

Stonor – a Lost Park and a Garden Found

By JOHN STEANE

SUMMARY

A survey of Stonor Park and its environs in the aftermath of storm damage in 1990 revealed previously unknown features. The present Stonor Park, laid out in the 18th century, seems to have been preceded by a larger medieval park to the west, enclosed probably in the 16th century. A rabbit warren may also have been of medieval origin. The sequence of gardens north and south of the house has been partially reconstructed, and examination of parchmarks south of the house during the summer of 1989 revealed traces of a terraced, probably 16th-century garden. The Stonor archives contain much information on garden management.

At Stonor Park at dawn on 26 January, 1990 Lord Camoys opened the east gate of the rear garden. In front of him all 15 ash trees were laid out neatly like stalks of asparagus on a plate. At one end of the house a cypress had toppled and missed the 14th-century chapel by perhaps a foot. At the other end a cedar so big, so fat in its girth, that it was hard to believe it was a living thing had been flipped over as if by a wanton finger and had dumped itself on the wall of the shrubbery. Beeches the size of factory chimneys lay prone everywhere, dozens and dozens of them.¹

This was the second time hurricanes had struck trees and other landscape features in the park. The damage was catastrophic and the Stonor Estates applied to English Heritage for grant aid. To support this application the firm of landscape consultants, Bodwyn Gryfydd Partnership, employed by the Stonor Estates, asked John Steane, consultant archaeologist, to prepare a report on the archaeological features of the park, its gardens, woodlands and visual environs. This was carried out from December to March 1990–1. During it a number of interesting and unexpected discoveries were made.

Stonor Park (SU 742890) is on the Buckinghamshire–Oxfordshire border about five miles north-west of Henley-on-Thames. The manor house is well removed to the north-east of the village which lies in a combe at the bottom of the slope below the house. It is situated in the formerly detached southern part of the parish of Pyrton. The study area went beyond this and included parts of the parishes of Assendon, Watlington and Pishill. The modern arrangements of the parishes are mapped in the *Victoria County History*² and the situation of the boundaries is seen in the O.S. 6 inch to 1 mile map of 1883. Geologically the underlying rock is chalk with a soil cover varying in thickness of clay with flints. There is some build-up of soil wash in the combes and dry valleys.³ This combination produces in

¹ D.F. Cutler, P.E. Gasson and M.C. Farmer, 'The Wind Blown Tree Survey: analysis of results', *Arboricultural Journal*, xiv, no. 3 (1990), 265–86. The dramatic description is in *The Times*, 27 January 1990.

² *Victoria County History of Oxfordshire*, viii, 128.

³ An analysis of the soil in sample plots on the Stonor estate is seen in a letter (in the Stonor Archive) dated 17.7.53 from the Forestry Commission.

most places a thin soil not conducive to vigorous tree growth which when ill managed produces a straggly formation.

Three approaches were pursued in an attempt to reconstruct the historical evolution of the landscape of Stonor Park and its environs to the west: archaeological, botanical and documentary. A number of visits were made during the winter of 1990–1. A gazetteer of earthwork features such as ponds, quarries, banks and ditches as well as flint and pottery scatters was compiled. Photographs were taken of all features. Botanical evidence in the form of such features as plantations, areas of woodland, areas of windblow, ancient woodland indicators and hedgerows were noted and mapped.⁴

A search for documentary evidence was made in the County Record Office, the Bodleian Library and the Stonor Estate Archive.⁵ The cartographic story can be quickly told. Stonor as a place name does not appear on the earliest county maps (Saxton, *Oxon., Bucks. and Berks.* 1574). It appears, but not as a park, on Burgher's map of Oxfordshire in 1677 (from Plot's *Natural History of Oxfordshire*), despite the fact that Watlington park is shown. It also appears on John Seller's map of the county (Philip Lea edition of 1690). Thereafter the house (not the village) appears regularly. Towards the end of the 18th century, however, it quite frequently is dropped out (e.g. Harrison's map 1787; J. Lodge (1789), 1795 issue; T. Kitchen 1764; and Emanuel Bowen 1758).

The park suddenly emerges from the printed cartographic record in 1768 with Bryant's map of Oxfordshire. Its shape is roughly approximate to the bounds of Kildridge Wood and reflects or causes ballooning of the county boundary at this point. Davis recognised its presence in his map of 1797, and thereafter park, place-name and house are regularly present. Greenwood showed the park in 1831–4, but at a slightly smaller scale, and the first edition of the Ordnance Survey shows a trapezoidal-shaped area of parkland enclosed on three sides within a skin of woodland, still called Kildridge Wood. The much larger maps of the late 19th century, at 6 inches to 1 mile and 25 inches to 1 mile, enable us to reconstruct the distribution of quite small areas of woodland and hedgerow boundaries. Whether they are scraps of former woodland or specially positioned plantations does not always emerge. 'Clumps', one of the field names, does suggest deliberate planting additions. The irregular edge on modern maps on the fringe of the present park suggests an attempt to conceal clear felling behind a thin amenity screen.

If we left it to the printed maps it would seem that the origins of Stonor Park go back no further than the mid 18th century. A shaft of light on the origins comes from a study of the slightly unlikely source of an early 18th century unprinted estate map, now kept in the house. This is the large-scale framed map entitled 'The plan of the estate of Thomas Stonor Esq.' with 'a particular survey of all the woods and arable land therabouts belonging with a terrier of all the small rents and quit rents with the measure of all the leaseholders and copy holders of note belonging unto the estate taken about the year 1725 measured statute measure 16.5 feet to the perch.' It is a mine of information about the state of the landscape at Stonor in the first quarter of the 18th century.

It is by studying the field names of this map that one begins to suspect that the present

⁴ Those features found to the east of the north-south road which runs through the present village were given the prefix SPE (Stonor Park East) and were numbered 1–70. Those in the west were given the prefix SPW (Stonor Park West) and were numbered 1–22. They were colour-coded and marked on 1/2,500 maps. Copies of the field archive were lodged in the County Sites and Monuments Record, Westgate Central reference library, Oxford.

⁵ I acknowledge the help of the Hon. Georgina Stonor who has made available photocopies of all documents relevant to the history and economy of the park and gardens.



Fig. 1. Stonor in 1725. Boundaries and field-names as shown in framed map in Stonor house.



Fig. 2. Stonor in mid 19th century. Field boundaries and names as in Pyrton and Pishill tithe awards.

park was preceded by another park or parks to the *west* of the road running from Watlington through Upper Assendon (now called the village of Stonor) to Henley-on-Thames. This thesis gains credence from a study of the field boundaries which suggest the former existence of a park larger than and situated to the west of the present one. The parish boundaries as shown in the 1840 tithe map (in the County Record Office) confirm the theory. This supporting evidence will be reviewed under three headings:—

(1) *Field names.* A large area of woodland in the 1725 map is named 'Stonor Park'. To the east of it are two fields marked 'Great Parks 18a 3r 30p' and 'Little Park 14a 3r 11p'. Further to the west of the first 'Stonor Park' there are three field names including the element 'lawn', *viz.* 'Little Lawn', 'Great Lawn', and 'Stoney Lawn'. 'Lawns' or 'laundes' are grassy plains between woods in deerparks useful for providing herbage for deer.⁶ A third name supporting the view that there was a park here is 'Lodge Farm' situated to the south of Maidensgrove. A lodge was 'a park lodge' from Old French 'Loge'.⁷

It should perhaps be noted that the place-name 'park' comes from middle English 'Pearroc' and simply means an enclosure. If they stood by themselves 'Great Park' and 'Little Park' may only mean 'Great enclosure' and 'Little enclosure'. When in close juxtaposition to laundes and lodges, however, I think we have the glimmerings of the location of a former deer park.

