

Kew Palace: A Seventeenth-Century Villa Rediscovered

by

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Kew Palace was constructed as a country retreat or villa for Samuel Fortrey, a wealthy London merchant in 1631, and remained a private house for a century before being taken over by the royal family and remodelled in the early eighteenth century. It has long been known as the Dutch House, reflecting Fortrey's origins and the exotic style and ornamentation which are keynote features of its external façades. Until recently physical investigation of the palace was not possible, but the extensive repair and re-presentation of the building over the last ten years led to the discovery and identification of significant elements of the seventeenth-century fabric, particularly the lost original staircase, the decorative scheme and the early plan-form of the building. By illustrating these discoveries, this article seeks a reassessment of the building in a wider context.

Kew Palace lies within the Royal Botanic Gardens, a landscape which was originally a subordinate pleasure ground to several royal residences which once existed in the area (Fig. 1). In origin however, the garden is much more complex, combining several properties which formerly fringed the wide common of Kew Green and which were only finally amalgamated in the 1780s. Several of these had, in turn, grown up as a series of courtiers' lodges built at the end of the Middle Ages by aristocrats anxious to be within easy reach of the sovereign at nearby Richmond Palace.¹ The house itself was built after a renewal of interest in the area in 1631 by Samuel Fortrey, a wealthy London merchant, and was one of many along the Thames, of which all but a handful have disappeared. Fortrey built his new villa on the foundations of one of these early lodges. Two vaulted brick chambers of mid-sixteenth century date survive beneath the western half of the palace, while on the ground floor, a small anteroom with Tudor linenfold panelling suggests that early decorative elements were valued and retained. Investigation has, however, provided no evidence that any of the above-ground structure is equally as old. Its construction was commemorated in several carved brick plaques above the main door, one of which entwines the initials of Samuel and his wife Catherine de Lafleur.

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Fig. 1

The idyllic setting of Kew Palace now disguises its earlier context, on a public road with other buildings in close proximity. The river Thames lies to the rear, on the north side of the palace

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The basic outline of its descent can be traced from surviving land conveyances and other records.² Even before Samuel's death in 1643, the house had been conveyed to the possession of his son, Samuel junior, but he by contrast demonstrated little interest and the property was transferred, after a brief spell in the hands of Edmund Prideaux, MP and Parliamentarian, to another child, Mary and her first husband Sir Thomas Trevor.³ Trevor is noted in occupation in 1664, when the house was assessed for tax as having twenty-six hearths.⁴ Later, in 1697, on the death of Mary, the lease was purchased from William Fortrey, Samuel junior's heir, by Sir Richard Levitt, tobacco merchant and Lord Mayor of London in 1699-1700. On his death in 1710, the house might have sunk into obscurity and disappeared as an old-fashioned relic but for the advent of royal interest in Kew.

THE PLAN AND LAYOUT OF THE PALACE

Even today, the palace retains its basic double-pile form despite extensive remodelling – it is two rooms deep, with a through-corridor from north to south, an off-set staircase and entry leading directly into the former hall space (Fig. 2). This is of a type which needs no reiteration. It conforms to the house-type common from the late sixteenth century, and advocated for more modest residences by Roger Pratt, Thorpe and Smythson, and which can be seen from as early as 1600 in provincial settings.⁵ Numerous examples can be cited for the double pile, including, perhaps its closest surviving parallel at Boston Manor in nearby Brentford, built for Lady Mary Reade in the early 1620s, suggesting

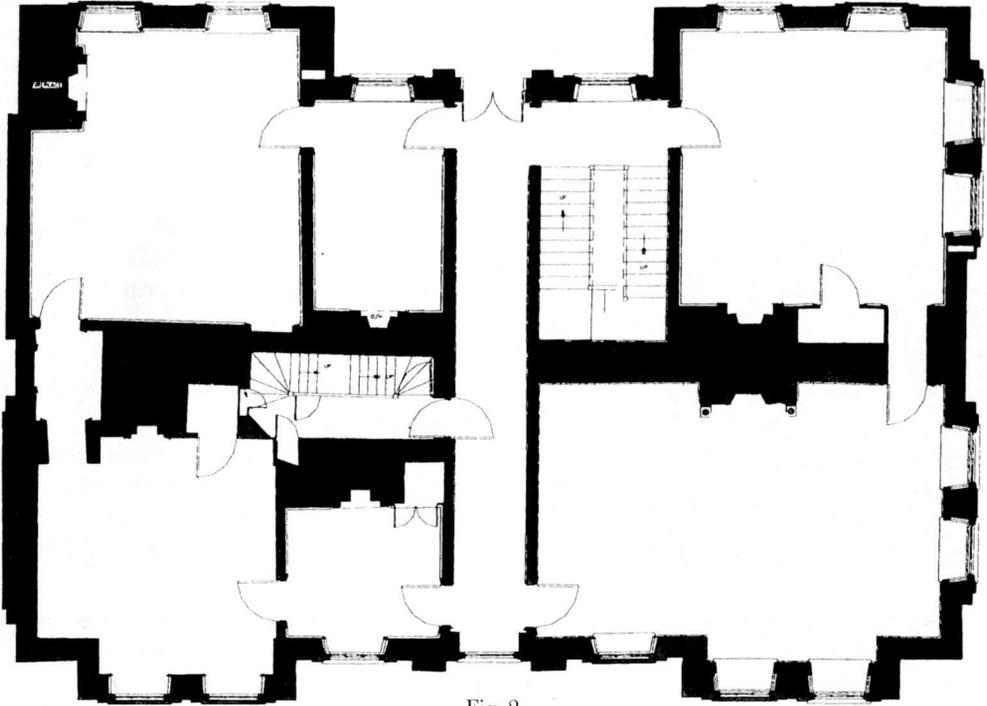


Fig. 2

The first-floor plan of the palace shows little alteration from its original layout. The central corridor is common to all three floors, giving access to the staircase, ante-rooms on the west side and the Great Chamber or dining room (bottom right)

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Fig. 3

Plaster overdoor decoration in the King's Dining Room. The mustachioed bust supporting the central niche, while not unusual, has close affinities with similar motifs at nearby Boston Manor, Brentford

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that the plan of Kew is a variant on a theme, which conforms to the basic outline of hall, parlour, possibly a common or winter parlour and kitchen, over which stood the Great Chamber or Dining Room, music room, bedrooms and other lodgings extending to the second floor. The removal of the panelling in several rooms during structural repairs in the 1990s revealed original stud walling, confirming that the current arrangement reflects the earlier layout as a series of large chambers, but with intermediate closets which are now lost on the first and second floors. This adds further to our knowledge, though the possibility of inserted chimney stacks and the arrangement of the house around the area of the existing eighteenth-century back stairs at the centre of the building has still to be determined. There is no trace of a gallery in the traditional sense, the function of which, if it remained must have been performed by the corridors, in keeping with its diminished status in similar houses.⁶

