

OVERTON COURT FARM AND THE LATE-MEDIEVAL FARMHOUSES OF DEMESNE LESSEES IN HAMPSHIRE

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INTRODUCTION

A recent survey of English rural houses between 1348 and 1500 divides them quite simply into 'manor houses' and 'peasant houses' reflecting the great gulf in size that generally existed between the two (Le Patourel 1991). Of course, there were exceptions; in medieval Kent the great Wealden houses of the yeomanry serve to blur the distinction between gentry and peasant accommodation (*op. cit.*, 848). Nevertheless, in Hampshire, the distinction holds good for most of the later Middle Ages.

Hampshire was then a county dominated by great, mainly ecclesiastical, estates whose lords could afford to build on a lavish scale. At Bishop's Waltham, the palace covered several acres (Hare 1988) and even a minor episcopal residence, such as East Meon Court House built in 1395–97, vastly exceeded in size any contemporary, non-manorial house in the county (Table 1; Roberts 1993b). Such aristocratic houses were almost always stone-built in part. The surviving homes of the medieval Hampshire peasantry are, by contrast, always timber-framed.

The decades around the year 1500 saw the emergence of a third group of houses in Hampshire: the farmhouses of demesne lessees. (Thereafter, of course, they were built and rebuilt in every century up to the present.) These farmhouses were significantly larger than non-manorial, peasant houses and yet significantly smaller than a minor, aristocratic house (Table 1) from which they also differed in being timber-framed. The surviving houses in this middling group were built by, or for, farmers who were leasing manorial home farms, or demesnes. Such farms were considerably larger than the average peasant holding, allowing a previously-unknown scale of tenant farming (Miller 1991, 705–06) and

supporting the erection of a new type of rural house; the large farmhouses of demesne lessees.

It may be argued that farmhouses for demesne lessees were commonly built long before c 1500 but have simply failed to survive. However, this position is hard to sustain in view of the survival of numerous, small, peasant houses from both the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in Hampshire. The lack of a matching survival of putative pre-c 1500 demesne farmhouses suggests that few, if any, were built. In order to try to explain this apparently sudden emergence of such farmhouses, it will be necessary to look briefly at the development of demesne leasing in Hampshire in the late Middle Ages.

LATE-MEDIEVAL DEMESNE LEASING

The period which extended from the Black Death, in the mid-fourteenth century, to the end of the fifteenth century witnessed a sea-change in the management of manorial lands: namely, the gradual abandonment by landlords of the direct management of their manorial home farms, or demesnes, which were then leased out to farmers or demesne lessees. This process has been less thoroughly explored with regard to Hampshire than to Wiltshire (Hare 1981; Hare 1985), and less well studied with regard to the bishopric of Winchester than to the church estates of Canterbury (Du Boulay 1965), Westminster (Harvey 1977, 148–63), and Worcester (Dyer 1980, ch. 8). In general, however, it may be said that on the chalklands which are typical of large areas of Wiltshire and Hampshire the abandonment of direct exploitation of demesnes progressed in stages and at a later date than on other soils and in other areas (Hare 1981, 1–2).

Thus on these chalkland manors the first stage,

Table 1 Sizes of Rural Houses in Hampshire, 1350–1550

- Group A: An aristocrat's minor residence. A solar wing with a chapel has been demolished leaving only the hall and service wing at present. Thus the original area of the core buildings alone is likely to have exceeded *c* 5000 sq. ft. (Roberts 1993b).
- Group B: Farmhouses built by or for demesne lessees. (* Abbots Barton including the 'Cottage' wing.)
- Group C: Non-manorial rural houses which survive substantially intact and which probably predate 1550. Forge Sound may just predate 1350. (The first six houses listed in this group appear in Lewis *et al.* 1988.)

Group	House, Parish	Area sq. ft.	Height in feet
A	The Court House, East Meon	3170+	44
B	Court Farm, Overton	2288	28
	Goleigh Manor, Priors Dean	1440	32
	Great Funtley Farm, Titchfield	2176	32
	The Manor House, Littleton	1150	29
	Abbots Barton Farm, nr. Winchester*	1932	29
	Group B – (averages)	1797	30
C	Stoneacre, Denmead	740	18
	78, Hursley	700	21
	The Crease, Micheldever	714	26
	Embassy Cottage, Twyford	710	17
	Forge Sound, East Meon	660	25
	Park View, Tichborne	768	17
	Thatched Cottage, North Warnborough	630	18
	Rose Cottage, Wild	612	20
	Molesey Cottage, Upper Clatford	740	18
	Group C – (averages)	697	20

which sometimes did not occur until the mid-fifteenth century, was generally the leasing of the demesne arable. At this stage, however, leases were often granted for short terms on an intermittent and experimental basis; and it was not uncommon for the lord to retain direct responsibility for the manorial sheep flock, taking the risk of profit or loss (Miller 1991, 712; Hare 1985, 85).

The second stage, which involved the leasing of the lord's flock and with it the effective management of the whole demesne, was often

deferred on chalkland manors until the late fifteenth century. The nature of the sheep-corn husbandry practised on these chalklands made it expedient to maintain the integrity of the whole flock and to lease the demesne in one block to one man, who thus had to be a person of substance (Hare 1981, 2; Hare 1985, 86). The 1490s was perhaps the decade that saw the final transformation of some lords to their role as rentiers, for at this time on ecclesiastical estates in both Wiltshire and Hampshire leases were increasingly registered and offered for longer

terms, sometimes for as much as sixty years (Hare 1985, 87–88; Greatrex 1978, 381–519). The farmer of an entire demesne might also take on the role of rent collector, bailiff or woodward; manorial responsibilities which formerly might have been under the direct control of the lord (Du Boulay 1965, 448). The demesne lessee had thus become a kind of surrogate lord, effectively controlling the bulk of manorial affairs. As such, although he stood below the lord in power and status, yet he stood far above the ordinary peasant farmer. He might be called a yeoman but aspire to be a gentleman and expect a house that both fitted his position and could accommodate the number of servants needed to run a manor farm.

This paper explores the possibility that this final stage of the late-medieval revolution in demesne management was associated with the building or rebuilding of a significant number of manorial farmhouses in Hampshire. Given the limitations of surviving documentary and archaeological evidence, it is only possible to deal with a tiny sample of those farmhouses that once existed but, within this limitation, it may be suggested that manorial accommodation was remodelled or rebuilt to meet new circumstances in which the demesne lessee now ran the manor farm and undertook wide-ranging manorial duties. Above all, an attempt is made to give examples (with particular regard to Overton Court Farm) of the way in which the building of farmhouses for or by demesne lessees has left a mark on the county landscape which may still be seen today.

