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Old Fallings Hall Bushbury, Staffordshire

by S. Litherland

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Introduction (with a Note on Sources Consulted)

In July 1991 Birmingham University Field Archaeology Unit undertook the final phase of documentary research into the history of Old Fallings Hall, Bushbury, Staffordshire (NGR:SJ 929 015), on behalf of Tony Collier Associates, the consultant architects coordinating the refurbishment of the property. The following report is intended to carry through and amplify the recommendations of the initial historical assessment which was made in June 1990 (Litherland 1990i). It is one facet of the overall conservation project which seeks to respect the historic nature of the existing fabric of the Grade II* listed building in order to restore and repair it to the highest possible standard. In addition, a full photographic survey of the building prior to restoration has been carried out and supplemented during the programme of refurbishment, and an examination made of the surviving early types of paint and decoration (Adriel Consultancy 1991).

Against this background the main thrust of the documentary research has been towards understanding the history of the present Hall from c.1720, although consideration has also been given to the history of the earlier house and its occupants. As usual during the course of research, new avenues presented themselves while others proved negative. Previous research had noted the curious virtual absence of evidence relating to Old Fallings in the main Gough Collection of papers deposited in Birmingham Central Reference Library. While a further search here did reveal some more information, mainly in miscellaneous, personal papers of Walter Gough (1677–1730), it was in the papers of the Paget Family, who inherited the Hall in the early 19th century, that the vast majority of evidence about the Gough occupancy was found. These papers are deposited in Bristol University Library (DM 106), and form a massive collection of family and estate papers, containing 22,342 items, only

briefly catalogued by bundle and approximate geographical location. Inevitably the possibility exists that further information on Old Fallings (such as an estate survey) may exist misplaced in one of these bundles of papers. The variety and quality of these papers, especially in the information they contain about the early history of Wolverhampton, means that they would merit full archiving, detailed cataloguing and indexing.

Unfortunately, antiquarian descriptions of the Hall are unrevealing; the accounts of Erdeswicke, Stebbing Shaw, and John Huntbach are mainly genealogical with few digressions on the appearance of the house and, most disappointing of all, contain no illustrations. Similarly, in the absence of an early estate map, the cartographic evidence reveals little until the later 19th century. There is the Yates map of 1775 and a 2-inch draft map made by the Ordnance Survey c.1812 which show the Hall in the context of its estate, but it is not until the publication of the Tithe Map in 1848, and subsequent editions of the 6- and 25inch Ordnance Survey maps from c.1880 onwards, that much can be discerned about the changing plan of the Hall itself.

The Hall Building

'In travelling through England...which way soever we look, we see something new.' (Daniel Defoe 1727)

Old Fallings Hall is a small, 18th-century brick, classical mansion of two storeys and five bays (fig. 7), architectural features including a plain tiled hipped-roof, wooden eaves cornice, angle pilasters, 'lush' Corinthian capitals (according to Pevsner 1974,321), and sandstone detailing. Behind and attached to the back of the Hall are an architecturally-muddled, mainly 19th-century, service range (perhaps incorporating elements of earlier structures) and a large, compact wing which must be pre-1848 in date. (For a full architectural description see Heath and Root 1990). Internally, the panelled room to

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the south of the Hall, and both principal and secondary staircases with quite substantial balusters to the tread, are of note. The compact plan of the Hall, two rooms deep in the main part, is typical of the double-pile, the mainstay design of the boom in medium-sized country house building in the early 18th century – what Pevsner called the 'standard product for the prosperous middle classes' (Pevsner 1968,225). represented a clear break from the sub-medieval tradition represented by the manor house with gabled ranges one room deep which began to occur towards the end of the 17th century (Barley 1986,222). It is tempting to read into the compact, practical, clean and simple classical lines of this design the changing attitudes and aspirations of the classes who commissioned them; consider, for instance, the tastes of that roughlycontemporary, assiduous traveller and writer of zealously 'modern' and whiggish tastes, Celia Fiennes, who would grudgingly concede for anything old that it might 'look nobly tho' not just as the new modell'd way of building' (Morris 1984,15).

The house has been attributed on stylistic grounds to Smith of Warwick (Heath and Root 1990), by comparison with the capitals of 10 Market Place, Warwick, and by the striking way, as at Stoneleigh, the top storey windows project up into the implied entablature, although it should be noted that no documentary evidence was found for this or, admittedly, any other association. architectural circumstantial evidence certainly does not rule out the connection; Smith of Warwick was one of the most successful master builders of the 18th century, who 'dominated a locality, but was not confined to it' (Colvin 1954,550). He was contracted to build one great house after another in the early 18th century, although as one antiquarian noted 'while all of them are convienient and handsome there is a great sameness in the plans, which proves he had but little invention' (Barrington 1784 in Colvin 1954). However, in Smith's defence, it must be said that the homogeneity of the double-pile plan offered little scope for originality of design.

