

Little Milton—The Rebuilding of an Oxfordshire Village

By D. PORTMAN, B.A.

THE village of Little Milton in Oxfordshire lies six miles south-east of Oxford at a height of approximately two hundred feet above sea-level. It is small, containing less than a hundred houses, and in spite of recent development is still compactly centred on three converging roads. It was previously a township of some thirteen hundred acres, predominantly arable, lying in the parish of Great Milton, but in 1844 it became an ecclesiastical parish in its own right. The local economy and society, though no longer completely dependent on agriculture, still bear strong marks of its influence, and the layout of streets and buildings testifies to the close links that once existed between the entire community and the land. Little Milton remains an excellent example of a nucleated farm village with the farmhouses, their barns and outbuildings clustered about them, lining the streets to this day. Not all of them continue to fulfil their original function—one, for example, now houses the village stores—but their former purpose is quite clear.¹

The timber-framed villages of Chalgrove and Chislehampton are only two or three miles away but Little Milton, together with Great Milton and the neighbouring Haseleys, rests securely on the upper Portland beds which lie east of Oxford and contain in this locality a bed of sandy freestone with a maximum thickness of six feet.² It was from this that the houses and farm buildings of Little Milton were constructed. The depressions of former quarries are still to be seen about the parish, and there are signs of ancient quarrying over the whole outcrop. Plot mentioned Little Milton, together with Bladon, Burford and Hornton, as places where there were quarries 'of considerable use' in the middle of the 17th century,³ and nearby Haseley supplied paving stones to All Souls College as late as 1733-4.⁴ The former village of Standhill, two or three miles away, must have had a quarry centuries earlier, indeed that was clearly the main cause of the settlement's

¹ In 1840 the open fields of Great Milton, of which Little Milton was then a part, were finally enclosed. However, it is clear from the Tithe Award Map of 1839 that the land immediately around the village of Little Milton was enclosed before that date.

² W. J. Arkell, *Oxford Stone* (1947), 90.

³ Robert Plot, *The Natural History of Oxfordshire*, 2nd ed., revised (1705), 78.

⁴ Arkell, *op. cit.*, 90.

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

growth, for the name is derived from Old English *stān gedelf*, 'stone quarry', and it was recorded as Stangedelf as early as 1002.⁵

Little Milton, however, was not always a stone village. Before the 16th century, when the typical farmhouse was still modest in size and of simple plan and construction, the inhabitants were content to build in timber. There were obvious practical and economic reasons for doing so. The necessary materials lay around them on the ground, there was no need to dig laboriously for them. Even so, timber was not over plentiful in the locality. Leland remarked, before the deforestation of the 16th and 17th centuries, that the ground between Haseley and Chislehampton, which took in the township of Little Milton, was 'baren of wood as al that angle of Oxfordshir is',⁶ and this shortage naturally affected the style of building in and around the village.

If wood is easier to cut and fashion it is also less durable than stone, and there are now only two houses remaining in Little Milton that can give us any indication of the form of the earlier timber tradition. The house known as Hill View (PLATES IV A and B, FIG. 20) is at first sight quite unpromising.⁷ Like many other medieval and sub-medieval dwellings throughout the country it has been provided with a completely new façade in the course of the centuries, and it has been extended by 6 or 7 feet at the west end, with an additional chimney stack incorporated in the extension. It is not until one looks at the rear of the simple, rectangular building that its true age becomes more apparent. The heavy, widely spaced timber-framing, the wattle-and-daub infilling, the small blocked two-light window under the eaves, all argue a 16th century date at the latest. The interior evidence is even more decisive. The structure is one room thick and is divided laterally by three heavy trusses, irregularly spaced and consisting of a tie-beam and collar-beam that are both slightly cambered with the former supported by two arch-braces. There were probably two similar trusses in the gable walls before these were rebuilt in stone. The whole is surmounted by a ridge-tree.

The construction of the roof is exposed in the dilapidated east end of the building, where great curving wind-braces support the single purlin, but the most interesting feature of all is the pair of massive, double-chamfered arch-braces to be seen in the central part of the dwelling on the first floor. It is clear

⁵ M. Gelling, *The Place-names of Oxfordshire*, Pt. 1 (1953), 90. The village of Standhill, now represented by a solitary farm, was finally depopulated by the plague in the first half of the 15th century (M. Beresford, *The Lost Villages of England* (1954), 300).

⁶ *Leland's Itinerary in England and Wales*, ed. L. Toulmin Smith, 1 (1907), 116.

⁷ I regret that distance and lack of time have made it impossible for me to measure this building properly. This ought to be done and I hope that it will be, perhaps by someone more conveniently placed than I am.

