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STARKEY CASTLE, WOULDHAM

By ERIC R. SWAIN

IN the parish of Wouldham, near Rochester, there is a stone-built structure known as Starkey Castle (N.G.R. TQ71376559). The name 'Starkey' appears to be derived from a former owner, and 'Castle' is purely fanciful. Various references have been made to the site in times past, but there seems to be no published record of any detailed examination and the building appears to be less well known than many of lesser merit. It is the purpose of this paper to review known sources of reference, to record the present structure, and to summarize the factual evidence.

PAST REFERENCES

In the Register of Hamo de Hethe under the date 12th March, 1334, it is recorded that 'Geoffrey, chaplain, rector of the church of St. Clement, Rochester, before the lord bishop in a room of the hall of Wouldham (Woldeham), that is to say in the manor of the prior and convent of Rochester, handed in his resignation in writing to the lord bishop . . .'. The Latin says 'in camera aule de Woldeham'. Charles Johnson, the editor, indexes this as 'Chamber of the hall in Wouldham' (1). No other building, past or present, and large enough to be called a manor-house is known in Wouldham, and the hall referred to is possibly Starkey Castle, although the present building appears to have been erected about 50 years after this.

Harris (2) made direct reference to 'Starkeys' saying that 'Woldeham' was previously known as Little Woldeham which was a manor albeit without a manor-house. He states that in the twentieth year of the reign of Henry III (1236) the manor was possessed by Sir John Buckland and afterwards by purchase went into the name of Newman, but stayed there not above a descent or two before it was sold by Henry Newman to Humphrey Starkey, one of the Barons of the Exchequer in the reign of King Henry VII. Harris continues to name subsequent owners, adding 'At this place of Starkeys I saw the remainder of a pretty large chapel'.

Hasted (3) also refers to 'Starkeys' in 'Little Woldeham' stating that the latter was formerly known as 'the manor of Lyttlyhall and

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Woldeham'. Hasted first mentions Starkeys as having been in the possession of one 'Richard Bysets' in the reign of King Edward III (d. 1377), thereafter passing to 'Henry de Bokeland' and then to Henry Newman, whose descendant, Henry Newman, conveyed it to Humphrey Starkey who 'was . . . in the second year of King Richard III, Chief Baron of the Exchequer'. Hasted accords to Starkey the credit of building a 'good house here being a large strong edifice of stone though much larger formerly than it is at present together with a handsome chapel'. Further reference is made to the remains of the chapel being visible at the east angle of the house, and also to an engraving dated 1769 (4). An attendant description of Starkeys at that time states, 'the great window of the hall being, for the most part, stopped up with bricks and plaster'. In reference to the ruinous chapel at the east angle, the work states 'when I lived in this parish a larger portion of it was standing, and one of the side windows with its mitred or pointed arch'. The engraving must be treated with the caution necessary in examining all 'artistic' illustrations which are not photographs, yet it nonetheless gives some useful pointers. There is shown a ruined wall at the north-east angle, the great hall window is unmistakably patched up with brickwork, etc., and a ground-floor entry is shown on the south-east face of the south-west extension.

A further drawing of Starkeys was made by Stockdale (5). This again showed the entry in the south-west extension referred to above. A note in this work obviously leans on the above quoted references in tracing the ownership of the house, but adds a useful assessment of the building describing it as 'one of the few remaining specimens of the domestic architecture of the middle centuries', and mentioning the great hall window 'now nearly filled up with bricks'.

Coles Finch (6) misquotes Harris in a mistaken endeavour to show that the existing building was built as a chapel. Coles Finch also makes some unlikely allusions to materials brought from Halling Palace. In the face of such misleading assertions, it is disturbing to have to quote the same source as the only one mentioning a mill lying to the north-west of the house. The mill-pond remains today with traces of a water-course meandering down to the Medway. Coles Finch surmises the mill to have been a tide-mill, and uses quotes to refer to an annual cleaning of the mill-pond.

A pond in the same position as the existing one is shown on a seventeenth century map in Maidstone Museum. This is of further interest in showing a possible louvre in the roof over the hall in a position now occupied by the chimney stack. There is also a wing where the chapel is believed to have been and other outbuildings which are now gone. A second map, dated 1796, also in the museum, shows some of the lost outbuildings and the existing brick extension.

