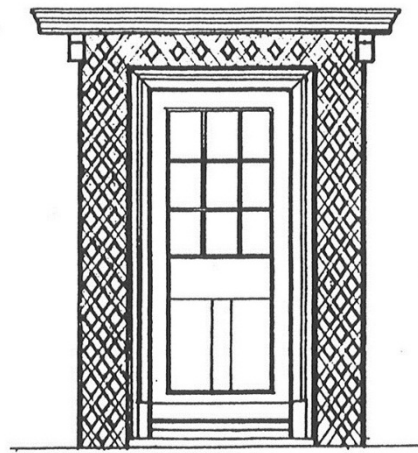


The Landmark Trust

HOUGHTON WEST LODGE



History Album

Researched and written by Alastair Dick-Cleland, 1997

Re-presented in 2014

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BASIC DETAILS

Built:	1840
Designed by:	Unknown
Last tenant:	Michael Kingsmith, gamekeeper
Form of tenure:	Leased from Houghton Hall estate
Repaired:	1996
Architects:	Michael Wingate; Peregrine Bryant
Builders:	Kentek Ltd
Site foreman:	Ken Briers
Quantity Surveyors:	Bare, Leaning & Bare
Furnished:	August 1996

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Summary

The West Lodge is one of four lodges that guard the approaches to Houghton Hall, the splendid rural palace that belonged to Sir Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister. The Walpole family held land here at least from the 13th century and, through inheritance and marriage, greatly extended the size of the Houghton estate until by the beginning of the 18th century it had reached some 16,000 acres. Sir Robert Walpole inherited the estate in 1700, and by this time the old medieval house was in a poor state. Jonas Wolfe, writing to Sir Robert in 1721 graphically illustrates why a new house was necessary - "I am writing this in your Honour's study, where I have a thousand ungrateful Companions, the Mice who doe dayly dispoyle to youre papers, parchments & Bookes ...They run in such numbers 'tis impossible to think of destroying them unless the whole be removed; in the meantime what are yett untouched by them are very unsecure".

Sir Robert also needed a house to match his political ambitions and to demonstrate his power, wealth and discrimination. Designs were drawn up by architect Colen Campbell and modified by Thomas Ripley, chief carpenter at the Office of Works. William Kent designed the interiors, which housed a fine collection of paintings. The resultant house was the most sumptuous of its day. Significant improvements were also made to the gardens and grounds. The entrance to the Park was then between a pair of lodges opposite the New Inn. The church, dedicated to St. Martin remained in the park, and it is here that Sir Robert and Horace Walpole lie buried.

In fact, the demands of political life and the need to be at the centre of power meant that Sir Robert only spent a month a year at Houghton Hall - but when there he entertained in style. The greater part of the government would go down to Norfolk during the summer and Christmas recesses to spend a week or more "plotting politics in the interval of hunting, feasting and boozing with the local gentry". These exclusively masculine gatherings were known as the Houghton "congresses" and underpinned the web of influence and patronage upon which the Whig party was based.

Yet for all this political power, the male line failed in 1797 and the Houghton estate passed to the Cholmondeley family of Cheshire. They decided to use Houghton as principle residence until their own new house was built. Lord Cholmondeley was evidently fond of the gates at Cholmondeley Hall for he had them transferred to Houghton with a new pair of lodges built to accommodate them. These were described by a surveyor in 1798 as 'the meanest looking Hovels of the kind I ever saw'. The second Marquis Cholmondeley "much extended the plantations on the estate, and planted ...a very fine oak avenue, leading to the West Lodge". In 1840, building accounts show they had been replaced by those we see today.

