

CONDOVERS: A TIMBER-FRAMED MANOR HOUSE AT WEST TILBURY

by Randal Bingley

RECORDS, OCCUPIERS, etc.

The earliest record of the personal name, from which the house is presumably derived, is that of John Condoever, known to have been alive in 1523. The manor called Condoever's, or Quindever's, was carved out of West Tilbury Manor (that is, The Hall, next to the church) in the reign of Henry VIII. In 1584, John Walker made an extensive chart of parts of the parish. Condoever's house site is not covered, but Walker does show parcels of land around the parish, obviously connected, called either "Quindors" or "Grindors". In 1614 there were 156 acres attached to the farmhouse.

The Low Street message has not been consistently called by the familiar name. It is "Quindors" in a rate-book of 1760-62, but in a manuscript of 1788 it is referred to as "Venable's Farm and Sawell's Farm", the latter name then being crossed out and "Quindoss" inserted. An advertisement for its sale in 1793, refers to it as "Walnut Tree Farm", and this seems to be the name by which it was known until 1868 at least. At that time, Henry Cole built the new brick and slate-roofed residence next to it, and supposedly revived the name "Condoever's".

Walnut Tree Farm took its name from the seven walnut trees which were planted outside by Church Road, the last of which survived until the early or middle 20th century. (1)

Some of the owners and occupiers known are as follows:-

- 1523 John Condover
1535 Edward Baker
1662 Robert Newton
1697 Fitch of West Tilbury
1697 Cox of London. Mealman.
1738 John Venables. Also known 1760-61.
1762 William Cornwell.
1774-93 Abraham Sawell (Sold on death of Sawell in 1793).
1793 William Kettlewell
1803 John Kettlewell
1807 Samuel Turner
1810 William Chapman
1823 William Tallmach
1828 Mrs. Tallmach
1832 Richard Turner
1838 Jackson King Hunt (also owned Hall, Manor and Marsh Farms).
1845 William Tallmach
1854 Rev. W.G. Goodchild (Whilst waiting for East Tilbury vicarage to be built?)
1868 Henry Cole
1909 Allen Charles Cole (Various agricultural employees were resident now).

Details from a sale advertisement of 24th December, 1793, give "... Lot II. The Valuable and Desirable unexpired lease of a farm called WALNUT-TREE-FARM, containing 170 acres, more or less, of rich arable and pasture land, in high cultivation, with convenient Dwelling-House, barn, stables, cart lodges, and useful buildings, of which 14 years were expired last Michaelmas, late in the occupation of Mr. William Sawell, deceased, at a very low rent of 110.1 (pounds) per year".

A sale catalogue of 1931, when A.C. Cole bought the farmhouse (he had been tenant previously) refers to the Old Farmhouse, built of brick, plaster, and tile, and containing Large Living Room, Wash-house and Two Stores, with Three Bed Rooms and Two Lofts.

Walnut Tree Farm House received a little damage in 1940, due to German action. The nearby barn was first burnt by an incendiary bomb. Some time later, cottages in Low Street were bombed and blast from this damaged the farmhouse roof slightly.

Condover's farmhouse, having latterly served the purpose of agricultural storage for wool bales and tools, was restored

during 1973-75 to a dwelling. Until this time its evolution was not evident, though it was thought to be fundamentally of the fifteenth century with later additions.⁽²⁾ During stripping of the exterior fabric (part early riven-oak and daub, with additions of red and yellow brick, pitch-painted featherboard, concrete infilling between studs, and asbestos sheeting), the following notes were obtained. To these have been added the basic details of the recent restoration.

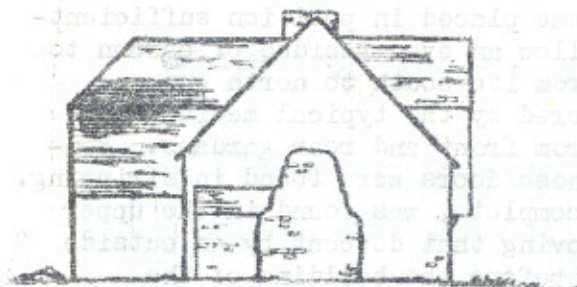
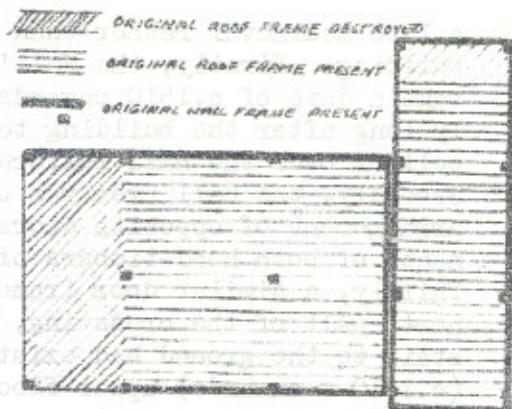
PHYSICAL CONDITION BEFORE RESTORATION

