

WOOBURN D'EYNCOURT: A LOST MEDIEVAL MANOR HOUSE

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'A fragment of the decayed mansion of the D'Eyncourts and Lovells remains on the western side of the churchyard. The building is not tenatable, but the premises form a farmyard ...': thus a printed cutting in the Bodleian Library (MS Top. Bucks, c 4, No. 391), of about 1880. It may have been about this time that William Peart, an artist who worked from c. 1854 to 1893, drew 'a plan of the ceiling timbers; a south elevation; a longitudinal section and two details', as recorded in the catalogue of the RIBA's drawings. Unfortunately his album is no longer in the collection. Peart made drawings of a number of churches prior to Victorian restoration, but the album did not contain a drawing of the church at Wooburn, which was restored by Butterfield between 1856 and 1869, and the drawings of the house may therefore have been made later than this. The building was certainly tenatable, or at least tenanted, in 1910, when an RCHM investigator visited the site; so Peart's drawings were made during a period when it lay empty.

The investigator's sketch plan of 'Dean Court Farm' is the basis of Figure 2. He found the condition of the buildings 'bad, in need of general repair throughout'. The range marked as 'outbuildings' he described as 'originally an important house'; an interior photograph of its roof was published in *RCHM Buckinghamshire (South)* (1912), p324, and illustrates what is perhaps the building's single most interesting feature. Unpublished photographs were also taken of the 'South' (properly south-east) fronts of both ranges. (Plate 1)

The whole group of buildings, with the exception of the cottage linking the 'outbuildings' with the western three 'cottages', has now disappeared. North east of the cottage

there is a small factory; part of the land to the south west has been added to the garden of the cottage, and the rest of the site, until recently concreted over to form the school playground, is now occupied by a private house. The 'outbuildings' were demolished in 1922 when the road was straightened. The westerly range of cottages disappeared in 1934.

The initiative for reopening discussion of these vanished buildings came from a meeting between one of the writers (P.F.) and Mr. Albert S. Kerry, of Seattle, USA, who had visited the house in 1934, while it was being demolished. He was able to photograph the roof of the hall from a ladder pushed through the inserted ceiling, and took two other useful photographs, one internal and one external – none of them, unfortunately, suitable for reproduction, owing to the poor light in which they were taken, but available for inspection at the National Monuments Record. A drawing done from his photograph of the roof is reproduced as Figure 3. He was also able to rescue a crown-post from the roof, and sent it to the County Museum; and he received from the builder in charge, Mr. Trickey of Beaconsfield, sections of what had evidently been a free-standing post, roughly nine inches through both ways, and with wide chamfers on all four corners); one of these he gave to Mr. Clive Rouse.

With the help of this evidence, and that of the RCHM report, it is now possible to attempt an interpretation of the buildings. From the 1:2500 OS map of 1899 (sheet 47/15) it is possible to estimate that the western range (the 'three cottages') was originally 60 ft. long and 39 ft. wide externally (18 x 9 metres). The divisions between the cottages, shown both on

