THE GABLES, LITTLE CARLTON, NOTTINGHAMSHIRE: THE RESTORATION OF A TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSE

by

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This important house at Little Carlton, near Newark, came to the notice of the author while he was living in the next parish and preparing *The English Farmhouse and Cottage*, published in 1961. It was then owned by Mr. Joseph Hallam, who had bought it in 1925, along with 179 acres of land, when part of Lord Middleton's estate, including Wollaton Hall and Aspley Hall, was disposed of.[1] He allowed a measured plan to be made, which was published with an interpretation suggesting that the house was essentially of one date (*c*.1600) and was, on the strength of comparisons with probate inventories for the parish, a rich yeoman's house of that time.[2] It is now clear that the structural analysis and the explanation of its date and status were erroneous.

In the 1960s Mr. Hallam built for himself a bungalow east of the house, which he then used only to shelter livestock; the aspect of the house from the road was spoilt by a new farm building of breeze blocks to its left. The greatest misfortune was that Mr. Hallam sold the staircase of *c*.1700. It had not been photographed, and is now built into the Old England Hotel at Sutton-on-Trent. The Nottinghamshire Building Preservation Trust tried in vain to find a purchaser. The fact that it was empty, deteriorating and unlikely to survive attracted the attention of the Royal Commission, and the first insight into its early origin and complex development was the result of a visit in 1979. The house was listed as Grade II*. It seemed a near miracle when in 1984 Mr. Barrie Roberts, a builder then living at Long Bennington, (Lincs.), decided to buy and restore it for his own occupation. Equally fortunate was the fact that he engaged as architect Dr. G. L. Worsley, a business associate who had trained at the

PLATE 1a
The Gables in 1978: from the north

PLATE Ib
From the south.

Manchester School of Architecture under Professor R. A. Cordingley. The house was therefore surveyed and recorded by photographs, drawings and a scale model before work started. While work was in progress, the help and encouragement of the conservation officers of Newark District Council, Messrs. R. S. Fell and M. Hurst, were of great value, and problems of compliance with building regulations were eased by the inspector accepting work as repair and replacement of an existing building.

The appearance of the house in the spring of 1984 resembled a vandalised ruin (Plate 1). On the north elevation, brick walling and tile-hanging had given reasonable protection, but broken windows had let in water. The south wall of the east wing was unsupported as a result of the roof collapsing; it was unsafe, as was the first-floor framing. The roofs over the west wing and the main hall were relatively sound, but rain penetrating down the valleys had caused severe deterioration to the framing in the most vulnerable places. The original roof covering, no doubt of thatch, had been replaced with a combination of hand-made clay tiles, Welsh slates, pantiles and machine-made plain tiles on different parts of the roof. A rubble stone plinth of local lias limestone was exposed on the north front to the left of the entrance, in the wall behind the hall fireplace and on the south wall at a position corresponding to Truss B (Figure 1). It was also visible in the north gable of the west wing and in the east wall of the south parlour in the west wing.

The survey showed that the house (Fig. 1) had had three stages of development, the oldest part being the hall of three bays to which east and west cross wings were added. Dendrochrological analysis in the Department of Archaeology of Nottingham University showed that the hall was built in *c.*1265, the west wing about 1540 and the east wing somewhat later.[3]

The hall has a simple collar and rafter roof, with a crown post to each truss but no collar purlin. The upper part of Truss B is heavily sooted on its west face, suggesting that the hall

