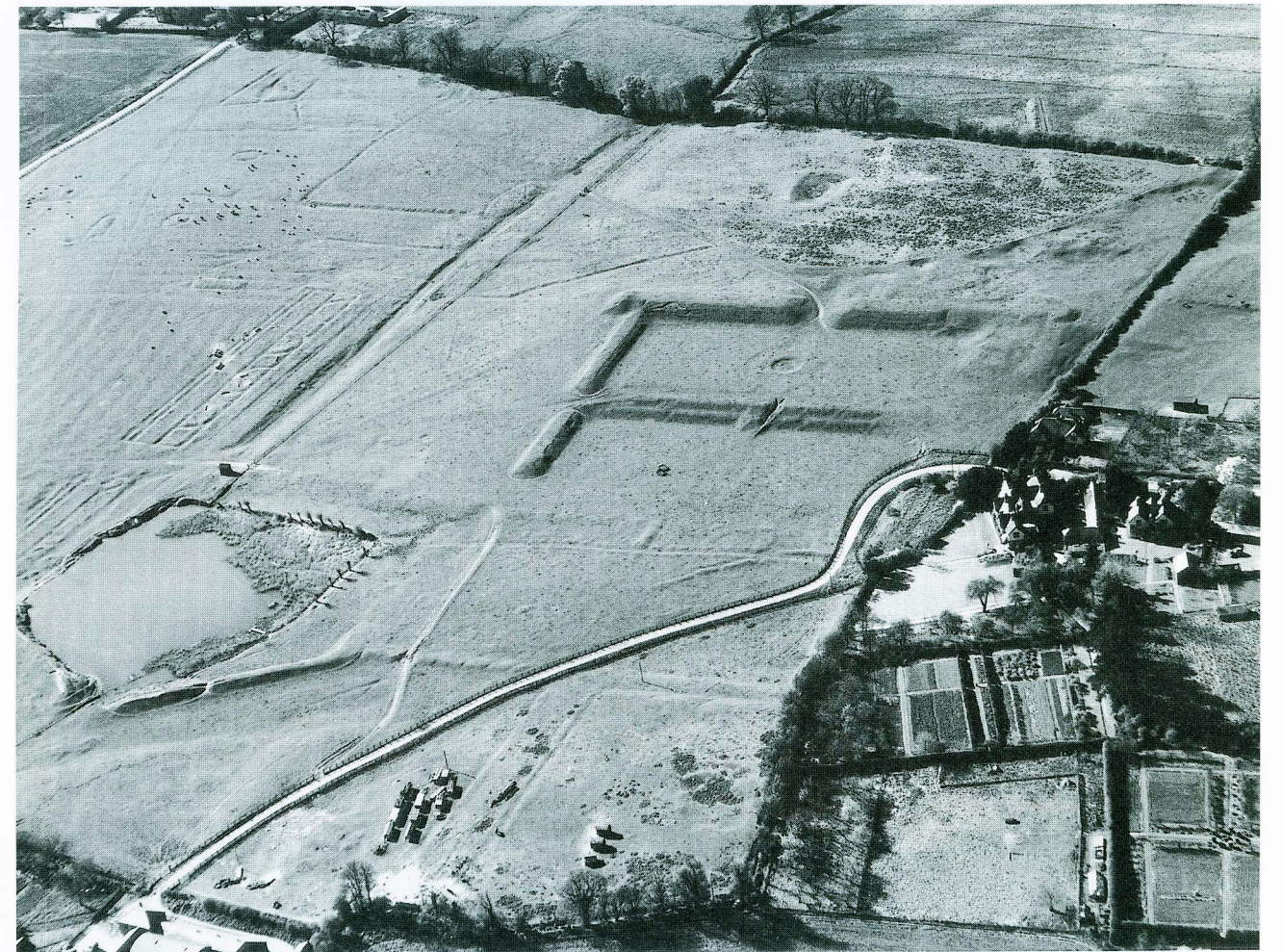


Fig. 2 : site of former house (upper right) and of associated formal gardens on a gentle slope, Wing Park (Bucks). (An area of former medieval ridge and furrow, top left, was later enclosed and used to breed rabbits.) 26 April 1954. Photo : Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs, Crown copyright.