The remodelling of the house in the 1720s consciously retained seventeenth-century features, though this was highly selective. On the ground floor King's Dining Room, formerly the hall, almost all features except a decorative plaster overdoor and the overmantel panelling were removed and replaced, though it is likely that the hall screen survived into the 1750s before being dismantled and its major components, a set of classical pilasters, repositioned in the adjoining Breakfast Room (Fig. 3). In the King's Library,



Fig. 4

The Queen's Drawing Room which occupies the original dining room, retains late-seventeenth-century bolection moulding and a plaster frieze

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opposite, almost all the original wall panelling and an overmantel were retained, being modified only with the blocking of two western windows and the insertion of a large Portland-stone chimney piece. On the first floor, the Queen's Drawing Room was likewise left almost untouched, with its fine chimney piece of touchstone, marble and alabaster, a plaster frieze and heavy bolection panelling installed in the late seventeenth century (Fig. 4). The adjoining Queen's Boudoir retains a fine plaster ceiling with medallions depicting the five senses, set within a fretwork lattice.⁷

The upper floors also retain significant features; three original applied panel doors survive, one of which was later reused to wainscot an inner closet, but the presence of original pintles suggest the location of original stud walling and so layout (Fig. 5). Several rooms were re-lined with seventeenth-century oak panelling of high quality, distributed as simple insulation. Superficially, the number of early features seems abundant, but as a source for understanding the house, this had never been fully utilised. Major impediments seemed to be uncertainty over whether these features were original. The treatment of surfaces was also completely obscured or repainted, often twenty or more times since the eighteenth century.⁸ Until the advent of modern paint analysis, their original colours and schemes seemed beyond recall.

Indeed the paintwork on early panelling in the King's Breakfast Room was thoroughly scraped and burned off by the Ministry of Works in 1932 in the mistaken belief that the oak should be seen. Another unrecoverable element seemed to be the original staircase, long lost, whose position and form were entirely unknown.

The early roof construction also survives largely intact, comprising three parallel roofs extending north-south between the principal gables, and housing transverse roofs on the north and south sides which link the lateral gables (Fig. 6). In form, each truss frame is joined by joggled butt-purlins, all exposed after remedial work in the 1960s, which removed the eighteenth-century plaster ceilings but allowed a more detailed inspection of the timbers. The pattern of empty mortices and blank soffits to the purlins, which



Fig. 5

The second and attic floors retain a number of early doors of Baltic pine with applied panels, mostly hanging in their original positions

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Fig. 6

Since remedial works in the 1960s, the original roof structure is now visible in the attics, together with doors and painted skirtings in small chambers and storage rooms

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should house the lower flights of the common rafters indicates a pattern which ultimately gave access around the edges of the building, but left two open valleys at the centre.⁹ A similar pattern can be seen at Forty Hall, Enfield, built in 1637 by Sir Nicholas Rainton, haberdasher, though Forty Hall is notable by its absence of dormers or gables. Three surviving seventeenth-century doors remain, two of which hang on original pintles and define large rooms or compartments. Three are provided with fireplaces.

THE FORTREY FAMILY AND ITS CONTINENTAL CONNECTIONS

In the absence of detailed information, early commentators assumed that the Fortrey family were simply Flemish, possibly first generation immigrants, but beyond that little was known. New research has, however, begun to reveal a fuller picture of the family. The Fortreys were part of a wider commercial elite but in origin essentially refugees, departing the turmoil and religious warfare which afflicted the Low Countries in the late sixteenth century.¹⁰ The founder of the family in England was Nicholas de la Forterie, who fled Lille, then part of the Spanish Netherlands in 1567 in the wake of the St Bartholomew's Day massacre and the Sack of Antwerp. By the 1560s, Lille had only recently been settled with Calvinist families, many from elsewhere, and his great-grandson James Fortrey recorded on his gravestone that the family originally came from Brabant to the north.¹¹ In their homeland, there is some anecdotal evidence to suggest that Nicholas was a silk-weaver, initially setting up business in Canterbury and Sandwich before fleeing the plague with a young family, the youngest of whom, Samuel, was an infant. The later success and wealth of the family suggests that they arrived both with capital and expertise, which was soon exploited, particularly after taking up residence

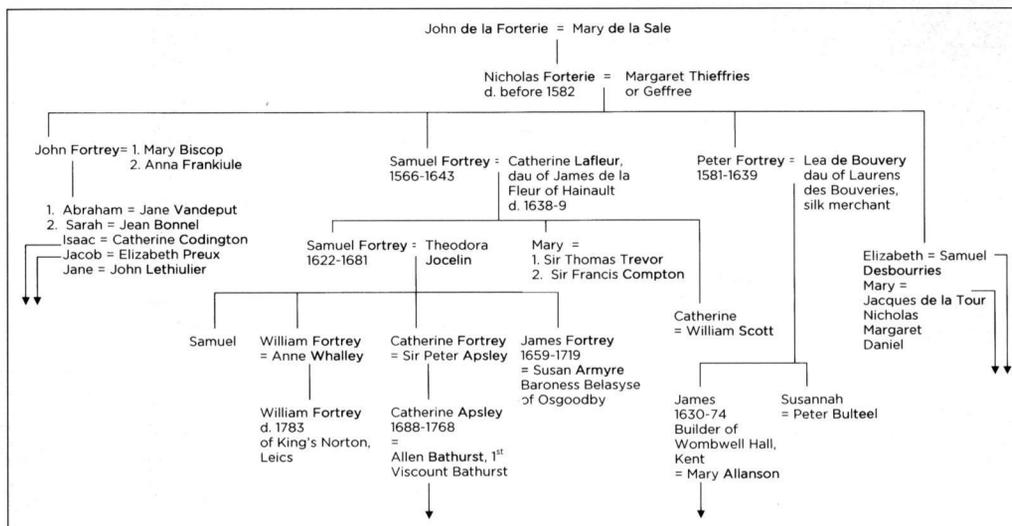


Fig. 7
Simplified chart of the Fortrey family tree
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in London. Two, and possibly three of his surviving sons were to become merchants in turn, establishing successful family lines. The family tree provides some evidence of the cultural milieu and how closed it was. Three sons and two daughters married into fellow foreign-born families (Fig. 7).¹² Peter Fortrey, a younger son married the daughter of Laurens des Bouveries, a successful silk merchant. The tradition continued into the third generation, where Dutch or French names predominate among spouses, and include other families associated with the silk trade, such as the Vandeputs. The link with silk would have provided Samuel with the capital and security to invest in such a grand house. John, the eldest son was almost certainly a member of the Entercourse of Merchant Strangers, allowing naturalised merchants to trade with special privileges and without taxes and excise duties applied to foreigners. Samuel also owned a part of a ship, the *Pearcey*, and in the Lay Subsidies of 1591 he was listed as 'gone beyond the seas', so was clearly active and travelled. On his death in 1643, he left just short of £3,000 in ready money and bequests in what appears to have been a successful and lucrative career.

