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FROM PALLADIO TO POTTER'S BAR: THE EVOLUTION OF THE GEORGIAN FARMHOUSE

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Pitstone Green Farm in Buckinghamshire (Fig. 1; Plate 1) is the archetypal Georgian farmhouse although, like every specific example of a generic house type, it has its individualities. It was built in 1830 by the Earl of Bridgewater for a good tenant, John Hawkins, farming some 300 acres, and it cost, including all farm buildings, £896 14s 3d (Davis, 1979).¹ It has the characteristic four-square plan with a central passage and stair, though unusually the farm end of the passage is enlarged into a lobby, almost another room. The kitchen is entered from another lobby, with the doors to the other rooms off it, but this was rapidly found impractical and was shut off. In the north-west corner is the dairy, sunk below ground by about four feet, and above it is the farm lads' bedroom, squeezed in as a mezzanine storey; outside hung a bell which John Hawkins could use to rouse any laggards. The main bedrooms and the attics (for the housemaids) are reached only by the main stair, not the back stair up to the lads' room. The windows are very unusual for a house of some status, having horizontal sliding sashes, with lifting shutters.

Details like these show the careful planning that went into the house, which extended to its social organisation. It clearly has a 'front' and a 'back', but the front entrance is not approached by a driveway; it faces the garden (Plate 1). Thus even the best visitors must have



Plate 1. Pitstone Green Farm, Pitstone Green, Buckinghamshire (1830), the 'polite', garden front.

Pitstone Green Farm, Buckinghamshire 1830

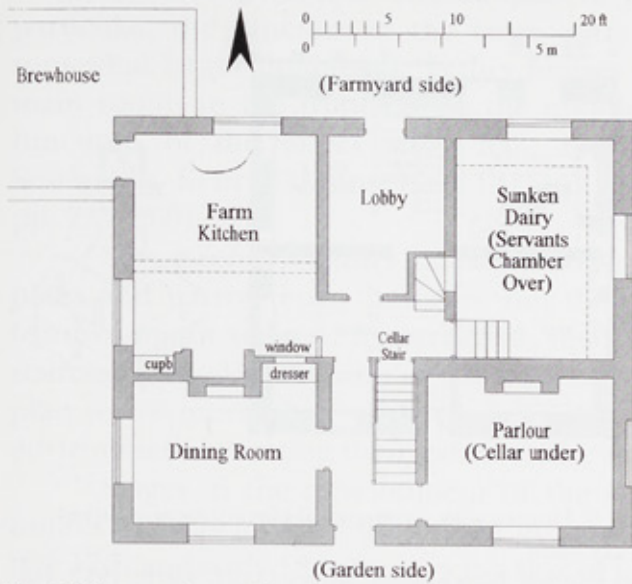


Fig. 1. Pitstone Green Farm, Pitstone Green, Buckinghamshire (SP937156), built in 1830 for the Earl of Bridgewater: ground floor plan.

come in from the back. However, the house is firmly segregated with a door between farm and house side, and a window in the dining room, no doubt both for serving and to keep an eye on the kitchen.

The four-square plan of Pitstone Green Farm is so universal among 18th century farmhouses, that it is often called 'the Georgian plan'. A brief consideration of two other examples, one of 1716 and one of 1797 (Fig. 2) illustrates the similarities in these houses. The two are virtually identical in overall dimensions, 45ft by 30ft, slightly larger than Pitstone which is 40ft by 33ft. They differ obviously in date but, more significantly, in location: the first is in Warwickshire, the second in Charleston, South Carolina. These houses invite the obvious question: How was the idea of the Georgian plan transmitted, here over three-quarters of a century and 3,000 miles?

