

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

6. THE OLD COTTAGE AT UPPER HARDRES

By E. W. PARKIN

ALMOST swallowed up by the encroaching woodland, just off the narrow lane leading down to Bursted Manor, stood an extraordinary cottage known as Palm Tree Farm. It was just within the parish boundary of Upper Hardres, about four miles south of Canterbury. Near it was an old barn with its thatched roof falling in, and around this, in various stages of decay were the remains of pig-styes and other outbuildings, and even a dried-up duck pond hidden under elder bushes.

Much has been written about churches, castles and the larger medieval houses, but very little indeed is known about the small habitations of those days. Here was an opportunity, and, in and around this cottage, one had an uncanny feeling of stepping back far into the past. A widow and her daughter were still living there in 1960, until a new bungalow could be ready for them, and it was with their kind permission that the house was recorded. Near the north-east corner of the house was an ancient stone-lined well, where the water was always abundant, and beautifully pure. This was still the only source of water, and in addition to that, there was a complete absence of the usual amenities of electricity, gas, or sanitation. So thickly were bushes and trees growing in on all sides, that it was practically impossible to take good photographs. Here and there through cracked plaster could be seen evidence of timber-framing and wattle-and-daub infilling, often much patched. Bending one's head to enter the doorway, one found oneself in the sitting room with a headroom of only 5 ft. 9 in. There was a wide fireplace of 2-in. bricks, and this was partly masked to fit an early nineteenth-century grate with a small oven at one side. In the extreme left-hand corner could be seen the door of an old bread oven, while shielding the right-hand end of the fireplace was a wooden spear, or screen. On the far side of the room was a window and the front door, now disused and in fact blocked by bushes outside. Both were eighteenth-century, and unaltered since then. The window had its original glazing bars, and a wooden shutter, hinged at the top, while the door was fitted with a draw-bar which slid into iron staples, its original wooden lock with a heavy key, a small squint or peep-hole covered by a hinged flap, and long strap hinges across the whole width of the door, of hand-made Kentish iron.

Before we explore more of this intriguing house, let us look to see what history there may be here. The deeds do not go back very far, but being so near Hardres Court and surrounded by estate lands, it seems certain that it was once part of the estate, though why, and how long it enjoyed an independent existence is not known. The property has since been purchased by R. D. Neame, Esq., and so reverts to the ownership of Hardres Court.

At the time of Domesday, Hasted informs us that the lands of the manor here were held of 'the Archbishop'¹ by Robert de Hardres, and in the time of Henry VIII by one Thomas Hardres. Hasted continues, 'He was with Henry VIII at the siege of Bullein (Boulogne) in France, and for his service there was permitted to bring thence the gates of that city, which still remain at Hardres Court in the garden wall opposite the church, and the King on his return lay there two nights, and as a further mark of his favour left his dagger, which was very lately preserved in the house.' Boulogne was taken by the English forces on 14th September, 1544, and Henry landed at Dover on 1st October.

The old gates were still in existence in the early part of the nineteenth century, as described in an earlier volume of *Archæologia Cantiana*.² The writer gives a drawing of the gates, and of their ultimate fate he reports that 'a new owner of Hardres Court, a Mr. Tillard sold them for the iron they contained, and they were knocked to pieces at the forge near Heppington'.³

The estate remained in the possession of the Hardres family until 1764, when Sir William Hardres died. He left it to his widow, and at her death it passed to her four sisters in equal shares.

The arms of the Hardres family were: Gules, a lion rampant ermine, debruised by a chevron or.

Returning to the cottage, Fig. 1a shows a plan of the site. The narrow lane D, from the direction of Hardres Court and the church passes downhill towards C and to Burstled Manor. A is a woodland track, and B an old lean-to seen in Plate IA. The woods to the north and west have now blotted out the whole site, and nothing except the remains of the barn can be seen from the lane. All around is woodland, except M which is meadowland.

Fig. 1b shows a plan of the cottage as it was before demolition. H was the sitting room, originally the open hall. S was once a store, but had now become a scullery. O and P had been one room originally, the parlour or sleeping room, but had been divided into a store and

¹ Lanfranc. Hasted's *History of Kent*, vol. ix, 305.

² Robert C. Jenkins, M.A., *Arch. Cant.*, iv, 43.

