The Landmark Trust

Woodsford Castle

History Album Volume II

by Charlotte Haslam
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A HISTORY OF WOODSFORD
Early owners: Belet and de Whitfield

Woodsford, we are told by the Rev. John Hutchins in 1774, takes the second syllable of its name from a crossing of the river Frome. Often called Werdesford, Wardesford or Wyrdsford, the first part came, the 1861 Hutchins suggests, from "some Saxon of the name of Wyrd". Already in 1066, according to the Domesday Survey, the parish was divided into East and West. Each half was a separate manor or estate and has followed a separate history ever since.

The owner of West Woodsford in 1086 was William Belet, one of the King's Sergeants or Men-at-Arms. His descendants, who rose into the ranks of the minor nobility, held it for the following two centuries, and for a while thereafter it was known as Woodsford Belet. In 1210, the reign of King John, Robert Belet (Sheriff of Dorset and Somerset in 1199) had land in Dorset at Frome, Winterborne, Werdesford and Lyme, held from the king for the sum of one knight's fee, together with a house-plot in Dorchester.

Then, in 1285, records show Woodsford and other Belet manors held from the king by Edmund Everard, another Dorset landowner and knight. A possible explanation lies in an Inquest made after the death of a William Belet in 1272, which noted that he had sold nearly all his lands in Dorset. Whether Woodsford had been the family's chief manor and dwelling until this time, we do not know. The local historian Clive Harfield, in a paper on the Belets for the *Proceedings of the Dorset Natural History and Archaeological Society* (1984), suggests that it was, but there is other evidence against this.

The ownership, or rather the occupation, of Woodsford over the next fifty years is far from clear. Medieval land tenure worked in a series of layers, with the king at the top. Sometimes the tenant in chief, in the next layer down, would occupy his own manor, but often he would let all or, more confusingly, part of it to someone else. This could happen several times, and the results can be difficult to disentangle, especially if family settlements come into the picture as well.

So, in 1277, two gentlemen named John de Whitfield and Robert de Bosco were summoned by the justices to show by what right de Whitfield had a gallows in Woodsford, and also exacted fines for misdemeanours in the making of bread and beer; and by what right de Bosco claimed wreckage on the coast. Neither had a licence to do this but both claimed that they and their ancestors "beyond memory had enjoyed these franchises without impediment". This implies that the de Whitfields had been connected with Woodsford for some time, perhaps as tenants of the Belets.

On the other hand, a few years later it is a Richard de Bosco who holds Woodsford (now worth a knight's fee on its own) from Edmund Everard, and he in turn seems to have let it to Richard de Portes. The possibility of a family trust is hinted at by the fact that Richard de Bosco married a de Whitfield. This is further born out when in 1320 the de Whitfields appear again as occupiers, with William de Whitfield being granted a charter of free warren (the right to breed rabbits for food) at Woodsford and other manors.

To confuse things still further, a member of the Belet family was still living in Woodsford. This was John Belet, who was apparently a priest, though this did not stop him from getting into trouble with the law. Clive Harfield has traced his misdemeanours through the Patent Rolls, and these throw some light on the state of society in this part of Dorset at that time.

To start with John Belet was the injured party. In 1317, he lodged a complaint with the justices that a band of men, including Richard de Portes, had stolen goods and chattels from his estates at Wyrdesford Belet. In 1327, he was the guilty party. This time, John Belet was accused by William de Whitfield of leading a group of men who stole 100 oxen, 1,000 sheep, felled trees and fished the ponds of his estates at Werdesford, and two neighbouring properties. Four years later, the two had joined forces. Both they and other landowners were accused in 1331 of carrying out a raid on the Abbot of Bindon, stealing 100 oxen and 7,000 sheep, as well as seals and documents from the abbey church itself. They even held three monks prisoner in Dorchester.

In 1335, John Belet was again again accused of raiding the Abbot's lands, "breaking his close at Bovynton" and driving away 55 oxen. Moreover, he had "cut down his heath, dug in his turbary, carried away turves, heath and other goods". Not surprisingly, the abbot's men were imprisoned beforehand. John Belet at least got off lightly from such escapades. In 1332, fines extracted by the justices for "an offence against the parson of Ore" were returned to him, because, under the system whereby the misdoings of priests could only be tried in a church court, he had been duly purged of his crime before the Bishop of Salisbury. The ordinary courts could not touch him.

What exactly John Belet's property or standing in Woodsford were, we do not know. That he was not the only landowner there is proved by the presence of the de Whitfields. Moreover, it was William de Whitfield who in 1335 obtained licence to crenellate "the dwelling place of his manor of Woodsford", probably a house that had existed for a long time. The present castle site would be a natural one for it, and for the productive farming of which the raids tell. Near a ford, with fertile watermeadows on one side and heath on the other, and backwaters of the river for fish ponds, the five households of Domesday had probably grown into a village, predecessor to the vanished Woodsford Strangways of which traces were recorded in 1970.

Permission to fortify a house could only be granted by the king. After the civil wars of the 12th century, during the reign of King Stephen, the Crown had kept a close watch on the building of castles by the nobility. To begin with, the fortification was genuine. The system provided the king with extra defences for which he did not have to pay, except in grants of land to his supporters. By the later Middle Ages, however, there is evidence that the addition of battlements was as much a status symbol, and a mark of a family's political success, as a genuine method of defence. The 14th century, in which Woodsford was built, falls somewhere between the two.

William de Whitfield was Sheriff at the beginning of Edward III's reign, from 1327-31, and was a man of wealth and influence who might have wished to increase his standing by giving his house the features of a castle. We have seen that there was unrest in the area, in which he was himself involved. He might have felt in need of protection for his retainers and his livestock. He might also have felt that a show of strength would serve as a deterrent, and bring stability to the area. On the other hand, the Patent Rolls are full of complaints such as those made against John

Belet, and most manors were anyway protected by a sturdy enclosure. William de Whitfield might have had better- armed attackers in mind.

There was good reason to feel uneasy in the 1330s if you were only a few miles from the sea, as at Woodsford. The war with France which was to continue on and off for the next hundred years began officially in 1337, when Edward III claimed the French crown. Until then he had concentrated on Scotland, but in 1334, David II of Scotland had flown to France, and prudent men could have foreseen that trouble would follow. A landowner on the South Coast might well have felt a need to defend his property, a precaution that was shown to be good sense when in 1336 the French raided the Isle of Wight.

So Woodsford probably became, not a full-blown castle, but a strongly and prudently defended manor house. Before 1347, William settled the manor on his wife Constance for her life, with reversion to their son John. He died soon after, and Constance and her next husband settled their life interest on the Bishop of Sarum, who duly handed it back to John de Whitfield in 1356. In 1367, John de Whitfield in turn granted, or sold, the manor to Guy de Bryan, with the bailiwick and custody of the banks of the Stour. It is possible that Sir Guy, trusted servant of the king, was consciously building up estates near the Dorset coast, to complement those he already owned on the coastlines of Devon and Wales, and with some form of defence in mind.

Sir Guy de Bryan

Sir William Dugdale, the 17th-century genealogist, described Sir Guy in his *Peerage* as a "person of very great note in his time". William Camden, who visited Dorset in 1570, wrote in his *Britannia* that he was a famous warrior [militari laude celebris]. Other early writers, such as Leland in 1535-40, apparently felt no need to describe him at all: "the castle of Woodsford was sometime belonging to Guy de Bryan" is all he says, assuming that everyone had heard of him and knew who he was, even though more than a century had passed since his death in 1390. Some further evidence of his status is given by the fact that his tomb, near that of his second wife and her previous husband, the Lord Despencer, is placed in a position of high honour in Tewkesbury Abbey, where through her he held property. One suspects that he was to the late Middle Ages a figure rather like the Duke of Wellington is for us today.

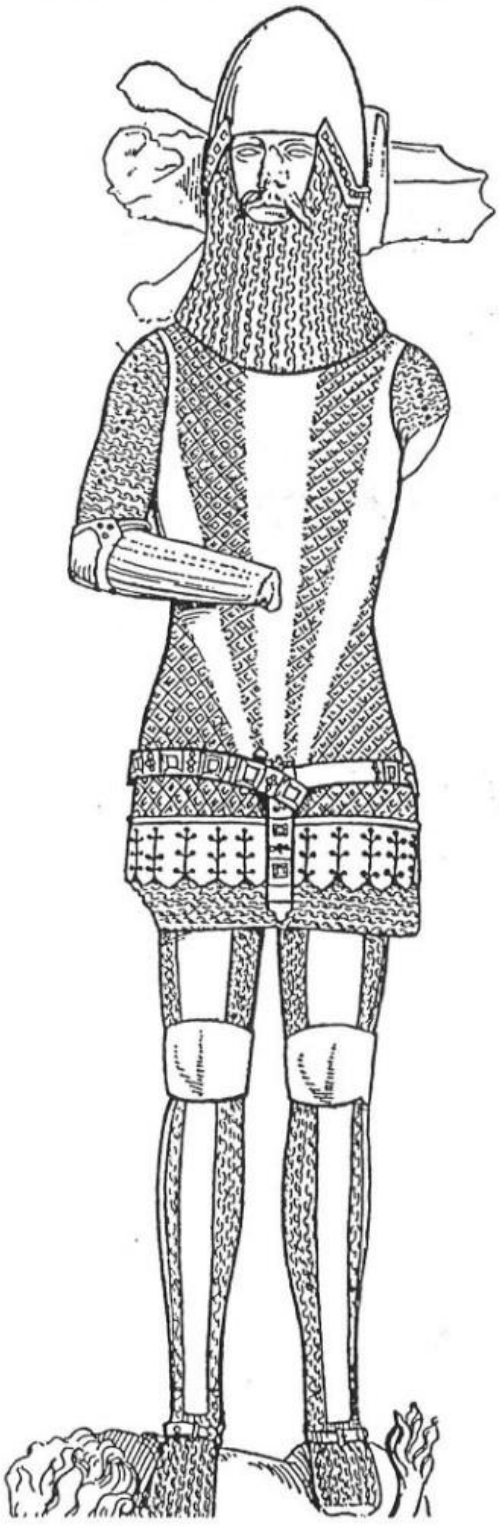
He was by no means born to such an exalted rank. His forebears came from South Devon, where the manor of Torbryan survives as a reminder of them. For some generations before Sir Guy himself was born they had also been marcher barons of a minor sort, with properties at Laugharne and Walwyn's Castle in Pembrokeshire. He began his career in a relatively humble position in the King's Household, being referred to for the first time in 1331 as the King's Yeoman, and later as "my beloved groom".

Born in about 1307, he was a near contemporary of Edward III, and it appears that they became close personal friends, to which fact he owed his advancement. In addition to such formal offices as Steward of the Royal Household, and Keeper of the Great Seal, he acted on a number of occasions as the king's deputy or ambassador on visits abroad, and as his councillor at home. He also acted as spokesman for the king in Parliament, to which he was summoned as a baron from 1350 until 1389.

Later, when he must have achieved the status of elder statesman, he acted as intermediary between the king (by then Richard II) and his barons. He served both as Standard Bearer to the king, and Admiral of the West. In 1370 he was created a Knight of the Garter, the highest honour he could have hoped for.

Inevitably, favours and wealth had followed, often for the stated reason that he was "continually at the King's side". Two separate life pensions of £40 a year were given him, in 1340 and 1346 (on the eve of the Battle of Crecy), with another of 200 marks (£133) in 1350. Multiplied by 120 (perhaps an under-estimate) to achieve today's values, these gave him a basic salary of £25,000. He was constable of Haverford, Carmarthen and St Briavel's castles, and Keeper of the Forest of Dean, all posts with revenues attached. In 1341 he was granted the lordship of Dartmouth, and in 1344 revenues from the wool trade in the city of London. In 1355, he was made Keeper of the Forest of Bere in Dorset. To these he added estates of his own by shrewd purchase, building up a considerable holding in Dorset, Somerset and Kent in addition to those already belonging to his family.

A profitable income was to be had from the guardianship of wealthy minors, and the king granted him a number of these wardships. It seems likely that his second marriage in 1350 was also a royal reward for good service. Elizabeth Montacute was not only of noble birth, being daughter of the Earl of Salisbury and Katherine Grandison, but was immensely wealthy, both in her own right and through her two first husbands, Lord Badlesmere and Lord Despencer. Her dower included estates in Ireland, Wales, Sussex (Laughton, another Landmark, among them), Kent, Berkshire and Oxfordshire, as well as Tewkesbury and the lordship of Lundy. Some went on her death in 1359 to her previous husbands' heirs, but Sir Guy kept a lot, before passing it on to their sons. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was able to spend money on expensive



53. Effigy of Sir Guy de Brian in Tewkesbury Abbey.
Foster after Stothard.
(By courtesy of the Somersetshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, and Mr. Vivian Neale)

projects, such as the chantry and college he founded at Slapton in Devon, his wife's and his own tombs at Tewkesbury, and Woodsford Castle.