Garden remains often form one part of a long sequence of settlement and habitation and there is a danger that they may be attributed to a phase other than their own. In Britain, the Dissolution of the Monasteries by King Henry VIII in the middle of the sixteenth century led to many abbeys and priories becoming the site of a big house with accompanying gardens, and often it is the remains of the gardens that have survived more obviously than those of the house. This in turn may result in misidentification. At Brooke Priory, in Leicestershire (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.6 : cf. HARTLEY, 1983, 9), no one indeed would now suppose that the earthworks belonged to anything but a sixteenth- or seventeenth-century garden; in addition to familiar features such as terraces flanked by raised walks, there is also a surrounding moat with prospect-mounds at two of the corners. The remains at Thornton Abbey in Humberside (fig. 3) are, however, more enigmatic. In the foreground of the photograph are the excavated foundations of the abbey church and cloister. In the background stands a seventeenth-century secular gatehouse. The ground in between is occupied by slight earthworks in a lay-out that appears to be related more

closely to the gatehouse than to the religious buildings, but further earthworks to the north of these are not so readily characterized or assigned to any individual phase.

At Stainfield in Lincolnshire (fig. 4) we can see a complex succession involving a medieval abbey and village, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardens, and nineteenth-century landscaping (RCHME, 1991, figs. 124-5). Regrettably, these remarkable earthworks have now been destroyed. The seventeenth-century gardens beyond the Hall seem to have been imposed on one end of the deserted medieval village. In 1766 a plan shows that the level area within the L-shaped walk was occupied by two bowling greens, divided by a path; next to them at that time was the kitchen garden; beyond (but perhaps no longer in that use) was a probable wilderness.

In the early eighteenth century the formal gardens attached to great houses in Britain extended ever further into the surrounding park, but a reversal of taste soon led to their destruction. The more informal parkland that took their place has





Fig. 3 : at Thornton Abbey (Humberside) how many of the earthworks seen in the upper part of the photograph are contemporary with the abbey, and how many belong to later secular use of the same site? 16 January 1973. Photo : Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

often been ploughed up in recent times, with the result that the best evidence for their design and extent is now provided by air-photographs of crop- and soil-marks. Derrick Riley's stunning photograph of crop-marks at Worksop Manor in Nottinghamshire (fig. 5) may be compared with one of the designs prepared by Lord Petrie about

1743 (BINNEY, 1973). On the photograph we can recognize the central canal and the rectangular groups of tree-pits, as well as a surrounding moat or ha-ha not shown on the drawing. A probable pond filling the space between two blocks of tree-pits on the left side is not matched on the right and may be a later insertion. The XVIIIth-century dra-

