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Exterior survey

4.1 The main range: the facade

THE hall presents an impressive prospect as it is approached, its height and bulk accentuated by the elevated site: it thus towers above the smaller surrounding farm buildings. This would have deliberately intended by the Corbets, as height represented status at a time when the majority of rural buildings would still have been cruck-built and thus single-storey.

The façade demonstrates the multi-gabled configuration that was the hallmark of gentry houses throughout Shropshire and elsewhere during the Elizabethan period. It has three gables: the largest, on the right, is that of the service wing, with the porch in the centre, and that of the west wing on the left. The service wing gable is plain, while that of the porch and west wing are of shaped, or 'Dutch', form; this type was highly popular in the first quarter of the 17th century with a pioneering example being its use at Moreton Corbet of the 1570s. Other gables of this form occur at Ludstone Hall, near Claverley, and could be found at the now-demolished Thorne's Hall, Shrewsbury, of around 1620.

The porch is faced in fine Grinshill ashlar and contains a wide open entrance which has a flattened four-centred - or 'Tudor' - arch, flanked by pilasters supporting a moulded entablature above. The inner walls of the porch have much early graffiti, with several dates and initials: the most prominent, on the right side, is, in florid script, *Dudley North, July* (day illegible) *1707*. The porch has wooden side benches within and a lamp recess in the right wall.

Inside, the main doorway has a basket-shaped arch and beneath a massive studded door, 6 ft 10 ins in height and 5 ft in width, made of heavy planks up to a foot in width. It is supported on strap hinges with fleur-de-lys ends and has an ornamental handle and knocker. Inside is a stock lock and iron latch.

On the first floor is a window of the cross type within a raised architrave. The mullion and one transom are of ovolo section, as are the remainder of the windows of the hall range. Beneath are two griffins placed at the corners of the porch as if guarding the entrance; they differ slightly in detail. The use of these heraldic beasts is a continuation of a medieval trait and something again probably inspired by those at Moreton Corbet. Between the griffins is the Corbett coat of arms, which has suffered much from erosion: beneath is the motto *Mediocra Firma*. Top and bottom of the griffins are moulded stone bands, which continue along the sides of the porch, but do not line up with those beneath the first floor windows on the hall range.

In the attic is a two-light mullioned window and above it a stone, now weathered, carrying a further badge of the Corbett family, an elephant. This has the name CORBET in a panel above and beneath it, although much eroded can just be made out THOMAS and MAR (Margaret, presumably). This refers to Thomas Corbet I and his wife and indicates the porch, and presumably the hall range façade, was completed before his death in 1615.

The porch gable has prominent moulded coping and its ogee-shaped sides rising to a flat top upon which is a finial in the shape of a ball upon a column. Beneath is a two light attic window with plain mullion and jambs.

Left and right of the porch are four windows, two on each floor. Three are of the mullioned and transomed type, of six lights, and of ovolo section. The fourth - which lights the great hall - is, smaller as it is of three lights with no transom. However, this has a finer moulding than the others, with a double fillet.

The ground floor windows have moulded entablature above, while the sills of the first floor windows are connected by moulded storey bands. This also continues onto the west wing.

The west wing has two six light mullioned and transomed windows on the ground and first floors. These are placed off-centre to the left, on account of fireplaces placed within on the eastern return wall. These have two thin diamond-shaped flues rising from the eaves.

The gable is also shaped, with plainer coping with a dentilled decoration instead. There is a two-light attic window and above, a plaque with a raven, the principal badge of the Corbet family. Beneath is a weathered inscription on two lines. On the right of the top line appears to be the name CORBET and the second line reads ROBT CORBET AD --. The date is illegible but appears to begin 16-. This would make it Robert Corbet II and indicate he continued building the hall, perhaps completing the west wing and the vanished upper wing, after his father's death in 1615. Further lettering on this line cannot be made out, but there appear to be the figures 05.

A crucial feature of the west wing is the fact that it has ashlar quoins on its right side only. On the left, there are signs of rebuilding reaching inward as far as the windows and extending upwards to approximately the top of the first floor window. The topmost stone in the plinth looks as if it stood on an internal angle. This suggests a length of wall - the side wall of the upper wing - projected from this corner and the brickwork of the west wing was disturbed when it was demolished.

4.2 The southwest elevation

The west elevation is a sheer flat stretch of brick wall, which gives the building a sheared-off look that supports the idea of an upper wing here having been demolished.

There are three windows on this elevation. To the left of centre is a wide 16-pane sash window, with brick lintel above, the proportions of which appear early 19th

century. On the first floor is a four-light mullioned and transomed window of plain section, similar to those in the service wing. In the attic, beneath a small gable, is a three-light mullioned window with the outer lights blocked; the central light has original fixed glazing, of 30 small panes.