The Repair of Houghton West Lodge

When The Landmark Trust acquired the West Lodge in 1990 it had not been lived in for many years and the ceilings in most of the rooms had collapsed. The estate had no further need for it and so leased it to Landmark. The west lodge is small single storey building a little over 20 feet square, built of brick on a stone plinth. It has a central brick chimney stack serving the sitting room fireplace and the kitchen range. There are only two other rooms, originally both bedrooms. The roof is of Welsh slate. Small sections of cornice return horizontally to create the impression of a broken pediment to each facade. The sitting room and main bedroom each have an elegant round arched window fitted with sashes. In contrast the kitchen, which faces onto a small yard, has metal casement windows. The front door is framed with a horizontal hood and trellis across the head and down each side. At the other side of the yard is a combined bakehouse and wash house roofed with pantiles rather than slates. A separate door led into the wood/coal shed and backing on to this from the opposite side was the privy.

The first works to be undertaken were structural. The walls of both the lodge and the wash house were in poor condition and leaning inwards. The east wall of the yard was taken down and rebuilt. All four gables had to be rebuilt down to some extent, and part of the south wall of the wash-house was taken down and rebuilt. The roofs on both buildings were also replaced - the lodge in slate and the wash-house with pantiles, in both cases reusing any sound originals. The chimney stack also had to be taken down to below roof level and rebuilt with new flue liners fitted. A lean-to woodshed and a 1920's extension in the courtyard were demolished.

All the windows and doors were repaired wherever possible or replaced with matching ones. The bedroom window, which had been blocked, was reopened and the sashes replaced. Softwood flooring was replaced with the same in the bedroom and tiles laid in the sitting room and kitchen. The tiny fireplace in the bedroom, previously plastered over, was discovered during the works. All the rooms were given new plaster ceilings and all walls were painted in lime paint. A new bathroom was created where the second bedroom had been. The top section of the adjacent estate wall was removed and the coping put back at a lower level. Where the extension met the wall, a new window was inserted to light the bathroom, with a casement to match the kitchen windows. The courtyard was laid with brick paviours.

Mains electricity and a new water supply had to be run from the nearest estate buildings nearly a mile away - a disconcertingly expensive undertaking. A new septic tank was also installed. The lodge walls were re-rendered after a careful analysis of the original lime based render, then lined out to imitate ashlar stone as had originally been the case. They were limewashed in white to match the other estate lodges. The brickwork of the yard and the wash house had not been rendered originally and so this was just re-limewashed without rendering it. New sections of the estate park railings were made and new timber gates constructed, based on those at the North lodge. Thus the scene was re-set, and the western approach to Houghton Hall once more benignly guarded.

Introduction

The West Lodge is one of four lodges that guard the approaches to Houghton Hall, the splendid rural palace that belonged to Sir Robert Walpole, the first Prime Minister, who remained in power for some 20 years from about 1721. Born in 1676, he was a country squire and Whig whose moderate and uncontroversial policies in the areas of peace, taxation and exports together with his persuasive oratory skills and self-confidence, enabled him to hold onto power for so long.

When Sir Robert Walpole died in 1745, the earldom passed to his eldest son Robert and then to his son George. Horace Walpole inherited the earldom when George died, unmarried in 1791. Horace was the younger son of Sir Robert. He was a well-known writer and friend of the poet Sir Thomas Gray and is now largely remembered for Strawberry Hill, the eccentric Gothic house he built for himself in Twickenham.



Sir Robert Walpole, 1st Earl of Orford, (The National Portrait Gallery)

History of Houghton and the Walpoles

The Walpole family may have acquired land at Houghton as early as the 12th century. They certainly had land here in 1286 and Henry de Walpol is recorded as the lord of the manor in 1316. By the 14th century Houghton had become the main residence of the family.

An inventory of the medieval manor house drawn up in 1512 shows that it consisted of "a hall, parlour, 'drawt', buttery, kitchen, dairy, bakehouse, chamber over parlour, white chamber, red chamber and four other chambers, all well if not lavishly furnished". There is no existing illustration to show how this building looked.

Over the next two centuries, through inheritance and marriage, the Walpoles greatly extended the size of the Houghton estate until by the beginning of the 18th century it had reached some 16,000 acres with those typical Norfolk products - sheep and turnips.

