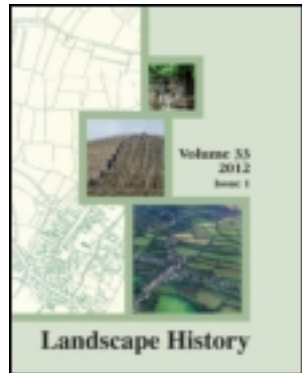


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Peopling polite landscapes: community and heritage at Poltimore, Devon

Oliver Creighton, Penny Cunningham and Henry French

ABSTRACT

Poltimore House, near Exeter, Devon, was the seat of the Bampfylde family from the mid-sixteenth century until the 1920s. The AHRC-funded knowledge transfer project 'Community and Landscape: Transforming Access to the Heritage of the Poltimore Estate' researched the changing relationship between house and setting through a public heritage initiative that promoted the co-creation of knowledge with local groups. Research techniques included analysis of maps, estate records and pictorial sources; geophysical and earthwork survey; test-pitting; and fieldwalking. The designed landscape around the house went through a series of previously unknown iterations as the park was enlarged and gardens re-designed, while accompanying changes saw roads diverted and farms and estate buildings variously moved, re-built and abandoned. Visual experiences of the house and its surroundings were manipulated in complex ways as different elements of the estate landscape were exhibited to certain audiences but secluded from others at different points in time. The case study demonstrates how the design of a post-medieval estate landscape could be moulded by the 'personality' of a local dynasty and mediated by local circumstances. It also shows how integrated archaeological and historical analysis of polite landscapes can reveal antecedent activity and illuminate layers of re-use to these settings.

KEYWORDS

Country house history; designed landscape; local and regional history; polite landscape; deer park; garden archaeology; garden history; gentry; great estates; public heritage; community archaeology

INTRODUCTION

To style Poltimore House, on the northern outskirts of Exeter, Devon, as former country house is to deny this remarkable building's extraordinarily complex biography (Pl. I). The earliest identifiable phase of the structure is of the Tudor period; thereafter the building underwent significant structural changes in the seventeenth, eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries before the Bampfylde family finally left it and sold the estate in 1921. It was subsequently re-used as a girls' school (until 1940), a wartime evacuation home for a boys' college (1940–45), a hospital (1945–75, first a private institution and latterly an NHS maternity ward), and then a nursing home until 1987, when its ballroom wing was destroyed by a disastrous fire. And that is not all: as a derelict shell in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Poltimore House became a locally infamous venue for rave parties; a temporary home for travellers who oral histories suggest carried out some repairs; and even a film set when it stood in for the Reichstag.¹ Since 2000, when the Poltimore House Trust acquired the property, a more sustainable future for the building has energetically been sought (see Hemming 2005; Howard 2009, pp. 58–9).

What is the relevance of all this for landscape historians? The first part of the answer is fairly conventional. Poltimore House was embedded within a tastefully designed parkland setting — a 'polite landscape' (Williamson 1995). These exclusive surroundings — blending aesthetic qualities with productivity and utility — con-

stituted the house's essential milieu before the breakup of its estate left the property set within a pocket of only 13 surrounding acres by 1976. There is, however, no disguising the fact that as a cultural artefact Poltimore House's surrounding landscape does not exhibit outstanding research potential as conventionally defined by landscape archaeologists and historians, or exceptional merit as defined by heritage agencies. It does not feature on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens, unlike the designed landscapes around better-known medieval and post-medieval Devonian country houses such as Dartington Hall, Powderham Castle and Castle Drogo, for example.² W. G. Hoskins certainly didn't rate the place; in *Devon* he described Poltimore House as a 'plain square mansion in a dull park' (1954, pp. 464–5). This remark needs to be appreciated in its correct context, however; Hoskins bemoaned that the 'atmosphere of slow decay about the country houses' was a characteristic feature of Devon's countryside, as manifest at properties including the seat of the Rolle family at Stevenstone, the Courtenays at Powderham and the Aclands at Killerton (*ibid.*, p. 296).

Poltimore House's polite landscape, as we shall see, underwent a complex series of iterations between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries that Hoskins was unaware of. Still, it is difficult to portray Poltimore's designed landscape in any of its phases as especially influential, although as we shall see it did incorporate some unusual elements; rather, it encapsulates a narrative of regionally distinctive landscape design at a level below the work of nationally important figures. Garden historians and landscape historians alike have naturally been drawn to polite landscapes at the 'sharp end' of contemporary design and this paper is a step towards redressing this imbalance. Landscape histories and social histories of designed landscapes do not always adequately reflect the full biographies of these settings, and the case of Poltimore emphasises quite how multi-layered even a relatively modest polite setting could be.

A final reason for Poltimore's research value is its potential as a resource to understand how

present-day communities engage with multiple layers of landscape heritage. Given the property's complex 'afterlife' in the twentieth century as a school, hospital, burnt-out shell, restoration project and community resource, coming to grips with public understandings of Poltimore's landscape also involves engagement and negotiation with a complex matrix of memories. The property and its setting are seen in multiple ways by visitors, villagers, academics and people who have lived and worked in and around the property in its various guises. A spectrum of responses, from bemusement and indifference through to deep engagement, are among the myriad public reactions to the house and its setting that we have encountered during the AHRC-funded project *Community and Landscape: Transforming Access to the Heritage of the Poltimore Estate* that is the focus of this paper.³

The paper is divided into two parts. The first considers the history of the Poltimore estate and its owners in a Devonian and national context. The second part outlines how archaeological fieldwork and related research have illuminated the physical development of the Poltimore landscape through time and presents a summary of its evolution between the sixteenth and early twentieth centuries. The conclusion reflects on the challenges and potential of 'community heritage' projects with particular reference to estate landscapes of the post-medieval period.

HISTORY: THE POLTIMORE ESTATE IN CONTEXT

Originating in Weston Bampfylde in Somerset, the Bampfylde family were first recorded as owners of Poltimore in a deed transferring the title from William Poyntingdon, a canon of Exeter Cathedral, to John Bampfylde, dated 26 Edw. 1 (1298) (Westcote 1845, pp. 492–3; Hemming 2005, pp. 3–4). The family retained ownership of the estate, surviving the apparent kidnap of a minor heir in 1528; elevation of the family to a Baronetcy in 1641; and extensive court cases about inheritance in the 1690s, 1720s and 1740s (Hemming 2005, pp. 5, 14;



Plate 1. View of Poltimore House from the south-west, showing the roofless ballroom to the left and the early eighteenth-century frontage to the right, obscured behind a temporary corrugated iron roof installed to protect the property from further damage (Photograph: Oliver Creighton).

NA, C5/113/2 Bampfylde v. Bampfylde, 1694; C11 322/10 Bampfylde v. Bampfylde, 1728; C11/394/7 Bampfylde v. Carew; C12/761/17 Bampfylde v. Carew). As shown below, although the family appear to have lived in Poltimore since the fourteenth century, the earliest parts of the surviving house date from the late sixteenth century, perhaps accompanying the Bampfylde's rise in county society, with Richard Bampfylde being chosen as sheriff in 1576 (Hemming 2005, p. 7).

In some respects, this retention was testament to the binding power of legal settlements rather than the prudence or skill of the family. In the later eighteenth century, Sir Richard Warwick Bampfylde 4th Baronet (1722–76) was described by one observer as a 'miser', known locally as 'Tenpenny Dick', after his desire to reduce farm labourers' wages to that level *per diem*, while his son Charles Warwick Bampfylde was described by the same observer as 'a sad instance of folly, thoughtlessness, extravagance, and compliance with luxurious taste and dissipation of the present age' (Atkinson Ward 1843, p. 219). Indeed, it

was alleged that Charles Bampfylde had spent £60,000 in cash, and sold lands worth £8,000 *per annum*, before his twenty-fifth birthday. He survived for another forty years as a Member of Parliament (using Parliamentary privilege to evade his creditors), before succumbing to a bullet fired by the deranged husband of his housekeeper in 1823 (Thorne 1986, p. 128). His son, George Warwick Bampfylde, claimed that his father had spent £80,000 on elections during his lifetime (*ibid.*, p. 127). These oscillations in fortune resulted in considerable neglect of the Poltimore estate. When Curwen passed the house on his travels in 1779, he described how 'an irregular old edifice and its office, deserted by its owner, foreshadows approaching ruin' (Atkinson Ward 1843, p. 219).

The Bampfylde's began to take more interest in their ancestral home after their ennoblement in 1831. George Warwick Bampfylde, the first Baron Poltimore, appears to have spent money on improving the house, and, under the supervision of John Gould, his energetic estate steward, to have improved some of the housing on the estate,

reorganised some of the farms, and (as discussed below) to have extended the park by demolishing Bargains and Pitts Farms. Gould explained to the Commissioners on the Employment of Women and Children in Agriculture in 1843 that he favoured a policy of parochial paternalism. ‘I subjected myself to be brought before a bench of magistrates at Exeter because I would give the labourers in this parish 9s. per week instead of 7s.’, and stressed his advocacy of allotments, to ensure that ‘the poor are generally healthy, and all well provided for in moral and religious instruction in this parish’ (*Report* 1843, p. 106). Garton and King, ironmongers based in Exeter, were commissioned to undertake a number of improvements in Poltimore House and gardens from 1868–1909, providing heating for the peach house and pipe work for the vinery and succession pine pit (DRO Quotations Book 2783B/A19, 2783B/A20, 2783B/A21). It is also from the mid-nineteenth century that court cases document poaching on an apparently increased scale, although park-breaking and trespass would have occurred ever since the park’s creation; articles in *Trewman’s Exeter Flying Post*, for example, chart an upsurge in the poaching of rabbits and pheasants — or at least the prosecution of local people for doing so — in the 1860s and 1870s, as well as the occasional violent assault of estate officials!