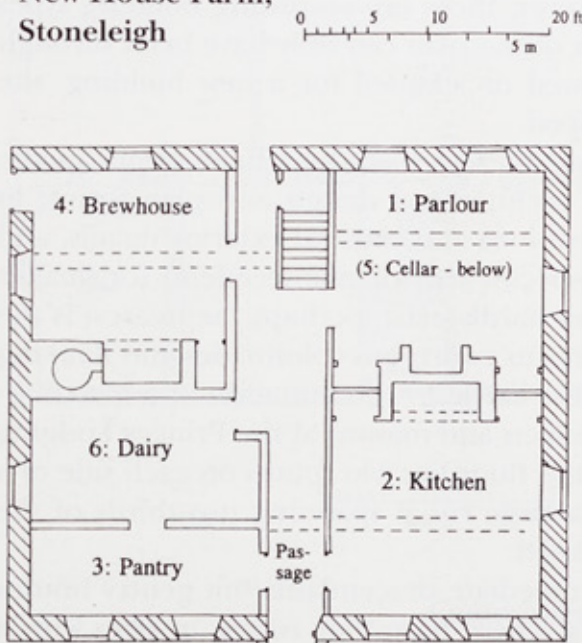
Stemming from this are two other problems:

How does the plan originate?

How does it evolve and eventually disappear?

The lack of previous study of this house type means that none of these questions can be answered fully, but it is significant that they are beginning to be asked.²

New House Farm, Stoneleigh



Pinkney Street, Charleston

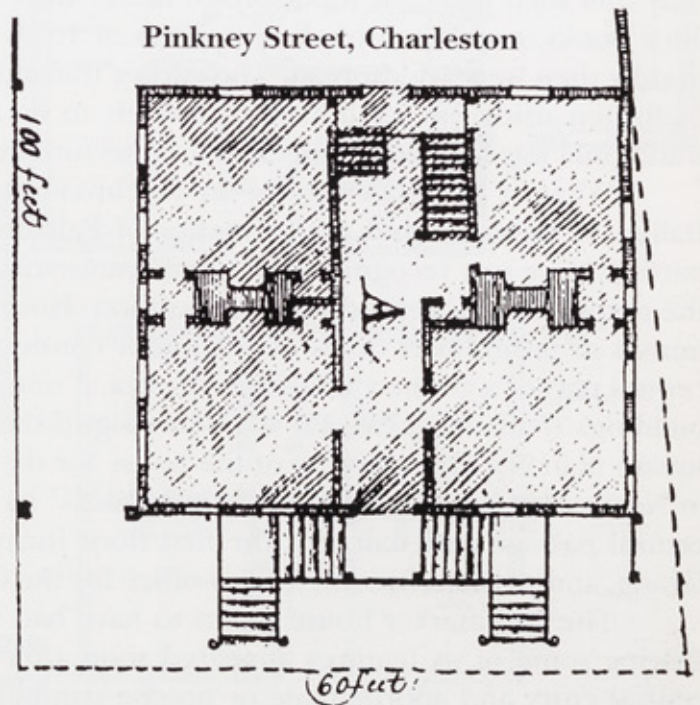


Fig. 2. (a) New House Farm, Stoneleigh, Warwickshire, built in 1716 by Francis Smith of Warwick as a farmhouse for Lord Leigh: ground floor plan (restored) with room names from a probate inventory of 1728 (Alcock, 1993); (b) House in Charleston, South Carolina, from a deed plat of 1797. (Charleston County Deed Register; I thank Dr B Herman for drawing my attention to this drawing).

