

TWO HEADCORN CLOTH HALLS.

BY H. S. COWPER, F.S.A.

HEADCORN HOUSE, No. I.

THE main purpose of this Paper is to record the plans of two timber-framed buildings at Headcorn, which belong to a class, as far as I know, undescribed in our Proceedings. Timber-framed houses in Kent are numerous, and in many instances of considerable interest, but most are of course of the usual domestic type. As will be seen in the following description, the subjects of this Paper belong to a different and rarer class.

The building I shall first describe is about two hundred yards east of Headcorn Church, on the south side of the road, towards which it presents its gable, a high pitched one, which suggests an early building. There are also other old houses on the same side of the road, but they appear to be of the normal village types, with their fronts facing the highway.

The structure in question lies nearly north and south, and the main portion is a rectangular building measuring $32\frac{1}{2}$ by $17\frac{1}{2}$ feet, divided originally into two stories, and apparently with only one room on the ground floor and one above. Both the ground floor and the next floor have, however, been divided into several rooms, and the interior has been so covered up with paper and plaster, that it is difficult to find any original features, although probably a good many exist, though hidden. The chimney stack is of a comparatively modern date; a floor has been inserted about $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet above the first floor and about the eaves level, and it would be necessary to clear away all these inserted features to expose the original construction. In the accompanying plan and section this has been done.

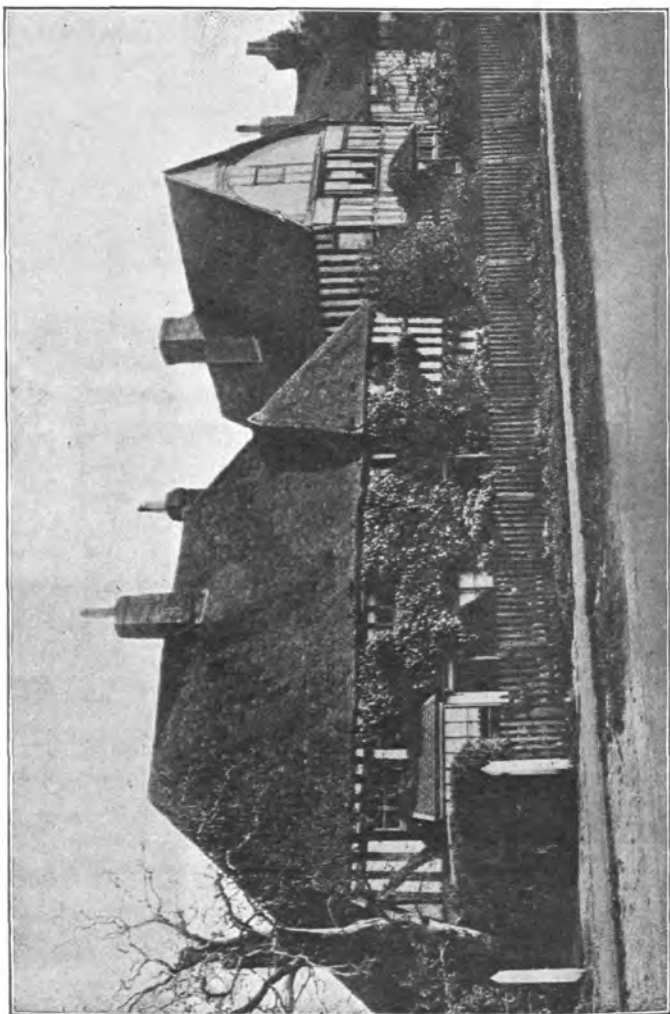
The building is framed in three bays, the width of each between the main posts (centre to centre) being approximately 10 feet, and the unit used in setting out being, I think, $10\frac{1}{2}$ feet. Mr. R. T. Blomfield, who has given some notes on these buildings in the *Portfolio*,* has suggested that it may have been one bay longer to the south. There is, however, absolutely no evidence available that this was the case, although the other building of the same class (to be described) is much prolonged.

The ground floor was apparently one large low room about 7 feet 9 inches high to the under side of the heavy girders crossing from main post to main post, and carrying the floor of the upper room. These main posts are substantial timbers, for they stand nearly 18 feet high, and on the ground floor are about 15 inches by 17 or 18 inches. They are moulded on the inner edges (see section, Fig. 1), and the same moulding is carried round the room as a cornice along the horizontal beams in the wall, and also along each side of the girders. The staircase was probably always where it is indicated in the plan, though now modernised. The bay window to the north is also modern, and the lights on each side appear to have been similar to those upstairs, to be noticed later.

The room upstairs must have been a handsome one before the insertion of the ceiling. Here we find the main posts are cut out, forming slender shafts with caps and bases standing out in solid oak. Above the half octagon which forms the capital is a bracket-like projection, again surmounted by a series of mouldings which projects like an upper capital† (or almost with the effect of a hammer beam), and carries the arched principal rafters of the roof.† This moulded bracket appears to be 2 feet from front to back, and may possibly be the root end of the tree. The caps and bases of the slender shafts below curiously vary much in size in the different posts. (See Figs. 2, 3, and 4.)

