

# INTRODUCTION

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**Abstract.** This chapter provides an introductory narrative of the work set out in this volume. It discusses the intellectual origins of the programme of research, how different members of the project became involved, and how the scope and aims of the work shifted and expanded as the project developed, starting with the castle and landscape of Bodiam and moving on to Scotney, Knole and Ightham.

This edited volume reports on and discusses the work of a team of scholars from Northwestern University and the University of Southampton. The team was led by myself, and the work was conducted in partnership with the National Trust. Between 2010 and 2014, different members of the group carried out topographical, geophysical and building survey at four different late medieval sites in south-eastern England, all owned and managed by the Trust: Bodiam, Scotney, Knole and Ightham (Fig. 1.1). Different members of the team also undertook research into documentary, map and other evidence. A particularly important element of the research was to synthesise and re-present the ‘grey literature’ at all four sites.

The volume reports on this work, and sets out a wider view of later medieval buildings and their contexts. It places the four sites and their landscapes in their setting, as part of the wider landscape of south-east England. It discusses the importance of these places in understanding later medieval elite sites and landscapes in general, and in terms of their longer-term biographies and contexts.

A key idea running through all this work is that of *lived experience*. Though the interests and backgrounds of the team members were and are very diverse, and ideas of lived experience can be very complex in theoretical terms, at its heart the focus is very simple: it is about understanding buildings and landscapes in terms

of the different human experiences they afford. Its application to understanding later medieval building and landscapes will be expanded on in later chapters. Here, as an introduction, is a brief indication of some of the themes that lived experience refers to:

- A focus on the everyday – the ordinary routines of work: how people moved around and acted upon landscapes and buildings on a day-to-day basis.
- A focus on the local context – the immediate and regional landscapes around the different sites.
- Engaging with the subjective experience of different individuals and groups, both elite and commoner, women, men and children.
- A focus on practice – how the experience of places is bound up with what people do at those places.
- A focus on the senses: how places were experienced through the body.
- Cultural biography and the long term: how buildings and landscapes change through time, at a series of scales, from the daily, weekly and seasonal, to the millennia.

Our governing thesis is that late medieval buildings and landscapes can be better understood through a focus on these themes. We will present a view of Bodiam, Scotney, Knole and Ightham that places these sites in their local and regional context, but also does much more than this. We will situate these sites in their long-term histories and contexts, from prehistory to the present, and understand them as