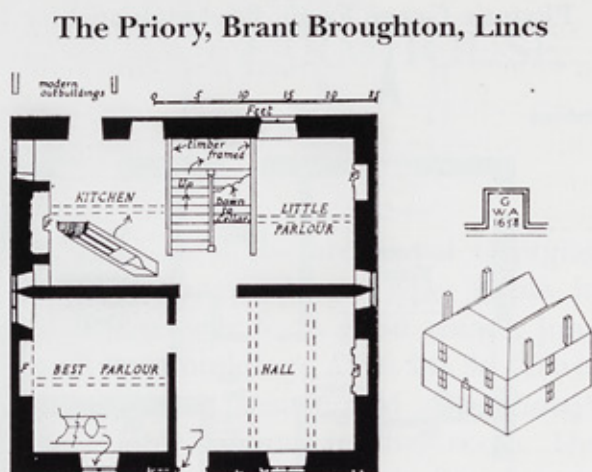
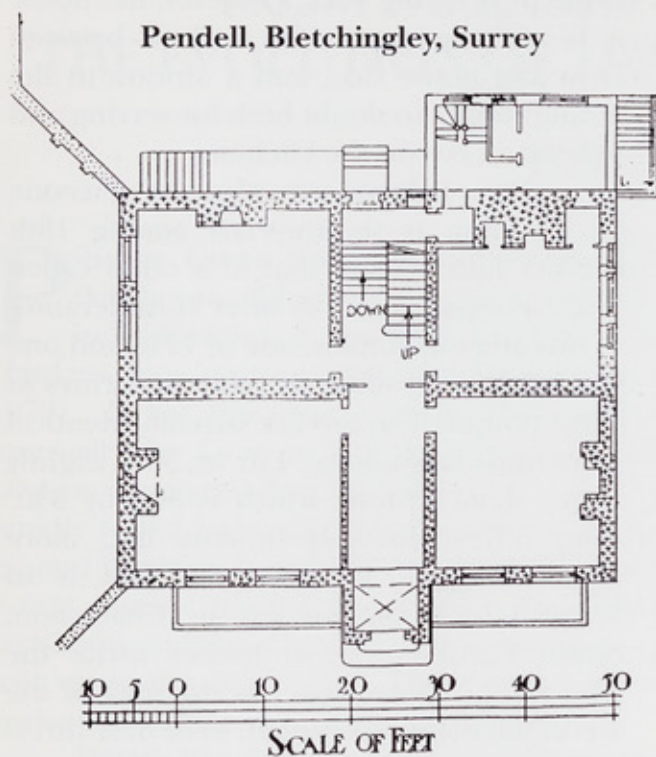


Fig. 3. Houses with symmetrical elevations and direct entry halls:
 (a) Pendell, Bletchingley, Surrey (*VCH*, Surrey 1912, Vol. IV, p. 253)
 (b) The Priory, Brant Broughton, Lincolnshire, built in 1658 by William Garnon, gentleman: Restored plan (Barley, 1963, p. 219). Reproduced with permission.

The first problem, that of transmission, should find an obvious answer in architectural pattern books, but this seems to be incorrect. The earliest pattern books giving house plans (as opposed to constructional or carpentry detailing) only begin to appear in the second quarter of the 18th century, and the central stair-passage plan is hardly visible in them until still later in the century. Timothy Lightoler, for example, in his *Gentleman and Farmer's Architect* of 1762, gives only one such plan, for a parsonage rather than a farmhouse. The type has more emphasis in later books, e.g. Loudon's *Encyclopaedia* of 1833. However, these are recording building types that by then were widespread. The earlier transmission of the plan can only have been through craftsmen using earlier houses as models to be followed or adapted for a new building, the traditional way in which vernacular architecture developed.

What of the plan's roots? In the broadest terms, these houses find their origin in the Italian Renaissance and the influence of Palladio on architectural design and plan forms; in particular we can recognise the use of symmetrical elevations and classical exterior details, and the emphasis on a centralised stair position. However, specific Palladian antecedents for smaller houses or farmhouses of the forms under consideration hardly exist; perhaps the nearest is the central part of a country villa near Vicenza, if one ignores its enormous colonnades and flanking buildings (Palladio, 1738, Pl. 40). More significant as the earliest representation of a true four-square plan is a little drawing of the house for the architects and masons at the Princes Lodging in Newmarket built by Inigo Jones in 1619-20.³ Its ground floor has two rooms on each side of a central passage and stair, but the first floor includes a large room spanning two thirds of the facade, and perhaps intended as an office for the craftsmen.

The Newmarket house seems to have had no immediate descendants but gentry houses sharing some of its features appeared soon afterwards. These have four rooms in plan with a central entry and approximate or precise symmetry for the front elevation. However, the entry leads directly into the larger of the two front rooms and the stair opens off this room at the rear.

Published examples of the type include Pendell, Bletchingley, Surrey,⁴ built in 1636 by Richard Glydd, Treasurer of Christ's Hospital (Fig. 3(a)), and The Priory, Brant Broughton, Lincolnshire, built in 1658 by William Garnon, gentleman (Fig. 3(b)). In both these houses, as

with many examples of the type, a wall was later inserted to produce a central passage plan. Despite the fair number of examples of this direct entry plan, its social dynamics and, in particular, the function of the large entry hall still remain to be established. A number of somewhat larger double-pile gentry houses show a related plan, with a central entry and three main rooms in the front range; the middle room was heated and probably had some of the functions of the direct entry hall. Examples are widely distributed, including St Clere, Sevenoaks, Kent (Country Life, 121, pp. 450, 518) and Troesymarion, Anglesey (Smith, 1975, pp. 235, 260).

