

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

5. THE OLD VICARAGE, MAIDSTONE

By E. W. PARKIN

DURING July and August, 1964, one of the most interesting small houses in Kent disappeared. This was the Old Vicarage in Knightrider Street, Maidstone, generally thought to have been part of Archbishop Courtenay's extension of the archiepiscopal Palace there around 1395 A.D. It was thus with considerable interest that it was examined, prior to demolition.

On the outside wall, near the main entrance in Knightrider Street was a small stone plaque, displaying the coat of arms of Lawrence Washington, who once lived in this house, and incorporating the stars and stripes of the ancestors of the first President of the United States of America (Fig. 2).

The first Corporation Burghmote Book, f21 (Maidstone Records, p. 56) has an entry under the date 6th April, 1602 as follows: 'Lease in reversion to Lawrence Washington of Maidstone, esquire, of a messuage and one acre of ground in Knightrider Street, bounded on the north side by the said street, on the east side by lands of the heirs of Sir Walter Henley, knight deceased, on the south side by lands late of Roger Roberts, on the west by lands of the heirs of Sir Walter Henley and lands of Sir John Roper (or Roper) knight, heretofore let to Henry Wastnes, deceased, for years yet unexpired. To hold from Michaelmas 1608 when the lease to Wastnes will expire, for twenty-one years at a yearly rent of 26s. 8d.'

Lawrence lived here until his death on 21st December, 1619, when he was buried in the nearby church of All Saints. After this the house was occupied by his daughter Mary and her husband William Horsepoole, but for how long is not known. On page 133 of Maidstone Records, quoting again from the Burghmote Books (f72), is an entry dated 3rd July, 1654; 'Ordered that certain of the Council view a tenement and land belonging to the Corporation, and heretofore let to Lawrence Washington esquire, and now in the occupation of Mr. Richard Marsh, and report as to the yearly value thereof, and what it

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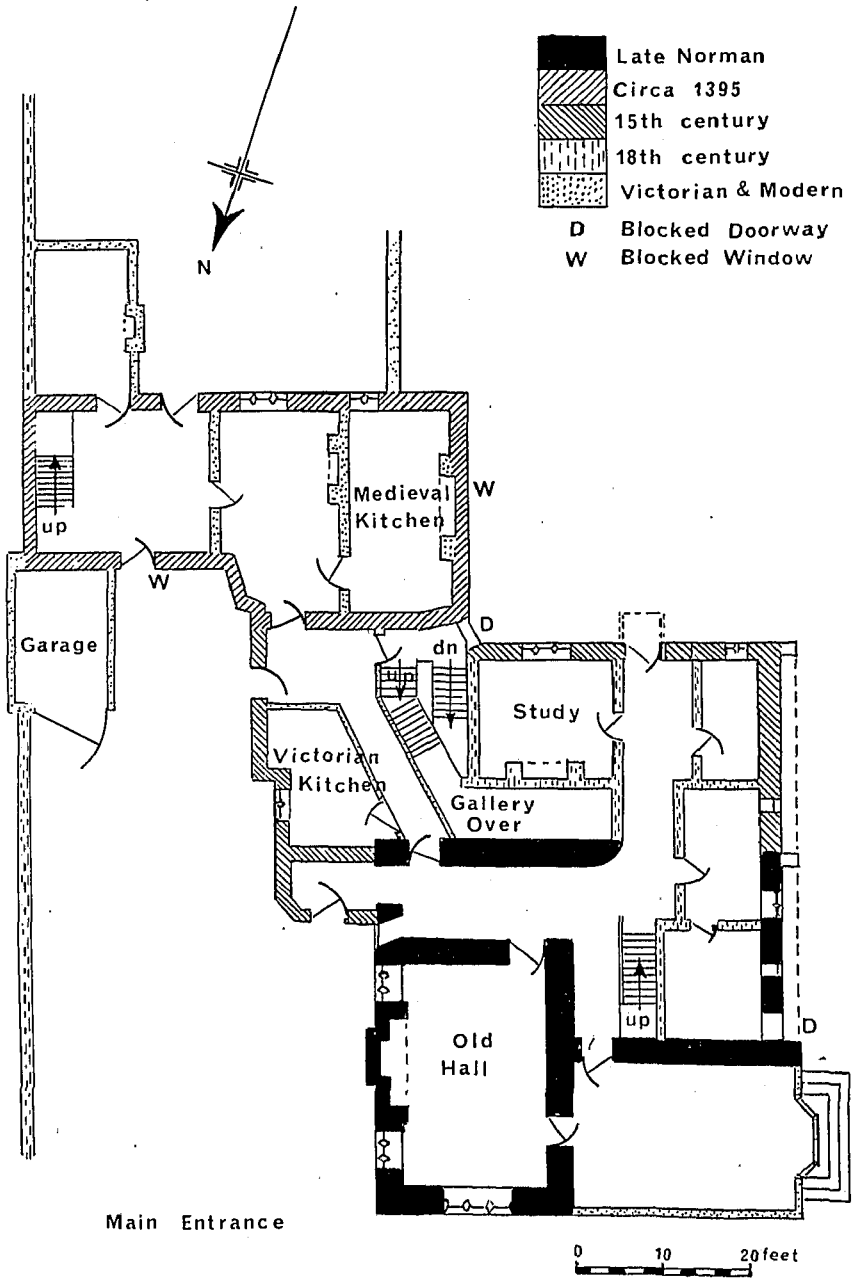


