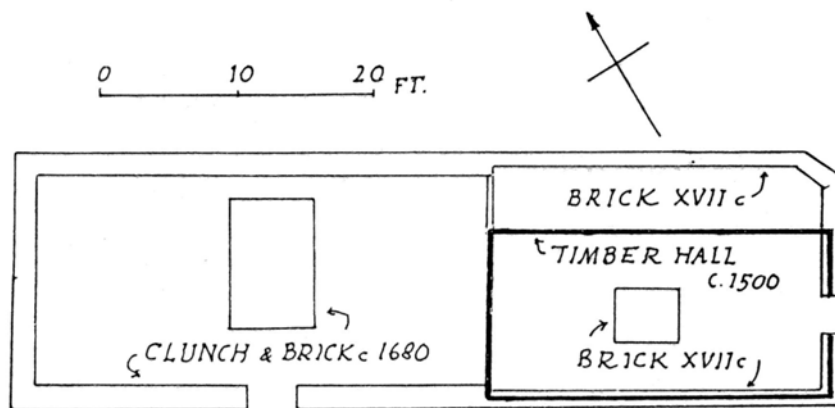


The ‘Old Hall’ in West Challow

by Professor Stuart Piggott

Among the half-dozen or so houses of a date before the nineteenth century surviving in West Challow village, one, north of the Church and fronting on the attenuated remains of the village Green, was inherited in 1968 and has been lived in since 1977 by the writer, who finding it had no traditional name called it non-committally 'The Cottage'. In the course of a study of villages in the Vale of White Horse conducted by the Historic Buildings Survey, this house was visited early in 1985 by Mr Jeremy Lake, for an architectural assessment which had unexpectedly interesting results.

In the plan the building forms a simple rectangle about 60 x 20 ft, its long axis NW-SE, now rough-cast (except for a library addition of 1974 at the N corner). In elevation the NW end is a block of two storeys with attics, some 15 ft to eaves level, with a tiled roof (Cotswold stone slates until the 1950s); the SE is lower, only 9 ft to eaves level, with a thatched roof rising to an apex well below that of the larger block. Mr Lake's interpretation of the building sequence, summarized in the sketch plan, is as follows.



The earliest building on the site was a small late medieval timber-framed hall, 24 x 12 ft, of c.1500, with post and wattle and daub walls carried on a stone socle, open to the roof with a presumed central fire on the floor, and thatched. In the XVII century the larger two-storey block (some 30 by 15 ft internally) was added against its NW wall, which became incorporated as an internal partition: this extension has walls of random clunch and a massive central chimney-stack. An approximate date is given by a fine wooden fireplace surround with a bold bolection moulding of c.1680, Presumably at the same time, the SE and SW walls of the original hall were cased in brick, an off-shoot added to the NE and a central brick chimney-stack incorporated. A floor was installed slightly below wall-plate level, and first-floor windows inserted in the gable and southern walls.

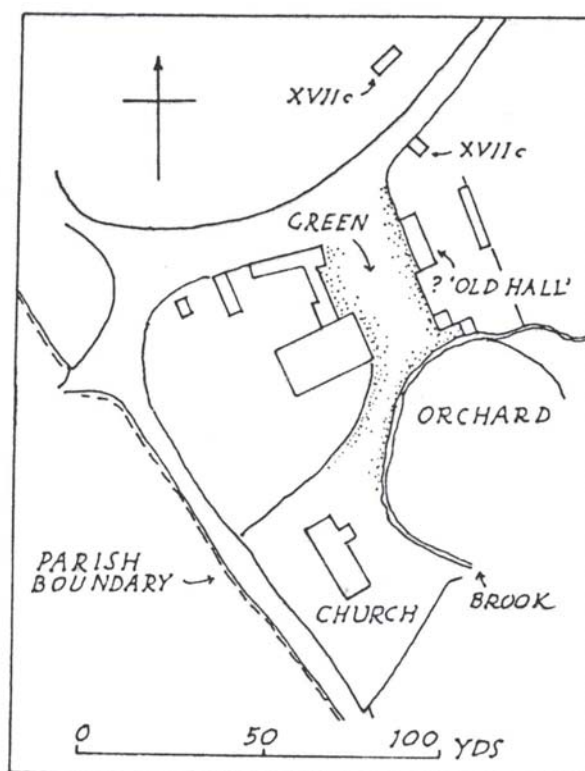
‘The Cottage’, then, despite a dull and unpromising exterior, proves to embody what may well be the earliest surviving domestic structure in the village. Since Mr Lake's assessment a West Challow document has been published, without comment, which seems to take the story a stage further (1). This is an indenture of 1742 between William Cowley

