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THE OLD CHANTRY HOUSE, BREDGAR

By E. W. PARKIN

THE foundation and endowment of chantries in this country flourished from the thirteenth century for almost three hundred years, until finally suppressed by Henry VIII. They reached a peak in the second half of the fourteenth century after the terrible visitation of the Black Death in 1349, and, although declining somewhat in numbers during the following century, more than two thousand still remained at the time of the Dissolution.¹

The chantry college at Bredgar was a small one, founded in 1392 by Robert de Bradegare and others with ample endowments. It was at the same time more than a chantry, as its object was clearly the education and preparation of certain clerk-scholars for the priesthood, and was unlike any other establishment of its kind in Kent. Wye College certainly had some provision for education, as had the chantry founded in St. Peter's church, Sandwich, in 1392 by a wealthy merchant, Thomas Elys, and so was contemporary with Bredgar. Here, according to Boys,² one of the three chantry priests was required to instruct the youth of the town.

The Chantry House at Bredgar still stands on the west side of the village street, almost opposite the church; it is a long flint building with very thick walls and ashlar dressings, the main east front having a door and windows inserted in the late eighteenth century (Plate IA).

HISTORY

The history of the house begins on 19th July, 1392, when upon payment of £40, a licence was granted by Richard II to Robert de Bradegare and others³ to found a college at Bredgar dedicated to the Holy Trinity, to house one chaplain and two clerk-scholars. Hussey⁴ describes Robert de Bradegare as a clerk of the Diocese of Canterbury, and in a footnote adds that he was one of the canons of Wingham College from 1376 until his death in 1409.

The building itself was probably finished in the early months of 1393, as the founder issued an ordinance for the management of the

¹ G. H. Cook, *Medieval Chantries and Chantry Chapels*, London, 1947, 22.

² William Boys, *Collections for an History of Sandwich in Kent*, 186.

³ John Burbache, Thos. Jakyn, John West, John Trowbregge, John atte Vyse, John Lambe and Roger West. Cal. Pat. Rolls, vol. 1391-6, p. 122.

⁴ Arthur Hussey, *Kent Chantries*, K.A.S. Records Branch, xii, 21.

college, dated the 3rd April of that year.⁵ The chaplain was to be allowed twelve marks yearly, and each of the scholars forty shillings for his maintenance. The residue of the endowment income was to be applied to the repair of the Chantry House, or otherwise to its use. A list of offices to be performed, and prayers to be said daily for the benefactors and their successors is elaborately delineated; the scholars were to '... pray daily for ever for the good estate of Archbishop Courtenay and his successors, Thomas Chillenden, Prior of Christ Church and his successors, for the monks of the same place ... and the founder and all the benefactors of the College whilst they live, and after their death ... the scholars to wear surplices in the church of Bredgar, or if this is not allowed, in the chapel of the College ... for the souls of the aforesaid daily, according to the use of Sarum, Placebo and Direge, with the seven Penitential Psalms and the Litany ...'.⁶

It would appear that the use of the church was allowed, for the scholars performed these divine offices in the chapel on the north side of the choir for many years, while in the Chantry House there is no discernible evidence of there ever having been a chapel.

The endowments of the chantry were considerable, and included 3 messuages, 250 acres of land, 100 of pasture and 60 of woodland, situated '... in the parishes of Holyngbourne, Houkyngge, Bradegare, Wornsell, Bordenne, Tunstall and Bikenor ...' as well as a rent of 13s. 4d., eight hens, and half a pound of pepper.⁷

The founder made fresh ordinances dated 12th of August, 1398,⁸ revising and adding to the earlier ones. The chaplain might absent himself for one month of thirty-two days from the college in each year, and might have an assistant to help him at mass, and otherwise serve him. Two extra poor scholars were to be admitted; the chaplain and his assistant '... to have the northern chambers of the college, and the scholars a southern chamber'. As at this time the hall and the kitchen were both open to the roof, and there were only two first-floor rooms (Fig. 1), their use is not in doubt. Architectural evidence shows that at about this time the chaplain's room on the first floor at the northern end was enlarged, and extended out into the hall, doubtless to accommodate the assistant priest, leaving less than half of the open hall as a smoke bay. This section is still open up to tie-beam level.