Overton Court Farm

The medieval bishops of Winchester held numerous manors throughout the south of England; although the bulk of their possessions lay in Hampshire, the heartland of the bishopric. On some manors, the bishops built for themselves great palaces, as at Wolvesey and Bishop's Waltham, where they sometimes lived for many months, and even years, at a time (Hare 1988, 232); on others there was only a small farmhouse, not designed to accommodate the bishop and his household, from which the reeve and bailiff ran the demesne farm and oversaw manorial affairs.

A third, intermediate category was a minor episcopal residence; a house that was smaller than a palace, but sufficiently large to offer occasional shelter to the bishop (Roberts 1993b, 475–8). Such a residence was at Overton, some 20 km (12½ miles) north of Winchester.

That the house of the medieval bishops at Overton was a minor episcopal residence is illustrated by the fact that bishops are only known to have stayed there on four brief occasions during the whole of the fourteenth century (Roberts 1993b, 477). Even so, this required accommodation far superior to that of a small house typical of a so-called 'reeve's manor' (Le Patourel 1991, 826; Roberts 1993b, 476) which would not have had the stone chimney recorded at Overton in 1256/57, the pigeon house and new garderobe in 1282/83, the bishop's chamber roofed with lead in 1284/85, nor the knights' chamber noted in 1287/88 (HRO Eccles II 159292, 159305, 159306, 159310). Furthermore, the luxury associated with episcopal visits is suggested by the peacocks kept and the pike bought in 1305/06, and by the repair of the lord's chamber and cellar in preparation for a visit by bishop William Edington in 1348/49 (HRO Eccles II 159321, 159358).

No references have been found to episcopal visits to Overton in the fifteenth century but the manorial buildings continued to be maintained. As late as 1483/84, a carpenter was making three new doors for the barn, two new shutters for the hall windows, and making good the solar, steward's chamber and bailiff's stables, and in 1488/89 there was further work on the great chamber and the clerks' chamber (HRO 11M59/B1/210, 212).

In spite of this apparent continuity, a major reorganisation of manorial administration occurred at Overton in the late fifteenth century. In 1452/53 the manor was in the direct management of the bishop as landlord but the first step towards the leasing of the entire manor occurred in 1453 when the demesne arable was leased for a term of only four years (HRO 11M59/B1/189, 190). Next, in 1488/89 the manorial flock was leased for the first time, with the entire risk of profit or loss resting with John Nash, the farmer (HRO 11M59/B1/212).

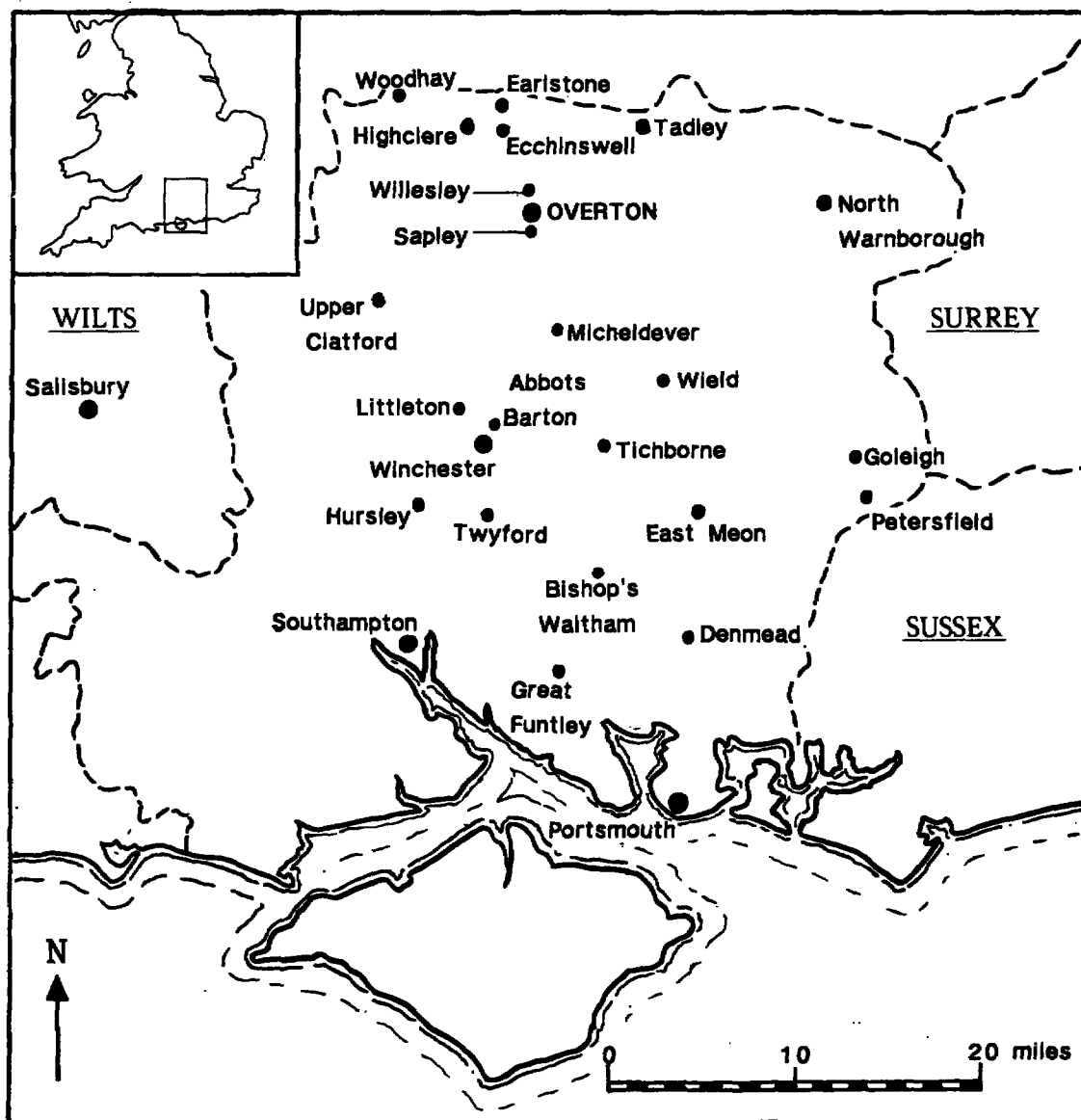


Fig 1. Overtton and site locations referred to in the text.

