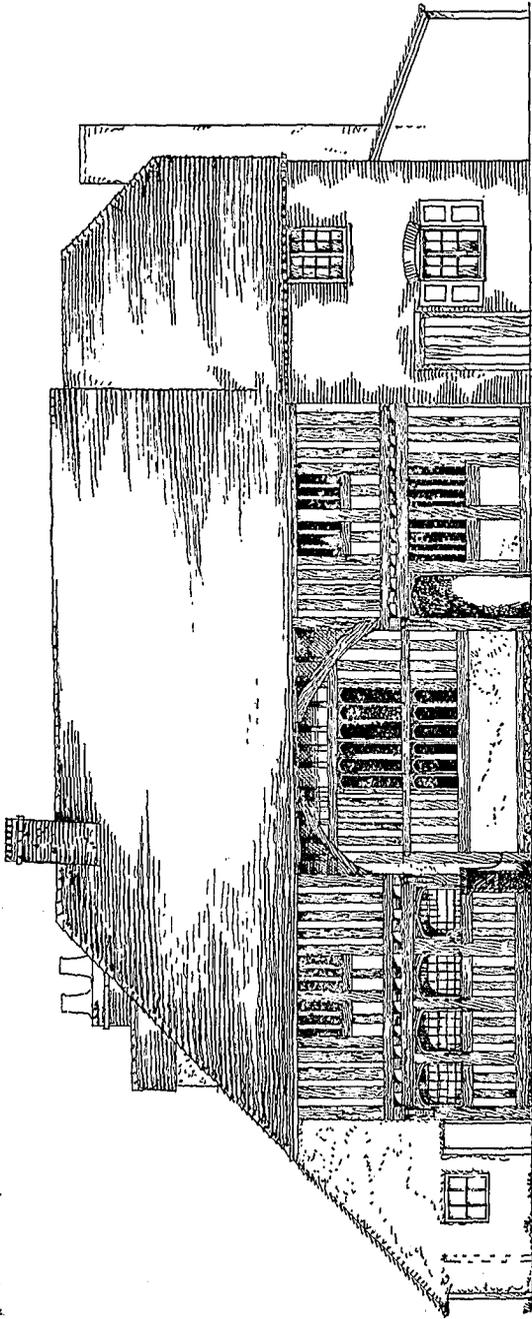


AN OLD TIMBER HOUSE AT SUNDRIDGE.

BY AYMER VALLANCE.

IN the village street of Sundridge, near the western, or Brasted, end of the same, stands an old house which, having recently been stripped of accumulated coats of plaster and other intrusive accretions, proves to be a singularly interesting specimen of a mediæval dwelling of the hall-house type. Though it is hazardous to pretend to fix the exact date of its erection, it may be assigned approximately to the middle of the fifteenth century. The house is situated by the south side of the roadway, with its principal façade looking towards the north. In elevation the scheme of this house does not differ from that of normal houses of its type. The line of the wall on the ground level is continuous, but the overhanging upper storey at either end has the effect of making the middle portion, containing the hall, to look as though it were recessed, an effect enhanced by the pair of braces which help to carry forward the eaves in one unbroken line from end to end of the building.

The plan of the house, as originally constructed, without the incongruous additions now attached to either end, is simply an oblong parallelogram, divided transversely into three almost equal portions, the central portion, the great hall, being thus relatively small in area. So small is it in fact that it consists of a single bay only, with no tie-beam to divide it across the middle. Moreover, the available floor-space of the hall being so curtailed, in order to avoid encroaching upon it further, the screen passage does not occupy the normal position within the hall itself, but was situated beyond the hall, though immediately adjacent, on the ground floor of the left-hand, or eastern, division of the building. The lower part of the east wall of the hall, then, actually constitutes a screen, and contains remains of the