Old Fallings in the 18th Century

The 18th-century landscape of Bushbury parish as depicted on the Yates Map of 1775 and

on later maps is one of enclosed fields, and a surprising number of major houses, many of which, like Old Fallings, were manor houses or capital messuages of long standing that were rebuilt in that century (Litherland 1990ii). Within a c.2-kilometre radius of Old Fallings are substantially 18th-century houses such as Bushbury Hall (c.1770), Bushbury Hill Farm (c.1780), Moseley Hall (c.1720), Low Hill (1760), Oxley Manor (c.1760), Showell and Elston Hall, in addition to other large houses such as Moseley Old Hall to the north, and Moseley Court which was built c.1815.

While the number of country seats is known to have grown steadily between 1540 and 1800 in every county, (for example, statistics for Hertfordshire show peaks between 1540-70, 1670-1710, 1770-1810 and 1840-80 (Stone and Stone 1972,56–123)) local factors, linked to the development of Wolverhampton in particular, must have been important in determining the concentrated pattern of rebuilding in the 18th century in Bushbury, in addition to the desire to modernise residences in the fashionable style of the day. Although it is difficult to imagine today, the landscape of Bushbury was pleasantly rural in the 18th and 19th centuries. Thomas Whitgreave wrote copiously about his favourite pursuit of walking in the district, in the 19th century, as did members of the Paget family in the early 20th century – both speak of an idyllic, gently-undulating landscape of rolling fields interspersed by 'noble piles floating in the distance'. Bushbury would have made a convenient yet pleasant location for the homes of the class of people like the Goughs or the Whitgreaves whose wealth was originally based on business rather than land, while the expanding market of Wolverhampton and other industrialising areas nearby would have provided a ready market for the agricultural produce of the estates. Later in the 18th century, and increasingly in the 19th century, canals, turnpiked roads, railways, quarries and the urban sprawl of Wolverhampton began to encroach into the south of the parish. While the character of the parish around Old Fallings did not alter dramatically until the later 19th century, the fact that Old Fallings was let out to tenants by the early 19th century at least, as was Bushbury Hall in 1790, is

evidence of both the changing character of the area and the rising social status of the Gough family.

The Hall, Family, Household and Estate

While no direct evidence relating to the building of Old Fallings in c.1720 was found during research, the design is undoubtedly early 18th century in date, and Shaw notes that the Hall was built by Walter Gough, who died in 1730 (Shaw 1801,188). It is tempting to read into the coincidence of the commissioning of a survey of Old Fallings in 1721 (BUL DM 106/29), and the recording in an account book of a pronounced rise in window tax in the same year (BRLGP330), the conclusion that the Hall was built at this time, but this cannot be proven. Walter Gough was an educated and travelled man, a classical scholar who made the 'continental tour' in his youth, and, therefore, should have been particularly aware of the latest classical fashions in architecture. Although Old Fallings was just one of several properties owned by the Gough family, properties which included Perry Hall and houses in Wolverhampton, it would appear from various documents that for most of the 18th century Old Fallings remained at least a secondary family home.

These references to the Hall in the 18th century, including inventories, carriers notes and merchants receipts, not only give an idea of the layout and use of the building at this time, but also of the furnishings of the house which are evidence of the increasingly sophisticated material culture of the gentry in Britain in the 18th century (Weatherill 1988). For example, in 1747 the following articles were delivered to the hall, a signet ring, a china snuff box mounted in gold, a cane with a gold head, a dressing box, and a harpsichord (BUL DM106/429). Walter the second died in 1773, and the inventories of goods he owned and those that were sold show that the house could not have been let at this time (BRL GP 237/2, /3, /6). Things sold included plate, china, books and family pictures, together with a large quantity of household furniture including: Turkish chairs, a pewter pen, a clock (still a relatively rare item), a coffee pot and a large brass kettle. An inventory of goods was usually made on a room-by-room basis, following the internal logic of the house, and therefore it is possible that the rooms at Old Fallings Hall were arranged as follows:—

In the Service Range Ground Floor: 'Kitchen, Pantry, Scullery and Dairy'

On the Ground Floor of the Main House:

'Best Parlour, Picture Parlour, Servants Hall, Bottom of the Staircase, Hall, Smoking Room and Housekeepers Room'

On the First Floor:

'A Room over the Kitchen, Dressing Room, Study, White Closet, Blue Room, Red Room, Drawing Room, Yellow Room, Green Room and Closet adjoining'

In the Attic/Top Floor:

'Little Brown Garret, Large Brown Garret, Passage between, Dark Garret, Nursery Room, First Maids Garret and Dark Garret adjoining'

In the Basement:

'Butlers Pantry, Salting Cellar, Beer Cellar, First Ale Cellar and Second Ale Cellar'

In the Outbuildings:

'Dairy, Washouse, Brewhouse, Lower Cheese Chamber, Cheese Garret, Malthouse Chamber, Bottle Garret, Carthorse Stable, Coachhouse Stable, Coachhouse, Barn, Oat Barn, and Pig Stye.'

