

SOME RECENT DISCOVERIES AT KING  
JOHN'S LODGE, WRAYSBURY

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Discoveries of considerable interest and importance have recently been made at the house known variously as Place Farm, King John's Farmhouse, and King John's Hunting Lodge, Wraysbury.

It is not necessary here to go into the rather complicated history of this property; but it may be briefly stated, by way of introduction, that it appears to have belonged to the Crown until 1627. In the early part of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, or possibly before, it was leased to the Stonor family, and passed to their connections by marriage, the heraldry on some stained glass formerly in the house itself corresponding with that on some brasses of early and mid-16th century date in Wraysbury Church. It is thus likely that the tenants between 1500 and 1574 did some building at Place Farm. An engraving of 1773, reproduced in the *Victoria County History*<sup>1</sup> shows quite a substantial mansion. But from that time on, the property seems to have deteriorated. Sheahan states<sup>2</sup> that after the time of Secretary Sir T. Smith it was sold, and, " after passing through several hands, " came into the possession of B. H. Gyll, who owned it in 1860.

It was, presumably, during this time, with changes of ownership and probably periods when it was empty, that the house was neglected and began to decay: and no effort seems ever to have been made to put matters right. Those portions which had gone too far for repair were simply pulled down. One might have expected Gordon Gyll, the historian and antiquary responsible for a voluminous history of Wraysbury, to have treated the house better than appears to have been the case. In his time it was only a fragment of the original house, and it was then that it became a farmhouse, a modern mansion, Remenham House,

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<sup>1</sup> *V.C.H., Bucks*, III., 320.

<sup>2</sup> *Hist. and Topog. of County of Bucks*, 877.

being built for the owners on the property near by. From the Gylls it passed to the Hargreaves family, who owned it until a few years ago. The old place was left to a process of gradual decay. No longer even a farmhouse, it was for many years only partly inhabited by a cowman, until in 1912, when the Royal Commission visited it, it was more than half ruinous; and since the war it has been empty, so that deterioration in that time has been the more rapid. Newcome Estates purchased the property from Mrs. Hargreaves, and from them, in turn, it was bought by the present owner, Mr. W. P. Kilton. It is owing to the courtesy of Mr. Kilton that I have been enabled thoroughly to inspect the house, and to keep in touch with and record the many interesting things that have been found. Mr. Kilton hopes eventually to restore the place to something like its original dignity and beauty, and he has already done much. The task will, however, be a long and difficult one, as the house is in a deplorable condition.

In the light of recent discoveries, it is both interesting and helpful to compare its present state with the engraving already mentioned, showing the house in 1773. There were gables, elaborate chimney-stacks, a wing at the South end projecting towards the East, and, finally, a tower at the South end. The drawing must not be relied upon too explicitly, for examination of the house does not confirm the positions of the chimney-stacks or of windows, and other details. Evidence of the vanished South-East Wing has been found in a brick joint and in differences in the timbering at the South end of the East front; the foundations, also, are probably still in the ground. So far no trace of the foundations or other evidence of the tower has been found. The gables, too, have all disappeared, though they were still there as late as 1862, when Sheahan thus describes the house:<sup>3</sup> " It has a rude porch, antique gables, huge oaken timbers and some grotesque carvings in the interior, and some stained glass of the arms of an early King of England." The positions of the gables are readily seen