* The *Portfolio*, edited by P. G. Hamerton, London, 1887, p. 3.

† This upper capital is hidden by the later floor, and the mouldings cannot be examined, but can only be traced by touch by passing the hand along them behind the floor boards.



OLD HOUSES, HEADCORN.
(The Gable End is that of House No. 1.)

The construction of the roof can only be examined by going into the attics, but I have shewn it to the best of my ability in the section (Fig. 5). It may be described as a truss rafter roof with moulded ribs springing from the post brackets and dividing each bay. The purlins are also moulded, and at the intersection of the ribs and purlins, and on the beam overhead, are flat square spaces, as if ornamental bosses have been removed.* There was originally an oak cornice all round this hall, continuing the moulding of the upper bracket. All mouldings in the roof itself are uniform, as shewn in Fig. 6, shewing the section of a rib.

As regards windows to this room, all those indicated on the plan at the north and south ends are of comparatively recent date, but some idea of the original method of lighting can be seen at the north end, where we can trace on either side of the modern window, narrow lights now filled with plaster, each 1 foot 8 inches wide. These lights are two on each side facing north, and one on each side facing east and west. They appear (as far as can be traced under the plaster and wall paper) to have had round heads, but in their present condition it is impossible to say more about them. Similar lights apparently existed on the ground floor directly below, but nothing like them can be traced at the south end of the building. A projecting oriel may have existed in the centre on both floors, but as there was no oversail, the evidence of this is missing.

The height of this interesting room from floor to apex of the rafter is about $22\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and as the roof appears to be a beautifully proportioned one, it must have been a handsome and dignified chamber.

Mr. Blomfield, in his article referred to, remarks that externally the building is not remarkable, except for the framing of the gables, which reproduces the arch of the principal rafters within—a constructive feature rare in England, but common in France. But, as a matter of fact,

* In the first bay from the north this boss socket overhead is omitted, and the mouldings meet.

weather-boarding hides nearly everything except the north gable and the upper part of the east side. There is, however, an original bargeboard still remaining, though in a very decayed condition, on the north gable, and the windows on both floors appear to have had, between the lights, small shafts with caps, something like those on the main posts inside. But these, and the mouldings over the door, are so decayed that the detail is unrecognizable and cannot be drawn.

This very interesting building is the earliest timber structure I have seen in the Weald, and Mr. Blomfield dates the roof about A.D. 1400. The building attached to it on the west side may be contemporary.

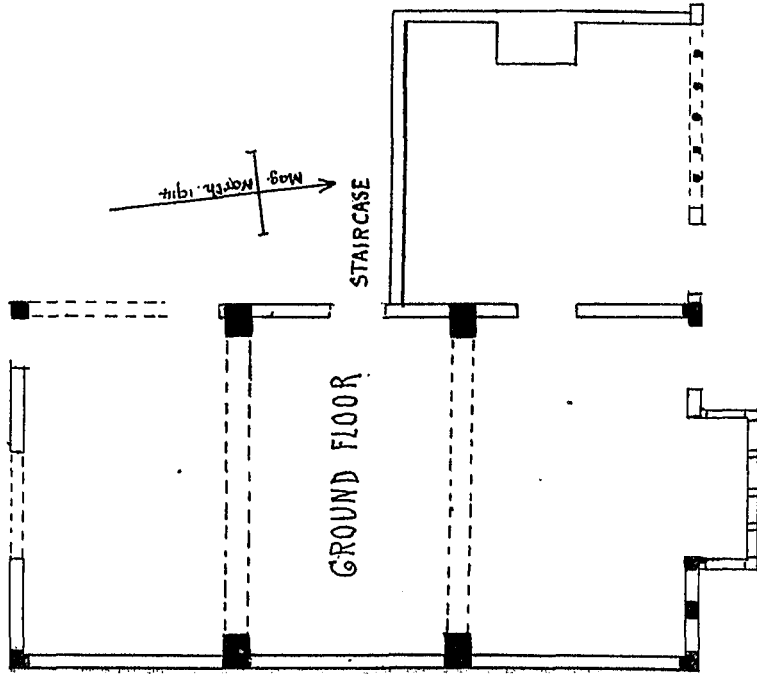
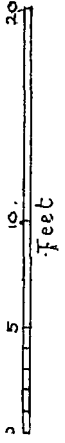
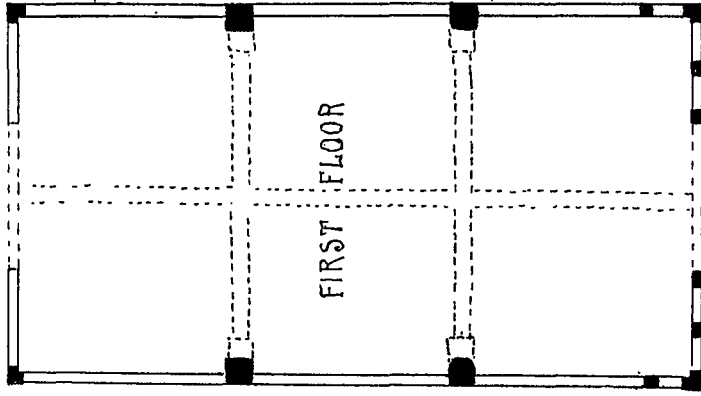
HEADCORN HOUSE, No. II.

