

Fletcher's House, Park Street, Woodstock: An Architectural and Historical Analysis

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SUMMARY

Fletcher's House, Woodstock, home of The Oxfordshire Museum, has recently been refurbished for new display galleries, and further buildings have been built and renovated within the grounds. This created an opportunity for archaeological investigation within the town unparalleled since its designation as a conservation area. The building and site were subject to a series of archaeological watching briefs during the course of this work by several professional bodies, the most recent of which concentrated on the building itself. This showed that the essential core of Fletcher's House is an early example of a 'double-pile' house, built by Alderman Thomas Browne in 1614. Combined with the work of two local history groups which gathered much of the documentary evidence, this study considers the historical and architectural development of the house and grounds.

INTRODUCTION

Fletcher's House, Woodstock (NGR SP 4437 1677; PRN 9504), has belonged to Oxfordshire County Council since 1949, and since the mid 1960s has been the county museum, now The Oxfordshire Museum (Fig. 1). For the rest of its history, Fletcher's House was a private house, occupied by several of Woodstock's mayors. The house is prominently situated, directly opposite the church of St. Mary Magdalene, between the Market Place and the entrance to Woodstock Park. It stands at the heart of the town founded as New Woodstock by Henry II in the 12th century.¹

The building of a new Exhibitions Gallery, Visitor Information Centre and Coffee Shop at the museum, as well as the refurbishment within Fletcher's House and the old brewhouse, has led to a series of archaeological investigations. These archaeological and building watching briefs have been carried out over some years by staff of the Oxfordshire Museum, the Fletcher's House Research Group,² Carol Rosier,³ the Oxford Archaeological Unit,⁴

¹ *Rot. Hund.* (Rec. Com.), ii. 839-42.

² C. Anderson et al., 'A History of Fletcher's House, Woodstock' (Fletcher's House Research Group unpubl. article, 1997). The members of the Research Group were Carol Anderson, Brian Cable, Pat Crutch, Trevor Hendy, Elizabeth Leggatt, Roy Rowland, Jack Shipp and Rebecca Vickers. Copies of all the reports and documents mentioned may be seen in the Fletcher's House Archive at the Museum.

³ C. Rosier, 'Fletcher's House, Woodstock' (Oxon C.C. Archaeol. Serv. unpubl. report, 1993).

⁴ A.K. Parkinson, 'Woodstock, Fletcher's House' (Oxf. Archaeol. Unit unpubl. report, 1994).

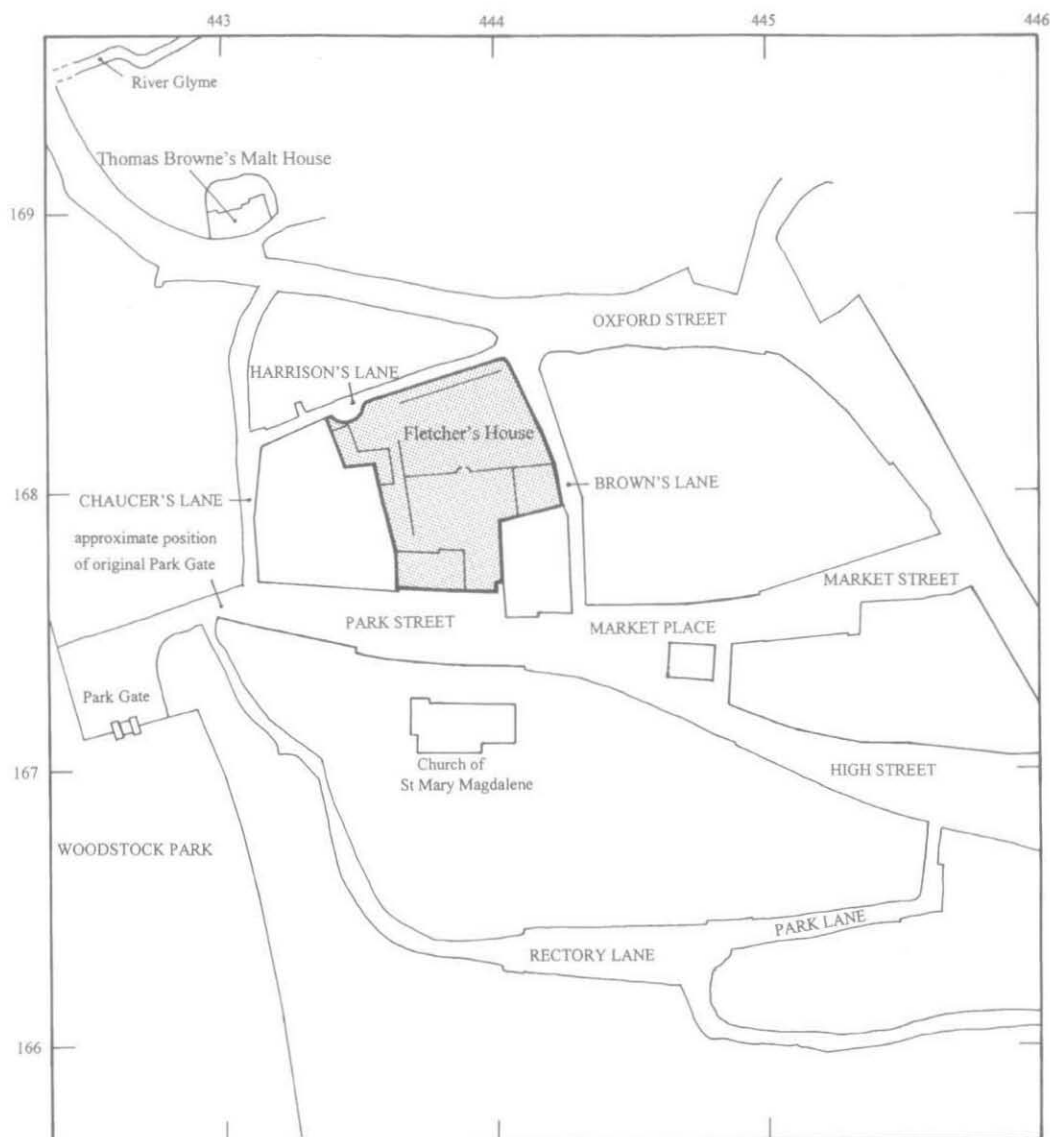


Fig. 1. Site location: Woodstock (drawn by I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

Lawson-Price,⁵ AOC Archaeology Group⁶ and the author, Imogen Grundon.⁷ The most recent phase of the refurbishment has led to a thorough reappraisal of the architectural development of the house. In presenting the results of the documentary, architectural and archaeological investigations, this article traces the development of the site and how the form and function of the building were adapted over time.

A great deal of research has been carried out in recent years by two groups of local volunteers known as the Fletcher's House Research Group (hereafter FHRG) and the Woodstock Society Local History Group (hereafter WSLHG). The basic floor plans are based on a survey conducted by the FHRG, though amendments were made where more information became available and all the plans redrawn by the author. The author is deeply indebted to the work that they carried out. The wills and inventories referred to in this article were transcribed by the WSLHG, who also gathered together the body of the Fletcher's House Archive at the Oxfordshire Museum, where copies of all the documents and reports referred to in this article may be seen.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The town of New Woodstock dates to the latter half of the 12th century. In 1279, 12 prominent local men stated that the town had been founded by Henry II to provide accommodation for the king's retinue while the king was hunting at the Royal Park or visiting his mistress, Rosamund.⁸ However, there had been a royal hunting lodge at Woodstock at least since the reign of Ethelred II (978-1016), and it remained in use as such until the 17th century. Although Roman coins were found near the church and an urn near Oxford Street in 1810, the earliest evidence of settlement on the site of Fletcher's House was a pit containing sherds of mid to late 12th-century pottery found beneath room G3.⁹ No structures were associated with this pit, but the pottery recovered consisted mainly of cooking wares. One fragment was part of a yellow glazed pitcher, a high status vessel that may have been imported from the continent. This could suggest that the site was high in status from the time of its foundation, a status it maintained in subsequent centuries. Due to the rarity of modern building development in Woodstock, and the consequent lack of archaeological investigation, very little stratified ceramic evidence has been recovered from the town. The pottery assemblage from Fletcher's House is therefore significant, but it represents only a small part of the wider context of New Woodstock, which still remains relatively unknown.¹⁰

⁵ A. Harris, 'Buildings Watching Brief: The Staff Room, Fletcher's House, Oxfordshire County Museum, Park Street, Woodstock' (Lawson-Price Environmental unpubl. report, 1997).

⁶ Reports in Fletcher's House Archive: A. Upson, 'Buildings Watching Brief: Fletcher's House, Oxfordshire County Museum, Park Street, Woodstock' (AOC unpubl. report, 1998); I. Grundon, 'An Archaeological Watching Brief at Fletcher's House, Woodstock, Oxfordshire: Interim Report' (AOC unpubl. report, 1998); I. Grundon, 'A Buildings Watching Brief at Fletcher's House, Oxfordshire County Museum, Park Street, Woodstock' (AOC unpubl. report, 1999); S. Richardson, 'Archaeological Investigation of Underground "Cistern", Fletcher's House, Woodstock, Oxfordshire' (AOC unpubl. report, 1999); S. Richardson, 'Sampling of Sediment within Underground "Cistern", Fletcher's House, Woodstock, Oxfordshire' (AOC unpubl. report, 1999).

⁷ I. Grundon, 'A Buildings Watching Brief: Fletcher's House, The Oxfordshire Museum, Woodstock' (I. Grundon unpubl. report, 2000).

⁸ *Rot. Hund.* (Rec. Com.), ii. 839-42.

⁹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 326; Grundon, op. cit. note 7.

¹⁰ M. Mellor, *Oxfordshire Pottery* (1994), 31-2.

The new town was incorporated into the demesne town of Bladon, and the Crown reserved the right to collect rent from the new properties. Burgage plots were laid out in New Woodstock by 1279, on average with a width of about 3 perches (*c.* 50 ft.). These long narrow land divisions are still clearly visible in some parts of New Woodstock. There were approximately seven of these plots on the block formed by Park Street (S.), Brown's Lane (E.), Harrison's Lane (N.) and Chaucer's Lane (W.).¹¹ Any attempt to relate specific buildings to the original plots presents problems, but in some cases is possible by tracing the quitrents for each property, which remained unchanged until the 20th century. In the Hundred Roll, Brown's Lane, which borders part of Fletcher's House to the E., was identified as the lane 'against the meat market'.¹² Throughout the Middle Ages the meat market was situated on the N. side of Market Place, on the E. side of Brown's Lane.¹³ From this it is possible to judge that four of the messuages at the E. end of the block belonged to Adam Beneyth. Two of these, nearest the lane, had a bakehouse, garden, two stalls (*seld*), and workshop adjoining, and a small piece of ground by the workshop.¹⁴ How these were laid out in relation to the burgage plots is unclear. The presence of stalls indicates that the market would originally have stretched right up to the park gate.

It is not until 1468/9 that a rent roll gives further insight into the use and ownership of this land.¹⁵ A vacant plot and a garden alongside Brown's Lane – then Wappenham's Lane – were held by Thomas Fletcher, the first Fletcher known to occupy the site. To the W. of this



Fig. 2. Fletcher's House from the SE. (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

¹¹ Anderson et al., *op. cit.* note 2; *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 336.

¹² *Rot. Hund.* (Rec. Com.), ii, 839-42.

¹³ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 338.

¹⁴ *Rot. Hund.* (Rec. Com.), ii, 839-42.

¹⁵ Woodstock Borough Muniments, 83/1.

land, a William Faulkener held an $8\frac{1}{2}d.$ tenement opposite the church, and it is stated that the tenant before him had been a Richard Stevence and a man called Waffer before him. Also opposite the church was a tenement with a quitrent of $1\frac{1}{2}d.$, held by Henry Bennett, previously by John Mondy, and another tenement held by John Gowles of London, which had been held recently by Margaret Mondy and before that by Robert Mondy (possibly her late husband). These probably cover the area of what is now largely Fletcher's House land, but little more information can be gained with any certainty.

In 1526 one of the houses belonged to another Thomas Fletcher and passed down through his family.¹⁶ It was then acquired at some time prior to 1608/9 by an alderman and several times mayor of New Woodstock, Thomas Browne, though the precise date is unknown. This was the first step in Thomas Browne's gradual acquisition of the land on which Fletcher's House now stands. A widow, Margaret Fletcher, continued to live in the house, which was probably situated beneath the present Visitor Information Centre at the E. end of Fletcher's House, one plot away from Brown's Lane to the E.¹⁷ It is likely that it was traces of this house that were found during two archaeological watching briefs carried out on the site in 1996 and 1998.¹⁸

By the early 17th century, the Metcalfe family owned the plot on the corner of Brown's Lane. In c. 1600 William Metcalfe senior (d. 1608) had built a new house at the southern, Park Street end of the plot, encroaching substantially onto what was then called Park Gate Street as he did so. He or his son and namesake sold the N. half of their plot (right down to the back lane, now Harrison's Lane) to Thomas Browne by 1609, for at that date the Metcalfe property is described as bordering Thomas Browne's garden to the N.¹⁹ Browne now held two adjacent plots, which he may well have amalgamated. However, the property he held was still not sufficient, so he bided his time.

To the W. of the house which Thomas Browne sublet to widow Fletcher were two tenements belonging to a woolman by the name of Francis Collingwood. These tenements were known as 'Mundyes' and 'Maynardes' after their medieval occupiers, and Collingwood owed a quitrent of 3s. 4d. for one and 18d. for the other, totalling 4s. 10d.²⁰ Like Thomas Browne, Collingwood was an alderman of the borough, and he and Browne would have known each other for years before Collingwood died in 1613.²¹ That summer, an inventory was taken of his goods and chattels, and Thomas Browne acted as one of the appraisers.

Francis Collingwood's tenements

Information about Collingwood's house relies entirely upon the inventory of 1613.²² Like any 17th-century inventory it lists the contents of rooms, but not necessarily all the rooms, which may not all, according to the assessors, have held contents worthy of description. It may be relevant that Thomas Browne was going round Collingwood's properties as a prospective buyer. Whether or not he already planned to demolish the existing buildings is

¹⁶ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 350.

¹⁷ M. Maslen (ed.), *Woodstock Chamberlains' Accounts 1609-50* (O.R.S. 58, 1993), 36.

¹⁸ Parkinson, op. cit. note 4; Grundon (1998), op. cit. note 6.

¹⁹ Woodstock Borough Muniments, 64/1/1. Pat Crutch of the WSLHG brought this document to the attention of the author.

²⁰ Maslen, *Chamberlains' Accounts*, 33, 36.

²¹ R.F. Taylor (ed.), 'Calendar of the Court Book of the Borough of New Woodstock 1608-1614 (W.B.M. 78/2)' (unpubl. TS. 1996).

²² Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 11/4/21 (will and inventory of Francis Collingwood, 1613).

of course unknown, but he did have more than a casual interest in them. However, together with the limited physical evidence of the basement rooms, the inventory is all that survives of the medieval building and its ground plan, and is therefore worth a closer look.

Only one cellar is mentioned in Collingwood's inventory and that would appear to have been situated beneath the shop and wool house. Though the inventory lists the contents of shop, wool house and cellar in one entry, it would seem logical that the drink barrels, stills and lumber were kept in the cellar, the wool, wheels (probably spinning wheels) and flaskett (a small flask or shallow basket) in the wool house and the form, table, iron beam and scales in the shop.

The hall, brass house next to the hall, buttery and boulting (sieving) house, mill house, kitchen and forward court all seem to describe the ground floor elements of the main dwelling house and separate outhouses. The stable and lean-to would certainly appear to be outbuildings at the back, accessed either from Park Street through the covered entry between the two houses, or from the back lane. Here Collingwood kept three gelding nags (castrated horses—'nag' implies that they were not particularly good animals).

The kitchen may also have been detached, perhaps in the same building as the mill house. From the contents of these it is clear that Collingwood carried out some malting on the premises. The contents of the buttery and boulting house confirm this and suggest brewing as well, although there is no mention of a separate brewhouse or a malt house. The source of water needed for both these processes seems to have been a 'great stone sesterne' (cistern or well) in the forward court by the kitchen. This may be the well or cistern discovered sealed beneath the 18th- or 19th-century flagstone floor of the corner store at the N. end of the 18th-century service wing (see below, *Archaeological Description*; Fig. 4).²³

Collingwood, like other aldermen of Woodstock, held several other properties. As well as the two adjoining properties on Park Street, he was tenant of two adjoining properties on Oxford Street 'otherwise called Sheepemarkett streete', for which he paid 3s. in rent.²⁴ These he rented out, but it was to the northern of these two properties that his widow Joan moved when Thomas Browne acquired both the Park Street properties in 1613. The speed with which he acquired the property suggests that it may have been an arrangement arrived at prior to Collingwood's death.²⁵

Thomas Browne and his new house

Thomas Browne was not a native of Woodstock. He came from Chipping Norton, but in 1593 he attested at the Oxford Church Court that he had been a resident of Woodstock for 27 years, which puts his arrival in the town at *c.* 1566.²⁶ By 1581 he was a member of Woodstock's Common Council, attaining by 1588 the position of chamberlain (one of two) and alderman (one of five, including the mayor). He was elected mayor in 1591, 1597 (serving two-year terms on both occasions), 1601 and 1608.²⁷ He was a Justice of the Peace from the early 17th century until his death in 1621. When he died he was a man of considerable substance in the borough and presumably also the county.

Browne was a maltster by trade. In 1609 he rented a 'mawlte house adjoyning to the river neere unto the bayes' for a 5s. rent from the corporation, and it can be assumed that this was

²³ Richardson, 'Archaeol. Investigation', *op. cit.* note 6; Richardson, 'Sampling of Sediment', *op. cit.* note 6.

