

1 Bridges Cottages, Darmsden, Suffolk

Heritage Asset Assessment



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March 2021

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This report provides an historic analysis at Historic England (2016) Level 2 of a grade II-listed building at TM 09248 52724, and is intended to inform and accompany an application for Listed Building Consent. The site was inspected on 15th March 2021.

Summary

1 and 2 Bridges Cottages represent the two halves of a former farmhouse that has been divided into separate dwellings at least since the 1960s and possibly from the latter part of the 19th century. At the time of the parish tithe survey in 1841 the farm was a tenanted arable holding of approximately 110 acres on the estate of the Earl of Ashburnham based at nearby Barking Hall, and is understood to have been acquired subsequently by the Shrubland Hall estate. It was known as Darmsden Farm as is marked as such on the 19th and early-20th century Ordnance Surveys which show a large barn and a complex of farm buildings immediately to the west. These outbuildings appear to have been demolished in the 1950s or 60s when the house was renamed Bridges Cottages after its previous occupants. The census of 1911 records an Ernest Bridges, a farm horseman, living next door to his younger twin siblings, William and Eliza – probably in the already sub-divided house. No. 2 Bridges Cottages is a complete early-16th century timber-framed house of 1.5 storeys containing a central hall flanked by a pair of service rooms on the right and a parlour to the left in the usual manner of its period. The majority of no. 1 occupies a large mid-17th century 2 storied extension projecting at right angles from the front of the parlour and consists of two rooms on each side of a central chimney. This new building was entered by a rare and ostensibly original single-storied porch opposite the chimney, and it is likely to have been designed as a ‘unit house’ for a semi-independent unit of the farming family. Complete unit houses of this kind are known elsewhere in East Anglia but are not common, and the property is accordingly of considerable historic interest. No. 1 also includes the ground-floor parlour of the early-16th century house, but not the chamber above, and a series of late-20th century single-storied sheds and garages to the rear. The 17th century structure contains an unusual combination of tall and flat-sectioned joists in the same ceiling, and originally faced north-east towards the church with a pair of dormer windows above the porch. A major refurbishment in the 1980s saw a new porch and dormers added to the rear, along with the rebuilding of the original chimney and stair. The internal fixtures, fittings and partitions are chiefly of this date.

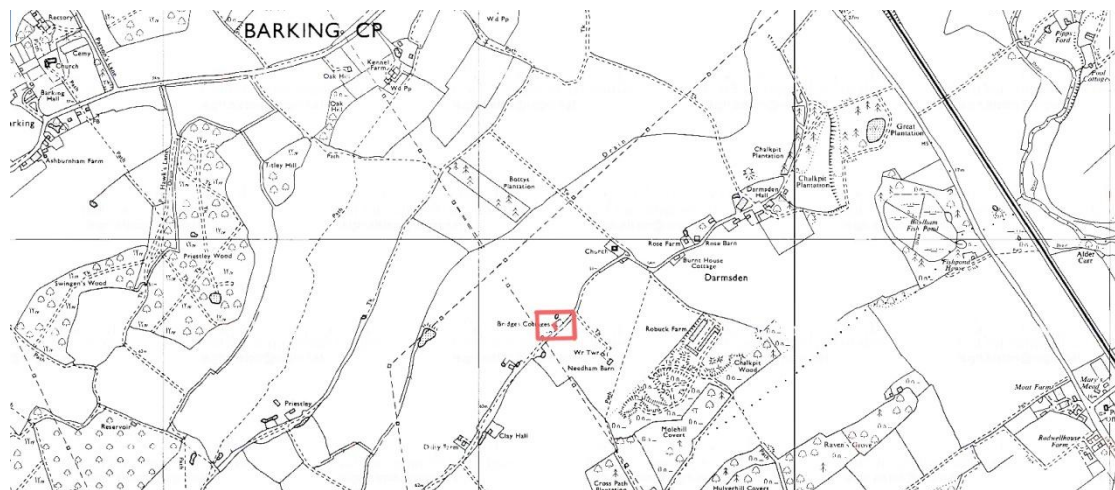


Figure 1. Location map highlighting Bridges Cottages to the south-west of St Andrew's church in Darmsden with Barking Hall to the north-west.

Documentary History and Map Regression

1 Bridges Cottages represents one half of a former farmhouse lying in open countryside approximately 300 m south-west of St Andrew's church in Darmsden. The site adjoins the north-western side of a private lane reached from the B113 via the small hamlet of Darmsden to the north-east. The property was listed in 1986 as 1 and 2 Bridges Cottages, and was named as such on the Ordnance Survey of 1969, but was formerly known as Darmsden Farm as shown on successive Ordnance Surveys between 1884 and 1958. White's Directory of Suffolk for 1844 notes that Darmsden was then 'a small parochial chapelry, consolidated with Barking Rectory' and containing only 61 souls and about 790 acres of land belonging to the Earl of Ashburnham of Sussex and Sir William Fowle Middleton of nearby Shrubland Hall. In 2013 the hamlet separated from Barking to become a civil parish in its own right. The 1841 tithe survey for the parish of 'Barking with Needham and Darmsden' identifies the farm as a substantial tenanted holding of 109.5 acres owned by the Earl of Ashburnham as part of his Barking Hall estate and occupied by Thomas Snell. The land was chiefly arable with approximately 18 acres or 16% pasture, and the house was shown with much the same outline that it retained in 1969. A large barn with a characteristic T-shape lay to the west along with a number of smaller outbuildings that increased in number during the mid-19th century (figures 3 & 4). The farm buildings were demolished between 1958 and 1969 (if the 1958 six-inch map was properly re-surveyed), and no. 1 has since been extensively restored and extended with a series of single-storied additions to the north-west (figures 6-9). The current occupants of no. 2 have been in residence since the mid-1970s and recall at least two phases of work to no. 1 in the late-70s and 80s which included the remodelling of the interior, rebuilding the chimney, renewing the tiles and replacing the dormer windows of the original north-eastern elevation facing the church with a new pair to the south-west. The historic orientation of the house was turned from front to rear as part of this process, affording greater privacy to each cottage, with the original entrance porch blocked and another built against the back wall. The building's present name is understood to derive from its former occupants, and the census returns suggest it may have been divided into a pair of farmworkers' tenements as early as the mid-19th century: Thomas Snell was recorded as a farmer of 105 acres employing 7 men in 1851, living with a housekeeper and a 13-year-old 'backhouse boy', but the farm then seems to disappear from the returns and by 1881 George Bridges had appeared as an agricultural labourer with a wife and five children including Ernest aged 13 and a pair of 6-year-old twins called William and Eliza. By 1911 Ernest was a 'horseman on a farm' with his own family of three young daughters, and lived next-door to 36-year-old farm labourer William who formed a separate household with his unmarried sister Eliza. Although no house names are mentioned it seems likely both elements of the family occupied what is now Bridges Cottages.



