

## A short history of the Old Palace, Bekesbourne, written for the opening of the garden, Sunday June 23, 2013



The 'Old Palace' is perhaps Bekesbourne's most notable building. It is all that remains of a palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury established by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer in 1542. Most of the palace no longer exists: only a small flint cottage (right); the old gatehouse (centre); and the porter's lodge with adjoining stables (left) survived the 17th century Civil War .

The crenulated building in the centre of this photograph (taken by Rosalie Stacey circa 1985) was once the gatehouse and housekeeper's quarters of the Archbishop's Palace. It was connected by a brick gateway to the porter's lodge on the left. According to Dr Charles Beke (resident of the Old Palace in 1861) they were tall red gates, 10 to 12 feet high, with a room above. Archbishop Cranmer's plaque and his arms carved in stone were affixed to the gateway – see photographs below.

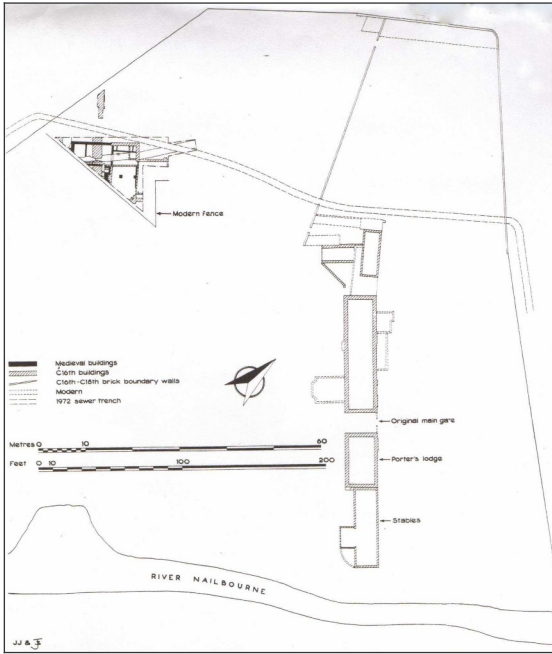
The gateway lead through into the inner court where, according to a Commonwealth Commissioner's survey in 1647, there was a Mansion House of brick and timber construction, several wood houses, coal houses, and other outhouses including a pigeon house. Beyond the buildings there were two gardens (a greater and a lesser) both enclosed by brick walls. There was an apple orchard, a hop garden, a six acre forestall (place in the front of the house to tether horses) and stables adjoining the porter's lodge. Water came from at least two wells – one near Flint Cottage and the other (now capped off for safety) behind the porter's lodge.

**A note on names:** The three dwellings on the site are now known as: 'The Gatehouse' (original porter's lodge and stables); 'The Old Palace' (original gatehouse and housekeeper's quarters) and 'Flint Cottage' (an earlier 15th century building). In this history the present names are presented in parentheses for clarity. The Old Palace is used as a general title encompassing all three buildings both now and in the past.

Before Cranmer acquired the land in 1542, there had been first a 14th century farmhouse built by a London merchant, William Doget, and then, from 1443 to 1540, a country house retreat for Canterbury Cathedral Priory. Flint Cottage is believed to be the last remnant of the 15th century Priory buildings. Nothing above ground remains of the 14th century farmhouse, however, excavations by Canterbury Archaeological Society in the 1970s revealed 'a fine late-medieval building of flint and chalk-block' which was L-shaped in plan. This was deemed to be the 14th century Doget manor house which then probably became one of the Priory buildings – possibly a house for the Priory's farming staff.

The excavation team also found some Iron Age and early Roman levels. No Anglo-Saxon or 11th or 12th century materials were found suggesting that this site so close to the Nailbourne was too wet for occupation in those times. It was deduced that some flooding had taken place in the early medieval period and that the Old Palace site had probably not been occupied again until the 13th century - coinciding perhaps with the alterations to Bekesbourne church at that time.

The aerial view of the curtilage of the Old Palace below shows the three surviving buildings and the extent of the Palace inner grounds – measuring between four and five acres. Compare it with the adjacent plan which was published in an article in *Archaeologia Cantiana* in 1980 detailing the findings of the excavations.



This aerial photo and below: Ken Moran circa 1997

The plan shows that Flint Cottage is on a slightly different alignment to the old gatehouse, porter's lodge and stables. It is thought to be the last remnant of the 15th century Priory buildings.



A mid-1990s rear view of the Porter's Lodge and stables now known as 'The Gatehouse'.

The porter's lodge was re-roofed in the 19th century but is otherwise externally little changed. It is constructed with red bricks laid in English bond in thick layers of yellow mortar. Some of the surviving windows are the original 16th century windows with stone surrounds.