²⁴ Maslen, *Chamberlains' Accounts*, 28–42.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 33.

²⁶ P. Crutch, 'Browne Family of Woodstock' (WSLHG unpubl. TS. 2000).

²⁷ Maslen, *Chamberlains' Accounts*, 232.

where his malting business was based (now White Hart House, 122 Oxford Street). This would explain his personal interest in keeping the 'bayes' or nearby sluices in good repair. He also paid £4 rent for the 'upper' of the four divisions of 'Le Poole', a large area of rich meadow on the S. bank of the River Glyme, near his malt house (Fig. 1).²⁸

He also held several tenements in the town. In 1608/9 he rented out a tenement with a quitrent of 6*d.* in 'Oxon streete near the Corne market hill' to the widow, Margery Fletcher.²⁹ The corn market hill was later Market Place, but this property probably refers to the house between the Metcalfes' and the Collingwoods' houses. Others of his tenements were in Oxford Street near Robin Hood's elm and in the 'beafe markett' (with an oven attached).

The first reference to Thomas Browne's new house occurs in the chamberlains' accounts, under the section noting quitrents for collection at Michaelmas 1614, where Browne is said to owe 4*s.* 10*d.* for 'his newe built house in the Park gate street'. The property is described as 'late Collingwoodes, sometymes twoe tenementes, the one called Maynardes, the other Mundyes place at 3*s.* 4*d.* and 18*d.* rent'.³⁰ This strongly indicates that Browne demolished both houses in order to create his new house rather than convert the existing buildings into one. At this time there is no mention of the new house being called 'Fletcher's House'; the only house that is referred to by anything approaching that name is the one he owned next door, on which he owed a quitrent of 6*d.* for 'widdowe Fletchers house'. This was the easternmost of the three houses that Browne had acquired on the site of the present Fletcher's House, and was still inhabited by Margery Fletcher.

There is scant map or pictorial evidence for Fletcher's House as it was in the 17th century except for an engraving by R. Godfrey, published by F. Blyth in May 1777 (Fig. 3). This shows a view of the house in the background from Market Place and the High Street. As the structure in the foreground had already been replaced by 1766, a certain amount of scepticism must accompany the use of the engraving as evidence. However, the information that has come from the surviving building suggests that this depiction of the 17th-century frontage of Fletcher's House can be used as a reference point, for there is nothing in the basic structural form of the building to contradict what is shown in the engraving.

No sooner was Thomas Browne's house complete than he resumed in his new home the hospitality expected of leading citizens of small market towns, such as the regular entertainment of visiting preachers. As alderman, Justice of the Peace and mayor (which automatically included being clerk of the market), Browne was closely involved with the running of the borough and was often witness to the seedier side of Woodstock life. He attended the view of frankpledge and portmouth courts. The former, known also as the court leet, met biannually at Lady Day and Michaelmas and was usually combined with sessions of the peace. At the latter, Browne attended witness examinations in cases of murder, witchcraft, assault and theft; one defendant who disliked his judgement as mayor went up to him in the market the following day and punched him. The portmouth court usually met on alternate Mondays, to deal with such business of the borough and burgesses as debt and trespass. Browne himself was not infrequently the plaintiff in debt cases.³¹

Thomas Browne had only six years to enjoy his new house, for he died in 1621. His will is sadly not accompanied by an inventory of the house and its outbuildings.³² Nonetheless the will does raise some important questions to do with the house and property as well as

²⁸ Ibid. 10, 28, 30; *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 346 (property no. 10).

²⁹ Ibid. 36.

³⁰ Ibid. 56.

³¹ Taylor, 'Court Bk.', op. cit. note 21, passim.

³² P.R.O., Prob. 11/137 (will of Thos. Browne, 1620).



Fig. 3. Engraving of Woodstock by R. Godfrey, published 1777. Fletcher's House is the four-gabled house with the porch on the right hand side of the street. (From E. Marshall, *The Early History of Woodstock Manor* (1873).)

giving some insight into the family. To his 'nowe' wife, Joan, Thomas Browne bequeathed 'my Messuage or Tenement called Fletcher's with the garden Orchard Backside and Malthowse heretofore called a Slawghthouse with all and singular the Appurtenances thereunto belonging'. This was to pass to her and to her assigns for the rest of her natural life. It is interesting that the name of the property had become 'Fletcher's'. Just as Collingwood's two houses had been known by the names of their medieval occupants (Maynards and Mundays), so Browne's new house, built only six years earlier, was named after the long-time former owners of the oldest house on the property. The last reference to Thomas Browne paying 6d. rent for 'widdowe Fletchers house' is in 1618, and it is not known how long she inhabited the house after this date. By Browne's death in 1621, the name Fletcher's appears to have referred to both houses.

Joan also received £200, a considerable sum, as well as the lease for her lifetime of the malt house down by the River Glyme, which was the business on which Thomas Browne had founded his wealth. A second malt house ('heretofore called a Slawghthouse') is referred to alongside Fletcher's House and the gardens and orchards in the backside, implying that it was in the grounds of Fletcher's House. No physical evidence has survived of such a building or of a slaughterhouse, but both activities would have required water nearby. This raises the possibility that it was on the site of the surviving 18th-century brewhouse, which had a water source in the form of the well or cistern immediately to the N. of it (see Fig. 4 and Archaeological Summary below). The inventory of Joan Browne's goods and chattels in 1624 contains the entry, under the heading 'Maulte and Barley': 'Maulte readie dried, green mault and in Barley one hundred and fortie quarters',³³ but does not indicate whether this large quantity was produced at the riverside malt house or in the grounds of Fletcher's House.

Joan Browne's inventory of 1624 is not a complete inventory of the house and does not mention all the rooms, only those in which she personally held possessions of value. The rooms listed are a hall, parlour, chamber over the parlour, buttery, kitchen, and 'William's chamber'. Linen, pewter and brass, and apparel were also noted, and the value of the latter indicates that Joan Browne was not inexpensively dressed.

Thomas Browne was twice married. Of his three children, the elder daughter Elizabeth was probably the child of his first wife, Elizabeth (née Dubber). The middle child was a son, named Thomas after his father. It is not certain whether he was the son of Elizabeth Dubber or the second wife, Joan (née Keene), though he refers to Joan in his will as his mother. The date of the second marriage is not known, but was around 1600. They had a daughter Joan, named after her mother, as the other two children had been named after Elizabeth and Thomas. All three of Thomas Browne's children were married by the time of his death in 1621. Elizabeth married Henry Cornish, one of Chipping Norton's wealthier citizens. Thomas the younger took Holy Orders and in 1621 was appointed rector of Bladon, which included the chapelry of Woodstock. He married Susannah Holland, daughter of the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, and had a son and daughter, named Thomas and Susan after their parents in the family tradition. Joan, the youngest daughter, married John Marriatt.

Joan Browne died shortly after February 1624/5. In her will there was a decided favour towards Joan Marriatt's family and particularly her daughter Mary, who was left £100. Thomas' and Susannah's children were given £10 each, while Elizabeth Cornish and her husband and children received no more than a silver spoon apiece. Joan Marriatt was clearly not satisfied and continued to pursue a greater share of her father's bequest. Shortly after

³³ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 5/2/9 (probate documents of Joan Browne, 1624).

the death of Joan Browne, the younger Thomas also became very ill and died. In his will he specifically asked his overseers to see that 'my brother and sister Marryot doe relinquish and give discharge of any Clayme which they have made concerninge my late fater'.³⁴ The death of her husband left Susannah as executrix of Joan Browne's will. An administration note of August 1625 shows that Joan Marriatt assumed charge of that administration, and effectively rewrote her mother's will to benefit her own daughter Mary, doubling her original bequest to £200, out of Joan Browne's total inventory value of £222 13s.³⁵

Thomas the younger passed on Fletcher's House to his 'good and lovinge wife Suzannah Browne... with all the howsinge gardens and backside which my mother had', with the use of all the rest of his property during her lifetime until their son Thomas should come of age.³⁶ However, she did not live there for long, if at all. Susannah married again not long after Thomas' death, to John Vernon.³⁷ In 1627 Vernon became rector of Hanbury in Worcestershire and the family moved away. Thereafter Vernon dealt with the financial details of renting out Thomas Browne's property, paying the annual quitrents on Fletcher's House and the smaller house next door. Susannah outlived her son, Thomas, and still owned the properties at her death in July 1681 at the age of 80. John Vernon followed her before the year was out, aged 82. In all, Susannah had eleven children, of whom only five survived her. Of these, Thomas Browne's daughter Susan and a half-brother set up a monument to John and Susannah Vernon, a man 'deservedly loved by all good men' and his 'pious, pleasant and modest wife'.³⁸

Sadly there is very little information relating to the houses during this period. In 1654, Dr. Francis Gregory, master of the Woodstock Grammar School, rented the house from the Vernon family. The hearth tax refers to the same Dr. Gregory renting a 12-hearth house in 1662, and it is probable that this was also the house built by Thomas Browne. After Susannah's death the house was sold, and by 1684 had been bought by Sir Littleton Osbaldeston, then New Woodstock's M.P. for the third time.³⁹ At that date, the quitrents for the Browne house and the smaller house were amalgamated for the first time into one single rent of 5s. 4d., as both houses were in the occupancy of a single owner.

Osbaldeston converted the smaller house where Widow Fletcher had originally lived into a brewhouse, although no malt house is mentioned in his will. It continued to be used as a brewhouse under the Groves, a family of brewers and maltsters who bought both houses after Osbaldeston's death in 1691. The will of James Grove, dated 1714, mentions a malt house and gardens (misread in the past as 'Marlborough Gardens').⁴⁰ Unlike Thomas Browne, they did not have the use of the malt house down by the river, which had been converted to an alehouse by the mid 18th century.

The Groves remained the owners of both houses until about 1781, when the last Mrs. Grove died. Her executors eventually sold the property in 1783 to George, 4th duke of Marlborough. He let the property for 3 years to a Lady D'Oyley, and then to a Mrs. Talbot, who ran a girls' boarding school in the town. By 1789, he had either given or sold the houses and land to his agent and auditor, Thomas Walker.⁴¹ Walker did well out of the duke, who had built the very fine Hensington House for him in 1768-9. But this residence presumably

³⁴ P.R.O., Prob. 11/145 (will of Thos. Browne, 1624).

³⁵ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 5/2/9.

³⁶ P.R.O., Prob. 11/145.

³⁷ Anderson et al., op. cit. note 2, p. 10.

³⁸ Crutch, op.cit. note 26.

³⁹ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 350; Anderson et al., op. cit. note 2, p. 10.

⁴⁰ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 350; P.R.O., Prob. 11/408; Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 129/4/19.

⁴¹ Anderson et al., op. cit. note 2, p. 13; *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 414.

went with the job of auditor and agent.⁴² As Thomas Walker was already 63 when he acquired the Fletcher's House property, it is probable that he intended Fletcher's House as his retirement home.

Thomas Walker's improvements

Between 1795 and c. 1800, Walker demolished the older and smaller of the two houses to create more space and radically altered the house that Thomas Browne had built. To turn a house that was thoroughly modern in the early 17th century into a house that was fashionable at the end of the 18th was no mean feat and the 17th-century house was virtually gutted to achieve that end. Thomas Walker also added the final piece of land to the property, reflected in the increased quitrent of 7s. 10d., and enclosed the whole with a high wall of stone and brick, with a fine back entrance and stable yard in the newly acquired NW. corner. A new service range was added along the W. edge of the gardens. All this suggests an increase in the size of the household, or at least in the service machine that was expected to maintain it.

The following written specification for the proposed building work survives in the Blenheim Muniments along with a design drawing for the ground plan.⁴³

Agreement 14.12.1795 T Walker Esq. J Chapman carpenter and builder
Ric Weller slatter

Cost £2,257 10s. 10d. Good under cellars, dining room, drawing room, chambers and dressing rooms over the same. Also stables, coach house and out houses as on plan.

Alterations and repairs to the old house.

Also a reservoir to hold 180 hogsheads of water [7500 gallons]

lead pipes from cistern in Frog Lane [now Harrison's Lane]

Chapman agrees to supply the reservoir with water during the time he holds the water engine in Woodstock for £4 4s. 0d. p.a.

Although the design was not carried out to the letter, this drawing does give a good idea of the layout of the main building and its outbuildings. This is confirmed by an auction catalogue of 1836, which, although not illustrated, gives the dimensions of the principal rooms, enabling identification of most of them.⁴⁴ The catalogue also describes the service buildings extant at the time.

The arrangement of the gardens and surviving service range is depicted in the Ordnance Survey map of 1876, and the changes are to some extent visible in the subsequent revisions of 1898 and 1922. Another auction catalogue of 1924 describes the house again without illustration.⁴⁵ It is possible to chart some of the changes that had occurred within the house from this document, together with verbal evidence collected over the years from people visiting the museum who used to know Fletcher's House, such as the housekeeper in the 1930s. When the county Fire Service took the building over in 1949 they drew up conversion plans, which show that quite a few of the details such as 18th-century fireplaces were still intact at that date. They made many drastic alterations, as did the museum service in the early years following its acquisition of the property in the mid 1960s. The recent building work (1999-2000) has removed enough of this last phase of the building's life to uncover substantial physical evidence of the architectural development of the house, which remains the best source of all.

⁴² *VC.H. Oxon.* xii, 20.

⁴³ Blenheim Muniments, shelf G1, Box 8, Walker Correspondence, 1794.

⁴⁴ Bodl. GA Fol. B71 Auction fl 56.

⁴⁵ Bodl. GA Oxon. C224 (14), Auction Cat.

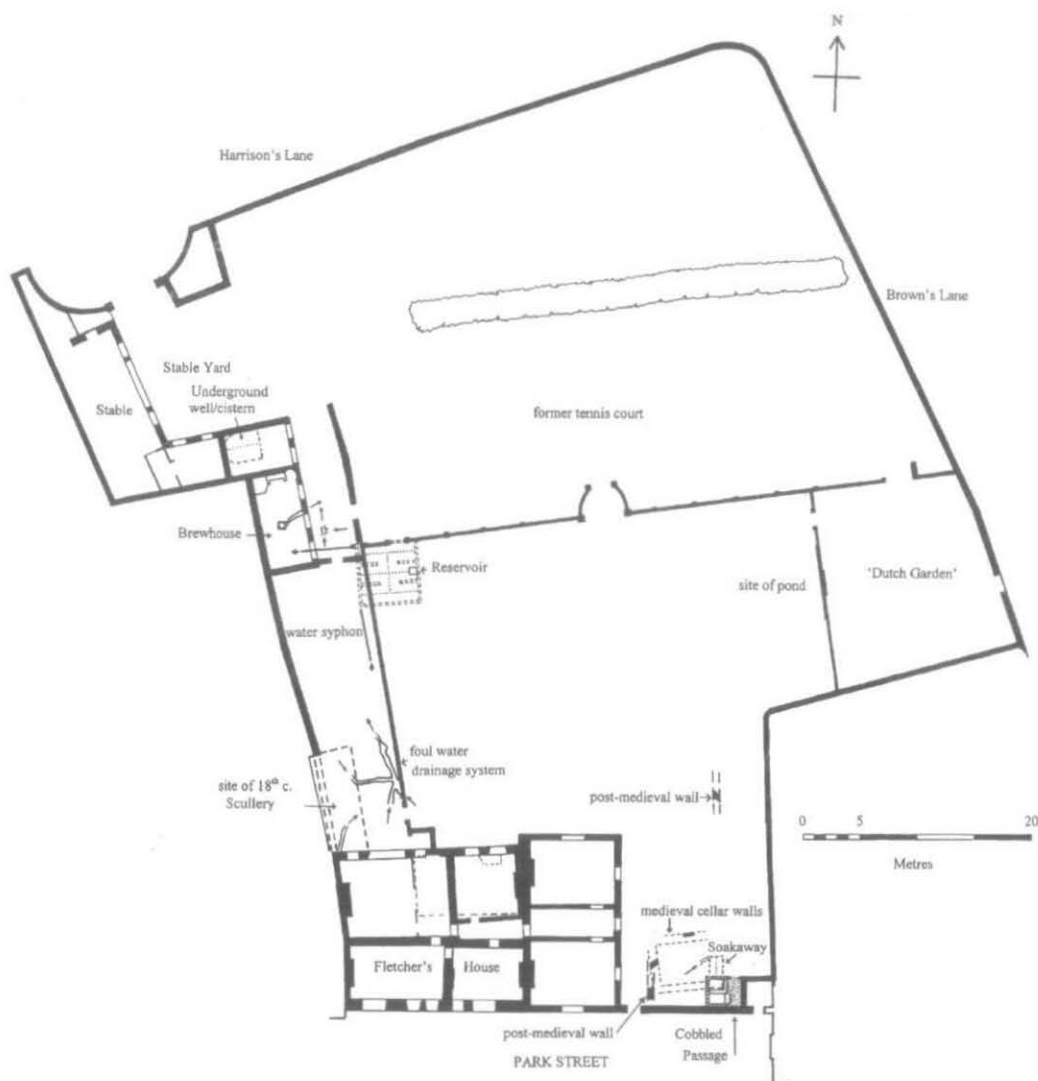


Fig. 4. Plan of Fletcher's House and grounds (drawn by I. Grundon, Fletcher's House Archive).

ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Building Materials

Fletcher's House is built of coursed rubble limestone bonded with a lime mortar, though it has been often repointed. The windows and lintels are of oak, and the interior faces seen show that wood was used within the walls to increase their tensile strength. Two limestone spine walls traverse the house N.-S. and E.-W. The internal walls of the upper (second) storey are essentially stud partitions. The surviving 17th-century windows are all of wood with quarries of hand-blown glass in lead comes attached to iron saddle-bars.