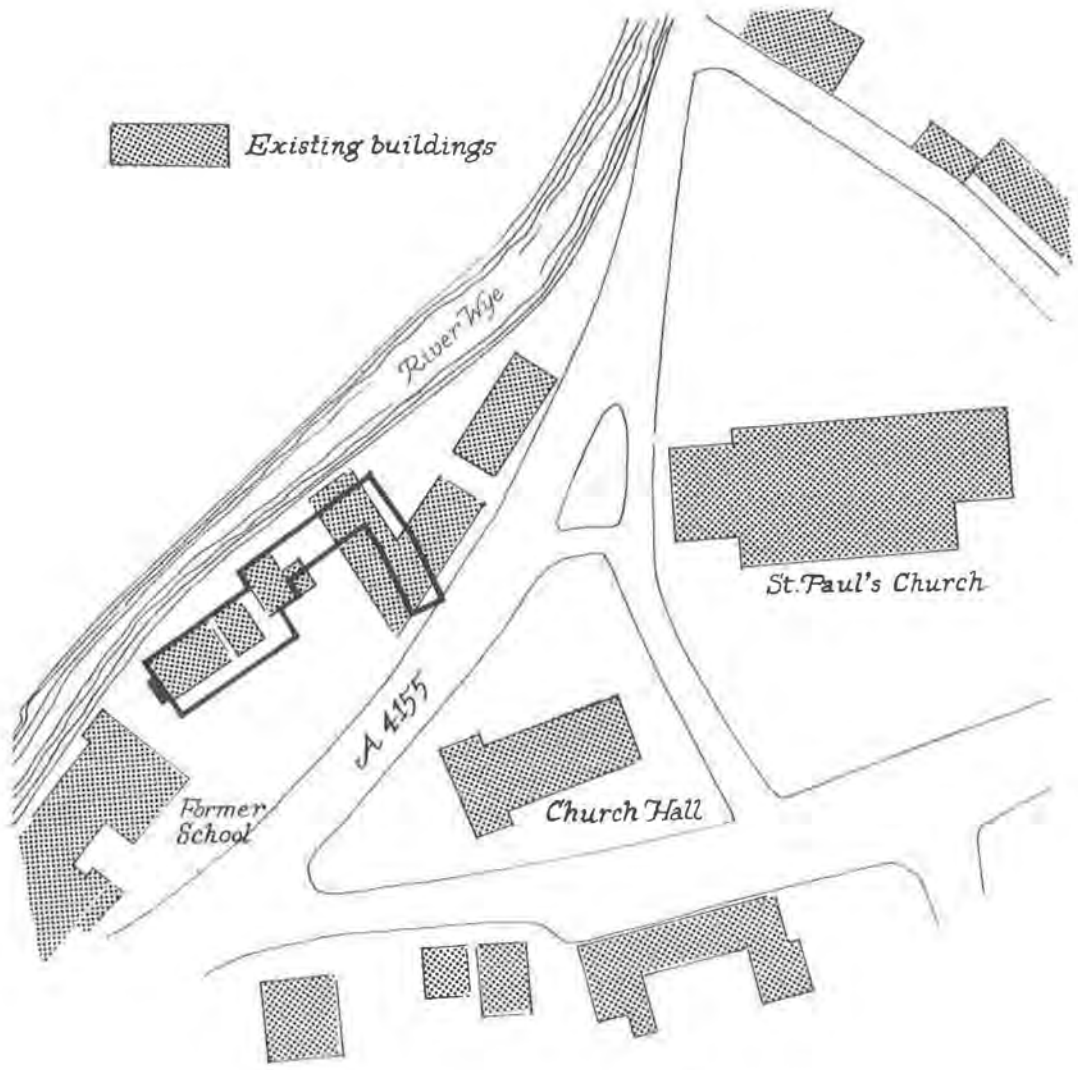


Fig. 1 Part of Wooburn, showing the position of the D'Eyncourt manor house (heavy lines).