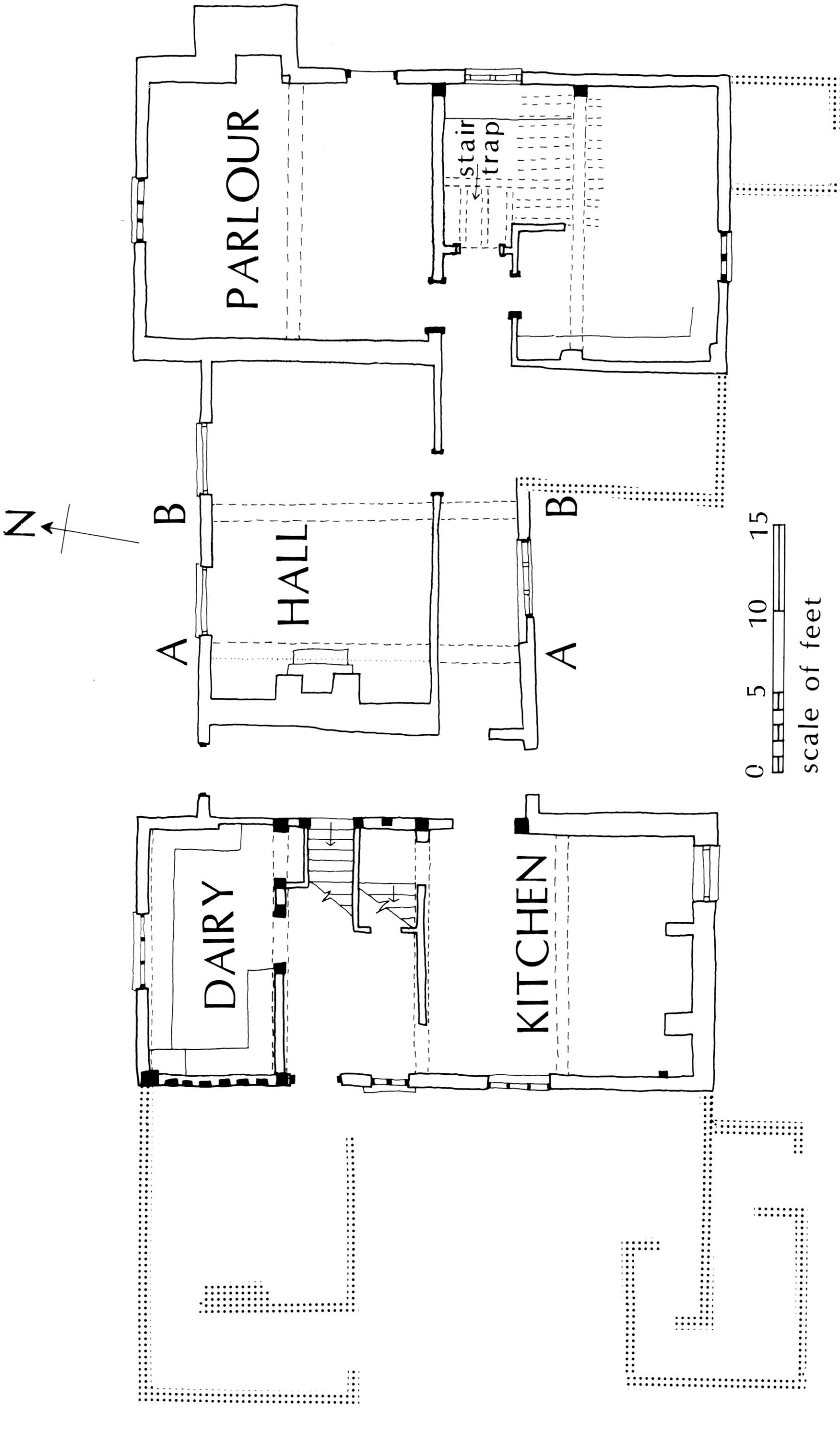

FIGURE 1
Plan of The Gables. Buildings shown stippled are 19th century removed in the restoration (*G. L. Worsley*)

