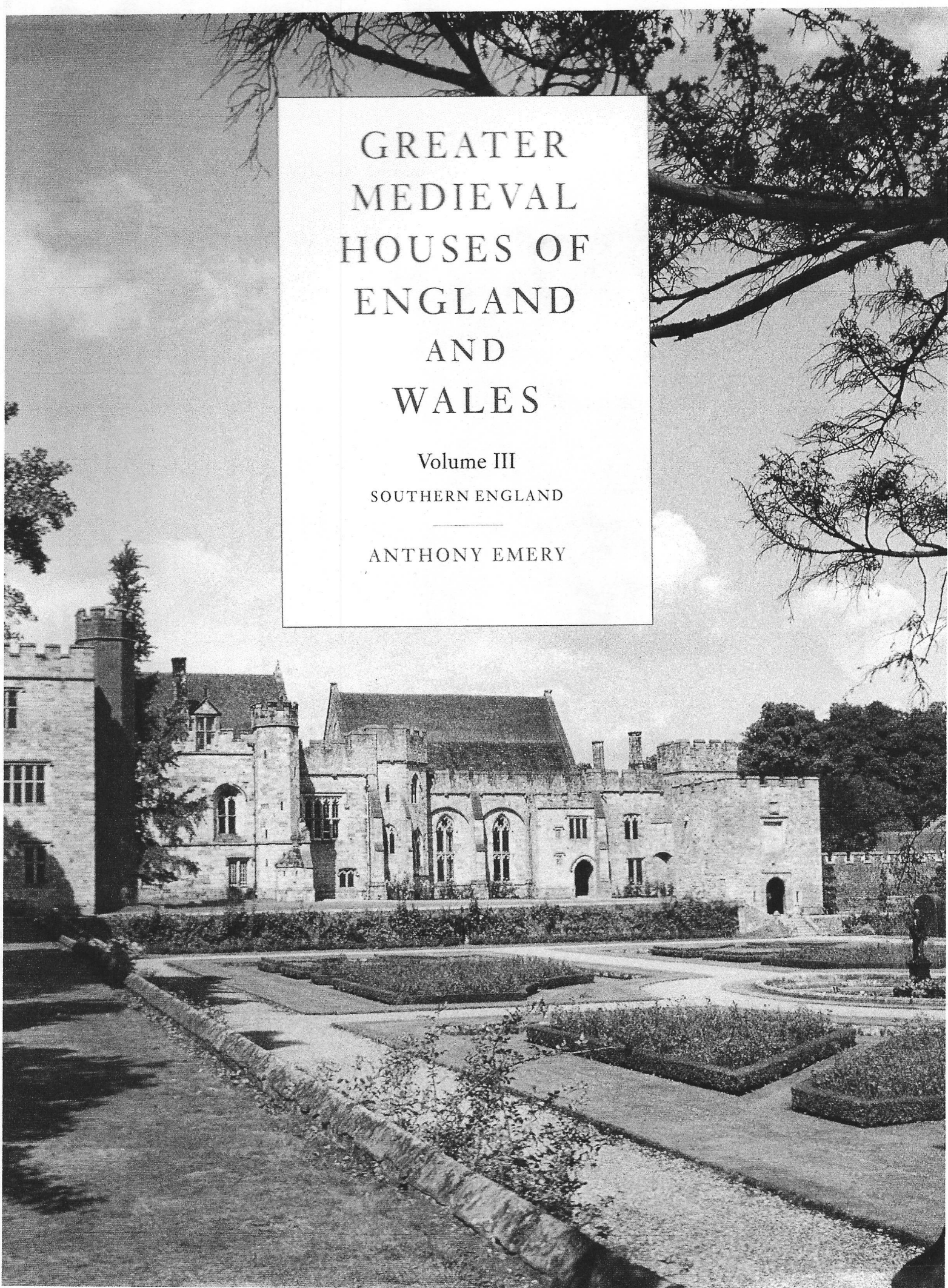


B/2

GREATER MEDIEVAL HOUSES OF ENGLAND AND WALES

Volume III
SOUTHERN ENGLAND

ANTHONY EMERY



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EAST MEON COURT HOUSE, Hampshire

