On the banks of the Uck: the story of a Wealden hall house

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At the southern end of Uckfield High Street, on the northern bank of the River Uck, lies Grade II-listed Bridge Cottage. The building, which comprises one of the largest Wealden hall houses in the area, has recently been the subject of comprehensive restoration. Bridge Cottage was originally saved from demolition in the 1970s by Uckfield District Preservation Society. Once ownership was secured, repairs were carried out and excavations, led by Ian Brooker, undertaken. Brooker never succeeded in publishing the results and it was not until Archaeology South-East's involvement that the earlier excavations could be fully understood. The more recent archaeological work was undertaken in response to the latest renovations and this article reports on their results. They are significant in showing the development of an individual house plot from the late medieval to post-medieval period. They provide an important analysis of architectural expressions of status and display for a Wealden household of the yeoman class.

INTRODUCTION

Grade II-listed Bridge Cottage is located on the northern bank of the River Uck at the southern end of the High Street in Uckfield, East Sussex (NGR:TQ 47240 20920; Figs 1 and 2). The building is constructed on a north–south axis, parallel to the roadway, with its principal elevation facing eastwards towards the street.

The cottage was built around 1436 as a Wealden hall house of much larger than usual size. Extensive alterations have been carried out during the lifetime of the building. The rear aisle was removed in the late medieval period, the upper floors were inserted in the 16th century and many further alterations were carried out subsequently, particularly during the early–mid 18th century.

By 1841 the building had been divided into cottages and numerous occupiers are named in later documentary evidence. Bridge Cottage was finally abandoned in 1966.

Uckfield and District Preservation Society began work on the house in 1975 when it was in a sorry state and due for demolition (UDPS 1976; Fig. 3). Between 1971 and 1979 it carried out limited excavations, led by Ian Brooker. These comprised a small trench close to the back door of the building and an area excavation immediately to the building's north (UDPS 1978; 1980; 1981) which encountered remains dated to medieval and later periods of occupation at the site.

Where relevant, the results of these excavations have been amalgamated with the results of Archaeology South-East's work, presented below (ASE 2011; 2012; 2013; 2016; Martin and Martin 2016; Fig. 4).

In 1983, Bridge Cottage was finally saved from demolition by Uckfield and District Preservation Society, together with Uckfield Town Council. The archaeological and historic building recording undertaken at the site was in response to the Listed Building Consent and Planning Consent granted by Wealden District Council for the refurbishment of the building, an extension to the side, a ground floor extension to the rear and installation of a ground source heating system. The works were carried out following a generous grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund. Renovation work began in September 2014 and was completed in April 2016.

THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Little historical or archaeological work has been dedicated to the town of Uckfield, perhaps because of its geographical situation and comparatively late founding, but also the lack of archaeological attention shown to the Weald in general. The situation has not been aided by the 'modernisation' of much of the town which, at least superficially, has swept away much of historical importance.

This pattern was evident to the Reverend Mr E. Turner who, as early as 1860, considered of Uckfield

Fig. 1. Site location and plan showing excavated features.

Fig. 2. Bridge Cottage today.

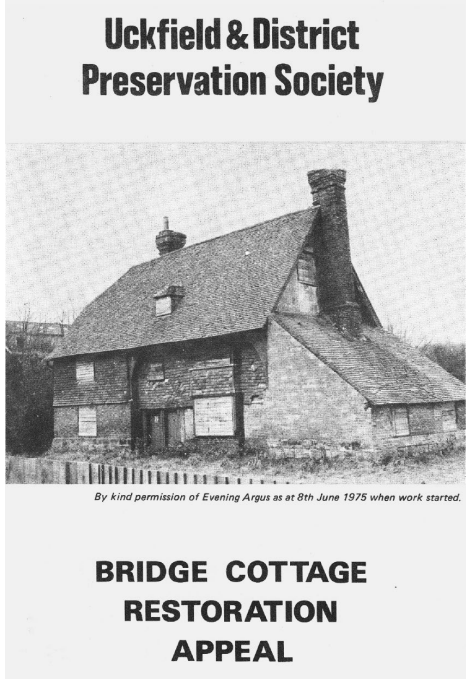

Fig. 3. Bridge Cottage awaiting demolition, 1975.

that: 'the objects of archaeological interest are few, in truth, this place has become singularly modern; almost everything of antiquarian value about it having of late years fast disappeared' (1860, 1). The 'Victorianisation' of the settlement is epitomised by the rebuilding of the church (originally a chapel of ease to Buxted) in 1839 but, despite these changes, elements of the medieval town still persist.

The historical importance of Uckfield has been championed by Uckfield and District Preservation Society and in particular Mick Harker, who has staunchly defended the value of the town's history (Uckfield News 2015). Uckfield played a role in national events when it provided lodgings for Edward I during his progress through the country in 1299 (Turner 1860, 6) and is of importance for those studying the later medieval colonisation of the Weald (e.g. Gardiner 1995) and the early iron and broadcloth industries (e.g. Zell 1994; Cleere and Crossley 1985; Hodgkinson 2008).

RESULTS

Prior to discussion of the archaeological results, it is important to note the inherent problems with

Fig. 4. Stages of excavation.

the dating of construction deposits and structural features within post-medieval buildings. In domestic structures of this sort there can often be difficulties due to small amounts of dating evidence and problems with residuality and intrusion caused by disturbance of earlier contexts.

In the latter case this was found to be compounded by shallow stratigraphy and over six centuries of repeated alterations to the site of Bridge Cottage. Phasing of contexts and groups was therefore based on stratigraphic relationships informed by artefactual evidence and known development of the historic building, as reported by David and Barbara Martin (Martin and Martin 2016). The post-excavation assessment for the project should be referred to for a full discussion of the artefactual evidence from the site (ASE 2016).

PERIOD 1. A MEDIEVAL BUILDING (late 13th – early 15th century)

Despite a lack of archaeological features or finds from Uckfield it is probable that there was a settlement in the area, of at least seasonal nature, by the late 10th century. The town's name derives from the Anglo-Saxon personal name *Ucca* combined with the element *feld* (Mawer and Stenton 1930, 396). Uckfield therefore has the meaning of *Ucca's* clearing or open land near woodland.

The area is of poor arable quality, a factor which is reflected in the '*feld*' place-names of the High Weald. These share a distribution with areas of later medieval downland or common (Gardiner 1995, 80).

Uckfield's proximity to Ashdown Forest, and association with the *feld* element and extensive areas of common land, may indicate that it was characterised by thinner vegetation than other countryside in the area. The tree cover could have been denuded and was then unable to regenerate due to grazing (*ibid*., 80–81).

It is highly likely that Uckfield developed due to its location at a river crossing and the junction of three roads, including that from Tonbridge to Lewes and the modern A272. Despite possible earlier origins it is not until the 13th century that evidence of more substantial colonisation of the area is apparent.

The earliest archaeological deposits encountered at the site probably date to the later part of this century and comprised dumped layers of dark yellow-brown clay sand containing moderately frequent sandstone fragments, as well as charcoal and occasional pieces of roof tile (G42; [260], [261], [262], [279], [280] and [283]; Fig. 7).

The deposits probably correspond to the lowest part of 'Layer 9' encountered by Brooker (UDPS 1980) and relate to a platform created prior to the construction of the earliest structural evidence encountered at the site. The creation of a building platform was probably the result of the proximity to the River Uck and the threat of flooding.

The platform would have likely been created following levelling of the area and, where revealed, the deposits were shown to be upwards of 210mm in thickness. Directly overlaying the building platform were sandy floor and occupation layers related to a medieval building (G2; [263], [264], [265], [271], [272], [275], [276], [289] and [290]; Fig. 7). These