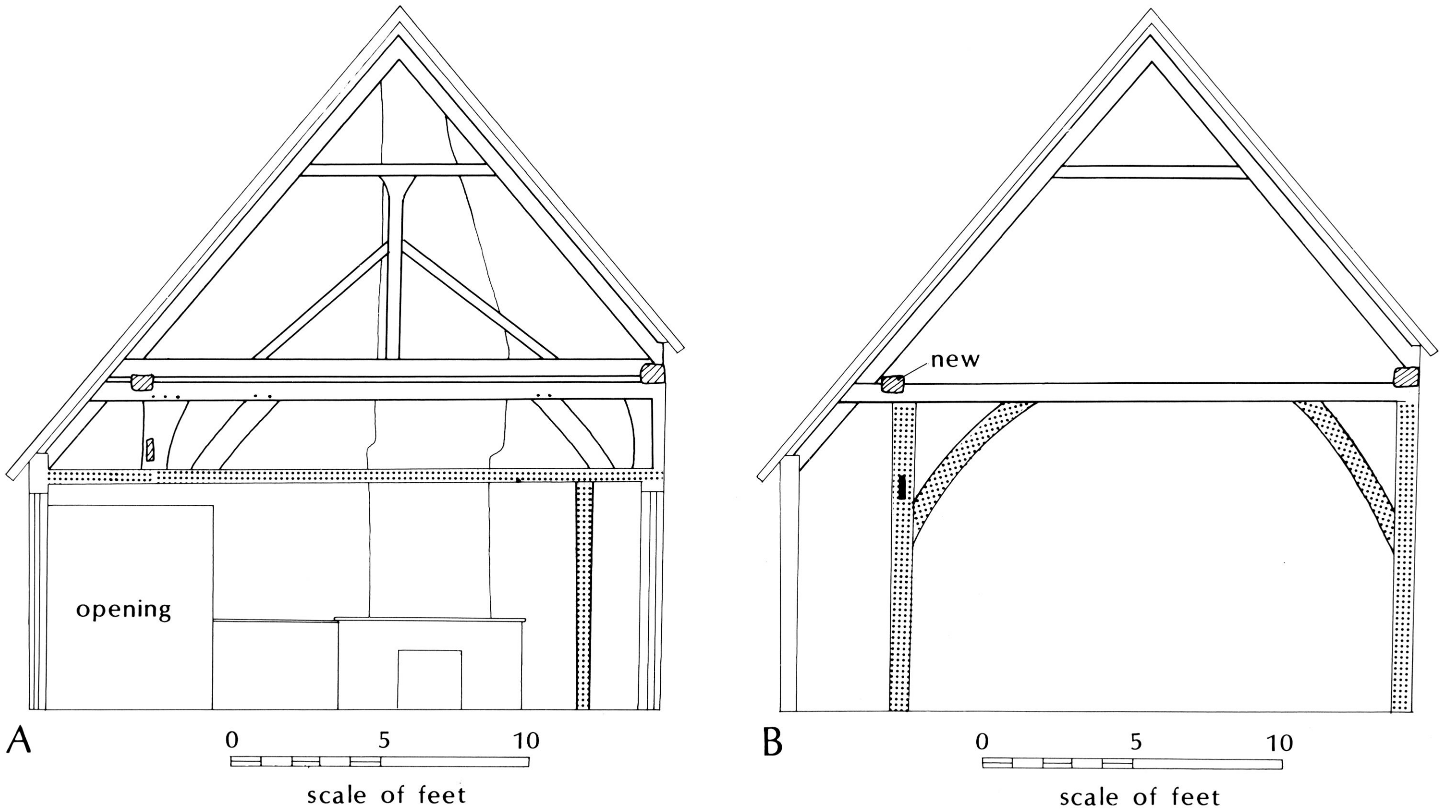

FIGURE 2
Sections of the hall in 1987. In Truss A, a new tie-beam has been inserted and a post to support it. In Truss B, the tie-beam has been renewed and posts and braces inserted. Inserted timbers are stippled.

was at first heated by an open hearth. The fireplace west of the truss, with a broad stack rising against its western face, is therefore an improvement, possibly of later medieval or Tudor date, and the rubble stone visible in the cross passage is a reredos for the fireplace. The oldest surviving brickwork is visible in the elevation, to the left of the entrance doorway, above courses of stone and forming the side wall of the fireplace. A series of shallow slanting grooves cut in the lower tie of Truss B must be for the framing of a smoke-hood for the fire.

Other changes in the hall are more difficult to interpret. There is no doubt that it was originally aisled, and the south aisle has survived. Lengths of arcade-plate still exist on both north and south sides, chamfered on the lower internal angle, and the chamfers stop at mortices in the soffit of the plates for arcade posts. There are also mortices for braces downwards from arcade plates to posts; there is no trace of any framing beneath the plates and the aisles were open to the hall. The north aisle has been demolished, most probably when the cross-wings were built. The soffit of the northern plate is concealed by the existing brick wall, but the two peg-holes for the braces can be seen between Trusses A and B.

