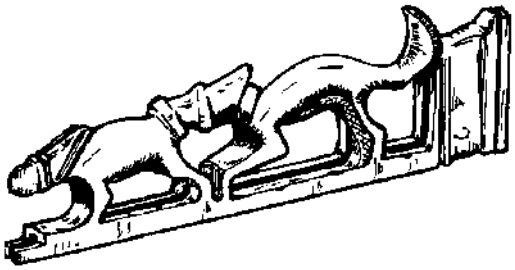
Ampthill & District Archaeological



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The Search for a lost Moat

A Resistance Survey of the Old House at Wrest
TL 092354

Kevan J. Fadden
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The Search for a Lost Moat.
A Resistance survey at the site of the Old House at Wrest

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Ampthill & District Archaeological and Local History Society

Summary

A resistance survey of the site of the Old House at Wrest showed up many of the walls and foundations but evidence for all but the western moat and its bridge was disappointing. The report attempts to relate the survey to the Kip/Knyff engravings of 1705, the Lawrence and Rocque plans of 1719, 1735 and 1737 respectively and sketches and drawings made at the time of the demolition of the Old House in the 1830's. The survey was also successful in showing up features dating from pre-1705 which sometimes become visible as crop-marks in dry summers.

Introduction



Fig. 1 Wrest House from Fountain

The Old House at Wrest lies in two areas of lawn to the south of the present fountain, Fig 1. Historical records indicate that the Old House site was moated but the only evidence for the location of the moat or moats is the small western section visible in the Kip/Knyff engravings of 1705, Fig.2. Between 1988 and 1991 an archaeological survey of the gardens, *Ref.1*, included a resistance survey on the site of the old house but this apparently did not extend to include the areas where the moat may have been.

During the summer of 2003 a marked depression could be observed running east-west along the north side of present fountain. It seemed possible that this was the site of part of the filled moat. It was therefore decided with the agreement of Silsoe Research Institute and English Heritage to do a resistance survey over the site of the old house and the areas immediately surrounding it. (see Site Summary Sheet at end of report)

Historical References

c.1512 *"except for the mansion house with all moats, moat water, fishponds.."* In a lease by Sir Henry Wyatt Knight to Thomas Hall of Wrest BRO L Jeayes 899

c.1639 A poem by Thomas Carew contains " *Wrest .....*

and entertains the flowing streams in deep
and spacious channels, where they slowly creep
in snaky windings, as the shelving ground
leads them in circles, till they twice surround
this island mansion, which, i'th centre placed,
is with a double crystal heaven embraced;".

Through Visitors Eyes, p.215, S Houfe

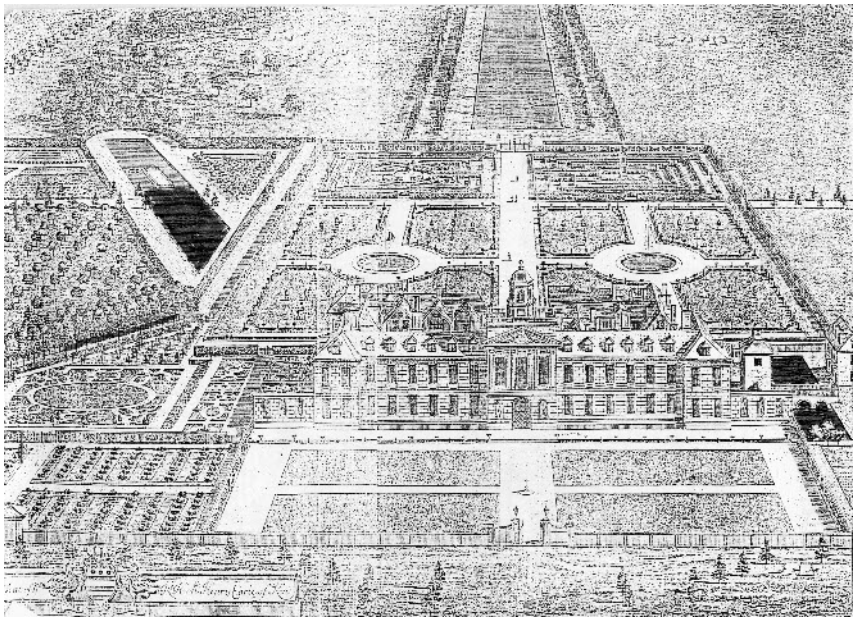


Fig. 2 Kip/Knyff Engraving looking south.

