

# Lower Roxhill Farm, Marston Moretaine: a measured survey of a timber-framed building

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## INTRODUCTION

Lower Roxhill Farm, Marston Moretaine, was in danger of being partly demolished during 1976 and a preliminary survey was carried out, during which the full significance of the building was observed by the writer. Fortunately the purchaser of the property was prepared to repair the building and preserve the considerable amount of original work which remained. He kindly consented to a full measured survey being made, with the result that most of the building details were observed and recorded.

Lower Roxhill is in the parish of Marston Moretaine and is a small hamlet, of widely dispersed buildings mostly of modern construction. The other main building of note is Lower Roxhill Manor. Lower Roxhill Farm itself is located at the crossroads, set back from the road and remote from any other remaining early buildings. Apart from the house itself there are no vernacular buildings of significant importance on the farm; the remainder of the complex is Victorian barns and modern structures.

## DESCRIPTION OF BUILDING

### GENERAL

The original part of the building is of timber-framed construction, most probably sixteenth-century in date. To this has been added a Victorian wing and various outbuildings. Although modification has been carried out most of the timber-framing survives.

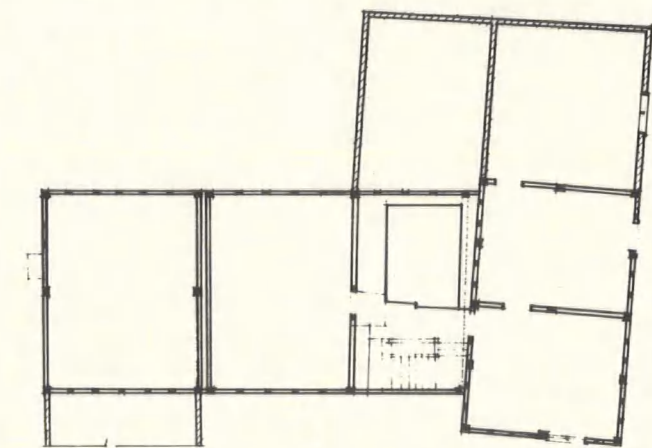
The basic form of the original building was a hall with a two storey cross wing at either end. None of the three parts of the building is jettied and all seem to have been built, if not together, within a short period of time. Figure 1 shows the ground and first floor plans of the buildings as they now are. Running from south-west to north-east are the original south-west wing, hall and north-east wing. Extending to the north-west is a Victorian brick extension in two parts; the south-west part is of double storey height but

without an intermediate floor. It contained a brick oven backing on to the chimney. The north-east part is two storey and served as a utility room at ground floor and as bedroom at first floor level.

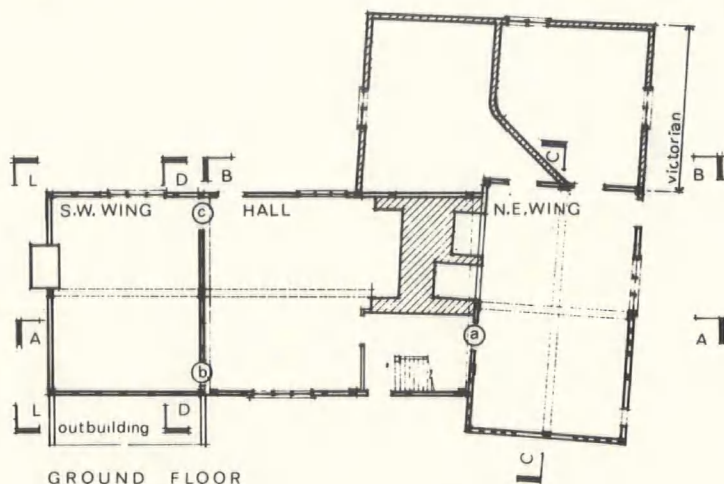
To the south-east is a range of late brick and timber-built outbuildings and stabling. Also shown on figure 1 are the north-west and south-east elevations together with a longitudinal section to the south-east. Both elevations have been drawn at an intermediate stage during the restoration when the pebble-dash had been stripped, but before new windows were added and doors repositioned. The south-east elevation is taken partly through the building. The longitudinal section has been simplified to show as much of the original work as possible and is a staggered view to miss the chimney and stair. Figure 2 shows the north-east and south-west elevations. Part of the outbuilding has been shown on the south-west elevation. The remaining sections and details in figure 2 are discussed in the body of this report. All of these sections have been much simplified to indicate the original work more clearly.

