

## ON THE OLD RECTORY AT NORTHFLEET.

BY GEORGE M. ARNOLD, F.S.A.

THIS building, with about nine acres of land, came into my possession in 1890. I purchased it mainly with the object of stripping off its successive coats of exterior mortar, and of disclosing its ancient timber-framed construction.

The architect to whom I entrusted the work (Mr. Herbert Baker) has kindly favoured me with a paper written from his professional standpoint, which I promised to preface by a few lines respecting the possible, if not probable, history of the building, but these lines I fear will be found to afford little in the way of identification, and will leave large room for speculative views on the part of others.

At the time when the great Norman Survey, Domesday, was taken, Northfleet Church and the manor belonged to the Metropolitan See of Canterbury. Archbishop Cranmer conveyed the manor and the advowson of the vicarage to King Henry VIII. by his deed of exchange of November 30th, 29 Henry VIII. The manor ultimately found its way into the Calcraft family.

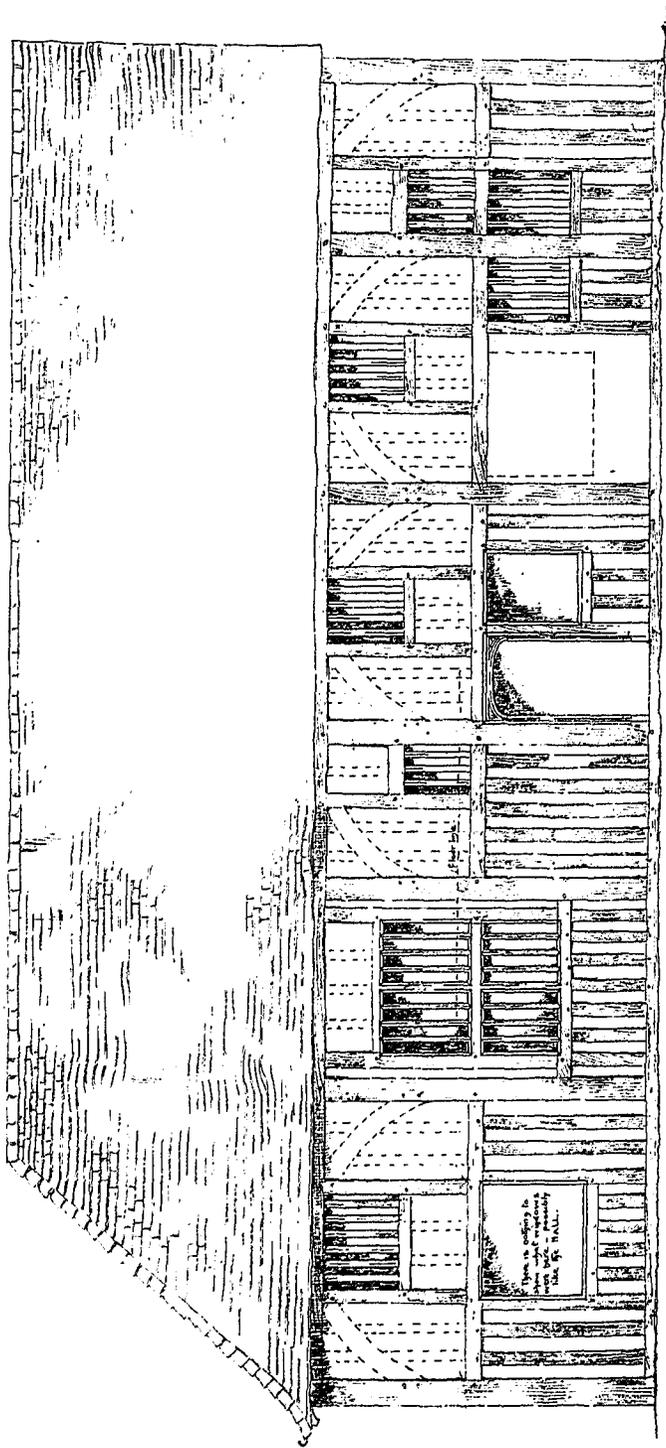
In the modern tithe apportionment of Northfleet the old rectory land is tithe-free, and is described as glebe.

