Medieval Domestic Architecture in Berkshire.

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(*Continued from Vol.* 44, *No.* 2).

IV. FIFTEENTH CENTURY.

THE fifteenth century witnessed the final development of the medieval house. It was then that the quadrangular plan became popular for the larger type and towards the end of the century the hall, which had hitherto been generally of two storeys, was often reduced in height and importance by the placing of rooms above it; verticality was giving way to the horizontal form of elevation, which characterises the Tudor and later types of domestic architecture. As has been mentioned earlier, some houses were designed from the first on a quadrangular plan, while others became quadrangular in course of time by additions to an already existing structure. Berkshire affords an example of the former type at Ockwells and of the latter in the "Abbey" at Sutton Courtenay. Wytham is also an instance of a house designed on the quadrangular plan, but it was so mauled and refashioned early in the nineteenth century that little except the gatehouse is in its original state. The house now consists of two quadrangles, but it is uncertain whether it was so designed from the first. Sutton Courtenay "Abbey" has been already briefly described under the fourteenth century and of Ockwells more will be said later on.

It was, doubtless, the desire to provide more accommodation as economically as possible that led to the placing of rooms over the hall and in the smaller type of house this occurs well before the end of the century, as at Ashbury, which is, undoubtedly, one of the most interesting medieval houses in Berkshire. It was not until the sixteenth century was well advanced that it became customary to have more than two storeys in a range of purely domestic buildings save, of course, in the tower houses of the North, of which there are no examples in this part of the country. In the second half of the sixteenth century three storeys are of frequent occurrence and many medieval houses when refashioned in Elizabethan and Jacobean times were provided with spacious attics fitted with fireplaces and adequate fenestration, doubtless with the object of affording better sleeping accommodation for the servants than was available in the kitchen and hall where they had hitherto usually reposed. The much rebuilt north wing at Charney Basset, in Berkshire, affords an admirable example of this arrangement. At Fyfield the hall range was completely refashioned about the end of the sixteenth century, the walls being raised and two

upper storeys provided. So complete was the transformation here that almost the only evidences of the original fourteenth century work are to be found in the porch and the service doorways. The solar wing on the other hand remains comparatively unaltered. At Bisham there was much building and refashioning in the third quarter of the sixteenth century, but here the new work has been mainly erected round rather than above, or within, the medieval house, though a flat plaster ceiling was inserted in the great chamber, above which were formed extensive attics where the magnificent fourteenth century roof may be studied at close quarters.

The materials most readily to hand continued to be used and bricks were not commonly employed in Berkshire until the sixteenth century was well advanced, though occasionally found in domestic work of the latter part of the fifteenth century as at Ockwells and formerly at Southcote, near Reading, where the remains of the moated manor house were wantonly destroyed in 1921. The early brickwork of Berkshire exhibits none of the elaboration found in the Eastern Counties and stone is generally employed for the architectural details.

A very pleasing and characteristic feature of late Gothic domestic architecture is the use of the *oriel window*, which gave scope for much variety of treatment and at the same time helped to relieve the flatness of a long range of walling or a gable end. It has been suggested that in its origin the oriel was a recess for the altar in a small chapel rather in the nature of an apse, and as a matter of fact the earliest surviving example, which occurs at Prudhoe Castle, in Northumberland and dates from the thirteenth century, is at the east end of a chapel over the great gate. But it is not until the fifteenth century that the use of the oriel becomes general and widespread. Strictly speaking an oriel window is one corbelled out from the wall, but the large bay windows characteristic of many late Gothic halls, as at Ockwells, are clearly a development of the same idea and may be treated as such. Sometimes the oriel is in two storeys serving rooms on both floors, as in the solar wing at Ockwells. At Wytham there are some good early sixteenth century overhanging oriels, which have been in some cases probably reset and partially renewed in the process. The most genuine are those on the front of the gatehouse which appear to be *in situ*. There are some late medieval oriels of wood in the Bell Inn at Hurley.

Another interesting feature of the period, and one which admirably illustrates the medieval craftsman's skill in converting something purely utilitarian into a thing of beauty, is the treatment of the *chimneys*, which often exhibit much ingenuity in design whether constructed of stone or brick. Sometimes they are octagonal, occasionally round and often rectangular, as are most of the surviving examples in Berkshire. There is a good octagonal

instance at Sutton Courtenay. In the sixteenth century the spiral shape is sometimes found both in stone and brick, but there appear to be no ancient surviving examples of this type in Berkshire. The chimneys at Ockwells are of brick, but they have been much renewed, though probably more or less on the old lines.

