

TWO LOST COURT LODGES—LONGFIELD AND WOOTTON

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THE designation 'Court', or 'Court Lodge', of such a high proportion of Kentish manor-houses often denotes an origin among the endowments of one of the great religious houses, or among episcopal temporalities. This is but one of the reasons why they often conceal remains of medieval stone buildings, and in particular of the specialized plans required by the clergy. Longfield Court (TQ603690) and Wootton Court (TR225466) have both been utterly demolished since the last war, and, apart from a hard-to-come-by note on Longfield, neither has been described in print in any modern fashion—even Sir Charles Iggesden's *Saunter* never took him to their small and secluded parishes. Nor was any notice given for an adequate survey before demolition since neither house had any statutory 'listing'. The accounts that follow are based on salvaged information.

LONGFIELD COURT

Longfield was an ancient possession of St. Andrew of Rochester, a 'dog-legged' *feld* or clearing, $3\frac{1}{2}$ miles long and $\frac{1}{4}$ mile wide. At the time of Domesday, it had been assigned to the Bishop and was held of him by Anschitil the priest who, at least by 1107–8, was his Archdeacon.¹ Thereafter, the Bishop regularly granted it to the Archdeacon,² and this arrangement persisted until the learned Archdeacon Plume, founder of the Plume Library at Maldon, Essex, was buried at Longfield in 1704. Presumably all these Archdeacons lived, on occasion, at Longfield Court, but when Harris wrote in 1719, he called it a 'farmhouse', albeit a massive one,³ and thanks to this reduced status it escaped rebuilding in the eighteenth century. In the mid-nineteenth century the Ecclesiastical Commissioners disposed of it.⁴

In the 1950s both authors had noticed the medieval flintwork appearing through the dense covering of ivy and creepers, though little detail was visible other than Victorian. The house appeared to comprise two attached ranges with gables at the north. In 1908, when it was less overgrown externally but already much disguised inside, it had been explored by C. E. Lovell who published a brief account, with drawings

¹ Domesday, f. 5b; *Registr. Hamonis Hethe*, 433.

² Cf. the similar tenure of Lympe by the Archdeacon of Canterbury.

³ J. Harris, *The History of Kent* (1719), 187.

⁴ After 1836, but several changes of ownership before 1908.

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of details but no plan, in the short-lived *Architectural and Topographical Record*.⁵ In March, 1962, we learned that it was being demolished to make way for more of the housing that has turned Longfield, in a surprisingly short time, from a tiny village into a singularly charmless little dormitory-town. We went at once to take what records we could, but of the eastern of the two apparent ranges only a fragment of the east wall, with a flint quoin at the south-east, remained, and of the west range only the west wall stood to plate level, the others being already reduced to shoulder-level or lower. Among the pile of rubble were few ashlar details, but quite a number of oak timbers, from which an attempt has been made to reconstruct the roof of the west range. There were also a few timbers with heavy deposits of soot consistent with their having at some time covered an open hearth. By June, 1962, not a trace of the building remained and its site was covered by a road.

The walling was of field flints; the quoins and the surrounds of the doors and windows were of ragstone, in long slabs, well-dressed and generally in fair condition. Lovell called the openings 'thirteenth- and fourteenth-century', and mistook an upper doorway (E) for a lancet. As far as we could see them, the dressings were in fact all of one, early Perpendicular period, with neat hollow-chamfers and brooch or pyramid stops (Fig. 1, P), from the late fourteenth century or a little afterwards, and there was no positive evidence that the medieval fabric of the house was other than one build.

Lovell records that the medieval stonework and rafter-ends were visible all along the west and south sides. The west range was certainly a unitary stone building, 45 by 25 ft. externally, roofed north to south, with a gable at the north, hipped at the south and of two storeys from the beginning. But of the apparent east range only the southern part was medieval—its termination in the west wall is clear in the only known photograph of the exterior. The original plan was thus L-shaped, and the south-eastern part was roofed east to west. At an unknown later date the re-entrant was filled in and covered by a gable, rather higher than the other, and likewise facing north, thus producing a nearly square ensemble. The entrance, with a Victorian porch, was in this addition, beside the north-east angle of the west range; it led, as Lovell records, to a passage right through the house, flanked on the right (west) side by five medieval arched doorways, one of which had been blocked.

