

Houses of the Oxford Region

Each article in this new series will consist of a brief description, a plan or plans and at least one plate. While the series is not restricted to 'vernacular architecture' famous houses such as Blenheim will be excluded. It is hoped to publish two articles—one on a town house and one on a country house—in each number of Oxoniensia. —Editor.

I. FISHER ROW, OXFORD

By W. A. PANTIN

FISHER Row consisted of a row of cottages which stood on a long narrow bank or strip of land running from Hythe Bridge on the north to Quaking Bridge and Castle Mill on the south; this bank was bounded on the east by the main stream or mill stream and on the west by a back stream, and its purpose was no doubt to divert the stream to feed the Castle Mill at the southern end; it was at first known by the medieval Latin name of *wara* (meaning a weir or defence), hence the later name Warham Bank. About half-way down the bank is divided into two halves, north and south, by a sluice which is a short distance south of the modern bridge joining the New Road to Park End Street.¹ The tenements south of this sluice were acquired by Oseney Abbey at various dates between about 1240 and 1469; after the Dissolution these passed to Christ Church who also acquired the tenements north of the sluice. The Oseney rentals from c. 1277 show that the tenants included such people as fishermen, carpenters and tanners; similarly the Christ Church leases from c. 1600 onwards show such tenants or occupants as fishermen, watermen, boatmen, bargemen, maltsters and brewers.² All the houses in Fisher Row were demolished in 1954, except for the rebuilt Nag's Head Inn at the extreme north and the four houses at the extreme south end next to Quaking Bridge, of which Nos. 1-3 had been rebuilt c. 1799, Nos. 2 and 3 being Tawney's Almshouses.³

The purpose of this article is to examine seven of the houses in the southern half of Fisher Row, namely, Nos. 4, 4A, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9, of which it was possible to make a rough survey before and during the demolition of Nos. 4A-9; No. 4 still stands. These houses probably correspond to a group of tenements which

¹ See plans in *Oseney Cartulary*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford Hist. Soc., xc, 1929), II, 380, 602-3; and Ordnance Survey 1/500 plan of Oxford.

² *Oseney Cartulary*, II, 382 ff., 494 ff., 602 ff., III, 117 ff.

³ The Tawney family can be traced in leases of the sixth tenement: Richard Tawney, boatman (1714), becomes boatmaster (1728) and brewer (1743), and is succeeded by Edward Tawney, mealman (1772) and alderman (1786), *Oseney Cartulary*, II, 498-9.

were all let on a new lease on the same date, 14 April 1658; this would have made possible a clean sweep, and it was probably about this date that the seven houses were rebuilt as a group, perhaps by the incoming tenant. Structurally the seven houses formed a timber-framed range 140 ft. long by 17 ft. wide; at the south end (No. 4) there is a projecting back wing which seems to be part of the original structure, while at the north end (No. 9) there was a projecting back wing which was a slightly later addition. The range was divided into twelve bays by pairs of principal timbers joined by tie-beams and curved braces (see Section A-A, fig. 24, and PL. X A); on two of these principals, on the east side, the original assembly numbers could be traced: 'IIIIIV' (=IX) and 'X'. This means that the southern-most pair must have been numbered 11; perhaps there was another bay further south, destroyed when Nos. 1-3 were rebuilt in 1799; or perhaps the principals of the projecting wing at the back of No. 4 were counted as 1. (The positions of principals II-XIV are indicated by Roman numerals on the first floor plan and elevation, fig. 24.) The timber framework stood on a low stone plinth, and in some places the studding had been replaced by brick or stone. There is no projection to the first floor either front or back. The range was of two stories with cocklofts, and contained five central chimney stacks and one chimney stack (rebuilt) at the north end. The front part of the southern-most house, No. 4, consists of two bays, divided by a chimney stack and a staircase. Another chimney stack divides the front part from the projecting back wing; on the top floor of this back wing the roof has two dormer-like projections on each side, which have the effect of turning a triangular cockloft into a room of full height (cf. Section B-B, fig. 24). The next two houses, Nos. 4A and 5, occupied three bays, the central bay being partly occupied by a central chimney stack (PL. X B) and the two (modern) staircases which served the two houses; each house contained one room on each floor, No. 5 being rather larger than No. 4A. Part of the ground floor of No. 5 was cut off to form a passage giving access to No. 6 as well as to the space behind, where a malthouse was built. The next two houses, Nos. 6 and 7, also occupied three bays; these had a chimney stack at each end, and the two staircases in the middle; No. 6 had retained its original spiral staircase, while the staircase of No. 7 was more recent. Nos. 6 and 7 had slightly projecting windows on the first floor in front (PL. XI B). There was a certain amount of overlapping—enjambment, so to speak—on the first floor level between Nos. 6, 7 and 8. It was behind Nos. 6 and 7 that a malthouse had been built, as has been said; as early as 1670 these houses had been leased to a maltster, and in 1829 the tenants were Henry Hall & Co.⁴ The last two houses, Nos. 8 and 9, occupied four bays, with a

