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## LANDSCAPE, GENDER AND THE LATE MEDIEVAL CASTLE

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**Abstract:** This paper takes as its focus the intersection of landscape and gender at one particular late medieval castle: Bodiam, in south-east England. Northwestern University and the University of Southampton have been working in collaboration to survey the landscape around Bodiam since 2010.

Bodiam is unusual in being largely of one build, associated with Sir Edward Dallingrygge and dated to the 1380s. Traditional narratives place Bodiam in a military context, as a coastal defence against the French, or talk in looser terms about Bodiam as a status symbol, an old soldier's dream house, the center of an ornamental medieval garden, or an expression of late medieval Gothic style. All these narratives fail to engage with gender issues overtly, though of course they can easily be deconstructed to reveal underlying assumptions about values of masculinity and patriarchy.

My analysis starts with the observation that prior to the building of the castle the manor of Bodiam came to Dallingrygge through his wife, Elizabeth Wardedieu. It was her manor, literally and metaphorically. This inheritance is given material expression in the heraldry above the gatehouse, where Dallingrygge's arms are placed alongside those of the Wardedieu family. I broaden this observation out at a series of scales. First, the internal layout of the castle acts as a grid to materialize certain (gendered) social values, and to control the flow of (gendered) human bodies in very particular ways. Second, documentary evidence indicates that Dallingrygge may rarely have been in residence at the castle, Elizabeth governing in his stead.

I go on to consider wider elements of the landscape: a deerpark for hunting, the millpond and watermill, fishponds and other water features, the nearby abbey of Robertsbridge. All these elements play a part in contriving a series of settings, both everyday and 'ritual', in which gendered identities were played out. I also consider how gendered identities played in to elements of wider social change in the period, for example the politics of faction, lineage and dynastic conflict, the relations between service to the State, the organization of war, and the masculine display of 'chivalry'.

## **Introduction**

This paper asks how we might interpret the intersection of landscape and gender at the medieval castle and landscape of Bodiam, near the border of Sussex and Kent in south-east England. I have been working at Bodiam since 2009, in collaboration with colleagues from the University of Southampton and in partnership with the National Trust, engaging in non-destructive survey of the buildings and of the surrounding landscape.

## **Description**

SLIDE Let me start by describing the area and the landscape context. Bodiam is 80 km. south-east of London, and 17 km. north of Hastings and the Channel coast. The site is adjacent to a meandering river valley and floodplain that runs roughly east-west down to the coastal ports of Rye and Winchelsea. Today, the river is shallow and the floodplain drained, but this has not been the case in the past: downstream from Bodiam, the area has been either marsh or tidal estuary at different points in the past.

SLIDE Conventional histories of the castle date its construction to the 1380s, and attribute its building to Sir Edward Dallingridge (the name can be spelt several different ways; here I follow the place-name from which it is derived). The core of the castle is a quadrangular courtyard with four towers at the angles, gatehouses to north and south, and interval towers to east and west. Internally, this courtyard is laid out in a common pattern for this period: central hall, cross-passage and kitchens at its lower end, a 'service' range, upper range, chapel, and lodgings.

More recent work has drawn attention to the landscape context of the castle. The castle courtyard sits just above the floodplain. It is sited in a gentle hollow, with higher ground to the north and west, and is surrounded by a wide moat held back by an earthen bank to south and east. Beyond these banks are further water features and banks, forming part of what has been termed a designed landscape. There are documentary references to a wharf or dock to the south, now under the visitors' car park, adjacent to the position of the medieval bridge. A few hundred metres to the north, on higher ground, are first the site of the earlier manor, and further north again the local parish church. To the west is a row of houses and properties in what was a standard ladder-like pattern, lining the road south to the bridge. The bridge, road, houses and church are probably earlier, antecedent elements in this landscape.

SLIDE It is difficult to convey the experience of the modern landscape through plans and photos. For modern visitors and locals, there is a sharp break between the gently undulating landscape of the Weald, in which fields are small, irregular and bounded by hedges, and open views are partly occluded by the patches of woodland, and the flat, open landscape of the floodplain and estuary running out to Rye, Winchelsea and Romney Marsh. Bodiam sits at the junction of these two landscapes, which are also congruent with different kinds of human relations and also with different kinds of archaeological practice.

## **Traditional Histories**

Bodiam is arguably the most-discussed and most controversial castle in Europe. Traditional narratives have seen Bodiam as a defence against French attacks on the coast. In the last two decades 'revisionist' historians have seen the landscape around Bodiam in aesthetic terms, and talked of 'status' and 'emulation'.

