

# Orleton Manor

Orleton NW/092670/FH  
Herefordshire



An  
Architectural & Archaeological  
Analysis

March 2008

Mercian Heritage Series No.325

RICHARD K MORRISS & ASSOCIATES - HISTORIC BUILDINGS CONSULTANTS  
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**Orleton Court  
Orleton  
Herefordshire**  
NGR: SO 491 669

N W / 0 9 2 6 7 0 / F H



*Crest of Thomas Blounts coat of arms  
on his memorial in Orleton church*

**An  
Archaeological & Architectural  
Analysis**

**Text**

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Orleton Court

Pl 2: Sketch of Orleton Court in Timmins' *Nooks and Corners of Herefordshire* published in 1892. Note the two porches on this north elevation at that time.

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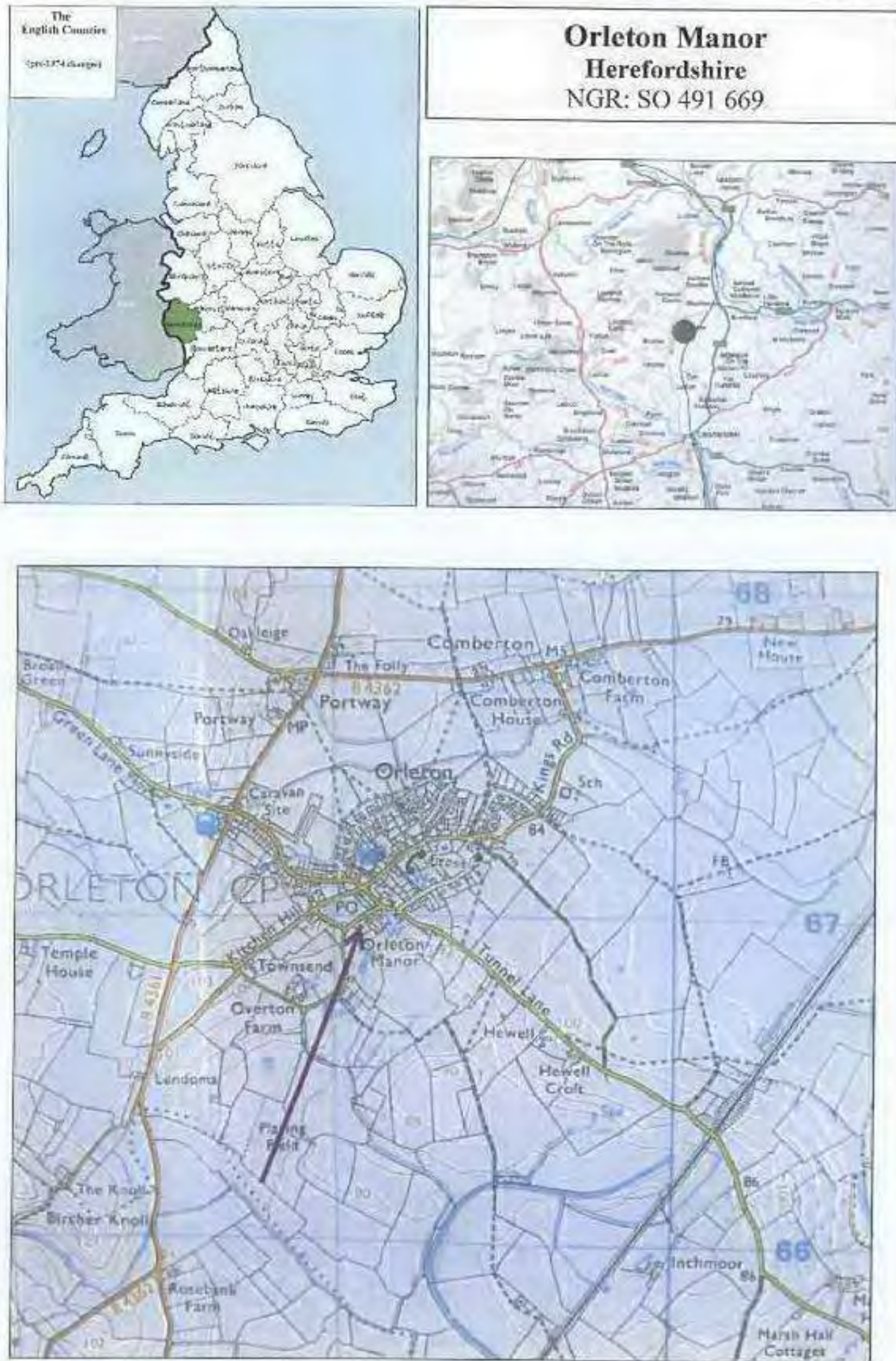


Fig.1: General location plan of Orleton Manor, based on OS maps (do not scale)  
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### **Summary**

*Orleton Court is a large and complex 17<sup>th</sup> century timber-framed mansion in north Herefordshire, once the home of the noted antiquary Thomas Blount. It appears to have been designed, if not necessarily built, as a quadrangular building, perhaps copying that basic design from nearby Croft Castle. Shortly after it was built it was altered and further changes have been made to it over the following centuries and these form part of its unique historic and architectural character.*

## **1. Introduction**

Orleton Court is a large, historic, timber-framed mansion in northern Herefordshire which dates to the early-mid 17<sup>th</sup> century and which was the home of Thomas Blount, the antiquary. Whilst it still belonged to the Blounts, from the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century it seems to have a tenanted property with a farmstead adjacent.

The farmhouse is now a separate property and the main house a family home. Proposals have been made to renovate the building and to undertake some changes to it and the grounds.

Because of its listed status the local planning authority, Herefordshire Council, have, under their own guidance and the national guidance set out in Planning Policy Guideline No.15 (PPG15), requested that an appropriate level of analysis of the property be undertaken to inform the decision-making process. This consultancy was commissioned by the owners of the property to undertake the necessary works.

## **1.2 Report Format**

The report format is fairly straightforward. Following this introduction, Section 2 is an outline history of the site. The description and analysis in Section 3 describes each building component in turn, whilst Section 4 contains is an overall assessment of the phasing, and Section 5 is a short conclusion. References consulted are listed in Section 6 and Section 7, the Appendix, consists of an annotated selection of the survey drawings of the building.

## 2. Outline History

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### 2.1 Orleton

Orleton is a small village in northern Herefordshire, close to the county boundary with Shropshire, six miles north of Leominster. It lies on slightly raised ground in the Devonian sandstones and is drained by small streams running southwards to the River Lugg and eastwards to the River Teme.

There is considerable evidence for prehistoric settlement in this area, and by the late Saxon period it was quite a sizeable village. It belonged to Queen Edith, consort to Edward the Confessor, just before the Norman Conquest in 1066; twenty years later, at the time of the Domesday Survey, *Alretune* was one of the many holdings of the powerful Ralph de Mortimer.

There were then four hides paying geld and four ploughs in demesne; there were, in addition, 11 villans, 15 bordars, a reeve, a radman (a 'riding servant' or retainer), six slaves, five oxmen and a smith. It had been worth £7 per annum but the value had fallen, no doubt because of local cross-border conflict, to £5 by 1086.<sup>1</sup> With a population of perhaps 200 it would have been one of the larger villages at that time.

It is logical to assume that Adam de Orleton, who rose the clerical ranks to be bishop, in turn, of Hereford, Worcester and Winchester, and a powerful figure in early-13<sup>th</sup> century politics, came from the village.