FIG. 1.

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is worth to be sold or let.' A further entry, dated 13th October, 1654 orders that ' . . . the above message and half an acre of land be sold to Richard Marsh.'

That Lawrence Washington was held in high esteem by his fellow townsmen, there can be little doubt. A resolution of the Council states that: ' . . . Mr. Lawrence Washington esquier be admitted to the freedom, and his othe ys respited.' The inscription on the monument in All Saints church, and which is set out in full under Fig. 2, speaks for itself. Washington was Registrar of the High Court of Chancery for twenty-seven years. From letters patent dated 26th March, 35 Elizabeth (1593), the names of Lawrence Washington Esq., and of Lawrence Washington Esq. junior, appear on the list of Chancery Registrars. Again in 1599, the register of Gray's Inn includes the name of Lawrence Washington as a Bencher of that Court.

Washington was the second son of a family of eleven children living originally at Sulgrave Manor in Northamptonshire. His father's name was also Lawrence, and his mother was Ameer daughter of Robert Pargiter of Greatworth in Northants. Sulgrave Manor is the famous and attractive Tudor house which is preserved as a shrine of United States history. Tombs and brasses of most of the family may be found in Sulgrave church. It is from the eldest son Robert that General George Washington is descended.

In the house at Sulgrave are seven glass panels, showing the coats of arms of members of the Washington family. These are facsimiles, five of the originals being in Fawsley Church, and two in Weston Manor near Sulgrave. Lawrence of Maidstone is represented by the arms of Washington impaling Newce. Martha Newce, his first wife, was the daughter of Clement Newce of Great Hadham in Hertfordshire, the arms of this family being: sable, two pallets argent, a canton ermine. Their union produced five sons and two daughters, the eldest child being Lawrence, later Sir Lawrence of Garsdon in Wiltshire. Apparently no children were born to Washington's second marriage to Mary Scott of Kent.

