

Notes from Edward Roberts' walk around East Meon

June 2012

Purpose of exercise

Edward has an unique knowledge of East Meon's historic buildings, especially those built in mediaeval times. We wanted to learn as much as possible from him both to enrich the research which members are conducting into their own House Histories, and to inform the guides who will be taking visitors around the village during the Flower Festival.

General observation

Edward indicated a number of houses which were originally Hall Houses, including The Court Hall, but also Forge Sound, Riverside, The Tudor House, Hockley Cottages ... The village is unusual both in having had so many in the first place, and in having preserved so many in their original shape.

The Court Hall

According to Edward, this is "the best preserved Court Hall in Hampshire." Three stages of history have helped its preservation. It was built in 1395 – 1397 by William of Wykeham. In the 17th Century, a farmhouse was built (now The Court House) and the Hall entered a period of "benign neglect" – it became an adjunct to the farmhouse, possibly a back kitchen; a floor was installed, cattle and farm equipment were sheltered in it. Then, in the 1920s, architect Morley Horder who then owned The Court House did extensive restoration, returning it to its present condition. For instance, he uncovered the magnificent fireplace.

When it was built, it was intended to inspire awe to those who visited it. Visitors would have entered it by the servants' end, and the bishop or his steward would have sat at the south end, on a dais.

The master builder was William Wynford – architects were unknown – and Edward pointed out that the walls are not entirely true – an extra length of beam was required at the south west corner. Wynford was also required to supervise the carving of the corbels, representing kings and bishops. The kings could be either, or both, Richard II who was on the throne at the time of building, and/or Edward III who died in 1377.

At the south end, the Hall was built onto a wing that was attached to an earlier wing which contained the bishop's chamber and chapel. A doorway, now blocked up, gave access to a winding staircase which gave access to the chamber.

At the north end, still in fine state of preservation, the great chamber probably pre-dated the main hall, and is entered via original oak block steps just outside the Hall. It would have been painted green. There is a garde-robe off the chamber, i.e. a toilet whose products would have been deposited a floor below, whence servants had to remove it. The buttery (bouteillerie, where drinks were made) and pantry (painterie – food, ditto) were below the chamber.

During the period of 'benign neglect' extra floors/lofts were built and the traces remain of the footings of the beams which were then installed.

The Cross

i) **Vicarage Lodge.** Although this was divided into two separate houses at the end of the 19th Century, Edward believes it was built as a single house originally.

ii) **Cross Keys.** Edward was very impressed by this building, which he believes was built at the same time as Glenthorne (my notes are smudged by the rain and I didn't hear all the reasoning behind this). John Mackinlay pointed out the outlines of previous doorways – Edward said it was normal for houses of that period to have a central doorway (might have been removed?)

John and Dennis reported that the garage of Cross Keys, an old building, was in living memory the workshop of a coffin maker, Coles.

iii) **Angel Inn.** Edward pointed out closely studded bricks and timber which indicate a date c. 1600. (At that time, there were three categories of 'public house'. First, Inns, which he described as 5 star hotels, and which catered for the gentry, officers, and well-off travellers. They would have had a grand room for reception, bed-rooms and a dormitory for less well-off travellers. Second, Taverns, which mainly existed in towns and cities. Thirdly, ale-houses, basically private houses where the wife might have brewed the ale and customers would have sat on benches at simple tables, drinking it.) Edward later suggested that the architecture of Ye Olde George Inn dates back to the 17th century.

Glenthorne House

Edward is firmly of the view that the north side of the house was built at the same time as the south exterior – the latter being a very ornate, brick-clad exterior typical of the reign of William and Mary, the latter very simple, possibly plastered, since nobody would have overlooked it. What puzzles him is the absence of accommodation for servants who would have been necessary in such a prosperous house. There is no sign in the attic of dormer windows having existed, or of any sleeping quarters for servants. Possibly there might have been a lean-to area on the north side.

Forge Sound

Edward described this as a remarkable survival. Forge Sound was built in the second half of the 14th century and originally comprised three rooms, a large aisled hall, in which a number of people would have lived (and some animals ...) and two smaller chambers. A feature of the house are the passing braces, large diagonal beams which are tilted towards the middle of the roof. At their feet, there would have been extra space. One of these survives in full, and half of another. The beams are 'sans purlin' – purlins were horizontal structural members supporting the roof deck. (It is, instead, supported by hips at each end.)

A very similar Hall House stands next door – Riverside.