

## STANVARDING HALL

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An extraordinary and fascinating house full of puzzles and surprises, and a living proof of the unwisdom of generalizing rashly about Elizabethan house plans. It was built by Robert Corbet, younger brother of Sir Andrew of Moreton Corbet, to replace one which stood within the partly surviving moat 100 yards to the west. He began evidently with the east wing, the completion of which may have been recorded by a date of 1560 on a now lost sundial. This wing stands on falling ground (ground which indeed fell during building; hence the crazy angles of windows and panelling in its two main rooms) and has therefore room for a full basement and ground floor within the principal storey of the hall range. Its early date is confirmed in its roof-framing which, unlike the splendid double-framed queen-post range running east-west, has no true trusses but massive principals supported by raking struts and huge wind-braces. The intention may have been to build a matching solar wing west of the hall; if so, it was aborted: the house which emerged during the next three decades turned out highly irregular, with numerous projections which don't match and a plan and elevations which suggest opportunistic enlargement and patching. (The brickwork, which at a cursory glance looks - apart from obvious small additions - all of a piece, proves to have many variations.) Strangest of all, the hall and great chamber are not in the middle but at one end and apparently always have been, occupying not only two thirds of the middle range, but the miniature 'west wing' as well.

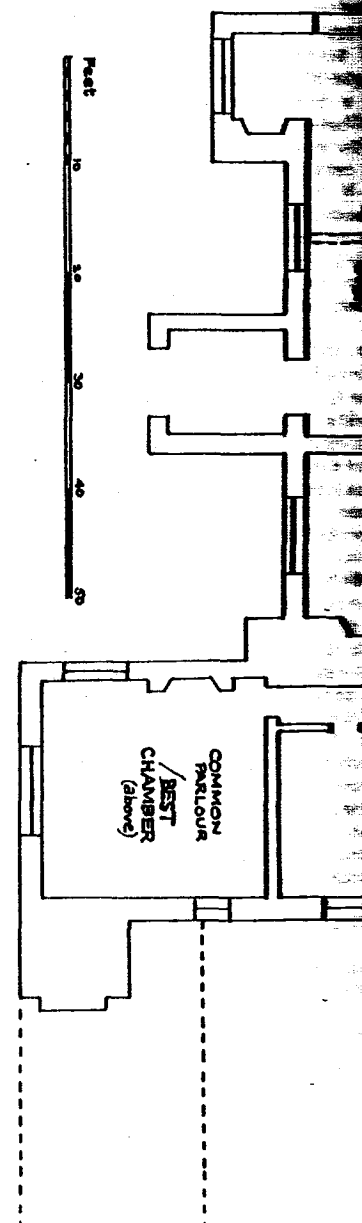
In fact it isn't really a west wing at all, just modest projecting bays front and back which - to judge from misalignment of the wall at the north-west corner, the need for a small flat roof beyond the north-west gable and the abbreviated wall-plate in the great chamber - were built out after the west wall was finished. But the south-west bay (to which at the outermost corner something seems once to have been built on - was a further range planned, begun and then abandoned?) is mysterious, or perhaps just miscalculated: it has quoins only at one angle, the string course stops short and the main windows, though centred inside, are off-centre on the façade because the bay also incorporates a stack - which almost suggests that minuscule rooms were partitioned off in the projection. The ogee gable, bizarrely decorated with dentils, may have been added in imitation of that on the porch, which is a reduced version of those at Moreton Corbet. The porch also is clearly an addition (though, since its gable displays the rebus of Robert Corbet's wife, Isabella of Castile, still within his time): its plinth has a different moulding from the rest, and, to accommodate a frieze with arms and griffons at the angles, the string course, and in consequence the first-floor window also, are raised above those on either side. (The porch roof purlins were simply abutted to the principals of the main roof and roughly pegged in.) The other elevations are equally irregular: the east front has been much pulled about, though original or early windows are easy to spot; a curious and specially attractive feature is a projection, one of whose outer corners is inverted to leave a re-entrant angle, but the gable (supported at the angle by a single timber brace) is continuous and creates a tiny belfry underneath. On the north front blocked windows mark the projecting bay of the hall and great chamber which is joined to the huge projecting stack, but only at the upper-floor level. This was apparently to create a garderobe and is further evidence of the bay's being an addition, since the quoins on the stack are interrupted to allow the junction. The staircase turret stands just not in the re-entrant angle to the east.

Corbet's son Thomas is said to have made alterations, perhaps to the hall, and then his son sold Stanwardine to Sir Watkin Wynn. The Wynns in turn altered the east wing in 1713 but lost the house later in the 18th century, reputedly as the result of a bet on a snail race. Since then it has changed hands several times. Most of the chimneys were renewed in the 19th century and the roof slated quite recently.

The hall is now subdivided, but its original size and the T-shaped plan resulting from the projecting bays are easy to make out from surviving sections of a quite refined floreated plaster frieze (part of the chimneypiece is also still visible, inside a cupboard on the north wall): behind the porch and marked by a point where the frieze changes gear there must have been a screens passage within the structural form of the hall - perhaps with a 'portable' screen as at Rufford. Above the hall, and (until one end was crudely partitioned off for a corridor) occupying the same area, is the great chamber, now shorn of all decorative features except a simple Elizabethan chimneypiece (another is in the porch room on the first floor); it too may once have had a frieze, and it was panelled: the wainscot is now in the church at Petton. A wide corridor leads east from the hall: on its right is a small room with mid-17th-century (?) woodwork round the chimneypiece; the rest of the wainscot suggests that the Wynns turned it into a parlour in 1713. But it may conceivably have once served as a pantry or buttery. Under the window (and almost certainly *ex situ*) is a panel containing Robert and Isabella's arms and initials and the date 1588, which perhaps signals the completion of their work on the house. Opposite is the staircase rising round a closed well. The kitchen, which must, to judge from the scale and outline form of its fireplace, always have been where it is now, at the north-east corner of the house, may have been approached through a pantry-lobby: the Wynns divided it horizontally in 1713 to provide a cheese-maturing room above. Rooms south of the kitchen were definitely for domestic use by the time they were wainscoted (early in the 17th century?), presumably providing a common dining room or parlour, with best bedchamber above. Here and elsewhere some original window ironwork survives, and there are a few panes of perhaps Elizabethan glass.

Of the grounds nothing now remains visible: the original drive came from the west and then swept round to a forecourt to the south; but the house has long been the centre of a vigorously working farm; and much of its charm arises from the intimate connexion between the surrounding farm buildings (of various dates) and a house which itself shows so many signs of having been happily adapted over and again to the changing life-styles of its numerous owners.

Andor Gomme



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Ground floor: sketch plan  
(designation of rooms conjectured)