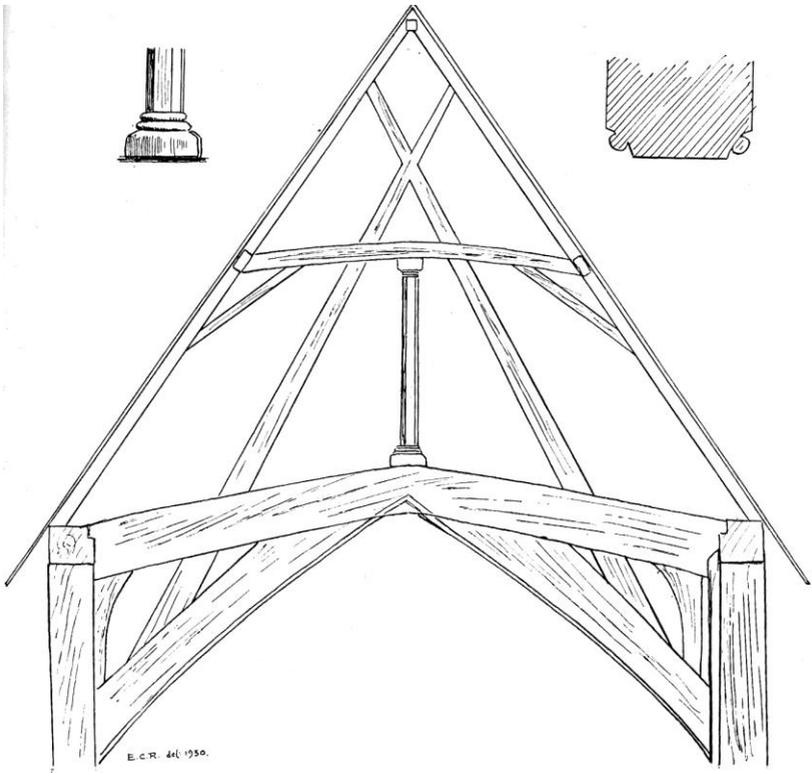
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<sup>3</sup> *Op. cit.*, 877.



PLATE I.

Main Roof-Truss of Great Hall looking South.



from the interior construction of the roofs; and two finely ornamented barge boards, presumably coming from one or other of them, have been discovered, re-used as rafters in the roof over the South part of the house. They are probably early 16<sup>th</sup> century, and were not noticed by the Royal Commission; it is likely that others may be found when the ivy roots that have penetrated this part of the house are re-moved. As regards the grotesque carvings mentioned by Sheahan, there is no trace of them at present, unless fireplaces are referred to.

The stained glass was removed for safety by Mrs. Hargreaves, at the suggestion of the South Kensington Museum authorities who inspected and restored it. It is now set in a window in Mrs. Hargreaves' residence, Fulmer Grange, and I am grateful to her for allowing me to see and take notes of it. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments does not describe the glass, and it is as well that it should be recorded here, though the interesting question of the heraldry need not concern us for the moment. The "early King of England" is Henry VIII, and the Royal arms are shown under a crown, impaling those of his first Queen, Catherine of Aragon. There are three other panels which may be classified as follows:—Two small shields of the same type and date as the Royal arms, namely, early 16th century; and a medallion in enamel colours of a shield with numerous quarterings under a helmet and mantling. The Department of Ceramics at South Kensington date this as late 16th or early 17th century; but since the heraldry corresponds almost exactly with that on the brass of Dame Elizabeth Hobby in Wraysbury Church, 1560, a mid-16th century date may reasonably be assigned to this glass.

The account of the house given in the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments<sup>4</sup> omits many details noted since, and though some clearly escaped the attention of the Commissioners, others were undoubtedly inaccessible in 1912. It is stated, with regard to the construction of the house, that the

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<sup>4</sup> *R.C.H.M.*, Bucks, I., 328-9.

walls are " timber-framed with lath and plaster fill-ing, partly replaced by brick nogging." This I venture to dispute. The original arrangement seems undoubtedly to have been close timbering with brick filling, the bricks being afterwards covered, and in some places replaced, by lath and plaster, and finally the walls of the North and East fronts entirely covered with lath and plaster or cement. The West front, mentioned by the Commission as containing brick fill-ing of later date, is of entirely different character, and would appear to have been re-built in the 17th century, as the earlier Hall roof has been altered on this side as well. On removing the modern plaster and some other filling on the other sides of the house, brick nogging appears that is undoubtedly original, though sadly mutilated, set in herring-bone pattern between the timbers. This is especially noticeable in the Hall, the oldest portion of the house, where the modern cement or plaster covering has fallen away. The bricks are unusually thin, and the timbers closely spaced. The whole arrangement is very reminiscent of Dorney Court, dated about 1510; but from other evidence, and detail King John's Lodge may well fall within the last years of the 15th century. Gyll incidentally ascribes the house to that century. The discovery of this original ornamental brickwork at once raised the prestige of the house, and gave hopes of further discoveries.

