

# *Marches Archaeology*

## **Bletchley Manor Bletchley Moreton Say Shropshire**

**A report on archaeological  
building recording**

March 2005

*Marches Archaeology Series 373*

**This report is produced by**

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**Bletchley Manor,  
Bletchley,  
Moreton Say,  
Shropshire**

**A report on archaeological building recording**

**NGR: SJ 6216 3358**

**Report by  
Susan Fielding**

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*Summary*

*Marches Archaeology were commissioned to carry out a Level 2 record of Bletchley Manor, Bletchley (NGR SJ 6216 3358). The house dates to the late 16<sup>th</sup> century and is a double-pile house of close-studded timber frame construction. In the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the house underwent a programme of modernisation, with a new staircase inserted and two rooms fitted out with panelling. Bletchley Manor then remained reasonably unchanged until the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a brick built range was added onto the south-east end of the building, and the house underwent a further programme of improvement.*

**1 Introduction**

Marches Archaeology was commissioned by Nigel Daly Design to carry out a programme of building recording at Bletchley Manor, Bletchley, Shropshire (SJ 6216 3358). A planning application had been submitted by the client to carry out alterations to the property which is a Grade II listed building, and the Local Planning Authority's Development Control Officer recommended that 'a programme of archaeological work in accordance with a written scheme of investigation' be carried out.

The Local Planning Authority's Development Control Officer produced a 'brief for building recording' and Marches Archaeology produced two projects proposals, one covering an initial photographic recording of the house 'as is' together with documentary research (December 2003), and a second relating to the provision of a drawn record (January 2004).

The work was carried out by Marches Archaeology between 3<sup>rd</sup> December 2003 and 7<sup>th</sup> February 2005.

**2 Aims and objectives**

The Institute of Field Archaeology (IFA) defines Building Investigation and Recording as "a programme of work intended to establish the character, history, dating, form and archaeological development of a specified building, or structure, or complex and its setting, including buried components on land, inter-tidal zone or underwater".

The purpose of Building Investigation and Recording is defined by the IFA as “to examine a specified building, structure, or complex, and its setting, in order to inform [either] the formulation of a strategy for the conservation, alteration, demolition, repair or management of a building, or structure, or complex and its setting [or] to seek a better understanding, compile a lasting record, analyse the findings/record, and then disseminate the results”.

The aims the programme of archaeological recording were

- The consultation of primary and secondary documentary sources relating to the area
- The preparation of a Level 2 record, as defined in the RCHM(E) publication *Recording Historic Buildings – A Descriptive Specification*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn. 1998.

### **3 Methodology**

#### *Documentary research*

Documentary research was undertaken, which looked at accessible sources including historic maps, photographs and written documents. The research included looking at the Shropshire Records and Archives, the Shropshire Sites and Monuments Record, and the National Monuments Record.

#### *Fieldwork*

The fieldwork was carried out in accordance with a RCHME level 2 record. This consisted of written, drawn and photographic elements. A comprehensive photographic survey using 35mm colour slides and black and white negatives was carried out of all internal and external elevations and fittings prior to any alterations taking place.

The alterations were subjected to an archaeological watching brief, and as the building fabric was progressively revealed, the photographic record was updated. All internal elevations revealing substantial remains of the original timber-framing, and the south external elevation exposed after stripping, were surveyed using a reflectorless EDM and TheoLt with further additions made using measured hand survey.

Architects drawings of the external elevations prior to stripping and of the floor plans were provided by the client. These formed the basis of those included in this report, except for the north-west external elevation which was re-surveyed after stripping. Further time was allowed on site for a written description and interpretation, in which all elements of the building were included.

#### *Office work*

On completion of the fieldwork a site archive was prepared, with the written, drawn and photographic data catalogued and cross-referenced and a summary produced. Two-dimensional elevations showing the construction and phasing of the building were produced from the three-dimensional survey data, along with this illustrated interim report detailing the aims, methods and results of the project.

### **4 Site description**

Bletchley Manor is located at NGR SJ 6216 3358, in the village of Bletchley in Moreton Say parish, Shropshire. It is located on the south edge of Bletchley, separated from the main body

of the village by the A41 8 miles south of Whitchurch, which at this point is a dual carriageway.

The house is orientated north-west south-east and forms one side of a former farm complex (Figure 1), the out buildings of which have been converted for residential use (Bletchley Court).

The building is constructed largely of closed-studded timber framing, with the south-east elevation replaced in brick and with a later brick extension on the south-west end. The brick elevations were painted with false studs and panels.