'Know thyself and God'

Cranmer's plaque and his heraldic shield were affixed to the gateway which linked the porter's lodge to the gatehouse. The lettering of the plaque is in the most up-to-date renaissance style: it carries Cranmer's initials, TC, the date 1552 AD, and his motto in Latin which translates to: 'Know thyself and God'.

The heraldic shield which was also affixed to the gateway has four quarters and a crescent for difference (to show that Cranmer was a younger son). Also above it is the Archbishop's mitre. In the top left-hand quarter and the bottom right-hand quarter are the Cranmer arms which comprise a chevron with three birds: in the family shield the birds are cranes – perhaps a pun on the family name – however, soon after Cranmer became Archbishop he changed the cranes to pelicans to depict the symbolism of that bird's legendary willingness to feed its young with its own blood. The quarter at bottom left has the lozenges of the Newmarch arms to reflect the Cranmer connection with the Ashlockton family of that name. In the quarter upper right Cranmer added the three cinquefoils of the arms of his mother, Agnes Hatfield.

Both the plaque and the shield were removed to the end wall of the old porter's lodge when the gateway was pulled down towards the end of the 18th century - for what the Kent Historian, Hasted, informs us (circa 1800) were 'the most sordid of motives'. *Note: The coat of arms described above has for a long time been ascribed to Archbishop Matthew Parker – particularly by the historian and one-time tenant of the Old Palace, Rev Nicholas Batteley. However, Cranmer's biographer, Diarmaid MacCulloch, writes otherwise and close inspection would suggest that he is correct.*



The door into the old porter's lodge on the west end of the medieval brick building is bricked up inside 'The Gatehouse' and has not been in use for over twenty years. The excavations by Canterbury Archaeological Society in 1976-1978 revealed a large vaulted drain. It led to speculation about a tunnel linking the Old Palace to Canterbury Cathedral but this is most unlikely to be true; neither is the story sometimes told that there is a tunnel from nearby Parsonage Farm. (Tunnel photo: Martin and Nicky Fry.)

## The Archbishops who used the Palace

Thomas Cranmer became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1533 and continued in post until he was found guilty of treason on November 13, 1553 and deprived of the see. By then he was already imprisoned in the Tower of London and on March 21, 1554 he was executed by burning at the stake. Cranmer had five palaces. The other one in Kent at Ford (between Canterbury and Reculver) is said to have been his favourite but nonetheless it is believed that he was often at Bekesbourne. Throughout the autumn of 1547 Cranmer was writing the Book of Common Prayer, some of which may have been written in the peaceful surroundings of his Bekesbourne home.

In late 1553 an inventory of Cranmer's Bekesbourne 'householde stufe sold to divers persones' was recorded by the King's Remembrancer. It includes a good number of bedsteads, tables, trestles, forms and stools and little else. According to MacCulloch, much had already been 'lost and stolen away'. Also some of Cranmer's personal items went with him to the Tower in 1553.

Perhaps most interesting in the 1553 survey is the list of chambers within the palace. Many are assigned to particular servants: some, such as [John] Gawan, are named; others are listed by their occupation. They include: the almoner, baker, cook, controller, joiner, porter and steward. The joiner is a person with some prestige and the various pieces of furniture listed as joined (*ioyned*) are valued more highly than the plain pieces. For instance, a plain bedstead is typically worth 12d whereas a joined one is valued at 8s. The value of the bedsteads is a reminder that bedchambers were at this time often used for entertaining because they were warmer, more intimate and more comfortable than the grand dining halls.

Other goods which give a glimpse into how life was conducted within the Palace include: in the kitchen, a boiling copper set with lead and two buckets for the well, two dressing tables and a 'holl of meade'; in the bakehouse, a kneading table and kneading trough; and in the meat larder, two brine tubs.

Although Cranmer was the Archbishop who acquired the property, and is perhaps also the most well remembered, in the century that marked the heyday of the Bekesbourne archiepiscopal palace several other Archbishops resided here and made their mark locally.

Matthew Parker (1559-1575) is said to have preferred his Bekesbourne house to his other palaces. He was here continuously for eighteen months from April 1563 while in ill health and attended St Peter's church most Sundays. He gave a set of oak choir stalls for the church chancel (long since gone). Parker had married his wife, Margaret, against the wishes of his Queen, Elizabeth I. He bought a house in Bekesbourne which he gave to Margaret for her lifetime and afterwards it passed to his son, John. This was probably the house a few hundred yards away across the Old Palace meadow that shows on the Andrews, Dury & Herbert map of 1769. It was built by a man called Whiting and known as Whiting's House. It appears to have been in the field opposite Parsonage Farm to the north of the Old School House. It is shown on the map with an avenue of trees linking it through parkland to the main house of Howletts. It disappears from the records circa 1789 and the land on which it once stood is now a horse pasture. Mrs Delano-Osborn, of the Old Palace, wrote circa 1930 that the foundations of the old house are sometimes visible in a dry summer and indeed they were evident this summer (2013).