The final phase of leasing, when the bulk of the responsibility for running the manor was granted to the farmer for a long term, centred on the figure of John Langton. This was perhaps the John Langton who was a beneficiary of the will of bishop Thomas Langton (1493–1501) wherein he is called the bishop's servant. However, as his legacy was the substantial sum of 66s. 8d., he is likely to have been a servant of some standing and was probably the bishop's kinsman as well (PRO, PCC Moone 10). It was not uncommon for good service to be rewarded with the office of bailiff (Greatrex 1979, 383, 416) and, in 1500/01, John Langton was bailiff of Overton and neighbouring episcopal manors, an office granted to him for life by bishop Thomas Langton (HRO 11M59/B1/216, 218). Bishop Langton died in 1501 but, after John Langton was made farmer of Overton in 1503, he made sure every year that the bishopric pipe roll rehearsed the fact that the office of bailiff had been granted to him by bishop Langton and confirmed by the prior of Winchester Cathedral. John was also made manorial rent collector in 1503, and was granted a lease of the demesne for the term of thirty-one years. He remained farmer until 1522/23, at – or shortly before – his death (HRO 11M59/B1/233, 234). As well as accumulating further leases of Overton land (WCL LB ii 22r.; CCC Lease Bk. i fo.6), he seems to have acted as the bishop's agent in the area, helping bishop Richard Fox to buy lands with which to endow his new foundation at Corpus Christi College, Oxford (C.C.C. Twyne, 6/1/149; 7/4/51; 7/5/49 and 50; Waight, this volume). John clearly lived at Court Farm for in his will, proved in 1524, he called himself 'John Langton of Overton' and expected his widow and his son Thomas to live at his farm there after his death (PRO PCC F.26 Bodfelde). Thomas did, in fact, take on his father's lease and, in 1527, secured a further lease of Overton manor for the extended term of fifty-one years (HRO 11M59/B1/234; WCL LB ii 118r.).

In parallel with the reorganisation of manorial affairs in the period around the year 1500, the bishop (as lord of the manor) paid for the total rebuilding of the great barn and the manor house at Overton. Of these two key manorial buildings, the barn was raised in 1496/7 and 1497/8 for a

total of about £47 and the house in 1505/6–06/7 for about £42 (see below). This figure should be set beside both the hundreds of pounds required to build an aristocratic dwelling in the late Middle Ages and the £3–£4 which – it has been claimed – was the cost of rebuilding a peasant house (Dyer 1986, 30).

The barn and house still stand substantially intact today. As their cost and survival suggest, they are large and well-built. But why did the bishop foot the bill? There was already an ancient house on the site which had formerly accommodated bishops. No doubt it was by now old-fashioned, but it had continued to be maintained (as we have seen) and, arguably, what had once been good enough for a bishop should now be good enough for a mere demesne lessee. Similarly, maintenance work on the barn had been recorded in the decades before it was rebuilt in the late 1490s (11M59/B1/199, 205, 207).

A further and related question is 'Why were the barn and farmhouse rebuilt when they were, and not at some other time?' Was this work simply part of a pattern of periodic rebuilding for which no further explanation is needed? While this is possible, it is hard to escape the conclusion that this major work on the two key manorial buildings reflects the major reorganisation of manorial administration that was going on at the same time.

The great barn was rebuilt a few years after John Nash had begun to lease the lord's flock. It is not clear, however, why the bishop felt the need to pay for it, for elsewhere leases were granted on condition that the lessees rebuilt at their own expense (Hare 1994, 166; Greatrex 1978, 381, 417). It is possible that the promise of a new barn was offered to the farmer to induce him to take on the lord's flock (and effectively the responsibility for the entire manor farm), but no copy of the conditions of his lease have been found.

How, then, can we account for the building of the Court Farmhouse at Overton? There may, of course, have been an element of nepotism. Just as bishop Woodlock may have set up his kinsman with a fine new house and estate at Marwell two centuries earlier (Crook 1993, 41), so bishop Langton, before his death in 1501, may have



Plate 1. Overton Court farmhouse from the north-west. The south block is to the right of the picture and is now concealed beneath a later brick skin. Its original elevation (see Fig. 4) had the same plain framing as can be seen on the north block in the foreground. This is not typical of other farmhouses in Hampshire of a similar date (see plate 3).

agreed to provide a fine manor house for his kinsman John. But since the house was not begun until 1505/6, this explanation is problematic. In any case, nepotism is unlikely to have been the sole, or even the main, consideration. It has been argued that, on the estates of the see of Canterbury, the choice of lessees was dictated by two motives. Firstly there was the wish to bestow patronage on someone who had a claim on the lord by virtue of kinship or service. Secondly, however, there was the need to place the manor in the charge of a trustworthy man of substance who could be relied upon to pay the rent and to represent the lord's interests in the area (Du Boulay 1965, 451–53).

This second need was especially important on chalkland manors where farming practices dictated that the manor should be leased as one block to one man (Hare 1985 *passim*) and, as we have seen, John Langton was a man of sufficient substance to lease several estates and trustworthy enough to act on the bishop's behalf in several capacities.

Other Demesne Farmhouses

More research needs to be undertaken before we can be confident that the rebuilding of Overton Court barn and farmhouse around the year 1500 represents a general trend. In the meantime,

however, it is possible to point to several significant parallels. For example, Littleton manor-house, which was at that time the property of the Winchester Cathedral Priory, was remodelled and then rebuilt as the manorial estate went through several stages of leasing. Here, the manorial demesne was directly exploited by the priory in 1428 but, by 1457, the arable had been leased to John Smith on a seven-year term. In the year 1458, although still restricted to a seven-year term, Smith began to lease the lord's sheep flock, thus effectively controlling the entire demesne (WCL, Littleton C. 1428, 1457, 1458). He was still the demesne lessee in 1480 when he was granted a lease of the manor for forty years, a long lease which could be inherited by his son (Greatrex 1979, 394). John Smith's memorial brass in Littleton church is dated 1505 and records the fact that he was still called the farmer of Littleton at the time of his death.

