

TWO EXCEPTIONAL TUDOR HOUSES IN HITCHAM: BRICK HOUSE FARM AND WETHERDEN HALL

by EDWARD MARTIN

HITCHAM LIES IN the clay country of central Suffolk, a large sprawling parish with many dispersed farmsteads. To the casual visitor there would appear to be little particularly notable about these farmhouses, for, as is often the case in Suffolk, the houses do not openly declare their age or distinction. The two houses examined here are very different, but in both cases aspects of their architecture and history suggest that they are probably unique structures.

BRICK HOUSE FARM

Description

In 1925 the Revd Edmund Farrer of Botesdale noted that 'There is undoubtedly something in the history connected with Brick House Farm which sets it, as it were, apart from other farmhouses in Suffolk' (Farrer 1925). Farrer, an observant antiquarian with a keen interest in Suffolk's architectural heritage, had been prompted to visit the place after seeing a brief reference to it in an article by the Revd Henry Copinger Hill (Hill 1924). Hill, who was the rector of a neighbouring parish to Hitcham, was mainly concerned with the Roman site that lay on the farm; it therefore fell to Farrer to make the first description of the farmhouse. Like all subsequent visitors, Farrer was struck by the incongruity between the small size of the house and the apparent wealth displayed in its brick corner turrets and the knapped flint decoration. Farrer was percipient enough to see that the house could never have been much larger than it was when he saw it, noting that its cramped site left little room for any extension or wing. Later visitors took refuge in describing it as 'part of an Early Tudor brick mansion', without further discussion of what the original form could have been (Pevsner and Radcliffe 1974, 274).

The house is situated on a narrow terrace on the south side of a hill, on the corner of a narrow and deeply cut lane that winds its way uphill from the church, some 500m to the south-east (Figs. 31 and 32). The house site is thus closely confined by the deep lane on the south and west sides, and by a linear pond on the north side.

The main part of the house is rectangular, 51ft 6in (15.7m) long, with polygonal buttresses or turrets at the corners, giving it a width of 19ft 6in (6m) at the west end and 24ft 3in (7.4m) at the east (parlour) end, where the turrets are larger. On the north side there is a relatively modern, single-storeyed, extension. The double-storeyed part of the house is arranged on the lobby-entry plan, with three main rooms on each floor and an internal four-flued chimney stack serving two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. The chimney originally had 'a rather slender stack of four shafts grouped together, moulded below and rather heavily capped above' (Farrer 1925). However, this was damaged by a bomb blast in 1941 and in 1944 it was taken down to the level of the attic floor and rebuilt (Bull 1976, 65). One of the original round shafts, made of shaped bricks, can still be seen in the garden.

The south and north walls are built of brick up to first floor level, with a timber-framed upper floor, jettied on the south side of the parlour end (Fig. 33). The west gable wall had to be rebuilt after the last war, due to subsidence. The east gable has a full height brick

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FIG. 31 – Map of the parish of Hitcham showing the places mentioned in the text. Based on the 1839 Tithe Map.

wall, with hexagonal brick turrets of Early Tudor type at each corner. These are hollow and are now roughly capped with tiles, but have clearly been reduced in height and must originally have projected beyond the eaves of the present roof. Similar, but smaller, pentagonal turrets existed at the corners of the west end, but only the base of one now survives, leaning out at an angle and supported by a modern buttress. Projecting from the south side of the south-east turret is the stub of a wall which can be traced as a foundation running along the west side of the garden.

All the turrets incorporate special moulded bricks, giving them elaborate stepped profiles (see Fig. 34). Traces of red pigment beneath the overhanging mouldings, coupled with traces of a rectangular pattern of scored lines on the flush mortar joints between the bricks, indicate that the brickwork was originally covered with a red wash or paint to hide

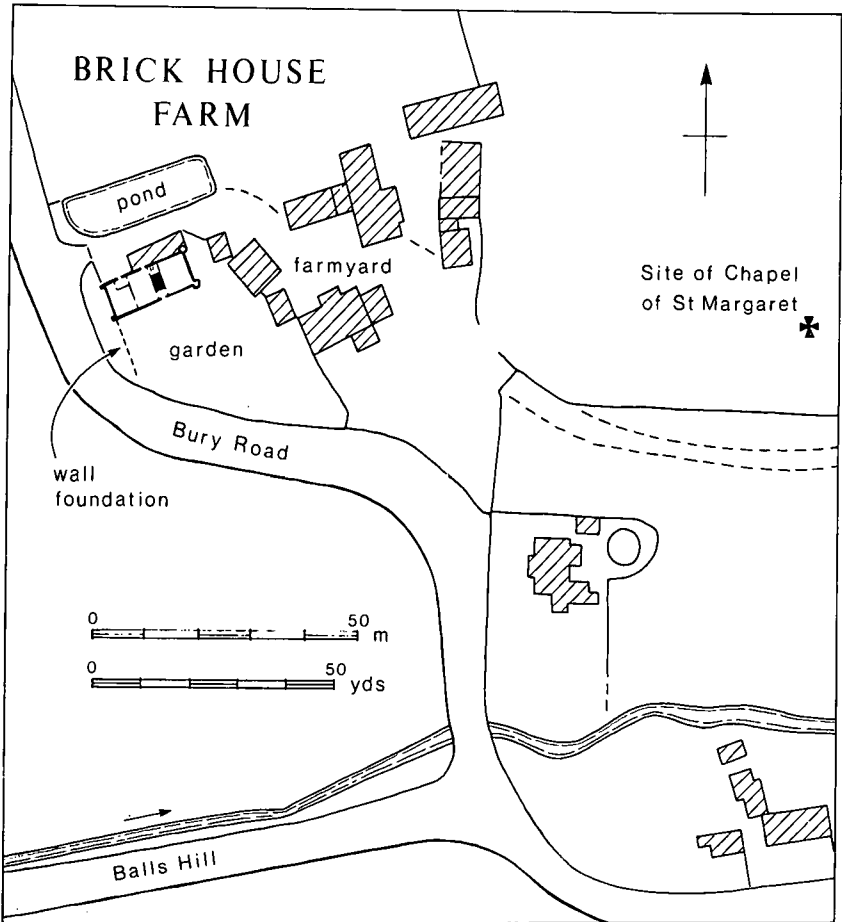


FIG. 32 -- Map of the farmstead at Brick House Farm, showing the cramped position of the house and the location of the medieval chapel in the field to the east.



FIG. 33 – Brick House Farm: sketch of the south and east elevations of the house. The building is difficult to photograph and this is an attempt to show the main features of the Early Tudor brick structure. The parlour is in the jettied end to the right.

the irregularities of the bricks and the uneven and often thick joints. The purpose of the scored lines was to give the impression of very fine, even, pointing. The use of paint in the Early Tudor period to give the appearance of very regular and even coloured brickwork with fine pointing is being increasingly recognised in East Anglia.¹ On each turret there is one recessed course of bricks which appears to have been completely covered with plaster (Fig. 34). These seem to lack the red colouration and may have been executed in imitation of stonework.

The original hand-made red bricks average $9\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{4} \times 2\frac{1}{8}$ in (though with a certain amount of variation) and are laid in an irregular bond that occasionally approximates to English bond. Bricks with blue or black vitrified header ends were also used to create diaper patterns, as on the west gable wall (Figs. 33 and 34). There is a more elaborate pattern on the south side of the parlour (Pl. XIIIa). This consists of an 'A' shape with a curious extension on the top, which possibly represents a crossed letter 'P'. Above, but separated by a single course of red bricks, is a pyramidal shape with an inset bottom course. More diaper work may be present on the west side of the south door, but this area is obscured by a climbing plant and only the occasional blue header is visible beneath the vegetation. A small fragment of another diaper pattern can be seen at the west end of the south wall.

The most striking feature of the south wall is, however, the knapped flint flushwork decoration to the east of the door (Figs. 33 and 34 and Pl. XIIIb). The lower part consists of four narrow panels with trefoil heads – the heads being formed by shaped bricks. Above these is a chequerwork pattern of square panels of black knapped flints alternating with red brick ones. The overall shape resembles one of the diaper patterns: a pyramid with a recessed base. Between this pattern and the door is a half-round pillar with a pyramidal top. There is no evidence of a matching pillar on the west side of the door.

The south doorway, with its arched head and chamfered brick edges appears to be one of the few original openings still in use. The west side of a similar, but blocked, doorway is visible near the west end of the south wall. All the existing windows on the south side are later insertions. That at the parlour end clearly fills part of a larger opening, the size of which is not totally certain as the brick walling beneath the window seems to have been relaid. There is another area of disturbed brickwork above the flushwork decoration, which may indicate another blocked opening.