This remarkable building stands to the east of the Church, with its east front against the high road, while one gable looks over part of the churchyard. It is quite a feature as one enters Headcorn from Sutton Valence or Staplehurst.

The total dimensions of the main block, which is a parallelogram, is 60 feet by 18 feet on the ground floor, as originally set out, increased to about 61 feet at the first floor by an oversailing story, the difference being filled by modern brick walling as shewn in the ground plan by hatched lines. The structure is divided into seven bays by six pair of posts and principals.

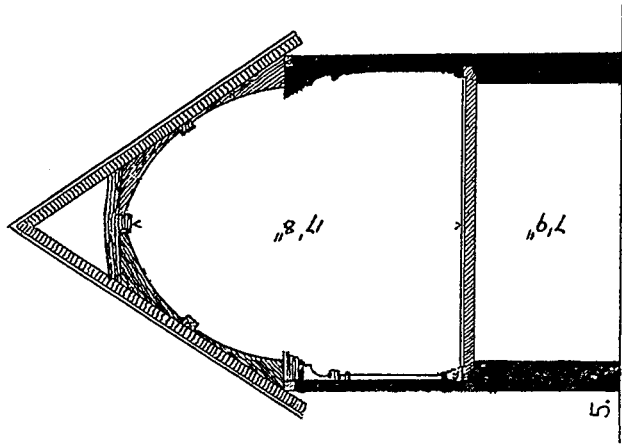
All the posts south of C are moulded (Fig. 1) on the ground floor, while north of C they are plain.

Throughout, the building is sadly altered and cut up. On the ground floor a modern shop has been made at the south end, and between the points A and B the original east wall has been cleared away and the posts mercilessly hacked about. The entire block is now in two

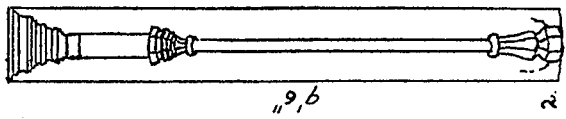


HEADCORN CLOTH HALL N° 1

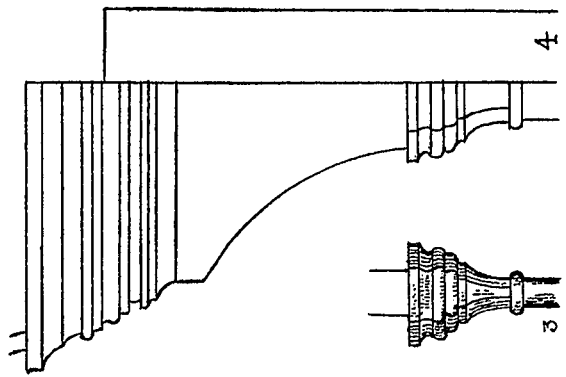
HEADCORN CLOTH HALL
No. 1.



SECTION THROUGH HALL



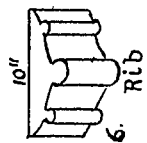
Oak Post 1st floor
East Side



Oak Post with Capital & Bracket



1.
Section Mampost



6.

tenements, a bakehouse with shop, and a cottage, and is divided by numerous modern partitions, and into three stories instead of two. There are also two inserted chimney stacks, the dates of which are immaterial, since they had no part in the original object of the building. All these features are omitted in my plan except the modern external brick walls. The partitions which are shewn are certainly original ones, except that marked D D, which I am not certain of, though I believe it to be so. In the first room the posts appear to have been set out 9 feet apart, but in the other rooms only 8 feet apart.

The main entrance was presumably somewhere in the wall now destroyed to make the shop. I have indicated a probable position on the plan, but it may have been further north.

The doors marked E and F F are both original. E leads to the staircase indicated on the first floor plan. F F have both depressed Tudor arches, that leading out of the building (originally) having spandrels carved in good style, similar to those to be described on the first floor.

No original windows can be traced in these lower rooms. Those on each side of letter C are probably in the position of original windows.

The height of these lower rooms is 7 feet 8 inches to the under side of the girder.

On the first floor the original arrangement, as shewn in the plan, was three halls open to the roof, the chief apartment being the southern one, which is of three bays, and measured $26\frac{1}{2}$ feet by 17 feet.

This room is entered by a Tudor doorway at the north end of the west side from a lobby at the stair head. It is, of course, now ceiled in so that the arrangements of the roof can only be found by examination in the attics.

This room I have partly described in a note in Vol. XXIX. (p. 201) of our Proceedings, and I now give a section (Fig. 2) shewing both floors and the roof. The latter, as can be seen, is of the tie-beam and king-post type, and there are large curved braces below the tie-beam, which form a

depressed Tudor arch at the division of each bay. The king-post is shewn in Fig. 3.