Timber became a greater source of income to the estate. Sales became more regular and trees were clearly specified and marked out for sale, rather than the sales consisting of those blown down in winter storms. The number of trees for sale rose from about 200 in 1859 and 300 in 1861 to over 800 in 1872, suggesting greater professional management of the asset (*TEFP*, 24 Feb 1859, Feb 13 1861, 21 Feb 1872. We are very grateful to Dr Julia Neville for access to her research on the park’s history through local newspapers). By the end of the century, the professionalisation of gardening (and gardeners) was reflected in the increasing public role of the head gardener at Poltimore. Lord Poltimore’s head gardener in the mid-1890s, Mr W. Martin, and his successor, Mr Slade, were

members of the Devon and Exeter Gardeners’ Mutual Improvement Association (*TEFP*, 27 Jul 1895). The reports of those meetings provide some information about the gardens. Mr Martin hosted a visit of the branch in 1895 when the lime avenues, the deodars, Wellingtonia and other specimen trees were much admired. Mr Slade, a fellow of the Royal Horticultural Society, who took up post in 1897, was a frequent speaker and exhibitor at the meetings showing exotic plants such as blue primroses, tree carnations, ceneraria and amaryllis. He also reported in 1900 on the fruit grown: apples, pears, plums, cherries, peaches and nectarines, apricots, strawberries and nuts, and exhibited not just locally but at the Royal Horticultural Society show at the Crystal Palace (*TEFP*, 18 Mar 1899; 17 Mar 1900; *Western Times*, Dec 13 1899, *WT*, 12 Apr 1902).

By the time of the 1873 Return of Landowners, the Bampfylde were the sixth-largest landowners in Devon, behind only Hon. Mark Rolle, the Duchy of Cornwall, the Dukes of Bedford, the Earls of Devon and Earl Fortescue. In total, they held 19,883 acres. This put them slightly ahead of their neighbours, the Aclands of Killerton, whose estate bounded the northern edge of the Poltimore estate. However, the Aclands owned another 25,000 acres in Cornwall and Somerset, while the bulk of the Bampfylde’s holdings were concentrated in the parishes of Poltimore, Pinhoe, Huxham, and Broadclyst, in south Devon, and within the (giant) parish of North Molton in the north of the county. By 1909, the family derived two-thirds of its landed income from North Molton, that is, £11,798 out of £16,664, rather than from the lands around Poltimore itself. Through the nineteenth century, they were attracted to the hunting grounds of North Molton, and the more manageable house at Court Hall, more often than to their seat at Poltimore.

Through the remainder of the nineteenth century, the Bampfylde remained interested observers in the fortunes of Poltimore and its surrounding district, even if they spent less and less time there. Unlike the Aclands, who eschewed ennoblement, and continued

contesting parliamentary elections until World War Two, the Bampfylde family settled for positions of social prestige within the royal household, and increasing absorption within the alternating rituals of ‘county society’ and the ‘London season’. However, Augustus Warwick Bampfylde, the second Baron Poltimore, (1837–1908) was steward of the royal household between 1870 and 1873. His decision in 1880 to cross the floor and become a Conservative rather than a Liberal was followed by greater use of the park for Conservative fetes and Primrose League events (of which he became chairman in the 1880s), to which the public was invited. The park was also used for field days for the militia and fund-raising events for the Devonshire Nursing Association, of which Lady Poltimore was patron. It appears that some visitors were allowed access to the park and the gardens, as newspaper reports refer in April 1902 to the pleasure of seeing the carpet of primroses under the limes and the plantings of narcissi throughout the park and in February 1904 to the display of rhododendrons and early prunus. The 1904 reporter also visited the greenhouses, naming the exotic flowers on display and approving the peach and nectarine in flower and the forced vegetables — mushrooms, French beans and new potatoes (*TEFP*, 3 Aug 1881, 31 May 1882, 4 Aug 1894, *WT* 6 Aug 1896; *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 22 Apr 1902, 24 Feb 1903).

These events accompanied the second Lord Poltimore’s wider agrarian and sporting interests. He gained considerable publicity for his achievements as a breeder of fox-hounds in the 1860s and of shire horses, short-horn cattle and Exmoor horned sheep in the 1880s and 1890s. Through the 1860s, he developed the Poltimore pack to such a degree that it became a stock of pedigree dogs throughout England. However, in April 1870, he decided quite abruptly to sell off the pack, possibly because it was becoming a drain of the estate’s resources. In July 1881, in its pen-portrait of Lord Poltimore, *The Sporting Gazette* recalled that ‘Poltimore Park was the scene of one of the most extraordinary hound sales ever held in England’, with masters of fox-hounds scrambling to out-bid one another. Eventually

£3,533 was raised by the sale of just thirty-three and a half couples of hounds (*The Country Gentleman: Sporting Gazette and Agricultural Journal* issue 999, 2 July 1881, p. 722).

Like his father, Augustus was a considerable patron of the Exeter nurseryman, plant-hunter and landscape gardener John Veitch, and it was during the period between the 1840s and the end of the first decade of the twentieth century that the pleasure gardens at Poltimore were developed and embellished with exotic ‘prestige’ species of trees, plants and shrubs. John Veitch created a pinetum here in the early nineteenth century and in 1839 his son Thomas rented 30 acres at Poltimore to use as nurseries, known as ‘Bamberries’ (Heriz-Smith 1988, p. 43). All these activities carried a degree of prestige and speak of social competition (Greener 2009). Lord Poltimore’s short-horn cattle contested the agricultural shows against those of Lord Rothschild and the Duke of Bedford. He vied with the Aclands at Killerton, the Rolles at Bicton and the grounds at Streatham Court for new species of exotic trees and plants. He served as patron or president of numerous societies, spanning everything from the Exmoor horned sheep to the Exeter Rovers Cycling Club. In this respect, the Poltimores remained steadily among the ranks of the late nineteenth-century county magnates, important for their prestige, metropolitan connections, and their social and financial patronage.

These interests were developed further by the third Baron, Coplestone Richard George Warwick Bampfylde (1859–1918). In 1908, immediately after inheriting the estate, Bampfylde and his wife, Lady Margaret, spent approximately £1,500 modernising Poltimore House, and Court Hall at North Molton. This involved building the extension wing at Poltimore, including a ballroom, buying electrical generating equipment, installing electric lighting, central heating, a telephone, a washing machine, and improving the perennially problematic drainage around the house. This investment may also have included construction of the 120-foot long aviaries and the Chinese water garden at Poltimore (see below), although

the estate steward's correspondence does not confirm this specifically. Such expenditure may appear surprising, given that the family sought to dispose of Poltimore House and gardens only a decade later. However, it appears that it was primarily routine updating, reflecting changing standards of comfort among the landed elite in the years before the Great War, funded in part by Lady Poltimore and by the sale of the Poltimore Arms public house in Pinhoe.

In this respect, the Bampfylde appear not to have been thrown off their stride by the existential threats to landowners contained in Lloyd George's 1909 Budget. In this package, Lloyd George proposed to calculate and levy an 'Increment Value Duty' on the value of land, particularly on the wind-fall profits on agricultural land sited near towns that might be generated by suburban housing development after the end of April 1909 (Short 1997, p. 20). This was clearly a consideration for the Bampfylde, given their sizeable holdings in the suburban parishes of Pinhoe and Heavitree on Exeter's eastern fringes. However, although their estate steward at North Molton, Riccard, described the budget as 'precious Radical Socialist Finance' (HaB, LTR 027 R. Louis Riccard to Lord Poltimore 1 May 1909) the family continued to employ twelve–fifteen gardeners, plus a head gardener (at £100 *per annum*) at Poltimore, plus a butler, house-keeper, three house maids, two laundry maids, several footmen, a lady's maid, a chauffeur and an odd-job man (HaB, LTR 027 Riccard to Lady Poltimore 6 July 1909; *ibid.*, Riccard to Lord Poltimore, 2 Jan, 1909). Unlike lesser landowners (particularly those with less than 5,000 acres), the Bampfylde seem to have possessed large enough holdings to ride out the agricultural depression, and the 1909 budget, but small enough levels of income to avoid substantial death duties in 1908 (levied initially only on estates worth over £1 million). In 1908, their mortgage debts amounted to £34,000, but the interest was bearable, at £1708 *per annum*, and Riccard remitted £3,480 15s. 10d. to Lord Poltimore as net income for the year, after all taxes, rates and expenses, or 21 *per cent* of his gross income from the estate.

Yet, the financial position of all landowners was deteriorating through the First World War. Interest rates rose from 3.5 *per cent* to 6 *per cent*, increasing the burden of mortgage debts. Farm incomes rose briefly between 1917 and 1921, buoyed by the wartime Corn Protection Act, but landowners were forbidden from increasing rents significantly (Cannadine 1990, pp. 93–4). At the same time, death duties were increased from 15 *per cent* in 1909, to 40 *per cent* in 1919, and were now levied on the current market value of the estate, not its rental income level. In addition, super-tax was now imposed on incomes in excess of £10,000 (*ibid.*, p. 97). In 1919, Lord Clinton calculated that on a selected group of estates, with an average rental income of £20,300, income tax, tithes and rates absorbed £15,800, leaving a free income of only 4s. 6d. in the pound, compared to 10s. in the pound from investment in government stock.

Quite suddenly, the 'big house' and its landed estate, which had been a great economic, political, social and cultural asset for five or six centuries, became a financial and political liability. Although Lloyd George's system of land valuation had proved too cumbersome to implement fully, landowners saw it as an indication that they were political targets for the Liberal administration. Unsurprisingly, most took advantage of the post-war property boom (1919–23) to sell off properties that had been guarded jealously through family trusts and marriage alliances for several centuries. In March 1919, Sir Arthur Acland Baronet of the neighbouring Killerton estate wrote to his son Francis to suggest selling the family's Somerset estates (of just over 16,000 acres) for £160,000–£200,000 and investing the money in government war loan stocks, to generate an income of £5,000 *per annum* which would not be subject to death duties (Devon HC, 1148M Add 14 series I/280 A. H. D. Acland to F. D. Acland, 5 March 1919).