A mixture of reasons probably lay behind "his own little castle". As a defensive work it was strong enough to deter all but the best prepared of attackers. Sir Guy was closely involved in the defence of England, by land and sea: the first castle on the River Dart was built while he was lord of Dartmouth, and as admiral he was responsible for the mustering of ships against rumoured invasion. There were several such threats between 1360-90, and in 1377 the French Admiral Jean de Vienne inflicted great damage on the Dorset coast, from Poole Harbour to Lyme.

So there was genuine excuse for fortification around 1370 (Sir John Chideock was licenced to crenellate Chideock in Dorset in 1371). But there were political and literary reasons too. Sir Guy became a Knight of the Garter that year. He had three sons living, and he might well have seen himself founding a great dynasty. It is true that the king never gave him an Earldom, (R.G.F. Stanes, in an article on Sir Guy in *Transactions of the Devonshire Association* (1960) points out that Edward III was reluctant to add to the aristocracy and created few new titles), but he had the nearest honour to it, and great wealth. He had family castles in Wales, but none on his new estates. A castle of his own was needed to complete the picture.

How much time could he possibly have spent there? It cannot have been much - a week or a month, before moving on to the next place. Very often he was in attendance upon the King, at Westminster or elsewhere, or was travelling by himself on the king's business. Stanes calculated that of the years between 1340 and 1380, Sir Guy was abroad in twenty, either campaigning with the king in France, or travelling as ambassador as far afield as Rome.

Stanes also recorded a tradition that Sir Guy's West Country estates were chosen to be a day's ride from each other, to make it possible to sleep in his own bed at night, even if in a different chamber. It is more noticeable that many of them were within easy reach of the sea. In 1371, Sir Guy is recorded as keeping his own ship, La Michel, at Dartmouth. It is easy to imagine him sailing from Devon to Dorset and on to Sussex; or from North Devon, where he held the manor of Northam, via Lundy to Pembrokeshire

Records show that Sir Guy had a treasury and muniment room at another Dorset manor, Rampisham, but Woodsford, as we have seen, could have been the administrative head of some at least of his Dorset estates, with a steward living in the south house. This would have given an added excuse to spend time there, perhaps sometimes to celebrate the feasts of Christmas or Easter. The castle could also have served as a hunting lodge, while he enjoyed his right as keeper of the Forest of Bere. Whenever he turned up, the grand rooms of his lodging would have been waiting for him and his household. Whether he ever brought the king or the queen with him we cannot say.

Sir Guy's name recurs constantly in the state papers of the reigns of Edward III and his grandson Richard II, but it is difficult to think of an equivalent modern role for him. His family name died out after the next generation, so he did not found a dynasty, although his property was still referred to as the de Bryan inheritance a century after his death. His was an individual achievement, in fact, just as Woodsford is a strongly individual building. R.G.F Stanes summarizes him thus:

> He is a typical product of the century that he so nearly spanned, a soldier and able administrator, a courtier, using his position to build up a considerable property and fortune. He must have been a brave and at the same time a charming man to have won his way so completely into King Edward's favour, no mean judge of men. At the same time a man of integrity and good counsel to have been so well liked and trusted not only by his fellow nobility but by the commons of the realm.

Sir Guy died in August, 1390. No structure for which he could have been responsible survives at Laugharne in Carmarthenshire, Torbryan in Devon or Rampisham in Dorset, at all of which we know he lived. Slapton College has vanished. Woodsford Castle is the only building left standing today that is certainly linked with him. Together with his tomb, and a stall-plate in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, bearing his shield and crest, it serves to remind us of a great medieval figure.

Sir Guy's descendants

Sir Guy lived an extraordinarily long time, so it is hardly surprising that two of his three sons died before him, both of them in 1386. The third died in 1395. Two of these sons left no children, but the eldest, Guy, had two daughters between whom the de Bryan estates were divided. In 1389, Sir Guy had settled Woodsford, with other manors, on Sir Robert Fitzpaine, husband of Elizabeth, his daughter by his first marriage (and owner of Stogursey Castle, another Landmark). Sir Guy was to retain use during his life, with remainder to his three sons. This appears merely to have been a form of trust, however, because on his death, Woodsford, along with half of his estates, passed to his grand-daughter, Elizabeth, who married Richard Lovell. She later inherited her sister's half as well, uniting the Bryan estates in one ownership.

Elizabeth Lovell had one child, a daughter called Matilda who married Sir Richard Stafford. He belonged to a family of rising wealth and influence in Dorset and Hampshire, cousins of the Stafford Dukes of Buckingham. Once again, the only child of this marriage was a daughter, Avice. She married Sir James Ormond, who was created Earl of Wiltshire by Henry VI.

The middle of the 15th century, with kings changing places, and warring nobility, provided ample opportunity for unscrupulous behaviour. The Earl of Wiltshire was one of those who took advantage of the weakness of Henry VI in the 1450s to strengthen his own position. Contemporary opinion judged him as particularly ambitious and grasping. Though influenced by an active propaganda campaign waged against the old king's advisers by their Yorkist opponents, this view is born out to some extent by his behaviour over his wife's inheritance.

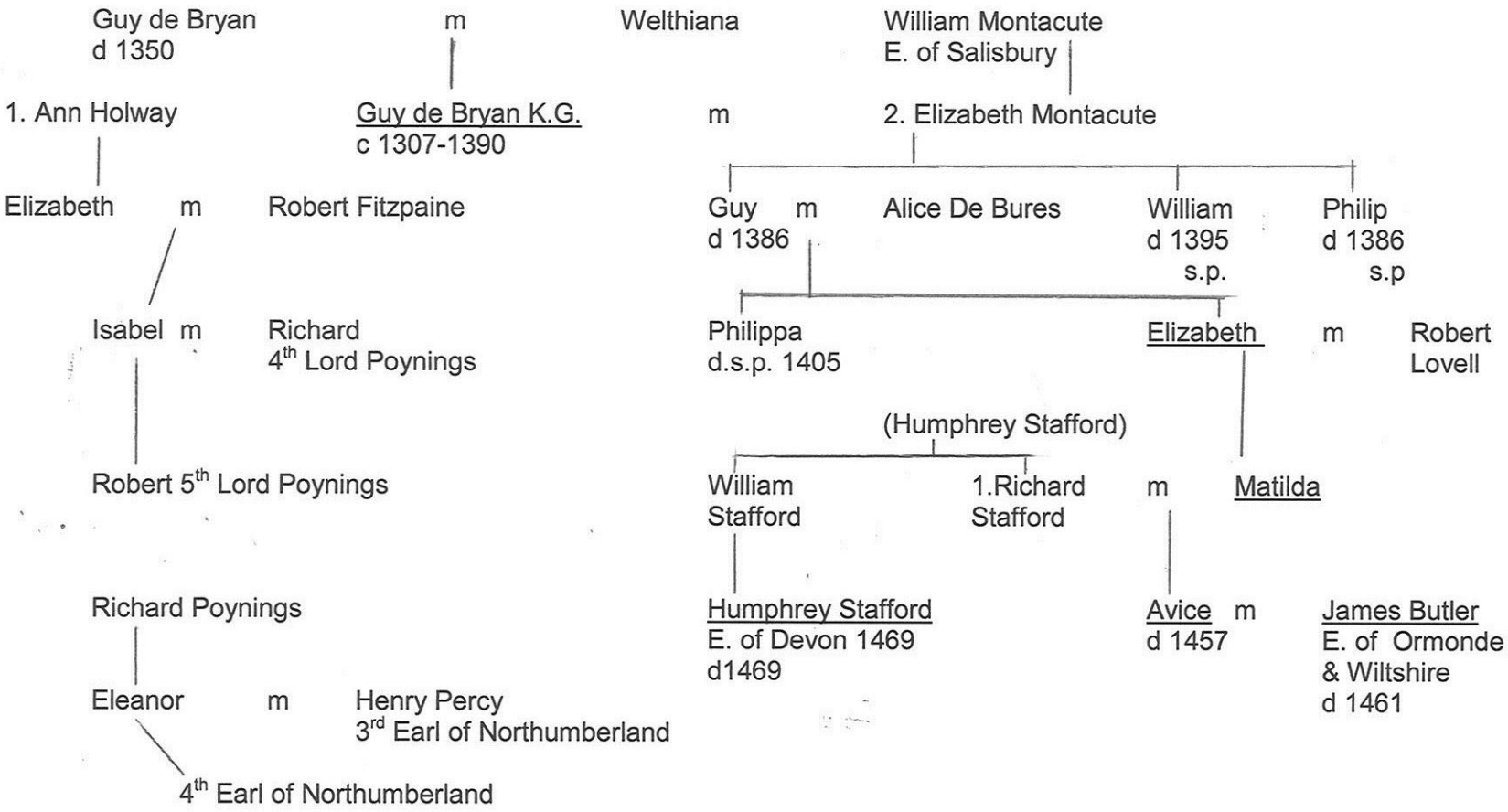
The situation was certainly complicated. Should Avice die without children, the heir to her Bryan inheritance was rightly her cousin, Lord Poynings, who descended from Elizabeth and Robert Fitzpaine; followed by Lord Poynings' granddaughter Eleanor, and her son the Earl of Northumberland. A deed of entail was drawn up along these lines in about 1439, soon after Avice's marriage. Her husband was to have a life interest, but failing children of her own, the Poynings were established as ultimate legatees.

The Earl of Wiltshire simply ignored this. In 1445, he and Avice had another entail drawn up by which his own heirs became residuary legatees. In other words, if no child of his and Avice's survived (not an uncommon prospect in those days of high infant mortality), his family would still inherit the Bryan estates. Sure enough, the worst befell: in 1457 Avice did die without children. The Earl now went one stage further. He quickly married again, and made a new settlement in 1458 in which the Bryan estates were entailed on himself and his new wife Eleanor, then on any children they might have, and finally on his own general heirs. Woodsford was included in this transaction, and the deed was actually drawn up there.

Then, in 1461, the Earl fell victim to wider political events, when he was executed after the Battle of Towton. Henry VI's Lancastrian army, for which the Earl fought, was heavily defeated by the Yorkist forces, led by the newly proclaimed Edward IV. The Earl's estates were confiscated at the same time, although this seems to have applied only temporarily to most of them.

The actual ownership of Woodsford thereafter is somewhat confused. Claimed in 1484 by the Earl of Northumberland, as part of his rightful Bryan inheritance, it seems in theory at least to have belonged to the Earl of Wiltshire's widow after his death, as part of her jointure, and then

The descendants of Guy de Bryan

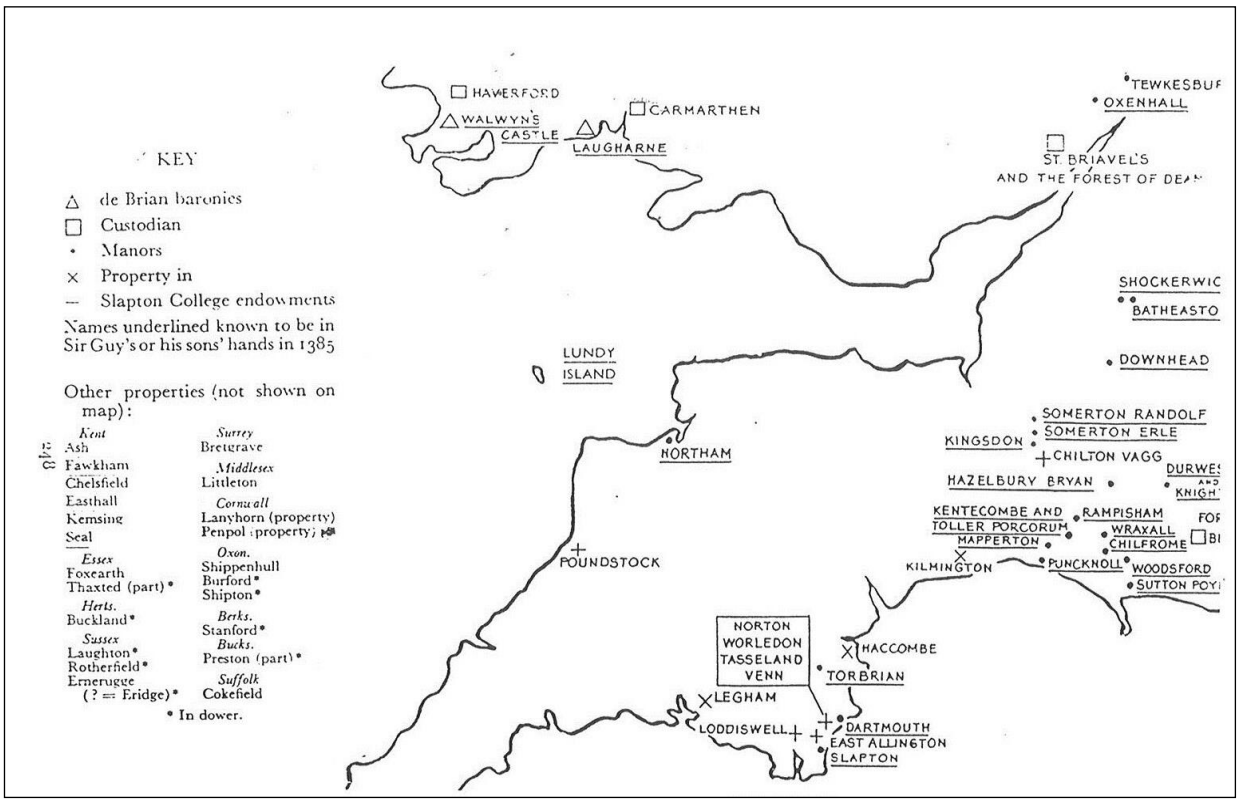


Onwers of Woodsford are underlined

passed to his brother, the Earl of Ormond. At the end of a wearisome legal dispute, a settlement between the Earls of Ormond and Northumberland was achieved in 1488. Deeds at Alnwick Castle dated 1489 record the transfer by the Earl of Ormond of the manor of Woodsford Belet to the Earl of Northumberland, and the appointment of officers to obtain possession and expel tenants.