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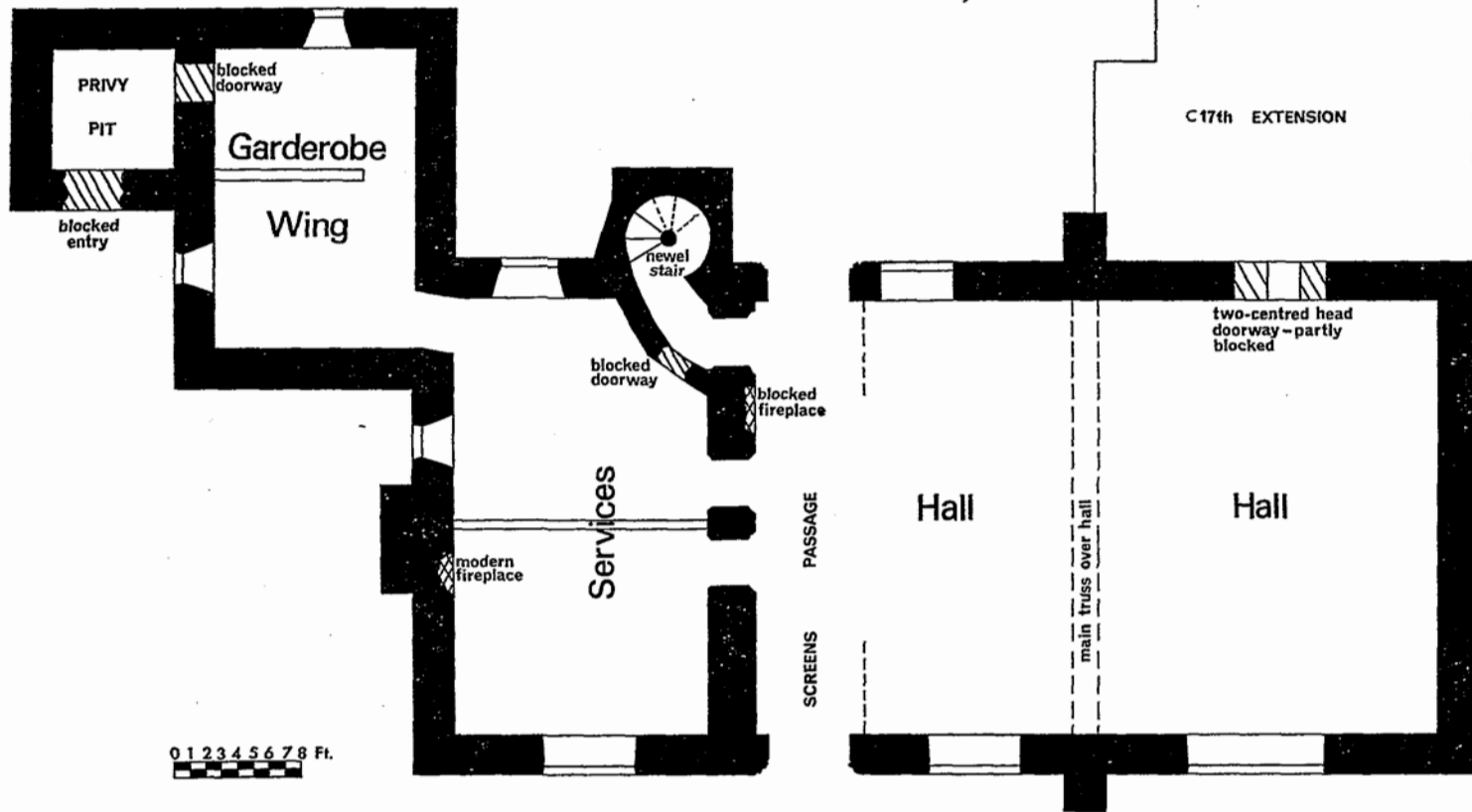
THE EXISTING BUILDING

Starkey Castle, as it now stands (Fig. 1 and Plate IA), is a very well-preserved fourteenth-century stone-built hall with a services cross-wing and domestic extensions, with further domestic facilities provided in a brick-built annexe of c. 1700. There is ample evidence of nineteenth-century repair but this was reasonably successful restoration work. The building is now divided into four flats for the use of farmworkers and is suffering continuing damage as the result of attempts to provide 'modern' facilities for the use of the present occupants.

The evidence of the fabric indicates that Starkey carried out alterations to the existing fourteenth-century building, and did not completely rebuild it as might be believed from earlier sources. The chapel which Starkey probably built abutted the north-east end of the hall and has now completely disappeared except for two stone corbels remaining on the exterior end wall of the hall.