This list can be usefully compared with the description of the property which appeared in the Wolverhampton Chronicle when it was offered to let in 1818:

'To be let and entered upon immediately. A good modern house called Old Fallings in the parish of Bushbury in Wolverhampton in the county of Staffordshire, consisting of a large Hall, Dining Room, Parlour, Housekeepers Room, Butlers Pantry and convenient offices on the ground floor; second floor (i:e the first floor) consists of a Drawing Room, seven Bed Chambers with six attics over them, cellars, offices and walled garden, also two coachhouses, three stables and other buildings with any quantity not exceeding 40 acres of good meadow and pasture land'.

And with that of Stebbing Shaw: 'The mansion house at Old Fallings, situated on a hill about 2 miles from west of Wolverhampton, and seen from the road leading from that town to Cannock, was built by Walter Gough whose arms, impaling Harwood, are over the front door. [This coat of arms was located during the documentary research, formerly having been in the possession of Mr A.M.R. Watts of Lydney, Gloucestershire]. To it belong 147 acres let to Mr Turner for a ladies boarding school and a farm called Newbolds.' (1801,187). Erdeswicke also mentions some portraits of the Gough family 'in the Great Parlour' (1844,350).

It is not clear from Stebbing Shaw whether or not the house itself was let at the time, but clearly it was by 1818. There was a general tendency for houses such as Old Fallings to be abandoned by the richer-gentry of the 19th century, in favour of letting or selling to local lesser-gentry, merchants or farmers (Barley 1986,215). The first tenants at Old Fallings who can be traced from the Census returns were the Briscoe family, who were hardware merchants; hardware was an expanding retail area in the 19th century as fewer and fewer items were produced by local specialists but instead were factory-produced. The second son continued to reside at the Hall, by 1871 had become a J.P., and later moved to Chillington Hall (Chatwin 1983,54). The last recorded tenant was a Dr Millington, who died in 1908. It is not clear if these tenants were rentiers and took seriously to managing the estate, but it is unlikely given their professions and because the amount of land still attached to Old Fallings Hall was by then negligible.

The overall impression given by the 18th century documentation is of a largish house with a modest farm attached based around the Hall and its outbuildings, perhaps more reminiscent of a manor house than a country house. Barley argues that despite problems of definition, particularly after 1550, it is still useful to retain some concept of the manor house, however tenuous; but Old Fallings fails even his broad criterion of the largest rural house occupied by a family with no other residence (Barley 1986,213). It would appear that because of its status as a secondary home, the normal definitions that might

be applied to a house based on its size or function became blurred; it was neither wholly country house, manor house or farm, but instead retained aspects of all three.

The account books of Walter Gough which have survived, from between 1707 and 1725 (BRL GP330–332), show that the family took a personal lead in controlling everyday affairs of the estates attached to the Old Fallings demesne, including collecting the rents of the various tenants in the opening years of the 18th century. In a marriage settlement of 1707 (BRL GP 63/ 1b), the main farm of 180 acres was said to be under the tenancy of a John Stokes; therefore the main bulk of the demesne had probably been rationalised into this block of land, probably based around Old Fallings Farm, just to the south of the grounds surrounding the Hall. This can be seen on the Tithe map of 1848, and on early editions of the Ordnance Survey large scale maps. By 1818 the demesne attached to the house had shrunk to 40 acres, but in another advertisement for the Hall, ascribed by Chatwin to the Aris' Gazette (1983,54), and which probably predates the tenancy of the Briscoe family, , the immediate demesne is described as 'not more than 131 acres of very good arable, meadow and pasture land, lying together round the house', and in addition 'the stock, and implements of husbandry on the premises could be had at a fair appraisment'. The two figures of 131 and 40 acres probably comprise the bulk of the 180 acre estate leased in 1707.

Some idea of the arrangement of the estate can also be discerned from the available early map evidence (op cit). The early maps from c.1770 to c.1820 show very little detail, except that the Hall and estate are marked out specifically, which indicates the high status of the property. In addition, a wood is marked to the north of the house, which also appears on the later Tithe and Ordnance Survey maps, and which may even be the remains of a park or, alternatively, a portion of formal garden. The bi-furcated driveway up to the Hall, from the turnpiked Cannock to Wolverhampton road, can be clearly seen on the Tithe map, the earlier maps not being of sufficiently large scale to note a feature of this type. The fashionability of such drives is typically 18th-century. The arrangement of the various outbuildings and the walled garden can also be seen on the later maps, before they were eventually pulled down after the Hall had been sold to St Chads School in the early 20th century.

Very little can be inferred about the structure of the Hall itself from the cartographic evidence. Only the Tithe map and the later Ordnance Survey maps have sufficient resolution to be able to define the outline of the building, and there is very little difference between these various block plans (figs.3,4,5,6). The reputed 'Victorian' wing to the south of the house appears on both the Tithe and later Ordnance Survey plans, and unless this presumed late wing had exactly the same plan as an earlier one, it must have been built prior to 1848. No other records which could refute or support this hypothesis were found, and therefore the question of the date of this section must remain open. However, the shape of the older western service wing is significantly different on the Tithe map compared to both the Ordnace Survey Maps and the building today, and this probably explains the curious arrangement of the rooves and the odd mixture of walling in this area, as either one or a series of rebuilds.

