

# Medieval Priests' Houses in South-west England

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## INTRODUCTION: DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

THE purpose of this essay is to study some examples of the official residences<sup>1</sup> of the parochial clergy—rectors, vicars, parochial chaplains—in England during the later middle ages. It is not proposed to deal with the prebendal houses, whether in town or country, belonging to the canons of cathedral chapters, still less with episcopal residences. The examples that I shall examine will be taken from the south-west of England, mainly from Somerset and Devon; they have this in common that they are almost entirely stone-built.<sup>2</sup> There seems to be room for the study of medieval priests' houses in other regions—in the south-east, for instance, where timber-framed buildings prevail, like the well-known rectory house at Alfriston (Sussex); or in the midlands, where Dr. Hoskins has led the way<sup>3</sup>; or in the north, with its fortified parsonages, the 'Vicars Peles' of Northumberland.<sup>4</sup>

The medieval parish clergy are a class about whom we have so much documentary and literary evidence, that it is obviously interesting and rewarding to examine the types of house that they inhabited, and to try to make out the architectural background of the home life, shall we say, of William of Pagula, John Wyclif, John Ball or Chaucer's 'Poor parson'. It is important to remember that the medieval parish clergy were a stratified body, and we may expect to find this stratification reflected in the buildings.<sup>5</sup> In the first place there were the beneficed clergy, and these in turn must be subdivided. On the one hand there were the holders of the richer benefices, who were likely to be what canon law

<sup>1</sup> As regards nomenclature, a common name for these houses in contemporary documents is 'manse' (*mansum* or *mansus*); also *domus* (plural) *rectorie* or *domus vicarie*. The word 'parsonage' should, strictly speaking, apply only to the house of a rector. It seems best to use the term 'priest's house' to cover the residence of all types of parochial clergy. I have deliberately excluded the dwellings of chantry priests; I propose to deal with them in a subsequent essay.

<sup>2</sup> I should like to thank those who have helped to make this survey possible: particularly Mr. E. T. Long, Dr. W. G. Hoskins, and Mr. A. W. Everett, who have been my companions and helpers in so many visits, and above all the occupants of the houses examined, who have received us with so much kindness and patience.

<sup>3</sup> W. G. Hoskins, *Essays in Leicestershire History* (Liverpool, 1950), ch. i, 'The Leicestershire country parson in the sixteenth century'.

<sup>4</sup> N. Pevsner and I. A. Richmond, *Northumberland* ('The Buildings of England', Penguin Books, 1957), p. 41.

<sup>5</sup> For the medieval parish clergy see A. H. Thompson, *The English clergy and their organization in the later Middle Ages* (Oxford, 1947), ch. iv; H. G. Richardson, 'The parish clergy of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries', in *Trans. Roy. Hist. Soc.*, 3 ser., VI, 89 ff.; W. A. Pantin, *The English church in the fourteenth century* (Cambridge, 1955), pp. 27 ff., 35 ff., 215 ff.; J. R. H. Moorman, *Church life in England in the thirteenth century* (Cambridge, 1945), ch. iii-vi.

called 'sublime and literate persons', and many of these were probably employed in royal or ecclesiastical business elsewhere, and would be absentees and pluralists. Such a man's house would probably resemble a manor house; it might well be let to a farmer, but the incumbent might reserve one or two rooms for an occasional visit. On the other hand, there were the less wealthy beneficed clergy, whose houses would probably be more like a yeoman's house; such men would be more likely to reside on their cures, but the 'pluralists' included some comparatively poor men, who tried to make ends meet by combining a small benefice with, say, the office of a vicar-choral in a cathedral. Finally there were the unbeneficed clergy, working for a small salary, the 'parish priests' or 'chaplains', who either deputized for a non-resident or assisted a resident incumbent, or served chapels of ease; these presumably either had houses of their own, or lived in lodgings, or perhaps lodged with the incumbent. The house of such a chaplain would probably in most cases differ little from the houses of the peasants and craftsmen of the village, and like them would be unlikely to survive into modern times; there are probably no medieval 'cottages' in existence. But in some cases a habitually non-resident rector might appoint a chaplain on a more permanent basis, rather like the 'perpetual curate' of later times, and might provide him with a better sort of house, comparable to a vicarage, and this seems to be what happened, for instance, at Kentisbeare, as described below.

Contemporary visitation records, which report on the state of repair of parsonage houses, sometimes speak of them as being 'competent', or the reverse, *pro statu beneficii*.<sup>6</sup> It seems clear that the standard of housing was expected to vary according to the wealth and importance of the benefice, so that a wealthy incumbent would be expected to build and maintain a better sort of house. At the same time, a parsonage-house may also reflect the personal enterprise and resources of a particular incumbent or patron or appropriator. A parochial benefice was either a rectory, where the rector had full possession of the church and its revenues; or a vicarage, where the church was 'appropriated' to a monastery or other institution, and the vicar only enjoyed a limited share of the revenues. This did not mean that a rectory was necessarily richer or had a finer house than a vicarage—there were comparatively poor rectories and comparatively rich vicarages; but it did affect the responsibility for building. A rector would be responsible for building and maintaining his house, and could be held to this by his successor (claiming dilapidations) or by the archdeacon or bishop on his visitation. It is clear from visitation records that parsonages were often in decay, especially, one suspects, through non-residence. On the other hand duty, comfort, prestige would all operate in a positive direction. A man like Roger le Mareschal, parson of Tackley, who must have spent a lot of money building a town house, Tackley's Inn, at Oxford in the early-fourteenth century, would probably have been no less prepared to spend money on his own parsonage.<sup>7</sup> In a vicarage, the responsibility for building and maintaining the vicar's house was usually laid on

<sup>6</sup> 'A visitation of the archdeaconry of Totnes in 1342', ed. G. G. Coulton, in *Engl. Hist. Rev.*, XXVI (1911), 108-24.

<sup>7</sup> *Oxoniensia*, VII (1942), 80; for other clerical landlords, see A. B. Emden, *An Oxford Hall in Medieval Times* (Oxford, 1927), pp. 56-7.

the appropriator. For this reason, there is rather more documentary evidence about vicarage-houses. The document which 'ordains' a vicarage, by prescribing the vicar's emoluments, sometimes describes in some detail the house to be provided for the vicar.<sup>8</sup> Thus in 1268 Eynsham Abbey undertakes to build a timber-framed house for the vicar of Histon (Cambridgeshire), containing a hall 26 feet long by 20 feet wide, with a 'dispenche' (buttery) at one end, and a competent chamber *cum necessariis camere* (garderobe?) at the other end, together with a kitchen, bakehouse and brew-house, under one roof.<sup>9</sup> At West Harptree (Somerset), the vicar was at first assigned part of the rectory-house, but was later (1344) given a house nearer the church, 'fitting to the status of the vicar', consisting of hall with a solar and cellar at each end, together with a kitchen, grange and stable.<sup>10</sup> At Bulmer (Essex) in 1425 the vicar was to have a house containing a hall with two chambers annexed, a bakehouse, kitchen and larderhouse, and a chamber for the vicar's servant, a stable and a 'hay-soller'.<sup>11</sup> It is clear from these and other descriptions that a vicarage often consisted of a fair-sized 'hall-house' of at least a yeoman's standard. There are well known complaints about appropriators who were out to get the maximum profit from their churches with the minimum expenditure, who 'have no ruth, though it rain on their altars',<sup>12</sup> and this would lead to the decay and ruin of vicarage-houses as well as chancels. But sometimes appropriation might operate favourably. An enlightened abbot or bishop or cathedral chapter might have capital available and take a long view and erect a really well-built, durable vicarage-house, better perhaps than what most rectors could or would put up. At any rate it is noticeable that among the houses examined below the finest specimens belong to appropriated benefices: Muchelney (appropriated to Muchelney Abbey), Congresbury (appropriated to the chapter of Wells), Stanton Drew (appropriated to the archdeacon of Wells). The arms of Bishop Beckington appear on the last two of these. Moreover, Walton, though not technically a vicarage, was in some sense the property of Glastonbury. The frequent mention of granges, barns, hay-houses, etc., in medieval records and in later terriers reminds us that every rector had some glebe land to cultivate either himself or through a farmer, so that the parsonage-house was likely to take on the character of a small farmstead. The documents 'ordaining' vicarages show that many parish churches were supposed to have a staff of assistant clergy, of varying size; at Breedon-on-the-Hill (Leicestershire) the vicar was to have two chaplains, *quos habebit socios*, a deacon and two clerks—there were two chapels of ease to be served; at Hinckley (Leicestershire) the vicar was to have a chaplain, a deacon and a clerk.<sup>13</sup> In both these the vicar and the chaplains were to be assigned separate houses, *mansos competentes*; but, in some cases at least, the incumbent and his assistant clergy must have lived together: the vicar of Whitchurch

<sup>8</sup> R. A. R. Hartridge, *A History of Vicarages in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1930), pp. 150-3.

<sup>9</sup> *Cartulary of the Abbey of Eynsham*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford Hist. Soc., XLIX, 1906-7), i, 260.

<sup>10</sup> *The Register of Ralph of Shrewsbury*, ed. T. Scott Holmes (Somerset Record Soc., X, 1896), p. 510.

<sup>11</sup> R. Newcourt, *Repertorium Eccles. Paroch. Londinense* (London, 1710), II, 104.

<sup>12</sup> *Piers Plowman*, B.X.313; C.VI.165.

<sup>13</sup> *Rotuli Hugonis De Welles*, ed. W. P. W. Phillimore (Canterbury and York Soc., 1907-9), II, 275.

(Oxfordshire) was to have a chaplain *secum commorantem*.<sup>14</sup> There are also mentions of the priest's servant, *garcio*, who makes his bed and looks after his horse;<sup>15</sup> he, too, would presumably live with the priest. This staff of clerks and servants would share in the food allowances which a vicar often received from the table of the appropriating monastery. The two gallons of the best conventual ale which the vicar of Muchelney received daily was probably not consumed by the vicar alone. The parsonage might also have accommodation for guests; at Newton Ferrers (Devon) in 1342 the rector had built two good and competent chambers, one for the rector and the other for guests.<sup>16</sup> All these potential occupants—the rector or vicar, the chaplains, deacons, clerks, servants and guests—help to explain the comparatively large size of many of the surviving priests' houses, houses which, if occupied by a yeoman, could have housed a whole family.

### SOME TYPICAL HOUSES

So far we have been considering the documentary evidence about the priests' houses in general. We can now turn to examine a limited number of architectural specimens taken from the south-west of England.

#### I. THE PRIEST'S HOUSE, MUCHELNEY, SOMERSET (PL. XVII, A-C; FIG. 22)

The church at Muchelney was appropriated to Muchelney Abbey, and the benefice was therefore a vicarage. The vicar's emoluments were fixed by an episcopal ordinance of 30 Nov. 1308;<sup>17</sup> he was to have the dwelling house, buildings and curtilages held by Richard Baldewyne of Martock, the then vicar; a monk's bread of 6os. weight and two gallons of best conventual ale daily from the cellarer of the abbey; a dish of flesh meat each Sunday and Tuesday, and a dish of eggs or fish on other days, from the monastic kitchen; £4 yearly from the sacrist in support of charges; and various oblations. The vicar had to find a suitable chaplain for the dependent chapel of Drayton. This ordinance implies that there was already a vicar's house in 1308, probably on the same site as the present one. The existing house was probably built not long after 1308, presumably by the abbey, since it had to provide a house. Evidently also this was built as a vicar's house, and was not a case of a rectory-house subsequently divided between the appropriators and the vicar. In 1535 the vicarage was valued at £10 per annum;<sup>18</sup> by this time the allowances of food from the abbey had probably been commuted. A terrier of 1635 says:

'there is belonginge to the vicaridge of Muchelney a dwellinge house, situate neare unto the church, an orchard conteyninge an acre of grownde or thereabouts, a garden before the howse, and tenn pounds yearly to be paid out of the parsonage at such times as usuallie heretofore it hath bin paid.'<sup>19</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 33.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, III, 297.

<sup>16</sup> *Engl. Hist. Rev.*, XXVI (1911), 118. Of the rectory of Ipplepen it is said that under previous rectors *solebat ibi teneri et esse magna hospitalitas et bona, tam divitibus quam pauperibus, ibid.*, p. 114.

<sup>17</sup> *Cartulary of Muchelney* (Somerset Record Soc., XIV, 1899), p. 224.