The farmhouse is a N-S orientated Hall, with a surviving E-W cross-wing on the north end, adjacent to Church Road. The cross-wing was virtually entire and fairly sound, of 15th or early 16th century timber framing, altered only by its cladding, tiling, re-cutting of window positions, and slicing of the roof at the west end. The Hall had been altered by the insertion of a chimney stack abutting the crosswing, laying of an upper floor, re-cutting of window positions, roof-tiling and part cladding of concrete and brick. As the Hall progressed south, so it had deteriorated more; the ground sills had sunk and the western bressummers dipped. At the extreme south, collapse seems to have been so great in the past that major brick rebuilding and propping was undertaken. The lower south wall was of red brick with lath-plaster framework above, probably all of c.1700. The timber frame of the southernmost bay of the Hall had been almost entirely renewed at a similar period. It appears that, as the sinkage of the building's south end advanced, an original cross-wing had to be demolished. Some concrete infilling on the west face (downstairs Hall) had perished the studwork considerably. Where timbers were in contact with the original panels of daub, no appreciable decay had taken place.

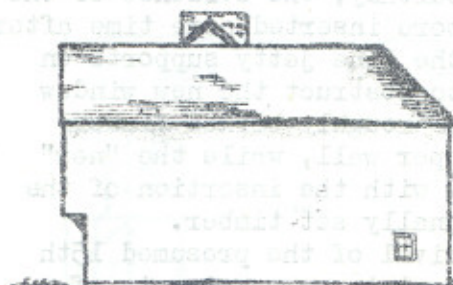
ORIGINAL, OR EARLY 16th CENTURY FEATURES

C. Hewett has suggested a date of between 1510 and 1540 for two very significant features of the house.⁽³⁾ These are the treatment of the tie-beam on the crosswing front, of a profile used on the fascias of houses temp. Henry VIII within the Tower of London, and the Hall floor joists which have diminished transverse haunch-tenon joints, originating from 1510/12 at the earliest. Similar joints are to be seen at the Ship Inn, Fobbing, in a beam dated 1564.⁽⁴⁾ Yet the crosswing joisting, which is entire, seems to be earlier. This was laid horizontally, that is, with the greatest width of the timber facing to receive the bedchamber floor planks. Other features would confirm

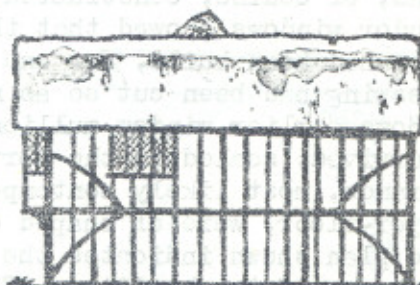
CONDONERS: WEST TILBURY, ESSEX.



SOUTH ELEVATION 1974.