On the west side, the lower window clearly occupies part of a much larger window opening with chamfered brick edges and a timber lintel. Above the lintel there is a large area of relaid brickwork which lacks the diaper pattern. The upper window lies in this disturbed area and may not be original, even though it too has a chamfered brick surround and a timber lintel. Immediately adjacent to it is an identical, but blocked, window opening. The south-west turret has a small rectangular window opening in one face. This has an original chamfered brick surround, but the timber part is more modern. A similar window may exist in the north-west turret, but is covered by the plasterwork of the later extension.

The main roof of the house is of the clasped-purlin type, typical of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The parlour end has a crown-post roof which may be mid 16th-century in date, possibly rebuilt. A blocked arched doorway in the north wall of the room over the parlour may have led to an external stair turret or perhaps to a projecting garderobe. This room also has traces of painted black decoration on one wall.

The finest feature of the interior is the moulded plaster ceiling in the parlour (Fig. 35 and Pl. XIVa). Farrer (1925) declared this to be the earliest plaster decoration that he had ever seen, influenced no doubt by the prominent appearance of pomegranates on the vertical surfaces of the beams. The pomegranate was of course the badge of Katherine of Aragon, Henry VIII's first queen. However pomegranates are not uncommon on plaster ceilings of

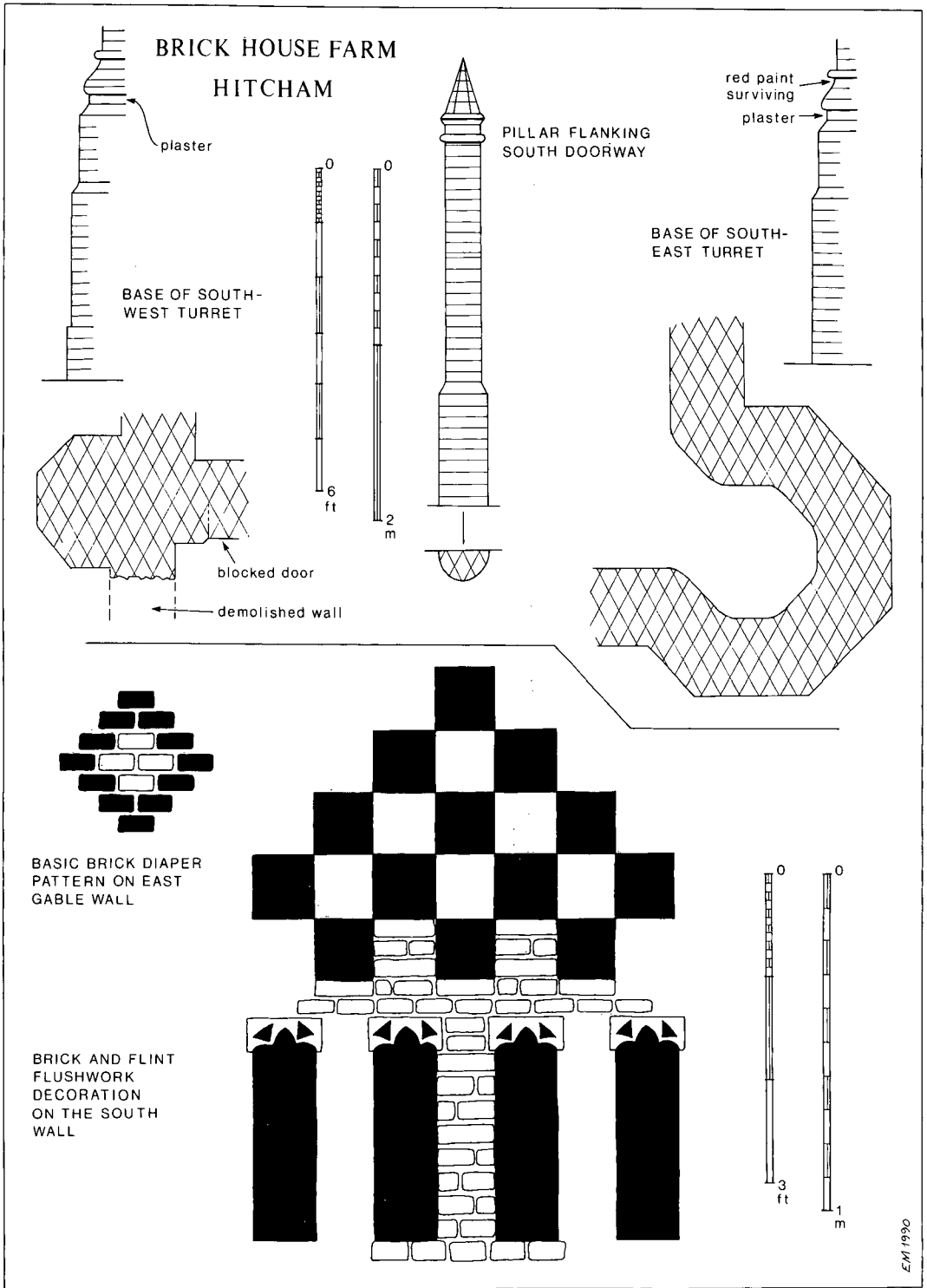


FIG. 34 – Brick House Farm: details of the Early Tudor brickwork and the brick and flint flushwork.

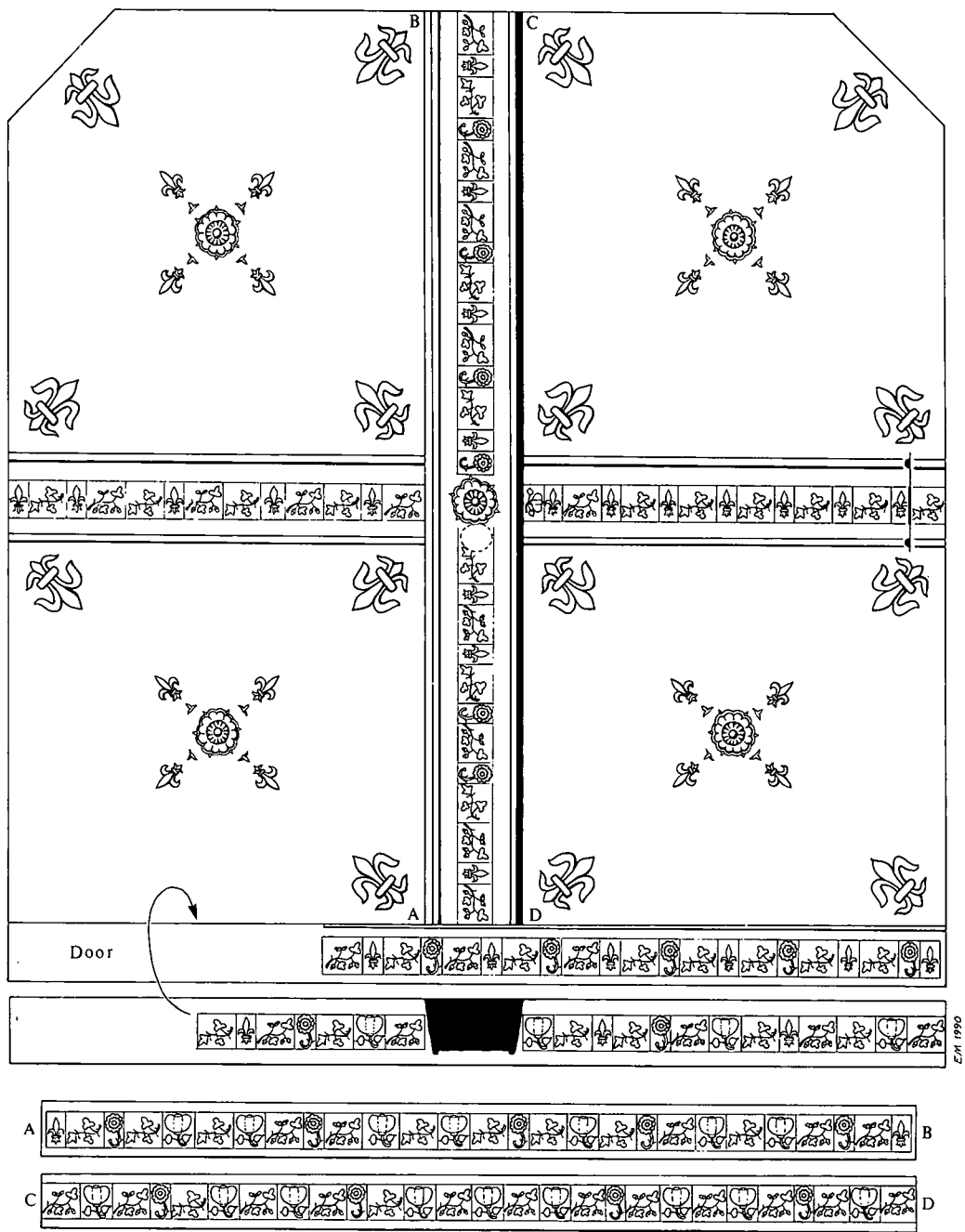


FIG. 35 – Brick House Farm: sketch of the plaster ceiling of c. 1600 in the parlour. The ceiling measures 5.32 × 5.35m. For recording purposes it was assumed that the orientation of the foliage stamps was constant; on the actual ceiling some are inverted.

the late 16th and early 17th centuries, e.g. Powis Castle, 1592 (Jourdain 1926, fig. 43) and the Vicarage, Tottenham, 1620 (Turner 1927, fig. 80). The overall design, especially the wide ribs infilled with small moulded decorations, is very characteristic of early 17th-century work (Jourdain 1926, 3; Turner 1927, 51) and there can be little doubt that the Hitcham ceiling is of that general date.