The south-east face (Plate IA) is the front of the building containing the great hall window. This latter was probably restored in the nineteenth century, some of the tracery being wooden but probably in similar form to the original. The masonry is ragstone rubble garretted with flint, the dressings are ragstone. The walls are approximately 2 ft. 9 in. thick with an additional 3-in. splay about 2 ft. above ground level. The face of the buttress is in chequer-work form with panels of knapped flint. The two windows between the buttress and the main door have a label moulding and form which shows them to be very probably the result of some of Starkey's alterations in the late fifteenth century. Their manner of being one above the other suggests also that a first floor was inserted over the hall at this time and probably the chimney stack inserted also. The period generally accepted as the heyday of floor and stack insertions in open halls is somewhat later than this (7) but the combination of a substantial building and a new owner of the standing of Justice Starkey is a sufficiently strong combination to explain why this hall should be among the earliest examples of such modification. The uppermost of these two windows has a stone relieving arch above it, which may well be evidence of an original secondary hall window of similar shape to that serving the chamber above the services (below the gable of the cross-wing). That window appears original and the arch moulding is surmounted by a similar masonry arch. The lower window in the cross-wing was again probably refashioned to its existing form in the late fifteenth century. The gable of the cross-wing has a stone coping supported at the eaves by very large corbel stones. The remaining main feature of the front façade is the screens passage doorway which has a two-centred head and moulded jambs (Fig. 2A). An external chimney stack and two window openings

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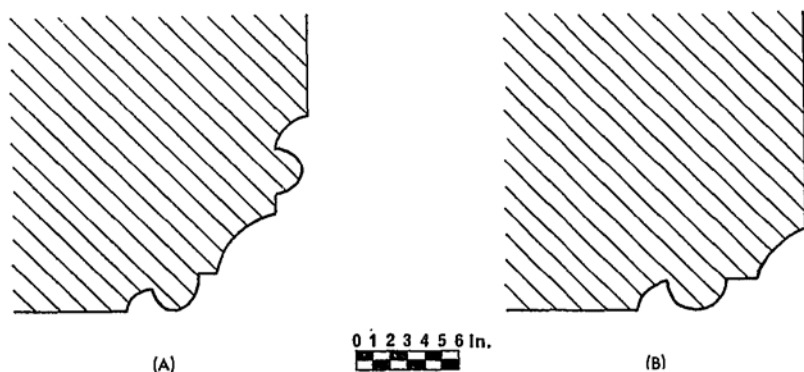


FIG. 2. Jamb Mouldings of Screens Passage Doorways.

can be seen on the south-west elevation of the cross-wing (Plate IB). The rear elevation, as seen from the north-west (Plate IIA), is partly obscured by the brick-built annexe referred to above. The entrance to this end of the screens passage is a two-centred head doorway of similar shape to its counterpart but with less elaborate jamb mouldings (Fig. 2B). Masons' marks may be seen on the jambs (Fig. 3) the first of which is similar to one found in Dedham Church, Essex (8).

An upper hall window of late fifteenth-century form has a similar stone relieving arch to that over its opposite twin at the front of the building and referred to above. The tower to the south-west of the doorway contains a stone newel stair providing access from the screens

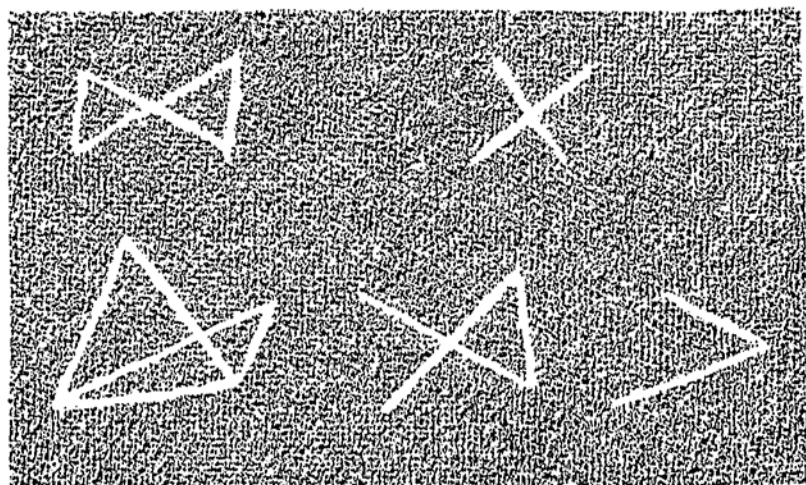
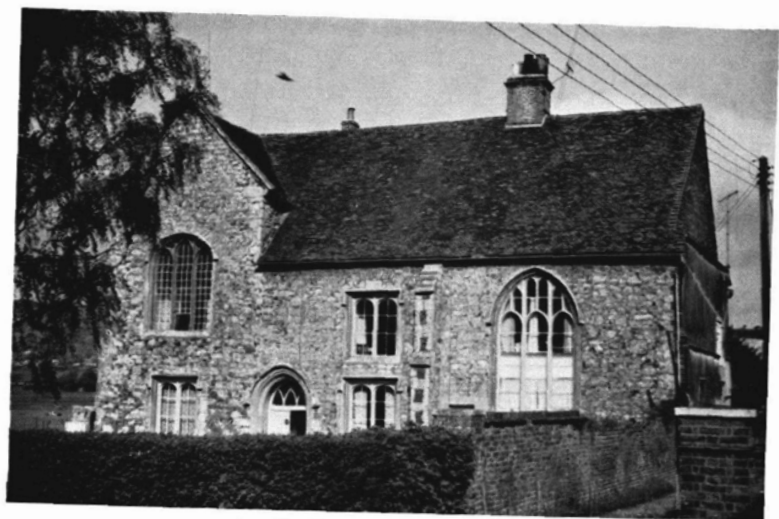