COTTAGE

FRONT ELEVATION SHEWING ORIGINAL OPENINGS



DRAWN BY BEVERIDGE & CO. 1923

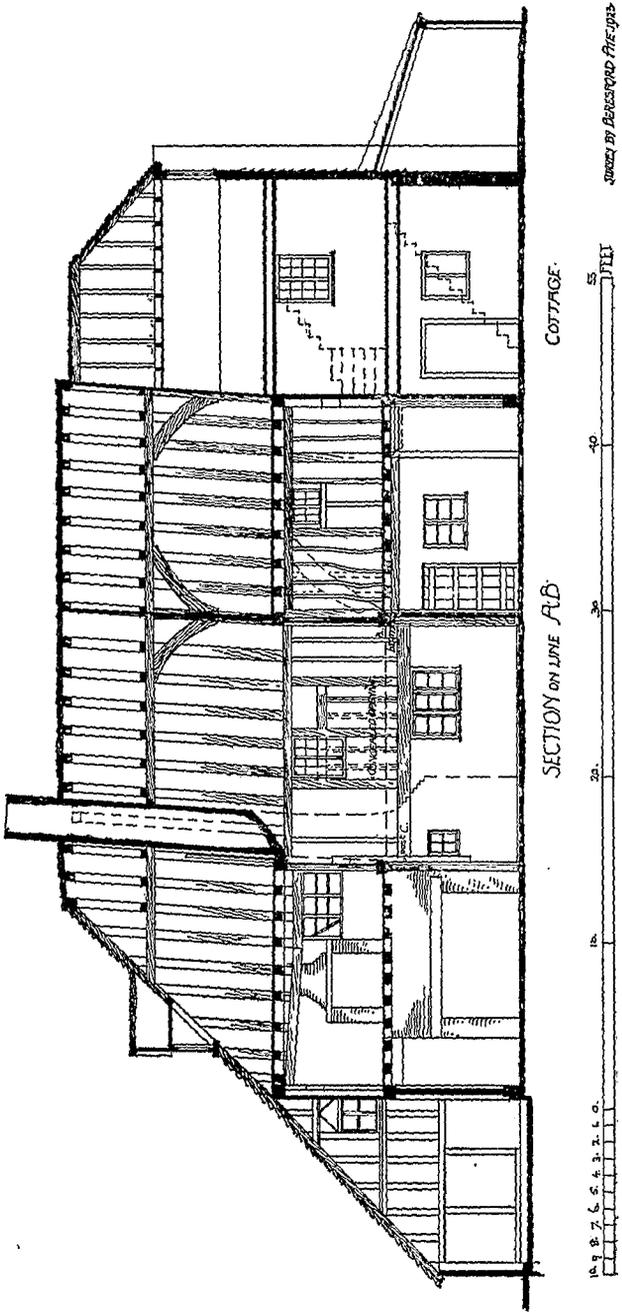
SUNDRIDGE, MEDIEVAL HOUSE. FRONT ELEVATION.

arched doorways which opened from the hall into the screened passage. The screen which bounded the passage on the other—the east—side, with its openings to the buttery and offices, has been entirely removed. No attempt has been made to supply its place, though the marks showing where it originally stood are plainly visible.

On taking up the brick flooring of the hall the original earth floor was reached, and there were discovered the remains of the ancient central hearth, roughly in the form of a circle, paved with irregularly-shaped stones. Close by was found a heap of ashes, which had been brushed aside and trodden into a compact mass. There was no trace of a louvre in the roof overhead, but the smoke would have found its way out through the unglazed windows in either side wall of the hall.

There is no projecting bay, either because the house was of too modest a scale for such an embellishment, or else because the bay itself had not become developed into a recognized feature of the hall by the date when this house was built. The principal window in the hall is therefore flush with the wall. It consists of six transomed lights, having arched heads both above and below the transom. In default of glazing, the window originally was protected by shutters, hung on iron hooks, and swinging inwards into the room. In the western jamb of the upper half of the window there yet remains the topmost hook. The hook below it, for the lower ride of the same shutter, has disappeared, but the hole into which the hook was inserted may still be seen. Curiously enough, the top of this window does not extend up to the level of the wall-plate or the eaves; but there is a considerable interval between, which is filled externally by a timber-framed cant of plaster, while internally there is a corresponding hollow. One would rather have expected the inner face of the wall to be carried up flush from above the head of the window to the plate.