Seventeenth century terraced houses, especially in London, include both double-pile plans and narrow entry passages, but they are not as close to the 'Georgian' house as these features might suggest. In particular, their characteristic plan is only one room wide, with the staircase placed at the side of the hall, between the front and back rooms (Kelsall, 1974). This plan seems more likely to derive from the adaptation of two-room houses to a crowded urban environment by setting their gables to the street, than from prototypic central passage houses.

Stages in the development of the Georgian plan can be illustrated by a case study of houses in Warwickshire (described in more detail in Alcock, 1996). What we find there in the late 17th and early 18th century is a flux of ideas, with the appearance of:

- Innovative materials, especially with brick replacing timber-framing
- Double-pile layouts
- Frontal symmetry
- Innovative planning of the entry and the stair.

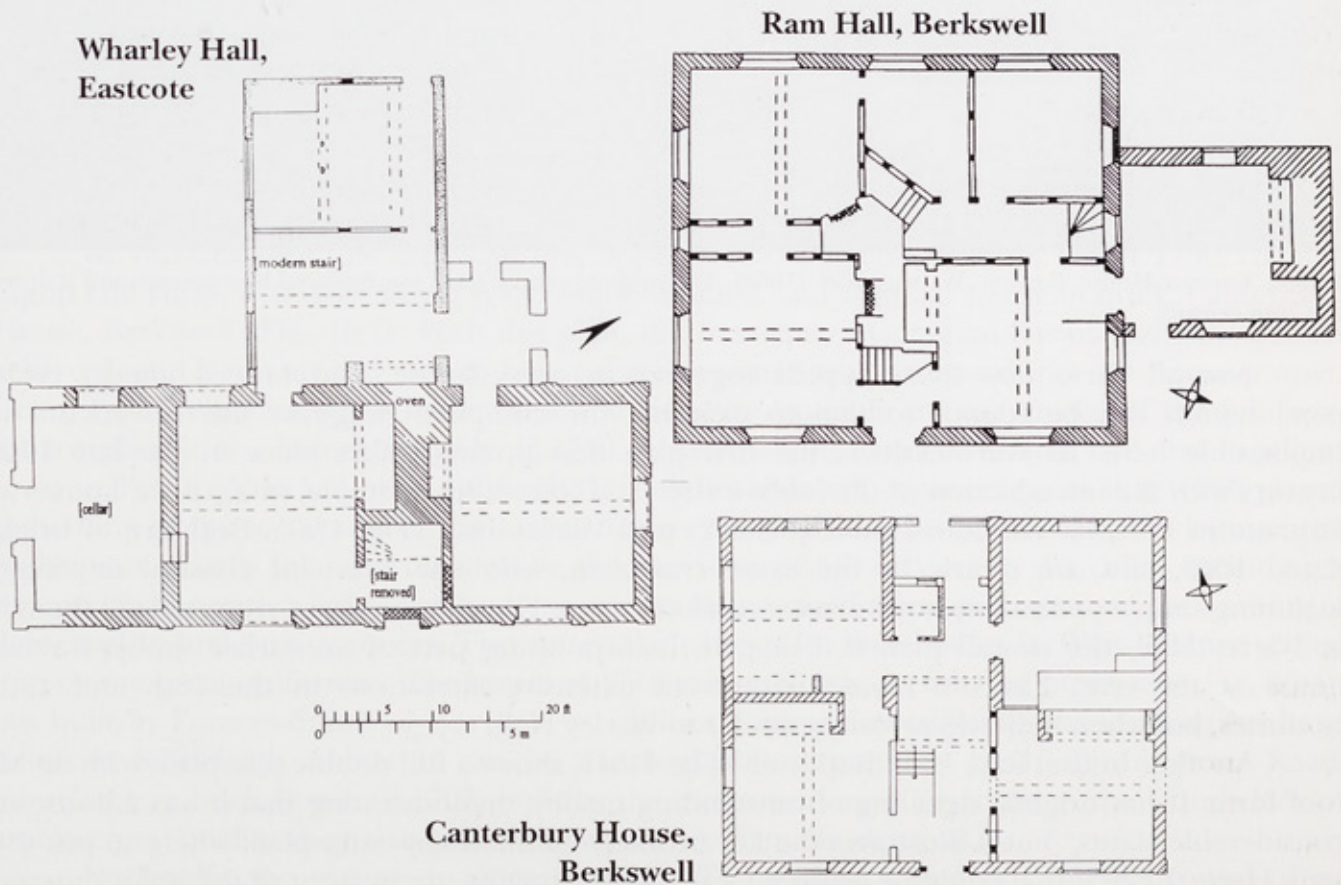


Fig. 4. Innovative Warwickshire houses (Alcock, 1996).

(a) Warley Hall, Barston (dated 1669): elevation; the leftmost section was originally a lean-to.

(b) Ram Hall, Berkswell (c. 1685), plan.

(c) Canterbury House, Berkswell (c. 1700), plan; originally u-shaped. The open rear section was later infilled.



Plate 2. Eastcote House, Barston, Warwickshire (1669). The original central stack was replaced by a passage and stair in the 19th century.

Not all these new ideas appear together in every house, and indeed almost every combination can be found, so that to examine the complete range of this eclecticism is impossible here. In Warwickshire, the first plan development takes place in the late 17th century with the introduction of the lobby-entry.⁵ It is found, for example, in a pair of houses at Eastcote in Barston, Eastcote House (Plate 2) and Warley Hall (Fig. 4(a)). Both are of brick, dated 1669, and are clearly by the same craftsman, who was aware of classical detailing, including simple pediments, strip pilasters and cornices. The elevations are symmetrical, though at Warley Hall, the overall plan is T-shaped, incorporating part of an earlier timber-framed house at the rear; Eastcote House underwent extensive alterations in the 18th and 19th centuries, but when built was probably similar to Warley Hall.