At Poltimore, the family's hand was probably forced by the death of the third Baron on 8 November 1918. Two years later, Riccard sought professional guidance on the likely liability for death duties. Admitting that the figures obtained were probably optimistically small, he calculated

that the family would be liable to death duties of £44,000. While these could be paid off over eight years at £5,500 per annum, this burden was probably unupportable when added to the total mortgage bill, which had now reached £49,530. The total value of the estate was estimated at £313,608 (HaB, LTR 039 R. Louis Riccard to Lord Poltimore, 10 Dec. 1920). There was little choice but to sell, and the axe fell on the south Devon estates, which were probably more saleable than the upland farms around North Molton, and which contained the biggest liability (Poltimore House). Riccard advised that a reserve price for the house, grounds and walled garden should be £37,821 (HaB, LTR 040 29 Mar. 1922 Riccard to Messrs. Hampton & Sons). The house and gardens were advertised in *The Times* on 23 July 1921, ‘conveniently arranged for a large establishment, the Residence is suitable for a Family Seat, Residential Hotel or Club, School, Hydro, Hospital or other public institution... Glorious gardens and grounds, magnificent avenues and specimen trees... about 55 Houses and cottages and 250 acres of woods with valuable timber. The whole extending to about 1,981 acres’ (*The Times*, 23 July 1921). An auction was arranged for 23 September 1921, but the house and grounds failed to find a buyer. Further adverts followed in January and February 1923, and the house contents were auctioned in July of that year, while the house and grounds were leased to a girls’ boarding school (possibly for less than the £2,000 *per annum* stipulated by Riccard in March 1922) (HaB, LTR 040 29 Mar. 1922), and owned by the Bampfylde until 1944.

UNRAVELLING A POLITE LANDSCAPE

The area surrounding Poltimore House had undergone very little historical or archaeological investigation before our project. Poltimore’s published parish history (Fortesque-ffoulkes 1954) is an exemplar of the type of popular community history dominated by ‘patronage, pedigree and the church’ (Jackson 2006, p. 47; see also Jackson 2003). Even the place-name, first recorded in Domesday Book (as *Pontimora/*

Pultimora), is obscure; the derivation of the first element is uncertain but the second derives from OE *mōr*, or ‘moor, marsh’ (Gover *et al.* 1932, p. 444; Watts 2004, p. 477). Poltimore’s pleasure grounds have been noted but never investigated. Described as exemplars of ‘vanished gardens’ (Lauder 1994, pp. 125–9), their loss is quite recent, being described in a state of semi-decay in the 1950s and ’70s by local observers and historians who noted the arboretum, overgrown Chinese garden and aviaries (Gray 1995, pp. 179–80). As we shall see, however, other earlier gardens were ‘lost’ through emparkment. We have a fairly limited array of documentary and pictorial sources for the gardens and park, including eighteenth-century drawings by Edmund Prideaux (1693–1745) (Harris 1964). Prideaux’s drawings are an essential resource for reconstructing Devon’s early gardens; crucially, comparison with extant arrangements shows that while his technique was often poor, his representations were ‘remarkably faithful’ with ‘no poetic licence’ (Pugsley 1994, pp. 4, 129; Lauder 1994, p. 129) and, as we shall see, he depicted Poltimore on two different occasions.

The evolution of Poltimore’s polite landscape is tied intimately to the fortunes of the Bampfylde family, as related above, but also, quite naturally, to the structural evolution of the house. Most accounts identify the earliest element of Poltimore House as the north range, attributable architecturally to the mid- to late sixteenth century (Cherry 1988, pp. 101–2; Hemming 2005, pp. v–vi; see also Keystone Historic Building Consultants 1999). Dendrochronological dating by Nottingham Tree-Ring Dating Lab has produced a felling date for roof timbers in the north range of 1559, but also indicated a felling date range of 1544–69 for roof timbers and stud posts in the east range, making it contemporary (Arnold *et al.* 2006, p. 111). A fine polygonal stair turret at the internal angle between the north and east ranges is clearly part of the same arrangement, with a U-shaped plan for the house at this date seeming the most probable of the range of options. Significant later additions comprise the eleven-bay south range added between 1726–8 by the Exeter master builder John Moyle



Plate II. Drawing of the south frontage of Poltimore House by Edmund Prideaux, c. 1727. From the collection of P. J. N. Prideaux-Brune Esq.

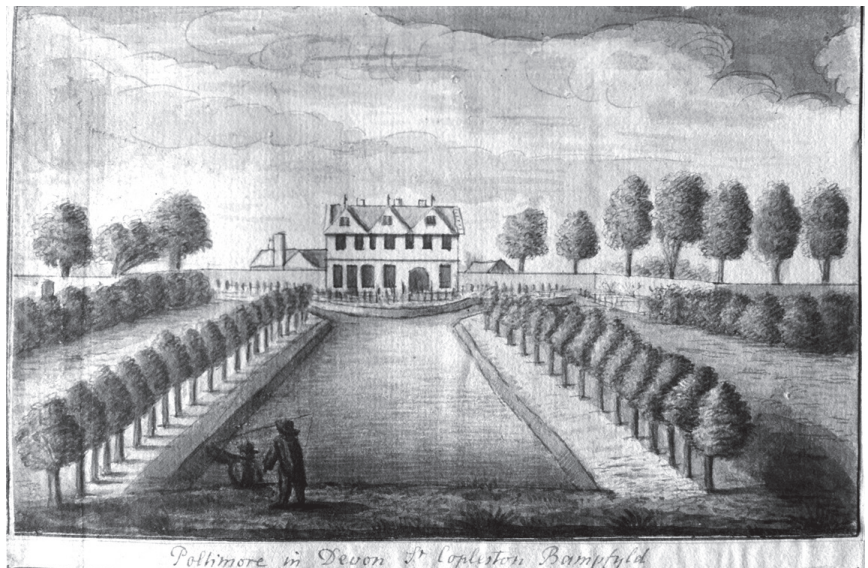


Plate III. Drawing of the north frontage of Poltimore House by Edmund Prideaux, c. 1716. From the collection of P. J. N. Prideaux-Brune Esq.

(C11/322/10 Bampfylde v Bampfylde, 1728); the impressive central staircase and kitchen ranges to the rear in the 1830s, and the east ballroom of 1908 (Hemming 2005; Keystone Historic Building Consultants 1999). It is also important to note here that the Bampfylde family's principal urban property, a two-storey townhouse built just inside Exeter's east gate in the 1590s but demolished in the wake of bombing during the Second World War, dates to the same period as Poltimore House. Comprising a main block between two cross-wings, it had an identical plan to that postulated for the earliest phase of their country residence, albeit in a smaller scale (Portman 1966, p. 29; see also Dymond 1874, p. 100).

One particular point worth emphasising here is that the plan of Poltimore House was effectively 'reversed' in the early eighteenth century and that this went hand in hand with a re-orientation of its surroundings. This new scheme saw the house, with its 'outward-looking' and symmetrical frontage, turn to face southwards, into parkland, as depicted in one of Prideaux's drawings (Pl. II), whereas before the building had 'looked' to the north, into formal gardens (Pl. III), as described below.

COMMUNITY ARCHAEOLOGY AT POLTIMORE

Poltimore's strikingly multi-layered past presented both challenges and opportunities for encouraging increased levels of public engagement with the house, gardens and wider landscape through integrated archaeological and historical research. The challenges included how to engage with a wide variety of participants, extending beyond the 'traditional' base of volunteers and including schoolchildren alongside local people and University students; how to sustain volunteer interest in a heritage project over the two years and beyond; and how to satisfy the high expectations that are an inevitable aspect of any community project. These challenges were largely met through a variety of training opportunities intended not only to unravel Poltimore's past but also to heighten public awareness of the

project and the place. The aim was the genuine co-creation of knowledge, with academic and community partners both gaining mutually from the experience, rather than paying lip service to public involvement in pursuit of research.

The Community and Landscape Project worked with this network of participants using a number of archaeological and historical landscape research methods, including documentary research, geophysical surveys, fieldwalking, earthwork survey, a tree survey, environmental sampling and test pitting in the environs of the house. Landscape-based methods of archaeological fieldwork and historic documentary research workshops formed the basis for the training and were well attended by volunteers and students. An unexpected consequence of the training was that a large proportion of documentary research was undertaken by volunteers from the community exploring the history and archaeology of Poltimore village. This was an important achievement as informal oral accounts from local people testify to an historically antagonistic relationship between house and village in the latter part of the twentieth century. Although it is tempting to see this as part of the place's 'estate village' heritage it is also bound up with the house's derelict state and perceived role as a magnet for antisocial behaviour in the 1980s and '90s.

Some project participants undertook specific projects on topics that interested them, including scrutinising nineteenth- and twentieth-century census data, undertaking a graveyard survey and analysing local newspaper references. As with the documentary research, some of the archaeological-based workshops were requested by volunteers, including a finds identification workshop, and others were led by specialists or students. A number of volunteers used their research results to create imaginative and informative resources that formed the basis for a number of public displays at Poltimore House and elsewhere, and on the project's website <http://elac.ex.ac.uk/poltimore-landscapes/>. Volunteers were also encouraged to contribute to dialogue concerning the content of a series of interpretation boards

located within in the gardens. Having varied but regular training workshops and public displays helped to sustain volunteer interest in the project and also to build confidence where volunteers felt able to participate at a level that suited their needs. The outreach and training programme also aimed to develop the skills and knowledge required to enable a community to continue to engage with their heritage beyond the scope of the funded project. Thus, a welcome legacy of the project has been the forming of a history group at Poltimore House to continue historical and archaeological research beyond the life of the project. Offering training and workshops for schools provided the opportunity to present Poltimore House and garden's multi-layered past to children, who were also given the additional

challenge of considering and suggesting ideas for the long-term future of the house and gardens. By enabling schoolchildren to contribute ideas and content for the interpretation boards, the project also encouraged them to think about how to present the many layers of Poltimore's heritage to the wider public.

