LITTLE WENHAM HALL, A REINTERPRETATION

by EDWARD MARTIN

LITTLE WENHAM HALL is regarded as one of the most important medieval domestic buildings in England on three counts. Firstly, it is probably the earliest English building constructed largely of brick (Lloyd 1925, 4; Clifton-Taylor 1972, 211); secondly, it has been regarded as one of the classic examples of a 'first-floor hall' (Wood 1965, 22); and thirdly, it has been seen as an important instance of the progression of a lordly residence from a castle keep to a fortified manor house, representing an important step in the evolution of the English manor house (Pevsner and Radcliffe 1974, 31 and 341). This paper will seek to re-examine the nature of the building and the identity of the original builder.

THE SITE (FIG. 38)

Little Wenham Hall and the parish church of St Lawrence form an isolated complex close to the stream that forms the boundary between Little Wenham and Capel St Mary, at the point where the road from Great Wenham crosses the stream.

The earliest description of the site is contained in a manorial extent of 1512 :

> The Site of the Manor of Wenham Parva with its buildings is in two parts, (1) on the inner part a hall with a vault of lime and stone, with a tower of the same and different rooms joined on to the hall, and connecting with a kitchen larder-house built under a roof with other rooms under and above, all enclosed within three gates; (2) on the outer part three barns, two for grain and one for hay, two stables for horses, one stable called an 'oxeshous', a mill-house, slaughter-house, malt-house, bake-house, and two other houses for pigs and other necessaries, with three orchards joining the same site, two of them gardens to the South of the church there, and the third on the North of the church, and a dovehouse in the outer part, and the extent is five acres (Crisp *c.*1910).

Unfortunately there appear to be no descriptions or maps of the site between 1512 and the Tithe Apportionment Map of 1839 (Fig. 39). The latter shows the manor site as roughly square, with the church, in its own square yard, at the northern end and the road crossing at a tangent to the north-west corner. The southern and part of the western sides are defined by a long L-shaped pond, described in the Tithe Apportionment as 'Moat'. The topography makes it unlikely that the 'moat' ever formed a continuous circuit, for the land rises towards the north, with the church occupying quite an elevated position. It may have functioned more as a fishpond or stew, or even as a mill-pond (land parcel 95 is described as 'Mill Meadow'; a name which also occurs in a document of 1685, Crisp 1902, 22) . Beside the moat is Little Wenham Hall Farmhouse, a timber-framed building of 16th-century date with later extensions.[1] The group of brick and timber farm buildings to the south of the church belongs to the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. To the west of the church is a large brick and timber barn of 16th-century date. The small square structure shown on the Tithe Map to the south of this barn is no longer extant, but is likely to have been a dovecote. The present Little Wenham Hall is a late 19th/early 20th-century building to the south-east of the church. The original Little Wenham Hall, sometimes (but only in recent times) called Little Wenham Castle, lies near the centre of the complex (in land parcel 97 'Chapel Piece').

Although the existing farm buildings all appear to be later than 1512, it is likely that they occupy the same general area. The 'outer part' of the manor site therefore probably lay to the