Figure 2. The 1838 one-inch Ordnance Survey showing Barking Hall to the north-west with Bridges Cottages to the west of Barn Lane (to the left of the name 'Darmsden').

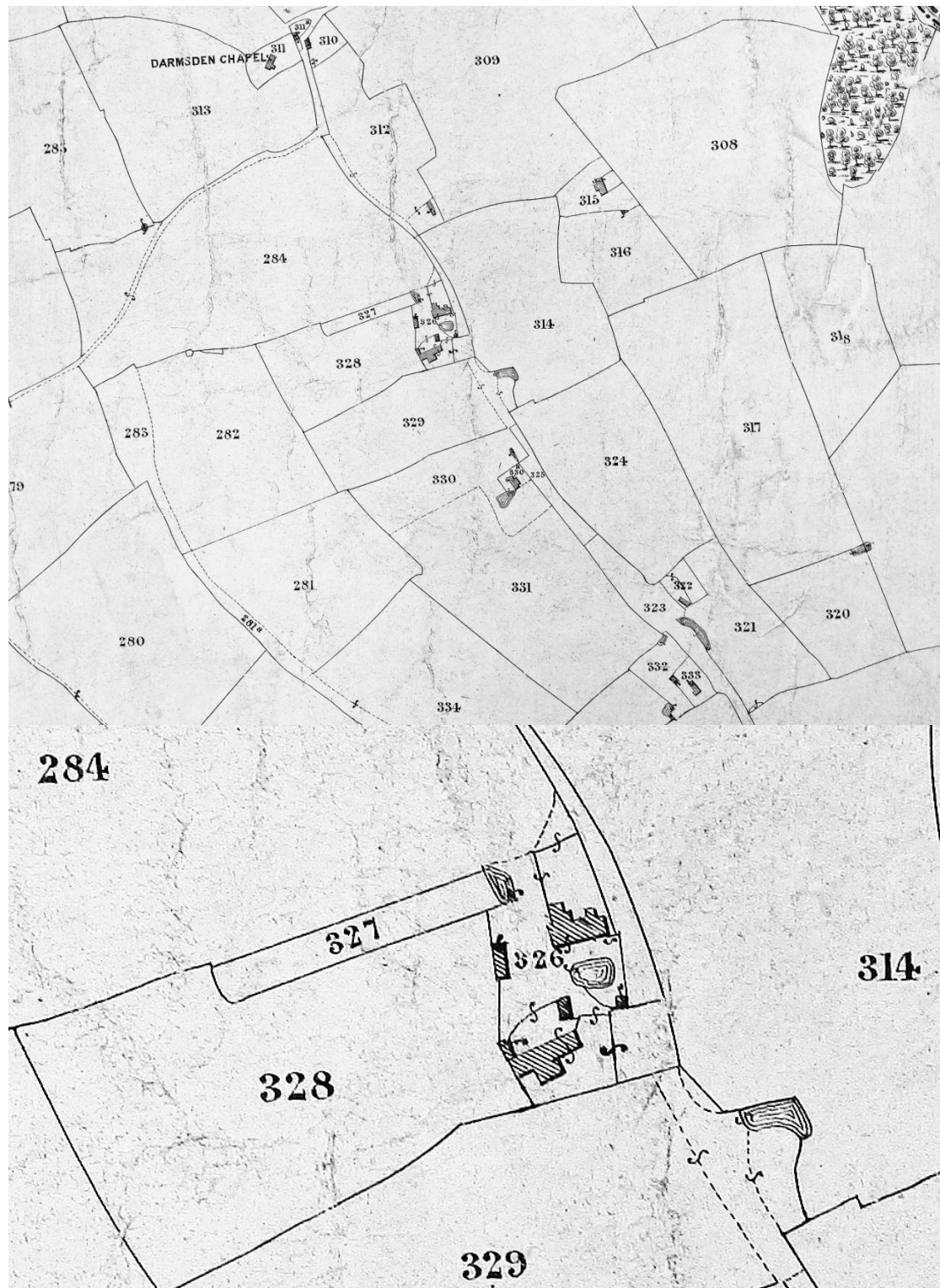


Figure 3a. The site on the 1841 tithe map of ‘Barking with Needham and Darmsden’, with a detail below (Suffolk Record Office). North lies towards the top left-hand corner. At this date Bridges Cottages was a single farm of 109.75 acres on the estate of the Earl of Ashburnham based at Barking Hall. Its site lay at the north-eastern end of a broad lane that almost certainly originated as a linear medieval green, but was described by the tithe apportionment as a ‘drift’ or road belonging in part to the farm (plot 325). Plot 326 was ‘buildings and yards’, 327 a ‘garden’, plot 328 ‘Stable Meadow’ and plot 329 ‘Stackyard Meadow’. ‘Slate Field’ lay to the north with ‘Great and Little Fidgets’ on the opposite side of the road (plots 314 and 312).