³ Opposite the junction of the lane from Lower Hardres and the road from Stone Street to Canterbury, this is still a working forge. Heppington House is a little to the north of it.



A. The Cottage, from the South.



B. Interior of Middle Room.



A. Windows on East Side.



B. Post on West Side.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

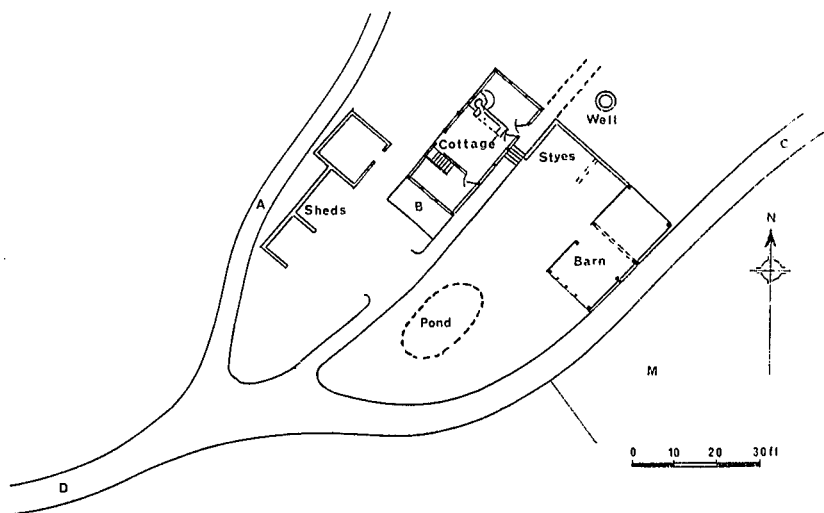


FIG. 1a. The Site at Upper Hardres.

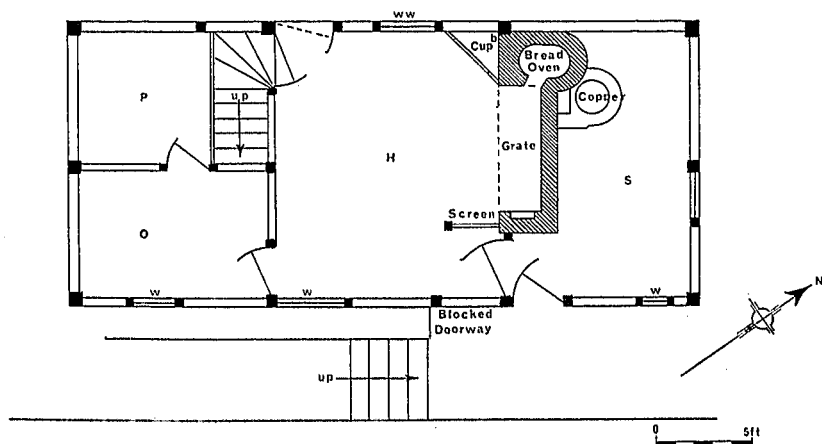


FIG. 1b. The Cottage in 1960.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

pantry, the latter without any window. The only window on the ground floor of the north-west side was WW, and this is seen with its small eighteenth-century panes and hinged shutter in Plate IB. Plate IIA shows two of the windows marked W, and all three of these were found to have the diamond mortises of earlier windows beneath their frames.

Fig. 2a shows a plan of the house as originally built. It had three rooms only, the central hall H, with an open hearth, the parlour P and the store S.

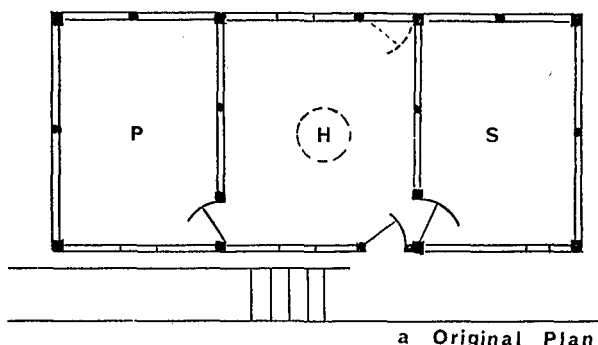
Fig. 2b shows the appearance of this house from the south-east. The three rooms were divided by wattle and daub partitions which were complete right up to the ridge, thus confining smoke from the hearth to the central room. Some sort of vent or outlet was provided in the thatch to allow smoke to escape, and this may have been a 'headless barrel' referred to by some early writers.