⁴ *Oseney Cartulary*, II, 497, 602.

SEVENTEENTH CENTURY HOUSES IN FISHER ROW, OXFORD

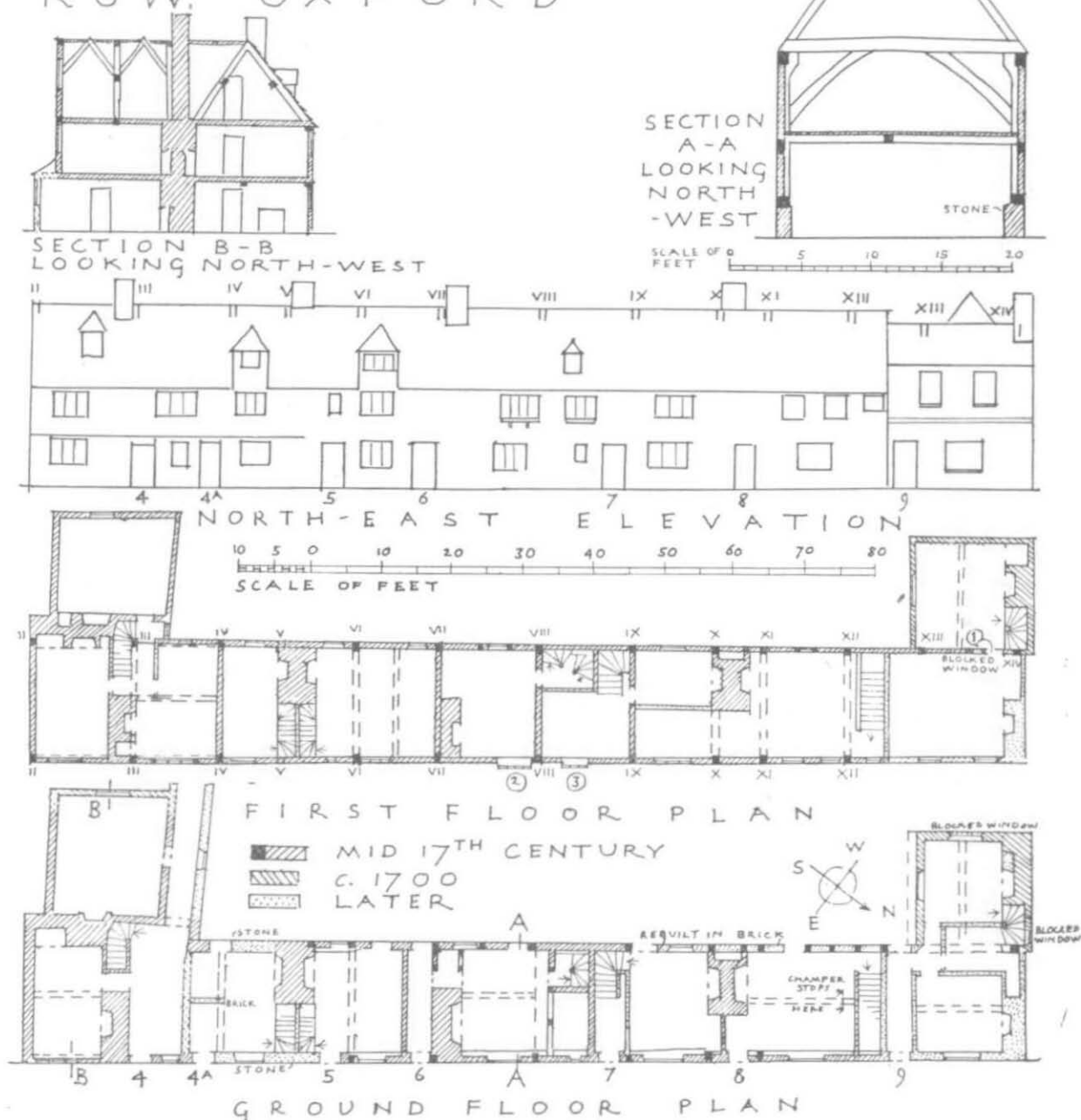


FIG. 24

chimney stack at both ends. To judge from a blocked window on the first floor (1 on plan), the back projecting wing of No. 9 was a slightly later addition, perhaps c. 1700; it had a northern chimney stack flanked by a spiral staircase, and the first floor (unlike the main range) had a jutting towards the south. The front part of No. 9 was rebuilt in stone, probably in the early 19th century. There were traces of original fireplaces in most of the rooms throughout the houses, including some of the cocklofts; many of these fireplaces had been mutilated or modernized, but there were some well preserved specimens with four-centred arches, as in No. 5 (first floor and attic), No. 6 (first floor), and No. 7 (first floor) (cf. PL. X B).

Were these houses intended from the first to serve as seven separate dwellings? It is very difficult to say, but I am inclined to think that they were originally designed to serve as *four* houses, and were subsequently subdivided. It is true that the division into seven houses can be traced as far back as the survey of 1772;⁵ but on the other hand, the 17th century leases suggest that these were then four tenements.⁶ If that is so, we may reconstruct the original houses as follows: (i) No. 4 was then, as now, a separate house. (ii) Nos. 4A and 5 formed one house, no doubt with a single spiral staircase, where the two later staircases were, adjoining the central chimney stack. (iii) Nos. 6 and 7 formed one house, served by the spiral staircase