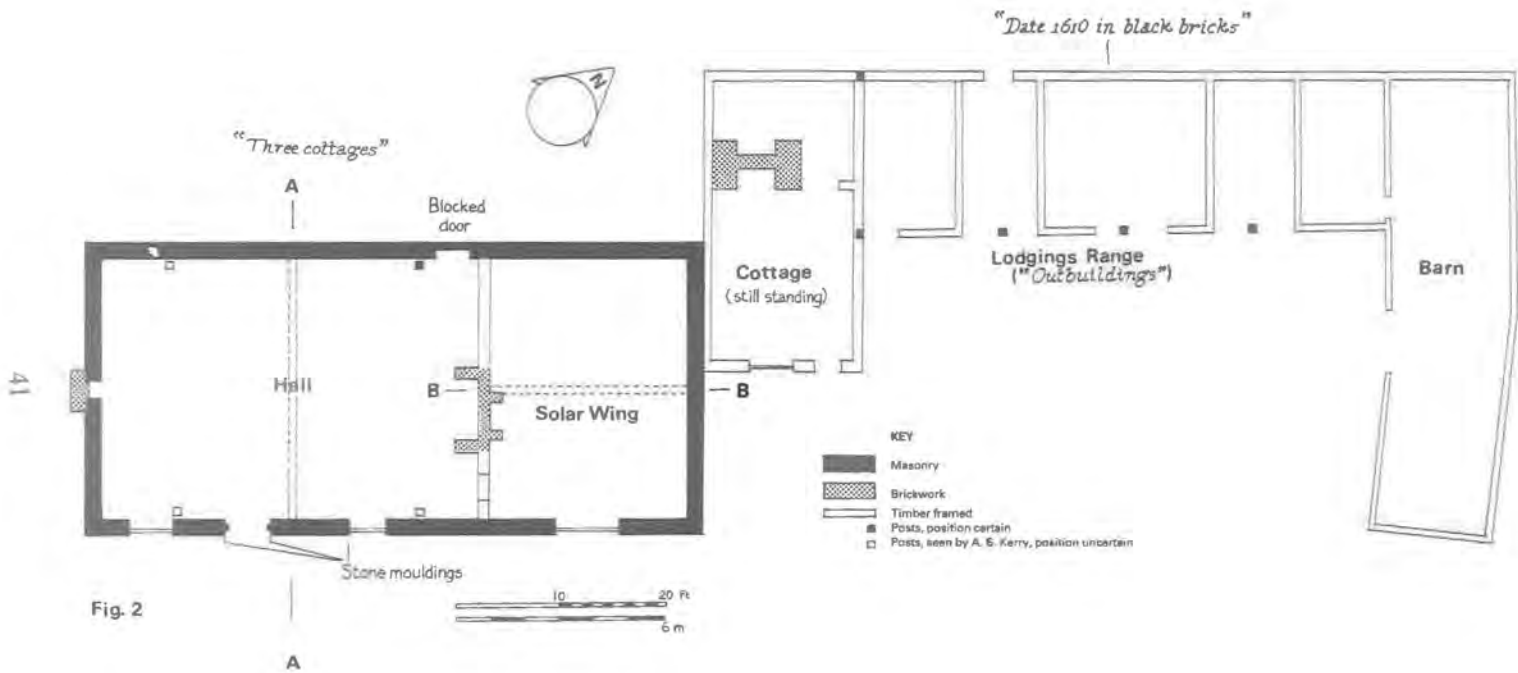


Fig. 2 Plan of Wooburn D'Eyncourt manor house, based on RCHM investigator's sketch, with additional detail from surviving photographs. Investigator's comments in italics.

the OS map and the investigator's sketch, probably correspond to bay divisions. The two western bays will have constituted the hall, which Mr. Kerry's photograph shows to have been of base-cruck construction, with the open truss at or very near the centre. The eastern bay was evidently a two-storey parlour wing at the upper end of the hall, roofed at right angles to the hall roof, and is thus shown in the RCHM photograph.

Six other base-cruck halls have been recorded in Buckinghamshire houses: Huntercombe Manor at Burnham, Creslow Manor House, the Old Bakery at Denham, the Manor House at Long Crendon, the Old Manor House at Thornborough (*ex inf.* Mr. R. Evans) and The Brills at Weston Turville. Of these only the Old Bakery has been published (Chenevix Trench & Fenley, 1979), though brief details of the Manor House at Long Crendon have been reported (Beresford, 1967), and all except Thornborough are

in the cruck catalogue (Alcock, 1981).

The RCHM investigator reported the whole of the north wall and the east end of the south wall of this part of the building to be of 'modern' brick, (an expression which in this context denotes post-1700), while the west wall (properly the south-west end) was of flint with a little clunch, and had an external brick chimney stack (this is likely to have dated from the conversion of the house into cottages, during the late nineteenth century). Flint and clunch chequer work appears in the RCHM photograph of the south front (Plate I), and probably the whole building was originally of this construction. The western door in the south wall had moulded stone jambs, and the window to the east of it has one jamb with similar mouldings, and a stone sill. One of Mr. Kerry's photographs shows clunch blocks on the inside of one wall.

The same photograph shows a post of a few inches from the wall, and to the right of it, in a



Fig. 3 The roof of Wooburn D'Eyncourt manor house, after a photograph by A. S. Kerry.

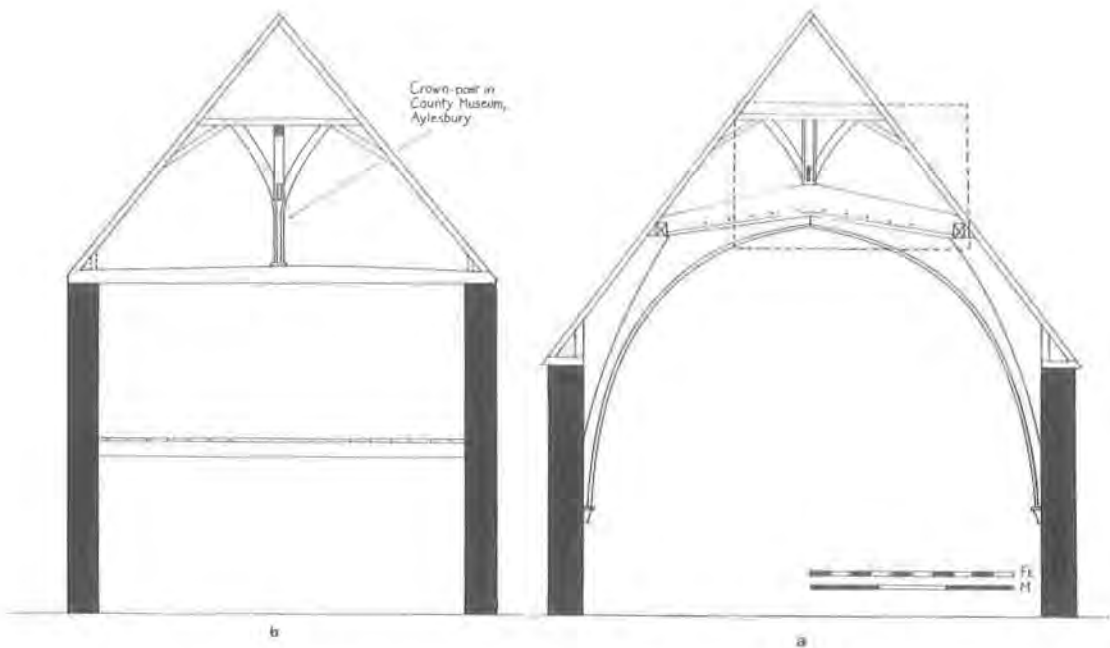


Fig. 4 (a) Section through hall at A-A. Broken line defines frame of photograph.
 (b) Section through wing at B-B.

