

THE VANISHING HOUSES OF KENT

7. HARRINGE COURT, SELLINDGE

By E. W. PARKIN

SINCE this series of articles began in 1962, public opinion towards the preservation of our heritage of old buildings has made considerable advances.

The joint sub-committee of the Kent Archaeological Society, and the Committee for the Preservation of Rural Kent, has done such good work, that material for this series is becoming noticeably scarcer. Indeed, it would be easier now to describe some of the committee's successes, often after hard and protracted negotiations, as in the case of the Preceptory Chapel of St. John at Swingfield, the fate of which had been in the balance for years.

The new sections of the Town and Country Planning Act of 1962 have encouraged, and facilitated this work.

The last remnants of one of the oldest manors in Kent disappeared in that year, despite every effort by the joint committee. This was Harringe Court in the parish of Sellindge, between Ashford and Folkestone. Just east of Sellindge church is a narrow lane which leads southward to the hamlet of Court-at-Street, and it is about half-way along this lane, said to be the longest in Kent without any side turning, that parts of the old mansion still stood in 1962.

Both the names Sellindge and Harringe indicate the pre-Conquest origin of these places.¹ After the first landing of the Jutes and Saxons in south-east England around A.D. 450, the erstwhile Romano-British inhabitants were gradually forced westward, and many favoured spots amidst the streams and forests of Kent were taken by family groups who settled there, and after whom the site was named. One example is the family and followers of Ealda, the Ealdings, who encamped by the river Beult in the heart of Kent, at a place now called Yalding. Other similar place-names are Malling, where the Meallingas or Meallings made their home, Detling, Huckling, Charing, and so on. Seven miles south-south-west of Canterbury are three farmsteads, barely half a mile from each other, named Bavinge, Podlinge and Ittinge. This indicates that some such settlements were very small. It may be that in the present parish of Sellindge the Sell-ings and Harrings made their home.

¹ P. H. Reaney, *Arch. Cant.*, lxxiii (1959), 62, and lxxvi (1961), 58.

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The first documentary mention of Harringe is in Domesday, when it was part of the estates of Hugo de Montfort, being the most important of four manors, the others being Wilmington,² Somerfield, and Hodiford.

Hasted tells us³ that the estate remained in the possession of the de Montforts until a grandson was exiled by Henry I, and the property was siezed by the Crown '... as escheats, and were immediately afterwards granted to Hugh de Gurney, or Gourney, descended from him of the same name who is on the list of those who attended William the Conqueror in his expedition from Normandy hither.'

The next owner mentioned is Robert de Sharfield, who died in the eighth year of the reign of Edward III (1335), and '... his heirs paid aid for it in the year 20 Ed. III' (1347).

The property passed to Henry Brockhull of Saltwood, and it remained in this family until the latter end of the reign of Henry VI (*circa* 1470) when it was conveyed to Sir Edmund Ingelthorpe, Knight, and later to someone of the name of Morton, then to a certain Fillol, being mentioned as in the name of Dorothy Fillol anno 28 Henry VIII (1537).

The next family to own the manor was that of the Willoughbys, until Sir Francis Willoughbye alienated the property to Ralph Hayman at the latter end of the reign of Elizabeth I (*circa* 1600) and this family continued to live there until '... towards the end of the reign of Charles II' (*circa* 1680).

Sir Peter Hayman, Bart., sold the property to Thomas Gomeldon, and later it passed to his son Richard, who, dying without issue, left it to his sister Meliora, whose husband Thomas Stanley of Preston later sold it to Sir William Smith, for a sum of little more than £200. In the year 1747, Sir William was adjudged a lunatic, and a commission under a certain William Dicconson administered the estate until the death of its owner, when it was sold to Thomas Hayman, a descendant of previous owners of that name.

The property eventually passed to the Haberdasher's Company, and finally to St. Katharine's, London,⁴ the present owners of it, by whom it has been let out to tenant farmers. In the nineteenth century a Mr. Birt was in possession, followed by the Buss family for many years. Earlier this century Mr. A. J. Nicholls was farming here, followed in 1936 by Mr. W. T. Butcher, who is still the tenant.

Fig. 1 shows Harringe Court and its farm buildings before the recent modernization programme. The outline of the house as it existed in 1962, is shown in heavy line (Ho), and the conjectural position of the medieval timber-framed house is shown in dotted line (Med. Ho.), one bay of which still survived (A), enclosed in brick and tile.