This is a most splendid survival, harmoniously sited close to the Norman-towered church and next to the smooth grass slope of a Hampshire Downs hill. It was subject to a sympathetic restoration by Morley Horder (d.1944) in the early 1930s after he had rescued the property from farm occupation, and he added an exemplary extension to the seventeenth-century timber-framed farmhouse for



PLATE 134 East Meon Court House: from the west

his own use so that the hall need not be domesticated. East Meon joins a handful of houses that includes Haddon, Penshurst, Dartington, Martock, and Stoke Sub Hamdon where the properties are of sufficient occupational scale to allow the roofed halls to remain in their barely furnished medieval state.

East Meon was a hall and cross-wing house, built of flint and occasional stone, with a clay-tiled roof. The 4 foot thick walls are well worn, as is the dressed sandstone of the windows and doorways, but neither has needed substantive remedial treatment. The hall, chamber, and kitchen of the bishop's house at East Meon are recorded in the first extant pipe roll of the bishopric for 1208–9.¹ There is no record of substantial building activity until the close of the fourteenth century, when the hall, stair lobby, and lower cross wing with garderobe block were rebuilt by William Wykeham. The upper cross wing was remodelled forty years later, but it no longer exists, leaving the hall and lower cross wing as the well-preserved record of Wykeham's work of 1395–7. This was carried out under the supervision of his master-mason William Wynford, at a cost of just over £110.²

The accounts confirm there was an outer court with a timber-framed gatehouse rebuilt by bishop Beaufort in 1438–9, while nineteenth-century maps, identifying post-medieval farm buildings, point to the earlier larger scale of this property. The area is now marked by an eighteenth-century thatched barn and a formal yew-enclosed garden by Horder. The imposing cross-passage doorways to the hall, neither porch-protected, have plain continuous chamfers and two-centred heads with higher four-centred rear arches. They access the hall, 48 feet by 26 feet internally and 46 feet high to the open roof. The walls are unplastered, but Horder floored the area with York paving slabs laid a foot lower than originally, leaving oddly positioned steps to the doors.

The three-bay hall is lit by a tall single window in the first and third bays, and opposing windows in the second one, all of two cinquefoiled and transomed lights set in broad splays with a plain depressed head. The windows were initially shuttered, not glazed until 1441, and there were no window seats. Nor was there a mural fireplace, but an open hearth which heavily sooted the roof timbers, though there is no extant evidence of a louvre. The relatively small doorway in the end bay opened into what the building accounts called an 'oriel' – a lobby to the upper cross wing – now pulled down, with the entry blocked externally. The oddly angled line of the end wall can only have arisen because of the position of a pre-existing structure, and this is confirmed by masonry joints and its different wall texture. Horder removed a two-storeyed farm tenancy against its inner face which has scarred it, and inserted the rectangular-framed fireplace which he found in the grounds of the house. The lintel of six blind quatrefoils with blank shields is early to mid-fifteenth century (pl. 104). The arch-braced tie-beam and crown-post to collar-purlin roof is supported on eight stone corbels of alternate carved heads of a bishop and a bearded king. The roof is competently made but markedly plain for an episcopal house.

Nothing survives of the upper cross wing which preceded Wykeham's building programme and had become so dilapidated that bishop Beaufort remodelled it in 1439–42.³ The accounts show that it included a chapel next to the lord's (i.e. bishop's) chamber, and that this had glazed windows, a stone chimney, and a screen beside the bishop's bed.⁴ It is possible that the fine fireplace, now in the hall, and the stone chimney cap currently used as a garden orna-

