

LANGFORD OLD HALL: A PROBABLE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY HUNTING LODGE

by

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Langford, on the east side of the Trent north of Newark, is one of Nottinghamshire's deserted villages and has long been known as such.¹ Those who travel the main road through the village notice most readily three farmhouses spaced out on the east side, more or less uniform in design and built of local stone with brick details. They must have been built early in the 18th century to revive the economy of the estate.² The name Langford Hall has been annexed to a Georgian house near the east edge of the parish, approached from the Fosse Way and originally called Langford Place (see below).

The earthworks of the old village, which have since 1956 been scheduled as an ancient monument, extend from the main road west to a 'fleet' or former course of the Trent. The Old Hall is sited close to the fleet and the parish church stands north of the house; as at Carburton, the church has at some time been reduced by demolishing a north aisle and a chapel.

It happens that the decline of the village and the circumstances leading to the building of the house are documented. Langford was a sizeable village in 1334, to judge from its assessment for the lay subsidy; its assessment for the subsidy of 1524 puts it among the larger villages as there were then 18 tax payers.³ Later assessments are standardised and do not reflect the population or the economy, but according to a statement of 1593 it was deliberately 'dispeopled', probably in the middle years of the 16th century.⁴ The rectory of Langford was leased from Trinity College, Cambridge by William Philpott, the wealthy Newark merchant.⁵ The lord of the manor was Sir Francis Leake of Newark; Philpott had acquired many small parcels of monastic and chantry land, but Leake had bought, and lived in, 'a certain great house of Friars'—the Friary in Appleton Gate.⁶

A new parson, Mr. Stringer, arrived at Langford in 1593 and recorded 'the state of the parsonage'. A copy of his statement was in 1869 in the possession of Captain Wolley of Collingham, who allowed E. G. Wake to include it as an appendix in his history of Collingham. Philpott 'had the tythe until the town was dispeopled by Sir Francis Leake, who fell at such variance with Philpott about the tythe, and the mainteyning of the tillage there, that he was finally by a composition constrained as it were to put over that estate he had therein unto Sir Francis Leake'. It is clear that land in Langford, as elsewhere in this part of the Trent valley, was valued more as grazing for cattle and sheep than as arable. Early in Elizabeth's reign, Leake sold the manor to George, Earl of Shrewsbury, Bess of Hardwick's fourth husband.⁷ He too valued his purchase for the quality of wool from Langford sheep.⁸

George died in 1590 and left the manor of Langford to his younger son Edward (1560–1618), who became the eighth earl, and it came after his death to his widow Jane. She mortgaged it in 1619.⁹ She died in 1625, and soon afterwards Langford was bought by John More, 'Doctor of Physic', who had acquired a manor at Kirklington from the Earl of Kingston and presumably lived there.¹⁰ He was a newcomer to the county, originally from Cheshire, and ambitious; he was granted a crest in 1626. It is possible from what Thoroton writes about Kirklington that he would have liked to acquire Belleau Park, but was unsuccessful; he obtained all of Kirklington except that house and its park, which the Earl of Kingston left to his son. At any rate, it may have been John More who conceived the plan to turn the deserted village site at Langford into a hunting park and to build a lodge in it; it was not uncommon for such sites to be converted into parks.¹¹ The design of the house, as will be shown below (Plate 1), seems to be that of a hunting lodge, although no reference to a park has been found. The evidence of dendrochronology dates it to the 1630s, with 1637 as the most likely year when the timbers used in it were felled (see Appendix I).

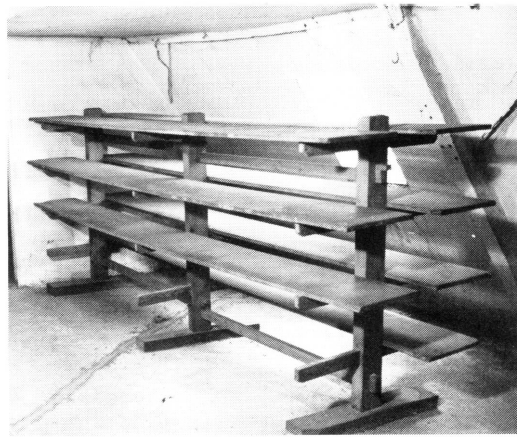


PLATE 1
General view.