FIG. 3. Masons' Marks, north-west Doorway.



A. South-east (front) Elevation.

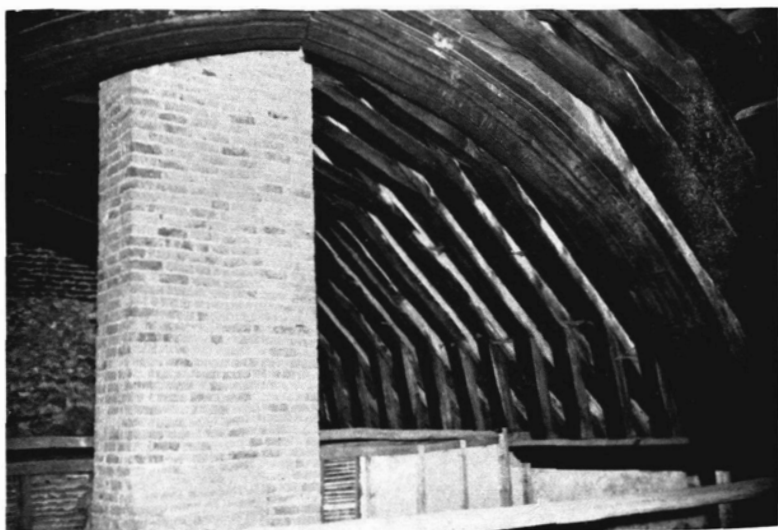


B. South-west Elevation.

PLATE II



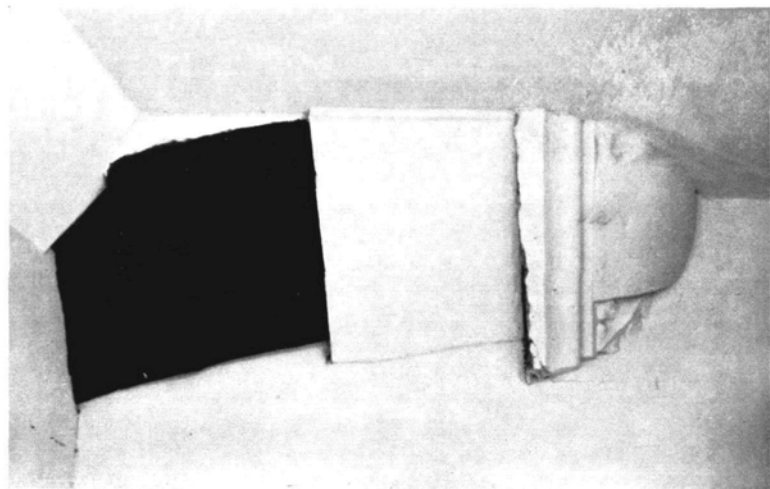
A. North-west Elevation.



B. Hall Roof Interior.



A. Main Truss Corbel.



B. North-west End Truss Corbel.

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passage to the chamber above the services. The L-shaped extension to the south-west corner of the cross-wing is contiguous with the main building and is undoubtedly part of the original building. This extension was probably a garderobe wing, the smaller part being a privy with a pit below. The main part of the wing has window openings at both floor levels on the south-west elevation (Plate IB), and again on the north-west (Plate IIA). The lower window in Plate IIA had a four-centred head with plain recessed spandrels in 1965 as shown, but has now been destroyed and replaced by a modern metal frame.

The garderobe privy is reminiscent of Old Soar, Plaxtol, where the entrance is through the angle of the walls. The south-east and south-west faces at first floor level only seem to have ever been provided with very small lights. The north-west face now has a window opening at this level but it may be a later replacement of an earlier small light. The garderobe pit has no evidence of window openings except the existing small square window of comparatively modern date on the south-west face. The south-east face had an entry which is now blocked. This is shown as an opening in the published drawings of 1769 and 1810 already referred to (9).