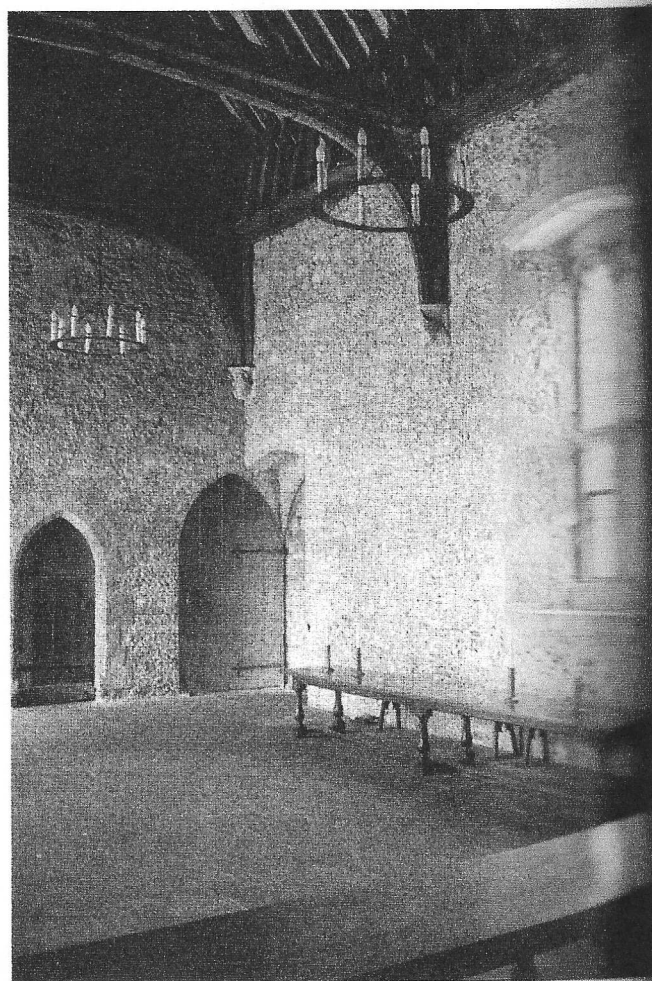


PLATE 135 East Meon Court House: hall interior towards the end

ment, may have come from this suite. The wing could not have been more than 15–16 feet wide because of falling ground, and the foundations traceable in dry weather suggest it may have projected further west than its fellow wing.⁵ This structure was replaced in the late sixteenth/seventeenth century when a brick chimney was inserted in the hall wall, while subsidence may have hastened the destruction of this wing.

The lower chamber block is a tall gabled cross wing with a smaller gabled extension. The ground floor was divided into two offices entered from the hall by single chamfered doorways. The wing repeat the higher rear arches of the cross-passage doorway. The framework of the hall screen with a central and two side bays existed in 1908, but Horder removed this and the wooden partition separating the two service rooms as he considered them unnecessary secondary work.⁶ The services partition, now marked by a central wooden post, divided the space into a slightly smaller and larger room, both with two windows. The west room accommodated the stair under the door to an inner chamber. With its high single window and retained old shutter, this relatively tall room was probably used for storage.

The upper floor was approached not from the cross

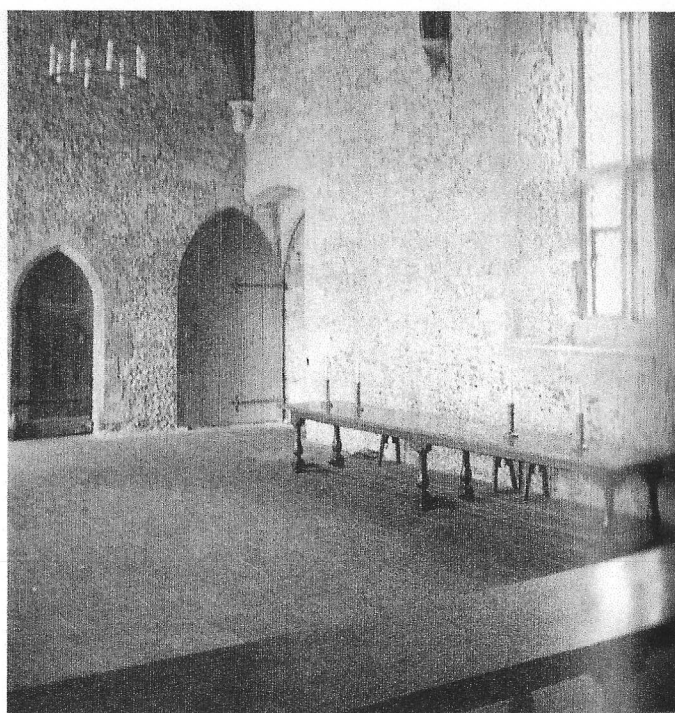


PLATE 135 East Meon Court House: hall interior towards the service

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The upper floor was approached not from the cross passage but

