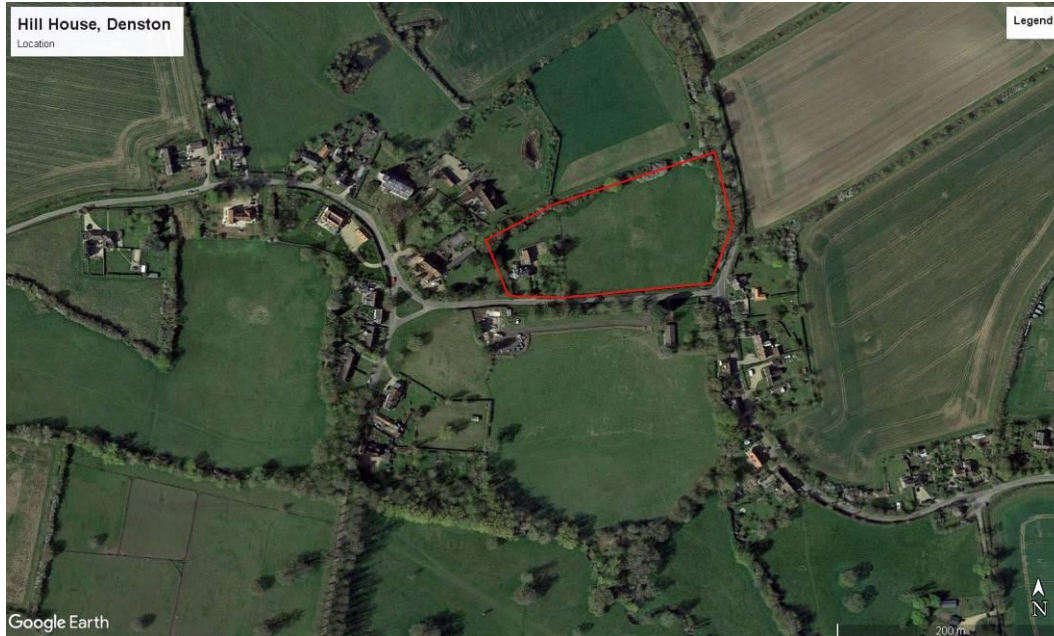
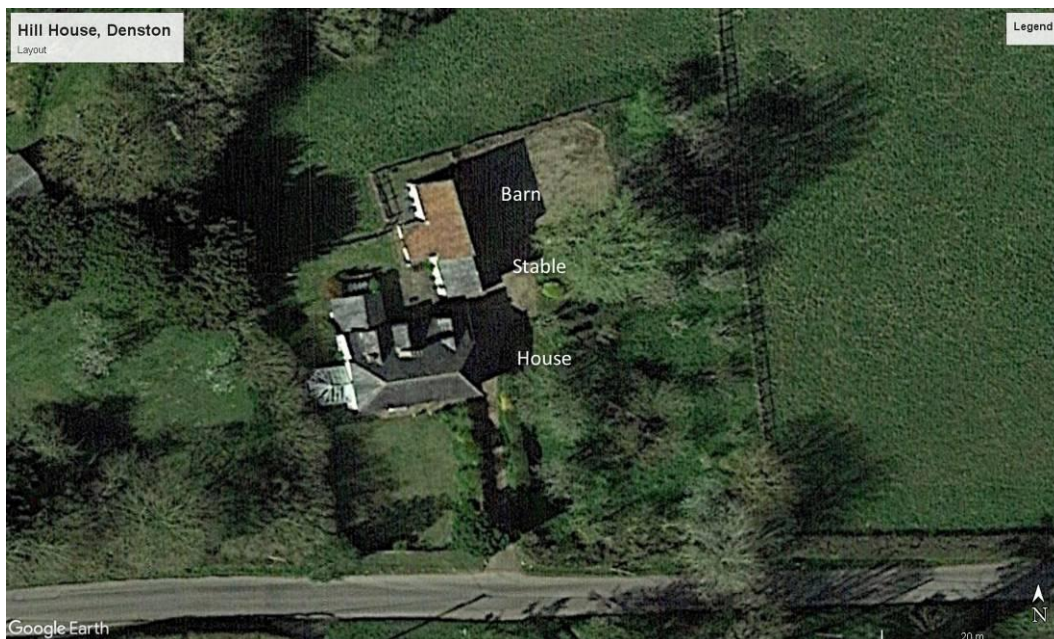


Hill House, Top Green, Denston, Suffolk CB8 8PW.
Historic building recording and analysis of the House. Recorded 27 05 2022.