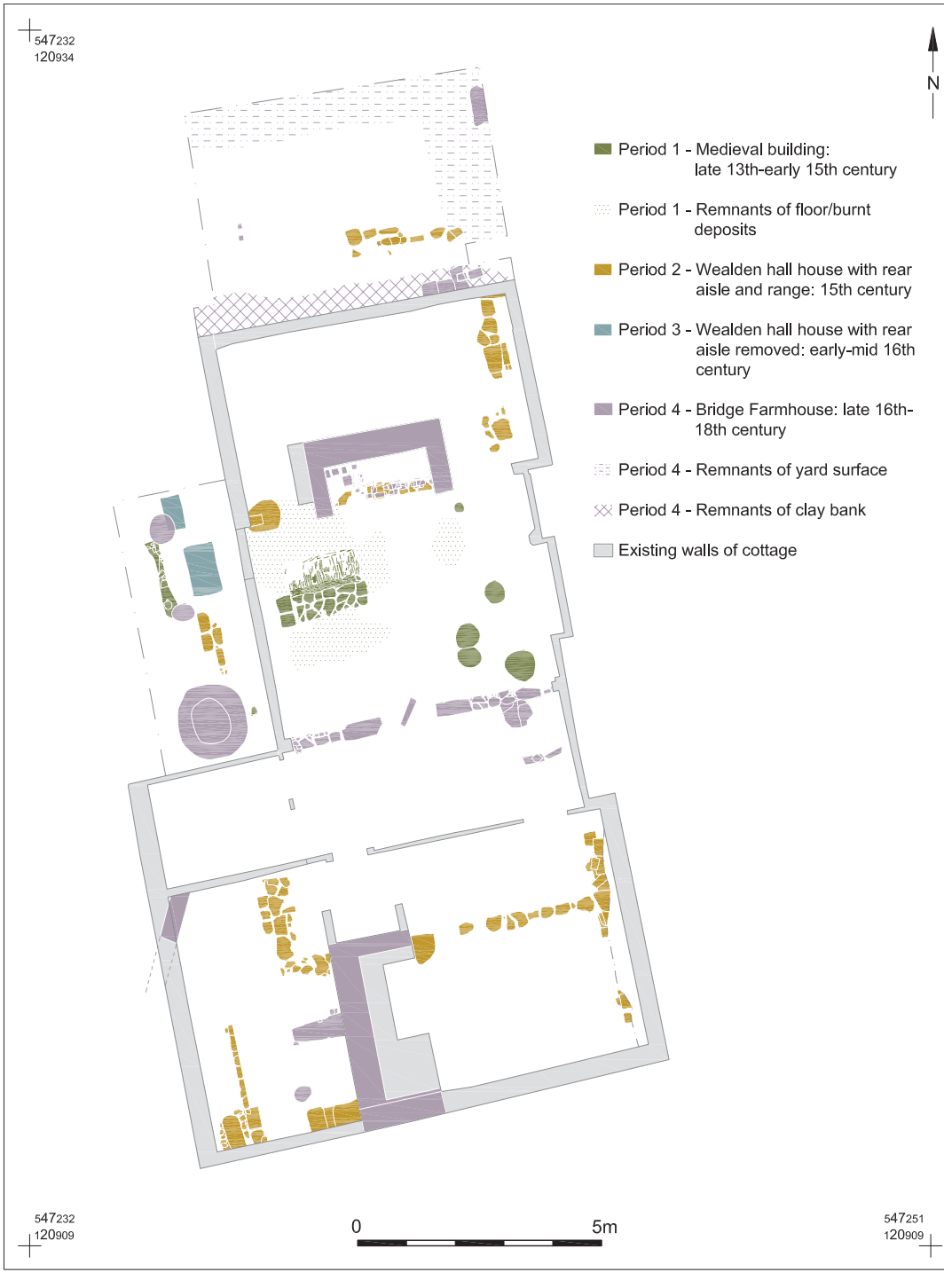

Fig. 5. Plan showing the archaeological phases discussed in the text.

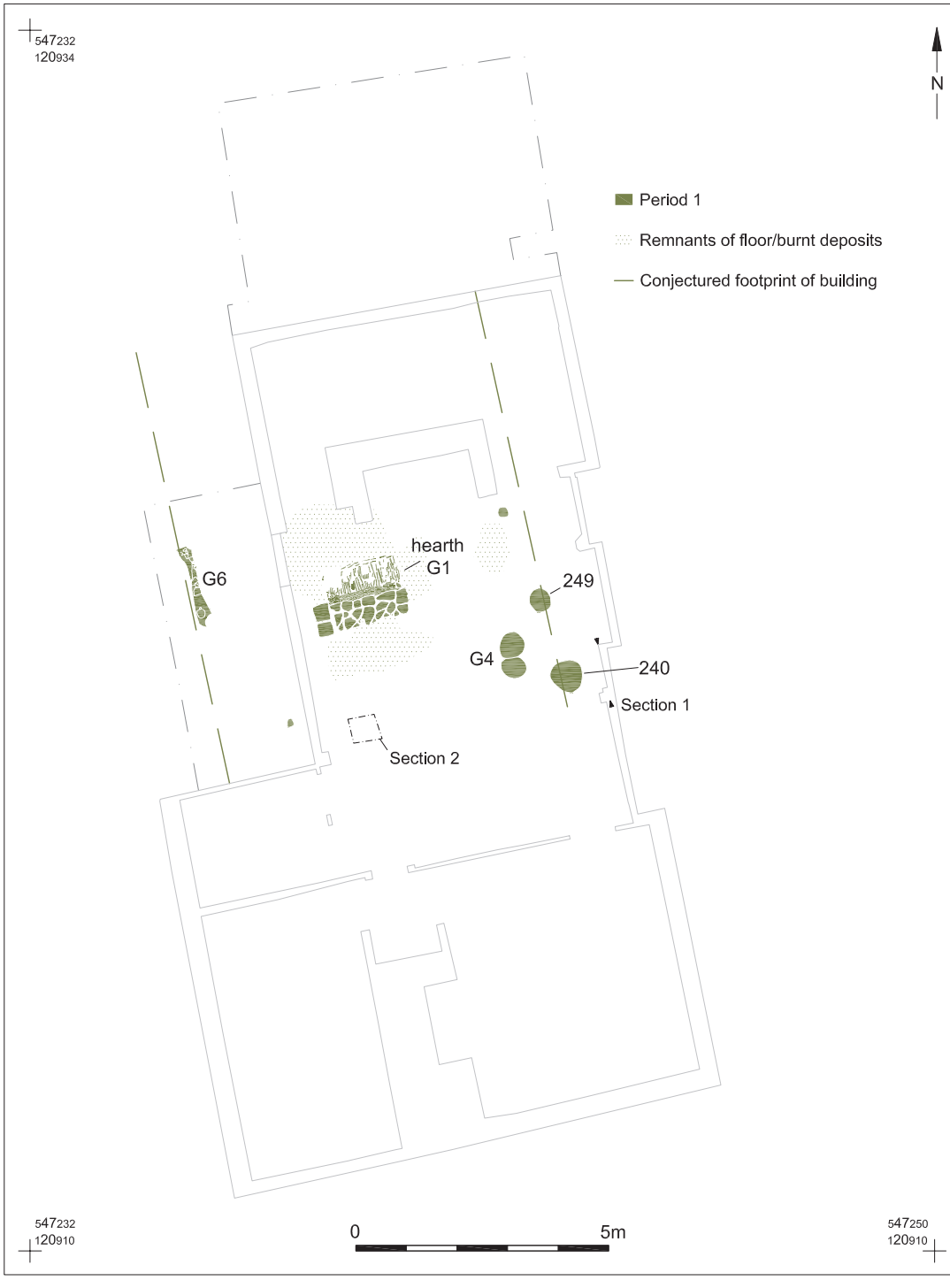

Fig. 6. Period 1 plan: medieval building (late 13th--early 15th century).

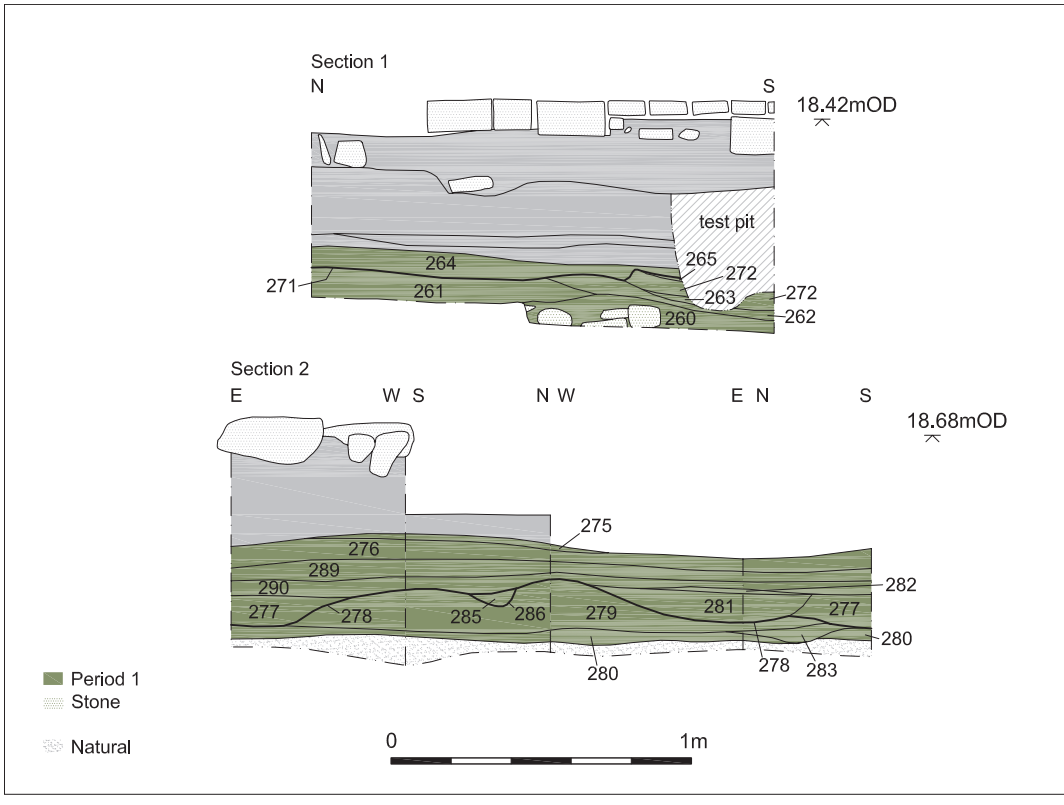

Fig. 7. Period 1 sections.

produced a single sherd of pottery with an AD 1275–1400 date range.