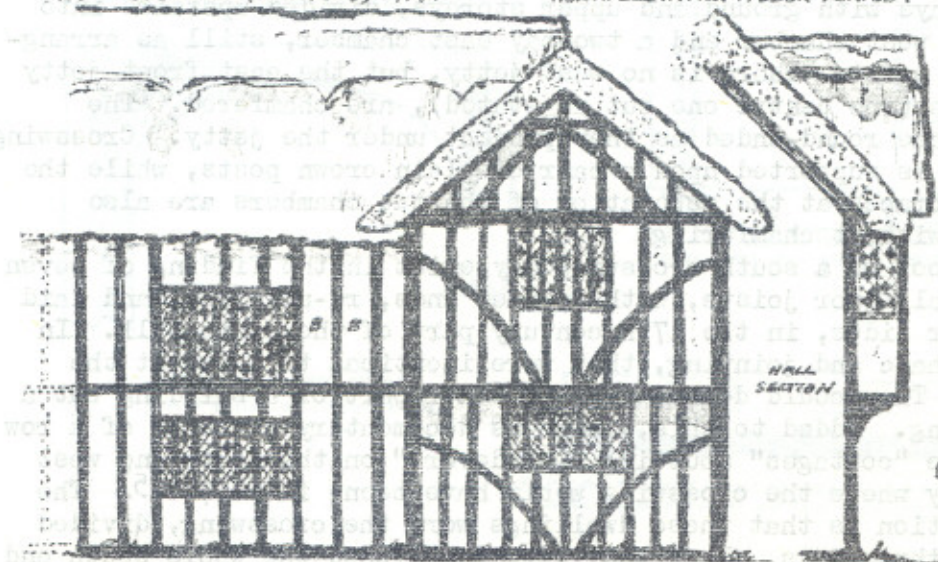


NORTH ELEVATION (CROSSING) 1974.



NORTH ELEVATION, TUDOR PERIOD.

16'-1 inch.



HALL
SECTION

8'-1 inch.

EAST FRONT; CROSSING AND PART OF HALL, TUDOR PERIOD.

"B" AREAS REFER TO PARGETTING SKETCHES.

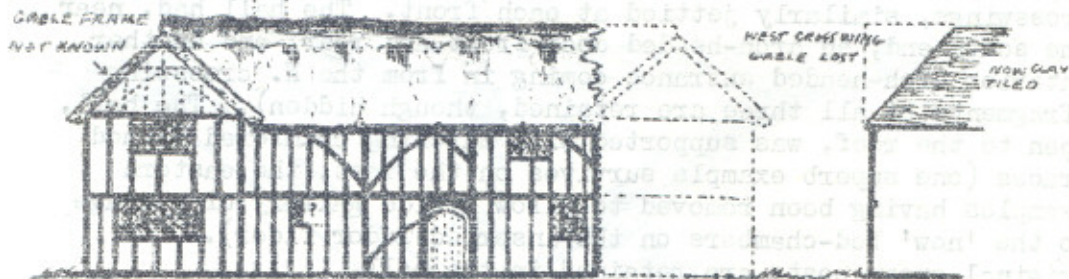
SOUTH TUDOR WINDOW IN
CROSSING TETTY.

a late mediaeval rather than early 16th century date for the building. Firstly, the Hall's inserted floor for which we may take a date of c.1510 onwards, was placed in position sufficiently long after the building to allow an even residue of carbon to collect over the hall rafters from its south to north end. Secondly, the hall area was entered by the typical mediaeval arrangement of opposite doors from front and rear gardens. Remnants of both head-timbers of these doors were found in stripping. Thirdly, a similar door frame, complete, was found in the upper north wall of the crosswing, proving that descent by an outside stair to the ground had existed before the building of the (c.1510 - onwards) upper floor of the hall. When the upper floor was inserted, a new entrance through to the hall by an indoor stair was, of course, constructed. Fourthly, the evidence of the early Tudor windows showed that they were inserted some time after the house had been built, for one of the fine jetty supports on the crosswing had been cut so as not to obstruct the new window head. Some earlier window mullions, of roughly-barked timber, still survived, sealed in the north upper wall, while the "new" Tudor frames, most likely contemporary with the insertion of the hall upper-floor, were of shaped diagonally set timber.

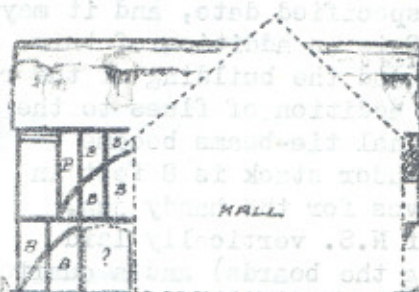
The plan shown indicates the survival of the presumed 15th century areas of the building. The surviving crosswing is of three bays with ground and upper storeys, divided upstairs into a small west chamber and a two-bay east chamber, still as arranged when built. There is no west jetty, but the east front jetty supports (the centre one cut as stated), are chamfered. The joists are round-ended as they project under the jetty. Crosswing roofing is supported upon a pair of plain crown posts, while the wooden braces at the separation of the two chambers are also plain, without chamfering.

