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MERTON HALL, NORFOLK

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The manor of Merton is situated in central Norfolk some twenty miles due west of Norwich and lies on the old road south from the market town of Watton towards Thetford, on the Suffolk border. It is a property that has never been sold in recorded history and has descended by inheritance since soon after the Norman Conquest. Today it has been the seat of the de Grey family for over 650 years, and was inherited by them through marriage in about 1340 to the heiress of the Baynard family, to which it had been granted by William the Conqueror following sequestration from its pre-Conquest Saxon possessor.¹ The exact details of the building of the Jacobean house at Merton (largely destroyed by fire in 1956) and its surviving gatehouse are obscure, but

this article will advance the theory that the latter is an unrecognised work of Robert Lyminge. Subsequent links with the eighteenth-century builder-architect George Shakespear and his contemporary the famed cabinet maker Thomas Chippendale the younger will be explored, besides early and later nineteenth-century schemes by a number of local architectural figures. In the process the effective neglect in the Georgian era of what the family clearly revered as their anciently ancestral yet hopelessly outmoded seat, when they themselves were leading a fashionable court life based in London and elsewhere will be examined. That was before their return at the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign led to a final flourish of aggrandisement under the architects



Fig. 1. Merton Hall, Norfolk, dated 1613, and its gatehouse, dated 1620, from north, with cast-iron forecourt screen here ascribed to mid-1830s and attributed to Edward Blore, his 1830s Drawing Room to right (behind tree) and 1840s Bachelor Wing to left, photograph, c.1875.

English Heritage, National Monuments Record.

Edward Blore (twice), Sir Arthur Blomfield and others that had put the house in a suitable state to be let for the shooting to the young Prince of Wales. Surprisingly, and conflicting with Blore's reputation as a dependable architect, his initial scheme seems to have set up long-running structural problems. Finally, at a relatively late date for their respective types, but again resulting from the revival of the house as the de Greys' principal residence, two ancillary buildings of Arcadian or bucolic character, a shell grotto and an ornamental dairy, were erected in the park, besides a new lodge at the park entrance once the public turnpike road had been diverted away from the house.

THE JACOBEOAN HOUSE AND GATEHOUSE

Merton Hall (Fig. 1) was dated 1613 on rainwater heads, a chimneypiece and an inscription panel above the front door.² It was one of a group of very similar, locally styled, major late Elizabethan or Jacobean East Anglian red-brick houses built on an E-plan – that is with boldly forward-projecting cross-wings either end of a hall range, which itself has a central, projecting front porch. The entrance facades of these houses are articulated with polygonal angle shafts and stepped gables to both the cross-wings and the full-height, gabled porches. The cross-wings also extend back slightly from the rear facades, and also have stepped gables, but, in contrast to the front, the angle finials framing the back gables are supported on kneelers. The mullioned and transomed windows of this group of houses are generally pedimented, while the entrance doors have round-headed rather than four-centred arches as in slightly earlier houses. Such symmetry, pediments and round-headed entrances were of course Renaissance elements, but otherwise the type belonged more in the tradition of late mediaeval English house building, particularly in plan. Furthermore, their new-found symmetry

was only skin-deep, the central entrance of each leading into a screens passage with a traditionally positioned hall off to one side. However, these halls were no longer double-height, as in earlier houses, but were ceiled at first-floor level.

In Norfolk the group starts with Costessey Hall (1564) and Felmingham Hall (1569) and included Thelveton Hall (post 1592), Dersingham Hall (c.1600), Honingham Hall (1605) (Fig. 2), Spixworth Hall (1609) (Fig. 4), Great Melton Hall (1611), and Kirstead Hall (1614).³ The somewhat hybrid Elizabethan houses of Breccles [*sic*] Hall, Breckles (1583), and Morley Old Hall (c.1600) are peripheral to the group. However, Honingham (demolished 1967)⁴ was so similar to Merton as to suggest the involvement of the same team of craftsmen, including the mason or designer.⁵ Both have a doubled-up pair of canted bays to the front of the hall range, Pevsner's description of Honingham being, 'the former hall bay window is extended, as it were, in the one re-entrant angle and has its counterpart, for no functional reason, in the other re-entrant angle'. Such was the extent to which the vogue for complete symmetry of elevations had taken hold.⁶ Honingham, only some 15 miles north-east of Merton, was built in 1605 by Thomas Richardson (1569–1635), a lawyer out of Lincoln's Inn, who rose in 1626 to be Lord Chief Justice of Common Pleas (in succession to Sir Henry Hobart of Blickling) and then of King's Bench.⁷ As a Norfolk man who was Recorder of Norwich, Richardson would undoubtedly have been known to Sir William de Grey, who completed Merton Hall in 1613 and who, as will be seen below, was first a JP and later a Deputy Lieutenant and so also part of the county hierarchy.

The entrance front of Merton remained very much as built in 1613, despite subsequent additions at each end. The original form of its rear façade, in contrast, was obscured by various nineteenth-century accretions, but close examination not only of surviving photographs taken from the south (Fig. 3), but also of a mid-1950s axonometric projection from



Fig. 2. Honingham Hall, Norfolk (dem.), built 1605, late nineteenth-century photograph.
English Heritage, National Monuments Record.

a south-western viewpoint, reveals that it must have been much like the back elevation of Spixworth Hall, just north of Norwich (Fig. 4).⁸ That only slightly earlier house, dated 1609, had a full-height central back porch between symmetrically paired chimney stacks to the hall range, flanked by the shallow-projecting backs of the cross wings. The Merton axonometric projection (Fig. 5) shows up the initials *R* and *G* (of its putative builder Robert de Grey) on the paired chimneys of this Spixworth-like arrangement either side of the step-gabled top of the back porch. And while the back of the western (left-hand) cross wing is self-evident, the corresponding eastern cross-wing back gable is the one beyond the intervening and later gabled projection, whose roof partly conceals the chimney stack to the right of the back-porch gable.

Unfortunately there are no known photographs of the Merton interiors from before the fire,⁹ but the house had two notable interior features. First, the stair at Merton was of the very newly introduced newel form round an open well,¹⁰ but rather than the highly ornamented and figure finial-topped newels of the stairs at Blickling and Hatfield, at Merton (the current Lord Walsingham reports) the newels were very plain with chamfer-top blocks visually separated from the main shaft by an encircling, horizontal notched, groove.

Secondly, the ribbed ceiling of the Adam and Eve Room (or Great Chamber) on the first floor of the right-hand (western) cross-wing at Merton had, besides a mass of smaller simple bosses at the intersections of the ribs, a large-scaled central hanging boss modelled with the Fall of Man. The



Fig. 3. Merton Hall, from south-west, late nineteenth-century photograph. *Richard Garnier*.



Fig. 4. Spixworth Hall, Norfolk (dem.), built 1609, rear façade, 1925 photograph.
English Heritage, National Monuments Record.



Fig. 5. Merton Hall, axonometric projection from south-west, mid-1950s.

Allan Sewell.

only known (and none-too-distinct) photograph of this (Fig. 6) dates from shortly after the fire that destroyed the majority of the house in 1956 and shows the boss to have been a sumptuous affair of considerable elaboration with The Fall round the lowest stage, below two tiers of radial, small figural busts modelled in the round, themselves between leaves of acanthus. Claire Gapper, whose dissertation for her MA degree was on Elizabethan and Jacobean plasterwork, comments that the apparent richness of the surrounding foliage on the Merton pendant reminds her of two others at Burghley House, Cambridgeshire (from a tiny fragment of ceiling surviving from 1580s), whereas the human elements are more reminiscent of pendants at Broughton Castle, Oxfordshire (1599), or Audley End, Essex

(c.1615).¹¹ She has, however, identified an even closer parallel nearer to hand, at Quidenham Hall, some twelve miles south-east in Norfolk, where the central motif of the strapwork ceiling over the staircase is modelled as 'the Hand of God descending as a pendant and holding a model of Noah's ark containing Noah, his wife and animals and the date 1619'.¹² It seems the occurrence of such pendants modelled with figures in the round (an uncommon feature) was confined to East Anglia. At both Merton and Quidenham the imagery was biblical, but within this the patrons chose to play safe in the then political climate by picking Old Testament subjects, as it must be remembered that this medium was both relatively permanent and prominent, being three-dimensional.¹³

The slightly later gatehouse at Merton, always



Fig. 6. Merton Hall, Jacobean plaster ceiling pendant, modelled with *The Fall of Man*, in first-floor 'Adam and Eve Room' or Great Chamber, post-fire photograph, 1956. *Allan Sewell*.

known as the Clock House (Fig. 7), is dated 1620 on the rainwater hoppers and 'has to its outer and inner side three steep shaped gables which are among the earliest examples in England of the fully formed type (cf. Blickling. . .)'.¹⁴ It is an unusually resolved building for its date, the similar shaped (single) gables of its side elevations marshalling its facades into two pairs: front corresponding to back and side to side. These shaped gables made the Merton gatehouse a foil to the house it guarded, for 'there were no shaped gables to the 1613 work' at Merton.¹⁵ Indeed, the shaped gables of the Clock House and the similar ones designed by Robert Lyminge at Blickling Hall, also dated 1620 (Fig. 8), are the earliest examples in Norfolk.¹⁶

Blickling's greatest Norfolk significance, besides being the only 'prodigy house' in the county, is its distinctly exotic or non-local style. Caroline Stanley-

Milson and John Newman in their *Architectural History* article on the building of Blickling,¹⁷ while evidently being unaware of the Merton gatehouse, commented as follows,

When we turn to consider the design of Blickling Hall the local element disappears altogether. The house is completely unlike contemporary houses in Norfolk (with one exception, . . . [¹⁸]), while the similarities with the Earl of Salisbury's new house at Hatfield, Hertfordshire, where Lyminge had previously worked, are obvious and have often been noted. The definition of the mass of both houses by slender lead-capped turrets, the use of shaped gables, the steady rhythm of two-storeyed canted bay windows and the continuous stone entablatures carried across the facades, all confirm that Hatfield and Blickling are essentially the products of the same designing mind.¹⁹

While the Merton gatehouse does not exhibit the entire foregoing catalogue, the contrast with the local style was even more immediate, standing as it does before the earlier styled house. However, the similarities between the two shaped-gable buildings at Merton and Blickling do not subsist merely in their use of shaped gables. First, while the function of the Merton gatehouse is self-evident, the entrance range of Blickling performed exactly the same role. Despite having a range of state rooms on its first floor, it shielded and gave onto the Great Hall in the range directly opposite, across the courtyard that its gateway opens into. Next, the ground and first floors of both buildings are divided by a plat band extending from the surmounting element of the architectural frontispiece to the gateway and girdling the entire structure. This band is expressed as a full entablature at Blickling, but at Merton confined to a cornice moulding with a comparatively broad bottom element, reminiscent of the cornice band below the upper storey of the Blickling corner towers and below the parapet of the west front there. Thirdly, and most importantly, the composition of the entrance facades of both buildings is very similar: an arrangement of three bays topped by shaped gables, centred by a Tuscan column-framed archway



Fig. 7. The Clock House, or gatehouse, Merton Hall, dated 1620, from south-west. *Richard Garnier.*



Fig. 8. Blickling Hall, Norfolk, south front, by Robert Lyminge, dated 1620. *Richard Garnier.*

and surmounted by a clock tower or bell cupola, the whole framed by vertically emphasised corners – full turrets at Blickling, but polygonal angle shafts at Merton in deference to those of the only recently built house there. It might well be objected at this point that the Merton gatehouse lacks the angle quoins that might be considered a *sine qua non* for an attribution to Lyminge, meaning that the Clock House would have to be derivative of Blickling,²⁰ but the difficulty there is that in order to have been roofed by 1620, the Merton Clock House would have had to have been started in 1618/19, in other words at precisely the same time as Blickling.²¹ There the contract with Lyminge was signed on 5 December 1618 and work started in February 1619. The clear dating of the Clock House's roofing-in in 1620, the same as that of Blickling's south front, accordingly renders that documented house by Lyminge as unavailable to act as an exemplar at the moment the campaign at Merton was being planned. The two structures evidently advanced in tandem, very much a factor strengthening the attribution of the Merton gatehouse to Lyminge. Pevsner's original (1962) volume on the area even lists the Merton shaped gables as the earliest in the county,²² and Stanley-Milson and Newman show that changes to the look of the Blickling south front were agreed as late as November 1619.²³

A further point must be made that whereas the 1613 house at Merton was entirely of brick, even down to the string courses and the inner structure of the rendered window cases, the Clock House, despite being a subsidiary building, and in an area devoid of local building stone, is treated in a superior way, as it has all its detailing in cut stone. It must not be forgotten that Merton is about as far from the sea or any navigable water as it is possible to be in East Anglia, making the use of such stone from completely outside the region all the more remarkable.²⁴ Despite subsequent whitewashing, this stone seems the same as that used at Blickling, namely a 'high quality oolitic limestone of Ketton type, ... presumably from the

Northamptonshire quarries of Thomas Thorpe'.²⁵ Thorpe was one of the other two main contractors at Blickling in addition to Lyminge, so this use of similar stone at the Merton gatehouse would strengthen its attribution to him.²⁶ A potential caveat at this juncture might be that the Merton Clock House windows have regularly spaced rectangular tails extending into the adjacent brickwork, whereas the jambs of the windows at both Blickling and Felbrigg abut the brickwork in a straight joint. But that this might not be relevant is suggested by the nature of the windows at Hatfield, which have distinctly untidy tails, a constructional detail that was possibly originally concealed by lime-washing of the brickwork.²⁷

In summary it can be said that both the cast of the Merton gatehouse being so reminiscent, if in miniaturised form, of the exactly contemporaneous entrance front of Blickling Hall and the use of similar stone dressings in a region devoid of local stone together strongly suggest an attribution to the same designer as was at work at Blickling. That his role may have been confined to initial consultation only and that some of the details may have been added in by Sir William de Grey's own mason may prove to be the case, but how the stylistic attribution can be strengthened by circumstantial evidence will be examined below.