Another house, Ram Hall, Berkswell (Fig. 4(b)), shows a full double-pile plan, with an M-roof form. It has original detailing of outstanding quality, demonstrating that it was a house of considerable status,⁶ but it illustrates the key problem of the lobby-entry plan: where to put the stair. Here, the best that could be achieved was a steep straight run in front of the stack, entered directly from the main living room. This would have been fine for a cottage, but was far from satisfactory for this gentry house. It was only the later history of the house, a tenant farm from the beginning of the 18th century almost to the present day, that preserved it from the radical internal alterations that befell several of the early lobby-entry houses, including Eastcote House.



Plate 3. Cowcroft Farm, Latimer, Buckinghamshire (1671).

There, the central stack was completely removed and a central passage and stair inserted, while the front rooms were given narrow fireplaces with coal-burning grates backing onto the passage.

In Warwickshire, the stair hall first appears in U-shaped houses of about 1700, such as Camp Hill Farm, Beausale, which is still timber-framed, and a similar house in brick, Canterbury House, Berkswell (Fig. 4(c)). With this plan, the four-square Georgian layout had almost been achieved, and it was an easy step to incorporate the small rear courtyard into the house proper. Grove Farm, Warmington is the earliest Warwickshire example yet recognised of the full four-square plan. It is a house probably of 1700, notable for its ample entrance hall and excellent open well stair (Alcock, 1996). Although the hall is unheated, its size suggests that it still played something of the social role of the earlier direct-entry halls. In this house, also, the logic of the four-square plan is followed through by the provision of full services in the cellar, including a second kitchen with a bake-oven and copper, another heated room perhaps used for brewing, a dairy and several service rooms. Thereafter, the pattern for farmhouses in Warwickshire settled into one of great uniformity. The house of 1716 at Stoneleigh, mentioned previously (Fig. 2(a)), was built by Frances Smith of Warwick, as a minor commission while he was working for Lord Leigh at Stoneleigh Abbey. It can be matched almost precisely by 16 Birmingham Road, Stoneleigh, a brick house of 1767, built by the estate workmen. Apart from the latter's lack of architectural quality, their size, and room layout are virtually identical.⁷