2021 Google earth. Location of the site.

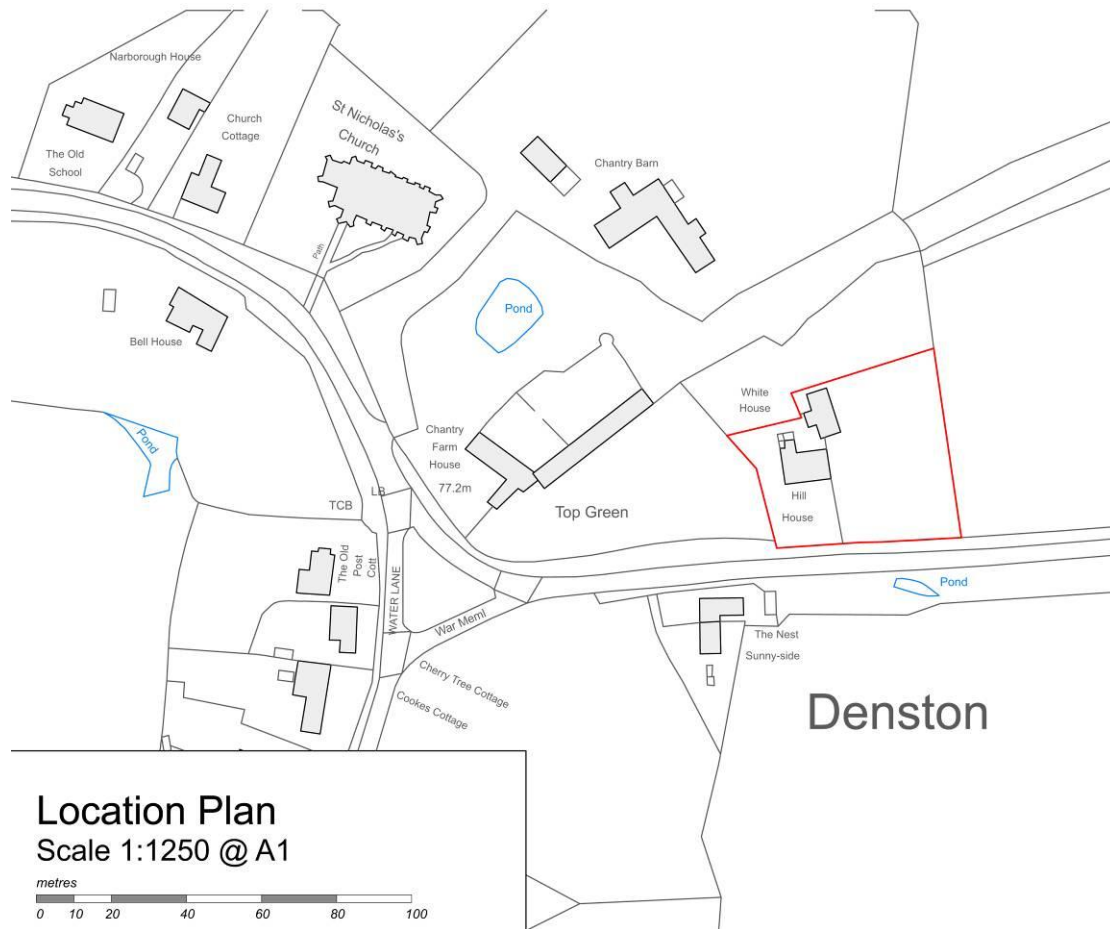


2021 Google earth. Detail of the site showing the buildings under study.

Location

Hill House, Top Green, Denston, Suffolk CB8 8PW. The site is immediately north of the road known as Top Green. The House is centred on TL7613252879. The Barn is at TL7613852896. The Stable is at TL7614052890.

Location plan of the site.



2022. Location of Hill House, Denston.

Listing

The House is Listed. The Barn is not Listed.

Entry Name: Hill House Listing Date: 20 May 1974 Grade: II Source: Historic England
Source ID: 1031663 English Heritage Legacy ID: 283095 County: Suffolk
District: West Suffolk Civil Parish: Denston Traditional County: Suffolk

1. DENSTON 2006 Top Green Hill House TL 75 SE 7/169 II GV

2. An early C19 timber-framed and plastered house. 2 storeys. 4 window range, double-hung sashes with glazing bars, in cased frames. A 4-panel door has an elliptical headed fanlight, fluted pilasters and a hood. The ground storey has 1 canted bay window. Roof slate, hipped. All the listed buildings in Top Green form a group. Listing NGR: TL7613252879.



SUMMARY

Site name/Address: Hill House, Top Green, Denston, Suffolk CB8 8PW.	
Parish: Denston	West Suffolk
NGR: TL7613252879.	Site Code: N/A
Type of Work: Historic Building Recording	Site Director/Team: Barry Hillman-Crouch
Date of Work: 27 05 2022	Size of Area Investigated: 20x40m
Location of Finds/Curating Museum: N/A	Funding source: Owner
Further Seasons Anticipated?: No	Related EHER Nos:
Final Report: Hill House, Top Green, Denston, Suffolk CB8 8PW. Historic building recording and analysis of the House. Recorded 27 05 2022. Barry J Hillman-Crouch MStPA DipFA BSc HND.	
Periods Represented: C15th - C20th	
<p>SUMMARY OF FIELDWORK RESULTS:</p> <p>Hill House is a typical Georgian country house of the MC18th that has built on an earlier cross-wing frame from a C15th open hall house. The western bays on the ground and first floor are framed for a cross-wing with heavy 8in wide axe finished oak studs, cambered top-plates and trenched down braces from swept jowl storey posts. On the ground floor, the few remaining studs in the eastern frame have fixture holes suitable for a bench and dais for the high end of an open hall. In the upper room the frame is smoked black from a hearth in an open hall that has subsequently been removed. The wall panels would have been made from wattle and daub with the ledgers set in long darts in the flanks of the studs.</p> <p>The style of the MC18th carpentry is quite brutal with major timbers cut through and pinned with forelock bolts but the fenestration and doorcase is of high quality and this is a common characteristic of this period. The building has been extensively altered. C.1800 a two storey rear extension was added with a brick built rear range for the more basic functions of kitchens, scullery, brewing and storage.</p> <p>In the MC20th the building was renovated with a new roof, ceilings and staircase and redecorated with lath and plaster finishes that were then over boarded or replaced with plasterboard. In the LC20th new dormers were added to form large bathrooms and the whole building redecorated, stripping out the internal walls and rendering the exterior with hard cement of EML.</p>	
Previous Summaries/Reports:	
Author of Summary: Barry J Hillman-Crouch MStPA DipFA BSc HND.	Date of Summary: 04 07 2022



The Barn in context with the House. Looking SE.



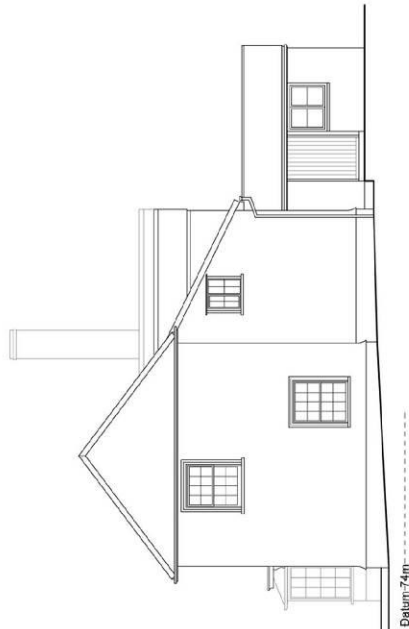
The south elevation of the House.

Scope of this Report

This report records and analyses the historic records of the building under study. This report adheres to Historic England Level 2 as outlined in Historic England. Understanding Historic Buildings – A guide to good recording practice. 2017. Page 25.

The Barn and Stable are recorded in a separate report. *Hill House, Top Green, Denston, Suffolk CB8 8PW. Historic building recording and analysis of the Stable and Barn. Recorded 27 05 2022.*

Description – External – House



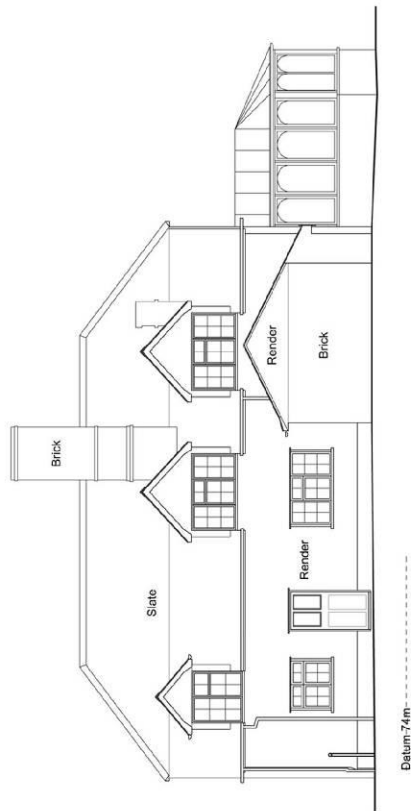
Side (East) Elevation



Side (West) Elevation



Front (South) Elevation



Rear (North) Elevation

2022. Elevations of the House

Description – External.



The south elevation.



The off-centre doorcase.

South Elevation

The south elevation presents the front of the building with four bays with the main doorcase set in the third bay from the west. The House is Georgian in style with a range of four upper 8/8 unhorned sash windows with many milled glass panes and two first floor 8/8 sash windows. Another opening has a canted bay with an 8/8 sash and 12 pane side casements. The fully hipped low pitch roof is clad with grey 12x24in slates.



