

## A NOTE ON BOWHILL, EXETER

By A. W. EVERETT

So far as is known there was no connection between the Holands of Dartington and the Holands or Hollands who built Bowhill, a medieval house situated just beyond the western end of Cowick Street, on the north side of the Exeter-Okehampton road.

During the greater part of the 15th and the early years of the 16th centuries, Bowhill was the possession and residence of a family named Holland, of whom the first to be connected with the house was Richard (*c.* 1385-*c.* 1455), who represented Devon in parliament in 1430. This Richard Holland was a younger son of the house of Holland of Weare (Countesswear, near Exeter). In 1429 he and Margaret his wife were granted a licence to have the Divine Office celebrated in any seemly place adapted for divine worship within their mansion in 'Cowykestrete' in the Diocese of Exeter. It has been said of Richard Holland that he was a person of consequence; by his marriage, his public appointments, and his friendship with the semi-royal Earl of Huntingdon, he had risen socially. He was succeeded by his son Thomas (living 1420-1472), member of parliament for Exeter in 1449, 1450 and 1455; and Thomas by his son Roger (*c.* 1450-1506), member of parliament for Exeter in 1504, Sheriff of Devon 1489, 1494, 1499, and member of parliament for Totnes in 1491. Thomasia, daughter and heir of Roger, married John Carew of Anthony in Cornwall, and so Bowhill passed into the possession of that branch of the Carew family in which it remained for several generations. The arms of Holland were 'azure semée de lis, a lion rampant argent'.

Bowhill House comprises a main range lying parallel to the highway and separated from it by a narrow strip of garden, with two ranges at the rear, the whole flanking three sides of an inner court. The fourth or north side is closed by a wall, but it is not unlikely that the plan of the house was originally quadrangular.

The eastern range contains the Great Hall, now partly divided into two floors. The screens-passage, with a good pointed and moulded arched doorway at each end, is at the southern end of the Hall, next the south range. The screen itself has been replaced by an inferior wooden partition. On the south side of the screens-passage there was formerly a stud-and-panel partition, with a doorway at its western end giving access to the ground floor of the south range. This has been replaced partly in lath and plaster and partly by a brick wall. The hall was lighted by four large square-headed two-light transomed windows; two on either side. These remain almost intact. The lights have cinquefoiled heads both above and below the transoms, and the lower mullions are pierced for shutter fastenings. External square labels terminate in human heads. A chimney-breast between the two windows on the east side (shorn of its stack and roofed over) indicates the position of a fireplace, of which all trace has been obliterated within the building. At the northern end of the west wall is a small doorway with chamfered jambs and a semi-circular arched head cut from a single stone. This gave access to a projecting stair leading up to a room beyond the north end of the Hall. Externally the site of this stair is shown by a patch of brickwork 3 ft. wide in the west wall.

The Hall roof, though now decayed and much propped up, is very fine. It is of four bays, with unusually stout arch-braces rising from 3 ft. 6 ins. below the wall-plate, to the collars. They take the greater part of the weight of the roof: large mortices at their lower extremities show that here there was formerly some kind of ornamental feature. There are two ranges of purlins; the upper have sections of 18 x 6 ins. and are tenoned into the ends of the collars and laid flat. On these rest the timbers of the semi-circular coving occupying the head of the roof. Each bay is divided vertically by a central moulded rib rising from the wall-plate and continued in the upper coving. Towards the lower ends of the ribs are large cusps, the points of which once bore a decorative feature. The lower divisions of the bays have two diagonal struts or wind-braces, curved inwards at the bottom;