The de Mortimers continued to hold the manor of Orleton until the early-15<sup>th</sup> century when Anne Mortimer, daughter of Roger Mortimer, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of March, married Richard Plantagenet, Earl of Cambridge; Orleton then went to her son, Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, in about 1424. Richard was the father of Edward IV, who claimed the throne by descent from Edward III, and grandfather of the unfortunate 'Princes in the Tower' – Edward V and Richard, Duke of York. Orleton remained part of the Edward IV's private estate until his death, when it became vested with the Crown.

Edward IV's daughter, Elizabeth of York, married Henry VII, and then the manor passed, through the marriage of their daughter, Margaret, to the Stewart monarchs of Scotland after she married James IV. Because of this the manor Orleton passed to her grandson, James VI of Scotland and James I of England who, soon after attaining the English crown, sold the manor to George Hopton in 1609.

Hopton sold it to Messrs Curteen, Warner and Wilson, presumably property speculators, who sold it on to John Popham. Popham acquired the right of free warren in the manor from Charles I.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Williams, A, & Martin, G H, 2002, *Domesday Book: A Complete Translation*, 506-7

<sup>2</sup> Pat 14 Car p 2, 44

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His brother, Alexander, inherited after John's death, and is listed as lord of the manor in 1646.<sup>3</sup> According to Thomas Blount's manuscript history, Charles initially granted the free warren jointly to John's widow, Mary, and Alexander.

Thomas Blount, whose father, Miles, had by that time purchased and leased property in Orleton including Orleton Court, bought the manor – then a separate entity with different benefits and privileges, in about 1655.<sup>4</sup> For a Roman Catholic to have done this during the Commonwealth seems, in retrospect, rather foolhardy and perhaps it is not surprising that his name does not appear as lord of the manor again until the Restoration; he appears to have vested the title in trustees.<sup>5</sup>

However, restored to the honour in the 1660's, Thomas was also granted the right, in 1664, to hold two annual Fairs in Orleton, in April and September.<sup>6</sup> After his death, the title lord of the manor passed to his daughter, Elizabeth, and, apart from a period in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century, the Blount's continued to hold the manor until the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup>

As late as the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, courts leet and court baron were still held in the village, in March and October, as well as petty sessions, and there was still then a great two-day cattle fair held in the village in late August.<sup>8</sup>

Up until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Orleton was on what was still an important main road between Leominster and Ludlow, part of the key route along the Welsh border; it was turnpiked in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and improved in the 1830's; improvements to what is now the A49 further to the east diverted much of the traffic away from the village. Another transport initiative that could have influenced the village – the ill-fated Leominster Canal – was built at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and passed within half a mile of Orleton Court. Never finished and never busy or profitable, the canal sold out to a railway company in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and was abandoned.

<sup>3</sup> Morgan, F C, 1944, 'Notes on the Court Rolls of the Manor of Orleton, Herefordshire', *Trans. Wool. Nat. Hist. Soc. For 1939, 1940 & 1941*, 2

<sup>4</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, 2

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> National Archives (NA) C66/3065; Pat 7 Dec 26 Car. 2

<sup>7</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, 2-3

<sup>8</sup> Lewis, S, 1835, *A Topographical Dictionary of England*, Vol. III



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## 2.2 Orleton Court

Thomas Blount's father, Myles Blount (c.1585-1663), sixth son of Roger Blount of Grendon Court, Warwickshire, had bought, in the late-1620's, '*A Capital Messuage and Lands here of one Humpry Hane*'. This was presumably the house that became Hill House and, subsequently, Orleton Court. A Roman Catholic, Myles married Ann, daughter of William Bustard of Adderbury in Oxfordshire, and they had two sons and five daughters. The family were permitted a coat of arms – *barry nebulée of six or and sa, in chief 8 pellets*, with a crest *or and sa, a cross in the sun* and a predictably religious motto '*Mors cruces mea sulis*' – He was crucified for my salvation.<sup>9</sup>

The Blounts already had land in the vicinity, in Yarpole and Bircher parishes, so clearly knew the area before buying land in Orleton; in 1640 he and his son, Thomas, consolidated the family holdings by leasing more land and, apparently, a second 'capital messuage' on a 99-year lease.<sup>10</sup>

Even during Charles I's reign, Roman Catholics had been subject to a degree of legalised discrimination, but the outbreak of the English Civil War exacerbated their plight. Miles, like most Catholics, would have supported the Royalist cause; wisely, he seems to have remained at Orleton during the conflict. Warwickshire, where his other estates were, mainly supported the Parliament. After initial skirmishes, Herefordshire, on the other hand, was a mainly Royalist county during the war and one of the last to fall to the Parliament.

Within a few miles of Orleton there were quite brutal sieges by Royalist troops of the handful of Parliamentary garrisons – such as Hopton Castle, Shropshire, where the defenders were murdered after surrendering, and at Brampton Bryan castle. The nearest known reference of such troubles to Orleton at this time was at nearby Croft Castle – really a mansion that looked like a castle.

An entry, of *circa* 1643-4, in Richard Symonds *Diary* states '*Croft house defaced by Ludlowe men*' – presumably Royalist forces ensuring that the site was of no military use for the Parliament.<sup>11</sup> This has been backed up by an archaeological analysis of the surviving fabric.<sup>12</sup> Quite how this would fit in to the discovery in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century of a cannonball embedded in the stair hall wall of Orleton Court, repeated in several accounts of the building, is open to debate.

At the end of 1645, Hereford fell to the Parliament and most Royalist opposition collapsed. In March 1646 two thirds of Miles Blount's Warwickshire estates were sequestered by Parliament, though he managed to rent back some of the land from the Exchequer.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Strong, G, 1848, *The Heraldry of Herefordshire*

<sup>10</sup> Bongaerts, T (ed.), 1978, *The Correspondence of Thomas Blount (1618-1679), A Recusant Antiquary*, 1

<sup>11</sup> see Morriss, R K, 2004, *Croft Castle: An Architectural & Archaeological Analysis* (MHS 263), 8

<sup>12</sup> Morriss, *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 2



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Pl.3: Part of Thomas Blount's memorial in Orleton parish church.

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Surprisingly, perhaps, it was not until April 1649 that Colonel Thomas Mytton presented Miles Blount as a delinquent and papist.<sup>14</sup> The more serious charge of delinquency was dropped, but two thirds of the estate was sequestered, which Miles leased back for £10 a year from September 1650.<sup>15</sup> By 1660 this had increased to £19.<sup>16</sup>

The family's Catholicism, and assumed Royalist sympathies, could lend some substance to the tradition that Charles II hid at Orleton after the defeat at the Battle of Worcester in 1651. The painted inscription on the fireplace in the room known as the State Bedroom on the first-floor, rediscovered under panelling in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century, is sometimes considered to be related to this event.