1687 Accounts contain a note about taking carp, tench and perch out of the best pond by the oak tree and putting them "*in the moat above the bridge next court wall*"; and also *"the end of the moot on the est side of the wall of the court there was taken out 18 large carp, 3 small jack and some small carp and a good many small bream. 14 of the carp and the 3 small jack and 3 small carp were all put in the little pond, one large carp with spawn was put into the horsepond"* . The best pond is likely to have been the Great Canal and the little pond the diagonal pond. The "est" may be incorrect, west was probably meant assuming the moat to be the remnant left in the Kip engraving.

Notes at front of L31/195

1689 Accounts also contain *"that day there was put into the moote next the sluice 167 carp. They were all taken out of the middle pond in the billiard room garden."* The middle pond may have been the Great Canal although it is not clear where the billiard room was.

Notes at front of L31/195

1689 *"Burrows a bill for putting down the trough to the mote"*

L31/195

1692-99 Cisterns were being made for the two fountains in the present croquet lawn area.

L31/288

1698-99 *"claying the fountains.....work to the fountains; buying a large stopcock; bushing the drain under the terrace wall"* L31/288

Jan 1703-Apr 1704 *"making a foundation for the spring"*
"*filling up moat and spring; work in spring*" - L31/289/p.156,162

"*carrying earth from the hill to the moat*" etc. - 320 mandays
L31/289/p.159,161,163,166,168,174,177,180,183

May 1704 *"Paid Yong 6 days at the mote for troughs*
Paid Jo Hill and sonn ii days at the mote
Paid Elsto 5 days at the mote" L31/289/p.194

"Carpenters bill for making troughs for the mote" L31/289/p.196

"Paid Jo Hill and son lay pipes in mote
Paid Elsto 6 days in mote
Paid Yongs 6 days" L31/289/p.196

May 1704 *"Covering the troughs in the mote*
Paid Yong 6 days
Paid Elsto 6 days" L31/289/p.198

"Carpenters bill laying the troughs in the mote" L31/289/p.202

June 1704 *"Making troughs to lay from the house to the troughs in the mote"*
L31/289/p.206

July 1704 *"Paid Sam Whithod 1 day making a drain to carry the water from the old mote"*
L31/289/p.218

1706 Leonard Knyff drawings, engraved by Johann Kip, sometime between 1697 and 1706, and published in 1707 in Brittannia Illustrata, Fig.2. The Great Canal, old millpond and diagonal eastern canal are clearly shown as is the remnant of the moat running close to the west of the old house. The engravings also show the arrangement of conifers on the northern approach to the house which will be dealt with later in this report.

No further mention of the moat is made in the accounts after July 1704 so it is possible that the Kip/Knyff engraving showed the situation existing before 1703 or 1704 when the last remnant of the moat existed. This remnant is then filled with earth and inlaid with troughs or drains to remove water from the area.

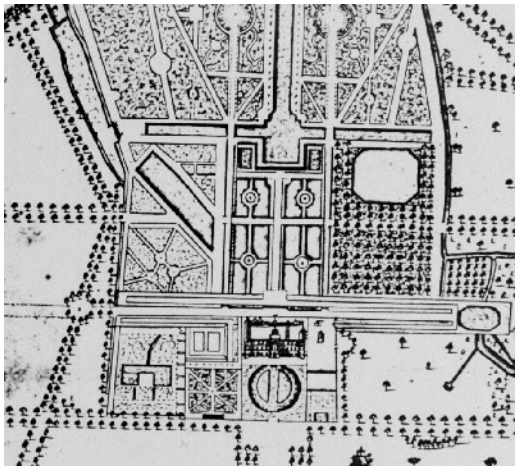


Fig. 3 Lawrence survey 1719

1719 Plan of gardens to scale published in a survey of the whole estate by Edward Lawrence. Fig 3. The originator of the heart of the plan may not have been Lawrence because a letter in 1715 stated:
"and yr Mr Ackers is doing one (a plan?) for me of the gardens". L30/8/87

1719 "*drain round house and connecting with octagon basin*". L31/245/f31
The octagon basin is that shown at the western end of the terrace.