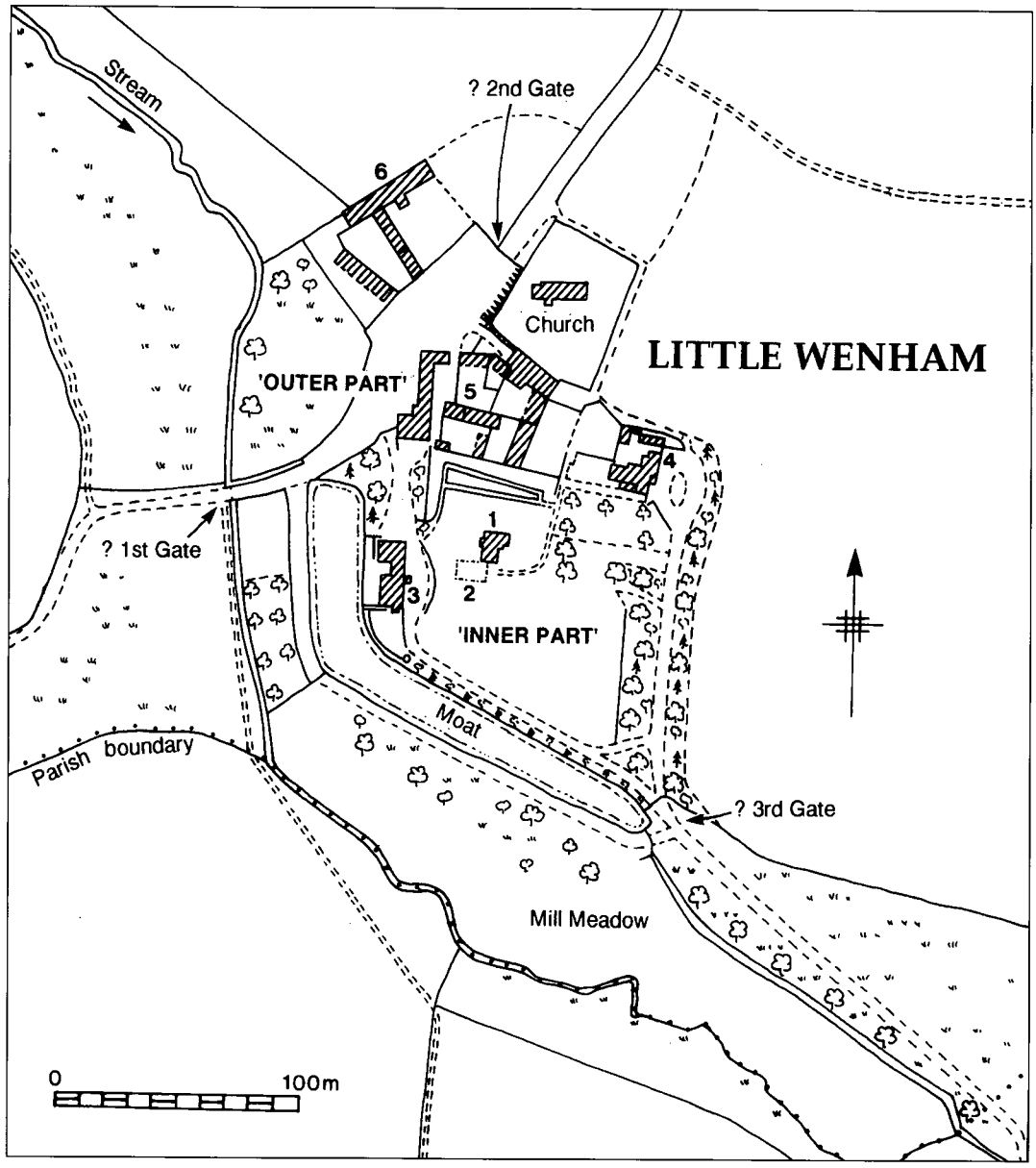

FIG. 38 – Little Wenham: plan of the hall-and-church complex, combining data from the 1512 Survey, the 1839 Tithe Apportionment and the 1926 1:2500-scale Ordnance Survey Map. Key: (1) the 13th-century brick building; (2) the suggested timber hall; (3) the 16th-century farmhouse; (4) the 19th-/20th-century house; (5) the 17th- to 19th-century farm buildings; (6) the 16th-century barn.

