

DODDERHILL BUILDING
RECORDING -
RIDGEWAY COURT,
WYCHBOLD,
WORCESTERSHIRE

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May 2006
Revised 7 June 2006

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Project P2838
Report 1415
WSM 34065

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Dodderhill Building Recording – Ridgeway Court, Wychbold, Dodderhill

Shona Robson-Glyde

Part 1 Project summary

Building recording was undertaken at Ridgeway Court, Brine Pits Lane, Wychbold (NGR SO 9140 6603). It was undertaken on behalf of the Dodderhill Research Group. The project aimed to establish the character and history of the building.

Ridgeway Court is a part of a large 16th century timber-framed dwelling associated with a farm. In the 19th century the emphasis of the building was moved away from the farm, and the south and east walls were rebuilt in brick, as the aspiring middle class of the day regarded timber framing and farming as more socially demeaning than they had previously been perceived. In the 20th century the building was divided to form separate houses and it is the eastern part that has been recorded. A full analysis of the building will only be obtained once the west half of the building has also been recorded.

Part 2 Detailed report

1. Background

Building recording was undertaken at Ridgeway Court, (NGR SO 9140 6603), Brine Pits Lane, Wychbold, (Fig 1), on behalf of the Dodderhill Research Group.

1.1 Project parameters

The project conforms to the *Standard and guidance for the archaeological investigation and recording of standing buildings or structures* (IFA 2001) and *Recording historic buildings: a descriptive specification (3rd edition)* (RCHME 1996).

1.2 Aims

The aims of the recording were to establish the character, history, dating, form and archaeological development of the building.

2. Historical context

Ridgeway Court lies to the west of Wychbold village (Fig 1). The building is included on the Historic Environment Record as WSM 35450 and is also Grade II listed. The listing describes the building as follows:

‘Farmhouse. c1600, remodelled C19. Timber-frame with brick infill on sandstone ashlar ground floor, partially clad in brick, tile roof. L-plan, limbs extending to west and north; main stack to west end of east/west wing, the kitchen. Garden (south) front: early C19, two storeys, dentilled cornice; three windows: flush framed glazing bar sashes under segmental heads; entrance between two left hand ground floor windows, flat canopy on scrolled brackets, 6-panel door. East wall, ground floor of stone with three windows, two blocked, that to north end of three lights with chamfered mullions. North wall of north/south wing has string course to ground floor, exposed timber- framing above with straight tension braces’ (DoE 1985, SO 96 NW 6/3).

It is located along Brine Pits Lane, close to an area that is recorded on the Historic Environment Record as a shrunken village (WSM 6602) called Wyken. It is also close to a field recorded on the tithe map as Ridgeway field (WSM 32006). The topography of the area shows that a ridge runs north-east to south-west and encompasses Old Ridgeway Farm (to the north), Ridgeway Court and Ridgeway field. This is very suggestive of a ridgeway running along the top of the ridge. Ridgeways originated in the prehistoric period as trackways following the high land. Though there are indications that Stone Age peoples travelled long distances in search of suitable flints for their tools and weapons, it was during the Bronze Age that the first trackways were regularly used. Ridgeways were tracks on higher ground, avoiding the densely wooded and marshy river-valleys, until forced to descend and cross them. For centuries they provided an important means of communication, and continued in use during the medieval period. This ridgeway may partially survive as Brine Pits Lane.

3. Results

Ridgeway Court was divided into three separate dwellings in the late 20th century. The original farmhouse has been divided into two houses (Figs 2 and 3) and the recording reported here only encompasses the east part of the house (Fig 4). The house has three floors and a cellar and is built partly in sandstone, (the ground floor and cellar) with the 1st and 2nd floors in timber and brick.