The interesting thing about this room is the carving of the spandrels of these braces, which is of excellent character, "admirably free" as Mr. Blomfield puts it in his description.

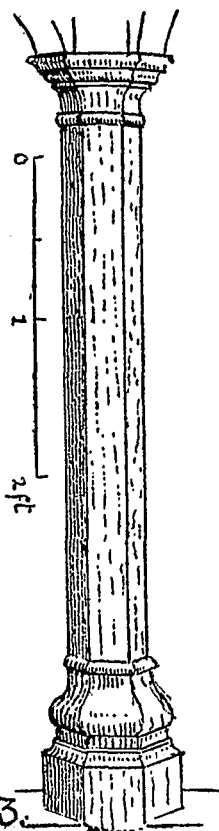


Fig. 3.

The main or story posts which carry the tie-beams of this building are richly moulded (Fig. 9), and the inner members or mouldings are continued along under the spandrels which form the Tudor arch. This moulding finishes at the floor level with an octagonal base similar to

I regret that the position of this carving does not lend itself to photography, and it requires a much more skilled hand than mine to make adequate drawings.*

South Arch, south side, west spandrel: Within a cusped quatrefoil, a character which is either an heraldic chess rook, or a very unusual letter I. (Fig. 4.)

Same side, east spandrel. The letter A in a similar quatrefoil. (Fig. 5.)

On the north side in both spandrels we find a big rose with foliage behind.

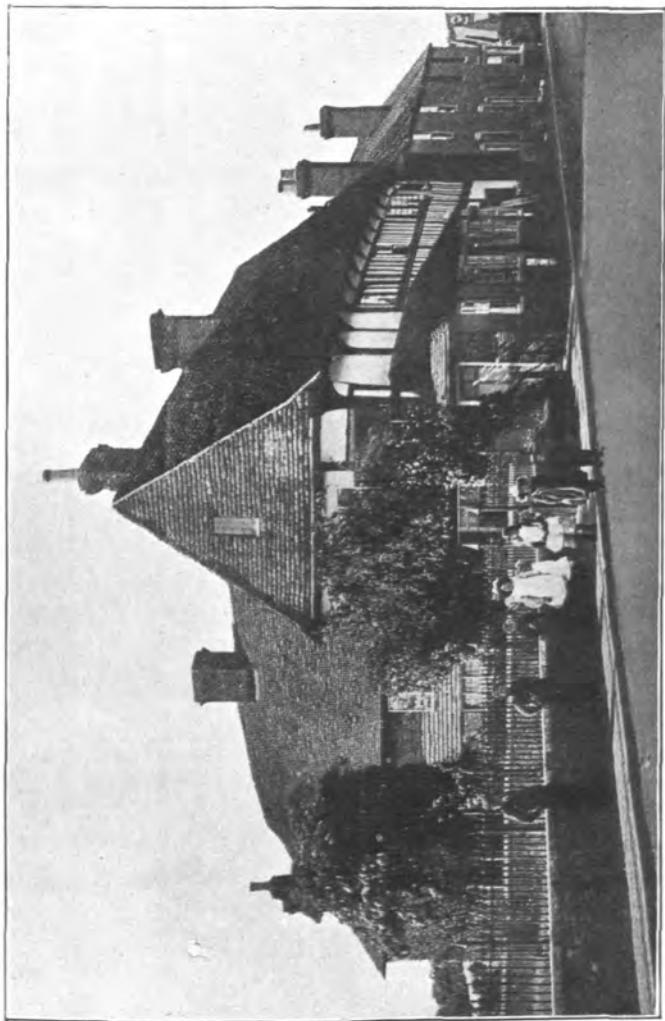
North Arch, south side, west spandrel: A and I joined by a knot, but foliage behind the letters. (Fig. 6, and PLATE.)

North Arch, east spandrel: The chess-rook badge (?) and A joined as above. (Fig. 7.)

On the north side both spandrels have leaves and foliage very well treated.

Besides the initials, etc., the spandrels are ornamented with cusps and trefoil carving of late Gothic character. (Fig. 8.)