This transfer seems in reality never to have taken place, and must at the time have been somewhat academic, since for twenty years Woodsford had been in the hands of the Strangways, as heirs of Humphrey Stafford, Earl of Devon. Humphrey Stafford was first cousin to Avice, Countess of Oxford, and in an inquest made after her death on another Dorset manor is recorded as her heir. It may be that in some lost deed, Avice had also settled Woodsford on him, subject only to her husband's life interest.

There is evidence for some such transfer many years earlier, in the lifetime of Elizabeth Lovell. This lies in a deed of final concord dated 1432, a form of legal fiction commonly used either to break an entail or sell the freehold of entailed land. In this case Richard and Elizabeth Lovell appear to be conveying Woodsford to five people, headed by Sir Humphrey Stafford, the Earl of Devon's grandfather. This can't have been a sale, since we have seen that the Earl and Countess of Oxford owned, and used, Woodsford in their lifetimes. It may, however, have effectively removed Woodsford from the entailed Bryan estates, and established the Staffords as having a long term interest in it.



Map of de Bryan properties

The younger Humphrey Stafford, heir to Avice in 1457 at the age of 24, had a lucky start in life. His grandfather and his father had both married Dorset heiresses, the first a Matravers of Hook, the second a Chideock of Chideock. So he already owned large estates in Dorset, before anything he had from Avice, or from another Stafford cousin in Hampshire. He was a Yorkist supporter and his career, not surprisingly, prospered after Edward became king in 1461. His acquisition of Woodsford must certainly have been made easier, even if the Earl of Wiltshire's widow still had a claim to income from it.

As usual, honours followed. Humphrey became Lord Stafford, High Steward of the Duchy of Cornwall and Constable of Bristol, in addition to other lucrative appointments. His friendship with the Woodvilles, the family of Edward's queen, brought more favours. In 1469, he was created Earl of Devon, in place of the Courtenays who were Lancastrian supporters. The same year saw a rebellion against Edward by the powerful Earl of Warwick, who saw his own family, the Nevilles, being supplanted by the Woodvilles.

Contrary to historians such as Coker and Hutchins, who have Humphrey Stafford rebel against Edward, he led the royalist army against Warwick, with the Earl of Pembroke. However, the two of them then quarrelled, their forces divided, and as a result Pembroke was defeated at Edgecote. Warwick, briefly victorious, executed both earls, and the leading Woodvilles as well.

Woodsford was listed among Humphrey, Earl of Devon's estates at his death. He had no children, so his main heirs were three cousins, daughters of a Stafford aunt. The eldest of them, Alianor, married Thomas Strangways, with Woodsford as part of her share. Among the Strangways papers now in the Dorset County Record Office are manorial accounts starting in 1469.

What can have been happening at Woodsford during all these stirring events? The answer is probably very little. The castle is likely to have remained "in hand", not let to a tenant. There would have been a resident constable, and possibly a steward as well. Occasionally, the owner would arrive (such as the Earl of Oxford in 1458) with his household, possibly 100 or more officers and servants who would sleep where they could. The main rooms would be richly furnished from the lord's baggage train. Then, after a short stay, they would be stripped and closed down again. Life would resume its normal routine, the land would be farmed, the resident skeleton staff would go about its daily business, in a pattern seen in the houses of the nobility all over the country, and in houses owned by the royal family today.

Is there any possibility of the castle being involved in warfare? Certainly none of the main campaigns of the Wars of the Roses came near it. However, men from Woodsford would probably have been among the retainers led by the Earls of Wiltshire and Dorset to Towton and Edgecote respectively, though to fight on a different side each time. The level of violence in medieval society as a whole was high. The wider civil war was reflected in more local feuds, such as that between the Bonvilles and the Courtenays in Devon. It is not unlikely that Woodsford at some point prepared itself for a raid from a rival faction or an unfriendly neighbour.

The Strangways

Thomas Strangways came originally from the North. He arrived in Dorset as a follower of the Marquess of Dorset and by his marriage in 1460 with Alianor, heiress of Humphrey Stafford, he established himself as a landowner there. Woodsford now became Woodsford Strangways. Melbury, still the family's main seat, was only acquired by Thomas's son, Henry, in 1500. Until then, the manor house at Stinsford (rebuilt by Humphrey Stafford) is said to have been the Strangways main home, but it is possible that they also used Woodsford Castle from time to time. That it was later regarded as a senior property is reflected in the fact that in 1741 they took the title of Baron Strangways of Woodsford Strangways, as well as that of Lord Ilchester.

About 1530-40, Woodsford was settled on Thomas Symonds. According to the 1861 Hutchins, he was the illegitimate son of Giles Strangways, who rebuilt Melbury in the 1530s. Thomas is described in pedigrees as being "of Woodsford Castle". It was entirely appropriate for a secondary estate, as this had now become, to be settled on a junior member of the family. The Symonds prospered, buying neighbouring land. Thomas died in 1566, and his son Giles is described as being of Woodsford Castle and West Stafford, but also of Hillesley in Gloucestershire. In 1594, he was assessed for tax at Woodsford and was alive in 1596, but it seems that the family settled thereafter in Gloucestershire.

The castle was then, it seems, abandoned. Coker's *Survey of Dorset* describes it in 1630 as "almost ruinated". It is likely that much of it had fallen in, and was already being plundered for building stone. Coker also repeats a tradition maintained by "neighbour inhabitants" that it was "besieged and beaten downe with ordnance; as a testimonie whereof they will show you not farre offe in the warren, Gunhill, where they sawe the ordnance planted".

Like all traditions, it is impossible to prove or gainsay. Coker attributes the siege to Humphrey Stafford's rebellion, but as we have seen he did not in fact rebel. Because the neighbours say they saw the guns themselves, H.J. Moule, writing for the Dorset Natural History and Antiquarian Field Club in 1899, suggests instead that it occurred during a later rebellion by a Stafford against Queen Mary, in 1560. But Woodsford was then owned by the Strangways and lived in by the Symonds.

Certainly there is no record of such a siege, and just as certainly most people believe that a castle is not a castle unless it has been besieged, and will supply it with one themselves if no one else does. In fact lack of maintenance has been a far greater destroyer of castles than ever were ordnance or siege machines. Like the King's and Queen's Rooms, the siege must remain in the realms of wishful thinking.

Castle Farm

Woodsford was still a valuable farm, however. A later note taken from "Sir John Strangways, his Boke of Survey taken anno 1609" gives his assessment of its worth at £300, compared with £260 for Stinsford. It came in useful for providing younger sons and daughters with an income. In 1649, a lease was drawn up settling the "manor, castle farm and demesne lands of Woodsford" on two daughters of another Sir John Strangways. Two other Strangways, presumably uncles or brothers, gave up their title at the same time.

Somewhere around this date the main surviving range of the castle was put in order. It is possible that part of it was already lived in by a farmer. The 1649 lease records that the farm, at least, had a tenant in occupation who appears, from the not very legible document, to have rejoiced in the name of Melchisadeck Gillett. How much money there was to spare for building work at this time, when Sir John Strangways had to raise cash to pay a huge fine to Parliament for his support of Charles I, is doubtful. Improvements at Woodsford may have had to wait a decade or so for prosperity to recover.

On the other hand, the Strangways estates were enormous, as is shown by Sir John's own proud account of them, written in doggerel verse in 1650 when restricted by Parliament to stay within five miles of his home at Melbury. The verses were read by Lord Ilchester to the annual meeting of the Dorset N.H. and Archaeological Society in 1932, and in transcription cover several pages, with each manor or farm only briefly mentioned: "Woodsford Strangways is well known, and Bolmeston, to be myne own. Of Stinsford Farm I have the Fee; that Right my ancestors gave me" and so on. The rental income must have been huge, so the impact of the fine was perhaps only minimal.

Either during or after the Commonwealth years (1649-60), then, the full transformation from castle to farmhouse took place. It was given a new roof, with existing cross walls built up into gables, and a thick covering added in the most readily available local material, thatch. Some of the existing chimneys were made taller to raise them well above the roof. Probably at the same time, the walls and roof of the South Hall and the lodging to its north were lowered. At the taller northern end, a new floor was inserted to create bedrooms, with new windows, some of them in partly blocked medieval openings. The lower south end became stables and hayloft, with a lean-to on its east side. There were probably other farm buildings within the still roughly enclosed courtyard on the west.

The names of more tenant farmers are given by elderly witnesses at a hearing in 1710, called to settle a longstanding dispute with the manor of Puddletown, over summer grazing of cattle on the flood meadows on the north (Puddletown) side of the Frome. Several ancients were wheeled out to state that this had been done "time out of mind". Farmer Meades was remembered 40 or 50 years before, when one witness had worked as a servant on the farm, and he was succeeded by Farmer Stout. A Widow Stout was the occupier when Castle Farm was leased in 1671 by Sir Giles Strangways to his two younger brothers, John Strangways of Marnhull, gent, and Nicholas Strangways, Fellow of Wadham College, Oxford. The lease includes a clause prohibiting them from demolishing any of the buildings.

The evidence of 1710 tells us that the ancient ford over the river was still passable by carts, going to collect hay cut in the meadows on that side. The tenant of Castle Farm was now John Thresher, who succeeded Widow Stout (perhaps a daughter-in-law to the Widow of 1671) in 1710. Her stock consisted of 176 ewes, 154 lambs, 140 weathers, and 15 rams. No mention is made of cattle, but perhaps these had been sold already. In the previous six months she had spent £18.0.1. on repairs to

the house, stiles, hedges, gates, and hatches, £12.10.8 (two quarters) in land tax and 5 shillings in window tax.

Thresher was only given a five year tenancy, but renewed it until 1735, when he was succeeded by John Spratt. He died in 1756, and a new lease was granted to his widow, Mary Spratt. Each lease included the provision that when it ended, the tenant would "hold and enjoy the Barns and some convenient part of the stables and one convenient room in the house till midsummer next after the end of his lease", thus ensuring an orderly hand-over.

The tenancy of Mr Henning

The 1861 edition of Hutchins notes that "the castle was inhabited by a Mr Henning in the past century by whom many alterations and repairs were effected, tending much, of course, to alter and obscure the original character of the building". Robert Henning succeeded Mary Spratt as tenant in 1763, and some confirmation of his alterations comes from an undated account that he drew up himself. Further reference is made to them in letters from his sons to Lord Ilchester's agent, at the conclusion of their father's tenancy in 1797-8.

The younger Hennings had arranged for independent referees to look over their father's improvements, and make a valuation of the "Fences and Repairs and Wears etc, their estimates of which, for the whole, except the Barns (which my father thought may as well or better wait to be valued at Midsummer) amounts to £49.4.8, and to leave 13 thousand of reed for thatching the farm-house and outhouses, the labour of putting up, included in the above sum.