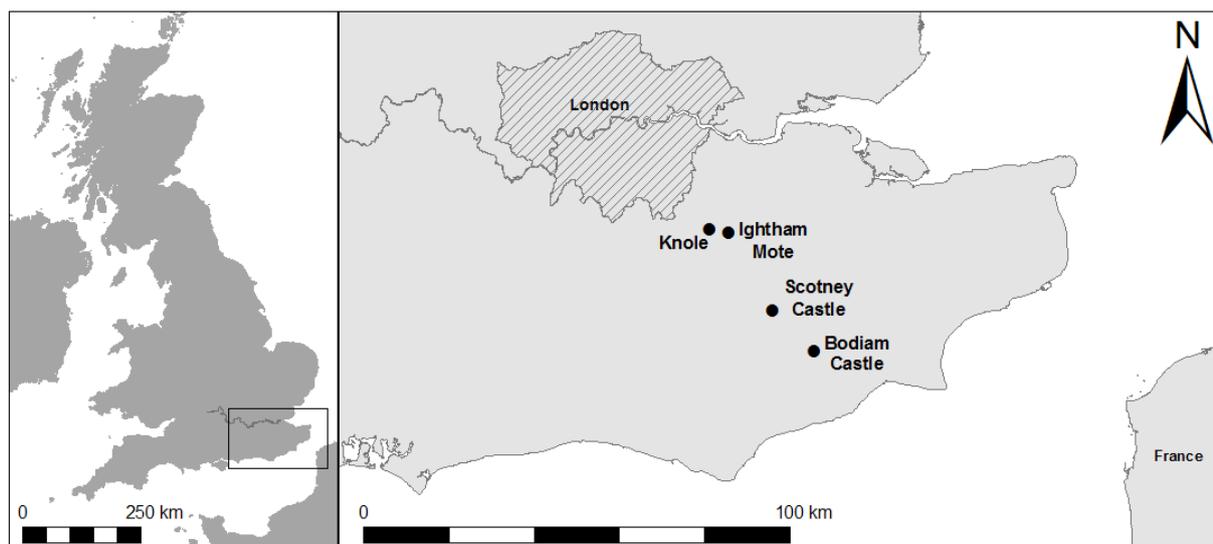


Fig. 1.1: Location map of Bodiam, Scotney, Knole and Ightham.

complex taskscapes and places of work rather than as architectural types or individual buildings.

Different elements of the themes that define lived experience are picked up in the chapters that follow. The concluding discussion will try to draw them all together into a fresh view of medieval buildings and landscapes. It will relate issues of lived experience to themes of political economy and ecology in a new understanding of these buildings that moves at a series of scales from the Weald and south-east England to the British Isles and beyond.

### Narrative of the Project

Over the last thirty years, approaches to the study of late medieval buildings and landscapes have changed radically. Many of these changes have been practical in nature, as new survey technologies and methods have produced much more accurate and detailed representations of buildings and the landscapes around them. Other changes have been intellectual and theoretical in nature. Changes include: a rethinking of the relationship between archaeological and historical evidence, a growing stress on understanding meaning and lived experience, growing stress on the social and landscape context of buildings within the discipline of architectural history, and a changing understanding of the demands and issues of public engagement and community archaeology. (For a fuller account of these intellectual shifts in medieval archaeology, see Austin 1984; 1990; 2007; Gilchrist 1999; Moreland 2001; Gerrard 2003; Johnson 2007 and Johnson 2010a).

My own work has been part of these changes. My 1993 book *Housing Culture: Traditional Houses in an English*

*Landscape* (Johnson 1993) was an early attempt to apply some of these ideas to the study of traditional houses between the 14th and 17th centuries. In *Housing Culture*, I explored the shift from the medieval hall to the early modern vernacular house in social and cultural terms, as part of a 'process of closure'. I asked what cultural meanings the open hall carried, and how and why those meanings shifted as the open hall was abandoned and houses became more segregated in the course of the 16th and 17th centuries. I amplified and broadened these ideas in my 2010b *English Houses 1300-1800: Vernacular Architecture, Social Life*, in which I took the story up to the segregated, symmetrical houses of the Georgian period. I also discussed the implications of new ideas for the traditional study of landscapes in *Ideas of Landscape* (2007).

I turned my attention specifically to the evidence of medieval and later castles and elite landscapes in my 2002 book *Behind the Castle Gate: From Medieval to Renaissance*. In this book, I showed how castles had traditionally been seen and interpreted in largely military terms, but that we needed to understand castles in social and cultural terms also. Castles were also stage settings, backdrops against which the identities and agencies of their builders and owners were played out. The landscapes around castles were part of these staged settings, controlling and delimiting views and the movement of people inwards and outwards. Having explored these themes for later medieval castles, I then traced how these views and settings changed at the end of the Middle Ages and through into the 16th and early 17th centuries.

A key case study in the changing interpretation of later medieval buildings was that of the castle of Bodiam, in

south-east England, built in the 1380s and associated with Sir Edward Dallingridge<sup>1</sup> (Fig. 1.1). Chapter Two lays out the very long history of debate over the interpretation of this site, termed by the eminent architectural historian John Goodall the ‘battle for Bodiam’ (Goodall 1998b; see also Goodall 1998a & Goodall 2011: 307-19). Many traditional scholars have seen Bodiam as having been built near the south coast as a defence against the French at an historical moment during the Hundred Years War when the French were making attacks upon the southern English coast. Others, including myself in *Behind the Castle Gate*, have questioned this exclusively military view and emphasised instead the social and symbolic aspects of the castle’s form and context. This latter view, as applied not just to Bodiam but to medieval castles in general, has been characterised by some as ‘revisionist’ (Platt 2007).