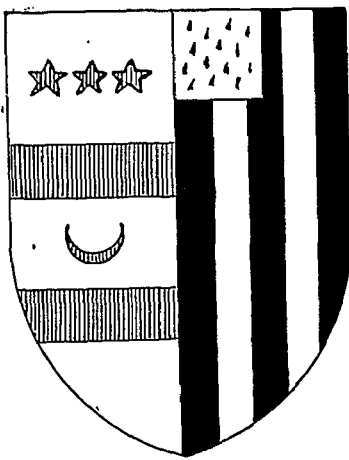
The monument in All Saints church, Maidstone attracts American visitors, as it has the three stars and two stripes still in colour, and is the oldest known representation of this device. In heraldic terms it is quartered as follows:

1 and 4 WASHINGTON, argent, two bars gules, in chief three mullets (five pointed stars) of the second.¹

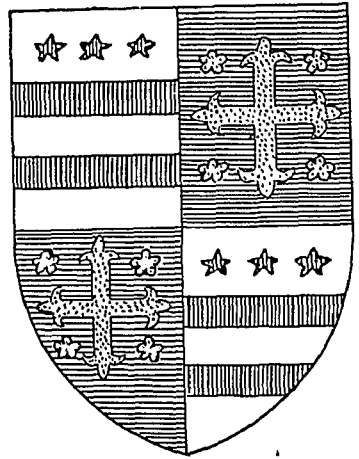
2 and 3 MERCURY or MARCURY, azure, a cross flory or, between four cinquefoils of the second.

¹ The Washington arms form the flag of the District of Columbia, in the U.S.A.

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a SULGRAVE



b MAIDSTONE

FIG. 2.

THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT
IN THE CHURCH OF ALL SAINTS, MAIDSTONE, KENT

This was formerly situated on the north side of the east window in the chancel, and is now in an elevated position on the south wall of the church.

The inscription reads:

‘MORTALIS MORTE IMMORTALIS’

“Here lieth the body of Lawrence Washington, Esq. of the Family of the Washingtons, antientlie of Washington in the Countie Palatine of Durham; Register of the Highe Court of Chancery XXVII yeares. He had two wyves, Martha daughter of Clement Newce of Hartfordshire, Esq., and Mary daughter of Raunald Scott of this Countie, Knight. By his first he had 5 sonnes and 2 daughters, Lawrence and Mary the eldest only lyving,² Lawrence succeeding him in his Office married Ann daughter of William Lewyn, Judge of the Prerogation Court, Mary married William Horsepoole of this parish, Gent. His other daughter Martha married to Arthure Beswick Gent., sonne of William Beswick of this countie Esq.

‘He having lived a vertuous life of singular Intiecity³ in this place, being of the age of LXXIII yeares, died the XXI of December AN. DNI 1619.

‘A faithful believer in the meritts and mercies of hys Saviour, to whose memorie his Sonne hath erected this monument.’

² This appears to be an error.

³ Indecipherable.

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The Maidstone coat of arms is something of an enigma, as it fits no known member of the family. In English Heraldry quartering usually signifies marriage with an heiress, and the device may be adopted several generations after such an event. The most logical explanation would be therefore that an ancestor, perhaps in Lancashire, married an heiress of the name of Mercury. The device of the Scotts of Kent, into whose family Washington married after the death of his first wife, displayed three Catherine wheels, and this may be seen in the churches at Bra-bourne, Smeeth and elsewhere.

Extracts from the Washington pedigree⁴ are given on other pages, and the great popularity of the Christian name Lawrence will be noted there. It would seem that this is due to an earlier union between a Washington and a Lawrence. In the 'Gentleman's Magazine' of 1815, 1816 and 1829 is a series of papers on famous members of the Lawrence family, and these mention a marriage between a Lawrence of Ashton Hall, and a Washington, both of county Lancaster.

Lawrence Washington junior, who became Sir Lawrence Washington of Garsdon, and chief Registrar of the Chancery, was the son of the Maidstone Washington, and he erected the monument in all Saints Church. He died in 1643 aged 64, and was buried in Garsdon church in Wiltshire.

In later years, the old house in Knightrider Street was used as the vicarage of All Saints Church, probably a reversion to its original use as its name implies. It was finally vacated when the new vicarage was completed in the garden on the south side, in 1963.