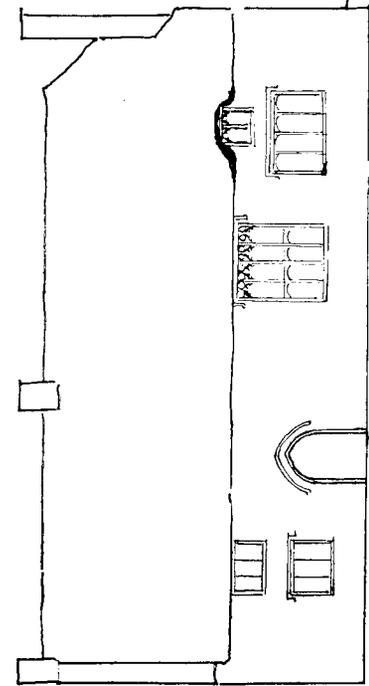
<sup>18</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus* (London, 1810), I, 198.

<sup>19</sup> Bath and Wells Diocesan Registry, Terriers, no. 226.

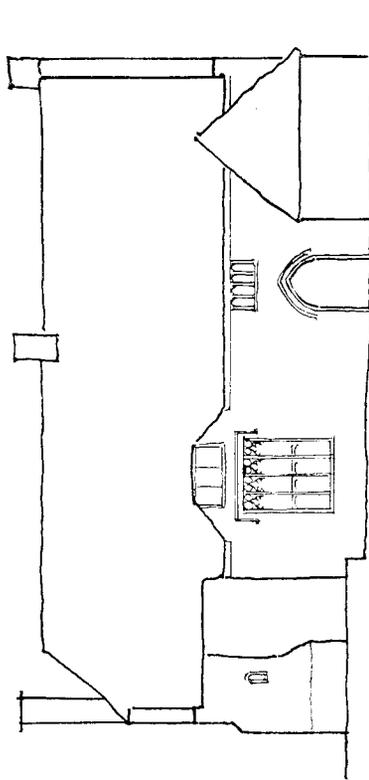
The house stands on the north side of the churchyard; it is a stone building, measuring externally 51 feet long by 22 feet wide, and now roofed with thatch. It is a good example of a hall-house of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. It is entered by a screens-passage (B on plan, FIG. 22), with a moulded, arched doorway at either end (2, 3 on plan); both have drip-moulds. To the right of the passage is the hall (C), which originally went up the whole height of the house, with an open, arched-braced roof of two bays covering both hall and passage. Between the hall and passage there now stands a large chimney-stack (6); this is probably a later insertion (sixteenth century?), replacing a central hearth. The floor which now divides the hall into two stories is certainly a later insertion (sixteenth century). On the north and south of the hall are two large square-headed windows (4, 5), each of two rows of four lights, the upper lights having traceried heads. When the floor was inserted, the upper lights of the windows were blocked up, and the lower lights were given four-centred, almost elliptical heads. The space above the screens-passage probably always formed a separate, narrow room (I), partitioned off from the body of the hall and lit by a small four-light window over the north door; it was presumably entered from the room over the buttery (H). East of the hall, and divided from it by a timber-framed partition on a stone base, is the parlour (D). This has a ceiling divided into six panels by moulded beams, apparently of later date than the main structure of the house; a fire place (8); and in the south wall a four-light window, with four-centred or elliptical heads (7), probably a replacement or enlargement made at the same time as the alteration of the hall windows. There is now a modern staircase at the north end of the room, breaking through the old ceiling, but the irregularities on the outside of the north wall suggest that there may have been originally a projection here containing a staircase (E, L) and perhaps a garderobe (F, M). There is a small window, now lighting the modern staircase, which may have been brought from the old staircase and re-set. The chamber (K) above the parlour has an open roof of one bay, and a tall window of two rows of two lights, all with cinquefoil heads, in the gable wall, and another two-light window in the south wall, with trefoil heads.

At the other end of the house, west of the screens-passage, is a service room (A) measuring about 18 feet by 11 feet. This may have been a kitchen, or it may have been divided into a small kitchen and buttery, or it may have been a buttery, with a kitchen adjoining on the north, where there is now a modern outbuilding (G). The room A is lit by a three-light window of the late sixteenth century; the fireplace has been modernized, and there is a modern stair leading to the room above (H), which also has a three-light window similar to the one below.

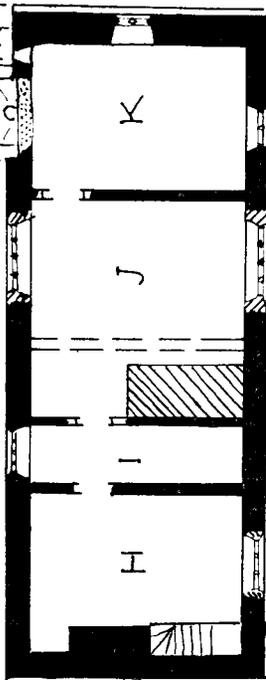
Certain features of this building, notably the two arched doorways, appear to date back to the fourteenth century, as Mrs. M. E. Kaines-Thomas has kindly pointed out to me. The chronology of the house may perhaps be conjectured as follows: (i) in the early fourteenth century, perhaps soon after the ordination of the vicarage, the main structure of the house was built, including the two arched doorways (2) and (3); while the two windows of the solar are perhaps a little later (mid-fourteenth century?); (ii) about 1470-80 there was some reconstruc-



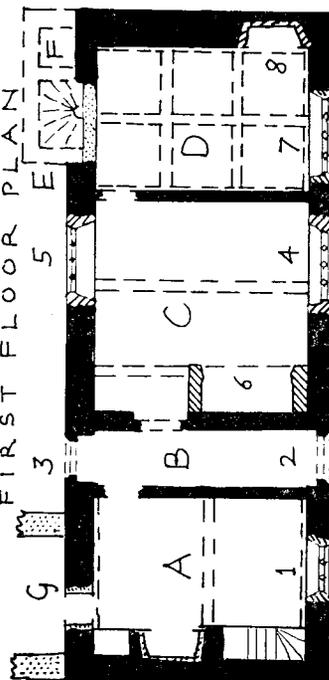
SOUTH ELEVATION



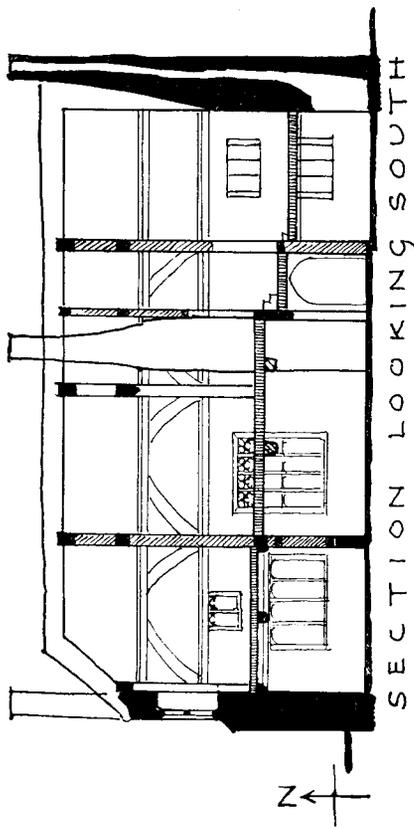
NORTH ELEVATION



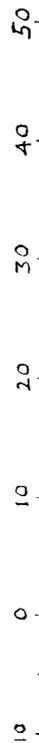
FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



SECTION LOOKING SOUTH



14 CENTY [diagonal hatching] 15 CENTY [cross-hatching] 16 CENTY [stippling] LATER

THE PRIEST'S HOUSE,  
MUCHELNEY, SOMERSET

FIG. 22 (p. 121)

tion, including the making of the two large hall windows (4) and (5), the panelled ceiling of the parlour (D), and perhaps the reconstruction of the whole roof; (iii) about 1550 the house was 'modernized' by the insertion of a floor in the hall and the alteration of the hall windows and of the parlour window (7); the hall chimney-stack (6) was inserted then or earlier; and about the end of the century windows in A and H were altered; (iv) at some later date the out-house G was added and the projection which probably contained the original staircase and garderobe (E, F, L, M) was demolished.

The house as originally built would have consisted of a two-bay, open-roofed hall, with, at the east end, a parlour and a solar, or best chamber, above, for the priest, and, at the west end, a service room or rooms, with a chamber above, which may have served as a guest-room, or possibly as a lodging for a clerk, or for the chaplain who served the chapel of Drayton, though, strictly speaking, he was supposed to reside at Drayton. The narrow room over the screens-passage may have lodged a servant. If the vicar was still in the fifteenth century receiving the allowances of food in kind from the abbey kitchen and cellar, he would need to do little cooking, and this might explain the smallness of the service room. Though the vicar's stipend was not very large, it was above the minimum, and he clearly had a well-built, well-finished house. This is one of the best preserved of all the surviving medieval priests' houses.

## 2. THE OLD RECTORY, DUNCHIDEOCK, DEVON (PL. XVIII, A, B; FIG. 23)

Dunchideock was a rectory, valued at £15.4.8 in 1535.<sup>20</sup> In 1396 the Bishop of Exeter invited contributions for the rebuilding of the rectory-house, which had fallen down. This would be rather an early date for the existing building, but there was some litigation which probably delayed the rebuilding, so that the house was probably built early in the fifteenth century.<sup>21</sup> The house stands south-east of the churchyard; it is a long, two-storied building, 61 feet by 23 feet, with a chimney-stack, staircase and two garderobes projecting on the west, and a chimney stack projecting from the south gable. It is stone-built, of rough ashlar with large blocks and rubble in pale red sandstone. It now has slate roofs, and is converted into three cottages. There is a screens-passage (E on plan, FIG. 23), with an arched doorway at the west end (13); at the east end, the door has been modernized, but there are traces of a relieving arch (4). North of the passage is the hall (F, G, H), originally 19 feet by 17 feet and 10 feet high, with a ceiling supported by moulded beams; it probably always had a room above it, as the original windows ended 7 feet below the wall-plate and the staggered chimney-stack was clearly built for two fireplaces. A hall with a large room above was a not uncommon arrangement in the west country (cf. Congresbury, below, and Gothelney and Blackmoor near Bridgwater). The hall was lit on the west side by a tall window (11) of two rows of two lights, with cusped heads, now partly blocked, partly converted into a doorway; the relieving arch of a similar window can be traced opposite in the east wall (7). North of the hall is the parlour (J);

<sup>20</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, II, 319.

<sup>21</sup> *Register of Edmund Stafford*, ed. F. C. Hingeston Randolph (London, 1886), p. 88.

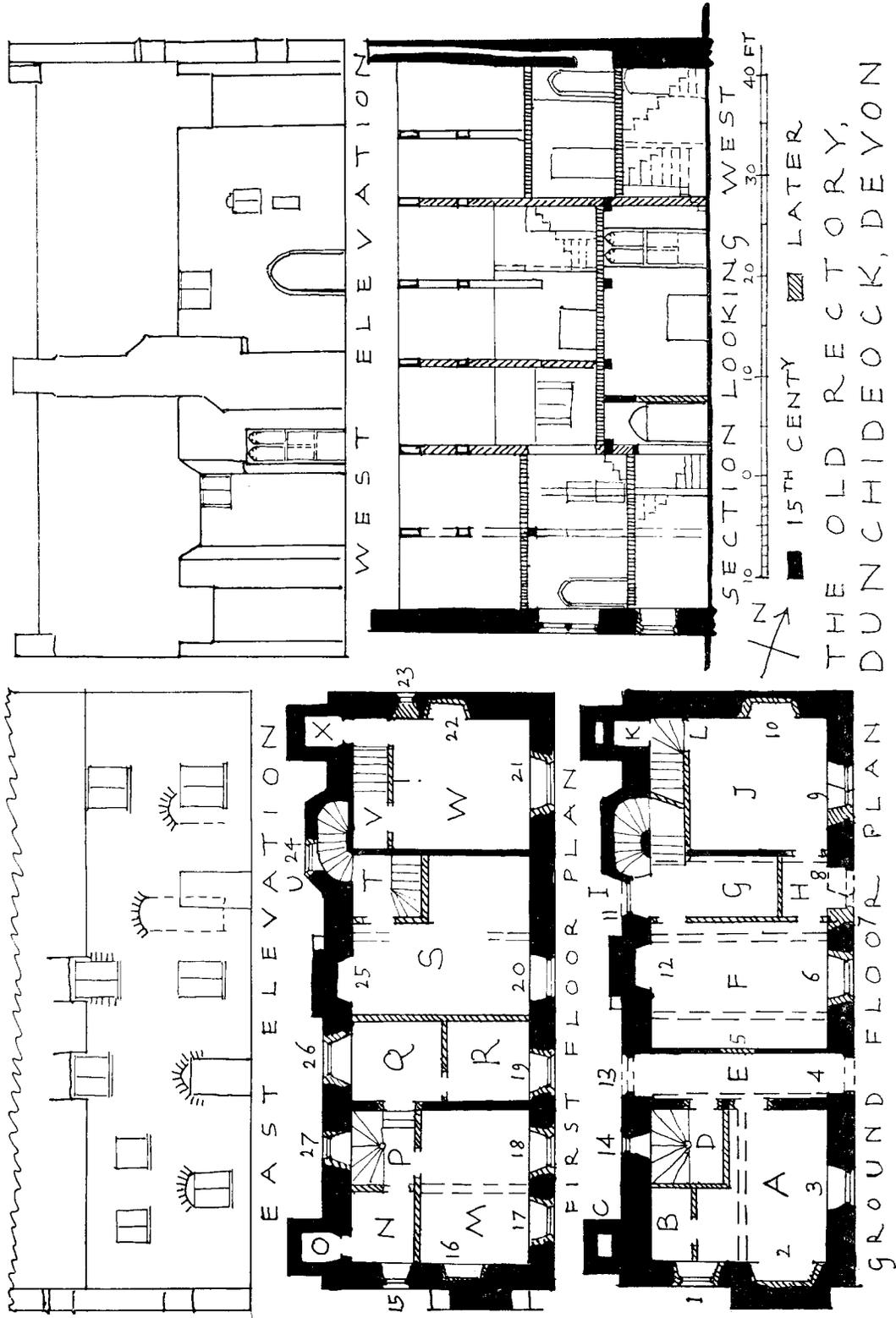


FIG. 23 (p. 124)