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

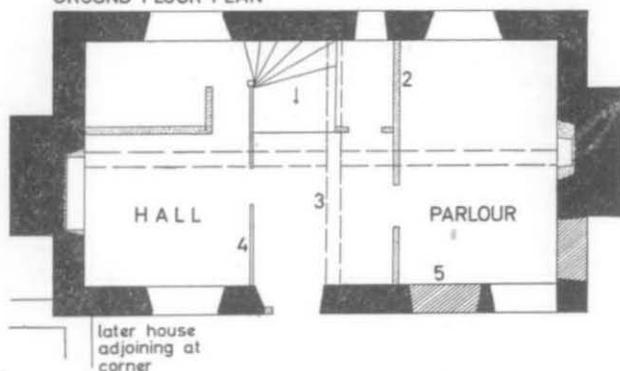
LITTLE MILTON - I 'THE GARAGE'

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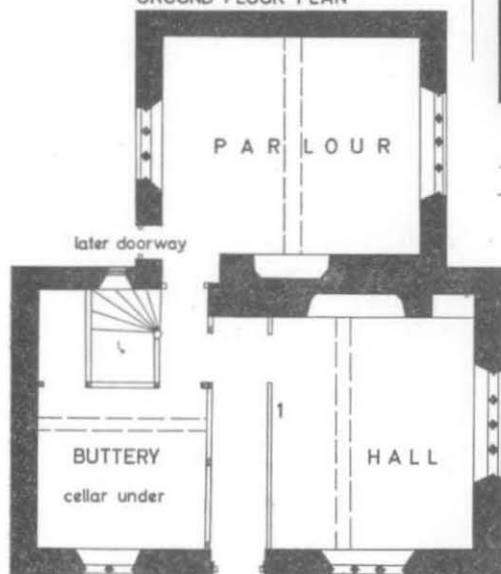
FROGMORE COTTAGE

d.p. 1959

GROUND FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN



SKETCH SECTIONS OF 'HILL VIEW'

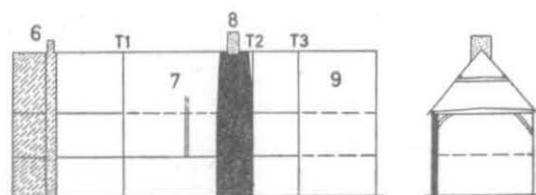


FIG. 20

1. Modern partition. 2. Modern brick partition. 3. Original partition was along line of beam.
4. Modern wooden partition. 5. Blocked window, once a doorway when cottage was subdivided into two parts. 6. Modern addition. 7. Arch-braced roof, originally open. 8. Inserted stack.
9. Wind-braces exposed here.

from these that the present low ceiling there was originally open and, furthermore, that this was once the principal room in the house.

The manner in which one of the arch-braces is embedded in the stone façade proves that the stonework is a later replacement of the original timber front. Moreover, the moulded arch-braces, as they stand at present, are not centrally placed between truss 1 (shown as T1 on the plan) and the great stone chimney stack, a lack of symmetry that is immediately suspicious even at such an early date as this. They are, however, midway between trusses 1 and 2. The central stack must therefore have been inserted, probably in the late

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

16th or early 17th century, as a concession to comfort in a house which originally had no proper fireplace, and which must have previously depended for warmth on braziers or a central hearth in the main hall, with the smoke escaping through a hole or louvre in the roof. It is also probable that the hall was originally on the ground floor and was open to the arch-braced roof, in which case it would have been 20 feet long by some 15 feet wide by about 22 feet high. On this assumption the first floor between trusses 1 and 2 was inserted at the same time as the central stack, and a proper staircase was also built then (the present staircase lying against the rear wall of the house and near the stack is not original, but it is probably in or very near its original position). Before it was introduced the first floor rooms on either side of the hall must have been reached from below by some form of stairladder.⁸

Hill View was originally occupied by a person of substance—its size alone makes this clear—and the evidence suggests that it was built around 1500. It is easily the oldest surviving house in the village and provides considerable information about the old timber building tradition there. The fact that it was a house of importance means that certain features, like the moulded arch-braces, were uncommon, but the ground floor hall, despite its size and imposing appearance, was similar in principle to those found in the humbler dwellings of Little Milton at that date. Other features must be typical of that earlier local style of building—the heavy timbers, the widely spaced studs and the frequent use of curving supports to take the strain of wind and weight. There is none of the close studding that is to be seen, for example, in some of the surviving sub-medieval houses in Abingdon and Burford. In Little Milton even such a house as Hill View suffered from the shortage of good building material.