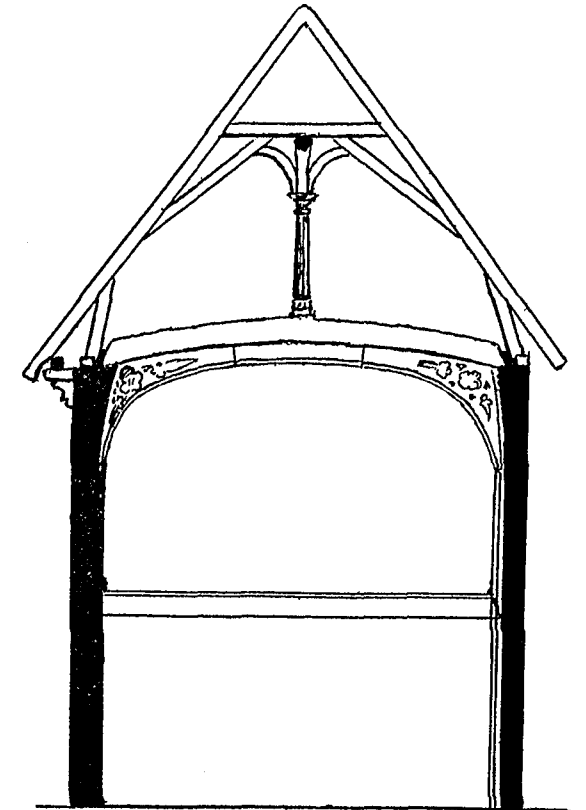
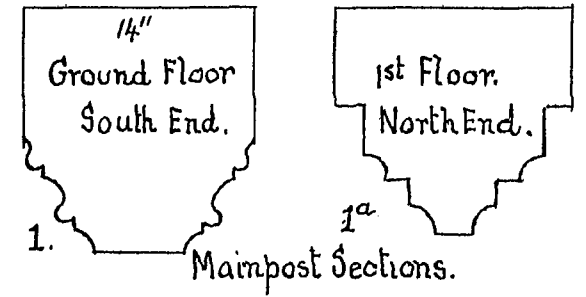
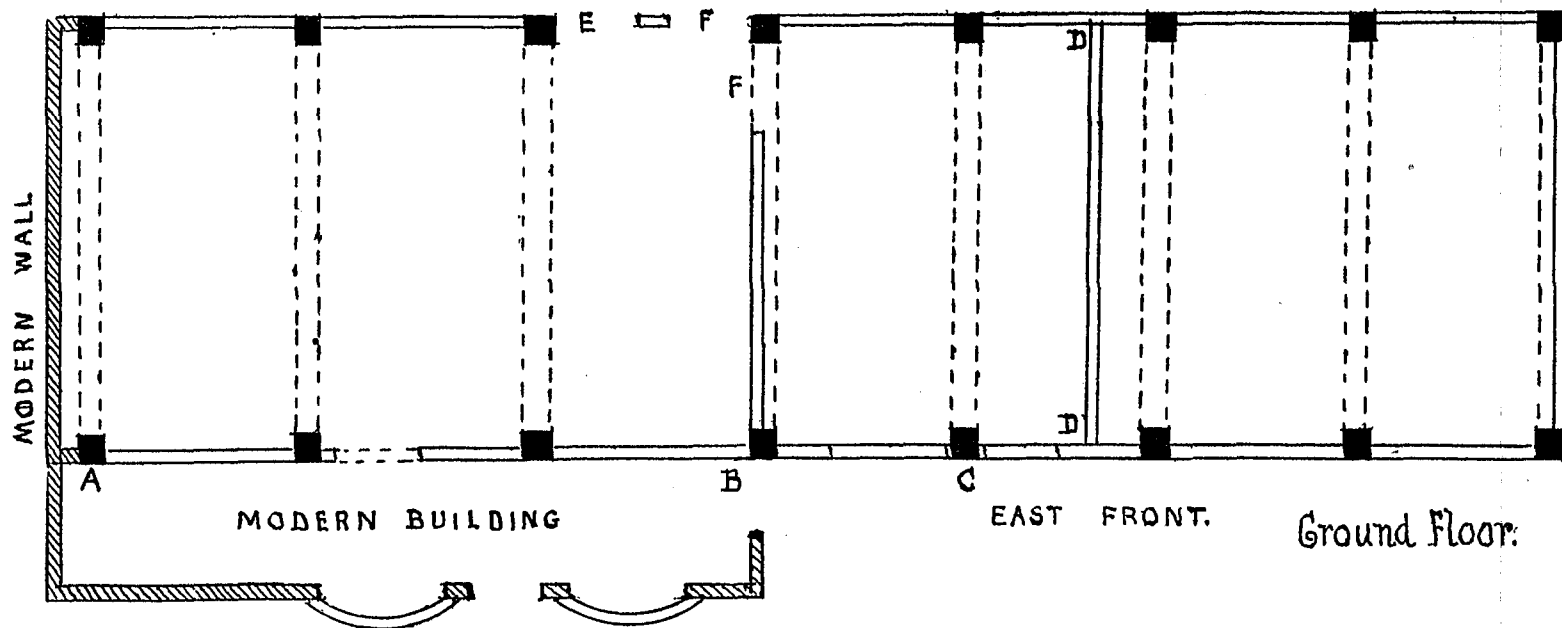
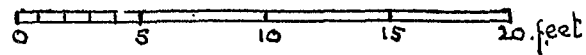