Perhaps the most valuable technique in terms of providing new information about the house's environs was a large-scale geophysical survey intended to determine the nature of the sub-surface archaeology in an envelope of space around the house and gardens and to train volunteers. An initial phase of extensive magnetometry survey over 22 hectares (Dean 2012b) (Figs 1 and 2) was followed by targeted resistivity across specific areas identified as having particular

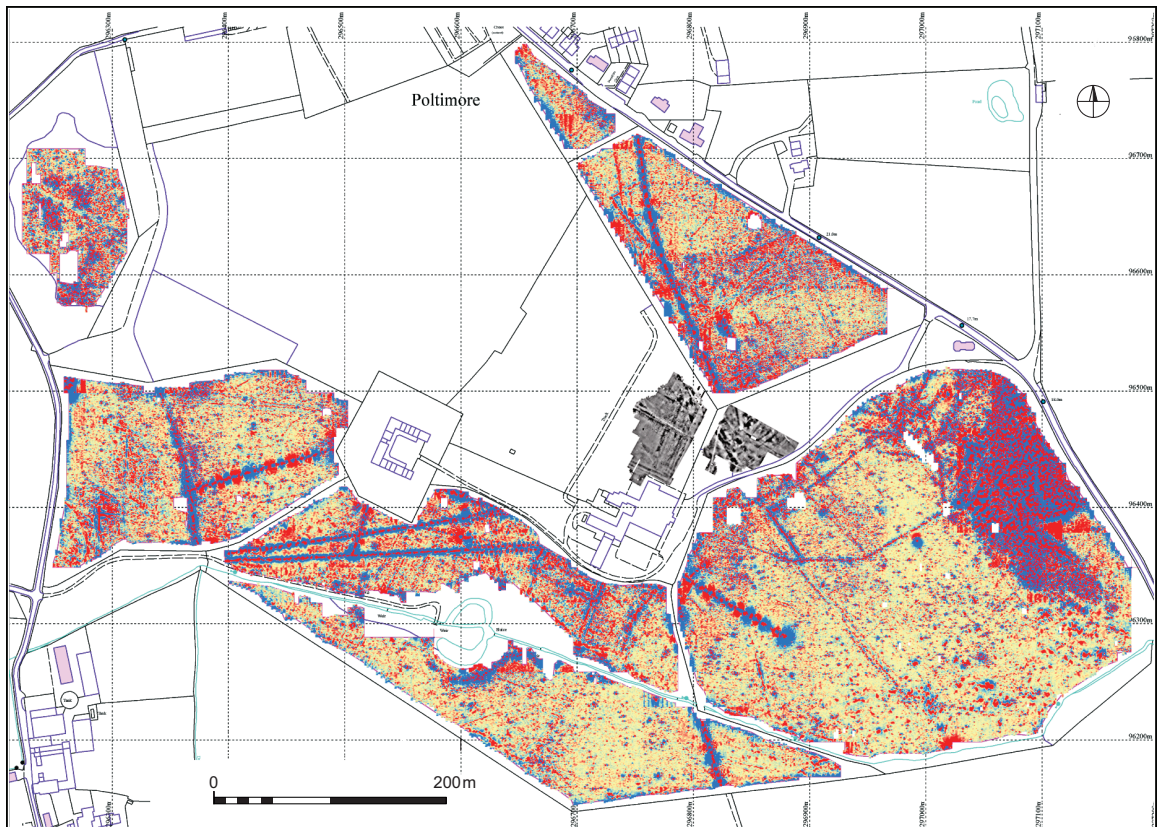


Fig. 1. Composite plot showing geophysical survey of Poltimore House and its immediate setting, with magnetometry in colour and resistivity in black and white. Survey by Ross Dean of Stratascan with project volunteers.

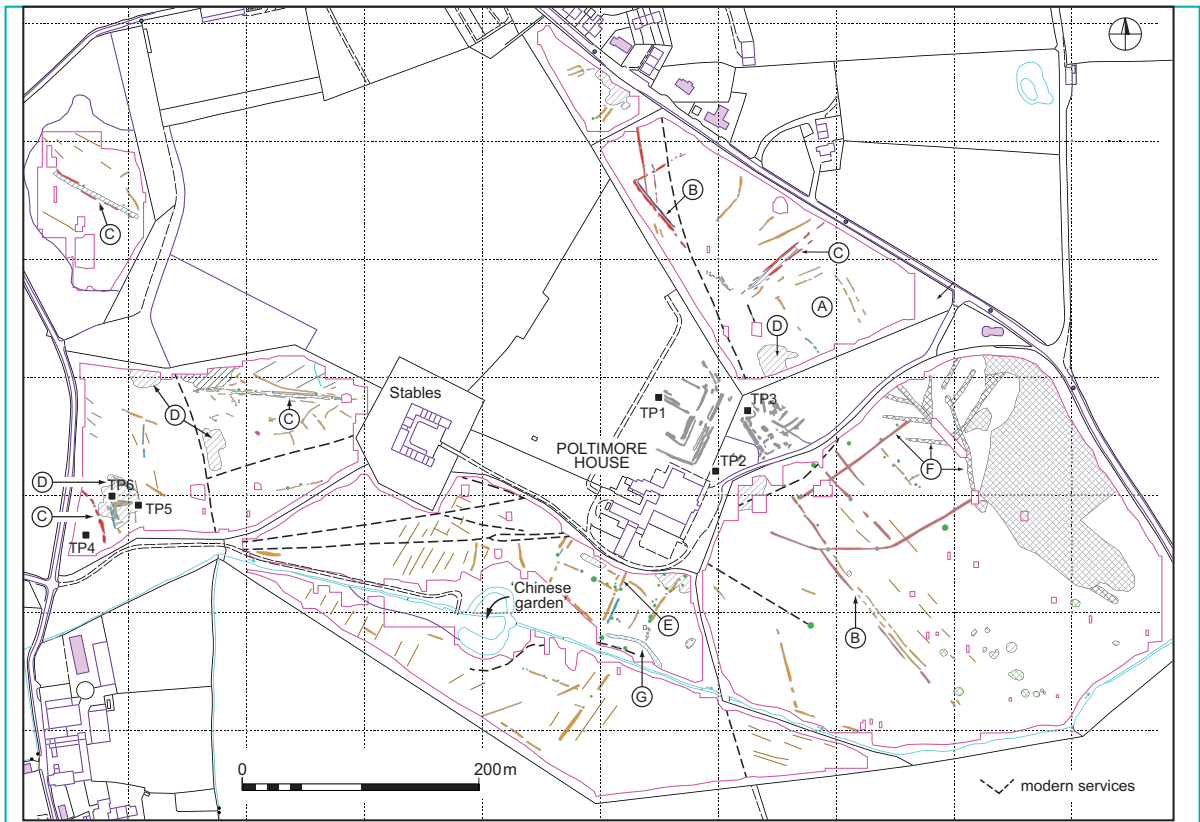


Fig. 2 Interpretation of geophysical results, identifying key anomaly groups and locating Test Pits 1–6. Key to lettering: A – double-ditched enclosure; B – line of road diverted in 1835; C – other lost or diverted roads and tracks; D – buildings and rubble spreads suggestive of buildings; E – likely garden features; F – brick-lined drainage system of the early nineteenth century; and G – original course of stream before canalisation.

potential, including the area immediately west of the house (Dean 2012a) (Fig. 3a and 3b). Among the many features of interest identified were roads and buildings buried beneath the parkland, some of them known from historic maps but many others not; relict field boundaries ranging from prehistoric to post-medieval date; a complex system of brick-built drainage channels; and a miscellany of garden features. The more significant of these features are discussed at the appropriate point in the phase-by-phase summary of the post-medieval landscape's evolution which follows, although quite naturally some of the evidence related to earlier periods. Of particular importance in this respect is a double-ditched square enclosure north-east of the house, with an

interior *c.* 45metres across, which is tentatively identified here as a newly discovered Romano-British farmstead (Fig. 2: A). The site's morphology and topographical position bears a strong resemblance to sites along the Lower Exe valley detected through aerial photography and sampled through trial excavation (Ugnow 2000). It might be seen as the farm of a lightly Romanised wealthy family rather than a villa site, although the site clearly requires excavation to confirm or deny this.

A programme of test-pitting investigated various anomalies identified during the geophysical surveys and provided a tangible display of field archaeology 'in action' for public events (Fig. 2: Test Pits 1–6). Significant findings included the sampling of a cobbled road running