The west range comprised a spacious Great Chamber, or Solar, with service-rooms and another room (X) beside them on the ground floor: the south-east quarter included a Hall, of which the further part of the passage seen by Lovell was the screens-passage. There was, however,

⁵ *The Architectural and Topographical Record*, London, I, 1908, 317-19.

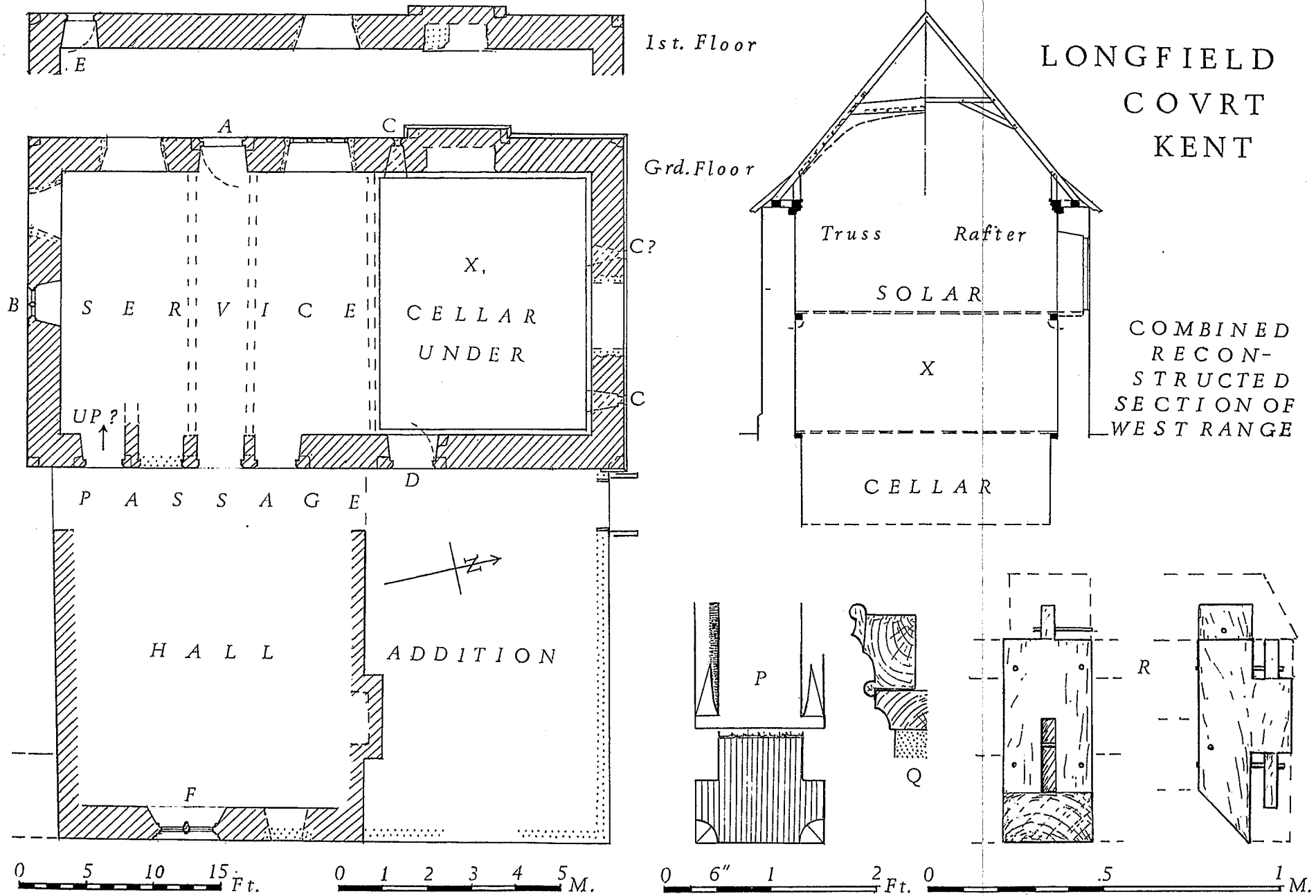


FIG. 1.

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no trace of stone entrance doors to the passage nor of any bonding of the north and south walls to the west range. These walls may have been, at least in part, timber-framed, and subsequently rebuilt in mixed materials, but the east wall was of flint and almost certainly of the same character as the west range. It contained a blocked opening, probably a door, and a low two-light window. This window (F), drawn by Lovell (see Fig. 2) and recovered in fragments, was clearly of the same period as the rest of ragstone detail and, to all appearance, *in situ*, indicating that, at the period in question, the Hall was short and confined to the ground floor. It will be shown that this is consistent with the appointments of the west range, though it is possible that something remained of an earlier open Hall, as the soot-caked timbers might suggest.