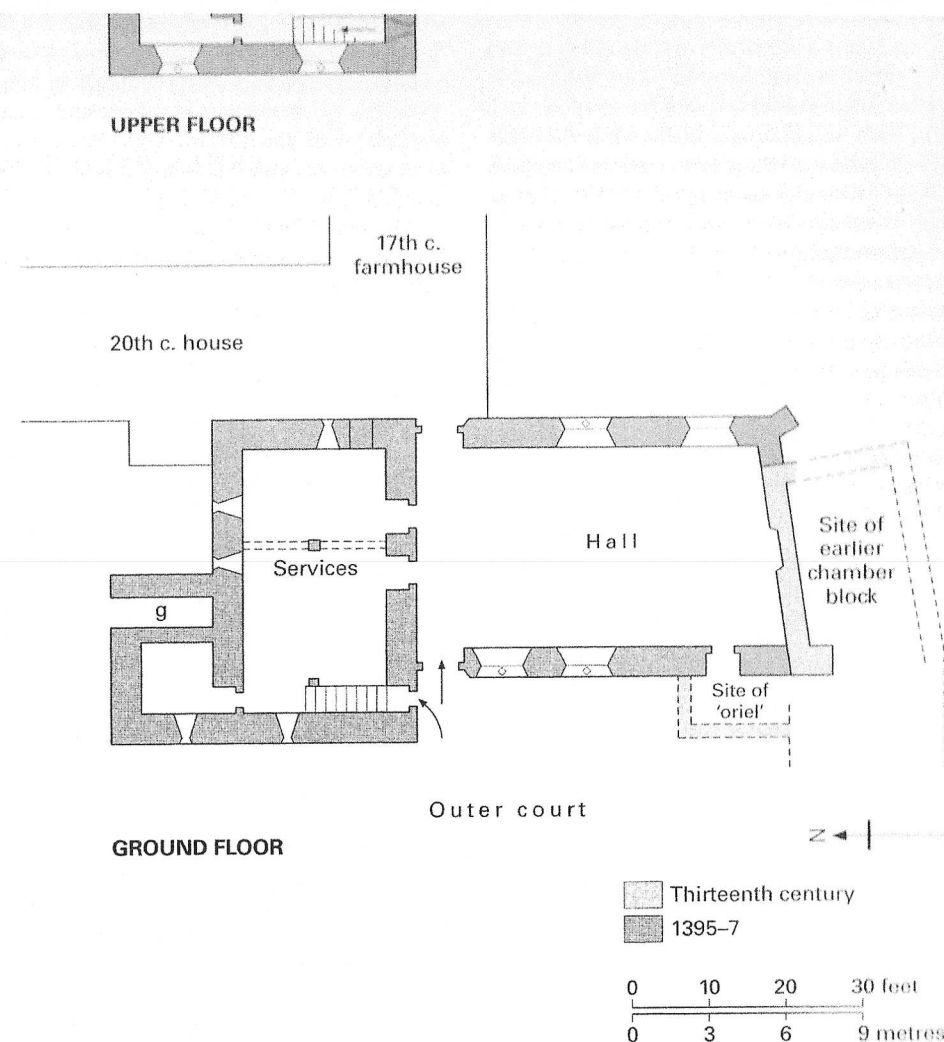


FIGURE 75 East Meon Court House: floor plans

from an external doorway opening on to a stair fortuitously retaining its original solid timber steps. This substantive chamber, 36 feet by 18 feet, has two trefoiled lights at each end (one converted by Horder to a door) and a single north light.⁷ The contemporary fireplace in a revealed stone stack in the hall end wall has a slightly curved head but it is otherwise plain. The three-bay roof repeats the hall form but the tie beams rest on wall plates rather than corbels, and the crown posts are not chamfered.