Detail of the fenestration looking NW.



Detail of the doorcase.

The window frames and doorcase appear original and well kept with let in repair sections and recently replaced leadwork. The walls are clad with hard cement finished with a broom swept pattern on EML (Expanded Metal Lath) and with galvanised drips. C20th casements have been inserted on either side of the doorcase to light the entrance hall.



The eastern elevation in context with the Stable.



The eastern elevation.

Eastern Elevation

The eastern elevation has the main block with a two storey rear extension under a single pent catslide roof. The frame can be seen shadowed on ten EML cement render and suggest two earlier window openings on the ground floor. Both windows are 8/8 pane sashes with the lower being a LC20th replica with horned meeting rails.



Detail of the modern render and galvanised drip detail on the NE corner.



Upper floor window with metal frame.

The render has a broomed finish with repair sections over the galvanised drips. The rear extension has a single high level casement window with portrait panes in an opening metal frame but a LC20th machine made fixed light.



The north elevation with outshot and conservatory.



The north elevation.

North Elevation

The back of the building has three gabled dormers. The two larger ones are C20th additions with LC20th three light, six pane casements with central top-hung light. The smaller one to the east appears to have C19th framing exposed beneath it but is also C20th with the same fenestration. The ground floor also has the same LC20th window frames. The back door is a Victorian style four panel pine door that has been half-glazed. There is a tall red brick chimney stack that runs down the back of the original frame of the House and has been rebuilt in the MC20th.



East elevation of the Outshot.



The north elevation of the Outshot is partly hidden by a plastic oil tank.

There is another back door in the Outshot which appears EC19th with edge moulded vertical boards and four hand-made ledgers and has a LC19th small letter box fitted. The Outshot has red/orange 65x110x225mm brick walls with smooth, creased faces, sharp arrises set in lime mortar pointing in Flemish bond. The gable is rendered above the eaves line and the low pitch roof is clad with grey slates.



The west elevation.



The west elevation of the Outshot.

Western Elevation

The Outshot has been remodelled to house a boiler and create a wood store. Historic mapping implies the Outshot was extended between 1850 and 1884. The roof has been extended to oversail to form the log store in the LC20th. Cotton threaded asphalt membrane is visible under the grey slates. A timber conservatory was added to the main House in the LC20th and is now in poor condition. The whole building is coated in the same broomed finish cement render on EML and all the rainwater goods are plastic.



LC20th casement window in the west elevation.



Low quality timber was used in the LC20th casements.

The ground floor has a poor quality LC20th timber casement at the end of its serviceable life. The render shows several attempts to repair failing sections under the window.



The north and west elevations of the conservatory.



The south elevation of the conservatory.

The conservatory is a typical unit erected in the LC20th on a low brick plinth with a timber frame and large pane glazing. A pair of French doors have been inserted where a window would have been along with folding security gates.

Description – Internal.



2022. Existing ground floor plan.

The building is divided into four easily identifiable phases of construction. The main House with Living, Dining and Entrance Hall contains a C16th style timber-frame as its main structure but has been remodelled in the Georgian style. The Kitchen, Study and WC all lie within a two storey timber-framed rear extension. The Utility Room is within the brick built Outshot which has been modified in the LC20th to house a boiler.



Looking E in the Kitchen. The door leads to the Utility Room.



Looking W in the Kitchen. A fireplaces has been bricked up.

Kitchen

The Kitchen has been opened up in the LC20th to form a continuous single room. There are chimney breasts for two fireplaces. There is an exposed sole plate showing the timber-framed construction of the outer walls. The floors have recent laminate surfaces but feel like solid concrete. Two broken cable operated servant's bells have been left on the wall.



Looking N into the Utility Room in the Outshot.



Looking SW in the Utility Room.

Outshot Utility Room

The Utility Room has been outfitted in the very LC20th or EC21st with fitted cabinets, a washing machine and a boiler dated to 2017. The door from the Kitchen is a vertically boarded door with four ledgers, repair sections, a modern cat hole and is hung on pintle hinges.



The eastern end of the tie-beam with short iron tie.



The western end of the tie-beam with short iron tie and carcase hook.

There an exposed deep section timber tie-beam fixed with hand wrought short iron ties and with one sharp carcase hook. The timber appears sandblasted and has lost its patina. All the wall finishes are recent and the ceilings are plaster boarded.



Doorway into the Study. Looking E.



Doorway into the Study. Looking W.

Study and Shower Room

The study has a vertically boarded and ledgered door with a wooden box lock and Suffolk latch both fixed with slot headed screws. The door has been extended and rehung on pintles.



The doorway into the WC Shower Room.



Looking S in the Hallway next to the Study.

The rear extension has an eclectic selection of doors representing a series of modernisations. The WC has a MC20th copy of a Victorian four panel door (identified by its lack of mouldings and Deal construction). The Hallway has a C21st fully glazed door often put in by ageing occupants to increase the internal light.



The staircase is MC20th. Looking N.



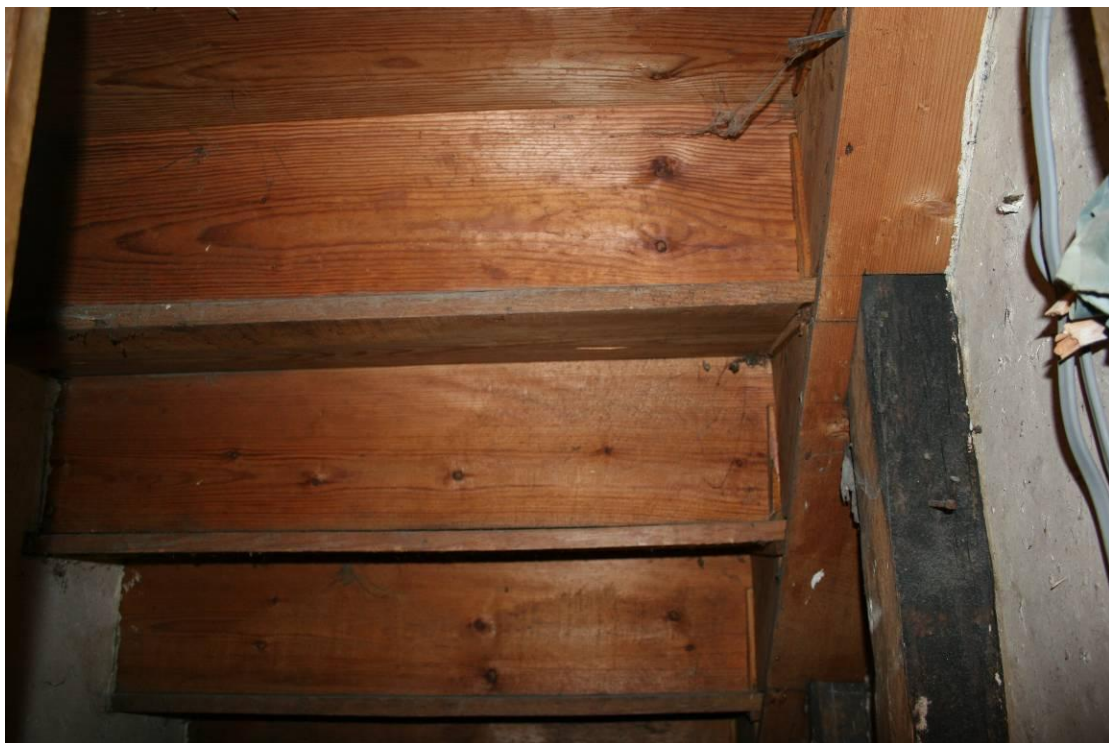
The first floor banister rail looking S.