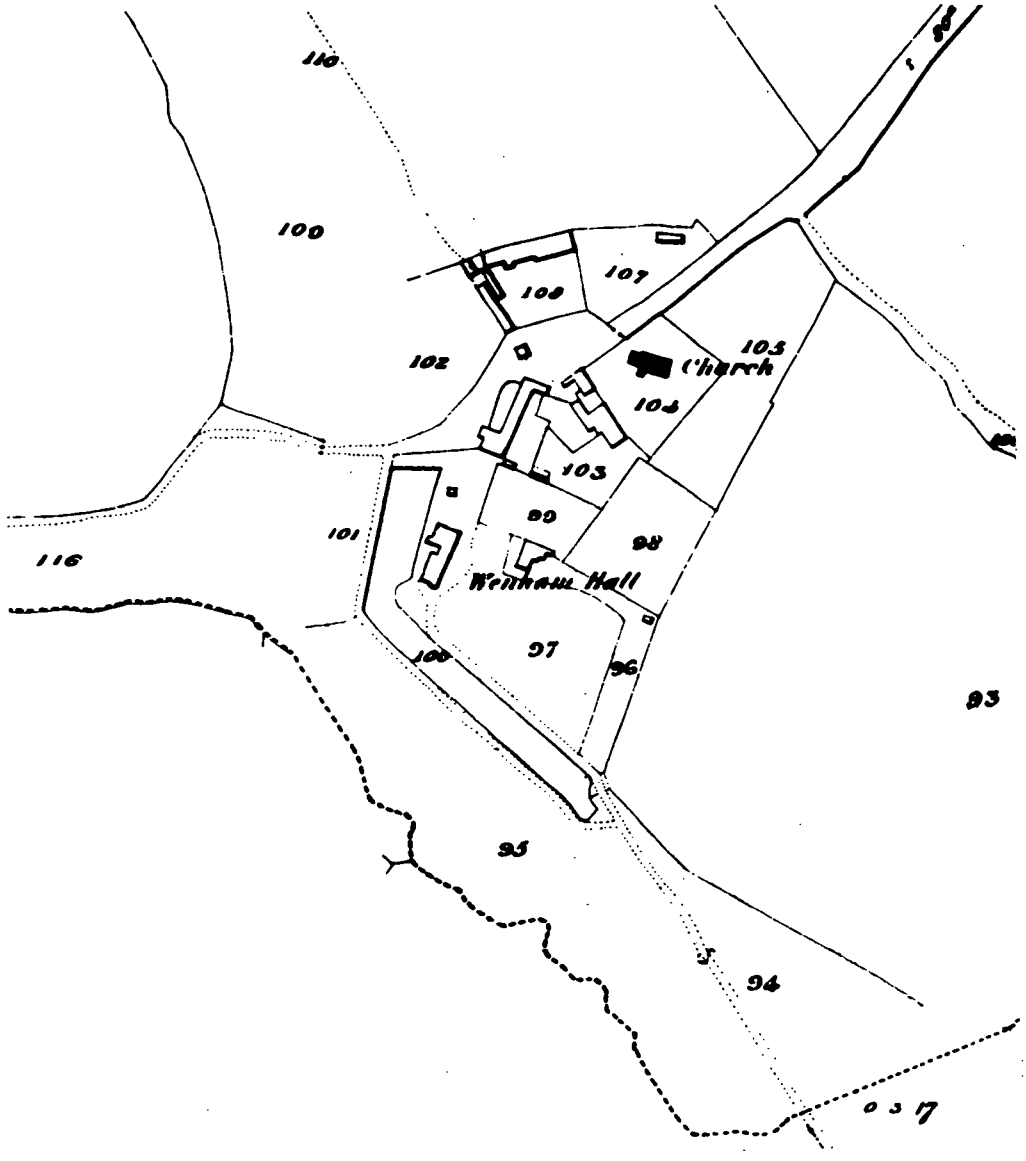

FIG. 39 – Part of the 1839 Tithe Map of Little Wenham (S.R.O.I., FDA 275/A1/1).

north of the original Hall. Two of the 'three gates' are likely to have been at the north-east corner, where the road entered the complex, with the third at the southern end, where another road or track entered the site. The 'three orchards' could well be the enclosures shown on the Tithe Map to the north and south-east of the church (land parcels 98 'Orchard' and 105 'Walnut Tree Piece').

LITTLE WENHAM HALL (FIGS 40–42)

Architectural historians since the 19th century have been united in ascribing a late 13th-century date to this building, with a preference for the period 1260–1280. An illustrated description of the Hall was published by T. Hudson Turner in 1851, but the most detailed survey to date is that by Margaret Wood in 1950 (Turner 1851, 63, 151–53; Wood 1950, 76–81). She dated it to *c.*1270–80 and described it as 'probably the best-preserved 13th-century house'.

It is L-shaped in plan, with two principal rooms on the first floor – a 'hall' with a chapel on one side, with a stair turret in the angle between them. Beneath are vaulted undercrofts, and above the chapel there is a second-floor room that forms a small square tower. The stair turret rises above this to give access to the roof of the tower. The battlements around the top of the building are mainly 16th-century renovations. A string-course around the building indicates that it is complete, except at the south-west corner, where a 16th-century wing is said to have been attached. It has been suggested that this wing may have replaced an earlier garderobe block (Quennell 1918, 127). The absence of buttresses at this corner is also a strong indication that something was attached at this point. The wing is said to have been demolished *c.*1760, when the Hall ceased to serve as a residence. This information about the wing stems from a former owner, the antiquarian Frederick Crisp (1851–1922), whose brother, George Crisp of Playford Hall (1857–1905), rescued the building from dilapidation at the end of the 19th century (Crisp *c.*1910; Tipping 1914, 363). Frederick Crisp also seems to have been the first to state that the chapel was dedicated to St Petronilla, based on the presence of a carved figure of the saint on a boss in the centre of the chapel vault (Crisp *c.*1910, 4). The grounds for this identification are not, however, clear. The figure is robed, but with its torso largely bare, its right hand is raised in blessing and there are indications of a cross behind its head. It is most likely to be a representation of Christ.

Recently, John Blair has questioned the whole concept of first-floor halls of the type apparently represented by Little Wenham Hall. Blair's study of examples elsewhere has shown that they are better seen as substantial chamber-over-basement blocks that accompanied now-vanished ground-floor open halls, often built of timber. In several examples the halls are either physically detached from the chamber-blocks, or merely attached at one corner, as at Nurstead Court, Kent, the Bishop's Palace at Wells, Somerset and Bricquebec, Normandy (Blair 1993). This seems to form a probable explanation of the circumstances at Little Wenham. Under the accepted interpretation, the private sleeping accommodation for the lord at Wenham was limited to the relatively small (14 x 15ft) second-floor room over the chapel. However the re-interpretation of the 'hall' as a chamber or solar makes it comparable in size (39 x 18ft 6in) to the reinterpreted chamber of *c.*1200 at Boothby Pagnell, Lincolnshire (35 x 20ft) or the solar of *c.*1280 at Charney Basset, Berkshire (31 x 17ft), both of which appear to have had a chapel on one side (Blair 1993, 8; Wood 1965, 19 & 231).

The break in the string-course at the south-west corner of the block at Little Wenham probably indicates where it was formerly attached to an open hall, in the corner-to-corner manner mentioned above. On the south face of the building there is a distinct vertical line descending from the end of the string-course, with remains of plaster to the west of it (this can be seen in Fig. 41). This clearly demonstrates that another structure was once attached at this point. The door into the undercroft at this point is original; the door above it at first-floor level

