

GREAT GARLANDS, STANFORD-LE-HOPE

by Randal Bingley



Great Garlands, the south front.

Photo Author

While under renovation, Great Garlands farmhouse (Thurrock's most easterly secular building showing major flint usage in its fabric), was briefly visited during October 2006, by kind arrangement with Ian and Moira Frood. Its frontal tablet, dating the building and stable, to 1753, led to some surprises. All the cement rendering had been stripped, allowing the handsomeness of the Georgian orange-red brick and flint panel design of its façade to be fully appreciated, its ground storey patternwork having long been concealed.

The building is of three piles, presenting triple gables to east and west, only the southernmost and its four external chimney stacks being of the 1753 period brickwork.



The brick work of the southernmost pile in English bond, 2½" x 9¼" x 4½" sized bricks.



The rear (north pile) was found to be a much earlier structure, of fairly regular purplish red brick in an English Cross bond of early mid-seventeenth century date. Sizes were 2½ x 8½ x 3¾ inches, laid in a very thick lime mortar.

This feature fixes 'Fox Hive' (as the building was called by Chapman and André, 1777) in its present location for some years further back than tradition had supposed. Harry Bennet Smith, who occupied the premises until 1974, had understood the 'old house' to have stood across the drive, to westward, in the present orchard ground. Mr. Frood knows of no building evidence there.

As for the central pile, its materials are various. A considerable part (abutting the north pile) continues the identical English Cross brick walling into this mid portion of the building. But the rest is a shabby assemblage of chalk lumps, brick and quarry flint nodules. Much of the central shell is of this random character. It was to the plastered interior surface of the western downstairs wall here that Mrs. Smith used to set her palm each day so as to forecast the coming weather. It was her 'weather wall'.

The west (driveway) door entrance, with attractive flat canopy (on curved wooden supports and decorated beneath, c.1753) accesses this mid-pile. It once had a large central (sash?) window above to serve a former stair arrangement. It is blocked with re-used seventeenth century brick. A smaller light replaced it.

Within, the timbers are of considerable interest. At the front, the 1753 work is represented by a plain firwood roof assembly and floor framing. The principal ceiling beam however is a re-used wall plate from a medieval or early Tudor house, morticed for 15" centred studs. The daubed infill panels would therefore have been only 11 or 12 inches in width. Grooving for these is present, and there are lozenge slots indicating a three-mullion window, fronted by a 1" wide channel to accommodate its sliding shutter boards.

In the front parlour also, may be mentioned an attractive glazed cupboard, built of vertical softwood planks to a half cylinder to about waist height from the floor. It is described as a 'wig cupboard', and may relate to the purported use by Thomas Mashiter (of Romford) of Great Garlands as a hunting or fowling lodge. Conceivably he maintained the 'best' part of the house for occasional residence while his farm tenant and family occupied the rest. The stable block, a prestigious building, would enhance the belief in Mashiter's personal connection with the place.

The main (east) fireplace of the south pile is a large inglenook (height 5' 3", width 7' 1") inconsistent with the mid 18th century arrangement, yet fronted almost entirely with the 1753 period brick, its slightly arched top supported on metal banding. A couple of courses of early ledged brick, apparently *in situ* at one corner, possibly hint at a near-complete rebuild upon an older hearth base. If this is so, then it would appear that a quite prestigious house of similar size to the present stood here a good century before Thomas Mashiter's mid eighteenth century revision. Two sizeable flues rise side by side from the hearthspace.

Other features of the centre and north part of Garlands include (a) a floor of flat, dense bricks (red) used as previous in the N.E. centre pile, indicating a mid eighteenth century or later dairy room, (b) a low trap-door cellar under the N.E. area of the north pile. This contained a brick plinth along its southern wall, with a shelf top, presumably for cold storage and preparation (game, vegetable produce, etc?). This smallish cellar with very little headroom, is similar in concept to that under the north kitchen area of Bluehouse (Manor Farm), West Tilbury. The roof trusses of both these two older parts of the house were of elm. Close examination was not possible, but they appeared to be an extreme hodge-podge of pieces and of no usefully describable assembly type.

THE outhouse

In the adjacent 'backhus', a low utility building just outside the north (kitchen) door, built of brick and rough flint, with plain-tile roof, (essentially of the 1753 phase), two massive cambered tie beams at once drew attention. They are superb chamfered items, of 16 feet length and measure 11 inches deep by 9" thick. A fragment of 21" wide brace remains in one of their long slots and the tie-beam tops are morticed for king post assembly. Each is smoke-blackened, as are the hefty cut-down rafters above them. Particular attention was paid to see if the tie beams had received the subsequent attachment of studwork, but they were never so treated. They appear therefore to be extracted material from a medieval house of open hall type, to which no upper floor had been inserted. The rafters are probably contemporary.

It seems more than likely then, that here in the humble outside shed is preserved the evidence of the timber framed predecessor building of five centuries or more ago. The measurements of the tie beams are, of course, sufficient to allow reconstruction of the scale of the whole hall. In terms of a timber framed homestead, no very tangible foundation need be present and hence it may well be that the nearby orchard site *was* the earlier position of 'Fookes heve', as the farm is referred to in a will of 1577. Earlier yet, one Thomas Fakes is referred to in the feet of fines of 1363, holding half an acre with a message in 'Stanford on Thames'.

THE STABLE BLOCK



A wall of the stable block showing typical brick and knapped flint panels

Photo Author

Pantiled roof and brick built in the same bond as the 1753 revision, but of a brick size 9" x 4½" x 2¾". Its decorative panels are of knapped irregular flint, but whereas those of the dwelling house are mottled grey, these are beautifully ochre tinted. There is a wide-entranced carriage housing at north, the fine horse stabling being next on south, the latter's doorway

quoins being of nicely bullnosed brick – a commonly met treatment around good stock-buildings in the 18th century. A large rumbler horse bell (illustrated), part of a road waggon set, was found at the north garden periphery by S. Brand, apparently upon the site of a former implement store shed. It is incised K W and is from the Aldbourne, Wilts bell factory founded by Robert Wells in 1760 and may be late 18th or early 19th century in date. These attractive items had a long use and continued as items of horse equipment on into the Victorian age. This one was recovered from among a dump of old plough shares.



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GLEANINGS FROM THE CHELMSFORD CHRONICLE

TO WINDMILLERS
WANTED

About Michaelmas next

A Man to attend a WIND-MILL. A person
Thoroughly acquainted with the business, bringing a good
Character for sobriety, and integrity, may meet with constant employ,
And good encouragement, by applying to Mr. Thomas Bird, South
Ockendon.

Chelmsford Chronicle 16th Sept, 1791

'Chelmsford, May 5. On Tuesday last an inquisition was taken on the body of Richard Stevens, a child of about seven years old, son to Mr. Richard Stevens, a farmer of Orsett, in this county. The child got upon a waggon loaded with wheat, and in a few minutes slipped off the sacks, by which the wheel going upon him, killed him on the spot.'

Chelmsford Chronicle 15th May, 1767