(2) *Topographical features.* Surmise becomes virtual certainty when the topography is scrutinised. A search among aerial photographs revealed interesting supporting evidence. There is a long curving hedgeline with a suggestion of an internal ditch south of Barns Close between grid references SP 729879 and SP 734880. This goes westward until it reaches Lodge Farm. Medieval deer parks are characterised by long linear curving earthworks.⁸ There may well have been an entrance to the park at Lodge Farm. The maps and the aerial photographs suggest that there was an area of assarting (clearance) which began as one large 'lawn', and this was then subdivided into four: 'Great Lawn', 'Stoney Lawn', 'Little Lawn' and 'Pond Close'. These fields may well have been connected with Lodge Farm; they would have been ideally situated for the control of stock, whether cattle, sheep or deer. They made a large bite out of the woods of Stonor Park at its south western corner. Further assarting in the form of a number of fields has resulted in a tongue of clearance between 'Doyley Wood' (outside the park) and 'Stonor Park'. Maybe the parish boundaries can help to reconstruct the rest of the circuit to the north and east.

(3) *Parish boundaries.* These are complex partly because there were numerous detached portions (explained by woodland rights) in these Chiltern parishes. The *Victoria County History* gives a modern and simplified map. The tithe award maps of Pyrton and Pishill (both in the County Record Office) are more helpful. There was a detached portion of Pyrton parish indicated in a map in the Stonor House archive which included both Kildridge Wood and 'Upper Assenton' (*sic*). More significantly it enclosed the area of the putative park described in the last section. This means that this southern detached portion of Pyrton parish was of

⁶ J. Field, *English Field Names* (1972), 123.

⁷ Field, *op. cit.* 128.

⁸ The general characteristics of medieval deer parks are described in Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, *Northamptonshire Vol. 2, Central* (1979), p. lvii.

the shape of a pair of kidneys, the oval extensions approximate to the outlines of what I have called Stonor East and Stonor West parks.

In sum, I think that the field names in the 1735 estate plan and the tithe award maps of 1840, together with the pre-mid-19th-century parish boundaries, combine to suggest that either there was formerly a much larger park at Stonor (unlikely), or that there was a succession of two parks at Stonor, a medieval one to the west of the Stonor area and an 18th-century one in the east. The former was the predecessor of the present one. It is on the edge of the parishes well away from centres of population in the classic position noted for many medieval deer parks.⁹ It seems quite possible that there was a gap in time between the two in the 17th and early 18th centuries, when the former park was enclosed and converted and the latter had not yet been created. It was clear that a further trawl in the documentary archives was required.

(4) *Other documentary sources* were traced in the Public Record Office and the Stonor archives which show that there was a park here at least as early as the late 14th century. John Parkere of Assendon, keeper of 'a fishery of Stonor Park' and 'the keeper of the Warren of Stonore, Bixgbuyr, Bixbronde, and Bromnes down', was to be paid 2*d.* a day for his wages.¹⁰ Although it does not specifically mention a park there was a grant to John de Stonere and his heirs of free warren in all their demesne lands in Stonore, Pishill Venables, Warmodescombe, Bix Gronde, Bixegibeurn, Watlington, Watecumbe and Brownesdone in the county of Oxford.¹¹ The park was again mentioned at the end of the 15th century in the Stonor correspondence:¹² 'Thanking you for my grete chere this day made me at your place, but not for your park sport where in your defaut John, your parker, that wold have been my frende is my great enmye'. Bucks, which were presumably caught in the park, are mentioned in letters as being sent to family friends or hangers on.¹³ The next mention of the park occurs in Leland. In his usual laconic way he summarises the situation at Stonor: 'There is a fayre parke and a warden of coynes and fayre woods. The mansion place standithe clyminge on a hille and hath two courtes buylded with timber, bryke and flynte'.¹⁴ The fact that he mentions the park first and separately implies that it was situated away from the house. It probably refers to the medieval park which I have labelled Stonor Park west.

Whether the warren at Stonor is as old as the park is doubtful. What is clear is that 'Warren Hill' and 'Hard Waren' were field names in the 1725 framed map. A ha-ha was dug round the warren in the 18th century. This was revetted in flint and brick by Lord Camoys in the 1880s. His levelling operations to erect the house called 'The Warren' probably removed all traces of artificial warrens which may have existed before.

The park at Stonor still there in Leland's time was not known to Saxton when he produced his county maps at the end of the 16th century. At this time and through most of the 17th century the Stonor family fortunes were under stress because of the large fines levied under Recusancy Laws on Catholic families. It is possible that the park was

⁹ The location of medieval parks is described in J.M. Steane, 'The medieval parks of Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, v (1975), No. 3, 216-17.

¹⁰ *Cal. Close Rolls 1392-6*, 342.

¹¹ *Cal. Charter Rolls*, iii, 283.

¹² C.L. Kingsford, *Stonor Letters and Papers 1296-1483* (Camden Society 3rd ser. xxix-xxx, 1919), ii, 93, letter no. 255.

¹³ *Ibid.* ii, 100, 110.

¹⁴ J. Leland, *Itinerary in England and Wales*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, v, 72.

disparked and divided up into closes and woodland in the late 16th century. Only the field names recalling the park remained. In the meantime the woods surrounding the house were being reduced by cultivation. A large triangle of cleared land had already by 1725 been introduced into the combe halfway up which stands the house. A lynchets defines this land on both north and south sides of the combe. It was divided into closes called 'Warren Hill', 'Great Berkley', 'Bain Close', 'Slype', 'Mapletree Close', 'Hard Warrin' and 'Darkwood Close'. Despite this the house was still virtually surrounded by woodland in 1725 except for a narrow strip of cleared land which extended eastwards to 'Dark Wood'.

The park begins to figure again in the estate records towards the middle of the 18th century, when it is mentioned in the timber books as a major source of timber and wood products. At the same time, as has been noticed, it is delineated on the county maps. It has now changed location and is to be found encircling the house in the classic position of parks at this period, acting as a foil to the house. A wooden pale was put round it and clearance of the woodland was extended. An undulating edge was kept to the south and several isolated clumps (probably not deliberately planted plantations, unlike in the former western imparked area) were left. The closes, presumably formerly hedged, were removed, and the open slopes were made available to deer. An iron paling was set round the park in the 1880s with handsome iron gates. A drive giving access to the house from the west replaced the more ancient southern track which was stepped into the side of the hill to the south of the house, halfway up the slope. Two new lodges, designed by Gillows and erected in the mid 19th century, straddled the revised entrance.

Stonor Park was reduced in size by the sale of woodland leases to the Forestry Commission in the 1950s. A thin strip of amenity woodland was, however, left as a screen between the shrunken park and the Forestry Commission woods. A chainlink fence with deer leaps at intervals was installed. Most of the rest of the former Stonor lands in the locality were sold off.

THE EVOLUTION OF THE ECONOMY OF THE STUDY AREA

There is little field evidence for the occupation and cultivation of this part of the Chilterns in prehistoric and Roman times. Judging from Anglo-Saxon charters and place-names it seems that the Stonor Valley was occupied by farming communities from the mid to late Anglo-Saxon periods. The land unit which comprises most of the modern parish of Pyrton was known in the late Saxon period as *Aet Readanoran*. It was in two parts, the bulk of the estate, and a separate piece of woodland no doubt providing the community with fuel, structural timber and pannage for swine. Gelling transcribes and comments on the bounds but does not attempt a convincing identification of the topographical features.¹⁵ A number of the place-name elements, however, offer clues to the appearance of the landscape at this early date. Arable cultivation of the valley bottom is implied by 'Assendon' ('Assas' = valley), and further up the slopes was already advanced by the 10th century ('Pishill' = hill where the peas grow).¹⁶ There are several references to lynchets, which imply plough lands; these can still be seen as earthworks, long linear banks running parallel with the contours half way up the slope on both sides of the Assendon valley as well (as has been already noted) as on the

¹⁵ M. Gelling, *The Place Names of Oxfordshire* (Eng. Place Name Soc. xxiii-xxiv), i, 86-9.

¹⁶ *Ibid.* 84-5.