In the ground floor of the easternmost division of the house is a range of four four-centred arched openings, extending throughout the whole length of this portion of



SUNDRIDGE, MEDIEVAL HOUSE.

drawn by Deutscher Photograph

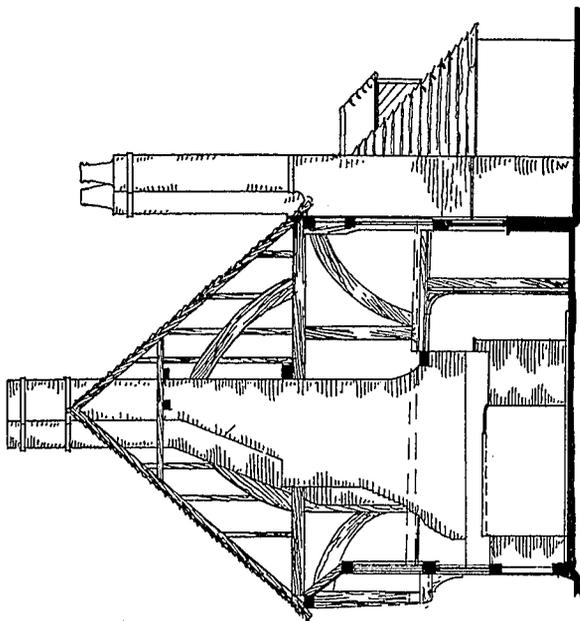
the building. Of these the opening nearest to the hall was the original front entrance, which led into the passage between the screens. Fragments of the original front door itself survived, though nothing remains of the back doorway and door, which must have stood at the opposite end of the screens. Its disappearance is accounted for by the presence of a huge fireplace, which seems to have been introduced in the seventeenth century, and which occupies the greater part of the south end of the eastern ground-floor room. The three windows to east of the front doorway were unglazed, but were fitted on the inside with sliding shutters, moving, not in horizontal grooves, as would be much the more usual plan, but up and down vertically in perpendicular grooves. When raised they were held in position by means of a metal pin, transfixing the lower part of each shutter, as is witnessed by the round hole in the middle of the face of the sill to each opening.

The ground-floor room at the western end of the house has a pair of square-headed windows, also unglazed, but protected, as also subdivided into lights, by vertical bars of oak, square on plan, but set anglewise. The rebate for the shutter on the inside remains.

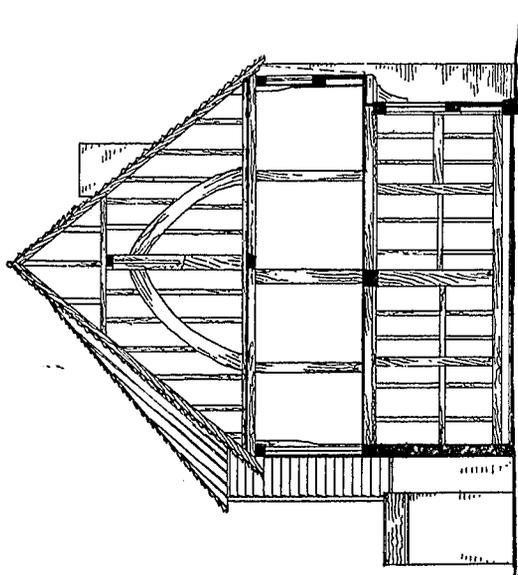
Of all the disfiguring alterations whereto this house has been subjected since its erection, that which has changed its proper character most materially was the introduction in the seventeenth century of a huge open fireplace, with internal chimney stack of brick, at the east end of the hall. To make room for this obstruction the screen, with its arched doorways (except one at the southern extremity), was nearly, if not totally, demolished. This chimney opening (like that already referred to as having been introduced in the back of the eastern room on the ground floor) has capacious ingles, with seats and recesses. It also has a curious and unusual feature in the shape of a squint, pierced through the brickwork, to allow observation to be made of any person entering the front door.