Only later did the family diversify. Samuel's heir was his son Samuel junior (1622-81), who seems to have been both successful and versatile, serving as Master of the Ordnance, involving himself in speculative building in the capital and penning an influential tract *England's Interest and Improvement* in 1673 which advocated the benefits of the mercantilist system. Primarily, however, he was an engineer. Not long after his father's death, he seems to have abandoned Kew for the Isle of Ely, where fellow Calvinists and Huguenots could be found in some numbers draining the fens and opening up new agricultural land for settlement and exploitation. His house, still known as Fortrey Hall in Mepal (Cambridgeshire) survives. In the following generation the family became more fully integrated. His son William married into the Whalley family of King's Norton, near Birmingham, where he became the squire and an informal money lender,¹³ while a daughter Catherine married Peter Apsley, so entering the ranks of the minor gentry. His younger son James became groom to James II and page to Queen Mary of Modena. After their fall and exile, he died in self-enforced obscurity without issue at Mepal in 1719.

The successful growth of the Fortrey family coincided with the uncertainty of the years leading to the English Civil War, which nonetheless witnessed an explosion of commercial activity and a new dynamic in architecture, particularly in London and the surrounding counties. The villa, or compact country retreat was one such form, of which Kew is a notable example. Of a type, the compact, double-pile house is bewilderingly diverse, but demonstrates how receptive London was to new influences, ranging from Inigo Jones's classicising influence on the Court of Charles I, percolating through the social strata through ideas and style, pattern books and architectural traits, and the cosmopolitan influence of London, to the level of the vernacular.¹⁴ The parallel rise of the mercantile, commercial classes played a seminal role in promoting its adoption, along with the minor gentry, building convenient, villa-style houses in their hundreds, and so affording themselves estates without obligations and traditional manorial encumbrance, and using them as conspicuous vehicles for display. At a detailed level, these houses similarly reflected the trends in architectural layout – the diminution of the hall, the rise in importance of the staircase, and embellishment which rode directly on the back of the spread of luxury goods and textiles, which the merchants themselves facilitated.

NEW DISCOVERIES

Crucially for our understanding of Kew, a chance observation rediscovered the form of the lost early staircase in 2005, as the re-presentation project neared its end, and other discoveries were soon to follow. In the late 1980s, a large crack appeared on the central spine wall in the attic, and a section of early eighteenth-century skirting board was removed to facilitate repair. This revealed a small slice of painted wall surface, which was not understood for a further seventeen years, but as elements of the underlying upper paint layers began to degrade, a ghosting appeared through the overlying limewash. When recognised, it became apparent that the top element of a *tromp l'oeil* painting had survived, which had mirrored the form of the earlier, lost staircase. Over a period of a month, this was uncovered and stabilised,



Fig. 8

Tromp l'oeil wall painting showing the form of the original staircase, discovered beneath layers of limewash and uncovered and stabilised by Andrea Kirkham in 2004

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to reveal the final, steep but fragmentary flight of stairs, complete with two-metre high newel, a section of handrail, the upper part of two widely spaced balusters and parts of a second newel (Fig. 8).¹⁵ This answered the immediate question of the location of the stair, within the same space as the existing 1720s flight, but also proved that the original stair had extended fully into the attics (unlike the later stair), as in many other double-pile houses. The design was recorded and analysed after stabilisation, and two essential phases of modification were recognised. After an initial gap of several years, during which dirt layers had built up on plain limewash, the wall

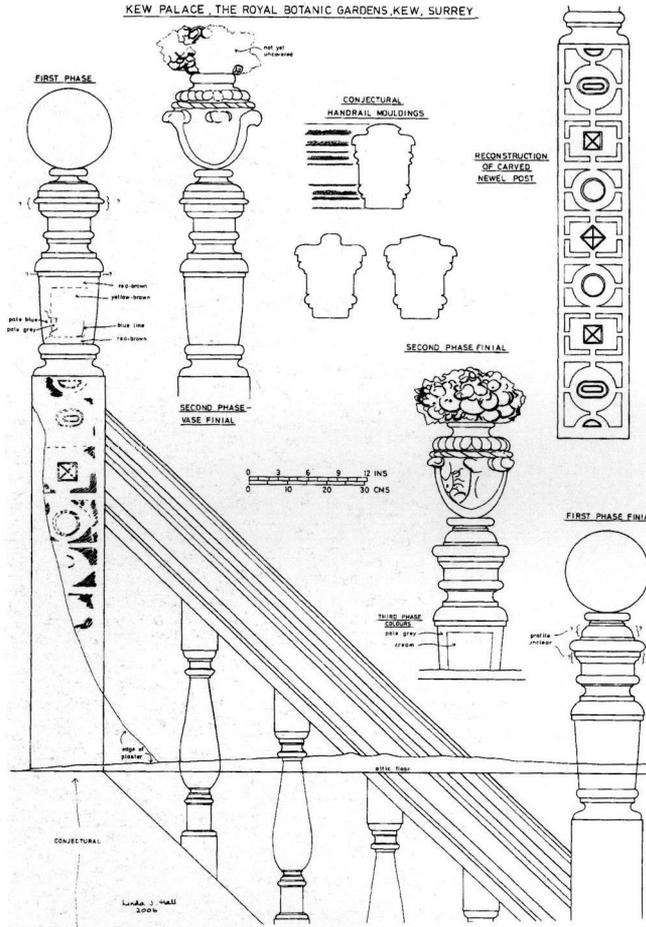


Fig. 9

Archaeological record drawing by Linda Hall, showing detail of the newel post and suggested reconstruction of the balusters

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was painted, and at a later stage freshened with dark oils, clearly in imitation of oak. In form it rose as a series of robust square newels, with moulded and embossed lozenge decorations, capped with mouldings and a ball finial. The form of a heavily moulded handrail was rendered into shadow, but the balusters were particularly important, because they were of vase form, which conventionally only becomes predominant, with some refinement from the early eighteenth century. Later, the stair was modified by the replacement of the ball finial with a much more elaborate tapering vase, adorned with carvings and a finial comprising a spray of fruit and flowers. The whole structure was then repainted to imitate stone, with added highlights of gold, and a much more theatrical addition of shadow, enhancing its realism (Fig. 9).

