

FOUR SINGLE-BAY HALLS

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In local houses of the small mediaeval type the accommodation generally consists of an open hall with either a combined solar-service compartment at one end or with separate solar and service compartments at either end. The hall is normally of two bays—the division being effected by an open truss with more or less ornamental kingpost.

Where the kingpost roof gave place to “purlin and windbrace” as it occasionally did in the later ones two bays still remained the standard and this seems to have persisted well into the 16th century.

The two-bay hall is therefore so common that the possibility of variations is at first difficult to accept. We are perhaps, unlikely to find halls of more than two bays in houses of this class, but single bay examples would seem to be fairly numerous. Perhaps they have been mistaken in the past for altered or mutilated two-bay halls.

The four houses here described show clear evidence in each case that the hall was actually designed as a single bay, whilst the solar and service apartments maintained the same relative importance as they would have borne to a two-bay hall. The houses are not, therefore, to be thought of as smaller than normal, nor are they of poor or mean construction. They probably represented (in their original form) the highest architectural level to which the local timber-framed house attained. It is simply a matter of reduction of size of what is usually regarded as the premier apartment.

A hall of about 13 feet by 18 feet complete with oriel seems almost absurd, yet these four houses each afford evidence of such or similar dimensions and character, provided we may assume that they originally agreed in detail as they clearly do in general design.

The first local example to be recorded is apparently Anne of Cleves house, Southover, which Mr. W. H. Godfrey, F.S.A., described in *Sussex Archaeological Collections*, Vol. 65. The excellent plans and sections show that this is a one-bay hall and it has certain other features by which this type of house may be identified. It also has, like Daleham, Fletching, described below, a narrow bay adjoining the hall which undoubtedly functioned as a cross passage. Mr. Godfrey suggested that this might perhaps be regarded as a hall bay, but it was, as at Daleham, quite separated from the hall by means of structural divisions and, viewing the hall as a single apartment, it must surely be regarded as of one bay only.

Houses of this type have certain features in common with the so-called "Wealden House." They have the "recessed front" formed by juttied wings at either end with a wide bracketted eave between. Set midway in this there is the oriel—a square or splayed bay window running the full height of the hall. Oriels survive at Anne of Cleves and Daleham; and at the Old Shop, Bignor, the mortices to which its framework was secured are clearly visible.

The position of the entrances seems to have been the same in all four cases, at the lower end and outside the hall and at either end of the cross passage. The alternative, where the doorways are within the hall, but still at the lower end, is perhaps the more common arrangement locally.

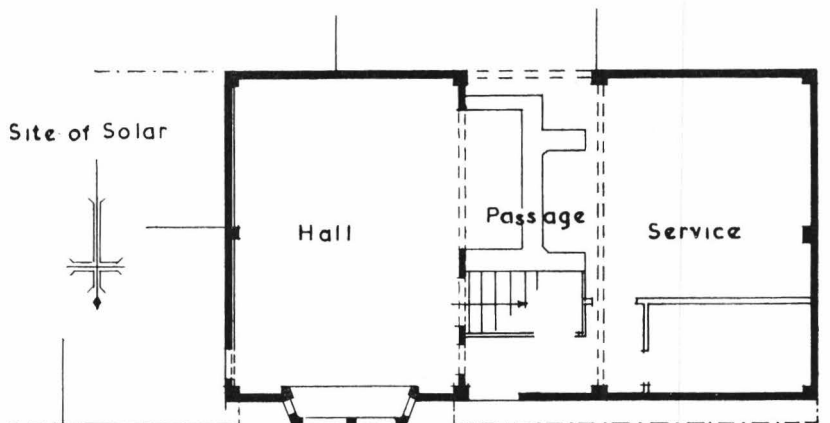
In preparing the accompanying plans, an effort has been made to express the mediaeval outlines of the building without regard for later work such as inserted chimney breasts, reconstructed walling, etc. Heavy black shows original walls which are still existing, and dotted lines where the mediaeval ground floor plan has been destroyed. A heavy broken line is used for the original first-floor outline whether existing or otherwise.

By comparison they show very clearly that there was little or no standardisation of size in such buildings

and no attention whatever was paid to orientation. They are also very clearly designed for aesthetic effect at the front only, any architectural virtue at the back or ends being the result of accident or the passage of time.

The reduction of the hall to one bay suggests that its status was variable in accordance with individual requirements.

Daleham, Fletching



DALEHAM. FLETCHING.