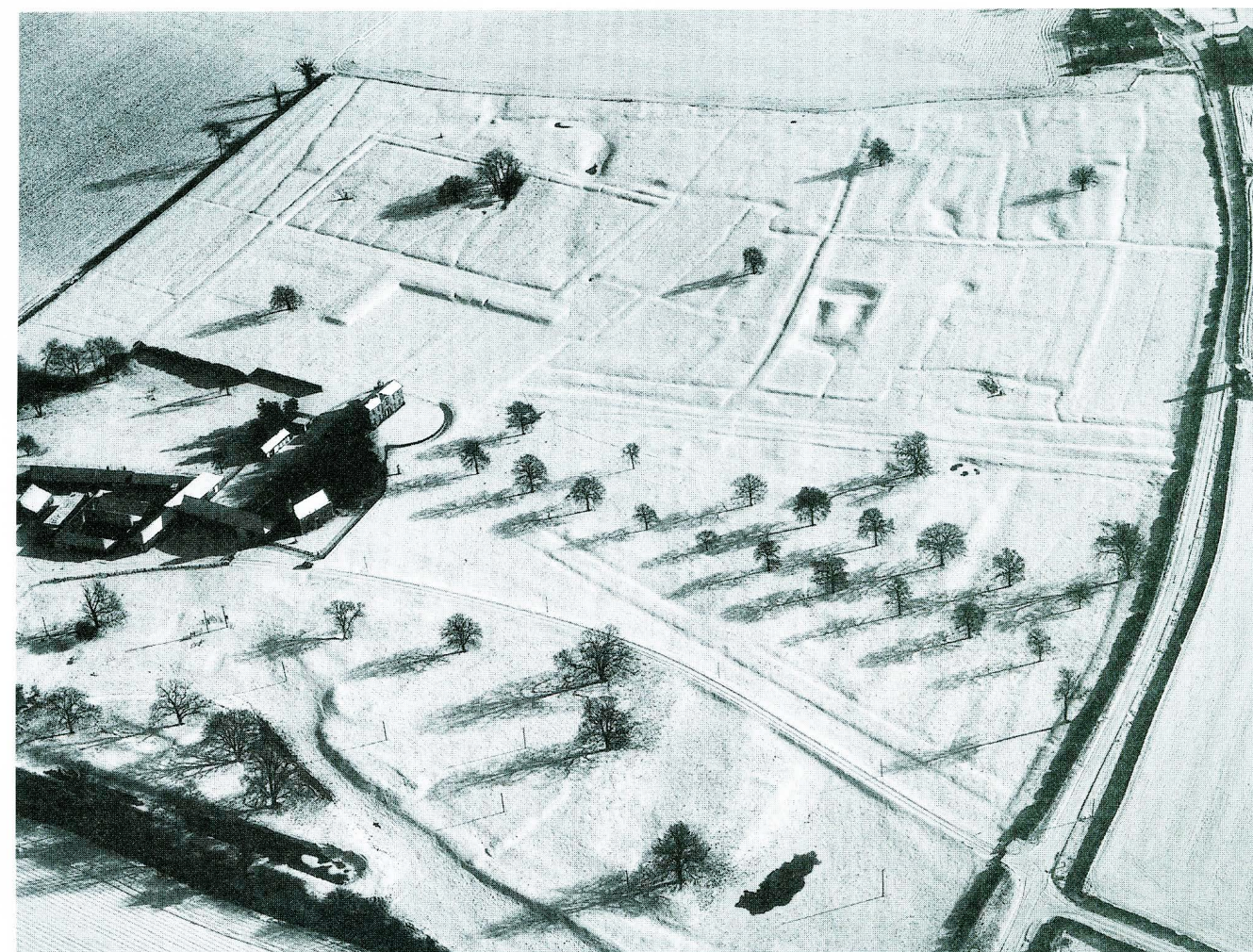


Fig 4 : earthworks at Stainfield (Lincs) : in the upper half of the photograph 17th-century gardens encroach on a deserted medieval village; in the centre a 19th-century avenue has been laid out across an early-18th-century park. 10 February 1978. Photo : Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs.

wings for its part, helps us to identify possible traces of parterres in the park, especially on the left of the photograph.

At Eastbury House in Dorset the gardens were designed by Charles Bridgeman about 1730, but abandoned when the house was demolished fifty years later (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.10; cf. RCHME, 1972, 92). The lawns, flowerbeds and canal in front of the house were ploughed up before 1840, and the rectangular groves of trees were transformed into irregular belts suited to a new and more informal layout. This nineteenth-century version of the park was not without its architectural interest, however. Closing a vista at its north-east margin was a feature whose ploughed remains yielded soil-marks apparently showing a broad moat claspings a circular island, with some kind of architectural embellishment such as a colonnade, and further adorned with statues standing in, or rising from, the water (WILSON, 1991, fig 3.13).

The lost designs of other nineteenth- and twentieth- century gardens can sometimes be recovered through observation of the effects of parching on the turf of grazed or mown grass. At Clumber House in Nottinghamshire the house was

remodelled in the 1850s but demolished about 1938 to make way for the buildings visible in fig. 6. Parching in the drought of 1949 revealed much of the layout of the gardens as they had been ninety years before. A recurring pattern was of rectangular spaces divided into quarters by axial paths meeting in a central circle, with circular beds in each of the quarters. On the shore of the lake (in the left foreground) this pattern is seen in an extended version, with trees planted in the outer compartments and along the two short sides of the oblong. These trees would then, of course, have been neatly clipped. A path beside the lake ran past a seven-sided feature, perhaps containing a gazebo or summerhouse. Similar parching in 1973 at Lilford Hall in Northamptonshire (WILSON, 1991, fig. 3.16) revealed the elaborate pattern of two former parterres on the upper terrace, where normally there is nothing to see but an unbroken expanse of green lawn.

