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Bifrons Palace

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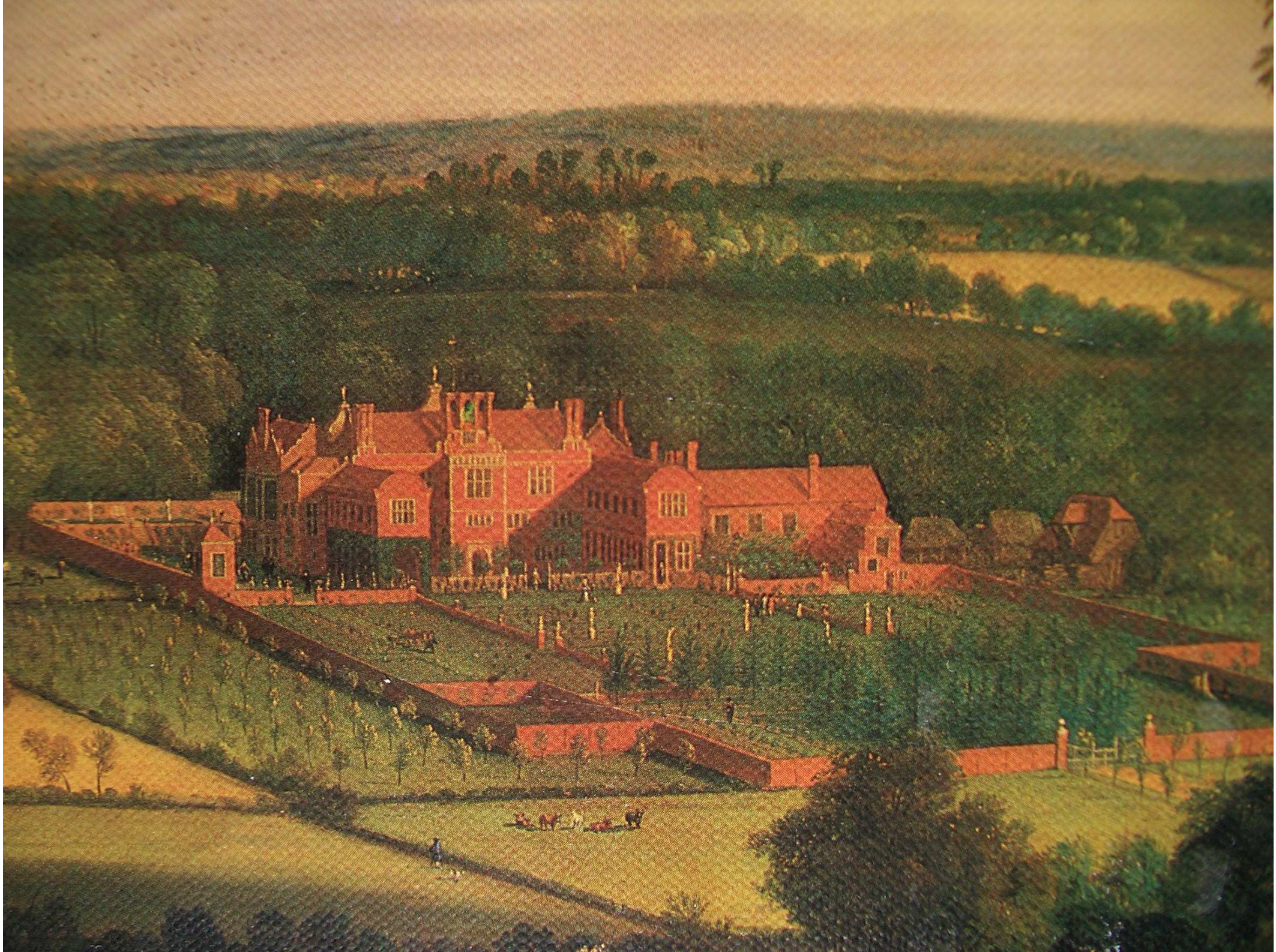
July 1989



From the Catalogue of The Paul Mellon Collection, The Center for British Art, Yale University, U.S.A.:—

BIFRONS PARK, KENT, ca. 1705-10

Oil on canvas, 61½" x 91½" (86·8cm x 132·5cm) B1977.14.83 Attributed to Jan Siberechts

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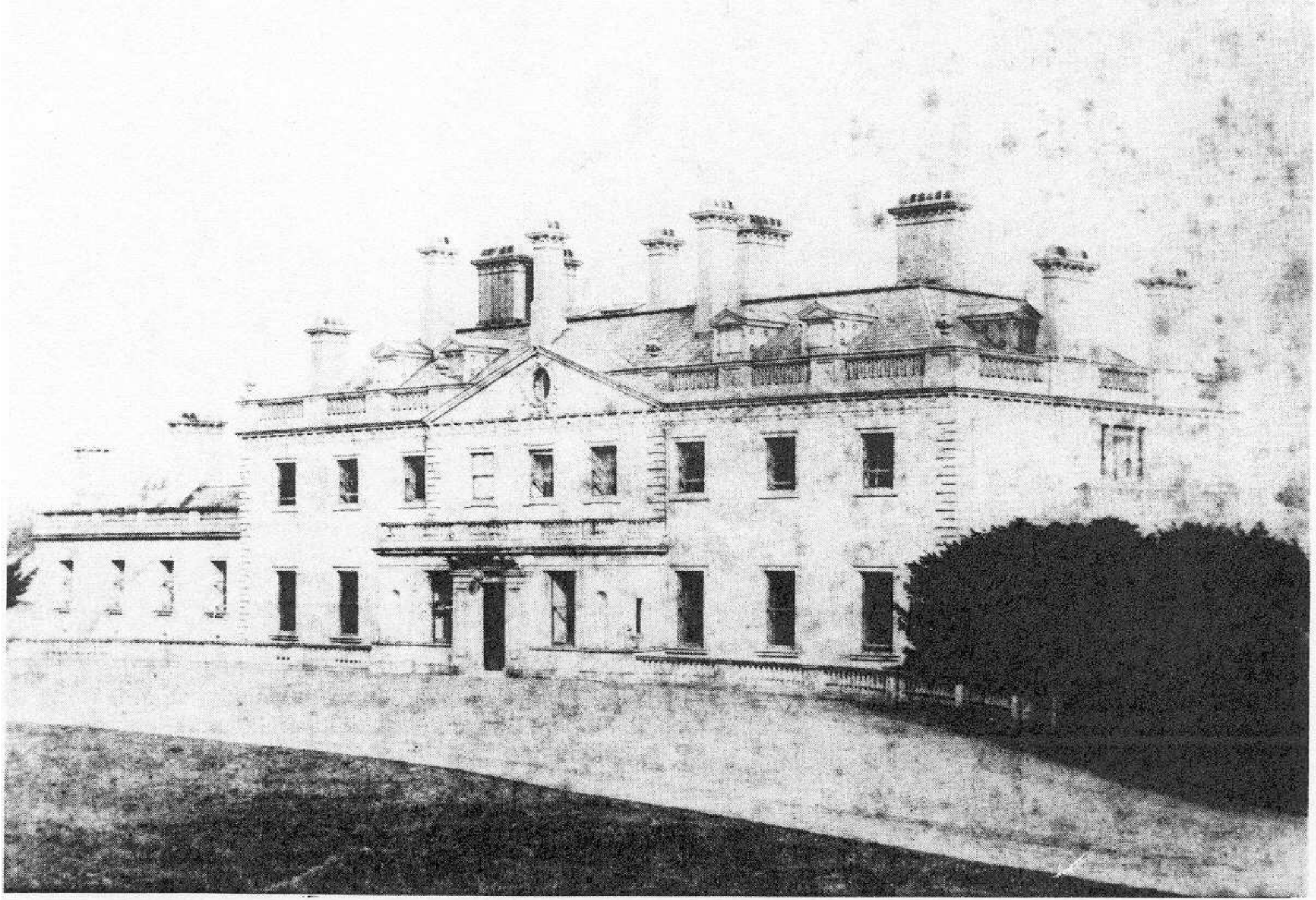
We would like to record our thanks to the Yale Center for their help, and their generous gesture in waiving all reproduction right fees since it is for the benefit of the local churches.