With the church of Northfleet, the saintly Anselm (who became Archbishop of Canterbury in A.D. 1093) endowed the Cathedral Priory of St. Andrew's, Rochester; all its attendant lands, tithes, oblations, and appurtenances being included in his gift. A charter of Archbishop Richard confirmed to the monks there, "Ecclesiam de Norfiete cum pertinentes ejus, cum decimis de Yfield (another manor in the parish) & de la Dune."

Further confirmation followed under the authority of a Metropolitan Synod of Archbishop Baldwin in 1 Richard I.: "Ecclesiam de Nortflete cum decimis de Hyffeld et de la Dune."

NORTH FLEET

ELEVATION SHOWING OLD TIMBER WORK RESTORED AS FAR AS IT CAN BE IDENTIFY.



0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Feet

H. BAKER, DEL.

OLD RECTORY HOUSE AT NORTH FLEET, KENT.

Respecting benefactions to St. Andrew's, Rochester (Thorpe *Reg. Roff.*, p. 116), situate within the Archdiocese, we read as follows: "Anselmus Archiepiscopus dedit ecclesiam de Northflete. Radulfus Archiepiscopus dedit decimam de Casfeld, de Wenivalle, de Dune."

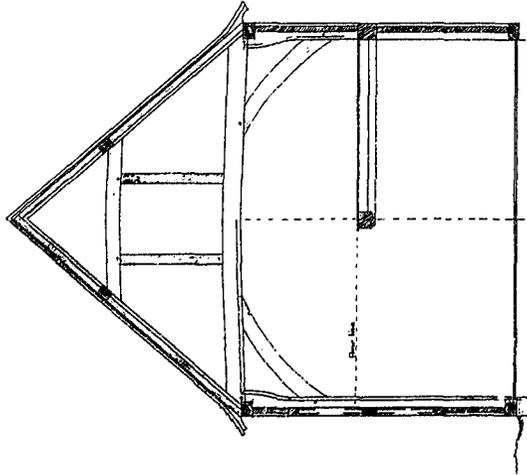
In a charter of Archbishop Richard of March A.D. 1177, at the British Museum (*Bib. Cotton* Domitian A, x., 9), we find that out of his affection to the church of Rochester and the monks dwelling there, he confirmed them in the same possessions.

Archbishop Ralph (*Reg. Roff.*, p. 443) in his confirmation charter made in the presence of Arnulph, Bishop of Rochester, includes: "Ecclesiam de Northflete quam Anselmus dedit monachis in Roffa Deo famulantibus," and he adds, "et de meo dominico do eis unam acram terre in mea propria cultura, in campo que dicitur Gudlesfelde ad edificandum domos sibi et suo capellano, ad opus predictę ecclesie et totam decimam de meo dominico & omnes decimas villanorum qui habent terram in Doune," etc., etc.

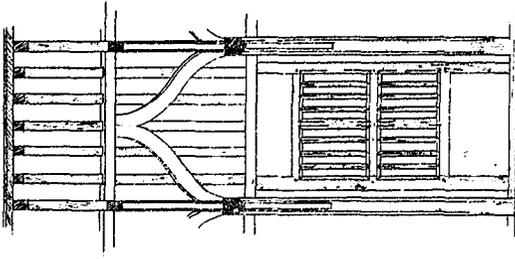
Amongst the archives of the Dean and Chapter of Rochester Cathedral is contained a charter by Archbishop Hubert made at Canterbury (1 John), wherein the Archbishop speaks of the foregoing gifts (*Registrum Roff.*, p. 506): "Cedent eciam libere & sine omni molestia in usus monachorum decime de la Dune & decime de Wenifalle & de tenementis Nigelli & alie decime quas per loca diversa in parochia de Northflete, ex collacione fidelium ab antiquo percipere consueverunt." The Archbishop in the name of the church of Canterbury renews and confirms the grant of Northfleet Church to the monastery of Rochester. Yet, from some unexplained reasons, he had presented to the rectory his own nominee, and the monks of Rochester never again enjoyed their former right to the church and its temporalities. In 29 Henry VIII. Archbishop Cranmer included in his deed of exchange the rectory, the parsonage, and the glebe.