These different views have been characterized as a 'debate'. However, it is a debate within a common (traditional, culture-historical) frame. To answer Vance's question, I started working here partly because it's a fantastic building and landscape, but also because I judged the debate as one that as going round in circles, partly because much of the basic landscape survey had not been done (no systematic topographical or geophysical survey.) Specifically for this conference, the debate has been gender-blind. The categories of war and the military, of 'status' and of aesthetics, can easily be shown to be gendered, but this is not acknowledged.

One result of this gender blindness, I suggest, is that the landscape has been somewhat disembodied. The question 'defence versus status?' opposes two highly abstract categories; one of my issues with this debate is that it is, in fact, not possible to empirically adjudicate between the two. On the other hand, the particularities of the landscape are real. It is clear people – gendered bodies -- move around this landscape: the water features constrain movement, there are two gates of the castle, in front of the gates are elaborate stone causeways, outer structures and timber bridges. There is a bridge, a river, a wharf, a mill. However, discussions of this as a 'designed landscape', including my own discussion, have been quite vague as to who, in terms of class, status, gender, age, is actually doing the moving about.

A second result is that discussions have become quite complex. What exactly is 'emulation'? Who was Dallingridge trying to impress? To what extent is it permissible to take concepts of ritual and procession, derived in part from late medieval religion, and apply them to a secular and domestic context? Here, I want to keep it simple...

Part of this vagueness on the part of traditional scholars is due to a perception of 'lack of evidence'. There are some documentary sources relating to Dallingridge's career, and the licences and permissions for the castle, the market, and the mill and mill leat all exist. But of course, a gendered perspective questions what does or does not count as 'evidence'. Prehistoric colleagues talk confidently about the experience of moving along and around Stonehenge or the Dorset Cursus with the assistance of far less evidence.

Phenomenological accounts in prehistory are often accused of not problematizing the body; here, it's not quite clear who is moving around the landscape, but we can make a pretty good guess. I want to start then by asking some simple and direct questions about who moves around this landscape and what they were doing at specific points.

SLIDE For reasons of space, I am going to concentrate on two levels and scales of landscape analysis: a landscape of work, and a landscape of politics. I'll go to think about gender issues as operating to link between these two levels.

### **Landscapes of Work**

SLIDE Let's start with the mill. Here is the millpond. The mill leat ran for some kilometres to the west, being diverted from the river on the lands of the Abbey of Robertsbridge (more on that later.) It is not quite clear where the mill was; it may be either here, a little to the east of the millpond, or alternatively we may have picked it up in this sub-rectangular feature in our resistivity plot a little further again to the east. There is no documentary reference to the miller but the normative expectation would be that, like most professions in the Middle Ages, he would be male and would live with his family on the site of the mill. (My reading of the secondary literature has revealed no female millers, but if milling was like other professions, one might expect a small minority of examples.) The residents of Bodiam village brought their wheat here to be ground, in accordance with manorial sanction and custom; the mill was one way, in classical feudal theory, of extracting rent from tenants. So we can visualize women and men carrying sacks of wheat and flour back and forth along the tightly defined causeways to the south of the castle, and we need to see the castle as it was viewed from the south-west as having a watermill in the foreground. It must be remembered that a mill was not just a machine – it was a symbol of manorial lordship, prosperity and harmony.

SLIDE Some of these sacks of wheat and flour may then have been loaded on to barges and boats at the wharf. Again, the normative expectation would be that harbor masters and manorial officials at the wharf would be men, but the labor may well have been mixed. The wharf was also the nexus of other flows of goods. The Weald was a centre of the late medieval iron industry. Iron working took place to the north and pig iron probably came down this Roman road running N-S before being shipped out to Rye, Winchelsea and the Channel. Here is a magnetometry plot of the area to the west of the castle. These anomalies indicate iron working or possibly tile production relating to the construction of the castle.

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All of this east-west activity and movement back-and-forth of human bodies, beasts of burden, and the goods they were carrying could be monitored from the southern walls of the castle

SLIDE A third site of work lies to the north of the castle courtyard: the earthworks famously interpreted as a 'viewing platform' overlooking the castle from the north. This was probably the site of the earlier manor house. When Dallingridge built the castle, the manorial buildings remained in use. Most elite buildings of this period have two courts, upper and lower, and here at Bodiam this earlier site had the functions of a lower court, with barn, byre and other farm buildings. Manorial courts continued to be held here.