Tromp l'oeil stairs of this form are relatively rare survivals, but much of the apparent lack of evidence may simply be due to straightforward loss, while few of the surviving examples are supported by documentary evidence. In higher status houses, where framed stairs are particularly important, such as Hatfield, Hertfordshire (1611-3), a carved, half-version of the staircase form is employed, and there are payments recorded to the painter Rowland Buckett for the gilding of selective areas of the oak.¹⁶ The most perfect surviving example is perhaps at Knole (Kent, 1606), which dispensed with the reality of a carved wall balustrade and instead both primary, and the lesser known second stair were painted on the responding wall in mirror image. Other houses employed the form, particularly at the social level of Kew, such as Boston Manor in Brentford, where the interplay of light and shadow was used to imitate stonework, but with a much more traditional baluster form culled from Hatfield-style precedents and the pattern books of Vriedeman de Vries.¹⁷ On

a much more domestic level is the Merchant's House at Marlborough (Wiltshire), installed at a contemporary date, and broadly occupying a similar, if provincial position.¹⁸

Much seems determined by personal choice. At Kew the use of the vase baluster, widening at the base is very precocious, when most other houses of this date continued to use the mirror-baluster. The vase form is classically inspired, almost certainly a feature first seen at Jones's Banqueting House, Whitehall, and for balustrades at the Queen's House, Greenwich. The Elizabethan form persists into the seventeenth century, but parallels, which are rare, have the mark of cosmopolitan influences on them.¹⁹ At Barnham Court, near Chichester (possibly 1640s), a modest double-pile house, though relatively provincial and eclectic shows traces of London influence and an urban style, and though its stair is simple and not fully developed, it too has vase balusters. At St John's College Oxford, the stair installed in 1635 in the Presidents' Lodgings at the behest of Archbishop Laud shows all the sophistication of a new style, including decorated newel posts, though the ball finials are lost (Fig. 10). The accounts survive, showing that a joiner, carpenter and turner were employed to produce the stair, which was not treated with any painted decoration.²⁰



Fig. 10
Staircase in the Presidents' Lodgings,
St John's College, Oxford
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The upgrading of Kew's staircase with new enrichments and a stone effect suggests a general augmentation in response to changing fashions. Comparative stairs with festoons of fruit and flowers, and baroque touches have mid-seventeenth century origins (such as Ham House), and numerous dated examples put this perhaps in the 1660s or 1670s, during the incumbency of Mary Fortrey and Sir Thomas Trevor. This sense of change and exuberance has been discerned elsewhere in the house.



Fig. 11

Early-twentieth-century view of the King's Library, showing the overmantel. The flanking niches were glazed in the 1690s, while the right hand panelling was repositioned slightly to create a small vestibule

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The King's Library, lying in the south-west corner is run round with original panelling. By tracing the run-out stops it can be established that the panels are not used in a secondary context. The overmantel consists of large oval panels with bosses, flanking a central, diamond panel, in typical 1630s or 1640s style. Flanking this structure are arched niches using 'green men' heads as keystones, one of which formed an alcove which had formerly been enclosed with an internal sash window of the 1690s (Fig. 11). This was regrettably destroyed in the 1960s refurbishment. In order to reinstate its form, several fitted shelves were removed, revealing, in the soffit, a section of panelling complete with its original colour scheme; a theatrical series of yellow ochre swirls on a brown ochre field, and a central scallop at the meeting of rail and style, with radiating diagonal lines through the fields of each panel. Touches of gilding still apparent were from an earlier scheme, and so more paint analysis was commissioned to establish the full sequence. This revealed that the overmantel had been installed at a slightly later date to the panelling, but stylistically perhaps no more than ten years, and was subsequently adorned, possibly

Fig. 12
Female figure painted in grisaille above the
King's Library fireplace,
discovered in 2004
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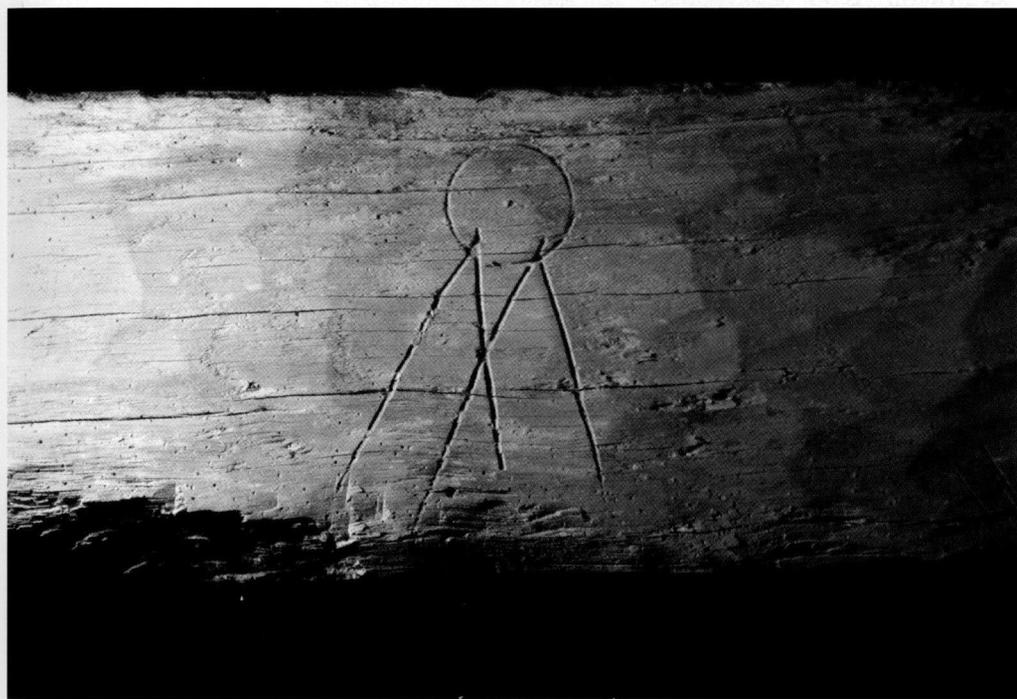


Fig. 13
Several ritual protection marks have been discovered on the seventeenth-century oak roof timbers, such as
this scribed circle with radiating lines, perhaps forming the letter M as an invocation to the Virgin Mary
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in the 1670s with a scheme of great virtuosity, consisting of black marbling, gilded lozenges and mouldings, with a grisaille figurative scheme set in the panels (Fig. 12).²¹ Now partly revealed, it depicts a classically draped female figure, clearly intended to imitate bas relief on a background of black marble. Such forms are reminiscent of Ham or Bolsover Castle. Early marbling exists elsewhere in the house, discovered on part of a plaster overmantel behind Georgian panelling in the Queen's antechamber on the first floor, and through paint analysis on the overmantel in the King's Dining Room, though its form has not been elucidated further.