Heavily timbered *ceilings* with moulded beams and chamfered joists are characteristic of late medieval work and sometimes exhibit carved bosses at the intersections of the beams, *e.g.* in the hall at Ashbury, where the bosses (*Plate* No. IX) display the Tudor rose, showing that the work is after 1485. Ockwells retains some good timbered ceilings in the parlour and former offices. In medieval roofs and ceilings the joists are usually approximately the same width as the interstices. The main roofs of the period retain a good pitch as a rule, though usually less acute than in the fourteenth century. The collar braced variety occurs frequently and there are notable examples in Berkshire at Ashbury and Ockwells. A form of queen post roof occurs in the solar at Ockwells and elsewhere. The braced rafter type of roof is found all through the later medieval period, but being, as a rule, severely plain it is often difficult to date. The example in the hall at Bisham may be contemporary with the fabric (late thirteenth century). Domestic roofs were sometimes decorated in colour and there are remains of a red and green scheme on the main roof at Ashbury.

The use of *glass*, both plain and painted, for domestic use was general before the end of the fifthteenth century, but surviving examples are rare. The best in Berkshire is the splendid series of heraldic glass in the hall at Ockwells, which has the additional interest of being *in situ*. It would be difficult to find a finer display of medieval domestic stained glass than that at Ockwells. There is a little heraldic glass of the fifteenth century in the great chamber at Bisham, but it is not in its original position. The interesting heraldic glass formerly at Childrey Manor has unfortunately disappeared, probably when most of the hall was pulled down in the middle of the last century.

It was customary to place a *screen* across the lower end of the great hall and Berkshire is fortunate in possessing two fifteenth century examples in a good state of preservation at Bisham and Ockwells. A gallery was often contrived over the screens passage and occurs both at Bisham and Ockwells.

Fireplaces tend to become increasingly elaborate with four-centred heads and sometimes a small projecting mantle shelf. The spandrels and apex of the arch are often decorated with heraldry and colour was frequently applied to the arch and its surround. The late Gothic type of fireplace persisted right into the seventeenth century and there are good examples of Jacobean date in the manor house at Kennington in Berkshire, which at first sight suggest a much earlier date. The elaborate overmantles so characteristic

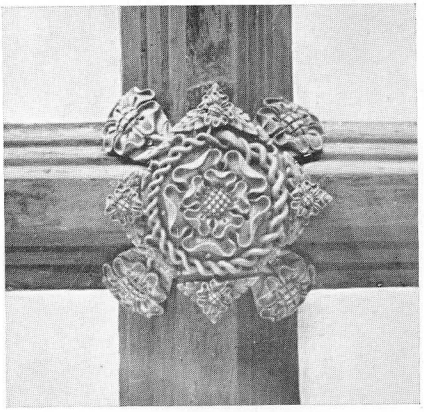

Photo : E. T. Long.

PLATE IX.

Chapel Manor House, Ashbury.
Ceiling Boss in Hall.