Two key events in Smith's long career as a

demesne lessee were his leasing of the entire demesne in 1458 and the grant of the long lease in 1480. Both seem to have been the occasion for significant building works. In 1458, the priory paid £4 12s. to make anew six feet of timber framing at the north end of the hall and a new chamber block beyond that. Furthermore, £3 17s. was spent on extensive repairs to the barn (WCL, Littleton 1458). More significantly, however, a recent tree-ring survey has shown that the entire manor house was rebuilt in 1485, only four years after Smith was granted a long-term lease (Miles *et al.* 1995, 63). This house, which still stands substantially intact, is considerably larger than the average peasant house of the time (Table 1) and, like his brass on the church floor, reflects the rising importance of the demesne lessee in local society (Lewis *et al.* 1988, 83–85).

There are other notable examples of late-medieval demesne farmhouses in Hampshire. Abbots Barton, near Winchester, is an early



Plate 2. Overton Court barn: interior looking west.

sixteenth-century farmhouse built on the demesne of Hyde Abbey or, if built after the Dissolution, of the Crown (Fradgley *et al.* this volume). Great Funtley near Wickham, is another early sixteenth-century farmhouse, built on the demesne land of the Uvedale family (Fradgley *et al.* this volume). Goleigh Manor, near Petersfield, is a demesne farmhouse built for the lessee of Winchester College in c 1500 (VCH iv, 436). In all these cases, a clear link between a building date and the date of first leasing can not be shown at present. However, all these houses were built c 1500, were occupied by demesne lessees, and were considerably larger than any known peasant house in Hampshire (Table 1).

Thus, although much work remains to be done, it would appear that in the late fifteenth century, an intermediate class of house emerged for the first time: the farmhouse of the demesne lessee. These houses of intermediate size were built fittingly for men from the middle ranks of society; men who might be considered wealthy peasants by some but who might aspire to gentry status. Walter Chaundler, the farmer of Abbots Barton, was called a merchant in 1540 but a gentleman at his death in 1546 (HRO 5M53/313; PRO PCC PROB 11/13). James Hawkesworth, farmer of Great Funtley, was called a gentleman in 1532 but Richard Hawkesworth of the same parish, and most probably his kinsman, was called a husbandman in 1552 (HRO 5M50/1875; 1552/B098). And John Langton of Overton may have been a kinsman of bishop Thomas Langton, but his son Thomas was called a yeoman (WCL LB ii, 118).

The houses for this middling group of men seem generally to have been newly-built, either to replace a small, bailiff's farmhouse (as in the case of Littleton) or an old-fashioned, aristocratic residence (as in the case of Overton). Another option, however, was the retention of some element of an aristocratic residence as a storage area, back kitchen or as lodgings for farmhands. On to this downgraded fragment could be grafted up-to-date accommodation for the farmer. This plan was, for example, adopted at the prior of St Swithun's mansion at Michelmersh, and at the bishop of Winchester's houses at East Meon and Hambledon (Roberts 1993a, 1993b, 1993c),

where ancient stone-built wings once occupied by ecclesiastical dignitaries are fronted by smaller houses for demesne lessees, built in timber or brick. Whichever plan was adopted, the lords' final abandonment of direct management of their demesnes and the final assumption of control by demesne lessees in the years around 1500 have left significant marks upon the landscape of Hampshire for those who have eyes to see them.

Building the Great Barn at Overton

This barn is situated about 30 yards to the north-west of the Court House. It is a large, aisled building some 27 feet high and almost 32 feet wide (Fig 2). Its timbers are of impressive scantling, the arcade posts being one foot by one foot in section. It has a queen post roof with undiminished principals and clasped purlins. Large, curved braces rise from the arcade posts to the tie beams and to the arcade plates. Modern cement blocks have replaced the original side walls, but peg holes in the wall plates show where there was wall-framing below. At present the barn has six bays (each bay being fourteen feet in length) and is approximately eighty-four feet long, but there is reason to believe that it once contained nine bays and was thus about 126 feet long. The evidence for this claim may be set out as follows.

Firstly, there are void mortices in the arcade posts at trusses C and I (Fig 2) which show that the barn originally had at least one extra bay at either end. Secondly, the arcade braces bear a sequence of Roman numerals (scribed by the carpenters) along the length of the barn. The first surviving braces, which rise from the arcade posts at the present west end of the barn (truss I in Fig 2), bear the numeral III (three). It seems, therefore, that braces one and two were in a demolished westernmost bay which is also evidenced by void mortices in the west faces of these posts.

Thirdly, on the evidence of peg holes in the wall plates, it seems that there was no room for waggon entrances in any bay on the north side of the barn, nor on the south, except in bays C-D and G-H where the wall plates have unfortunately been removed or damaged.

