

The Landmark Trust

LAUGHTON PLACE History Album



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1981 and 1994**

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BASIC DETAILS

Purchased by Landmark	1978
Architect	John Warren, Architectural & Planning Partnership
Repairs & Refurbishment	2000
Environment Consultants	Hutton & Rostron
Specialist advice on terracotta	Catherine Woodfitt, Ingram Consultancy
Specialist lime contractors	IJP Building Conservation
Contractors	Quadric Limited

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Summary

The tower we see at Laughton today was built in 1534 by Sir William Pelham. It is all that survives of a house that existed from the 13th century until the 1950s, undergoing many alterations and rebuildings on the way. From 1401 until 1927 Laughton remained in the single ownership of the Pelham family, who owned great estates in Sussex. In the 15th and 16th centuries it was indeed their chief residence, and it bears the emblem that they traditionally used to mark their property: the Pelham Buckle, claimed to have been won by military prowess at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356.

There is evidence that the Pelhams rebuilt the existing moated manor-house at Laughton in the early 15th century, but a century later Sir William Pelham, who had succeeded his father in 1517, clearly thought it in need of further improvement. How much work he actually carried out is now uncertain, but it is likely that his plans, at least, were extensive. And until recently there survived bricks bearing the inscription 'lan de grace 1534 fut cest mayso faicte', indicating that he was responsible for more than the addition of the tower and some internal redecoration.

William Pelham belonged to a generation brought up with some knowledge of Renaissance ideas, of which the keenest follower was the young prince himself, later Henry VIII, whose near contemporary William was. It was in Henry's Court circle that the influence of Italy made its first tentative appearance, partly in rivalry with the equally Renaissance monarch, Francois I of France. William Pelham was present at their meeting on the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520. Through his two marriages he came into further contact with the Court, his second father-in-law being William Sandys, Knight of the Garter and Lord Chamberlain, and patron of Italian craftsmen.

Besides the tower, William seems at least to have rebuilt the forecourt, with a gatehouse and corner building. 17th-century illustrations show a house still very much of medieval type, but with an upper floor over the central hall, and this may have been inserted in 1534. Perhaps there was a porch as well, forming an elegant frontispiece, embellished like the tower with decoratively moulded terracotta, a new material which was itself something of an emblem for Renaissance enthusiasts.

The purpose of the tower again we do not know for certain, but in such marshy surroundings the likelihood is that it was intended to serve as an outlook, both for practical purposes and for pleasure. A number of such outlook towers survive from the 16th century. Its top floor was accessible only from the ground floor by the stair turret. The two middle floors, with the grandest rooms, were reached from the main house, which surrounded it on two sides.

By the end of the 16th century, however, Laughton had ceased to be a house of any importance. In 1580 Sir Thomas Pelham built a new house on higher ground at Halland and the family turned its back on the marshes. During the 17th century, Laughton became a tenanted farmhouse, which it remained for the rest of its existence.

There was still one more chapter to come in Laughton's architectural history. In 1715, Thomas Pelham, Duke of Newcastle, gave Laughton Place Farm to his younger brother Henry. These two were among the great figures of the 18th century, both as politicians (each served as Prime Minister) and architectural patrons: Thomas at Claremont, Henry at Esher Place, where William Kent transformed what remained of the Bishop's Palace into a Gothick mansion. Towards the end of his life, Henry Pelham resolved to do likewise at Laughton. He employed for this a Mr White, a carpenter who had been in charge at Esher, and so had worked under William Kent. He chose to remodel Laughton in a similar Gothick manner.

There is some evidence that Henry Pelham intended to have rooms for his own use at Laughton, but he died before the work was finished, in 1754.

The new house continued as the home of a tenant farmer, until 1927 when the property was sold. Virginia and Leonard Woolf briefly considered buying it, but concluded on reflection that it was 'unspeakably dreary'. The eventual new owner made repeated attempts to demolish the house, and eventually did so in the 1950s, leaving the tower standing on its own in the marsh.

RESTORATION OF THE TOWER

The demolition of the buildings around the tower in the 1950s and the removal of their support, had caused structural problems, probably there from the beginning, to become much worse. Large cracks opened up in the north and south elevations as the stair turret started to move away from the main building, and the east front bulged in the opposite direction. The large number of openings in the walls did not help, and collapse was probably only prevented by the steel joists of the concrete roof, inserted when the tower was used as an observation post in the Second World War.

It was in this sadly battered condition that Laughton was acquired by the Landmark Trust in 1978. The first work supervised by the architect, John Warren of APP, was therefore the urgent erection of a cradle of scaffolding to hold the tower, while methods of repair were considered. The movement that had caused the cracks had happened some time ago, so it seemed that the best course was to repair the building in its settled position, rather than try to force it back together. Steel ties were inserted at three levels, running in both directions, and later, as part of the general work on the walls, the cracks were stitched up with a

mixture new brick and lime mortar. The doors on the south and north elevations were blocked up, to reinforce the walls.

When plaster had been stripped from the walls, inside and out, they were closely examined for evidence of the tower's original appearance. As a result, a number of doors, windows, and fireplaces were discovered, including the terracotta windows in the south wall, the door leading into the present lavatory, and the remaining half of that on the first floor. It was also discovered that the buttresses of the stair turret were 'flying', with an open archway at their base. At the top of the tower, enough evidence was found in the parapet of the original crenellations for their reconstruction.

Work then began on the overhaul of the entire building. Decayed pointing was scraped out, worn bricks replaced with new handmade equivalents, new coping stones placed on the steps of the buttresses where they were missing, and the whole repointed. The method and mix for this was copied from a small area of original pointing that had been found inside the blocked buttress arches. The bulge in the east front had caused the pediment to come away from the main wall, allowing the weather to penetrate and damage the brickwork. This was all rebuilt, with a new cornice, coping stones and lead flashing.

The roof and internal floors were renewed completely, and the two new additions, known as The Blisters, added at the back of the building, to provide a space for the bathroom, and to link the second floor to the stair turret. Access to the first floor was provided with a new oak stair rising from the ground floor room. The floorboards of the first floor are also oak.

While all this work was going on, the terracotta was also undergoing repair. In some places, this had fractured into several large pieces; these were fixed back together by inserting glass fibre dowels, and then any gaps filled with epoxy resin coloured with brick dust. Where the material had actually started to crumble, it was impregnated with epoxy, to bind it together. Missing sections, such as a sill or the head of a window, were renewed but left plain.

The window joinery on the east front was repaired, as was the door. All the windows were reglazed. New door and window latches were designed in the form of the Pelham buckle, which also adorns the hand-printed curtains.

Round the exterior, the ground was lowered by several inches, to return it to its original level, and a new path formed. During this work, the footings of earlier houses were discovered. The bridge was also rebuilt, and the moat excavated, under the supervision of archaeologists. In 1981, Laughton was ready to receive its first visitors, after three years work.



Laughton Place in about 1925

Introduction

The tower we see at Laughton today, built in 1534 by Sir William Pelham, bears the name of two successive houses of which it formed a prominent part. The first of these was mainly medieval, but was enlarged and possibly remodelled in the 1530s, when the tower was added. The second, constructed partly from the materials of its predecessor, was built around the base of the tower between 1753 -1760 at the order of the Hon. Henry Pelham, probably to the designs of a master carpenter-cum-architect named Fuller White.

This later house can be seen in a number of sketches and photographs, ranging in date from soon after it was built until just before it was demolished in 1939. Wings projected on either side of the tower, rather like a whalebone crinoline. The two parts together, for they were never quite one, were the product of opposite, but similarly distinctive, periods in English architectural history. Each was an example of the native adaptation of a style that flourished on the continent, but was never wholly accepted here: first of all the Tudor, or Gothic, Renaissance of the early 16th century; and then the Rococo, or Classical, Gothick of the mid-18th century.

In this architectural character, Laughton Place resembles two other houses; and both, in either the earlier or later period, had links with the Pelham family, which owned the manor of Laughton from 1401 until 1927. One is the Vyne, in Hampshire, built by Lord Sandys, father-in-law of William Pelham, and later embellished with Rococo Gothick decoration by John Chute, a leading member of Horace Walpole's Committee of Taste. The other is Esher Place, in Surrey, a Palace of the Bishops of Winchester, owned in the 18th century by the Hon. Henry Pelham, for whom the architect William Kent transformed the great Tudor gatehouse into a substantial Gothick mansion.

All such ramifications, and much else, will be explored in the pages that follow. Our knowledge of the history of Laughton has increased greatly in the last ten years, as the result of archaeology and architectural studies, and new historical research, a rise in activity prompted largely by the restoration of the tower by the Landmark Trust in 1978-81. These findings have now been drawn together in a series of articles in *Sussex Archaeological Collections Vol 129*, published in 1992.

These articles are best read in full, along with earlier works such as the Rev. W.A. Pearson's *The Village of the Buckle*. This album simply provides a summary of the existing knowledge, together with background information for which, inevitably, there was no space in the more scholarly works.

Laughton Place – the Medieval Manor

Early history

The history of Laughton goes back much further than the remaining building on the site. It existed as a manor before the Conquest, when it was held by Earl Godwin. In Norman times it passed to the Count of Mortain, and then to the family of de Aquila, who held the estate in that part of Sussex known as the Honour of Pevensey, from 1110 until 1231.

An Honour was the name given to the great estates formed after the Conquest and held 'in chief', or directly from the king. Some had an identity quite separate from the successive barons on whom medieval monarchs might bestow them for a lifetime. If such an Honour was allowed to descend for several generations in a single family, however, it was common for their name to become attached to it. So the Honour of Pevensey was often known as the Honour of the Eagle, a name which stuck to the property long after the family of de Aquila (which means eagle in Latin) itself had died out.

Inevitably, as time progressed, such Honours changed in shape as properties were added to them or taken away, or they became divided by inheritance. So, for example, for ten years from 1283 - 1293, the manor of Laughton was separated from the Honour and taken in hand by the King. Accounts for these years, happily surviving, have enabled John Farrant and Christopher Whittick to discover what buildings existed then; an aisled hall, a solar and a hall chamber (this built of stone), a chapel and a kitchen.

All of these stood within a moat crossed at one time by four bridges, although the remains of only one were found, on the north-east side, in 1984. The moat is thought to have been dug in the middle of the 13th century, by an earlier holder of the Honour, Peter of Savoy. The authors suspect that it was he who added the first of the new buildings to an existing manorial farm, as a hunting lodge, forming a core which was then enlarged by later owners.

Laughton, with other Eagle lands, was granted in 1317 to Bartholomew de Badlesmere, and after 1322 to his son, Giles. Now, it was Pevensey Castle itself that was detached from its earlier estates, since it was not included in the Badlesmere lordship. When Giles, Lord Badlesmere, died in c.1338 without male heirs, Laughton passed first to his widow (whose 3rd husband was Guy de Bryan, owner of Woodsford Castle, now a Landmark) and then, on her death in 1359, to his sister, Maud. She was the wife of John de Vere, 7th Earl of Oxford, so that Laughton effectively became his. Meanwhile, its house had undergone another round of repair and rebuilding around 1338, when the accounts give payments for roofing in various materials, carpentry and plastering.

First signs of the Pelhams

The family of Pelham now appears briefly on the scene, in the person of John Pelham, Clerk, who in 1360 stood as one of the executors of the Earl of Oxford. In this capacity he had various dealings with the manor of Laughton, as its feoffee, or representative, in 1369, and again in 1371, when it was settled on Matilda, the widow of the 8th Earl of Oxford.

The Village of the Buckle quotes an 18th-century genealogy, *The British Compendium*, which in its descent of the Pelham family asserts that in the 30th year of the reign of Edward III, 1356-7, a Richard Pelham was living at Laughton, and had two sons, John and Walter. No other confirmation of this has been found, and indeed in their book *Some Early Pelhams*, the Hon. Mrs Arthur Pelham and David Maclean have shown that the Earl of Oxford's follower was the son of another John Pelham, and not Richard Pelham. On the other hand, no records survive to show who was actually living at Laughton at this period, when it was only used occasionally by its overlords, and could well have had a resident bailiff.

In 1390, the 9th Earl of Oxford, a favourite of Richard II, disgraced himself by running off with one of the Queen's maids. For this and other sins, he was attainted, or suspended, by the Crown, losing all his estates. He died two years later, but his estates, with most of the Eagle Lands, were afterwards restored to his heirs. Laughton, being the property of his mother, escaped these upheavals, and was to retain its separate status in the years to come.

In 1401, Sir John Pelham, Constable of Pevensey Castle, leased the manor of Laughton from the Countess of Oxford for £60 per annum. Sir John was also, as an addition to his office, granted the remainder of the Honour of the Eagle by the king, which the de Veres had therefore to give up. Throughout the 15th century, in fact, the Honour seems to have been attached automatically to the office of Constable. There seems to have been an element of cunning, therefore,

in his agreement with the Countess whereby Laughton remained under her ownership, with himself simply as tenant. Unlike the lordship of the Honour of the Eagle, which would revert to the Crown on his death, to be given to the next Constable, a lease could be passed on to his own heirs.

Sir John's rent roll of 1403 shows him still paying rent for Laughton, and this is again confirmed in the subsidy roll of 1411/12. It seems clear that he intended to make this his home, when not required by duty to be at Pevensey, or in attendance on the King. In 1409, Bishop Robert Reade granted a licence to the Pelhams 'to choose for themselves a fit and proper person, as their Priest and Confessor, to administer the Holy Eucharist, and to perform Mass in the Oratory or Chapel of Pevensey and in their manor of Laughton.'

The house at Laughton was probably still little more than a hunting lodge, if a fairly grand one able to accommodate a nobleman's household for short periods. Naturally, there were improvements that the Pelhams wished to make. Building work was soon underway, and it is easy to imagine a new hall, with additional service rooms and lodgings, besides the Constable's own chambers. Whittick and Farrant have found a reference to 'the lord's tower' in 1421-2, which was probably a solar tower of the kind then becoming fashionable, forming a set of rooms at the high end of the hall. The existence of such a tower may have set a precedent for the Tudor remodelling of the house.

After Sir John's death in 1429, his widow appointed John Halle, Esquire as 'Steward of her said manor of Laughton and hundred of Shiplake, and grants to him, for executing the same office, five marks per annum during her life.' From her, Laughton passed to Sir John's son, another John. Technically, he was still a tenant of the de Vere family, but he seems to have regarded Laughton as absolutely his own. This John was also Constable of Pevensey and lord of the Eagle Lands for a time, but like his father he saw Laughton as a distinct property, to which he meant to acquire full title.

The fulfilment of this wish was made easier by the eclipse in the fortunes of the de Veres, brought on by their too active support of the Lancastrian cause, which ended in the beheading of the 12th Earl of Oxford and his eldest son in 1461. When, in the short period of Lancastrian rule after 1464, the 13th Earl made a bid to regain control of Laughton, his claim was disputed by Sir John Pelham. The case was put to arbitration in 1466, with a result that must have been, at the least, satisfactory to both. The Earl agreed to renounce all claims in the future, in return for a payment of 1,000 marks from Sir John (a mark was 13s.4d). It was from 1466, therefore, that the Pelhams could count themselves full owners of Laughton, which was to remain part of their estates until 1927.

THE PELHAM FAMILY IN THE MIDDLE AGES

Before starting on the next phase of Laughton's history, and especially its rebuilding by William Pelham in the reign of Henry VIII, there is the story of his ancestors to tell, what they did and where they came from. The answer to the last question can vary slightly, according to taste.

On the one hand the Pelhams are said to descend from Saxon thanes, living in the Pelham villages in Hertfordshire in the days of Edward the Confessor, who, with early signs of their later political skills, successfully held on to their possessions after 1066. On the other hand their forebears are said to have been Norman barons, named de Bec, who seized these same Pelham villages for themselves under licence from William the Conqueror and then, in a spirit of reconciliation, changed their name to that of their dwelling place.

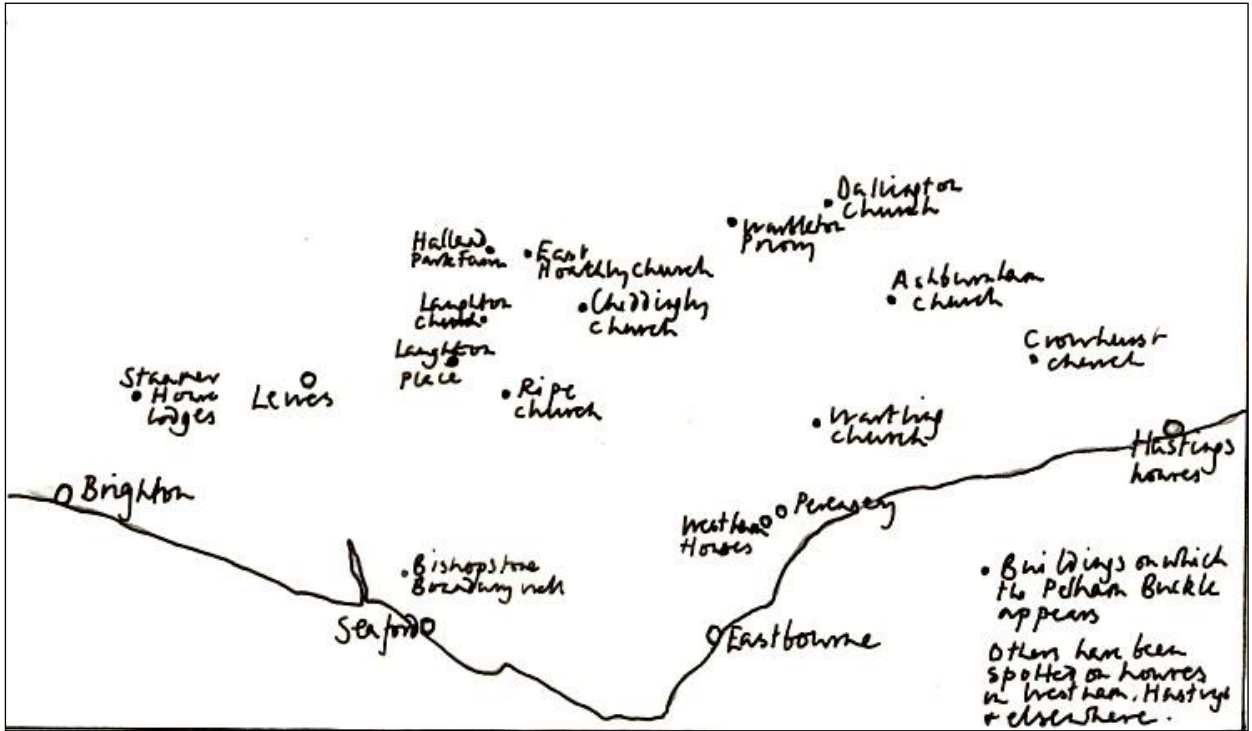
Whatever the truth, the Pelhams make their appearance in recorded history in the 12th century, first of all in Hertfordshire, then in London. Towards the end of the 13th century, a branch of the family emerges in Sussex, holding land at Hailsham and then Warbleton, from which point they never looked back. Although they retained links with Hertfordshire, Sussex became their chief place

of residence. There they set about acquiring land, and were soon found holding county offices, such as Coroner and Sheriff, before setting out to represent the shire in Parliament.