The Owners and Occupants

Walter Gough the first, the probable builder of Old Fallings, died in 1730, to be succeeded by his son, another Walter, who died in 1773, an event which led to the compilation of the various inventories listed above. By this time the Gough family held extensive estates not only at Old Fallings and Perry Hall, but also land in Wednesfield, Newbolds, Prestwood, Moathouse and the Moors. John Gough who succeeded the second Walter was called 'the misanthrope' in an article in the Wolverhampton Antiquary, but unfortunately, unlike Victor Hugo, the author did not amplify why this was the case. John died in 1828, and in 1848 the last of the line of Goughs of Old Fallings, Jane Elizabeth, devised the estate to her brother John Moore Paget of Shepton Mallet, and it remained in that family's hands until its eventual sale in 1924 to the Catholic Church for conversion to a school.

Briefly, between approximately 1908 and 1913, the Pagets returned to Old Fallings Hall,

and the house enjoyed something of an Indian Summer, like the country as a whole before the outbreak of the First World War. Sir Richard Paget appears to have taken an active interest in many of the latest inventions, ideas, and celebrities of the time, according to an anonymous history of the Hall which appears to have been based on conversations with surviving members of the family. Apparently here were staged aviation weekends when biplanes would circle Wolverhampton with various members of the Paget family perched on the wings; Charles Rolls of Rolls Royce fame was a regular guest until his death in a aircrash in 1911, as was Captain Scott R.N..

During the family's brief stay at Old Fallings, and undoubtedly the main purpose for their presence, Fallings Park, an estate, based on the ideas of the Garden City Movement inaugurated by Ebenezer Howard, was planned, and later built, on most of the demesne property of the Hall. Its outline can be seen on an provisional Ordnance Survey plan of 1938 (fig.6). It has a formal plan, consisting of a central circle surounded by housing arranged in an almond shape with two ovals north and south and radiating streets. Pevsner's verdict was that it was not a very good example of its type, although Thomas Adams, who had been closely involved in the Letchworth project in Hertfordshire, had a hand in the design along with local architects Pepler and Blow.

The building of the Old Fallings Park marked a watershed in the history of the Hall, the surrounding estate being reduced to about 11 acres, and the Hall was offered up for sale. It was not until 1924 that the Hall was purchased to be a school for the sum of £3,250. The history of the school has been outlined by one of the former teachers T.M. Martin; the school was quickly short of space and, despite the utilisation of the outbuildings around the Hall in the post-war period, several new extensions were built on the land adjacent to the Hall sweeping away the former outbuildings. The Hall was eventually dwarfed by the new accommodation and largely abandoned for the purposes of teaching, gradually falling into the unfortunate state of neglect which initiated the present refurbishment programme.

The Earlier History of Old Fallings

The place name Old Fallings probably refers to an early assart made into the Forest of Cannock before the end of the 12th century, possibly in Saxon times. A number of 14th century deeds refer to the site as Oldefallynge, only very occasionally is it called 'Old Furlong', and as woodland was invariably cleared for agricultural purposes it is clearly a topographical place name. The Dean of Wolverhampton first granted half a yard of land here to Adam, son of John, for 12 shillings, and by the reign of Henry III further encroachments were being made into the forest in the area. In addition to the felling of woodland several deeds refer to the digging or presence of marl pits, an activity that has left a legacy of ponds all over this area.

Many of these deeds (in the Paget Papers) contain a wealth of topographical information about the area: for example, in 1381 Hugh Tomkyn (of Old Fallings) granted a messuage and 7 selions of land to William Wyssh of Bushbury: 'the said messuage lying in breadth between the tenement of Adam Tomkyns, his brother, and the highway (probably the Cannock Road), and extends in length from the great stone as far as the land called 'le Lonehemdelone', two selions of land with certain marl pits hedges and ditches adjacent, at one end, on the south side lie together in the field towards the wall between the land lately belonging to Philip de Oldfallynch...'.

By the 17th century the capital messuage of Old Fallings was held by the Challenor family who held a great deal of land in the Wolverhampton area, but in 1634 'all that capital messuage situated in Old Fallings...and all cottages, barns, stables, and outbuildings, gardens and orchards' belonging to it, were sold by William Normansell to Henry Gough for £400 (BUL DM 106/16). The Gough family were 'merchants of the staple', and appear to have moved to and acquired extensive estates in the Wolverhampton area in the late 16th century. Henry's son John called Old Fallings his home in 1665 (P.C.C. 110 Mico), and a year later in the Hearth Tax returns the house was clearly the largest in the area with 10 hearths, the next largest property having 7. The family fortune appeared to survive the turbulent times of the Civil War relatively well, probably because the family were careful not to align themselves too openly with any one side and, unlike the Whitgreaves of Moseley, were not openly recusants. The royal princes stayed briefly in the hall in 1642, but when a public contribution was asked of the citizens of Wolverhampton John Gough wisely donated a large sum, but in private. After the Restoration John's son Henry purchased the manor and house of Perry Barr and was M.P. for Tamworth, Walter his son was the Gough who rebuilt the hall in its present form.