### THE HALL

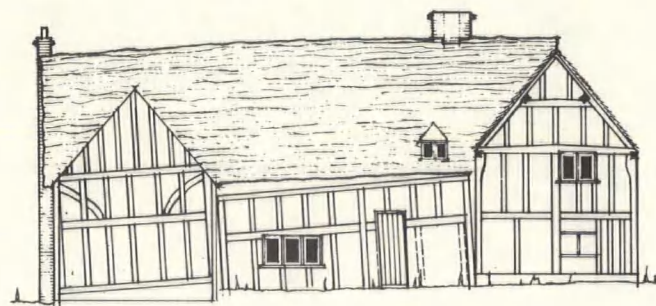
The hall is in two major bays with the north-east bay divided into two by an additional truss to form a screens passage at the north-east end, and what presumably must have been a smoke bay. The screens passage was at the extreme north-east end of the hall. A later fireplace and chimney has been inserted in the hall, filling the major part of the north-eastern bay and destroying much of the evidence of the screens passage other than the detail of the door frames at either end. Positive evidence of original doors leading through from the hall into the wings can be seen, and these are indicated in figure 1 as doors (a) and (b). A later opening was made into the south-west wing (door c). Possible evidence of a second door into the north-east wing has been destroyed by the inserted fireplace. The entire north-east end of the hall has been destroyed except the corner posts and part of the roof truss. However, a large por-



FIRST FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR



SOUTH EAST ELEVATION

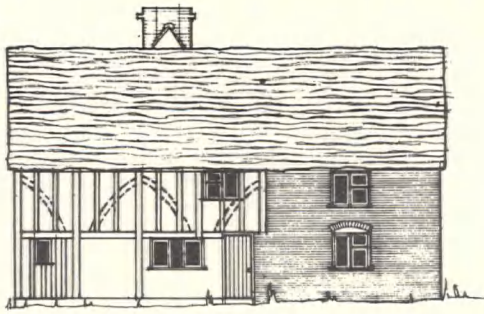


NORTH WEST ELEVATION

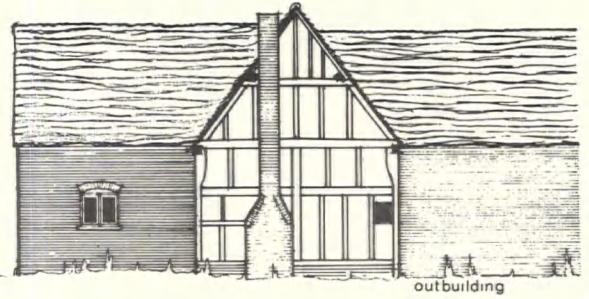


SECTION A A SIMPLIFIED

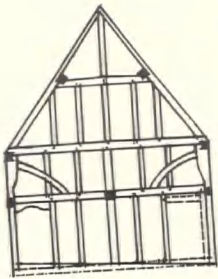
Fig 1 Plans, elevations and longitudinal sections.