One antiquary considered that he may have stayed at Orleton on the 12<sup>th</sup> September, en route from his hiding place at Boscobel, Shropshire, to try and find a ship in Bristol.<sup>17</sup> However, Miles' eldest son and heir, Thomas Blount, after the Restoration, wrote a book – *Boscobel* – about Charles' escape and it seems odd that he did not mention his own home's role in the affair if the king had indeed stayed at Orleton; according to Blount, Charles arrived at Abbot's Leigh, Somerset, on the 12<sup>th</sup> and stayed there for several days.<sup>18</sup>

The Restoration of Charles II would have been a relief to the Blounts and they were rewarded with the grant of an annual fair. One of the estate records includes a letter from Miles to Thomas about the common rights of the parish and, in the postscript, he wrote '*we are in great want of some lute strings*'.<sup>19</sup>

Miles Blount was assessed for £30 in the Militia Assessment for Herefordshire in 1663 – one of, but not the, largest amounts in the parish.<sup>20</sup> Miles died on the 23<sup>rd</sup> November that year and was buried in the parish church on the following day. In the following year Ann, his widow, was assessed for 7 hearths in the Hearth Tax and was thus considered to be the householder of Orleton Court.<sup>21</sup> In 1665, however, Thomas Blount was assessed for 7 hearths – presumably for Orleton Court – whilst Ann was assessed for 5 – suggesting that she had moved to another large house in the parish.<sup>22</sup>

Thomas, had been born at Bordesley Park, Worcestershire in 1618 and was thus a young man during the Civil War – though there is no record of him fighting; he was trained as a lawyer in the Inner Temple but his religion severely restricted the type of work he could do.<sup>23</sup> This fact, and the sequestration of the family estates, may have been one of the initial reasons for him taking up writing to supplement his legal career.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Faraday, M A (ed.), 1972, *The Herefordshire Militia Assessment of 1663*, 164

<sup>17</sup> Anon, 1916, 'Charles II & Presteigne', *Trans. WNFC*, 1912 and 1913, 40

<sup>18</sup> Hodgetts, M, 1989, *Secret Hiding Places*, 196; 207

<sup>19</sup> HRO S51/I/36-47

<sup>20</sup> Faraday, *op. cit.*, 164

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Harnden, J (ed.), 1984, *The Herefordshire Hearth Tax of 1665* (ts.), 142

<sup>23</sup> Mortimer, I, 2004, 'Thomas Blount, 1618-1679, Antiquary and Lexicographer', in Matthew, H C G, & Harrison, B (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Vol. 6*, 331



He was careful not to produce any overtly pro-Catholic material until after the Restoration, and even then was quite careful in his writings.

Much of his work was plagiarised, including his dictionary of the law, the *Nomolexicon*, published in 1670. His last work was *Fragmenta Antiquitatis*, a guide to ancient tenure of lands, in 1679 including the 'jocular customs of some manors'.<sup>24</sup> By the 1670's he had taken up the researches for which is now best known, compiling notes for a pioneering parish-by-parish history of Herefordshire; this was never published but formed the basis of several later histories – even though half of his own notes were later lost in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>25</sup>

Blount seems to have spent most of his time in Herefordshire, especially after inheriting the estates on his father's death in 1663; at the time the Orleton estate was valued at £49 10s. *per annum*.<sup>26</sup> His mother died in May 1669, and like Miles, was buried in the parish church.

He also paid regular visits to London, where he stayed in Fig Tree Court. In one of the periodical anti-Catholic persecutions, his chambers there were raided in 1675 on the orders of the Privy Council and any '*Popish and unlicensed books*' removed; however, there seems to have been no other serious consequences.<sup>27</sup>

In the late-1670's anti-Catholic feeling was again on the rise and in January 1679 Thomas, his younger brother Myles, and his sister Jane's husband, Thomas Goodyear, were amongst 56 Herefordshire Catholics forced to swear the Oath of Allegiance.<sup>28</sup> Thomas had married Ann (1617-1697), daughter and co-heir of Edmund Church of Maldon, Essex, also a Catholic and they had a daughter, Elizabeth.<sup>29</sup> Both were also ordered to swear the Oath but both, like many Catholic women, somehow managed to move from parish to parish to avoid doing so, despite parish constables being allowed by law '*to breake open and enter into any house or roome where they should suspect*' them to be.<sup>30</sup>

Blount was clearly troubled by the rise in anti-Catholic feeling, even though Herefordshire was fairly tolerant and he had influential friends, including the Harleys of Brampton Bryan and the Crofts of Croft Castle. He died on the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1679, aged 61 and was buried in the chancel of the parish church. His widow erected a memorial wall plaque and died in 1697, aged 80, leaving goods worth the not inconsiderable sum of £800 and '*a fair and plentiful estate*'.<sup>31</sup> Their daughter, Elizabeth, born sometime before 1663, inherited the Orleton estates for life and married Richard Griffin of Bickmarsh, Warwickshire.

<sup>24</sup> Cooper, J, 1994, 'Herefordshire', in Currie, C R J & Lewis, C P (eds.), *English County Histories: A Guide*, 177

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 6

<sup>27</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 12

<sup>28</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> Cooper, *op. cit.*, 177

<sup>30</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 12

<sup>31</sup> Motimer, *op. cit.*, 313

Richard died at Orleton in 1702 at the young age of 39, their only child, Anne, died in 1714 aged just 17, and Elizabeth died in 1724; all three were buried in the parish church. The Orleton estates, then valued at over £139 a year went to Thomas' nephew and namesake, eldest son of his brother, Myles.<sup>32</sup> He married Mary, daughter of John Mostyn of Talacre, Flint, and their eldest son, Edward, married Mary Cotham from St. Helen's, Lancashire; however, he does not seem to have initially inherited Orleton.

One of the long-held traditions relating to Orleton Court that still gets repeated in modern guides to the county is that the great Augustan poet Alexander Pope (1688-1749) wooed Martha Blount, a daughter of the family, and that he stayed in a room above the porch. Sadly, this seems to have no basis in fact. Martha (1690-1763) was indeed one of Pope's most faithful friends and the two were at least platonic lovers; however, she came from a different Catholic family, from Mapledurham, Oxfordshire, and first met Pope when his family were living in nearby Windsor Forest.<sup>33</sup> There seems to be no link between her and Orleton and the origin of the story is a mystery.

The Blount family appear to have encountered financial problems in the 1730's and the Orleton estate was certainly mortgaged and probably tenanted. A deed of 1730 relates to the ownership of the estate by Mary Blount, a widow, and Thomas, her son and heir. This is presumably the Thomas Blount 'of Orleton', in whose marriage arrangement with Elizabeth, daughter of the late John Berington of Winsley, drawn up in March 1727, the house is described as '*the capital messuage or chief mansion house of Orleton*'.<sup>34</sup>

Thomas presumably died young and seems to have been quickly succeeded by his brother, John Blount, 'Doctor in Physick'.<sup>35</sup> John owned the manor and estate in 1733 but by that time it seems to have been mortgaged and, possibly, tenanted by a Thomas Pickering; on the estate there were 150 acres of 'land', 50 acres of meadow, 180 acres of pasture, and 12 acres of wood – and there was still one fair a year.<sup>36</sup>

Surviving deeds indicate that John died intestate and was succeeded by his elder brother, Edward, an Apothecary practising in Shifnal, Shropshire.<sup>37</sup> It is not known if lived at Orleton, but the estate was clearly still mortgaged. He is listed as lord of the manor in 1738, but for the next fifty years, no Blounts are recorded as holding that office.<sup>38</sup> Amongst the mortgagees was Edward Turnour, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Winterton in the Irish peerage.<sup>39</sup> He is recorded as lord of the manor of Orleton in 1762 but it seems unlikely that he lived there – especially as his principal seats were at Shillingleigh Park, Sussex, and Besthorpe Hall in Norfolk.<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 9; Robinson, C J, 1872, *A History of the Mansions and Manors of Herefordshire*, 221

<sup>33</sup> Rumbold, V, 2004, 'Martha Blount, 1690-1763', in Matthew, H C G, & Harrison, B (eds.), *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography Vol. 6*, 303

<sup>34</sup> HRO S51/III/8

<sup>35</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 17

<sup>36</sup> HRO S51/III/8

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, 2

<sup>39</sup> Owen, J, Davis, L, & Debret, J, 1785, *The New Peerage*, Vol.III, 130-2

<sup>40</sup> *ibid.*





Pl.4: The north front of Orleton Court in the late-19<sup>th</sup> century(Pilley collection)



Pl.5: The south front of Orleton Court, in 1872, from Robinson's *History of the Mansions and Manors of Herefordshire*.