While the house was derelict, evidence was noted to suggest that the arcade posts of Truss B were removed, probably before the house was very old, and base-crucks were inserted in their place. This would have cleared the central part of the hall of the obstruction of free-standing posts. The alteration was relatively simple to carry out; each base cruck could have been reared against the outer face of the existing post, the feet of the blades packed up as necessary until the tie-beam was supporting the arcade plates. The aisle post could then be removed. This hypotheses relates only to the south aisle, there being no evidence for a base-cruck in the north aisle, but it seems likely that both aisles would have been treated in the same way. This deduction by the Royal Commisssion in 1985 was not communicated to Dr. Worsley. Some of the evidence had been removed in *c.*1700 when an upper floor was inserted in the hall, and the southern base-cruck may have gone at that time; other evidence was removed in the restoration, when part of the southern arcade plate had to be renewed. Truss B therefore now has an arcade post again, a length of old oak having been found for this purpose. This particular medieval improvement, of inserting base-crucks to replace arcade posts, was also carried out at a house in Harwell, (Berks.), formerly called Lime Tree House and now identified as Catewy's Farm.[4]

Truss A at the west end of the hall is in effect a spere-truss. It has clasping ties, above and below the arcade plates. The upper tie carries a crown post, supported by straight braces halved, apparently without notches, over the western face of the tie. These braces are face-pegged into the crown post. There is a slightly cambered lower tie carrying the arcade plates; the arcade posts, the lower parts of which were removed when an upper floor was inserted in the hall, have deep jowls and slightly curved braces up to the tie. A mortice near the top of the outer face of the southern aisle post was probably for a brace or rafter down to the wall of the aisle.

This unusual composite truss may or may not be of single construction. Pairs of clasping ties are known in the East Midlands, at the Hollies, Bathley (in the next parish of North Muskham), at 5 King Street, Melton Mowbray (Leics.) and Thorpe Acre, Loughborough, (Leics.).[5] There the composite truss seems to be associated with aisled or box-framed construction, rather than with base-crucks as they appear elsewhere in the country. On the other hand, it is possible that the lower tie and the posts that carry it are later alterations; the braces to the crown strut may originally have continued downwards as passing braces and been cut off.

The hall, measured over its full present extent and over the likely width of the aisles, was some 30 feet long and 26 feet wide, proportion comparable with other aisled halls. Neither at the east nor the west end of the hall do its end trusses survive, so that whether it had a service bay or bays at its west end is unknown.

The two wings each contain two rooms on each floor, the eastern wing containing two parlours and the west wing the services. They are probably close in date; the size of each is similar and both have butt-purlin roofs with almost straight braces. It is clear that the hall remained open after the wings were built, since each had its own stairs. The formation of a passage along the south of the hall[6] and in effect separating the south aisle from the nave of the hall, may be contemporary with the building of a staircase within a brick extension in the angle between the hall and the south-east wing. The west wing contained a kitchen at the south end, heated by a broad fireplace at the gable; its smoke-hood still survives at first-floor level. The chamber over the kitchen was ceiled; the chamber at the north end was not. Trimmers in the north-east angle of the kitchen ceiling frame an opening immediately facing a wide door in the partition between the two first-floor chambers, as if the openings were used for passing up such produce as sacks of corn, bales of wool or cheeses.

In the east wing the north parlour and the chamber over it are heated by fireplaces with monolithic, four-centred stone lintels. The projecting brick stack is framed by posts and is integral with the wing.[7] In this second bay there is outside a small area of plaster pargetting with a swirl pattern. This 17th century pattern has been noticed in other local buildings such as the Old White Hart at Newark and the vicarage at South Scarle.

In addition to the changes already described, the ground-floor walls, except for two bays on the north side of the west wing, were rebuilt in brick. Further repairs were carried out in the 19th century and extensions were built to provide store rooms and outside closets. After 1925 Mr. Hallam inserted tiled fireplaces and contrived a bathroom behind boarded screening in the west wing.

The Restoration Programme

Each of the major decisions to be made about the restoration was debated in detail. The major interest in the building was in its timber-framed construction. It was therefore agreed that the frame should be carefully restored as a full structural entity and all joints checked and repegged. The inserted floor over the hall should be removed so that its general form resembled that of *c.*1600, and the brick wall enclosing the staircase of *c.*1700 should be removed, together with the 19th century additions.

Apart from the lengths of reasonable stone plinth, the brick walls had been built with a few courses below ground level but without foundations. It was agreed to underpin the whole building, insert foundations and where necessary to rebuild areas of brickwork, using original bricks in the same bond and mortar. For the windows, the possibility was considered of inserting frames similar to those in the Governor's House, Stodman Street, Newark, since it was clear enough from the proportions of the frame and its openings that the house had originally had windows with diamond mullions. It was agreed however that all windows should be reused or repaired as they were in the 1980s; the resultant mixture of casements and sashes indicates the changes over time. A new ground floor slab in concrete with oversight damp-proof-course was to be laid over the whole of the ground floor, related to existing floor levels. Upper floors could be retained in the west wing, but a new boarded floor was to replace the plaster floor in the east wing where there was collapse or damage.

