

## WYLLYOTT'S MANOR.

BY

A. HUGH SEABROOK.

*Read to the Society at Wyllott's Manor, October 7th, 1925.*

It is not easy to trace much of the detailed history of this Manor because apparently no family of prominence ever owned or occupied it. One thing is certain, and that is that the house is a timber frame building of considerable antiquity. Professor Beresford Pite, who came and looked at it in 1923 when I commenced occupation, said he could not do much more than guess, because no uncovering had then commenced, but he should imagine it was a "mediaeval gem."

The following scanty information has been gleaned from Cass' *South Mimms*, 1877 and Lysons' *County of Middlesex*, 1800. South Mimms (Cass, pp. 38-40). Sir Roger Lewkenor, knt., gave in 1478 "Wylllyotts" to his son Roger. In the following year, Henry Kyghley and Thomas Bartelot (Lysons) "were found by an inquisition to be seised of a messuage, 80 acres of arable land, 44 of pasture, 48 of wood, and £1 rent, which estate was called Wylllyotts and was held under the manor of South Mimms." These persons appear to have been trustees for the family of Lewkenor or Leukenor who it is probable had long enjoyed this estate. Henry Wyliot was an assessor to Richard de Kellehulle in the suit between the abbot of St. Alban's and William Atte Penne. In 1562, Thomas Lewkenor aliened this estate to William Doddes of North Mimms who, in 1575, conveyed it to Robert Staunford or Stamford of Pury Hall, Staffordshire. Robert Stamford was eldest son of Sir William Staunford, knt., judge of the Common Bench. In 1594, he conveyed Wylllyotts to Robert Taylor and his wife who re-conveyed it in 1603.

Subsequently there were several changes of ownership. In 1651, it was conveyed by Stephen Ewer and Brett Netter to James Hickson citizen and brewer of London, who by his will, dated 16th February, 1686, 3 Jac. II and proved P.C.C., 1st July, 1689, bequeathed "unto the Masters and Keepers or Warders and Commonalty of the Mistery or Art of Brewers of the City of London, and their successors, all that very manor or lordship of Williotts in the countyes of Middx. and Hertford, or in one or both of them, and all the Chiefe Manner House, etc., All which said Mancon house, etc., within the parish of South Mimms, now or late in the tenure of Benjamin Robinson."

A rent charge of £20 per annum issuing out of the manor of Williotts was sold by the Lewkenors in 1568 to William Larke who was proprietor of the Manor from 1594 to 1603.

Manor of South Mimms, *Lyson* (pp. 226-7, 228-9). No mention occurs in Domesday; probably it was included in Geoffrey de Mandeville's manor of Enfield.

Thomas de Leuknore died in 1302; his son Thomas who died in 1316 is called lord of the Manor of South Mimms. His descendant, Sir Roger died seised of this Manor in 1479. (At Lysons' date the manor was in the possession of the Marquis of Salisbury).

Manor of Williotts.—In 1479, "Henry Kyghley and Thomas Bartelot were found by an inquisition to be seised of a messuage, 80 acres of arable land, 44 of pasture, 48 of wood, and £1 rent, which estate was called Wylyotts, and was held under the manor of South Mimms. These persons appear to have been trustees for the family of Leuknore or Lewknor, who it is probable had long enjoyed this estate, of which they continued in possession a considerable time after they sold the Manor of South Mimms." In 1562, Thomas Lewknor aliened this estate, then described as the Manor of Williotts, to William Doddes. In 1575, they conveyed it to Robert Staniford of Pury Hall in the County of Stafford; in 1594, Staniford to Robert Taylor;

in 1603, Taylor to Sir Roger Aston; the next year, Aston to Thomas Honeywood; 1607 Honeywood to Elinor Hyde and John Wylde; in 1619, Sir John Wylde to Henry Fetherstone; in 1623, Fetherstone to Walter Lee; in 1650, Lee to Alexander Wilding. In 1651, Wilding to Stephen Ewer and Brett Netter, trustees, it is probable for James Hickson, citizen and brewer to whom it was conveyed by them the same year. James Hickson by his will, February 16th, 1686-7, bequeathed the estate to the Brewers' Company in trust for the purpose of endowing and keeping in repair certain alms-houses founded by him in the parish of South Mimms. A rent charge of £20 per annum issuing out of the manor of Willliots was sold by the Lewknors in 1568 to William Larke and after some intermediate assignments was purchased by Robert Taylor who owned the Manor from 1594 to 1603. "It has since passed with the Manor" also says Lysons.