Proof of a south crosswing may exist in the finding of seven identical floor joists, with rounded ends, re-utilized, and laid on their sides, in the 17th century part of the south hall. In size, shape and jointing, they were identical to those at the north. They could derive from no other part of a building but a crosswing. Added to this, there is documentary evidence of a row of three "cottages" abutting "Quindevers" on the south end west (exactly where the crosswing would have been) in 1697. (5) The implication is that these dwellings were the crosswing, divided by its three bays. When they were demolished the whole south end was bricked up and a chimney stack with oven inserted. Additional evidence is also found in the fact that, when excavated for a

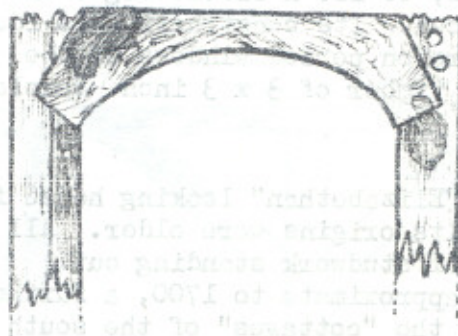
CONDOVERS - WEST TILGARY.



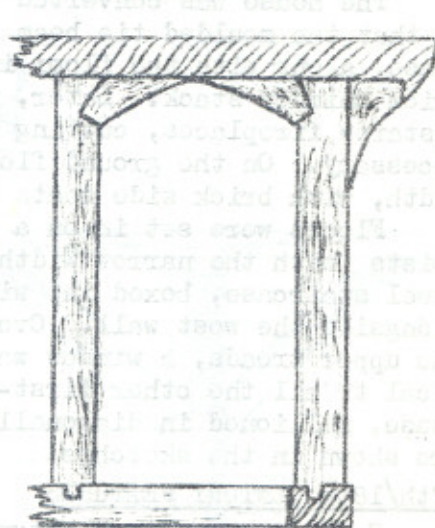
CONDOVERS - WEST ELEVATION. KNOWN FRAMING / ORIGINAL, AND TUDOR WINDOW POSITIONS.



FRAMING / PARTGETTING W. CROSSWING.



WEST WALL OF LOWER HALL.



INTERIOR DOOR FRAMING / CROSSWING TO HALL. ORIGINAL.



TYPICAL TUDOR MULLION SLOTS AND SILL. HALL. EAST SIDE. UPPER CHAMBER

garden wall in 1974, sections of floor levels containing pottery of 17th and initial 18th century (6) date, oyster shell, and bone were reported. So we may suggest an original hall with double crosswings, similarly jettied at each front. The hall had, near the south end, an arch-headed door front and rear, and another interior arch-headed entrance coming in from the N. crosswing (fragments of all three are retained, though hidden). The hall, open to the roof, was supported with matching chamfered arched braces (one superb example survives on the west, the eastern examples having been removed to allow a side gallery or passage to the 'new' bed-chambers on the inserted Tudor floor). Two original crown posts are retained in the hall.