THE OLD RECTORY,  
DUNCHIDEOCK, DEVON

this has traces of an original window (g), a little to the south of the modern window; a wardrobe opens north-west (K), and a modern staircase (L) was inserted when this end was converted into a separate cottage. The original staircase (I, U) projects from the west wall between the hall and parlour; it must have originally opened from the parlour and led up to the rooms over the hall and parlour. On the first floor the room over the parlour (W) was probably the solar, or best chamber; it probably had an open roof of two bays, but it is now ceiled over with an attic above. The east window is modern, but there is an original small window, now blocked, in the north gable (23), and a wardrobe opens north-west (X). The space over the hall and screens-passage, of three bays, was perhaps originally one large room, but is now subdivided (Q, R, S, T); there is a fireplace on the west side; the windows are modernized; there was perhaps originally no communication between this room and the adjoining room (M, N, P). On the ground floor, on the south side of the screens-passage, are two doors; one leads to a spiral staircase (D), which may be in the original position, but not in its original form, since it blocks an early window (14). The other door leads into the kitchen (A); the fireplace and windows are modernized, but the original relieving arch can be traced over the east window (3). On the first floor there was perhaps originally one large room, but it is now subdivided (M, N, P); a wardrobe opens off the south-west corner (O). There is an original tall, narrow window in the south gable (15); the other two windows are modernized (17, 18), and there is a bolection-moulded fireplace (16). The roof of the house is of seven bays, three over the hall, and two at each end; it was probably originally of an arch-braced collar-beam type, but so far as it is now visible it seems to be a reconstruction of the seventeenth century. The medieval house seems to have consisted of a hall with an upper hall or great chamber above it; a parlour and chamber at the north end for the rector; and, at the south end, on the ground floor, a service room, either a kitchen or divided into kitchen and buttery, and above this a chamber for a guest or an assistant priest. The house was liberally supplied with wardrobes.

In a terrier of 1679, the house is thus described:

'In that part of the dwelling howse which is called the Kitchin part is a Kitchin, a dairy room, a cellar, and 3 chambers—all in mud and roofs thatched. In that part of the howse which is called the Hall is a parlour [J], Hall [F], buttery [A?], and cellars, 4 chambers, and a closet . . .'<sup>22</sup>

This implies that there was then a two-story outbuilding, with earth (cob) walls, containing the kitchen, etc., which has now disappeared; we cannot tell whether it was medieval or a post-medieval addition. The reference to cellars is puzzling, for there are no traces of underground cellars now; possibly the term is used loosely for a ground-floor store-room.

A terrier of 1728 gives more details:

'The Parsonage house is built with Stone and covered with Slate, consists of seven bays of building, and contains two porches, and entry [E], kitchen [A],

<sup>22</sup> Exeter Diocesan Records, Devon County Record Office, the Castle, Exeter; I owe this and the extract relating to Kentisbeare, below, to the kindness of Dr. Hoskins.

hall [F], and parlor [J], 4 chambers [M, R, S, W?], 2 garrets [over M and W?], a study [perhaps G or Q?], and a closet. The porches, entry and kitchen are paved with stones. The Hall floored with lime and sand, and the parlor, study, and closet with boards. There is not room in the whole house wainscotted. But all (except the Porch towards the Back Court) are ceiled with plastering . . . [the outhouses are then described.]<sup>23</sup>

The kitchen wing had apparently by then disappeared.

3. PRIESTHILL, KENTISBEARE, DEVON (FIG. 24)

Kentisbeare was a rectory, valued at £27 18s. 10d. in 1535.<sup>24</sup> It formerly had two houses, a parsonage or rectory-house, and a vicarage-house, thus described in a terrier of 1613:

'One mansion howse and fortie accers of land neer adjoyninge. One other howse and garden neer adjoyninge the churchyard . . .'

and in a terrier of 1680:

'The Parsonage house is built wholly with Cob Walls except the Hall chimney which is built with stone. The dwelling house conteyneth these lower roomes, a Kitchin, a Dairy, a little room called the Cornhouse, an Hall, a Parlor, & two Butteries, seven in all, and eight Chambers and two Closets . . . [outbuildings then described] . . . The vicaridge house (alias Priesthill) is also built with Cob walls, and conteineth these rooms, five lower rooms, and four chambers, all divided into five poor dwellings . . .'<sup>25</sup>

The existence of two houses, a parsonage and a vicarage, is curious. This church was never appropriated to a monastery. But in valuable benefices non-resident rectors would appoint an acting priest, who would normally be called a chaplain, but might be called a vicar, and in some a vicarage might be formally ordained, that is, a vicar's portion set aside. Perhaps something like this happened at Kentisbeare; at any rate a house was evidently built for the vicar, near the churchyard, some time in the fifteenth century, and it is with this house, known as Priesthill or Priesthall, that we are concerned. The house can hardly have been built for a chantry priest, since in that case it would have passed into lay hands at the suppression of the chantries. The other house, the parsonage, was demolished about 1840.

Priesthill is a hall-house, about 57 feet by 23 feet, built of cob and rubble, with timber-framed internal partitions, and thatched.<sup>26</sup> It has a lateral chimney to the hall, and a chimney-stack at each end. Most of the windows and doors have been modernized. There was a screens-passage (D on plan, FIG. 24) with a door at either side; at the east end, the original ogee-arched timber doorway (3) survives. The screens-passage is separated from the hall by a good plank-and-

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, II, 311.

<sup>25</sup> Exeter Diocesan Records.

<sup>26</sup> I owe this survey of Priesthill to the kindness of Mr. A. W. Everett. For further details, cf. E. S. Chalk, *Kentisbeare and Blackborough* (1934), where the wooden traceried window is illustrated opposite p. 35.

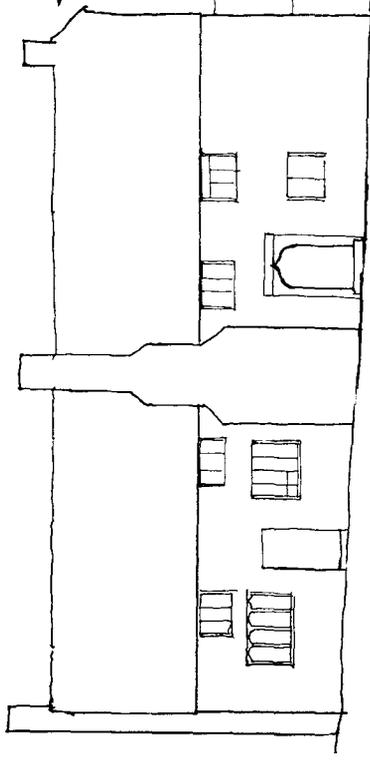
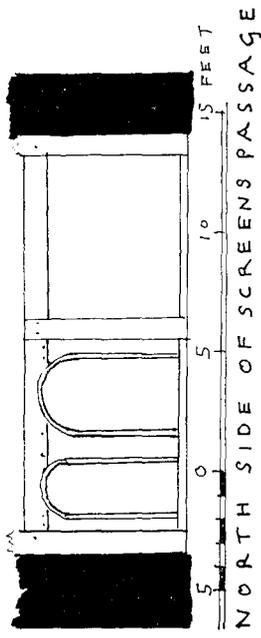
muntin partition (8). The hall, measuring 19 feet by 17 feet, was originally open to the roof, but was later divided by a floor. It has a large fireplace (2) on the east side, and in the west wall is an original unglazed wooden window, of four lights, with trefoil heads and trefoil spandrels (9). The roof over the hall has been reconstructed, but there remain in the west wall two wall-posts (10, 11), rising from about 18 in. above floor level to the top of the wall, which must have supported the roof principals. The roof is better preserved at the north end of the building. South of the hall is the parlour (A), which has an early-sixteenth-century four-light wooden window with flattened-arched heads (1), and a projecting staircase on the west side (B), leading up to the chamber above (H). The screens-passage has a timber-framed wall on its north side, containing two round-headed doorways. One of these (6) probably led originally to a flight of stairs to the floor above. The other led into the adjoining ground-floor room, which was no doubt the kitchen (E). Probably the kitchen chimney-stack (5) originally projected, but the space east of it is now occupied by a modern staircase (4) leading to the chamber above (K). The outhouse (F) seems to be a modern addition, as is another lean-to shed south of the parlour. Over the screens-passage, and slightly projecting into the hall, is a narrow room (J), presumably entered from the room above the kitchen. The medieval house would have consisted of an open hall, with a parlour and a solar, or best chamber, above, for the vicar, at the south end; and, at the north end, a kitchen and above it a second chamber for a guest or lodger (e.g. a chantry priest), and a third small chamber over the screens-passage, perhaps for a servant.

#### 4. THE VICARAGE, CONGRESBURY, SOMERSET (PL. XIX, A, B; FIG. 25)

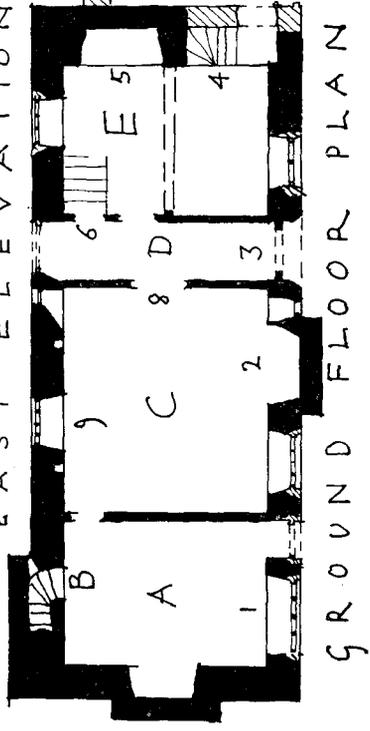
The church of Congresbury was appropriated to the Dean and Chapter of Wells,<sup>27</sup> while the Bishop possessed the manor. The vicarage was valued at £48 8s. 8d. in 1535.<sup>28</sup> The vicarage-house stands on the north side of the churchyard. The medieval building is attached to the east end of an early-nineteenth-century block, which now forms the main part of the house. The medieval house was presumably built by Bishop Beckington (1443-64) or his executors, as it bears his arms on the porch; it is unusually complete and unspoilt, no doubt through being left to serve as an annexe to the modern house, though it is remarkable that it escaped modification in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Perhaps we have to thank periods of non-residence for this. The house consists of a range about 48 feet by 20 feet, with slender buttresses and a projecting porch on the south side; it is built of plastered rubble and ashlar, with a tile roof. It has always been two-storied throughout. The plan is divided into two unequal parts. On the ground floor, the west part consists of a hall, about 25 feet by 15 feet and about 9 feet high; it has a fireplace at the west end, three windows on the south side and one (blocked) on the north; the windows are square-headed, of two lights, with transoms, cinquefoil heads and square labels. The ceiling is divided into six panels by moulded beams. Projecting north from the hall is a staircase leading to the

<sup>27</sup> *Register of John of Drokenford*, ed. E. Hobhouse (Somerset Record Soc., I, 1887), p. 224.