Parker entertained visitors of state at Bekesbourne, including at Elizabeth I's request in 1564, the French Ambassador, Monsieur de Gonor. The Parker household at the time numbered circa one hundred – retainers and servants - and the palace was a grand and opulent place. Parker hoped that Elizabeth would stay at Bekesbourne when she progressed to East Kent in 1573 but it was decided instead that she would stay in Canterbury.

The next Archbishop to favour Bekesbourne was John Whitgift (1583-1604). He may have done some more building work. There was some repair work between 1583 and 1593 which has been attributed to him. Archbishop Dr George Abbot (1611-1633) is said to have lived at Bekesbourne often and to have preached many times in St Peter's church.

In 1643, the last Archbishop to have a connection with the Old Palace, Laud (1633-1645), was imprisoned in the Tower of London and the demesne of Bekesbourne manor was subsequently rented by Frances Stockett,

widow, at the yearly rent of £15 17s 8d. The Bekesbourne pastures were rented by Thomas Harflete Esq at £4 pa, and Walter Harflete, gent, was (by patent) housekeeper of the palace with the yearly fee of £4 11s 2d.

## The end of the Palace

The days of opulence were over. Archbishop Laud was beheaded for supporting Charles I (1625-1649) and the subsequent revolution was to be to the destruction of the palace. The Commonwealth Commissioners carried out a comprehensive survey of the buildings in 1647 and then in 1658 ordered their demolition. A workman, John Chambers, was killed in the process and he was buried in Bekesbourne churchyard on February 1, 1658 in an unmarked grave. His burial record reads 'a stranger slain by the fell of a wall'.

1708 Nicholas Battely: The sequestrator did first destroy the pantry, then the baking house, then the other outhouses which were pulled down. At last he caused the whole house, the hall, parlours, large gallery – and the chapel which was beautiful and adorned with painted glass – to be demolished.

The property passed to the Hales family, who were owners of the nearby manor of Howletts, and the bricks and other materials from the demolished parts of the palace were sold by Robert Hales (and others) and used in houses in the district, possibly at Cobham Court (in Bekesbourne adjacent to the church) and for cottages on Littlebourne Green and at Swanton Farm (between Littlebourne and Canterbury). Such was the robbing of the bricks that it is said that even many of the medieval foundations were destroyed.

## Later occupants

The old buildings at the Old Palace formed one dwelling for most of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries and have been occupied by many families over the years including: Nicolas Battlely, Vicar from 1685 to 1704 (he had purchased the lease from a Nathaniel Tredcroft); on Batteley's death the interest passed to his son, Oliver, who later sold it to Robert Peckham. The explorer Dr Charles Tilstone Beke and his wife, Maria, were here from circa 1860 to 1873. Mr and Mrs Ian Fleming owned it briefly at the end of the 1950s and later it was owned by John Quine who was Head of Counter Intelligence at MI6 in the 1960s. For a while in Victorian times from 1840 Frederick Wood used it as a school for the sons of 'noblemen, knights and gentry'.

This postcard of 'The Old Palace' from the south-facing rear possibly dates from around the 1930s when the house was in the ownership of the Delano-Osborns. The Nailbourne had been diverted to create a moated island in the garden behind the old porter's lodge. The 'moat' is still there but these days it is usually dry and there is a yew hedge following its line which acts as a divide between the gardens of the two houses – see page 2. The Ordnance Survey map of 1898 shows the moat was in place by then as does a map produced by Reverend Francis Vine (of Patrixbourne) in 1887 and we can only speculate as to which of the various owners or tenants might have created it.

