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Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd

92a Broad Street · Canterbury · Kent · CT1 2LU

01227 462 062

admin@canterburytrust.co.uk

canterburytrust.co.uk

Holly Cook,
Clague Architects,
62 Burgate,
Canterbury,
Kent, CT1 2BH

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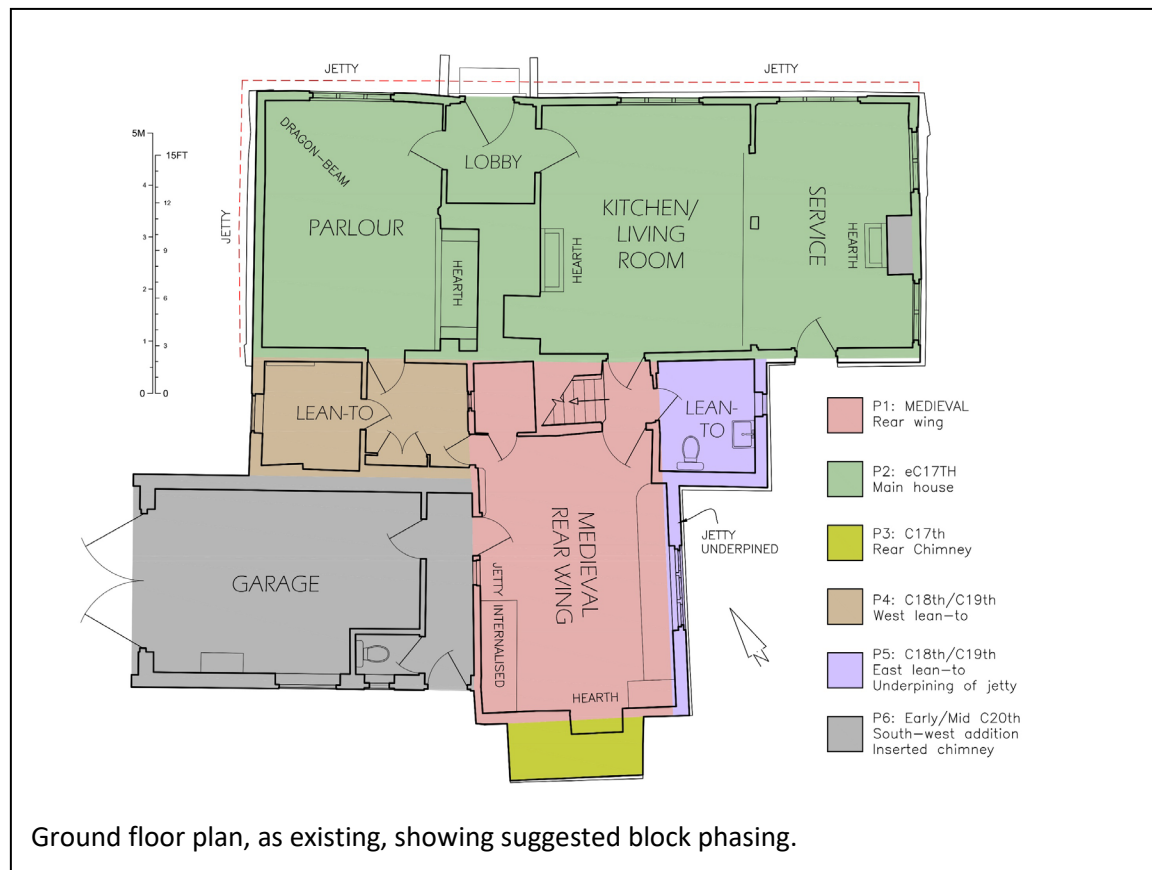
Dear Holly

RE: Spicers Farm, Etchinghill, Kent

Further to my site visit to Spicers Farm, Etchinghill, on the 31 August 2023, please find below, as requested, some comments and observations, based on my provisional assessment of the building. In the following account, it will be assumed that the building faces north, its main range therefore aligned east-west. The property, which has recently been sold and is awaiting repair and refurbishment, comprises a grade II listed timber-framed dwelling.

Medieval rear wing

Surprisingly, the oldest part of the property appears to be the north-south aligned wing to the rear. Evidence suggests this is not coeval with the front of the house, as suggested in the listed building description, but is an earlier medieval structure.



This wing comprises its own independent, freestanding frame, that is not reliant on the main body of the house for support. This has resulted in two frames standing side-by-side where the structure abuts the main part of the house, but this is to be expected. The frame appears to have been formed in a conventional manner for the period and locality. It comprises two bays, however, its central tie-beam and arch-braces have been lost and this is not immediately apparent. Notably, the north face of the internalised north cross-frame is heavily weathered.