Sir Robert Walpole inherited the estate in 1700, and by this time the old medieval house was in a poor state. Jonas Wolfe, writing to Sir Robert in 1721 graphically illustrates why a new house was necessary - "I am writing this in your Honour's study, where I have a thousand ungrateful Companions, the Mice who doe dayly dispoyle to youre papers, parchments & Bookes - especially those bound in vellum, which I could wish were putt up in Boxes or remov'd till some Fitter place might be fixed for them, the Vermin having nibbled holes & made Free passage into the drawers. They run in such numbers 'tis impossible to think of destroying them unless the whole be removed; in the meantime what are yett untouched by them are very unsecure".

Up until this time the Walpoles had been only minor Norfolk gentry. Sir Robert had other ideas and was determined that the new house at Houghton should be one of the finest in the land. To that end he employed one of the leading architects, used the best craftsman and fitted the house out with one of the finest picture collections in England. The result was a house to demonstrate his power, wealth and discrimination.

Preparations for the new house began in the summer of 1721 to designs by the fashionable architect Colen Campbell, but modified by Thomas Ripley, Walpole's building supervisor. He was a carpenter from Yorkshire who in this year had succeeded Grinling Gibbons as chief carpenter of H. M. Works. Ripley was the architect of the Admiralty Buildings in Whitehall, built whilst Houghton was under construction. He substituted domes for Campbell's pitched roofs on the corner pavilions of the house and made other minor changes to the interior. Walpole himself and possibly James Gibbs also played a part in Houghton's design. The equally fashionable William Kent was commissioned to design the interior decoration, which was at last finished in 1735, although we know from correspondence that the principal rooms were being used in 1731.

The resultant house was the most sumptuous of its day and very large. Once the central block had been connected to service pavilions by colonnades the frontage was 450 feet in length. The hall was inspired by Inigo Jones's version at the Queen's House, Greenwich and was in the best tradition of Roman splendour. It was decorated by Kent ably assisted by Atari, an Italian 'stuccodore', who created the ornate ceiling with its gambolling putti. The result was modestly described by Colen Campbell as "a cube of 40 feet all in stone; the most beautiful in England".



Horace, 4th and last Earl of Orford, with Strawberry Hill in the background (The National Portrait Gallery)

The grandeur of Houghton caused much resentment with Sir Robert's brother-in-law and neighbour, Lord Townshend. He had helped Sir Robert on his way to political success and envied the heights to which he had subsequently risen. Lord Hervey, in his memoirs, wrote that "Lord Townshend looked upon his own seat at Raynham as the metropolis of Norfolk, was proud of the superiority, and considered every stone that augmented the splendour of Houghton as a diminution of the grandeur of Raynham." They quarrelled so badly that whenever Walpole was entertaining at Houghton, Townshend moved out of the neighbourhood.

Others were equally uncharitable. Lord Harley, suffering from a bout of political spleen said in 1732, "This house at Houghton has made a great deal of noise, but I think it is not deserving of it. I think it is neither magnificent or beautiful. There is very great expense without either judgement or taste ... I dare say had the money which has been laid out here, nay and much less, been put into the hands of a man of taste and understanding, there would have been a much finer house, and better rooms and greater".

Despite all the money, pride and affection that Sir Robert Walpole had lavished on Houghton, the demands of political life and the need to be at the centre of power meant that he only spent a month a year at the house. But when he was there he entertained in considerable style. The greater part of the government would go down to Norfolk during the summer and Christmas recesses to spend a week or more "plotting politics in the interval of hunting, feasting and boozing with the local gentry". These exclusively masculine gatherings were known as the Houghton "congresses" and were the start of the phenomenon of country-house gatherings that went on to become such an established part of country house life. The indoor aspects of these congresses were conducted entirely in the 'rustic' - the rusticated lower storey of a Palladian house, dedicated to "hunters, hospitality, noise, dirt and business" underneath the piano nobile, which, in contrast, was dedicated to "taste, expense, state and parade". Lord



Houghton Hall today



The stone hall, Houghton (*Country Life*, 1907)

Hervey, a guest at these affairs, described how they lived “up to the chin in beef, venison, geese, turkeys, etc. and generally over the chin in claret, strong beer and punch”.