FIG. 1

Here the extent of the hall is defined by two rather heavily moulded beams, that at the upper end being embattled, presumably to give distinction. There was a narrow bay or cross passage west of this beyond which lay the service apartments. The jambs and head of the oriel are also moulded, and one other small original window remains set in the north wall of the upper part of the cross passage bay.

The solar bay which lay east of the hall has completely disappeared, and there is said to be a local tradition of a serious fire having taken place here which is probably founded upon fact. The accompanying photograph of the north front clearly shows the deficiency and the design, as it exists, is obviously incomplete. The tradition may also find some support in the fact that the house has been re-roofed and also to some extent re-floored. Only a few of the floor joists at the service end are original and the roof is probably late 17th century incorporating a number of mediaeval rafters.

Of about the same period is the outshot addition at the rear and there is a large inserted Jacobean chimney with an interesting "staggered" grouping of flues. This, and a cruciform arrangement were the most popular local patterns for multi-flue chimneys.

The original framing, where visible, is of the close vertical type. The lower storey of the service bay has plain rectangles, but these have resulted from the removal of intermediate studs. The general character of the house, in conjunction with its mouldings, suggests a late 15th-century date.

The Old Shop, Bignor

I must apologise for the lack of internal detail in the plan of this house, having been unable to obtain the necessary measurements, but the essential features are visible externally and it is the least altered example so far met with. The extent of the hall is determined by the two jutting wings, the floor joists of which are evidently original. Traces of the oriel remain and also of the arched head of the west doorway. There is a moulded beam which suggests a mid-15th-century date. The back wall has been re-built throughout in ragstone and there is an addition in this material at the south end. Some of the panels are infilled with flint and herringbone brickwork, both of which have no doubt replaced the original lath and plaster.



Photo: Harry Urquhart

PLATE I. Daleham, Fletching



PLATE II. The Old Shop, Bignor



PLATE III. Hickpots, Ardingly

Photo: S. R. Relf



PLATE IV. 23-25 East St., Robertsbridge

Photo: S. R. Relf

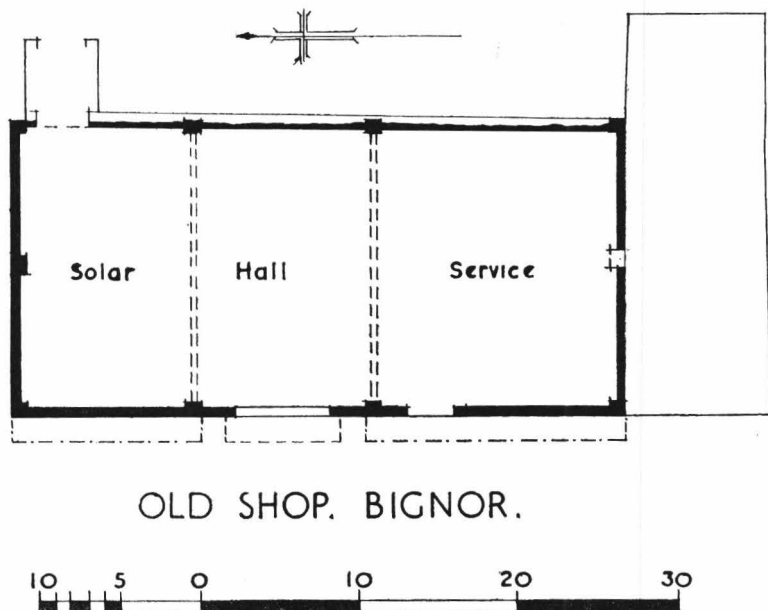


FIG. 2

Hickpots, Ardingly

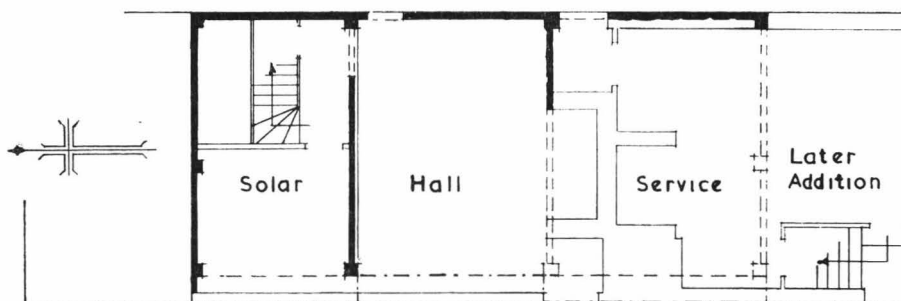
The accompanying photograph of this house should be compared with that of The Old Shop, Bignor, because, although it may appear to be a fantastic suggestion, these two houses were originally of substantially the same design.

