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FORD PLACE, WROTHAM

JAYNE SEMPLE AND KENNETH GRAVETT

Ford Place is situated in Holmesdale, west Kent, within the Archbishop of Canterbury's medieval manor of Wrotham. It lies on the parish boundary between Wrotham and Addington (TQ 636586) north of a point where small streams running south off the North Downs join to form the Nepiker, or Lillieburn river, which drains this part of Holmesdale eastwards to the Medway at Snodland. It was here, west of the house, that one of the three Domesday mills of Wrotham possibly stood.

Symonson's map of Kent (BL M.T. 6. f.1. (4)), 1596, shows Ford lying between the two routes which linked London to Maidstone and Ashford (**Map 1**). Ford itself lies just to the north of the ford through which the Sevenoaks to Rochester road crossed the Nepiker. It was well sited for communications with London, Maidstone, Rochester, Canterbury and the north Kent and Channel coasts.

'Ford was very antiently in the possession of the family of Clerke' says Hasted.¹ He cites John Clerke Esq. in the reigns of Henry V and VI. This may be the John Clerke who was a steward of the household of the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1460-62 and previously the bailiff of Aldington, another archiepiscopal manor.² Clerke may be one of those men referred to by Du Boulay who made a satisfactory career in the service of the archbishop and found the opportunity to settle on the archbishop's property.

It may be this John Clerke who from 1465 onwards was one of 'a panel of extremely powerful trustees, all of them close friends and servants of Archbishop Bourghier, [set up] to receive pieces of land sold by local men for the enlargement of the Knole estate'.³ Another member of this panel was Sir William Tyrrell Kt., steward of the archbishop's household and former bailiff of Aldington after John Clerke. The latter made his will 10 December 1480 in the name of 'John Clerk thelder'.⁴ It was proved at Knole on 10 March the year following. His will refers to his 'tenement of the Forde', property in Iwade and Middleton (Milton), and other properties in Wrotham, Stansted, Trottiscliffe, Addington, Ryarsh and Birling. Among other



Map 1. Extract of Symonson map showing location of Ford Place.
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bequests the high altar of Wrotham church received 13s. 4d. and the high altar of Aldington church 3s. 4d.

His son and heir was John Clerke II who made his career in the royal service. The father may have been a lawyer, the son certainly was as he was appointed one of the barons of the Exchequer in Trinity Term 1461. There is an entry about him on 18 April 1480 in the wardrobe accounts of King Edward IV: 'Richard Sheldone and John Clerk,

auditors of the Eschequier of oure saide souverain Lorde the King, to either of hem for heire somer liverie, iii yerdes of Mustrevilers cloth and betwix them a yerde and iii quarters grene clothe for half a counting clothe'.⁵

John Clerke II continued to serve the crown through the troubled times of Edward V and Richard III. In Henry VII's first year, 1485, John Clerke and Richard Sheldon were confirmed in their office of the auditorship of divers lands which had belonged to George Duke of Clarence. In 1486 they had the auditing of the lands of Warwick, Salisbury and Spencer. In 1487/8 Clerke was a searcher of the town and port of Calais; he was dead in 1492.⁶

Richard Sheldon died in 1494 leaving a will which showed an uneasy conscience about money.⁷ He begged forgiveness from Lord Stanley, his master, for any irregularities which might have occurred in the conduct of his office. Work at the Exchequer was not the only link with John Clerke. His will names his daughter, Jane Culpeper. The Culpepers were neighbours of the Clerkes with seats at Preston Hall, Aylesford, six miles to the east and Oxenhoath five miles to the south.

Employment at the Exchequer was a route to personal enrichment. J. C. Wedgwood comments on the normal Exchequer pay of Chamberlains of 8*d.* a day, and of Tellers of 3*d.* a day – 'but that was not what they got'.⁸ The fees were such that within 250 years the Teller's 3*d.* a day had become five or six thousand pounds a year.

The chief Baron of the Exchequer in John Clerke's time was Sir Humphrey Starkey who became a neighbour when he purchased the manor of Littlehall in Wouldham and built Starkey Castle.⁹ Social pressures from neighbours such as Starkey and the Culpepers may have led John Clerke to enlarge his old fashioned house and his service at the Exchequer would have produced the money with which to do it.

His mother, Lady Alice Clerke, outlived her son. She was still alive in 1494/5 when she appears in the Wrotham manor rental and survey holding Daniel Grenehill's messuage, garden and croft of land in Nepiker borough.¹⁰ Her husband, John Clerke I, had left Ford to her for life. Whether she lived in the house or just enjoyed the income is unknown.

John Clerke II was followed by John III who appears on various occasions from 1498 to 1506 in the court rolls of the manor of Wrotham.¹¹ In 1524 his successor James paid 40*s.* tax on lands valued at £40, a sum only exceeded in the Hundred of Wrotham by Reginald Pekham of Yaldham manor whose lands were valued at £140.¹² James was taxed again in 1543 and 1544 at a similarly high rate in relation

to everyone else.¹³ George, his son, figures in the same tax returns but rated on goods or moveable property not lands, not yet having inherited Ford. James died in 1555¹⁴ and was followed by George (bap. 1510, m. 1533, d. 1559),¹⁵ then William.¹⁶ A brass memorial to William (d. 1611) and his wife Anne is in St George's church, Wrotham. John IV held Ford from 1611.¹⁷ The date of his death is unclear.

His son William served in the Civil Wars on the Royalist side and was knighted at York in 1641. The family was prosperous. In 1642 William Clerke could afford to pay £5,000 towards the bail required to release the poet Richard Lovelace, a fellow Kentish gentleman, from prison.¹⁸ In 1643 Sir William suffered sequestration of his estate by Parliament and he died, aged 36, fighting for the king at Cropredy Bridge.¹⁹

The family's misfortunes increased the following year when about 400 mutineers seized the house. The intruders were put to flight by Colonel Blount's troops.²⁰ It is hard to assess what damage was caused to the house in this incident but the presence of the cannon ball referred to in F. D. John's article suggests there was some. However, the Hearth Tax return of 1664²¹ shows John Clerke Esq. charged on 15 hearths, indicating a substantial building. Today only four sixteenth- and seventeenth-century fireplaces remain in the one wing still standing.