The position in the family tree of the first member of the family to achieve real fame is not quite clear. His name was John, and he accompanied the Black Prince on the expedition to France that was to culminate in the capture of the French King at the Battle of Poitiers in 1356. He is generally agreed to have been the same John who was executor to the Earl of Oxford, in whose entourage he probably went to France, since the Earl was a commander on that campaign. In documents relating to John Pelham's duties as executor he is referred to as 'clerk' or 'Parson of the Church of Wykeham', and once, conflictingly, as 'knight.' The title of clerk could denote a man of education, who had not taken full vows. If he was in charge of the Earl's business affairs, it would not have been unusual for him to be rewarded with a parson's living, nor even to have taken arms.



The Black Prince with King John of France after the Battle of Poitiers.



The Pelham Buckle on Wartling church...



and on Laughton Place.

The Pelham Buckle

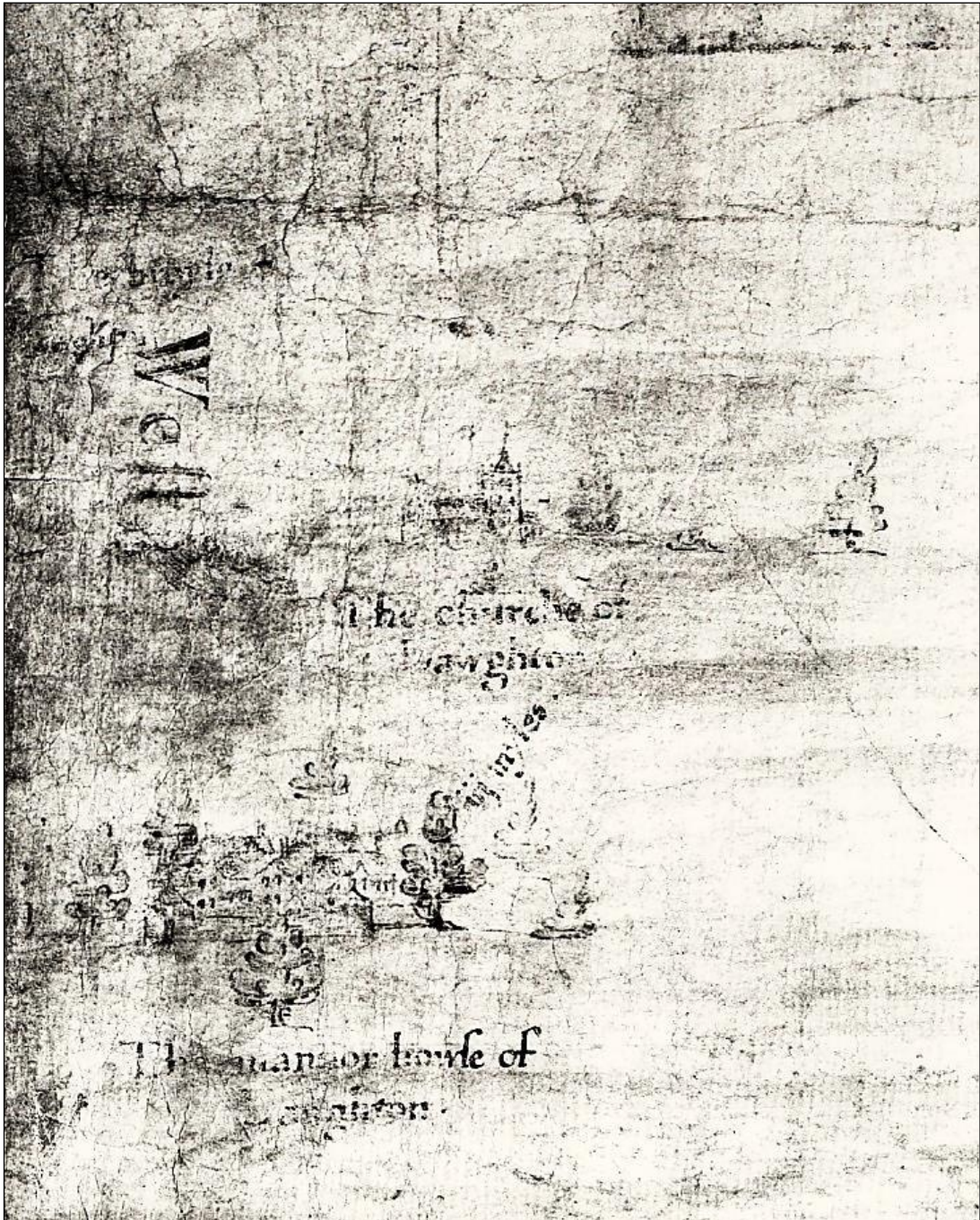
It was at the Battle of Poitiers that the act of glory took place which earned John Pelham his fame in family annals. The story of the battle is told in the Chronicles of Froissart. These describe how, at the end of the day, the French King gave himself up to a Knight from Artois, from whom he was quickly separated by a crush of other hopeful captors, all eager for a share of the ransom. The Black Prince, not knowing this, sent the Earl of Warwick and Lord Cobham into the field to discover what had happened to the King. They found him surrounded by 'upwards of ten knights and squires' who all claimed 'to have challenged him at the same time as belonging to each of them.'

What the Chronicle omits to say is that foremost among this throng were two gentlemen from Sussex, John Pelham and Roger de la Warr, who succeeded in winning from the King tokens of submission; for Pelham the buckle of his swordbelt; for de la Warr the crampet, or tip of the scabbard. Both men immediately adopted these as badges or emblems, to be borne by their families in memory of the deed.

Such devices, quite distinct from crest or coat of arms, were common enough in the Middle Ages, and generally derived from an exploit, or from the name of the holder. They were used very much as a logo or stamp is used today, to mark the ownership of anything from livestock to buildings. Few have survived into recent times, the Stafford Knot being almost the only one besides the Pelham Buckle.

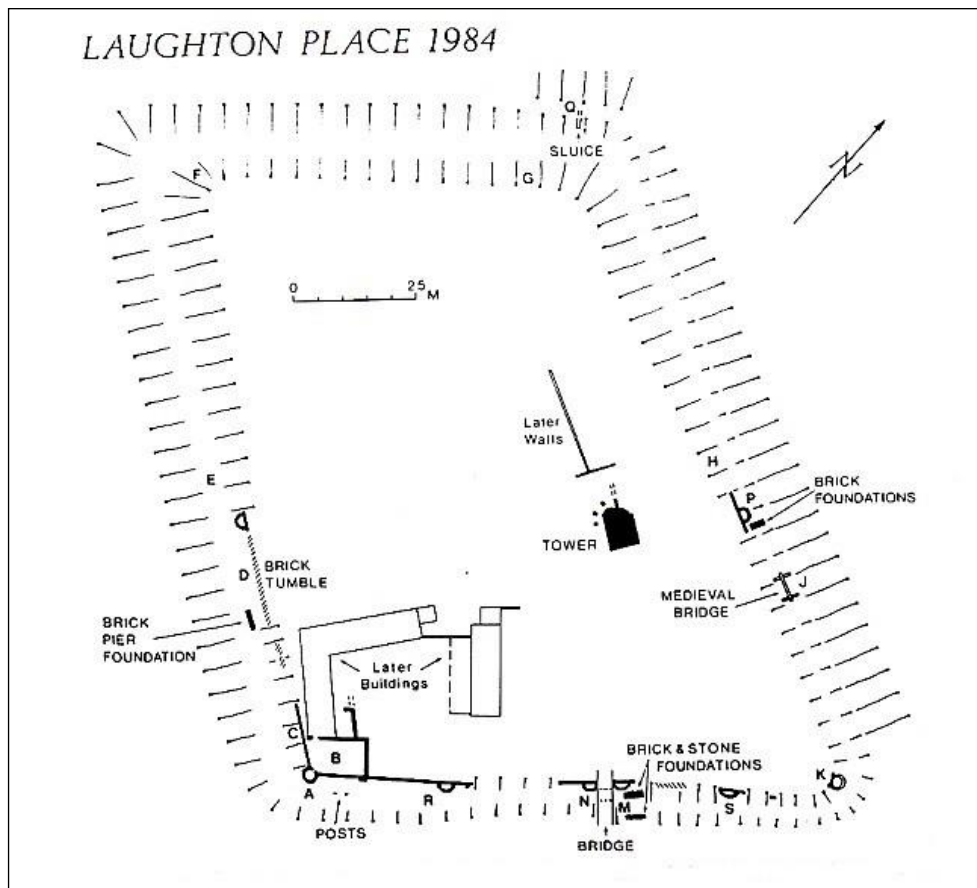
It has usually been assumed, because the family adopted the Buckle so readily as its badge, that John Pelham of Poitiers must have been in the direct line of descent, and therefore father to the next and equally famous John Pelham, Constable of Pevensey Castle. The evidence for the first John Pelham being at least partly in Holy Orders is not the only line of objection to this. In their book

Some Early Pelhams (1931), the Hon. Mrs Arthur Pelham and David Mclean provide evidence to show that the father of John the Constable was Thomas



On this undated map of lands near Pevensey on the Sussex coast, Laughton is just visible as a jumble of buildings inside a high wall (bottom left).

Pelham, of Warbleton, Coroner of Sussex. They suggested that the two Johns were in fact first cousins: in c.1325 another John Pelham, almost certainly brother of Thomas Pelham of Warbleton, married Joan Finch, a member of the family of the Earls of Winchelsea, and had a son, John. It was very probably he who was present at the Battle of Poitiers, and being childless himself, passed on to the descendants of his younger cousin the badge earned by his own prowess.



Plan of Laughton Place in 1984 to show locations of areas of archaeological investigations/discoveries.

Sir John Pelham, Constable of Pevensey

John the Constable did not stand in need of much reflected glory, being fully capable of earning it himself. He first appears in the service of Henry Bolingbroke, son of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster. He earned their trust and favour so well that in 1393 he was made Constable of Gaunt's strategically important castle at Pevensey. He continued to serve the Lancastrian cause, holding Pevensey against the king's forces when Henry arrived in England in 1399, intending to seize the crown from Richard II. S.K. Walker *in English Historical Review Vol 106* (1991) has shown that this played an important part in diverting attention from Henry's real plan of landing in the north at Ravenspur, before marching on to Pontefract.

More interesting still is Mr Walker's interpretation of a letter which because of its terms of endearment was long thought to have been written to John Pelham by his second wife, Joan. Doubts as to its authenticity arose when it transpired that she had scarcely then been widowed from her first husband and probably only remarried the following year. Moreover there is no other evidence that John was ever at Pontefract. It is now suggested, much more convincingly, that it was in fact written by John himself to Henry. The devotion is not that of a wife but the then equally powerful one of a loyal follower to his lord:

My dere Lord, I recommande me to yowr hie Lordeshipp wyth hert and body and all my pore myght; and wyth all this I think zow, as my dere Lorde, derest and best yloved of all erthlyche Lordes; I say for me, and thank yhow my dere Lord, with all thys that I say before, off your comfortable lettre, that ze send me from Pownefraite, that com to me on Mary Madgaleyn day; ffor by my trowth I was never so gladd as when I herd by your lettre that ye warr stronge ynogh, with the grace off God, for to kepe you fro the malyce of your ennemys.

And dere Lord, if it lyk to your hyee Lordeschipp, that als soon als mycht, that I myght her off your gracious spede, whyche God Almyghty contynue and encesse. And my dere Lord iff it lyk zow for to know off my ffare, I am her by layd in manner off a sege, with the counte of Sussex, Sudray and a great parcyll of Kentte, so that I may noght out nor none vitayles gette me, bot wyth myche hard. Wharfore my dere iff it lyk zow, by the

awyse off zowr wyse counsell, for to sett remedye off the salvation off yhower Castell, and wtstand the malyce of ther schires foresayde. And also that ye be fullyche enformed off there grett malyce wyrkers in these schyres which yt haffes so dispytfully wroght to zow, and to zowr castell, to yhowr men and to zour tenaunts ffore this cuntree, have yai wastede for a grett whyle. Farewele my dere Lorde, the Holy Trinyte zow kepe fro zowr ennemys, and son send mye gud tythings off yhow. Ywryten at Pavensay in the castell on Saynt Jacobe day last past,

By yhower awnn pore,
J. Pelham

When Henry became King, he did not forget those who had helped him. John Pelham was created Knight of the Bath, King's swordbearer, and confirmed in his position as Constable of Pevensey; at the same time, as said already, he was granted the original lands belonging to the castle, known as the Honour of the Eagle, and amounting to about one sixth of the whole of Sussex. The post of Bailiff of the Rape of Hastings came next, followed in 1408 by the Chief Butlership of the Ports of Sussex, and in 1412 by the full Lordship of the Rape of Hastings, adding further to his estates. He was a trusted councillor to the king, and one of his executors. He was also Privy Councillor to the young king, Henry V, for whom he acted as Treasurer, on occasion, and as ambassador over the question of his marriage with Princess Katherine of France.

Sir John was undoubtedly a fine example of chivalrous knighthood; wise, loyal, reliable and courageous. He was respectably pious as well, as is shown by his grant of land at Warbleton to the priory of the Holy Trinity at Hastings, whose original buildings were falling into the sea. All these qualities of which he was so liberally possessed made him a suitable warder for youthful royal prisoners. The Earl of March and the young King James I of Scotland were entrusted to his care, to supervise their education and upbringing, while keeping them under restraint.

With King James he succeeded so well that, one account says, on his release `it appeared in all his behaviour and manners, in what company so ever he came,

that his bringing up had been according to his nature, neither of them differing from his birth, and the quality of a noble and most virtuous Prince.'

Sir John died in 1429, leaving a reputation that his son, a third John Pelham, found it rather difficult to live up to. He began well, taking over the position of Constable from his father; he was also Chamberlain of the Household to Queen Katherine, and married one of her ladies in waiting. But he then seems to have fallen from favour, to the extent of losing the Lordship of the Rape of Hastings, which he had been allowed to inherit from his father, saving only three of its manors. He was also replaced as Constable of Pevensey Castle. To compensate for these losses, he made sure to consolidate his other possessions in Sussex, in particular by the purchase of Laughton in 1466.

Throughout the remainder of the 15th century, the Pelhams occupied themselves at home on their chief manor of Laughton, nursing their estates, experimenting with the iron industry and adding to and increasing both as the opportunity occurred. Shrewdly, they avoided the scramble after positions of power which were, at that time, more than usually precarious. It was not until the early 16th century that another member of the family emerged who was to feel the attraction of the court, and seek the service of the king.

William Pelham and the rebuilding of Laughton Place

It has been known for a long time that William Pelham, when in his late forties, embarked on a programme of building at Laughton. The evidence for this has lain not only in the tower which survives but in some terracotta plaques which were built into the succeeding, 18th-century house. These bore the Pelham Buckle, along with the comprehensive inscription 'lan de grace 1534 fut cest mayso faicte' [in the year of grace 1534 was this house made] and the initials WP. These were later removed to other buildings (one is at Halland Park Farm), but drawings were made of them in the 1850s by W.H. Blaauw.

The actual extent of the work carried out is less certain, although recent archaeology has made some aspects of it much clearer. We are now sure, for instance, that while William was in one important respect looking back to earlier models, he also set about transforming his property along lines then fashionable in court circles. And he did this on a scale, and at a level of sophistication, which could only be guessed at until recently.

William Pelham lived in very interesting times. Born about 1486, he was older than Henry VIII by only four or five years; living until 1538, he almost spans the period in which the influence of the Italian Renaissance made its first tentative appearance in England before it was rejected, albeit temporarily, by the isolationist policy which followed the break with Rome.

The way had been paved by the priests and scholars of the late 15th century, men such as Bishop William Wayneflete who had travelled to Rome and seen what was happening there. It was Wayneflete who remodelled Esher Place around 1480 on a courtyard plan, and added a tall brick gatehouse. Of the tower he built at Farnham Castle Nikolaus Pevsner wrote: 'There is a sense in which it is more Renaissance than the gauche ornamental system of a gatehouse like that of Layer Marney.'

One man who was strongly attracted to the new learning, and who was in a position to sway the opinion of others, was Cardinal Wolsey. He was quick to encourage the young king, already well prepared for it by Thomas More, in the same direction. Henry VIII as a young man modelled himself on the perfect Renaissance prince, and seemed the very personification of this ideal, skilled as he was in all the arts and sciences, from music to horsemanship, from scholarship to government. In his pursuit of excellence he was, no doubt, spurred on by a sense of rivalry with Francois I of France, a passionate student of the Renaissance.

Both monarchs vied to attract Italian artists and craftsmen to their courts, but in this Henry was at a disadvantage; the climate of his country was hateful to the Italians. More particularly, foreigners of any description, but especially those seeking work, were equally hateful to his solidly conservative subjects, and liable to be mobbed by them.

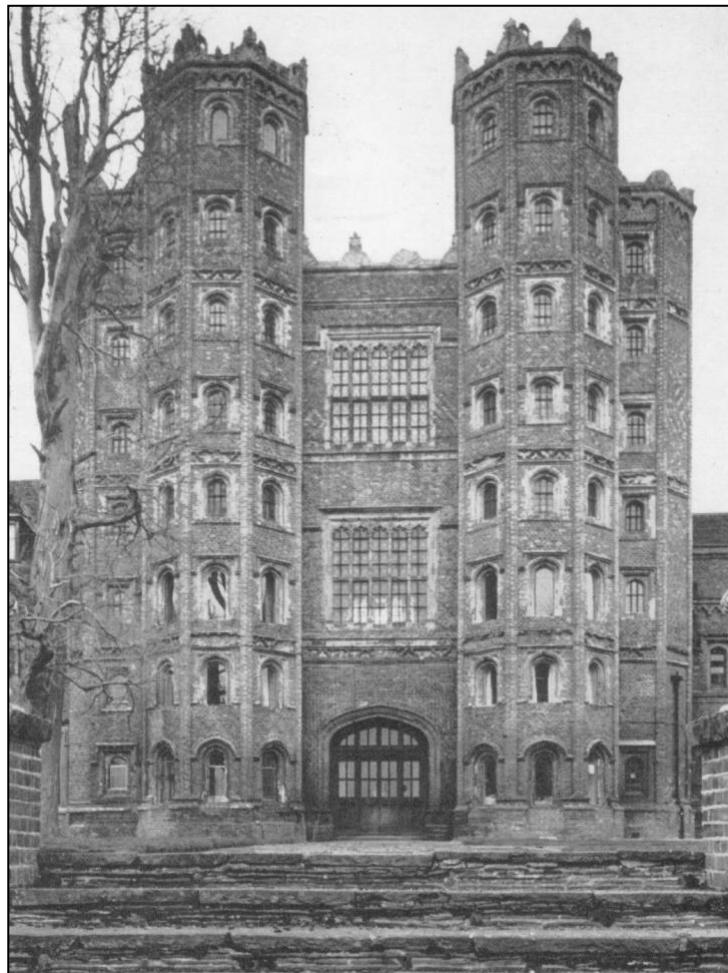
A few Italian craftsmen did come to England, however, the most notable of whom was Torrigiani, who designed the tomb of Henry VII in Westminster Abbey. A number of other works, in churches and houses, have been ascribed to Italians, but it is questionable in just how many cases they were themselves present, rather than native craftsmen who had learnt their skills. The use of terracotta, in particular, is subject to just such uncertainty.

Terracotta ornament

The suitability of this fine, hard, and easily moulded material for decorative purposes had been rediscovered in Lombardy in the 14th century, and adorned with Classical ornament from about 1475. It was introduced to this country by Italians but, the technique being only a refinement of brickmaking, native craftsmen were quick to pick it up and use it to advantage for windows, chimneys, wall surfaces and anything else which, to their Gothic trained eyes,

seemed better for some lively decoration. They worked as happily in Classical idiom as in traditional, the new styles simply giving them a wider choice.

