

## ANCIENT TIMBER-FRAMED HOUSE AT SHORNE NEXT GRAVESEND.

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

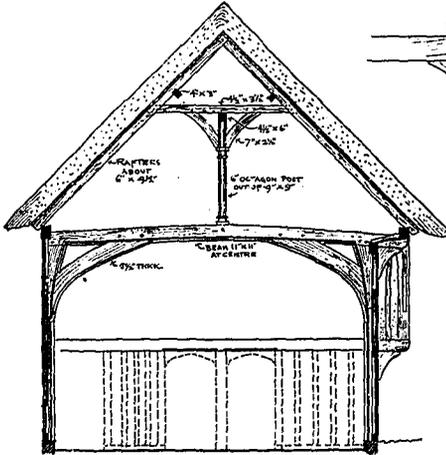
MR. ROBERT WEIR SCHULTZ of 14 Gray's Inn Square, W.C., architect, in reporting to me upon this structure, which he professionally examined, says :—

This house is a typical specimen of the mediæval yeoman's house of the fifteenth or early sixteenth century. A yearly decreasing number of examples of such houses are to be found in the counties of Kent and Sussex, but all more or less altered and cut about, as this has been.

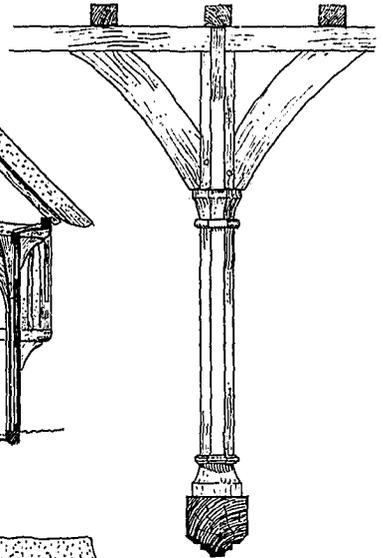
In spite of the numerous alterations and changes which have been effected in this structure from time to time, enough of the old timber-framing, etc., still exists to enable us to form a very accurate idea of the original form and arrangement. Most of this had been covered over by modern plastering or hidden away above later ceilings, etc., and it is due to your care and to the judicious removal of later surface coverings that I have been enabled to prepare the accompanying drawings, which shew the house as it was originally constructed. These drawings are not in any sense complete, as I have only shewn thereon what I have been enabled to verify from existing evidence, but enough has been laid bare to enable me to reconstruct the main lines of the house, and of its sub-divisions, although it has been impossible to fill in every point of detail. I have purposely avoided shewing on these Plans any of the later alterations, as they are of no value for our purpose, and would only have tended to confuse.

This building differs considerably from the two houses of similar date which have already been recorded by you in *Archæologia Cantiana*, viz., "The Old Rectory at Northfleet" (1892) and "Filborough Farmhouse, East Chalk" (1894), but it seems to me to represent more nearly the *typical* Kentish yeoman's house than either of those buildings. Several examples of houses, almost identical in every respect with this one, still exist in various parts