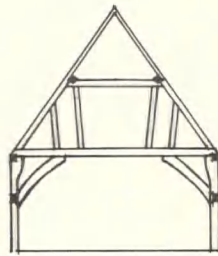
NORTH EAST ELEVATION



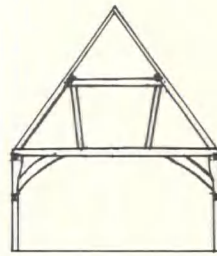
SOUTH WEST ELEVATION



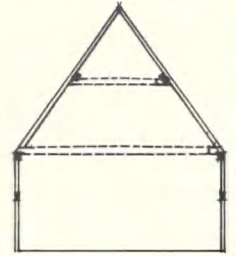
SECTION D D



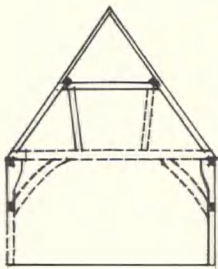
SECTION E E



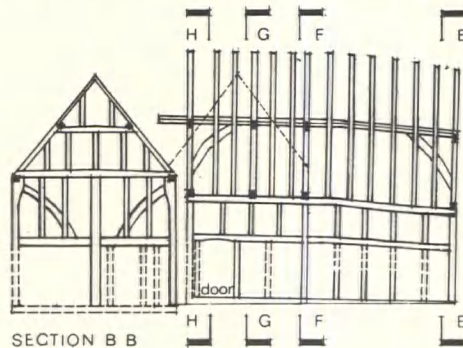
SECTION F F



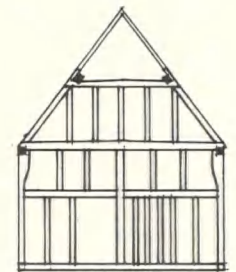
SECTION G G



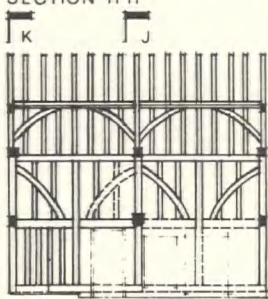
SECTION H H



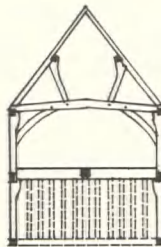
SECTION B B



ELEVATION L L



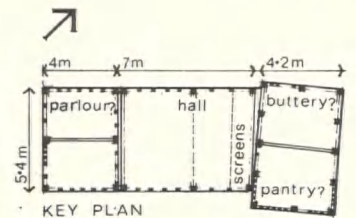
SECTION C C



SECTION J J



ELEVATION K K



KEY PLAN

J.M.B.

Fig 2 Elevations and Sections.