Plate IA shows the Old Vicarage as it last appeared in June, 1964, viewed from the main entrance in Knightrider Street, and the general plan, Fig. 1 indicates its main details. It was indeed a real rabbit warren of a house, with additions and alterations covering some seven centuries. The oldest part, shown as the Old Hall on the plan, and somewhat similar in style to known Norman Halls, may have been as early as 1200 A.D. This could easily be traced inside the building, as it had walls of stone rubble three feet thick. Later stone windows had been inserted, and an upper floor added with dormer windows. At the east end, incorporated in a small bedroom was a handsome gallery, which had at some time been added to the hall. This hall had a great fireplace and chimney, originally of stone, but since almost completely re-built in stone and brick. It seems certain that there had always been a fireplace and chimney here, as the roof timbers showed no sign of ever having been soot-coated. The roof itself proved to be of very great interest. It was of high pitch with gable ends, and appeared to be original, hence it must have been one of the oldest surviving small

⁴ From the book 'Sulgrave Manor and the Washingtons', by kind permission of the publishers.

roofs still left in this country. It had a row of six straight, heavy tie-beams, not evenly spaced, and each tie-beam supporting a true-king-post, which is rare in the south of England. By king-post is meant a massive square post, in this case, resting on the tie-beam, and reaching right up to the ridge, whereas a crown-post finishes at the collar purlin, often with curved braces. As is usual in medieval roofs, the heavy oak rafters were in pairs, tenoned at the ridge, and held together by collars which in turn were supported by the longitudinal collar purlins. These were short ones, tenoned into the king-posts. All this can be seen in Plate IV and in Fig. 3a, and may be compared with the later crown-post roof in Plate III and Fig. 3b.

It will be noticed that one king-post had been sawn off just below the collar purlins and the corresponding tie-beam cut out to make room in the small bedroom. The under edges of the tie-beams had plain chamfers, as had the king-posts up to the collars. Altogether, the design and the heavy timbers made this a very strong roof, as its condition after so many years proved. It was a design unique in Kent, and similar examples are known only in two churches in Normandy, and one in Paris, all of around 1200 A.D.⁵

The timbers of this roof were eventually sold, and some were used to construct the small flat roof of a wine parlour in the wine merchants shop at 2 Theatre Street, Hythe, where a plaque records their origin.

Whether this hall was originally erected as a free-standing building is not quite certain. It had an internal division giving it a small room at the south end, and it had at some time a wing at the S.W. corner, making it L-shaped in plan, as fragments of stone walling almost three feet thick show.

Next in age to the old hall was the wing at the S.E. corner of the building. This again was of very great interest as it had been apparently the medieval kitchen, and at first quite separate from the rest of the house. This arrangement was not uncommon before the days of brick chimneys, but very few survive. One other example in Kent was the separate kitchen at Pierce House in Charing.

The old kitchen is marked on the plan, and may be seen in Plate II. Its walls were also of local ragstone rubble with ashlar dressings, and about two feet thick. Note several small blocked windows, and large gablets high in the roof at the kitchen end, which may have been used for ventilation. Here the transverse hipped roof was of a more typical Kentish style, with a crown-post and a continuous collar purlin (Plate III and Fig. 3b). The roof timbers were heavily encrusted with soot, indicating an open hearth. A plaster partition prevented the smoke from gaining an entry into the rest of the wing, and part of this, with its

⁵ Reported by J. T. Smith. Since writing this article, S. E. Rigold reports a similar roof in the Abbey at Robertsbridge, in Sussex.