PLATE 4
Chimney stack and rear extension.

PLATE 3
Cheese rack in garret.



John More had died by 19th October 1639; he was unmarried and left Langford to his nephew, Sir Edward More, who died at Newark of wounds received at Marston Moor.¹² His will (proved on 20th November 1646) provided for him to be buried at Kirklington, as he was on 3rd August 1644.¹³ His wife 'the Ladie More', had been buried there a month earlier. There are puzzling features about the building which, but for the evidence of a probate inventory of 1708 (see below), would have left it doubtful whether the house was actually finished. The source of the design is unknown, though its tempting to introduce the names of the second Smythson, John, who lived until 1634, and his son Huntingdon, who died in 1648. There are no stylistic features to support the suggestion, however. Briefly, the shell of the house and its roof are of the primary date but the whole of the internal plan is later—probably late in the 18th century or early in the 19th. The farm buildings south-west of the house are of the latter date or dates. The outer walls are of stone; coursed limestone rubble with good sandstone details. It has two full storeys. Its most splendid feature is a storeyed porch (Plate 2a), placed asymmetrically; its doorway has widely spaced rusticated jambs, moulded imposts and a semi-circular head, also rusticated. Over it there is an angled hood mould. The side walls of the porch are corbelled out, presumably to make the room over the entrance a little larger and to accommodate its front window, which has four lights and a transom. Each side wall of the porch has a two-light mullion and transom window. The room must have been intended to give a prospect of the park.

The porch shows further evidence either that the house was not finished or, much more probably, stood empty at some time. The recessed jamb stones of the doorway are deeply worn into curves by being used to sharpen knives or implements. There are many casual graffiti, some of them cut after the stones had been worn by sharpening. On the left side, the stone below the impost (Plate 2b) has two carefully cut square panels, close together, one with the initials 'TF', the other 'MF', and each dated '1722'. They look as if they were those of an occupant of the house and his wife, but if so neither can be identified. In 1711 the rectory had been leased by Trinity College to one John Flamstead and it is possible that the house was occupied by a member of his family, though there is no documentary evidence to support that suggestion.¹⁴

All the other windows had two lights and a transom at mid level, including that in the east gable at attic level (Plate 2d); the roof space was intended for use as chambers rather than merely as storage space. All the windows have been either totally blocked or reduced to one or two half lights. The west wall is an exception; it has been completely rebuilt (Plate 2c). The most recent alteration is to the room to the left of the porch, which has been extended outwards. At the rear there was a doorway, now blocked, opposite the porch entrance. A large chimney stack projects west of that back door, and has four brick chimneys built diamond-wise (Plate 4), but inside there are no traces of fireplaces on the back wall; it might be expected that they would have had moulded surrounds, in keeping with the quality of the design of the house; they have been removed and the openings blocked. Two original ceiling beams survive for the lofty ground-floor rooms, but no internal walls.

There is no evidence that any member of the More family ever lived in the house; they must have allowed others to lease it. In the Hearth Tax returns of 1674 a Mr. Braddy paid tax on six hearths in Langford.¹⁵ He was William Brady, gentleman, probably from a family resident at Thorpe-by-Newark; in January 1677/8 he married Dorothy Colston of Newark, widow. Ten years later his widow married Alexander Clark, alderman of Newark.¹⁶

In 1705 John More of Kirklington, senior and junior leased the manor of Langford to Thomas and John Mottram for 21 years at a rent of £800 *per annum*.¹⁷ The Mottrams are described as of Langford, and so may already have been tenants. The family were in origin Newark mercers; Thomas and Samuel were so termed in 1688.¹⁸ Thomas died in 1708, and the probate inventory of his goods, dated 2nd December of that year, is printed in full as