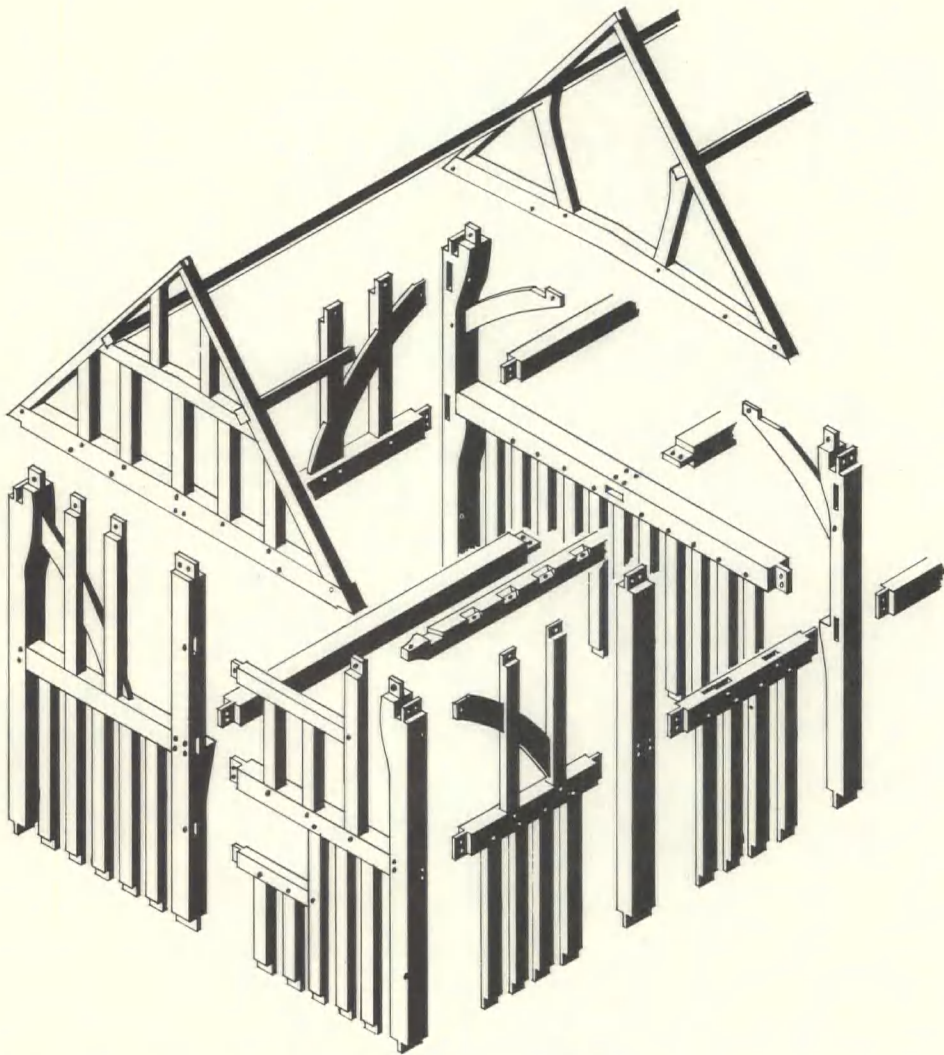


Fig 3 Exploded isometric view of north-east wing, looking from east.

tion of the south-west end does remain, and details can be firmly established.

It would seem that the entire hall is of light open construction and did not have any infilling studs between the underside of the tie beams and the ground cills, the only stiffening being tension braces below the tie beams. This is important as it shows that the hall must have been constructed at the same time or later than the wings. This is discussed later in the paper.

Windows were located at both sides of the south-west bay of the hall. Unfortunately, details of these were lost when the undersides of the horizontal mid-plates were cut away for later win-

dows. Shutter grooves remain running the length of the bay on both sides.

The roof has been much cut away and replaced but the location of the rafters can be seen and it is of clasped purlin construction. A simplified section through each truss of the hall is shown in figure 2. Section EE shows the south-west end of the hall from the inside. This was of very light construction with a queen post truss without studs above the collar. Below the tie beam the only structural members are the two braces from the underside of the tie beam to the corner posts. The remaining evidence of the north-east end of the hall, section HH, shows that this end was identical to the south-