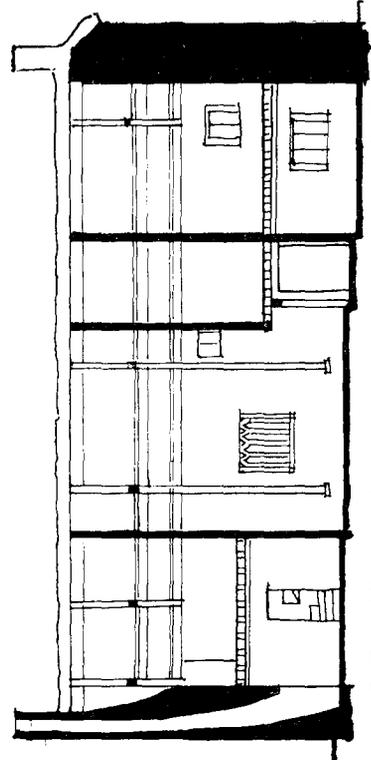
<sup>28</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, 121, 127, 190.



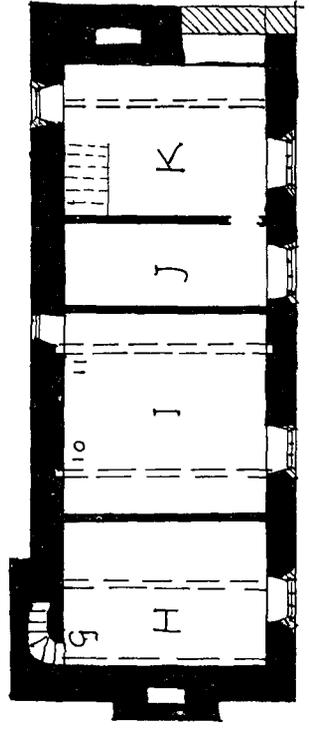
EAST ELEVATION



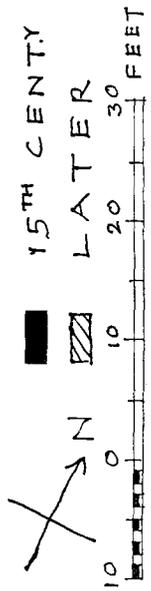
GROUND FLOOR PLAN



SECTION LOOKING WEST



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



PRIESTHILL,  
KENTISBEARE, DEVON

FIG. 24 (p. 127)

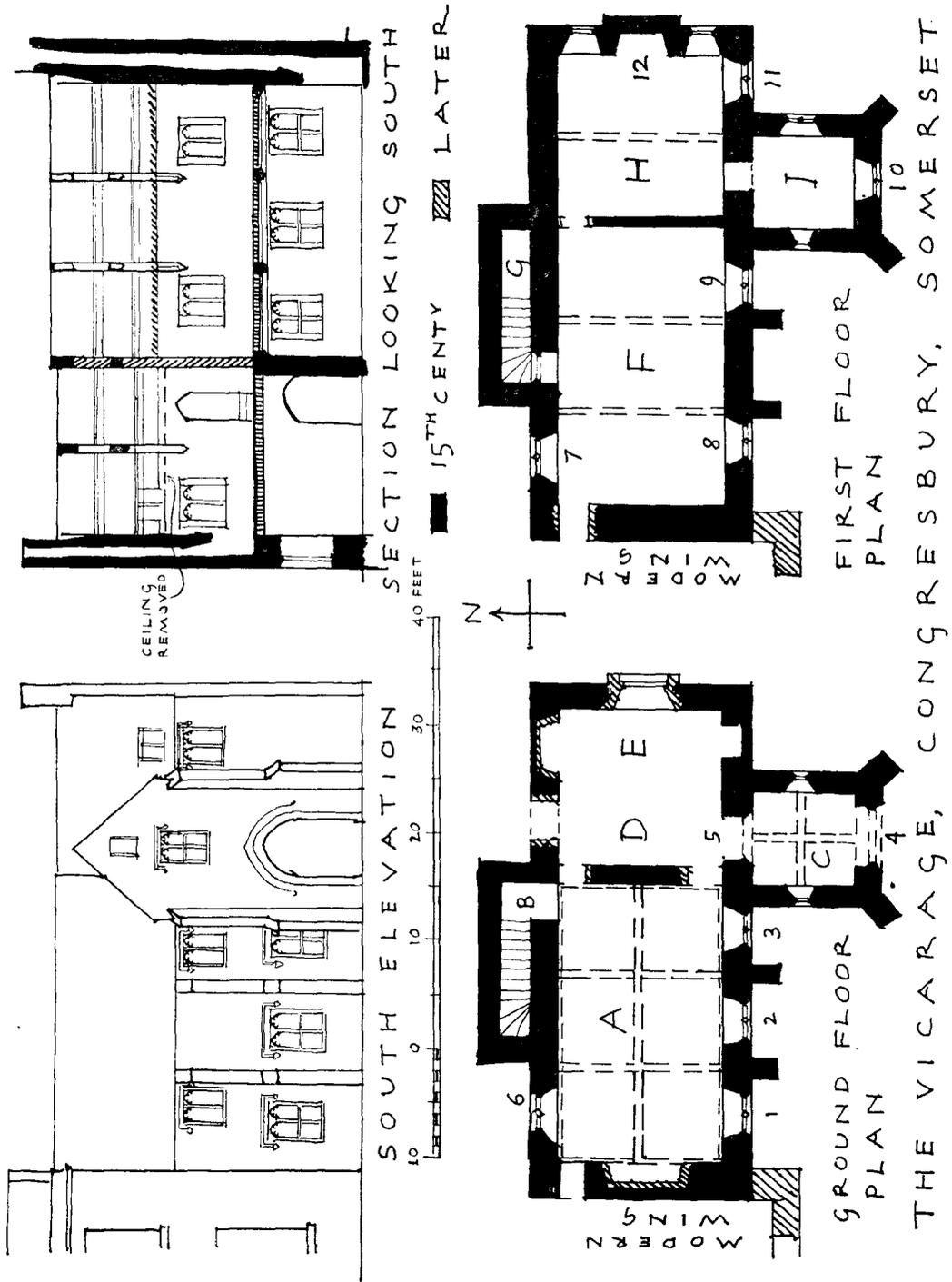


FIG. 25 (p. 128)

room above. The eastern part of the ground floor must originally have consisted of a screens-passage (there is still a door at each end) and a small service room about 8 feet by 15 feet; this seems too small for a kitchen, which may have been at the back. In front of the south door of the passage is a gabled, two-storied porch, with angle buttresses. The four-centred outer arch is decorated with a delicate dog-tooth moulding. On the first floor, the large room over the hall had an open roof of three bays, probably of an arch-braced, collar-beam type; this is now hidden by a modern ceiling, but the ends of the principals still show. This room has two windows on the south side, similar to those below, but without transoms, and another on the north. The eastern part of the first floor consists of a room 15 feet square, probably the solar, or best chamber; it now has an open roof, but this was formerly concealed by a flat-cambered ceiling.<sup>29</sup> There is a fine stone fireplace with a traceried lintel on the east wall. Opening out of this room is a small room over the porch, with two-light windows on the south and east and a smaller window on the west. We cannot be certain that the medieval house did not continue westwards, beyond the hall, in a wing later destroyed by the modern house; but it is very probable that it always consisted, as now, of a two-compartment plan, with a service-room right of the screens-passage, and the ground-floor hall to the left, from which one went up to the upper hall or great chamber with its open roof, and from that to the priest's chamber over the service-room, with its ceiling. The room over the porch may have served as a study or oratory.

At Congresbury, as at Kentisbeare, there were formerly two houses, a rectory-house belonging to the appropriators (the Dean and Chapter), and the vicarage-house, with which we are concerned. They are described thus in a terrier of 1634:

'In primis there is belonging to the Rectory there, being an Impropriation held of the Deane and Chapter of the Cathedrall Church of Welles one howse with divers Roomes in it, one Barne, a Backside conteyning half an acre, one garden . . .

Item there is belonginge to the Vicaridge there one house with a stable and dove house, an orchard, a garden and Backside adjoininge conteyning by estimacion two acres . . .'<sup>30</sup>

##### 5. RECTORY FARM, STANTON DREW, SOMERSET (FIG. 26)

The church of Stanton Drew was appropriated to the archdeaconry of Bath. The vicarage was valued at £7 2s. 7d. in 1535, and at the same time the archdeacon's rectorial emoluments included £2 rent from the mansion-house (*domus mansionis*) and certain lands belonging to the house.<sup>31</sup> If this mansion-house is to be identified with the surviving house under discussion, it may possibly have been shared by the archdeacon (as rector) and the vicar, the latter occupying part and the archdeacon occupying or letting the rest. If so, it seems to have become in time simply the vicarage, for the terrier of 1639 speaks only of the 'Vicaridge

<sup>29</sup> *Proc. Somerset Archaeol. and Nat. Hist. Soc.*, LXVIII (1922), pt. i, 58.

<sup>30</sup> Bath and Wells Diocesan Registry, Terriers, no. 75.

<sup>31</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, 133, 185.

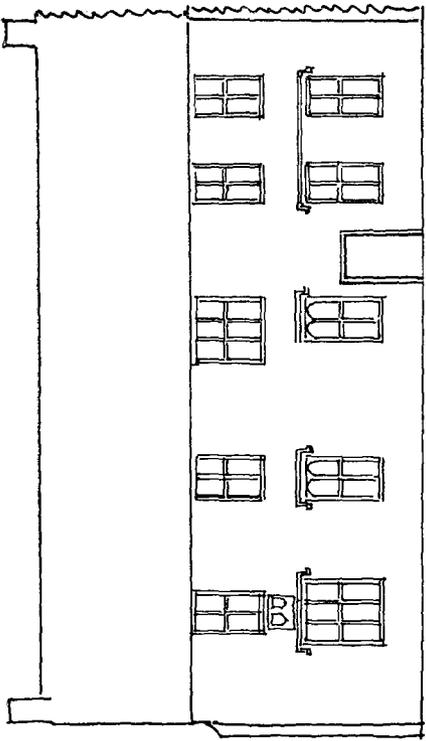
House'.<sup>32</sup> The existing house was probably built by, or in the time of, Bishop Beckington, whose arms appear on the north wall of the house, together with another unidentified coat.<sup>33</sup> The original house is a rectangle about 60 feet by 25-28 feet, with a later extension on the west; it is built of stone (rubble) with a chamfered plinth and a modern tile roof. It was probably always two storied throughout. The plan is of three compartments. There is a screens-passage; at the south end of this is a stone doorway, probably original, with a four-centred arch and continuous chamfer, and at the north end is a square-framed, moulded stone doorway, which is apparently post-medieval; it is possible that a four-centred stone doorway with a continuous chamfer, now in the western extension, is the original south doorway of the screens-passage reset. To the east of the screens-passage is the hall, about 18 feet square and about 9 feet 6 inches high; it has a timber ceiling, now concealed by plaster. On the south side is a lateral chimney, and beyond that to the east is a projecting staircase leading up to the first floor; it presumably came out in the room over the parlour. In the north wall of the hall are two original two-light windows with transoms; between them is said to be a blocked door, now concealed, but there can hardly have been an external door in this position. East of the hall is the parlour, with an original chimney-stack (fireplace modernized) in the east wall, and, in the north wall, a window which was originally of three lights; it is above this that the coats of arms appear outside. West of the screens-passage is a room with two two-light transomed windows; this was presumably the kitchen. The southern part, now occupied by a modern staircase, was perhaps partitioned off to form a buttery or spence, and there are two blocked windows in the south wall. The first floor probably consisted originally of three rooms, over-parlour, hall and kitchen. The part over the hall is said to have an arch-braced collar-beam roof, now concealed by ceilings, and there is a flat timber ceiling to the room over the parlour. In the east gable, at first-floor level, are two original windows; a two-light window with four-centred heads under a square label, lighting the room over the parlour; and a three-light window under a pointed head, lighting a recess or closet at the stair-head, which may perhaps have served as a study or oratory. This seems to have been the type of house that had a ground-floor hall with an open-roofed upper hall, or great chamber, above (cf. Dunchideock and Congresbury); at the east end was a parlour with a chamber and study or oratory above, presumably for the use of the archdeacon or vicar, and at the west end, a kitchen and perhaps buttery, with another chamber above. It is a well built, stately house.