LANGFORD OLD HALL

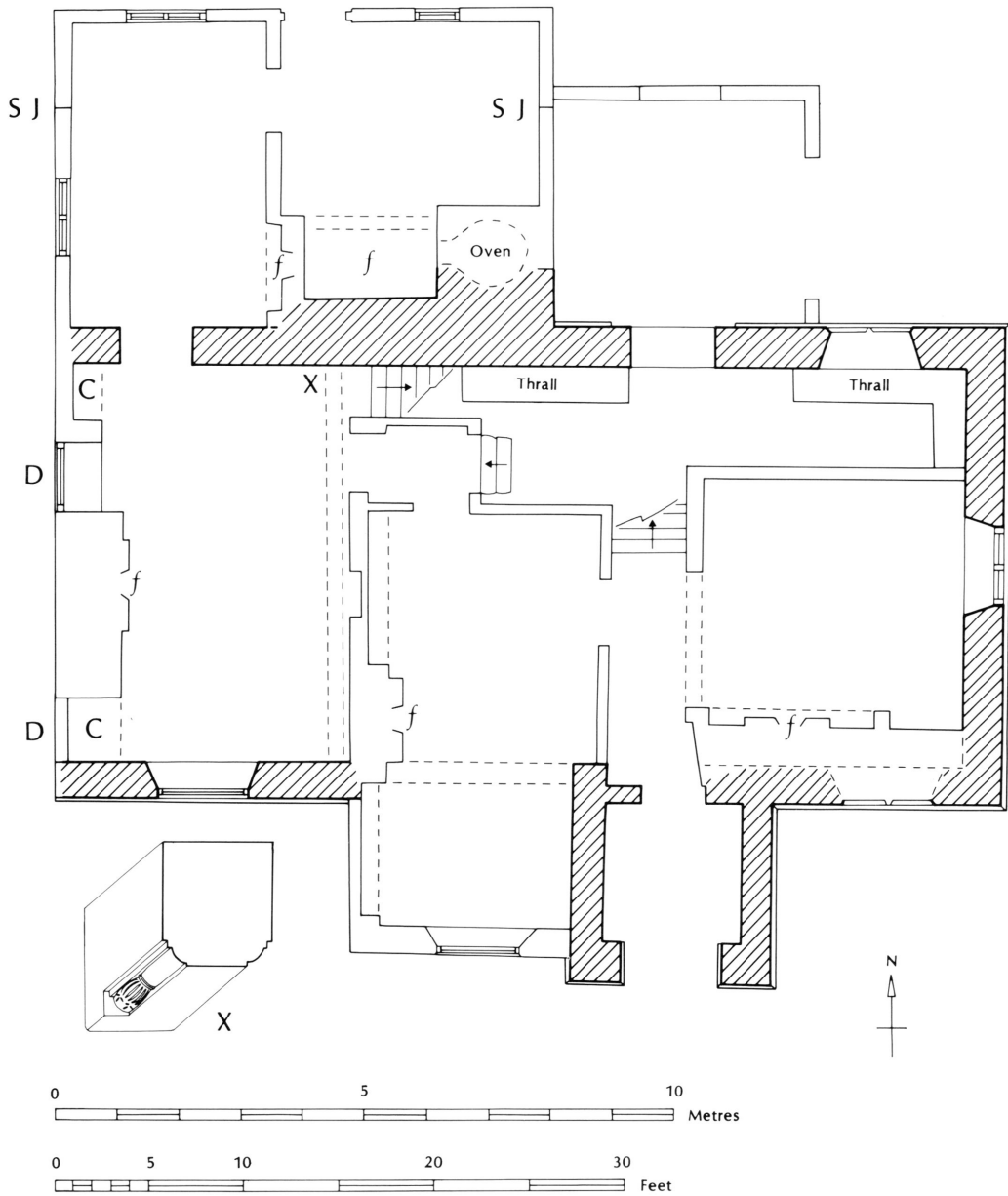


FIGURE 1
Ground plan.

Appendix 2.¹⁹ It shows that he was a wealthy man and farmed at Meering as well as Langford. In 1707 he had leased from Nottingham Corporation its right to passage tolls on the Trent, a privilege which the borough had enjoyed since the Middle Ages.²⁰

The inventory appears to name all the rooms in the house but does not remove uncertainties about the original plan. There were four main rooms on the ground floor: *Kitchen, Little Hall, Great Hall* and *Parlour*, as well as *Cellars, Pantry* and *'Booting'* (i.e. *boulting*) *House*. The last was one room, for storing and preparing food. The house was very simply furnished, considering Mottram's wealth. Only in the kitchen are fire irons (one 'andiron' and hooks) listed, so that the inventory fails to show the original heating arrangements. The account of first-floor rooms does not show which chambers were over which ground-floor rooms.