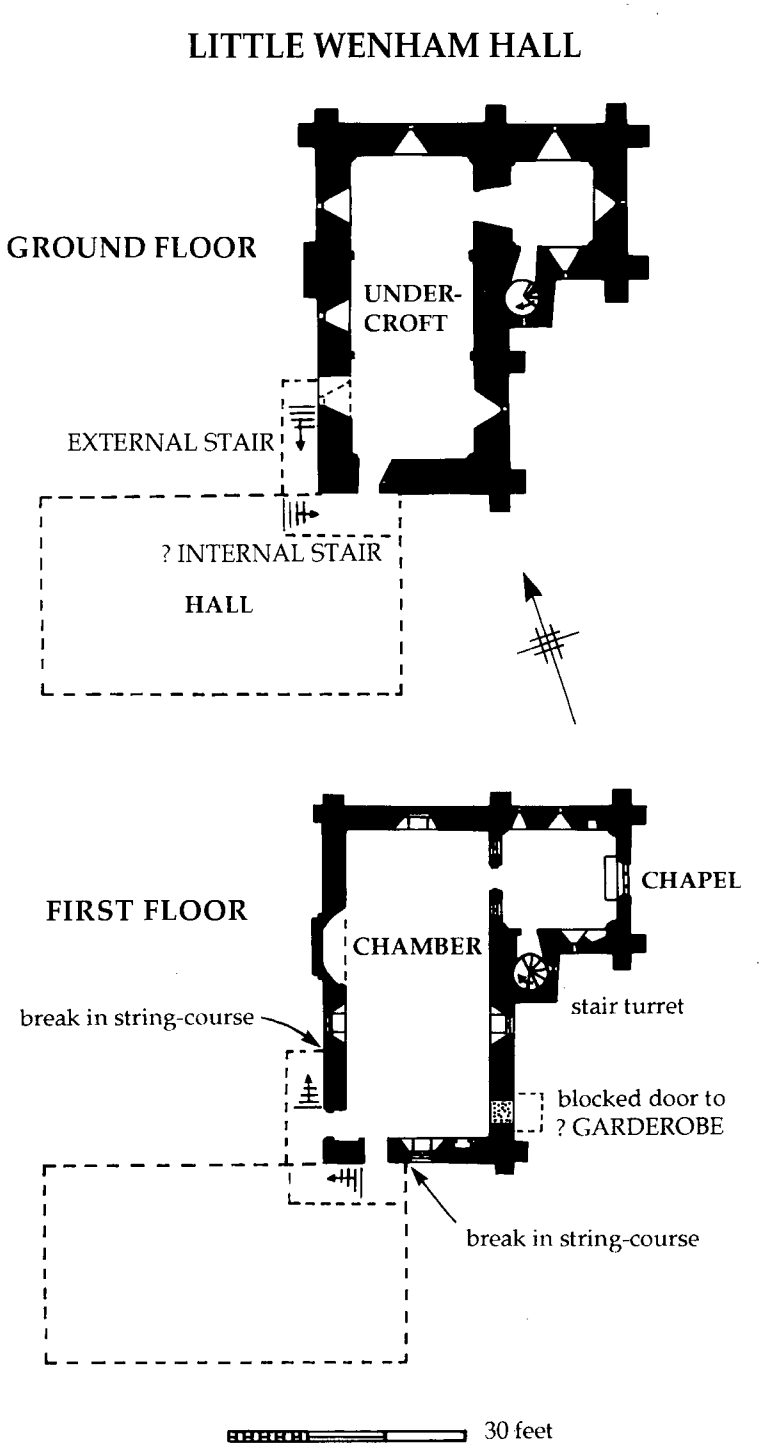

FIG. 40 – Little Wenham Hall: plans of the ground and first floors of the brick chamber block (*based on plans in Wood 1950*).

has been altered but the chamfered segmental head could be 13th-century. The west side of this corner has been extensively rebuilt and it is not possible to see much original work, though the break in the string-course is intentional. The first-floor doorway has a 16th-century exterior, but the tall inner opening with a chamfered segmental head looks original. Margaret Wood thought that this was the intended entrance into the 'hall'. She also thought that the lower door, which bears a date of 1569 (see below), may have been created out of a former loop, citing the splayed south jamb, but the tall internal head of the west door could indicate that it is an original opening. Hudson Turner's 1851 plan shows a straight-sided entrance, so, if original, the splay must have been opened up when the building was restored.

Without excavation or geophysical investigation, it is not possible to be certain about the original layout, but it is most likely that a timber hall adjoined the south side of the south-west corner (Fig. 40). Possibly an internal timber stair, similar to that at Stokesay Castle (Munby 1993, 21–4), gave access from the interior of the hall to the first-floor chamber, via the upper south door. A garderobe block on this side seems less likely, as the lower door has its door-check on the outside face. This, together with the slot for a bar, suggests that it was the entrance to the undercroft from the hall, rather than an access to the base of a garderobe. A blocked door

FIG. 41 – Little Wenham Hall: view from the south (*from Turner 1851*).

in the east wall at first-floor level, near the south-east corner, could have been an access to a projecting timber garderobe. The blocked door can be clearly seen in Fig 41.

The upper door on the west side seems to have been intended as a way of entering the chamber block, by means of another timber staircase, without going through the hall. The oblique view of the west side published by Turner in 1851 (Fig. 42) shows a diagonal line above this door that may represent the roof line (? one side of a pitched roof) of a structure covering this stair. If the break in the string-course on the west side marks the outside limit of this covering structure, the northern jamb of the ground-floor west door, as built or rebuilt in 1569, would fall just outside it, but a hypothetical earlier door of the same width as the south door may just have been within it. This suggests that the covering structure had gone or was removed in the 16th century. The nature of the 1569 inscription would be more appropriate for an outside door, though it is worth noting that R. Thurston Hopkins (a descendant of the 18th-century owners) stated that 'this tablet was rescued from the demolition by the Thurston family and placed here to preserve it' (Hopkins 1935, 190). The undercroft would certainly have been more secure with a loop rather than a door in this position, which probably means that this lower door is not an original feature.