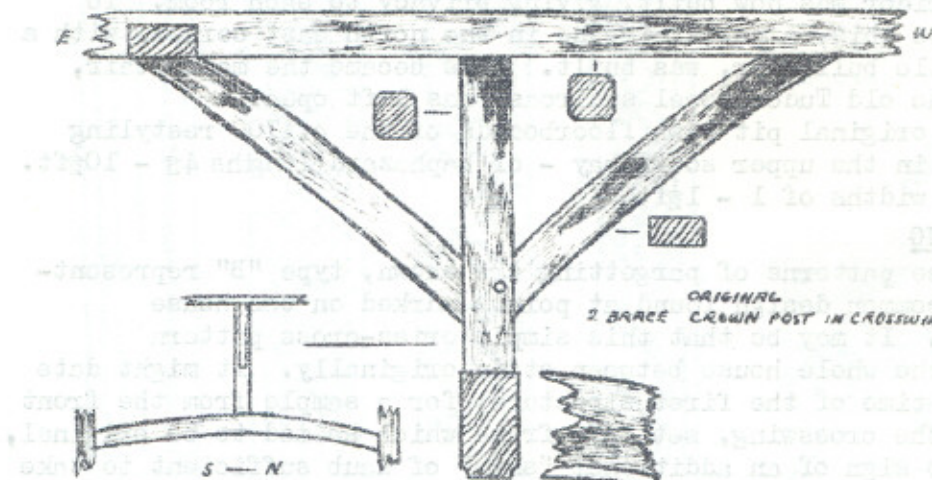
16th CENTURY FEATURES

The house was converted at an unspecified date, and it may be that the moulded tie beam of c.1540 is an addition of this phase, along with the floor insertion and the building of the red brick chimney stack. Later, with the addition of flues to the upstairs fireplaces, cutting the original tie-beams became necessary. On the ground floor, the Tudor stack is 8 feet in width, with brick side seats and alcoves for the handy jug.

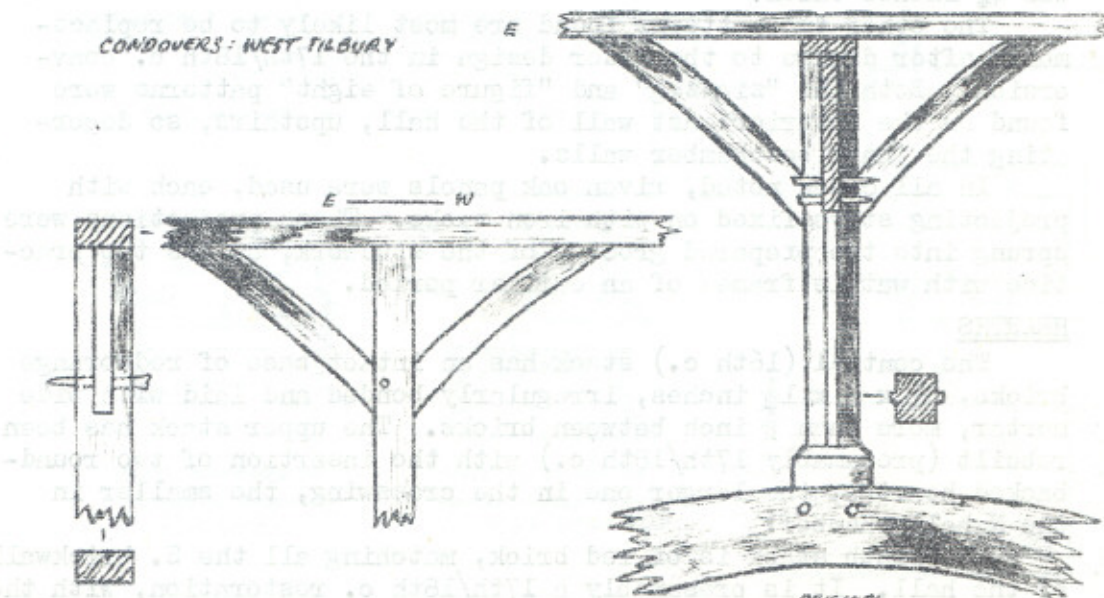
Floors were set in on a series of N.S. vertically laid joists (with the narrow width touching the boards) and a quarter-newel staircase, boxed in, with chamfered rails above, was cut in alongside the west wall. Over this, to let a little light onto the upper treads, a window was placed. Its construction is identical to all the other first-conversion period windows of the house, mullioned in diagonally-set timber of 3 x 3 inch. Samples are shown in the sketches.

17th/18th CENTURY FEATURES

Condoovers remained a typical "Elizabethan" looking house for something like 150 years, even if its origins were older. All its oak frame showed the patterns of studwork standing out between daub infills. At a date approximate to 1700, a further conversion took place, probably as the "cottages" of the south end were in danger of collapse through sinkage. Along with the bricking-up and chimney stack erection on the south crosswing site, the southernmost-bay of the hall had to be restored, partly with old crosswing material (7 floor joists and 4 slotted wall timbers) from floor right up to rafters. A new crown post was made. The division of the c.1700 framing from that of the original is marked strikingly by the colour of the timber, which is smoke blackened over the two northern bays, but clean on the southern. Fragments



CONDOVERS: WEST TILBURY



2 BRACE CROWNPOST, 17/18 MC. SOUTH HALL.

4 BRACE CROWNPOST — A 7TH HALL.

of the mediaeval frame were retained on the walls also (bressummers and wall posts). The ground sills were jacked up with red brick. Whereas in the Tudor refashioning, the upper chambers of the hall were connected by central doors from room to room, a side corridor was now built, giving privacy to each room. To facilitate this, a new staircase in the north east corner, with a neat little bullaster, was built. This became the main stair, though the old Tudor newel staircase was left open.