Summary and Conclusions

Perhaps the most striking feature of the history of Old Fallings and its estate from the 18th century onwards is the close way it mirrors the general changes in these centuries which have been outlined by historians of the country house such as Barley (Barley 1986). In so many details, from the double-pile design and early 18th century rebuilding of a former manor house, through the eventual abandonment of the house by the family in the period c1780-1820, and the eventual abrupt change in usage in the 20th century, and in countless other smaller ways, the house appears to typify the trends which were occurring to houses of this sort in the country as a whole. In this sense the history of the house is important precisely because of its apparent normality.

Certain answers can be tentatively proposed after this stage of documentary research to the questions outlined in the English Heritage report on the building (Heath and Root 1990). Firstly, the proximity of the north elevation of the Hall to the various outbuildings and structures of the adjacent farm may explain why that elevation is so different from the south east elevations because the house was clearly not a completely detached box. Furthermore, if this explanation is accepted, it follows that the 18th century double-pile design was constrained by the presence of features predating it and surviving from the older manor house. Such features may well include parts of the curiously attached service wing, which evidence from the Tithe map suggests was rebuilt or altered at some point in the mid-19th century, as well as the layout of the farm outbuildings. This all suggests that the 18th century rebuild of the main house was less comprehensive than may be gauged from an initial inspection of the hall today. There are many examples of this type of work throughout the county, Wolseley Hall (now demolished) further north being one (Buteux, Cane and Litherland 1989). This may account for some of the clumsiness in the detailing of certain architectural features, and would be plausible in a house that was already by this stage a secondary residence. Finally it would appear that one of the main considerations governing the orientation of the property, in addition to the possible constraints given by the pre-existing features, was the position of the turnpiked road, the bi-furcated drive from which would have been built into landscaped grounds as was the fashion of the day. Such garden features have

doubtless been buried in the levelling operation for the playing fields, recorded by Martin in his history of the school. The full archive relating to this study will be deposited with Wolverhampton Borough Council.

Acknowledgements

During the course of research a number of record offices were either visited or contacted by phone or letter; in particular I should like to thank the staff of Bristol University Library Special Collections Department, Birmingham Central Reference Library, and Wolverhampton Archives. At B.U.F.A.U., Iain Ferris edited the report, Liz Hooper prepared it for publication and Mark Breedon, Ed Newton and Nigel Dodds drafted the figures.

References

Abbreviations of depositories and record offices follow the Victoria County History system as far as possible, the main ones used in the text are: BUL refers to Bristol University Library Special Collections Department, BRL to Birmingham Central Reference Library, WSL to the William Salt Library Stafford. The primary sources relating to Old Fallings are too numerous to list in full, but the main collections of papers are in the Paget Papers (BUL), the Gough Papers (BRL), and Wolverhampton Library Archives.

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Figures

- 1. Detail of the William Yates Map of 1775.
- 2. Detail of the 1 inch Ordnance Survey of Staffordshire published 1834, but surveyed and made into a 2 inch draft c.1812.
- 3. Sketch taken from the Tithe Map of 1848 showing details around Old Fallings.
- 4. Ordnance Survey 6 inch First Edition 1886, detail.
- 5. Ordnance Survey 6 inch Third Edition 1920, detail.
- 6. Ordnance Survey 6 inch Provisional Edition 1938, detail.
- 7. Floor plans of the Hall.
- 8. Details exposed during building work.
- 9. Photograph of the main staircase.
- 10. Photograph of the panelled room. No date.
- 11. Photograph of the panelled room. No date.