Update on the notes below

The current view of the Yale curatorm is that this painting which is attributed to Siberechts, or possibly John Wootton, 'could well turn out to be someone like Adriaen van Dienst (1655-1704) who worked nearby in Kent'. The idea expressed below that artist could not have seen the Bell Harry tower from his vantage point has been disproved and it is now believed that the tower would have been visible as it has been painted.



The entrance front: A photograph of Bifrons in the late nineteenth century.

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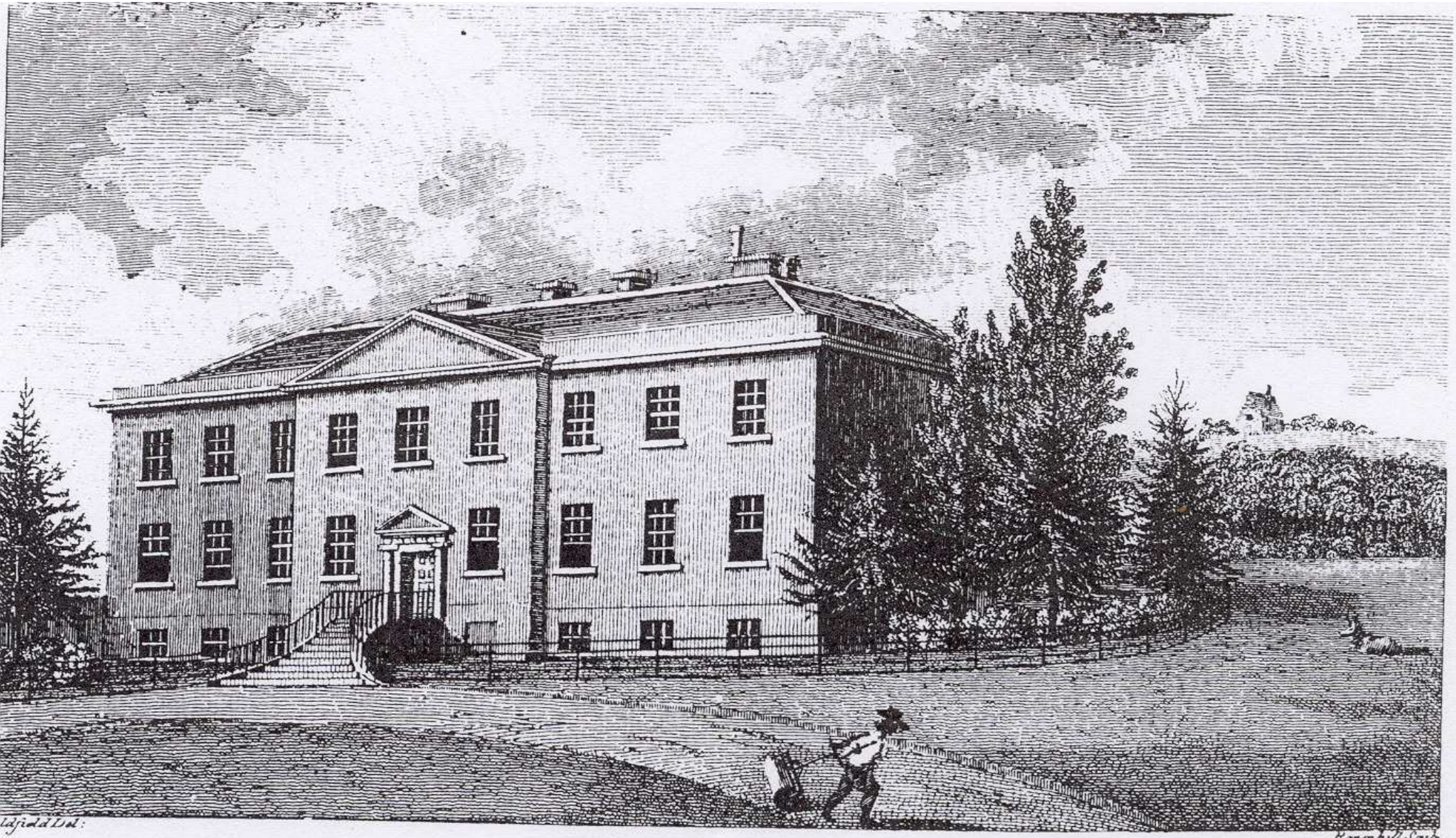


BIERONS, the Seat of the REVd EDWd TAYLOR,

Published July 1st 1794 by Simmons, Kirkby & Sons, Canterbury.