Such examples could be multiplied many times. Garden archaeology has become an accepted field of archaeological study in Britain, involving the full range of exploratory techniques, including topographical and geophysical survey, excavation and (of course) aerial reconnaissance.



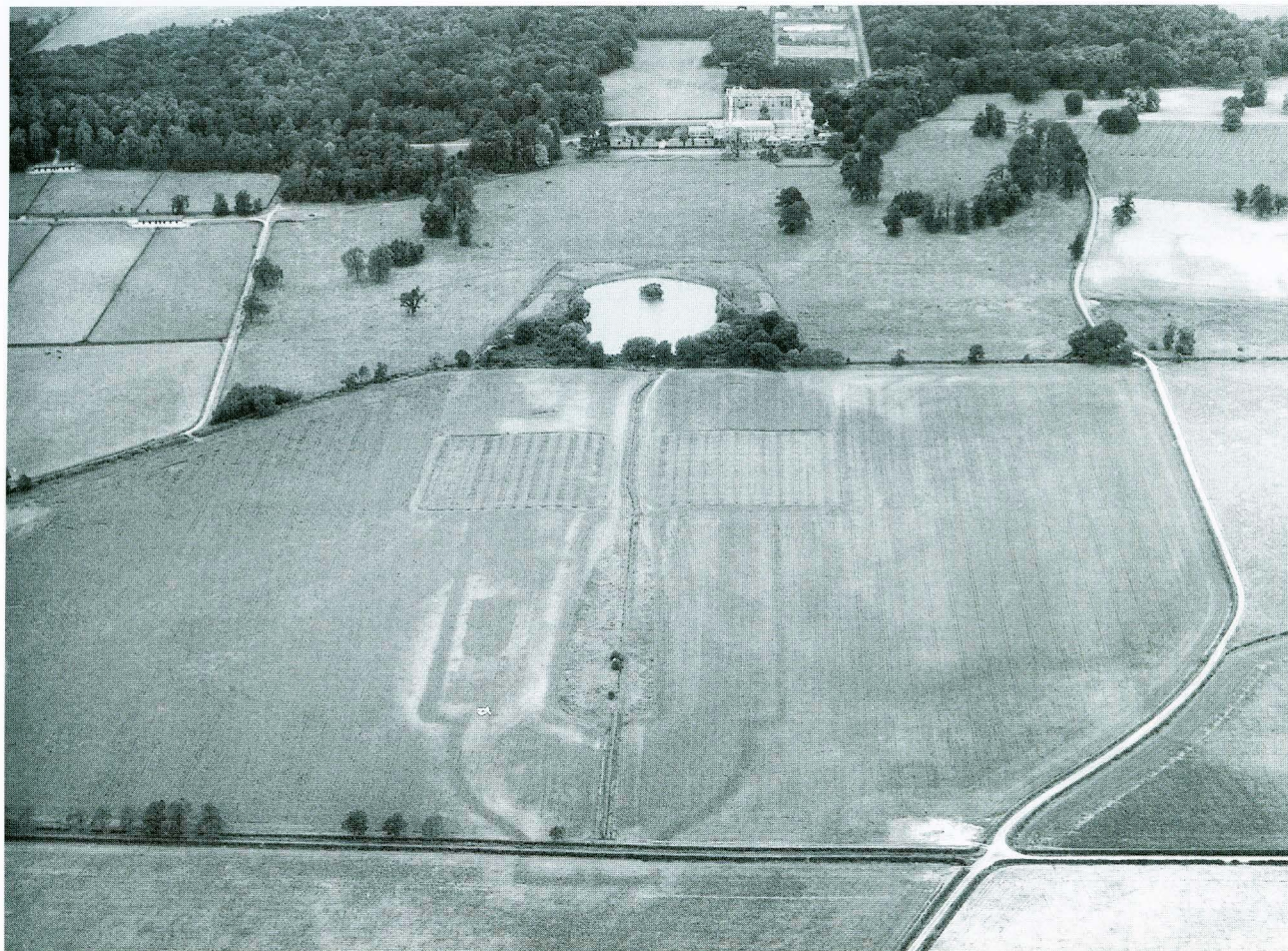


Fig. 5 : crop-marks of the formal gardens laid out c. 1745 at Worksop Manor (Notts). 27 July 1977. Photo : D.N. Riley.