The other structure containing timber-framing is smaller and later. Well Cottage (PLATE IV D, FIG. 21) is again of simple rectangular plan and originally had a ground floor room on either side of a wide central through passage—the building's most remarkable feature.⁹ There are corresponding

⁸ An alternative arrangement would be an original first floor hall, and there were precedents for this within the region. The Prebendal House at Thame has a first floor hall of mid-13th century date, and there may have been one dating from the 13th or 14th century in the manor house at Cottisford, north of Bicester (see M. E. Wood, *Thirteenth-Century Domestic Architecture in England*, Archaeological Journal, cv, Supplement (1950), 57, 60). In all likelihood there were others.

A third possibility is an original ground floor hall with a large principal chamber above. This arrangement is often found in the South West, where it goes back to at least the 15th century (see W. A. Pantin, 'Medieval Priests' Houses in South-West England', *Medieval Archaeology*, 1 (1957), 124). In fact it occurs as near Oxford as Ashbury, Berks (*ibid.*, 144). However these alternatives require a first floor from the beginning. In view of the definite insertion of the chimney stack, it seems to me that an original open, ground floor hall is still the likeliest explanation.

⁹ The building is now divided into two separate dwellings, and I was able to gain admission to only one of these. But in view of the interesting central through passage I thought it worthwhile to measure and record as much of the structure as I could.

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

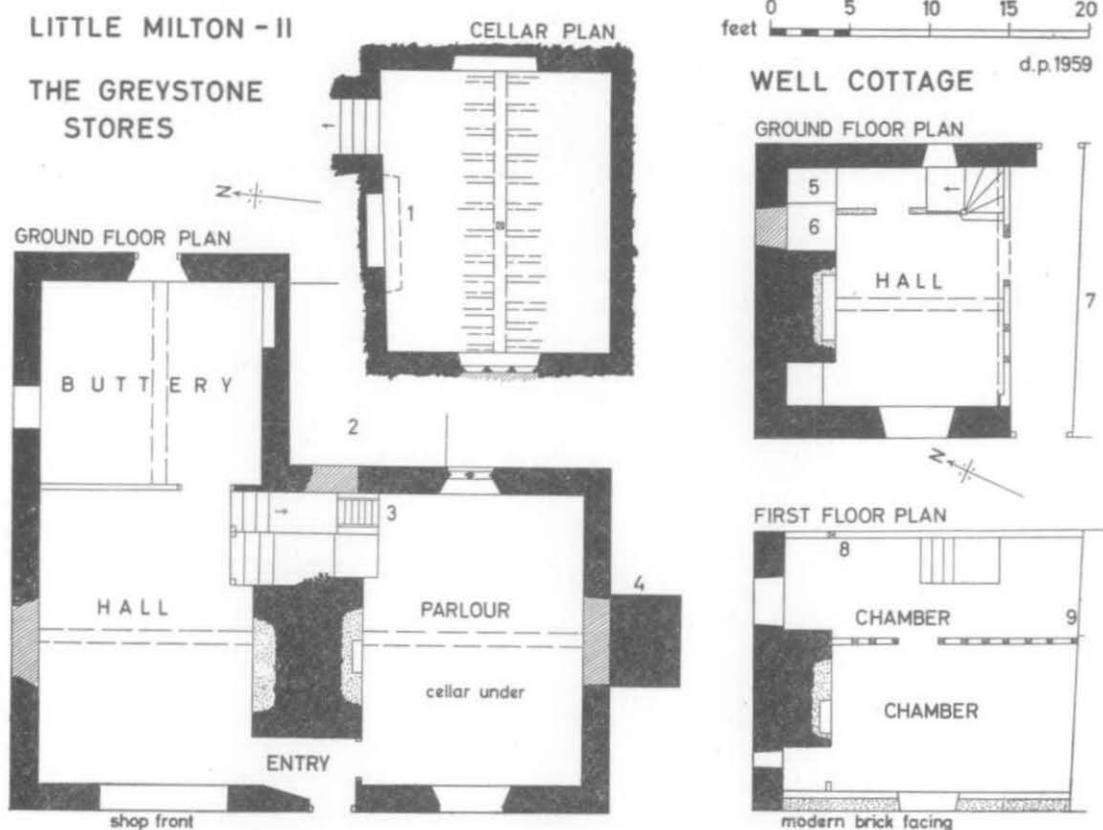


FIG. 21

1. Ceiling coved to support hearth-stones of fireplace above. 2. Modern outbuilding to house later oven. 3. Modern stepladder. 4. Later buttress. 5. Solid stone 4 ft. 2 in. high. 6. Solid stone 4 ft. 8 in. high. 7. Other half of original house, now separate dwelling. 8. Wattle-and-daub walling. 9. Door to adjoining house.

rooms on the first floor, one of them being divided into two by a timber-framed partition. In this case, too, a later façade has been added, consisting of random rubble limestone on the ground floor and modern brick on the first floor, but the timber-framing with its wattle-and-daub infilling shows clearly in the north gable and at the rear of the building. The chimney stack extends an inconvenient distance into the dwelling-rooms and the random rubble walling cuts through the timber-framing in the north gable, the two factors together suggesting that the stack may be a later insertion. The house is probably of late 16th century date. The widely spaced timbers and the

curving braces in the walls still persist, and the infilling is still laid on a base of coarse, heavy twigs. But inside the building nothing of significance remains.