of Little Fawley and John Smith of Letcombe Regis, which repeats the terms of an earlier indenture of 1694 (between John Cowley and John Knowles of West Challow) respecting property in that village. This is described as

'two Messuages or Tenements which were then before in the Occupation of John Green scituated lying and being in West Challow aforesaid Containing these rooms Following that is to say the Old Hall the Entry and all the other Rooms over them or belonging to the Old Buildings'

with ground belonging to them called the Old Orchard 'as the same was then bounded and set Forth from the backside or Orchard ... the Chapple there being on the south the green there on the west and Land late of Francis Knowles ... on the north side thereof'.

A sketch plan based on that of the 1802 Enclosure Award (2), with the writer's annotations, shows the property boundaries and buildings present at that time; the parish boundary with Childrey, the parish church of St. Lawrence ('Chapel' on the original), the Childrey Brook which runs NE through the village, and the village Green, the last remains of which survive as common land and a public footpath today. West of the Green are the buildings replaced in 1852 by G E Street's Vicarage, the enclosure wall bounding the west side of the Green being that shown on the 1802 map, brick and probably of the XVIII century. To the NE of the Green are two XVII century houses, now 'Fairview' to the N and 'The Thatched Cottage' across the road, and then, fronting directly onto the Green, the building under discussion with behind it a range of probably XVIII century brick outhouses and privies (surviving until the 1950s) and two small vanished buildings towards the Brook. The house and its parcel of land belonged to James Pusey (or Pizzey) who held other lands in the parish of West Challow in 1802. Orchards lay to the N and SE until very recent, giving the name of Orchard Gardens to the late 1960s building estate to the NE.



'The Cottage' seems in fact the only claimant for the 'Old Hall' of the documents of 1694 and 1742. It is the only building of any size which fits the relationship to the Green and the Church and does appear in fact to embody an 'old hall' in its fabric. Its history after 1802 is simple and unedifying. It appears as Lot 66 on the schedule and map of the sale of the West Challow property by the then Lord of the Manor, C A Ferard of Ascot Place, Berks, to W S Burton of Childrey Manor in 1888 (3), where with the present 'Thatched Cottage' it is described as 'Cottages (5) and Gardens (late Trinders)', totalling 2 sq. roods 10sq. chains. In 1920 the Manor Farm property was bought by J J Burson, from whom in 1923 my aunts (then living with their parents in Bridge Farm House in West Challow, now destroyed) bought it as four farm labourers' cottages. After renovation and internal alterations, they lived there until their deaths, when in 1968 it passed into the writer's hands. Its appearance about 1920 is shown in an undated published photograph (4), recording its appearance before its restoration and refenestration: the present fence and hedge (as on the 1888 map) have encroached on the common land of the Green by some 30 ft since 1802!

Footnotes

- [1] V.M.Howse, West Challow; a parish record, privately printed 1985, p. 89.
- [2] Reproduced in facsimile by Howse, loose folder.
- [3] Howse, p.10 with map.
- [4] Howse, plate opp. p.29



West Challow - 1970s? - church from road, southeast. (v.chw003.jpg)



West Challow - 1910s? - church from northwest.
(v.chw004.jpg)



West Challow - 1910s? - church porch northwest;
lady standing in porch. (v.chw005.jpg)



West Challow - thatched cottage (1905). (v.chw006.jpg)

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