A



B



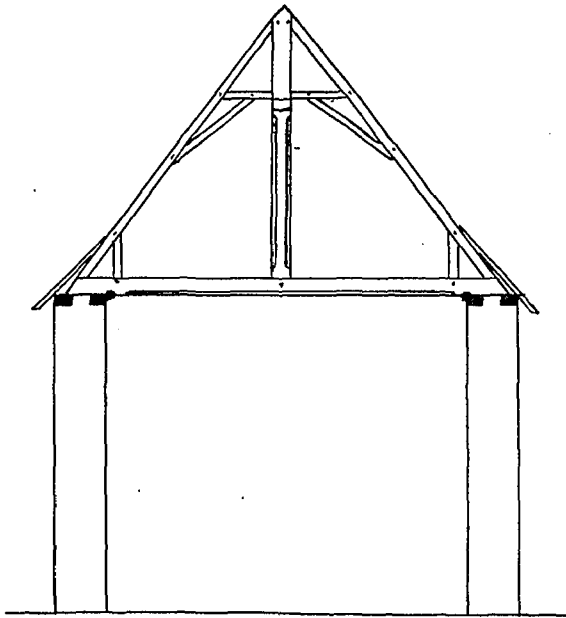
A



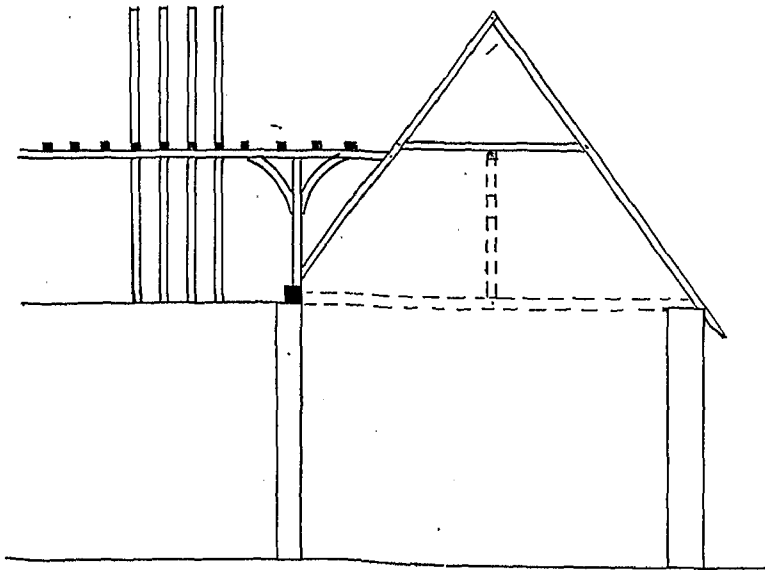
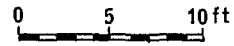
B







a Section through OLD HALL



b Section through Medieval Kitchen

FIG. 3.

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blackened surface may be seen in Plate III. Fig. 3b shows a section through this kitchen, and part of the wing, and the method of framing the roof at this junction. The crown-post of the kitchen is dotted as it is forward of the main axis. The wing east of the kitchen was probably used as a store; it had a small upper room at the far end above heavy, original joists. This separate block may be dated at about 1400 A.D. This makes it contemporary with Archbishop Courtenay, and it may indeed have belonged to him, and to have come within the bounds of the Palace of Maidstone.

Later in the fifteenth century new building work joined together the old hall and the kitchen. This part had survived almost intact, and is seen clearly in Plate IA. The stone quoin just to the left of the open doorway had remains of moulding which showed that a stone archway once stood there.

After the Dissolution the house became the property of the Corporation, and the first known occupant was a Henry Smythe,⁶ who was there in 1562. It was possibly he who built the Tudor additions on the west side of the hall. Here we have a timbered upper storey with two gables and a jetty, or overhang, constructed on remaining portions of older stone walling. The study in this part had a Tudor fireplace. Henry Wastnes took possession about 1591.

Further alterations took place in later years. The gallery probably belongs to the seventeenth century, and the inserted upper rooms and dormer windows over the hall, after that. An attractive eighteenth century porch led out into the garden at the rear, and a modern drawing room with French windows was built at the N.W. corner.

Below the main part of the house were passages and cellars, some blocked.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks are due to the Author and Publishers of the book 'Sulgrave and the Washingtons,' H. Clifford Smith, F.S.A., and Messrs. Jonathan Cape of 30 Bedford Square, London, for permission to reproduce from their book parts of the Washington pedigree, and information relating to the history of Sulgrave Manor and the Washingtons.