Three key pieces of work have been influential in so-called revisionist views. First, Charles Coulson wrote a series of articles reassessing the architecture of Bodiam in terms of what he saw as its lack of military effectiveness (Coulson 1992; 1996). Second, Coulson also reinterpreted Bodiam’s ‘licence to crenellate’, a document dated to 1385 in the form of a licence issued by the king, suggesting that it and other such licences issued at the time were honorific in nature rather than transparent evidence of defensibility (1993; 1994). Third, a survey by the then Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME, or simply Royal Commission) of the immediate landscape setting led to their claim that the immediate landscape context of Bodiam could be understood as ‘elaborate gardens’ (Taylor *et al.* 1990; Everson 1996: 67).

The battle for Bodiam, and the broader debate over the meanings and functions of castles of which it was a part, stemmed in part from different disciplinary backgrounds, generational views and intellectual approaches to castles. Some elements of the ‘debate’ were frustrating. In particular, there was what I felt to be a false framing of the debate in terms of military *versus* social explanations of castles, and an assertion by some traditional scholars that I and others were claiming that castles had little or no military role to play (Platt 2007). The wrongly attributed view that castles were ‘not defensive’ (Thompson 2003: 621) could then easily be refuted by a long list of examples where castles could and did play a military role. There was a strong element of rhetoric here: military views were presented by their advocates as ‘common sense’ and the currency

of the ‘plain historian or archaeologist’ (Thompson 2003: 621), and conversely ‘social’ interpretations were derided as ‘imaginative flights’ or as ‘hostile to empirical research... never needing to put a spade in the ground’ (Thompson 2003: 622; Platt 2010b: 431).

The mismatch between a rhetoric of empiricism and common sense, and the reality, was particularly apparent when one considered the previous history of field and archival research at Bodiam. I had taken care to examine closely the archive at Bodiam, and to talk to local archaeologists and historians such as Casper Johnson and David and Barbara Martin. One of the things that was striking about critical reactions to the battle for Bodiam was that they paid so little attention to the work of these and other local scholars and of the grey literature (research written-up and archived, but not fully published: see Glossary) on the site. In particular, as we will discuss at more length in Chapter Two, important grey literature research outlined in a 2000 Conservation Management Plan commissioned by the National Trust (Johnson *et al.* 2000) had placed Bodiam much more fully in its local and regional context, and raised a series of questions about the 1990 RCHME interpretation.

The battle for Bodiam, then, seemed to be going around in circles. Scholars were spilling a great deal of ink on the interpretation of the castle and its context, and sometimes getting quite cross with one another, without, it seemed to me, advancing to a better understanding of the site or what the evidence of the site might mean during the later Middle Ages. This lack of progress was frustrating, but it wasn’t enough to just get cross. It occurred to me that as someone who had worked on ‘theory’ in archaeology (Johnson 2010a), it was incumbent upon me, not merely to be frustrated, but to ask the question *why*. Why was the debate going round in circles? How might we change the terms of the debate to make it more meaningful, and to move it forward – to enable different scholars to discuss and advance their understanding of the site with reference to evidence, rather than simply restating old views over and over again?

Towards 2010, I was developing two related answers to these questions. The first was that as framed, questions about the purpose or intent of the builder of Bodiam were unanswerable. Much of the debate concerned questions of individual intention – what did Dallingridge intend when he built this castle, to defend against the French or to express his social status? In general, scholarly arguments that appeal to the presumed intention of an individual in this way can be very difficult to resolve,

<sup>1</sup> Sir Edward Dallingridge’s surname can be spelt several different ways; in this volume, we follow the place-name from which it was derived.

for the rather old-fashioned reason that we will never be able to directly observe what goes on between someone's ears, let alone someone who has been dead for over six centuries. Consequently, any piece of evidence could be marshalled to support either view, depending on one's prejudice – one person's defensive causeway was another person's processional routeway, one person's gunport was another person's fashion statement.