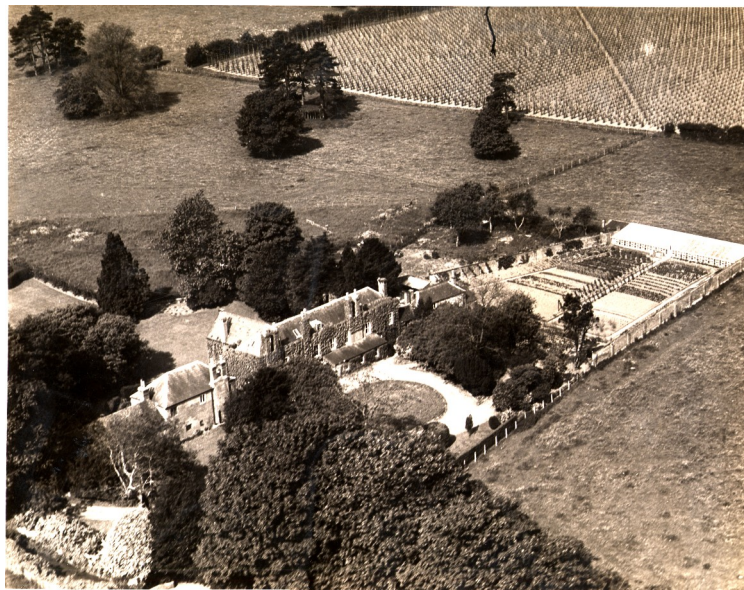


This photograph also shows the L-shaped footprint of the house. The original building was much altered during the 18th century probably by Robert Peckham, Esq. who also constructed the bridge over the Nailbourne. The wing is deemed to be a 19<sup>th</sup> century addition and perhaps this was also when the whole building was rendered. (Photo: Raymond Newport.)



Although these days the Nailbourne is dry most years, it clearly flowed well enough through medieval and early Georgian times to necessitate a brick bridge known as 'the Parson's Bridge' to enable the Archbishops and others living at the Palace to reach the church with dry feet. The current bridge dates from 1776: it replaced an earlier bridge noted as very dilapidated in 1647.

This aerial photograph taken circa 1931/2 by Flight Lt Tommy Rose (and kindly loaned by Kathleen Hill) is interesting not only for its view of the palace curtilage and its extensive kitchen garden but for the view of Parsonage Farm Hop garden in the background. The diagonal footpath through the garden is marked on the 1898 Ordnance Survey map but no longer exists on quite the same line.



Hops have been important in Bekesbourne for centuries but the extensive acreages once grown declined dramatically in the 20th century. In 1932, Mr Ernest "Buff" Baker of Parsonage Farm said, '*Now there are only 15 acres of hops in the whole of Bekesbourne parish, over 40 acres have been grubbed out during the past year. It remains to be seen whether the last hop will disappear in the near future*'. Happily in 2013 there is still a hop garden in Bekesbourne close to the one shown on this photo where Essentially Hops grows thousands of hop garlands each year to be sold mainly as whole bines for the interior decoration.



The Old Palace in the snow 1960 when the Flemings were the owners (Photo: Hazel Belby who taught at Bekesbourne school that year when known as Miss Andrews.)

Synopses of Bekesbourne's history often refer to the Ian Fleming connection and whilst it is true that Fleming and his wife Ann owned the Old Palace from October 1957, their sojourn in the village was neither long nor particularly happy. For much of the time Ian was away travelling abroad to gain background for his books or staying at their house, Goldeneye, in Jamaica. Ann, meanwhile, was alone with their young son, Caspar (born August 12, 1952), and suffering depression.

Ian Fleming's biographer, Andrew Lycett, explains that the purchase of the Old Palace was against Ann's better judgement and according to a friend, Mark Amory, she regarded it as a miserable, haunted, place: '*doors banged, ghostly footsteps were heard*', and, worse, '*it was too close to the railway*'.

In August 1960, the Flemings sold the Old Palace to Donald Campbell, Esq for £10,000 and moved to a flat close to St George's while they waited for their new home, Sevenhampton, in the West Country, to be renovated. Ann wrote as follows to Evelyn Waugh on August 31 1960 : '*We are homeless until Christmas 1961. The last days at the Old Palace were like the last act of the Cherry Orchard, we sat upon our suitcases awaiting release from finality gloom*'.

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Fortunately Ann Fleming's bleak opinion of the Old Palace is not universal. The house and its beautiful garden have been enjoyed by many families over the years and are much admired by all.

The gardens were opened on this occasion by kind permission of Martin and Nicky Fry in aid of Bekesbourne Church. In 2014 the gardens are open under the National Gardens Scheme.



#### Main sources

Amory, Mark (1985) The Letters of Ann Fleming London; Collins Carville

MacCulloch, Diarmaid (1996) Thomas Cranmer: A Life New York and London; Yale University Press

Tatton-Brown, Tim (1980) Excavations at the Old Palace, Bekesbourne, near Canterbury Archaeologia Cantiana Vol XCVI p27-57

P.R.O., E. 154/2/39 f. 74v

Also many happy conversations with local residents David Gilmour, David Millyard; Martin and Nicky Fry; and others with an interest in the history of Bekesbourne.

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