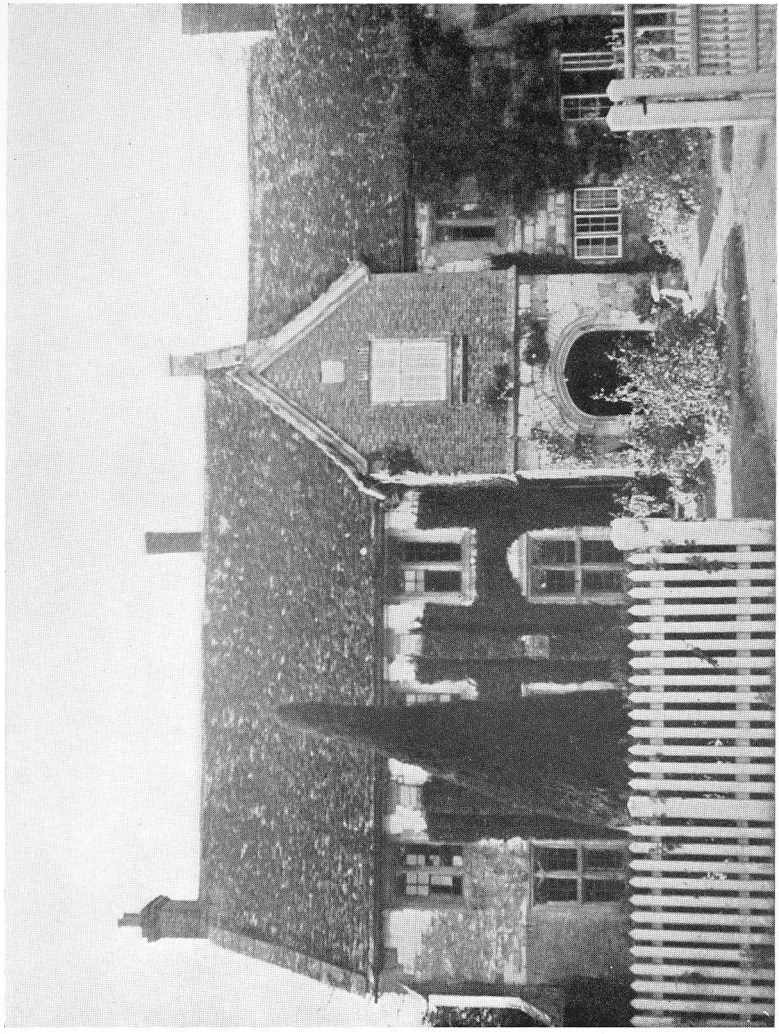

Photo: P. S. Spokes.

PLATE X.

Chapel Manor House, Ashbury. South Front.

of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods do not occur in medieval work. In later times these open fireplaces were frequently filled in with metal grates and surrounds completely obscuring them. Of late years numbers of old fireplaces have been brought to light in perfect condition by the removal of the incongruous insertions. The above mentioned examples at Kennington were all concealed until the recent restoration of the house.

The fashion of *panelling* the walls of rooms came into vogue during the latter part of the fifteenth century. Hitherto the plaster surface had been decorated with paintings or covered with hangings when it was desired to create an effect of richness. Of course this treatment was only employed in the more important rooms of the larger houses. In the majority of cases the lime-washed walls were without any form of decoration. The earliest type of panelling consisted of planks of oak massively framed up and devoid of any form of decoration. Early in the sixteenth century the linenfold variety of panelling was devised and gave scope for much delightful decoration. Arabesques and figure carving in low relief are characteristic of the second quarter of the century. There is very little medieval wall panelling now to be seen in Berkshire; the best and most extensive display is at Ashbury and even this is more in the nature of partitions rather than wall panelling. The panelling in the hall and elsewhere at Ockwells probably belongs to the second half of the sixteenth century and is, therefore, post-medieval.

The exigencies of space do not permit of a detailed account of all the surviving examples of late Gothic domestic architecture in Berkshire. It is proposed, therefore, to take the principal portions of the typical medieval house and note briefly under each the more notable examples to be found in the county concluding with a more detailed description of two of the most important houses of the period—Ashbury and Ockwells.

The remaining *halls* of the period are not numerous, and with the exception of those at Ashbury and Ockwells, have been greatly altered. Ockwells has a two-storeyed hall, which retains its original form and details in an unusually perfect state of preservation. The screen with gallery above remains at the lower end and there is a rectangular bay at the dais. Childrey manor house formerly possessed a two-storeyed hall, which was unfortunately pulled down in the middle of the last century with the exception of the lower end (*Plate* No. XI), which is approached through a porch with chamber above; the two service doorways remain. Much of the material was re-used in erecting a two-storeyed wing on the site of the destroyed portion. The hall of the manor house at East Hendred was of two storeys, but an upper floor was inserted at a later date and all original features have been destroyed, or concealed, though the old roof is said to remain above a plaster ceiling. Ashbury has a single storeyed hall now divided by an

oak partition ; more will be said of this later on. Other halls of one storey remain in the parsonage at Radley and in a fifteenth century house at Shippon, but both have been much pulled about on more than one occasion. The former house is a timber framed structure of early sixteenth century date and the latter is of stone and altogether more pretentious ; it was probably a grange of Abingdon Abbey.

Solars of the period under review in anything like their original state are rare in Berkshire. The two best of this period are at Ashbury and Ockwells, both of which will be described later.