The interior of the building (Fig. 1) is greatly masked by its present usage and the resultant partitioning used. The screens passage is divided longitudinally with an inserted wooden staircase. There are doorways from this passage, two leading to the services and a third to the stone newel stair. All have two-centred heads and are of comparable form to the exterior doorways. A fourth opening appears low down in the wall and was latterly used as a fireplace. It, too, has a two-centred head but appears to be an imitation in form of the adjacent doorways. However, there does appear to be a flue running up through the thickness of the wall and the stack can be seen rising through the roof above the point of intersection with the cross-wing (Plate IIA). Even allowing for the usage of the house in later years, it seems a peculiar position for a fireplace.

Little can be seen of the internal fabric of the hall. There is what appears to be a blocked doorway on the north-west side of the hall, with a modern door piercing the infilling. This may have provided access to a kitchen wing, but the evidence is not clear. The interior of the hall roof is accessible (Plate IIB), and there is much evidence of soot blackening from the open fire which evidently burnt in the hall. There is no ridgepiece in the roof. The rafters are paired and close set with small interspaces. Each pair is collared with additional straight bracing from rafter to collar, there are no purlins. The main truss over the hall is aligned on the external buttresses and is heavily moulded, taking the form of a two-centred arch below the collar. This truss is supported on stone corbels in the form of angels' heads and shields

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(Plate IIIA). One of these corbels is damaged and at present obscured within a cupboard, the other has recently received a coat of white gloss paint. The trusses at either end of the hall are similarly moulded and supported on corbels bearing a shield (Plate IIIB).

There is a doorway at first-floor level providing access from the upper part of the hall to the chamber over the services. This doorway is adjacent to the upper entry to the newel stair in the north-west end of the chamber, and may well have provided access from the chamber to a gallery above the screens passage.

The garderobe wing is accessible from both ground floor and first floor levels of the services cross-wing through angled doorways at the point of abutment. All small window openings have a wide internal splay and a further doorway at first floor level through the wall angle provides access to the privy. There is a blocked doorway connecting the privy pit with the rest of the garderobe wing but this is believed to have been a later modification. The privy pit, latterly used as a cellar, is now completely inaccessible. The fireplaces serving the chimney stack of the cross-wing, are modern and do not allow for detailed examination of any earlier work. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to gain entry to the roof void above the cross-wing which has a false ceiling preventing access. Mr. S. E. Rigold, who was able to see into it (but not gain entry) some years ago, has confirmed it to be generally similar to the main roof.

SUMMARY

There is obviously much more to be learned about Starkey Castle. If opportunity ever arises for restoration of the building, the consequent detailed examination of the fabric would doubtless add greatly to the structural assessment made here. Nonetheless it is evidently a hall erected during the fourteenth century, possibly about 1380, by the Richard Bysets mentioned in Hasted (10). Furthermore, it is again evident that it was not substantially rebuilt by Sir Humphrey Starkey who probably modified it (e.g. the late fifteenth-century windows already described) and added such extensions as he required (e.g. the chapel now lost). There are probably also far more extant records referring to the building than the writer has been able to discover.

In its present form Starkey Castle is a remarkably complete and rare example of fourteenth-century domestic architecture and yet enjoys little popularity in discussions of the subject.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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expressed in this paper are of course my own and not necessarily endorsed by any other person. I am further indebted to Mr. Rigold for permission to reproduce the photograph in Plate IIA.

Permission to inspect the property was kindly granted by the agents Messrs. Weatherall, Green and Smith and Mr. D. G. Gore of Rings Hill Farm, Wouldham.

REFERENCES

(1) I am indebted to Mr. L. R. A. Grove of Maidstone Museum who supplied this information.

(2) JOHN HARRIS, *The History of Kent* Vol. I (1719), 337.

(3) HASTED, *History of Kent*, 8vo. edn. (1798), pages 403 to 404.

(4) *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, No. VI (1782), part I, facing page 21.

(5) FREDERICK WILTON LITCHFIELD STOCKDALE, *Etchings from Original Drawings of Antiquities in the County of Kent* (1810).

(6) WILLIAM COLES FINCH, *In Kentish Pilgrims' Land* (1927), 246.

(7) M. W. BARLEY, *The English Farmhouse and Cottage*, 43, 63.

(8) F. A. GIRLING, *English Merchants' Marks*, 10.

(9) *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*, *op. cit.*, and Stockdale, *op. cit.*

(10) HASTED, *op. cit.*