Despite Merton's inscribed date and argued Jacobean character, family tradition has always maintained that the rebuilding of the former mediaeval house on the site was started by Robert de Grey (†1601) and only finished by his son Sir William in 1613 during the succeeding reign, with the final addition of the gatehouse in 1620. George Crabbe, the Victorian rector of Merton, who occupied his spare time as the historian of the family, summarised the problem as follows,

If Robert began the house, he might well have made slow progress, or may have been obliged to discontinue the building, by the confiscation of part of his estates on account of his recusancy – and Sir William who

was three years three months and twenty days a minor and a Ward of the Crown after his father's death – during which time the Queen enjoyed much of his lands and who married at the early age of 18½ years might have put off completing the house his father began, for some years.

In favour of the supposition that Sir William, son of Robert built the house, are the facts that there was no difference between the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean styles, that the date 1613 is over the entrance and on the pipe heads, that Sir William speaks in his will of 'houses builded' by him, and lastly that Spelman in his *Villare Anglicanum* (p.161) says, 'Hinc per Watton Mercantorum ad Merton itur; quod a lacu nomen habet; decus autem a splendidis aedibus, quas illic nuper extruxit Gulielmus Grey probitate et propria eques splendidis'. All these facts however are consistent with the supposition that Robert de Grey began the house, and that it was finished many years after in the style in which he began it, by his son.²⁸

On the face of it, as a recusant in straitened circumstances (both as to finances and liberty) Robert de Grey would seem an unlikely candidate to have embarked on such a major commitment as rebuilding his ancestral seat. Nevertheless, the family tradition cannot on four counts be swept aside. First, there is the fact of Robert's initials that were on the chimneys of the rebuilt house (now, since the demolition of the burnt-out house, transferred to the Clock House). Second, there are reports of a priest hole at Merton, a natural feature in a house not only built by a Papist but situated in a direct line between neighbouring Breccles Hall, Breckles, and nearby Oxborough Hall. As those two recusant houses were priest holes, Merton could only within Robert's lifetime fall into place as the mid-point in a line of 'Jesuitical' priest-harboursing households, as his son Sir William was a conforming Protestant. Thirdly, there is the question of the change of style that occurred between the house and gatehouse. It is surely significant that at least some of the links, in contrast to his father's, that enabled Sir William de Grey to look beyond the local building style and led him arguably to consult Robert Lyming when

embarking on the gatehouse in 1620 were already in place by the time he finished the house in 1613, and this might suggest that he was initially continuing in a style set on by his father. However, the exact nature and relevance of those links will best be set out following an examination of the father's milieu. Lastly, the very close similarity of Honingham Hall to Merton argues that the design of the latter house originated some time earlier than the 1613 date attached to it, as Honingham was finished nine years earlier, in 1605, and so must have been started in at least 1602/03. That was not long after Robert de Grey's death in 1601, indicating how it would not have been impossible for him to have initiated the rebuilding of Merton.

Although at least one of the group of locally-styled East-Anglian houses enumerated above, Thelveton, was probably built by a recusant,²⁹ and another, Breccles, by an ostensibly conforming 'Schismatic' with a recusant wife,³⁰ the majority of them, including Honingham which was so similar to Merton, were built by men of new wealth accumulated from London-based careers in the law or at court.³¹ Robert de Grey was not of that mould. His wealth was inherited, but only in 1566 and unexpectedly, from his under-age nephew, who had himself succeeded Robert's elder brother Thomas.³² Tempting assumption as it may be, there is no evidence, even as a second son with no apparent prospect of that inheritance, that Robert de Grey may have pursued a lucrative London career based on his family connections with Marian and Henrician legal officials.³³ Following his inheritance, it was certainly to the contrary; his adherence to the old form of religion forced his containment during the period when the rebuilding of the house was supposedly started and even threatened the family's very survival.³⁴ Owing to his absolute refusal to attend church services in the rite of the Elizabethan Settlement, he was persecuted for a total of 23 years from 1578 up to his death. This persecution involved lengthy periods of imprisonment, besides repeated

finances and sequestration of the income from his estates, so that at his death in 1601 he owed the very considerable sum of £1,780 in back fines.³⁵

As hinted at above, Robert de Grey can be revealed as integral to a network of Norfolk and Suffolk gentry supporters of Queen Mary, the majority of whom went on to become recusants under Elizabeth I. Inter-marriage with the Wodehouse, Bedingfeld [*sic*]³⁶ and Spelman families seems a repeated thread in this network of interlinked Papist families. First, he was related (through their Spelman mothers)³⁷ to Francis Wodehouse of Breccles, a house already listed in the roll of East-Anglian styled houses, and who, as Robert's nominated tenant, probably acted to hide the true extent of Robert's income during his imprisonment; by law two-thirds of an imprisoned recusant's landed income was to be forfeit to the Crown.³⁸ Another relation, Sir Henry Bedingfeld, of nearby Oxborough Hall, was a staunch adherent of Mary, taking a band of his tenants to Framlingham in her support when Lady Jane Grey was being proffered as queen.³⁹ Mary in turn later appointed Sir Henry Privy Councillor and Constable of the Tower, whereby he was gaoler of the then Princess Elizabeth following the Wyatt plot to dethrone Mary.⁴⁰ Third, Robert de Grey's wife, Anne Lovell (granddaughter of the recently identified sitter in Holbein's portrait *Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling*)⁴¹ sprang from a repeatedly recusant family: her widowed mother, an uncle, an aunt, two brothers and a sister and brother-in-law were all recusants.⁴² Next, the trustees of Robert's 1574 marriage settlement⁴³ included Sir Thomas Cornwallis (who had been arrested in 1570 as a recusant)⁴⁴ and his cousin Sir John Sulyard, also a noted Elizabethan recusant.⁴⁵ Sulyard's first wife was a Bedingfeld daughter, while his third wife was a Bedingfeld widow and mother of Humphrey Bedingfeld the recusant.⁴⁶ Cornwallis, whose mother was a Sulyard, attended on Mary at Framlingham soon after her accession, and was later appointed her Comptroller of the Household, having been a

commissioner for the trial of Wyatt, and Treasurer of Calais.⁴⁷ Finally, both Cornwallis and Robert's younger brother, Edmund de Grey, were married to daughters of the Jernegan (or Jerningham) family,⁴⁸ which also included Elizabeth Jernegan, a maid of honour to Queen Mary⁴⁹ and Sir Henry Jernegan of Costessey near Norwich, the first to declare openly for Mary, joining her at Framlingham with his tenantry immediately after Edward VI's death and accompanying her to London, where he was appointed Vice-Chancellor of the Household and Privy Councillor.⁵⁰

The contrast between Robert de Grey and his heir is very marked. William de Grey had not attained his majority at his father's death and so became a charge of the Court of Wards and Liveries.⁵¹ As the income from the estates of minors was annexed to the Crown, representing an important source of state funding, the Court of Wards and Liveries was effectively a government department and was commonly headed by a pivotal figure in the administration. At this time it was the Earl of Salisbury, chief minister successively to Queen Elizabeth I and King James I, and the one who employed Lyminge at Hatfield. In time-honoured custom William de Grey was made ward to a local figure with links to the court party, and at this date one who was demonstrably sympathetic to the (Protestant) regime, namely (Sir) James Calthorpe of Cockthorp, Norfolk.⁵² He received control of his ward's estates and marriage, promptly ensuring William's marriage to his daughter before the year was up. Robert de Grey had died on 28 February 1601⁵³ and his under-age heir of 18½ was married to Anne Calthorpe at Merton church on 7 October in the same year.⁵⁴

Herein must lie the cast of William de Grey's adult life, as he was ever a fully conforming Protestant and such a divergence from his parents' uncompromising Papism requires an attempt at explanation. The contrast is as marked as that between Mary Queen of Scots and her son James VI

and I: perhaps de Grey too had been in the control of a Protestant guardian from an early age during his father's imprisonment for recusancy, and, with his mother having predeceased his father,⁵⁵ the provisions of the Court of Wards were merely regularising the *status quo ante* with the Calthorpes. That family had included Martin Calthorpe, the Mayor of London in the year of the Spanish Armada and who thereupon rallied the City,⁵⁶ while (Sir) James's widowed mother had married secondly Sir J. Bowes,⁵⁷ who can presumably be identified with the Sir Jerome who was an Elizabethan courtier and ambassador to Russia from 1583.⁵⁸ And in later continuation of the Calthorpes' court connections, Sir William de Grey's brother-in-law, Sir Henry Calthorpe, was first appointed Solicitor-General to Charles I's queen shortly after her marriage in 1625, and next appointed Recorder of London at the special behest of the King. That was a post he held only a few weeks from December 1635, as in January 1636 he was appointed Attorney to the Court of Wards and Liveries.⁵⁹

Apart from his links to the Calthorpes, the first clue that William de Grey had himself become attached to the court party is that at an extraordinarily early age, within a month of attaining his majority, he had already been knighted. The firm evidence for this is that on 20 July 1604, as 'Sir William de Grey knight', he petitioned the crown to be released from payment of his father's recusancy fines, receiving the royal assent the very next day.⁶⁰ It is surely indicative of his favour in court circles that William de Grey was knighted both at such an early age and before his father-in-law *cum* guardian, who seems to have been knighted only when appointed Sheriff of Norfolk shortly before his death in 1615.⁶¹ However, a note in an undated, but clearly eighteenth-century manuscript genealogical memoir, giving the callings of the successive heads of the family, records that Sir William received his knighthood in 1600,⁶² which would have been before his father's death and even while he was still a minor, so especially indicating his

significance to the court and crown. But that dating must be discounted as at least a year early, because the entry in the Merton parish register of his marriage has him as 'Esquier', giving a *terminus post quem* for his knighthood. The plausible explanation of Sir William's early advancement is that he was a *protégé* of the Earl of Salisbury, who, as Master of the Court of Wards and Liveries in 1606, agreed *ex officio* to the grant of special livery to Sir William.⁶³ The appropriate letters patent of James I followed in 1607,⁶⁴ vesting Sir William in full possession of his ancestral estates (from which he derived an annual income of £904 7s. 9d. in 1624, rising to £1,022 10s 1d. in 1630).⁶⁵ Sir William de Grey then went on, in the words of Rev. Crabbe, to become 'the leading man in Wayland Hundred, a captain of a foot company, deputy lieutenant and a JP in which [capacity] he had orders to search the houses of recusants and take away all furniture of war' therefrom.⁶⁶ This placed him in the thick of official county business, illustrated by a volume of transcribed letters compiled by him and his sons.⁶⁷ The volume includes letters written to him as a JP by the Deputy Lieutenants before he was appointed one himself, and thereafter to the JPs from him and his fellow Deputy Lieutenants and to them from the Privy Council, which was of course headed by Salisbury, one of the joint signatories in the Council's letters. Significantly for the present argument, the names of the Norfolk correspondents include in 1617 a Thomas Hobart (perhaps a brother of Sir Henry Hobart, the builder of Blickling, and named after their father) and in 1627 John Hobart, Sir Henry's son, who will be encountered again, below.