Hallway Stairs

The Hallway stairs are styled for the Victorian era with alternating turned and barley twist spindles but the construction details and pine risers and treads suggest they are MC20th.



The closet under the stairs.



Detail of the pine risers and treads. Looking S.

The staircase is made of machined pine with screwed together treads and risers numbered up and marked up in pencil. The treads are lodged in the stringers and the risers held in with fillets. The pine has not aged and must only be MC20th or later. The carcass is older and is probably late Victorian. There is a small two board door with reused wrought iron pintle straps and small steel lock.



Looking N in the Dining Room.



Looking S in the Dining Room.

Dining Room

The Dining Room display no historic fabric except the windows. The four panel Victorian style door is a MC20th replica with nailed in mouldings. The original lock has been replaced with a B&Q brass door handle. The storey post and main joist have been boxed in. The walls and ceiling are plaster-boarded. The bullnose skirtings are narrow.



Looking W in the Living Room.



Looking N in the Living Room.

Living Room

The Living Room occupies two bays of a timber-frame where the dividing wall has been cut through and most of the studs removed. There is a brick firebreast with timber bressummer that has been stripped of its render, repointed and rebuilt above the bressummer. The lower part has reused Tudor style 50x110x230mm red/orange bricks in thick buttered lime mortar joints. The upper section has 70x110x225mm red and orange bricks with blue headers laid in English bond with regular 10mm white mortar joints. There is a wrought iron strap with rowlock course segmental arch over the fireplace.



The dividing wall has been largely removed.



Stud with deeply cut wattling dart. Southern end of wall frame.

The dividing wall has the original storey post that carries up into the room above and three original studs with darts and mortices for ledgers for wattled panels. The faces have stripes from being lime plastered and each has a few fixture holes. The 6in wide studs are morticed into the midrails and the sole plate which is a later replacement.



The storey post has a slip tenon which is numbered to match the sole plate.



The soleplate is rebated for a doorway.

The soleplate has a rebate for a doorway which was subsequently blocked with an inserted stud. The storey post has a slip tenon which is numbered to match the sole plate but also has an earlier number. The wall was remodelled in the Georgian era when the house was given its current form.



Looking S in the western half of the Living Room.

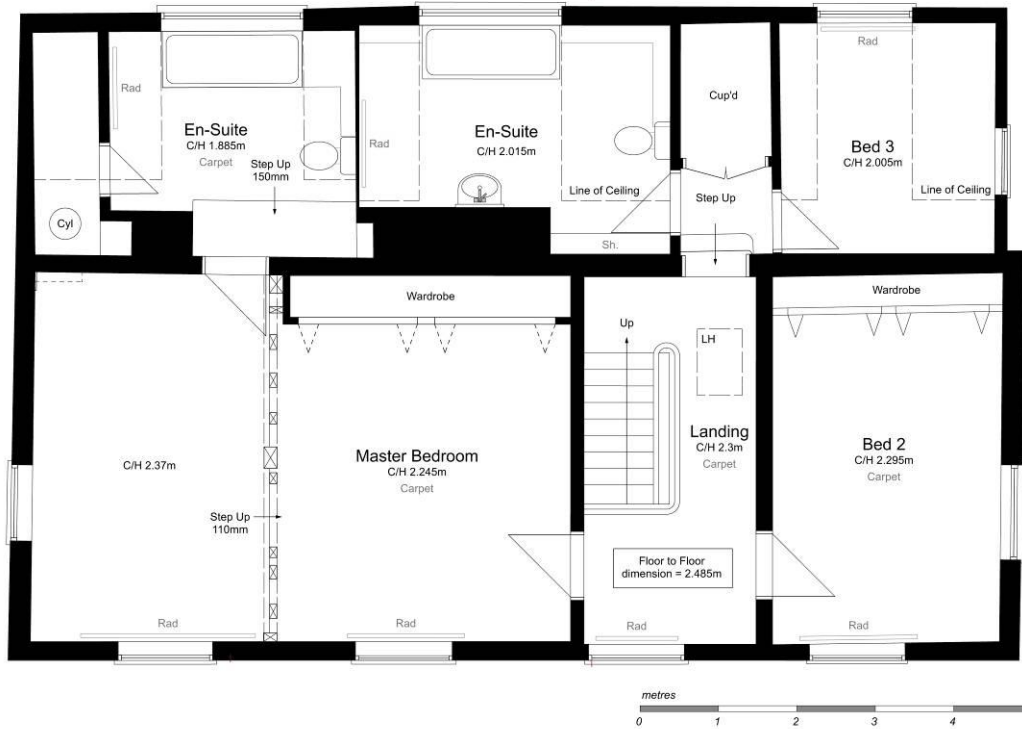


The external western wall frame.

The south and west walls have exposed 8in axe finished oak studwork and midrails, The studs have several taper burn marks showing that tapers were applied to the timbers in the same places many times rather than as single marks. The studs have been cut short and a new sole plate inserted on a brick plinth in the western wall. The south wall is frame for a large central window with a shutter and a later aperture has been inserted for a side light. The framing suggests that the western part of the Living Room is a cross-wing.



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2022. Hill House First Floor.



Looking W in Master Bedroom 1.



Detail of the inserted doorway in the top-plate.

Master Bedroom 1

The frame in the Living Room continues up into the Master Bedroom where it displays two easily defined phases noted by a radical contrast in colour.



The western side of the wall frame.



Detail of the forelock bolts.

The east side of the earlier frame is blackened by smoke from a hearth in an open hall that is no longer present. The main beam has been sawn through and a door frame secured with forelock bolts, rebated and punched for pintle hinges. The timber has been chiselled out to recess the forelocks so they can be buried in lath and plaster as part of a Georgian conversion. Whilst the lower studs are all correctly pegged the upper studs are of various colours and skew nailed in place with some being LC20th.



Large apotropaic VV mark on the early stud.



Taper burn marks and strike marks on the top-plate.

The top-plate has a large number of strike marks made with a narrow blade and several repeated taper burn marks on both sides. Some resemble numbers such as IIIIV and there is a definite VV mark. Others are parallel frenetic strike marks. One of the studs has a VV mark made with a race knife. These are Marian marks signifying Virgin of Virgins. When so many strike marks are seen they are considered as apotropaic marks used in a blessing ritual to protect the occupants of the house from witchcraft. Single taper burn marks are also considered apotropaic. Repeated marks are more likely made when the Bible has been read time and time again in the dark and the timbers marked with the flame.