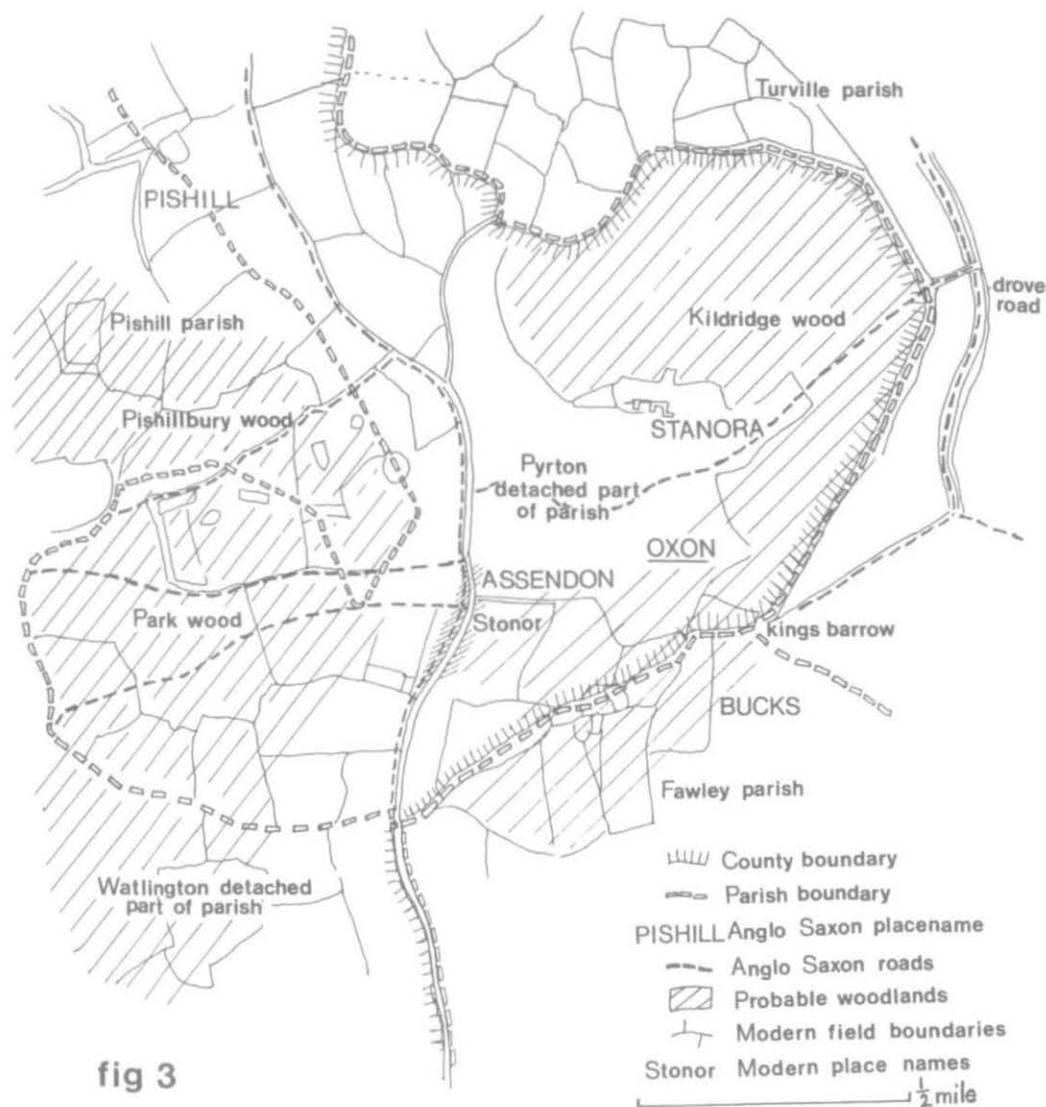


Fig. 3. Stonor. Reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon landscape.

opposite sides of the combe in which Stonor House stands. The landscape, however, remained predominantly wooded to the present day. Wood lapped up against these lynchets on the upper parts of the slope. Long strip-shaped parishes like Pyrton and Watlington extended tongues of land into this wooded part of the Chilterns. A number of place-names and field names mentioned in the bounds have a woody or timber element (e.g. 'timber valley', 'wood belonging to Stonor', 'wild cat valley'), but other references to single trees (e.g. 'slender Ash tree', 'maple tree on the west side of Assendon') imply a largely cleared landscape where trees were an item to take note of and where they stood out as individual

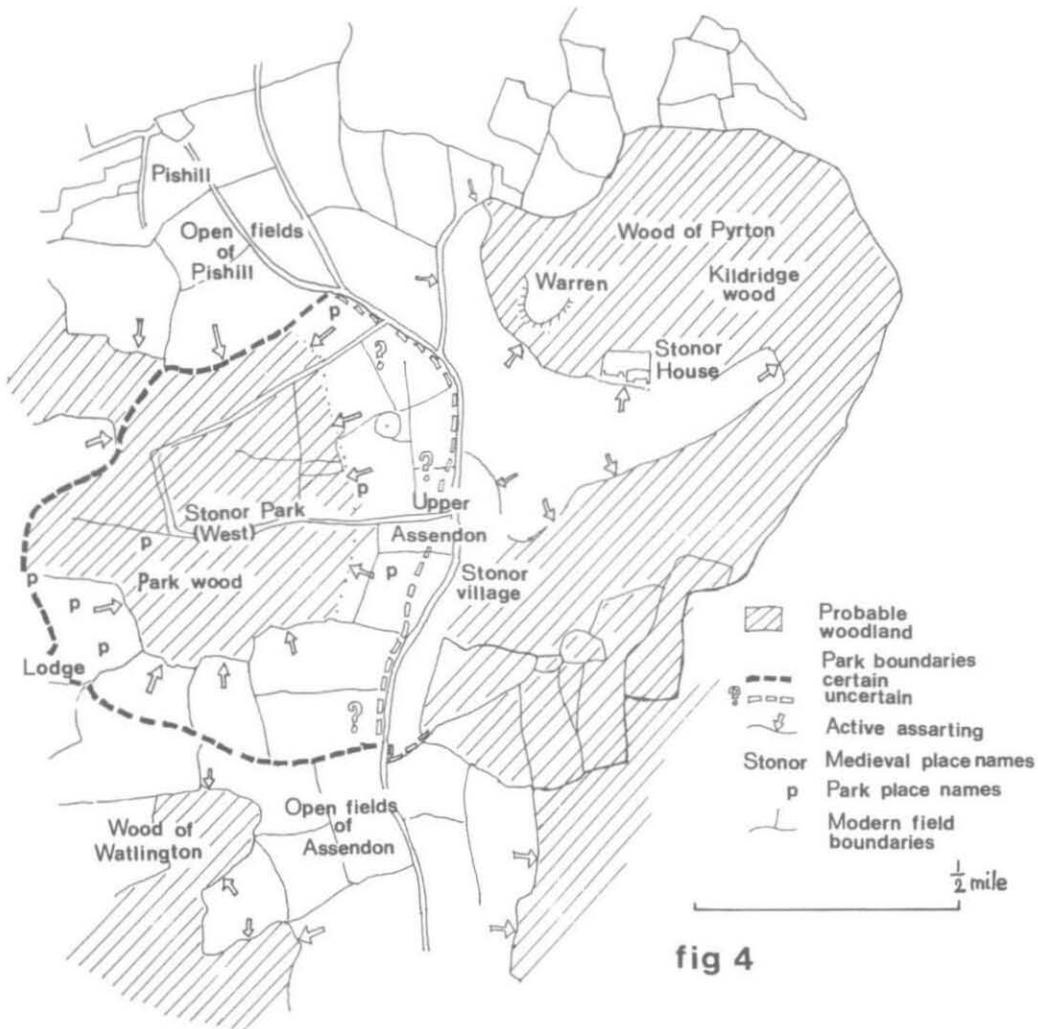


fig 4

Fig. 4. Stonor. Reconstruction of the medieval landscape.

landmarks.¹⁷ Grundy makes the perceptive comment that while the survey is traversing the cultivable lowlands at the foot of the Chilterns the landmarks are in general much closer together, and that the productive cultivable land called for stricter definition than the uncultivated (and by implication still wooded) part of the grant.¹⁸

One last comment on clearance in this area. Sarsen boulders, the much eroded remnants of the band of rock originally covering the chalk, are found littering the surface of the chalk.