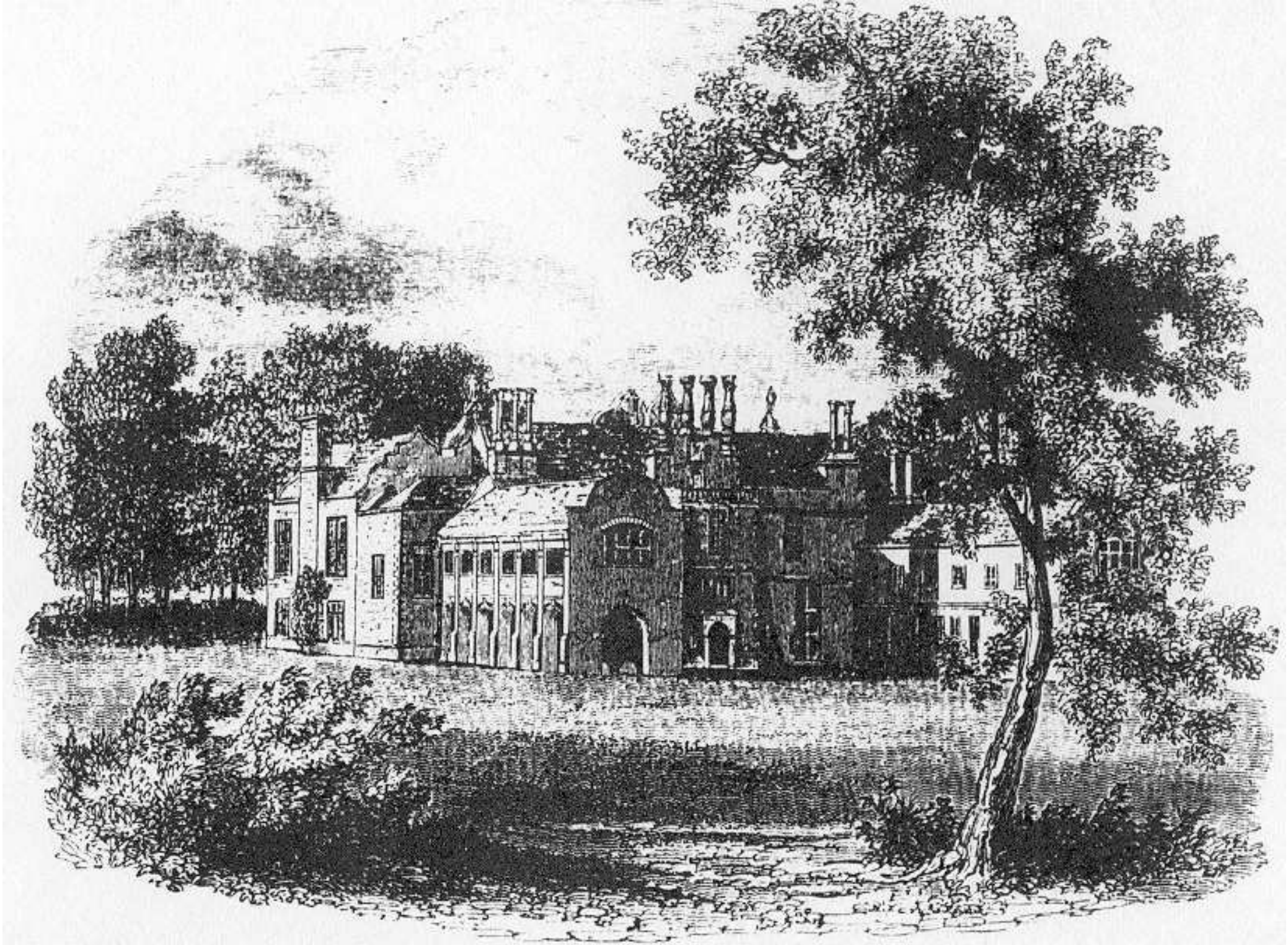
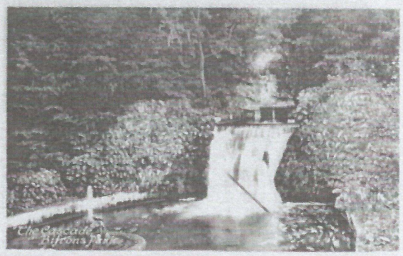


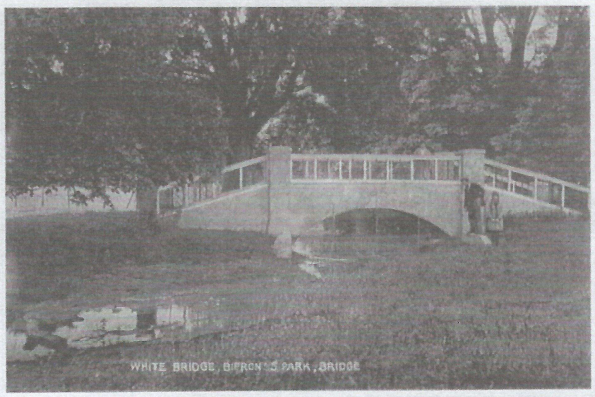
Fig. 14 Mid-nineteenth century

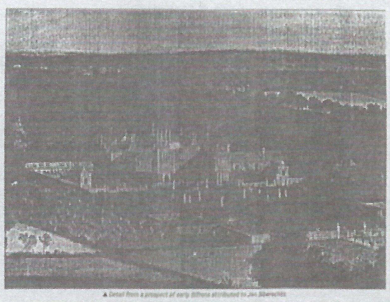
Bifrons.

BIFRONS

TOPIARY IN THE GARDENS OF BIFRONS, NEAR CANTERBURY, IN KENT







▲ Detail from a prospect of early Bifrons attributed to Jan Siberechts

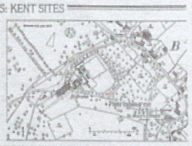
▲ Engraving of the north front of Bifrons, c. 1794

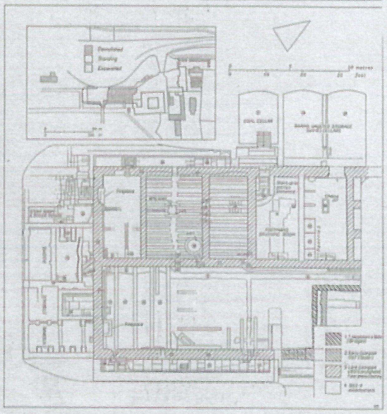
In 1830 the Bifrons estate passed by sale to the Cavaghan family. Minor alterations to the house were probably undertaken both before and after its sale. The architect, Thomas Hunt (c. 1830) is known to have given Bifrons its 'Tudor' style and his pupil G.H. Smith is also known to have carried out alterations to the house in 1835. None of these changes, however, were readily identified in the excavations.