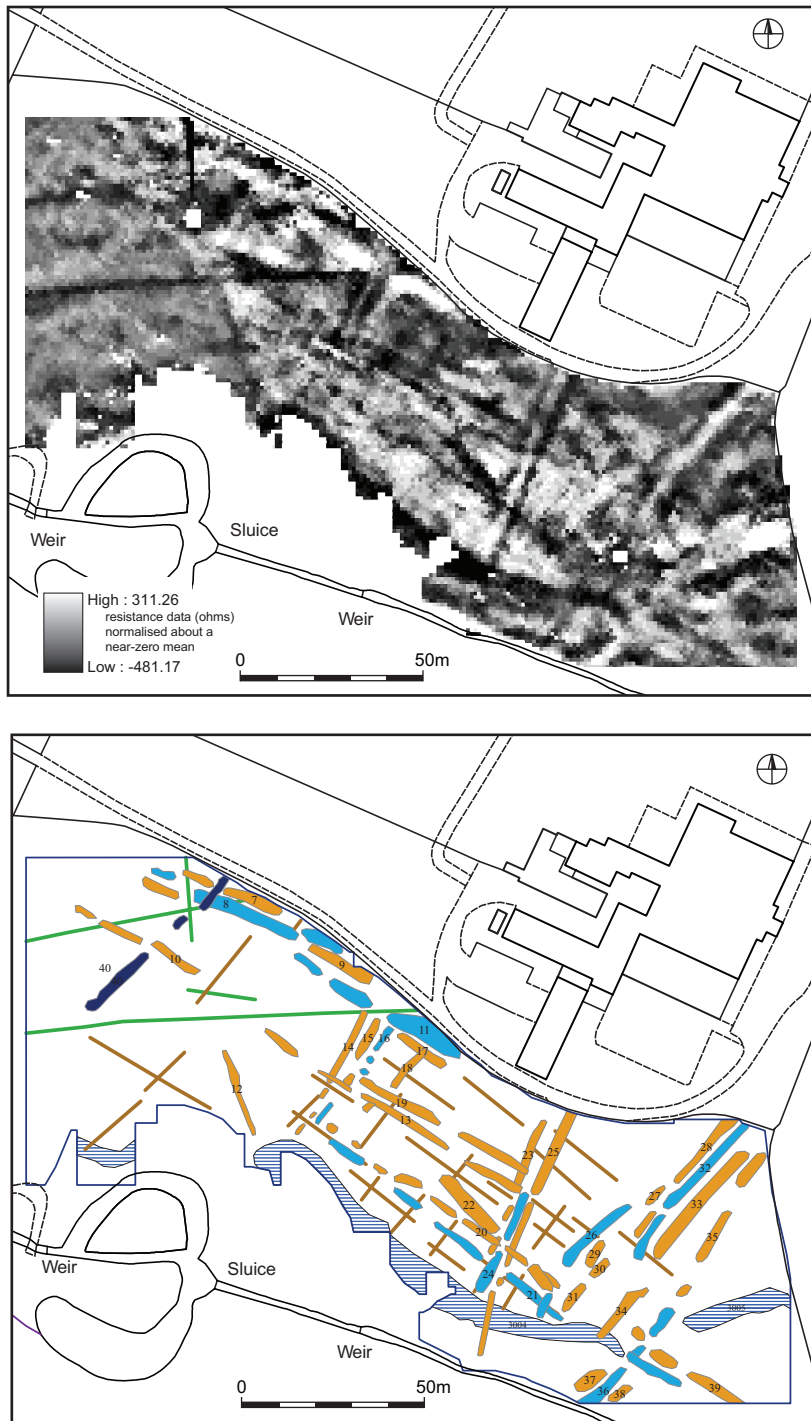


Fig. 3a and b. (Top) Resistivity plot of areas to the south and west of Poltimore House. (Bottom) Interpretation of resistivity results. Survey by Ross Dean of Stratascan with project volunteers.

through the park until its diversion in the 1830s (TP3); investigation within and around the 'lawn' area immediately east of the house which 'ground-truthed' geophysical traces of garden pathways and recovered ceramic roof ridge tiles related to a seventeenth- or eighteenth-century refurbishment (TP1–2); and test excavation of geophysical anomalies of an unmapped building complex west of the house, which produced a significant volume of eleventh- to thirteenth-century pottery alongside post-medieval dumped deposits (TP4–6).

A fieldwalking survey examined a more limited area of the deer park to the south of the zone sampled through geophysical survey, in the large field now known as 'Poltimore Park' that formed the core of the Tudor park, later extended on several occasions (see below). Using the traverse and stint method (Liddle 1985, p. 9), thirty-three volunteers and students picked up over 800 artefacts. Worked flint pieces, including some of Mesolithic date, indicate a modest prehistoric

presence, supplementing evidence from flint scatters elsewhere in the locality (Jarvis 1976; Miles 1976). Most of the pottery evidence was nineteenth and twentieth century in date, with only a single medieval sherd (fifteenth- to sixteenth-century Donyatt ware) and a very sparse array of early post-medieval wares, including North Devon gravel freeware, South Somerset ware and Raren ware.

Surveys of earthworks and other above-ground archaeology were targeted at specific garden features around the house, using a variety of methods including sketch survey, offset-tape surveys and electronic surveys using a Leica TPS 1200 Total Station. Our surveys produced new information about two highly unusual early twentieth-century garden features. To the west of the house stands the earthwork of a Chinese water garden now overgrown, eroded and studded with stretches of brick walling. Topographical survey rationalised the plan of the site (Fig. 4), which focused upon a moated

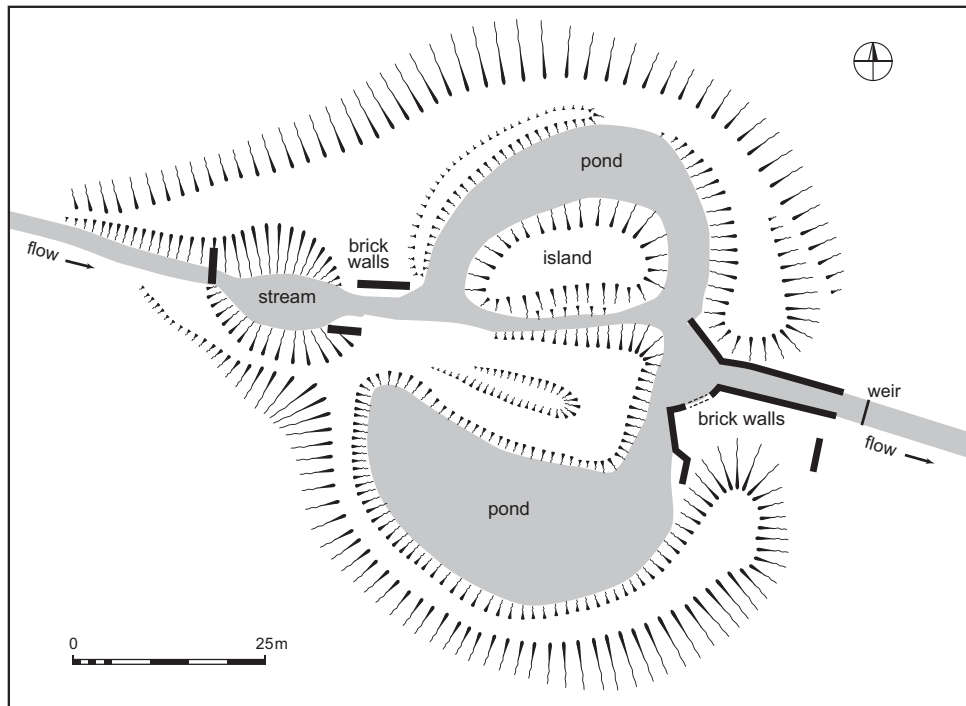


Fig. 4. Earthwork survey of the Chinese water garden. Survey carried out by Gemma Lissaman and Martin Bailey.

pagoda known from early photographs of 1912 that also show a (lost) oriental-style bridge and boathouse (DRO 7274Z/1). Our geophysical plots clearly identified the formerly sinuous course of the stream that fed the water garden prior to its canalisation (Fig. 2: G). The garden is entirely undocumented other than a reference in the *Western Times* for December 4 1908 that specifies the date of its construction:

His lordship [Lord Poltimore III] is having a new pond constructed close to the mansion to provide work for [the] unemployed, who will be thus found something to do right through the winter months until next spring. This pond will cover pretty well an acre of ground. There is to be an island in the centre, and from this to the sides of the lake will be bridges. The lake will be stocked with fish and water fowl, while the waterside will be elaborately planted the whole way around (*Western Times*, December 4, 1908, p. 11).

The Chinese garden's water supply was regulated via a sluice system and when the house became Poltimore College this was altered to create a small swimming pool, as depicted in a photograph showing schoolgirls swimming in it the 1920s (DRO 7274Z/1). Idealised memories of the site as a decaying but still highly ornamented object of fascination are captured in a semi-autobiographical work of fiction by a former pupil of the College (Manning 1962). The garden appears characteristic of the later 'authentic' Chinese style, without the gilded dragons and rococo touches that are defining traits of earlier *Chinoiserie* (Jacobson 1993, pp. 184, 186). Rather, later *jardins anglo-chinois* from the mid-nineteenth century were marked by higher levels of accuracy mirroring contemporary attitudes to artistic revivals (Honour 1961, p. 203).

Chinese gardens of late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century date are uncommon, with rare examples preserved in similar parkland settings at Whatton House, Leicestershire (English Heritage Register of Parks and Gardens of Special Historic Interest in England, Leicestershire, Part 26), and Pickenham Park, Norfolk (Wade Martins & Williamson 2008, p. 88). The example at Poltimore

is also unusual in that it survives as an earthwork; an intriguing parallel is the eighteenth-century Chinese garden at Newton, Lincolnshire, which was formed by re-shaping a medieval moated site and adding to it a conical mound surmounted with a summerhouse (Lincs HER 60541). The Poltimore example was built on the southern edge of the zone of former formal gardens long since buried under the parkland, although reuse of an earlier water garden or water feature of some sort cannot be ruled out (see below).

More ephemeral were the remains of the house's aviaries, also of the first years of the twentieth century, when Lord and Lady Poltimore published articles on bird breeding here in the journals *Bird Notes* and *Avicultural Magazine* (Poltimore 1912; 1936). Six timber- and iron-framed aviaries lay in the gardens to the north of the house, set into the banks of the relict ornamental canal. Three of these preserve visible building remains, comprising bird-houses (indicated by postholes and drainage gullies) set within concrete floors delimited by brick perimeter walls, which offered the captive birds a dark warm place in which to nest their young (Fig. 5). The bird-houses were connected to large outdoor cages enclosed by walls and iron frames most likely interlinked with meshing. The outdoor areas also contained large mosaic drinking bowls or baths and offered the birds a source of natural light and a place to spread their wings that could be easily observed from the outside.

THE EVOLVING POLTIMORE LANDSCAPE: AN OVERVIEW

Drawing on the historical account of the Bampfylde family and the archaeological evidence of human activity in the environs of their house offered above, we offer below a summary of the Poltimore landscape's evolution (Fig. 6).