² *Arch. Cant.*, xlviii, 18.

³ Edward Hasted, *History of the County of Kent*, viii, 307.

⁴ The Royal Foundation of Saint Katharine, Ratcliffe, London, E.14.

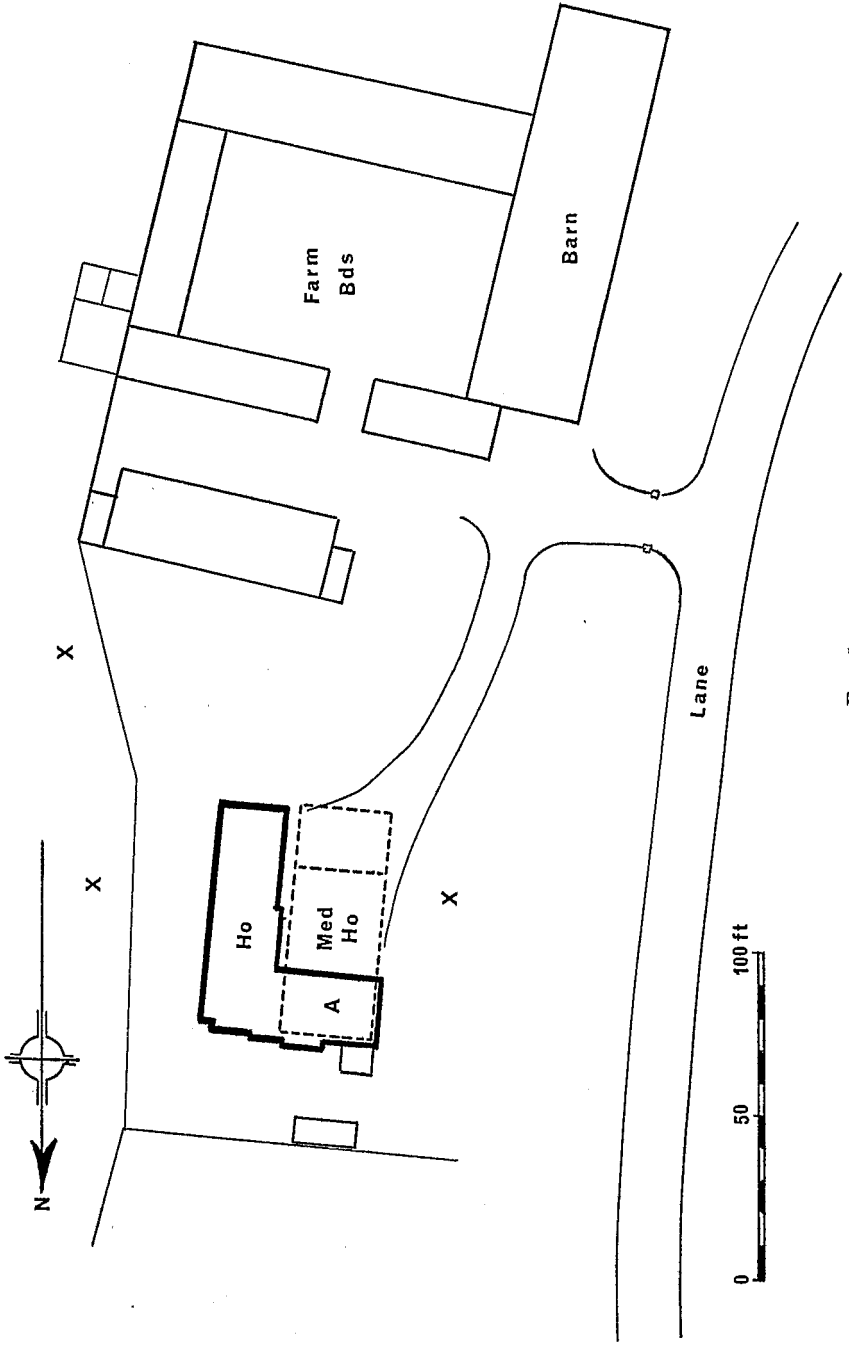


FIG. 1.

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Permission was sought from the owner, and the house was surveyed.⁵ Fig. 2 shows a plan of it in more detail. The longer wing B had all the characteristics of the seventeenth century, with timber-framing on the first floor, since covered by tiles, and a long jetty or overhang, now underbuilt in brick. Inside, the two main rooms had massive cross-beams, shown in broken line. These were finely moulded on the edges, with scroll stops.