in the centre, the later staircase serving No. 7 being added when the house was divided. (iv) Nos. 8 and 9 formed one house, perhaps served by the spiral staircase in the back wing, the staircase serving No. 8 being added when the house was divided. Thus the southern end house (No. 4) was a larger, L-shaped house, with three rooms on each floor, the ground floor rooms no doubt serving as hall, kitchen and parlour, with three chambers and three cocklofts above. The two middle houses (Nos. 4A-5 and 6-7) were smaller, each having two rooms on each floor, the ground floor rooms serving as hall and kitchen or as combined hall-kitchen and parlour, with two chambers and two cocklofts above. The northern end house (Nos. 8-9) was originally a smaller, two-part house like the middle houses, but at an early date it was turned into a larger L-shaped three-part house, similar to No. 4.

Some general conclusions suggest themselves. First, these houses are one more example of that very extensive process of rebuilding that was going on in the early and middle 17th century at Oxford and indeed throughout the

⁵ *Surveys and Tokens*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxford Hist. Soc., LXXV, 1920), p. 42.

⁶ *Oseney Cartulary*, II, 495-8: the 'second tenement', which was apparently nos. 8 and 9, was let to one tenant, and the 'fifth tenement', apparently no. 4, was let to one tenant; the 'third tenement' (nos. 6-7) and 'fourth tenement' (nos. 4A-5) each had a single occupant, but there are two other tenements mentioned in the leases, which may imply that the third and fourth tenements were already four houses.