The Great Rebuilding is a phenomenon of rural England that is still being widely investigated, but the general pattern of events is clear.¹⁰ The 16th century was a period of great inflation but on the whole the yeoman farmer and, to a lesser extent, the husbandman benefited greatly by it, particularly from the 1540's onwards. It was a time when their selling prices rose rapidly whilst their labour costs remained comparatively low. Furthermore, they were largely self-sufficient, able to meet their own needs where food and some of their clothing were concerned, and so, unlike the townsman, they were protected from the vagaries of the open market. Freeholders were particularly fortunate, but many copyholders (i.e. tenant farmers with prescribed obligations to their landlords) were hardly less so. In a considerable number of cases they continued for a long time to hold their lands at a nominal rent that had been fixed in the middle ages and which was quite unrelated to current values. Even when rents and entry fines were revised and raised by landlords who also wanted a share in the prosperity, the tenant farmer was not often so oppressed as some of the contemporary evidence suggests. The weaker ones fell but a great many survived and grew rich.

For some decades the farmers used their new wealth to increase their stock, to improve and extend their farms. Throughout this period the great majority were living in houses that in no way reflected their owners' new prosperity. These dwellings were often small, cramped and dirty, relics of the middle ages consisting usually of a single general living room open to the roof, with another room or two on the ground floor or a crude loft formed above by laying boards across the beams. There was little discrimination and the same room would be used for storage and sleeping.

Towards the end of the century, however, the farmers, prepared now to indulge themselves a little, driven by a desire for greater comfort and privacy and probably by a natural wish for some ostentatious display of their wealth, began either to extend their medieval dwellings or to build completely new houses. These contained a larger number of rooms with more specialized functions, and a complete first floor was inserted to help accommodate them. In the Oxford region by the early 17th century the average yeoman's house contained at least six rooms, whilst that of the average husbandman comprised four or five rooms. The framed staircase began to replace the stairladder, proper fireplaces were installed, bigger windows became fashionable and far more of them were glazed, for glass was now cheaper. Together with this

¹⁰ For a thorough discussion of the subject see W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, no. 4 (1953), 44-59.

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

there was a notable increase in the quantity, quality and variety of household furnishings. Most of the earlier buildings had been of timber and wattle-and-daub but now, if good stone was readily accessible, the new farmhouses, barns and other outbuildings were raised in this expensive, handsome and more durable material. Soon they were springing up along the whole of the limestone belt stretching across the country from East Somerset, through Gloucestershire, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, to Rutland and Lincolnshire.

The Great Rebuilding extended over the whole of southern and midland England and over much of the North. It began around 1570, though in certain regions it did not appear until some decades later, and it was generally brought to an end by the Civil War. In some areas, in parts of the East Midlands, for example, there was a second wave of building activity after the Restoration, but the far northern counties—Cumberland, Westmorland, Northumberland and Durham—had to wait till the 18th century before the change was effected. In Little Milton, judging by the surviving material evidence, the movement seems to have begun in about 1600 and to have continued through the first few decades of the 17th century down to the outbreak of the Civil War. The confusion and uncertainty of the 1640's, brought home to the villagers by the battle in 1643 at nearby Chalgrove, must have put a firm stop for some time to any ambitious local building activity.

Before that this activity was typical enough. In some cases the easier course was taken and an existing dwelling was merely improved. It was at this period that the massive central stack was inserted at Hill View, and perhaps the new stone façade was added then. The inserted stack at Well Cottage may also be of the same date. A high proportion of fireplaces is one of the major features of the rebuilding in Little Milton, and Harrison's observation on 'the multitude of chimneys lately erected' certainly applies here.¹¹ But Hill View with its seven or eight rooms was already a large house. The majority of the yeomen and husbandmen in the village elected to build completely new houses, to replace their timber-framed dwellings with more costly stone structures. Within little more than a generation the face of Little Milton was almost completely changed.

Two houses there, those known as The Garage and The Greystone Stores, are admirable examples of the new style of building. The former (PLATE IVC, FIG. 20), dating from about 1600 or soon after, is in fact the best preserved house of all. It stands at right angles to the street and a little away from it, and is built of rubble limestone with a roof of handmade tiles, though it was probably thatched originally. It still has its original ovolo-mullioned

¹¹ *Elizabethan England: from 'A Description of England', by William Harrison (1577)*, ed. L. Withington (undated), 119.