From the above it is clear the the building has undergone considerable alteration and change. The main roof is clearly later than the Early Tudor brick base. The brick turrets at the east end have been reduced in height, possibly to accommodate the new roof, and the south-east one fits very uncomfortably with the jettying on the south side. The possible blocked opening on the south side of the parlour, above the flushwork decoration, may indicate that the brick walling extended further upwards, further implying that the jettied upper floor is a later rebuild. The main timber-framed part of the house is offset slightly inwards on its brick base and it is possible that much of this upper floor is a later rebuild, contemporary with the roof. The original appearance of the upper part of the house is thus not totally certain. The brick base implies a narrow range with brick turrets at each corner; the most logical roof structure to go with this would be a single, axial, one, which would allow the turrets to project beyond the eaves.

History

The Hitcham tithes apportionment of 1840² records Brick House Farm as a 60 acre holding, the property of Stephen Iveson and occupied by William Grimwood. There was a core area of 33 acres around the farmstead and 27 acres in detached fields. The court books of the Manor of Hitcham reveal that Stephen Iveson Esq. of Bath was a copyholder of the manor, in the right of his wife Elizabeth. The court books³ contain a copy of a long indenture concerning the reversion of Iveson's estate, including lands outside Hitcham and belonging to other manors. The Hitcham lands are contained in the 8th schedule and comprise a single copyhold tenement made up of various parcels of land, containing in all 27 acres 2 roods. This suggests that although the acreages do not tally, the copyhold tenement was thought to encompass the whole holding.

The descent of this copyhold can be traced back to the early 17th century, when it divides into three separate holdings: a main holding of 23 acres 2 roods; two acres of pasture called Bantocks; and 2 acres said to be part of Merry Mouth's or Merrymouth's tenement. The main holding can be traced back to the admission in 1596 of Christopher Hannam, gentleman, on the surrender of Sir George Waldegrave. This only exists in an 18th-century index of admissions;⁴ the first original admission is that of Robert Ighes in 1619,⁵ who took the property on the surrender of Robert Parke, who had in turn taken it from Christopher Hannam in 1614. Ighes was a Bury St Edmunds goldsmith, whose will was proved in 1631/2 (Evans 1987, no. 367); he left his 'messuages and lands in Hitcham' to his daughter Abigail, with remainder to his other three daughters. Elizabeth Iveson, who held the property in the early 19th century, appears to have been a descendant of Ighes's daughter Margaret Groome. Although Robert Parke surrendered the copyhold to Ighes in 1619, there is a possibility that the Parke family stayed on as under-tenants. At the head of the 1674 Hearth Tax list for Hitcham is the entry 'Mr Parke 4 [hearths]'. As has already been noted above, Brick House Farm has four original fireplaces.

The admission of Robert Ighes in 1619⁶ describes the holding thus (translated from the Latin original):

14½ acres of land of the demesne of the Manor lying in a field called *Holeperpell*;
3 roods of meadow lying in *Small Meadow*, lately of Robert ffynes, knight;
2 acres of land, lately of Thomas Kembold;
one field called *Netherfeild* containing 6 acres 1 rood.

The field called *Holeperpell* can be identified with the demesne field called *Purtepol*, which is mentioned in a survey of the manor in 1251.⁷ *Purtepol* appears to have been three pieces: 63 acres lying towards the house of William del Hil, 22 acres lying towards the house of Ralph Chuncy and 20 acres lying towards the mill. The first element of *Holeperpell* (which is sometimes found in the more colourful version of *Hell purple!*) is almost certainly 'hill' (a nearby field called *Hill Meadow* regularly occurs as *Hell Meadow*) and it would not be unreasonable to equate *Holeperpell* with that part of *Purtepol* field that lay towards the house of William 'of the hill', i.e. 'the hill *Purtepol*'. The name *Purtepol* is an interesting one, the second element is clearly Old English *pol* 'a pool, a pond, a pool in a river, also probably a stream or rivulet' (Smith 1956, 68). The first element is more problematic; it also occurs in Portpool, Middlesex (*Purtepol* 1203), Purfleet, Essex (*Purtefhyete* 1285) and *Purtewelle* in Manuden, also in Essex (Reaney, 1969, 130), within Suffolk it also seems to occur in *Purtepyt/Purtepet* in Woolverstone (information from Mrs S. Laverton). Reaney suggests that there is a hitherto unrecognised element, *purte*, connected with water, but whose significance is obscure. At Hitcham *Purtepol* probably refers to the stream which runs down from the abandoned farmstead called The Hobbets towards the church. This course takes it past the eastern fields of Brick House Farm, and in this area it runs in an unusual, deeply cut, channel.

The first recorded holder of this tenement, Sir George Waldegrave, lived nearby at Wetherden Hall, as did Sir Robert Fenys (or Fiennes), who is mentioned as a previous holder of part of the Brick House lands – more details of both men are given in the second part of this article, but neither is likely to have lived at Brick House Farm. Christopher Hannam (or more properly Hanham), who acquired the property in 1596, was descended from an Essex gentry family which was seated at Hanham's Hall in Tendring in the 15th century. Christopher's grandfather, Edmund Hanham, had come to Hitcham at the beginning of the 16th century through his marriage with Agnes, the daughter and heiress of Nicholas Reeve, gent. of Hitcham (Metcalf 1882, 142–43). Morant (1768, 142) gives the additional information that Reeve was 'Gentleman usher and carver to the last Abbot of Bury St Edmunds' – presumably John Reeve alias Melford, Abbot from 1513 to 1539. Where in Hitcham Nicholas lived is uncertain, but he is named as previous holder of a copyhold tenement of 40 acres called Fennys (or Fenny's; presumably named after the Fenys family of Wetherden Hall – see below). This tenement formed part of a large holding of 92 acres centred on Lower Farm Barn (formerly Causeway Farm), which was held by John Harper of Hitcham Hall in the early 19th century. The Lower Farm Barn lands surrounded those of Brick House Farm on the north and east. Another part of the Lower Farm Barn holding was said to be 3½ roods of land 'parcel of the lands tenements meadows lately Fenns', which had been surrendered by Christopher Hanham in 1563. Another part of the holding consisted of 7 acres of land and meadow that had been held by John Hanham (Christopher's uncle) sometime before 1600.

Edmund Hanham, Christopher's grandfather, was in Hitcham by 1504, when he is named as an executor of the will of Thomas Fysshier, a former Rector of Hitcham,⁸ and in 1524 he was taxed on land valued at 10 marks in Hitcham. His widow Agnes's will,⁹ as 'gentlewoman of Hitcham', is dated 1557 and mentions 'the tenement wherein I nowe dwell called Barkers'. Unfortunately Barkers tenement cannot yet be identified; however she also mentions land called *Mellefeld* and *Loves Medowe* (both of which lie near the church), another tenement called *Bennettes* (which is now called Hill Farm and lies on the top of the hill above Brick House Farm), and yet another tenement in Hitcham called *Balles* (this is also unidentified, but the road up to Wetherden Hall is called Balls Hill). Christopher Hanham is described as 'of Hitcham' when he recorded his pedigree at the Heralds' Visitation of 1612 (Metcalf 1882, 142–43), but appears to have moved to the adjoining parish of

Bildeston by 1623 and was buried there in 1628.¹⁰ This fits with his surrender of Brick House Farm in 1614 and there must be a strong presumption that he actually lived there. This makes it likely that he was the person who reshaped the house in the years just before or after 1600. He was also probably responsible for the fine ceiling in the parlour, which made it truly fit for a gentleman.