#### 6. THE OLD RECTORY, WALTON, SOMERSET (PL. XX, A-C; FIGS. 27-28)

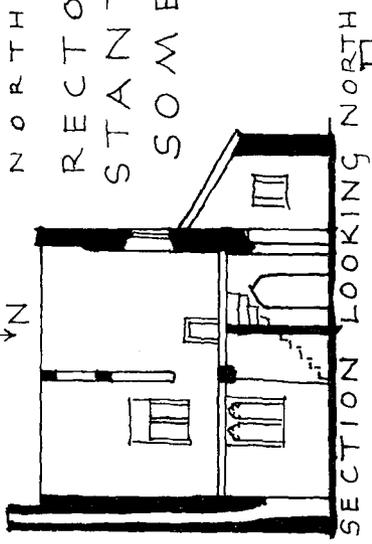
Walton was not a separate parish, but a chapel of ease, dependent upon the parish church of Street; the latter was in the jurisdiction of Glastonbury, and belonged to the abbey, to which it paid a pension, but it remained a rectory and was valued at £34 in 1535, and Walton was served by a chaplain who was paid

<sup>32</sup> Bath and Wells Diocesan Registry, Terriers, no. 50.

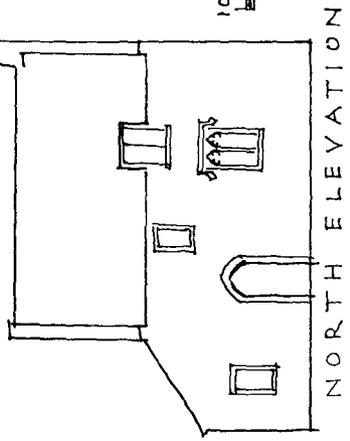
<sup>33</sup> J. Collinson, *History of Somerset*, II, 438.



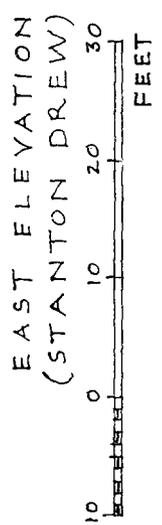
NORTH ELEVATION  
RECTORY FARM,  
STANTON DREW,  
SOMERSET



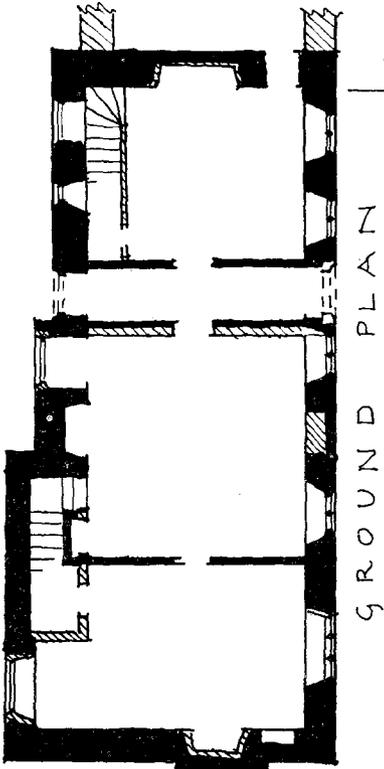
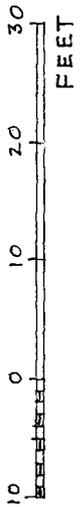
SECTION LOOKING NORTH



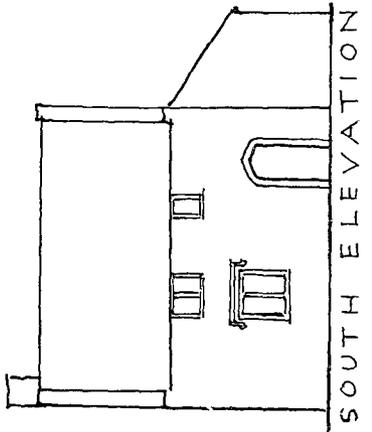
NORTH ELEVATION



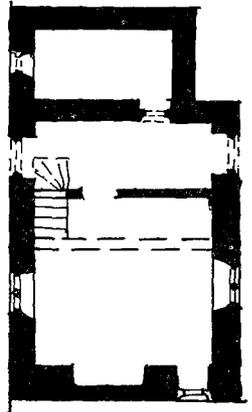
EAST ELEVATION  
(STANTON DREW)



GROUND PLAN



SOUTH ELEVATION



GROUND PLAN  
OLD RECTORY,  
WINFORD, SOMERSET

FIG. 26 (pp. 131, 138)

£6 per annum.<sup>34</sup> Glastonbury Abbey were lords of the manor both at Street and Walton.<sup>35</sup> The existing parsonage house at Walton is too large to have been simply the residence of the chaplain; it is more likely that it was the residence of the rector of Street; at any rate, in the terrier of 1621, it seems to have been the chief house belonging to the parsonage of Street and Walton, and it seems to have remained a parsonage until the nineteenth century, when a new parsonage was built.

The house is a large and elaborate building of the fifteenth century; it is possible that, as Glastonbury were the patrons and lords of the manor, one of the abbots, such as the energetic Abbot Selwood (1457-93), may have had something to do with the building. The house lies on the west side of the churchyard of Walton. It is of two stories, and has always been so. It is built of stone, with a modern tiled roof. It now consists of two parallel ranges, joined at one angle, where there is a stone newel-stair; originally the only internal communication between the two ranges was on the first floor at the top of this stair. There was formerly a third range, to the south, of which only fragments of walls and foundations remain.

(i) The north-west range has a fine semi-octagonal bay window projecting from the north gable end. On the ground floor it has a long, low room (A), now used as a kitchen, but perhaps originally a store room; it was originally entered from the outside by a moulded doorway (2), now blocked, the present door (9b) from the staircase being a modern insertion. Out of this room open a closet (B), under the bay window, and a curious narrow space (C) lit only by a slit. The first floor is now divided into two rooms (J, K), but probably originally constituted one large room, 25 feet by 15 feet, perhaps the solar; there is a ceiling with moulded beams over the southern part (K), which perhaps formerly extended over the whole area. The roof is probably post-medieval. There is an original bay window at the north end, and another original three-light window in the east wall (1, 3), both with traceried heads; and at the south end there is a window (5) which appears to have been originally a doorway, with a shouldered rear-arch; this presumably led to an outside staircase. The room communicates with the south-east wing through the spiral staircase (L).

(ii) The south-east range is much longer than the north-west one, and it is divided on each floor into two unequal parts by a thick cross-wall. On the ground floor the southern part perhaps originally constituted one large room (G, H), about 17 feet by 19 feet, with a ceiling divided by moulded beams; if so, the northern end (G) must have been divided off to form a passage by about 1600, when the present doorways were made at the eastern and western ends (26, 31) and a porch added on the west (I); a staircase was inserted here in the eighteenth century. The windows of the room H have been modernized, but a dripstone suggests that the two eastern windows replace a large mullioned window of five or six lights. A chamfered doorway (25) leads into the large northern part (E, F).

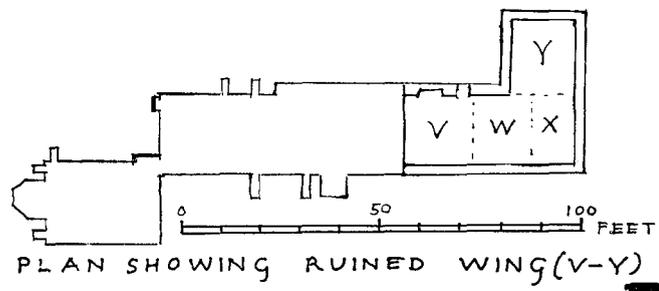
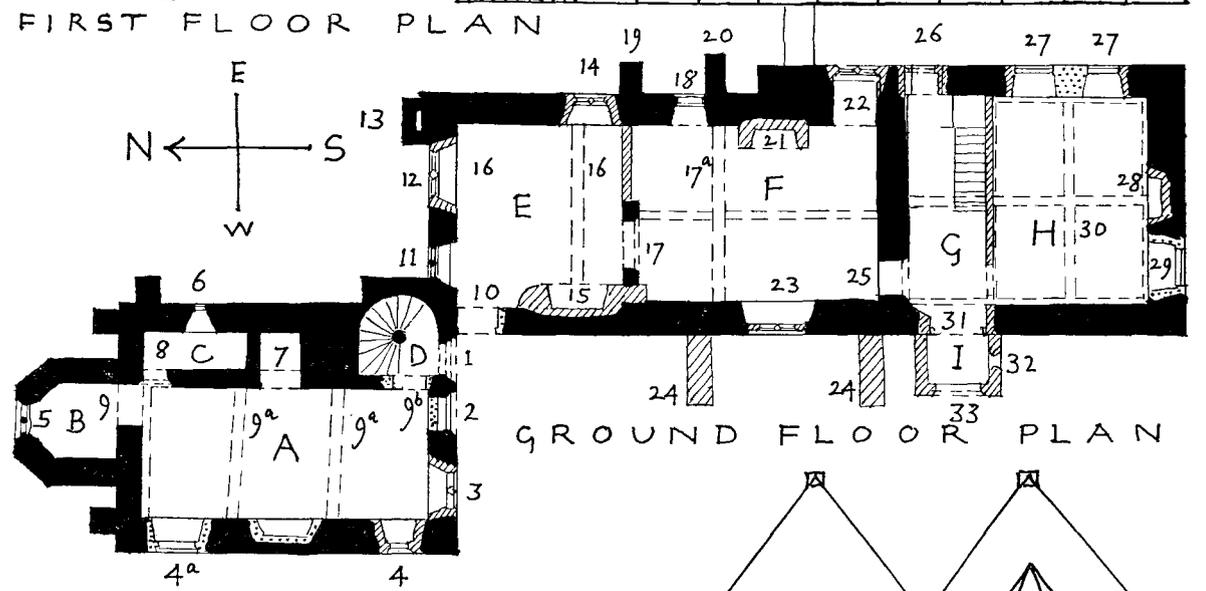
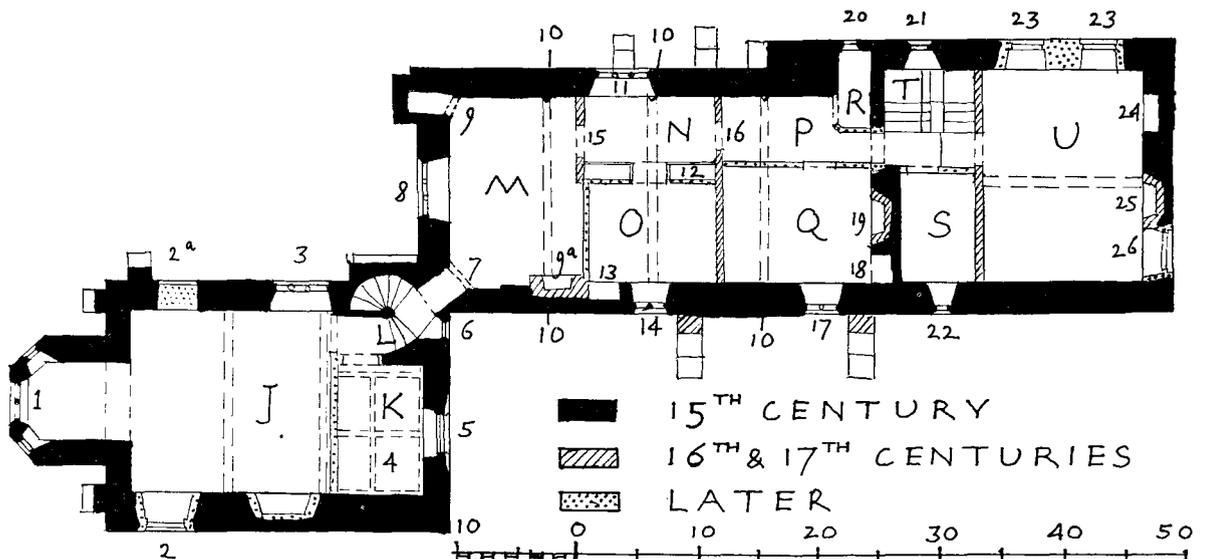
<sup>34</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, 142, 225.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, I, 147; *The Great Chartulary of Glastonbury*, ed. Dom Aelred Watkin (Somerset Record Soc., LXIII, 1952), ii, cxlii-cxlvii, 409-25.