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

windows and its four fireplaces, two on each floor, with their flattened arches and simple recessed spandrels. Some of the fittings on windows and doors are also original, as is the wainscotting below the east window in the hall.

The most interesting feature of the house is the plan, which is T-shaped, though not of the standard type. In fact it seems to lie half-way between the T-shape and the L-shape, for the projecting wing is not at the end of the main block but midway at the rear. As a result the structure is physically centred around the stone stack, which is also its outstanding architectural feature. There have been so few insertions and later alterations that it is simple to reconstruct the original disposition of the rooms. The main, and once the only, external doorway opened directly into the hall-cum-kitchen, which probably had a sere or screen as a protection against the draughts, but certainly not the partition that it has today. The parlour, sharing the central stack, was tucked comfortably away in the projecting wing, and the buttery or general service room lay beside the hall. The three rooms or chambers on the first floor echo those on the ground floor, and above them is the loft, well lit, extending over the whole of the house and providing ample space for storage, and for extra sleeping accommodation if required.

The advantages and attractions that a house such as this must have held for a Jacobean farmer are many. It looks imposing, in spite of its small scale. It is solidly built, roomy and conveniently, indeed superbly, planned. It has the added refinement of a cellar beneath the buttery, with a handsome central newel stair, independent of the stack, rising from it to the loft at the top. There are other signs of careful craftsmanship. The gable trusses in the roof are set flush with the inner faces of the stone walls,¹² and outside there are several rows of pigeon-holes in the west gable, accommodating enough birds to provide the household with a fair amount of unsalted flesh to vary its winter diet.¹³

¹² This is of archaeological significance, for the gable trusses were structurally unnecessary. The purlins and ridge-tree could well be borne by the stone gable walls, and in fact this was the common practice. It seems that the peculiar arrangement adopted at The Garage reflects the misplaced survival of a timber-framing technique into the stone tradition, and suggests that this dwelling was among the earliest, if not the first, to be erected in the new material.

A comparable survival occurred at Nuneham Courtenay where, in the early 1760's, the emparking zeal of the first Earl Harcourt led to the removal of the timber-framed village, which was subsequently re-erected in brick a mile away from the original site (*V.C.H. Oxon.*, v, 236). Timber-framing was incorporated in the gable ends of the new dwellings, but this, too, was of no structural importance, and serves only as a reminder of the earlier settlement.

¹³ There is no authoritative book on the subject of dovecots, but Mr. R. G. Chapman of the Bodleian Library has made a special study of them, particularly in the neighbourhood of Oxford. He informs me in a letter that there is no difference in status between a dovecot in a house or a dovecot as a separate building. The holes were for breeding not roosting, and dovecots are always in his experience built in a southern or western wall. In the middle ages dovecots could only be erected by the lord of the manor, and this distinction applied to ecclesiastical property also. Before the Reformation no one except the lord did in fact erect them, but between the Reformation and the mid-17th century

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

There is a further point, and an important one. At some time, probably in the last century, an external doorway—the building's only real blemish—was made in the parlour and the house was divided into two separate dwellings, the main front block forming one and the projecting wing the other. The parlour communicated with the chamber above it by means of a stairladder through the ceiling, and this was still in position when the present owners took over the house, though it has now been removed. Clearly the farmer years ago quitted the house to go into an even more imposing one, or one that suited his taste better, and converted his old home into two cottages for his labourers. Such a move must have been quite common at some period of farming prosperity—during the period of high farming in the third quarter of the 19th century, for example. Perhaps it was at that time that the alterations were made to The Garage, or they may have been made around 1840 when the open fields in the neighbourhood were finally enclosed. It is not the only case in the village that we shall come across.

But it has a further significance. Just as the farmer who built the Jacobean house did so because he had outgrown his medieval dwelling, so the farmer who moved out of a house like The Garage did so because it no longer fulfilled his needs or his position in society. Of course, he could have altered or extended the house for himself, he could have 'improved' it by giving it a new façade or an entire new outer skin of brick, and many did. But evidently in many other cases the owners were content to move out of the building, leaving many original features untouched, and to put in labourers who had neither the power nor the resources to 'improve' the structure, and who could bear inconveniences and features that their employers might think outmoded. We can therefore be grateful for such a process, which has resulted in houses like The Garage coming down to us in such good condition.

The Greystone Stores (PLATE V A, FIG. 21), standing parallel to the street and built a little later than The Garage, is not so well preserved. The façade has been greatly altered, quite a number of the ovolo-mullioned windows have been blocked, a strengthening buttress has been added to the south gable wall, and a leanto enclosing a large oven has been built on to the rear. In essence, however, it is well in keeping with the tradition of the Great Rebuilding. It is strongly and roomily constructed, of simple L-shaped plan and with plenty of window space. There is a massive central stack, originally

landowners built them without leave. From the Restoration onwards any restriction had disappeared. Dovecots could be profitable. In 1620 Robert Loder who, as lord of one of the two manors of Harwell, Berks, was the legitimate owner of a large dovecot, made a total profit of £8 14s. 1d. on the sale of pigeons and their dung (see *Robert Loder's Farm Accounts*, 1610-20, ed. G. E. Fussell, Camden Soc., 3rd series, LIII (1936), 186). The latter, with its high nitrogen content, was a particularly valuable fertilizer.