Together, the evidence shows rich paint effects used both in the principal chambers and ante-rooms, and this was confirmed on the second floor, where analysis of the *in-situ* doors revealed them to be of pine, but having had two schemes of graining to imitate oak. Painted skirtings of the seventeenth century were also recognised in the attic; first painted in red and then overpainted in black, which, given the ascent of the main stair to that point, suggests that we should re-evaluate the uses of the area. That the attics housed only servants or storage has, perhaps been a simplistic assumption now needing a fresh appraisal. However, the seventeenth-century evidence is abundant here also, if we turn from the decorative to the structural form of the house.

Reassessment of the roof carpentry revealed two principal elements. First, the original oak structure is not of particularly fine quality, using waney-edged timbers but utilising them to their maximum capacity. Secondly, ritual protection marks were discovered on the original oak, scribed with a race-knife or similar tool into the soft, fresh timber. These are clearly primary to its construction and distinct from the carpenters' assembly marks which normally appear on roofs at the jointing of the principal timbers. The function of apotropaic marks is not universally accepted, but their form and location offer a compelling case for seeing the investment of vernacular tradition in the house.²² In form, they range from circles, scribed into the soft wood, to inverted pairs of 'V's, and even a distinctive 'MR', possibly an invocation to the Blessed Virgin Mary, noted on many vernacular buildings in recent studies, and here at Kew, distributed on timbers near windows, the staircase and other areas which were perceived to be vulnerable from malevolent external influences (Fig. 13).

While the evidence remains limited in some respects, our knowledge of the palace in its earlier form has increased exponentially, and this has important repercussions for studies of comparative houses, particularly the few examples which now survive in London. The combination of structural analysis of the roof and external brickwork is most fruitful as it reveals a distinct dichotomy between the money invested in the structure, and that of the decorative finishes, suggesting clearly that external, superficial appearance was the driving force. It reveals expense invested in the house both inside and out. Of the interiors, the evidence furnishes us with sufficient to reveal the concerns and aspirations of Fortrey, of attention to painting, graining and wainscoting in diverse and expensive styles. Sadly, no inventory survives to furnish the house – Samuel Fortrey's shrewd transfer of the property to his son prevented any need for Probate, but a final glimpse of the house is provided in his will, for while he conveyed the building to his son, he evidently retained some of its more valuable furnishings, bequeathing to Catherine his daughter 'the imbroidered bed with all that belongs to ytt', and to Mary, 'the bed wrought with

red crewell'. Finally, to his son he bequeathed 'the hangings of the great dyninge roome in his howse at Kew, which hangines are of gilt leather'.²³ It is no coincidence that this room, now the Queen's Drawing Room, preserves the most opulent features.

THE DUTCH CONNECTION AND ARTISAN MANNERISM

While the interiors of the house add much to our understanding, they bear good comparison with other houses of the same date. There are north European touches, particularly the Mannerist, pattern book overdoor in the King's Dining Room, and the spectacular and expensive chimney piece in the Queen's Drawing Room, which is redolent of tomb sculpture and the work of immigrant craftsmen identified in Southwark in the first decades of the seventeenth century. But it is the exterior which has prompted enduring interest. The vocabulary and architectural influence are now difficult to retrieve, partly because Fortrey's life is known only in sketchy outline, but also because many comparative buildings have disappeared, leaving a diverse range of similar houses spread across the



Fig. 14

The rear façade of the palace, facing the river Thames, is equally as ostentatious as the south.

The central loggia was destroyed in the nineteenth century and reconstructed in the late 1960s from engraved sources

region, affording no simplistic, logical sequence from which to draw easy conclusions. However it is useful to attempt to trace some of the architectural influences to which Samuel Fortrey was exposed and which manifest themselves on the building.

The derivation of the external design of Kew, with its classical motifs and shaped gables is a thorny puzzle to solve because it is this aspect which is so closely identified with Dutch influence. Ten gables encircle the building, alternating between triangular and cambered pediments. Those on the east side were rebuilt in 1801-2 on a simple, triangular form, but eighteenth-century illustrations show that they were equally as decorative and the house was clearly designed to display a level of symmetry and a good aspect from all angles. Both north and south façades display important component features. The south is superficially symmetrical, though less so on closer inspection, as the projecting bays, which flank a central, compressed Tower of the Orders lie slightly off centre to the internal spaces. The Tower, with its Doric (now lost), Ionic and Corinthian pilasters, frame round-headed windows which enclose the main through-passage of the house. The front door has been modified, but an early illustration of the palace by Philip Mercier, shows a narrow light over a tall door, which was replaced by the existing fan-light and double doors in the 1750s. A voussoir remains suspended above this to indicate its position. The façade is covered in Mannerist characteristics; rusticated window surrounds and very deep and complex string courses, which divide each floor and provide strong horizontal delineations.

The north side, by comparison, which overlooks the river Thames, has pairs of windows at the upper level spanned by single, bold triangular pediments, with the main projecting wings of the house bridged by a loggia with a balcony (Fig. 14). This is a reconstruction of 1967, based on an earlier engraving. There is now no way of knowing whether it was added in the eighteenth century, but it would be congruous for developments of the time.²⁴ The palace was originally lit by more windows, particularly on the west side, where the façade is now characterised by large blank areas and blind windows. These were probably blocked when a range of ancillary buildings was added in the 1730s, and further made good in 1881 when part was demolished. Opportunities to examine the brickwork behind panelling showed blocking, and the reopening of a blocked doorway to a demolished eighteenth-century privy shaft revealed that this too had been a window, existing in a seemingly impossible location adjoining the central spine wall, and must have formed a small closet. Moreover, by revealing the original window splays, evidence for the earlier window form was established. Before the installation of sashes in the late 1720s, there had no doubt been a four-light transom and mullion window form, but there was no evidence of cut-back brick on the surviving jambs, suggesting that the earlier windows were entirely of timber. Our knowledge of the external appearance was enhanced in the late 1990s when close analysis revealed colour-wash on the early façade, concealed and protected behind a rainwater hopper.²⁵ The use of colour-wash with pencilling has been explored elsewhere, but as a device it would have added conspicuous and exuberant element to the display of the façade.

