

THE RAPE OF HASTINGS ARCHITECTURAL SURVEY

Incorporating
Hastings Area Archaeological Papers

REPORT NO. 344

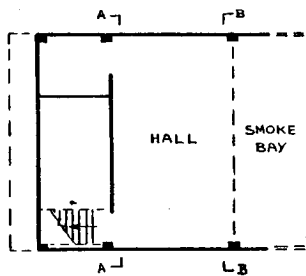
SEDLSCOMBE - STRAWBERRY HILL FARM NGR TQ 76592152

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND¹

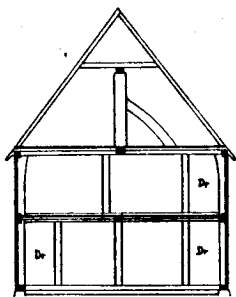
Held of Robertsbridge Manor and originally known as 'Belatkyns', prior to 1566/7 the tenement was held by Richard Stace als Shether, but in that year it came into the lords hands and was leased to Ralph Knight for 21 years at the annual rent of £4. This lease however, was subsequently made void and the lands were regranted to William Stace (the heir of Richard Stace) as a copyhold property. At that date the holding consisted of three separate copyholds; Belatkyns itself contained a messuage, kitchen, barn and 4.3 acres of pasture and 12½ acres of woodland and was held at the quit rent of 4/8d + 1 cock and 2 hens; Yerkeshill contained 51 acres at the quit rent of 16/-; and Primrose garden, (9 dayworks of land) at 2d. The entire farm can therefore be shown to have consisted of 94 acres of pasture and 12½ acres of wood, though it is not known for how long the tenements of Belatkyns and Yerkeshill had descended together.

In 1632 the farm was either owned or tenanted by William Skinner² whilst by 1731 it had become the property of John Fuller of Parkgate³. The Ewhurst and Sedlescombe tithe maps (c1840) give the owner as Sir Peregrine Palmer Fuller Palmer Ackland Bart., it then being tenanted by Richard Smith.

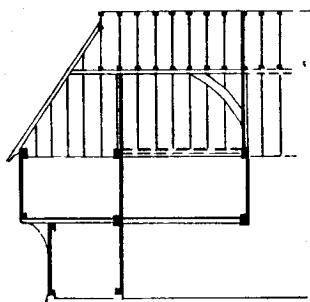
The total acreage is stated as being 105 acres (48 acres in Ewhurst and 57 acres in Sedlescombe), very close to that in the Robertsbridge Manorial Survey.



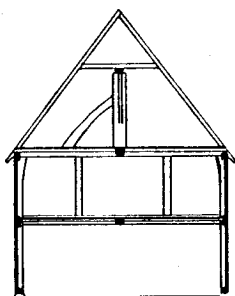
Ground Plan



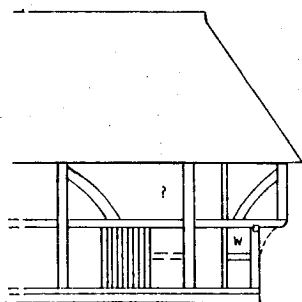
A-A



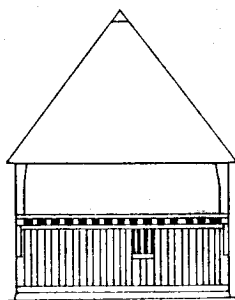
Section



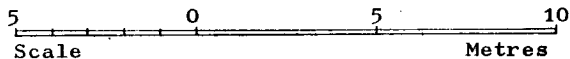
B-B



North Elevation



West Elevation



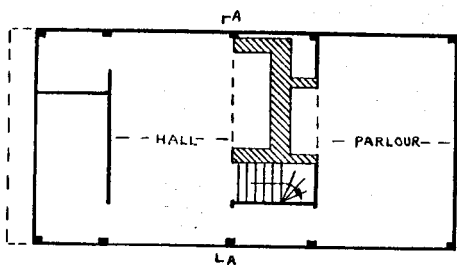
THE BUILDING

PERIOD A (c.1500)

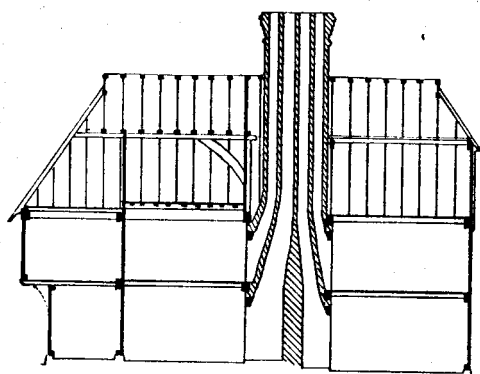
Only the western two bays survive of this 5.96 m (19'6") wide house, though from the surviving sooted eastern roof truss and the reused soot encrusted medieval rafters within the chimney bay it is clear that an unrestricted open smoke bay has been destroyed. It is probable that there was also a short floored eastern bay beyond the smokebay, though there is no way of proving this. The surviving 3.50 m long hall bay was always floored over (using central girder construction) and was entirely open to the now destroyed smokebay. The hall's length, including the destroyed bay, would have been about 5.00 m long⁴. The short western bay beyond the hall incorporated a wide end jetty⁵, giving a ground floor bay length of only 2.10 m (6'10"). The longitudinally set joists to the bay are of post medieval scantling (measuring only 10cm x 11 cm) with the exception of that to the edge of the stairway trimming which is of double width. The stairs were set against the southern (front) wall and were accessible from the hall/western bay partition, the door also having given access to the main ground floor room within the bay. Another door at the northern end of the partition lead from the hall into a 1.60 m x 2.10 m room divided off at the northern end of the bay⁶.