## 5 Archaeological and historical background

Prior to 1066 the manor of Bletchley, located in the parish of Moreton Say was held by Almund and was valued at 40 shillings. The Domesday survey records Moreton Say as held by Roger de Lacy, from Earl Roger and William from him and as having 1 plough and eight serfs plus four villeins and four smallholders with two ploughs and woodland for fattening 100 pigs, with its value being 30 shillings.

Earl Roger was the Vicomte of the Heimois in Normandy and was related to William the Conqueror by marriage. He had come to England in 1067 and received much of Shropshire *c.* 1071 after the death of Earl Edwin of Mercia. Although involved in the rebellion against William Rufus in 1088, he retained his lands, on his death in 1094 Moreton Say passing to his second son Hugh, and on Hugh's death in 1098, to his elder son Robert of Belleme. Robert rebelled against the crown in 1101 and subsequently all his lands and title were forfeit.

Roger de Lacy was descended from the de Lacy family which had originated from Lassy, in the Calvados region of France. He had also been involved in the 1088 rebellion against William Rufus, and as a consequence had been banished to Normandy. On his death *c.* 1106 his English holdings passed to his brother Hugh, and then to Gilbert de Lacy, Hugh's nephew and a strong supporter of Empress Matilda.

Sometime between 1195 and 1222 the Moreton Say manor became held by Helias de Say of Stokesay, with Hugh de Say recorded as sitting on a Wem inquest in 1290, and named as Lord of Moreton in 1308 and 1310. The Lordship of Bletchley was held from the elder branch of the Say family by the de Bletchley family, who adopted the name from that of the manor. Nicholas de Bletchley granted a mill at Bletchley to Lilleshall Abbey in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century.

By the mid 13<sup>th</sup> century Roger de Bletchley was holding the lordship of Bletchley of Robert Corbet of Moreton, under the overlordship of the Theobald de Verdon, and in turn donated to Lilleshall Abbey "all his wood called Overe", a half-virgate in the vill of Bletchley and half of his meadow. Theobald de Verdon had inherited the manor through his mother Margery, wife of John de Verdon and daughter of Walter de Lacy. By 1285 Robert de Bletchley sold his interest in the manor entirely to Robert Corbet, who is recorded in the *Feodary* as holding it of Theobald de Verdon. In 1309 the will of Matilda Corbet showed she had held the vill of Bletchley, and on Theobald de Verdon's death in 1317 the Corbet family were found to have held one-fourth of a knights fee in 'Blecchele' under Theobald, with the estate valued at 40 shillings *per annum*.



Between 1680 and 1800 the population of Moreton Say doubled, with the Compton Census of 1676 giving a figure of 200 communicants. The population appeared to hold reasonably steady from 1676 until c.1715 after which there was, in general, a substantial population expansion, which lasted until the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. At the same time the farming population was decreasing and the labouring population increasing, with the amalgamation of many farms occurring. Between 1670 and 1800 it is estimated that approximately one third of the farms in the parish ceased to exist as separate entities.

In 1721 Rowland Hill sold the manor and estate of Bletchley to John Corser; by 1831 the Bagshaws Directory of Shropshire recorded that Richard Corbet esq. and John Tayleur esq. jointly held the manor of Moreton Say. The township of Bletchley was recorded in 1841 as containing 16 properties and 101 inhabitants with a rateable value of £684 16s, the major landowners being Earl of Powis and George Corser esq. By 1891, Kellys Directory states the lord of the manor of Bletchley was Henry Reginald Corbet esq., who shared the manor of Moreton Say with John Tayleur esq. The Earl of Powis remained one of the principal landowners, together with the Reverend Henry H Price of Acton Hill, Stafford, and the rateable value of the township had increased to £1,171. However by 1929 Kellys mentions Bletchley merely as “a hamlet”, with no details as to its lordship, landowners or value. It does list a William Furber, as a farmer at Manor Farm at this time however.

## **6 The Results**

Bletchley manor is a close-studded timber framed house of two parallel ranges of two bays each, with a third two bay range of brick at the south-west (Figure 3) end which until recently was painted with ‘mock’ timber framing. All three ranges are gabled to front and rear (north-west and south-east) (Plates 1 & 5), and there are four brick chimney stacks, one in each of the valleys created by the triple-gabled roof and two on the south-east end wall.

### ***Phase I (c. 1594)***

The first phase of construction consisted of the building of a double-pile house comprised of two parallel ranges orientated north-west south-east, each two bays in length. The north-west and south-east end of each range was gabled, the roof of each range being hipped to form a double-pile roof (Figure 5, Plate 2).