Before being purchased by Mr. C. P. Munn, a builder, of **Hampstead**, in 1923, the house had been converted into two

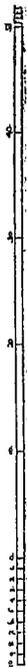
MEDIAEVAL HOUSE SUNDRIDGE KENT.



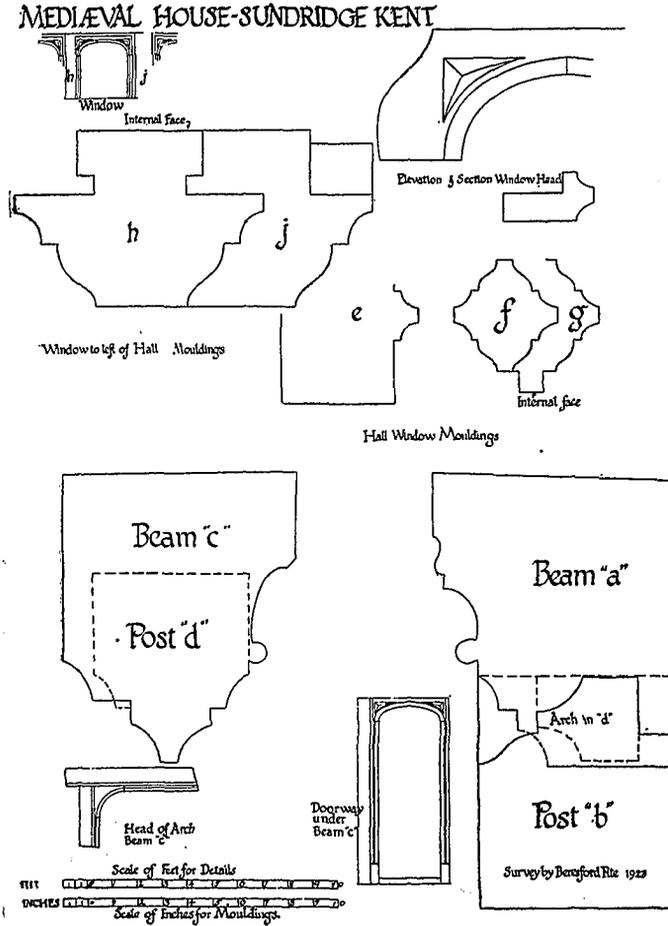
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tenements. Mr. Munn, at once perceiving that he had acquired a house of no ordinary possibilities, consulted the eminent architect Professor Beresford Pite, under whose careful direction and supervision the building has now



happily recovered very much of its original aspect. The floors which had been intruded in the hall, to form attics as well as a first-floor storey, have been cleared away, and the hall itself opened up from ground to roof.

The process has exposed the smoke-grimed rafters to the

apex—it would not be correct to say to the ridge, since this house, in common with all others of its period, is distinguished by the absence of any ridge-piece. Again, this house had originally no stairs. There were only ladders leading through open hatchways in the floor. To provide for these the floor joists were found to have been trimmed for square-framed apertures, after the manner of their kind. Altogether the house at Sundridge is interesting as a typical sample of the dwelling of a villager possessed of but moderate means. It exhibits little or nothing in the way of applied decoration. There is no sculptured cusping nor foliage. Its sole ornament consists of mouldings sparingly used on the window-mullions, door frames and in certain horizontal wall-timbers. In short, the whole building is admirable for the solidity and soundness of its construction and its appropriate use of native materials, rather than for any more obvious and irresistible quality of attractiveness.

Special acknowledgments and thanks are due to Professor Beresford Pite for his kindness in preparing, and lending for reproduction, the architectural drawings which illustrate the above article.