

5:

Interior survey

5.1 Ground floor: the great hall

THIS was originally the largest room of the house, measuring approximately 35 ft in width and 24 in depth. It was subdivided in the mid-to-late 19th century to create three rooms, but now there are two rooms of unequal size: the largest termed the front hall, which lies immediately behind the entrance, with the billiard room to the west. The partition dividing then runs from the centre of the hall window towards the rear but is staggered in the centre.

The great hall was originally flagged throughout, and the flagstones remain in the front hall. The porch entrance originally led to the screens passage, approximately 7 ft wide, running backwards to a doorway in the rear wall. The left side of the passage was probably formed by a timber-framed partition dividing it from the great hall. This was perhaps removed in the 19th century when the great hall was subdivided: its position is betrayed by a stylistic change in the plaster frieze below the ceiling. This partition was either continuous, with a doorway to the great hall, or else had a break in which was sited a moveable screen (as in the well-known example of Rufford Old Hall, near Ormskirk, in Lancashire).

The plaster frieze extended throughout the great hall. Decoration of this type was highly fashionable in gentry houses in the late 16th and early 17th century: the earliest dated Shropshire example is 1576 at Manor Farm, Aston Boterell. Here, the ceiling itself is decorated, and is divided into panels by thin ribs and carries a coat of arms; a later and highly-exuberant example is at Wilderhope Manor. Stanwardine is more restrained than these contemporaries, for the ceiling itself is perfectly plain. However, the fact that no beams are exposed suggests it was intended to have plaster decoration: perhaps this too was removed when the hall was partitioned.

There are two designs present on the plaster frieze. The east wall, (the right side of the screens passage) it is of relatively crude form, with shields, cones and vines, but on the rear wall of the hall, above the rear door of the passage, this same pattern is executed in much finer quality. On the front wall, right of the screens passage, is a lion's head and a change in pattern, with different shape shield and foliage. This continues into the billiard room.

On the rear wall of the hall was formerly a wide lateral hearth, which as well as providing heat also functioned as a device of gentry status. It is now concealed by a built-in cupboard, entered by an early 18th century six panel-door cut asymmetrically to fit. The part that is visible is relatively plain with a four-centred arched head and flanked by pilasters, whose base has a lozenge design, supporting a moulded mantelshelf. To the right of the fireplace lay a straight-flight stair, now removed, which must have been a later insertion.

A 19th century door of six-panel form leads to the billiard room, a step higher than the front hall because a wooden boarded floor was inserted over the original flags. The room is heated by a fine late 19th century fireplace of black slate with marble panels and a metal fender. To its right is a corner cupboard, probably of late 18th century date.