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

containing four fireplaces, with a framed staircase adjoining it. Here, too, the parlour lies by itself on one side of the stack, the hall being on the other side with the buttery or general service room leading off it. There are three chambers which, if one ignores a later partition, were once similarly disposed on the first floor, together with a little chamber over the entry lying between the stack and the front wall and opening off the chamber over the parlour. Above the chambers there is again a spacious, well-lit loft running over the whole of the house, with a lath-and-plaster partition of 18th or 19th century date dividing the main block from the projecting wing. The loft therefore must have been used for sleeping as well as for storage at some time. A further feature is the cellar beneath the parlour. It is a large one and is chiefly remarkable for the ovolo-mullioned, three-light window in its west wall. This is blocked because it is now below ground level, but it was clearly not so originally. The fine cellar was once well lit, an unusual refinement in a house of this standing at this date.

The Greystone Stores is not the excellent building that The Garage is, but there are some notable features in its construction. Part of the ceiling of the cellar is coved out to support the hearthstones of the parlour fireplace above, and this device is repeated in the parlour itself. The beam in the parlour chamber has a chamfer consisting of a single roll, and there is another, very fine one in the parlour with a double roll and fillet and a recessed face (see FIG. 23). There are also signs of a certain sophistication in the exterior of the house. The symmetrical façade with its blocked centre window is reinforced with good-sized ashlar quoins. The structure is built of roughly hewn masonry, almost random rubble, but this has been laid in fairly even, thick and thin courses, though these do not alternate regularly.

After the T- and L-shapes of The Garage and The Greystone Stores, the later 17th-century houses surviving in Little Milton revert to the simple rectangular plan. Fletcher Farm House (PLATE V B, FIG. 22), standing at right angles to the street, is a good example of this arrangement, and is also the earliest dwelling in the village to which a definite date can be confidently ascribed. The date, 1638, is actually carved on a beam in the barn belonging to the house, but the masonry of the two buildings is so alike that there can be little doubt that they were erected at much the same time.

The dominating feature of the structure is its enormous central stack, of huge proportions in relation to the overall size of the building. The two ground floor rooms lie on either side of it and, though neither of the original fireplaces has survived, the parlour can be distinguished from the hall-cum-kitchen by its larger windows and by a little more decorative detail on the spine-beam. The chamfered beam in the former room has a raised stop which

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

LITTLE MILTON - III

FLETCHER FARM HOUSE

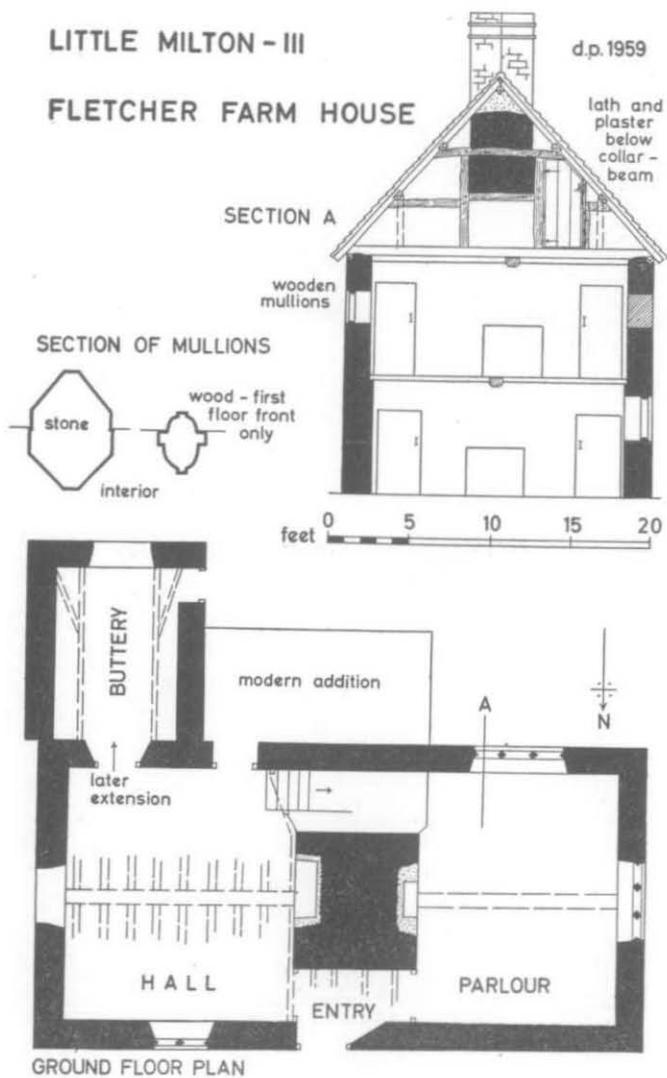
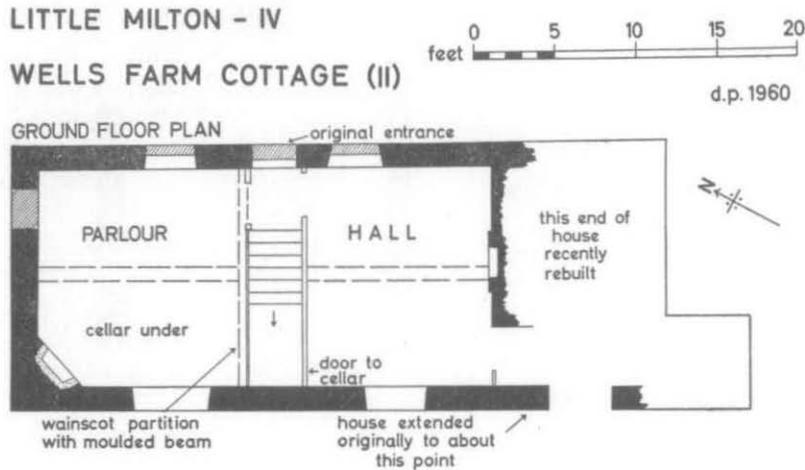