Nationally, the picture is more complex. The earliest dated example yet found of an unequivocal four-square house with a central stair passage is of 1671, Cowcroft Farm, Latimer, Buckinghamshire (Pl. 3; Fig. 5). Although the house has undergone some alterations, the original plan is clear. In particular, unlike some early houses apparently with central passage plans, it did not have a direct entry hall from which a passage was later cut off (cf. Fig. 3). At

**Cowcroft, Latimer, Buckinghamshire
1671 (partly restored)**

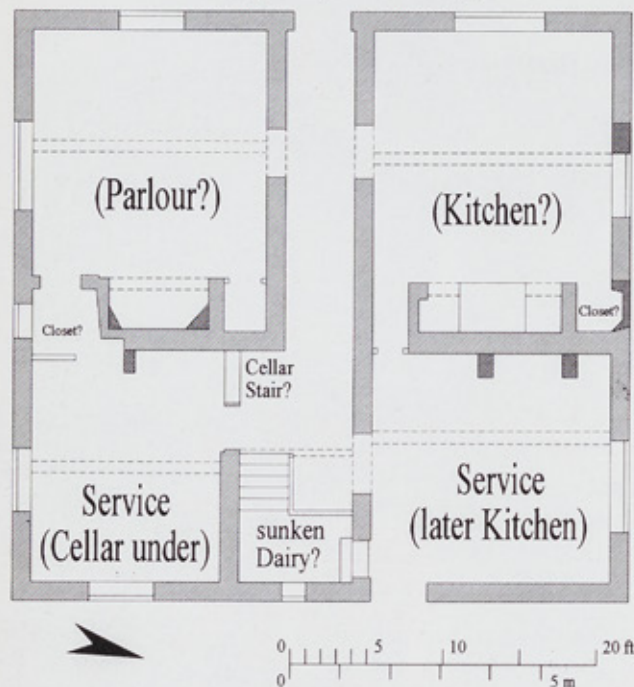


Fig. 5. Cowcroft Farm, Latimer, Buckinghamshire (SP983016): plan (restored to pre-1980 form). The house was altered in 1980, including the reversal of the stair to rise opposite the door, but the surviving bearer beam indicates that the original form was as drawn; some aspects of the plan, such as a possible original side door (rather than the closet shown), cannot now be established. The stair has symmetrical turned balusters. On the first floor, the two front rooms and that over the later kitchen are heated.

The terracotta plaques read IW and SA
1671 and TD

The first probably identifies the builder as Sir Jeremy Whichcote (*VCH Bucks*, 1925, Vol. III, p. 210); the second may refer to his tenants, but the initials have not been identified.

present Cowcroft stands alone, some 10-20 years before any successors, and in Gloucestershire, for example, where the larger 17th century vernacular houses have been extensively studied, the first houses that mark the beginning of the continuous 'Georgian' plan tradition date from just before 1700, including Egypt Mill House, Nailsworth, of 1698 (Hall, 1983; Vernacular Architecture Group, 1983).⁸ By contrast, in Northern England, the plan seems not to appear until the mid-18th century.

Regional variations are found in elevation and proportions, particularly between two and three storeys, and in roof form. A common Midlands variety has the roof hipped to the front but triple gabled at the rear, with a narrow gable over the passage and stair flanked by wider ones; a house which reached this form by conversion in the late 18th century from a 17th century two-room house is illustrated in Alcock, 1993, p. 110. Plan variants also occur, clearly deriving from the archetype. A number of Midland houses with symmetrical elevations are exceptionally high, having two full storeys and a lower third storey, sometimes with attics as well; their stairs are still within the central passage, though they may have single depth or L-plans as well as four-square forms; an early L-shaped example at Ashby Magna, Leicestershire is of 1720.

Small houses, too, reveal the innovations that were so influential in the development of 18th century farmhouses. As a minimum, we find a symmetrical elevation though, as late as 1800, this might be combined with the old fashioned lobby-entrance plan. Much more often, by the mid-18th century, the chimneys were repositioned on the gables, with the staircase in the central passage. A number of plan variations were possible, including the provision of a rear lean-to, or of service rooms cut off from the main rooms, and occasionally of a direct entry into the kitchen rather than a central passage. As a typical example, Rose Cottage, Pickering, of 1800 (RCHM 1989, p. 60) (Plate 4) has a narrow rear service room at the back of each main room, thus achieving a small but recognisable version of the Georgian house.