In places, the upper surface of these layers was discoloured through burning and, in the north-western part of Bridge Cottage's existing hall, a rectangular hearth comprising ferruginous Wealden flagstones, as well as ceramic and stone tiles laid on edge, was encountered (G1; Fig. 8).

Attempts to scientifically date the hearth proved inconclusive. However, its presence, together with the remains of a contemporary sandstone sill wall (G6) and twin post-holes [240] and [249], indicate something of the ground plan of the medieval building. The post-holes contained late 13th–14th-century pottery as well as slag, charcoal from a mix of species, sandstone fragments, mortar flecks, and burnt clay.

They were located at the same distance from the hearth's centre as the sill wall (G6) and were interpreted as the remains of a doorway. Hearths were generally placed equidistant from the side walls within buildings of this date and the post-holes suggest an eastern wall line, parallel to G6 to the west (Fig. 6).

Additional features comprised pits dated by pottery found just inside the entrance (G4), which included pit [278] (Fig. 7) and a number of small post-holes including [286] (Fig. 7), possibly relating to internal supports.

The platform deposits (G42) indicated a sizeable building, encountered as they were within Section 1, Section 2 (Figs 6 and 7) and within Brooker's excavations to the north. Based on the assumption that during the 14th century open halls of tripartite plan are the most likely building form in the area, this early precursor to Bridge Cottage perhaps comprised a centrally placed hall, open to the roof, with a high end on one side of the house and a service bay on the other.

The high-end bay would have been the private quarters of the owner and his family whereas the services at the low end were used for dairying,

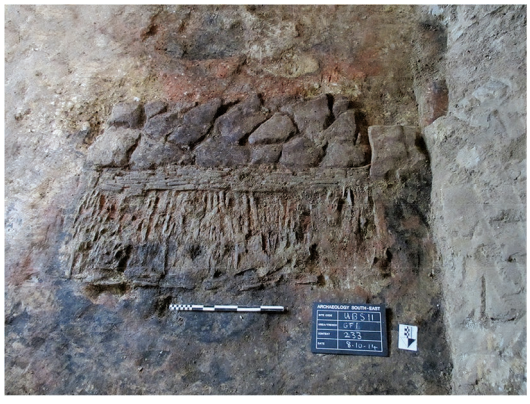

Fig. 8. Period 1 hearth (0.5m scale bar).

probably with a loft for storage above. Evidence of floor and occupation layers (G7) revealed beneath the northern wall of the existing Bridge Cottage further illustrate the substantial nature of this early building.

Although the structure's width (approximately 6.80m) would be consistent with a medieval hall of large size (*see* Martin and Martin 2009, 97), this is not the only explanation for the Period 1 remains. The hearth is notable for being constructed of two separate elements, perhaps implying a specialised use such as within a kitchen or similar subsidiary building.

Certainly, detached buildings serving as kitchens were a feature of the local vernacular and, after houses and barns, they were the most common building type within late medieval/early post-medieval South-East England (Martin and Martin 1997, 85). Those that survive are of late 15th- to mid-16th-century date and are surprisingly large and complex, having in the past sometimes been mistaken for houses (*ibid.*).

Earlier examples tend to be found on moated or ecclesiastical sites and to be generally square in plan (e.g. at Glottenham, Hawkshurst and Streatham, Martin 1989; 1990; Funnell 2009), although the small rectangular 'building 3' at Hangleton (Holden 1963, 85–94) is now generally accepted to have been a kitchen/bakehouse and represents an example lower down the social scale.

Around the time that the Period 1 structure was built Uckfield had achieved modest size, with the settlement probably comprising narrow tenements clustering near the crossroads, perhaps with more scattered and larger plots along the High Street. It is likely that the core of the settlement grew up to the east of the chapel of the Holy Cross, which was well placed to serve outlying farms. The earliest reference to this chapel is dated to 1291 when it is recorded, along with the church of Buxted, as the *capella de Ockefeld* (Denton 2014).

It is documented as being in the deanery of South Malling and was therefore under the jurisdiction of the archbishops of Canterbury (*ibid.*; Harris 2008, 13). Although the chapel may reflect the later medieval development of Uckfield, especially by the end of the 14th century when it had acquired a bell tower and chancel, it may not have provided the impetus for the growth of the town itself.

This growth may have been from Henry III's early 13th-century grant of a weekly market to the Archbishop of Canterbury (*Calendar of Fine Rolls 1219–20*, 12). Such grants can be seen as an attempt to stimulate urban activity within the underexploited medieval Weald.

It seems to have succeeded as, by 1285, the settlement comprised 12 burgesses and 11 shops (Redwood and Wilson 1958, 76–77) and the 1296 lay subsidy rolls for Pevensey Rape list 26 taxpayers (*Sussex Record Society X*, 39) including a merchant or trader and two millers or bakers (Harris 2008, 13).

Mills in Uckfield held by Canterbury Cathedral Priory were documented in 1285 as being among the custumals of the archbishop's Sussex manors (Redwood and Wilson 1958, 75). They included a grain mill tenanted by Sir Thomas de Marinis and two fulling mills tenanted by Andrew de Luddesham and Helwis' de Fullestr' (*ibid.*, 75; Lucas 2016, 93).

A mill pond and fulling mill are shown close to the east of the site on Richard Hart's estate map of 1784 (Fig. 9) and a further fulling mill may be represented by a pond with an associated leat in a land parcel named Tom Fullers field on the 1841 tithe (Fig. 10; ESRO ACC 9558, land parcel 262). The presence of these water-powered industries is clear evidence that the River Uck was key to the settlement's medieval economy; however, its proximity has also been a source of heartbreak to the town.

Understandably, the threat of the river bursting its banks was taken into account by the Period 1 builders who chose to raise the footings above the surrounding land and the banks of the river. This may not have been sufficient to save it from the

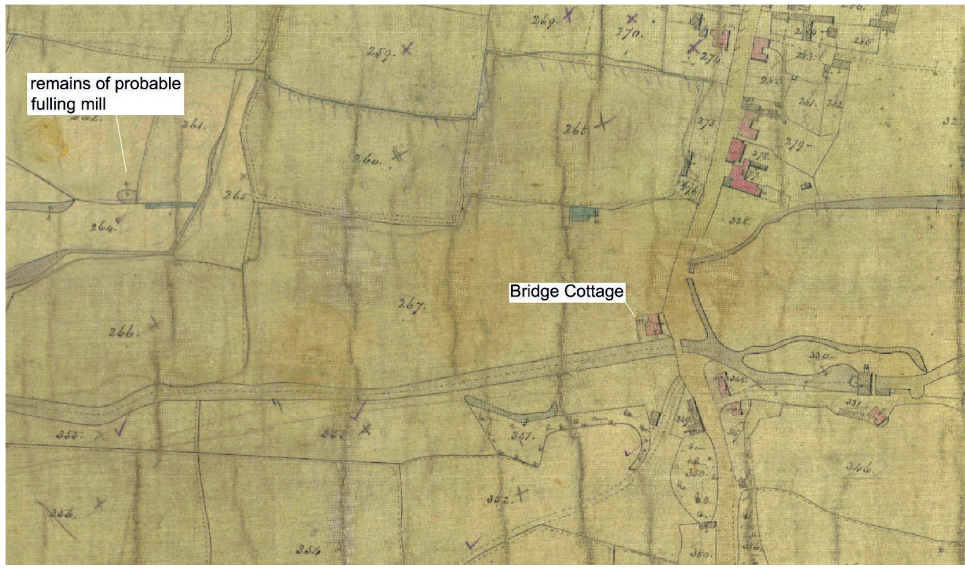

Fig. 9. Richard Hart's estate map of 1784 (ESRO ACC 3763) showing the location of the fulling mill.

Fig. 10. Extract from the Uckfield tithe map of 1841 (ESRO TDE 33/1) showing remains of probable fulling mill.

effects of the late medieval storms which had such devastating effects on both coastal and inland areas of Sussex (Baker 1966; Brandon 1971).

A fine, greenish grey (and in places yellow-grey), sandy silt, with occasional preserved wood fragments, was found to overly the remains of the Period 1 building. The presence of this deposit suggests the structure was subject to inundation sometime prior to the construction of Bridge Cottage in around 1436 (*see* Period 2, below).

It is unclear, however, whether the building had actually been demolished prior to the postulated flood event. Layers of destruction debris and burning could possibly relate to the demolition of the site prior to any flood. Alternatively, the destruction debris may actually relate to high-energy flooding leading to structural damage.

The burning may have been associated with earlier internal activity connected to occupation layers (G2). Whatever the sequence of events, it is clear that Bridge Cottage's late medieval predecessor came to an abrupt end sometime prior to the mid-15th century.