The timber roof of the N. range is of rough-hewn elm retaining much of the bark, with the unevenly spaced three principal rafters numbered I, II and III (W. to E.), jointed at their

apex with half lap joints. The roof space is just under 3 m. in height beneath a 56° pitch. The roof of the S. range, lowered in the 18th century, is of sawn oak, and much of the wood shows signs of re-use. The almost parallel roofs of both ranges were originally clad in the local Stonesfield slates. Now only those on the N. side of the N. range survive, the rest being Welsh slate.

All the 18th-century alterations, both internal and external, are of unfrosted brick with an average size of 230 x 110 x 60 mm., although the 18th- and 19th-century outbuildings are of coursed rubble limestone.

The interior is plastered throughout with lime plaster tempered with horsehair applied directly to the stone walls or to split laths on post partitions.

THE EXTERIOR

South Façade

The first impression of Fletcher's House as it faces onto Park Street is of a bland stucco façade, scored to look like ashlar masonry (Fig. 2). The stucco dates from Thomas Walker's improvements to Fletcher's House in 1795-1800 and fulfilled two purposes. The first was to give the impression of a uniform modern building with a fashionable Italianate flat roof, and the second was to hide any sign of the 17th-century 4-bay house beneath the W. end of the building. The 17th-century roof of this range was lowered so as not to be visible above the new brick parapet.

The only image to survive of Fletcher's House, prior to the re-facing and extension, is the engraving published in 1777 (Fig. 3). This view of Thomas Browne's house from Market Street shows that the house was of 4 bays with a central entrance. Four gabled dormer windows opened into the steeply pitched roof space at second floor level. Adding to the prestige of this large and impressive 17th-century house was a two-storey porch above the central entrance. This provided a small niche accessible from the great chamber above the hall, from which the life of the town could be observed or in which confidential conversations could be held.

The stucco makes it impossible to be certain of the size of all the 17th-century windows on the ground and first floors, but it would appear that these at least were in the same positions as the 18th-century windows. They may well have been of the same style as the surviving stair window on the N. range, but perhaps more elaborate and possibly even with stone mullions (Figs. 5 and 11f). All but one of the windows and one door on this façade date from 1795-1800. The small ground floor window and the E. door belong to the late 19th or early 20th century when the front ground floor rooms were used as solicitors' offices.

The proportions of this façade reveal that the house is in two parts, the western 17th-century end with three storeys and the eastern 18th-century end with two. The larger sash windows of late 18th-century date at the W. end were an attempt to imply to passers-by that there were generously proportioned rooms after the Georgian fashion within. However, the external impression belied an awkward arrangement of the windows and room spaces on the inside. The latter did not matter as long as the former conveyed a sense of fashion and wealth.

East Façade

As the principal entrance to Thomas Walker's improved house of 1795-1800, this façade is faced with a fine limestone ashlar, unlike the etched stucco of the S. façade (Fig. 2). To give stone facing to the extension on the S. side would have drawn attention to the two different builds, so this was avoided. Broader than the 17th-century house behind it, this façade projects just enough beyond the N. face of the old building to hide the undisguised

N. façade from view (Fig. 7). The arched window and entrance door are centrally placed, flanked to the N. by the window of the original dining room (Fig. 18). On the left was a dummy or blind window, which gave symmetry to the façade without letting unwanted light into the drawing room. The large windows above lit the dressing rooms rather than the principal bedrooms themselves.

There is little evidence of how the 17th-century E. façade appeared prior to the construction of the extension. External render found between the two parts of the building suggests that it was freestanding, and a small window found intact on the W. wall raises the possibility that the E. façade may have been fenestrated as well. An early 17th-century window hook found adjacent to the E. wall on the first floor may also suggest the presence of a casement window at first floor level. However, the doors connecting the two building phases have destroyed any evidence of earlier openings, as have the two 18th-century brick chimney stacks inserted between the two parts of the building.

North Façade

This façade best shows the two main phases of the building's history. At the W. end can be seen the 3 gabled bays of Alderman Thomas Browne's house built in 1613/14 (Fig. 5). The N. range is wider than the S. range and though the pitch of the roofs of each range would have been similar, the width of the N. range led to a taller roof. This allowed fewer and larger gabled dormer windows.

The top window in the central bay shows the mullion and transom form that the other windows would have taken in the early 17th century. The size of the original windows can



Fig. 5. N. elevation of the 17th-century part of Fletcher's House (drawn by I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

be judged by the surviving stone quoins, and these also indicate that the positions of the windows were for the most part left unchanged. Only the dressed stone quoins around the windows and at each corner of the building would have been visible, as the rough limestone walls would have been covered in a lime render. The corner stones are now only visible on the NW. corner of the building, as the 18th-century extension enveloped those on the NE. corner. However, even on the NW. corner, the quoin stones begin only part of the way up the building. This probably represents the height of the original W. boundary wall when Thomas Browne's house was built in 1614.

The central bay housed the main staircase of the 17th century. Three windows lit this bay, though only the large first/second floor landing window remains in its original form. The window below this was of identical proportions and probably form too, with a single side-hung casement window in the centre. A small blocked window to the W., between the central and W. bays, would also have lit the staircase. The central gable window was high above the stair bay and was intended to shed extra light on the stairs.

At the end of the 18th century, two of the 17th-century windows (both lighting the staircase) and one door were blocked, reflecting the substantial structural alterations carried out within the house in order to make it conform to 18th-century tastes. The old principal stair had become the service stair and it was inappropriate for the servants to have such generous views over what was now the very private preserve of the garden. The lower stair window was made narrower and a bathroom eventually set in front of it. The remaining transom and mullion windows were replaced with taller sash windows. The original back door was moved, and the old kitchen window (where the westernmost of the three lights is) was doubled in width. The third, easternmost light of the kitchen window was a further enlargement carried out in the 19th century.

The consequent patchwork visible now on this façade was completely hidden by render in the late 18th century, which this time covered the dressed stone of the windows as well. It is not certain when the render was removed, but it was probably in the late 19th or early 20th century when it was considered more 'authentic' to display the stonework. The 18th-century extension is faced on this N. side with limestone ashlar masonry. Structural investigations on the ground floor, above the French windows, revealed that the original intention to have Venetian windows on both storeys of the N. façade was initiated but never completed. This would have added a semicircular fan above the central light of the window, but probably due to lack of funds the idea was abandoned. The French window is a much later enlargement of a standard window.

THE INTERIOR

BASEMENT (Fig. 6)

The physical evidence for Collingwood's two properties is scant. Two rooms of the cellar or basement level show features that clearly belong to an earlier building. The first of these features is an irregular projection from the N. wall in B2, and the second is the sill and lower part of a blocked window in B1.

The feature in B2 has been partitioned off in modern times, but is visible beneath the floor of Room G7/8, as the feature and the brick curtain partition form a cavity. This was full to a depth of over a metre of substantial building rubble, which it was not possible to clear to floor level. The W. side is at an angle of about 120° from the N. wall, while the E. side forms a right angle. It has the appearance of the base of a chimney stack, but whether such a large projection could be an internal support for a stack is open to question. The base of the 18th-century stack on the adjacent E. wall projects less as it is built in brick, but does nonetheless project at basement level, so there is a possibility that the larger feature was an internal reinforcement for a chimney stack above.

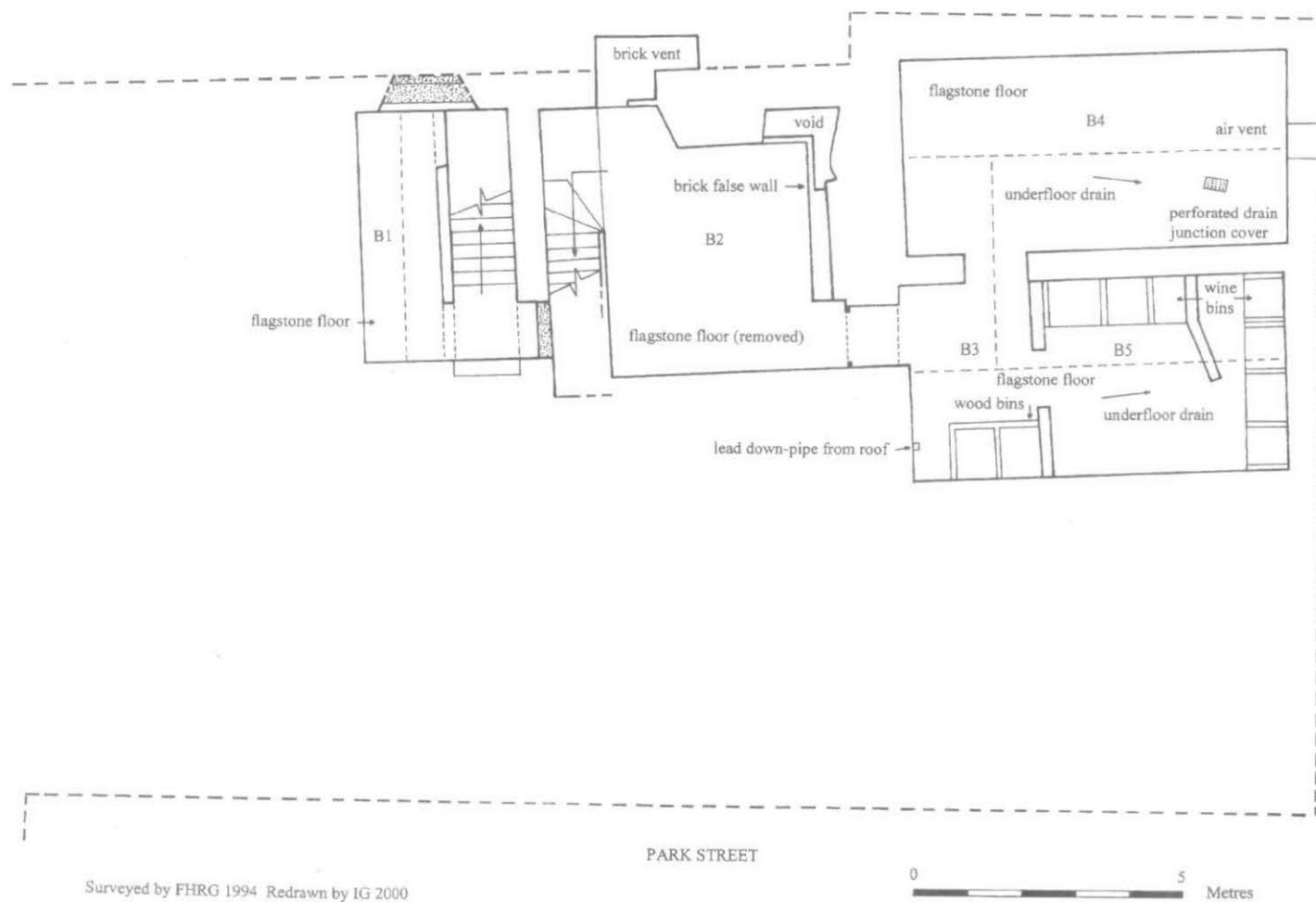


Fig. 6. Basement plan (Fletcher's House Archive).

A re-used block of moulded limestone was found in the 18th-century chimney stack during work on the ceiling of G7/8. The form of the moulding as recorded, though not very accessible, seems to be the corner piece of 4-centred arch fireplace.⁴⁶ Its original provenance is not known, but it is probable that it was part of an original fireplace from the 17th- or even pre-17th-century building.

In B1, later the coal cellar, the base of a wide blocked window is visible in the N. wall. The position of this opening shows that the window pre-dates the stone stairs that now lead to that part of the cellar. However, whether these steps date from the 17th- or 18th-century build is less certain. The jagged top of the wall, visible at the top of the stairs down to B1, indicates that a building was demolished to what is now ground level prior to the construction of the 17th-century house. The position of the window sill at what is now ground level on the N. side of the house, would suggest that prior to the building of the 17th-century house the ground surface was lower. This may have reflected the steep natural slope down to the N., as the land descends to the valley of the River Glyme. There is therefore a possibility that the cellar mentioned in the inventory of Francis Collingwood was originally a half-basement.⁴⁷

Whether the cellar was one room or two is unclear as the singular term 'cellar' is still very often used when more than one room, accessed by a single staircase, is involved. The stone wall dividing the cellar into rooms B1 and B2 may well be no earlier than 17th-century in date, for it shows none of the scars of partial demolition as the N. wall does. The presence of both the cellar stairs makes any further investigation difficult. The natural cornbrash located not far beneath the flagstone floor in Room G3 indicates that there was no cellar closer to the present street frontage at the E. end of the building. The evidence in Room G5 was less conclusive but did not encourage the possibility of a further cellar. The modern concrete floor of Room G4 made it impossible to establish the presence or absence of a cellar beneath that room. It is unlikely, given the substantial drainage runs that exist beneath the concrete screed, that a cellar would have escaped notice. It can therefore be fairly safely assumed that no other rooms were at this level, suggesting that B1 and B2 did form the cellar or 'cell' mentioned in the inventory.

The inventory gives no clue as to the floor plan of Collingwood's houses – whether they were parallel or perpendicular to Park Street. The alignment of the basements B1 and B2 and the positions of the window and base of internal chimney stack suggest that one of the buildings at least lay parallel to Park Street – presumably the shop above the cellar.

How far forward these buildings came is unknown. The evidence of Room G4 is lost, and there was no evidence for earlier wall alignments beneath the floor of Room G3. It can be assumed that whatever stone walls could be re-used – even if, as is likely, it was merely their footings – would have been re-used. However, the Collingwood buildings were probably timber-framed on stone footings, an incentive for Thomas Browne to build a completely new house in stone.

GROUND FLOOR (Fig. 7)

The ground floor is on two separate levels. The 17th-century building which forms the W. end of Fletcher's House is 0.6 m. lower than the exterior level of Park Street, whereas the 18th-century E. end is raised half a metre above street level. The 17th-century part of the house will be dealt with first, as this was the main object of study during the watching brief.

⁴⁶ Harris, *op. cit.* note 5.

⁴⁷ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 11/4/21.

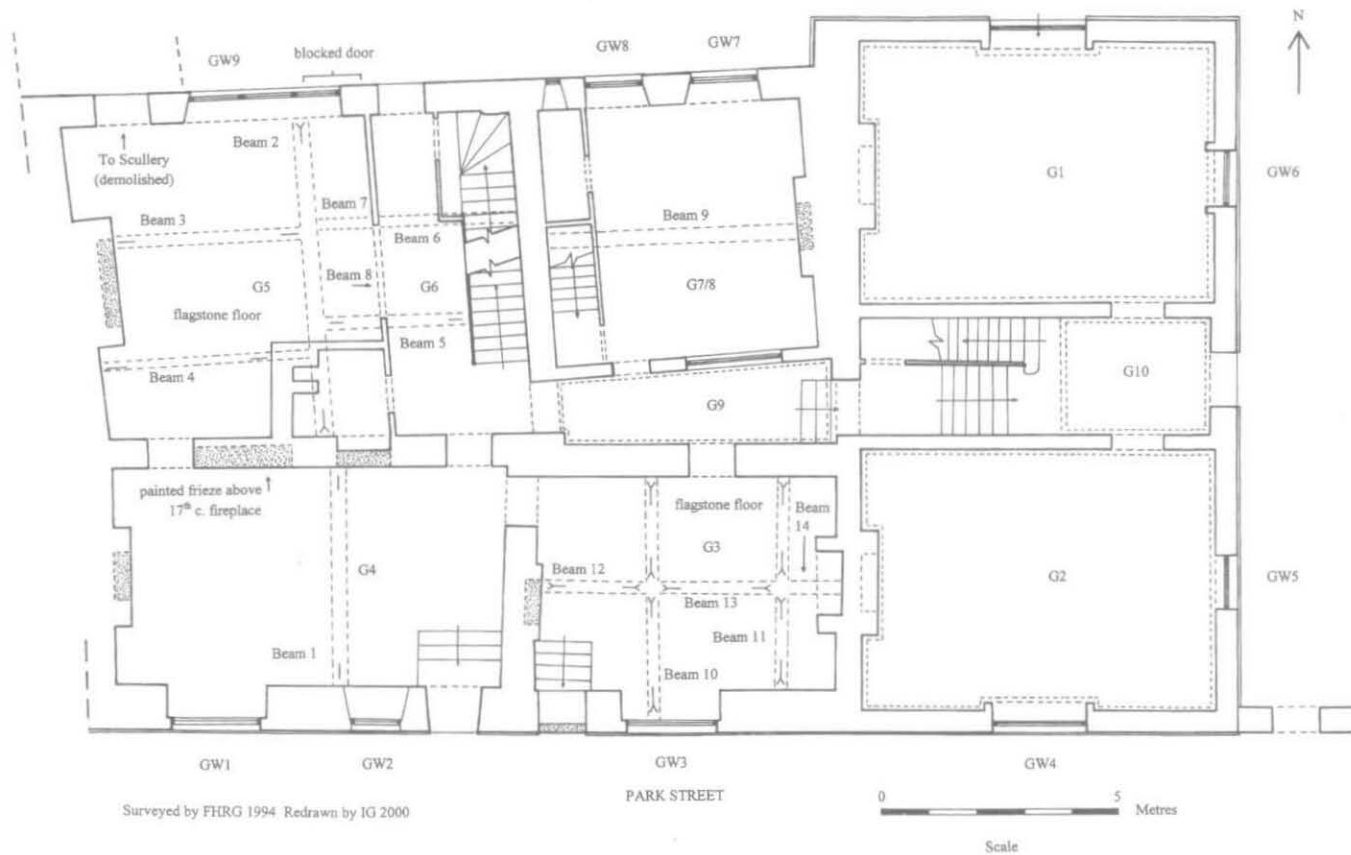


Fig. 7. Ground floor plan (Fletcher's House Archive).