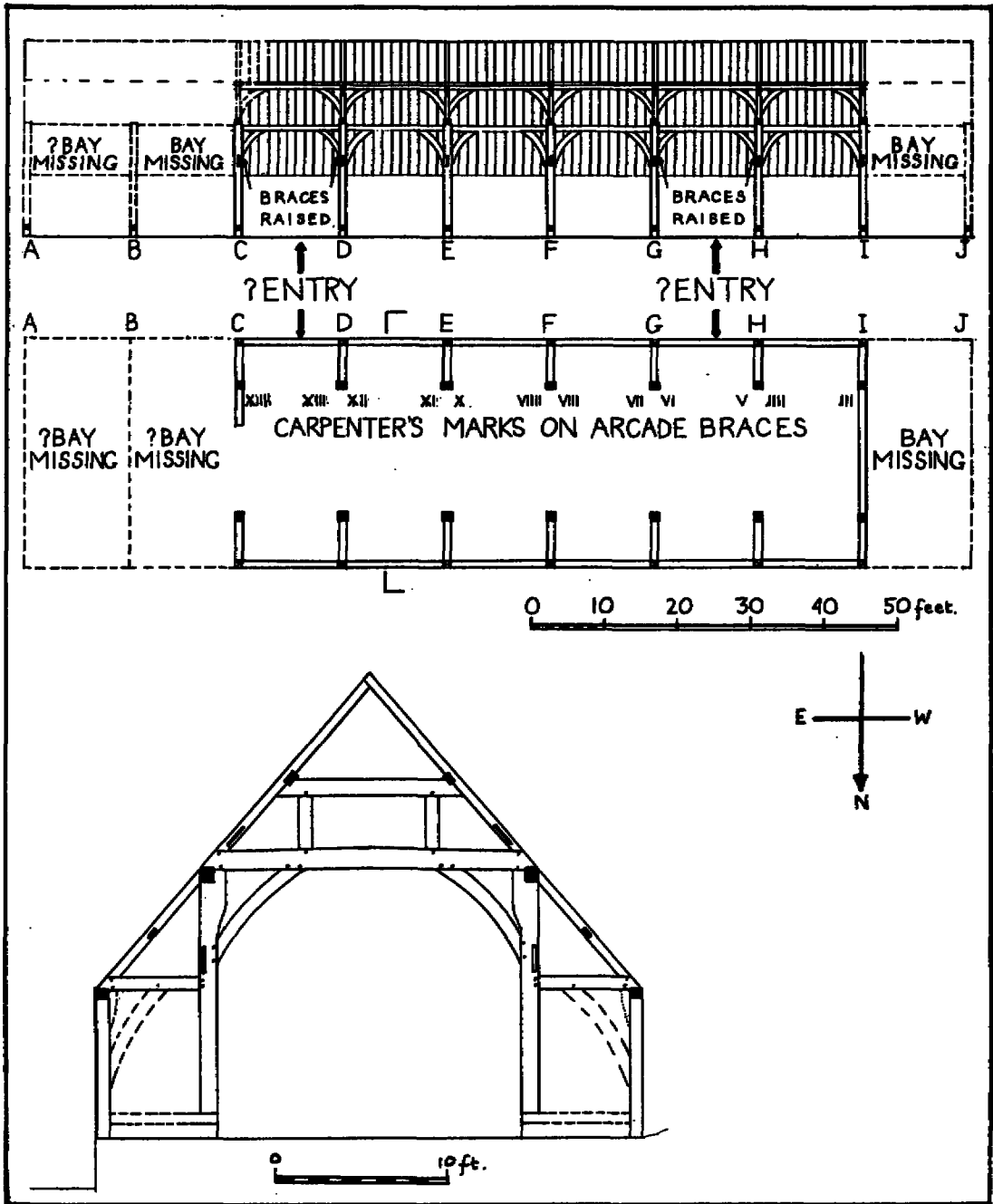


Fig 2. Overton Court barn: long section, plan and cross section at E.



Plate 3. Goleigh Manor near Petersfield, a large farmhouse built for the demesne lessee of Winchester College *c.* 1500. Note the showy close studding, a feature also employed to give status to other contemporary farmhouses at Abbot's Barton, Great Funtley and Littleton Manor (Fradgley *et al.*, this volume; Lewis *et al.* 1988, 83).

However, there must have been waggon entrances in some bays, and C–D with G–H are the only possible candidates. Further evidence which strongly suggests that entrances were housed in these two bays lies in the sequence of raised arcade braces on the south side of the barn which seem to mark waggon entrances (Fig 2). They occur in the bays that were originally third from the west (G–H), and seventh from the west (C–D). This is reminiscent of another large Hampshire barn, at Hensting (Roberts and Gale 1995), which has two waggon entrances with three bays in between and two bays at each end – making nine bays in all. On this basis a suggested reconstruction of Overton Court barn may be offered (Fig 2).

Further evidence for this interpretation of the original length of the barn may be drawn from early maps. Large-scale maps of 1872 (O.S. 25" map) and 1795 (HRO 10M57/8) both show a barn approximately 125 feet in length (nine bays, each fourteen feet long, would exactly fit into a barn 126 feet in length). The map of 1795 shows two waggon porches to the south – features that may be inferred from the present structure. Furthermore, a copy of an eighteenth-century drawing, now at Court Farm, shows the barn with a gable end to the east, which may represent its original form.

In 1994, the timbers of the barn which, apart from a few replacement rafters, would all seem to belong to one building phase, were dated by

dendrochronology to 1496 (Miles *et al.* 1994, 29–30). This led to the identification of the building accounts in two pipe rolls of the bishopric of Winchester, dated 1496/7 and 1497/8 (HRO B1/214, 215: see Appendix).

The pipe roll for 1496/7 records payments to masons and labourers, the purchase of tiles, and the carriage of timber to repair (*repar*) the great barn (*magna grangia*) at Overton. It should be noted that the word 'repair' in medieval documents often refers to a total rebuild (Roberts forthcoming), as both the pipe rolls and the structure of the barn show was clearly the case in this instance. Total expenditure on the great barn in 1496/7 was £4 17s 6d.

In 1497/8, £42 7s 11d was spent on making the barn which was completed in that year. Stone was bought, presumably for the foundation walls, and one hundred and twenty oaks were felled for 'the new barn'. These oaks came from Willesley and Sapley (Fig 1), two woods within Overton manor, and were sawn into 11,700 feet of timber and boards. (This is interesting evidence for supposing that the barn walls were clad in weather-boarding.)

It seems the timber frame took thirty-four days to erect, although the pipe roll is slightly ambiguous on this point. It is clear, however, that thirty-nine days were spent in tiling the roof, the tiles coming from the bishop's manor at Highclere (24,000), from Earlstone (3,500 with 220 hip tiles), and from Woodhay (60 crest tiles). These places were all within a few miles of Overton (Fig 1) and on the north Hampshire clays where there were several tile kilns in the late Middle Ages (Hare 1991, 89).

Overton Court Farmhouse

(This description and the accompanying measured drawings (Figs 3 and 4) focus upon the timber-framed structure which represents the earliest surviving phase of the building. Brickwork dating from the eighteenth century and later has been largely excluded from consideration.)

The earliest part of Court Farmhouse comprises two timber-framed blocks forming a T-shape. Even without the evidence of dendrochronology (see below), the structural

similarities between the two blocks, and the care and symmetry with which they are joined, would argue that they are coeval. Both blocks are identical in the scantling and shape of their timbers, in their queen-post roofs with raking struts to double butt purlins, and in the unusual arrangement of their wind braces (Fig 3 A and D). They both measure about twenty-four feet across, an exceptional width which necessitated the elaborate roof-structure. There are only two marked differences: the purlins in the northern block are plain whereas those in the southern block are chamfered, and while the northern block seems to conform to the standard late-medieval house-plan, the southern block has an unusual arrangement of spacious chambers. Both differences indicate the superior status of the southern block.