Fig. 2c shows the house in the seventeenth century, after the insertion of the fireplace and chimney, and after the door had been moved to the right. The unglazed windows shown with oak bars were probably still in use until the early part of the eighteenth century.

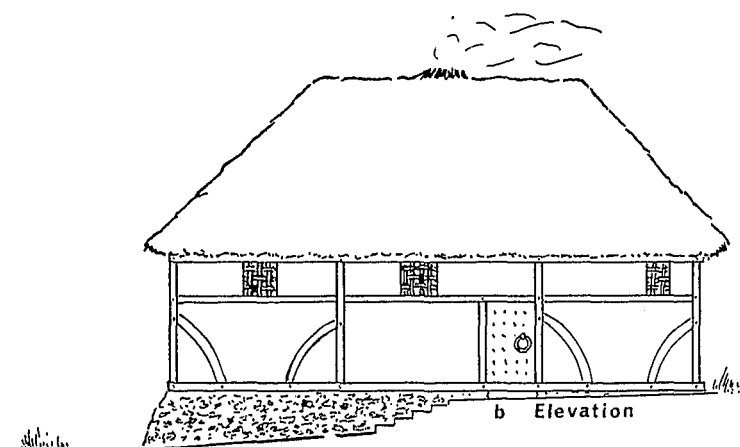
The cottage measured externally 33 ft. by 15 ft., and from ground sill to eaves 8 ft. It rested on a ground wall of flint rubble, which was as much as 4 ft. high at the south-west end, owing to the slope of the ground. The height of 8 ft. seems to have been standard for single-storeyed medieval houses, the usual arrangement in Kent being to have a horizontal rail running along the sides of the house 2 ft. below the eaves, to give room for doorways below, and small windows above. Several such cottages remained until recently in the village of Tilmanstone, near Sandwich, but three of them have now been demolished, and elsewhere they are becoming exceedingly rare. Little indeed is known about these humbler homes, but before the seventeenth century they must have been very numerous. They are shown on the maps of John Walker and Son of Essex which were mostly drawn for the owners of large estates such as Ingatestone, and which cover the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. One is of the town of Chelmsford, and of this, and of several other maps which show a good range of all types of houses, no less than 59 per cent. were found to be houses of one storey only.⁴

By the time of Elizabeth I many brick chimneys were appearing, mostly inserted into older houses, and glass was being fitted into the more affluent ones, though this did not become universal until well into the eighteenth century.

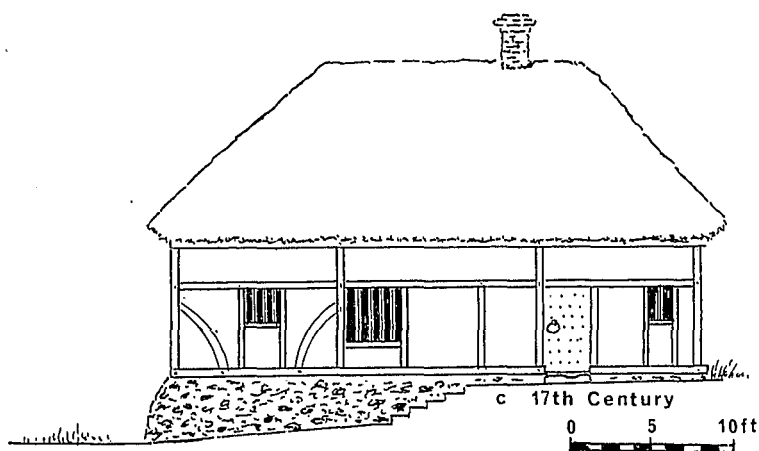
⁴ A. C. Edwards of the Essex Record Office has demonstrated the surprising accuracy of John Walker's maps, both in scale and in detail. Essex Record Office publications, *Medieval Essex*, *Essex Homes*, etc.



a Original Plan



b Elevation



c 17th Century

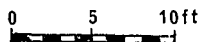


FIG. 2.
b. Elevation of original House.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

The Hardres cottage in its early days was certainly no hovel. It was of substantial construction, as the difficulty with which it was eventually pulled down proved. The main framework was of oak, with posts 7 in. square, all joints were of the mortise and tenon type, and the workmanship was excellent. From the fact that the barn contained timbers of similar age, there can be little doubt that the house had been built as a farmhouse, and that it was a very early one, certainly not later than the fourteenth century.