The light colour stud indicates an earlier opening. Looking W.



C18th wrought iron tie used to repair the failed joint in the top-plate. Looking E.

The frame has braces from the jowled storey posts that are trenched across the studs on the eastern side (where the timbers are blackened). The joints with the top-plate and storey posts have been reinforced with C18th style hand-wrought iron ties fixed with staples and nails. One of the studs is an obvious insertion and this would have been where the hatch door into the upper room would have been.



The fitted closets hide the firebreast. Looking N in the Master Bedroom.



Looking north in the western half of the Master Bedroom.

The firestack seen downstairs has been bricked up and rendered over on the first floor and only a vent shows its position. The top-plate is visible in the north wall where it has been cut through to insert a door into the current bathroom.



Looking W in the Bathroom.



The flank of the western firestack.

Bathroom

The Bathroom is a LC20th addition and has modern decor and sanitary wares. Of interest is the flank of the western firestack seen in the Kitchen which has been limewashed.



The east wall of the Bathroom.



The flank of the central firestack.

The west flank of the central firestack can be seen in the east wall of the Bathroom. The bricks have been rendered over but the size and construction details are similar to the other firestack and it is evident that both have been formed at the same time.



Looking N in Bedroom 2.



Looking S in Bedroom 2.

Bedroom 2

Bedroom 2 displays no historic fabric except for the windows which have fine astragals and milled glass panes. In contrast the window at the top of the stairs is a LC20th replacement.



Bedroom 3 looking NE.



Bedroom 3 looking NW.

Bedroom 3

Bedroom 3 displays pitsawn oak timber top-plates in the external wall. That in the eastern wall appears to have been lowered to insert a window. All the finishes are recent.



Looking W in Bathroom 2.



Looking E in Bathroom 2.

Bathroom 2

Bathroom 2 also displays the top-plate of the timber frame. Again all the finishes are recent with plaster boarded walls and ceilings and carpeted pine boarded floors.

Roof Structure



Looking NW in the roofspace.



Looking W in the roofspace.

The fully hipped roof is a simple clasped side purlin construction and is composed mostly of M-LC20th machined red softwood. Some older elm rafters have been reused and are turned on edge displaying hundreds of marks from lath nails. The rafters are paired onto a ridgepiece and are cut on a metric module with 80mm thick rafters and 180mm deep collars.



Detail of the collars and principal rafters.



Reused studs used as hangers for the ceiling structure.

The roof has an asphalt undercloak indicating a re-tile between about 1965 and 1985 but it is exceptionally clean and made be a later like-for-like repair. There are some ceiling hangers cut from older elm studs.



Machined softwood ceiling joists with lath and plaster.



Earlier softwood main ceiling joist with skew nailed common joists. Note plasterboard.

The ceilings have machine cut softwood main joists which appear older and greyer than the bright red softwood common joists which are skew nailed in place. The ceilings have cedar laths and bright white plaster used in the MC20th before plasterboard made it obsolete in the 1960's. Sheets of British Gypsum Gyproc have been used to overboard all the ceilings.

Topographical Survey from Maps

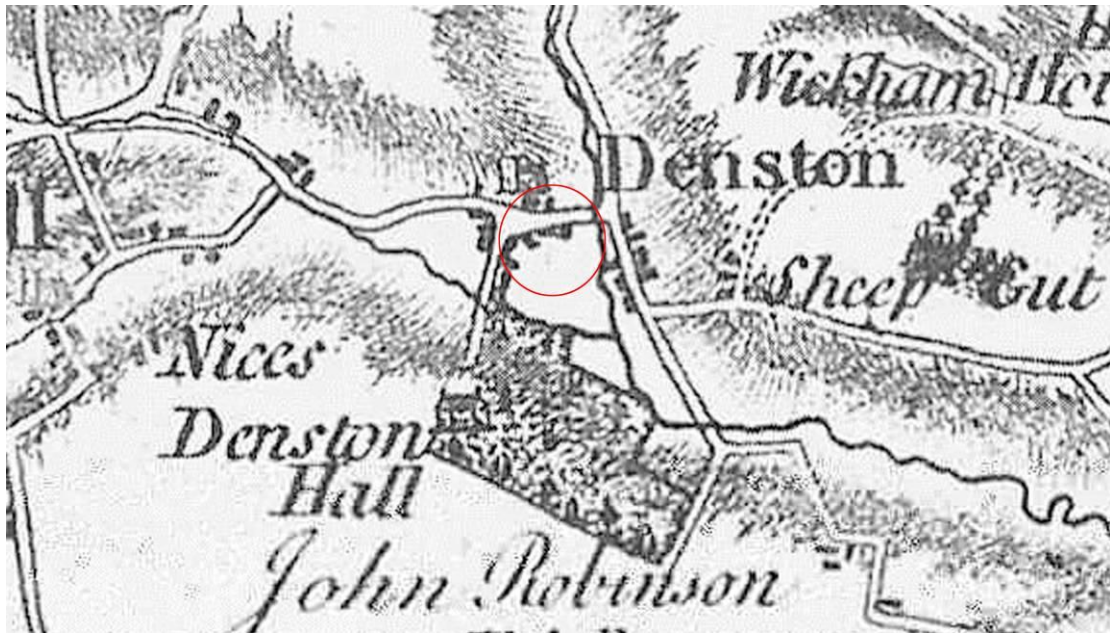


1778 Denston Estate Map.



1778 Denston Estate Map.

The House and Barn are shown on the 1778 Denston Estate Map. Two other buildings are also depicted. The plot is labelled for Thomas Webb. The buildings are not shown realistically but schematically. For example Hill House is shown as being the same as the cottages across the road which were notably more modest buildings.