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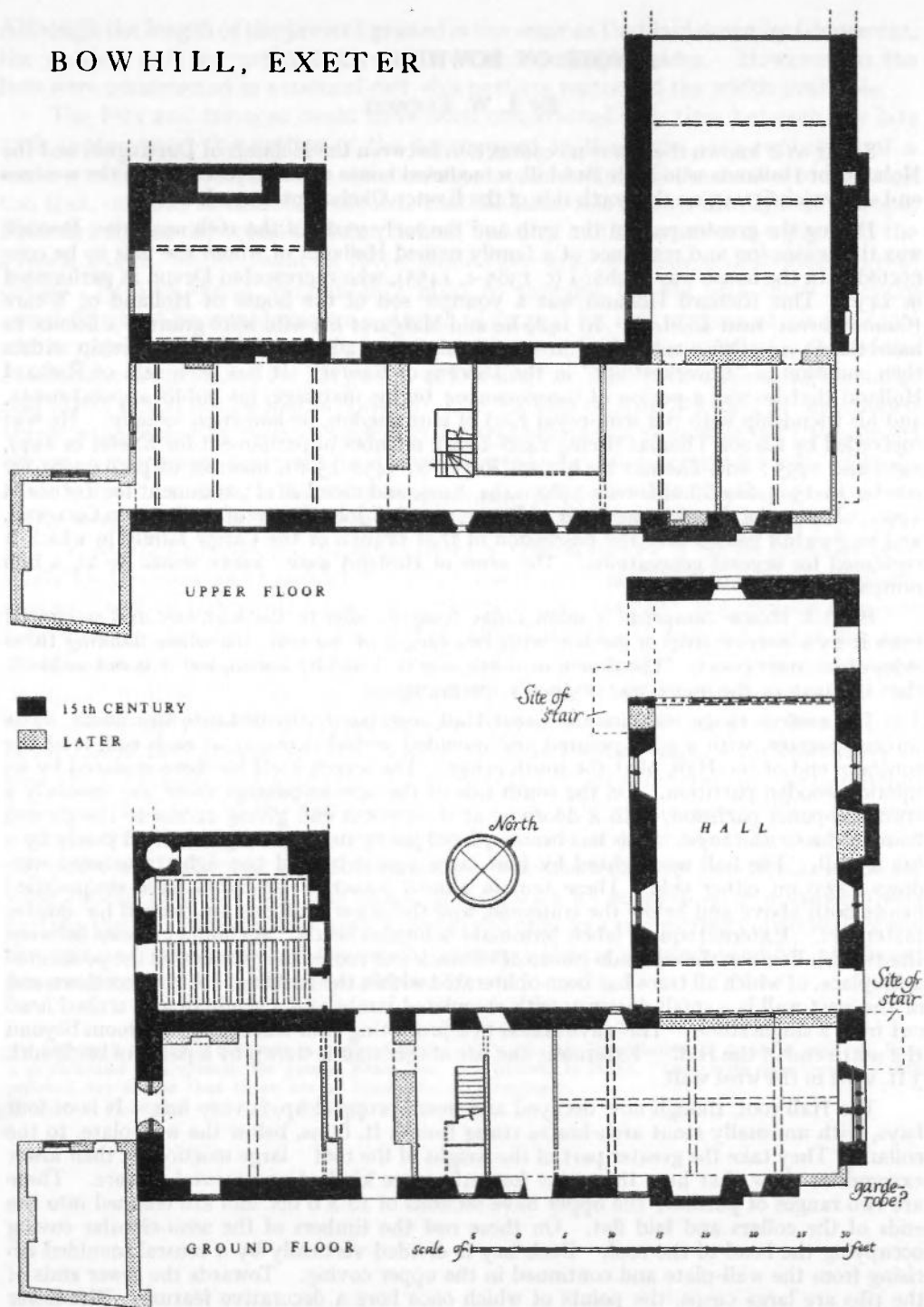


Fig. 1. Plan of Bowhill, Exeter

they rise from the corners of the bays to the junction of the central rib with the lower purlin. At the intersections there have been large bosses.

Beyond the end of the Hall the range was divided into two floors, the end truss at the northern end of the Hall being moulded on one side only. Here the upper part of the walls has been removed and the former ground floor room is now a shed with a lean-to roof. Between it and the Hall was a stud-and-panel partition with a doorway in its western end. This partition has been replaced by a brick wall, but the large beam which formed the head of the partition is still *in situ*, and on it stands the original timber framing of the division between the Hall and the upper room. The ground floor room has a small window in its north wall, and there is evidence of a larger one in the east wall. There is no sign of a fireplace, so the room may have served as a storeroom. This arrangement, with a small narrow room beyond the Hall, has parallels in other medieval houses in Devon.

