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Orford House, Ugley

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Orford House at Ugley, viewed from the south. Photograph by author.

Orford House at Ugley in NW Essex is an imposing Grade II* Listed Building thought to have been built in c.1699.

It was owned by Admiral Edward Russell who became Lord Orford in 1697. The property is exactly half way between his two residences in London and Chippenham Park near Newmarket, Suffolk. It lies on Pound Lane on the outskirts of the village (TL 5155 2705). Various phases of construction and alteration were identified during a survey of the building and its ancillary structures by Oxford Archaeology East in 2008, the most extensive of which took place in the mid 18th and late 19th centuries. Other buildings examined included the Coachman's Cottage, a substantial timber barn, a dovecote, stables and a granary. The layout of a Dutch Garden also survives.

Admiral Russell's Ugley House

Orford House is thought to have been built c.1699. Its first recorded inhabitant was Admiral Edward Russell (1653-1727). Russell was the younger brother of William Russell, the 1st Duke of Bedford. In 1688 Russell was one of the 'Immortal Seven', a group of English nobleman who issued the 'Invitation to William', a document asking William of Orange to depose James II.

In the subsequent War of the Grand Alliance, Russell served at sea, commanding his own fleet after 1690. In 1692, Russell was Commander-In-Chief of the Anglo-Dutch force that fought the French fleet at Barfleur, and destroyed much of it at La Hogue, his victory there being the decisive naval battle of the war.¹ Russell became First Lord of the Admiralty in 1694, remaining in that post until 1699. He served in the Mediterranean from 1694 to 1695 and was created Baron Shingay, Viscount Barfleur, and Earl of Orford in 1697. He was also a Member of Parliament for Cambridgeshire in 1695 and entered into the House of Lords in 1697 when his peerage was raised by his new titles.²

Russell purchased from within his own family an estate at Chippenham near Newmarket in Cambridgeshire in 1689 which was probably financed out of the profits of his naval career. Between 1698 and 1712 Russell had his Chippenham house reconstructed by the architect Thomas Archer, and the Chippenham estate remodelled, relocating the village and creating a walled park. The staircase at Chippenham Hall was embellished with paintings of Russell's victory at La Hogue, while two lines of lime trees in the park are said to have been planted to represent the positions of the French and Anglo-Dutch fleets at the battle.

By the time he lived at Chippenham, Lord Orford had three other residences; one in King Street, Covent Garden, a country house in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital and a smaller house at Ugley.³ Russell again employed Thomas Archer to design his house at No. 43 King Street, Covent Garden in 1716. Although research has not established whether Russell had Orford House built for him or whether he purchased a house already in existence, the plan and layout of his King Street residence in many ways echoes the layout of an early phase of the house at Ugley. The house is almost exactly half way between Chippenham Park and London and located on a route between Newmarket and London. Orford House is very small in comparison with the Chippenham Park estate where Russell appears to have spent most of his time and would have provided a convenient location to stop off or change horses. Examination of one of Russell's account books from 1717-18 shows that almost all of his listed expenditure was associated with his Chippenham House.⁴ There were a few references to money spent on the upkeep of 'the house at Ugley' including 'cloth for my great stairs', 'paid the carpenter' and 'paid glazier,

plumber and painter'. Many references relate to paying for horses to be kept, expenses to the coachman and most often, wages to Henry Rogers, who appears to have been based permanently at Ugley.

Russell died in 1727. Although he had married his cousin, Lady Margaret Russell, they had no children. No information has been found to indicate who inherited or purchased Orford House at this point, and surviving records for Chippenham Park also failed to provide any evidence.

The Russell House

Admiral Russell: The possibility that a house existed here before Lord Orford's arrival is suggested by some of its architectural features, including a fireback dated 1645, located in a ground floor room; firebacks are often secondary additions, however, and cannot be relied on for accurate dating.

The original entrance may have lain on the southern side of the house, since this was the direction of the approach from the main road. At this time, the house was symmetrical, with large and small chambers or withdrawing rooms flanking either side of the stairs and entrance hall.