"The undated account (spelling uncorrected) lists more extensive work:

Bildings at Woodsford

7 ctdge (cottage?) houses, £30	210. 0. 0
2 Barns	95. 0. 0
A porch to the Wheat Barn	15. 0. 0
A cart house	6.10. 0
A calfs house for the Dareyman	2.10. 0
Watering & weirs trunks for Woodmeadow	40. 0. 0
Bilding part of the Farm house	50. 0. 0
The grannery	75. 0. 0
Cow houses in the Barten	30. 0. 0
Two thimber flores	10. 0. 0

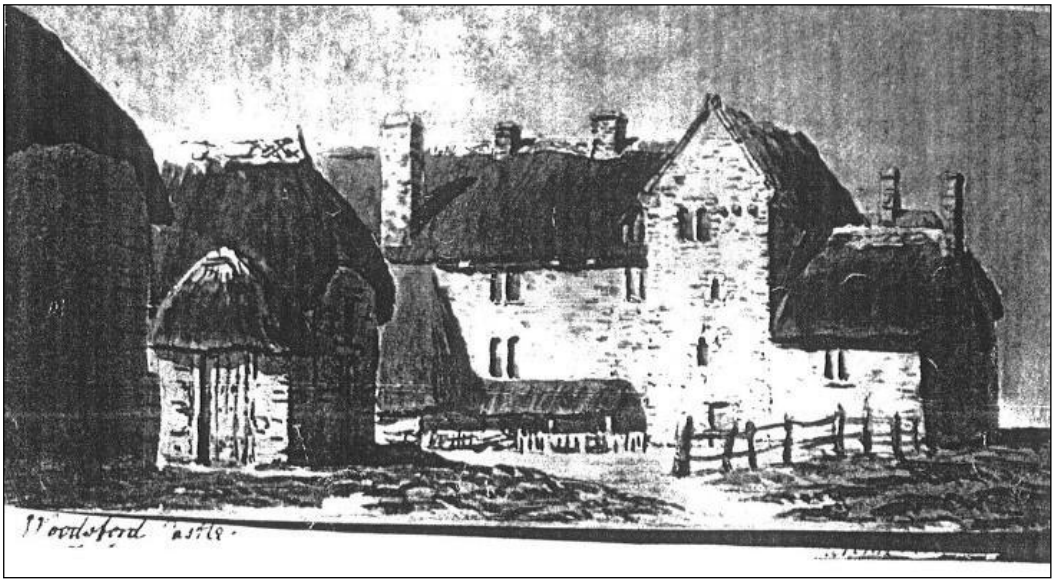
This account, and the two, probably 18th-century, views in which it does not appear, argue that it was Henning who built the north-west wing ("Bilding part of the farmhouse"), and possibly another wing on the north end which was removed by Hicks. It was probably he, too, who rebuilt the west wall of the King's Room, possibly for structural reasons, but destroying in the process all evidence for its medieval arrangement.

Whether he inserted the attic floor over the King's Room is less certain. In 1990, a beam spanning the room from north to south at this level was taken down. In the wall-pocket for it a George III silver penny was found, with the date 1797. This may have been put there by Henning at the very end of his tenancy, or by the incoming tenant to mark his arrival.

The barns which show in the 1840s view of Woodsford by H.J. Moule must have been Henning's. These stood east of the house, and to build them he probably removed the last of the ruins noted by Hutchins, and recorded on the "old map" of which a copy was made in the mid-19th century. Some remainder of these earlier ranges, or a barn built on their foundations, stands in the foreground of the 18th-century watercolour.

The "old map" also contains interesting details. The track to the ford is clearly shown, as are the weirs which were presumably to control flooding. One was by the village and one, Great Weir, was further east, complete with a watch house. There is no sign of the village of Woodsford Strangways, but "feint remains of antient trenches" is written where the RCHM was later to see a hollow way, and the boundaries of village plots. Robert Henning's seven cottages were on another part of the farm altogether, and it is not clear at all when or why this village faded away. Curiously the road from Dorchester stops short of the castle, and shows no sign of continuing towards East Woodsford village.

Watercolours by H. J Moule, in the 1840s



Robert Henning was obviously a prosperous farmer, although he still called himself Yeoman. His sons lived in Dorchester and to judge from their handwriting, were well educated. Some of this prosperity he no doubt owed to the enclosure of the heath to the south, and its conversion to arable land. This was the age of agricultural improvement, and it is interesting to see that the lease drawn up by the estate in 1797 for the new tenant, John Beaton, included lengthy instructions for good husbandry, in addition to routine instructions to keep in good repair "the windows of the dwelling house, the barns, floors and thatching of the buildings". Some measure of the increase in value is given by the rent John Beaton is to pay: £470 a year, as against £210.6.8 paid by John Spratt and £250 by Robert Henning himself.

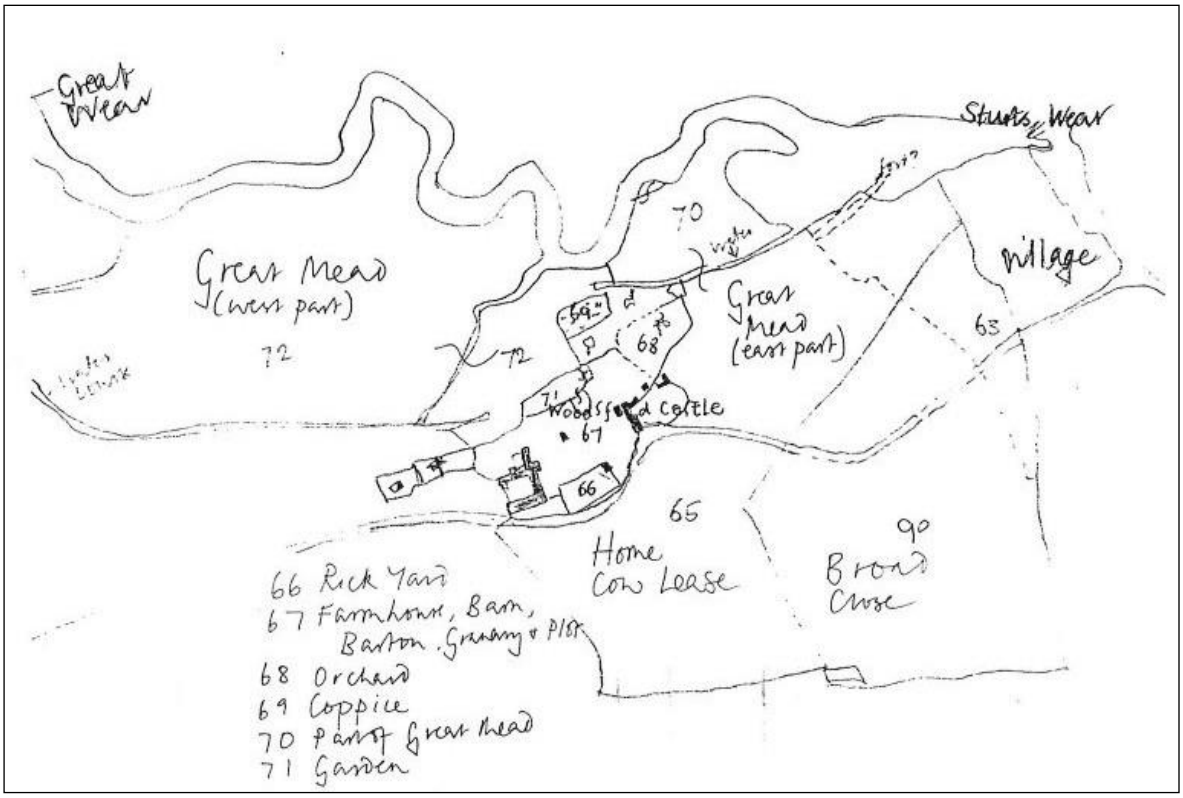
Woodsford in the 1840s, before restoration

John Beaton was tenant of Woodsford until about 1820. He was succeeded by Joseph Kerslake, whose daughter Rosina, according to a descendant, was born at Woodsford in 1825. During one tenancy or other the main activity of the Castle Farm was moved to a new farm and rick yard west of the castle, which appear for the first time on the Tithe Map of 1842 and on a similar, but undated, estate map. The Tithe Apportionment lists Joseph Kerslake as tenant of a farm of 770 acres, a mixture of meadow, pasture and arable. There is still some open heath, and few woods or plantations.

The maps also show that the track to the ford has all but gone. A series of watercourses indicate the draining of the watermeadows. Between castle and river there is also an orchard, a garden and a coppice. There is now a road skirting the castle to the south, and on to East Woodsford.

There were buildings east of the castle still, and a good deal of messy farming activity is illustrated in the series of views by W.W. Weatley and H.J. Moule, each slightly different and all undated, but done roughly within these same years. They give a vivid picture of Woodsford as it must have been from before 1650 until 1850.

A description of this older Woodsford, which he had sketched himself, is given by H.J. Moule in his paper of 1899: "It was much more archaic looking 50 years ago. Then it stood out boldly on the west in an open field, and few or no creepers shrouded the hoary walling. And on the east it was surrounded, nay in one instance leant against, by old-world thatched farm buildings". The untidiness of two centuries of haphazard existence was about to be swept away.



The tithe map of 1842

Woodsford Castle: The Victorian restoration of 1850

The opportunity for restoration was perhaps provided by the departure of Joseph Kerslake, who in the county directory of 1851 is listed as living at Higher Woodsford, rather than Castle Farm as earlier. The architect chosen by Lord Ilchester was John Hicks of Dorchester, a busy but unexciting architect responsible for building, adding to, and restoring churches all over Dorset.

It is not clear exactly in which year the work was carried out, since no accounts for it have been found, but various descriptions seem to agree on a date of about 1850-1851. It was completed by 1853, since the directory for that year list the new tenant, Joseph Warne, and states that though the castle was "much injured by neglect and injudicious repairs, it has recently been in part restored by the Earl of Ilchester, the proprietor". John Hicks' chief claim to fame is that Thomas Hardy was his apprentice. According to Hardy himself, he owed his place to Woodsford Castle, where his father, Thomas Hardy senior, was employed as builder. Hicks was impressed by the boy, and apparently suggested that he help with a survey of the castle, as a test of his capabilities. On the strength of it, Hardy was taken on by Hicks in 1856, when he was sixteen. In Hicks' office in South Street, Dorchester, Hardy received his training as an architect, before he moved on in 1862 to join the busy and fashionable practice of R. Blomfield in London.

Sadly, Hardy's survey of Woodsford does not survive, either among the Ilchester estate papers or those of the Crickmay Partnership, the practice that took on Hicks' office after his death in 1868, and is still going strong in Dorchester. It seems that many early plans were taken to London, where the firm practiced for some years, and were there destroyed.

A hand coloured copy of the photograph that appeared in 1857 in *Dorset Photographically Illustrated*, by J. Pouncy

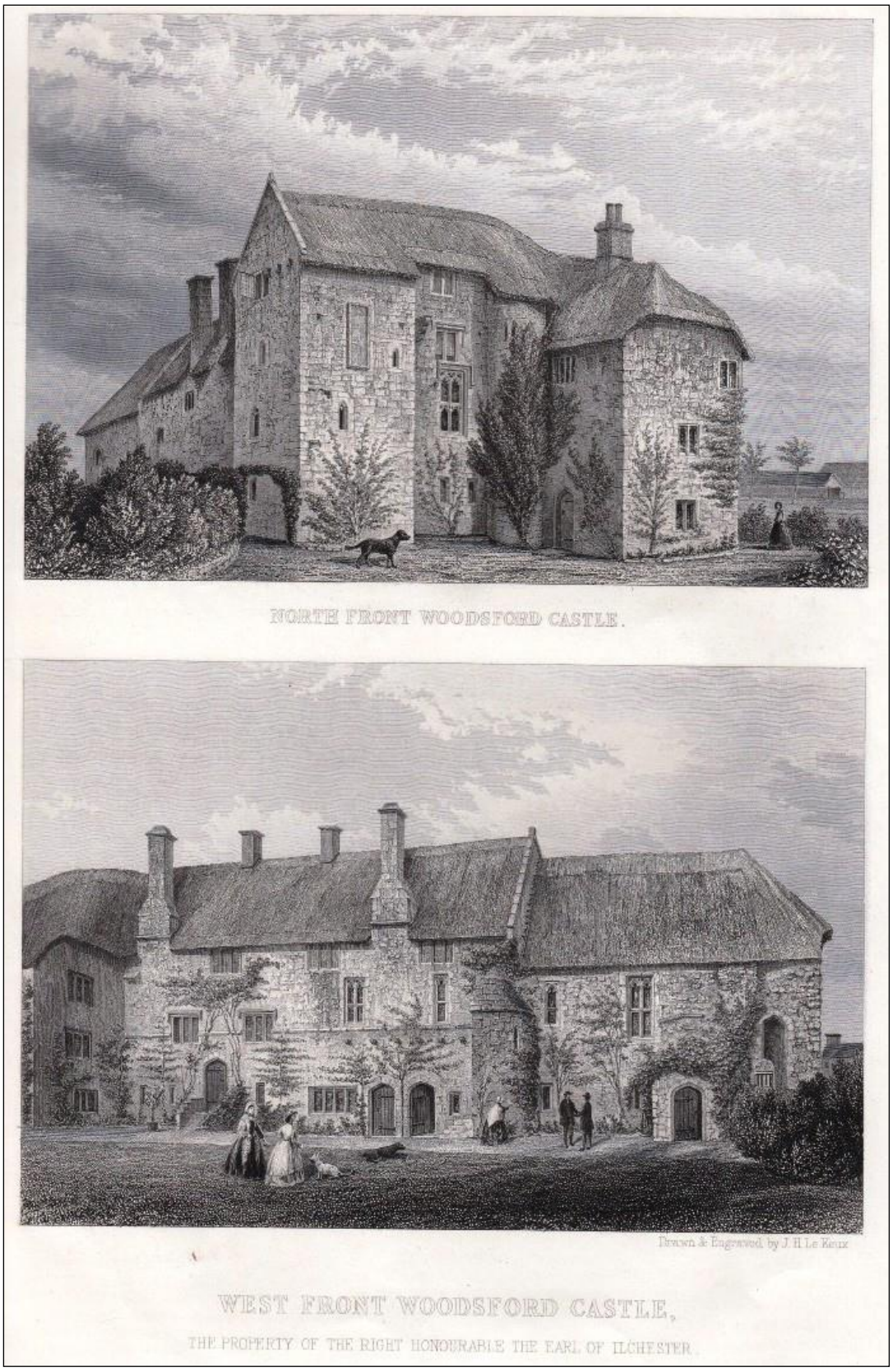
At Woodsford, Hicks' main contribution to the castle's appearance was the removal of all additions and lean-tos on the east and north sides, and the reopening and restoration of medieval doors and windows on the west front and the north end. Curiously, the descriptions of the castle by both J. Pouncy in 1857 and the 1861 Hutchins imply that the east window in the King's Room was still blocked, so it must have been renewed at a later stage....