At some point the Clerkes sold Ford Place to John Knowe, gentleman. In 1719 he wrote a will in which his properties are listed.²² They include 'a messuage called Ford Place wherein I now dwell. ..some-time since purchased of Mr Clerke.'. Two other excerpts follow:

'Then my capital messuage Ford and all other properties to Roger Knowe nephew', to be held in trust for John Knowe's daughter Mary and her sons. 'And I do hereby will and direct that my wife Jane and daughter Mary and son in law Mr Bartholomew (of Oxenhoath, West Peckham) shall have their living gratis in part of my said capital messuage wherin I now dwell (that is to say the great Hall and all the north part of the said house, the Stone Garden, Court Yard and Little Kitchengarden the Coach House and stables belonging to them for so long as thay or any or either of them shall think fit to live in the same'.

As well as Wrotham he had other property in Trosley, Ryarsh, Leyburn, Addington, Hunton, Ridley next Ash, Hayes and Stansted. In 1719 with its great hall still standing, Ford Place was a substantial principal residence for a wealthy man.

John Know Bartholomew succeeded to the estate of Ford on his grandfather's death in 1723. He died without issue and was succeeded by his brother Leonard of Oxenhoath who also died without issue in 1757.

Oxenhoath and Ford then passed to the Geary family in 1757 and it



Ford Place, Wrotham: North Front

must be from this time that Ford Place was allowed to decline into a farmhouse, which is how Hasted described it in 1798.

A short inventory accompanies John Knowe's will.²³ The only named room is 'The Chappel Chamber' in which are stored wool, hops, wheat, oats and clover seed to a value of £176 10s., the most valuable item being the hops at £150. There is no evidence that there was ever a chapel at Ford Place. One can only suspect therefore that 'Chappel Chamber' is the name given to the solar with its great traceried window at the southern end of the great hall range (see below Hall range, south bay, p. 295). Its situation upstairs and indoors would give security to stored crops.

Ford was not a manor but an estate, the house of Ford Place being within the manor of Wrotham and its land lying in Wrotham and the neighbouring parish of Addington. In the survey of 1494/5²⁴ and another of 1538²⁵ the house at Ford is not mentioned, only sundry parcels of land in Wrotham and Nepiker boroughs on which the rent is 15s 8¾d. and a pound of pepper. This is an above-average rent for Wrotham but not an indication of superior means.

In the 1568 rental and survey of the manor of Wrotham²⁶ we learn



Ford Place, Wrotham: South Front

that William Clerke, Gent, holds... a messuage called fforde, a dove-cot, two barns and other edifices, two courtyards, a garden, orchards, a water mill called fforde mill and a mill pond and lands in Nepiker and Wrotham totalling 112 acres on which he pays a total rent of 16s. 0¼d. He may have held land in Addington as Ford is on the parish boundary. A map and terrier of 1780 shows Ford Farm with 280 acres, more than half of the land being in Addington parish.²⁷

By the second half of the sixteenth century a large courtyard house stood here. One courtyard remains (see **Fig. 1**) enclosed to the west by a mainly brick wall with traces of an entrance gateway [R]. The courtyard is bounded to the south by a brick and stone encased timber-framed wing of five bays and to the east by the ruined stone walls of a possible hall, (referred to as 'hall range' in the discussion which follows) with the substantial remains of a two storeyed end abutting the south-west wing. The northern side of the courtyard is occupied by two red brick barns on stone foundations. The eastern barn has a south wall made of random brown limestone to a height of 5ft (1.5m) which must have some connection with the north end of the hall range beside it. The northern end of the west wall of the hall range is made of smooth ashlar brown limestone and there is a drip mould about 5ft (1.5m) above ground level. There is no evidence that these barns were ever domestic buildings. The second courtyard probably lay to the east of the hall range. A brick wall [A] on the site plan indicates the existence of domestic buildings.

The Hall Range - Phase I

The ruined hall range is the earliest building on site, probably dating to the fourteenth century. It was built of the local brown iron-stained limestone or rag which can be seen out-cropping within 500 yards of the house, at Wrotham Heath. Walls stand in the present garden from 6 to 10 feet high to the north, west and east of the hall range while the southern wall, within the present house, has survived to eaves level.

In the northern wall, at present ground level inside a stone garden shed, can be seen the head of a pointed arch [B]. It lies on the central axis of the hall range and may be a doorway giving access to service rooms and a kitchen lying to the north of the hall range, roughly 6ft (2m) below present ground level. If this was the arrangement, a central passage would have run from the doorway [B] to the south with the buttery and pantry on either side. The line [C] on the site plan marks a change in the ground level and may coincide with the southern walls of the buttery and pantry. A cross entry south of these would have given access to an open hall with central hearth.