The external walls were constructed of close-studded timber framing, the studs being storey height without intermediate rails, and secured into the girding beams by pegged mortice and tenon joints. The corner posts and central uprights between the ranges were jowled, with small braces set between the top of the corner posts and the tie-beams on the north-west elevation and wall plate on the north-west elevation. The panels were infilled with wattle and daub, or more probably, lathes, as suggested by grooves visible along the edges of some of the studs in the north-west and north-east elevations.

The front (north-west) elevation was symmetrical, with the entrance placed just off-centre to allow for the main upright between the two ranges (Figure 5). The doorway was small and the opening is plain with no carved decoration or moulding, and no evidence of the presence of decorative doorhead. There are empty mortices in the uprights either side of the doorway however, just above the level of the lintel, with the remains of a third lower down where the upright to the left of the door has been truncated at a later date (Plate 6). These may indicate

that there was a structure such as a small, single storey, porch creating a more impressive entrance.

This front entrance led into a ground floor with either a lobby or baffle entry plan. Internally the house was divided into four, roughly equally sized rooms by centrally placed north-west south-east and north-east south west cross-walls (Figure 3). These were constructed of larger, square panelled timber framing, infilled with wattle and daub, a sample of which survives on the first floor (Plate 9).

A large central brick stack, heavily altered in later phases, stood directly opposite the front door with a large room to the left and right, separated beyond the chimney stack by a partition wall, later removed. The room immediately right off the entrance (Room 1) would have been heated by a large inglenook fireplace, only the right hand side of which remains significantly unaltered (Plate 7). This had a large lintel with a simple roll moulding along the lower edge, and internally was corbelled inwards above the level of the lintel to narrow into a smaller flue. A small square opening, now bricked up, is visible in the side wall, possibly creating a shelf.

The room was lit by two windows, one in the north-west wall which has had a later sash window inserted, and one in the south-west elevation which has been bricked up (Figure 11). Due to the later alterations the form of these windows is obscured but it is likely that they consisted of vertical mullions holding panels of leaded lights fixed by lead or wire, as was common by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century. The number and position of the mullions cannot be seen, but the openings left by the surrounding struts are relatively large, indicating that these were almost certainly glazed. The upper lintel has a central instep, the origin of which is unclear, but which was probably created when the windows were enlarged in later phases to accommodate portrait leaded or sash windows.

Running north-east to south-west across the room was a large, central bridging-beam, simply decorated with a steep chamfer, the north-west end of which was supported by the brickwork of the chimney stack. The floor joists ran north-west and south-east from the beam, cogged into the top of it and decorated in the same fashion. Those joists in the north corner of the room were supported at the south-east end by the brickwork of the fireplace.

Room 2 has been heavily altered at a later date, and together with the fact that some areas of plaster were not removed during the watching brief, it is not known what access there was between the front entrance and this room during this phase. Internally the building fabric of the walls is obscured by later panelling and a ceiling has been inserted to hide the floor joists of the first floor room above. From the framing visible on the outside it is clear that this room was also lit by two window identical to those in Room 1 (Figure 7), and it was almost certainly heated by a fireplace set into the north-east side of the central stack.

Room 3 appears to have been accessed directly from Room 2, via a doorway in the centre of the north-east south-west partition wall (Figure 9). This had a pegged doorhead, the underside of which was worked into a shallow segmental arch and decorated with a chamfer. The south-east elevation has been completely replaced at a later date, but this room was lit by at least one window in the north-east wall. This has again been heavily altered later, but the remains indicate an opening the same as those found in Rooms 1 and 2.

Room 4 would have been accessed from Room 3 via a doorway identical to that found between Rooms 2 and 3 (Figure 9), with possible further access from Room 1 via the top of a flight of stone steps leading to the cellar, although this access would have been awkward (Plate 11). The two external Phase I walls of this room have been replaced at later dates (Figure 5), but it is likely that it would have been lit by two further windows similar to those seen elsewhere on the ground floor. Both rooms contain large bridging beams and exposed joists as those found in Room 1.

The doorway in the north-west corner of Room 4 led to the top of a flight of stone steps which led down to a brick built cellar beneath Room 2. These steps turned 90° immediately north-west of the doorway to run in a straight flight down into the south corner of the cellar. The steps could also have been accessed from Room 1, with a further two steps leading from the floor level here to the 90° turn in the steps. This cellar had brick lined walls and a brick floor, and contained a wide, solid brick ledge around all four walls. In the north-east wall the ledge was interrupted by what appears to be an outlet for drainage (Plate 10), and it is possible that this room was used as a buttery or dairy.

As stated earlier, the cross walls forming the partitions between rooms 1 and 4, and 2 and 3, and between 3 and 4 are timber framed. Where these survive intact they have two panels to a storey, although those between rooms 1, 3 and 4 have undergone later alteration.