The doorway at the head of the stair – the only one now at the correct floor level – opens into a closet with garderobe facility. It has a two-light window but no fireplace, and as it has lost the garde-

robe partition, it is a single room 16 feet by 11 feet with a disrupted collared roof. However, the garderobe with its pit floored in 2000.

East Meon was not a first-rank residence like Waltham, nor was it just a manorial farm like Wotton. The quite separate approach to the upper floor of the wing supports its possible use as a court room or a study. The inner closet for the clerk, though the name is medieval, was used before 1647.⁸ But it was far more a residence than a centre for the large estate of about 19,000 acres. It has been the steward's lodging and business area

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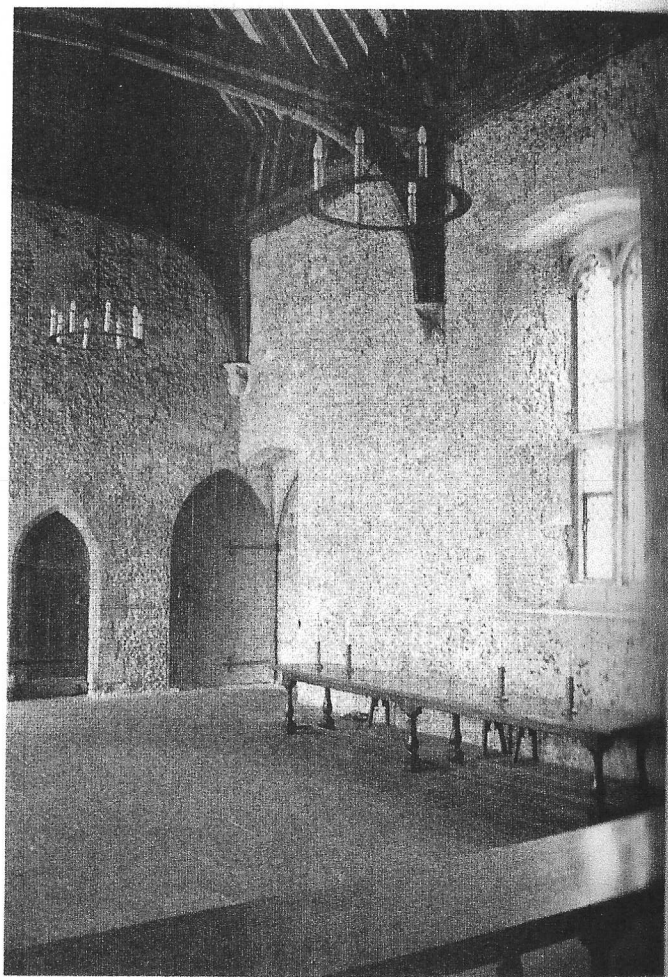
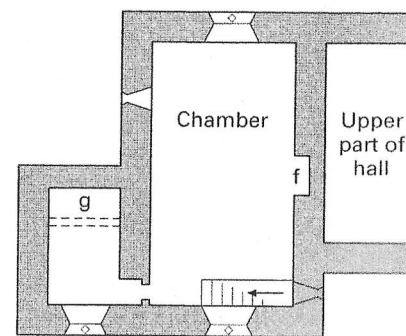


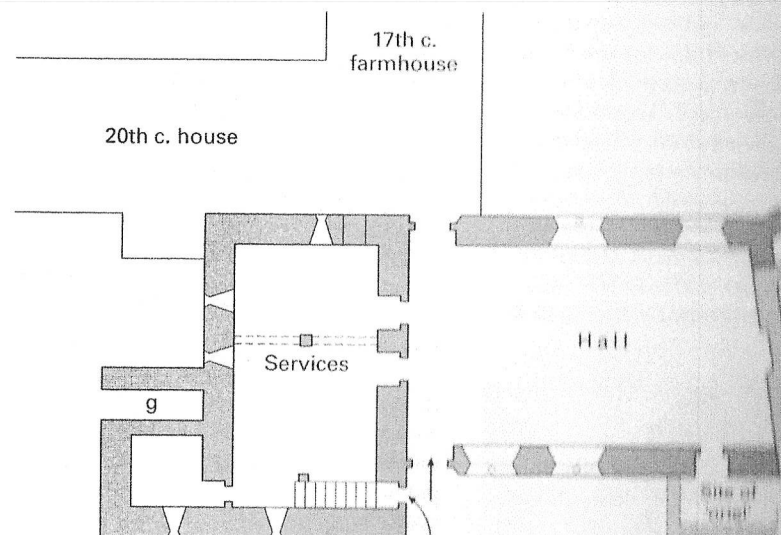
PLATE 135 East Meon Court House: hall interior towards the services

