



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

FORD MANOR.

BY B. J. BENNETT, P.A.S.I. (Chartered Surveyor).

A FEW fragments of massive walls, here barely showing through the surface of the ground, there rising to a height, at the most, of a few feet, obscured and hidden away behind and under haystacks, hop-oasts, pigsties and cart-roads and all the litter of a present-day farm. This is all that now remains of the former glory of the Bishops' Manor House at Ford, which was situated beside the road from Canterbury to Herne Bay, and which belonged to the See of Canterbury, and was the residence of such famous Bishops as Whitgift and Cranmer.

The manor house was built by Cardinal Moreton about A.D. 1480, and although we are told that its situation was considered unhealthy, yet it is on record that Cranmer fled to Ford from Lambeth to avoid the plague which was raging in London in 1537. The buildings, however, having fallen into a state of disrepair, were demolished in the year 1658 by order of the Commonwealth, the materials being disposed of for the sum of £840 ; and to-day Ford is known locally only as the site of the farm built over the ruins, and of the adjoining wells and pumping station of the local Water Company.

Until recently the only pictures known to exist of the old manor house, sometimes inaccurately styled "Palace", were sketches of the ruins in varying stages of depredation. An old piece of parchment (Plate I) has now, however, come to light, which is evidently a fragment of a map of the locality and which bears the date 1624 in faint figures evidently added when this section was torn from the whole map. It will be seen that this has a rough sketch of a block of buildings surrounding two court yards, and with a tower, several storeys in height, on its northern side. Interesting though this old sketch undoubtedly is, unfortunately, as is common with maps so old, it only gives a very crude idea of the nature of the buildings and affords but little more faithful

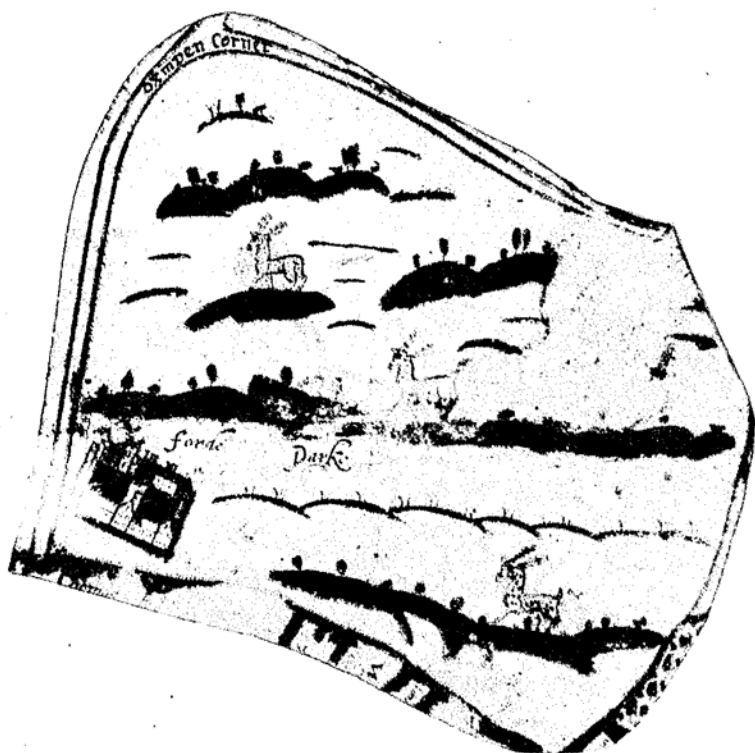


Photo : T. A. Bennett.

PLATE I. FRAGMENT OF A MAP OF "FORDE PARKE."

(The original measures 6 ins. across.)

The date "1624" is written to the right of the house in figures too faint to appear in the reproduction.