The debate was also framed around terms and concepts which appeared simple and straightforward but which, when examined more closely, were actually quite complex – defence, honour, status, display, conspicuous consumption... any student of social, cultural and political life in the later Middle Ages would readily affirm that defence, honour, status, display, conspicuous consumption were very complex and fluid ideas in the thought and conduct of the period. One might suggest that they need to be defined and dissected in anthropological terms, before looking for them in the archaeological and documentary record.

If it is to be a responsible and rigorous science, then archaeology must have at its centre the relationship between theory and evidence. The accumulation of vast amounts of evidence, in and of itself, leads precisely nowhere if it is not related in its turn to the evaluation of different ideas. We can look very hard at a castle, climb its stairs, stand in its ruins, and tramp across the surrounding landscape until our legs are heavy and our feet are cold and tired, but unless the observations we make are rigorously tied to the evaluation of different and often competing interpretations, such hard and back-breaking labour tells us nothing. What was needed, then, was more careful theoretical consideration of how arguments over Bodiam, and for that matter late medieval buildings and landscape generally, were framed in relation to the evidence.

The second answer was more prosaic, and was practical rather than theoretical: despite the huge literature on the interpretation of Bodiam, including my own contributions, much basic work at the site had yet to be done. First, there was no modern building survey of the castle. Plans of the building were direct or indirect copies of the drawings Sydney Toy made of the building during Lord Curzon's work in the 1920s. These drawings were outstanding for their time, but buildings archaeologists are very aware that time and again new surveys have thrown up fresh insights into buildings. For example, work at the Tower of London (Impey 2008), at Colchester (Drury 1982), and at Norham and Hedingham (Dixon & Marshall 1993a; 1993b) has shown how the popular image of the Norman stone

residential tower-keep actually conceals a great variety of early forms and arrangements. Chapter Three, then, reports on our survey of the interior of Bodiam, the new observations arising from that survey, and their implications for the interpretation of that site.

There was, second, no systematic topographical survey of the Bodiam landscape, and a sustained programme of geophysical work had never been done. The famous Royal Commission survey (Fig. 1.2) was a hachure survey, with all the strengths and limitations of that method. Hachure surveys are a distinctive form of field practice and representation. They are national, in the sense that the drawing of hachures was developed within the 'English school' of landscape archaeology and direct equivalents are rare in other national traditions. Hachured plans draw on the immense and deep knowledge of their practitioners in making judgments about the form, nature and relative chronology of the humps and bumps being surveyed. The hachures or 'tadpoles' that appear on the final plan are the product of close observation of the land by experts in the craft, but they cannot be characterised as objective or neutral, as they always go hand-in-hand with a developing understanding of the site, as their own practitioners often affirm (Bowden 2000; Johnson 2007: 93-5).

In 2008-9, then, I was thinking about how frustrating it was that all sides in the battle for Bodiam had taken so little notice of the grey literature, and how so much work remained to be done. At the same time, I also became aware, both indirectly and directly, of the outlooks and views of local archaeologists and historians. These included Caroline Thackray, then the Regional Archaeologist for the National Trust, Casper Johnson, who at the time was working for Archaeology South-East and went on to be County Archaeologist for East Sussex, David and Barbara Martin, who had worked in the area for over forty years, knew the castle intimately and whose work there included a report on work on the bridge timbers and other features exposed during draining of the moat (Martin 1973), Chris Whittick, Senior Archivist at Sussex County Council, and George Bailey, who was Site Manager at Bodiam between 1992 and 2016.