By combining the evidence of the Hearth Tax assessment and the inventory, the original plan can be confidently inferred (Figure 1). The appraisers of the inventory started at the west end of the house, naming first the kitchen, which was demolished at some later date along with the cellars, wherever they were. The reduction of the house required rebuilding of the west wall. The kitchen probably had a chamber over, though it is not named; to assume that would account for two of the six hearths in the tax assessment. The little hall and the great hall probably occupied the space of the present west and middle rooms. They both had fireplaces on the back wall, fairly close together. For a house to have two halls is quite alien to the vernacular tradition and must reflect its intended function as a hunting lodge. The remaining ground floor room, the parlour, must have been at the east end, beyond the through passage. It is surprising that it was not heated, but that must be so, to judge from the way a fireplace was later inserted, blocking the front window. The location of the pantry and boulting house cannot be inferred. They are not likely to have been at the east end where there is now a narrow sunk larder with its thralls. On the first floor the best and middle chambers were over the two halls and the maids' chamber over the parlour. The porch room was used only for storing hemp and flax. Male and female servants were segregated, the men sleeping in one of the chambers in the roof space, another being used, as it was until recent times, for ripening cheeses. There is still a large cheese rack in this room (Plate 3).

After Thomas Mottram's death the lease passed to John, probably his son, who was certainly engaged in farming at Langford until 1723.²¹ There is no proof that he occupied the Hall; if he was living elsewhere, that might explain the initials and the date carved on the porch. Nothing is known of any tenants in the rest of the 18th century.

Langford was until 1722 owned by the More family, which by then had become Catholic and so is included in the county register of Papist estates.²² In that year Elizabeth, widow of John More, sold the estate to Thomas Duncombe for £25,100.²³ The Duncombes' main seat was at Copgrove near Harrogate, and it was for a Henry Duncombe that John Carr built Langford Place. Copgrove Hall, built before 1785, is also attributed to Carr by tradition.²⁴ When Throsby wrote in about 1790 Langford Place was 'newly built, at present not inhabited'.²⁵ In 1834 Lord Middleton bought the Langford estate from the Duncombes and it remained part of the Middleton estate until in 1925 it was sold to Trinity College, Cambridge.²⁶

The Old Hall must while it was Duncombe property have been empty and become derelict before it was reduced, repaired and the interior remodelled, with brick partition walls. There are other minor changes, such as making new doorways in the west wall, that may be the work of the Middleton estate or of tenants whose names are unknown. It is of course impossible to put the many changes, such as rebuilding the west end and reducing the window openings, into a chronological sequence. It was both an arable and stock-rearing farm but there are no grain bins of the sort to be seen in the garrets at the Manor House, Gotham, and at a former farmhouse in Chilwell (The Meads, 265 High Road).

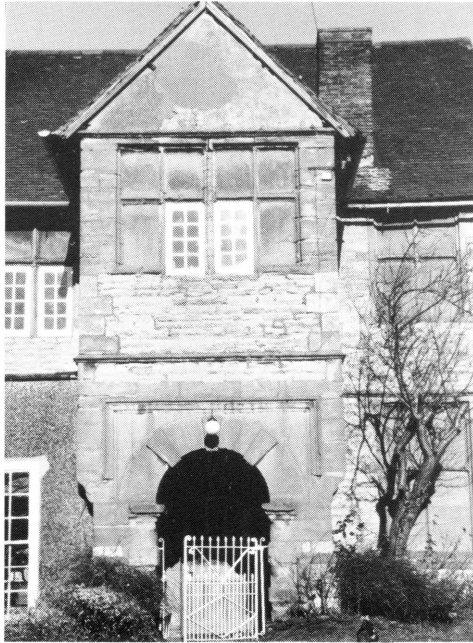


PLATE 2a
The porch.