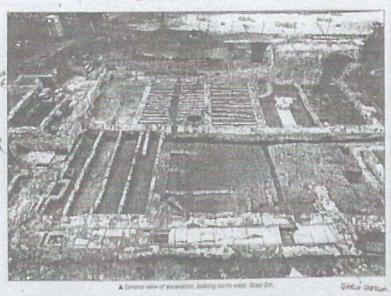
The major refaceing of Bifrons occurred in 1863/64 when the early Georgian house was virtually demolished and the ground level to the north raised 2 m. by extensive dumping of sand. The majority of the structural remains exposed on the excavations date from this period of massive rebuilding. At semi-basement over the Georgian windows and east foundations of the north elevation, some bifrons stretched, but were placed for the insertion of a pair of barrel-vaulted cellars which extended below the main driveway. Another barrel-vaulted cellar was also surveyed immediately to the west of the main/sidelines widows. This may date from c. 1815, being constructed of bricks in a yellow sandy fabric comparable to types used in the Napoleonic period fortifications at the Western Heights, Dover. A wide range of brick forms, slats and fabrics were in fact observed in the various building phases of Bifrons house. Some were obviously early, possibly late Sixteenth century or early seventeenth century in date, but it is sometimes difficult to date brick types individually with any degree of certainty. At a large and important building such as Bifrons there are the added complications of re-used earlier material and the use of large numbers of bricks procured at regular intervals from non-local sources. The predominant types used in the 1863/64 refaceing were the soft red bricks probably from the Faversham brickyards, but use was also made of London Brick Company 'yellows'.

With the exception of the entirely Victorian north portion, the foundations of which were exposed, only the floors and wall partitions of the lower basement survived the demolition of 1948. These comprised

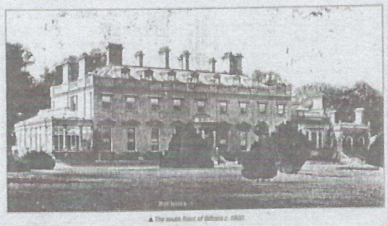
a range of rooms leading off a central east-west corridor. The domestic functions of these rooms which included both outside and inside sectors, scullery, kitchen, lawn room, butler's pantry and brushing room as well as a footman and hallway's bedroom, reflect something of the way of life of not only aristocratic Victorian England, but also the living and working conditions of the servants necessary to run such large country houses as Bifrons. Much of the complex sewerage, water and heating systems to the house was also recorded, but could not be directly related to individual room function and use. From the demolition deposits which infilled these rooms, however, a large number of architectural mouldings together with a range of other building materials provide some indication of the private and heavy Victorian internal decoration of the house. The recovery of a small Whitby jet bead and a 'flat' lead toy soldier from the site of one drain similarly allow a glimpse of the material possessions of the occupants of the building in the nineteenth century.







▲ General view of excavation, looking north-west. Scale 2m.



▲ The south front of Bifrons c. 1900

BIFRONS

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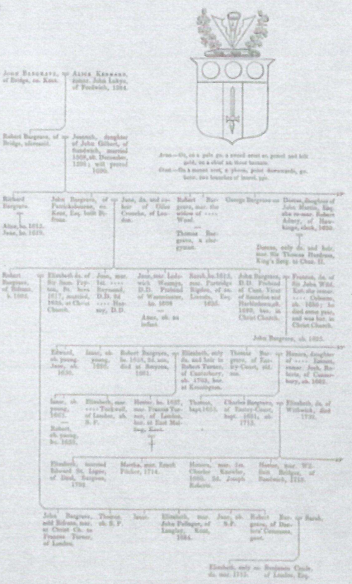
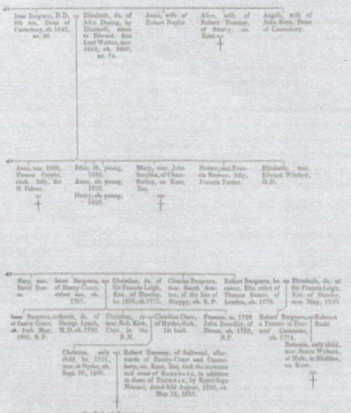
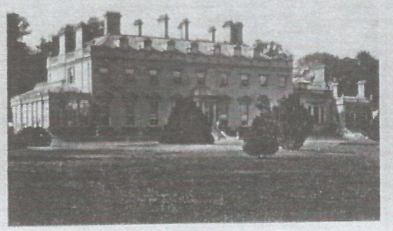