Access to the first floor was probably via a main staircase in the same position as the current staircase, which is itself a later replacement. This would have given access directly to Room 5, which was connected to Rooms 6 and 8 by doorways in the north-east and south-east walls respectively.

A secondary staircase rising from the south-east corner of Room 3 to Room 7 is suggested by the plan of floor joists on the first floor. A further staircase may have risen directly above this to give access to the northern attic rooms. An identical staircase rising from the north-east corner of room 8 would have given access to the southern range attic rooms- evidence for these staircases can be seen in the two identical sized openings in the rafter plan (Figure 4), the northern of which contained a later staircase and the southern one inserted joists.

There is no visible structural evidence for a corridor within the first floor plan, but it would appear likely that the rear staircases would have been partitioned off from the main body of Rooms 7 and 8 in order to retain the privacy of the family. The rear elevation and the partition wall between Rooms 7 and 8 in this area have been replaced in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and therefore evidence for a short corridor for this purpose would have been removed.

Access between the first floor rooms appears otherwise to have been directly through connecting doors with no evidence of a central corridor. As stated the staircase probably led into Room 5, from which Room 6 would have been connected by a doorway in the north-east corner of the room, evidenced by a empty mortice in the north-west face of the jowled post forming the central upright of the two cross-walls (Figure 9). It is likely that a second doorway would have led into Room 8 in the eastern corner of Room 5, roughly in the same position as the current doorway (Figure 9). Room 7 however would then only be accessible from Room 8. The partition wall between these two rooms has been largely removed and then replaced during later phases of alterations, removing any evidence for the door's position.

Rooms 5 and 6 would both have been lit by two windows identical to those described on the ground floor and directly above them in the elevations. No windows survive in the north-east elevation of Room 7, so it must have been lit from a single window in the south-east elevation. Due to the fact that both the external walls of Room 8 have been replaced there is no surviving evidence of its lighting arrangements.

Rooms 5 and 6 would have been heated by back to back fireplaces in the brick stack that rose from the ground floor, both of which were greatly altered at later dates leaving no evidence as to their original form, while rooms 7 and 8 would have been unheated.

Each attic contained two rooms separated by the intermediate roof truss, the panels of which were infilled to form a partition wall with a central doorway connecting the two rooms (Figure 9). The attics were reached by two staircases, probably of ladder-stair form, located at the rear of the house, but were not inter connected due to the double-gable form of the roof. The south-easterly room of each attic would have been lit by a small window set centrally into the gable apex, the form of which is unclear. Peg holes are visible in the south-westerly of the two gables indicating the presence of a timber that would have performed the function of a cill, but none are found in the north-easterly gable. Above each window opening are two small, empty sockets (Figure 5), which presumably relate to the form of the window, but without more complete evidence, and in particular the cill, their particular function is uncertain.

The roof is of trenched purlin construction, the purlins being of a square section (Plate 12) and stepped between the front and rear bays, with the purlins within each bay being of unequal height (Figures 10 & 11). The exception to this is in the north-west bay, Room 11, where a small doorway above the main doorway in the intermediate truss appears to access the space above purlin height (Figure 9, Plate 13). This would suggest an inserted floor within this bay, supported on the purlins, possibly creating a space for storage, and which may have been simply of nailed planks, explaining the lack of visible evidence on the upper faces of the purlins.

The trusses exposed in the north-west façade have principal rafters largely supported by the closely set studs acting as struts, with a small unsupported collar high up within the truss (Figure 3). The intermediate trusses between the bays however have two vertical queen struts off the tie-beam supporting the principal rafters, with a short timber between them that acts both as a collar and as a door lintel for the connecting doors (Plate 13).

The construction of the house has been dated using dendrochronology to within a year or so of 1594. Five timbers sampled gave a felling date of this year, three of which were sourced from the same tree. This confirms, and narrows, a date range suggested stylistically by the construction, with the overlapping of the single storey close-studded timber framing, the trenched purlin roof and the chamfers indicating a date of the second half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Dendrochronological Dating** *by Martin Bridge*

Dendrochronological sampling took place in November 2004 with eight samples taken from the first floor or roof timbers (See table 1). All the timbers sampled were of Oak (*Quercus* spp.), and several retained sapwood.