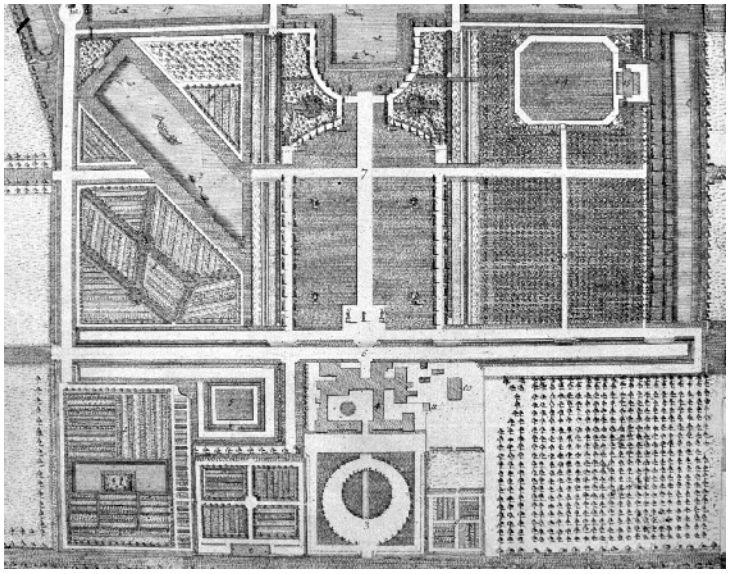


Fig. 4 Rocque Plan 1735

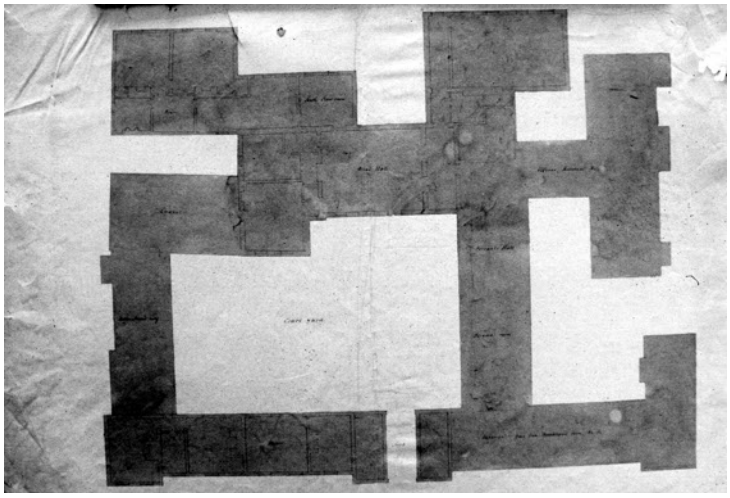


Fig. 5 "Green tinted" Plan

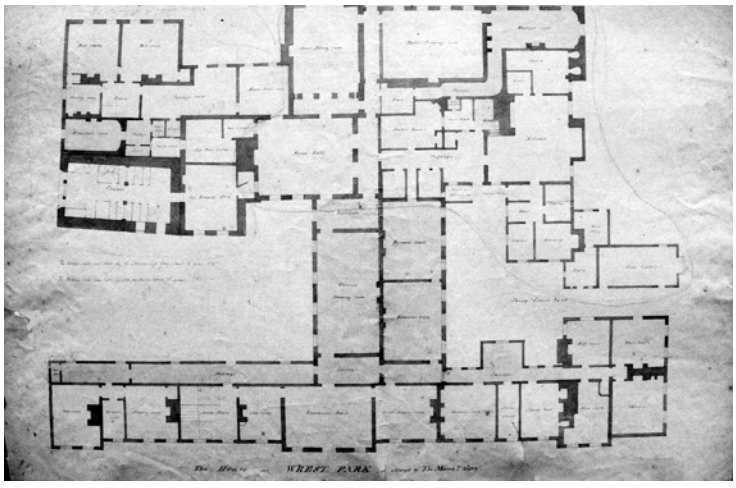


Fig. 6 Earl De. Grey Plan

1735 The first of the Rocque plans Fig.4. All the fountains and mazes have been removed from the area south of the house.