FIG. 22

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

dies away in a hollow curve, whereas the raised stop in the parlour has an ogee curve and there is, in addition, a small lozenge on the face of the chamfer (see FIG. 23, 2, 9). The hall itself, which still had a floor of bare earth until a decade or so ago, now has in its east wall a smaller, modern replacement of the



DETAILS OF WOODWORK IN THE VILLAGE - NOT TO SCALE

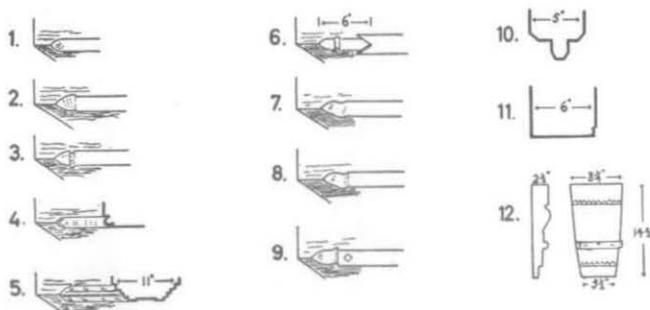


FIG. 23

1. The most common type of stop found for example in The Garage. 2. In the hall of Wells Farm Cottage (II) and in the hall and first floor chambers of Fletcher Farm House. 3. Hill View, in room beneath that containing the arched braces. 4. In the chamber over the parlour, Greystone Stores. 5. In the parlour of Greystone Stores. 6. In the hall of Frogmore Cottage. 7. In the chamber over the hall, Greystone Stores. 8. In the chamber over the buttery, Greystone Stores, and on the first floor, Wells Farm Cottage (II). 9. In the parlour of Fletcher Farm House. 10. The moulding of the arched braces at Hill View. 11. The ground floor lateral beam at Wells Farm Cottage (II). It is moulded only on the parlour side. 12. Head of post, first floor, Frogmore Cottage. All chamfers are straight or occasionally very slightly hollowed. There are no examples of the deeply hollowed chamfer.

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

mullioned, three-light window that was originally there, and there are two later extensions to the south, one very modern, the other of 18th or early 19th-century date (it is shown on the Tithe Award Map of 1839). It is probable, too, that there was originally no doorway in the south wall, for such an arrangement would have encouraged through draughts.

The narrow staircase, typically placed and with a little turned balustrade of 17th century date on the landing, leads to two chambers on the first floor. Opening off the parlour chamber is a further small room over the entrance lobby, an arrangement similar to that in The Greystone Stores; and it seems, judging from the stops on the beam and joists in the hall chamber, that there was also originally a small closet or little chamber, about six or seven feet square, in the south-east corner of that room. It probably had walls of wainscot, and it was the type of room that we find occasionally described in contemporary probate inventories as being 'within' another (i.e. a subdivision, not opening off it, which was the common meaning of the term).