ment, may have come from this suite. The wing could not have been more than 15-16 feet wide because of falling ground, while foundations traceable in dry weather suggest it may have projected further west than its fellow wing.⁵ This structure was modified in the late sixteenth/seventeenth century when a brick chimney flue was inserted in the hall wall, while subsidence may have hastened the destruction of this wing.

The lower chamber block is a tall gabled cross wing with a smaller gabled extension. The ground floor was divided into two offices entered from the hall by single chamfered doorways which repeat the higher rear arches of the cross-passage doorways. The framework of the hall screen with a central and two side entries existed in 1908, but Horder removed this and the wooden partition separating the two service rooms as he considered them inferior.



UPPER FLOOR



GROUND FLOOR

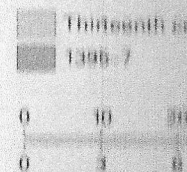


FIGURE 75 East Meon Court House: floor plans

from an external doorway opening on to a stair fortuitously retaining its original solid timber steps. This substantive chamber, 36 feet by 18 feet, has two trefoiled lights at each end (one converted by

robe partition, it is a simple interrupted collared roof. However with its pit floored in 1600



FIGURE 74 East Meon Court House: hall interior towards the services

have come from this suite. The wing could not have been more than 15–16 feet wide because of falling ground, while four-arched in dry weather suggest it may have projected more than its fellow wing.⁵ This structure was modified in late fifteenth/seventeenth century when a brick chimney flue was added in the hall wall, while subsidence may have hastened the addition of this wing.

The lower chamber block is a tall gabled cross wing with a gabled extension. The ground floor was divided into two rooms separated from the hall by single chamfered doorways which were higher rear arches of the cross-passage doorways. The floor of the hall screen with a central and two side entries was removed in 1908, but Horder removed this and the wooden partition of the two service rooms as he considered them inferior work.⁶ The services partition, now marked by lines on the wall and central wooden post, divided the area into a smaller and larger room, both with two single light windows. The west room accommodated the stair underside and led to an inner chamber. With its high single light and old shutter, this relatively tall room was probably used for

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robe partition, it is a single room 16 feet by 11 feet to the uninterrupted collared roof. However, the garderobe chute survives below, with its pit floored in 2000.

East Meon was not a first-rank residence like that at Bishop's Waltham, nor was it just a manorial farm like Lodge Farm, Odiham. The quite separate approach to the upper floor of the lower cross wing supports its possible use as a court room twice a year with an inner closet for the clerk, though the name 'Court House' was not used before 1647.⁸ But it was far more a record and accounting centre for the large estate of about 19,000 acres⁹ and is likely to have been the steward's lodging and business area. Initially it was called