1737 The second of the Rocque plans. This shows a similar plan of the house to the 1735 plan with the addition of a new brewhouse to the north west

In the Bedford Record Office there is also a green-tinted plan of the house at about this time. Fig.5. L33/148

c.1830 There is also a plan of the Old House as altered by the Marchioness de Grey and presented by the Earl de Grey as he thought it would have been in about 1797. Fig.6. L33/149

Important publications regarding the Old House itself are those of James Collett-White entitled "The Old House at Wrest Parts I and II" published in the Bedfordshire Magazine. *Ref 2,3.*
Also the English Heritage publication, 1995, "Wrest Park" by Nicola Smith contains useful information regarding the Old House.

Procedure

The setting out and surveys took place on Wed 12th Nov, Wed 19th Nov, Wed 26th Nov, Thurs 27th Nov, Wed 3rd Dec and Wed 10th Dec 2003. The survey was delayed until appreciable rainfall had followed the exceptionally dry summer. Between the two major survey days there was a heavy downpour and the effect of this was very noticeable in the results, for example notice the great difference in contrast obtained on the main north-south central drive.
The site reference point was taken as the intersection between a line joining the centre of the fountain and the centre of the present mansion and a line running across the south front of the bases of the two

statues to the north-west and north east of the fountain. From this point the twenty metre grids were marked out with pegs and white emulsion paint crosses. The base point for the actual survey was the north west corner of the gridded area. The survey was conducted using a TR/CIA resistance meter with a twin probe configuration, the readings being taken at 1 metre intervals.

Results

The survey results are shown in Fig.7. Using a grey scale, "black" represents low resistance and "white" high resistance. Most of the very white areas represent statues, the present fountain or trees and bushes where readings could not be taken. However several are anomalous readings caused by the probe not being in complete contact with the ground and the reading being recorded automatically without the operator noticing. The results can be compared with the house plans, Figs 4,5,6 and the Kip/Knyff engraving, Fig.2.

The north front is relatively easily identified with its lean-to passage on the south side. The Great Dining Room, built c.1760, somewhat surprisingly shows up well beneath the central gravelled drive.

The chapel shows up clearly and also the bridge over the moat on the west side. See the Kip/Knyff engraving Fig.2.

The central block connecting the north front to the older part shows as a higher resistance blur amidst