(I) PRE-EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

A deer park at Poltimore existed by the late sixteenth century; it is depicted in Saxton's (1575) and Speed's (1610) maps of Devon, in

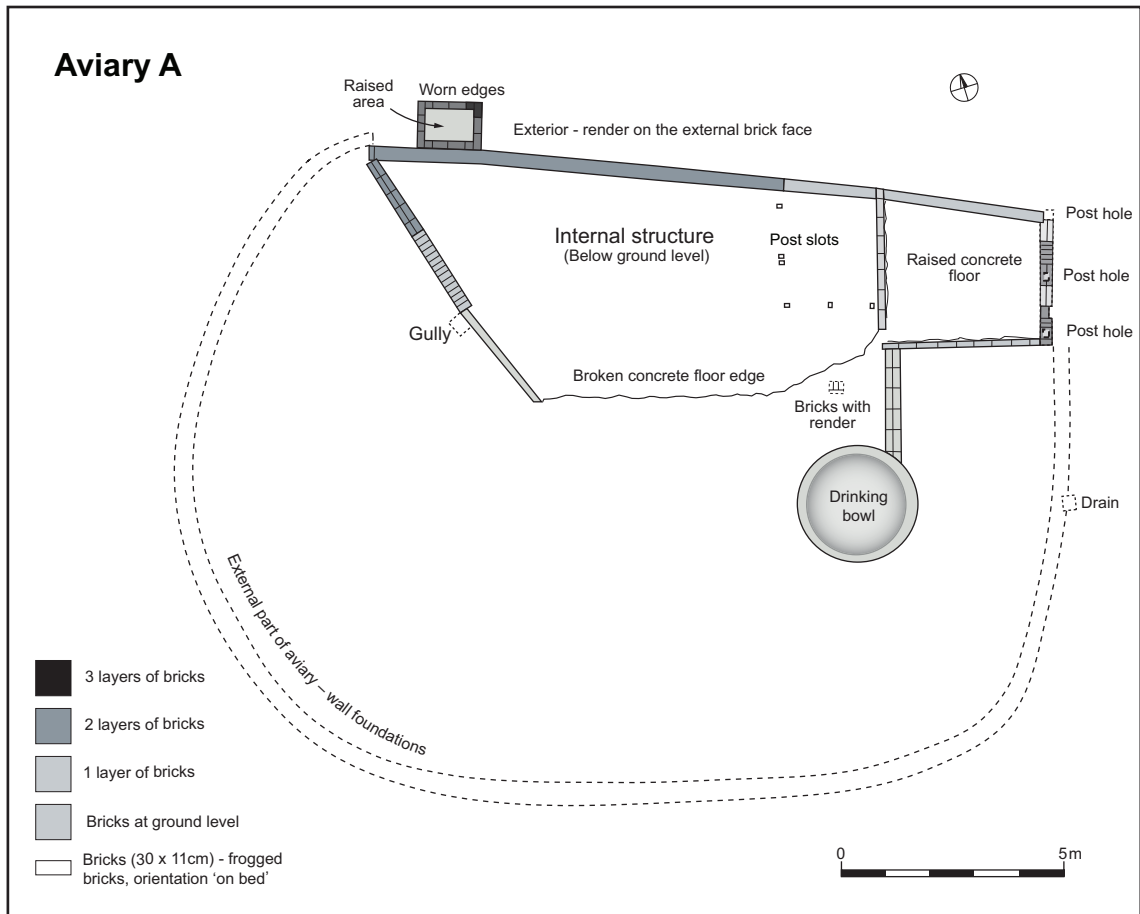


Fig. 5. Survey of one of the aviaries. Survey carried out by Penny Cunningham and project volunteers.

both cases as a stylised circular enclosure with the house positioned centrally within. It has long been recognised that Devon's landscape was one of the least densely emparked areas of England (Cantor & Hatherly 1979, p. 74, fig. 1), although the county's parks have been little researched, even in comparison to neighbouring Cornwall (Herring 2003). The only studies are brief or unpublished (Gallant 1986; Illes 1994) but suggest at least forty-five parks documented before *c.* 1500 (only eight of them licensed), with at least fourteen other possible examples. Although there are no medieval references to a deer park at Poltimore a late thirteenth-century date has been mooted (Illes 1994, p. 27) and it is not impossible that a pre-Tudor park existed

here, perhaps attached to an earlier manor house. The extreme sparseness of medieval pottery from our fieldwalking survey within Poltimore Park perhaps provides a tentative hint that the area was not under cultivation, as material was clearly not imported through manuring — in common with neighbouring Broadclyst, large swathes of the parish were covered by medieval open fields (Sandover 2012, pp. 156–7). The location of the manorial centre in the medieval period is moot. It may of course underlie the present house, although another scenario is that its predecessor stood adjacent to the church, where a clear gap in the village plan might suggest a co-located manor house (*ibid.*, p. 130), but neither topographical survey nor resistivity survey across this zone has

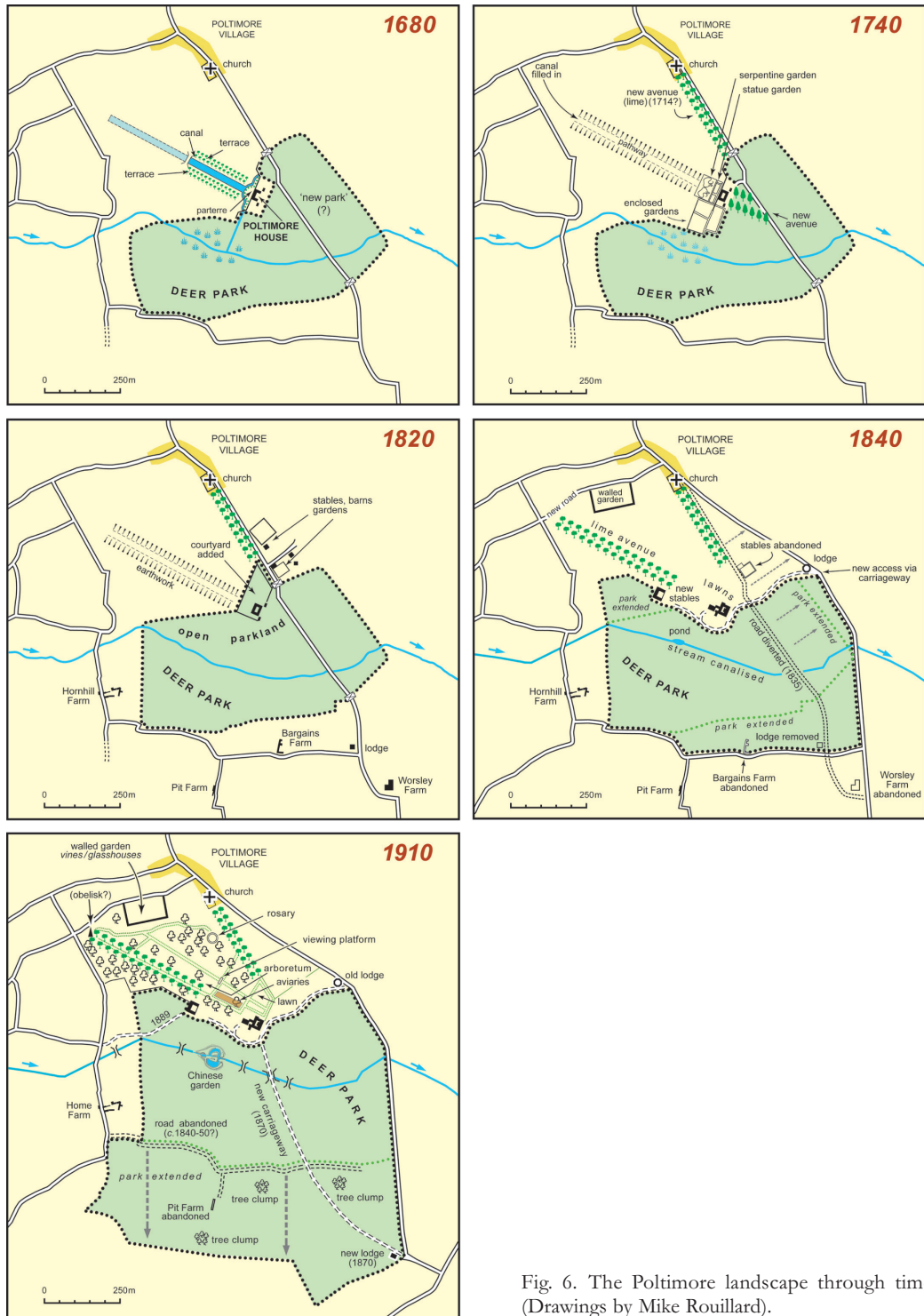


Fig. 6. The Poltimore landscape through time (Drawings by Mike Rouillard).

produced any evidence of sub-surface structures. A potential alternative site lies to the west of the house, beyond the bounds of the early park, where the test pitting programme recovered eleventh- to thirteenth-century volumes of pottery on the location of geophysical traces of building remains on a low platform within a kink in the road system (Fig. 2: Test Pits 4–6).

Map regression makes it clear that the Tudor park was approximately half the size of its late nineteenth-century equivalent, when the parkland was at its greatest extent. Unlike important Devonian parks at Berry Pomeroy and Dartington, which were both walled, Poltimore's early park was surrounded by a timber pale surmounting an earthwork bank, *c.* 2.5 km in length, vestiges of which have been traced in our geophysical survey. The park had a curving outline and embraced the house, which lay on its north-west edge, on three sides. Relatively flat and featureless, the park was bisected by a stream flowing in from the west that provided a ready-made water supply for deer. An oddity of Poltimore's early estate landscape was that a public road ran right through the middle of the park; although this was in many ways an exclusive, private setting, local people and travellers clearly had access through it. This raises practical but unanswerable questions about whether the park was gated at the points where the road entered and exited, in order to secure deer, or whether the herd was enclosed in an internal compartment. The original line of the diverted road is clearly identifiable in the magnetometry plot as a pair of linear positive anomalies (Fig. 2: B), in some places doubled on the south-west side, and was sampled with Test Pit 3, which revealed a carefully paved structure with a boundary or building running at right angles to it. A warren and dovecote at Poltimore are noted in a description from *Worthies of Devon* (Prince 1701, p. 35), representing both the symbols and machinery of a productive estate; their locations are indicated by the field-names Little Warren, Great Warren and Culver Hayes to the north-east of the house.