One indication of its age, and a very interesting one was what appeared to be evidence of a lattice window, also that the oak-barred windows already mentioned were insertions. In the centre of the north-west side of the cottage, between the rail and the wall-plate was noticed a square patch in the clay infilling, about $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft. by 2 ft. When some of the clay was removed there was discovered in the upper face of the rail a row of four circular holes, $\frac{3}{4}$ in. diameter and $1\frac{1}{2}$ in. deep, with corresponding holes under the wall-plate. They were spaced about 4 in. apart and did not match the rest of the wattle which was woven round split oak slats more widely spaced, and fitted between an elliptical mortise under the wall-plate, and a groove in the rail (Fig. 3). The only conclusion being that here was once a lattice window, and if so, it could be the only known example.

Such windows have not infrequently been mentioned by early writers. Harrison's *Description of England*, published in 1584 says: ' . . . of old time our countrie houses, insteade of glasse did use much latisse, and that being made of wicker or fine rifts of oak'. Again, we find in W. Horman's *Vulgaria*, printed in 1519 the following: 'I will have a latesse before the glasse for brekyng . . .' Taverners were said to have red lattices, and when they are shown in medieval illustrations the wicker canes of the windows are set diagonally, and this indeed may have been the precedent for the small diamond panes which were so popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. At Upper Hardres, however, it would appear that the main rods were sprung in vertically and then hazel canes woven horizontally through them (Fig. 3).

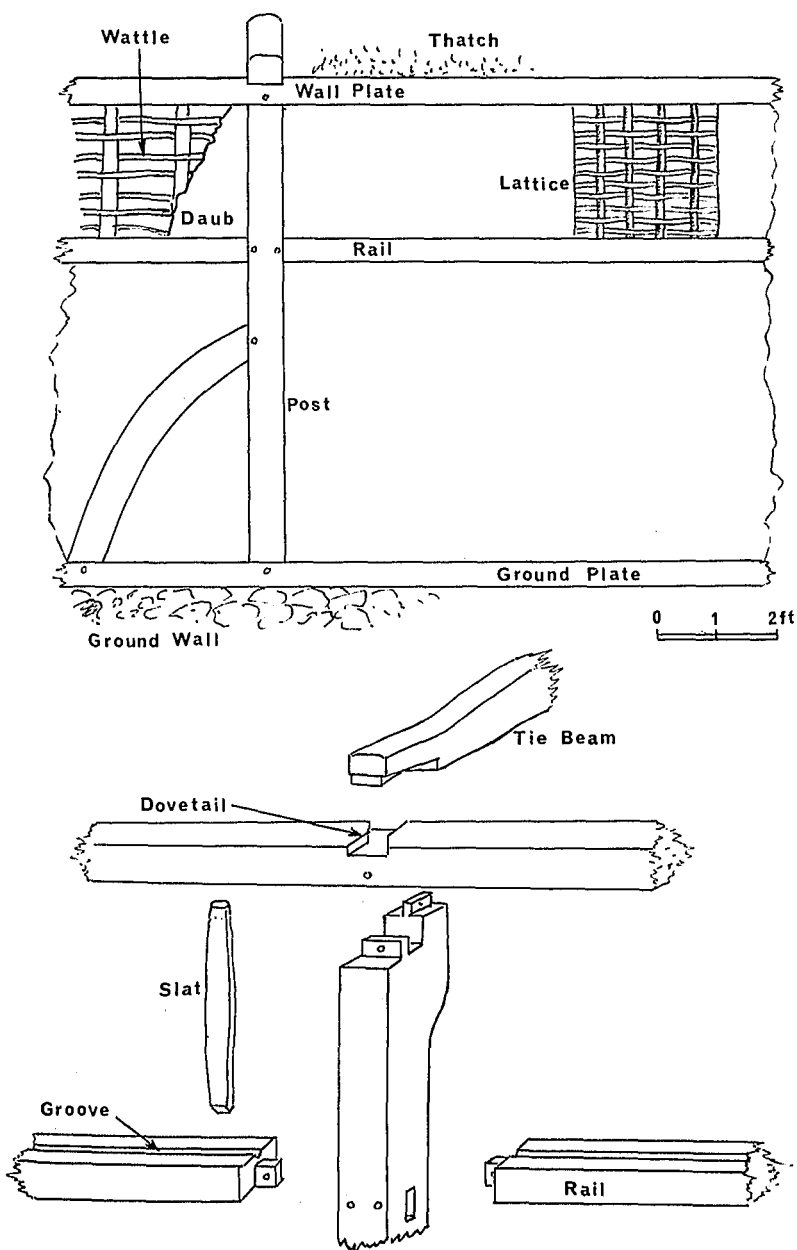
Evidence of more of these windows was not discovered as the timbers were removed or burned shortly afterwards.