Hasted\* states that the reference to "Wenifalle" denotes a well-known locality in the parish called Windfield-Bank. This Windfield-Bank lies immediately south of and abuts upon the old rectory property, which may probably be comprised in the term "Dune." This hypothesis in its turn leads us to the derivation of the word Dune. The English form of the Latin "Duna" would suggest a situation by no means inapplicable to that occupied by the old rectory, viz., immediately under an abrupt and sudden

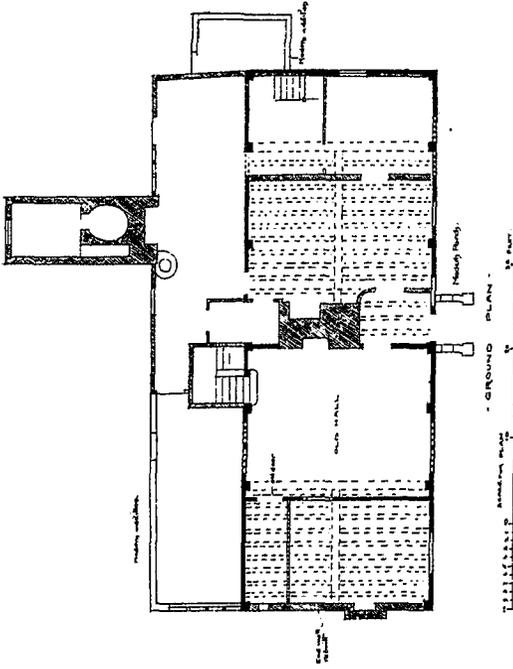
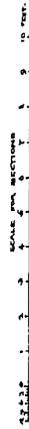
\* Folio ed., i., 445; octavo ed., iii., 316.



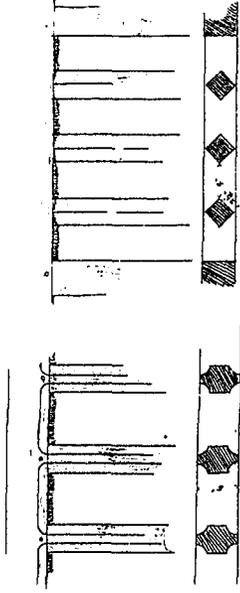
SECTION  
"THRU" HALL "THRU" ROOF"



"ELEVATION OF ONE BAY OF HALL"



"GROUND PLAN"



"WINDOWS GENERALLY"

"WINDOWS TO HALL"

DETAILS OF OLD RECTORY HOUSE, NORTHFLEET, KENT.

chalk hill or bank, at the base of which flows the spring which, taking its rise close to the building, runs into the Fleet that gives the parish its name.

The farm house on the highway opposite the rectory is known as the Vale Farm House, indicative of the same hollow.

Dr. Cowell (edition 1708) describes "Duna" as a bank of earth cast up, or the side of a ditch, and gives the following quotation: "Faciēt fossatū adeo forte & bonū prout voluit, ita quod fundū a retro Dunæ utriusque fossati sit in fundo 14 pedum." (Chartular, Glaston., MS., fo. 75.)

There are traces of the foundation of outbuildings between the old rectory house and the high road, which is here known as "Snagg's Bottom," and it is conceivable that the present structure served as a residence for a clerk (capellanus) and as a receptacle for the grain and other tithe to which the Priory of St. Andrew was entitled, and wherein they could be garnered and stored until forwarded to the priory, or otherwise disposed of.

The vicarage house is situated close to the parish church, and I have never heard of its existence at any other less convenient part of the parish. This old rectory house is nearly a mile from the church, and there is no very direct route connecting them.

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MR. HERBERT BAKER'S NOTE RESPECTING THE OLD  
RECTORY HOUSE AT NORTHFLEET.

THE present structure was built probably early in the sixteenth century (say *circa* 1510), and was constructed entirely of timber in the form of a parallelogram, as shewn in black on the plan.