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country.⁷ It was then that the gaps and waste spaces of the medieval town were being filled up, and men were beginning to be apprehensive of overcrowding. While much building activity, both in country and in town, represented increasing prosperity, it might also sometimes, at least in the towns, represent a lowering of standards; hence the multiplication of poor cottages ('squobs') and the subdivision of tenements at Oxford c. 1620-40 were opposed by the King's Council and by the University and City, as tending to increase the number of poor and beggars.⁸ But Fisher Row seems to have been above the 'squob' standard. One is also reminded of a certain stylistic time-lag in this rebuilding; some of the characteristic features here, like the four-centred arched fireplaces, the projecting bay-windows, and the general timber-framed structure, at first sight look 'Jacobean', but in fact seem to belong to the end of the Commonwealth period. Secondly, this row of at least four houses all built in one piece, though not quite uniform in plan, may be regarded as early specimens of 'terrace houses'; not the earliest indeed, for we find landlords in London and York in the 14th and 15th centuries building uniform rows of houses and shops, in one piece,⁹ as an investment; these houses in Fisher Row are more likely, in the 17th century, to have been built by the tenant than by the landlord. Thirdly, although these houses had been much altered by the insertion of modern doors, windows, etc., such original fireplaces and windows that survived and the general construction showed how much good workmanship was put into comparatively small houses, inhabited by fishermen, watermen and the like, and this is an interesting piece of social history. Although such houses might sometimes degenerate into slums, as originally built they were very far removed from the poor quality mass-produced dwellings that were put up to house the working classes in the 19th century. Fisher Row might have been rehabilitated and turned into a series of serviceable and attractive houses, if it had not been for its damp and low-lying situation. The only thing that was sub-standard about Fisher Row was its site, and the utilization of such a site for well built houses is a measure of the keen demand for building space in 17th-century Oxford.

⁷ Cf. W. G. Hoskins, 'The rebuilding of rural England, 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, iv, 1953, pp. 44 ff.; cf. Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan, *Monmouthshire Houses*, II, 13.

⁸ Cf. letters on this subject, and returns of newly-built cottages, Oxford University Archives, WP.B., R. 10(2), (9), (10), (15), quoted in *Oxford University Gazette*, 17 April 1952, p. 745. These particular houses, nos. 4-9 Fisher Row, do not appear to be among the new cottages returned, though other nearby Christ Church properties are.

⁹ Cf. *Medieval Archaeology*, II (1958), 161-2, n. 11.

2. HORDLEY FARM

By W. A. PANTIN

THE name Hordley means 'Treasure Ley', a wood, or clearing in a wood, where treasure is found; this may refer to a Romano-British treasure discovered by Anglo-Saxon settlers; the site is very near to Akeman Street.¹⁰ In the 13th century Hordley was a member or hamlet dependent on the King's Manor of Woodstock; it consisted of 151½ acres, divided into small holdings of about 12 acres each; the tenants owed, among other services, the duty of cleaning the hall and chambers of the King's house at Woodstock when the King visited there, and of repairing Stratford bridge nearby.¹¹ At this time Hordley probably consisted of a cluster of cottages rather than one large farmhouse. Ecclesiastically, Hordley was a dependency of the parish of Wootton; there was a 'King's chapel' here in the 13th century.¹² There is now no trace of the chapel, but the memory is preserved in the field-name 'Chapel Lays'.

For about three centuries, from the early 16th century to about 1809, when it was bought by the Duke of Marlborough, Hordley was occupied by the Gregory family, whose arms occur over the entrance door in the south-east corner of the quadrangle. John Gregorie of Hordley left in 1547 goods worth £78;¹³ he was already well established, with land in Wootton and Handborough as well as in Hordley, and left 260 sheep to his wife and daughters. His son, Thomas Gregorie, yeoman, in 1571 left goods worth £333;¹⁴ his son John Gregory occurs c. 1578, 1590; his son Francis Gregory is described in 1630 as 'counsellor at Law'.¹⁵ Mrs. Margery Gregory occurs as a benefactor to Wootton in 1639 and 1641. In 1717 Thomas Gregory, gent., left goods to the value of £1,826, including nearly 600 sheep; his inventory will be discussed below. His son was Francis Gregory, succeeded by John Gregory, who occurs 1750, 1754, and by the Rev. Thomas Gregory, c. 1755-86.¹⁶ The

¹⁰ M. Gelling and D. M. Stenton, *The Place-Names of Oxfordshire* (English Place-Name Society' xxiii-xxiv, 1953-4), I, xvii, II, 294.