Access from the western chamber into the hall chamber was by way of a door set at the northern end of the dividing partition. The western chamber appears originally to have been open to the roof, but the hall chamber had a low ceiling carried by a central girder morticed into the tiebeams⁷. The hipped, crownpost roof has rafters of medieval scantling⁸. The partition crownposts survive and are of exceptional width (30cm). Even so, the eastern crownpost has but one headbrace to the collar purlin, whilst the western post has none at all; the collar purlin does however continue though to joint into the central jack rafter of the hip, thus giving the roof additional stability. Both crownposts have a single footbrace, (on the northern side) whilst that to the west also has hinge rides for a former door position to the south of the post⁹. The existence of this door strongly suggests that the hall chamber garret was used as a storage area reached by ladder from the western chamber.

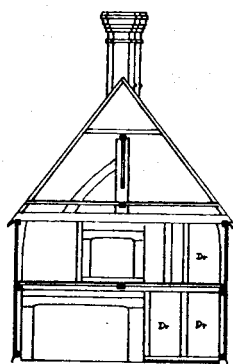
The basic construction of the house is sturdy, the principal posts being 30 cm (1'0") wide. Only to the west and north is anything of the external wall design visible. Mortices in the soffite of the jetty plate show the end wall to have been of close vertical studding incorporating a four light unglazed window without sliding shutters. From this it seems highly probable that the front elevation would have been close vertical studded throughout. As is common practice, however, the rear wall (at least at first floor level) comprises large daub panels with footbracing to the principals¹⁰. Surprisingly, at ground floor level the small area of walling which survives is of close vertical studding and it is possible that the entire



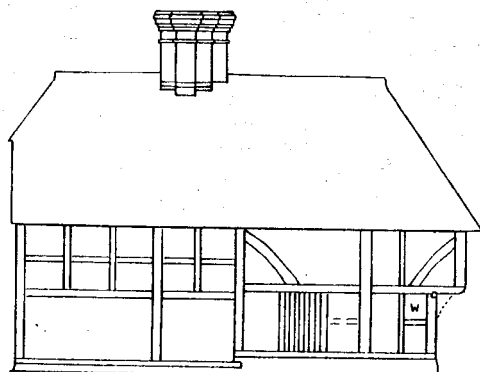
Ground Plan



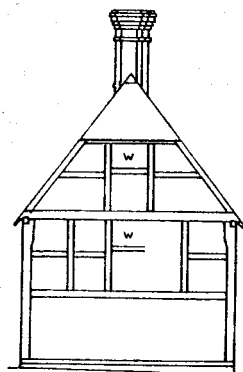
Section



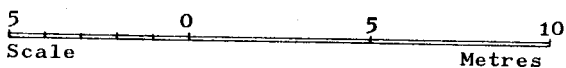
A-A



North Elevation



East Elevation



ground floor external walls were of this type, though a most unusual feature.

PERIOD B (early 17th C)

When the building was upgraded, probably soon after 1600, the western end of the house was rebuilt to incorporate a chimney bay and 3.84 m (12'7") long eastern parlour bay, thus giving a house 11.68 m (38'4") in overall length.

The four flue chimney was constructed to the rear of the bay and retains its heavy cap of staggered section with over-sailing courses at the head. Immediately to the south of the stack rise the stairs. That leading to the first floor has been rebuilt, but formerly consisted of a straight flight leading direct from the hall, with winders at the head in order to give direct access to a first floor landing running adjacent to the southern wall. The flight leading up into the eastern garret is a reversal of this pattern, having winders leading off of the first floor landing with a straight flight above. Nailed on treads against the west wall of the chimney bay at this level allowed easy access into the hall garret, at this time still used as a storage area.

The roof to the eastern bay is of side purlin and collar construction, and has a hiplet terminal with a window in the stub gable beneath. The remainder of the framing is of small square panel type with interrupted mid rails. All ceilings incorporate central girders.

NB:- Mortices in the rear wall may indicate the existence of a contemporary rear leanto, certainly the rear wall of the period B section contains no evidence of windows. The present rear leanto shows no signs of antiquity.

PERIOD C (modern)

During the late 18th or 19th century the ground floor walls were rebuilt in brick and the first floor walls tilehung, whilst at some uncertain date the lintel to the hall fireplace was replaced at a higher level. Apart from this, the building has been altered very little structurally.

FOOTNOTES

1. The historical background is largely based on the 1567 Robertsbridge Manorial survey, and is represented by Tenement Nos. 375-380 in Sussex Record Society Vol. 47. Its location has been made possible by a complete analysis of the survey. The comment on p. 62 of Sussex Record Society Vol. 47 that the adjacent tenement of Inkpyns is now Strawberry Hill, is incorrect and the Ewhurst Tiths map reference given, unfounded. Inkpyns, (Tenement 154) Hogmans (Tenement 107) and a holding of

Battle Manor became combined to form the farm adjacent to Strawberry Hill, the farmhouse of which has not survived - see Sedlescombe Tithe Map.

2. Sussex Archaeological Collections Vol. 52 (1909) p. 96 - Sedlescombe church seating plan.
3. Sussex Record Society Vol. 47 and Sedlescombe Land Tax.
4. There would have been no need to have rebuilt the smokebay unless smaller than the 2.24m long period B chimney bay.
5. The jetty has been underbuilt, but the top-plate to the wall beneath remains insitu.
6. The southern wall of this room is now only evidenced by stave holes in the soffite of the joists.
7. The ceiling has since been rebuilt at a higher level and is now only evidenced by mortices in the tiebeams.
8. The collars are dovetailed to the rafters.
9. The western crownpost has had a second 'modern' footbrace nailed on for the sake of symmetry.
10. Only two braces are now visible and it is not known whether others formerly existed.