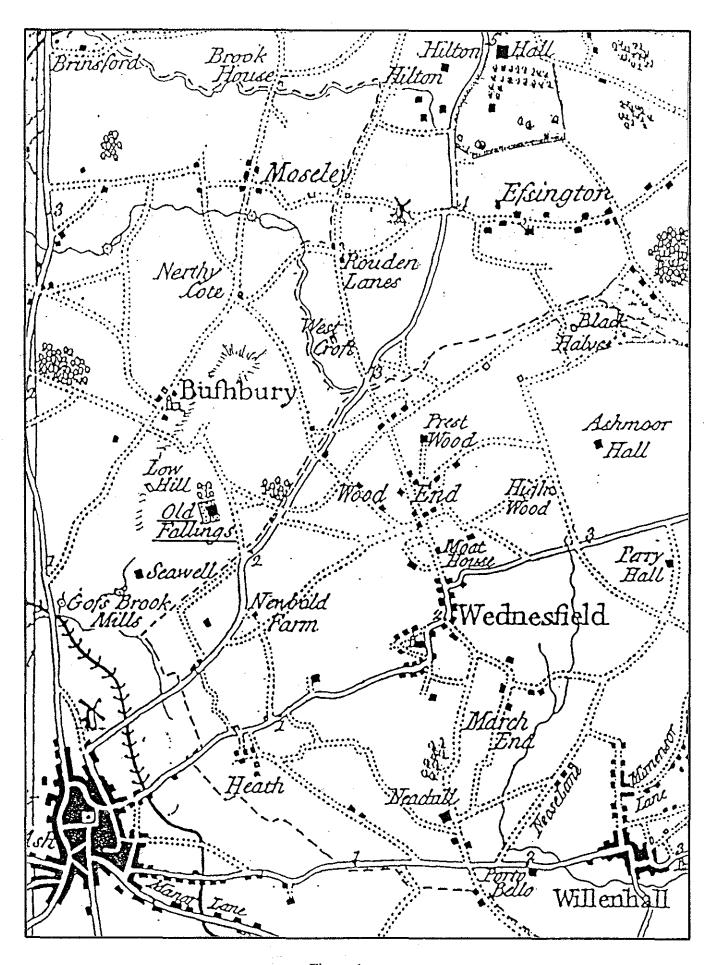


Figure 1





Figure 2

Figure 3

Figure 4

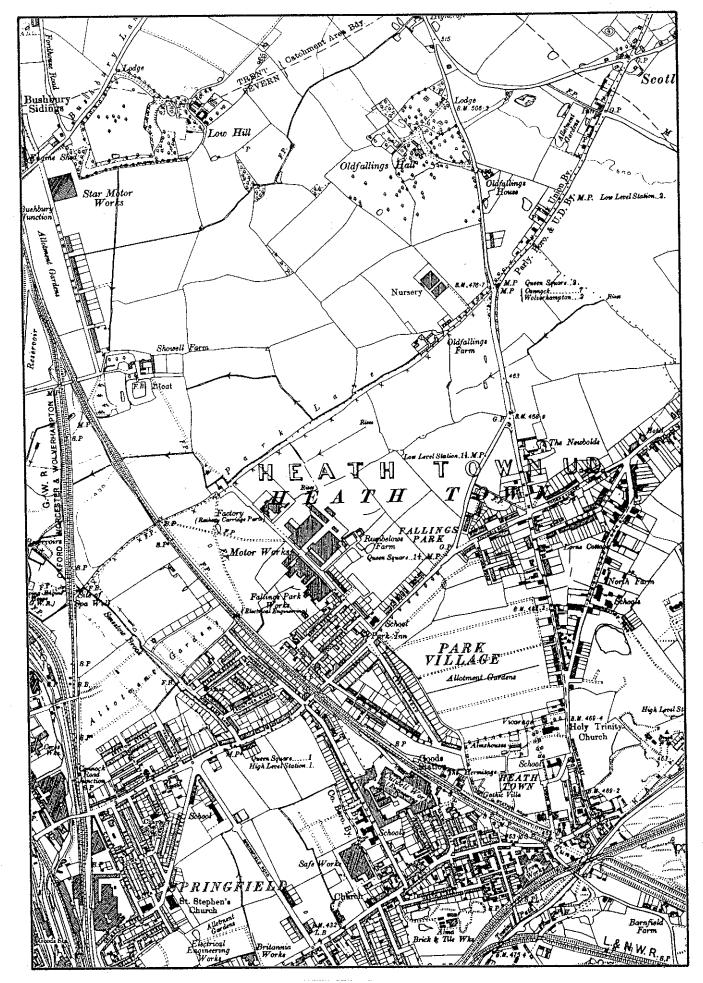