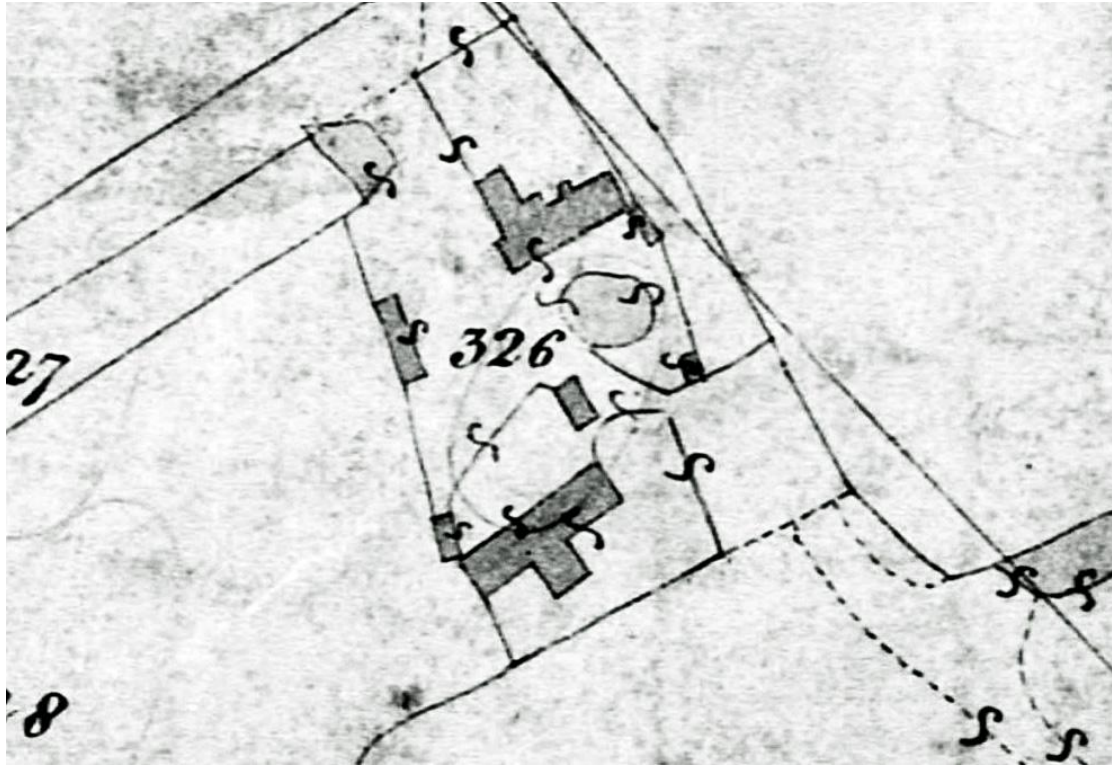


Figure 3b. The slightly different version of the 1841 map in the Public Record Office. The outline of the farmhouse remained much the same in the mid-20th century with its north-eastern porch and the lean-to in the angle of the old and new wings. The T-shaped building to the south-west was a large barn and the small adjoining shed probably a stable (hence the names of the adjacent fields). A second ‘barn, yard and pond’ lay to further to the south-west (plot 330a in figure 3a). The farm is understood to have been acquired later in the 19th century by the Shrubland Hall estate.

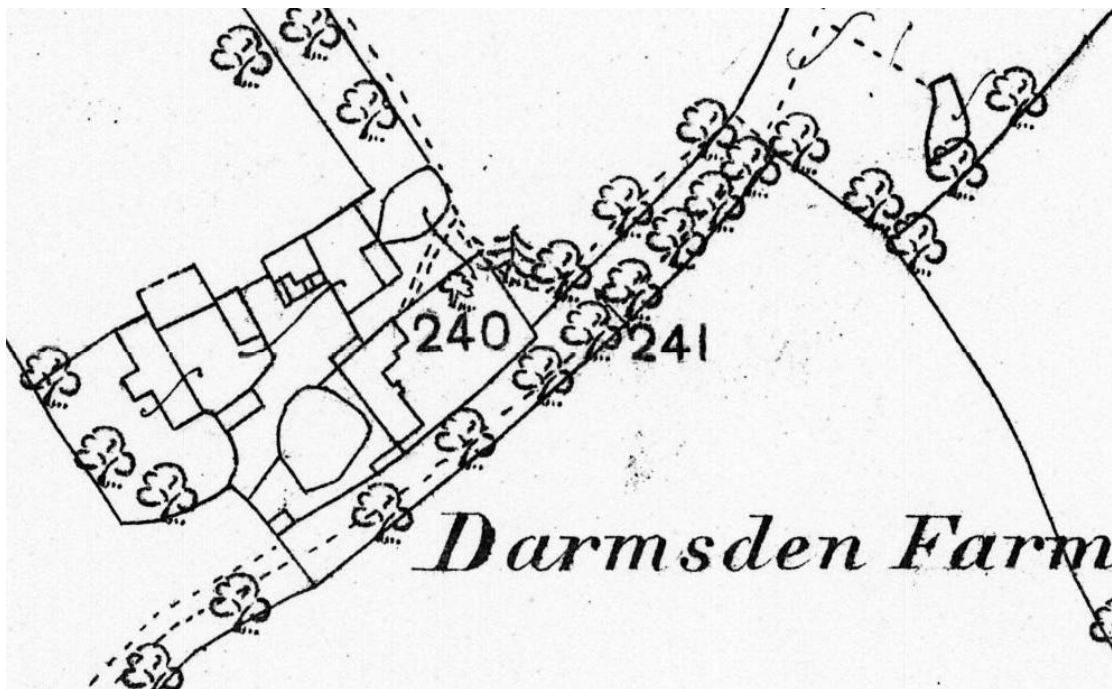


Figure 4. The First Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1884 naming the property as Darmsden Farm and showing the addition of several new farm buildings since 1841. The large pond behind the farmhouse has since been drained.

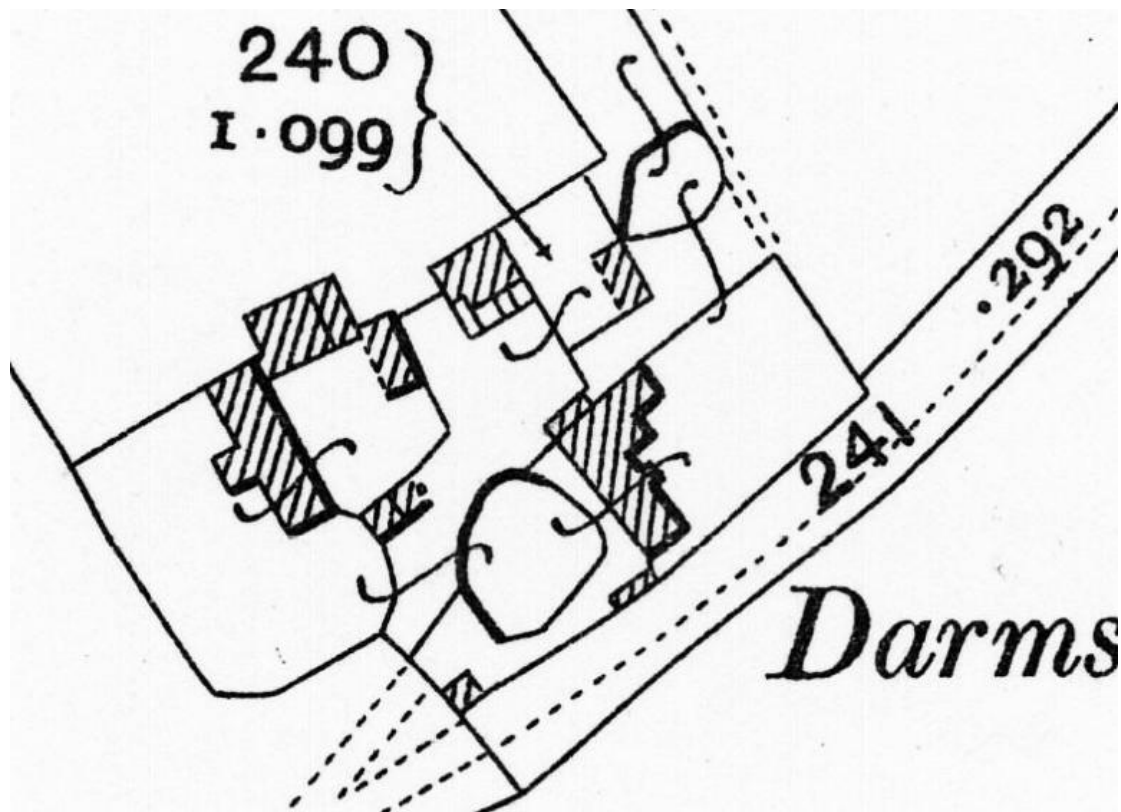


Figure 5. The Second Edition 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1902, showing little change since 1884. Open-sided structures such as cart lodges and the shelter-sheds of enclosed animal yards are indicated by broken lines.

