

WESTON MANOR FARM, THAMES DITTON

BY

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THE attention of the authors was attracted to this building early in 1960. It was in use as a farm until 1956 and had been derelict for some three years. During this time considerable vandalism had occurred and it was decided that a record should be made while there was yet time. Unfortunately, the two staircases had been burnt down before a measured plan could be taken. This not only destroyed some important evidence, but prevented an adequate description being made of the first floor. Later, in the autumn of 1960, the land was sold for educational purposes and the farm buildings were demolished in February 1962.

Weston Manor Farm lay beyond the north side of Weston Green¹ and comprised a farmhouse and series of outbuildings as indicated in the site plan (Fig. 1) surrounded by a fine brick wall in English bond. Many of these buildings were modern, but also of interest were a large barn to the north-east of the house and a smaller barn to the south-west. A further small barn to the south-east was not ancient, but was covered with weather boarding which had been pit-sawn. It was perhaps a hundred years old.

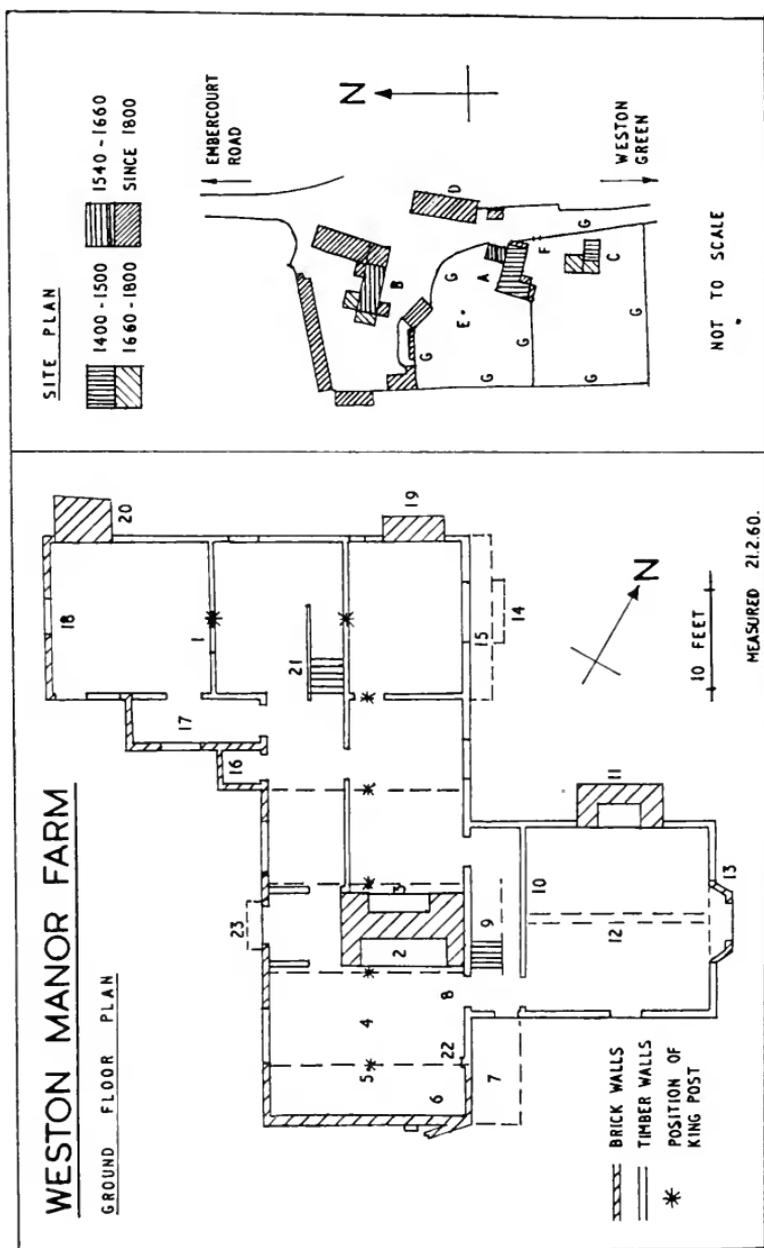
THE FARM HOUSE (pl. III)