The ground floor plan (Fig. 7) shows a 'double-pile' house of the early 17th century. This was a house very much ahead of its time for a small market town like Woodstock. In plan the house closely resembles several of the designs and surveys of John Thorpe, a designer and surveyor working in London from the late 16th to early 17th century. This is not to suggest that Thorpe was in any way responsible for this building, but his drawings do reveal that houses with this type of plan were being built at the turn of the century in the newly expanding parts of London, and probably elsewhere.⁴⁸ The plan was well-suited to both spacious suburbs and rural towns, where more building space and street frontage were available than in a city like Oxford, for instance. The term 'double-pile' refers to the fact that the house is two rooms deep, in this case formed by two slightly misaligned ranges set parallel to Park Street. The S. range, being narrower, would have had a slightly lower pitched roof than the wider N. range. This was probably a restriction imposed by re-using the foundations of an earlier building, which had also imposed the different alignment of the N. range on the builders.

The principal entrance was centrally placed in the S. range as it faced onto Park Street (then Park Gate Street). Directly opposite the church tower of St. Mary Magdalene, this entrance led into the E. end of the hall, although it is probable that there was not as great a drop in level on entering the house as is the case now. The parlour was entered from the hall to the E. Directly ahead of the principal entrance was another door which led directly to the staircase, centrally placed in the N. range and probably very visible to the visitor on entering the building. Flanking the staircase in the N. range were the kitchen to the W. and the buttery to the E. Two back-to-back chimney flues at either end of the house sat originally between the two ranges, separating the hall from the kitchen and the parlour from the buttery. The original door to the back yard, or 'backside', was immediately to the W. of the present one (Fig. 5). The cellar was reached from beneath the stairs, but no evidence of the original arrangement of this access survives.

The hierarchy of this floor changed entirely with the building of the new extension in 1795-1800 by Thomas Walker. There was no option, if the new design was to be seen and admired by the outside world, but to build this extension at the E. end of the building. This made a facelift for the whole house a possibility, and permitted an elegant new entrance, with the best rooms – now at ground floor level – flanking it. The new principal entrance was to be accessible from Park Street, but reached from a small drive rather than directly from the street as hitherto.

This was necessarily at the expense of the old house once inhabited by Widow Fletcher, which had by then long been a brewery. The consequences were also severe for the early 17th-century house of Thomas Browne. The principal entrance was demoted to the tradesmen's entrance, the grand stair reduced (in both senses) to being the back service stair, and three of the best rooms suffered the same fate. The new principal entrance necessitated a complete change in the circulation of the building. Corridors were needed to link the two builds at ground and first floor levels, and to allow the family a measure of privacy from the comings and goings of the servants. But these had to conform to the symmetry of the new extension, leading from the centre of the new wing. There was really no alternative but to remove the E. 17th-century stack. Similarly, requirements for a greater kitchen necessitated the removal of the W. stack. So the status of the rooms in the house were radically altered.

⁴⁸ N. Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry* (1999), 143-50.

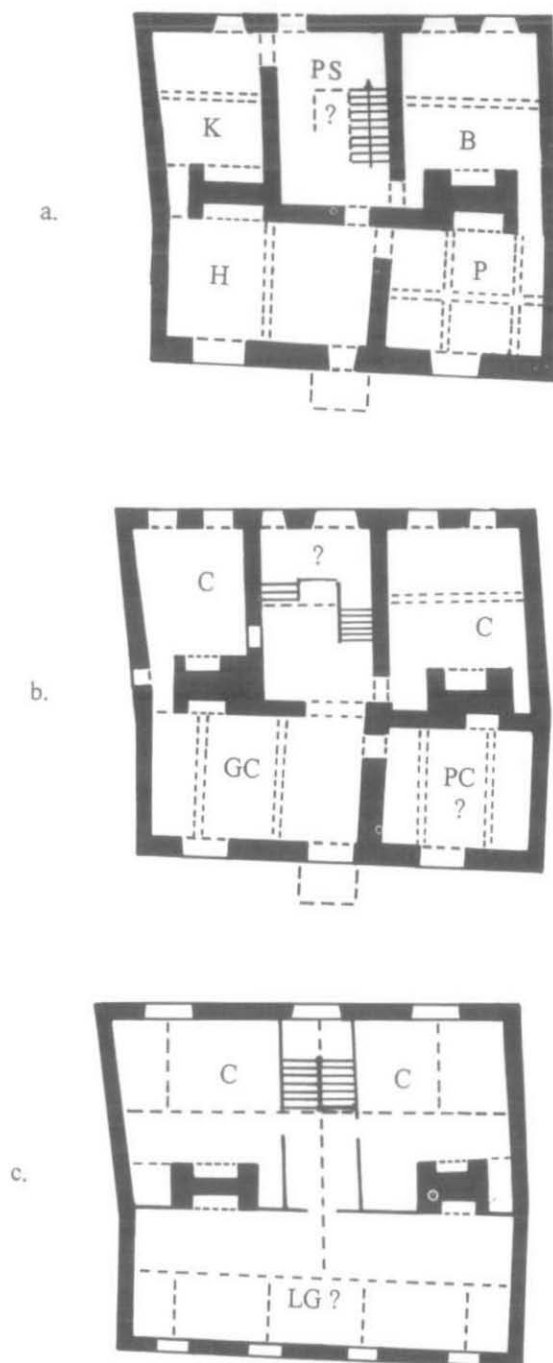


Fig. 8. Conjectured reconstruction of 17th-century floor plans: a. ground floor; b. first floor; c. second floor (H = Hall; P = Parlour; K = Kitchen; B = Buttery; PS = Principal Staircase; C = Chamber; GC = Great Chamber; PC = Principal Chamber; LG = Long Gallery) (drawn by I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

Room G4

The form of this room reflects the plan of a medieval hall, with a quasi screens passage leading across the E. end of the room between the principal entrance and a door to the central stair in the rear range. At the opposite end, a large fireplace faces an imposing window. This layout leads to the identification of this room as the hall of Thomas Browne's house.

The fine fireplace at the W. end of the N. wall was blocked up during the 1795-1800 building work and the flue dismantled (Fig. 9). This was replaced in this room by a brick chimney stack and fireplace centrally placed on the W. wall. The late 18th century saw the introduction of coal as fuel, which required substantially smaller fireplaces. The old stack, which would also have housed the flue of the original kitchen range in the S. wall of the kitchen, was totally removed, and the old fireplace blocked up. The blocked 17th-century fireplace, with a large chamfered oak bressumer, was discovered during damp-proofing work in 1993, together with fragments of painted wall plaster above and a possible spice cupboard or aumbry to the E. The feature was then covered again until 1999.⁴⁹

The width of the fireplace can be estimated at c. 2.2 m. though it was truncated at its W. end by a door in the mid 20th century.⁵⁰ The surviving E. chamfer stop of the bressumer was elegantly carved, but several successive layers of paint were visible, the last of which was a pale duck egg blue, showing that the bressumer and interior face of the fireplace had originally been painted (Fig. 11h). The elm-lined spice cupboard, recessed into the wall to the E. of the fireplace, was very damaged. It had a single recessed shelf, and perhaps originally an elaborately carved door.

Only a small fragmented area of the wall painting survived *in situ*, so it was plastered over following conservation (Fig. 10).⁵¹ The design was in the form of a linear frieze of blue/green fleurs-de-lys on a cream background, bordered above and below with the same colour. Fragments of mottled red/brown plaster, perhaps forming a mock panelled design, were also found. There is no evidence to show whether these two designs were contemporary or whether the fleurs-de-lys pattern, very popular in the 1620s following the marriage of Charles I and Henrietta Maria of France, had superseded the mock panelling more common in the earlier 17th century.⁵²

The 17th-century window almost certainly occupied the same substantial recess now taken up by the large 18th-century window at the W. end of the S. wall (GW1). A central vertical box-sash panel of 3 x 4 lights is flanked at each side by a fixed panel of 1 x 4 lights, taking the form of a Venetian window without the arched element above. The earlier window would however have been set lower in the wall, but no further evidence of it was uncovered. The smaller E. window is a later insertion. The sash construction and 6 large rectangular panes suggest that the window is of late 19th- or early 20th-century date. A blocked doorway to the E. of the wall cupboard was probably inserted at much the same date.

The 'gothick' arched door leading N. into G6 forms part of the late 18th-century refurbishment, when the 17th-century hall was sub-divided into the housekeeper's room at the W. end and the tradesmen's passage at the E. end. The door to the 17th-century parlour, G3, may well be in its original position in the E. wall.

⁴⁹ Grundon (1999), op. cit. note 6.

⁵⁰ Grundon (2000), op. cit. note 7.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Rosier, op. cit. note 3.



Fig. 9. Fireplace and cupboard in Room G4 (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

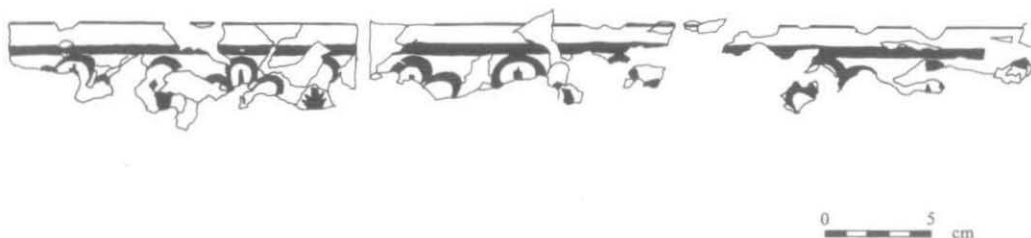


Fig. 10. Drawing of wall painting above fireplace in Room G4 (after C. Rosier, 1993. Fletcher's House Archive).

Four stone steps descend into the room from Park Street. In the latter half of the 20th century, these steps were re-surfaced with a thin screed of concrete. At the same time, the steps were augmented by the addition of a circular quadrant of cast concrete between the W. side of the original steps and the S. wall. When the added concrete structure was removed, the four earlier worked stone steps were revealed. The upper treads of these steps, beneath the screed, may represent an earlier re-surfacing (of *c.* 0.15 m.) of the blocks beneath, which are differently tooled.

The N.-S. main beam that bisects the ceiling is a massive timber (Beam 1). It is simply chamfered and the stops are damaged. Although no joists survive, there is enough to suggest that the ceiling framing was much simpler than that in Room G3 next door to the E., implying that the parlour was the more elaborate room of the two. The joist mortises in the beam suggest a high standard of joinery, akin to that displayed in Room G3, but more subdued, and the framing may well have been a visible feature in this room.

Although the function of the hall had greatly changed by the early 17th century, it was still an important reception room from which any visitor would gain their first impression of the wealth and status of the family, as indicated by the wall painting and spice cupboard.

Room G3

The carving of the beams – the finest surviving in the house – suggests that this was originally a fine room, probably the parlour (Fig. 11d). The quality of the furnishings listed in Joan Browne's inventory of 1624 for her parlour suggest that, in her eyes, the parlour was more important than the hall. These included 'one yellow coverlet, one joined peartree chair, six new turkeywork cushions & a little stool, one yellow rug... [and] glasses in the cupboard'.⁵³ As it was entered solely from the hall (G4) to the W., its position in the house's hierarchy can be judged to be higher than that of the hall.

The moulded ceiling frame is the only 17th-century feature to survive in this room. The generous use of wood was a symbol of status as much as the quality of the moulding. Two main N.-S. beams (Beams 10 and 11) are crossed by two shorter E.-W. beams (Beams 12 and 13). A further beam (Beam 14) was removed in 1795-1800 to insert the brick chimney stack in the E. wall, but the peg holes still remain in Beam 11 to indicate that it was there.

The generous window recess may be an indication that the original 17th-century window was in the same position as the much larger surviving 18th-century one. However, the 1777 engraving showing Fletcher's House (Fig. 3) depicts two windows at ground floor level E. of the entrance porch. This may be supported by the arrangement of the ceiling beams, as a window lintel or other structural timber doubled up as a support for the axial beams of the ceiling frame wherever possible. This was not only for the sake of economy but also of structural integrity in a building of coursed rubble limestone. The uncomfortable position of the N.-S. axial beam of the ceiling in relation to the present window, hanging off-centre in front of the window and bolted to the new lintel, is evidence enough that a rather inadequate adaptation was undertaken in the 18th century to achieve the desired result. The appearance that was important, however, was the external one.

The S. wall of the room appears to have been re-faced with brick about 270 mm. in thickness. This may well have been done to cover the too obvious scars of the blocked window, or some other 17th-century feature such as panelling. A similar strategy was carried out in limestone on the N. wall. It is clear from the limits of the late 18th-century flagstone floor, uncovered following removal of a bitumen damp proof membrane, that the re-facing of both N. and S. walls was carried out when the flagstones were laid. Two wooden niches in the re-faced N. wall are later insertions.

Archaeological evidence beneath the flagstone floor at the foot of the N. wall established that the wall had been re-faced to hide the scars of the 17th-century fireplace. This fireplace had been adapted in the earlier 18th century to make it smaller and more efficient. The brick firebox, full of coke, was located sealed beneath the flagstone floor where the door to the corridor G9 now is. A quantity of fine wall plaster fragments in varying pale colours was found beneath the flagstone floor around and within the disused fireplace, some pieces showing evidence of simple moulding. This debris very probably represents the demise of the earlier fireplace, sealed by the flagstone floor. However, it was not its inefficiency that led to the final demolition of the E. chimney stack, for it had clearly been adapted to take coal. It was its position in relation to the E. extension built in 1795-1800 that made its retention impossible. It would have made access clumsy between the old house and the new extension, detracting from the design of the latter.

⁵³ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 5/2/9.

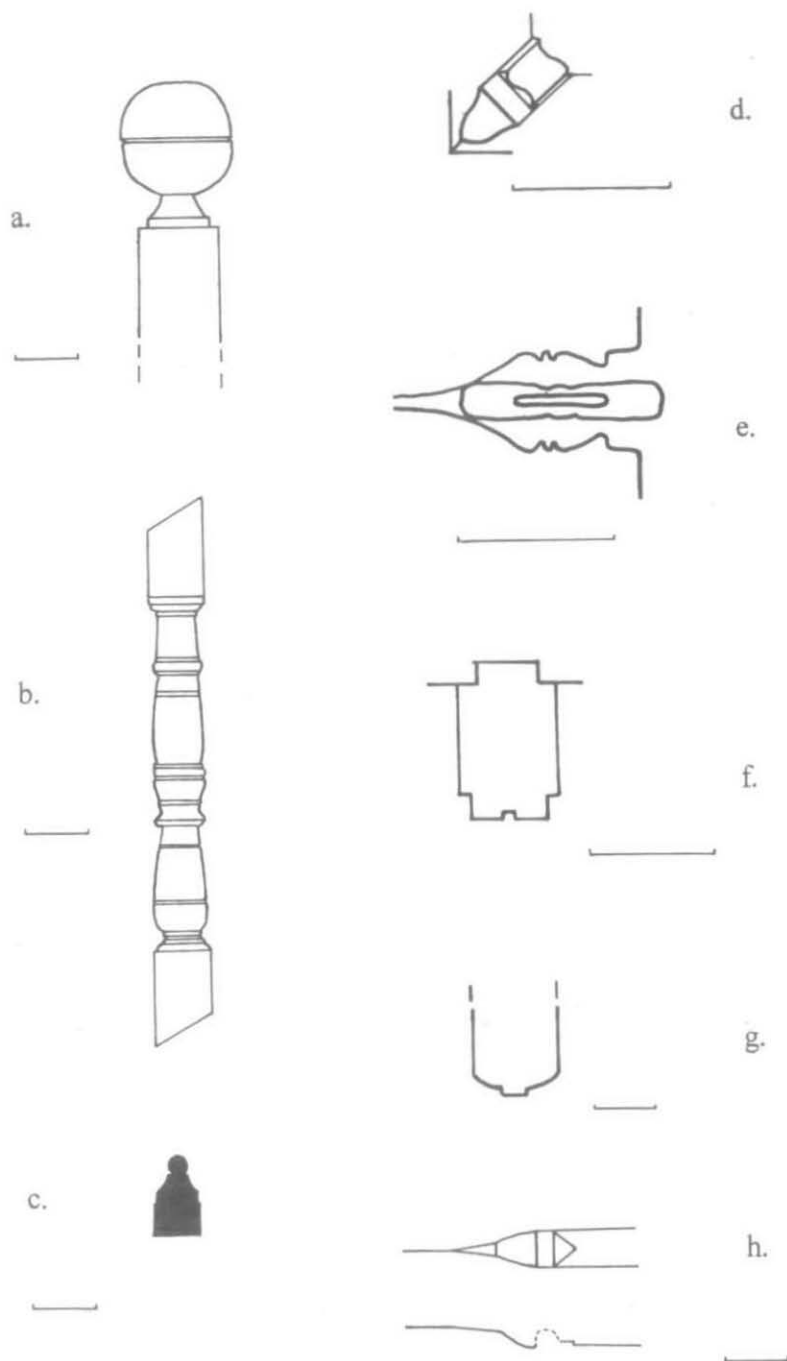


Fig. 11. 17th-century architectural details (all scales represent 100 mm.): a. newel post of staircase; b. turned baluster of staircase; c. section of handrail; d. chamfer moulding and stop of beams in Room G3; e. latch of window FW11; f. moulding of mullion, FW11; g. moulding of small window in F6; h. chamfer stop of fireplace bressumer in Room G4 (drawn by I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

The room was radically reduced in status when the house was altered in 1795. The design plan for the refurbishment showed that Room G3 was to be subdivided to form a servants' hall to the W. and a butler's pantry to the E.⁵⁴ Though not carried out exactly according to the design plan, the room was subdivided with a narrow brick partition of no more than a brick thick. The rectangular flagstones of the new floor were laid after the partition was built and aligned differently on either side of it, leading to a messy job at the foot of the partition. Moreover, the partition itself was constructed so that it cut the light from the window not quite down the middle. The large new window was no more designed for the benefit of the butler and servants than that in Room G4 had been for the housekeeper. Two new brick fireplaces were inserted to serve each of the new rooms, one on the E. wall and one on the W. One designed to go at the W. end of the N. wall was never built and may have been the designer's attempt to avoid entirely dismantling the limestone stack.