The external details preserved in the west range were: on the north, a plinth, returned a short way round the east; on the west, a broad chimney-breast, beyond which the plinth ceased, and an arched doorway (A, see Fig. 2), rescued intact. This contained its original door-leaf of vertical lap-boards with ledges, though it had been reversed. In the south wall, which had no plinth, a two-light cusped window, with shutter-rebates but no glazing-groove (B), had already been broken down but its position is almost certain. Internally, four adjacent arched doors, with hollow chambers and brooch-stops (as Fig. 1, P), gave on to the hall from the west range. The widest of these doors, opposite the door (A) in the west wall, indicated a kitchen-passage; the southernmost door probably led to a stairway to the chamber, leaving window (B) to light one of the two flanking service-rooms. The western windows were formed, or enlarged, later. The partition-walls must have been timber-framed, but the boundary between the service and the northern room (X) is suggested by a cellar under the latter, apparently contemporary and lit by a cellar-light (C) beside the chimney-breast and at least one on the north front (C). The fifth door in the extended screens-passage (D) did not lead from the Hall but possibly from an attached pentice. It formed the entrance to room X which had no communication with any other part of the house, and was probably an independent lodging for a subordinate, rather than a store-room. The remaining jamb of its fireplace did not look original.

The floor of the Great Chamber or Solar was carried on heavy chamfered beams, presumably framed into girder-beams on the side wall, carried not on offsets but on corbels. There was no trace of any sub-division on the first floor, though a chamber of this size is likely to have had a framed partition. All the windows had been altered beyond recognition and relined in brick, but Lovell records traces of a Gothic window-head in the north gable. The absence of any traces of window-seats, usually a durable feature, confirms that the range was of relatively

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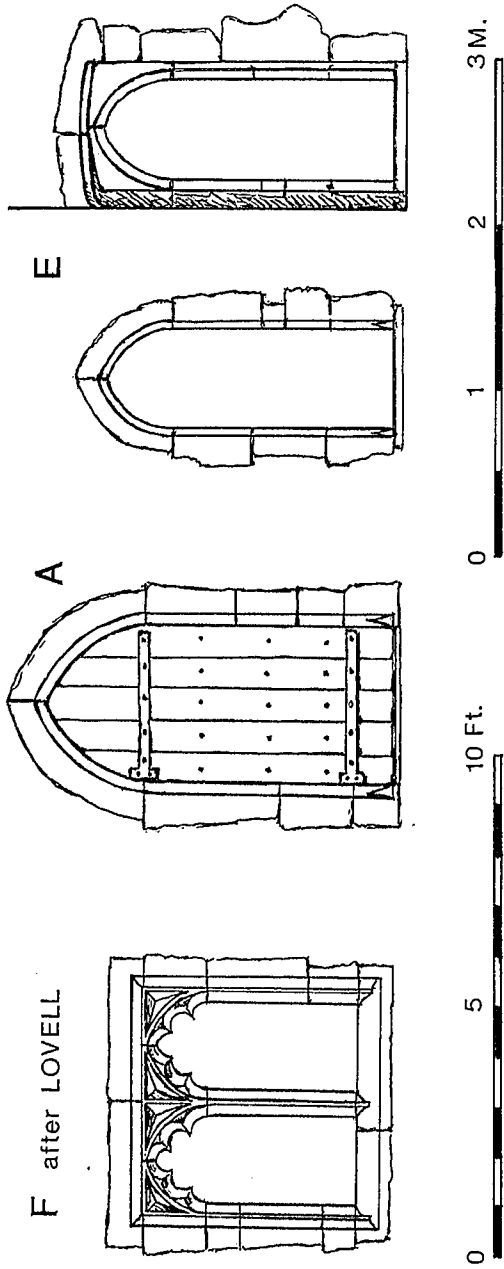


FIG. 2.