SLIDE A fourth site of work was the 'village' itself. Though more a small row of peasant houses than a typical medieval village, these houses, with their ladder-like arrangement of back gardens, materialized gendered divisions of labor around the peasant household itself. Only one of this row of houses survives from the Middle Ages, the 15<sup>th</sup> century house at the top of the row, a typical house for its time. The Weald was an affluent area in this period, due to the production not just of grain but also dairy products – butter, milk, cheese – also wool -- and of course iron. Dairy and industrial products were extracted from the surrounding fields, orchards, woodlands through the work of women and men, gathered and brought into these households, and there processed. So these houses themselves acted as gendered micro-landscapes, within which women did the cultural work of transforming nature into food and other products for the table and the market.

Rather than seeing Bodiam as a series of facades within a designed, ornamental landscape, I am sketching for you a place where the castle courtyard sat perhaps somewhat in isolation (like a hole in a doughnut) within a set of flows of people and goods that moved around it.

SLIDE AND SLIDE it would however have been monitored from the castle walls

What I will do now is move to a much larger scale of landscapes of political alliances and networks in which we see more clearly values that were gendered masculine, specifically violence and war.

### **SLIDE: Landscapes of Violence**

SLIDE AND SLIDE Let's return to that southern gatehouse from which an observer could look down on the wharf and mill. Above the gate are three shields, the two to left and right are now blank but probably originally painted. The central shield is that of Sir Robert Knollys. Dallingridge served under Knollys in the wars in France. Here, his helmet appears above that of Knollys, and Knollys's arms are tilted, for reasons that are unclear.

War in the later Middle Ages was in part an economic exercise, indeed political-economic, embedded in dynastic conflict. Kings mobilized armies to acquire territory, enforce or defend dynastic claims, and acquire prestige. They recruited war captains who recruited sub-captains in their turn. Men such as Dallingridge signed up in return for a cash payment; in turn, they recruited companies to serve below them. Kings needed to balance the economic outlay of war and the need to reward followers against the potential rewards. Successful monarchs such as Edward III earlier in his career played this game successfully, gaining 'honour', political credit, territories and wealth through war with France; his successor Richard II famously got the balance horribly wrong, alienating factions led by Henry Bolingbroke and ending up losing his life.

Dallingridge's position in this political landscape was situated below the great nobles. His grandfather had been a socially middling yeoman and his father had not been a knight. Dallingridge's position rested on the proceeds of successful participation in war, on inheritance of lands through marriage, of service to the the monarchical State in the bodies of Edward and then Richard. Dallingridge built the castle at a late stage in the lifecourse; the placement of the Knollys arms references his past and references an heraldic landscape of alliances and networks.

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War between kings was at one end of a male landscape of violence. For the community of Sussex, this landscape was closer to home by the 1380s; the coast 14 km away was subject to French raids; Rye and Winchelsea had been looted and burned by the French in the 1370s, and one of Dallingridge's services to the King was to officiate in the defence of the coast. Dallingridge's jousting helmet references another level of violence, down through armed conflict between barons, to the ritualized violence of the joust and the tournament.

SLIDE Jousting was a central component of male identity; by the 1380s it had evolved from the melee to a highly ritualized (but still dangerous and often fatal) form of combat and horsemanship in which values of male honour were performed.

SLIDE A more everyday act of violence was the hunt. There is an extensive literature on hunting and its gendered meanings. Dallingridge hunted in the deerpark a little way away from Bodiam castle, to the west. He also used the action of hunting as a medium of political action. He committed a deliberate act of trespass in hunting in the nearby deerpark of John of Gaunt, the king's uncle. This was a deliberate political statement, for which he was imprisoned but later released.

SLIDE So what I am describing for you is a landscape of political alliance, of violence at different levels, within which men like Dallingridge created a place for themselves both literally and metaphorically. Bodiam sits within the interstices of an earlier spatial structure of feudal lordships.

#### **SLIDE: GENDERED COMPLEXITIES**

SLIDE How do we join these landscapes together? We looked at the heraldry on the south gate – let's look at the north gate. The landscape indicated by the heraldry on the north gate of Bodiam references a linked but different set of networks. Again we have Dallingridge's jousting helmet, above three shields, but here Dallingridge's own arms are placed center stage. The left-hand shield either references the local family of Radynden or it is the historic arms of the manor of Bodiam. On the right are the arms of Dallingridge's wife, Elizabeth Wardedieu.

The heraldry here materializes what most members of the community would have been very well aware of: that Bodiam was in fact Elizabeth's manor, at least historically. Elizabeth Wardedieu was an heiress, the last in the line of Wardedieu's who married Dallingridge in 137? and who brought him the manor of Bodiam in dowry. We do not know the legal details of the marriage; we do know that there was a trend in the later middle ages to protect the rights of heiresses through a variety of legal stratagems, and we do know that the practice of pairing in this way references such arrangements). Again, the normative expectation was that land was the property of men; elite wills of the period generally assign landed property to the son(s), moveable goods to the daughter(s).