It was not possible to ascertain what the 17th-century flooring would have been at ground floor level. It may have been tiling or flagstones but no evidence has survived in any of the rooms for anything earlier than the 1795-1800 building phase. However, a medieval pit was found immediately beneath the flagstone floor, cut by the earlier N. wall in Room G3. Although only a small sample of the pit could be excavated within the constraints of the watching brief, a reasonable quantity of pottery was recovered which was found to date from the latter half of the 12th century.⁵⁵

By the 1920s, the partition wall and the W. fireplace had been removed. A new door to Park Street was inserted to serve the room, which was then in use as a solicitor's office independent of the rest of the house. By the 1930s this had become the kitchen with a sink in front of the window, and a cupboard built over the now obsolete door and stairs from Park Street.

Room G5 (Fig. 7)

This room has been the kitchen since 1614, though its present shape and form date from the late 18th century. Of the three overhead beams, beam 3 is the one that defines the size of the original 17th-century kitchen, being the original axial ceiling beam. The ends of this simply chamfered beam have been lost to later 18th-century features, so there are no chamfer stops visible. The joists that were attached to it have now gone, but their ghosts remain in the southern E.-W. beam (beam 4), which was inserted to carry the joists when the 17th-century limestone chimney stack was removed. It is clear from the mortises cut into this secondary beam for the pre-existing joists that the 17th-century framing was not replaced. The smaller central mortises cut into it were for the short bridging pieces used generally to link a trimmer beam and a wall. The reinforcing trimmer beam would originally have supported the substantial weight of a hearthstone in the room above, but was kept as part of the floor framing even when there was no longer a fireplace above. Beam 4 also marks the N. edge of the old chimney stack which, together with the surviving fireplace in Room G4, gives an original width for the stack of c. 2.4 m. (approx. 8 ft.) at ground and first floor level. The secondary beam, beam 4, is broadly chamfered at its W. end, with an equally large chamfer stop, but is clearly a re-used part of an older beam.

During investigation at the S. end of the room beneath the 18th-century flagstone floor, a considerable spread of limestone rubble was found to cover the remains of a limestone structure. This deposit of rubble was sealed by what was proved to be the late 18th-century

⁵⁴ Blenheim Muniments, shelf G1, Box 8, Walker Correspondence, 1794.

⁵⁵ Grundon (2000), *op. cit.* note 7.

working surface. The space available for investigation was necessarily small, but clay between these stones, which appeared to be deliberately laid, was found in places to have been reddened by heat. The area available was too limited to be sure of any floor surface associated with it. The structure was too far forward to represent the inner hearth, which could explain why there was little other obvious evidence of burning. Nonetheless, given the evidence elsewhere that there was a stack here, it is possible to assume that this structure was part of it.

The presence of such a substantial stone structure at the S. end of the kitchen would have made the 17th-century kitchen considerably smaller than now. But it was also made narrower by the presence of a stone wall enclosing the E. edge of the room, the footings of which were found in limited excavation beneath the 18th-century flagstone floor. When this wall was demolished in the 18th century along with the stack, it too was replaced by an overhead beam (beam 2). This enormous N.-S. beam follows the same alignment as the wall footings beneath, and was inserted to carry the beams previously carried by the wall. The most important of these were the axial beam of the old kitchen (beam 3), and the E.-W. beam that supported the 17th-century staircase at first floor level (beam 5).

The old kitchen was always rather dark, being north-facing. The present large sash window, consisting of three panels of 3 x 4 lights each, represents successive attempts to lighten the gloom of this dimly lit room. The position of the original 17th-century window is indicated by the splayed recess beneath the W. end of the window. The width of the splay suggests that this was a two-light window. In two subsequent phases, the window was enlarged to the size it now is. In the 18th century, when the room was enlarged, the window was modernised and widened to form a double sash window with a central wall prop to support the window lintel where it too had been extended. This is the westernmost and more delicate of the two props. The large overhead beam, beam 2, was put in at the same time, and probably rested on the new, longer window lintel. Then, at some time in the 19th century, the window was enlarged again with the addition of the E. section, which raised the problem of how the main ceiling beam should be supported, hence the insertion of a solid vertical prop for that purpose. The evidence of metal brackets, vertical acroprops and other such reinforcements up to the present day shows that replacing the stone wall with beam 2 was structurally inadvisable.

During investigation of the N. façade of the house outside Room G5, two dressed quoin stones, worked to receive render, were noted beneath the E. section of the window (Fig. 5). They face E. but do not tally with the present position of the rear door. The removal of the external wooden surround of the door revealed that some of the upright quoin stones at its W. edge were set to serve a door to the W. of the existing one. The style of these quoin stones strongly suggests that this blocked door was contemporary with all the dressed stone on the N. façade, dating to the 17th-century build of the house. This door also had a splayed opening similar to that of the 17th-century kitchen window. Although situated in the extreme NE. corner of what is now G5, this door was originally on the E. side of the old stone wall. Situated beneath the old staircase it linked the original kitchen passage to the back yard, offset from the principal entrance and 'screens passage' to be less obvious to visitors being taken upstairs. The position of this door became inconvenient following the remodelling of the kitchen, passage and lower service staircase during the 1795-1800 refurbishment of Fletcher's House, and was blocked to allow the opening of the new door just to the E. of it.

The new enlarged 18th-century kitchen was given a new brick stack in the centre of the W. wall, and a fine flagstone floor. A narrow line of repairs in the flagstones, running roughly S. from the E. window strut, directly beneath the large N.-S. beam (beam 2) indicated that at some date a brick partition had been inserted to give further support to the overhead

beam. The kitchen was now something to boast of, and was described in an auction catalogue in 1836 as an 'excellent kitchen, fitted up with hot plate, smoke Jack, coppers etc'.⁵⁶ A new wing of service buildings was also added in 1795 to the NW. corner of the house, and a door inserted which led directly from the kitchen to the new scullery and larder. Both rooms were paved with similar flagstones to those in the kitchen.⁵⁷

In 1924, when the house was again up for auction, the kitchen was described as having 'ample cupboard accommodation, a double oven, Eagle Range and gas stove'.⁵⁸ The attached scullery now had running hot and cold water with a glazed sink. A kitchen dresser filled the W. wall to the S. of the range, while the introduction of stairs to the first floor from G4 blocked the door that had probably been inserted to give direct access for the housekeeper to the kitchen. It was enclosed to become a cupboard under the stairs for preserves. However, by the 1930s the room had become too large for a modern kitchen, especially as the scullery was no longer used, and it was turned into a children's playroom. In 1947, the County Fire Service re-surfaced the kitchen and outbuildings with a bitumen damp-proof membrane called 'pitchmastic'. The recent lifting of this surface revealed the flagstone floor beneath, which had first been noted when the once adjoining scullery and larder (converted by the museum to a toilet block) were demolished.⁵⁹ On both sides of the connecting door there were signs of considerable wear and frequent repair, as there were in front of the 18th-century fireplace.

Passage G6 (Fig. 7)

This space consists of the passage to the garden and cellar and the service or 'back' stair leading up to the first floor. In its present form it dates to the 1795-1800 phase of building, and the elegant design of the stair reflects in cheaper wood the grander stone and iron principal stair in the new E. wing (G10/F2). The 1960s partition wall that separated this space from the old kitchen (G5) was replaced during the current building works with a timber and glass partition. Very little of 17th-century date survives in this space. However, the footings of the stone wall that bounded its W. edge and the doorway to the back yard give an idea of the original dimensions, corroborated by evidence on the beam that supports the surviving flights of the 17th-century staircase at first floor level. As it relates to the original arrangement of this ground floor stair lobby, it is dealt with here.

Beam 5 now rests on beam 2 where it would once have been set into the demolished stone wall. This beam, as well as supporting the first floor flight of the 17th-century staircase, carried the joists for the first floor landing of the same date. On both the N. and S. sides of beam 5 the pegged mortises for these joists go right up to the wall line (now beam 2), *c.* 1.5 m. further W. of the existing stud partition. The original landing was therefore wider than now. The joists also show that it extended further N., for the size of the mortises suggests that the joists were of similar dimensions to those surviving on the landing S. of beam 5.

In 1795-1800, both the kitchen passage and the landing above were narrowed. It would clearly have been ridiculous to have a staircase of such size taking up so much space as a service stair. The 18th-century stud partition sits along the line of one of the earlier joists. On the S. side of beam 5, all the joists survive *in situ* where the present landing is, marked with the crude 17th-century joiners' number system that contrasts greatly with the neater

⁵⁶ Bodl. GA Fol. B71 Auction fl 56.

⁵⁷ Grundon (1998), *op. cit.* note 6.

⁵⁸ Bodl. GA Oxon. C224 (14), Auction Cat.

⁵⁹ Grundon (1998), *op. cit.* note 6.

Roman numerals visible on carpentry of 18th-century date in the house. On the N. side of the beam, W. of the 17th-century stair, the joists were ripped out. Three of the mortises were re-used for joists of considerably smaller scantling in the construction of the 18th-century stair.

This passage was at the heart of the service end of the 18th-century house, and the undecorated ceiling contrasts with the moulded cornice on the ceiling of the 'corridor', G9. However, two doors do provide an element of ornament, which was perhaps more of a nod to current fashion than a consideration of the servants' aesthetic sensibilities. The passage is reached on the S. side through a two-centred 'gothick' type arch, where once the hall had opened on to the principal stair. The form of this arch conforms with the fashions at the time of the 1795-1800 build, and the underlying brick uncovered during stripping of the wall plaster confirmed this date, as the bricks used throughout the 18th-century building are of a uniform size. The construction of this doorway destroyed any evidence of an earlier door, but its position is without doubt 17th-century in origin. Another arch in the SE. corner of the kitchen passage, this time semicircular in form, leads through to the E.-W. passage, G9. This doorway would once have opened directly into the buttery, G7/8.

The considerable structural change that was made to this passage and lower staircase in 1795-1800 may well have extended to the cellar and its point of access. The floor of the passage is now concrete, but it is supported on a shallow brick vault of 18th-century date, which forms the ceiling of B1. Panelling beneath the 18th-century service stair encloses the steps down to the cellar, but a square hole drilled into the stone at the top of the stairs suggests that there was once merely a simple balustrade closing off these stairs, although it has not been possible to establish at what date this may have been the case. Nothing else has come to light to inform further knowledge of the 17th-century form of the central bay at this level.

Room G7/8

This room would originally have been the buttery. The 17th-century buttery was essentially a room for storage, partly for drink barrels and partly for lumber. The inventory of Joan Browne shows that she kept ladders and tubs in the buttery, as well as bunches of lath and lime that would have been used to construct the plaster and lath walls and partitions as seen in many parts of the building.⁶⁰ No features survive of the 17th-century room, except the position of the existing windows, enlarged in the 18th century. A fireplace at the S. end of the room would once have heated the room. This was dismantled in order to allow space for a corridor giving access between the old and new parts of the house. The wall separating the room from the corridor is entirely of late 18th-century brick construction. No evidence survives at floor level, as the floor framing is entirely modern.

The design drawing of 1795 shows that this was the only room to be elevated in status by the new building work, becoming a Breakfast Parlour.⁶¹ This was essentially a family room where most meals – not just breakfast – were eaten. How long it remained a Breakfast Parlour is not known, for it could also be identified as the library mentioned in the auction catalogue of 1836.⁶² Its status was reduced again by 1924, by which time it had become the Butler's Pantry, and a new set of stairs to the now divided cellars had been inserted in the SW. corner. This gave the butler sole access to the beer and wine cellars. A cupboard over

⁶⁰ Oxfordshire Archives, MS. Wills Oxon. 5/2/9.

⁶¹ Blenheim Muniments, shelf G1, Box 8, Walker Correspondence, 1794.

⁶² Bodl. GA Fol. B71 Auction fl 56.

the stairs became the housemaid's cupboard. A white glazed sink, with hot and cold running water, a draining board and stand were situated in front of the windows, and a baize-lined cupboard occupied the E. end of the S. wall, in which the silver or plate was kept. This superseded the need for the scullery, which went out of use in the 1920s.

Corridor G9

This corridor dates from the 1795-1800 phase of the building. Prior to this date, there was an internal chimney stack at this point, for which evidence was found in rooms G3, F4 and F9/10. Passage G9 was flanked to the N. by the 18th-century brick wall into Room G7/8. The 18th-century door to this room has not survived, but it was probably centrally placed, like that into room G3 and the equivalent two rooms above on the first floor.

This passage, which gave access to the Breakfast Parlour, was clearly seen as being in the 'good' part of the house. The cornice found here, although simple, is entirely absent in the kitchen passage. The position of the Butler's Pantry and Servants' Hall in such close proximity to the non-service parts of the house is unusual, but shows how difficult it was to convert a 17th-century house to the needs and fashions of the late 18th century. The corridor itself was a concept that only became common in double-pile houses in the later 17th century. In this house it was an essential ingredient for satisfactory circulation within the building. It allowed a measure of privacy that was considered unnecessary in the early 17th century, particularly from the servants and the children.

Any evidence from below floor level has been lost due to the solid concrete bedding for the late 20th-century service pipes. The substantial changes made between 1795 and 1800 to the basic structure of the original 17th-century house have made it impossible to be sure how this E. end of the house was arranged. It is known that the E. wall of the building, where it is now joined by the 18th-century E. extension, was an exterior wall, as external rendering was found on several occasions when the joining walls were knocked through. It is unknown whether there was ever a door at this end of the house, but the evidence of the small early 17th-century window in F6 shows that there may have been other windows at the E. end. The most likely positions for these are at the E. end of the corridors G9 and F11, now destroyed by the large connecting doors of the Georgian extension.

FIRST FLOOR (Fig. 12)

Of the four chambers on the first floor, it was those in the S. range, fronting Park Street, that were the two principal rooms. The staircase was the most important feature that a house could boast at this date, and particularly one so generously placed and proportioned as once was here. It was an indication to any visitor entering the house that there were significant rooms above to which such a staircase led. The primary of these was the great chamber. The size and elevated first floor position of the great chamber contributed to its status and Thomas Browne's most important guests would probably have been received in this room.

The two chambers in the N. range were smaller, and were unlikely to have fitted into the reception hierarchy of the house. Room F7 would, like the kitchen beneath it, have been smaller than now, due to the presence of the stone wall that originally marked its E. extent. The room gained a walk-in dress cupboard in the place of the W. 17th-century chimney stack. A window to the E. of the vanished stone wall gave the staircase extra light. This was blocked in the 18th century when the smaller staircase was inserted at this level. The chamber over the buttery, F9/10, gained no extra space from the removal of its chimney breast. As below, a corridor was created in its stead to allow access to a mezzanine landing in the new E. wing.

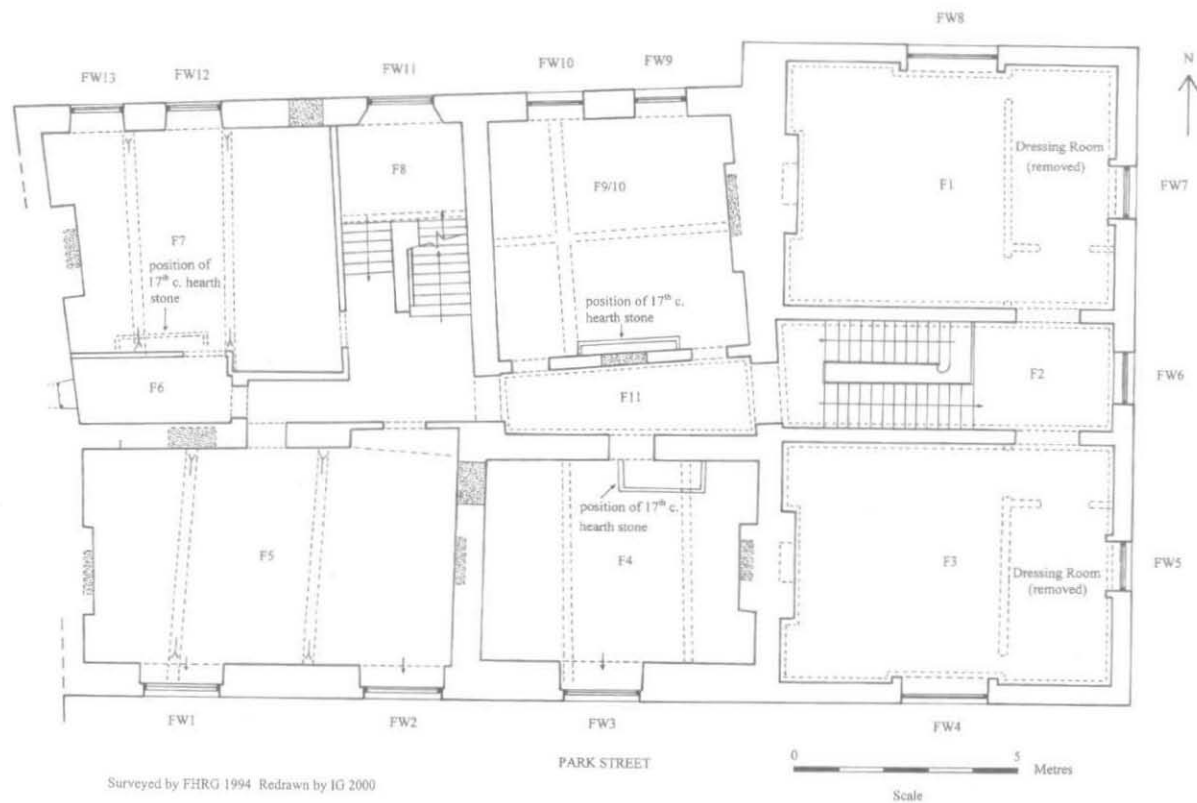


Fig. 12. First floor plan (Fletcher's House Archive).