This presumption of Sir William's adherence to the court interest throughout his adult life, in what, it must be remembered, was a period in which the blandishments of the parliamentary faction were strengthening, is confirmed by the provisions in his 1629 will.⁶⁸ His bequests included his 'honoured friend and kinsman Sir Henry Bedingfeld of Oxborough', eponymous grandson of the Sir Henry

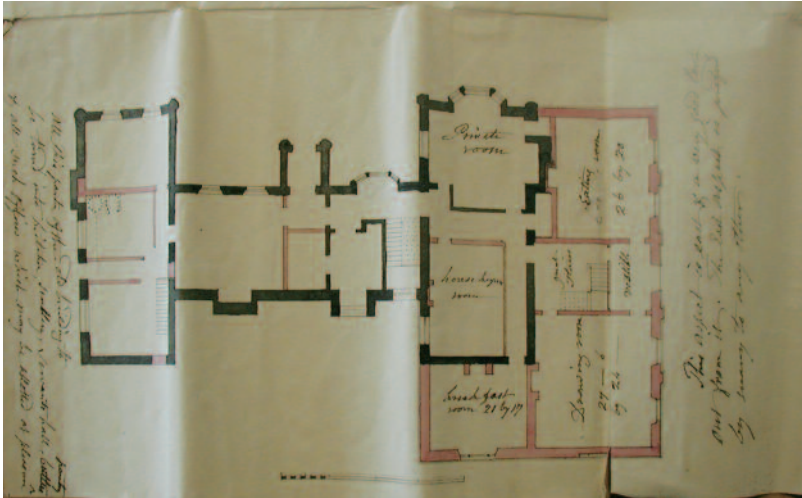


Fig. 9. Merton Hall, 'Plan No. 3' with proposed alterations and additions, by Heffer, verso endorsed 1804, commissioned by Lord Cadogan. *Norfolk Record Office. Richard Garnier.*

already encountered above.⁶⁹ Burke's *Peerage* describes this later Sir Henry as 'an active and zealous royalist'.⁷⁰ In continuation of this argument, the will specifically excludes his brother-in-law Sir Edward Peyton of Isleham, Cambridgeshire, from receipt of a mourning ring,⁷¹ yet for Dame Alice Peyton (born Calthorpe and a sister of Dame Anne de Grey) it provides for a ring of greater value than some of the other siblings-in-law.⁷² This must indicate a specific bias against Peyton, who by this date had become 'an avowed enemy of the court

and of the established church', following 'his intemperate display of Puritan zeal... [which had] led the Duke of Buckingham to recommend, about 1627, his removal from the office of *custos rotulorum* for Cambridgeshire'.⁷³ Clearly Peyton's switch of political allegiance was no more congenial to his brother-in-law: the will's exclusion of the parliamentary Peyton and inclusion of the royalist Bedingfeld confirms that de Grey maintained his allegiance to the court right up until his death.⁷⁴

However, Peyton's significance does not lie merely



Fig. 10. Merton Hall, perspective commissioned by Lord Cadogan illustrating proposal for restoration and extension of the house with conforming Jacobean windows, and retaining the forecourt walls, possibly by Heffer; watermarked 1804. *Norfolk Record Office. Richard Garnier.*

in corroborating Sir William de Grey's adherence to the court party. It must be remembered that it was as a *protégé* of Salisbury that Sir Henry Hobart (from 1606 the predecessor-but-one of Sir Henry Calthorpe as attorney to the Court of Wards under Salisbury's mastership) came to employ Lyminge at Blickling. And while similarly that may have been the way in which Lyminge was introduced to de Grey, it is the latter's kinship to Sir Edward Peyton that is even more likely to have been the conduit. As it turns out, both the Peyton and Hobart families received their baronetcies on the day that the order was first instituted by James I in 1611,⁷⁵ and, in addition, the second baronet's sister, Frances Peyton, was married to Sir Miles Hobart, second son and younger brother respectively of the builders of Blickling, namely Sir Henry and Sir John Hobart, first and second baronets.⁷⁶ This family linkage arguably provides a final element of conviction to the stylistic attribution of the Merton Hall gatehouse to Robert Lyminge and suggests that it may be more than coincidence that Merton happens to lie on the most direct route from Hatfield to Blickling,⁷⁷ which remain the only two *documented* country houses by Lyminge.⁷⁸

SUBSEQUENT HISTORY

Unlike Blickling, Merton never underwent the process of modernisation engaged in by the mid-Georgian Earls of Buckinghamshire on their country seat.⁷⁹ Instead at Merton, following completion in 1620, there was a period of architectural stasis for two hundred years, with possibly one brief and rapidly curtailed exception in 1766. During these two centuries the successive heads of the family focused on consolidating their estates, spread over Norfolk, and the Suffolk and Essex border, and engaging in county and then national business: from 1685 the family head in each generation became an MP and so started a drift away from Merton as the family's principal residence. This trend was confirmed in the



Fig. 11. An alternative scheme to fig. 10, but with sash windows to the extension and the forecourt walls replaced by railings, possibly by 'Heffer', c.1804. *Norfolk Record Office. Richard Garnier.*

person of 'Long Tom' de Grey who had been educated at Bury St. Edmunds and came into a considerable estate there on marriage to an heiress in 1746.⁸⁰ From then he preferred that town as much as Merton when not in London, despite the fact that shortly thereafter he had assumed the administration of his father's Norfolk estates and finally actually died at Merton.⁸¹ It was reportedly following his father's death in 1765 that

About 1766 the then Mrs de Grey, while her husband was abroad, substituted modern windows for the original Elizabethan bay windows, but her husband's return put an end to 'further improvements'.⁸²

Confirmation that such a reported but very brief campaign took place is provided by a series of early nineteenth-century plans of Merton (Fig. 9), as these otherwise curiously lack canted bays to the right of the porch and to the right-hand (west) cross wing, that were both in evidence again by the time the house was photographed. This would then mean that two early nineteenth-century related perspective views of Merton, one on paper watermarked 1804 (Figs. 10 and 11), which show the canted bays, must be proposal drawings to illustrate the bays' reinstatement, as will be explained below. J. P. Neale's topographical print from that period is, however, no help in this as the relevant section of the house's



Fig. 12. J. P. Neale, *Merton Hall, Norfolk*, engraved by B. Acon, sash windows visible both to the far left and to the porch. *Richard Garnier*.

façade is concealed by the Clock House, although there is a single Georgian sash window in what seems an extension to the left, east, end of the front, and two more in the porch (Fig. 12).⁸³

‘Long Tom’ and his briefly modernising wife remained childless, so his heir presumptive was his younger brother, another Sir William de Grey, who had followed a legal career in London and was also an MP. He had risen to Lord Chief Justice of Common Pleas in 1771, having declined the Duke of Grafton’s proffered Lord Chancellorship in 1770/1, on account of gout, despite the king’s preference for him.⁸⁴ His career had culminated in a barony in 1780, as Lord Walsingham. As a courtier,⁸⁵ having been Solicitor-General to the Queen, he maintained a house at Englefield Green, near Windsor, as well as a London town house in Lincoln’s Inn Fields. But the first Lord Walsingham died six weeks before his childless elder brother, so it was his own son, the second lord, who succeeded in 1781 to the family estates: from when on it is highly revealing on where he chose to concentrate his expenditure.

The second lord, another courtier, was also London-based,⁸⁶ and, like his father, had a house in Old Windsor to be close at hand when the king was at Windsor Castle.⁸⁷ To furnish his new town house at No. 30 Upper Harley Street (now 70 Harley Street) the second peer had turned to Chippendale the younger by 1778–81,⁸⁸ and in the latter year Chippendale carried out a valuation and complete ‘Inventory of the Household Furniture’ at the house, totalling £1,800.⁸⁹ Although the elder Chippendale did not die until 1779, he had effectively retired in 1777, and Walsingham’s connection with the son is one of the longest of any on record, running from at least 1778⁹⁰ and continuing until the peer’s death in 1818, long after the younger Chippendale’s 1804 bankruptcy and ostensible cessation of business.⁹¹ But all the while Walsingham’s outlay shows a pronounced bias against spending on Merton.⁹² This leading ‘upholder’ and cabinet maker of the day,⁹³ besides furnishing the Harley Street house, is thus found submitting bills for hanging paper and other decoration work for Walsingham at a house in

'Kilburne',⁹⁴ but for Merton he is documented as only supplying a 'common table five foot diameter', 'six oval face firescreens', a set of 12 'neat mahogany parlour chairs', 'three mahogany tea kettle stands' and two 'very large festoon window curtains, lin'd and fringed for Drawing Room' in 1786 for a total of £56 3s. od.⁹⁵ The payments to him in 1802, 1806 and 1809 in Lady Walsingham's personal account books⁹⁶ are unlikely to have been for Merton, which would have been the responsibility of her husband, and again show how the family's emphasis on expenditure was skewed away from their ancestral seat.⁹⁷ However, on the deaths, under six months apart, of his patron and his wife in 1818,⁹⁸ Chippendale undertook their funerals, personally conducting the cortèges from Old Windsor up to Merton for the burial in the family vault in the chancel of the parish church in the park.⁹⁹ He charged the not inconsiderable combined sum of approximately £1,000 for the two funerals,¹⁰⁰ so that in death nearly twenty times as much was spent at Merton on the second Lord and Lady Walsingham than they had laid out on the house in their lifetimes. As a postscript, Chippendale's activities did not quite end with their interment; at the same time he valued the furniture, wine and stationery at Merton for inclusion in the executors' accounts, the then £712 value of the contents of Merton comparing unfavourably with that in London of thirty-seven years earlier.¹⁰¹ Somewhat curiously, he was not retained for the contemporaneous valuation in London, although that might be explained by the nature of that valuation, which seems to indicate that it was planned to sublet the house.¹⁰²

Despite the facts that Long Tom had died at Merton and that his successor is seen to have initially required some new furnishings for the house, Merton 'seems to have been neither occupied nor let between 1781 and 1831'.¹⁰³ It must have been one of them who consulted George Shakespear (†1797) about updating the house, for a plan by him proposing an eastward extension was still extant for reconsultation in 1818.¹⁰⁴ Meanwhile, as draft letting

conditions were drawn up in 1787, the assumption must be that the goods supplied by Chippendale the year before were decided on in readiness for that plan of action, after the exploratory visit to Merton that was being planned in 1784.¹⁰⁵

A lease of the park for the shooting it offered was indeed taken by 2nd Earl Cadogan in 1787, but he must have had no need for the house itself as he already had his own place just across the Suffolk border at Santon Downham.¹⁰⁶ This division of house and park seems to have led to neglect of the house becoming the norm under the 2nd Lord Walsingham. An undated family memorandum that must date from between 1811 and 1818 ponders the ongoing problem of what to do with the house:¹⁰⁷

No matter who the Representative of the Family is & putting Lord Walsingham & the General out of the question Such Representative could not put the House at Merton in a habitable state & furnish it with proper furniture according to the present day ~~much~~ ~~under 10,000~~ under a considerable sum & would any Possessor of it for the time being be inclined to sink such a sum out of his Income, for that purpose which is entirely a Family one generally – & the Estates being settled as they are can furnish no Funds for such purpose – It then becomes a question, whether leaving the Means open for putting the family Mansion House in a fit state for the Representative of the Family to live at i.e. might not be a good policy by way of re-establishing the Family on their own estate & inclining them to reside & spend part of their income (arising out of the Estate) on the spot.