By the late seventeenth century and probably before, elaborate formal gardens accompanied the

house. An important drawing of Poltimore House by Edmund Prideaux of *c.* 1716 (Pl. III) clearly depicts a sophisticated garden design outside its north frontage. A D-shaped compartment containing a parterre-style arrangement lay directly in front of the house, with a water-filled canal flanked by double rows of young trees completing an axial arrangement that stretched away to the north. The canal's earthwork partially survives and was adapted as a later garden feature, as described below; an augering survey confirmed the feature's anthropogenic origin, although pollen preservation was poor and geochemical analysis indicated that a water feature here was most likely short-lived (Pears 2012). The topiary, use of gravel and grass in the parterres and ornamental canals most likely belie a melange of French and Dutch influences, although the garden designer — if there was one — remains completely obscure. Devon had very few showpiece gardens of this sort of French baroque style, characteristic of the period after the restoration of Charles II in 1660, with their expansive axial arrangements and use of water and avenues that are sometimes seen as unsuited to Devon's broken terrain (Pugsley 1994, p. 6). Indeed, ornamental water features in post-medieval designed landscapes are quite uncommon in Devon generally — a phenomenon that might be traceable back to the lack of medieval fishponds in manorial contexts (Creighton 2009, p. 119). Surviving garden canals of the period are rare indeed — one of the best preserved is at Westbury Court in Gloucestershire — and the survival of a similar feature at Poltimore is an important discovery that tells us about the sophisticated tastes of the Bampfylde family.

(ii) *c.* 1740

Poltimore House's immediate setting was radically re-designed to form an arrangement captured by a further two Prideaux drawings of *c.* 1727 (Pls III, IV), although the deer park remained essentially unchanged. These garden alterations reflected a major change in the plan of the house itself: the early years of the eighteenth century saw the building's dramatic south front



Pl. IV. Drawing of the north frontage of Poltimore House by Edmund Prideaux, c. 1727. From the collection of P. J. N. Prideaux-Brune Esq.

added, giving the mansion a full courtyard plan. The alteration was probably an initiative of Sir Copleston Bampfylde (1689–1727), since the estate accounts dealing with his son's minority record a payment of £165 18s. 4d., as part of the sum of £400 'for finishing the New Building' (NA C117/138: Barnfield *vs* Barnfield). In effect the house changed orientation, so that it faced to the south rather than the north, and the new layout of its grounds reflected this. A local parallel is Powderham Castle, on the Exe estuary, where the house's plan was also reversed, by the Countenay family in the early eighteenth century, in a scheme closely linked to a re-orientation of its setting (Wainwright 2005, pp. 166–91). Prideaux's drawings of Poltimore House show that the strikingly symmetrical south frontage was enhanced by a broad avenue of trees, although this feature — and the paths that marked its course on the ground — are invisible in our geophysical survey (Fig. 1), perhaps casting some doubt on the source's veracity. The same scheme saw the house visually linked to the church with

the 'new' lime avenue of 1714, and in 1731 the estate accounts reveal payments to the gardener, Robert Hogg, for the labourers 'to make the avenue from the house straight' (C117/138), which may refer to this feature. On the north side of the house, meanwhile, the ornamental canal (or pond) was drained and its southern extent transformed into an arrangement of garden compartments in a pseudo-Rococo style; here Prideaux depicts a serpentine-style arrangement of irregular curving paths and statues within a walled garden (Pl. IV). Such activity may be recorded in payments of more than £10 in 1729 'towards carrying of earth to fill the pond' (C117/138), and the site of 'the pond' might have been alluded to in mention of 'The Pond House' in an inventory of Poltimore House taken on Richard Warwick Bampfylde's death in 1780 (C109/171 Bampfylde *v.* Courteney).

Geophysical survey in this area is not practicable due to tree cover (this was the site of the later arboretum), although our magnetometry and resistivity plots suggest that the gardens depicted

in the Prideaux drawing were embedded within a more extensive arrangement. It is to this phase that we tentatively ascribe a series of rectangular garden compartments lying on the level area west of the house, as revealed by geophysics (Fig. 3a and 3b). The problems of dating ‘archaeological gardens’ are well known, however (see Rowe *et al.* 2011), and in Devon knot-style gardens persisted until the eighteenth century, as at Sharpham and Fulford, near Crediton (Pugsley 1994, p. 3; Gray 1995, p. 9). The results are especially clear in the resistivity plot, in which double linear positive anomalies define a garden of $c. 50 \times 20$ metres perhaps adjoined to another further south. Further linear anomalies to the east, on a markedly different alignment, might conceivably represent an antecedent phase. The celebrated engravers Leonard Knyff and Jan

Kip entirely overlooked Devon in their early eighteenth-century *Britannia Illustrata* (Harris & Jackson-Stops, *c.* 1984), pp. 58–82). Figure 7 reconstructs how they might have viewed Poltimore in their exaggerated bird’s-eye view style, which characteristically drew the eye from a landscape of formality to the horizon via ruler-straight tree-lined avenues.

During the period of the estate accounts, between 1729 and 1744, we have further insight into the management and maintenance of the parkland landscape, which extended to the immediate south-west and south-east of the property. The accounts record payments to carpenters for maintaining the wooden park pale; repairing gates that must have been placed at either end of the stretch of public highway that ran through the park; and for mowing $14\frac{1}{2}$

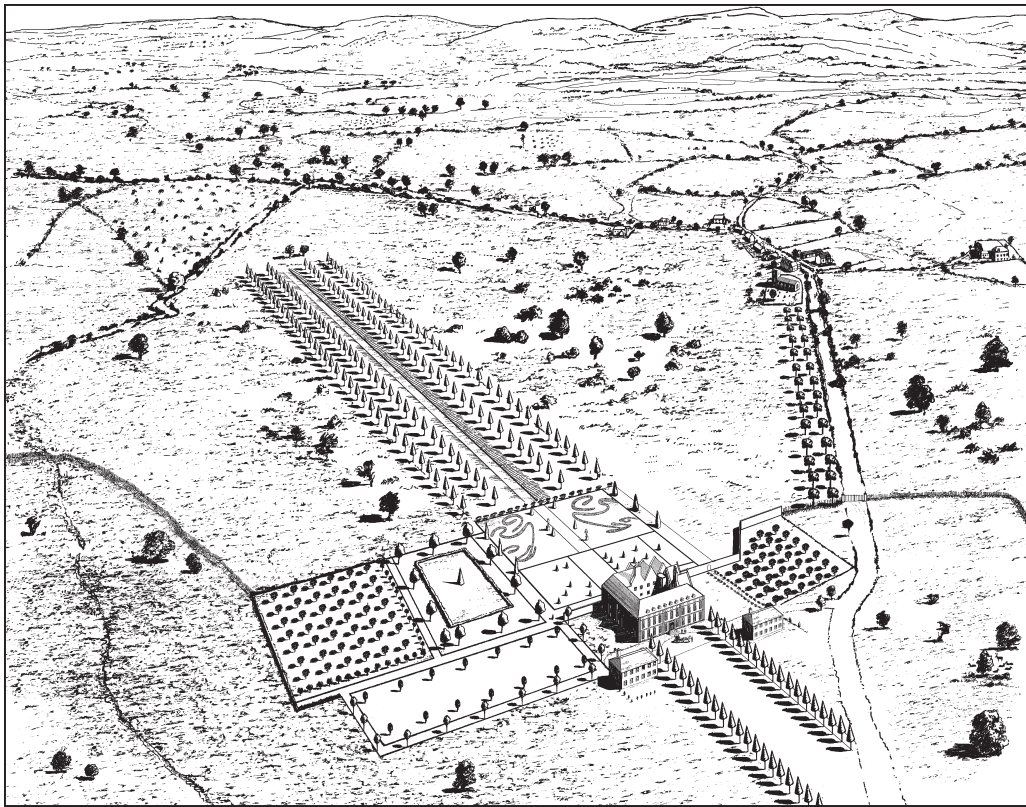


Fig. 7. Reconstruction of Poltimore as it might have looked in the first quarter of the eighteenth century, emulating the style of Knyff and Kip. Drawing by Mike Rouillard.

acres of hay enclosed in 'New Park' for the deer (NA, C117/138: Barnfield *vs* Barnfield, 1744). This acreage was within the parkland area that extended south from the Poltimore-Pinhoe highway to the boundary with the two farms abandoned after 1838 (see below).

(III) MID- TO LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The major changes to the landscape that had accompanied the construction of the house's new south frontage in the early eighteenth century remained in place for around a century, after which historic map evidence charts subsequent alterations more precisely. By the time of Greenwood's 1827 county plan the house lay within a courtyard, flanked by two enigmatic buildings that appear in a painting of 1831 as Gothick-style lodges. Agricultural buildings and facilities including barns and gardens had also been laid out to the north-east of the house and the plan of the park was also adjusted. Traces of the newly extended park perimeter to the west of the house, embracing the site of the formal gardens which now lay under parkland, show up clearly in our geophysical plots. This new arrangement ensured a more private and dignified setting for the mansion, which was visually severed from the working estate, although the public road still ran through the park (in Benjamin Donn's map of 1765 as well as the Greenwood map it is depicted as a dotted line where it cut through the park). Alternative explanations can be offered for the longevity of this arrangement: was the road in effect an articulation of a gentry landscape designed to showcase the trappings of efficient estate management to passers by, or did it instead talk of the impotence of the lord to divert it until the 1830s? One argument in favour of the first explanation — that the road was embedded in the designed landscape and effectively an extension of it — is the fact that the reversal of the house's orientation in the early years of the eighteenth century ensured that the principal façade of the property looked out towards the public road rather than away from it, thus turning away from a formerly more intimate setting.