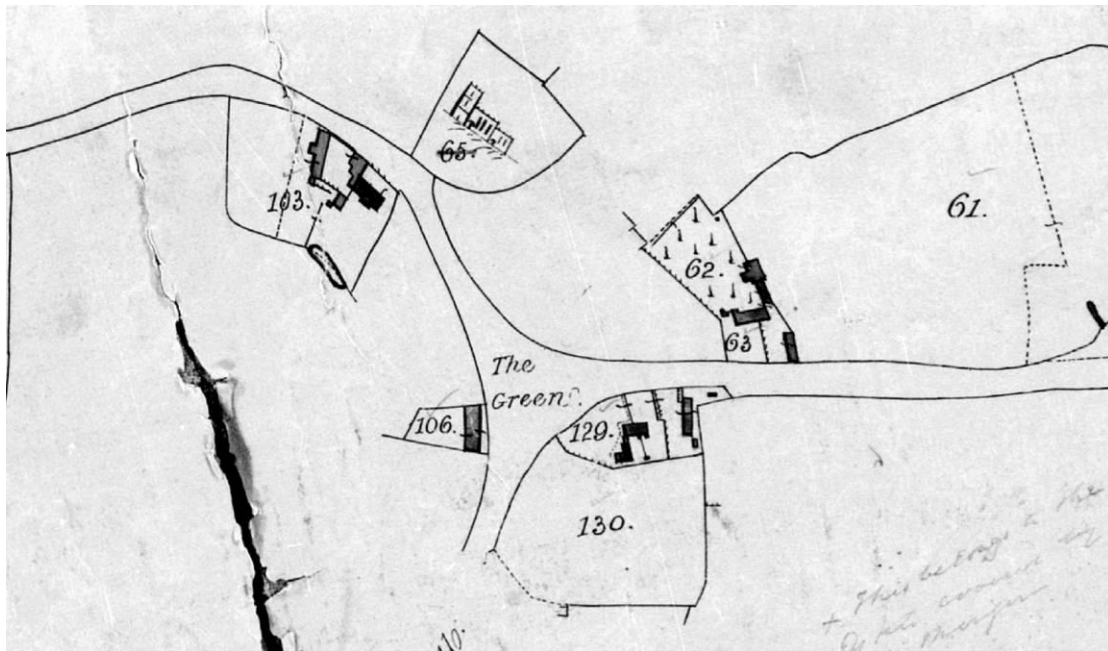


1783 Hodgekinson's Map of Suffolk.

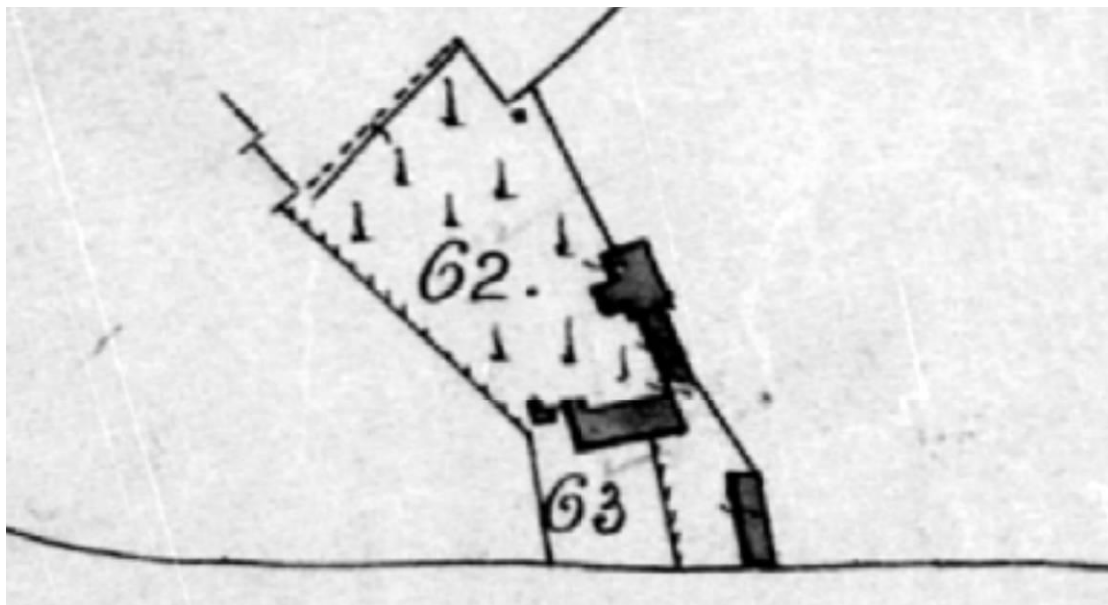


1805 Ordnance Survey.

The 1783 map and the 1805 OS show the House but not the outbuildings.



The 1850 Tithe Map for Denston.

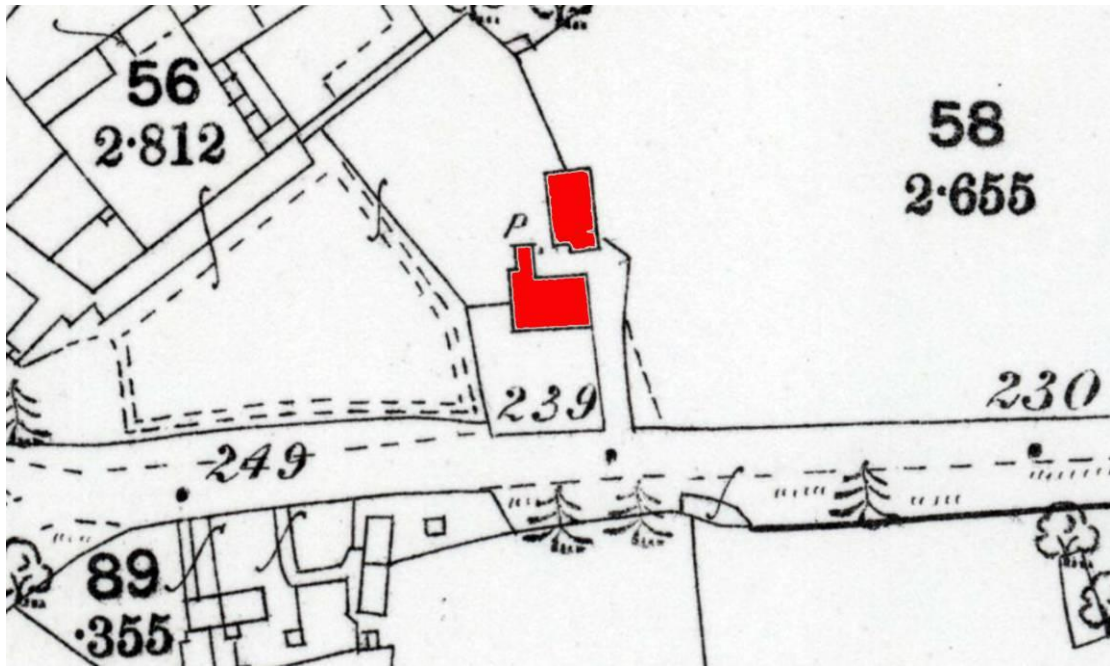


The 1850 Tithe Map for Denston.

The site is shown on the 1850 Tithe Map for Denston. Plot 63 Cottage and Garden owned by Thomas Webb and occupied by John Starling. Plot 62 Outbuildings Orchard and Yard owned and occupied by Thomas Webb. Plot 61 Old Field was laid to arable and pasture and the orchard was also used for pasture. The House is shown with a small rear outshot and much closer to the Stable range than today which has been subsequently truncated.