A house called ‘Ridgeway’ has been known since the 14th century, presumably on the same spot as the present house, which, given its 16th century dating, may have been built by John Perks (Cheryl Stewart pers comm). The more recent owners can be established as follows from the early 19th century onwards. John Farmer leased the building to William Roe by 1803, and when he died

in 1814 the building passed through his will to George Perks. In 1820 Ridgeway was leased to Mr Fladgate and it was then passed to another George Perks (presumably a son) in 1839. At the time of the tithe map in 1845, George Perks was still the owner. In 1852 the owner and occupier was still George Perks who then passed it on his death to John Perks in 1854. In 1855 Ridgeway Court was owned by Thomas Harris, and it was bought by John Corbett. In 1912 the executors of Thomas Corbett sold Ridgeway Farm to John Brazier of Bromsgrove for £2850, and the name 'Ridgeway Court Farm' first appeared by 1921 (Cheryl Stewart pers comm).

3.1 **Structural analysis**

The results of the structural analysis are presented below and the basic phasing can be seen on Figures 5 and 6. Photographs of the building are presented as Figures 2 – 4 and 7 – 24.

3.1.1 **Phase 1 – 16th century**

It is probable that Ridgeway Court was first built in the 16th century. The close studding of the timber framing (Fig 7) was a style that began in East Anglia in the 13th century and spread to the Midlands area in the 16th century. The unusual construction of a sandstone ground floor (Fig 8) to the building can also give us a date of the 16th century for the building by the style of the stone mullioned windows (Fig 9) that are still visible in the cellar. The layout of the cellar of Ridgeway Court suggests that it was originally the ground floor of the building and that it has been turned into a cellar in later times. It is also likely that the cellar was used as an animal house at some time prior to its use as a cellar. The ground levels outside the house appear to have changed and may have been raised in some places so the original route into the cellar has been lost.

3.1.2 **Phase 2 – 18th century**

In the 18th century very little change occurred to Ridgeway. The main change was the addition of two structures that have been described as ice houses. They are situated close to the house (Fig 10) and are unusual structures. The portions above ground consist of brick-built domed-tops (Fig 11) that have openings. Below ground they are 1.4 metres deep, brick-built circular structures that have a conical base. The brick sizes (8 $\frac{3}{8}$ " by 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " by 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ ") are consistent with them being early 18th century in date. This type of structure is too shallow for it to be an ice house proper and besides the plan and shape is not consistent with their being ice houses. They should have steps to allow access and be a minimum of 4 metres deep. It is possible that the structures at Ridgeway Court are water-holding tanks, for holding fresh water. More likely is the possibility that these are temporary ice stores, used for storing ice that had been transported from a full size ice house some distance away. The location of Ridgeway Court, on top of the ridge, gives no opportunity to produce ice in sufficient quantity to justify a full-size ice house. Even Wychbold Court has no ice house and the nearest known example appears to be within the grounds of Chateau Impney, close to the River Salwarpe. Ice houses were always built within range of a river or lake due to the need to collect the ice during winter. These structures at Ridgeway are, therefore, very unusual and other examples have not yet been recorded in the county.

3.1.3 **Phase 3 – early 19th century**

In the early 19th century the south and east elevations of the house had its timber frame removed and were rebuilt in brick. The brick sizes of these walls (8 $\frac{3}{4}$ " by 2 $\frac{5}{8}$ " by 4 $\frac{1}{4}$ ") date the building to the early part of the 19th century. The replacing of the timber walls caused some of the internal timbers beams to be cut off (Fig 12 and 13) in order for brick to replace the timber. The placing of the new windows in the south wall, in order to fit in with an architectural style, caused the ceiling to be sloped upward on the first floor to accommodate the windows. This is a very unusual feature that is only seen in timber buildings that have had walls replaced. In this period, social changes saw timber-framed buildings being replaced with brick ones, or being encased within brick walls, as they were seen to be of a lower class than brick or stone ones. At Ridgeway Court the emphasis of the building was also changed at this time. Prior to the south wall being constructed in brick, the building faced north to look onto its associated farm buildings and fold yard. Following the

replacing of the south wall, the emphasis of the building was changed to look south and outwards onto the surrounding landscape. This change was common in the early 19th century when the middle classes were beginning to consider the ‘dirty work’ of farming as being lower down the social scale and therefore not to be aspired to or observed. It is probably at this time that the ground level to the new front of the house was altered by being raised about a metre causing two of the former ground floor (now cellar) windows to be blocked (Fig 14).