PLATE 2b
Graffiti dated 1722



PLATE 2c
West end

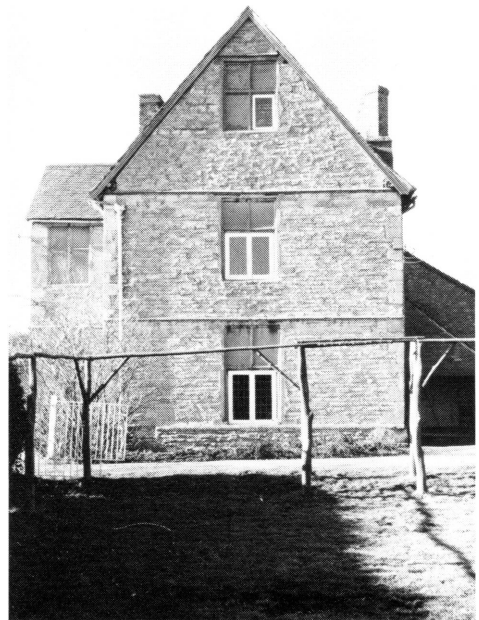


PLATE 2d
East end

The most drastic alteration was to insert a new and large fireplace in the east room, placing it against the front wall, which involved blocking the window entirely. Its chimney rises through the slope of the roof, a practice quite alien to local tradition. A new staircase rises opposite the front door. A sunken dairy was made at the rear, blocking an original back door. This position for such service rooms, either within the body of the house or in an outshot, can be seen in several Laxton farmhouse of the 18th century. A new back staircase rises behind the middle room, which is also heated by a new fireplace on a cross wall; that too has a chimney on the slope of the roof. An outshot was built at the rear of the western end of the house; it was built first as one storey and then raised to include lofts over (Plate 4). The stone stack was used to take a flue from a fireplace in a back kitchen which has a Victorian range. In the next room, a large and deep fireplace was cut into the stack, and a projection alongside contained a bread oven, now blocked.

The house is listed as grade II and was purchased recently by Mr. and Mrs. D. J. Potter.

REFERENCES

- ¹M. W. Beresford and J. G. Hurst, *Deserted Medieval Villages* (1971), 200.
- ²One of them, Grange farm, is illustrated in N. Summers, *A Place to Live* (1975), 39.
- ³R. E. Glasscock, *The Lay Subsidy of 1334* (1975), 233; Public Record Office, E179/159/121.
- ⁴E. G. Wake, *History of Collingham* (1869), 84, 117–8.
- ⁵M. W. Barley, 'Newark in the 16th Century' *Trans. Thoroton Soc.* liii (1949), 25. Phillipot died in 1557 and his very long will is printed in full in C. Brown, *History of Newark-on-Trent II* (1907), 357–62.
- ⁶J. Throsby, *Thoroton's History of Nottinghamshire* (1790–95, reprinted 1972), I 389–90.
- ⁷*Ibid.* I, 368–9.
- ⁸Hist. Mss. Comm., *Calendar of Shrewsbury and Talbot Papers I* (Lambeth Palace Library) JP6 (1966), 695 Fo. 61 (1578); 697/Fo. 63; 699/Fo. 69; 708/Fo. 178. See also JP7 (1970), 147 with a complaint of 1589 from Trinity College to the earl of Shrewsbury that the tithes had been granted by the earl to the tenant farmer.
- ⁹N(ottinghamshire) A(rchives) O(ffice), DD 4P 46/1, 21.
- ¹⁰Throsby, III, 98; I, 369; G. D. Squibb, ed., *Visitation of Nottinghamshire, 1662–4*, Harleian Soc., NS.5 (1985), 40.
- ¹¹Beresford and Hurst, *passim*, especially 40.
- ¹²N.A.O. DD.WK 32.
- ¹³N.A.O., PRNW, Newark Deanery, 1646.
- ¹⁴N.A.O. DD. WK 31.
- ¹⁵W. F. Webster, ed., *Nottinghamshire Hearth Tax, 1664: 1674*, Thoroton Soc. Record Series, 37 (1988).
- ¹⁶T. M. Blagg and F. A. Wadsworth, *Abstracts of Notts. Marriage Licences*, I (1930).
- ¹⁷N.A.O., M 7441.
- ¹⁸*Abstracts, op. cit.*
- ¹⁹N.A.O., PRNW, Newark Deanery, 1709.
- ²⁰N.A.O., DD.T 17/20.
- ²¹K. T. Meaby, ed., *Notts. County Records of the Eighteenth Century* (1947), 119, 213, 240.
- ²²*Ibid.*, 295.
- ²³N(ottingham) U(niversity) M(anuscripts) D(epartment), Mi Da 45.
- ²⁴N. Pevsner, *Yorkshire, West Riding* (1974), 170.
- ²⁵Throsby, I, 369.
- ²⁶N.U.M.D., Mi 3E 15, 17.