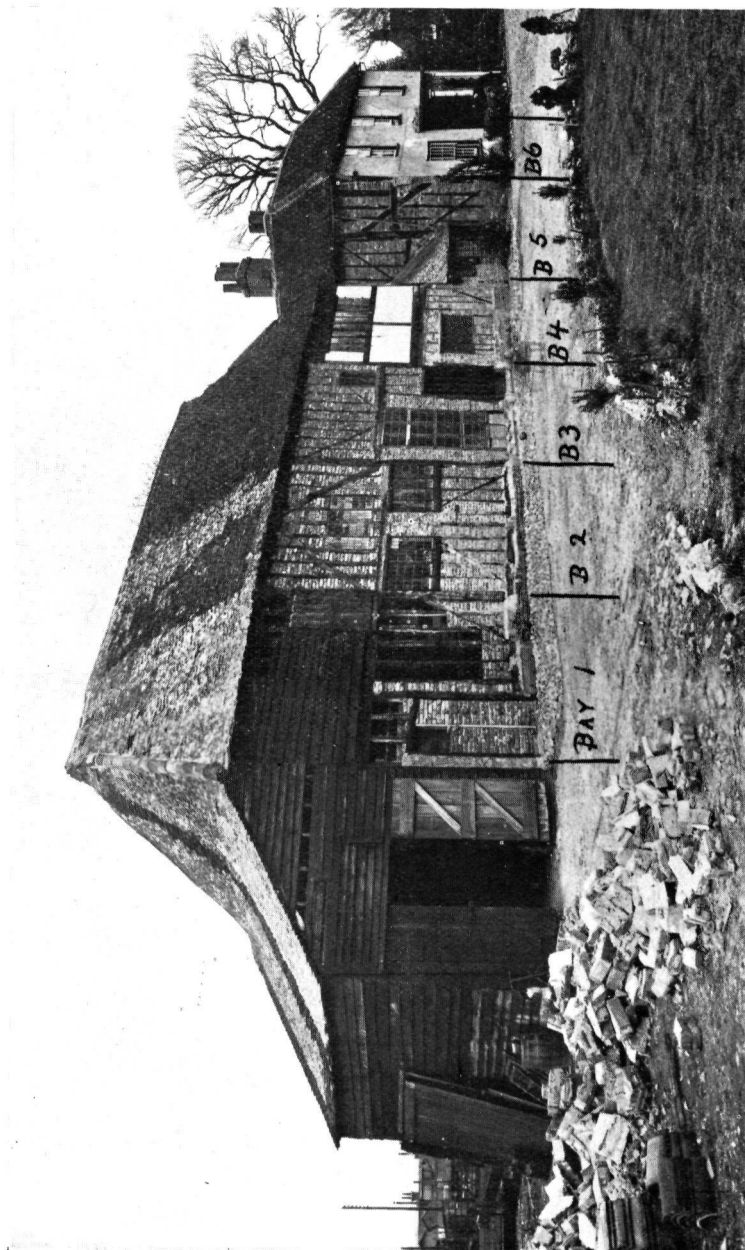
Jas. Hickson, who died in 1689 having in his lifetime built a set of six alms-houses for poor widows at Dauncers Hill in this parish, by his last will dated February 16th, 1696-7, bequeathed the Manor of Willliotts to the Brewers' Company in trust for their endowment, directing that a pension of £4 per annum should be allowed to each widow, with a load of firewood, and every other year a gown; the remainder of the income being appropriated to keep the houses in repair. The women are now allowed £1 per annum in lieu of firewood.

I took possession as tenant in July, 1923, and became so fascinated with its possibilities that I arranged terms of purchase with the Brewers' Company in 1925. At that time Wylyyotts was, and had been for many years, a very badly maintained and dirty farmhouse and barn. There were 25 acres in all, the land and buildings being in as bad a condition as the house. Chicken runs were fixed outside the side entrance to the house, the courtyard was full of

thistles, nettles, and rubbish. Cabbages were growing up to the front door. Tiles were off the roof, windows boarded up, doors non-existent, while the oak from the old structure had evidently provided the tenants with firing for many years past. It had long been the habit to pitch cinders and house rubbish outside the backdoor and the premises were infested with rats and vermin. It had not however been touched up by any so called 'restorer' and had suffered no tinkering except the erection of a few excrescences used for purely utilitarian purposes. It required some vision to take the place, but we regarded Wylllyotts at that time merely as a roof over our heads, and it was almost by accident that I became resident. However, no sooner had we commenced cleaning away the dirt and filth of the habitable portions of the place than we saw approximately what it had been and what it could be made into again, and from that day to this I have devoted practically all my spare time to repairing the house, but I estimate that it will take me from five to ten years to make it what I want it to be, as I do not allow anyone but myself to touch the important part of the work.

There is little doubt that the original structure consisted of a rectangular timber aisled-building. The outside dimensions are about 84 feet by 28 feet, divided into six bays varying in width from 13 feet 3 inches to 14 feet 6 inches. The central portion of the nave varies in width between the columns from 16 feet 3 inches to 18 feet 9 inches and the aisles vary in width from 5 feet to 6 feet 3 inches. The irregular dimensions are significant of an early period of construction.