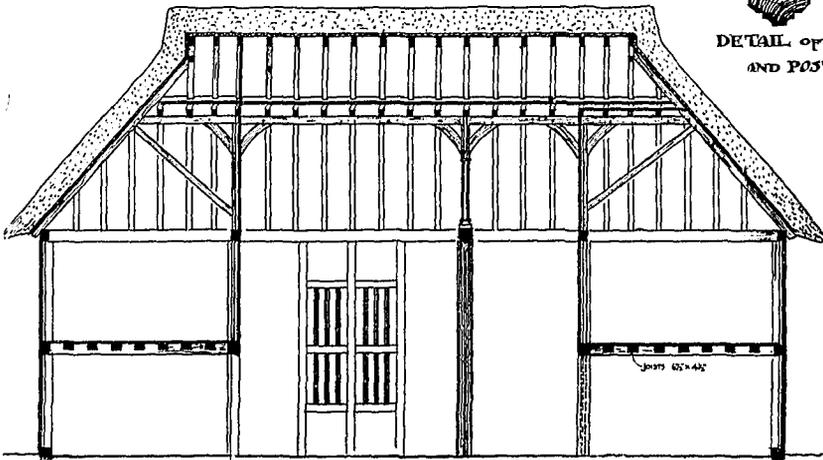
HOUSE AT SHORNE  
NEAR GRAVESEND KENT



SECTION ACROSS HALL



DETAIL OF ROOF BEAM  
AND POST IN HALL



LONGITUDINAL SECTION



of Kent and Sussex—as for example at Sole Street, Pattenden, Hollingbourne, Horsmonden, Cranbrook, Goudhurst, Tenderden, in Kent; and at Robertsbridge, Northiam, Chiddingly, Alfriston, in Sussex.

In plan the building was originally a parallelogram about  $45\frac{1}{2}$  feet long and  $20\frac{1}{2}$  feet wide. It was subdivided into three parts. In the centre was the hall or houseplace extending the full width and height of the building, and at either end were rooms or offices with chambers over.

The timbers composing the floors of the upper chambers project over the lower framing about 2 feet towards the front only; the framing of the upper part rests on the ends of these timbers, the face of the upper storeys thus standing out in front of the lower, while the timbering of the hall face runs right up without projection. The eaves of the roof are continued right across the front, on the line of the projecting upper face, thus forming that curious and interesting soffit, with its curved braces supporting the eaves plate, which is so characteristic of the early Kent and Sussex cottages, and is all the more interesting in that it is developed directly from the practical structural scheme of the building.

The original roof, with its hipped ends and its beams, posts, rafters, etc., is still intact. These are still black with the smoke and soot of the sixteenth-century wood fires on the floor of the hall, and the old soot-begrimed plaster of the side partitions of the hall is also still in existence above the more modern ceiling of the first floor room, which has been fitted, later, into the upper portion of the original hall. "*Full sooty was hire bour and eek hir halle.*"\*

I am of opinion that the sides and divisions of the building were entirely constructed of oak framing, the sole-plates resting on cross plankings of oak, or on strong piles, or stakes driven into the ground to support the framing, that there were no brick footings of any kind, that the spaces between the timbers were filled in with wattle and daub, that the lower floors were of earth, and that the roof was covered with thatch.

It seems quite clear to me that these buildings were erected with materials of the most inexpensive kind, and those most easily procurable, such as oak from the surrounding woods, earth and sand, and straw or reeds.

In this building the slopes of the ends of the roof differ from those of the sides. This would not have been of any consequence

\* Chaucer, *The Nonne Preestes Tale*.

in a roof covered with thatch, but would be found somewhat awkward in adjusting the hips of a tiled or slated roof. Many of these cottages are still thatched, as for example the old Clergy House at Alfriston, a house near Horsmonden, the Well House near Northiam, etc.

Distinct traces remain of the original windows; the openings in the hall were filled in with oak bars, set angle-wise, in two tiers, as at Northfleet Rectory. Traces of similar windows can also be seen at the Well House, near Northiam, Sussex. The sill of the front window is high up, being between 6 and 7 feet from the floor, while the back one is about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  feet. The back window was the longer one of the two. The windows to the lower side chambers were filled in with similar bars. The upper windows had broader openings with mullions between. All these windows may have been protected by inner-hinged or otherwise moveable shutters of wood, and the upper windows may perhaps have had inner frames filled with oiled linen, or skin, or the like, which would let through a certain amount of light, and at the same time keep out the weather.

In your clearance you have brought to light the original entrance door into the hall. This is at the extreme right-hand side. There may probably have been a similar door opposite. The arrangement of the hall is curious, as the main upright timbers and the great cross beam do not come in the centre of the length, but divide the length into two unequal spaces, a narrower one next the door of one-third of the whole length, and a wider one of two-thirds. The windows come centrally in the wider space both at back and front, whereas the door is not in the centre of the narrower space, but at the right-hand side. It is unlikely that, in the hall of a small house like this, there was a screen right across under the main beam, as we so frequently find in larger halls. It is more probable that there was a small screen forming an inner porch, known as the "Speer," immediately inside the door and parallel with the front wall. The fire was no doubt an open one on the floor in the centre of the hall.