corner, a blocked doorway. Mr. Kerry recalls three other similar posts in corresponding positions close to the corners of the space in which he found himself on entering the building.

This space must have been the hall. It cannot have been the entire ground floor, as suggested by a sketch which he drew long after the event, since his external photograph shows that the central stack was still standing between the hall and the cross wing; the division between them must therefore have been clear at this time.

The blocked doorway in the photograph is too insignificant to have been the entrance to a cross passage, but it could well have been the door to a stair turret. It is therefore suggested that the photograph shows the north-east corner of the hall, in the angle of the cross wing, and that there was a newel stair here giving access to the upper floor of the wing.

The investigator evidently did not see much of the interior of the building. He indicated the bay divisions but not the central stack. Unfortunately neither he nor Mr. Kerry saw the feet of the arch-braces of the open truss.

The crown post in the County Museum is not the one in the photograph of the hall roof, and must have come from the wing. It is 6 ft. 11½ in. high (1.98 m.) and was braced four ways, i.e. to a collar and a collar purlin. It is slightly thickened at the top, which is decorated on the chamfers with tapering triangular grooves about 3 ins. long and ¾ in. wide (75 x 18 mm.).

The section of post now in the possession of Mr. Clive Rouse bears traces of having been lime-washed, and is therefore most unlikely to have come from a crown-post. It might have come from one of the four posts seen by Mr. Kerry in the angles of the hall, though the only

one whose position is certain was too close to the wall to need chamfers on all four corners. A spere-truss post might be suggested; the position of the western pair of posts is quite uncertain, and they may have been further from the walls than the one in the photograph. But a spere truss as substantial as the one adumbrated by a post of this scantling is perhaps unlikely to be found at less than a full bay's interval from the open truss; when the screens passage is taken out of the lower bay, the screen tends to be of slighter construction.

The problem is linked with the anomalous position of the doorway (Plate I), Fig. 2) which is not consistent with its having opened into a screens passage. And this in turn is connected with the date of the masonry wall, which does not have to be contemporary with the timber roof.

Flint and clunch chequer work spans a wide date range in Buckinghamshire. Early examples in the neighbourhood of Wooburn include the chancel of Langley Marish church, c. 1330 (RCHM Bucks I, 232), and the north aisle of High Wycombe, c. 1275 (RCHM Bucks I, 194). The south aisle of Harefield church, of the early fourteenth century, may also be cited (RCHM Middlesex, 12). But Old Hedsor House may be of the sixteenth century (RCHM Bucks I, 194), and there are cottages at Bledlow and Askett which can hardly be earlier than the seventeenth.

The moulding on the door jamb in the south wall gives a somewhat closer dating. It consisted of a small bowtell on a straight chamfer (RFCHM, 1911) consistent with a date in the early fourteenth century, and consistent also with the character of the roof: the well cambered tie-beam, the short crown post and curved braces are characteristic of the period 1310 - 1360 (Fletcher & Spokes, 1964), while the chamfered crown-post and the presence of braces between the rafters and the collars points to the early part of this period.

We conclude that the masonry walls are

original, and contemporary with the roof, and that the doorway had probably been moved to its ultimate position, perhaps in the seventeenth century, a reasonable date for what can be seen of its lintel.

The four posts seen by Mr. Kerry were doubtless those referred to by the investigator when he wrote of a 'high-pitched roof with some of the supporting posts reaching to the ground'; but 'supporting posts' have no place in a base-cruck building with masonry walls. It is tentatively suggested that they were supports for the inserted floor. Such a method of supporting a floor has not been hitherto reported, but it is technically feasible, and in a masonry building may have had advantages. The possibility of the posts having been re-used timbers must also be borne in mind.

The question of a spere truss must be left unresolved for lack of evidence. That the screens passage lay beyond the south-west wall reported in 1910 is not probable, owing to the presence in that wall of flint and clunch chequer work.

Suggested sections of the hall and wing are reproduced as Fig. 4.

The building to the north-east of this hall range (the 'outbuildings' of Fig. 2) would have gone unrecorded but for the visit of the RCHM investigator in 1910. It is in fact of no less interest than the hall range.