The Royal Commission's report on the interior<sup>5</sup> is very cursory. They state that " the ground floor has one original moulded ceiling beam; the others are plain. " The beam that they did see is in the room North of the porch, and it is particularly fine, with bold and well-cut mouldings. All the beams necessitated by the 17th century insertion of an upper storey in the Great Hall, and some others of possibly earlier date, are of good workmanship and are stop-chamfered, the chamfers being in some cases hollow. There is, however, another moulded beam of especial interest, not mentioned by the Commission. This runs right across the house from East to West on a

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<sup>5</sup> *Op. cit.*, 328-9.

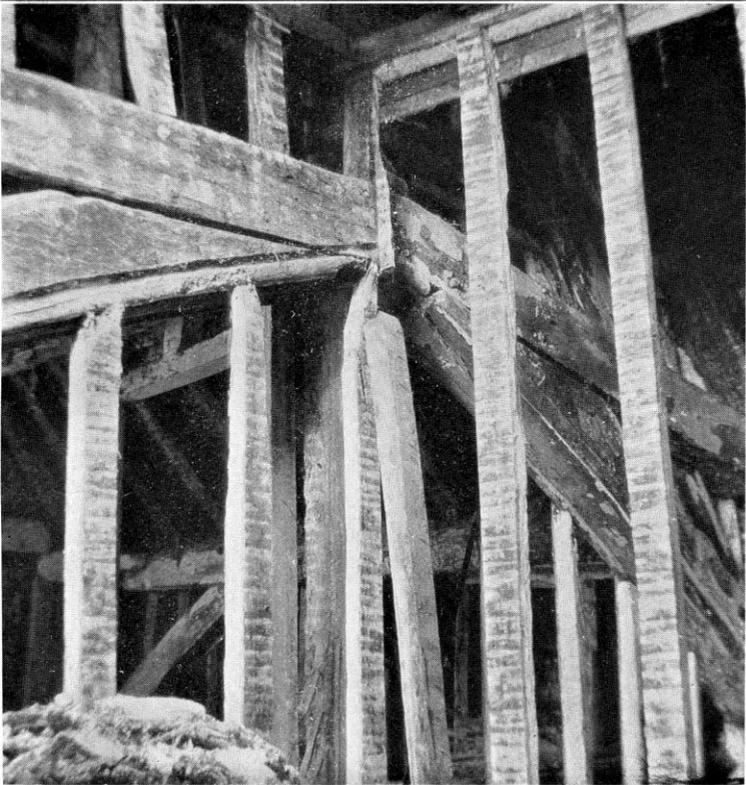


PLATE II.

Roof of Great Hall looking South-West.

line with the South side of the Porch, and is elaborately ornamented with bold mouldings *on one face only*, the South. It is about 6ft. from the floor level which appears to have been raised. It clearly marked the termination of the North end of the Hall, and strongly suggests that there was a gallery above, to which the little stairway at the West end would have given access. If the screens were at this end, as seems probable, with entrance into the Hall from the passage behind them, leading straight in from the Porch in the usual way, then the kitchens and offices must have been at this end also; but of this there is now no evidence. The original plan is thus very difficult to determine. There is a large open fireplace of brick, with four-centred chamfered arch and jambs with a recess at the side, in the room at the extreme North end of the house: but this seems to be of later date than the Hall, and had it been the kitchen it would have meant that food would have had to be carried along a passage to reach the Hall through the screens. It thus seems probable that the rooms at this end of the house replaced some earlier work, and have obliterated some of the original plan; while the South end has been either destroyed or so altered as to render any guess as to the arrangements there almost impossible.