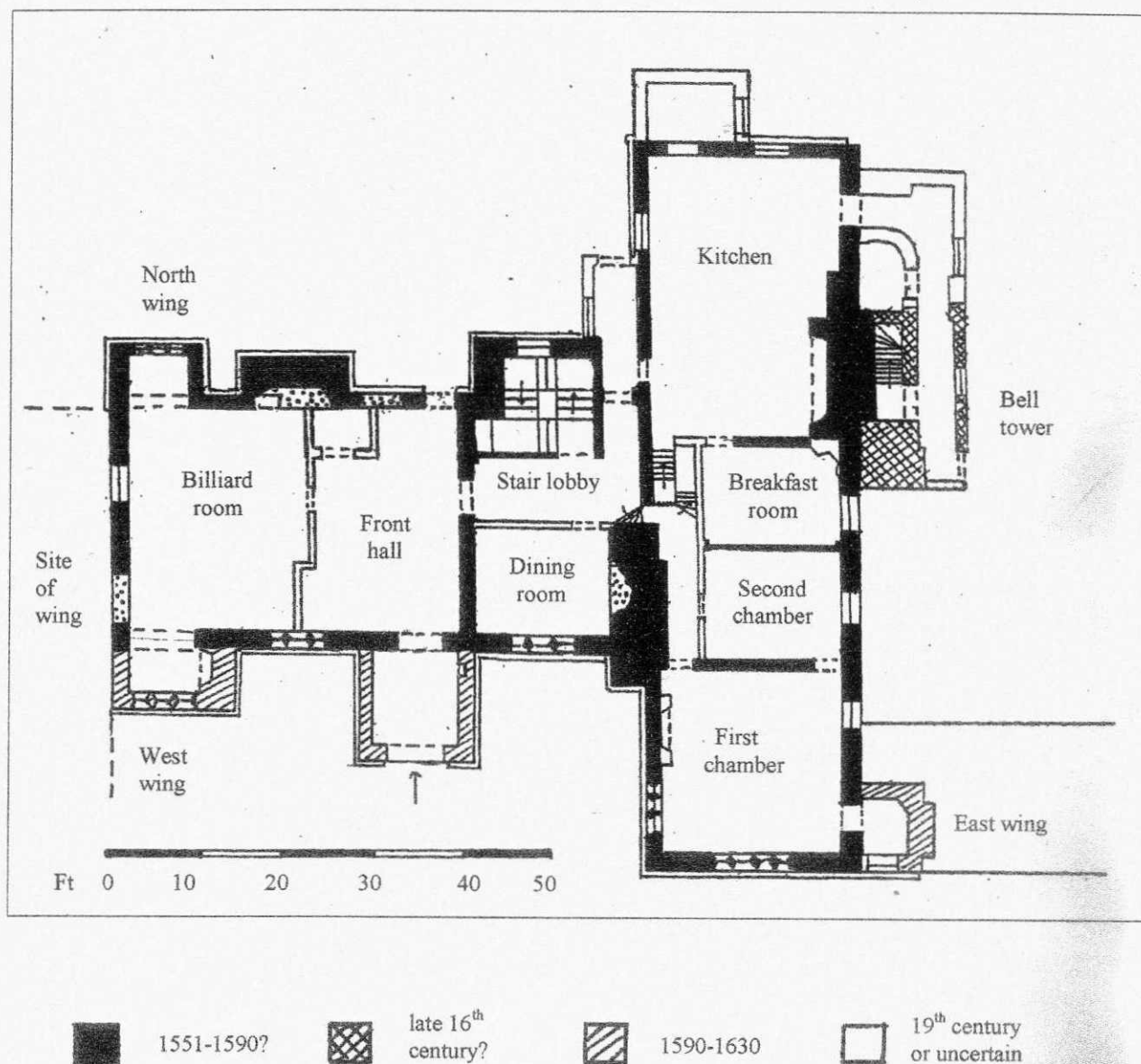


FIGURE 1: Ground floor plan, showing names of rooms and building sequence

Leading off the billiard room is the ground floor room of the west wing, which is approximately 7 ft square, and despite its small size, provided with a fireplace. Here the plaster frieze changes to a design of shields joined by interlaced bands. The change in design indicates the room was partitioned off from the great hall, and perhaps served as a small parlour.

Adjacent to the west wing, on the west wall, is crucial evidence that the house once continued further in this direction. There is a shallow recess that was originally a doorway, around 3 ft 6 in wide. It has a wooden frame with nicked lintel, a device indicating a date around 1600. This door must have been the means of entry to the upper wing that lay beyond. Above it is a fragment of the vine pattern frieze, but for the remainder of the west wall it is missing.

At the rear of the billiard room is the ground floor room of the north tower. This is now screened off by a modern partition but it originally must have been open, for the vine frieze continues into it. Its large three-light transomed window, now blocked, would have given fine views over the countryside to the north.

Finally, an interesting curiosity is the covering of the billiard table itself, which is of fabric from a barrage balloon shot down nearby during World War Two.

5.2 The stair lobby

This leads off the rear of the screens passage and provides access to the stair turret and the service wing.

It is entered by a two-panel door which, at 4 ft, is unusually wide; the style suggests the early 18th century. On the right of the lobby is a wall that appears to be partly of timber-frame construction, containing an early 18th century four-panel door to the dining room.

On the left is an open entrance to the stair tower, with heavily-moulded architrave (the right side of which has been renewed) and moulded entablature above. Both sides of the passage have wooden gun racks.

The style of the doorways infers the stair lobby was created in the early 18th century, probably during the refurbishment of the house which took place at this time.

5.3 The dining room

This is a relatively small room, measuring 13 ft in depth and 15 in width, but contains the finest original decoration in the building, with fine panelling of the early 18th century. However, it must have assumed high status only at that time, for

its position at the lower end of the hall, beyond the screens passage, indicates it must have had a service function when the house was first built. We have already noted that rooms placed in this location were an innovation shared by Stanwardine and several of its late 16th century peers.