At the same time as the house was being built, significant improvements were being made to the gardens and grounds to compliment the new house. The park was expanded which meant that the old village of Houghton now lay within it, a situation no nobleman could entertain for long. And so it was that in 1729 work started on a new village. By 1731, Sir Thomas Robinson was able to write that “the enclosure of the Park contains seven hundred acres, very finely planted, and the ground laid out to the greatest advantage. The gardens are about 40 acres, which are only fenced from the Park by a *fossé*, and I think very prettily disposed”. The entrance to the Park was at this time between a pair of lodges opposite the New Inn. The church, dedicated to St. Martin remained in the park, and it is here that Sir Robert and Horace Walpole lie buried.

Houghton and the Cholmondeleys

Because of the lack of a male heir, in 1797 the Houghton estate came, via the female line, into the ownership of the Cholmondeley family whose seat was Cholmondeley Hall in Cheshire. By this time, Cholmondeley Hall was very dilapidated and Lord Cholmondeley decided to use Houghton as his principle residence until a new house was built. Despite the fact that they were already damaged, he was evidently fond of the gates at Cholmondeley Hall for he had them transferred to Houghton with a new pair of lodges built to accommodate them. But Joseph Hill, who surveyed the estate for Lord Cholmondeley, wrote in November 1798 that "Lord Cholmondeley is greatly disappointed in the Workmanship of his new Lodges, which are I must say the meanest looking Hovels of the kind I ever saw, but expect when he comes to fit the Gates he will be more and more out of humour with them and do expect to see them pulled down and rebuilt".

In 1832 a survey of the houses on the estate was carried out, and an entry reads:-

"Great Bircham. West Lodge. a small octagon Building 22ft 6in. in Diameter the walls built wth Bk the Roof covered wth Pantiles consist of two rooms on the Ground floor with Pantry etc. Leanto next ditto 10 feet by 9 ft wth Stud & Board the Roof cover'd wth Pantiles. William Williamson occupier."

The North lodge had a similar description but with "walls built with Red Brick and covered with Thatch". These are obviously not the present North and West lodges, and it is not clear whether these are the "Mean hovels" or their replacement.

Once the new Cholmondeley Castle had been built the family moved back to Cheshire only visiting Houghton intermittently. Although money was spent on modernising the estate and keeping the house in good repair, the grounds seem to have been allowed to slip to the extent that James Grigor, visiting Houghton around 1840, wrote "there is not even a regular gardener kept ... The gardens are gone, the lawn obliterated ... the entrance lodges, offices, and stabling, with their stalls for a hundred horses, are still here, but empty, - conspiring with the other things to form a picture only of magnificent desolation". But there were some improvements - the Rev. J. H. Broome, Houghton's parson, wrote in his book 'Houghton and the Walpoles' that the second Marquis Cholmondeley had "much extended the plantations on the estate, and planted what will, hereafter, be a very fine oak avenue, leading to the West Lodge".

The building of the existing West Lodge can be pinned down to 1840, as the Account books for that year record:-

The West Lodge

Paid Willett for Oven grates and boiler	£3-16-2
Paid Butcher Bricklayer and plasterer	43-17-7
Paid Jackson Carpenter	30 - 7-4
Paid Love Plumber and Glazier	22 - 6-2
Paid Dunger Lime &c	10 - 4-3
Paid Hewitson Slater	12 - 5-4
Paid Gilbert Stone Mason	2- 17-6
Paid Hogge for deals & laths	12-13 -8
	133-8 -0

In the 1841 accounts the following appears:-

At the West Lodge

Paid Athow well sinker	9-6-0
Jackson palings & gates	14-5-4
Gage, Iron & Wire fences and Gate hangings	15-16-8½
Love painter	4-0-2½

West Lodge described

The lodge is small single storey building a little over 20 feet square. It is built of brick off a stone plinth, with all the walls rendered and lined out to resemble stone ashlar blocks. It has a central brick chimney stack that served the sitting room fireplace and the kitchen range. The only two other rooms were two bedrooms. The roof is of Welsh slate and each elevation of the lodge terminates in a gable with valleys running down to each corner. Here small sections of cornice return horizontally creating the impression of a broken pediment to each facade. The sitting room and main bedroom each have an elegant round arched window fitted with sashes. In contrast the kitchen, which faces onto a small yard, has metal casement windows.