Wardedieu's arms are placed side by side with those of Dallingridge, and possibly those also of the ancient manor of Bodiam: a trinity of male, female and the past.

SLIDE There are indications in the arrangements of the castle (upper suite of private apartments, window looking down into the chapel) that may indicate the particular importance of female agency at Bodiam.

Ultimately, however, Elizabeth's agency was swallowed up in patriarchal structure. Ultimately, all we have of Elizabeth is her arms, her identity as the only daughter of a patrilineage; her body had been erased. The Bodiam estate was inherited by son John. John, like his father and probably his mother, was buried a few kilometres upstream at Robertsbridge Abbey.

SLIDE AND SLIDE Robertsbridge was reached by boat or barge up the river; water flowed from Robertsbridge to power the mill, while patronage from the Dallingrygge household flowed in the other direction, as did their deceased bodies destined for burial at the abbey.

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SLIDE Part of John's tomb effigy survives (here it is, next to a comparable effigy of Thomas Couen, a near contemporary, to indicate its probable original appearance; Couen was single so is not partnered with a female effigy). Edward and Elizabeth most likely lay side by side in the church at Robertsbridge, a male institution.

SLIDE However, I want to argue that this erasure of bodies, both male and particularly female, is telling us something interesting. I see the Bodiam landscape as materialising a strong grid of relationships. There is an inference to be drawn from the career and pattern of service of Dallingrygge: his service to the King took him regularly to London, and also to other places in south-east England. It is likely that Dallingrygge was away from Bodiam for well over half the time.

Such absences were normal practice for elite men in the later middle ages; the administration of the estate fell to the wife. In my view, a really important consideration in thinking about these kinds of buildings and landscape is that they materialize a structure of gendered authority for someone who is actually not there much of the time. Dallingrygge's place at the hall table or watching from the battlements may have been empty, but his structural position in the community was taken by his wife. The person looking down from the south gate tower, then, may well have been Elizabeth.

### **SLIDE Methodological Reflections**

I want to conclude by noting that I have taken a slightly different route from other writers on gender in this period. I wanted to start with the landscape, follow the threads of the evidence, and end up with a structural account of gendered social relations. One of the problems here is that I've deployed normative expectations. It should be stressed that these may not be correct.

SLIDE Others have taken a slightly different route: Gilchrist and Richardson have started with exceptions, women building castles and women hunting, and used these exceptions to explore female agency.

SLIDE I see this as a complementary route; for a comparative example one might look at nearby Iden I haven't looked at other sites in area, particular the site of Iden where the house is almost completely destroyed but the moat survives and is of the same size as Bodiam: here is its licence to crenellate, though the depiction of the building is probably fanciful; tradition states that Edmund de Pashley constructed Iden at the instigation of his common-law wife Margaret, who then killed Edmund and his legitimate sons so that her children could inherit. Even if partly fanciful, this story speaks to the underlying realities of the intersection of landscape, gender and inheritance at this period.

### **Conclusion: Keeping It Simple**

Many of the papers in this conference engage with theoretical concepts of some complexity and sophistication. This is an appropriate way to engage with landscape and gender; but there is an alternative. In this paper, I have tried to take a different route. I've tried to deploy an interpretive triangle: the site, lived experience of the site, a comparative political economy

I've tried to ask very direct questions about what people were doing or may have been doing, how people moved around the landscape and the work that they did at different specific points in that landscape, what that landscape looked like from different specific points. I've linked these direct movements to more direct and indirect flows and networks, again more or less directly observed. As feminists have argued now for thirty years, an attentiveness to gender in all of this renders the analysis concrete and situated, not just faceless blobs within a landscape of abstracted 'lordship'.

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SLIDE If you visit Bodiam today with your kids, for a small fee the volunteers will dress them up, either as knights or as ladies. The castle of the 1380s worked in more subtle and more complex ways at a series of scales. But while we may end in a very complex place, we should start by keeping it simple.

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Still held back by culture-historical definitions:

what is 'the castle'? Does it include the manorial site to the north?

'land'

people back in to it

In the process have used the normative expectations of the time: it is important to remember the exceptions to this rule. Medieval queens often hunted, for example, and there are numerous references to women practicing professions usually considered male. In 1383 for example....

Keep it simple: how do people move around this landscape? What do they do?

harbor: both places that house male work, according to normative expectations

But there were female millers and women working on and around ships

Harbour links downstream to ports at Rye and Winchelsea

Iden, Scotney sites in the area

Then relate to political economy