The oak-barred windows appeared to be insertions as the sills were not morticed into the main framework as were all original timbers.

It is not known what proportion of houses had lattice windows, nor how long such windows survived, but in Kent windows with oak bars and sliding shutters were undoubtedly almost universal, and indeed they still come to light during the restoration of medieval houses. Sometimes only the diamond mortises remain as evidence. The word 'diamond' is used because the oak window bars were square, and were set into the sills and lintels at an angle of 45° , with points

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

Details of Construction



0 1 2ft

FIG. 3.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

front and rear. The reason for this was presumably to allow a wider dispersal of light, though whether in fact it did make any appreciable difference is open to doubt.

Very little glass was manufactured in England in medieval times, and such as there was was of poor quality. Some fine glass was imported from France and elsewhere, but this was so costly that it was the prerogative only of the Church and the wealthiest in the land. One can imagine the awe and wonderment of church windows in the eyes of villagers who never otherwise saw glass. A glass window in a house was a treasured possession, and was sometimes removed from house to house when the owner moved. Glass became cheaper and more obtainable in the second half of the sixteenth century, and from then on became more and more used in private houses.⁵

Apart from slight repairs and alterations, the roof of the cottage was intact and original. It was of simple construction, the heavy rafters being set up in pairs with collars but no purlins, the ends of the roof being hipped, after the usual Kentish fashion. The two partitions between the rooms still had original wattle and daub on the first floor, but one had been pierced for a doorway, and a tie-beam has also been cut through. On the ground floor, more than half of all the walls still had wattle and daub infilling.

The scullery was still open to the roof, and only above the other two rooms had small bedrooms been squeezed in under the thatch, each with one very small window. This operation appears to have taken place in the first half of the eighteenth century, when the cottage was thoroughly 'modernized'. The ceiling joists tally with this date, as do the surviving doors, windows, stairs and bedroom floorboards. A red brick floor was at the same time laid in the three ground-floor rooms, which had had hitherto probably only a bare floor of beaten clay. It was at first puzzling that the door on the south-west side led into the scullery, and not into the old hall, as was the medieval custom. On removing some of the plaster, however, the original doorway was discovered. The old hinges were still there, and the inner edges of the jambs and lintel were chamfered, but the most interesting discovery was that the doorway had been filled with wattle and daub. An empty peg-hole showed where a curved brace had been removed to insert the later doorway.

A close examination of the window-frames revealed nothing to suggest that there had ever been sliding shutters, but one window in the sitting room still had a shutter hinged at the top (Plate IB) and small holes over another window might mean that this type of shutter had always been used.

⁵ In 1589 at least fifteen known makers of glass were operating in this country.

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

The barn at the side of the lane was a small one, measuring 27 ft. 6 in. long and 15 ft. wide. It rested on a low ground wall of flint rubble, as did the cottage. Its main framework which included one heavy tie-beam was medieval and mostly intact, but the original wattle and clay infilling had been replaced by eighteenth-century weatherboarding. The roof had been re-built, using most of the original rafters, and was of the usual hipped construction.

The walls of the sheds and the pig-styes were of flint rubble, with dressings of $2\frac{1}{2}$ -in. red brick, and appeared to have been built during the eighteenth-century reconstruction.