The front door was framed with a horizontal hood and trellis across the head and down each side. At the other side of the yard is a combined bakehouse and wash house roofed with pantiles rather than slates. A separate door led into the wood/coal shed and backing on to this from the opposite side was the privy.

In the 1920's an extension was inserted into the yard to provide a larger bedroom and to provide a larder. A little later a corrugated iron lean-to shed was added to the back of the wash house.



The lodge in 1991, before repair

The Repair of West Lodge

When the Landmark Trust acquired the West Lodge in 1990 it had not been lived in for a considerable number of years, the last tenant having been Roger Kingsnorth, a gamekeeper. It was generally very dilapidated and was on the local authority's 'Buildings at Risk' register. The ceilings in most of the rooms had collapsed.

The first works required were structural. The walls of both the lodge and the wash house were in poor condition and leaning inwards. The east wall of the yard was taken down and rebuilt. All four gables of the lodge had to be taken down to a greater or lesser extent, and part of the south wall of the wash-house was taken down and rebuilt. The roofs on both buildings were also replaced - the lodge in slate and the wash-house with pantiles, in both cases reusing any sound originals. The chimney stack also had to be taken down to below roof level and rebuilt with new flue liners fitted. The lean-to woodshed was demolished as was the 1920's extension in the courtyard. The top section of the adjacent wall was removed and the coping put back at a lower level. Where the extension had abutted the wall a new window was inserted to light the bathroom, with a casement made to match the kitchen. The courtyard was laid with brick pavements.

All the windows and doors were either repaired or if too far gone, replaced with matching ones. The bedroom window, which had been blocked up was reopened and the sashes replaced. Softwood flooring was replaced with the same in the bedroom and tiles laid in the sitting room and kitchen. The tiny fireplace in the bedroom was uncovered during the works, and had previously just been plastered over. All the rooms were given new plaster ceilings and all walls were painted in lime paint. A new bathroom was created where the second bedroom had been.