Buildings with this terracotta ornament are most common in East Anglia: East Barsham Hall and Great Snoring Rectory for example or, on a more spectacular scale, Layer Marney, the splendid gatehouse of a mansion begun but never completed by Lord Marney in about 1520. Even its 'battlements' are of terracotta, semicircles supported by dolphins. In the church nearby the Classical tombs of Lord Marney and his son are also made of terracotta.



The gatehouse at Layer Marney (c. 1520).

Another house where this material is used to marvellous effect on walls and windows is Sutton Place in Surrey, built by Sir Richard Weston, Treasurer to Henry VIII. And, less elaborately but with equal skill, it was also used at Laughton Place in Sussex, in a new curtain wall and, at the very least, on the tower added to the main house. Here corbel-table, hood-moulds, windows and doors provide a confident display of garlands, arabesques, swan's necks and other flowing designs, together with a sprinkling of Buckles.

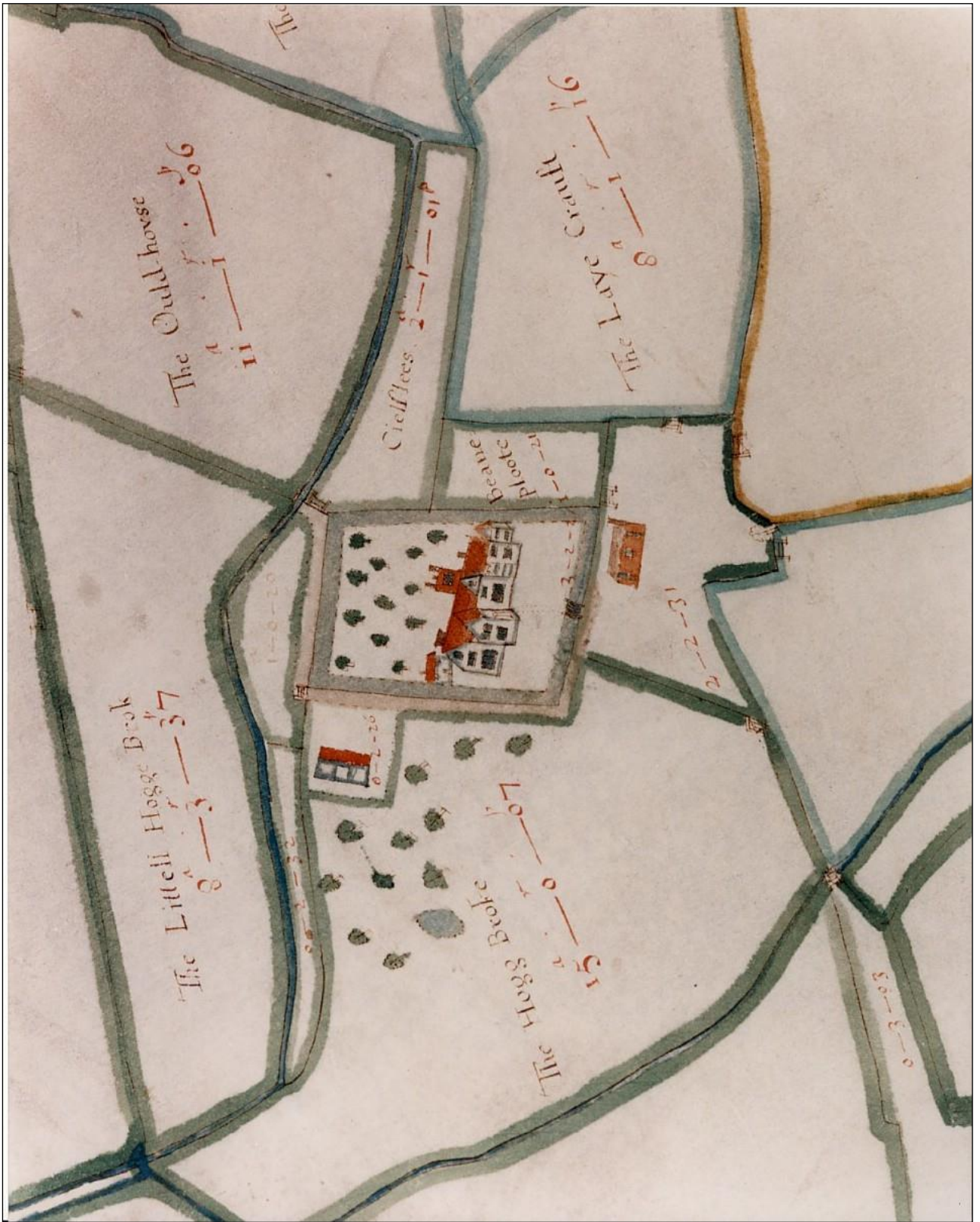
Lord Marney and Sir Richard Weston were what are known as Tudor 'new men', raised to power and wealth by the patronage of the king. It was mainly in these court circles that Italianate fashions were followed, although other old families besides the Pelhams were known to favour it in a small way: tombs of the de la Warr family at Boxgrove and Broadwater in Sussex display similar motifs in stone to those at Laughton, for example.

In almost every case, however, whether in terracotta, stone or wood, Classical Renaissance designs were limited to decorative detail within a Gothic architectural framework: on the ribs of a vault, the members of a Perpendicular chancel screen, the jambs of a pointed Tudor window. It achieved its most complete realisation only in the tombs already mentioned and in temporary structures such as pavilions at a pageant or, most extravagantly, at the Tournament of Guisnes, known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold.

Although William Pelham did not hold high office nor enjoy royal favour to any marked extent, he did serve at court, was present at the Field of the Cloth of Gold in 1520, and attended the king to another meeting with Francois in 1533 between Calais and Boulogne, when he was knighted. Moreover, his two marriages brought him into contact with two leading men at court who were among the most responsive to Renaissance ideas.

William Pelham's first wife was Mary Carew, whose brother Sir Nicholas was Master of the King's Horse, a position of great trust, close to the king. As a young man, Nicholas Carew had spent some years at the French court. According to Hall's Chronicle, when he and his fellows `came again into England, they were all Frenche, in eatyng, drynkyng and aparell, yea, and in Frenche vices and bragges, so that ... nothing by them was praised, but if it were after the Frenche turne' - which, indirectly, meant Italian. As the use of French for inscriptions was no longer normal by 1534, it is amusing to trace in William's use of this language the possible influence of the francophile brother-in-law, Nicholas Carew.

By then, however, Mary Carew had died, and William was married again, to another Mary, daughter of William Sandys. Sandys was another distinguished member of the court who served as Treasurer of Calais, and organiser of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, was created Knight of the Garter, and subsequently Lord Chamberlain. Incorporated into the house he built, the Vyne, is not only Flemish glass with Renaissance designs, but also a terracotta medallion similar to those at Hampton Court, which are known to be the work of a Florentine, de Maiano. In the library, the linenfold panelling also has Renaissance motifs carved on it, and above the door is an escutcheon supported by a pair of putti. It was hardly surprising that when William Pelham came to rebuild his own house, he was influenced by the taste of his father-in-law.



Laughton Estate Map of 1641 by Anthony Everenden

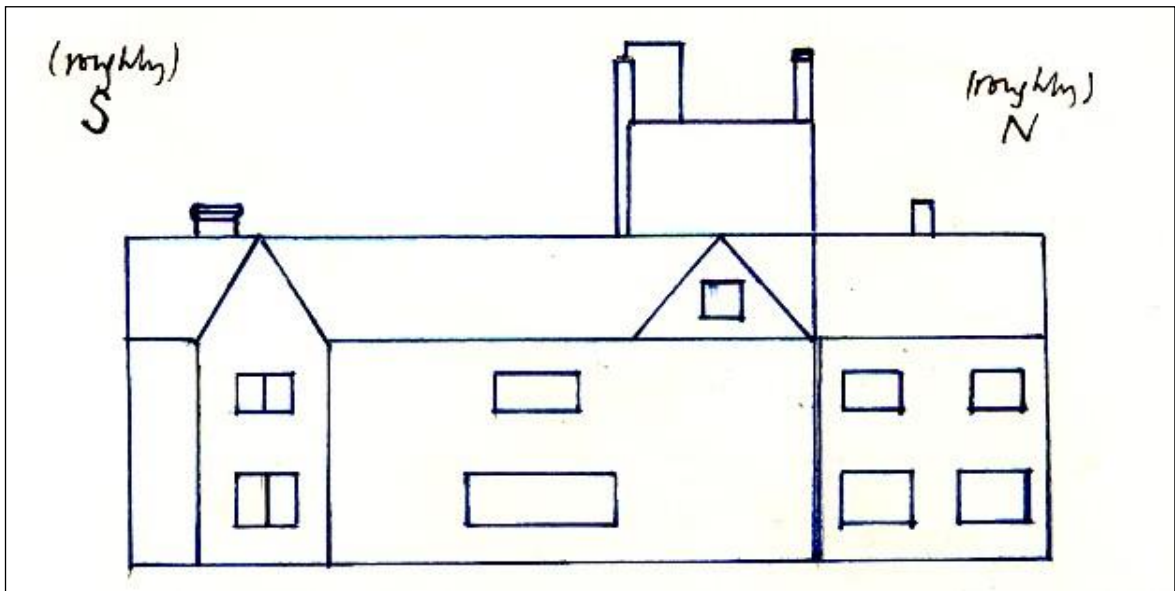
The house and its surroundings

However, a map of Laughton and its estate, drawn by Anthony Everenden in 1641, although not wholly reliable, shows a house of basically medieval type. There is a hall lit by a large window, with rooms leading off it at each end, and a two-storey porch set asymmetrically in the front, all clearly shown in the isometric drawing based on the map by a local historian, John Houghton.

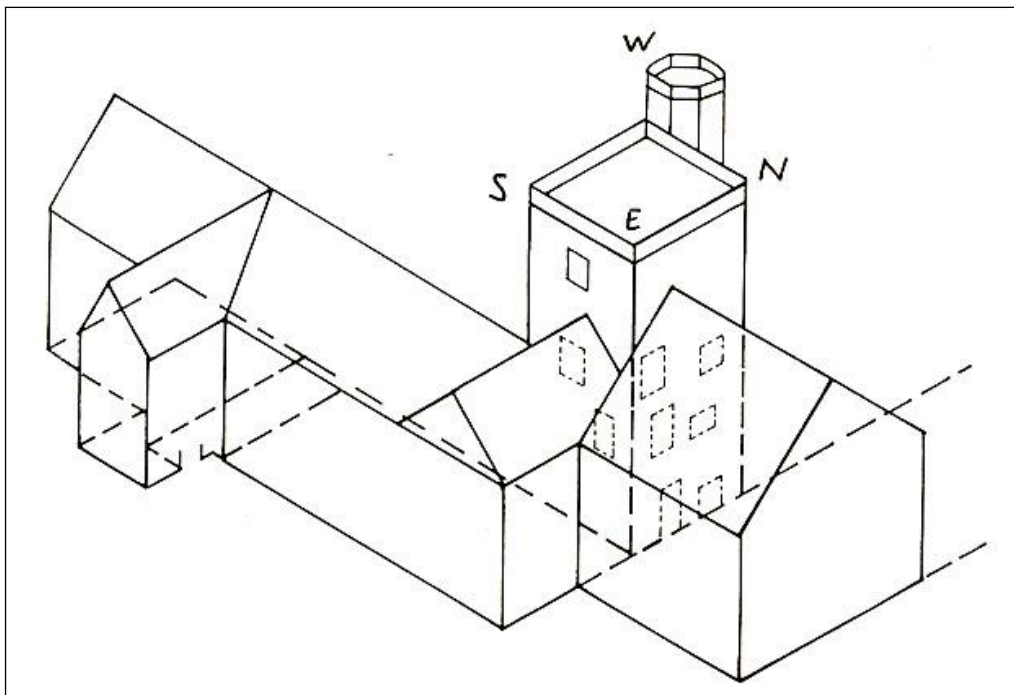
The only indication of Tudor remodelling lies in windows of Tudor form, and the fact that a strict medieval arrangement seems to have been departed from to the extent that, as at Sutton Place, the hall is of a single tall storey, with a room over it, looking forward to the Elizabethan Great Chamber. It is possible, though, that William Pelham simply inserted a floor into the existing hall. The height from the ground of the heavily moulded door in the east wall of the tower, which must have led into an upper room, shows that the ceilings of the ground floor rooms were higher than was common.

It seems likely, therefore, that William, like many of his less wealthy contemporaries, did not 'make' a new house, but limited himself to updating an existing one. He probably inserted new windows and doors, perhaps the more important ones being built up in terracotta like those in the tower, with others in oak, since the old house was almost certainly timber-framed. There were terracotta chimneys too, one or two of which survived the 18th century rebuilding, were recorded in 1854, and were later noticed, along with other broken fragments, by Viscountess Wolseley early in the 20th century.

We know more about William's work on the edges of the moat. One of the less obvious, but more enduring, results of this early phase of the Renaissance in England was the introduction of symmetry in the external arrangement of a building. Layer Marney as visualised, the Vyne and Sutton Place as originally built, and on the largest scale Hampton Court and the vanished Nonsuch, were all laid out round regular, if not actually square courtyards, entered through a



Interpretation of the estate map by John Houghton. In map makers' convention, what seems like a cross wing at the south end is in fact the end gable turned round in order to be seen, while the line by the tower indicates that the north wing is set back from the main front. Windows and proportions were not drawn to scale, the purpose being to show the number of floors in occupation, with the number of entrances and hearths, but nothing more detailed.



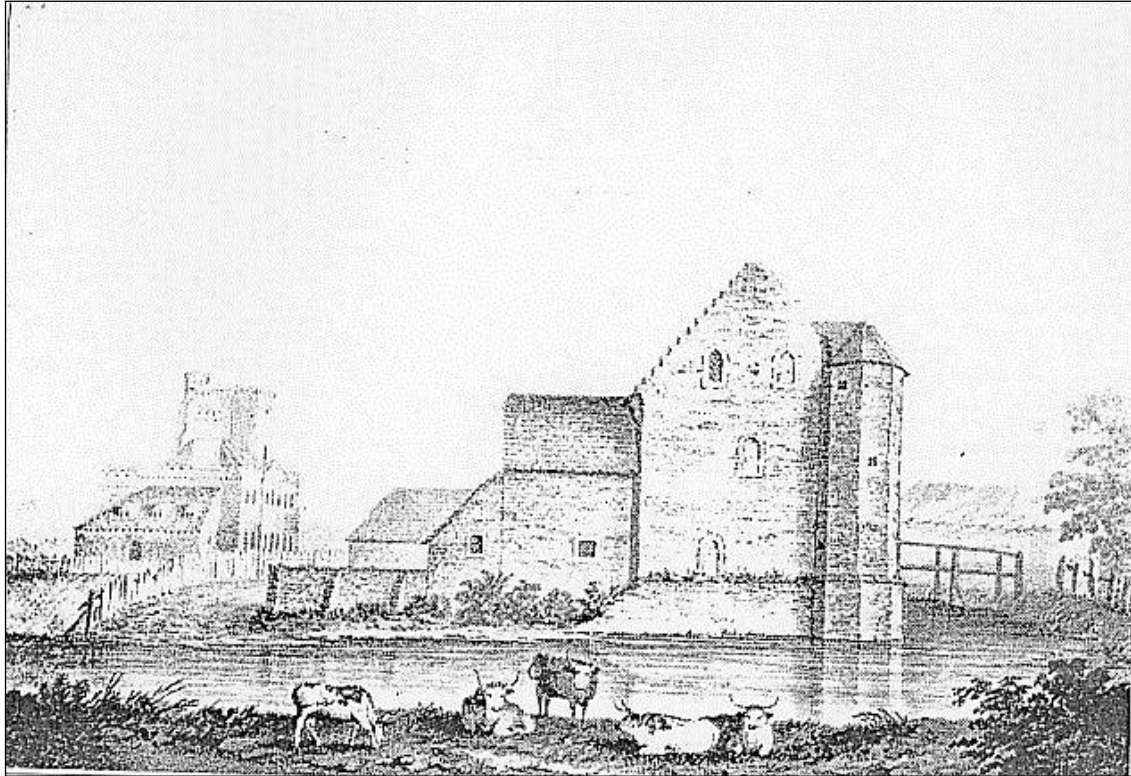
Reconstruction of the appearance of the house from the 1641 Estate Map.

gatehouse placed centrally in the outer range, which might have corner towers as well. The principal apartments were in the range directly opposite, though the main entrance usually remained off-centre, in medieval fashion.

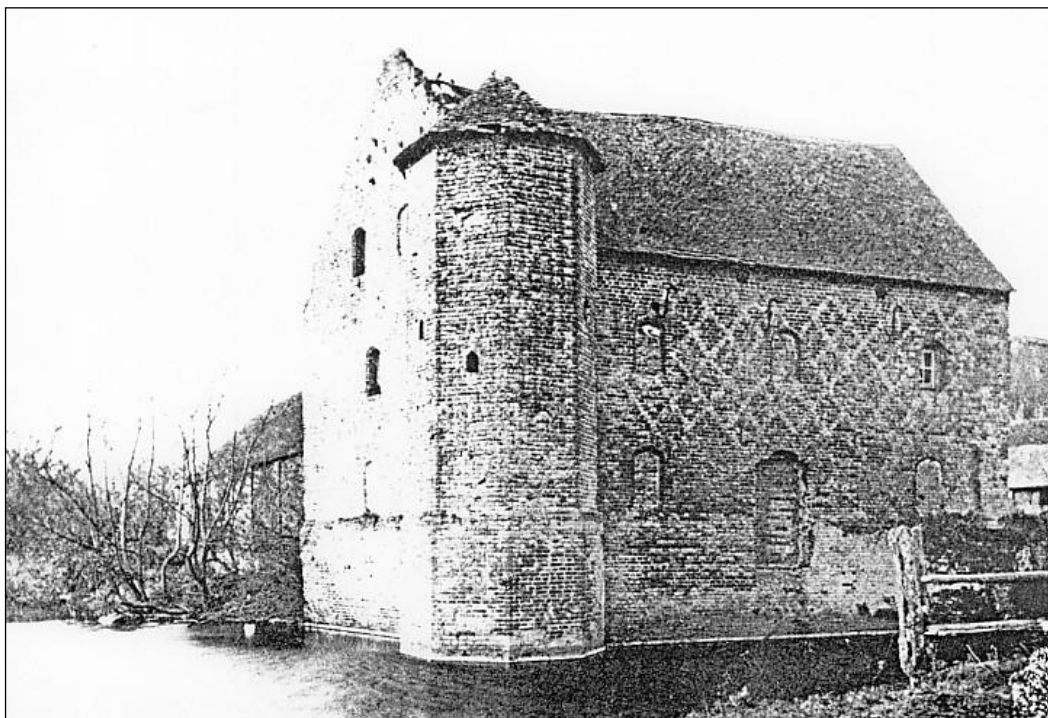
When it was first discovered therefore, just when Landmark was beginning the restoration of Laughton, it was puzzling that the estate map of 1641 showed no sign of a forecourt and gatehouse. These would surely have been part of the plan evolved by the Renaissance-conscious man that William Pelham was shown to be by his use of terracotta? To accept that he might have restricted himself to adapting an existing house was one thing; it was much more surprising that, if the map was to be believed, he did not follow the example of others in attaching it to a courtyard.