There were two rooms on the ground floor to the right of the hall, and these were entered by two doorways in the centre of the partition (see section through Hall): one would be the buttery or larder, and the other may have been a cellar or store, or perhaps a stable or barn. Access to the chamber over was no doubt obtained by means of a rough ladder made out of balks of timber. Several of

these still exist in church towers, etc., as at Hever. This ladder may have been placed against the cross-beam at the point marked (A) on Plan. The lower rooms are about  $6\frac{1}{2}$  feet high, and the old beams or joists over same, which still exist, measure  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches.

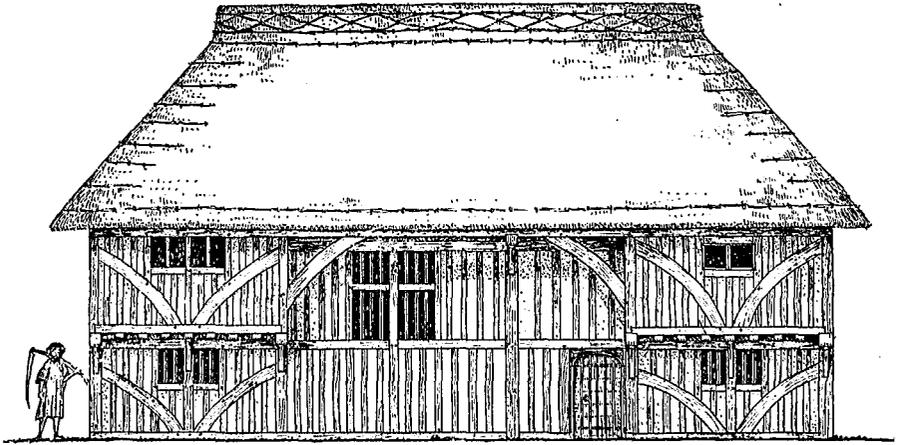
Over the ceiling of this upper chamber there still exists a platform known as the "Balk" or "Scaffold," on which the bacon was no doubt placed. This platform does not exist in the corresponding position over the opposite chamber. It is just possible that there may have been an outlet for the smoke at this end of the roof.

The construction of the roof is very curious. The great beam, which is strongly braced to the main upright posts by curved braces, has, standing on it, an octagonal post of early form (a similar one is shewn in an illustration of a thirteenth-century (?) roof at Charney, in Turner's *Domestic Architecture*). Braces from the top of this post help to support one of the cross ties of the roof, and also a beam 6 inches deep by  $4\frac{1}{2}$  inches wide, which runs the lengthwise of the building, and is again braced from the partitions at each end of the Hall. On this beam rest the cross ties of the roof, which in turn are pinned to the rafters. A very considerable portion of the weight of the roof is thus taken off the timber-framing of the walls, and is carried on the main beams and uprights instead. The rafters are further tied together and steadied by two pieces of timber of light section, viz., 4 inches by 3 inches, which run along the whole length of the roof and are notched to each rafter. At first sight these look like ordinary purlins, but they exercise none of the duties of a purlin, and are not supported in any way from the main beams.

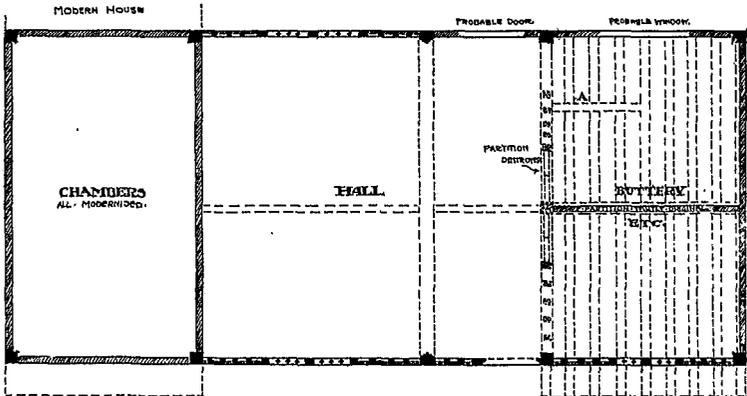
The portion of the building to the left of the hall, where would be the bower or women's chamber, with the "Solar" over it, has been so thoroughly modernized that it is impossible to discover whether there were one or two rooms on the two floors, also where the door or doors were into them. There is a disused steep wheel staircase to the present first-floor rooms, but this, while fairly old, must be later than the original arrangement.