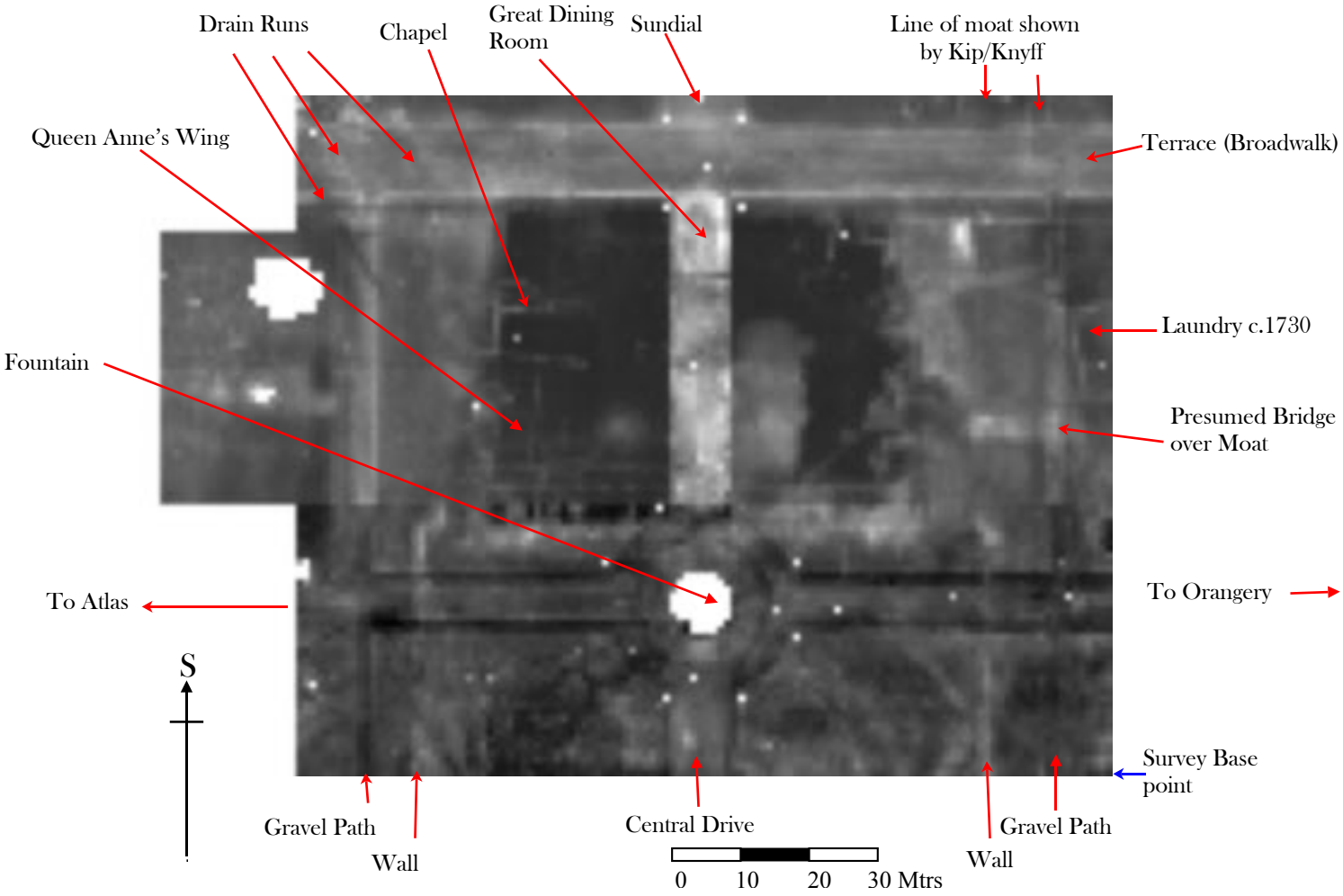


Fig. 7 Resistance Survey

a lower resistance courtyard and surrounding floor areas. It is possible that the heavy rains had caused water to accumulate in puddled areas below ground. See later evidence from an older fountain site.



Fig. 8 Terrace North Edge - scorch mark



Fig. 9 Terrace South Edge - scorch mark



Fig. 10 Edging Wall of Lower Terrace - scorch mark

The buildings, Queen Anne's wing, and circular feature in the east courtyard show up in accordance with the details in Figs.4 & 5 as do the walls heading north either side of the main approach to the house. There is some evidence of the major circular features around the drive in this area.

Interestingly there are other features showing up in the courtyard areas which may represent other buildings and drain runs. Other drain runs are visible in the south east corner of the site one at least linking up with a modern inspection pit cover.

The known western section of the moat shows up as a relatively uniform clear area with a bridge and it is possible that the clear area on the east side at a similar distance from the central drive is the eastern part of the moat. The northern leg has not shown up at all. The southern leg assuming a rectangular moat may have lain under the terrace before it was filled and gravelled to produce the present Broad Walk. The edges of this terraced area, Figs.8 & 9, showed up as high resistance areas which may represent containing walls either for the terrace or possibly the moat. The ground to the south then drops away appreciably to the level of the present croquet lawns in which a very clear crop-mark, Fig.10, shows up the edging wall of the lower terrace leading down to the pleasure grounds. This area was not surveyed.

The edges of the east-west gravelled drive either side of the present fountain show up as low resistance areas, suggesting ditches in contrast to the edges of the terrace.