The room is panelled throughout to a height of just over 9 ft; the full height of the ceiling is 13 ft, similar to the hall. The panels are rectangular and are surmounted by a cornice with a dentilled base. On the east wall however is panelling of an early 17th century, with columns of Jacobean design flanking a blocked fireplace. This panelling has probably been reused from elsewhere in the hall and was probably imported when the dining room was upgraded in the early 18th century.

Beneath the window is a panel with inlaid design of a raven along with the date 1588 and the initials C and R I, representing Robert Corbet I and his wife Jane. Again this must have been transplanted in the early 18th century from elsewhere in the house, for it is too fine for what would have been a service room in 1588.

The ceiling has two beams, one approximately 2 ft in from the east wall with a deep chamfer on one side, the other around a foot inward of the fireplace, and again chamfered.

5.4 The stair tower and landing

The tower contains a stair comprised of solid oak blocks, which rises in short straight flights of three steps, at right angles to each other, around a closed central well. This was a practical form of stair in late 16th century gentry houses – in the early days of ceiled halls – but offered little in the way of display. By the early 17th century, the fashion developed for ornate carved staircases on full view in the main body of the house, such as that at Benthall Hall, Benthall.

On the first landing, between ground and first floors, is an unglazed window of five lights separated by wooden diamond-shaped mullions, which looks down into the stair lobby. On the left side of this landing is a storage area with wooden door. On the right it extends further and in its end wall is a small spy window, with wooden window, offering a view of the hall, with wooden door. This was a device which allowed visitors to the hall – perhaps guests who were not entirely to be trusted – to be observed. A similar window occurs in the late 15th century Borrass Hall near Wrexham, Clwyd.

This extended landing may have been the *gallery* referred to in the inventory of Thomas Corbett in 1616. The inventory also refers to the *closet in the gallery* and *store house in the gallery* as well.

The stair ends on the first floor in a wide lateral landing, from which the chambers over the hall range, and those on the second floor of the wing, can be reached. On

the hall side is a wide early 18th century two-panel door, similar to that leading off the front hall to the stair lobby: this leads to a corridor running from front to back, which mirror the former screens passage below. The chambers over the great hall, dining room and porch lead off. The partition on the dining room side is timber-framed, with large rectangular panels. That on the hall side is modern, but has replaced an earlier one: probably the corridor did not exist in the original arrangement however, and the great hall chamber extended the full width of the floor.

5.5 The great hall chamber

This would have been the *dining chamber* referred to in Thomas Corbet's inventory of 1615. On the rear wall is a stone fireplace with four-centred arched head. The ceiling is not plastered, but supported instead on fine moulded cross-beams. The room originally contained fine wooden panelling, but this was removed to Petton Church in the 19th century.

The chamber of the west wing leads off and again this, like the room below, was heated.

5.6 The porch chamber

Despite the small size of this room, it too was heated: a fine stone hearth with a four-centred arched head, but has inserted within it a hob grate of the early 19th century. The room has an early 18th century four-panel door.

5.7 The parlour chamber

Here is a fine ceiling of moulded cross-beams, similar to that in the hall chamber. The axial beams continue through the rear wall into the stair landing area, where instead of being moulded they are chamfered and stopped. This indicates the wall dividing the chamber and landing is an original arrangement.

On the eastern wall is a fine early 18th century stone fireplace whose square opening has a heavy cyma moulding and is flanked by moulded brackets on pilasters

supporting a mantelshelf. The fine style of the fireplace indicates that by then this had perhaps become the most important bedroom of the house.

A two-panel door left of the fireplace leads to a narrow passage which leads to the second chamber on the second floor of the wing. In this passage is a small cupboard with wooden door built into the side wall of the parlour chamber fireplace.

5.8 The service wing: introduction

The term service wing may in fact be an over-simplification, for it appears to have been multi-functional. Some of the rooms, such as the kitchen and the basement, clearly began had a service role. However, others, such as the chambers at the front of the wing, were residential rooms of high status, for their crossbeam ceilings and large windows makes this evident. These must have been for members of the family, or for guests. Probably the wing housed a separate household, perhaps the younger generation of the Corbets lived here while their parents occupied the upper wing. Therefore, the wing would have combined service and residential use.