Another Edward Blount is listed as lord of the manor in 1787, and he was presumably the son of the previous Edward who held that position in 1738. It is possible that by this time much of the mortgages had been paid off, but it still seems that the family did not live at Orleton – despite still being described as being ‘of Orleton’ in various deeds.

Edward’s brother, Thomas Blount MD is listed as practising in Hereford in the 1791 *Universal Directory*.<sup>41</sup> He was visited occasionally by their younger brother, William, who studied medicine in Edinburgh before he qualified and settled in Hereford in 1788; in the following year he married Mary Lambe of Bidney and after Thomas’ death, William inherited Orleton.<sup>42</sup>

He remained in Hereford; a Land Tax Redemption certificate of September 1802 shows that he was paying the Land Tax (of £15 3s.) on the Orleton estate but that the estate was ‘*in the occupation of Thomas Haynes*’.<sup>43</sup> After William died in 1831 Orleton passed briefly to his eldest son, Edward, who died in 1835, after which it went to Thomas, his brother. In the same year Thomas had the right to vote for the knights of the shire by virtue of his ownership of ‘The Hill Farm’ in Orleton, though he was living in Hereford.<sup>44</sup>

Thomas died in 1859 but seems to have given or sold Orleton to his brother William in 1839 as part of the agreement drawn up for his second marriage.<sup>45</sup> Although initially described as being ‘of Orleton’, William is later described as being ‘of Orches Hill’, Buckinghamshire, and the Blounts seem then to have left Herefordshire. Nevertheless, he retained the title of the lord of the manor of Orleton. This William, like his famous ancestor Thomas, was a lawyer and in 1839 was elected MP for Totnes – but the election was subsequently declared void and he had to step down in the following year.<sup>46</sup>

William had firstly married Elizabeth Wright of Essex and had a son, William, by her; after her death in 1826 he married, in 1839, Lady Charlotte, a daughter of Edward Seymour, 11<sup>th</sup> Duke of Somerset, and had more children. The Orleton estates passed initially to his eldest son, William Blount, who, in the 1873 returns of landowners, owned 408 acres in Herefordshire worth £434 a year in rentals.<sup>47</sup> These estates eventually passed to his step-brother, Archibald, by virtue of an 1885 agreement with his mother to ‘disentail’ the property.<sup>48</sup> Archibald – an eccentric bachelor who was wealthy but lived as if he were poor - died without issue in 1907, still retaining the title of lord of the manor.<sup>49</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Barfott, P, & Wilkes, J (eds.), 1791, *The Universal British Directory of 1791*, Vol.III, 223

<sup>42</sup> HRO S51/III/7-18

<sup>43</sup> HRO S51/II/6

<sup>44</sup> Anon, 1835, *The List of Persons Who Are Entitled to Vote in the Election of the Knights of the Shire for the County of Herefordshire*, np.

<sup>45</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 17

<sup>46</sup> House of Commons, 1878, *Members of Parliament, Part II*, 365

<sup>47</sup> HMSO, 1875, *Return of Owners of Land, 1873*; Vol. I, *Herefordshire*, 3

<sup>48</sup> HRO M5/25/25

<sup>49</sup> Bongaerts, *op. cit.*, 17



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In the early-19<sup>th</sup> century Orleton Court was known as Manor House, or Hill, Farm and the site is labelled Hill House on the 1<sup>st</sup> edition of the 1" Ordnance Survey map, published in 1832.<sup>50</sup> In an advertisement of the period for a new tenant it was described as being '*a residence suited for the family of a gentleman*'. It was then occupied by Robert Thomas for £250 a year; the adjacent Lodge Farm, in the same ownership, was then tenanted by Richard Hill.

At this time Hill Farm consisted of 209 acres of meadow, pasture, orchard, hop and corn land as well as having right of pasture of Bircher Common. The farm buildings were listed as '*Barns, Cow-sheds, Stables, Coach-house, Wain-house, Hop Kiln, Cider Mill, and Outbuildings, very complete*'.

Unfortunately, the few surviving plans of the estate are fairly uninformative. They usually show only a stylised outline of the house and there are few clues in the field names or layout to relate to the historic landscape. Even the broad sweep of the main field to the south of the house is simply labelled 'Cow Pasture'.<sup>51</sup>

By the 1841 Census, Hill House was farmed by John Longmore, aged 32 and originally from Adforton.<sup>52</sup> He lived there with his wife, Jane, and their infant daughter, Margaret; also in the house were two young female servants, Hester Green and Jane Roberts, and four 'male servants' are also listed – probably agricultural labourers living in the farm buildings. Ten years later Longmore was farming 200 acres and employed two labourers directly; by then he had three more children and the family were looked after by two teenage female servants.

From the late-1850's the farm, by now renamed Orleton Court, was tenanted by Richard Partridge, originally from the Forest of Dean but latterly from Bitterly in Shropshire. At the time of the 1861 Census he was described as a 30 year old farmer who employed 4 men and 3 boys on the farm. He and his wife Kate, aged 34, had four young children aged six and under, two boys and two girls, and also in the house were a housemaid and nursemaid, both teenagers.

Richard Partridge was subsequently replaced as the tenant by Richard Hill. He had been born in Pembridge but moved to Orleton from a farm in Cound, Shropshire. In 1871 Richard Hill was 60; the farm then extended to 220 acres and he employed 6 agricultural labourers to run it. He lived at Orleton Court with his wife, Elizabeth, and his nephew, John Richard Hill, then 22 years of age, who had been born in Shropshire.

John Hill succeeded his uncle to the tenancy and in 1881 employed 5 men and 2 boys on a farm that had increased slightly to 230 acres in all. He lived at what the Census simply called 'Court' with his widowed aunt, the two being looked after by an 18-year old Cook, 16-year old housemaid and a 17 year old 'farm servant'. At the time of the Census Alice Gilkes, aged 35 and from Leominster, was visiting the house; she later became John's wife.

<sup>50</sup> Sheet 55 NE Quarter, published on the 11<sup>th</sup> February 1832

<sup>51</sup> HRO S51/III/7-18

<sup>52</sup> His age in 1841 was rounded down to 30; in the 1851 census his age is put, more accurately, at 42.

The couple had three children and in 1891 Alice's brother, Thomas Gilkes, was also staying at Orleton Court. The children were then looked after by Elizabeth Banks, 34, the governess, and there was also a housemaid, cook and a groom living on the site. Ten years later none of the children was at 'Court House' at the time of the Census – perhaps being educated away from home – and another of Alice's brothers, Edgar, had replaced Thomas. There was no longer need for a governess, but still need of a housemaid, cook and groom though none of these individuals had been there in 1891.

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the house had begun to attract the interest of antiquaries. Illustrations and photographs show that there had been a campaign of introducing sash windows – presumably in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – and references from the 1860's to a recent 'restoration' that had resulted in the removal of the stair indicate other alterations.

