

NOTES ON THE REMAINS OF WESTEN-
HANGER HOUSE, KENT.

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WESTENHANGER HOUSE, or such part of it as still exists, is situated in the parish of Stanford, about four miles west of Hythe. Formerly, Westenhanger was a separate parish, but its church is demolished, and its lands have long been joined to the parish of which it now forms a part.

Seen from the railway the ivy-clad ruins form a striking and picturesque group. The remains are evidently those of a large and important house, and closer inspection and study confirm the impression that it was also a place of great archæological and historical interest.

There are two traditions connecting Westenhanger with very early times. One ascribes to it the distinction of having been a royal residence during the heptarchy. There is nothing really impossible or improbable in this tradition. The kings of Kent doubtless had their houses in various parts of their kingdom, and Westenhanger may well have been one of them. Of course the matter must be received merely as a tradition, lacking both positive proof and the confirmation of contemporary remains. It may be added that a natural spring feeds the moat, and the site is peculiarly well suited for defensive residence.

The second piece of tradition relates to a later period. Popular legend associates this house with the story of Rosamond Clifford, commonly known as "Fair Rosamond," the mistress of Henry II.; and one of the towers is actually pointed out as the scene of her death. Apart from the fact that several other places in the kingdom have been claimed as Rosamond's Bower, there are three good reasons which make it impossible to accept this tradition: (1) the archi-

ture of the tower is of an age several centuries later than Rosamond's time; (2) there is no evidence that Rosamond Clifford was ever here; and (3) the whole story, romantic, tragic, and circumstantial as it is, appears to be without foundation of fact.

The various printed accounts of Westenhanger contain much interesting, although sometimes contradictory information as to the age of the building. It is not considered necessary, however, in a brief paper like this, to do more than give a list of the authorities (see page 8). But perhaps one quaint and very brief account by Leland may here find a place:

"Ostinghaungre was Creals lordeship, of sum now corruptly called Westenanger. Poynings a late hald it. The King hath it now."*

Although so brief, this extract gives much of what is known about the house in early times. Whatever may have been the history of the place during the Anglo-Saxon period, for example, it is pretty certain that in the fourteenth century Westenhanger was the property of the family of Kiriell or Criol. An entry on the Patent Rolls, under the date 18 August 1343, records the granting of a "Licence for John de Kiriell to crenelate his dwelling-place of Westyngehange, co. Kent."†

For reasons which will be explained presently it does not seem certain that John de Kiriell immediately made use of the licence granted. It seems probable that he lived on in the old house for a few years. The Black Death, occurring in 1348-9, probably caused further delay. We are forced to this conclusion not by documentary but rather architectural evidence, and by the character especially of the plan, which shews strong indications of a date late in the fourteenth century.

The following extracts from the Calendars of the Patent Rolls during the early years of Richard are interesting as shewing that Westenhanger was not built strongly enough

* *Itinerary* (edition of 1907-1910), vol. iv., p. 44.

† Cal. Pat. Rolls, 17 Edward III.

to repel marauders. They are also interesting in a broader sense as shewing the unsettled state of Kent during the last quarter of the fourteenth century:—

5 Richard II., February 11 (1381-2).

Commission of oyer and terminer to Robert Bealknap, Stephen de Valence, William de Haldenne, William de Horne,* and William Makenade, on complaint by Lettice, late the wife of John Kiriell, knight, that John Cornewaille, knight, William Elys of Hynksell,† William Malyn, John Philipp of Chilham, John Hemmynghurst of Mersham, John, son of Ralph Faunescoumbe of Wy, Andrew Scot, Thomas Strode, Brunus Armorer, John Burnby, armorer, and others, with ladders scaled by night and entered her castle of Ostrynghangre, co. Kent, broke her houses and chambers, searched for her so closely that she was compelled to hide in some water, narrowly escaping death thereby, carried off twelve horses, value 40*l.*, besides other goods, and assaulted her servants.

For 20*s.* paid in the hanaper.

7 Richard II., September 22 (1383).

Pardon, at the application of the king's mother, to John Clyfton, indicted before 26 January, for having with others broken the gates, doors, and windows of the lady of Kyryel's castle of Estynghangre, co. Kent, besieged her there, and stolen a coat and hood of one of her servants value 40*d.*

By p.s.