The *domestic offices* have for the most part been altered almost beyond recognition and in the majority of cases are not utilised for their original purpose. At Ashbury the kitchen still serves as such, but the great open fireplace has been filled with a modern range. The offices at Childrey now serve as an entrance hall. In both these examples the kitchen occupied the normal position beyond the screens passage at the lower end of the hall, but at Ockwells, where the house is quadrangular in plan, while the buttery and pantry were in the normal position, the kitchen was on the opposite side of the court to the hall, but it no longer serves its original purpose.

No complete *domestic chapel* of the period now survives in Berkshire, but part of the north wall of one remains at Ockwells, where it occupied the space between the south-east angle of the house and the gatehouse ; it was brick with stone dressings and was unfinished in 1465 when Sir John Norreys made his will and bequeathed " to the full bilding and making uppe of the Chapell with the Chambres ajoyning with 'n my manoir of Okolt . . . not yet finisshed, XL pounds." The " Chambres ajoyning " were probably for the use of the chaplain. At Ashbury a structure standing to the north of the house and running east and west may have been the chapel, but it has been virtually rebuilt at some period and there are now no definitely medieval features visible.

As regards *barns* and *pigeon houses* of late medieval date there is not much to be said. Ockwells retains some timber-framed barns and a circular pigeon house of brick with stone dressings. At Bisham and Hurley there are good stone barns and pigeon houses, the latter in both cases being circular. At Shellingford the only remains of the manor house consist of a long range of early sixteenth century date, now used as cottages, but probably once part of the offices.

The more important houses were usually approached through a *gatehouse*, which led either into a large forecourt, of which the house formed one side as at Ockwells, or formed the direct entry to a small court, around which were grouped the principal portions of the house itself, as at Wytham. The gatehouses at Ockwells and Wytham are the only surviving medieval examples of purely domestic origin in Berkshire, the former being of brick and timber

and the latter of stone. The Wytham gatehouse (*Plate* No. XI) is an imposing structure with two storeys above the entrance, each with an oriel window on the front and two stair turrets flanking the inner angles and rising above the embattled parapet.

The two best and least altered houses of the fifteenth century in Berkshire are the manor houses of Ashbury and Ockwells, the former of chalk with stone dressings and the latter of timber framed construction with brick fillings. Ockwells, for long derelict, has been excellently restored, but Ashbury, alas, is still disfigured internally by modern partitions and plaster ceilings, which conceal its noble timber roof and other interesting features. If Ashbury was sympathetically restored as Ockwells has been it would be the most interesting late medieval house of stone in the county. We will conclude this brief survey of the medieval domestic architecture of Berkshire with a concise description of these two notable houses. The manor of *Ashbury* belonged for many centuries to Glastonbury Abbey and the house we are about to describe was, doubtless, built under the auspices of that important monastery. Though constructed of local materials it is in some respects of such a definite West Country character that it may well have been built by Somerset masons. There is a finish and style about the work which at once recalls many of the late Gothic houses in which Somerset is so rich. The materials are chalk with stone dressings and the roofs are covered with stone slates. (*Plate* No. X). The plan is L-shaped, the main portion consisting of two blocks running east and west, the larger to the west containing the hall with the solar above, and the smaller the kitchen and offices. A projecting porch with chamber above leads to the screens passage. The upper part of the front of the porch was rebuilt in 1697, which date occurs on the gable. At the back of the main block is a small wing of two storeys containing a room on each floor, a staircase and garderobe. An attic was contrived in this wing in post-medieval times. To the north of the kitchen block and connected with it by a modern structure is a small building running east and west, the foundations of which appear to be medieval, though the rest of the fabric can hardly be older than the eighteenth century. It is possible that this much rebuilt structure represents the chapel, but there are now no visible indications to confirm this theory. Over the hall are two large rooms divided by an oak partition, the easternmost of which was probably the solar. This latter is separated from the chamber over the porch by an open wooden screen of fifteenth century date. The original roof remains above the plaster ceiling of both rooms and is a superb piece of medieval carpentry of collar-braced type with wall posts and an elaborate wall plate in the solar ; the western section of this rood possesses remains of colour decoration in red and green. A small original chimney shaft remains on the east gable of the hall range and served a fireplace in the solar now completely blocked. This small gable chimney

is a characteristic West Country feature. The stack of the hall chimney is original, but the shaft is of brick and probably dates from the eighteenth century; the fireplace remains behind a modern grate. The windows of the hall range are all of two lights with cinquefoiled heads; those lighting the hall itself have transoms. The hall block has typical fifteenth century buttresses with one set-off. The kitchen block retains only one original window on the first floor; it is of two lights with uncusped heads. In this part of the house is the upper portion of a wooden newel staircase which communicates with an attic and was probably inserted early in the seventeenth century. The front door is probably original and is of two layers studded with nail heads.