Its width, inferred from posts still to be seen in the east wall of the surviving cottage, was 15 ft. 3 ins. (f. 57 m.) and there were 5 bays, in all about 65 ft. long (19.5 m.). The building ran parallel to the river, and about 8 ft. away from it (2.4 m.); its south wall was in line with the north wall of the hall. It is not known whether there was direct access between the two ranges, but the 1:2500 O.S. map suggests that there may have been: it shows the eastern range overlapping the parlour wing of the hall. No stairs to the first floor of the eastern range are recorded, and it is not known how the in-

vestigator got up there (Plate II attests that he did).

The investigator described this part of the building as '... of timber framing with brick filling set in herring bone fashion in some of the panels. Some of the filling was originally lath and plaster. In the N wall (ground storey) are some shallow recesses in the brick work the use of which is uncertain; five of them have triangular heads and two of them are square. All the windows are blocked and much of the lower part of the south wall has been removed to make wide openings, but in the upper storey are two fine 16th century projecting windows and the head of a third and the site of a fourth. They were each of four lights with moulded mullions, heads and sills ... the upper storey has a fine open timber roof'. He also recorded that the date 1610 was picked out in black headers in the brickwork of the north wall. His drawing of one of the windows is reproduced, at its original scale, as Figure 5.

The 1910 sketch plan has one puzzling feature: four dotted lines are drawn across the building, defining five roughly equal spaces, of which those nearest the barn are numbered 1 to 4. The dotted lines and the numerals are in pale green ink (the rest of the sketch being in black ink). They may be intended to indicate bay divisions: but they do not correspond to the positions of the posts shown on the sketch.

Two of these posts also appear in one of the Commission's photographs, and there is no doubt that they are principal posts, and must therefore mark bay divisions. The ground floor is shown divided into a number of spaces, which do not correspond either to the posts or the green ink lines; so whatever the latter represent, it seems that the dividing walls are not on bay divisions, and therefore probably not original. The ground floor would thus have formed a single large room. The building appears to have been of two storeys from the first, and there is no evidence that the first floor was ever anything but one long room, with a handsome window in each of its four bays. Both floors were unheated.

The investigator did not number the bay nearest the hall. Probably it did not form part of the large rooms; perhaps it housed a stair; it may well have been differently roofed.

The structure is clearly domestic, and may be interpreted as a lodgings range. There must have been many such ranges attached to important houses in the sixteenth century, increasing the accommodation available – a valuable amenity in an age when prominent people travelled with large retinues. With the progressive addition of more such ranges, larger houses developed a courtyard form, but it is not clear whether anything of this sort happened at Wooburn. An early reference to a

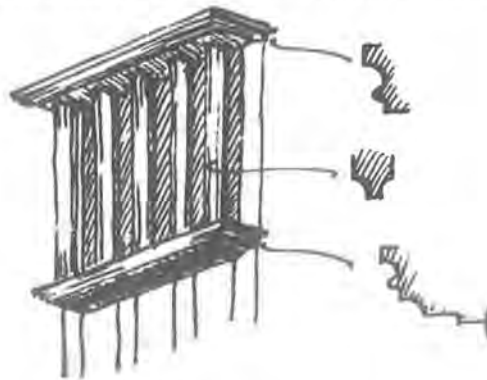


Fig. 5 RCHM investigator's sketch of window in lodgings range.

gate-house and houses 'without the gates' there (C 142/434/106) suggests some sort of enclosure, but it need not have been defined by buildings.

An idea of what such lodgings looked like, albeit on a very grand scale, may be got from van den Wyngarde's drawings of Richmond Palace in 1562 (Harvey, 1944, Pl. XXV). Few timber-framed ranges of this kind seem to have survived, but a wing of Barton Old Hall, Lancashire, now given over to farm use (as happened also at Wooburn) may be a building of this nature. It is, however, about 5 ft. wider and appears to have been divided into two rooms on the first floor (VAG, 1979).

In the absence of other, more appropriate parallels, it may be permissible to cite Wingfield Manor, Derbyshire (Emery & Binney, 1982), built in the mid-fifteenth century by Ralph, Lord Cromwell, where the unheated lodgings range, forming the east side of the outer court, was divided on both floors into two rooms, each 50 – 60 ft. long. It had two garderobe towers, a feature perhaps not to be expected at Wooburn, where, however, the proximity of the river would have simplified sewage disposal.