I am anxious to obtain the opinion of students as to the period of the structure and the original uses of the various portions as my assumptions are mere guesses. Professor Pite was inclined to think that the structure was not originally intended for a residence but was monastic, and there are several indications in support of this theory. It seems pretty



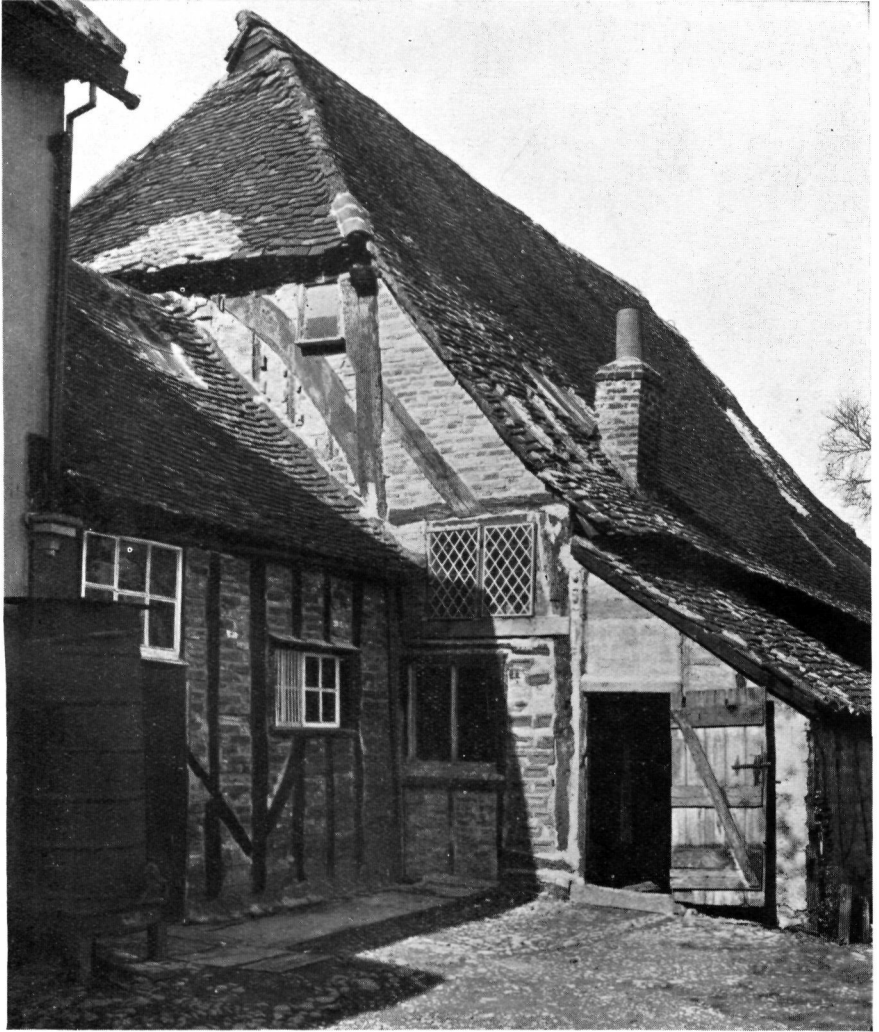
WYLLYOTT'S MANOR HOUSE (WITH NUMBERED BAYS).

certain, however, that early in its history it was used as a residence and it seems to me that Bay No. 1, consisted originally of solar and cellar, Bays 2 and 3, which are open to the roof, were the great hall, the rafters being black with smoke. Bay No. 4, and possibly bays 5 and 6 also, were kitchens, pantries, larders and offices. I cannot account for the room over bay No. 4. Bay No. 5, *evidently fell down many years ago; the mortice holes and pegs show how it was constructed and it was uniform with the rest.* It now consists of one storey. Bay No. 6 is part of the present habitable residence, the remainder of the latter being added at a later date. The ceiling of the room next Bay 6 fell down during last winter and I removed the whole of it and found remains of an earlier ceiling and under that heavy oak beams. Experts can probably guess the date from the design of these beams which is extremely crude. The latest alteration was the fitting of the bow windows in these rooms, an ingenious method being adopted by the old time craftsman for holding up the beam previously supported by the wall that was removed to form the bow window. The timbering consists of an "A" construction, tied in at the legs to prevent separating, the beam being hung from the apex of the "A" by a long bolt. I have not yet uncovered much of the walls of the present house as I must first get some rooms ready in the derelict portion, but I anticipate finding the original construction to be interesting.