The north wing retains most of its original fenestration, including single and two-light windows with cinquefoiled heads. The windows here and in the hall block retain their original ironwork. The hall has a fine timber ceiling with moulded beams and elaborately carved bosses exhibiting the Tudor rose (*Plate* No. IX); it is now plastered below the joists. The screens passage is separated from the hall by a thin partition wall on the site of the screen. The service doorways remain, but two of them are blocked and the present entrance to the kitchen is modern. The offices have been much pulled about, but the kitchen retains its spacious fireplace, in which a modern grate has been inserted; the lintel is formed by an enormous beam. The roof of the kitchen block is old, but appears to have been reconstructed in the early part of the seventeenth century. The north wing contains the stair leading to the solar and the upper room is separated from the stair by an original oak partition. Next to this room was the garderobe, now thrown into it by the removal of the dividing partition.

The manor of *Ockwells*, in the parish of Bray, belonged to the Norreys family from 1267, but it was not until the first half of the fifteenth century that there is any evidence of the place being residentially used by members of the family. At this time it came into the possession of John Norreys, younger son of Sir Henry Norreys of Speke, in Lancashire, who became Sheriff and Esquire of the Body to Henry VI during his infancy. This John was succeeded by another John, the builder of the present house during the third quarter of the century. The second John was knighted by Edward IV, to whom he was Master of the Wardrobe. The house has since then suffered very little alteration, though the chapel, a large structure of brick with stone dressings has almost disappeared and there is a modern service block to the north-west, which harmonises admirably with the rest of the fabric. The house is built round a small central court on three sides of which runs a cloister-like corridor. It is approached through an outer court entered on the south by a picturesque gatehouse and with the barns and other outbuildings grouped round it. The hall

occupies the centre of the east front with the former offices on the south and the parlour and solar to the north. The kitchen was across the inner court at the north-west angle of the house, a departure from the normal medieval plan, rather unusual at this date. A cloister is occasionally found in other quadrangular houses of this peroid, but it is not a common feature in purely domestic buildings. The hall is entered from a porch with chamber above and retains its medieval character in a marked degree. The screen is *in situ* with the gallery above and there is a wonderful display of contemporary heraldic glass in the windows. The occurrence of the arms of Richard Beauchamp, Bishop of Salisbury, 1451–81, helps to establish the date of the house and this is further confirmed by Sir John's will of 1465. The open timber roof is a fine one of arched collar braced type and the open fireplace is probably original. There is a large rectangular bay window at the upper end. The walls are panelled to the level of the windows, but this is an addition dating from the third quarter of the sixteenth century. At the upper end of the hall is the parlour with the solar above. The walls of both these rooms have panelling similar to that in the hall, and the former has a mid-sixteenth century fireplace with a Jacobean overmantle. The solar has an open timber roof of queen post construction and an oriel window in the east wall. The original kitchen is now the library and the former offices at the lower end of the hall have been converted into a parlour. Early in the seventeenth century considerable alterations were made in the interior of the north range with the object of inserting a staircase. A feature of the house is the fine series of elaborate barge boards decorating the gables of the east front. Rarely outside East Anglia can such fine examples be seen as these at Ockwells.

The outbuildings are unusually complete and form with the house a most valuable example of a fifteenth century manorial establishment. The circular pigeon house of brick and stone with its substantial buttresses is particularly pleasing. (For a fully illustrated description of Ockwells, see *English Homes* by H. Avray Tipping, Periods I and II, Vol. II, " Country Life," 1937.)

REMAINS OF DOMESTIC ARCHITECTURE.

12TH CENTURY.

Appleton
Sutton Courtenay

13TH CENTURY.

Bisham
Brimpton
Charney Basset
East Hendred
Sonning (foundations only)

14TH CENTURY.