PERIOD 2. A SUBSTANTIAL WEALDEN HALL (15th century)

Following the destruction of the Period 1 building, a large quantity of sandstone rubble and soil (G55) was imported to the site where it was dumped before being sealed by a compacted clay (G54). These deposits were recorded by Brooker in his 1970s excavations to the north of the cottage as Layer 6, Layer 7, Pit 4 (relating to G55), and Layer 5 (relating to G54; UDPS 1980).

The latter produced a few sherds of medieval pottery (*ibid.*). The layers clearly related to a higher building platform than had been afforded the Period 1 remains, which were incorporated within the later platform's core. Deposits similar to G55 were found in the southeast of the site (G50; [353]) where they produced finds of late 14th- to late 15th-century sandy ware pottery, roof tile, animal bone, and a type 4 iron horseshoe (RF<5>).

At the same time as the new platform was being formed, work began on erecting the prefabricated frame of the substantial Wealden hall house of L-shaped plan. This was the earliest phase of Bridge Cottage, which has been demonstrated via dendrochronology to have been constructed sometime during the year 1436 or very shortly thereafter (Martin and Martin 2016, 9).

The hall house comprised a four-bay main range and a small, single-bay, rear range at its southern low end (Figs 11 and 14). The sandstone remains of the northern and eastern walls of the original high-end bay were encountered during excavations (G9 and G15 respectively).

The eastern example was partially covered in a pinkish clay, pressed into the joints between the masonry (G46). This relates to wet clay squeezed between the dry stone underpinning in order to prevent wobbling during the erection of the timber frame. Also related to the eastern wall was a large stone slab thought to be associated with an internal support (G16).

To the south of the high-end bay, the northern wall of the hall (G25; [228], [257]; Fig. 12), as well as the western wall of the aisle were encountered (G12). Some masonry blocks (G17) found near to the hall's northern wall almost certainly relate to props used to support the sole plate during the erection of the frame.

In the service bay, the eastern (G10) and southern wall (G13) were found, together with the western wall of the rear range (G18; [347]; Fig. 12) and its clay floor (G49; [357]; Fig. 12).

It is possible that, prior to construction of the building, its builders or owners began to be concerned about the threat of flooding or the ingress of high groundwater caused by the proximity of the River Uck. They certainly decided to raise the floor of the building and it is overwhelmingly likely that the finished floor level was already decided before the sole plates were in position.

Timber-framed buildings were usually laid out on site and supported by stone or timber blocks located at strategic locations. The use of these supporting blocks under the sole plates is clearly indicated by contemporary building accounts and confirmed as practical by present-day timber framers and conservation specialists.

Stone ground walls were packed under the sole plates after they had been laid and, in some instances, after the entire frame had been erected. This negated the possibility of the prefabricated frame not fitting onto prebuilt walls, a situation that would have required difficult adjustments.

This underpinning gave the stratigraphic impression that most of the walls had been constructed before the floor-raising event. However, it was far more clear that the eastern wall of the hall (G11; [226]; Fig. 12), its rammed clay floor, and the

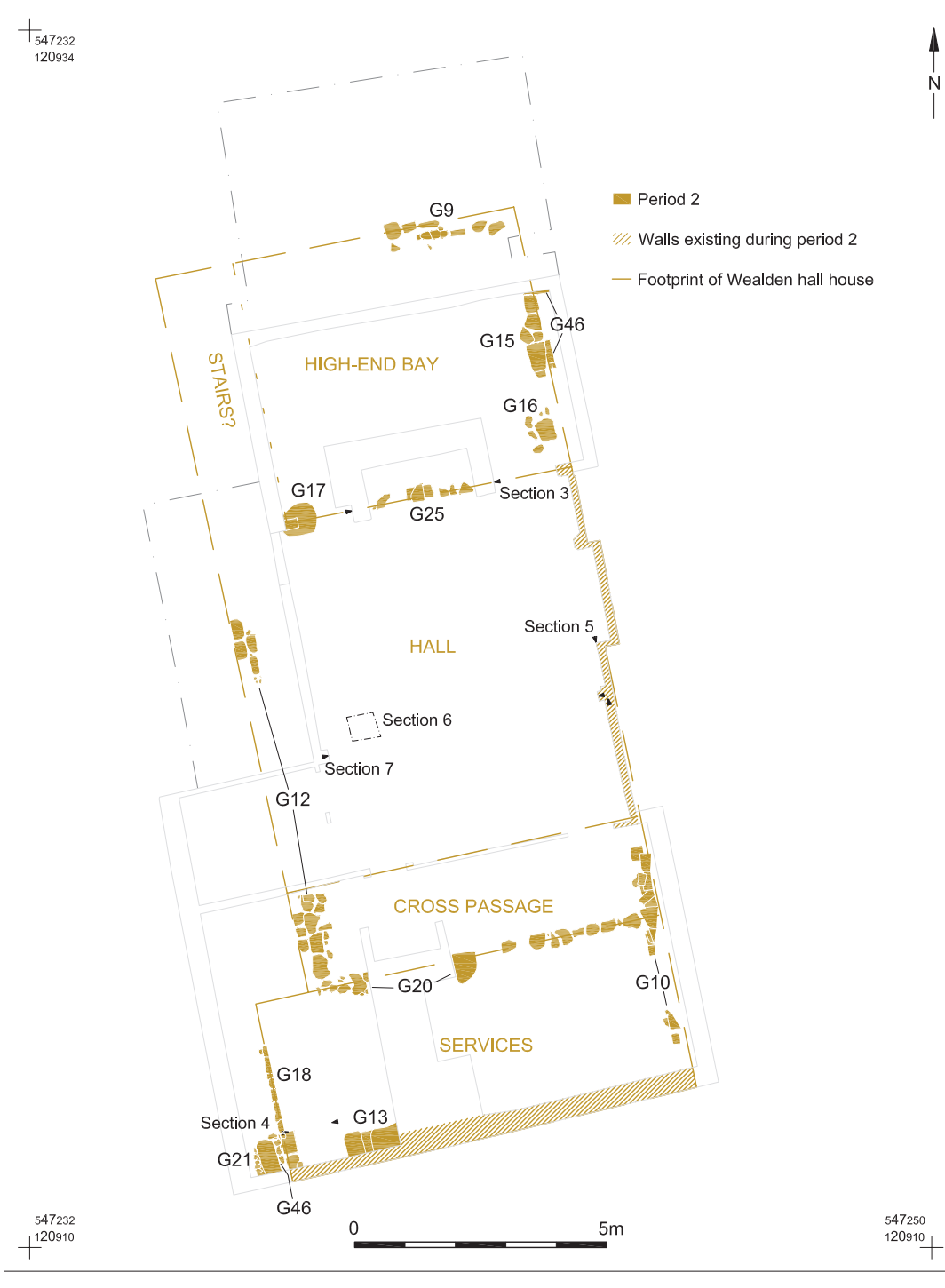

Fig. 11. Period 2 plan: Wealden hall house with rear aisle and range (15th century).

Fig. 12. Period 2 sections.

Fig. 13. Photos, Period 2. Top: junction of walls G12 and G20 looking north-east; bottom: part of G21 showing pink clay deposit (1.0m scale bar top; 0.5m scale bar bottom).

southern cross passage wall (G20) were all laid after floor raising had taken place.

Around the time the ground floor was built up, it was also decided to buttress the south-eastern corner of the rear range with a large sandstone block (G21). This was smeared with the same pinkish clay as G15, described above (Fig. 13).

The floor-raising deposit comprised a layer of light yellow-brown, silty clay up to 450mm thick (G19; [222], [225], [266], [267]; Fig. 12). It contained finds of slag, copper, animal bone, and iron nail fragments, as well as a sherd of tin-glazed plate (dated 1675–1750), early 18th-century pieces of clay tobacco pipe and slightly corroded fragments of green wine bottle. The latter three categories of find are all thought to be intrusive.

The footprint of the hall house measured 16.45m in length by 7.20m in width, making it one of the largest examples in the area (Martin and Martin 2016, 11). The newly finished building was of tripartite design and comprised a large hall, open to the roof, with a high end to the north and a low end to the south.

A visitor would have entered the overshot (floored over) cross passage before turning right into the impressively long open hall with its rear aisle. This would have been heated by a central hearth and lit by a large, projecting bay window in the front wall of the hall's upper bay. Against the far wall would have been the owner's bench and table with an elaborate backdrop provided by a dais

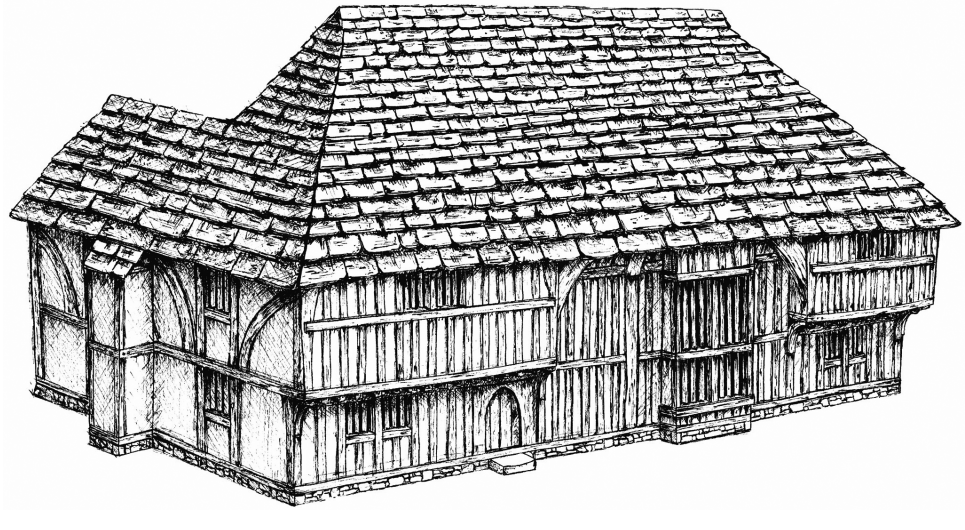

Fig. 14. Reconstruction of Period 2 Wealden hall house.