The surviving N.-S. stone spine wall again formed the division line between the service and the 'good' part of the 18th-century house, and on both levels was eventually fitted with green baize doors. The children of course occupied the service end of the house.

Rooms F5 and F6

Room F5 reflected the layout of the hall (G4) above which it is situated. Being on the first floor it had in both senses a more elevated position in the hierarchy of the 17th-century house. The chamfered beams with elegant stops at either end of these help to indicate the status of the room, but they are all that remain visible of what was probably a very fine room.

Like the hall, it was heated by a fireplace at the W. end of the N. wall. This had been blocked in the 18th century but was uncovered during the recent renovation work (Fig. 13). Though smaller than the fireplace in the hall, its worked stone surround suggests that it was the more expensively built of the two. The stone lintel was in two parts and the stone quoins appeared shabbily chiselled, but this was damage caused to apply plaster after the blocking. This stonework and some of the surrounding coursed rubble masonry had been roughly painted with a black/brown paint or render. Holes in the freestone were blocked with wooden pegs at either end of the lintel. This, together with the rough paintwork around the fireplace, may suggest that there was at one time some kind of applied, probably wooden, mantelpiece or surround on this fireplace. The rest of the wall would have been rendered, as can be seen by the rebating of the faces of quoins of the fireplace, but there was no evidence of further decorative paintwork such as that found in the hall below (G4).

At first glance it appears that the large 18th-century windows have masked any evidence of the original 17th-century window positions. However, the similarity of form between this room and the hall, and the fact that the windows are not entirely symmetrical within the room or the façade, suggests that they are in the same positions. The E. window is situated opposite the fireplace, as in the hall, and the awkward position of the beam hanging above it shows that it has been enlarged. The E. window is hard up against the central stone spine wall, which is directly above the principal entrance to the hall. This E. window then is where the recess above the two-storey porch depicted in the engraving of 1777 would have been (Fig. 3).

The W. 17th-century chimney stack occupied the larger part of the cupboard space F6. When the thick wall plaster, damaged by the removal of old museum exhibits, was removed to reveal the fireplace, a straight joint became visible to the W. of the fireplace. This indicated that there had once been a narrow recess or cupboard to the W. of the chimneybreast, and explained the earlier discovery of a small window, long thought to be merely a recess, high up in the W. wall of F6 (Fig. 14). This tiny window, not much more than a foot square, had been covered up with plaster and lath, presumably when it was rendered obsolete by the construction in the mid 19th century of the building next door to the W. The window, of undoubtedly early date, with ovolo-moulded wooden surround and hand-blown diamond leaded lights, tied with lead strips to a central diamond stave, has survived remarkably well and has been left on display at the museum (Fig. 11g). It would never have provided a great deal of light, but sufficient perhaps for a small cupboard.

The original 17th-century door to this chamber would without doubt have been that at the E. end of the room, centred on both the staircase and the recess above the porch. Whether this was ever as wide as the present gap in the stone wall is not known, but it is quite possible that the plaster and lath partition that was inserted to make it narrower is of 18th-century date.

A blocked doorway at the N. end of the E. wall once led directly from this great chamber to what was probably the principal bedchamber. This was blocked when access was opened from the new corridor, F11, and access direct from room F5 was deemed to be no longer



Fig. 13. Fireplace in Room F5 (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).



Fig. 14. Small window in Room F6 (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

desirable. During the reorganisation of the house in 1795-1800, room F5 was divided in two and new fireplaces inserted at both the E. and W. ends of the room. The W. end became a day nursery, with a smaller nanny's room at the E. end. In the 1920s an extra stair from the ground floor was inserted in the E. subdivision, but was removed in the late 1940s.

Its reduced status was emphasised further by closing off the W. rooms and service stair with a green baize door within the arch, creating a back landing which was thenceforth separate from the main part of the house. This served to maintain the privacy and peace of the household, and reflects the Victorian insistence on isolating children and servants from the better end of the house.

Room F4

In the 17th century, this room was reached only from the great chamber to the W. It was described in Joan Browne's inventory as the 'chamber over the parlour', and was most likely her own bedchamber. Its contents included two feather beds, a joined chair frame with the cloth to cover it and wool that may have been to stuff the seat, a looking glass and a satin cushion.

Little survives of this date except the beams and the floor framing. It is probable that in this room, as below in room G3, that there was always a single window, but this like all the others on this S.-facing façade has been enlarged. A trimmer beam in the floor framing near the present door revealed that the original hearth stone had been on the N. side of the room, confirming the presence of the chimney stack at the E. end of the house. It was not possible in this case to remove any plaster to reveal the fireplace itself. Neither could it be established whether or not there had been a window at this end of the house comparable to that found in F6. However, an early 17th-century window hook, similar to several surviving elsewhere in the house, was found beneath the floorboards in the NE. corner of the room, which may suggest that there had been a casement window nearby.

In 1795-1800 when the chimney stack had been removed, a deep door was pierced through the old fireplace in the N. stone wall, so that the room was now accessed from the corridor. It was no longer desirable to have sequences of rooms leading off one another as it detracted from the increasingly important privacy. This door still retains its panelled surround from this period, and the quality of this work reflects the new status of the room. It is not known what it was used for immediately after the renovation, but by 1836 it had taken over room G7/8's role as the breakfast parlour. When the family were eating without guests, they would have taken their meals in this less elaborate room. By 1924 this room was the morning room-cum-family sitting room.

Few of the original 18th-century features in the room, other than the 1795 window and shutters, survive. The fireplace inserted in the E. wall to replace the 17th-century one has itself been blocked. It was once tiled with a hob grate, but this was removed to room G1 in the late 1940s. The early 19th-century flue that ran through the W. wall only served the E. part of the partitioned Room F5 to the W. rather than this room.

Corridor F11

This corridor was essential in linking the new 18th-century extension with the old house and the servants. The rooms that led off it, F4 and F9/10, were considered good rooms, if not the best. Their more regular proportions lent them more easily to the classical tradition so clearly revered in the new extension. The N. wall of the corridor F11 was brick-built and therefore, though its door was directly opposite that leading into F4, it did not have the elaborate panelling necessary to conceal the stone wall.

The presence of render or paint on the E. face of the E. wall strongly suggests that the building was freestanding on the E. side, though it is not known how closely it overlooked

the widow Fletcher's house. But whether there was any fenestration on this façade is unlikely ever to be known, as the large semicircular-arched connecting doors inserted in the late 18th century have probably destroyed any possible earlier openings.

As in the corridor below, G9, the difference in status can be seen between this corridor and the back stair, by the presence of a simple moulded cornice.

Room F7

This room was probably one of the bedchambers in Thomas Browne's house. Like the kitchen below it, it was much narrower before the stone wall that once marked its E. extent was demolished to make the kitchen larger and the staircase narrower. The evidence in the floor beam (beam 4) for a hearthstone and consequently a fireplace at the S. end of the room has been explained above (Room G5). The space resulting from the removal of the chimney stack was converted into a walk-in dress cupboard attached to this chamber.

The two windows are curiously offset within the N. wall. Both are shown by the stonework of the N. exterior façade to be in the same positions as the 17th-century windows. Originally the two surviving W. windows were symmetrically placed within the room. The now vanished E. stone wall of the room was about 0.6 m. to the E. of the E. window. Beyond this wall to the E., a smaller window, now blocked, once lit part of the much larger 17th-century staircase (Figs. 5 & 12).

The low ceiling was supported on two simply chamfered beams. A modern partition wall now supports the S. ends of these beams, and the chamfers at their S. ends indicate that they were made to respect this S. limit. This does not however imply that they are 17th-century beams that once rested on the defunct chimney breast. The shallow, unelaborated chamfers and the joinery of the joists which they support all suggest that this framing is entirely 18th-century in date. The form of joint used is identical to that found in the service stair which is undoubtedly part of the 1795-1800 work.

Room F9/10

This room too was probably a bedchamber in the 17th century. Its two windows are both 18th-century in form, but in their earlier positions. Like all the windows in Fletcher's House, the original internal splays reached down to floor level. Evidence from rooms F7, F9/10 and the lower stair case window of F8, showed that these window splays were plastered in the 17th century. This survives under the late 18th-century panelling and shutter housing. There was no evidence of any design scheme in the painting. The fireplace was originally at the S. end of the room, and again a trimmer beam survives in the floor framing to prove this. The corridor, F11, replaced this in the 18th century. It is likely that the original entrance to the room was alongside the stack where the semicircular arch divided the good end of the corridor from the nursery landing. There was no evidence of a blocked door on the W. wall of the present room.

After the construction of the E. wing in 1795, room F9/F10 was used as a third bedroom. Though not as substantial as the principal bedrooms in the new wing (F1 and F3), this room did have a good aspect over the gardens. At some point, probably in the early 20th century, the room was divided into two to enable a bathroom to be put in. It is not known at what date the bathroom and WC were established on the back stair landing, but it was likely to be some time in the 19th century. Prior to this date it is not clear what the sanitary arrangements of the house were. It was not uncommon in Woodstock for waste to be disposed of into cracks and fissures in the limestone on which the town stands. One former well, found in the grounds during an archaeological watching brief, was clearly converted to such a use, but it has so far been difficult to say more about its date than that it was in use for waste purposes from at least the early 19th century.

Staircase F8/S10

The position of the staircase in the central bay of the N. range was typical of the late 16th- and early 17th-century double-pile house plan. The staircase at this date was one of the most important features of a house, and this was probably true also of Thomas Browne's new house. It was quite usual for such an imposing staircase to reach right to the top of the house, whether or not there were any rooms of importance on the second floor. It was also quite usual to maintain the same style of stair all the way up.

At Fletcher's House, the upper two flights, between the first and second floors, are all that have survived, so a description of the 17th-century staircase should start here (Fig. 15). The staircase is a fairly sober example, solidly constructed in oak with square newel posts surmounted by a ball finial, turned balusters, carved handrail and broad elm treads, all held together with pegs (Figs. 11a-c).

The landing between these two flights, though not as broad as the 18th-century one below, is generous enough. Well-lit by a triple-light mullion and transom window (SW5) with carved wooden surrounds in tramline form, the landing was given additional light from a dormer window high up in the central gable (Fig. 11f). This would have emphasised the imposing height of the stair bay. This stair window, and the identically proportioned one on the landing below (FW11), were the largest on the N. side of the house. Enhanced further by the upper gable window, they show the importance of light in early 17th-century interiors, as typified by the paintings of Dutch interiors of the period. The staircase was after all the *pièce de résistance* of the house, and only when well-lit could it be shown off to advantage, particularly being on the darker N. side of the house. Both the window and the view from it were to be enjoyed while standing or passing, as the sill is set at chest height.



Fig. 15. The 17th-century staircase (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

Thomas Browne may even have been able to look down on his malt house by the river from this window.

These windows were of a far higher quality than the small light discovered in F6. The square panes of window SW5 are of a paler, more transparent glass than the almost opaque green diamond panes of the less significant window. The old-fashioned wooden diamond stave is here replaced with slender vertical metal saddle-bars with delicate spearhead ends nailed to the frame, to which the glazing panels of square came are tied with lead wire. The lower panel of the central light is a side-hung casement with its original hinges, twisted hook stay, figure-of-eight turnbuckle, and tulip leaf handle (Fig. 11e).

The stone quoins of the window below, FW11, show that this was originally of identical proportions to the one described above. The 17th-century level and form of the stair or landing in relation to this window is not known, but it would appear from the plastered recess revealed beneath the sill level that it was a 'walk-in' window common to the first and second floor rooms of the house. It is set very low in comparison to the chest height sill of window SW5 above. This may have been so that those ascending the stair were shown a view of the garden and the country beyond at the earliest opportunity, for at this date the aspect of a house was almost as important as its interior.

Such a staircase was an important symbol of wealth and status, eloquently hinting at the presence of significant chambers above. The width of the staircase, generously spaced at ground and first floor levels within a whole bay of the N. range, showed that the house was of a size where it could accommodate such a lavish use of space for access to upper floors. Even between first and second floor level, it was generous enough in its proportions to accommodate easily the broad-skirted costume of the period.

In 1795-1800, when this stair became the service stair, the uppermost gable window was blocked (Fig. 15). The glass and frame were removed and the window was blocked with brick flush with the exterior façade, with only a plastered recess visible on the inside. It was then decided at some later date to lower the ceiling by some 30 cm. and so the recess was blocked with stone to carry a ceiling beam. The new flat ceiling was plastered over and the old gable window hidden in the roof space. What the ceiling arrangement was prior to this, and how the ceiling rose to include the central gable, is difficult to judge from the surviving evidence. The lower flights of the 17th-century stair were dismantled. It has already been shown from the joist mortises cut into beam 5 that the lower landing was originally broader, extending further N. and W. than is now the case (see *Passage G6*). The small blocked window at first floor level may once have lit a small intermediate landing at a turn in the stair, but there is not enough evidence to speculate further on the appearance or form of the 17th-century principal stair.

The 18th-century stair was more delicate, with narrower treads, and a larger area of landing between ground and first floor levels. At some point in the 19th century, two small cubicles containing a small water closet and a bath were built on this landing. This may account for the slight narrowing with brick of window FW11, to ensure greater privacy. The bricks conform to the standard used in the 1795-1800 build, but when exactly this use of the landing as a bathroom originated is not known. It is not impossible that it was there in some form in the very early 19th century, for the use of the children as much as the servants. This function survived well into the present century and when the shutters were recently adapted a cupboard was found behind them, containing a loofah brush and antique bottles from a local chemist store.

THE SECOND FLOOR (Fig. 16)

The S. range at second floor level has been greatly altered by the lowering of the roof in 1795-1800 in order to hide it behind the parapet. It was the fashion in the 18th and early 19th century to appear to have a flat roof after the Italian style, although it was entirely impractical in England to have it as a reality. The original pitch of the roof would have been similar to that in the N. range, but being narrower, it needed four gabled dormer windows as opposed to three on the N. range.

The engraving of 1777 depicts the original 17th-century frontage of the S. range (Fig. 3). It had four good-sized contiguous gabled dormers, smaller and closer together than those on the larger N. range, but similar in appearance. This was a common feature of late 16th- and early 17th-century buildings developed in houses where the roof line was parallel to the street. These dormers greatly increased the usable area 'from an awkward triangular cockloft into a full story with adequate head-room'.⁶³

In the N. range, two rooms would probably have flanked the central stair at second floor level in the 17th-century. It can be seen from the framing of the stair at this level that the original door positions are still in use. Both the chimney stacks would have risen through this level also, passing through what is now S6 and S2. As it is likely that this is the house with 12 hearths at the time of the 1662 hearth tax, it must be assumed that there were four fireplaces also at this level.⁶⁴

Room S3/S4/S5

This room was until recently divided into three. A modern partition wall was removed in 1999, turning S4 and S5 into a single room. This leaves the N.-S. spine wall between S3 and S4/5 as the only division of this upper floor of the S. range. No other internal stone wall in the house rises above the floorboards of the second floor. The only reason that it does in this case is because it carries the 18th-century flue that served rooms G3 and the E. end of F5, to the capped chimney above in the roof space. It is very unlikely that it did so in the 17th century. There is no evidence to suggest then that there were any earlier divisions of the upper floor of the S. range, which leads to the conclusion that this room formed a long gallery.

It was not unusual in a house of this type to have such a gallery. There is a similar example of 1620, Red Hall at Bourne in Lincolnshire. Though rather more ornate on the exterior it is very similar in plan.⁶⁵ The builder of Red Hall was a man of yeoman stock whose success raised him to the gentry. In his fine new house he included a long gallery at the top of the front range, but perhaps his social aspirations outstripped his worldliness, for he used it merely to store cheeses. It is hard to think of Thomas Browne being similarly naïve as to the accepted functions of his new house. The long gallery developed as a place where exercise could be taken when bad weather denied the use of the garden. Indoor games were played in such galleries, although sadly no 17th-century shuttlecocks were found beneath the floorboards as at Chastleton. Nonetheless, it says much about Browne and how completely he took to heart the new compact, double-pile form of house, in all its details and pretensions.

If there were four fireplaces at second floor level, then this long gallery would have been heated by a fireplace at each end. The stacks would have risen to the roof through what is

⁶³ W.A. Pantin, 'The Development of Domestic Architecture in Oxford', *Antiq. Jnl.* xxvii (1947), 143.

⁶⁴ *V.C.H. Oxon.* xii, 350.

⁶⁵ Cooper, *op. cit.* note 48, pp. 146-8.