The original pit sawn floorboards of the c.1700 restyling survived in the upper south bay - of haphazard lengths $4\frac{1}{2}$ - $10\frac{1}{2}$ ft. long, in widths of 1 - $1\frac{1}{2}$ ft.

PARGETTING

Three patterns of pargetting are shown, type "B" representing the common design found at points marked on the house sketches. It may be that this simple criss-cross pattern covered the whole house between studs originally. It might date from the time of the first structure, for a sample from the front apex of the crosswing, set on a frame which seemed to be original, showed no sign of an additional "skim" of daub sufficient to take a fresh pattern onto an old daub block. The daub, with its panel, was $4\frac{1}{4}$ inches thick.

The other two patterns found are most likely to be replacements after damage to the older design in the 17th/18th c. conversion. Both the "zig-zag" and "figure of eight" patterns were found on the interior east wall of the hall, upstairs, so decorating the inner bedchamber walls.

In all cases noted, riven oak panels were used, each with projecting stays fixed on with iron tacks. These projections were sprung into the prepared grooves of the studwork, as was the practice with wattle frames of an earlier period.

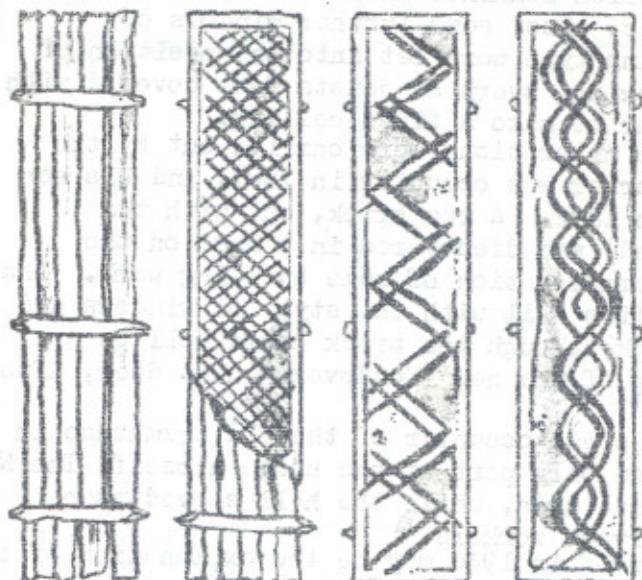
HEARTHES

The central (16th c.) stack has an intact base of red-orange bricks, $8\frac{1}{4}$ x 4 x $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches, irregularly bonded and laid with wide mortar, more than $\frac{1}{2}$ inch between bricks. The upper stack has been rebuilt (presumably 17th/18th c.) with the insertion of two round-backed hearths, the larger one in the crosswing, the smaller in the N.hall chamber.

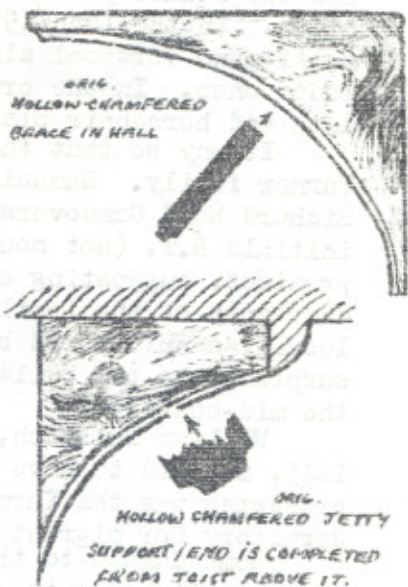
The south stack is of red brick, matching all the S. brickwall of the hall. It is presumably a 17th/18th c. restoration, with the later addition of a hearth on the upstairs south wall.