In *Nooks and Corners of Herefordshire* it was referred to as the 'Court House' and was said to have:

*'a very picturesque exterior, standing amidst a quaint, old-fashioned garden, with formal parterres and clipped yew hedges. A large panelled room is shown as one of King Charles's numerous resting-places after the battle of Worcester; in removing some panelling from the wall by the large fireplace, the following inscription was found cut upon the stone mantle: 'Honner Him in Hart that Souffered on the Crosse for them as worship Him'. A three-pound cannon ball was also discovered, during some alterations, embedded in the wall'.<sup>53</sup>*

Visitors were also shown *'the recesses of a vast old chimney, where a singular hiding-place is shown us; in which, if discovered, the luckless fugitive would certainly have met with a very warm reception'.<sup>54</sup>*

This was presumably taken to be a priest's hole – a not unusual feature in a recusant's house, but whether or not it was one is unknown; it is not mentioned in the only comprehensive and academic study of priest's holes but as it is now impossible to identify that is hardly surprising.<sup>55</sup>

The illustrations in Timmins' book, and others of the late-19<sup>th</sup> and early-20<sup>th</sup> centuries – mainly of the north front – show some minor but significant differences to the present elevations.

The most obvious change has been to the eastern, or left-hand, bay. On the earlier illustrations, the ground-floor is open and the upper section supported on exaggerated scrolled brackets. The other main change is the addition of a window in the left-hand gable at first-floor level.

<sup>53</sup> Timmins, H, 1892, *Nooks and Corners of Herefordshire*, 50-52

<sup>54</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> Hodgetts, M, 1989, *Secret Hiding Places*



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When Archibald Henry Blount died without issue in 1907, for some unknown reason he left his Orleton estates to Yale University – though he had no known connection with the institution or, indeed, with the USA.

On the advice of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the University then sold the manor and gave the proceeds to Blount's relatives. Quite why they acted in this generous manner is not known – or indeed, how the sale was arranged in such a way that it was bought by the sitting tenant.

Sales particulars were issued for an auction of the Orleton Manor Estate to be held at the Law Society's Rooms in East Street, Hereford, on the 13<sup>th</sup> May 1908.<sup>56</sup> The estate consisted of 405 acres in all, of which nearly 215 acres were made up by the Court Farm – of '*Rich pastoral, pasture, orchard, arable and hop land*' – as well as '*an ancient Manor House...a well preserved and beautiful example of the Black and White style of architecture, and contains on the ground floor two sitting rooms and six bedrooms, good cellarage and offices*'; the accommodation seems to have been under sold.<sup>57</sup>

The Orleton Court estate was sold to the sitting tenant, Richard Hill, who was then renting it at £243 *per annum*, and he also purchased the remaining rights and title of the lord of the manor; he was recorded as the Lord of the Manor in the same year.<sup>58</sup> Evidently, despite being a tenant farmer, he was sufficiently wealthy to convert his leasehold into outright freehold.

Richard Hill was succeeded by John Arthur Hill, born in 1885; he was married prior to the First World War and his eldest son, John Denis, was born in 1913. During the war he reached the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel in the RASC and returned to Orleton to farm the family estate.<sup>59</sup>

In 1937 Colonel Hill donated the Court records for Orleton to the Woolhope Club.<sup>60</sup> He continued to live at Orleton until he died in 1971; his wife, Margaret, died in 1986, aged 93 and both were buried in the churchyard. Two years previously, in 1984, the executors of their eldest son and heir, Sir John D N Hill, had sold Orleton Court to Robert and Emily Jones. They subsequently sold the property to Christopher Marsden in 1994 and moved into the adjacent barn that they had converted into their new home.

<sup>56</sup> HRO M5/25/25

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> HRO M5/25/25; Morgan, *op. cit.*, 2

<sup>59</sup> Wilson & Phillips (pubs.), 1933, *Who's Who in Herefordshire*, 60

<sup>60</sup> Morgan, *op. cit.*, 2



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### **3. The Building**

Essentially, Orleton Court consists of a main Hall Range with two projecting south wings, forming a half-H or U-shaped footprint. In addition, there are some minor later accretions to the main plan form and strong evidence for a missing south range that could suggest that the Court was originally a quadrangular building.

Whereas the junctions between the later accretions and the earlier sections are easy to identify, the junctions between the three surviving earlier sections are more complex and, superficially at least, less logical.

The separate buildings identified for this report are:

- Building A: The Hall Range
- Building B: The West Wing
- Building C: The East Wing
- Building D: The Oriel Range
- Building E: The Porch
- Building F: The North Bay
- Building G: The Western Lean-to
- Building H: The Game Larder

Each of these will be described in turn.



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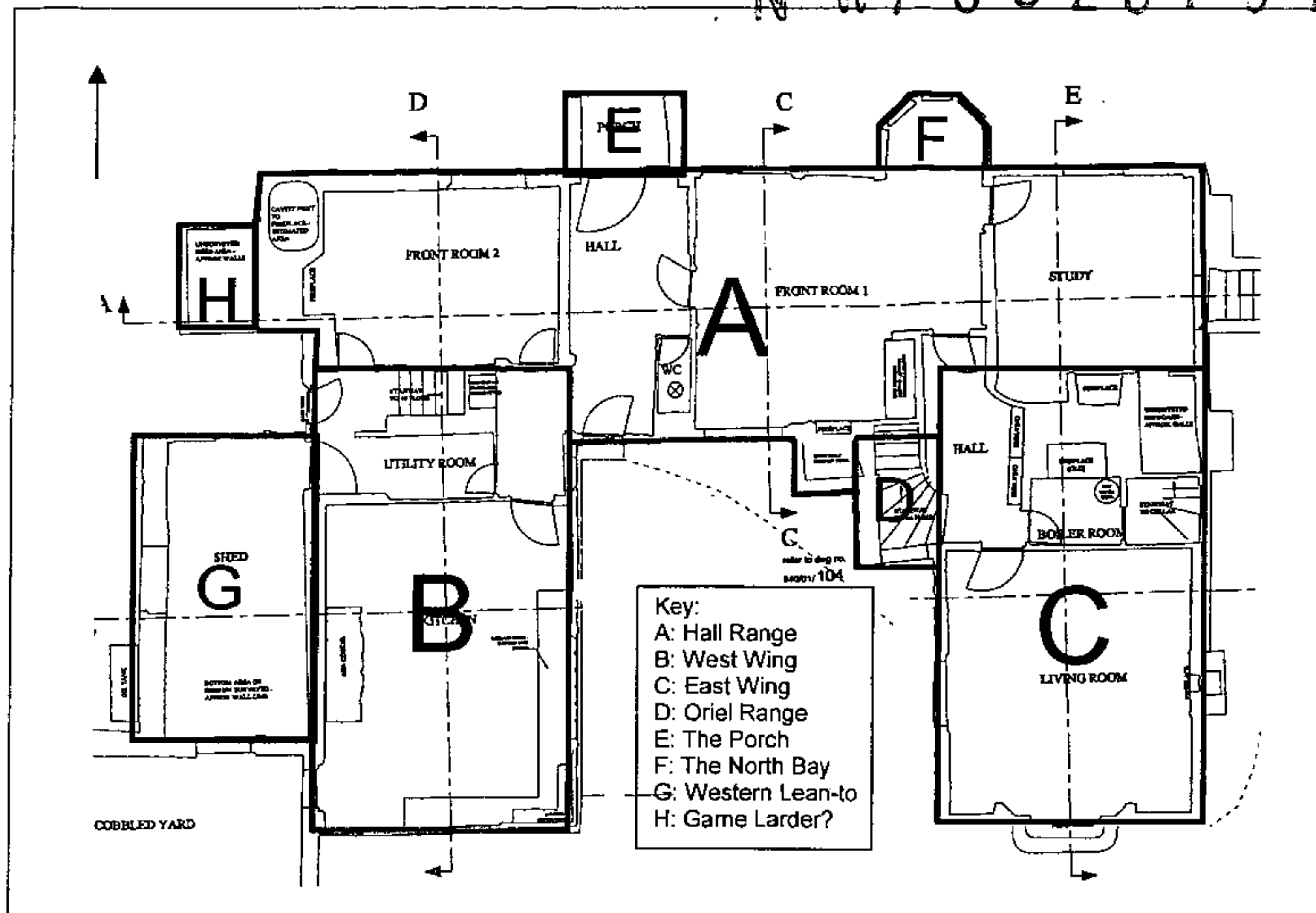


Fig.2: Sketch plan of the ground floor, showing building identification.