late date. There was, however, an intact external door (E, see Fig. 2) to the upper floor, at the extreme south of the west wall, implying an outside staircase leading from a point near the kitchen passage. It was only 2 ft. wide, and the arch head, like that of door A, was formed of two voussoirs only, and the almost flat inner arch, likewise of two stones, bore a hollow chamfer. This probably led into a vestibule or ante-chamber, leaving the larger northern part as the Great Chamber proper. But even this would not have provided complete accommodation for a higher cleric; there was for instance, no oratory, nor place for a garde-robe, both likely adjuncts to an inner chamber or bedroom, and it is suggested that the inner chamber stood above the ground-floor Hall. The stoolings of two more double jambs, with broach-stops (as Fig. 1, P), found among the débris at the west end, probably derived from paired doors leading into these adjuncts, and the absence of a stone quoin at the south-east may indicate that the garderobe was here. This reconstruction would provide a complete and appropriate suite for the Archdeacon on the first floor, with Hall for occasional public use, service-rooms, and probably a separate lodging for a servant (X), on the ground-floor. This would have been the arrangement from a date not earlier than the late fourteenth century: it is possible, but no more, that it made use of flint, but not ashlar, from an earlier lay-out, with a simpler chamber-block and open hall. The flint quoin at the south-east might even have been a relic of a building from Anschitil's time.

The late medieval roofs must have been substantially intact until the demolition. Lovell records that the cornice was visible in the 'south-east bedroom' (i.e. over the Hall) and in the 'north-west bedroom', while the demolition showed that it remained throughout the west range. He also says that the roof-trees were exposed in the north-west part and their profile was visible, though plastered in, above the Hall. It is only possible to describe the roof over the west range, and that only as far as it could be reconstructed from dismantled timbers. The cornice, or 'jowpe', was in two parts, the upper 'brattished' or embattled, over a cavetto and roll, the lower with a plain broad cavetto or hollow chamfer (Fig. 1, Q) again, a purely 'Perpendicular' series. The roof was of simple 'trussed rafter' type, with light collars and braces, and ashlar rising from the cornice, but without purlins, central or lateral, which points to a date little if any after 1400. But there was at least one 'medial' truss, decorative rather than functional, with a heavier and slightly cambered collar (13 in. deep at the centre, 8 in. thick), thin but solid arch-braces, and neat chamfers on the collar and the lower part of the rafters, which again were deeper (9 by 6½ in.) than the common rafters but not functionally 'principals'. Here, as at Croydon Palace, are echoes of a more western type of roof intruding into the area of Kentish practice. A loose timber among the rubble of

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the hall (Fig. 1, R) was essentially like the jowled head of a post, with normal tenons to carry wall-plate and tie, but a similar tenon on the under part showed that it was not the top of a post but a short block made to ride over a lower plate while a frontal mortice suggested a second, lower tie; this *may* indicate that the roof of an earlier open hall had been raised to gain one foot of headroom.

The building invites comparison with the splendid Rectory built by Thomas of Alkham, at Southfleet not far away. Though half a century or so later, Longfield was not only of much less architectural pretension, but more archaic in concept, in that the Great Chamber lay over the service end, whereas at Southfleet (as also at Salisbury Old Deanery, half a century earlier yet), it formed a grand cross-wing at the high end.⁶ On the other hand, as the hall was apparently reduced to a relatively small apartment on the ground floor, it is also an instance of the urban 'double block' type, with single storey hall and second chamber over it, not unknown in priest's houses of the fifteenth century.⁷

WOOTTON COURT

Wootton formed part of the lands of Christ Church when the minster was indistinguishable from the archiepiscopal *familia*. In the Norman period Geddinge, a sub-manor in it, was held of the monks as a dependency of Eastry,⁸ while the tenant of the chief manor was numbered among the Archbishop's knights, but only 'acknowledged half a knight', i.e. presumably the half not connected with Geddinge.⁹ Mr. H. M. Colvin has shown that the same person may sometimes have been the sub-tenant of both,¹⁰ but later there is a suggestion of division and perhaps of dispute. An eponymous family of Wootton, who also held Wootton, or Wolton, in Westwell, are represented by Alan, who acknowledged half a knight in 1170, and Ivo in 1236,¹¹ but in 1210-12 and again in 1253-4 the tenants are 'of Guestling',¹² while in 1346 we hear of John of Ore (which is near Guestling) and the heirs of Richard of Wootton.¹³ Although this might imply absentees, living in east Sussex, as well as minority and wardship, there is no documentary reason to suppose anything other than a secular type of house at

⁶ For variant plans of Priest's Houses, with a high proportion of low halls, cf. W. A. Pantin, *Medieval Arch.*, i (1957), 118-46. Another late instance of the best chamber, i.e. the semi-public *camera* over the service end may be seen at Headcorn Manor, or Old Vicarage.