The problem still remains concerning the builder of the original brick part of the house. Although the Hanhams seem to have held property around Brick House Farm in the 16th century, there is nothing to connect them firmly with it before 1596. The copyhold estate that formed a part, at least, of Brick House Farm does not seem to have been a normal one, for it appears to have been a collection of pieces of land rather than a unified holding and at least half of it was made up of former demesne land of the manor. In addition, one of the fields contains the remains of a medieval chapel (Martin *et al.* 1984, 51–52). A Chapel of St Margaret in Hitcham is mentioned in the *Inquisition of the Ninths*, 1340/1; and in 1566 the site of a free chapel in Hitcham was granted to William Gryce, the Queen's servant, and Charles Newcommen (*C.P.R.* 1563–1566, no. 2560).

Hitcham was the largest and most valuable of the demesne manors of the Bishops of Ely in Suffolk. It was granted to Ely by two brothers called Godwine and Ælfmær *c.* A.D. 1000 (Hart 1966, nos. 78, 80, 339; Blake 1962, 140, no. 70). It remained in the possession, first of the Abbots and then, after the establishment of the bishopric in 1109, of the Bishops of Ely until 1559, when it was acquired by the Crown through a forced exchange (*C.P.R.* 1558–1560, 441). Being a demesne manor, it was not granted out but was administered by bailiffs (a bailiff is specifically mentioned in a survey of 1251).¹¹ In 1251 the demesne consisted of 888 acres (560 acres of arable, 42 of meadow and pasture and 286 of woodland). By 1356 this had been slightly reduced to 810 acres (480 acres of arable, 30 of meadow and pasture and 300 of woodland).¹² By the 19th century it had further decreased to 220 acres centred on Hitcham Hall and another block of 264 acres composed of Hitcham Wood (102 acres) and the adjacent Plains Farm.

The position of Hitcham Hall, adjoining the northern side of the parish church and surrounded by demesne lands, suggests very strongly that it is on the site of the original manor buildings. The Hall is first mentioned by name in the will of John Grymwade of Hitcham, dated 1593.¹³ Grymwade was the undertenant of Edward Steward Esq. of Teversham in Cambridgeshire, who was the farmer of the 'scite and demecane' of the manor under Queen Elizabeth.¹⁴ The farm buildings of the Hall are shown on the Tithe Map of 1839 in a yard to the east of the church (Fig. 31), but these have disappeared and the area is now overgrown with trees. It seems that the farming operations of the Hall were transferred to Lower Farm Barn some time during the 19th century.

The above serves to demonstrate that although Brick House Farm had a substantial amount of demesne land in its makeup, it was probably not the 'site of the manor'. Of the two barns on the farm, the larger one dates from *c.* 1600 and the other one was extensively rebuilt at about the same date, although in origin it was an aisled barn of 13th- or possibly early 14th-century date (information kindly supplied by Philip Aitkens). The smaller barn is now only three bays long and has almost certainly been shortened. All this suggests that the farming establishment was radically reorganised by Christopher Hanham, at the same time as he renovated the house. What was there before him is now unclear.

A clue as to the original nature of Brick House Farm comes from the manorial survey of 1251 already mentioned.¹⁵ For performing some services, such as carrying the lord's corn or hay for a day, the tenants were to have food provided; however if only half a day's carrying was performed, part of the food was to be carried (? donated) to the hospice (*hospicium*). The location of the hospice is not mentioned, so presumably it was in Hitcham. A hospice, in the sense of a lodging for travellers, possibly combined with a function as an

almshouse, might go some way to explain Brick House Farm – its siting on the manorial demesne, its position close to the road and also the close proximity of a chapel. It could be that an earlier hospice was replaced in the early Tudor period by a grander brick building, with perhaps a more overt function as a lodging for official visitors from Ely, perhaps even the Bishop himself. The lobby-entry plan of the house may be significant. This plan form seems to have been developed at the beginning of the 16th century, most particularly for lodgings. One of the earliest buildings of this form is Cobb's Hall in Aldington, Kent, which seems to have been built between 1509 and 1526 as the combined lodgings and court-house of Thomas Cobbe, the steward of the Archbishop of Canterbury's Aldington estate (Quiney 1984, 460–61 and 1990, 108).

A close connection with the Bishops of Ely might explain one of the decorative motifs on the exterior of Brick House Farm – the pyramidal shape with a recessed base which occurs both in the flushwork and the diaper-work. Might this be a stylised bishop's mitre? This tempts one to look at the other pieces of decoration for clues as to the identity of the builder. Most prominent, of course, is the diaper-work 'A' shape which is surmounted by one of the possible mitre shapes (Pl. XIIIa). In the early Tudor period there is only one Bishop of Ely with a name that begins with an 'A' – John Alcock, who was Bishop from 1486 to 1500. The 'J' of his Christian name would also fit with the possible crossed 'I' shape that lies between the 'A' and the 'mitre'. Perhaps significantly, Alcock was a great builder: he was Comptroller of the royal building works under Henry VII, and on his own account he built the Bishop's Palace at Downham in Cambridgeshire, as well as Jesus College in Cambridge.

Ascribing Brick House Farm to John Alcock, and therefore implying a date most likely in the 1490s, does cause a little unease. Closely dating Early Tudor brickwork is very difficult, but there has been a tendency to date structures with small polygonal turrets to the 1520s or 1530s, by comparison with buildings like West Stow Hall or Shelley Hall. However the plan form with polygonal corner turrets was established as early as the mid 15th century at King's College Chapel, Cambridge.

The brick and flint flushwork decoration is, as far as I know, unique on a secular building and rare even on churches. It occurs on the porch of Ixworth Thorpe church (Fig. 36, A and B), but is not closely dateable there. It also occurs on the porch of Great Bealings church (Fig. 36, C); this porch also has brick corner turrets and an inscription requesting prayers for the souls of Thomas Seckford and Margaret his wife. The reference to souls might be taken to imply that persons named were dead when the inscription was set up; however a

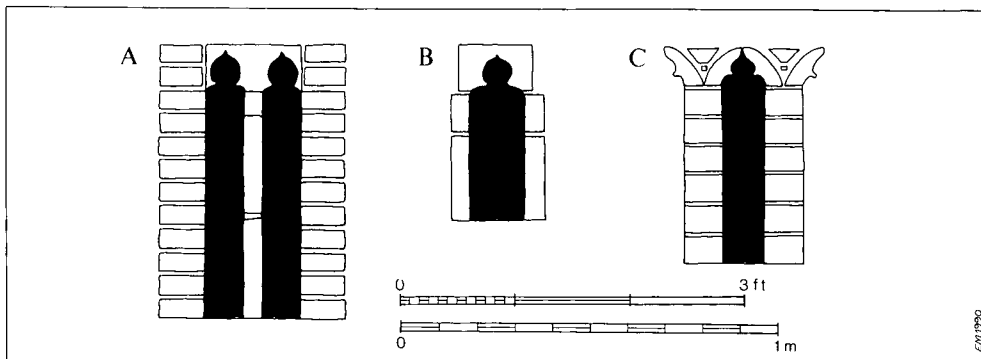


FIG. 36 – Details of the brick and flint flushwork on the porches of Ixworth Thorpe (A and B) and Great Bealings (C) churches.

similar inscription on the south chapel of Lavenham church, requesting prayers for the souls of Thomas Spring and Alice his wife, was actually erected in the lifetime of Alice. Thomas Seckford died in 1505, but his wife Margaret's will was not proved until 1543 (Corder 1981, I, 200). The porch could therefore have been erected anytime after 1505 by Margaret Seckford or by her son Thomas (c. 1495–1575), the builder of Seckford Hall, a brick mansion of 1553–75. The bricks used on this porch are unusually thick for 16th-century ones, being $2\frac{7}{16}$ in thick, rather than the norm of about 2in. Interestingly, thick 16th-century bricks also occur at two other places in East Suffolk: at Kenton Hall and in the entrance arch at Moat Hall, Parham – in both these cases the bricks are $2\frac{3}{4}$ in thick and probably date from the second half of the century. On these grounds a date towards the middle of the 16th century is possible for the Bealings porch.

In conclusion it can be seen that Farrer was right in saying that there is something in the history of Brick House Farm that sets it apart from other farmhouses in Suffolk. Its likely origin as a high class hospice or lodgings connected with the Bishopric of Ely makes it unusual enough; add to this its unique exterior decoration and its probable pioneering use of the lobby-entrance plan and you have a building that is of exceptional interest both historically and architecturally.