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM SITE PLAN

Figure 1

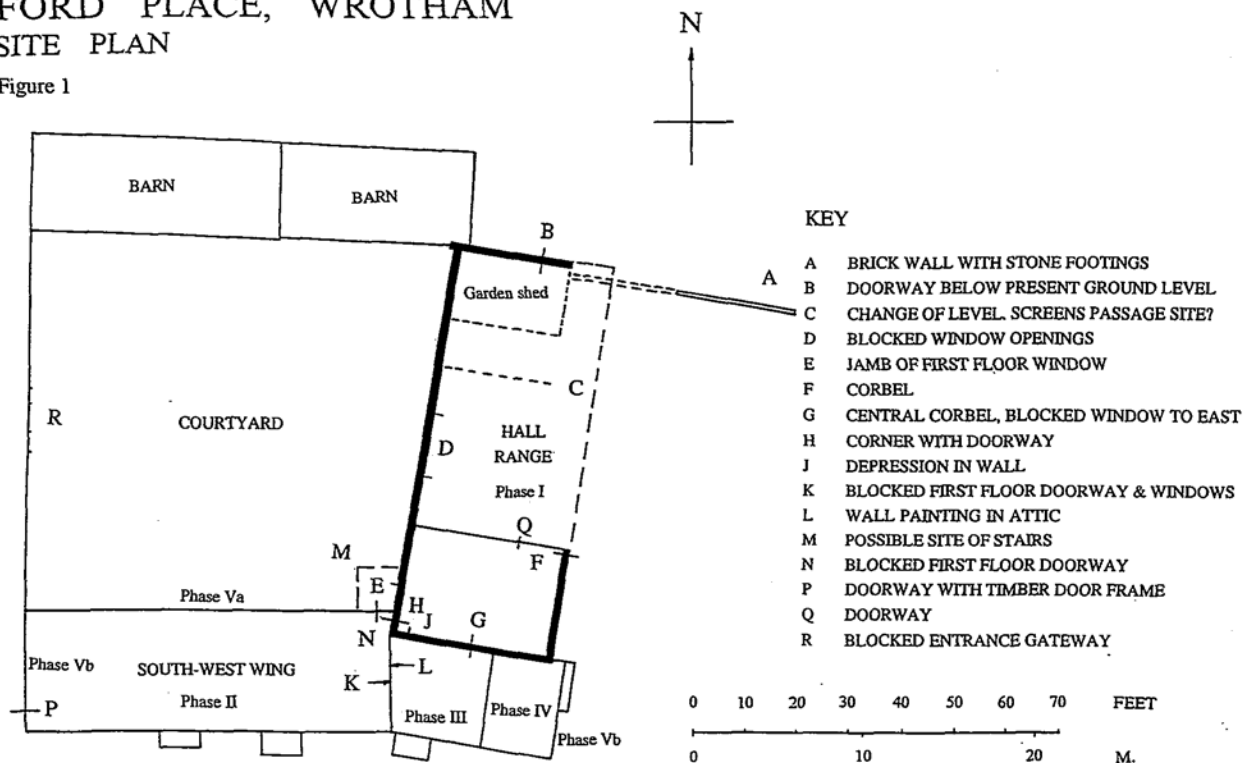


Fig. 1 Ford Place, Wrotham: Site Plan

If the hall range did not have an open hall but was a floored chamber block this arch [B] could be part of a window lighting the undercroft or a doorway. Doors into undercrofts in this central position are uncommon. They are usually sited near a corner. Excavation of the area might answer this point.

In the western wall [D] are the remains of two openings which have been blocked. The small size of the openings indicates that they were windows which, as windows in an undercroft were small, would favour the floored chamber-block argument. South of these blocked openings, at first floor level, 2m from the junction of the hall range and the southern wing, is the jamb or side of a window [E]. Of the eastern wall of the hall range nothing remains above ground between [F] and the north wall.

Hall Range, south bay, ground floor

Two stone corbels, projections which supported a former first floor, remain in the south bay, one in the north-east corner [F] and one central to the south wall [G]. East of the central corbel is a single light rectangular window (see **Figs 2 and 3**). It seems probable that this window was matched by another to the west. If so, it was knocked through and made into a doorway when the painted chamber block was added to the south in the early sixteenth century. Four other ground floor windows have no dateable detail and externally the walls all show evidence of rebuilding. The two corbels and the first floor window jamb on the west wall, show that this south bay of the hall range was floored. It was either the southern bay of a fully floored chamber block or the solar end (private family living quarters) of an open hall arrangement.

Hall Range, south bay, first floor

The south wall of the hall range stands to a height of 23ft (6.90m). (See **Figs 2, 3 and 4**, north elevation) It can be examined on the north side (the interior side of the first period of building) within and above the two roof spaces of the present single storey living quarters. On the south side (the exterior of the first period building) modern living requirements have obscured the evidence. The top of the wall can be seen from within the roof space of the painted chamber block to the south.

A window with a two-centred arch and a window seat occupied the centre of the south wall of the hall range at first floor level. The position and outline of them both can be seen from the north above the two roofs of the present entrance block (**Figs 2 and 4**). The window

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM

Figure 2

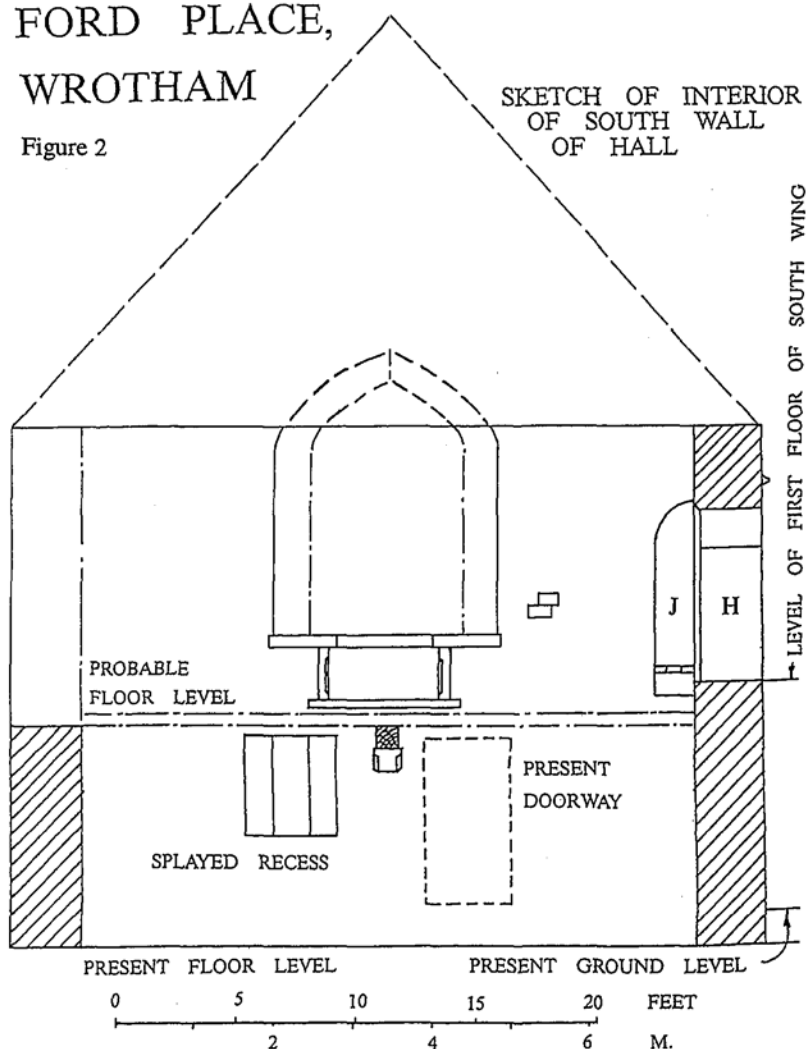


Fig. 2 Ford Place Wrotham: Sketch of Interior of South wall of Hall (solar window)

seat is made of a white limestone and the front corners of the reveals of the seat are moulded with rolls at arm-rest and seat level, the vertical stone between them rounded-off and with scalloping to the base (**Plates III and IV**). This is an unusually elaborate treatment of