At the start of the long history of the Georgian farmhouse, the distant influences of Palladio and the Italian Renaissance can be seen. Its final disappearance can be attributed to their antithesis, 19th century Romanticism. However, like the Renaissance ideals, the devolution of these influences to the level of ordinary houses was very slow, and the Georgian plan flourished for much of the century – in such unlikely places for classical influences as Potter's Bar. Until 1850, this was a small rural settlement, but in that year its character began to



Plate 4. Rose Cottage, Pickering, Yorkshire (1800).



Plate 5. Chadhurst, Heath Road, Potter's Bar, Middlesex (c. 1870).

be transformed by the arrival of the railway. A few years later, two optimistic entrepreneurs laid out an estate of 230 large building plots (Warren, 1992). Their ambitious plans largely came to nothing but a few houses were built in the 1860-70s, including that shown in Plate 5. In Potter's Bar and innumerable other suburbs around London and elsewhere, the farmhouse of two centuries earlier has become the archetypal villa. Another example, from Leamington Spa, Warwickshire (Fig. 6) can be illustrated from the plan of 1862, deposited with the local Board of Health, which gives the names of all the rooms. The layout only differs from earlier versions by the provision of a large service block behind the main house; this was probably cheaper for a speculative builder than excavating a cellar, though it must have detracted from the attractiveness of the garden.

Even Victorian suburbs do not provide the farthest-flung appearances of the Georgian plan. An urban example from North America (Fig. 2b) has already been illustrated, and indeed the type was in use in New England almost a century earlier, for example, in the McPhaedris-Warner House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire; this was built in 1716-18 for a wealthy merchant, by an emigrant London joiner, John Drew (Garvin, 1983). Study of these houses has led to the interesting possibility that the adoption of the Georgian plan was the result of social as well as architectural driving forces. It has been suggested that the social segregation between the polite rooms and the service rooms is mirrored in their physical separation to each side of the hallway (Upton, 1982). However, when early room identifications can be firmly established (e.g. Fig. 2(a)), such segregation is not marked. The separation of polite and service functions may well be among the reasons for the plan's later popularity, but it is unsatisfactory as an explanation of its origin.

The Georgian plan found particular application in Virginia where it is very widely distributed in houses of the 1850's; these even include throw-backs to the 17th century double-pitch M-roofs (Plate 6), although shallow hipped roofs are more common (like that in Plate 5). It was also used at about this date in South Carolina (e.g. McLeod Plantation, James Island, of 1854; Vernacular Architecture Forum, 1994, p. 289). An example was even included among more exotic houses as a 'Southern Cottage' in an 1878 catalogue of house plans available by