WETHERDEN HALL

Description

Wetherden Hall lies on the top of a hill, just over a half a mile to the west of Brick House Farm. Here a large square moat surrounds an unusually long timber-framed building (Fig. 37). The building now consists of fourteen bays and is 130ft 3in (39.7m) long; however until its renovation and repair in 1984 it consisted of twenty-one bays, a staggering 210ft (64m) long, and may originally have been slightly longer (Fig. 38). Before renovation the eastern end consisted of a row of cottages, while the western end contained a barn, granaries and other farm buildings, all in a fairly derelict condition, especially at the western end (Pls XIVb and XVa). Most of the latter end was demolished when the structure was renovated (Pl. XVb).

The whole range seems to have been of one build, though there is some sign of rebuilding with re-used timbers at the extreme eastern end. There are three chimney stacks in the cottage end, but only the eastern one, positioned in a narrow bay and emerging through the apex of the roof, appears to be original. The other two are offset from the centre line of the roof and are probably later insertions. The timber frame is of good quality, with substantial but mainly plain timbers being used. The wall posts have long jowls and scroll stops occur on the joists. Several original windows with diamond-shaped mullions survive at the western end. The roof is of the clasped-purlin type with slightly arched wind-bracing. Philip Aitkens has dated this as c. 1570. A barn of identical construction stood just outside the moat (Fig. 37), but this was dismantled and moved to the Rushbrooke Arms at Sicklesmere in 1987, where it now functions as a restaurant annexe.

The long range flanked almost the whole length of the northern side of the moated platform. The moat itself is almost perfectly square, with external measurements of 108×100 m, enclosing an area of 0.65ha. The south and east sides of the platform have a brick revetment – laid in English bond with small projecting buttresses at intervals. The red bricks measure $9\frac{1}{2} \times 4\frac{1}{2} \times 2\frac{1}{4}$ in and probably date from the late 16th or early 17th century. Unfortunately much of this brickwork is in poor condition. It is possible that erosion has destroyed the revetment on the west side, part of which was enlarged for a farm pond (a small stretch of later brick revetting does exist on the edge of this extension). The site is

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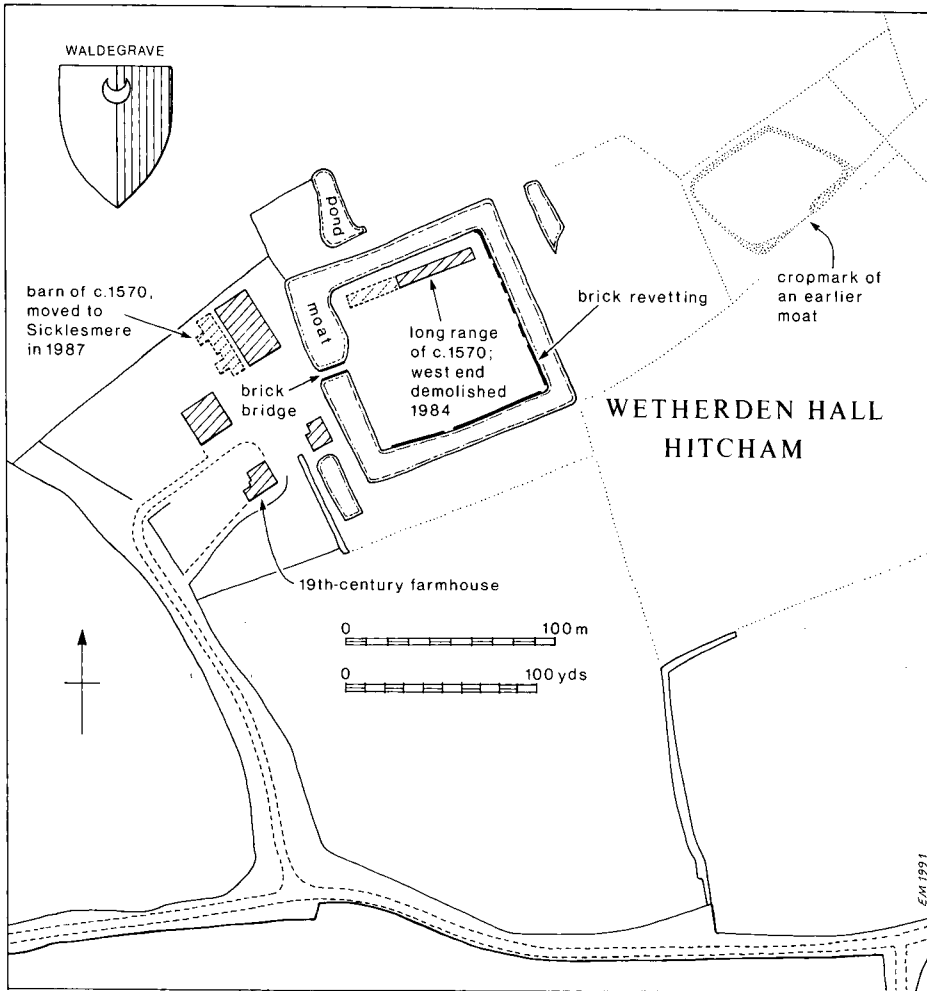


FIG. 37 – Wetherden Hall: plan of the large square moat, showing the position of the timber long range and the surviving extent of the brick revetting. The cropmark of the earlier moat can be seen to the east.

entered via a two-arched brick bridge in the middle of the west side. The base of this appears to be original 16th-century brickwork, the upper part has however been rebuilt. A wooden bridge across the middle of eastern arm of the moat existed in 1917 (Farrer 1917) and the foundations of this were exposed when the moat was cleaned out in 1984. Part of the central area was covered by various 19th- and 20th-century farm buildings, but these have now been demolished. Traces of brick footings are reported from the east side of the platform, but no coherent plan is known.

History

Wetherden Hall has nothing to do with the parish of Wetherden; it is in fact a corruption of the surname of its first known owner, Richard Wederton or Witherton. Unfortunately we do not know a great deal about Richard. He was of Hitcham when he made his will in 1461.¹⁶ In addition to his Hitcham estate, he had property in Raingate Street in Bury St