A plan of the ground floor of the farmhouse is given in Fig. 1. It apparently consisted originally of a hall-block of four bays (an unusual size) to which a cross-wing, of three bays with jettied upper storey, was attached on the north-west side. Later to the middle of the north-east side a wing was added. The original house was apparently thus L-shaped and the hall-block single storied. This plan is not uncommon in Essex² and Kent.³ However, the fact that the other end of the hall-block had been extended in brick may mean that a second cross-wing has been destroyed. This is unlikely since the end timbers before the extension show considerable signs of weathering. The addition of the later wing and the fact that the south-west wall has been encased in brick have made it impossible to locate the position of the original doorways. Care was taken to look for a screen's beam arrangement, but this

¹ National Grid Reference TQ (51) 153667.

² H. Forrester, *The Timber-Framed Houses of Essex*, p. 6.

³ E.g. Canon's Cottages at Wingham.



KEY TO FIG. 1

A. House. B. Larger Barn. C. Smaller Barn. D. Barn with Pit-sawn Planking. E. Monkey-puzzle Tree. F. Gateway. G. Old Brick Wall. I. Four-centred Arch, embedded in Wall. 2. Inserted Brick Chimney Block. 3. Jacobean Panelled Overmantle and Panelling. 4. This room is full height of house. 5. Arch-braces of this King-post contain "Wattle and Daub." 6. This section added recently. 7. Modern Lean-to. 8. Original Window above door. 9. Modern Staircase. 10. Panelling. 11. Chimney with "Triple Diamond" Stack. 12. Chamfered Beam in Ceiling. 13. Bay Window above. 14. Oriel Window above. 15. Overhanging Upper Storey. 16 and 17. Modern additions. 18. This end rebuilt. 19. Chimney blocked. 20. Oven and Chimney blocked. 21. Seventeenth-century Staircase. 22. Beam originally at end of house, sawn off at head height. 23. Modern Porch.

The authors wish to record their thanks to Captain M. A. Wilson for his assistance with the measurements from which this plan was prepared.

was hampered by the destruction by fire of the staircase. The three doors by this were in line and may represent the screen, but they were completely plain and square-headed and were not central. It was concluded that remains probably exist of the hall and "upper" end, the domestic offices having disappeared.

A large chimney in the hall was a later insertion, being shaped within the roof to avoid roof beams. At this level the old bricks were visible, being masked on the ground floor by the insertion of more recent fireplaces. The room divided from the rest of the house by the chimney block was of the full height of the house, although a ceiling of match-boarding had been erected at tie-beam level. A floor had been inserted over the section of the hall and this communicated to the upper floor of the cross-wing by a very small door.

Both the hall-block and cross-wing had King-post central-purlin type roofs, with no ridge-piece, the rafters being close-set and halved and pegged at the upper intersection. The King-posts were completely plain with arch-braces, the south-eastern retaining original wattle and daub in-filling. These features point to an early date, and this is confirmed by the fact that repairs were necessary to the rafters, which were strengthened by having two beams nailed with hand-made nails one on each side. The roofs were tiled with flat, hand-made peg tiles. These were of standard size, as was to be expected since the sizes were standardized in the fifteenth century.⁴ Each tile had two holes, approximately square, and was secured by two pegs. Since, however, these pegs were of deal, they probably date from the reconstructions to the rafters. (Tiles very similar in type were observed by one of the authors at the Nonsuch Banqueting House excavations.) Only one of the ridge tiles was found and a photograph taken in 1951 confirms that they were plain. The gable-ends were without barge-boards, but the roof angle was steep. The north-east wing had a simple collar-beam roof of lower pitch, largely renewed. It was of two stories and possessed a fine brick external chimney with three detached shafts rising above the stack. The bricks were slightly smaller than standard size, four courses being $11\frac{1}{2}$ in. high.

