

Each month of this 125th anniversary year, COUNTRY LIFE illustrates a period in the development of the English great house, from the Middle Ages to the present day. In the third of this 12-part series, John Goodall looks at the architecture of the Tudor home

IN April 1521, Edward Stafford, 3rd Duke of Buckingham, was urgently summoned from his seat at Thornbury, Gloucestershire, to appear before Henry VIII. The Duke could reasonably claim by birth to be the outstanding nobleman of his generation, boasting descent from Edward III and—arguably—possessed of a better claim to the throne than the Tudors. He played the role of a great nobleman with proud perfection, both at home and in such public events as Henry VIII's meeting with Francis I of France on the Field of Cloth of Gold, where he jousted and appeared in costume of fabulous expense. His birth and magnificence, however, also made him vulnerable to Court intrigue.

Receiving his summons, the Duke had a premonition that all was not well. According to *Hall's Chronicle*, as he began the final leg of his journey on April 16, he had difficulty eating breakfast. Having taken his barge—the transport of the wealthy between their riverside London houses—he called at the residence of Cardinal Wolsey. Landing at its river gate, the Duke was told that the Cardinal was sick. Nevertheless, he demanded some wine and was led to the cellar. →



Fig 1 left: The panelled parlour of Alston Court, Suffolk, dated to about 1520. Fig 2 right: The 1530s chapel glass at Hengrave, Suffolk, is by Continental glaziers



Fig 3: The Abbot's Parlour at Thame Park, Oxfordshire, with 'antic' plasterwork, an internal draft porch and linenfold panelling

Despite the 'reverence' the Duke was shown, the lack of welcome was obvious. He 'changed colour' and continued on his way, only to be arrested on his barge by the Captain of the King's Guard and marched to the Tower of London. A month later, he was condemned for treason and executed on Tower Hill.

As the world marvelled at the Duke's fall, the royal administration set to work listing and seizing his possessions, including a carefully ordered muniment collection. Thanks to this, we have an exceptionally full picture of his property and lifestyle. As did all noblemen, he possessed an inherited portfolio of multiple residences. In this case, more than a dozen castles and manor houses spread across his vast estates, which extended from South Wales to Kent. These included buildings of every age stretching back to the 13th century. We often study buildings by period, but then, as now, in the living world architecture of every age co-exists.

In the dispassionate surveys of these buildings, the royal officers variously dismiss these residences as 'old' or admire them as 'proper', 'uniform' or 'strong'. By these judgments, they reveal a clear preference for compact and regular architecture with big windows—in effect, architecture in the Perpendicular style first promulgated by the royal designers



Fig 4: Holcombe Court, Devon. The plaster ceiling can be securely dated before 1566

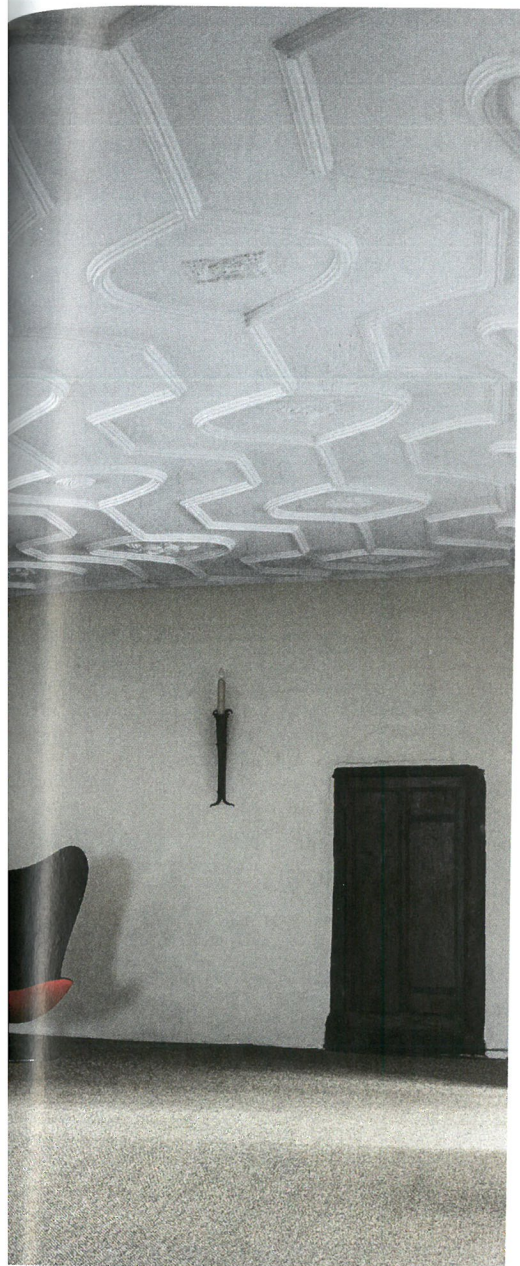
in the 14th century—and also for the prestigious and timeless aesthetic of the castle; the house that outwardly expresses the martial vocation of a nobleman (**Fig 8**).