There is no doubt that Kew is cast in a Mannerist mould, in the sense which Sir John Summerson meant when he coined the phrase to describe the manipulation of pure classicism in the hands of masons and those unfamiliar with the new vocabulary

coming from Italy. The ‘Dutch’ characteristics of the building are almost entirely invested in the presence of the gables, but precedents may be found across the south and east of England, indicating a much broader and more general influence. The gable itself appears from the late sixteenth century, at Wollaton of 1588, where they seem derived from du Cerceau, or Montacute (Somerset) and even on very high-status houses such as Houghton (Bedfordshire), where it is believed that they follow an idiom already worked on by Inigo Jones. Some commentators have dismissed the combination of gables and pilasters as illogical additions, detracting from intellectual appreciation of the façade,²⁶ yet at Holland House in London of c.1605, the eastern extension of 1638-40 does precisely this.²⁷ On a more moderate scale they were consciously adopted at Eagle House, Wimbledon of 1613 where they continue the façade without a break. Even at the commercial level, the Leatherseller’s Hall service block of 1623 (demolished 1799) would have provided one of many inspirations.²⁸ Regional variation is also apparent in Kent and Suffolk, though a study of gables there shows that many were distinctively earlier and of a different form from Dutch examples.²⁹ On the whole, Dutch gables tend to be steeper, later, and in the case of Amsterdam examples, topped with stone. Kew’s idiosyncrasies have more in



Fig. 15

Almost nothing is known about Fairfax House, Putney. However, the resonance of style with Kew is clear from the few images which survive

Photo courtesy of Wandsworth Local History Service



Fig. 16

Barnham Court, near Chichester, displays metropolitan pretension in a provincial setting. The house has undergone extensive refurbishment in the recent past, when it was rescued from certain ruin by its present owners

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common with a group of houses closer to home. Perhaps the closest in spirit was Fairfax House in Putney, sadly demolished in 1887, but built in the 1630s by Henry White, a wealthy baker (Fig. 15). Surviving photographs show it conspicuous for its ogeed gables, in fact almost identical in many respects to Kew, though with little of the Mannerist accomplishment in which the palace luxuriates.³⁰ In Hertfordshire, there are a number of buildings remaining with ogee gables, such as Astonbury Manor, perhaps of the late 1610s, Rawdon House in Hoddesdon, of 1634 for Sir Marmaduke Rawdon, and many more lost or altered, for which early illustrations suggest a similar pattern.³¹ Hide Hall and Hunsdon House, both of the late sixteenth century were clearly gabled, and though lost, they and several like them, drawn from illustrations by the local antiquary show their predominance.³² The form can be found distributed across much of the region and even further afield. Close parallels have been drawn between Kew and Barnham Court, near Chichester (Fig. 16), of a similar date, though poorly understood.³³ Closer inspection shows a much more eclectic and classicising influence at Barnham however, which, were it not for the crowning of its façade with gables, would be more in tune with slightly more advanced forms such as Cromwell House, Highgate, of 1637. It mimics Kew in some respects, but in the flesh, deteriorates on closer inspection, and is much cruder in construction and decorative form. In a much more provincial East Anglian tradition, the White Hart Inn at Scole in Norfolk of 1655 has been described as the 'bedizened harlot of the highways'³⁴ but the hand of the carpenter is everywhere seen in the medium of brick, and Kew is similar, but at a more refined scale.

Endless comparisons may be drawn with existing and lost buildings to try and understand the grammar of Kew. The problems of individual taste, the robust and eclectic tradition of the master-mason as architect and the influence of pattern books have produced buildings of great variety and individuality. Kew however, stands at some distance for the quality of its brickwork, by the amount of expensive cut and rubbed work used in preference to stone for its ornament, and the rendering of the whole building in Flemish bond, a costly and time-consuming affectation of alternating headers and stretchers. Kew is often vaunted as the earliest building constructed entirely of this form, as if the style had appeared from nowhere, but in fact there are signs and seeds of it in discontinuous stretches attempted but abandoned on other buildings such as Barnham, but particularly drawing us back to East Anglia.³⁵ Flemish bond was not used in Flanders in the seventeenth century, and apart from a few medieval buildings, it did not become widespread again until after its reappearance in England. Perhaps a seminal building in this respect is the service range of Blickling Hall of 1623, which is gabled and built largely in Flemish bond.³⁶ Broome Park in Kent may also be cited with some Flemish bondwork,³⁷ but there are no ready answers, except one, and that is that seventeenth-century Flemish bond is not Flemish but more likely to be an East Anglian tradition.

The picture of Kew and houses like it is clearly complex and diverse, but needs a far deeper appreciation of these small villa houses than simple analysis of proportion, plan and façade. Artisan Mannerism was by its very nature individualistic, excessive and not subject particularly to rules that we can readily delineate. The Dutch influence can only be seen in the very broadest sense. Samuel Fortrey was not strictly Dutch, though he may have been considered an outsider. Architecturally many double-pile buildings,

or variations on the villa survive at a regional level, or can be traced in the historical record to show that there are distinct groups, or affinities, though attempts to associate them with one political group or another has met with only limited success.³⁸ Provincial derivation is also fraught with problems. The great provincial example of Blickling has been seen much more as an outpost of the London style, and Barnham Court is so far-flung from any comparison that it too must be an isolated example of something which comes from the centre.

THE LATER HISTORY

It was perhaps only from the mid-eighteenth century that Kew Palace was first ascribed to a Dutch architect. By then it housed a royal princess who cared little for its modest proportions, but even by that date there were probably few surviving buildings with which to compare it. By the 1720s it was undoubtedly old-fashioned, but a combination of chance and luck ensured its preservation to the present day.

Queen Caroline (1683-1737), consort of King George II, was, immediately after their accession keen to bring her seven surviving children together in one place. Like many before her, she was drawn to the idyllic qualities of the river Thames around Kew and Richmond, and took leases on several houses in the vicinity. The Fortrey house was taken for the use of her three daughters, the Princesses Anne (1709-59), Amelia (1711-86) and Caroline (1713-57) and was extensively remodelled between 1728 and 1734 by William Kent and Thomas Ripley. Later it was used intermittently as a school and household for the future George III as Prince of Wales in the 1750s, and in turn by his son, the future George IV in the 1770s, during which time a nearby Palladian mansion known as the White House, also remodelled from an earlier house by William Kent, served as the main summer residence for the sovereign. During the eighteenth century, the surrounding pleasure grounds developed under the auspices of botanist William Aiton, and architect William Chambers through close royal patronage, beginning the process which was to transform the area into the modern Botanic Gardens and a place of public recreation.