It is also likely that at this time one room of the cellar was converted for use as a dairy. A dairy cold shelf was created, built on brick arched piers (Fig 15). It is not obvious what the function of the other room was at this time but it did have a gate (Fig 16) in place of a door on its entrance and may have been used for the housing of animals. It is probable that this was the reason a water sump was added into the cellar, in the dairy. This brick lined circular structure (Fig 17) seems to have drains leading into it, possibly from the ice stores although this is not proven.

3.1.4 **Phase 4 – early 20th century**

In the early 20th century a number of small changes were made to Ridgeway Court. This really only consisted of the construction of two new fireplaces and brick chimneys. One was constructed in the dairy area of the cellar (Fig 18), which caused the partial removal of the dairy cold shelf and its brick piers (Fig 19). This chimney also continued into the kitchen on the ground floor (Fig 20).

The other fireplace and chimney was constructed in the other room of the cellar (Fig 21). Obviously by this time the room was being used for something other than animal housing and was possibly a forge. This chimney also continues on to the ground floor where it is used as a fireplace in the living room (Fig 22). This fireplace is constructed with quite narrow bricks that have been reused. The fireplace openings have been removed on the first and second floors but the chimneybreasts are still visible.

3.1.5 **Phase 5 – mid 20th century**

The mid-late 20th century saw the dividing of the original building into the two halves we have today, including the house recorded here. In order to do this the cellar was made smaller and the main part of the frontage was given to the other part of the building. In the house recorded, the only change to the original fabric appears to be the addition of a partition on the first floor to create an en suite bedroom and a separate bathroom (Fig 23). The exterior also had a set of steps (Fig 24) added to allow direct access to this part of the building from outside.

4. **Synthesis**

Ridgeway Court has proven to be an interesting and complicated building that still holds many mysteries. It reflects much about the times it has passed through, most notably a concern with social graces in the early 19th century, when the building was re-orientated and turned away from more mundane farming scene it had happily looked out on for many generations.

The division of the building in the 20th century caused the building to lose some of its integrity, although it has been sympathetically done. In order to get a full picture of Ridgeway Court, the other half of the original building would also need to be recorded. This would allow us to see more evidence of the replacing of the timber and any changes that may have been made to facilitate this in the early 19th century. The recording of the rest of the cellar may also provide extra evidence of its usage and layout at the time of the original construction in the 16th century.

5. **Publication summary**

The Service has a professional obligation to publish the results of archaeological projects within a reasonable period of time. To this end, the Service intends to use this summary as the basis for publication through local or regional journals. The client is requested to consider the content of this section as being acceptable for such publication.

Building recording was undertaken on behalf of the Dodderhill Research Group at Ridgeway Court, Wychbold, Worcestershire (NGR ref SO 9140 6603; SMR ref WSM 34065). Ridgeway Court is a part of a divided up, large 16th century timber framed dwelling associated with a farm. In the 19th century the emphasis of the building was moved away from the farm and the south and east walls were rebuilt in brick, since contemporaries regarded timber framing and farming as lower in class than they had previously been perceived.

6. **The archive**

The archive consists of:

- 4 Photographic records AS3
- 148 Digital photographs
- 1 Building record forms AS43a
- 3 Building record phase forms AS43b
- 2 Scale drawings
- 1 Computer disk

7. **Acknowledgements**

The Service would like to thank the following for their kind assistance in the successful conclusion of this project, Mrs and Mrs Hollingsworth.

8. **Personnel**

The fieldwork and report preparation was led by Shona Robson-Glyde. The project manager responsible for the quality of the project was Derek Hurst. Fieldwork was undertaken by Shona Robson-Glyde and illustration by Shona Robson-Glyde.