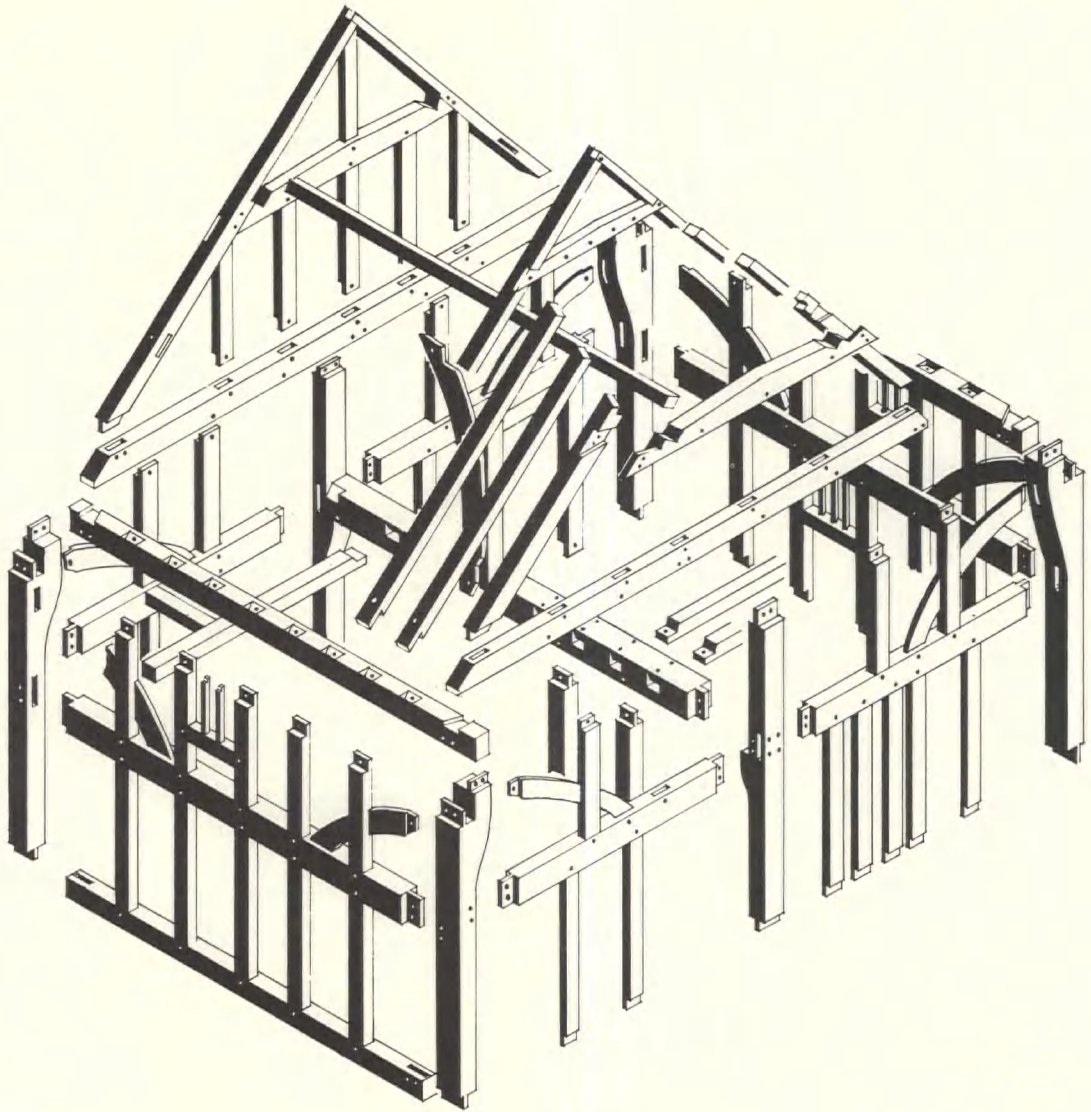


Fig 4 Exploded isometric view of south-west wing looking from west.

west end. The central truss, section FF, is similar to the ends except that the braces strike the posts at a higher level. Section GG shows the additional truss forming what must have been the smoke bay. Only a small section of the collar and tie beam remain, as they were cut away by the inserted chimney. The trusses are of clasped purlin construction and, with the exception of the smoke bay truss, the principal rafters reduce in section above the collar.

#### *THE NORTH-EAST WING*

This wing is the most substantially built section of the building with the somewhat uncommon feature of close studding at ground floor level and wide panels at first floor. The first floor elevations are stiffened by curved braces spanning across between their respective corner or mid-posts and mid-plates. These braces are halved onto the inside of the studs and are not visible on the external elevation. This wing is on a north-west to south-



Plate 1 Lower Roxhill Farm, Marston Moretaine: from east.

Photograph: J.M. Bailey.

east alignment, while the hall and west wing are on an axis running south-west to north-east.

Most of this wing can be analysed except for the north-east face which at the time of writing had not been stripped of its pebbledash coating and could only be surveyed from inside. The wing is in two equal bays and from remaining evidence was originally divided at ground floor level into two rooms by a partition running across the centre of the building. There are four full height prick posts, one on the centre of each elevation. These perform the dual function of receipt of the tenons of the eight mid-plates running around the building and the carriage of the beams supporting the floor joists. The primary joist runs the length of the building and is in two halves: the outer ends are supported on the ledge of the prick posts and the inner ends are tenoned into the bearer, which in turn spans between the other two prick posts.