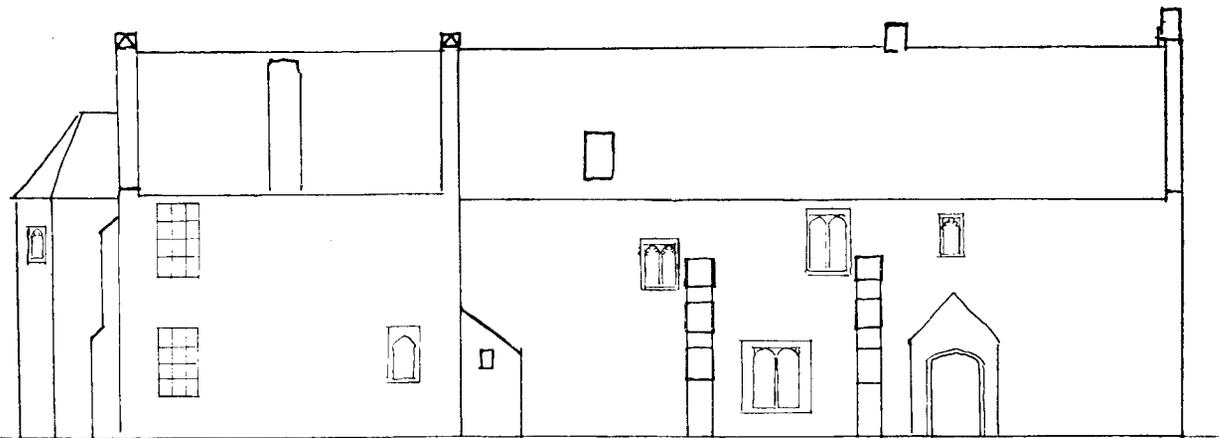
This is now divided into two rooms, but it may possibly have been one room originally; there is a chamfered doorway (fifteenth-century?) in the partition-wall (17), but this may have been reset. In the middle of the east wall is a fifteenth-century doorway which has been converted into a window (18), and in the north wall is a two-light window, apparently of the fifteenth century, with its cusping cut away; the other windows (12, 14, 23) and the two fireplaces (15, 21) are insertions or replacements of about 1600. On the east side, where the wall projects (22), there may have been a staircase originally, starting, perhaps, in the window recess (22) and coming out on the first floor at T; the window here (21) must always have lit a staircase. On the first floor, the space south of the cross-wall is now divided into a large room (U) with a fireplace of *c.* 1600 and eighteenth-century windows; a small room (S) with a single-light fifteenth-century window; and the staircase (T) lit by a single-light fifteenth-century window. The northern part of the range, M, N, O, P, Q, was originally one large room, about 35 feet by 15 feet, with an open roof with arch-braced collar-beams, of four bays, which still survives, though concealed by modern ceilings. There are two fine fifteenth-century three-light windows with traceried heads, one in the north gable, the other in the east wall (8, 11), and two fifteenth-century two-light windows (one with its head replaced *c.* 1600) in the west wall (14, 17). In the north-east corner is a garderobe, and in the north-west corner, the door communicating via the newel staircase with the north-west range. This large room must have been divided into three (M; N, O; P, Q) by about the middle of the sixteenth century, as the cross partitions contain doorways of that date; and there are fireplaces of *c.* 1600 in the south (19) and west walls (9*a*); there was perhaps an earlier and larger fireplace on the site of the latter. There is a bulge in the west wall of this range, to correct which two buttresses (24, 24) were added *c.* 1600; and there are two buttresses on the east side (19, 20), which seem to be original.

(iii) The third range, of which only low walls and foundations remain, formerly adjoined the south gable of the south-east range just described; it was L-shaped, extending 43 feet southwards, with an arm at the south end projecting 18 feet eastwards.

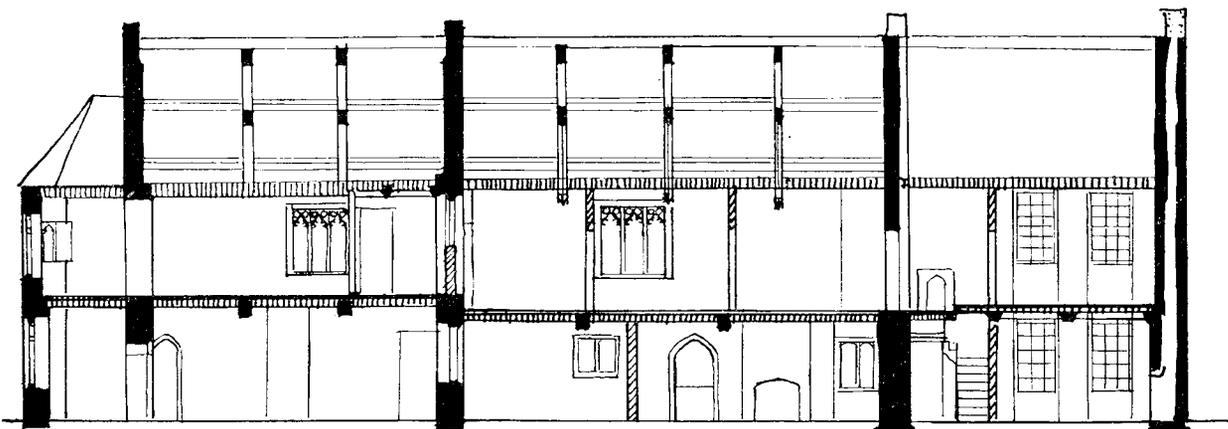
This building is a little difficult to interpret as a medieval house-plan. The solar, or best chamber, was probably on the first floor of the north-west range (J, K); the kitchens and offices were probably in the third or southernmost range, now in ruins. It is the large middle, or north-east range that is the problem. One would expect to find the hall here; perhaps it occupied the northern and larger part of the ground floor (E, F), but if so the doorway in the middle of the east wall (18) is hard to explain. Possibly the southern portion was occupied by a screens-passage at G and a buttery or parlour at H; but the ceiling here seems unduly elaborate for a buttery. The first floor is simpler: the large room with the open roof of four bays (M, N, O, P, Q, R) would be an upper hall, or great chamber; both this and the solar could be approached independently by the newel staircase; and there would be a secondary chamber, probably ceiled over, at the southern end (S, T, U). There was presumably another staircase somewhere in this range, since the newel staircase had no internal connexion with the ground



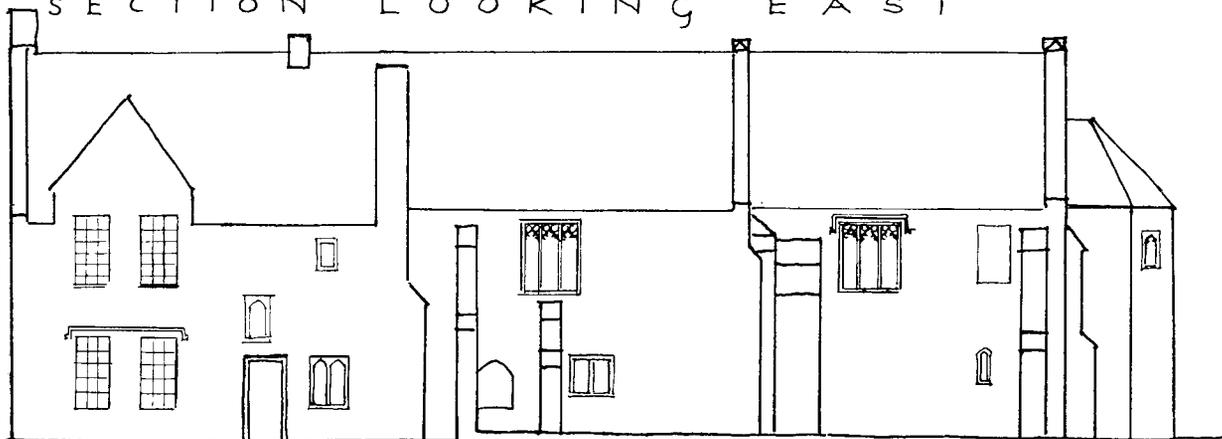
THE OLD RECTORY, WALTON, SOMERSET



WEST ELEVATION



SECTION LOOKING EAST



EAST ELEVATION



floor. Perhaps, as has been suggested, a stair led from the south-east corner of the 'hall' up to the space occupied by the modern stairs (T).

A terrier of the glebelands, etc., belonging to the parsonage of Street and Walton, made 24 Oct. 1621,<sup>36</sup> describes the 'mansion house' as a fair house of stone covered with slate, containing a Hall [F?], two parlours [E?], two butteries [H?] with chambers over the same, containing six or seven 'field of building' [bays?] in one range [=the middle range?]; one other low room [A?] with two chambers [J, K?] over it, containing about two field, in another range of building [=the north-west range?]; also a kitchen, a pastry, a brewhouse and a larder house, with three chambers over the said kitchen, pastry and larder house, in a third range containing about five or six field all covered with blue tile [=the southernmost range, now ruined; the brewhouse, which had no chamber above it, perhaps occupied the projecting eastern limb]. There was also a stable containing two field and a barn containing five field, all of fair stone building covered with reed; a large base court, with a mow barton [stackyard] covered, and one close court parted with a stone wall; a pigsty; a 'fair garden'; a backside having a 'staull' and a wainhouse, newly erected by Mr. Anthony Eglesfield, the present incumbent; containing by estimation one acre of ground, all enclosed with a fair stone wall about seven or eight feet high. These outbuildings and yards probably all stood west of the house, except the garden, which was probably the space east of the house and south of the churchyard.

#### 7. THE OLD RECTORY, WINFORD, SOMERSET (PL. XIX, C; FIG. 26)

This house is now known as the Old Rectory. If this identification is correct it represents the smallest and simplest type of priest's house, of which surviving or identifiable examples are very rare. It seems to be a late-fifteenth-century building, of stone, with a tile roof, probably replacing thatch. The ground-floor space, 20 feet by 15 feet, of two bays with a central beam, was probably always divided by a partition into one large room (a hall-kitchen) and a screens-passage having doors at the north and south ends (four-centred with continuous chamfer). The hall is lit by two two-light windows which have hood moulds with bat's-wing stops; the window on the north retains trefoil-headed lights. The chimney is in the west gable end. A four-centred doorway with a continuous chamfer opens eastwards from the screens-passage into a small outshut, which was probably a dispenche or buttery. The stair on the north side (probably in its original position, to judge from the window) leads from the hall to the first floor; the latter is now subdivided, but was perhaps originally one large attic. The house would thus originally have consisted of one room down (hall), with a dispenche, and one room up (chamber). Although the house is so small, Winford was a valuable benefice, worth £21 19s. 9d. in 1535.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Bath and Wells Diocesan Registry, Terriers, no. 195.

<sup>37</sup> *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, I, 185. The Winford tithe map of 1837 (in the Somerset Record Office, Shire Hall, Taunton) shows the Old Rectory as an isolated piece of glebe land, and the modern rectory as near Winford House, about a mile south-west. The medieval rectory-house had perhaps been abandoned as early as the seventeenth century to judge from the terrier of 1636 (no. 59, Bath and Wells Diocesan Registry), which seems to describe the rectory house as already in its modern position.

## 8. THE OLD RECTORY, SAMPFORD PEVERELL, DEVON (PL. XVII, D; FIG. 29)

Sampford Peverell was a rectory, valued at £23 16s. 8d. in 1535.<sup>38</sup> The old rectory-house is a building of about the beginning of the sixteenth century; it may possibly have been built by Lady Margaret Beaufort, Countess of Richmond, who lived here for a time, and is said to have rebuilt part of the church.<sup>39</sup> The house is a two-storied, L-shaped stone building. There is a screens-passage (C), entered by a west doorway with a flattened, four-centred, moulded arch. This opens north into a hall, about 19 feet square, with a fine ceiling of sixteen panels divided by moulded beams. On the west side is a lateral chimney between two windows which have been modernized; there are no windows on the east side. North of the hall is a long room, 33 feet by 15 feet, which also has a fine panelled ceiling divided by moulded beams. There is no sign of this room having been subdivided, and it presumably served as a large parlour; in that case it is remarkable in having two external doors, one at the east end, the other in the south-west corner. There is a fireplace chimney-stack on the north side, a large five-light window at the west end, and a two-light window next the door at the east end. South of the screens-passage is a room (D), which may have served as a small kitchen, or as a buttery with a kitchen, now destroyed, beyond. There is a modern staircase (E) at the east end of the screens-passage; it is not clear whether the original stairs were here, or at the north-east corner of the parlour range. On the first floor, the part over the hall, screens-passage, etc., has been entirely rebuilt in recent times, and an old view shows this part as consisting of a mere attic above ground-floor level; this being so, it is more likely that the original stairs communicated directly with the northern wing. The first floor of the northern wing, above the parlour, has a fine waggon-roof of eight bays. This space is now partitioned into three rooms and a passage; but there is one original cross-partition near the east end, which must have divided the wing into a small eastern room of two bays (F), perhaps an ante-room, and a large room of six bays (G), about 25 feet by 15 feet, which was presumably the best chamber, or solar. This room has a fireplace and two windows (one blocked) on the north, a three-light window on the west, and a small slit on the south (giving a view of the entrance). The smaller room has two windows in the east wall. It may be noted that in this house the hall is smaller than the parlour.