It began to appear that the estate map might not give the complete picture. Despite going into some detail with the house itself, such as colouring the tower in red, for the remainder of the site Everenden could have followed map maker's convention, a form of shorthand intended only to give essential information to a landowner.

Indeed, this was actually provable, because until quite recently, there stood on the south corner of the site [following the geographically correct orientation of the SAS reports, rather than a simplified version], a building known as the chapel barn or keep, of brick with diaper work, and an octagonal stair turret on the corner. It was undoubtedly of the same date as the tower, and therefore of the Tudor house, but was not shown on the map. We can only assume that in 1641, it served no useful function. Furthermore, in his book, *The Village of the Buckle*, the Rev. W.A. Pearson repeats a tradition that the 'keep' on the south had formerly been matched by another at the east corner.



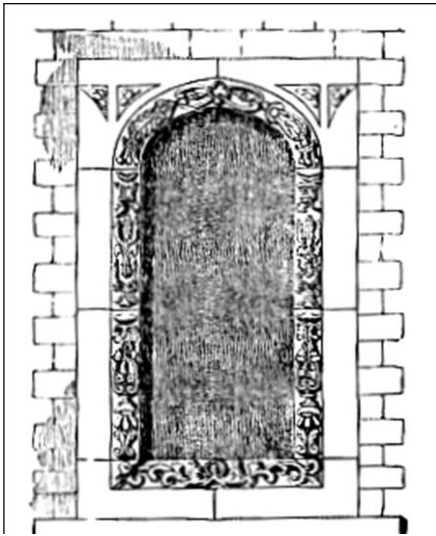
View of Laughton from the South-west in the 1780s, by S.H. Grimm or James Lambert, and showing Chapel barn within the southern corner of the moat. From the Burrell Collection in the British Library.



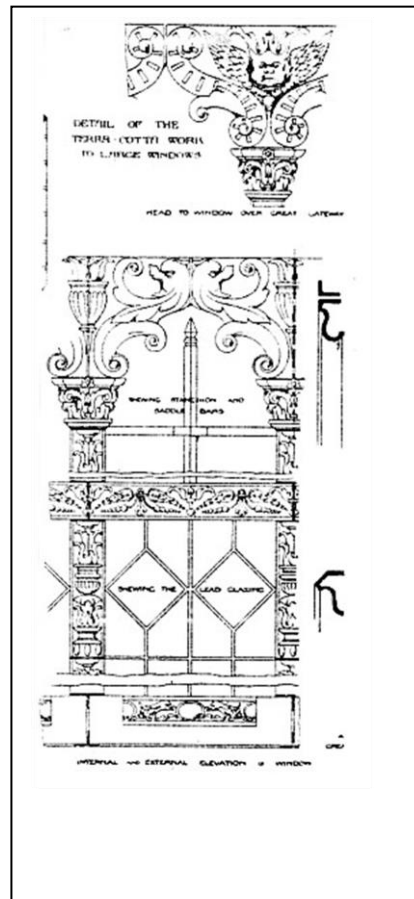
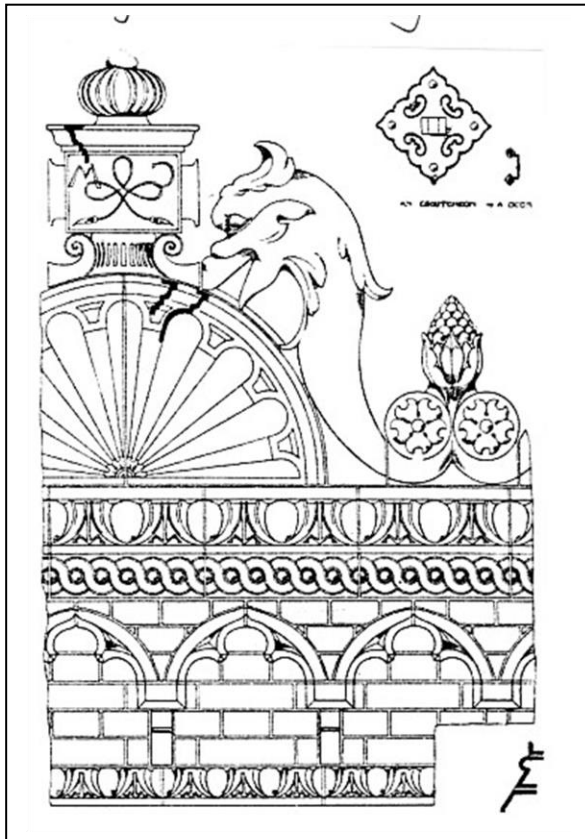
Chapel barn from the South c1925.

It seemed probable that these buildings were part of a range running along the south-east or entrance side of the site, linked by walls, or further ranges of building, to the principal block. Happily, archaeology carried out during the dredging of the moat in 1984 confirmed this belief, actually revealing a more elaborate scheme than had been suspected.

Footings of a curtain wall were found along much of the south-east side, with the possibility of a second building at the east corner, and also by the bridge, which itself turned out to be built within its Tudor predecessor. In addition, the walls not only returned for some way along the north-east and south-west sides, but had smaller turrets built against them at intervals, which appear to have had no function other than an ornamental one. From fragments found by them, it seems that these turrets may have been faced with panels of terracotta emblazoned with heraldic and other designs.

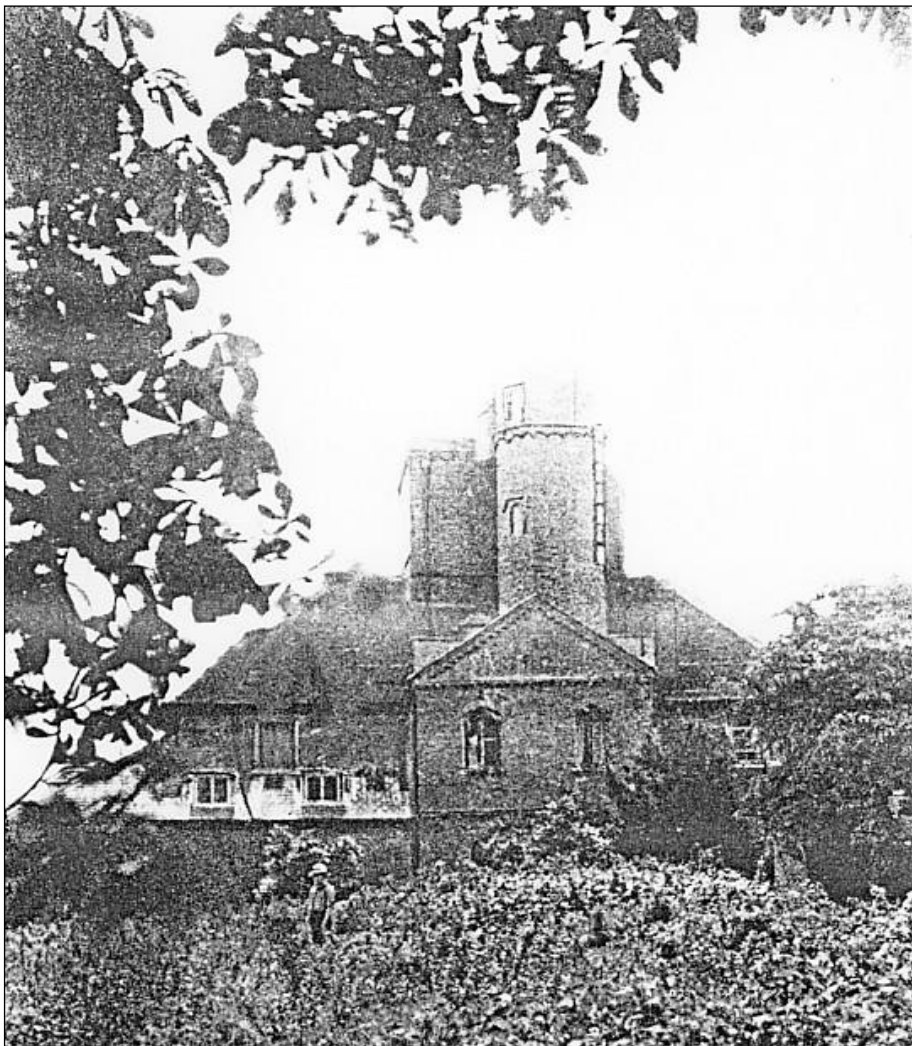


Details of terracotta work, Laughton Place



Layer Marney Tower

So William Pelham did after all follow his contemporaries in attempting to transform Laughton into a symmetrical courtyard house. With its corner buildings, a possible gatehouse, and smaller turrets, ornately decorated, the approach must have been an impressive one. The archaeologists also found evidence that William intended to go further, and surround the whole site with a curtain wall, but this he did not achieve. He died in 1538, and, it seems his plans died with him.



The back, or north-west side, c. 1925.

The tower

One aspect of William Pelham's work at Laughton remains unusual: the four-storey tower at the northern end of the house. There is nothing like it in the other courtier houses mentioned, where towers are limited to a gatehouse, or symmetrically placed corner towers. Here again, research by Maurice Howard has helped to clarify both use and pedigree. In effect this tower is a hybrid, combining within it the functions of a solar tower and of its relative, the outlook tower, also common to the late medieval and early Tudor periods. Here, it seems, William was not, as in his use of terracotta, following the latest fashion, but was looking back to older precedents.

As already mentioned, there may have been a 15th-century solar tower at Laughton, forming a private apartment at the high end of the hall, which William simply replaced in new materials. Solar towers were still built in the early 16th century, at Thame Park for example, but they had become rather luxurious, tending to have large windows on at least three sides, so that the rooms were light and comfortable. The tower at Laughton is underlit by these standards. Even so, there is good reason to believe that this was indeed the function of the ground and particularly the first floor, which was reached not from the stair turret but by a door from the main part of the house.

The second floor room seems also to have formed part of the lord's apartments, and may have been a strong room, as in the slightly later tower added by William Sharrington at Lacock Abbey. It was thought at one stage that a door led into it from attics over the high end of the house, but the hood mould over the window on the north-east front appears to be original, and in situ. This would imply that in 1534 there was a window here looking out above the roof, even if the arrangement changed later.

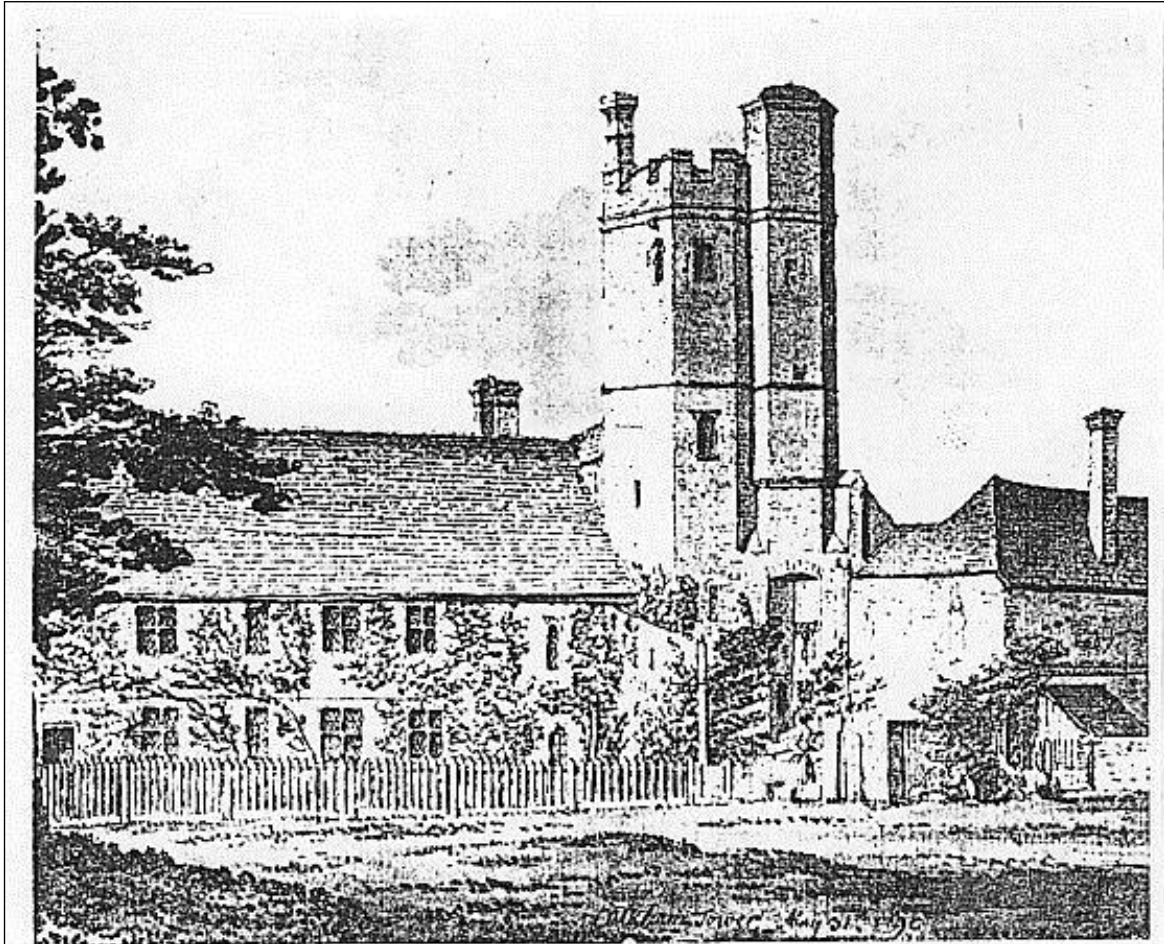
It is now thought that the present system of two doors linked by a bridge-like lobby is a repetition of the original one, even though the lobby itself dates from 1981. A photograph of c.1925 shows that to provide headroom here, a dormer was made in the slope of the 18th-century roof. This could have been an innovation, or the carrying on of an earlier arrangement.

Furthermore, it is possible that the wing shown in 1641 on the north-east side of the tower ran on to the north-west, and round the tower as far as the stair turret. The second floor lobby could then have rested on its roof. To support this is the fact that what looks like a low buttress on the north angle of the turret is actually a contemporary wall running north-west. And footings of another, arguably Tudor, wall were uncovered during building work running north-east from the tower's north corner, before branching to the north-west at the far end as well as to the more predictable south-east.

The lower floors are thus allotted to the private use of the owner. The top room, on the other hand, played a more public role, which it shares with that other species, the outlook tower. Originally defensive, in Tudor times these came to have other purposes, both practical and recreational. Generally built of brick, they had a viewing platform on the roof, and a chamber below, usually with large windows on all or most sides. Laughton is again under-provided, but it did once have a large window on the south-east, and possibly another on the north-east, although the one there now was inserted in 1981. In some cases this room was reached, as here, directly from the ground floor by a stair which did not serve all the rooms in between. Servants on duty could thus reach it without entering the private apartments.

A good, and early, example of this sort of tower was the Guyhirne Tower in the fens of Norfolk, built in the 1480s by Cardinal Morton as part of a drainage scheme. It served partly as a mark on which to align canals and cuttings, and partly as a surveying point. Of similar date were two towers which Maurice

Howard points to as having clear parallels with Laughton: Gainsborough Old Hall in Lincolnshire, and the vanished Castle Camps, Cambridgeshire, built by John de Vere.



2.—DRAWING BY S. H. GRIMM OF CAKEHAM MANOR, SUSSEX, SHOWING THE BRICK TOWER BUILT BY ROBERT SHERBURNE, BISHOP OF CHICHESTER FROM 1508 TO 1536 (British Museum, Add. MS. 5675, f. 69)

Another outlook tower with a clear purpose was added to a house in London in the early 16th century by a merchant who wished to be able to see over the other houses to shipping on the river. With similar nautical intent, and nearer to Laughton, was the tower added by the Bishop of Chichester to his manor house at Cakeham at the head of Chichester harbour in about 1520. The tower is of three storeys, a pentagon with a stair turret attached. It is a fascinating structure, changing its silhouette according to the angle from which it is seen, and built with what Nairn and Pevsner call 'the subtlety and suavity which was very typical of English architecture in the first half of the 16th century.' Besides any domestic use that the chambers on the lower floors were put to, it clearly had a practical use as a mark for the harbour, and as a lookout for ships in trouble.

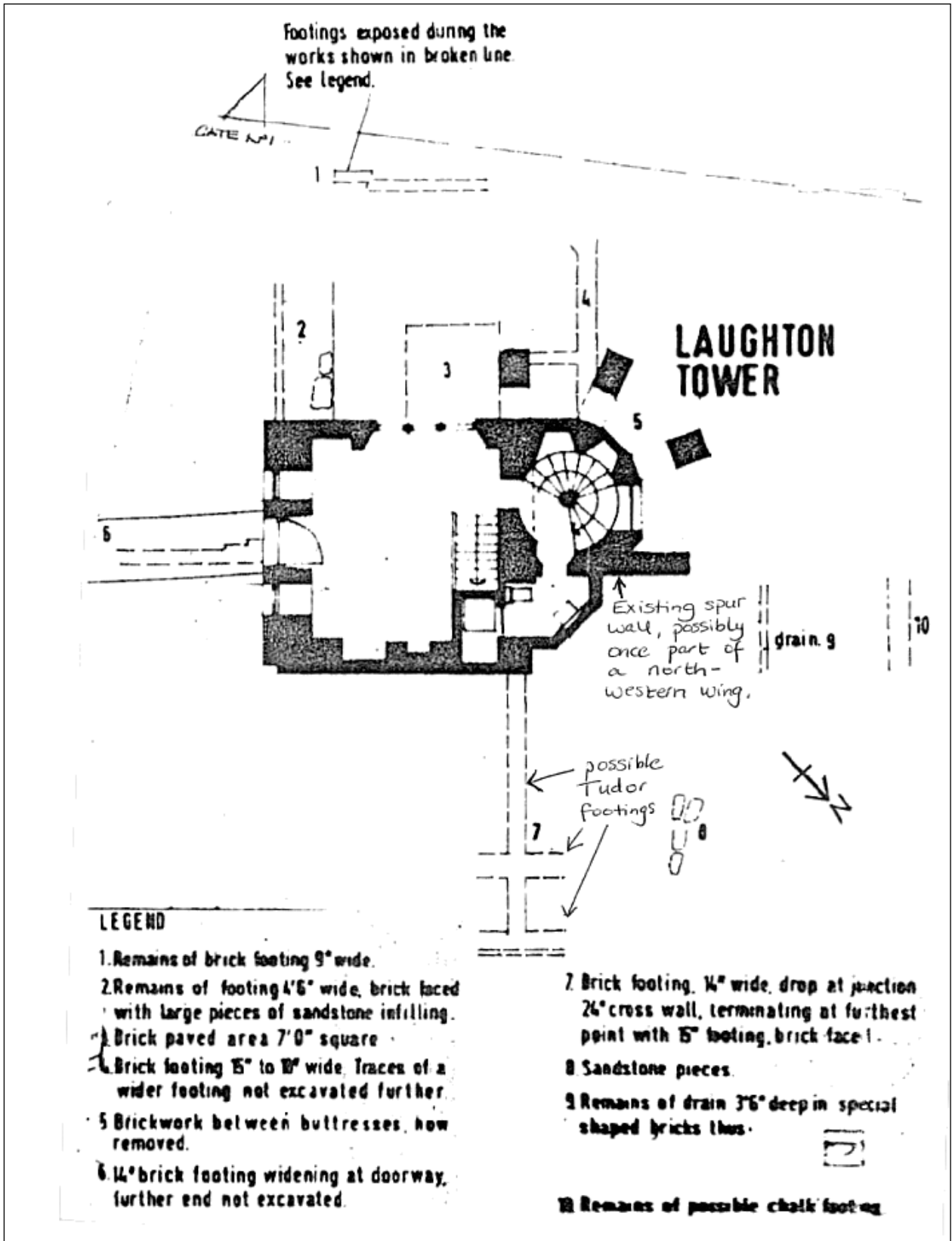
It seems likely that the Laughton tower falls within this group, at least with regard to its uppermost room and roof. It is set in a flat and marshy landscape, where a mark could be useful, and a viewing point desirable. In *The Early Tudor Country House* (1987) Maurice Howard points out that the Pelhams were also closely involved in the defence of the south coast. Besides these practical reasons, it was no doubt used for pleasure as well. The Tudors liked to look over their garden or demesne, and the outlook tower itself developed into the prospect tower or belvedere, to which the company might repair to enjoy the view or to watch a hunt.