The House at Merton is in such a state (it is to be presumed) from Time, that no ordinary Repairs such as may usually be expected out of the Possessors Income would be sufficient. It must be nearly new built to make it habitable & new furnished.¹⁰⁸

Clearly the house was deteriorating, occupied only by the servants, as had already been reported around 1800 by an anonymous visitor who had been there for the shooting.¹⁰⁹ Although not named, in view of his lease, the writer may be identifiable as Lord Cadogan. As a near neighbour and tenant of the shooting, Cadogan must have frequently seen the old

house, and had obviously developed an affection for it in its state of neglect by the de Greys, whom he was keen to urge to return to maintaining a presence in the locality. We are on certain ground that it was Cadogan who in 1804 wrote to Walsingham in London:

I went all over the House which certainly is getting very much the worse for want of proper repairs, it w^d. certainly require a considerable sum to make it what it should be but not much to make it habitable (is a pity some of you do not live there occasionally so I think I never saw so good a thing so much neglected).¹¹⁰

By April of that year Cadogan was in full swing in trying to persuade the de Greys to return, haven fallen into the role of commissioning plans to repair and update the house, commenting, ‘I wish this enquiry may have the effect of bringing one of the most ancient and respectable families again among us!’¹¹¹ Mindful of the escalating expense of building work, the great question was whether to rebuild. He sent

your Lordship the different plans new and old concerning the alterations & improvements at Merton with what I have to say upon them written in an explanation as we go on, which I think by the most intelligible method for you . . . the only observation I shall make is that there is not the difference which appears at first sight in the expense stated in my old one . . . & considering the expense of building is fairly double to what it was at that time, & in this case you already have really a very good house with every comfort whatever attending it & on the other I fear you would be most disappointed. . . . To conclude – as to any idea of repairing the old house as it stands at present nothing can ever make it answer the expense it will occasion nor can it be what I should call habitable – as to any rebuilding plan it will in my opinion be very little better & the expense be much greater probably than can be calculated or expected from the miserable state of the old buildings which must be put in an equal state of good repair – the present plan proposed in my opinion will be a good thing & a cheap thing when all things are considered & you & yours will have a better house to live in & receive a certain number of your friends in than many have after laying out double the money in a new building.¹¹²

The plans were by one Heffer,¹¹³ an obscure local practitioner who, perhaps naturally, escapes notice in Sir Howard Colvin’s *Dictionary*. As pronounced in Cadogan’s accompanying gloss, Heffer’s various proposals represented a midpoint between the two extremes of repair and total rebuilding, suggesting the addition of an uncompromisingly plain new-built block to the east of the house. The reoriented house was to be entered via an east-facing five-bay show front with a three-bay centrepiece with a pediment supported by a giant order of pilasters (Fig. 13). The proposed juxtaposition of clashing styles was of little concern as the original house was to become the back wing, the unaltered part adjoining the extension sandwiched between that and its already Georgian-fenestrated western end. The Clock House was presumably to go.

Unsurprisingly, these plans were neither adopted then, nor did they find favour with the next generation.¹¹⁴ The newly succeeded 3rd. Lord Walsingham evinced more sensitivity towards the old house and its gatehouse in particular by opining ‘Nor can I approve making the East the front of the House as L^d. Cadogan proposes. I think the front is at present where it ought to be – & I w^d. not move the Lodge in front if it could be preserved.’¹¹⁵ This was written on 13 June 1818 and shows he was immediately onto the problem of what do about the house.¹¹⁶ But each generation does things its own way and Walsingham engaged a new man, Robert Snare of Thetford, perhaps a builder with architectural pretensions.¹¹⁷ He sent Snare the Shakespear and Heffer plans mainly as an indication of what he did not want.¹¹⁸ The next month Snare submitted his structural report that ‘Merton Hall is capable of being repaired in its present form’, but, significantly (in view of later problems), he recommended that the roof was slated in place of its common tiles.¹¹⁹ He followed up in August with the estimate for doing so, totalling £1,364 10s *od*, but with an extra £236 if the roofs were to be stripped and slates substituted for the tiles, while concluding ‘N.B. There is nothing in



Fig. 13. East elevation of proposed addition to Merton Hall, by Heffer, commissioned by Lord Cadogan, 1804. *Norfolk Record Office. Richard Garnier.*

any Immediate danger Except the China Closet and Housekeepers Room which I think should be put in hand Directly.¹²⁰ There also survives a small sketch plan by Snare proposing a 'greenhouse or grapery' for the back of the house, partly to improve communication about the house.¹²¹ But even though there was such a south-facing conservatory in evidence here from the time of the earliest photographs of the south side of the house until the 1956 fire, this cannot be ascribed to him. Instead it appears that the conservatory was installed in 1874 by the Royal Exotic Nursery of South Kensington, as there is a letter from them about its construction.¹²² In conclusion, it remains unlikely that Snare carried out anything at all, although he can take credit as a (slow-burning) catalyst on the family, since the great majority of his proposals were eventually carried out, if with a dithering delay of up to fifty years and more.

The suspicion that Snare's estimate was not

taken up, prompted by his assurance on the lack of immediate danger, is probably confirmed by the state in which the structure was found to be thirteen years later, on the succession of the next peer. Following the deaths in 1831 of the 3rd Lord and Lady Walsingham, who perished in a fire at their Harley Street house, his brother, now the fourth lord, also the rector of Fawley, Hampshire, had turned to a London-based antiquarian architect.¹²³ The new parson peer was a pluralist, holding the livings of both Fawley and Merton, and dividing his time between the two. But the thorough refurbishment and enlargement of Merton, initiated for him under Edward Blore, was not without problems, which were seemingly wholly of Blore's making, despite a 'reputation of being a thoroughly trustworthy architect whose estimates were to be relied upon.'¹²⁴ As will be seen, others had to be engaged in his stead to solve the problem, but Blore's standing somehow

remained high enough for him to be re-engaged at Merton in the next generation.

Blore's August 1831 structural survey did not find

the House, particularly the interior in that sound and satisfactory state your Lordship may possibly suppose, and it appears to me that in order to make it a suitable habitation for your Lordship it will be necessary almost entirely to renew the interior. I except from this sweeping communication the old staircase and the ceilings of the Library and Room adjoining all of which are particularly handsome, for their age the walls are generally in a tolerably sound state but the Roofs will require to be stripped recovered and partially repaired, the brick mullions of the windows are in bad condition, and will be quite impossible to fit new sashes into them.... The Gatehouse which I understand it to be your Lordship's wish to put in immediate repair is in a worse condition than the house, the whole of the interior and the Roof is in a state of absolute decay.....¹²⁵

Blore is already documented elsewhere as building the western extension, containing the Drawing Room, and otherwise carrying out repairs,¹²⁶ but a year-by-year draft summary of work in Walsingham's handwriting dated 'November 27/sent December 2' amplifies the details and reveals the hiatus that had developed. 1832 saw the 'Drawing Room and Beer House built, the Clock House thoroughly repaired'; in 1833 the 'centre division' of the house 'thoroughly repaired and parts rebuilt'; in 1834 the 'eastern division' likewise; 1835 involved 'Inside work and Garden walls'; whereas in 1836 came the first clues of things awry with 'Tiling repointed under the direction of the architect who built it (original architect) & Eastern side of Garden wall rebuilt by him after falling down.'¹²⁷ The note of work carried out the following year, 1837, when 'Eastern & Centre division of the House stripped & retiled', introduces a Mr Fuller Coker of nearby Shipdham as in charge and hints that Blore had by then been dismissed. While Walsingham reverted to his own 'Workmen on the Estate' to carry out the comparatively simple rebuilding of the garden walls, the really intractable

problem subsisted in the roof of the Drawing Room extension. Structurally inadequate from the start, Blore's remedial treatment within four years of its construction had clearly failed to prevent the repeated ingress of rainwater.¹²⁸ Of work that had only recently been carried out under Blore, Coker's survey reported that 'the tiles are generally bedded in Morter [*sic*] in large quantities where scarcely any ought to be used [and] the sealing throughout is not executed in a proper workmanlike manner.'¹²⁹ The requisite complete renewal of the roof would cost £287, an extra expense that annoyed the fourth lord enough to sour relations with Coker as well, as there was a need for arbitration on his bill in 1837–38 for partial works and a further switch of architect.¹³⁰

The arbitrators were Messrs. Carpenter and Brooks, of Islington, who were then retained to continue supervision of works at Merton with William Brooks of the partnership as the job architect. He instructed a London builder, Nicholas Winsland of Duke Street, Bloomsbury, and solved the problem by the insertion of roof ventilators after cutting out and replacing the 'decayed timber of the roof of drawing room end of west wing building', not then ten years old, besides 'repairing tiling on Clock House' and executing other general exterior works to what had supposedly been attended to by Blore. The total of £387 *os* 7*d* was submitted to the fourth lord's executors in December 1839.¹³¹ A nineteenth-century topographical oil painting must date from c.1840 (Fig. 14) and would have been commissioned to record the successful completion of works. It shows the house with Blore's 1832 drawing room extension to the right, and the reinstated canted bays to both the right-hand cross wing and the hall range adjacent (just visible behind the right edge of the Clock House), but still without the Bachelor Wing that was to be added in 1846.

The shortcomings in Blore's first campaign at Merton for the 4th. Lord Walsingham must have been considered by his son as an uncharacteristic or forgivable aberration on the architect's part, as it was



Fig. 14. Anon., *North, Entrance, Front of Merton Hall* (detail), topographical oil painting, c.1840, executed on completion of the 1830s restoration and extension of the house and showing the Jacobean-revival forecourt screen here attributed to Blore.

Private Collection. Richard Garnier.

Blore who was back in employment there in 1846. By then widowed, the newly succeeded 5th Lord had established Merton as his principal residence and, even before his second marriage in 1847,¹³² he had bespoken an additional Bachelor Wing, presumably to house shooting parties.¹³³ Despite the long agonised-over investment in the family's anciently ancestral seat as their principal base for family life, the fifth lord's residence at Merton can hardly have been continuous, as it was during his tenure that the house was let, on the strength of the estate's prime shooting, to the Prince of Wales. This was at some point before the Prince had bought his own Norfolk shooting estate, at Sandringham, in 1862.

Blore's Bachelor Wing was at the left end of the front, to the east of the left cross-wing, and stretched forward of it along the edge of the forecourt nearly as far as the inner line of the Clock House. It is this wing that survives today after the post-fire demolition of the remainder of the house in the late 1950s. Pevsner describes the architect's additions as 'pure Blore: big, solid, functional, and conventional,'¹³⁴ but in fact their cue is taken directly from the old house, which he both faithfully restored and then copied absolutely,

for the reinstatement of the canted bays removed in 1766 must have been due to him. While the single introduced stylistic note was an oriel window to the first floor of the porch over the front door, he also adopted a radical solution to the awkward circulation about the house, by moving the old staircase. This was originally located in the back half of the right-hand cross-wing, but Blore (while preserving the Jacobean woodwork of the stairs) shifted them bodily from there to a new-built extension adjacent to the back of left-hand cross wing, and at the same time he added a two-tier corridor on ground and first floors across the back of the house.¹³⁵ In an unusual choice of material, many of the mullion and transom windows, as renewed in his 1830s campaign, were of cast iron, their rising sashes passing through the transom.¹³⁶ However, the windows of his 1840s wing were of stone save in one instance, presumably a re-used window removed from where the new wing abutted the then-existing house.

Following another fire in 1890, which destroyed the stables, the architects Milne and Hall were employed to furnish their replacement.¹³⁷ Dating from 1898 and projected as based on Oxborough Hall, these make reference to the house by using stepped gables and star-topped chimneys, but they also introduce an exotic element by using sections of timber-framing with brick nogging.¹³⁸ An 1891 drawing for a Tudor garden doorway to the forecourt walling signed by the same architects shows that they were at work elsewhere at Merton.¹³⁹ The doorway in the drawing is very similar to the one in the 1840 topographical painting shown in the angle between the west cross-wing and Blore's Drawing Room, and that door's resiting must have been occasioned by the building of a Billiard Room on its site. It is therefore reasonable to suppose from that Milne and Hall gateway drawing that they also designed and constructed the Billiard Room. In doubling up the gable of the adjoining cross-wing, the Billiard Room counterbalanced Blore's Bachelor Wing at the other end of the front. Milne and Hall's style thereat was



Fig. 15. The Clock House, detail of stonework showing Blomfield's inserted arch moulding, corbel and set back jamb standing back from the mouldings of the plinth to the paired side columns. *Richard Garnier*.

identical to Blore's, but this final extension was comparatively short-lived. This was because the seal with the old fabric had failed, causing dry rot in the Library below the Adam and Eve Room in the adjacent east cross-wing. The Billiard Room was demolished sometime between the two World Wars, but the rot it had brought on remained active and was still causing problems up until the 1956 fire that destroyed the old house.

In a penultimate chapter in the development of

the house, Sir Arthur Blomfield was engaged in 1888 to carry out minor works related to the Clock House.¹⁴⁰ Although the particulars of these are not specified in the surviving correspondence, there are references to a need to remedy the narrowness of the gateway.¹⁴¹ This prompts a close inspection of a surviving mid-Victorian photograph of Merton, which reveals that the arch within the columned centrepiece of the Clock House was different from how it is today. At present it commits the grammatical solecisms of not only projecting further than but also cutting into the base mouldings of the entablature above. The early photograph reveals that originally the arch did nothing of the sort and was correctly contained within a recessed plane above a straight impost moulding. So the Jacobethan corbels supporting the springing point of the arch of the gateway must have been introduced by Blomfield at this time, thus allowing the jambs to be pushed back and achieving the nine-inch widening either side that the correspondence states was required.¹⁴² That pushing back of the jambs in turn explains the present uncomfortable way in which they stand back from the top mouldings of the column plinths, which are thus left to project further into the space of the carriage opening than the jambs (Fig. 15). The nineteenth-century photograph reveals the original, grammatically correct arrangement.