9. **Bibliography**

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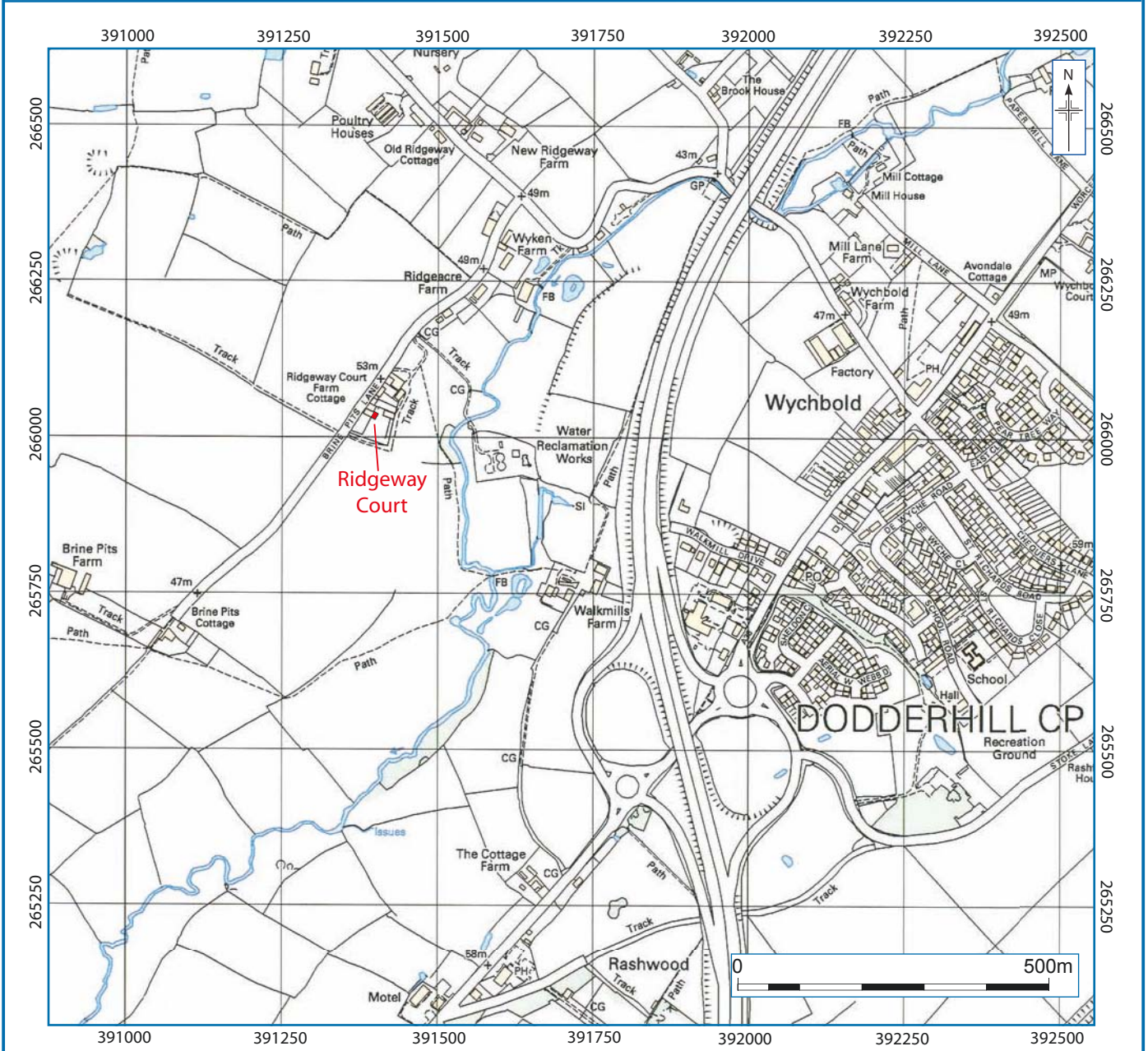
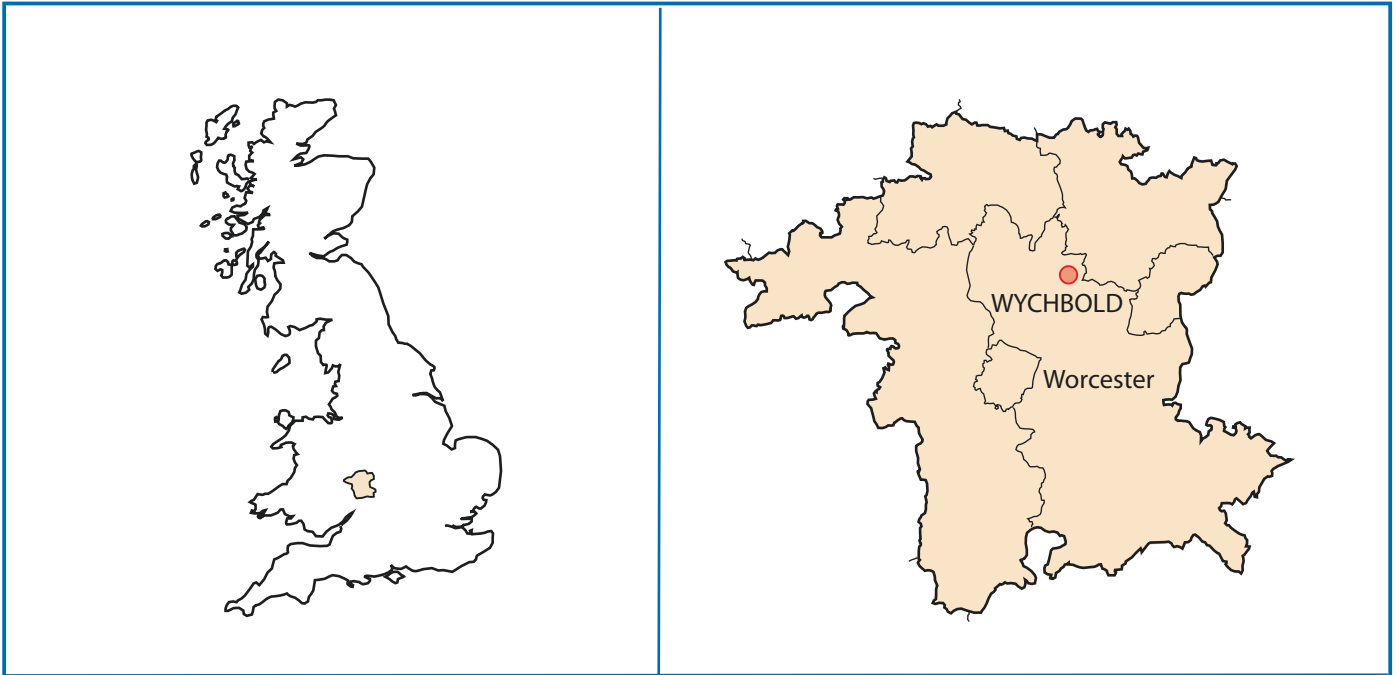
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RCHME, 1996 *Recording historic buildings: a descriptive specification (3rd edition)*, Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England