Figure 5

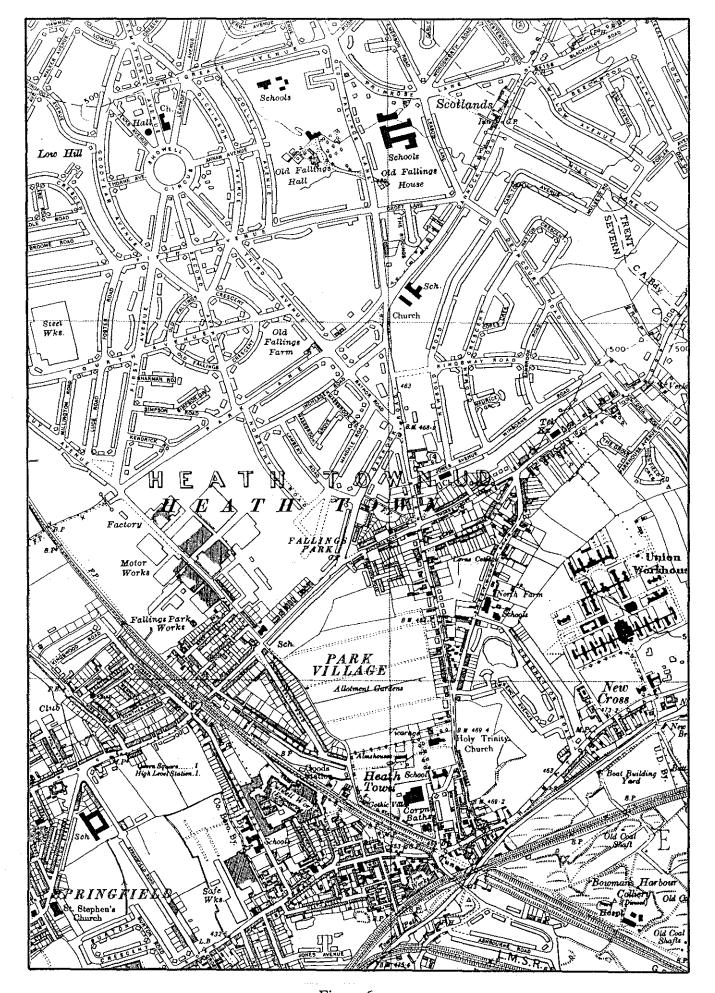
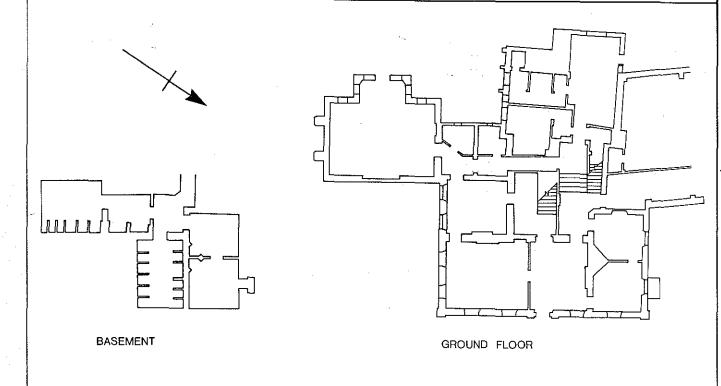