William Kent's refurbishment was considerable, though there is some evidence that Sir Richard Levett had already begun the process by repainting rooms and repainting others in more sober colours. Under Kent's supervision however, structural changes were made; windows were blocked, the early windows replaced with sashes and shutters, and the house was rearranged into a series of semi-state rooms, complete with an elegant new staircase, a back stair, ancillary buildings to the west, new panelling and doors, perhaps a comprehensive reflooring and other major modification, which was then decorated lavishly with silk hangings and fine furniture.³⁹

The palace would have disappeared in the early nineteenth century, but for the supposed madness of George III (1760-1820). When the King began to manifest symptoms of his illness, now known to be the metabolic disorder porphyria, he was taken to Kew in order to recover in the tranquil surroundings of the gardens, away from prying public eyes. Shortly before, the White House had been allowed to fall into semi-dereliction in anticipation of a new, Gothic and castellated Palace conceived by the King, the shell of which was gradually constructed by the architect James Wyatt between 1799 and

1806 on the riverside adjacent to the palace.⁴⁰ In the event, the new building was never completed, and so for a few years Samuel Fortrey's little house became a most unlikely but necessary residence for the King and Queen. For the domestic-minded monarchs however, it was ideal, and several happy summers were spent in the house. The house was altered particularly thoroughly in 1805, when rooms on the first and second floors were refurbished in the latest style for the royal princesses.⁴¹ Today all these rooms retain their nineteenth-century nomenclature. The ground floor is essentially the King's floor, with panelling predominating over wallpapers, and Spartan spaces given over as a King's Library, a Dining Room and Breakfast Room. The first floor is much more feminine in inspiration, with a large Drawing Room and Boudoir for the Queen, her bedroom and a room for her daughter Elizabeth, both with ante-rooms and decorated with fine fabrics, wallpapers and fitted carpets. The second floor was given over partly to accommodation for two of the younger princesses, in small modified suites of rooms, but here most interestingly, the difference in status between the east and west sides of the house, which had formerly marked the floors below, was retained with a collection of old-fashioned storage and service rooms to the west, overlooking the tiled roofs of a kitchen and servants' quarters, and divided from the 'royal' side by the axial north-south corridor which is a feature of all three floors. The second floor remains exceptional, having been left almost completely unaltered since the early nineteenth century. The king last visited in 1806, but Queen Charlotte and her children continued to spend odd weeks intermittently until about 1816. It was last used in 1818, when the Queen spent several months at Kew during her final illness before dying there in November of that year. These final years of the palace have been recreated and retained in the current scheme, which opened to wide acclaim in 2006.

Today Kew is Britain's smallest royal palace, which though unoccupied since 1818, remains an official royal residence, like its companions cared for by Historic Royal Palaces, the charitable trust charged with maintaining the unoccupied royal palaces.⁴² Closure of the palace in 1996 due to severe structural problems was perceived initially as a set-back, but the unique opportunity for thorough physical investigation proved of immense value.⁴³

The research on Kew and houses like it is far from complete, but it reveals the role of fashion, however short-lived in determining the nature and appearance of the house, perhaps more so than cultural origins. Samuel Fortrey's house was clearly fitted out to a high specification. In the later seventeenth century, most probably under Samuel's daughter Mary Fortrey and Sir Thomas Trevor, several rooms and the staircase were modified and upgraded to accord with current trends, and yet again in the 1690s, more decoration was taken and the house was sobered up by Levett, sadly a man about whom we know almost nothing. It is probable that Samuel Fortrey's intention was not to proclaim his foreign credentials (which would have been unwise), but to impress and startle his contemporaries with the Mannerist details which were fashionable at the time and to make them readily recognisable to his primary audience: like-minded peers, merchants from London and the Continent. Kew's origins may be seen not so much Dutch as inspired from wider and deeper origins – regional developments drawn in turn from vernacular interpretation of the carpenters and brick masons who built the palace, within the cultural

diversity of London and the City exposed to provincial, Hanseatic and other influences from further afield across northern Europe. Like its builder, Kew Palace is a naturalised English subject, of foreign extraction, developed in a cosmopolitan world.

NOTES:

1. For an overview, John Cloake's two-volume work *Palaces and Parks of Richmond and Kew* (Phillimore, 1996) is comprehensive and gives much context as well as an excellent bibliography. Much of the new information is contained in *Kew Palace: the official illustrated history* by Susanne Groom and Lee Prosser (Merrell/Historic Royal Palaces, 2006).
2. Documents which record the transfer of the property from the Portman family to Samuel Fortrey via his brother Peter are held in the Portman Papers, Somerset Record Office, class DD/PM. Other related documents are held in the Hilyard Papers, University of Nottingham – 'Abstract of deeds relating to the estate at Kew of the late Sir Richard Levett'.
3. Sir Edmund Prideaux (1611-59) was MP for Lyme Regis, and a strong Parliamentarian. In 1648 he was appointed Solicitor-General, but resigned before the King's trial. Between 1640 and 1652 he was responsible for organising the postal service. His other country house lay at Forde Abbey, now in Dorset (information from the *Dictionary of National Biography*). His link to Fortrey is not known, but he may have had a distant family connection. The original lease is held in the Hilyard Papers University of Nottingham.
4. Transcribed in John Cloake's book *Cottages and Common fields of Richmond and Kew* (Phillimore, 2001), 206.
5. Toseland Hall in Huntingdonshire is an early example, see Nikolaus Pevsner, *Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough* (Penguin 1968), 356-7.
6. For a summary of the type, see Nicholas Cooper, *Houses of the Gentry 1480-1680* (Yale, 1999).
7. Ernest Law, the early historian of Hampton Court, suggested, on no firm evidence that this was a creation of William Kent, though Clare Gapper's 1998 report (unpublished) has disproved this.
8. Paint analysis shows up to twenty-four layers of paint in some rooms.
9. This arrangement was remodelled in 1730 for the construction of the back stair.
10. Tracing the Fortrey family is fraught with problems, but references to them are contained in Lay Subsidies, State Papers, the returns of Aliens (Cecil MSS 210/11), much published in the *Returns of Aliens, dwelling in the city & suburbs of London*, ed. R. E. G. and E. F. Kirk (Huguenot Society Publications, 10). Also *Dutch Calvinists in Early Stuart London, The Dutch Church of the Austin Friars, 1603-1642*, Publications of the Sir Thomas Browne Institute, New Series, 11 (Peter Grell, Leiden 1989), 168-9.
11. James Fortrey's tombstone in Mepal church.
12. Samuel's son John married Mary Biscop and later Anna Frankiule, Peter married Lea de Bouvery while daughters Elizabeth married Samuel Desbourries and Mary married Jacques de la Tour.
13. British Library Additional MS 26082. Correspondence of William Fortrey of King's Norton and Bryal Fen.
14. For an outline, see Maurice Barley (ed.), *The buildings of the countryside* (Cambridge University Press, 1990). Also John Thorpe's survey book, in Sir John Soane's Museum.
15. H. C. Andrews and Francis W. Reader, 'Representations of staircase balustrades', *Transactions of the East Herts Archaeological Society*, 11 (1940-4), 150-2; also in the same volume, H. C. Andrews, 'Other Jacobean paintings', 152-3.
16. Hatfield Papers: Warrants 10 December 1610 to 16 November 1611; also agent's accounts, April to September 1611. Also discussions and comparisons with Theobalds Palace, in John Summerson, 'The building of Theobalds, 1564-1585', *Archaeologia*, 97 (1954).
17. Illustrated by Vriedeman de Vries as designs for grotesque pilasters – reproduced as figure 29 in M. Jourdain, *English decoration and furniture of the early Renaissance* (Batsford, 1924).
18. Other examples cited by Andrea Kirkham in her condition report, include Knole, Ightham Mote, Kent, Harvington Hall, Worcs, Sutton House, Hackney and Hadleigh, Suffolk.
19. Linda Hall, *Period house fixtures and fittings, 1300-1900* (Countryside Books, 2005); also Walter Godfrey,