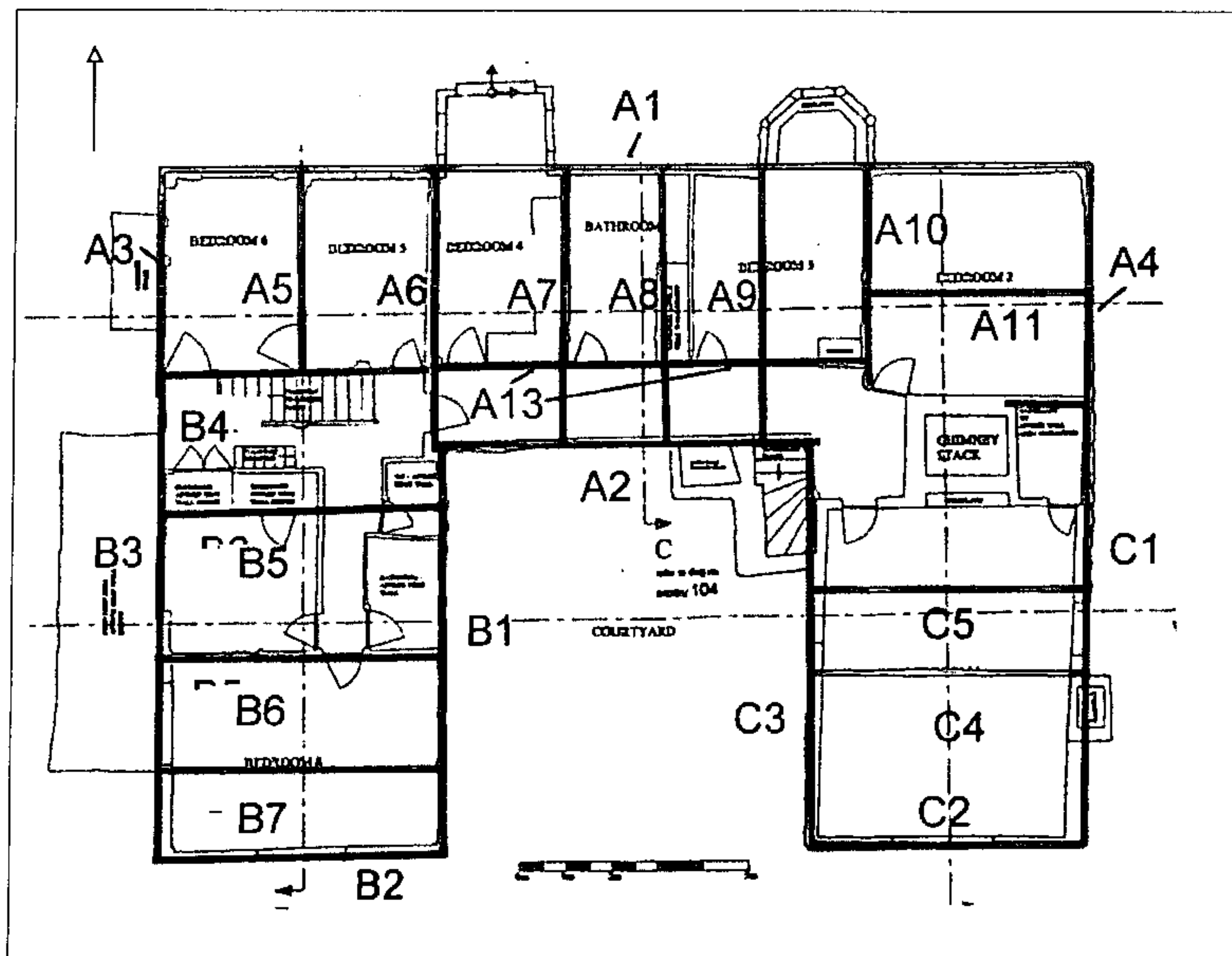


Fig.3: Sketch plan of the first floor, showing frame identification.

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Pl.6: Orleton Court from the north-west.



Pl.7: Orleton Court from the south west.



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### 3.1 Building A: The Hall Range

Superficially, the Hall Range – of two storeys with attics - appears to be a large but fairly logical, if a little altered, rectangular range to which the south wings are attached. Externally, there seems little to contradict this assumption, though there are some oddities visible. However, internally, the relationships between the Hall and its wings become far more complex and the Hall itself becomes a less simple structure.

Structurally, it can be divided into a four-bay central section – none of the bays being the same length; the south wall of this portion is the external elevation between the flanking wings. To either side of that section is a slightly narrower section, against which the two wings abut. On the west side this is divided into two bays by a north-south frame (A5) whilst on the east side it is divided into two by a west-east frame (A11).

#### 3.1.1 The Exterior & External Timber Frames

##### *The North Elevation*

The north elevation is also the main entrance front of the house (frame A1). It is not a symmetrical elevation, especially as the eastern (left-hand) roof structure ends in a gable and a full sized dormer gable whereas the right-hand end of the roof is hipped. However, some attempt at equalising the façade has been made in the positioning of the two projections – the present Porch (Building E) to the right (or west) and the Bay (and former porch) to the left (Building F).

Large areas of the close-studding have been replaced or faced in the past century or so, removing or obscuring much of the structural evidence in the process. In addition, many of the openings in the elevation – and the frame – are inserted.

The eastern, or left-hand, portion of the elevation lies under a full-height timber-framed gable of the same proportions of the roof of the wing behind. This has two collars but no window openings and has largely been rebuilt – though peg holes in the principal rafters, which seem primary, suggest that the pattern of studding was replicated. What is less clear from within is whether or not the gable itself is a primary feature of the building.

In this section there is a large three-light cross-mullioned casement window on the ground floor – of vaguely 17<sup>th</sup> century form but probably of 19<sup>th</sup> century date. Above it, offset further to the east, is a three-light first-floor window of similar style and probably similar date.

Neither window is primary. There were windows at each floor level in this bay, but these were both further to the west (nearer to the Bay) and aligned above each other; they thus had no relationship with the gable above them.

The position of the former first-floor window is marked by the slight dropping of the mid-rail which formed the sill of its opening – in the same way as this was done on the wings. When the window was blocked, a pair of studs was nailed carefully in place. The former ground-floor opening was less carefully blocked, and its position is still clear; it was presumably replaced by the present window.

The North Bay obscures the next section of the frame; internally there are large openings at both floor levels into the bay, but the evidence of the flanking bay posts shows that the bay is a later addition and that these openings were fully framed originally.

However, there is a lack of any suggested primary openings in the two bays between the Bay and the present Porch; the present large 17<sup>th</sup> century style three-light ground-floor and two-light first-floor windows are probably of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and inserted into what had been solid sections of framing. It is possible, therefore, that there had been windows in the portions of framing removed when the Bay was added.

The Porch is clearly, like the Bay, an addition, though an early one; it is not quite the width of the structural bay of the hall so that whilst its right-hand (west) wall is aligned with a bay post, its left-hand return is not.