¹⁷ G.B. Grundy, *Saxon Oxfordshire, Charters and Ancient Highways* (Oxford Record Society, xv, 1933), 48-9.

¹⁸ *Ibid.* 50.

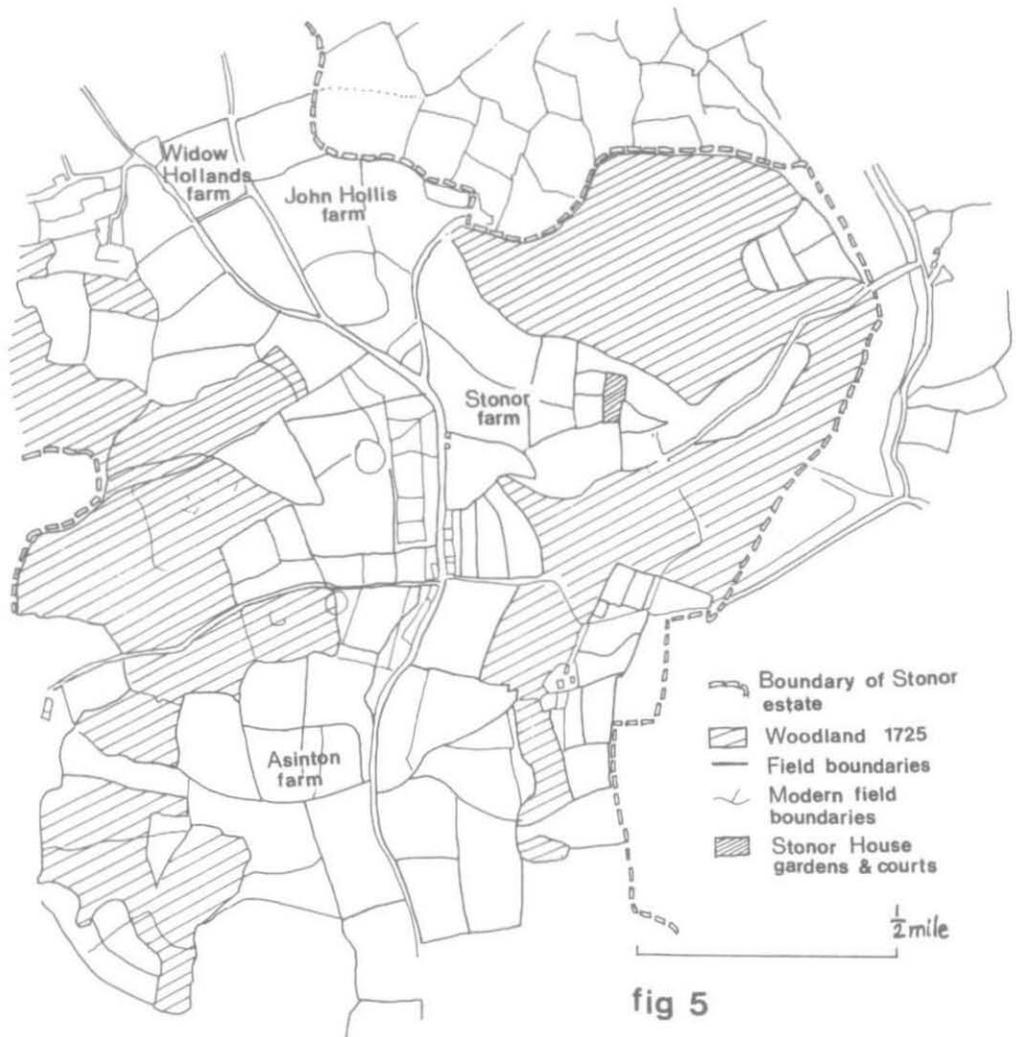


Fig. 5. Stonor. Reconstruction of the 18th-century landscape.

They were a major hindrance to cultivation and were early dragged to the field edge or placed round ponds. It is possible that the family name Stonor originated from a group of these stones. Such a group lined the rim of a pond to the south-east of the house and are to be seen in a mid 19th-century photograph in the family archive. Another was in the village itself. A sarsen is found embedded in the surface of the track leading from the house to Southend (at SU 751896). This is very near the county boundary and may have been used to mark the same. The group seen in the photograph was re-erected as a modern folly in the form of a stone circle in 1975. It continues to bemuse visitors in the area to the west of the woolhouse.

There is no doubt that the woodland in this area of the Chilterns has been exploited over

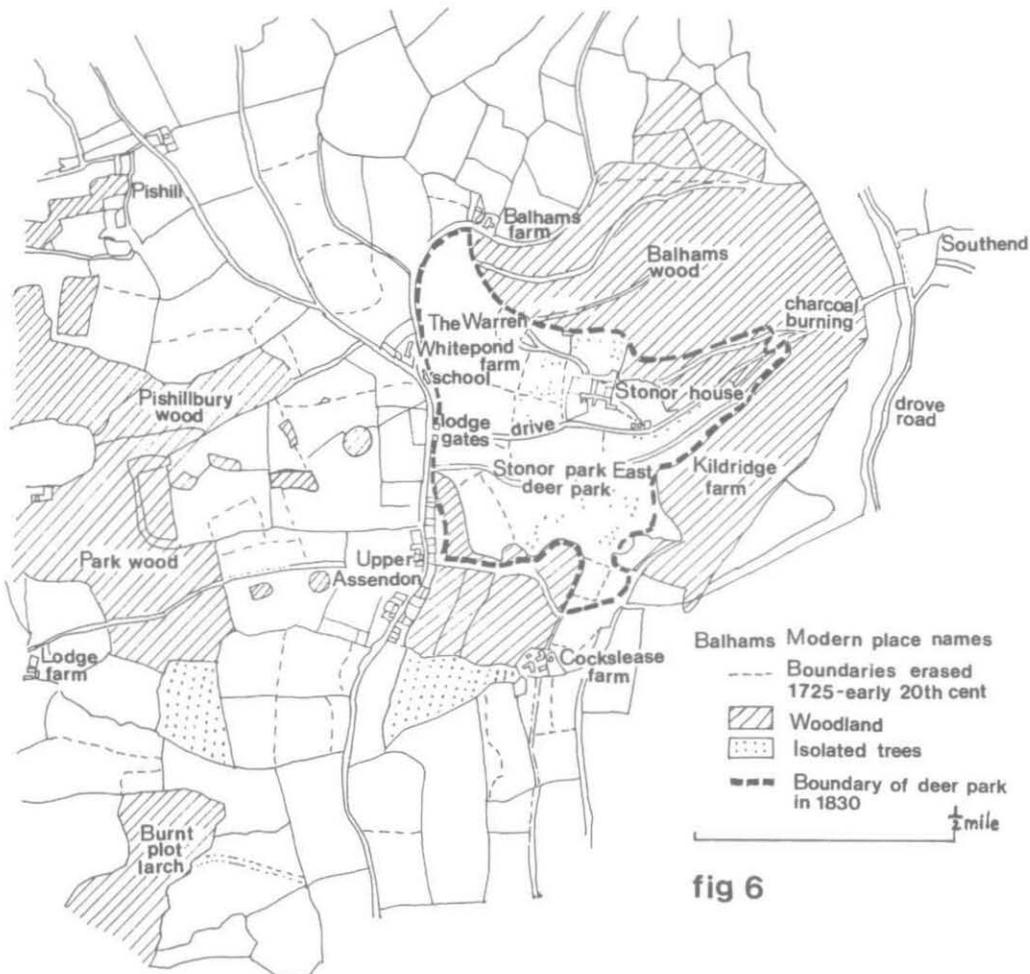


Fig. 6. Stonor. 19th and 20th-century landscapes.

the last 1,500 years, and there were four main sources of profit: deer, rabbits and other small game, timber and wood products, and minerals.