COUNTRY LIFE—SEPTEMBER 3, 1943 179

A—THE CHILDREN OF JOHN TAYLOR, OF BIFRONS PARK



Bifrons

BIFRON'S

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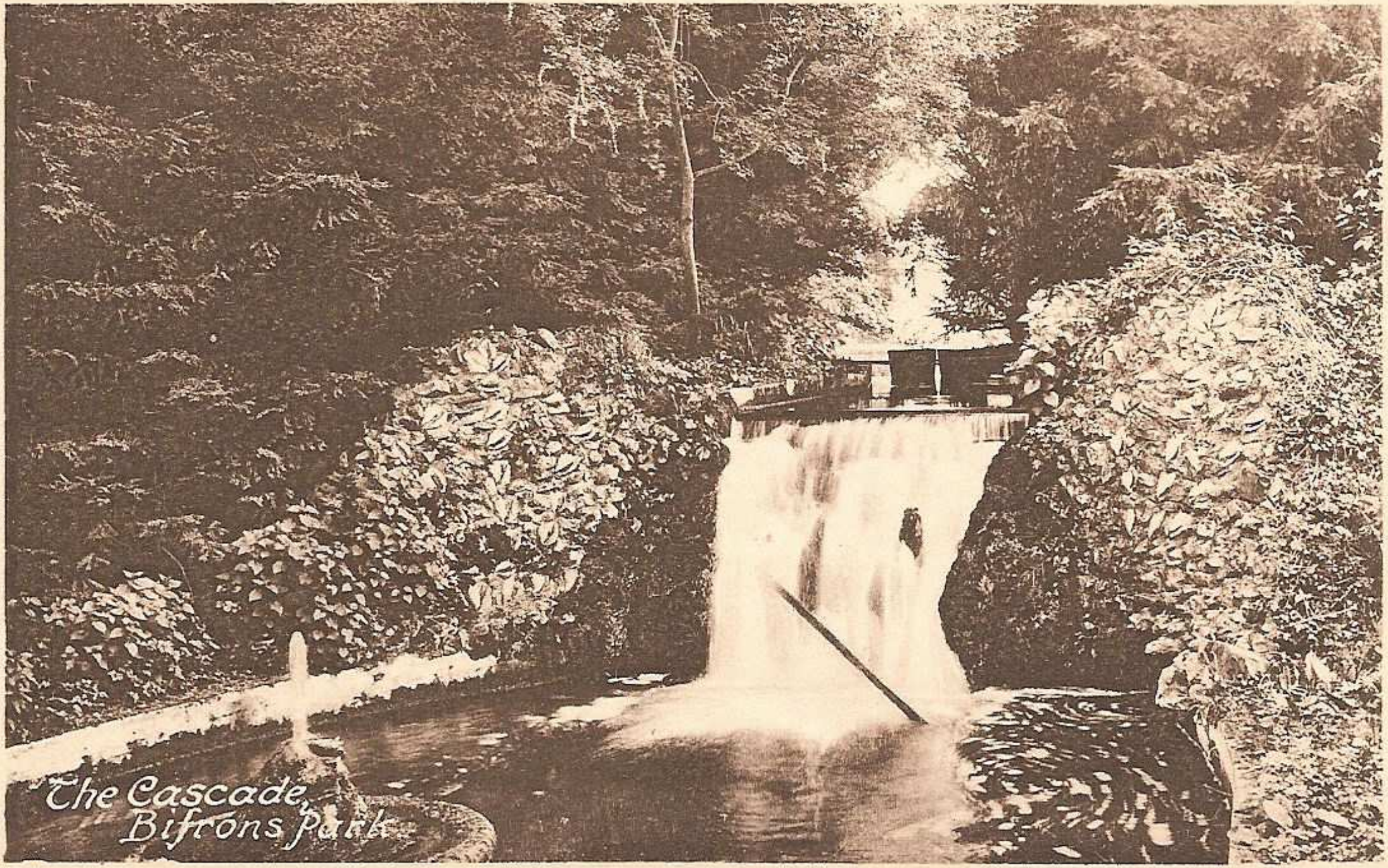
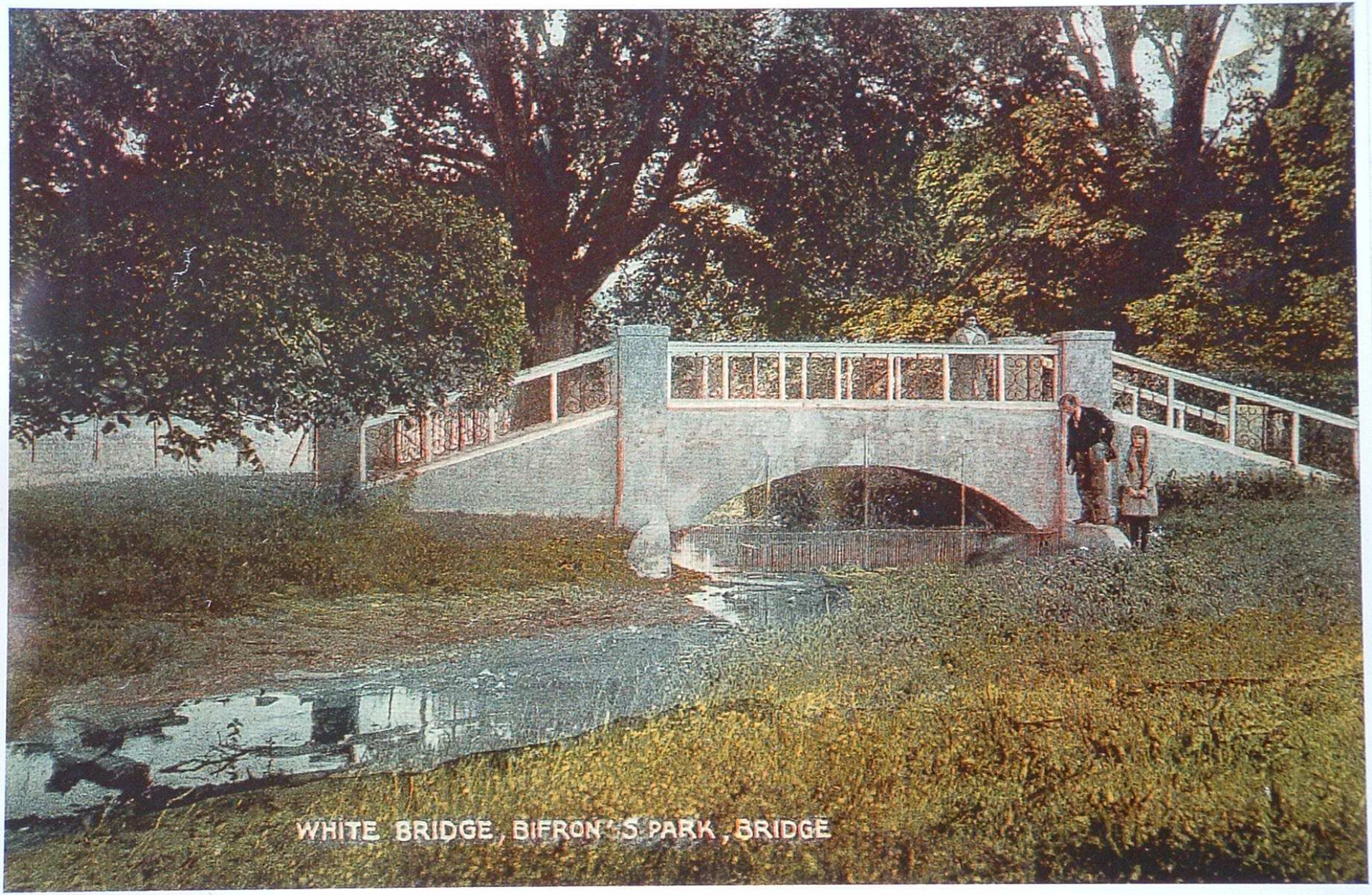

The Cascade,
Bifrons Park.