Bisham
Denchworth

Great Coxwell		Fyfield	
Cumnor (2)		Sutton Courtenay	
	1400—1550.		
Abingdon (several)	T	Harwell	T
Ashbury	S	East Hendred (several)	T
Barkham	T	Hurley	T
Binfield	T	Marcham	S
Bray	T	North Moreton	S
Brightwell	T	Newbury (several)	T
Childrey (2)	S	Ockwells	T
Chilton	T	Radley	T
Clewer	T	Shellingford	S
Compton Beauchamp	S	Shippon	S
Cumnor (2)	S	Steventon (several)	T
Denchworth	S.T.	Sutton Courtenay	T
Faringdon	S	Ufton	T
Goosey	S	Wadley	S
East Hagbourne	T	White Waltham	T
West Hanney	T	Wytham	S

S=of stone or chalk construction.
T=of timber framed construction.

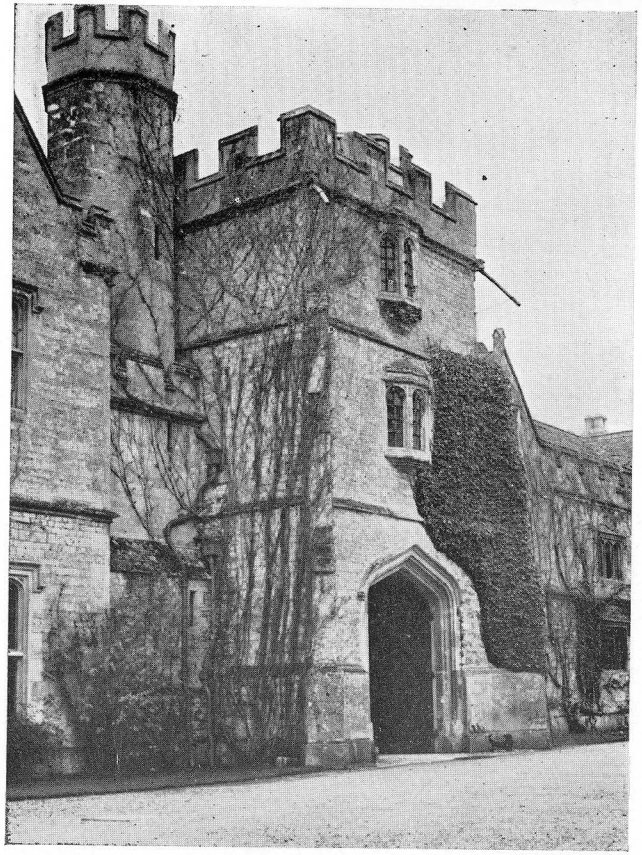

Photo : E. T. Long.

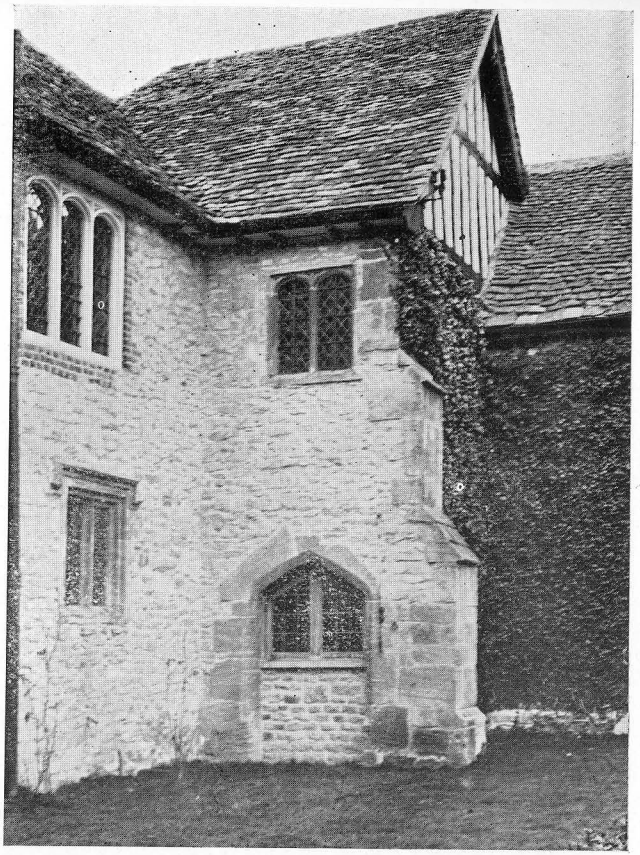

Photo : E. T. Long.

PLATE XI.

Wytham "Abbey." The Great Gate.

Childrey Manor. Remains of Great Hall.