Many of these buildings served simply as administrative centres and were neglected or little used. Newport Castle, for example, had an exchequer chamber for receiving rents and a prison in repair, but its 'proper lodgings' were in decay. Others were fine residences, but neglected. These included Maxstoke Castle, Warwickshire, which the surveyor called 'a right proper thing after the old building, standing within a fair and large moat full of fish, being builded four-square' and entered via 'a large base court' of barns and stables.

There were also a number of residences that were clearly used intensively by the Duke. Bletchingley in Surrey, for example, was described as 'properly and newly builded'. Here,

'the hall, chapel, chambers, parlours, closets and oratories be newly ceiled, with wainscot, roofs, floors and walls, to the intent they may be used at pleasure without hangings'. This final aside is very important. Hitherto, richly appointed interiors had always been hung with fabrics (of which tapestry was, from the 14th century, the most prized and expensive). Tapestry and fabrics remained common, but, from the early 16th century, it also became popular to furnish rooms with intricately carved wainscoting (**Fig 1**).

Like many of the most fashionable domestic furnishings in 16th-century England, such wainscoting was largely manufactured by Continental immigrants. The same group dominated stained-glass production (**Fig 2**) and other specialist crafts (**Fig 6**). Carving panels was a way of making them seem intensively worked, thus both expensive and 'curious'.

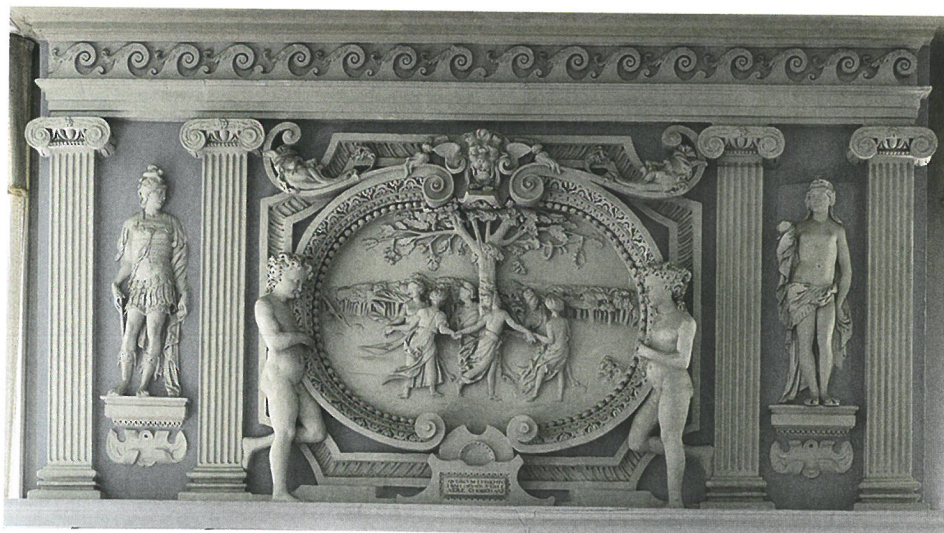


Hence the complexity of so-called 'linenfold' panelling, which gave the effect of symmetrically crumpled fabric in wood (*Fig 3*). These craftsmen brought a fashion for 'grotesque' or 'antic' work ornament, too, derived from classical paintings found amid ruins in Rome.

Wainscot kept rooms warm and didn't preclude the display of tapestry, which could be hung over it where necessary. Panelled ceilings served the same practical purpose and are known to have existed in English domestic interiors from the early 13th century. They had the disadvantage of creating dark rooms, so, from the mid 16th century in England, there developed a tradition of decorative plaster ceilings, the white surfaces reflecting the light (*Fig 4*). It was particularly popular in galleries, long elevated corridors in which it was possible to walk for exercise and enjoy the view. Bletchingley possessed one of these modern interiors, which was the scene of an exchange cited in the Duke's treason trial.



Fig 5 above: The now-truncated abbot's hall at Forde, Devon, of about 1510, with walls of glass. Fig 6 below: Italianate plasterwork of about 1550 at Broughton Castle, Oxfordshire



The Duke's most notable residence, according to the survey, was more conventional. In 1521 the 'manor or castle' at Thornbury in Gloucestershire (*Fig 9*) comprised two courts, both of which were in the process of magnificent transformation. Big architectural projects took time and this one had been under

way for more than a decade. The inner court incorporated the remains of a pre-existing house—built in 'old' and 'homely' fashion—and a residential range 'fully finished with curious works and stately lodging'.

This two-storey range survives and is otherwise known to have comprised two suites →



Fig 7: The dense Perpendicular grids of timber and complex geometry of the 'compass' windows of Little Moreton, Cheshire, of 1559

of domestic rooms beyond the hall, one for the Duchess below and another for the Duke above. Projecting from the range are two spectacular 'compass' windows, a form that would enjoy enormous popularity into the 17th century (**Fig 7**). No less striking are the massive and intricately carved chimney stacks, a distinctive feature of English buildings that advertised the comfort of the rooms they served. In both details, Thornbury is inspired by the opulent building projects of Henry VII.