Mr. Kilton hopes to open up the Hall and restore it to its original state. The 17th century insertions contain no detail of importance, and all has been carefully gone over. The beams and one or two original doors and any other useful material will be preserved by being re-used elsewhere in the house. Already the lath and plaster partitions and ceilings have been removed upstairs, and during this work many highly interesting features came to light. The main roof truss was completely revealed, and is a magnificent specimen: the main tie-beams and arched supports are almost a foot square. When the ceilings were removed an octagonal king-post, with moulded capital and base, was found. This rises from the apex of the main tie-beam to the collar beam, and is unusually tall and slender. It is not now strutted at all, but two projections may be the remains of pegs joining

struts or supports that have disappeared. The centre of the truss and the base of the king-post are shown in plate I. The uprights of the 17th century partitions have had, for the moment, to be retained for support. The whole truss is remarkably elaborate, and is a splendid example of its type; the greater part was hidden in 1912, and is merely described in the Commission's Inventory as "an arched truss." The construction is shown in plate II. and in the diagram, which is only approximate and not drawn to scale. The arrangement of the rest of the Hall is unusual and difficult to re-construct. To the South of the main truss there are two trussed hammer-beams with chamfered angles, "possibly the ends of the original tie-beams of the Hall roof."<sup>6</sup> On the West side the roof has been altered, and no corresponding beams are visible, though the main purlin has large mortise holes. The collar beams all have struts from the rafters, giving a very pleasant effect when looking along the length of the roof. One of the hammer-beams is visible in plate III. beyond the pile of laths and plaster from the partitions. The type of roof construction suggested by these timbers does not at all resemble the main truss. The beams are slighter, and of quite different character. Moreover, the measurements of the Hall are curious. From the present South wall to the ornamental beam marking the North end is 28ft. (18ft. to the main truss) by 22ft. This suggests that there was perhaps another bay at the South end. The measurements of the hammer-beam bays seem to bear little relation to the main truss, and the fact that this latter comes so far to one end of the Hall is another curious feature.

One of the original windows of the Hall has been found in the East wall, just South of the porch. It consists of two trefoiled lights of oak, each 4ft. by 1ft.. with moulded and stopped jambs and mullion under a square head. It is entirely covered by the modern plaster outside, and was formerly also plastered over on the inner side. Its position, high up under the eaves of the roof some 10ft. from the ground,

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<sup>6</sup> R.C.H.M.. Bucks I., 329.



PLATE III.

Roof of Great Hall looking South-East.

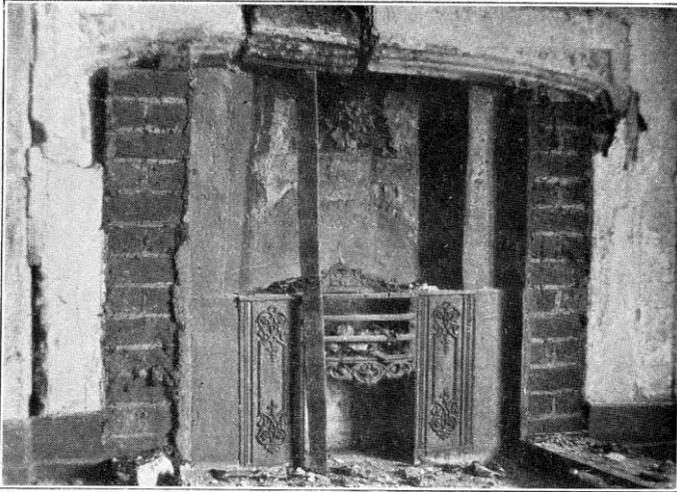


PLATE IV.

Early 16th Century Fireplace as uncovered.