¹¹ *Rotuli Hundredorum* (London, 1818), II, 850; cf. also C. Ponsonby, *Wootton, The History of an Oxfordshire Parish* (Oxford, 1947), pp. 94-7, for an account of Hordley.

¹² *Calendar of the Liberate Rolls, 1226-40* (London, 1916), p. 115; *Taxatio Ecclesiastica P. Nich. IV* (London, 1802), p. 31; Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, pp. 67-8.

¹³ Bodleian, MS. Wills Oxon., 179, f. 229.

¹⁴ Bodleian, MS. Wills Oxon., 185, f. 88; he was sufficiently conservative to include a 'crucifyx of sylver and guylte, a paire of corall beades with gaudyes of sylver' among his bequests to his daughter Alice.

¹⁵ *Calendar of State Papers, Domestic, 1629-31* (London, 1860), p. 389; cf. also Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, p. 96, on his claim to arms.

¹⁶ Cf. Ponsonby, *op. cit.*, pp. 39, 40, 81, 89, 91, 96, 97; also materials about Hordley from the Public Record Office (Exchequer, Depositions and Special Commissions, 13 Charles I and 17-18 Charles II), collected by Colonel Ponsonby for the *Victoria County History*.

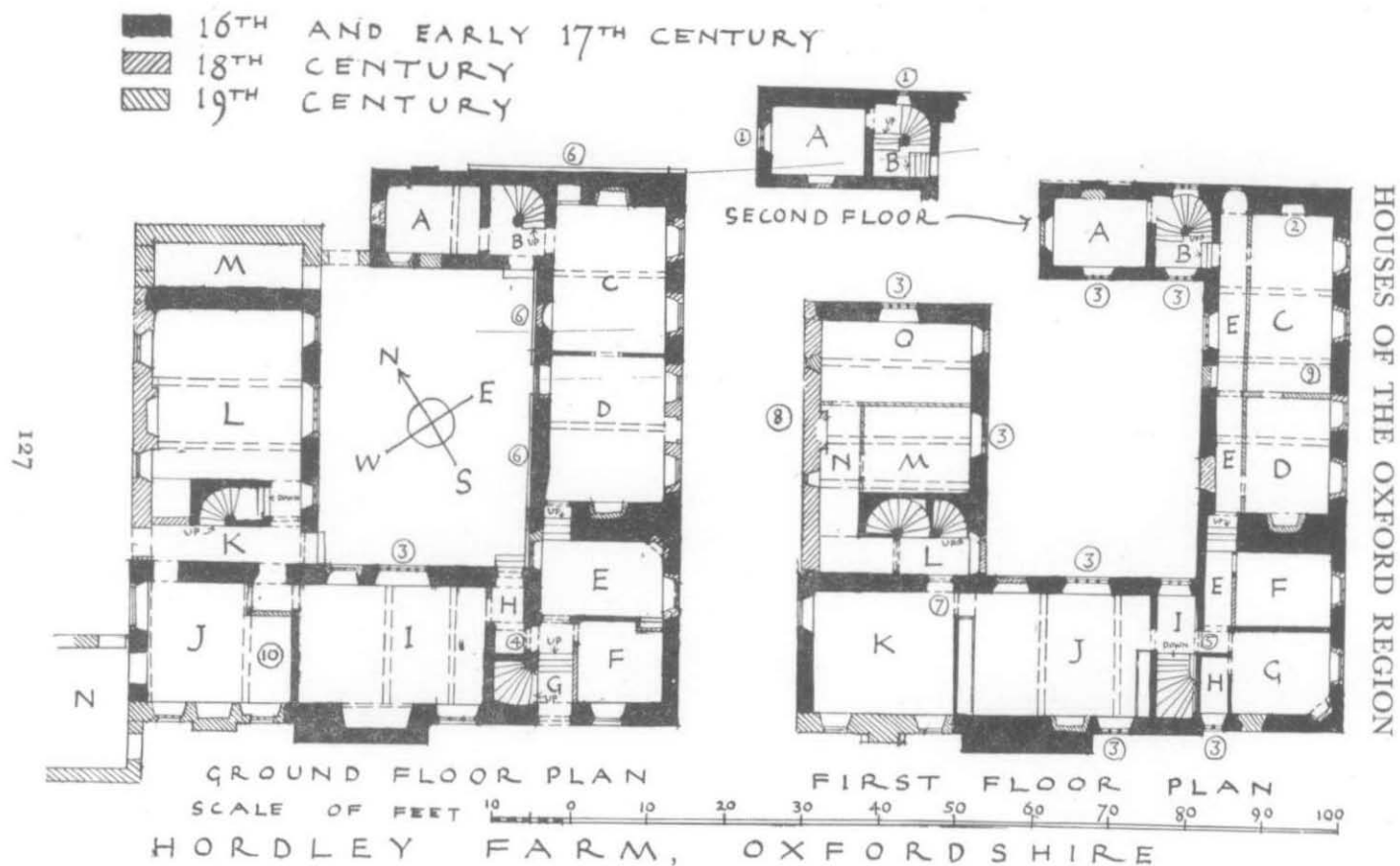


FIG. 25

existing house at Hordley which we are considering is in fact a monument to the growing prosperity of the Gregory family, who belonged to that class of yeoman and lesser gentry who benefited so much during the 16th century by having relatively fixed expenses and steadily rising selling-prices. As Dr. Hoskins has pointed out, for a time the freeholder cautiously invested his new gains in tithes, or flocks and herds, or new pastures; he spent nothing on ostentatious display. 'Not until the 1560's, and more especially the last quarter of the century, do we find him embarking upon the rebuilding or the enlargement of his house. Now there is money to spare for the graces of living.'¹⁷ This seems borne out at Hordley; the big jump in wealth (even allowing for inflation) came between 1547 and 1571, but the building of the present house probably came towards the end of the century, in the time of John Gregory.