To the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments for kind assistance, and for permission to use Crown copyright photographs, Plates IA, IB, III and IV, and for drawings re-drawn for Figs. 3a and 3b.

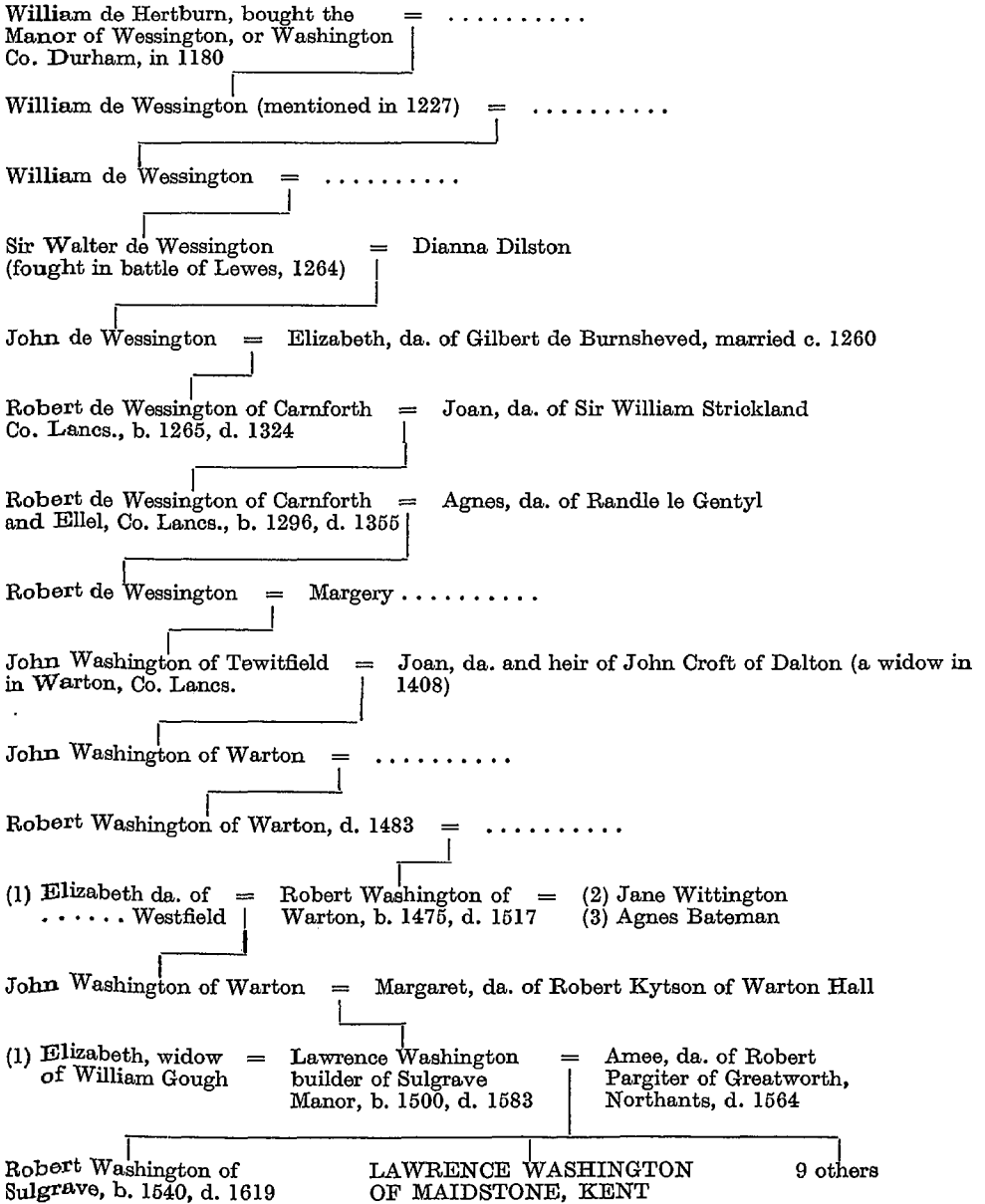
To L. R. A. Grove, B.A., F.S.A., F.R.E.S., of the Museum, Maidstone for help in research into the Maidstone Records.