Sample No.	Timber & position	Dates AD spanning	Heartwood/Sapwood boundary	Sapwood complement	No of rings	Mean width mm	Standard deviation mm	Means sensitivity	Felling seasons and dates/date ranges (AD)
btm01a	North roof, SW purlin	1-113	98	15½ C	113	1.86	1.26	0.195	
btm01b	ditto	47-98	98	H/S	52	1.28	0.41	0.194	
<b>*btm01m</b>	North roof, SW purlin	1481-1593	1578	15½ C	113	1.86	1.26	0.195	Spring/Summer 1594
btm02a	North roof, SE purlin	12-58	51	7	62	1.74	0.53	0.193	
btm02b	ditto	1-62	51	11	47	1.61	0.45	0.213	
<b>*btm02m</b>	North roof, SE purlin	1527-1588	1577	11	62	1.74	0.52	0.189	1588-1618
<b>*btm03</b>	North roof, central princ. rafter	1501-1582	1577	5(+9NM)	82	1.55	0.42	0.191	1591-1618
<b>*btm04</b>	South roof, NE purlin	1485-1585	1585	7NM	101	1.93	1.40	0.228	Spring/Summer 1594
<b>*btm05</b>	South roof, SE purlin	1499-1576	1571	5(+16NM)	78	0.96	0.41	0.251	1592-1612
<b>*btm06</b>	South roof, SE purlin	1496-1575	1575	H/S	80	1.14	0.58	0.190	1586-1616
<b>*btm07</b>	South roof, central princ. rafter	1489-1578	1578	H/S	90	1.87	0.74	0.244	Spring/Summer 1594
btm08a	First floor stud	1-32	-	-	32	2.97	1.07	0.284	Unknown
btm08b	Ditto	1-29	10	19C	29	1.38	0.87	0.306	Unknown
*= included in BLTCHMNR Site Master		1481-1593			113	1.78	1.23	0.170	

NM= Not Measured      C=Winter Felled      + ½ C=felled following spring/summer  
Sapwood estimate of 11 – 41 used (Miles 1997)

**Table 1: Timbers sampled from Bletchley Manor**

Many matched each other well, although sample **btm08** had too few rings to be cross matched. The very strong matches between **btm01** and **btm04** suggested they may have come from the same tree, and this was further reinforced by comparison of plots of the series. Sample **btm07** matched both of these series well, and a combined **0104** series very well, and after comparison of all the plots it was decided that all three timbers had been derived from the same tree. Their series were therefore combined to form a single series, **btm147m**, used in subsequent analysis. Series **btm02m**, derived from two cores of the same timber, showed very weak matching with the other series, but was dated independently as a check. Series **btm147m**, **btm02m**, **btm03**, **btm05**, and **btm06** were combined to form a 113-year site chronology, **BLTCHMNR**, which was subsequently dated to the period 1481-1593 by comparison with reference chronologies.

The finding that three different timbers from elements of both roofs of the parallel ranges were derived from the same tree shows that the whole was, as suspected, all built at one time. Although series **btm02** gave rather poor matching with the other series, and had to be dated independently as a check, its addition to the site chronology improved the matching found with the dated reference material. Strangely, even stronger matches were found when each of the timbers was related as an individual, although since the tree timbers from the same tree would have undue influence on the construction of the site if treated individually, it was decided to make the final site chronology from a series of five.

Although only one timber retained complete sapwood to the bark, others have lost very little sapwood on coring, and it is possible to conclude that all the timbers would have been felled within a relatively short period. The date most likely for construction of this house is therefore 1594, or within a year or two after this date.

### *Phase II (Mid-Late 17<sup>th</sup> century)*

In the second half of the 1600s the house underwent a series of modifications designed to update the house both in terms of construction and of style internally.

The lath and plaster infill of the exterior panels was replaced in many, possibly all, instances by bricks. These bricks were large, measuring 27cm by 11cm by 5cm, and, in the south-west elevation in particular, were laid on edge to minimise the number used.

Internally both Rooms 2 and 6 were fitted with oak panelling from floor to ceiling on all walls. In both cases the panels are small, formed from rails and muntins that are butt jointed and pegged, and decorated with relatively plain ribbed mouldings (Plates 15 & 16). In both cases the moulding patterns are inconsistent in some areas of the room, which together with the poor fit of panels in certain sections (particularly around the windows), indicates that the panelling was not specifically designed for the house and may well be reused from elsewhere. Room 2 had a moulded cornice applied around the top of the panelling and the bridging beam is decorated with an ovolo profile chamfer. In Room 6 are a set of wooden pegs which appear to be contemporary with the panelling.

In addition to fitting the panelling, the timber-framed south-east wall of Room 6 was removed and replaced with a less substantial timber partition wall flush with the south-east side of the chimney stack, to which the panelling was attached (Figure 10). As stated earlier, a lack of stripping on the ground floor did not revealed the fabric of the partition wall

between Rooms 1 and 2 and it is impossible to determine the original layout, but it may be suggested that it followed that on the first floor.