Right of centre on the ground floor is a blocked doorway: further proof an upper wing existed, for it was the means by which it was entered from the great hall. The door is blocked with brick that appears to be 18th century. This may indicate when the upper wing was demolished.

There is no plinth on this wall, except for a section about seven feet in length beneath the observation tower. Where it stops indicates where the rear wall of the upper wing stood (see Figure 1).

4.3 The rear

Here the hall takes on a more irregular appearance, in great contrast to the façade. Beginning from the east, just inward of the junction with the service wing is a massive stair tower with plain gable. In the recess between the two is, on the first floor, a small two-light landing window. Its mullion and jambs are of red sandstone, while the sill and lintel are of buff stone.

The brickwork of the tower is completely undecorated, and this plus the small windows gives it a bleak appearance. On the ground and first floor are two-light mullioned windows. The ground floor one is of red sandstone, and unusually the bottom half of both lights are blocked in the same material - suggesting it occurred at an early date - which may have been done to provide greater privacy for those using the stair, especially the ladies. Each light has leaded glass of six rectangular panes. The first floor window is also of red sandstone but with a buff sandstone lintel.

Above this is a small window with fixed glazing, composed of 12 small panes, which lights the landing of the stair in the attic. However in the gable is a further window, formerly of three lights, now blocked. A timber lintel suggests this was of wood, and this is confirmed within the attic, where the frame is exposed.

Right of the stair tower is a modern single-storey glazed porch, built into the space between it and the tall projecting chimneystack which served the great hall. Within the porch is a doorway into the rear of the hall, which has buff stone jambs above and red below. On the right jamb is an incised symbol like a cross with rounded ends, which may be a mason's mark. Right of the door is a blocked two-light mullioned window, which formerly lit the rear wall of the great hall.

Above the porch, on the first floor, is a vertical cross-window, which has its central mullion renewed.

The stack is sheer and straight-sided, but narrows at eaves level, where stone offsets support an upper section topped by three tall brick flues of star-shaped section. It has stone quoins right up to the eaves on the left side, but on the right they are interrupted at first floor level where what is thought to be a garderobe, with small modern window, has been added in the gap between the stack and the north wing.

The north wing itself is of two storeys, with no quoins, and rises to a flat parapet which has stone crenellations. The parapet may have been a lookout point, for it has fine views across to Kenwick Park to the northwest. The tower has two three-light transomed windows on each floor, with ovolo mouldings, the ground floor one blocked in brick. This must have been done to reduce duty paid on the house under the Window Tax, which was levied from 1696 to 1851. Beneath it is a blocked narrow opening with timber lintel, which has the appearance of a former cellar window, yet there is no cellar at this point.

Above the parapet, and flush with the rear wall of the range, is the timber-framed gable touched upon earlier. It has decorative framing featuring two panels with lozenge decoration. Beneath is a section of wall with close studding, with brick infill between the timbers, and a door to the attic. The eastern return wall of this gable, visible in the attic, is also close-studded.

This gable shows Stanwardine Hall was originally a timber-framed building, the external walls comprising decorative framing and close-studding, the most prestigious forms of treatment. This suggests a date before 1590, as by this time stone and brick were the predominant materials for gentry mansions in Shropshire. Why this gable was allowed to stay when the remainder of the building was later rebuilt in brick is not immediately clear.

4.4 The service wing

The massive size of the service wing indicates it was intended to support a large household. The treatment of it is startlingly plain, even severe, when compared to the main residential range, and on the façade, this results in an awkward marriage between the two elements.

The south gable on the façade has four windows, all of much plainer style than the main range, with flat-chamfered frames. The basement window is mullioned only and has four lights, each with six panes of renewed glass. On the ground and first floor are mullioned and transomed windows of four lights. Both have leaded glass, some of it early, with nine panes in the upper lights and 15 in the lower; however, the left lower light of the ground floor window has 24 smaller panes, which is perhaps the original 16th century glazing. In the attic is a two-light window, each light with fixed glazing of 15 panes.

Projecting from the gable are the ends of the roof purlins: two on each side and one at the ridge. The ends of the wallplates also project at eaves level. These are shaped and were therefore meant to be seen. On the roof is a weathervane in the form of a raven.

The left return wall of the wing has two three-light mullioned-and-transomed windows. That on the first floor is of red sandstone. To their left is an integral chimney, with two tall diagonally-placed flues rising above the eaves.

Projecting right of the wing is the east wing, narrow single-bay structure of two storeys plus basement. An irregular joint in the brickwork proves it is an addition, probably of the early 17th century.

Its south wall has windows of later style, possibly the early 18th century, a time when the hall experienced a considerable refurbishment. The ground floor has a wooden cross window (the frame is renewed) with semi-circular head. This window has been recently opened out, for an English Heritage photograph of 1989 shows it partly blocked. Above this is a wooden two-light mullioned window, again with modern frame.