Where they survive, sturdy jowled posts are located at the corners and bay divisions of the structure, as one would expect. The west wall is reasonably well preserved, retaining many of its original timbers along with evidence for those that have been lost. On the first floor, impressive long curved down-braces descend from the corner posts. On the ground floor braces rise up from the posts. A simple collar-rafter roof, hipped to the rear (south), but possibly gabled to the front (north), covers the structure, its rafters robust and laid flat in the medieval manner.

Evidently, the wing was originally jettied on both sides. The west jetty has been internalised by later additions. Notably, its jetty brackets were integral with the ground floor posts, however, only the southernmost bracket now survives. The east side of the building has been almost completely rebuilt and the jetty here lost and the original arrangement is now no longer obvious – possibly the only remaining original timber here is the jetty bressumer.

The east-west aligned floor joists are robust, laid flat and rounded-off under the jetty. A trimmed opening for stairs to the first floor (now enlarged and accommodating a later winding staircase) was located at the north end of the floor. Evidently, the ground and first floors of the wing contained single ground and first floor roomst.

Presumably, the wing was linked to the main body of the house at ground level. No evidence for an original door was, however, observed but the fabric remains largely concealed in this area. Notably, there was no connection, originally, on the first floor.

Evidence for original medieval windows was observed in the west wall, on the ground and first floors, on the soffits of the west jetty-plate and west eaves-plate. Typically for the period, these were unglazed and provided with sturdy wooden mullions, set on the diagonal. Grooves above the openings indicate they were secured with wooden shutters. Possibly, similar windows pierced the east wall originally.

A substantial brick and stone chimney was formed against the rear (south) wall of the wing in perhaps the seventeenth century, its sides tumbled in where its flue reduces in size with height. This was provided with ground and first floor hearths. Unfortunately, these have been heavily altered. The original ground floor hearth has been almost completely rebuilt (the extant hearth is presumably smaller) only a fragment of its stop chamfered east reveal now remaining. Presumably, it was provided with a long oak lintel originally. The first-floor hearth was remodelled in perhaps the early twentieth century.

Early seventeenth-century main range



View of main seventeenth-century range of house, looking south (Photo Clague Architects)

The main body of the house is aligned east-west. The listed building description suggests it dates from c1634, although the basis of this date is not stated. This seems reasonable but a slightly earlier date should not be ruled out.

The listed building description correctly identifies it as a continuous jetty, ¹ lobby entry house, of four bays – two bays to the left (east) and one to the right (west) of a narrow bay containing the lobby and a large brick chimney. The west bay is also jettied down its west side, the jetty turned with a dragon beam and supported by a dragon post. The framing of the house is typical of the period – within its elevations there are occasional, long curved down-braces from the posts, ² and mid-rails at uneven heights, forming small square panels. The frame sits on a low stone rubble plinth or dwarf wall.

The stop chamfered floor joists are relatively slender, compared with those in the medieval wing and furthermore they are laid on-edge. The original wide oak floorboards appear to survive in many of the rooms. A conventional clasped side-purlin roof, hipped to the east and west, covers the range. ³ This roof, although not framed with the best quality timber, is well preserved. Notably, a short, coeval, north-south aligned link, comprising mostly jack rafters, was formed atop the rear slope of this roof, to connect it with that over the medieval wing. This confirms the wing predates the main body of the house.

A notable feature of the elevations is the brick nogging that infills the panels between their timbers. ⁴ Where some of this nogging had been removed, however, along the north

¹ Note the jetty-brackets have ovolo-moulded shoulders and are integral with the posts.

² These were always exposed externally.

³ Note this is a sprocketed roof.

⁴ The earliest nogging comprises thin red bricks, however, some panels are now infilled with thicker later bricks.

(rear), east and west walls, empty mortices for staves, that would have supported lath and daub panels, were observed on the soffits of the eaves-plates. No such mortices were, though, seen on the underside of the south (front) plate, although most of this timber remains concealed and we can't be certain they are completely absent. Perhaps, only the prominent front wall was provided with brick nogging originally (this being a relatively expensive material then compared with mud and straw), the panels in the sides and rear walls infilled with cheaper lath and daub.⁵

The window openings along the front wall remain broadly in their original positions, however, most of the openings were adapted and enlarged in perhaps the early nineteenth century, when they were fitted with cast-iron, gothic style frames. Evidence for some of the original windows can be seen in the west wall. A two-light window illuminated the bedroom here, a single light window the ground floor room. Grooves over the openings suggests they were provided with shutters. Further evidence for these features is presently concealed as both are presently blocked with later brickwork. Tentative evidence that the ground floor hall was illuminated by a bay or oriel window was observed.