The fact of the width of the carriageway suddenly becoming an issue suggests that the construction of the Repton-esque¹⁴³ pierced stone low walling, which still closes off the forecourt either side of the Clock House, was due to Blomfield, as the previous iron railings that the low walls replaced had had gateways and a sweep carriageway entering and leaving the forecourt either side of the Clock House. These gatescreens are shown not only in the 1840 oil painting, but also in the Victorian photograph of Merton cited already, which must date from about 1875. Both the painting and photograph show that those gates were much wider than the archway in the Clock House. They are shown in enough detail to



Fig. 16 Walsingham Gates, Church Walk, Watton, Norfolk, detail of Blore's 1830s Jacobean-revival gate pier and railings as set up in 1902 following their previous removal from Merton. *Richard Garnier*.

suggest that on removal they were not wasted, as although it would be some time before they were redeployed, they must be those of the same pattern still extant at either end of Church Walk in the nearby market town of Watton, although now minus their original gates, removed some time since installation of the railings there and recently replaced with modern copies. In confirmation of this the Watton railings bear plaques recording their presentation to the town by Lord Walsingham in 1902 that have all the appearance of having been brazed on later than the railings' original manufacture (Fig. 16).¹⁴⁴ This in turn raises the question of when and by whom the railings were made. It has already been discussed how the two 1804 perspectives of the house may be proposal drawings and while one

shows the old forecourt walls replaced by palings, the other shows the walls retained but pierced with gates either side of the Clock House. Clearly the question of opening up the approach to and prospect from the house was being broached as early as Lord Cadogan's and Heffer's 1804 modernising schemes, but nothing was done at the time. The oil painting gives a *terminus ante quem* for the date of the gatescreens, but, while their evident neo-Jacobean character might naturally suggest that they are part of Blore's 1830s campaign, if they truly date from Snare's involvement in 1818 they would represent a notably early instance of Jacobean revival, contemporary with the younger Repton's work in that style at Blickling.¹⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the answer to the second question may be supplied by the park gates hard by the lodge on the Watton road, which are of wood but of related style to the former forecourt gatescreen and whose strap hinges are cast with the manufacturers' details, 'Redmunds Patent Charles St. City Road'.

ANCILLARY BUILDINGS IN THE PARK

The Gothic lodge (Fig. 17), built of flint and gault brick, is sited where the old public road had entered the park before diversion in the 1790s carried the Watton to Thetford turnpike away from in front of the house.¹⁴⁶ It sports a slight Regency air, and must date from the late 1820s on the evidence of the 1827 agreement to hire a gatekeeper to live in the lodge about to be built.¹⁴⁷ But there is no mention of a designer. Just predating the time when Blore, Coker and Brooks are documented as working successively at Merton, it might be thought that all three can be discounted, especially as the lodge was built for the head of the family prior to the one who employed that trio. This certainly holds true for two of them. First, the lodge's lightness of touch is quite distinct from Blore's more stolid antiquarian style, so it is implausible that his engagement can have dated from



Fig. 17. Merton Hall Lodge, of split flint and gault brick, c.1828, here attributed to Fuller Coker of Shipdham, Norfolk. *Richard Garnier*.

any earlier than is documented. Next, Brooks seems to have been concerned only with arbitration and ensuring the house was made watertight. Besides this, both were London-based, and so hardly close to hand.

That cannot be said for Coker, even though his documented engagement under 4th. Lord Walsingham was very short and ended in acrimony, a seemingly unlikely outcome if he had earlier worked satisfactorily for his then patron's elder brother. But perhaps Coker should not be excluded, and especially so because he was local and was both 'an architect and builder'.¹⁴⁸ It must be borne in mind that as 4th. Lord Walsingham on succession was both rector of Fawley in Hampshire and squire of Merton, the Blore problem had to be sorted at second hand while Walsingham was in Hampshire. And if Coker had been satisfactory when working for the previous third lord on the gate lodge in the late 1820s, who better for Wing, the steward, to turn to to sort out the crisis

brought on ten years later by Blore's failure to rectify the structural inadequacies of his Drawing Room roof. Indeed, Coker's first submission in 1837 was that 'In obedience to your commands to me, through Mr Wing, I have inspected the Roofs at Merton Hall.'¹⁴⁹

Typical of the age, Coker was a man who could turn his hand to more than one style: his Cranworth Rectory of 1839 is in a sub-Soanian reduced neo-classical style,¹⁵⁰ but in 1840 he rebuilt the aisles of Watton church (three miles north of Merton) 'in an insensitive Gothic style'.¹⁵¹ Admittedly Coker's Gothic manner consorts uneasily with the pre-existing Gothic parts and Norman round tower of Watton church,¹⁵² but the windows of his north aisle there (Fig. 18) are very close in style to those at the Merton gate lodge (Fig. 19), which are some ten to twelve years earlier. Both buildings are of split flint with gault brick plinths and quoins, while both sets of lancet windows have a single bifurcated central

Fig. 18. St. Mary's Church, Watton, north aisle window by Fuller Coker, 1840. *Richard Garnier.*



Fig. 19. Merton Lodge, detail of window and door treatment. *Richard Garnier.*





Fig. 20. Shell House in Merton Park, c.1840s, attributed to Edward Blore, from south-east.
Richard Garnier.



Fig. 21. Shell House from north-west, with oriel window of wood conforming to that added by Blore to the porch of the house.
Richard Garnier.

mullion forming a pair of lancets within the whole, and a closely conforming hood mould with horizontal kick-out stops just below the springing point. Meanwhile, while considering the style of the lodge in the light of Coker's varied repertoire, it should be noted that it was commissioned by the 3rd Lord Walsingham, whose wife was a Methuen from Corsham, Wiltshire, where she would have been familiar and perhaps sympathetic with the earlier Gothic revival work of John Nash and Humphry Repton carried out for her father, Paul Cobb Methuen in 1797-98.¹⁵³

The Shell House (Fig. 20) in the park about quarter of a mile west of the house resulted directly from the family's return to permanent residence at Merton following the succession of the 5th Lord

Walsingham in 1839. Wilson's revision of the Pevsner volume describes it as

GROTTO... Tudor, red brick, tiled... It has stepped gables with pinnacles and the entrance is in a gable-end. In the opposite gable is a timber oriel. Inside is a mosaic floor and the rest is covered in shells, even the roof.¹⁵⁴

It should also be mentioned that before a period of vandalism in the 1960s the Shell House used to contain a shellwork model of Merton church, while a similarly-made model of the Clock House and its shell-encrusted William IV circular pedestal-table stand with tricorn foot are still extant. Wilson correctly ascribes the Shell House to the 1840s, muses on for whom or by which of the fifth lord's ladies¹⁵⁵ it was assembled and attributes it to Blore.¹⁵⁶

This last makes sense in the light of the Shell House's northern oriel window (Fig. 21), considering the similar (stone) window to the porch that must be due to Blore's campaign at the house. Otherwise Wilson is both partly inaccurate and tells only part of the story, for it can now be revealed that the Shell House is unexpectedly both a reincarnation and relocated. The shells were arranged originally by the previous generation in Hampshire. Correspondence over purchase of furnishings and handover reparations with Rev. William Gibbon, the incumbent succeeding to the late Rev. 4th. Lord Walsingham's living at Fawley, which he died in possession of in September 1839, includes this from Gibbon, dated 'Saturday night Nov^r. 2'

With respect to the Grotto in the Garden to which you refer I have no objection to make to its removal. I do not know whether there is any doubt respecting it, but in a matter of such purely personal feeling, I shall never think of adverting to the question of right.¹⁵⁷

However, despite this consent, Walsingham's local agent had to report a week later, on November 9:

My lord I find the grotto cannot be moved without destroying more than half the work and shells as the wood in the first place was nothing but cope poles and now I find they are quite rotten so that there is nothing to hold it together. My lord I regret it very much as I know it would much amuse her Ladyship to help put it together. I have had Bernard and Wheeler this morning to look at it and they both think as I do that that if its taken down it must be in such small pieces and so much of it destroyed that nothing could be done with it when it gets to Merton. I wish I could think of some plan of getting it there as it now is.¹⁵⁸

As the fifth lord did not marry until 1842, the 'Ladyship' referred to here must be his widowed mother, Elizabeth North, daughter of the Bishop of Winchester and niece of Prime Minister Lord North, who lived on until 1845.¹⁵⁹ Furthermore, family tradition has it that the arrangement of the shells was in large part carried out by the fifth lord's childless sister Elizabeth Wrightson (with the assistance of the Merton butler) during her frequent visits to Merton.¹⁶⁰

This can now be amplified by the unexpected fact that the shells, no doubt supplemented by purchases and swaps effected by her brother,¹⁶¹ sprang in the most part from the dismantling of the shell grotto previously constructed in wood for his parents in his father's parsonage garden in Hampshire.

The date of the Ornamental Dairy, located by the home farm to the north-west across the park, is more problematical. Now converted into a house, with dormer windows to a new upper storey pushed through the roof line, this was originally a rustic building. Today its oversailing, formerly thatched, roof is pantiled and the tree-trunk supports to the eaves of the encircling verandah have been replaced in straight, sawn timber posts. A 'Ground Plan for proposed Dairy', unsigned and undated (Fig. 22), reveals the gentrified purpose of this building, as the rooms are labelled as 'Dairy/Lady Walsinghams Room/Bed room/Wash House', of which only the dairy has no fireplace. From the filed location of the plan in the de Grey muniments it must date from the fifth lord's time. His first wife died only two years after her marriage in 1842, and the nature of the paper and the character of the script together suggest a date after his second marriage in 1847. Perhaps it was a wedding present to his new bride, making it an unusually late manifestation of this bucolic genre of building, but could it really be by Blore who, as has been seen above, was then engaged on the Bachelor Wing at the house?

RETRENCHMENT, FIRE AND DEMOLITION

The construction of the Billiard Room in 1891 proved to be a temporary lull in a process of retrenchment that had started, as with so many landed estates, with the agricultural depression that was at its height in the 1880s.¹⁶² The process at Merton was complicated by the effective bankruptcy of 6th. Lord Walsingham in c.1916/17. He was the

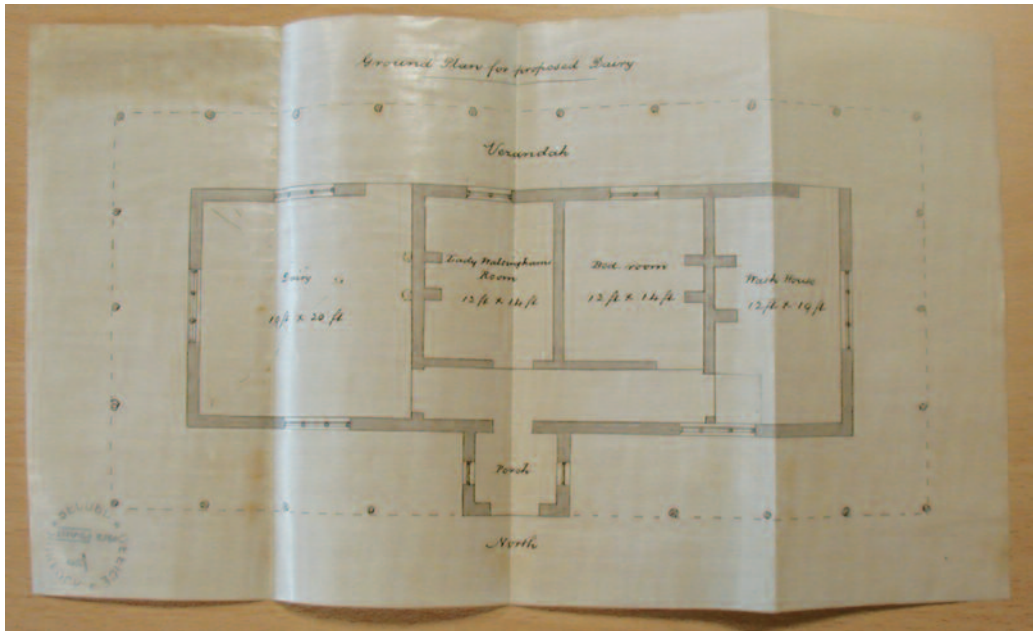


Fig. 22. Anon., 'Ground Plan for proposed Dairy' at Merton Home Farm, third quarter nineteenth century.
Norfolk Record Office. Richard Garnier.

great shot and friend of the Prince of Wales, but rather than from the strain of keeping up in such circles, it is now thought that his financial crisis was possibly brought on by failed investment in South American railways wherein his capital was confiscated through nationalisation of the company's assets. Walsingham had tried unsuccessfully to improve his finances by rebuilding his town house (on the corner of Arlington Street and Piccadilly, and now the site of the Ritz Hotel) as The Walsingham House Hotel in 1887.¹⁶³ After the Great War he retreated to the south of France as an economy, leaving his half-brother and heir to salvage what he could. Sales of any outlying land in Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex and Yorkshire, of the London house to Cesar Ritz and the greater part of the heirlooms and all the better chattels such as the Chippendale furniture at auction,¹⁶⁴ still threatened to be insufficient to save the nucleus of the estate around Merton. That was achieved only by the sixth lord's death in 1919 shortly before the expiry of the

insurance policy on his life, the payout from which was sufficient to pay off the creditors. Small wonder then that the Billiard Room at Merton was demolished on the onset of rot, but there remains the tantalising possibility that if the 1956 fire that signalled the old house's demolition had occurred more recently, the house's restoration could have been achieved.