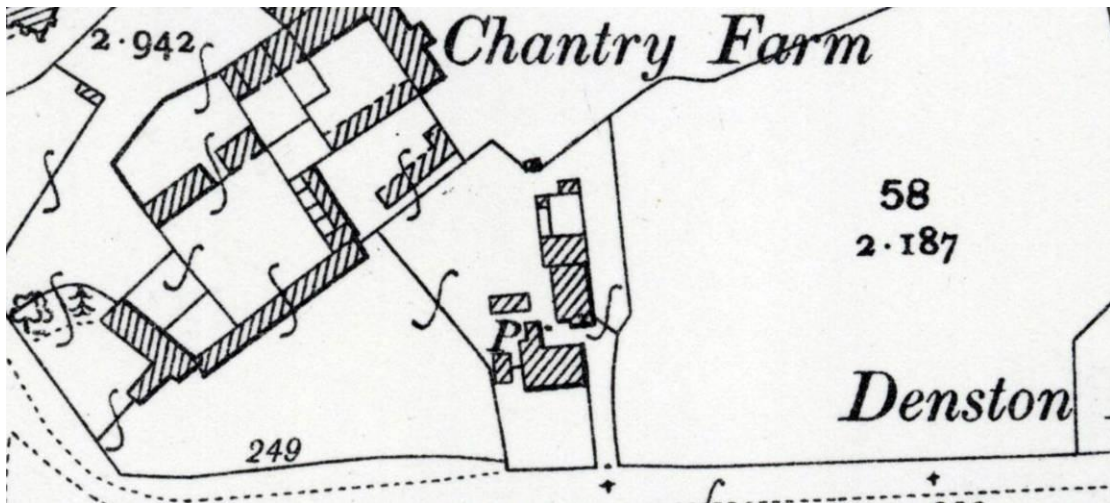


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1884 Ordnance Survey Map.

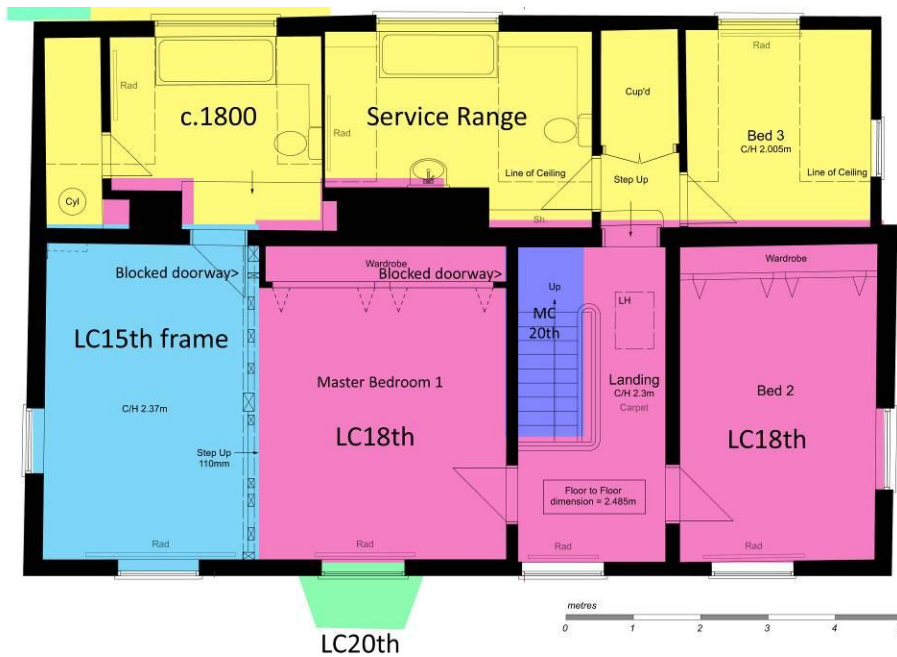
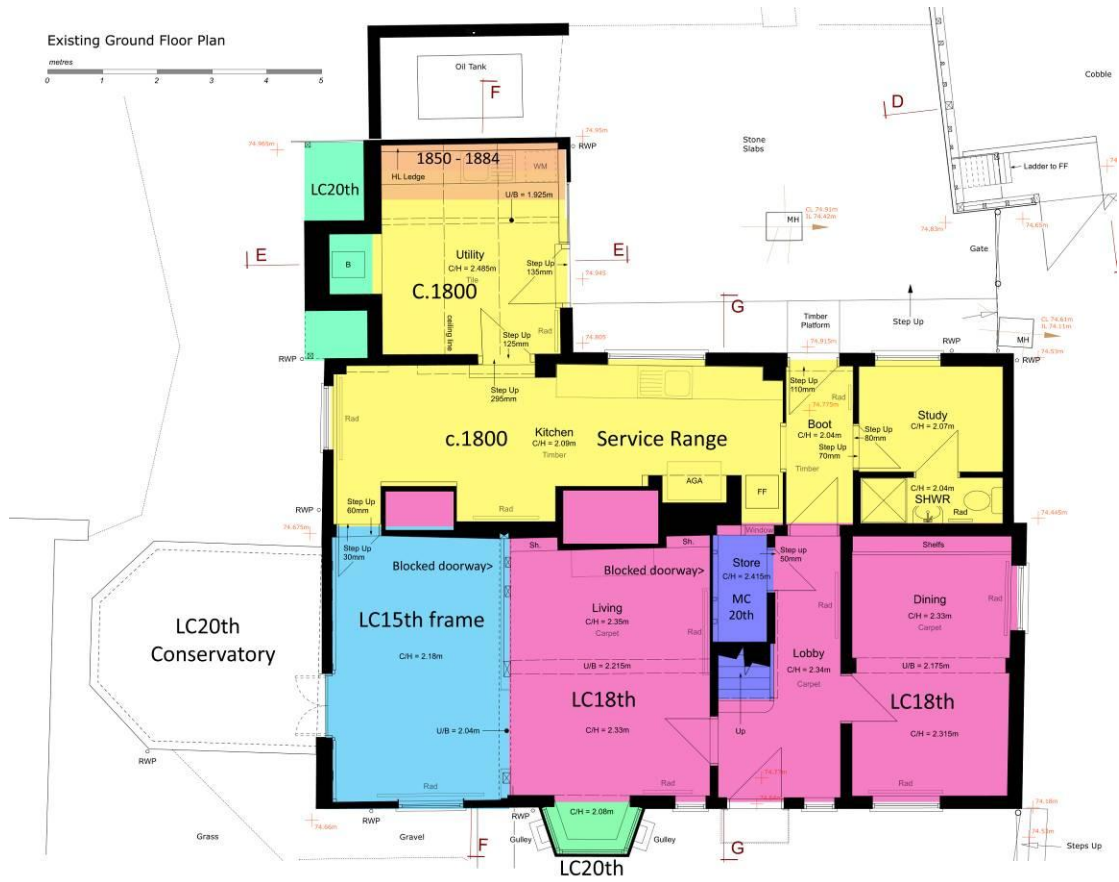


1902 Ordnance Survey Map.



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Phasing and Discussion



General phase plan Ground and First Floors.

Phase 1 – C15th frame.

The western bays on the ground and first floor are framed for a cross-wing with heavy 8in wide axe finished oak studs, cambered top-plates and trenched down braces from swept jowl storey posts. On the ground floor, the few remaining studs in the eastern frame have fixture holes suitable for a bench and dais for the high end of an open hall. In the upper room the frame is smoked black from a hearth in an open hall that has subsequently been removed. The wall panels would have been made from wattle and daub with the ledgers set in long darts in the flanks of the studs.