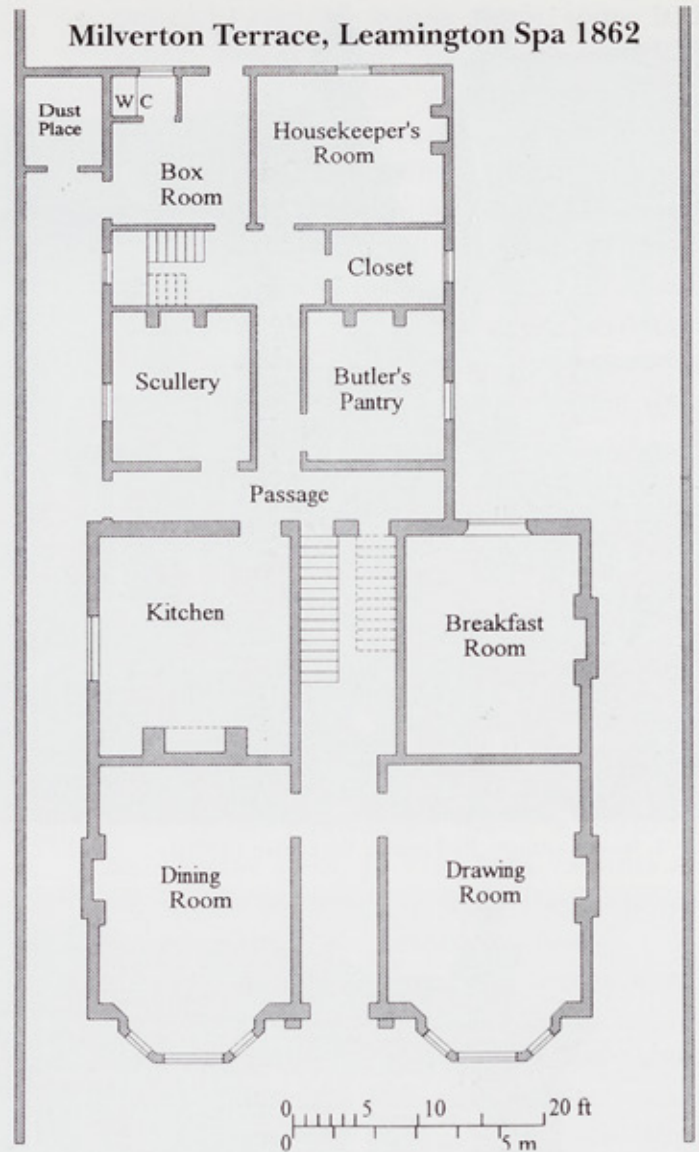


Fig. 6. Proposed plan for a house in Milverton Terrace, Leamington Spa, redrawn from the deposited plan of 1862 (Warwickshire County Record Office, CR2487/Z1598). It is not clear whether this particular proposal was executed, but several houses in the street are very similar to this drawing.



Plate 6. Farmhouse outside Middlebrook, Augusta County, Virginia (c. 1850) (Photo: Ann McCleary).

mail order.⁹ Although overlaid with gingerbread and gables, it is still recognisably the house that emerged two hundred years earlier in Midland England.

At least the framework can now be seen for the development of an extraordinarily long-lived building type, one that superficially in its symmetry and occasional classical detail belongs to polite architecture, but in reality in its organic evolution and informal transmission is as vernacular as any long-house. Developments of the plan do appear, especially in the choices made about segregation of masters and servants, under the control of the social setting and the lifestyle of its users. However, the detail of these changes remains to be discovered, and perhaps reported to future conferences discussing the character of the 'ordinary Georgian house'.

NOTES

1. The acreage is that at enclosure in 1854, and may have changed somewhat since 1830.
2. Among the most relevant earlier papers is that by Barley (1979) on the general development of double-pile houses, though the Georgian plan itself is surprisingly sparse in the same author's 1985 survey of houses from 1640 to 1750. Smith (1981) examines two early Welsh houses with symmetrical elevations and plans. The texts of unpublished papers kindly made available by Nicholas Cooper and Malcolm Airs have also been particularly useful in providing examples.
3. The drawing is among a group of plans and elevations of small houses made by John Webb (c. 1640?). It is reproduced in Harris & Higgot, 1989, p. 102, and is also shown in Reiff, 1986, p. 100, but is there attributed to Inigo Jones himself.
4. The published plan shows a central stair passage, but the thinner left wall, and the position of the fireplace in the left hand room, centrally placed in relation to the room *and* the passage, make it clear that this wall is an insertion.
5. The stone houses in the Northamptonshire and Oxfordshire portions of the Banbury region include lobby entry plans from the first half of the century, but their spread to Warwickshire seems to have been limited until after the Civil War (Wood-Jones, 1963, pp. 289-92).
6. It was probably built as a dower house for Lady Mary Marow, after the death of her husband Sir Samuel Marow, in about 1685 (Alcock, 1996).

7. The room names in the latter house are derived from a small account book giving the measurements, the materials and the labour used in its construction (Alcock, 1993, 155-7).
8. The earliest example noted by Rieff, 1986, is Blounce, South Warnborough, Hampshire, of 1699.
9. Garvin, 1981, p. 315, reproducing Pl. 23 from Palliser, Palliser and Company, *Palliser's American Cottage Homes* (2nd ed., Bridgeport, Conn.). The identification as 'Southern' suggests that by this date the use of the 'Georgian' plan was geographically limited.

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