The roof, covering four bays and a total length of about 50 ft., was the most interesting feature of the building at Wooburn, as it represents a continuation, into the very end of the medieval period, of the tradition of scissor bracing, which goes back at least to the thirteenth century. (See Plate 00.) In the form found here it was probably adopted for the aesthetic effect of the succession of arches formed by the curved undersides of the braces, but the technique of scissor bracing was basically a means of securing lateral stability in roofs, and one of the earliest to be used. In early examples, however, the timbers are straight. Examples in which the timbers are curved on the underside to form an arch include the chancel of the church at Cogges, Oxfordshire, dated to the fifteenth century (Howard, 1913); Nos. 52–54 High Street,

Salisbury, where the lower parts of the scissors form, in effect, short principals into which lighter upper principals are jointed, and which has been dated to the mid-fourteenth century (*RCHM, Salisbury, I*); and Catmore Farm, near Newbury, where scissors were used in a roof which had crucks on one side and jointed crucks on the other. A date of around 1400 has been suggested (Kennedy, 1979).

None of these are really very close analogies however, and in all of them the scissors are pegged where they cross; the builders at Wooburn realised that this was unnecessary. The analogy closest to Wooburn, structurally, chronologically and geographically, has only just been brought to light (by Mr. Roger Evans). It is at Manor Farm, Weston Turville, and its mouldings date it to the late fifteenth century. The refinement of its design and the quality of the finish indicate a builder able to command the services of one of the best master carpenters of his time, and we suggest that the most likely builder is Sir Henry Colet, sometime Lord Mayor of London and father of Dean Colet of St. Pauls, who bought the manor in 1483/4 (VCH iii, 109). Dean Colet gave it to the Mercer's Company as part of the endowment of St. Paul's School, and it remained with them until bought by the grandfather of the present owner early in the present century.

This is the only other scissor-braced roof known to the writers in which the crossover is unpegged; but the junction of the scissors and the principals is arranged differently, and in other respects it is a roof of much greater sophistication than that at Wooburn. Not only are there opposed rows of wind-braces, but every main member is elaborately moulded, and even the rafters are chamfered. The face of the wall plate was originally decorated with a frieze of applied quatrefoil tracery. This has now disappeared, but was recorded in *Records of Bucks*, XI 25. The seating of a louver, for the escape of smoke, was found *in situ* over the upper bay (see Figure 6). Apart from these refinements the roof of the lodgings at Wooburn



Plate I. The former manor house of Wooburn D'Eyncourt, before demolition: south aspect.



Plate II The roof timbers of the lodgings range at Wooburn D'Eyncourt, from a photograph by the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.

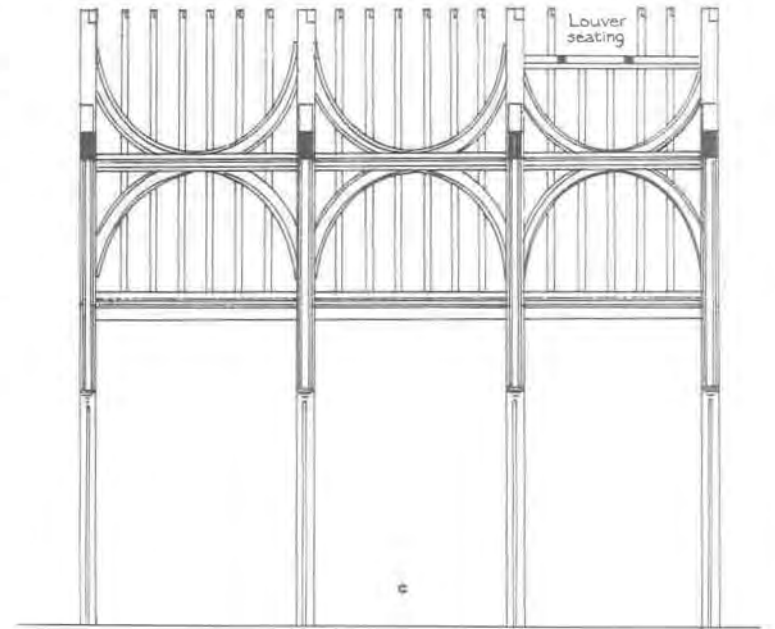
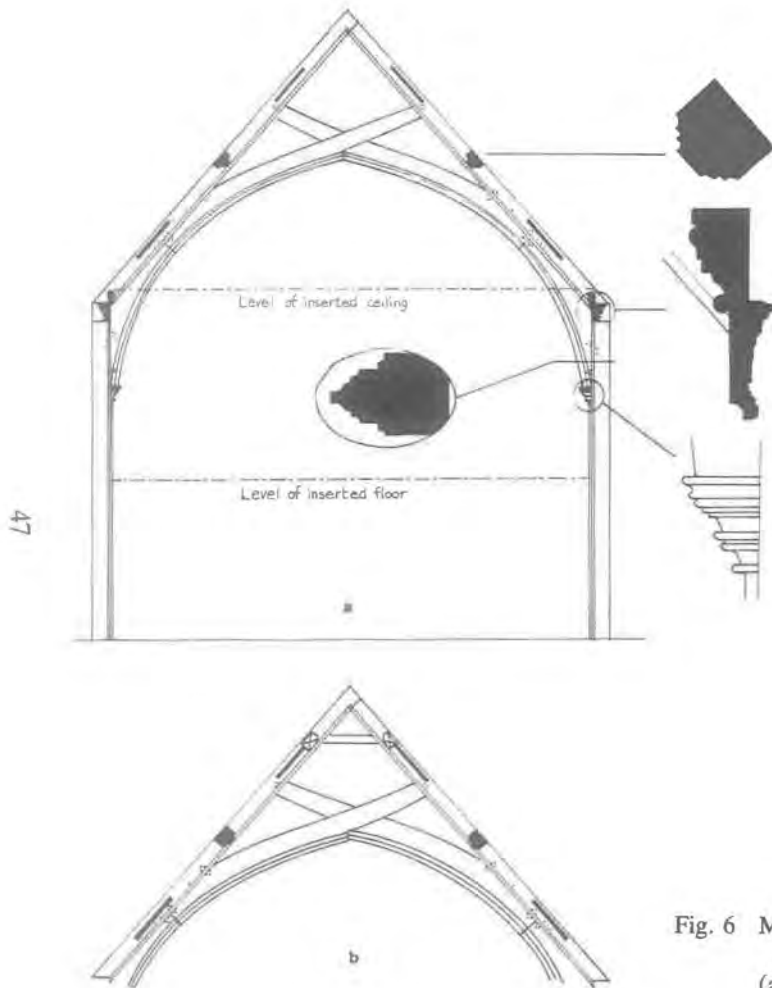