In 1956, after a five-year period of lying empty, the house had only recently been let to a boys' preparatory school whose previous premises, Old Buckenham Hall, not far away in Norfolk, had been burnt out shortly before. At the time of the fire at Merton the school were engaged in a campaign of alterations to adapt the house to school use. This included the use of elements transposed from the burnt out shell of Old Buckenham, as detailed in the axonometric drawing. The fire had started in the early hours of Saturday 14 January 1956¹⁶⁵ from shorting in a newly-installed electricity fuse box, part of a re-wired circuit in the Long Gallery on the



Fig. 23. Merton Hall, entrance front in post-fire stabilised form, from north-east, 1956.

Allan Sewell.

second floor of the house only connected to the mains at the close of the working day on the Friday. The damage, although extensive, was mainly concentrated at the west end of the house and in the roof. It was not so bad as to have completely destroyed the Adam and Eve Room with its Jacobean plaster ceiling, or the Jacobean Stair relocated by Blore, while his Bachelor Wing was completely unscathed. The fire was only just before the start of the Spring Term, and somehow the school managed to function in the undamaged parts.¹⁶⁶ By the start of the Summer Term the unsupported gables had been taken down and the central part of the original Jacobethan house provided with a temporary corrugated-iron roof (Fig. 23), enabling the ground-floor rooms to be used, but the right-hand cross wing and Blore's drawing room wing were too damaged for such remedial treatment and were left open to the sky. This explains the rapidly deteriorating condition of the Adam and Eve Room ceiling by the time that the

few interior photographs of Merton which have been traced to date were taken after the fire.

With more demolitions than in any other decade of the twentieth century, the 1950s were the nadir in the decline of the country house, yet the partly burnt out house at Merton remained in its temporarily roofed state for some two years while its future was debated.¹⁶⁷ At the completion of the 1956 Summer Term, the school had moved out, having secured other premises in Suffolk, but demolition was not decided on until 1958.¹⁶⁸ The Blore Bachelor Wing was retained, its southern end newly closed off with a conforming step-gabled wall, and let as flats. That remained the *status quo* until the current Lord Walsingham and his family themselves needed rehousing following the gutting by fire in April 1970 of their own house a quarter of a mile south of Merton Hall. A new drawing room was added at the south end of the Blore wing. The south elevation of this was set with an armorial panel dated 1876

salvaged from the back porch of the demolished house, while a new front door surround of Victorian date from Woodbastwick Hall, Norfolk, itself then being taken down, was inserted in Blore's east façade.¹⁶⁹ It is an ironic result of the two house fires in the current Lord Walsingham's period of tenure that the most recent campaign of alteration at Merton has ushered in the longest period of continuous occupation of the house there by the de Grey family for some considerable time past.

APPENDIX A

The Inventory of Furniture at Merton Hall, 1785, lists the following rooms in the house and out buildings:¹⁷⁰

Hall	Billiard Room
Drawing Room	Maid's Garret
Staircase Room and Staircase	First Men's Garret
Great Room	Second D°. D°.
Green Room	Third d°. Garret
First Blue Room	Garret up the Large Staircase
Second Blue Room	Housekeeper's Room
Closet over the Porch	Servants' Hall
Passage	Kitchen
Little Blue Room	Scullery
Pheasant Room ¹⁷¹	Steward's Room
Inner Room	Closet belonging
Dying King's Room	Footman's Room
Closet	First Chamber over the Stables
Lady's Bedroom	Second Chamber over D°.
Dressing Closet to Bedroom	Bed Room over Laundry
Butler's Pantry	Drying Room over D°.
Passage	Laundry
Staircase to Breakfast parlour	Wash House
Breakfast Parlour	Dairy
Study	Brew House

APPENDIX B

THURSFORD HALL, NORFOLK

Lyminge is credited with designing only two country houses in Norfolk, Blickling and Felbrigg Halls, but operating out of Blickling from 1619 to his death in 1628, he was in Norfolk long enough to have been engaged in designing more than those two houses in the county.

Thursford Hall is a potential candidate. Situated just north of the road from Fakenham to Holt and Cromer, it is some 15 miles equidistant from Blickling and Felbrigg, north-west of the first and south-west of the other. It was, in addition, the seat of (Sir) Thomas Guybon, the son-in-law of Sir William de Grey of Merton. Thomas Guybon had married Sir William's daughter Barbara in 1617,¹⁷² shortly before the erection of the gatehouse was being planned at Merton.

Demolished in 1918, Thursford Hall was by then cloaked in alterations done in 1820 and 1857 for the Scott-Chad family,¹⁷³ which had added shaped gables to the end walls and reduced the former full second storey to a row of shaped-gabled dormers set in the lowered roof (Fig. 24). Evidence that this was a reduction is found in J. P. Neale's print of 1821 which shows an earlier state of the house (Fig. 25). This has the full second storey, but the shallow-pitched roof seems an eighteenth-century rationalisation somewhat at odds with what is otherwise an early seventeenth-century structure. The corners of the house are quoined and the front sports the trio of 'bulging protruding bays'¹⁷⁴ comprising a central porch and flanking windows that survived unaltered until the house's demolition. It is the combination of quoins and canted bays that are noteworthy: plausibly the original appearance of this single-range house would have been more like Felbrigg Hall with a lower, but steeper, roof and shaped end gables. Again it is possible that the front originally had a row of shaped gables over two-storey canted bays as on the east and south elevations of Blickling. This



Fig. 24. Thursford Hall as remodelled *c.*1855, photographed before its early twentieth-century demolition. *English Heritage, National Monuments Record.*

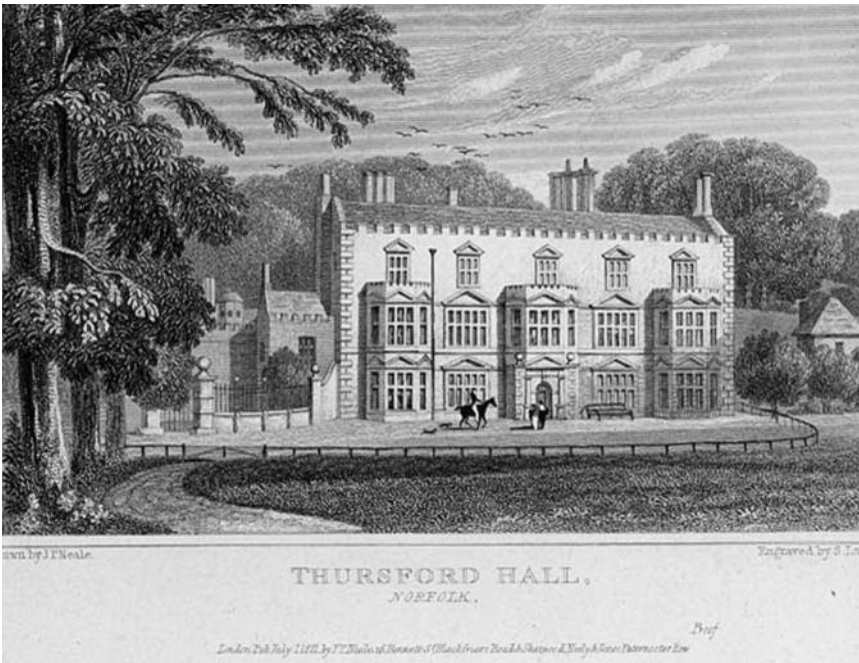


Fig. 25. J. P. Neale, *Thursford Hall, Norfolk*, engraved by S. Lacey, 1821. *English Heritage, National Monuments Record.*

would mean that the nineteenth-century alterations at Thursford were an attempted restitution of the original roofscape, admittedly a heavy-handed one. But otherwise it seems unlikely that in the nineteenth century the height of the second storey would have been reduced, when all about houses were customarily being increased in size or height. However, without more evidence, now that the house is gone, the idea that Lyminge was at least consulted at Thursford remains a possibility that should be flagged up for research and debate.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to thank Lord Walsingham for permission to work on the de Grey muniments deposited by him at the Norfolk Record Office, the County Archivist for permission to reproduce or quote from them, and his staff for their help during my researches, including Mr Jonathan Draper who kindly re-checked some relevant details for me. Debts of gratitude and acknowledgement are also due to Dr Mark Girouard, Mr John Newman, Dr John Maddison and Dr Claire Gapper for their helpful contributions on reading an earlier draft of this article. Mr Dirk Bouwens put me in touch with Mr Allan Sewell who most kindly placed at my disposal his architectural drawings of Merton for Old Buckenham Hall School, while his brother Mr Donald Sewell gave me many details of the 1956 fire and its aftermath.

NOTES

- 1 Rev. George Crabbe, 'Robert de Grey, Recusant', *Norfolk Archaeology*, IX, 1884 [hereafter Crabbe, *Recusant*], 285 states that the de Greys are 'an ancient and knightly family which had been settled at Merton in Norfolk since the marriage of [their] ancestor, about 1340, with Isabel Baynard, heiress of Merton and of Baynard's Manor in Bunwell. The first English de Grey, Anschitel, and the first English Baynard, Ralph, both came over with the Conqueror, and their names are in the roll of Battle Abbey, their lineal descendant being the present Thomas de Grey, sixth baron Walsingham of Merton.' Anschitel de Grey's great aunt was supposedly Arlotte, the mother of William the Conqueror, making de Grey William's first cousin once removed [Family pedigree at Merton Hall].
- 2 Rev. George Crabbe, 'Merton Church and Hall', *Norfolk Archaeology*, VI, 1864, 310: 'Over the entrance door is still legible the text, "NISI DOMINUM AEDIFICAVERIT DOMUM, IN VANUM LABORAVERUNT QUI AEDIFICANT EAM. ANNUS DOMINI 1613." One of the bedroom chimneypieces bears in the spandrel of its arch the same date, 1613.'
- 3 Images of several of these houses are featured on the Norfolk County Council website 'Picture Norfolk' on norlink.norfolk.gov.uk.
- 4 Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk 2: North-West and South*, London, 1999 [hereafter Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk 2*], 427.
- 5 Both houses are illustrated in Marcus Binney and Emma Milne (eds.), *Vanishing Houses of England*, SAVE, London, 1982, 41.
- 6 Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England, North-West and South Norfolk*, Harmondsworth, 1962 [hereafter Pevsner, *NW & S*, 1962], 206; Great Melton Hall, once mentally stripped of its later (18th/19th century) dress appears to have been another manifestation of this doubling up of the former hall bay.
- 7 Sir Leslie Stephen and Sir Stephen Lee (eds.), *Dictionary of National Biography*, 1885-1901 [hereafter *DNB*], XLVIII, 247.
- 8 Nikolaus Pevsner and Bill Wilson, *Norfolk 1: Norwich and North-East*, Harmondsworth, 1997 [hereafter Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk 1*], 671: Spixworth Hall was demolished in 1955.
- 9 Nor was the relevant Pevsner volume (first published 1962) researched before the loss of the house by fire.