All chaplains and scholars were required upon admission to take an oath, swearing that each would be faithful to the chantry, college, its rights, etc., and would not alienate or destroy any of its goods or properties.

⁵ *Lit. Cant.* (Rolls Ser.), iii, 15-21.

⁶ Hussey, *op. cit.*, 21.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *V.O.H.*, vol. ii, 1926 (Fowler), 230.



A. The east Front of the House.



B. Inside Vault under Chaplain's Room.

PLATE II



A. The Crown-post Roof.



B. Original Window and seventeenth-century Fireplace in Chaplain's Room.

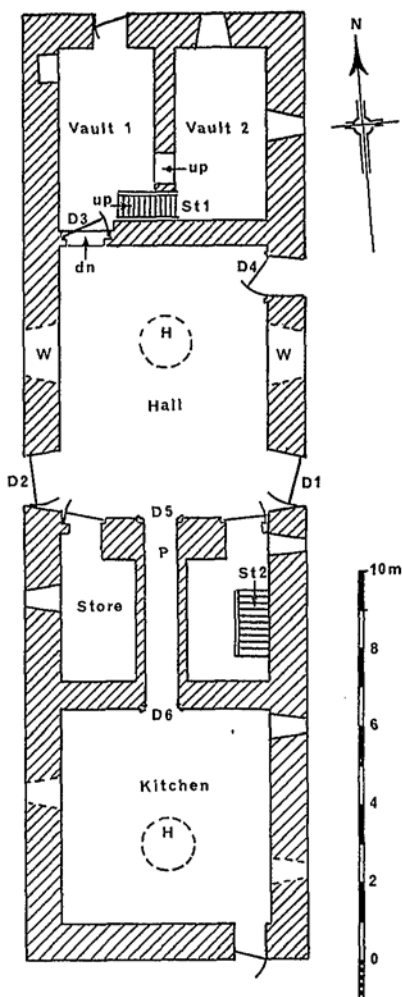


FIG. 1. Plan of the original House.

KEY TO DRAWINGS

- | | | | |
|----|--|------|------------------------------|
| D1 | Front Door, replaced by eighteenth-century door and doorway. | HL | Part of Old Hall still open. |
| D2 | Rear Door of old Hall, now open doorway. | K | Original Kitchen. |
| D3 | Original Doorway into Chaplain's Quarters. | Kn | Modern Kitchen. |
| D4 | Chaplain's Private Door. | MC | Moulded Oak Cornice. |
| D5 | Moulded Doorway at N. end of Passage, now blocked. | OS | Outshot. |
| D6 | Moulded Doorway at S. end of Passage, now blocked. | P | Original Passage to Kitchen. |
| F | Added Fireplaces. | St 1 | Stairs to Chaplain's Room. |
| G | Garden Store. | St 2 | Stairs to Students' Room. |
| H | Site of Open Hearth. | St 3 | Central Oak Staircase. |
| | | SW | Original Stone Window. |
| | | V1 | Vault. |
| | | V2 | Vault. |
| | | W | Site of old Hall Windows. |
| | | WS | Wedge Sprockets. |

Holy vessels and other valuables belonging to the chantry were to be kept in a chest, or other safe place having three different locks and keys for greater security.⁹ This chest or cupboard must have been located in the chaplain's room, or in one of the storage vaults beneath it (Fig. 4). The chaplain's quarters were sealed off from the rest of the building by a heavy Gothic door (D3 on plans) of which the moulded stone doorway and the heavy pin hinges still remain. According to Igglesden,¹⁰ the actual oak door had at some time been removed to a house on the west side of the village, known as Mann's Place, where it could still be seen. The vaults, apparently, were referred to locally as 'the dungeons'.