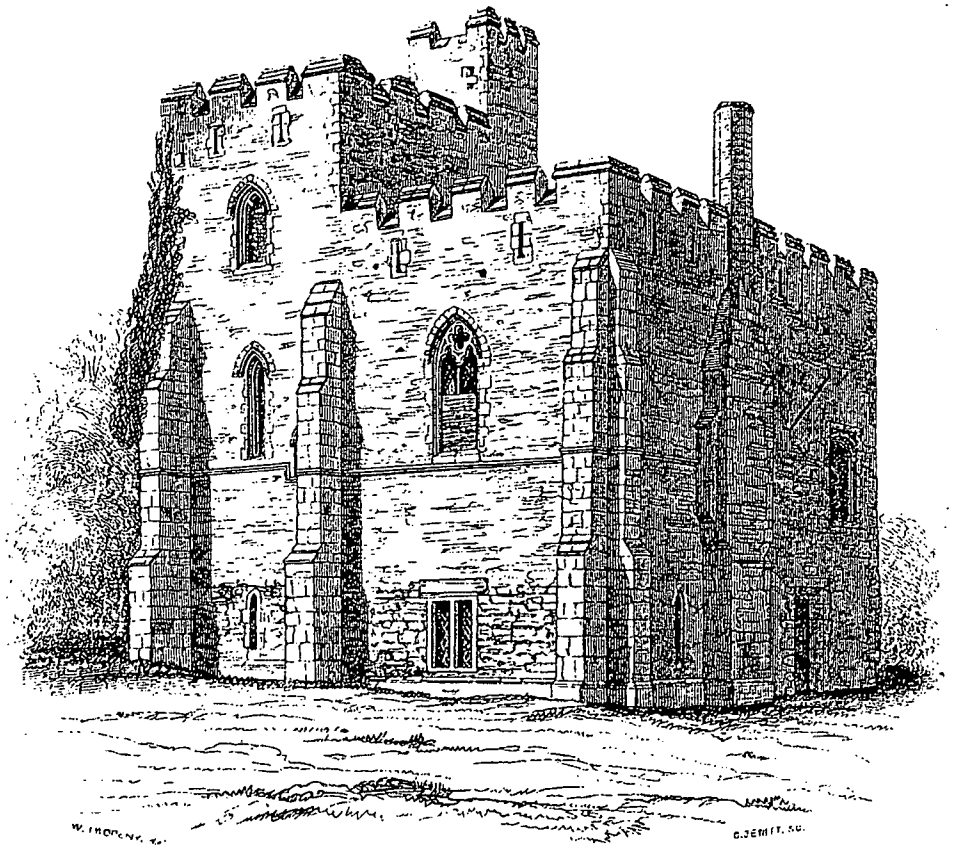

FIG. 42 – Little Wenham Hall: view from the north (*from Turner 1851*).

In the description of 1512, it is likely that the 'hall with a vault of lime and stone, with a tower of the same' refers to the surviving building; however it is not clear if the 'different rooms joined on to the hall' were in the same block or adjoining, but the connecting 'kitchen larder-house built under a roof with other rooms under and above' must, presumably, refer to the vanished part of the building. This is clearly not a description of an open hall, but it could refer to a hall that had been subdivided and reduced in status.

As reinterpreted, Little Wenham Hall changes from being a self-contained brick and stone building with an embattled top, appearing like a mini-castle, to being but the surviving half of a larger and distinctly more domestic-looking complex that included a large timber hall. The brick chamber block could certainly have withstood an attack from a small group of lightly-armed assailants, but the hall would have been very vulnerable. It is therefore likely that tower and castellations were more in the nature of status symbols, a demonstration of wealth and social rank, rather than a determined attempt at making a defensive structure. The main purpose of the chamber block was to provide the owner with high grade living and sleeping accommodation that was separate from the smells and bustle of the hall.

The main door into the hall was probably on the north side, the access being through a yard surrounded by farm buildings (the 'outer part') that would have been as much an indication of wealth as the splendid brick chamber block that overlooked them. The churchyard probably delineated the northern side of this yard. To the south of the hall, stretching down the side of the moat, there would have been a more private area ('the inner part') that may have contained gardens. The basic layout probably stems from a Late Saxon hall-and-church complex. The Domesday entries for the two Wenhams, Great and Little, are difficult to separate, but in view of the later Bigod suzerainship (see below) it is probable that Little Wenham can be identified as the land that Roger Bigod held in *Wenham* under the Bishop of Bayeux. This included a manor of one carucate, together with the fourth part of a church, that Tuneman, a thane of King Edward's, had held in 1066 (Rumble 1986, section 16.40).

In 1851 Hudson Turner was convinced that Little Wenham Hall and church shared 'so much of the same features as the Hall, that there can be no doubt that whoever built the one erected the other' (Turner 1851, 153). Particularly distinctive are the mask-like stops on the hoodmoulds above the windows and doors. Very similar stops can also be seen on the window hoodmoulds of several other churches in the near vicinity: Great Wenham, Raydon and Shelley. This suggests that the Little Wenham mason was also involved in their construction.