The handsome chimney stack F, had a disappointing modern grate inside it on the ground floor, but when this was taken out, there was discovered behind it a fine stone fireplace with moulded jambs, and a stone beam carved with a floral pattern. This was unfortunately broken in taking it out. A similar but smaller fireplace was found in the room above.

Inside the hall H, the staircase and partition were later insertions. There was a brick wine-cellar under the northernmost room, reached by the stairs marked dn. The windows and doors were modern.

The roof was original, and in fairly good condition, having almost square rafters and heavy side purlins, with deep collars, or cross-pieces, which were fitted at intervals of every fifth pair of rafters.

The smaller wing A looked unattractive, being enclosed in brick and tile, but inside it one realized that it was the oldest part, and it had an unusual roof. Heavy oak beams and joists supported the first floor, and these included the two dragon beams D-D, which showed that once there must have been jetties here on three sides, and that this was in fact the end bay of a very fine Wealden house, being the owner's parlour, with solar above. The hall and the rest of the house could only have extended southward from this (Fig. 1).

The roof was about two-thirds original, having been reconstructed at the eastern end to join it to the seventeenth-century wing. Its design was most unusual, in that it had, apart from two normal tie-beams across the wing, a third one joining them at right angles, and upon which stood a square crown-post. It was impossible to photograph this, as a large wooden platform for a water tank stood upon it (Plate IIB). The cut-away drawing (Fig. 3) shows the main features more clearly. The rafters R were in pairs, and joined by collars C. These were supported by the collar purlin CP and the crown-post P, resting on the longitudinal beam LT, between the two normal ties, one of which, TT, is shown. PT is a partition.

That these remaining portions were only fragments of a former mansion is quite clear. Charles Igglesden states⁶ that 'Mr. Charles Buss, whose family lived here for many years, has traced old foundations

⁵ In conjunction with R. W. McDowall of the Royal Commission on Historic Monuments.

⁶ *A Saunter through Kent*, x, 49.



A. Harringe Court, view from the south-west.



B. View of the east side.

PLATE II



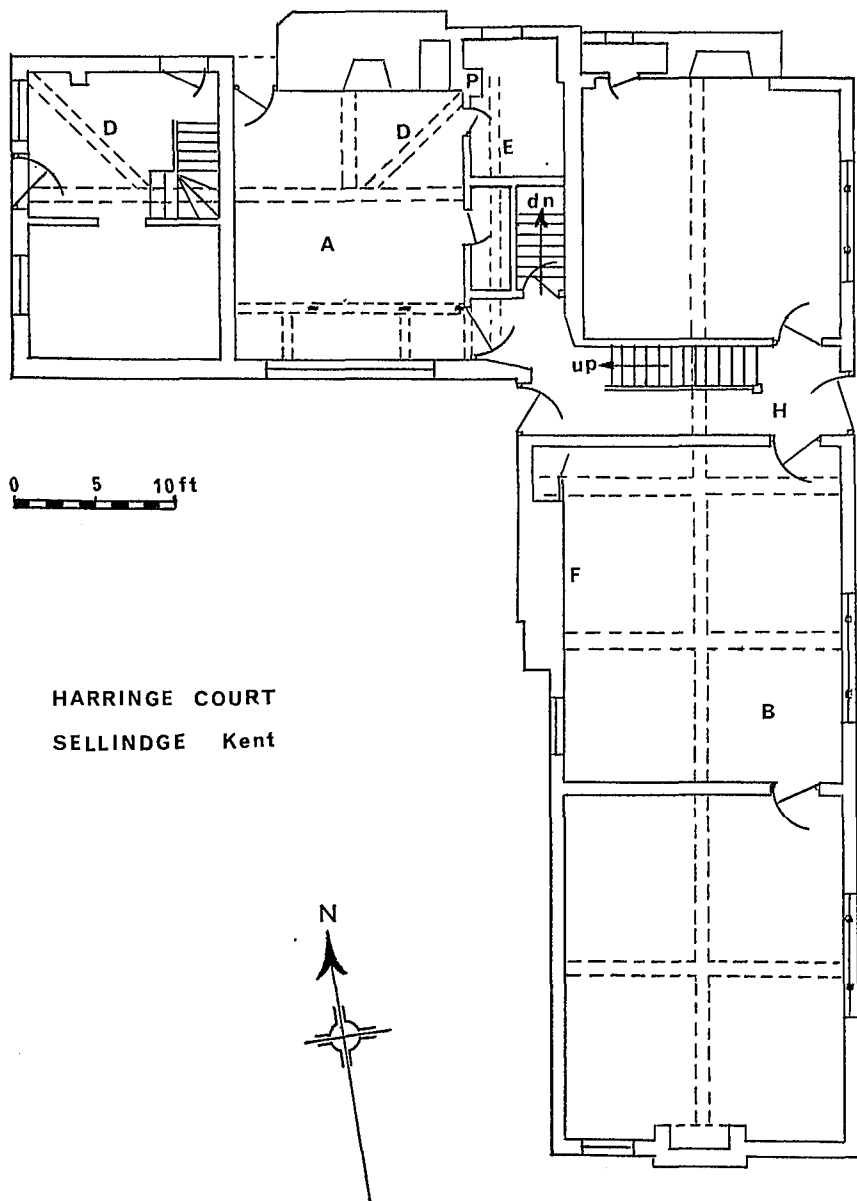
A. The seventeenth-century chimney breast.