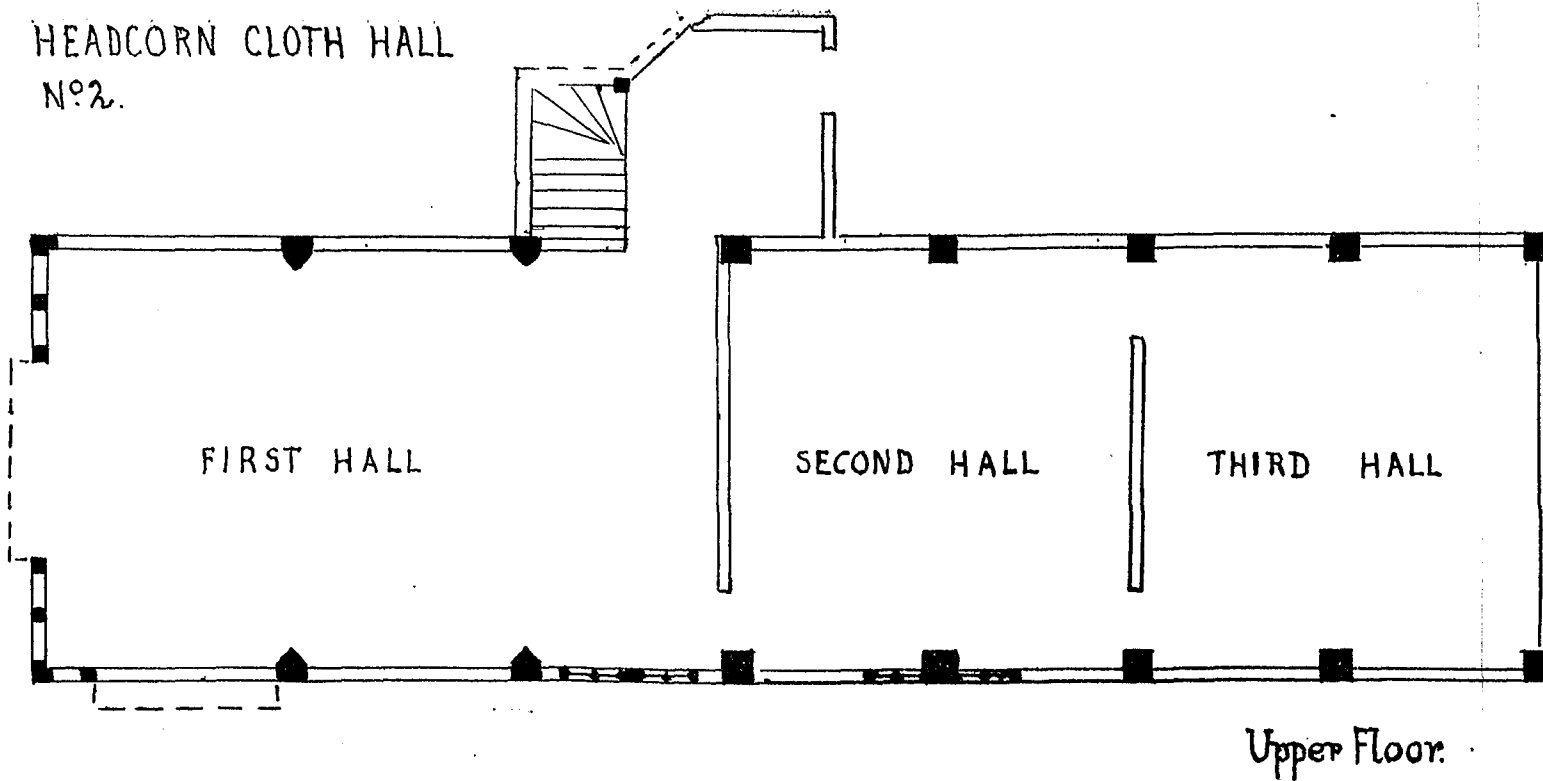
* Since writing the above, Mr. Reginald Blomfield has most kindly sent me a drawing of one of these, which is now reproduced.