That the southern block originally comprised five trusses is shown by the Roman numerals scribed on each truss. The southern bay of the block has been partially demolished to accommodate a Georgian brick front, so that the first surviving truss is inscribed 'II' (two). The truss at the north end of the block bears the numeral 'V' (five) and must always have formed the end of this block since it abuts the northern block which is coeval.

Although its overall size is clear, the original plan of the southern block is not easy to determine. There is no sooting on the rafters and all spine beams are apparently original. Thus it was floored throughout from the start. Its internal chimney seems to be original (on the evidence of the very narrow bricks of which it is composed) and would be one of the two chimneys referred to in the building accounts (Appendix), although the awkward way in which it crosses the spine beam suggested at first that it may have been an insertion (Roberts 1990, 30). On the ground floor, to the north of the stack is a passage which leads to an outer door (Fig 3B), thus forming a so-called 'hearth passage', a feature typical of early floored houses in Hampshire. From this passage, an internal door with a four-centred arch (Fig 3C) gives access to a large, heated chamber which stretches past truss IIII to truss III and (if the partition at truss III is secondary) was originally even larger.

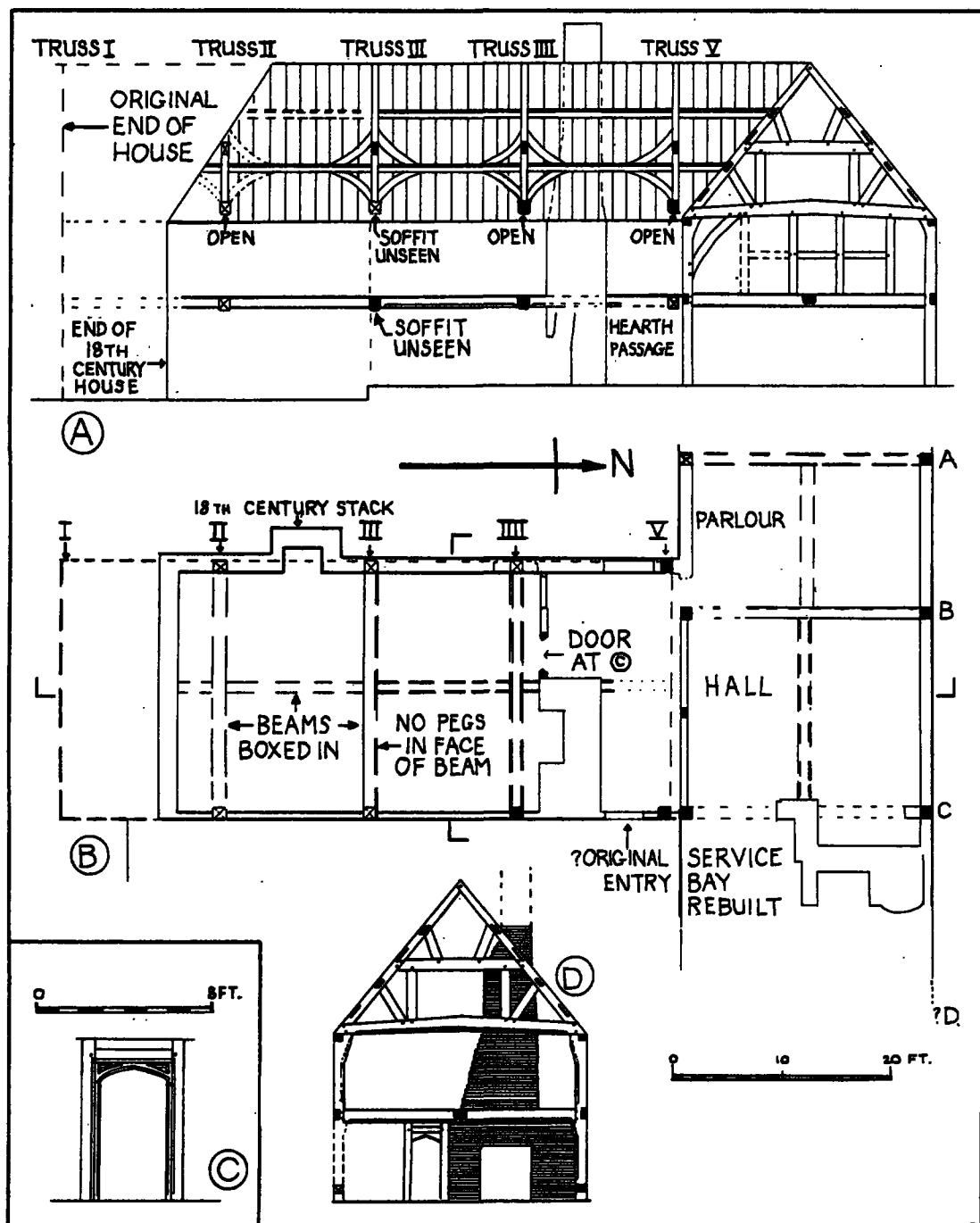


Fig 3. Overton Court farmhouse: A, long section; B, ground-floor plan; C, door from hearth passage to a principal chamber; D, cross section at truss III.

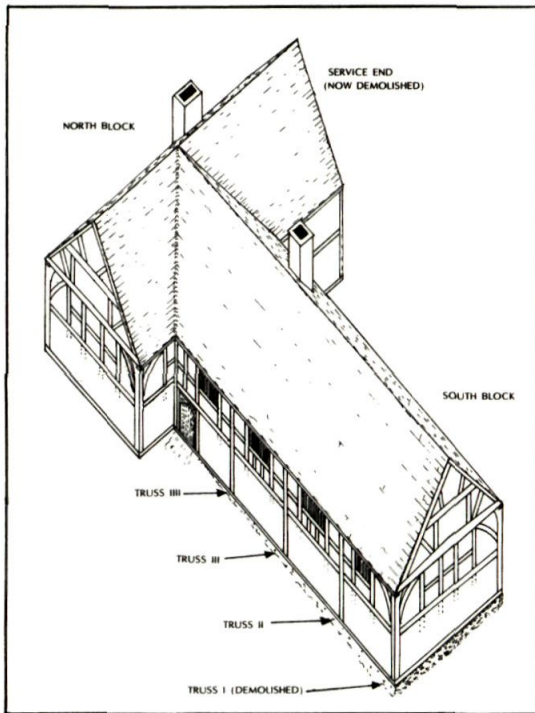


Fig 4. Reconstruction of the original appearance of Overton Court farmhouse from the south-west. Truss I (the gable end of the south block), although demolished, is assumed to have been similar to surviving cross frames. The eastern, side elevation of the south block survives in part, and has been copied for the west elevation. It has been assumed that the hearth passage had opposing doors. The position of the two chimneys is discussed in the text. The service end of the north block has been rebuilt and its appearance here is based on similar houses of this date.