The main timber-framing was in oak, the panels being on average a little taller than their width, and wind-braced at the corners. In the front of the house (north-eastern side) they were completely covered with lath and plaster. At the back (south-west side) the timbers had been covered with a single thickness of brick, but even here the destructive efforts of local children made them visible. Originally they were filled with wattle and daub, traces of which remained. The timbering of the north-east wing was considerably lighter than that of the rest of the house. The base of the timbering was much obscured by fallen rubbish, but it appeared to rest on two courses of brick of standard size. This probably is the result of underpinning. Internally the timbers were visible in the part of the

⁴ L. F. Salzmann, *English Industries of the Middle Ages*, p. 176.



(a) WESTON MANOR FARM: FARMHOUSE EXTERIOR FROM THE NORTH-EAST (p. 27).



(b) THE SAME: FARMHOUSE, CROWN POST IN HALL (p. 29).



(a) WESTON MANOR FARM: THE LARGER BARN (p. 31).



(b) THE SAME. ROOF OF LARGER BARN.

hall which was the full height of the house. This room had been extended to the south-east more recently in brick. The outer side of the King-post and arch-braces showed effects of exposure to weather and the space between them still retained its wattle and daub in-filling (pl. III*b*). Below this a horizontal beam originally at the end of the building had been cut off at the ends to allow the extension. This room also possessed high up in its northern corner an original window, unglazed, complete with two vertical plain mullions set diagonally, but with no evidence of grooves for shutters. This was the only original window found. The blocked fireplace in this room was spanned by a cambered oak lintel. The section of the hall the other side of the chimney was divided at ground-floor level into a room and passage. The dividing wall was lighter in construction and had been largely removed before it could be examined. This room was panelled to the ceiling in oak in nearly square panels, with continuous rails and styles divided into muntins. The over-mantle was divided into three panels with rounded heads, a late sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century feature.

At the end of the passage-way and within the cross-wing was a staircase. This was destroyed by fire before it could be examined properly, but as the treads were inserted into slots and pegged, it could not have been earlier than the seventeenth century. It was panelled, and probably corresponded to this date.

The rooms in the cross-wing showed no signs of panelling and had at some time been internally covered with canvas. The room at the south-west end was much rebuilt, and had a concrete floor. However, in the opposite wall and only visible from under where the staircase had been was a small door with a four-centred arch at its head. Although badly charred by the fire, there was no sign of moulding in the spandrels. Both fireplaces in this wing were blocked, the south-western being old. The north-east end of this wing projected on stout timbers, which formed the floor. The oriel window in this end was of sixteenth-century shape.

The north-east wing contained a staircase which was modern. The large downstairs room was panelled in oak in square panels with continuous moulding on the rails. The brick fireplace had a cambered oak lintel. The ceiling was divided into two by a chamfered beam and the room was lighted by a bay-window which was repeated upstairs. The upper part of this looked to date from the sixteenth century, but the lower part had been reconstructed for a door, and the whole may have been modern, built to match the oriel window.

To conclude, the house originally consisted of an open hall with King-post roof and a cross-wing of two stories. Although it is difficult to date these houses, it is suspected that this was erected in the fifteenth century. Later, probably in the sixteenth century, a fireplace was added to the hall and a floor put in part of it. Perhaps at the same time, but certainly by the last quarter of that century, the north-east wing was built with its fine chimney. The oriel window

was probably then added to match, and from about this time dates the brick wall including an arched gateway into the back of the house. Later, in the early part of the nineteenth century extensive repairs were necessary. The roof was strengthened and the walls underpinned, the back wall being cased in brick and the ends of hall-block and cross-wing rebuilt. Possibly the very fine old monkey-puzzle (*Araucaria Araucana*) in the front garden was planted about this time. The species was first introduced into England in 1795.⁵

THE SMALLER BARN

Behind the house was an outbuilding, which is here referred to as the smaller barn. It was of timber construction of three bays (30 ft. 7 in. long and 17 ft. 3 in. wide), the two eastern bays with a King-post roof, without ridge-piece, similar to that of the house and covered with similar flat peg-tiles with square holes, and an extension to the north (16 ft. 8 in. long). There were some signs of wattle and daub filling, but the panels were mainly treated in brick, and the timbering rested on a brick base. An unglazed window with diagonally set plain mullions was found, similar to that in the house. The dating of timber barns appears to offer even more pitfalls than the dating of timbered houses, but in view of the similarity in construction our inclination is to assign to the two eastern bays of this barn the same date as the house, the western bay with the extension being later, in lighter timbers.