Fig. 15. Interior of Bridge Cottage during Period 2. Top: reconstruction looking towards the dais partition and high table (courtesy of David Martin); bottom: following restoration (with the floor and chimney inserted).

partition with its intricately carved dais beam and timber panelling (Fig. 15).

Beyond would have been the accommodation for the occupier and the immediate family. This comprised a ground floor room with a chamber above. The chamber, which was jettied along the front and may also have incorporated an end jetty, would have been accessed via a stairway almost certainly located in the width of the rear aisle (*ibid*., 18).

The ground floor of the southern service bay may have been divided into two rooms; however, there was little evidence for this or for the staircase that would have allowed access to the service chamber above. To the west was the small rear range. It is not known whether this room had a first floor or whether it was open to the roof (*ibid*., 10).

The large service chamber would have partially overlain the cross passage. It would have been lit by unglazed windows of three lights, with mortices for diamond-section mullions. This room was served by a garderobe projecting from the southern end wall, indicating that it was used to accommodate persons of some status.

It is unclear whether the garderobe outshut extended down to ground level (Fig. 14) or was supported on brackets, as reconstructed in Bayleaf at the Weald and Downland Living Museum (*ibid*., 17–18; Fig. 16).

The creation of a prestigious house would have been a considerable outlay in the 15th century and the choice to build it in a rather precarious location beside the river might be of significance. The building, which lay astride a crossing point on an important north–south routeway, would have been a suitable residence for a wealthy yeoman, many of whom were dual-economists, combining farming with some other occupation.

Fig. 16. The projecting garderobe (rear left corner) as reconstructed at Bayleaf, from Chiddingstone, Kent, now at the Weald and Downland Living Museum.

What is certain is that the earliest phase of Bridge Cottage was constructed during a time when new larger holdings were being created in the High Weald. These were often formed of amalgamations of earlier holdings, as wealthier members of society bought out or subsumed the abandoned tenements of their neighbours.

As well as these social changes, this was also a time when the Weald was undergoing a certain amount of 'proto-industrialisation'. By the end of the century the blast furnace had been introduced and the rise of the Wealden iron industry had a significant impact on the local economy.

It was the emergence of the important Wealden broadcloth industry, however, which was more concurrent with the construction of Bridge Cottage (*see* Zell 1994; Flisher and Zell 2009). The cloth industry was dependent on fulling mills, two of which are known to the east and west of the site (Figs 9 and 10).

PERIOD 3. THE REMOVAL OF THE AISLE (early to mid-16th century)

Sometime during the close of the 15th century or earlier 16th century the rear part of the open truss and part of the arcade plate in the hall's roof failed (Martin and Martin 2016, 22). This was probably due to subsidence, which seems to have been worst in the southern part of the rear aisle.

Perhaps due to this structural deficiency the decision was made to demolish the rear wall of the hall (Fig. 17). Excavations to the west of Bridge Cottage encountered two rectangular 'robber pits' (G23), excavated to extract reusable stone from the removed western wall of the rear aisle. These were covered by deposits of 'garden soil', (G35) indicating that the area had become external and part of a rear yard.

Excavations within the hall encountered construction deposits (G22) for its new rear wall. This was built to include a glazed window in the hall's high-end bay, measuring 1.85m long by 0.85m deep and positioned low in the wall. The window comprised five panes, with each pane divided vertically by a single tie bar.

The mullions were chamfered and rebated to accommodate the glass. Although the window was

Fig. 17. Period 3 plan: Wealden hall house with rear aisle removed (early to mid–16th century).

glazed, it was also built to include internal sliding shutters, a common feature in early glazed windows.

There may have been a second window in this wall, occupying the hall's low-end bay, although if this was the case it might have been of unglazed type in order to maintain airflow to the halls open hearth (Martin and Martin 2016, 23). The presence of a glazed rear window in the hall is a rare feature in houses of this date and is a mark of prestige, glazed windows usually being restricted to the front elevation, where they were used as a status symbol (*ibid*., 22).

Apart from the demolition of the rear aisle, which would have resulted in the narrowing of the building, the only other modifications to Bridge Cottage at this time were the insertion of a new staircase to access the upper chamber in the high-end bay, and the removal of part of the dais partition to form a doorway allowing access to the high-end room and stairs, the earlier door and stairs having been within the demolished rear aisle.

PERIOD 4. BRIDGE COTTAGE (late 16th to mid-18th century)

During the later 16th century a number of alterations were made to Bridge Cottage to bring it up to date. The nature of these modifications indicates that they were carried out with a restricted budget (Martin and Martin 2016, 25).

The old open hall was subdivided by the insertion of a partition to form two, near-square rooms. The base of the partition was formed of sandstone blocks (G24; [215]; Figs 18 and 19). A nearby stone pad [232] was also thought to belong to this phase and may represent the base for an internal support.

The insertion of the partition served to create what can best be described as an 'inner' and 'outer hall' (*ibid*.). The inner hall lay to the north of the partition, was unheated and no longer open to the roof, it now being floored over to create a new chamber above. The outer hall, by contrast, remained open to the roof and incorporated the lower bay of the Period 2 hall and the overshot cross passage.

The central foundation of the partition (G24) was formed of larger stone blocks than the remainder, and these showed signs of scorching on the southern side (Fig. 21). The blocks and the pattern of sooting apparent within the roof indicate the outer hall was served by a hearth.

The larger size of the sandstone masonry within the centre portion of G24 indicates the hearth was associated with a stone reredos screen incorporated within the partition (Martin and Martin 2016, 25). The outer hall may now have functioned as a combined hall and kitchen, whereas the inner hall probably served as an unheated parlour.

This was fitted with a new bay window in place of the Period 2 example, this one being slightly narrower and constructed as two windows, one above the other, with the space between infilled with close studding. The new chamber above this inner hall was accessed from the high-end chamber, which by this time was provided with a ceiling.

During the early 17th century, the size of the large Wealden hall house was reduced. This involved demolition of the high-end bay. Evidence from Brooker's excavations (UDPS 1980) indicates that the area was replaced by a crushed sandstone and clay yard (G51).

The yard survived into the 18th century as it produced contemporary pottery as well as residual medieval sherds and a lead token. The yard was cut by post-holes (G52) thought to represent a fenced division as well as a pit (G53) incorporating animal bone and building debris (*ibid*.).

Modifications to the hall comprised the insertion of a brick chimneystack and fireplace (G26; Figs 18 and 20). The hall's ground floor was also resurfaced utilising a light grey-brown silt clay. Slabs of reused Horsham Stone found within the deposit may indicate that at least some of the hall's floor was flagged.

The early 17th century changes also affected the low end of the building, although it is possible, even likely, that these modifications were carried out a little later than those described above. The partition between the low-end room and cross passage was removed and the old opening between the cross passage and hall blocked. This had the effect of converting the northern part of the earlier 'outer hall' into an entranceway, with a staircase allowing access to the rooms above.

A new front doorway was cut through the external wall in its current location. The remains of a draught spere (G38) were related to this change in entrance. These alterations to the entrance arrangement were allied to the creation of a large new kitchen in the low-end bay, served by a two-flue brick chimney inbuilt against the rear wall.