Hicks probably inserted the stone corbels to support the beams of the inserted floor in the King's Room, which are still above the fireplace. He also renewed the fireplace surround, together with the chimneys. We do not know if he was copying an earlier fireplace. In this same wall, in both King's Room and chapel lobby, and perhaps because any evidence for medieval windows on this side had been lost, Hicks merely renewed the 17th-century windows. In the chapel lobby, he built a new stair to the upper floor which cut awkwardly across its window.

In the Queen's Room and the Guard Room beyond it, Hicks did away with the inserted floor, and raised the ceilings to their medieval level. The two 17th-century upper windows became redundant, left lighting the roof space. The Queen's Room became a drawing room and the chapel became a sitting room. It had a fireplace below the squint, and a door directly into the King's Room, or dining room.

On the ground floor, Hicks reinstated the north kitchen as the main kitchen, with the south kitchen as the bakehouse. To make a quicker route from kitchen to dining room, he made a door from the room north of the kitchen to the room next to it, and then another new door and steps to the landing just inside the front door.

Hicks' work was well and skilfully done. In several places, when exploring the building in 1987-88, instead of finding medieval work behind the plaster, it turned out that Hicks' had been there already, with repairs in brick, but leaving no visible external sign of it. If his arrangement of the house was curious, it must be remembered that he was working within what was by then a very curious house, probably with a limited budget and with orders to make it habitable for an incoming tenant as quickly as possible.



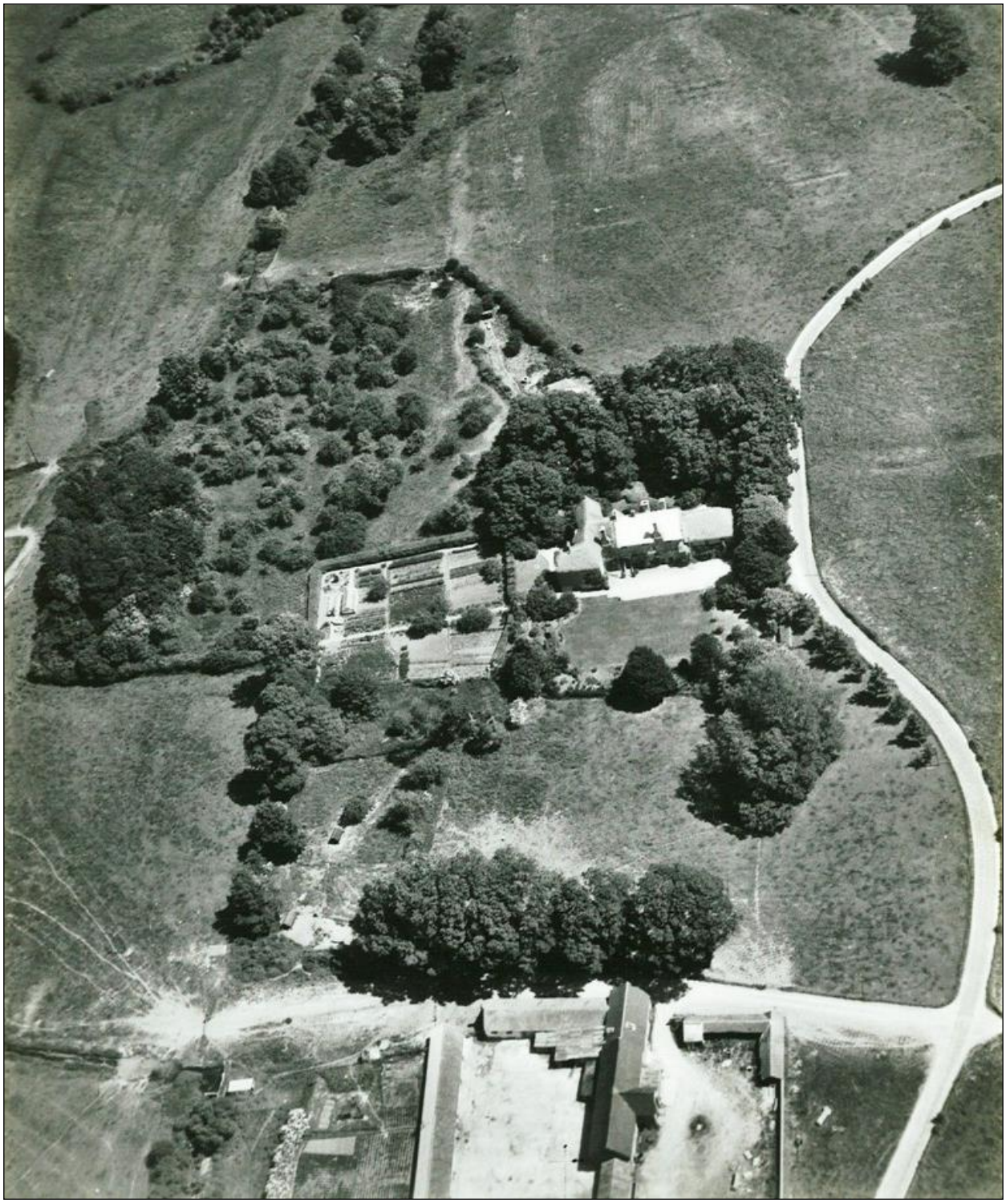
Hutchins, History of Dorset, 3rd edition 1861

H.J Moule, 1880s

c.1900

1978

1988



Possibly a 1930s aerial photograph taken by the Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography. A trace of the hedged kitchen garden had gone by 1977. The trees behind the castle were mostly elms and were killed by Dutch Elm disease.

Recent history

The restored Woodsford, with lawns and thatch equally smooth, and creepers already covering the walls, was photographed by J. Pouncy for his book, *Dorset Photographically Illustrated*, which appeared in 1857. The gentleman standing in the foreground is the new tenant, Joseph Warne. The castle was also drawn and engraved by J.H. Le Keux for the revised third edition of Hutchins, which appeared in 1861. H.J. Moule came back to sketch it once again in the 1880s.

All of these show that Woodsford was now a gentleman's residence, let to tenants of equal status. Robert Henning had called himself a yeoman, but Joseph Warne and his successor in the 1880s, William Cake, would certainly have considered themselves gentlemen farmers. The next tenant, Thomas Lee, took on the farm in 1898 and remained there until 1934. According to his great-niece, who wrote to Landmark in 1980, the farm was then over 2,000 acres: "During his time many notable people came to stay, and Thomas Hardy was a regular visitor".

Thereafter, house and farm became separated. When Arthur Oswald wrote about it in 1935 in *Country Houses of Dorset*, the house was let to Ralph Bond of Tyneham, member of an old Dorset family. His daughter, Lady Williams, says they lived there until 1938. The children used the Guard Room as a squash court. When summoned to appear before visitors, the door into the former east tower formed a useful escape route, via a rope kept hidden for that purpose. An aerial photograph taken by the Cambridge Committee for Aerial Photography at about this time shows a large hedged kitchen garden to the north and a small wood to the east. This consisted mainly of elm trees, which died of Dutch Elm

Disease in the 1970s

By the 1970s, all trace of the kitchen garden had gone, too, and the field north-east of the castle was covered by the buildings of a pig farm. Tenants had come and gone during and after the War. A Mrs Stevens and her son were there from about 1948 until 1955. The remaining fields were leased in 1967 to Geoffrey Pickup, who handed them on soon afterwards to Mr and Mrs George Sherwood. They were living in the castle when it was sold to the Landmark Trust in 1977.

Tom Dulake, the Landmark's building adviser, had noticed the castle's deterioration, and particularly the increasingly serious condition of the roof. Landmark therefore approached the Ilchester estate, offering to take the castle on and repair it, an offer which was accepted. As Sir John Smith put it in the Landmark Handbook, the renewal of the roof was "a formidable undertaking, the prospect of which may have brought about the castle's sale to us".

LANDMARK'S RESTORATION OF WOODSFORD CASTLE

The first phase, 1978-80

Work got underway on the repair of the castle roof in 1978. The lower section had been renewed quite recently, so could be left, but the main part was on the verge of collapse. The work was carried out by G. & L. Barnes, local builders, while the thatcher was J.D. Martin. A grant for the repairs was given by the then Historic Buildings Council.

When the old thatch was stripped off, it became clear that in earlier reroofings, the new thatch had in most cases simply been added to the old. In places the covering was six feet deep. As a result, the weight on the roof structure, itself in a pretty decayed state, was enormous. In the end both structure and covering had to be renewed completely, apart from one 17th- century truss.

In the process of renewing the roof, it was decided to do away with a dormer window on the east side lighting the attics. It was clear that when the castle as a whole was restored, these rooms would not be needed.

The two chimneys on the east side of the castle were repaired, the larger one needing almost complete rebuilding. The west stair turret was also in a poor state. A combination of failed coping stones and modern hard cement pointing had allowed damp to build up in the wall, and weaken the footings. John Schofield, architect and authority on traditional lime mortars, was asked to supervise its repair and repointing with lime slaked on the site.

The use of lime mortars and plasters, which allow damp to evaporate, has been largely superseded since the War by the use of cement, with catastrophic results for many historic buildings. Walls designed to breath have the wet trapped in them by cement on one side and modern plaster on the other. The resultant problems are blamed on the poor workmanship of our fore-fathers, when it is in fact modern treatments that are the cause.

By the 1970s, persuaded by restorers such as Professor Robert Baker, and bodies such as the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, a few architects had realised where the fault lay, and were relearning traditional techniques. Landmark has adopted the use of lime on its buildings wherever possible, and the National Trust and English Heritage do the same. As a result, twenty years on, the use of lime is becoming more and more widespread, and many buildings are the healthier for it.

Slaking the lime, 1980

The west stair turret, before and after repair, 1979-80

The old roof of the north turret and north west wing, after the thatch was stripped off in 1979

1979

Restoration of the interior, 1987-92

When the Sherwoods moved out of the castle in 1987, work could start on the creation of a Landmark within it. This time the architect in charge was Peter Bird of Caroe and Martin (now Caroe and Partners) of Wells in Somerset. The main proposals for the restoration had already been agreed, the chief of which was the removal of the inserted bedroom floor from the King's Room, to reveal its true proportions.

It had also been agreed that the Landmark would be at the north end of the building. Following the medieval practice of having sets of chambers opening off a central hall, the bedrooms would fall into two groups at either end of the King's Room: a high end group formed round the chapel and the Queen's Room or solar; and a low end group in the north-west wing, which would also have the new kitchen on its first floor. Little use would be made of the ground floor, except as an indoor playground. The two rooms in the north-east tower were felt to be a little too spartan for bedrooms, but fun to explore.