Remarkably, the internal arrangement of the house has remained almost unaltered and is relatively easy to understand. The lobby, from where one could turn left or right into the principal ground floor rooms, is located off-centre, towards the west end of the house.⁶ The double jetty at this end of the house suggests it was the high-end of the dwelling, the ground floor room here, which was provided with a hearth, perhaps the parlour. The central room was also provided with a hearth and was perhaps a kitchen-cum-living room, the unheated east room perhaps a service room.

Less obvious is the location of the original stairs to the first floor. Evidently, these were located behind the lobby, against the front (north) face of the chimney, where there is a trimmer in the floor. These led to a small landing on the first floor, from where one could turn east or west into the bedrooms. They must have comprised a rather cramped winder and in the eighteenth or nineteenth centuries, perhaps, they were removed, and new more spacious stairs formed in the rear wing. Three bedrooms were located on the first floor, these open to the underside of the roof, originally, their ceilings inserted later.⁷ Only that within the centre of the house was originally heated – its hearth has been blocked and its oak lintel removed. This was surely the master bedroom. The west bedroom was provided with a small hearth in perhaps the nineteenth century, formed against the pre-existing flue here.⁸ A chimney was inserted into the east end of the house in perhaps the early twentieth century, to provide the previously unheated rooms here with hearths. Many of the original(?) plank-and-ledge doors that led between the rooms have survived, these variously hung on butterfly or strap hinges.

⁵ It is conceivable, however, that the owners of the house changed their minds during construction and abandoned the daub to the sides and rear in favour of brick.

⁶ Unfortunately, the original front door and its frame(?) have been replaced.

⁷ The intervening doors located to the front.

⁸ Note it is formed from frogged red bricks.

Later additions

Two single-storey lean-tos, beneath catslide roofs, have been formed against the rear (south) wall of the main body of the house, to the east and west of the medieval wing, thereby partly internalising its jetties. Exactly when they were added is uncertain, however, an eighteenth or nineteenth-century date seems likely, that to the west possibly slightly earlier than that to the east. In our view they have only modest historic or architectural significance.

Map regression analysis indicates the two-storey, east-west aligned range, abutting the west side of the medieval wing, was formed between *c*1907 and *c*1930 and is therefore an early twentieth-century addition. In our view this has no significant historic or architectural interest.

Conclusion

The main body of the house is thought to date from the early seventeenth century and is a good example of its type. It is remarkably well preserved with respect to the percentage of original fabric that has survived. Unfortunately, although still extant, much of this fabric, particularly the timber-frame, is now in poor condition. The structure is generally relatively easy to understand and interpret, its original plan form surviving almost unaltered. Where changes have been made, ample archaeological evidence remains (and more will surely be exposed during works) to interpret the original arrangement and subsequent developments, although some questions will inevitably remain. This part of the building has high historic and architectural significance.

The central north-south aligned rear wing is more puzzling. One could be excused, without further investigation, for assuming this was a later addition, however, inspection reveals it to be an earlier medieval survival – a two-storey, two bay timber-framed structure, jettied down both sides. A few possible explanations for this unexpected order of development present themselves.

Possibly, this wing was an addition to an earlier medieval open-hall house that once occupied the site. This putative dwelling may have been in a dilapidated state and or unsuitable for modernisation and was perhaps replaced by the extant farmhouse in the seventeenth century – typically, hall houses were adapted by flooring over their halls, but this was not always easy, if their eaves were too low for example. Evidently, the wing comprised two full stories and was retained.

Notably, the now internalised north face of the north cross-frame is heavily weathered, where its timbers survive, on the first floor. Possibly, this indicates that the structure once stood higher than our putative hall house. Alternatively, it might indicate that this was originally a detached building that stood, perhaps, a few meters or more from the medieval dwelling it was associated with, which was perhaps located in a slightly different position to the extant house. If so, it could have been a service building. Such structures are not overly common but are a recognised building type. Exactly what they were used for is unclear. They were not generally provided with hearths, so could not have been used for cooking, although stowage or food preparation is possible, as are numerous other domestic tasks and activities. A use related to the farm is also possible. A less likely explanation is that the structure has been moved here from elsewhere, however, no evidence to support this suggest as so far been observed.

The framing of the rear wing is now heavily depleted, and the original arrangement is no longer obvious. The east wall and north cross-frame (that abutting the main part of the house) are the most poorly preserved and in need of repair – the framing of the east wall has been largely replaced with brick, that of the west internalised by later additions. Archaeological evidence for the original form of the structure does, however, survive and should be used to inform repairs and restoration. This part of the building has high historic and architectural significance.

I hope these comments have been helpful.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to get in touch.

Yours sincerely



Rupert Austin BSc MCIfA

Building Recording Manager

Canterbury Archaeological Trust