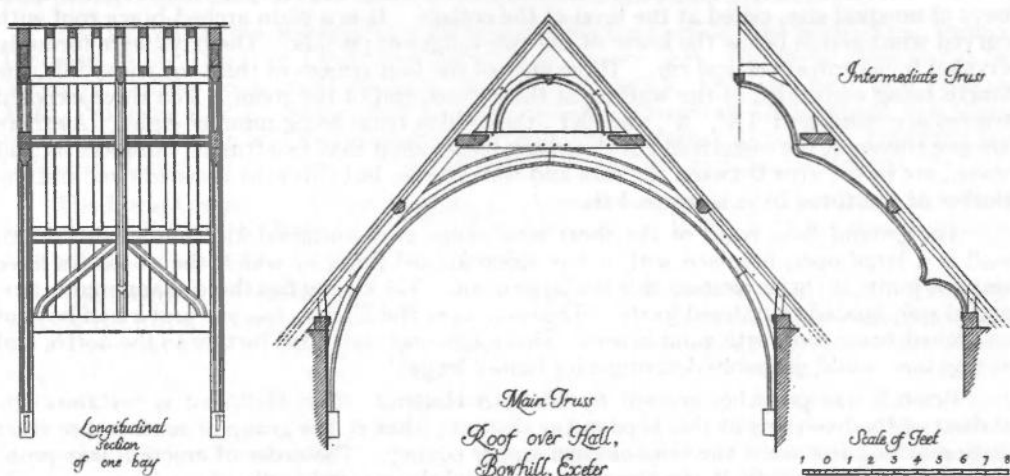


Fig. 2. The Hall roof, Bowhill, Exeter

The upper room, reached by the external stair now gone, would normally have been the solar. Traces remain of its original arch-braced roof. It is possible that this may have been the room adapted for use as a chapel, after the licence of 1429.

The doorway in the stud-and-panel partition in the screens-passage gave access to the eastern ground floor room of the south range. This room was certainly the parlour. Its ceiling is divided into large rectangular compartments by well-moulded beams. The compartments are subdivided by moulded ribs of later insertion. The east wall has a pair of two-light windows separated by a pier of masonry. The windows have been mutilated, but the lights had cinquefoiled heads and stone mullions; externally both windows are enclosed under a single square label. Immediately north of the windows is a small pointed-arch doorway which formerly opened into a projecting stair leading to the floor above. This has gone, but its projecting turret can be seen in an old topographical view of the city. In the north wall of the lower room is a small blocked window with cinquefoiled head, and there are traces of similar windows in the south wall which has a large original fireplace, now concealed by a modern grate.

The centre of this range is now divided into three small compartments, one containing the entrance hall<sup>1</sup>, and one a modern staircase. At the western end of the range is a large

<sup>1</sup> The entrance door appears to be modern, but workmen who stripped the plaster about three years ago state that the door was set within an

arch. This report, if reliable, may indicate that there was an original entrance at this point.

room which may have been the buttery. It has no feature of interest. On the upper floor the east room, now divided by a 19th century partition, has an open timber roof of four bays. The design of this roof is almost identical with that of the Hall, though the work is less elaborate; the cusps of the central ribs still retain their ornamental terminations, and at the intersections of the ribs with the lower purlins there are bosses with well-carved foliage. This room was probably the solar. The original east wall has been replaced. It probably contained a window of the same design as that in the wall of the parlour below. It appears that some other feature was present at this point, and a garderobe is suggested. In the south wall is a small window with cinquefoil head and square label, and there was probably a matching one the other side of the chimney-breast; it is now replaced by a modern sash. Two more original windows appear in the passage which leads to this room. The doorway giving access to the room has a door-frame of c. 1600, as has the door to the adjacent bedroom. The large room occupying the west end of the range has an open timber roof of three bays of unequal size, ceiled at the level of the collars. It is a plain arched-brace roof with curved wind-braces below the lower of the two ranges of purlins. The bays were formerly divided by a central vertical rib. Three only of the four trusses of this roof are visible, the fourth being embedded in the walling at the eastern end of the room. The three exposed trusses are numbered 'IX', 'X', and 'XI', the hidden truss being number eight. As there are five trusses at the eastern end of the range, it is evident that two trusses, numbers six and seven, are in the area between the east and west rooms, but this area is ceiled over and the timber of the three bays is concealed.

The ground floor room of the short west range is the original kitchen. In its north wall is a large open fireplace with a fine stone arched lintel of which the voussoirs have stepped joints. On its western side is a large oven. The ceiling has three chamfered beams and closely spaced chamfered joists. The room over the kitchen has one and a half bays of an arched-brace roof, with wind-braces. This range once extended further to the north, and excavation would probably determine its former length<sup>1</sup>.

Bowhill was probably erected by Richard Holland. The Hall roof is certainly the earliest of the five roofs of this type in the district; that is, the group of roofs whose chief distinguishing feature is the semi-circular upper coving. The order of erection was probably Bowhill, the Guildhall, the Deanery, the Law Library, and Cadhay<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> The author is much indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Sclater, the owners of Bowhill, for their kindness in allowing access to the house and to Mr. S. D. T.

Spittle for his measured drawing of the Hall roof.

<sup>2</sup> The two last are described in *Arch. J.* CXIV (1957), 138-9, and 161-3.