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM FLOOR PLANS

Figure 3

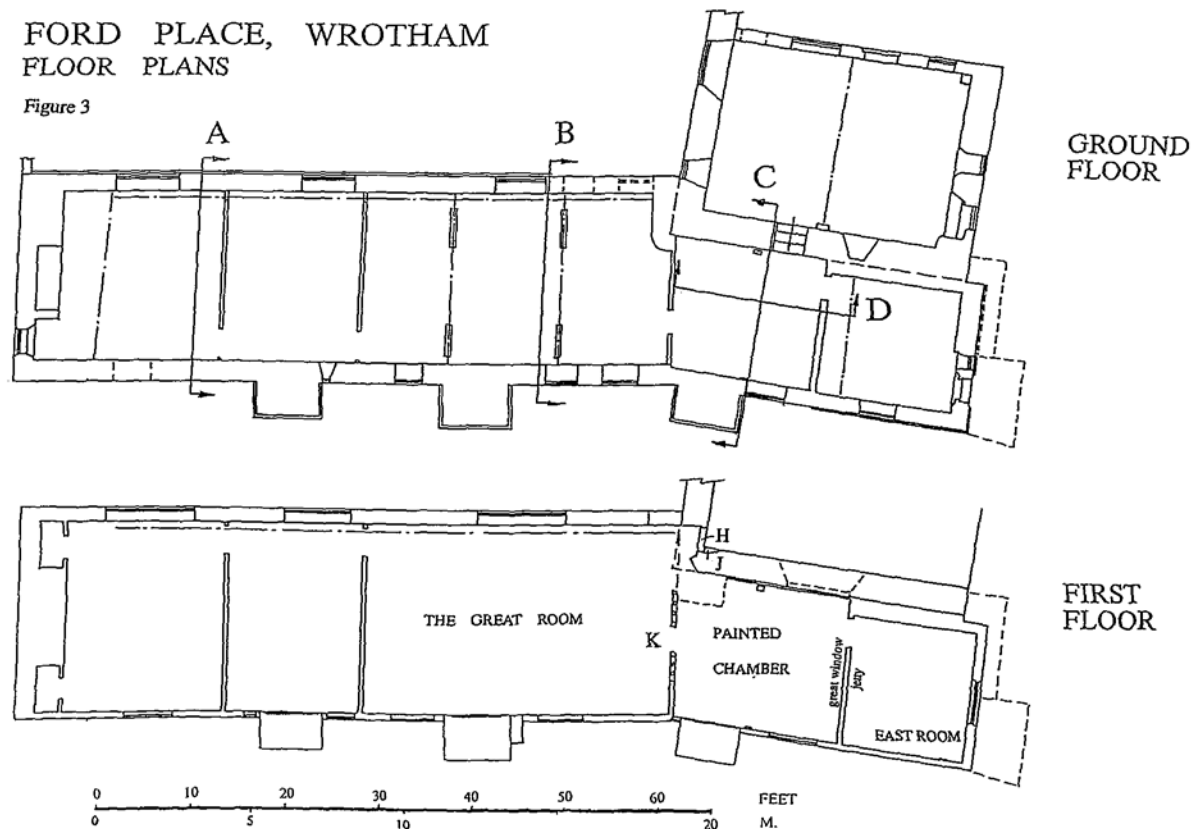


Fig. 3 Ford Place Wrotham: Floor Plans

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM

Figure 4

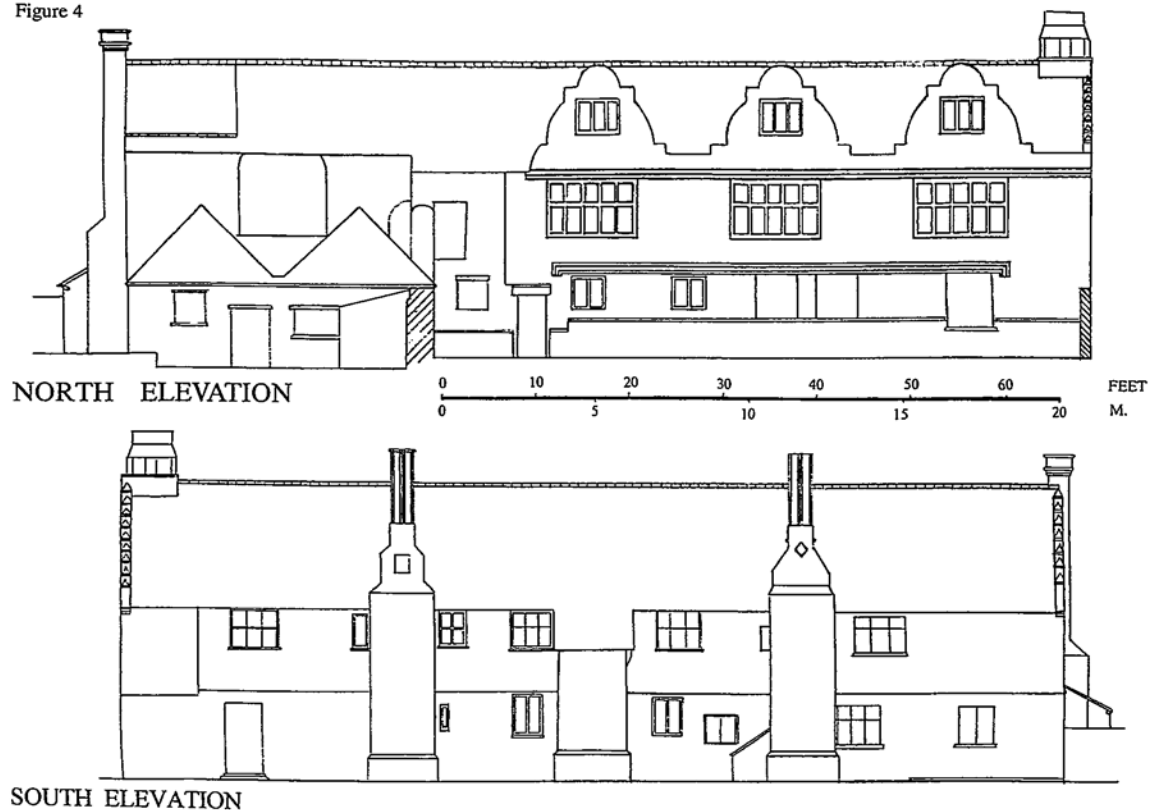
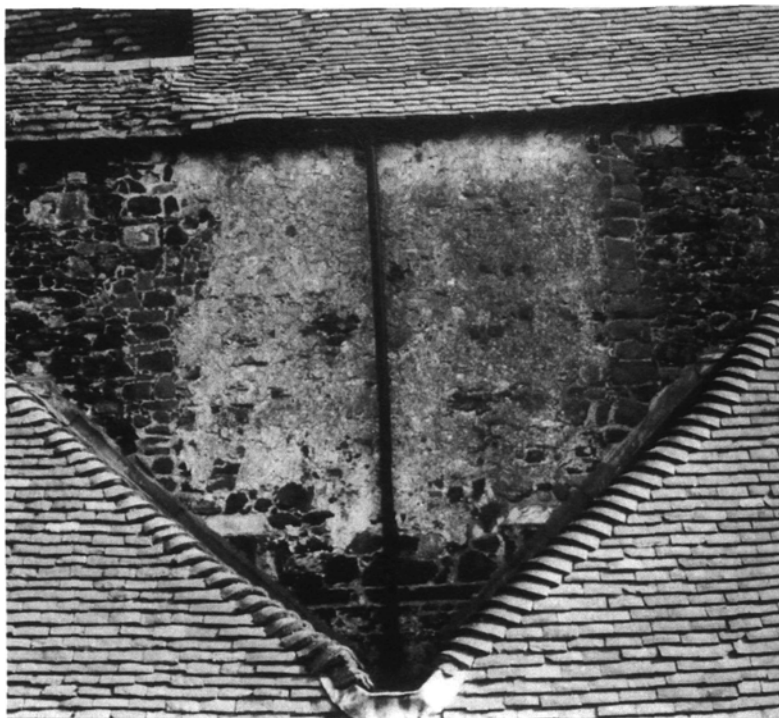