⁷ E.g. Chesil Old Rectory, Winchester.

⁸ *Domesday Monachorum*, ed. D. C. Douglas, 88.

⁹ H. M. Colvin, in *Documents Illustrative of Medieval Kentish Society*, 25-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Hasted, quarto ed., vii, 424.

¹² *The Red Book of the Exchequer*, ii, 470; *Arch. Cant.*, xii (1878), 203.

¹³ *Arch. Cant.*, x (1876), 116 (at the knighting of the Black Prince).

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Wootton Court although it stood a short distance north of the churchyard.

After the Reformation the tenancy-in-chief passed to impropriators with wider interests, including the Digges of Barham, but John Coppin acquired it in 1606, probably with the intention of living there, as the Brydges, who followed in 1704, certainly did.¹⁴ Works of both periods could be identified. The Rev. E. Tymewell Brydges, who succeeded in 1781, immediately, or at any rate after he had married a rich wife four years later, transformed the house by building a complete new residence on the north-west side and demoting the old building to a rear range. The young 'squarson' was ambitious:¹⁵ he employed the well-known and articulate architect John Plaw,¹⁶ and the building, on a truly grand scale, was presumably finished by 1790, when an engraving after a drawing by Plaw himself appeared in the folio 'Hasted', showing the new, north-west, entrance-façade in all its neo-classic elegance.¹⁷ It was stucco-covered and more graceful than durable, for in 1876, when George Joseph Murray bought it off the trustees of J. G. W. Brydges, he re-cased it in flint and hard brick;¹⁸ at the same time the eighteenth-century entrance was replaced by a polygonal projecting bay, making this side into a garden-front, and a brick-arched portico, large enough to take a carriage, was built on the north-east. There are in broken lines on Fig. 3. Murray cannot have enjoyed the house long: by c. 1894, it had become a preparatory school, founded by H. G. Underhill, whose widow continued it after his death in 1908. A few years after, it was taken over by the then acting headmaster, H. R. Yates,¹⁹ who with his son-in-law and co-headmaster, evacuated the school in 1939. The school never returned: it was used for prisoners of war and displaced persons, and about 1952 everything was demolished except the stable-block.

One of the writers (S.E.R.) attended the school in 1932 and 1933. The plan (Fig. 3) and description depend upon a photographic boyhood memory. That the scale has not been magnified by time is attested by the known capacity of certain rooms in human terms.²⁰

¹⁴ Hasted, quarto ed., ix, 364.

¹⁵ As his monument records, he wore himself out trying to claim the barony of Chandos. He died in 1807, left no children and was succeeded by his brothers, Sir Egerton and Sir John W. H. Brydges.

¹⁶ H. M. Colvin, *Biographical Dictionary of English Architects*, 463, with references.

¹⁷ Hasted, folio ed., iii, opp. p. 763. By the quarto ed. he had 'improved the grounds'.

¹⁸ Kelly's *Directory*, 1913: the 1878 edition describes it as still uninhabited, presumably since the last Lady Bridges died in 1850.

¹⁹ Others will share my *pietas* towards this fine headmaster, and that rare thing, a patient teacher of mathematics.—S.E.R.

²⁰ Forty boys and eight adults could dine in comfort at separate tables in one of the large rooms.