Room 2 was fitted with a bolection-moulded fireplace surround with an eared mantle. The fireplace itself, and the hearth has been rebuilt in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Plate 15). In Room 6 the fireplace provided also has a bolection moulded wooden surround, with a tiled inset of hand-painted blue and white tiles sporting a grape-vine design (Plate 16). These frame a small fireplace with plain cheeks and back.

The windows in these rooms were replaced with wooden cross windows containing small leaded panes (Plate 3). These were higher, rectangular windows than their Phase I landscape predecessors, necessitating the cutting out of the central portion of the lintel of the Phase I framing. The door surrounds and doors to both Room 2 and 5 were replaced, the door to Room 2 being decorated with raised and fielded panels, while that to Room 6 was designed of smaller panels of rails and muntins identical to the panelling used inside the room, and forming a continuous part of the panelled wall (Plate 16) This was hung with cast iron cockshead hinges, and was furnished with a circular drop handle.

The Phase I staircase was replaced with the current wooden staircase against the rear wall of Room 1. This is a single, straight flight of 13 steps, some of which are of quite uneven height. The balustrade comprises a square plan newel post with a square, flat, cap, both quite plainly decorated with roll moulding along the corners and edges, with a square profile handrail following the profile of the newel cap. The balusters are elaborately turned, being jointed into the string, which is plain, and handrail (Plate 8).

At the top of the staircase a partition wall boxed off the stair well from the main body of Room 5, and a new corridor was inserted running north-east south-west along the length of the first floor (Figure 5). A new doorway into Room 7 was inserted at the top of the stairs in its current position, identical to that for Room 6 but with a small brass door knob. This was allowed for by the fact that the partition wall of Room 4 had been moved to the north-east. At the south-western end of the corridor, a doorway to the east accessing Room 8, was furnished with a door identical to that opening into Room 7, while opposite it the Phase I doorway between Rooms 5 and 8 was replaced, and slightly repositioned with another identical door frame and door with cockshead hinges (Plate 17).

On the west side of the small landing at the top of the new stairwell, opposite the doorway to Room 7, a wall height cupboard was constructed. This had plank and batten doors hung with strap hinges and small brass door knobs as found on the other first floor doors.

The dating of this phase is largely dependant on stylistic evidence. The form of the panelling, which is of small, quite plain panels formed by butt jointed timbers suggests a date of the earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century, but the fact that it appears to be reused makes this unreliable dating evidence. A panel of stained glass which was removed from the house sometime in the 20<sup>th</sup> century but which survives, bears an inscription of Forster and Hill 1639. It would be tempting to associate this with the refurbishing of the house, but we have no context for its original position, and no documentary evidence to give further details on the date or names. The staircase, with its turned balusters, is far more indicative of the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, or even early 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the heavily newel posts and splayed balusters of the earlier 17<sup>th</sup> century were being replaced by this more elegant form.

### *Phase III (18<sup>th</sup> century)*

The only evidence for any alterations in the 18<sup>th</sup> century are three sash windows in the north-west elevation. These comprise the northernmost window on the ground floor and the two first floor windows lighting Rooms 5 and 6. They are all 9 pane sashes with exposed boxes and ovolo moulded glazing bars.

### *Phase IV (19<sup>th</sup> century)*

In the earlier part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (prior to the Tithe Map of 1843) a third range was added onto the south-west end of the house. This was constructed of brick laid in Flemish bond with a dentilated cornice along the top of the south-west elevation, and was a two-bay, gable-end range of two storeys to mimic the Phase I ranges, although wider in plan and with a less steeply pitched roof (Figures 5, 6 & 8).

At the front of the house (Rooms 9 and 11) the new range butted up against the Phase I external elevation, the close studded timber framing being left in place and provided with a brick skin on its external face. At the rear however, the timber framing was removed and replaced with brickwork (Figure 11), with a third chimneystack inserted at the south-west end of Room 4 providing it with a kitchen fireplace.

Internally the new range was divided into two rooms on each of the ground and first floors, the attic not being accessible. It was provided with two, partly external, brick chimney stacks with yellow clay pots (Plate 4), located on the south-west elevation, which accommodated fireplaces in both the ground floor and one of the first floor rooms. Both the fireplaces on the ground floor have been replaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, while that on the first floor (Room 12) has been removed and the opening boarded and plastered over.

