

SAWSTON HALL, 1991 Tennis Court development

Introduction

Following advice from the County Archaeologist concerning the proposed development of two tennis courts in the orchard at Sawston Hall, an archaeological evaluation was undertaken in order to establish the presence/absence and character of any archaeological remains possibly associated with the sixteenth century hall or the earlier building of Pirof's Manor (S.M.R: 01267). Of prime concern was the location of the possible north leg of the 'moat' which was thought to flank the northern bank of the garden.

Method of Investigation

Two trenches were laid out within the orchard, taking into consideration rows of apple trees which would remain in place during the development to form a screen.

The trenches were excavated using a J.C.B.. Trench I measured 36m by 1.50m (the width of a J.C.B. bucket) and covered most of the length of the proposed development area (see trench location plan). The south end of the trench lay at a distance of c. 8m from the existing yew hedge which separated the 'sunken' garden from the orchard.

Trench II measured 16.40m by 1.50m and was located 12.50m to the east of Trench I. The south end of the trench commenced approximately 6.5 metres from the hedge line.

The Geology

The topsoil, to a depth of c. 0.18m, comprises a mid-brown sandy silt loam. This is a light, friable loam which contained very occasional small fragments of tile and brick, and even fewer fragments of 19 - 20th century china.

The 'B'-Horizon was seen to occur to a depth of c. 0.25-0.30m and comprises a light orangey brown sandy clay containing moderate fine to small chalk fragments and flints. This horizon was cleaned and studied in the attempt to discover any former land-use of the site (e.g. the depressions and ridges of medieval ridge-and-furrow which can often be detected within buried strata even after landscaping). However, no such pattern was in evidence and the 'B'-Horizon was undisturbed.

The natural consists of a chalky marl with flint nodules and occurred at an average height of c. 23.63m O.D. across the site.

The Archaeology

No archaeological remains were revealed within the evaluation trenches. All that was evident was a quantity of fragmentary brick and mortar rubble laid beneath the topsoil at the south end of both trenches. This appears to have been a make-up layer for a footpath along the northern side of the yew hedge, a fact confirmed by the Hall gardeners.

Conclusions

It is surprising that despite the complex building history of Sawston Hall and the earlier Pirot's Manor no trace of archaeology was visible in the trenches. The absence of topsoil finds alone (pottery sherds, iron nails, bone etc.) is itself striking. A 'moated house' at Duxford (Evans, 1990), to the south-west of Sawston, revealed a significant quantity of pottery during fieldwalking, which dated to Medieval and Post-Medieval periods. The nature of the topsoil and the 'B'-Horizon, together with the absence of finds, indicates that the area of the present orchard may have always been meadows or garden, and, therefore, was subjected to minimal human action/disturbance.

A question still remains concerning the 'moat'. A survey, held in the archive of Sawston Hall, commissioned in the fifteenth century (?) to record Pirot's Manor (J. Corsellis, *pers. comm.*) makes no mention of a moat associated with the building. The fishponds to the south of the present 'moat' are referred to along with a description of the house and gardens. This suggests that Pirot's Manor, the precursor of Sawston Hall, was unmoated.

The date of the present 'moat' ditch (interestingly marked 'pond' on the recent Ordnance Survey map) is unclear. It may well have been constructed at the same time as the Hall in the mid sixteenth century. The short length of ditch and the substantial bank to the east of the Hall, as well as the northern bank, remain of more enigmatic date. It is unclear whether the north and eastern earthworks are contemporary with the southern 'moat' ditch. They may have been a later (18th century?) 'folly', replicating a prestigious boundary demarcation rather than acting as defensive earthworks.

Moats were constructed in the 12th-14th centuries and were the ditched-enclosed households of local lords and well-off farmers. By the 16th century moated sites were no longer being built and many were turned into gardens (Taylor 1972:247). There is considerable debate as to their exact function. Generally, however, the purpose of their ditches does

not seem to have been defensive, but rather for prestige (see Taylor 1972; Clarke 1984: 47-62).

The evaluation trenches excavated in the orchard would have indicated the presence of a moat ditch had there been one in the vicinity. The absence of the ditch and paucity of artefactual material would argue against the existence of a moat in that area.

Therefore the eastern, and more particularly the northern, bank are thought to be garden features providing landscaping for the sunken garden to the east of the Hall, screening that area of the Hall grounds from the hinterland beyond.