The timber framing of external walls was discussed at length. The easy solution would have been to retain some sort of tile-hanging on the exterior and allow the framing to be fully exposed only on the inside. Mr. Roberts was determined to have the framing surviving at first floor level fully visible both outside and inside. This necessitated inserting a creasing course in places between the brickwork and the frame, and using modern materials such as fibreglass for the infilling of the frame. In the roof the rafters were much out of line and level; they were packed out where necessary and the whole roof underlined with boarding so that insulation could be inserted. For the roof covering, hand-made plain rosemary tiles would have been preferred, but since it was impossible to obtain a sufficient number, second-hand pantiles were used. They came from demolished cottages in Sutton-in-Ashfield.

PLATE 2a
The Gables in 1987: from the north

The whole restoration project took over two years; the work was done by Mr. Roberts' own staff, but he himself spent many hours at nights and weekends working on the house. Most of the frame was plastered over internally; it was stripped and where necessary taken down and defective members replaced with new. Mr. Roberts had grown up in Bottesford (Leics.) and was familiar with the Belvoir estate; through his acquaintance with the manager of the wood-yard, Mr. David Scott, he was able to help to choose the 42 trees to be felled for new work. Any old oak taken out was used again where possible; it made, for instance, doors or skirtings. His enthusiasm for old oak means that in the hall, for instance, the archaeologist needs the kind of key shown as Figure 2 to be able to tell what is original and what is restoration. The two new staircases were made either from new oak or from posts bought many years previously from a wood-yard at Worksop by Mr. Roberts' father, himself a builder at Bottesford. The hall is now paved with stone flags collected over many years by Mr. Roberts; some stone steps came from a barn at Brant Broughton (Lincs.); red hand-made quarry tiles from the old pantry were relaid in the through passage; the kitchen had had red and blue tiles laid in a herring bone pattern; frost damaged the red ones but the blue were saved and used for window sills and steps. Such details are not usually thought worth recording, but they illustrate what must have happened in the repair and restoration of houses, and they are a warning to archaeologists against simple explanations. Oak and mahogany from various sources was used to make other fittings and furniture. The house as restored is shown in Plate 2.

PLATE 2b
From the south *(M. W. Barley)*

OWNERS AND OCCUPIERS OF THE GABLES

Among the several Carltons in the county, what is now called Little Carlton in the parish of South Muskham was also known as South Carlton. The manor of South Carlton came, according to Thoroton, into the possession of a family named Marshall, until a Robert Marshall sold it 'in our time' (Thoroton's phrase) to a Chancery clerk named John Rotheram, whose sister married a Willoughby of Normanton-on-Soar and Selston.[8] Sir William Willoughby, whose father was Sir Rotheram Willoughby, died in 1630 and was buried at Selston. His son Sir William Willoughby who died in 1680 had no legitimate issue and gave his inheritance 'for name's sake to Mr. Francis Willoughbie's son of Wollaton, and his they now are'. Cassandra, Duchess of Chandos, in her 'Continuation of the History of the Willoughby Family'[9] which she wrote in *c.*1720 admits that she did not know the relation of Sir William Willoughby of Carlton to the Wollaton family. Thoroton says that the Carlton Willoughbys bought the seat of the Marshalls from a Willoughby Pond who, to judge from his name, must have been related to the Willoughbys; a John Pond, gentleman, is party to more than one local deed of the early 17th century. In Dugdale's heraldic visitation of Nottinghamshire in 1667, the second Sir William described himself as of Norwell; he had recently bought half of the lordship of Norwell from Peniston Whalley of Screveton, as Thoroton noted.[10] He left it to his natural son Hugh, who died in 1675: hence the gift to his namesake. It seems to be only a coincidence that there is a deserted hamlet of Willoughby in Norwell parish and the site of a moated manor house; we do not know whether Sir William's half included that site but he may have been attracted to the purchase by knowing of it.