On the first floor, truss II must have been open beneath the tie, as there are no mortices in the posts for a cross-frame. Truss III was certainly open, for the soffit of the tie is unmarked. Thus the only possible partition could have been at truss III where evidence for a cross-frame is obscured (Fig 3A).

In sum, then, the southern block comprised four bays divided into several large chambers, but no service room. This suggests that it was a living area for someone of superior status and perhaps, also, that it was used as a court house as its name suggests. Indeed, in the nineteenth century, this

part of the block was called 'the Court House' to distinguish it from the north block which was called 'Court Farm' (Roberts 1990, 30).

The northern block, or that part of it which survives, does in fact conform much more obviously to the typical plan of a late-medieval farmhouse. In the centre is a hall (bay B-C), with a parlour bay at one end (A-B), and apparently a demolished service bay at the other.

Weathering on the western face of cross-frame A shows that it originally marked one end of the north block (even though there is now a small brick extension). It was a gable end, unusual in Hampshire and often indicative of relatively high-status buildings.

The hall (bay B-C) has slightly sooty rafters and, at first, this was taken as evidence that there had been an open hearth (Roberts 1990, 30). However, further examination revealed evidence of a door at first-floor level in truss B (Fig 3A), showing that the hall must have been floored-over from the start. Unfortunately, the hall chimney appears to have been completely rebuilt but it is in an off-centre position typical of hearth-passage plans of c 1500 and it can, most probably, be accepted as the second chimney referred to in the building accounts. Further evidence may be derived from dendrochronology which gives a felling date of 1496 for one joist in the hall floor (Miles *et al.* 1994, 30). This is interpreted as a leftover from the previous building campaign on the great barn and supportive of the view that the hall floor is coeval with the rest of the block.

Two collars span the centre of the chamber over the hall. This may simply be a practical necessity, given that the hall bay is the longest in the north block; but it may also respect the medieval tradition of a decorative hall truss – a tradition honoured at the near-contemporary farmhouse at Great Funtley, near Wickham, where there is an arch-braced collar in a chamber over a hall that had been floored-over from the start (Fradgley *et al.*, this volume).

Bay C-D was almost certainly the service bay. Although it was rebuilt in brick to the east of cross-frame C, a lack of weathering and heavy soot-encrustation on the east face of this cross-frame show that it was never an exterior wall and that bay C-D must, at one stage, have contained

an open hearth. The lower status of bay C–D is suggested by the lack of mortices for wind braces in the east face of truss C.

Building Overton Court Farmhouse

In 1994, the timbers of both blocks of the house were sampled by dendrochronology and ascribed a felling date of 1505 (Miles *et al.* 1994, 29–30). However, one floor joist in the hall bay (B–C) of the north block was dated to 1496. As we have seen, this was interpreted as a leftover from the building of the great barn, and evidence for the view that the hall had been floored from the start. This is an early date for the flooring-over of a hall and indicative of the importance of the building as a whole. The building-date of 1505 suggested by dendrochronology led to the identification of the building accounts in two pipe rolls of the bishopric of Winchester dated 1505/6 and 1506/7 (HRO 11M59/B1/219 and 220).

In 1505/6, thirty oaks were felled at Ecchinswell (a bishopric manor some four km (six miles) away from Overton). Their carriage to Overton manor and the making of saw-pits strongly suggests that this was preparatory to rebuilding the farmhouse in the following year. The timber of the farmhouse differs in part from that of the barn. The barn was made from a large number of small trees probably grown on the chalklands of Overton manor, whereas many of the farmhouse timbers were made from larger trees probably grown on lower-lying clay, each log being sawn up into many members. The clay soil of Ecchinswell is a likely source for this timber (Miles *et al.* 1994, 30), however, some of the timber for the farmhouse came from Willesley nearby (Appendix).

The roll of 1506/7 accounts for £39 4s 3½d spent on building a new hall and kitchen within the manor with various chambers and partitions therein, and for placing ground sills anew in the chamber at the south end of the hall. At first sight, it may seem that 'the chamber at the south end of the hall' can hardly refer to the whole of the south block. However, the word 'chamber' (*camera*) in medieval sources can mean either a single room or a chamber block that is floored throughout (Currie 1992, 91). Although 'placing

ground sills anew' could be construed as a repair, the structural and tree-ring evidence clearly shows that the chamber block was built in its entirety at this date. The hall with diverse chambers must be the north block, and the kitchen may either have been the service bay in this block or a detached building.

When building work began, the old hall was pulled down, and timbers and tiles were saved; probably for inferior buildings, as there is no reused timber in the farmhouse. Ninety-nine quarters of flintstones were collected to build the plinths on which the timber frame would rest. Two sawyers sawed 13,100 feet of boards, joists, gables (*ponchynnes*), and rafters; and several carpenters worked for up to 119 days (almost twenty weeks) on the new building. Two thousand five hundred bricks were bought to make two chimneys (presumably one in the hall and another in the chamber block), and an oven and furnace were made in the kitchen. Finally, tilers worked for up to thirty-seven days (about six weeks), and hinges with other ironwork were bought and fixed to various doors and windows. Glass, which was still an aristocratic commodity, is not mentioned in the accounts.

Appendix: The Building Accounts for Overton Barn (from the Pipe Rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester)

1496/7: (HRO 11M59/B1/214) The Great Barn

Building costs: For various masons and labourers, together with tiles bought, pegs (*clav*) lime, carriage of timber to build (*repar* – see text) the great barn there, as appears in the schedule above this account, £4 17s 6d.

1497/8: (HRO 11M59/B1/215) The Great Barn

Building costs: Hiring one man to fell 120 oaks for the new barn being built there, 34 days' work at 5d a day, 14s 4d.

For 11,700 feet of timber (?)boards sawn by piecework, 113s (*sic*) – so for 1,000 (ft.), 12d – less 2s in all.

Hiring several carpenters to dress timber for the new barn and to construct the said barn for daily payment together with their meals, as shown in the

account book of Thomas Saunders the bishop's servant and clerk of works there, £15 14s 1d.