William Pelham was no doubt familiar with some of these other towers, both outlook and solar, and decided to combine them in the one he added to his own house. The choice of brick was both fashionable and cheap (in that bricks could be made on site with clay dug from the surrounding fields) and also, in theory, practical - brick, being lighter than stone, could be used for taller buildings on unstable soils.

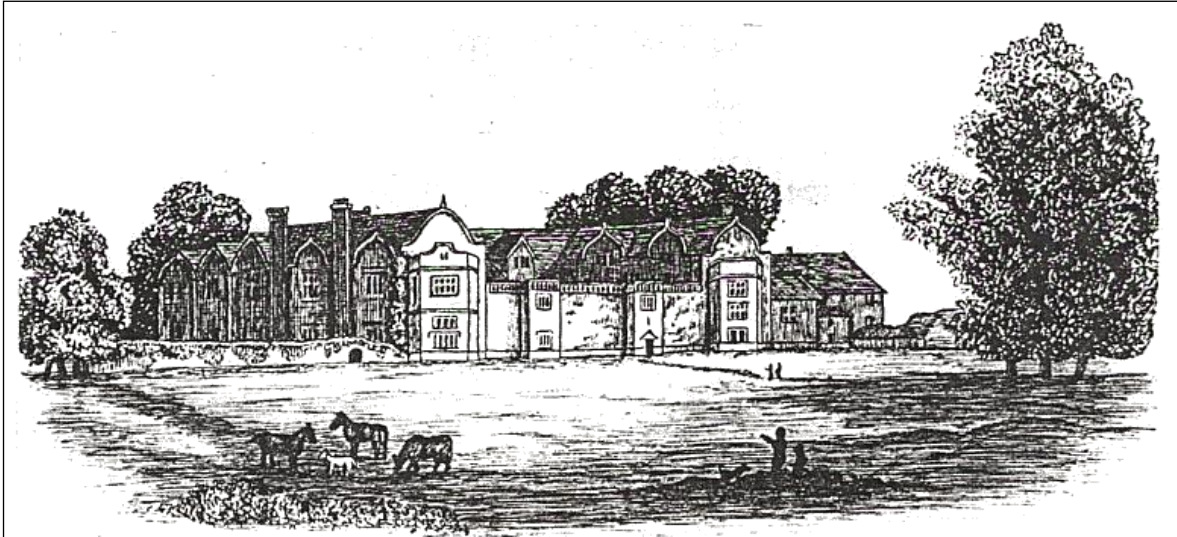
More specific information for the tower's use, or the decoration of its rooms, can only be guessed at, as with the house itself. It is tempting to imagine the windows in the south-west face of the tower being matched by a bay or an oriel on the north-west front of the house, which must itself have overlooked a formal garden. The chamber on the first floor, with the largest window, could have been a private closet, perhaps lined with panelling carved with renaissance motifs. It could even have been the 'chamber in Laughton House' remembered by Thomas Pelham in 1620 in a letter to a cousin 'wherein were those arms of intermarriages of our house and with our house.'

Whether there was a way through the tower to the north-east range is also uncertain. This is thought to have been part of William Pelham's additions, but must have been built after the tower, since it blocked a ground floor window in its north-east wall, which can be seen half way up the present stair to the sitting room. The blocked doors visible on the outer north-east face are all 18th-century. However, it may have been possible to pass through the stair turret, and the present door to the lavatory, and on into its suggested north-west end. An alternative route would be through the rooms at the high end of the hall in the main body of the house.

Sadly, no inventories or other documents have been found to help us answer these questions, or to fill out speculation with descriptive detail. Later events were to relegate this fine new house to a much less prominent place in the family records than William Pelham had a right to hope for.



Survey of area excavated around tower 1981.



HALLAND HOUSE, 1595—1770.
(From painting at Stanmer).



Photo : Reeves, Lewes.

TOMB OF SIR NICHOLAS PELHAM, KNIGHT,
in church of St. Michael in foro, Lewes.

Later History of House and Family

As events turned out, the remodelled Laughton Place was only to remain a principal residence of the Pelhams for two generations. On Sir William's death in 1538, his estates passed to his eldest son, Sir Nicholas, who followed the example of many of his predecessors in being more active in local than in national affairs, as Sheriff, M.P. and responsible landowner. In matters of glory, Sir Nicholas was outshone by his younger half-brothers, William and Edmund, both of whom, the former as a soldier, the latter as a lawyer, lived to become distinguished Elizabethans.

Of one action, however, and the joke that grew up around it, their elder brother had every cause for the pride that made him have it inscribed in verse on his memorial tablet in St. Michael's church, Lewes:

His valours prooffe, his Manly Vertues Prayse,
Cannot be Marshall'd in this narrow Roome;
His brave Exploit in great King Henry's Dayes,
Among the Worthye had a Worthier Tombe:
What time ye French sought to have Sackt Sea-foord,
This Pelham did Repell them back Aboord

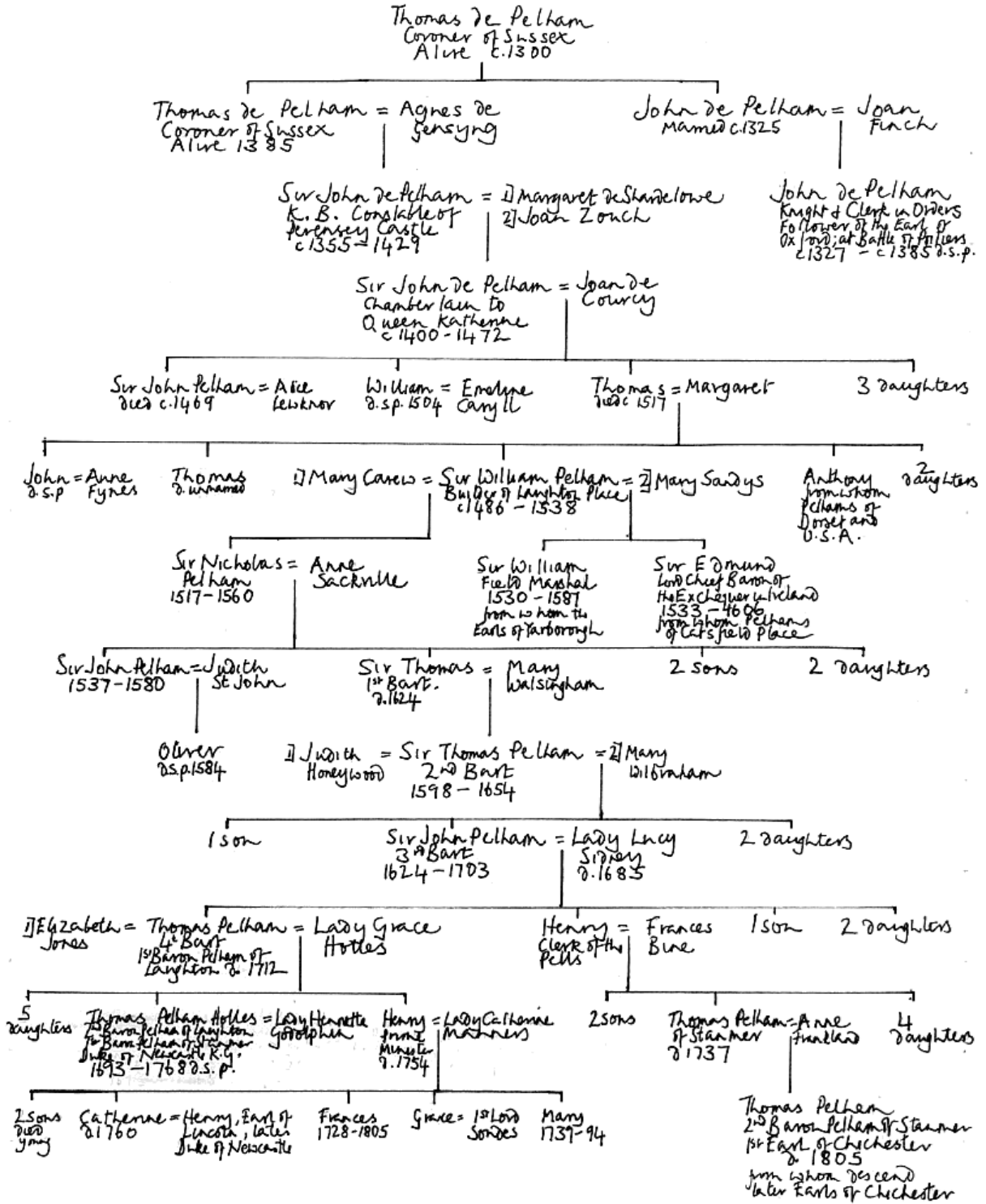
Sir Nicholas was in turn succeeded by his eldest son, Sir John, who lived until 1580 and was succeeded by his only son, Oliver. The latter survived his father by only four years, and his estates accordingly passed back a generation to Sir John's younger brother, Thomas.

Thomas Pelham was typical of his age; shrewd, learned on antiquarian and genealogical matters, and keen on improving his family's position. He married a niece of Secretary Walsingham, which gave him access to the inner circles of the court, he bought the Lordship of the Rape of Hastings which had been held by his ancestor, Sir John, and thereby substantially enlarged his income. In 1611, when

James I invented the new rank of baronet, he was among the first to pay for the

honour of holding it.

Pelham Family Tree



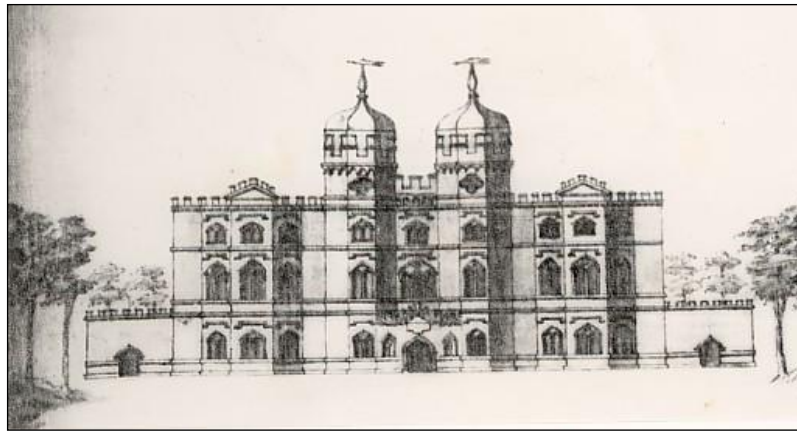
Thomas Pelham also decided that his grandfather's mansion was no longer fit to be his residence, mainly because it was unhealthily damp. Instead he built a new, and more magnificent house on land bought by his father in the same parish, but on slightly higher ground, at Halland. The work was completed by 1595, and it is probable that fittings were taken there from Laughton Place, and possibly bricks and terracotta ornament too: in the present farmhouse at Halland is a frieze in a very similar style to those at the earlier house. Thomas might well have felt that he owed it to his grandfather to take some of this work on to his new home.

Laughton continued to be used by the family as a secondary house for a while: accounts for household items there survive for the years 1633-41. Thereafter, it was let with its land as a farmhouse to a new tenant, Thomas Stedwell. The change of tenancy and status was also marked by Anthony Everenden's survey of 1641. Whether the outer walls had been largely pulled down by then, or were simply overlooked, we don't know. The house was still quite large, being assessed at seven hearths in the hearth tax returns of 1662.

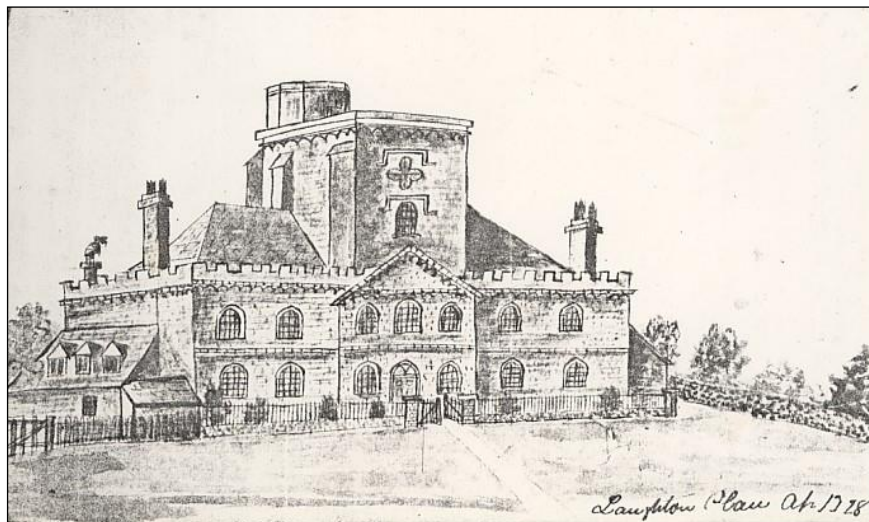
The 17th century may have been one of gradual decline for Laughton Place, but for the Pelham family it was a time of steady improvement. Their progress can be mapped by the marriages that they made, starting with the gentry and then rising to the nobility, as they themselves moved into readiness to take up a position among the great Whig landowners of the 18th century: the first two baronets married the daughters of other baronets, but the third married the daughter of the Earl of Leicester, and the fourth made a more glorious marriage still. His wife was Lady Grace Holles, daughter of the Earl of Clare but, more importantly, heiress to her brother, the Duke of Newcastle. In time to confirm them in their good fortune came the award of baronial rank; in 1706 Sir Thomas



Esher Place as built, in a view by Luke Sullivan of 1759



As proposed, by William Kent c. 1730.



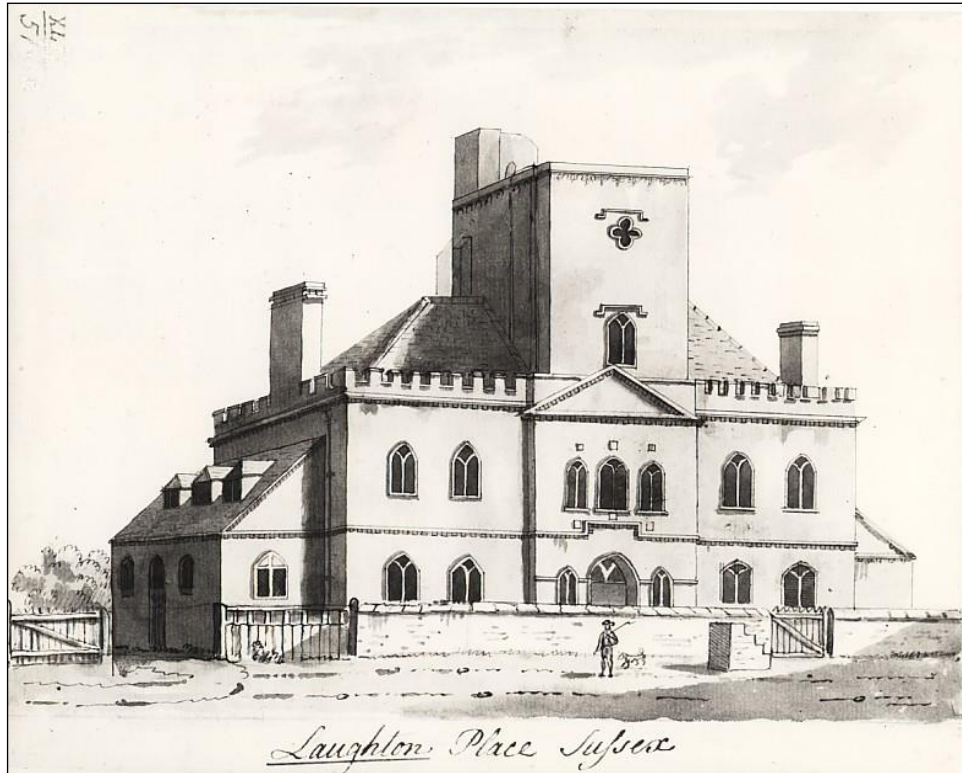
Laughton Place, sketched by Thomas wells of Brighton, 1828.

Pelham became Lord Pelham of Laughton.

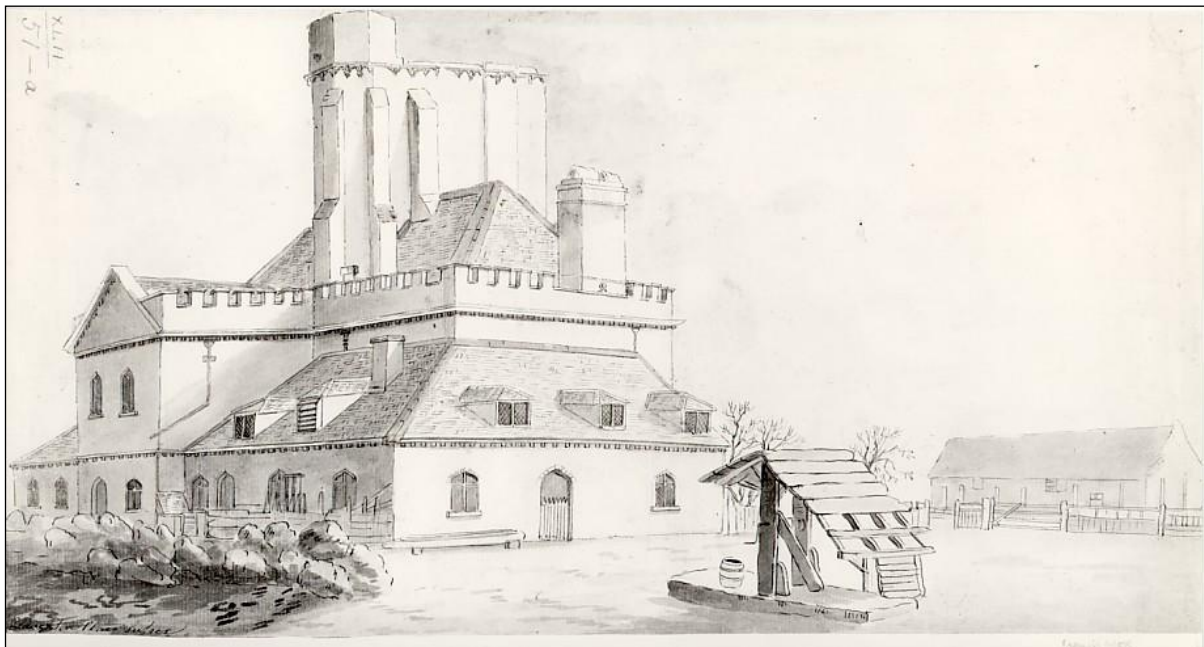
Few men can have been more fortunate in their inheritance than Thomas Pelham-Holles, eldest son of the marriage, consisting as it did not only of his father's estates in Sussex, but those of his maternal uncle as well, distributed round ten counties. His younger brother, the Hon Henry Pelham, was not initially so well provided for, except in ability, and indeed was known to have financial troubles for much of his life. On his marriage in 1726 to Lady Catherine Manners, however, the Duke, as he was by then, did settle on his younger brother a large part of the Sussex estate. This was in addition to a separate gift made just over ten years earlier of Laughton Place Farm.