The frame is marked with many taper burns and apotropaic marks in the form of repeated slash marks and at least two VV inscriptions. These are Marian marks – invoking the protection of Mary Mother of God and can be read either as M for Mary or VV – Virgin of Virgins. The strike marks represent blessings made to either protect the building or to expel spirits. The fact that there are marks on both sides of the top-plate means that the practice continued into the C16th or even C17th when the open hall would have been floored over.

There was a hatch into the upper room which was probably for looking down rather than for a ladder as this would have interfered with the dais and canopy. One of the VV marks is directly above the hatch opening and could have been made from the other side.



1778 Denston Estate Map.

Phase 2. MC18th Georgianisation. Before 1778.

There is no good evidence that the open hall or its later floor remain and they were most likely completely removed when the building was Georgianised in the LC18th. The firestack in the Living Room is made from 2in Tudor style bricks below the bressummer but C18th style 70mm thick bricks above. It was common practice to reuse the older bricks and only indicates that the open hall had a fireplace added later in its development.

The second firestack was added to heat the two rooms in the westernmost bays and is built to a similar design with the same sized bricks. All the fireplaces have been subsequently

bricked up except in the Living Room where the firebreast has been stripped of its render and the brickwork exposed in the LC20th.

On both floors there are blocked up doorways into each room against the north wall. It is likely the rooms were interconnected with staircases providing access at each end of the building both for servants and the family. A central doorway was created in the upstairs bedroom by cutting through the top-plate and inserting a frame secured with forelock bolts sunk into the timbers to allow lath and plaster to be applied throughout.

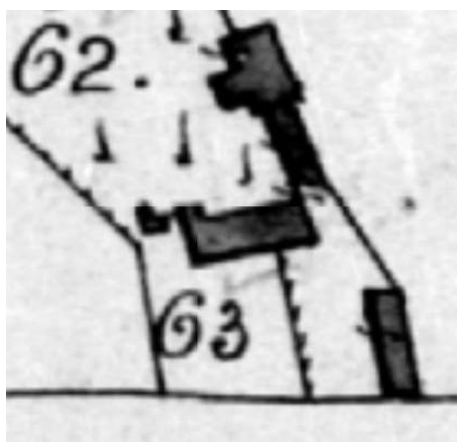
Phase 3. C.1800. Rear Service Range

A common addition to farm and village houses that were prospering was a full length rear range to accommodate a scullery, new kitchen, new staircase and other 'offices' that made domestic life easier. The two storey addition may also have allowed for a corridor across the back of the house so the bedrooms could be made private rather than 'walk-through'.

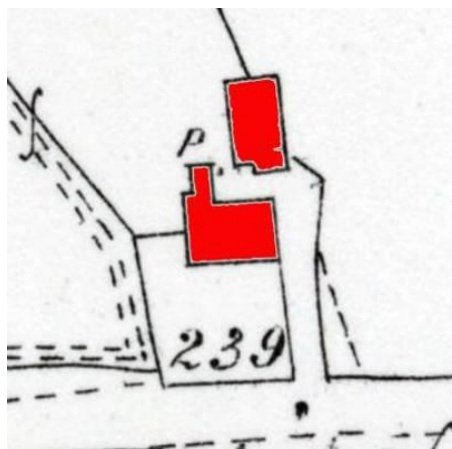
The rear extension has at least three rooms with a lobby for rear access. The two fireplaces were also opened up on the north side to provide cooking facilities which may have also included brewing and washing. The internal partitions have been removed to open out the Kitchen but the Study remains and was most likely a pantry or larder.

The brick extension now containing the Utility Room has a carcass hook for rendering animals and may have been a general purpose room as well as a log or coal store. It is the only brick part of the building except where plinths have been inserted to replace the rotted away frame.

There is a good historical reason why this type of work flourished c.1800. Farming enjoyed an economic boom during the era of the Napoleonic War (1799-1815) due to embargoes placed on grain and timber among other products sourced from France. Essex farms capitalised on the high grain prices and expanded significantly. The shortage of timber led to an industry where buildings were fabricated from recycled timbers pinned together with ironwork and these are seen in Hill House.



1850 Tithe Map Denardiston



1884 Ordnance Survey Map.

Phase 3 – E-MC19th. 1850 to 1884.



Mapping indicates that the rear range was extended between 1850 and 1884. This would explain the change in brickwork in the walls and the back door with a letterbox in it. The fence lines indicate direct access to the rear of the building.

Phase 4. MC20th. New roof, staircase and ceilings.

It is impossible that the building stayed static for a hundred years but later interventions have removed all the Victorian features except for the servant's bells and some four panel doors which have been stripped and rehung. The roof has been completely rebuilt with MC20th machined red softwood and an asphalt membrane. The ceilings were replaced. Some older elm rafters are retained but there are only a few. The ceilings have been replaced with softwood common joists and rendered over cedar laths. The use of cedar was popularised in the EC20th and carried through to the 1960's when plasterboard became the common material to clad walls and ceilings.

The staircase was replaced with a machined timber structure which may have mimicked an earlier one but it is more likely the original had stick balusters in the Regency style to match the doorcase. The fireplaces were bricked up except for that in the Living Room which was made into a 'feature' by stripping off its render and exposing the brickwork. This could be done because central heating was installed.

Phase 5. LC20th. External render, window repairs, internal strip out.

The building was invested in during the LC20th and most likely the 1970's through to the 1990's when it was fashionable to create open plan homes. The Kitchen was opened out into three bays, the Living Room was opened out by removing most of the cross-wing wall and the Master Bedroom above similarly opened out but retaining most of the now butchered frame.

The two bathrooms were added in the LC20th and a new suite of timber framed casements installed in the dormers and back rooms. The exterior was rendered with hard cement on EML. Some sash windows were replaced but most were repaired with let in sections. As would be expected the decorative schemes are LC20th with plasterboard finishes, self assembly furniture and updated electrics. A timber conservatory was added. The roof over the rear range Utility Room was rebuilt for a new boiler.

Significance

Hill House is a typical Georgian country house of the MC18th that has built on an earlier cross-wing frame from a C15th open hall house. The style of the MC18th carpentry is quite brutal with major timbers cut through and pinned with forelock bolts but the fenestration and doorcase is of high quality and this is a common characteristic of this period. The building has been extensively altered. C.1800 a two storey rear extension was added with a brick built rear range for the more basic functions of kitchens, scullery, brewing and storage.

In the MC20th the building was renovated with a new roof, ceilings and staircase and redecorated with lath and plaster finishes that were then over boarded or replaced with plasterboard. In the LC20th new dormers were added to form large bathrooms and the whole building redecorated, stripping out the internal walls and rendering the exterior with hard cement of EML.

As such the building is typical of the small rural higher status house, developing from the early yeoman's open hall into a more glamorous Georgian house mimicking those in 'town'.

Acknowledgements

I am indebted to the current owners for engaging me to record the buildings and to JAP architects for recommending me and supplying the architect's plans.

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