The present main entrance into the Hall Range, and indeed, the house, is not primary but was probably added when the Porch was built. The evidence for this is quite clear in the framing around it – especially on the west side where there is a redundant mortise in the bay post for the lost mid-rail. The moulded doorframe has been inserted into an opening cut into the original framing, though it is difficult to assess if this was merely the result of remodelling an original doorway or whether there had been no doorway at all at this point.

Above the doorway, a large section of the original first-floor framing was also removed to extend the chamber into the first-floor space of the Porch – though it is possible that this was not done at the same time as the Porch was built.

To the west (right) of the Porch the ground-floor framing has been replaced in two different phases; at the western corner the underbuild is a continuation of the rubblestone under-building of the whole of the western elevation of the house, while to the east the under-build is in hand-made red brick. The windows in both are fairly modern.

Most of the first-floor framing in this section survives. In the westernmost bay there is an inserted window of four lights, though the moulded frame suggests that it was inserted fairly early on. In the other bay is an original three-light window with a slightly dropped mid-rail as its sill and storey high studs acting as its jambs.

From the evidence of other first-floor windows with this specific detailing it seems highly likely that there would have been a matching ground-floor window below it originally.



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Pl.8: The central portion of the north elevation of the Hall Range.



Pl.9: The central portion of the south elevation of the Hall Range.



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### *The South Elevation*

The south elevation between the wings has been greatly altered and most of the eastern portion of it is obscured by the stone south stack and the adjacent Oriel (Building D). Two bays of framing (A2) are visible and the eastern (right-hand) one seems to have been completely refaced and fitted with large windows – four-light on the ground floor and five-light (but the same width) above.

### *The West Elevation*

The west elevation (frame A3) has been under-built on the ground floor in rubblestone that continues round to the north elevation and is contiguous with the underbuilding of the adjacent section of the West Wing to the south. Much of the ground-floor is obscured by the later stone extension, and there is also a small stone projecting stack, capped by a brick chimney. At the north side of the stack is a small stone structure under a sloping roof – presumably a bread oven.

Structurally, the south-western corner post of this narrower end of the Hall Range is marked by a bay post cut out just below the first-floor girding beam. To the south of this is a rear doorway.

At first-floor level the close-studded framing survives erratically. Several of the studs have been removed, particularly those beneath the wall-plate. There seem to have been no primary openings in this area.

### *The East Elevation*

The timber-framed east elevation (A4) is topped by a large timber-framed gable and at first sight seems to be the logical end of a full-width Hall Range. However, the south (or left-hand) end of the truss does not sit on a full post. Instead, the nearest full post – structurally marking the division between Hall and East Wing – is set one stud 'in' under the truss. There seems to be a second bay post a little to the north of the centre of the truss.

The present window pattern, centred on the truss, is not original. The framing around both the three-light cross mullioned ground-floor and two-light first-floor window has been re-set. There was a primary window opening at first-floor level, now marked by the dropped mid-rail to the north of the second bay post and quite carefully blocked.

### **3.1.2 Internal Timber-Framing**

The understanding of the cross-frames within the building can help with a more overall understanding of the building's original design and development. The frames have been numbered for clarity.



*Frame B7*

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At the north-western corner of the building the end frame of the West Wing (Building B) (B7) is set a little to the north of the external south frame (A2) of the Hall Range visible between the wings. This partition cross frame is on the north side of the secondary stair in the West Wing (Building B) and forms the junction between the wing and the westernmost two bays of the Hall Range (Building A).

At ground-floor level it was originally close-studded but much of this has been removed and replaced by studwork. At first-floor level is of two rows of panels instead – and at this level there is a primary doorway at the west end of the frame; this has a separate lintel timber and a four-centred head. It appears that the present eastern end post of the frame – which also forms part of the western frame (A6) of the entrance Hall - is inserted (*see below*).

It may be that the frame originally ended on the large post now to the west of a later first-floor doorway; there are no indications of peg holes to suggest that the panelling continued eastwards from it although the tie-beam of the truss above certainly did. This post takes the inward end of the dragon beam and part truss that forms an integral part of the hipped roof at this corner of the building (*see below*).

*Frame A5*

Frame A5 divides the narrower western portion of the Hall Range into two bays. The frame is open on the ground floor, its first-floor bridging beam forming the ceiling beam of the room in this area (Front Room 2).

The beam is richly moulded with an ovolo between cavetti on each side and an ovolo moulded soffit; the mouldings have elegant run-out stops. This beam's profile is the original profile of other ceiling beams in the Hall Range though the rest have mostly lost their soffit mouldings.

At first-floor level the framing is of two rows of panels but the timbers are of fairly thin scantling; their crude junction with frame B7 could also lead to the assumption that this panelling has been inserted into a more ephemeral frame.

There is a gap for a doorway at the southern end between the two chambers created by the cross-frame. At the north end the bay post in the north frame (A1) is jowled to take the top rail of the cross-frame, which is also the part tie-beam of the hipped roof structure (*see below*).

*Frame A6*

Frame A6 forms the western end of the main body of the Hall section and is aligned with the eastern, or courtyard, frame of the West Wing. In the southernmost section, the frame is effectively the northern continuation of that frame.

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At this southern end the opening from the Hall into the West Wing is in between two substantial posts – one the corner post and the other a large post to the north that is inserted. This is shown by its relationship with the richly moulded bridging beam of the frame. This beam seems to have been cut at the south end and then re-set – in the opposite direction – after the post was inserted. The reason for this is not known. However, the decoration of the beam suggests that it was indeed a bridging beam and thus had no primary framing beneath it – certainly not at this end of the frame. There is also no sign of any mortises in the corner post to indicate any ground floor framing.

At first-floor level there is a cross-frame two panels high and no brace from the northern post.. At this level the large inserted post is associated with the corridor frame (A13) and it may have been added when this was added. The frame is topped by a truss (*see below*, 3.3).

#### *Frame A7*

Frame A7 is a cross-frame in the main body of the Hall Range and presently, on the ground-floor, the junction between the entrance Hall and the main Front Room 1. The evidence shows that the studwork on the ground floor is a later addition and that there was originally no frame at that level – the line being spanned by the moulded bridging beam. At first-floor level there are two rows of square panels

At first-floor level there is a cross-frame two panels high, stiffened by a straight up-brace from the jowled bay post in the north wall. There are indications of an inserted but later blocked doorway through the frame. The southern portion of the frame may have been cut out when the corridor was created at this level. The frame is topped by a truss (*see below*, 3.3).

#### *Frame A8*

Frame A8 was similar originally to Frame A7 to its west and there is still no infill at ground-floor level, leaving the bridging beam exposed. At first-floor level, however, the frame has been removed between the bay posts and re-set slightly further to the east, though not incorporating the original brace from the northern bay post – the mortise of which is visible. The frame is topped by a truss (*see below*, 3.3).

#### *Frame A9*

At ground-floor level Frame A9 was similar to Frames A7 and A8 but it seems that there was never any cross-frame at first-floor level. The truss tie is hidden above the ceiling of the first-floor room, but there are no traces of mortises in the bay posts. However, the frame is topped by a truss (*see below*, 3.3).



*Frame A10*

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This frame marks the eastern end of the main Hall and separates it from the slightly narrow portion of the Hall Range at the north-eastern corner of the house. It is a rather odd frame which begins at a bay post in the north frame (A1).

Unlike the frame at the western end of the Hall (A6), which is in line with the courtyard wall of the adjacent West Wing, this frame is not in line with the courtyard wall of the adjacent East Wing; nor does it even reach the south frame of the Hall Range.