THE LARGER BARN (pl. IVa)

This was a fine structure of seven bays some 85 ft. long and 22 ft. in width with one transept. The timber-framing was again in oak, but the roof timbers had been strengthened in places in the same manner as those of the house. In this case, however, the truss was of Queen-post type (pl. IVb), and windbraces were provided in the walls. The walls were clad with quite modern weatherboard and were roofed with peg-tiles with round holes. The timber work rested on brick walls of several courses and these were in standard size bricks laid in Flemish bond. This represented underpinning, since the ground sills were rough tree trunks, not exhibiting the original excellence of construction.

More careful examination showed that originally the barn was of five bays only without transept, holes for the uprights of the panelling of the outer walls being found in the timbering. Later the western bay and the transept were added. An eastern extension of one bay, divided into two very recently by a simple truss in deal, connected with a modern wing. This end had been reconstructed with a deal floor and modern brick divisions.

The Queen-post roof, differing from that of the house and smaller barn, raises some interesting points. Since a roof of this size could

⁵ R.H.S., *Dictionary of Gardening*, p. 172.

have been constructed by either method, it suggests that this barn was constructed at a different period from the house and the smaller barn. It also suggests that at some period the storage space in the smaller barn became inadequate, perhaps due to a difference in farming methods. Such a change could have occurred at several periods in the history of the farm, from the change of ownership at the Reformation up to the eighteenth-century agricultural revolution.

Large barns were not uncommon in Surrey, since they might have to provide winter accommodation for cattle, and threshing was done inside the barn. A barn at Canbury House, Kingston, was said to be so large that twelve horses and carts could unload together, and it had four threshing floors.⁶

The Queen-post truss is in general a later type than the King-post and in regions where both are found together, occurs later. This is true in Essex⁷ where it rarely appeared before the sixteenth century, probably true in East Sussex,⁸ and we suspect true in Guildford, where the building behind 41 High Street (Queen-post) was dated to the early sixteenth century and the building behind 121 High Street contains a fine fifteenth-century moulded King-post.

The closest analogy for dating comes from Middlesex where barns were studied by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.⁹ Queen-post¹⁰ barns without aisles exist at Greenford, Harefield, Harmondsworth,¹¹ East Hillingdon, Pinner, Ruislip and Shepperton, all of which are dated to the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries, and the later dated examples seem to correspond more with that of Manor Farm. Thus a dating of, say, about 1600 \pm 60 years is probable on architectural grounds alone.

HISTORICAL NOTE

A search through local records for details of the farm's early history has not revealed very much. Historical articles, that have appeared in the local press, contain many contradictory statements; and as they quote no authorities one must dismiss such assertions as "it was a house of bygone abbots," that "monks bred pigs for making bacon and hams to feed the household of Hampton Court," or "the barn was once a chapel for monks who lived in the farmhouse."

⁶ M. S. Briggs, *The English Farmhouse*, p. 44.

⁷ H. Forrester, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁸ R. T. Mason, *Sx. N. & Q.*, XIV, p. 249.

⁹ R.C.H.M. *Middlesex*, particularly plate 33.

¹⁰ A new classification of mediæval roofs has been put forward, since this paper was written, by R. A. Cordingley, *Trans. Ancient Monuments Society*, New Series, ix, p. 73. In this the term "crown-post" has been substituted for "King-post", and "Queen-strut" for "Queen-post." According to this classification, the roofs of the house and little barn are of type IIe, and that of the large barn is of type Vd (variant 4b).

¹¹ At Harmondsworth also is a very fine fourteenth- or fifteenth-century barn with King-post roof.

The Victoria County History and Brayley seem agreed on the following points. The Manor is referred to in Domesday Book as in Amelebridge Hundred in the possession of the Abbess of Berchinges. It is uncertain by whom it was given to the nuns of Barking, but it may have been part of the original endowment when the convent was founded in the seventh century. The manor remained in the possession of the Abbess until Henry VIII bought it when forming the chase of Hampton Court. It was leased the following year to John Baker, but in later times it was leased to the owners of Imber Court. There is no suggestion that nuns, still less monks, ever worked or lived at the farm; the nuns were simply landlords.