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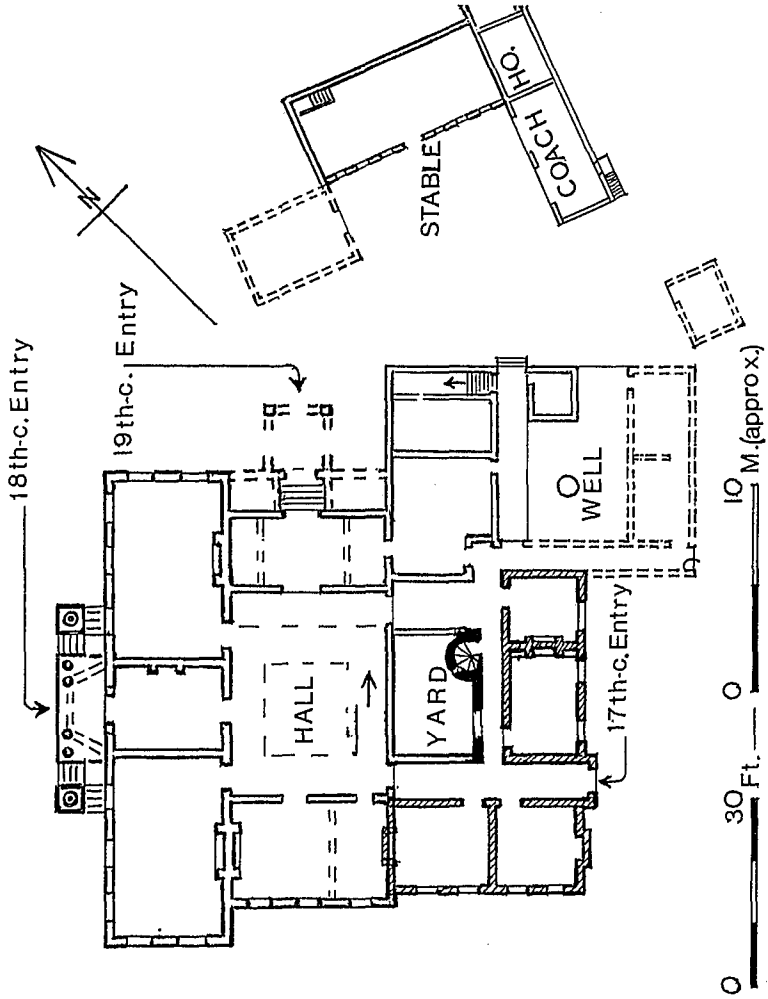


FIG. 3.
Wootton Court, Sketch-plan.

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The plan of the new, north-western part of the house (unhatched on Fig. 3) needs little explanation. The window-spacing, and therefore the shape of the main rooms, agreed with the view of c. 1790, but, as far as can be remembered, all or most of detail, including the staircase, dated from the 1870s. The spacious hall, where the whole school could assemble in one rank round the walls, was lighted from above. The polygonal central bay of the nineteenth-century garden front had little to say for itself; the eighteenth-century entrance it replaced, as recorded in the Architect's own drawing, was of a sensitive and unusual type, somewhat in the idiom of Samuel Wyatt. The large wings flanking the entrance were quite without ornament, as was the pediment and the first storey beneath it. But the doorway had a broad elliptical fanlight and the broad Doric porch before it, had an upper balustrade and wide central intercolumniation; steps led up to it in two directions, with pedestalled urns in the re-entrants.

On the south-east side of the main block was an open courtyard, flanked on the other three sides by passages lined with rooms towards the outer walls, which though somewhat Victorianized, had the appearance of seventeenth-century brick-and-flint masonry. The panelling of the rooms was of early eighteenth-century type. These ranges (hatched on Fig. 3) were all that remained of the old house, which on the strength of the detail, would seem to have been re-cast by the Coppins in the early seventeenth century, and, at least internally, re-furnished by the Brydges soon after 1704. In the east corner of the open courtyard was a medieval semi-circular stair-turret, of flintwork with narrow ashlar lights, and part of the adjoining wall was of similar masonry (solid on Fig. 3). There may have been more work of this period visible until the 1870s, as several works mention the ancient nucleus of the house. The passage from the eighteenth-century hall to the entrance to the old house could be interpreted as a vestigial screens-passage from the seventeenth-century house, but this may be delusive. The service and kitchen-court seems always to have been at the east, near the well, and the stair-turret suggests that the south-east range was never an open hall and always a two-storey chamber-block: the hall, if any, would then have been in the north-east range, and the west a later addition. The medieval fragment was hard to date closely, but was certainly not earlier than the thirteenth century, more probably of the early fourteenth. Excavation might still one day settle these points.

East of the house, on an oblique axis, across a paved court, was the stable-block which remains still, in a ruinous state; it is of red brick, of late seventeenth-century appearance but probably the work of the earliest Brydges, soon after 1704, with a central gable, in which a clock was once set, and above this an ogee-capped polygonal bellcote. Altogether it looked not unlike a schoolhouse and was used for teaching

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handicraft. Attached to it were a chalk-ashlar coach-house, with groom's apartment above, and opposite it, a large harness-room used as a gymnasium. Further east was an ice-house. The only garden ornament was a gigantic bearded head on a pedestal, known as 'Julius Caesar', but apparently representing the Brydges' crest.