The positions of windows cannot be clearly seen but there is some evidence in the south-east end. This would seem to show that there were two windows, one at ground floor and one at first floor level, both on the north-east side of the centre post.

The only door opening still visible is that in

the south-west side of the south-east bay (door (a) on fig 1). As the wing was originally divided into two by what appears to have been an unbroken partition, there would logically have been a door in the south-west side of the north-west bay, also leading into the screens passage.

An almost complete clasped purlin roof caps the building, with rafters and wind braces intact. In figure 2 there are sections through this wing, giving details of all evidence of original construction that can be seen so far. Section JJ looking to the north-west through the central truss indicates the two sloping queen posts that exist between the tie beam and purlins. The two curved braces at first floor level have also been indicated. A row of mortices along the underside of the horizontal beam would seem to indicate that there was an unbroken partition running across the wing at ground level and the studs have been indicated in chain dot.

#### *THE SOUTH-WEST WING*

This wing is of single-bay construction and was divided into two rooms on the ground floor by a partition running from south-west to north-east along the centre line of the building. This partition

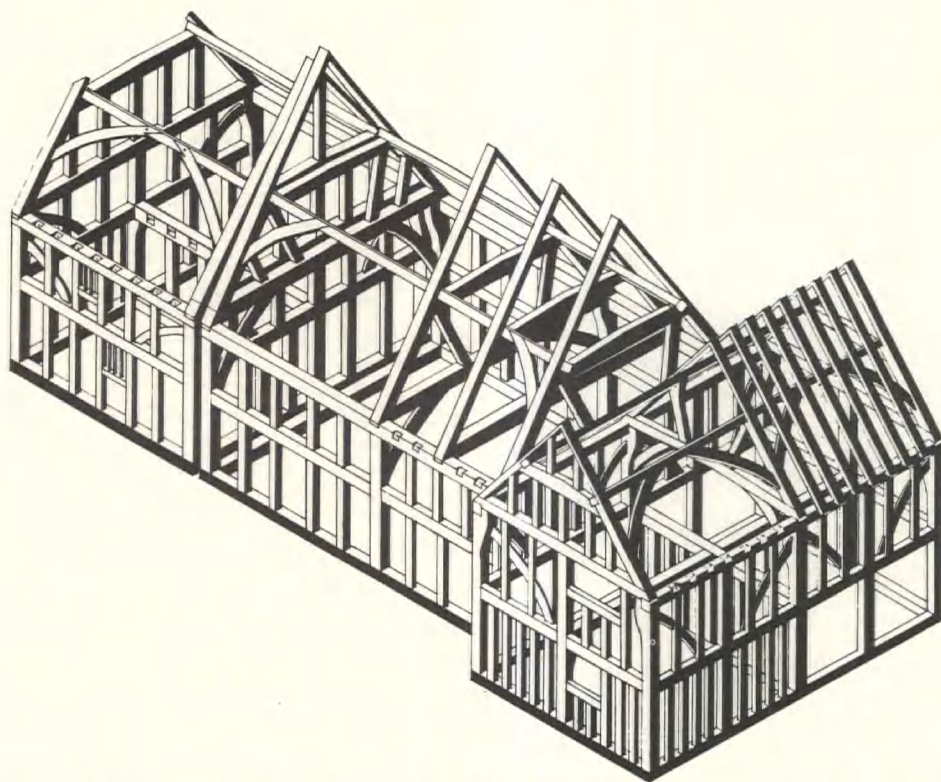


Fig 5 Composite isometric view of the timber-framed building at Lower Roxhill Farm, Marston Moretaine, looking from east.

may have been added later as door c (see fig 1), giving access to the northern room, is certainly an insertion. The primary joist is supported at either end by prick posts which extend from the ground cills to underside of the tie beams.