The further statement that about 1801 the Crown sold its rights to William Speer is incorrect, for much earlier than that Manor Farm and much surrounding property belonged outright to the Onslow family. In the actual auction catalogue (which one of us possesses) of the sale of Ember Court by Lord Onslow, it appears that on 16 June 1778 the freehold of Manor Farm with 39 acres was sold to Mr. Speer for £1,900. Obviously therefore the Crown had parted with its rights earlier than 1778. The catalogue refers to the "Manor of Weston or Barking," a very late use of the name. As to when the farmhouse was built, nothing could be found in local records to confirm or contradict the approximate date suggested on architectural grounds.

In the Poor Rate books, where the property is referred to as Manor Farm or Winch's Farm, there is no earlier reference than 1728; but from that date the occupiers are:

1728-1738	Widow Cross
1738	Rt. Hon. Arthur Onslow paid the rates as owner
1738-1778	Thomas Fitzwater
1778-1783	Henry Mazey
1783-1785	Alexander Ross
1793-1795	Richard Sedding
1795-1821	William Beckford
1822-1833	Richard Potter Sen .
1834	Executors of R. Potter
1834-1843	Henry Winch (grandfather)
1844-1845(?)	Henry Winch (father)
1859(?)-1904	Henry Winch (son)
1904-1947	Ben Keen
1947-1956	John Joseph Spooner

Most of the farmers seem to have entered into the general life of the village, taking their turn serving the posts of Churchwarden or Overseer of the Poor. The following were Churchwardens: Fitzwater (twice), Beckford (thrice) and Potter. Serving as Overseers were: Fitzwater (twice), Mazey, Ross, Beckford (thrice), Potter (thrice) and Winch the grandfather. Beckford and the eldest Winch appear on

various Jury Lists, and Beckford was also a trustee for the local charities.

Richard Sedding was an active member of a band of "vigilantes" formed in 1792 to combat the menace of highwaymen that infested the Portsmouth Road where it passed through the vicinity. Its headquarters were Ye Olde Harrow Inn, only a few hundred yards from the farmhouse.

For Poor Rate purposes the farm was valued at £200 in 1770, £315 in 1798, £293 in 1837, £346 in 1839 and 1843.

The Barns

As might be anticipated, there is no separate reference to the barns in the various Church books, but the oldest inhabitants remember the large barn being called "Henry VIII's barn." While there is no documentary evidence to confirm this, there is equally none to disprove it. Henry took over the farm in 1540, dying in 1547; a period included in the slightly longer one determined above, on architectural grounds, as its erection date. It is not very obvious however why Henry, having reduced the farm to hunting ground, should want a larger barn. It is suggested that the farm lands gone, a much smaller area—perhaps that enclosed within the surrounding brick wall previously referred to—was devoted to vegetables. Henry had a household numbering over a thousand at Hampton Court and the storage for such huge catering would indeed need to be large, particularly for roots such as carrots, turnips and parsnips then in vogue¹² and which need storage for out-of-season use. There is also the question of winter food for the deer with which the chase was so plentifully stocked. If there was also a dairy and pig farm, the need for more accommodation than that afforded by the small barn would be even greater.

The farm was deached in 1551 by Edward VI and presumably reverted to normal farming. It may have been at this stage that the storage facilities were considered insufficient and the larger barn was constructed. It may date from some seventeenth-century requirement, although in the latter half of that century records appear of another farm (Stook Farm) in the immediate area, and considerable expansion of the village occurred. Certainly Manor Farm does not seem to have regained its former importance. If this is so and the position is one of a reduction in size, a larger barn hardly seems to be required, and it is unlikely to date so late. Records have not survived of enclosure in this part of Thames Ditton because it was part of the Ember Court estate, but this barn may be evidence for such a change of land use. Later in the eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries changes in the methods of agriculture necessitated additions to the barns.

¹² R. Dutton, *The English Garden*, p. 28.