Orford House is labelled on the Chapman & Andre map of 1777, although it appears just on the edge of the map meaning that the whole estate cannot be seen. A significant amount of land was evidently attached to the south of the estate at this time and the tithe map of 1839 shows a long rectangular plot of land lying to the east. This map also shows what appears to be a long, tree-lined avenue leading up to the house, set just to the right of the main road. This entrance approached the house from the south, running parallel to the road, before sweeping the back (perhaps to the stables/coach house) rather than following the more recent entrances directly from the main Cambridge Road and most recently from Pound Lane). Although the line of trees along the route has now gone, it is still possible to see the iron railings marking the original edge of the estate, as well as the point at which carriages would have left the main road to approach the house.

At some stage during Russell's occupation, two 'closets' were added on the north side of the house. These would have projected out from this elevation, still retaining and emphasising the need and fashion for symmetry: such closets were a popular addition to houses at the time.⁵ Russell's house at King Street, Covent Garden (built in 1716) also had closets on the north side of the house. Although no direct evidence could be found to show that Archer was employed as the architect for the house at Ugley, the fact that Russell was using him at his other houses (Chippenham between 1689 and 1712, King Street in 1716) and the strikingly similar layout of the King Street house to that at Ugley strongly

supports this suggestion.⁶ Archer (1668-1743) was unique amongst English architects, and incorporated baroque influences he had experienced during his travels.⁷ He is known to have worked on many famous buildings such as Chatsworth House and Wrest Park.

Orford House has an imposing dog-leg staircase with a rounded curtailed end at the base. The staircase has an open string with carved wooden brackets to the tread ends, decorated with scrolls with foliage/feather detail. These tread ends are very similar to examples dated to 1744, recorded in Sussex.⁸ Each tread has two turned balusters, a form more common in the early half of the 18th century.⁹ Each baluster has a bottle-shaped main shaft, a frequent design from around 1655 and popular until around 1700; this suggests that the Orford House balusters may have been reused from a staircase contemporary with the original build. The handrail is moulded, ramped and wreathed and is very similar to an example of c.1734 from Surrey.¹⁰

Isaac Whittington employs William Kent (?)

The next name associated with Orford House is Isaac Whittington (c.1710-1773). Whittington was elected as a Member of Parliament for Amersham in 1754 and was certainly in residence at Orford House in 1749 and died there in 1773 (according to a memorial in St Peter's Church, Ugley). Little information regarding Whittington's time at Orford House has been found, although *White's Directory of Essex* from 1848 provides a description: 'Orford House ... a large mansion, with pleasant grounds ... and much improved by the late Isaac Whittington, Esq.'

Pevsner suggests that Whittington extended the house by two bays to the left and added the two-storey canted bay window in the Drawing Room.¹¹ This room's interior is believed to have been partly designed by W. Kent, but no other link to Kent has been found. William Kent (1685-1748) was a renowned architect and painter of the period and also specialised in the designing of stuccos, frames, chimney pieces, door surrounds and similar decorations. One of Kent's most renowned architectural works is Holkham Hall, built for the Earl of Leicester in the Palladian style. Orford House's Drawing Room boasts a decorative asymmetrical Rococo design plasterwork ceiling with a central sun face design, matching that on the fire surround lintel. The ceiling plasterwork incorporates flowers and foliage, a theme reoccurring around the room in the cornices, overmantle, door cases and window surrounds.

Above the fire surround is an overmantle mirror which extends to almost ceiling height and a pediment with a central fruit basket design provides a grand decoration. The fruit basket detail would certainly fit Kent's style as his interior decorations were bold, with three-dimensional solidity.¹² Below

the pediment is a frieze with foliage decoration and a pair of central griffin heads.



Rectified image of the fireplace and carved chimney piece overmantle, in the Drawing Room. Illustration by author.

Two doorcases in this room can be stylistically dated to the early-mid 18th century; one door pediment is decorative and the other plainer. These variations reflect differing status. The decorative pediment over the door leading to the corridor may have been designed to be seen as guests entered and left the room, whereas the other door provided access/egress for staff towards the kitchens/servants areas at the rear of the house.