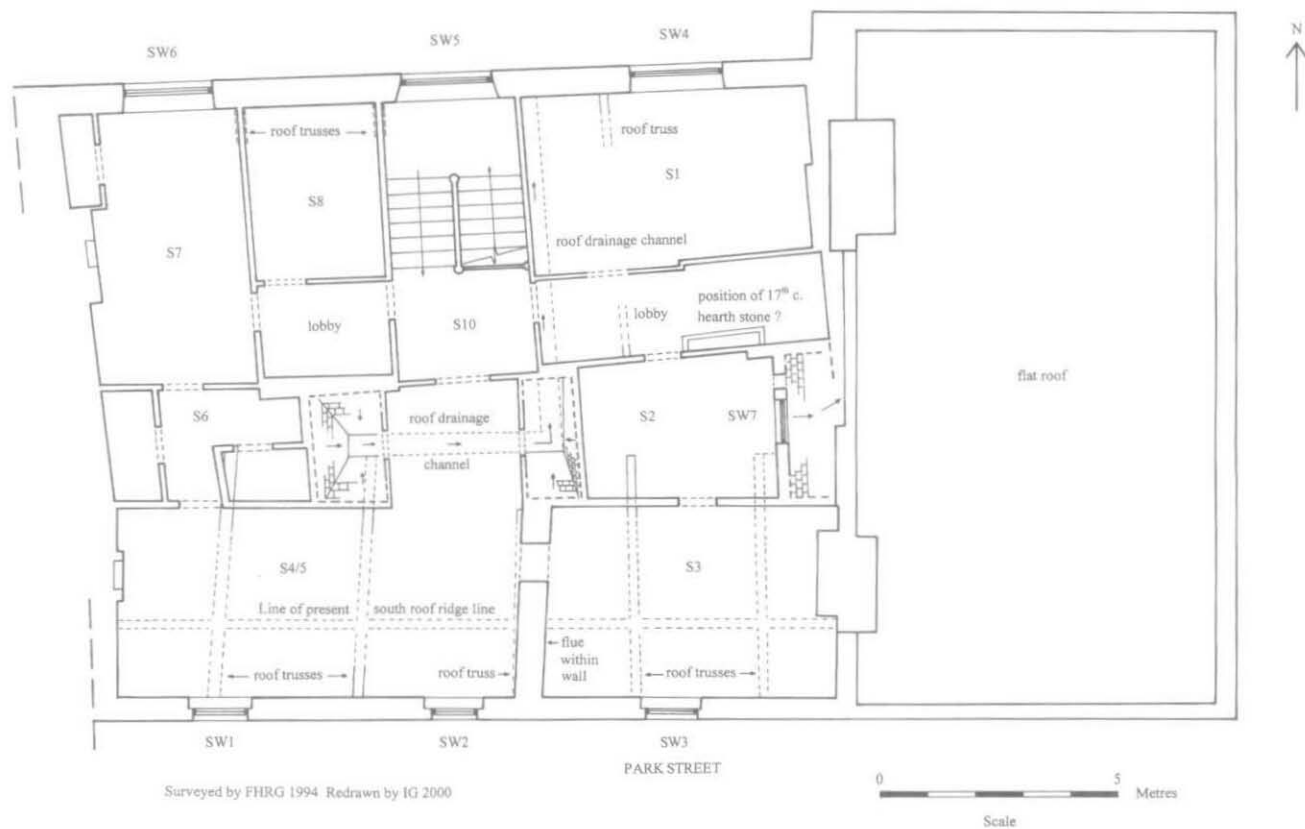


Fig. 16. Second floor plan (Fletcher's House Archive).

now S6/S7 at the W. end of the house and S2 at the E. end. In both rooms, S. of the E.-W. transverse wall which would have constituted the S. face of any flue, the floor framing is a patchwork of small lengths of joist, which could feasibly have been part of the reinforcement for a hearth stone.

No obvious features of the 17th-century gallery survive. When the flues were removed in 1795-1800, the larger area available was subdivided with stud partitions. The floor joists, which had clearly sagged a great deal, were made level with reused bits of wood. Some of these were taken from old axial beams, or had chamfered edges. But two of these pieces were parts of two moulded door frames which showed a very elaborate moulding, similar to that which can be seen on the window lintels of the 'Ancient House' in Woodstock (20 High Street). Although there is no guarantee that these pieces originally came from Fletcher's House, it is certain that the 18th-century renovation work led to the removal of a substantial quantity of the 17th-century interior furnishings of this house, and it would have made economic sense to reuse waste in the house.

The three windows that look out on Park Street are small 18th-century sash windows, replacing the four dormer windows. The principal rafters are still visible at many points in this room, but it can be seen within the roof space that the angle of these has been radically altered by shortening the northern principal rafters. The 1836 auction catalogue describes the second floor as having eight chambers, three of them good ones.⁶⁶

Rooms S6, S7, S8 and lobby

Eighteenth- or 19th-century subdivision has altered the form of this space. What was originally a single chamber has been divided into two rooms with a connecting lobby. Originally a triple-light gable window lit the chamber. The triple form has survived but none of the woodwork, metalwork or glazing. A modern roof light now illuminates S8. None of the 17th-century features of this space remain except the cross frame which forms the E. limit of the old chamber. If there had been a fireplace at the S. end of the room it would have been situated where S6 and S7 meet. Nothing however survives to prove or disprove this, as the framing of the floor strongly suggests that this floor was completely replaced in the 18th century. The joints of joists and beams are of the same type as found on the 18th-century stair at first floor level, and the carpentry marks are far more neatly classical.

The room was subdivided with a stud partition between S7 and S8, and tongue and groove panelling between S8 and the lobby connecting both rooms with the staircase. The form of the doors also supports a 19th-century date. Only room S7 was heated, by a small brick fireplace on the W. side of the room. It is very likely that these rooms were used for servants' quarters in the 19th century, and a quantity of sewing materials were found beneath the floorboards by the low window seat. The seat is probably also of early 19th-century date, allowing someone to sit at the window for greater light, but not to be able to see out over the garden at the same time. Among the many newspapers and cuttings found beneath the floorboards was one advertising a position as a lady's companion.

Rooms S1, S2 and corridor

Subdivision of this room from the 18th century on has also changed this room. S1 and the corridor would originally have formed the 17th-century chamber, which extended part of the way into what is now room S2. A gable window, similar in proportions to that in room S7, lights room S1, and with the same tramline moulding as that seen on window SW5. This

⁶⁶ Bodl. GA Fol. B71 Auction fl 56.

is the only original feature left in the room. It is probable that the chamber had a fireplace at the S. end of the room in the 17th century, as there is a trimmer beam that has no other obvious function. The 18th-century chimney breast is located on the E. wall and this would have destroyed any evidence of earlier windows, and no evidence for any was found when a fire door was inserted to the S. of the brick flue.

The S. wall of the corridor between S1 and S2 is very likely of 18th-century date. The small double-light window at the E. end of room S2 does have 17th-century elements but it does not appear to be in its original position. The window looks out onto the 18th-century brickwork of the E. extension, and a small stretch of tiled roofing. A small cupboard space, beneath the window and the narrow stretch of roof outside, shows that the plastered wall surface of the 17th-century room continues into this now inaccessible area. It appears then that this external valley was created to allow drainage from the central valley between the roofs of the N. and S. ranges after the construction of the E. extension. The lead down-pipe descends between the 17th- and the 18th-century building to be drained away in the 18th-century cellar, B3, by one of the network of such 18th-century stone-lined conduits found beneath the house and its grounds.⁶⁷

Similar drainage was needed following the removal of the 17th-century chimney stacks and the construction of the E. and W. cross ridges that enabled the construction of rooms S6 and S2. Two more valleys had been created, so a lead-lined drain was inserted. This was set into the top of the E.-W. transverse wall, turning a right angle northwards along the N.-S. spine wall and out into a down pipe of some form on the N. side of the house. The E. extension, which originally had 5 shallow pitched roof ridges, drained separately on the E. side of the building. Another down-pipe fed the water through a stone-lined drain into a barrel-vaulted stone soakaway built into the cellars of widow Fletcher's old house when it was demolished and before the cellars were completely backfilled.⁶⁸

THOMAS WALKER'S EASTERN EXTENSION

Thomas Walker built two new reception rooms, two principal bedrooms and two barrel-vaulted cellars in his new two-storey eastern extension. The changes he wrought within the old house, with varying levels of success, have been described above, but it is in the new extension that one sees the full scale of his vision.

The demolition of the small house adjacent to Thomas Browne's house was the first step of Walker's plan. It does not appear from the archaeology that the extension reached the foundations of the old house, but had it been left standing it would have cramped the style of the new principal entrance, not to mention the aspect. The placing of the new entrance on the E. side led to a radical alteration in the hierarchy of the rooms within the house. Although it was not ideal to have the principal reception rooms so close to the entrance, it did have the advantage of placing them as far as possible from the smells of the kitchen and the noise of the servants.

Basements B3, B4 and B5 (Fig. 6)

The new cellars were excavated on the same alignment as the existing basements, the oldest part of the whole building. This has led to the suggestion that the 18th-century cellars are of medieval origin. But this is not the case, and their form is identical to the barrel vaulting

⁶⁷ Grundon (1998), *op. cit.* note 6.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

of the other 18th-century underground structures found on the site. Only above this level did the builders bother to mask the curious shape and alignment of the old house.

The two cellars are aligned E.-W. B4 was probably the beer cellar where the barrels were kept. A vent opened at the E. end for ventilation or light and to keep the temperature from getting too cold. The southern smaller cellar, B5, was the wine cellar. The 19th-century brick wine racks were built in after the vault was completed. At a later date a small brick wall was constructed in the NE. corner of the wine cellar, and it has been suggested that this was a blast shelter. Whether the brick wall that eventually enclosed B5 from B3 was also an attempt to create a bomb shelter during WWII is not known. It may just have been responding to a need to lock the wine cellar.

The small lobby, B3, contains the wood bins. Here also the lead down-pipe draining the junction between the 17th- and 18th-century structures emerges into a drain which, as can be seen by a straight joint in the flagstone floor above it, runs roughly E. beneath the floor from B3 into B5. A second straight joint in the floor of B4 marks the line of another drain, and there is a perforated stone cover marking a junction with a deeper drain. The full complexity of the drainage system cannot be fully known without excavation beneath the flagstone floors. Their starting depth makes it impossible that they drain into the subterranean barrel vaulted soakaway that was built into the cellar of the demolished widow Fletcher's house to the E. However, other much deeper drains have been located running N. parallel to the service range, and it is clear that more of these remain to be located.⁶⁹

The access to the new cellars was originally from B1, beneath the service stair. The door connecting B1 and B2 was blocked when a new staircase was put in at some time near the end of the 19th or early 20th century. This staircase was only put in when room G7/8 above became the butler's pantry, and gave the butler sole control over the wine and beer cellars. An opening was knocked through from B2 into the new cellars. Much of the clay that was excavated to build the cellars was used to build up the ground on which the southern, cellarless, part of the new extension was built.⁷⁰

Room G1 (Fig. 7)

This elegantly proportioned room, with its high ceiling, was designed to be the dining room of the newly modernised house. It has wooden panelling below dado level and originally had bordered mock panels around the room. The projecting shutter housing around the windows was quite a new fashion at the time the extension was built. On the N. window, the internal projection is continued by the wall up to ceiling level, carrying the cornice round. This survives largely intact, though the shutters of the N. window have been greatly altered. It was converted into a French window by the early 1920s when this room became the drawing room. The E. sash window survives in its original form, with its shutters intact. The projecting wooden surround has an elegant panelled design to blend in with the lower panel and the shutters, whether open or shut. The surround does not quite extend up to cornice level, but in both windows extends to the floor.

The finest surviving feature of this room is the classical Adam style fireplace at the W. end of the room (Fig. 17). The wooden surround is carved into an elaborate cornice, including egg and dart and dentil moulding, above an arcaded frieze containing two roundels flanking a central motif. The central motif depicts a lion's head with an eagle's head on either side enclosing a stylised cloud with emanating bolts of lightning. Both the roundels depict seated

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Grundon (2000), *op. cit.* note 7.



Fig. 17. 18th-century fireplace surround in Room G1 (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).



Fig. 18. Principal entrance and staircase of 18th-century E. extension (Ph. J. Brasnett, Oxfordshire Museums. Fletcher's House Archive).

women. It is just possible to distinguish a further figure behind each, but years of overpainting have made it near impossible to see what they are. The fireplace is flanked by two plain projecting Ionic pillars. Originally, this surrounded a series of blue Delft tiles, and the hearth itself was an iron grate supported on iron dogs, with a marble hearthstone in front, but none of these features survives.

The ceiling possesses an elegant moulded cornice, repeating the egg and dart motif of the fire surround, but less ornate than the cornice in the adjacent drawing room.

The 18th-century dining room was often on the darker side of the house, as sunlight was not desired during meals. By the early 1920s, though, it was more desirable for a drawing room to open on to the garden so the large N. window was opened up to form the French windows and the function of the two ground floor rooms was reversed. The room then remained a drawing room until the late 1940s when the house became the headquarters of the new county fire service.

Room G2 (Fig. 7)

This room was the drawing room, the most important reception room in Thomas Walker's house. As such it would probably have been the most lavishly furnished room in the house when it was first built. The only surviving reflection of this is the ceiling cornice with a frieze motif in more Corinthian fashion, a considerably more elaborate design than the severe Ionic order used in the dining room.

Many of the original features of this room have been lost, most notably the Adam style fireplace which is known to have been here, complete with the blue Delft tiles, iron grate and dogs and marble hearth stone. It would have been very similar to that in room G1. However, the combination of motifs of the Ionic order in cornice and fireplace in G1 suggests that the Corinthian motif of the cornice in G2 reflected a far more elaborate Corinthian style fireplace. The room is essentially a mirror image of the dining room in form, except that originally there was no window in the E. wall. There was only a blind window, visible as a recess on the outside of the house to give symmetry to the E. façade.

The drawing room was generally used in the afternoon when, after c. 1840, it became the fashion for ladies to take tea. In the evening, the adults would gather here before proceeding into the dining room for dinner, and the ladies would withdraw here while the men lingered over port and cigars. After the 1920s this room became the dining room and remained as such until the late 1940s.

The Hall and Principal Staircase G10/F2 (Fig. 18)

The semicircular arch of the E. entrance opens into a hall paved in Portland Stone. The original door does not survive, but the half-length shutters that were recently uncovered suggest that the upper half of the door was glazed. A fanlight surmounts the entrance after the fashion of the day, though the radiating spokes are of old-fashioned wood rather than being moulded more delicately in metal. Only the looped strings linking the spokes and the central detail are wrought in metal.

Facing the entrance is the staircase of Portland Stone, with plain square iron balusters topped with a mahogany handrail. Flanked by the drawing room to the S. and by the dining room to the N., the high narrow hall has a simple fluted cornice moulding. The stone floor continues down a few steps into the corridor, G9, leading to the kitchen. The difference in level between the two main phases of the building is here most obvious.

A half landing on the stair linked the 18th-century extension with the first floor of the 17th-century house through a large doorway with semicircular doorway. The stair then continues up to the new principal bedrooms, F1 and F3.

An arched sash window, with sash shutters, dominates the upper landing. The arch cuts through the cornice, suggesting either a lack of forethought in the design or another example of the exterior appearance taking precedence. Two large arched doorways leading to the principal bedrooms on either side echo the arch of the window, but the doors themselves do not survive.

Principal bedrooms F1 and F3 (Fig. 12)

Both these rooms were set out on more or less the same plan. They are of the same size and dimensions as the reception rooms below, but with marginally less lofty ceilings. In the N. room, F1, the N. window and the wall above it project as in room G1, but the advantage was lost in this room. Originally, the room was sub-divided into bedroom and dressing room. A stud partition (the mortises of which survive in the beam) with a full cornice of its own, stretched from immediately E. of the projecting N. window to immediately W. of the main door from the landing.

The main door from the upper landing originally led into a small lobby, with a large cupboard on the E. side of it. Two doors led from this lobby. That to the W. led into the main bedroom with the window looking over the garden and beyond to the fields N. of the town. The door straight ahead led into the long narrow dressing room lit by the E. window. This small room also had a door at the far end of the dressing room which led into the bedroom. The arrangement was mirrored in room F2. The arrangement of the bedroom in this way, with its convoluted routes of access from the landing, was devised so that the husband could maintain his privacy while the wife was being dressed or undressed by her personal maid. It also made it impossible for servants or guests passing on the landing to see by chance into the bedroom. But even given a full cornice to match, the proportions of the room were greatly compromised by the dressing room. It may have been an afterthought, for the full effect of the modern projecting window was lost by being partially covered at cornice level.

The S. window of room F3 is much larger than the N. window in F1. This was intended not so much to give more light but to provide a unity of design between this window and the other new windows on the street front facade. The shutters were split horizontally into two sections to control the amount of light in this S.-facing room while maintaining privacy from the garden or Park Street.

The cornices are less ornate than those in the drawing and dining rooms. Likewise the fireplaces, with their cast iron grates intact, but without the original marble hearthstones, are simpler in design than in the public reception rooms.

The service range (Fig. 4)

This service range was originally designed to line the W. boundary of the property. The design drawing of 1795 shows a continuous line of buildings with doors opening onto a walled passage, separating the service buildings from the garden, out of view of the owners.⁷¹ Just N. of the kitchen, where a new door had been inserted, was the scullery, which also had an internal door leading into the larder. Adjacent to this was the knife house, followed by a wood house. Beyond this was a coal house with a laundry above, which had its own entrance directly onto a staircase. The coal house would have been rather cramped, for even with the laundry above, the heights are uniform throughout the range at 7 ft. 1 in. Finally, running

⁷¹ Blenheim Muniments, shelf G1, Box 8, Walker Correspondence, 1794.

off the page and with no measurements legible, was the brewhouse, the only building to survive. The rooms were narrowest at the S. end (8 ft. 2 in.), widening as they reached the coal house to the N. (14 ft. 7 in.) and the brewhouse which has no measurements legible.