The English Staircase (Batsford, 1911).

20. St John's College, Muniments, MUNLXXXI.2. Also research by Howard Colvin, *The Canterbury Quadrangle. St John's College, Oxford* (Oxford University Press, 1988).
21. John Burbidge in his unpublished report on the conservation, held at Hampton Court Palace.
22. Tim Easton's research on apotropaic marks, outlined in 'Ritual marks on historic timber', *Weald and Downland Open Air Museum Bulletin* (Spring 1999), 22-8. For further discussion, see Linda Hall's chapter on fixtures and fittings in Edward Roberts (ed.), *Hampshire Houses 1250-1700. Their dating & development* (Hampshire County Council 2003).
23. The National Archives: PRO PROB 11/202.
24. Pevsner considered that the loggias were added later at Houghton (possibly in the 1640s), and there are compelling reasons to suggest that he was correct, not least of which is the emergence of diapering beneath crumbling seventeenth-century render on the inner faces – clearly meant to be seen originally. Nikolaus Pevsner *Bedfordshire, Huntingdonshire and Peterborough* (Penguin, 1968), 40-1.
25. For a good summary of the tradition of colour-washing, see Gerard Lynch, 'The colour washing and pencilling of historic English brickwork', *Journal of Architectural Conservation*, 12: 2 (2006), 63-80.
26. Timothy Mowl & Brian Earnshaw, *Architecture without kings* (Manchester University Press, 1995), especially the discussion on East Anglia and Mannerist influences, 159-88.
27. Holland House was constructed for Sir Walter Cope in 1605, probably to the designs of John Thorpe. The eastern range was added in 1638-40 for Sir Henry Rich, replicating the forms of de Vries, with gables, pilasters and other Mannerist details. The original accounts are now held in Leeds City Library. The east wing survived the bombing and subsequent neglect and destruction of the house after 1940, but is much altered.
28. John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain, 1530-1830* (Pelican History, London 1969), Summerson mistakenly illustrated the kitchen block of the Hall.
29. See Suffolk Houses. Also Winesham Hall of 1625, compared to Zierikzee town Hall. Kuyper's idea on Dutch architecture. H. J. Lowe, 'Anglo-Netherlandish Architectural Interchange, c.1600-1660', *Architectural History*, 24 (1981), 1-23. Anthony Quiney, *Kent houses* (Antique Collectors' Club, 1993).
30. Little is known about Fairfax House, but photographs exist in the Henry Field collection, held at Wandsworth Local Studies Library, while the Victoria and Albert Museum hold several drawings (DD2, S3, EE181).
31. J. T. Smith, *English houses 1200-1800. The Hertfordshire evidence* (Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, London, 1992); also J. T. Smith, *Hertfordshire houses. Selective Inventory* (RCHME, 1993).
32. Sir Henry Chauncy, *The Historical Antiquities of Hertfordshire* (2nd ed., 1826).
33. Cooper, *op. cit.*, 176.
34. Mowl and Earnshaw, *op. cit.*, 165.
35. There has been much discussion of early forms of Flemish bond brickwork appearing in dated Essex church porches from the late sixteenth century, none yet published.
36. Caroline Stanley-Millson & John Newman, 'Blickling Hall: The building of a Jacobean mansion', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain*, 29 (1986), 1-54.
37. Colin Platt, *The great rebuildings of Tudor and Stuart England* (UCL Press, 1994), 165-7.
38. Mowl and Earnshaw, *op. cit.*, 159.
39. The history of the remodelling can be traced through the use of archaeological techniques, the results of which are contained in the Conservation Plan for the Palace, and a series of Works Accounts, held at the National Archives: under TNA: PRO Work 5, with some of the later refurbishment of the 1750s under Work 5/66, 5/105, LC9/292, LC9/302.
40. The Castellated Palace was an early iron-framed structure comprising a central keep, containing the State Apartments and two ancillary wings enclosing a courtyard, of which one was probably never constructed. It was abandoned in 1806, at which point the internal fittings seem to have been complete, but was demolished in 1827-8 on the orders of George IV. Much of its fabric was reused for modifications at Windsor and Buckingham Palace. The earlier White House was demolished by degrees, but substantially taken down in 1802.

41. TNA: Work 5/93 and Work 5/100 cover 1804-5.
42. Historic Royal Palaces was established by Royal Charter in 1989, becoming a Charitable Trust in 1998. In addition to Kew Palace and Queen Charlotte's Cottage, it maintains The Tower of London, Hampton Court Palace, Kensington Palace State Apartments and Inigo Jones's Banqueting House in Whitehall.
43. The research includes unpublished reports on the structure by Derek Gadd, produced in the late 1980s by English Heritage, a roof survey by Oxford Archaeology, an extensive paint survey by Crick-Smith, with supplementary research by Catherine Hassall, also a plaster survey by Clare Gapper. In addition, photogrammetry was undertaken with rectified photography, geophysical prospecting, a wallpaper survey by Allyson McDermott, ironmongery analysis by Charles Brooking, measured drawings of fixtures and fittings by Linda Hall and many others, which are housed in the curatorial archive at Hampton Court.