Another decision was to do the work slowly, employing our own workforce, rather than bringing in an outside contractor. In actual fact this workforce consisted of one craftsman, Leonard Hardy, who lives nearby and whose work was already known to Landmark. The appearance of Woodsford now owes everything to his skill, knowledge, and ability to learn new techniques, whether of joinery, masonry or plastering. During the first three years it was really only for the heaviest tasks, and specialist jobs such as wiring, that another pair of hands was brought in. Then, in 1990, when it was decided to hurry things on a bit, Andrew Coward came to help with the final stages.

The finer details of the arrangement emerged as we set about the exploration of the building in 1987-88, and carried out research into its original form and use. Productive days were spent, when the architect, the builder and the historian were able to draw on the eyes and knowledge of Nicholas Cooper of the Royal Commission, Laurence Keen, the County Archaeologist, and David Sumpster, Historic Buildings Architect for English Heritage. Woodsford also enjoyed the close and detailed attention of Sir John Smith.

The learning process resolved, for example, the question of where the dividing line between the Landmark and the unrestored part of the building should be drawn. The original north house had clearly ended with the Queen's Room, so that is where the Landmark should also end. Then, as it emerged that the present front door was not a Hicks invention, but replaced a medieval door which was probably the main entrance to the north house, it became clear that this should stay as the front door, as against an earlier proposal to enter by the door into the ground floor of the north-west wing.

The partly restored King's room, with later openings blocked, the window arches renewed but the walls bare of all except medieval plaster. The line of the hacked off corbel table can be seen above, disappearing above the attic floor.

The King's Room

Once the bedroom floor had been taken down, the walls could be explored. Quite large areas of early plaster were found. Cupboards in the south and north walls turned out to be blocked doors of c.1790 or later, one into the chapel and the other into a former wing on the north end. In the south wall, a clear break in the masonry at the west end, combined with the poor masonry of the west wall as far as the north-west wing, gave evidence for its rebuilding.

More interesting were filled pockets for the medieval roof trusses, and hacked off corbels beneath them. The camber or light pitch of the medieval roof showed on the north and south walls, from the remains of the corbel table or ledge which runs at this level throughout the building. Most of it had been hacked back in the King's Room, but one bit survived intact on the west wall, completing the evidence for the height and form of the roof and ceiling.

Work then began on the walls, blocking all those openings that were no longer needed: the two cupboards, doors to the bedroom floor from the chapel lobby and the north-west wing, and a bedroom fireplace in the south wall. The 17th-century window in the north end had been blocked already, in 1986, because it was causing structural problems. It rested on the head of Hicks' restored medieval window, leaving this large opening with less than half a retaining arch. In this case, the surround was left visible from outside, but the window in the east wall, where there was no stone surround, was blocked invisibly.

The blocking of these upper windows also made it possible to replace the rear-arches over the main windows, of which only half of that over the east window existed. This was done in Purbeck cliff stone. Later, new stone inner mouldings were fitted on the mullion and transom of each

The tie beam over the King's Room, inserted in 1979, which had to be raised to allow clearance for the ridge beam of the new ceiling.

window, which Hicks had left incomplete. The windows were reglazed and fitted with shutters made of very wide elm boards.

The new oak boarded ceiling was to be a copy of the original, as far as it can be known. To fit this in, the attic floor had to be taken down. At the same time, the tie beam of one of the roof trusses had to be raised a few inches, to clear the new ridge beam. This had to be done without disturbing the truss itself, a hair-raising task which Leonard Hardy tackled with complete calm. The whole job of working the great oak beams, raising them to this height, and fitting them into the medieval wall-pockets, required a great deal of ingenuity as well as skill.

The walls were then replastered, with a thin coat of lime plaster to match the medieval work. The whole room was then limewashed, but with only a thin coat over the medieval plaster, to leave it showing through.

The chapel and chapel lobby

In 1987, the chapel was a bathroom. Before that it had been a sitting room, with a fireplace under the squint, found when the plaster was stripped off. Further exploration revealed the surround of the east window and, in the bedroom above, the head of the window appeared. Rather than recreate this, it was decided to leave it in its mutilated but romantic state. The wall blocking it has been plastered to what would have been the medieval glass line, and he ceiling was cut back to leave the window visible as a whole from below.

The decision to leave the inserted floor over the chapel was taken partly on historical grounds, to leave evidence of the castle's post-medieval use, and partly on practical: the extra floor made it possible to have three bedrooms and a bathroom at this end. It also meant that instead of one small but very tall bedroom, there would be two of rather more cosy proportions.

A wooden floor was taken up in both chapel and lobby, in the hope of finding the medieval floor beneath, but only the top of the vault was found. A new floor of Purbeck stone flags was laid instead. The Victorian brick wall between the chapel and lobby was taken down, in search of evidence for the medieval arrangement, but the Victorian work had destroyed any traces of an earlier screen or partition.

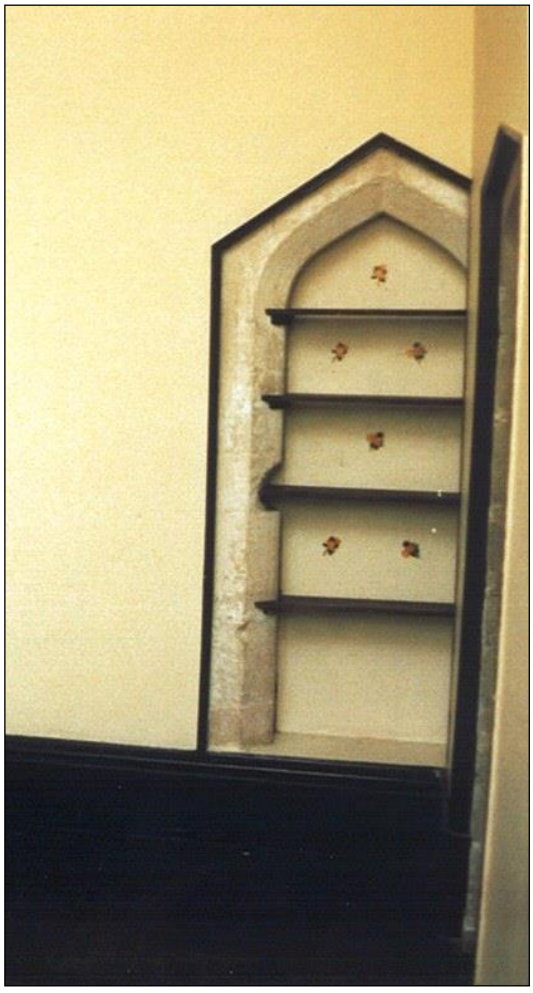
Hicks' staircase occupied most of the lobby and, to reach the bedrooms over the King's Room, cut across the window. Since these rooms no longer existed, it was possible to take a new and smaller stair up on the cross-wall. A separate set of steps would then lead to the Queen's Room, emphasising its higher status. The arguments for these changes had to be hard fought with English Heritage, whose architects favoured keeping the old stair. The stone stair leading up from the front door was given new treads. The outside steps were also rebuilt, to a more medieval design than the Victorian ones, and the oak door itself is new.

The chapel before

Hick's staircase in the chapel lobby

The Queen's Room

Work in the Queen's Room followed the same pattern as elsewhere. Plasterboard on the walls was taken down, and replaced by a coat of thin lime plaster. The door to the supposed garderobe was opened up, and the later door leading through to the Guard Room was blocked. As in the King's Room, the mullion and transom of the window were given proper mouldings on their inside face. A wooden floor has been replaced by stone flags, beneath which a small box was placed, with a selection of artefacts dating from 1990.



The Queen's Room – the garderobe door

The North wall after hardboard was stripped off the walls and the passage partition was taken down.

The north-west wing

The wing had been a separate cottage for Mrs Sherwood's father, with a sitting room on the first floor and a kitchen on the ground floor, now the garden room. The arrangement has been changed to provide a large kitchen (by taking out a passage) and three bedrooms, with a bathroom on the ground floor. The existing stair took up a lot of room, so a new stair was made, to tighter measurements. It was the first staircase that Leonard Hardy had ever made.

Although some of the partitions are new, most of the doors, windows and floors are old. Only the two south facing windows in the kitchen and the big bedroom were renewed. The others were repaired as necessary. The walls in the kitchen were lined with hardboard
. When this was taken away, the two cupboards on the north wall were found. The panelled window embrasures are original, but all the rest of the kitchen joinery was made by Leonard Hardy.

On the ground floor, the door in the south wall had been turned into a window. This was now put back as a door. The kitchen fittings were stripped out, and the walls brushed down. A new stone cover was made for the well. On the outside walls of the wing, recent cement render was cleaned off again.

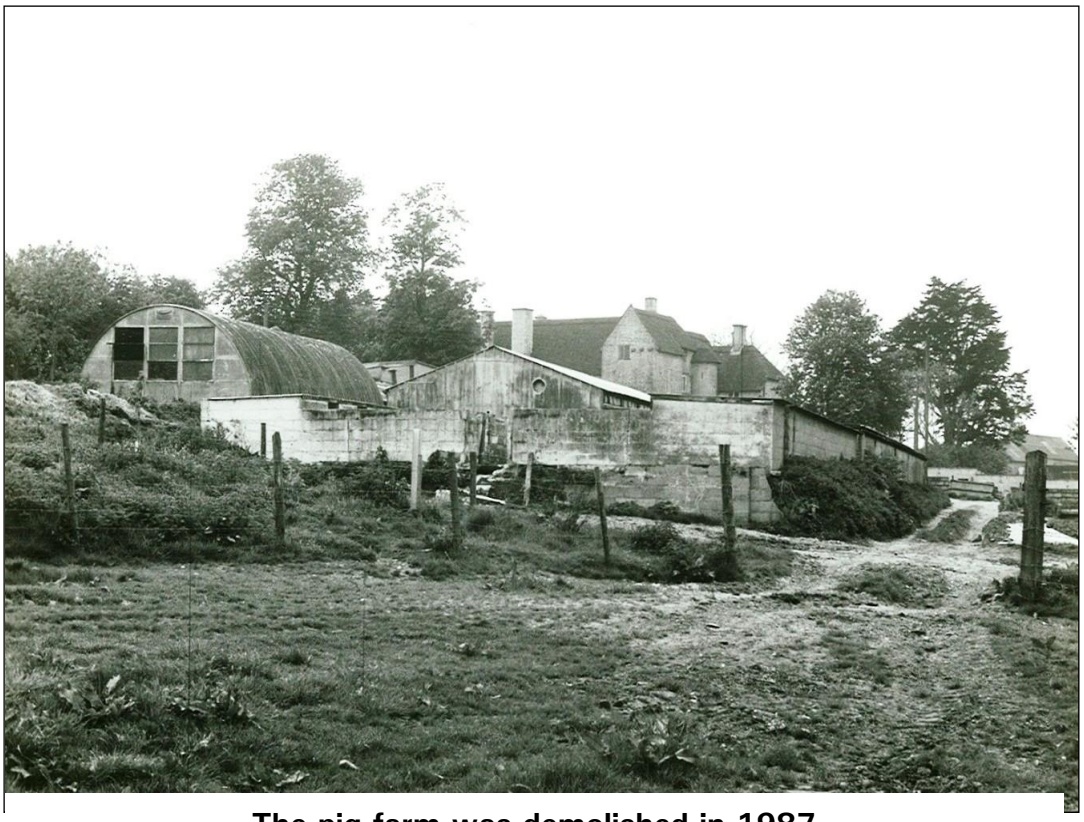
The north-east tower, the ground floor, the south end and the grounds

The rooms in the tower were stripped of plaster, limewashed and fitted with garderobes. The same policy was followed on the ground floor, where all recent partitions, ceilings, and other fittings were stripped out, the vaults cleaned of gloss paint, and the whole limewashed. The stone floor was made good. The two kitchen fireplaces were opened up, and three later doors (one in the east wall, one linking the north and south kitchens, and one opening onto the front steps) were blocked, to reinstate the medieval circulation.