The windows within the canted bay are elongated double-hung sashes with nine panes per sash and segmental arched tops; the original wooden shutterboxes and shutters remain in place. The shutters are in two parts: this was usually so that the upper part could be closed independently, allowing light to enter the room whilst protecting furniture and fabrics from direct sunlight. Decorative scrolls flank either side of each window and the window backs are panelled but undecorated. Bay windows of this type came into fashion in the early 1750s and 60s, followed by the fashion for curved bays in the later 18th century.¹³

This room also has a dado/chair rail, as would have been present in more important rooms of the period. Such wooden rails protected the walls from the backs of chairs in the early Georgian period.¹⁴ The elaborate design of the rails at Orford House incorporates egg and dart design, as well as the Greek key pattern. An elaborate skirting board is also present, using beaded and leaf patterns, echoing the themes noted above. The design of such skirting boards frequently derived from detailing of classical column

bases and coloured paint was often used to pick out detail in the pattern.¹⁵

When this extension was added, it appears that the entire fenestration on this side of the building was replaced. The cut brick lintels with decorative brushed keystones and nine-pane sash windows are distinctive of the early Georgian period. Around this time, a new wing was added onto the back of the two bay extension at the front of the house, creating two new large rooms on the ground floor and on the first floor, together with a new rear staircase. These newly created rooms may have been added for servants quarters/service rooms, since they lay at the rear of the house and allowed access to the main house via the new rear stairs. Service staff were thereby kept out of the main house.

Samuel Leightonhouse

A memorial in St Peter's Church informs us that Samuel Leightonhouse lived in Orford House until his death in 1823. Although precisely when he bought the house is uncertain, an annual register of the 'History, Politics and Literature' of 1794 shows that he was there in that year.¹⁶ A weathervane on the clocktower of the Coachman's Cottage has an inscription which states 'the clocktower was built Aug 4th–Nov 3rd 1821 for Samuel Leightonhouse by Thomas Livey'.

The changes made by Leightonhouse comprise the addition of a rounded bay/extension on the south side of the house, which perhaps shifted its focus from the front, facing the road, to the south side overlooking the gardens and land beyond. This ensured that visitors to the house and those riding in the grounds approaching from this side would see the new fashionable rounded bay. This phase may also have seen the addition of the recess for the Sheraton cabinet as described in a 1908 Sale Catalogue – such features typically date to the late 18th century.

William Chamberlayne

William Chamberlayne and his family resided at Orford House from at least 1851 when they first appear there in the census. Chamberlayne was a magistrate and his memorial in the parish church of St Peter states that he was Lieutenant General William Chamberlayne of the 2nd Dragoon Guards and was born in Ryes, Essex in 1788. Like the occupants before him, William Chamberlayne died whilst the owner of Orford House in 1869 and was buried in the local church. According to census data, his wife Sarah continued to live there until her death in January 1887.

The only changes to the building that can be ascribed to Chamberlayne comprise a small square extension located on the east side of the house dated stylistically and through cartographic evidence to the mid to late

19th century. This structure was described as 'a room with brick built forge now used as a workshop' in the 1908 catalogue; it is present on the 1st edition Ordnance Survey map and therefore pre-dates 1876.

Robert Woodhouse

Major Robert Woodhouse was living at Orford House between at least 1891 (1891 census) and 1900 (Kelly's Directory). By 1912 it had again changed hands. It appears from Kelly's Directory of 1894 that he did not own the house; the owner was a 'Miss Brocket of Spain's Hall, Ongar'. 'Miss Brocket' may have been Elizabeth or Mary Brockett, daughters of Stanes Brocket Chamberlayne (later Stanes Brocket Brocket). He was a descendent of Stanes Chamberlayne of Ryes, Essex who was presumably the son or brother William Chamberlayne, the last recorded occupant at Orford House.¹⁷ Later in 1900 the property is listed (Kelly's Directory) as belonging to a Mrs Miller.