WCRO ref 705:507 BA 9637, 1796-1982 *Deeds and wills relating to Ridgeway Farm in Dodderhill*, Documents held at Worcestershire Record Office.

10. **Abbreviations and or glossary**

- NMR National Monuments Record.
- SMR Sites and Monuments Record.
- WCRO Worcestershire County Records Office.
- WSM Numbers prefixed with 'WSM' are the primary reference numbers used by the Worcestershire County Historic Environment Record.



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Location of Ridgeway Court

Figure 1



Figure 2: Frontage (south), of Ridgeway Court showing division of house

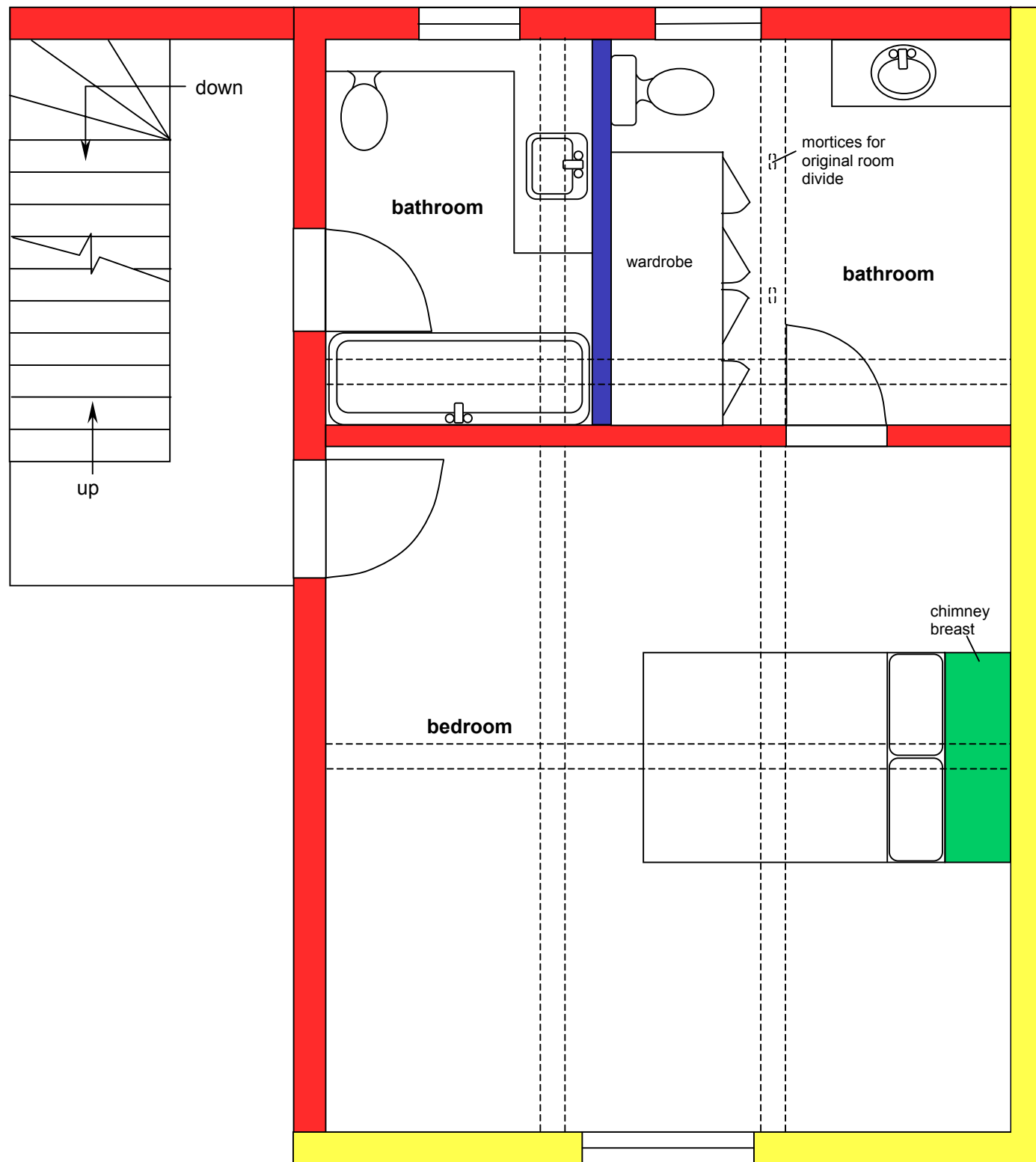


Figure 3: Frontage (south), of Ridgeway Court showing division of house

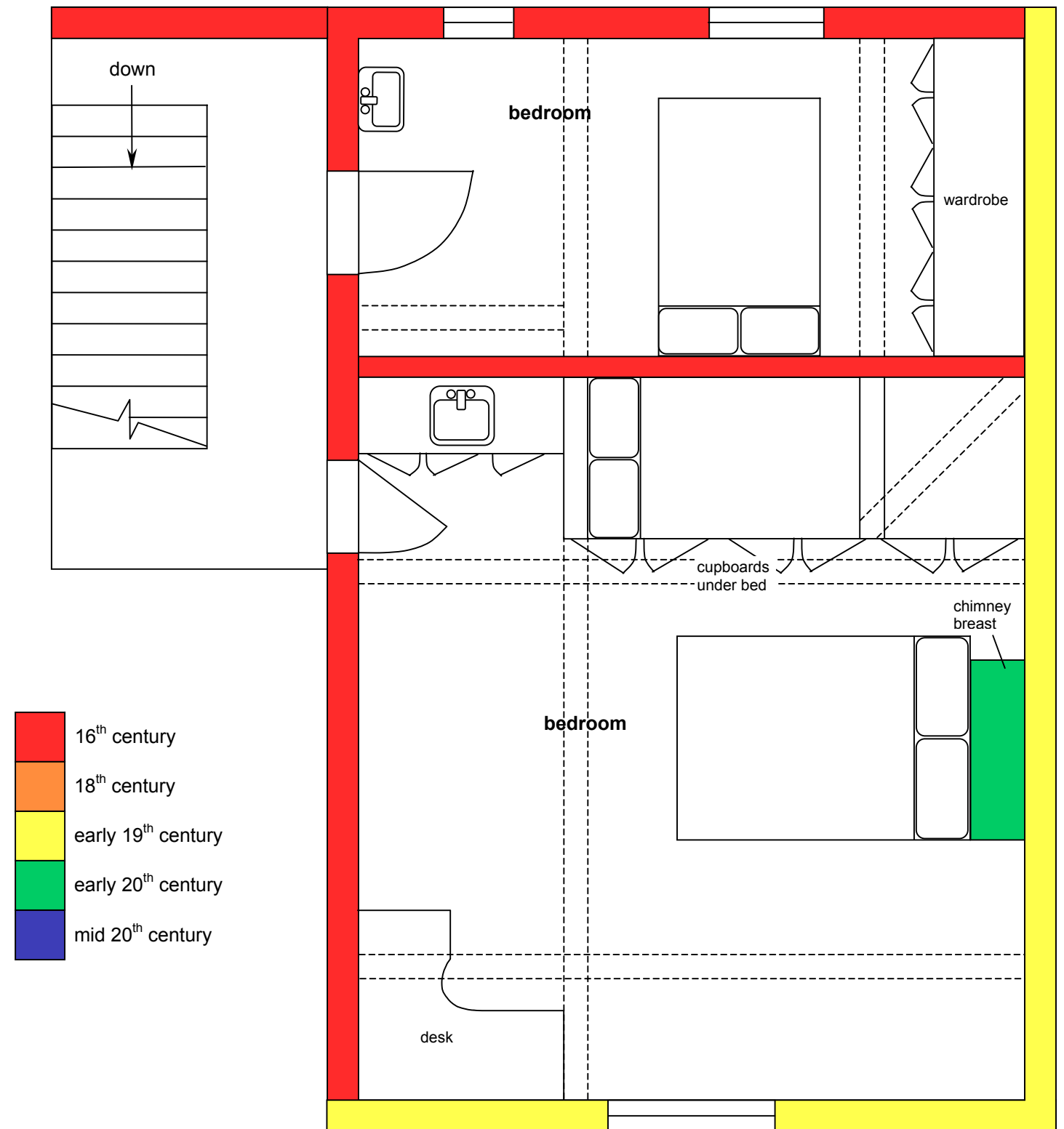


Figure 4: Ridgeway Court, east part

FIRST FLOOR



SECOND FLOOR



First and second floor plans of Ridgeway Court

Figure 6



Figure 7: Ridgeway Court rear (north) elevation showing close studding



Figure 8: East elevation of Ridgeway Court showing sandstone walls



Figure 9: Sandstone, mullion window dating to 16th century



Figure 10: Possible 'ice stores' to rear of Ridgeway Court



Figure 11: Domed-tops of 'ice stores'