The range was lit by window openings with very shallow segmental arch heads, and six-pane, horned, sash windows, the majority of which have been replaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A good example of the window type is found surviving in the north-west wall of Room 9. This has six panes arranged in two rows of three, separated by glazing bars with ovolo moulding. It has a quadrant stay and moulded horns, and there are internal two-leaf shutters with inset panels surrounded by thin mouldings panels and brass knob handles which fold back into the sash box to be flush with the wall (Plate 18).

The doorways have moulded architraves and doors decorated with raised and fielded panels, but the majority of other internal fittings, including the skirting and coving appears to have been replaced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century,

Probably at the same time that the extension was added, the front entrance was moved from its Phase I position near the centre of the original façade, to its present position, making it central to the new façade presented by the extension (Figure 5). The doorway has a moulded architrave with a half-glazed door with two lower flush panels and nine small panes in its upper half. It is fronted by a gabled porch, with a brick built half walls topped by cross-brace timber framing, and framed decoration of struts and braces within the gable apex.

In the later 19<sup>th</sup> century the rear (south-east) wall of the building was rebuilt in brick laid in Flemish Stretcher bond. This contained window openings with segmental arch heads and a rear door with a similarly segmental arch head at the northern end of the ground floor (Figure



6). A section of the north-east elevation adjoining the south-east elevation at ground floor level was also rebuilt in brick. The bargeboards over both gables were replaced and new cast iron drain heads and down pipes installed channelling water down from the two roof valleys.

### *Phase V (20<sup>th</sup> Century)*

The house underwent many modifications throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century both internally and externally. On the exterior a false façade was laid over the Phase I timber framing, consisting of thin pine planks creating a ‘mock’ timber frame with panels of cement render painted white overlying the brick infill (Plate 1). The cement used both within the panels, and to re-point brickwork at the base of the Phase I elevation, indicates that this was applied in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Internally the house had a number of plasterboard partition walls inserted in order to increase the number of rooms both on the ground and first floor (Figure 3). In Room 1 the walls forming the sides of the fireplace were extended to create a cloakroom (Figure 2, Plate 7.), access to which was through a doorway in the south-west wall using a re-used door similar to that found in Room 2. A further partition wall extended between this cloakroom and the staircase, with a second reused door, screened the cellar stairs off from the main body of Room 1, while the door between the cellar stairs and Room 4 was bricked up.

Room 2 was sub-divided into three separate rooms, which by the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century were used as a utility room, office and shower room, the latter with a late 20<sup>th</sup> century tile shower in the north corner. On the first floor Room 8 was sub-divided, with the south-west half converted into a bathroom. Further bathrooms were created in the north-west corner of Room 5, accessible both from this room and from Room 6 via the door in the south-west corner of the room, and between Rooms 11 and 12 within the 19<sup>th</sup> century extension.

The partition wall between Rooms 7 and 8 was rebuilt using thin battens in a mock square-panel frame (Figure 10).

## **7 Discussion**

Timber-framing plays a major part in vernacular architecture in Shropshire throughout the medieval and Post medieval periods, and although cruck framing is dominant in the early centuries, in high status houses box framing is used from an early date within the county. Close studding is also used relatively early, with the earliest dated example being Henry Tudor House in Shrewsbury which was constructed in 1430, and the peak of its popularity appears to have been in the second half of the fifteenth century. It was still widely used in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and continued to appear until the 1660s.

Although there are notable exceptions, the majority of buildings where close-studding was used were of relatively high status, the profusion of timber providing a conscious sign of wealth. Single storey studding, such as that used at Bletchley Manor was particularly indicative of status, but had largely gone out of use by the mid 16<sup>th</sup> century, when the use of the mid-rail became generally adopted. It is clear Bletchley Manor had both front and side elevations of close-studding, at a period when it was common for the secondary elevations to be of square panelling hence saving cost, although it is not clear whether the rear elevation

was also close studded. However, there is a lack of any other decorative framing that may be expected from high status houses of the late 16<sup>th</sup> century.

The double pile form came into use in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, with White Hall in Shrewsbury, constructed 1578-83, one of the first in the county. This style of house was characterised by being a symmetrical square or rectangular block two rooms deep, very different to the single depth H or T shape houses which had been dominant previously. Symmetry was a main feature, with a centrally placed doorway entering a lobby or hall that accessed the high status or 'family' rooms of the house, while a separate rear entrance serving the service rooms. With this development the ongoing process of separation between high and low status members of the household that had been taking place over the later medieval and early post medieval period with the development and then disappearance of the open hall became complete. As part of the separation of the service elements of the house came the desire to conceal them from the public rooms, making the provision of a basement or cellar an important introduction.