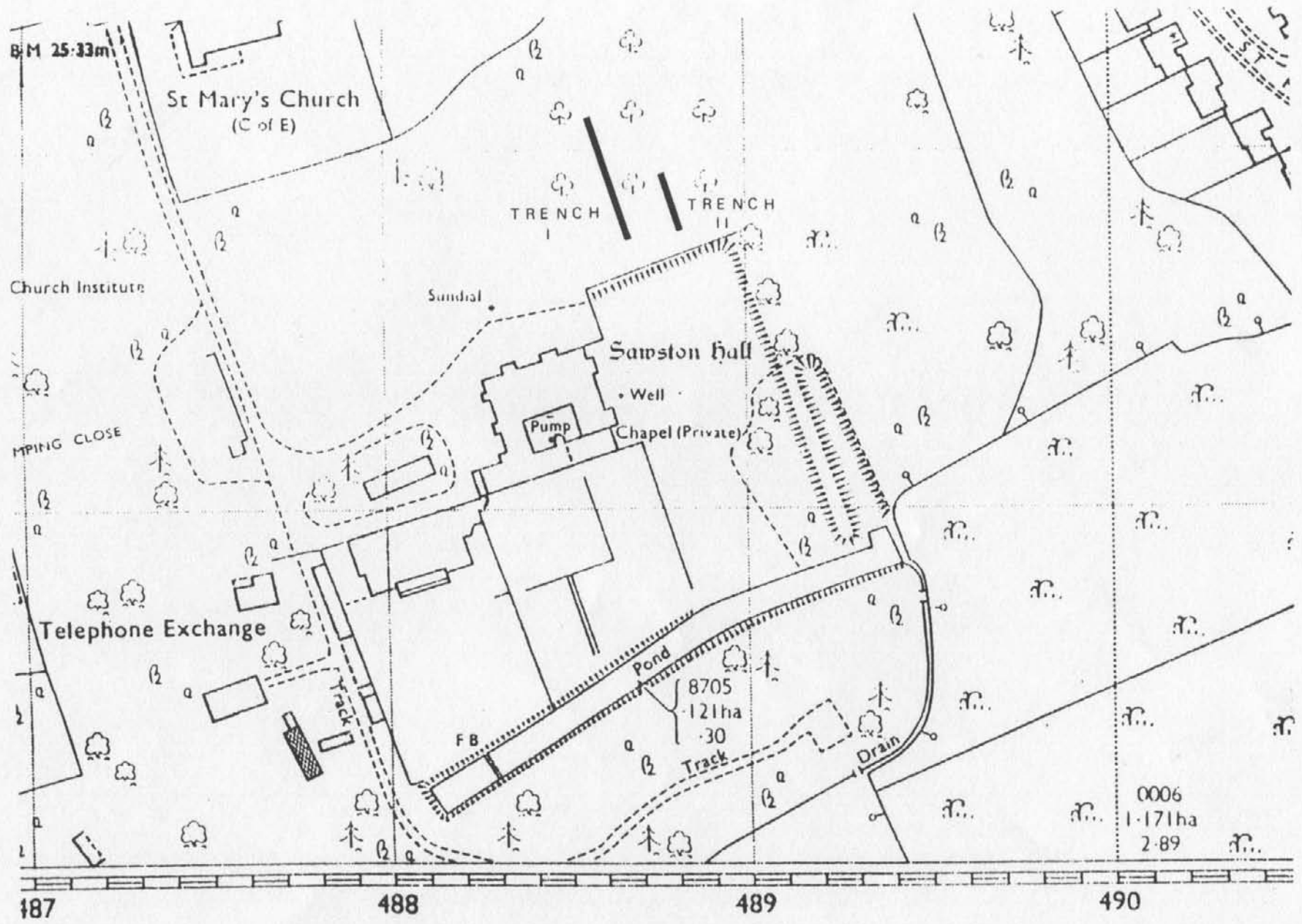
Bibliography

Clarke, H. 1984. *The Archaeology of Medieval England*. London: Colonnade.

Evans, C. 1990. *The Duxford Archaeological Assessment*. Cambridge Archaeological Unit.

Taylor, C. 1972. Medieval moats in Cambridgeshire, in P.J.Fowler (ed.), *Archaeology and the Landscape*: 237-248. London: John Baker.

Kasia Gdaniec,
Cambridge Archaeological Unit,
13/3/91



B.M. 25.33m

St Mary's Church
(C of E)

TRENCH I

TRENCH II

Church Institute

Sundial

Sawston Hall

Well

Pump

Chapel (Private)

MPING CLOSE

Telephone Exchange

Track

Pond

8705
121ha
30

Track

Drain

FB

0006
1.171ha
2.89

187

488

489

490