Fig. 4 Ford Place Wrotham: North and South Elevations



Ford Place, Wrotham:
Jamb of Window seat

a window seat. The window was blocked with greyish green ragstone when the timber-framed building to the south, the painted chamber, was built in the early part of the sixteenth century. The top of the window was removed at the same time to provide a lodging for a wall plate for the roof of the painted chamber. In the roof space on the south side can be seen the ashlar (smooth-cut), brown limestone jambs of the window. At the wall plate worked limestone can be seen. Even where it is invisible, the shape of the window-head can be detected with the fingers. It implies a quatrefoil or trefoil head to a traceried window which may well survive in the blocked up wall below. This, taken with the window seat ornamentation, suggests a window of some quality dating to the late fourteenth or early fifteenth century.



Ford Place, Wrotham: Blocked-up solar window. Window seat visible below

In the south-west corner of the hall range, at first floor level [H, Fig. 1], originally within the solar or chamber block but now external to the present building, can be seen a doorway on the western wall [H in Fig. 3] and immediately beside it on the southern wall a depression [J, Fig. 3] suggesting half a doorway or window. The vertical line of the jamb of the depression continues down within the first floor roof space nearly to the floor level indicated by the corbels and the window seat. These two features suggest a doorway to a spiral staircase contrived partly within the thickness of the wall and partly in a lean-to turret as at *Old Soar Manor*, Plaxtol, giving access to the undercroft below. It is not possible to see the construction of the south wall

at this point. The doorway [H] could be fourteenth-century with its double hollow moulding on the east side internal to the solar or chamber (see Fig. 6, labelled 'Doorway at south-west corner of hall'). A doorway in this location could be the entrance to a garderobe or privy but this doorway seems too elaborate for a garderobe entrance. A doorway to a staircase or to an inner chamber off the solar or chamber seems more likely.

On the floor above there are further clues to the arrangements at this corner. From within the roof space of the south-west wing the original walls of the south-west corner of the hall range can be seen. They are made of random rubble stone walling with large ashlar quoins, or corner stones, in the local brown ragstone. On the west wall a straight drip mould runs for about 3ft (1.0m) to the south-west corner. This does not run over the doorway below but to one side, to the south of it.²⁸ Perhaps a timber-framed garderobe was situated beneath the drip mould. Whatever stood at this corner vanished when the timber-framed south-west wing was built across the corner of the stone hall range.

On the plan of the ground floor (Fig. 3) can be seen a rounded intrusion in the north-east corner of the south wing. It is of solid construction but whether of brick or stone is impossible to say as it is plastered and painted. It is of later construction than the timber framing of the wing because joists in the wing run north/south here to form a jetty to the north and the easternmost joist has been removed to allow for the intrusion. The construction of a copper for laundry or brewing may account for it.

The South-West Wing - Phase IIa

The south-west wing is the most striking feature of Ford Place today. Visible from the M26 motorway 500 yards to the north, the three shaped gables along the brick north front and the crow-stepped gables at each end catch the eye (Plates I and II, **Figs 4 and 5**).

Approaching from the south (from Wrotham Heath) the entire range appears to be of stone and brick with three stone chimney stacks. The brick chimneys have ornamental cappings. From the outside Ford Place looks like an early seventeenth-century house but the stone and brick are later cladding to a fifteenth-century timber-framed range of three periods.

The earliest part is the wing of five bays running from the west wall of the hall to the westernmost broken line on the ground floor plan (Fig. 3). This line represents the first external wall at the west end. The fireplace bay to the west came later. On the first floor the three