The east wall is completely windowless and has a narrow brick chimneystack placed centrally, yet no fireplaces survive in any of the rooms inside. It has a shaped gable similar to the facade, but with plain coping. This indicates it was probably added at the same time as the main range was rebuilt. The function of the east wing is uncertain, yet the shaped gable, provision of fireplaces and a fine door lintel inside indicate it was of high status.

The east return wall of the service wing displays a variety of windows of several periods, indicating piecemeal replacement. In the basement are stone mullioned windows; but those on the first and second floor windows are wooden-framed, with some early blocked ones clearly left over from the hall's timber-framed phase. The blocking indicates that windows in the service wing were considered expendable when faced with the Window Tax.

The basement windows, which are actually just above exterior ground floor level, are of three lights and there are three of them: the right one lights a cellar but is on the same level as the others. Above and to the right of these, at the junction with the bell tower, is a sash window of squat appearance and of 20 panes, lighting the breakfast room. It is probably of the mid-18th century.

On the first floor is a square-shaped cross-window, blocked, but with its wooden pegged frame still visible. It is blocked in handmade brick, indicating this was done at an early date. Right of this is a wooden mullioned and transomed window of three lights and 12 panes. The lower middle light opens outwards. The proportions suggest it is an early 18th century replacement for another square wooden cross window. Then to its right, adjoining the bell tower, is a small four-pane window.

On the second floor is, from the left, a blocked former three-light wooden mullioned-and-transomed window, and two early 18th century three-light mullioned and transomed windows. Blocking to the right however indicates this is the remnant of a much larger window, probably of five lights. Thus it was probably the largest window in the building and therefore the room within – the second chamber on this floor – was an important one, something confirmed by the fact it has the finest beams in the wing.

Beyond the bell tower, at the far right of the wing, is what appears to be a blocked, tall cross-window on the first floor and on the second floor a square window with modern frame.

We have already noted how the rear gable of the wing shows signs of being rebuilt from the first floor upwards, where a variation of English bond has at least two courses of stretchers to one of headers. Also, at first floor level, is a series of headers, placed approximately one foot apart. The rhythm suggests they have blocked the housings for floor joists, and therefore, the wing continued further – at least in single storey form, for the feature is not found on the first floor. However, this idea is challenged by the fact there is a plinth on this wall.

There are three windows on the rear gable: on the ground floor is a tall cross-window of early 18th century style, which actually lights both the kitchen and the cheese room above: the floor level cuts across midway and this arrangement suggests the window pre-dates the insertion of the cheese room floor, which took place after 1713. On the first floor is a modern three-light window, and in the attic a blocked former three-light window.

Right of the cross-window is a single-storey outshut of irregular brickwork, probably late 18th or early 19th century, with a slate roof; this functions as a pantry.

The west return wall of the wing has on the ground floor an early-18th century three-light wooden mullioned window with central opening light. Blocking in the brickwork above indicates this window was once taller, ie, it was transomed; a tall window was necessary because of the original 13-foot height of the kitchen.

Right of this is a single-storey porch, 19th century, which forms the rear entrance to the house. It has a flat wooden canopy over the door, Flemish bond brickwork, and a slate roof and a three-light window. Above the porch, on the first floor, is a modern three-light mullioned-and-transomed window.

4.5 The bell tower

This is an unusual feature, shown by its roof structure to have been added at a later date, perhaps late 16th century. It is of three storeys plus attic and is sited right of centre on the northeastern wall of the service wing. It is possible this was the brewhouse, with malt chambers, named in Thomas Corbet I's inventory of 1615.

The tower is L-shaped, but the gable itself is full-out, resulting in an overhang on its left side, beneath which is suspended a bell. A wooden angle brace supports the overhang of the gable. Directly beneath, at ground level, a single-storey porch has been built into the angle of the L-shape, its round-headed doorway indicating an early 19th century date.

There are three windows, all mullioned and with wooden frames: a tall three-light on the ground floor, a low three-light on the first floor and a wide three-light on the first floor. In the gable is evidence of a blocked three-light window in the attic. There is also a blocked two-light window on the south-facing side wall on the second floor. This is the only evidence of a window on this wall.

Right of the bell tower is a tall, single-storey outshut, which reaches up to the second floor of the former. It is built in Flemish bond brickwork, suggesting the early-to-mid 19th century. The quality is poor and it has begun to shear away from the bell tower where the two structures join. There is a two-light segmental-headed casement window, but joints in the brickwork beneath indicate it was originally a door. To its left is a small blocked opening and beneath this, at ground level, a further blocked opening with timber lintel. The function of this outshut is not immediately clear other than to act as a porch. Internally, it is now all one with the bell tower, providing an entrance hallway to the kitchen. However, the fact the 16th-century kitchen door opens outwards into this porch suggests it may have replaced an earlier structure here.