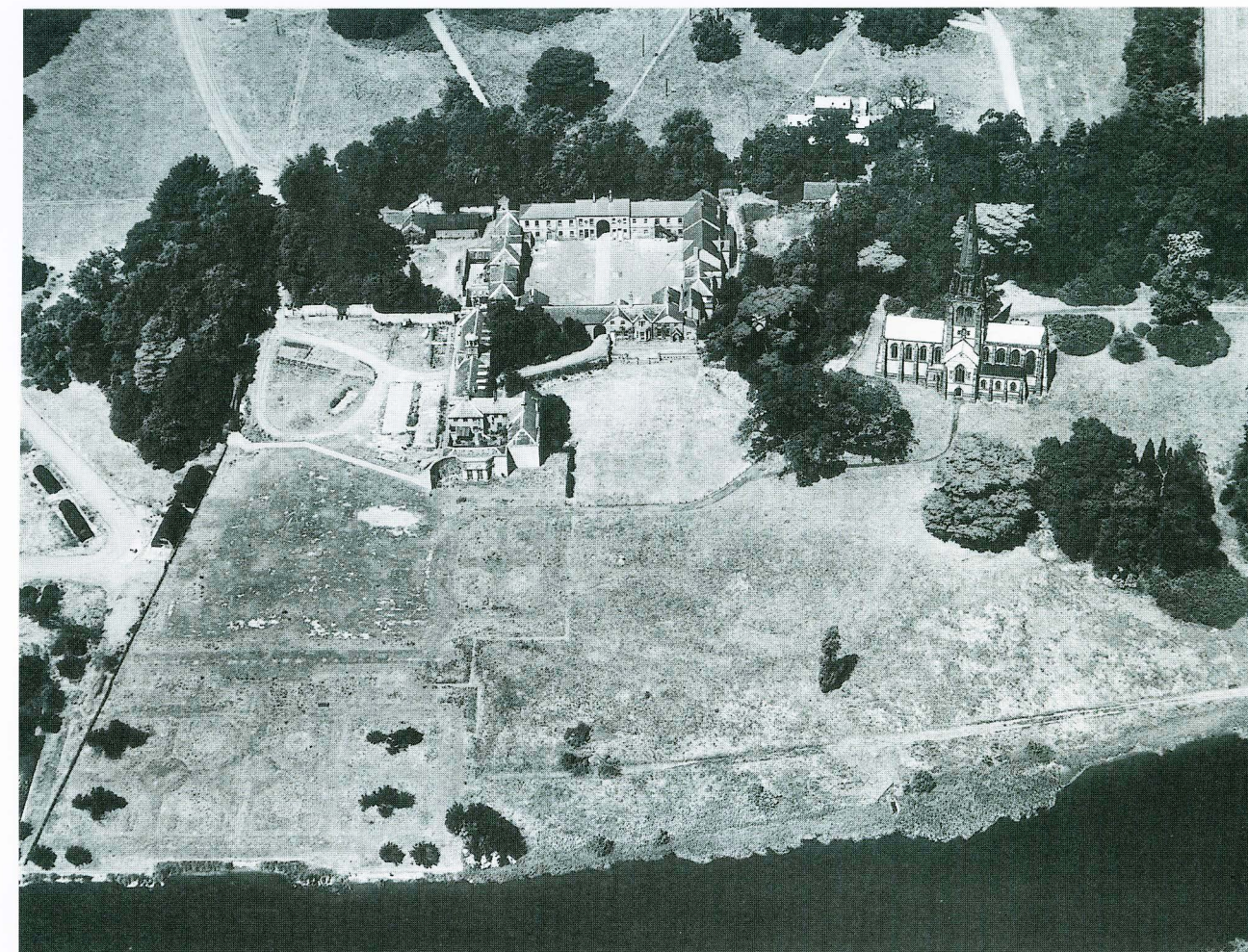


Fig. 6 : a garden layout of the mid-19th century is revealed by parching of the grass at Clumber House (Notts). 13 July 1949. Photo : Cambridge University Collection of Air Photographs, Crown copyright

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