The drawing of the "Front Elevation" which accompanies this report may be looked upon as fairly accurately representing the original appearance of the house. A good deal of the old timbering still exists. It will be observed that, in addition to the main curved braces supporting the eaves plate, there is a smaller brace projecting from the main upright post of the hall, and supporting

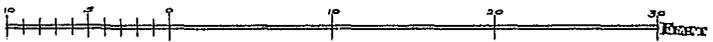
HOUSE AT SHORNE  
NEAR GRAVESEND, KENT



FRONT ELEVATION



GROUND PLAN



the end of the main cross beam, which in its turn helps to support the eaves plate. This main post, beam, and brace is of course not in the centre of the recessed space. An exactly similar arrangement can be observed in several of the other houses of the same period at the places noted above.

Attention is also drawn to the fact that the upper rooms project over the lower ones towards the front only in this house. In some of the other examples they project over at the ends as well. There is an example of this in the same village in a house also belonging to you, and known as "The Old Vicarage." In the ceiling of the room inside, there is a diagonal beam into which the ordinary joists of the front and end are tenoned, and the end of this beam is strutted externally on the angle from a strong angle post.

The detail of the wood-work throughout the house is simple and straightforward; there is no ornamentation, the entrance doorway has a curved head and bevelled spandrils, the external braces are simply curved, the inner braces and uprights are splayed on the angles, and the main beam of the hall is cut in two orders, one a plain splay and the other a flat curve. The main post of the roof is the most architectonic feature of the whole building, and represents the persistency of the early form of the thirteenth century down into the fifteenth century, as is not uncommon in the more primitive village and country work.

By your labours in connection with this house you have made it possible to record accurately yet another example of the smaller Kentish house, and it is sincerely to be desired that other owners of similar historical if somewhat primitive buildings will follow in the same path, and enable archæologists to obtain accurate records before they are further modernized or disappear.

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In presenting to the readers of this Journal the accompanying Illustrations of the example of ancient domestic architecture at Smith Street in Shorne, near Gravesend, with my architect's careful survey, I should have greatly desired to have connected the structure with some of its local antecedents, pointing to its erection, ownership, or occupation, but I regretfully admit that I have none to offer, nor do I know of any circumstances out of which any reliable account could be evolved as to its specific use or origin.

There is, however, immediately contiguous, an ancient flint-built chapel of small dimensions, long since converted into secular uses, having amongst other purposes served as a malt-house (with its steeping vats dug into the floor of the nave), and ultimately, when I acquired it, a portion was appropriated as a stable and cow-house.

In the course of my investigation, we discovered that the chapel was one of the chantries which had fallen a victim to the well-known Act of Parliament 1 Edward VI., and under the operations of the Royal Commissioners appointed to search for concealed lands, it was sold, and the proceeds swept (with other fragments of ecclesiastical spoil) into the coffers of Queen Elizabeth.

In the course of this enquiry the dedication of the chapel was found to be to St. Katherine, a circumstance which had been previously unknown. No record of the institution or induction of any clerk in respect of the chapel has rewarded our researches, and indeed the slender written evidence of the existence of a chapel at all is derived from the circumstance that in a Shorne deed of Confirmation by Walter, Bishop of Rochester, one of the five attesting witnesses is "Nicholas, the Chaplain of Shorne." Since then Mr. Leland L. Duncan kindly drew my attention to the Will of Thomas Davy of "Shorn Streete," dated A.D. 1516, in which occurs the bequest: "To the reparacion of Seynt Kateren Chapell half a quarter of Barley"; and as there is no record of an altar or chantry of St. Katharine at the Parish Church, the legacy is confirmatory of our researches.

It is now necessary for my purpose to make a digression, for the purpose of exhibiting how the tithes of the parish were held during the period under consideration.