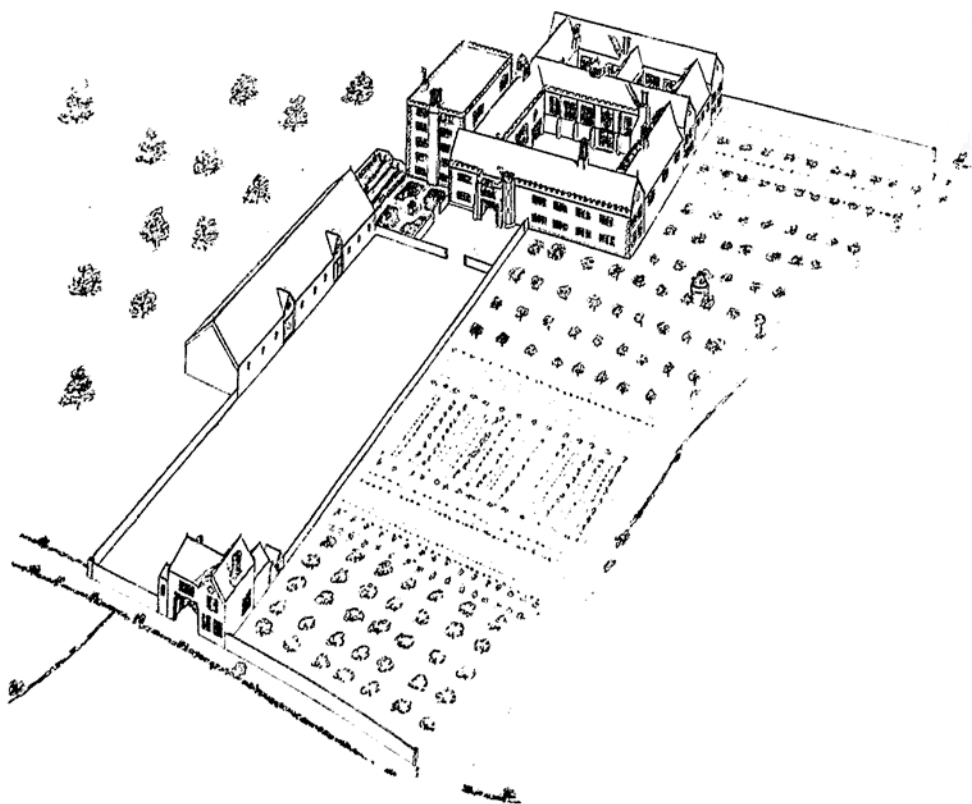


Photo : T. A. Bennett.

PLATE II.

FORD MANOR HOUSE.

Reconstructed and Drawn by B. J. Bennett, P.A.S.I.

representation of them than the sketches of the animals gambolling in the "Parke" can be regarded as accurately proportioned drawings of the deer.

Fortunately, however, we have a much more trustworthy contemporary description of the manor house contained in the "Parliamentary Surveys of the Lands of the Bishops, Deans and Chapters and other Ecclesiastical Benefices, etc." in the Library at Lambeth Palace. The survey, so far as it relates to Ford, was taken by "John Madden, Jeffery Sandwell, John Griffin and William Belgrave, gents., on the 20th day of April, 1647," and this section of it was reprinted in Mr. Hussey's article in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XXVI. This gives us a detailed description, sufficiently dimensioned to permit of a theoretical reconstruction of the whole "mansion house" (as the Survey calls it), a task which I have endeavoured to carry out, and such that has resulted in the accompanying drawing (Plate II). The Survey, while giving ample dimensions of the main features, omits nearly all reference to architectural details and it has therefore been necessary to arrive first at the main outline of the blocks of buildings and to embellish these with details culled from contemporary residences which still exist. At the time when Ford Manor House was built English architecture was at a transitional period. The necessity for fortified castles and manor houses was passing, and the extensive country residence was developing instead. We find, however, that details such as the battlemented parapet-walls were still largely retained as architectural features, other prominent details of the Tudor period buildings being the "four-centre" arches to gateways, doorways and windows, and the large number of tall "twisted" or "moulded" chimneys—external evidence of the increasing standard of comfort within. The grouping of the main block of buildings, either in the form of the letters "E" or "H", round central courtyards was, too, typical of the period. In the case of Ford this form was complicated by the division of the rear court into two by a sort of cloister. This cloister does not appear on the 1624 map but is referred to below.

In view of the detailed description of the number of rooms or chambers contained in the Parliamentary Survey and the care taken to indicate which of those chambers were equipped with a chimney it was thought desirable to work out room plans of both floors of the buildings. The result confirmed my reconstruction to be a practicable one, but the actual sizes of the individual rooms are not given in the Survey, and these floor plans, although of use as a check on the accuracy of the whole, are too conjectural to justify publication. It will be seen, too, that on the whole my reconstruction tallies with the 1624 drawing, due allowance being made for the crudity of the latter, and it has also, of course, been compared with such of the ruined walls as can be seen to-day. Local tradition speaks of "Fishponds" on the site and within comparatively recent years a moat adjoining the ruins has been filled in. There is, however, no reference in the Parliamentary Survey to features such as these (which would have been sufficiently prominent to call for some note) and I am therefore forced to regard them as subsequent additions and to omit them from what is claimed to be a possible reconstruction of Ford Manor House as it existed in the year 1647, based primarily on the Parliamentary Survey and on details of contemporary architecture.

To deal with the buildings in more detail we may best adopt the starting point of the Survey of 1647—the central building or Great Hall. Access was obtained to this from the forecourt by the entrance door leading into the "screens"—a kind of passage—on one side of which would be doors leading to the buttery, pantry and kitchens and on the other leading into the Great Hall, 52 feet by 27, extending in height through both storeys and surmounted by a "lanthorn covered with lead" (probably an adaptation from earlier days when the residences consisted solely of one hall with a fire in the centre of the floor and an opening in the roof above to permit the egress of smoke). The Great Hall ran approximately north and south, on the north end, on the ground floor, being a pantry, wine cellar and three beer cellars, and on the south end, beyond the screens, the buttery

or pantry with a passage leading through between that and a store room to the great kitchen, which latter apparently possessed a typical Tudor fireplace—"sixteen feet between the jambs".