Discussing Bodiam in 2008-9 with those who had a local and intimate knowledge and continuing engagement with its immediate landscape clarified several impressions. First, the information in the grey literature needed to be more widely disseminated. To that end, Chapter Two presents the key findings from past work since 1999 and in particular the surveys and interventions since 2000, including the key points

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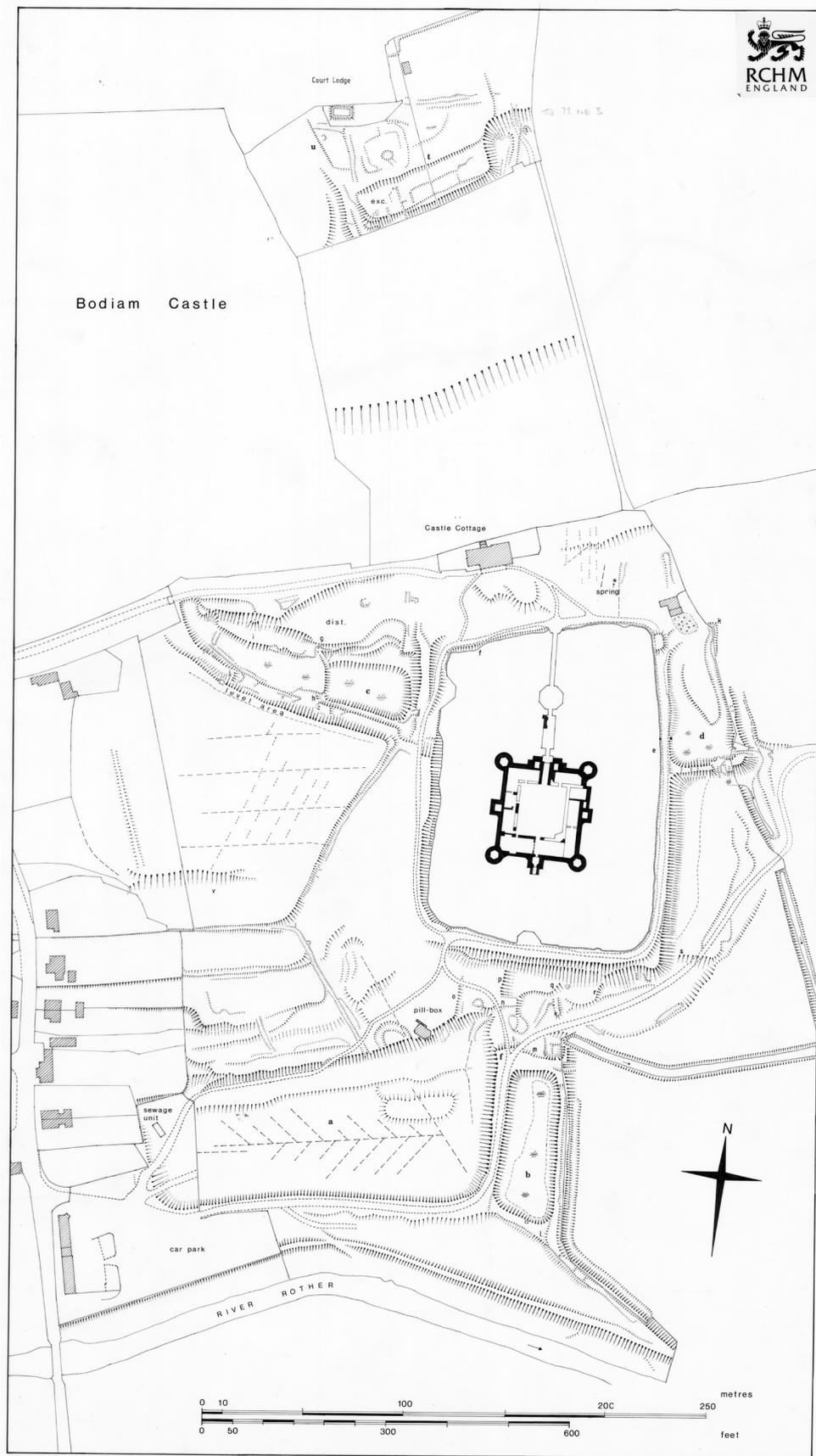