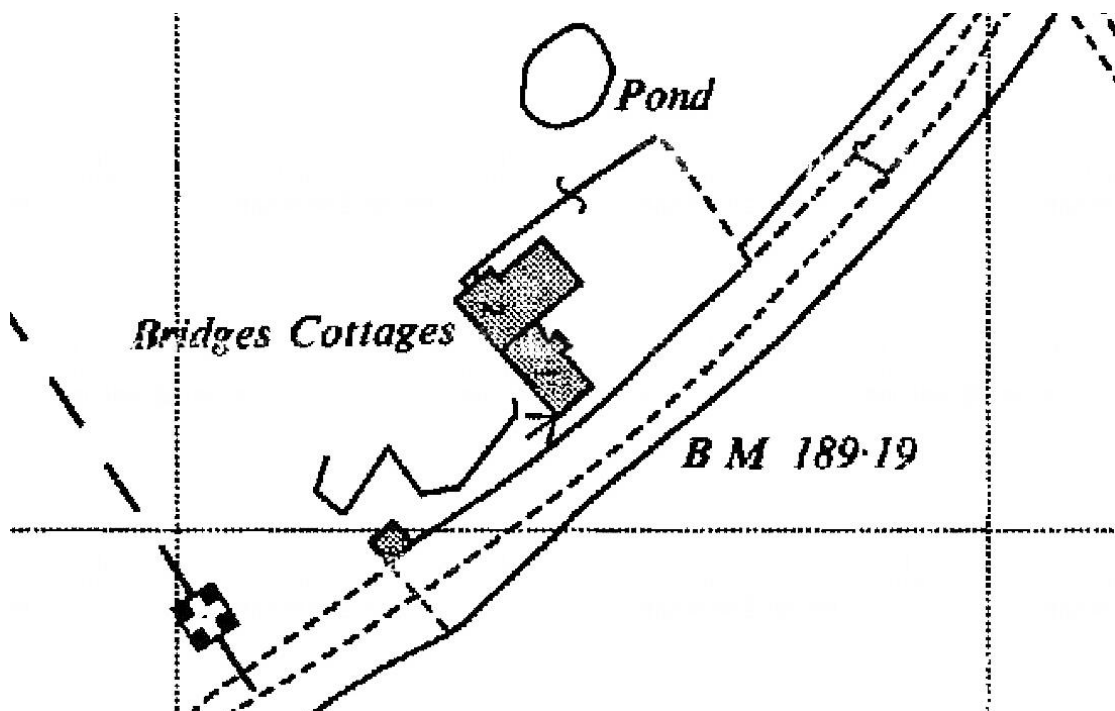


Figure 6. The 25 inch Ordnance Survey of 1969, by which time the farm buildings had been demolished and the house converted into 1 & 2 Bridges Cottages. The lean-to between the old and new wings had been removed but the building's outline was otherwise identical to that of 1841. The six inch map of 1958 showed the farm buildings much as in 1902 and the name 'Darmsden Farm' (not reproduced here).

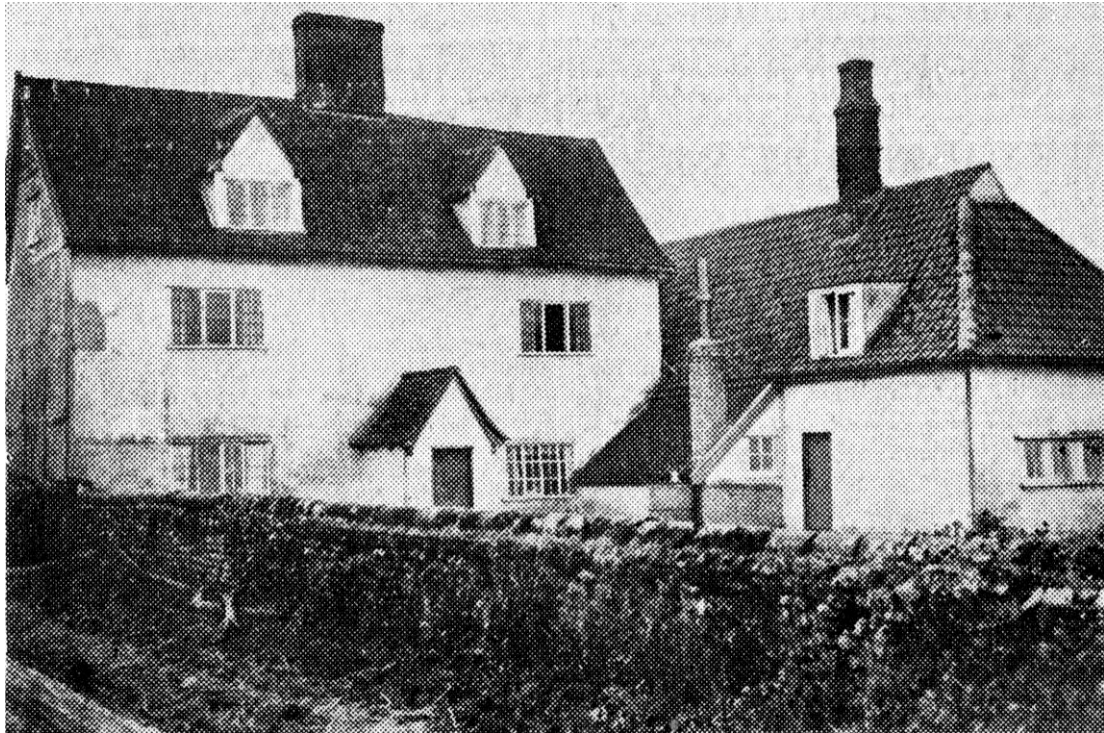


Figure 7. A photograph of the north-eastern facade in 1938 entitled ‘The Farm, Darmsden’ (East Anglian Daily Times article on Darmsden by ‘Yeoman’, 1938, author’s collection). The presence of separate entrances to the two wings suggests the house was already sub-divided, with the lean-to operating as a bake-house for the two-storied range and entered via the blocked door in its present sitting room. With its dormer windows and gabled porch this was clearly the front of the house, facing the church.



Figure 8. An aerial photograph from the north dated 1964 in the possession of the owners of 2 Bridges Cottages. The modern sheds and garages had yet to be added, and the large axial chimney with multiple flues of the two-storied wing had yet to be rebuilt.

Building Analysis



Figure 9. A current plan of the site indicating nos. 1 and 2.