THE BUILDER

Initially, the identity of the builder of the Hall was the subject of some debate – the Holebrok, Montchensi, Vaux and Brewse families were all considered (Jackson 1859; Redstone 1901; Copinger 1910; Crisp *c.*1910), but since the 1950s the builder has tended to be identified as Sir John de Vaux (otherwise de Vallibus) and/or his daughter and co-heiress Petronilla de Nerford, with a strong reliance on the supposed corroborative evidence of the dedication of the chapel to St Petronilla (Wood 1950, 80 & 1951, 190; Pevsner and Radcliffe 1974, 341; Reid 1981, 250).

Robert de Vaux is recorded in Domesday Book as holding extensive lands in Norfolk and Suffolk as a tenant of Roger Bigod. By 1166, William de Vaux held thirty knights' fees of Earl Hugh Bigod (Brown 1985, 106). The first certain link with Wenham comes in 1199, when Robert II de Vaux is recorded as holding a knight's fee here, with Hubert de Montchensi as his tenant (Dodwell 1958, no. 281). Sir John de Vaux was Robert's grandson, being the son of Oliver de Vaux (d. *c.*1238–41) and Petronilla de Craon (d. 1262). He was an influential figure in eastern England: sheriff of Norfolk and Suffolk 1263 and 1265, keeper of the king's fleets in Norfolk and Suffolk and of Norwich Castle 1267, a justice 1278, Chief Justice 1281, steward of Aquitaine 1282–83 (Moor 1932, 96–97; Foss 1870, 689). He is recorded as the feudal

overlord of Little Wenham around 1270, when his tenant, Hubert de Montchensi died (*C.I.P.M.*, Henry III, no. 883) and at the time of his own death in 1287 (*C.I.P.M.*, Edward I, no. 653), when his tenant at Wenham was Roger de Holebrok (Sir John de Vaux, in turn, owed knight service for Wenham to Roger Bigod, Earl of Norfolk). Sir John de Vaux's *I.P.M.* reveals that he held fifty-eight knights' fees in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Lincolnshire, with demesne manors at Freston in Lincolnshire, Tharston, Shotesham, Holt, Cley, Whitwell, Hackford and Houghton in Norfolk, and Wissett in Suffolk. He is described as 'of Sotesham' in 1270 (Hervey 1926, 29), suggesting that Shotesham, just south of Norwich, was one of his principal residences. There is nothing to suggest that he ever lived at Wenham.[2]

In 1288 Sir John's lands were partitioned between his daughters, Petronilla (*c.*1259–1326) the wife of Sir William de Nerford of Narford, Norfolk, and Maud (*c.*1261– ?) the wife of William de Ros, 2nd Lord Ros de Hamlake of Hamlake Castle, Yorkshire. Despite F.A. Crisp's assertion to the contrary, the main knight's fee at Wenham passed to Maud de Ros and not to Petronilla, though the latter did receive a smaller holding there (? the manor of Vaux in Great Wenham) that was a dependency of the manor of Wissett (see *C.P.R.*, 1288). The Ros family are recorded as overlords of Little Wenham in 1302–03 (*F.A.*) and as late as 1386 (*I.P.M.* of Thomas de Roos of Hamelak).

The builder of the Hall should not, therefore, be sought among the non-resident Vaux overlords, but among the resident tenants. As noted above, Hubert I de Montchensi is recorded in 1199 as holding a knight's fee at Wenham as the tenant of Robert de Vaux. He belonged to a junior branch of the Montchensi family of Edwardstone and probably acquired Wenham through his mother (Matilda, wife of Roger I de Montchensi), who is thought to have been a member of the Vaux family (Fowler 1938). Hubert I died in 1210, leaving an under-age heir, Hubert II, who died around 1232 and appears to have been succeeded by Roger II, who was a minor in 1241. He was dead by 1249, leaving a son, Hubert III, who was still a minor in 1257. Hubert III died around 1270 and his *Inquisition post mortem* (Henry III, no. 883) states that he had a 'capital messuage' at Wenham. His heirs were his sisters: Johanna (aged 24 and married to Walter de Colchester) and Euphemia (aged 20), with his mother, Agatha, holding a third in dower. Shortly afterwards, in 1270–71, the sisters appear to have sold Wenham to Roger de Holebrok (Rye 1900, 72). Roger is frequently styled 'Master', which suggests that he was a cleric. He was probably the brother of Sir Richard de Holebrok, lord of the nearby parish of Holbrook. Sir Richard was King's Steward in fourteen eastern and midland counties (from 1275 till his death in 1291) and keeper of Rockingham Castle.

In 1294–95 Master Roger settled Wenham on a kinsman, John, son of William de Holebrok (Rye 1900, 99). John the son of William de Holebrok and his tenants are recorded as holding a quarter of a knight's fee in Wenham under William de Ros, and William under the Earl of Norfolk in 1302–03; a further eighth part of a fee in Wenham was held by Joan de Vaux of John de Holebrok (*F.A.*, p. 24; see note 2 for the identity of Joan de Vaux). This John de Holebrok married a woman called Petronilla (probably by 1285–86; Anon. 1928, 51), which accounts for the confused suggestion that Petronilla de Nerford remarried a Holebrok (Copinger 1910, 113), but the two Petronillas are clearly separate people.