Fig. 1.2: The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments of England (RCHME) survey of Bodiam (after Taylor et al. 1990, fig. 4). The use of hachures will not be familiar to all members of an international audience: they are the 'tadpoles' indicating breaks and changes of slope. 810438 Bodiam Castle in AF0809527 RCHME survey 1988. © Crown copyright. Historic England Archive.

from the observations in the 2000 Conservation Management Plan of Casper Johnson, David Martin and Chris Whittick. This chapter is the result of a very long gestation, going back to early discussions initiated with Caroline Thackray's encouragement in 2009 of what a paper on the grey literature might look like. Here, it forms an introduction to the rest of the work on Bodiam, a framing of questions which we have been able to partly answer through subsequent fieldwork.

Second, there was a need for more systematic survey of the Bodiam landscape using the latest technologies. Here, I turned to my colleagues at Southampton, Dominic Barker, Timothy Sly and Kristian Strutt. Tim, Dom and Kris were annually running two extremely popular survey courses in Archaeological Survey and Geophysical Survey for Southampton undergraduates. An integral part of both courses (and a key reason for their popularity) was a week's field experience on local sites, and it was imperative that the students get experience with as wide a range of up-to-date equipment as possible during that time. They expressed enthusiasm when I suggested that we work together at Bodiam; it has proved to be an ideal partnership. Dom, Tim and Kris work to the highest professional and technical standards; managing large programmes of systematic fieldwork has never been my strength, but I hope I have been able to engage with their work and facilitate the articulation of its results within a wider intellectual frame. The National Trust, thanks to the efforts of Caroline and George, were able to provide student accommodation at their Scotney Base Camp for two two-week spring field seasons at Bodiam, in March/April 2010 and 2011. During this time, a total of c. 80 Southampton undergraduates took part in the work, with c. 15-20 working on the project at any one time.

At the same time as the topographical and geophysical survey of the landscape was underway, we were able to undertake a new survey of the castle fabric. We were successful in obtaining Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funding through the PARNASSUS project (studying the impact of climate change of ancient monuments) for Penny Copeland, Research Fellow/Technician at Southampton, to work on the standing fabric of Bodiam as an example of a monument that rises from standing water. The AHRC was also able to fund a limited programme of coring. Penny Copeland and Catriona Cooper prepared a new survey which is presented and discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Four presents the results of topographical and geophysical survey of the areas around the castle, and Chapter Five does the same for coring and environmental analysis.

In 2011, we extended the work to the nearby site of Scotney. Scotney is another later 14th-century castle with striking parallels to Bodiam; it is also owned and managed by the National Trust. It was always apparent that for all its fame as a particularly impressive site, Bodiam's significance was in part that it was representative of a group of late medieval buildings and landscapes, most of which, including Scotney, have been much less cited in the literature. Scotney is very similar to Bodiam in a number of ways – built by a contemporary and associate of Dallingridge's, Roger Ashburnham, in the 1370s, and also surrounded by an extensive, watery landscape including a mill and artificial moat or lake. The topographical and limited geophysical survey of the Scotney estate, extensively re-landscaped in the 19th century, was led by Tim Sly.

In the autumn of 2011, I moved from the University of Southampton to Northwestern University in the USA. For the three years of 2012, 2013 and 2014, we continued work as a three-week summer field season, involving a team of students from both universities in an Anglo-American collaboration that brought a new intellectual dimension to the project.