For various men carrying timber for laths (*sindul'* – this can also mean shingles) from the wood this year by daywork, as specified in the book of the said Thomas – beyond 17 cart-loads (carried) by the lord's tenants together with their food bought for the same carting, 100s 7d.

For carting timber from Willesley and Sapley, 16s 3d.

For 11 cart-loads of stone bought at the quarry (apud Quarr'), 7s 8d.

And in 4 cartloads of the said stone in addition to the 7 cart-loads carried for boonwork, 3s.

Food bought for the men carrying the said stone, 2s 9d.

Paying a mason to dress the said stone, 18d.

And a tiler hired to roof the said barn, 19s 6d.

And for two men helping him, 15s 8d for 39 days at 4d a day each.

For carting fuel to the lime kiln and for finding the same fuel, 7s 10d.

One man hired to burn lime for the said work as appears in the said Thomas's book, 15s 3d.

Food and drink (*mens' & lact'*) for the lime-burner for the said work, 8s.

Carting sand for the said work, 10s.

Carting lime from the kiln to the barn, 3s 6d.

And 18,000 tiles bought at Highclere, £4 10s, besides 6,000 from the lord's stock at Highclere.

And 3,500 tiles bought at Earlstone, 17s 6d.

And 220 tiles called hiptiles (*heptile*) bought at Earlstone, 8s.

And 5 dozen crests bought at Woodhay, 5s.

And for carriage of tiles from Woodhay, 16d.

And for carting tiles from Highclere to the manor, 37s 4d.

Paying for the food (*mens'*) of the lord's servants (*famulorum domini*) at Tadley, 11s 5d.

And for their food at Overton, 9s 6d.

And for 7,200 laths (*sindul'*) made, together with carriage, 14s 10d.

Sum total, £42 7s 11d.

1505/6: (HRO 11M59/B1/219) The Court House

Repairs: And in money paid to John Alfrede for felling 30 oaks at Ecchinswell on the lord's tenants' land there, taking 4d for each oak, 10s.

John Wodman the carpenter for trimming the said 35 (*sic*) oaks, taking 12d for each tun-tight (*dol'*), 35s.

John Colyn for cutting and separating 300 feet of the said oaks and for making 6 saw pits to saw the timber, so for each 100 feet separated 12d and for each pit 2d, 4s.

1506/7: (HRO 11M59/B1/220) The Court House

Cost . . . of repairs: Money paid for the cost and expense of making, bringing in, and building anew one new hall and kitchen within the manor there with several chambers and partitions therein, and for placing anew the ground sills (*groundcelles*) in the chamber block (*camera*) at the south end of the said new hall, this year, viz:

In payment John Woodman carpenter hired with his helpers to dress and trim 39 tun-tights (*dolia*) of timber in Willesley and in the wood of the lord's tenants at Ecchinswell, and to build and construct the said hall and kitchen with all necessary things in them, giving 11d for each tun-tight, 35s 9d.

And in paying several hired labourers to pull down the old hall there, saving the tiles and timber of the same, namely William Hockley, Thomas Barbour, John Grene and John Curteys, and for (making) the walls of the new hall and kitchen (and) chambers, and for (making) partitions of wattle and daub with muddy earth (*terra luti*), and for (making) the foundations of the said buildings by piecework, 77s 6d.

John Woodman carpenter hired for the work there for 119 days at 7d a day, 69s 5d, paying him in both wages and board (*mens'*).

Nicholas Syllenes carpenter hired for 118 days at 6d a day, 59s.

John Mason carpenter hired for 99 days at 6d a day, 44s 6d.

Thomas Goddarde carpenter for 80 days at 6d a day, 40s.

William Adam carpenter hired for 55 days at 6d a day, 27s 6d.

Robert Tylborough carpenter hired for 77 days at 6d a day, 38s 6d.

John Eyles carpenter hired for 30 days at 6d a day, 15s.

Ralph Hegger carpenter hired for 27 days at 6d a day, 13s 6d.

John Selokok carpenter for 16 days at 6d a day, 8s.

John Mouston carpenter hired for 11 days at 6d a day, 5s 6d.

William Ewen carpenter hired for 11 days at 6d a day, 5s 6d.

John Colyn and John Tyne sawyers hired to saw 13,100 feet of boards, joists, gables (*ponchynnes*), and rafters at 12d per 100, £6 11s.

John Helyer for 99 quarters of flints (*silcis adamantis*) collected at 4d a quarter, 26s 4d.

For 2,500 bricks (*Bryces*) bought for making chimneys there, paying 5s per 1,000 with carriage, 12s 6d.

Several tilers hired to tile and roof the said hall, chamber block (*cameram*) and kitchen, with underpinning (*groundepynnyng*) under various sill beams of the same, and making 2 chimneys in the hall and chamber block, and making an oven and one furnace in the said kitchen.

William Helyer the elder, tiler, hired for 37 days at 6d a day, 8s 6d.

Richard Goodgrouse tiler hired for 5 days at 6d a day, 2s 6d.

William Tyler tiler hired for 37 days at 8d a day, 24s 8d.

John Baldyng tiler hired for 20 days at 6d a day, 10s.

William Hylton tiler hired for 17 days at 6d a day, 8s 6d.

Robert Durbare his servant hired for 34 days at 4d a day, 11s 4d.

John Calewey servant hired for 31 days at 4d a day, 10s 4d.

John Parker servant hired for 5 days at 4d a day, 20d.

John Welles servant hired for 6 days at 4d a day, 2s.

Richard Tyler servant hired for 18 days at 4¹/₂d, 6s 9d.

John Barlond servant hired for 37 days at 4¹/₂d a day, 13s 10¹/₂d.

Robert Dennys servant hired for 14 days at 4¹/₂d a day, 5s 3d.

William Stanys servant hired for 8 days at 4d a day, 2s 8d.

8,000 laths (*sindul*) bought from John Yonge at 4s 2d per 1,000, 33s 4d.

8 pairs of pintles and hinges for various doors and windows there weighing 50 lbs. at 1¹/₂d a lb., 6s 3d.

Sum total, £39 4s 3¹/₂d.

(Note: Some of the foregoing calculations are incorrect. This is probably due to scribal error. 'Tun-tight' is a measure of capacity. Martin Smith has analysed the building accounts for both house and barn, and concludes that there are marked discrepancies between the buildings themselves and the quantities of materials accounted for. This problem requires examination in a further study.)

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