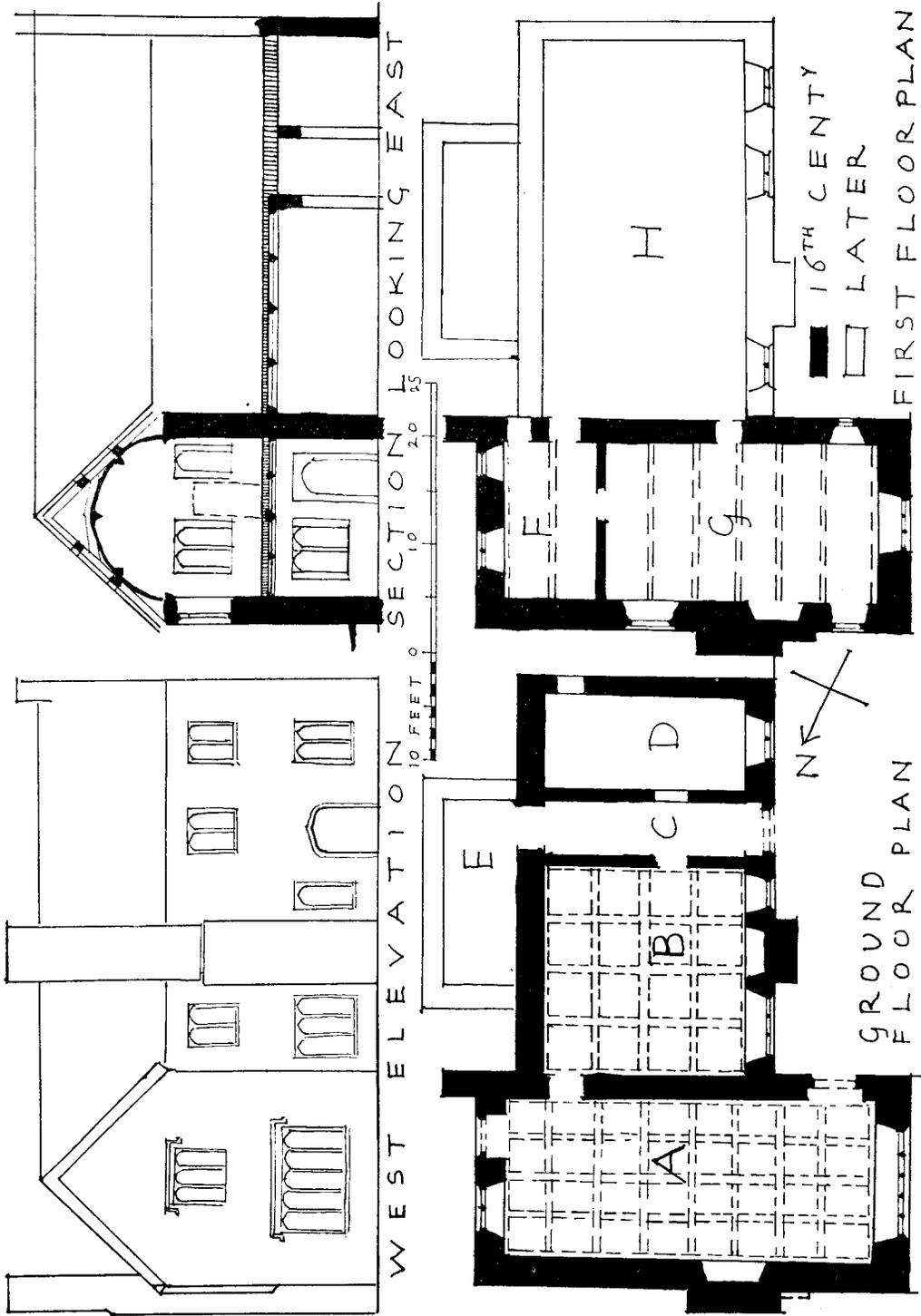
## ANALYSIS OF PLANS AND GENERAL FEATURES

It will be useful to analyse the types of plan and general features of these priests' houses, comparing them with analogous lay houses, such as the bartons and larger farmhouses of the south-west (FIGS. 30-31).

(i) We have two good examples of a 'hall-house', of three parts—a central hall with a two-storied part at either end. One is Muchelney (no. 1, p. 121), where the hall must originally have had a central hearth (a chimney-stack and floor were later inserted); the solar and service room are both of comparatively small

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, II, 332.

<sup>39</sup> R. Polwhele, *History of Devonshire* (1797), III, 365.



THE OLD RECTORY, SAMPFORD PEVERELL, DEVON  
 GROUND FLOOR PLAN  
 SECTION LOOKING EAST  
 WEST ELEVATION

dimensions ( $12\frac{1}{2}$  feet by 18 feet; 11 feet by 18 feet). The other is Kentisbeare (no. 3, p. 127), where the hall has a lateral chimney. A feature of both these houses is the room over the screens-passage. These houses may be compared with three lay examples: Bury Court Farm, Donhead, Wiltshire (fifteenth-century), with an open hall of two bays and apparently a central hearth; Yard in Rose Ash, Devon (fifteenth-century), with an open hall of three bays and a lateral chimney; and Medros in Cornwall, which retains its open hall and lateral chimney. In both the first two a floor and central chimney-stack were later inserted. This type of plan is of course widespread in other parts of the country, e.g. the yeomen's half-timbered houses of Kent and Sussex.

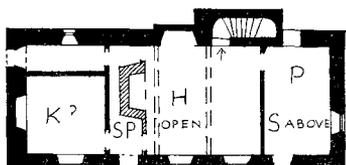
(ii) There is a type of house with a ground-floor, single-story hall, having above it an open-roofed room of the same dimensions, a kind of upper hall or great chamber; this type is widespread in the south-west from the early fifteenth century onwards, and is represented by several of these priests' houses. Two of these houses, Dunchidecock (no. 2, p. 124) and Stanton Drew (no. 5, p. 131), have a three-part plan, a central hall (with a lateral chimney) between service-room (kitchen?) at one end and parlour at the other. The end rooms (kitchen and parlour) are slightly larger than at Muchelney and Kentisbeare. It is possible that, in both, the rooms on the first floor over the hall and parlour formed as it were a separate suite for the priest, not communicating with the room over the kitchen, which is, at least today, approached by a separate staircase. Lay examples of this type are at Manston, Sidmouth, Devon (fifteenth-century) and Nettacott, near Upton Pyne, Devon (sixteenth-century).

(iii) A variation of the two preceding types is where the parlour and solar are contained in a wing at right angles to the hall, giving the plan an L-shape. An example of this among the priests' houses is at Sampford Peverell (no. 8, p. 139) where the parlour-solar wing is larger than the hall, and higher, for it seems that the main wing containing the hall had originally only an attic story above the ground floor. A large lay example of this L-shaped plan, with a ground-floor hall with an upper room above it, is at Blackmoor, Somerset (fifteenth-century). There is no example among these priests' houses of the L-shaped plan with a lofty, open-roofed hall, but there are lay examples at Tickenham, Somerset (fifteenth-century) and Hareston, Devon (early-sixteenth-century). Among the priests' houses, the Walton parsonage (no. 6, p. 132), with its projecting solar wing attached by a corner to the main range, may be regarded as a variant of the L-shaped plan.

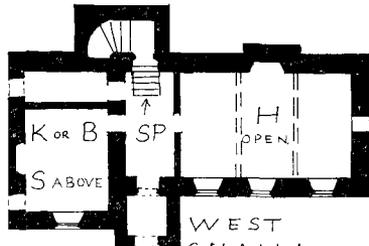
(iv) A two-part plan, with the solar above the service-room (kitchen, buttery) at the lower end of the hall, seems to have been common in most parts of the country. Lay examples of this, with a lofty, open-roofed hall, are at Lower Bramble, near Trusham, Devon (late-fifteenth-century), and at West Challacombe, near Combe Martin, Devon (late-fifteenth-century L-shaped); and with a ground-floor hall, with open-roofed upper hall above, at Gothelney, Somerset (early-fifteenth-century) and at Hams Barton, near Chudleigh, Devon (late-fifteenth-century, L-shaped). It may be accidental that among the priests' houses examined here there is only one example of this two-part plan, namely Congres-



PRIESTS HOUSE,  
MUCHELNEY, SOMERSET



YARD IN ROSE ASH,  
DEVON



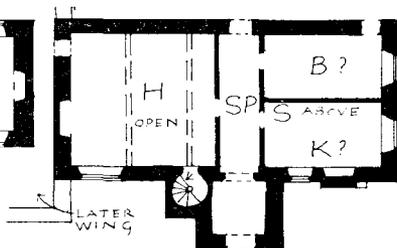
WEST  
CHALLA-  
COMBE, DEVON



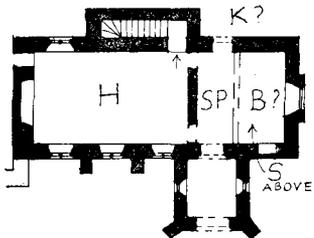
OLD RECTORY,  
DUNCHIDEOCK,  
DEVON



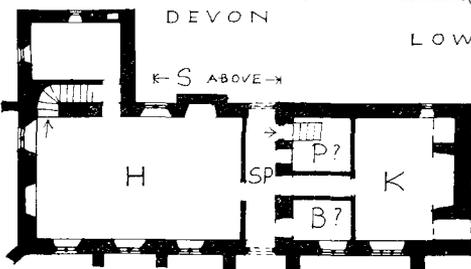
MANSTON,  
SIDMOUTH,  
DEVON



LOWER BRAMBLE, DEVON



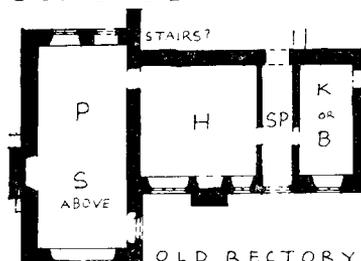
OLD VICARAGE,  
CONGRESBURY,  
SOMERSET



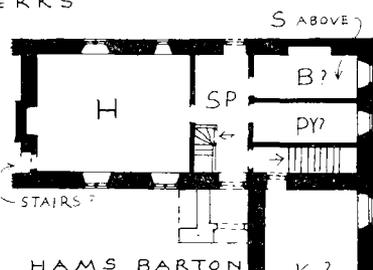
MANOR FARM,  
ASHBURY,  
BERKS



OLD RECTORY,  
WINFORD,  
SOMERSET



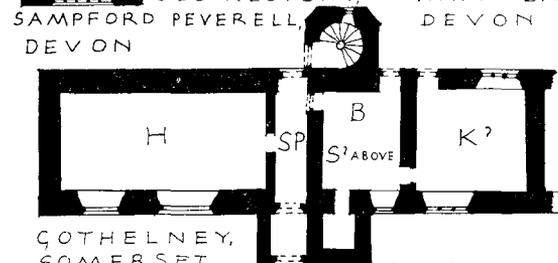
OLD RECTORY,  
SAMPFORD PEVERELL,  
DEVON



HAMS BARTON,  
DEVON

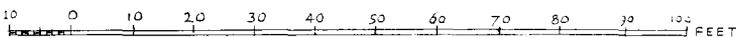


BISHOP VEYSEY'S  
HOUSES



GOTHERNEY,  
SOMERSET

- B BUTTERY
- H HALL
- K KITCHEN
- P PARLOUR
- PY PANTRY
- S SOLAR
- SP SCREENS-PASSAGE



PRIESTS' HOUSES AND LAY HOUSES  
GROUND PLANS COMPARED

FIG. 30 (p. 139)