The wing is unusual in that it has five floor levels. The lowest is the basement, which is beneath the front part of the wing only. The ground floor is represented by the kitchen and breakfast room. The first floor comprises two chambers at the front of the wing beyond the breakfast room: these are however only around six feet higher than the level of the ground floor. The cheese room is an intermediate storey, created when a floor was inserted in the kitchen: the latter originally had the same ceiling height as the first floor. The second floor meanwhile is continuous throughout and so too is the attic floor.

Furthermore, there are differences in height between the floors of the hall range and the wing. The ground floor of the hall range is a foot or so higher than the kitchen, but only around five feet lower than the first floor of the wing. Only the second floor of the wing and the first floor of the hall range are on the same level. In the attic, the floor level over the hall range is higher than that over the wing.

The chambers in the wing do not have specific names, and so for ease of identification will be numbered from front to rear, ie first chamber, second chamber, etc.

5.9 The rear lobby

External entry to the wing is principally through a lobby entered from the single story rear porch. On its left is the door to the kitchen, with a 19th century batten-and-board door. This would have been an external entrance before the rear porch was constructed. Immediately ahead is a basket-shaped arched entrance, with no

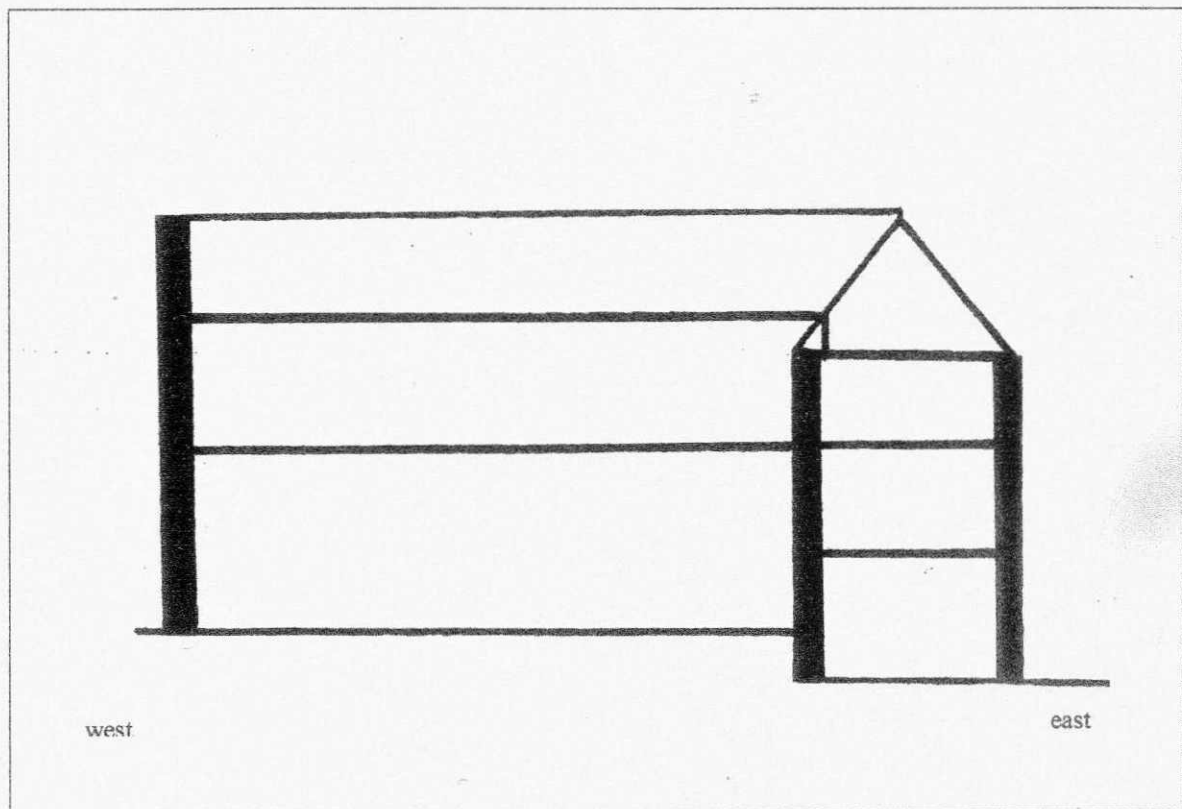


FIGURE 2: Sketch, not to scale, showing floor levels in hall range and wing

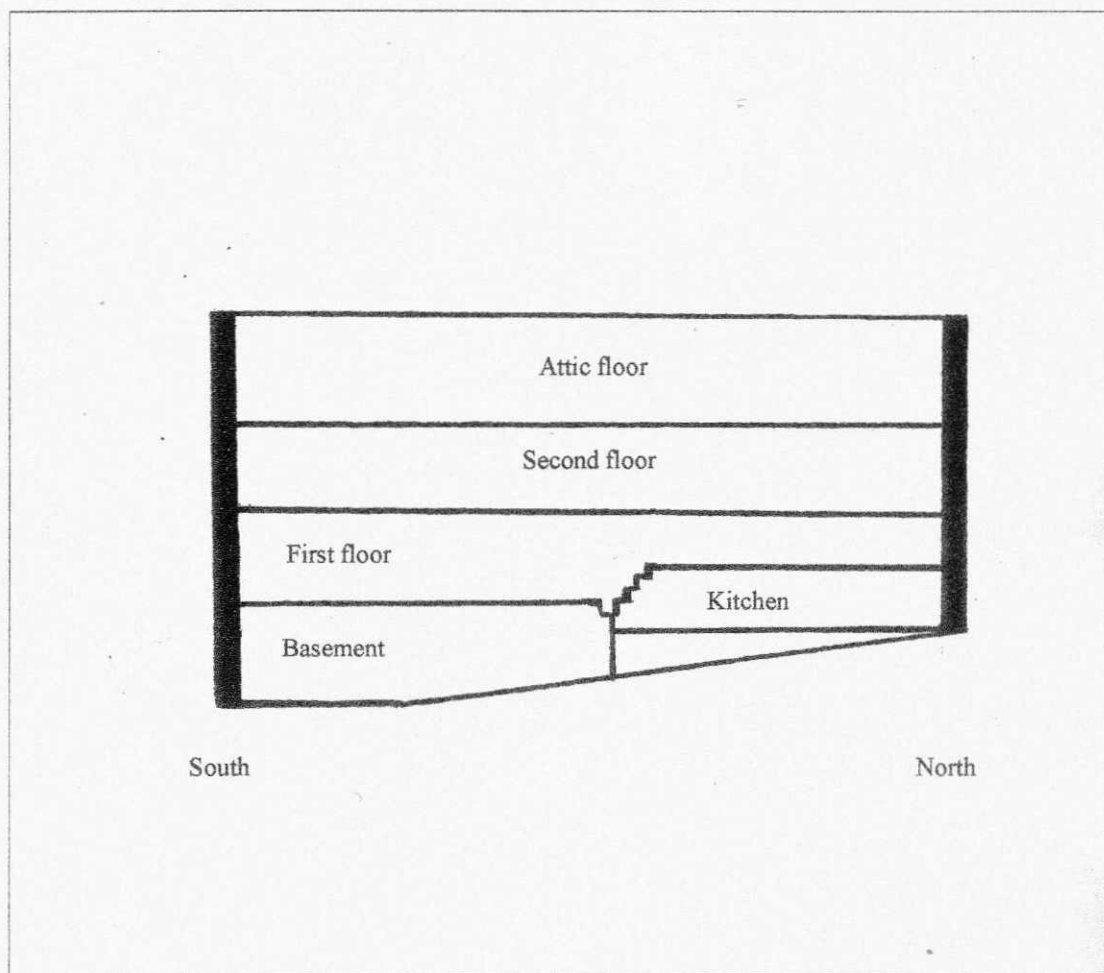


FIGURE 3: Sketch, not to scale, showing floor levels through service wing

door, which would have been the rear entrance to the building: it lies at the junction of the wing and the hall range.

Beyond this, the lobby meets at right angles the stair lobby of the hall range. Directly ahead, a short flight of wooden spiral stair leads to the first floor of the service wing, via an entrance, with no door, with triangular arched head. To the right of this is a triangular-headed lamp niche.

5.10 The kitchen

Following the great hall, this is the second largest room in the building: its size an indication that a large household – perhaps with two generations of the family living under one roof, along with guests – being catered for. The room measures approximately 14 feet in width and 26 feet in length, and before the insertion of the cheese room floor would have been around 13 feet in height. It is heated by a fireplace at its southeast corner, now blocked. This is dated 1713, on a plaque in the cheese room.

The present height of the ceiling is 7 ft 6 ins and it is supported on two stop-chamfered beams approximately a foot in width. These ceiling must have been inserted soon after 1713, for their narrow chamfer suggests an early 18th century date.