18th/20th CENTURY FEATURES

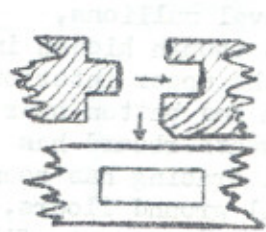
Few changes followed; part of the lower east wall was bricked with yellow stocks in the early mid-19th century, and this front



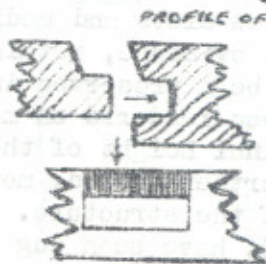
RIVEN OAK PANEL. EXTERIOR-NORTH HALL/ EXTERIOR S.WEST CROSSING. EXTERIOR-SOUTH HALL/ INTERIOR-NORTH HALL.



PARGETTING ON RIVEN OAK PANELS.

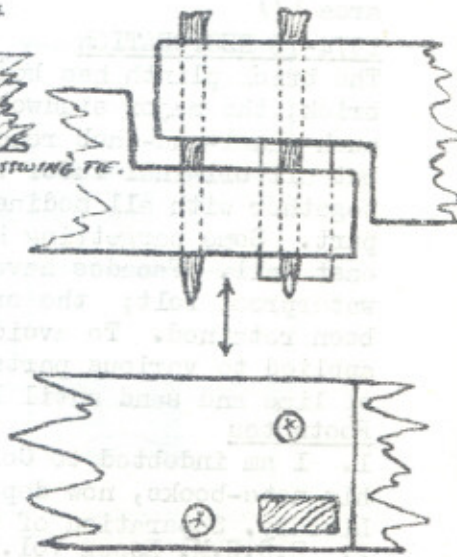


JOIST JOINTING IN ORIGINAL FRAME/CROSSING.



JOIST JOINTING IN TUDOR INSERTION OF HALL UPPER FLOOR.

PROFILE OF CROSTWING PIE.



TYPICAL SCARFS IN ORIGINAL FRAME.

CONDOVERS: WEST TILBURY. SKETCHES, NOT TO SCALE.

probably then received its skirting of the popular and new-fangled weatherboard. The jetty may then have been propped on its two square pillars, which remained until the 1974 restoration. In the 18th/19th c. also, some further windows of multi-pane vertical sliding type were let into the position of Tudor ones. In the crosswing, overhead joists were covered with lath and horsehair plaster to make a flush ceiling.

It may be that these alterations were carried out by the Turner family. Samuel Turner was occupier in 1807, and his son Richard held Condoovers in 1832. A red brick, cut with the initials R.T. (not moulded) was discovered in a shed on the premises, suggesting a commemoration of some building work. The date-span of the family fits well with the style of windows and locally-manufactured brick, though the brick could well be a surplus from the building of the new "Condoovers" next door, after the mid-century.

William Tallmach, who was occupier of the old farmhouse in 1845, is said to have used only part of the house himself. The N. crosswing was the farmhouse area, while the hall served as a dormitory for migrant harvest workers.

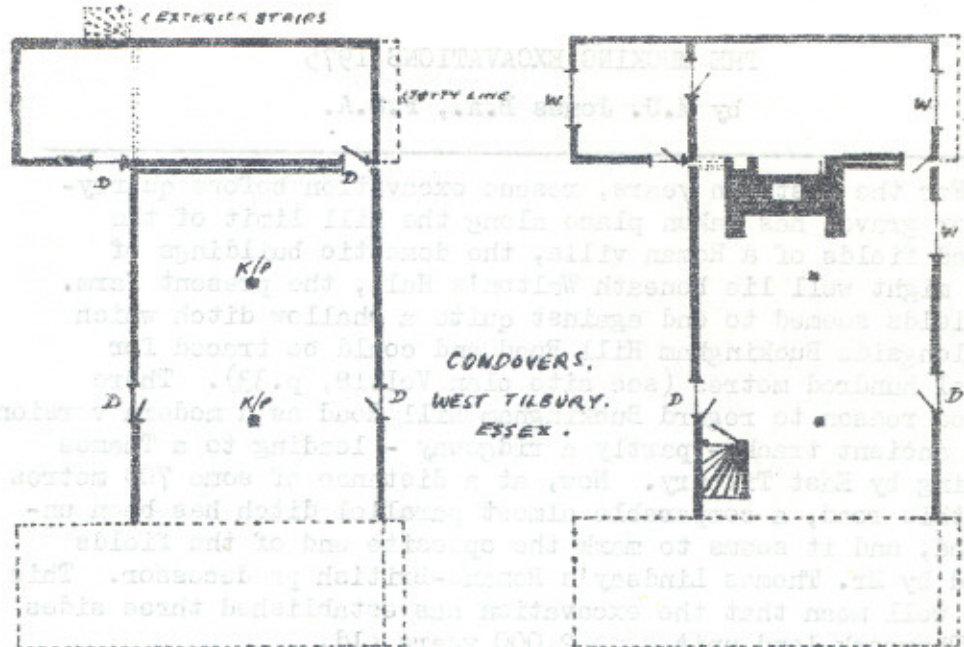
Bomb damage to the roof in 1940 may be the explanation of the steeply pitched cutting of the rafters of the western crosswing area (7)