HEADCORN HOUSE, NO. 2.

(From the South.)

HEADCORN CLOTH HALL
No. 2.



SECTION SOUTH END.

the bases of the shafts in the house first described. (Fig. 10.) The king-posts shewn in Fig. 3, now only to be seen in the attic, are of quite good character.

The total height of the building is about 32 feet, and of this room, from floor to apex, about 23 feet. An examination of the sections of this hall and that in the other house will reveal an entire difference in constructive system, and probably a considerable difference in date.

With regard to the lighting of this hall, it had at the south end, corner lights, two on each side, and one facing east (all now closed), similar to those at the north gable of the other house. These were 5 feet 10 inches high, $1\frac{1}{2}$ feet wide, divided by a 7-inch post. In the middle of the gable was a projecting window under the overhang which has entirely disappeared, and can only be traced by the mortice holes in the brestsummer above. Another projecting bay has also disappeared from the south end of the east front. Presumably these bay windows were original features, but such windows were so frequent in local sixteenth-century work that it is not certain.

At the north-east corner a door (now blocked) leads into the next hall, and next to this door in the east wall is a four-light original window with mullions of the section shewn in Fig. 11. Each pair of lights is 2 feet 1 inch wide, and between each pair there is a 9-inch post.

The second or central hall was of two bays only, and measured 16 feet by 17 feet. Its present condition with inserted ceiling and chimney stack is deplorable. It had two two-light windows similar to those last-mentioned facing the street, but one is now closed up; the little arched heads remain in the other. The roof is similar to the bigger hall, and has a similar king-post, but the main posts have a different and plainer moulding (Fig. 1A), and the braces below the tie-beam are uncarved.

From this hall two doors with flat Tudor arch and hollow chamfer lead to Hall No. 3, originally 16 feet long. This part is now a separate cottage, and there is no way into the attic, which is not boarded. With the aid of a ladder I

managed to screw my head under the tiles, and so ascertain the existence of a king-post, and observe the roof construction and rafters which elsewhere are ceiled in. These, as shewn in the section, are drawn from this limited point of observation.

Now, a few words as to the exterior of this curious building. In the first place there is no jetty story or overhang on the front, which is so characteristic of Kentish timber houses. Neither is there in the other house already described. But there is a peculiarity in roof construction as seen from the road. The rafters (not properly indicated in Fig. 12 done several years ago), instead of resting directly on the wall plate, project over a series of false joist ends which are carried on brackets, tenoned into the main and intermediate posts. This was presumably intended to carry the rainfall clear of the walls. A similar roof at Dunster in Somerset is illustrated by Parker and Turner.* The roof does not appear to overhang the same way on the west side, but the mass of weather-boarding and other buildings make that part very difficult to study.

The house was close timbered, that is, it has upright intermediate posts between the main posts along most of the street front, and an oaken string is carried under the windows. The south end oversails not only at the main floor level, but also in a line with the eaves. I am not quite sure whether the last was not an alteration when an attic floor was inserted. At the south corner of the east wall may also be seen an interesting little carved shaft similar to the base moulding of the main posts in the big room. This certainly ornamented the jamb of the window.

The cottages at the back which I have not planned may be part of the original structure, but the roof is much lower, and I hesitate to form an opinion.

With regard to the date of this house, I see that Mr. Blomfield, taking into consideration the mouldings of the strings and other features, saw no reason "for

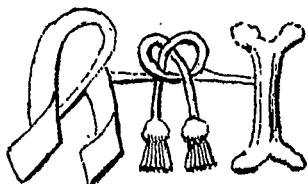
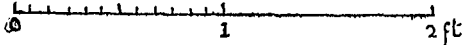
* *Domestic Architecture*, fifteenth century, part ii., p. 339.



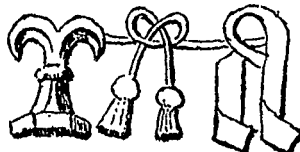
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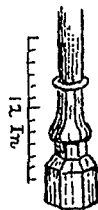
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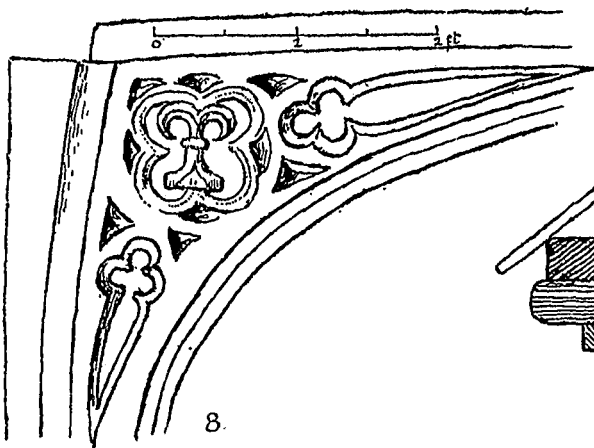
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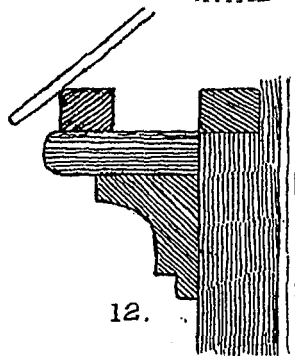
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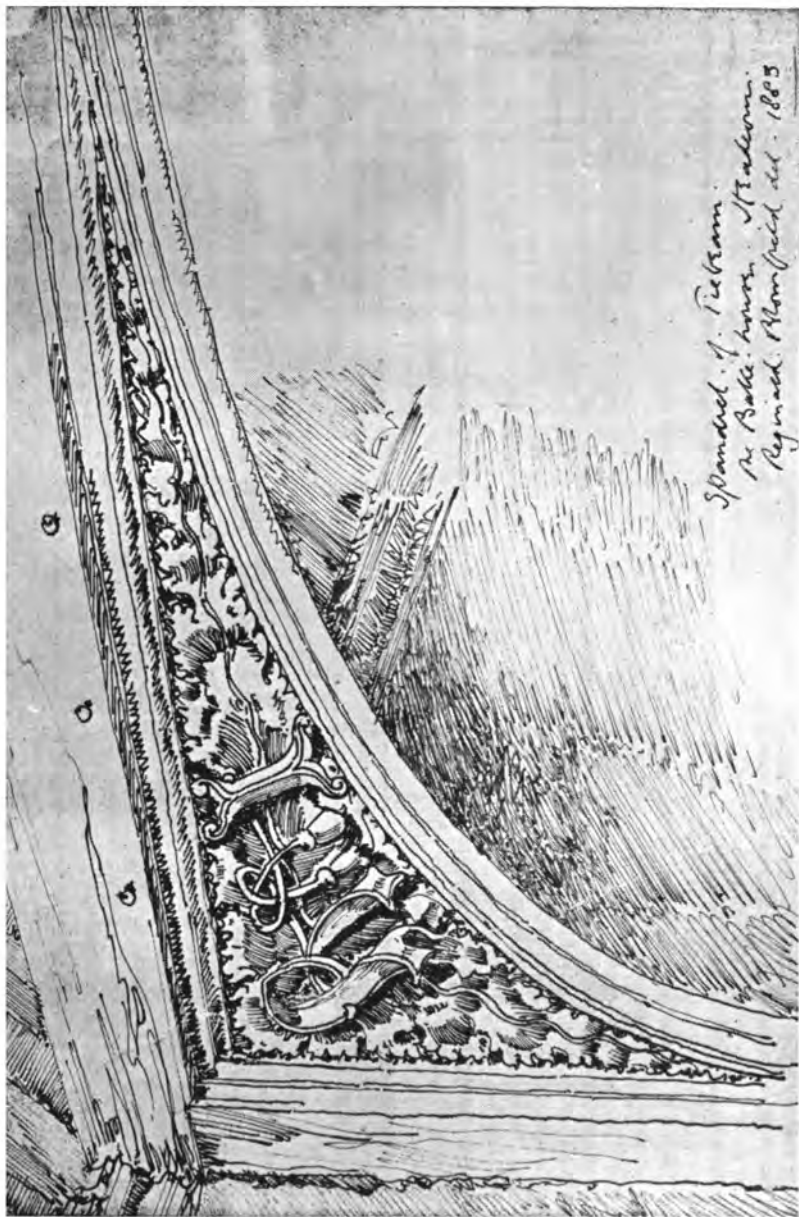
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12.