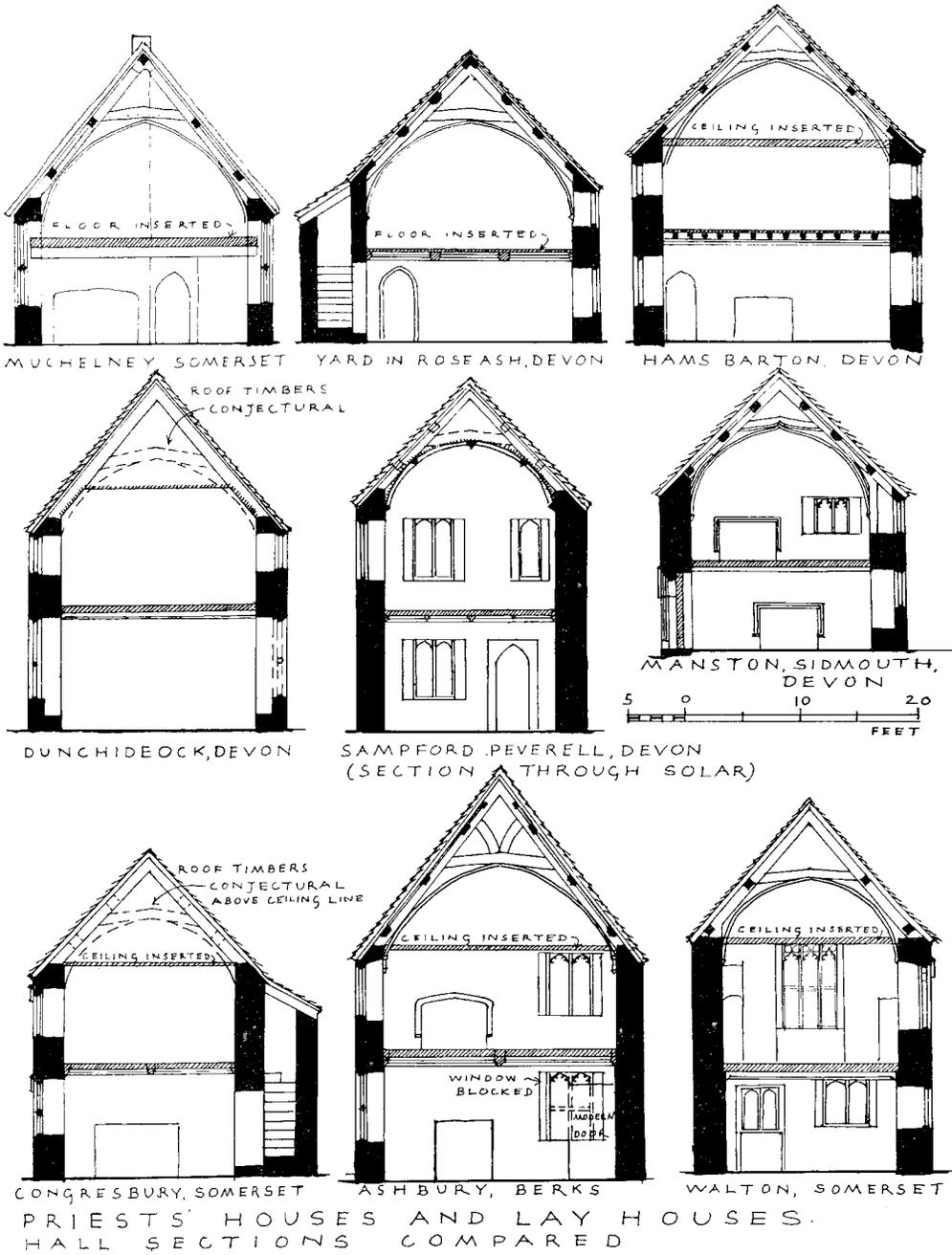


FIG. 31 (p. 139)

bury (no. 4, p. 128), and we cannot be quite certain that this did not have a solar wing beyond the hall which has disappeared. If there should prove to be a genuine scarcity of the two-part plan among priests' houses generally, this might be because a clerical master would want to ensure privacy by having his solar at the opposite end from the kitchen, whereas, in a lay household, the mistress of the house might see a positive advantage in having the solar above and in closer control of the service-rooms. There is an unusual variant of the two-part plan at Ashbury, Berkshire, a Glastonbury manor, where the ground floor is occupied by the hall and the kitchen quarters, but the first-floor space above the hall is sub-divided into an ante-room and the solar, the space above the kitchen-quarters being presumably a secondary chamber; the solar thus occupies the centre of the first floor, and communicates (as at Congresbury) with a chamber over the porch.

(v) The early-sixteenth-century house at Winford (no. 7, p. 138) must represent the smallest unit among priests' houses: a single room, hall-kitchen, with entry and dispenche, on the ground floor, with an attic room above. This type of priest's house must originally have been widespread, but does not seem to have survived. Among lay houses, outside the south-west region, there are some interesting examples resembling this type in the set of small houses which Bishop Vesey of Exeter (1462-1554) erected in the neighbourhood of Sutton Coldfield, Warwickshire, his birthplace.<sup>40</sup> These, on an average, measure 30 feet by 20 feet externally, and the main ground-floor rooms (hall-kitchen?) average 17 feet by 16 feet; Winford measures 25½ feet by 19 feet externally, and the ground-floor room is about 14 feet square.

In the priests' houses we have examined, if we except the largest, Walton, and the smallest, Winford, there is a certain uniformity about the size of the hall, which averages about 16½ feet wide by about 18½ feet long, or 24½ feet long if we include the screens-passage, which is included in the bay-system of those halls that have an open roof.

A noticeable feature in some of the priests' houses (Muchelney, Congresbury, Sampford Peverell) is the comparatively small size of the service-room at the 'lower' end of the hall; was this space divided into a very small buttery and kitchen, or was it used as a buttery with a detached kitchen (as it seems to have been at Dunchidcock), or was cooking done in the hall? As regards the first-floor chambers, there are usually two, one at each end of the hall, one for the priest, no doubt, and one for guests, with sometimes a third room for a servant. Dunchidcock, Walton, and probably Muchelney in its original state, were supplied with garderobes; these are lacking in the others. The solar, no doubt, often served as the priest's study as well as his bed-chamber.

The main staircase in these priests' houses is generally contrived in a lateral projection. The staircase leads from the parlour to the solar at Muchelney and Kentisbeare (cf. Bury Court Farm and Blackmoor); from the parlour to the upper hall at Dunchidcock; from the hall to the solar at Stanton Drew and perhaps at Sampford Peverell (cf. Yard in Rose Ash, Badlake, Hareston); from the hall to

<sup>40</sup> P. B. Chatwin and E. G. Harcourt, 'The Bishop Vesey Houses and other old buildings in Sutton Coldfield', in *Trans. Birmingham Archaeol. Soc.*, LXIV (1941-2).

the upper hall at Congresbury; while at Walton a newel stair led from the exterior to both the upper hall and the solar. The original form and position of the staircase leading to the upper chamber over the service end is now in most cases obscure; at Kentisbeare, at any rate, it probably led up from the screens-passage, but at Muchelney and Stanton Drew it perhaps led, as it does now, from the service-room—not a very convenient arrangement, if the upper room was a guest chamber. In the lay houses where the solar is above the service room, it is approached by various forms of staircase: a newel stair at Gothelney and Lower Bramble; a straight flight from the screens-passage at Hams Barton; a lateral projection leading from the hall to the solar at West Challacombe.

It is only a small number of priests' houses in the south-west region that I have taken for examination, but these, combined with some lay examples, may serve as a kind of framework or scheme with which other specimens may be compared. It may be asked why there are comparatively few medieval priests' houses to be found. Post-medieval developments may throw some light on this. Dr. Hoskins has traced the changes in the social and economic life of the country parson in the sixteenth century in Leicestershire, for instance:

‘The poor parson, like the village labourer, grew poorer; but the parson in the fatter living, whose farming was as profitable as many a yeoman's, was able to build himself a more commodious house or to enlarge the old medieval rectory or vicarage after the new fashion. . . . The great increase of prices between 1550 and 1650 was not so disastrous to the clergy as might be supposed, for since the greater part of the rectorial income at least came from tithes in kind, and prices of all commodities had gone up, the value of benefices had risen accordingly.’<sup>41</sup>

But, if clerical incomes were holding their own, there was a new factor, altering the economic position of the parson for the worse, in the abolition of clerical celibacy; the parson had to make his income support a wife and family, often with the greatest difficulty. Moreover, the demands of a family and new standards of comfort must have made the accommodation of a medieval house seem increasingly inadequate, especially from the late seventeenth century onwards; the medieval period in domestic architecture really comes to an end about the time of the introduction of the sash window. Prolonged non-residence was another factor. The result was that either the old parsonage was rebuilt out of all recognition, or, after a period of neglect and abandonment, a new parsonage was built. When, as a result of the clerical residence bill of 1808, Sydney Smith was forced to reside on his living at Foston-le-Clay in Yorkshire, he found that no clergyman had resided for 150 years and the parsonage house was a ‘hovel’—though probably a very interesting hovel from an archaeological point of view. He therefore set to work to build a new house. The neglect and the improvements of the last four centuries must between them account for the disappearance of most medieval priests' houses.

<sup>41</sup> W. G. Hoskins, *Essays in Leicestershire History*, pp. 13, 16.

## APPENDIX

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF PRIESTS' HOUSES AND LAY HOUSES

	length of house (external)	dimensions of hall* (internal)	dimensions of service-room (internal)	dimensions of solar (internal)
<b>THREE-PART PLAN; STRAIGHT; OPEN HALL</b>				
<i>Priest's House, Muchelney, Somerset; early 15 cent.</i> (no. 1, p. 121) ..	51'	18' (24') × 18'	11' × 18'	12' 6" × 18'
<i>Priesthill, Kentisbeare, Devon; 15 cent.</i> (no. 3, p. 127) ..	57'	19' (24' 6") × 18'	13' × 17'	12' 6" × 17'
Bury Court Farm, Donhead, Wiltshire; 15 cent. ..	65'	18' (23') × 18'	17' × 18'	16' × 21'
Yard in Rose Ash, Devon; 15 cent. ..	56'	19' (25') × 18'	14' × 18'	12' × 18' 6"
Badlake, Devon; 15 cent. ..	60'	17' (22' 6") × 16' 6"	21' 6" × 16' 6"	11' × 16' 6"
Medros, Cornwall; 15 cent. ..	66'	19' (24') × 15'	15' × 15'	15' × 15'
<b>THREE-PART PLAN; STRAIGHT; LOW HALL</b>				
<i>Old Rectory, Dunchideock, Devon; early 15 cent.</i> (no. 2, p. 124) ..	61'	19' (24') × 17'	15' × 17'	13' × 17'
<i>Rectory Farm, Stanton Drew, Somerset; 15 cent.</i> (no. 5, p. 131) ..	60'	18' 8" (24' 8") × 18' 3"	14' 6" × 16'	14' × 18' 3"
Manston, Sidmouth, Devon; late 15 cent. ..	61'	15' ? (22') × 15' 6"	15' × 15' 6"	16' × 15' 6"
Nettacott, Devon; 16 cent. ..	65'	20' (25') × 18' 3"	17' × 18' 3"	17' 4" × 18' 3"
<b>THREE-PART PLAN; L-SHAPED; OPEN HALL</b>				
Tickenham, Somerset; 15 cent. ..	60' + ?	32' (36') × 20'	—	30' × 16' 6"
Marsh Barton, Devon; early 16 cent. ..	58'	18' (24') × 16' 6"	12' × 17'	25' × 14'
Hareston, Devon; early 16 cent. ..	69'	24' 6" (30') × 18'	26' 6" × 15'	16' 6" × 14' 6"
<b>THREE-PART PLAN; L-SHAPED; LOW HALL</b>				
<i>Old Rectory, Sampford Peverell, Devon; early 16 cent.</i> (no. 8, p. 139) ..	57'	19' (25' 6") × 18' 6"	9' × 18' 6"	24' 6" × 15'
<i>The Old Parsonage, Walton, Somerset; 15 cent.</i> (no. 6, p. 132) ..	97'	(35' ?) × 15'	—	24' ? × 15'
Blackmoor, Somerset; 15 cent. ..	90'	24' (32') × 18' 4"	20' × 15' 6"	20' 6" × 18' 4"
Shapcot Barton, Devon; 16 cent. ..	53' + ?	22' (27') × 18'	—	17' 6" × 18'
<b>TWO-PART PLAN; STRAIGHT; OPEN HALL</b>				
Lower Bramble, Devon; late 15 cent. ..	55'	23' 3" (30') × 22'	19' × 22'	19' × 22'
<b>TWO-PART PLAN; STRAIGHT; LOW HALL</b>				
<i>Old Vicarage, Congresbury, Somerset; 15 cent.</i> (no. 4, p. 128) ..	48'	25' × 15'	8' ? × 15'	15' × 15'
Gothelncy, Somerset; early 15 cent. ..	65'	35' (41') × 16'	13' × 16"	13' × 16"
Ashbury, Berkshire; 15 cent. ..	75'	34' (40') × 20'	13' ? × 20' 6"	20' × 20' 6"
<b>TWO-PART PLAN; L-SHAPED; OPEN HALL</b>				
West Challacombe, Devon; late 15 cent. ..	58' 6"	26' (35') × 17' 6"	17' × 14'	23' 6" × 14'
<b>TWO-PART PLAN; L-SHAPED; LOW HALL</b>				
Hams Barton, Devon; late 15 cent. ..	53'	25' (35') × 20'	17' × 15'	17' × 15'

\* The dimension in brackets is the length of the hall including the screens-passage. Dimensions are cited in feet (') and inches (").