A trapdoor in the ceiling of the hall chamber leads to the loft, which must always have been approached by a ladder. This top floor, because of the stack, is cramped, but it would always have been used for storage, and it was evidently at a later date adapted for sleeping accommodation as well. In the 18th or 19th century the western half was lined with lath-and-plaster, and a room was contrived with a ceiling at collar-beam level and walls that dropped vertically from the lower purlin. A further refinement was the gap left in each wall so that the space behind it could be used for storage. This arrangement, together with the existence of a trapdoor between the parlour and the parlour chamber, indicates that Fletcher Farm House, like The Garage, was once subdivided and occupied by two families, one living in the parlour and the chamber above, the other in the hall, hall chamber and loft.

Fletcher Farm House is no longer thatched, none of the original four fire-places has survived intact, and a number of windows are blocked, especially in the loft and in the south wall on the first floor; but there are some original door and window fittings remaining. The windows deserve further comment. The straight chamfer, which can be no later than *c.* 1638, has succeeded the ovolo moulding on the stone mullions, but in addition to these there are three sets of wooden mullions in the first floor windows at the front of the building. They are curious not only because they are wooden whilst the others are stone, but also because they combine Tudor and classical features in the ovolo moulding with the dentilled course above. It is possible that they are a later, romantic insertion.

In all likelihood Fletcher Farm House was the last dwelling to be erected in Little Milton before the outbreak of the Civil War. Those that were built

D. PORTMAN, B.A.

in the latter part of the 17th century, when the initial impetus of the rebuilding was over, were, judging by surviving examples, markedly inferior in appearance. It seems that their windows, which were never as large as those in The Garage, did not have stone mullions. These houses retained the simple rectangular plan but dispensed with the central stack, which was replaced by a staircase that was less cramped than those formerly fitted in between the stack and the rear wall. The fireplaces, numerous as ever, were now contained in one or both of the gable walls, in stacks projecting from the main structure, as in Frogmore Cottage (PLATE V C, FIG. 20), or in stacks included in it, as in Wells Farm Cottage I and Wells Farm Cottage II (PLATE V D, FIG. 23).¹⁴ In all three cases the original plan consisted fundamentally of hall and parlour on the ground floor, with two chambers above them and a fairly well-lit loft of typically generous proportions above those. The loft in Wells Farm Cottage I was used for sleeping as recently as 10 years ago. In addition both Wells Farm Cottages I and II have cellars.

There are no original fireplaces and very few original door or window fittings remaining, but both of these last named dwellings retain wainscot panelling, which can be fairly accurately dated in Wells Farm Cottage II, for the dates 1691, 1701, and the inscription R.S. 1700 are to be found in various parts of the loft.¹⁵ In each case, too, the thick and thin courses of rubble limestone are evenly laid, and the two buildings also have well cut ashlar quoins in the façade. A further feature is the stone coping, designed originally to protect the thatch, that surmounts the gable walls of Wells Farm Cottage I, and also those of Frogmore Cottage.

The houses have a fair proportion of blocked windows, but none more than Frogmore Cottage which illustrates, a little too forcibly perhaps, the drastic alterations that some of these village buildings have suffered. In addition to the three recently blocked windows in the east gable wall, and certain straight joints at the rear which are difficult to interpret, there is also a window in the façade that has been moved to the right. This was done to make way for a second door, which was subsequently blocked. The alterations make it clear that this house, too, was once subdivided to accommodate two families, though in this case it was not the blessing that it proved to be for The Garage.

The houses in Little Milton that were built before c. 1700 and which have survived to this day are comparatively few in number, and they are not always the best of their kind. But there is attached to them an abundance of evidence

¹⁴ There are two houses known as Wells Farm Cottage in the village. The further end of the building shown in Plate V D is a later extension, so the far stack was originally in a gable wall.

¹⁵ The panels are fairly small, 9 $\frac{3}{4}$ in. by 14 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. in Wells Farm Cottage I and 9 $\frac{1}{4}$ in. by 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ in. in Wells Farm Cottage II.

LITTLE MILTON—REBUILDING OF OXFORDSHIRE VILLAGE

for the study of the earlier building traditions in the village. Many of the features are of purely local significance, but many others are relevant to our national building history, and to our social history also. The urge which led to the Great Rebuilding found expression in Little Milton as it did elsewhere, and the history of certain of the houses illustrates a further, if more limited, general social phenomenon—the retreat by many 19th century farmers from their 16th and 17th century dwellings, which were then subdivided and occupied by the labourers and their families. But the real significance of this study lies in the fact that Little Milton is not an exceptional village, there are a score of others like it in the Oxford region. Its story has been enacted in hundreds of other small communities throughout midland and southern England.



A



B



C



D

A. Hill View. B. Hill View from rear. C. The Garage. D. Well Cottage.



A



B



C



D

A. The Greystone Stores. B. Fletcher Farm House. C. Frogmore Cottage. D. Wells Farm Cottage II.

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