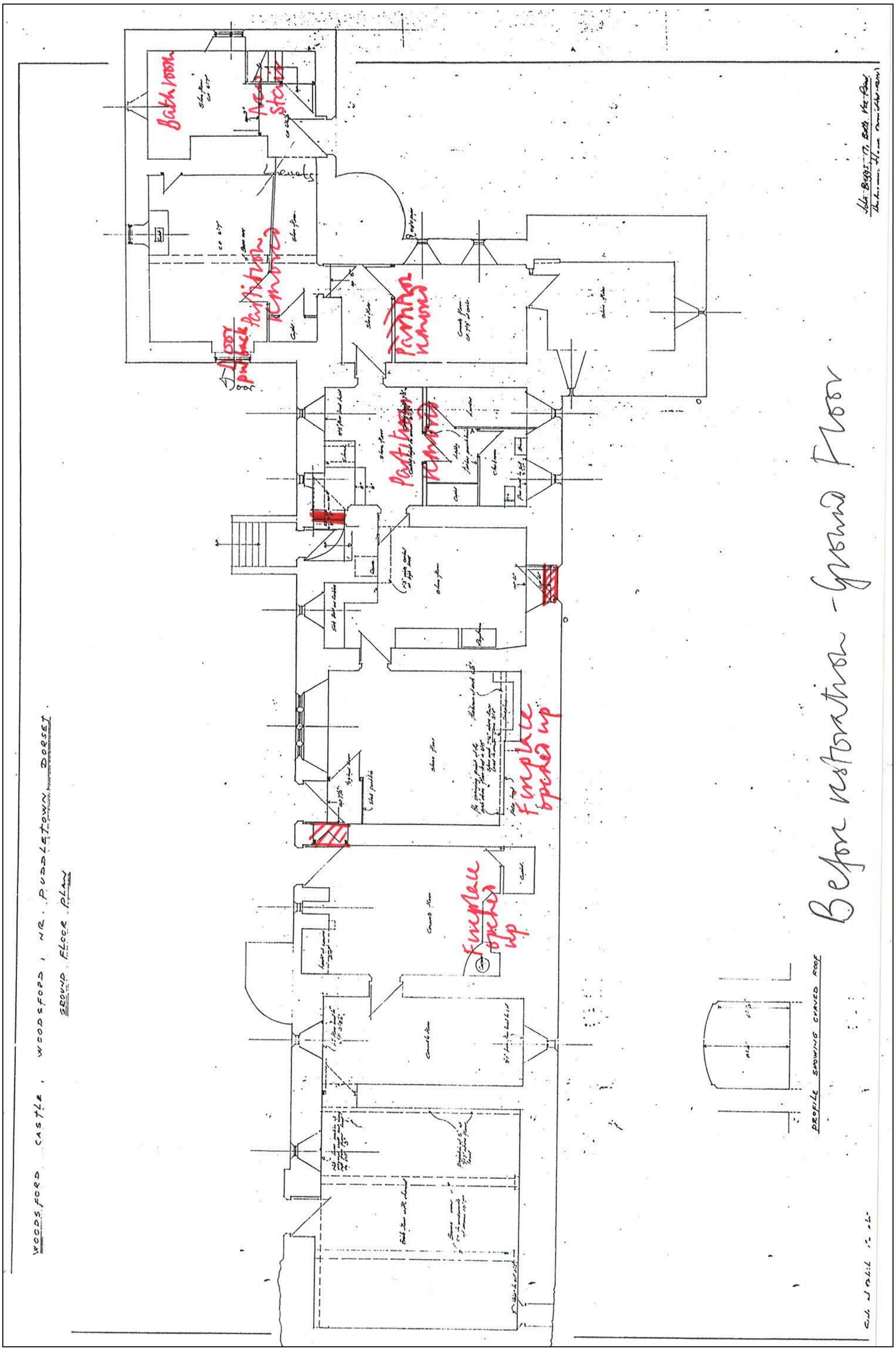
The south end of the building has for the time being been left as we found it, except for the roof of the lower section which was rethatched by Wessex Thatching of East Knighton in 1991. When funds permit, the floor of the south hall will be made safe, so that it can be left open for visitors to explore. Meanwhile it makes a useful store for salvaged building materials.

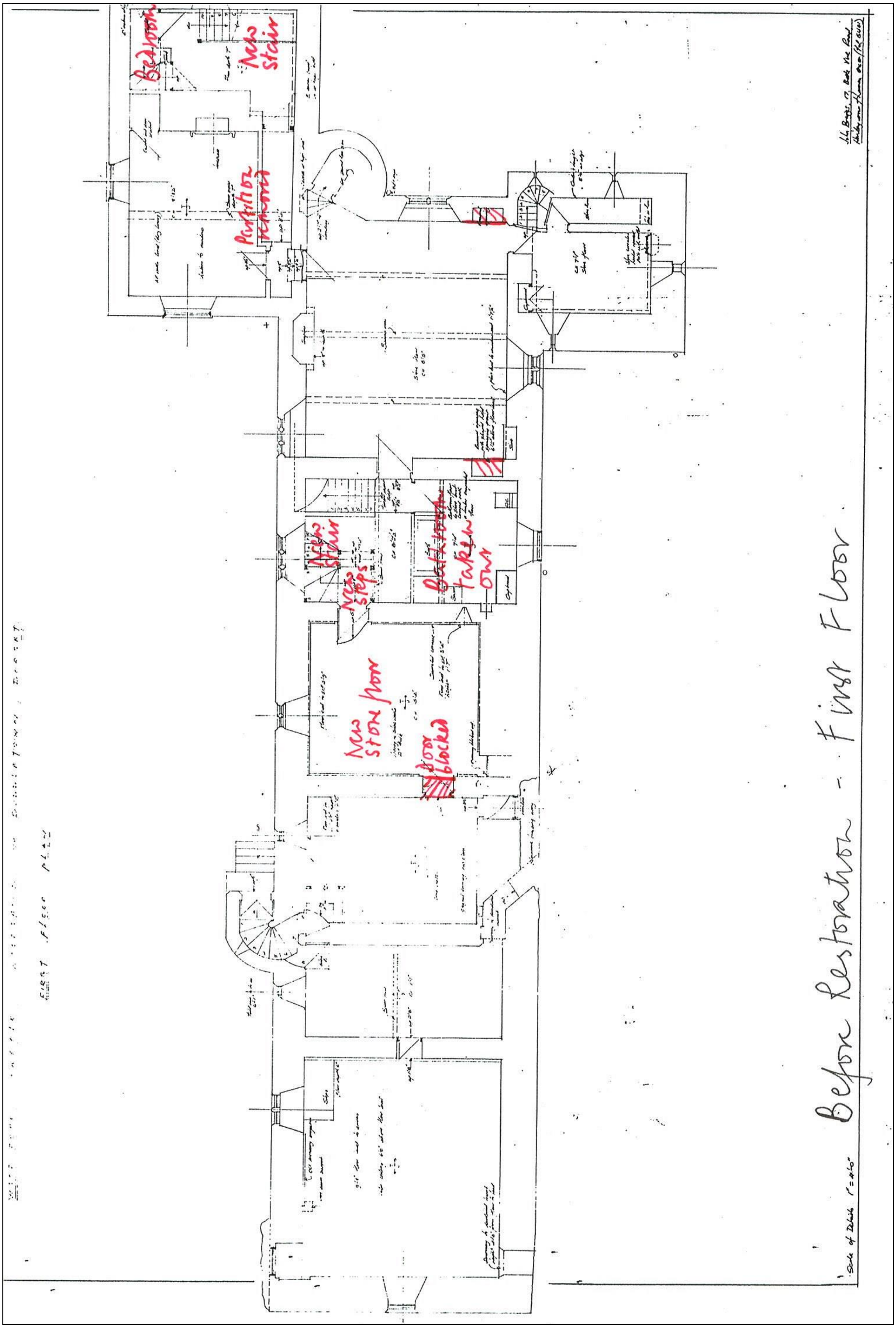
Perhaps the most dramatic change to the castle has been to its setting. The pig farm was bulldozed by Mr Honeybun in 1987, and in 1991, the ground east of the building was lowered and levelled. On the west, gravel has given way to grass and paving. Some trees have been planted, with more to follow, so that the castle will recover the shelter it enjoyed earlier this century, and stand once more against a wooded backdrop.