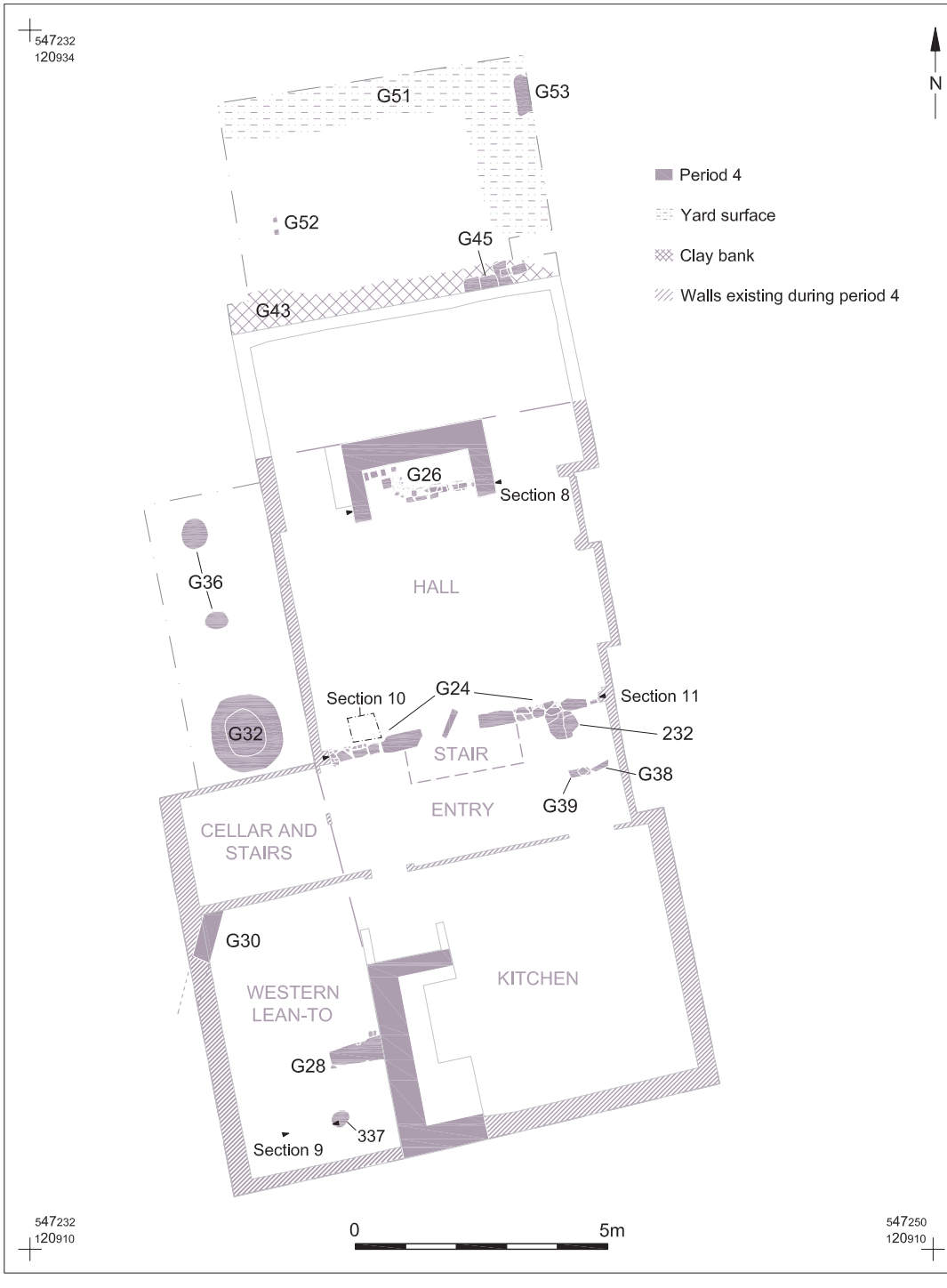

Fig. 18. Period 4 plan: Bridge Cottage, late 16th–18th century.

Fig. 19. Period 4 sections.

Fig. 20. Photos, Period 4. Top left: yard area with G32 in background; top right: G24 facing south; centre left: G26 fireplace looking north; centre right: witch marks on G26 lintel; bottom left: oven inserted into rear of kitchen fireplace; bottom centre: kitchen fireplace; bottom right: G28 buttress.

The fireplace for this chimney was deeper and wider than the example in the hall to the north, reflecting its use as a cooking hearth. A large stone block (G28; Figs 18 and 20), found in the area to the west of the kitchen, represents an attempt to buttress this new chimneystack while an isolated post-hole [337] may have been used for a scaffold during the chimney's construction.

Fig. 21. G24 showing scorched stones (right of pillar), part of reredos screen.

The changes in the entrance arrangement necessitated building a new section of wall in the northern side of the kitchen. This was covered in comb-decorated daub with an interlaced figure-of-eight pattern. The size of the kitchen was increased slightly by underbuilding the front jetty of the southern bay and repositioning its alignment flush with the upper storey.

The kitchen was given a new, mid-yellow-orange, beaten earth floor (G27) that contained finds of 17th century pottery, roof tile, a single floor tile, glazed bricks of 16th–17th-century type, animal bone, and a copper alloy dress pin fragment (RF <3>). In the south-eastern corner of the room an interesting deposit was encountered, almost entirely comprised of charcoal from a range of species [204] (sample <101>).

It may represent debris from a cleaned out fireplace used to level the room. Amongst the charcoal, part of a cast iron firedog (RF<1>; Fig. 22) and a lead token (RF<6>) were encountered (see below).

To the back of the kitchen, the old Period 2 rear range was finally demolished. Evidence that its walls were robbed were recorded in excavations and the remainder of this now external area was covered in a layer of burnt clay.

This layer may have been related to industrial activity taking place in the yard to the north where a large pit (G32), roughly one metre in diameter, had a burnt clay lining. The pit's primary purpose is unknown but it subsequently served as a convenient receptacle for domestic waste.

Finds included pottery dated to the 16th and 17th century, including a large jug with all over metallic glaze, an intrusive 19th-century sherd, clay tobacco pipe fragments (bowl types AO12, AO15, AO20 spanning AD 1640–1710), a 17th/18th-century green window glass fragment and two green window glass fragments dated to the 18th to 19th

Fig. 22. Photo of cast iron firedog RF<1> (Archaeology South-East).

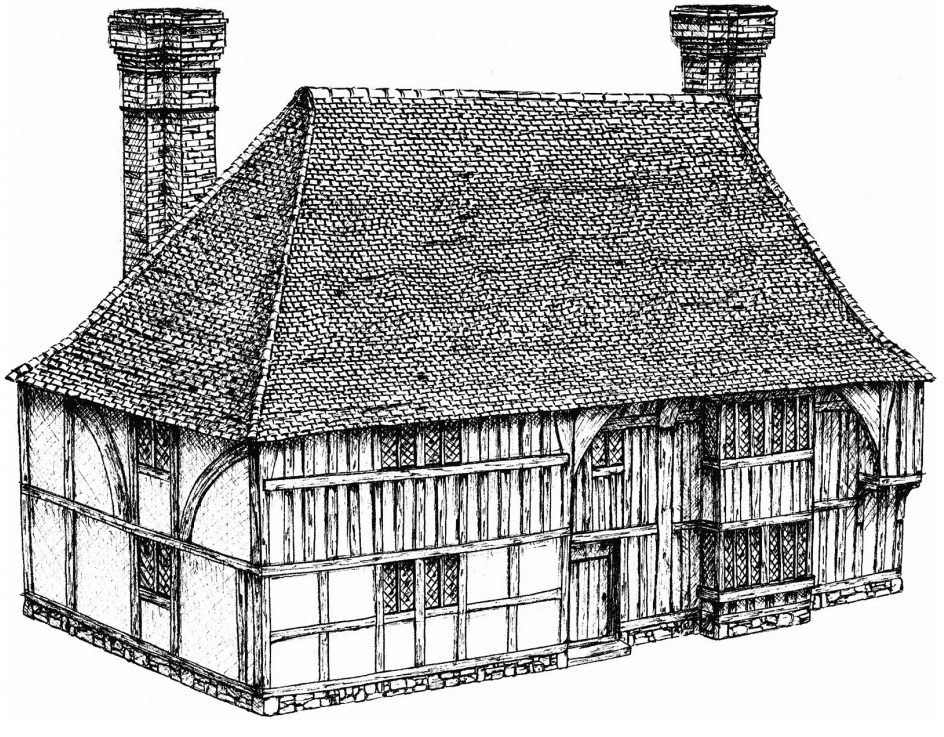

Fig. 23. Reconstruction of Bridge Cottage in the early 17th century (Period 4).

century (from two different panes), two pieces of West Country slate and a Horsham Stone roof slab. Two other pits in this area (G36) were also associated with external activity represented by construction deposits and yard soils.

The early 17th-century upper storey reflected the changed layout of the ground floor, with fireplaces of standard design with timber lintels heating the chambers. A new, slightly higher, first floor was built above the kitchen, perhaps to compensate for subsidence that had occurred in the main frame (Martin and Martin 2016, 30; Fig. 23).

The final alterations during Period 4 took place in the earlier 18th century and included the addition of a lean-to bakehouse to the rear of the kitchen as well as a northern lean-to outshut adjoining the hall. The latter was built in the part of the yard that occupied the area of the former Period 2 high-end bay.

Excavations by Brooker (UDPS 1980, 'Feature 3') showed that before the outshut was built, a clay bank (G43) and sandstone block base (G45) were laid down to give the external wall a firmer footing. The lean-to was constructed of brick walls laid in Flemish bond and served to internalise the hall chimney. It provided two service rooms in which occupation layers were found.

The western lean-to bakehouse incorporated a small cellar that cut an earlier brick culvert (G30). The cellar floor comprised a compact, stiff, yellow clay thought to act in part as a barrier to water ingress. The cellar lay below a new staircase leading to a corridor that allowed independent access to the first-floor chambers.