At around the same time as the introduction of the double-pile form, but not exclusively used by it, was the use of the double-gable which became fashionable in Shrewsbury town houses such as Owens Mansion (1592) in the early 1590s. The adoption of the double gabled form in country house is generally considered to be of a later, 17<sup>th</sup> century, date making Bletchley Manor an early example, led by its use of the double-pile form. It can therefore be considered to be a good example of a 'modern' house at this date, being fully two stories, with the provision of attics, a cellar, and a porch (albeit a single story one) and using some of the most up to date building forms.

The form of the Phase I entrance at Bletchley Manor is unclear, with the centrally placed doorway and chimney stack creating a baffle-entry rather than purely lobby entrance plan. The lack of any visible remains of a second chimney stack may indicate that Room 1 still functioned to some extent as a kitchen rather than purely as a lobby, although it is possible that a second stack stood against the rear elevation which has subsequently been replaced. Room 2 would almost certainly have functioned as the higher status 'parlour' however. In many double pile houses there is the provision of a short corridor off the lobby from which the other three rooms can be accessed, but in the case of Bletchley Manor, each room is connected to each room either side of it by a doorway. A similar situation occurs on the first floor, with Room 7 presumably accessible only through Room 8, and passage to Rooms 6 and 8 via Room 5. Although the fabric in the area between Rooms 7 and 8 has been replaced entirely at later dates, it is supposed that the rear staircases to the attics, which would have housed accommodation for the non-family members of the household, must have been separated by a partition wall in order to achieve a level of privacy within the first floor rooms.

The work carried out in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century appears to have been intended to further raise the status of the house and to make the interior more decorative. Rooms 2 and 6 can be clearly seen to be of the most importance with the insertion of the bolection moulded fireplaces with eared mantles, which in the case of Room 6 include the finely hand painted tiles, and most importantly the floor to ceiling panelling. As stated earlier this panelling appears to have been re-used from elsewhere rather than having been custom made for the property, with some sections having to be cut down to size, and with mis-matching of moulding in other areas. Some care has been gone to however, for instance in Room 2, the pattern of the panelling muntins and rails extends uninterrupted across the door, so that when closed it is visually absorbed into the rest of the panelling.

The style of the panelling is earlier than the apparent date of this phase of work, the cockshead hinges used to hang the doors indicative of a later 17<sup>th</sup> century date while the pegged joints formed by the muntins butting up square against the rails to create small panels, and the ribbed mouldings running along separate lengths of muntins and rails rather than forming a continuous line between them are typical of late 16<sup>th</sup>/ early 17<sup>th</sup> century date. While very popular in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, the fashion for panelling had diminished in the second half of the century only reviving in the early 1700s.

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century the importance of the staircase as a focal point of the public part of the house had become more apparent, and subsequently the newels and balusters became more decorative. That forming the front stair at Bletchley manor has a relatively simply decorated newel and handrail, with quite finely turned balusters that are typical of those that were coming into fashion in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and reached their peak with the elegantly turned examples of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the work carried out on the internal fittings, quite major work was undertaken to replace many, or all, of the lath and daub panels in the external timber-framing with brick. The preference for brick over wattle was again a 17<sup>th</sup> century development, being virtually unknown in Shropshire before this date, and such work is unlikely to have been a structural necessity, the lath and plaster being less than 100 years old.

The next major development in the history of the house was its expansion in the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the new range increasing the living accommodation by half again. The porch was also added at this time, the front door being moved from its original location to its current one to keep the symmetry of the south-west façade, but the ‘mock’ timber framing applied to this façade and previously thought to be of this date appears after removal to date instead to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, as shown by the type of brickwork and cement mortar used at the base of the elevation behind the planking. The ‘mock’ framing painted into the brickwork of the extension may also be assumed to be of a later date therefore. During the 20<sup>th</sup> century the house was modified internally to create a larger number of rooms, and to modernise it with the provision of fitted kitchens and bathrooms.

## **8 Conclusions**

Bletchley Manor is an early example of a countryside house using the double-pile, double-gabled form, which together with its prolific use of single storey close-studding indicates it was a house of some status. Internally this appears to have been somewhat let down by its lack of decoration, with decorative mouldings absent from the exposed ceiling beams and plain inglenook fireplace. This was rectified in the later 17<sup>th</sup> century, with the complete redesigning of two of the rooms with decorative fireplaces and panelling.

## **9 Acknowledgements**

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## 10 References

### *Maps*

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## 11 Archive

The site code is BMB 04A The archive consists of:

16 photo record sheets

8 films of black and white photographic negatives

7 films of colour photographic transparencies

A digital Theolt survey

The archive is currently held by Marches Archaeology awaiting transfer to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm: accession number 1777