

SUPPLEMENT

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THE

EVOLUTION

OF A

DEVONSHIRE RECTORY

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EAST WORLINGTON

1. Notes by the Rev. H. J. Hodgson

THE
EVOLUTION
OF A

Rectory of East
West Worlington
1918-37

DEVONSHIRE RECTORY

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TO those who live in our ancient English houses, it is always a matter of interest to speculate as to the age of each of the component parts of the complex whole, and advance conjectures as to the origin or reason of the many changes, which a careful examination will reveal. Occasionally some fortuitous chance enables us to establish our speculations as a certainty.

The old Rectory House of East Worlington in the heart of Devon furnishes a good example. This is one of those long narrow houses of two stories with a thatched roof and limewashed walls of stone and cob, which, once common, are becoming rarer every year. The same fate usually awaits them, destruction by fire.

The house is now the residence of the incumbent of the united benefices of East and West Worlington, which were joined by an order in Council dated August 18th, 1919. Up to this time the living had been held in plurality for some years and the present rector, who had been appointed to the benefices in October, 1918, had been residing with his family at the West Rectory since November of that year and did not move into the East house till June, 1920.

On March 2nd, 1920, the West house was sold by public auction with its Glebe land of 85 acres and also 48 acres of the East Glebe. There still remain attached to the house 18 acres of meadow land and gardens. The West rectory is now a private residence known as The Gables.

Owing to the non-residence of the previous incumbent, the whole of the East premises had fallen into a deplorable state of disrepair. One surveyor after inspecting the buildings, reported that the house was worn out and recommended that it should be pulled down or sold if any purchaser could be induced to buy it. But the diocesan surveyor was of a different opinion and under his supervision and with the expenditure of a large sum the premises were put into reasonably good condition and in all likelihood they will remain habitable for another fifty years.

An old terrier or inventory of Church property, recently discovered in the tower of East Worlington Church and dating from early in the 18th century, clearly indicates the plan of this house, as it existed in

THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY.

The terrier states that the Parsonage House contains the following rooms:—"Great parlour, hall, kitchen, little parlour, cellar, bottle house, wood house and dairy, having all common flooring except ye parlours, which are floored with oak boards and ye hall whose floor is of lime ashes (a kind of Portland Cement). Over the under rooms are seven chambers all floored with oak boards. All ye walls are of mudd except ye great parlour which is of stone. The house is all covered with thatch."

The original oak floors still remain in some of the bedrooms but have been replaced in the parlours. By "common flooring" is meant cobble stones packed close together, as is still the case in the cider cellar. The mudd or cob walls have been almost entirely replaced by stone or lath and plaster, especially the dividing walls of the bedrooms. Several of the windows retain the original small panes of glass fitted into lead lattice work.

By referring to the terrier and by scrutinizing the existing buildings, in which there is in several places unmistakable evidence, that a passage way has been cut through old walls to give access to new rooms, we are able to present a plan of the old rectory as it must have appeared in the seventeenth century.

It was a compact little residence, sufficiently large for the needs of a country parson of that period, and probably the best equipped house in the village, for the parish has never boasted of a Manor House.

Reference should now be made to plan No. 1. The GREAT PARLOUR, which was later wainscoted in oak, was a fine apartment twenty-five feet long and seventeen feet wide, with probably three small windows facing the south and the usual wide open fireplace. Its ceiling was supported by massive oak beams, which are still in position. The LITTLE PARLOUR was eventually also panelled in oak to a height of three feet, and all the interior doors are of oak with quaint brass catches and no locks. In the old KITCHEN, now the housekeeper's room, is a little furnace, by the side of the big hearth, with two circular openings, upon which rested the pots in which the clotted cream was scalded.

In all likelihood the MAIN ENTRANCE to the house was through a doorway at the *east* end of THE HALL. This is a somewhat peculiar position, as the roadway communicating with the outside world runs north and south to the *west* of all the existing buildings. The explanation appears to be as follows:—The church was in existence on its present site in the 12th century, for, above the doorway are the remains of a carved arch in the typical Norman work of that period. Up to the time of the Reformation there would be frequent Services, daily as well as weekly, and if the convenience of the incumbents of those days were considered, no better position for the chief entrance to the house could be desired than the one shown on the plan.

The DAIRY must have been an important room, as the rector in the 17th century would be dependent on his farming operations for a large portion of his income. Both the kitchen and the dairy were fitted with narrow benches fixed against the walls. Many traces and indeed some portions of these remain to this day. The establishment probably included maid servants and day labourers, who would have some of their meals in the house.

The BOTTLE HOUSE was in reality a pantry and is used as such at the present time. The half-door is a massive structure four feet high to exclude dogs. In medieval times, both in colleges and manor houses, the Buttery or Bottle House (from F. bouteille) was a small room for storing drink. Later, gloomy cellars were built for this purpose, as it is a common belief, that casks of ale and cider should be kept in the dark. The word Pantry has likewise lost its significance, for bread is no longer stored there.

The portions of the STAIRCASE with its narrow treads should be noted. It remains on the original site, but has doubtless been reconditioned more than once.

We have no means of indicating the position of the SEVEN CHAMBERS on the upper floor; the partitions between the several rooms are now mostly of lath and plaster.

The terrier after a long list of outbuildings and various courts states that:—"On ye south side of ye house is a GARDEN enclosed with a mudd wall, which hath a thatched covering." This garden was ideally situated for growing vegetables, as the ground in front of the house slopes to the south, but no trace of it remains. The WEST COURT has also vanished; the NORTH COURT is now absorbed in the LARGE YARD and the ORCHARD is a shrubbery.