Introduction and Listing Entry

1 Bridges Cottages occupies the south-western section of a former farmhouse with 2 Bridges Cottages projecting to the north-east. This farmhouse has been divided in an unusually complicated manner with no. 2 comprising the majority of a complete early-16th century timber-framed house of 1.5 storeys to which the 2 storied structure of no. 1 was added at right-angles in the 17th century. A single ground-floor room of no. 1 projects into the 16th century structure and the property includes a range of late-20th century sheds to the north-west (figure 10). The analysis below discusses each of the two principal structures in turn, and details the subsequent alterations at no. 1. The references to no. 2 are based on a brief internal inspection courtesy of the present owners. The text is intended to be read in conjunction with the captions to illustrations 1-22, which form a major part of the description, and the account of medieval and Tudor houses in the Appendix on page 22.

The house is listed at grade II with the following entry in Historic England's schedule, last revised in 1986 (no. 1231696):

1 & 2 Bridges Cottages, Barking Darmsden

*Two houses, built as one in the 16th century, with major alterations of the 17th century and later. 3-cell cross-passage entrance plan. 1 storey with attics. Timber-framed and plastered; the front elevation with cable-pattern pargetting, and one end wall with exposed framing and plaster infill panels. Roman pantiled roof with gabled hip at right hand end and axial chimney of red brick; a 19th century gabled casement dormer. Various 19th and 20th century casements. 4-panelled 19th century entrance door and glazed 20th century porch. **To the front of the left-hand parlour end (now part of Cottage No.1) is a 2-storey 2-cell extension of the***

17th or 18th century. Plaintiled roof. Various small-pane casements some with leaded lights. A blocked 1-storey plastered and plaintiled entrance porch gave access to a lobby entrance at a large axial chimney. The main framing members and many rafters of the lower range are of the 16th century, but the 1st floor joists are laid flat and chamfered in the 17th century manner, and much of the studwork and the clasped-purlin roof are of the 17th and 18th century. Large chimney of the 16th or 17th century with open lintelled fireplace backing against cross-passage.

Most of the entry relates to the 16th century house of which the majority forms no. 2, and is generally accurate, with only the section highlighted in red referring to no. 1. It is unclear whether the inspector gained access to no. 1 as no internal features are mentioned and any lobby entrance is now obstructed by the modern staircase.

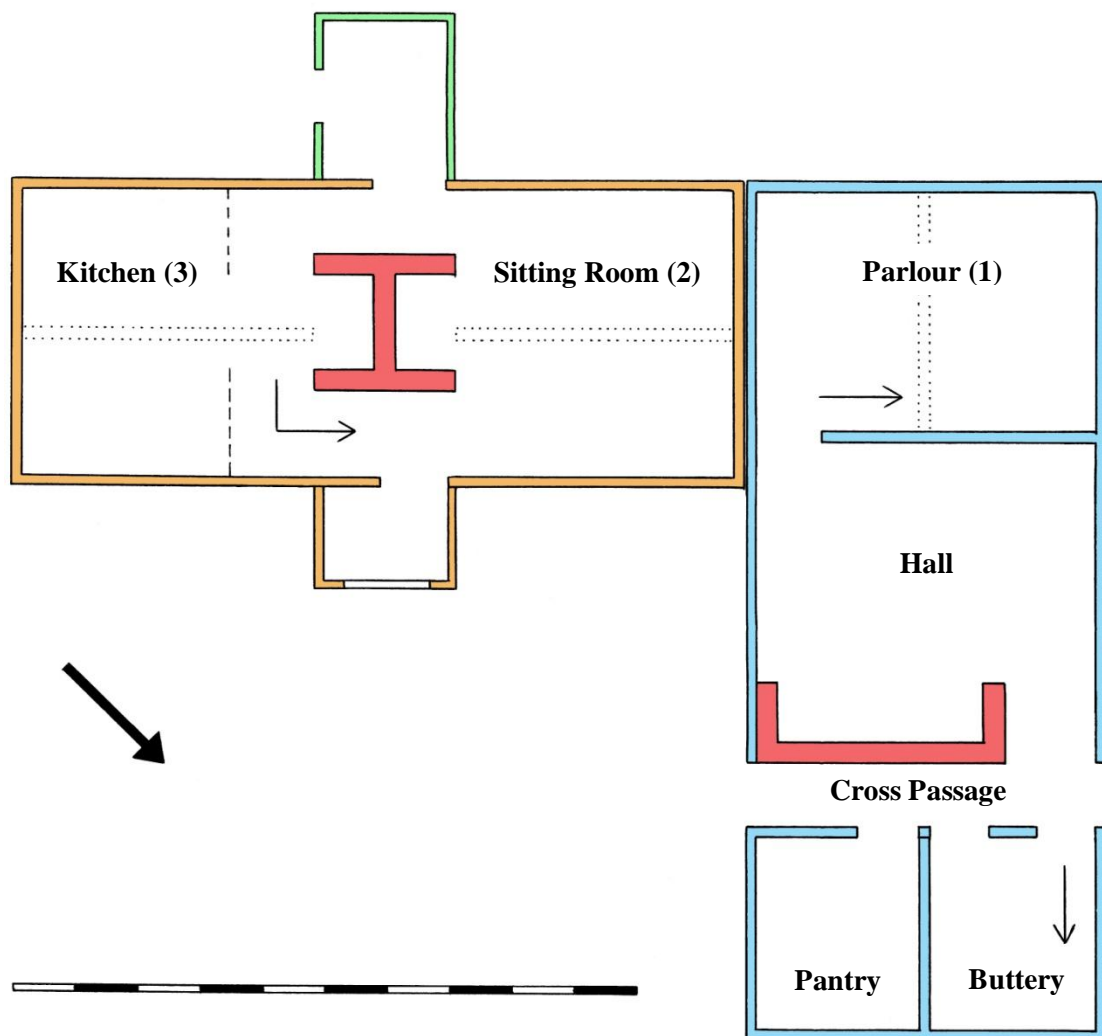


Figure 10

An historic ground plan of the farmhouse highlighting the original three-cell 1.5 storey building in blue and the 17th century two-storied addition in brown. The late-20th century entrance porch is shown in green and the two principal chimneys in red. 1 Bridges Cottages consists of the 17th century structure and the ground-floor parlour of the original house but not the parlour chamber above – and a linear range of late-20th century sheds of no historic significance that projects to the north-west. The names of the rooms in no. 1 refer to their modern functions and numbers have been added for ease of reference in the text and photographs. Scale in metres. No. 2 not fully surveyed.