In particular, Northwestern graduate students Kat Catlin and Ryan Lash worked on different aspects of the material and played a key role in the move from fieldwork to publication, collating, processing and re-presenting the data from different sites. Eric Johnson, then an undergraduate at Northwestern, and at the time of writing a graduate student at Harvard, took the survey data from Scotney and related it to the map and documentary evidence presented in Chapter Six. Eric also conducted the survey and analysis of moated sites across the Weald that is presented in Chapter Ten.

In 2013, having concluded work at Bodiam and Scotney, we moved our accommodation and base of operations from the Scotney Base Camp 30 km north-west to the northern side of the Weald at the Base Camp at Outridge, and on to two further late medieval sites owned and managed by the National Trust: Knole and Ightham. Ightham developed from quite obscure origins in the 14th century as an 'unfortified' house, sited at the base of a narrow valley on the north edge of the Weald. Ightham is of comparable size to Bodiam and Scotney, and its owners, including Thomas Couen and the Haute family, were of a similar social class to the builders of Scotney and Bodiam. The landscape context of Ightham is a complex one, again with an intricate arrangement of watery features and routeways that speak to the wider debate about the meaning and interpretation of 'designed landscapes'. Chapter Eight

discusses the results of the 2013 and 2014 survey at Ightham, and its relationship to the history of the house and the surrounding landscape.

Knole, by contrast, is a much larger residence; its present form owes its origins to its construction as a great house for the Archbishop of Canterbury in the later 15th century. Again, the landscape context of Knole is critical: it is sited within the largest surviving medieval deer park in England. Knole is still partly occupied by the Sackville family. Chapter Seven summarises our survey of that part of the Knole landscape owned and managed by the National Trust, and puts the survey in the wider context of the history and development of Knole and the meanings and practices of medieval deer parks in general.

In 2010, we were successful in obtaining funding for two AHRC studentships into lived experience at the sites we were studying, which were filled by Southampton students Catriona Cooper and Gemma Minihan. As the two projects developed, Catriona focused on digital visualisation of the private apartments at Bodiam, worked with Penny Copeland on the Bodiam building survey, and engaged in an aural study of the great hall at Ightham. Her work is presented in Chapter Nine. Gemma's study as it evolved became a more traditional historical study of the life and career of Thomas Couen, the later 14th-century owner of Ightham Mote. Catriona's PhD is available to download from Southampton University Library, at <http://eprints.soton.ac.uk/377916/>, and copies of both PhDs are on file in the National Trust archives.

### **Intellectual Basis of the Project**

As the project has developed, our view of all these sites has changed, and the questions we have asked of these sites have evolved. Our ideas, as we express them in this volume, were not ones that were fully articulated at the start of our work. As outlined above, they were initially articulated out of a particular frustration with the perceived sterility of the battle for Bodiam and a desire to move thinking and research at that site forward in very general terms. So at the outset, the research aims of the project could be seen as quite limited and specific.

Rather, the intellectual basis of the project emerged incrementally and gradually through the process of research in the broadest sense – of talking to collaborators, National Trust staff and volunteers, and to other stakeholders, through formal and informal discussions between different members of the team, and through the changing field and intellectual setting

of the work. An important element of this development was the commitment to public engagement – the work on all four sites was conducted in full view of visitors; students and staff wore project T-shirts and were expected to respond fully to enquiries from the public, even if it meant interruptions to their work. Southampton student Becky Peacock conducted a qualitative survey of public attitudes and opinions at all four sites and this public feedback was fed in to the project as it developed. Becky's work is reported in Chapter Eleven.

I would pick out several key elements in terms of the intellectual progress of the work. First, I was very struck in the earlier years of the project at the constant reference back to local and regional context in the comments of local archaeologists and historians. Many people, both professional and amateur, working in the region clearly felt that national and international scholarship had viewed these places in a rather disembodied way, set apart from local landscapes; they had tended to overlook the smaller scale networks and regional affiliations of which these four sites were a part. Of the four sites, Bodiam in particular had suffered from what I came to call the 'A21 syndrome' – national scholars and academics, including myself in my earlier work, had driven down the A21 road from London, spent a few days or even a few hours at the site, and then driven back again in short order.