In the 18th century the Willoughby family of Wollaton had acquired the whole of South Muskham except for a few small freeholds: that is the two manors of South Muskham and South Carlton. They also leased the land of the prebend of South Muskham in Southwell Minster. There is therefore a large collection of deeds, rentals, etc., in the Middleton archive. It is at least possible that The Gables was built by the Garnon family, who according to Thoroton 'had a good freehold here (where the family hath continued for above four hundred years) not very great or eminent'. Garnons are mentioned in Domesday Book as owners of land in Essex and Suffolk, and were once, wrongly, thought to be ancestors of the Cavendish family. At the heraldic visitation of Nottinghamshire in 1614 Henry Garnon's claim to arms was accepted; his heir then was a boy aged 14.[11] The first Sir William Willoughby (d.1630) had acquired the house and its land by 1615, for in that year he leased to John Pond 'all that field commonly called the Great Sand Field' (120 acres) 'tithe free and all the tithes of Garnon's Farm . . .'.[12] In the same year a final concord was executed between John Pond, gentleman, and Henry Garnon, gentleman, for two barns, two acres of land and six acres of meadow.[13] With that modest transaction, the Garnon family as landowners disappears from the record. Perhaps the boy John Garnon had died. The lease of the whole of the Great Sand Field shows that the Willoughbys could effectively enclose the open fields; hence the fact that there is no Parliamentary award for the parish. In a survey of 1762[14] the Sand Field had been divided into closes. It lists tenants field-by-field, but its map, from which the fields and where each tenant lived could be located, has not survived. The largest farm was then held by Henry Gilbert and it was probably the manor farm; Henry Huggins held 306 acres, including Chapel Close, across the road from The Gables, and may have been the tenant of it. The tithe apportionment of 1837[15] is unhelpful and merely indicates that one Henry Tollinton and various tenants held land in the vicinity of The Gables. The Gilbert family were still tenants of the manor in 1879, and William Bennett of The Gables.[16] According to local tradition, the Bennetts were succeeded there by the Becketts, and T. C. Beckett bought the manor at the sale of 1925.

It may be suggested tentatively that The Gables was built originally by a family of lesser gentry or substantial freeholders named Garnon. If so it is possible to suggest with some confidence the name of the builder. In the large group of charters relating to Kelham in the Rufford Abbey cartulary, four generations of Garnons, or Gernons as they were then called, figure as witnesses. The first, a Ralph, was living *c.*1176–1200; the second, a Henry Gernon, spans the first half of the 13th century, his son Hugh *c.*1237 to *c.*1261 and another Henry *c.*1279 to 1326. Henry Gernon was involved in *c.*1250 in modest land transactions and either he or his son Hugh seem the most likely candidates, in view of the date of the hall according to dendrochronology.[17] Thoroton's statement about the duration of the family is supported by the fact that throughout the 14th and 15th centuries Garnons or Gernons regularly served on local juries.[18] The cross-wings may have been built by on of the last Garnons, or by a new owner, for the family was evidently in decline. The probate inventory of Henry Garnon, gent., who died in 1629, shows its pathetic end.[19] His goods were valued at only £7 17s. and he was living in a two-roomed cottage. His hall was furnished with a 'little' table and a 'little' cupboard and not much else; his parlour contained two beds; he had some wool, and flax, nine yards of woollen cloth and two spinning wheels; outside there were two kine and a yearling, two swine, three sheep and some hay. Although the appraisers designated him a gentleman, he was worse off than many labourers.

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[2]M. W. Barley, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage*, (1961), 84–85 and fig. 12.

[3]*Vernacular Architecture*, 17 (1986), 52.

[4]*Ibid.* 51; *Archaeol. Journal*, 136 (1979), 173–92.

[5]Only the last example has been published, in *Antiquaries Journal*, LII (1972), 141. The same combination of base-crucks with double ties occurs in two houses in North Yorkshire; Royal Comm. on Hist. Monuments, *Houses of the North Yorks. Moors*, (1987), 18–9.

[6]See Barley, *op. cit.*, fig. 12.

[7]Dr. Worsley states that the fireplace were certainly added, since structural timbers were cut through. He also says that in the 17th century a small window was inserted as first-floor level on the east side of the second bay; this involved cutting through a wind-brace.

[8]R. Thoroton, *Antiquities of Nottinghamshire*, ((1677), 345–7.

[9]A. C. Wood, ed., *Continuation of the History of the Willoughby Family*, (1958), 36, 42.

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[15]N(otttinghamshire) A(rchives) O(ffice), AT 121.

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