Figure 6

OLD FALLINGS HALL



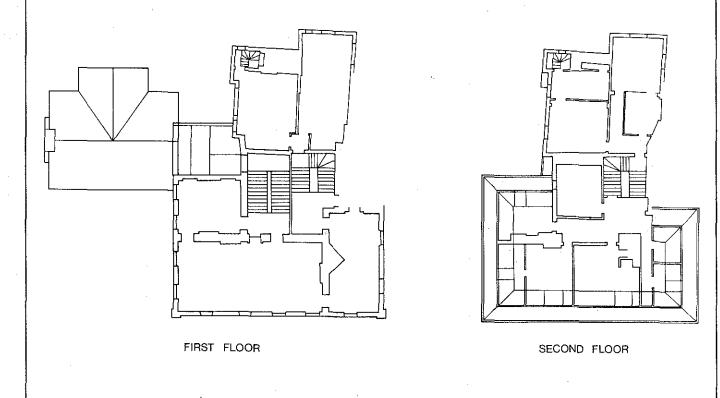


Figure 7

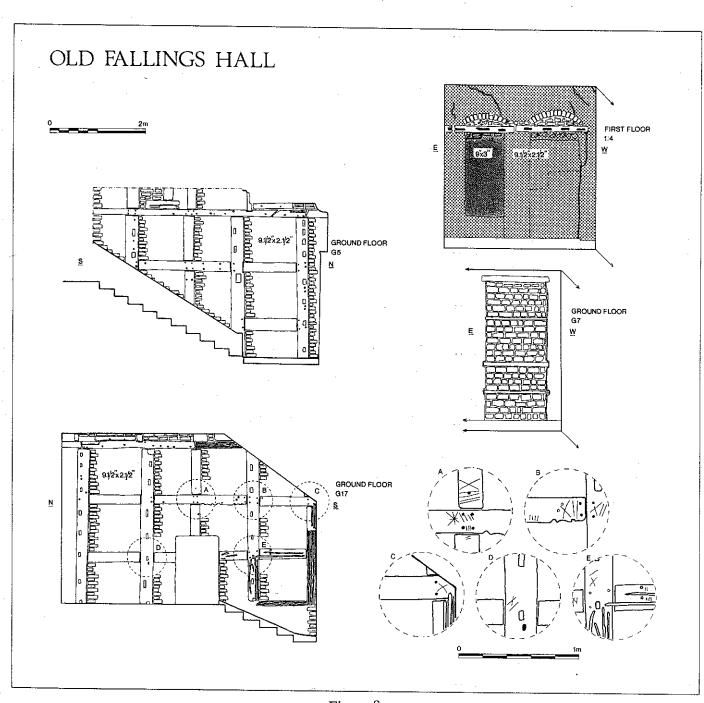


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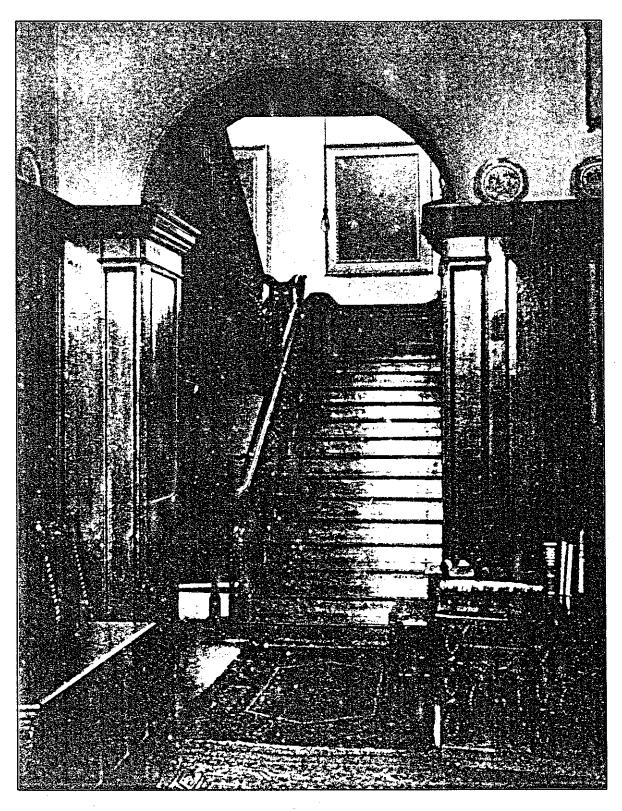


Figure 9

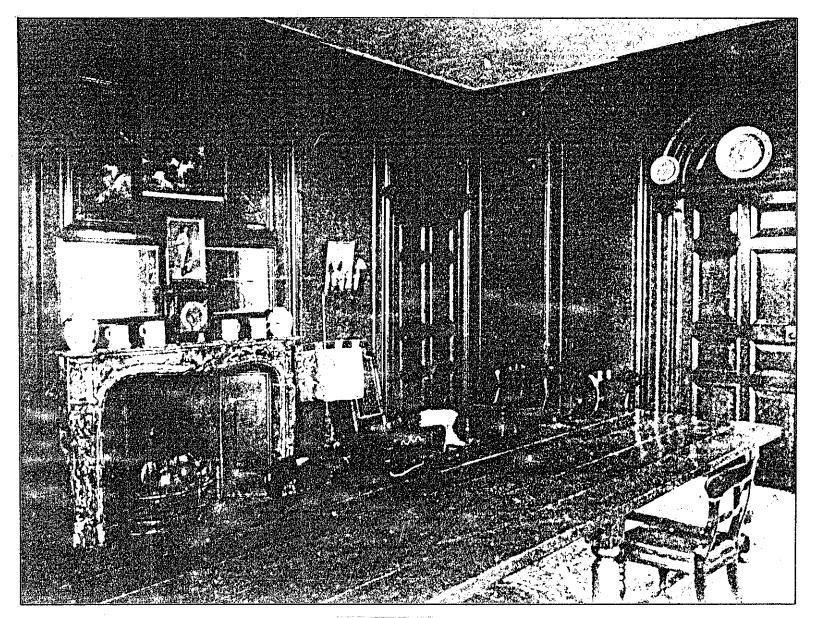


Figure 10

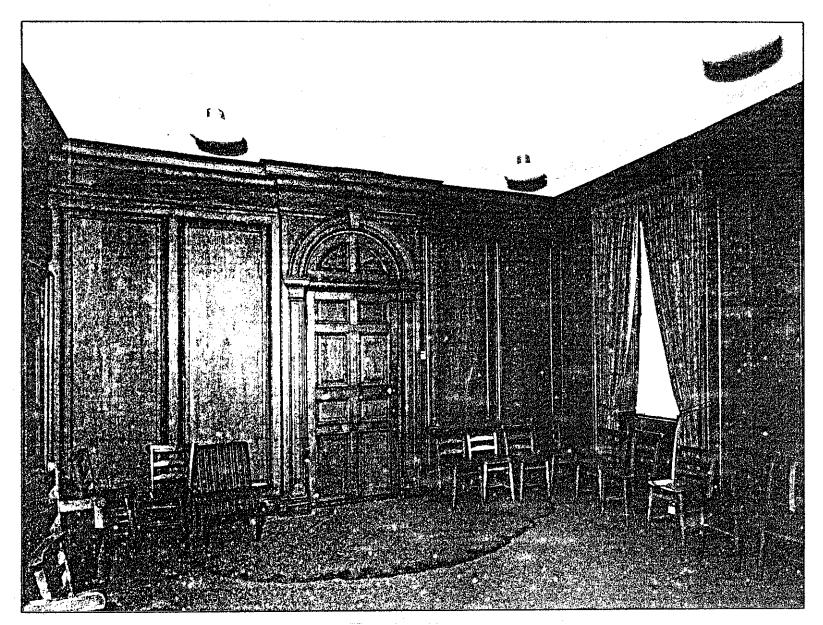


Figure 11