B. The roof of the smaller wing.

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both front and back of the present building, and it is said that the residence was once so extensive that it contained a window for every day of the year, 365 in all.'



HARRINGE COURT
SELLINDGE Kent

FIG. 2.

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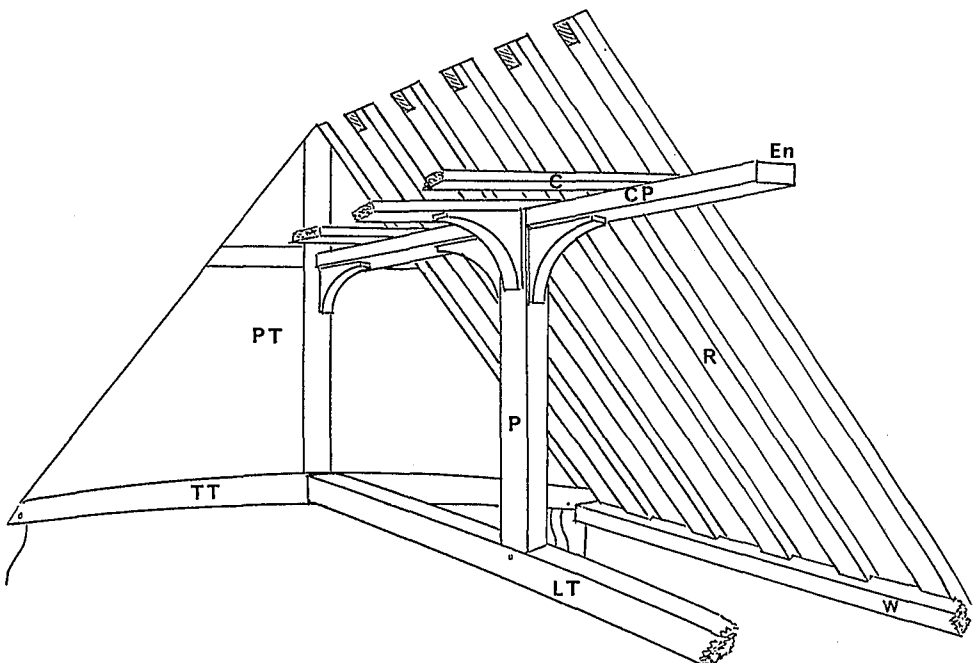


FIG. 3.

Edward Hasted, writing in 1799, concludes his history of the estate thus: ‘... Thomas Hayman has almost rebuilt this seat, which had remained unfinished from the time of its first building until then, and now resides in it.’

It is difficult to reconcile these statements with the observed facts. Fragments of old foundations do still peep through the grass in places, and one or two are marked X on the plan (Fig. 1). If Thomas Hayman built a large mansion as Hasted says—and there is no reason to disbelieve him, it must all have disappeared again since, for no remaining part of the house belonged to the eighteenth century.

The large barn, and a smaller one were ancient, but since then, all the farm buildings have been rebuilt, and a new house stands on the site of the old one.

In one of the farm buildings, an ancient well and a ‘Donkey Wheel’ still existed until 1962. This was for drawing water, and appears to have been a common feature in certain farms and large houses before the present century.

They were chiefly found on higher ground, where natural streams did not exist, and a few complete examples still survive in Kent, with evidence of some twenty more. A well-known example of a Donkey Wheel is at Chilham Castle.