The south west corner of the site is rather baffling if the Earl de Grey's plan is correct. A very strong anomaly matched with cropmarks showed up well to the west of the large bake ovens shown on the plan. It may however be the site of the small square building shown in Fig 4

Other Surveys undertaken

Two other areas were surveyed with the resistance meter. The first was the presumed site of the eastern fountain shown in the Kip/Knyff engraving and the Lawrence plan.
The results were most encouraging, Fig.11a, the bowl of the fountain showing up clearly as a low resistance area with a central plinth. There was obviously still some water holding capacity in the bowl which may have been of puddled clay – see earlier historical references.
The second area surveyed was that outside the main approach on the eastern side of the central drive. In dry summers green circles appear in the lawns indicating the sites of the conifers shown in the Kip/Knyff engraving. We chose to survey an area containing six such circles to see how well a resistance survey would respond. The results were encouraging, Fig.11b, but if we had not known what was there it may have been difficult to be certain what the features showing up were. For example we are still uncertain as to what the dark rings on the main survey to the north-east of the present fountain represent.

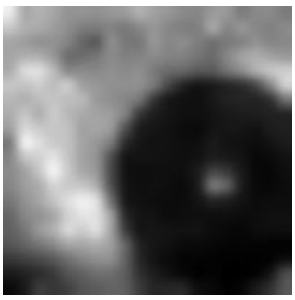


Fig. 11a Old Fountain

Conclusions

The results have proved the value of a resistance survey on such a site as this one. However the search for the unknown sections of the moat has not been successful apart from some indication of the possible site of the eastern section and the possible interpretation of a pronounced dip in the ground running across the north side of the present fountain which did not show up in the survey. It is possible that in somewhat drier conditions better definition might be obtained in the very low resistance areas in the centre of the main complex. Therefore it is recommended that, if the opportunity arises, a survey should be repeated in drier conditions in the south-west corner of the site and in the sunken area north of the site.



Fig. 11b Tree Circles

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Silsoe Research Institute and English Heritage for granting access to the site and to the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Record Service for their assistance and permission to reproduce the Kip/Knyff and Lawrence, Rocque and Earl de Grey plans.

References

1. Dawson, M, 2001, A Brief Introduction to the Archaeology of Wrest Park, Bedfordshire, *Bedfordshire Archaeology*, 24, 81-97
2. Collett-White, J, 1991a, The Old House at Wrest –I, *Bedfordshire Magazine*, 22, No.176, 322-326
3. Collett-White, J, 1991b, The Old House at Wrest – II, *Bedfordshire Magazine*, 23, No. 177, 4-12

Other references within the text are to records stored in the Bedfordshire and Luton Archives and Records Service.

Site Summary sheet

ADALHS SURVEY	No.4	**NGR**	TL 092 354
SITE TYPE	Site of moated house		
DESCRIPTION	Site of old house on flat lawned area in grounds of Wrest Park.		
PERIOD	c.1200 – 1840		
GEOLOGY	Sandy loam overlying clay		
LAND USE	Lawns, gravelled paths		
SURVEY TYPE	Resistance – Twin Probe	**METHOD**	Zig-Zag
INSTRUMENT	TR/CIA Resistance Meter	**SURVEY AREA**	1.28 hectares
SAMPLE INTERVAL	1.00m	**TRAVERSE INTERVAL**	1.0m

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

A resistance survey of the site of the Old House at Wrest showed up many of the walls and foundations but evidence for all but the western moat and its bridge was disappointing. The report attempts to relate the survey to the Kip/Knyff engravings of 1705, the Lawrence and Rocque plans of 1719, 1735 and 1737 respectively and sketches and drawings made at the time of the demolition of the Old House in the 1830's. The survey was also successful in showing up features dating from pre-1705 which sometimes become visible as crop-marks in dry summers.

SURVEY START	12th Nov 2003	**REPORT DATE**	Jan 2004
SURVEY END	10th Dec 2003		
AUTHORS	M J B Turner, K Fadden	**ASSISTANTS**	B Lazelle S Jones

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