Extending eastward along the southern flank of buildings and continuing partly upon the eastern range were the domestic offices, comprising a large bakehouse, two ovens, a boulting-house, a wash-house, and a folding room. The court (52 by 30 feet), of which these rooms formed sides, was known as the "base" court on account of its proximity to the menial offices. On the north side of this base court was a passage passing between the Great Hall and the Long Gallery in the eastern flank. Over this passage were three chambers, and it would seem therefore to have been in the nature of a cloistered passage, the arches of which supported the rooms on the first floor. As already mentioned this feature does not appear on the 1624 plan but it is the only possible interpretation of the Parliamentary Survey and traces of masonry do, in fact, still appear in the appropriate position on the ground. North of this passage was the Inner Court (52 by 49 feet), bounded on the west by the Great Hall and on the north and east by "lodging chambers" opening on to the Court.

On the first floor in the eastern flank of the buildings was situated the Long Gallery with a "compass" or oriel window. This window would probably overlook the surrounding Park and does not, therefore, appear in my drawing.

North from the Great Hall was a drawing room on the first floor and, extending along the north flank therefrom an "entry or walk" into which opened the back stairs from the Park. This entry gave access from the drawing room to the Long Gallery and another pair of back stairs, and had a number of chambers opening into it, these chambers presumably being lighted by windows overlooking the inner court.

The forecourt in front of the Great Hall had on its northern side the Chapel (75 by 25 feet) built of stone and surmounted by "an old clock with a bell hanging in a small

turret ". The other sides of this forecourt were comprised of lodging chambers, in two storeys on the west and one on the south, with the exception of the inner Gate-House or Porter's Lodge opposite the Hall and in the corner next to the Chapel. In many contemporary residences the gate-house was a structure of considerable prominence, rising into towers of considerable height, but the Parliamentary Survey clearly refers to one storey, and one storey only, over the gate-house and the reconstruction has been made accordingly. Some means of access to the second storey chambers had to be provided, and the turret staircase beside the gate suggested itself as a reasonable solution, at the same time strengthening the dignity of the entrance.

With regard to the five-storey lead-roofed tower (48 by 90 feet and 52 feet high) abutting on the northern wall, the exact locating of this structure presented some difficulty as the Survey refers to it as being on the north side of the whole fabric from the east angle westwards. This, of course, does not agree with the 1624 sketch, but on a reperusal of the Survey it was found that it deals first with the buildings surrounding the two inner courts, and then with those bounding the forecourt, and in the same paragraph as the latter refers to this tower. From this I believe I am justified in reading the Survey as placing the tower extending from the east angle of this section of the building westward, i.e. along the northern wall of the Chapel. This view is confirmed by the fact that to the north of the site the contours rise steeply, but in the position where I have shown it there is a fold in the ground where the tower might well have stood. This, too, agrees with the 1624 drawing, and also leaves room for the two pairs of back stairs from the "entry or walk", previously referred to, into the Park. The passage from the drawing room into the tower is then also possible.

The Gate-House opened on to an Outer Court (64 by 54 feet) surrounded by a brick wall, to the north of which was a small garden. In view of the rising contours at this spot I have assumed a portion of this garden to have been terraced. This Outer Court in turn opened on to a large yard, on the

north of which were the stables and on the west the highway with the " out gate-house or lodge, usually the housekeepers, having four ground rooms, three above, and two stacks of chimneys, and about two bays of outhousing serving for a beerhouse ". This outer gate-house was approximately on the site of the present-day house now known as Ford Manor.

South of the yard and house were two acres and one rood of ground, used as an orchard and garden plot, with a dove house therein, the latter being built of timber and covered with tile, but at that time " unstored ".

It will be noticed that I have assumed the obvious explanation of the name of " Ford " to be the correct one and that the stream forming the southern boundary of the whole, which has now eaten its way into a gulley bridged by the road, did at that time actually cross the highway and had to be forded.

In conclusion the Survey points out that the greater part of the manor house and outbuildings were constructed of brick and roofed with tiles, notable exceptions being the Chapel, which was built of stone, and the tower, which was roofed with lead, the " demolition " value of the materials being estimated at £820. The accuracy of which estimate is confirmed by the record that the materials did, in fact, fetch £840 some eleven years later. An interesting comparison with to-day's values is afforded by the Commissioners' valuation of the whole premises, together with the Park of 166 acres, as being worth a rental of £43 10s. 0d. per annum.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: The fragment of the 1624 map, which is the property of Dr. T. Armstrong Bowes, is now deposited in the Museum of the Herne Bay Records Society. Another reconstruction of Ford Manor, based on the old sketch thereon but differing from Mr. Bennett's in several interesting ways, has been made by Mr. Dickinson, and a photograph of it, with a short note, appeared in *The Times* of March 30th, 1932.]