Figure 12: Beam cut off when south wall replaced



Figure 13: Carved beam



Figure 14: Blocked window on the south elevation



Figure 15: Dairy cold shelf in cellar



Figure 16: Gate at entrance to large cellar room



Figure 17: Water sump in dairy in cellar



Figure 18: Fireplace in dairy in cellar



Figure 19: Dairy fireplace showing where it has caused the removal of the dairy cold shelf (bottom left)



Figure 20: Kitchen fireplace

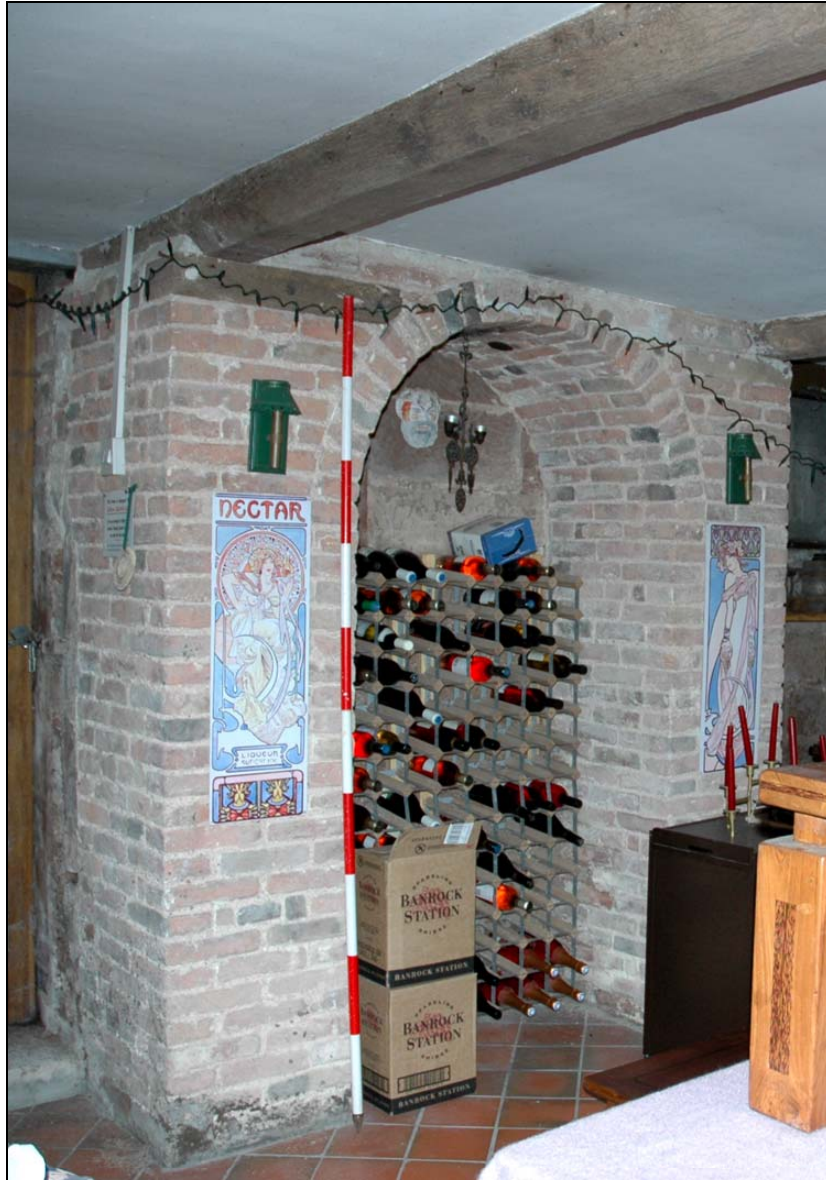


Figure 21: Fireplace in cellar large room



Figure 22: Living room fireplace



Figure 23: First floor bathroom



Figure 24: Entrance steps into the house