Large-scale transformation of the estate landscape followed the Bampfylde family's ennoblement in 1831. The diversion of the north-south road through the park evidently provided a catalyst for wider changes that created a much expanded grassy landscape park sweeping right up to the frontage of the house, whose courtyard was removed. Depicted in a plan of 1835 (DRO QS/113A/158/1), the road's new alignment skirted the eastern edge of the enlarged park, also entailing the abandonment of the stable and garden complex north-east of the house. Expansion of the park to the south saw two farms abandoned (one of which survives as a scatter of building materials recorded in our fieldwalking survey) and the removal of the lodge here. It was replaced with a new polygonal lodge bearing the Bampfylde family arms, positioned at the point where a new private carriageway led to the house from the north-east.

Managing lines of sight and visual experiences of the estate from within and beyond the park, as well as providing differential levels of access to its various component parts, were clearly driving factors behind these radical changes. The extension to the park to the south lent it a bowl-like topography and more secluded character, while access to the estate's working apparatus was regulated. Based around a courtyard and featuring an archway with a clock turret, the new stables were secluded through an extension of the park boundary here and became accessible from the village via a newly built track. Another road was created specifically to enable access from the village to the new walled kitchen, containing a heated glasshouse where peaches, pineapples, grapes and orchids were grown; significantly, the gardens had been moved from the core to the periphery of the house's setting and lay just out of sight of those living in Poltimore House. Another sort of visual experience of this landscape is captured by mid-nineteenth-century artworks that formerly adorned the walls of Poltimore House now on display at Hartland Abbey, including portraits of family members that capture views through windows over idealised views of the estate's rolling parkland and stands of trees.

(V) THE LATE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

Poltimore's parkland landscape reached its apotheosis in the late nineteenth century. Another massive extension of the park to the south was carried out by *c.* 1850, increasing its size by more than one-third and entailing the abandonment of Pit Farm and a road running east–west along a low ridge. The extension ensured that people and traffic no longer cluttered the view from the house over what was now one of Devon's largest and finest landscape parks, with the newly incorporated zone given a park-like makeover with the clumps of trees which also served as cover for game given the family's well-documented investment in hounds under the second Baron Poltimore. While the aristocratic obsession with fox hunting left less obvious physical traces than the creation of deer parks, this activity played a prominent but underestimated role in the shaping of landscape character (see Finch 2004; 2007). While the Parliamentary Enclosure landscapes of the East Midlands, with their characteristic hedgerows and coverts, represent the quintessential milieu for this sport, Poltimore was in its own context no lesser example of a fox-hunting arena.

A new carriageway of 1870 arced from a new lodge at the south-east extremity of the park to the hall; that its course took an indirect route through the newly enlarged parkland is not coincidental and its long curving course was clearly intended to showcase the house and its setting in all its glory. Whitaker provided a brief account of the park at this time in *A Descriptive List of the Deer-Parks and Paddocks of England* (1892); at 280 acres it was said to be surrounded by iron hurdles and paling and contained 150 deer, recently reduced from a herd of 300. Modifications to the pleasure grounds north and west of the house, all in place by the end of the nineteenth century, saw the creation of lawns criss-crossed with paths; a rosary (or rose garden); an obelisk at the terminus of the southern avenue; and a viewing platform from which the entire ensemble could be admired. Amidst a programme

of infrastructural investment in the village, the home farm (Hornhill Farm) was singled out for development, given 2nd Lord Poltimore's interest in breeding Exmoor sheep, with a footpath giving direct access to Poltimore House and stables, while new courtyard farm buildings were constructed to the north of the older buildings (now known as 'Home Farm cottages').

Despite the supposed pressures on gentry families of the Bampfylde's status in the early years of the twentieth century, as outlined above, this period saw a short sharp burst of investment in Poltimore House's grounds and gardens by the third Baron Poltimore. It was also at this time that the public were granted controlled access to the parkland, with the *Western Times* for June 16 1904 (p. 2) reporting that Lord Poltimore had taken the lead of Sir Thomas Acland at nearby Killerton in throwing the park open on occasional days. Development of the grounds around this period also notably indicates the influence of the Lady Poltimore and lends the gardens a tangibly gendered character for the first time. Both Lord and Lady Poltimore indulged in breeding white birds, while waterfowl adorned the Chinese water garden that may have served as a more secluded and feminine garden space. The banks of the former ornamental canal, long since drained, formed a walkway alongside the aviaries, from which they could be observed. A more costly project of this time saw the insertion of an elaborate arrangement of brick-lined drainage channels in a fruitless effort to drain the low-lying part of the park east of the house. These are visible in the magnetometer plot as Christmas Tree-like anomalies (Fig. 1: F).

COMMUNITY HERITAGE AND POLITE LANDSCAPES: CHALLENGES AND FUTURE POTENTIAL

This paper has shown how even a modest and fairly unknown designed landscape such as Poltimore's can have an interesting, unexpected and multi-layered story to tell. Poltimore House's setting captures an evolving dynamic between architecture and landscape design and presents

us with a case study of how concepts of taste and fashion were mediated by personalities and countryside distinctive to the region and the locality. Changes to Poltimore's estate landscape were also clearly driven by emulation of and competition with the Bampfylde family's rivals on the same regional stage — dynasties such as the Aclands, the Rolles and the Courtenays. This regional dimension to designed landscapes is underplayed in research, although its study is particularly amenable to the methods and approaches of landscape history (Williamson 2004, pp. 16–19). Might sites such as Poltimore provide us with an altogether better guide to the characteristic structures and everyday meanings of designed landscapes than the commissions of prominent designers for the nationally and internationally rich and famous?

It is something of a truism that studies of designed landscapes needed rescuing from the clutches of art history. This case study of Poltimore House's polite landscape has shown how the setting of a country house that may not have been at the forefront of national or international trends and cannot be linked to a known designer still has important value as a resource for research but also as a platform for public engagement. As a case study of a polite landscape, the sequence outlined at Poltimore tells us about the re-shaping of a rural landscape at a level below that of famous designers and super-rich patrons. This is perhaps a more representative brand of designed landscape, although it means that the dating of many of the elements discussed here is often less than precise. That said, the project has still identified garden features that are remarkable and unusual — most notably the artificial canal (on account of its size, date and rarity) and the Chinese garden (in this case for its late date and unusual survival as an archaeological earthwork).

The fieldwork programme certainly indicated that a great deal of change has occurred in the gardens and the surrounding landscape. Although the more tangible changes occurred from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, we can begin to glimpse traces of much older features, including

diverted roads and trackways; the double-ditched enclosure that hints at much earlier settlement; and the traces of lost formal gardens west of the house. Furthermore, we can also see how older features were adapted and re-invented. Thus the Chinese water garden, once a place of quiet contemplation, became a swimming pool, while the earthen banks of the ornamental canal served to provide access to and views of the aviaries. The case study also testifies to the changing relationship between the elite core of mansion, gardens and park and the wider working vernacular world — the wider 'penumbra' not only of farms and fields, but also the village, routeways and the parish church — which was such a defining feature of the estate landscape (Williamson 2007, pp. 1–2).

Landscape studies of these sorts of designed environments need to be far more than pseudo garden history, with its tendency — from the point of view of critics — towards being elitist, aloof and inherently top down. The antecedents and reuses of 'polite landscapes' are easily sidelined or neglected but, as a case study such as Poltimore emphasises, they represent rich layers of heritage that are meaningful, important and sometimes more accessible to modern-day communities. A particular issue worth emphasising is that the history of Poltimore House and its landscape after 1921 represents far more than a great house's 'afterlife'; rather, the polite landscape was re-populated, re-thought and reused in myriad ways that drew on the place's elite heritage in some ways but rejected it in others. The history of this landscape in the second half of the twentieth century contains important lessons about how quickly buildings and garden architecture become 'archaeological'; how rapidly designed landscapes unravel; and how irreversibly the gardens and trees within them revert to semi-wild states.

Our project's emphasis on working in partnership with school children, volunteers and local people and its engagement with the total biography of Poltimore's landscape have also thrown up interesting questions about how to present its findings to the public. This paper began by reflecting on the many layers of



Plate V. View of Poltimore Park bunker (Photograph: Oliver Creighton).

Poltimore's heritage and will end by highlighting yet another, so far unacknowledged here. An extensive but now crumbling military complex was a later twentieth-century addition to the parkland landscape. The Poltimore Park bunker complex comprises two installations: a subterranean Second World War Royal Air Force Sector Operations Room and a Cold War Royal Observers' Corps Group 10 Headquarters built in 1961 and decommissioned in 1991 (Pl. V). While this might seem a peripheral and even uncomfortable part of the landscape's story, it is instructive to note that the Cold War bunker is one of a group of only thirty-one that were ever built and thirteen of its type (Cocroft & Thomas 2003, p. 187), of which around only five

remain intact. Incorporating children's art into the display boards that now punctuate Poltimore's surroundings, to educate and inform, was one device the *Community and Landscape Project* used to encapsulate the many different reactions to this remarkable place. In one particular example — immediately in front of the house — part of the display board depicts a mushroom cloud over Exeter that reflected the place's Cold War heritage in the eyes of one eight-year-old child. That this image jars with an adjacent nineteenth-century landscape artist's depiction of Poltimore's gently sweeping parkland and an early twentieth-century photograph of school girls playing cricket on the same spot captures the melange of reactions to and experiences of this 'polite' landscape.

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NOTES

1. In January 2005, for the TV film *Ten Days to Victory*. Volumes of rubble were also imported on to the site for the purpose, which created challenges for an archaeological survey of masonry fragments of the house and gardens undertaken as part of the Poltimore Community Landscape Project.
2. See: english-heritage.org.uk/caring/listing/registered-parks-and-gardens/
3. See the Poltimore Community and Landscape Project website at: <http://elac.ex.ac.uk/poltimore-landscapes/>

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| Devon HC | Devon Heritage Centre | Lincs HER | Lincolnshire Historic Environment Record |
| DRO | Devon Archives | NA | National Archives |
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