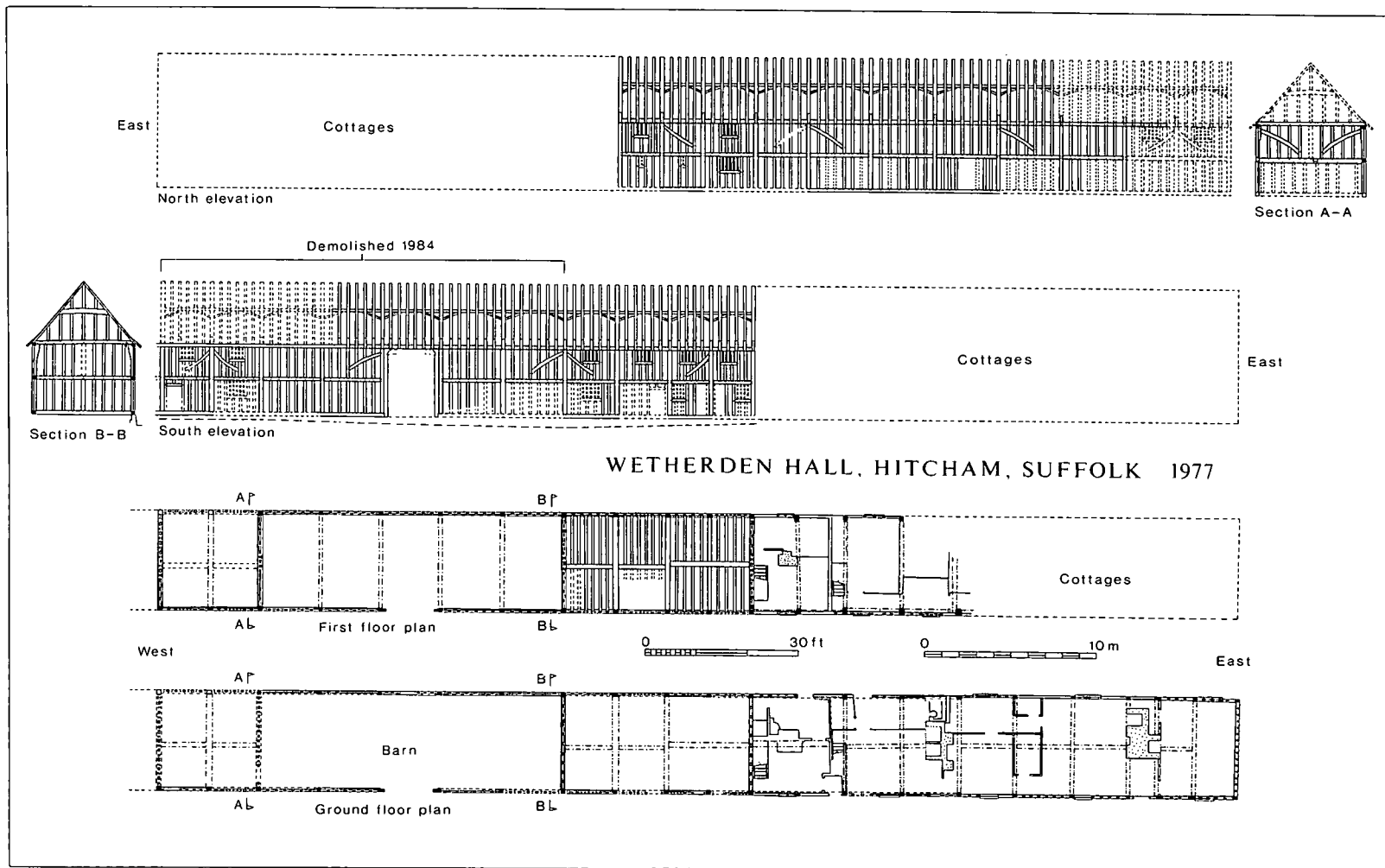


FIG. 38 - Wetherden Hall: plans and elevations of the unique long range of c. 1570. Surveyed by the Suffolk Buildings Recording Group and drawn by W.A. Thompson, 1977. Scale 1:400.

Edmunds, as well as lands in Kettlebaston, Brettenham, Preston and Bildeston. He named John Clopton Esq. (of Kentwell Hall in Long Melford) as the supervisor of his will and he willed to Clopton his suit of body armour. He requested burial in the body of Hitcham Church, before the image of the Crucifix; he also requested a tomb like that of William Cressener Esq.¹⁷ in the Friars' Church at Sudbury (the Dominican Friary, later erroneously called Sudbury Priory). That some sort of memorial was erected is proved by the 17th-century *Church Notes* of William Blois of Grundisburgh,¹⁸ which list amongst the stones in Hitcham Church, one to '... Wetherton, et Johanna uxoris eius'.

How or when Richard acquired his Hitcham property is unknown. Having no children he left all his property to his wife Johanna. She only survived her husband by five years, but in that time she had remarried. In her will, dated 1466,¹⁹ she requested burial beside her former husband, Richard Witherton Esq., but left her property to her second husband, Sir Robert Fenys.

Sir Robert Fenys was the younger brother of Sir Richard Fiennes of Herstmonceux Castle in Sussex, who was summoned to Parliament, in his wife's right, as Lord Dacre in 1459. Sir Robert's first wife, Philippe Dacre, was the younger sister of his brother's wife. He married her when she was still a minor (probably *c.* 1446), but she was dead by 1458 (Barrett-Lennard 1908, 163 and 170). He does not seem to have had any children by her, or by Johanna Witherton, his second wife. His third wife was Elenore Jenny, the daughter of Sir William Jenny of Knodishall, Judge of the King's Bench, by whom he had seven children.

Sir Robert's family had been very influential at the court of Henry VI and he had become a 'King's Squire' when he came of age in 1446, becoming a 'Squire of the Body' by 1448. However the family's influence collapsed in 1450 with the fall of his uncle, Lord Saye and Sele, the Lord Treasurer, and Robert lost most of his posts, including the Constablership of Porchester in Hampshire. Under the House of York his fortunes recovered slightly and he was knighted between 1462 and 1466. In 1462 he was described as being of Wandsworth and Herstmonceux. By 1466 he had acquired his Hitcham estate and was soon taking part in Suffolk affairs – serving as a Justice of the Peace from 1470 and on various commissions. Under Richard III he became a 'King's Knight', being granted a pension of £40 a year in 1484 (this out of money payable to the Crown by Bury St Edmunds Abbey). With the arrival of Henry VII in 1485, Sir Robert's close connection with Richard III counted against him and he was dismissed as a justice. He had to wait over a decade before he was re-appointed, in 1497, but he then continued as a justice until his death in 1509.²⁰

His will of 1509 describes him as of Hitcham, with property there and in Chelsworth and Kettlebaston.²¹ His wife Elenore died the same year²² and both she and her husband were buried in Hitcham, where again William Blois²³ noted a memorial stone which has now disappeared. The executors of both the wills were John Jenny, 'Master of Brundish' and Thomas Hudson, parson of Brettenham, possibly because all the Fenys children were minors. John Jenny was Elenore's uncle and was Master of the wealthy chantry at Brundish in east Suffolk. He may have died before discharging his duties for there is a Chancery Proceeding of *c.* 1515–29,²⁴ unfortunately in very poor condition, which appears to be a complaint, probably by John Fenys, Sir Robert's eldest son, against his uncle Sir Edmund Jenny of Knodishall, 'pretending to be guardian', who had entered into certain lands to take 'governance' of them for a term of twelve years.

John Fenys had certainly gained possession of his inheritance by 1524, when he was taxed on an estate in Hitcham valued at £20 (Hervey 1910, 158). He reappears in the Muster Roll for Hitcham, 1539,²⁵ where he is listed as an esquire, with 'a harnes with a bow and arrows'. However it is likely that he had lost possession of Wetherden Hall by that date, as will be seen below. He is probably the 'John Vynes Esq.' who appears as the lessee

of the lands of the manor of Manton in 1544.²⁶ This small manor lay in Hitcham and Kettlebaston, apparently centred on Chapel Farm, on the border of the two parishes. It had been part of the possessions of the Commandery or Preceptory of the Knights of St John at Battsford (Aitkens and Martin, 1990, 170–71), but had been granted by the Crown to Edward Elrington and Humphry Metcalf in 1544.²⁷ They disposed of it rapidly, within the month, to Thomas Poley of London.²⁸ Poley, in turn, disposed of the manor to Ralph Chamberlain of Gedding Hall in 1548 (*C.P.R.* 1547–1548, 278). Chamberlain, a Catholic sympathiser who was knighted in 1553 by Queen Mary, was John Fenys's brother-in-law, having married his sister Elizabeth in the 1530s.

In 1556 an annuity of £20 was granted to 'the king and queen's servant, John Fenys gent.', in consideration of his service to Henry VIII, Edward VI and to the Queen [Mary] at Framlingham (*C.P.R.* 1555–1557, 228). The following year John Fenys Esq. of Hitcham was granted the lordship and site of the Priory of Torksey in Lincolnshire (*C.P.R.* 1555–1557, 498), a small house of Austin Canons that had been dissolved in 1536. An *Inquisition post mortem* at Lincoln for a John Fynys who died in 1557, holding land in Lincolnshire, Nottinghamshire and Yorkshire,²⁹ probably refers to the same person.

The Fenys family of Hitcham give the impression of being well-connected, but probably not very wealthy. One of the orphaned Fenys children, Elizabeth, seems to have gone to live in the household of her cousin, Lord Willoughby de Eresby, at Parham in east Suffolk, for in 1526 he made a bequest of £20 'to her marriage, if she be ruled by my wife and my brother Sir John' (Goff 1930, 14). The purchase of Manton by her husband may have been designed to safeguard her brother's lease of the property – Chamberlain sold the property in 1561, just a few years after John Fenys's death. (A fine two-storeyed bay window, built of Tudor brick, at the rear of Chapel Farm, may be part of a house, possibly unfinished, that John Fenys built.) Some other members of the family may have been living with Elizabeth at Gedding Hall, for the Gedding registers record the burial there of a Robert flynes (? her brother) in 1568, and of a Raphe flynes in 1569. Debt is therefore a possible reason why John Fenys lost Wetherden Hall.

What is certain is that by 1538 Wetherden Hall had passed into the possession of Dame Alice Clere, the widow of Sir John Clere of Ormesby in Norfolk. In her will, dated that year, she mentions that she had already enfeoffed her younger son Thomas of her 'manor of Wythertons', together with all her lands in Hitcham, Kettlebaston and Brettenham.³⁰ This is the first actual reference to a 'manor' of Wetherden Hall. There was a slight connection between the Fenys and Clere families, in that Dame Alice's step-daughter was married to John Fenys's first cousin, William Jenny, but nothing further is known.

Thomas Clere died of his wounds at the siege of Montreuil in France in 1544; however it seems that he had parted with Wetherden Hall before that date to his elder brother, Sir John, for in 1542 Sir John Clere sold the manor to Sir Edmund Rous (Copinger 1909, III, 175). Sir Edmund or Edward Rous, a junior member of the Dennington family, was a Justice of the Peace for Suffolk from 1543, and Member of Parliament for Dunwich in 1554, but appears to have been impecunious and disreputable (MacCulloch 1986, 46, 82).