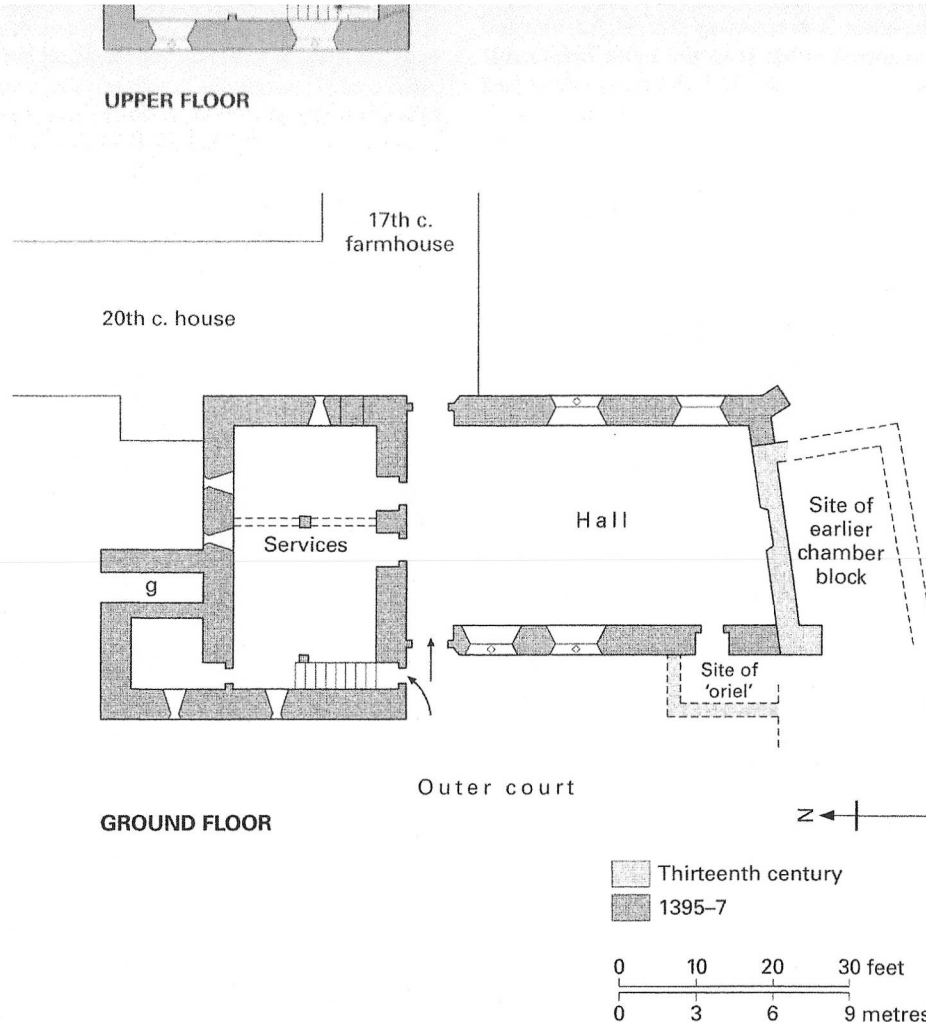


FIGURE 75 East Meon Court House: floor plans

the 'new chamber' to distinguish it from the lord's chamber, and that occupational distinction continued after Beaufort remodelled the bishop's suite.¹⁰ The body of the house would have been a periodic residence for household officials and servants, and was occasionally used by the bishop, though not apparently by Wykeham. It was (and is) a particularly pleasant rural retreat, one where the bishop could hunt or relax for one or two days with a small group of companions. It was also used by the bishop's friends, but in the hierarchy of episcopal properties East Meon was a minor, though valuable, multi-purpose residence.

What characterises the house is its economy of style. All door and window arches are two-centred rather than the more fashionable four-centred. Doorways are single chamfered, and the windows lack elaborate traceried heads, seats, and glazing initially, while the roofs are markedly plain. This contrasts with the greater elaboration of the other Wykeham (and Wynford) buildings, particularly Winchester College, but also Bishop's Waltham Palace, and points up the lower status of this house, though the simplicity of timberwork has been claimed as a regional characteristic.¹¹ Yet the principal doorways and windows are tall, the rooms are particularly well proportioned, and the restrained decoration may not necessarily have extended to the bishop's suite had that been part of Wykeham's programme.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Pipe Roll of the Bishopric of Winchester 1208-9*, ed. H. Hall (1903) 47. Part of the church was built by bishop Henry of Blois (d.1171) who may have initiated a residence on the site of the present Court, used by King John in 1211.
- ² Roberts (1993) 458-66.
- ³ This wing may have stood since at least the opening of the thirteenth century, see note 1.
- ⁴ Roberts (1993) 462.
- ⁵ Without excavation, it is difficult to distinguish any stone/flint foundations from the brick walls of known farm buildings to the south-west.
- ⁶ Oswald (1937) 510.
- ⁷ The two gable lancets and that over the stair entry are Horder insertions in concrete to identify his work, as elsewhere in the house.