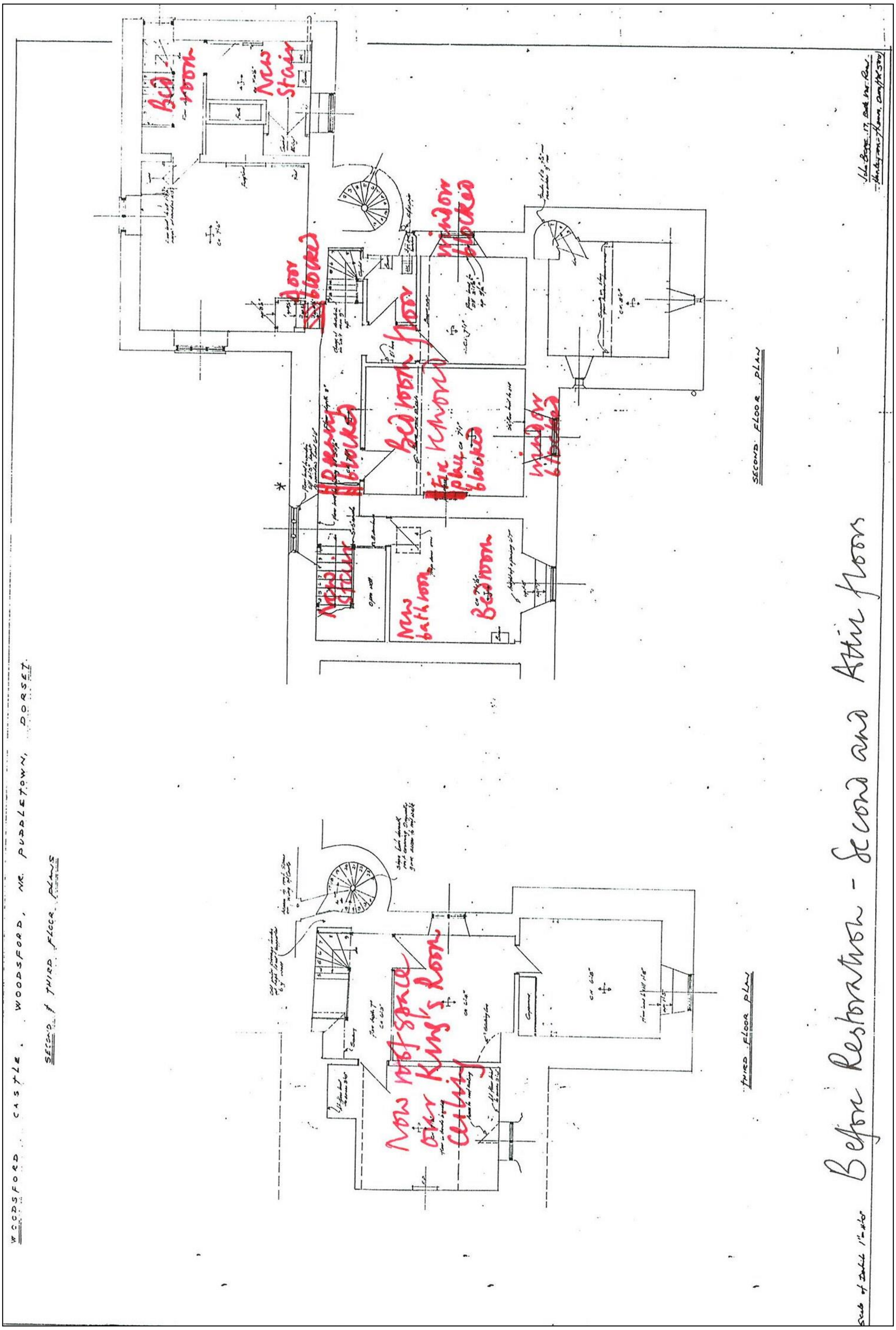
Charlotte Haslam
November 1992

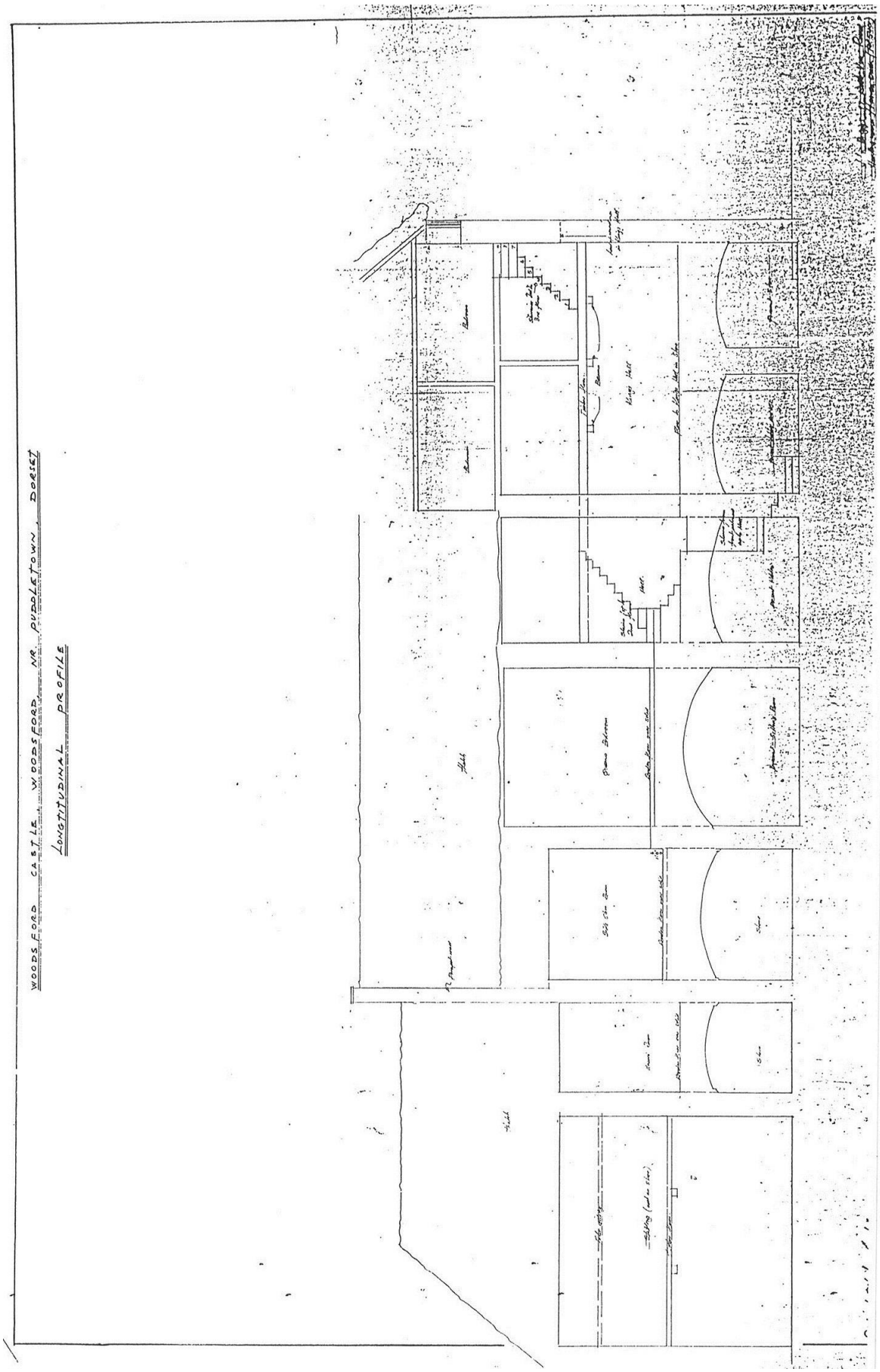


The pig farm was demolished in 1987

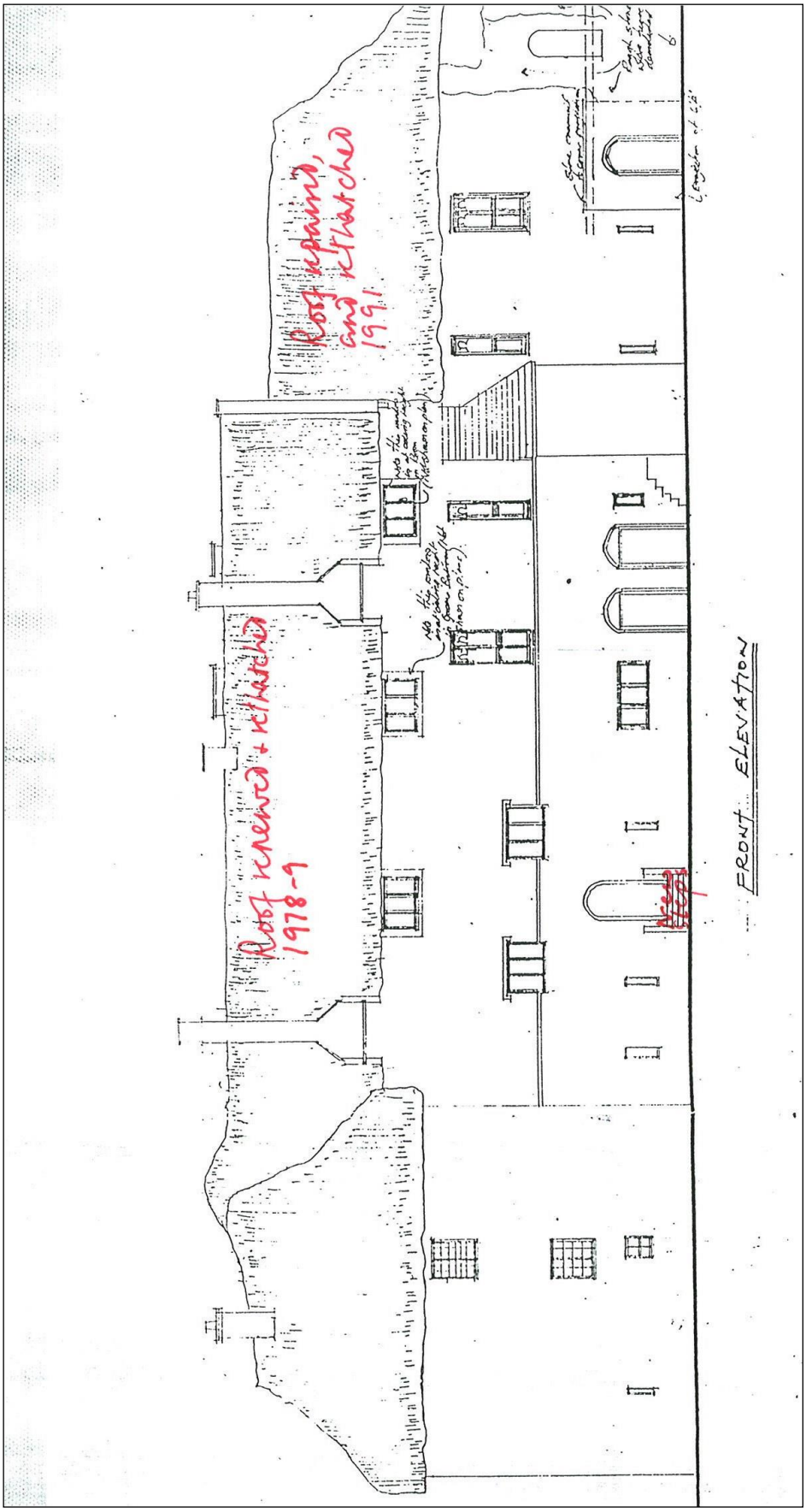

WOODSFORD CASTLE, WOODSFORD, NR. PUDDLETOWN, DORSET
GROUND FLOOR PLAN
PROFILE SHOWING CURVED ROOF
Bathroom
New Stairs
Partition removed
Door put back
Fireplace opened up
Fireplace opened up
Before restoration - Ground Floor


Bedroom
New stair
Partition removed
New stair
New steps
Partition taken out
New stone floor
Door blocked
FIRST FLOOR PLAN
Before Restoration - First Floor

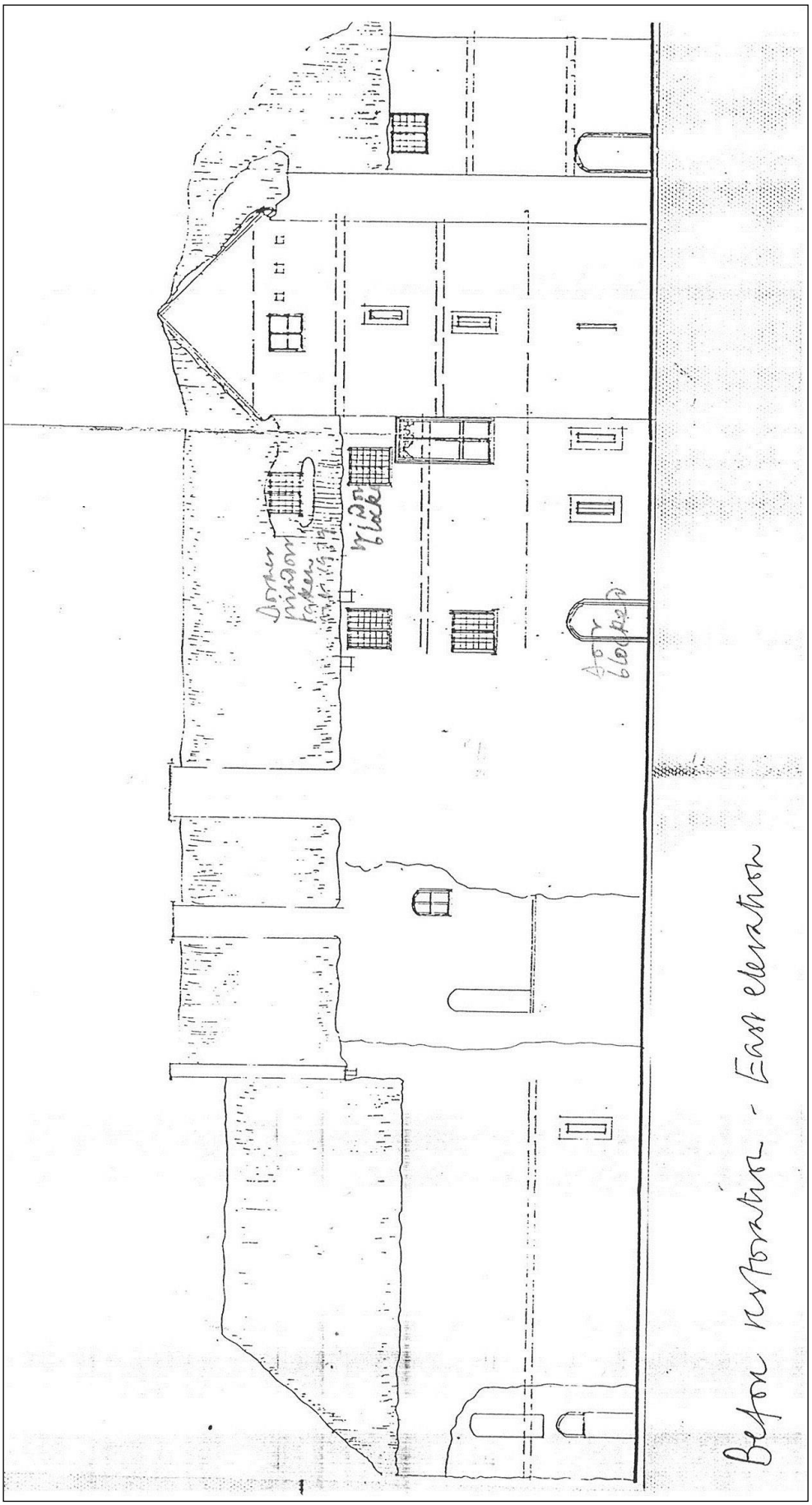

WOODSFORD CASTLE, WOODSFORD, NR. PUDDLETOWN, DORSET.
SECOND & THIRD FLOOR PLANS
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
THIRD FLOOR PLAN
Before Restoration - Second and Attic floor
New Stairs
Door blocked
Window blocked
Bedroom
New bathroom
Now just space over King's Room ceiling



Before Restoration – Section looking west



Before restoration, west elevation


Before restoration - East elevation

Re-thatching work in 2009. The total depth of the thatch is 350mm.

Re-thatching (2008 -2011)

A three year, phased programme of re-thatching started in 2008. Phases were determined by comparative wear (south facing being the worst), budget and to limit closure periods.

Woodsford Castle has in excess of 3,000 square feet of thatch, making it the largest thatched manor house in Dorset – and the only thatched castle. Thatch is a word derived from Anglo Saxon for roof covering – but has come to mean a vegetative covering. This could be bracken, heather, gorse but in this area has come to mean, almost invariably, straw or reed.

There are three common types of thatch – water reed, long straw and combed wheat reed (also straw). In this area, two common types of thatch are water reed and combed wheat reed. A team of five local thatchers, headed by Dave Symonds from Chideock, worked on the re-thatch. Water reed would originally come from adjoining areas surrounding the river Frome.

It was grown at Radipole, Lodmoor (both Weymouth area), Wareham and Abbotsbury. Abbotsbury reed is used on Strangways estate buildings. The plainness of the thatch with a flush ridge and no embellishment reflects a slightly austere fortified building.

The thatchers used 2,400 bundles of Austrian reed on the first section of roof. This was chosen because it was the best quality to be found at that time. Quality varies from year to year. Poland and Turkey also produce this type of reed. The famous Norfolk reed is seeing a small increase in supply but it is still used very locally to where it is grown. The hazel spars used came from the Kingston Lacy estate in Dorset (NT).

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The Ilchester /Fox Strangways papers in Dorset County Record Office provided most of the information for the history of Woodsford from the 17th century.

Early deeds and accounts were transcribed by the CRO staff.

Henry Moule's watercolours are in the Dorset County Museum, slides were provided by Laurence Keen. Other views are owned by the Landmark Trust.

Deeds from Alnwick Castle were kindly transcribed by Christopher Whittick.