Within the remainder of the lean-to bakehouse floor levelling deposits were encountered (G29; [349], [355]; Fig. 19). In these, a copper-alloy fragment (RF<2>), possibly part of a button, was found. In its eastern wall, at the rear of the kitchen, the fireplace was narrowed and shallowed in depth to allow the insertion of a bread oven.

Fig. 24. Photo of Bridge Cottage prior to its renovation, showing how the building would have largely appeared in the early 18th century.

THE FINDS AND ENVIRONMENTAL ASSEMBLAGE

THE REGISTERED FINDS by Trista Clifford

A small assemblage of six objects was recovered during the excavations, most notably part of a large, cast iron firedog (RF<1>) from the Period 4 levelling deposit [204], the legs cast in the shape of a horseshoe with a shield-shaped boss at the apex containing the initials 'RW'. The object measures 300mm long, 190mm wide, with a thickness of 40mm.

I am grateful for the expertise of Jeremy Hodgkinson, of the Wealden Iron Research Group, in providing the following information on this object:

> The initials are reputed to be those of Richard Woodman, of Cralle, in Warbleton, ironmaster and Protestant martyr, who was burnt at the stake in Lewes on 22 June 1557. The fire dog is most likely to be an example of one used to decorate an iron fireback that is in Hastings Museum.

The Hastings fireback depicts three similar fire dogs with horseshoe legs and central pillars which appear to be decorated with a flame-like motif, surmounted by a spherical terminal bearing crude facial features depicting eyes, nose, mouth, and hair. The Bridge cottage firedog is rather corroded and the surface of the object is obscured; therefore, it is not possible to be certain if these decorative features are present.

A type 4 iron horseshoe, RF<5>, came from G50 Period 2 dump deposit [353] (Clark 1995, 88). The horseshoe measures 97mm in length, 99mm in width and has a thickened heel on the remaining branch. This is the most numerous form during the 14th–16th century.

Other finds from the excavation include copper-alloy dress pin fragments (RF<3> and <4>) with wound wire heads, of 16th- to 17th-century date, from G27 floor [201] and post-hole [337]. Wound wire heads of both type B and C are present (Caple 1991, 246).

A lead token (RF<6>) from the Period 4 floor levelling deposit [204], depicting a rudimentary grid or cross, is of similar date. A copper-alloy ?button fragment (RF<2>; diameter 15.5mm), with incised border, recovered from levelling deposit G29 [349] is probably within the latter part of this range.

CHARCOAL by Mariangela Vitolo

Methods

One hundred charcoal fragments were extracted from the heavy residues of each sample and analysed for species identification and signs of woodland management. The fragments were fractured by hand along three planes (transverse, radial and tangential), according to standardised procedures (Gale and Cutler 2000; Hather 2000; Leney and Casteel 1975).

Charcoal specimens were viewed under a stereozoom microscope, for initial grouping, and an incident light microscope at magnifications up to 400x. Taxonomic identifications were assigned by comparing suites of anatomical characteristics visible with those documented in reference atlases (Hather 2000; Schoch *et al.* 2004; Schweingruber 1990).

Genera, family, or group names have been given where anatomical differences between taxa are not significant enough to permit more detailed identification. Taxonomic identifications of charcoal are recorded in Table 1, and nomenclature used follows Stace (1997). Latin names are given at first mention and, with the exception of the *Maloideae* group, taxa are subsequently referred to by their English common names.

Results

Anatomical characters observed on the charcoal specimens from Bridge Cottage were consistent with those of the following taxa or groups of taxa. *Fagaceae*: *Quercus* sp., of which two species are native to the British Isles, *Quercus robur*, pedunculate oak, and *Quercus petraea*, sessile oak; *Fagus sylvatica*, beech; *Quercus* sp./*Castanea sativa*, oak/sweet chestnut (this identification has been made when fragments did not present the large multiseriate rays typical of oak). The sweet chestnut is an introduced tree in Britain.

Betulaceae: *Corylus avellana*, hazel, *Alnus* sp., alder. *Salicaceae: Salix/Populus* sp., willow/poplar (the woods of both genera present many similarities and overlapping of characters and the two taxa are genera indistinguishable). *Rosaceae*: (*Prunoidae*) *Prunus* sp., cherry/blackthorn, (*Maloideae*) a subfamily including several taxa that are generally not distinguishable, such as *Malus* sp, apple, *Pyrus* sp, pear, *Crataegus monogyna*, hawthorn, and *Sorbus* sp., rowan, service, and whitebeam. *Aceraceae: Acer campestre*, field maple; *Oleaceae*: *Fraxinus excelsior*, ash.

Table 1. Charcoal Identifications; rw: round wood, V: vitrified, cf: compares with.

	Sample Number	**101**	**103**
	Context	**204**	**241**
	Parent Context	**204**	**240**
	Group		**3**
	Period	**5**	**1**
	Context / deposit type	**Floor**	**Post-hole**
Taxonomic Identifications	**English Name**		
Quercus sp.	oak	35 (1 rw, I V)	36
cf *Quercus* sp.	oak	1 V	
Quercus sp. /*Castanea sativa*	oak/sweet chestnut		1
Fagus sylvatica	beech	1	33
Corylus avellana	hazel		1 (rw)
cf. *Corylus avellana*	hazel	7 rw	2
Alnus sp.	alder	33 (1 rw)	
cf *Alnus* sp.	alder	1	
Corylus avellana/*Alnus* sp.	hazel/alder	3 (V)	1
Salix/*Populus* sp	willow	2	4
cf. *Maloideae* group	hawthorn, whitebeam, rowan, apple, pear		2
Prunus sp.	cherry/blackthorn	1	
Acer campestre	field maple		1 (rw)
Fraxinus excelsior	ash	1	3
Indeterminate/Distorted		16(V)	16

The state of preservation of the charcoal assemblage ranged from poor to good, although most of the analysed fragments were identifiable. However, vitrification was noted. This happens when the wood anatomy homogenises, creating a glassy appearance.

Vitrification is generally associated with the use of high temperatures, although experimental evidence has shown that this factor alone is not sufficient to make charcoal vitrified and that a secure cause is not yet known (McParland *et al*. 2010). Distortions of the wood anatomy were also common and hindered the identification of more than 15% of the fragments.

Discussion

The charcoal assemblages appear to be very mixed, with no one taxon exceedingly dominant over the others. Given that the features do not represent *in-situ* burning, it is likely that the charcoal in each context originates from multiple episodes of charring.

Oak, beech, and alder were the most frequently occurring taxa. The identified taxa are indicative of deciduous woodland, hedgerows, and scrub. Alder and willow/poplar are typical of wet environments and could have been sourced from the banks of the nearby River Uck. Most of the taxa are excellent fuels and would have withstood high temperatures and prolonged burning. Alder, however, does not burn very well but its use could represent opportunistic fuel selection.

A large complete oak fragment, measuring 8.5cm long and 2.5cm in diameter, with 10 growth rings, was recorded from [204]. This fragment could have been exposed to high temperatures in a reduced oxygen environment allowing for the complete carbonisation of the log without combustion (Braadbart and Poole 2008; Caple and Murray 1991). This could indicate the burning of charcoal rather than fresh wood. Charcoal was generally preferred as a source of fuel because it is easier to transport and burns more effectively.

The local woodland was likely to have been managed through coppicing, in order to guarantee the supply of wood both for export and the needs of local industries. The oak roundwood fragment from floor levelling deposit [204] could have originated from an oak coppice on a ten-year cycle. There were numerous roundwood fragments of several taxa

which could also have originated from coppices, although they were not complete and growth rings count was therefore not possible.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The exploration of Bridge Cottage is one of the most thorough and long-lasting investigations of an individual house plot within South-East England. As such, it is an important contribution, not only to the understanding of building types, but also of the late medieval colonisation of the Weald, urban development, and the medieval/post-medieval transition.

The building fabric and the artefactual remains encountered at the site provide evidence for the occupier's status as well as methods of displaying wealth, both in the late Middle Ages and the Early Modern period. The excavated remains provide evidence for the material culture of yeoman class households and may demonstrate how environmental factors threatened (often newly acquired) wealth.

As well as the work's inherent value for wider study, the investigations also demonstrate the archaeological potential of emergent market towns, both in the Weald and beyond. It is clear that Uckfield's historic interest has been much underplayed in the past and it is hoped the investigations at Bridge Cottage have gone some way to dispelling misconceptions about the age of the settlement.

Uckfield's 'modernisation' is only a veneer. The potential for medieval and early post-medieval remains to lie buried within historic plots, particularly in the High Street and Church Street, should be better recognised.

At the time that Bridge Cottage's precursor was constructed (the late 13th or 14th century) the Weald was undergoing a transformation. Settlement of the region was being actively encouraged by lords keen to gain income by renting new holdings or stimulating urban growth by the granting of markets and by the formation of boroughs and 'permissive settlements' (Gardiner 1997).