In 1307–08 John and Petronilla appear to have made some temporary alienation of Wenham to Robert de Reymes (Rye 1900, 114). Robert was a younger son of a local landowner, William de Reymes of Higham. Robert died in 1312 and his will indicates he was a man of some substance, with his own clerk, grooms and chaplain; he also mentions a wardship that he had in Wenham 'by the demise of Lady Petronilla de Holebrok' (Raimes 1938, 113–15). Petronilla de Holebrok is recorded as the lady of Wenham in 1316 (*F.A.*, 24). Petronilla was probably dead by 1322–23, when the executors of Alice Bigod, Countess of Norfolk had the wardship of the heir of John de Holebrok (*C.I.M.*, II, no. 485). In the Lay Subsidy of 1327 one of those executors, Sir Robert de Aspal, appears to have been answerable for Wenham (Hervey 1906, 5). In 1328, Sir William de Ros, the feudal overlord of Wenham, presented to the church in

the minority of William, the son and heir of Edmund de Holebrok. William de Holebrok was probably dead by 1346 (*F.A.*) when Wenham was held by John de Breuse (parson of Stradbroke), one of the trustees named in a settlement of the manor in 1336 (Redstone 1901, 72). The last mention of the Holebrok family comes in 1349, when Mary de Holebrok presented to the church.

The possible builders are therefore :

1. Roger II de Montchensi, in his brief period as an adult in the 1240s.
2. Roger's widow, Agatha, between about 1249 and the coming of age of her son in the 1260s.
3. Hubert III de Montchensi in his brief period as a adult in the 1260s.
4. Master Roger de Holebrok, between 1270–71 and 1294–95.
5. Sir John de Holebrok, between 1294–95 and 1307–08.
6. Robert de Reymes, between 1307–08 and his death in 1312.

Of these, Roger and Hubert de Montchensi only had very brief periods of ownership, possibly not long enough to carry out an extensive programme of building, though Hubert certainly had a 'capital messuage' at Wenham by 1270. Agatha de Montchensi may not have had access to the full resources of the estate during her widowhood and therefore may not have been able to afford a building of the quality of Little Wenham Hall. Master Roger de Holebrok had the estate for around 25 years, which would have given him plenty of time to build. His exact status is uncertain – his title suggests that he was a priest, but the possession of a sizeable estate strongly suggests that he was not an ordinary cleric. He may perhaps have been a 'King's Clerk' – one of the elite members of the royal administration (Cuttino 1954; Powicke 1962, 340–1) – though so far there is no documentary confirmation for this. His ownership certainly falls within the period preferred by architectural historians for the building of the Hall. However, why did he choose to build in this new material, brick? Moreover, although bricks had been used in England since the 12th century, the bricks used at Wenham were of a new type, with possible Dutch or Flemish origins (Moore 1991, 226; Ryan 1996, 45). None of the likely builders has any known links with Flanders or Holland, but it is probably significant that at this period the weight of the English wool trade was with those countries. Interestingly, there is evidence that some royal clerks were deeply involved in that trade (Lloyd 1977, 79). Sir John de Holebrok and Robert de Reymes come towards the end of the likely building period, but both are possible builders. If the link between the chapel and St Petronilla can be sustained, Sir John did have a wife called Petronilla. Reymes was clearly wealthy and his will indicates links with Ipswich, raising the possibility that he had mercantile interests that might have led to Flanders.

LATER HISTORY

By 1361 Wenham belonged to Gilbert I de Debenham, a lawyer who counted the Black Prince, the Earl of Suffolk and Sir John Wingfield amongst his clients (Roskell *et al.* 1992, 760–61). In his will dated 1361 (proved 1374, Norwich Consistory Court, 44 Heydon), Gilbert requested burial in the south wall of Little Wenham church. His large, but uninscribed tomb can still be seen on the south wall of the nave. His descendant, Gilbert IV Debenham (1405–81) was steward to the Duke of Norfolk and a notorious character on the Yorkist side in the politics of the period (Haward 1929). Wenham Hall was attacked in 1470 during the brief return of the Lancastrians. His son, Sir Gilbert V Debenham (1435–1500) was also a prominent Yorkist. In 1491 he was sent or banished to Ireland, but became involved with Perkin Warbeck's rebellion and was attainted in 1495. He was executed or died in prison in 1500 (Wedgwood 1936, 264–66).

Sir Gilbert's sister, Dame Elizabeth Brewes, paid £500 to recover some of her family's lands in 1501. She was the widow of Sir Thomas Brewes of Whittingham in Fressingfield and Akenham in Suffolk, and Stinton and Topcroft in Norfolk. Her son, Robert Brewes (d. 1513), a lawyer, obtained the reversal of his uncle's attainder in 1504 (Wedgwood 1936, 108–09). Robert's grandson, Sir John Brewse, appears to have carried out some alterations at Wenham Hall, as appears from an inscription above the lower west door: 'Cecy fait a laide de Dieu lan grace 1569 I.B.' ['This was done with the help of God in the year of grace 1569, J.B.']. These probably included the alterations to the fireplace and chimney, the reroofing of the 'hall', the paving of the floor with tiles, and the battlements at the top. Some large bricks bearing an impressed cross-crosslet (a device taken from the Brewse arms) probably date from this time.