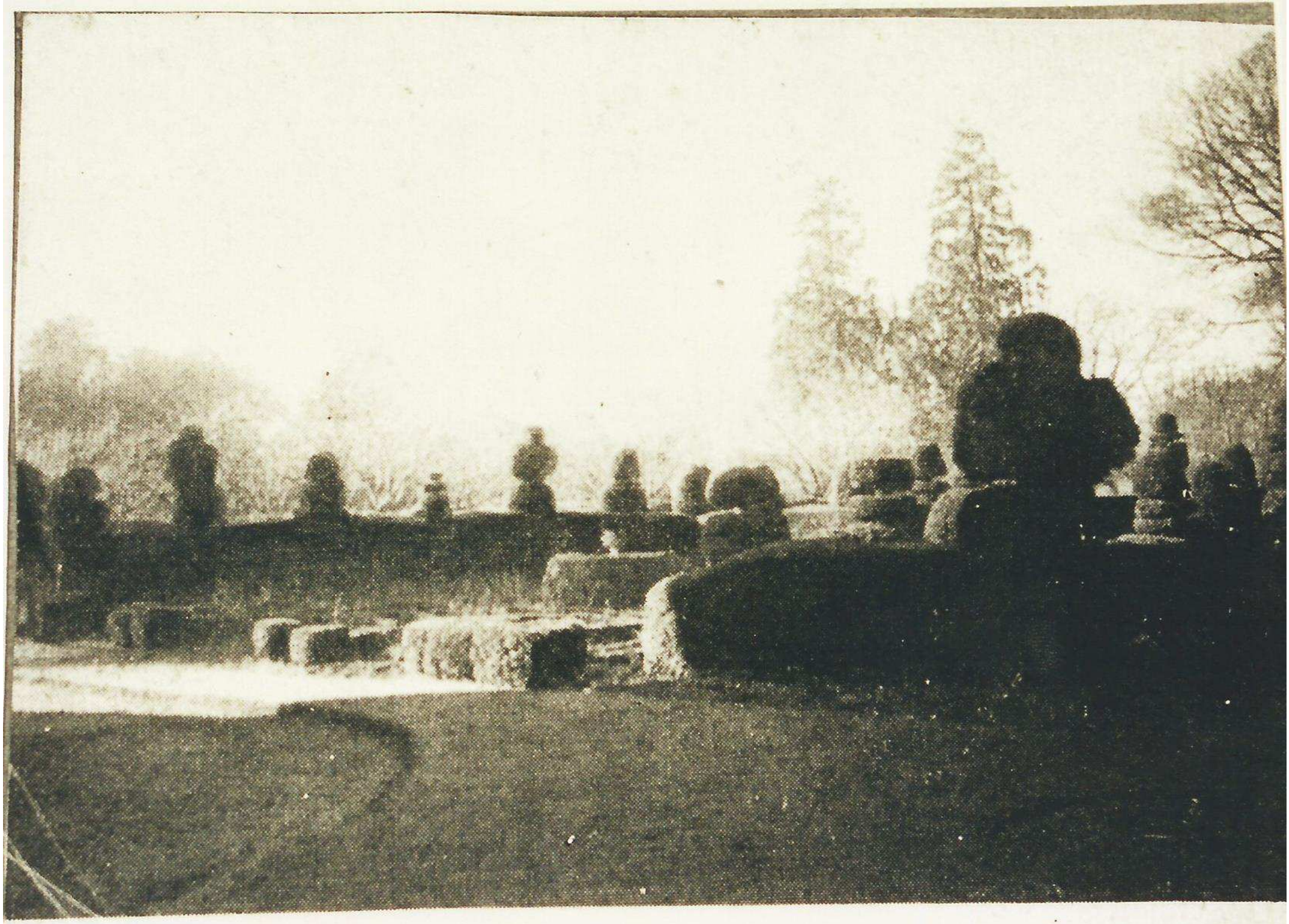
Bifrons Park


WHITE BRIDGE, BIFRONS PARK, BRIDGE

Bridge. Kent. A Real Photograph. J.M.

Patrixbourne, Kent, A Real Photograph, J.M.

THE WHITE BRIDGE, PATRIXBOURNE.



TOPIARY IN THE GARDENS OF BIFRONS, NEAR CANTE

EXP
The Park Plantations &c.
A Cottage
B Cold Bath
C Bard Yards &c
D Garden
E Yard & Pasture
F Meadow
G Two Cottages
H Garden
I Plantation
K Cottage and Meadow
1 Field and Cottage
2
2 a
2 b
3
4 Great Knowles
5
6 Cottage and Garden
7
7 a Plantation
7 b Do
8 Little Knowles
9 Bridge Bottom
10
11 The Downs
12
13
14
15 Cottage
22 Sluice Meadows
23 Do
25 a
24
25
26
27
36 (Part of)
38
37
31
41 House and Garden
48 Acre piece
49
50 Heath Field
51 Little Do
54
55
56 & 57
58
59 60. 61 and part of 62
63 Great Heath Field
64
65 and 71 Patre Nostre Hill
65 a
65 b
65 c
66
67 with part of 62
68
69. 70. 72 and 73
74
75 Thistle Down
79 Church Meadow
To Dover
Baron De Montesquieu
B D Montesquieu
Mr Brazier
BISHOP BOURNE EST
BRIDGE

E X P L A N A T I O N

A. R. P.	No.	Name
[illegible]	23 a	
[illegible]	24	
[illegible]	25	
0. 3. 8	26	
0. 0. 37	27	
1. 1. 18	35	Part of
[illegible]	36	
0. 1. 8	37	
0. 3. 8	31	
1. 1. 5	41	House and Garden
1. 2. 12	40	Acre piece
7. 1. 37	49	
	50	Heath Field
	51	Little D^{o}
118. 1. 4	54	
2. 2. 36	55	
13. 2. 0	56 & 57	
1. 3. 3	58	
0. 1. 27	59. 60. 61 and part of 63	
	63	Great Heath Field
	64	
55. 1. 19	65 and pt	Patre Nostre Hill
7. 2. 3	65 a	
53. 2. 13	65 b	
2. 2. 37	65 c	
5. 3. 38	66	
1. 2. 6	67 with part of 62	
3. 1. 19	68	
4. 0. 3	69. 70. 72 and 73	
1. 0. 16	74	
2. 1. 32	75	Thistle Down
2. 3. 20	79	Church Meadow

10. 0. 30; 6. 2. 24; 6. 1. 30

A. R. P.	No.	Name
3. 1. 0	84. 85. 89	
0. 0. 8	89 a	
0. 0. 16	87	
1. 3. 24	87 a	
1. 0. 16	90	
	92 a	Orchard
	94	
23. 1. 8	96	
4. 1. 34	97. 98. 99 and 100	
0. 3. 0	100	
1. 0. 14	101	
13. 3. 38	102 a	
48. 2. 19	102 b	
9. 3. 0	102 c	
10. 3. 15	102 d	
11. 2. 16	102 e	
14. 3. 18	103	Little Standards
7. 3. 5	104	House Yard and Orchard
6. 1. 5	106	Pole Dane
32. 2. 18	106 a	
5. 2. 28	118	
24. 2. 8	107	
4. 1. 19	108	Great Standards
0. 0. 14	109	
2. 3. 3	110	Barn Field
5. 0. 4	111	Upper Nine Acres
12. 1. 36	112	Beagles
20. 0. 35	113	Nine Acres
10. 1. 35	114	Reed Down
6. 1. 2	115	Seven Acres
6. 3. 39	116	Little Reed Down
7. 1. 18	117	