The compass windows overlooked 'a proper garden', enclosed on its outward sides by a two-storey timber gallery that communicated with the adjacent church (which the Duke splendidly rebuilt as part of the castle's demesne). We otherwise know that this cloister-like space was planted with geometric patterns termed 'knots' by the gardener John Wynde, who was rewarded for his work in 1520. Confusingly, his knots may have depicted knots, a tied length of rope being an emblem of the family; Tudor nobles dusted everything they

possessed with marks of ownership. This 'privy' garden opened by degree into the landscape.

Next to it was 'a large and goodly orchard full of young grafts well laden with fruit, many roses and other pleasures', such as 'goodly alleys to walk in openly' and encircling alleys 'with resting places covered thoroughly with white thorn and hazel'. Around the orchard were enclosing fences and ditches with 'quickset hedge' and from it several gates issued into 'into a goodly park' beyond with 700 deer. The connection of the house with its garden, orchard and the wider landscape was not a novelty, but it increasingly shaped the design of houses during the 16th century and clearly delighted the surveyor; it sounds as if he visited on a beautiful day.

The Duke's many residences served as the backdrop to his daily life, which was focused on the institution of his household. Its operation can be inferred from the accounts seized by royal officers and sets of regulations governing other aristocratic households, such as the

voluminous statutes drawn up by his brother-in-law, the Earl of Northumberland, in 1512.

Confusingly, the household could vary in size depending on which residence it occupied. It was usually at its largest at Thornbury where, in 1507–08, for example, more than 150 members attended two meals in the castle every day (accompanied by about 70 guests). Not all the Duke's residences were big enough to accommodate the entire household. In London in the same year, for example, it was less than half that size. For travel, it reduced yet further as a 'riding' household.

In all its forms, the household was divided into specialist departments, including the kitchen, stables, chapel and personal companions. From the late 15th century, moreover, and encouraged by the behaviour of Henry VII, who chafed at the public lifestyle expected of an English king, there was an increasing division between the public realm of the great hall and the withdrawing or 'privy' accommodation beyond it. In the houses →



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of both noblemen and ecclesiastics (the domestic building traditions of both are almost indivisible), halls remained important as the spaces (Fig 5) in which the bulk of the household received their meals, one of the central benefits of household membership.

Increasingly, senior members of the household began to live more of their lives in the withdrawing apartments beyond the hall. These were figures of real social standing, their service reflecting on the Duke's high status. At Thornbury, this shift is documented in the arrangements for feasts, where this group sat separately from the rest of the household in the withdrawing room beyond the hall dais.

‘The royal officers dismiss the residences as “old” or admire them as “proper” or “strong”’

Meals were governed by complex protocols and places were laid with a spoon and pointed knife only. Food was served in bowls to ‘messes’ or small groups, who generally sat on one side of a table to allow servants access on the other. The Duke himself probably sat alone. On important occasions, food would be played into the room and eaten to music. Medieval and Tudor dining was visually splendid, but conversation cannot have been easy.

In addition to food and an allowance of fuel, members of a great household received measures of cloth for clothing or livery, the colour and quantity again denoting status. It's from livery that we derive modern academic and judicial gowns, which make the relative status of an individual apparent. Gowns were a clear mark of service often bearing family emblems. That explains why, in 1519, Henry VIII was so enraged to spot a member of the Royal Household wearing the Duke's livery in his presence. ‘None of his servants,’ he raged, ‘should hang on another man's sleeve.’



Fig 8 above: A martial face. Sir Henry Marney, who built this gatehouse at Layer Marney, Essex, arrested the Duke of Buckingham. Fig 9 below: Thornbury in Gloucestershire

Running households was hugely expensive. The annual expenditure on the provisions of the household for the years ending in September 1518–20 was respectively £2,634, £3,700 and £2,898. In addition, over the same years, £2,414, £2,586 and £4,200 were spent

on the wardrobe. At a time when skilled workmen might receive a wage of eight pence a day, these were stupendous sums.

These same accounts list occasional payments that illuminate curious details of daily life. There are rewards for cooks, ‘idiots’ or jesters, harpists, tumblers, singers, poets, waites and players, as well as considerable gambling losses for games of dice, shooting and tennis. These are incongruously interleaved with devotional oblations, plus outlay for food, drink, scholarships and servants’ tips. It's easy to think of noble life in the past as being serious and comfortless, but the rich have always lived for pleasure and delight.

With the execution of the Duke, the last great medieval inheritance passed into the voracious maw of the Tudor state. The property of the Church would follow by stages over the next three decades. The effects of these changes were surprisingly slow to be felt in the domestic sphere, as we will discover next time.