(1) *Deer*. The part played by deer in the function of the park has already been mentioned. The protection of the game required the services of a resident parker who may well have lived at the lodge recalled by the place name, Lodge Farm. This is certainly suggested by the contiguity of the laundes (lawns) to the lodge. A number of references in the Stonor archives allude to the principal problems of running deer parks at Watlington and Stonor.¹⁹ These

¹⁹ Stonor Archives 184/69/20, account for 18 June 1755; 174/71/15, William Strongtharm's disbursements.

included the maintenance of a secure enclosure to prevent the escape of the deer and their consequent depredation of crops and young trees belonging to tenants and neighbours. A succession of fences was provided. Until the end of the 18th century a wooden paling on top of a linear earth mound and reinforced by an internal ditch was used. Remnants of such a ditched system can be seen along the western edge. Slight traces of a linear mound are seen to the south of the lodge gates (1990). With the industrial revolution iron became plentiful. Lord Camoys in 1882 asked several firms for estimates for 3 miles or more of iron fencing. Eventually A.L. Main of 108 Queen Victoria Street provided the necessary 317 yards, 6 feet high with 8 bars with standard pronged feet, for £657. This was later completed with a double-leafed gate on 31 August 1883. Frederick Banks seems to have been involved in a good deal of the erection. Lord Camoys also employed newfangled barbed wire (1,000 yards in 1887). The first mention of this is in 1874.²⁰ There is a long stretch of this paling still in position on the western edge of the present park along the north-south road from Watlington to Stonor. During World War II an official letter ordered the gates to be removed together with parts of the railings to be used for the war effort. During the 1950s when the park was reduced in size, steel mesh, with deer leaps at intervals, was substituted on the northern, eastern and southern stretches. Deer leaps are gaps so made as to enable deer to enter the park, but once in they are there to stay.

The second problem was to provide the deer with food, water and cover. The lawns (laundes), cleared areas to the west of the woods known as Stonor park, were one source in the early phase of the park's history. Normally grass and young shoots of shrubs and saplings provided sufficient food but this had to be supplemented in times of frost when foliage was cut from trees. Neale in 1820 described Stonor Park as nearly three miles in circumference and stated that it 'contains a considerable portion of beech woodland, the mast produced by which, and the thyme and other fragrant herbs with which the pasture abounds are said to contribute to the flavour of the venison and to have been the cause of its celebrity.'²¹ Deer take care not to feed on their own cover and there is plenty of this among the patches of rhododendrons, hawthorn scrub and other woodland scrub in the steep slopes of Stonor Park east. The chalk hills and combs were devoid of streams, so ponds had to be dug, lined with clay, and surface water from paths diverted into them. There is a string of ponds along the ridge to the north of the house, and one was dug at Dark Wood. Water is channelled into it from the path. The need for stocking the parks showed that the techniques of moving deer from one park to another was well understood. They were caught, trussed and moved by cart, or, if the distance was short (as between Watlington and Stonor Parks) they were moved like sheep along the roads. Stonor was stocked from Watlington in the 18th century. Magdalen College Deer Park has been similarly topped up with deer from Stonor in the 20th century.

From detailed statistics kept by the estate in the 1830s it is possible to trace the size of the herd. In 1834 there were 49 bucks, 48 does, 10 buck fawns and 17 doe fawns. In 1838 there were 39 bucks, 48 does, 17 buck fawns and 13 doe fawns.²² At the end of the 19th century Whitaker described the park as being 200 acres in extent with a 6 ft. fence, with four ponds, beech trees, very hilly, and stocked by 100 fallow deer, the average weight of the bucks being

²⁰ *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. 'wire'.

²¹ I.J. Neale, *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland* (London, 1820), vol. III.

²² Stonor Archives 4/1.

100 lbs. and does 70 lbs.²³ The deer were reduced in numbers during wartime. There was a lively trade in venison in the London restaurants in the 1940s. The deer were alleged to be damaging the neighbouring woods in the 1950s. The herd is now 150 strong. Stonor's connection with hunting was celebrated by meetings of the staghounds on the slope to the west of the house in the 1860s and '70s.²⁴ There is a photograph showing a meet of her majesty's staghounds at Stonor on 18 April 1873.²⁵

(2) *Rabbits and smaller game.* Rights of free warren were granted by Edward II to John de Stonor in his six manors as we have seen. A grant of free warren gave local lords the sole rights of hunting small game over their own manors and estates and the right to prosecute any commoner found hunting on their ground. The term warren also acquired a more specific meaning.²⁶ Artificial rabbit warrens began to appear in Oxfordshire by the 14th century.²⁷ It is not known when the warren was established on 'Warren Hill', but it is possible that it had a medieval origin. Such warrens had enclosures in an endeavour to keep marauding rabbits in. In 1536 Edmund Stonor obtained a lease of the herbage and coneyes in Watlington Park.²⁸ The name 'Warrin Hill' was still to be found on the 1725 framed map in Stonor House. The 1838 analysis of estate statistics mentions 'received of Mr. Thomas for 10 rabbits @ 7¹/₂, 6/3; 2 hares @ 2/6, 5/-', and in 1838 the number of rabbits had gone up to 34.

Another source of income which became more important in the 20th century was the shooting rights. Details of game bags are recorded.

	Pheasants	Partridges	Hares	Rabbits
1928	2003	352	50	133
1929	2110	780	38	117
1930	2507	601	61	133
1931	711	403	30	33
1932	1300	293	42	104

This was particularly important as a supplementary source of income during a period of agricultural depression when it was difficult to sell wood.

(3) *Timber and timber products.* Landowners such as the Stonors took great care of their timber resources since these often yielded a substantial income, either as a supplement to annual income or as a means of countering excessive debts.²⁹ Before leaving to live abroad in 1750 Thomas Stonor handed over the administration of his estates to his uncle Talbot Stonor with detailed instructions for the administration of his estate in his absence. 'The workmen order the workmen what trees are fite to be felled and when a wood is felled sufficiently. They are to give notice to the steward that he or his Deputy take the tale [counting the individual trees] thereof and immediately pay the workmen for the same. . . .ther is a

²³ Whitaker, *A Descriptive list of the Deer Parks and Paddocks of England* (London, 1892), 120–1.

²⁴ *V.C.H. Oxon.* ii, 359.

²⁵ Stonor Enterprises, *Stonor, Home of the Stonor Family for at least 8 Centuries* (no date), 7.

²⁶ O. Rackham, *The History of the Countryside* (1986), 292, 299, 301, 304.

²⁷ J. Bond, 'The Oxford Region in the Middle Ages', in G. Briggs, J. Cook and T. Rowley (eds.), *Archaeology of the Oxford Region*, 154.

²⁸ F. Woodward, *Oxfordshire Parks* (Oxfordshire Museums Services Publications no. 16, 1982), 3.

²⁹ J. Thirsk (ed.), *Agrarian History of England and Wales, VI: 1750–1850*, 626.

woodfeast allowed at my expense at Henley to encourage the chapmen [the middlemen] to bring part of their money and this is always within a month after midsummer . . . and immediately after the woodfeast the woodmen are to pay their first payment which is never less than three hundred pounds.' The woodmen, as the instructions continue, 'in the first week of the month of February . . . bring in their accounts together with a general Tale of the wood fell'd which is to be compared with the Steward's Talebill delivered in the May before . . . I also expect of them that during the felling time they attend the workmen particularly at night at their going off from work and that no *shoulderstick* be allow'd to be carry'd off by the workmen but that no more be allow'd them to take away than a Brush fagot or some such thing'. Other duties involved mending fences broken down during the processes of cutting and drawing out the timber; also 'to see there is no trespass of cattle which does incredible damage and upon repeated trespass from the same person that they make complaint thereof to the Steward or if necessary to my uncle'.