8 Roberts (1993) 479.

9 It retained this extent until the mid-nineteenth century. VCH, III (1904) 64, 76-8. The farm buildings that made the property so useful between the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries may have originated in those mentioned in the medieval accounts. They included hay and barley barns, a granary, and a cowshed. Roberts (1993) 461-2.

10 Roberts (1993) 472 suggests otherwise.

11 R. Warmington in J. N. Hare, *Arch. Jour.* 145 (1988) 246, though he is referring to a lodging range of 1438-42 at Bishop's Waltham Palace.

VCH, *Hampshire*, III (1908) 65-6

A. Oswald, *Country Life* (May 1937)

E. Roberts, *Arch. Jour.* 150 (1993) 456-81

ESHER PALACE, Surrey

The bishop of Winchester's house at Esher, like Farnham Castle, was a convenient stopping point between Southwark and Winchester. The see had purchased the manor in 1245 and constructed a small lodging there shortly afterwards which had proved particularly popular with William Wykeham and Henry Beaufort, but it was William Waynflete who initiated the redevelopment of the site during the mid-1460s.¹ We have no building accounts for this work but the gatehouse had been completed before April 1484 when 'the flore of the chambyr in the towre over the gate of the manor of Essher' was taken as the model for that of the bishop's grammar school under construction at Wainfleet in Lincolnshire.² The palace was an irregular group of buildings on the banks of the River Mole with the gateway originally facing towards Esher Green rather than the river as today. A drawing of 1606 shows that Waynflete's gatehouse was approached through a stable yard and gave access to a quadrangle with a range of buildings on either side. Opposite was the porch of the hall, leading to a group of three-storeyed residential apartments built on a promontory in the river at the right-hand angle of the courtyard.³ The extent of Waynflete's responsibility for this work is uncertain, but excavation in 1912 suggested that it

included much of the quadrangle and the hall, but excluded the central apartments.⁴

In 1718, Aubrey recorded that the timberwork in the hall was not unlike that in Westminster Hall,⁵ but much of the work had already been pulled down in 1678. The site was owned by William Kent in the early 1730s, but it passed through several hands during the nineteenth century until the house was broken up in the early 1930s. The sole surviving element of the palace is therefore approached today through roads of suburban houses in a sequence of eclectic styles.

The gatehouse stands as an isolated tree-embowered ruin, so substantially altered by Kent that it looks more like a neo-Gothick folly than a late medieval gatehouse. It is a three-storeyed structure with polygonal angle turrets rising above the roof and was originally flanked by curtain walls.⁶ The extensive diapered brickwork on the two principal façades remains a striking feature – apart from the replacement windows inserted in 1718. Each floor is marked by a bold string course (upper two restored) which break up the brickwork patterns. The battlements were carried on miniature blind corbels and the original battlements survive, but none of the window fittings. The ribbed passageway, protected by a portcullis at either end,⁷ was flanked by a chamber on either side. A brick staircase in the north-west corner, similar to contemporary work at Kirby Muxloe Castle, rises to all floors, which may have consisted of a large outer and smaller inner chamber at each level, with a garderobe behind the staircase.

After the politician Henry Pelham bought the estate in 1718, William Kent was asked to update the house and its later work added a single-storey fretted porch between the turrets, altered the windows, and inserted several striking quatrefoil openings. One of the earliest examples of Rococo Gothick. Waynflete's vaulted entrance hall was stuccoed and pretty niches were added along its walls.

Compared with his residential tower at Farnham, Waynflete's building at Esher was a conventional gatehouse, one providing three suites of lodgings. Both structures are faced with close-set diapering, but dressed stonework in the Esher which breaks up the patterning. The Esher gatehouse is more restrained and lacks the more sophisticated elements introduced at Farnham such as the cusped corbelling, the prominent machicolations, and the unbroken diaper display. While the Farnham tower of 1470-5 may reflect the uncertain political climate immediately following Edward IV's deposition and the need for a more defensible residence, the prettier Esher gatehouse is more closely in tune with the relaxed mood of the king's later years.