About the middle of

THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

NO
See plan, framed

the need for a third sitting room seems to have arisen; perhaps the Rector's quiver was full and his wife and daughters insisted upon the provision of a ladies' room, to which they could withdraw. Plan No. 2 should be consulted here, for at this juncture a serious mistake was made by interfering with the original plan in constructing a new room, henceforth to be known as the DRAWING ROOM and the fault has never been remedied. Seven feet of the eastern portion of the Great Parlour were sacrificed to supply a NEW HALL with its main entrance from the south instead of from the east. This hall is too narrow and not much better than a passage. The new entrance from the hall to the diminished parlour, now the DINING ROOM must have been the cause of extra draughts.

A portion of the old hall was given up, as a site for a NEW STAIRCASE of an easier gradient than the old one, which now became the backstairs. The foot of the new stairway projects into a small annexe, which served as a kind of porch in which was a doorway leading to the church path. This staircase is a pleasing feature, with a short bridge across the passage which leads to the present kitchen.

About this time the rear premises were increased by the addition of a SALTING HOUSE or larder on the site of the old wood shed; fresh meat during the winter even at this period being something of a luxury. Then the old original lead-latticed windows in front of the house were replaced by the more convenient but less artistic sash windows. At a later date the Dining Room and Drawing Room were equipped with French windows rising from the floor level and probably during this century the three reception rooms were wainscoted in oak.

This period too, must have seen a good many alterations in the surroundings of the rectory. With an entrance in front of the house a short drive would be made giving a carriage approach from the main road on the west side. The old walled garden would be abolished and some attempt made to lay out the site as a pleasance.

We come now to the early days of

THE NINETEENTH CENTURY,

when further alterations and extensions were made, as will be noted on plan No. 3. By removing a thick cob wall extra space was available and the old dairy was converted into a KITCHEN, with a small SCULLERY alongside. A fireplace with an external chimney stack was necessitated by this change. The old kitchen was henceforth the SERVANTS' HALL or HOUSEKEEPER'S ROOM. Two of the doors of the dining room were blocked. The one leading to the old hall was plainly visible a few years ago, when a fresh wall paper was being hung and no less than five layers of paper were stripped from the walls.

A new approach was introduced to the little parlour, now known as the STUDY, a quaint looking apartment with two four-centred arches supporting part of the ceiling and with numerous bookcases, cupboards and drawers built into the walls.

Part of the salting house was partitioned off to form a LARDER, sufficiently large to be used now as a DAIRY for the half dozen cows, which graze on THE LAWN in front of the house. A BAKEHOUSE was built out to the west with a very large open fireplace and two side ovens of stone, to be heated with faggot wood, for baking bread and pastry. Over it is a MAN SERVANT'S ROOM with its own private staircase.

To the east, beyond the dining room, was erected a large CIDER CELLAR, approached by a long passage, which also gave access to the laundry buildings. This LAUNDRY was demolished before the end of the 19th century. We have some particulars concerning it from a lady, a daughter of the Rev. R. S. Bryan, a former rector from 1852 to 1877. She remembers as a young girl sleeping in one of the bedrooms on the upper floor, the approach being by a staircase in the corner of the present apple store. Traces of the ground plan and also of the staircase are still in evidence.

The laundry was found to be unworkable owing to difficulty with regard to a sufficient supply of water, the only source in those days being a well at the extreme west end of the rectory. The conveyance of water must have been a very laborious business and in dry summers very little washing would be possible as the well is a shallow one.

Fortunately an additional supply from a well seventy feet deep is now available and the bakehouse has been fitted up as a modern laundry.

Reference to plan No. 4 shows, that on the upper floor there are TEN BEDROOMS, a large BATH ROOM, a STOREROOM and a BOX ROOM. The approach to most of them is by long narrow passages and in two separate cases access to a bedroom can only be obtained by passing through another.

Turning to the OUTBUILDINGS, whose positions are outlined on plan No. 5, it will be seen that they include a GARAGE, STABLES, POULTRY HOUSES and many useful sheds. On the west of the LARGE YARD stands the old TITHE BARN, built of cob and thatch, with its lead latticed windows and held together by massive tie beams. Converted into a PARISH HALL, this old building is the scene of many dances, whist drives and other social gatherings. The SMALL YARD is a picturesque grass laid enclosure, its walls encrusted with small ferns, stonecrops and climbing roses.

This old rectory in spite of its age is a most comfortable residence ; the very thick walls and the thatched roof rendering it cool in summer and warm in winter. It is beautifully situated on a terrace, the summit of a grassy slope with some very fine trees, called in the 17th century "The Bridge Park," but now known as "The Lawn." Reference should be made here to plan No. 6. On the south is the River Little Dart, a famous trout stream and for a background there are dense woods of larch and beech. Scattered among them are still some full grown specimens of spruce firs, but many have been felled in recent years. They were planted about 100 years ago by the Rev. Benjamin Clay, rector for 56 years from 1796 to 1852, a close friend of the 4th Earl of Portsmouth, at that time owner of the woods and patron of the benefice.

The meadow lands on both sides of the river marked on the plan Great Mary Hams and Small Mary Hams now form part of the Glebe lands. They originated as a benefaction to the living from an unknown source, the rent to be applied to the provision of bread and wine to be used for Holy Communion. "Mary Hams" is an abbreviation of "The water meadows attached to S. Mary's Church."

Altogether the house, its surroundings and its beautiful situation, justify its description as a typical old Devonshire Rectory. It has no pretension to style itself a mansion, nor should it be classed with some of the huge edifices, of which a few may still be found in Devon, generally regarded as "White Elephants." In plain language it is a curious mixture of a gentleman's residence and a farm house. Common enough in the country a hundred years ago such parsonage house are gradually being superseded by something more up-to-date !