APPENDIX 1

Timbers were sampled for dendrochronology on 16th February 1988 by the Nottingham University Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory. The following is a summary of the results. Eight samples (cores) were taken, six of them from principal rafters in the roof and one each from cross beams in ground floor rooms. Two samples, one from a principal and one from a cross beam, were not dated because they had too few rings (50 and 29). The other six matched together to form a sequence of 166 years. There is a highly satisfactory match against the East Midlands Master Chronology, indicated by a t-value of 9.3. Three samples, taken from adjacent principals, gave such a t-value that they probably came from the same tree, or from trees that had grown very close together.

The sequence has a first ring date of 1467 and a last measured ring of 1633. There is springwood growth for the year 1633; this suggests that only the soft sapwood rings, which average 30, have been lost. The relative positions of the heartwood/sapwood boundaries are consistent with a single felling date for the group. The estimated felling date ranges from 1633 to 1657, with the most likely date of *c.*1637.

APPENDIX 2

Probate inventory of Thomas Mottram, 1708

An inventory of the goods and chattells of Thomas Mottram late of Langford in ye county of Nottingham dec[ea]sed apprized the second day of December Anno D[omi]ni 1708 by us whose names are subscribed.

	£	s.	d.
Imprimis his purse and apparrell	15	0	0
In the Kitchen one end iron hooks table chaires other huslem[en]ts	2	0	0
In the Cellars one cheese press dressers and trenchers barrells shelves and other huslem[en]ts	2	0	0
In ye Little Hall one table six chaires and one clock	1	15	0
In the Great Hall sixteen chaires one table	2	15	0
In ye Parlour one wheel and other huslem[en]ts		5	0
In ye Pantry and Bootinghouse 2 doz[en] and 9 plates three casters 2 stands 8 pewter dishes candlesticks two pott pans two little pans with other huslem[en]ts	3	10	0
Item in ye Best Chamber one bed and beding table stands patch box chest of drawers twelve chaires fire shovell and tongs and other things	30	0	0
Plate	4	0	0
In ye Middle Chamber bed beding and other furniture	7	15	0
In ye Maid's Chamber two beds and beding two chests one side saddle w[i]th boxes and other huslem[en]ts	5	0	0
One Chest of linnen	4	5	0
Item in ye Men's Chambers two beds and huslem[en]ts	1	0	0
In ye Cheese Chamber cheeses and other things	4	0	0
In ye Porch Chamber hemp and flax		15	0
The blue bed	3	0	0
Seaventy and two beasts	204	0	0
Twenty horses and mares 2 foales and one filly	100	0	0
Ninety and nine sheep	50	10	0
Sixty and nine acres of rape	207	0	0
Seaven hay stacks	100	0	0
Thirty acres of rye	75	0	0
Two stacks of oates	100	0	0
Damaged oates	50	0	0
A stack of barley	50	0	0
Oyle and clotts	200	0	0
Carts and plows gears harrows and utensils belonging to husbandry	12	0	0
Halfe of sixty and nine beasts at Meering	128	0	0
Halfe of a stack of oats at Meering	25	0	0
Halfe of ye hay at Meering	50	0	0
Halfe of the tumbrells stoops railes and cart at Meering	10	0	0
Item good and bad debts	15	0	0
Things unseen and forgotten	5	0	0
	<hr/>		
	1408	10	0

Apprized by us
Roger Pocklington
John Thomlinson

Nottinghamshire Archives Office, PRNW, Newark Deanery, 1709.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. Trotter for ready access to all parts of the house and their knowledge of it; to David Taylor for drawing the plan for publication; to Adrian Henstock for documentary references, and especially for finding the inventory and providing a transcript; and to Nottingham University Tree-Ring Dating Laboratory for dating the house timbers.