Second, the field experience itself was distinctive. All four sites are located either in or on the edge of the Weald, a distinctive form of rural landscape found on either side of the Kent/Sussex border in south-east England. The Weald and adjacent areas have a particular quality all of their own, what the great landscape historian WG Hoskins would call a *genius loci* after the Classical idea of a spirit presiding over a particular locality (Hoskins 1955; Phythian-Adams 1992; Johnson 2007). The Weald is very different from the stereotype of the English village, with houses clustered round the church and manor house. By contrast, the Weald is a landscape of rolling hills, small fields, and patches of woodland, sandwiched between the more open ridges of the North and South Downs. Working in such a distinctive landscape, only 40-90 km from the very centre of London, and yet at the same time deep in the countryside, prompted further thoughts on the issue of place and space.

One of the most difficult things to communicate to an international audience is the way the English landscape can be so very particular – it has innumerable subtle variations and sudden changes over very short spaces,

so that the landscape of Scotney, say, is very different from the landscape of Ashdown Forest 30 km away. Understanding these particularities, making sense of them, is a rational and empirically informed exercise in historical geography, but as I discussed in *Ideas of Landscape* (Johnson 2007), it is also in part about the bodily and sensory experience of 'being there', coming back to the place in different times of the day, weather conditions and seasons of the year. One of the most challenging parts of the project, but also the most enjoyable, was introducing students from a North American and urban background to these subtleties, seeing them grow to appreciate the texture and nuances of the Ordnance Survey map, variations in field and woodland, and uses and patterns of different building materials. As any teacher will affirm, the act and effort of explaining particular features and differences to an intelligent and inquisitive audience can also become a move towards a deeper personal understanding of them.

Third, discussions and interactions with Southampton and Northwestern colleagues, particularly research and graduate students, prompted the development of the idea of lived experience. Part of the utility of lived experience is as a bridging concept. It has the potential to bring together the stress on the local and regional with wider theoretical trends in the study of archaeology generally, the love of particular place in the Hoskins tradition, mentioned above and discussed in my *Ideas of Landscape*, with a wider need to situate scholarly findings within a broader, comparative context. Lived experience also bridges a series of disabling oppositions between function and aesthetics, practical and symbolic, utility and ornament, that were embedded into habits of thought in the 18th century and have impaired thinking about landscape ever since.

Fourth, the move to Northwestern and to a North American intellectual environment impressed on me that however attractive the understanding of a particular place was, it always had to be situated within a wider, comparative context of political economy and ecology. Describing the lived experience of a particular place is arguably a necessary first task. What one then needs to do is situate that understanding within a wider analysis of the context and affordances of the region, and more widely still in comparative context. Viewed in this light, 'subjective' and 'objective' approaches to landscape are complementary rather than competing approaches: if properly thought through, each enables the other, a point I will return to in the Conclusion.

In Chapter Twelve, and in the conclusion to this volume, I try to draw together some of the findings presented in the earlier chapters of the book. I discuss the idea of lived experience and relate it to the long-term histories and biographies of the sites. In particular, I stress how all four sites were elements of a distinctive regional landscape on the edges of the Weald of south-eastern England. I then try to work outwards to understand the four sites at a series of scales, from the most intimate and local, outwards through the landscape and region, to the widest of temporal and geographical scales.

This report is presented as an edited volume. Individuals or small groups of scholars worked within the project on particular pieces of work. Though the project as a whole was under my overall direction, this structure allows individual contributions to be properly foregrounded and acknowledged. The authors for each chapter are presented in strictly alphabetical order, rather than in order of academic or professional 'seniority', and each jointly-authored chapter includes, in the first footnote, a brief statement on who did what.