

EXTRACT FROM ENGLISH HERITAGE'S RECORD OF SCHEDULED MONUMENTS

MONUMENT: Old Soar Manor: a fortified medieval house

PARISH: PLAXTOL

DISTRICT: TONBRIDGE AND MALLING

COUNTY: KENT

NATIONAL MONUMENT NO: 27035

NATIONAL GRID REFERENCE(S): TQ61945410

DESCRIPTION OF THE MONUMENT

The monument includes the solar wing, attached chapel and garderobe block of a fortified manor house situated c.2km to the east of the village of Plaxtol, on the edge of the Kent Downs. The buildings, which are constructed of coursed Kentish Ragstone rubble and capped with red clay-tiled roofs, are Listed Grade I, and comprise the north eastern end of the original manor house. They date to c.1290, although there are some 14th century additions and alterations, and were restored during the 1940s. The main hall range of the medieval house, originally attached to the south western end of the solar wing, was demolished in 1780 and replaced by an adjoining farmhouse. This incorporates traces of the coursed rubble base of the original hall, which is believed to have been rectangular, aisled and timber-framed. The Grade II Listed farmhouse is in use as a private dwelling and is not included in the scheduling.

The solar wing is the largest of the standing medieval ranges and takes the form of a north west-south east aligned, two-storeyed, rectangular building measuring c.10m by c.7.5m. At ground floor level is a barrel-vaulted undercroft with an inserted brick floor, originally used for storage. The first floor, reached from the undercroft by way of a newel staircase set in a semicircular tower projecting from the south western corner of the block, formed part of the private accommodation of the lord's family. This chamber is lit by two, tall lancet windows set in the north western and south eastern walls. Further light is provided by a smaller, square-headed window, with a shouldered lintel and chamfered jambs, set in the north eastern wall, just to the north west of a large, square chimney breast. In the north eastern corner is a doorway leading to the attached chapel, whilst a further, now blocked, doorway in the south western wall originally provided access to the now demolished hall range. The solar wing has an open crown-post, collar-purlin truss roof, and its defences include arrow loops in the north eastern wall at first floor level, in the north western wall of the ground floor and in the wall of the staircase tower.

The chapel block, attached to the north eastern corner of the solar wing, is a roughly square building with walls c.6m long. The chapel is located on the first floor above an undercroft with an inserted, modern concrete floor, entered from the outside by a doorway with chamfered jambs and a segmental-pointed arch, set in the south western wall. The room is mainly lit by a large, pointed-arched two light window in the south eastern wall, restored during the 1940s, and two further arched windows which pierce the south western and north eastern walls. Set into the south western wall is a

piscina, or stone basin, with a cinquefoiled head, trefoil and crocket decoration and a hexagonal drain, dating to the early 14th century. The chapel functioned essentially as a chapel of ease, allowing the lord's family to attend regular Christian worship at home, rather than travel to the nearest parish church at Wrotham c.5km to the north.

The garderobe chamber, used as a room for storing clothes and also originally containing a latrine, is located on the first floor of the garderobe block.

This is a small, rectangular building attached to the north western corner of the solar wing, measuring c.6m by c.5m. Access to the garderobe is by way of a segmental-pointed arched doorway in the north western corner of the solar. Cruciform arrow loops provided protection on all four sides. To the north east at ground floor level is an exterior, two centred arch which allowed the emptying of the underlying latrine pit. The block now has a hipped roof, although this would originally have been pitched.

The external faces of all three blocks have putlogs, the regularly spaced, square holes which housed the original wooden medieval scaffolding poles used to aid the construction of the building.

Old Soar Manor is believed to have been built for the influential Culpepper family, who owned the manor of Soar from c.1290 to 1601, at which time the manor was sold to Nicholas Millar. By the 16th century, the buildings were being used as a farmhouse, and the solar wing was converted into a granary during the 18th century. The manor eventually became part of the Geary estate and the monument was given to the National Trust by Mrs J Cannon in 1947. The monument is in the care of the Secretary of State and is open to the public. Excluded from the scheduling are all rainwater goods, all English Heritage fixtures and fittings, all modern wooden doors and the modern concrete floor of the chapel undercroft, although the ground beneath this feature is included.

ASSESSMENT OF IMPORTANCE

Fortified houses were residences belonging to some of the richest and most powerful members of society. Their design reflects a combination of domestic and military elements. In some instances, the fortifications may be cosmetic additions to an otherwise conventional high status dwelling, giving a military aspect while remaining practically indefensible. They are associated with individuals or families of high status and their ostentatious architecture often reflects a high level of expenditure. The nature of the fortification varies, but can include moats, curtain walls, a gatehouse and other towers, gunports and crenellated parapets.

Their buildings normally included a hall used as communal space for domestic and administrative purposes, kitchens, service and storage areas. In later houses the owners had separate private living apartments, these often receiving particular architectural emphasis. In common with castles, some fortified houses had outer courts beyond the main defences in which stables, brew houses, granaries and barns were located.

Fortified houses were constructed in the medieval period, primarily between the 15th and 16th centuries, although evidence from earlier periods, such as the increase in the number of licences to crenellate in the reigns of Edward I and Edward II, indicates that the origins of the class can be traced further back. They are found primarily in several areas of lowland England: in upland areas they are outnumbered by structures such as bastles and tower houses which fulfilled many of the same functions. As a rare monument type, with fewer than 200 identified examples, all examples exhibiting significant surviving archaeological remains are considered of national importance.

Old Soar Manor survives comparatively well, retaining three standing wings of the original house, and represents an early example of this monument type. The buildings have been the subject of few alterations over the years and contain many original features, illustrating 13th century, Early English architectural

techniques and fashions. The garderobe block and chapel are particularly unusual survivals, the latter providing evidence for the importance of regular Christian worship amongst high status families during the medieval period.

SCHEDULING HISTORY

Monument placed in Guardianship on 15th October 1948 as:

COUNTY/NUMBER: Kent 88

NAME: Old Soar Manor, Plaxtol

The reference of this monument is now:

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SCHEDULING REVISED ON 01st July 1996