The scholars were required to take the order of sub-deacon in their twentieth year, and not remain in the college after their twenty-fifth birthday. During the first week in October of each year of the anniversary of the founders was to be kept by the chaplain and scholars, and at this time an account was to be made up of the goods of the college. The chaplain was to retain a lawyer of the Council of the Archbishop of Canterbury at a fee of 6s. 8d. yearly. The books of the college were not to be lent out.

In 1403 and later, further endowments were added to the charity.

The *Valor* of 1535¹¹ throws further light upon the condition and the possessions of '... the primary chantry of Bredgar, given in the certificate of Walter Dowle,¹² chantry priest there'. The stated value was then £32 14s. 8d. yearly, which after deductions of £4 18s. 5½d., left a net value of £27 16s. 2½d.

In 1546¹³ the gross value of '... the late chauntery house of Bredgar' was given as £39 15s. 4d., with a net value of £36 12s. 7d. The return also mentions a chalice of silver valued at 26s. 8d., a bell at 10s., and '... two old vestments and albs price 10 shillings, all which stuff came into the hands of Walter Dowle, late master there'.

Grayling¹⁴ refers to a bronze mortar formerly belonging to the College which was then (in 1913) in his possession at Brighton, but the present whereabouts of which is unknown.

The first chaplain to be appointed to the chantry is not named, but is believed to have been John Foiset who resigned in 1397. Known wardens then may be listed as follows:

1393 (?) John Foiset, resigned 1397.

1397 Dom. John Bromhull.

⁹ Reg. S., fol. 11, also Reg. Morton, ii, f. 123 *et seqq.*

¹⁰ Igglesden, *Saunters through Kent*, vol. xxxi, 66.

¹¹ *Valor Eccl.* (Rec. Com.), i, 68.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Chant. Cert. 29, no. 107.

¹⁴ Grayling, *Churches of Kent*, ii, 151.

THE OLD CHANTRY HOUSE, BREDGAR

- 1431 Thomas Faunt, died 1457.
- 1457 John Perdrich.
- 1490 Thomas Denewey, or Denway, who became chaplain in January of that year, but who died in December. He had previously started at the college as a priest-scholar in 1467.
- 1491 Thomas Colley, who died in 1517. There is a fine brass to him in the north aisle of the church at Bredgar.
- 1517 William Ketelidsen, who resigned with a pension in 1532.
- 1532 Walter Dowle, who made the return for the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*.

The names of all scholars are not known, but of those who are, all but two are described as priest-scholars.

- 1398 Thomas Webbe.
- 1398 Thomas Monks. These two appear to be the two extra poor scholars allowed by the founder's revised ordinances of that year.
- 1417 Thomas Talboth, who died in the same year.
- 1417 John Herne.
- 1417 John Sone.
- 1421 John Hochon, aged fifteen.
- 1427 Eustace Court.
- 1428 Richard Godwyn.
- 1467 Thomas Denway, who came back as chaplain in 1490.
- 1491 Thomas Balsier, who resigned in 1495.
- 1495 William Hicson, who left in 1499 to accept another benefice.
- 1499 Henry Bowrege.

Further research into the archives of Canterbury Cathedral, to which the chantry at Bredgar was so closely connected, might add to this list, and throw further light on the subsequent career of some of the persons named.

After the Dissolution, according to Hasted,¹⁵ ' . . . the site by the name of the Chantry House of Bredgar, with sundry premises was granted to George Harpur Esq., who afterwards, 33 Hen. viii (1542) exchanged it with the King for other estates . . . it seems to have remained in the hands of the Crown till Queen Elizabeth in her third year (1561), having taken into her hands several manors, lands, etc., parcel of the See of Canterbury, by her letters patent of that year, granted to Archbishop Parker and his successors several rectories, parsonages and other premises in lieu of them, among which was the dissolved college of Bredgar, then valued at £13 6s. 8d. Since which it has continued parcel of the possessions of the Archbishop, and remains

¹⁵ Edward Hasted, *History of Kent*, 2nd edn., vi, 103.