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM SECTIONS & END ELEVATIONS

Figure 5

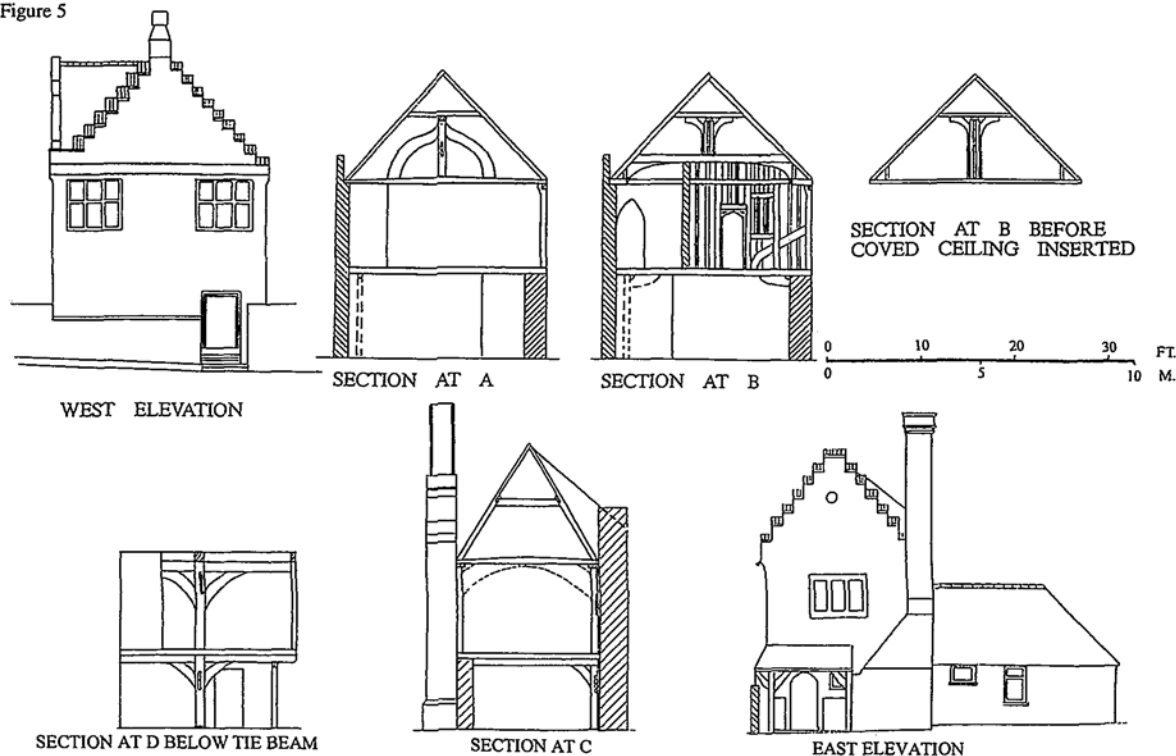


Fig. 5 Ford Place Wrotham: Sections and End Elevations

FORD PLACE, WROTHAM

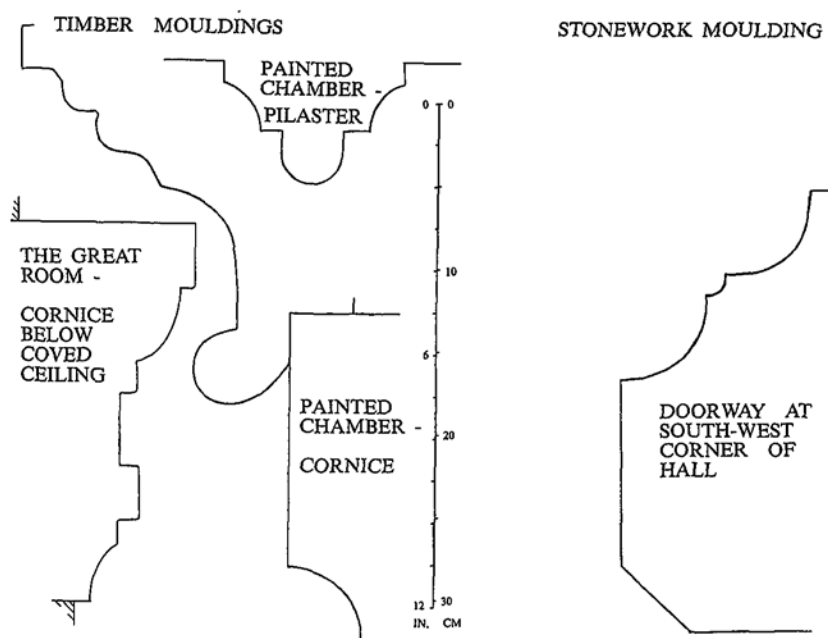


Fig. 6 Ford Place Wrotham: Some examples of Mouldings

eastern bays formed a Great Room, with the two west bays divided into two separate rooms. The roof is of collar purlin construction with double-rebated (cruciform cross-sectioned) crown posts over the Great Room (See section B, Fig. 5). Other local examples of cruciform crown posts are at *Dene Manor*,²⁹ Meopham; *Nut Tree Hall*,³⁰ Plaxtol; *Ashenden*,³¹ Plaxtol; *Platt Farm*,³² St Mary's Platt and *Claygate Cross*,³³ Shipbourne. Dates for all of them fall into the second half of the fifteenth century. At Ford Place the crown posts in the Great Room were painted yellow. The roof was open to the ridge and this must have been a chamber of some consequence. The two western rooms were reached through the Great Room by doorways on the south side of the partition walls within this range. The framing of the doorways still exists but the openings were blocked when the present corridor was formed on the north side. There is no sign of an original staircase between the ground and the first floor.

The eastern wall of the Great Room has a pair of blocked unglazed windows of three lights with vertical sliding shutters (K, Figs 1 and 3). Between them is a doorway the head of which is not morticed and tenoned into the jambs. It was inserted when the painted chamber was

added to the east. The most likely date for the doorway, with its four centred doorhead and sunken spandrels, is 1470-1500, but dates thirty years each side of this are possible.

The five-bay range was jettied to the north and possibly also to the south. To the north the existence of ground floor posts and a jetty plate can be detected from empty mortices at each partition. (Section A and B, Fig. 5) In the north-east corner the end of the jetty plate is still *in situ*.

On the south wall the evidence for a jetty is questionable. The wall which replaces or infills the timber frame on the ground floor is made of ragstone and is bulkier than the brick under-building of the north side. Possible empty mortices corresponding to those on the north wall would have been obscured by the stone. The upstairs south wall is 20cm (8in.) thick compared to the downstairs wall which is 70cm (2ft 4in.). This is supporting evidence for an under-built jetty. Furthermore, the spine is 30cm off axis to the south of a central position implying the loss of the southern ends of the joists in the south wall. Further evidence may exist at the south-west corner post at the original west end. The south end of the cross beam which marked the end of the original range is lost in the stone wall, but a large and a small mortice in the underside of the beam may be for a ground floor post and an angle bracket.

However, evidence against jettying to the south might be found in the positioning and sizes of the mortices for arched braces beneath the two cross beams in the three-bay downstairs chamber. On the south side one brace remains, the horizontal length of the junction between brace and cross beam being 90cm, the corresponding empty mortice is 68cm. The north side mortices were longer at 124 and 136cm which indicates a difference in style between the north and south sides. No evidence remains of any original external doorways or windows at ground floor level. They were either lost in remodellings or are hidden in modern cladding. Upstairs, two original internal doorways survive at the southern ends of the partition walls to the two western bays, in addition to the formerly external doorway in the eastern wall already mentioned.