The sitting room

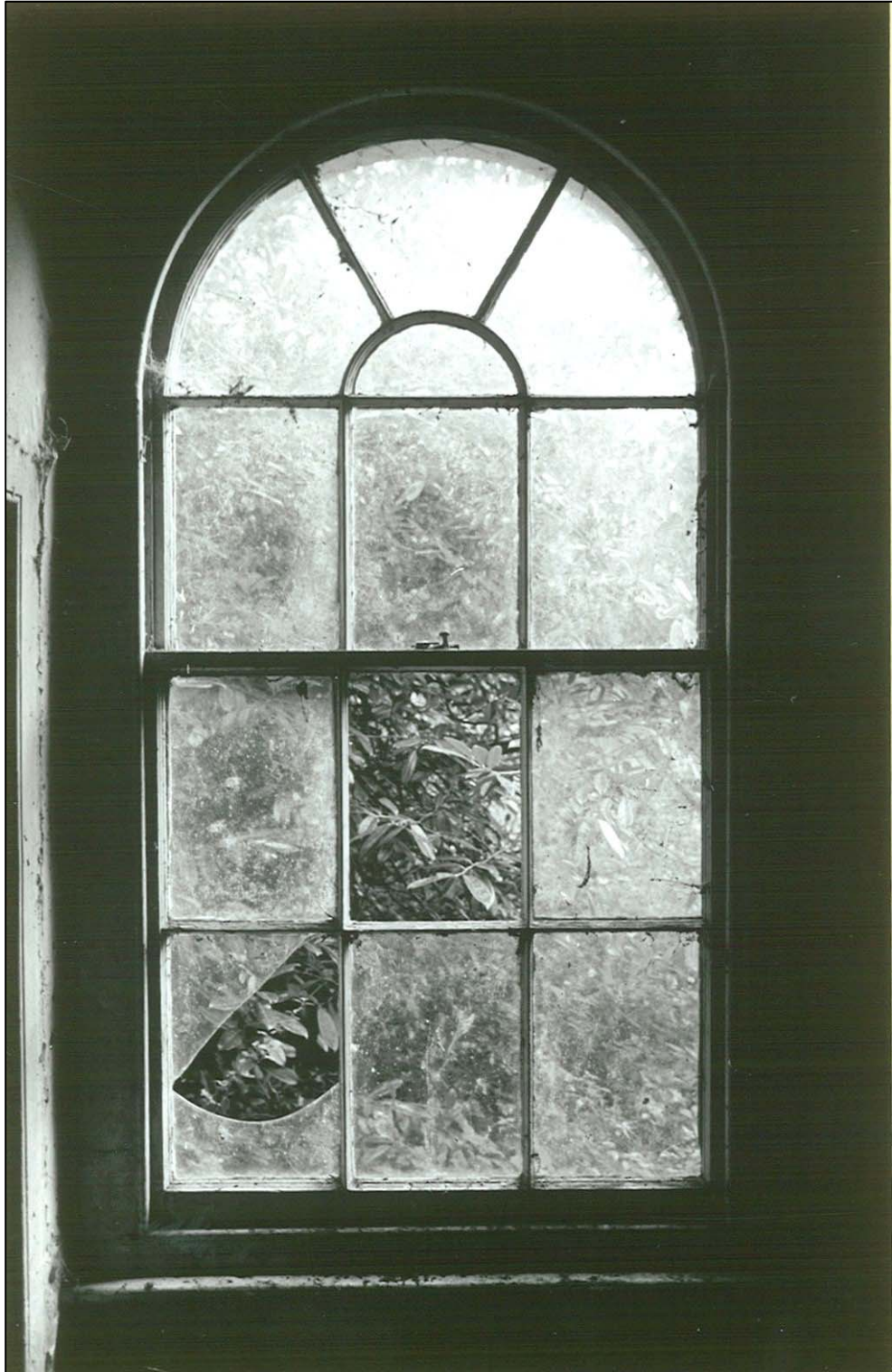
Perhaps the hardest decision to make was how to heat and light the lodge. It had no mains electricity supply, and there was no local point to which to connect. Much thought was given to using a gas-powered generator buried in a pit, and even having gas lighting, but when it became clear that the water supply needed to be replaced as well, the decision was taken to run new supplies in the same trench from the nearest estate buildings just under one mile away - a disconcertingly expensive undertaking. A new septic tank was also needed.

The lodge walls were re-rendered after a careful analysis of the original lime based render, then lined to resemble stone as had originally been the case, and finally limewashed in white to match the other estate lodges. The brickwork of the yard and the wash house had not been rendered originally and so this was therefore just re-limewashed without rendering it.

New sections of the estate park railings were made and new timber gates constructed, based on those at the North lodge.