Areas of roadside waste were particularly susceptible to being implanted with these new holdings, either by the granting of rights to 'intake' land from the highway or via illegal encroachment. By the later 14th century, with its well documented demographic changes, the earlier rural settlement pattern of the High Weald was replaced by a new pattern of farmsteads, as tenants bought out their neighbours or subsumed abandoned properties (Gardiner 1995).

Such a situation could have led to the holding that would become Bridge Cottage. However, there might be other, more favoured explanations for the origins of the property. The discussion below is an attempt to understand its past ownership as well as its function. It should be noted that until a full tenement analysis of Framfield manor is undertaken, such discussion remains speculative.

The presence of the original building, and the subsequent Wealden hall house, so close to the River Uck is perhaps puzzling. In the High Weald, villeins, of the sort found on the some of the larger episcopal manors of the Sussex Coastal Plain, were not a particularly widespread social class. Moreover, the area was characterised by individualistic free tenants.

The house (possibly houses) at the site were clearly above the status of the servile tenantry or poorer freemen (see below) and accord better with a yeoman class household. Whoever built the Period 1 building or the subsequent Bridge Cottage, was willing to jeopardise their wealth through the proximity of the buildings to the notoriously flood prone Uck.

It might be concluded, therefore, that its owners or occupiers found this location in some way favourable. Given their apparent wealth, they may not have been forced to build in this vulnerable position and the location near to the river and the associated crossing point may be viewed as somehow important.

Ferguson (2002, 55) has postulated that Thomas Maunser, the grandson or great grandson of Sir Robert Maunser, ironmaster of High Town, Wadhurst, was the first known occupier of the cottage (UDPS 2017). This was based on the survey of tenements and rents within the queen's part of Loxfield half-hundred (in effect a rental of Framfield manor) where it states that Maunser held 'one messuage with a garden and a medowe…lynge in the South ende of Uckfelde to the bridge' (ESRO AMS 5863, f66r).

Although it is probable this document refers to Bridge Cottage it could also refer to another alternative holding in the southern end of the town. Similarly, a 1584 conveyance of a house in Uckfield from Arthur Langworth, of Buxted, to Edward

Orwell, of London, (ESRO AMS 6994/5/3/2; Thorpe 1830, 133) cannot be easily related to Bridge Cottage and has been highlighted by David and Barbara Martin (2016) as requiring further verification.

Nevertheless, a later survey of Framfield manor (1617; ESRO ADA 137, 256) suggests that somebody named Orrell (probably Orwell) held 'one messuage or tenement…lying neare unto Uckfield bridge'. The possible associations are too strong to be circumstantial and it is likely that the Orwell family retained ownership of the cottage into the early 17th century.

Also strengthening the case for Arthur Langworth's ownership and the subsequent ownership by Edward Orwell are transactions between the two gentlemen recorded in the Fuller family archive. The dealings concern a *feoffment,* or conveyance of pieces of land, in the Chapelry of Uckfield adjoining 'Mallinge Buddell Common'. These were called Shermonrede, Byrchett and Lodgeland (ESRO AMS 6994/5/3/2; Thorpe 1830, 133).

The common can be equated with Budlett's Common and the land parcels with Shermanreed Wood (OS 1st Edition), The Birches (ESRO ACC 9558, land parcels 76 and 77) and probably Lodge Field *(ibid*. land parcel 61). The latter was owned by 'Bridge Farm' at the time of the tithe award (1841). All these land parcels were located to the north of Uckfield, away from Bridge Cottage itself. However, the conveyance also includes 'Fullingmyll Mead', which probably relates to one of the two fulling mills known to exist in proximity to the site.

These, and the nearby corn mill, belonged to Canterbury Cathedral Priory in the late medieval period (Redwood and Wilson 1958, 75). It should be noted that there was a connection between Bridge Cottage and the priory, as Edward Orwell was a lawyer and Registrar to the Archbishop of Canterbury's Court of Arches (PROB 11/159/355).

That the cottage may be related to church land, and therefore has the potential to represent the home of one of the millers, is derived from the name of its plot. The parcel in which it is situated is named in the 1841 Uckfield tithe apportionment as the Bell Brook (ESRO ACC 9558 land parcel 267). Nearby are the Old Bell and the Young Bell which lent their name to the 19th-century Bell Inn (a little way to the north).

Bell field names are known to relate to land endowed for the 'provision and maintenance of church bells and ropes, or for the payment of bellringers' (Field 1989, 18) and such associations possibly indicate that Bridge Cottage and its forerunner belonged to Canterbury Cathedral Priory. That the building may have been associated with one or more of the ecclesiastical mills known from the vicinity of the site would explain the proximity of the building to the river and the willingness to rebuild despite the threat of flooding.

Additional evidence that the building could be connected to milling is derived from the quantity of lead tokens recovered from the site, a number of which depict a rudimentary grid or cross, sometimes thought to be a pictorial representation of the miller's stone or wheel (Mernick and Mernick 2017); the tokens perhaps represent manorial payments for the milling of grain. Of course, such evidence may seem somewhat circumstantial and, as stated previously, such suggestions will remain speculative until a thorough analysis of the property's tenurial history is attempted.

However, despite the thin evidence, the status of the building would perhaps accord well with a wealthy miller, *ulnager* (broadcloth official), fulling mill owner, or clothier. Both the Period 1 building and its descendant were large in size.

In its earliest phase it measured 16.45m long by 7.2m wide and this width was increased slightly at the southern end by the projecting rear range and garderobe, as well as the first floor jetty on the end bay (Martin and Martin 2016). The northern bay may have also been jettied, although this is no longer provable.

The overall roof span of the Period 2 building (excluding the aisle) was 6.57 metres, making it one of the largest Wealden-style hall houses in the area (*ibid.*). The owners also displayed their status in some of the architectural details of the house. The close studding apparent on the building's frontage was clearly a mark of wealth and represents an attempt to create an impressive façade.

Close studding is thought to have been introduced to South-East England in around 1430 and to have become common only after the middle years of the 15th century (Pearson 1994, 158, 178). Since Bridge Cottage was constructed sometime around 1436, the building represents a regionally early adoption of the technique.

Also displaying status and wealth was the presence of a Period 3 glazed window on the hall's rear wall. Such rare features are usually restricted

to the houses of the gentry, as at Great Dixter, East Sussex (*ibid.*, 22), and its presence here may suggest that Bridge Cottage's owner had achieved the status of minor aristocracy by the late 16th century. The suggestion of church officials or descendants of Wealden 'proto-industrialists' as owners of the property would not then be farfetched.

The possible association of the building with Canterbury Cathedral Priory and the large size of the Wealden hall house also suggests another explanation for its origins. It is possible that the building was occupied by more than the usual household. Its location, so close to the river crossing of an important trans-Weald route linking Lewes and London, the inclusion of a garderobe, and finds of lead tokens may indicate that visitors were accommodated at the site.

The building has similarities with The Pilgrim's Rest, Battle, which was the Almoner of Battle Abbey's hostelry for entertaining lesser guests (referee's comment). The nearby A272 has been suggested as a pilgrim's route linking Winchester to Canterbury, an interpretation that has been recently reinforced (Draper 2019). Perhaps the ecclesiastical links could suggest the accommodation of people on their way to Canterbury, with tokens found at the site taken as payment for refreshment or lodgings?

Whoever constructed and subsequently owned the earliest two phases of building at the site, it is clear that the recurrent choice to occupy a riverside location meant putting it at great risk of flooding. Breaching of the banks of the River Uck could have contributed to the end of the Period 1 building at the site, which was replaced by the earliest phase of Bridge Cottage.

That the latter was vulnerable, was clear to its builders who attempted to raise the ground floor of the later building. These efforts do not appear to have saved it from the effects of high water which may have led to later episodes of subsidence evidenced at the property.

Fig. 25. Photo of Bridge Cottage in the 19th century prior to removal of the 'old bridge' (courtesy of Brian Philips and Mick Harker).

The consequences of the Little Ice Age, with its series of long winters, wet summers, and increasing storminess (Fagan 2000; Trouet *et al.* 2012) are well known but are not often seen on the scale of a single house plot. Neither is settlement of the Weald recognised as being as vulnerable to these events as coastal areas such as the Pevensey Levels or the Manhood Peninsula (e.g. Brandon 1971; Stephenson and Kraweic 2019). It is clear that the Period 1 inundation is likely to have been a high-energy event and the Great Flood of 1421 would appear (given its timing and the construction date of the Period 2 replacement) to be the culprit.

The effects of flooding on the river were not restricted to the medieval period. Sometime around the end of the 18th or early 19th century, probably May 1797, sudden and heavy rain fall caused flooding of low-lying areas around Uckfield. This flood contains echoes of events that occurred around the time of the destruction of the Period 1 building.

At Buxted Park the flood water backed up behind a portion of the park fence that had lodged in a narrow part of the river channel. When the barrier eventually gave way the pent-up water rushed forward, carrying away everything in its wake.

When the water met the old bridge (Fig. 25) that neighboured Bridge Cottage it swept away the parapet as well as several bystanders who had gathered to watch the flood (Turner 1860, 2). The drowning of these unfortunate people is symptomatic of the precarious nature of life, for both humans and buildings, on the banks of the River Uck.

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