It contained a Hall, open from the ground to the roof; two chambers on either side about 6 feet 6 inches high, with rooms or lofts over them; and, at the north end of the building, a small chamber, which, like the hall itself, had no ceiling below the roof.

This arrangement of high central hall, with low stories on either side, we find almost universally adopted at this period for cottages in the South of England, especially in the Weald of Kent and Sussex. Careful examination will in almost all cases reveal that the present floor over the central room or hall, and the chimney, were added about a century later. About the end of the sixteenth

century, the primitive method of burning a fire in the centre of the hall began to die out, and fireplaces came into general use in the houses of the humbler classes.

Such cottages, once the residences of the proverbially well-to-do yeomen, abound in Kent. One for example, by the churchyard at Headcorn, has the history of its internal changes clearly marked on its exterior. They are more rare in the chalk districts, but good examples can be seen near Northfleet, at Sole Street, and at Luddesdown.

The more common arrangement, of having side stories on the first floor projecting on overhanging timbers, is not followed at Northfleet Rectory, where the rudeness and absence of ornamentation and ordinary comforts (such as glass to the windows) denote that the building was not intended for any family of means or importance. This helps us to agree with the suggestion of Mr. Arnold, that it was somewhat austere built for the temporary residence of the chaplain or steward appointed by St. Andrew's Priory to superintend the collection and transmission to Rochester of the grain and tithe from their lands at Northfleet.

The internal re-arrangement of the hall, the new staircase and the additions at the back, all of which are shewn hatched on the plan, were made in the next century, and we are fortunate in being able to fix a date for them by the discovery (embedded in the ceiling plaster) of a token, dated 1656, of Edward Pashlowe (who was Mayor of the neighbouring town of Gravesend in 1653).

Although much damage has been done to the old timber work, by the insertion of sash windows and the rebuilding of the decayed portions, sufficient has fortunately been preserved beneath the many coats of plaster, with which the whole building had been covered, to shew the character of the work, and to fix an approximate date. The two original windows of the hall, which were opposite to each other, east and west, have been brought to light. Their position proves that no upper floor could have existed at first. They are of very curious detail, the mullions being very close together and without groove, rebate, or any means of fixing glass. They probably had wooden shutters which opened or shut at will, to suit the conditions of light, weather, and smoke inside. Most of the other window openings are still more primitive, being filled in with square mullions placed close together and diagonally, after the manner of cellar windows in old houses.

Only one old doorway remains inside, with moulded jambs

and arched head, but there is sufficient evidence that the front external doorway was similar in character.

The old floors are formed of oak joists, 7 inches by 5 inches, laid flat; while the floor introduced later into the hall has small deep joists of a later style; and that over the north room is quite modern.

The roof is strongly framed in oak with curved wind braces, and appears substantial to our nineteenth century eyes, but is simple in comparison with existing masterpieces of carpentry of the sixteenth century. The timbers over the hall are black with a thick coating of soot from the smoke with which they must generally have been enveloped. Smoke could only have found its way out through the chinks of the tiles, there being no sign of any such louvred outlet as was usual in larger buildings. The unglazed windows would have kept the lower part of the hall sufficiently free from smoke to make it habitable.

There was probably no staircase to the upper rooms originally, access being obtained to them by ladders from the hall; by no means an uncommon way of going to bed in those days.

The external framing of the timber work shews a curious disregard of design, the lower part being of the usual massive post and pan work, while, above, the curved braces are set back about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inch from the face of the main posts and window frames. The original thick plaster, formed of marly clay and chopped straw, with which they were covered, can still be seen in places. The braces and uprights, where originally covered, are shewn in dotted lines on the drawing of the elevation.

With the exception of the doors, the windows, and the main timbers of the hall, which are rudely chamfered or hollow moulded, there exists no moulding or carving of any sort. The builder had no object other than to erect a rude and solid but almost barn-like structure, and it is perhaps all the more interesting to us as shewing the strength and durability of the honest and simple craftsmanship of our ancestors.

The thanks of all lovers of antiquity are due to Mr. Arnold, who, at great trouble and expense to himself, has rescued this building from imminent destruction, and preserved it, in a neighbourhood where such relics have for the most part disappeared.