HEADCORN CLOTH HALL. No. 2.

DETAILS.



Spandrel of Peckham.
The Bells, house, St. Paul's.
Reynold, Mansfield del. 1885

SPANDREL IN HOUSE NO. 2.

dating it earlier than the end of the fifteenth century." And I, in my note of the subject in Volume XXIX. of our Transactions, suggested the middle of that century. Possibly it may lie between the two.

What is more important than the exact date is the meaning of the curious arrangement of both these buildings. I do not wish to recapitulate in full what I wrote formerly on this subject,* but the most probable suggestion I was able to make about the building just described, was that as the chess-rook badge occurs twice on the carved spandrels, it was probably erected by, or at any rate in some way connected with, the Boddendam (or Boddenden) family of Lashenden (a place only two miles from Headcorn), which was a family of some position, and who bore on their coat of arms three chess rooks. Probably, like most Biddenden families, they were clothiers.

These two buildings are not domestic, although they have been taken for such by some writers. The placing of the large open halls upon the first floor, with large low rooms beneath them, and without the usual office and parlour wings at each end, points to some use totally alien to the usual domestic requirements.

It cannot, I think, be doubted that we have here two veritable "cloth halls," a term used frequently loosely and indefinitely, and one on which it does not appear easy to obtain accurate information as to its proper application.

It can hardly be doubted that "cloth hall" is an old term, and the only thing that appears certain is that its meaning was not "Clothiers' hall house." But when we come to enquire how these halls were used, it is difficult to meet with any authoritative explanation. The new English Oxford Dictionary gives us—

"Cloth hall, a hall or exchange where sellers or buyers of woollen cloths meet at stated times to transact business."

* "Old Timber Houses in the Weald," *Archæologia Cantiana*, XXIX., pp. 203-4.

while Furley, in whose *History of the Weald* there is much of interest and value concerning the history of the Kentish Clothiers and their trade,* says—

“The residences of the employees with their gable ends were more substantial, and besides the factories attached to them, they possessed large and lofty halls for the deposit of their stock.”

I have put myself in communication with several gentlemen engaged in south-country research, but without any definite result. It is thought that they were probably erected in compliance with Statute, and that they were used either as court rooms by members of Trade Guilds in cloth-making centres, or for storage, and inspection by the Government officials. The last-named use appears to me very probable. By Statute I believe these officials were *searchers*, *measurers*, and *alnagers*, the last of whom collected the aulnage duty, and I think sealed the cloths. Somewhere, no doubt, there is contemporary documentary evidence of value on the subject, but I do not know exactly where to look for it. It is difficult to understand, for instance, why such excellent detail should be found applied to the timbering of these halls, and especially why in House No. 2 the south hall should have so much decorative detail, while the other halls were left so plain.

For permission to use the photographs in this Paper I am indebted to Mr. H. Tippen of Headcorn.

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* Vol. ii., pp. 323, 325, 408, 479, 566—573, 606, etc.