Fig. 6 Manor Farm, Weston Turville:

- (a) Section through hall
- (b) Section showing louver seating
- (c) Cut away view of hall in longitudinal section

is a close parallel.

The historical context

The connection of the D'Eyncourt family with Wooburn goes back to the Conquest (VCH Bucks, i, 234a), and continued in the male line until 1422, and in the female line until 1485 (VCH Bucks, iii, 108). A plausible context for the building of the hall range is the descent of the manor to a collateral branch, which occurred in 1327. It seems that their main seats were always elsewhere, but a fragment of evidence from the late fourteenth century suggests that they may have kept the Wooburn house for occasional use, for example during visits to the capital, of which it was within a day's ride. In 1392 Alice, widow of William D'Eyncourt (who had died in 1382, and whose surviving son, John, was still under age) sued John Pensele, vicar of Wooburn, for taking away timbers from her house there (CP 40/527/392). Alice lived at Granby in Northants, and the house must have been empty at the time of the vicar's depredations; but if it had been included in any lease of the demesne she would hardly have described it as 'her' house. The inference is that it was still kept up for the family's use.

At this date it is unlikely to have had a lodgings range. Sleeping arrangements in manorial households have been little studied, but there seems no evidence at present for the existence of lodgings ranges before the mid-fifteenth century.

The easiest timbers to remove from a house are the window and door frames, but if it was these that were taken they did not come from the hall, whose doors and windows were framed in stone. There must have been a service bay or wing, however, of which no trace has survived, and possibly this was timber framed, and a standing temptation to the neighbours. There are a number of other known examples of buildings being stolen, in whole or in part; four of them are from South Bucks (CP 40/404/41; CP 40/480/316; CP 40/487/437; CP 40/523/197).

The D'Eyncourt connection ended in 1485 with the attainder of Francis, Viscount Lovell, whose grandmother had been a D'Eyncourt heiress. The manor was then granted to Sir John Riseley, and after his death in 1512 it was acquired by Sir William Compton, a favourite of Henry VIII, to whom he was Chief Gentleman of the Bedchamber and Groom of the Stole. His family held it until 1597, and on the generally accepted dating of the type of window moulding found in the lodgings range, the Comptons would be the most likely builders of the range. In fact, however, it is unlikely that they ever used the house. Sir William himself was an absentee owner in 1522 (Musters), and at the time of his death in 1528 the house was let (SC 6/Hen VIII/5 890). He had property in twenty two counties, and it included Compton Wynyates (which he rebuilt and enlarged) and a house in Finchley where his grandson was born (C 142/73/9), and which is of course much nearer London than Wooburn, as well as being more conveniently situated for a Midlands-based magnate.

The builder of the lodgings range must therefore be sought among earlier owners, even if this means pressing the date of the window mouldings back into a period generally considered too early. A house so near London, built for someone of a standing that necessitated a lodgings range, is very likely to have been built by a London carpenter – as Manor Farm, Weston Turville, surely was – and we know almost nothing about London houses of the late middle ages. They may well have been a generation ahead of the provinces in matters of fashion.