The slope of the roof-tiles to the chimney stacks should be noted, instead of the formation of a valley gutter which is the usual practice. In Bay No. 6 (Residence) at the back of the stair-case are the remains of an oak mullion window which was covered up to put in the stairs. This bay is the only one having a south aisle intact. The oak columns on the outer side of the aisle have been lengthened to form and support the first floor. Bay No. 6 next to the X-tie is where the curved strut has been removed that formerly took the

roof-principal and which was replaced by common framing. It is clear that each bay had a strutted rafter plate of which several have been removed, but pegs and mortice holes show that they existed. I should imagine they have been removed from Bay No. 6 to make room for the present first floor room.

I think the foregoing covers the principal points I would call attention to. The place puzzles experts and I have formed several theories about it which I am anxious to get proved or otherwise. I do not believe the place was originally built as a residence and I believe the date to be 13th or 14th century. It was at any rate before gables or projections came into vogue and the high pitch of the roof leads me to believe that the design is not far distant from that time when roofs and walls were almost in one slightly bowed line. A further indication of this is that the distance between the oak columns at the tie beam is less than the distance at the foot. The brick nogging seen in the walls was all put in by me after removing the weather boards, with the exception of the brick work found underneath the boards of Bay No. 5. I also put in leaded lights and casements, many of which were lying about the premises, and I made the door from old material on the place. Most of the bricks that I used were found or dug up on the premises. All the flints marking the site of the south aisle were found under floors. The north aisle of Bay No. 6, the present house, has been removed causing that portion of the structure to lean to the north. The south aisle in the derelict portion, Bays 1 to 4, has been removed causing that part to lean to the south. In No. 5 Bay, both aisles have disappeared and evidently for a considerable time after the roof fell down the end of Bay No. 4 was the end of the building, because in the wall between Bays Nos. 3 and 5 I found ancient weather-boarding that was lathed and plastered over when the low roof was put on and that bay again made habitable. The first floor of Bay No. 4 is peculiar in only reaching over a part of the room underneath. It has been suggested that the oak columns and



WYLLYOTT'S MANOR HOUSE; BACK VIEW OF BAYS 5 AND 4.



main beams were taken from wooden ships and in support of that theory there are peculiar incisions, particularly in the columns, that I cannot account for.

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The following is taken from *The Barnet Press, Finchley and Hendon News, Southgate and Edgware Chronicle* of the 17th October, 1925:—

Members of the London and Middlesex Archæological Society visited Wyllott's Manor, Potters Bar, last week on the invitation of the owner, Mr. A. Hugh Seabrook.

Wyllott's Manor stands within a stone's throw of Potters Bar railway station, and it may prove to be a building of much historic interest. Apparently no family of outstanding prominence ever owned or occupied the manor, but there is no doubt that it is a timber frame building of considerable antiquity. Professor Beresford Pite, an expert on mediæval domestic architecture, who saw the building in 1923, expressed the opinion that it was a "mediæval gem." At first it was thought that the building might originally have been a residence, but later Professor Pite advanced the theory that it was monastic. However, the uncovering of the major part of the old structure leaves little room for doubt that the building was originally intended as a barn. That is the opinion of Mr. Aymer Vallance and Mr. J. C. Gotch, two of the greatest authorities on early English architecture who were present during the visit of the archæological society last week. They put forward the interesting theory that the original manor house, which was smaller than the barn, stood apart from the present building. They suggested that it was located in the field in front of the house, and pointed out traces indicating, it is thought, the former existence of a moat. The original line of the moat, if it were such, is well defined. Its banks form a rectangle which is complete except in one place. That is by the gate into the field, and it seems more than possible that this part was

filled in after the original Manor House had ceased to exist to permit the passage of carts or cattle to and from the field.

Mr. Gotch and Mr. Vallance thoroughly examined the old building, but there were no clues to the exact period of its construction. If there had been any moulding they might have fixed the date, but the constructors of the building had not paid any attention to the niceties of architecture, and it was this which led the experts to the belief that the present house was originally built as a barn. Their suggestion was that at some period after its construction it was converted into a dwelling-house for the labourers at the Manor House. Bays two and three, open to the roof, were probably the Great Hall, and in this the rafters are blackened either by age or smoke. Mr. Vallance and Mr. Gotch both spoke appreciatively of the work Mr. Seabrook had done in uncovering the old building. Dr. William Martin thanked Mr. Seabrook for his generous hospitality and said a most interesting afternoon had been spent by all present. Dr. Martin thanked also Mrs. Seabrook for taking so much trouble on the visitors' behalf.

Mr. Seabrook briefly replied saying he was most happy to have expert opinion on the origin of the building. He added that he was only too pleased to have the opportunity of preventing one old building from falling into the hands of vandals, or from being transported to America. He expressed the hope that the society would pay another visit to Wylllott's when he had proceeded further with his work.

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