1974-75 RESTORATION

The brick plinth has been entirely replaced with Southwater red brick; the major studwork and framing has been left intact, but much panel-and-daub removed. Some windows have been replaced, but all original Tudor window slots and mediaeval mullions, together with all mediaeval evidence, retained though hidden in part. Some pargetting has been preserved in the upper interior east wall. Facades have been rendered on mesh and batten over waterproof felt; the original height of the weatherboard has been retained. To avoid further spread, metal bracing has been applied to various parts of the structure. All ground floors, of lime and sand until 1974, have been dug out and concrete-filled.

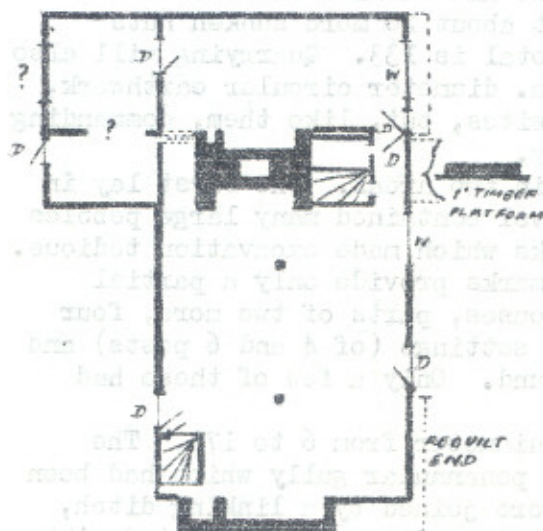
Footnotes

1. I am indebted to Col.A.E.Loftus,C.B.E. for these extracts from his note-books, now deposited with Thurrock Central Reference Library. Separation of Condoovers v. Morant's History of Essex.
2. R.C.H.M. Essex Vol.IV,1923.
3. Correspondence with C.Hewett. These dates also tally closely with Morant's details of the forming of Condoovers manor.
4. This beam is a re-utilised timber. Most of the Ship Inn is of mid 17th c. date.
5. Indenture releasing cottages, 29th November, 1697. Folder 249, Central Reference Library, Thurrock.

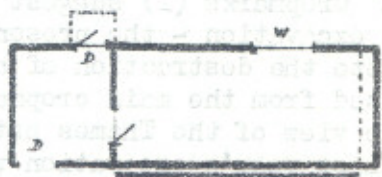


ORIGINAL PERIOD. GROUND.

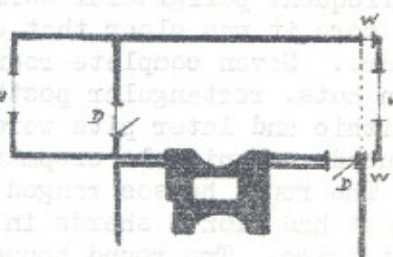
16th CENTURY RE-STYLING.



17th CENTURY, GROUND, CROSSWING DEMOLISHED.



ORIGINAL PERIOD (CROSSWING) UPPER, SEPARATE FROM HALL.



16th/17th CENTURY, UPSTAIRS CROSSWING LINKED TO UPPER HALL CHAMBERS.

6. Correspondence V. & A. Department of Ceramics, 1974.

7. Thurrock Gazette, 15 June 1940.

Thanks are due to Mr. and Mrs. R.L. Alliker for much time and kindness during visits to Condovers. The farmhouse has been saved and restored entirely due to their enthusiasm.