Instead, it ends rather unconvincingly in an almost freestanding post set about 1m short of the south frame. At ground-floor level the wall is plastered making assessment difficult, although there is a curving section immediately to the south of the post.

At first-floor level the post is exposed and clearly the frame did not extend in any direction from it. However, this post, jowled on the east side, does support the inward end of the dragon beam forming a part of the complicated roof structure (*see below*).

The frame is close-studded on the ground floor, but the studs are storey high and thus of a type not seen elsewhere in the building. In addition, they are not pegged into the ceiling beam, which suggests that they may have been inserted beneath it.

However, on the first-floor, the framing is of two rows of panels and there is a blocked primary doorway against the north wall; the redundant mortises for its lintel survive and the mid-rail across the former opening has clearly been planted. The frame is topped by a truss (*see below*, 3.3).

*Frame A11*

This is a fairly ephemeral frame, consisting solely of the bay posts, a first-floor bridging beam (boxed) and a half truss; it divides the eastern portion of the Hall Range into two bays, but is the only primary internal frame of the range aligned west-east (apart from the shared frame B7 at the junction of the Hall Range and West Wing).

*Frame A12*

Frame A12 is a clearly inserted ground-floor frame of which much has since been removed. It was built across the west end of the former hall and was probably associated with the remodelling of the main entrance and the creation of the Porch.

It was a close-studded frame with mid-rail under a moulded wall-plate and had a central opening through it – the grand doorway into the hall from this cross-passage. This is shown by the pattern of redundant mortises in the former wall-plate – now little more than another bridging beam.

Only a small section of intact close-studded frame survives, visible within the small modern WC at the south end. This section shows that it was of high quality work and there are also surviving carpenters' marks of fairly standard form.

### *Frame A13*

Frame A13 is a long west-east frame at first-floor level, parallel to the south elevation and thus forming a corridor serving the first-floor bedrooms. It is a frame two panels high containing primary square-headed doorways with neatly moulded frames.

At the west end it seems to rely on the large full height inserted post already mentioned (*see above*). At the other, it ends in a very crude junction with frame A10, just to the north of the post supporting the dragon beam of the roof structure.

## **3.1.3 The Floor Structures**

### *The First Floor Structure*

The first-floor structure in the wider central area of the Hall Range is mainly based on paired axial beams between the cross-beams of the bay frames. These seem to be primary and share the same mouldings as the main cross-beams. The common joists run between these axials but none were exposed at the time of the survey. In the narrower end bays of the Hall Range there are single west-east beams, boxed.

### *The Second or Attic Floor Structure*

The attic floor structure consists mainly of common rafters between the truss ties. At either end, where there are odd dragon ties and attendant half ties, these are respected by the common joists.

## **3.1.4 The Roof**

The slate-covered roof of the Hall Range is somewhat complicated, despite appearing superficially straightforward from the outside – though with one end hipped and the other terminated by gables at right-angles to each other. Nevertheless, the understanding of the roof is critical to an understanding of the development of the building itself.

The portion over the middle part of the Hall Range is fairly straightforward. This section of the roof is plain gabled and of four unequal bays reflecting the bay pattern of the framing beneath.

The three intermediate trusses (A7, A8 and A9) are identical, consisting of the ties, principals and pairs of slightly raking struts to allow good access through and between the trusses.





Pl.10: The Hall roof, looking west.



Pl.11: Detail of the hipped roof structure at the west end of the Hall Range.



At the western end is a closed truss (A6) with a doorway set between two vertical queen struts and beneath a collar; the door jamb struts 'interrupt' a lower collar. This arrangement is possibly primary but there is a stave groove on top of the tie-beam within the threshold of the doorway, which could suggest a degree of change. Significantly, this truss is on top of a cross-frame of the Hall Range at the junction between it and the West Wing.

At the eastern end of this middle section of the roof is another closed truss (A10). In contrast to the situation at the west end of the roof, this truss is over a cross-frame which is not in line with the courtyard frame of the adjacent wing. Instead, this frame is aligned rather oddly at the junction between Hall and East Wing.

In this part of the roof the trusses support two tiers of trenched purlins, and these have the remains of either pegs or redundant peg holes associated with the original spacings of the common rafters.

At either end of the Hall Range roof the structure is more complex and rather odd. At the western end there are two bays of framing beneath the last 'bay' of the roof structure to the west of the truss of frame A6.

This end of the roof is now hipped and the evidence of the roof timbers suggests that it was designed to be. However, the design of the hip is rather poor. There is no proper hip truss but a rather *ad hoc* arrangement of timbers, some of which have since been removed.

There is a dragon tie at the end of the roof. The outward end of this rests of the north-western post of the timber-framing. The inward end, however, rests on top of the jowled head of a large post situated towards the eastern end of Frame B7. This post, it must be noticed, is not at the inward corner between the Hall Range and the West Wing as would normally be expected if the setting out was done logically.

A hip rafter is tenoned into the dragon beam and was supported by two raking struts rising from it – the upper one of which has since been removed. The top of the hip rafter rests uncomfortably against the junction of the two ridge-pieces – one running eastwards over the main Hall section and the other southwards, towards the wing. The hip rafter does take the ends of the adjacent tiers of purlins.

There are no neat half trusses to help stiffen this junction. There are short half ties at right-angles to each other tenoned into the sides of the dragon beam. The western one, supported on what is now a storey high stud but which was probably once a full height bay post in the west frame (A3), has a short rafter rising from its outward end which is fixed on the angle to the flank of the hip rafter.

The northern one retains its half tie, which is also the top rail of a timber-framed partition at first-floor level, but the half rafter has been removed. However, the cut for the trenching survives in the upper purlin.



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At the eastern end there was a similar but not quite identical arrangement but this area has been remodelled. There is a large dragon beam, again sitting on top of a jowled post in the framing below – this particular one being the end post of frame A10; it seems to have not been continued southwards and sits rather isolated now that it is exposed on the first floor (*see below*).

There are short half ties tenoned into the dragon beams, as at the western end, but the rest of the 'truss' is part of a later alteration. This includes a 'mast' supported by angled timbers to create a type of king-post hip truss, but the whole arrangement is evidently the result of repair and change, perhaps of the later-19<sup>th</sup> century.

The eastern gable seems to be of some antiquity and retains most of its original timbers. These form close-studding with the panels infilled by laths would around horizontal staves. In contrast, the gable on the north elevation is evidently rebuilt. The principal rafters could be original but the rest certainly is not – and seems to be bolted together.

It is possible that this gable, at least, was not part of the original design. This is supported by the existence of a partly cut and unusual form of wind-brace on the north slope.

This, from the evidence of identical ones at the southern end of the West Wing (Building B)(*see below*) would have begun low down, perhaps at wall-plate level, and then risen across the backs of the lower purlins and the truss rafter to be tenoned into the soffit of the upper purlin.

Such a wind-brace in this position would suggest that there were purlins in this section that pre-date the north gable dormer – either ending at the eastern gable or, perhaps, on the lost hip rafter arrangement.

The evidence, although complex, does suggest that the dragon ties at either end of the roof structure are probably primary and, by association, that the angles of the roof may have both been hipped originally.

This, in turn, also suggests that the otherwise oddly position posts on which the inward ends of the dragon beams rest are indeed part of the original phase of the building and not later additions – no matter how odd they initially appear to be.

In addition, it would also suggest that both of the timber-framed gables at the north-eastern corner of the building are later additions replacing an original hipped junction. Quite why this would be the case is open to debate – as is the date the changes were carried out. Given the weathering of the eastern truss, it is even possible that a change of plan occurred during construction.