As only the brewhouse is still standing and the plan of it is incomplete, there is no way of assessing the accuracy of the plan. Parts of the walls of the scullery and possibly also the larder survived until 1998, incorporated in the public toilets, but these had been substantially rebuilt in the past. When they were demolished to build the new gallery, it was found that the flagstone floor partially survived beneath the concrete of the toilet block. This was of similar stonework to the 18th-century flagstone flooring located in the house in rooms G3 and G5. A posthole that was noted in this floor suggests that there had been a partition just inside the scullery door as shown on the plan.⁷²

There is a strong possibility that only the scullery, larder and brewhouse were ever built. No foundations for the others were found during the archaeological watching brief prior to building the new gallery.⁷³ However, the auction catalogue of 1836, although not illustrated, describes the service rooms as including two larders, a dairy, a knife house, a laundry and a drying house.⁷⁴ This suggests that the range was built as designed, and that it survived for some 40 years. Why parts of the range were then demolished is not clear. The back yard consisted of a double coach house, two 4-stall stables, one of which was divided into a loose-box and single stall, and a saddle room with granary, loft and groom's room over.

The buildings around the stable yard are all 19th-century and it is probable that all the existing buildings had been built by the time the auction catalogue was compiled in 1836. Their conversion first to accommodate the Fire Station and in recent years to house offices, conservation lab, photographic studio and design studio has resulted in few datable features surviving.

The Brewhouse (Fig. 19)

The brewhouse is the most interesting of the surviving service buildings. The raised copper, with a capacity of approximately 200 gallons, still remains with its great lead tap, a furnace below and an ash pit beneath that. Above the copper up in the NW. corner of the room is the vent which, together with the hob grate fireplace, kept the room at the required temperature. A perceptible curve in the N. wall, E. of the fireplace, indicates a second copper of a similar capacity. A description of the brewhouse contents amongst details for an unsuccessful auction of Fletcher's House in 1836 listed coppers, coolers, mash tubs, and coal house.⁷⁵ This second copper could have brought the production up to the commercial level of a public house, and may have tempted the landlord of the Bear Inn and the Marlborough Arms, Alderman William Margetts, eventually to buy the house in 1842.⁷⁶ Wooden staging would have given access to the furnace and the upper copper, but neither this nor any of the brewing furniture survives.

It is clear that the buildings bounding the S. side of the stable yard were added onto the N. of the brewhouse at a later date. The storeroom immediately adjacent blocked the vent above the copper, suggesting that the brewhouse no longer functioned at the time it was built. This same room sealed a substantial well or cistern feature beneath its flagstone floor, which could date back to the days of Francis Collingwood.

⁷² Grundon (1998), op. cit. note 6.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Bodl. GA Fol. B71 Auction fl 56.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Anderson et al., op. cit. note 2, p. 16; *VC.H. Oxon.* xii, 354.



Fig. 19. Interior of the brewhouse from S. (Ph. I. Grundon. Fletcher's House Archive).

The exterior wall of the brewhouse, facing onto the passage, shows that it was substantially rebuilt above window level when the building to the N. was added. The lower part of the wall has a curved corner, but not the upper. However, the curved stones that very likely formed the upper NE. corner of the brewhouse can be found at ground level in the later block to the N. This, together with the form of the surviving doors and windows of the brewhouse, suggests the possibility that the brewhouse existed in some form before 1795. Unfortunately, the 19th-century rebuilding destroyed the original roofing which could have given more of an indication.

Few original features survive in the buildings that bound the stable yard on the W. and S. A survey of these buildings was carried out by the FHRG and their results written up in the paper on the history of Fletcher's House. However, no further work has been carried out since on any building other than the brewhouse described above, and the examination of the well or cistern beneath the old wood store to the N. of it.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SUMMARY (Fig. 4)

Several phases of archaeological work have been carried out within the grounds of Fletcher's House. The Oxford Archaeological Unit (OAU) carried out the first watching brief in 1994 during the excavation of pipe trenches and a soakaway on the E. side of Fletcher's House, beneath the present Visitor Information Centre.⁷⁷ AOC Archaeology Group carried out a further watching brief in 1998, during the groundworks for the construction of the Visitor Information Centre, Coffee Shop, and the Temporary Exhibition Gallery. It also involved an investigation within the brewhouse and adjacent store, and areas of the lawn to the N. of the house.⁷⁸ The author, Imogen Grundon, carried out a further archaeological investigation during the watching brief within rooms G3 and G5 of Fletcher's House.⁷⁹

The OAU located three walls to the E. of Fletcher's House, two N.-S. walls one (105) above the other (108), and one E.-W. wall (116).⁸⁰ Wall 105 was late in date and interpreted as a boundary wall or garden retaining wall (Fig. 4). The wall was located again further S. by AOC, but no further information could be added.⁸¹ The other two walls, which were perpendicular to each other, were thought to be medieval, but it was not possible to establish their relationship to each other. One of these, wall 116, was found at a depth of 1.3 m., leading to the conclusion that it was a cellar wall. Three sherds of pottery found from a deposit above this wall were of early and late medieval Oxford Ware. Wall 108 appeared to be a main structural wall being the more substantially built.

To the E. of these walls, during the watching brief carried out by AOC, a pebble cobbled surface 2.5 m. long by 1.2 m. wide was found leading from the boundary wall with Park Street at the S. end to a pair of limestone door jambs at the N. end.⁸² West of this paving there was a square opening into the S. end of a rectangular subterranean barrel vaulted structure. The main walls were built of unmortared limestone, though a lime mortar had been used to construct the segmental vault. The floor was of rough uneven limestone rubble, and appeared to be more of a demolition layer than a deliberate floor. However, it was clear that no attempt had been made to render the structure waterproof. A stone-lined conduit drained into the NW. corner of the structure from the approximate direction of the SE. corner of the 1795 house. Although the splayed edge seemed to suggest some sort of well or cistern, it was clear from the drain and the lack of waterproofing that it was probably a soakaway.

The opening of the soakaway structure had at one time been covered over with a protective structure of brick, and brick had been used to face the S. end of the arch. These conformed with the unfrogged bricks associated with the 1795-1800 building phase found all over the site, but appeared to have been reused. The whole structure was surrounded by the lower two courses of a structure built of the same brick. A threshold stone indicated an opening in the SE. corner which had given access to the covering structure from the cobbled side passage. The rubble found in the base of the subterranean structure suggests that this structure had glazed windows and a tiled roof finished with lead.

The cobbled passage was closed off by the construction of the S. perimeter wall of the site, but it is difficult to say when exactly the subterranean structure and its superstructure went

⁷⁷ Parkinson, *op. cit.* note 4.

⁷⁸ Grundon (1998), *op. cit.* note 6.

⁷⁹ Grundon (2000), *op. cit.* note 7.

⁸⁰ Parkinson, *op. cit.* note 4.

⁸¹ Grundon (1998), *op. cit.* note 6.

⁸² *Ibid.*

out of use and were pulled down. Both passage and superstructure are marked on the 1922 Ordnance Survey 2nd revision. It is possible that the brick surround is a 19th-century reuse of the soakaway, perhaps as a toilet.

At the base of the soakaway, beneath the opening shaft or manhole, are the foundations of an earlier wall, the lower courses of which were bonded with strong grey clay. The wall was demolished where it crossed the line of the soakaway, but survives to a height of 0.4 m. in the E. and W. walls of the structure. The earlier wall is defined by both a straight joint in the stonework and by the fact that it is mortared with clay, rather than of dry stone as the rest of the structure. This wall lies at 2.77 m. below ground level and can therefore also be identified, along with the OAU's wall 116, as the wall of a medieval cellar, though more than a metre deeper.

A further section of wall orientated N.-S. and constructed of limestone was found to the N. of this late 18th-century soakaway. The finds suggest that this was a 17th-century build rather than medieval, and may have been a later extension of the medieval house (represented by the cellar), lining the same side passage to the rear of the property as that found alongside the soakaway.

Work on the site of the scullery, larder and service passage revealed a complex water management and drainage system. This tied in with the brewhouse and a subterranean cistern located opposite the brewhouse. This 5 m.-square cistern is divided into 3 barrel vaulted bays set E.-W. with a cross vault in the centre. The cistern was built of brick, with stonework bonded with a sandy lime mortar closing the arch of the vaults above the springing line, indicating that the water would not have risen above the level of the brick. No coherent brick bond was used, but the structure was well-built with a very hard waterproof cement-type mortar. The unfrosted bricks are of the same dimensions as those found throughout the 18th-century building. The floor and the lower 0.5 m. of the external walls were sealed with tanking render. Access to the cistern was through a manhole at the E. end of the central bay, covered by a stone slab supported on detachable iron grilles. Several lead pipes led to and from the cistern – two perforated at the cistern end and stopped with a wooden bung drew water from the cistern. A more rigid pipe in the NW. corner was attached to a pump that once stood above, opposite the entrance to the brewhouse. This cistern is undoubtedly the 'reservoir' commissioned by Thomas Walker as part of the 1795-1800 work.⁸³

Several stone-lined drains leading from the direction of the kitchen, the drain from the central roof valley and scullery all converged near the wall dividing the passage from the garden. All drained N. at an approximate gradient of 1 in 20, converging in a single deep drain with drains from the brewhouse to the W. and the garden to the E.

Abutting the S. wall of the brewhouse was a brick structure, varying between half a brick and a brick thick. This was a form of soakaway or drain for the pipe that descended the S. wall of the brewhouse. This feature sealed a blocked doorway on the S. face of the brewhouse.

The reduction of the floor level of the brewhouse by 0.5 m. revealed a small brick settling tank leading into a stone drain leading NE. beneath the brewhouse wall. The brick structure contained a coke deposit similar to one that had been found in a drain leading from the kitchen. This could be associated with the first stage of filtering waste water, in this case from the brewing process.

⁸³ Blenheim Muniments, shelf G1, Box 8, Walker Correspondence, 1794.

The makeup for a wall was found running almost parallel to the W. wall of the brewhouse and approximately 1 m. away from it. This may have been to support the various vats used in the brewing process. Beneath the curved niche in the NE. corner, where a second copper once probably stood, was evidence that it had been heated. A lead pipe connecting the brewhouse and the cistern probably drew clean water directly into the brewhouse.

The floor level of the adjacent store room was also reduced, revealing a third subterranean structure. This structure was barrel vaulted in a curious fashion, with unmortared stone walls. At the base, 4 m. below the 19th-century flagstone floor level of the store room, was a roughly circular cut in the bedrock. An analysis of the deposits found within the rock-cut feature showed that its last phase of use was for the disposal of foul waste. However, it is possible that this was originally a well of some sort, and may well be the 'cistern' mentioned in the inventory of Francis Collingwood. It is not known when it went out of use. A wood-cut drain originally drained into it, replaced later by a salt-glazed one. This may indicate that it was in use for waste disposal from an early date. It was not possible to carry out a physical inspection of the feature, but a CCTV video recording was made of the interior.⁸⁴

Archaeological evidence for earlier detached outbuildings, such as those referred to in the inventory of Francis Collingwood, is so far lacking. This could well be attributed to the considerable build-up in the garden's ground level over the centuries. It is clear from exploratory test pits by several of the garden walls that there is a considerable depth of garden soil, with over 1 m. of good garden soil almost parallel with the N. face of the house. The form of the present garden with three successive terraces, and the walls that enclose and define it, is essentially of early 19th-century form.

The perimeter wall of the garden is certainly of late 18th- or early 19th-century date, as there is no evidence on the exterior of these walls of a back entrance prior to the one that survives today on the piece of land acquired last of all by Thomas Walker. This wall is stone built until just below the present soil level, above which it is stone on the outside and brick on the inside. This was for the cultivation of espaliered fruit trees. Nails for the attachment of these fruit trees can still be seen around the walls, as until recently could the leather ties from the surrounding Woodstock glove factories.⁸⁵

The inset walled garden in the SE. of the garden originally had a building along its W. interior wall. Two curious bricked up openings in this wall may have been part of a water feature driven from within the structure, which was not a greenhouse as its roof was never glazed. This is supported by the presence in the 1920s of a pond here, depicted in a watercolour now in the Oxfordshire Museum's collection.

The OS map of 1876 shows that what now forms the lower two lawns was used as an orchard, with 21 trees marked. A central N.-S. path divided the orchard into two, with another path circling round the orchard. There are clearly beds between the wall and this encircling path, which could have included the espaliered fruit trees. At this date, the wall that separated the service passage from the garden continued down to the S. perimeter wall. This shut off the orchard from the stable yard, except for a small opening. A wall also separated the orchard from the upper lawn. It appears then that the transformation of the orchard into the lower two terraces post-dates this map. This was almost certainly carried out to create the tennis court that once occupied the middle lawn by the 1920s. One of the corner markers for this tennis court was found in the central lawn.

⁸⁴ Richardson, 'Archaeol. Investigation', *op. cit.* note 6; Richardson, 'Sampling of Sediment', *op. cit.* note 6.

⁸⁵ E. Leggatt, unpubl. TS. on garden walls of Fletcher's House.

Though there have been changes to the layout since then, there is no evidence of any garden feature of an earlier date, as it is probably buried deep. There is therefore a good chance that many earlier features have been preserved, and that deeper excavation would reveal evidence of the earlier use of the back yards of these properties over time.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the site of Fletcher's House has enjoyed a high status throughout its history. There is so far a lack of physical evidence for the buildings on the site prior to Thomas Browne's acquisition of the land (excepting the basements B1 & 2). Only the cellar walls to the E. of the present house can be assigned a medieval date, albeit not a very specific one. No more certain is the date of the building to which the basement rooms B1 and B2 within the present Fletcher's House belong.

The present size of the site dates back to the 18th century, when Thomas Walker added the land on which the stable yard lies. Thomas Browne's property encompassed the rest of the site, although the cellar walls of the widow Fletcher's house indicate a separate burgage plot, which may well have been separated from the Brownes' property. The vast size of the present site in relation to the town can be well judged from Fig. 1, and its prominent position opposite the church and between market and park gate marked it out from the start.

This paper is largely a discussion on the evidence of the form of the house in the 17th century, and how it changed over time. It is generally thought that in the early 17th century the double-pile house was only just coming into fashion amongst the wealthy, not reaching the minor gentry and yeomanry until the later 17th century. Therefore, it was thought unlikely that the alderman of a small market town such as Woodstock would build such a house. However, the physical and documentary evidence put forward here indicates that Thomas Browne did build such a house as early as 1613/14. The documentary records also show that he was a man with considerable standing in Woodstock. The architectural details that survive of the 17th-century house show an innovative design on a grand scale. Much of the evidence defining this double-pile form has been removed or masked, but an attempt has been made here to reconstruct it on paper. The floor plans in Fig. 8 are a conjectural reconstruction of what the form of the house might have been in the 17th century. Many gaps remain to be understood, but enough survives to show that it did adhere to what was becoming a standard plan.

The significance of Fletcher's House is that it exemplifies a period of transition from the medieval house plan, and the more spartan communal living that this necessitated, to a form of home that reflects the increasing importance of privacy and comfort from the later 16th century. The form of the hall is still apparent, but its importance as the centre of the life of a house was already lost. The available evidence strongly suggests that this double-pile house was of a single build rather than an extension or conversion of a medieval building to create a similar effect. The curious alignment of the N. range and the evidence of features in the cellar reveal that the position of an earlier building on the site coincided with this range. This alignment tallies more closely with that of Brown's Lane than with Park Street, which had suffered concerted encroachment (and consequent alteration in the alignment of the street frontage) since the town's foundation. Only the cellars of this earlier building were incorporated into Thomas Browne's 'new built house', which was of a single build. The presence of the cellars as pre-existing foundations thus affected the alignment of the N. range only. Meanwhile, the builder was free to bring the front of the S. range into keeping with more modern buildings, such as William Metcalfe's even greater encroachment of c. 1600 on the corner of Park Street and Brown's Lane. This house is neither unique nor the

earliest example of its kind, but it is one of a few rare early examples surviving of this transition at this level of the social scale.

After the house passed out of the Browne family, it continued to be used by people of wealth and influence, and was clearly seen as one of the better houses in Woodstock, though not the largest or finest. Its purchase by the duke of Marlborough confirmed that its position was sufficient to give it importance even when the house itself was considered old-fashioned. It received a new lease of life under Thomas Walker's ownership, and again had a claim to being one of the more fashionable and 'modern' houses in town, albeit due largely to a facelift. Thomas Walker transformed the building from a house that catered for a 17th-century family with a few servants, to a smaller version of the great households of the early 19th century. Walker's main contribution to the house was the creation of a substantial service machine, hidden away behind a genteel veneer. Though the family would have been fairly small, it was served by a substantial number of servants who worked hard to keep the family in comfort, carrying out their tasks in a comprehensive but well hidden range of outbuildings. The acquisition of the final piece of land by Walker, enabling the building of the stable yard, completed the separation of servants from family by the addition of a secondary entrance. Walker certainly never managed to make Fletcher's House as grand as Hensington House, where he had lived as auditor to the duke of Marlborough, but he nonetheless ensured that he was kept to some extent in the luxury to which he had become accustomed.

By and large, the house continued to be inhabited by the more prosperous members of Woodstock society, including several mayors. But the 20th-century inhabitants could not support so great a household as Walker had built for, and many of the outbuildings fell into disuse, their original functions obsolete. By the early part of the 20th century, the W. end of the S. range had been converted to offices for the family of solicitors who owned the house. Further subdivision, this time into flats, spread to the rest of the house by the Second World War, the house being too large for modern households in a small town. Shortly afterwards, the house was acquired by compulsory purchase order by Oxfordshire County Council, and has been in their possession ever since, first as the County Fire Service headquarters and then as the county's museum. In this latter function the building has undergone a further transformation, with the addition of a suitably modern extension, the curved, sweeping glass of which at once reflects and enhances the cool classicism of the E. façade. Yet again, the house can boast that it is the most modern and daring building in Woodstock.

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