4. 1. 0; 1. 3. 0; 5. 2. 0; 7. 1. 22; 1. 2. 30; 20. 3. 24; 2. 0. 32; 2. 2. 33

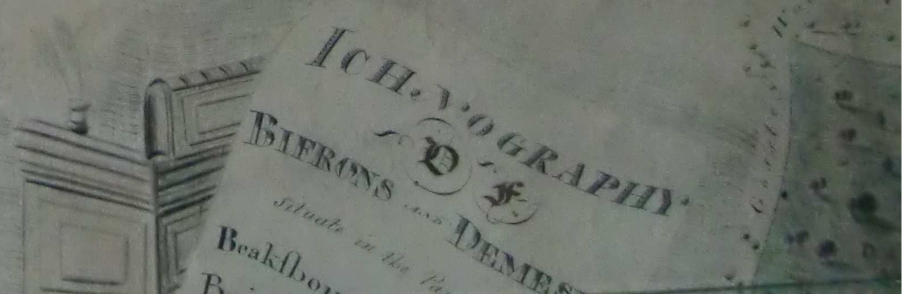
A. R. P.	No.	Name
[illegible]	119	
[illegible] 1. 0	120	Bell Hill
[illegible] 2. 10	121	Lower Nine Acres
[illegible]	122	House Yard and Orchard
[illegible]	123	Well Close
[illegible]	124	Cottage
[illegible]	125	Cart Bell
[illegible] 3. 22	126	Upper Eaton
[illegible] 1. 31	127	Barracoers
[illegible] 0. 23	128	Little Freez Bush
[illegible] 2. 25	129	Great Freeze Bush
	130	Long Hill
	131	(with the Shave)
	131 a	late Harnetts
	131 b	
33. [illegible] 12	133	
6. [illegible] 35	134	
4. 0. 39	135	Bell Down
	137	
	138	
34. 3. 6	139	Well Close
6. 1. 39	140	
32. 3. 1	142	
5. 3. 4	143	
16. 3. 4	144	[illegible]
9. 2. 26		
4. 2. 24		
8. 1. 26		
19. 3. 23		
7. 1. 9		
13. 0. 16		
[illegible] 0. 23		

1372. 3. [illegible]

Wood Land

A. R. P.		Name		
[illegible]				
[illegible]				
9. 0. 16				
[illegible]				
14. 0. 4	A			
[illegible]	B			
14. 1. 2	C			
8. 3. 4	D	[illegible]		
3. 0. 1	E	[illegible]		
10. 3. 32	F	[illegible] H. N° 13	[illegible]	18. 3. 19
25. 0. 30	G	[illegible]	19. 3. 30	
16. 0. 18	H	Bell Wood	3. 0. 1	
2. 2. 29	I	[illegible]	3. 1. 1	
8. 3. 20				
2. 0. 3				
4. 0. 1				
5. 1. 29				
15. 2. 11				
6. 1. 7				
6. 3. 12				
19. [illegible]				
7. 0. [illegible]				
2. 0. 16				
0. 3. 15				
0. 3. 15				

O U R N E   E S T A T E



ICHNOGRAPHY
OF
BIFRONS AND DEMESNE
Situate in the Parishes of
Beakſbourne, Patrixbourne,
Bridge, Biſhopſbourne
and Lower Hardres
in the County of Kent
the property of
Edward Taylor Esq. MP
Surveyd by J. Grist 1810
BISHOPS BOURNE ESTATE
Juniper Rough
102 a
102 b
102 c
102 d
103
107
108
109
110
111
112
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130
131 a
133
134
137
138

Baron De Montesquieu
BISHOPS BOURNE ESTA
BRIDGE PLACE
Church Meadow
Mr Brazier
Mr Delmar
The Red Lyon
The White Horse
Richard Barham Esq
and others
BRIDGE
Mr Ottoway
POTS DANE
79
87 a
87
84
90 a
90
92
100
101
102 a
102 b
102 c
102 d
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Mr Wanstall
Baron De Montesquieu
Great Knowles
A. B. Canterbury
Mr Wanstall
A B C
Mr Wanstall
Mr Brazier
Mr Delmar
Church Meadow
Mr Wanstall
Church
The White Horse
Richard Barham Esq
and others
BRIDGE
Mr Ottoway
THE
Bifrons
PARK
PATRIX BOURNE