The elevations are infilled with widely spaced studs and the frame is stiffened at first floor level on all of the elevations by curved braces set between the corner posts and the mid-plates. These braces are halved on the inside of the studs. There is an exception to the symmetry of stud spacing at the west end of the building where, at ground floor level, the studs are at close centres. Judging by the arrangements of studs, there was most probably either a door or window in this elevation at ground floor. Evidence of original windows could be seen in both south-east and north-west elevations. On the south-east side windows with diamond mullions had been located at both first and ground floor levels. The evidence on the underside of plates included the shutter grooves in addition to the diamond-shaped holes. It was also possible to obtain the original cill position at both levels from evidence of joints in the studs. Windows on the

north-west side were of different form. At first floor level there are 50mm by 25mm mortices to receive the mullions which could have therefore been moulded. The window at ground floor had iron bars, the remains of which are cut off level with the underside of the plate.

This wing also has a clasped purlin roof with curved wind braces. The south-west end of this roof would appear to have been hipped, as the principal rafters and three adjacent common rafters have been cut back at an angle and then at a later date extended to the full height of the ridge. This hip would seem to have been original as there is no evidence of studs originally being on top of the collar.

In addition to the elevation on the south-west end of this wing a reconstructed detail (section LL) has been shown on figure 2. All of the existing evidence has been summarised on this section, with the studs shown in their original position. It has been assumed that all of the close studding at ground floor level was full height between mid-plate and ground cill. Section DD through the north east wall of the wing can be completely re-



Plate 2 Lower Roxhill Farm, Marston Moretaine:  
north-east wing.  
Photograph: J.M. Bailey.

constructed. The door at the south-east end of this elevation (door b) can be seen to have been adjacent to the corner post. A tenon for the door head can be seen on the inner face of the remaining side of the door frame; and there is a mortice in the underside of the mid-plate, tight to the corner post, which would have received the tenon of the other side of the door frame. The inserted door at the other end of the elevation (door c) had been located between the existing studs and a crude door head added.

### ORIGINAL FORM OF BUILDING

The trapezoidal shape of the hall gives the impression that it was a later infill between the two wings. This however cannot be proved and there may be other reasons for the asymmetrical form of the general ground plan. Certainly the hall could not have been in position without the two wings (or earlier wings) as the ends of the hall were not infilled and the north-eastern ends of the hall purlins extend 750 mm beyond the end of the building.

The final form would have been a central hall with a screens passage at its north eastern end.

There would be two doors at either end of the hall. The two doors at the north-east end would have led from the screens passage into the two rooms in the wing. These rooms would most probably have been the buttery and pantry with a chamber at first floor level. At the south-west end the two doors led into two other rooms possibly a parlour and perhaps another private room. Above would have been the solar.

### THE CARPENTRY

There are not, unfortunately, any scarf joints in any timbers other than the purlins, all the main timbers being in one piece. By carpentry analysis alone there is nothing to prove or disprove that all three sections of the building were built together.

The only slight difference in the roof construction was that the collars for the south-west wing were halved to the principal rafter whereas all other collars were tenoned into the principal rafters. This point cannot really be used as dating evidence as it is not unknown for both forms of jointing to be used in one building. In all three buildings bare-faced lap-dovetail joints were used to connect the tie beams to the wall plates.

The floor joist joints in the south-west wing were bare-faced soffit-tenon joints with diminished haunch and peg. The floor joist joints in the north-east wing are not visible and could not be inspected.

Exploded isometric views of the north-east and south-west wings respectively appear in figures 3 and 4. The former (fig 3) is shown looking from the east and gives details of the carpentry for half of the wing. The window locations visible are shown on the south east elevation at ground and first floor levels. The partition across the centre of the wing has also been reconstructed. Further details such as rafter locations and wind braces are shown on the composite isometric drawing (fig 5). Figure 4 is an exploded view of the south west wing looking from the west. The original stair position is shown at the north east end of the wing. Also shown is the detail of the hipped end with the supplementary collar across the common rafters.

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am much indebted to the owners of the building, Mr and Mrs Chapman, for allowing me to carry out the survey. My thanks are due to Eric Mercer for reading through my draft text and making many useful comments.

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