

THE FORMER GATEWAY AT CHILTON HALL RECORDED BY ISAAC JOHNSON

by John Blatchly

Most of Isaac Johnson's topographical watercolour drawings were made more than once for different patrons, all based on the same sketch made on the spot and kept for reference. The drawing of Chilton Hall gateway (Pl. VII) is unusual in being the only copy known and no sketch has been found for it. Although Johnson was recording a structure 'lately taken down' it did not occur to him to give date, position or orientation, and when the late owner, Mr Aubrey Herbert, first saw the watercolour he was delighted but considerably puzzled. Although demolition had taken place within the last 200 years, Mr Herbert had seen neither record nor illustration of the gateway before. Mr Sandon in his *Suffolk Houses* (1977) mentions a serious fire c. 1800. If the undamaged appearance of the house in the drawing is any indication, the latter dates from the 18th century.

What remains today of the early Tudor moated house of the Crane family is the east wing of a former E-shaped house. Mr Herbert's suggestion after studying the drawing was that it is the east side of the east wing that is shown through the gateway at a time when it stood to the full height of three storeys (again, before the fire no doubt). In that case the gateway stood east of the moat on a site where Mr Herbert had discovered foundations, and the path through led in the approximate direction of the light modern footbridge over the moat. Such a gateway implies an extensive outer defensive wall; a minimum length of 600 feet would be needed to leave 10 feet between wall and moat.

The drawing shows what may be wildmen in the spandrels of the arch, six shields displayed vertically on each of the jambs, and a spiral staircase to the north of the archway. Only excavation would throw further light on this impressive fortification. The colour plate has been most generously donated by Mr A.T. Copsey. The drawing is in private possession.