The title of the Duke of Newcastle had not automatically passed to Thomas Pelham-Holles on his inheritance of the property in 1711. It was only granted to him in 1715 by George I, in acknowledgement of his support, both political and active, in the Jacobite rebellion of that year. He continued to be in favour with the king, as did his brother. Indeed, in the persons of these two, both of whom for longer or shorter periods served as Prime Minister, the family reached a peak of achievement that had not been approached since the days of Sir John Pelham of Pevensey Castle. Between them in effect, and greatly to the detriment of Newcastle's fortune, they presided over the government of the country for most of the mid-18th century.

Success in politics at that time meant the exercise of patronage, in order to win over a greater number of supporters than anyone else; this involved the outlay of a great deal of money, in favours and entertainment. The fetes and banquets held by the Duke at Halland became part of local legend, for their lavishness, but they were entirely necessary if his brother was to retain the votes which ensured him his seat in Parliament as member for Sussex.



Drawings attributed to Francis Grose 1760-2, in the King's Collection in the British Library. View from the south.



View from the west.

Like most Whig landowners, Newcastle and Pelham had a keen interest in architecture, and in shaping the landscape according to their orderly view of the universe. It was not in Sussex, however, that their activities in this field were centred, but in Surrey, where the brothers bought neighbouring estates and set about improving them: for Newcastle, Claremont, which he bought from Vanbrugh; for Pelham, the former bishop's palace at Esher Place.

All that remained at Esher was Wayneflete's gatehouse, with decayed later wings on either side. William Kent, the architect and landscape gardener employed by both brothers, transformed this fragment into a delightful Tudor Gothick mansion; the wings sprouted crenellations, the gatehouse tower produced a crocketed porch, and pointed or quatrefoil windows appeared throughout. The park was laid out with belvederes, a fishing temple, a grotto, and other ornamental buildings, interspersed with sheets of water and nodding groves`where' in Pope's famous words, `Kent and Nature vie for Pelham's love.'

Meanwhile, in the midst of all this activity, Laughton Place was not entirely overlooked. The old house was in poor repair, and in 1753 its architecturally minded owner decided that it was time for it too to be rebuilt. He chose to do this in a very similar style to that of Esher Place, presumably under the influence of Kent, who considered it suitable for Tudor buildings, although not under his supervision, as he had died in 1748.

It was a Mr White, who had been foreman or possibly site architect at Esher, who was employed to carry out the work. John Farrant suggests he was Fuller White, a master carpenter turned architect typical of the period, who later worked for Pelham's nephew and son-in-law, Lord Lincoln. He had clearly profited from his association with Kent. If a Classical training crept in with a pediment and a regular facade, the intention was honestly Gothic, the windows firmly pointed or quatrefoil. The result, if eccentric, was very charming, with

that decorative light-heartedness characteristic of Gothick design in the middle decades of the 18th century, which has caused it to be called Rococo.

Work began in late 1753, with the old house, or more probably the remains of the outer wall, providing many of the bricks. But Henry Pelham died in the spring of the following year, 1754, when only the outer shell was complete. A description and valuation of his estates was accordingly drawn up by the agent and the entry for Laughton reads:

A good house called Laughton Place which was lately built around the Old Tower, in which there is good conveniences for the farmer and likewise a large Parlour, Dining Room, Bed Chamber and an intended Staircase, but these are unfinished, and in all probability never will be.

Over the next few years, the work was gradually completed. The stair went into the lower floor of the tower which, with its new front door, now became the hall. Doors were pierced in the side walls, leading to the rooms in the new wings. Floor levels changed and old windows and doors were blocked. Laughton Place became a fine, modern, house.

Interestingly, to the description quoted above is added a further note:

Sometime before Mr Pelham's death there was near £1,000 laid out upon this House, with an intent to have made an Apartment for himself, but the low situation, want of water and bad roads, I am of opinion will never induce any person to compleat what he had near finished.

John Farrant is incredulous of this statement of Henry Pelham's intentions, but it is not so hard to believe. He could well, as he grew older, have wished to spend more time in Sussex, and wished for something similar to a hunting or fishing lodge to retreat to there. As Roger White pointed out in his article on Laughton in *Country Life* in May, 1983, he had already handed Esher to his daughter Frances. Equally hard to believe is that so grand a house was intended for sole occupation by the farmer, even a gentleman-farmer.

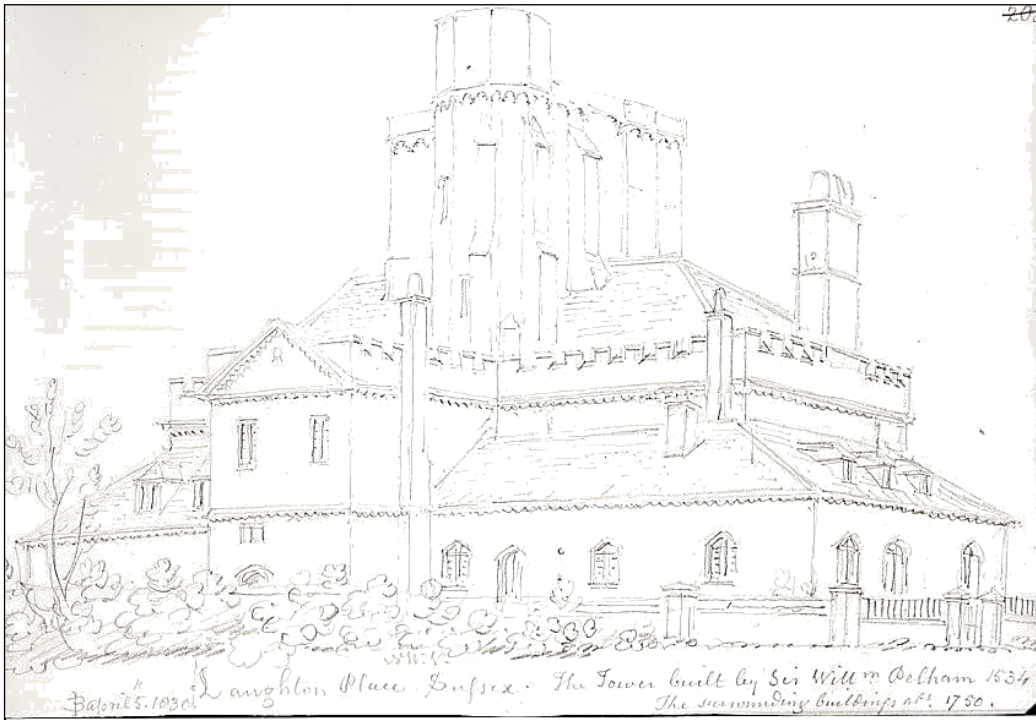
The tenant at the time of these improvements was a young man, Robert Saxby, whose father of the same name had been the tenant before him. He was

followed by John Saxby, probably his brother. Both were men of standing within the parish, serving as Churchwardens. In the 1780s the farm went to Robert Attree, during whose tenancy a change of ownership occurred.

Neither the Duke of Newcastle nor Henry Pelham had a son, though the latter had four daughters, to whom his share of the Pelham estates passed in 1754. The eldest of these was married to the heir of the Newcastle estates, so that she became, in part, her uncle's heir as well. In 1768, when the Duke died, the Pelham title, with the Pelham estates he had kept for himself, passed to his cousin, Thomas Pelham of Stanmer, near Brighton.

The new Lord Pelham, who was later made Earl of Chichester, was keen to regain the parts of the Sussex estate owned by Henry Pelham's daughters. From the two who were married he obtained the land outright; but with the unmarried daughters, Mary and Frances, in whose share Laughton Place Farm belonged, he agreed that their property should only come to him on their deaths. Mary died in 1794 and Frances in 1804, when Laughton Place passed back into the hands of the head of the family, and was reunited with the rest of the Pelham estate.

It was no longer to lie near the heart of that estate, however. In 1768, Lord Pelham had decided that the cost of maintaining Halland was too great and it was demolished. The centre of the estate moved further west, to his own home at Stanmer. All the same, future Earls of Chichester took an active interest in the old Pelham family seat, and saw that it was kept in good repair. The 3rd Earl had facsimiles made of the bricks bearing the Buckle, the original ones having become worn. In the mid-19th century local historians started to take an interest in the buildings, such as M.A. Lower, who wrote a history of the Pelham family, and W.H. Blaauw, who wrote on the architecture of William Pelham's house, and made engravings of details, such as the window surrounds, the Buckles and the Chapel Barn.



Drawing by John Buckler, 1830, from the west. Now in the British Library.



Laughton Place from the north, a watercolour by Dorothy Pelham, wife of Hon Henry Pelham. Younger brother of 6th Earl of Chichester, which now belongs to a descendant, Richard Pelham. It was done in 1938, when the fate of the house hung in the balance. The wings were to be demolished the following year.

At about this time the Woods, who had been tenants since about 1830, were replaced by William Mannington. Under his care, the farm prospered and he took on more land, at one time farming 1300 acres. Cottages were built for farm workers. In 1881 there were ten households besides the farmer's, making a community of 46 people. Besides farm workers, there were a coachman and a gardener employed by the Manningtons, who also had three indoor servants.

The house itself fully justified any increase in importance. In 1914 it was listed as having on the ground floor, a sitting room, dining room, hall, drawing room, kitchen, scullery, three sets of cellars with three bedrooms over them, presumably for servants; and on the first floor, six bedrooms, besides a room in the roof to the tower, the top room in the tower, a w.c. and a large cupboard. Miss Joscelyn, daughter of one of the last tenants, recalled in 1992 that the dining room was to the left of the tower as you looked at it from the front, with the hall and staircase in the middle, the kitchen behind, and the drawing room on the right, with the best spare bedroom above it.

In 1926, the 6th Earl of Chichester and his eldest son, briefly 7th Earl, died within ten days of each other. The Trustees of the second son, who now became 8th Earl at the age of 14, were faced with double death duties and had to sell land to raise funds. Since Laughton had become an outlying farm, it seemed an obvious choice. In 1927, the house, with 653 acres, was sold to Mr C.F. Russell. He only wanted the land, since he lived and farmed elsewhere, and Laughton Place was left empty.

It was almost bought by Virginia and Leonard Woolf, who had lived since 1919 at Monk's House in nearby Rodmell and were looking for a new house in Sussex. On a sunny morning in September 1927, Virginia, drove over to Laughton Place with Vita Sackville West. 'I broke in, & explored the house. It seemed, that sunny morning, so beautiful, so peaceful; & as if it had endless old rooms. So I came home boiling with the idea of buying it; & so fired L[eonard]

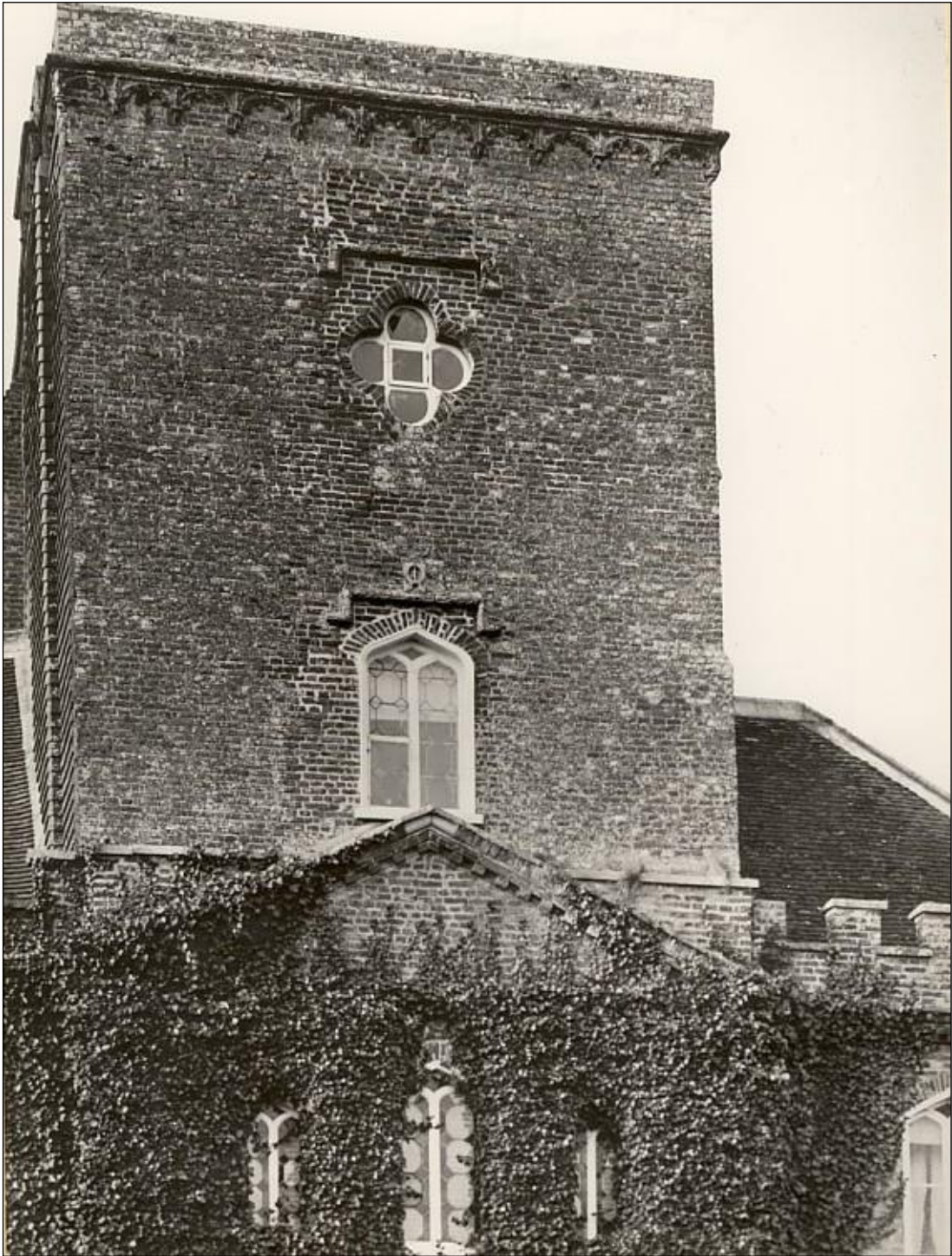
that we wrote to the farmer, Mr Russell, & waited, all on wires, edgy, excited for an answer. He came himself, after some days; & we were to go and see it. This arranged, and our hopes very high....& we went to see the house & it turned out unspeakably dreary; all patched and spoilt; with grained oak and grey paper; a sodden garden & a glaring red cottage at the back.' (Diary entry for 20th September 1927.)

The house continued to stand empty and neglected. Some of the back part is said to have been demolished, probably in 1931 when Chapel barn was also pulled down. The bricks were sold to an architect in Seaford. For a few more years, the Gothick wings were allowed to stand, but became increasingly dilapidated and overgrown. Various people tried to buy it, but without success. In 1939 the wings too were demolished, despite protests from the Sussex Archaeological Society, leaving William Pelham's tower standing isolated inside the moat.

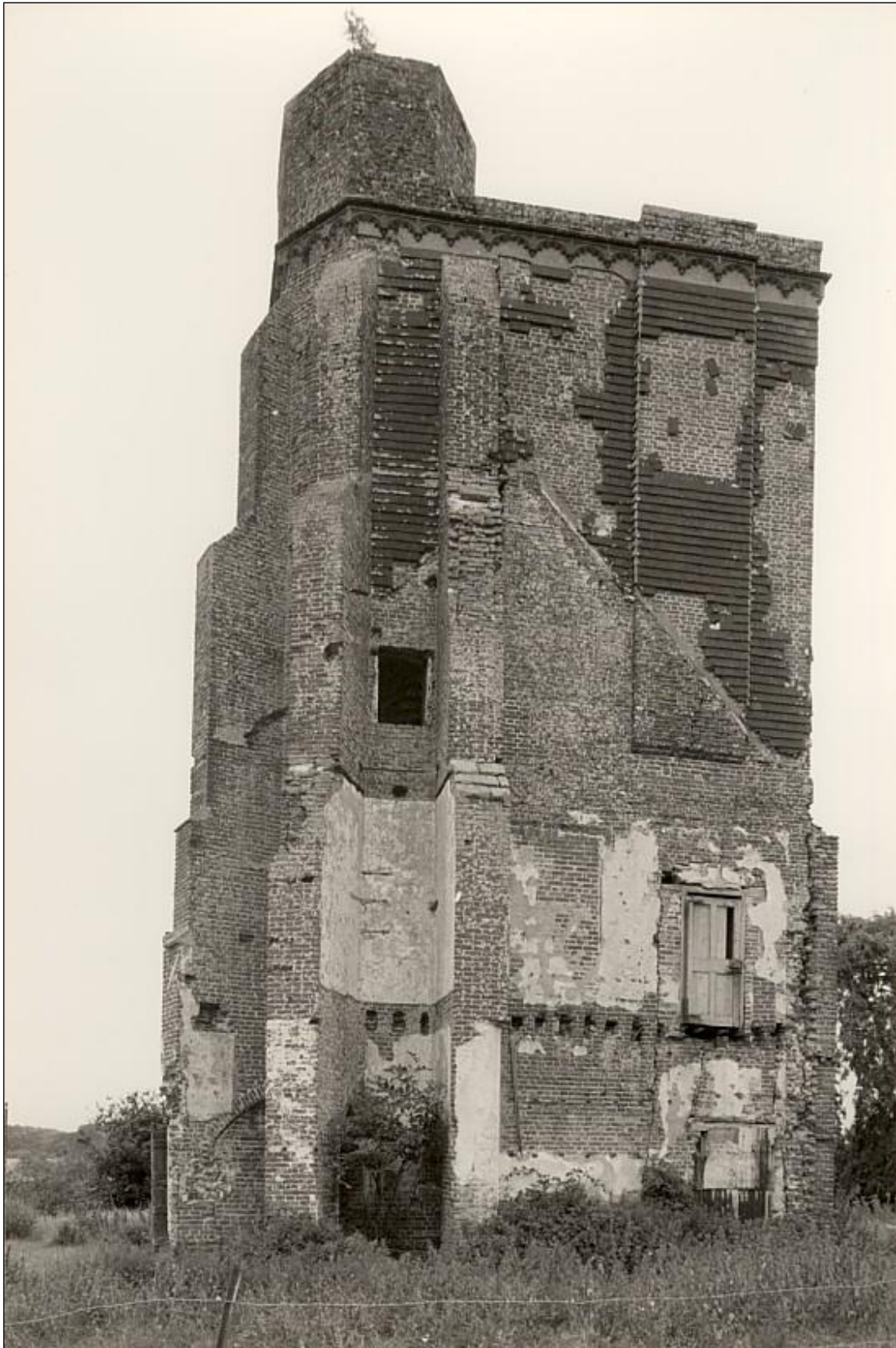
THE TOWER IN DECAY - PHOTOGRAPHS TAKEN IN 1978