The alterations made during the late 19th century comprised the addition of a two storey wing which extends on the eastern side of the house and is dated by builders' marks to 1896. Described as a billiard room by 1908, this room may have been used as a library or for other entertainment. On the first floor this extension allowed for yet another large bedroom with a nursery or maid's room in the attic above. The house was occupied by Robert Woodhouse and his family in the late 19th century. Census data reveals that Woodhouse had only one child but a large number of servants at Orford House, hence the additions to the service areas seen in this period. Access was opened up from the main stairs to the service areas allowing better circulation of staff over all floors via a rear staircase. A walled area at the front of the house was roofed and converted for storage.

The new extension on the eastern side of the house not only made it appear larger when approaching from the southern drive or from the grounds, but it also destroyed the symmetry of this elevation, a fashion which was no longer a concern in the Victorian period.

In 1908 the house was auctioned, perhaps at the end of a tenancy. Cartographic evidence suggests that the house/estate was accessed from a new point by this time. A sale catalogue dating from 1908 which included the sale of Orford House lists all the rooms floor-by-floor, with room dimensions, as well as all other buildings.¹⁸ This allows functions to be ascribed to each of the rooms and buildings recorded, at least as they were in 1908 and before the property was converted to its most recent use.

William Tennant

William Augustus Tennant (1861-1941) lived in Orford House with his wife Agnes Hannah Tennant until his death. When exactly he obtained the house is uncertain, although it is likely that he purchased it at auction in 1908. The first evidence of Tennant at Orford House is found in Kelly's Directory of 1912. William travelled every day to London to work for the family firm, Charles Tennant & Sons.¹⁹ Memorials to Tennant and other members of the family who lived in Ugley can be found in the parish church.

During the time that William Tennant lived in the house, very little alteration work or construction was carried out. As noted above, the sale catalogue from 1908 provides a very useful source. A photograph of Orford House from the south at this time shows that the current door and porch were not yet present, suggesting that this addition together with the accompanying decoration internally around the door was added by Tennant, sympathetically and true to the original style of the house. The inscription on the coach house also tells us that Tennant was responsible for rebuilding the clock tower in 1923. The Dutch Garden may also have been created at around this time. A photograph of the grounds taken from the north shows a formal garden to the south of the house which was not present on the previous 1897 map. Following the path beyond the hedge, the grounds continued into the parkland.

Agnes Dalrymple Tennant (Nancy)

Agnes Tennant (1897-2003), daughter of William Tennant was the last private owner/resident of Orford house before the Home Farm Trust took over the property in the 1983. Agnes, or Nancy as she was known, played a prominent role in the life of the Women's Institute in the 1940s and was active in developing their musical life – her enthusiasm led to the creation of WI choirs across the country.²⁰ Most of the alterations attributed to Agnes' occupation appear to be internal and mostly cosmetic. The only structural change recorded was the addition of an external chimney on the south-facing elevation, dated by graffiti to 1959.

The Home Farm Trust

The Home Farm Trust is a charitable organisation which provides long term support for people with learning disabilities and their families. They acquired Orford House in 1983 and converted it into the institutional use in which the property was found when the survey began.

Other Buildings

The Coachman's Cottage: The single-storey coachman's cottage is located at the rear of the house. It is an 'L'-shaped building with attics, dormer windows and a clocktower with an octagonal open cupola and a weather vane. An inscription reads:

¹⁹'Orford House, Ugley' – *Saffron Walden Historical Journal* No 23 (2012)

*'This clocktower was built Aug 4th – Nov 3rd 1821
For Samuel Leightonhouse by Thomas Livey
This clocktower was again rebuilt August 1923
For William Agnes Tennant by Robert Livey'*



The Coachman's Cottage, viewed from the north-west. Photograph by author.

The building survives almost as it appears on the first edition Ordnance Survey map. The original layout of the building comprised a rectangular structure with a wide opening at the southern end, facing into the courtyard, to allow access for horses. Fireplaces at the northern end of the house may indicate living accommodation.