8 Richard II., March 31 (1385).

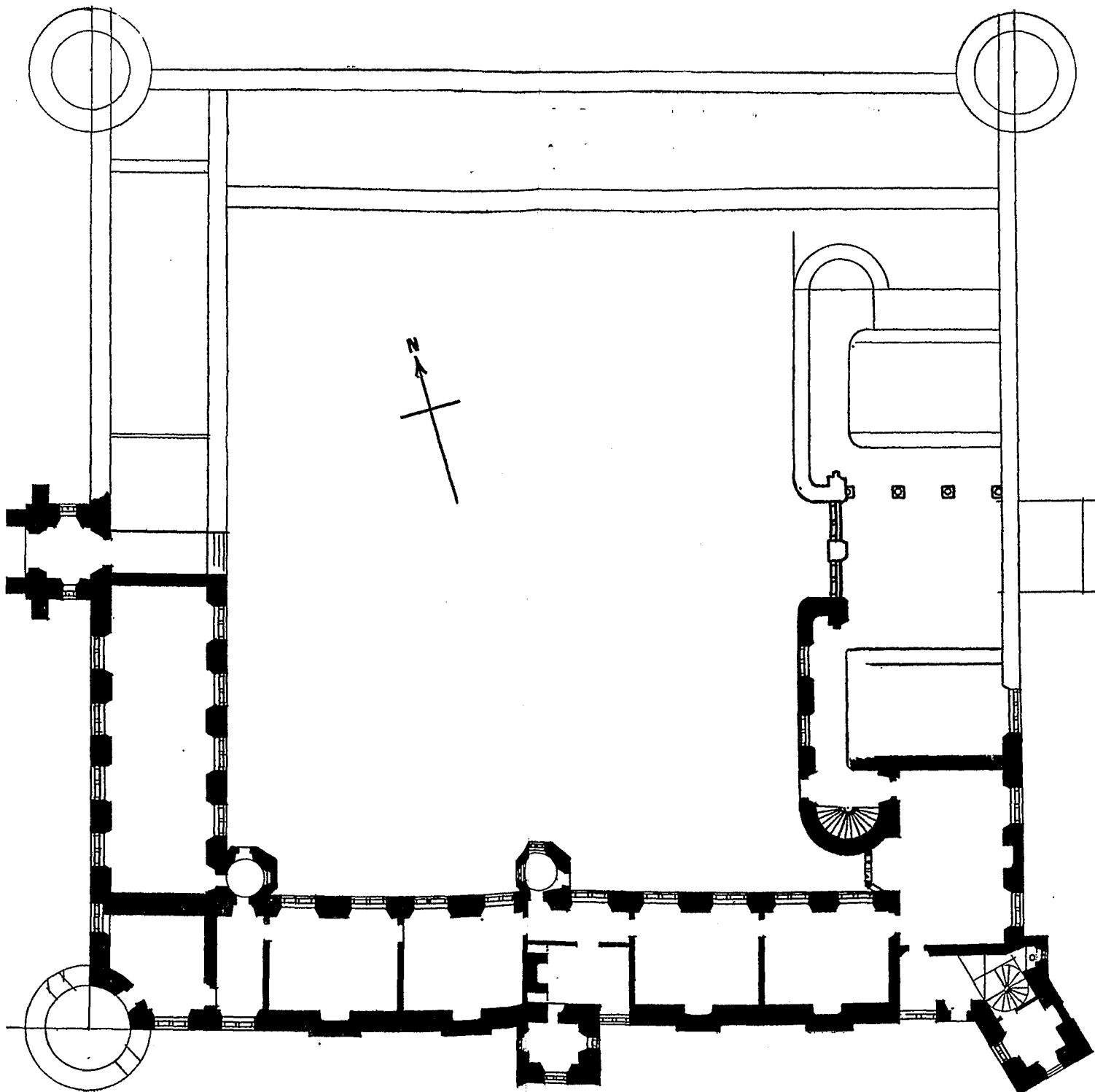
Pardon, out of regard for Good Friday, to John Vannescombe *alias* Swannescombe of Wy, co. Kent, a prisoner in Neugate, by the appeal of Lettice, late the wife of John Criel, knight, for that he with others on the vigil of SS. Simon and Jude, 5 Richard II., broke her castle at Westynganger in that county, entered it and took away divers of her goods, viz., a black and a bay horse with their saddles and bridles, value 10*l.* and 40*l.* in gold and silver money, silver spoons, gold nouches, rings, and brooches, and other jewels.

By p.s.

It is not an easy task to interpret the original plan of the house from a study of the existing architectural remains, and nothing short of an extensive and costly excavation

* Of Horne's Place, Appledore.

† Hinxhill.



PLAN OF WESTENHANGER HOUSE, from Harl. MS. 7599, fo. 93.

would enable us theoretically to entirely reconstruct the house. Fortunately, however, we have a manuscript preserved in the British Museum* in which, although unfinished, is carefully laid down the ground-plan of about half of the building, extending from the gate-house tower on the west, southward, eastward, and northward, to what was obviously the great hall in the eastern range of buildings.

It so happens that the portion planned is that part which is now either entirely or nearly demolished, and in publishing the accompanying plate it is hoped that some help may be given to a future hand which shall recover the plan of the northern parts of the house by means of excavation and surveying.