To the rear of the kitchen is a pantry, located in the 19th century outshut on the rear wall. It has a 19th century batten-and-board door. In the east wall of the kitchen is a similar door of 16th or early 17th century date, supported on strap hinges that have fine fleur-de-lys ends. This door opens into the 19th century outshut added to the north side of the bell tower. The fact the door opens in this direction indicates a structure must have stood here before the outshut.

5.11 The breakfast room

This is a small but superior room leading off the kitchen, reached by a fine early 18th century door with six raised panels. The wall dividing it from the kitchen is timber-framed.

It is panelled throughout with rectangular oak panelling of the early 18th century date extending two-thirds of its height. There are two original cupboards, one in the southern wall with butterfly hinges to the door, and a larger in the west wall with H-hinges. Built into the northeast corner of the room is a fireplace with modern grate. There are two beams with fine cyma-moulded chamfers.

This was probably originally a service room, and unheated, but then upgraded in the early 18th century to become a small parlour and its fireplace inserted at that time. Evidence for this is found in the attic, in the way its chimney flue is built across at an angle to join that of the kitchen hearth.

5.12 The basement

The basement extends from beneath the dining room to the front of the wing. It is reached from the kitchen by a batten-and-board door of 16th or early 17th century date, which leads to a set of brick steps. Left of the steps are further ones down to the cellar, which also has a 19th century batten-and-board door and unchamfered ceiling beams.

The largest room in the cellar is known as the back kitchen, but despite its name this room was probably used as a wash-house rather than for cooking. At the foot of the steps are uprights posts which belonged to a cheese hoist, formerly located adjacent to the cheese room on the first floor. Next to this is a fireplace on the west wall and the floor is quarry-tiled. The crossbeam ceiling has beams up to 14 inches wide. Adjacent to the fireplace is a smaller room lit by a 19th century iron-framed window with semi-circular head providing borrowed light from the back kitchen. Opposite this is an external door to the cobbled yard east of the house.

At the front of the wing, entered by wide double batten-and-board doors, is an unheated dairy, which extends into the east wing, where an external door has been created to give access to the garden. There are plain ceiling beams.

5.13 First floor: stair landing

The first floor of the wing is reached from the spiral stair at the end of the rear lobby. From this, to the right, is a corridor running to the front of the wing, with 18th century panelling, which leads to the first and second chambers. Left is a short, steep flight of stairs, which leads to a wide landing, where the cheese hoist was formerly located. Directly ahead is the cheese room and to the right a straight flight of stairs to the second floor.

5.14 The cheese room

When the floor was inserted some time after 1713, it created a low room with a ceiling height of approximately 6 ft.