This last problem meant that a good deal of hedging and ditching was unavoidable in the management of woodland. There was of course the circular ditch and mound dug around the woodland area. Inside the wood there were further ditched enclosures surrounding the separate coppices. A third type of ditch was the drainage gyp or gully since most trees objected to ill-drained soil. William Strongtharm's disbursements of 1749 include a total of £10 3s. 'for heging (hedging) and dicing'. This included '129 poalls (poles) of heg meaking in Kildrig at 3s per score 0-19-4. Pd For 49 poalls do in Darkwood at 3s per score 0-7-4; For 96 poalls do in Stonor Park at 3s per score 0-14-4'. It was vital to keep young deer from browsing on the shoots of the coppice wood. They were quite capable of totally inhibiting the regeneration of woodland if they were not excluded by well maintained fences and ditches.

What were the main timber products coming from the Stonor woods in the 18th century? The answers are found in an elaborate series of accounts for 1749-79 which make it clear that there were basically two sorts of material, timber and wood. Among the most valuable was oak timber, as in the 1748 account:

39 foot to Stonor for repairs
 4 load 39 foot to Watlington Park for Thatchers and Roalls farm for repairs
 5 load to Mr Parker at 50s per load £12-10

The difference in value between this and beech pealls (poles), for instance, is clear:

181 load in Stonor Park @ 8d per load	£72-05-0
630 load in Kildrig	£250-16-0

It would seem that the chief timber sources were oak, beech, ash and some chestnut. One or two lime trees are mentioned but they were not at all common. During the 18th century coniferous trees do not seem to have been planted in the Stonor woods.

Oak timber produced oak bark which also figures in the timber accounts, e.g. 1748-9:

1 load 14 yards in Stonor Park	£3-05-0
1 load 6 yards in Galls Hanging	£2-17-9
1 load 9 yards in Piers grove	£3-00-7

Bark was often bought while still on the trees. The workmen were allowed to enter the woods to strip the bark, dry, harvest and weigh and carry away the bark. The material was checked by the waggon load. An average tanner used the bark of 3 or 4 dozen mature trees

a year or even more, so there was a great pressure on coppice oaks (which produced the best bark) to provide sufficient for their craft.³⁰

The Chilterns in the 18th century were a major source of fuel. Some of the wood was used for firing at the house at Stonor itself. Other loads were sent to the Stonor house in London ('Paid for sawing and clearing 20 cop of old billet in the combes which was sent up to London for my masters own firing').³¹ Some ended up in the hearths of the alms people at Stonor. Some was used by tenants 'for their allowance of plough boote and cart boote, rock boote and hurdle boote'. Town billet,³² presumably fire wood for urban hearths, was made and sold at 13s. per load in 1735. Much was sent to Henley-on-Thames where wharfage dues were paid ('Paid for the wharfage of 458 loades of billet at 2s. per load wharfage'). Thence it was taken by barge to London.

Other firing products had specialised uses. Bavins, for instance, were bundles of brushwood or light underwood such as were used for baker's ovens. They differed from faggots in being bound with only one withy or band instead of two (e.g. in 1748-9). Both are found in the accounts:

long faggotts 100 in Stonor Park	0-15-0
669 in Horsells Bottom	5-19-8 1/2
Bavins 1230 in Stonor Park	9-04-6
830 in Stompers Hill	6-04-6
5560 in Kildrig	41-14-0

There was also stackwood,³³ which required binding ('Recd of him for 17 stacks and a half of binding stackwood 06-16-00'). Loads of 'water wood' were sent to the wharf at Henley for use in piling and lining canals. Much of the beech was used by the furniture makers of the Chilterns. The beech polls which were the top cuttings from pollarded beeches were sold at 10s. 6d. per local. It went to bodgers to be fashioned by hand lathes into chair legs. These ended up at High Wycombe where they were made into furniture.³⁴

Revolutionary changes in management and planting occurred in the timber trade at Stonor in the 19th century. Auctions began to be held usually in local public houses such as the Bull, Nettlebed. Notices appeared such as this one:-

To Builders, Timber Merchants & others
 Important sale of about
 1200 loads of fine
 BEECH & ASH POLES
 with their
 Felling Fagots and Stackwood
 in the undermentioned woods of the
 Right Hon Lord Camoys and James Weld Esq.
 Between Pishill and the Wharf at Henley
 to which roads are Good and no Turnpike.

³⁰ L.A. Clarkson, 'English Bark Trade 1660-1830', *Agricultural History Review*, xxii (1974), 136-52.

³¹ Stonor Archives 140/5/4.

³² billet: trunk of tree, length of round timber wood cut for fuel. Firewood of size regulated by law. (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

³³ stackwood: a pile of sticks, faggots, firewood, poles. A load of firewood. (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

³⁴ N. Wymer, *English Country Crafts* (London, 1946), 65-6.

More significant were changes in planting policies. Quantities of coniferous trees made their appearance for the first time in the Stonor woods. Fir trees, Austrian pines, larch, spruce, all figure in the diary of Lord Camoys in the 1880s.

I had all the Austrian pines taken out of Grandmother's garden this morning and in the afternoon we planted them up the drive through Dark Wood. We planted 20 the others had all been killed by the rabbits. Thursday March 10th Kimble is putting the fir trees that are over in the old nursery: all the planting is done for this year and the wire is half round it is only a day's work to finish it.

Softwood was in great demand during the two World Wars but not in the interwar years. Much timber was cut down during 1914–18 and 1939–45. Major Stonor in 1940 received a letter from his agent: 'the timber position is still very acute and we are constantly being pressed to keep the merchants supplied and whereas one is, in so doing, cutting more drastically than one would in normal times, the redeeming feature is the keenest demand for soft wood, thus realising timber which in peacetime was almost unsaleable'. One complication brought about by the war was the presence of a number of sheep 'evacuated from Romney Marsh by the government which will pay for their keep'.

Charcoal burning was carried out in the wood to the west of South End in the 1950s to produce high density charcoal used by Courtaulds in nylon spinning. The rusting circular iron furnaces can be found among the bracken.³⁵

(4) *Mineral extraction.* There are several flint quarries in the study area. Water-worn (i.e. glacial) pebbles were useful for road and track metalling. Angular and fractured flints from below the weathered levels were used for building. The tradition in the area from the middle ages was to use them in conjunction with bricks and tiles which formed the quoins, jambs and bonding courses. The house itself, the Wool House, and a series of estate houses west of South End are good examples of this mix of materials. Flint was also a raw material used in glass manufacture, an interest of the family in the 17th and 18th centuries. A second extractive industry at Stonor was the making and firing of bricks. The kiln yard was hedged in 1749 and a ha-ha was planted by the kiln for 2s. 4d. Catherine Shirfield, kiln woman, appears to have been in charge, and provided Thomas Stonor with bricks for his reconstruction of the house.³⁶

THE GARDENS AT STONOR

The gardens attached to the house can be divided into two, those to the north and those to the south of the house. Three field visits were made in the spring of 1991 to the northern gardens. Six visits were made in the drought summer of 1989 to survey and plot the parchmarks of the garden features to the south of the house.

There are a number of late 15th- and early 16th-century references to the gardens at Stonor in the Stonor correspondence.³⁷ An account rendered by Henry Chowne c. 1480 mentions work done 'pinning the walls' in 'the great garden', 'washing' (i.e. white washing) the walls, and daubing and pargeting 'the walls of the great orchard'.³⁸ William Harleston

³⁵ I owe this information to the Hon. Georgina Stonor.

³⁶ Brickbooks which record these transactions are in the Stonor Archive. I have not examined them.