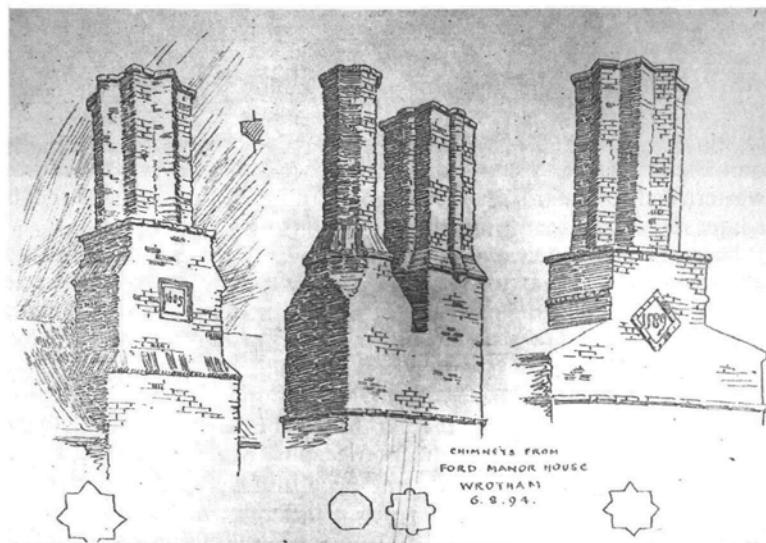
It is impossible to say for certain whether the five-bay timber-framed range was heated from the first, but it is likely that it was not. A stone stack with two flues on the south side, external to the timber-frame, serves two fireplaces heating the Great Room above and chamber below. A simple stone fire place with a four-centred arch survives in the Great Room. The site of the fireplace in the room below is now a cloak-room within the chimney stack where the flues can be clearly seen. Of the three stacks on the south side of the building only this one is undated. A stone protuberance east of the stack may be the remains of a

garderobe. The chimneys have disappeared (Fig. 4, south elevation) but are shown in a drawing of 1894 by Tavernor Perry to be of brick rising from a joint brick base (**Plate V**). They were unusual in being unmatched. The western one was octagonal and the eastern one was square with a central vertical decorative moulding. The western chimney could date anytime between the early and late sixteenth century. The eastern chimney was seventeenth-century. Perhaps it had to be rebuilt.

The South-West Wing - Phase IIb

The addition of the stack to the Great Room may have been contemporaneous with the insertion of a coved ceiling above the chamber. Lowering the ceiling would conserve the heat from the fire. To create the coved ceiling four pairs of new principal rafters were inserted (Fig. 5, Section B). The tie beams were raised and morticed into these and the crown posts were shortened to fit. Lightweight curved joists were laid from a central spine beam to form the frame for the caved ceiling which has a four centred profile. A deep wooden

PLATE V



Ford Place, Wrotham: Taverner Perry Drawing of Chimneys, 1894. Photo by kind permission of Mr K. Denham

cornice (**Fig. 6**) ran round the room hiding the junction of the curved joists with the wall plate. The cornice has survived at the north-east corner and along the east and south sides. On stylistic grounds the cornice and coving date to between 1560 and 1600 and they must predate the insertion, in the late sixteenth century, of three ten-light windows which destroyed them (see below, Phase Va). No original staircase site has been detected in this wing.

The Painted Chamber - Phase III

Early in the sixteenth century a two-storey chamber block was built south of the hall range. It was timber-framed, of two bays, with a jetty to the east. Only one joist of the jetty survives in the room built later to the east. Above the jetty was a large window with a smaller one on the south wall (**Fig. 3**). The framing of the north wall of this block is carried against the stone south wall of the hall range by a post with braces supporting a beam against the wall at ground-floor ceiling level surmounted by another post with braces supporting the wall plate (see **Fig. 5**, section D). This upper post and the post that faces it on the south wall still have the remains of mouldings (**Fig. 6**). The original tie beam has been replaced. Presumably the moulding on the posts would have run on under the tie beam to form an arch (**Fig. 5**, section C). The roof was visible from below and there is a hint of a principal truss of quality comparable to that at the *Old Rectory*, Horsmonden, c. 1480. It has suffered in the seventeenth-century rebuilding of the roof, perhaps following the troubles of 1645. The roof of the painted room was of side purlin construction and the western and central trusses are largely original. To the east the roof is a later reconstruction of inferior workmanship.

There is no evidence that the attic was ever a self-contained apartment. The suggestion that the room was originally open to the roof is supported by the presence of wall painting in the present attic on the west partition wall. The painting in the attic is a vine leaf scroll pattern in red on white. It runs across the studs and the plaster (**Plate VI**). On the first floor there is a different painted design, a brocade pattern, in red and black on the two braces between the post and the wall plate. On the evidence of photographs, Muriel Carrick, David Park and Peter Welford feel that both paintings are late fifteenth or early sixteenth-century and Muriel Carrick sees no reason why the two designs should not have been present contemporaneously.³⁴ A moulded wooden cornice 15in. (38cm) deep, of fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century date, runs along the south, east and west walls (**Fig. 6**).



Ford Place, Wrotham: Vine leaf painting, red on white, west wall of attic above Painted Chamber

The painted room seems originally to have been unheated. A stone chimney stack, dated 1589, was added on the south wall to heat the upper but not the lower chamber. A stone fireplace with a four centred arch was installed immediately west of the principal truss and a small window made in the remaining piece of wall to the west. The chimney is octagonal, as is the chimney, bearing the date 1605, on the third stone stack to be erected on the south side of the bay west of the Great Room. All three stacks are pargetted to resemble ashlar masonry with quoins at the corners and the surfaces decorated with flints (**Plate VII**). Ashlar masonry pargetting was photographed by Nathaniel Lloyd in the 1920s at the western end of the south wall near the chimney³⁵ and also at the north-west corner of the south-west



Ford Place, Wrotham: Stone stack, dated 1589, pargetted to resemble stone quoins and flint walling

wing which was pargetted to resemble stone quoins.³⁶ The pargetting no longer exists.

Eastern Chamber Block - Phase IV

The jetty to the painted room mostly disappeared when a timber-framed room, with chamber over, to the east, filled in the remaining

vacant rectangle south of the hall-range. One joist of the jetty survived the building of a modern staircase within the painted room block. The joisting at ground floor level is heavy. It could be late sixteenth-century but one cannot rule out re-use of medieval joists during the seventeenth century.

Brick Fronting to Timber-Framed Wing - Phase Va

The brick front in English bond with three shaped gables to the north and crow-stepped gables to east and west may have been designed together to update and give some unity to the house, but the work is certainly of two periods (Figs 4 and 5).