⁶ v. manuscript survey of Maidstone 1832, by Clement Taylor Smythe, Town Clerk.

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EXTRACT FROM THE WASHINGTON PEDIGREE

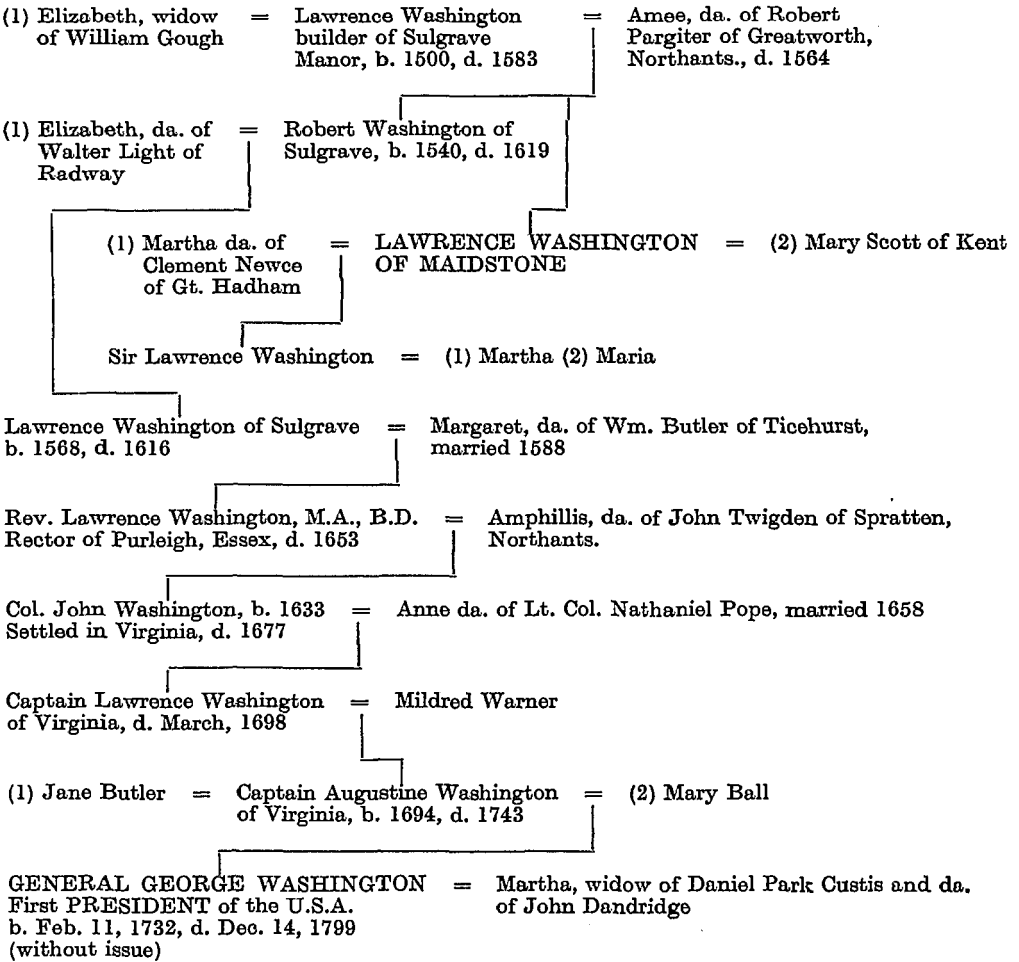
I. SOME ANCESTORS OF LAWRENCE WASHINGTON OF MAIDSTONE



THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

EXTRACT FROM THE WASHINGTON PEDIGREE

2. THE WASHINGTONS OF SULGRAVE, TO GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON



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