Bishop Walter of Rochester, who came to that See in the twelfth year of King Stephen, confirmed by the above Charter to the Monastery of St. Saviour's, Bermondsey, the Churches of Shorne and Cobham, which the Monks held from the gift of King Henry I., in pure and perpetual alms; and the Bishop willed that they should possess these churches well, freely, and peaceably to their own use, together with the lands and all the tithes and other things belonging to them. And as he had granted to the Monks a parsonage in the above churches, he granted licence that the Vicars serving yearly in them (who should answer to the Bishop and his officials for the cure of souls) should, with their consent, perform their fealty and due obedience to the Monks. This appropriation was confirmed to

Bermondsey by Archbishop Thomas Becket, and by the Prior and Community of St. Andrew's, Rochester, in the years 1246 and 1270 respectively.

From this it is clear that the tithes of the parish, generally speaking, appertained to the Bermondsey Prior and Community. It also appears that the Parson, to whom the care of souls was delivered, was not a mere removable Vicar or simple representative of that religious house, but that relations were formally created between him and the Bishop of the Diocese, and the Episcopal officials in all that related to the care of souls; and further, in searching the Registry of the Archdeacon of Rochester, I found that under date 27 January 1470, William Peper, the then Shorne incumbent, described himself as the "*perpetual* Vicar of the Parish Church of Shorne."

Leaving for the moment the ownerships of the tithes generally, and also of the vicarial tithes, I would next draw attention to the circumstance that the Prior and Community of the Cathedral Church of St. Andrew, Rochester, had already become possessed, through the gift of Smallman, of Shorne, of a portion of tithes arising in the manors of Roundal and Thong within the parish, a donation which Bishop Gilbert confirmed in the reign of King Henry II. "to the Church of Rochester and the Monks of God serving there."

With reference to this portion of tithes, it would seem from the Commonwealth Survey of A.D. 1649 that there was then a barn and barnyard called "Mounken" or "Monks" barn lying at Thong, in connection with the portions of tithe of corn and grain arising in the parishes of Shorne and elsewhere. Now, under the same Commonwealth Survey, we find there was also existing a tithe barn and yard at Shorne containing two roods. The Rectory of Shorne remained with the Bermondsey Priory down to the dissolution of the latter in the 29th year of the reign of King Henry VIII., when it was surrendered into the King's hands; all which was confirmed to the King, his heirs, and successors, by the general words of the Act of the 31st year of his reign.

The Church of Shorne accordingly continued to be held by the Crown till the 36th year of King Henry VIII., when that King by instrument under his Privy Seal, of 23 June of that year, conveyed the Rectory appropriate and the Advowson of the Vicarage to the new Dean and Chapter of Rochester, in exchange for their Manor of Southfleet.

The last mentioned barn, having ceased to belong to the Priory of Bermondsey, and now becoming of little use since the conversion of tithes in kind into money rentcharges, was pulled down within the last few years, with the assent of the Dean and Chapter, the owners of the Living—indeed, during the incumbency of the present justly respected Vicar. Now, this tithe barn was in immediate contiguity to St. Katherine's Chapel, and also to the ancient house which forms the subject of this Paper. The three buildings, indeed, form the three points of an irregular triangle.

The suggestion which I advance, with diffidence, is that the Community of Bermondsey, having for the collection and safe-guarding of their grain and other tithes, occasion to be represented in Shorne, by their bailiffs, labourers, and dependents for the reception, storage, and conversion of their property, and occasionally by clerical members of their own Community, provided the house for residential and storage purposes for their own people, and for their own property. At the adjoining Chapel of St. Katherine's (if it were their's) they would be able to render independently, and receive, when in residence, those daily offices of religion which were in accordance with the requirements of their rule.

I feel that the suggestion is not one which stands on any basis of proof, but I advance it as being the only suggestion that has occurred to me in the matter of the use and appropriation of my old timber-framed house.

May I, in conclusion, suggest that a negative argument in favour of the theory is afforded, in that it would, I conceive, account for the absence of any record of the institution or induction of a Chaplain serving at St. Katharine's Chapel.