The Early-16th Century House

The oldest part of the timber-framed former farmhouse is the 1.5 storied pantiled structure to the right in illustrations 1 and 2. This was built as a complete early-16th century house that faced the road to the south-east and reflected the standard domestic layout of its period as described in the Appendix: a central hall was flanked on the right by a pair of service rooms and on the left by a single parlour with a ceiling of neatly chamfered joists (illus. 6-8). The hall may have been open to its largely rebuilt crown-post roof initially despite the presence of an original chimney backing onto its cross-passage: the evidence on this question is inconclusive as the roof-plates contain no traces of open-hall windows yet the present ceiling appears to have interrupted an arch-braced tie-beam in the rear wall. A stair rose from the back of the cross-passage in the usual way, with another adjacent to the doorway linking the hall and parlour as indicated in figure 11. This doorway is now blocked and the parlour belongs to no. 1 while the chamber above and the rest of the 16th century house form part of no. 2. The parlour gable was originally hipped to match the service gable but was remodelled with a vertical gable to increase first-floor headroom in the 18th or 19th century. The ground floor ceiling survives intact with a blocked trap for the stair and empty mortices for missing wall studs in the underside of the mid-rail adjoining the extension. There is no evidence of a window in this elevation and the room was presumably lit from its gable which now contains a set of late-20th century French doors. Any other evidence of the original wall fabric in the parlour is concealed by render. At 5.8 m or 19 ft in total the early-Tudor house was unusually wide by the standards of its day, despite its relatively low height, and would have formed a respectable farmhouse with a significant landholding of perhaps 50 acres.

The 17th Century Extension

The majority of 1 Bridges Cottages comprises a two-storied timber-framed and rendered extension to the front wall of the early-16th century parlour. It originally contained two rooms on each floor divided by a central chimney with a further pair in the roof-space lit by twin dormer windows in the north-eastern facade. Each room was of identical length at 4.75 m or 15.5 ft and the building was 4.9 m or 16 ft in total width, overlapping the earlier hall by approximately 1 m. Much of the wall framing is concealed or has been renewed, but the exposed original mid-rails on the ground floor contain pegged mortices for substantial studs with gaps for central windows in the front and rear walls of each room. The ground-floor ceiling of the modern sitting room (1) contains an unusual mixture of wide flat-sectioned joists in the 16th century tradition and narrow tall-sectioned joists in the style of the mid-17th century and later (illustrations 12-14). Both sets of joists appear to be original to the structure and may relate to the availability of re-used timber and the fact that most of the walls and ceiling fabric would have been hidden by newly fashionable lath-and-plaster from the outset. The first-floor ceilings are supported by rails set beneath the roof-plates to maximise headroom on the attic storey and contain clear evidence of re-used flat-sectioned joists that vary considerably in size – although some may be recent replacements. The original rafters are visible above the attic ceilings and also consist of secondhand timber salvaged from a medieval open hall or bake-house with liberal deposits of soot. While the structure of the roof is hidden the wall framing is typical of the mid-17th century, and appears to be contemporary with a rare central porch that until the remodelling of the 1980s served as the main entrance. This small building of some 2 m in width by 1.5 in depth consists of jowled posts with pegged studs but now operates as a laundry room and proved difficult to photograph. It is likely to have opened into a lobby entrance against the large chimney shown in 1964 (figure 8), with doors opening into the rooms on each side and a newel stair to either the front or rear.

The position of this porch coupled with the dormer windows in the same elevation indicate that the new building faced north-east towards the church and was evidently entered from this direction with its back towards the nearby farm buildings. Its layout is typical of its period, and it may have been built as a new farmhouse with its predecessor retained a service wing or

bake-house (as suggested by the ‘backhouse boy’ mentioned in the 1851 census). However old houses were rarely retained in their entirety for this purpose, and it is far more likely that the new structure was designed for a semi-independent element of the farming family such as the younger or older generation. Many East Anglian farmhouses were provided with two domestic ranges in the 17th century, known at the time as ‘inset houses’ and to modern historians as ‘unit houses’. They can often be recognised by their separate chimneys, each with a wide fireplace for cooking and a smaller example heating the parlour, but any such evidence was lost in this instance when the chimney at no. 1 was rebuilt with fireplaces of identical proportions in the 1980s. Whatever its exact arrangement the new house was a substantial building that would have been entirely appropriate to a farm of 100 or more acres – the threshold of Yeoman status in the 17th century.

20th Century Alterations

The aerial image of 1964 suggests no. 1 remained largely unaltered until the major renovations of the late-1970s and 80s recalled by the occupants of no. 2. These changes were dramatic, and involved the replacement of all but one window (illus. 3-5), the rebuilding of the chimney and the insertion of the present stair along with various partitions of plasterboard and re-used timber. The previous stair is said to have risen in the opposite direction and may have been the original newel stair against the chimney which appears from the aerial photograph to have contained at least four fireplaces. Its replacement possessed only the two shown in illustrations 10 and 17. The 17th century entrance porch was blocked and a new porch added to the back wall, effectively changing the building’s historic orientation from front to rear. The dormer windows were similarly moved from the north-east to the south-west, and many of the internally exposed timbers were probably stripped of their original lath-and-plaster at the same period. French doors were inserted into the parlour (1) and the south-western wall of the sitting room and kitchen was rebuilt in masonry below the level of its mid-rails with the exterior of the entire property rendered in cement. Cement tiles were installed on the roof, replacing the earlier peg-tiles, and a series of new single-storied sheds of rendered brick and cement block-work was built to the north-west as shown to the left in illustration 4. These sheds include a timber conservatory and are of no historic significance

Historic Significance

1 and 2 Bridges Cottages are of considerable historic interest as a pair of probable unit houses illustrating the changing nature of domestic housing between the beginning of the 16th century and the middle decades of the 17th. No. 1 was extensively altered by a previous owner in the late-20th century but retains much of its original framing, including an unusual combination of flat and tall-sectioned ceiling joists together with a rare single-storied porch.

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Leigh Alston is a building archaeologist and architectural historian who for 20 years lectured on the understanding and recording of timber-framed structures in the Departments of Archaeology and Continuing Education at Cambridge University. He worked as the in-house building archaeologist for Suffolk County Council’s Archaeological Service for 10 years and still fulfils this role for its successor, Suffolk Archaeology CIC. He also undertakes commissions on a freelance basis for the National Trust, private clients and various county archaeological units. Leigh co-founded the Suffolk Historic Buildings Group in 1993, serving as Chairman for 13 years, and has been involved in several television programmes including ‘Grand Designs’ and David Dimbleby’s ‘How We Built Britain’. Publications include ‘Late Medieval Workshops in East Anglia’ in ‘The Vernacular Workshop’ edited by Paul Barnwell & Malcolm Airs (CBA and English Heritage, 2004) and the National Trust guidebook to Lavenham Guildhall.

Illustrations (pp. 11-21)



Illus. 1. The former farmhouse from the lane to the east with no. 1 adjoining the road at right-angles on the left and the original 16th century house at no. 2 parallel to the road in the rear.



Illus. 2. The original north-eastern facade with the complete early-16th century 1.5 storied house on the right and the two-storied 17th century extension that probably formed a 'unit' house in front of its parlour on the left. No. 1 comprises the extension and the 16th century ground-floor parlour. Note the dramatically reduced size of the chimney since 1964.