Unfortunately we have no evidence that would enable us to make judgements about Sir John Riseley and Lord Lovell similar to those we have made about the Comptons. No doubt a survey of the Lovell estates was made at the time of their forfeiture, but it has not survived, and neither has Sir John's inquisition *post mortem*; Lord Lovell's was not held until 1537 (he disappeared after the battle of Stoke) and is of no use to this enquiry. Sir John's main in-

terests seem to have been in Kent, where he received numerous Royal commissions (Cal. Pat. Hen. VII), and Wooburn would not have been particularly convenient for him. For Francis Lovell, on the other hand, it would have been highly convenient, lying little more than a mile from the most direct road between London and Minster Lovell. With the accession of his friend as Richard III in 1483 his fortunes were at their zenith, and he would have had a pressing need, which would not have arisen before, for a house close to the capital – with accommodation for a substantial ‘riding household’. We think him the most likely builder of the lodgings range, and 1483–85 the probable date of its building.

The subsequent history of non-resident ownership makes it probable that relegation to farm use followed quite shortly afterwards.

The next change of ownership to affect the structural history of the house took place in 1597, when it was conveyed to Ralph Atkinson (VCH Bucks, iii, 109). He had already been living in Wooburn for some years (E 179/79/216), and may have been the tenant of the manor house. It was then described as ‘the manor house or farm’, and it may be noted that the Manor of Wooburn D’Eyncourt was by this time in the same hands as the other Wooburn manor, Bishop’s Wooburn, where a much larger and finer house had become the only ‘manor house’ in the village. Ralph Atkinson died in 1626; it must have been he who replaced the wattle panels in the framing of the lodgings range with brick infilling, and probably he who inserted a floor over the hall, put in a chimney and moved the entrance. His will, recited in his inquisition *post mortem* (C 142/434/106), specifies the rooms of which his wife was to have the use, and lists ‘the little chamber, my closet or study, the great chamber and the chamber and study within same’. This convincingly describes the entire first floor of a house such as the western range of Wooburn D’Eyncourt would have become after the insertion of a floor over the hall.

The will goes on to list ‘the old barn, oast house, malting house, corn loft, cart house, paled house, stables, haylofts, gate house and other houses, rooms, moats and easements without the gates’. Of this it can only be said that it is consistent with the lodgings range having been converted to farm use.

After 1756 the freehold in the house passed to the lords of the manor, who from 1784 were the Du Pre family. At one time they evidently had a well-to-do tenant: a board in the church records that a Mrs. Butterfield, ‘late of Dean Court in this parish’ left £100 in the 3% reduced annuities, to provide 5/- each for twelve poor families, to be paid on St. Thomas’s Day for ever. It is signed by the churchwardens and four trustees, including the rector, the Rev. W. Du Pre, who had been reappointed in 1834. But the place must have been going downhill. Lipscomb, writing in 1847 (Vol. III, 636) remarks of Wooburn that ‘the D’Eyncourt family had their seat near the church, a part of the house being still standing’. ‘Still standing’ is not a phrase that evokes a house in good condition. By about 1880, as we have seen, it was ‘not tenatable’; presumably the conversion into labourers’ cottages took place shortly afterwards. Its fall was almost complete, and soon nothing remained but demolition.

Acknowledgements

We are glad to thank Mr. J. T. Smith for support throughout this project, and his kindness in reading and commenting on a draft of this paper; Mr. E. Clive Rouse for his constant help and encouragement; Dr. John Harvey for his generous help in interpreting the lodgings range, and Mr. Stanley Jones for help over its roof. We owe Ralph Atkinson’s inquisition *post mortem* to Dr. Bridgett Jones of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments.

The investigator’s sketch (Fig. 4) is reproduced by kind permission of Dr. P. J. Fowler, Secretary of the Royal Commission on Histor-

Historical Monuments, as are Plates I and II (the former hitherto unpublished). These were found in the National Monuments Record by Mr. Ian Leith. The Photographic Section of the Commission most skilfully processed Mr. Kerry's negatives.

Our thanks are due, too, to Mrs. Cox of Manor Farm, Weston Turville, for her kindness in allowing us to record her roof; and we owe a special debt to Albert S. Kerry, without whose original initiative and continued interest this paper would never

have been written.

Postscript

Since this paper was completed, Mr. John Blair has kindly drawn our attention to the roof of the south range of the Old Rectory at Standlake, Oxfordshire, which was investigated by himself and Mr. John Steane of the Oxford County Museum at Woodstock. It has scissor braces of the same form as those at Wooburn and Weston Turville, but they are pegged where they cross, with two pegs, and further secured at this point by having the halved portions narrowed in the middle to form, in effect, double lap-dovetails. A date of c. 1500 has been suggested for this roof.

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