The next phase of development saw the addition of the east to west orientated extension at the southern end of the building which would allow for the stabling of more horses. A wide entrance may have allowed cart access. The narrow room built onto the southernmost end may have served as a tack room or for storage. Another phase of development saw the alteration of the east-west wing into a garage, as described in the 1908 catalogue.

Finally, during the early 20th century, a centrally located entrance porch was added, presumably when much of the interior was re-modelled to create more living accommodation. This work may have coincided with the replacement of the roof and repair to the clocktower in 1923.

The Barns

The barns were probably used as threshing barns, reflecting the need for greater storage following improved grain yield in the late 17th and 18th centuries. The examples at Orford House had two opposing high doorways allowing carts and wagons to drive into the barn and unload from the threshing floor into one of the bays. The height also provided light for working and ventilation when winnowing the husks from the grain.

When the later phase of barn was added it seems that the eastern gable end was opened up to create one large barn and it is only within the last 100 years or so that these were divided into two. Assuming that these barns are 17th and 18th century in date, they are contemporary with the earliest phases of Orford House. They also demonstrate that the house was also part of a working farm during these periods and potentially continued to be, perhaps until the 19th century.

Dovecote

Although no longer within the grounds of Orford House, on the northern side of the wall (and now the property of the relocated Home Farm Trust) stands a dovecote which was originally part of the estate. This small square building is timber-framed and plastered with a brick base, with a door located on the west side with a two-light window above. The dovecote was not accessible during the time of the survey, although the listed building's description states that the interior has 350 nests. The roof is covered with peg tiles, like those on the Coachman's Cottage and a square wood and tiled cupola surmounts the top. On the brick base of the west-facing elevation is graffiti which reads 'IV 99' and 'IR 99'.

Stables

Located to the immediate north of the barn is a brick-built stable block. This building does not appear on the map supplied with the 1908 Sale Catalogue, indicating that it must date to the early-middle part of the 20th century. The room at its far northern end may have been for a blacksmith/stablehand as it has a small Aga/stove. One of the stalls had been converted into a laundry, with a large ceramic sink and washboard still *in situ*. The roof is tiled and double pitched at the front.

Granary

A granary lies to the north of the stables. This timber-framed building is raised from the ground by staddle stones which were only used to support granaries, the overhanging top stone being designed to prevent rats from getting into the building. It was restored and rebuilt in 1986 by the Rotary Club of Bishops Stortford for the Home Farm Trust, according to a plaque on the outside. It may have been moved from its original location, perhaps not even within the grounds of Orford House, as it does not feature on any of the historical maps consulted, nor is it mentioned by the Listed Buildings Survey carried out in the 1970s.

Kitchen Garden Buildings

Within the grounds of the newly relocated Home Farm Trust, to the east of Orford House are two 19th-century brick built structures incorporated into

the high garden walls of the estate. Graffiti located dates them to at least 1858.

The Dutch Garden

The Dutch Garden lies at the rear of the Coachman's Cottage (east of Orford House) and at the time of the survey, was almost completely overgrown. The lower part of the garden walls probably date to the 18th century, but have been altered and lowered with no visible architectural or historical features.²¹

A set of small stone steps leading to a revetted terrace lies at the western end of the wall (which continues to the western limits of the grounds). On the right-hand side of the summit of the steps are the remnants of a statue. The surviving fragments suggest a possible a metamorphosis theme of an emerging butterfly, probably dating from the 18th or 19th century.²² Within the garden is an ornamental pond of brick and stone construction. Steps lead down to it and to a statue of a child with a shell. This figure is likely to be 19th or 20th century in date.²³

Conclusions

The survey at Orford House has revealed a wealth of original features that indicate that the house has undergone a number phases of development, some of which can be tentatively linked to the work of individual owners. The associated buildings also retain much of their original fabric. Despite the recent adaptation of the house for use as a care home, few of the alterations were irreversible and have allowed the house to be restored to its layout and appearance as a residential building. The presence of so many early original features from securely dated phases makes Orford House unique in its character and survival. It should continue to be recognised as a building of considerable historical interest.

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