The sitting room



One of two arched windows



The courtyard with the bedroom extension on the left



The yard side of the wash house



The interior of the wash house



The rear of the wash house



The lean-to wash shed removed



The lodge with the render removed



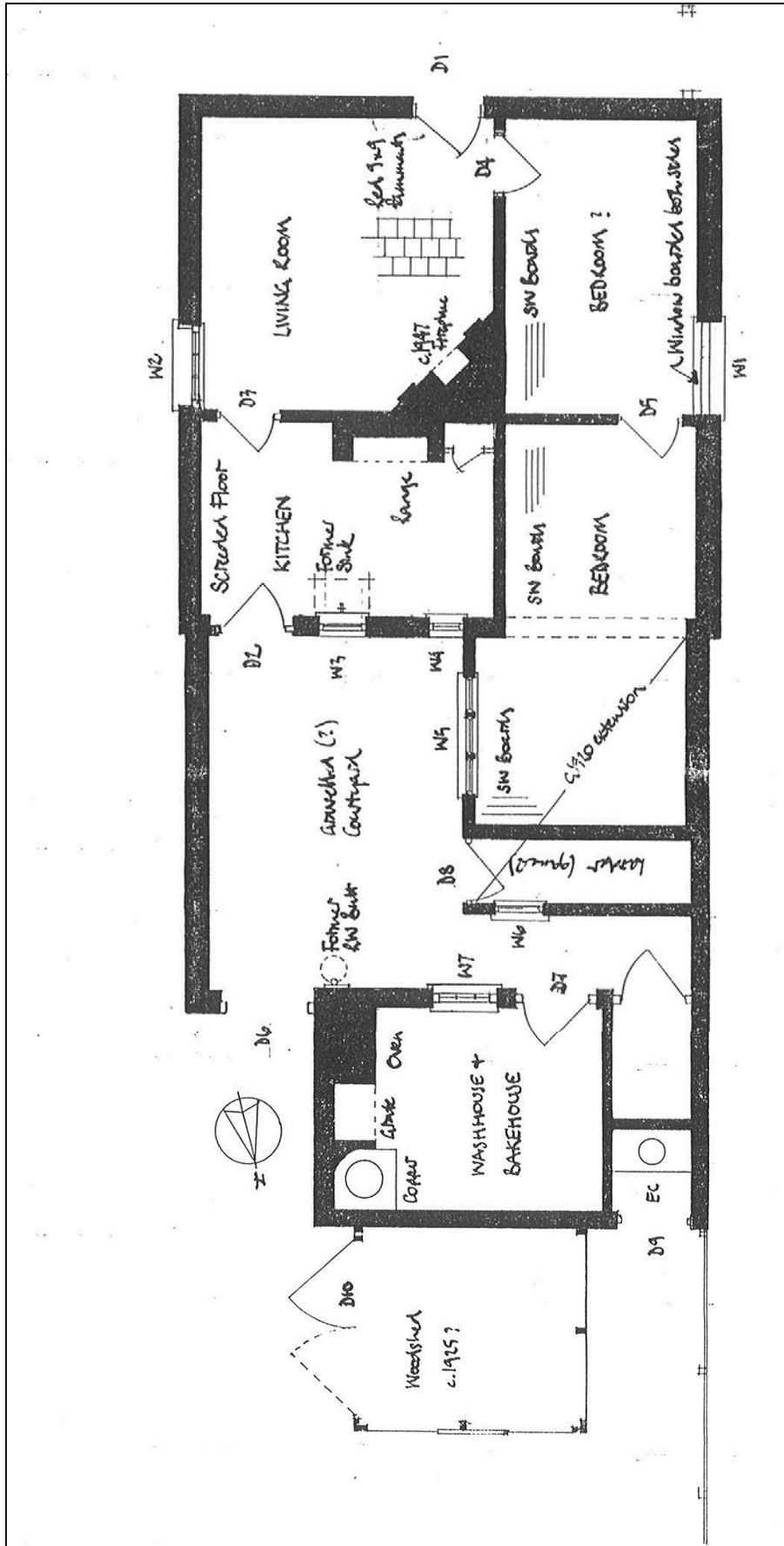
The buried gas tank



The courtyard wall with the bedroom extension removed and the window inserted



Reroofing the wash house with pantiles



Before



The work completed

Early owners of Houghton

Henry de Walpole d. c.1442

Thomas Walpole m. Jane Cobbe of Sandringham, Norfolk

Edward c. 1483-1559 m. Lucy Robsart of Systrene, Norfolk

John d. 1588 m. Katherine Callybutt of Coxforthe, Norfolk

Callybutt m. Elizabeth Bacon of Hessett, Suffolk

Colonel Robert d. 1663 m. Susan Bankham of Southacre, Norfolk

Sir Edward d. 1668 m. Susan Crane of Chelton, Suffolk

Robert b. 1651 m. Mary Burwell of Rougham, Suffolk

Sir Robert Walpole

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I am most grateful to David Yaxley, the "honorary" archivist at Houghton Hall,
for all his assistance.