HOATH
FIELD
Great Hoath Field
Richard Barham Esq
Richard Barham Esq
FROM CANTERBURY
KINGSLEY
GLEBE
Occaridge House and Meadow
To Beaksbourne
Rd Peckham Esq
Foord Esq
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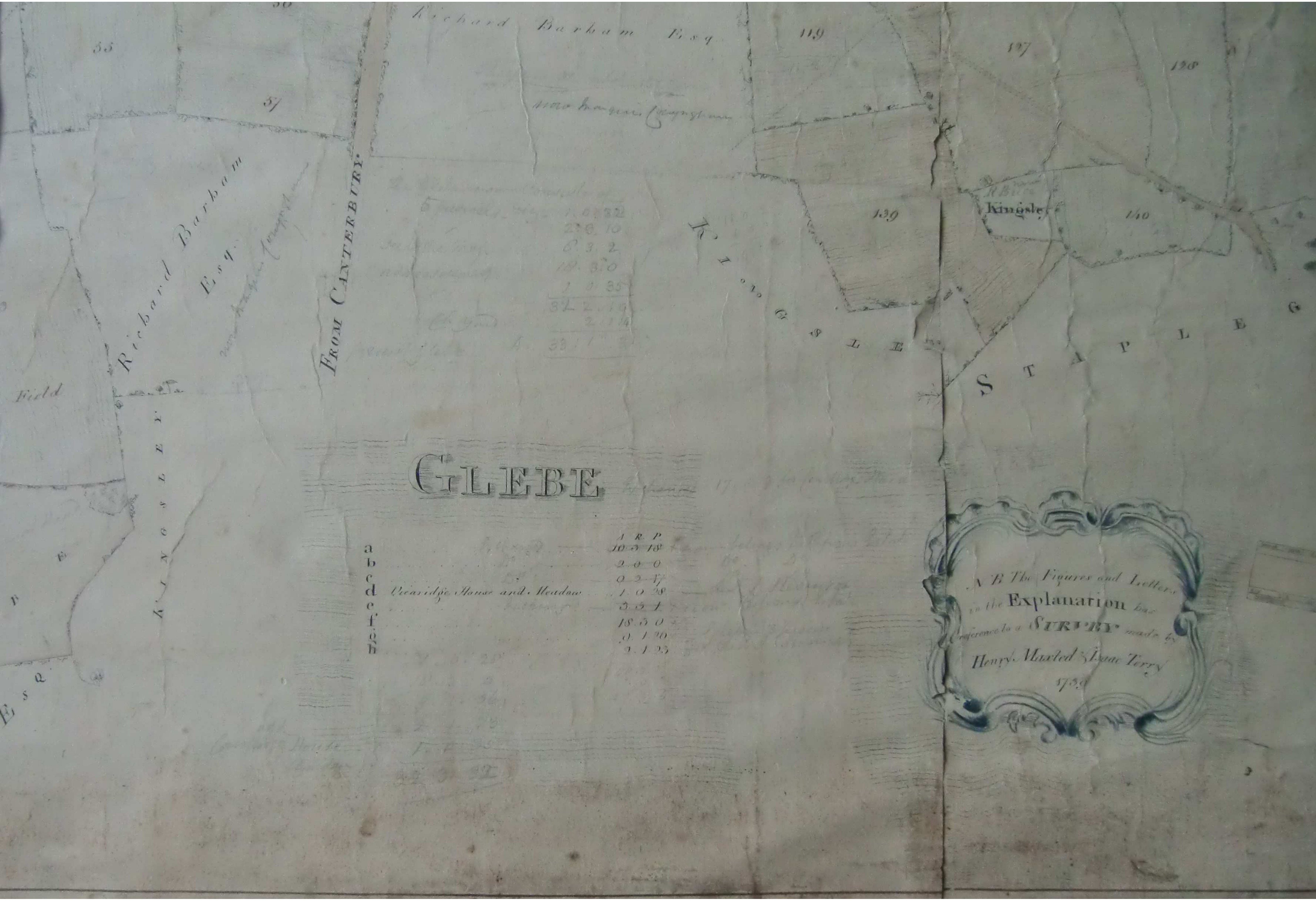
Richard Barham Esq
119
127
128
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57
FROM CANTERBURY
Richard Barham Esq.
139
Kingsley
140
KINGSLEY
STAPLEG
Field
KINGSLEY
ESQ
GLEBE
A R P
a 10 3 18
b 2 0 0
c 0 2 17
d Vicaridge House and Meadow 1 0 28
e 3 3 1
f 18 3 0
g 0 1 20
h 2 1 23
N B The Figures and Letters in the Explanation has reference to a SURVEY made by
Henry Maxted & Isaac Terry

130
131 a
F
133
134
136
137
135
128
129
131
131 b
Bishops Bourne Estate
142
H
Wm Fox
G
I
Mr Terry
L E G A T E
B I S H O P S B O U R N E E S T A T E

From Beaksbourne
Glebe
Mr Wanstall
a
Road from Wingham
Road from Beaksbourne
No 1
Robt Foot
Ro Peckham Esq
Mr Wanstall
HIGHAM
b
A. B. Canterbury
Mr Wanstall
Mr Wanstall
Great Knowles
Baron De Montesquieu
To Dover
A. B. Canterbury
Mr Wanstall
ABC
Mr Wanstall
B. D. Montesquieu
BIS

John Closterman exh. held NPG July – October 1981
catalogue by Malcolm Rogers.

12 *John Closterman*

The Children of John Taylor of Bifrons Park
189.8 × 271 (74¾ × 107)
(?)1696

Provenance: almost certainly painted for John Taylor (1665-1729); by descent to B.M.C. Trench; his sale, Sotheby's, 9 July 1980 (126); bought by the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, November 1980.

The portrait shows eight of the children of John Taylor, a wealthy Kent landowner, and his wife Olivia. Second from the left is Brook Taylor (1685-1731), their eldest son, later a celebrated mathematician, the inventor of Taylor's Theorem. According to a memoir of Taylor published by his grandson in 1793, the portrait shows him aged thirteen; that is, on or after 18 August 1698. There are two objections to this. First, Closterman was in Madrid by November of that year, allowing very little time for so ambitious a commission. Secondly, one son, Bridges (1695-1727), would be missing. A date of 1696 for the portrait, when Brook was eleven, fits the circumstances better. The children would then be (left to right): Olive (b.1681), Brook, Margaret (b.1683), Mary (b.1690), Upton (b.1696), Nathaniel (b.1687), John (b.1687) and Bridges (rather than Herbert, b.May 1698).

Closterman is known to have painted two other family groups – *The Seymour Children* (Syon House) and *The Marlborough Family* (Blenheim Palace) – but this highly finished group, with its assured, rhythmic composition, sumptuous colouring and Frenchified elegance, is arguably his masterpiece. It is contrived as a play on the motto of the Taylor family, 'Fama candida rosa dulcior' (fame is sweeter than a white rose) (information from Professor J. Douglas Stewart). Olive and Margaret hold the traditional allegorical attributes of Fame: two trumpets and a wreath with which they crown Brook, who was evidently something of a child prodigy and an accomplished musician. The wreath appears to be of orange blossom rather than the more usual bay. Mary, seated at the centre of the group, dispenses from her cornucopia, symbol of the benefits of good fortune, a white rose. It is possible that the exquisite flowers were painted by a specialist flower painter, rather than by Closterman himself.

National Portrait Gallery, London NPG 5720

13 *R. Williams after John Closterman*

Sir Richard Blackmore d.1629
34.3 × 25.1 (13½ × 9⅞)
Mezzotint, c.1697

The portrait of the much satirised physician, poet and prose writer was perhaps painted about 1697, the year of his appointment as Physician in Ordinary to William III. The original, which has been wrongly identified as the portrait in the Royal College of Physicians, is untraced.

The Trustees of the British Museum

14 *John Closterman*

The Hon Alexander Stanhope 1638-1707
231.2 × 160 (91 × 63)
1698-9

Provenance: presented by the artist to the sitter's son, James Stanhope, later 1st Earl Stanhope; thence by family descent.

This portrait of the English Resident in Madrid, the father of Closterman's patron James Stanhope, was begun on or before 12 November 1698, and is described as almost finished on 15 April 1699. It shows Stanhope 'at length in golilla [formal Spanish starched collar] with other Spanish ornaments', and was intended by both sitter and artist as a demonstration of Closterman's powers. In one of several letters to his son in which he discusses the portrait, Stanhope writes: 'I hope it will serve to introduce him where I cannot go myself, for his ambition is to make the Queen's picture'. In this Closterman succeeded.

Despite the characteristically baroque accessories of the tumbling curtain and attendant page, the sober 'fancy dress' and rather stiff pose suggest that Closterman had quickly absorbed something of the exaggerated formality of Spanish court portraiture.

The Administrative Trustees of the Chevening Estate