By 1544 Rous had leased the property to an important personage, Sir John Spring, for in his will dated that year, Spring bequeathed to his wife his 'hole lease and interest for terme of yeres, which I have in my house that I dwell in, and in all the lands and tenements which be Edward Rouses in Hecham'. Sir John, the eldest son and heir of Thomas Spring, 'the Rich Clothier' of Lavenham, was a Justice of the Peace from 1531, Steward of the Liberty of St Etheldreda in 1536 and was knighted in 1547. However Spring was resident in Hitcham before 1544, for he heads the 1539 Muster Roll for Hitcham,³¹ having to provide, owing to his great wealth, twenty *harnes* (suits of body armour) with bows and bills. Whether he was already living at Wetherden Hall by that date is uncertain; but in view of his connection

with Ely, as Steward of the Liberty of St Etheldreda, it is possible that he was occupying Brick House Farm, which, as has been argued above, probably functioned as a high class lodging for Ely; however it is difficult to envisage Sir John living in such a small house for any length of time.

Sir John Spring died in 1547 and was buried in Hitcham church. His large black marble tombstone still lies on the floor of the chancel, but the brass inscription and effigy of him in armour have disappeared, leaving only the indents. Luckily the inscription was recorded in the 17th century, but in two slightly different versions: 'Hoc tegitur saxo Iohannes Spring, qui quidem Iohannes obiit duodecimo die mens. Augusti, Anno a Christo nato, M.D.xlvii. Cuius anime propitiatur Deus. Amen' (Weever 1631, 767); but the local antiquarian, Robert Ryece, recorded it as 'Hoc tegitur saxo Johannes Spring Miles qui quidem Johannes obiit 12 die februarii anno a Christo nato millimo CCCCC xlvii cujus anime propitiatur deus Amen'.³² Ryece also states that of the two shields at the head, one bore 'Springs single coat', whilst the other bore 'Spring empaled Waldegrave & Mouchancy quarterly'. This last shield was also seen by William Blois, but his sketch shows Spring impaling the single coat of Waldegrave, without the Mouchancy quartering.³³

After Spring's death his widow went to live at Cockfield, a few miles from Hitcham, where she died in 1560. She would appear to have resigned her rights in Wetherden Hall to her nephew, George Waldegrave, for in his will dated 1551³⁴ he bequeathed to his wife his manor of Witherton and all his property in Hitcham, Kettlebaston, Brettenham and Preston, which he 'late purchased of Sir Edmund Rouse Kt'.

George Waldegrave, described as an attorney of the Common Pleas (Copinger 1909, III, 175), was the younger brother of Sir William Waldegrave of Smallbridge Hall in Bures St Mary. In her will, dated 1562,³⁵ George's widow requested burial beside her husband in Hitcham church and the stone indent of their memorial survives on the floor at the east end of the north aisle. Luckily, Ryece recorded this lost inscription too: 'Here lyeth the body of George Waldegrave late of Hitcham esquire who died the 1: day of August 1551 and Mary Francis his wife died the 21 of November 1561. leaving behind them 5 sons that is to say William, Richard, George, Edward, and Edmund, which Mary Francis caused this stone to be made by her Executor'.³⁶ The indent shows the figures of George (left) and his wife (right) standing on the rectangular inscription plate, with a separate large shield above them and two other plates below them depicting their five sons (left) and one daughter (right).

George's eldest son, William, was taxed on lands worth £13 in Hitcham in 1568 (Hervey 1909, 103) and was buried at Hitcham in 1577. His will is dated 1577³⁷ and in it he directs that 'all such Timber as I have remayninge in Brettenham hallwood shalbe employed to the Reparacons of the Bridge over the moate and other Reparacons aboute the saide moate'. This reference to building works fits very well with the suggested date of *c.* 1570 for the long range on the moated platform and the barn outside.

William's heir was his son George, who was born *c.* 1570 and was therefore only a boy at his father's death. George's monument in Hitcham church refers to his public service to the Bench and County of forty years and more: he served as Member of Parliament for Sudbury in 1597, was serving as a magistrate by 1601 and was knighted at Whitehall in 1603 (Hasler 1981, 563).

Sir George's only child was his daughter Elizabeth, who married Arthur Coke of Brook Hall in Bramfield, a younger son of Lord Chief Justice Edward Coke. In July 1608, a few months after the marriage, the Lord Chief Justice, with a host of attendants and followers, made a visit to Wetherden Hall that was recorded with something approaching awe in the diary of a neighbouring gentleman, Adam Winthrop of Groton (Robinson 1929, 99). Elizabeth predeceased her father in 1627 and her monument, with a fine effigy of her by the

eminent sculptor Nicholas Stone, is a notable feature of Bramfield Church. Sir George Waldegrave died in 1637, at the age of sixty-seven, and was buried with his ancestors in Hitcham church. His marble monument (much less distinguished than his daughter's) can still be seen on the wall of the north aisle.

Sir George's widow (his second wife, Elizabeth Jermy) moved to Kettlebaston after her husband's death: she paid Ship Money there in 1640 (Redstone 1904, 19) and she was buried there in 1667. The heirs to the estate were Sir George's four granddaughters, the daughters of Arthur and Elizabeth Coke: Elizabeth, Mary, Winifred and Theophila. Following the death of their father in 1629, the orphaned girls may have lived with their grandfather at Wetherden Hall; certainly one of them, Mary, appears to have been resident in Hitcham for she was married there in 1631.

The eldest granddaughter, Elizabeth, married Henry Bing Esq. of Grantchester in Cambridgeshire (a lawyer who was the son of a serjeant-at-law and the grandson of a Regius Professor of Civil Law). The couple may have lived at Wetherden Hall for a time – Bing was of Hitcham when he compounded for delinquency in 1646 (Copinger 1904, III, 181). Also one or two Hitcham copyholds (e.g. Westfield) in the area adjacent to Wetherden Hall, cite him as the holder of adjoining lands, which were 'lately' those of Sir George Waldegrave. Mary Coke married Robert Naunton Esq. of Letheringham, the nephew and heir of Robert Naunton, Secretary of State to James I. The elder Naunton had acquired a twenty-one-year lease of the manor of Hitcham from the Crown in 1619, and this passed briefly to his nephew in 1635, but was in the hands of George Fowler Esq. by 1639. Winifred Coke married Edward Bing of Grantchester (the brother of her sister's husband) and her sister Theophila married their cousin, Robert Coke Esq., another grandchild of Lord Chief Justice Coke.

In the 1660s the various heiresses or their representatives were selling their Hitcham copyholds to Sir George Wenyve of Brettenham Hall, and it is likely that they also sold Wetherden Hall to him at about the same time. Wenyve's lands bordered those of Wetherden Hall and the purchase was a logical extension of his estate; in fact through a series of acquisitions the Wenyve family came to dominate much of the western side of Hitcham. The last representative of the family, Lieutenant-Colonel John Camac, was the largest landowner in Hitcham in 1840. The estate was sold shortly after his death and changed hands several times in the course of the 19th century. At the beginning of this century the Wetherden Hall farm was sold off separately.

It seems likely that Wetherden Hall ceased to be used as a gentleman's seat in the 1650s or 1660s. Interestingly, the 1674 Hearth Tax actually names it as 'Witherdun Hall 6 [hearths]', instead of listing, as is usual, an occupier. This probably means that the house was empty. The number of hearths recorded in 1674 corresponds with the number that existed in the long range before renovation. This long range, though undoubtedly impressive, would not have afforded accommodation of sufficient quality for a gentleman, let alone a knight, especially as at least half the structure consists of farm buildings. It must therefore be a service range, ancillary to a main house which was demolished some time between Sir George Waldegrave's death in 1637 and the Hearth Tax of 1674. Presumably the service range was thought to be adequate enough for a farmhouse, and it continued to be used as such until it was superseded by the Victorian brick house that lies outside the moat.

The rebuilding at the west end of the long range may indicate that the main house was attached, at right angles, at this end, and that this part had to be rebuilt when the house was demolished. Assuming that the main house was of the same date as the long range and the barn, the most fashionable plan for a grand house in the 1570s would have been an E-shaped one, as had recently been built by the Waldegraves' close relations at Rush-

brooke Hall and Kentwell Hall. At both places it is likely that the moats that surround the houses are contemporary and part of the original plan. However there are problems in trying to reconstruct Wetherden Hall as a similar house. On such a large square moat the back range, to be symmetrical, would have to have been about 66m long, which is clearly excessive: the houses of the Waldegraves' much wealthier cousins had main ranges of only 46m (Rushbrooke Hall) and 40m (Kentwell Hall).