The building of a new timber-framed house beside the moat at about this time may indicate a changing use for the old Hall. The Brewses may have removed the timber hall and other 'domestic' adjuncts to the Hall in a conscious attempt to emphasise its 'castle' appearance; the renewing of the battlements may have been part of the same process. The possession of an ancient castle was seen as an important social distinction in Tudor times, emphasising the prestige and antiquity of the family that owned it (Howard 1987, 23 and 55). It could be that the '16th-century wing' mentioned by F.A. Crisp never actually existed, though the Brewses certainly had a substantial number of hearths (21) in one or more houses here in 1674 (Hervey 1905, 300).

Another use for the Hall is suggested by the name given to the surrounding land in the 1839 Tithe Apportionment: 'Chapel Piece' (Fig. 39, land parcel no. 97). Sir John Brewse does not appear to be a known recusant, but there are suggestions that he was at least 'conservative' in his religion, even though he was a justice of the peace from 1543 until his death. In 1545 he visited the Protestant martyr Kerby, then imprisoned at Ipswich, in a vain attempt to get him to recant his religious opinions (Williamson 1965, 160; MacCulloch 1984, 186). He was amongst those who went to the aid of the Princess Mary at Framlingham Castle in July 1553 (MacCulloch 1984, 257) and he was knighted at her accession. In 1559, soon after the accession of Elizabeth, his parish priest at Little Wenham, Sir Ralph Backhouse, voiced seditious words that were serious enough for the Privy Council to order that Backhouse be pilloried at Ipswich and have his ears cut off (MacCulloch 1986, 182). Sir John's renovations or alterations to the Hall in 1569 were expressly undertaken 'with the help of God' and, perhaps significantly, he used bricks impressed with a cross. The year 1569 was the start of a period of crisis for English Catholics and, according to Lord Chief Justice Coke, the year when 'the name of recusant' was first heard (MacCulloch 1986, 192). When William Dowsing, the iconoclast, visited 'Lady Bruce's House' at Wenham in 1644 he recorded that 'in her Chapell, there was a Picture of God the Father, of the Trinity, of Christ, and the Holy Ghost, the Cloven Tongues; which we gave order to take down, and the Lady promised to do it' (this was in addition to the thirty-two superstitious pictures, including one of the Virgin Mary, that Dowsing found in the church; White 1888, 253–54). A religious use for the old Hall could have played a significant part in its survival as a building.

Sir John Brewse's death in February 1584/5 is thought to be commemorated by a scratched inscription on the jamb of the upper west door: 'Vale 1584'. His sons, Thomas (d. 1593) and William (d. 1599), succeeded in turn and both are buried at Wenham, as was the latter's son, Sir John Brewse (d. 1643). His widow, Dame Susanna, was visited at Wenham by William Dowsing in 1644, but by 1652 she was living in Ipswich and by the time of her death in 1660 the Hall was let to Nicholas Bacon. Her son, William Bruce (the adoption of this spelling of the surname is presumably a reflection of the strong Scottish influences at the Stuart Court) had twenty-one hearths here in 1674, but died in London in 1678, being brought back to Wenham for burial. His widow, Dorothy, married John Boys and together with her son John Bruce, they mortgaged Wenham in the 1680s to Mary Mason of Dedham and her son John. In 1695

the estate was sold to Joseph Thurston, barrister of Colchester. His son, William, is said to be the last person to inhabit the old Hall; he sold the estate for £5,500 to Philip Havens in 1765 (Crisp 1902).

CONCLUSION

As reinterpreted here, the national significance of Little Wenham Hall remains high. Its importance as an early brick building is unchanged, but it should perhaps now be seen as one of the finest surviving examples in England of a semi-detached chamber block, rather than a first-floor hall. The suggested adjunct of a timber open hall would have reduced the castle-like appearance of the Hall, indicating that even by the late 13th century, crenellations were more in the nature of status symbols than serious defensive works. More importantly, buildings like Little Wenham Hall should now not be seen as being in direct descent from castles, but instead as representing an important step in a parallel line of development that leads from physically separate Late Saxon open halls and chambers (*heals* and *burs* in Old English) to the standard late-medieval house with a hall, chamber or parlour and service rooms all under one roof.

Close examination of the evidence for the ownership of the Hall reveals that the likely builder was not Sir John de Vaux, an influential military commander and justice, but a lesser member of the land-owning class and perhaps one with mercantile links, such as Master Roger de Holebrok. This makes this innovative brick house less an expression of the defensive needs of the knightly class and more of a statement of wealth, refinement and openness to new ideas.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

1 The dates of this building and of the farm buildings are taken from the Listed Building register.
2 Confusingly, a junior branch of the Vaux family held the manor of Vaux (now called Vauxhall) in Great Wenham as sub-tenants of the senior branch, and were also tenants of the manor of Belchamp in Essex. Sir Fulk de Vaux of this branch was Marshal of the Household in 1294 (Moor 1932, 95–96; Farrer 1931). Fulk's widow, Joan, is mentioned in the will of Roger de Reymes of Little Wenham in 1312 and she also appears in the 1327 Lay Subsidy Roll for Wenham (Hervey 1906).

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Abbreviations

C.I.M.	*Calendars of Inquisitions Miscellaneous.* H.M.S.O., London.
C.I.P.M.	*Calendars of Inquisitions Post Mortem.* H.M.S.O., London.
C.P.R.	*Calendars of Patent Rolls.* H.M.S.O., London.
F.A.	*Feudal Aids, AD 1284–1431.* H.M.S.O., London.
S.R.O.I.	Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.