³⁷ I owe these references to Dr Peggy Jefferies of the University of Reading, who has kindly made them available in advance of her own publication.

³⁸ Public Record Office, C47/37/file 18/24.

wrote to Sir William Stonor on 16 January 1480 ‘of one thing that is told me; that you do make a fair new garden; in the which I pray you, for patience and time. And that these two herbs be put in the potage that ye eat so as ye may eat them daily’. A pious reflection but not necessarily evidence for a herb garden at Stonor!³⁹

Turning to the pictorial evidence for the gardens to the north of the house at Stonor, we are fortunate in having a framed oil painting of the house and gardens *c.* 1680 in the house.⁴⁰ This shows a rectilinear garden on the steep slope to the north of the house. It is enclosed by a white (flint/chalk?) wall with an orange (tiled?) coping on the north. It wraps the house round on the west and south. The garden is divided by a grid of whitish (presumably gravelled) paths. Five of these can be seen running east–west, four north–south. There are trees trained against the southwards-facing wall facing north, southwards on the south wall, and on the east side of the west wall. Within the rectangles of the grid different regimes of plants are suggested by the dark green, light green and brown colouring. There are no traces of parterres as such.

A mid 18th-century plan (cracked in places and now framed and kept in the house) shows the same area divided into three by walls. The ‘Pleasure Garden’ is immediately to the north of the ‘Mansion House’; from it lead two gaps in the east wall to the ‘kitchen Garden’. On the south-east corner and also walled is a ‘Kitchen Court’. Neals’s water colour of 1824 seems to have been painted from memory and is vague in its delineation of the garden. The rectilinear shape of it behind the brewhouse on the left of the house can be dimly discerned. Another early 19th-century painting also in the house in a naïve style shows the garden enclosed by the long east–west wall. Within it is a rectilinear grid and to the south a row of short rectangular north–south beds ending in the southern east–west wall.

Continuing to restrict ourselves, for a moment, to an examination of the northern of the two gardens, the Ordnance Survey map 25 inches to 1 mile⁴¹ shows that considerable changes had taken place in the 19th century which brought the garden more in line with Victorian fashion. A square lawn now covers the slope behind the house, bordered by two rectangular groves of trees with paths winding through them. On the upper terrace is a large greenhouse. This had a tank of water beneath it.⁴² To the west was another rectangular area walled in on the north, west and south sides, and divided by paths into four equal rectangles each bounded by trees. South was a further walled enclosure with two ranges of greenhouses.

Physical examination of the gardens to the north of the house in February 1991 revealed a number of features of interest. There is a large squarish lawn running up the slope to the north of the house. This is bounded on the north side by a series of steps and terraces. There is a pool with a fountain on the site of the underground tank on which sat the greenhouse seen in the 1876 map. These terraces and ponds date from the 1950s and were constructed by Sherman Lord Camoys. On either side of the lawn are remnants of treed areas seen in the 1876 and subsequent maps. These include several rather ungainly yews which have grown somewhat wild in aspect. The ground is made up immediately to the north of the house. There is a basement with blocked windows below the present level of the path to the north of the house. There is no dividing wall now between the two areas of

³⁹ Kingsford, *op. cit.* note 12, ii, 99.

⁴⁰ This is reproduced in black and white in *K.C.H. Oxon.* viii, *oppos.* p. 142, and in colour in the official guide to Stonor.

⁴¹ O.S. Maps 1/2,500, Oxfordshire sheet L.12, Buckinghamshire sheet XLV.12 (1876 edn.).

⁴² Information from Hon. Georgina Stonor.

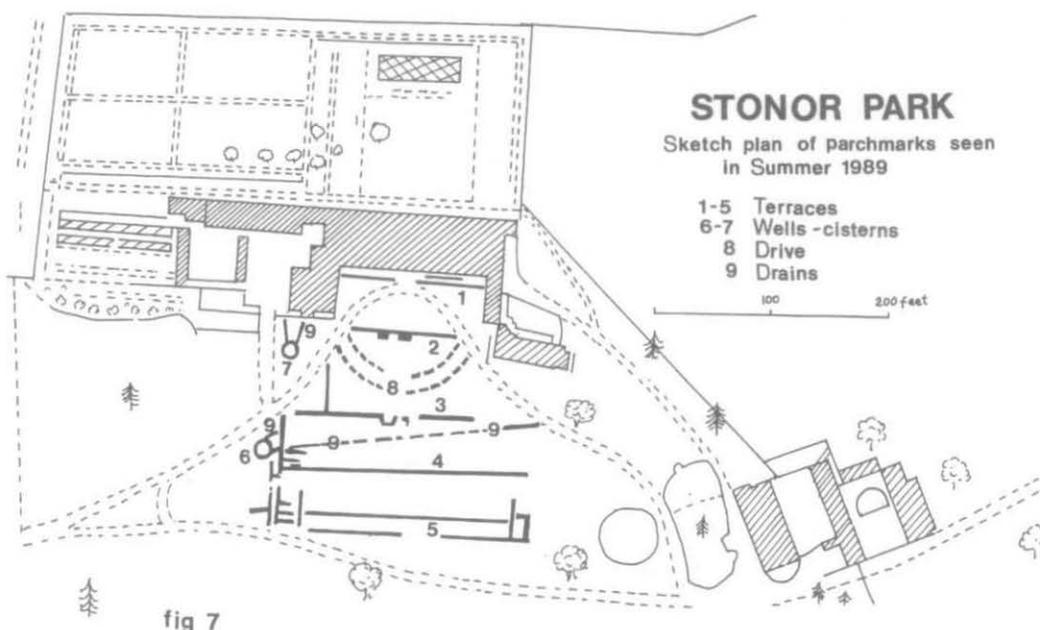


Fig. 7. Stonor Park. Sketch plan of parchmarks seen in summer 1989.

garden. The western half is criss-crossed with a rectangular grid of paths which approximate to the pattern shown in the 1680 picture. While they are now mostly grassed over, judicious prodding established that they have hard material beneath them. The south wall is of flint and brick with diapering and pilasters at intervals. A long servants' wing extended out in this direction in Victorian times and is shown on the 1876 map but this was demolished in 1978. To the west of it is the rear wall of the greenhouses seen in the 1876 map. It is lower than the main gravel path and shows signs of being raised to take glass. The western wall is of red brick with vitrified headers built in checker fashion.

The upper (northern) end is built of flint rubble and occasional (18th-century or later) bricks. The top five courses are of modern brick in appearance. This part of the wall is closest with those shown on the *c.* 1680 picture. The northern wall is of brick with vitrified headers. There are shallow pilasters of brick strengthening it at intervals and it is capped with a thick tiled coping. These walls were all repaired in 1987-8 and in places a concrete coping added.⁴³ In the centre the composition of the wall changes to flint rubble brick diaper work. The flint walling of the centre part of the north wall matches the eastern end of the southern wall. An 18th- or early 19th-century date is suggested. Towards the east end of the north wall the material changes to brick with blue brick checker and shallow buttresses. The eastern corner is of flint with a brick diaper. The top three courses are modern. In the north-east corner is a mid 20th-century gazebo with a herringbone floor of brick. This structure is half-timbered and tiled. The eastern wall of the garden is flint with brick and

⁴³ Information from Mr Derek Boddy, administrator, Stonor Park.

flattish brick buttresses at intervals. The steep slope near the house has caused some slippage which has been counteracted by an extra buttress added in 1988 at the south end. In the south-west corner is an area brick walled which now contains cold frames and greenhouses.

Despite the many changes, the gardens to the north of the house are still recognisably seen as stemming from the late 17th-century layout. When we turn to consider the gardens to the south of the house a good deal more detective work is required. The smooth grassy slope and gravel drive are not on the face of it very promising. The former existence of much more complex garden works, however, can be reconstructed from a series of sources. The c. 1680 picture is a good starting point.