Even as it stands the plan is most valuable, because it represents about half of what was once, in its complete state, a building of remarkable importance and symmetry. From what is shewn of the southern half it is not difficult to imagine roughly what the northern half must have been, especially if one is guided by the existing walls of the latter.

A plan of Westenhanger, based on the MS. plan here reproduced, was published in *Archæologia Cantiana*, Vol. XVII., p. 200, but it appears to be rather difficult to account for certain features in the restoration there given, and it seems desirable, therefore, to rely only on the MS. plan.

The date of the licence to crenelate, although clearly enough 1343, is not necessarily that of the actual building. As has already been suggested, the main structure of the house seems to have been built in the last quarter of the fourteenth century rather than in the second quarter.

The plan of Westenhanger should be compared with that of Bodiam Castle, Sussex, a building which is known to have been erected by Sir Edward Dalyngruge in 1386. Excellent plans of the latter were published by William Cotton† in 1838 and by Mr. Harold Sands,‡ F.S.A., in 1903.

* Harl. MS. 7599, fol. 93. This is one of the volumes of *Adversaria* of Col. Thomas Colepeper (1637—1708).

† *A Graphic and Historical Sketch of Bodiam Castle in Sussex*, p. 31.

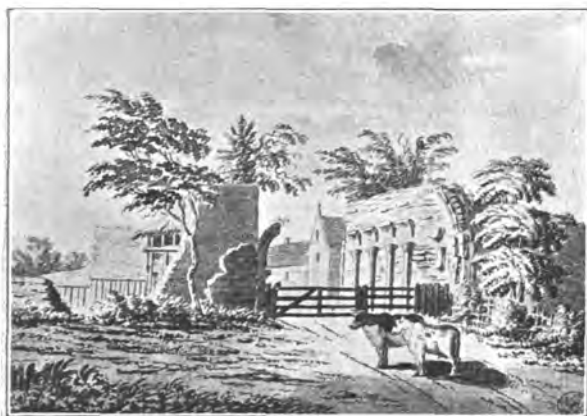
‡ *Sussex Archæological Collections*, vol. xlv., p. 116.

A careful examination proves that the relation between the two plans is striking. The massive circular towers at the angles, and the square, or rectangular, towers half way between them are noteworthy. The general arrangement of the building round the four sides of an open quadrangle, and the strongly-defended gate with its portcullis and draw-bridge, etc., are points of resemblance which will naturally suggest themselves at first sight to any one who pays any attention to the two plans. Bodiam, whose walls stand practically intact, belongs to a class of military architecture which may be referred, without hesitation, to the latter part of the fourteenth century, and it is the close relationship which Westenhanger has to this group of castles (to which Bodiam and Scotney belong) which induces one to place its erection at the latter part, rather than the middle, of the fourteenth century.

There are several remains of later work, mostly of Tudor character, to be seen about the ruins of the old house. The dove-cot in the north-east angle tower, for example, which contains spaces for 500 or 600 nests; remains of a kitchen of the same period, built just adjacent to the north-east tower; and a charming Tudor brickwork fireplace still remaining just to the north of the entrance gateway; and certain other fragments, are the most noteworthy of these.

The courtyard or quadrangle within the house is said to have been 130 feet square, and round it were the great hall 50 feet by 32 feet, with minstrels' gallery at one end, and a chapel measuring 33 feet by 17 feet.

There are at Westenhanger, probably derived from the Tudor part of the building there, several plaster ornaments of good bold design, which appear to have enriched one of the ceilings in the house. The designs, which were pointed out to me by the present occupant, Mr. George Vincent Bird, comprise (1) the royal arms on a shield surmounted by a crown; (2) the sun in his splendour; (3) the Tudor rose; (4) a shield bearing a key surmounted by a crown (the badge of the Poynings family); (5) a shield bearing I.H.C. supported by an angel with a small cross at the top of the



Entrance Gateway, from a Sketch, c. 1750.
(British Museum, King's Library, xviii, 43, 1.)



Buildings on the west of the house, probably of late
15th century date.

WESTENHANGER HOUSE.

head; and (6) a shield bearing three garbs within a bordure engrailed (the arms of Cardinal John Kemp, Archbishop of Canterbury 1452—54).

All of these devices or arms, except the last, are figured in *The Home Counties Magazine*, vol. xii. (1910), pp. 172, 173.

A rank growth of ivy obscures most of the more important remains of Westenhanger, threatening destruction of the fabric at no distant date. If any words of the present writer might perchance influence the owners of this charming old Kentish house, they would speak strongly for the immediate removal of this dangerous, destroying, and disintegrating plant.

On the western side of the house there are two ranges of most interesting fifteenth or early sixteenth century buildings, one possessing a really fine hammer-beam roof, the other possessing door and window mouldings of a character which seems more intimately related to the fifteenth century than the sixteenth.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

The following works contain accounts of Westenhanger:—

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