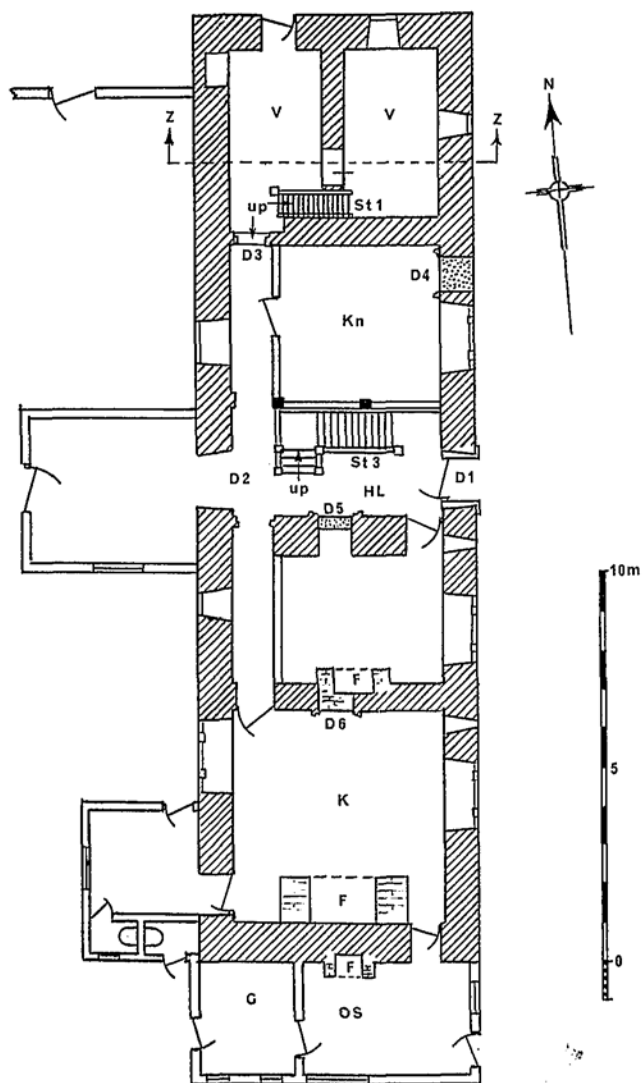


FIG. 2. Plan of present House.

so at this time (1799). The tenths payable to the Crown receiver from this dissolved chantry are £1 17s. 7½d.

'William Sherman Esq., was lessee in 1643 at the yearly rent of £13 6s. 8d. Edward Jeffrey Esq. is the present lessee; he new fronted and much improved the Chantry House in which he resides.'

In the first half of the nineteenth century the house became empty, and, as was commonly the case at this time, became converted into four small cottages, remaining so until modern times.

In 1973, the property, in a very sad state, was purchased by Norman Hepple, Esq., of London, who restored it into one house again in the fine condition in which we see it today.

THE ORIGINAL HOUSE AND ITS SUBSEQUENT ALTERATIONS

A detailed examination of the present house shows that it retains many of the features of the original building (Figs. 1 and 2). The massive flint walls, 0·91 m. (3 ft.) thick remain; these had dressings of Kentish ragstone, and were faced with knapped flints, some of which original work still survives, especially at the north-west corner. The quoins were particularly massive, the principal windows and doorways being moulded, and in the Gothic style.

The front of the house, facing the road, presents the appearance of a late eighteenth-century house—the front door, doorways and windows still have most of their original fittings, including folding shutters to the windows. The present front doorway has some eighteenth-century brickwork around it where earlier stonework had been removed, and there is some evidence that it then had a porch. All this leaves little doubt that these alterations were the work of Edward Jeffrey, Esq., as noted by Hasted. Before this, it is thought that the original open hall had a large pointed window, both at front and back. Patching in the flint rubble walls indicates roughly the outline of these.