In the late sixteenth century the five-bay timber-framed south wing was remodelled to form a three-bay brick front with three ten-light windows at first floor level. The windows have *ovolo*-moulded brick mullions and transoms plastered to resemble stone. These interrupt the coved ceiling within, so they were certainly later. Nathaniel Lloyd dated them to 1580-1600.³⁷ Three smaller windows were formerly set below them, plastered to resemble stone, of which the one beside the present door still remains (**Plate VIII**). A moulded cornice runs above the upper windows and a decorative drip mould over the lower windows. At the top of the three shaped gables are bases for finials.

The brick front comes to an abrupt end near the present ground floor entrance doorway on the north side of the timber-framed wing. From here to the junction with the hall range the wall bears the remains of plaster, pargetted in ashlar masonry style. This was the internal decoration to a vanished projecting staircase block [M., Fig. 1]. The doorcase with *fleur-de-lys* decoration on the jambs at first floor level [N, Fig. 1] must have been at the head of the stairs. This staircase block was part of the last stage of the remodelling of the north front as it overlays the brick plinth which runs the length of the building. It was part of the brick remodelling scheme from the first because the easternmost of the three shaped gables stops abruptly to accommodate it. The parapet would have turned to run round the stair-case block.

New Bay to West of South-West Wing - Phase Vb

In the second part of phase V, a 10ft (3.0m) bay was added at the west end to accommodate an angle-nook fireplace to heat the ground floor room. A fine quality Bethersden marble fireplace was installed in the room above. This has a chased frieze of scrolls, squirrels eating nuts and birds eating cherries (**Plate IX**). The jambs are ornamented with



Ford Place, Wrotham: Ground floor window by back door, north front

strapwork. The fireplace is similar to one at Goddards Green, Cranbrook, which is dated 1634. Six-light brick *cavetto*-moulded mulioned windows were placed in the west wall either side of the fireplace to create an elegant chamber lighted on three sides.

Changes in the colour of the bricks suggest that work continued over a period of time. There is a significant change of colour at the point which marks the addition of the western bay and indeed the bricks here seem to be identical to those used in the shaped gables. Stuart Page, working in 1997 on repairs to the western gable and the north-west corner, reported on a butt joint, unbonded between the western shaped gable and the parapet wall, which was the cause of



Ford Place, Wrotham: Bethersden marble fire-place, c. 1640, with incised floral and animal designs

instability.³⁸ This is further evidence for the western extension being in the final phase of work.

The doorway in the west wall [P, Fig. 1] appears to have been the only external doorway into the south-west range until the twentieth century. Carved strapwork decoration on the jambs indicates a seventeenth-century date, but the doorway was clearly brought from another site as this is not an original aperture. Inside the house at this point there was a staircase, probably removed in the 1920s.³⁹ The doorway [Q, Fig. 1] into the patched up south end of the hall range is of unknown date. The doorway in the east end is part of the final phase of building.

The end of this phase came with the brick walling of the east and west ends in English bond with crow-step gables. The work in both walls is similar. The windows in both ends have *cavetto*-moulded brick mullions. Dating must lie between the finishing of the brick front, 1580-1600, and the installation of the Bethersden marble fireplace c. 1635. It is likely that the shaped gable front and the crow-stepped ends were completed at about the same time, probably before the death of William Clerke in 1610.

The sequence of building the house is clear. Precise dating of the various phases is more difficult. Excavation of the medieval hall range might decide whether it is a ground floor hall or a floored chamber block. Excavation of the traceried south window might produce a date for the building.

The builder of the medieval range is unknown. The stone hall at Ford is one of a group of surviving medieval stone houses in this part of west Kent which includes *Nettlestead Court* and *Old Soar Manor* of the thirteenth century, *Ightham Mote* and *Yaldham Manor* of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth-century *Starkey Castle*.

John Clerke I (d. 1480) or John Clerke II (d. 1492) may have built the south-west wing. James (fl. 1520-1553) is a likely candidate for the painted room. Dendrochronology may be the only way of producing firm dates for the south-west wing and the painted room. William Clerke, who owned Ford from 1559-1610 and whose brass is in Wrotham church, perhaps did most, creating the coved ceiling, the chimneys, and probably the three-bay brick front and the brick ends with their crow-stepped gables.

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NOTES

¹ E. Hasted, 1797, *The History and Topographical Survey of the County of Kent*, Vol. 10, 2nd edition, p. 19.

² F. R. H. Du Boulay, 1966, *The Lordship of Canterbury*, p. 401.

³ F. R. H. Du Boulay, 1974, 'The assembling of an estate', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, lxxxix, 8.

⁴ PRO PCC Logge, fol. 15v.

⁵ N. H. Nicolas, 1830, *Wardrobe accounts of Edward the Fourth*, London.

⁶ *Rot. Parl.*, vi, 355, 405, 451.

⁷ PRO PROB 11/50 15 Vox.

⁸ J. C. Wedgwood, 1936, *History of Parliament*, HMSO.

⁹ *Dictionary of National Biography*.

¹⁰ CKS U55 M59.

¹¹ CKS U55 M17.

¹² PRO E179/124/187.

¹³ PRO E179/125/280/264.

¹⁴ CKS U55 M20.

¹⁵ *International Genealogical Index*.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Hasted, E., *op. cit.* (see note 1).

¹⁸ *Commons Journals*, ii, 629, 635.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ F. D. Johns, 1992, 'The Royalist rising and parliamentary mutinies of 1645 in west Kent', *Archaeologia Cantiana*, cx, 1-15.

²¹ CKS Q/RTh fol. 34v.

²² PRO PROB 11/585.

²³ PRO PROB 3 21/276, 17 February 1721.

²⁴ CKS U55 M59

²⁵ CKS U55 M60.

²⁶ CKS U830 M25

²⁷ British Library C7 b.17.

²⁸ *Moigne Court*, Ower Moigne, Dorset, 1270-80, has a similar drip mould in an identical position. It is a floored chamber block, not a ground-floor hall building.

²⁹ S. Pearson, P. S. Barnwell and A. T. Adams, 1994, *A Gazetteer of Medieval Houses in Kent*, RCHME, p. 88.

³⁰ *Ibid.* p.100.

³¹ *Ibid.* p. 98.

³² Personal observation by the writer.

³³ Personal observation.

³⁴ Personal communications, 1993, Muriel Carrick, Art Historian; David Park and Peter Welford, Courtauld Institute of Art.

³⁵ Nathaniel Lloyd, 1931, *History of the English House*, p. 278, fig. 315.

³⁶ RCHME NMR C37/639.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 336, fig. 519.

³⁸ Personal communication, 1997, Stuart Page, architect.

³⁹ Personal communication, Keith Denham.