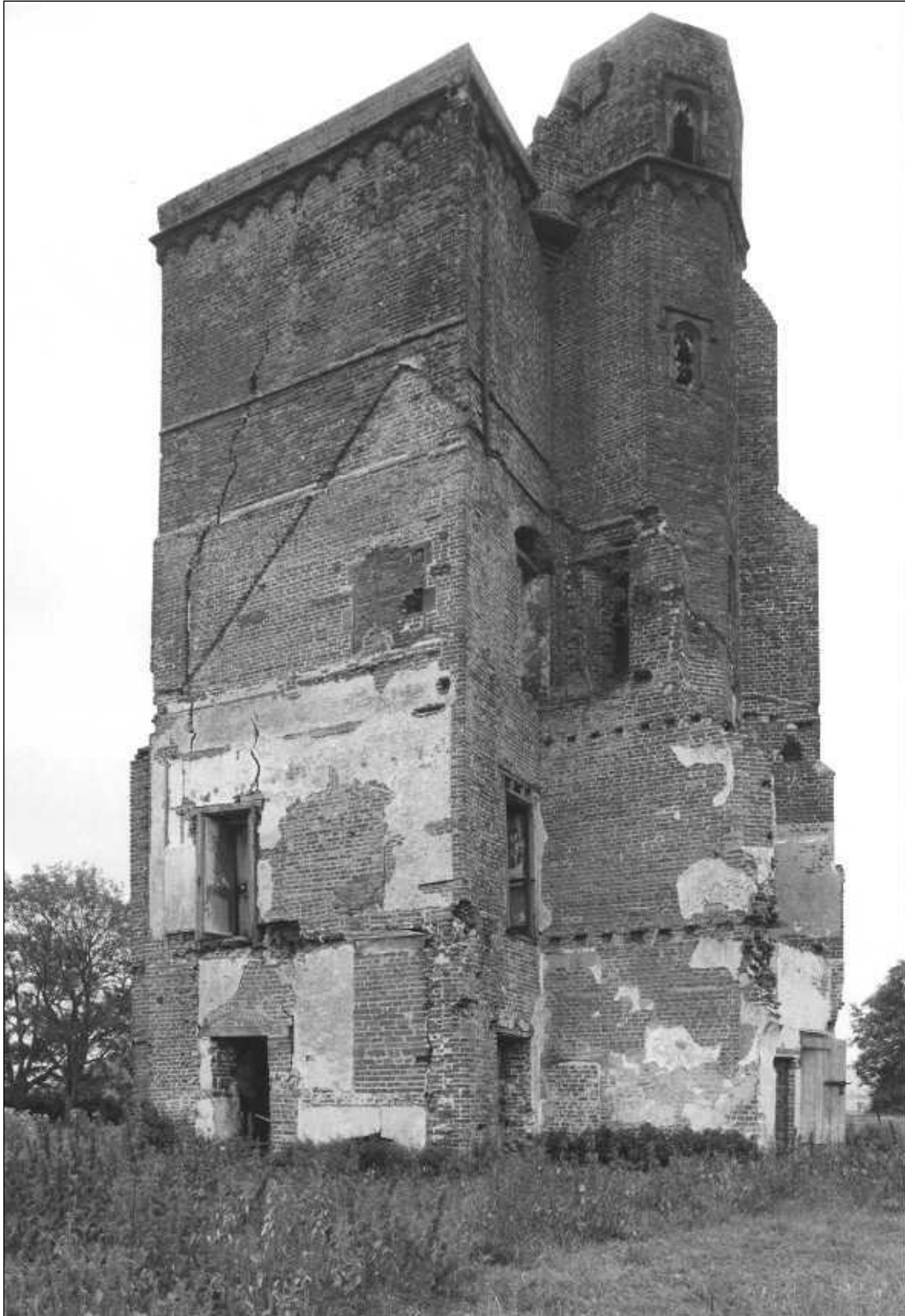
The South East Face. The front wall was bulging outwards, forcing the brickwork of the pediment away from the face of the tower, and allowing water in behind. The door and window joinery was in a better state than it looked, and could mostly be



Early 20th century



The South West Face. The openings in the lower part of the tower had weakened the wall. The ground floor Tudor window and the arches in the buttresses had been blocked early on. These and the first floor Tudor window, the head of which can be seen, were opened up again by Landmark, and the eighteenth-century doors blocked.



The North East Face. Here the worst of the cracks can be seen, caused by complex movements in the tower as buildings came and went around it. Apart from the blocked door in the stair turret, and the two giving access to the second floor, the doors are 18th century. The blocked one on the second floor led onto the 18th century roof.



The North West Face. The remains of the 18th-century additions can be seen against the stair turret.



The North East Face. The remains of the 18th century additions can be seen in the gap between the pediment and the face of the tower.



The Roof. The tower had been given a new roof during the War to make it safe for use as an observation post. This probably saved it from total collapse in the following decades, but by 1978 it was itself in poor condition.



The Ground Floor. The decayed Georgian stair, blocking the door to the stair turret. The head of the Tudor window can be seen behind the plaster. The door on the left led into the dining room of the Georgian Gothick house.



Inside the Tower. This photograph was taken from the door opening into the third floor room from the stair turret. Surprisingly, a number of the floor beams and joists were sound enough to salvage for reuse. Under each floor now is a grid of steel ties holding the four walls of the tower in place.



A Stair Turret Window



The Landmark Trust's Restoration of the Tower

The tower of Laughton Place had one brief return to its original function when it became an Observation Post during the Second World War. The steel beams inserted then to support a concrete roof probably saved it from collapse in the years to come, when long cracks in the sides threatened to split the building in two. When the farm was bought by Mr D. Monnington in 1972, there seemed little alternative to demolition. Fortunately, one of those who went to see it in the next few years, in the hope of effecting a rescue, was John Warren, a Sussex architect who had worked on some similarly decayed buildings in East Anglia for the Landmark Trust. Was this a possible a solution? It was, and in 1978, Mr Monnington agreed to the sale. As soon as the transfer was complete, work began on securing the building.

The first task that faced John Warren, now architect in charge of the restoration, was to make sure that the cracks in the sides of the tower did not grow any worse. Scaffolding, with diagonal bracing bars wedged against the wall face, was erected like a cradle around it. The causes for the cracks could then be looked for: they did not start from the ground, so the obvious one of subsidence in the foundations did not apply. The trouble seemed to come from the south-east front, which was bowed out and therefore putting great strain on the side walls, already weakened by the number of doorways in them.

Another problem lay in the junction of the tower with the solid structure of the stair turret, which had set up a pull in the opposite direction. There were signs, such as the early filling in of the arches in the buttresses and the blocking of the ground floor window on the south west, that this problem had appeared not long after the tower was built. Attempts to solve it then had not been wholly successful, and the later history of the house was to make matters worse.

The different weights of the two parts of the tower, as the buildings around it were removed, replaced and then removed again on marshy ground, had set up movements which caused stresses to appear, not at ground level, but higher up. There was clearly nothing that could be done about this, except to hope that the movements had worked themselves out. Instead of closing the gaps that already existed, the best hope was to secure the building in its settled position. A grid of steel tie bars was inserted, running in both directions and on three floors. Later, as part of the general repair work on the walls, the cracks were stitched up with a mixture of new brick and lime mortar.

Before this work started, plaster was stripped off the walls inside and out, with weather tiles at the higher levels. A close look was then taken, discover what openings there were; what needed to be unblocked, and what needed to be blocked up. The main discoveries were the two blocked terracotta windows on the south-west side and others in the stair turret, with part of another window in the north-east wall; also the door which now leads into the shower room, fireplaces on second and third floors, and the richly moulded door on the first floor, in the south-east or front wall, cut by the 18th-century window.

Armed with this knowledge, repairs could begin. The later doors in the sides were blocked, after removing rotten lintels, to reinforce the walls. The brickwork in the blocked fireplaces on the north-east was also replaced, for the same reason. All such openings were left clearly visible.

Decayed pointing was scraped out, worn bricks replaced with new hand-made ones, new coping stones placed on the steps of the buttresses where they were missing, and the whole building repointed. The method for this was copied from a small area of original pointing that was uncovered when the arches of the buttresses were unblocked. The bulge in the south-east front had forced the pediment away from the main wall, allowing water to get in and damage the brickwork. This was all built up securely, with a new cornice, coping stones and

lead flashings. The wartime roof had by this time decayed, and was no longer weather-proof. New joists were inserted, and covered with asphalt, with brick paving laid on top.

The most noticeable addition to the tower is the battlements. Clear evidence for these was found where the parapet of the tower met the stair turret. The building certainly looks better re-crenellated, although the size and spacing of the merlons had to be guessed at. Another new arrival is the north window on the third floor, although, again, there was some evidence for a previous opening in the same place. The mullions are, in fact, of old brick, obtained with the help of the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum.

Two final additions can be seen in the angle between the stair turret and the north-west wall of the tower. These came to be known as the Blisters, and were the only way of making the tower function easily within its four walls - a plan to build small side wings was abandoned early on. The stair turret connected the ground and top floors only. As we have seen, when the tower was built there was almost certainly a lobby bridging the gap between the stair and the second floor room, in which case the new work is an echo of the old. It is less certain that there was a building in the angle where the shower room now is, but this turned out to be the only place to put it without subdividing the tower rooms.

Early precedent might also be followed in linking ground and first floors by an internal stair. The very decayed one found in 1978 was of course 18th-century and also blocked the entrance to the stair turret. It was clearly sensible to repeat the idea, but in a different place. The stair itself was beyond re-use, so a new oak stair was fitted instead.

Other new joinery consisted of a new oak floor in the sitting room and new doors throughout. The joinery of the door-frame and most of the windows on the south-east front, although damaged, was still basically sound and only

needed an overhaul before being refixed. All the windows were then re-glazed with leaded lights, to patterns based either on surviving fragments or, on the south-east front, on old photographs.

The upper floors also had to be renewed, although some of the old joists were sound enough to be re-used, now hidden beneath brick floor tiles. The tiles on the ground floor were copied from a small area of old paving that was found under rubble at the foot of the stairs.

Meanwhile, the terracotta ornament was being attended to. Its condition varied from areas which needed no attention at all to those needing expert restoration to ensure their survival. In some places, it had fractured into several fairly large pieces; these were fixed back together by inserting glass fibre dowels, and then filling any gaps with epoxy resin coloured with brick dust. Where the material had actually started to crumble, it was impregnated with epoxy resin, to bind it together. Unfortunately, in a number of places, whole sections were missing, such as a sill or the head of a window; in others there was not enough terracotta left to reassemble a whole window surround, as in the stair turret. In these cases, new parts were made, but left plain, to be easily distinguishable.

When all the structural work was completed, the walls were coated with lime plaster, and then limewashed. The kitchen went in under the stair and the shower room in the lower Blister. Finally, to maintain the Pelham tradition, Buckle latches were fitted and, when it came to furnishing in 1981, hand-printed Buckle curtains too.



The first floor doorway when newly discovered behind plaster.



The first floor window still



**Remains of a crenellated parapet,
beside the stair turret.**

Outside, further work was needed. The ground level had risen a lot, which not only made the walls damp, but spoiled the proportions of the tower. To correct this, it had to be lowered by about twelve inches. While this was being done, a number of brick footings were uncovered, mainly 18th-century, with just the one possibly Tudor set, extending from the north corner. More footings were uncovered when the bridge was being rebuilt. These gave the first confirmation that William Pelham's building works had consisted of more than the addition of the tower. Full discovery came three years later, in 1984, when the moat was dredged and archaeologists from the Field Archaeology Unit were on hand to record anything that appeared.

The restoration of this tower was one of the most challenging rescues tackled by the Landmark Trust, so ruinous was its condition in 1978, and so extensive were the repairs needed. These were ably supervised by John Warren of APP of Horsham, and as skilfully carried out by James Waters Ltd of Forest Row, the main contractors. This, together with the quality and interest of the building itself, helped to make it a most rewarding project

Landmark is not just there to rescue buildings, however. It also gives them a future, and maintenance begins when repairs end. Good housekeeping is vital, and this Laughton has certainly had from the moment when the builders moved out and Dennis Whittingstall took charge, ably assisted by Lalli Crow.

At the same time, as the Pelhams found in the 16th century, this is not an easy building to look after. Brick, being porous, is anyway inclined to let in the rain, but especially so if it arrives with a strong south-westerly wind behind it. The weather wall of the tower soon showed signs of damp, explaining why in the past it had been hung with tiles. After abortive attempts to solve the problem with heavier pointing, and an application of silicone, the south-west walls of the two uppermost rooms were finally dry-lined. To do this in the ground and first

floor rooms would be much more intrusive, visually, so these have been left alone, at least for the moment.

Changes have taken place outside as well. A group of farm buildings inside the southern corner of the moat was flattened in the great storm of October 1987. Most of them were quite modern, and related to a silage yard removed in 1984, but one had an older gable. There was no longer any use for them, so it was decided to clear all the remains away. At about the same time, the opportunity arose to buy the surrounding land. Much of this was later sold again, keeping only a protective belt round the moat. This has allowed another group of modern barns south of the moat to be taken down.

The tower at Laughton has had a long and eventful life. Now, having survived the demolition of two houses around it, it faces life on its own, but in good heart. All in all, it seems to be managing very well.

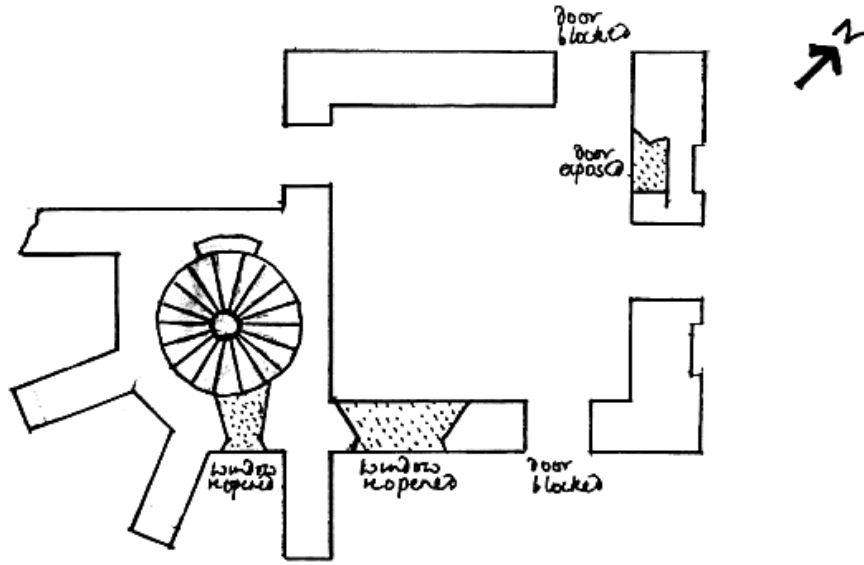


The terracotta corbel table (above and detail below), a view now only available to the birds.

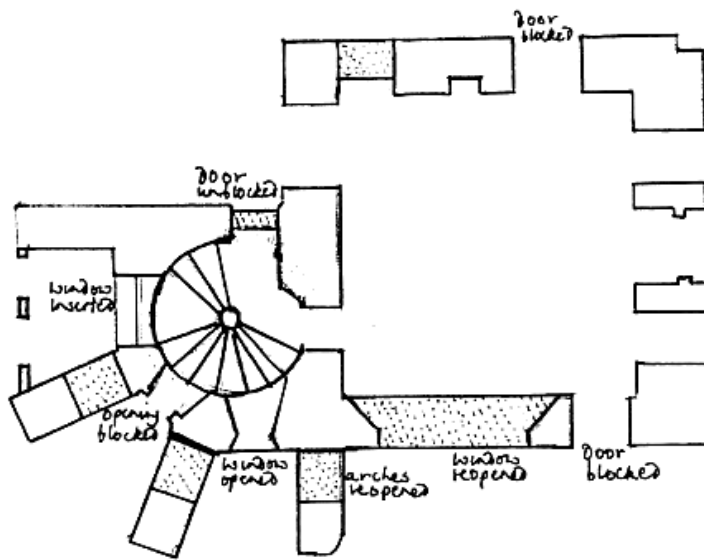


Salvaged timber

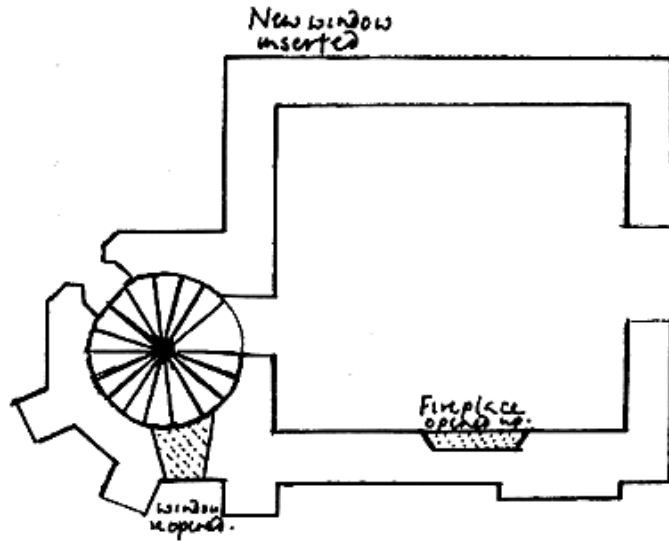
"Before" Plans



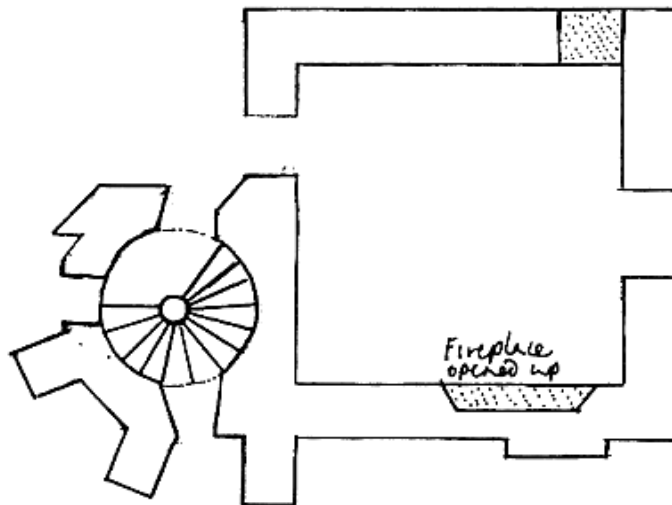
1st Floor



Ground Floor



3rd Floor



2nd Floor



**Buildings inside the southern corner of the moat after the gales in October
1987.**

Further Reading

Laughton and the Pelhams

Pelham family papers in the British Library and East Sussex Record Office

Laughton Place: A Manorial and Architectural History, by J. Farrant, M. Howard, D. Rudling, J. Warren & C. Whittick, in *Sussex Archaeological Collections* Vol 129 1991

W.H. Blaauw *On the Ornamental Brickwork on a tower at Laughton Place in Sussex* *Archaeological Collections* Vol 7 1854

William Coxe *Memoirs of the Administration of the RT Hon Henry Pelham* 1829

M.A. Lower *The Pelham Family* 1873

Stebelton H. Nulle *Thomas Duke of Newcastle* 1931

W. A. Pearson *The Village of the Buckle* 1931

Hon Mrs Arthur Pelham & David McLean *Some Early Pelhams* 1931

Roger White *Saved by the Landmark Trust; Laughton Place, Sussex* in *Country Life* May 5, 1983

John W. Wilkes *A Whig in Power; The Political career of Henry Pelham* 1964

Viscountess Wolseley *Some of the Smaller Manor Houses of Sussex* 1925

General Background

Terence Davis *The Gothick Taste* 1978

Kenneth Clark *The Gothic Revival* 1949

Mark Girouard *Life in the English Country House* 1978

J.A. Gotch *Early Renaissance Architecture in England* 1901

John Harris *A William Kent Discovery; Designs for Esher Place, Surrey* in *Country Life* May 14, 1959

Maurice Howard *The Early Tudor Country House* 1987

James Lees-Milne *Tudor Renaissance*

James Lees-Milne *The Vyne* 1961 (National Trust guidebook)

Nathaniel Lloyd *A History of English Brickwork* 1925

Ian Nairn & Nikolaus Pevsner *The Buildings of England; Sussex*

Arthur Oswald *Tudor Outlook Towers in Country Life Annual* 1957

Nikolaus Pevsner *The Buildings of England; Surrey*

John Summerson *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* 1967

Jane A. Wight *Brick Building in England* 1972

Margaret Wood *The English Mediaeval House* 1965



From Richard Pelham's collection

Repairs and Refurbishment in 2000

Since Landmark restored the building in 1980 it has become clear just how exposed to the weather Laughton Place is, being a fragment of a larger building in an exposed landscape. We have been particularly concerned about the effect of weathering on the fine terracotta, and it was clear that nothing less than substantial works were needed to give better protection to the building and its occupants.