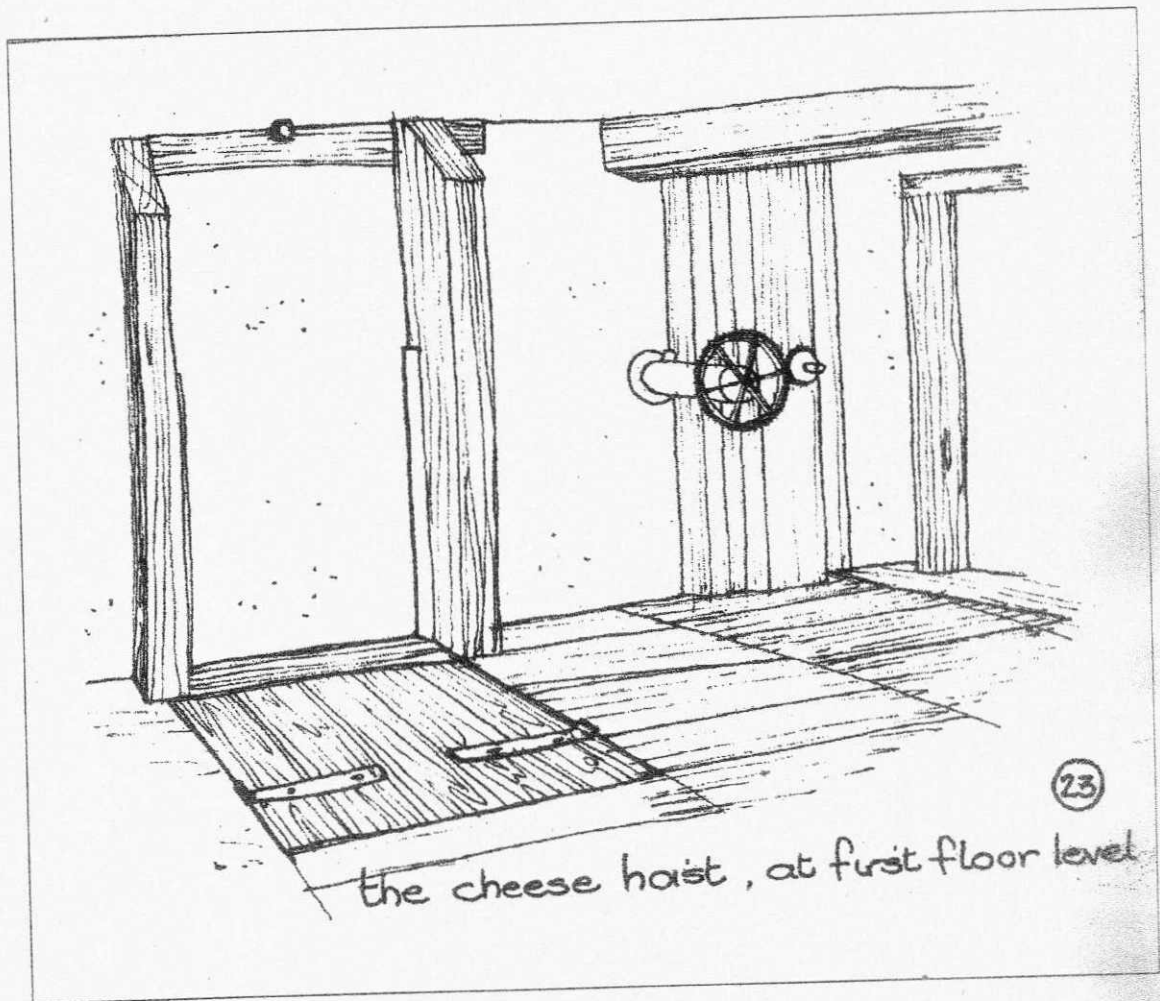


FIGURE 4: Sketch of cheese hoist on first floor, now removed; from report by architect Leach Rhodes and Walker, 1962

The ceiling is of crossbeam type, with deep-chamfered beams approximately one foot in diameter and intermediate joists exposed. In the southeast corner of the room is the upper portion of the kitchen fireplace, with, just above floor level, a stone inscribed:

Sir I W
KNT & BAT (*Knight and Baronet*)
1713

Above this is a wooden inspection door that enabled the cavernous flues to be cleaned.

The sole window is the upper portion of the tall cross-window on the rear wall, though a further cross window has been blocked on the northeast wall.

5.13 The first chamber

It is entered by a three-panel door of late 17th or early 18th century style, with glass overlight. Left of the door is an area of rectangular panelling on the crosswall dividing it from the second chamber, and, at the far end of this wall a door between the two rooms, which, unusually, has 12 small panels. Again, the style is of the late 17th or early 18th century.

The ceiling has crossbeams up to 16 inches in width, with deep chamfers and stops. On the west wall is a cast iron hob grate known locally as the Coalbrookdale type: this is probably early 19th century and has delicate decorated panels featuring designs including lyres, a phoenix and a lion.

Leading off is a door to a room in the east wing, now a shower room. This has a door of eight-panel form, ex situ and cut to fit the opening.

5.14 The second chamber

This has a six-panel door and a crossbeam ceiling similar to that of the first chamber: the beams continue through.

In the northeast corner is a small early 18th century cross-corner stone hearth, with basket-shaped arch, and a later hob grate inserted within. The latter is again probably early 19th century and features a design with fluted classical columns and wreaths.

5.17 Second floor: general

This floor is accessed from the stairs on the landing by the cheese room. However this stair is a later insertion, for vacant mortices in the ceiling beams betray where joists have been removed to accommodate it.

The stair enters the third chamber of the wing and from here, all other chambers in the wing are reached. It also communicates with the wide landing on the first floor of the hall range, which is on the same level as this floor of the wing.

Before the stairs from the cheese room landing were installed, then this floor must only have been reached from the main staircase in the hall range.

5.18 First chamber

This can only be entered from the second chamber, via a late 17th or early 18th century eight-panel door, and therefore this seclusion implies this was a superior chamber.