- 10 I can remember, aged about eight, venturing with my elder brother part of the way up the staircase of the largely burnt-out house, only to retreat on reaching the first floor once we realised the unstable state of the structure.
- 11 Communication direct to myself.
- 12 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 597. Another pendant modelled with busts in the round (this time of animals), still extant at Barnham Broom Hall, approximately twelve miles north-east of Merton, is dated 1614 but is simpler in conception and handling and seems to be by a different hand from that at Merton [see Mark Girouard, 'Barnham Broom Hall, Norfolk', *Country Life*, CXXI, 23 February 1967, 405, Fig. 8].
- 13 New Testament subjects are much rarer and only appear later in the seventeenth century, and then mostly in the West Country [*ex. inf.* Claire Gapper].
- 14 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 538.
- 15 *Idem.*
- 16 *Ibid.*, 'Introduction', 99.
- 17 Caroline Stanley-Milson and John Newman, 'Blickling Hall: The Building of a Jacobean Mansion', *Architectural History*, XXIX, 1986, 1–42.
- 18 Felbrigg Hall, Norfolk, which is discussed in *ibid.*, 14.
- 19 *Ibid.*, 7.
- 20 I am grateful to Dr Mark Girouard for pointing out this potential *caveat* to me.
- 21 Stanley-Milson and Newman, *op. cit.*, 1.
- 22 Pevsner, NW & S, 1962, 53; that is discounting the shaped gables of the Manor House, Bracondale, Norwich, whose 1578 dating Bill Wilson has shown to be sham, in his revision of the companion volume, *cit.*, 335.
- 23 Stanley-Milson and Newman, *op. cit.*, 8.
- 24 In the Middle Ages there had been a local tradition of using clunch (hard chalk), especially in monastic houses, but its use had all but ceased in the early sixteenth century, and the minor revival in its use was still in the future, occurring towards the end of the seventeenth century [Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 24].
- 25 Stanley-Milson and Newman, *op. cit.*, 6.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 5.
- 27 *Ex inf.* John Maddison.
- 28 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 312–13.
- 29 Thomas Havers, who acquired it in 1592 [Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 699].
- 30 Francis Wodehouse [Rev. Augustus Jessop, 'Notes on the History of Breccles Hall', *Norfolk Archaeology*, VIII, 1879, 303–18]; Mrs Wodehouse was known as 'a popish seducing recusant' [Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 215].
- 31 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 98.
- 32 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 291–3.
- 33 For instance his grandfather was Sir John Spelman (1495?–1544), of Narborough, Norfolk, a judge of the King's Bench, who had been one of the commissioners to enquire into the Norfolk possessions of Wolsey, was present at Anne Boleyn's coronation in 1533, two years later was a commissioner on the trials of Sir Thomas More and Bishop Fisher and finally in the subsequent year was a commissioner for receiving indictments against Queen Anne (Boleyn) and her brother Lord Rochford [*DNB*, XLV, 134–5].
- 34 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 295–97, discusses Robert de Grey's 1582 sale of the manor of Lillington, Warwickshire, long held by the de Greys, in order to liquidate the dower still owing to Elizabeth Mynne, the remarried widow of Robert's under-age nephew, at whose death, aged eleven, Robert had inherited. The sale was forced on him in the constrained financial circumstances brought on by his recusancy fines. Robert had also had to continue to her death in 1577 the dower of Dame Temperance Heydon, the remarried widow of Robert's elder brother Thomas de Grey. She was the daughter of Sir Wymonde Carewe of Anthony, Cornwall, and had married secondly Sir Christopher Heydon of Baconsthorpe Castle, Norfolk. Heydon (effectively Robert's brother-in-law), Sir Christopher Butts of Thornage, near East Dereham, and Edward Freake, Bishop of Norwich, were the principal agents in the prosecution of Robert de Grey's recusancy. A copy of the sale conveyance in the de Grey muniments states 'The sale of the manor of Lillington in Warwyckshire to Nicholas Mynne being forced to it by the unconscionably [*sic.*] certyfycate of the bishoppe' [Norwich, Norfolk Record Office, WLS IV,5].
- 35 Norwich, Norfolk Record Office [hereafter NRO], WLS IX,2.
- 36 The spelling maintained by the present family is pronounced as though spelt Bedingfield, the spelling in erroneous common usage; see L. G. Pine (ed.), *Burke's Peerage*, London, 1956 [hereafter *Burke's Peerage*, 1956], 184, *sv.* Paston-Bedingfeld of Oxborough, Bt.
- 37 For Elizabeth Spelman, Robert de Grey's mother,

- see *Burke's Peerage*, 1956, 2241, *sv.* 'Walsingham'; for Wodehouse's mother see Jessop, *loc. cit.*
- 38 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 305–12.
- 39 *DNB*, IV, 113–15; *Burke's Peerage*, 1956, 184–85, *sv.* 'Paston-Bedingfeld'.
- 40 *Idem.*
- 41 David J. King, 'Who was Holbein's Lady with a Squirrel and a Starling', *Apollo*, May 2004, 42–49.
- 42 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 292, records Anne de Grey's brothers Sir Thomas Lovell of East Harling and Robert Lovell of Beechamwell as fined for recusancy; George Lovell Harrison, 'A Few Notes on the Lovells of East Harling', *Norfolk Archaeology*, XVIII, 1914, 46–77, has [p. 60] Dame Anne Lovell, her daughter and son-in-law Eleanor and John Shelly and her 'cosen' Elianor Wodehouse all as recusants, and [p. 61] has Dame Anne's sons Thomas and Robert, her brother Ferdinand Paris, and her sister-in-law Dorothy Lovell (second wife of Dame Anne's husband's brother, Gregory Lovell, the Cofferer) as recorded 'in the Proceedings of the Privy Council as those "who do not appear at Church at the tymes of praier" and "show great backwardness in religion" and "whose houses are the resort of suspected persons".'
- 43 NRO, WLS IV,4.
- 44 *DNB*, XII, 242–44.
- 45 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 293.
- 46 *Idem.*
- 47 *DNB*, XII, 242–44.
- 48 *Idem.*; Crabbe, *Recusant*.
- 49 Sir Bernard Burke and A. P. Burke, *Peerage and Baronetage*, London, 1917, *sv.* 'Jerningham, Bt.'
- 50 *DNB*, X, 784–5.
- 51 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 313.
- 52 NRO, WLS IX,1.
- 53 NRO, WLS IV,7: copy Inquisition post mortem Robert de Grey of Marton [*sic.*].
- 54 Merton, Norfolk, parish register, as cited by Crabbe, *op. cit.*, 313, *n.* 4.
- 55 Crabbe, *Recusant*, genealogical table, gives her burial in Merton chancel as on 16 May, 1600.
- 56 Rev. H. J. Lee-Warner, 'The Calthorpes of Cockthorp', *Norfolk Archaeology*, IX, 1884, 153–79.
- 57 *Ibid.*, 154–55, genealogical table.
- 58 *DNB*, VI, 57: in 1577 he was temporarily banished from court for slandering Elizabeth's favourite, Lord Leicester.
- 59 *DNB*, VIII, 260–1.
- 60 WLS IX,2; Crabbe, *Recusant*, 319.
- 61 Sir James Calthorpe died in 1615: see Lee-Warner, *op. cit.*, 154–55, genealogical table.
- 62 NRO, WLS LXIV,1,5.
- 63 WLS IX,3.
- 64 WLS IX,4.
- 65 NRO, WLS IX, 7–8; the earlier figure also cited in Crabbe, *Recusant*, 291–92.
- 66 Crabbe, *Recusant*, 318.
- 67 NRO, WLS XV,11,2: covers years 1606–27, 1637–42, and 1663.
- 68 NRO, WLS IX,9,1–2.
- 69 *Idem*; Bedingfeld was left 'my crucifix of gold left me by my deare mother and also all my old Gould I have by me at my decease being not above fifty pounds'.
- 70 *Burke's Peerage*, 1956, 184–85, *sv.* 'Paston-Bedingfeld'.
- 71 'To my sister in law Lady Peyton of Isleham Cambridgeshire a diamond ring of five pounds price; to the rest of my brothers in law except Sir Edward Peyton and to all my other sisters in law a death's head ring of twenty shillings price' [NRO, WLS IX,9,1–2].
- 72 *Idem.*
- 73 *DNB*, XLV, 134–5; J. Burke and J. B. Burke, *Extinct and Dormant Baronetcies of England, Ireland, and Scotland*, reprint of 2nd ed., Baltimore, 1977 [hereafter Burke, *Extinct Baronetcies*], 410, *sv.* 'Peyton of Isleham', has him as 'one of the knights of the shire for the county of Cambridge, and was *custos rotulorum* thereof, which office he was deprived of by the influence of the Duke of Buckingham, "whereat he was so much disgusted, that he first drew his pen against the court, and writ several pamphlets with great acrimony against Charles I and the royalists".'
- 74 This also fits with R. W. Ketton-Cremer, *Felbrigg, The Story of a House*, London, 1962, 38, when describing the political divide in 1640s Norfolk: 'Thomas Windham [of Felbrigg] was wholly in agreement with this Puritan and Parliamentary majority in Norfolk.... The Royalist elements were few and scattered – Sir William Paston of Oxnead, the L'Estranges of Hunstanton, the de Greys of Merton, the Heydons (fallen now on evil days, with their great house at Baconsthorpe already in decay), Catholic families such as the Bedingfelds of Oxburgh and the Cobbes of Sandringham. There was nothing that they could effectively do against their united and overbearing neighbours.'
- 75 Burke, *Extinct Baronetcies*, 408–11, *sv.* 'Peyton, of

- Isleham'; *Burke's Peerage*, 1956, 317–19, *sv.* 'Buckinghamshire'.
- 76 *Idem.*; [John Maddison and John Newman, *et. al.*], Oliver Garnet (ed.), *Blickling Hall*, National Trust guidebook, 1998, genealogical table inside back cover.
- 77 This route from Hatfield to Blickling followed the Great North Road (A1) to Baldock, thence via Royston on the (now designated) A505 to the A11 and on via Newmarket to the Norfolk boundary at Thetford, where it leaves major roads, passing through Croxton and the park at Merton to Watton, whence on via Dereham, Swanton Morley, Bawdeswell and Reepham, before skirting Cawston and arriving at Blickling. An alternative final leg would have been to have passed through Cawston to Aylsham and then on to Blickling. See also *n.* 92 and 139, below.
- 78 Howard Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840*, New Haven and London, 1995, 607–08, *sv.* Robert Lemyng.
- 79 John Maddison, 'Architectural Drawings at Blickling Hall', *Architectural History*, XXXIV, 1991, 75–135; Colvin, *op. cit.*, 531, *sv.* Thomas Ivory, 805, *sv.* John Adey Repton, and 1126, *sv.* Samuel Wyatt; *Blickling Hall*, National Trust guidebook, *cit.*, 44–52.
- 80 Sir Lewis Namier and John Brooke, *The House of Commons, 1754–1790*, Oxford, 1964 [hereafter Namier and Brooke], II, 306–07.
- 81 *Idem.*
- 82 [Walter Rye], *Rye's Norfolk Lists*, 1st series, No. 3 (Double Part), 'Castles & Manor Houses', Norwich, 1916, 43, *sv.* Merton Hall (ii, 298), quoting *Norfolk Tour*, 990.
- 83 J. P. Neale, *Views of Seats of Nobleman and Gentlemen*, London, 1818–26, series 6, v.
- 84 Namier and Brooke, II, 308–09.
- 85 NRO, WLS LII,14 comprises: invitation to Lord Walsingham at Queen's command to a dinner in honour of Duke of Clarence's birthday, 1810; letters from Princess Augusta re health of Princes Amelia, 1810; accompanying gift portrait of (?) the king to commemorate 'the very great attachment which you have so strongly manifested towards the King and all his family for many years', 1811; letter from Queen Charlotte accompanying a present to Lord Walsingham, 1811; *et al.*
- 86 He was groom of the bedchamber 1771–77, and having had various governmental appointments and placements when an MP, on succession to his father's peerage he went on to become chairman of committees in the Lords, 1794–1814 [Namier and Brooke, *cit.*, II, 307].
- 87 NRO, WLS LVIII,15–16: inventory of furniture bought of G. P. Towey on acquiring Leatherlake House, Old Windsor from him, 1775; inventory at the same, 1781.
- 88 Lucy Wood, 'Lord Walsingham and the Younger Chippendale', *Antique Collecting*, February 1987, 38–44.
- 89 NRO, WLS L,6.
- 90 Lucy Wood, *Catalogue of Commodes*, London, 1994, 187, *n.* 23.
- 91 Christopher Gilbert, *The Life and Work of Thomas Chippendale*, London, 1978, 15.
- 92 For a list of the rooms at Merton in 1785 see Appendix A, above.
- 93 A measure of Chippendale's social standing is the family solicitor's letter to 3rd. Lord Walsingham, timed 9.30 p.m., wherein he states that he had just returned from Chippendale's and had thought of sending him down with a bier that night to Old Windsor (a journey of a good three hours) to collect the body of Lady Walsingham, but gives the assurance that he would be there in the morning before none other than the servants have stirred [NRO, WLS XV,20].
- 94 NRO, WLS LVIII,11,21.
- 95 NRO, WLS LVIII,11,22; to this order was added, in the list of items despatched to Merton, a sofa, 'a stripe cotton case with squab and two bolster Do. for a sofa now at Merton' and 12 'painted chairs cane seats' [WLS L,9, dated 12 April, 1786].
- 96 NRO, WLS LI,4.
- 97 Lord Walsingham antipathy to the country is indicated by his comment in 1815 about 'Norfolk where the only object is sporting, and where they live, breathe, move, and have their being in nothing else but shooting' [NRO, WLS LXII,20,6].
- 98 He died 18 Jan., and she 28 May 1818 [*Burke's Peerage*, 1956, *loc. cit.*].
- 99 NRO, WLS XV,25; this is erroneously calendared as 'inn bills for a journey by Lord Walsingham', but the item 'beer for the men with the body' reveals it as Chippendale's list of out-of-pocket expenses for conducting Lady Walsingham's cortège to Merton, the men being required to prevent body snatchers while the cortège had stopped for the night at successive inns along the route. Incidentally, the