A favourite alteration (to which many "recessed front" houses have been subjected) was the bringing forward of the main walls flush with the projections of the end bays, thus making a plain straight-fronted house. Examples are extremely common, and it was clearly an easily-made alteration devoid of structural difficulties, which added 18 inches or so to all the ground floor rooms, including the hall.

Hickpots has been treated in this way, but it is obvious from the arrangement of the original floor joists at the service (south) end and the one remaining

cantilever bracket to be seen in the north west corner of the solar bay, that the house was originally of the recessed front type.

Apart from the above alteration, it has had additions made to both north and south ends in the 17th century and outshots built throughout the east side which are superficially modern in character. The building was re-roofed—also apparently during the 17th century, but later—the mediaeval rafters over the hall area being retained.



HICKPOT'S. ARDINGLY.



FIG. 3

It will be noted that the extreme north end is roofed to a much steeper pitch than the remainder. No doubt this indicates the original roof slope, that over the mediaeval portions being lowered when reconstruction took place. There is some modification of the surviving mediaeval trusses and braces which supports this view.

The building is now divided into three cottages, two of which are in an unrestored condition. No. 1 embodies

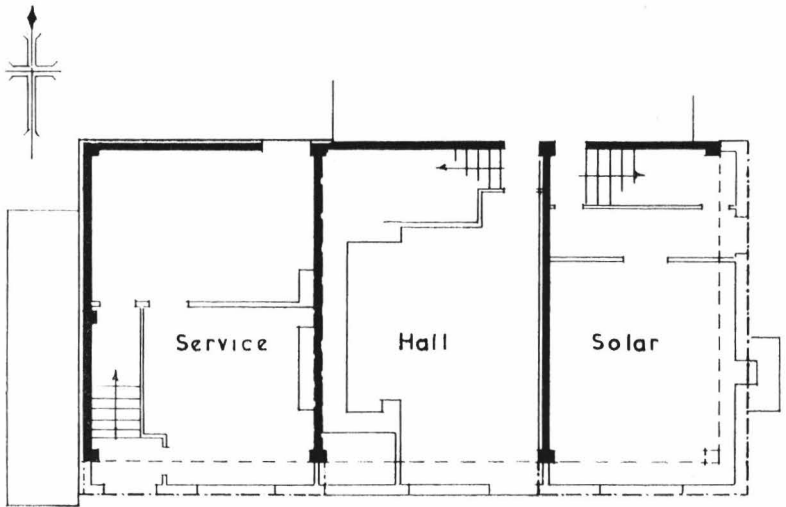
the south 17th-century addition and the major portion of the mediaeval service bay, whilst No. 2 represents the hall and solar. No. 3 has not been examined internally, but appears to be wholly 17th century, and is more likely to be an addition than a "rebuild," the design being complete without it.

In the north wall of the hall is a moulded beam at about 6ft. 6in. above floor level. No panelling is visible beneath it and the wall appears to be wholly of timber and plaster. The moulding is of a very common type, generally assigned to the second half of the 15th century. It resembles that in nearby Hapstead Farm, which is a larger hall of about the same date. Practically the whole of the ground-floor framing of both mediaeval and later work has been replaced with an interesting variety of stone and brickwork of varying periods. The large inserted chimney is of a handsome cruciform design, which appears to have been favoured locally towards the end of the 16th century.

23-25 East Street, Robertsbridge

As at Hickpots, the recessed front has been removed and the walls brought forward to produce a plain front. Here the upper storey projected also at the solar end, as evidenced by a post and bracket which may be seen built into the north-east corner. This double overhang of the east and south walls would normally require a dragon beam projecting diagonally from the south-east corner. In the building's present condition it cannot, unfortunately, be verified. There is no sign here of the cross passage as at Daleham. It will be seen from the plans that this feature could have existed at both Hickpots and The Old Shop, the dimensions being sufficient to allow it, though it has not been recorded there.

The extent of the hall can be checked by the existence in the roof space of blackened partitions at either end and also by the survival of mediaeval floor joists in



23-25 EAST ST. ROBERTSBRIDGE.



FIG. 4

both the service and solar bays. The roof itself is extremely well framed and very steep, with heavy rafters in a first-class state of preservation.

There is a beam in the solar hall partition with mid-15th-century mouldings and the space below this is filled in with close-spaced vertical framing and plaster. This represents an interesting departure from the more usual oak panelling and has been noted also in an early partition at Brook House, Rotherfield.