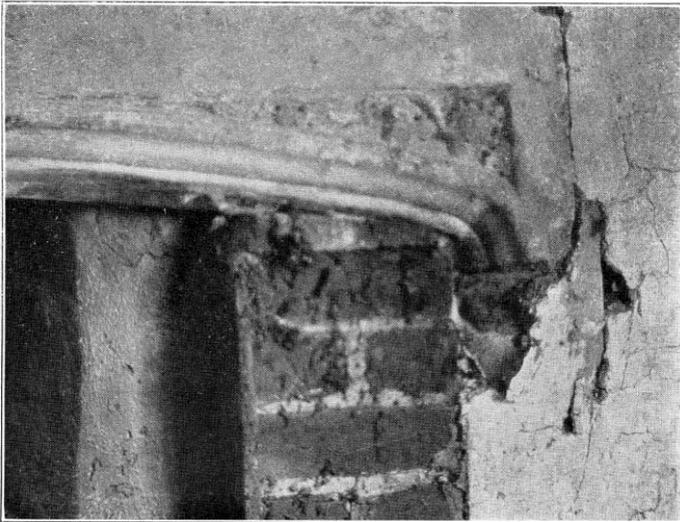


PLATE V.

Detail of Carving in Spandrel of Fireplace.

is most unusual. The original wrought iron bars remain. The date of this window confirms the conjectural date of the Hall itself, and cannot well be later than the end of the 15th century.

In the room opening off the passage above the porch ( ? gallery at North end of Hall), the removal of a modern mantelshelf revealed an early Tudor fireplace. Plate IV. shows this immediately after it was un-covered. The head is of stone, probably limestone, and there is the unusual feature that the jambs are of plastered brick, chamfered, apparently quite original. The moulding of the stone arch dies into the chamfer on the jambs. The four-centred arch is 5ft. across, and is well moulded. The spandrels have good carving, representing a bearded King's head on the left and a Queen on the right (see detail plate V), both crowned, and vine-leaf, fruit and tendril ornamentation. It is probable that the room below this, with the elaborately moulded ceiling beam, contains a similar fireplace behind the 18th century grate and mantelshelf. In the North-West room another wide fireplace was uncovered. This is entirely of plastered brick, with plain chamfered four-centred arch and jambs. The fireplace with recess in the room below this has already been mentioned. None of these is noticed in the Royal Commission's report.

From an examination of the roof above the room containing the carved fireplace, it appears that this room was open to the roof, as the collar beam and braces from the rafters are all chamfered, and there are large mortise holes for brackets to support the main tie-beam, now covered by the ceiling. There is one very sharply cambered beam used in the roof of this part of the house, which appears to have been re-used, and suggests a date earlier than that of any other material yet noticed in the building. The house seems at one time to have ended at this room. The North side of the large chimney-breast, which is un-usually massive and certainly looks as if it had been outside to act as a kind of buttress, has a plinth at the base.

It will, in all probability, be impracticable to retain the original wattle and daub partitions in the interior,

as these are in bad condition and would never take a smooth coat of modern plaster. Many have been un-covered, and their interesting method of construction revealed. When the actual reconstruction and restoration of the house begins, many other interesting points will no doubt come to light, and careful note will be taken of these.

North West of the house there is a pond, clearly of ancient origin. It is uncertain whether this formed part of a moat at any time, or was a fish-pond connected with the Thames, about 150 yards distant, by a narrow channel. The pond has been cleaned out and enlarged, and the channel dug out. In the course of the work a number of interesting objects were found, amongst which was the upper part of a sword—the pommel, hilt and about 11 inches of the blade. The pommel, now detached, appears to have been of ovoid or globular shape: only one side of the guard remains, and this is curved downwards, ending in a drop. At the other sides of the hilt there are pierced circular projections turned up towards the pommel. The blade, at the top, is a shade under 2 inches broad. The type is unusual, and has been assigned to the late 15th century by the Keeper of the Department of Armour at the Wallace Collection. A curious find, as yet unidentified, was that of a narrow, double-pronged instrument, the prongs being some 11 or 12 inches long, and sharply pointed. This might be an implement of the chase.

Many animal remains were encountered, the teeth and bones of horses being the most numerous. In connection with the traditional name of the house as a Royal Hunting Lodge, the discovery of numerous deer antlers and of a remarkably fine boar's tusk is of especial interest. This suggests an antiquity for the site, if not the building, almost equivalent to its name. No coins earlier than George II., and no pottery remains were found. A piece of masonry very rough, possibly the remains of a sluice, was encountered deep in the mud, but no detail was left.