Illus. 3. The north-eastern facade of the extension with its ostensibly original timber-framed entrance porch. Two dormer windows have been removed from this elevation since 1964 and both ground-floor windows replaced (the right-hand example in PVC). The only window that survives from 1938 is the right-hand example on the upper storey which replicates the style of the 18th century but dates from the early-20th. The small central window was inserted between 1938 and 1964 and is identical to its larger counterpart on the left.



Illus. 4. The house from the site of the demolished farm buildings to the west with the formerly hipped parlour gable of the original house in the centre and the various single-storied extensions of the 1980s on the left. These extensions form part of no. 1 along with the original ground-floor parlour lit by French doors and the two-storied addition to the right. The first-floor room above the parlour belongs to no. 2.



Illus. 5. The orientation of the house was altered as part of a major refurbishment in the 1980s which included the insertion of new dormer windows in the original rear (south-western) elevation and the addition of a new porch with a side-entrance facing the road. The ground and first-floor windows were renewed at the same time and the lower storey rebuilt in cement-rendered brick or block-work.



Illus. 6. The early-16th century parlour (1) seen from the south-east with the 1980s French doors shown in illustration 4 on the left. Of the original framing only the neatly chamfered ceiling joists are exposed with a trap adjoining the hall on the right for the missing stair. The hall and the room above belong to no. 2.



Illus. 7. A detail of the chamfered ceiling joists with small step-steps in the early-16th century parlour (1). The timber has been cleaned by abrasion.



Illus. 8. The early-16th century parlour ceiling (1) from the sitting room in its front extension (2). Empty mortices for the missing studs of the original front wall are visible in the mid-rail above with no gaps for windows. The stair in the blocked trap would have risen from the foot of the original doorway to the hall on the extreme right in a standard late-medieval arrangement.



Illus. 9. The north-western wall of the sitting room (2) in the two-storied extension showing the much lower ceiling of the earlier parlour beyond. The blocked door on the right opened into the demolished lean-to shown in figure 7 and is a later insertion.



Illus. 10. The fireplace to the south-east of the sitting room (2), with lobbies on each side that open into the original porch on the left and its modern counterpart on the right. The fireplace consists of re-used bricks, some of which are soot-encrusted, and appears to date only from the late-20th century. Curiously the tall-sectioned ceiling joists to the left of the room are tenoned to the mid-rail while their counterparts to the right are flat-sectioned in the earlier tradition and lodged on the mid-rail.



Illus. 11. The original north-eastern facade of the sitting room (2) with its modern PVC window and the blocked secondary door to the former lean-to addition on the left. The tall-sectioned ceiling joists are tenoned to the mid-rail, with no evidence of flat-sectioned predecessors, and the rail contains pegged mortices for three studs on each side of a central window. The narrow studs above the present window are later replacements.



Illus. 12. A detail from the south-west of the axial ceiling joist in the sitting room (2) showing pegged mortices for original smaller, tall-sectioned joists matching those visible in the rear. The large, flat-sectioned joists in illustration 13 are either replacements or more probably re-used timbers intended to be hidden by plaster.



Illus. 13. The ceiling of the sitting room (1) from the north-west showing its unusual combination of narrow, tall-sectioned joists to the left of the axial joist – all tenoned to the mid-rail – and flat-sectioned joists on the right which are lodged on the mid-rail.



Illus. 14. The opposite side of the axial joist in the sitting room (1) showing the tall-sectioned common joists with no mortices for flat-sectioned predecessors. The mid-rail in the rear lacks joist mortices but is otherwise identical that of the original facade with three pegged stud mortices flanking a central gap for a window. It is highly unusual to find two entirely different forms of carpentry in the same structure.



Illus. 15. The kitchen (3) from its south-eastern gable showing the re-used timbers of a partition that was probably inserted in the 1980s to frame the staircase on the right of the fireplace.



Illus. 16. The ceiling of the kitchen (3) where the joists are also tenoned to the front mid-rail to the north-east and lodged on the rear but consist entirely of flat-sectioned timbers. The four joists to the left in this image have been replaced with re-used timber and may indicate the position of an earlier stair. Exposed framing had ceased to be fashionable by the mid-17th century and these timbers would have been hidden by insulating plaster initially.



Illus. 17. The fireplace facing the kitchen (3) with the foot of the 1980s staircase on the right and the modern entrance porch to the left. The timber lintel and bricks are re-used, like those of the sitting room (2), and the entire chimney appears to have been rebuilt as part of the 1980s refurbishment. The flue above consists entirely of modern Fletton bricks laid in cement mortar where visible in the roof void.



Illus. 18. The exposed framing of the original facade against the modern stair showing mortices for flat-sectioned joists in the mid-rails which are tenoned to the central storey post. These joists were removed to accommodate the stair which probably lay on the other side of the chimney initially.



Illus. 19. The stair landing on the first floor as seen from the south-east with the narrow, rebuilt chimney of rendered Fletton brick in the centre. Like the chimney the internal partitions and doors at this level date almost entirely from the extensive refurbishment of the 1980s. The large original chimney in figure 7 would have contained 17th century fireplaces heating the bedrooms rooms on each side.



Illus. 20. The early-20th century leaded-light casement window in the original north-eastern facade of the bedroom above the sitting room (2). The ostensibly original ceiling joists on the first floor consist largely of re-used timbers, as do the small areas of exposed wall framing. The rails supporting the joists lie approximately 12 inches below the chamfered roof-plates to create low vertical walls on the attic storey and the base of a jowled corner post is visible to the left.



Illus. 21. The central stair landing of the attic storey, as seen from the south-east. The narrow Fletton-brick chimney, partitions and balustrade date only from the 1980s, as do the dormer windows to the south-west (left). The roof structure is hidden by plasterboard but a number of original rafters are visible above the ceiling and retain traces of soot-encrustation having been re-used from a medieval open hall.



Illus. 22. The attic stair landing looking towards the south-eastern gable showing the late-20th century balustrade and plasterboard partitions. This level of the house was previously lit by dormer windows in the north-eastern facade and has been altered almost beyond recognition.