However the house of George Waldegrave's brother-in-law, Sir Clement Heigham, at Barrow in west Suffolk may give a clue as to a more likely layout at Wetherden Hall. Heigham's house was demolished in the early 18th century, but luckily there is a sketch of it on a map of 1779, copying one of 1597 (Fig. 39).³⁸ Like Wetherden Hall, the house was surrounded by a large square moat (126 × 110m), which still survives, though at Barrow Hall the entrance is not central, but is offset to one side. The L-shaped group of buildings opposite this entrance consisted of a double-storeyed main range, *c.* 40m long (possibly with short cross wings at either end) running north-south, and, at right angles, a single-storeyed range, *c.* 35m long, with dormer windows in a series of small gables in the roof. From the way they are drawn it is not clear whether the two ranges actually joined or were just close together at one corner. The nature of the single-storeyed range is not clear, but three chimneys are shown, so it must have contained some rooms for human occupation. It is possible that what is shown is an unfinished E-shaped house, but if so the

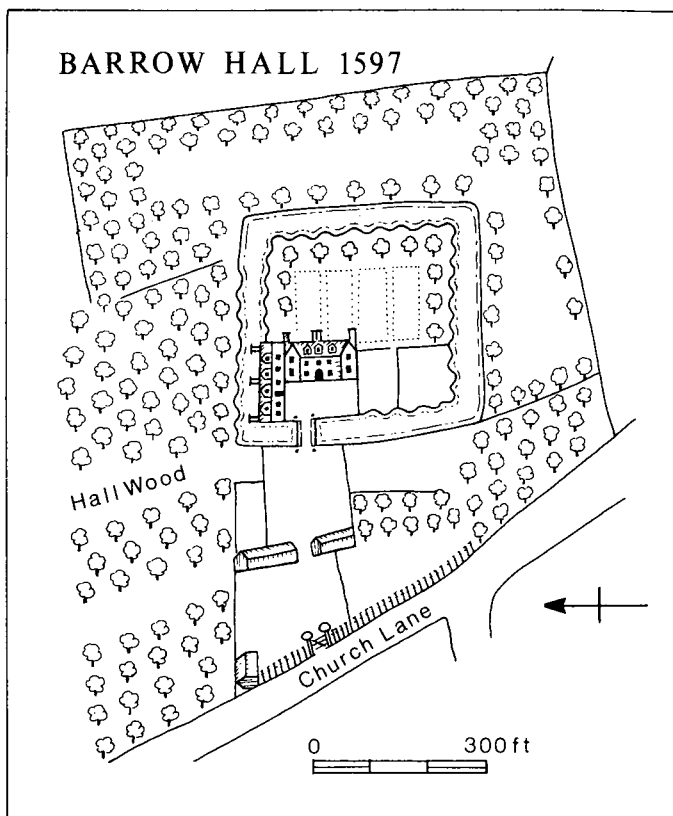


Fig. 39 – Plan of Barrow Hall, redrawn from a map of 1779 by Thomas Warren 'copied exactly' from one made in 1597 (S.R.O.B., 862/2).

building work was taking some time, for Heigham had acquired the property in 1540 and presumably started to build soon afterwards. If it is accepted as a finished building, with a probable service range aligned along the north side of the platform, the parallel with Wetherden Hall is striking. This makes it likely that there were only two ranges at Wetherden Hall: the existing long range and a demolished main range lying at right angles to it at the east end.

Despite its positional similarities with the service range at Barrow Hall, the long range at Wetherden Hall, with its integral barn and much greater length, is clearly different. An apparently similar range, 72m long, exists at Crow's Hall in Debenham. However this seems to have started as a nine- or ten-bay timber-framed barn of the 16th century, to which a three-bay manorial court hall and a six-bay stable (?) were added in the mid 16th century. Also this forms the south side of an outer court that adjoins the moated house. This position outside the moat conforms to the usual pattern at moated sites, where the farm buildings flank the approach to the moat, but are not on it. The apparent presence of an integral barn in the long range at Wetherden Hall is thus highly unusual, especially as there is a contemporary barn outside the moat in the more normal position. At present no close parallel to this extraordinary range is known in Suffolk, and it is therefore unfortunate that the barn end of this unique structure has been demolished.

The close comparison with Barrow Hall makes it likely that the Wetherden Hall moat was a 16th-century construction, very likely contemporary with the house. This would make it one of a group of very regularly shaped moats, commonly with brick-revetted sides that are characteristic of the late 15th and 16th centuries, and like many of them (e.g. Hawstead Place and Rushbrooke Hall) it occupies a prominent place on a hilltip, with extensive views across the surrounding countryside. The partial nature of the brick revetting of the moat can also be paralleled elsewhere, e.g. at Crow's Hall in Debenham, where it is clear that the revetting was done for display and was confined to those areas that were likely to be seen by visitors – presumably the high cost of this work led to its omission in places where it would not be noticed and admired.

From the above it emerges that there is very little on the site that dates from the time of Richard Witherton and the Fenys family. Interestingly, an aerial photograph taken in 1986³⁹ shows the cropmark of another, smaller, moat to the east of the present one (Fig. 37). There is a strong possibility that this is the site of the original Wetherden Hall, abandoned and infilled when a larger and grander moat was built by the Waldegraves in the mid 16th century.

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NOTES

- 1 Information from Timothy Easton, publication in preparation; see also Easton 1986. Painted brickwork of c. 1525 is also recorded from London (Curnow 1984, 2).
- 2 S.R.O.B., T 147A/1, 2.
- 3 S.R.O.B., 392/14.
- 4 S.R.O.B., 392/15.
- 5 S.R.O.B., 392/1.
- 6 *Ibid.*
- 7 The Ely Coucher Book, C.U.L., E.D.R. G/3/27.
- 8 Proved 1505, P.C.C., 30 Holgrave.
- 9 Proved 1558, N.C.C., 50 Ingold.
- 10 D.E. Davy. 'Suffolk Collections', B.L., Add. MS 19, 134, ff. 97–98.
- 11 C.U.L., E.D.R. G/3/27.
- 12 B.L., Add. MS 6165, p. 247.
- 13 Proved 1593, N.C.C., 332 Clearke.
- 14 P.R.O., E. 134/6, Jas I. East. 8.
- 15 C.U.L., E.D.R. G/3/27.
- 16 Proved 1462, Archdeaconry of Sudbury, Baldwync 363.
- 17 Of Boxted; will proved 1454, P.C.C., 10 Rous.
- 18 S.R.O.I., GC 17: 755, iii, 320.
- 19 Proved 1466, N.C.C., 124 Betyns.
- 20 Wedgwood 1936, 323–24. His biography of Sir Robert Fenys fails to note his Hitcham connection and erroneously suggests a possible connection with Heacham in Norfolk. See also Copinger 1904, II, 370 and MacCulloch 1986, 323–24, 414.
- 21 Proved 1509, P.C.C., 17 Bennett.
- 22 Proved 1509, P.C.C., 21 Bennett.
- 23 S.R.O.I., GC 17: 755, iii, 320.
- 24 P.R.O., C1/517/54.
- 25 *L.P.*, XIV pt i, no. 625, 5; Powell 1918, 211–18.
- 26 P.R.O., E. 318/10/411.
- 27 *L.P.*, XIX pt i, no. 442, 16.
- 28 *L.P.*, XIX pt i, no. 444, 20.
- 29 *The Genealogist*, N.S., XXV, 65.
- 30 *Catalogue of Ancient Deeds*, H.M.S.O., v, A, 12173.
- 31 *L.P.*, XIV pt i, no. 625, 5; Powell 1918, 211–18.
- 32 Ryce, ff. 55, 64.
- 33 S.R.O.I., GC 17: 755, iii, 320.
- 34 Proved 1551/2, P.C.C., 2 Powell.
- 35 Proved 1562, P.C.C., 28 Streat.
- 36 Ryce, ff. 55, 64.
- 37 Proved 1577, P.C.C., 37 Doughty.
- 38 S.R.O.B., 862/2.
- 39 Suffolk County Council Planning Department, 195/1686.

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- Add. MSS Additional Manuscripts.
- B.L. British Library.

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- C.U.L. Cambridge University Library.
N.C.C. Norwich Consistory Court.
P.C.C. Prerogative Court of Canterbury.
P.R.O. Public Record Office.
Ryce Ryece, R. (1555–1638), 'A Description of Suffolk' etc., B.L. Harleian MS 3873.
S.R.O.B. Suffolk Record Office, Bury St Edmunds Branch.
S.R.O.I. Suffolk Record Office, Ipswich Branch.