The house is built round three and a half sides of a quadrangle, the north-west corner being open; it is built of stone, and is of two stories with attics and a cellar under the western range. There may have been a medieval house on this site, and this might account for the quadrangular plan; but there is no architectural feature surviving that appears earlier than the middle of the 16th century. There seem to be three periods of building. (i) The main fabric of the existing house was probably built in the late 16th or early 17th century—perhaps, as suggested above, after Hordley had been in the possession of the Gregory family for two or three generations. On the second floor of the north wing (marked (1)¹⁸ on the plan) there is a stone, two-light window with hollow mouldings, four-centred arch and drip-mould (PL. XI c), and a similar single-light window to the stairhead; these might be as early as c. 1550, but more probably date with the rest of the house nearer c. 1600. There are a good many features that date c. 1600: numerous wooden mullioned windows, with ovolo mouldings (3); an elaborate four-centred doorway (4) and a plainer one (5); a stone four-centred fireplace on the first floor of the east wing (2); the three stairs, of a rather archaic type (B, G, K); the moulded plinth on the north and west sides of the east wing (6); the great external chimney stack on the south side of the south range (PL. XI A); and almost the whole of the roof, except where reconstructed in the south-west corner. (ii) There was some 'modernization' about 1750: the west front was partly rebuilt, with a dated stone 'J.G. 1750', for John Gregory (8); the east front was partly rebuilt, with a round headed door and sash windows, set in ashlar; new doorways, external and internal, were made; some windows were blocked, others rebuilt; and about 20 yards out west of the house a two-storeyed gazebo was built, with a

¹⁷ W. G. Hoskins, 'The Rebuilding of Rural England, 1570-1640', *Past and Present*, iv, 1953, pp. 50-1.

¹⁸ The Arabic numerals and letters in brackets refer to the plans (fig. 25).

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dating stone 'J.G. 1750'. (iii) In 1885 (see dating stone) the south-west corner was rebuilt, and some outbuildings added or rebuilt.