Fig. 1 shows a plan of the Chantry House as first built in 1393. It had a central hall open to the roof, and a kitchen similarly open to the roof at the south end. Smoke griming of the roof timbers, found only above these two sections, shows clearly that both had open hearths. The hall and kitchen were at that time connected by a central passage (P on plan), of which the moulded stone doorways at each end remain, though now blocked (D5 and D6). On each side of this passage were small rooms, corresponding to the buttery and pantry, while above was the priest-scholars' room. The chaplain's room was at the north end on the first floor, and this has still an attractive two-light window with stone tracery (Plate IIB and Fig. 4). The brick fireplace here in the Dutch style is seventeenth century. The fact that the roof timbers are entirely free of soot, and that the flue is a flint one, suggests that the room may have had a small, earlier fireplace. It must be noted that

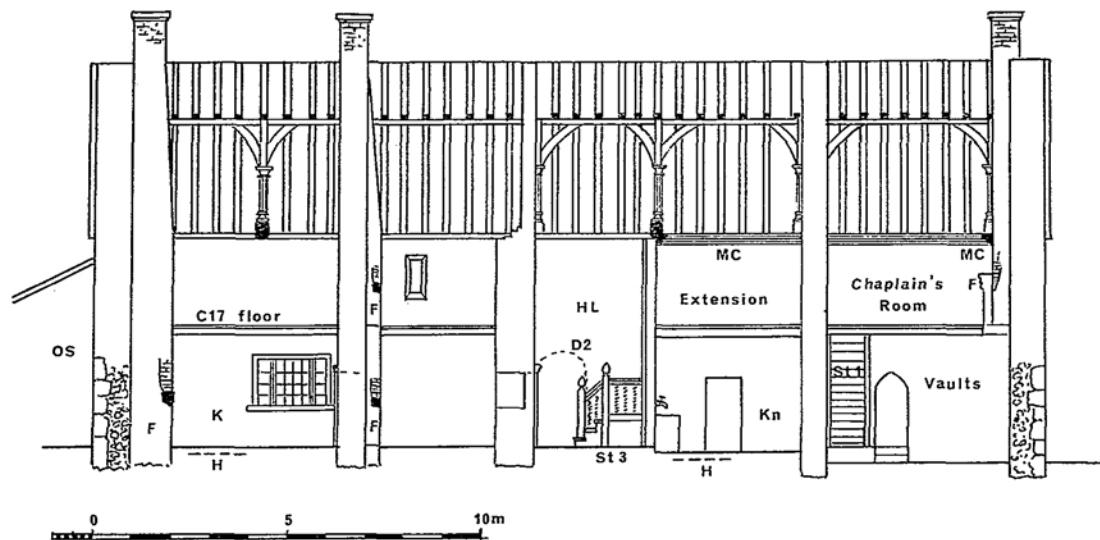


FIG. 3. Longitudinal Section of House.

other chimneys are also of flint, although the fireplaces and the external stacks are of brick.

On the ground floor, beneath the chaplain's room are two stone vaulted chambers, the two floors being connected by a steep, narrow stairway (St 1). All these were part of the master's quarters, and were shut off from the hall by a heavy Gothic door (D3). Another small blocked doorway, in the hall but at this end, is thought to have been the chaplain's private door (D4). It has hollow chamfers with pyramid stops.

Apart from the principal windows already mentioned, most of the others appear to have been loop or oblong windows, of which seven still survive. The largest of these in the east vault has an opening of 0.60 m. (2 ft.), with rebates for shutter and iron bars.

The fine oak roof survives intact; it has a crown post over both the hall, and over the kitchen at the south end; the tie-beams in both cases being off-set from centre—as is usually found—in order to avoid the main heat from the open hearth. The more important rooms have half crown posts—or perhaps more correctly, crown pilasters against the partitions, which partitions go right up to the ridge to preclude smoke from the sleeping quarters.