Appendix 1

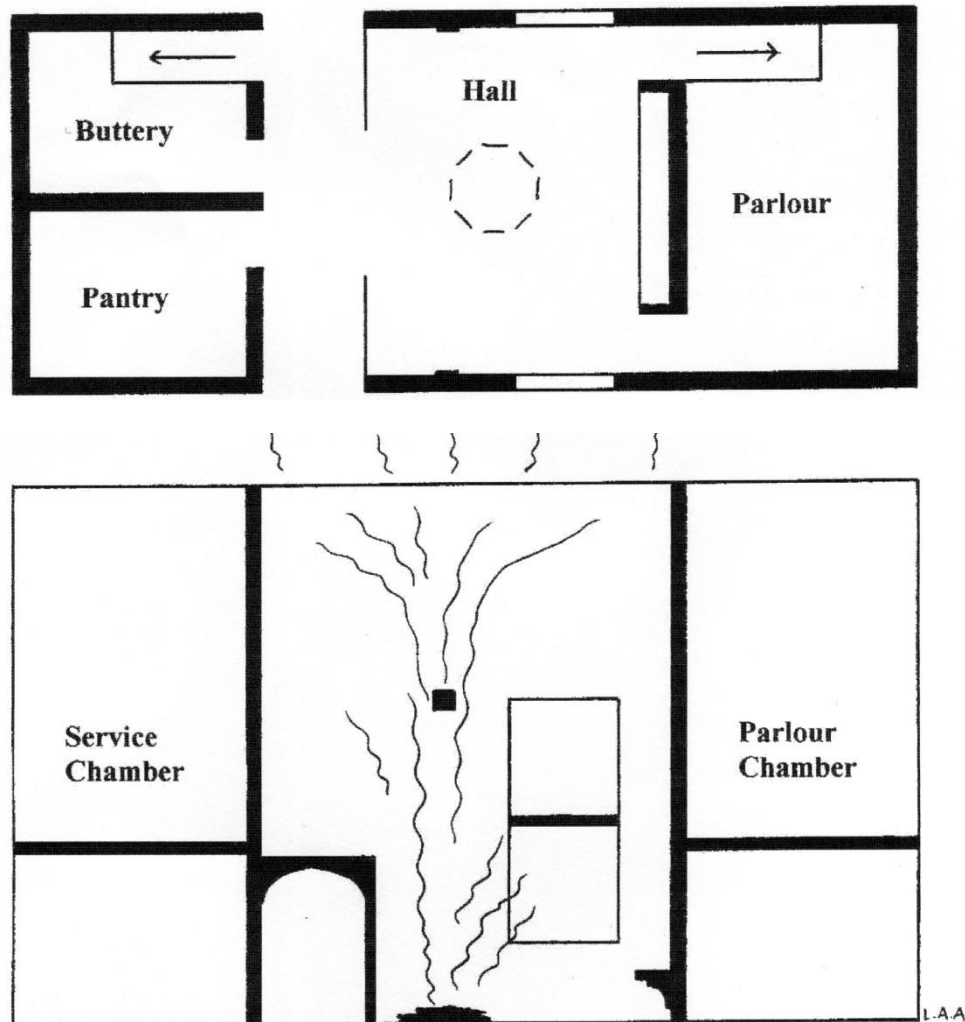
The Standard Room Plan of Medieval and Tudor Houses

Although identical houses are rare, almost all domestic buildings constructed between the mid-13th and the early-17th centuries reflect the same room layout (see accompanying diagram). Until the opening decades of the 16th century the only heated space in a typical house comprised an open hall with an open hearth akin to a bonfire burning on its floor. In the absence of a chimney the hall, as its name suggests, was open to its roof in the manner of a barn to allow smoke to escape through the roof covering and through tall, unglazed windows which rose from normal sill height to eaves level. The hall was a communal space with little or no fixed furniture, and was used as a dining room, a dormitory for household servants and apprentices, and as a kitchen and general purpose working area at varying times of the day. The hall was also designed to display the wealth and status of its owner, and at meal times was arranged like a modern college dining hall, with the head of the household sitting with his immediate family behind the 'high table' at one end, while his servants and employees were arranged in order of precedence at secondary tables along the side walls. The lower an individual's status in the household, the further he sat from the 'high' end of the hall. The high table was often raised on a platform or dais, but contemporary references to the high and low ends of houses relate rather to social than physical hierarchy. Halls were usually divided into two structural bays, separated by a pair of principal posts carrying a tie-beam that spanned the walls at eaves level, with the great windows in the high-end bay towards the dais. Fixing pegs for the high-end bench, which was often attached to the wall, can sometimes be seen in surviving examples. The front and back doors of the house (which often stood open for ventilation purposes) lay opposite each other at the low end of the hall, forming a cross-passage that was partly screened by boarded partitions to exclude the weather.

The open hall in the middle of the typical medieval house was flanked by additional rooms that were usually floored over. Beyond the high end of the hall lay a single room known as a parlour, that served as the main bedroom for family members and guests and contained at least one bed (perhaps consisting of nothing more than a straw mattress) and perhaps a few pieces of furniture that normally included a storage chest. The parlour was entered by a door to one side of the high-end bench, and sometimes a second door on the opposite side of the bench opened onto a stair to the solar (upper room) above. Medieval living took place primarily on the relatively warm ground-floor, and the two solars of the house were used chiefly for storage purposes. An increasing demand for domestic privacy during the later 16th century saw the provision of additional bedrooms on the first floor, and the 'parlour chamber', as the room over the parlour came to be known, was often provided with its own fireplace. Principal bedrooms, used more and more for sitting and entertaining as well as sleeping, remained downstairs until well into the 17th century.

Beyond the low end of the hall lay two service or storage rooms termed butteries and pantries (or collectively as 'spences', i.e. dispensing rooms). As their names suggest, these were used for storing wet and dry goods respectively, and represent the household larder. The front service rooms of town houses often contained shops, and the buttery sometimes served as a dairy in rural contexts. Two doorways lying side by side in the middle of the low-end wall gave access to these rooms, usually in conjunction with a third door against the back wall that opened onto a stair to the service chamber above. Although the original arches of these doorways have frequently been removed, their position may be revealed by the distribution of peg holes used to secure the mortise and tenon joints of the wall timbers. The tripartite plan described here is found in both large manor houses and small peasant cottages in the countryside, but is sometimes condensed in towns where houses consisting of only a hall and subdivided parlour (or occasionally a hall with service rooms) may be found. Houses of high status might also possess rear courtyards, containing additional accommodation or perhaps bake-houses and workshops, but rarely add to the tripartite arrangement in their main ranges.

Rectangular houses under a single roof are common, but more ostentatious town houses frequently contain their parlour and service rooms in relatively expensive cross-wings with jettied gables built at right-angles to their halls. From the beginning of the 16th century chimney stacks were inserted into open halls, and new houses built with ceilings throughout, but the standard layout endured. By the end of the same century fireplaces were typically provided in parlours as well as halls, and often the parlour chamber was also heated (but rarely the hall chamber). Not until the second quarter of the 17th century did the cross-passage plan begin to disappear from new houses, to be gradually replaced by a number of different layouts of which the 'lobby-entrance', where the main door opens into a narrow 'lobby' in front of a chimney stack between the hall and parlour, was the most common.



The Standard Medieval House Plan

The early-16th century house at Bridges Cottages reflected this layout but in reverse, with a parlour to the left when viewed from the road and a pair of service rooms to the right. The central hall was heated by a chimney backing onto its cross-passage and appears to have contained a ceiling from the outset – although there is some evidence that it was initially open to the roof despite the presence of the chimney. The parlour now forms part of no. 1 while the chamber above and the rest of the house belongs to no. 2.

The majority of no. 1 is formed by a large extension added to the front wall of the parlour in the mid-17th century that was probably designed as a 'unit' house for a semi-independent element of the farming family.