- journey as itemised takes up the route described from Hatfield to Merton set out in *n.* 70, above.
- 100 NRO, WLS XV,11–12/13–17; L,19.
- 101 NRO, WLS L, 14/21. The valuation comprised: furniture in house and lodge, stables, etc., £712; linen, £60; glass and china, £57; plate, £369 3s.; wine of various sorts, £611; 1,300 volumes of books, £325.
- 102 NRO, WLS XV,8: executed by John Palmer, whose valuation was ‘... the sum of five hundred pounds per ann[um] furnished clear, the proprietor paying all the taxes, a fair and liberal rent’.
- 103 Richard Wilson and Alan Mackley, *Creating Paradise, the Building of the English Country House, 1616–1880*, London and New York, 2000, 349.
- 104 NRO, WLS XLV,7,7 from Lord Walsingham on 13 June, 1818: ‘I send you the proposed plans which have been suggested for the improvement of Merton.... My remarks upon them are these – first in both Shakespeare’s & Ld Cadogan’s – the best Rooms and Apartments are moved from the west wing to the East, & I can see no good reason, why?’.
- 105 NRO, WLS XLIX,10; LXX,9.
- 106 G. E. C[ockayne] (ed. Vicary Gibbs,), *Complete Peerage*, London, 1854 [hereafter *Complete Peerage*], II, 462; *Burke’s Peerage*, 1854, 150–51. The latter names it in error as ‘Sandy Downham’.
- 107 This memorandum must date from between 1811 and 1818 as the Lord Walsingham and the General therein mentioned must refer to Thomas, 2nd Lord Walsingham and his elder son General George de Grey, who was promoted Major-General in 1811 and succeeded as 3rd lord in 1818. General George was further promoted Lt.-General in 1821. He had married Matilda, daughter of Paul Cobb Methuen of Corsham, but they remained childless; both perished in a fire in 1831 at the house in Upper Harley Street, London, that had been furnished by Thomas Chippendale the younger for his parents: see Wood, *op. cit.*
- 108 NRO, WLS XLVIII,43,4.
- 109 NRO, WLS XLVIII,9.
- 110 NRO, WLS XLVIII,9,2.
- 111 NRO, WLS XLV,7,4.
- 112 *Idem.*
- 113 *Idem*: ‘Ld. Cadogan’s comps. to Ld. Walsingham & has seen Heffer today but is rather tired with the thorough discussion he has had with him & therefore will send up the plans & estimates by the same coach of Sunday next for his Lordship’s inspection together with his own ideas on the subject; Thursday March 30th 1804’ and ‘April 1st 1804 – PS. ... However, if you have anything further you wish me to do on it I will with pleasure, or will send to Heffer for his bill as you shall direct.’
- 114 *Idem.* Cadogan was aware he was fighting a losing battle, adding a postscript, ‘By the tenure of your short note recd. this morning I hardly think there will be much more to discuss in the subject of Merton; but I can not see any other kind of plan that will make it worth your while to do anything at all, however if you have anything further you wish me to do on it I will do it with pleasure, or will send to Heffer for his bill as you shall direct. The plan, being quite on a new idea cost us a pretty good bore one morning, but I think it well worth your laying by?’
- 115 NRO, WLS XLV,7,7.
- 116 His parents had died on 18 January and 28 May just previous, resulting in two trips to Merton in quick succession for their funerals, as outlined above.
- 117 Probably springing from a family of flint knappers at Brandon, Suffolk [*ex inf.* Sir Howard Colvin].
- 118 NRO, WLS XLV,7,7: ‘My remarks upon them are these – First in both Shakespeare’s & Lord Cadogan’s – the best rooms and apartments are moved from the west Wing to the East, & I can see for no good reason, why?’.
- 119 NRO, WLS XLV,7,6
- 120 NRO, WLS XLV,7,5.
- 121 NRO, WLS XLV,7,11.
- 122 NRO, WLS XLV,14. Confirmation of that otherwise undocumented campaign of 1874–76 is provided by rainwater hoppers dated 1876 on the laundry block at the eastern extremity of the house, accompanied by the similarly dated armorial panel that was salvaged after the 1956 fire from the back porch newly built with the conservatory either side of it in 1876.
- 123 NRO, WLS LIV, 10–11/16–17/25; *Burkes Peerage*, 1956, 2242.
- 124 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 130.
- 125 NRO, WLS XLVIII,7,20.
- 126 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 132.
- 127 NRO, WLS LIX,23,3–4.
- 128 Coker reported on the roof, ‘After having carefully inspected the same I find the wett gets through very much, which if not prevented, will injure the whole Fabric to an alarming extent. The Roofs being covered with plain tiles, require experienced workmen to execute The same especially the valleys, the tiles being in themselves very small, their

- meeting so numerous, leaves but a very small space for the water to spread itself: [NRO, WLS LIX,23,2].
- 129 *Idem*. The inference is that Blore had either failed to supervise the work closely enough, or his clerk of works was ineffectual.
- 130 NRO, WLS LIX,23,3-4, WLS XLV,7,9-10.
- 131 NRO, WLS LXVIII,25,1-4.
- 132 His first wife had died in 1844 [Pine, *loc. cit.*].
- 133 The reason given in Pevsner and Wilson, *op. cit.*, 539, 'reputedly for the accommodation of the Baron's illegitimate children' cannot be so at this date, as it was 6th. Lord Walsingham of the next generation who was the one who had a need for such arrangements, still then in the future.
- 134 Pevsner and Wilson, *op. cit.*, 539.
- 135 This is revealed by comparison of Heffer's 1804 plans and mid-1950s plans of the house, the latter kindly forwarded to me by Mr Allan Sewell, formerly architect to Old Buckenham Hall School.
- 136 *Ex. inf.* Allan Sewell.
- 137 NRO, WLS LX,7.
- 138 *Idem*; Pevsner and Wilson, *op. cit.*, 539.
- 139 NRO, WLS LX,5-6.
- 140 NRO, WLS LXVIII,28,4-5/17-18/24/50-51.
- 141 NRO, WLS LX XIII,28,17/18.
- 142 The 6th. Lord Walsingham was in the habit of taking control of his carriage as the house came in view and charging the Clock House carriageway at full tilt from a distance some quarter of a mile down the axial approach drive, a doubly daring feat on account the narrowness of the archway and the short distance available in which to pull up on entering the forecourt in front of the house. Family tradition has it that his terrified coachman always got down before this daredevil display, which is seemingly backed up by the fact that it was the said coachman who requested the widening of the carriageway. He had written direct to Blomfield, which engendered the rebuke that he could take orders from none other than 'his lordship', but the suggestion was evidently taken up in the event.
- 143 Maddison, *op. cit.*, fig. 30, illustrates 'Design for a neo-Jacobean gatescreen for the front of Blickling Hall' of c.1822 by John Adey Repton, whose pierced panels closely prefigure the late-Victorian pierced walling at Merton.
- 144 A cast iron plaque just inside the western gatescreen commemorating the planting of the lime tree avenue along Church Walk in celebration of Edward VII's coronation, confirms by association that the screens were set up for the same reason.
- 145 Maddison, *op. cit.*, 81-83.
- 146 NRO, WLS XXXI, 15: deposition of 1772 by the Merton steward, John Andrews, *re*. felling of trees by William Tooke and others in Thomas de Grey's park under pretence of clearing the old Thetford road; NRO, WLS XVII,9 includes map by John Griffin, surveyor, of proposed road from Thetford to Watton, showing also roads to be stopped; WLS LXI,13 includes plan of the turnpike, 1790-1818.
- 147 NRO, WLS LII,53.
- 148 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 265.
- 149 NRO, WLS LIX,23,2.
- 150 My interpretation of an estate agent's 2004 sale particulars description.
- 151 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 265.
- 152 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 752.
- 153 Colvin, *op. cit.*, 691.
- 154 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 539.
- 155 He married twice, in 1842 and 1847 [*Burke's Peerage*, 1956, 2242].
- 156 Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk* 2, 539.
- 157 NRO, WLS LIX,23,16.
- 158 NRO, WLS LIX,23,16,5.
- 159 She divided her time between Merton and her husband's London town house in Upper Portland Place, where she died [*Complete Peerage*, 1912, XXII, pt. 2, 335].
- 160 She was Hon. Elizabeth Augusta de Grey and married in 1832 Richard Heber Wrightson of Cusworth Hall and Warmsworth, both in Yorkshire [*Burke's Peerage*, 1956, *loc. cit.* and *Burke's Landed Gentry*, 1886, II, 2048, *sv*. 'Wrightson of Cusworth']. She died in 1875 and her diaries, which recorded her working on the Shell House, descended to her great nephew, Hon Richard de Grey, named after her husband, and survived into living memory at least until the house then occupied by the current Lord Walsingham was burnt in 1971 [Information, via my mother, originally from the late Hon. Richard de Grey's sister-in-law, who died only last year, aged 100].
- 161 NRO, WLS XLV, 37, a nineteenth-century list of seashells, some priced; typescript historical note by current Lord Walsingham, *A Note for Visitors to the Shellhouse at Merton Hall*, March, 1991, suggests that swaps were employed. The fifth peer was a pioneer in the advancement of the theory of evolution through the study of shells, in consort

- with his barrister colleague and friend, Sir Charles Lyell, whose *Principles of Geology*, 1830, Darwin acknowledged as a formative influence. Walsingham's classified collection of shells survived in serried cabinets along the Long Gallery at Merton until the 1956 fire.
- 162 John Harris, 'Gone to Ground', in Roy Strong (ed.), *The Destruction of the English Country House*, London, 1974, 15, gives the dates of the 'Great Depression' in agriculture as 1873–96.
- 163 NRO, WLS XLV,14: includes letter from the family solicitor H. T. Boodle suggesting means of increasing income from the Arlington Street property; WLS LXVIII, 32–38: papers *re* Walsingham House, 1883–91, includes rebuilding estimates; Harold P. Clun, *The Face of London, The Record of a Century's Changes and Development*, London, 7th ed. 1927, 178: The Ritz 'occupies the site of the modern Walsingham House Hotel, a tall red-brick building originally constructed in 1887 as a block of residential flats... '.
- 164 *E.g.*, the furniture sold at Christie's, 20 November, 1917.
- 165 Reported in *Eastern Daily Press*, Monday, 16 January 1956.
- 166 This was achieved by an exhibition of veritable Dunkirk spirit. The school was still using the games pitches at Old Buckenham and continued to do so after the fire at Merton, as by then it was not going to be worth making new ones at Merton. The senior half of the pupils remained at Merton, while the junior half of the school was transferred to Wood Dalling Hall in north Norfolk. However, the whole body of pupils was reunited under one roof at Merton for the Summer Term [*ex inf.* Mr Donald Sewell, joint headmaster, with his father, of Old Buckenham Hall School].
- 167 The present Lord Walsingham, by then the legal owner, wanted the house restored, but his parents were against the idea and won the argument on grounds of the expense of ongoing upkeep.
- 168 The rubble from the demolition was bulldozed into the forcibly collapsed cellars, which were rumoured to have been mediaeval, a survival from the pre-Jacobethan house on the site.
- 169 *Ex inf.* Lord Walsingham.
- 170 NRO, WLS L, 8.
- 171 This designation remained in use up to the house's demolition, and perhaps referred to an aspect of the room's decoration.
- 172 NRO, WLS LXIV,1,5: eighteenth century manuscript genealogical notes on the de Grey family.
- 173 Binney and Milne, *op. cit.*, 41; Pevsner and Wilson, *Norfolk I*, 697.
- 174 Binney and Milne, *loc. cit.*