This is also confirmed by its stop-chamfered crossbeam ceiling. The lateral beams in this room, along with the remainder on this floor, are the tiebeams of the roof trusses. One on the east wall has the stop partly buried in the outer wall, which is usually a sign of cladding of timber-frame.

On the same wall is a large built-in cupboard with panelled doors, again of late 17th-early 18th century date. Right of this is a door to the east wing, which has a fine four-centred arched head beneath a modern architrave. This is superior to the triangular nicked lintels found elsewhere in the wing and indicates the east wing room, though small, was prestigious. The east wing room is now used as a bathroom.

On the west wall of the chamber is a fireplace, now concealed.

5.19 Second chamber

This room is distinguished by beams with very fine stops with a prominent cyma moulding, a type not found elsewhere in the wing or indeed the house. Although lacking a crossbeam ceiling, this shows it was still a prestigious chamber, something also indicated by the fact it once had the largest window of the house: probably a five-light mullioned and transomed one. This was partly blocked and replaced by a three-light transomed window in the early 18th century.

The room is entered by an eight-panel door of late 17th-early 18th century style, similar to that of the first chamber. There is a plain 19th century fireplace with mantelshelf.

5.20 Third chamber

The inner walls of this room have exposed timber-framing with large vertical rectangular panels. It has a single deep stop-chamfered beam and a blocked fireplace on its northeastern wall.

From this room, a two-panel early 18th century door leads to the landing on the first floor of the hall range. From this the attic stair leads off, and also the fourth and fifth chambers at the rear of the wing.

5.21 Fourth chamber

This and the fifth chamber are inferior rooms, unheated and with plain chamfered beams. This and their position at the rear of the wing indicates they would probably have been used by servants.

The fourth chamber is reached by a six-panel door of late 17th century or early 18th century style. Directly opposite in the far wall is the door to the fifth chamber, set in a timber-framed wall. The door however is an insertion of the 19th century, for pegholes in the post to its side indicate where a rail has been removed to make way for it.

The original means of entry to the fifth chamber from the fourth was a triangular-arched doorway in the opposite end of the same wall. However, this cannot now be seen from the fourth chamber as it has been screened off by a partition forming a short corridor from the fifth chamber to the bell tower. The corridor dates probably from the 19th century. Previously the bell tower would have been accessed from the fourth chamber.

5.22 Fifth - the 'haunted'— chamber

This is a narrow unheated chamber is so called because of the legend connected with an inscription now concealed beneath a painting on the crosswall between it and the fourth chamber.

It reads:

E Hitchen
Stanwardine Hall
Closed this room on Nov 19th 1910
By Order
S J Fowles

To the right of this is written:

Jan 14/11

And beneath this:

Oscar J F Lewis
Inspected this room and found all in order 28.9.19

The tradition is that the room was sealed following a series of supernatural happenings.

This room must have been used as servants' quarters, and graffiti left by them is said to have been left on the walls. Evidence of inhabitation also comes in the form of taper burns on the jamb of the inserted door.

In the southeast corner of the room is a doorway with triangular headed lintel and batten and board door. This was the original means of entry from the fourth chamber. Now this leads to a narrow passage and the bell tower, created by screening off part of the fourth chamber.

5.23 The bell tower

This functioned independently of the service wing, as it has its own stair and had limited communication with the latter. Its role must have been purely a service one: possibly, it was the brewhouse, with malt chambers, recorded in the inventory of Thomas Corbet I in 1615.

The ground floor room serves as a long entrance passage, with flagged floor, leading from the 19th century round-headed bell tower entrance to the east doorway of the kitchen. This passage also extends through the tall 19th century outshut built on the north side of the bell tower, where there is, leading off the passage, a store room which rises to the full height of the outshut.

Adjacent to this is a quarter-turn stair leading to the chambers on the first and second floor of the bell tower. At the first landing level is a blocked doorway with wooden surround. This may originally have been an external loading door, perhaps for sacks of malt. The other side of the door is visible in the outshut. Next to this door on the landing is a triangular-headed lamp niche.

The chambers on the first and second floor of the bell towers are unheated. That on the second floor originally communicated with the fourth chamber on the second floor of the wing via the triangular-headed doorway noted earlier. However, in the 19th century a partition was inserted, as we have seen, to isolate the bell tower from this room, which was instead reached from the fifth chamber. This door has now been blocked.