As regards the plan of the house: the large room in the middle of the south range (I on plan, Fig. 25), with its large chimney, was no doubt the hall, and the room above (J) was perhaps the 'great chamber'; on the west was the range containing the kitchen and offices (J-L); on the east the range containing parlours below (C-F) and chambers above (C-G). The rooms C, D, F on the first floor were originally passage rooms, the corridor E being a later refinement; and the partition wall between C and D was probably originally a few feet further north, under the beam marked (9). The only difficulty about this plan is that the nearest approach to a 'screens passage'—the entrance lobby marked H on plan—is at the wrong end of the hall; but possibly the screens passage was originally at the other end, between the hall (I) and the kitchen (J), in the position marked (10), before this corner of the house was reconstructed in 1885. On the first floor, the door marked (7), between K and L, is very heavily defended with two bolts, two iron hooks for bars, and a peep-hole; this may have been intended to cut off the south and east ranges, occupied by the family, from the west range, occupied perhaps by farm servants. The first floor room J ('great chamber'?) has two rows of fine Jacobean cupboards built in at the west and east ends; on two of the doors on the west side is pasted an inventory of the household linen of the Rev. Thomas Gregory, 20 November 1755. There is some good early 17th-century panelling in room C on the ground floor, and rooms C and D on the first floor.

The probate inventory of Thomas Gregory in 1717¹⁹ enumerated the following rooms, some of which I have conjecturally identified (in brackets) with the rooms shown on the plans; I have also indicated which rooms contained beds: The Great parlour (ground floor, C or D); the best Chamber (first floor, C or D; 1 bed); the little parlour Chamber (first floor, F or G; 1 bed); the Garden Chamber (second floor, J); the study (first floor, H); the Roome over the Kitchen (first floor, K; 1 bed); the Maides Chamber (first floor, M; 1 bed); the servants Roome (first floor, O; 2 beds); the Granary; the Brewhouse; the Cheese Chamber; the Roome under the Cheese Chamber; the Dayry (ground floor, L?); the Woollhouse; the Sellar (under L); the Kitchen (ground floor, J); the Hall (ground floor, I); and little Parlour (ground floor, E or F). It would seem that the inventory began on the ground floor in the east range, went up to the first floor via staircase B, continued round through the east, south and west ranges, went down staircase L/K to the offices and kitchen on the west ground floor, and continued along

¹⁹ Bodleian, MS. Wills Oxon., 129/4/35; his will is dated 6 July 1715.

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to the south-east corner. Some of the offices such as the Granary, Brewhouse and Woolhouse probably lay beyond the quadrangle to the west (on the site of N, later rebuilt), as also the Cheese chamber (unless this was possibly in the three-storeyed north range A). There remain a number of rooms on the plan unaccounted for in the inventory; these may have been left out as containing little of value, for the inventory only describes the furniture very summarily, unlike the more detailed inventories of earlier times.²⁰

²⁰ I wish to thank those whose kind help and collaboration have made these surveys possible, particularly Mr. P. S. Spokes and the occupants of the houses described.



A



B



C

A. Fisher Row from the east; showing from left to right: nos. 4 (on extreme left) and 4A (both with roof intact); nos. 5-8 (with roof stripped); no. 9 (as rebuilt in stone in early 19th century). B. Fisher Row; chimney stack between nos. 4A and 4, from the north, showing 17th-century stone-arched fireplace on the top floor; the staircase on the left is a later rebuilding. C. Fisher Row; nos. 8 and 9 during demolition, showing the stone front of no. 9 in the foreground, and the 17th-century timber framework of no. 8 beyond, with the arch-braced truss xii

Phh.: P. S. Spokes



A



B



C

A. Hordley Farm from the south; showing from left to right: the rebuilt gable above the kitchen; the great chimney stack of the hall; and the gable-end of the east range. B. Fisher Row; projecting 17th-century window on the first floor of No. 6 (marked 2 on first floor plan, fig. 24). C. Hordley Farm; the western gable-end of the north range, showing the stone two-light window on the top floor (1 on plan).

Phh.: A, B, P. S. Spokes. C, W. A. Pantin