The work was arranged by the Landmark Trust Building Department after advice by Hutton and Rostron (Environmental Consultants) and some helpful comments by Maureen O'Connor of Donald Insall (our architects working on the Grange at Ramsgate at the time). Advice on the terracotta came from Catherine Woodfitt of Ingram Consultancy. We decided to use a local contractor, Quadric Limited, who had just completed our restoration at Wilmington Priory, and again we asked that they work with specialist lime contractors IJP Building Conservation of Henley.

The work started in the summer so that the building had time to dry out but we could not have reckoned on the autumn that was to follow, one of the wettest on record, with the Lewes area particularly flooded. At times the access to Laughton Place itself became impassable. Those tradesmen who lived on site in portable accommodation, and worked within the scaffold rain screening, gamely put up with a more isolated and windswept existence than any of us had bargained for.

Our works concentrated on the east, south and west elevations where the prevailing weather had badly attacked the mortar and where the external walls are thinnest (bearing in mind that some of these walls were originally internal before the wings to Laughton Place had been lost). You can now see the difference in pointing where the north elevation has a softer, 'birds beak' joint

that characterised the 1980s restoration. Conservation practice having changed since the 1980s, we chose a mildly hydraulic lime mix for the pointing. This mortar mix demanded a change to the type of joint which is now flush and a little more buff coloured. The need to provide a 'shelter coat' render on the thin and exposed chimney breast on the south elevation is also an example of this. In the past we have had to install gutters on the *internal* face of the wall to catch water which circulated through to the fireplaces, and needed to be caught and channelled back outside! The terracotta, both inside and out, has been carefully conserved by Torquil McNeilage.

Inside the building we have replastered the walls and ceilings, again on the prevailing weather side only, with a hydraulic lime mix because the earlier plaster had become so badly affected by moisture. This gave us the opportunity to reverse some earlier repairs, and put the rooms back to the arrangement devised by our original architect John Warren, whose work is so characteristic of the period and of his style (and can also be seen at Purton Green and the New Inn at Peasenhall). With these more robust lime-based mortars and plasters we expect to have given the building some better protection against the weather, whilst at the same time allowing the building to breathe. To encourage the circulation of air within the building and to make life more pleasant within, we have introduced more permanent ventilation, as well as central heating, to make better use of the natural 'stack' effect of a tower. Although we expect that some moisture will continue to affect the building, we also hope the changes will make life more comfortable for those who stay here.

SAVED BY THE LANDMARK TRUST

LAUGHTON PLACE, EAST SUSSEX

By ROGER WHITE

APPROACHING Laughton Place the only way it can be approached, by a rutted track from the north, the first, distant sight is memorably romantic—a tall, solitary tower (Figs 2 and 3), isolated in a great expanse of water meadow against the long, level backdrop of the South Downs. Closer inspection discloses that here is only the fragment of a building, but a fascinating fragment all the same, compounded of nationally significant work of two periods.

The manor of Laughton was in the hands of one of the greatest Sussex families, the Pelhams, from 1466 until 1927. The present Laughton Place is all that survives of a mansion built, or possibly just added to, by Sir William Pelham in 1534.

We can be precise about the date because Sir William obligingly adorned the house with his badge, the Pelham buckle, inscribed with the legend, *lan de grace 1534 fut cest mayso faicte*. The site he chose is moated, partly no doubt for defence, partly to alleviate the natural sogginess of the ground, and partly, perhaps—as so often in East Anglia—to provide the clay for home-produced bricks.

Just how the tower, some 20ft square and 74ft to the newly restored battlements of its stair turret, related to the rest of the house is unclear. In the absence of documentary evidence, our main sources are a couple of blurred and seemingly contradictory vignettes on two early maps.

What is likely to be the earlier of the two occurs on an undated map of the Sussex coast and its hinterland from Eastbourne to Pevensey, probably of the early 17th century. Laughton is made to look like a fortified manor house, a cluster of red-roofed buildings of no discernible pattern or symmetry, enclosed within a high defensive wall. No tower is shown, and it may be that the vignette is largely schematic.

On an estate map datable to 1640, however, the tower is unmistakably there, rising up behind a single, gabled range. The fact that the tower is coloured red and the other building white, combined with the lack of symmetry or axial relationship between the parts, may indicate that Pelham simply added his tower (and probably other structures now vanished) to an earlier house. In this case it may have abutted onto the hall and combined the functions of solar and look-out or prospect tower.

If so, this would be singular enough. But what makes the Laughton tower altogether more significant is the Renaissance terracotta decoration with which Pelham enriched it (Fig 4). This places Laughton in that highly select group of buildings of the 1520s and 1530s on which terracotta was used as the medium for the first tentative appearances in English architecture of Renaissance ornamental detail. The familiar examples—Sutton Place, Surrey, Layer Marney Tower, Essex, and a handful of other East Anglian buildings—are all associated with a group of francophile courtiers of Henry VIII, who followed the King's lead in these years in aping the tastes of François I. Sir Richard Weston at Sutton Place and Lord Marney at Layer Marney, like Henry at Hampton Court and in his pavilions for the Field of the Cloth of Gold, applied the stock range of quattrocento motifs (putti, arabesques, dolphins, candelabra and so on) to otherwise straightforward Tudor Gothic structures.

Such motifs do make roughly contemporary appearances in Sussex in tombs and woodwork, notably in the de la Warr chantry at Boxgrove Priory, but, so far as one can tell, Laughton is the only building south of Sutton Place to use them structurally and in terracotta. Thus at Laughton, as at Sutton and Layer Marney, we have terracotta windows but with the Pelham buckle here combined with the more usual motifs. Around the top of the tower runs a cusped terracotta frieze, and

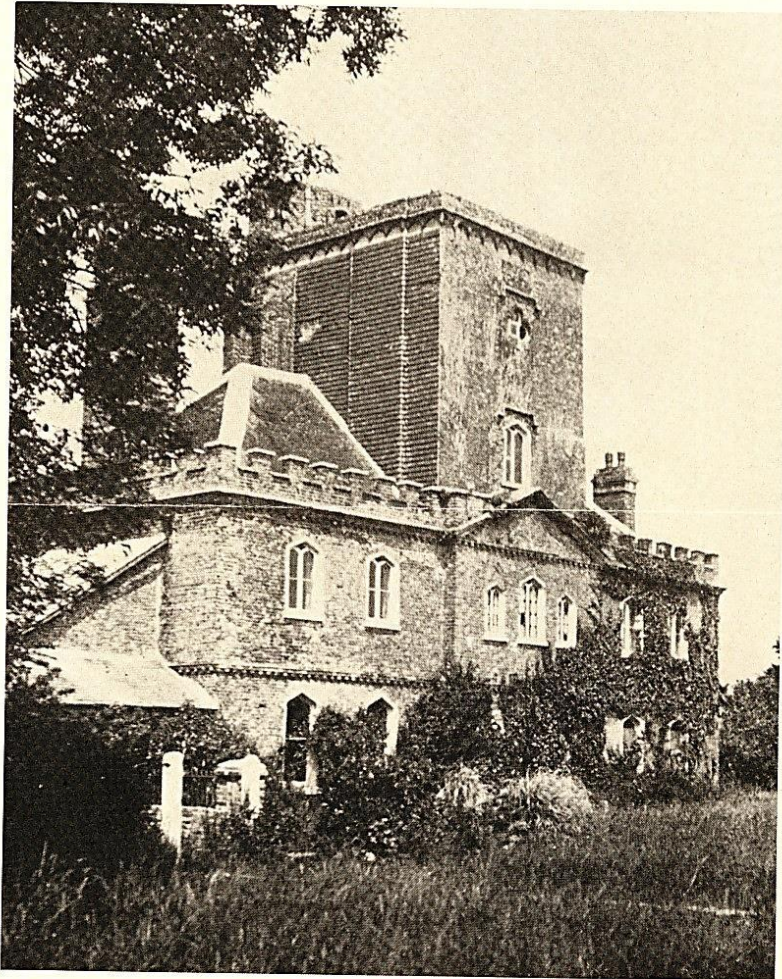
around the free-standing buttresses at the base an enriched terracotta plinth.

Built into an 18th-century farmhouse at Halland, two miles to the north, and said by plausible local tradition to have come from Laughton, is part of a different plinth, whose conjoined buckles make their point even more obsessively.

William Pelham fits the francophile bill quite neatly, for he attended Henry at the Field of the Cloth of Gold and at another meeting with François in 1533. Moreover, he was

the family well into the 17th century. In time, though, as the fortunes of the Pelhams rose, Laughton declined to the status of just one of many tenant farms on the expanding family estates.

The second phase of Laughton's architectural significance coincides with the zenith of the Pelham family fortunes. In 1711 the 18-year-old Thomas Pelham, eldest son of the 1st Lord Pelham of Laughton, succeeded to the vast estates of his uncle John Holles, Duke of Newcastle-under-Lyme. Four years later,



1—LAUGHTON PLACE, EAST SUSSEX, IN 1925, BEFORE THE DEMOLITION OF ITS WINGS. Until the 1950s the Tudor tower at Laughton was the centrepiece of a Rocco Gothic farmhouse

related by marriage both to Sir Nicholas Carew (singled out by Hall's *Chronicle* for his "French vices") and to Lord Sandys. Sandys had organised the Field of the Cloth of Gold, and his own house, The Vyne, is a *locus classicus* for early Renaissance detail in England.

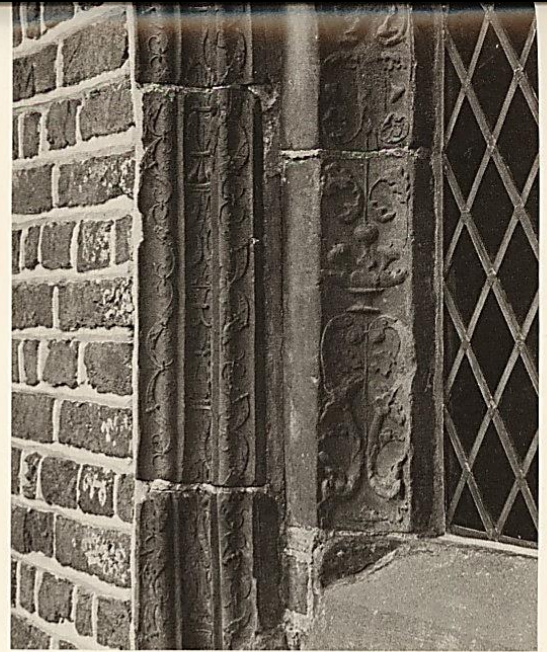
Pelham died in 1538. It seems that, despite his spanking new tower, Laughton Place was not much loved by his successors, and in 1595 it was vacated in favour of a new house on higher ground at Halland. The same local tradition has it that much of Laughton was pulled down at this time and the materials reused, but certainly a substantial portion still remained in 1640, and there is evidence that it continued to be occupied by a cadet member of

having also by now inherited his father's title and lands, he was created Duke of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Land in 10 counties and an annual rent roll of £25,000 gave him enormous political influence, and also enabled him, by settlements of 1715 and 1726, to make over half his Sussex estates, including the manor of Laughton, to his impecunious younger brother Henry. Newcastle continued to dispense legendary (and ruinous) hospitality from Halland, but it was the Hon. Henry who benefited, being returned as MP for Sussex from 1722 onwards and rising politically until he became prime minister in 1743.

With his finances placed on a sounder footing, Pelham could afford to acquire a



2 and 3—THE TUDOR TOWER BEFORE AND (below) AFTER RESTORATION. "It is now one of the Landmark Trust's most idiosyncratic and architecturally rewarding properties"



4—TERRACOTTA WINDOWFRAME. "One of the first tentative appearances in English architecture of Renaissance ornamental detail"

that until the 1950s the Tudor tower at Laughton was the centrepiece of a Rococo Gothic farmhouse (Fig 1). Henry Pelham's responsibility for the conversion is proved by a valuation of his Sussex estates, carried out after his death in 1756 and 1757. This refers to "a good house called Laughton Place which was lately built round the old tower, in which there is good conveniencys for the farmer and likewise a large parlour, dining room, bed chamber, and an intended staircase, but these are unfinished and in all probability never will be".

It continues: "before Mr Pelham's death there was near £1,000 laid out upon this house, with an intent to have made an apartment for himself, but the low situation, want of water and

country retreat nearer the capital, and in 1729 he bought Esher Place, a mile or so from Newcastle's estate at Claremont. He thereby came into possession of another Tudor fragment, in this case the brick gate tower which was all that remained of a palace of the Bishops of Winchester. In 1733, possibly on the strength of his work at Hampton Court the previous year, William Kent was called in to transform and extend the tower into a habitable house.

The resulting designs present, fully fledged and perhaps for the first time, the vocabulary of Rococo Gothic—ogee-arched windows and doors, rudimentary tracery, quatrefoils, Tudor drip-moulds, cusped friezes, and battlements. Some or all of these elements form part of Kent's response in all subsequent commissions where he was obliged to take into account an existing Gothic or Tudor building—notably at Honingham Hall, Norfolk (1737), Rousham House, Oxfordshire (1738 onwards), Westminster Hall (1739) and Gloucester Cathedral (1741).

Kent's work on the house and grounds at Esher evidently found favour with client and critics alike, being hymned by Cibber and Pope and praised even by Pelham's arch-enemy Horace Walpole. Kent, on the evidence of his letters, became something of a family friend and was subsequently called upon to supply designs for Newcastle's gardens at Claremont (1738) and Pelham's town house in Arlington Street (1740 onwards). Although the evidence is circumstantial, it seems highly probable that he also had a hand in the Esherising of Laughton Place carried out by Henry Pelham.

Drawings of the 18th and 19th centuries, together with 20th-century photographs, show

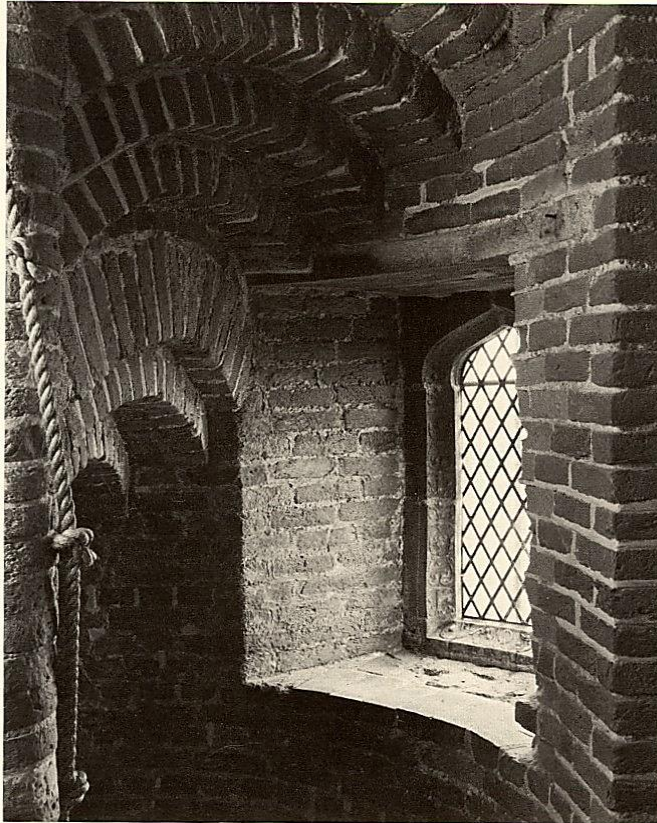


bad roads, I am of opinion, will never induce any person to complete what he had near finished, and in its present situation all the money is thrown away as the farm is very little better on account of these buildings."

Pelham's Gothick farmhouse was wrapped around three sides of the tower, while the tower itself was given a Gothick frontispiece on its free side. Gothick, that is, except for the inclusion of a Classical pediment and dentilled cornice. The mixture of the two styles here is particularly close to Kent's wings at Rousham, and the similarity of Laughton to his Gothick work in general hardly needs labouring. Of the three payments to Kent in Pelham's bank account, the first of £210 in 1736 presumably relates to Esher, and the third, of £298 5s in 1748, to Arlington Street.

The second, of merely £25 in 1739, might conceivably cover the provision of drawings for the conversion of Laughton, although there is no reason why they should have been acted upon until some years later, even after Kent's death in 1748—perhaps in 1751, for instance, when Pelham made an unsuccessful attempt to retire from politics.

By this time, it seems, he had handed over Esher to his daughter Frances, and may have been looking forward to rustic retirement on his Sussex estates. In the event he died,



5—STAIR TURRET AFTER RESTORATION

still in harness, in 1754, and Laughton Place immediately became, not a *ferme ornée* but a farmhouse proper.

So it continued into this century, occasionally visited by local antiquarians, but largely ignored and increasingly decrepit. In 1927 the Pelham family sold off its Laughton property, and the building was abandoned even as a farmhouse. In the 1950s the Gothick wings were pulled down, leaving the tower, still with its Gothick frontispiece, once more isolated—a curious parallel to the sequence of events at Esher.

By 1978, with the internal floors gone and the outer walls rent with the most alarming cracks, it seemed as though nothing could save the building from collapse or demolition. In that year, however, by extreme good fortune, the Landmark Trust persuaded a reluctant farmer to yield it up.

Three years later, after an immensely difficult and complex restoration, the first paying guests made their way down the rutted track, and Laughton Place joined the Dunmore Pineapple and Clytha Castle as one of the most idiosyncratic and architecturally rewarding properties on the Trust's books.

I am grateful to Charlotte Haslam of the Landmark Trust for her help with this article.

Illustrations: 2, John Warren; 3-5, Jonathan M. Gibson.