The thick outer walls carry two wall plates; the rafters being rebated into the outer ones, while short vertical ashlar posts are tenoned to the inner plates. Raking struts support the collars, while the upper part of the crown posts and the pilasters have distinct jowls, which swell out to embrace the collar purlin. The carpenter's assembly marks on the posts are particularly interesting. These are numbered and show the order, and the assembly position of the posts.

All joints, except those of the rafters are mortise and tenon; the rafters have bridled joints at the ridge, and are fitted with wedge sprockets at the base, many of which are the original ones (Fig. 4). Even the raking struts have mortise joints.

The house then followed the fate of so many of its type in the nineteenth century, when it was converted into labourers' cottages, until so admirably restored in recent times. A clutter of dilapidated partitions, cupboards, cottage stairs, etc., had to be removed, so that as many original features as possible could be brought to light. The extension of the chaplain's room out into the hall, made presumably in 1398, can now be clearly seen; its floor is supported on heavy, medieval style oak joists, while above this part, and the original chaplain's room runs a heavily moulded double cornice in oak (Fig. 4).

A fine oak staircase now graces what is left of the open hall (St 3). This leads up to a landing which connects the north and the south parts of the first floor, while a further staircase ascends to the rooms in the roof space, which are inter-connected.

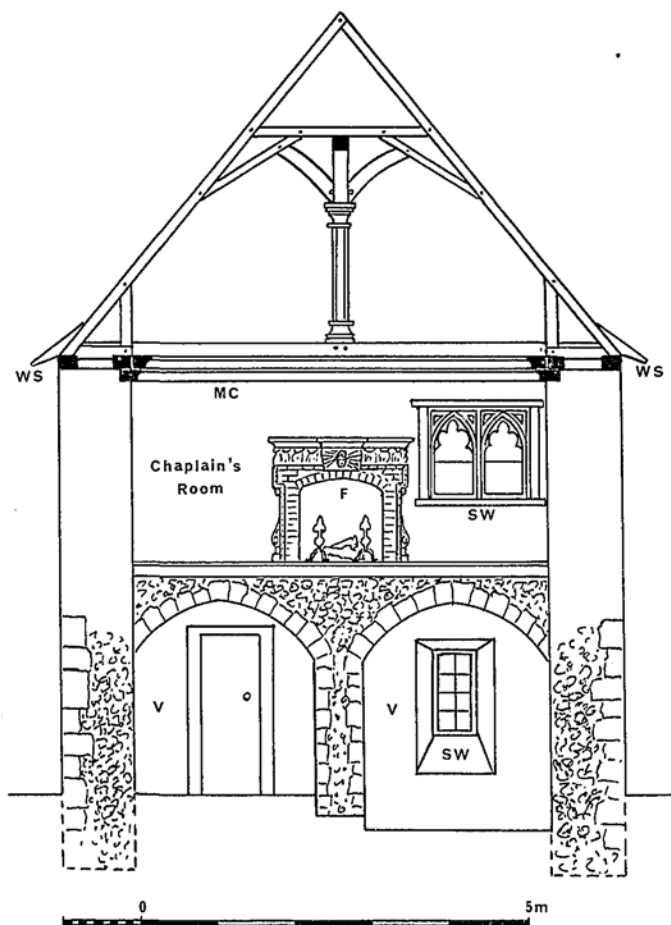


FIG. 4. Section Z—Z through Chaplain's Quarters, looking North.

The several fireplaces are of various dates, the oldest probably being the one in the old kitchen.

An attractive small barn, close to the house on the north-west side dates from the seventeenth century; it is 7·31 m. (24 ft.) each way, and is timber-framed with close studding, resting on a ground wall of red brick. The roof is hipped, with large gablets, with a circular opening for a louvre at the centre.

Fig. 2 shows a plan of the house as it is at the present time.

THE OLD CHANTRY HOUSE, BREDGAR

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