This shows a flat sloping grass-covered area to the south of the house enclosed by a wall, flint-lined on the inner side and brick on the outer, with a brick coping on the east and west. In the centre of the southern wall are two castellated towers about 12 feet high judging from the scale of the figures nearby. The towers are lozenge-shaped in plan with a pointed-headed door approached by four steps, also in brick, topped by a parapet crowned by a strapwork conceit. The broad path behind this doorway goes straight to the steps which lead into the house via the porch which encloses the front door. The grassy enclosure is criss-crossed by four paths leading to different doorways in the enclosure wall and house (three in number) and the chapel. In front of the south wall to the west is a pond overshadowed by trees and enclosed in a white painted fence. These trees extend south and are balanced by a similar massing on the eastern side. They seem to be about 12 feet high and trimmed flat topped.

Major changes had occurred by the mid 18th century when the framed plan of the house and environs was drawn. The area enclosed in the 1680 picture is referred to on this plan as the 'Upper Court'. The gatehouse has in the meantime disappeared and there is simply a gap in the wall in its place. Below and to the south is a further enclosure known as the 'Lower Court'. This is flanked by the stableyard to the east of the farmyard with two banks to the west. A 'walk' (so called) leading to 'Manor Lane' connects the house to the outside world and stableyard through two gaps and a gateway. Opposite the gateway is a semi-circular feature presumably for carriages to turn round in when depositing their passengers.

As might be expected, the 1876 Ordnance Survey map shows a complete remodelling of the landscape to the south of the house. Gone is any sense of enclosure. The countryside as it were laps right up against the house. The two courtyards, farmyard and stableyard have all been swept away and replaced by lawns and a curving carriageway. This approaches from the west, and is connected by two arms to the areas of gardens to the west by the house. It then curves down the slope, past the chapel, past the circular pond (with sarsen stones already noted) and so joins another carriageway which joins the bottom of the slope and goes off in a southern direction up the slope on the western side of Kildridge Wood. Also, curving walls of flint and revetted ha-has have appeared at the top of the south-facing slope to the west of the house.

So far the pictorial and map evidence have been combined to produce a story of an evolving garden from 1680–1990. Nothing was known of the predecessors of the late 17th-century garden until the unusually dry summer of 1989. This resulted in a complex of parchmarks becoming visible in the south-facing slope in front of the house. The Hon. William Stonor began to survey these and I was called in to help. It is of course well known that the presence of walls and paths under the ground will result in the grass or crops growing over them to become stunted or parched during drought conditions.⁴⁴

The main features to be observed were:

⁴⁴ K. Kenyon, *Beginning in Archaeology* (London, 1961), 161.

- (1) A long straight line parallel with the south range of the house and about 2 metres from it.
- (2) A long straight line, presumably footings for a wall, running parallel to the south front, with footings of two rectangular shapes, either buttresses or turrets.
- (3) Another long straight line, presumably wall footings, running parallel with (1) and (2), with a gate in the centre and remains of two towers shown in *c.* 1680 painting.
- (4) A long uninterrupted wall running parallel with (3) further down slope.
- (5) A level area at the foot of the slope bounded by two straight footings. There are signs of rectilinear foundations of ?gazebos at the south eastern and south-western corners of the grass slope.
- (6) and (7) Circular features, probably wells or cisterns.
- (8) A large curving feature visible on the grass in front of the house. This was seen from the top of the house at night when five cars were lined up on the gravel below and their headlamps turned on. It is likely that this was the remains of an oval shaped carriage drive.
- (9) A long diagonal crosses the slope and ends at the cistern or well (6). Probably a drain. Shorter stretches also lead into wells or cisterns.

From these observations it seems that the sequence of garden layouts is more complicated than the 1680 picture and the mid 18th-century plan suggest. It is not possible without excavation to determine the sequence of these features but a provisional interpretation is as follows. The parallel configuration of the footings suggest a flight of five stepped terraces similar to the multiple terraces seen in late 16th-century garden layouts such as Harrington, Holdenby and Lyveden in neighbouring Northamptonshire.⁴⁵ Such a formal rectilinear layout would certainly have conformed to late Elizabethan and Jacobean horticultural predilections. Later gardeners and landscapers have all but eliminated the terracing by producing a wide slope beloved of Capability Brown and his age when formal gardens were swept away or hidden behind the house and the park was encouraged to sweep up against the walls of the house. If this is so one would expect some kind of barrier, such as a ha-ha, to prevent deer and other animals from approaching the house. An alternative explanation of (8) is that it may have been a large semi-circular gravelled walk beloved of 17th-century gardeners. Such features could be seen at Llanerch (Denbighshire), Denham Place (Buckinghamshire) and Hadham Hall (Hertfordshire).

Much information about the plants grown and the crops harvested in the Stonor gardens can be gained by studying the invoices for seeds and plants surviving from the mid 18th century until the 20th in the Stonor archives. It is evident that the kitchen garden flourished in the 18th century. In 1768, for instance, there are bills from Richard Swallow to Thomas Stonor for onion, carrot, radish, parsnip, balsam, potatoes, peas, dutch turnip, black Spanish radish, white radish, lettuce, mustard, cress, and cauliflower seeds. The same bill records the delivery of a peach tree and a fig tree. A bill of 1769, also from Richard Swallow, mentions the delivery of a nectarine, a dwarf plum and a dwarf pear as well as 12 'apell trees'. Presumably these fruit trees were trained on the walls of the garden. Light relief came from asters, marigold, sweet william, and occasionally bulbs were bought as in November 1769, when 8 fine double hyacinth and 2 Narcissus were bought of Ferne & Thatcher, Water Lane, Fleet St, London. Additional gardeners were employed in 1770. Eight shillings and fourpence was earned by Thomas Muspratt from Thomas Stonor 'for five days tacking care of his garding'. In 1796 Thomas Stonor bought from Reading nursery quantities of soft fruit trees

⁴⁵ J.M. Steane, 'The development of Tudor and Stuart garden design in Northamptonshire', *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, v (5), 383-405.



Fig. 8. Stonor Park c. 1883. The drive curving in front of the house is clearly visible. Balhams Wood and Kildridge Wood are seen beyond the house. Coniferous planting of the 19th century in the foreground.



Fig. 9. Stonor Park c. 1989. The lawn in front of the house shows parchmarks. The chapel is bottom right. The walled garden as in c. 1680 painting is centre left.



Fig. 10. Garden staff at Stonor Park c. 1883.

including 50 gooseberries, 10 currants, apricots, mulberries, peaches and nectarines. During the 19th century the variety of vegetable seeds expanded, and Camoys bought from James Veitch, seedsman of the Royal Exotic Nursery, Kings Road, Chelsea SW. They included Pine Apple Beet, Borecole, Broccoli, Brussels Sprouts, Celery, Chervil, Cucumber, Endive, Leek, Curled Parsley, Salsafy and Curled Savoy, as well as a pair of pruning gloves and a clasp budding knife. New flowers also came in, such as sweet pea, pansy, mignonette, zinnia and Russian stocks.

The most vivid account of work in the grounds and garden at Stonor is found in the estate diary of Francis Robert Lord Camoys from 1881: 'I then went round the garden in the spring to see where I should plant the rhododendrons which are coming out on my pit cover as they are too much there' (12 Feb). He also decided to make a lawn tennis court out of Grandmother's garden (7 March): 'The turf that I am going to cut away in front of the house so that a carriage can turn will cover part of it'. This seems to confirm the observation made above about the circular feature in front of the house. On 23 March 'Henry and I began a new summer house in the old gardens'. Judging from the long lists of roses ordered the gardens would have been full of blossom and early 20th-century photographs confirm this.

If one visits Stonor Park in 1994 and walks from the Stonor Watlington road through the park to South End it is obvious that many of the injuries inflicted by the hurricanes of 1987 and 1990 have been healed. Hundreds of young trees have been replanted. 'It's an ill wind which blows no-one any good'. Our understanding of Stonor Park and its evolution has clearly benefited from the attention that has been given it.

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